Dissident

by Constance1

Summary

In a world of Alphas and Omegas, Harry is surprised to discover that he is a rare male Omega. He assumes his pull towards Draco Malfoy is because the Slytherin is an Alpha, but there is more at play here than even Harry knows. My own twist on the Alpha/Omega-verse.

Notes

This is first and foremost a Creature-fic which also happens to involve Alpha/Omega dynamics. If you don't enjoy wizards turning into large mythical animals, then this probably isn't the fic for you. There will also be elements of dub-con, attempted rape, and graphic violence for those that require that warning up front.
Harry opened his eyes and stared up at the ceiling in confusion, wondering why he was awake. His small bedroom at the Dursley's was still enveloped in darkness and the house was silent. He was about to chalk it up to bad dreams and close his eyes again when he noticed it: a strange vibration throughout his body, as though a weak electric current was running just under his skin.

He quickly became a lot more alert when he realised that in conjunction with the strange buzzing, he felt an overwhelming achiness in his limbs, as well as being stiflingly hot and sweaty.

Harry sat up with a muted groan as his achy body immediately protested the movement.

"Brilliant," he muttered as he rubbed at his eyes, thinking that he had come down with some sort of virus. He was currently living on his own; his Aunt and Uncle having decided to remain where they had fled to during the war. They intended to resume their life in Surrey after Harry returned to Hogwarts for his eighth and final year of schooling, and Harry hoped to never see them again.

He opened his eyes and his breath caught in his throat. His fingers were glowing with a faint white light, which then began to crackle a little the longer he stared at them. The electric buzzing just under his skin suddenly intensified and Harry quickly threw back the bedclothes and jumped to his feet, staring down at his body in fear.

Nothing else appeared to be amiss aside from his glowing fingertips.

Harry frowned and glanced at his wand sitting on the bedside cabinet, unsure as to whether he should touch it or not. It felt as though his magic suddenly had a mind of its own and wanted to strike out at something.

Harry clapped a hand over his mouth when his stomach suddenly turned over. He immediately sprinted for the toilet down the hall.

He collapsed onto his knees before the porcelain bowl and emptied the contents of his stomach into it in great heaving convulsions. Once his stomach was sufficiently empty and nothing more was able to come up, Harry dropped his forehead onto the cool white toilet seat and closed his eyes, panting heavily.

He swallowed and kept his eyes closed as wave after wave of dizziness continued to break over him, making him feel faint and light-headed, and he really didn't want to pass out on the floor all alone.

No one would even think to check on him until he didn't show up for the Hogwarts Express, which was still a month away.

Harry swallowed and did the only thing he could think of - he croakily called out for Kreacher.

The stooped and knobbly-kneed little house-elf appeared quite quickly. "Master Harry, how may I be of assistance?" he asked slowly, in a voice as dry as paper. He gave a slight bow as though he wasn't even aware that he was standing in the loo next to his Master; who was currently hunched over a toilet reeking of vomit.

Harry forced his eyes open a crack and looked at him. "I'm not well Kreacher, could you perhaps bring me some potions from Hogwarts? I'm sure Madam Pomfrey wouldn't mind…"
Kreacher's large bulbous eyes narrowed at Harry and his nostrils flared when he leaned in and sniffed.

Harry flinched away from him with a frown. "What…?"

"Master is in the midst of his change," he replied as though that answered everything.

"What… change?" Harry questioned weakly, closing his eyes when another wave of nausea washed over him.

Kreacher stepped in and took another whiff then nodded to himself. "Master is coming into his Omega inheritance."

Harry's eyes snapped back open. "O-omega?" he repeated, tripping over the word. "Don't you mean Alpha? I thought only females were Omegas."

Kreacher shook his head, eyes shining with pride for being able to impart such important information to his Master. Ever since the war Kreacher had been much more pleasant and helpful, and Harry had come to trust him, though by no means had he become even half the friend to Harry that Dobby had been.

"Male Omegas are rare but not non-existent," Kreacher explained slowly. "There was a male Omega in the Black family a century ago."

"Are you sure I'm… I'm one?" Harry asked, not even wanting to say the word aloud; it was too embarrassing. Omegas were highly sought after females who were beautiful and who produced offspring for their Alpha mates when they went through a heat cycle - that wasn't him.

Kreacher nodded. "You are producing the scent of an Omega. Mistress Narcissa had the same smell when she turned eighteen and went through the change. Master Sirius' Alpha scent was very different to this one. You're no Alpha, nor Beta, Master Harry."

"Thanks," Harry replied dryly, closing his eyes and leaning against the toilet once more. "Is there anything I can take to stop feeling quite so awful?"

Kreacher bowed again. "I will fetch Master Harry some nausea potions from Hogwarts. I will also bring some potions to mask your scent."

"What for?"

"You shall not wish to advertise the fact that you are an Omega amongst all the new Alphas attending Hogwarts this year. Young Alphas do not possess the control that older, more experienced ones do. You shall also not possess the mental capacity to make wise decisions when an Alpha approaches, so best to avoid that until you are finished at Hogwarts."

Harry cracked his eyes open and grimaced at the small house-elf. "Brilliant, so the fact that we're returning to Hogwarts for a special eighth year means that we're more susceptible to trouble due to our inheritances because normally you're finished with school by the time you turn eighteen?"

Kreacher nodded and Harry rolled his eyes.

"Why did no one mention this when they thought it was a good idea to extend the invitation to us to return for another year?" Harry bit out with a scowl.

Kreacher merely stared back at him, blinking large glassy eyes.
Harry sighed. "Fine, please fetch me those potions Kreacher."

Kreacher bowed then paused before leaving. "Master Harry must also register himself with the Ministry; all Omegas must be documented for their own protection."

"What?" Harry exclaimed in alarm. "I'm certainly not telling the Ministry that I'm an Omega! It'll be splashed across all the papers… everyone will know that I'm some sort of abnormal freak. How is advertising to the world that I'm an Omega a safety precaution? No, I'm not going," Harry refused with a shake of his head. "Just fetch me those potions Kreacher."

Kreacher bowed once more before disappearing on the spot.

Harry dropped his head back onto the cool toilet bowl and closed his eyes with a muted groan. He couldn't believe that he'd finally rid the world of Voldemort, ready to begin a somewhat normal life, and now he's had this suddenly thrust upon him.

He was beginning to think that he was cursed.

Harry reached up to flush the toilet and then leaned back against the cabinet beside him.

He would just have to confide in Ron and Hermione on the way back to Hogwarts to get their opinion of things; he was sure Hermione would know all about male Omegas and their history and have some sort of advice for him.

He tried to avoid thinking about the Alphas that would also be on the train, and what being 'mated' would even mean for him. Did this mean that he could now become pregnant? Would the Alphas even want him? Would they even be interested in having a male Omega as a mate? And did he have to choose an Alpha? Could he still be with whomever he wanted, regardless of their status?

He hated being forced into things or being told that he had to do something; it only made him want to do the exact opposite.

It was all so confusing and he found for the first time in his life that he was actually dreading returning to Hogwarts.
Harry stood on the crowded platform, anxiously waiting for his friends to arrive. After feeling terribly sick for about twenty-four hours on his birthday, he had then felt perfectly fine, as though nothing had happened at all. He was beginning to wonder if perhaps Kreacher had been mistaken and it had just been a bout of food poisoning or something instead.

He'd been taking his scent masking potions religiously though, just in case.

He glanced at all the students and family members as they walked past, keeping an eye out for any strange reactions to his proximity, but everything was normal on that front as well. Either the potions were doing their job, or Kreacher really had made a mistake, and he was just a regular every-day Beta.

He truly hoped it was the latter.

"Harry!"

Harry looked up to see Hermione striding towards him, pushing her overloaded trolley with a bright smile on her suntanned face. She hugged him in greeting as soon as he was within arm's reach.

"How are you?" she asked, pulling back to look into his face. "Wow, you look good."

Harry froze. "W-what do you mean?" he asked.

She smiled and tipped her head to one side to look him over appraisingly. "You look… well rested; like you've been at a spa for the past two months. You're practically glowing."

Harry swallowed and forced a weak smile. "I guess time away from my relatives and Voldemort will do that."

Hermione chuckled and nodded. "I suppose this is the first time in your life that you haven't had to deal with any of that, no wonder you look so healthy."

"How was your summer in France?" he asked, wanting to get off the subject of his healthy new glow.

"Oh it was brilliant!" she replied, instantly diverted. "I'm a little rusty with my French but their wizarding history is so fascinating! I think I'm going to go back once we leave Hogwarts, spend some more time soaking up the culture and their unique magical practices."

Harry nodded, trying to force himself to pay attention to what she was saying but he was distracted by the dense crowd all around them; every glance directed his way took on a suspicious edge with his new-found paranoia. It was almost a relief when Ron finally joined them and they could board the train and settle themselves into a nice quiet compartment.

Harry exhaled, finally able to relax a little as he settled into his seat next to the window.

"Ron, could you please put my trunk up on the rack?" Hermione asked as she rolled the heavy thing into their compartment. It was obviously stuffed full of heavy - and utterly unnecessary - books.

"Sure." Ron smiled and took the trunk before hefting it up into the overhead bin with ease.

"Having an Alpha around sure has its advantages," Hermione stated teasingly as she collapsed onto
the seat next to Harry.

Harry felt his heart stop as his gaze flew to Ron. He'd completely forgotten that his best friend had come into his Alpha inheritance last March. He quickly tried to determine whether Ron had treated him any differently so far…

Ron took the seat opposite Harry and looked at his friend. "How was your birthday?" he asked with a grin.

Harry felt a flash of panic, wondering if Ron knew something.

"Oh that's right," Hermione said before he could form a response, "you're eighteen now too. I guess you're a Beta," she added, slipping an arm through his with a smile. "I hope I'm a Beta too, much less nerve-wracking than being an Omega."

"I thought for sure you'd be an Alpha," Ron said offhandedly.

Harry frowned, affronted. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Ron looked up and noticed his expression. He immediately flushed red. "Sorry, I didn't mean it like that. I just thought… if anyone was going to be an Alpha, you would."

"Being a Beta does not automatically mean you're weak or soft," Hermione said reproachfully. "Dumbledore was a Beta after all."

"I know," Ron mumbled self-consciously.

The compartment door slid open then, interrupting them - and saving Ron from shoving his foot even further into his mouth.

Neville and Luna walked in, followed by Ginny only a few seconds later. They made themselves comfortable on the seats, oblivious to the somewhat tense atmosphere.

"How was everyone's summer?" Neville asked as he tossed his school robe onto the seat beside him.

"Looks like you had a good one," Ginny said with a wink, indicating Neville's taller, more muscular stature.

Neville blushed and ducked his head. "Yeah… Gran was really pleased, she thought I'd be a Beta for sure."

Ginny raised a brow at the silent, averted gazes from Harry, Ron and Hermione. "What's up with you three?"

"Nothing," Harry said quickly. "How was your summer Luna?" he asked abruptly, turning to the smiling Ravenclaw seated next to the door.

Harry's gaze slid past Luna as she replied, through the open doorway and over to the compartment opposite them. It was filling up with what appeared to be more returning eighth year students. Harry was surprised to note that it was a mix of houses, including a few Slytherins.

Harry's roving gaze suddenly locked with the pale grey eyes of Draco Malfoy who was seated near the window. His breath caught in his throat and his heart faltered in his chest. His whole world seemed to suddenly zero in on the blond across the corridor from him and he couldn't tear his eyes away.
A small furrow appeared between Malfoy's brows as he held Harry's gaze a moment before turning away to look out the window.

Harry inhaled sharply as his breath seemed to return to him in a sudden whoosh as he was released from the strange hold that had suddenly gripped him.

"Are you alright?" Hermione asked with concern.

Harry blinked and looked around, noticing that everyone was staring at him. "Yeah, I'm fine… Just... er, choked."

"Choked?" Ron repeated in confusion. "On what?"

"Erm, Ice Mice," Harry improvised, trying to keep his eyes from wandering back to Malfoy. The urge was ridiculously strong.

"Can I have one?" Ron asked.

"That was my last one," Harry replied awkwardly as the train suddenly started moving, pushing him back into his seat.

The group fell silent as the screech and grind of the train starting out of the station made it too difficult to be heard.

Harry looked out the window, already feeling the strain of what he suspected was going to be a very tense year ahead.

And what had that moment with Malfoy been about?

A feeling of dread began to fill his gut as his mind helpfully supplied him with the realisation that Malfoy looked as though he'd had a growth spurt over the summer holidays. In other words, the Slytherin had come into his inheritance - and it had resulted in his nemesis becoming an Alpha.

Harry swallowed and shifted in his seat, keeping his gaze firmly on the changing landscape outside.

Malfoy had looked… good. Very good, in fact. The blond appeared to have grown at least three inches, his hair was soft and shining instead of slicked back, his pale skin looked even more flawless than usual, and Harry had never noticed what striking eyes Malfoy had before; they were such a lovely shade of grey which seemed to darken to a deeper, steely grey around his irises.

Harry shook his head. He really needed to stop thinking about the colour of Malfoy's eyes.

Harry tried to think of something else but he felt his heartbeat quicken and his palms begin to sweat as his thoughts quickly began to spiral out of control. What if the Omega in him was drawn to the Alpha in Malfoy? What if something in him was compelled to pursue Malfoy as a potential life partner? What if a part of him wanted to mate with Malfoy?!?

Harry let slip an involuntary sound of horror which he quickly turned into a cough.

"Are you sick Harry?" Luna asked in concern.

Harry shot her a weak smile. "No, I'm fine Luna, just... something caught in my throat. Again. I'll er… get some pumpkin juice or something."

Harry stood and quickly walked out into the corridor of the train, holding onto the walls for support as the train bumpyly chugged onwards over the uneven tracks. He very intentionally kept his gaze on
the floor as he moved past Malfoy's compartment and caught up with the food trolley witch at the other end, who was just beginning to make her rounds.

"Hullo," Harry greeted her distractedly. "One pumpkin juice, a roast beef sandwich, and a chocolate frog please."

He feebly hoped the chocolate would settle his nerves a little.

Harry paid for his things then walked back towards his compartment, trying to breathe normally and not think about the terrifying notion of potential mates.

He was nearly sent sprawling onto the floor of the corridor when Blaise Zabini walked out of Malfoy's compartment and straight into him.

"Steady there Potter," he said with a smirk, placing one hand on his arm and holding him upright.

"Thanks," Harry replied uncertainly, pulling his arm back and reaching down to pick up his dropped sandwich.

"Say Potter," Blaise continued, crossing his arms over his chest and leaning against the wall of the corridor. How the man could look so steady and suave while the train bumped and rattled beneath their feet, Harry had no idea. "I was hoping to speak to you about something."

"Oh?" Harry replied warily as he straightened up and hugged his food to his chest.

"As there are so few of us returning for eighth year, we thought it might be prudent to let bygones be bygones."

Harry's brow raised in surprise. That wasn't what he'd been expecting. "Yeah?"

Blaise nodded, his expression earnest and as open as Harry had ever seen the dark-haired wizard. "There's really no point in house rivalries now, is there? I mean, the younger years will carry it on and all, but we were thinking that it might be practical to form a study group between us leftovers."

"Leftovers?" Harry repeated, unable to hide a smile of amusement.

Blaise grinned. "I thought I would approach you since everyone tends to follow your lead," he continued matter-of-factly. "I've spoken to the returning Slytherins and we're all in agreement on this."

Harry was surprised at first but then realised that any returning Slytherin students were most likely the ones that had made good choices during the war, or at least had stayed out of things, which Harry couldn't fault them for.

"Yeah…" Harry finally replied slowly. "I think that's a brilliant idea."

Blaise smiled and held out his hand. Harry shifted his snacks to the other arm as he reached out and shook Blaise's hand. He was happy to let go of the hostility of the past, especially between Gryffindor and Slytherin. It was too much effort to keep up such hatred, and what for? Voldemort was dead and everyone just wanted to move on with their lives - no one more so than Harry himself.

"Come on." Blaise tugged on Harry's hand once before releasing it and leading him over to stand in the open doorway of his compartment. "Everyone, Harry has graciously agreed to our study group idea," he announced grandly.
Harry was met with smiles of delight - except from Malfoy, who was frowning at him. Harry swallowed and determinedly ignored the blond - and the fluttering in his stomach - as he attempted a carefree smile in return.

"Hi Harry."

Harry turned to see Cho Chang smiling at him from the seat to his right. "Oh hi Cho, how are you?"

"I'm fine," she answered quietly. "You look well; you must've had a nice summer."

Harry instantly felt on edge again. "I did," he replied shortly.

"Well, you've earned it," she said sincerely, still smiling.

"So we were thinking Thursday nights," Blaise interrupted. "Right Draco?"

Before he could stop himself, Harry's eyes flicked up to see grey eyes watching him intently. Malfoy shrugged carelessly then turned to look out the window.

Blaise rolled his eyes then turned to Harry. "Please forgive Draco, he's decided brooding is the look he's going for this year."

Harry couldn't help but snort in response and Blaise smirked.

"I guess I'll see you Thursday night in the library then?" Harry said, preparing to leave.

Blaise nodded in confirmation and Harry waved at them all before walking back across the narrow corridor.

Everyone in his compartment was staring at him in shock when he entered.

Ron quickly stood and slid the doors shut before turning to Harry, who had once again settled into his seat by the window. "What the bloody hell was that all about?" he demanded.

Harry shrugged as he let his food tumble into his lap and then opened his bottle of pumpkin juice. "A truce," he replied nonchalantly.

"Really?" Neville said in surprise. "The Slytherins too?"

"It was their idea," Harry informed them. "Blaise Zabini said that all the students wanted to let go of the past and just forget about silly house rivalries. We're even starting an eighth year study group: Thursday nights in the library."

"And you agreed?" Ron asked incredulously.

Harry frowned. "Of course, why not? I want to put an end to all that pointless animosity too. There aren't that many of us anymore so I think it's a brilliant idea."

"Me too," Hermione readily agreed and Luna nodded along with her. "Why not help each other?"

Ron returned to his seat and shook his head. "I dunno… seems suspicious to me."

"Oh get over it Ron," Hermione said with a roll of her eyes. "Why would they try anything now? What would be the point? It's over."

"Yeah, I agree," Neville put in quietly. "We could really help each other out, and I need all the help I
can get in Potions."

"I guess…" Ron said uncertainly, glancing at Harry again.

"Doesn't mean we'll go easy on them in Quidditch though," Harry added, placating.

Ron visibly brightened. "Yeah… there is that," he said enthusiastically.

The others laughed and Harry threw his sandwich wrapper at him.

The rest of the trip continued without incident and Harry began to relax. No one had noticed anything other than the fact that he looked rested and healthy, which was not enough in itself to raise any sort of suspicion. Ron, as an Alpha, seemed entirely oblivious to Harry's new Omega status, which went a long way to calming his anxieties as well.

The only thing he had to worry about now was the way his gaze kept unconsciously shifting to stare at Malfoy across the corridor. Luna left the doors wide open when she returned from the loo, which resulted in Harry suddenly having a perfect view of the blond. He couldn't just up and close the doors without arising suspicion, so he just had to endure it and hope no one noticed. Luckily, Malfoy didn't look his way again for the rest of the journey.

He didn't know if he was pleased about that fact or not.

They finally reached their destination and piled into the waiting carriages for the short trip up the dirt track to Hogwarts. The castle loomed dark and imposing against the inky-blue sky in the distance, the flickering of hundreds of candles glowing warmly from each tiny window. The castle looked just as it had before the final battle; it looked like home.

Hermione sidled up to Harry as they walked up the drive towards the castle in the cool night air. "Is there something you want to tell me Harry?" she asked quietly.

Harry stopped in his tracks and turned to stare at her. "What do you mean?"

Hermione glanced around to ensure that they were alone before continuing. "Well, it's just that I noticed you looking at Malfoy an awful lot on the train…"

Harry sighed and ran a hand through his hair. He had planned on telling Hermione and Ron all about his Omega problem until his friend had reminded him that Ron was an Alpha, and suddenly the idea of telling them had seemed too humiliating.

"I know you watched him a lot in sixth year, but I really couldn't come up with a plausible explanation for you to *still* be suspicious of him, so… I wondered if perhaps there was something else going on."

Harry swallowed, feeling inexplicably nervous. "There is something I want to talk to you about, but not right now. I wanted to write to you over the summer about it but it isn't something that I can put in a letter, and I'm not sure I ever want to tell Ron…"

Hermione's eyes widened. "Do you… have feelings for Malfoy?"

"Shhh!" Harry shushed her then grabbed her arm to start them moving again.

Hermione chewed her lip before venturing to speak again in a hushed voice. "I feel I should tell you that while Malfoy *is* an Alpha, he's still a pureblood, and will be seeking out an Omega who can carry on the Malfoy line. Not a Beta," she added cautiously.
"I know."

"And I've heard rumours that he's already engaged to Astoria Greengrass."

"I know!" Harry snapped, feeling a flash of such red-hot jealousy over the idea of Malfoy with someone else that he couldn't even stop the sharp retort in time.

Hermione stared at him in surprise.

Harry sighed and shook his head. "I'm sorry 'Mione, I didn't mean to shout. It's just... there's a lot going on and I'd really rather not get into it right now. Later, okay?"

Hermione nodded in understanding and gave his hand a supportive squeeze. "Of course."

Neville and Ron caught up with them then and the two fell silent as they entered the school with the rest of the masses.

As new Headmistress, McGonagall stood at the front of the huge dining hall to make the traditional opening remarks once the Sorting Hat had done its job. She welcomed them all back to the newly reconstructed castle and spoke of the importance of encouraging house unity. Blaise had raised his goblet to Harry at that with a nod of his head and a smile. Harry had returned the gesture with his own pumpkin juice, happy that at least that aspect of the school year looked promising.

The part that wasn't promising was the awful realisation that there was indeed something powerful drawing him to Draco Malfoy. He steadfastly refused to look at the blond throughout the meal, but it was a real struggle. He didn't know much about the world of Alphas and Omegas, but he knew enough that Betas didn't feel drawn to one person in particular, that they were basically the same as Muggles in that respect and could settle down with an Alpha or another Beta. The fact that he felt this strongly towards Malfoy only confirmed what Kreacher had told him: that he was indeed an Omega.

He couldn't wait to speak to Hermione about all of this. He had so many questions - and reservations - about the whole thing, and he needed answers as soon as possible or he wouldn't be able to sleep.

After dinner, Harry pulled Hermione aside as they marched out of the Hall towards the Gryffindor dorms and quickly told her to meet him in the Common Room at midnight. She nodded in acknowledgement and the anxious churning in his stomach abated somewhat at the prospect of discussing his problem with someone; someone whom he knew would either have all the answers or would stop at nothing to get them.

At one minute to midnight Harry snuck out of the boy's dormitory, leaving his snoring dorm mates behind, and tiptoed down the stone steps in his pyjamas. Hermione was already seated on the squashy sofa in the weak light of the dying fire.

Harry quickly settled himself on the other end of the sofa and drew his legs up to his chest, wrapping his arms around them and dropping his chin onto his knees.

Hermione neatly tucked her legs underneath her and patiently waited for Harry to start.

Harry licked his dry lips and took a deep breath. "Okay... I... I guess I should start from the beginning," he ventured uncertainly.

"That's usually the best place to start." Hermione nodded encouragingly.

Harry turned to look into the glowing embers of the huge hearth beside them. "I woke up on my
birthday over the summer, feeling really sick and like my magic had a mind of its own.” Hermione frowned and he pushed onwards. “So I called for Kreacher, thinking that maybe he could bring me some potions from Pomfrey to help.” Harry paused and exhaled shakily before continuing. “He came and said… he said that I was coming into my inheritance, that he could smell it on me.”

"You are an Alpha?” Hermione interjected in confusion. "But you don't-"

"I'm an Omega."

Hermione's lips parted and her brown eyes widened in disbelief. Harry could see a hundred different thoughts and emotions flash across her face in quick succession before she finally swallowed and looked at him worryingly. "And… and you believe him? Does it feel true?” she asked.

Harry dropped his chin back to his knees with a sigh. "Yeah it's true."

"How do you know?"

"Because I'm drawn to Malfoy,” he replied emotionlessly.

Hermione's indrawn breath spoke volumes and Harry could see her fitting the pieces together.

"Hermione, I don't know anything about male Omegas or Alphas or mating or… or anything,” Harry continued, beginning to feel desperate and wholly unprepared for this new direction his life had taken.

Hermione's academic expression immediately slotted into place as she sat up straight and took control of things. "Alright, calm down. I don't have a vast knowledge of male Omegas since they're so rare, but we can research that tomorrow night in the library. I know quite a bit about Alphas and Omegas though, so what did you want to know?"

Harry tried to get his agitation back under control so that he could think rationally. "I think the thing I want to know the most right now is, just because I'm drawn to Malfoy, does that mean that I can't ever be with anyone else? Can I feel this way towards another Alpha? And does he feel the same? Just because I feel drawn to him does that mean that he's going through the same thing on his side?"

"Okay," Hermione replied calmly, "let's start with whether you're only bound to Malfoy now. As far as I know, an Omega can feel the pull towards multiple Alphas in their lifetime until they're mated or officially bonded. I know Alphas will only be drawn to one Omega until that Omega is officially claimed or bonded with another, and then they are free to find someone else. Does that make sense?"

Harry nodded. "So… I will able to feel this way towards another Alpha other than Malfoy?"

Hermione nodded.

Harry exhaled in relief.

"Did Malfoy react to you in any way?" Hermione asked curiously. "Do you think he's drawn to you too?"

"No," Harry replied, and even though the human side of him was rejoicing in this fact, the Omega in him felt distinctly hurt. "He just scowled at me when I looked at him. He certainly wasn't staring at me like I was him."
have been all over you Harry but they weren't."

"I've been taking scent masking potions since my birthday," he explained. "And no they wouldn't be all over me Hermione; they all want beautiful female Omegas, not some abnormal male one."

Hermione gaped. "First of all, you are very attractive Harry, even more so since coming into your inheritance. Secondly," she stressed loudly as he opened his mouth to argue, "while it's true that male Omegas are rare, they're also coveted much more than female ones. Imagine being a gay Alpha and having to mate with a female just because she's the only choice you have? They'll flock here just for the chance to be with you Harry."

Harry's eyes widened in horror at the thought of a bunch of strange men clamouring for his attention. "No," he said resolutely, shaking his head. "That's not what I want; I don't want someone to want me just because I happen to be an Omega. If someone can fall for me without knowing the truth, then I'll know that they truly want to be with me. Surely being an Omega or an Alpha doesn't mean that you have to forsake actual feelings?"

Hermione couldn't help but smile affectionately at her friend. "No, of course not Harry, but I think most can't help but fall in love when they start off feeling so intensely attracted to someone. Don't forget that the Omega in you is only drawn to suitable partners, not just any old Alpha."

"Great, so my Omega is broken," Harry replied derisively. "Because there's no way that Malfoy is a good match for me."

Hermione's smile grew. "I don't know Harry; he might be perfect for you. You should give him a chance. And," she added enthusiastically, "the scent masking potions you've been taking might have thrown him off so far and that's why he hasn't been staring at you."

"Exactly," Harry scowled, "he doesn't know I'm an Omega so he's not interested in the slightest."

Hermione pursed her lips but let it go. "Alright, what else do you want to know?" she asked.

"This is going to sound really thick but… can I get pregnant?" Harry asked uncomfortably.

"No question is foolish Harry," Hermione lectured gently. "And yes, when you're on your heat you will be able to conceive. I'm not sure what sort of heat cycle male Omegas have so I couldn't tell you how often that will happen."

Harry sat back, stunned. For some reason he really hadn't expected the answer to be yes. He'd been exposed to the magical world for seven years now and he was still constantly amazed by the possibilities it held. It was probably the one good thing to come out of this whole Omega situation; he wanted a family of his own more than anything. He'd never really had one growing up and he'd thought having a child of his own was a lost cause because of his sexuality, so the unexpected potential to create his own was… incredible.

"Those scent masking potions might not work as well during your heat Harry, so you need to be careful."

Harry blinked, coming back to himself. "Oh? So I'll have to hide in my bed for a week?"

"Or the infirmary," Hermione replied seriously. "Or else you'll attract every unmated Alpha in the school - teachers and students alike - and it won't be pleasant."

Harry swallowed. He didn't like the sound of that at all. "How will I know that I'm about to… you know?"
Hermione shrugged, looking slightly irritated that she didn't know the answer. "I'm not sure Harry, but we can look into that tomorrow as well. I'll make sure we know everything there is to know so that you don't encounter any surprises."

Harry sighed, feeling exhausted; it had been a very long and emotionally draining day. "Okay, I think… I think that's enough for now. We should get some sleep." He looked up and smiled a little. "Thanks for all your help Hermione."

Hermione smiled and leaned forwards to hug him. "Don't worry Harry, we'll figure this out."

Harry hugged her gratefully in return before they both stood and prepared to head off to bed.

"Oh Harry, what about Ron?" Hermione asked suddenly.

"I want to tell him but…" Harry flushed in embarrassment. "But will he erm, want me?" he mumbled.

Hermione giggled and Harry glared at her. "Sorry," she said apologetically. "But that would be so odd. I doubt that would happen Harry; he's straight and he sees you as a brother, so I'm fairly certain you being an Omega won't change that. It might just make him more protective of you around other Alphas."

Harry nodded. "Yeah, alright, I can deal with that I guess. We'll tell him tomorrow."

"Goodnight Harry," Hermione smiled before turning away to return to the girl's dorm.

"'Night."

Harry slowly walked back up to his own room and slid into bed as quietly as possible. He laid back and stared up at the canopy over his four-poster, deep in thought.

He'd had questions answered - but gained some too. He felt a little more settled about the situation but his stomach was still churning nauseatingly.

Harry frowned and turned onto his side, tucking his hands underneath his pillow.

He knew why he felt sick to his stomach; he still felt the pain of rejection because Malfoy didn't want him. It was crazy and ridiculous but he couldn't help it. It was like his heart had gone and attached itself to another person and that person didn't want anything to do with him, and not only that, but Harry knew he would be forced to watch as Malfoy found someone else to bond with and that was going to be truly upsetting to his Omega.

Harry closed his eyes and tried to remind himself that he could find someone else. He just needed to do it before he caught Malfoy and Astoria snogging in the corridors because he wasn't entirely sure that his Omega wouldn't make a scene if he had to bear witness to that.
Chapter 3

Harry and Ron walked into the library and looked around, searching for the table with the largest group of students. It was Thursday night and the first meeting of the new eighth year study group.

Harry pointed to a table in the far right-hand corner and they began to make their way over. It looked as though they were the last ones to arrive.

"Are you going to be alright?" Ron whispered aside as they walked.

"I hope so," Harry replied apprehensively, green eyes immediately narrowing in on the blond seated at the table in between Blaise Zabini and Theodore Nott.

True to his word, Harry had told Ron everything that was going on. The Gryffindor Trio had commandeered a table in the corner of the library after their first day of classes and talked over everything for hours, with Ron offering what little advice and knowledge he had. His older brothers were both mated Alphas, with Charlie mated to a male Beta, so he shared some of their experiences with Harry. Unfortunately he didn't know anything more than Hermione on the mystery of male Omegas. The Hogwarts library had next to nothing on the subject so Harry was already planning a trip to Hogsmeade to see what material the bookshop there might have.

Harry had been incredibly relieved that Ron wasn't freaked out by him - or by his apparent attraction to Malfoy. Ron was treating him just like he always had, except that Harry noticed that Ron had become a bit more watchful of other students around him in corridors and in class, and he somehow seemed to take it personally that Malfoy had rejected his best friend as a potential mate and was constantly glaring at the Slytherin whenever he had the chance. Harry knew Ron didn't actually want him with Malfoy so he wasn't sure what the point of all the glowering was, he simply chalked it up to it being one of those mysterious Alpha things.

Not that Malfoy noticed any of this. Harry's eyes were always glued to him whenever their paths crossed and Malfoy never made eye contact. It was as though Harry didn't exist anymore.

Harry would have been ecstatic about that turn of events a few years ago but now it only frustrated the hell out of him.

"Hi Harry!" Neville greeted as they approached the table. "Ron."

The only two seats left were on the end across from Blaise and Malfoy, so Harry hurriedly took the seat directly opposite Blaise. He did not want his legs or feet anywhere near where they could accidentally brush up against Malfoy's limbs. Just the thought of it was enough to make him shiver with unwelcome desire.

Harry dropped his bag to the floor and distracted himself with removing his potions textbook so that he didn't have to see whether Malfoy was scowling at his presence or not.

"How's Slughorn's favourite student?" Blaise quipped with a smirk as Harry flipped his book open to the chapter on the importance of Jobberknoll parts.

Harry glanced up with a puzzled frown until he remembered Snape's potions book and cheating his way to success in sixth year. It all seemed so long ago now. "Erm, I kind of had help that year. I'm actually quite hopeless at Potions."

"Only with Snape," Ron defended loyally. "Slughorn loves you so you might actually have a chance
this year."

"How did you cheat?" Justin Finch-Fletchley piped up curiously from the other side of Ron.

Harry shared a look with Ron before replying. "I had an old second-hand textbook that year with some helpful tips written in the margins by the previous owner."

"Wow that's lucky," Justin replied enviously. "I don't suppose you have one this year?"

"No, have to rely on my own brain now, so I think it's a lost cause."

Blaise snorted and Harry shared a look of amusement with the Slytherin. Perhaps Zabini could be a welcome distraction from his Malfoy obsession. Blaise was handsome and the Slytherin didn't appear to completely loathe him. He didn't feel anything for him but he thought that anything would be better than dealing with this unrequited lusting.

"What are you going to do next year Harry?" Hannah Abbott asked from down the table.

Harry looked over at her, furtively taking in Malfoy's profile as he turned; the blond had his head down and was reading intently. Harry smiled at Hannah and ignored the now expected clenching of his gut upon seeing Malfoy in the flesh.

"Not sure yet," he replied honestly, "maybe join the Aurors?"

"Really? Isn't that a bit dangerous?" she replied, eyes widening in awe.

Harry smirked. "Can't be any worse than being hunted down by a raving lunatic from the age of eleven."

The sudden sound of a book slamming shut startled everyone at the table.

"I thought this was a study group not an excuse for a social hour," Malfoy snapped before abruptly standing and striding off into the rows of bookshelves behind them.

"What's up with him?" Dean Thomas asked with a confused frown. "He was chatting earlier."

"Yeah but that was before Potter showed up," Daphne Greengrass muttered snidely.

Harry felt a flash of irritation and narrowed his eyes where Malfoy had disappeared into the rows. "I'll be right back," he said tightly as he stood.

"Want some help?" Ron asked quietly, looking uneasy.

Harry shook his head and stalked off to find the infuriating Alpha.

He walked past six rows of floor-to-ceiling shelves before spotting the tall blond standing at the far end of the seventh. Luckily the row was empty save for Malfoy. He quickly ducked in and walked right up to him, feeling his irritation burning under his skin and his hands balled into fists at his sides.

"What's your problem Malfoy?" he demanded, trying to keep his voice down in the hush of the cavernous room.

Malfoy's head jerked up at the vehement exclamation and his expression immediately turned stony. "What are you on about Potter?" he asked coolly.

"I know you have a problem with me and I want to know what it is," Harry continued, trying to
remain calm as his emotions seemed to be at war within him; a confusing combination of satisfaction
at finally conversing with the object of his desire, and frustrated anger at the unwarranted contempt
directed his way.

Malfoy's lip lifted into a sneer as he crossed his arms over his chest. "Did you really believe that the
truce between eighth years extended to the two of us?"

Harry gaped; he hadn't expected Malfoy to readily admit to his dismissive treatment of him. "Why
wouldn't it?" he had to ask, his tone quickly losing its angry edge. He knew he sounded disappointed
but he couldn't help it - he was.

Malfoy appeared to notice as well as something flickered in his eyes. He blinked and it was gone.
"Why would you want it to?" he asked acerbically.

Harry swallowed and forced himself to think of this logically and not through the eyes of an
infatuated Omega. "Because now that Voldemort is finally dead, it would be nice if we could let go
of this ridiculous hate. Isn't it exhausting keeping it up without reason?"

Malfoy's eyes flared. "There are plenty of fucking reasons Potter, or have you forgotten?"

Harry frowned. "I would've thought there'd be more reason on my side than on yours Malfoy.
You've been a right prick to me since the moment I met you."

"At least I didn't slice you up and leave you for dead!" Malfoy hissed.

Harry stumbled backwards half a step; feeling actual physical pain flash through his body from the
force of Malfoy's hostile accusation and the ensuing guilt at the reminder of what he'd done. He
quickly shook it off and straightened up as Malfoy frowned warily at his behaviour.

"I'm sorry," Harry said sincerely, the words spilling forth without any conscious deliberation. "You
didn't deserve that and I'm sorry it happened. I didn't know what the spell did, which was stupid, I
know, but I was angry and... and unfortunately you were an outlet for that anger." Harry sighed and
held out his hand. "Now can we please just forget all this and move on?"

Malfoy stared at the outstretched hand extended to him a moment before his eyes darted back to
Harry's face and narrowed. "No," he bit out shortly before striding past and leaving Harry alone in
the dusty bookshelves.

Harry wanted to scream as he clenched his jaw shut so tight it hurt. Why the fuck has his bloody
Omega chosen that self-centred, arrogant, spiteful prat as a potential mate?! They were only four
days into the school year and already he wanted to throttle Malfoy. How was he going to last
an entire year? This frustration was going to be the death of him. Voldemort was less trouble.

Harry turned and practically stomped back towards the group table. He stopped short when he
cought sight of Malfoy collecting his books and then walking over to another table - where Astoria
Greengrass and friend were sitting. Astoria smiled up at Malfoy and he sat down beside her to
resume studying.

Harry couldn't help it, he felt crushed; the blatant rejection and contempt Malfoy had for him was
never more clear to him than in that moment. He could feel the Omega in him wanting to crumple to
the floor in a heap and sob, the urge was so strong that he had to physically stop himself by placing a
hand on a nearby bookshelf and grip it hard, eyes boring into the top of that insensitive blond head.

Harry took a deep breath and, with great determination, tore his gaze from that nightmarish scene and
slowly placed one foot in front of the other until he was back at his table. He sat down in his vacated
seat, all the while cursing his Omega status and the complicated situation he now found himself in.

Ron and Hermione were both shooting him worrying looks but he couldn't concentrate on them right now, he needed to ensure that he wasn't going to fall to pieces in public first. Or murder Astoria Greengrass.

Harry exhaled and pulled himself together. He could do this. He just had to distract himself; Malfoy wasn't the only Alpha around.

"Blaise?"

Blaise glanced up at him with a questioning arch of the brow.

"Would you like to go to Hogsmeade with me on Saturday?" he asked, shoving aside the feeling of wrongness that arose from him asking out someone who was apparently not on his Omega's pre-approved list.

Blaise looked taken-aback a moment before slowly grinning. "Yeah, why not?"

"Great." Harry nodded with a smile then looked down in an attempt to absorb something about Jobberknolls, even if this study session already felt like a lost cause.

He could feel Ron's eyes on him but he would have to be filled in later. Maybe it was pointless to go out with someone whom he didn't feel drawn to but at least it would provide a welcome diversion - and that was worth any minor discomfort to his Omega.

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Harry stood in the entrance hall, waiting for Blaise to show for their Hogsmeade excursion. He was looking forward to it but he also didn't really know him that well and he hoped it wasn't going to be awkward; he'd never been very good at small talk.

Harry felt the hair on the back of his neck suddenly stand on end and he knew before he looked up who would be there. He met familiar grey eyes and immediately turned away, crossing his arms over his chest and looking out the open doorway at the pleasant autumn day beyond.

The clearing of a throat had him turning back around and staring as Malfoy stood before him; looking at him as though he actually wished to speak with him.

Harry quickly hardened his expression; it wasn't difficult with all the resentment still boiling close to the surface from Thursday night. "Yes?" he asked tersely.

Malfoy appeared a little uncomfortable but held Harry's gaze. "Blaise sent me to tell you that he can't make your… meeting today, and that he sends his apologies," he finally replied stiffly.

Harry's heart dropped, but he lifted his chin, green eyes defiant. "Fine," he snapped, then spun and marched out the doors into the muted sunshine.

Did Blaise have to send Malfoy to tell him that he was being stood up?

Harry stopped halfway down the wide stone steps when he suddenly realised that Malfoy was following him. "What are you doing?" he asked, too bewildered to keep up any hostility.

This time Malfoy's eyes were anywhere but meeting Harry's. "I am also visiting Hogsmeade today and thought… I could join you."
Harry frowned suspiciously. "Was this Zabini's idea? Because if it was, you really don't have to. In fact, I'd rather you didn't."

Harry turned and jogged down the rest of the steps, continuing up the gravel drive without waiting for a response. He nearly groaned aloud in frustration when he noticed Malfoy still walking along behind him. He turned to face him, beginning to feel irritated again.

Malfoy spoke before he could get started though.

"I wanted to apologise," he said. "My behaviour Thursday night was… inexcusable."

Harry could only gape, too stunned to do otherwise. "Why are you so… odd?" he exclaimed, throwing his arms up in the air. He turned and walked about five steps before reluctantly glancing back over his shoulder. Malfoy was still standing in the same place, watching him.

Harry sighed in exasperation and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Well come on then," he said.

Malfoy nodded once and quickly fell into step beside him as they made their way towards the charming little town of Hogsmeade.

Harry's stomach was doing somersaults and he honestly thought he might be sick from the rollercoaster of emotions that this stupid Alpha was subjecting him to. He needed to say something—anything—to distract himself from reading something further into this other than the fact that Blaise had most likely coerced Malfoy into taking his place. Merlin knows how.

"So… what made you change your mind?" he asked, trying to keep his tone neutral.

Malfoy was watching the ground pass beneath his feet, hands tucked warmly into his black cloak. "I gave what you said some thought, about moving on and not holding the past against each other." He glanced at Harry, strands of pale blond hair falling over one eye. "I know you would never have used that spell on me if you knew what it did, you're not that kind of person. You're too… virtuous."

Harry couldn't help but laugh as Malfoy said 'virtuous' as though it were a dirty word.

Malfoy's lips twitched in amusement - causing Harry's Omega to purr in happiness - before returning his gaze to the ground. "Are you really going to join the Auror program next year?"

"What? Oh…" Harry blinked at the sudden change in topic. "I dunno, hadn't really given it much thought lately. I used to, but now… I feel a bit tired and world-weary for that sort of career. What do you think?"

Malfoy looked surprised at the question. "You want my opinion?"

Harry smiled and nodded. "Yeah, I do," he replied, thinking that he might as well do this right if they were going to try to get along.

A furrow appeared between Malfoy's brows as he seemed to consider the question in great depth. "In my opinion, I think you would be pushing your luck. I believe you would be better off doing something that makes a difference yet doesn't involve risking your own life."

Harry was surprised; most people didn't think like that, they mostly thought that he should be an Auror because he'd been fighting evil from such a young age and assumed he knew what he was doing.

"What should I be instead?" Harry asked with a smile, wanting to keep things light and not delve
into the war or Voldemort.

"A cook?"

Harry laughed, delighted by Malfoy's wry humour and the fact that he felt comfortable enough to use it. "Nah, pants at Potions, remember?"

"Ah yes, of course." Malfoy nodded with a smirk, amusement clear in his eyes. "Healer?"

Harry scrunched up his face and shook his head. "No, too much study, I'm not really the academic type. Unless it involves Defence or Quidditch, there's probably no hope for me."

"Do you have to do anything at all?" Malfoy asked. "There's nothing wrong with focusing on getting married and starting a family."

Harry's breath caught in his throat when Malfoy's words assaulted him with images of Draco and tiny blond children in their own little cottage by the sea. He shook his head to dispel such ridiculous, unobtainable ideas.

"I've never really been interested in that sort of thing," he said instead, his voice sounding hollow even to his own ears.

Malfoy glanced at him, his brow drawing down in a frown. "Really?"


"I don't think that matters, at least you know what not to do," Malfoy replied.

Harry slanted a look at him, head tilted to one side as he regarded him curiously. "Is that how you feel?"

The corner of Malfoy's mouth lifted into a smirk as he met his gaze. "No Potter, as much as you believe that my parents are the devil incarnate, they really aren't."

Harry smiled and turned to look ahead as they approached the picturesque stone wall which surrounded Hogsmeade. "I may or may not believe that, but I do know that they care about you as proper parents should."

"They do," Malfoy agreed firmly as they passed through the open wrought-iron gates.

Harry stopped and looked up the high street. "Where to?"

"Wherever you want, this was your idea."

"Not with you it wasn't," Harry quipped, but grinned to show that he was joking. "I need to visit the bookshop, if you don't mind."

"Lead the way Potter," Malfoy replied politely.

They walked at a leisurely pace towards the small shop, which may not have looked very impressive from the outside but was filled to bursting with every kind of book imaginable. Harry sincerely hoped they had something useful on male Omegas - or else he would be completely at sea with everything that was going to happen to him.

"I suppose if we're going to do this friendship thing properly we should be calling each other by our
given names," Harry commented nonchalantly. He chuckled when he caught Malfoy pulling a face.

"I think that's taking things too far," the blond remarked, then added slyly, "Harry."

Harry laughed and didn't even try to stop himself from enjoying the pleasant tingle that ran up and down his spine upon hearing his name from those lips.

They reached The Paper Hound and Draco held the door open before they both walked inside. They immediately removed their cloaks and hung them over one arm when the warm air of the cosy shop surrounded them.

"I ah… have something in particular that I'm looking for," Harry said, "so did you just want to have a browse and I'll find you when I'm done?"

Draco nodded in easy agreement and headed off into the rows of overfilled shelves.

Harry watched him walk off a moment before turning and disappearing into the History of Magical Beings section. He stopped before a loaded shelf on Alphas, Alpha Behaviours, Alpha physiology…

He crouched down and ran his finger over the spines of the Omega books that were on the shelf below.

"Yes!" he cheered under his breath when he spied a thin blue book at the end of the row titled 'The Elusive Male Omega.' He withdrew it from the slightly dusty shelf and flipped it open to the table of contents. Harry smiled in relief; it looked like the book covered everything he needed to know, including a chapter on 'The Male Heat Cycle', 'Pregnancy' and something called 'Knotting.'

Harry carried the book to the front counter and quickly paid for it, relieved when the blue and silver book was slipped into a green cellophane bag and hidden from prying eyes. Hopefully Malfoy wouldn't ask what he bought.

Harry looked around for his travelling companion and spied him over near the window, idly flipping through a black and gold-covered book. He took a moment to observe the handsome Slytherin unimpeded. Harry's heart hammered in his chest as he stared at the Alpha whom his Omega longed for. It was easy to see why; the man was tall and lean, with a grace to his movements that somehow seemed to belie the power within those muscled limbs. Harry knew his eyes only came level to the top of Draco's shoulder and, while it still irked him that Malfoy was now taller, he had to admit that it was the perfect height for him to neatly tuck in under Draco's chin if he was ever to be held in his arms. The very thought almost made him weak in the knees.

Harry wanted to laugh out loud at how maudlin and sentimental his thoughts had become since his inheritance. He was beginning to learn to live with it though instead of fighting it at every turn. He knew he would never be a good little submissive mate like the vast majority of female Omegas, but he was coming to appreciate some of the more appealing aspects of having an Alpha as a partner. The general feeling of safety for one, the idea that there would be someone in his life who loved him unconditionally and looked out for him every day was such a comforting thought.

When he'd told Malfoy that his upbringing had affected his outlook on life, he hadn't been lying, but it had caused him to crave stability and safety, and the urge to have his own family, instead of dissuading him from those things. He just hoped that he found another Alpha soon that he felt just as strongly for, one that he actually had a chance with.

Draco looked up then and flashed him a quick smile when he saw that Harry was ready to leave.

Harry knew he was a lost cause when his breath hitched and his stomach flip-flopped at that tiny
inconsequential display of friendliness.

They slipped back into their woollen cloaks and stepped outside.

"Do you want to get a hot drink before we go?" Harry asked.

Malfoy nodded and glanced up the street. "Madam Puddifoots or the Three Broomsticks?" he asked.

Harry paused, neither location seemed fitting somehow. "How about a secret spot I know of? And it won't cost us a knut."

The Slytherin readily agreed and Harry led the way back to Hogwarts. They chatted aimlessly as they walked, not short on conversation which seemed to flow a little easier now that their initial discomfort was out of the way.

Once back at the school, Harry led Draco into the entrance hall and then down the stairs to the basement corridor. Draco followed him with a puzzled frown as Harry walked up to a painting of a fruit bowl and tickled the pear.

Harry grinned knowingly at the surprised look on Draco's face as the pear transformed into a large green handle. He pushed it open to reveal the vast Hogwarts kitchens beyond the secret entrance.

They walked inside and Draco seemed to hesitate uncertainly when they were instantly swarmed by about a dozen cheerful house-elves, but he pushed onwards and stood beside Harry.

Harry spotted Kreacher amongst the other elves and smiled at him. "Kreacher, could Draco and I please get some hot chocolates and perhaps some biscuits?"

Kreacher bowed low at Harry's request. "Of course Master Harry, Kreacher is indebted for the opportunity to serve Master Draco from the honourable house of Malfoy."

Harry rolled his eyes as the withered little elf disappeared into the enormous pantry at the other end of the room. The other elves quickly cleaned a spot at one of the long tables for them, practically bouncing on the balls of their feet at being presented with the rare opportunity of serving visitors.

"How on earth did you discover this place?" Draco asked as he took a seat, purposely withdrawing his hand from a little female elf who was examining his fingers with reverence.

Harry grinned at the amusing scene as he sat beside him, placing his bag from the bookshop on the bench next to him. "Hermione," he replied simply. "It's been very useful whenever I happened to miss a meal or didn't want to eat in the Great Hall."

"And they'll bring you whatever you want?" Draco asked, impressed despite himself.

Harry nodded.

"And do you think they would do the same for me if I came without you?"

"I would think so, especially Kreacher, he seems to be quite fond of you," Harry replied teasingly.

Draco smirked, looking a little more comfortable and not so out of his depth.

Harry smiled and leaned back, elbows resting lightly on the table behind him. "I'm glad you came today," he confessed, suddenly overwhelmed with the need to say so.

Draco appeared slightly astonished by his admission but then one of his rare smiles graced his lips
and Harry was immediately flooded with pleasure.

"As am I," Draco replied in a tone that made it clear that he was as surprised as Harry by this acknowledgment.

Kreacher approached then with their drinks and a large plate holding a vast array of tempting biscuits.

Harry pulled his full mug towards him and took a sip of the smooth hot chocolate topped with fresh whipped cream.

"Master Harry has chosen a fine mate," Kreacher noted approvingly as he looked between the two boys.

Harry choked on his drink and hurriedly put his mug back on the table. "Kreacher!" he spluttered, face turning red. "It's not like that; Draco and I are just friends."

Kreacher frowned, looking perplexed. "But the joining of the Potter and Malfoy families would be a great-"

"Thank you Kreacher, that will be all," Harry interrupted in a commanding, slightly panicked, tone.

Kreacher hesitated a moment before finally bowing and leaving the room.

Harry chanced a glance over at Draco to see the blond staring intently into his hot chocolate, pale cheeks slightly pink. "Sorry," he quickly said in embarrassment. "He has some funny ideas that one."

Draco looked up and shook his head a little, a forced smile of nonchalance on his face. "Don't worry about it," he said and turned back to his drink with a frown, fingers idly stroking the warm sides of the large mug. "You know I can't be with a Beta, right?" he added in a subdued voice.

Harry just wanted to sink into the floor and disappear. "Yeah I know," he put in quickly, almost stammering in his haste to reassure the blond, even as his Omega screeched in protest. "Please don't think that I had ulterior motives when I said that I was glad that you came along today, I really didn't, I'm just happy that we can talk like normal people now," he babbled.

Draco nodded and took a sip of his drink.

Harry returned to his own drink and the easy camaraderie which they had shared for a good part of the day was instantly gone.

They finished their drinks in silence and, without even touching the biscuits, left the kitchen and ascended the stairs to the entrance hall.

"See you in class Potter," Draco said absently before parting ways.

Harry didn't even get the chance to say a word before the Slytherin was gone. With the heavy weight of disappointment pressing on him, Harry slowly made his way back to Gryffindor Tower.

The day had been going so well before bloody Kreacher had stuck his big nose into things. He had actually felt as though a real friendship was possible between the two of them and that perhaps they had more in common then they knew. And a part of him couldn't help but wonder what would have happened if he'd told Draco the truth about being an Omega?

Harry set his jaw and quickly discarded such thoughts with a firm shake of his head. He was
standing by his decision to be with someone who was not choosing him simply for being an Omega. If an Alpha truly cared for him then nothing should stand in their way.

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Harry slept late Sunday morning after a long night of tossing and turning, his fragmented sleep full of strange dreams of sneering blond Slytherins and meddling house-elves.

Harry dragged himself out of bed and into the adjoining boy's lavatory. He placed his toiletry bag on the edge of the sink and stared at himself in the mirror, frowning at the faint dark circles under his bloodshot eyes. He shook his head and looked away from his reflection as he squeezed some toothpaste out onto his brush, absently wondering how Malfoy was going to treat him today, and if all the progress they'd made yesterday would be gone.

Harry heard the door open behind him and he glanced up to see Dean Thomas walk in, looking sleep-ruffled.

"Morning Harry," he greeted drowsily, one hand raking over his hair as the door swung shut behind him.

Harry smiled in greeting through the mirror before recapping the toothpaste and setting it down.

Harry paused, suddenly sensing that the atmosphere in the small room had changed dramatically. Gooseflesh broke out on his arms as he forced himself to look back up and he swallowed at the sight that greeted him: Dean was staring at him with wide unblinking eyes, his pupils so dilated that they almost took over any hint of colour, his body rigid and tense.

"Dean?" he ventured cautiously, trying to keep the nervousness out of his voice.

Harry saw Dean's nostrils flare a little before the other boy was suddenly rushing forward and grabbing him by the shoulders. Harry yelped in surprise as he was spun around and pinned up against the stone wall, held firmly in place by arms that felt like steel bands.

"What are you-" Harry bit off when Dean suddenly dropped his face to Harry's neck and inhaled deeply.

Dean sighed and Harry froze when he felt the warm press of lips against his throat. "Merlin… you smell so good..." Dean murmured as though in a pleasure-induced trance.

"D-dean?" Harry tried desperately, unsure of what to do. He didn't think Dean wanted to harm him, but his intent was made clear a second later as the other boy suddenly pressed further into Harry's body and Harry could feel the hard line of his arousal against his stomach.

Dean ignored him and began to fervently kiss his way up Harry's pale throat, hands pressing Harry's wrists against the stone to hold him in place.

Harry gasped as a strange foggy awareness crept over him and seeped into his mind. His body relaxed and he suddenly wanted to wrap his arms around the Alpha's body and plead for more.

Dean seemed to sense this and released Harry's wrists, quickly dropping one hand to the small of Harry's back and the other to cup his backside and bring him up hard against him.

Harry moaned and his head rolled back against the wall as his eyes fell closed, drowning in a sudden haze of arousal that flooded through his entire body, hands clutching onto Dean's strong shoulders and holding him close.
Dean's teeth grazed his skin and Harry shivered.

"Want you..." Dean breathed against his skin before licking a stripe up the side of his neck and thrusting his pyjama-clad erection into him. "Going to fuck you..."

Harry's eyes flew open and he felt as though ice-water had suddenly filled his veins, instantly clearing the stupor from his head. "No!" he exclaimed, hands sliding to the front of Dean's chest and pushing ineffectually against the strong Alpha. "Dean stop!"

Dean growled lowly in his throat and only pulled Harry against him even tighter, hips still pressing forward, seeking friction.

Harry's panic quickly turned to outrage at being manhandled like this. He started to move sideways to escape the persistent pawing but only managed to trip over Dean's foot. Dean was taken by surprise and the two fell to the floor with a crash.

Harry's head bounced back against the solid flagstones and he almost blacked out from the impact. His pained groan seemed to rouse Dean from whatever testosterone-induced daze he'd found himself in and he quickly sat up, blinking in confusion.

"Harry? Oh Merlin, Harry are you alright?" he exclaimed in alarm.

Harry opened his eyes and his vision swam for a moment.

"I'm so sorry Harry," Dean apologised, sounding distressed. He reached down and carefully helped Harry to sit up. "I'm not even sure what happened, something just... just came over me."

Harry swallowed and looked at him, his head throbbing. "It's okay Dean, it wasn't your fault," he said faintly. "Help me up?"

Dean was quick to comply as he gently lifted Harry up and set him on his feet. Harry swayed and Dean instantly scooped his dorm mate up into his arms and turned to exit the bathroom with him.

"I'm taking you to the infirmary," he said firmly.

Harry didn't argue; his body felt like jelly and he could feel the beginning of what felt like shock come over him as he began to shiver.

Dean carried him down the stairs and into the Common Room where a few lingering students were still hanging out. They all looked up and stared in shock at the sight of a limp Harry Potter in Dean's arms.

"Harry!"

Harry winced as Ron's alarmed exclamation rang in his ears.

"What happened?" Ron demanded as he ran over. He looked to Dean as Harry closed his eyes without replying.

"He... he fell and hit his head on the floor," Dean replied, obviously uncertain of attempting to explain something that he didn't even understand himself. "I'm just taking him to the hospital wing."

"I'll take him," Ron said.

"No, it's fine, I was there, I'll take him," Dean said firmly.
"You have chess club," Ron pointed out.

"Bugger, that's right."

Harry forced his eyes open. "Just go Dean, I'll be fine with Ron. It's okay," he assured.

Dean looked hesitant but finally transferred him into Ron's arms, the movement causing Harry's head to spin and he quickly shut his eyes again against the ensuing nausea.

"I'll check on you later," Dean promised, sounding hesitant to leave.

Ron ignored him as he turned and carefully carried Harry out the portrait hole and into the corridor. "What the fuck happened Harry?" Ron whispered.

Harry tried to ignore the embarrassment of being carried through the school like a helpless child. "I'm not sure but I think maybe the scent masking potions aren't doing their job anymore," he replied as he tentatively opened his eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"Dean… he… kind of attacked me," Harry admitted.

"What?!" Ron exclaimed, horrified.

Harry felt his shivering increase as he thought back to Dean's lust-filled eyes and arms so strong that he didn't have a hope of escape. Not to mention the terrifying realisation that he had actually submitted to the Alpha's unwelcome advances. What if he hadn't come to his senses? What would have happened?

"He knew what I was," Harry finally said solemnly. "He knew Ron."

"But how?" Ron replied with a frown, maneuvering them up the staircase towards the hospital wing. "You smell the same to me."

"I dunno, maybe because we were in an enclosed space?" Harry reasoned. "He was completely normal until the door shut."

Ron's frown deepened but he didn't say anything as he entered the infirmary and carried Harry over to the nearest hospital bed and laid him down. Harry closed his eyes with a sigh, only too relieved to be stationary again.

"Oh great," Ron grumbled under his breath.

"What?" Harry asked, keeping his eyes shut.

"Malfoy's here."

Harry felt his stomach clench. "Of course he is," he muttered, keeping his eyes closed and praying that they wouldn't be noticed by the Slytherin.

"Mr. Weasley, what's happened?" Madam Pomfrey's voice rang out from somewhere near her office followed by the immediate squeaking of her rubber-soled shoes striding efficiently across the floor.

"Dean Thomas attacked him," Ron informed her without hesitation.

"Ron!" Harry cried, eyes flying open to glare at his friend. "He didn't attack me; I tripped over his
foot and hit my head on the floor."

"Only because you were trying to get away from his wandering hands."

Harry gaped at him in disbelief.

"Mr. Malfoy, you may leave," Madam Pomfrey said absently as she prodded Harry to sit forward so that she could inspect the back of his head.

Harry looked up to see narrowed grey eyes; it seemed Draco was back to scowling at his very presence again. Harry winced in pain when the nurse suddenly touched upon the sore spot on his head and when he opened his eyes again, the blond was exiting the infirmary, a couple bottles of what Harry knew to be Dreamless Sleep clasped in his hand.

Harry took a deep breath and slowly released it. His Omega was outraged that its chosen mate was leaving him when he was injured and in pain. Harry, on the other hand, was only too relieved to see him go.

Madam Pomfrey asked him a few questions once she finished her examination and then bustled off to fetch him some potions before he could be discharged.

"Why did you tell her?" Harry hissed at Ron once she was out of earshot. "I don't want Dean to get into trouble, it wasn't his fault!"

"He attacked you Harry, even if it was because he accidentally lost control, she should still know that you're at risk," Ron said gravely. "You should tell her the truth mate; if the potions aren't working anymore then you're going to be in trouble. Maybe your heat is coming on?"

"Oh god…" Harry moaned and covered his face with his hands.

Ron opened his mouth then closed it when Madam Pomfrey strode back into the room.

Harry downed the potions she shoved at him without complaint, all the while thinking about what Ron had said. What if he was about to go into his heat cycle? What was going to happen?

Harry knew he needed to read his new book if he was going to find the answers - and he needed to read it now.
"Sorry I'm late!" Hermione exclaimed breathlessly as she slid onto the bench across from Harry at the table in the furthest corner of the library. "I had a few questions for Professor Babbling about our assignment. What have I missed?"

Harry looked up from where his nose had been buried in his blue and silver Omega book. "What?"

"Never mind," Hermione said as she withdrew a stack of spare parchment and a quill from her bulging school bag. "All right, what have you found out so far?"

Harry glanced down at the book laid open in front of him as though it was about to jump up and bite him. "I've skimmed through the first chapter on male Omega characteristics."

"And?" Hermione replied, quill poised and ready, eager to learn everything she possibly could about male Omegas; to help her friend as well as to satisfy her endless thirst for knowledge.

"Apparently I am slowly turning into a sensitive and delicate flower."

Hermione laughed before she could stop herself and quickly clapped a hand over her mouth as she darted an anxious glance towards Madam Pince behind her large mahogany desk at the far end of the large room. "What do you mean?" she asked in a whisper, trying her best not to giggle.

Harry glared at her before replying in an unhappy tone, "it says during their eighteenth year, the male Omega will begin to develop a more sensitive and nurturing side, that I will acquire what are generally considered female characteristics."

Hermione swallowed her laughter and tried to school her features into a thoughtfully neutral expression. "And have you noticed any of these changes yet?"

Harry absentely toyed with the edge of the page. "I dunno… maybe."

"Such as?" Hermione asked with interest.

Harry sighed and tried to think back on the day he'd spent with Malfoy in Hogsmeade. It was the only time he had felt… different, as though his thoughts were unlike anything he’d thought or felt before. "When I went to Hogsmeade with Malfoy, I…" Harry could feel his cheeks heat as he spoke. "I wanted to be taken care of," he mumbled.

Hermione's expression softened. "And you've only felt that way around Malfoy so far?" she asked quietly.

Harry nodded without looking up.

"But you've hardly turned into a delicate flower," she reasoned, seeing how distraught her friend was. "I mean, you still act like you as far as I can see. So what if you want to be in a relationship with someone who will take care of you? It's about time somebody took care of you Harry, instead of you always being the one to do it for everyone else." She smiled a little before turning back to the book. "So, what else is there?"

Harry flipped to the next chapter, grateful to be off the subject of his feelings. "Choosing a Mate," he read.
"Ooo let me see!" Hermione replied eagerly, reaching for the book.

Harry gave her a look. "This isn't some romantic fairy-tale Hermione; this is my life we're talking about here."

Hermione smiled sheepishly. "Sorry, I'll try to… bear that in mind." She looked back to the page in front of her and read aloud. "A male Omega does not differ from a female Omega when it comes to choosing a mate. The male Omega will be drawn to one, or even several, unbonded Alphas during their search for a life partner. As Alphas are exclusively male, this means that a male Omega will always end up with another male as his mate." Hermione paused to glance up at Harry. "Good thing you're gay Harry. Imagine being a homosexual Alpha and having to be with a female Omega because there's no other choice? That would be awful."

"Now you know why I want to keep it a secret," Harry muttered. "There would be hundreds of Alphas out there who wouldn't care about what I'm like so long as I have all the right bits."

Hermione chewed her lip as she nodded in understanding. "I think it's a good idea - in theory," she replied slowly.

"In theory?"

"Well, I wouldn't want you to miss out on the perfect mate just because he doesn't know you're an Omega. It isn't a crime to want your own children."

Harry's expression hardened. "If you're referring to Malfoy-"

"I wasn't," Hermione interjected quickly, "but there would be others like him. He's an Alpha Harry; it's in their genetic make-up to want to start a family, to want to procreate with their mate."

"Charlie's an Alpha and he chose a Beta," Harry pointed out.

"I'm not saying it doesn't happen, I'm just saying it's uncommon."

"Well I'm not in a rush, I can wait until the right person comes along," Harry replied determinedly.

Hermione smiled. "Is this part of your new delicate flower sensibilities?" she couldn't help asking. "Wanting love instead of just sex?"

"Fuck off," Harry replied with a reluctant smile.

Hermione laughed as she flipped the page over and continued reading. "It says that you can keep several mates if you wish but that your Alpha, or Alphas, will only ever remain loyal to you and you alone once you're bonded."

Harry grimaced but kept his comment about wanting just the one partner to himself, as it would only encourage further disparaging remarks about his female sensibilities.

"Oh this is interesting," Hermione was saying as she pointed to a paragraph halfway down the page. "To become officially bonded, an Alpha will bite the male Omega somewhere on his body to the extent that it will leave a permanent scar, or claiming mark as it is generally referred to. The most common location is on the neck, as the site is visible to the general public and will demonstrate to anyone who cannot scent a claim that there is in fact one in place."

Harry frowned. "That is not happening," he said firmly. "No one is fucking claiming me."
Hermione glanced up. "It says that the Omega will actually crave this mark from his Alpha."

Harry shook his head, determined that he wasn't going to consent to such an archaic ritual.

"But Harry… how else will you bond with your Alpha?" Hermione questioned worriedly. "If you don't officially bond with one then you will be forever chasing off Alphas who think you're still on the market. The claiming mark doesn't stop all of them - just as a wedding ring doesn't - but it definitely helps. Plus it will ease your Alpha's insecurities about you being around other Alphas on your own."

Harry swept a hand through his dark hair with a sigh. "I dunno, I guess it's something I'll have to think about. And talk over with my… erm, mate, when I find one."

Hermione nodded and decided to move on. "Do you want to skip the chapter on mating?" she asked.

"Er yeah, I think I know where all the bits are supposed to go," Harry replied, caught between amusement and embarrassment.

"All right, good," Hermione replied, looking relieved. "And if you do have any questions, I'm sure Ron can answer them." Hermione flipped through the short chapter on mating and paused near the end, frowning at one of the definitions. "Do you know what knotting is Harry?"

Harry leaned over and began to read as Hermione turned away to make some notes on her parchment, cheeks slightly pink. Green eyes widened as he read that a bonded Alpha's penis will engorge at its base into a large mass, or knot, during ejaculation to keep the two wizards tethered together. This will ensure that the semen remains in the mate's body for a time to assist with conception. The length of time the knot remains in place will differ; anywhere from one or two minutes up to a full twenty minutes. The knot will dissolve quickly if danger is present or will last longer if the Omega is reluctant.

"Reluctant?" Harry repeated with a frown.

"What's that?" Hermione said, looking up.

"It says that the knot will last longer if the Omega is reluctant. What's that supposed to mean?"

Hermione bit her lip and fiddled with the quill in her hand. "Well, I guess it's referring to the fact that some Alphas will take an Omega against his or her will."

"You mean rape?" Harry replied furiously.

"Yes." Hermione confirmed with a nod.

Harry frowned at the book, once again hating how much of his life felt completely out of his control. "When Dean… started touching me in the boy's toilets, I… I wanted it Hermione." He looked back up at her, fury still burning in his eyes. "As soon as he had me, I just… submitted. I'm not attracted to him, never have been, but it was like my Omega side just took over."

Hermione placed a hand over his, her brown eyes resolute as she met his gaze. "But you did stop it when he wanted to take it further and you can do it again Harry. You're not helpless, it's probably a
little like fighting off Imperio - and you can do that easily."

Harry sighed, trying to push aside his anger. It was more important to learn everything he could now and think about the ramifications of it all later. "Yeah… I guess."

Hermione gave his hand a squeeze before releasing it. "Okay, what else do you want to know?" she asked, pulling the book back towards her.

Harry leaned his arms on the table and dropped his chin onto his forearms as he frowned at the scuffed table-top. "I guess I should know about male pregnancies," he said.

"Is that something you're okay with?" Hermione asked casually as she flipped to the relevant chapter.

"Yeah," Harry replied instantly, "I am. It's the one good thing about this whole bloody Omega mess. Not that I'm looking forward to the actual pregnancy part of it."

Hermione smiled to herself as she turned the pages. "All right, male Omega pregnancies are very similar to any human female, whereas the Omega will gestate for nine months, can suffer morning sickness, food cravings, nesting behaviours, hot flashes, etc… the only two differences are that the baby must be born by caesarean and that the Omega's body will begin to form a womb during each heat cycle in order to accommodate the foetus." Hermione paused to glance up. "That doesn't sound so bad," she observed encouragingly.

"Yeah, I could put up with all that," Harry replied as he pressed a tiny grin into the sleeve of his jumper.

Hermione smiled as she thought about Harry having his own children, it was something she wanted for him very much and knew he did as well. She had her suspicions about his Muggle relatives going beyond just not treating him well while raising him and had always wondered if that's where the strong desire for his own family had stemmed from. That and the fact that he had lost his parents at such a young age.

"Guess we should move on to the heat cycle," Harry proposed unenthusiastically.

Hermione nodded and turned back to the chapter entitled 'The Male Omega Heat Cycle.' She smoothed the pages out and began to read: "the male Omega will go through one heat period per month-"

"Every month?" Harry repeated, eyes widening in shock and dismay.

Hermione cleared her throat and continued. "A typical heat period lasts about two or three days. During this time, the Omega will emit heat pheromones which alert any nearby Alphas to the Omega's condition - regardless of whether the Omega is bonded or not. Most Omegas will spend their heat cycles at home and not leave until the cycle is complete. It can be slightly uncomfortable for an Omega to be in heat without the assistance of an Alpha to alleviate the overwhelming sexual urges, but it can be done without too much distress with the aid of masturbation. The Omega's anus will self-lubricate during his cycle to assist in easy penetration and safeguard against injury, which could deter copulation during the cycle and delay conception; which is the ultimate goal of a heat cycle. A male Omega can only fall pregnant during his heat."

"Well that's good to know," Harry interjected.

Hermione nodded. "It also mentions that an Alpha can only ever form a knot with his bonded mate. An Alpha can impregnate any sexual partner at any time but their chances of conception significantly increase once bonded due to the formation of the knot."
Harry nodded thoughtfully, trying to work through all the information. This was why he had asked Hermione to read the book with him; he absorbed information much easier when it was read aloud and discussed rather than him simply reading it by himself.

"So… I can only fall pregnant during my heat, but any Alpha can impregnate me, it doesn't necessarily have to be my mate?"

"Yes, that's probably why Omegas hide out in their homes until they are finished their cycle."

Harry exhaled heavily. "So if an Alpha was to rape me during my cycle - even if I were already bonded - I could potentially become pregnant with his baby?"

"Yes," Hermione confirmed, "just as any female could."

"Okay," Harry nodded, absorbing this. "Does it say whether there are any signs for when a male Omega is about to go into heat?"

Hermione hummed as she skimmed through the rest of the chapter, finger running across the page as she read. "No, not really," she surmised in disappointment. "But it does say that you will have your heat at the same time every month and can plan for it." She looked up with a slight smirk. "Just like a girl on her menstrual cycle. Maybe we'll sync up."

Harry rolled his eyes. "You're supposed to make me feel better not worse."

"Sorry," Hermione laughed.

Harry sat up and absently pushed his glasses back up his nose. "Okay, I think that's enough for today," he said, feeling a little overloaded with information. He looked up with a grateful smile. "Thanks for your help."

"Any time," Hermione replied, slipping her notes back into the bag at her feet.

They both stood and gathered their belongings, Harry hiding the Omega book deep within his leather book bag, before walking with Hermione towards the exit.

"So how are you feeling about everything now?" she asked quietly as they passed through the library doors and out into the corridor.

Harry shrugged noncommitively. "I dunno, I'm glad I have more information and a better idea of what's happening to me but… I also dislike so many aspects of being a you-know-what." Harry paused and glanced around to ensure that they were alone before adding, "and the most frustrating part is that I still only want Malfoy, who clearly has no interest in me."

"Maybe we should take a trip into Diagon Alley next weekend to find you another Alpha to fixate on," she suggested with a sly grin.

Harry couldn't help but chuckle, eternally grateful for his friendship with such an understanding and intelligent witch.

. . . .

Harry stood in the centre of the Quidditch pitch and watched with intense concentration as his team
practiced maneuvers high above him in the crisp September air. He clutched his Firebolt in one hand, dried sweat on his brow from moving through his own set of grueling Seeker exercises at the start of practice.

He grinned in triumph as his team managed to complete a particularly complicated passing maneuver - and did it flawlessly. He clapped and whistled his approval before signalling for them to return to the ground.

They landed around him in semi-circle; exhilarated smiles on all of their flushed faces. The only returning members of the Gryffindor team were Harry, Ron and Ginny; the other four were all new faces.

"Great job everyone," Harry said enthusiastically. "I knew you could do it - please don't forget exactly what we did today. We'll run it again next practice to make sure it's really cemented in your brains before our first game against Ravenclaw."

The Gryffindors thanked Harry before proceeding to the change rooms.

"Ravenclaw hasn't a hope," Ron said with a grin as he and Harry quickly collected the practice equipment and placed it back into the battered wooden trunk before heading off the pitch together.

Harry returned the grin, emerald eyes sparkling with energy. "Yeah, we have a decent team this year. I was a little unsure when I saw Abercrombie and Peakes at the tryouts for Beaters - but they're brilliant!"

Ron laughed and nodded. "Yeah, I know what you mean, they're so little but they really pack a punch."

The two pushed through the doors at the back of the stadium tower and jogged up the stairs with their brooms in hand.

"I think their size may actually help," Harry commented. "It makes them quick flyers instead of looking ungainly in the air."

Ron nodded his agreement as they pushed through the door into the loud chatter and rushing shower water of the boy's change room. It appeared that the Ravenclaw team were already gearing up for their practice as the room was full of blue robes as well as red.

Harry smiled to himself as the two teams spouted some good-natured teasing back and forth behind him as he walked to his locker; each team certain of victory for the upcoming match.

He'd really missed Quidditch over the summer, and now it was the only time he felt even halfway normal.

Harry had a quick shower and washed his hair before toweling off and slipping into clean clothes. It was Saturday and he was wearing his old worn-in jeans and t-shirt along with his favourite scuffed trainers to complete his typical weekend ensemble.

"Hey Harry, can I ask you a question?"

Harry peered around his open locker door at the captain of the Ravenclaw team; Anthony Goldstein. "Yeah sure," he replied as he hung up his damp towel.

Anthony walked over, absently fastening up an armguard. "I happened to pass by the pitch during Slytherin's practice Thursday night and it appeared as though their Beaters were practicing the
Dopplebeater Defence."

Harry raised his brow in surprise. "Really?"

"Hey Harry, do you want me to wait?" Ron called out as he slammed his locker shut and turned to him, ready to leave.

"Nah, I'll catch up. Hermione's waiting, remember?" Harry called back.

"Right." Ron waved and walked out of the locker room, the rest of the Ravenclaw team trickling out with him to start their practice session.

The locker room was finally silent as Harry turned back to Anthony. "Is that legal at Hogwarts?" he asked, knowing that the act of both Beaters hitting the bludger at the same time for maximum power - and maximum impact - was permitted in professional Quidditch but he'd never seen it done at Hogwarts before.

Anthony finished lacing up his leather armguard and looked up. "I believe it's technically allowed, but no team has attempted it in all of my time here."

Harry nodded as he chewed his bottom lip in thought. "Well I certainly wouldn't put it past Slytherin to be the first," he finally surmised.

Anthony nodded in agreement. "I suppose all we can do is warn Hufflepuff and just be prepared for it."

"Yeah, thanks for letting me know," Harry replied with a brief smile. "I'll have to keep my team on their toes when it comes to what Slytherin's Beaters are up to next match."

"I suspect the Seeker will be most at risk," Anthony pointed out. "Especially you Harry, they know how essential you are to a Gryffindor victory."

Harry shrugged self-consciously. "I have a great team behind me this season," he replied. "So I'm not as essential as Slytherin may think."

Anthony smiled and held out his hand. "Well, good luck Potter, I'll see you on the pitch next Friday."

Harry shook his hand. "Yeah, same to you."

When Harry went to remove his hand from Anthony's, the other boy's grip suddenly tightened. Harry's eyes darted up to Anthony's face and he paled as he noticed the dilated pupils in Anthony's bright blue eyes.

"Anthony?" he said, feeling a strange sense of deja vu wash over him.

Anthony held fast as he took a step towards him, nostrils flaring. "You… you smell delicious Harry."

Harry groaned inwardly; it was Dean all over again. "Anthony, let go of my hand," he said firmly, taking a step away from him.

Anthony frowned as though confused and then before Harry could even take a breath to speak, Anthony had brought up his other hand and pushed Harry up against the wall of steel lockers at his back.

Harry inhaled sharply, surprised by the sudden impact.
Anthony pressed the length of his body up against Harry's, his hands pinning Harry's arms to his sides to keep him in place. He smirked in satisfaction and then proceeded to lean in and press his lips to the side of Harry's neck to suckle at the soft skin.

Harry couldn't stop the moan from escaping his lips, his knees trembling as his arousal shot into overdrive and his dread melted away. He was instantly hard and rolled his hips against Anthony's body.

Anthony growled and immediately inserted his thigh further between Harry's legs, one hand dropping to his backside to encourage Harry's rutting motions.

"Oh fuck..." Harry gasped, eyes rolling back in his head as he continued to thrust his jean-clad erection against the muscular Alpha.

"Yes," Anthony hissed against Harry's shower-warmed skin, pleased at eliciting such pleasure from his delectable quarry. He moved his lips downwards and scraped his teeth along the soft juncture of Harry's shoulder.

Harry instantly shivered with desire and Anthony smiled around the skin in his mouth when he felt Harry's response. He set his teeth more firmly around Harry's flesh and bit down.

Harry's eyes flew open and his foggy mind quickly cleared. He wrenched his head to the side, as far from Anthony's sharp Alpha teeth as possible. Unfortunately this had the unwelcome result of him striking his head against the open locker door beside him and being cut by the sharp steel edge.

The pain only seemed to fuel Harry's anger and he promptly shoved Anthony away from him. The Alpha's grip had slackened when Harry had started to respond to him so he stumbled backwards without requiring too much force.

"Stay the fuck over there!" Harry panted warningly, green eyes burning as he held up one hand as though to ward him off.

Anthony remained where he was but his eyes were still burning feverishly, not even blinking as he stared back at Harry, hands twitching at his sides as though wanting to grab ahold of him again.

Harry quickly withdrew his wand from the waistband of his jeans and pointed it at him. "Stay right there Anthony," he said as calmly as he could manage, his heart beating rapidly in his chest and his body tensed in flight or fight mode. "I'm leaving and you will stay here until I'm gone. Then all of this will stop and you will be able to think clearly, and know that you don't actually want to claim me."

Harry swallowed, horrified at the thought of what could have happened. He slowly backed away from the other boy, who hadn't moved a muscle during Harry's speech. Harry walked backwards towards the door, never taking his eyes - or wand - off of the tense Alpha. He cursed the fact that his robe and bag were still in his locker but didn't want to take the chance that Anthony might jump him again if he went back for them.

Harry bumped up against the door and, with one last glance at Anthony, spun around and pushed through. He sprinted down the short hallway to the stairs and leapt down, taking two or three steps at a time in his haste.

Harry burst outside in to the cold air and kept running, wand still clutched in one hand. When he felt as though he were far enough away, he stopped and looked over his shoulder. Anthony was nowhere to be seen and he exhaled shakily in relief, bending over with his hands on his knees,
breathing hard.

Once he'd caught his breath, he straightened up and absently reached up to wipe the sweat from his eye - and his hand came away red. Harry frowned then remembered that he'd cut himself on the locker door.

He cursed, half wondering if he could heal himself without a mirror.

"Potter?"

Harry spun around and instinctively raised his wand, body still fraught with adrenaline.

Blaise Zabini held up his hands, eyes wide. "Whoa! Steady there Chosen One."

Harry slowly lowered his wand again. "Sorry," he said, knowing he must look mental running around with his wand out, no robe, and blood dripping down the side of his face.

Blaise merely appeared concerned though. "Are you all right?" he asked. "Did Dean Thomas' attacker get to you too?"

Harry frowned. "Who?"

Blaise's gaze shifted over Harry's shoulder and Harry instantly turned to see what he was looking at. Anthony Goldstein had exited the tower and was walking towards the Quidditch pitch, clutching a broom in one hand and absently rubbing his temple with the other as though bewildered.

"Blaise?" Harry prompted, satisfied that Anthony no longer posed a threat. He knew he would have to look into why this was happening to him when he was alone in confined spaces with a single Alpha, but he needed to know what Zabini was talking about first.

Blaise turned back to him. "Dean was sliced up somewhere near the lake."

"Sliced up?" Harry repeated, stunned.

"Yeah, some sort of cutting curse or something."

*Sectumsempra* drifted unbidden through Harry's mind and he quickly shook his head. "Is he all right?"

Blaise nodded, not looking too concerned. "Oh yeah, Pomfrey had him fixed up and out of the infirmary in an hour. Don't know why anyone would target such a straight-laced Gryffindor."

"Hmm…." Harry hummed thoughtfully but his mind was spinning. Why Dean Thomas indeed? Did it have something to do with what happened between Dean and himself? Only Ron and Hermione knew about that though. Would Ron in his new protective mode carry out revenge on Dean or would only his true Alpha mate do something like that…

"Are you sure you're all right?" Blaise asked, interrupting his musing. "Because you do know your head is bleeding, right?"

Harry blinked and forced a smile. "Yeah, Quidditch practice," he dismissed offhand.

Blaise didn't look entirely convinced. "You seem a little jumpy Potter, are you heading back to the castle? I could walk with you?"

Harry was about to refuse then thought better of it. Maybe an escort wasn't such a bad idea until he
could sit down and figure this out with Hermione. He knew Blaise was an Alpha but the Slytherin appeared unaffected by him. "Yeah, all right."

The two fell into step as they walked back towards the castle together. Harry shoved his hands into his jeans pockets for warmth, cursing the fact that he hadn't been able to grab his robe from the locker room.

"So do they have any idea who attacked Dean?" Harry asked.

Blaise shook his head. "Not as far as I know. No magical signature could be traced on the wounds and he doesn't have any known enemies either. Bit of a mystery until it happens again I suppose. Dean isn't allowed to go anywhere on his own for awhile. His parents are furious that this happened on school grounds, but honestly, a lot worse has happened here over the years."

Harry snorted in agreement then glanced sideways at him. "So… was the person trying to kill Dean, do you think, or just… you know, scare him?"

"Definitely out to scare him, I'd say," Blaise replied reflectively. "The cuts weren't that deep and he was left out in the open. Dean can't remember a thing, just that he was walking near the lake and then something knocked into him and everything went black."

Harry frowned at the description; it didn't sound like a wand attack, at least not at first. "Perhaps it was a wandering Acromantula?"

"Yeah, I think that's what they're investigating at the moment, with Hagrid's assistance," Blaise replied as they approached the wide stone entrance steps of the school.

"Zabini."

Harry and Blaise both looked up to see Malfoy striding towards them, a strangely blank expression on his face.

He stopped in front of them, eyes glancing between the two before finally settling on Blaise. "Thought you were coming to the library," he said without preamble.

"I was on my way, just helping Harry here," Blaise replied evenly, and Harry noticed that Blaise's expression was oddly defiant. "As you can see, he's been injured."

Draco's grey eyes flicked to Harry's forehead a moment before returning to Blaise. "Yes I can see that. Why don't you carry on to the library and I'll walk Potter to the infirmary and then meet you there?"

Harry frowned as the two seemed to be conducting some sort of stand-off before Blaise finally nodded.

"See you later Harry," he said with a tight smile before striding past Draco and disappearing into the school.

Harry's frown deepened. "I don't need an escort Malfoy," he said irritably as Draco turned to him expectantly.

"I beg to differ Potter."

Much to Harry's surprise, Draco reached out to take him by the elbow and began to walk him into the school. Harry was so shocked that he went along with it without complaint.
When the shock wore off, halfway up the first set of stairs, Harry wanted to tear his arm out of the Slytherin's firm grasp but Draco's touch was warm and tingly on the bare skin of his arm and he just couldn't find it in himself to do it. He cursed how pathetic he was as he walked alongside the Alpha, trying to ignore how Draco's warmth was seeping into his side as they walked nearly shoulder to shoulder.

"Why are you doing this Malfoy?" Harry asked crossly. If he couldn't physically force himself away from Malfoy then perhaps he could do it verbally. "I know how much you hate me."

The grip on his arm tightened for a fraction of a second then loosened.

"Well?" Harry demanded when he didn't get an answer, glaring at Draco as the tight-lipped Slytherin stared straight ahead.

"I don't hate you," he finally replied.

Harry rolled his eyes.

"Much," Draco added, lips twitching.

Harry gaped. "You're unbelievable," he stated. He was irritated by Malfoy's erratic behaviour and with himself for feeling so hot and bothered by Malfoy's close proximity.

They turned up the corridor to the infirmary and approached the double entrance doors.

Harry let out an undignified yelp when Malfoy suddenly dragged him sideways into a small alcove, hidden behind a rusty suit of armour. "What the fuck is wrong with you?" Harry demanded loudly before Draco placed a hand over his mouth.

Grey eyes stared intently back into furious green for a moment before Draco's gaze slid upwards to the wound just above Harry's right temple.

Harry's anger immediately evaporated when he saw the expression on Draco's face.

"I just need to… confirm that you're all right," Draco murmured distractedly as he lifted a hand to brush Harry's dark hair off of his forehead and away from the small gash.

Harry shivered as soon as Draco's hand came into contact with his hair. He had to bite back a moan as Draco suddenly leaned in and inhaled the skin right below his ear, breath promptly exhaling warmly and causing gooseflesh to rise on his arms. Harry's eyes fell closed as the scent of Draco's shampoo and something that was probably uniquely his, drifted to his nostrils and filled his body with coiled desire; ready to spring at a moment's notice.

This was completely different to the other two times that an Alpha had crowded his space and he'd submitted. This wasn't submission; this was pure want. This wasn't foggy, unconsciousness forcing his reactions and movements; this was something he wanted - with clear-headed certainty. He felt it right down to his very bones; this wasn't just some random Alpha, this was a potential mate.

"Please…” Harry whispered, not knowing what he was asking for but needing something - anything - from the Alpha. He didn't care that he sounded needy because he fucking was, and clearly Draco was feeling something as well or he wouldn't be sliding warm hands up his sides and curling his arms around Harry's back to pull him in.

Draco held him close as he moved his head back to stare into Harry's eyes as though trying to find something there.
Harry held his breath, praying that Draco would succumb to whatever internal struggle he was currently waging within himself. Those grey eyes were so close that Harry could see every little speck of black and variation of colour as they stared intently back at him, deciphering.

The Slytherin eventually frowned and, as though having to force himself, took a step back. "Come on," he said quietly, taking Harry by the elbow once more and leading him out of the alcove as though nothing had happened.

Harry felt his stomach drop with crushing disappointment - but he had hope, he knew that whatever he had been feeling, Draco felt it too, or at least felt something.

Draco silently led him up the corridor, straight into the empty infirmary and over to the nearest hospital bed. "I'll fetch Pomfrey," he said unemotionally, about to turn away.

"Wait!" Harry reached up and grabbed him by the arm. "We need to talk."

Draco frowned as though confused but Harry could see panic hidden in those guarded grey eyes. "About what?"

Harry glared. "About what the bloody hell just happened in that alcove Malfoy," he replied, trying to keep his voice down. "And why you felt the need to personally escort me to the infirmary in the first place."

Draco swallowed as he glanced down at Harry's hand wrapped around his wrist. Harry saw the moment the mask came down and the Slytherin's expression fell in obvious defeat. "Yes, I suppose we do," he finally relented, forcing his gaze back up to meet Harry's. "What do you propose?"

Harry exhaled in relief. "Meet me in the seventh floor corridor-"

"Opposite Barnabas the Barmy?" Draco guessed with a knowing look.

Harry nodded. "Yeah."

"At ten?"

"Ten," Harry agreed, excited and relieved and scared all at once.

Draco turned his wrist in Harry's grip and fleetingly rubbed his thumb over the top of Harry's hand before turning and walking off.

Harry visibly sagged and had to place his hands on the starched bedsheet beside him to hold him up, shaky with everything that had happened.

He glanced up and saw Draco speaking to Madam Pomfrey just outside her office.

He needed to speak to Ron and Hermione as soon as he was released, there was so much he needed to talk to them about. He needed to find out how certain Alphas were able to respond to him as though they knew he was an Omega - despite the fact that he was still taking daily scent masking potions. He needed to find out more information on what happened to Dean, and most of all, he needed to know whether they thought him meeting with Draco alone was a good idea or not. Draco had reacted to him in a way that was similar to the other Alphas, but he was the only one who had been able to stop himself and walk away, despite Harry doing everything in his power to spur him on.

Harry's eyes fell closed for a moment. Merlin, he wanted to be alone with Draco again; the Alpha's
scent and the feel of his arms around him and his warm breath on his neck… He wanted it so much that he positively ached with the strength of his desire.

Harry swallowed and opened his eyes to see Madam Pomfrey striding towards him, wand in hand. Draco was nowhere to be seen.

Harry answered the nurse’s questions mechanically as she went through her routine and efficiently healed his injury, which had scabbed over long ago, his mind all the while on Draco and their possibly disastrous upcoming meeting.
Harry stumbled over the threshold of the Gryffindor common room as he pushed his way in through the portrait hole. He paused to look for Ron and Hermione and quickly spotted them in their usual seats next to the fire.

"Harry, where on earth is your robe?" Hermione asked as he joined them, noticing his bare arms.

"What took you so long?" Ron asked with a frown.

Harry withdrew his wand before taking a seat in the armchair across from them. He subtly cast a strong privacy charm around the trio, causing the other two Gryffindor's brows to rise in surprise.

"What's happened?" Hermione asked, leaning forward in concern.

Ron's eyes narrowed. "You smell of the infirmary," he observed grimly.

"What hasn't happened?" he responded. "Goldstein pulled the Alpha card in the locker room and almost bit me. I had to push him off before running for it."

Harry swallowed, still slightly breathless from his run from the hospital wing. "But he didn't, well, not hard enough to break the skin anyway," Harry quickly assured them when he saw that Ron's hands had curled into fists. "Then I ran into Blaise Zabini and he told me about what happened to Dean as we walked towards the hospital wing-"

"Hospital wing?" Hermione interrupted. "Did Anthony hurt you?"

"No, I cut my head on a locker door trying to get away from him. I'm fine," he quickly brushed off with a wave of his hand. "And then we ran into Malfoy and for some reason the git took it upon himself to walk me to the infirmary instead of Blaise and…" Harry paused, suddenly feeling a little awkward. "And he kind of pushed me up against the wall behind a suit of armour and… and sniffed me. He said he needed to make sure that I was all right. We kind of… had a moment. It was odd."

"And then what?" Hermione asked rap-tly.

"And then I said we needed to talk about what the hell just happened and he agreed," Harry replied, still feeling a little baffled himself. "I'm meeting him in the Room of Requirement at ten."

"Whoa…" Ron surmised, sitting back. "This is big."

Hermione nodded in agreement and Harry ran a hand through his hair with a sigh.

"Okay," he said, attempting to focus on one issue at a time. "First thing I need to figure out is why some Alphas seem to be able to detect that I'm a… you-know-what." Even with his privacy charm in place, Harry was reluctant to call himself out as an Omega with so many students around.

"Right." Hermione took on her 'determined pupil' expression and sat up straight. "Ron, what does Harry smell like to you?"

"What?" Ron exclaimed, turning to her in horror. "I'm not bloody sniffing him!"
"Just do it," Hermione instructed with a sigh. "You're an Alpha so it's the simplest solution without involving anyone else."

Ron glanced about the room before reluctantly moving to stand in front of Harry's chair. Harry couldn't help but snicker as Ron leaned in and took a big whiff of his neck.

Ron immediately took a step back, eyes wide, as he looked down at Harry. "Yeah mate, you smell like an Omega."

"Shh!" Hermione admonished as Ron returned to his seat on the sofa beside her.

"But how is that possible?" Harry cried out in frustration. "I take a scent masking potion every day!"

"It's only faint though," Ron said. "I can only smell it when I'm close and purposely sniffing at you."

"And maybe it's harder to detect with lots of people around," Hermione added, indicating the common room full of studying Gryffindors. "The only times an Alpha has jumped you is when you're alone with him."

Harry nodded before leaning forward on his elbows. "So perhaps I need to strengthen the potion or switch to two a day or something."

"Maybe," Hermione replied, wrinkling her brow in thought. "You should probably speak with Madam Pomfrey before making any changes though Harry, I don't know anything about these scent masking potions; you don't want to make yourself sick."

"I don't get them from Pomfrey," Harry reminded her. "Directly, anyway; Kreacher steals them for me."

"Oh that's right, I'd forgotten." Hermione withdrew a notebook from the bag at her feet. "I'll look into it for you."

"So you heard about Dean?" Ron asked, turning to Harry as Hermione quickly jotted down a few notes in her book.

"Yeah, just briefly," Harry replied solemnly. "Any ideas on who or what it was?"

Hermione and Ron glanced at each other, causing Harry to frown. "What?"

Ron cleared his throat uncomfortably before speaking. "It's just… the description sounded a lot like that spell the Half-Blood Prince came up with, the one that you know how to do."

Harry merely stared at the two of them in confusion for a moment before his eyes widened in disbelief. "You think it was me?!"

"It's just that Dean assaulted you recently and perhaps he tried it again and you just… lost control?" Hermione answered tentatively.

Harry would have laughed if he wasn't so offended. "I don't lose control and almost kill people!"

"The cuts were relatively shallow," Hermione pointed out, placating. "Whoever did it certainly didn't set out to murder Dean."

"Sectumsempra doesn't work that way," Harry explained tersely. "It will kill you unless you know
the counter curse. I can assure you that it wasn't me; I had nothing to do with it. I actually thought it might have been you Ron."

Ron snorted. "You're having me on."

"Actually, it crossed my mind as well," Hermione cut in quietly. "You have been very protective of Harry lately."

Ron spluttered. "Yeah but he's not my bloody mate, is he? That sort of violent revenge isn't something a friend would do; it would've had to have been Harry's mate."

"And I don't have a mate," Harry immediately acknowledged, "so maybe it's just a coincidence that Dean was attacked? Maybe it has absolutely nothing to do with what happened between us. If I didn't do it, and you and Ron had nothing to do with it, then-"

"Oh no," Ron groaned.

"What?" Harry and Hermione said at the same time.

"Malfoy."

"Malfoy?" Harry repeated. "What about him?"

"Remember? He was in the infirmary when I told Pomfrey about Dean attacking you."

"And he knows Sectumsempra," Hermione finished conclusively, looking as though all the pieces were suddenly slotting into place.

Harry slumped back into his chair, gobsmacked. "And he went overboard trying to see if I was okay today..."

"So does that mean that Malfoy is drawn to you?" Ron asked, puzzled. "Because he certainly doesn't show it."

"What do you think Harry?" Hermione asked quietly. "Do you think Malfoy secretly sees you as a potential mate?"

Harry let his head fall back against the squishy surface of the well-worn armchair. "Yesterday I would have said no, but... after today I think he definitely feels something. Whether he wants to or not is another thing."

"If he feels drawn to you, then wouldn't he know what that must mean?" Ron asked, looking to Hermione. "An Alpha isn't drawn to a Beta, they can fall in love the usual way but they don't have an inexplicable need to be with them. If Malfoy doesn't want a Beta but is drawn to Harry regardless, wouldn't he be the world's biggest thickhead to not know what that proves?"

Hermione chewed her lip as she stared at Harry. "Not necessarily," she said slowly. "There hasn't been a male you-know-what in about eighty years, so it's possible that the idea wouldn't even cross Malfoy's mind. Or any of the other Alphas you've tempted."

"Or perhaps Malfoy already fancied you and when he came into his Alpha inheritance, he just chalked it up to his inheritance intensifying what he already felt," Ron suggested.

Hermione stared. "That is the most intelligent thing I've ever heard you say Ronald Weasley," she declared, causing Ron to flush.
"Do you think that's true?" Harry asked them both, clenching his hands on the armrests, embarrassed at the hope that coloured his words.

"Well… he has always been interested in what you're doing," Hermione answered carefully, thinking back on previous years.

"And he lives to irritate you," Ron added helpfully.

"So what you're saying is that he's proving that he fancies me by antagonising me?" Harry asked.

"He wouldn't be the first male in history to do so," Hermione pointed out with a smirk.

"You've always been interested in him too though, haven't you Harry?" Ron asked. "You're always watching him. I assumed you fancied him but didn't want to tell us."

"No, of course not," Harry replied indignantly.

"But Harry, if you want Malfoy to want you for being you, then shouldn't he expect the same courtesy in return?" Hermione asked pointedly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, if you never thought of him that way until this year when he came into his Alpha inheritance, then how is that any better than him falling for you because of you being a you-know-what?"

Harry opened his mouth but words failed him. She was right.

"Can we please stop calling Harry a 'you-know-what'?" Ron begged, shifting uncomfortably in his seat. "It's too close to You-Know-Who - and that's just fucking disturbing."

Harry and Hermione turned to look at Ron and simultaneously burst out laughing at his uneasy expression.

"Well it's true," he persisted stubbornly, a reluctant smile pulling at his lips as his friends continued to laugh.

"All right, what would you prefer to call him then?" Hermione asked, grinning.

"Prongs," Harry answered for him, saying the first thing to come to mind when thinking of code names. He studiously ignored the sympathetic look Hermione turned his way. "You're right though Hermione-"

"Usually is," Ron cut in with a smirk.

"- if I don't like him without the Alpha component then I'm not any better than what I've been trying to avoid by not telling anyone about being a - a Prongs," Harry finished with a sigh. "It's so hard to think about how I felt before this year though, my… feelings for him are so strong now that I can't even remember what it was like before. I feel like I've always wanted him this way."

"Maybe you have," Ron said with a shrug. "Maybe you were just in denial."

"Yeah, maybe." Harry exhaled, feeling mentally exhausted.

"And maybe it doesn't matter," Hermione said shortly, obviously a little weary of Harry's excessively honourable ways when it came to his Omega inheritance. "What you feel for him now isn't fake
Harry; Alphas and Omegas have been pairing off like this for centuries. It doesn't make it any less real or any less wonderful. It's common knowledge that mated Alpha and Omegas are extraordinarily happy and content couples."

Harry looked up at her and suddenly felt like such a wanker; overthinking something that most people would see as a gift. To be given the opportunity to love someone that intensely and completely, and have the same returned, is all he could ask for in life. Maybe he really was fucking it all up by not wholly embracing it.

"Yeah Harry, I say just go with it," Ron said encouragingly.

Harry emitted a bitter bark of laughter. "Oh sure, just tell Malfoy that I'm a… Prongs and that I'm in love with him and wait for him to break my heart. You don't even like him, so I'm not sure why you're pushing this, I could just as easily find someone else."

"But you haven't," Hermione pointed out briskly. "There are plenty of young, fit Alphas walking around these corridors and you've only felt drawn to one. At least if you tell Malfoy the truth tonight, he can make a fully informed decision and you will know once and for all. If, as you say, he says no and breaks your heart, then we can move on to Plan B and find you another Alpha. How does that sound?"

"Terrifying," Harry quipped before his expression set with determination. "All right, I'll do it. I'll tell him the truth and just… see what happens."

"Good." Hermione nodded in approval.

"Are you going to be okay alone with him though?" Ron asked worriedly.

Harry absently toyed with a loose thread on the arm of his chair. "Yeah, I think so. I'll take my wand in any case but he's the only Alpha so far that has been able to stop and walk away from me."

"Are you going to be able to stop yourself?" Hermione asked, blushing a little at thinking of her friend in that way but needing to get her concerns across regardless.

Harry bit his lip and shrugged. "I… I dunno. Do I have to?" he added quietly.

"Harry!" Hermione cried, scandalised.

"Come on Hermione," Ron said with a smile. "Harry's eighteen, and he's not in heat, so what does it matter?"

Hermione blushed as she snapped her mouth shut.

Harry felt sorry for her but shared a smirk with Ron over her head as she bent to busily put her notebook back in her bag.

"You're going to be late."

Harry looked at Ron with a frown before his gaze slid to the large copper lion's head clock on the wall. "Shit," he swore at seeing that it was somehow nearly ten.

Harry quickly dissolved the privacy charm and stood up, noticing that the common room had virtually emptied while they'd been so ensconced in their discussion.

"Good luck Harry," Hermione said sincerely. "Should we wait up for you? Just to make sure you're
okay?"

Harry shared a look with Ron before shaking his head. "Nah, don't wait up, I'll be fine."

"Yeah, good luck mate," Ron added with his easy, lopsided smile. "Just keep the details to yourself, yeah?"

Harry rolled his eyes and turned to walk out, slipping his wand back into the waistband of his jeans.

He shivered when the icy air of the corridor hit his bare arms and once again cursed the fact that he'd left his things back in the Quidditch locker room. Harry hurried to the seventh floor corridor as fast as he could; not wanting Malfoy to think that he'd stood him up. That would be a terrible beginning to their night.

He spotted the tall blond leaning causally up against the stone wall opposite the now familiar Barnabas the Barmy painting, the wooden door leading to the Room of Requirement already in place next to him.

"Hey," Harry said somewhat inadequately as he approached; unsure of what sort of reception he was going to get from the mercurial Slytherin.

Draco turned to look at him before pushing off of the wall. "Potter," was all he said before turning to open the door and walking inside.

"Good to see you too," Harry muttered before following.

Harry halted abruptly just inside the room, the door almost smacking him in the arse as it swung shut and locked behind him. He'd never seen the Room look quite like this before: instead of the large castle stonework rising up to meet a square, flat ceiling, they curved and arched overhead as though they were in some sort of cave. There was even loose soil, rocks and what appeared to be hay littering the floor. There was a cracked window on the far wall that was covered in a layer of filth so thick that it barely let any light through. There was no furniture of any kind in sight, nothing to sit on to conduct a civil conversation.

Harry didn't think it boded well for their forthcoming chat.

Malfoy had wandered to the far side of the room, arms crossed over his chest, not seeming perturbed in the slightest by the conjured room's bizarre appearance.

"What on earth were you thinking about when you summoned the room?" Harry asked curiously as he looked around and took a few venturing steps forward. The air was cold and damp, only increasing the impression of being inside an old abandoned cavern deep within a mountainside.

Draco turned to face him, arms still crossed protectively over his chest, expression stern. "Are you going to confess Potter?"

Harry blinked, taken off-guard by the question. "Confess…?"

Grey eyes narrowed. "Yes, confess Potter. Admit that you or your army of house-elves put something in my food."

"Like what?" Harry responded, feeling nettled already.

"Amortentia."
Harry nearly choked in surprise, then started to laugh. Malfoy looked ready to punch him. "You think I slipped a love potion into your tea?" he exclaimed.

"But you obviously have," Draco persisted, ignoring Harry's amusement. Harry quickly sobered when he saw how determined Malfoy appeared to be about this love potion business. He kept his distance and wrapped his arms around himself for warmth, watching the Alpha carefully.

"What are your symptoms?" he asked solemnly, genuinely curious about what the blond had been going through compared to his own suffering.

Draco huffed out in annoyance and his glance skirted away from Harry's openly curious expression. "Ever since the start of term, I can't stop…" He paused to emit another breath of irritation, though perhaps a little more self-directed this time. "I can't stop thinking about you. I have this… this ridiculous compulsion to be near you at all times, to ensure you are safe with my own eyes, to keep others away from you…" He finally brought accusing grey eyes back to Harry. "How is that not a potion or spell of some kind? You've fucking confounded me Potter - and I want to know how and why!"

Harry swallowed, unable to not be hurt by Malfoy feeling so outraged by his clearly unwanted feelings for him. "So…when you accompanied me to Hogsmeade, it wasn't because you wanted to?" he asked, thankfully managing to keep the injured tone out of his voice.

Malfoy swiped an agitated hand through his blond hair as he began to pace in front of the grimy window. "Yes, I wanted to. I wanted to see if being friends with you would ease this… this torture. I also didn't want Blaise to go with you, or anyone else for that matter."

Harry nodded, it all made perfect sense when you knew the truth of the matter, and then he suddenly remembered something. "Were you the one who attacked Dean Thomas?"

Malfoy whirled around to face him. "I never raised my wand to him Potter," he bit out vehemently, eyes narrowed; daring him to dispute it.

Harry detected the sincerity in his words and immediately backed off. He turned and walked over to where the walls began to curve upwards and ran his hand along the moss-covered stone, fingers dipping in and out of the deep grooves and dislodging the gathered beads of moisture there. "It wasn't a love potion," he finally said, oddly calm now that the moment had arrived, green eyes absently watching the droplets of water as they trailed down the damp wall away from his roaming fingertips. "Or a spell, or anything that I've done to you."

"What is it then?" Malfoy asked doubtfully.

Harry took a deep breath and turned to face him. "I never raised my wand to him Potter," he bit out vehemently, eyes narrowed; daring him to dispute it.

Malfoy whirled around to face him. "I'm not a Beta, I'm an Omega." Malfoy simply stared.

"Everything you've been feeling this year, I've felt as well. Maybe even more so, since I haven't been fighting it like you," Harry couldn't help adding resentfully.

Too many emotions flashed across the Slytherin's face to actually pinpoint a single one, but Harry thought he could detect a rising anger underneath it all.

"So you didn't think being the Boy-Who-Lived was enough?" Malfoy finally responded, voice pulled tight with anger. "Now that the Dark Lord is dead you have to pretend you're a sodding
Omega to get attention?

Harry's mouth dropped open, incredulous. "You think I want to be a fucking Omega?" he retorted furiously, irritation prickling hotly all over his skin. "Do you know how miserable I've been since term started - and it's still September! I've had to take daily potions to hide what I am from every student in this school, I've had two Alphas jump me already - despite the scent masking potion - and despite what you may think, and what you've always thought, I don't want to be the Boy-Who-Fucking-Lived either!"

Harry turned away after forcefully expelling his pent-up frustration at Malfoy and rested his forehead against the damp stone wall, hands coming up to press palms against the cool stone on either side of him, eyes closed.

Silence greeted his outburst and he really couldn't care less if Malfoy just up and left right now. In fact, he hoped he did.

Harry turned his head to the side at the sound of approaching footsteps. Malfoy had moved closer and was watching him with an apprehensive look on his pale, aristocratic face, which was not an expression Harry was used to seeing on the Pureblood.

Malfoy's brow creased as he surveyed Harry in silence for a moment.

Harry braced himself for whatever vitriol the blond would spew forth next.

"You're not making this up, are you?"

Harry couldn't help but laugh hollowly. "You really think I'd go to this much effort just to take the piss Malfoy?"

Malfoy dropped his gaze, staring reflectively at the gravel-strewn floor for a moment before looking back up. "No, I suppose not," he finally accepted.

Harry turned and exhaled heavily as he slid down the wall to sit on the floor, uncaring of the filth, arms wrapped around himself in a futile attempt to keep warm.

After a moment's hesitation, Malfoy slowly sat down opposite him, arms clasped around drawn up knees. Harry eyed his warm woollen cloak with envy.

"Perhaps you should start at the beginning?" Malfoy suggested, still looking guarded but no longer accusing.

Harry took it for the olive branch that it probably was and took a steadying breath, trying to quell his temper. "On my eighteenth birthday, I awoke in the middle of the night feeling ill and called for the help of the Black family house-elf, who is loyal to me." Harry waited for a caustic comment on that but none came. "I was going to ask him to fetch some Pepper-up from Pomfrey when he told me what was actually happening. He's the one who told me that I was an Omega."

"And he knows this how…?"

Harry smiled ruefully. "Because of your mum, actually. He mentioned that during his service to the Black family, he'd witnessed Sirius' Alpha inheritance as well as your mum's Omega inheritance, and he knew which was which just by scent. The fact that two Alphas - or three now including you - have reacted strangely to my presence when we're alone, confirms it. And Ron said that I smell like an Omega too."
Malfoy's eyes closed briefly, as though to steady himself. "So you're telling me that you're an Omega who is sharing a dorm room with three unbonded Alphas?"

"I know it sounds mad but I assumed the scent masking potions would do their job and no one would know," Harry replied honestly, suddenly hearing how completely naïve he sounded.

Draco eyed him speculatively. "You do know those potions are not supposed to be taken on a continuous basis, right Potter?"

"What? Why?"

A heavy sigh was the first sign that he'd obviously rushed headlong into something without proper research again. "They were created to mask an Omega's scent during their heat if they absolutely had to be out in public," Malfoy replied knowledgably. "They are also known to be harmful to your chances for conception if taken regularly."

Harry's eyes widened with alarm. "What? Fuck."

Draco's features relaxed for the first time that night as he smirked at Harry's horrified expression. "I do believe it takes about twelve months or more of non-stop ingestion before you need to panic Potter."

Harry exhaled in relief and Draco cocked his head to one side, watching him.

"You want children?" he asked with interest, looking as though he was surprised by this fact.

Harry looked up and nodded. "Yeah, it's about the only plus side to this whole Omega nightmare."

Draco's expression unexpectedly pinched as though he were in discomfort.

"What?" Harry couldn't help asking.

Draco absently plucked at a thread from the hem of his charcoal grey trousers. "I… I apologise for being so obtuse. You hate the fact that you're an Omega in part because of me."

Harry blinked in surprise. "I can't really blame you Malfoy; you've hated me for years and there hasn't been a male Omega for nearly a century, of course you're going to jump to conclusions."

Draco shook his head. "I should have realised," he said. "I pride myself on thinking things through logically and if I had just put aside our petty differences…"

"When have we ever been able to do that?" Harry asked with a sly grin.

Draco acknowledged this statement with a small but genuine smile and Harry felt that familiar tightening of his gut at the sight. Harry hugged his arms tighter around himself to stave off the shivering that had started up from leaning against a damp stone wall in nothing but a thin t-shirt.

Draco immediately noticed his discomfort and, without hesitation, unclasped his black cloak and held it out.

"Won't you get cold?" Harry asked uncertainly.

Draco shook his head and handed it over. "I don't tend to feel the cold."

Harry smiled gratefully as he lifted the expensive woollen garment and draped it around his shoulders. He was immediately infused with warmth from the cloak and from Draco's lingering
body-heat. The scent of the Alpha invaded his nostrils, making him want to sigh with contentment.

Harry hadn't realised that he'd actually closed his eyes in bliss until he opened them again to see Draco arching a questioning brow at him.

"Sorry," he mumbled, cheeks heating, "it smells like you."

Draco blinked, startled out of his mocking amusement.

Harry determinedly shoved away his self-consciousness in order to delve into what it was they needed to discuss. "How is it that you can… resist me, for lack of a better word, when the other two Alphas couldn't keep their hands off of me when we were alone?"

Draco swallowed and nodded, as though freely consenting to Harry's efforts at steering the conversation towards the crux of the matter. "Self-control?" he speculated.

"Really?" Harry replied with a sceptical frown. "So… are you employing self-control right now?"

"Yes."

As soon as the word was out of Draco's mouth, it occurred to Harry that Draco's inscrutable grey eyes had been fairly dilated for the entirety of their meeting, from the moment the door had shut behind him. The Slytherin had also been maintaining his distance up until he sat down, but still not close enough to accidentally make physical contact.

"What about you?" Draco asked stiffly, interrupting his musing. "What are you... feeling?"

Harry could tell the Alpha was uncomfortable with the line of questioning. "Full disclosure?"

"What is that supposed to mean?"

Harry smiled. "It means, let's just forget that we're having the most awkward conversation of all time and not hide anything. No question is off-limits and no emotion is absurd."

Instead of appearing deterred, Draco actually looked a little relieved. "Agreed," he nodded.

Harry exhaled and dropped his chin onto his knees, eyes on Draco. "I... What I'm feeling is so hard to describe. I guess I should start by saying that since my inheritance, I've only ever felt drawn to you. It's as you said before, I want to be with you all the time, and not just in a 'jump into bed with me' way, but in a serious relationship sort of way."

Draco nodded in understanding.

"Full disclosure," Harry muttered, steeling himself before continuing, "and I want… I have this desire for you to take care of me."

Draco's lips parted and his eyes flashed silver in the weak light.

"And maybe that doesn't sound strange to you but I've always been a fairly independent person and I've never wanted someone to watch over me before," Harry tried to explain, squirming a little in embarrassment.

Draco swallowed before replying. "That… that is like music to an Alpha's ears Potter."

"Huh?" Harry blinked, astonished. "You… Alphas want me to be like that?"
"If it's your natural reaction, yes," Draco confirmed. "An Alpha lives to take care of his mate, and if that mate longs for their Alpha's presence and protection…"

"It's like an Alpha's wet dream?"

Draco's lips twitched into a smile as he nodded. "That and their mate wishing to start a family."

Harry smiled as he absentely rubbed his chin in the soft fabric of Draco's cloak; stirring the scent of the Alpha up into his nostrils with a tiny sigh of pleasure. "So I'm not completely failing at this Omega thing?"

Draco smirked. "Do you ever fail at anything Potter?"

Harry laughed outright and it felt good. "I guess the next question is… now what?"

Draco's easy expression turned troubled and he hesitated before finally replying. "The proper way of things is for you to register with the Ministry as an Omega so that any enquiring Alpha is informed of your existence and given the opportunity to meet with you."

Harry held his gaze. "And the un-proper way of things?"

Grey eyes searched his face intently. "The... un-proper way of things is to just give in to your urges and settle for the first Alpha that piques your interest."

Harry could feel the atmosphere in the room change as it thickened with a heavy, expectant tension that wasn't altogether unpleasant. "I think I prefer the second option," he replied, mouth suddenly dry and heart pounding wildly in his chest. "If you're interested."

Harry held his breath, feeling horribly exposed as he laid everything out there and waited for a response. Yes Draco had his faults; he concealed his emotions, was relentlessly condescending, sarcastic, and was a bit of a ponce. But he was also intelligent, challenging, interesting, didn't pander to Harry's celebrity, and, truth be told, was rather easy on the eyes. If they could just reconcile their past history, Harry didn't think he could find a more perfect match.

Draco's eyes, which had been positively blazing moments before, suddenly dimmed as he dropped his gaze to the floor, a slight frown creasing his brow.

Sharp and immediate disappointment filled Harry as he nodded mutely and quickly pushed himself to his feet. He wasn't in the mood to hang around to hear the reasons why.

Draco swiftly stood up as Harry unclasped the borrowed cloak from around his shoulders and held it out to him.

"Harry no, wait," he said at once, ignoring the extended cloak in front of him.

"No!" Draco exclaimed fiercely, reaching out with one hand to clamp around Harry's arm. "I'm not rejecting you. Merlin, I want you. Very much," he said bluntly, breathlessly. "In fact, I was planning on approaching you until the idea of a love potion was put into my head. Beta or not, it was beginning to not matter to me anymore. Now that I know you're an Omega and it isn't some sort of trick... I can't... there's just no way that I can let you walk away."

Harry's eyes widened as his heart soared with sudden joy - then immediately sunk like a lead weight.
"There's a 'but' though, isn't there?"

Draco's gaze was penetrating as he stared back at him. "There is a 'but' - however it has nothing to do with not wanting you." He took a step closer, directly into Harry's personal space.

Harry had to tilt his head back to maintain eye contact. The urge to step back to keep some distance - and a clear head - was strong but he managed to resist as he waited expectantly for an explanation.

"There's something you don't know about me that you need to - before consenting to be my mate."

Harry felt a shiver run through his body at the title and unconsciously swayed a little towards the Alpha. "What is it?" he asked roughly. A part of him suspected he'd agree to anything Draco said in that moment, merely from the close proximity and intense eye-contact.

"I can't tell you here," he replied and Harry had never seen the Slytherin look so grave. "Tomorrow, away from the school."

Harry swallowed. "Why?"

Draco's gaze flicked about the room before returning to rest on Harry's questioning face. "Someone may hear; this castle has eyes and ears everywhere."

Harry raised his brow, a tingle of apprehension suddenly running down his spine. "Is this thing something that will affect my decision?"

Draco's expression didn't change but Harry saw the brief flash of sorrow in his eyes. "It may," was all he said.

Harry frowned at the mysterious sadness he instantly knew was buried deep inside the blond, and slowly raised a tentative hand to slide trembling fingers across Draco's cheek. His thumb came to rest along one pale cheekbone as he cupped his face and stared intently into grey eyes; trying to discover the Slytherin's secrets and reassure him all at the same time.

Draco closed his eyes briefly and leaned into the touch before mirroring Harry's action by sliding a warm hand across the chilled skin of Harry's cheek. His hand continued sliding backwards into thick unruly hair and moulded firmly to the back of Harry's head.

Harry swallowed and allowed the Alpha to guide him forward, green eyes dropping to stare transfixed as Draco ran a pink tongue over dry lips, and then his eyes fluttered shut as those lips suddenly brushed against his. It was just a light pressing of lips but it still sent shivers through Harry's body and made his stomach clench with want.

Draco's cloak dropped carelessly to the floor as his other arm wound its way around Harry's waist and pulled him close. He cautiously opened his mouth to deepen the kiss but he needn't have worried, Harry was only too happy to comply as he submitted completely.

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This thing between them had been building for so long that Harry couldn't have resisted even if he'd wanted to. It struck him again just how different Draco was to the other Alphas; his movements weren't desperate and depraved, they were slow, methodical and maddeningly arousing, as though he knew it was a living breathing person in his arms not just an Omega undistinguishable to any other Omega.

Harry made a needy noise in the back of his throat as his tongue collided messily with Draco's, sweeping his mouth before tangling insistently, hotly, with his own. Harry had been hard as soon as his questing fingertips had touched Draco's cheek and he pressed his erection firmly against Draco's
thigh as they kissed, suddenly wanting the Alpha to feel it, to know how affected he was.

Draco pulled away from the kiss with a deep shudder that seemed to run the entire length of his body. He rested his forehead against Harry's and closed his eyes, breathing deeply. "Fuck… you are… that was…"

"Yeah." Harry grinned breathlessly, fingers clenching in the soft cashmere of Draco's black jumper, pleased to have rendered the articulate Slytherin so incoherent.

Draco opened his eyes and smirked, eyes still glazed with arousal.

Harry couldn't help pressing another kiss to that smirking mouth, he'd never been so close to that trademark expression before and it made him positively giddy that it now belonged to him.

Depending on what he was told tomorrow of course. He didn't want to take things too far tonight just in case whatever he heard tomorrow really did make him want to walk away from Draco as a potential mate.

With that in mind, Harry gently - and reluctantly - extracted himself from Draco's warm embrace and took a step back. "Tomorrow?" he said, smiling to soften his actions.

Draco exhaled unevenly, attempting to compose himself, and nodded. He leaned down to retrieve his forgotten cloak from the floor. "I'll meet you at the front gates after last class."

"We're leaving the grounds?" Harry replied in surprise.

"It's safer that way," Draco replied evasively. "And it would be prudent to have our conversation with my parents in attendance as well."

Harry's mouth dropped open. "You want me to go to the Manor? And meet your parents to discuss our relationship?"

Draco's lips twitched imperceptibly and Harry covered his face with his hands.

"Oh god, they will not be pleased."

Draco gently pulled Harry's fingers away from his face. "You will be fine Potter, once they hear that you're an Omega they'll welcome you with open arms."

Harry snorted sceptically. "Easy for you to say, they didn't want you dead last year."

"To be fair, only my father wanted you dead," Draco quipped with another smirk that melted some of Harry's anxiety.

Harry smiled wryly as he shook his head. "We must be mental," he proclaimed as he furtively slipped a hand into Draco's.

"Decidedly," Draco agreed with a smirk, threading long fingers with Harry's.

They walked to the door, shoes crunching noisily over the gravel-strewn flagstones. Draco turned to him, one hand on the handle, the other still firmly clasped in Harry's.

"I think you should stop taking those potions," he said, concern sharp in his eyes. "Regardless of what happens tomorrow."

"I know," Harry replied hesitantly. "But… then everyone will know what I am."
"If you cover your scent I- your Alpha won't be able to find you."

"Find me?"

"Yes, your Alpha is able to detect your scent from miles away if you're not hiding it through potions," Draco explained. "He'll also be able to distinguish when you're in distress. If... if it was me, I would sleep easier knowing that I would be alerted to any threats to your safety - especially with you sharing a room with those other Alphas."

"Alright, I'll stop." Harry gave his hand a reassuring squeeze. "Also, you needn't worry about my dorm mates; Ron is exceptionally straight and not interested in me in that way, and Neville is the same as far as I can tell."

"And Mr. Thomas?" Draco reminded darkly.

Harry smiled a little. "And Dean won't try anything again, he felt really guilty the last time, and I'll just make sure that I'm never alone with him. Plus Ron has turned into my bodyguard when it comes to other Alphas. Purely as a friend thing," he hurried to reassure when Draco's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "You're not my mate yet Draco, you can't go all jealous and possessive," he teased, trying to lighten the mood and smooth away those worry lines on Draco's face.

Draco's expression immediately relaxed and he tugged Harry up against him. "The sooner the better," he growled, the sound going straight to Harry's groin. "Don't think I haven't noticed that you haven't told me who this other Alpha was who attacked you Potter."

Harry grinned. "And don't think that wasn't on purpose Malfoy."

Draco chuckled as he suddenly released him and stepped back. "Here, take this," he directed, lifting his cloak and passing it back to Harry. "Your skin is fucking icy Potter. Don't they teach common sense in Gryffindor?"

Harry took back the warm garment and swept it over his shoulders. "Just for that, I will take it and you can bloody-well freeze Malfoy."

Draco smirked at Harry's attempt at a haughty expression and opened the door. They stepped out into the corridor together and Harry suddenly found that he didn't want them to part just yet.

"You're thinking something horribly sentimental right now, aren't you?" Draco asked with an arched brow.

Harry laughed, slightly embarrassed. "Never," he refuted, hugging the cloak tightly around himself.

Draco wavered, looking disinclined to leave as well. "See you tomorrow Potter," he finally uttered quietly.

Harry was learning to look to the Slytherin's eyes for a hint of what he was feeling, and there was a softness there that immediately put a smile on his face.

"G'night Malfoy," he said before turning and heading for Gryffindor Tower.

This 'relationship' between them was so different to what he thought finding a mate would be like; he thought it would feel like he wasn't in control and that there would be an instant intimacy, but there wasn't - and that discovery delighted him. The initial attraction and pull was definitely there, but they would still have to work at this, despite being an Alpha and an Omega. Their mateship wasn't going to be a free ride by any means and they would still argue and get annoyed with each other, and
everything else that went along with sharing your life with someone. They weren't automatically in love - they still had to fall the old fashioned way.

He lowered his chin into the soft cloak wrapped around him and inhaled the Alpha's scent indulgently, already knowing that there was a high probability of him sleeping with the cloak tonight - and vowing to never, ever mention that fact to Draco.
Chapter 6

Harry straightened up from where he had been leaning against the old gnarled tree next to the Hogwarts entrance gates and smiled in greeting as Draco came striding into view. The blond was moving quickly up the long dirt track, wind whipping pale blond strands into disarray.

Harry had awoken that morning uncertain of what the day might bring after Draco had had the night to think things over; a night away from Harry's Omega scent and the close proximity they'd shared in the Room of Requirement. But a day of surreptitious glances in the Great Hall and secret little smiles across classrooms had quickly quashed any feelings of anxiety that Harry had been harbouring. Now that Draco had actually admitted to wanting to be with him and was willing to give this crazy - and most likely ill-advised - relationship a try, Harry had found that his feelings for him were only growing more intense.

A smirk played about Draco's lips as he walked up to him. "What have you done to my cloak Potter?"

Harry glanced down at what used to be a green and silver Slytherin crest on the expensive cloak slung around his shoulders, and was now, thanks to Hermione's nifty transfiguration work, a cheerful Gryffindor insignia. "Improved it," he replied, looking back up.

The arched brow clearly demonstrated what Draco thought of that assessment.

Harry couldn't help smiling in response. "I suppose you want it back now," he said, trying his hardest not to sound disappointed and failing miserably.

"You keep it, I have more than one," Draco replied negligently as he began walking towards the gates, Harry falling into step beside him. "Furthermore, no mate of mine will wear the offensive collection of clothes that you call a wardrobe."

Harry's offended glare turned into a smile when he caught the teasing light in grey eyes, stomach flip-flopping as 'mate' fell so easily from Draco's lips. "You're such a poncy git," he said disparagingly.

"Get used to it Potter," Draco replied with a lofty smirk.

"I think I will," Harry answered easily, facing forward as they walked underneath the huge black wrought-iron gates.

Once they were safely off school grounds, the two turned to face each other and Harry's nerves kicked back in as he stared back into grey eyes.

Draco's nostrils flared delicately as he stepped close to prepare for Apparation. "You've stopped taking your potions."

Harry blinked, taken by surprise; he didn't think an Alpha would be able to tell after missing just the one dose. "Yeah, I told Kreacher that he didn't need to steal from the hospital stores any longer. Oh, and he asked if this was because his plan had worked and if I'd found a mate."

"Plan? What plan?" Draco repeated with a frown.

"He admitted to diluting my potions in order for an Alpha to properly scent me," Harry informed him with a scowl, remembering his angry outburst at the meddlesome house-elf that morning when
Kreacher had informed him of his interference. "He only did it because he was hoping it would be you, if that helps."

Draco's eyes flared. "So thanks to that sodding house-elf you've been attacked more than once? Unaware of why the fuck it was happening?"

Harry almost smiled as the same fury that he'd felt that very morning was now flashing in Draco's eyes. "Yeah, but it's also thanks to him that you were able to scent me on the way to the infirmary yesterday."

Draco exhaled, releasing some of his anger as he met Harry's gaze with a reluctant smile. "So you're crediting him as match-maker?"

"Something like that." Harry laughed. "Don't worry, I yelled at him for a good five minutes before telling him to never interfere with my life like that again."

"Good." Draco reached for his hand and gripped it. "Ready?"

Harry swallowed, his light-hearted mood instantly vanishing. "As I'll ever be. Did you at least warn them?"

"I owled them to say that I was bringing a potential mate home to meet them tonight - but not that it was Harry Potter." Draco smirked. "I didn't want to miss out on their expressions when you walked into the room, it's not often I'm able to take them by surprise."

Harry groaned and closed his eyes briefly. "You owe me Malfoy."

Draco tugged him close. "What do you want?" he murmured suggestively, voice dropping an octave or two.

Pleasant tingles instantly ran down Harry's spine and pooled warmly in his groin at Draco's seductive tone. "I'm sure I'll think of something," he replied flippantly, hoping he didn't sound as breathless as he felt.

Before either of them could utter another word, Draco leaned in and kissed him soundly.

Harry could only cling to the Alpha as his senses instantly exploded into overdrive. He opened his mouth and encouraged Draco's tongue to tangle hotly with his own, stroking, chasing, lips slotting into place and hands clenching hard into the thick fabric of their cloaks. The pair both moaned into the rough kiss as Harry pressed closer, wanting - needing - to get as close as possible, as though trying to climb right into Draco's body.

"Draco…" Harry whimpered, unable to stop himself as Draco moved warm seeking lips down his throat and then back up to the spot just behind his ear that drove him mad. "I can't… need more…"

A rough sound ripped itself from the Alpha's throat as he pulled back and held Harry tight before suddenly Disapparating the two of them with a loud crack that echoed long after they were gone.

Harry stumbled upon landing jarringly in a strange bedroom which could only be Draco's. Capable arms held him up and he was barely able to catch a glimpse of the tastefully decorated room before eager lips were pressed back to his and his eyes fell shut of their own volition.

Harry shoved aside the tiny, niggling Hermione voice that was in his head asking him if this was a good idea, before he knew what Draco's secret was, before he knew what the Malfoy's reaction was going to be, before…
The backs of his knees hit the edge of Draco's bed and he sprawled back on soft covers, Draco quickly covering his body with his own and resuming the heated kiss.

"Yes," Harry hissed in pleasure, arching up as Draco moved to nuzzle into his neck, inhaling deeply while pinning Harry's wrists to the bed. Merlin, he felt as though his entire body was throbbing with arousal, every touch of Draco's lips and hands seemed to be magnified a thousand times over by his nearly unbearably sensitive body.

Draco kneeled up and quickly unclasped Harry's cloak and pushed it open before leaning back down to run his nose and lips down Harry's neck to his collarbone, sniffing and licking slightly salty skin in turns, murmuring and humming his approval.

Harry slid his hands up into soft wind-tangled hair as he continued to arch up into the delicious weight of the Alpha, every push upwards resulting in friction and sparks of pleasure which he only wanted more of. "More..." he muttered dimly.

Draco inhaled sharply and Harry almost sighed in relief when the blond hurriedly began to remove both of their cloaks and shirts until they were both bare-chested in the muted evening light flooding through the huge glass-paned window.

Harry reached up and pulled Draco back down to him, not quite catching the sigh this time as their lips met and suddenly it was warm skin on skin, and more sparks and more soft tingly sliding of exploring hands and hushed moans traded back and forth between urgent mouths.

Harry ran his hands up and down the soft skin of Draco's pale back, flattening his palms to the expanse of warm skin and pressing down, closer.

Draco tore his mouth away from the deep kiss as he began to kiss and lick and mumble incoherently down Harry's throat, over his collarbone and chest, stopping to lick or suckle on particularly delectable spots, inhaling deeply, memorising scent and taste alike.

Harry was too far gone to be embarrassed or to wonder if he washed himself well enough for this sort of intense scrutiny. He was lost in the overwhelmingly primal needs of his Omega; touch, taste, smell, rolling hips up to seek out delicious wonderful sparking friction. He threw his arms out to the sides and fistd the silky bed covers in damp clenched hands as Draco's hot breath puffed across the sensitive skin just below his navel, goose pimples rising across his flat abdomen.

Harry's breath stuttered and held as long pale fingers deftly began to unzip his jeans. The ensuing brush of cool air told Harry that he was now fully exposed to critical grey eyes and he pushed himself up onto his elbows to glance down.

He had to bite his lip to stop the wanton moan from breaking free at the sight of Draco sprawled between his parted legs, darkened lust-filled eyes flicking up to meet Harry’s gaze before licking a long slow confident stripe up Harry's cock, lying flushed and leaking against his stomach.

Harry threw his head back on the pillows, hands pulling at the blanket on either side of him, as he emitted a low groan, hips unconsciously thrusting upwards, wanting more. Mouth open and panting, Harry forced bright green eyes to open and glanced down again, wanting to see what his Alpha would do next.

Draco smirked up at him once before taking him fully into his mouth.

Harry gasped and continued to watch avidly as Draco's hand came up to stroke in conjunction with
his mouth moving up and down, pausing every few strokes to circle his tongue around the head and gently press into the slit, before starting all over again. His erection glistened wetly between Draco's stretched lips and Harry collapsed back again, eyes closing, all too quickly pushed to the edge of orgasm.

Gentle hands slid over his hips and kept him from thrusting up too forcefully, allowing just enough movement to drive Harry mad.

Harry swallowed and opened his eyes when everything suddenly stopped. Draco was kneeling up on the bed and unzipping his own trousers with trembling fingers, eyes glued to Harry's flushed face.

Harry drank in the sight of Draco's cock as it was finally revealed to his eager eyes. He thought it was beautiful and perfect - much like the man himself. Harry licked his lips and met fervent grey eyes for a moment before Draco was back, chest to chest, lips meeting once more, as the hot firm slide of their erections pressed together.

Harry's eyes rolled back into his head as he lifted his legs to wrap around Draco's lean hips. He knew it wouldn't be long now as the most perfect pressure was applied and met his rising hips thrust for thrust. It felt dirty and urgent and devious, kiss turning messy and sloppy with the need to breathe and to release hushed moans of approval and encouragement. The mattress squeaked and the bedframe thudded dully against the wall behind him in a rhythm that quickly began to lose its even measured tempo as their movements turned shorter and more erratic.

Harry could feel his body trembling and shaking; tensed with approaching completion. He let out a sharp gasp as Draco's teeth suddenly closed over the soft juncture of his shoulder and lightly bit down - and that was it. He was suddenly free-falling into an orgasm that seemed to spread outwards to every part of his body as he cried out and spurted hotly between their bodies.

Draco bit off a gasp above him and thrust a few more times, staring intently into Harry's face before suddenly arching and freezing. Harry forced his eyes open and watched raptly as Draco's cock added to the warm sticky mess pooling between them, the last vestiges of Harry's own orgasm still breaking over him. The sight of Draco with his head thrown back, straight white teeth biting into a kiss-swollen bottom lip, was the most erotic thing he'd ever seen.

Draco collapsed forward onto his hands for a moment before rolling off to the side and onto his back, breathing hard.

Harry felt as though his whole body was melting into the soft pile of sheets and blankets beneath his back, under which was probably the most comfortable - and expensive - mattress he'd ever had the pleasure of lying on. "I can't move," he finally uttered, a sleepy and satisfied sort of contentment colouring his voice.

There was a quiet rustle of fabric as Draco turned his head on the pillow to look at him, grey eyes warm and alight with amusement.

Harry blinked; he'd never seen the Slytherin quite so... relaxed before; pinked cheeks, mussed blond hair, not hiding genuine emotions behind a wall of carefully constructed pretence. A slow smile spread across Harry's face. "Can we just stay here?" he asked.

Draco's eyes remained warm as his lips twitched at the corners. "Not unless you wish to be late for the first official meeting with your future in-laws."

Harry laughed; he was too tired and sated for his nerves to kick in again at the mention of the Malfoy patriarchs. Somehow, what he and Draco had just shared had filled him with not only the confidence
to deal with the situation at hand, but also assurance of his partner's willingness to stand by him. He couldn't even pinpoint why he was suddenly filled with this calm confidence, perhaps it was just a part of an Omega's afterglow, or perhaps it was the way Draco was gazing back at him as though he was someone important.

"Shower first?" Harry suggested, shifting on the bed and feeling the tight pull of dried semen on his skin. He glanced down at the clothes thrown haphazardly about the bed, the tell-tale signs of sex drying on his stomach, his jeans hanging off of one ankle - and he dearly hoped Draco's parents wouldn't just walk into the bedroom unannounced. The thought was slightly horrifying.

Draco murmured a quick cleaning spell with an absent wave of one hand. "Secret first," he sighed, sitting up.

Harry's pulse quickened and the smile slid off his face; he'd almost forgotten about that. He couldn't regret what they'd just done though, it had been building within him for too long and he'd needed an outlet - they both had. Plus it had been bloody fantastic.

Instead of gathering his clothes and getting dressed, Draco slipped all the way out of his rumpled trousers and slid naked beneath the sheets. Harry quickly followed his lead, awkwardly kicking his jeans off and away before climbing in, silk sheets smooth and cool against bare skin.

They faced each other on their sides and Harry was relieved to see that the sorrow he'd caught a glimpse of in Draco's eyes the night before was absent this time.

Draco's pale brow creased in concentration as long fingers idly played with the edge of a pale blue pillow case.

Harry glanced around the room as he patiently waited for Draco to gather his thoughts. The bedroom was decorated in cool colours; the look soothing and tranquil yet elegant, but nothing was too ornate or over-the-top. He idly wondered if he would be expected to live here with Draco once they were bonded.

"I guess I should start by finding out what you know of Ministry banned creatures."

Harry's attention immediately snapped back to Draco. "Banned?" he repeated. "As in… illegal to own one?"

"Not illegal to own, illegal to exist."

Harry's eyes widened. "Wow. No, I… I didn't know there was such a thing." He paused and frowned. "What could they possibly ban if werewolves and vampires and dragons are permitted?"

Draco's responding look was sardonic. "Yes indeed," he said ambiguously then sighed, sounding resigned and weary. Without hesitation, Harry reached out and wrapped one hand around Draco's wrist. The blond looked up in surprise then relaxed, looking appreciative of the silent support. "There are a few completely banned beings that the Ministry have deemed too dangerous to co-exist in our world," he continued steadily. "One group of those beings are called Nundu - have you heard of them?"

Harry frowned thoughtfully, searching his memory for any recollection of that name. "No, I don't think so…" he eventually replied.

Draco licked his lips and pushed on. "Nundu are a species of human-like creatures which, when in their natural state, are comparable to large felines."
"Like tigers?"

"Larger."

"Okay," Harry said, processing this. "And what's so bad about them that the Ministry felt the need to enforce extinction?"

Draco propped his cheek on one hand as he looked across the room without really seeing. "Nundu can be extremely violent in their cat form and are prone to over-reacting to situations if they do not practice self-restraint. But it can be done and it works."

Harry swallowed. "And… your family are these Nundu, aren't they?" he asked, suddenly feeling a little dizzy.

"Yes." Wary grey eyes flicked back to his face. "And I am too."

Harry took a steadying breath and released it slowly. "So… I'm guessing you're not the only ones?" he asked, latching onto the first question that popped into his head.

"No." Draco shook his head, still watching him carefully. "There are about sixty of us in this region alone."

"And the Ministry has no idea?"

"They… no, they don't," Draco replied, frowning a little. "Every once in a while an incident will occur that will raise some suspicion within the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures but nothing has ever been confirmed because we regulate ourselves; we have our own Board that oversee everything. They monitor activities, keep a record of all members, and dole out punishment when required."

Harry chewed his lip as his mind spun too fast for him to keep up. "When you say incidents which raise suspicion in the Ministry…" he said hesitantly.

"Attacks on non-Nundu."

Harry forced himself to remain calm and think things through logically; Draco had never lost control and attacked him, even when they were younger and considered themselves to be mortal enemies. Not even Lucius had done that. They obviously did have a modicum of control to hide that side of themselves even from someone they loathed.

Harry looked up. "Did Voldemort know about you?" he asked suddenly.

Draco nodded. "Yes, that's why my father followed that lunatic. The Dark Lord promised that once he was in power, he would lift the Ministry ban."

Harry's expression immediately cleared as true understanding dawned on him. "So… between a prejudiced Ministry that wanted to see your family exterminated and a psychotic madman who would make it so that you didn't have to hide anymore, your father just chose the lesser of two evils?"

A hint of Draco's usual smirk flitted about one corner of his lips as he stared back. "You could say that, yes."

"Wow." Harry blinked and sat up, needing to move, as he rested folded arms on bent-up knees and stared at the opposite wall. "That explains so much."
"My father is still no saint, Potter," Draco said, remaining lying on his side as he stared up at Harry.

Harry turned to glance at him. "But… Voldemort kept your secret. He never… he never tried to use your kind to his advantage? To force you to fight in your true form against the Order?"

"No, Nundu are not more powerful than a wizard; we still need a wand to perform complex magic. We are only useful in close range combat. The Nundu Board would not agree to an emergence in our true form until the Ministry had officially fallen. We would fight and stand by his side as witches and wizards only until such time that the Ministry was truly gone."

Harry shook his head. "I can't believe all that was going on and… I had no idea. None of us did."

"We're very strict and very thorough," Draco replied solemnly. "We have to be."

Harry couldn't help but feel a sudden rush of warm pleasure. He lay back down on his side, facing Draco. "You trust me."

Draco's expression softened and this time a true smirk quirked his mouth up on one side as he replied, "yes, I trust you Potter."

Harry smiled. "So can I see it?"

Draco blinked and arched a brow. "Is that it? No more questions? No running screaming from the room?"

Harry chuckled and flopped onto his back. "I have loads more questions for you Malfoy - but first I want to see you as a cat."

Draco couldn't help but laugh and Harry's smile widened at the sound. "You're very… odd, do you know that Potter?"

"I do. Now make with the change."

Draco rolled his eyes and, with a rueful smile, slid off the bed and stood tall and naked in front of the window. Harry swallowed; his spent cock giving a little twitch of interest at the sight.

Draco took a breath, closed his eyes, and then in a whirl of light and a breeze that lifted Harry's hair, there was suddenly a very large, very real, panther-like cat standing on all fours where Draco had been.

Harry sat up and slowly swung his legs off the side of the bed and got to his feet. He'd forgotten to ask Draco if he could approach him in his Nundu form.

"Too late now," Harry muttered as he took a few tentative steps forward, sure that the blond would never have agreed to change if it was remotely dangerous for Harry to be in the same room as him.

The huge cat was black but there was a hint of silver in the fur that, when he shifted, made the fur appear almost wet and shiny. There were barely discernible spots in the colouring like a leopard, which only showed when the light hit it the fur just right. The animal was sleek and muscular, and very proud looking.

Harry stepped closer and the cat shifted and huffed as he watched Harry approach. Harry smiled a little when he saw that the cat's eyes were still Draco's; still that familiar grey. It immediately put him at ease and he took the last step forward to stand directly in front of the huge animal. Harry noted that the top of his head only reached the top of the cat's shoulder joint.
Harry hesitantly smiled up at him.

The cat paused - and Harry could’ve sworn he saw an eyebrow arch - and then the cat was leaning down and gently butting his head into Harry's chest.

Harry let out a puff of surprised laughter and immediately raised his hands to stroke the sleek fur on the back of the cat's head and neck. His fur was so soft and smooth. Harry buried his fingers into the thick fur as the cat continued to push his head against his chest, seeking further attention.

Harry moved his hands around to the cat's cheeks, just behind the long whiskers, and scratched. It was just like patting one of Mrs. Figg's house cats. Only the Clifford version.

Harry grinned when the cat distinctly began to purr in contentment, the sound deep and rumbly, and somehow soothing. He slid his hands along the soft fur as he walked down one side, shifting up onto his toes to run his hands along the cat's firmly muscled back, and then made a full circle all the way around to the other side and back around to his head. Harry dropped his hands back to his sides and stared up into handsome feline eyes that were distinctly amused.

Draco's Nundu form was much like the man himself; you had to look to the eyes for his true emotions.

"So… do you understand me when you're a cat?" Harry asked aloud, crossing his arms over his chest.

The cat nodded his magnificent head and Harry grinned.

Draco turned and neatly leapt into the centre of the bed, landing on all four large paws, long tail slashing through the air. He turned to glance Harry's way before suddenly shifting back into his human form.

Harry's grin was still in place as he walked back over to the bed. "What bothers me the most Malfoy, is that you're still bloody gorgeous even in cat form."

It was the right thing to say, as any trepidation in Draco's expression instantly melted away. "Of course I am," he replied but Harry knew he was relieved.

Harry laughed as he crawled back under the blanket, suddenly remembering his nudity as he stood there in the cold room. "Okay, question time," he said, keeping his tone friendly. "Would I ever be in danger with you in your Nundu form? Is there anything I should remember to do - or not do?"

"No," Draco replied decisively. "A Nundu's mate comes first and foremost to him, I could never hurt you."

A pleasant sort of liquid warmth flowed through Harry at Draco's resolute tone. Having grown up abused by his relatives, sentiments and promises like that meant so much more to him than most people. "What about your family? Or other Nundu? Will I ever meet them?"

"My family will not harm you, Nundu family clans stand by each other no matter what," Draco replied then hesitated a moment. "If you are to become my mate, then it will be expected of you to meet the Board. Other Nundu… could potentially pose a problem. While a Nundu's mate is sacred to him, a few Nundu have no qualms about taking what they want by force or by challenge. And a male Omega will be highly sought after in the Nundu community just as much as in the wizarding world."

For the first time, Harry felt a tiny flicker of apprehension.
Draco moved over and placed a warm hand on Harry's knee. "Not all Nundu will act that way, only some, and I or my family will always be with you while in their presence."

Harry nodded, trying to push aside his fear.

Draco paused and then looked as though he were forcing the words out when he continued. "You can always have more than one mate Harry. The more Nundu mates you have, the more protection you will have. I would not... I would not stop you from seeking additional mates for our family."

"No." Harry frowned, his anxiety drifting away on a wave of stubborn indignation at Draco's words. "I don't want that. I don't care if there are additional risks, I don't want a harem of men, I just want one mate."

Draco's eyes flickered with obvious relief and his hand gently squeezed Harry's knee. "Gryffindor," was all he murmured but the fondness was evident.

Harry relaxed a little and propped up one of the pillows behind him so that he could lean back against the bedframe, keeping his legs crossed in order to maintain Draco's hand atop his knee. "If we have children, does that mean that they will be Nundu too?"

Draco's expression brightened at the mention of offspring and it eased Harry's concerns even further. "No, when a Nundu mates with a human Omega, it means that only the male offspring will be Nundu. We're not sure why that is, but never has a female Nundu been borne by a human mother. Female Nundu can only be borne by two Nundu parents. That's why I'm one, because my father is Nundu but my mother is a human Omega, understand?"

Harry nodded then frowned. "So any male children we have will technically be in danger if the Ministry were to find out about them?"

"Yes, they would," Draco replied honestly, "but we have not been discovered in the hundred or so years that we have been in hiding thus far."

"Aren't you concerned that by having Harry Potter as your mate, you will be under even closer scrutiny?" Harry had to ask. "My every bloody move is put in the Prophet. I have reporters following me around as soon as I take a step outside."

"I had thought of that," Draco admitted, "but then I also thought that if anyone is altruistic enough to keep our secret, it's you."

Harry rolled his eyes and looked away as he felt his cheeks heat in embarrassment. "I'm not a saint either Malfoy," he muttered.

Draco leaned towards him. "I know you're not, I couldn't stand to be with you if you were, but I also know that you would never reveal our secret to the Ministry because it would mean the execution of so many people."

Harry glanced up. "Do you really think they'd do that?"

"I'm not sure, the law requires that they do," Draco said with a slight shrug. "You probably know the Ministry better than I on whether they would follow through or not."

"I don't trust the Ministry," Harry instantly stated darkly. "I trust Kingsley but the rest of them can get stuffed."

Draco smiled and was about to respond when a tiny chime rang out from somewhere on the floor.
"It's time," he said, releasing Harry's knee and sliding off of the bed. He picked up his wand from where it had been buried in his discarded trousers and spelled the alarm off with a quick flick the wrist.

Harry stared for a moment before his brain caught up. "Oh fuck, aren't we really late?" he exclaimed in a panic as he pushed himself off of the rumpled bed and hurriedly pulled on his underwear and jeans.

Draco smirked at how flustered he was as the blond calmly dressed on the other side of the large bed. "No, we are perfectly on time. I ensured that we had ample time for me to speak with you first."

"Oh… well good." Harry sagged with relief as he pulled his t-shirt and jumper on over his head in a more sedate manner.

Draco glanced up from buttoning his shirt, expression carefully neutral. "So… you still want to go through with this? After everything you've heard?"

Harry paused in a futile attempt at finger-combing his hair into submission. "Yeah, I do," he said, and meant it.

Draco's grey eyes glittered with some unnamed emotion as he came and stood in front of Harry, reaching up with one hand to artfully arrange his dark hair over his forehead. "You look fine," he murmured. "Besides, they have seen you before Potter."

Harry laughed, storing away the fact that whenever Draco felt really strong emotions he reverted to mocking and sarcasm, and 'Harry' became 'Potter.'

"Thanks," Harry replied with a wry smile. "Should I have worn something a little more posh? I feel under-dressed."

Draco smirked as he took his hand. "You look like you," he said simply before pulling him towards the door.

"Is that a good thing?" Harry asked, half joking and half serious.

Draco opened the door. "Yes," he answered simply before leaning in and kissing him on the lips.

Harry couldn't help but smile, feeling silly yet pleased as he was led down the hallway towards his fate. With Draco's warm hand firmly in his, he felt as though he could face whatever they wanted to throw at him. He was fairly confident that he could persuade Narcissa to tolerate him - but Lucius was another matter.

Harry distracted himself by looking around the long empty corridor with interest. It was as he'd expected: ornate and cold and full of stuffy old portraits of what he assumed were deceased family members. The carpet was looking a little worn and there was a thin layer of dust on wall lamps that he thought had probably not been there before the war. It was an opulent home but with the minor neglect, it felt like a stately museum that hardly ever received visitors anymore.

"Will I have to live here with you once we leave Hogwarts?" Harry asked, remembering his unasked question from earlier.

Draco glanced at him, looking as though he were holding in his amusement. "Only if you want to."

Harry scowled. "It's not that daft a question; you said family clans are very close, and this place is certainly big enough."
"But do you actually want to live here Harry?" Draco asked with a sceptically arched brow as they turned the corner and ascended the wide marble staircase to the main level.

"Erm… no," Harry admitted. "I don't think I would feel comfortable."

"Then we won't."

"Plus it's really cold in here," Harry added with a shiver.

Draco squeezed his hand as they walked out of the grand entrance foyer and headed for one of the front parlour rooms. "I apologise for that, Nundu tend to run warm and so we keep it a little on the cool side at home."

"Hey." Harry stopped and turned to face him before they reached the closed double doors. "Is that why the Room of Requirement was a cave? Because of your… heritage?"

Draco actually looked slightly discomfited as he looked at the floor. "Yes, it… it's a comforting place for me."

Harry smiled, a daft part of him feeling a tug of affection whenever Draco was outwardly self-conscious. Something about it was utterly endearing. "Damp and bitterly cold? Oh yeah, very cosy."

Draco glanced up with a half-hearted glare. "Shut up Potter."

Harry bit his lip to keep from laughing out loud. Before he could protest, Draco had turned and pushed open the doors.

Oh fuck, I'm not ready for this, flitted through Harry's head just before Draco's hand reached back for his and pulled him through into the large sitting room beyond.

Harry blinked as his eyes adjusted to the bright light after the dimly lit corridors. There was a warm, orange glow from a crackling fire in the large grate to his left and quite a few flickering gas lamps on the walls, making the room warm and inviting - in sharp contrast to the occupants themselves.

Harry swallowed as he forced himself to meet two pairs of critical pale eyes.

"Good evening father, mother," Draco greeted with a nod of the head. "I'd like to introduce-"

"We are aware of who that is Draco," Lucius interrupted with controlled impatience. "What we do not know, is why Harry Potter is standing in our parlour?"

Harry refused to look away when Lucius' dismissive gaze flicked to him briefly.

Narcissa cleared her throat lightly. "Draco, when Trinket informed us of your arrival with Mr. Potter, we thought she must be mistaken," she said serenely.

"Trinket told you?" Draco replied, the trace of disappointment in his voice reassuring Harry that the Alpha was not only not nervous, but also not about to cower to his parents.

"Surprise," Harry said under his breath and Draco glanced at him with a smirk.

"Yes, she informed us the moment you arrived - which was some time ago," Lucius added pointedly.

Harry felt his cheeks flush but Draco quickly gave his hand a reassuring squeeze.

"Yes, we were in my room," Draco replied unconcerned. "I required some time alone with Harry to
tell him the truth about our family. I could hardly do that at Hogwarts now could I father?"

Both of Draco's parents seemed to pale; Narcissa's lips parted in shock and Lucius froze, body tense.

Harry knew a challenge when he heard one and he winced, preparing for certain backlash.

Lucius' pale eyes flared with controlled rage as he gathered himself to respond. "Mr. Potter, would you be so kind as to leave us?" he asked through gritted teeth. "I need to have a word with my recalcitrant son."

Draco rolled his eyes. "I've already told him everything so there's no need to send him away. Harry is my mate and, as a part of this family, he can hear whatever it is you feel the need to say to me."

Lucious opened his mouth to retort and Narcissa quickly placed a calming hand on his arm. She turned to Harry with a delicate smile. "Forgive my husband Mr. Potter, won't you please sit down? I am certain we can discuss this in a civilised manner."

Harry glanced to Draco for what to do next, and followed his lead when he stepped forward to seat himself in the pretty two-seater sofa across from his parents in their stiff-backed armchairs.

"Thank you," Harry replied to Mrs. Malfoy, smiling tentatively as he took a seat across from her. He was relieved when Draco kept ahold of his hand, laying their joined hands on his thigh, eyes on his father.

Narcissa glanced at Lucius and Harry saw the minute pressure she put on his arm before turning to Harry. "Now Mr. Potter, my son may have explained certain… aspects of our family to you, but I would be remiss not to mention the fact that under no circumstance shall he encumber himself with a Beta as a life partner. I'm sure you understand."

"Draco, how could you be so foolish?" Lucius hissed angrily, clearly unable to hold back any longer.

"Not a…" Narcissa trailed off, a slight crease between delicate pale brows. "What do you mean darling?"

"I'm an Omega," Harry spoke up, gazing steadily at Mrs. Malfoy when she turned to him with a soft gasp. "I came into my inheritance over the summer and I've been drawn to Draco ever since."

"You're lying," Lucius instantly accused.

"Scent him for yourself," Draco countered sharply.

Harry turned alarmed green eyes towards Draco but remained silent.

Lucius appeared as averse to the idea as Harry but he eventually pushed himself to his feet, straightened his deep blue formal robes with a sharp tug, and strode over to stand next to Harry's chair.

The urge to jerk back and away from Lucius Malfoy was strong and Harry had to clench his hand on the armrest to keep himself in place, his other hand safely anchored in Draco's.

Lucius leaned in towards Harry's neck and inhaled. His eyes immediately widened and he straightened up, stunned. "It… It's not possible," he surmised faintly.
"Of course it's possible," Draco said, narrowing his eyes as his father leaned in and sniffed at Harry again.

"Lucius, come away from the boy, you're making Draco uncomfortable," Narcissa commanded gently.

Lucius' gaze swivelled to the possessive expression on Draco's face. He stared at him a moment before eventually moving back to his vacated seat beside his wife.

Nobody seemed to know what to say and Harry licked his lips as the awkward silence stretched on a little too long to be comfortable. He firmly gathered his courage and forced himself to look at Lucius.

"I know you're concerned about me knowing something so… er, incriminating," he said, "but I can assure you that your secret is safe with me." Harry's eyes sharpened when Lucius made a dismissive sound. "I know we have a colourful history that would prevent you from trusting me, but one thing you must know is that I always protect my own - no matter what. And you may think that this came about rather fast but I have been around other Alphas and none of them have made me feel the way Draco has. I want to be with him, I want Draco as my mate, and if this means accepting you as my family as well, then I will, regardless of how you feel about me in return. You must know that I would never do anything to endanger Draco's life or the lives of any children we may have."

Harry stopped and held his breath. Draco squeezed his hand as he watched Malfoy Senior inhale and share a private look with his wife.

Lucius visibly swallowed and Harry didn't think he'd ever seen the man so wrong-footed.

"I cannot help but think that this… relationship will be ruinous to what we have worked so hard to protect," he finally said, and though the words were severe his tone was remarkably mild. "I do not know what my impulsive son may have divulged to you about our kind Mr. Potter, but there is a reason that the Ministry felt it best to force our race to die out. The acts of violence Nundu have committed throughout history are not for the faint of heart. With that knowledge, I cannot see you allowing our secret to continue and therefore I cannot in good conscience condone your bonding."

Harry ignored the impulse to be instantly defensive and tried to see the situation from Lucius' viewpoint; from a man who has made tough decisions throughout his life in order to protect his family. And while Lucius may have known Harry for years, he didn't really know Harry. Yet.

"Draco has told me about your Board members which govern Nundu and, as you have not been found out, I assume they do their job well," Harry replied evenly, knowing that he could hide behind his Alpha and allow Draco to do all the talking, but he knew it was important for Draco's parents to hear him speak if he was ever going to be taken seriously. "I am not new to keeping vital secrets Mr. Malfoy, having had to keep fairly significant ones since the age of eleven. You should also know that one of the wizards I looked up to most was a werewolf and I would've done anything for him, regardless of what he was capable of in his werewolf form. The Ministry enjoys using me as their personal poster boy but I have absolutely no respect for that organisation. I consider myself a friend of Kingsley Shacklebolt and that's it - which could be in your favour if any of you ever were found out."

Harry felt slightly out of breath as he came to a stop. He glanced uncertainly at Draco and was warmed by the admiration shining in grey eyes. He gave him a soft smile which was instantly returned.

"I know you are a good person Mr. Potter."
Harry turned to look at Narcissa, pale eyes gazing back, appraising.

"I do not doubt your strength of character, I have seen it for myself," she continued in the same effortlessly elegant tone. "We are merely acting out of love for our only son who has surprised us by initiating the bonding process a little out of the proper order. Instantly telling you the truth should not have been Step One for him." She paused and darted a pointed look towards Draco. "We had a suitable candidate already selected for him as a matter of course."

"Astoria Greengrass?" Harry interjected, unable to stop the slight scowl at the name.

"Yes, she is of a respectable family whom were already aware of the truth," she replied prudently.

"But she may not even turn out to be an Omega," Draco countered. "She still has a full year until her eighteenth. Plus, I would not have been satisfied nor happy with her. I know it sometimes escapes your notice, but I'm gay, I want to be with a man, and I want to be with Harry. Certainly you can see how this is the perfect solution? The first male Omega in decades and he actually wants me in return?"

Harry's stomach swooped with delight at Draco's words. The fact that the Alpha seemed to acknowledge and value the fact that Harry wanted him was utterly heartening. He was confident that their relationship would be about equality and not dominance - regardless of how other bonded Alpha/Omega couples acted.

"I must agree with my husband," Narcissa was speaking again, "that this is not a preferable mateship, however," she stressed when both Harry and Draco opened their mouths to argue, "as Mr. Potter has already been apprised of the truth, I do not know that it would be sensible to refuse their wishes at this time."

Harry felt a flicker of hope at her words, too happy to be offended by the reluctance in her tone. "What is the proper order of things?" he asked, wondering just how much Draco had broken protocol.

Lucius cleared his throat and Harry had almost forgotten the man was there.

"The proper order of things would have been for Draco to inform us of his attraction before speaking to you or promising anything. It is the right of the Alpha's parents to approve their son's choice in mate prior to bonding," he explained derisively.

"And if I'd asked your permission in advance you both would have refused," Draco retorted scornfully.

Lucius' stare hardened on his son. "Of course we would have. You have deliberately disobeyed us in order to secure your own selfish desires," he seethed in a deadly whisper. Narcissa's hand immediately tightened on his arm.

"Selfish?" Draco countered incredulously. "Who is being selfish?"

"We have your best interests at heart Draco-" Narcissa spoke up soothingly.

"No, you don't," Draco replied tersely. "If you did, then you would accept the fact that I want to be with Harry. I'm not a child."

"As much as you loathe it, you are a part of the Nundu clan Draco," Lucius snapped, "and as such, you have a responsibility to us, and one of those responsibilities is to keep your clan safe. How long do you think it will be before someone realises the truth? How many bloody Prophet reporters follow
you around every day Mr. Potter? Did you think about your children when they're too young to fully comprehend the gravity of the situation and transform into their feline forms without a thought to where they are or who they're with? How long before Harry Potter's illegal offspring are splashed across every newspaper in the country?"

Harry chewed his lip; the man did have a point.

"Harry."

The warning in Draco's voice had Harry turning towards him.

"Don't listen to him," the blond said firmly, angling his body sideways in order to speak to him, ignoring his parents. "My father has been under intense scrutiny ever since the Dark Lord's return, including his trial and subsequent house-arrest, and still they never uncovered the truth. If we have to move to the other side of the planet while our children are young in order to protect them and everyone else, then we will alright?"

Harry felt the tension gripping his body lessen a little at Draco's calm logic. "Of course," he said with a nod, holding his gaze. "Of course we will." He took a deep breath and turned to Lucius. "What can I do? As Mrs. Malfoy pointed out, I already know the truth, so what can I do to earn your approval?"

"You will never..."

Narcissa turned to her husband with a quelling look and, amazingly, he fell silent. She clasped pale hands in her lap overtop of her silky rose-coloured dress robes and turned her piercing pale eyes on Harry. "You could make an Unbreakable Vow."

Draco sighed. "Must you be so dramatic mother? Harry, you don't have to do that."

But Harry's interest was seized. "Why didn't I think of that? Yes of course I can."

"Harry."

Harry turned to Draco with earnest eyes. "I would need to approve the wording before I did it of course, but why not?"

"Because no other Nundu has ever had to make such a vow," Draco said, directing a glare at his parents, voice rising with annoyance. "I trust Harry and you will just have to trust him as well - without the threat of death hanging over his head."

Narcissa seemed to sag a little in her chair and shared a look with her husband.

Lucius also appeared slightly defeated and weary. "We could Obliviate him," he finally suggested aside to his wife, causing reserved Narcissa Malfoy to smirk a little in amusement.

Harry was shocked by the demonstration of what could only be described as humour from Malfoy Senior. He suddenly saw a bit of Draco in both of his parents and found this discovery oddly reassuring.

Draco snorted and rolled his eyes. "If you have quite finished with your interrogation for tonight... I think Harry and I shall be getting back to school."

"If you don't mind darling, I'd like to have a word with Mr. Potter alone," Narcissa said calmly.

"Whatever for?" Draco replied with a long-suffering sigh.
"It's alright, I don't mind," Harry interjected with a reassuring smile at Draco before turning back to Narcissa, back straight and chin lifted self-assuredly.

"I'll be right outside," Draco finally relented, giving Harry's knee a squeeze before rising and exiting the room, Lucius not far behind after levelling a look at Harry that he couldn't quite decipher.

Narcissa rose from her chair and Harry watched in surprise as the elegant woman walked over to perch in Draco's vacated seat beside him on the small sofa, bringing a waft of pleasant floral perfume that swirled about her silky dress robes and long pale hair.

"I still believe your relationship with my son is irrational and impractical - but I can see that you are as stubborn as he is when it comes to the things you want," she began evenly. "And I can see that my son cares a great deal for you already. I can only hope that you are able to return those feelings, despite your shared history."

Harry relaxed once he saw that she wasn't here to dissuade him from bonding with Draco. "I can assure you Mrs. Malfoy that I do care for Draco, more than I thought possible after such a short amount of time."

Narcissa's lips pulled into a gentle smile and she nodded her head in satisfaction. "Being with an Alpha Nundu is not an easy task Mr. Potter," she continued in a conspiratorial tone. "They are prone to allowing their emotions to get the better of them, as well as being completely and exasperatingly protective."

A cautious smile bloomed across Harry's face, an amiable feeling of camaraderie sweeping over him as he realised that Mrs. Malfoy was in the same position as him and could advise him and share what lessons she may have learned along the way; not only in dealing with an Alpha Nundu but how to do deal with a Malfoy as well.

"Do you desire children Mr. Potter?"

"Yeah, I do. Very much."

Narcissa's pale eyes warmed to show her obvious pleasure and Harry instantly knew he could win her over in time. She rose gracefully and Harry quickly stumbled to his feet in order to follow her.

She turned to him just before the doors, one hand resting on the burnished gold handle. "Do not concern yourself about Lucius, he cares very much for his son and being an overprotective Nundu Alpha with so much to worry about is not easy for him. He will adjust to this news in time - as will I," she said with another tiny flicker of a smile.

"Thank you," Harry replied and meant it.

Draco gave him a searching look when he joined him in the entrance hall, a touch of anxiety in grey eyes. Lucius was nowhere to be seen.

Harry smiled and slipped a hand into his, silently reassuring. "I'm ready."
Harry stared down at the floor as he quietly walked up the staircase to his dorm room, unable to keep the tiny smile off his face. He was still full of the pleasant liquid warmth of Draco's goodnight kiss at the portrait hole, not to mention the wired after-effects of such an emotional evening. Draco's secret was nothing compared to the daunting task of trying to befriend Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy though.

Harry's smile widened as an image of Draco's Nundu form came to mind; something about the proud, handsome animal was so captivating and alluring and comforting all at once. He wasn't frightened or repulsed by this side of Draco at all, and he wondered if it was his exposure to Sirius in his Animagus form that made it so easy and natural for him to be completely okay with it.

Harry opened the dorm room door and headed for his waiting bed. He suddenly felt extraordinarily tired and wanted nothing more than to crawl between his soft flannel sheets and fall asleep - a part of him already itching to see Draco again in the morning.

"Where have you been then?"

Harry startled out of his thoughts and looked up. "Ron, what are you doing still awake?"

Ron was sitting cross-legged in his pyjamas in the centre of his bed, wand in hand, the glowing tip illuminating his face in the darkened room. "Waiting to make sure you weren't dead. Where did you go?"

Harry avoided his narrowed eyes as he began to get undressed next to his bed. "I told you I was meeting up with Draco."

"Yeah but you failed to mention the fact that you would be leaving school grounds."

Harry's eyes snapped up. "How did you..." he trailed off as he suddenly noticed a large familiar map unfolded across Ron's lap. "You were spying on me?"

"Why would you leave Hogwarts?" Ron asked, ignoring the question.

Harry roughly pulled on his pyjama bottoms, a hot prickle of irritation running under his skin. "Because I was meeting his parents, and as his father is currently under house-arrest, I can hardly meet them at Madam Puddifoot's now can I?" he snapped back.

Ron frowned. "You should've told us Harry, just in case something happened. Can you trust the Malfoys?"

Harry took a deep breath and tried to calm his hot temper, which felt hotter than usual at the disparaging remarks cast towards the Malfoys; who were now, in essence, his new family. "Yes Ron, I can trust them. I'm bonding with their son and will be producing heirs so they're not likely to murder me in my sleep now are they?"
Ron shuffled over to hang his legs off the side of the bed, leaning forward on his hands towards Harry as he buttoned up his top with jerky fingers. "Did you sleep with him?"

"Ron!" Harry exclaimed, whirling to face him. He glanced towards the other sleeping occupants of the room and quickly cast a wandless privacy spell. "That is none of your fucking business."

Ron had the decency to look slightly abashed. "It's just… er, you really reek of him. That's all. Sorry, I didn't mean it like that."

Harry took a moment to climb into bed and under the covers while he tried to compose himself. He held out a hand for the Marauder's Map and Ron dutifully passed it over, looking at a loss now that he'd started the conversation. Harry sighed as he tucked his precious map into the bedside table and then folded his hands in his lap, he was much too tired for this conversation; a conversation in which he had to watch what he said and hide things from his best friend.

"It was fine Ron, I'm fine," he said, looking over. "It was really good to be able to talk without worrying about another student or professor catching us."

Ron nodded, looking slightly less worried. "So… his parents were… happy to see you?" he hedged.

Harry couldn't help but laugh hollowly as he shook his head. "No. Draco didn't even warn them that it was me who he was bringing back as his intended mate. Once they were over the shock, it… er, went a bit better. I think it'll be fine. Eventually."

Ron's mouth lifted up on one side as he looked back at him with amusement in his eyes. "Must've been strange though?"

"Being in the Manor or making nice with Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy?" Harry asked, irritation giving way to reluctant amusement.

"Both," Ron snorted, causing Harry to smile.

"Yeah, it was. We weren't in… we were in different rooms, ones I hadn't seen before," Harry replied carefully. "I think Lucius will be the hard one to win over but…" he trailed off with a shrug then covered a huge, jaw-cracking yawn.

Ron sat back in his bed. "Looks like he wore you out," he teased with a raised brow. "I'll let you get some sleep."

Harry removed his glasses and set them aside before sliding down into his warm bedclothes and tucking his hands neatly under his pillow.

"Don't forget it's Hermione's birthday tomorrow," Ron reminded from his bed.

Harry opened his eyes. "Oh yeah, I almost forgot. I got her a book of course," he added with a sleepy grin.

"Me too," Ron chuckled.

Harry looked at the blurry outline of his friend, considering. "Do you care what the outcome is for her?" he finally asked curiously, because they'd never spoken about the awkward dance Ron and Hermione had been doing for the past eight years and he truly didn't know where Ron stood on the whole Omega versus Beta issue. Ron was from a pureblood family but they were the furthest thing from traditional.
"Er not really," Ron replied uncomfortably. "I came into my Alpha inheritance and I still uh, feel the same about her."

Harry smiled into his pillow. He was happy for his friends, especially now that he had someone to call his own as well. "Are you actually going to tell her that one day?"

"Fuck off," Ron retorted and Harry could hear the grin in his voice. "When are you going to tell Rita Skeeter that you're an Omega?"

Harry sighed and rolled onto his back. "I'm not telling that witch anything, but I guess starting tomorrow Draco and I will… stop hiding."

Ron whistled as he deftly flicked off his Lumos. "There is going to be some serious backlash from you being with Lucius Malfoy's son. It's a good thing we have all the same classes tomorrow."

"Yeah…" Harry replied with a sleepy frown, already on the edge of drifting off. He pushed one hand out from under the covers and cancelled the privacy charm before promptly falling asleep.

Harry grunted the next morning as someone shoved him in the shoulder in an attempt at tearing him from his very pleasant dream; which basically replayed the bed scene in Draco's room yesterday.

"What?!" he demanded tetchily, not even bothering to open his eyes as he pressed his face deeper into his pillow. It felt as though he'd only just fallen asleep, who on earth could be disturbing him already?

"Harry! Bloody hell," Ron swore under his breath before continuing in a much louder voice, "get up, you're going to be late for class!"

"Huh?" Harry dragged his eyes open as he lifted his head and stared fuzzily at Ron looming over him. "What are you talking about?"

"You missed breakfast and you made Malfoy talk to Hermione because he's worried about you and you have ten minutes to get to Potions."

Harry lifted his head and blinked owlishly, trying to wrap his brain around Ron's words, he felt heavy and slow with a threatening unconsciousness that just wanted to drag him back under. He dropped his head back onto his pillow and closed his eyes. "Go without me," he mumbled. "Too tired."

He could hear Ron hesitating, shifting his weight from foot to foot. "Okay, if you're sure. I'll… I'll come get you after Potions, yeah?"

Harry mumbled something incoherent and didn't wait for a response before drifting off to sleep again.

An hour later, Harry was standing under a cold shower in a futile attempt at waking himself up. Ron had promised to bring him some hot coffee before DADA, which he really did not want to miss as it was his favourite subject and he really liked the new professor.

Harry rubbed at his face and groaned; he was still utterly shattered and couldn't figure out why. He hadn't been up that late and he didn't think his outing last night had exhausted him to this extent.

He reluctantly shut off the water and got out, quickly throwing on his uniform and then grabbing his
bag and making his way down the stairs to the common room, rubbing at heavy eyelids that didn't seem to want to stay open.

"Harry, mate, here's your coffee."

"Thanks Ron." Harry gratefully took the hot cup of liquid caffeine from his friend and then fell into step beside him as they made their way out the portrait hole towards the DADA classroom on the main floor.

"Are you sure you're alright?" Ron asked, glancing at him. "I've never seen you so tired before. Are... are sure the Malfoys didn't...?"

Harry would've rolled his eyes if he'd had the energy. He gulped down some of his coffee, burning his tongue in the process. "Ouch, shit. No Ron, the Malfoys didn't poison me with some sort of... sleepy... poison thing," he said; sluggish and inarticulate. "If it makes you feel better, I didn't even eat or drink anything in their home."

"Spell," Ron muttered under his breath but Harry studiously ignored him.

He swallowed another large gulp of coffee and remembered something. "Hey, what did Hermione find out this morning?" he asked, suddenly recalling the significance of his friend's birthday.

Ron grinned. "Beta."

Harry smiled over the rim of his cheery red and gold Gryffindor cup. "That's what she wanted."

"Yup."

Harry flicked some spilt coffee from his thumb as the staircase suddenly moved beneath their feet. "Did Draco really talk to Hermione about me this morning?"

Ron rolled his eyes as he shifted his bag up on his shoulder. "Yeah, the git stared at our table all through breakfast - I don't even think he ate anything - and then he just got up and walked over to Hermione, demanding to know where you were."

Harry hid a smile in his cup but Ron caught it.

"Oh Merlin, you think that's cute, don't you?"

"No comment." Harry smirked. "Though you can shut your gob now about him having some sinister plot to murder me."

"No promises," Ron muttered as they walked towards the classroom door.

"What did Hermione tell him?"

"Just that you were tired and decided to have a late start," Ron replied with a shrug.

"And what did he say?"

"Oh for... Ask him yourself in about twenty seconds," Ron said with an exasperated sigh.

Harry smiled at his aggravation. "And did you tell Hermione that you were in love with her yet?" he needed. "Or shall I tell her for you in about twenty seconds?"

Ron shoved his shoulder with a friendly glare just before they rounded the corner and strode into the
classroom.

Harry immediately sought out Draco as he entered the large room and was surprised to see the blond seated at Harry's usual table on the left-hand side of the room. He walked towards him with a slow smile stretching his lips, knowing that he really shouldn't have been that surprised.

Draco's features relaxed as soon as Harry made eye contact and Harry could visually see the tension leave his body upon confirmation of his mate's well-being.

"Hi," Harry said in greeting as he casually slid into the empty seat next to Draco. Ron took the seat next to Hermione across the aisle, staring distrustfully at Draco all the while. Some of the other eighth years noticed the change in seating arrangements as well and were openly staring at the bizarre spectacle of Harry Potter calmly taking a seat next to Draco Malfoy.

Draco's eyes tightened when he took in the shadows under Harry's eyes. "What's wrong?" he asked immediately, then lowered his voice. "Did last night… upset you?"

Harry smiled and placed his hand on Draco's thigh under the table. "No, nothing like that. I dunno, I guess I just didn't sleep very well."

"Are you sure?" Draco asked, grey eyes searching his expression intently.

"Yeah," Harry replied, glancing up at Professor Fischer as he entered the classroom, then looked back to Draco with a smile. "I'm sure."

Draco's lips twitched into a brief smile before he turned his attention to the Professor.

Harry gave his warm thigh a squeeze and then let go, knowing that his body would react inappropriately to touching Draco like that if he left his hand there much longer. He turned his attention to the front and tried to concentrate through his thick fog of exhaustion.

He really liked the new DADA Professor; he was an ex-Auror who had had to retire in his early thirties due to a permanent injury to his leg that left him unfit for duty but not for teaching. When Harry had heard about his background, he had expected a bitter man who resented the idea of teaching a bunch of teenagers instead of being an Auror, but he'd been proven wrong within in the first few minutes of his first class. Professor Fischer was intelligent and friendly and fairly shone with enthusiasm for the position.

"Alright eighth years," Professor Fischer began with a clap of the hands to garner their attention. "Today we shall be doing some practical work."

Harry blinked and would have brightened if he'd had the energy; he loved it when they got to actually perform the spells and curses rather than just learning the theoretical side of things. He withdrew his wand and idly played with it between his hands as he stared up at the Professor, wondering if he could secretly cast some sort of wake-up spell over himself without anyone noticing.

"If you don't stop that Potter, I shall be forced to do unthinkable things to you," Draco murmured out the side of his mouth.

Harry glanced down at his hands with a confused frown and suddenly realised that he'd been stroking his wand in quite a lewd manner without realising. "Get your head out of the gutter Malfoy," he shot back loftily, but quit his fidgeting nevertheless.

Draco smirked, eyes still locked on their Professor.
"Today we shall be learning a very valuable smokescreen spell that is quite convenient for escaping sticky situations," Professor Fischer continued, looking around with a smile. "Let's pair up and clear these tables to the side."

Harry looked to his mate with a grin.

"I can't be your dueling partner," Draco said instantly.

Harry frowned as they both stood to Banish their table to the vast sides of the classroom. "What? Why not?"

"Because it goes against my Alpha instincts as your mate," he replied agitatedly, pale fingers clenching around his wand in one hand.

"Huh…” Harry replied with interest as he covered a yawn with one hand. "I don't seem to have any such reservations."

"Because you're supposed to be able to force me away if you think I present a danger to you or our children," Draco replied matter-of-factly.

"Draco, would you like to be partners?"

Harry and Draco looked over to see Hermione standing before them, Ron at her side, as she smiled tentatively at Draco. She was obviously fully aware of the situation already or had overheard their brief exchange.

Harry looked to Draco to see how he would handle it. He was relieved when Draco merely nodded and thanked her for the offer. He supposed if he was expected to befriend Draco's parents then Draco would also be expected to befriend Ron and Hermione. Probably just as intimidating an undertaking for him as it was for Harry.

"I guess you're with me Harry," Ron said with a grin.

Harry began to smile back but ended up yawning instead.

"Gather round, gather round," Professor Fischer commanded from the centre of the cleared area as he withdrew his wand. All the eighth year students formed a semi-circle around him, wands at the ready, expressions eager. "The incantation for the smoke-screen spell is 'Fumos.' Try it together."

"Fumos," Harry enunciated clearly along with everyone else.

"Excellent," Professor Fischer beamed before raising his gleaming, chestnut brown wand. "Now I shall demonstrate the wand movement…”

Harry gave his head a shake and tried to concentrate on the graceful swooping movements of Professor Fischer's wrist and wand. The man always made everything look so easy. Luckily this spell had a fairly simple movement, obviously designed for a quick escape.

Harry joined in with everyone else to practice the precise action and felt confident, despite his fatigue, that he'd managed to replicate the Professor's movements, with perhaps just a little less finesse.

"Miss Greengrass, less jerky if you please," the Professor corrected as he wandered amongst them. "Begin with your wand raised up a little higher Mr. Longbottom. Alright good, let's pair up and find a space on the floor."
Harry followed Ron to a spot near the front of the room and stood opposite him, wand up and at the ready.

Professor Fischer hopped neatly onto the surface of his desk at the front of the room as though it were a raised platform. "I'd like everyone to try the spell first. On the count of three please: one-two-three!"

"Fumos!" Harry cast and was pleased to see a great purple cloud erupt from the end of his wand and fill the space between himself and Ron like an impenetrable wall of thick, coloured fog.

Professor Fischer cast a complicated spell to remove the mass of purple clouds, but it took a few minutes to dissipate enough for the class to see each other again. "Now, I'd like you to face your partner and choose one of you to attack with a Stinging Hex - only mild mind you - then shield the hex and cast the smoke screen spell. Practicing spells in succession is a much more realistic scenario and a valuable skill to have for anyone. Decide between the two of you who does what and begin when you're ready. Just do it once and then wait for me to clear the air before you switch. At your own pace everyone - proceed!"

"You want to do the smoke screen first?" Harry asked Ron as he turned to face him.

"Sure, but first I want to watch Hermione hex Malfoy."

Harry looked over his shoulder just in time to catch Hermione throwing a Stinging Hex Draco's way. The blond deflected it then smoothly cast the Fumos spell. Harry turned back to Ron who was grinning. He rolled his eyes and quickly threw out his own Stinging Hex, trying to catch Ron off-guard.

Ron deflected it in time with a shielding spell then cast Fumos, filling the space between them with thick purple smoke.

"Nice job!" Harry called out to him, coughing a little on the thick haze.

The room was getting a little warm with all the conjured clouds and body heat and Harry could feel his energy waning even further. He covered another yawn and blinked slowly as he waited for Professor Fischer to clear the air with a wave of his wand.

Harry barely resisted the urge to sit on the floor while he waited, then suddenly the Professor was calling for them to swap roles. He turned to face Ron and took up his dueling stance.

He suddenly remembered it would be Draco's turn to cast at Hermione and he began to turn to watch when he vaguely heard Ron cast the Stinging Hex. His sluggish reaction time was not up to the task of shielding the surprise attack in time and he was hit with the full force of the Stinging Hex in his side. He crumpled to the ground with a startled cry of pain.

Harry curled up on his side and breathed through the Stinging Hex as it slowly began to fade. It hadn't been that strong a cast but the shock of it had taken his breath away.

"Harry!"

Harry swallowed and cracked open his eyes to see Draco's anxious face swimming above him. His Alpha was on his knees next to him, hands gently grasping his shoulders. "I… I'm okay," he gasped, knowing he sounded anything but.

Draco smoothed Harry's dark hair back from his forehead as he stared into his eyes with concern, much to the shock of everyone else who had stopped to watch the scene unfold. There was a
collective gasp as Draco suddenly turned a furious glare on Ron.

"That was supposed to be a mild hex Weasley!" he snarled and then before anyone could say a word, he'd raised his wand and cast a most-decidedly unmild Stinging Hex back at the gobsmacked Gryffindor.

Ron couldn't raise his wand in time and cried out as the hex hit him squarely in the chest, causing him to stumble and then pitch backwards onto the ground, dropping his wand in the process.

"Expelliarmus!" Professor Fischer deftly caught Draco's wand in his outstretched hand, a look of severe disapproval on his face. "Mr. Malfoy, you will see the Headmistress immediately. Attacking another student will not be tolerated, regardless of whether you think it was warranted or not."

Harry pushed himself into a sitting position, worried gaze on Draco as the Slytherin took a steadying breath and then nodded in assent. "Yes Professor," he replied deferentially as he got to his feet. He glanced uncertainly at Harry, clearly not wanting to leave him.

"I'm okay," Harry promised, relieved that Draco hadn't fully lost control and done something stupid and over reactive - like change into his Nundu form.

It looked like Draco wanted to say more but he finally nodded and turned to leave the room.

"Miss Granger, would you be so kind as to help Mr. Weasley to the nurse?" Professor Fischer asked once Draco had left.

Harry looked at Ron, ashamed that he'd completely forgotten about his best friend sprawled out on the floor due to his mate's Stinging Hex.

"Of course Professor." Hermione hurried to Ron's side and helped him to his feet where he swayed unsteadily. Draco had clearly put a lot of force behind his spell in order for Ron to still be dazed by it.

Harry bit his lip and sent Ron an apologetic look as Hermione slung an arm around his shoulders and helped him from the room.

"Okay Mr. Potter, you're with me," Professor Fischer instructed, some of his cheery enthusiasm somewhat dimmed by the event. "Everyone else, please return to your positions and continue to practice."

Harry slowly got to his feet and followed Professor Fischer to his desk where they sat side by side, the Professor keeping an eye on the working students.

"Something you want to tell me Harry?" he asked without looking at him.

Harry swallowed. "Uh… it's not really Draco's fault sir." He turned to look at his Professor. "He's my mate."

Professor Fischer turned his steady blue gaze on him and quirked an eyebrow. "Is that so?" he replied, then leaned in just a little to sniff at Harry. He leaned back, eyes widening slightly in surprise but still calm. "You're an Omega?"

Harry nodded and then covered another yawn under his Professor's scrutinizing gaze.

"You don't look well Harry," he concluded. "Why don't you sit here and rest a bit? I'll get you to help me put the desks right once class is over and we can chat then."
Harry nodded and rubbed at his eyes, which felt gritty and heavy under his smudged glasses.

Professor Fischer patted him on the shoulder then got up to slowly move around the duelling pairs, clearing away purple smoke every few minutes.

Harry watched the rest of the lesson through weary eyes, too tired to care that he was missing out on such a good class. He hoped Draco wasn't getting into too much trouble with McGonagall. He would most likely be called up to her office once class was over to confirm his side of the story, as well as to talk about his Omega status.

"You alright Harry?" Blaise Zabini asked, pausing in his duel to sidle over and check on him.

Harry smiled and nodded, trying not to yawn. "Yeah, it'll take more than a Stinging Hex to bring me down."

Blaise returned the smile, looking strangely relieved. "Hey Harry, do you -"

"Alright class." Professor Fischer clapped his hands once the last of the smoke was whisked away. "Thank you all very much for your attention and participation today. You've done well."

The class murmured their thanks as they gathered their bags and began to trail out the door, most of them casting curious looks Harry's way as they walked past.

Harry kept his head down, feigning interest in his scuffed trainers in order to avoid their inquisitive stares.

"You too Mr. Zabini," Professor Fischer chastised as Blaise lingered next to Harry. "Don't be late for your next class."

"I'll catch up with you later Harry," Blaise said with a vaguely disappointed look and then he was gone.

Harry was too tired and preoccupied to wonder what the Slytherin was up to.

"Give me a hand Harry?" Professor Fischer asked once the room was empty of students, indicating the scattered tables around the perimeter.

Harry nodded and hopped off of the Professor's desk. As soon as his feet touched the stone floor, a wave of heat and dizziness suddenly washed over him and made him sway precariously on the spot. His wand dropped to the floor from nerveless fingers as he put a hand to his temple with a hushed moan.

"Harry?"

Harry kept his eyes closed and leaned on the desk. His body felt as though it were getting hotter and hotter, attempting to scorch him from the inside. A sweat broke out over his brow and his breathing sped up exponentially. He placed both hands palms down on the desk as his knees trembled and threatened to give out. His stomach turned over and then he shuddered as the heat gradually changed and morphed into something else; a kind of hot, feverish inertness.

"Harry…?"

He gasped out loud as a gentle hand tentatively touched his shoulder. His body instantly thrummed with arousal - there was no other word for it. He was hard in an instant, his body still hot and feverish but now with an overwhelming ache to lay back, open his legs and be taken.
He heard the indrawn breath and then suddenly a fit, firm body was pressed to his back and he moaned in relief as something hard pressed against his aching backside, which had begun to steadily leak some sort of fluid, dampening his pants. Harry pushed back against the welcome body behind him.

He wanted the feeling to end; this hot itchy arousal that was spurring him on to be filled with an Alpha's seed.

Insistent lips were pressed to the back of his neck and he clenched his splayed fingers on the wooden desk beneath his hands as he tipped his head forward in encouragement. A warm tongue began to lap at his flushed skin and Harry unconsciously pressed back again with a soft moan, seeking that wonderful pressure again. Frenzied hands suddenly dropped lower to unbutton his trousers and wrench them down over his hips.

Harry whimpered as hands were suddenly sliding all over his naked skin, stroking his erection and cupping his backside and squeezing. Eager fingers finally parted his cheeks and a single digit stroked over his leaking hole, sending an electrified current through Harry's entire body.

Harry inhaled deeply at the contact - and the scent that invaded his nostrils was all wrong.

He immediately stiffened and opened his eyes. Somewhere in the back of his mind, in a place that was still more human than Omega in heat, he knew with certainty that this wasn't the Alpha he craved.

This wasn't his Alpha.

This wasn't Draco.

Harry gasped as his mate's name finally permeated the fog in his brain. No! No, no, no, no, no…

"No!" Harry cried out as he straightened up and stepped sideways, away from unrelenting hands and lips. He couldn't get far with his trousers pooled around his ankles and he stumbled when the Alpha aggressively grabbed him once more and bent him forwards over the desk.

Harry grunted as the edge of the desk hit his hips hard enough to bruise and he was firmly forced down so that his face was pressed uncomfortably hard against the desk's lacquered surface, bare arse exposed. The Alpha kept one solid hand on the back of his neck, keeping Harry's face pressed to the desk, his glasses cutting painfully into the bridge of his nose and against his temple. The Alpha's free hand trailed over Harry's spine down to his arse and, without warning, a single finger suddenly breached his opening.

Harry cried out in shock, a spike of terror shooting through him. This Alpha wasn't like the young student Alphas he'd thrown off so far, this one was mature and intent on getting what he wanted, overwhelmed by the scent of an Omega in heat.

"Professor stop!" Harry shouted as loudly as he could. He then had to promptly shut his eyes as another wave of heat and dizziness swept over him, his body a confounding jumble of heat and arousal and fear. It was as though his body was at war with itself and the feeling of being torn apart was making him feel sick.

The finger suddenly withdrew and Harry's heart thundered in his chest when he heard the sound of a zipper being pulled down behind him. He tried to struggle but he was so weak and faint that he couldn't do much against the iron grip the domineering Alpha had over his anaemic body.

So he did the only thing he could think of and started to yell.
The hand on the back of his neck suddenly and forcefully pushed down, effectively stifling Harry's shouting as he cut off with a cry of pain. The urge to give in and just let the Alpha do what he wanted so that it would all be over faster was nearly overpowering, but Harry clenched his jaw and tried to force his pinned body into motion. He would not go down without a fight.

The outraged growl that reverberated throughout the nearly empty classroom startled Harry, and for a moment he thought it had come from the Professor, but the pressure on his neck suddenly let up and he was able to turn his head and open his eyes.

Relief flooded his body swift and instant when he spotted Draco standing in the open doorway, a fierce snarl on his face as he glared murderously at the Alpha laid out over his half-naked mate.

An involuntary whimper escaped Harry's lips at the sight and the sound seemed to spark his Alpha into action. Draco pelted into the room, directly towards the Professor.

Harry was quickly released and his knees gave way as he slid awkwardly to the floor. He leaned back against the desk with his arms curled protectively around drawn up knees. He could feel a trickle of blood running down the side of his nose from where his glasses had cut into the skin. He raised his head and distantly watched his mate tackle the young Professor to the flagstone floor.

As soon as the Professor was no longer touching him, the heat and arousal and ache returned full force, perhaps made worse by the appearance of his mate. Harry could feel his body beginning to tremble and his arms tightened around his shins, feeling oddly detached from the scene unfolding in front of him.

A blast of magic suddenly swept into the room and pulled the two hostile Alphas apart, throwing them to opposite sides of the room and holding them there.

Harry blinked and looked up to see Professor McGonagall standing in the doorway, wand held aloft in a steady hand which was pointed directly at the two Alphas. She motioned with her free hand and the classroom door promptly swung closed behind her.

Harry swallowed and absently attempted to cover himself as he looked up at the Headmistress. "Professor, it's not... it's not Draco's fault," he said weakly, head spinning. He felt as though he was on the edge of passing out but knew he needed to speak up before his Alpha was unfairly punished.

She turned sympathetic eyes on Harry as she lowered her wand. "I know Mr. Potter," she said with her usual calm stoicism.

Harry met her gaze and knew Draco was safe. He closed his eyes and allowed the tug of unconsciousness to pull him under as everything went dark.

. . . .

Harry's eyes snapped open, his mate's name still on his lips as he suddenly came awake with a shout. He blinked and realised he was in a strange white room and not in one of the usual infirmary beds, though the air still had the same powerful antiseptic smell as the hospital wing.

Harry slowly sat up and looked around. The room was tiny and looked more like a white painted cell rather than a hospital room. He could feel his chest beginning to tighten a little as his latent claustrophobia set in, but before he had to resort to counting backwards from ten there came the sound of sharp rapping from the door.

The handle turned and opened inwards, and Harry felt the air rush back into his lungs as the door opened to the outside world and Madam Pomfrey appeared in her starched white uniform.
"Mr. Potter," she said as she took a few steps into the room and withdrew her wand. "How are you feeling?"

Harry licked his lips and swallowed; a million answers to that question swirling around in his head but not really feeling up to talking about the vast majority of them. "Tired. And thirsty," he finally replied, settling on the simplest two.

The nurse quickly conjured a paper cup full of water and placed it into his hand. "Here you are dear."

Harry drank the cool liquid gratefully as she raised her wand and began to perform some non-invasive diagnostic tests. She deftly refilled the cup when Harry finished it then smoothly returned to her casting; Harry's skin glowing various shades of white and gold as she skillfully ran through each assessment.

She finally stopped and slipped her wand back into its sheath at her thick-set waist before leaning over to open his eyes wide and peer into them with a concentrated frown.

"You should have come straight to me at the beginning of term Mr. Potter," she said crisply as she looked him over. "Any Omega should directly report to the Ministry upon discovery of their status and the Ministry would have notified me prior to your return to Hogwarts. I realise male Omegas are extremely rare and you probably didn't want the added publicity, but I could have taken the proper precautions for you to avoid what happened today."

Harry avoided her disapproving gaze as she straightened up and dug his glasses out of her apron pocket for him. He slipped them into place, absently noticing that the cut on his nose had been healed.

"Now, Mr. Potter," she continued seriously, hands folding in front of her. "Your heat has terminated early due to elevated stress levels."

Harry frowned, feeling a tiny ache of sadness at her words and he wasn't even sure why. "Really? I... I didn't know that could happen. How long have I been here?"

"About two hours."

Harry nodded as the events of earlier began to flood back in and fill his head with suddenly urgent questions. "Where's Draco? What happened to Professor Fischer?"

Madam Pomfrey held up a hand to stay his questions. "Slow down Mr. Potter. The Headmistress would like to see you in her office once you're dressed. I believe Mr. Malfoy is with her."

Harry threw back the thin sheet covering his pyjama-clad body. He suddenly needed to see Draco straight away; he wanted the reassuring touch and scent of his mate so much that it ached. "Where are my clothes?"

Madam Pomfrey turned and removed a neat pile of clothing from the top of the small chest of white drawers and handed them over. "Mr. Weasley brought these for you."

"Ron knows?" Harry asked as he took the clean clothes from her.

"He was still here when you were brought in by Mr. Malfoy."

"Draco brought me in?" Harry replied in surprise as he began to tug on his socks.
Madam Pomfrey nodded before moving towards the door. She turned and glanced back at him, seeming to hesitate before asking, "Is Draco Malfoy really your chosen mate?"

Harry looked up as he slid on his other sock. "Yeah, he is. Mental, right?"

Madam Pomfrey smiled for the first time. "Not necessarily Mr. Potter. Come to my office when you're ready and I'll take you to the Headmistress' office."

Harry changed as fast as he could before making his way to the nurse's small, cluttered office near the entrance to the infirmary. His body was still weak and exhausted, and his legs felt like jelly, so he was glad of Madam Pomfrey's presence as she helped him walk the long distance to Professor McGonagall's office.

The two made their way up the spiralling staircase and Madam Pomfrey knocked on the door, Harry shifting his weight from foot to foot as he waited impatiently.

"Come in," McGonagall's voice rang out from within and Madam Pomfrey opened the curved, wooden door.

Harry hurriedly pushed past her and, before he could get a proper look in, suddenly had an armful of tall, blond Alpha.

"Harry…” Draco breathed, burying his face in Harry's hair and inhaling deeply, arms wrapped tightly around him.

Harry encircled Draco's slim waist as the door clicked shut behind them and allowed his mate's scent to fill him up, calming the panic that had felt permanent from the moment he'd regained consciousness. He pressed his face into Draco's neck and closed his eyes.

"I know you're not alright but… how are you?" Draco murmured so that only Harry could hear; the two completely ignoring for the moment the silent Headmistress seated behind them at her desk.

Harry exhaled, thankful that it wasn't too shaky. "Better now that you're here," he admitted just as quietly. "My… my heat ended early because of what happened," he added.

Draco pulled back to look at him. "I know."

Harry could sense that his mate wanted to say more but his grey eyes held a promise of later and Harry nodded in acknowledgment of the silent promise.

Professor McGonagall cleared her throat and the two finally turned to face her, arms still loosely wrapped around each other. "Please take a seat gentlemen," she said, indicating the two armchairs fronting her large desk. The flowered armchairs were new additions to the office since Dumbledore's time and looked oddly out of place with the masculine feel of the rest of the space.

Harry kept ahold of Draco's hand as they each took a seat, Draco having to slide his chair closer in order to maintain contact. Harry would have been embarrassed if the need for touch in that moment hadn't been so dire. He knew Draco probably felt the same way; the Slytherin was not one for public displays of emotion.

The Headmistress folded her hands on top of the desk and peered at Harry over her square spectacles. "Firstly, how are you Mr. Potter?" she asked gently, concern etched in the lines around her eyes.

"I'm okay," Harry replied with a shrug, not really knowing what else to say, he'd hardly had time to
process it himself. Draco gave his hand a light squeeze.

"If you need to speak with someone, a Professional," she continued, eyes nearly piercing him with their intensity, "then please let me know and I can arrange for someone from St. Mungo's to meet with you."

Harry's eyes widened in alarm. "Uh no, I… I don't think that will be necessary."

"Very well, if you change your mind please let me know, or you can always contact them on your own time. I will say no more about it." She stopped and reached for the waiting cup of tea next to her elbow, her gaze taking in the pair of them as she sipped. "I suppose I do not need to ask this question after witnessing the pair of you together and after my discussion with Mr. Malfoy, but humour an old woman," she said, resting her cup in one hand. "Harry, is Mr. Malfoy your chosen mate?"

"Yeah - yes," Harry replied instantly.

McGonagall nodded, obviously confirming what Draco had most likely already told her.

"Professor?" Harry spoke up. "Is… is Professor Fischer okay? It really wasn't his fault…"

The Headmistress' eyes instantly hardened and she set her cup back down with a loud clink. "Yes, he has recovered from the frenzy he found himself in. Mr. Potter, while the Professor's Alpha instincts took over because of your heat pheromones, he has still committed a heinous act against a student and has thus been informed that he must leave Hogwarts immediately."

Harry's lips parted in shock and then a wave of self-loathing quickly washed over him. "But… but Professor that's not fair. He's a brilliant teacher and he loves his job, you can't sack him!"

"Mr. Potter, if Mr. Malfoy had not sensed your distress and come to your aid, Professor Fischer would have most certainly succeeded in raping you. He cannot in good conscience be allowed to remain here and continue to teach. Rest assured that he is not out on the street though; he will be accepting a transfer to Beauxbatons."

Harry sat back in his chair, feeling dreadful for being the cause of Professor Fischer's departure. He didn't blame him at all; it was just terrible timing for his heat to start then, combined with the unfortunate fact that Harry didn't know how to recognise the signs of an impending heat cycle.

"But-"

"Harry, do you really think you could sit in class with Professor Fischer instructing you after everything that's happened?" Draco interrupted quietly, turning to face him. "Do you think I could sit in class with the two of you in the same room again?"

Harry looked at his mate and tried to picture it. He knew instantly that Draco was right, there was no way he could act normally in Professor Fischer's presence again, not as flashes of images from earlier suddenly assaulted him; snap-shots of being pinned down, unable to move, an intrusive finger breaching him, hot breath on the back of his neck, and the terrifying sound of a zipper being pulled down…

Harry shuddered in revulsion and quickly tried to hide his reaction but the squeeze to his hand let him know that he wasn't fooling anyone.

McGonagall picked up her teacup once more, seeming satisfied, and took a sip of the fragrant liquid. "Harry, I know you detest the Ministry so I will not push you to inform them of your Omega status, but they will find out eventually."
Harry sighed and firmly pushed aside the disturbing images from earlier in order to concentrate. Truthfully he never wanted to think about it again. "I know. It doesn't matter I guess. As long as they also know that I already have a mate and that I don't want any other Alphas contacting me."

McGonagall surveyed him over the rim of her steaming cup. "Mr. Malfoy has informed me that you have not been officially claimed as of yet."

Harry felt his face heat. "Er no, I guess not. I… I don't really… I don't know that I'm all that comfortable with the whole… biting thing."

The Headmistress' lips twitched minutely and Harry refused to look at Draco, knowing the Slytherin would most likely be smirking in amusement at his naïveté too.

"I'm not afraid of the pain," Harry explained defensively. "I just don't like the idea of being claimed. It's archaic and… and a little insulting. And I've read that the Omega doesn't bite his Alpha to claim him in return so… so it's sexist too! Well, not really sexist in our situation since we're the same sex but you know what I mean."

Harry chanced a glance at Draco and, instead of being met with a smirk, his mate was steadfastly looking at McGonagall, a trace of discontent in his grey eyes.

"I'll think about it though," Harry swiftly added, not wanting to upset his mate, not after everything he'd done for him that day. The fact that a claim mark would help ward off other Alphas was certainly a benefit that he couldn't argue with. It was just all so confusing; his human side at odds with his Omega side.

"I'm not here to discuss the minute details of your relationship Mr. Potter; I simply wish to ensure that you are aware of how a mateship works between an Alpha and Omega. Being raised by Muggles as you have been, I know your knowledge may be limited compared with Mr. Malfoy's, and I realise some things may not seem as 'normal' to you."

Harry nodded, relieved that she understood.

"You are now aware of when your heat cycle will occur every month," McGonagall continued efficiently, "so I expect you to take the proper precautions during that time. You may miss your classes and use the isolation room in the infirmary for the duration if you wish. We have a few female Omegas here that have already arranged their schedules with Madam Pomfrey. You are the first Omega here to have already selected a mate though, so I must insist that you are removed from Mr. Malfoy's presence during this time. It would be irresponsible for me to allow you to spend your heat together and possibly end up with a pregnancy before you've finished your education."

"Yes Professor," Harry replied with a nod. He had no intention of ending up pregnant at eighteen either.

The Headmistress set down her now empty teacup and sat back in her chair with a creak of ancient wood, tugging her tartan shawl around her bony shoulders despite the warmth of the crackling fire in the large grate located beneath the vast collection of moving portraits. "I believe the student gossips have already been hard at work spreading the rather astounding news that Harry Potter is an Omega and that Draco Malfoy is his mate, so brace yourselves; I hope you're prepared for what this news may bring upon you - from both sides."

Harry looked to Draco and was relieved when the Slytherin finally made eye contact with him again. His mate looked resolute and determined and his eyes visibly softened when Harry looked at him. He turned back to the Headmistress and knew the same stubborn, determined look was on his own
She observed them both with what could only be described as fond exasperation. "If you have any trouble or if anything else happens to you Mr. Potter, please alert me straight away."

"Yes Professor," Harry promptly assented.

"And Mr. Malfoy, thank you again for your quick action today," she added, turning to Draco. "It's good to see that Harry has an Alpha that just may be up to the challenge of being his mate."

Draco smirked and Harry could tell that they'd had quite the conversation while he'd been unconscious. He wondered what else they'd spoken about without him around.

"That's all for now," Professor McGonagall said, straightening in her chair in a clearly dismissive gesture. "Keep me advised of any changes or odd behaviour from other students or professors. I shall make a short announcement with regards to Professor Fischer's transfer without divulging the details of what transpired. I will find a replacement as quickly as I can and classes will hopefully resume shortly. Good day gentlemen."

"Uh Professor?" Harry said as he and Draco stood. "I've had two erm, encounters with other Alphas - both students - when alone with them and… it doesn't seem like the female Omegas have this problem."

"Who were they?" she asked with a frown.

Harry glanced at Draco, who was listening closely, before replying. "I'd rather not say," he said. He didn't want McGonagall to know that one of them was Dean since she might accuse Draco of being the one who attacked him, and he didn't want to tell her Anthony's name since Draco didn't know that one and he wanted to keep it that way.

"I see," she replied pensively. "Well, most unclaimed Omegas will avoid being alone in the company of an Alpha. That's just good sense, is it not Mr. Potter?"

Harry nodded, feeling distinctly foolish. There was no way he was going to mention taking the scent masking potions to excess now.

"Thank you Professor," Draco inserted smoothly as he pulled on Harry's hand and led him from the room, clearly ready to leave.

Harry breathed a sigh of relief once they were out in the empty corridor together. "That was awkward," he surmised over the noise of the stone gargoyle grinding to a close next to them. "What?" he asked when he turned to see Draco staring at him rather intensely.

"Come on." Draco turned and began to drag Harry along behind him.

"Where are we going?"

Draco glanced over his shoulder at him, eyes gleaming silver in the flickering torch light. "To our room."

"Our room?" Harry repeated in confusion. "Do you mean the Room of Requirement?"

"No, McGonagall has seen fit to allocate a spare set of bedchambers for the two of us to share."

Harry's eyes widened. "Are you serious?"
Draco rolled his eyes at his mate's incredulous expression. "You're such a prude Potter, she knows what we will be getting up to behind closed doors, so she's decided to keep us away from prying eyes. Plus, it'll be safer for you to be living away from those Gryffindor Alphas."

"I still can't believe it," Harry said, amazed.

"I also told her that you only wanted the one mate and I'm fairly certain that that romantic notion is what completely swayed her into giving us our own shag room."

Harry's stride faltered and he blanched at Draco's words.

Draco stopped to face him, eyes tightening in concern. He took in Harry's paled face and the shameful expression that he was attempting to hide and then gently pulled on his hand to get them moving again. "Come on," he said softly.

Harry followed silently, a sense of dread coming over him. He didn't want what happened to affect him, he didn't want to be weak or have it change his desire for Draco. Professor Fischer hadn't even succeeded in actually raping him, he should be fine.

Harry hoped it wouldn't scar him for life; he had enough of those already.
Chapter 8

Harry didn't pay any notice to what direction or which corridors Draco was leading him through to get to their new shared living quarters. He was exhausted - mentally and physically - and just wanted to curl up in bed with his mate. Draco kept shooting him little concerned glances but was clearly saving any questions for when they were alone.

Harry blinked as they finally stopped in front of an ancient wooden door in a familiar part of the castle. "Hey, is this the third floor corridor?"

"Yes, do you know it?" Draco asked as he withdrew his wand and tapped the iron handle.

"Yeah, kind of," Harry replied, mouth curling into a slight smile.

Draco looked relieved to see his mate's smile and turned to open the door. "The door will only open for the two of us. McGonagall said not to key anyone else into the wards because if you're caught out on your heat then you need somewhere to escape to that people can't follow, and anyone could attack you, even close friends who you would normally trust to be alone with."

Harry nodded solemnly. After today he would never take his safety for granted again.

He followed Draco through the door, gazing around curiously as he entered and walked to the centre of the room. The room was about the same size as the Gryffindor dorm room, except that it had one bed instead of five. There was one large window on the far wall which opened to the outside. The bed was a large wooden four-poster and was covered in a deep green quilt. Harry smirked but refrained from comment as he continued to look around.

There were two other doors in the room; one was open and showed a small attached toilet, and the other door was closed.

"That one leads to a secondary bedroom," Draco explained when he saw Harry glance at it questioningly.

"What for?" Harry asked, turning to him. His eyes suddenly widened. "It's not for a… a baby is it?"

Draco laughed and shook his head. "No Potter, it's not. It's just another room to sleep in if either of us needs some time alone. It locks from the inside, so you could also potentially spend your heat there as well."

"Ah…" Harry nodded and walked over to open the door. The room beyond was very small and contained a single bed, a single set of drawers and a toilet area. Harry frowned; there was no way he was going to spend twenty-four to forty-eight hours in that tiny space, his pulse quickened just at the thought of being locked in there.

He shut the door and turned to face Draco, who was sitting on the edge of the bed, watching him. Harry slowly walked up to him, eyes lowering to the quilt. "McGonagall didn't choose the colour scheme, did she?"

Draco smirked, following his gaze and running a hand over the soft quilt. "No, I don't believe so."

Harry smiled and kicked off his trainers next to the bed before climbing up onto it. He lay on his stomach with his head at the foot of the bed, chin resting on folded arms.
"Mind if I join you?" At Harry's nod, Draco removed his shoes and lay on the wide bed, mimicking Harry's pose next to him, elbows touching.

Harry sighed and closed his eyes. "Merlin, I'm tired."

"Do you want to sleep?"

Harry opened his eyes again and laid his cheek on his arms as he turned to look at his mate. "No, not really; I feel exhausted but my mind won't stop whirring, you know?"

Draco's answering smile was tinged with sadness. "Yes, I know."

"I don't think I thanked you, for earlier," Harry said quietly.

Draco's eyes narrowed slightly. "You never have to thank me for helping you Harry; it's just what we do for each other."

Harry smiled. "I'm glad you said it's what we do for each other and not it's what you do for me as my Alpha."

Draco chuckled. "You may be the Omega in our relationship but you're still Harry Potter; brave, powerful wizard and vanquisher of evil dark lords."

Harry laughed and felt his heart swell with a warmth that he couldn't put a name to.

"I do feel different since coming into my inheritance though," Draco continued. "Flight used to always be my reaction of choice, as you know, but now… my fear for your life seems to override any fear I have for my own safety. It's… odd. It must be how you've always felt," he added.

"It's not that I'm exceptionally brave or anything," Harry responded, trying to put it into words. "It's just that I've always felt somehow responsible for a lot of what was happening. Voldemort was after me, he killed my parents because of me. If other people got in the way of getting to me, they became expendable, so I was just trying to avoid that as much as possible."

Draco nodded in understanding. "Still makes you brave though," he pointed out.

Harry smiled. "Nah, just guilt-ridden."

Draco smiled as he blew some fallen strands of blond hair out of his eyes. "You should know that McGonagall thinks you're rather special. Actually, she said the pair of us are special."

Harry snorted. "Yeah, in what way?"

Draco's expression turned serious and a slight furrow appeared between his pale brows. "She thinks we are more in control of our baser instincts than most Alpha/Omega pairings."

"Really?"

"Yes, I didn't think much of it at the time, but I was able to carry you to the infirmary and leave you with Madam Pomfrey while you were still in heat. Most Alphas are unable to think past their own arousal once they get a whiff of their mate's heat pheromones. She also mentioned the fact that you are able to think clearly enough around Alphas to attempt to stop them, and what's more, you're able to do it while in heat. That's incredibly rare. She said she's never heard of an Omega being able to do that before."

Harry chewed his lip as he thought about that. "Maybe it's because I don't agree with the whole
dominant/submissive thing when it comes to Alphas and Omegas. It's never felt right to me, I've always hated the idea of bending to an Alpha's will - especially ones who are trying to fucking rape me to get what they want," Harry uttered darkly. He glanced at Draco's expression and quickly put a hand on his arm. "But like McGonagall said, you're not like that; you seem to be able to think rationally."

Draco's answering smile was tight. "Sometimes."

"What times haven't you been able to?" Harry asked with a confused frown, not remembering any such incidents.

"I did hex your best friend quite badly today."

"Merlin, I forgot," Harry replied, eyes widening. "Is he alright?"

"Yes, he's fine, it was just a Stinging Hex after all," Draco answered, trying to play it off but his expression was plainly contrite. "If I had been able to think clearly, I would've remembered that he's your best friend and therefore important to you, so I shouldn't be harming him, especially because he wasn't actually trying to attack you. I also attacked the Professor. Violently."

"Yes but he deserved it," Harry replied instantly. "I mean, it wasn't really his fault but you had to do whatever you could to get him off of me. I could never blame you for losing control in that situation, I would've done the same thing if I'd walked in on that scene and it was you pinned to the desk," Harry broke off and had to swallow, vividly remembering the feel of a hand pressed to the back of his neck, firmly pushing him into the unyielding surface of the desk. "I was just relieved that you didn't change into your other form," he added.

"You don't have to worry about that," Draco replied, laying his cheek on his arm as he turned to Harry, inhaling the skin of Harry's hand where it rested on his arm as though taking comfort from it. "I have full control of my other form, most of us do. Such an immense secret would not last long if every little row caused us to suddenly change."

Harry smiled. "Yeah, I suppose. I'm glad I don't have to worry about that." He stopped and shuffled a little closer so that their bodies touched from hip to ankle. "I like it here, like it's our own little sanctuary."

Draco's lips tugged into a smile at Harry's words. "As do I. When McGonagall suggested it, I thought she was joking."

Harry laughed and turned over onto his back, head still turned to Draco. "I can't believe the Headmistress is actually encouraging us to share a bed every night."

Draco's grey eyes crinkled with laughter as he grinned. "Saucy old minx isn't she?"

"No way would your Head of House have allowed this."

"When it was Severus?"

Harry nodded, still grinning.

Draco smirked. "Only if he thought it was punishment and not something you wanted. He may have allowed it for me though."

"I'm glad you had someone on your side," Harry said, sobering, reaching out to run his fingers down Draco's pale cheek. "You seemed very alone in sixth year."
Draco caught his hand in his and kissed his fingers, causing Harry to flush a little in embarrassment. "I was."

"But not anymore."

"No." Draco smiled at him a moment then sat up. "Want to get under the covers?"

"Yeah, that sounds brilliant." Harry grinned and quickly slid off the bed and began to get undressed. "We're not expected in class this afternoon?"

Draco rolled his eyes as he unknotted his tie. "Of course not, we can stay here all week if we wish."

"Oh we should, we really should," Harry replied, green eyes gleaming.

Draco chuckled as Harry pulled back the thick quilt and climbed in. Draco stripped down to his pants and quickly followed, piling the pillows up against the headboard and leaning back against them.

He opened one arm and Harry smiled as he shifted over to lean against his mate, Draco's arm wrapped securely around him and holding him close.

Harry sighed, relaxing still further as he inhaled Draco's scent and felt the Alpha's body-heat seep into his skin and begin to warm him. "This is exactly what I needed," he said with another sigh.

"Good," Draco replied with approval. "I… was concerned that you wouldn't want me anywhere near you after what happened today."

Harry slid his left arm around Draco's waist, cheek resting comfortably on his shoulder. "Me too. I was worried that being around any Alpha was going to freak me out but I find that I want you near me, I think I need it."

"Do you think you'll have a problem being around other Alphas?"

Harry frowned as he thought about it, trying to picture what it would be like to be near an Alpha that wasn't his mate. "I… I don't think so, not really." He paused and then felt a flash of fear as he thought about his next heat.

"What is it?" Draco asked, having felt Harry stiffen against him.

"I… I'm scared to go into heat again," he replied honestly, heart pounding at the thought. "I didn't like how it felt and I… I didn't like what it did to Professor Fischer."

Draco combed his fingers through Harry's hair as he held him close. "You needn't worry about that. You know when it's going to happen now and we can prepare for it, you won't be caught out again."

Harry nodded, knowing that Draco was right but still fearing it. What if he was abnormal and had unreliable cycles? Or maybe his heat ending early today had upset his cycle and it would come a day earlier or a day later next time?

"What if my heat starts on a different day next month because it was interrupted?" he said, voicing his concerns aloud.

"You felt extraordinarily tired right before your heat, didn't you?" Draco replied steadily. "So we'll know it's about to happen when you fall asleep in your breakfast. And Weasley and Granger are now able to recognise the symptoms too."
Harry took a deep breath and released it. "Yeah, you're right. I… I'll just lock myself away when I start to feel really tired without reason again."

Draco nodded encouragingly. "Precisely. It won't be such a surprise next time."

Harry closed his eyes and tried to relax. He wouldn't think about his heat any longer, there was no point worrying about something he had no control over. Draco was right; he would know it was coming because he could now recognise the symptoms.

"How did you know I was in trouble?" he asked, wanting to change the subject but also remembering to ask the question that had been on his mind since their meeting with McGonagall.

Draco shifted a little, resuming his finger-combing of Harry's hair. "I could smell your fear."

Harry glanced up at him. "Really? But… you were in McGonagall's office at the time weren't you?"

Draco nodded. "I was. Remember when I told you that by stopping the scent masking potions, it would allow your Alpha to scent when you were in trouble?"

"And you could scent it from that far away?"

"Yes. I'm not certain, but I think my other form enhances that ability a little too. If you're inside the school and in distress, I'll know about it."

Harry smiled into Draco's bare shoulder, the smell of his skin all around him, creating little flutters in his stomach that he would never admit to out loud.

"I wish you could change right now," he said, the words just tumbling out of his mouth before he could think about what he was saying.

The fingers stilled in his hair. "What?"

Harry felt his cheeks heat and he avoided the stare he knew was directed at the top of his head. "Erm, you know… it would be… uh, nice and… warm." He stopped spouting gibberish and held his breath.

The gentle combing started up again and Harry exhaled.

"I know you said that it didn't bother you, but… you actually want me to change?" Draco asked, sounding surprised.

Harry shrugged, not looking up. "Yeah, it would be… I would feel safe. Not that I don't feel safe now, but… I dunno, it's different, isn't it?"

"Sure."

Harry could detect the smile underneath the sarcasm in Draco's voice and he finally chanced a glance up. He met amused grey eyes which also held a trace of relief and perhaps a little pride as well.

"Shut it Malfoy," Harry said with a grin.

"I didn't say anything," the blond replied innocently. "I don't care if my mate has a cat fetish."

Harry pressed his face into Draco's shoulder with a moan. "Please don't say that. I do not have a cat fetish - or any fetish. That I know of."
Draco chuckled, the sound rumbling pleasantly under Harry's ear. "I don't have a problem with your cat fetish, in fact, I encourage it."

Harry laughed then lifted his head to glare mockingly. "I'm not into bestiality Malfoy."

Draco delicately wrinkled his nose with distaste. "I should hope not Potter," he said, sounding slightly horrified.

They both dissolved into laughter; the last remaining tension of the day melting away completely.

Harry raised one hand and moved it through the air as though sweeping something off of a shelf. The drapes immediately pulled closed and the torches blazed to life then dimmed to a muted glow. He settled back down against Draco's shoulder with a sigh of contentment, Draco's fingers still carding through his thick hair, dragging pleasantly against his scalp.

"Show off," Draco muttered, not quite able to conceal the trace of fondness.

Harry frowned and sat up, Draco's hand falling from his head. "I just realised I didn't attempt to use wandless magic against the Professor earlier. I didn't even think of it."

"That's probably a good thing," Draco replied sombrely. "Omegas in heat are notorious for bouts of uncontrolled magic. You might have done something to him that you would later regret."

"That's right…" Harry replied vaguely, recalling that fact from his Omega book.

"Come here," Draco pulled him back down against him. "We need to talk about you becoming an Auror next year."

Harry blinked at the sudden subject change. He relaxed back against the Alpha, deciding to accept the change of topic for the clear diversion that it was meant to be. "Er, we do?" he replied lightly, absently tracing a finger around Draco's exposed hip.

Draco nodded, serious. "Yes, I must confess that I'm not keen on the idea of you putting yourself in harm's way on a daily basis, especially…"

"Yeah?" Harry prompted with a smile.

Draco cleared his throat. "Especially once we start a family and you have children at home depending on you," he managed to say, somewhat uncomfortably.

Harry's smile grew as he listened, continuing to trace tiny circles around Draco's pale skin. "Are you forbidding me from joining the Aurors?" he asked, injecting a faux note of warning into his tone.

Draco shifted under him. "No… I'm not," he replied slowly - and very diplomatically. "But I would have thought that your family would mean more."

Harry laughed. "Okay stop, it's alright, I'd already made up my mind to not join up with the Aurors."

"You did?"

"Yeah." Harry grinned and looked up at him. "I don't want to chase escaped Death Eaters or rising Dark Lords. As soon as I found out that I was an Omega and could have children, I knew I probably wouldn't want that lifestyle anymore. I don't want my family to worry about me or take the chance that I might not come home to them one night. I know what it's like to not have parents and I don't want to inflict that on my own children. Our children," he corrected softly.
Draco smiled, looking relieved - and a little emotional.

Harry placed a tender kiss to his shoulder before settling back against him.

"Not to mention the added stress on your husband," Draco said haughtily, trying cover up how affected he was by Harry's words. "I wasn't made for changing nappies Potter."

"Husband?" Harry repeated with a raised brow. "Are you going to make a respectable man out of me Malfoy?"

"That would be an impossible task," Draco shot back with a smirk, causing Harry to laugh.

"That being said, I'm not entirely sure what I want to do after Hogwarts," Harry continued, entangling his fingers with Draco's over his lap. "Remember when you suggested I not do anything at all?" he added, remembering their brief and disastrous Hogsmeade trip.

Draco nodded with a slight smile. "Yes, even then I knew that I didn't like the idea of you in danger," he noted.

"If we're not required to live at the Manor, then where are we going to live?" Harry asked. "Where we settle will probably narrow down our career choices."

"What about with your family?"

Harry swallowed, realising that he'd never really discussed the Dursley's with his mate. He didn't think Draco would be too happy to hear of their treatment of him.

"No, they don't have the room," he replied vaguely. "Plus they live in a Muggle neighbourhood."

"Alright, we'll find our own place," Draco concluded then asked, "how did they handle you going into your inheritance over the summer? Were they surprised?"

Harry nearly choked on his snort of derision. "They don't know anything about our world, including anything about Alphas or Omegas. Plus, they weren't even home all summer."

Draco frowned in confusion. "You were alone? Where were they?"

Harry sighed and knew that he would have to explain everything; there would be too many lies between them otherwise.

"My Aunt and Uncle," he began slowly, reluctantly, "are not... comfortable with having a wizard in the family." He sighed and decided to be blunt. "They basically hated me and treated me like a slave while I lived under their roof. They left the house when the war was getting too close to home and they promised to stay away until I left for Hogwarts this year. With any luck, I'll never have to see them again."

Draco swallowed, clearly attempting to rein in his outrage. "Their nephew is one of the most famous and powerful wizards of our time - and they treat you with nothing but contempt?"

Harry sighed and ran a soothing hand down Draco's arm. "Don't worry about it; I'm used to it. Hogwarts is my real home. I do own a house that my godfather left to me but... I'm not quite ready to live there yet. That's why I didn't stay there over the summer, too many memories."

"Are you speaking of Sirius Black's home?" Draco asked and Harry nodded in confirmation. "My mother told me that his old home in Muggle London went to you. I can't believe... I never knew you
had such an unhappy home life, I always thought you had a family like the Weasley's; all noisy and
caring and… and Muggle."

Harry couldn't help but laugh. "Not even remotely. Thank Merlin I had the Weasley's; they were my
unofficial surrogate family - still are, in fact."

Draco tightened the arm around his mate in response. "I suppose I need to apologise to Weasley and
make amends then."

"Yes you do," Harry replied unequivocally. "If I have to make nice with your parents then you have
to be civil to Ron and Hermione."

"Duly noted Potter," Draco replied with an exaggerated sigh, causing Harry to elbow him in the side.

"Ruffian."

Harry grinned and Draco's soft laughter blew across the top of his hair, unsettling a few strands onto
his forehead.

"If you feel up to attending class tomorrow, then I shall speak to them first thing," Draco promised.

"Thank you," Harry replied sincerely then covered a yawn with one hand. "I think I'm ready to sleep
now," he said with a somnolent smile.

Draco nodded in agreement, looking just as drained as Harry felt.

They pulled apart and slid beneath the heavy quilt, lying on their sides, facing each other.

Harry smiled and closed his eyes as Draco lifted a hand to extinguish the flickering torches. "This is
nice, this… sharing a room thing," Harry stated drowsily.

Draco smiled at him, barely visible in the darkened room. "Go to sleep Potter."

Harry's smile widened and he curled into his pillow a little before sleep swiftly carried him away.

. . . .

"Weasley?"

Harry held his breath as Draco approached Ron in the Great Hall at breakfast the next morning. He
and Draco had entered the Hall together, holding hands for everyone to see to confirm the rumours
that had been flying around the castle since the incident in DADA the day before. They'd both
agreed to be open about their relationship and deal with the repercussions as they came - unpleasant
as they may be.

"Malfoy," Ron replied tersely, hand tightening around the handle of his spoon as he looked up.

Harry noticed Hermione biting her lip next to Ron, watching with worried eyes. He turned back to
Ron, hoping his friend would be reasonable.

Draco cleared his throat, grey eyes flicking around the hushed Gryffindor table a moment before
coming back to rest on Ron's face. "I would like to offer my apologies for yesterday; I am still new to
having a mate and I… clearly need to work on my Alpha instincts when it comes to Harry and his
safety."
Harry couldn't help but smile, Draco was acting so stiff and formal that it made him want to laugh. He was such a different person behind closed doors; when it was just the two of them sitting in their bed, wearing next to nothing and threading fingers through hair or running warm hands along bare skin, talking and trading stories and making each other laugh…

Harry felt that same rush of warmth in his chest that made him want to smile and drag his mate back to their room to hide away from the rest of the world again.

"Harry?"

Harry blinked and came back to himself, noticing that both Ron and Draco were staring at him expectantly. "Sorry, what?"

Ron rolled his eyes and glanced at Draco. "I think the daft grin on his face answers my question."

Harry frowned, suspecting he should be embarrassed - if Draco's smug smirk and Ron's exasperation were anything to go by.

"Alright Malfoy," Ron said, setting his spoon down next to his half-eaten porridge. "I'm willing to let bygones be bygones as long as you treat Harry well and don't fucking hex me again." He stuck out his hand.

Draco's smirk remained firmly in place as he reached out to accept the handshake. "I shall do my best Weasley."

Harry snorted and shared a look with Hermione. She hid a grin in her tea as she turned away to face the table once more, affecting nonchalance as though she - and the rest of the table - hadn't just been listening in to every word. He knew she was more than likely thinking the same thing: that Ron and Draco would be quarrelling again by the end of the week.

"Hungry Harry?" Draco asked, breaking through his distracted thoughts.

"Uh yeah, famished actually." Harry was about to step over the bench in front of him and sit down when he suddenly realised that they hadn't discussed which house table to sit with at meal times.

"Here is fine," Draco murmured into his ear with an amused smile.

The entire table eyed them with interest as they took their seats, except for Ron and Hermione who had returned to their breakfast.

"Slytherin table at tea then?" Harry suggested as he loaded his plate with food. He was starving after all the excitement of yesterday.

"Agreed," Draco accepted easily. He reached for the platter of sausages, glaring at one of the second years that was openly staring at him. The student's eyes widened and he quickly turned away with a squeak. Draco smirked with satisfaction before politely offering some sausages to Harry.

Harry just shook his head at his mate and accepted the food. Some things about Draco Malfoy would never change and, Merlin help him, he kind of liked it that way.

"How are you feeling today Harry?" Hermione asked, closing the book she had open on the table next to her goblet of pumpkin juice.

"Better thanks," Harry replied as he added marmalade to his buttered toast. He knew the rest of the table would think she was merely referencing the Stinging Hex incident and not him going into heat
yesterday. That fact had thankfully remained confidential.

"How are the new rooms?" Ron asked around a mouthful of scrambled eggs. "Dorm room isn't the same without you mate."

"I know, I've been in the same room as you for six years," Harry replied emphatically, and then glanced at Draco. "But… change can be good," he added with a furtive grin.

Draco returned the smile before taking a sip of his tea, appearing quite at home behind enemy lines.

Breakfast was interrupted by the arrival of the morning post; loads of multi-coloured envelopes and rolled up newspapers carried in the talons of dozens of owls soaring through the large Hall.

Harry, Ron and Hermione continued to eat their breakfast. All three of them had been boycotting The Prophet ever since the war, when it began printing absolute rubbish about Harry on a daily basis.

Harry turned at the sound of Draco choking on his tea and saw the blond staring at the front page of The Prophet across the table from them. He followed Draco's gaze and his own eyes widened in shock; staring back at him was a photograph of Harry and Draco taken during the Death Eater trials, when Harry had spoken on behalf of Draco and his mother. The photo's repeating loop merely showed them glancing at one another with a stand-offish expression that could either be a glare or stubborn indifference, yet the headline screamed "Harry Potter a Male Omega and Mated to a Death Eater!"

"Well of course you're male, do they really need to spell that part out?" Hermione said with a roll of her eyes.

"That was quick…” Harry uttered as Draco leaned across the table and snatched the paper directly out of Neville's hands.

"Hey! I was reading that Malfoy!"

Harry shot Neville an apologetic look before leaning over Draco's shoulder to read.

"What's it say?" Ron demanded impatiently.

"Our Chosen One and brilliant hero, Harry Potter," Harry read aloud, tone instantly turning scornful, "is once more making headlines because of his newly established Omega status. The-Boy-Who-Lived reached the age of eighteen this past summer and, it has recently been discovered, come into his inheritance as an Omega. He is the first male Omega in more than one hundred years-"

"What a load of rubbish," Hermione interrupted with disgust. "It hasn't been over a hundred years."

"- and is now mated to none other than Draco Malfoy, the son of Lucius Malfoy. Malfoy Senior is currently under house-arrest because of his reprehensible actions during the war. How can Harry Potter enter into a family with such a dark past? A reliable source close to Potter has said that Harry and Draco Malfoy have never been friends and were even considered rivals at one time. One wonders if our poor orphan is swayed by the deep-seated longing for a family of his own, regardless of what that family may be like or what young Malfoy's true intentions are-"

Harry stopped reading and seized the newspaper right out of Draco's hands before crumpling it into a ball and tossing it onto the floor, a furious expression on his face.

"Harry," Neville whinged. "I wanted to read that."
"That drivel isn't worth your time Neville," Harry snapped back, green eyes blazing. He withdrew his wand with every intention of setting the newspaper ablaze on the floor but Draco quickly pressed a hand to his wand arm, stilling him.

"As much as I love your indignant rage Potter," he said quietly. "The Headmistress is watching."

Harry glanced over to see McGonagall standing up at the head table, looking as though she were about to storm down the aisle towards him. He reluctantly sheathed his wand and turned his back on the discarded newspaper.

Harry exhaled and ran an agitated hand through his hair, still fuming. It didn't help that he was surrounded by students still reading the offending article all around him. He glanced at his mate. "You okay?" he asked under his breath.

Draco smirked and took up his tea once more, holding it in one hand, pinkie extended. "Never better Potter."

Harry couldn't help but chuckle; wondering how he had become the hot-headed one and Draco the cool, composed one.

"Just wait 'til the howlers start coming in," Ron pointed out, glaring at two third year girls eagerly poring over the article down the table from him.

"I'll speak to McGonagall," Draco calmly interjected. "There's no reason we can't put a stop to any post addressed to Harry or myself for a time."

"Great idea," Hermione said with a tentative smile at Draco. "As Hogwarts students, I'm sure the school will step up to protect you from such malicious defamation."

"Why start now?" Harry muttered sarcastically, earning a snort from Ron. He set down his fork with a sigh. "I think I've lost my appetite."

Hermione frowned and opened her mouth to scold him but Draco beat her to it.

"Eat Potter. You need to replenish yourself after yesterday," he instructed firmly. "Don't let those sad old buggers at the Prophet bother you."

Draco pointedly picked up his discarded fork and held it out to him. He flashed Harry a brief smile as Harry's fingers curled around the utensil before turning back to his own meal.

Harry flushed at the smirk Hermione was giving him before turning away to scoop up his cooling eggs.

For the first time, he wasn't completely alone in The Prophet's attacks. In fact, it was Draco who was bearing the brunt of the horrible comments, this time painting Harry as the victim in it all. As he ate, he wondered if he should actually write them a letter or - shudder - give a brief interview to clear everything up.

He cupped his tea between his hands and blew on the steaming liquid. It would be nearly impossible to alter people's perception of Draco if their minds had already been made up. Time would eventually expose the truth, he supposed. Hopefully the papers would become bored and move on to something else soon.

"We'd better get to class," Ron said, interrupting his thoughts as he withdrew long legs from beneath the table and stood up, shoving one last triangle of toast into his mouth.
"Yeah, alright." Harry downed the rest of his tepid tea and stood with the rest of the group, trying to ignore the fact that almost every remaining student had their eyes on him.

The four made their way to the doors and out into the entrance hall.

"See you in History of Magic?" he said to Draco as he slung his bag up onto his shoulder. He and Ron had Care of Magical Creatures while Hermione and Draco had Ancient Runes first.

"Of course." Draco flashed him another one of those warm, brief smiles that Harry was growing to love as they seemed to be for him and him alone. "Don't be late Potter," he imparted with a soft touch to his hand before walking off towards the staircase.

Harry pulled Hermione aside before she could follow. "Could you maybe… keep an eye on him for me? Make sure no one is harassing him?"

"Yeah, of course Harry." Hermione smiled, eyes softening. "I'll take good care of your mate for you, though I must say, I don't think he needs it; he's really taking all of this in stride."

"Yeah, I know," Harry replied, glancing at Ron. "I keep waiting for the penny to drop but… I'm starting to think it's not going to."

"Nah, it won't," Ron stated confidently, causing the other two to look at him in surprise. "Well, he's an Alpha and Harry's his mate… Nothing's more important than that, is it?"

Harry grinned at him and adjusted his bag as he was jostled by some passing students. "Hey Ron, weren't you just saying that you needed Hermione's help for our Potions essay? Perhaps you two should meet up at lunch to… study?"

Ron glared at him while Hermione shrugged.

"Sure, we could meet in the library; I have some extra-curricular projects I really need to get started on."

"Uh great, see you there!" Ron forced a smile before grabbing Harry's arm and dragging him off through the main doors of the school and out into the grounds. "What the fuck Harry?" he hissed as they walked across the vast lawns, the grass still glittery and crunchy beneath their feet from the overnight frost.

Harry laughed. "Don't you think it's time you actually told Hermione that you want to be with her?" he asked without hesitation. "At least ask her out to Hogsmeade or something - before somebody else does."

Ron pursed his lips and didn't say anything, but Harry could see the wheels turning in that ginger head of his and nodded with satisfaction. He was tired of their dithering.

The two Gryffindors made it to Hagrid's hut and stopped outside to wait for the rest of the class, giving a wave to Hagrid as he set up some sort of complicated contraption within the small paddock next to his garden. It looked very much like a giant mouse trap and Harry wondered what on earth it was supposed to catch.

"Harry?"

Both Harry and Ron turned to see Blaise Zabini standing behind them.

"Hi," Harry replied, bemused. "What are you doing here? You're not in this class, are you?"
Blaise smiled and shook his head, stuffing his hands into the pockets of his warm black cloak. "No, I have Ancient Runes. Do you have a minute?"

"Uh sure, I guess," Harry replied slowly, glancing at Ron who immediately scowled at the Slytherin.

"I'm sure you can speak to both of us Zabini," Ron said, a clear warning in his tone.

Blaise frowned. "Actually it's private."

"It's okay Ron," Harry intervened, not wanting the two Alphas to get out of hand; he'd dealt with that enough lately. "I'll just be over here."

Ron huffed and crossed his arms over his chest as he watched Harry and Blaise wander off, away from the gathered group of students.

Once they were far enough away not to be overheard, Blaise turned to Harry, hands still tucked into his pockets. "I saw the article this morning," he started carefully.

"Yeah?" Harry replied, trying not to sound instantly defensive.

"I just… I just wanted to say that I don't think Malfoy is the right match for you."

Harry's eyes widened, he hadn't expected that to come out of the Slytherin's mouth. "What?"

Blaise shifted uncomfortably but held his gaze. "There are… things you don't know about him."

Harry's heart skipped a beat. "What are you talking about?"

"Draco is… hiding something."

"Yeah, what?" Harry challenged, sensing that Blaise didn't actually know anything - confirmed with the next words out of his mouth.

"I don't know exactly, but he's always distanced himself from all of us in Slytherin, never really talking about himself in detail. It's like he becomes skittish when conversation turns towards his home life, and he never invites anyone over to his home for a visit - ever."

Harry narrowed his eyes. "Perhaps he's just private; he's not the type to display his emotions openly or easily, is he? Or maybe he's embarrassed about his parent's role in the war and would rather not join in discussions that could turn to talk of Voldemort or what his parents are up to now or what they did then..."

"No, this has been going on since first year," Blaise insisted.

Harry crossed his arms over his chest with an impatient sigh, wanting to give the impression of indifference as much as possible. "Did you actually have a point to make Blaise? Because I'm late for class..."

"I would like to offer myself to you as a secondary Alpha."

Harry's lips parted in shock. "A… what?"

Blaise licked his lips and took a step closer. "I've known you were an Omega since the first of September."

"You have?"
Blaise nodded. "Ever since you shook my hand on the train, supporting our mixed study group idea."

Harry recalled that moment but couldn't remember Blaise acting any differently afterwards. "Then… why did you wait so long to say something?"

Blaise smiled. "I thought I'd play it cool and try to be friends first, since nobody else seemed to realise the truth. Guess I shouldn't have waited quite so long."

Harry frowned, confused. "Then why did you stand me up for our Hogsmeade outing?"

Blaise's smile turned into a scowl. "Draco ordered me not to go and insisted that he take my place."

Harry raised a brow. "And… you just let him?"

"No, he challenged me," Blaise muttered through pressed lips. "And won."

"He… fought you? Like with his hands?" Harry couldn't help exclaiming in astonishment.

Blaise chuckled. "No, it was a proper duel - with wands. It was all very civilised."

"Oh… okay. Well good," Harry replied uncertainly. He absently pushed his glasses back up his nose with a sigh. "Look Blaise, I... I'm not really sure how to say this without hurting your feelings but I've only ever been drawn to Draco. Even when I still thought he was an absolute git, I still wanted to be with him. And... I've never wanted to have more than one Alpha, it's not really my... thing," he added uncomfortably.

"I understand," Blaise replied, sounding sincere, and, before Harry could react, he'd taken his hand in his. "Please think about it though, and remember what I said about being careful around Malfoy, I would hate to see you hurt Harry."

Blaise withdrew his hand and smiled warmly before turning and heading back towards the school.

Harry stared after him for a moment, shell-shocked. That was... surreal. He shook his head and re-joined the group of students lined up along the paddock fence, listening to Hagrid as he demonstrated what the strange wooden contraption was for. There was a strange feathery animal calmly sitting next to him on the ground.

"What was that about?" Ron whispered as soon as he was next to him.

Harry kept his eyes on Hagrid as he whispered back. "He offered to be a second Alpha to me."

"What? Are you serious?" Ron gaped.

"Yeah," Harry replied with a nod.

There was no way he was going to mention that Blaise also suspected Draco of keeping secrets. Ron would then ask if Draco was hiding something and it would all get a little too close to the truth, and Harry knew he wasn't a good enough liar to muddle his way through that particular web of lies. Especially as Ron probably didn't fully trust Draco yet, their truce was still very new and fragile.

"What did you say?"

Harry looked at him. "I said no, of course. I'm not interested in having fifty Alphas - one is plenty."

Ron snorted, relaxing as he turned back towards Hagrid. "Malfoy will not be pleased to hear that
other Alphas are sniffing around you - right here at Hogwarts no less."

"I'm sure he'll be fine," Harry said with an unconcerned shrug.

"He might be cross that it was his best mate though," Ron pointed out.

"I don't think they're all that close actually," Harry said vaguely.

The two tuned back in to Hagrid as he asked for a volunteer, the white feathery animal now perched atop his woolly head and peering at the students with curiosity.

....

As soon as class was over, Harry hurried back up to the school with Ron. He wanted to speak to Draco as soon as possible to warn him that Blaise was becoming suspicious of him. He didn't really think it was something to be concerned about though as Blaise had been suspicious for the past seven years without uncovering anything.

He knew he also needed to tell Draco about Blaise's offer; if there was one thing he never wanted between him and his mate, it was secrets and lies. Plus, Blaise might surprise Draco by challenging him to a… a duel or something, and he wanted Draco to be prepared. Just in case.

He stopped outside the door to the History of Magic classroom, telling Ron to go on inside without him.

The other students slowly trickled in, either openly staring at Harry as they passed by or staring hard at the floor and avoiding his gaze altogether.

"You're early Harry."

Harry turned to see Hermione and Draco walking up the corridor towards him. "Uh yeah, I needed to speak to Draco about something."

"Must be the same thing that Draco just has to speak to you about too," Hermione replied with a wink before disappearing into the stuffy classroom.

Harry frowned in confusion as he turned to Draco.

Draco took him by the elbow and steered him away from the classroom door to a quiet alcove across the corridor.

"What is it?" Harry asked nervously, reacting to the tension he could feel rolling off the Alpha in waves.

Draco withdrew something that looked like yellowed parchment from deep within his pocket. "I received this letter in the post."

Harry took it from his outstretched hand with a frown. "I didn't see you get any letters this morning…"

"The owl was trained to give it to me only when I was alone."

Harry's trepidation only grew at his words, hoping it wasn't a personal attack on his mate due to The Prophet article already. He opened the folded parchment and read the simple message:
Harry looked up with a bewildered frown. "Who is this from?"

Draco took the letter back and folded it into his pocket. "It's from The Board," he said with quiet emphasis. "And it was addressed to the both of us."

"Oh." Harry's eyes widened as he cottoned on; he was to meet the official Board that resided over the Nundu. "Oh fuck…"

"Indeed," Draco replied dryly. "I guess they saw the article."

Harry swallowed and tried not to panic.
Chapter 9

The loud crack of Apparation rent the cold evening air in Wiltshire as Harry and Draco suddenly appeared outside the looming wrought-iron gates of Malfoy Manor.

Harry looked through the open gates towards the daunting Manor silhouetted against the darkening sky. "Why couldn't we Apparate directly inside?" he asked, shivering a little against the late autumn chill.

Draco clasped Harry's cold hand in his warm one and began to lead them inside. "The wards are set to keep any but Malfoy blood out tonight. We have to ensure that every attending member passes through these gates, which have layered security charms on them, and then request admittance at the front doors."

A strong wave of protective magic washed over and through Harry as he passed under the archway. "Every possible safety precaution is taken for these meetings," Draco continued as they strode along the gravel drive. "And they are never held in the same location twice in succession."

"And they selected your home tonight so that your father could attend?" Harry asked, breath coming out in little white puffs in the cold air. It was quite dark, with no lamps or torches lighting their way, so Harry kept close to his mate's side. The lack of light was obviously to help keep any attending guests concealed as much as possible. Harry wondered if perhaps Nundu had night vision like a cat, and therefore didn't need any artificial light.

"Yes, all family members must be able to attend any meeting concerning one of their own. Nundu families are very close and we support one another. Regardless of what may have happened in the past, my parents will advocate on your behalf Harry."

Harry smiled but Draco's words failed to diminish the tension that was currently stringing his body tight with anxiety; he couldn't shake the feeling that things were not going their way tonight.

"They can't… split up couples once they've chosen a mate, can they?" he asked, suddenly realising that he didn't know all the possible outcomes to tonight's meeting.

Harry could see the frown on Draco's face when he glanced over at him.

"They can reject a proposed mateship, if they have sound reasons, but they can't reject a mateship once the two in question have bonded."

"And what do they consider as being 'bonded'?"

Draco glanced at him. "A claiming mark."

Harry felt his insides twist. "But I don't have a mark, does that mean they can split the two of us up?"

Draco's expression hardened. "No, they can't deny our mateship now because you already know our secret. It's too late for them to do anything about it."

"So you were supposed to ask permission before deciding to be my mate?"

"Yes." Draco nodded, frown clearing as his lips quirked into a tiny smirk. "I may have skipped that step in order to secure you as my mate prematurely."
Harry exhaled unevenly. "Good, I… Good," he repeated, relieved. The thought of losing Draco as his mate now was unthinkable. Even though their mateship was still relatively new, he still felt as though his body and soul were already intrinsically connected with Draco’s, and breaking that connection would be… unbearable.

Draco stopped walking and turned to face him. "Harry, no matter what happens in there, I promise that you and I won't be separated. It may take some time to convince them that allowing you in on our secret is a good thing, but eventually they'll see reason. Plus, you're good at charming complete strangers," he added with a smirk.

"I am?" Harry replied in surprise as they began moving forward again.

"Potter, you have no comprehension of your own appeal, do you?"

Harry blinked. "I have appeal?"

Draco chuckled and shook his head. "Yes - how do you think you managed to snag this particular Alpha?" he said deprecatingly.

"Because I'm male and an Omega," Harry shrugged.

Draco stopped him dead in his tracks at the bottom of the wide stone steps that led up to the front entrance doors. "You don't really think that, do you?" he asked with a frown.

"Erm…" Harry squirmed, looking away. "Well yeah."

Grey eyes narrowed. "Why would you think that?"

Harry met his gaze, chin lifting defiantly. "Because look at you - you're all tall and blond and handsome, and you always know the right thing to say and how to say it, and I'm this short, scruffy-

"Gorgeous man," Draco firmly interjected. "Harry, I'm not only attracted to you because you're an Omega, the fact that we can share this bond and the fact that you can bear our children definitely adds to your desirability, but it's certainly based on more than just that." Draco paused to slide one hand over Harry's cool cheek, thumb softly stroking over his cheekbone. "I've been attracted to you since before you turned eighteen."

Harry's eyes widened in surprise. "You have?"

"Yes." Draco nodded then added with a smile, "as much as I am loathe to admit it, I have been obsessed with obtaining your attention for as long as I can remember. You didn't want my friendship so I satisfied myself with your irritation instead. Satisfied myself in other ways when it came to my obsession with you as well…"

Harry laughed, feeling suddenly light as a feather. "Wow… I had no idea, why didn't you tell me?"

"I was hoping you would admit to the same thing first," Draco confessed self-consciously.

Harry placed his hand over Draco's on his cheek and leaned into the touch, letting his eyes fall closed for a moment. "I was fixated on you too, only I didn't really understand the reason for it. I thought you were attractive, I wasn't blind, but I only just recently realised that there may have been something deeper there; why you were able to rattle and infuriate me like no one else." Harry suddenly grinned. "Ron was right."

"Hmm?"
"He said that you probably didn't know you were drawn to me as an Omega because you'd always fancied me and couldn't differentiate between the two."

Draco smiled and wrapped his other arm around Harry's waist, pulling him close. "That is probably the most perceptive assessment to ever pass through Weasley's lips," he murmured.

"That's what Hermione said," Harry chuckled.

Draco slid his hand round to the back of Harry's head and leaned in for a kiss. He gently encouraged Harry's mouth to open to him, allowing him to instantly deepen the kiss, yet keeping the pace slow and intense.

Harry couldn't help but moan breathlessly as he grabbed ahold of the thick lapels on Draco's woollen cloak and kissed him back with fervour. They hadn't gone beyond a few lingering kisses since the incident in DADA, and Harry was certainly ready for more.

Draco caught Harry's bottom lip in his teeth for a moment before pulling away. "I'll have to show you later just how alluring I do find you Potter," he murmured.

Harry felt his stomach flutter in anticipation. "I look forward to it. Malfoy," he replied heatedly.

Draco smirked then stepped back and took Harry's hand in his. "Come on, let's get this over with."

Harry dutifully followed Draco up the steps to the front entrance doors, not nearly as tense as he'd been when they'd first arrived.

The considerable doors swung open soundlessly upon their approach and they walked inside without stopping. Harry assumed the doors were responding to Draco's presence as there was no intrusive wave of protective magic this time as they walked through. Two small house-elves were standing on either side of the foyer and bowed to them in greeting.

"Master Draco," the female one greeted respectfully. "Master Lucius and Mistress Narcissa are being in the front parlour room."

"Thank you Trinket." Draco turned to Harry and gave his hand a reassuring squeeze before leading the way to the same sitting room in which Harry had first met with the Malfoys.

Harry lifted his chin, readying himself for another battle, as he entered the room behind Draco.

"Father, mother," Draco greeted formally as he moved to kiss his mother on the cheek.

"Draco," Narcissa welcomed him with a smile that could almost be considered warm.

"You remember Harry of course," Draco said, stepping aside and indicating his mate.

Harry blinked in surprise as Narcissa immediately reached out to take his hand, the same half-smile she directed towards her son now presented to him. "Hello Mrs. Malfoy," Harry greeted with a polite smile. "It's nice to see you again."

Lucius snorted derisively and Harry turned to him as Narcissa released his hand.

"Father, behave," Draco admonished with a roll of his eyes.

Lucius' smirk was a lot like his son's but without the attractive teasing light in his eyes.

"I always behave," he scoffed then turned to Harry and extended a hand. "Good evening Mr.
"Mr. Malfoy." Harry swallowed and shook his hand, dropping it again as swiftly as possible.

"I hope you are prepared for tonight Potter," Lucius continued, still in the same falsely pleasant tone.

"In what way?" Harry replied stiffly, refusing to allow the man to frighten him.

"The Board are very… *meticulous* in their interrogations."

Harry immediately frowned. "Interrogation? I thought this meeting was called so that they could meet me?" he said with an uncertain glance towards Draco.

Lucius smiled but it was far from affable. "Yes, it is their chance to meet with you - and deign whether or not you are a suitable Nundu mate."

"And as I've already discussed with Harry," Draco interrupted evenly, "the Board is not here to approve or reject a proposed mateship, they are here to meet Harry; to set their minds at ease that he is in fact a brilliant partner for me."

Harry relaxed into Draco's side as his mate wrapped an arm around his shoulders. For a boy who once seemed to cow to his parent's every whim, he wasn't hesitant in the slightest to stand up to them when it came to matters concerning Harry.

Narcissa stepped up to her husband's side and linked her arm through his, pale gaze on Harry. "I was sorry to see that dreadful article in The Prophet Mr. Potter," she said, breaking the strained silence.

"Only the first of many I can assure you," Lucius added, no longer looking at Harry but at his son, with a pointed expression.

"I was sorry to see they dragged you into the article as well," Harry snapped before he could stop himself. "It's such a shame that the public at large doesn't trust Draco because of you."

"Harry…" Draco uttered warningly before turning to his father. "Father, you know we must show a united front to the Board, if they sense discord in our family they will not trust Harry. And if you cause complications for Harry and I…" he trailed off threateningly.

Narcissa raised a hand, the sleeve of her elegant gold dress robes sliding down to expose a slender wrist. "No need to worry my darling, your father shall conduct himself most respectfully whilst standing before the Board members."

Harry chewed his lip; he hated the tension he'd created in Draco's family. He certainly didn't regret his decision to be with Draco but it was troubling to witness the detrimental effect his presence was having on a family that was still obviously recovering from the events of the war. Now that he knew the background on why Lucius had made the decisions he'd made, he really didn't blame the man for those choices, he just wished Lucius would make it a bit easier to bloody like him.

"I would appreciate it in private as well," Draco responded, levelling a look at his father.

"Something to work towards, hmm?" Narcissa said lightly, pink lips curving up into a diminutive smile.

As Narcissa stroked a hand down Lucius' arm, Harry noticed that she seemed to always touch him in some way when he needed to be calmed or his behaviour modified. He stored that information away to ask her about when they were alone, wondering if the same trick would work on Draco when he
was upset.

The small female house-elf who had greeted them at the front doors appeared and bobbed an uneven curtsy. "Master Lucius? The members is all being here now sir."

"Yes, thank you Trinket. Shall we?"

Harry raised a brow at Lucius thanking a lowly house-elf but didn't comment. He figured he was in enough hot water with the man tonight as it was.

Draco slipped a hand into his and they followed behind the elder Malfoys.

Harry looked around with interest as they walked, trying to remember the directions to Draco's bedroom from his last visit, but he was hopelessly lost already. He only recalled that it was upstairs and then down a long network of corridors to the… east wing? Or perhaps it was west?

Draco had filled him in on as much as he could think of regarding the procedure and protocols of the Nundu Board meetings. Harry knew that he and Draco must always enter behind Lucius and Narcissa, until such time that Draco becomes head of the household - which would only happen upon his father's death or mental incapacity. Draco told him that elderly Nundu must be closely watched and are generally segregated from non-Nundu as a precaution against letting something slip to the wrong person.

Harry knew they were making their way towards the grand ballroom, as it was the largest space the Manor afforded and had no windows to speak of, so no prying eyes. He also knew the full contingent of house-elves were on duty tonight, watching every conceivable entrance or exit, as well as keeping an eye on the guests themselves. Every Floo connection had been shut down and all post owls diverted until morning.

It was quite the operation and Harry was impressed. In his weaker moments, he irrationally fretted that he might accidentally divulge something to the wrong person and then be blamed for the genocide of an entire group of people. With that hanging over his head, he wasn't even tempted to tell Ron or Hermione about it.

Part of him suspected that they would disapprove; Hermione because of her knowledge of how violent a past the Nundu had, and Ron because he was, at heart, a bit of a staunch Ministry supporter. Harry thought it had something to do with his dad working there, along with the fact that Ron himself wanted to work for the Ministry one day.

They rounded a corner and the sound of low chatter from a large group of people reached Harry's ears. He instantly felt his heart speed up. Draco had warned him that there would probably be more members in attendance than was customary, as they all knew the meeting was being held to introduce famous Harry Potter to the Nundu clan. Draco had told him that with a smirk on his face but Harry was not amused. He hated being the centre of attention - especially for the purpose of being judged by a group of people whom he did not want to disappoint. He really did want to make Draco - and even his parents - proud, or at the very least, not embarrass the fuck out of them.

Harry unconsciously shifted closer to Draco as he walked into the impressive ballroom. The elder Malfoys were obscuring his view of the raised platform at the far end on which he knew the Board to be situated, but he could see all around the sides of the mirrored room and there were quite a few faces staring back at him; some curiously and some with narrowed, distrustful eyes. Harry startled when he saw that some of the gathered group were in their cat form; large feline beasts prowling the edges of the crowd, dark tails slashing and noses lifted as they sniffed the air upon his entrance.
The chatter had stopped abruptly as soon as the four of them had entered, and there was an expectant hush that filled the room, broken only by a few quiet rumblings that may have been either growls or purrs.

Harry swallowed; he certainly didn't feel very welcome, but then, these people had a lot to lose if they couldn't trust him.

Draco stuck close to his side, hand firmly clasping Harry's as they approached the long table on the dais.

Lucius and Narcissa both bowed their heads to the table in deferential greeting to the Board before stepping aside to stand on either side of Harry and Draco.

Harry finally got his first look at the Board members themselves. There were five in all, and he knew that they were all full-blooded Nundu. There were two females and three males sitting on the Board. Harry's gaze swept across the five figures staring back at him, emerald eyes lingering on one of the females who appeared to be heavily pregnant.

Out of the corner of his eye, Harry caught Draco bowing his head in greeting and he quickly copied, putting as much respect as he could muster into the action.

"Good evening Malfoys," the elder gentleman in the centre greeted with a brief smile. He had kind eyes which creased congenially when he smiled. "Good evening Mr. Potter, it is an honour to finally meet you."

Some low grumblings from the crowd superseded his words.

Harry forced a smile, feeling his cheeks heat self-consciously. "Good evening members of the Board," he replied with a respectful nod.

"I am Hugh Sloane, the Chair of this Board," he continued amiably, then glanced to the end of the table. "I shall introduce the other members of our Board; there on the end is Terence Fancourt."

Harry nodded at the man who had dark hair streaked with grey. Mr. Fancourt nodded in return but did not smile.

"He is our second longest-running Board member after myself," Mr. Sloane said. "Next to Terence is Sophie McDougal."

This was the pregnant Nundu and Harry nodded at her with a tentative smile. The blonde woman merely narrowed her eyes as she slid one hand over her protruding belly, as though trying to shield it from his eyes.

Mr. Sloane indicated the young man seated next to her. "This young lad is Lorcan Hipwell, who joined the Board in place of his father late last year."

"Mr. Hipwell," Harry greeted with another polite nod.

The angry, heated glare he received in return made Harry want to shrink behind Draco. He quickly looked to the last Board member, the only other female.

"And this is Perpetua Bagnold," Mr. Sloane introduced and the older woman nodded courteously. She didn't smile but she also didn't look hostile like some of the others.

"Pleased to meet you all," Harry said as graciously as he could muster under the circumstances. He
hated being the centre of attention but he also hated formalities and treating people as though they were better than others, no matter their social standing or professional position. He held his tongue and behaved as well-mannered as he could manage though because this was vital to a peaceful life with his mate.

Hugh Sloane folded his hands on top of the table and leaned forwards. "Now gentlemen," he began with a dry chuckle, gazing down upon them both. "The clan has been in quite the bother over the two of you due to the fact that this mateship was not approved in advance, and, of course, that young Mr. Malfoy has aligned himself with someone so famous as his mate."

Draco bowed his head then looked back up at the Board Chair. "That was my doing Mr. Sloane, and I apologise for my haste in choosing a mate and divulging our most closely guarded secret to him without your blessing first, but please know that Harry was not aware that I had acted out of accordance with our laws."

Mr. Sloane smiled at Draco and Harry was strongly reminded of Dumbledore in that moment. Mr. Sloane looked at Draco with that same indulgent, fatherly expression that Harry used to receive from the late Headmaster.

"I am interested to know how this pairing came about Draco."

Harry looked at his mate and was met with warm grey eyes before Draco turned back to Mr. Sloane.

"There really isn't much to tell," Draco explained forthrightly. "We were both drawn to each other from the start of term. Harry kept his Omega status a secret until he questioned my feelings one night and I confessed that I felt compelled to be with him, to protect him. He confessed the same and… here we are. There was no question of wanting to be with each other - exclusively and indefinitely."

Harry couldn't help but smile a little, stomach fluttering happily, repressing the distinct urge to bury his face in Draco's neck and kiss his warm skin. He settled for giving his mate's hand a soft squeeze instead. Draco instantly returned the gentle pressure.

"I must say it was quite the surprise," Mr. Sloane replied before turning to Draco's parents. "And were you both aware of the rather rash actions of your son?"

Lucius cleared his throat before answering. "He brought Mr. Potter to our home, introducing him as his mate, so yes we were aware of his intentions prior to the publication of that article."

"And do you believe he will be a suitable mate for your only son?" Mr. Sloane asked with interest, his gaze thankfully turning to Narcissa.

She gave a single nod, smiling reverently. "Yes, I believe Mr. Potter to be a perfect match for my son. Not only is he a powerful wizard and an Omega with an immense capacity for caring, I also have no doubt that he will look after my son to his fullest extent."

Hugh Sloane nodded in approval before glancing at the other members of the Board. "Our Board have some questions for you of course, so we shall start with Mr. Terence Fancourt."

Harry turned to look at the older man with the grey-streaked hair and waited, teeth gnawing nervously at his bottom lip. He knew a lot was riding on his answers and he had never considered himself a very articulate bloke at the best of times. He reminded himself that Draco thought him to be charming to strangers and desperately held on to that belief.

"Yes." Mr. Fancourt shifted in his seat, gaze flicking between Harry and Draco. "I am concerned that the ever-present media attention on Mr. Potter will lead to the discovery of our people.
Journalists are persistent and not below sinking to underhanded means to get what they want, these types of people will now be following Mr. Potter and the Malfoy family around for a significant amount of time - especially once Mr. Potter falls pregnant. How do you propose to counteract this in order to preserve our secret?

"Mr. Fancourt," Draco nodded in greeting before continuing. "We will of course be cognizant of these factors as we conduct our lives together. The same rules that have always applied to Nundu shall still be in place, such as no transforming into my natural form except here at the Manor or on the protected grounds of our own home once Harry and I leave Hogwarts. We have discussed the idea of perhaps moving away for a time when Harry is pregnant and when our children are young, to escape the media and any other curious onlookers during those times."

Mr. Fancourt nodded in approval. "I am pleased to see that you have planned ahead."

Draco nodded in appreciation. "One does not consider a mateship with a celebrity without considering it from all angles Mr. Fancourt."

Harry couldn't help but smile at Draco as he smirked at the Board member, clearly unbothered by the proceedings - or hiding his nerves with remarkable aplomb.

"No further questions Chair Sloane," Mr. Fancourt spoke, looking to the elder.

Harry couldn't believe how civilised it all was; except for the giant prowling cats in the background, he could be in the middle of any refined English courtroom.

"Sophie?" Mr. Sloane indicated the pregnant female next and Harry didn't miss the look of warning he shot her.

The young female kept her hand over her baby bump and pierced Harry with cool blue eyes. "Mr. Potter, do you fully comprehend the consequences of what it would mean for the Ministry to find out about us?"

Harry swallowed and held her gaze, even though she looked ready to eat him alive. "Yes, I believe I do; possibly more than anyone who has not been a part of the clan their entire lives could. I have spent most of my life trying to protect a particular group of people - half-bloods - from being slaughtered just because Voldemort deemed them to be unworthy for wizarding society, and this is not so different to that same ideology. Draco has of course told me about the history between the Nundu people and the Ministry and, while you probably see me as someone aligned with the Ministry, I am not. I don't trust the government as a whole; there are good people there but there will always be the corrupt and the money-driven as well, and so they will never have my absolute trust or support." Harry took a breath and pressed on. "And even if I did believe in the Ministry and everything it stood for, I could still never reveal you to them because it would mean the execution of not only hundreds of innocent people, but the death of my own mate as well. This thought alone would keep my lips sealed."

Ms. McDougal narrowed her eyes at him. "And when one of our own attacks someone? When an innocent witch or wizard, or even Muggle, is ripped to shreds - what then? Will you allow us to carry out our own justice without involving anyone from the outside world? Even when you disagree with the punishment handed out. Or will your sense of righteous injustice stretch that far?"

"Y-yes, I will not interfere with your ways," Harry stammered, knowing it was a fair question and also knowing that it would be difficult for him to stand by and watch such a thing.

Sophie looked as though she didn't believe him but Hugh Sloane intervened. "Thank you Ms.
McDougal, I believe that will suffice. Mr. Hipwell?"

Sophie sat back with a huff of irritation but remained silent.

Harry turned next to Lorcan Hipwell; the one who looked as though he had been quietly seething for the entirety of the meeting so far. He shifted closer to Draco, taking comfort from the heat seeping into his shoulder from his mate's body.

Lorcan didn't look to be much older than Harry himself. With dark auburn hair and brown eyes, he would've been rather attractive if it wasn't for the harsh scowl drawing his face down.

"How dare you so blatantly disregard our traditions and bring a fox into the henhouse Mr. Malfoy," he said with quiet ferocity, glaring at Draco.

Harry immediately bristled and stood a little taller, a flare of indignant anger igniting in his chest. He felt much more comfortable with the Board attacking him and leaving his mate alone.

Draco merely narrowed his eyes in return and remained composed as he replied. "And as I've already explained Mr. Hipwell, I acknowledge that the process was not carried out in the usual way of things and have apologised for the lapse, but what's done is done, and I think we all just wish to move forward in the best way possible now."

"You should be punished!" Lorcan hissed.

"Mr. Hipwell," Hugh interjected warily. "This is not a punishable offence. Revealing our secret is an unforgiveable transgression but not when it is to an intended mate. They clearly have a bond and are not here to deceive us."

"Yes but he revealed the existence of our people to *Harry Potter!*" Lorcan exclaimed, losing any thread of equanimity that he had been clinging to. "Malfoy's impulsive decision to bed the Chosen One is now going to cost us all our lives!"

A loud rumbling of agreement seemed to come from some of the gathered members in the crowd.

Harry's lips parted with indignant anger but a squeeze to his hand from Draco had him closing them again as he turned to his mate. Draco shook his head minutely, eyes clearly entreating Harry to rein in his outrage.

Harry pressed his lips together and held his tongue, knowing he would just make it worse if his temper did get involved.

Relief showed in grey eyes before Draco turned back to the front. "I believe Harry has already spoken to that effect Mr. Hipwell," he spoke, tone calm but cool. "He has no desire to reveal our secret or to put any of us in harm's way."

"If it weren't for him, we'd all be free!"

Harry felt as though he'd been slapped in the face. Of course; some of these people had hoped that Voldemort would come out the victor in the war so that they could live their lives unrestricted. Harry had fought hard - even sacrificing his own life - but it meant nothing to them because they hadn't actually wanted Harry to succeed.

"We would never have been free under his reign."

Harry's head snapped to Lucius in surprise.
"The Dark Lord promised many things which he had no intention of following through on," Mr. Malfoy continued evenly. "He was not a wizard of his word and killed many a loyal servant in order to achieve what he desired."

Harry saw Draco's expression flicker with sadness and knew his mate was thinking of Snape.

"He also could not stand the thought of anyone being considered superior or more singular than him," Lucius stated knowingly. "Do you really believe that he would have allowed the unhindered existence of our people? A special group of people that he was not a part of? How long before he forced himself on an Omega - on one of our own? Would we have been able to carry out judgment on his wrongdoings?"

Harry gaped; he couldn't believe Draco's father was actually defending him.

"Of course we would have," Lorcan retorted, but his confident tone had flagged somewhat. He shook his head. "But that is not what is on trial here today-"

"I don't believe anyone is on trial here today," Narcissa inserted icily. "The Board is here to meet Harry and allow him the opportunity to answer any questions or to put to rest any reservations you may have. He, and the rest of our family, is not here to be verbally attacked or insulted by you."

"She is right Lorcan," Hugh Sloane interjected, looking to his fellow Board member with disapproval. "If you cannot carry out your questioning in a respectful manner, then I shall have to ask you to leave. Let me reiterate to everyone here," he said loudly, taking in the rest of the crowded ballroom with a discerning gaze. "Harry Potter is not on trial here today. He is mated to one of our own and is here to be accepted into our clan. We simply want his word that he will abide by our laws - and he has given it. Our questions are so that we may get to know Mr. Potter a little better, and to perhaps impart our wisdom on matters which they may need to consider whilst entering into this partnership."

"So that's it," Lorcan snapped, "we just allow the Malfoys to do whatever they want and damn the consequences?"

"You are out of line Mr. Hipwell," Hugh Sloane replied sharply.

"I say we Obliviate Potter!"

Harry's eyes widened and he took a step back, hand twitching towards his wand.

Draco instantly stepped in front of Harry, blocking him from the Board's view as he withdrew his wand and, without hesitation, aimed it directly at Lorcan.

Harry glanced behind him as some of the pacing cats made growling noises of displeasure, as though waiting to pounce. He suddenly felt very exposed and very human.

"Mr. Hipwell! That is enough! You are disgracing our clan with this behaviour and creating a very poor first impression. You will not speak again for the remainder of this meeting and that is an order!"

Lorcan's expression was apoplectic but he did as he was told and sat back, crossing his arms over his chest, face flushed.

Hugh Sloane exhaled and turned back to Harry, who was now peering around Draco's shoulder. "I apologise Mr. Potter, please do not judge all Nundu based on this youngling. He is still new to the Board and I fear the power is going to his head a little."
Draco sheathed his wand but kept his gaze on Lorcan as Harry slowly stepped out to stand at his side again.

Harry noted that both Lucius and Narcissa had also drawn their wands. Draco hadn't lied when he'd said that his family would stand by them when it came to the Board.

"Of course," Harry replied with a nod, still feeling on edge.

"I think we may continue now." Hugh gave a tight-lipped smile and turned to the other female Nundu on the panel. "Ms. Bagnold, do you have any questions for Mr. Potter?"

The older woman didn't smile but her eyes were sympathetic and Harry felt some of his tension release a little.

"Good evening Mr. Potter, it is lovely to make your acquaintance," she said quietly. "I do not have any reservations about your character; I know you would not intentionally bring harm to our people. I do worry however that you have selected a mate rather quickly. I am aware that you did not register your Omega status with the Ministry, as I work in the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures Department." She paused and allowed a tiny smile to break through her sedate demeanour. "We like to have someone on the inside to keep an eye on things you see."

Harry nodded but was too nervous to return the smile.

"Without Ministry registration, you would not have received attention or proposals from other Alphas other than the few that may be at your school. You must admit that that's hardly a generous pool from which to choose someone to spend your life with." Her gaze flicked to Draco and back. "Not that young Malfoy is not a wonderful choice, but you see my concern?"

Harry swallowed, trying to work some saliva back into his mouth after Lorcan's round of harsh accusations. "I understand," he replied earnestly, not afraid to speak from the heart on this one, regardless of the large room now hanging on his every word. "There are a few Alphas at Hogwarts, I think about six in total, but Draco was the only one that I felt drawn to. I did receive attention from some of the others but it never felt right. While we have only been together a short time, we have been in school together since the age of eleven, and throughout those years we have always been interested in the other but never realised why until we came together after our inheritances. While it may seem hasty to you, it has actually been a long time in the making."

"And you agree?" Perpetua said, turning to Draco with interest.

"Yes, I..." Draco paused and glanced at Harry, an affectionate smirk flickering about his mouth. "He is the perfect mate for me."

Harry couldn't help but smile back, nerves retreating.

"And you have claimed him?"

Harry instantly snapped out of the warmth of Draco's gaze as the blond froze; appearing to be at a loss for words for the first time all evening. Harry's adamant refusal of being bitten and claimed suddenly seemed like a terrible decision, and would not look good to the people gathered in that room, all of whom probably didn't have any moral issues with the act of claiming. He quickly turned to Ms. Bagnold.

"He hasn't yet, but he will. Very soon," Harry responded firmly. He could feel Draco's gaze on him but didn't look over.
Ms. Bagnold smiled, looking pleased, and Harry knew he'd made the right decision. It was just a sacrifice he would have to make in order to keep everyone happy.

"And do you want children Mr. Potter?" she asked, still smiling.

"Yes, loads," Harry replied, relaxing. He could sense that this meeting was drawing to a close and he was almost giddy with the relief of it.

"Loads?"

Harry glanced up at Draco's quiet murmur to see a look of amusement on his mate's face. Harry grinned back. "Yup. Loads," he stressed.

"Well, I think that's all we need to know for now," Hugh Sloane announced with a clap of his hands, smiling down at the two mates. "I believe that concludes our meeting for tonight. Your answers have adequately satisfied the Board Mr. Potter and I thank you for your attendance. Please feel free to mingle everyone; I believe our hosts have provided some refreshments for your enjoyment."

Harry exhaled in relief and sagged against Draco's side. "Merlin, I'm glad that's over with," he exclaimed quietly.

Draco slipped an arm around him and leaned down to whisper into his ear. "What is this about being claimed? Did you change your mind?"

Harry shivered as Draco kissed the side of his neck, letting his teeth lightly scrape the surface. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad…

Before Harry could form a response, Draco's parents had approached. Narcissa looked pleased and even Lucius seemed content.

"You did well Mr. Potter," Narcissa commented, placing a gentle hand on his shoulder fleetingly.

"Thank you," Harry replied, grateful for her support.

Harry felt Draco tense beside him and glanced over. His mate seemed to be scowling at the crowd that was now wandering the room at will and drawing ever closer to Harry, dozens of curious eyes on The-Boy-Who-Lived.

"Relax Draco, it will do no good to become possessive in this crowd tonight," Lucius murmured to his son, his own gaze on the wandering clan members. "You know they will feel better once they meet your mate and scent him for themselves."

Harry almost grinned in amusement when Draco released a low growl under his breath before clamping his lips shut.

"Mr. Potter?"

Harry turned to see an older gentleman standing next to them, a crumpled hat in one hand and his other hand tightly clutched by a young girl who looked to be no older than ten. Harry smiled at the pair of them.

"Hullo," he greeted. "Please call me Harry."

The older man smiled and instantly stopped fidgeting with his ruined hat. "Good evening Harry, I am Stuart Goodfellow and this is my granddaughter, Gemma."
"Pleased to meet you," Harry shook Stuart's hand and then crouched down at eye-level with the little girl. "And very pleased to meet you as well Gemma. How old are you?"

"I'll be nine in a fortnight," she replied shyly, hiding half her face in her grandfather's sleeve.

"Wow, happy early birthday," Harry replied.

Gemma giggled and Harry grinned at her before standing upright once more.

"Loads?" Draco repeated into his ear with a smirk.

Harry laughed and elbowed him in the side. He could tell that Draco was also slightly enraptured by the sweet child. He wondered if Gemma was a Nundu and if it was a polite question to ask someone or not.

"I think we've taken up enough of your time Harry Potter," Stuart said, looking pleased to have met him. "My granddaughter wanted to meet you and I just wanted to say that I'm glad you're here. We could use some decent wizards in our clan."

"Harry Potter!"

Harry startled as someone grabbed his hand and pumped it up and down exuberantly, spinning him away from Stuart and Gemma as they disappeared into the pack. He could practically hear Draco's jaw cracking as he clenched his teeth and glared at the interloper. The man was probably only a few years older than Harry and Draco and was smiling widely.

"H-hullo," Harry stuttered before carefully retracting his hand. "Erm, who are you?"

"Benjy," the man replied rapidly, as though not really paying attention to the words coming out of his mouth. "You have the most beautiful eyes."

Caught off-guard, Harry coughed, nearly choking on his amusement, but was quickly distracted by the growling sound emanating from his mate. He took a chance and placed a hand on Draco's arm, attempting to calm him the same way Narcissa had her husband.

"Thank you Benjy, but you should probably back off," Harry replied with a smile. "I don't think my mate appreciates your attention."

Draco fell silent but continued to glare at Benjy.

Benjy glanced at Draco for the first time and blinked. "Oh, right," he said haltingly. "Nice to have met you."

Harry chuckled as Benjy made a hasty getaway but he was quickly replaced by another Nundu. And then another. And another.

Draco's patience and strength were truly tested as slowly most of the gathered crowd introduced themselves to Harry, some rather quickly and nervously, while others seemed happy to chat the night away, despite the snarling Draco standing watch.

Harry found Draco's jealous streak endlessly amusing, especially because the blond himself seemed taken by surprise whenever it reared its ugly head. Harry was soon able to predict which clan members would set him off; if they were young, attractive and male, then Harry would precede the introduction by holding Draco's hand or slipping an arm around his waist. It definitely helped to ease Draco's unstable emotions.
The only part Harry didn't particularly feel comfortable with was when the clan members would approach in their cat forms, practically knocking him over as they wound their huge furry bodies around him and sniffed at his hair. He would tense up and keep his eyes on Draco's face for the duration; finding comfort in Draco's calm demeanour. He knew that just because they were in cat form, it didn't necessarily mean that they were hostile or would attack at a moment's notice – that's just how it felt.

All the cats had the same general colouring but each one seemed to have some type of distinguishing mark or feature that separated them from another Nundu. Some had features more obvious than others though and Harry knew it would take him a long time to match the cat to the witch or wizard. Other than Draco's grey eyes, he didn't know what other characteristics Draco had that would separate him from the others and vowed to get Draco to transform later that night so that he could familiarise himself with his mate's other form.

"Draco? Harry?"

Harry glanced up to see the Board Chair, Hugh Sloane, standing next to them. The smile immediately slid off of Harry's face as he took in the older man's sombre expression.

"I need to speak with you both in private."

Harry suddenly felt rooted to spot with dread but Draco slipped a hand into his and silently led him out of the crowded ballroom, following directly behind Chair Sloane.

The three of them walked up the corridor, which suddenly felt much too cold and quiet after the noise and heat of the ballroom, almost like an omen, Harry thought. They stepped into an empty guest room around the corner where two house-elves stood guard outside the door.

Harry frowned upon seeing Lucius and Narcissa already in the room; Narcissa's hands wringing together as she paced in front of the fire in the small grate. Lucius stood unmoving behind an armchair, hands curled tensely over the top of it.

"What is going on?" Draco asked, turning to Hugh with a deep frown and pulling Harry into his side protectively.

Hugh sighed heavily before answering Draco's question. "I'm afraid we've had a request for an enquiry."

"Against who?"

"Against you Draco," he replied grimly.

Harry's eyes widened. "For what? And what does that mean exactly?" he demanded, knowing it wasn't good judging by the dour expressions on all their faces.

Hugh raised solemn eyes to meet Harry's worried gaze. "For attacking a non-Nundu on public grounds."

Harry felt as though his heart had stopped beating. It hurt his chest as he tried to draw breath to speak, to force out the question he already suspected the answer to. "Isn't that… punishable by death?"

Hugh Sloane nodded grimly and Harry thought he was going to be sick.
Chapter 10

As soon as the shock wore off, Harry felt his natural instincts kick in and his mind demanded that he jump into 'fix-it' mode. Before he opened his mouth though he realised that his mate had yet to say anything.

"Draco?" he said gently, turning to the blond still standing pressed to his side.

Draco's gaze was unfocused as he replied. "I… I think I need to sit down."

Harry immediately walked him over to the middle of the guest room and sat him on the edge of the bed, the other occupants of the room looking on silently. Draco wrapped one hand around the bedpost, the other clutching a fistful of the quilt in his hand as he continued to stare unseeing across the room.

Harry placed a hand on his shoulder and kept it there. He immediately turned to the head of the Nundu Board; more determined than ever to defend his mate.

"What can we do?" he demanded resolutely. "How much time do we have?"

Hugh rubbed his jaw as he considered, fingers rasping audibly on the white stubble that peppered his face. "There will be an official hearing in one week's time. I cannot advise you on what to do Mr. Potter, as I am on the Board and must remain impartial, but I will recommend that you gather whatever evidence you can in order to refute the claim."

"Is this about Professor Fischer?" Harry asked, needing to know all the details. "Oh fuck…" he breathed out with sudden realisation. "This is my fault…"

Draco immediately snapped out of his shocked stupor and turned to him, placing a hand over Harry's resting atop his shoulder.

But Hugh shook his head before Draco could speak. "No, it's regarding a student who was attacked on school grounds."

Harry frowned in confusion. "Dean Thomas?"

"Yes, I believe that was his name."

"Who requested the enquiry? Who is accusing my son of this assault?" Lucius demanded.

"You know I cannot tell you that Lucius," Hugh replied, sounding sincerely apologetic.

"It's obviously someone from Hogwarts though," Harry interjected. "Who else would know about it?"

Hugh sighed then and straightened his cloak. "I will be in touch with regards to a hearing date. I'm truly sorry this has happened Draco."

Draco nodded but remained seated as the Board Chair gazed at them all sadly before taking his leave.

The door clicked shut behind him and Harry immediately began to pace the small space, needing to move with the influx of restless energy.
"Did you do it Draco?"

Harry stopped his pacing as he glanced at Lucius in surprise. He supposed it was a fair question, Harry had already asked Draco the same thing the night of their first conversation in the Room of Requirement.

Draco's solemn grey eyes met his father's. "No," he replied concisely.

Lucius nodded in acceptance and Harry exhaled, not realising that he'd been holding his breath. He'd believed Draco that night when he'd said that he hadn't touched Dean and he still believed him now, but the reassurance of the genuine look of assertive truth in Draco's eyes was still a comfort.

"Harry is right," Narcissa spoke up for the first time, her tone quiet but steady. "The accuser would have come from Hogwarts, someone who knows of our kind for them to bring it forward to the Board."

Harry nodded. "Who at Hogwarts knows the truth?"

"Depends who you have enlightened," Lucius countered with suspicious eyes.

"I haven't told anyone!" Harry snapped back, unable to help himself. His emotions were running dangerously close to the surface.

"Lucius," Narcissa said warningly. "Attacking each other is not about to help matters."

"It doesn't matter who brought the request forward," Draco interrupted impatiently. "What matters is proving my innocence."

Harry nodded in agreement. The flare of sudden fear in his chest prodded him to stride back over to his mate and sit next to him, needing the closeness. He pressed his shoulder against Draco's and entwined their fingers, resting their joined hands on Draco's thigh.

"I'll speak to Dean myself," Harry continued after taking a calming breath. He looked to Narcissa, ignoring Lucius for now; it was better for his temper. "I'll find out everything he remembers about that day and hopefully we can prove that Draco wasn't there. This person, whoever it was, only believes that it was Draco because Dean sort of molested me the day before when he scented the Omega in me."

"If you had been enacting revenge on behalf of your mate, then surely the boy wouldn't still be alive?" Narcissa said with an arched brow. "The Board must see that if you were in your Nundu form, this other student wouldn't have survived the encounter?"

Both Draco and Lucius nodded in confirmation, causing Harry to swallow uncomfortably; he hoped it never came to that some day. He wasn't sure how he'd feel if Draco - his mate - killed someone in vengeance. The idea didn't sit well with him.

Harry shook his head; there was no point in dwelling on that. Professor Fischer was still alive and Draco had actually witnessed him attacking Harry with his own eyes, so that must mean Draco had a modicum of self-control.

Harry suddenly turned to Draco. "Wait, the Board can't just... just make you disappear," he said earnestly. "It was printed in the Prophet that you're my mate, the whole of the wizarding world now knows that I'm with you. If you suddenly disappear, people will ask questions. Plus, do they really think that I'll keep my mouth shut about the existence of Nundu if they kill my mate?"
Lucius withdrew his wand and threw a powerful silencing charm at the door before turning to Harry with sparking eyes. "You fool!" he hissed. "You can't say such things when my home is full of our people - the ones that approve of you as well as the ones who do not. Draco's accusers are likely in this very house right now!"

Harry felt his cheeks heat with embarrassment. Lucius was right of course, not that Harry was about to admit it.

Narcissa rose from her seat and walked over to stand in front of Harry and Draco, placing a gentle hand on her son's shoulder. "We will prove Draco's innocence," she said with quiet determination. "Do not worry yourself over this Mr. Potter. I have every confidence in the two of you working through this and emerging victorious. You always do, don't you Mr. Potter?"

Harry swallowed, feeling the weight of Narcissa's gaze. "I… I normally have help," he admitted quietly, thinking of Hermione's tenacious intelligence and desperately wishing that he could confide in her about all of this. "But I am stubborn," he added resolutely, "and Draco is awfully clever."

Draco gave Harry a faint smile and it bolstered his spirits.

Narcissa nodded, appearing satisfied. "Perhaps it would be best if the two of you returned to school now?"

Draco stood slowly, looking as though the weight of the world was on his shoulders. His mother embraced him, a hand on each shoulder as she pulled back to look him in the eye.

Draco nodded, as though they were conducting a silent conversation, before reaching back for Harry's hand.

"Goodbye Mrs. Malfoy," Harry said dutifully to the graceful woman as he stood. "Mr. Malfoy," he added, nodding shortly at Lucius without making eye contact.

"Goodnight Mr. Potter," Narcissa replied, pale eyes warming a little as they alighted on him.

"Come on," Draco said as he led Harry forward towards the door. "Father," he said briefly as they passed Lucius. It seemed Draco was a little miffed with his father's treatment of Harry as well.

Once upon a time, Harry would have grinned smugly at that, but he was too preoccupied with the terrible turn of events to even entertain the idea.

The two boys walked swiftly through the corridors of the large Manor, the echo of music and voices still resounding from the ballroom. They made their way out the entrance doors, past the house-elves standing guard, and down the gravel drive without saying a word. They didn't speak again until they had Apparated back to Hogwarts and were making their way across the darkened grounds to the castle.

"Did you want to be with me when I talk to Dean tomorrow?" Harry asked, glancing sideways at his mate. His mind was already working frantically; making plans and strategizing, trying to take control of the situation as best he could.

Draco's pale brow furrowed slightly. "I'm not sure…"

Harry nodded, turning front to absentely watch the shadowed ground pass beneath his feet. "I don't share a room with him anymore, so I'll ask him at breakfast. Do you think we should put together a list of questions for him tonight? I don't want to miss anything."
When Harry was met with silence, he glanced at his mate. "Are you all right?"

Draco visibly swallowed before replying. "I don't really want to talk about this anymore tonight, if you don't mind."

Harry stopped and turned to face Draco, a hand on each of his arms. "Draco, they're not going to execute you," he said firmly, desperately, eyes searching Draco's slightly ashen expression. "You're innocent - we just have to prove it."

"That's not what I'm concerned with," Draco replied quietly, and then amended, "well, I am, obviously, but there's more to it than that."

Harry frowned. "Such as?"

"You were right Harry, if they find me guilty and execute me, then there are certain procedures in place to ensure your continued loyalty and secrecy. You will be immediately placed with a new mate - of their choosing."

Harry's eyes widened and his stomach felt as though it had dropped right out from under him. The shock was quickly replaced with anger though. "They can't do that!" he retorted, trying to keep his voice down. "I'm not… I'm not just some piece of property that can be passed around from Alpha to Alpha."

Draco's expression flickered with anguish. "They can and they will Harry. They will take you from me the moment a guilty sentence is passed and you will not be allowed to return to Hogwarts, or to the outside world, until you can be trusted enough to continue to keep our secret."

"So they'll imprison me?" Harry replied angrily. "I won't do it, I'll tell people now - tonight. I'll make it so that if I disappear on the date of your enquiry, someone will reveal the truth to the media."

Draco shook his head, expression intensely serious. "You mustn't Harry, if I am declared innocent and they find out that you informed someone outside the clan, then it will be you who will be held accountable - and most likely executed."

Harry clenched his jaw as he dropped his grip on Draco's arms and strode away towards the castle, needing to move, hands clenched into fists as he glared at the ground. He was furious and, worst of all, he felt a tiny flicker of regret; for blindly agreeing to be a Nundu's mate without knowing every single detail and eventuality that could come of that decision. The Nundu people were clearly barbaric in their common practices and the trapped feeling he was now experiencing was maddening. The entire situation made him want to explode with the blatant injustice of it all.

Harry stopped his headlong flight and spun around to look for Draco. The blond was still standing where he had left him, staring hard at the ground.

Harry instantly felt a wrenching guilt in his gut; this wasn't Draco's fault, the fact that his mate's biggest concern was Harry's welfare once he was gone spoke volumes of the kind of man his mate was.

He quickly walked back to Draco and reached out for his hand. "I'm sorry," he said quietly. "I'm not angry with you, I'm just angry at… the situation."

Draco met his gaze and nodded in acknowledgment, his expression carefully blank, but his grey eyes were clearly distressed.

Harry quickly tugged him in and slid his arms around Draco's waist, forehead coming to rest against
his mate's firm chest. "Don't worry, we'll figure this out," he whispered into the cold night air.

Draco's arms eventually came up to enfold him and Harry sighed at the welcome infusion of warmth that always came with his mate's hot-blooded body. Draco rested his chin on top of Harry's head and sighed, his breath ruffling the strands of jet-black hair.

"Hey, if things were easy for us, I would be concerned," Harry murmured wryly into the thick fabric of Draco's woollen cloak.

Harry felt the soft snort of laughter rather than heard it and it made him smile with relief. He pulled back and slipped his hand into Draco's to get them moving once more. He carried a little more hope in his heart now and crossed his fingers that that spark of optimism lasted through the night.

As they crunched across the gravel towards the stone steps leading up to the large entrance doors, they spotted someone walking out of the darkness to their right.

"Good evening gents."

The two stopped as Neville came walking out of the shadows with a grin on his face, arms full of empty bottles and soil evident on his hands and beneath his fingernails.

"Hullo Neville," Harry greeted in surprise. "What are you doing out so late?"

Neville shifted his awkward load as he came to a stop in front of them. "Could ask you the same thing," he countered good-naturedly.

Harry tried to smile but it felt stiff. "Just visiting Draco's parents."

"Oh?" Neville's brow rose. "And did it go well?"

"Er, yeah," Harry replied self-consciously.

"As well as can be expected," Draco interjected smoothly, a slight smirk on his face.

Harry looked at his mate and was immensely impressed with his stoic demonstration of false nonchalance.

Neville's easy grin instantly returned. "Yeah, I can imagine." He shifted his load again, the glass bottles clinking together. "I've been chosen by Professor Sprout to feed the Midnight Bottle Brush plants in Greenhouse Four. It's quite an honour really."

"So… your job is to come out here at midnight every night and water some plants?" Harry asked dubiously.

Neville laughed. "There's more to it than that, but yeah… They're very temperamental plants and are used in loads of potions."

Draco nodded knowingly and Harry thought with embarrassment that he probably should've known that.

The three began to walk up the steps and into the school, the massive oak doors whooshing closed behind them once they'd entered the entrance hall.

"So… how is it living together?" Neville asked with a teasing grin as they began to climb the first set of stairs. "Any domestic rows yet?"
"What?" Harry replied distractedly as the question pulled his mind away from mulling over the Nundu situation again.

Neville glanced at him. "You all right Harry? You seem a little… on edge."

Harry shook his head as though attempting to shake the thoughts clear out of his mind. "Yeah I'm fine, just uh… just a bit tired. Not usually up this late."

Neville nodded silently but Harry didn't think he was entirely convinced. It made him wish he had Draco's acting ability.

Draco slipped a hand into Harry's as they paused in the corridor where the three were to part ways; Neville to head up to Gryffindor Tower and Harry and Draco to their third floor living quarters.

"Goodnight Neville," Harry said with as much normality as he could muster, even managing a small smile.

"Goodnight Harry," he said and then added with a nod, "Malfoy."

Draco dipped his head in return before directing Harry away and into the adjoining passageways which led to their private rooms.

"Good show Potter," he muttered with a roll of his eyes.

Harry glared. "Sorry that lying doesn't come quite as easily to me as it does you," he retorted sharply.

Draco looked at him as they turned the corner. "I was being facetious."

"Oh." Harry bit his lip as he withdrew his wand and touched it to their door. "Sorry."

The two walked inside and, while Harry unclasped his cloak and tossed it haphazardly over a chair, Draco busily put up a strong silencing charm over the door in conjunction with his usual locking spells.

Harry sat down on the end of the bed, leaning back on his hands braced behind him. "I thought you didn't want to talk about it anymore tonight?" he asked, nodding at the formidable silencing spell.

Draco finished casting and began to remove his cloak, sharp gaze on Harry's. "That's not why I placed a silencing charm on the door."

Harry's eyes widened and he promptly sat up, a sudden energy stringing his body tight as he took in his mate's predatory gaze. It had been a long time since he'd felt such strong desire and he was instantly wide awake.

Draco neatly hung his travelling cloak on the coat rack near the door before stalking towards Harry, hungry intent written all over his face.

Harry licked his lips as he tilted his head back to look up at his mate. Draco's expression seemed to say 'your move Potter' and Harry's lips twitched into a smirk at the implied challenge.

Draco was right; enough talking for tonight - and what better stress reliever was there than sex?

Harry moved his hands to the outsides of Draco's thighs and then slowly slid them upwards over his black trousers, the warmth of Draco's skin seeping through to his hands. His fingers dragged over the black leather belt before touching upon the deep blue shirt that was neatly tucked into the waistband of his expensive trousers. Harry glanced up with a wicked smile as he carefully untucked Draco's
shirt, fingertips lightly skimming over bits of exposed skin, and then started on the shiny row of shirt buttons.

Draco's breathing faltered at the contact and his eyes fell closed as he tipped his head back.

He made such an arousing picture that Harry was suddenly in no mood to take things slow. He unbuttoned the top button and then dropped his hands to slide eager palms up over Draco's flat abdomen to his chest and then outwards to push the shirt open, revealing more delicious pale skin to Harry's eager eyes. Draco didn't have any scars but there was a smattering of freckles and a tempting trail of pale blond hair that only served to enhance his mate's masculine appeal.

Harry pushed the shirt off of Draco's shoulders and let it flutter to the ground before reaching for the hem of his own jumper and roughly pulling it over his head, uncaring of his glasses getting caught up in the process as he dumped the lot onto the floor.

Even without his glasses he could see Draco's responding smirk. Harry scooted back on the bed and lay down, staring back at his mate in invitation.

Draco made a rough sound deep in his throat before climbing onto the bed and crawling forward to hover over Harry's prone body. Harry hurriedly reached up to pull Draco down on top of him, snaking his arms around his warm torso and dragging him in for a deep kiss.

He nearly sighed at the release of tension that simple act caused; his whole focus now on pleasure and touch and taste instead of frazzled nerves and explosive tempers.

Draco's firm body rested perfectly in between his parted legs and he arched up into the wonderful weight against his groin. He moaned into Draco's mouth, tongue stroking deeply, rolling his hips up into a hardness that matched his own; his cock achingly full within his trousers. Draco's naked torso felt brilliant against his own; muscles shifting underneath warm, soft skin as he kissed Harry back, moving his hips down into each of Harry's upward rolls.

"What do you want?" Draco asked as he pulled back and searched Harry's face intently.

Harry's eyes opened. "All of it - everything."

Draco made a noise that was part whimper and part breathless moan, the sound going straight to Harry's prick and causing him to firmly thrust upwards, once. Draco quickly knelt up, knees straddling Harry's legs, and began to unbuckle Harry's belt and then unzip his trousers, the ones Draco himself had painstakingly picked out for Harry to wear to the Board meeting. He made quick work of pulling them off and tossing them to the floor.

Draco leaned down to nuzzle his face into Harry's pants, lingering over the damp spot from Harry's leaking erection. He inhaled his mate's scent deeply with a slight moan and kissed the tip of his clothed erection before slipping long fingers into the waistband and pulling them down and off, the discarded pants now joining the rest of the pile on the floor.

Harry had been watching with rapt attention and once Draco had divested him of every stitch of clothing he had on, he quickly sat up and reached for Draco's belt. Draco knelt up and Harry pressed a tender kiss to Draco's stomach, right over the trail of blond hair leading down into his trousers, the scent of his mate's arousal evident even through his clothing. The smell seemed to surge through Harry's body almost like euphoria, causing his body to hum and ache with need.

Harry lowered the zip and then pushed everything down to pool around Draco's knees. He looked at the long, curved erection standing stiffly in front of him and flicked his gaze up to Draco's expectant
face before returning to stare at Draco's flushed cock, licking his lips in anticipation, heart pounding.

He leaned forward and licked upwards from the base of his mate's shaft, all the way up until he hit the head, and then wrapped his lips around it and sucked greedily, the salty tang bursting onto his tongue, causing his mouth to water.

Draco’s hands quickly moved to Harry's head, fingers sliding through the thick strands and gripping tightly as he moaned.

His mate's reaction spurred Harry on and reassured him that he wasn't completely useless at this. He'd never done this before so he knew he would have to learn as he went, guided by Draco's responses as well as what he knew he himself liked.

Harry's hands moved around to knead the soft flesh of Draco's rounded arse as his mate thrust shallowly into his mouth in tiny pulses, clearly trying to hold back so that he didn't choke him. Harry hummed around Draco's cock as he stroked the base with his right hand and moved his mouth up and down as far as he could, firmly tonguing the underside on each upward slide, the stiff shaft quickly becoming wet with saliva and aiding the smooth glide of Harry's movements.

Draco's breathing had sped up and turned shallow, fingers tensing and releasing in Harry's hair like a cat kneading its claws. He bit off a moan and suddenly pulled back, holding Harry's head firmly away from his flushed prick.

"That was close," he gasped weakly, eyes still closed in concentration.

Harry smiled smugly and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand as he watched his mate take a moment to compose himself. Draco finally opened sharp, silver eyes that quickly and intently zeroed in on Harry. Harry felt his mouth go dry at the expression on his mate's face; it was all arousal and fierce possession, and Harry's cock twitched in response.

Draco's full lips quirked with the tiniest hint of a smirk before he stood and removed the remainder of his clothing, penetrating gaze still on Harry as he squirmed expectantly.

"You haven't done this before have you?" Draco asked quietly as he removed his wand from his discarded trousers.

Harry shook his head, swallowing. "H-have you?"

Draco smiled a little as he crawled back over him, wand in hand. "I've had one or two practice sessions, most Alphas do." Grey eyes tracked Harry's captivated expression. "I don't want to hurt you."

Harry smiled and laid his head back on the pillow. "You won't."

Harry could see just how much his words, and the implied trust they carried, had affected his mate. Especially after everything they'd been through that night.

Harry's expression softened. "What's this for then?" he asked, meaning to distract his mate as he touched a finger to Draco's wand.

Draco blinked shiny grey eyes and then his playful smirk swiftly returned. "For this," he replied, raising his wand and whispering a few quiet words.

Harry watched, fascinated, as a healthy dollop of thick, clear liquid formed in Draco's cupped hand. "Ah... a lubricant spell."
"And your new best friend Potter."

Harry grinned and then promptly gasped as Draco dipped one lube covered finger to trace down the crack of his arse. "That's cold," he complained. Despite his grousing, Harry parted his legs to give his mate easier access. Harry emitted another gasp – for entirely different reasons – when Draco's slick finger gently circled his hole.

"Feel good?" Draco asked with a knowing look.

"Yes," Harry gasped as Draco's finger continued to stroke up and down and then circle the rim.

"More?"

Harry quickly nodded and then arched his neck, clutching onto the bedclothes beneath him as Draco's finger gently pushed its way inside his body. "Fuck..." he gasped as the pleasure washed over him, his cock leaking copiously onto his stomach.

Draco pushed his finger in and out, slowly, stretching and rotating as carefully and thoroughly as he could, then adding a second finger and gently repeating.

Harry was a mess; feet flat on the bed as he pushed into the brilliant pumping of those long fingers, blankets fisted in taut hands and eyes clenched shut in pure bliss. The addition of a third finger didn't even faze him as he lost himself in the heady fog of pleasure.

"Fuck... Harry, you look so good..." Draco uttered, his voice low, nearly gravelly with arousal.

"I... I'm not going to last if you keep doing that," Harry cautioned, eyes still closed. "Please..."

Draco obviously didn't need telling twice as he instantly withdrew his fingers.

Harry opened his eyes and raised his head off of the pillow to watch as Draco used the rest of the lube to coat his own prick which was bobbing rigidly in front of him. Harry had to swallow and nearly look away. He was already on the edge of losing it completely, his entire body strung tight and humming with a tingly anticipation and aching with need. His body's demand for this to happen was definitely outweighing any anxiety or hesitation.

Harry blinked and came back to himself as Draco gently guided him to turn over onto his hands and knees.

"It's easier this way for the first time," Draco murmured into his ear as he curled his body over Harry's, his slickened erection sliding tantalisingly between Harry's arse cheeks.

Harry nodded in understanding, pushing back a little to encourage the delicious sliding movement of Draco's heavy cock over his arse and bollocks.

Draco smirked into the back of Harry's neck and then placed a tender kiss to his warm skin before kneeling up and taking hold of his prick. "Ready?" he asked before going further.

"Yeah," Harry rasped out, facing front and dropping his head down, eyes closed, trying not to tense.

Draco stroked one hand down Harry's spine in a soothing motion as he nudged the head of his cock at Harry's loosened entrance and pushed.

Harry inhaled sharply at the pain of Draco breaching his body; like a burning/stinging/stretching intrusion. He bit his lip and held his breath as Draco pushed the swollen head of his cock in and then
stilled, Harry's body holding his member tightly in place once he'd pressed in past the yielding rim.

Harry exhaled shakily and took another deep breath, trying to relax, waiting for the initial pain to recede. Draco stroked another comforting hand down his back. Harry could feel him trembling with the effort to remain still.

Harry took another steadying breath. He could feel his body slowly accepting the intrusion, which felt uncomfortable rather than painful now. "You can move," he instructed in a whisper.

He could feel Draco hesitate and then slowly continue pushing forwards, until centimetre by centimetre he was all the way in. Harry suddenly felt the wiry coarseness of Draco's pubic hair pressed against the soft, sensitive skin of his arse and, for some reason, this renewed his waning arousal once more; the image in his head of his mate buried deep within his body was intoxicating.

Harry moaned under his breath and pushed back experimentally, his body relaxing further and further as his arousal began to enflame again.

Draco placed a hand on either side of Harry's hips and pulled out halfway then firmly slid back in in one smooth motion.

Harry moaned loudly and dropped his forehead to the pillow, his arms braced on either side of his head. There was no more pain now, just an amazing fullness that made him feel connected to his mate in an entirely new way.

Draco curled over his body and kissed the nape of Harry's neck as he continued his slow, deep thrusting movements, rocking Harry's body forwards, causing his mate's breath to hitch and to press back against him in counterpoint.

Draco groaned and reached around Harry's hip to enclose his mate's warm, rigid prick in his hand.

Harry gasped as his eyes flew open. "I… I'm going to come if you do that."

"That's the point Potter," Draco replied breathlessly as he tightened his fist and gave Harry's cock a firm stroke.

Harry moaned loudly and didn't think he could handle any more; the full thrusting feeling of Draco's considerable cock inside him in conjunction with the amazing stroking on his own prick; so sensitive and hard that he felt ready to explode.

Draco continued to stroke and push, his breathing shallow and fast, damp forehead pressed to Harry's shoulder blade as he moved over him.

Harry shook his head with a helpless whimper - and decided to let himself go and stop trying to hold back. Draco seemed to sense this and suddenly wrapped an arm around his waist and hauled him up and back so that Harry was now sitting in his lap, still impaled on his cock as Draco began to thrust up into him; fast and hard.

Harry cried out as Draco's solid member seemed to touch upon something deep inside of him that sent sparks throughout his body and exploding in front of his eyes. He quickly reached one hand back to balance himself and enclosed his other hand around his reddened prick to continue stroking at a rapid pace.

Harry began to whimper and gasp and moan and make all manner of noises as he felt his orgasm begin to build. His body tensed and his eyes clenched shut as he dropped his head back onto Draco's shoulder. Quite suddenly he reached the pinnacle and tipped over the edge with a shout as his cock
began to spurt thick, white ropes of semen out over his hand and onto the bedclothes.

Draco’s breath caught and faltered behind him and then he roughly thrust up twice more before freezing, thigh muscles straining, as he emptied himself inside of Harry with a muted groan. Harry distantly felt the pulsing of Draco's cock within his tight channel and the feeling prolonged his own orgasm; his cock giving one last feeble squirt out over his fist.

Draco released the breath he'd been holding with a gasp then wrapped both arms around Harry's chest, holding him tight while he caught his breath.

Harry swallowed and allowed himself to just melt back into his mate's embrace, feeling utterly spent and unable to actually form any words.

Draco nuzzled his nose into the side of Harry's damp neck and inhaled reverently before kissing his heated skin.

Harry smiled softly and hummed in appreciation.

"We'd better get under the quilt before you get chilled," Draco murmured into his ear.

"Yeah, all right," Harry sighed, still in a sated haze as he carefully extracted himself from Draco's lap.

Draco reached for his wand and cleaned them both with a quick spell before sliding under the bedclothes and pulling his mate into his chest, legs entangling, heartbeat strong and comforting against Harry's bare back.

Harry relaxed into him with another sigh of contentment as his heartrate began to slow back to a normal pace once more. He could feel the rest of the world threatening to push back in to his mind and crowd out this shiny new bliss, and he just wanted to stay in his bubble of happiness a little longer.

"That was… good," he commented nonchalantly.

A huff of indignant laughter blew across the back of Harry's neck, causing him to grin.

"That was fucking fantastic and you know it Potter."

Harry laughed. "Yeah all right, let it be known that Harry Potter agrees with Draco Malfoy."

Draco chuckled, warm lips pressed to Harry's skin. "It will be even better when you're in heat."

"Really?" Harry replied dubiously, trying not to tense at the mention of another heat cycle. He was still dreading it after the last one. "How do you know?"

"Because," Draco replied quietly, lips moving against his nape, "you won't require any artificial lubrication or preparation. There won't be any pain at all - only pleasure. Which will go on and on for hours."

Harry felt his mate's spent cock give a little twitch and he knew how much Draco was looking forward to one day spending his heat with him. After what they’d just done, he had no reservations whatsoever of going into heat around his mate; he knew Draco would take care of him. It was just the fear and uncertainty of when and where his next heat cycle would hit and the loss of control he'd felt - and the loss of control of those around him.
Harry shivered slightly and shifted back into Draco's warm embrace, his hand tightening on Draco's forearm, which was draped over his chest.

"Are you cold?"

Harry forced away any further thoughts about his heat; they had bigger problems at the moment. "No, I'm fine, you're like my own personal heater." He sighed and stared out the moonlit window. "What are we going to do?" he eventually whispered, struggling to keep the helpless sorrow out of his voice.

Draco sighed and shifted behind him. "Whatever we can," he finally replied.

Harry closed his eyes, exhausted; mentally and physically. He hadn't slept well the night before due to his anxiety over meeting the Board for the first time and now it was already past two in the morning.

Draco's arm tightened around him and he finally drifted off to sleep with a feeling of safety swirling around him.

At least he wasn't alone.

Harry woke late the next morning; the muted autumn sun already streaming through the window and creating a rectangular square of light on the flagstone floor.

Harry rolled onto his back with a yawn, stretching his arms over his head and then wincing a little as his backside came into contact with the mattress.

The bruised feeling made him smile in remembrance.

He turned to Draco's side of the bed to discover that his mate was already up and gone, his half of the bed cold to the touch.

Harry sat up and looked to the small clock on his bedside cabinet. If he hurried he could still make breakfast and ask Dean if he would meet with them at lunch.

Harry threw back the bedclothes and quickly dressed and brushed his teeth, running a comb through his rather hopeless hair as he stared into the mirror with a frown. Draco generally woke before him but he'd never left him before, not since they'd begun sharing a room. He thought it was very odd, especially since last night was the first time they'd had sex and the first time Harry had ever had sex. He had expected to wake with Draco next to him today.

Perhaps he was being silly and overly sentimental but he couldn't help but feel a hollow sense of disappointment.

Harry sighed as he tied the laces on his scuffed school shoes, the weight of last night's other, less pleasant, events settling heavily onto his shoulders, made so much worse by the fact that his mate had apparently decided to leave him to deal with it on his own this morning.

Harry straightened and pressed his lips together as he collected his cloak. He knew dark thoughts
were made worse by an already gloomy mood so he tried to not automatically condemn his mate for his actions. Perhaps Draco just needed some time alone to think, and Harry couldn't begrudge him that.

He slung his school bag up over his shoulder and left the room. The corridors were mostly empty as the majority of students were still having breakfast in the Great Hall.

Harry walked swiftly through the quiet school and down the moving staircases, mind preoccupied with possible questions for Dean and distracting images of last night in bed with Draco. He was surprised that he didn't trip and fall headlong down the stone steps with everything that was going on inside his brain.

Harry walked into the Great Hall and looked to the Gryffindor table, disconcerted to see that his mate wasn't there. He frowned and walked over to take a seat next to Ron (trying his hardest not to wince), and felt a flicker of worry over where Draco could be.

"Tired of each other already, mate?" Ron asked around a mouthful of toast and marmalade.

"What?" Harry turned to him, belatedly realising what he'd said and then dropping his bag to the ground behind him with a loud thunk. "Oh… not sure where Draco's disappeared to this morning actually."

"He's over there," Hermione piped up across from him, tilting her head towards the Slytherin table.

"I thought the two of you were going to have breakfast with us every morning?" Ron said as Harry looked over at the Slytherin table, surprised to see his mate seated with the other eighth years, mid-conversation with Daphne Greengrass.

Harry clenched his jaw to prevent himself from saying anything impulsive. He narrowed his eyes at his mate speaking to Daphne - an Omega no less - and flicked his gaze around the Slytherin table, searching for Daphne's little sister, Astoria. It hadn't escaped Harry's notice that Astoria still flirted with Draco and hung on his every word as though she were still promised to him. His gaze finally landed on her and he found that she wasn't paying Draco the slightest bit of attention; in fact, she seemed to be flirting heavily with a boy in her own year for once.

Slightly placated, Harry forced himself to tear his gaze away from the Slytherin table and reach for the platter of sausages.

"Harry?"

Harry sighed inwardly, not in the mood to deal with a prying Hermione. "Yes?" he replied without looking up, loading his plate with food.

"Is everything all right between the two of you?"

"Yup," Harry replied shortly as he poured some pumpkin juice into his goblet.

There was a slight pause and then, "Neville said he saw you last night, coming back from Malfoy Manor."

Harry set down his knife and fork with a heavy sigh and looked up. "And?"

Hermione bit her lip and glanced at Ron, who pretended not to listen, clearly unwilling to be involved but also wanting to hear the ensuing conversation. "Well, he just mentioned that you seemed a little… tense, and not quite yourself."
"What would you expect me to be after sitting through an evening making small talk with Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy?" Harry countered. It wasn't exactly a lie, but it wasn't the truth either.

"It was awfully late…"

"Midnight isn't late when you're eighteen," Harry ground out in irritation. "You're not my bloody mother 'Mione."

"Hey, she's just worried about you," Ron interjected quietly.

Harry knew he should leave before he said something he regretted. He should've known coming to the Hall was a mistake, he was too distracted and stressed to attempt to hold normal conversation with people who didn't have anywhere near the level of complications he had to deal with at the moment.

It seemed eighth year was going to be just as difficult as every other year he'd endured so far at Hogwarts.

Harry swivelled on the bench seat and grabbed up his heavy school bag before standing. He reached over and snatched two pieces of buttered toast from the plate.

"Harry, don't leave," Hermione said, startled, eyes wide and pleading. "We hardly see you anymore. We don't have to talk about whatever's bothering you..."

Harry forced a smile and shook his head. "It's all right, I'm not very good company this morning. I'll catch up with you later."

Hermione looked as though she were going to say more but Harry just gave a quick wave and strode off down the table, pausing next to Dean Thomas.

"Hey Dean, do you think I could speak with you later? Maybe at lunch?" he asked, hoping his tone was neutral enough not to make him uneasy.

Dean blinked in surprise then smiled. "Sure Harry, something wrong?"

Harry shook his head and tried to match his casual smile. "No, not at all, just some… uh Potions questions," he replied, quickly recalling one of Dean's best subjects. "Meet you in the centre courtyard at lunch then?"

Dean nodded. "It's a date." His eyes widened as he seemed to realise what he'd said as a few heads turned their way with interest. "Well not that sort of date…"

Harry laughed, and it seemed to ease some of his tension, if only for a second. "Yeah I know, see you then."

Dean grinned and turned back to his breakfast as Harry walked off, absently munching on one of his pieces of toast.

He knew he was being petulant but Harry steadfastly refused to glance in Draco's direction as he left the Hall.
Harry could only glare as his mate stood, collected his books, and exited the classroom as swiftly as possible. A mumbled 'see you later,' the only words Harry received before Draco departed. In fact, they were the only words Draco had spoken to him all morning - and now it was lunch time and Harry was to meet Dean in the courtyard. He hadn't even had a chance to remind Draco about the meeting, so it looked like he was on his own.

"What on earth is going on?" Hermione asked in exasperation as she watched Draco's blond head disappear out the door.

Ron cleared his throat as he shoved his books into his tattered school bag. "Yeah, people are beginning to talk, mate. They think you and Malfoy are having problems, and that maybe you've decided against the mateship. I mean, you don't even have a-"

"Ron!" Hermione hissed. "Harry doesn't need to know what people are saying."

"I don't have what?" Harry asked with a frown as he slung his bag over his shoulder and slowly walked with them from the classroom.

"Er…" Ron glanced at Hermione before replying. "A claiming mark."

Harry gaped furiously. "How is that anyone's business?"

"It's not," Hermione responded immediately, glaring at Ron. "It doesn't matter if you ever get one Harry, what matters is that you're happy, and we're worried that… Well, that you're not."

"I'm fine," Harry replied crossly. "And perhaps I do have a claiming mark and it's located somewhere no one can see it!" he added hotly, causing Ron to grimace. Harry rolled his eyes and stopped to face them in the busy corridor. "Look, no relationship is perfect right? We're just trying to work through some… some family stuff. I don't want to end the mateship or anything like that, I want to be with Draco and that isn't going to change, all right?"

Ron nodded while Hermione frowned, looking as though she wanted to say more.

Harry sighed. "Look, I have somewhere to be, I'll talk to you later, okay?" he said, taking a step back, eyes flicking between his two best friends. He knew he couldn't hold them off forever; he would have to tell them something eventually to appease their concern. At least having Lucius and Narcissa as in-laws was an excellent cover story for any tension in his budding relationship with Draco.

"Promise?" Hermione said, a clear warning in her tone.

"Yes, promise," Harry answered quickly as he walked backwards, away from them. "Sorry have to run!"

Harry turned and strode off up the corridor, leaving his friends staring after him. He would need to discuss all this with his mate to ensure that they had matching stories, he knew how determined Hermione could get when she was suspicious about something; a bit like a dog with a bone. It was all very inconvenient when you were trying to keep an important secret. He suddenly knew how Draco had felt back in sixth year when Harry had been suspicious of all of his mysterious activities.

Harry frowned in thought as he walked, wondering where Draco was having lunch, and what it was
that had caused him to put up a wall between them this morning. His insecure subconscious tried to tell him that perhaps Draco thought he was lousy in bed, but his more rational side knew that would be the last thing on Draco’s mind right now.

He would have to force his obstinate mate to talk to him later, but right now he needed to focus on interrogating Dean without coming across as completely mental.

Harry walked into the chilly courtyard; the late September sun hidden by a thick layer of clouds. He paused under the stone archway while he pulled his cloak tighter around himself. He quickly spotted Dean seated on a bench underneath one of the large oak trees and made his way over. He sat down next to the tall Gryffindor with a friendly smile, placing his heavy bag on the crushed gravel at their feet.

"Hey Harry," Dean smiled in greeting as he removed a pair of grey woollen gloves from his bag and slipped them on.

"Good idea," Harry said, turning to withdraw a pair of fuzzy, black gloves from his own bag.

"So… was it the Potions essay you needed help with?" Dean asked, reaching for the heavy textbook sitting next to him on the bench.

"Erm, no not really," Harry answered awkwardly. "I actually wanted to speak to you about the uh… attack."

Dean’s eyes widened and he glanced around the nearly empty courtyard before replying. "I already apologised for that, I… I don't know what else-"

"Oh!" Harry quickly interrupted, cheeks heating. "No, not… not that. The attack that happened to you near the lake."

"Oh." Dean’s expression cleared and he smiled in embarrassment. "Sorry."

Harry couldn’t help but smile back. "Don't worry about it."

"What did you want to know?" Dean asked, slipping his Potions book back into his bag.

Harry was relieved to see that it didn’t look as though Dean was reluctant to discuss the incident. "I was just wondering if anyone had been caught yet or if you had any idea who it was?"

Dean blinked in surprise. "No on both counts I'm afraid. I don’t think they're even investigating it anymore. To be fair, there wasn't much information to go on."

"What do you remember?"

Dean sighed and looked at the ground as he shook his head. "Not much. I was walking near the lake and had stopped to take off my scarf because I was getting a little warm and next thing I knew, something had slammed into my back, throwing me forward onto the ground. Everything went black after that."

Harry tried to picture the scene in his head. "Do you think it was a spell that pushed you or a person?"

Dean frowned in thought. "I think it may have been a spell because, from what I remember, it was a single point of contact, not like two hands pushing against me. And it was quite strong."
"Did you hear anyone casting?" Harry asked. "To at least identify if it was male or female?"

"No." Dean promptly shook his head. "If it was a spell then it was done non-verbally."

Harry nodded, absorbing every detail. "So in your mind, could it have been a wild animal or something from the Forest, or are you fairly certain it was a witch or wizard?"

Dean smiled, bemused. "Why the sudden interest?"

Harry shrugged. "You know me, can't let a mystery go unsolved."

Dean chuckled. "Yeah, I do know you."

Harry smiled and noticed a few students openly watching them with interest from the other side of the courtyard. Harry narrowed his eyes at them before turning back to Dean.

"So… no wild animals or magical creatures then?" he prompted.

Dean leaned against the back of the bench and crossed his legs at the ankle. "No I don't think so. There was no noise. Whoever it was, they were completely silent, can't think of many animals around here like that."

Harry nodded in agreement. "So they probably used some sort of powerful form of Stupefy to knock you out first," he mused aloud.

"But why?" Dean replied, staring unseeing across the quiet courtyard. "Why stun me and then harm me while I'm unconscious, but not severely enough to kill me? What would be the point?"

"And then leave you out in the open so that someone could find you?" Harry added, just as puzzled. He shook his head and then removed a notebook and quill from his bag. Spreading it open on his lap, he began to scratch out some notes. "Okay, so what time of day was the attack?"

A slow smile spread across Dean's face as he shook his head. "Merlin Harry, perhaps you should work at the Prophet after you leave here."

"Not a chance," Harry laughed.

Dean grinned. "The attack happened just before lunch on the Saturday," he said.

Harry jotted that down then chewed on the end of his quill. "Is there anyone here you would have reason to be suspicious of?" he asked, glancing up.

Dean shifted uncomfortably. "Well… I suppose the only person I would be somewhat suspicious of is Malfoy."

Harry had been expecting that but it still wrenched at him to hear it. The urge to protect his mate was definitely a strong one. "Because of what happened between you and me?" he asked, trying his best to sound impartial.

Dean nodded, looking apologetic. "He's the only one that I can think of that would have a plausible motive. No one knows that I suspect him though," he quickly added. "I didn't know about the two of you at the time of the attack so when McGonagall and the Aurors asked the same question, I didn't have an answer."

Harry raised his brow in surprise. "And you haven't gone back to them since you found out?"
Dean shrugged and glanced up at the watching students who were too far away to overhear anything. "I didn't want to tell McGonagall what I'd done to you; I didn't want to be expelled." He shrugged, looking a little shame-faced. "I figured if it had been Malfoy, I couldn't blame him for wanting to get some sort of revenge on me for what I did to you, and if I just left you alone then he probably wouldn't do it again."

Harry frowned. "That's no excuse," he said. "I would never allow a mate of mine to do something like that."

Dean nodded. "I know, unfortunately it's the only hint of a lead that I have. This might have to be one mystery that goes unsolved - unless it happens again."

"Yeah, I guess so." Harry sighed and forced a smile, disappointed that he hadn't uncovered anything of use. "Thanks for talking to me."

The two Gryffindors stood and collected their things.

"Going to the Hall for lunch?" Dean asked.

"Yeah, you?"

"Yeah, I'm famished."

"I'll walk with you," Harry said as he fell into step beside his house-mate.

"Are you sure Malfoy won't mind?" Dean asked and Harry wasn't entirely sure whether Dean was joking or not.

"Of course not," Harry replied easily. "He's not like that."

Dean snorted as he slanted a glance at him. "All Alphas are like that Harry. No exceptions."

"Draco's not." Harry shrugged.

Dean chuckled and shook his head. "I suppose I'll just have to trust you to keep a short lead on him."

Harry glared but couldn't help breaking into a grin as he pictured Draco in his Nundu form wearing a collar with Harry holding the lead. "I must confess Draco was a little bit jealous of Blaise wanting to go to Hogsmeade with me, so I guess he's not completely innocent."

Not to mention how Draco growled at the other Nundu at the Board meeting, but Harry couldn't volunteer that particular piece of information.

"Jealousy does strange things to a person," Dean commented wryly as they walked through the quiet school corridor.

Harry suddenly stopped in his tracks, eyes widening and mind ticking over faster than he could keep up.

What if someone had attacked Dean, not to get revenge on him, but to get revenge on Draco?

"Harry?" Dean had stopped a few paces ahead and turned when he noticed that Harry was no longer beside him. "Something wrong?"

"Uh…" Harry blinked, eyes a little glazed as he swiftly began to piece together the puzzle in his head. "No, you go ahead; I just remembered something I need to do."
"You sure?" Dean asked with concern.

Harry nodded and wheeled around to walk in the opposite direction. He ducked into the first empty classroom he came across and closed the door, leaning back against it, heart pounding.

"The Greengrasses…" Harry whispered aloud, staring unseeing across the empty room.

Astoria Greengrass had been promised to Draco almost since birth. Draco had mentioned that Astoria's family knew about the existence of Nundu already, which was why she was a good match for him. Astoria took every opportunity to flirt with Draco and spend time with him; she was clearly infatuated with him…

Could that pretty little blonde really have orchestrated such a vicious attack just because Draco had broken her heart though? An implication that would mean Draco's imminent execution and death?

Harry frowned; he didn't want to believe it but he also knew that it was a theory worth investigating.

He needed to speak to his mate; Draco would have a better idea of what Astoria was capable of.

Harry shoved away from the door and opened it, stepping out into the quiet corridor and swiftly making his way up to the third floor corridor. If Draco was attempting to avoid him, then he probably wouldn't be taking lunch in the Great Hall. Hopefully he had chosen their room to hide out in.

Harry touched his wand to the wooden door of their room and it instantly swung open.

Draco was seated inside at the large desk near the window, a single plate of cold chicken sandwiches and biscuits next to his open schoolwork and a steaming pot of tea.

"There you are," Harry exclaimed with relief, shutting the door behind him and dropping his bag to the floor, glad that he wouldn't have to run all over the castle trying to locate him before afternoon classes began.

"Mm hmm…” Draco hummed in response, not bothering to look up.

Harry scowled at the side of Draco's head, his temper quickly rising; he was tired, stressed, hungry - and he'd had enough of his mate's shit.

Harry clenched his jaw and stormed over to the desk, his magic crackling outwards and abruptly pushing all of Draco's books and papers off the surface of the desk, the plate of food and tea things all crashing alongside it to the flagstone floor and smashing into pieces.

Draco jumped back in his chair, trying to escape the hot tea splashing everywhere, and then glared up at Harry. "What was that for?" he demanded furiously.

"I am trying to get your attention you complete wanker!" Harry bit out roughly, his hands balled into fists. "If breaking things is the only way to get it then that's what I'll fucking do!"

Draco's expression immediately shuttered. "You have my attention now Potter, what do you want?"

Harry saw red. He wanted to scream and throw something, preferably at the cool, distant expression on his mate's face. He turned away from Draco and paced across the room, one hand pulling at his hair fretfully.

"What do I want?" he exclaimed angrily, spinning to face him again. "I want my fucking mate back! I want to work together to figure this out. I also want to go back in time to this morning and not wake
up alone! You fucking abandoned me and then ignored me all day as though I'd done something wrong." Harry exhaled heavily and turned away, body shaking, his doubt and insecurity and hurt all creeping back in and pushing out the anger, leaving him feeling suddenly defeated. "I dunno, maybe you're just having second thoughts about us…"

Harry heard a sharp inhalation and then the scraping of a chair. He raised his head and caught Draco's stricken expression before he was firmly pulled into his mate's arms and held tight.

Harry could physically feel the tension drain out of his body like water. He'd forgotten that being separated from his mate would have such a tangible effect on him; that his health and well-being were actually tied up with Draco's proximity and the degree of contact in their relationship. It was just one of the side-effects of having a mate which he wasn't accustomed to yet.

"I'm sorry," Draco mumbled into his hair. "I can't believe I made you feel that way, that couldn't be further from the truth. I... I'm not used to this; I'm used to working things out on my own and keeping to myself when things get difficult."

Harry pulled back and looked his mate in the eye. "And keeping your emotions to yourself?"

Draco nodded stiffly and Harry sensed how hard it was for his mate to admit that.

"Bad Alpha," Harry whispered with faux disapproval, an affectionate smile beginning to tug at his lips, the fight having completely drained out of him at the sight of Draco's exposed vulnerability.

"I'm clearly not handling the relationship thing very well, am I?"

Harry shook his head. "It's okay, this is all new to me too."

"It's not okay," Draco continued with a slight frown. "Regardless of my shortcomings due to my rather unconventional upbringing, my mate should always come first," he said, as though reciting from the Alpha Handbook.

Harry snorted. "Don't be daft. Equal partnership, remember?"

Draco's expression softened as he smiled a little and Harry was so relieved to see it that he pressed a kiss to his lips, and then another one, just because he could, before taking a step back.

"There's something I need to talk to you about," he said earnestly, wanting to get back to the original reason for trying to find his mate.

Harry walked over to perch on the edge of the wide desk, waving a hand over the mess on the floor to wandlessly clean it up and set things back to the way they were before he'd thrown a paddy. Unfortunately the food and tea were a lost cause.

Draco sat next to him, crossing his arms over his chest, waiting for Harry to continue.

"I spoke to Dean," he began.

"I know," Draco cut in. "Do you know how many Slytherins warned me that you were planning to replace me?"

Harry glanced at him, unable to suppress a grin. "Hardly surprising when we suddenly have breakfast at separate tables and don't speak to each other," he pointed out. "You were invited, if you remember correctly. You could've been there to stop any nasty rumours from spreading."
"I imagine whatever information Mr. Thomas had to provide, it wouldn't have come so easily if I had been involved," Draco drawled in response.

Harry smiled. "Yeah, you're probably right."

"And did he have anything worth knowing?"

Harry felt a flicker of nervousness, wondering how Draco was going to take his speculation. "No not really, but I sort of had an epiphany of sorts while I was speaking to him."

Draco arched a brow, a clear indication for him to continue.

Harry swallowed and looked at the damp spot on the floor where the spilt tea had begun to soak into the stone. "Well… I began to wonder if perhaps Dean was attacked in the way he was because someone wanted it to look as though you had done it; in order to frame you. Implicate you," he modified, unsure as to whether 'frame' was a Muggle term or not.

"I came to the same conclusion," Draco replied with a nod, tucking his hair back behind his ear when it came loose to fall over his eye.

"Really?" Harry replied. "Did you come up with a possible suspect too?"

"It had to have been someone who knows about my true nature," he replied slowly. "There aren't that many at Hogwarts whom are acquainted with the truth. Unless it was someone outside of the school population, in which case, we don't have any possible leads."

"But who on the outside would want to do that?" Harry replied with a frown. "Surely a student here at Hogwarts has more motive than some random clan member?"

Draco turned to him with a raised brow. "Such as?"

Harry hesitated, biting his bottom lip. "Erm, someone like Astoria Greengrass?"

Draco's grey eyes widened. "You suspect Astoria?" he replied, taken aback. "Why?"

Harry was surprised that it obviously hadn't crossed Draco's mind. "Because she was promised to you. Any time I saw the two of you together, she seemed to be quite taken with you. Plus her family knows the truth."

Draco's forehead creased in consideration. "Yes, her older brother and father are both in the clan," he said distractedly. "But… I don't think Astoria would be capable of such a thing. You don't know her; she's very sweet and caring, not vindictive in the slightest."

Harry ignored the hot flash of jealousy that curdled his insides at Draco's charitable description of his ex. He swallowed the sharp retort that rose unbidden to his lips, surprised by its intensity.

"But she must be heartbroken that you chose me," he said instead. "She had her whole life planned out and now she has to find someone else."

"She always knew there was a chance we wouldn't marry though," Draco replied slowly, thoughtfully. "She has yet to come into her inheritance, and if she had become a Beta, then our arrangement would have been negated."

Harry frowned. "But how likely is that?"

"Not very," Draco admitted with a sigh, leaning back on his hands behind him. "Her family is one of
the oldest Pureblood families, the Greengrass' go back generations. Odds are that she will be an Omega."

"But not a guarantee," Harry added, considering. He looked at Draco. "So you don't think there's a chance that she could have done it? Or asked someone else to do it for her?"

"I sincerely doubt it."

"Couldn't we just use Veritaserum on her?" Harry asked.

Draco shook his head. "Veritaserum doesn't work on our kind. It can also make us quite ill."

"But Astoria's not...?" Harry frowned in confusion.

"No, but her father is and it's been proven to be less effective even in the same family, and I wouldn't wish to base our case on a method that can be easily manipulated."

"Well fuck," Harry said with frustration.

They fell into a thoughtful silence for a few minutes.

"But perhaps we shouldn't discount her completely," Draco eventually said with a concentrated frown.

Harry looked up. "What makes you say that?"

"She told me whom her parents had selected to replace me as her future intended and she wasn't happy with their choice."

Harry's eyes lit with a tiny spark of hope. "Really? Well, that's something, isn't it?"

"It could be," Draco replied pensively.

"Anything is possible when dealing with a Slytherin, right?" Harry replied with a slight smirk.

....

"Damn you and your bloody optimism Potter."

Harry glanced over at his mate and gave his hand a comforting squeeze. They were just about to walk into the designated meeting room at Sloane Estate for Draco's official Board enquiry. The meeting was being held in the Board Chair's personal estate home, which managed to comfort Harry a little; he sensed that the man had a soft spot for his mate and he hoped Hugh would try his utmost to protect Draco from a guilty sentence.

Harry swallowed and tried not to think about what would happen if Draco was found guilty, he'd been avoiding envisioning such a thing as it was all too horrible to comprehend. He would have to watch them execute his mate before being dragged off and forced to live out the remainder of his life with some other Alpha. A part of him couldn't believe he'd aligned himself with a group of people who seemed so uncaring and sadistic - and yet another part of him knew he wouldn't change being Draco's mate for anything.
This past week had shown him just how well-suited they were for each other and that, despite going through a tremendously difficult situation, they were still somehow able to overcome the strain and tension, and their relationship was all the stronger for it.

"Optimism is the only weapon you have sometimes," Harry muttered in response, eyeing the deep blue double doors at the end of the hall.

"Spoken like a true Gryffindor," Draco replied but his tone was lacking its usual bite.

Harry stopped them just before the doors, ignoring the small house-elf who had been leading them and who was now glaring at the delay.

"It's going to be fine," Harry said firmly, reaching up to grip Draco's chin with his fingers and turning his face towards him. Whatever Harry was feeling, he knew he had to try to remain calm and confident - for Draco's sake. It was his mate's life on the line, not his. Draco had the most to lose, the most to fear. "I won't leave your side in there," Harry promised.

Draco swallowed and nodded, and Harry could see the warring emotions in his eyes; fear and anxiety, and struggling to rein it all in in true Malfoy fashion. Draco had stopped trying to shut Harry out after that first day, but he still had problems freely acknowledging what it was he was feeling. Harry had come to realise that Draco was scared to show any vulnerability in fear of it changing Harry's opinion of him, or of appearing weak to his mate. The combination of being an Alpha and a Malfoy was an emotionally stunting mix, and although it could be utterly frustrating, Harry also couldn't help but find it endearing too.

"Have you ever known me to lose?" Harry added lightly, forcing a smile.

That seemed to snap Draco out of his mounting haze of panic and he took Harry's hand in his and squeezed it. "What could go wrong with the Boy-Who-Lived on my side, right?"

Harry smiled encouragingly before turning to the house-elf and giving him a nod to show that they were ready to proceed.

The little elf, clad only in two washcloths held up by a thin piece of pink rope, opened the doors with a snap of his bony fingers.

Harry took a deep breath and let it out slowly as they walked forward, his heart pounding furiously in his chest. It was a much smaller group this time that was gathered before the Board. No children were present and almost all of the assembly were in their cat form, but seated and still, just the odd twitch and flicker of a long tail disturbing the stillness.

Harry spotted Narcissa seated in a chair off to the side, her pale blonde head held high and expression focussed. There was a large, elegant cat standing next to her which Harry could only assume was Lucius. There were two empty chairs set up in front of the Board who were sat behind a long black desk in the centre of the rather cold room.

Harry lifted his chin and moved forward beside Draco, who at a glance was cool and composed, only his tight hold on Harry's hand giving him away to be anything other than perfectly poised.

They took their seats in the two chairs and nodded in greeting at the silently observing Board.

Hugh Sloan cleared his throat and shifted some parchment in front of him. He raised sombre eyes to Harry and Draco. "I wish it was under more agreeable circumstances that we meet again gentlemen, but as a serious accusation has been brought forth we must of course investigate its legitimacy."
"Of course," Draco accepted steadily, gaze unwavering.

Hugh nodded at him and glanced down at the documents in front of him. "Now, the student in question who was attacked is not one of our clan and so we cannot question him with regards to this matter."

"I spoke to him sir," Harry interjected as respectfully as he could. "Without revealing the truth behind my interest of course."

Hugh looked up. "And?"

"He couldn't remember much of the attack, only that it was most likely a spell that knocked him out first and not physical force."

"But no details on the actual attacker?" Perpetua Bagnold asked.

Harry shook his head. "No, I'm afraid not."

Hugh sighed heavily. "I must ask if you have any evidence at all of this attack being carried out by anyone other than young Mr. Malfoy."

Harry shared a look with his mate and Draco turned to the Board Chair.

"We don't have physical evidence or a witness to the attack, but we do have someone whom we suspect," he stated.

"And who is that?" Terence Fancourt asked, quill poised over his parchment.

Draco glanced at Harry before continuing in a strong voice. "Astoria Greengrass."

There were some low rumblings from the gathered clan and Harry had to force himself to keep his gaze facing front; he knew Astoria's parents were most likely present.

The Board members all seemed to be taken off-guard by this statement, some of them glancing at each other with raised brows or frowns of disbelief.

"And what makes you think it was Miss Greengrass?" Sophie McDougal finally asked with narrowed eyes, one hand resting atop her pregnant stomach, thumb rubbing in unconscious circles.

"I was originally promised to her," Draco explained clearly. "She has always been obvious about her attraction to me and often spoke fondly of our future life together. It was clear that she was pleased with the arrangement."

The Board all looked to Harry for a moment and Harry could see their minds working through this new information.

"Astoria, along with the rest of my house-mates, knew of my regard for Harry. I began to spend time with him and I believe she knew of my intentions and that her place by my side was suddenly at risk."

"And so you think that she - in a fit of anger and revenge - attacked a student so that it appeared as though you had done it?" Lorcan Hipwell asked sceptically. "Would she not have simply attacked Mr. Potter instead?"

Harry remembered Lorcan from the last meeting; he'd been the young, horrible Board member who had demanded that Harry be Obliviated.
"You do not simply kill off Harry Potter," Draco replied, a slight smirk quirking his lips and causing Harry to be amazed by his calm demeanour. "If the Dark Lord couldn't do it then a seventeen year old girl certainly wasn't going to achieve it." Draco's expression turned serious once more. "Astoria is one of the very few at Hogwarts who knows of our kind and would know exactly how to implicate me."

"I was told that the victim, this… Dean Thomas," Mr. Fancourt said, glancing down at the parchment in front of him, "had assaulted Mr. Potter only the day before he was attacked. It would seem that you, Mr. Malfoy, have the more likely motive."

Draco staunchly held Mr. Fancourt's gaze. "When the news of Dean Thomas' assault on Harry spread through Slytherin house, I believe that's when Astoria saw her chance."

"May I ask a question Mr. Sloan?" Harry interrupted, looking to the Board Chair.

"You may."

Harry licked his lips and kept his gaze on Hugh, ignoring the suspicious looks from the other Board members. "If Draco, or any other Nundu, transformed into their cat form in order to attack someone in vengeance, tell me, would that person have walked away from the incident?"

Hugh frowned, considering the question.

"Or perhaps a better question would be: has anyone ever walked away from being attacked by a Nundu?" Harry amended, leaning forward in his seat.

Surprisingly it was Lorcan who answered. "The only people to ever survive a Nundu attack are fellow Nundu," he said arrogantly, "and even then, they are almost always severely injured."

Harry privately thought Lorcan looked quite proud of that fact but Harry didn't care in that moment if it supported their case.

"This is true…" Hugh murmured, glancing at the other Board members to ensure that this point had been received by all of them.

"Astoria Greengrass would be capable of using magic to injure another student but I do not think she would have been willing to kill him," Draco added, looking between the Board members, clearly sensing their vacillating positions. "I believe she injured Mr. Thomas with a shallow cutting curse, left him out in the open to ensure that a passerby would happen across him, and then brought her accusation to the Board in order to enact her revenge on me." Draco paused and arched a brow. "She was the one who brought forth the accusation, was she not?"

Harry held his breath while Hugh pressed his lips together, deliberating.

"Yes she was," Sophie McDougal replied stridently before Hugh could make a sound.

Harry started and spun around in his seat when there was a very loud roar from behind them which seemed to vibrate through the floor itself. He immediately withdrew his wand and held it clenched in one hand as he quickly tried to seek out the source of the outrage. Draco, meanwhile, had stood up out of his seat and placed a knee on the side of Harry's chair, hovering over him like a human shield, his free hand gripping his wand and leveling it to the rear left-hand corner of the room.

Harry quickly spotted the large cat who was growling and spitting in protest, tail slashing the air violently, as those around him took a few steps back, their own tails flicking backwards and forwards in agitation.
The Board Chair rose out of his seat and beckoned to the cat. "Mr. Greengrass, please calm yourself and come forward," he said in a commanding tone.

The livid Nundu narrowed dark eyes and stalked forward, large head low to the ground and gaze pinned to the Board Chair.

Harry tensed as the feline walked past him on silent paws, close enough to see that his dark eyes were in fact a deep chocolate brown and some of his black whiskers were tipped with white.

Draco sat down and wrapped an arm around Harry, pulling him into his side, wand still in hand and darkened grey eyes locked on Mr. Greengrass.

Harry would have protested the overly-protective behaviour, but in truth, he was quite glad for it; Mr. Greengrass cut a very imposing figure in his feline form.

Hugh Sloan remained standing. "Mr. Greengrass please transform so that we may discuss this matter."

Harry held his breath, half expecting him to refuse and pounce on the elderly Board Chair.

The large cat shook itself as though shaking his coat free of water, then there was a brief flash of light and instead of a large, prehistoric-looking jungle cat, there was now a man who appeared to be in his early fifties, very thin, with greying hair, standing before the Board with a fierce scowl on his face.

Harry relaxed a little, relieved that Mr. Greengrass was now in human form and therefore on a level playing field so to speak. Draco didn't lessen his protective hold on him though.

"Philip, you know we must explore every aspect of this case," Hugh said before lowering back into his seat.

Mr. Greengrass swiveled his head to glare at Draco and Harry's grip tightened around his wand.

"He is throwing out false and detrimental accusations about my daughter!" Mr. Greengrass exploded, turning back to the Board. "She is a child and not capable of such a monstrous act!"

"May I remind you that your daughter is nearly of the same age as Mr. Malfoy, so be careful of what you say Mr. Greengrass," Hugh pointed out evenly. He paused, staring hard at Mr. Greengrass for a moment before looking to the male house-elf at his side; the same one that had led Harry and Draco into the room. "Popkum, would you please fetch Miss Astoria Greengrass from Hogwarts?"

The stern little elf nodded and disappeared with a loud crack.

Harry slipped his hand into Draco's without looking at him, needing to ground himself, and hopefully ground his mate as well. If they couldn't prove that it was Astoria, they had no other leads. This either worked or it didn't - and if it didn't, then Draco would be executed tonight.

Harry clenched his jaw and his hand felt clammy as it tightened around his wand. He didn't know what he was going to do, but he did know that he wasn't going to let that happen. He'd thought about it all week; if the Board decided that Draco was guilty, he wasn't going to let them execute his mate without a fight.

Popkum reappeared with another loud crack of elf magic, his gnarled hands firmly gripping the arms of both Astoria and Daphne Greengrass, both of them wearing their dressing gowns and blinking in wide-eyed surprise.
Popkum released his hold on them as Mrs. Greengrass rushed forward from the back of the room and pulled her daughters into her arms. The house-elf walked up to Mr. Sloan and took up his station next to his chair once more.

"We were expecting only one girl," Hugh said with a frown of confusion, glancing at Popkum.

"They were together and the other one insisted on coming too," Popkum explained subserviently.

"I'm sorry for the disturbance," Hugh said, his tone kind as he turned back to the two girls who were standing huddled together with their mother.

Harry would have felt sorry for them if not for the fact that his mate's life was on the line thanks to Astoria.

Hugh cleared his throat and folded his arms on the desk in front of him. "Now, which one of you is Astoria?"

"M-me," Astoria replied, hands clenched around her mother's arm as she stood plastered to her side, looking much younger than her seventeen years.

"Miss Greengrass, we have brought you here tonight because we're trying to find out the truth about the incident that you recently brought to our attention."

"T-the truth?" she stuttered anxiously.

Hugh nodded. "Yes, the attack on your fellow student," he said calmly. "Mr. Malfoy has claimed that he is innocent, and has, in fact, said that he suspects you in this event."

Astoria's blue eyes widened. "M-me?" she repeated, stunned. "But why… why would I have done it?"

Harry felt his insides twist as he watched the fear play across her face; she was either a remarkable actress or she truly was innocent.

"You were promised to Draco before he found a mate in Harry Potter, were you not?" Hugh asked.

"Yes," Astoria answered quietly, glancing at her mother. "But… I didn't do it, I didn't attack Dean."

Hugh's expression lost its sympathetic appearance as he narrowed his eyes at her gravely. "This is a very serious matter Miss. Greengrass; Draco's life is on the line. Do you understand that?"

Astoria's face crumpled a little and her eyes filled with tears. "Y-yes I know. I didn't want Draco k-killed."

Harry glanced at Draco and was met with a look of hopeless defeat that tore at his heart. Draco was thinking the same thing; that Astoria obviously didn't have anything to do with it after all. Harry felt his pulse race and his palms sweat, mentally preparing himself for the worst. He subtly glanced around the room, checking for possible exits. He knew they couldn't Disapparate out as there were wards in place to stop them, but perhaps he could create a distraction and make a run for it…

Harry glanced at Astoria again and wished for the hundredth time that they could just use Veritaserum - on her or Draco. If only…

Harry sat up suddenly and turned sharply to the Board Chair. "Mr. Sloan?"

"Yes Mr. Potter?"
Harry licked his lips and glanced at the huddled Greengrass family. "Could you just use Prior Incantato on Astoria's wand to see if she used some sort of cutting spell?"

The Board members glanced at each other for a moment before Hugh replied.

"Yes, I don't see why not," he answered slowly. "It may not help you if that's not how it was carried out or another wand was used."

"I know," Harry replied desolately, "but we don't have another option right now."

Hugh nodded and looked to Popkum. "Fetch Astoria Greengrass' wand please."

The little elf instantly disappeared and reappeared next to Astoria, who startled and leaned back against her mother. Harry crossed his fingers, hoping against hope that this would work. He didn't know what the punishment would be for Astoria if she was found guilty but he didn't care. Even the terrified looks on Astoria and Daphne's faces didn't soften his feelings.

Popkum snapped his fingers and a wand shot into his hand from out of the belt loop on Astoria's dressing gown. He disappeared with another loud crack and appeared next to Hugh in the blink of an eye.

Hugh took the wand and placed it carefully on the black table in front of him. He withdrew his own wand and pointed it at Astoria's. "Prior Incantato," he cast quietly, a pale beam of ivory light flowing from the tip of his wand to encompass Astoria's.

Harry held his breath as one by one the stationary wand regurgitated a visual history of previously cast spells; all the typical student spells were there and Harry watched as Wingardium Leviosa gave way to Aguamenti and so on until…

Portens Stupefy and then Diffindo, popped out of the wand - seven times in a row.

Hugh held up a hand to pause the stream and muttered a few words under his breath.

Harry watched in surprise as the date of the spell suddenly materialised next to the spell name itself. He frowned and quickly tried to work backwards to see if the dates matched. A noticeable hitch in Draco's breathing had him turning to his mate in a hurry; the hopelessness was gone from Draco's eyes, replaced by something that made Harry's stomach leap.

The room was heavy with an expectant silence, nobody was making a sound or even moving, even Mr. Greengrass was staring frozen at the floating symbols.

"Miss Greengrass, please explain this," Hugh finally ordered.

Astoria quailed in fear, shrinking back against her mother, eyes fixed on the floating evidence. "I…"

"It wasn't her."

Harry gaped in surprise as Daphne Greengrass took a small step forward, chin lifted, eyes defiant and challenging.

"I did it; I used her wand and injured Dean Thomas to make it look as though Draco had done it."

Mrs. Greengrass gave a tiny gasp of horror while Harry sagged in his chair; too weak with relief to feel the boiling anger that he knew he should be feeling. He shared a stunned look with Draco before turning back to Daphne.
"Why would you use your sister's wand?" Perpetua Bagnold asked, shocked.

Daphne sniffed. "I didn't think anyone would suspect her. I didn't want her involved - truly. I love my little sister."

"I think what we would all like to know is why you orchestrated this attack," Hugh Sloan said, still looking amazed by the sudden turn of events.

Daphne swallowed and glanced at her mother and father before turning back to the Board members. "My parents selected a mate for me, an Alpha of a traditional family in good standing, but I wasn't very fond of him. He wasn't young and attractive and…” She paused and turned her gaze towards Draco. "He wasn't Draco," she said boldly.

Harry narrowed his eyes as she smiled at his mate, the adoration clear underneath all the bravado. He couldn't believe he'd missed how infatuated Daphne had been with his mate. Harry suddenly remembered Daphne snapping at him in the library during their first group study session, and now that he thought about it, she'd been rather rude to him all year.

Daphne turned back to Mr. Sloan. "But then my intended was killed in the war."

Sophie McDougal frowned, hand still resting atop her pregnant belly. "But Draco was already promised to your sister..."

"Yes, but if she doesn't become an Omega next year…"

Hugh, and the others, suddenly nodded in understanding. "It would have fallen to you to marry Draco in reparation," he said.

Harry's brow rose to his hairline. He was feeling distinctly out of his depth; attempting to navigate this complex maze of traditional Pureblood crap.

"Yes, I should have thought of that," Draco quietly murmured next to him, a slight crease between his brows.

"So then you asked your sister to accuse Draco of attacking Mr. Thomas?" Mr. Fancourt asked, tapping the end of his quill absently against his cheek.

"Yes, I convinced her that Draco was guilty and she agreed to bring the accusation forward," Daphne explained with a rueful glance towards her sister. "She is a much better person than I and I knew her sense of righteous injustice would compel her into doing it without a second thought."

Astoria shook her blonde head, eyes still shining with unshed tears. "How could you Daph?" she whispered, clearly distraught.

Daphne's expression became pinched and unhappy, appearing remorseful for the first time that evening. She reached out towards her sister but Astoria stepped away and refused to look at her. The entire Greengrass family seemed unable to meet Daphne's gaze, too embarrassed and stunned to do anything more than stare at the floor in silence.

Hugh Sloan cleared his throat. "Now that we have a confession, I believe this enquiry can be dismissed. The Board will meet to discuss the matter in private and another meeting shall be held in order to determine the punishment for Miss Greengrass' deception. Astoria you may return to Hogwarts if you wish but Daphne you are henceforth placed under house-arrest within your family's home until further notice."
Harry tuned out of the rest of the conversation as his head buzzed with ecstatic joy. He breathed out, suddenly lighter than air; the heavy, world-weary burden he'd been carrying around all week was gone in a flash. He was almost dizzy with the abrupt loss of it. He belatedly realised that Draco was on his feet and tugging at his arm.

"Come on Potter, we can go," he said, eyes twinkling with a giddy amusement that Harry had never before seen in his mate's eyes.

Harry allowed himself to be pulled to his feet, grinning from ear to ear. He really wanted to throw his arms around Draco and hug him for all he was worth, but he restrained himself as he spotted Draco's parents walking towards them.

Narcissa placed a gentle hand on her son's shoulder, gazing at him with warm eyes for a moment before silently beckoning for them to follow her and Lucius, who was back in human form, out the door.

Harry held fast to his mate's hand, still grinning, as they walked out into the corridor. They didn't speak another word until they had reached the empty entrance foyer. There were two house-elves stationed at the doors but the rest of the clan were still in the meeting room, clearly discussing the matter further amongst themselves.

Harry nearly jumped when Narcissa slipped an arm through his, an oddly conspiratorial look on her face.

"Mr. Potter, now that this messy business is over with-" Draco rolled his eyes at his mother's dismissive term for his possible execution - "we must hold a party to honour your bonding with Draco."

"Oh," Harry replied in surprise, cheeks heating. "Erm… is that a thing? Yeah, sure. That would be… fun."

Draco snorted and took Harry's arm, gently pulling him away from his mother. "I think what Harry means is, yes we would be ever so grateful to you for throwing a party in our honour so that Harry may meet our family friends and notable acquaintances."

"So it is a thing," Harry mumbled moodily under his breath.

Draco laughed, clearly still running on a high from the outcome of the meeting, and Harry smiled back at him, unable to be upset by anything in that moment. After this past week, Harry knew facing a party full of Nundu and Purebloods would be easy.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

So so sorry for the delay on this chapter, I was on holiday and then just couldn't get my act together after I got back until this week. So here it is. Hopefully will return to fortnightly updates again after this one, especially since the next two chapters are my favourite - which always means bad things for Harry ;)

"You were about to do something daft, weren't you?"

Harry turned his head where it was resting on Draco's shoulder to look up at his mate, the glow of the fire flickering warmly over bare skin still flushed from their previous exertions as they lay in bed in their private room at Hogwarts.

"What do you mean?" Harry asked in amusement.

Draco arched a brow as he slid one arm behind his head and looked down at Harry. "Don't think it escaped my notice Potter that when it looked as though everything was about to go pear-shaped, you had your wand out and body tensed for a fight."

Harry hid a grin against Draco's warm chest, green eyes bright with a guilty sort of enjoyment. "I admit no such thing."

Draco rolled his eyes but continued to absently card his fingers through Harry's hair.

Harry chuckled and closed his eyes, body languid and relaxed as he leaned into the soothing touch of his mate. "You know," he said into the stillness, "with everything going on, I'd almost forgotten about the match tomorrow."

The gentle finger-combing paused for a second and Harry made a noise of protest that caused Draco's lips to quirk into an affectionate smirk.

"I assume you're speaking of the first Slytherin versus Gryffindor match of the year?" Draco replied, resuming his hair stroking. "Are you ready for it Potter?"

Harry grinned, eyes still shut. "The question is Malfoy, are you ready?"

Draco snorted lightly. "Care to make a wager?"

Harry opened his eyes and glanced up with a grin. "Yeah, all right. What do I get if Gryffindor win?"

"Blow job in the back alley of the Hog's Head."

Harry barked out a laugh. "And if you win?"
"The same," Draco replied simply.

"Deal," Harry agreed with a nod, eyes still sparkling with laughter. He settled back down into Draco's side with a sigh. "It feels good to talk about Quidditch like it's the most important thing going on in our lives, isn't it? It makes a nice change from all the drama that's been going on since term began."

Draco made a noise of agreement and they fell into a comfortable silence, Harry idly dragging his fingers back and forth over Draco's bare hip, smiling in contentment. He honestly couldn't believe how happy he was. When he'd come into his Omega inheritance, he'd pictured a tough road ahead with lots of heartache and anxiety, attempting to find 'the one,' and now he had a mate that he could actually see himself with for the rest of his life. The fact that it was Draco Malfoy still made him chuckle at times but he couldn't deny that once they had moved beyond their previous feelings and misconceptions, Draco was a brilliant match for him. They still bantered and teased, but now it was decidedly good-natured and not meant to sting, and Draco was protective and startlingly caring when it mattered most.

Harry turned and propped his chin on his arm across Draco's chest, peering up at his mate in thoughtful silence. Draco had his eyes closed and was breathing deeply, clearly just on the edge of sleep. He was probably exhausted after a week of sleepless nights and the stress of the enquiry. Harry gazed at him, his heart swelling so much that he thought his chest may burst with the warmth and fulfilment and incredible joy of it all.

Harry blinked and suddenly realised with astonishing clarity that he loved Draco.

"Quit staring at me Potter, it's unnerving," Draco suddenly said into the stillness without opening his eyes.

Harry smiled and it was on the tip of his tongue to say it; to just blurt it out because why should he keep it inside? His mate should know that he loved him.

Pale grey eyes opened and drifted down to meet his gaze and Harry quickly lost his courage under the sudden scrutiny.

"Sorry," Harry mumbled instead, smiling sheepishly. "Just plotting ways to knock you off your broom tomorrow."

Draco snorted softly before his lids drifted closed once more.

Harry smiled and settled back down beside him, closing his eyes and allowing sleep to come; heart content.

      

Harry looked up in amusement as Ron slid out of their booth at the Hog's Head and held his brimming pint above his head while calling for their attention. The entire group of eighth years were gathered around adjoining tables at the old Hogsmeade pub and fell silent upon Ron's somewhat inebriated shout.

"I'd like to make a toast," he began magnanimously, "to Mister Draco Malfoy." He made a slight bow to a startled Draco, beer spilling over onto his hand a little. "And to the seventh year Slytherin
Beater - who-I-do-not-know-the-name-of - who smashed that Bludger in Harry's direction and distracted Malfoy long enough for Harry to catch the Snitch right out from under his nose.

Harry grinned as Draco made an indignant scoffing sound beside him and crossed his arms over his chest. Draco had indeed been so busy glaring daggers at his Beater that Harry had been given the perfect opportunity to locate the Snitch and grab it out of the sky before his mate even knew what was going on.

A cheer went up round the table, even from the Slytherins who were looking at Draco with unconcealed mirth.

Harry chuckled at his mate's sour expression and wrapped his hands around his large mug of hot chocolate. His hands still felt stiff and frozen after forgetting to wear his gloves for the game and the October wind had been bitterly cold on his exposed skin.

Ron slid back into place, a satisfied grin on his pink-cheeked face as he took a sip of his drink.

Harry took in Draco's sullen expression and leaned in to whisper, "I know Gryffindor won but, I'd be happy to blow you off in the alley instead if it'll wipe that cross look off your face."

Draco's lips twitched imperceptibly. He took his time taking a long draught of Firewhiskey before cocking his head towards Harry. "Seeing as you cheated and all Potter, I should think that that's the least you could do."

Harry stifled a laugh and nodded in concurrence. He finished off of his hot chocolate, relishing the melted heap of whipped cream in the bottom of the mug with a sigh. He looked around at all of his chatting classmates, a feeling of warm contentment washing over him. The pub's pervading air smelt of stale ale and salted chips, and suddenly reminded Harry that he was famished after the match.

All of the eighth years had decided to celebrate the game - regardless of the outcome - at the Hog's Head, and Harry was pleased to see the house unity efforts still going strong. The only one missing was Daphne Greengrass, who had been on house-arrest with the Nundu clan since the enquiry. Except for Harry and Draco, no one else knew the truth of Daphne's whereabouts, just that she was terribly ill and remaining at home on Healer's orders.

Harry's stomach gave a noticeable growl and he decided it was time to do something about it. "I'm going to get some chips, you want anything?"

"I'll just have some of yours," Draco replied absently before returning to his plant-based potions conversation with Neville.

Harry rolled his eyes. "Over my dead body," he muttered under his breath as he climbed awkwardly out of the booth and headed for the slightly congested bar area. He waited with his arms resting on the sticky countertop, absently watching the bartender as he pulled pint after pint with a grim expression. He was a far cry from easy-going Tom at the Leaky.

"Harry Potter?"

Harry inwardly cringed and turned to the wizard seated on the tall bar stool to his right. "Yeah...?" he replied, trying his best to avoid sounding wary or annoyed - even though he was both.

The wizard angled his body towards him a little with a toothy grin, half-empty pint in one hand. "Wow, you're so much shorter than I imagined."

Harry just looked at him blankly. "Sorry to disappoint you," he finally responded dryly before
turning away, wishing the bartender would hurry up and come over so that he could order and then retreat to the safety of his table.

"Oh no, it's fine, I like 'em short," the man dismissed, as though that was a compliment.

*For fuck's sake,* Harry thought irritably, running a hand through his shower-dampened hair as he always did when frustrated with a situation. The man was clearly an Alpha, but looked to be at least twenty years older than him.

He shot the man a thin smile and turned away, trying to signal the bartender with wide, desperate eyes. It seemed to work as he caught Harry's gaze and made his way over.

Harry nearly sighed in relief. "Hi, can I get an order of chips and vinegar please?"

The barman nodded curtly and turned away to scribble on a soiled piece of parchment before sending the paper fluttering off to the kitchen.

"Is your boss here?"

Harry glanced at his unwanted companion while he handed over his money to the bartender. "My… what?" he replied distractedly.

The man's lips stretched into an oily smile that made Harry's skin crawl. "Your Alpha; that Malfoy boy."

Harry felt indignant rage flare up his spine and his hands clenched on the curved edge of the bar. "He is *not* my boss," he responded through clenched teeth.

The man laughed loudly, obnoxiously, and Harry had never wanted to punch someone quite so badly.

A fist suddenly connected with the man's cheek and sent him sprawling onto the floor.

Harry turned in surprise to see Blaise standing next to him.

"Sorry to step in but I thought if I punched him instead of you, it wouldn't make the papers," he offered in way of explanation, an amused smile on his face. "Bad publicity and all that."

The man groaned from his position on the floor and held a hand to his cheek as he blinked blearily up at Blaise in confusion, looking as though he'd ingested enough alcohol to keep him puzzled long enough for Harry to make his escape.

Harry turned his back on him. "You didn't have to do that," he said to Blaise, then narrowed suspicious eyes as he suddenly thought of something. "I'm not going to change my mind, you know."

Blaise grinned and followed Harry as he began to slowly push his way back through the crowd towards the Hogwart's tables.

"Then why haven't you told Draco?"

Harry looked back over his shoulder. "About you? What makes you think I haven't?"

Blaise snorted. "Because he hasn't tried to rip my head off yet."

Harry rolled his eyes but turned back around without saying anything. In the wake of the enquiry,
he'd honestly forgotten all about Blaise's offer, and now... well it just didn't seem important. It would feel like boasting if he suddenly told Draco about it, or as if he was trying to make his mate jealous.

"I won't stop trying," Blaise suddenly said, voice pitched low enough so that the people around them couldn't hear. "Especially since you've yet to be claimed Potter." His gaze pointedly dropped to Harry's unblemished neck a second before he turned and walked off to the other table.

Harry swallowed, hating that feeling of vulnerability that always washed over him any time someone mentioned the fact that he was "unclaimed," as though he was susceptible to random people just grabbing him and hauling him off to wherever they wanted; to do whatever they wanted.

Harry tried to shake it off as he walked over to his own table and slid back into his seat.

"Where's Draco?" he asked Ron, glancing at Neville, the only other occupant of their table, who appeared to be nodding off against the back of the seat.

"Too many late nights, that one," Ron observed with a smirk. "Toilets," he said, turning back to answer Harry's question before finishing off the remainder of his Butterbeer.

Harry nodded and sat back with a happy sigh as his order of warm, salted chips doused in vinegar arrived at the table and drifted down to rest in front of him. He dug in, blowing on each chip a moment before popping it into his mouth and chewing with a blissful groan.

Ron reached across to pluck a few from the grease-soaked paper tray.

"Here we are," Hermione announced, returning to the table suddenly, carrying a tray of what looked like many, many shot glasses filled with an amber liquid which appeared to be smoking.

Harry raised his brow as she slid into the booth next to Ron. "Erm, Hermione? What are all those?"

"Firewhiskey," she replied, glancing down at the twinkling glasses.

Harry blinked at her as he reached for another soggy chip. "Since when do you drink Firewhiskey? And why so many?"

Hermione pushed the tray into the centre of the table and folded her arms. "They're for you, well, for all of us really, but mostly for you to practice with."

"Huh?" Harry replied as he chewed, feeling as though he was missing something. "You know I don't like alcohol; always gives me a massive headache."

"Yes but Draco was just telling us about the party his mum is planning for the two of you, and he mentioned that he wished you had a little more practice at being... refined."

Harry frowned, slightly hurt by that comment; Draco had never mentioned to him that he felt that way. "And drinking Firewhiskey makes you fall into that category?" he replied doubtfully.

Hermione shrugged and glanced down at the loaded tray. "It's what Draco always orders, isn't it?"

"I suppose," Harry replied blandly, following her gaze and grimacing at the shiny glasses which were still emitting a few wisps of smoke. "This many will get me pissed though."

"I'll help." Ron grinned and grabbed one of the glasses. "Cheers!"

The truth was, Harry had been a little nervous of the upcoming party at Malfoy Manor. He knew he didn't really fit in with Mr. and Mrs. Malfoy's usual crowd of Purebloods and society page friends.
He also knew it wasn't only clan members that would be attending the fancy gathering, so he needed to remember to keep his mouth shut about anything Nundu-related, as well as being on his best behaviour.

It was the perfect recipe for a very stressful evening.

And now that he knew that Draco was worried about him fitting in, well…

"All right," Harry said unenthusiastically, reaching for one of the glasses.

Hermione smiled, pleased, as she watched from across the table.

"Are you supposed to just… throw it back in one, like a shot?" Harry asked, staring down into the swirling liquid and wincing when just the smell of it made his nostrils burn.

"It might be better if you do," Hermione advised.

Harry glanced at Ron, who seemed to be drinking his effortlessly. He rallied his courage and pinched his nose before tossing back the entire contents of the glass. The Firewhiskey burned all the way down his throat and he only just managed not to cough or splutter in response.

Harry's eyes were watering as he set the glass back down on the table and then quickly followed it up by stuffing a few chips into his mouth and chewing.

"How was it?" Hermione asked, giggling a little at his expression.

Harry looked up to scowl at her and was startled when the room took a moment to right itself.

"I think that's a rather strong version of Ogden's," Hermione mused as she observed Harry's unfocused blinking. "Better follow it up with another one straight away."

"What?" Harry exclaimed, gobsmacked. "Are you serious?"

Hermione glanced over her shoulder then back to meet Harry's incredulous gaze. "Here comes Draco," she whispered urgently. "If you want to impress him, take another one Harry. He's made a lot of concessions for you, hasn't he?"

Harry was reaching for another glass before he even knew what he was doing; trying to process Hermione's reasoning was making him feel as though his brain was moving in slow motion, through thick treacle. He would just have to trust that she was the intelligent one and knew what she was talking about.

He refrained from pinching his nose this time and quickly swallowed the vile drink down as fast as possible, hoping his throat was still scorched enough from the first one to numb the pain a little.

He banged the glass back down with a cough as Draco came up beside their table.

"Potter, are you drinking Firewhiskey?" he asked in amazement, taking in the vast collection of full glasses with a slightly furrowed brow.

"Yeah," Harry replied thickly, hand clenching around his empty glass in an attempt to anchor himself as he looked up at his mate with a proud smile.

"Would you care for a few Draco?" Hermione offered pleasantly, nudging the tray towards him.

"Draco! Come settle a bet between Theo and I."
Harry frowned as Blaise came up beside Draco and slung an arm around his shoulders. Something about the sight made him feel unsettled, but he couldn't figure out why. He shook his head and tried to concentrate. Conversation seemed to ebb and flow around him as he floundered; attempting to latch onto bits of the discussion, which were drifting around him like fragmented particles, just out of his reach.

"If I must." Draco sighed as though greatly inconvenienced. "Thank you Granger," he added as he selected a glass of Firewhiskey from the tray. He passed another one to Blaise before turning back to Harry. "You all right on your own for a minute?" he asked as he inhaled the fragrant scent of his drink before taking a small, discerning sip.

Harry frowned, cursing the fact that he'd drunk two glasses of Firewhiskey in rapid succession. Clearly you were supposed to savour it and drink it slowly.

"Are you talking to me?"

"Wha?" Harry blinked at his mate.

Draco's eyes narrowed slightly. "You just said 'slowly' without any context."

Ron snickered and Harry turned to grin at him, as though sharing a private joke.

"He'll be fine," Hermione interjected when it appeared as though Harry wasn't about to answer. "We'll watch him."

"You know, this stuffs s'not so bad," Harry slurred, turning back around and reaching for yet another glass after Ron had carefully selected his second.

"I thought you didn't drink Potter?" Draco said, bemused, and then watched in horror as Harry carelessly tossed back a full glass. "Fuck, you're not supposed to gulp it like that Harry."

Harry coughed and then promptly hiccupped before turning to his mate with a doleful expression. "Shit, that's right. Sorry Draco, I knew I would mess it all up."

"I think that's enough," Draco said quietly, stepping forward and pushing Harry's chips back in front of him. "Here, you'd better eat something."

"Thanks," Harry replied unhappily, eyes still watering from his last drink. "But you're still not my boss," he muttered sullenly as he reached for a few soggy chips and stuffed them into his mouth.

"Come on Malfoy," Blaise cajoled when Draco frowned in bewilderment.

Draco looked at his mate with concern but Hermione waved him off. "We promise not to let him drink anymore."

Draco nodded uncertainly before allowing Blaise to steer him away.

"So Harry," Hermione said brightly once they had left. "How are things going between you two?"

"Gooooood," Harry replied slowly, tone rising at the end as though he were unsure.

Hermione smiled and nodded encouragingly. "You mentioned that you were working through some family stuff with Draco's parents, so I'm glad you've sorted all that out. It mustn't be easy having a father-in-law who has tried to murder you on more than one occasion."
Ron snorted with laughter, causing tiny ripples to dance across the surface of his Firewhiskey.

Harry smiled uncertainly at his friend; part of him thinking that he shouldn't be amused by that comment but unsure as to why.

"I don't mean anything by that," Hermione quickly added, noticing Harry's expression. "I mean, it's true, right?"

"Erm…"Harry frowned blearily, trying to keep up.

"But now you've worked everything out, right?" Hermione continued, unperturbed. "You and Lucius get along now? You're friends?"

"Friends?" Harry repeated, staring hard into his cooling tray of chips and attempting to focus.

Hermione reached over and plucked a chip from his tray. "I mean, now that you're going to be his son-in-law, he must have to tell you all the Malfoy family secrets, right?"

"Secrets?" Harry replied as though stuck on repeating everything Hermione was rapid-firing at him.

"Yeah, Blaise Zabini told us that Malfoy's family has loads of secrets."

"Like what?" Harry replied slowly, dragging his bleary gaze back up to her face.

Hermione smiled and leaned forward. "I don't know Harry, you tell us."

Harry swirled one of his chips in the pool of vinegar as he stared back at her with a frown. "Lucius Malfoy doesn't… doesn't tell me things, or… er, secrets. Draco does," he replied, as though that should be obvious.

Hermione nodded receptively. "What sort of secrets?"

Harry swallowed and rubbed the back of his neck, closing his eyes a moment as the room tilted dizzyingly with his movements. "Uh… secrets?" he echoed, woolly-headed.

"Yes, you know, like family secrets. Dark family secrets," she reiterated meaningfully.

Harry suddenly heard warning bells going off in the deep recesses of his mind. "You already know the Malfoy family secrets," he replied vaguely, tongue suddenly feeling too big for his mouth. "They were… uh, Death Eaters and they supported Voldemort."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Yes, everyone knows that, but what has Draco told you that no one else knows? Something only you and Draco and his family are supposed to know - and your best friends," she added hastily.

"Oh," Harry said quietly then perked up after a moment of hazy thought. "Draco loves comfort food. The posh git's favourite food is shepherd's pie, if you can believe it."

Ron barked out a laugh. "What?"

Harry grinned at him, relieved that at least one of them found that as amusing as he did. "I know, right? I thought it was going to be something French that I wouldn't have a hope of pronouncing-"

"But Harry," Hermione interrupted, trying to recapture his attention. "What about the things you're not supposed to tell people?"
Harry tilted his head to one side, puzzled. "You mean like his favourite position?"

"Merlin no, why would you want to know that 'Mione?" Ron demanded, appalled.

Hermione closed her eyes with a sigh and rubbed her temple. "No, that's not what I… I meant important secrets."

"But Hermione, if it's a secret then I can't tell you," Harry said slowly, as though explaining what a secret was to a two year old.

Harry frowned and shared a look of bewilderment with Ron when Hermione made a loud noise of exasperation and dropped her face into her hands.

A shadow fell over their table then and Harry looked up to see Draco standing at the end of their booth, staring coldly at Hermione's bowed head.

Harry lowered his gaze guiltily. "I'm sorry Draco, I told them… I told them about the shepherd's pie thing."

Draco’s lips pressed together into a thin line when Hermione raised her head and met his frigid gaze. He replied - without taking his eyes off of her. "That's okay Harry; I don't think that was the information she was after." He paused and leaned towards Hermione threateningly. "Firewhiskey is not Veritaserum Granger," he said sharply, severely. "If you want to know something, just ask him."

Hermione straightened in her seat, quickly recovering her wilted courage. "I've tried speaking to him; he either doesn't have the time or avoids the subject of what's wrong with him altogether," she said with quiet anger. "He used to confide in me. He hasn't been happy Malfoy, and he refuses to tell me why."

"What?" Harry blinked out of his stupor and lifted his chin defiantly. "I'm happy 'Mione. Draco makes me happy - don't you Draco?"

"Yes Harry." Draco's gaze warmed noticeably as he turned to Harry. "Come on, I think it's time we took our leave."

"See ya later Harry!" Ron called out with a cheerful smile, as though nothing out of the ordinary had just occurred. "Good game tonight."

"Yeah… you too." Harry smiled uncertainly at his two friends as he carefully slid out of the booth, sure that there was an underlying tension between them but unable to remember why. He fervently hoped that it wasn't something he'd said…

He stumbled to his feet and Draco had to grab ahold of his arms to steady him when the room spun. Harry groaned and feverishly hoped his stomach contents would stop spinning too and not end up all over the pub's floor.

Draco looked murderous as he helped his mate on with his coat. Once buttoned up and safely tucked into Draco's side, Harry stared listlessly at the floor while Draco turned to glare at Hermione, who was now biting her lip and looking slightly uncomfortable.

"I hope it was worth it Granger," he said quietly, sneering. "He's going to be ill all night and into the morning. Pomfrey won't give out Sobriety Potions to students and I don't happen to have any on hand."
"McGonagall-"

"Would do her nut if she found out Potter was intoxicated," Draco replied sharply, causing Neville to snort in his sleep.

Harry swallowed, too light-headed and off-kilter to care that people were talking about him as though he wasn't there. "Can we go now Draco?" he asked miserably.

Draco's expression became immediately concerned. "Of course."

Harry kept his head down as Draco led him from the warm, noisy pub without another word and out into the cool evening air. A sudden breeze washed over Harry's heated skin and he closed his eyes with a sigh as some of the cobwebs cleared and his nausea subsided. The quiet of the village also helped to lessen the tightness behind his eyes.

"Better?" Draco asked as they continued to slowly walk down the high street together, his arm still secured around Harry's shoulders to help support him.

"Yeah." Harry took a deep breath and let it out. His balance was still a little skewed and his vision fuzzy around the edges, but the sombre mood of inside quickly vanished and a bubble of giddy, drunken happiness returned and fizzled inside him. He smiled and leaned into his mate. "Thanks Draco. You take good care of me."

Draco snorted and looked ahead. "Not good enough," he uttered darkly. "What did Granger ask you?"

Harry scrunched up his face as he tried to remember, but that entire conversation was a bit of a blur; like the remaining fragments of a dream quickly receding the harder you tried to think about it. "Erm, something about… your… favourite food. I think."

"My favourite food?" Draco repeated dubiously then turned thoughtful. "So she was asking about me?"

Harry nodded, turning his head to inhale Draco's scent from the thick woollen coat he was wearing. Draco always smelt really good, and the scent always helped calm him. Or awaken his arousal.

"What else did she want to know about me?"

"You smell good," Harry murmured distractedly before replying, "secrets. She asked about your secrets."

Draco stopped and turned to him, glancing around before speaking. "Did she know something or was she just suspicious?"

Harry stepped in close and slid his arms around Draco's waist, pressing into him. "Mmm… she wanted to know your favourite position - but I wouldn't tell her. That's our secret."

Draco couldn't help but smile as Harry leaned in and kissed the side of his neck, diligently working his warm lips all the way up to Draco's ear. "From what I overheard, it didn't sound as though she'd gleaned anything of value," Draco said absently, leaning his head away in encouragement. "Perhaps I'll ask you tomorrow, when you're making a little more sense Potter."

Harry grinned and pointedly rolled his hips into him. "Yes," he breathed into his ear. "Less talking and more… doing."
Draco chuckled and stepped into a turn, Disapparating the two of them back to the front gates at Hogwarts. From there, they stumbled their way up the drive and into the castle, heading straight for their private rooms, pausing every-so-often to thoroughly enjoy a few heated snogs in dark corners along the way.

Harry was too aroused and off his trolley to care if anyone saw them. He also felt drunk on power, nearly giggling into Draco's mouth at the smugness he felt. His mate, normally so reserved and controlled in public, was so turned on by Harry's arousal and Omega scent that he'd lost all sense of propriety.

Draco had him shoved up against their bedroom wall as soon as the door shut and locked behind them.

Harry's head spun with a heady mix of delight and Firewhiskey as he kissed him, one leg coming up to hook behind his mate and pull him in tight in all the right places.

Draco moaned into Harry's mouth and thrust against him, causing Harry's eyes to roll back in his head and a gasp of pleasure to rip out of his throat as Draco continued to rut against him through their trousers. Harry felt hot and frantic, body strung tight with arousal as he met Draco thrust for thrust.

Draco moved his lips from Harry's panting mouth and began to kiss and lick his way down over his jaw and throat, breath warm against his skin.

Harry let his head fall back against the stone wall with a 'thunk', the lingering Firewhiskey dulling any pain. He loved the feel of Draco's erection, hard and long under his clothing, pressed against the length of his own arousal.

"Draco," he gasped, suddenly remembering something in his drink-addled state. "I forgot… your prize…"

Draco's lips smirked against his skin without pausing in their assault. "Another time Potter," he replied, sucking on his skin and inhaling Harry's scent through his nose. Draco moaned under his breath, the vibrations causing Harry to shiver. "Mine..." Draco breathed mindlessly.

Harry groaned as his eyes fell shut again. "Yes... yours..." he gasped, head spinning, not even knowing what he was saying, lost in a fog of heat and arousal and alcohol. "Mark me. Claim me... please."

Draco immediately stopped what he was doing and pulled back to look into Harry's face. "What did you say?"

Harry frowned at the loss of warm lips on his throat and the sudden discontinuance of insistent hips frotting against him. "Make me yours Malfoy. I want you to. Claim me. Please..."

Harry watched as Draco's eyes fluttered closed, as though Harry's words were too much for him to handle. Harry instantly loved that look on his mate's face and bumped his throbbing erection up against him insistently. "Bite me Draco. Merlin, I want you to so much... please... Make me yours. Make me yours so everybody knows," he mumbled deliriously.

Draco let out a low noise, almost like a whine, as he lowered his lips to Harry's neck.

"Yes..." Harry hissed, leaning his head away and to the right, exposing the long column of his throat to his mate. Harry felt the scrape of teeth over his flushed skin, moving purposefully to the soft juncture of where neck meets shoulder.
Harry gasped as the intense anticipation and too-many-sensations suddenly overwhelmed his shuddering body. He gave himself over to it and was lost…

Harry woke with a start, eyes flying open to stare at the canopy over their bed. The room was warm and the smell of sex was still thick in the air.

He winced as the pounding in his head suddenly made its presence known and he reached up with one hand to sluggishly rub at his temple.

It all came flooding back to him then: winning the game, the Hog's Head, the creepy bloke at the bar, Blaise, Firewhiskey, Hermione's strange questioning, Draco taking him home, snogging, being so turned on that…

Harry gasped and sat up, moaning when the world spun around him. He ignored the nausea in favour of clapping a hand over his neck - and was surprised to feel nothing; not a cut or bite or even a bruise of any kind marred his skin.

"Harry? What are you doing? Come back to sleep."

Harry turned at the sleepily slurred words and his heart swelled with such sudden and intense love for his mate that he thought it should be exploding out through his toes and fingertips like beams of pure light, like magic. Draco still had his eyes closed, pale blond hair splayed out and tousled on the pillow beneath his head, quilt dropped to his waist, exposing his pale torso and leanly muscled arms.

Harry leaned down, half draping himself over his mate but keeping his weight off of him, staring down into Draco's face as his gaze tracked over lowered blond lashes, high cheek bones, pointed chin and parted lips.

"I love you, you know."

Pale grey eyes opened slowly and turned to look at him; a soft, questioning smile in his gaze. "What brought that on?"

"You didn't do it; you didn't claim me last night, even though I asked you to."

Draco blinked the sleep from his eyes and turned over onto his back, looking up at him. "Of course not Potter, you were half out of your mind on Firewhiskey."

His pink lips quirked up into a half-smile. "I do have a limit to my self-interest you know."

Harry grinned and ignored the pounding of his head and the dryness of his mouth as he lay back down beside his mate and turned onto his side towards him. "Which obviously only impedes you to a certain extent because my arse is quite sore this morning."

Draco smirked, looking quite satisfied. "I deserve something for my troubles Potter; I did lose out on my prize last night after all."

"How about a new prize?" Harry offered, cocking his head to one side, a gleam in his eye.

"Better than a blow job in an alley?"
Harry laughed and shifted closer. "Now that I'm completely and utterly lucid - I still want you to claim me."

Draco's expression instantly lost its amusement and his brow furrowed with unease. He leaned up on one elbow and looked down at him. "It will hurt."

Harry snorted. "I'm not afraid of a little pain."

Draco frowned as he absently tucked a lock of dark hair behind Harry's ear. "When one of our kind performs a claiming bite, it's different to normal Alphas, it releases a kind of venom through our teeth which will forever remain in your body Harry."

"What does the venom do?" Harry asked, curiously undaunted.

Draco's expression relaxed a little. "The venom allows me to track you when I'm in my other form," he explained quietly. "It can also be scented by others of my kind so that they know, beyond just a physical a bite mark, that you've been claimed."

Harry nodded, absorbing the information, and trying to figure out why he suddenly felt a little ball of tension in his gut. "The… the tracking thing…"

Draco looked at him knowingly. "Bothers you, doesn't it?"

Harry sighed and shook his head, stubborn. "Yeah, I guess so, but… I still want you to do it." Harry thought about the bloke at the pub, and about what Blaise had said; that Harry's being unclaimed cast doubt on whether Harry really did only want Draco or that their mateship wasn't as strong as it should be.

"There's no rush Harry," Draco said softly, stroking his cheek and breaking him out of his thoughts. "I know you've always been hesitant about it, that the enquiry forced you to say you wanted it when you weren't even sure if you did or not. Why don't you take another week to really think about it?"

Harry bit his lip, considering. Putting it off was like backing down from a challenge - and he hated that feeling. He knew he wasn't going to change his mind about it though. He knew, deep down, that he wanted Draco's mark on him. He just didn't think he'd be able to convince his mate of that just yet. This tracking venom thing felt a little demoralising… but he just needed to get over his issues with being the 'Omega' in the relationship. A part of him still thrilled at the thought of his mate taking care of him, watching over him, protecting him, yet that part of him was still at war with his inherently independent nature.

"Okay," he finally relented, meeting Draco's gaze and finding comfort there. "I want it done before the party though."

"All right," Draco agreed, studying him at length. "If you still want me to do it next Saturday morning, then I will."

Harry nodded, placated, and Draco flopped back down beside him with a sigh.

"Can we please go back to sleep now Potter?" he said, disrupting the serious atmosphere.

Harry smiled, relieved, and tucked into his side, Draco's arm automatically coming up to wrap around him as he closed his eyes. It hadn't escaped his notice that Draco hadn't said 'I love you' back, but he wasn't worried; the past twenty-four hours clearly demonstrated just how much Draco cared for him. Harry knew he would say it when he felt it, when he was ready.
He tried not to grimace as he thought about the aforementioned party at Malfoy Manor; being claimed was going to be the least of his worries that day.

One thing he knew for sure; he didn't care what the Purebloods thought of him, he was not going to drink anymore Firewhiskey.
Mr. Potter,

Thank you for your prompt response to my numerous questions. I fear the minute details of this party are occupying my time more than is sensible or practical, and perhaps causing you to feel apprehensive in a way that you needn't be. I have little to occupy my time these days and have not hosted a festive gathering at the Manor in quite a long while, so I may be getting a little carried away. Do not trouble yourself Mr. Potter with thoughts of not fitting in or making an error in decorum; only close friends shall be in attendance, so please put your mind at ease.

It shall be a wonderful evening in which to celebrate your imminent bonding with my son. Lucius and I are both looking forward to it immensely.

Sincerely,

Narcissa Malfoy

"Yeah right." Harry snorted derisively, folding the letter in half and then feeding the large elegant eagle owl a treat before it took off through the window of their room.

"She doesn't even mention me," Draco scoffed incredulously as he stepped back, having read the letter over Harry's shoulder. "We both answered her inane questions about food and colour schemes."

Harry chuckled. "Don't pretend you don't care about that stuff Malfoy, you were much more invested in those answers than I was."

Draco smirked as he sat on the end of their bed and leaned back on his hands. "So, how many letters is that this week?"

Harry slid the letter onto their large desk situated under the window before turning to his mate with a grin. "Two a day," he said, taking a seat in the desk chair and propping his chin on the chair back, facing Draco. "You know, I do believe she's beginning to like me."

Draco laughed. "If there's one good thing to come out of all this party nonsense, it's that my mother is getting to know you a bit better."

Harry hid a pleased grin in the crook of his elbow. Truth be told, he was quite enjoying his owl post correspondence with Narcissa, it seemed she had taken her role as mother-in-law to heart and was trying to make him feel included and comfortable. Some of her letters even included little Omega tips, which were actually quite insightful, even if Draco did snicker and dismiss them as rubbish. Because of her letters, Harry also found he wasn't dreading the party quite so much.

Harry sighed and his smile faded as he remembered that his only two invited guests weren't invited any longer. He looked at Draco. "What am I supposed to do about Ron and Hermione? I can't stay cross with them forever, and Ron didn't even technically do anything wrong."
Draco breathed out through his nose and Harry knew he was trying to control an anger that was still simmering just below the surface at what Hermione had done that night at the pub.

"You do agree that not inviting them is the right thing to do though, right?" he finally replied evenly. "Having a suspicious Granger wandering around the Manor amongst a few others of my kind would be a disaster waiting to happen."

Harry nodded. "Yeah, I agree. I just… I just know that she had good intentions at heart when she did what she did. The three of us have always watched out for each other, ever since first year. She's just a bit…"

"Ruthless?" Draco supplied with a sneer. "Meddlesome?"

Harry frowned in reproach then stood and walked over to his mate, grasping his chin in one hand and forcing his gaze up. "No - concerned," he corrected.

Draco narrowed his eyes then grabbed Harry's wrist and tugged him so that he fell forward into Draco's lap.

Harry couldn't help but smile grudgingly as he settled himself over his mate, straddling his lap and sliding his hands around Draco's neck. He sat back and looked into Draco's eyes. "Ron would still be coming to the party if he hadn't drunkenly snogged Hermione that same night," he said, disappointed about the timing of his two best friends finally getting together. "Now he feels as though he has to choose her side just because they're dating."

Draco snorted lightly. "Good luck to him."

Harry glared half-heartedly and Draco sighed, sliding his hands around from Harry's hips to cup his backside and firmly pull him up against him. Harry grunted in surprise but didn't move, feeling his cock thicken in his pants when he felt that his mate was already aroused beneath him.

"I promise not to hold a grudge against Granger - if she promises to take a step back and let you live your life without interfering. She has to acknowledge that you have me to look after you now and that you're in good hands," Draco stated with a smirk, brow arched, undulating his hips against Harry in hypnotic little rolls that were causing Harry's breath to hitch in his throat, despite his best intentions. "If there was something of great importance which you wished to discuss with her, then she needs to learn to wait for you to approach her instead of just jumping to conclusions."

"O-okay," Harry replied, embarrassed by the breathless quality of his voice but unable to control it as he pushed his hips forward, sparks of pleasure rocketing through his now fully hard prick. "That's all… all I can ask for…"

Draco smiled with satisfaction as Harry's eyes closed and his head tipped back, losing himself in the repetitive rocking motion.

"We're… going to be late…" Harry murmured, not sounding in the least concerned, but merely pointing out the fact that afternoon classes would be starting soon.

"This won't take long," Draco replied. He wrapped an arm around Harry's lower back and pulled him with him as he fell backwards onto the bed, Harry still straddling his strong thighs and pressing the length of his erection more firmly against Draco's.

Harry placed his hands on the bed on either side of his mate and ground down with a quiet moan. Every lunch this past week they'd spent together in their private rooms and, without fail, every time it had eventually dissolved into some sort of sexual activity.
Harry wasn't about to complain though; it was a brilliant way to spend their mid-day break. He only hoped it wasn't too obvious to his classmates or professors when he showed up to his post-lunch classes glowing and relaxed.

"Don't stop," Draco panted, gripping Harry's hips hard and encouraging his rutting motions.

"No…" Harry agreed in return, gasping, beginning to feel feverish with the sudden and desperate need to come; to shoot his seed in his pants along with his mate, without even taking off their clothes. He wanted it to be quick and dirty; he was hot with the thought of it. "So close…" he gasped before leaning forward and kissing Draco, hips frotting at a frantic pace as his tongue delved inside his mate's mouth.

Draco moaned into the kiss, opening his mouth and allowing his mate to take what he needed; to plunder his mouth in an almost punishing fashion as they thrust and gasped and moaned their combined pleasure.

Without breaking the kiss, Harry reached back and grabbed Draco's hands from off of his hips and pinned them to the bed on either side of his mate's blond head. Draco immediately arched up into him with a moan and Harry almost snarled with pleasure, body already reaching the peak and about to spiral out of his control as he thrust faster, losing all rhythm, skin flushing hotly, breath catching and holding.

"Want you to come first," Harry panted against Draco's lips before kissing his cheek and then moving across to gently nip at his ear.

"Harry…" Draco brokenly groaned and clenched his eyes shut, neck arching back, hands fisting beneath Harry's firm hold.

Harry watched with avid, unblinking green eyes; wanting to see his mate come undone beneath him. "Come for me Draco…" he breathed unsteadily. "Please. Want to see you come," he babbled. "I can't wait for you to claim me tomorrow, to make me yours. Want you to mark me and then come all over me…"

A loud moan broke through Draco's pressed lips as he came hard, expression twisted with intense pleasure and relief.

Harry drank in the sight for all of two seconds before he too was gripped by a powerful orgasm which tore through his body, head tipping back, eyes closing as he cried out, feeling his cock pulse wet and warm within his snug trousers.

Once every last tingle of pleasure and drop of fluid was milked from his prick, Harry slowly opened his eyes and looked down. Draco was gazing up at him with intense grey eyes and flushed cheeks, breath coming out in quiet huffs. Harry blinked at the look in Draco's eyes, something inside of him tightening at the sight; a sentiment that matched the one in his own heart was shining back at him.

Draco swallowed, gaze unwavering, and Harry instinctively released his hold on his mate's wrists as he stared back at him; waiting, expectant.

"What you do to me Potter…" Draco whispered in wonder, absently reaching up to straighten Harry's crooked glasses, fingers lingering in his dishevelled hair a moment before abruptly dropping away, gaze averting.

Harry smiled a little as he sat back, content in the knowledge that something had shifted within his mate, something that was transparently obvious but not quite ready to be shared or formed into words.
just yet, but it was there.

"That was different," Harry finally said, still smiling that little half-smile as Draco's gaze carefully flicked back to him. "We didn't even get our clothes off."

Draco's expression relaxed, whatever thoughts previously distracting him pushed aside as he focussed on his mate, trademark smirk pulling at his mouth.

Harry grinned and quickly leaned down to peck his mate on the lips before turning and climbing off of the bed. He plucked his wand from the bedside cabinet and quickly cast a cleaning charm over the pair of them; the uncomfortable, sticky feeling immediately vanishing.

"I really hope no one can tell what we get up to at lunch every day," Harry said as he slipped into his school robes, still with the Gryffindor insignia on it even though he wasn't technically living in Gryffindor Tower anymore, and slung his heavy book bag onto his shoulder.

"Course they do Potter," Draco replied simply as he slipped his Ancient Ruins text into his bag. "Your hair is even more atrocious than usual directly after lunch."

Harry rolled his eyes and waited for his mate to join him at the door before swinging it open and walking out into the empty corridor. "I wasn't the one on my back this time Malfoy," he countered.

Draco narrowed his eyes at him as he followed and Harry had to bite his lip to keep from laughing as his mate's hand automatically shot to the back of his head to check his hair.

They made their way to the first floor and parted ways with a gentle touching of fingers and one last lingering look before Harry walked to Care of Magical Creatures on his own.

Harry shifted his bag up on his shoulder with a sigh, missing Ron's company as he walked through the open entrance doors, squinting a little at the muted winter sunshine sparkling off the fresh layer of snow on the ground. This would be his first opportunity to speak to Ron without Hermione around. Ron had been darting him little apologetic glances in the Great Hall all week, so he didn't think his friend was holding a grudge, even if his new girlfriend was.

"Hey Potter."

Harry looked up to see Blaise ascending the wide stone steps, obviously heading back into the school for Ancient Runes. "Oh… hi," he replied, growing a little weary of deflecting the Alpha's advances.

Blaise grinned and hugged his textbook to his chest as he stopped in front of him. "I'm looking forward to the party tomorrow night."

Harry stared. "You're invited?" he responded in surprise.

"Old friend of the family," Blaise said with a shrug, eyes gleaming cheerfully. "You'll have to save me a dance Harry."

Harry sighed and shifted his weight. "I don't think that's a good idea Blaise," he said with a touch of irritation. "And pushing me to change my mind is not going to suddenly endear you to me. In fact, I'd rather you didn't come to the party at all."

Blaise's confident smile didn't waver. "But if I don't show up then I won't be able to inform the Malfoys of my intentions towards you. It's just good manners to at least give them some warning."
"What?" Harry frowned, feeling his irritation swell into anger. "Why would you do that? There's no point, I've already told you - multiple times - that I don't want another Alpha."

Blaise shrugged, undeterred, the motion only adding to Harry's annoyance. "Draco might step down if I formally challenge him. Plus," he added with a playful smirk, "I want to see you all dressed up."

Harry pressed his lips together into a hard line, starting to think that Blaise would never be discouraged. "Why are you being so stubborn about this?" he demanded, his low tone full of warning.

Blaise's expression turned solemn for the first time, the playful sparkle in his eyes dimming. "Because I'm gay and attracted to you, and you're a male Omega, the only known male Omega in existence. Not to be too dramatic, but... you're my only hope for genuine happiness."

All of Harry's anger and irritation left his body with a sudden swoop of understanding. He didn't know what to say. He knew he wasn't going to change his mind, but could he really get angry with the man for chasing a chance at happiness that he would not otherwise attain if forced to bond with a female Omega?

Blaise smiled a little, expression clearing and a trace of his earlier bravado returning. "See you tomorrow," he said simply, an edge of determination in his tone, then walked past him and into the castle.

Harry stared after him a moment, lost in thought, then suddenly remembered where he was and what he was supposed to be doing. He turned and carefully jogged down the icy steps then sprinted across the frozen grounds in order to get to class on time, his bag banging uncomfortably against his hip as he reached down to steady it with one hand. The cold air burned in his lungs and stung his eyes as he ran, but if felt good; a distraction.

He ran and ran until he could no longer think about how unfair life was; about family tradition and Purebloods and carrying on the bloodline regardless of personal desires and wants and needs. How parents can disregard a child's happiness for their own ridiculous agenda. He supposed Draco was in the same position; deep down his parents were just as callous and relentless about tradition and bloodlines, only Draco was lucky enough to have been spared all that because of Harry.

"Glad to see you could join us Harry," Hagrid called out as he arrived, out of breath, joining the others at the paddock fence and dumping his bag to the ground.

Harry smiled in apology and purposefully stood next to Ron as Hagrid returned to the lesson, unbothered.

"Hey."

Harry turned to Ron at the quiet, unsure greeting and smiled a little. "Hey."

"You... you all right?" Ron asked, brow crinkling a little with worry, the expression warming Harry's heart and easing his anxiety over whether he was going to lose his best mate over Hermione's actions.

Harry smiled and nodded. "Yeah, just late. Zabini is a very persistent Alpha," he found himself disclosing.

Ron's eyes widened fractionally. "Did he touch you?"

"No, he didn't. He's just... verbally persistent. I feel bad for him really," he added quietly, glancing at
Hagrid to ensure that he was still engrossed in his lecture before turning back to Ron. "I'm his only hope for not having to bond with a female."

Ron frowned disapprovingly. "Yeah but you already told him no, so he should just back off."

"What if you only had one chance to be with a female? Imagine being forced to have a sex with a male when it's not what you want?"

Comprehension dawned on Ron's face, his mouth making an 'oh' of understanding. "I guess I didn't think of it that way…"

"Yeah." Harry turned back to Hagrid. "So… how's Hermione?" he asked, a touch coolly.

Ron shifted, folding his arms on top of the wooden fence and leaning against it. "She's… embarrassed mostly, but also worried. Zabini was the one who told her that he was suspicious of Malfoy, which only made her even more anxious when you started acting really stressed out and distant. She loves you like a brother Harry and she can't help but be suspicious because of some of the things Malfoy has done in the past, not to mention his family's history with You-Know-Who."

Harry turned to him with a sigh. "I know she's worried but she can't… she can't interfere in my life like that. I don't need her to. I have Draco and despite what she, or anyone else may think, he treats me really well. I'm happy with him and I couldn't really ask for anything more from my mate. I love him," he said simply.

Ron nodded, taking it in stride, as though he'd already known. "I'll talk to her."

"The war is over," Harry added into the silence that followed, staring across the snow-covered paddock without really seeing it, thinking of all that had changed since the demise of Voldemort. "It's time we stop being mistrustful of people because of the past and move on. That was the point of it all, wasn't it?"

Harry pushed through their bedroom door, hair windswept and cheeks pink from the icy air that had been sweeping through the Quidditch stands for the past two hours. He and Draco had gone to watch the mid-day match between Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff (Hufflepuff taking the win at the last second for a surprising victory), and they were now back in their room to dress for the much-anticipated party that evening.

Harry walked over to his wardrobe to pull his clothes out for the night ahead, butterflies fluttering anxiously in his stomach for more than one reason.

"Are you going to do it now?" he asked without turning around, listening to Draco delve into his own wardrobe on the other side of the room. There was a pause and Harry glanced over his shoulder to see his mate looking at him speculatively. "What?"

Draco turned; his stylish ensemble draped carefully over one arm. "I spoke to my father and I think it would be best to do it after the party," he explained.

Harry frowned at him as he struggled gracelessly into his good black trousers. "Why?"

Draco walked over to him as he struggled gracelessly into his good black trousers. "Why?"

Draco walked over to the bed and laid his charcoal grey trousers and white button-up over it, staring down at the clothing critically. "Because," he replied distractedly. "The bite is a bit of an uncomfortable process." He finally glanced up and watched as Harry removed his t-shirt and donned his new deep blue button-up. "And the discomfort is supposed to last for a couple of days while your
"body adjusts. I wouldn't want you to be in pain all evening while simultaneously trying to make a good impression."

"And you thought I'd appreciate the gesture of goodwill?" Harry asked as he buttoned his shirt, tongue poking out between his lips as he concentrated on not missing a button-hole.

"Something like that," Draco murmured carefully, looking wary of his mate's response.

Harry glanced up and smiled crookedly, unable to help himself. "Yeah, all right - but I'm not putting it off until tomorrow. Tonight, okay?" Harry added firmly.

"If you wish."

Harry pulled some clean socks from his drawer and walked over to the desk chair where he'd set out his shoes and sat down. "You want to though, right?" he asked, tone a little too casual.

"Harry?"

"Hmm?" he replied, glancing up.

Draco levelled him with a look as he slid his arms into the sleeves of his white shirt. "What is it you want to know?"

Harry exhaled and stared at his feet as he slowly slipped on his soft black socks followed by his rarely worn good shoes. "I dunno, you seem… hesitant sometimes. And other times…"

"Really turned on by the idea?"

"Yeah." Harry placed his feet back on the floor and leaned sideways against the chair, gazing at his mate with questioning eyes.

Draco returned to buttoning his shirt, faintly discomfited. "I suppose I feel somewhat conflicted by it. I want to do it, it's such a powerfully innate part of my nature, but I also don't want to cause you pain." He paused and exhaled slowly as he absently checked his reflection in the mirror. "But then I picture another Alpha's gaze lingering on you a little too long and…" he trailed off with a shrug.

Harry nodded, Draco's words suddenly reminding him that he needed to tell his mate about Blaise. "Er, that reminds me…" he said, shifting uncomfortably in the wooden chair. "There's something I should probably tell you before the party."

"Yes?" Draco sat on the edge of the bed in order to carefully tie the laces of his smart Italian leather shoes.

Harry swallowed and fidgeted with the cuff of his new shirt, the material stiff between his fingertips. "Blaise er, Zabini, he's going to be there. Tonight."

"And?"

"Well, he… he kind of offered himself as a second Alpha to me. A while ago."

Draco's fingers froze in the midst of tying his laces, his entire body tensing.

Harry opened his mouth to speak then shut it as Draco straightened and focused on him with darkened eyes.

"When?" he bit out tersely, voice raspier than usual.
"Uh, right before I met with the Board the first time," Harry replied carefully, not sure why he felt as though he had to tread on eggshells but doing so none-the-less.

"What?" Draco's voice was low and severe and Harry had the distinct impression of a brewing storm. "Why the fuck didn't you say something? That was weeks ago."

Harry frowned, irritation spiking a little at his mate's censorious tone. "Because meeting the Board and then the enquiry, where your life was on the line, was more important, and I just kind of forgot about it."

"Until when? Until today? This morning?"

Harry straightened in his chair, feeling defensive. "Well no, he reminded me at the pub-"

"What?" Draco's eyes positively blazed. "He's approached you more than once? Why? Did you tell him you'd think about it?"

Harry glared, affronted. "Of course not, I told him no and he said he wasn't going to give up."

Draco stood, running an agitated hand through his white-blond hair. "Of course he isn't going to give up when you haven't been claimed yet. Fuck Potter, I can't believe you didn't tell me… Merlin, you've been alone with him…"

Harry stood, indignant anger coursing through him. "What does it matter if I'm alone with him? I don't want him and I told him so. You're being ridiculous."

Apparently it was the wrong thing to say; Draco's hands immediately clenching into fists by his side as he faced him. "Is this why you're always putting off being claimed?"

"What?" Harry spluttered, outraged and incredulous all at once. "You're the one who's been delaying it!"

"And you're not exactly objecting," Draco exclaimed accusingly. "Having second thoughts?"

Harry gaped, wanting to slap some sense into his mate. "How can you… How many times do I have to tell you that I don't want him - or any other Alpha - before you believe it?" Harry retorted. "And, you said at the beginning of all this that I could add another Alpha for protection if I wanted to, so you're not allowed to be cross over the idea anyway."

Again, it was the wrong thing to say.

Draco's expression shuttered completely, gaze instantly turning icy. "So you are considering it."

"No!" Harry exclaimed vehemently, sliding his hand into his hair and clenching the strands in agitation. "I'm just pointing out… Oh for fuck's sake, Blaise isn't a threat to you."

"No, he isn't, because you're not going anywhere near him again."

Harry stiffened, feeling his exasperation teeter on the edge of defiant recalcitrance. "What do you mean?" he asked evenly, forcing a calm into his tone that he didn't remotely feel.

Draco sat on the edge of the bed and began to rip through his laces before roughly pulling his shoes off and throwing them to the floor.

"What are you doing?"
His mate started on the buttons of his white shirt next. "We're not going."

Harry stared, disbelieving. "Are you serious? We can't not go; this party is for us. Your mother would be so upset."

"I'll send her an owl with our apologies."

Harry walked over to stand in front of him, watching as Draco unbuttoned his shirt with fingers that were still trembling with anger. "I'm not missing this party just because you're having a jealous Alpha meltdown. Your mother put too much effort into it and is looking forward to it too much for us to do this to her. What does it matter if Blaise is there? You'll be with me the whole time."

Draco paused in his jerky movements and looked up at Harry with a scowl. "I don't want you anywhere near him again, especially at a party with alcohol and lots of people; I could lose sight of you."

"And what?" Harry snapped scathingly. "I'll forget all about you and let him fuck me up against the wall?"

Draco's eyes flared and Harry knew he'd crossed a line - but then so had his mate. Who was he to order Harry around? To act like Harry had no free will, like he was just some slutty Omega who couldn't resist an Alpha's charms.

"If he gets you alone-"

"What?" Harry interrupted furiously. "What will happen? I've already proven that I can say no when I want to."

"Yes but do you want to? Perhaps Blaise is different; you invited him to Hogsmeade once upon a time."

Harry clenched his jaw and glared at his mate. He could see that there was no winning this argument with the temperamental idiot. "You're being a complete wanker about this, you know that right?"

Draco narrowed his eyes. "We're not going and that's final Potter."

Harry stared at him, fuming, a million responses running through his head. "Fine," he eventually bit out.

He spun on his heel and stormed over to his wardrobe where he began tossing clothes onto the floor.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm not sleeping here tonight," Harry replied shortly, fury strangling his voice. He strode into the ensuite and grabbed his toothbrush.

Draco stood, watching him with narrowed eyes as he returned and threw his things into an overnight bag. "Where are you going then?"

"Gryffindor Tower," Harry spat back, turning to face him. "I'll stay with the girls if it will make you feel better, but I'm not staying here in this room with you when you're being such a controlling prick."

Draco's expression tightened and he crossed his arms over his chest. "Fine."

Harry straightened his shoulders and lifted his bag. "Fine."
He turned and walked to the door, feeling Draco's silent gaze on him the whole way. Without a backwards glance, Harry wrenched the door open and threw it shut behind him, making it rattle on its hinges, before striding angrily down the empty corridor. He knew he was acting ridiculously petulant now too but he was too infuriated to care.

He collapsed against the wall the next corridor over, breathing hard and dropping his bag to the ground. He couldn't believe the fucking audacity of Draco ordering him not to go simply because he didn't think Harry was capable of controlling himself. After all their conversations about having an equal partnership, he couldn't believe Draco would do this to him; play the Alpha card and act as though he were in charge, like he was the one responsible for making all of their joint decisions like some sort of mateship dictator.

Harry scowled and kicked the wall behind him in anger. This was exactly what he was afraid of when his Omega inheritance was confirmed, that he would feel out of control and prohibited from making his own choices and decisions in life.

"Right," Harry muttered determinedly, straightening up from the wall.

He tossed his bag into an alcove, close enough to the third floor corridor that no one would probably find it, then turned and swiftly walked to the stairs and made his way down to the entrance hall, heart pounding in his ears. Without pausing to second-guess his decision, he pushed through the heavy oak doors and out into the cold evening air.

He cursed the fact that he didn't have his winter cloak with him, but at least he had his wand.

Harry picked up his pace and jogged all the way down the snow-covered drive to the gates unimpeded. As soon as he was outside the Hogwarts' grounds, he Disapparated with a grimly resolute expression on his face; he was not going to disappoint Narcissa after all of their friendly ice-breaking letters over the past week, in which she mentioned how much she was looking forward to this evening, and he was not going to miss out on getting to know the Malfoy family's close friends either.

This night was important in making Harry feel accepted and comfortable with Draco's family, and if Draco couldn't see that then he could just stay behind and sulk on his own.

. . . .

"Good evening Mr. Potter."

Harry smiled, pushing aside his foul mood in order to enjoy the night. "Hullo Mrs. Malfoy," he greeted the regal woman reservedly, wondering if the warm tone of her letters was any indication of how she would now act with him in person.

She stepped back to let him pass into the entrance foyer of Malfoy Manor. She didn't smile but her pale blue eyes sparkled with a warm greeting as she kissed him on the cheek and pulled back to look him over properly.

"You look very dashing Mr. Potter, if somewhat out of breath," she observed with a raised brow, very reminiscent of her son. "Where is Draco?" she asked, as though reading his thoughts.

"Er, he's not coming."

"Really?" Narcissa replied in surprise, glancing up as Lucius joined them. He took his wife's hand, gaze sliding over Harry without a smile or even a hello. "Draco isn't coming darling."
Lucius turned to look suspiciously down at Harry. "Oh? And why is that Mr. Potter?"

Harry lifted his chin and decided to go with the truth. "He didn't think I should be anywhere near Blaise Zabini because he offered himself to me as a secondary Alpha. I told Blaise I wasn't interested but Draco still argued against coming, so he stayed behind and I came on my own."

"He let you attend unaccompanied with an interested Alpha present?" Lucius asked, eyes narrowing doubtfully.

"No," Harry replied directly. "He doesn't know I'm here."

There was a brief pause in which Lucius' mouth turned down into a disapproving frown whilst a tiny smirk twitched at the corner of Narcissa's lips. She stepped forward in her beautiful pale blue and silver dress robes and slipped an arm through Harry's before leading him away towards the ballroom.

Harry felt his anxiety ease as Lucius fell into step behind them without another word.

"You are a treasure Mr. Potter," Narcissa drawled, quietly amused, as they ascended the stairs together. "Draco is in good hands."

Harry blinked at her, startled. He had thought that Draco's parents would disapprove of his headstrong and nonconformist behaviour. "Really?"

Narcissa emitted a tinkly little laugh of delight, one hand going to her chest. "Yes Mr. Potter, you are just what Draco needs."

Harry smiled, catching her eye and feeling an odd sort of intimate camaraderie with Draco's mum. He was instantly glad that he'd come despite his intransigent mate.

Harry could hear voices down the hall and realised that it must be later than he'd thought, they had planned on arriving prior to any of the guests, but clearly he was not the first to arrive.

"A few people were quite eager to meet you," Narcissa whispered aside in explanation. She squeezed his arm and led him through the doorway into the gleaming golden ballroom, the same room from his first Board meeting, but this time the atmosphere was decidedly less hostile.

Harry squinted a little at the sudden influx of flickering candle-light after the dimly lit corridors. His eyes quickly adjusted and he took in the meandering house-elves holding trays of food and drink, as well as about a dozen witches and wizards in formal clothing.

He nearly started when a small girl suddenly squealed and ran over, black party shoes click-clacking on the shiny flooring and red dress robes streaming out behind her.

Harry instantly relaxed as he recognised the young Nundu clan member. He just couldn't remember her name…

"Harry Potter!" she exclaimed with a huge grin. "You're here! Remember me?"

Harry couldn't help but smile. "Of course I do."

"Gemma, you mustn't run."

Harry glanced up to see the same friendly grandfather hobbling to keep up.

"Please forgive her Mr. Potter, she's a little star-struck around you," he apologised. He reached out with one gnarled hand and shook Harry's, his grip surprisingly strong for his age. "Stuart
Goodfellow, pleased to see you again Mr. Potter."

"I'm glad you're here," Harry said with a smile, turning to Gemma to include her in the sentiment as well. "It's good to see some friendly faces. You'll have to save me a dance later," he said to her with a conspiratorial wink.

Gemma blushed as she nodded her head, glossy curls bouncing.

"But be warned, I'll probably step on your toes," Harry added in a faux whisper, causing her to giggle.

"You should dance with my mother too," Gemma said, smiling. "My father isn't here tonight, he had to work."

"Gemma dear, I don't think your mother is in a fit state to be dancing," Stuart said gently, smiling down at her with obvious fondness.

"Oh… I guess not," she conceded with a bemused frown.

"Which one is your mother?" Harry asked curiously.

Gemma instantly turned and scanned the room of about a dozen people. "There!" she cried, pointing at the short, pretty witch speaking with Hugh Sloan.

Harry swallowed. "Your mum is… is Sophie McDougal?" he asked, remembering quite vividly the pregnant Board member who was not the friendliest of women.

Gemma turned back and nodded her head proudly.

"Come Mr. Potter, we must move on," Narcissa politely interrupted. He'd almost forgotten she was even there. It appeared that Lucius had already left him to his own devices and wandered off amongst the guests.

Harry smiled at his two new acquaintances before slipping away with Narcissa.

"You seem to have a way with children Mr. Potter," Narcissa commented quietly.

Harry smiled, taking the words as a compliment. "I'm just practicing for later," he quipped.

Narcissa's gaze was warm as she turned to him, hand tightening on his forearm for a moment. "I would be lying if I said that I was not looking forward to being a grandmother Mr. Potter, as well as seeing my son, my only child, become a father." She paused and looked away, gently steering him towards a long table laden with food. "I am sorry if Draco is behaving poorly at the moment, having a mate is still new to him. I hope whatever foolishness he may have done or said, that you will not hold it against him."

Harry smiled and shook his head. "Of course not, we're both still adjusting, and I know I'm not the easiest person to live with either."

"I would say that I am sure he will be calm and collected when you return home, but I have a feeling he will not be appreciative of your little disappearing act tonight."

Harry couldn't help but chuckle. "Technically he doesn't even know that I'm outside the school, I told him that I would be staying the night in Gryffindor Tower."

Narcissa smirked as they stopped near the food and she delicately selected what looked like a
Harry grinned and began to fill a plate with a selection of delicious smelling food. It was all rather fancy but looked edible enough, and he was famished.

"Harry, good to see you again."

Harry looked up and smiled at Hugh Sloan who was extending a hand towards him. Harry shifted his plate to his left hand and shook the Board Chair's hand in greeting. "You too Mr. Sloan."

"Please call me Hugh," he replied jovially. "I'm still so pleased that everything worked out for you and young Malfoy." He paused to glance around, puzzled. "Where is Draco this evening? I haven't seen him yet."

Narcissa politely excused herself as a group of guests entered the room.

"He isn't feeling well," Harry replied carefully, avoiding Hugh's gaze as he reached for some more food to load onto his already crowded plate.

"Oh, that's a shame," he replied sympathetically. "Well pass on my good wishes to him - to the both of you. I believe you two will be a wonderful match and a credit to us all."

Harry knew he was speaking of the Nundu clan as he said this and Harry nodded in acknowledgment, touched. "Thank you."

"Harry! You made it old chap."

Harry felt his stomach clench as Blaise sauntered up to them with a grin. He was dressed in a black and white suit that Harry begrudgingly had to admit looked quite fetching on the tall, dark Alpha.

"Hullo Blaise," Harry replied wanly before stuffing some food into his mouth to avoid further conversation with the prat.

"Well I'll leave you gentlemen to it," Hugh said with a departing smile, plucking a glass of champagne off the table before turning away.

Harry's eyes widened in alarm but his mouth was too full to protest the Board Chair's departure. He didn't want to be alone with bloody Zabini. Despite everything that he and Draco had argued about, it still felt like a betrayal to his mate to be speaking with him.

"Where's Draco?" Blaise asked nonchalantly before taking a sip of his drink, dark eyes watching Harry intently.

Harry swallowed, gaze skittering around the room a moment before reluctantly returning to rest on Blaise's face. "He isn't here," he finally answered, unwillingly.

"Oh?" Blaise asked with interest. "Why not?"

"He wasn't feeling well," Harry said with a little more conviction, not wanting Blaise to get any ideas.

Blaise stepped up to the table and leaned in to reach for some food, at the same time leaning in towards Harry to quietly whisper, "now why don't I believe you Potter?"

Harry bristled and took a step back, frowning at him.
Blaise chuckled and held up a hand in defeat. He selected another cracker laden with something green and turned back to Harry. "Is it safe for you to be here on your own though?" he asked, sounding legitimately concerned, but Harry was fed up. He couldn't help but blame Blaise for his fight with Draco, however unfair that may be. And so what if Harry was the only male Omega around, it didn't mean he was fair game forever.

"The only menace here is you Zabini," Harry retorted.

Blaise seemed to find that amusing and grinned back at him impudently.

"Mr. Potter, your presence is required."

Harry looked up and was never so relieved to see Lucius Malfoy in his life. "Of course. Excuse me Blaise."

Blaise looked as though he was about to say something but Harry quickly set his plate down and followed Draco's father into the crowd.

Lucius led him to the opposite side of the large room before suddenly stopping and turning to him, causing Harry to nearly stumble right into him, unprepared.

Lucius gazed at him dispassionately. "You looked uncomfortable Mr. Potter."

Harry frowned in confusion, and then his expression suddenly cleared. "You… you took me away from him on purpose?"

Lucius swallowed, clearly ill at ease. "Yes, my son is not here to safeguard you so, I feel it is my… duty," he responded stiffly, not quite making eye contact.

Harry's brows nearly rose into his hairline in amazement. "I… thank you I guess. I mean, thank you." He paused and felt he should say more, something to ingratiate himself with his aloof father-in-law. "Just so you know, I have no intention of accepting Blaise Zabini's offer, or any other Alpha's. I don't know if it would bother you if I was to accept another Alpha or not, as I'm not used to Alpha family dynamics, but I thought that you should know that you needn't worry. Just in case you were. Worried, that is," he trailed off clumsily, hoping that at least the sincerity of his words shone through.

Lucius finally met his gaze and gave a short nod of acknowledgement before stalking off without another word.

Harry rolled his eyes, but a smile tugged at his lips; he was going to make Lucius like him or die trying.

He glanced back towards the table to see if his plate of food was still there, and to see if Blaise was gone so that he could safely return to his abandoned meal. It appeared the Alpha had moved on so Harry swiftly made for the table once more.

"Harry!"

Harry tore his gaze away from the delicious cuisine with a sigh, quickly brightening though when he spotted Gemma standing next to him, arms behind her back, smiling shyly up at him.

"It must be time for our dance," Harry concluded, deciphering her bashfully expectant expression.

The small girl nodded and took his hand when he held it out to her.
Harry spent the next hour dancing with Gemma, laughing and tripping over his own feet as she stood on top of them and tried to guide him through proper dance steps. It was messy and uncoordinated, and Harry was almost glad that Draco wasn't there to see it because the pretentious Pureblood side of him would have been mortified.

When he was too tired to dance anymore, Harry stopped and spoke to some of the other guests, quickly growing more comfortable. Most of the guests were friendly enough, and even Sophie McDougal, Gemma's mum, thanked him for humouring her daughter and dancing with her. She even smiled at him and called him 'kind.'

Harry refused to dance with anyone else though, it just didn't feel right and no one pushed him. Even Blaise kept his distance the remainder of the evening, though he seemed to be constantly watching him from afar. Harry pointedly ignored him.

He purposefully didn't drink anything with alcohol in it the entire evening in order to keep his wits about him, as well as to not make a fool of himself. He was eventually able to eat his fill, and stood by the table conversing with Purebloods and clan members alike. Now that he was here, it was startlingly easy to keep the secret that he'd always irrationally feared would just slip out.

He noted that all of the guests were aristocratic Purebloods yet seemed easier to get along with than his father-in-law; the only one sporting a stern expression all night.

It was nearly midnight by the time Harry felt like he'd had enough and was too tired to remain a minute longer.

He found Narcissa standing next to her husband with her head resting lightly on his shoulder, a faintly pleased smile on her face as she surveyed the crowd of guests in her home.

"Thank you, for everything," he enthused with a grateful smile after telling them that he was leaving. "I had a really good time."

"Imagine that," Narcissa replied with a tiny smirk as she lifted her head, eyes dancing. She had clearly enjoyed acting the hostess; it seemed to lift her spirits and added a vivacious sparkle to her that Harry had never seen before. It was probably how she was before the war, the effervescent woman that Draco had grown up with; hosting glittering parties with posh guest lists and lively music filling his family home.

While Harry was still not that keen on sophisticated parties, he was sure he would have preferred that to his childhood with the Dursley's.

"I shall accompany you back to Hogwarts Mr. Potter," Lucius interjected formally.

Harry could see that Lucius was exhausted and he didn't want to trouble him with something so unnecessary.

Not that he would ever admit it out loud, but he also didn't want to be alone with the intimidating man. He wasn't quite ready for that.

"I'm okay, my friend Ron is meeting me at the gates," Harry lied smoothly. "Really, I'll be fine," he insisted at Lucius' dubious expression.

"Thank you for coming, despite Draco's absence," Narcissa said, slipping an arm around her husband's waist.

Harry smiled. "Yeah, I missed him," he admitted. "Might not spend the night in Gryffindor Tower
after all," he added.

Narcissa smiled knowingly at him while Lucius frowned in bewilderment.

"Goodnight," Harry said, glancing between them. "And thanks again."

"Goodnight Mr. Potter."

Harry turned and made his way through the remaining guests, waving at a few of them and bidding them goodnight. All in all, the night had been a smashing success, he thought proudly, suddenly floating on a high of relief that it had gone so well - and also that it was now over.

He walked down the stairs and thanked the house-elves who held open the front doors for him. He shivered as the icy air suddenly swept right through him.

"Mr. Potter."

Harry turned to see Lucius striding towards him, a winter cloak folded carefully over one arm.

"Please use this, my wife noticed that you did not have the proper attire upon your arrival and she does not wish you to get cold on your journey home."

Harry smiled, feeling a warm glow fill him as he carefully took the garment. "Thank you," he accepted gratefully. He slipped into the warm cloak and inhaled deeply. "It's Draco's, isn't it?" he asked, recognising the scent.

Lucius nodded and Harry could've sworn he saw a flash of warm pride in his pale eyes. Lucius turned and strode back towards the stairs; back straight and blond hair a smooth curtain over his shoulder-blades.

Harry smiled after him a moment, suspecting that maybe he was growing on the man. Maybe.

Harry grinned to himself and walked out into the night, wrapped up in the warm woollen cloak and surrounded by the scent of his mate. He really was missing him. Hopefully Draco would be a little more receptive when he saw him and a little less controlled by his illogical Alpha emotions.

The night was clear and he could see millions of stars above Wiltshire as he slowly walked to the end of the gravel drive and past the large Manor gates.

He took a moment to inhale the night air into his lungs, relishing the fresh crispness of the outdoors after the warm ballroom. He exhaled on a smile and then promptly Disapparated with a loud crack.

Two large men walked out from the shadows on the outskirts of the gates and followed right behind him with two violent cracks of Disapparation.
Chapter 14

The second Harry passed through the tall gates of Hogwart's, he heard the distinct crack of Apparation from somewhere behind him. He stopped and turned around, unconcerned, wondering if Lucius had decided to follow him after all.

Unfortunately his lapse in 'constant vigilance' cost him dearly in reaction time.

Two tall, burly men were facing him, wands pointed, terrifyingly ugly expressions on both of their faces.

"Expelliarmus!"

"Petrificus Totalus!"

Harry didn't even have time to cry out; the two spells struck him in quick succession, causing him to inhale sharply before his wand flew into their outstretched hands and his immobilised body fell to the ground, barely making a sound as he came to rest on the snow-covered terrain.

The only movement the spell afforded him was the ability to swivel his eyes to the two attackers and wait to see what they would do next, pulse racing.

Both men had to be over six feet in height, both with dark hair and wearing nearly identical brown cloaks that were a little threadbare in places. They had their wands out and trained on him as they approached, the tension visibly easing from their shoulders with every step now that Harry was sprawled out on the ground and incapable of defending himself.

They stopped next to him and glanced at each other, having some sort of silent conversation that Harry wasn't privy to. Harry inwardly cursed the fact that he couldn't even speak, couldn't even demand to know what they were doing or why. The two men didn't look familiar and they didn't seem in any hurry to fill him in either as they continued their silent discussion.

Finally, one of them pocketed Harry's wand while the other man suddenly raised his own wand and pointed it directly between Harry's eyes.

Harry felt his heart stop at the evil intent on the man's face right before he cast.

"Crucio!"

Harry had never felt pain like this before; the fact that he couldn't move because of the body-bind curse, couldn't even try to escape the absolute agony, made the torturous spell that much worse. His eyes rolled into the back of his head as the pain tore through his petrified body. He just had to lie there and take it as what felt like thousands of bolts of electricity jolted through his body combined with the sensation of sharp knives tearing at his insides.

It seemed to go on and on and on…

"Finite Incantatem."

Both spells lifted simultaneously and Harry was suddenly freed from the body-bind spell as well as being released from the torment of the Cruciatus Curse. The after-effects were such though that he could only lie there; panting, eyes stinging with tears, as they stared wordlessly down at him. The snow was beginning to burn against the skin of his cheek as he lay there, inhaling panicked gulps of
air as his body shuddered through the aftershocks.

The two men didn't say anything, not a single word, and Harry didn't have the strength to speak, let alone attempt to disarm them wandlessly.

"Crucio!"

Harry choked on a cry of shock as he was once again put under the Cruciatus Curse. This time his body was free to writhe in the snow unconstrained, limbs stiffening and twisting at odd angles as he was gripped in absolute agony, neck arching back and mouth open in a scream that he couldn't have held back if he'd wanted to.

The man calmly kept his wand on him without wavering; bright blue eyes watching Harry thrash and struggle impassively.

It went on for so long that Harry began to see white spots behind clenched eyelids before suddenly, thankfully, losing consciousness.

His awareness returned slowly as he felt his aching body being dragged through the snow. The residual pain was almost as bad as the curse itself; as though every cell in his body was still crying out in distress. His head lolled on his neck and he could do nothing but squint blearily up at the dark sky above him. His glasses had obviously come off at some point and his poor vision only served to increase the feeling of helplessness washing over him. It was cold and dark and he had no wand, no strength, and he was outnumbered and hopelessly outweighed by the two brawny wizards.

The tight grip on his wrists suddenly disappeared and he dropped to the ground, left to lie limp and gasping in the snow. A spell was cast next to him followed by a strange shattering sound, almost like breaking glass.

After a moment of inaction, Harry was able to gather the strength needed to open his eyes. He was quickly able to ascertain by the dark towers of blurred lights in the distance that the men had actually brought him closer to Hogwarts rather than away and off the grounds. Before he had time to wonder why, the men were back and roughly lifting him from the snow.

Harry's heart stopped as he was suddenly, without warning, flung through the air, arms automatically wind-milling in alarm as he fell through dark, empty space.

He inhaled in shock as his body was suddenly immersed in freezing cold water.

The lake. They'd tossed him into The Black Lake.

Harry sank a few metres down in the pitch black water before his momentum slowed and he was able to put his arms out to stop his descent. He panicked for a moment; not knowing which way was up, then quickly clamped down on his terror and forced his sluggish brain and Crucio-addled body to relax.

As soon as his panic receded a little, he was able to feel his body rise on its own towards what must be the direction of the surface, and he quickly kicked his feet and paddled his arms to assist.

He had his eyes open but it was so dark and murky that he couldn't see a thing. The arctic temperature of the water was burning his skin and quickly stiffening his muscles, but at least the cold and fear distracted him from the lingering curse pain.

Harry quickly shucked off his heavy cloak as he swam upwards and left it drifting behind him, lost to the shadowy depths of the large lake below. He could tell he was nearing the surface and clenched
his jaw as he gave a couple of powerful kicks to increase his speed. He was sure the men would still be there, waiting for him, but he didn't have a choice; it was either breach the surface of the lake or drown.

A sudden jarring impact to the top of Harry's head had him seeing stars.

He stopped swimming, his lungs beginning to burn in his chest. He raised his arms up over his head and tentatively reached out with his hands. His fingers came into contact with a thick, knobbly layer of ice. He moved his hands through the water, sliding over the ice in every direction, trying to locate the hole in which he'd fallen through.

And then it hit him: the breaking noise earlier had been the men making a hole in the ice - and they must have sealed it again once they'd tossed him through.

He kept searching, hands frantically scrabbling at the dense layer of ice, panic beginning to set in as he came up with nothing but more and more ice; so thick that he didn't have a hope of breaking through it.

He tried to gather his magic in a desperate attempt at casting wandlessly but almost cried out at the ensuing pain that rippled through his body with the effort. The Cruciatus Curse had definitely done the job they'd intended.

Harry instantly reared back with his right arm and punched the ice as hard as he possibly could, uncaring of whether he broke every bone in his hand to do so. The shock of the hit reverberated painfully up his arm, and definitely did some damage to the bones in his hand, but did absolutely nothing to the ice.

Harry knew he was out of time, he couldn't hold his breath any longer and his limbs were now so cold that he could barely feel them let alone move them.

He couldn't believe after everything he'd been through, that this was how it was all going to end; murdered at the hands of a couple of nobodies for reasons he didn't even bloody know.

They wouldn't even find his body for months - if at all. It was only October and the snow wouldn't be properly melted until February or March…

Harry felt a sudden flare of hope within his chest.

It was only October; the lake wasn't safe to skate on until usually December or January, that meant that the centre of the lake wouldn't be frozen solid yet…

Harry forced his stiff body to start moving. He felt uncoordinated and slow but he pushed onwards with fresh determination, this would work, he was sure of it.

A surge of bubbles escaped his mouth as his lungs forcibly pushed out the single breath he'd been holding. He clamped his lips shut again, lungs burning and nearly empty, and pressed on. He was beginning to feel light-headed and dizzy but held onto his consciousness with the same resolve and fortitude that had kept him alive so many times before.

'Don't stop moving, just keep going, keep going, keep going,' he chanted over and over again in his head like a frantic mantra.

He dragged one hand along the underside of the ice as he struggled along, the texture of the ice changing noticeably as he moved; from smooth and slick to grainy and rough. Soon enough his nails were able to actually dig in and chip away little bits of ice.
Spots were beginning to dance before his eyes and he could no longer feel any part of his body as he did a kind of a jerky, clumsy swimming motion to keep himself moving forward. The last of his breath left his body in another surge of bubbles, his mouth automatically opening and inhaling icy-cold water which flooded down his throat and entered his lungs.

It was now or never.

Harry stopped and used the last of his strength to once again punch at the ice, using his uninjured left hand this time. Even though it was a weak hit, it still managed to split the thin layer of ice and he quickly surged up to shove his head through the small opening. The rest of the fragile surface fell away, some of the ice cutting his skin and ears, but allowing him to take in a huge gulp of desperately needed air.

He coughed up the water he'd inhaled and his throat burned as he tried to catch his breath in between bouts of choking. The blackness instantly cleared from the corners of his vision and his mind felt a little more lucid as he continued to gasp in great uneven breaths.

He couldn't relax for long though, he knew he needed to get out of the water - and fast.

Harry began to propel himself onwards towards the other side of the lake, feeling heavy and weak as he continued to slowly break through the thin layer of ice as he went, like a ship breaking through glacial Antarctic waters. He kept swimming until he finally hit the dense ice that surrounded the outskirts of The Black Lake.

It took him a few attempts to lift his exhausted arms out of the water in order to place his hands on the surface of the ice. He winced as he put pressure on his injured right hand, but it was just a drop in the bucket compared to the pain of everything else in that moment.

Harry took a deep breath and pushed himself up, the buoyancy of the water helping immensely to lift his weary, water-logged body up out of the lake so that he could slide his knee up onto the ice. He fought to tip his weight sideways, away from the edge, until his body finally overbalanced and he was able to fall onto his back on the ice, gasping from the effort.

He closed his eyes as he lay there breathless and panting, his body beginning to twitch and shiver out of his control. His trousers and button-up shirt were soaked through and sticking to his skin, providing no source of warmth whatsoever. He was so cold but so tired too.

He knew it was a dangerous thing to want to give in to the urge to sleep in his situation. He forced his eyes open and lifted his head to glance back over to the opposite shore, trying to detect any hint of movement to ascertain whether his two attackers were still there. He couldn't see anything, not a lantern or even a faint wand *Lumos*, but in the dark and without his glasses it was difficult to know for sure.

Harry lay there for what felt like two minutes, but may in actual fact have been closer to twenty, by the time he gathered the strength of will to push himself over onto his hands and knees and begin the painfully slow process of crawling over the rest of the ice-covered lake towards the snowy shore; half afraid that the ice would give way at any moment and he'd end up back under water.

He knew he wouldn't make it out a second time.

His arms were shaking so badly now that his elbows kept giving out every few steps, nearly sending him chin-first into the hard ice. He stopped every once in a while to rest, careful not to lie down, because he knew it would be too hard to get up again.
What felt like hours later, Harry arrived at the edge of the bank of snow that sloped up from the lake towards Hogwarts, the lights growing clearer and brighter the closer he got.

He pushed onwards, safe in the knowledge that his two attackers had obviously left the scene of the crime, expecting him to have perished beneath the ice, because no one had attempted to stop him yet. His heart clenched at the reminder that the men had his wand, but he would have to worry about that later.

Harry's progress slowed to a snail's pace as he crawled up the hill through the thick layer of heavy snow, sliding backwards every few steps before taking a breath and then pushing onwards.

He paused, chest heaving, staring up towards the school with desperate eyes. It looked so far away. His shivering had actually lessened to almost nothing now, which he thought was probably a bad sign. His whole body felt numb, and his mind was turning to mush again, indistinct thoughts flowing fuzzy and faraway.

Harry set his jaw and continued on. At least the cold numbed the leftover pain from the Cruciatius Curse, as well as what were surely broken bones in his right hand. He tried to stand but instantly stumbled back to his knees; limbs too frozen and weak to hold him up, and head spinning with light-headedness.

He kept his gaze on the looming castle, placing each hand down on the snow, sinking through to his elbow, then placing the next hand down, sinking, drag one knee forward, drag the other knee forward. Lift, place, sink, lift, place, sink, drag, drag. Repeat.

On and on it went until he couldn't even think anymore, his stiff and frozen body moving forward on autopilot.

He was nearly at the footpath that led to the bottom of the stone steps when, with an involuntary whimper, he finally collapsed onto his stomach in the snow. The thought of trying to climb those steps, and then, because it was the middle of the night, he would most likely have to make it all the way up to the Hospital Wing on his own too. It was all just too much to even contemplate. Everyone else would be warmly tucked up in their beds, fast asleep, including his mate. And if his mate was asleep, then he wouldn't be able to detect Harry's distress once he entered the castle like he'd been able to before.

Harry closed his eyes with a sigh. He didn't think he was giving off distress signals anyway, he just felt really, really tired.

He wasn't shivering at all anymore; in fact, he didn't even feel cold anymore, not even where his cheek was resting on top of the snow.

'Just a quick rest and then I'll be ready to move again,' he promised himself muzzily.

He lay there breathing slow and shallow, mind already drifting towards sleep, when he suddenly heard a noise like the clinking of champagne glasses.

His groggy mind supplied him with an image of the Malfoy's party guests coming to Hogwarts to continue the festivities. Maybe they wanted to see Draco.

Harry smiled to himself and pried his frozen eyes open to look down the path that rounded the side of the school. There was a group of people merrily walking along, clinking glasses that sparkled in the reflected lights of the school.

He thought he'd better make some sort of noise or else they wouldn't know he was there. He didn't
want to miss out when they went to find Draco to continue the party.

He opened his mouth to call out but nothing happened. He tried a few more times before a raspy 'hey' finally made its way up through his hoarse throat.

Harry watched with satisfaction as the group of people seemed to pause and then began to slowly move towards him.

He blinked as the blob of party-goers approached and reformed into just one person; one tall person holding some wooden boxes which tinkled with the sound of rattling glass. Harry frowned, wondering where the others disappeared to.

"Hello? Is someone there?"

The voice sounded familiar but Harry's fuzzy brain couldn't identify it. He heard the sound of the box of tinkling glasses being shifted around and then set down in the snow. There was a moment of quiet before a bright Lumos suddenly lit up the whole area.

Harry stared at the wand light without even squinting at the brightness of it.

"Harry!" Panicked hands were suddenly on him, turning him over onto his back. "Oh shit, Harry? Harry?"

Now he was being shaken a little.

Harry wanted to reply but all that came out was a harsh, wet-sounding gurgle.

"Fuck."

Neville. It was Neville.

Harry couldn't help but groan a little as he was suddenly gathered up in the Alpha's arms and lifted. He felt so disoriented and had no idea what was going on, his head was spinning dizzily as Neville quickly carried him up the steps and into the school.

Harry inhaled sharply as Neville's body-heat pressed against his frozen form; the sensation of his body beginning to thaw out was absolute agony. He closed his eyes with a muted moan and went limp in Neville's arms, hoping he would just pass out.

"Hang on Harry, please hang on," Neville muttered anxiously from above. "I'll get you to Pomfrey and she'll fix you right up, and I'll get Malfoy too…" he trailed off uncertainly, probably wondering where Harry's mate was and why he hadn't been with him in the first place.

Harry just grit his teeth and remained silent. Everything hurt; everything ached beyond belief, from the cold and the after-effects of the Cruciatus Curse, to his broken hand and slowly defrosting skin.

The sharp, pungent sting of antiseptic hit his nostrils and he knew they'd finally reached the infirmary.

Neville gently laid him out on a bed and went to fetch Pomfrey. Within minutes, he heard the nurse standing over him, wand out, casting diagnostic spell after diagnostic spell.

He couldn't hear what they were saying to each other but it didn't matter, because after another minute Harry finally - gratefully - lost consciousness.
The first thing Harry became aware of again was the sensation of being cocooned in soothing warmth, like being submerged in the most perfect bath; where you are pleasantly, wonderfully warm but not too hot. He basked in the feeling for as long as possible, eyes closed, not allowing his brain to fully rouse. He didn't want to wake from this dream. There was something nagging at a tiny corner of his mind that made him shy away from complete awareness, something that he knew would not be pleasant once remembered.

Unfortunately the tiny niggling reminder wouldn't let go and Harry frowned as it picked away at him until he could no longer ignore it. The soothing warmth was still there but it dawned on him that he should also feel achy and sore and… cold?

After that, it all slammed ruthlessly back into his head: his argument with Draco, the party, the two men, *Crucio*, being tossed into the lake, and finally Neville carrying him barely conscious to the hospital wing…

He could feel his body beginning to tremble as he remembered the fear he'd felt; that feeling of absolute terror at being trapped under the ice and thinking that he was going to drown. He'd come close to death countless times in his life - and even truly *did* die on one occasion - but for some reason this one was really hitting him hard.

Perhaps because, for the first time in his life, he had more to lose.

He knew he couldn't ignore reality any longer and, with his mate on his mind, he dragged heavy eyes open.

He was still in the infirmary and it was silent and empty, save for himself and one occupied chair at his bedside.

"Harry."

Harry frowned at the sight of Draco's exhausted face; drawn and paler than usual, with dark violet smudges under his eyes, as though he'd been awake for a week straight.

Harry opened his mouth to say something but nothing came out.

"Don't speak," Draco cautioned, scraping his chair forward and reaching out to softly stroke his fingers down the side of Harry's neck. "You need to drink this first," he said before turning to lift a small vial off the bedside cabinet and then holding it to Harry's lips.

Harry eyed the yellow potion before obediently swallowing it. The cool liquid flowed down his throat and soothed away any lingering inflammation, leaving his throat clear and tingly in its wake.

He watched as Draco set the empty vial aside before turning back to him, looking as though he didn't quite know what to do with his hands.

It was then Harry noticed that his entire body was wrapped in a thick blanket which seemed to have a permanent warming charm woven into the fabric. That was why he felt as though he were lying in a bath of perfectly warmed water.

Harry cautiously cleared his throat before attempting to speak again. "Can you… can you free my arms please?" he asked in a raspy voice that didn't sound at all like himself.
"Of course." Draco immediately grasped the top edge of the blanket and carefully untucked it before pulling it down and away, releasing Harry's upper body so that he could slide his arms out and lay them on top of the thick covering. He shivered a little at the sudden brush of cool air on his arms through the thin cotton hospital pyjamas.

"Thanks," Harry responded quietly, then hesitantly added, "join me?"

Draco looked surprised but didn't question him.

Harry shifted onto his side as Draco carefully slipped under the covers, their arms and legs automatically entangling as they faced each other across the narrow hospital bed. The action of lifting one arm to wrap around his mate made Harry realise just how exhausted and anaemic his body still felt after his ordeal.

Draco absentely brushed a lock of hair back from Harry's forehead, fingertips lingering over the lightning bolt scar, grey eyes tight with emotion as he gazed back at Harry, seeming to drink in the sight of his mate alive and breathing.

"You're not cross with me?" Harry couldn't help asking softly once Draco had dropped his hand away. A part of him was still waiting for his mate to explode over his insolent behaviour.

Draco's expression went slack with surprise. "With you?"

Harry nodded.

"Harry, I..." He shook his head. "You're the one who should be cross with me. I over-reacted, about Blaise. I should've known that forbidding you to do something would only encourage you."

Harry frowned. "But I shouldn't have just left without telling you. Look what happened," he stressed, voice breaking a little on the last word.

Draco's arm tightened around him as he searched Harry's expression intently. "What did happen Harry? Pomfrey said that she found traces of the Cruciatus Curse on you..."

Harry swallowed and dropped his gaze to the collar on Draco's deep blue pyjamas for something to look at other than his mate's troubled expression. "When I left the party at the Manor, two wizards followed me back to Hogwarts and... and attacked me. I don't know why, I don't even know who they were; I don't think they were guests at the party. They didn't speak - except to cast spells."

"What did they do to you?" Draco asked, and Harry glanced up to see that quiet fury had replaced the concern in his mate's eyes.

For some reason, Harry found this emotion much easier to face. It was strange to see Draco so distressed and anxious because of him, even though they were "mated" now, it was still so new to him to have someone else wrapped up in his health and happiness - above anyone else's.

He bit his lip, knowing that going into detail would cause untold feelings of guilt for his mate, but he didn't want to keep it a secret from him either. He tried to describe it as quickly and as emotionlessly as possible. "I Disapparated to Hogwarts and they appeared right behind me almost as soon as I got there. They took my wand and then bound me before casting the first Crucio-"

"First?"

Harry nodded and pushed on before Draco could comment further. "They lifted it and then cursed me again until... until I passed out."
"Harry…" Draco responded, quietly anguished, and Harry suddenly didn't want to say anything else. He wanted Draco to be furious again, not broken.

"Please don't say anything," Harry interjected sharply, closing his eyes. "I can't tell you if you… if you look like that."

He opened his eyes again and Draco's expression had smoothed over. "Go on," he said with a nod.

Harry looked at him a moment and then took a deep breath, something inside of him aching with the inhalation, as though his lungs were slightly bruised.

"Once I was unconscious, they dragged me over to the edge of The Black Lake and threw me in."

Draco's entire body tensed and grey eyes flashed with controlled rage, but his expression remained impassive, lips firmly pressed together.

Harry exhaled and pushed on, trying not to picture the scene in his head but it was impossible; the images appearing bright and vivid before his mind's eye. "They sealed the ice over me and left me to drown," he said, startled by the sudden hot prickle of tears behind his eyes and in the bridge of his nose. "Fuck," he uttered under his breath, turning away in embarrassment to look at the ceiling, blinking rapidly.

Draco's arm tightened around him and Harry quickly turned his face into Draco's warm neck, uncaring of whether it was pathetic or not as he inhaled his mate's scent, letting it wash over him to ease his distress. He sighed and closed his eyes, the tension in his body immediately lessening.

Draco gave him a minute and then quietly, steadily, asked him what happened after he was thrown into the lake.

Harry took a breath and went on to describe how he had managed to escape the ice and crawl up the snow-covered slope to the school steps. He told him how he'd all but given up when Neville had found him, lying in the snow, and then brought him here.

Draco nodded and Harry wondered what he was thinking. He could hear the rapid beating of his mate's heart and noticed how he swallowed several times before speaking again.

"So, these men, did you see what they looked like?"

"Yeah, a bit; they were strong and quite tall, both Alphas I'd say. They both had dark hair and one had bright blue eyes, they may have even been related, brothers perhaps? But I'm not really sure, it… it all happened so fast."

Draco frowned in thought and Harry's gaze slid past him, suddenly noticing that there was an oily sheen to the air surrounding them.

"Er, Draco? Is there a shield charm around us?" he asked uneasily, still feeling a little on edge.

Draco's lips quirked into a slight smirk as he followed Harry's gaze. "Yes, I may have involuntarily erected a shield charm as soon as I saw you unconscious in the hospital bed. And I may have accidentally knocked out Pomfrey and Longbottom in the process - just for a second," he added when Harry's eyes widened. "They're fine. Longbottom left once Pomfrey checked him over for concussion, and then she told me everything she knew so far about your condition."

"She didn't make you remove the shield?" Harry replied in surprise.
"No, she could tell that I wasn't feeling particularly rational, so she let it go. Plus, she knows they haven't caught whoever did this to you so the added protection was a good idea," he added darkly, all trace of amusement gone from his expression.

Harry shivered at his mate's words; the men had been extremely intent on killing him and he didn't think it likely that they would simply give up once they found out he was still alive.

"I'm taking you to the Manor for a few days."

"What?" Harry blinked and looked up at Draco in confusion. "You are?"

"Yes," he replied unalteringly. "We're leaving tonight, and when we get there I'm going to officially claim you Potter. Then you will have a couple of days to rest with both myself and my parent's to watch over you. You will be safe there, even McGonagall approved the plan."

Harry nodded in agreement - with everything. He knew it was time for Draco to claim him as his, not just to help put off other Alphas but for the added protection as well. Especially now that there were two men out there who intended Harry serious harm. It felt good knowing Draco was right there with him, wanting to protect him, and, strangely enough, it was reassuring having Draco's family looking out for him too.

Harry suddenly let his head fall back against the pillow with a muted groan. "Oh no, your father is going to kill me."

Draco arched a brow. "What are you on about?"

"He offered to escort me back to Hogwarts when I was leaving the party and I declined, I told him that I had a friend meeting me at the gates," he said, chagrined.

"You lied?" Draco realised with a frown.

Harry swallowed uncomfortably. "I didn't want to bother him, I didn't think it was a big deal to go on my own. I was just Apparating from the Manor to Hogwarts, I didn't know... I didn't know." He paused, suddenly realising something that hadn't occurred to him before. "Wait a minute, your father can't leave the grounds of the Manor, isn't he still on house-arrest?"

Draco sighed, grey eyes flicking to the closed doors of the infirmary. "Yes, he is," he answered quietly, "but there are a few loop-holes which one may take advantage of if necessary, such as coming and going in another form and then not performing magic away from the Manor grounds. He only does it for emergencies, mind you."

"And taking me home is classified as an emergency?" Harry asked with a raised brow. He wouldn't have thought that Lucius deemed him worthy of such a risk.

"He must have been concerned about your safety without me around to keep an eye on you," Draco reasoned.

"I told him and your mum about Blaise's offer," Harry admitted tentatively, wondering if that was why Lucius had offered to escort him.

"I know, I've already spoken with my mother." Harry frowned. "How long have I been unconscious?"

"About five hours." Draco shifted on the narrow bed, unconsciously bringing his nose closer to the
top of Harry's head and inhaling his mate's scent without even seeming to realise it. "Do you think you're up for travelling now?" he asked, sounding a little anxious to get away. "Mother and Trinket have already taken all of your required potions to the Manor and prepared my room for our arrival. Trinket will return once we're ready for her to collect us."

Harry could see that Draco was restless in his own skin and, for some reason, needed to get to the Manor as soon as possible. Harry found he didn't really wish to be at Hogwarts right then either. He hoped the Aurors managed to capture his attackers before he had to return to school; the thought of spending the remainder of his time at Hogwarts terrified of another lunatic trying to murder him was not a welcome one.

"Yeah, I'm all right. Let's go," he said resolutely.

The relief on his mate's face was palpable.

Draco slid out of the bed, bare feet silently touching down on the flagstone floor. He turned to help Harry sit up before reaching for a thick, fluffy dressing gown on the chair back and assisting his mate to slip it on over weak and shaky arms. He tied it securely around Harry's waist and then, without another word, scooped Harry up into his arms.

Harry closed his eyes briefly to stop his head from spinning at the movement. Draco was being very careful but it was still disorienting and he exhaled a slow breath before opening his eyes once more. He remained quiet as Draco called for his house-elf. He wasn't going to argue with his mate for taking charge of the situation or for coddling him; he felt as though they both needed it.

Trinket appeared at the end of the bed with a muted pop. She nodded in sombre approval at the sight of Draco holding Harry and then walked over to gently wrap her long fingers around Harry's wrist.

Harry closed his eyes bracingly and they disappeared in a muffled whirl of elf magic.
Harry cautiously opened his eyes once everything felt as though it had stopped moving and Trinket's hand was no longer clutching onto his wrist. He immediately recognised Draco's bedroom at Malfoy Manor; the large, elegant room decorated in soothing hues of pale blue. For reasons beyond his understanding, Harry instantly felt at ease in the space, something about it alleviating some of his lingering anxiety.

Harry noticed a sizeable tray of potions on the bedside cabinet as he idly watched Trinket pad over to the large bed and turn down the bedding.

"Is Master Draco needing anything else?" she asked earnestly as she turned to Draco.

Draco shook his head and Harry watched as the little house-elf bobbed a short curtsy before swiftly disappearing.

Harry shivered, despite being held against his mate's warm chest. He'd forgotten how cold the Manor was and his recovering body was clearly sensitive to the sudden drop in temperature.

Draco's arms tightened around him in response and he quickly walked over to the bed and carefully deposited Harry onto the thick mattress. He untied Harry's dressing gown and carefully pulled it off before placing a hand on his mate's pyjama-clad chest and gently pushing him to lie down.

Harry silently watched as his mate pulled the thick bedding up over his shivering body before stepping back and removing his wand from the waistband of his pyjamas.

"How did you know I was in the infirmary?" Harry asked absently, feeling utterly worn out as he watched Draco cast a few silencing and locking charms at the closed door. "You're still in your pyjamas, like you just jumped out of bed and ran straight there."

Draco walked around to the other side of the bed and set his wand on the bedside cabinet before calmly undressing, grey eyes flicking up to meet Harry's curious gaze. "I wasn't asleep, I... I'm apparently unable to sleep properly without you there," he said stiffly, causing Harry to smile a little; he loved it when Draco became flustered by expressing his emotions, it was so... adorable. "Therefore I felt it when Longbottom brought you into the castle," he continued.

Harry's smile faded. "So you knew something was wrong?"

Draco stepped out of his silken pyjamas, leaving just his pants on, before climbing into the wide bed. He shuffled over to lie alongside Harry and Harry nearly sighed in relief at the welcome influx of body-heat.

"Yes," Draco finally replied, cheek propped in one hand as he looked down at Harry. "I knew it the moment the two of you stepped foot into the castle." He paused a second before adding, "and then the scent of your distress faded away. It was strange, as though you'd walked into the school and then back out again... I didn't know what it meant. I thought perhaps... that maybe you'd..."

"Died?" Harry interjected bluntly and then winced.

Draco shrugged, undoubtedly playing off what had probably been a rather terrifying stretch of time. "I didn't really believe that that's what happened, but I also couldn't help imagining it."

"You must have lost the scent when I lost consciousness," Harry said distractedly, imagining Draco...
running through the corridors, frantic with worry, rushing to the hospital wing to find out what had happened, and whether his mate was in fact still alive or not.

"I'm sorry," Harry said, quietly, intently. "I'm sorry I put you through that." He paused and took a deep breath. "I promise that no matter how angry I become with you in the future, I will never just leave without telling you and put myself in that kind of situation again." He reached out to affectionately smooth Draco's blond hair out of his eyes, stomach clenching with guilt at how weary his mate looked.

Draco leaned into the touch a moment before reaching up and tightly grasping Harry's hand in his own. "To think, you were outside on school grounds that whole time… the entire time you were being tortured…” he broke off with a shake of his head, grey eyes haunted.

Harry wanted to look away from the anguish in Draco's eyes but he forced himself not to, he needed to hear how much his actions had affected his mate. He deserved it. Yes Draco had over-reacted about Blaise, but he hadn't done anything so foolish as to walk out and get himself nearly killed. Harry knew it was a lesson that he sorely needed to learn, and now he most definitely had.

Life wasn't the same as it was before he was an Omega; there were new rules now, he couldn't just go anywhere on his own and do as he pleased - even more so than when he was merely famous Harry Potter, walking target for Voldemort - now it seemed he was a walking target for any slightly unstable Alpha out there. He also couldn't be selfish, no matter how unintentional; he had to remember that what happened to him also affected his mate.

Draco swallowed, struggling to compose himself. "If I… If I'd only known… You almost died Harry, if Longbottom hadn't found you…"

"I know," Harry responded softly, reassuringly. "And if only I'd let you claim me right from the start, then you would have known. You would have known right away. But I'm still here. I'm here," he repeated steadily.

Draco exhaled shakily and Harry gave his hand a squeeze, wanting to soothe his rattled nerves as much as he was able.

Draco laughed unsteadily and pressed his forehead to Harry's. "I should be the one comforting you, not the other way around Potter," he murmured, sounding as though his tension was finally easing a little.

Harry smiled, his own nerves beginning to settle a bit as well. He extracted his hand from Draco's and gently slid it around to the back of Draco's neck, pulling him down into a soft, chaste kiss.

Draco returned the gentle pressure, smiling against Harry's mouth as he pulled back a moment, allowing his lips to lightly brush against Harry's for a single breath before leaning in for another tender kiss.

Harry felt his body melt into his mate's touch, the way Draco's thumb was rubbing gentle circles over his skin where his hand was resting over Harry's ribs.

The kisses were slow and gentle, a reaffirmation that the other was okay, that everything would be all right. Harry didn't think he'd ever felt as connected to his mate as he did in that moment.

And perhaps that was what prompted Harry to pull back from the kiss and tilt his head to the side, arching his neck and deliberately exposing the pale column of his throat to his mate.

Draco swallowed audibly as his gaze tracked over the pure, unblemished skin laid out before him.
He lifted a hand to skate his fingertips down Harry's neck to the collar of his pyjamas.

Harry held very still as Draco began to unbutton the top few buttons of his cotton hospital pyjamas and push back the sides to uncover bare shoulders. Harry bit his lip as the cold air hit his skin, causing him to stiffen slightly.

Draco's gaze flicked up to Harry's face; trying to read his expression. Without a word, he shifted over to cover Harry's body with his own, keeping his weight on his forearms so as not to crush his still recuperating mate.

Harry automatically spread his thighs to allow Draco to settle comfortably between his legs, one arm wrapping loosely around Draco's naked back, his smooth skin warm to the touch. He shuddered as Draco's naturally warm body-heat began to slowly seep into him, chasing away some of the chill that had settled into his body from the cool room.

Draco dropped his head down to sniff at Harry's neck, causing Harry to shiver; no longer from the cold but from an oddly thrilling sense of anticipation.

Draco pressed his lips to Harry's skin, pausing a moment to inhale his mate's scent, then moved up the side of his neck, kissing each new stretch of bare skin with warm seeking lips. He moved all the way up to just beneath Harry's ear and then back down again, lingering over his pulse point and then again over the soft juncture of his shoulder.

Draco's lips parted and he began to lightly suck at the soft flesh, drawing it gently into his mouth and wetting it. Harry's eyes fell closed as his mate then began to lave the site with his tongue, as though thoroughly cleaning the area in preparation.

Harry could feel Draco hardening against his inner thigh as he continued to lap at Harry's skin, utterly absorbed in what he was doing. Harry knew he probably would have been aroused as well if he wasn't so exhausted.

Draco eventually pulled back and Harry opened his eyes to meet his gaze. "Ready?" Draco asked thickly.

"Yeah," Harry whispered back, voice hoarse but sure.

Draco looked as though he wanted to say something more, perhaps to remind Harry that it would hurt or that it was irreversible, or to remind him of the Nundu venom that would forever more flow through his veins, but he didn't. Maybe he didn't want to say anything that might change Harry's mind.

Harry arched his neck and closed his eyes in clear submission.

He was ready.

He felt Draco lean forwards, felt warm breath drifting across the damp patch of skin that he'd created.

Harry shivered, and then suddenly he felt the distinct sensation of teeth closing around is flesh. Harry's heart pounded and he was suddenly wide awake, body buzzing with instant awareness.

He inhaled sharply through his nose as the teeth slowly began to clamp down, harder and harder, felt the sharp pressure of pointed canines straining to break through his skin. Harry idly wondered if Draco's Nundu heritage made his teeth elongate for the purposes of making a claiming bite.

The thought was soon overtaken as his mate's teeth suddenly, and easily, pierced through his skin, as
though biting into a piece of fruit. Harry stiffened but made no noise, biting his lip hard in order to stifle a gasp of shock and pain.

Draco continued to sink his teeth in a little further before finally stopping and letting his lips close around the wound, teeth still firmly embedded in Harry's flesh. He let out a muffled moan against Harry's skin, hips reflexively thrusting against Harry's thigh, erection hard and insistent as his primitive Alpha instincts slowly took over.

Harry felt dizzy as the stinging sensation steadily turned into an intense burning at the same time that the scent of his mate's arousal swirled around him, confusing him and pulling his body in two different directions. His own prick was half hard as Draco rolled his hips, seeking out any sort of friction to relieve his body's natural reaction at finally claiming its mate.

Harry gasped as the burning suddenly reached a crescendo and then began to flow outwards from the bite wound, travelling through his veins at breakneck speed. Harry could feel the venom's magic coursing through his body, curling around his magical core and fusing together. The searing pain began to ease as it continued to spread, turning warm and then slightly cool as it reached the tips of his fingers and toes.

Harry exhaled in relief as the pain finally dissipated, leaving only a deep throbbing sensation where Draco's teeth were still fastened over his skin.

Harry was beginning to wonder if his mate was having a hard time letting go, when Draco finally eased up the pressure of his sharp teeth and slowly released Harry's injured flesh from his mouth.

"Oh…” Harry's eyes fluttered shut in unexpected pleasure as Draco began to tenderly lick over the bite mark. All of a sudden, he felt… connected, tethered to his mate in a way that he couldn't even begin to comprehend. His Alpha's tender ministrations as he cleaned the blood and Nundu venom from his wound spoke more clearly than words of how much he cared for his Omega. Harry could feel it; the love ringing out clear and beautiful, like the pure and exquisite tone of a bell resounding throughout his whole being.

It was a connection unlike anything he'd ever experienced before, like a Legitimency for the soul.

Draco's hips had stopped their instinctive rutting but his erection had not diminished in the slightest, pressed long and hard against Harry's leg. Draco pressed a single kiss to the mark then sat up, straddling Harry's hips, surveying his work with approval before turning his heated gaze on his mate.

Harry looked back at him, blinking in astonishment at the way Draco's eyes had gone silver and how his pupils had grown distinctly oval-shaped rather than circular.

They were the eyes of a cat; of a Nundu.

Harry didn't know what it said about him when he felt a flare of arousal at the visual reminder of his mate's alter ego.

Draco licked his lips, eyes fixed on Harry as he reached down and unbuttoned the rest of Harry's shirt. He pushed the hospital-issued pyjamas open, exposing Harry's chest and causing him to shiver again - from the cool air as well as from his mate's intense gaze.

Draco sat back and promptly pushed his pants down, just far enough to allow his erect cock to spring free.

Harry's breath stuttered in his chest as Draco began to fist himself, gaze still locked with his. Harry ran his hands up Draco's thighs, which were lean but firm with muscle, eventually settling his hands
at Draco's hips, watching his mate's expression with rapt attention.

Draco's breath was coming in rapid pants, huffed between parted pink lips, hand working quickly over his flushed cock.

Harry's mouth turned dry; his mate made such an erotic picture sitting astride him and wanking, and he wished he had the energy to be an active participant.

All thoughts of the attack were completely wiped from his mind.

Harry knew it wouldn't be long as he watched a rosy flush work its way up Draco's pale chest and neck. Draco's gaze suddenly shifted to the fresh claiming mark on Harry's neck and his eyes became half-lidded with a fresh wave of arousal.

A couple more pulls and Draco was suddenly groaning, long and low, spurting generous amounts of come and coating Harry's naked torso.

Draco paused a moment to catch his breath, eyes closed and head tipped back, one hand still lightly clasped around his softening cock, drops of clear fluid still leaking out the tip and over his fingers.

Harry watched with interest as Draco slowly opened his eyes and then leaned forward without a word; beginning to systematically spread his own ejaculate over Harry's skin, a slight crease of concentration between pale blond brows as he worked, silent and focused.

Harry found it to be the most base, most primitive, moment of his inheritance so far. Maybe this was more Nundu than Alpha, but it was so primal that Harry really didn't know what to say. First the bite and now this scent marking business…

All he knew was that he liked it; it was a possessive act but also one of cherishment too.

Once Draco was satisfied, he glanced up at Harry's face; eyes softening as he slowly came back to himself. He pressed a soft kiss to Harry's lips and then one to the claiming mark, before climbing off the bed. He slid his fingers into the waistband of his pants and began to slide them off.

Harry watched him in silence; wondering what else he was going to do. He thought it was odd that they weren't speaking - but somehow it seemed fitting too; communicating by touch and eye contact alone. He began to shiver as the warm fluid on his chest and abdomen began to cool, his body still feeling overly-sensitive. His new claiming mark was beginning to throb dully as well.

Draco tossed his dark underwear aside, frowning a little when he noticed Harry's shivering.

Without a word, he took a few steps back and then changed into his Nundu form.

Draco leapt neatly onto the empty side of the bed and then nuzzled his way under Harry's upper body, lying across the two pillows at the top of the bed.

Harry smiled a little as he instantly curled up against his mate's soft furry side, dragging the blanket up over his shoulders and then sinking his fingers deep into Draco's fur as he lay his head on Draco's silky side.

Draco craned his huge silvery-black head around so that Harry's head was tucked in under his downy-soft chin. Draco huffed in contentment, warm breath ruffling Harry's dark hair.
Harry sighed and allowed his eyes to finally slip shut as the warmth of his mate surrounded him, chasing away any trace of cold. He covered a yawn and then chuckled in surprise as a loud rumbly purr started up just under his ear.

It wasn't long before the comforting vibration and soothing warmth forced him to drift off into a deep sleep.

Harry woke with a start; eyes snapping open, a rough gasp tearing from his throat.

He lay there a moment, heart pounding, staring up at the white ceiling and waiting for his body to calm down. The nightmare had been a vivid one and he had to actively remind himself that he wasn't trapped and drowning beneath the ice again.

Harry swallowed and his throat felt tender. He shifted a little, wondering if he needed a potion, and noticed how sore the rest of his body was as well - not to mention the persistent throb of pain from the claiming mark making itself known.

It was then that Harry also realised that he was alone in the wide bed.

He frowned and carefully pushed himself up into a sitting position, grimacing at the pull of dried semen on his chest and stomach.

The sexy, romantic notion of scent marking was now completely gone; now he just wanted a hot shower.

The same house-elf who had brought them to the Manor last night suddenly appeared beside the bed with an almost soundless pop.

Harry quickly closed his pyjama top to hide the mess of dried ejaculate. He flushed and hoped house-elves didn't have a heightened sense of smell.

"Master Potter," Trinket greeted with a low curtsy, plucking out the sides of her 'dress' as she did so. She seemed to be wearing what appeared to be an old fabric bag which apparently contained apples at one point, if the label on the front was anything to go by. "Mistress Narcissa says you are to join her for tea in the conservatory."

"Erm, all right," Harry replied slowly. "I… I'm just going to pop into the shower first."

Trinket nodded and then indicated a pile of neatly folded clothes on the chair by the desk. "Master Draco brought you something to wear, and I was to remind you to take your yellow and red potions now."

"Oh… thank you," he stammered, glancing at the tray of potions and quickly spotting the correct phials. "I won't be long," he said, turning back to her.

Trinket merely blinked her large brown eyes at him and didn't move, and Harry suspected she wasn't to leave until he'd taken his potions.

He swallowed the potions in quick succession - the yellow one was vile and the red one tasted of
strawberries - and then Trinket swiftly disappeared after bobbing another curtsy.

The pain instantly dulled into the background and Harry was able to have a quick shower and then dress without too much discomfort.

He peered curiously at his new claiming mark in the mirror; it was quite red and a little swollen. The indents where Draco's teeth had pierced his skin were scabbed over and ugly, but he knew they would fade into a smooth, silvery scar at some point.

Harry smirked a little at how visible the mark was; Draco had clearly wanted it to show above the collar of any shirt or robe that Harry might wear. It was an obvious declaration that he was already taken, and Harry just shook his head with a fond sort of amusement. Such actions would have irritated the fuck out of him not that long ago, but now he could see the other side of things. He understood that it was an act of possession, yes, but that it also stemmed from a deep-rooted concern for a mate's safety - as well as an act of love.

Harry made his way out into the hall, clean and with slightly damp hair, and walked towards the grand staircase which led down to the entrance hall. He tugged a little uncomfortably at the black trousers which Draco had selected for him. They were of very fine material and soft to the touch, but a little more snug than he was used to. The shirt and jumper were also of fine quality, lovely and soft against his skin, the deep green of the jumper setting off his emerald-coloured eyes behind his glasses.

Harry took his time walking down the marble steps, hanging onto the hand-railing for support as he still wasn't feeling all that strong. He knew it would take more than a few potions and a bit of sleep for his body to heal completely.

Harry shook his head, not wanting to think about the attack, or about the fact that those two men were still out there somewhere.

He hesitated at the bottom of the steps, wondering which way the conservatory was, and more than a little annoyed that his mate hadn't waited around for him to wake up so that he wasn't lost in the massive home on his own.

The aroma of food finally directed him to the right. He passed through the large front parlour, into the library, and then on into what must be the conservatory at the rear of the Manor, adjacent to the kitchens.

Harry hesitated in the doorway when he spotted Narcissa curled up on the long window-seat, legs tucked beneath her, dressed quite casually in a lavender-coloured dress with a knitted grey shawl draped around slender shoulders. Her long blond hair was plaited down the side over one shoulder and the informal style made her look years younger.

She turned at Harry's appearance and her expression visibly warmed as she lifted a hand to beckon him in.

Harry smiled a little as he shuffled inside and made his way over to the window to join her. The octagonal-shaped seat had pale yellow and white cushions across the length of it and was situated beneath huge glass-paneled windows criss-crossed with white glazing bars. Beams of winter sunshine were streaming through the glass onto the seat and onto the white and grey marble table laden with lunch.

It all looked so wonderfully cosy and inviting, and Harry felt his reticence ease as he approached.
"Good morning Mrs. Malfoy," Harry greeted politely as he took a seat across from her.

"It is good afternoon at this point," she replied with a tiny smile over the rim of her teacup.

Harry blinked; he'd never seen Narcissa Malfoy so natural and light-hearted before.

"Sleep is good for you though," she continued, unperturbed by his lack of response. "Draco sends his apologies; he was quite… distraught and needed to burn off some excess energy. His father is with him."

Harry frowned in confusion as he followed her gaze through the window and out across the vast grounds. He quickly spotted two Nundu racing across the snow, bodies low to the earth and ears laid back to the their heads.

"Distraught?" Harry repeated, turning back to her.

Narcissa set her cup down on top of her knee. "He could not sleep; he was too full of anger and frustration. I told him to go outside before he crawled out of his skin." Narcissa sighed, gaze drifting back out the window towards her husband and son. "An attack on a Nundu's mate is a very serious matter, and it is not taken lightly. Historically, the people responsible would be immediately brought before the Board and the Alpha would then enact retribution upon the guilty. An attack on an Alpha's mate this serious generally stems from a moment of lost control, but this… " She paused to swallow delicately, turning troubled eyes on Harry. "This was a planned attack meant to kill for unknown reasons, and no one has any idea of who it was or why."

Harry dropped her gaze and reached for a scone in order to keep his hands occupied. "So, usually the Alpha would… do what exactly to the ones responsible?"

"Tear them apart limb from limb," she replied evenly.

Harry nodded, having expected that. "Even if they aren't clan members? That's still what happens?"

Narcissa nodded serenely. "Yes, otherwise the Alpha will not feel fulfilled, he will not be settled. He will always have this need, this compulsion, to seek revenge for what they've done. A Nundu's mate, the bearer of his children, is the most sacred thing on this earth to them."

Harry looked up. "Which is why Draco is so on edge?"

"Yes, my poor boy," she murmured, lifting her tea and taking another sip.

Harry bit into the jam and cream covered scone, not feeling hungry but knowing he needed to eat something in order to rebuild his strength. He chewed while Trinket appeared at his elbow and poured him a hot cup of tea.

"Thanks," Harry mumbled to the little elf before she disappeared again.

"He loves you."

Harry's head jerked up and he nearly choked on his food.

"Quite a bit," she added, eyes warm with approval. "Draco does not readily articulate his emotions, he keeps a tight hold on himself in that regard, like his father, but I can see how very deeply he cares for you."

Harry smiled shyly as he brought his feet up to sit cross-legged on the soft cushion, half-eaten scone
still in one hand. "I know he does," he replied with conviction. "He hasn't said it out loud but I know he does."

"He will," Narcissa replied with a smile. "I wouldn't be surprised if this incident is the turning point for him. He may become desperate to ensure that you know just how much you mean to him."

Harry blushed, pleased, but also realising just how odd this conversation was. He quickly reached for his tea to avoid having to form a response.

"I see he has marked you at last," she observed, causing Harry's cheeks to flush even further. Narcissa was nothing if not direct.

"Erm, yeah - yes, he has," Harry replied awkwardly, suddenly and inappropriately reminded of how turned on his mate had been during the whole claiming process. "It's hard to miss," he added with a wry smile.

Narcissa chuckled in amusement.

Harry wondered where her claiming mark was as he couldn't see any scars.

"Lucius did not wish to mar my skin so he was perhaps a little more discreet in his placement than my son," she said, correctly interpreting Harry's silent musing. Her smile of amusement slowly faded. "It is wise for your mark to be more visible though, being a male Omega will not make life easy for you."

Harry laughed - with only the barest hint of bitterness. "My life has never been easy."

Narcissa acknowledged his statement with a slight nod before reaching for one of the colourful little macarons on the silver tray, selecting a pale pink one and setting it aside on a delicate china plate.

Harry had finished his scone and reached out for one of the tempting sandwiches on the tiered silver tower. He was feeling a little hungrier now and eagerly bit into the thickly sliced bread. He hummed his approval as the flavour of tangy mustard and roast beef burst over his taste buds.

They both ate in silence for a few minutes, watching their mates through the window whenever they came into view.

Harry frowned when he noticed that the two giant cats were nipping and clawing at each other rather aggressively. He glanced at Narcissa but she didn't appear bothered by the vicious behaviour. He turned back to the window, brow still knit in thought.

Sometimes he had to remind himself that the Nundu people had such a violent past, a past that eventually led to their banishment and illegal status with the Ministry. It was hard to keep that in mind when his mate was so caring, and even when Draco was angry or upset, he wasn't explosive or dangerous like Harry thought he ought to be in order for his people to deserve such a harsh sentence.

As far as Harry could see, the Nundu clan were a responsible group of people who were able to intelligently and justly govern their own kind in order to live in relative harmony, but he knew trying to convince the Ministry of that would be nearly impossible, even stepping forward and declaring their existence could yield terrible consequences.

He knew it wasn't worth the risk, especially because exposure would mean the possible execution of his mate. The naïve, hopeful part of him refused to believe the Ministry capable of executing so many people if it did come to light, but the side of him that had experience with corrupt governments
and dark wizards, knew it was a distinct possibility. All the Ministry had to do was put fear into the public at large and they would soon clamour for Nundu genocide.

Harry shuddered at the thought.

He finished off his sandwich and then added a splash of milk to his tea before cupping it in both hands. He glanced at Narcissa; the woman seemed so serene and at ease. He found he was warming to her as a mother-in-law; she provided useful information and advice, but didn't pressure him or try to influence his decisions.

Harry cleared his throat. "Uh… is Mr. Malfoy very upset that I didn't allow him to take me back to Hogwarts after the party?"

Narcissa appeared surprised by the question. "I was not aware that he had offered." She paused, lip curling up into a tiny grin.

"What?" Harry asked, unable to hold in his own smile in response to the teasing gleam in her eyes.

"I do believe he is becoming fond of you Harry."

Harry laughed and they shared a moment of closeness and familiarity which warmed Harry from the inside.

"And do please call us by our given names Harry," she said. "I think we may dispense with the formalities now that you are a part of our family."

"All right, I'll… I'll try to remember that." Harry nodded, still smiling faintly. He suddenly remembered something he'd meant to ask her a while ago and he felt comfortable enough in that moment to finally voice it. "Erm, this may be a stupid question but, do Alphas and Omegas usually have some sort of marriage ceremony?"

Narcissa cocked her head to one side thoughtfully. "Some mated partners do," she replied carefully. "You and Mr. Malfoy - sorry, Lucius," Harry amended, stumbling a little over the name, "are married, aren't you?"

Narcissa nodded. "Yes we are. A marriage ceremony is something some monogamous couples decide to take part in, but not all."

Harry ran a hand through his shower-damp hair, balancing his tea on one knee. "Monogamous? As in Omegas which only take a single Alpha as their mate?"

She nodded, head still tilted to one side as she gazed back at him. "Every partnership is different," she said. "Some mated pairs prefer to just let the claiming mark speak for itself, others like the idea of a traditional marriage as well."

Harry nodded, absorbing this. "I once read that a mated pair become 'bonded' once the claiming mark is in place, is that true? And what does that mean exactly?"

Narcissa smiled gently, leaning back against the stack of white silk cushions behind her. "Bonded is merely a generalised term for mated pairs. Some believe a pair to be bonded once they have acknowledged their mateship, some believe it is when the couple has spent a heat cycle together, or it could be once a mate has received their claiming mark. It isn't something clearly defined and it doesn't change anything about a mateship, it's just a term which people throw around. You needn't concern yourself with it Harry. With Draco being a Nundu, you will have a much stronger
connection with each other than most," she added upon seeing his bemused expression.

Harry swallowed the rest of his tea and set his cup down on the table. "It's all so confusing," he finally said with a sigh. "There should be a bloody course at Hogwarts about all this."

Narcissa laughed, the sound light and pleasing. "Perhaps you should initiate one?"

Harry snorted. "I am not qualified for that."

Narcissa laughed and Harry was once again struck by how young she appeared when she was relaxed. He hoped it meant that she felt comfortable around him now.

"What are you two giggleing about?"

Harry and Narcissa looked up to see Lucius in the open doorway, pale gaze sweeping over his smiling mate with approval.

"Mr. Potter, how are you feeling?" he asked, turning to Harry.

Harry tried not to stare at the bleeding gash across Lucius' cheek and the rather deep one on his upper arm that was currently staining his white shirt a deep red. "Erm, better, thanks."

Narcissa rose from her seat with a tsk of disapproval. She swept across the sun-drenched room and placed a chaste kiss on her husband's uninjured cheek. "He's in better condition than you my love."

Harry nearly gaped when Lucius rolled his eyes at her, smirking good-naturedly.

"I'm fine, Trinket is waiting for me and she will have me healed in a moment."

"I'll accompany you," she replied, slipping her arm through his. "Where is Draco?"

"Trinket is seeing to him now, he'll be down shortly."

Harry watched as the two Malfoys turned and exited the room, Narcissa's gaze decidedly tender as she gazed up at her mate.

Harry exhaled heavily and flopped back against the pillows. He eyed the trays of tempting sweets, wondering how long he would have to wait for his mate to make an appearance. He selected a large chocolate-coated biscuit and happily munched on it as he turned to look out the window.

He hoped Draco had worked out all his pent-up Nundu frustration.

He smirked, wondering if there were other ways for Draco to excise his restlessness.

He absently reached up with his left hand and lightly traced his fingertips over the rough scar tissue of his new claiming mark. His pain potion was still holding strong and he didn't feel a thing as he gently prodded the disfigured skin.

He wondered if the potion was keeping his fear at bay too, because he was feeling oddly calm after nearly dying last night.

He finished off his biscuit and was contemplating having another when he caught some movement out of the corner of his eye. Harry turned to see Draco standing in the open doorway, his smile of greeting dying on his lips when he took in the fierce expression on his mate's face.

Draco strode briskly into the room to stand on the other side of the table from Harry, hands balled
into fists at his sides, grey eyes wild.

Harry sat back in his seat, unconsciously leaning away from his mate who appeared slightly unhinged. "Wha-"

"I love you!" Draco abruptly shouted over him.

Harry blinked, and then felt the overwhelming urge to laugh; as though a huge bubble was expanding in his chest, ready to burst. He bit his lip but it was no good, he could feel his lips twitching. A sort of snort/snicker escaped as he stared back at his mate.

Draco visibly deflated and rubbed a hand over his face with a sigh. "I'm sorry…"

Harry laughed, and he couldn't seem to stop laughing. His mate looked thoroughly mortified.

Harry finally stood up and came around the table to sling his arms around Draco's neck. "Want to try that again?" he said with an amused grin.

Draco snorted softly as he looked down at his mate. "No, you laughed at me."

Harry's responding smile was all affection as he stared back at him. "I promise I won't next time," he said, then narrowed his eyes. "Did your mum put you up to this?"

"You think my mother forced me to say that?" Draco replied, affronted.

"She may have mentioned - and apologised for - your lack of communication skills over lunch."

Harry said with a grin.

Draco frowned. "Firstly, I should think that you knew how I felt about you without me having to say it, and secondly, the intimate details of our relationship are really not my mother's concern."

Harry reached up, wanting to smooth the frown from his mate's face; he was clearly regretting the whole conversation and Harry suddenly felt bad for teasing him.

"How are you feeling?" Draco asked, catching Harry's hand in his own and hanging on as he deftly changed the subject.

Harry gave his hand a squeeze before dropping it back to his side with a sigh. "I... I'm okay," he replied with a shrug.

"And this?" Draco said, fingers moving to rest lightly around the reddened bite mark on Harry's neck.

"It's fine," Harry answered honestly, "I think the pain potion is helping."

Draco's gaze moved back to meet Harry's. "I'm sorry I wasn't there when you woke."

Harry shook his head. "It's fine, your mother explained everything, and by the looks of things you really needed to let off some steam. I can't believe you attacked your own father."

Draco seemed to recover from his previous embarrassment as he smirked at Harry's words. "He wounded me as well - once," he added smugly.

Harry just shook his head and wandered back over to the window-seat. He selected a pale green macaron for Draco and a blue one for himself before sitting down.
Draco joined him and poured some tea while crunching on the sweet meringue treat.

"Do you do that often?" Harry asked curiously as he drew his feet up onto the seat and hugged his knees to his chest. "Er, fight with your father while you're both in Nundu form?"

"No, not anymore," he replied as he sat back with a cup of tea, settling warmly against Harry's side. "I needed it when I was younger and still working through everything, trying to deal with the more… animalistic side of my heritage. While my mother may think that my father and I have trouble expressing our every thought and emotion, she forgets that trying to control our reactions is something we work at every single day, that it's something drilled into every Nundu from birth. If you don't, it could mean Azkaban - or execution by our Board. Sometimes it's hard to turn that off and let down your guard when you've been doing it for so long."

Harry nodded in understanding, chin resting on his knees. "It must be so difficult; living with that over your head all the time. It's hard to believe you had to deal with that at such a young age, it's amazing you've turned out as normal as you are. I mean, I still think you're a bit of a wanker but…"

Draco glared and bumped his shoulder, causing Harry to smile. "You're one to talk Potter; I'm not the only one with a messed up childhood."

Harry snorted. "Yeah and look at how much of a nutter I am."

Draco chuckled in response as Narcissa and Lucius entered the room; Lucius all patched up and with a fresh shirt on.

Harry immediately slid his feet back down to the floor. He noticed a piece of parchment in Narcissa's hand as they walked over to join them around the table.

"I've had an owl from your Headmistress," she said, handing the short scroll over to Harry. "It seems they've found your wand at the edge of the Forbidden Forest."

Harry was immediately flooded with relief; he'd honestly thought it was lost for good, or at least until they apprehended the people responsible. He glanced up hopefully. "Were they able to track the two men down?"

She shook her head and Harry sighed as he glanced down at the short note from McGonagall.

"Are the Aurors investigating?" Draco asked.

"They would be," Lucius interjected. "Any attack of this nature on a Hogwart's student would require immediate action from the Ministry - particularly due to Potter being the one who was attacked."

Harry chewed his lip, wondering why they all looked so worried; surely the Aurors' investigation wouldn't include the Malfoys?

"Any news from the clan?" Draco asked his father next.

"Not yet." Lucius shook his head and Narcissa laid a hand on his forearm and gave it a gentle squeeze.

Harry swallowed, taking in their grave expressions. "You don't… You don't think the Aurors would involve you, do you?"

"Not necessarily," Narcissa replied gently, "but if the men who attacked you are clan members, it
could pose a bit of a problem if they are caught."

Harry's eyes widened as the scope of the issue finally sunk in. "Do you think they were clan members?" he asked, glancing between Lucius and Narcissa. "They were certainly human the entire time I was with them."

Lucius ran a hand over his chin briefly, looking a little weary, and Harry wondered if he'd been up all night with Draco. "We're not sure; the Board is looking into it of course. We've given them your description of the men, and the fact that you believe they were related, but hopefully they were not our kind. This will all be much simpler if they were merely leftover idealists from the Dark Lord."

Harry nodded in agreement. Mad Voldemort supporters he could handle. He glanced down at the Headmistress' brief note, reading her last line which stated that he could stay with the Malfoy's for as long as he needed and that his wand would be waiting for him in her office upon his return.

Harry sighed; why did everything always happen to him?

Draco slid an arm around his shoulders and pulled him close, obviously sensing his melancholy.

For the first time, he began to question whether he should be having children. If he and Draco were constant targets, then what hope did their children have for survival?
Chapter 16

"Are you sure you're ready for this?"

Harry took a deep breath and slowly released it, his mate's concerned gaze locked on his expression, probably searching for the tiniest flicker of doubt in order to keep Harry safely locked away in the Manor for another day or two.

It had been a wonderful few days with nothing to do but enjoy each other's company and allow his body and mind to heal. Harry had felt as though he'd been able to push the pause button and finally catch his breath. The time with Draco's parents had also improved his relationship with them, especially with Lucius, who clearly felt protective of his son's mate in a way Harry never would have thought possible given their history.

"Yeah, I'll be fine," he replied, trying to ignore the heavy weight of dread in his stomach. "Let's go."

Draco nodded and took his arm before Disapparating the two of them from the Manor and back to Hogwarts.

Returning to the 'scene of the crime' wasn't an issue because Hogwarts was the scene of many crimes for Harry, but he was definitely reluctant to return because it would also mean the return of all his troubles; namely what Ron and Hermione would have to say about the recent attack on him. He was sure they would somehow blame Draco and he really wasn't eager to suffer through that argument again. He was tired of defending his mate and his choices to his best friends; they were supposed to be pillars of support in his life, not the cause for added stress.

Draco slid an arm around his shoulders as they walked up the snowy track together in silence, Draco's thumb absently stroking over the claim mark on Harry's neck.

Harry's tense expression softened slightly at the gentle contact. His scar was healing nicely; it was still an angry-looking red but smooth to the touch. In another week or two he knew it would settle into a silvery-white sheen.

Harry leaned into his mate with a sigh, absently watching the tiny sporadic snowflakes fluttering down from the grey sky above as they approached the front of the school. He was just pondering what his Christmas plans might consist of this year when Draco suddenly jerked to a stop, a low growl emanating from his lips.

Blaise Zabini striding down the wide stone steps towards them, wand in hand, dark brows drawn into a forceful glare.

Draco subtly placed his body in front of Harry as he withdrew his wand and watched his house-mate approach with narrowed eyes, posture rigid and uneasy.

Harry swallowed and allowed his mate to stand in front of him; knowing that Draco's Alpha and Nundu natures compelled protective responses like this, and without his wand, Harry probably wasn't much use if it came down to a fight anyway.

Blaise came to a stop in front of them, eyes flicking briefly to Harry before settling on Draco. "You've crossed the line this time Malfoy," he said with a hard unforgiving edge to his voice.

"What are you on about Zabini?" Draco drawled, tone light but body tensed for a fight.
"You allowed your mate - an extremely prized and sought-after male Omega - to go out alone and very nearly get killed!" Blaise spat accusingly.

Harry instantly felt his temper flare in defence. "He didn't know I'd left the castle," he snapped, taking a step out from behind his mate to stand shoulder to shoulder with Draco. "I snuck out on my own and told him I'd be in Gryffindor Tower. It wasn't his fault I was attacked - it was mine."

Blaise's eyes narrowed. "A decent Alpha would've known you'd left the castle because he would have claimed you ages ago!"

Harry's hands balled into fists as he tried to restrain himself from leaping at the impertinent Alpha. "I didn't want to be claimed," he retorted. "I was the one who made us wait until I felt ready - which had nothing to do with me not wanting to be with Draco and everything to do with me not being used to Alphas and Omegas." He raised his chin defiantly. "A detail which we have now rectified by the way."

Blaise blinked in surprise at the mark on Harry's neck but quickly regained his anger as he turned back to Draco. "Even so, you can't handle Harry on your own Malfoy. Admit it, you're not up to the challenge and you need another Alpha to pick up the slack."

Harry opened his mouth furiously. "That is fucking insulting Zabini - to both of us!"

Draco calmly sheathed his wand and crossed his arms over his chest. "It doesn't appear as though Harry is interested in your offer Blaise, and by continuing this line of discussion, you're only doing more harm than good."

Blaise seemed to pause at that, some of the anger fading from the taut lines of his body, and Harry suddenly realised why Draco hadn't said anything thus far; he'd been allowing Blaise to spout off and engage Harry's temper, placing himself firmly in Harry's bad books and demonstrating what an incompatible mate he would be for the Boy-Who-Lived.

Harry hid a smirk of amusement at his cunning Slytherin mate.

"Harry, why don't you head into the castle and I'll meet you in McGonagall's office?" Draco suggested, turning to him.

Harry frowned. "Why? What are you doing?" he asked suspiciously, not wanting to leave Draco on his own.

"I would like to have a word with Blaise before I join you," he explained with a glance towards his wary house-mate.

"But we're not finished here," Blaise interrupted, a note of uncertainty creeping into his voice.

Draco straightened and faced Blaise with a stony expression. "Harry has no intention of accepting you, so he has nothing more to say and you cannot have anything more to add to this pointless conversation. You and I, on the other hand," he added with the hint of a threat, "need to resolve this matter once and for all. Without magic," he added, eyeing the way Blaise's wand hand had twitched by his side.

"What do you mean without magic?" Blaise scoffed, trying to regain some lost ground. "Are you proposing a fist fight Malfoy?"

Draco sneered. "No Zabini, we are going to have a civilised discussion like the good little Purebloods we are."
"Are you sure you're going to be okay?" Harry spoke up, touching Draco's arm to get his attention.

Draco turned to him and his sneer relaxed into an affectionate smirk. "Of course, Zabini and I will be the very definition of gentlemen," he said, then raised his voice slightly, "particularly because he knows how much you detest violence and dominant Alpha behaviour."

Harry swallowed a snort of amusement and lifted up onto the balls of his feet to quickly kiss his mate on the lips. "Don't be long," he said, shooting Blaise a look of warning before continuing to the castle on his own.

He wasn't worried about Draco, he'd bested Blaise in a duel before if it came down to that, but he also suspected Blaise wouldn't really want to injure Harry's mate because it would only serve to push him further away from his goal of winning Harry's affections.

Harry ascended the wide stone steps, which were covered in a layer of soft powdery snow, and paused at the heavy oak doors, glancing back over his shoulder to check on Draco before heading inside.

His mate was watching him closely, ensuring that Harry made it safely into the school. Blaise was glancing between the two of them, shifting his weight from foot to foot, clearly unsettled.

Harry pushed through the doors, hoping Draco managed to get the Blaise matter resolved once and for all.

He removed his heavy winter cloak, another borrowed one from his mate, and hung it over one arm as he trekked the familiar path to the Headmistress' office to collect his wand. The password hadn't changed and he quickly stepped past the gargoyle and strode up the steep steps, careful to keep Draco's cloak from dragging over the dusty stones.

He knocked on the ancient wooden door at the top and waited for McGonagall to call him in before pushing through.

Harry hesitated just inside the doorway when he saw that the Headmistress wasn't alone. "Oh, sorry Professor, I can come- Hermione?" he said when he suddenly recognised the mane of frizzy hair over the top of the chair in front of McGonagall's desk.

She swivelled in her seat and Harry thought her expression was a tad guilty. "Hi Harry, uh… how are you?"

"Please take a seat Mr. Potter," McGonagall instructed, sitting tall and straight at her desk, expression sombre.

Harry frowned and slowly walked forward and took the empty seat next to Hermione, who was now studiously avoiding his gaze.

McGonagall folded her hands on top of her deep green ink blotter and peered at him over her spectacles. "Where is Mr. Malfoy?"

"Erm, he's just talking to Blaise for a minute, he'll be along shortly," Harry replied, nonplussed.

McGonagall nodded. "I wished to speak with you alone first in any case."

"What about?"

McGonagall cleared her throat before continuing. "Ms. Granger tells me that she has some concerns
about your relationship with Mr. Malfoy."

Harry shouldn't have been surprised, he really shouldn't, but he was. He couldn't believe his friend had stooped so low as to run to the Headmistress behind his back.

"Her concerns are only speculation and based entirely on past prejudice Professor," Harry replied evenly, attempting to keep the irritation out of his voice.

"They're not!" Hermione insisted indignantly and Harry turned to stare at her. "Harry, you've been so different the past couple of months, and not just adjusting to becoming an Omega, but distancing yourself from Ron and I. You've been sad and upset, and sneaking off school grounds at night. Blaise Zabini has been suspicious of Malfoy for a long time - and now this sudden attack! You can't honestly sit there and tell me that everything is fine Harry Potter!" she finished censoriously.

Harry felt such a sudden flash of anger he was surprised he hadn't let any unintentional magic slip out to strike at her. "I haven't been distancing myself from you and Ron, I've been trying to spend time alone with my mate to strengthen our bond and to get to know each other beyond just the sexual attraction that started all this," he said through gritted teeth. "And it's been a huge adjustment becoming an Omega, no matter how inconsequential you think it is; it's completely changed my life and my future. I can't go out alone any time I feel like it, do you know how hard that is for me to accept?" he demanded, striving to keep the self-pity out of his voice. "It's not just people out to get my autograph anymore; they want to have sex with me and some will stop at nothing to get it - regardless of whether or not I give my consent!"

"I know," Hermione said quietly, pleadingly. "But Harry, this recent attack on you… they tried to kill you. That wasn't due to your Omega inheritance. What happened between you and Professor Fischer was due to you being in heat, but this… this was something entirely different. And where was Malfoy? Why wasn't he with you?"

Harry exhaled hard, hands tensing on the thick arms of the chair, fingers causing the worn fabric to squeak in protest. "We had a disagreement-"

"Ah ha!" Hermione cried, as though that proved everything.

"- about how Draco didn't want me around Blaise because of his offer to be a secondary Alpha to me," Harry continued, glaring at the interruption. "I have refused Blaise on more than one occasion so of course Zabini is going to try to discredit Draco any chance he gets; he's determined to be my Alpha." He turned to McGonagall. "I was out alone because Mr. and Mrs. Malfoy were hosting a party in our honour and I still wanted to go, even though Blaise would be there. We argued and I told Draco I would be in Gryffindor Tower and I left and went to the party at the Manor instead. I was returning to Hogwarts around midnight and that's when I was attacked. It wasn't anyone's fault but my own. I have to accept that this is the way my life is now, and I can promise you that I will never do something like that again; it's selfish and I don't want Draco to suffer. He feels so guilty over what happened, as though it's his fault."

He turned back to Hermione, scarcely able to restrain his anger the more he thought about her accusing his mate of being in any way neglectful or abusive.

"You don't know Draco like I do, and you won't give him a chance because you're still suspicious of him from the war. I understand, because I didn't trust him either, but now that he is my mate," Harry emphasised severely, "you need to stop being instantly suspicious of everything he does or of anything that happens to me. I trust him so you should trust him too. He's done nothing wrong - unlike you I might add." He paused and Hermione's cheeks flushed pink and her eyes widened. She shook her head but Harry ignored her and turned back to the Headmistress. If Hermione wanted to
play this game, then he would as well. "Hermione purposely got me drunk in order to interrogate me about my relationship with Draco, hoping I would let something slip."

McGonagall turned to Hermione, brow raised and lips pursed. "Is this true Ms. Granger?"

Hermione's expression crumpled a little as she nodded. "Yes," she replied. "I was just worried," she added, quietly defensive.

"And did you attempt to discuss your concerns with Mr. Potter before resorting to such behaviour?"

"Yes, but he wouldn't say anything!"

Harry frowned. "You mean I wouldn't say anything bad."

"You're hiding something!" Hermione insisted obstinately.

"I'm not hiding anything!"

"All right - enough," McGonagall ordered, unclasping her hands and placing them palms down on the surface of her desk. "Mr. Potter, I can see that Mr. Malfoy has now officially claimed you by the mark on your neck."

Harry heard the sharp intake of breath from beside him but ignored it as he stared back at McGonagall. "Yes. I asked him to," he added so that Hermione couldn't twist his words again.

"And Mr. Malfoy treats you with the respect and care with which you deserve as his mate?"

Harry couldn't believe he had to reply to these ridiculous accusations, but he swallowed his irritation and replied as calmly and sincerely as he could, hoping that this would be the last time he would have to do so. "Yes, he loves me and considers me as not just his Omega but as a true mate, as an equal." He turned to Hermione with accusing eyes. "And yes we will have the odd disagreement, what couple doesn't? You and Ron are constantly at each other's throats but that doesn't mean you're not well-suited to be together."

"Yes, but he's not-"

"I think we have heard enough from you on the subject Ms. Granger," McGonagall interrupted. "Mr. Potter has given his word that Draco Malfoy is a perfectly capable and suitable mate, and as I have had the chance to witness them together, I will take his word that that is the truth, as I have seen nothing to contradict it as such. As there is no actual evidence of mistreatment, I must ask that you not approach me again with this matter and that you two work this out in private so as not to tarnish your last year at Hogwarts. You may leave Ms. Granger."

Hermione opened her mouth and then thought better of it. With a huff, she rose from her chair and left the room, closing the door behind her.

Harry flopped back in his seat and rubbed his eyes beneath his glasses with a sigh. He'd only been back in the castle for less than an hour and already he was exhausted.

McGonagall opened one of her desk drawers with a wave of her hand and withdrew Harry's wand from within.

"Thanks," Harry accepted gratefully as he took his wand from her outstretched hand, his new glasses dropping back into place on the bridge of his nose. Draco had conjured him a new pair since his old ones had gone missing during the attack.
McGonagall nodded. "And how are you feeling Harry?" she asked, her previously stern demeanour now replaced with her usual understated concern.

Harry sat back in his chair, rolling his wand between his hands with a frown. "I'm... all right. I wish the Aurors had caught the two men who attacked me; I don't like knowing that they're still out there. It seems unlikely that the Aurors will catch them now."

The Headmistress waved over a waiting tea service and poured a cup for herself and one for Harry.

"Believe me Mr. Potter, they will not stop until they find them."

"Because of who I am?" Harry replied disparagingly.

"Does it matter?"

Harry had to smile as he took the white and blue teacup from her; she had a point.

McGonagall sat back in her chair with her tea cupped in one hand. "Can you think of any reason why these men attacked you?"

Harry took a sip of the strong tea and tried not to grimace. "No," he finally said with a shake of his head. "I've been trying to come up with a reason and I can't. I dunno, maybe they're just trying to finish what Voldemort started."

The Headmistress nodded thoughtfully. "Unfortunately, that seems the likeliest motive."

"Either that or it was just utterly random and I happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time," Harry added with a shrug.

McGonagall snorted through her narrow nose, brows raised. "Nothing is by chance where you are concerned Mr. Potter."

Harry couldn't help but smile a little; that was a cynical statement but it was also the truth. He reached out and carefully spooned some sugar into his tea.

"I must admit, when I first heard that you and Mr. Malfoy were bonded, I had my doubts," she ruminated, tilting her head to one side and regarding him shrewdly. "But I can see how you balance each other. You've both had your struggles in life and have come out the better for it, and Mr. Malfoy has greatly impressed me with the way he has stood beside you, despite what the public, and even his parents, may have wanted."

Harry grinned at this assessment of his mate; he was proud of everything Draco had become as well.

McGonagall smirked. "And I can see from that pleased smile that you are happy with him."

Harry could feel his cheeks flushing but the grin stuck. "Yeah, I... I'm happy. Even his parents are treating me well."

"Glad to hear it, I doubt I would've believed that if it hadn't come from your own lips."

Harry laughed.

"And do not worry yourself over Ms. Granger," McGonagall continued. "She has become too accustomed to being your surrogate mother over the years and now that Mr. Malfoy has taken on the role of protector and closest confidante, I believe it's hard for her to let go. You three have had a lot of adventures together and she may be looking for a mystery to solve where there is none. The fact
that this is your last year before going out into the real world may be on her mind more than she realises."

Harry nodded, knowing Hermione wouldn't get any sympathy from him after the way she'd behaved.

"Are you still thinking of becoming an Auror?"

Before Harry could reply, there was a light knock at the door.

"Enter!"

Harry nearly upset his tea at the barked command but he quickly recovered and turned to see Draco opening the door. He looked his mate over for any obvious signs of injury but could see nothing; Draco's expression was calm and unruffled.

Draco walked over and took a seat in Hermione's vacated chair, sliding it across the rough flagstone floor to bump up against Harry's.

Harry rolled his eyes at him but smiled, relieved to see that he was okay.

"Good morning Mr. Malfoy, glad you could join us," McGonagall greeted. "I was just asking Mr. Potter about his plans for next year."

Harry turned back to her, shifting in his chair uncomfortably. "Oh right, well… I was thinking of maybe not joining the Auror Department …"

"Oh?"

Harry set his empty cup down on the desk. "I… sort of don't want to chase Dark Wizards any more. I think I would appreciate a more..." he glanced briefly at Draco, "quiet life."

The corner of Draco's mouth curved up into a smile and his grey eyes warmed.

Harry quickly turned back to McGonagall before his melting heart forced him to babble something embarrassingly saccharine. "Not that raising children will be quiet, I suppose."

The Headmistress couldn't help but chuckle and Harry glanced at Dumbledore's portrait over McGonagall's head to see the old wizard's blue eyes twinkling merrily in his direction.

Harry smiled.

"I believe you've earned the right to do whatever you please Mr. Potter," McGonagall finally replied, surprising him, her own eyes as close to twinkling as they would ever get as she looked back at him. "Are you well enough to attend class this morning Potter or would you like the day off before joining the masses again?"

"I think I'll be fine," Harry replied honestly, wishing to return to 'normal' as soon as possible.

"Good, our new Defence professor is starting today and it would be a shame for you to miss out on his first lesson."

"Oh?" Harry replied with interest. "Who is it?"

McGonagall smiled as she set down her tea and then rose from her chair. "If I told you that, then you would have an unfair advantage over the rest of your classmates."
Harry grinned. "I guess I'd better go to class then. I think I'll be fine - as long as Hermione keeps away from me."

Draco frowned, glancing between them. "What has Granger done now?" he asked, and though his tone was unchanging it was clearly a demand.

"The usual," Harry replied as he got to his feet with a yawn, "sticking her nose where it doesn't belong."

Draco stood and McGonagall held up a hand to halt him.

"Mr. Potter mentioned that Blaise Zabini offered himself as a secondary Alpha, and that Mr. Zabini has been somewhat… persistent in his pursuit of Mr. Potter. Is this true?"

Draco nodded sharply, eyes growing cold. "Yes, unfortunately."

"And were you or were you not just speaking with Mr. Zabini?" she asked.

"I was," Draco replied with a nod.

"And… you are both in one piece?" she enquired with a raised brow.

A hint of Draco's trademark smirk reappeared. "Yes, all limbs accounted for."

McGonagall nodded. "All right, you may go. If you need to leave the castle Mr. Potter, please have someone else with you at all times," she said firmly, gaze flicking to Draco.

"Yes Professor," Harry replied, only too willing to comply.

Harry slid his wand into the waistband of his trousers and clasped Draco's hand as they exited the cluttered circular office together.

As soon as they were out in the corridor, Harry interrogated him about his meeting with Blaise.

"Okay, what really happened?"

Draco smirked loftily as they made their way to their room to gather their books for class. "I simply explained the situation to him; that you abhor heavy-handed Alpha behaviour and people who completely disregard what you say and what you want, so he was going about winning your affections all wrong. I told him that you only desired one Alpha, but an extra set of eyes on you would be very beneficial right now, as your life was still in danger."

Harry stopped abruptly. "Wait, what?"

Draco slowed and glanced over his shoulder, smirk still firmly in place. "Oh yes, I fully intend to take advantage of the fact that he fancies you."

"By… making him think that he has a chance if he just pretends to be a good match for me?" Harry asked disbelievingly.

Draco walked back and took him by the hand, pulling him onwards. "I didn't actually tell him that you may change your mind, but you do need extra protection right now, so who am I to turn down such an offer?"

Harry shook his head. "So you don't have any problem with Blaise constantly following me around, thinking that he has a chance at being my Alpha?" he asked incredulously. He wasn't cross, per se,
extra protection was a good idea, especially with Hermione not on speaking terms with him right now, but he didn't think Draco would be able to handle it.

"It will be trying," his mate admitted, "but I also don't plan on leaving your side except during our separate classes."

"Then why accept his help if you're going to be with me at all times anyway?" Harry asked before yawning, his jaw cracking with the force of it.

Draco's expression darkened. "Because if someone inside this school had anything to do with the attempt on your life, then the more ears listening out for condemning whispers the better."

Harry finally understood; this was about more than just extra protection; it was about finding the ones responsible by any means possible, even if it meant recruiting Blaise Zabini to the cause.

His Nundu mate wanted revenge and he wanted it as swiftly as possible.

"All right," Harry acquiesced without a fight. He was quickly learning when to protest and when to just let it go because it was something his Alpha needed to do.

If Draco was surprised by Harry's capitulation, he didn't show it.

Harry yawned again, stumbling a little over his own feet. "All this talking has worn me out," he said wearily, "I don't know how I'm going to get through all of my classes today, the new professor is going to think I'm completely useless…"

Harry trailed off, eyes widening and heart suddenly leaping into his throat. He stopped walking abruptly, causing Draco to stop and look at him in concern.

"Harry?"

"What's the date today?" Harry asked in a rush.

"The… seventeenth, I believe."

Harry swallowed, trying to search out a familiar feeling or recognizable symptom deep within him.

"Harry, what is going on?" Draco demanded with a frown.

Harry looked at him. "I feel really tired… Like, really tired."

Draco's grey eyes widened as comprehension dawned. "Is it because you're still recovering? It's two days early."

"I know," Harry replied, trying not to sound hysterical; he wasn't ready to go into heat again. "But Pomfrey said my cycle might be affected because of what happened last time… If I'm tired now then I'll probably go into heat tonight or tomorrow," he said slowly, trying to work it out without panicking.

Draco seemed to snap out of his shock and quickly took Harry by the hand. "All right, let's get you to our room."

Harry could feel his mate's tension through their joined hands; Draco clearly didn't want a repeat of the last time Harry went into heat.

"Our room?" Harry questioned, suddenly realising what Draco had said. "Why would we go there?
"I'll get pregnant."

Draco seemed to have a sudden coughing fit.

"We have that isolation room for you for this purpose, remember?" he finally managed to get out.

Harry instantly put on the brakes and stopped cold. "No," he rejected stridently, shaking his head. "I won't go in there."

"Why not?"

Harry swallowed and glanced around, but luckily they were still alone in the corridor. "I...erm, I don't like small spaces."

Draco scrutinised him intently, as though performing Legilimency. "Why do I think there's more to that statement than you're letting on?"

Harry felt an unrelenting sluggishness begin to creep over him, confirming his suspicions. He sighed. "Take me to the infirmary and I'll tell you."

Draco nodded, and, without another word, they began to make their way up to the hospital wing. They passed by other students on their way to class, and received some curious looks. Everyone knew of the attack on Harry by now, but no one approached them. The scowl on Draco's face was probably keeping even the bravest student at bay.

They met Madam Pomfrey just as she was coming out of her office.

"Good morning gentlemen, what can I do for you today?" she said in greeting, and then narrowed her eyes at Harry who was busily covering up another yawn. "How are you feeling Mr. Potter?"

"He's recovered from the attack but it seems he's now going into heat early," Draco answered wryly.

"Never a dull moment," the matron uttered under her breath as she immediately led the way over to the closest bed and sat Harry down.

She proceeded to check Harry over; peering into his eyes, checking his pulse, and then running a few diagnostic spells. Everything pointed to Harry indeed going into heat within the next twenty-four hours.

Harry greeted this news with a groan, even though he'd been expecting it.

Pomfrey readied the quarantine room while Harry stood near the doorway with Draco.

He didn't like the size of the infirmary's quarantine room either, but it was larger and brighter than the one attached to his and Draco's bedroom. It was definitely his preferred choice. He shuddered just thinking about locking himself away in that other tiny, dark room.

"Are you going to be okay?" Draco asked as Harry eyed the white sterile room beyond the open doorway with trepidation.

"Don't have much choice, do I?"

Draco looked up as Madam Pomfrey walked back out. "Could we put a window in the door?" he asked her.

"Whatever for?"
Draco glanced at Harry before replying, "so that we may communicate while he's in there."

"You will be going to class Mr. Malfoy," she replied as she waved her wand at a nearby cupboard and directed a few phials over to her free hand.

"No, I'm staying with Harry," he replied steadfastly. "He's not going through this alone."

Madam Pomfrey sighed. "You really shouldn't be anywhere near your mate while he's in heat Mr. Malfoy, it will not be easy on you either." She rubbed her temple and emitted another heavy sigh. "Fine, you may stay, but I cannot put a window in that door; Mr. Potter will not be fit to be seen if another student wanders in here."

"What about a vent or something?" Harry asked. "Just so we can talk?"

"A vent will allow your scent to come through…" she replied, eyeing Draco dubiously.

"He can handle it," Harry replied firmly. "He carried me here while I was in heat the last time."

"That is true," she assented with a nod. "All right, I'll create a small vent. Mr. Malfoy, you may place a bed here by the door and stay for the duration - however if I deem your presence to be harmful to Mr. Potter, or if your behaviour is in any way unseemly, then I will ask you to leave. By force if necessary."

"Of course," Draco instantly agreed.

Harry smiled in relief, glad that he wouldn't have to go through this alone.

Draco used his wand to slide one of the empty beds over to the door while Pomfrey gave Harry some instructions on the potions she was leaving in the room for him; one of them was a mild Calming Draught and the other was a Cooling Potion, meant to keep his core temperature at a more comfortable level. She created a small metal vent in the bottom half of the door, with about six slats the width of a finger, and then waited with crossed arms to ensure that Harry actually went into the room. Alone.

Draco glared at her and Harry would have laughed if he hadn't been so nervous. He walked over and demanded a hug from his tall Alpha, distracting him from his glowering.

Draco quickly wrapped his arms around him and lowered his face into Harry's wild hair, inhaling his scent and causing pleasant shivers to run down Harry's spine. Draco dropped his head even lower and pressed his lips to the claiming mark.

Harry had to bite his lip to keep from moaning out loud. Merlin, that claiming mark was sensitive.

"You'll be fine," Draco murmured for his ears only. "I'll be right here the whole time."

Harry smiled and closed his eyes as he tightened his arms around his mate. How could Hermione ever question whether or not Draco cared for him?

"I love you," Harry murmured before pressing a warm kiss to the side of Draco's neck. He pulled back and smirked up at him. "Don't do anything unseemly."

Draco snorted. "Don't make me."

"All right, off with you," Madam Pomfrey interrupted impatiently. "I haven't got all day."

Draco pressed one more lingering kiss to Harry's lips before reluctantly stepping back, fingers
entangled with his mate's until the very last second and then falling away.

Harry sighed and walked into his new home for the next couple of days. He hoped his heat would only last for twenty-four hours, but he'd read that some Omega heats can last up to three days.

Madam Pomfrey closed the door and locked it with a wave of her wand.

Harry took a deep breath and eyed the glossy black cord hanging next to the door. It was for emergencies only; if Harry pulled the cord then Madam Pomfrey would instantly be notified and come to unlock the door. Harry had relinquished his wand to the matron for safe-keeping and he suddenly felt very vulnerable without it.

He exhaled slowly and decided to change into the clean pyjamas that were neatly folded on the end of the bed. Once dressed, he walked back over to the door and sat down, leaning sideways against it and tracing the metal vent with his finger.

"Harry?"

Harry smiled tiredly and stuck the tip of his finger through the slat. "Yeah?"

Strange though it was, the barely there touch of his mate's finger to his was instantly calming.

"How are you feeling?"

"Tired," Harry replied honestly, tipping his head sideways to rest against the door, idly watching his hand pressed to the cool surface of the vent. "I'll probably fall asleep soon."

He heard a slight shuffling, as though Draco was getting more comfortable on his side of the door. "That's good, perhaps you'll just sleep through it?"

Harry smiled a little, eyes falling closed. "That would be nice."

There was a soft chuckle through the vent. "You're very cute when you're sleepy."

"Am not," Harry protested half-heartedly.

"Are you all right in there? It's a… a small space."

Harry opened his eyes and nudged his finger against Draco's. "Yeah, it's okay, much better than the one in our rooms. And... and it really helps that you're here."

Harry's finger was lightly bumped in return and he smiled.

"So are you going to tell me what your claustrophobia stems from? Is it… was it something to do with the war?"

Harry blinked and suddenly felt a little more alert; they'd never really talked about the war much since they got together, not about individual experiences anyway. Just sort of general things. Safer things.

"Er… not the war, no," Harry finally replied hesitantly. He'd brushed off his time with the Dursley's when talking to Draco about them before, mostly because he really didn't want to admit that he'd had an abusive childhood. It was a hard thing to admit, even to himself, and for some reason he also found it embarrassing.
Yet, in that moment, he found that he suddenly wanted Draco to know the truth. His mate should know everything about him, especially the lingering trauma of growing up with a family who didn't want him and of having never felt loved.

"Remember when I told you that my Muggle relatives weren't very nice to me?"

"Hated you, I believe were your words," came the dispassionate reply.

"Well, as part of their 'hating me and treating me like rubbish' regime, they put me in the cupboard under the stairs and called it my bedroom until the age of twelve. They also locked me in there whenever they didn't wish to be bothered with my presence or felt I'd done something wrong, like not ironing their clothing to perfection. Sometimes I even went a day or two without eating…" Harry's breathing hitched and he clamped down on the bitter wave of anger and self-pity. He paused and took a steadying breath. "So, I have a bit of a claustrophobia thing - mostly because I would spend my time locked in there terrified that my uncle was about to throw open the door and beat me within an inch of my life."

Harry stopped speaking, his chest rising and falling too rapidly, heart pounding. He'd said too much… why had he said that?

There was silence on the other side of the door.

Harry closed his eyes and counted, he was not going to panic in here. Not now.

If only Draco would fucking say something…

Harry stopped counting and opened his eyes at the sudden stroke of Draco's fingertip against his own; solid and reassuring.

"Salazer, I wish I could open this fucking door."

Harry half-sobbed, half-laughed; Draco was angry and frustrated and wanted to get to him. Harry's heart soared as he pressed his fingertip back against his mate's. Draco wasn't disgusted with him or deterred from being with him because of his past or his odd mental issues. Not that he truly believed he would be put off by something like that, but sometimes his heart just wasn't as rational as his mind.

"I really really want to destroy those Muggles."

Harry snorted, feeling lighter. "Get in line." He paused and then frowned. "But… don't really do anything to them. They're not worth going to Azkaban for Draco."

"I'm going to assume that these Muggles of yours are extraordinarily uptight and would be most displeased if, say, their much hated and unwelcome nephew, came waltzing up to their door holding hands with his strikingly handsome gay lover. Am I right?"

Harry laughed, the door rattling with the force of his shaking shoulders. "Yes, they would be mortified."

"Perfect. It's decided then."

Harry laughed and shook his head. Merlin, he loved that man. Especially because he knew Draco was being perfectly serious.

"You're going to be a great father," Harry said derisively. "I can see it now, teaching the little
bugs every sly trick and haughty expression in the book."

"I'm sure some your noble, self-sacrificing ways will pass on to at least one or two of them," was the smug reply.

Harry smiled; he would never tell Draco this, but, he loved picturing their future children. His smile faded as he suddenly remembered his earlier concerns.

"Do you think…" He had to stop and try again. "Do you think our children will be targeted?"

"What do you mean?" Draco asked, sounding concerned.

Harry yawned, his lethargy washing over him in a sudden wave. "It just seems like both of us are constantly targeted because of who we are. What if… what if our children are made to suffer because of who their parents are?"

He heard a soft sigh on the other side of the door before Draco spoke again. "I think that's just something we're going to have to be aware of and talk to them about," he replied.

Harry was surprised that he so readily agreed, he'd thought Draco would just try to gloss over it and tell him not to worry.

"You don't… resent that about me, do you?"

Harry frowned as he tiredly rested his head against the door again. "Resent what?"

"For… you know, being a Malfoy and an ex Death Eater. You wouldn't worry about your children being targeted if you were bonded to, say, some quiet Hufflepuff boy no one'd ever heard of."

Harry closed his eyes and curled a little tighter against the door, as though he could feel his mate's strong, warm body against him. "I think they would still be picked on and bullied with just the Potter name attached to them," he replied. "I don't think the Malfoy name is going to make it worse; it might actually help in keeping some people at a distance." He sighed. "There will always be people out there who wished the other side had won and who would love to accomplish what Voldemort was unable to. I don't think it matters what side you were on during the war because there will always be two sides."

There was a lengthy pause and then, "maybe we should move to Australia?"

Harry smiled and he could feel his mind growing fuzzy and slow. "Okay, Australia it is. Running away from your problems is always… the best course… of… action," he finished around another yawn.

"Don't fall asleep on the floor Potter," Draco ordered gently. "Why don't you get into bed? I'll be right here in my very own comfortable hospital-issued bed."

Harry snorted in amusement, half-asleep. He forced his eyes open and dragged his sorry arse up off of the floor and over to his own narrow bed. He flopped down onto the squeaky mattress and lay on his stomach, arms curling around the pillow and holding it tight as he quickly drifted off, safe in the knowledge that his mate was just on the other side of the door.
Harry woke with a start, and for one terrifying moment thought he was trapped in a room full of Fiendfyre.

He sat up with a loud gasp, beads of sweat running in rivulets down his forehead and temples, the back of his pyjama top was soaked through and sticking to his skin.

He was so incredibly hot and the room spun around him as his eyes attempted to focus without his glasses.

Harry quickly began to unbutton his sodden pyjamas, his fingers flying over the buttons before ripping the garment off and throwing it to the ground. The rest of his clothes soon followed until he was naked on the bed, chest heaving.

Harry dropped his head into his hands with a muted moan as the heat continued to lick up his chest. His face felt as though it was on fire and his hair was plastered to his scalp with sweat.

He was really thirsty, and he suddenly remembered Pomfrey's Cooling Potion. Harry quickly stumbled out of bed and over to the cabinet. He uncorked the pale blue potion and downed it all as quickly as possible, barely managing to not choke in his haste. The liquid was cool on his tongue and he could feel it running down his throat and into his stomach, leaving a trail of refreshing iciness in its wake. The cool stone floor on his bare feet also seemed to help ease the intensity of the burning.

It only took about twenty seconds for the unbearable heat to diminish a bit and Harry exhaled shakily, leaning against the wall and willing his initial panic to recede.

Harry swallowed and ran a hand through his damp hair. Now that he didn't feel as though he was about to spontaneously combust, some of the other signs of his heat slowly began to surface. Namely the fact that he had a raging hard-on.

As soon as he became conscious of this fact, he could think of little else. His body was thrumming with a simmering heat and his groin was positively throbbing; aching with the need to be touched.

He felt as though if he didn't come soon he would die.

Harry dropped a hand to wrap around his stiff cock and his knees nearly buckled at the intense pleasure. He leaned back against the wall and began to stroke, eyes falling closed as his free hand began to run over his naked body, tweaking his peaked and sensitive nipples and then running down his chest and stomach to lightly squeeze his bollocks.

Harry opened his eyes when his exploring fingers suddenly touched upon something wet. He reached around behind himself and moaned under his breath as his fingers caressed his hole, which was oddly loose and wet, the warm fluid dripping out as he tentatively pressed the tip of his index finger inside.

Harry moaned loudly, wantonly, as his finger pushed all the way in and his other hand continued to firmly stroke his aching cock. It was awkward attempting to do both at the same time, but the sensation was mind-blowing.

Harry's breath hitched and suddenly he was coming; toes curling against the floor as he spurted out over his fist.
He withdrew his finger from his arse as his head tipped back against the wall, his breathing ragged, his other hand still loosely grasping his prick.

Harry slowly opened his eyes and glanced down. It seemed his erection wasn't waning; in fact, it was still aching and throbbing with obvious need. The respite from his orgasm was all too brief, only lasting a few seconds.

Harry moaned, this time with dismay.

He tightened his hand around his erection and began to stroke again, using his still warm ejaculate to aid his hand in smoothly gliding up and down, hips pumping into his fist as the aching decreased at his touch.

After about a minute of wanking, Harry frowned; something was wrong, it just didn't feel like enough this time.

Even his fingers weren't enough as he reached back and inserted them back into his wet hole, the movement squelching loudly with his body's naturally created lubricant as he began to pump them in and out.

Harry growled in frustration; desperately wanting to come again but it just wasn't working.

He moved closer to the bed, looking for something to help - anything to ease the feeling of utter dissatisfaction roiling through him. His hand continued to absentmindedly stroke his flushed and swollen cock as he glanced around the small room.

He scowled in irritation when there was absolutely nothing to help him out.

*Madam Pomfrey left potions but she should have left a fucking dildo to stick up my arse,*' he thought viciously.

His body heat was beginning to increase again as his frustration flared; the potion was no match for his fiery annoyance. His mind was quickly becoming muddled with arousal and aggravation, boiling together to fuel a frenzied need.

Harry whimpered as he continued to stroke himself ineffectually. Merlin, he needed his Alpha, nothing else was going to even come close to satisfying him in this state.

"Harry?" Draco's voice suddenly drifted through the door as though he had a direct link to Harry's thoughts.

Harry stumbled over and knelt down, bracing one hand on the door and leaning his forehead against the cool surface. "Draco…" he practically sobbed, closing his eyes and giving his tender cock a light squeeze.

"Harry, what's happening? I woke to feel your distress and your scent coming through the vent… it's so strong," Draco replied, his voice sounding sleep roughened and causing Harry's prick to pulse with need. "Are you all right?"

"No," Harry shook his head, his forehead still pressed to the door. "I… Fuck, I can't bear this. I need you. You can't be out there, I need you with me. In me."

"Harry…" Draco replied, voice tight. "I can't do that, you know I can't be in there with you. Even if I wanted to, I can't get through this door. Pomfrey has my wand."
Harry choked on a sob at his mate's words. Merlin, his body was aching so badly it almost hurt. "I can't do this," he whimpered. "I can't. Nothing is helping, not even my own hand, it just burns and aches so much... Please do something Draco."

"I can't," Draco replied, sounding pained. "Should I leave? Perhaps I am making it worse..."

Harry's eyes flew open and he banged his fist against the door. "No!" he shouted. "Don't leave. I... maybe you can talk me through it?" he suggested, taking a deep breath and exhaling, trying to will away the all-encompassing heat of his arousal.

"I'll do anything, just tell me what I can do," Draco replied, an edge of desperation suddenly sharpening his voice.

Harry swallowed and glanced down at his poor reddened prick. "Maybe if I close my eyes, I can pretend your hands are on me and you... you can talk to me as though you're touching me."

"All right," Draco agreed thickly, sounding affected in a different sort of way now.

Harry nodded to himself, already feeling a little better. "Tell me... tell me what to do," he instructed throatily as he held his arms out to the side and waited for his Alpha's instructions.

There was a slight shuffling as though Draco was settling in as close to the vent as possible.

"I want you to drag your left hand down your cheek to your mouth," Draco ordered, voice oddly low and husky, the tone immediately settling over Harry and drawing him in as he did as he was told. "Then slip two fingers into your mouth and gently suck on them, wet them..."

Harry moaned deep in his throat as he obeyed; his index and middle finger slipping into his mouth. He wrapped his lips tightly around them and sucked lightly, his tongue wrapping around them and stroking, wetting, almost as though it were a sensual kiss.

"Now take your other hand and run it down the side of your neck until you reach my claiming mark, then lightly scratch your nails over it."

Harry's heart pounded and his breathing was fast becoming uneven as he willingly complied. He ran his fingers down over his heated skin until they reached the spot where he knew the mark to be, and then he curled his fingers, lightly dragging his nails over the scar.

Harry gasped as shivers instantly ran up and down his spine and his cock throbbed in time with his heartbeat. He moaned around his fingers as he continued to suck them diligently.

"Good boy," Draco praised breathily, his voice thick with arousal, and Harry could picture his mate's grey eyes silvery and half-lidded in the darkened infirmary. "Now, take your fingers out of your mouth and lay down on the floor on your back."

Harry quickly complied, holding his breath in anticipation of his Alpha's next command.

"Bend your knees and plant your feet on the floor."

Harry obediently bent his knees, his hips unconsciously thrusting up into the air, desperate for contact, his hands flat to the floor and fingers clenched against the rough stone.

"Now put those wet fingers in your arse Potter."

Harry's breath caught in his throat as he moved his hand down and inserted his fingers, careful to not
touch his aching erection, which was lying flat and swollen to his stomach.

"Are they in?"

"Yes…" Harry gasped, back arching off the ground as he pushed them in as far as he could.

"Now close your eyes and forget that it's your hand. I'm the one touching you Harry. You're my mate and I'm the only one who can make you feel this good."

"Yes…" Harry hissed as his eyes fell shut and he lost himself in the sensation, his Alpha's voice wrapping around him and filling him up, taking over everything else.

"You feel so good Harry…” Draco moaned through the door. "So tight. Now fuck yourself on my fingers."

"Ungh…” Harry groaned as he began to pump his fingers in and out.

"That's it, get my fingers nice and wet Harry. Are you doing it?"

"Yes… yes," Harry answered dutifully, eyes squeezed shut as he pushed into his stroking digits, his cock still untouched and throbbing, but it was bearable now.

"Good boy." Draco's voice was low and tight. "Now put a third finger in."

Harry slid another digit in alongside his other two, his loosened rim easily accepting the addition. His hips rose to meet each push and he curled his fingers to brush against his prostate and he nearly screamed at the pleasure that rocketed through his bowed body. A continuous stream of moans and panting breaths spewed forth from his parted his lips as he followed his mate's orders; fucking himself on his fingers, his hips picking up speed.

"Fuck Harry, I want you so badly… want to knot you…” Draco's voice was breathless and rough, and Harry vaguely wondered if his mate was wanking on the other side of the door.

"Oh god yes… want your knot inside me," Harry gibbered, eyes still shut, picturing his mate's swollen cock deep inside of him. "Want you to come inside of me…”

Draco moaned and Harry curled his fingers again, pressing against his prostate and nearly coming untouched, purely from the sound of his mate's pleasure and his own fingers.

"Touch yourself Harry," Draco rasped desperately. "Put your hand on your cock and come on your fingers."

Harry immediately wrapped his free hand around his neglected erection and fisted himself, his pre-come sliding wetly against his palm as he pulled at a rapid pace.

"I want to hear you come."

Harry moaned, holding his fingers still inside of himself as his other hand flew over his cock. "So close…” he ground out. "Draco…"

Draco moaned under his breath, the sound drifting in through the vent along with the sound of skin on skin as his mate frantically stroked himself on the other side of the door, the musky scent of his Alpha's arousal wafting in through the slats and filling Harry's nose.

The scent of his aroused mate hit Harry hard and he suddenly stiffened, arching into his hand and crying out sharply as he came in great ropes of warm ejaculate all over his hand and chest. His
orgasm exploded through his entire body, from head to toe, before slowly fading away and leaving him limp and spent on the floor.

All Harry could hear was the sound of his own breath, coming fast and shallow, as he recovered.

He slowly dragged his eyes open and glanced towards the vent in the door. He couldn't see through it, but he could smell that Draco had come as well. The air was thick with the smell of sex.

Harry's erection had finally waned and the heat and arousal in his body felt sated for the moment. It was still there, just under the surface, and he knew it wasn't the end by any means, but it was finally tolerable.

Harry reached out with one shaky arm and tapped the vent once before sliding the tip of his finger through the bottommost slat.

The touch of Draco's finger was there waiting for him and his lips stretched into a tired smile.

Harry's heat continued for the next day and a half.

Draco had reminded him of the Calming Draught in between his bouts of intense arousal and need, and Harry had felt instant relief the moment he drank it - not to mention a bit silly for having forgotten it was even there - but his mind was dominated by his heat and it was definitely hard to focus on anything other than the aching need that kept re-emerging after the brief moments of reprieve.

The combination of the Cooling Potion and Calming Draught during daylight hours was able to get Harry through the agony, and as soon as it was dark, Draco was able to talk him through it as they practically made love through the quarantine room door.

Harry suspected that his mate was suffering almost as much as he was during the day; with Madam Pomfrey and various students coming and going in the infirmary, Draco couldn't do anything other than sit there and try to ignore his own erection as he listened to his Omega writhe in the throes of his heat cycle.

Once Harry was confident that his heat was over, he pulled on the cord to alert Madam Pomfrey, his arm feeling abnormally heavy and weak.

The matron opened the door and Harry's cheeks heated in embarrassment as her nose visibly wrinkled a little at what he was sure was a very pungent odour of sex and body fluids.

He didn't have to think about it for long though because he was suddenly enveloped in the arms of one rather frantic Alpha.

Draco dropped his face into Harry's dishevelled hair and inhaled deeply, rubbing his nose in the thick strands before softly kissing Harry's temple, and then his forehead, and then his other temple.

"Ugh… don't," Harry protested, trying to squirm away. "I need a shower."

"No you don't," Draco murmured throatily, apparently enthralled by his mate's sweat-salty skin and
Harry yelped when a spell suddenly pushed the two of them apart.

Madam Pomfrey stood with wand in hand, one brow arched, as she surveyed them in disapproval. "I must ask that you refrain from physical contact until you are in your room and out of sight of impressionable young children, gentlemen."

Harry blinked in surprise when Draco issued a growl at the stout matron.

"Easy there Mr. Malfoy," she said calmly, appearing unfazed by his threatening behaviour. "I won't separate you from your mate but you must return to your rooms. I'm sure you would like to allow your tired Omega to rest and get cleaned up," she added pointedly.

Draco instantly ceased his snarling, as though a switch had been flipped, and turned to Harry, grey eyes full of concern.

Madam Pomfrey obviously had experience dealing with newly bonded Alphas.

She nodded in approval and turned away to begin cleaning up the quarantine room. "I've sent one of the house-elves on ahead to your room with your wands and you will find them there waiting for you," she said over her shoulder. "Oh and Mr. Potter?"

Harry turned to her, feeling dead on his feet, his eyes dry and gritty. "Yes?"

"I would stick close to your mate as you walk back to your rooms; he looks as though he won't be quite himself for the next few hours."

Harry nodded tiredly and began to walk towards the exit, too drained to care that he was still dressed in hospital pyjamas. He'd put on a fresh pair when his heat had ended but that was about the extent of his efforts to be socially presentable.

Draco walked beside him, one hand resting on the small of his back.

Luckily, morning classes were already in session and they only ran across one student on their journey to the third floor corridor.

Harry quickly grabbed onto Draco's sleeve and pulled him along as he began to growl at the poor Ravenclaw. It was a clear sign of just how not in his right mind his mate was, as the offending interloper was twelve years old and female.

Harry collapsed into the nearest chair as soon as they were both safely shut away in their private room. "I'm definitely not going to class today," he said wearily, rubbing his eyes beneath his glasses. "Merlin, I need a shower."

He settled his glasses back on his nose and then looked up at Draco. He frowned at the strange gleam in his mate's eyes. "What?"

Draco slowly stalked towards him and Harry suddenly noticed the bulge in the front of his trousers.

"Oh no you don't," Harry exclaimed in alarm as he jumped out of the chair and backed away. "Don't you dare touch me; I'm too bloody tired and sore for that sort of thing right now."

Draco's narrowed eyes followed Harry as he backed all the way across the room towards their ensuite. "You expect me to not touch you after the absolute agony you put me through over the past
"You?" Harry replied incredulously. "Sitting there with an inopportune erection is nothing compared to the fucked up shit that was happening on my side of the door."

Draco blinked, his dilated pupils suddenly shrinking, and then he snickered.

The moment appeared to break whatever aroused Alpha stupor Draco had been stuck in.

Harry couldn't help but smile as he shook his head at his mate. "How about you help me get cleaned up?" he suggested as a compromise. "That bath is big enough for the both of us, and if you do a good job, then perhaps I'll reward you. Later."

"With a blow job?" Draco asked immediately.

Harry laughed with the sort of fond exasperation he reserved especially for Draco. "Yeah, all right."

"Brilliant." Draco smirked in satisfaction.

Ron and Hermione,

If our friendship still means something to you, then please meet Draco and I near the entrance doors Saturday morning at eight-thirty. I am proposing a truce, at least for one day, to give you both the chance to get to know my mate properly.

Oh and wear Muggle clothing because we're going out.

Sincerely,

HP

Harry and Draco had decided to remain in their room for the rest of the week; Harry to sufficiently recover from his first real heat and Draco to recover from his exceedingly over-protective and possessive behaviour.

It turned out that keeping Harry away from his mate while Harry was suffering in the midst of his heat had affected Draco in a way that no one could have predicted. He wasn't fit to be around other students because if someone even looked at Harry the wrong way he was likely to hex them.

Harry wasn't about to complain though, he loved having his mate around while he convalesced; Draco was extra attentive and practically catered to his every whim. He'd never experienced having family around to take care of him while he was unwell before - and Draco was his family now. Any time he was sick at the Dursley's they'd just tell him to stay in his cupboard until he was over it.

On Saturday morning, Harry and Draco emerged from their sanctuary - where only house-elves had been permitted to come and go for the past few days - and re-entered the real world.

Harry felt rested and refreshed, and ready to face reality again. Draco also appeared to be in control
of his responses once more as they passed some of their fellow students without incident. The two mates headed down to the entrance doors, hands clasped; a united front against whatever was about to come their way.

Harry had received a very short note from the other two-thirds of the Gryffindor Trio, agreeing to meet in the entrance hall on Saturday morning, but there had been no pleasantries in the message, and he still didn't know where Ron stood as he hadn't heard from him all week.

He spotted them as soon as they rounded the corner. Ron was seated on the large square base of one of the stone statues, dressed in some worn jeans and a flannel shirt, absently picking at a loose thread on the coat laid out over his knees. Hermione was standing next to him, dressed casually in jeans and a black jumper, while chewing her thumbnail and looking tense.

Ron got to his feet as Harry and Draco approached, looking awkward as he stood beside Hermione, hands shoved into his pockets.

There was a tense silence as Harry and Hermione each waited for the other to speak first.

"So… where are we going?" Ron asked, breaking the uncomfortable stand-off.

"London," Harry answered, turning to him.

Ron's brown eyes flicked to Draco and back. "With Malfoy?"

"You act as though I've never been to Muggle London Weasley," Draco drawled, and Harry wanted to groan at how his mate had already reverted back to his usual haughty posturing.

"Have you?" Ron replied in surprise.

"Yes, he has," Harry quickly intercepted before Draco could take offence. "But not since he was a child, so it'll be fun. For all of us," he added lamely, rubbing the back of his neck and wondering how on earth they were going to get through an entire day together. "Shall we?"

Without waiting for a response, Harry marched past them and through the doors. He buttoned his thick wool peacoat as he crunched across the frozen snow and down the steps, Draco right beside him.

Harry was relieved to see Ron and Hermione catch them up and the four walked silently down the track towards the gates to Apparate.

"Is that a new coat Harry?" Hermione asked as they walked.

"Er, yeah," Harry replied, glancing down at the stylish navy blue coat with a smile. Draco had bought it for him.

"And new glasses too?"

"Yeah, I lost mine and Draco made me a new pair."

"And new clothes too, I see."

Harry frowned a little as he turned his head to glance at her. "Erm, yeah, Draco bought me some new ones." He shared a look with his mate, who was looking decidedly nettled. "Why? Is there a problem?" he asked, confused.

Hermione's answering smile was very unnatural. "Of course not, they just don't seem like you, that's
Harry stopped walking. "What are you trying to say?"

The rest of them stopped as well. Draco looked ready to dive in to defend his mate and Ron shifted his weight uncomfortably from foot to foot as Hermione crossed her arms over her chest and stared at Harry.

"I'm just pointing out that Malfoy is changing you - and not for the better."

Harry's brow pulled down into a frown as he stared back at her. "How are new clothes and glasses proof of corruption?" he asked, utterly exasperated by her outlandish accusations. "Most of my existing clothes were my fat cousin's cast-offs because my aunt and uncle refused to spend more on me than they absolutely had to, and the rest of my wardrobe consisted of Molly Weasley jumpers and my school uniform. I'm sorry if you think I'm suddenly evil incarnate just because my coat is Armani."

Hermione blinked and then her lips twitched - and then she was suddenly laughing; a full-belly laugh that Harry hadn't heard in a very long time.

"What's Armani?" Ron asked over her laughter, bewildered.

Draco snorted and Harry quickly placed a hand over his mate's mouth before he could say something detrimental.

Hermione wiped her eyes while a few lingering giggles escaped her lips. Once she'd sufficiently recovered, her smile slowly began to turn contrite. "I'm sorry Harry, you requested a truce for the day and I swore to myself that I would try to keep an open mind. Let's continue on shall we?"

Harry smiled and nodded in relief.

The foursome began walking towards the gates once more, the atmosphere a little more relaxed.

They agreed on an Apparation Point in Diagon, and then from there, they all walked out through the Leaky Cauldron and onto Charing Cross Road in Muggle London. There wasn't any snow in London but the late October air was crisp and cold, and Harry was thankful for his cosy wool coat.

"How about we head somewhere warm?" Harry suggested as he slid his hands into his pockets.

Ron nodded emphatically as he zipped up his own coat, shoulders hunched against the wind.

"I know of a brilliant coffee shop not far from here," Hermione suggested tentatively as errant curls blew across her face.

"Sounds good to me," Harry replied with a nod before turning to his mate with a questioning gaze.

"Lead the way Granger," Draco agreed as he tucked his arm through Harry's.

The footpath was too crowded with Saturday morning shoppers for any conversation as they walked south along Charing Cross Road. They crossed the street after a few minutes and followed Hermione as she ducked up a side street and then into a small, unassuming shop. The trendy little wooden sign encased with black iron above the door had Notes Coffee scrawled across it.

It was just past nine and the coffee bar had only just opened. The shop's interior was warm and welcoming as they stepped out of the cold and the air was filled with the smell of sweet things and
fresh baking. There were only two other customers seated at one of the tables, and one of the employees flashed the four new guests a smile of greeting as they walked in.

They inspected the menu and then gave their orders to a young girl at the counter before making their way to a table in the back surrounded by pale grey walls and illuminated by trendy lighting. Winter coats were soon discarded and draped over the backs of chairs as they settled round the table to the sound of jazz music playing softly in the background.

"So, is that really Armani?" Hermione asked with a tiny grin.

Harry laughed. "No, that's just the only designer name I know. You ordered it from somewhere, right?" he asked, turning to his mate.

"Yes, a close acquaintance of my mother's is a designer in Paris whom we order most of our clothing from."

"I didn't realise your family wore Muggle clothing often enough to warrant having a designer on call," Hermione mused aloud, and Harry wasn't sure if she was being facetious or spiteful.

"My mother and I both appreciate Muggle fashion," Draco replied steadily. "It has a practicality to it that wizarding fashion is sadly lacking."

"Too right," Ron agreed while tipping his chair back and marveling at the low hanging electric light fixture above his head. "I can't stand robes." He dropped his chair back down and shot Harry a lop-sided grin. "Must be nice having your Alpha buy a new wardrobe for you."

Harry's temper flared for just an instant before he thought about what his friend had said. "You mean, because then I don't have to go out shopping myself?"

"Yeah, I know how much you hate it."

Harry relaxed and smiled back. He really needed to watch his reactions; he was feeling perhaps a little overly sensitive to the situation. Hermione's earlier accusations had him on edge and he didn't want it to ruin a day that was meant to repair relationships.

"Is that why you've been so accommodating?" Draco asked his mate with an arched brow. "Because you're a lazy sod and not because you actually like the things I pick out?"

Harry smiled sheepishly as he shrugged. "Well, at first yeah, but now… I can appreciate the difference in quality and how they make me look."

Hermione smiled. "Whereas before you didn't know you were wearing trousers ten sizes too big for you Harry?"

Harry scowled. "Hey, enough about my clothes. Fucking hell." The young Muggle staff member chose that moment to pop over with their drinks and Harry smiled apologetically. "Sorry."

She waved him off with a grin. "No worries, I've heard plenty worse, believe me," she said good-naturedly as she placed everyone's order in front of them. "Enjoy."

Harry pulled his hot chocolate towards himself and licked a bit of whipped cream off the rather large mound which topped his decadent drink, green eyes flicking to his mate, daring him to make a disparaging remark.

Draco's lips curved into a smile but he remained silent as he reached for his espresso.
Harry caught Hermione watching the exchange with interest and he wondered what she was thinking.

"I didn't know if we were allowed to talk about this today or not..." Ron started hesitantly with a glance towards his girlfriend, "but, what happened last weekend Harry? You were all alone and someone attacked you?"

Harry quickly placed a comforting hand on Draco's knee beneath the table when his mate stiffened at the question. He knew Draco still blamed himself for what happened and Harry hoped Ron wouldn't encourage that guilt in any way.

"Yeah, I was..." Harry trailed off with a sigh, cupping his hands around his warm cup. "It's a long story," he said, knowing there was so much more to the attack than just him being out alone. He tried to sort it in his mind before speaking again.

"You know how Blaise Zabini offered himself to me as an Alpha?" At their nods, he continued, his thumb absently stroking over Draco's thigh to keep him calm. "Well, I kind of forgot to tell Draco."

"Forgot?" Ron repeated incredulously. "How could you forget to tell your mate something like that?"

Harry took a sip of his drink to give himself time to think. He knew exactly why he forgot; he'd been too preoccupied with meeting the Nundu Board and then Draco's subsequent enquiry where he could've very well been found guilty and then executed.

Blaise Zabini's little crush wasn't exactly high on his list of priorities at that time.

"I didn't want to upset Draco," he said once he'd set his drink back down. "I didn't think it was important to tell him if it was just going to cause him distress or instigate a fight between the two of them."

Ron snorted. "That's what happens when you're raised by Muggles," he said with a shake of his head, giving Harry a perfectly reasonable excuse as to why it had slipped his mind. "You really don't know anything about Alphas, mate."

"If I knew it was going to be such an issue, I wouldn't have forgotten," Harry replied honestly.

"So when did he find out?" Ron asked, glancing between the two mates.

"Right before we were meant to leave for the party," Harry answered, flashing a somewhat sheepish smile at his Alpha. He was feeling a bit silly about the whole thing now. He and Draco had both over-reacted, but Harry had been the one who had taken it too far and disregarded his own safety in order to prove a point. "He wasn't pleased," he added dryly.

"It wasn't merely the fact that Harry had forgotten to tell me about Blaise's offer that bothered me," Draco interjected smoothly, one finger circling the rim of his tiny white cup. "It was the fact that Zabini had approached Harry on more than one occasion, and I was completely oblivious to the fact that another Alpha was trying to move in on my mate. It's not that I actually thought Harry was secretly interested in him, it was only that I wasn't prepared for that... turn of events, and I'm afraid I do not handle being caught off-guard very well."

Ron leaned forward in his chair, nodding in understanding - which was a very odd sight for Harry to witness; Ron agreeing with Draco.

"Yeah, I wouldn't be happy if some Alpha was trying to snag Hermione behind my back and she
neglected to tell me about it."

Harry rolled his eyes at Hermione who smiled at him over the rim of her teacup. She'd already heard the abridged version of this story in McGonagall's office and was clearly not offering an opinion on the matter.

"Anyway," Harry continued purposely. "Draco no longer wanted to go to the party at the Manor because he didn't want me around Blaise."

"A heat of the moment declaration, I can assure you," Draco stated calmly before taking a sip of his espresso.

"So you don't mind if Harry is around Blaise now?" Hermione asked, and Harry was relieved to note that her tone was curious rather than accusing or suspicious.

Draco shook his head. "Not at all, I trust Harry when he says he's not interested in him. That being said, I do not trust Zabini and would rather they weren't alone together if it can be helped."

"Fair enough," Hermione conceded, surprising Harry.

"So then Malfoy stayed at Hogwarts while you went to Malfoy Manor on your own?" Ron asked, trying to get back to the subject at hand.

"Yeah, I told Draco I would be in Gryffindor Tower for the night and I went there instead," Harry admitted, getting a little tired of telling people of his deception. It really had been a rather terrible thing to do to his mate.

Draco slipped an arm around the back of Harry's chair and Harry unconsciously leaned into the touch.

"And how was the party?" Ron asked, his expression clearly stating that he fully expected the answer to include the words 'fucking awful' and 'complete nightmare.'

Harry grinned. "It was actually really great. I got to meet their close friends, Lucius kindly kept me separated from Blaise, and Narcissa was a complete sweetheart."

Ron and Hermione stared at Harry, frozen with disbelief.

Draco choked on his drink while Harry just laughed at the two gobsmacked Gryffindors.

"Okay, I'm starting to think Hermione was right - you're not the same Harry," Ron said slowly, fearfully. "Malfoy must have cast some sort of dark curse-type thing on you."

"It's not that wand that has Harry under my complete control," Draco drawled with a smirk.

Harry let out a bark of laughter, completely forgetting where he was, while Ron's expression turned to one of disgust and Hermione rolled her eyes.

Harry grinned; it felt good, like the four of them were old friends, instead of two friends he was currently fighting with and a boyfriend whom they both hated and mistrusted.

"I'm serious," Harry finally continued. "Lucius even offered to escort me back to Hogwarts, he was quite concerned that Draco wasn't with me - and now I wish I'd listened to him." He paused and then decided to quickly finish the story. "So, I left the Manor and returned to Hogwarts where these two strangers jumped out of nowhere and stunned me before tossing me into the lake to drown. They didn't know who they were dealing with though," he added with a smile, trying to make light of the
situation so that it didn't dampen the mood.

Draco's hand moved from where it had been resting on Harry's shoulder to the base of his neck, fingers idly stroking over the claiming mark in a soothing manner.

"And they haven't caught them yet," Hermione added, forehead creased in thought.

Ron leaned forward, lowering his voice. "So… they could be anywhere. They might've even followed us here."

Harry glanced up, watching as the coffee shop filled with more and more customers, forming a long queue at the counter and rapidly filling the empty tables around them.

"I doubt it," Harry replied, turning back to Ron. "They won't just be wandering around the streets of London, hoping I'll show up. If the Aurors haven't found them yet then they're probably far away."

"I'm sure that won't be the end of it though," Hermione said, gaze shifting to Draco for a moment. "If they were that set on killing Harry, they won't be put off easily. When they hear that he's still alive and kicking, they'll probably be back."

"Which is why Potter is not to go wandering about on his own anymore," Draco intoned evenly, fingers still lightly resting on his mate's claim mark; the tiniest of movements sending a cascade of shivers down Harry's spine.

"Bloody hell…" Ron breathed out as he sat back in his chair. "With You-Know-Who dead, I thought people would stop trying to murder you Harry."

"That's probably why they're trying to murder me," Harry replied sullenly. "I killed off their idol and now his mental followers are trying to get their revenge."

"Perhaps," Hermione said, still frowning thoughtfully. "There could be other reasons too, like maybe someone trying to get revenge on Draco or his family, or perhaps they're not Voldemort followers but men who wanted a male Omega for themselves."

"Well they got one thing right," Harry replied darkly. "I'd rather be dead than forced to be their Omega."

He shuddered just at the thought and Draco subtly pulled him a little closer into the crook of his arm. Harry acknowledged his mate's caring gesture with a soft smile, quietly inhaling his mate's scent and allowing it to flow through his body, settling him.

"Well that's a happy thought," Ron responded sarcastically.

"Yes, Harry has a knack for finding the silver lining in any given situation," Draco drawled. Harry rolled his eyes but a reluctant smile tugged at his lips as he returned to drinking his cooling hot chocolate. He was feeling decidedly picked on in this conversation but he knew it was good-natured, and Draco felt comfortable enough to join in, so that was a good indication of the current comfort level of his Alpha.

He looked up as Hermione leaned her arms on the table, gaze pinned on Draco. Harry bit his lip nervously, waiting for her to speak, because he knew she was working up to something uncomfortable.

"When Blaise spoke to Ron and I about your family having some big dark secret, that was just
"I really couldn't say," Draco replied slowly, clearly forcing himself to be as candid as possible with the two Gryffindors. "That would be my assumption, as I can think of no other reason." Draco's expression hardened a little. "I find it ironic that he suddenly felt the need to spread this story about me at the same time in which he decided to pursue my mate. He also attempted to convince me that Harry was slipping me Love Potions when I spoke of what was happening at the start of term. I had confided in him my suddenly intense attraction to Potter and that I was thinking of defying my family in order to pursue Harry, whom I still believed to be a Beta at that time, and Blaise was clearly attempting to discourage that idea in order to pursue Harry for himself. Blaise even admitted to Harry that he'd known he was an Omega since our first day, so he already knew truth when he fed me the Love Potion story."

Harry was so proud of his mate in that moment. Draco was obviously trying his hardest to not just get along with Harry's friends, but to be as open with them as he was able to be. For a Malfoy.

"Definitely sounds suspect," Ron concluded, glancing pointedly at Hermione, who slowly nodded in agreement as she absorbed everything that Draco had told them.

"So can we please drop the unnecessary scrutiny of my boyfriend now?" Harry asked with a sigh.

"Fine by me," Ron said with a shrug, gaze connecting with Hermione's again. "He's still a pompous arse but I don't think he's evil."

"I'm offended by that comment Weasley," Draco drawled. "I must be losing my touch."

Harry elbowed him in the ribs, causing his mate to smirk ingenuously.

"Hermione?" Harry questioned, turning to her to see if she would also agree to stop the interrogation.

Hermione bit her lip, dropping her gaze to the table as she fiddled with her empty cup. "Yes, I... I promise to stop being suspicious."

"And you won't ever mention it again?" Harry pressed.

"Mention what exactly?" Hermione hedged.

"This supposed dark secret that Draco is hiding?" Harry clarified. Just uttering that sentence made his heart pound and caused his pulse to jump but he knew he was concealing it well. His intense need to keep his mate and the Nundu Clan safe far outweighed his reluctance to lie to his friends.

"Yes I promise not to bring that up again," Hermione assured him with a sigh of resignation.

Harry nodded, satisfied. He finished off the last of his drink and pushed the empty cup aside.

"Where to next?" he asked round the table, determined to spend the rest of the day forging a genuine friendship between the three most important people in his life.

"I've never been to the zoo," Ron said, a smile suddenly lighting his face. "Muggles have the strangest animals."

Harry raised an incredulous brow at that.

"I too would like to visit the Muggle zoo," Draco put in casually.

Harry suspected his mate was endeavouring to hide his excitement and he thought it was perhaps the
cutest thing he'd ever seen.

"Fine with me," Hermione said with a smile, also looking slightly delighted by the idea. "I haven't been there since I was a little girl."

"I went to the zoo once and it's my happiest childhood memory," Harry said dreamily. "I set a huge snake on my cousin Dudley."

The other three eyed him strangely as they stood and gathered their coats.

"Come along my little Parselmouth," Draco quipped as he slung an arm about Harry's shoulders.

"If you make a joke about Harry speaking Parseltongue to your trouser snake then I'm going back to Hogwarts right now," Ron warned the two mates.

"I wasn't going to say anything of the sort," Draco replied with an arched brow. "You think about the two of us having sex more than we do Weasley."

"Come on," Hermione motioned for them all to leave before another word could be spoken.

The four of them caught a bus to the zoo, with both Ron and Draco commenting on its sluggish pace compared to the Knight Bus. They hopped off at the stop directly outside the park and Harry bought their tickets with the stash of Muggle money that he'd brought with him. They then spent the better part of the day slowly meandering through London Zoo's extensive grounds.

As they walked through the Rainforest Life section, Harry ended up walking next to Hermione, their respective partners moving wide-eyed between animal exhibits just ahead of them.

Draco had given up all pretense of disinterest long ago.

Harry smiled fondly as Draco and Ron snickered over the Red Titi Monkeys.

"You really love him, don't you?"

Harry looked over at Hermione.

"And he loves you," she continued without question, looking a little amazed by her own observations.

Harry smiled and turned back to his Alpha. "Yeah, he really does - and I really do."

Hermione smiled at him and it was so heartfelt and sincere, and she looked so genuinely happy for him, that he felt the hot prickle of tears at the back of his eyes.

"I'm glad," she said with quiet sincerity. "You deserve happiness Harry, you deserve to have an attentive partner who loves you and who thinks the world of you, and as much as it pains me to admit that I was wrong, I think Malfoy maybe is that partner. I've seen the way he stares at you when you're not looking, like he can't get enough of you. The entire trip here, all he did was eye the people around us and glare at anyone who got too close to you. You probably didn't even notice."
Harry grinned. "No, I'm so used to it now. I don't even think he knows he's doing it half the time."

Hermione smiled. "At one time that would have bothered you."

Harry nodded. "Yeah, but now… I dunno." He shrugged and turned back to look at his mate as the blond stared up into the trees. "I guess it makes me feel… loved," he described simply. "Not stifled or inferior, or any of the other things that I used to think of at the thought of having an Alpha mate. Draco is protective and possessive, but he's not disrespectful or condescending because I'm an Omega. He's…"

"Perfect?" Hermione hazarded with a teasing grin.

"I wouldn't go that far," Harry laughed and then paused, tilting his head to one side. "Or maybe I would. He's not a perfect person but he's perfect for me. Even though he has all of these stoic Alpha traits, he's still a witty, sarcastic Slytherin too."

"And that's a good thing?"

Harry grinned at her and wondered if she could see the glow of happiness he was feeling. "Yup."

"Hey Harry, I think there's something wrong with this creature!"

Harry walked over to gaze up into the trees alongside his mate, ignoring the strange looks from the people around them.

"This one may need to be put out of his misery," Draco surmised seriously, frowning up at the animal hiding amongst the tree-tops.

Harry squinted upwards until he spotted it. "That's a sloth Draco, he's supposed to move that slowly."

"Oh?" Draco's expression turned to one of critical disapproval. "How inefficient. He should still be put out of his misery, just for being so incredibly useless."

Hermione giggled, but she didn't realise that Draco was being perfectly serious.

"Can you at least make potions out of their body parts?" Ron asked loudly from the other side of Draco.

Harry hid his face in his hands at the horrified looks the Muggles were now directing their way.
"Good morning Harry. Morning Draco."

Harry smiled at Hermione's friendly tone as he and Draco slid into their seats at the Gryffindor table early the next morning. The day trip to London had worked wonders for the relationship between the three of them, even Ron looked up with a smile of greeting for Draco as he shoveled scrambled eggs into his mouth.

The zoo had been a brilliant idea and they had all gone to dinner afterwards at a local fish and chips shop. The zoo had been the perfect ice-breaker and everyone was much more relaxed after that; the conversation over dinner a lot friendlier, with no talk of attacks or secrets or odd behaviour. They didn't even mention classes or Hogwarts at all. They mostly discussed future plans and Quidditch - and Ron took great pleasure in teasing Draco over the fact that it was his first time in a fish and chips shop.

Harry decided not to mention the fact that it was Draco's first time having fish and chips. Draco had confessed later that he had rather enjoyed the chips but couldn't understand why Muggles would ruin perfectly good fish with that disgustingly greasy coating.

"Morning," Harry replied cheerfully as he reached for the pumpkin juice.

Draco usually went straight for the tea as though his life depended on it, but today he seemed to be glancing about the table with a diminutive frown.

"Looking for someone?" Harry enquired as he stabbed a couple of juicy sausages with his fork and slid them off onto his plate with one finger.

"Mmm…" Draco hummed distractedly. His expression suddenly cleared and Harry glanced up to see Neville walking into the Great Hall.

Neville took his usual seat across from Ron, absently uttering good morning to everyone while simultaneously examining the plates of steaming food crowding the long wooden table.

Draco cleared his throat. "Longbottom."

Neville paused, a piece of toast clutched in one hand, as he looked up at Draco in surprise. "Uh… yes?"

"I just wished to thank you for saving Harry's life. I hadn't the chance to say it to you until now, and if it hadn't been for your involvement, my mate wouldn't be sitting here today."

The entire table fell silent - including Harry.

His Alpha's expression was impassive as he stared back at Neville but his voice was tight with controlled emotion.

Harry turned to his gobsmacked housemate just in time to see his cheeks flush.

"Er yeah, no worries," Neville stammered in embarrassment. "Harry has saved all our lives more than once… it's the least I could do, right?"

"If you ever need a night off from your late night plant feeding," Draco continued magnanimously,
"let us know and we will be happy to step in for you."

Harry almost laughed outright as Ron's fork froze halfway to his mouth, staring with wide-eyed amazement at the Slytherin.

Hermione kicked Ron under the table as Neville thanked Draco and said he would let him know.

Draco nodded in response and Harry slipped his hand under the table to give his mate's thigh a supportive squeeze. He then returned to his breakfast as though nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. He hadn't known Draco was going to do that and the Slytherin's oft unseen thoughtful side usually remained concealed in public.

Draco then began to prepare his tea and everyone else gradually stopped staring and returned to their breakfast as well.

A few students - mostly from other tables - continued to glance in Harry's direction with openly curious expressions throughout the meal, but Harry just ignored them. The staring had become a lot more prevalent after the attack. He knew the rumours would be running rampant about what had happened to him and why; no one else knew that he'd gone into heat upon his return, so the majority of the school now assumed Harry had been so grievously injured in the mysterious attack that he had had to remain in the hospital wing for a full week.

One of the advantages to having an over-protective mate was that it kept the invasive questions to a minimum; no one dared to approach Harry in the corridor - even just ask if he was all right. His friends were also very tight-lipped about the incident, not revealing the details of what had happened to anyone outside their little circle. Only a handful of Aurors and Professor McGonagall knew the description of his attackers and the details of the attack itself. This way, any student found to possess more information than was purposely leaked would be instantly under suspicion. The hope was that the two men would be daft enough to boast about what they'd *almost* accomplished to friends or family.

Once they were finished with breakfast, the eighth years at the Gryffindor table collected their things and began to make their way to the first floor DADA classroom.

"So what's the new professor like?" Harry asked Hermione as they strode through the corridors together.

"Oh that's right, you haven't met him yet," Hermione replied, and then added with a strange little grin, "you really missed out."

"What do you mean?"

"She means the new professor is young and fit," Ron answered with a roll of his eyes, "and she thinks he's just your type."

"My type?" Harry replied, baffled. "I didn't realise I had a type."

Ron snorted. "You'll see."

They rounded the corner and headed for the open classroom door.

Harry glanced at his mate with amusement when Draco slipped his hand into Harry's as they entered; it felt as though Draco was staking his claim for the new "fit" professor to observe.

Harry looked towards the desk at the front of the classroom and had to stifle a laugh. The new
professor did look awfully young - and was tall, lean and had shining blond hair.

He was about to comment to Hermione when he felt his mate stiffen beside him.

"What is it?" Harry asked, hoping his Alpha wasn't that susceptible to jealousy.

"Later," he murmured out of the corner of his mouth and Harry instantly knew it was something other than a fit of jealousy.

The four of them took their seats, placing their Defence texts on top of their desks and sitting back to wait. Harry silently studied the new professor and wondered if he would last more than a year. The man was calmly leaning against the edge of the desk, arms crossed over his chest and gaze on the door as the last few students wandered in. He was dressed in brown tweed trousers and a white buttoned shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows beneath a fitted vest.

He carelessly waved one hand to quietly shut the door behind the last student and then turned to his expectant class with an easy smile.

Harry glanced at his mate out of the corner of his eye, trying to read his expression. He didn't look upset, just… uneasy, as though taken off-guard by something.

"Welcome back class, I hope you all had time to look over Chapter Eleven," the professor began, gaze travelling around the room. His eyes lingered on Harry and Draco for a split-second longer than the rest of the students. "For those of you who were absent, my name is Professor Garrick. I'm afraid you will need to review both Chapters Eleven and Twelve this week to catch up." He paused and his smile widened. "Not to worry though, it's all very fascinating."

Harry flipped open his book to Chapter Eleven. The title in thick black lettering read 'Hex Deflection.' He turned to Chapter Twelve and blinked at the title spread across the page: 'Controlling Your Inheritance.'

Harry scanned down the page and it seemed that the chapter was mostly directed towards Alphas. It went into detail on specific methods for repressing baser instincts so as to remain clear-headed in any given situation - including in the midst of battle.

Harry suddenly realised how serious that could be - especially for an Auror. All the criminal would have to do is throw an Omega in the path of an Alpha Auror and they could be suddenly rendered utterly useless.

"This subject is usually taught in Seventh Year, prior to any of you actually coming into your inheritance," Professor Garrick continued. "As this year is such a unique situation, it's a once in a lifetime opportunity to test these techniques out in real life scenarios. The younger you begin to master these techniques the better."

Draco made a low sound of displeasure in his throat and Harry knew his mate didn't like the sound of that. Come to think of it, Harry didn't really like the sound of it either; it sounded as though the professor was going to use the students as guinea pigs.

Professor Garrick's brown eyes swept over to Draco as though he'd heard him. "Not to fear Mr. Malfoy, we will not be using your mate as an Omega test subject in order to trigger Alphas. I would never consider such a thing in my classroom."

Draco's tense expression eased a little.

Harry was now watching Professor Garrick with renewed interest; it was common knowledge who
Draco was - especially after being continually splashed across the cover of the Prophet as Harry Potter's mate - but something in the man's tone almost made it sound as though the professor knew Draco personally.

If that was true, then why would Draco be uncomfortable in his presence?

Harry pushed that thought to the back of his mind and refocused as the young professor walked forward to stand in front of the first row of desks. "Now that most of you have read the chapter on Hex Deflection, we shall be ready with the practical work."

Harry smiled and withdrew his wand, eager to get started.

Professor Garrick spotted him and addressed him with a rueful smile. "I'm afraid as you and Mr. Malfoy have not yet had a chance to study the theory, I must ask that you both merely observe for today." He turned back to the rest of the class as Harry visibly deflated. "We are taking class outside this morning, so grab your warm things and a wand and head out to the entrance hall."

"It's for your own good Potter," Draco said with a smirk as the class stood and gathered their cloaks.

Harry glared at his mate, who was looking quite pleased about the professor's decision. He knew Draco disliked it when others practiced dueling with him in class but the bastard didn't have to look quite so smug about it.

The students began to file out the door as they pulled on mittens and hats, excited grins of anticipation on their faces; they never took class outside.

Ron and Hermione joined Harry and Draco as they walked between desks to the front of the room. "Could I have a word with you Mr. Potter?" Professor Garrick interrupted as Harry was about to walk past.

Harry paused, a slight frown of apprehension on his face.

"Mr. Malfoy is of course welcome to join us," he continued amiably.

"Oh, ah… sure," Harry replied uncertainly, wondering what he'd done wrong already.

Ron and Hermione continued on past them out the door, both of them darting looks of concern over their shoulders as they left.

Harry unconsciously stepped a little closer to Draco and he instantly wrapped an arm around Harry's waist in response.

"Nice to see you again Draco," Professor Garrick said, turning to him with a warm smile once the door had fallen closed behind Ron and Hermione.

Harry immediately bristled, his mind buzzing with jealousy from the over-familiarity with which he greeted his mate. Was this man one of the men whom Draco had 'experimented' with?

"I think the last time we saw each other you were still in nappies."

Or not.

"Not quite," Draco replied dryly, he didn't return the smile but his tone was friendly enough. "I believe I was about nine or ten, close to Hogwart's age." He turned to Harry, who was shifting impatiently, waiting for someone to explain what was going on. "Harry, this is Michael Garrick. He's
"Oh," Harry responded in surprise, stilling. "Er, nice to meet you."

Professor Garrick reached out to shake his hand. "It's nice to finally meet you too Harry," he said. "I wish we had time for a proper chat but the class will be waiting. I just wanted to let you both know that I've been sent here to help keep an eye on Harry. I'm sorry that there was no time to warn you Draco, it must have been quite a shock walking in to see me at the head of the class."

Professor Garrick began to walk with them towards the door, grabbing his cloak from off of a wooden coat rack as they passed.

"There have been some… developments," he continued, sounding reluctant to broach the subject, "and the concern was that you are somewhat vulnerable at the moment Harry." He turned to them both, one hand on the door handle. "Obviously I cannot speak of such things here, but your parents have been apprised of the situation Draco. If you wish, I can accompany you both to Malfoy Manor after the last class of the day to discuss this further."

Draco stared at him, looking as though he desperately wanted to ask for more details, a muscle in his cheek twitching as his jaw clenched and unclenched. "And… you believe your presence is required for our trip to the Manor?" he finally asked.

"Yes."

"Is it safe for me at Hogwarts?" Harry asked, trying to rein in the strong urge to demand the specifics right bloody now.

"We believe so," Professor Garrick replied slowly. "Your Headmistress stepped up security measures and alerted the Aurors after the initial attack, and those measures are still in place, so within these grounds you should be safe."

Harry pressed his lips together into a hard line; the emphasis on 'should' hanging in the air between the three of them.

Professor Garrick looked at Harry sympathetically for a moment before turning and opening the door.

All conversation ceased as they strode through the corridors to the entrance hall, Draco's hand clasped around Harry's; his firm grasp speaking volumes on his current state of mind.

Their classmates were all amassed near the door, talking and laughing loudly, not a care in the world.

Harry wanted to glower at them; why was he always singled out? Now that the war was over, they were all able to move on while Harry felt as though his problems were almost as bad now as they were at the height of Voldemort's reign of terror.

He slanted a glance at his mate, feeling a tug of guilt for dragging Draco into this mess. He wondered if Draco was starting to doubt whether or not Harry was worth all the stress of having him as his mate.

"All right everyone, let's go!" the professor called out above the din.

"What was that all about?" Ron asked as he and Hermione joined the pair while everyone else trooped outside into the snowy grounds.
Harry clasped his heavy cloak around his shoulders and walked out with them into the muted winter sunshine, squinting a little at the glare of sun off of the snow.

"McGonagall had spoken to him about the attack and the extra security, so he just wanted to know if there was anything he could do to help," Draco replied smoothly, handing over a pair of grey gloves to his mate who had neglected to bring his own. Harry flashed him a grateful smile as he slipped them on. "He's an old friend of my family's as well, so he asked after my parents."

"Was he living locally?" Hermione asked with interest, looking over at the professor as he led the pack of students across the grounds to a flat, open space near the frozen lake. "He sounds as though he has a slight accent."

"He's been living in Germany with his wife for the past eight or nine years," Draco explained. "I believe they were planning to make the move back to the UK when the Hogwart's post came up, so he applied."

"Was he an Auror?" Ron asked as they joined the back of the group forming a semi-circle around the new professor.

Draco shook his head. "No, just a bit of an expert in his field, he's been teaching for years."

"Well, I like him," Hermione whispered. "He seems kind; reminds me of Professor Lupin."

Harry leaned against Draco's side for added warmth and forced himself to push all gloomy thoughts to the back of his mind in order to not ruin what trust he'd managed to rebuild with Ron and Hermione yesterday. "Yeah, he seems nice," he commented.

"Nice?" Ron snorted. "Is that what you're calling it these days?"

Harry turned to him. "Just because my mate is blond, that does not mean that I am into all blonds. Though he is quite attractive," he added with a sly grin.

Harry stifled a laugh when Draco elbowed him in the side. The four of them turned their attention back to Professor Garrick as he began to introduce the lesson.

Harry quickly discovered that he really didn't enjoy sitting on the sidelines while everyone else got to have all the fun, especially when he felt full of nervous energy which demanded to be expelled. He desperately wanted answers and it didn't look as though he was going to get any until the end of the day.

He and Draco retreated to the outskirts of the group while the class took turns standing alone in the centre of the circle. The professor then proceeded to fire some weak hexes at each of them in turn, pushing them to employ the new techniques they'd studied last week, and gradually increasing the speed and ferocity of the spells as the students grew more adept.

Professor Garrick wanted each and every student to be able to deflect hexes as though it were second nature; to not even think about it before their wand was up and deflecting in the wide arc movement from their Defense texts. It was very different to a shielding spell; it was a spell to counteract another spell. The goal was to send it ricocheting back towards the attacker.

Harry was itching to join in, his wand hand felt empty and useless as he watched the action unfold in frustration.

He didn't think it looked that difficult; surely he and Draco would be able to pick it up and give it a go, at least a couple of times…
"Steady Potter," Draco murmured out the side of his mouth. "We can practice with the professor later if you're that desperate to have hexes thrown at you."

Harry smiled dolefully at his perceptive mate. "I just think it would be a good idea to learn this one, especially with my attackers still out there somewhere."

At Harry's words, a slight furrow appeared between Draco's pale brows.

"Hey." Harry turned to him fully and reached up with one hand to smooth away his worried expression. "Stop it; we're on our guard now so no more surprise assaults, right?"

Grey eyes flicked to meet his but Draco's anxiousness was still evident. "I just wish I knew what these new developments were that Michael mentioned."

Harry sighed and turned back to absently watch as Neville deflected a bright blue spell back at Professor Garrick, who had a shield spell up and at the ready. "If it was something really serious, he wouldn't have let me come outside for class today though, right?"

"His idea of what is safe enough for you, and what mine is, are quite different, I assure you," Draco replied coolly.

Harry glanced at him. "Merlin, you're hot when you're in protective Alpha mode," he said with a straight face.

Draco kept his grey eyes on the professor, but his lips twitched minutely as he replied, "I happen to know you truly do find that arousing Potter… and when we get back to our room I'll show you just how Alpha I can be when I have you on your hands and knees with my cock up your arse."

Harry's mouth went dry and his trousers suddenly felt a little too tight. That's what he got for provoking his mate.

He tried to adjust himself without anyone noticing.

"Fuck you," Harry muttered when Draco caught the movement and smirked.

It was decided that Professor Garrick would Apparate ahead of Harry and Draco to the Manor, in order to avoid raising suspicion if any students or teachers were to spot them together. It also allowed the professor time to inspect the Apparation Point for any threats prior to Harry's arrival. The Apparation Point was just outside the Manor gates, and the only unprotected section of their journey, so they didn't want to take any chances.

They all arrived without incident and made their way through the front gates of Malfoy Manor. The wards felt thick and heavy in the air as Harry walked up the long drive towards the Malfoy family home, and he vaguely wondered if Draco's parents had recently stepped up their security to compensate for these 'new developments.'

As they walked, Harry had the strangest feeling that Draco resented the professor's presence. He wondered if Draco saw it as an affront to his ability to protect his own mate. Draco was acting unusually cool and short with Professor Garrick, hardly even speaking to him and leaving Harry to
answer all of the man's seemingly friendly enquiries.

He didn't think Draco would ever admit to feeling inadequate in any way though, so Harry held tight to his hand, determined to show Draco that he made Harry feel safe and that he wasn't in any way deficient as an Alpha - no matter how irrational his mate's insecurities seemed from the outside.

"So Harry, it must have been a bit of a shock for you to learn of Draco's heritage," Professor Garrick said conversationally.

"Yeah it was," he admitted, glancing at Draco with a gentle smile, causing stony grey eyes to soften just a little. "A good surprise though."

"Oh?"

"Well yeah, I mean, who doesn't want an Alpha who has an even stronger side to him if called upon? I think it's amazing. I'm a bit jealous to be honest," he admitted, staring at the ground. "It'd be nice to not be human for a while. To just run around and… and pounce on things."

Draco coughed, trying and failing to hide a smile in the thick collar of his cloak.

The professor chuckled in amusement and Harry flushed, feeling suddenly embarrassed for voicing such juvenile thoughts. He quickly changed the subject. "So… you're a Nundu too then?"

"Yes," he admitted freely. "My wife, Anna, is not, and we have three daughters."

"Is your wife still in Germany?"

"No, we have a little flat in Hogsmeade. She looks after the girls while I'm teaching. I'm able to come home every night and put my girls to bed; makes a lovely change to the long distance position I had prior to this one."

Harry smiled and felt a little tug at his heart at the mention of the man's children and the thought of Professor Garrick's domestic nights at home with his wife and daughters. Harry found the longer he was with Draco, the stronger that urge to give his mate children became. He couldn't wait to create a little family of their own.

The three of them walked up the wide snow-covered steps towards the imposing front doors of the Manor.

"Do you have an Animagus form Harry?" the professor suddenly asked.

"Erm, no, I don't."

Professor Garrick smiled warmly, showing even white teeth in the light of the waning sun. "You may wish to explore that aspect of your magic in order to perhaps join Draco while he is in his Nundu form. My wife uses her Animagus form quite often whilst I'm in my true Nundu form; it's actually a lot of fun, as well as creating a closer bond between the two of us. Just a thought."

Harry was immediately intrigued. "What animal is your wife?"

"Anna is a Golden Eagle. I have heard that you are able to cast a Patronus," the professor continued, blond head cocked to one side thoughtfully. "If you are able to master the Animagus transformation, then it will most likely match your Patronus form."

"It's a stag," Harry replied absently, already lost in thoughts of running around with Draco in his cat
Draco wrapped his hand around the door handle and arched a brow at his mate. "I might accidentally eat you Potter."

Harry narrowed his eyes at Draco as his mate opened the door and walked inside, not entirely sure Draco was joking.

Professor Garrick laughed as he followed his two students into the grand entrance foyer.

They were immediately greeted by Mr. and Mrs. Malfoy.

"Michael, how lovely to see you again," Narcissa greeted with a gentle smile, clasping his hand between hers and giving it a light squeeze. "How is dear Anna? And your beautiful girls?"

Professor Garrick answered her polite queries as they all retired to the front parlour together. The fire was crackling in the large hearth, warming the room, and there were some drinks set out on the low marble table situated between the deep green sofa and the two high-backed armchairs.

Harry and Draco settled on the two-seater while Lucius and Narcissa sat in the stiff armchairs opposite them. Professor Garrick pulled up another smaller chair to the end of the table next to Narcissa in order to continue their conversation.

"How are you Mr. Potter?"

Harry turned in surprise at Lucius' quietly uttered question. "Erm, I… I'm all right," he replied with a shrug. "I'd like to know what's going on though," he added honestly. "We're both in the dark about what these new developments related to my safety are."

Lucius nodded. "We are here tonight to discuss precisely that. No one wished to keep you 'in the dark' as you put it, but it is never safe to discuss Clan issues via post or the Floo network," he explained as Narcissa and Professor Garrick concluded their pleasantries and listened in.

"I understand," Harry replied, in complete agreement on that point. "I am a little anxious to find out exactly what's going on though."

Draco laid a comforting hand on his thigh and addressed his father. "Have you discovered the location of the two men?" he asked outright. "Are they nearby?"

Lucius sighed and sat back in his chair. "Not a location, no, but we have heard from another Clan that they have two missing brothers who possibly match your description."

"Missing?" Harry repeated with a frown, glancing at Professor Garrick.

The man nodded, looking sombre. "Yes, the brothers are from our one and only Clan in Norway. They fit your description apart from hair colour, which of course can be masked or modified easily enough." Professor Garrick clasped his hands in his lap, his gaze flicking between Harry and Draco. "The Clan in Norway is known for being a little more… intense, than the majority of Clans worldwide."

"Meaning?" Harry asked, still frowning. He was clearly the only one in the room who wasn't familiar with the Norwegian Nundu Clan.

"They have a very controlling and dictatorial approach to how they live and how they govern their Clan," Lucius interjected in a disapproving tone.
Harry would have scoffed at that statement coming from Lucius Malfoy if not for gravity of the situation.

"They won't approve a proposed mateship within their Clan unless they are full-blooded Nundu," Professor Garrick continued without missing a beat, "and they feel that other Clans should also employ this method in order to keep the secret. It's not that they have anything against non-Nundu, per se, it's just that they believe telling people outside of the Clan is a dangerous, and inevitably unnecessary, risk to take, and that it will one day expose us."

"But I'm not the only non-Nundu within a Clan," Harry protested, nerves quickly blossoming into anger. "Why single me out?"

"Because you're the only famous one," Draco answered for the Professor, tone flat and resigned. "They clearly fear you'll be the cause of our discovery, so-"

"So they wanted to eliminate me from the equation," Harry finished for him acrimoniously.

Professor Garrick nodded. "One of the brothers recently had his first child and I think that was the impetus for the decision to take out Harry; he's not quite in his right mind - not that I'm defending his actions - but it would be why the attack was so sudden and extreme. The other brother has children as well."

Draco dropped his face into one hand and rubbed his temple, eyes closed, looking overwrought. Harry was swamped with guilt but he quickly pushed it aside in order to tend to his mate first. He gently pulled Draco's hand away from his face and placed his mate's arm over his shoulders instead. He leaned against him, resting his head on Draco's shoulder. Harry could tangibly feel his Alpha's fear and distress and had no words to comfort him; Harry's touch and presence would have to suffice for now.

"So they're willing to possibly be caught and imprisoned, just to ensure that I'm silenced forever?" Harry asked in disbelief, turning his attention back to the professor.

He nodded. "Yes, they will go to any length to ensure the survival of our kind."

Harry sighed and eyed the steaming cup of what looked like spiced apple cider in front of him on the table, wondering if there was anything stronger he could have instead.

Draco lifted his chin and seemed to get a hold of himself. "So, no location is known at this time? Just that the two men are most likely Nundu and intent on killing my mate, no matter what the cost."

Harry winced, stomach clenching; he was more concerned for his mate than himself at this point though. "Do you think they'll try again?" he asked, looking between the three adults in the room.

Lucius shared a look with Professor Garrick before replying. "Yes, they will most likely keep trying until they are successful. The fact that no one has heard from them since just before it happened is a good indication that they have not given up. They are unfortunately from a very tenacious Clan, who have a Board which is most likely standing behind their abhorrent actions."

"If their entire Clan condones my murder, then how did you find out?" Harry asked.

Professor Garrick shook his head. "Not the entire Clan, just the Board and elders of the group. Not everyone agrees with their rigid and old-fashioned ideals. We were notified by a young Norwegian Clan member who I believe is friends with one of the brother's children - and a fan of yours Harry. They alerted us at great risk to their own safety, I cannot imagine the Clan would look kindly upon
such a traitorous act if they were to find out."

Harry picked up his cider and took a sip as a distraction from the guilt that continued to pile upon him. He was always putting people in danger, even people he didn't know. He didn't want people risking their lives for him, and he'd thought that once the war was over, that constant feeling of guilt would finally be assuaged.

The hot fragrant liquid slid down his throat and soothed his frazzled nerves a little. In fact, he wondered if there was a dash of Calming Draught in it.

"And what is *our* Clan doing about it?" Draco asked, expression uncompromising, as though issuing a threat.

"The Board is in agreement that we need to thwart their mission as quickly as possible, and are prepared to throw all of our resources behind it."

Harry looked at Lucius in surprise; he couldn't believe the Board was in agreement about helping him. He already knew there were members of their Board who didn't like him and didn't approve of his presence in the Clan.

"The few Aurors we have stationed across Europe are taking a leave of absence in order to find and capture these vile men," Narcissa interjected, sounding as though a great deal of anger was simmering just beneath her outwardly placid surface. "Once they have been found, they will be brought to justice. Swiftly."

Harry swallowed hard, remembering what Nundu justice entailed. He really didn't know what to think of that, especially considering that it would involve the violent participation of his own mate.

Draco turned to his mother, a hard gleam in his eyes. "So we take precautions and remain on our guard until we hear anything further?"

"Yes," Narcissa replied with a nod. "And keep an eye on your mate at all times."

"Of course," Draco replied sharply, and Harry could still feel the tension stringing his mate's body tight next to him.

"I'll accompany the boys back to Hogwarts before I return home," Professor Garrick promised as he took a sip from his own warm cup of cider.

Draco stiffened next to Harry and he knew they couldn't return to school like this, Draco needed to let off some steam or else risk arising suspicion - especially if Ron or Hermione were to see them.

"Er, Professor?" Harry spoke up, setting his cup down and rising. "Do you mind if we stay here a bit longer before returning to Hogwarts?"

"Not at all," he replied with a smile.

"Come on." Harry turned to his confused Alpha and tugged him to his feet. "We're going outside."

"Outside?" Draco repeated with an arched brow, but followed Harry out of the room nevertheless. "You do realise they're going to think we're out here having sex?" he said as they strode across the entrance foyer.

Harry grinned. "Let them," he replied simply.
Draco's expression softened a little at his mate's playful tone, and Harry inwardly cheered that his plan was already helping ease Draco's stress.

"We're safe within the grounds, right?" Harry checked as he pushed through the doors and out into the cold air. He smiled at Draco's nod of affirmation and continued to pull him along, down the stairs and across the crunchy snow. "All right," he said, stopping and turning to his mate. "I really liked the Professor's suggestion of using an Animagus form, but as I haven't had any training yet, I'll just have to be human for tonight."

"So… you want me to change then?" Draco asked, puzzled.

"Yup."

"And what are you going to do?"

Harry smiled and shrugged, unbothered. "Watch?"

"Hmm… I see." Draco's answering smirk was extraordinarily devious and Harry narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

Before Harry could say a word though, Draco stepped away and in a flash of light and swirl of wind, had transformed into his Nundu form.

Harry gazed at the huge cat before him. He really was stunning; so majestic and sleek and dark, with piercing grey eyes. He walked forward and sunk his hands deep into the soft fur at the base of Draco's neck, meeting his Alpha's gaze with an affectionate smile.

Draco lowered his large head and gently butted his forehead into Harry's shoulder, that deep familiar purr beginning to rumble from within.

Harry stroked Draco's head and leaned into his sturdy chest, his body sinking into the thick coat. Draco dropped his head and nuzzled into Harry's neck, causing Harry to chuckle before pressing his face into that soft fur and hanging on.

Merlin, he loved every facet of this man.

Harry opened his eyes as Draco stepped back and then lowered his front to the ground, rump in the air and long tail swiping from side to side. It almost looked as though his mate was about to playfully pounce on him - then Harry suddenly understood.

He grinned and walked up to Draco's side, excitement fluttering in his stomach, while his mate looked on.

Harry chewed his lip, hoping he wasn't too heavy, and then carefully lifted one leg up and over his mate's back. He grasped handfuls of fur in both hands and then hauled himself up so that he was sitting astride the wide back.

Harry inhaled in surprise as Draco straightened and he suddenly found himself high in the air, precariously balanced just behind the large cat's shoulders, nothing to hang on to but tufts of fur, his legs clamped around Draco's sides as best he could.

Draco turned to look over his shoulder and Harry couldn't help but laugh at the smirking cat.

*How does a cat smirk?* Harry mused, but didn't get the chance to say it aloud before Draco was abruptly taking off.
"Whoa!" Harry exclaimed in surprise. He quickly regained his balance by leaning low over Draco's neck and gripping the thick fur tightly with his fists, as though they were the reins of a horse.

Draco didn't hold back; his easy lope quickly gave way to a fast-paced sprint, strong muscles bunching and stretching beneath Harry with the elongated stride.

Harry grinned as the wind whipped over him, stinging his cheeks. Draco bounded across the snowy grounds, moving them to the rear of the manor, breath huffing out in white clouds while his massive paws pounded the earth in a heavy rhythmic thump, sinking right through the snow and hitting the frozen ground beneath.

Harry laughed with exhilaration as Draco dropped his head and charged towards a low-lying hedge in the distance, the top of which was dusted with snow. Harry tightened his fists and his inner thighs as Draco adjusted his stride, preparing to leap.

They soared through the air and cleared the little hedge with room to spare, the powdery snow whooshing out behind them in a white sparkly trail as they flew over top.

Draco landed with a thud and kept going without losing even a fraction of his momentum.

Harry buried his chin in the soft fur, keeping his eyes peering out between Draco's dark ears to see where they were going.

Draco pounded up the path between the hedges, which gradually began to increase in height the further into the garden they progressed.

Draco rounded a corner into what appeared to be a central courtyard in the middle of the elaborate gardens. He immediately began to slacken his pace until he was moving at an easy walk, breath still coming out in rapid pants, ribs expanding and contracting between Harry's legs, as he recovered his breath from the mad gallop.

Harry sat up, finding the slower gait a lot harder to balance with, as Draco's shoulder blades pushed up prominently with each step and awkwardly tipped Harry from side to side.

Harry lay forward on his stomach and wrapped his arms around Draco's broad neck, effectively hugging him to help keep him stable. He smiled and simply enjoyed the soft prowling stride of his mate as he carried him to the glass gazebo located in the centre of a massive circle of rose bushes. The roses weren't in bloom but the gardens were still beautiful. They had a wintery appeal to them that Harry had always rather enjoyed as it reminded him of the upcoming holidays. It was nearly November and Christmas wouldn't be far off now.

Draco nudged open the narrow glass doors with his broad forehead and walked inside the gazebo.

Harry looked around with interest as he was enveloped in sudden heat. "Is there a constant warming charm on your gazebo?" he asked incredulously. Draco's pricked ears swivelled back to listen to him. "That's pretty fucking pretentious Master Malfoy."

Draco huffed and then abruptly reared up so that Harry slipped backwards off of his back.

Harry was caught by surprise but managed to land on his feet, only stumbling a little.

Draco turned his head to look back at him over his shoulder, and again Harry was struck by the very clear smirk on the feline face. He also looked rather smug.

Harry rolled his eyes but couldn't help smiling fondly as he leisurely strolled around Draco, taking
the opportunity to really look at his mate in his Nundu form. Residing at Hogwarts meant that it wasn't often he had the opportunity to see it.

Harry laughed at the clear bemusement in Draco's grey eyes. "I'm just checking to see what separates you from another Nundu - so I don't accidentally ride the wrong one," he added teasingly.

Draco let loose a low warning growl and Harry grinned.

Harry continued moving around his mate, looking him over but not finding anything that stood out. Draco shifted restlessly under his gaze.

Harry crossed his arms over his chest with a frown, frustrated. He really wanted to be able to tell which Nundu was his mate from a distance.

Draco suddenly lay down and turned over onto his back.

"Er… you want me to scratch your belly?" Harry asked him, equal parts perturbed and amused.

Then he noticed it; a very thin white zig-zagging line which ran back and forth across Draco's stomach and ribs, right up to the base of his neck.

Harry slowly crouched down and reached out to touch the white fur. It almost looked like the remnants of a scar amongst the dark grey and black of his coat.

Harry's eyes suddenly widened as comprehension dawned; this was Draco's Sectumsempra scar - from Harry's own hand. It wasn't noticeable in Draco's human form though, Harry was sure of that, he'd purposefully looked for it the first time he'd ever seen Draco bare-chested.

Harry looked up with wide, horrified eyes. "Is… is that from me?" he asked, appalled.

Draco moved his front leg under Harry's gaze and on the underside was more white fur.

"The Dark Mark…" Harry murmured in understanding. "But all the Marks disappeared when Voldemort died, and these scars don't show when you're in human form. I don't understand…"

In a flash, Draco had transformed back into his human form and sat up, his body covered by clothing once more. "Any damage done by magic to a Nundu - regardless of what form they're in at the time - will forever mark their body," he explained. "We are very sensitive to magic. And don't you dare go blaming yourself for that scar Potter."

Harry scoffed. "But it is my fault," he replied instantly. "My moment of complete idiocy has scarred you for life."

Draco shook his head. "Please let's not go over how you almost killed me, because some of my more foolish decisions could've resulted in your death as well. We both have regrets Potter but at least we lived to tell the tale." He reached out and cupped Harry's cool cheek in his hand before leaning in and pressing a soft kiss to the corner of his mouth. "I love you, and you're going to be the father of my children, I believe that more than makes up for you nearly murdering me."

Harry smiled faintly as he wrapped one hand around Draco's wrist; he still felt guilty for acting so rashly. Normally his impulsive, unthinking actions only had consequences for himself and not for others.

"Harry," Draco said sternly. "I know you have a guilt complex the size of Russia but you have to be sensible about this. Think about it this way," he tried when Harry didn't say anything. "You are the
only male Omega that we know of in existence right now, and you chose me -out of every male Alpha in the world. You've given me a life I never thought I'd have; which still seems so completely surreal to me that at times I nearly resort to pinching myself."

Harry was astounded by Draco's frankness; he hardly ever spoke of his feelings in an open and sentimental way like that.

"Not that I'm grovelling at your feet Potter," he was quick to add. "I am quite the catch as well."

Harry laughed and tackled his mate to the ground. "And so modest too," he said, leaning over Draco with a grin. He pressed a chaste kiss to his smirking lips before crossing his arms over Draco's chest and dropping his chin down to rest on top. He gazed back at his mate as Draco began to absently card one hand through Harry's windblown hair. "Are you jealous of Professor Garrick?" Harry finally asked, lips pressed into the woolly fabric of his jumper. He knew jealousy wasn't the problem but he thought it might elicit a truthful response.

Draco snorted and moved his hand out of Harry's hair to flick him on the nose.

"Ow!"

"Don't be daft Potter," he replied glibly.

"Why do you dislike him then?" Harry challenged, rubbing his nose.

Draco sighed and stared up at the glass ceiling above them. "I don't dislike him, I just…"

"Don't think he's necessary?"

Draco frowned. "I think the more people looking out for you the better, but I don't want him becoming… possessive of you."

Harry blinked. "Possessive? He wouldn't become possessive of me - he's straight."

Draco rolled his eyes before giving Harry a look of derision. "You are so naïve Potter. Just because he has a wife and children, does not make him straight. He's Nundu, it's in his blood to procreate, remember?" Draco's gaze slipped away to stare broodingly at the ceiling.

Harry sat up, straddling Draco's hips, and stared down at him reproachfully. "And just because he may turn into an interested Alpha because he's helping to protect me, that still won't change my mind about how many mates I want. I do have a little choice in the matter, you know. So no more talk of adding mates - because it's just not going to happen. I'm afraid you're stuck with only me for company for the rest of your life Malfoy."

Draco sat up, arms sliding around Harry's waist to hold him steady. "That sentiment would have given my fourteen year old self nightmares Potter."

Harry smiled; Draco's tone may have been indifferent but the relief was clear in his eyes. It looked as though Harry would have to keep reminding Draco that he only wanted one mate until it eventually sunk into that thick Alpha head of his.

"If you're so concerned about my flightiness then perhaps you should marry me?" Harry countered mischievously.

Draco snorted and pushed him off of his lap before standing and extending a hand down. "Don't be a tosser."
Harry laughed as Draco helped him to his feet. Well now he knew where Draco stood on the whole marriage thing.

"Do you mind if we just walk back?" Harry asked as they headed for the glass doors, the windows of which were now opaque with steam.

"Not fond of my mad dash through the snow?" Draco asked as they walked out into the cold evening and began to make their way through the rows of rosebushes.

Harry smiled, looking at the ground. "No, that was fun, rather like riding Buckbeak."

He laughed when Draco visibly shuddered.

"I'm just not in a hurry to return to Hogwarts."

"Oh?"

Harry sighed, his warm breath coming out in a white cloud to hang in the icy air. "I almost feel like the safest place for me to be is right here." He glanced up, gaze resting on the massive Manor, lights flickering warmly in the windows as the sun slowly set. "I don't even know what I want to do now that I'm not focused on becoming an Auror. I don't know what classes I need high marks in - or if I even need to finish school…" He trailed off and kicked at some of the loose gravel mixed in with the snow. "My concentration this year has just been utter crap with everything that's been going on, so I probably won't pass half my classes anyway."

Draco slanted a glance at him as they exited the gardens and walked across the snow-covered grounds. "More so than previous years?" he asked with a raised brow.

Harry smiled reluctantly; his mate had a point. "I suppose not. At least I don't have Voldemort inside my head this year." He shrugged and faced front again. "I dunno, I'm just really tired, and staying here with you and your parents just seems so… easy. I… I'm just tired, I guess."

Draco pulled Harry in against his side in silent support.

Harry shook himself; he was supposed to be comforting Draco and easing his stress, not adding to it with his own trivial woes. "I have a question for you," he said abruptly, veering off-topic.

"Mmm?"

"When you're in your Nundu form - do you still find me attractive?"

Draco let out a bark of laughter that was most unlike him, before settling his expression into his usual smirk, eyes glittering with mirth.

"Well?" Harry pushed, grinning.

"I would have to say… I don't really think about that particular aspect when I'm in that form. All that's running through my mind when I look at you is mine, mine, mine, and that I must protect you at all costs because danger could be lurking around every corner."

Harry chuckled and shook his head. "So you're you, but not quite in the same frame of mind as when you're human?"

Draco nodded. "Yes, not quite as rational I suppose." He glanced over. "Do you find me attractive in my Nundu form?"
Harry grinned at the ground. "I think you're bloody gorgeous in your Nundu form - but do I want to shag your brains out when I look at you as a cat? No, I would have to say not."

Draco chuckled.

"I would like to practice transforming into an Animagus form," Harry mentioned casually. "Like Professor Garrick suggested. It may also be a clever way to avoid being recognised by my attackers. You wouldn't really eat me though, would you?" he added as an after-thought.

Draco laughed as they both approached the front of the Manor. "No matter what shape you're in Harry, you're still my mate. Even if your Animagus form is a mouse."

Harry grinned. "Wouldn't that be ironic? Cat and mouse."

"Very fitting for the two of us," Draco replied deprecatingly.

The front doors opened and Harry spotted Draco's parents, along with Professor Garrick, standing and conversing quietly in the open doorway next to two male house-elves who each held a door open.

Draco gently pulled back on Harry's arm, delaying him a moment. "It... it means a lot to me to hear you say that you feel safe here, with my parents and I." He swallowed, gaze skittering from Harry's face, to his parents, to the ground and then back to Harry's face again, cheeks flushing lightly.

Harry smiled warmly at his mate, heart swelling as he realised not only was Draco right; Harry did feel safe with the Malfoy's, he also found that he was coming to rather enjoy their company.

"It's true," he replied sincerely. "I know they care about me now, even if it's just out of love for you, but I... I actually feel like I'm part of a family. For the first time in my entire life," he added, realising – somewhat incredulously – that it was the truth. The Weasley's had always been warm and welcoming to him, but he'd never actually felt like he was a part of the close-knit Weasley unit, more like a temporary foster brother.

Draco held his gaze as he squeezed his arm once before letting go. "Shall we?"

Harry took a deep breath and slipped his hand into his Alpha's. He looked up at Lucius and Narcissa, who were now watching them, and Professor Garrick who had a genial smile on his face as he waited for his pupils.

"Yeah, I'm ready."
Chapter 19

Harry stood with hands on hips, surveying himself in the full-length mirror, teeth sinking into his bottom lip as he frowned uncertainly. He wasn't the biggest fan of Hallowe'en, not only because it was the anniversary of the murder of his parents, but also because he didn't really enjoy dressing in costume. He was never confident in his costume choice and this year wasn't any different.

He was tempted to just forget it and go as himself, but unfortunately for someone like him, that would look as though he had the most inflated of egos. Draco would never let him live it down.

Harry stared at the gold wings bobbing about behind him and the gold sparkles in his black hair and couldn't help but think that he looked really...

Gay.

At the time, dressing as a Snitch sounded like a good idea; simple, with the only elaborate part being the golden wings. When all was said and done though, he just looked like a shimmery gold fairy.

Harry sighed and pushed his glasses farther up on his nose as he continued to frown at his reflection. Maybe he should just start again, throw a white sheet over himself and go as a Muggle ghost.

The door to the loo opened and his mate finally emerged after nearly an hour of mysterious costume preparation.

Harry was instantly distracted from his costume troubles when he spotted Draco and, unable to help himself, started to laugh.

Draco smirked loftily as he strut across their room under Harry's amused gaze; faux black tail hanging lifelessly behind him.

"You can't go as a Nundu," Harry managed between peals of laughter.

"I am not a Nundu Potter, I am a simple black cat," was Draco's sniffy response.

This caused Harry to laugh even more, and Draco's haughty expression finally broke as he smiled at his entertained mate.

Harry walked over, gaze running up and down Draco's body, taking in the whole costume. He was dressed in a simple black t-shirt and had placed a fuzzy pair of black cat ears on his head, which were attached to a fuzzy black Alice band, and the piece de resistance was the rather naff black elastic belt around his waist with the black tail hanging off the back. Oddly, it looked as though his mate had acquired his entire costume from a Muggle pound shop. Everything except for the...

"Are those leather?" Harry exclaimed, eyes widening as he reached out to finger the smooth material of Draco's black trousers.

Draco frowned down at them. "I believe they are some sort of pretend leather. I borrowed them from Blaise."

"They're… uh, nice," Harry said, swallowing, and wondering if Blaise would be willing to part with them. He tore his gaze away from the fitted trousers and reached up to flick the little silver tag attached to his mate's green collar, grinning. "Where are your whiskers?"
Draco snorted. "I draw the line at make-up." He paused and then seemed to take in his mate's sparkly attire for the first time. "As for you…"

Harry groaned and turned away. "Don't say it."

Draco smirked. "What?"

"The horrible comment on the tip of your tongue Malfoy."

"Which one?"

Harry rolled his eyes and then promptly grimaced as he caught sight of his reflection again. "All of them."

Draco smiled and slid his arms around Harry's waist, resting his chin on Harry's shoulder as he surveyed his mate's reflection in the mirror. "I'm rather partial to the comment about you looking like a raging homosexual though."

Harry half-laughed, half-groaned, as he hung his head dejectedly. "That's it, I'm changing."

"No time," Draco rejected immediately as he turned Harry around and took ahold of his hand. "We're already running late for the Feast."

Harry reluctantly allowed himself to be tugged along to the door after his mate. "Only because you took forever getting ready - doing Merlin knows what in there. All you had to do was put on ears and a belt."

"And this," Draco reminded, indicating the collar.

Harry leaned in and read the inscription on the silver tag: 'If found, return to HP.'

Harry laughed and shook his head as he followed Draco out into the corridor, eventually joining the throng of students still streaming towards the Great Hall. Happily, it seemed that everyone else was running late too, and Harry wouldn't be quite so conspicuous in his costume when he entered the Hall amongst the hordes of other brightly dressed students.

Harry waved at Ron and Hermione over with the Gryffindors before he and Draco took their seats at the Slytherin table. They always had breakfast with Gryffindor and dinner at the Slytherin table with Draco's housemates; it was the only fair way to share their time between the two houses.

Harry was greatly regretting that decision now as he approached a table full of Slytherins who were all openly smirking at his costume.

"What a lovely costume Potter," Pansy was the first to simper as Harry sat down across from her.

Harry realised with horror that Pansy was dressed as a lavender-coloured fairy - complete with sparkly lavender wings which closely resembled his own golden pair.

"Yes very fetching," Blaise commented in a choked voice.

"Yes all right," Harry snapped in exasperation. "I know I look ridiculous. Go on then, get it out of your system."

"Bearing in mind that raging homosexual has already been used," Draco interjected obligingly as he reached for a buttered roll.
There was a smattering of snickers around the table and Harry dropped his forehead onto the table with a groan.

"Oi! You're getting glitter all over the food Potter," Gregory Goyle complained beside him, swiftly moving his plate away from Harry's head.

Thankfully, the Headmistress stood then and made the usual Hallowe'en Feast opening speech; thanking the professors who had helped decorate the large Hall, telling everyone to enjoy themselves, and asking them all to *please* be responsible.

McGonagall was well aware that the eighth years were planning a late night trip to the Hog's Head for further revelries once the Feast was over, so Harry suspected those remarks were directed towards them.

He and Draco had declined to join their classmates in Hogsmeade though, due to the fact that it would be all too easy to target Harry out in public like that on such a busy night. A crowded pub would be an ideal location for the men to snatch Harry unnoticed or slip something into his drink. It simply wasn't worth the risk.

Harry was disappointed because it was his last Hallowe'en at Hogwarts, and he might've pushed the issue if not for his vow to avoid heaping unnecessary stress onto his Alpha.

Once McGonagall was finished speaking, they all tucked into their food, and Harry silently hoped the Slytherins had been diverted from openly criticising his appearance.

"How about Poofter Pixie?" Pansy suggested thoughtfully, twirling her spoon as she smirked at Harry.

Draco snorted while everyone else laughed heartily. Harry sighed and prayed for the floor to swallow him up as he tried his best to ignore them and eat his meal.

Draco leaned in and kissed the side of his neck. "Just ignore them Potter, I think you look adorable," he murmured.

"That's not really what I was going for," Harry muttered, but flashed him a quick smile to let his mate know that he wasn't really bothered by the good-natured ribbing.

Harry found that he'd actually started to enjoy the sharp snarky banter at the Slytherin table. There was something rather refreshing about it. As much as he dearly loved his own house, he did find them somewhat too polite at times. He supposed the Sorting Hat had it right when it said Harry could go either way. He definitely felt on the fence between the two houses; not completely Slytherin, but not wholly Gryffindor at times either.

"What are you supposed to be Zabini?" Draco asked, attempting to take some of the heat off of his mate.

Blaise shot Draco a withering look. "Isn't it obvious?"

Harry squinted at the Slytherin, also trying to work out his costume without success. The Alpha wasn't wearing his school uniform but he wasn't wearing anything resembling a costume either. He was dressed in nice black trousers and a grey button-up shirt underneath a deep purple waistcoat.

"I'm the Minister for Magic."

Harry paused in his chewing. "Which one?" he finally asked.
"I am the future Minister for Magic."

Goyle goggled at him. "How do you know who the future Minister for Magic is?"

Pansy rolled her eyes and swiped a lock of purple hair out of her eyes. "He means himself you knobhead."

"Is that really what you want to do?" Harry asked, wondering if he was the only one at the table who wasn't aware of the Slytherin's impressive aspirations.

"I enjoy politics, and that is, after all, the definitive position for a politician, is it not?" Blaise replied as he poured himself a goblet of pumpkin juice.

"I suppose," Harry said slowly, wrinkling his nose in distaste. He loathed politics.

"Good luck convincing people to vote in a Slytherin," Pansy put in cynically.

"My rise to power will take many years Pans, people won't remember such trivial things such as house affiliations by then," Blaise retorted, unbothered.

"I'd vote for you," Goyle put in around a mouthful of chicken leg.

"Thanks Greg."

"I wouldn't," Pansy interjected with a saccharine smile.

Blaise rolled his eyes while Goyle asked her why not.

"Because," she said haughtily, "it's time we had a female Minister. Not me, obviously," she added, before anyone could make a snide remark, "I wouldn't be a politician if you paid me; too much arse-kissing for my taste. Someone sensible and intelligent, not like you hormonal Alphas."

"Hermione would be a brilliant Minister," Harry put in casually before biting into his pumpkin pastie.

Pansy arched a dark brow at him, speculative gaze sliding over his shoulder to the Gryffindor table for a moment. "I would prefer someone a little less like an uptight virgin, but she's a better choice than Blaise," she allowed.

Harry grinned as Blaise spluttered with indignation.

"What happened to house pride and unity?" he demanded.

Pansy rolled her eyes as she lifted her goblet, which looked suspiciously as though it was filled with champagne. "That went the way of the Dark Lord, dear," she drawled.

The others snickered and Harry continued to eat the delicious meal with a grin on his face, nearly able to completely forget that he was currently dressed as a sparkly gold fairy.

Once Harry had eaten all that he possibly could, including second helpings of pudding, he and Draco said their goodbyes to the Slytherins then wandered over to say goodnight to Ron and Hermione.

"One word about my costume and I will hex you," Harry warned Ron before he could open his mouth.

Ron looked as though he was swallowing a laugh before he quickly shook his head, all innocence.
"At least Harry actually **wore** a costume Weasley," Draco commented.

"This *is* my costume," Ron replied with a lopsided grin before glancing down at his West Ham Football Club t-shirt and jeans. "I'm a Muggle. I even have one of their communication devices."

Harry laughed as Ron pulled a mobile phone out of his pocket and waved it about; plainly without a clue of how it actually worked.

"Nicked it from my dad," Ron explained before Harry could ask. "Had it in the shed out back hanging on a piece of string from the ceiling."

"Good to see the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Department is well in hand," Draco commented wryly.

"Are you an astronaut?" Harry asked Hermione while Ron flipped two fingers at his mate. She was wearing a white and silver jumpsuit and was carrying a rounded glass-fronted helmet under one arm.

"I'm Helen Sharman," she replied proudly, as though that explained everything. She sighed at Harry's blank look. "She's the first Briton in space and the first female to visit the Mir space station."

"Why Muggles feel the need to explore the vast nothingness of space is beyond me," Draco commented with a shudder.

"Yeah, they haven't even realised that magic exists yet. How are they supposed to discover life on other planets when they don't even know what's happening on this one?" Ron said with a grin.

Harry laughed, having to agree with his housemate on that one, while Hermione looked vaguely insulted.

"Seriously though, Harry, what **are** you supposed to be?" Ron asked.

"I'm a Snitch," Harry clarified, exasperated, and studiously avoided Draco's amused gaze.

"I really think you ought to reconsider Harry," Luna spoke up as she joined them, sliding a warm cloak on over her unicorn costume. "You make a very handsome fairy."

Draco and Ron both snorted with laughter.

"I wish you were coming tonight," Hermione said to Harry, ignoring them.

"So do I," Harry replied unhappily.

"I think you're doing the right thing though," she added in a quiet undertone. "It would be too easy to lose you tonight, even with Draco there."

Harry sighed and ran a hand through his hair, absently scowling at the glitter that covered his palm afterwards. "Yeah, I know. Hopefully by Christmas I can join you again."

Hermione nodded and reached out to pat his arm before picking her cloak up off the bench. Ron meanwhile completed his authentic ensemble with a blue Muggle raincoat.

Harry gasped and his heart stuttered in his chest when two very strong arms suddenly grabbed him from behind and yanked him back to be trapped against a tall someone who was definitely not his mate.

"Gotchya!"
Before Harry could even comprehend what was going on, Draco had whipped out his wand in record time and, with a furious growl, fired off a hex. The purple bolt of light flew over Harry's head and struck its target square in the face.

The arms wrapped vice-like around Harry's chest instantly slackened and before he could turn around to see who his assailant was and what had happened to him, Draco had reached out and snatched Harry back to shield him with his own body, wand still pointed at the fallen wizard.

"Stop Draco! Stop!" Hermione called out frantically.

Harry turned his face away from being suffocated in Draco's chest and looked over his shoulder, feeling disoriented, his heart still racing.

Anthony Goldstein was lying on the ground in a rumpled heap of pale blue and black robes.

The teachers were beginning to converge on them, and every student in the Hall had stopped to watch the scene unfold.

"He's not trying to hurt Harry," Hermione continued, gently now, still addressing Draco, "Anthony's dressed as a Quidditch player. I think he was just trying to be funny - by grabbing Harry because he's a Snitch?"

Harry swallowed and realised she was right. Anthony was dressed as a player from the Appleby Arrows.

Harry turned back around to face Draco and frowned sympathetically at the burning rage in his Alpha's eyes, his darkened gaze still locked on Anthony and chest heaving as he kept his wand pointed at the fallen Ravenclaw.

"Hey," Harry said quietly, placing a hand on either side of Draco's face and attempting to direct his mate's gaze back to him. "Draco, it was just a joke, I'm fine. Look at me."

Draco seemed to shudder in his grasp and then his grey eyes slowly refocussed on Harry's face.

"What is the meaning of this Mr. Malfoy?" McGonagall was demanding as she swept up the long aisle towards the group.

"That's it," Harry said, cajoling, keeping his focus on Draco and nothing else. "See? I'm all right."

"It was just a misunderstanding Professor," Hermione said, stepping forward while Harry worked on calming his mate down.

Harry tuned them out as he watched Draco's dilated pupils shrink back down to normal and his breathing began to even out.

Draco finally, reluctantly, lowered his wand arm, his left arm loosening its hold on Harry a little. He breathed out shakily and began to blink at an ordinary rate once more.

Harry smiled in relief, the expression clearly easing his mate's concerns too as Draco instantly buried his face in Harry's neck, inhaling his scent and pressing warm lips to the Claiming Mark; the action comforting the both of them after the brief moment of all-out panic.

"Foolish boy should've known better than to attack Potter like that," McGonagall was saying to Hermione disapprovingly as some of the other teachers tended to the fallen boy, "even if it was in jest."
Anthony was finally coming round again, a slight moan escaping his lips as he sat up with Hagrid's assistance.

"Perhaps you two should make yourselves scarce before Mr. Goldstein recovers his faculties."

Harry glanced up to see Professor Garrick next to them.

"Mr. Goldstein seems a nice chap but I'd hate to see him go up against Mr. Malfoy should he be displeased upon finding out what happened," he added.

"Yeah, I think you're right," Harry replied with a nod. "Is it all right if we go back to our room now Professor?" he asked the frowning headmistress.

"Yes, good idea Potter," she replied, waving a dismissive hand at them. "I'll ensure Mr. Goldstein has recovered enough for further celebrating in Hogsmeade tonight. I'm sure by morning he'll have forgotten all about this little incident."

Harry nodded gratefully and turned to his friends. "See you later," he said with a despondent smile.

"Bye Harry."

"See you Harry."

Draco finally decided to put his wand away, one hand still clutching onto Harry as he did so.

"I'll walk with you," Professor Garrick offered, falling into step beside them as they walked away from the crowd of costumed students.

Draco quickly pulled Harry to the other side of him, placing himself in the middle next to the professor. Harry complied without a word; his Alpha's system was probably still thrumming with protective testosterone after witnessing Anthony's stunt and he wasn't about to make it worse by objecting to the dominant behaviour.

"Are you all right Draco?" Professor Garrick enquired quietly as they left the Hall.

Draco swallowed, his jaw working, as he composed himself. "Yes, I'm fine," he replied tightly.

"Harry?"

"Yeah." Harry quickly nodded.

"I saw the whole thing," Professor Garrick said with a frown of concern. "It looked like he latched onto you rather aggressively."

Draco inhaled sharply through his nose.

"No, it's fine. He... he didn't do any damage," Harry was quick to assure, even though he thought there may be some bruising come morning. "Erm, professor? There was something I wanted to talk to you about," he added. He wanted to change the subject for Draco's sake, but he also wanted to speak to the professor about something that'd been on his mind since their last conversation.

"Yes?"

"I know you're not the Transfiguration teacher, but I was hoping for a little guidance with my... my Animagus training."
Professor Garrick's face broke into a smile. "I would be happy to help you Harry. I need to prepare a few things, with your involvement, and should be able to start in about a month."

Harry smiled, looking forward to it already. "I know the perfect place to practice too," he said keenly.

Draco glanced at him and a little more tension seemed to ebb away at Harry's pleased expression. His gaze ran over his mate's body, confirming that he was, in fact, all right, before he allowed a tiny smirk to pull at his lips.

"I think your lovely fairy wings are ruined Potter."

Harry twisted round to look over his shoulder and saw that his shimmery gold wings were indeed crushed beyond repair after Anthony's attack cuddle.

He mock glared at his mate but was happy to see that Draco was feeling a little more like himself.

"Good," Harry said emphatically. "This costume is officially retired."

....

Harry grinned as the fluffy little Caipora nuzzled into his hand, searching for more figs.

"I'm going to ask Hagrid if I can take him home," Ron said, also smiling, as he placed a piece of banana in front of the Caipora's nose and it immediately grasped onto it with its tiny clawed feet.

"Not before I do," Harry replied, chuckling when the little creature gobbled down the banana as though it was the last piece of fruit on earth.

Hagrid was attempting to educate the eighth years about the Caipora's place of origin in the Amazon and about their history, but the students were too distracted by the creature's delightful charm and adorable appearance to absorb much of it. Harry and Ron included.

Harry handed the creature over to Ron as he continued to feed him the rest of the bruised banana. Apparently the more bruised and mushy it was, the better, as far as the Caipora was concerned.

"So I start my Animagus training the first Sunday in December," Harry mentioned quietly. The paired students were scattered around the large paddock and no one was close enough to overhear their whispered conversation. Plus they were all too engrossed with their own Caipora. "Is Hermione still on about me registering?" he asked.

Care of Magical Creatures was the only time Harry had alone with Ron, now that he lived with Draco, and he wanted to make sure that they made time to talk about all the big things going on in their lives - without the interference of their respective partners. He didn't want to lose the closeness he had with his friends like some people did when they became wrapped up in their love lives.

Ron tickled the Caipora under the chin as it mashed the banana pieces into its small mouth and happily chewed. "I don't think she understands quite why you want to transform. I get it," he added assuredly. "Wanting a bit of freedom where those tossers can't recognise you; makes complete sense to me mate. It's kinda like what Sirius went through. Your dad and his mates all had an Animagus form," he finished with a shrug, as though it was obvious that Harry would also want to follow in
their footsteps.

Harry leaned forward onto his knees as he nodded, eyes on the little animal cupped in Ron's hands. "I just don't want to make a big deal out of it - and I don't want the Ministry to say no, either."

"Yeah, and the less people that know, the better, right?" Ron said. "Those blokes could work in the Ministry for all you know."

Harry reached down into the bucket at his feet and selected another squashed banana for the Caipora. "So how are you and Hermione going?" he asked, chuckling when the fruit was snatched from his fingers with a squeak of delight.

"Yeah good," Ron replied ardently. "She's uh… really surprising sometimes."

Harry grimaced. "Is that a sex thing? Because I really don't want to know, she's like a sister to me."

"Hey, if I have to put up with the thought of you and Malfoy shagging, then you can suck it up when I talk about snogging my girlfriend," Ron shot back with a grin.

Harry laughed. "Yeah all right; tell me all the horrible details."

"Mate, her breasts are so -"

Harry scooped up a handful of snow and threw it at him as Ron laughed while simultaneously trying to shield his little furry friend.

They both continued to laugh and the Caipora paused in its chewing to blink up at them in confusion.

"I just meant," Ron eventually said, picking up the thread of their conversation once more, "that she's not as rigid as you might expect. It's our last year at Hogwarts and she's actually ignored her revision timetable a few times to spend time with me."

Harry grinned at his friend. "So what you're saying is that you'll be the cause of her not achieving perfect O's on her NEWTS."

Ron snorted. "Yeah, that'd be a brilliant start to our life together."

Harry smiled and reached out to stroke the fuzzy coffee-coloured head of the Caipora as it sniffed Ron's hand for more treats. "Are you going to marry her, do you think?"

Ron glanced up and his freckled cheeks flushed pink but his eyes sparkled. "Yeah."

Harry plucked the last fig out of their supply box and passed it over.

"What about you?"

Harry glanced up as he wiped his sticky hands on his trousers. "Marry Draco Malfoy?" he asked with a smirk.

Ron made a face. "Merlin, that's a fucked up sentence - but yeah, that," he said.

Harry snorted and rested his elbows on his thighs as he leaned forward and watched their furry friend inhale the last of the food. "No, I don't think so. I don't think Draco's into the whole marriage thing."

Ron frowned. "I'm sure he would do it if you wanted to."
Harry sighed. "I dunno, I'm not that fussed either way."

Ron eyed him. "I don't think there's much he wouldn't do for you, Harry, if you did want it. But," he added, brightening, "if I don't have to sit next to Lucius Malfoy while you make declarations of love to his son, I'm all right with that too."

Harry laughed and would have thrown more snow if he wasn't so worried about traumatising the Caipora.

The two finished feeding him and, at the end of class, reluctantly handed him back over to Hagrid, who placed him into a wooden crate with the others. The little furballs immediately began to squeak and squawk to each other; as though comparing notes on the adventure they'd just had and the snacks they'd just inhaled.

Harry waved goodbye to Hagrid as he and Ron collected their bags and began to walk back towards the school. It was late November and Hagrid had been busy shovelling paths through the thick layer of snow that veiled the extensive grounds of Hogwarts, making travelling between his classes and the castle a lot easier.

Nothing had come of the search for the two Nundu brothers yet and Harry was beginning to wonder if perhaps the two brothers had simply disappeared, planning to remain in hiding until the attack had been forgotten. Maybe they had decided that it was too risky to attempt it for a second time.

At least, Harry hoped so. Not that he or Draco were about to become complacent when it came to Harry's safety, especially not Draco, who was just as overzealous now as he was a month ago. For instance, Harry had to remain with Ron after Care of Magical Creatures until Draco was able to meet them so that Harry was never on his own between classes.

Harry looked up from watching his feet in the snow and blinked when his head spun with the movement. When his head didn't quit spinning, he stumbled to a stop and closed his eyes, swallowing against the sudden onset of nausea in his stomach.

"Harry?"

He opened his eyes and looked at Ron, the other students continuing on past them towards the school. "Uh… I don't feel very good… Like I'm going to be sick."

"You didn't eat any of that Caipora fruit, did you?"

"No I didn't eat the fruit," Harry replied with a roll of his eyes that sent his head spinning once more. Harry swallowed and began to feel as though he'd ingested something spicy; his stomach began to burn from the inside and sweat broke out on his forehead.

"Oh fuck…" he breathed, suddenly realising what was going on. "What's the date today?"

"Does that matter right this second?"

"Because I think-" Harry bit off as his knees trembled and threatened to give out on him.

Ron dropped his bag to the ground and quickly reached out to support his friend. His brown eyes widened in alarm as he caught a whiff of Harry's scent.

"Shit, Harry, are you…?"
Harry moaned and nodded miserably as another wave of heat washed over him, causing him to slump in Ron's arms.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck…" Ron swore, panicking. "All right, I'll… I'll get you to Madam Pomfrey, mate. Don't worry."

Harry barely comprehended what Ron was saying as he swayed on the spot, closing his eyes as his heat came on like a freight train.

Ron half-carried, half-dragged, Harry towards the castle, cursing under his breath the entire way.

"I thought you were supposed to have all these bloody signs before you went into heat," he accused, as though this was all Harry's fault.

Harry just groaned and tried to move his feet forwards to aid his friend. He really didn't want any of the students to know what was going on, especially any interested Alphas, who might get out of control and become too much for either Ron or himself to deal with before they made it to the hospital wing.

The thought of going through what had happened between him and Professor Fischer again was terrifying.

Ron hauled him up the front entrance steps as quickly as he could and strode forward into the castle. They'd been let off of class a little early so thankfully not many students were in the corridors yet.

Harry tried to control his breathing as the familiar ache and the burning and the overwhelming need increased in pitch to a level of torment that he'd forgotten about - until now.

He kept his eyes closed and hoped he was doing a good job of preventing himself from moaning out loud, but he wasn't positive; everything began to feel a little like he was hallucinating. His body was taking over his rational thought, his pants quickly growing damp as his body pumped out its natural lubricant in preparation for his mate.

Harry bit off a moan at the thought of his mate, the sudden desire for his Alpha pushing everything else into the background.

"What has happened Mr. Weasley?"

Harry groaned under his breath as Ron stopped suddenly and began to speak with someone who his muddled brain couldn't quite identify in his current state.

"Erm, Harry's in heat," Ron answered in a whisper.

The reply was swift and efficient. "Take him to his room, he has a chamber in there set up for his heats and will be safe."

Harry blearily placed the voice as Madam Pomfrey's, the conversation washing over him but not quite sinking in; just insignificant words floating around his head.

Harry frowned as Ron began to drag him forward again, Madam Pomfrey on his other side, assisting. Something she'd said was bothering him - but he couldn't figure out why.

"Should I tell Malfoy?" Ron asked as they slowly climbed staircase after staircase to the third floor.

Harry, unable to help himself, moaned at just the sound of his mate's name.
Madam Pomfrey was puffing with exertion as she replied. "He will probably scent his mate's heat before you are able to reach him, but just in case, try to locate Mr. Malfoy and let him know where Harry is. We will need to lock Harry in from the outside this time, as he is not in his right mind to do it himself. How on earth did his heat surprise him again?" she asked in exasperation as they entered the third floor corridor. "The female Omegas in this school seem to be able to keep track of their cycles just fine."

"I dunno, I think he was waiting to be tired again and it didn't happen."

Harry bit his lip as they stopped outside the door to his room, wanting nothing more than to tear his clothes off and submerge himself in a cold pool of water.

Madam Pomfrey raised Harry's hand and touched it on the door and it immediately swung open. They took him through into the main room and across the flagstones towards the side door that led to the antechamber.

Harry frowned and felt as though he was about to lose consciousness. He opened his eyes and his vision grew black around the edges, tiny pin-pricks of light dancing before his eyes.

He closed them again and seemed to lose track of time and of what was happening to him, as the next time he opened his eyes again, he was alone, laid out on a bed without his glasses.

Harry moaned and reached down to palm his throbbing erection through his trousers. He was still wearing his uniform, as well as his winter cloak, and he was sweltering.

Harry pushed himself into a sitting position and clumsily reached for the clasp on his cloak - and froze.

His mind suddenly seemed to catch up with his surroundings and his stomach clenched in a way that was unrelated to his heat. They'd put him in the tiny room attached to his bedroom, the room he swore he would never stay in because it was so utterly small and dark and panic inducing…

Harry's throat instantly tightened and his eyes widened in alarm.

He blindly stumbled to his feet and staggered to the door. He latched both hands around the handle and pulled, needing out of there as quickly as possible, damn the consequences of trying to get to the hospital wing in his current condition.

The door wouldn't budge.

Harry choked and continued to wrench at the solid door before his arms finally gave out and he lurched backwards, falling to the floor.

They'd fucking locked him in! He was trapped.

Harry tried to fight the haze of panic that filled him, but his claustrophobia was not mixing well with his heat-addled brain, and he could feel himself becoming slightly unhinged.

Harry crawled forward and banged on the door with both fists. Maybe they'd only just left him; maybe they were still close by.

He wanted to scream and yell, but he was having trouble breathing.

Harry felt the hot prick of tears as his banging seemed to go unheeded. He stopped and pressed his sweaty forehead against the door and squeezed his eyes shut, one tear slipping out and trailing down...
his heated cheek as he whimpered. His cock was still insistentely hard between his legs even as his heart raced with uncontrollable fear.

It was too much; it was all too much…

"Harry?"

Harry's head came up with a gasp as he heard his mate's voice call out from the other side of the door.

He let out a sob of desperate relief as he knelt up and placed both palms against the door. "Draco!" he called out frantically, hoping Draco could hear him even though his shout came out thin and dry. "In here! Let me out, let me out, let me out…"

He couldn't seem to stop saying it over and over; stuck in a panicked loop.

Harry heard an uttered incantation and then the door unbolted with a 'clunk.'

The door swung outwards and Harry fairly threw himself into his Alpha's arms as soon as he saw him. He didn't care how pathetic he came off; he needed out of that room, and every cell and instinct in his body told him that he desperately needed his mate.

"Harry…” Draco exclaimed in response, voice sharp with surprise and concern. He pulled Harry in close and stroked his sweat-dampened hair as he dropped his nose to scent at his mate's neck, confirming for himself that Harry was alive and unharmed.

Harry tilted his head away and to the side, exposing his Claiming Mark to his Alpha, and Draco's lips immediately descended onto the scarred skin; alternately licking and kissing the Mark as he calmed his mate.

Harry's trembling soon turned into shivers at the touch, and eventually all of his prior fear and anxiety over being trapped in the room, vanished, and he was once again achingly aware of other needs now making themselves known.

Harry's breathing sped up and his heart-rate increased as the Omega in him realised that his mate was right there; available to help him through the burning ache of his heat.

Harry released a hushed moan and pushed his hips forward into Draco's, hands tightening on Draco's back, pulling him in as close as possible.

Draco's breath audibly caught as he paused in his ministrations, he didn't pull away but he didn't respond in kind either.

Harry continued to roll his hips into his mate as he rotated his head around to search out Draco's mouth, needing to taste him as well as try to arouse him into some sort of action. Harry felt feverish with the need for friction and touch and now, his pants soaked through with fluid and his cock positively throbbing.

Draco kissed him chastely, once, twice, and then pulled away, searching out Harry's gaze. "Harry…” he said, his tone was hesitant and admonishing, but his grey eyes were burning with something completely contrary.

"Please," Harry whispered, kissing the corner of Draco's mouth and then flicking his tongue out to lick along his bottom lip. "Please… touch me. I need you…”
A dark corner of his mind knew he was goading his mate into something he shouldn't be, but it was too late; he felt like an out of control drug addict suddenly faced with the very object of his desire and losing all willpower to say no. Fuck the consequences.

"Harry…" Draco moaned lowly, eyes falling closed against a tide of instinct and emotion, clearly wanting to give in but valiantly battling against it.

Harry didn't still his hips, pushing the long hard line of his erection against Draco, who was unmistakably aroused now as well. He kissed Draco, hard, insistently, tongue pushing through stiff lips to sweep into his mate's mouth, trying to coax his tongue to stroke him in return.

Harry made a sound of disgruntled frustration when his mate didn't kiss him back.

Whatever subconscious noise Harry had made seemed to suddenly spur his Alpha into action, as, with a low growl, the Slytherin suddenly began to kiss him back, taking control of the kiss and deepening it.

Harry's knees nearly buckled in relief and Draco quickly moved his hands to Harry's arse and lifted him up so that Harry's legs were firmly wrapped around his hips. Draco carried him over to the bed and threw him down into the centre before climbing on top of him and resuming the heated kiss.

"Yes," Harry breathed as the full weight of his Alpha pressed onto him in all the right places. He writhed and arched and gasped as the touch of his Alpha seemed to cool the intense burning that was roiling through his feverish body.

Draco moved his lips down Harry's neck to the Claim Mark and lightly scraped his teeth over it, causing Harry's hips to nearly come right off the bed at the sensation. Draco hummed in satisfaction, the sound vibrating against Harry's skin gratifyingly.

Harry felt frustration wash over again, needing things to move along much faster than this. He didn't want foreplay - he wanted to be taken. Now.

The heat licked at his body again, escalating as he became frustrated and desperate.

Harry threw his head back on the pillow, hands clawing at the bedclothes on either side of him. "Fuck me," he ground out, arching his neck, face a twisted grimace of urgent need. "Please Draco… please… I need you…"

He looked up at his Alpha, sweat stinging his eyes, and bit his lip hard. Draco's expression was just like it had been on the night he'd claimed Harry; feral and possessive - and fuck if it didn't ramp Harry's arousal up another unbearable notch.

Draco threw an arm out towards the door to their room and Harry heard it lock before becoming muffled by an efficient silencing charm.

Draco sat up and began to rip Harry's clothing off of him in a frenzy, first his cloak and then his shirt - popping buttons in his haste - and then flinging his belt open and wrenching his trousers down and off, Harry assisting as best he could, levering his weight off of the bed, eyes locked on his Alpha, transfixed.

Draco's nostrils flared as he removed Harry's wet pants, the scent of his mate's arousal hitting him like a bludger to the head.

Harry swallowed, breath coming shallow and fast, as he watched with rapt attention as Draco tore his own clothes off in a rush, throwing them to the floor as though he was infuriated with their very
existence.

Harry sighed as his mate lay back on top of him, skin to skin, and oh, the relief that washed over his body and into his feverish mind. It was so wonderful; such a sense of rightness and perfection.

Draco snarled as he began to grind down into Harry's flushed prick, the fluid from Harry's arse slicking the way to enable the smooth slide of cock against cock, and Harry thought he just might explode as his legs came up of their own accord to grip on either side of Draco's thrusting hips. Sparks ignited in his groin over and over again at the repeated action.

Draco suddenly shifted so that his stiff cock dropped back and began to drag over the crease of Harry's lubricated arse and bollocks.

Harry whimpered as his arsehole twitched, demanding to be filled and not just subjected to this torturously too-gentle surface glide.

"More," Harry gasped, demanding, ordering his Alpha to comply. Surely he would die if Draco didn't fuck him soon.

Draco knelt up and had shoved Harry's knees into his chest before he even knew what was happening, all the air in his lungs forced out in a sudden 'whoosh.'

Draco dropped one hand to his erection and lined himself up before brutally shoving himself inside of his mate.

Harry cried out in blissful, ecstasy-induced pleasure. His Alpha had a sizeable cock and it usually took Harry some time to adjust to the substantial intrusion, but in his current state, it slid right in with barely any burn.

This was not like their usual love-making at all, even the times they had had to hurry for lack of time, or because they had been gripped by sudden desire. This was rough and feral and much more animalistic.

Draco dragged Harry's legs up over his shoulders and began to pound into him with abandon.

"Y-y-essss…." Harry stuttered, dragging the syllables out like Parseltongue as he closed his eyes and gave himself over to his Alpha; to the ruthless thrusting that brought him quickly to the edge but not quite tipping him over into the blinding orgasm he knew was just there.

Draco held tight to Harry's sweat-slippery thighs as he continued to hammer into him with the staccato sound of skin slapping on skin, filling the room and echoing in Harry's ears like a drum beat.

Harry opened his eyes as an inexplicable frustration slowly stirred his temper again; his body was screaming 'more, more, more' and he didn't know what it wanted or how to alleviate it.

The appalling heat crept back in and caused him to moan miserably.

Draco opened his eyes, his gaze tracking over Harry's expression, searching for something, even as he continued to thrust into him with a grunt on almost every inward push, his platinum hair now gold with sweat and sticking to his temples.

Harry stared back at him imploringly. "More," was the only thing he could articulate, the only thing he knew undeniably. "Draco…" he keened desperately, hoping his Alpha would understand and would know what to do, how to take care of him.
Draco's grey eyes flashed, his pupils blown wide, staring as his Omega desperately demanded more.

Harry gasped as Draco abruptly pulled out and flipped him over onto his stomach, his flushed and neglected cock pressed into the mattress for a brief moment before Draco grabbed his hips and pulled him up onto his hands and knees.

Draco parted his arse and slammed back inside of him, not even pausing before relentlessly pounding into his slick hole again. Harry dropped his forehead to the bed with a bitten off moan, bracing himself on his arms, as he waited expectantly for his Alpha to make everything better; to fix the burning ache that threatened to consume him.

Harry's eyes flew open as something changed, something significant was happening. Draco faltered and then began to slow his pace, changing to long, slow, deep thrusts; in and out, in and out…

But instead of frustrating Harry, it was easing that desperate ache like nothing else had thus far. Suddenly each thrust felt more fulfilling, dragging out immense and unexplainable satisfaction. He could feel a stretch that hadn't been there before, as though his mate hadn't been fully hard when they'd started and now he was becoming more and more engorged.

Harry let loose a long, low moan as Draco's swollen cock dragged over his prostate, catching on his rim, feeling huge and just fucking brilliant.

"Uhhh Harry..." Draco groaned out in a mix of reverence and gratification, as though he couldn't quite believe the pleasure he was experiencing.

Harry wished he could see his mate as he pushed back against him in counterbalance, feeling amazingly full.

Draco pushed in deep twice more and then couldn't pull out again; now firmly knotted inside of Harry.

As soon as this happened, Draco's breath caught in his throat and he froze for a moment, before pressing his hips forward once more, hard, and stilling.

Harry nearly sobbed at the feeling of Draco's cock pulsing deep within him as his Alpha came, groaning above him in the throes of orgasm. Harry quickly reached underneath himself and tugged on his leaking prick. He gasped as he rapidly and efficiently fistied himself, feeling as though he was going to pass out it felt so good.

Draco leaned forward over Harry's sweaty back, bracketing him with his body, and lowered his mouth to firmly bite the silvery Claim Mark.

Harry jolted with a gasp and Draco remained buried deep inside of him as Harry finally, finally, came with a shout; spurting rope after rope of come all over the bedclothes and his working hand.

It was the most explosive and overwhelming orgasm of his young life, and he again wondered if he was going to pass out from the overpowering experience. He was drowning in it.

He continued to milk his prick until his orgasm had completely receded, leaving him utterly spent and trembling.

"I've got you," Draco murmured into his ear as he curled one arm around Harry's waist and lowered them both to lie side by side on the bed, his knot keeping them bound together.

Harry settled back against his Alpha with a weary sigh of contentment, pressing his arse back against
Draco’s pelvis and tucking neatly into his arms. His heat had now settled into a barely there warmth. As soon as Draco had come inside of him, he’d felt a wonderful cooling sensation wipe over him like a cool cloth on fevered skin.

Harry’s eyes fell shut almost instantly, his body demanding sleep before it threw him back into the frenzy of his heat again. He felt sated and protected in his mate’s arms, and was absolutely not thinking about the consequences of their actions. He was just too bloody exhausted to give a fuck.

He smiled softly as Draco kissed the top of his head and murmured something that sounded like ‘I love you.’

Harry drifted off before he could gather the energy to respond.
Harry woke to an intense throbbing in his head. He hadn't even opened his eyes before he was acutely aware that his entire body was hurting; what felt like every single muscle was tender and aching. He was also intensely thirsty.

He slowly forced his eyes open and blinked as the world came into blurry focus.

He was lying on the floor - on the throw rug next to the bed to be exact - and he was completely starkers. Even his glasses were missing. Harry grit his teeth and gradually pushed himself up into a half-sitting, half slouched-over position, and hesitantly looked around.

The room was in complete disarray; chairs overturned, everything that had been on the desk was now scattered all over the floor, there was a squashed pillow next to Harry on the rug, a heap of blankets near the door on the other side of the room - even the pictures on the walls were at odd angles.

Harry probed his temple with gentle fingers, the throbbing in his head making him feel ill. He couldn't really remember last night - had he been drinking?

Harry heard a rustle from above him on the bed and turned, wincing, to glance over. Draco was sitting up with his back against the headboard, also sans clothing, pale eyes wide and staring.

Harry swallowed, trying to work some saliva into his dry mouth in order to ask his mate what was wrong. It was then he noticed the open door to his left, the one that led into his 'heat room' - and then everything came slamming back into his shattered brain, causing his breath to catch in his throat, nearly choking him.

Oh fuck.

Oh fucking fuck.

He'd spent his heat with Draco.

Harry turned away from his comatose Alpha to glance out the window, the shock of his discovery quelling the pounding in his head for the moment, and saw that it looked like late afternoon. He could feel that he was well and truly finished with his heat, and he suspected that they had been locked in there for quite some time; more than twenty-four hours at any rate.

Harry dropped his head into his hands.

What had they done? He could be bloody pregnant!

After a few moments of internalised all-out panic, he forced himself to his feet and stumbled over to the bed. "Draco?" he said, trying - and failing - to keep the frantic edge out of his voice.

Draco turned to stare at him with something akin to numb disbelief. His mouth opened but no sound came out.

Just on this side of hysterical, Harry felt the irrational urge to laugh, but quickly quashed it, and, with a deep breath, climbed onto the bed to sit cross-legged in front of his mate, clasping his hands together in his lap to keep them from shaking.
"Perhaps… perhaps I'm not pregnant," Harry said weakly. It was the only thing he could think of to say to his Alpha that might wipe the look of utter devastation off his pale, pinched face.

Draco swallowed, a muscle in his cheek jumping, and slowly nodded, as though talking himself down. "Yes… right…"

Harry dragged one of the rumpled blankets from the bed around his waist, suddenly feeling inappropriately naked.

"I'm sorry Harry."

Harry looked up sharply. "What for?" he asked, feeling a hot spike of irritation. He was exhausted, hungry, thirsty, sore, and his skin was covered in dried sweat and all manner of other fluids, and he was in no mood for his mate blaming himself for the situation they now found themselves in. He almost preferred the Draco Malfoy who never blamed himself for anything, the Malfoy who would never let the words 'I'm sorry' trip over his tongue.

Draco frowned at Harry's peevish response, the slightly dazed look finally clearing from grey eyes. "For… for a complete lack of restraint," he replied slowly, as though that should be obvious.

Harry glared. "I all but threw myself on your cock Malfoy, I'm amazed by how long you were able to resist. I'd say the blame rests solely on me; if I had just been able to stay in that room then we wouldn't be in this mess."

Draco's perplexed frown turned into a scowl. "If we're blaming anyone here Harry, then we should be blaming your horrid Muggles for causing you to develop issues with small spaces in the first place."

Harry let out a bitter laugh. "I'll be sure to tell them that their blatant mistreatment is the cause for their gay nephew to now be up the duff. They aren't even aware that men are able to become pregnant in our world."

Draco suddenly exhaled hard, his head falling back against the wall with a thud. "My father is going to kill me," he stated numbly.

Harry couldn't help but snort in the face of Draco's dread. Lucius had only recently come to terms with the fact that Harry was his son's mate, this news - if he was in fact pregnant - was going to come as quite the shock.

Harry sighed, his hot temper fading back down to a simmer as he shuffled over to sit next to his mate. He took Draco's cool hand and placed it in his own, resting them both on his blanket-covered thigh.

His initial panic and horror had receded and he felt remarkably composed about it now. He'd always had a knack for adjusting quite quickly to panic-worthy news and was able to just get on with things.

Harry gazed at their joined hands for a moment and then his gaze slid to his stomach; flat and innocuous above the edge of the woollen blanket. His gaze softened as he couldn't help but imagine a Potter-Malfoy baby growing in there.

"Would it really be so terrible?" he said softly, unable to stop the contemplative words as they spilled forth.

Draco turned to him, incredulous. "You can't be serious Potter. We're still in school! You'd barely have finished the year before… before you…" He broke off and shook his head.
"I know the timing isn't the best, but… I dunno." Harry shrugged, not wanting to continue the conversation if Draco was going to be all cross and negative about it. "Forget it."

Draco squeezed his hand, forcing him to look up. "Harry, having a child is a huge responsibility and not to be taken lightly. Plus-"

"I know that, I'm not an idiot," Harry interrupted with a glare, taking his hand back. "I want a family more than anything but I'm not blind to how much work it will be or just how much it will change my life."

"Our lives," Draco corrected, grey eyes staring intently, and then he looked away with a sigh, running a hand through his tousled hair; a habit he'd clearly picked up from his mate. "I suppose we should just go see Pomfrey and find out for sure before we discuss this any further."

Harry swallowed, suddenly hesitant. "You wouldn't want to terminate the pregnancy, would you?"

"Of course not," Draco retorted, glowering.

"Well I don't know," Harry snapped back, temper rising once more. "You don't seem overly enthusiastic."

"Of course not!" Draco exploded, shifting away from Harry and beginning to roughly pull on his discarded trousers from the floor. "This was an accident," he continued hotly, his back to Harry, "and it's too soon. You're not supposed to be pregnant at Hogwarts Harry. You're vulnerable and surrounded by other people here - including other Alphas." He stood and turned to face him, pale fingers trembling as they slid his belt into place around his waist. "Meanwhile there are still two fuckwits out there who want you dead, and who, if they find out you're pregnant, will most likely re-double their efforts at trying to exterminate you - right along with my child."

Harry stared at him, stunned, and slightly ill. "Draco…"

There was still so much Harry didn't know about Alphas, especially Nundu Alphas, and his mate was plainly struggling with more than just the fact that he might be a father in nine months.

Harry shifted to the side of the bed, hanging his legs off the side and raising his hands to grip onto his mate's hips, giving them a little shake to draw Draco's gaze down to him. "I'll leave school and live at the Manor if it gets to be too much for either of us, or… or I'll come with you to all of your classes so that we're never separated… We'll get through this, whatever it takes, all right?"

Draco stared at him a moment before finally exhaling shakily and nodding, staring back into Harry's unobstructed green eyes, seeking solace in his mate's steady gaze as his own eyes lost some of their manic gleam.

Harry nodded with relief as Draco's breathing evened out and became a little less shallow.

"Shall we go see Madam Pomfrey?" Harry asked, smiling gently as he stood and reached out to smooth the little frown lines between Draco's pale brows. "All this worry may be for naught, right?"

Draco took another moment to collect himself and then nodded.

Harry reckoned there was a lot of internal dialogue occurring within his Alpha at that moment.

They quickly set about making themselves presentable in silence, each lost in their own thoughts. Harry waved a quick cleaning charm over the two of them in lieu of an actual shower, as neither of them wanted to put off the inevitable any longer than they had to. Harry eventually found his glasses
(on a bookshelf of all places), and Draco released the locking and silencing charms on the door before they stepped out into an empty corridor.

Tension that Harry hadn't even realised he'd been holding on to, released when Draco slipped a hand into his. A part of him had been unconsciously concerned that this might drive a bit of a wedge between them. He glanced at his mate and gave his hand a gentle squeeze in response, grateful for the silent display of support.

They walked all the way to the hospital wing in silence, passing quite a few students along the way. Harry felt as though the fact that he could be pregnant was written all over his face; that his expression was screaming it out clear as day for anyone to see, and that heading for the infirmary was only confirming their suspicions. The fact that people always stared at him wherever he went did not help diminish his paranoia.

He held tight to Draco's hand and kept walking, trying to fix his expression into one of indifferent nonchalance. His Alpha had that expression mastered.

Harry glanced up at the tall ornate clock outside of the infirmary and saw that the last class of the day was nearly finished. They must have missed two full days of classes then.

"Harry."

Harry broke out of his thoughts as Draco suddenly stopped and turned to him before going through the large double doors.

"If I had the choice, I'd rather you weren't pregnant right now," Draco said quietly, noticeably uncomfortable. "But if you are, rest assured that I will do everything I can to protect you and our child." He paused, gaze dropping away self-consciously. "I just wanted you to know that even though the timing may not be ideal, it won't change how I behave, or how I feel towards you or towards our son or daughter."

Harry swallowed, throat feeling unexpectedly tight. He nodded in response, unable to form the words to say how much he appreciated his mate's assurances.

Draco raised his eyes back up to meet Harry's emotional gaze and flashed him a tight smile before turning and walking through the doors into the infirmary, the sharp sting of antiseptic hitting their nostrils and making their eyes burn for a moment as they entered the sterile environment.

Madam Pomfrey turned from where she was attending to a student in the nearest bed. Her gaze tracked over the pair of them and then she pursed her lips when she saw that they showed no outward sign of injury or distress. She silently indicated that they should head into the office to their right to wait for her.

They both took a seat in the two wooden chairs opposite her wide, cluttered desk and waited.

The matron appeared after about ten minutes and closed the door. She sat at her desk, absently wiping her hands on a white towel as she eyed the two of them. "What can I help you with today gentlemen?" she asked, then glanced at Harry. "How was your cycle? I stocked the medicine cabinet in your heat room; did you manage to locate the potions?"

"Erm..." Harry glanced at Draco and felt his cheeks flush. He hadn't really thought about how embarrassing this conversation was going to be until that very moment. "No, I didn't."

Madam Pomfrey frowned, pausing in her hand wiping. "Why-"
"Harry has a fear of small spaces," Draco interjected, taking control and directing the conversation where it needed to go as quickly as possible. "He can't use that room."

Madam Pomfrey blinked in surprise and laid the towel down on the desk as she leaned forwards, gaze flicking between the two mates. "Oh? I wasn't aware that you had Claustrophobia Harry. You should have told me, you could've..."

She trailed off and Harry could see in her eyes when the Knut dropped.

"Where did you spend your heat?" she asked with her usual sharp astuteness.

"In our room," Harry unstuck his tongue long enough to reply. "With Draco."

Madam Pomfrey closed her eyes for a moment, inhaling through her nose, and then exhaled bracingly before opening them again.

"So you've come here for a pregnancy test?" she asked.

Harry was surprised by the lack of condemnation and shouting; he guessed her position forced her to be a little more objective, unlike what a professor's reaction would be. He knew Professor McGonagall would not be quite so calm.

"Yes," Draco was replying, somehow managing to sound just as composed as the matron.

She sighed and folded her hands over a stack of papers on her desk. "Well I'm sorry to inform you that you will have to wait two weeks before I can administer the scan. It's too early yet for me to identify either way."

Harry sat there in stunned silence. He was supposed to live in torturous uncertainty for two weeks?!

Draco cleared his throat and shifted in his seat, visibly taken aback as well.

Madam Pomfrey looked as though she wanted to roll her eyes at their surprise, but instead reached into one of her drawers and withdrew a thin white book. She passed it over to Harry, who took it automatically, and saw that it was a book on early pregnancy for Omegas.

"Read this, just in case," she explained, folding her hands on the desk again. "It will give you some advice on your diet and recommended potions. It was written with the female Omega in mind, so you will have to ignore the female-specific aspects. If, in two weeks, you have a positive pregnancy result, then I will order a male prenatal book for you. There is quite a lot to know and to be prepared for Mr. Potter," she added, and Harry finally saw a little of that censure that he'd been expecting.

Harry swallowed and nodded. "Thank you."

"There are things you need to be aware of as well Mr. Malfoy," she continued briskly, turning to the Alpha. "Harry will need a great deal of support and understanding over the next nine months." She paused and eyed them both a moment. "I assume this was not a planned decision?"

"No," Draco answered for them both, raising his chin slightly as he gazed back at her. "I had to get Harry out of that room and I found that I could not control myself."

"He resisted for as long as he could but I literally threw myself at him," Harry was quick to add with a reproachful glare at his mate. "It wasn't his fault. It wasn't anyone's fault really, it was just... an accident."
"I see," she replied, mouth pressed into a thin line. "This is the problem with having eighteen year olds at Hogwarts," she eventually uttered under her breath, as though it was a discussion that she'd had multiple times before the year started, perhaps with school officials. She finally pushed to her feet with a heavy sigh and addressed them both. "I'm afraid there isn't much I can do for you at this stage, you will simply have to wait."

Harry felt oddly dissatisfied as he stood and prepared to leave. Madam Pomfrey fetched him a few potions from the cupboard in her office to help ease the resulting discomfort of his heat, downing them quickly and silently while she watched, and then chasing those up with a tall glass of water. She also forced Draco to drink some water as well, much to his chagrin.

Madam Pomfrey walked them to the door and put her hand on the knob, but didn't open it. She turned to them, eyes narrowing. "And for Merlin's sake, do not tell a soul about the possibility that Harry could be pregnant," she said sternly. "If it turns out that you are not pregnant, then no one need ever know about what happened. If you are, well that will need to remain a secret for as long as possible. I'd hate to think of the media circus that will surround you when that piece of information gets out Mr. Potter, and as loathed as I am to mention it, it may also encourage your attackers to come out of hiding again. Someone who wishes to end the life of Harry Potter would probably love to eliminate his potential offspring as well."

Harry nodded, noticing Draco stiffening beside him. He absently reached out to take his hand.

Madam Pomfrey gave them a sympathetic look, not knowing what else to say. She turned to open the door and swiftly left them in a flurry of skirts, returning to her patient laid out in the hospital bed, withdrawing her wand as she went and approaching with a gentle smile. The first year Hufflepuff with the tear-stained face seemed to relax at her kind demeanour, indicating that he may have done something a bit foolish in Potions class to end up there.

Harry and Draco left the infirmary in a bit of a stupor, unsure of what to do; neither of them having been prepared to play a waiting game for the next fortnight.

"I think it's time for dinner," Harry pointed out numbly as he glanced at the tall ornate clock in the hospital wing corridor.

Draco stopped walking, pulling back on Harry's hand.

Harry turned to him with a frown. "What is it?"

Draco stared at him a moment, brow knit. "Nothing," he finally replied vaguely, giving his head a tiny shake and then starting forward again.

Harry continued to frown at him as they walked; clearly something was agitating his mate and Draco didn't want to talk about it. Harry pressed his lips together and resolved to ask him about it later.

They entered the Great Hall and headed for the half-empty Slytherin table. They were a little early and students were still drifting in and taking their seats at the four long house tables, chatting loudly or getting an early start on assignments.

Harry refused to glance towards the Gryffindor table, because if Ron and Hermione were there, they would be able to read him like a book and would run straight over, demanding to know what was wrong. He had every intention of warning them about the possibility of him being pregnant - just not with half the school listening in.

Only Pansy was seated at the end of the Slytherin table where the eighth years always gathered. She
looked up with a smirk as they settled themselves onto the bench opposite her.

"How are you feeling Potter?" she asked, batting her dark lashes innocently.

"Fuck off," Harry muttered. Pansy knew full well he'd been out of class because he'd been in heat. He couldn't wait until her eighteenth birthday; experiencing a heat cycle for herself may finally shut her up - or she may end up a Beta and be utterly mortified. Either way, Harry could count on the snide comments coming to an end.

"Enough Pansy," Draco said warningly, not appearing in the mood for her teasing either.

Pansy immediately pouted at her housemate. "You're no fun tonight Draco. You should be nice to me; I have front-page-worthy gossip."

Harry noted - with no small amount of dread - the smug sparkle in her eyes, and he immediately clenched his hands in his lap. He really hoped this thrilling gossip didn't concern either himself or Draco; he couldn't take anything else going wrong.

Pansy leaned in and lowered her voice dramatically. "Astoria was taken out of Potions yesterday by McGonagall, and Graham Pritchard overheard the Headmistress in the corridor telling Astoria that her family wanted her at home because her sister's illness had taken a turn for the worse. Today, all of Astoria's things have disappeared from her room and Professor Slughorn announced in the common room that she wasn't expected to return again this year - because Daphne had passed away."

Harry felt all the blood drain from his face.

Pansy smiled proudly; clearly pleased that she could be the bearer of such astonishing news. She leaned on one elbow as she absently twirled her dark ponytail with one finger. "I don't know why she's taking the entire year off though," she continued pensively, and then paused in her hair twirling. "I do hope whatever Daphne had wasn't catching," she added, wrinkling her pug-like nose.

Harry was too busy wondering if Daphne really was gone to be outraged by Pansy's insensitive attitude towards her deceased housemate. Had the Nundu Clan finally reached a decision on what she'd done to Draco and executed her? As much as he loathed Daphne for what she'd done, and, even though Draco could've been the one on the wrong side of the executioner's wand because of it, Harry was still shaken by the news.

It all seemed so surreal that he was a part of this secret world where people - teenage girls - were put to death for their crimes.

But perhaps her death was just a ruse for the family to flee the country; either by order of the Clan or in defiance, in order to save their daughter's life.

Harry turned to look at his Alpha, needing answers to questions he knew he couldn't possibly ask in that moment.

Draco wasn't looking at him though; he was looking at Pansy with a slight frown. "And you're clearly overwrought by the news of her passing," he drawled wryly in observation.

Harry was once again struck by just how proficient Draco was at affecting nonchalance, when inside he must have been reeling just as much as Harry.

"I didn't really know her that well," Pansy sniffed dismissively, glancing up as the rest of their year began to filter in and sit at the table around them.
Draco immediately slid an arm around Harry and pulled him in to his side, then left his arm where it was; one hand firmly wrapped around Harry's right shoulder.

Harry glanced at his mate questioningly but Draco was still frowning at Pansy. Harry wondered fleetingly if Draco's Alpha tendencies were going into overdrive because of the possible pregnancy. Draco didn't appear comfortable with the sudden crowd, although it could just be the topic at hand that was making his mate uneasy.

"Talking about Daphne?" Blaise asked as he took a seat on the bench next to Pansy.

The steaming hot food appeared on the table in front of them then and all conversation ceased while they filled their plates.

Harry had been starving when he'd awoken but now he found that he'd lost his appetite. He took a sip of his pumpkin juice and then began to half-heartedly pile a bit of food onto his plate.

"Yes, just filling these two lovebirds in on why Astoria isn't here," Pansy said to Blaise before delicately biting the tip off of a honey-glazed carrot.

"I wonder what she had?" Theo mused aloud with a frown. "Nobody seems to know, not even Professor Slughorn."

"Does it matter?" Pansy sniped. "She was always a bit of a cow, especially this year."

"Is this really how you treat each other in Slytherin?" Harry loudly interrupted in disbelief. As far as the rest of the house knew, Daphne had died from a disease, not from committing a crime, so they had no possible reason to be so heartless.

"Hey don't lump us all in with Parkinson," Blaise instantly replied with a censorious look at Pansy. "Pansy only disliked her because Daphne was her only competition for Pureblood males. You'll soon learn that Pansy's a bit of an unfeeling tart, Potter."

"Oi!" Pansy threw a carrot at Blaise with indignation.

"It's true darling," Blaise said, picking up the thrown vegetable and popping it into his mouth with a smirk.

Harry turned to his mate as the other two continued to squabble, suddenly noticing that Draco was spooning more food onto Harry's plate. He couldn't help but feel a little tug of affection, pushing aside some of the sick feeling in his stomach.

"What are you doing?" he asked him with quiet amusement.

Draco glanced up and caught the warm look in Harry's eyes. He smiled a little and some of the tension in his expression eased as he continued to add more food to Harry's meagre helping. "Fattening you up Potter, you have to keep up your strength," he murmured into his ear.

Harry smiled as his heart did a little flip at his Alpha's words. Regardless of whether it was a good idea or not, or that it was the worst possible timing in the history of bad timing, Harry couldn't help but feel excited about the possibility that he could be carrying their child at that very moment. He knew it was the Omega in him that was flooding him with the warm and fuzzies over all this, but Draco showing signs of love and support was almost making him teary-eyed with happiness.

Harry gave his head a shake and quickly clamped down on that terribly embarrassing response. He picked up his fork and shot a grateful smile at Draco before starting to eat with a little more
"Ugh! You two make me sick," Pansy proclaimed with a roll of her eyes, having caught the tender exchange of smiles between the two mates. "What happened to you Draco?"

"You're just jealous," Goyle put in around a mouthful of mashed potatoes.

"I know I am," Blaise uttered quietly.

Harry glanced up and then quickly away again at the look in the Slytherin's eyes. Draco's hand on his shoulder tightened in response.

"Jealous of that sickening display?" Pansy continued, waving a hand at them. "I prefer a much more respectable relationship; where my husband keeps his distance and I spend all his money."

"That's real love," Theo interjected sardonically, causing the rest of them to snigger and Pansy to wink at him in response.

Harry took a bite of his roast chicken and hummed in pleasure at the delicious herb flavour; gaining back a little of his appetite as the shock of the news about Daphne began to dissipate. He hadn't eaten at all during his heat cycle, they had barely stopped fucking to sleep and drink during those two and a half days. He would need to remember to fill up on carbohydrates prior to the next heat cycle he planned to actually spend with his mate.

Draco kept his arm around Harry for the entirety of the meal, only releasing him during pudding when a small barn owl flew over and dropped an elegant cream-coloured envelope into Draco's lap.

Harry peered over his mate's shoulder as he opened it and withdrew a thick card in the same cream colour as the envelope, with silvery ornate writing scrawled across it. It looked like a wedding invitation.

"It's an invitation to Sophie McDougall's," Draco informed Harry as he scanned the card. "It's a formal gathering to welcome her new baby."

"Sophie had her baby?" Pansy asked with interest. "I must tell mother. She has the most gorgeous family," she added wistfully. "What did she have?"

"A boy," Draco replied, sliding the card back into the envelope.

Obviously the McDougall's were a Pureblood family whom everyone in Slytherin knew. Harry wondered if it was only Nundu invited to the celebration or if it was open to everyone, and then Harry wondered if he should even be going because his attackers might hear of it and expect to find him there. He hated how complicated everything became due to those two wankers and their irrational vendetta.

"Come on Draco," Goyle said, stuffing one last Abernethy Biscuit into his mouth before standing.

Draco looked up at him with an enquiring arch of his brow.

"Quidditch?" Goyle reminded, deciding to snatch another biscuit from the plate during the delay.

"Oh right," Draco replied, expression clearing.

"The poor Alpha is a bit bewildered after sitting outside Potter's heat room for the past two days," Pansy drawled in amusement. "All those heat pheromones and persistent erections; must have addled
your brain darling."

Draco narrowed his eyes at her as the others laughed.

Harry was just relieved that no one suspected the truth.

"I don't think I can make it…" Draco finally replied slowly, turning back to Goyle.

"It's fine," Harry interjected, turning to Draco. He didn't want his mate to miss out on practice just because he was worried about leaving Harry on his own. "I'll come too and hang out in the stands or something. I'm sure I have loads of assignments to catch up on now."

Draco frowned uncertainly.

"I could sit in the stands with him," Blaise offered. "That way he won't be alone."

Draco looked as though he liked that idea even less, despite being the one to ask Blaise to help keep an eye on Harry for him.

"Actually, maybe Hermione and Ron should come instead," Harry suggested with an apologetic glance at Blaise. "They can catch me up on all the classes I missed. Plus, I've been so preoccupied lately that I don't think I've been a very good friend."

"All right," Draco eventually conceded with a nod. He looked at Blaise and the Slytherin merely shrugged and returned to his meal.

Harry stood and walked over to tell Ron and Hermione the plan. The two eagerly agreed, and Harry went up to his room with Draco to grab his schoolwork while his mate changed into his Quidditch attire.

Harry sat huddled in the stands under one of Hermione's warming charms as the trio watched the Slytherin's practice for a few minutes. Harry's gaze tracked his Alpha as he warmed up with a few laps around the pitch, his platinum blond hair easily discernible against the charcoal grey sky.

Harry fidgeted in his seat, feeling a flare of arousal, and then biting his lip at the tenderness in his arse. The potions had helped with the intense aches and pains from his heat but it left just enough soreness to remind him of what they'd got up to over the past few days. That, combined with staring at his mate in his green and silver Quidditch robes, was making him feel decidedly squirmy.

"Should we start with Care of Magical Creatures?" Ron asked, opening his worn leather school bag and rummaging through it.

"Nevermind that," Hermione dismissed with an impatient wave of her hand, causing Ron to frown at her in confusion. "How was your heat? Ron said Draco completely panicked when he told him what was going on."

"He did?" Harry replied in surprise.

Hermione nodded and then looked to Ron for corroboration.

"Oh, right," Ron agreed belatedly. "Yeah, I caught Malfoy in the corridor and told him that you were in heat, and that Madam Pomfrey and I had put you in the little room attached to your bedroom. He sort of went mental and ran off." Ron paused and wrinkled his nose. "I guess he was desperate to get to you, while you were… in heat," he added with reticence.
Harry flushed, feeling decidedly awkward. "Erm, it wasn't about my heat, it was about the room you put me in. You know, small spaces..." He shrugged and hoped that it was enough to fill them in. They'd spent enough time on the run together that he knew Ron and Hermione suspected he had issues with closed-in spaces, but he'd never acknowledged it out loud.

"Oh shit," Ron exclaimed with wide eyes. "I... I forgot, well, I didn't really... know... Sorry mate."

Harry shook his head. "It's fine," he said truthfully. "Madam Pomfrey didn't know and... and it's fine. Really. Draco knew and he unlocked the door and... well, actually that's kind of what I wanted to talk to you both about."

Hermione immediately gasped and her hands flew up to cover her mouth, eyes large and horrified as she silently shook her head at him; clearly entreating him to deny her suspicions.

Never let it be said that his best friend was slow on the uptake. Harry swallowed and pulled at his hair, unable to meet her gaze. He finally nodded his head in response, staring hard at the floor.

"Oh Harry..." she replied, slowly removing her hands, voice dripping with sympathy and perhaps a hint of pity.

"What?" Ron frowned in confusion, glancing between the two.

Harry clenched his hands on the bench and couldn't bring himself to look at Ron.

"Harry... spent his heat with Draco," Hermione answered for him, quietly.

Harry could feel Ron's shocked gaze burning a hole in the side of his head.

"So... you're pregnant?"

"I don't know yet," Harry replied and then sighed heavily, dragging his gaze back up to his two friends. "Pomfrey will test me in two weeks and then I'll... know for sure."

Ron continued to stare at him. "I... I can't believe it. You can't be pregnant!"

Harry smiled humourlessly. "I might not be."

Ron snorted, some of the colour returning to his face. "With your luck, you will be mate."

Hermione placed a hand on Harry's arm and gently squeezed. "Well, whatever happens Harry, we're here for you. I'm glad you told us, even if it turns out to be a false alarm."

Harry nodded, silently acknowledging her point about not keeping secrets.

"Does anyone else know?" Ron asked, suddenly keeping his voice low as he glanced out at the Slytherin players as they swooped by their section of the stands.

"Just Madam Pomfrey."

"So..." Hermione started, eyes narrowing in thought. "If you're pregnant now, you'll be heavily pregnant at the end of the school year. What if it interferes with your exams? What if you go into labour early and miss exams?"

Harry sighed; he knew Hermione would overwhelm him with a thousand questions that he hadn't thought of or didn't have answers to. "I dunno, we'll cross that bridge when we get to it I guess."
"What does Malfoy think?" Ron quickly asked before Hermione could scold Harry about lacking a solid contingency plan.

Harry smiled a little, tension easing as green eyes sought out his Alpha on the far side of the pitch. "He was stunned, at first, but… he's coming around to the idea, I think."

Hermione smiled at that. "Cover your ears Ron," she abruptly instructed.

"What for?" Ron replied, insulted.

"Because I want to know what it was like," she said, turning to Harry, eyes alight. 

Harry raised his brow. "What… spending my heat with an Alpha was like?"

"Oh Merlin," Ron moaned with a roll of his eyes. "I don't want to know that stuff!"

"That's why I told you to cover your ears," Hermione retorted with a teasing glance at her boyfriend, causing Harry to grin.

"It was bloody amazing," Harry declared before Ron could complain. "I'm a touch sore though today."

"Harry…” Ron groaned, burying his face in his knees as Harry laughed.

Hermione leaned even further forward. "And what was knotting like?" she whispered keenly.

"Hermione!" Ron cried, lifting his head, appalled.

"Purely academic reasons Ron," she responded flippantly without looking at him.

"It was brilliant," Harry said, managing to say it with a straight face. It was the truth, but it was also hilarious to wind Ron up. "Draco is amazing in bed - and on the floor, and the desk, and against the wall…"

Hermione giggled as Ron finally did clap his hands over his ears. She turned away and leaned in towards Harry again, looking curious. "Can I ask you something?" At Harry's nod, she continued. "Don't you ever want to… you know, top?"

Ron tightened his hold on his ears and began to hum in the background.

Harry grinned at him before turning back to Hermione. "You know, I was always interested in a relationship where both partners participated, er, equally, but now… ever since coming into my Omega inheritance, I never have that urge anymore." He shot a glance at Ron before continuing. "I love being under Draco, I mean, there's just something so… perfect about it. I don't even know how to describe it. I suppose it's just part of being an Omega and all of those 'Omega tendencies' the book spoke of."

Hermione nodded with interest.

"Plus he has a huge cock," Harry added with a smirk as Ron hesitantly lifted his hands to see if they had finished.

Ron stood abruptly, nearly falling over in his haste. "If you two can't be… be civilised, then I'm leaving."

Harry and Hermione burst out laughing.
Ron glared down at the pair of them, which only served to make them laugh harder.

Harry suddenly noticed a shimmery quality to the air behind Ron and, without a second thought, instantly withdrew his wand and fired off a *Petrificus Totalus*.

Ron yelped and ducked out of the way even though Harry's aim had been true and the flash of yellow light flew past him and hit its intended target.

There was a loud thud which reverberated through the wooden floorboards at their feet.

Harry jumped up and neatly hopped over the bench.

"Harry, are you sure you should be..." Hermione stood and trailed off as Harry slid his foot forward and nudged his toe against something solid.

Harry knelt down, wand still in hand, and carefully wrapped his hand around the silky material of an Invisibility Cloak. He wrenched back on the soft fabric to reveal Blaise Zabini lying frozen in shock before them.

Harry rolled his eyes and stood up. "Finite Incantatem," he uttered with an absent flick of his wand.

Blaise blinked as his entire body suddenly melted free of the binding spell. He stared up at the three of them as he rubbed the back of his head with one hand.

"What the fuck are you doing Zabini?" Harry asked with a sigh, crossing his arms over his chest. He then just as quickly uncrossed them and raised his wand. His initial reaction was to relax because it was just Blaise Zabini - but then Harry remembered himself, and his hand tightened on his wand; just because it was Zabini it didn't mean he wasn't involved in the threat against him. No matter how far-fetched it might seem.

Blaise sat up, hands up in mock surrender. "Easy Potter, I'm here on Malfoy's orders."

"What?"

"Draco asked me to help keep an eye on you during practice," he explained, sounding genuine. "He asked while you were at the Gryffindor table with Weasley and Granger. He seemed very intense about your security tonight..." He paused and then a tiny smirk stretched his lips. "I guess we all know why now."

"Fuck," Harry swore under his breath, turning away in agitation. "You weren't supposed to find out about that!"

Blaise shrugged, still smirking. The bastard.

Not knowing what else to do, Harry leaned down and grabbed his cloak back, bundling it up under one arm.

"We could Obliviate him," Ron suggested casually.

Blaise actually appeared slightly concerned by Ron's proposal. "Uh, you don't want to do that. I want to help out, and knowing that you're carrying around Malfoy's offspring will ensure that I keep my hands to myself."

"How do you mean?" Harry asked.

Blaise seemed surprised by the question. "Because Alpha's aren't sexually attracted to pregnant
Harry didn't know what to say to that. Did that mean Draco wouldn't want him for the next nine months? That he would find Harry's baby bump a turn-off?

Harry pushed aside the hurt of Blaise’s statement and nodded. "Right, that... that's right," he said, as though he'd been aware of that information all along. "Well, you can't tell anyone," he said, voice growing stronger as he frowned at the Slytherin. "Not Slughorn, not Pansy - not anyone."

Blaise rolled his eyes and got to his feet with a huff. "Well of course not Potter; Malfoy would kill me if I leaked that information."

"Fine." Harry nodded, reassured, and then narrowed his eyes at Blaise. "And don't borrow my things again," he warned, tightening his hold on the Cloak. "No matter what Draco says."

Blaise's lips twitched with amusement but he nodded deferentially.

The four of them sat back down on the bench and watched the rest of the Slytherin practice in silence, each lost in their own thoughts.

Harry chewed on his thumbnail as he absently tried to feel if he was pregnant, whether he felt any different at all. He couldn't feel anything beyond the muted soreness of his heat and his full belly from dinner, other than that, he felt completely normal.

Harry sighed, eyes on his mate as he shouted at some poor third year Chaser.

It was going to be a very long two weeks.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

So sorry for the delay on this chapter, I hate when real life gets in the way, but hopefully the longer length of this chapter makes up for it at least a little :)”

"Now place the tip of your wand over your heart."

Harry nodded and raised his wand to do as Professor Garrick asked, steadfastly ignoring his silently seething Alpha in the corner of the room.

Harry had had to tell his DADA professor about the possibility of him being pregnant in order to find out whether it was still safe to begin his Animagus training, and despite Professor Garrick's assurances that Harry could continue without any harm coming to a potential foetus, Draco was not pleased. They had had quite the row over it, the tension of which was still lingering between the two mates, but Harry was determined to learn how to transform, and he also needed a distraction during this interminable two week wait.

"That's it." Professor Garrick watched closely as Harry complied with his directions. "Now say the incantation."

Harry licked his lips and held his wand in place over his heart. "Amato Animo Animato Animagus," he chanted quietly.

"Good Harry," Professor Garrick said encouragingly, "now drink the potion."

Draco emitted a sound of disapproval as Harry reached out with his free hand to lift the crystal phial from off of the wooden table on his left. Without looking at his mate, Harry quickly downed the blood-red liquid and then swiftly set the phial back down, knowing, from the professor's warning, exactly what was to come.

Harry grimaced and shut his eyes against the rather fiery pain that erupted deep in his chest.

"Tell me when you feel it," the professor called out in the background, tone steady and calm.

Harry took a deep breath and tried to ignore the burning sensation under his skin in order to detect the thud of a secondary heartbeat.

His eyes flew back open as he suddenly felt it. It was definitely there; the distinct thump, thump, thump of a heartbeat in counterpoint to his own.

It was a very odd sensation…

Harry stared straight ahead and held his breath as the next stage began to materialise right before his eyes. Professor Garrick was speaking in the background but he couldn't understand what he was saying, he merely continued to stare straight ahead as a faint silvery light began to glow and rise up out of the dusty floor of the Shrieking Shack, slowly increasing in size.
Harry knew this was his vision of the animal he was to become whenever he transformed. He tried to pick out the antlers of the stag as the ball of light slowly took its intended form.

He frowned as the reforming light began to take on the shape of something that wasn't anything like a stag - or any sort of hooved animal at all.

It wasn't as tall as a stag, and a long tail seemed to be developing and becoming more solid under his baffled gaze. He wanted to look to Professor Garrick for assistance but he knew only he could see his intended animal; this was his vision and his alone.

Harry's eyes widened as the distinct shape of some sort of jungle cat began to take shape. It wasn't as tall as a lion or a tiger, its legs were shorter and stockier, but it had rounded cat ears and a long, oddly thick tail.

As the white fur with the black spots became obvious, Harry suddenly knew what it was. He'd only just seen one of these exact animals at the London Zoo with Ron and Hermione.

The cat swiftly became solid and looked at Harry with a cheeky sparkle in its green eyes. Harry absently admired the beauty of the creature for a minute, noting the black zig-zag on its forehead which perfectly matched the placement of his lightning-bolt scar.

The glowing creature only remained solid for a minute before finally beginning to dissolve into silvery mist once more.

Harry blinked and suddenly the vision was gone, the dim room of the Shrieking Shack coming back into focus and causing him to instantly miss the warm light of his Animagus.

He felt nothing now; not the mild burning sensation in his chest nor the secondary heartbeat.

Harry turned to see his mate standing next to him; the concern Draco felt for his Omega clearly overriding any residual irritation.

"It wasn't a stag," was all Harry could think of to say.

Professor Garrick approached him, looking curious. "What was it?"

Harry swallowed and a reluctant grin twitched at his lips as he got over the initial shock of his Animagus form not being what he had expected. "I think it was a Snow Leopard," he replied, answering the professor but looking at his mate.

Draco arched a brow. "You don't say..." he murmured, clearly amused.

Professor Garrick laughed out loud. "Perfect!" he said, looking pleased. "Your magic has chosen a form to match your Alpha; that's extraordinary."

"But I'm not a... you-know-what," Harry replied, bemused. "I'm not even a tiger or any sort of cat that comes close to the same size as a you-know-what."

"But you will have the same sort of inclinations as Draco," Professor Garrick said, still smiling. "The same sort of instincts and nature, perhaps not as emotionally turbulent as him, which is brilliant, as you may help ground your mate in times of distress. It really is perfect Harry," he added, and then paused, his smile turning sympathetic. "I know you were hoping to share the same form as your father..."

Harry smiled a little and shook his head. "I'm not disappointed, I'm just... surprised. I assumed my
Animagus form would match my Patronus."

"You may find that your Patronus has changed as well."

"Really?" Harry didn't know how he felt about that, he'd always felt as though his Patronus was like having a link to his father.

He re-sheathed his wand, not wanting to find out in that particular moment.

"How are you feeling?" Draco asked as his assessing gaze ran over his mate, searching for any hint of discomfort.

"I feel fine," Harry replied with a nod, as he reached for his cloak on the broken chair behind him. "Completely normal."

Draco glanced at the professor while Harry slung his cloak over his shoulders and clasped it into place around his neck. "And he can safely continue his training if he's pregnant?" he asked for perhaps the tenth time that evening.

Professor Garrick nodded, smiling indulgently at the young Alpha. "Yes, as I've said before, there is no harm in allowing Harry to continue to learn this process. I would advise against transforming during his final trimester as it would put extra strain on Harry's magical reserves at a time when he will need to conserve it." He paused, blue eyes flicking to Harry and back. "I am certain he will be much too exhausted to even think about attempting a transformation by that point though. Male pregnancies are known to be quite taxing on the body."

Draco exhaled heavily, still not looking pleased, but at least he seemed a little more accepting of Harry's foolhardy ways.

Harry smiled at him, wanting the tension hanging over their heads to be gone. "Hey, no complaining, you knew what I was like when you accepted me as your mate," he teased.

Draco reluctantly smiled back. "Yes, but I never used to care when you were reckless," he pointed out. "In fact, I encouraged it wholeheartedly."

Harry laughed and they followed a grinning Professor Garrick towards the exit and down into the secret tunnel, which had been surreptitiously restored by the Golden Trio and a few close friends after it had been destroyed during the war.

Draco held onto his hand as they made their way back to the castle and Harry felt better than he had in days, like some of the weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He'd successfully completed the first stage of his Animagus training and Draco was at least speaking to him again. He knew fighting with his Alpha was not going to make this pregnancy fiasco any easier so he vowed to at least hold off on his training until after they found out.

The three carefully emerged onto the snow-covered grounds of Hogwarts. It was still early evening, but too cold and dark for any of the other students to be wandering around out there, so they were safe to make their way back into the castle unobserved.

Harry took a deep breath and slowly let it out as he walked close to Draco's side. In just six days he would find out if he was truly carrying their child.
Harry chewed on his ravaged thumbnail and nervously swung his legs back and forth whilst sitting on the edge of the hospital bed. Draco stood next to him, arms crossed over his chest, not saying a word and face expressionless.

The silence in the infirmary was deafening, even the sound of heavy rain hitting the glass windows outside seemed muted as though in sympathy with the tension of the room within. Madam Pomfrey had ensured that the infirmary was empty for their appointment time and the quiet was only adding to their anxiety.

The past two weeks had been two of the longest in Harry's life, but now that the moment had finally come, it felt as though the time had gone by in the blink of an eye. He'd gone to all of his classes as though on autopilot and, except for his one night of Animagus training, his evenings with Draco had been subdued and quiet, not talking about the possible pregnancy but not talking about much of anything else either; mostly just remaining quietly lost in their own thoughts.

Even though Draco had been quiet, he'd been extraordinarily single-minded when it came to Harry's safety; grey eyes sharply watching anyone who came near his mate. Harry had wanted to start taking meals in their room to help ease the obvious strain on his Alpha, but Draco had said it would raise too much suspicion and so they continued on; with Draco attempting to moderate his reactions and Harry constantly worried about him.

To say they were both feeling a little ragged by the end of the fortnight was an understatement.

Harry looked up as Madam Pomfrey finally emerged from her office and strode towards them, wand in hand and face set.

"Good evening gentlemen," she greeted absently as she stood at the foot of the bed. She rested her wand in both hands and looked at Harry. "There is a very simple detection spell which I will cast on you Mr. Potter. You will not feel much, just a slight warming sensation around your abdomen, but no discomfort. It will only take a few seconds." She paused and then raised her wand in preparation. "$Gravida Revelare.$" She turned back to the matron as a soft white light flowed from the tip of her wand and swept over him, encompassing his entire body for a moment before settling over his stomach.

Harry anxiously bit his lip as the light seemed to pulse there for only a second before the light shifted and vividly changed colour before their eyes.

Harry's teeth sunk even deeper into his bottom lip as the bright yellow light seemed to burn directly into his retinas.
And then it was over; the yellow light abruptly disappearing.

Madam Pomfrey cleared her throat as she lowered her wand. "I would usually offer my congratulations..." she said tentatively.

Harry swallowed thickly; gaze still glued to the spot where the yellow light had just been merrily glowing, at a loss for what to say.

Despite there being a fifty percent chance of this exact outcome, he still felt numb with shock. He honestly didn't know how he felt yet.

A warm squeeze to his clammy hand brought him back to the present.

"While this pregnancy was not precisely planned, it is certainly not unwanted."

Harry blinked and turned to look up at his Alpha. He knew surprise must have been written all over his face.

The corner of Draco's mouth stretched up into a tiny smile, gaze soft as he looked down at him; causing hope to unfurl warmly in Harry's chest.

Madam Pomfrey couldn't help but smile at the two of them. "I've already placed an order for a male pregnancy book for you Mr. Potter," she said, reluctant to interrupt their little moment but needing to give them further advice before they left the infirmary. "I should have one on hand for future cases regardless - if there ever are any. I will let you know when it is in my possession. I shall also charm the book so that no one else is able to read it except for the two of you."

"When do you think you will have it?" Harry asked, feeling a sudden wave of determination sweep through him.

It was like a switch had been flipped inside of him at the sight of that yellow light followed by the unmistakable love in Draco's eyes - and now nothing was more important to him than this fragile foetus growing inside of him.

"I expect it tomorrow," she replied swiftly. "In the afternoon. If you are in class then I will send it to your rooms with one of the house-elves."

Harry nodded, satisfied.

"Now, I shall start you on a very specific course of potions which will safeguard your young one against any errant magic that may leach into the womb. These potions also contain supplemental vitamins and a mild boost to your magic levels. It is very important that you take these potions every day Mr. Potter. I expect you to help him to remember Mr. Malfoy," she added with a sharp look in his direction.

"Of course," Draco replied evenly, and Harry had no doubt that his mate would be forcing these potions down his throat if he ever tried to skip one.

"I will have one of the house-elves deliver a seven day supply to your rooms once a week. One of the potions you will take morning and night, and the other is once a day before bed. The bottles will be clearly labelled."

Harry nodded in understanding.

"I think that's all for today gentlemen," she said, tucking her wand away. "I will of course schedule
some periodic check-ups with you, which will become more frequent the closer we get to your due date."

Harry slowly sat up and swung his legs over the side of the bed. "What is my due date? And will we be able to find out if it's a boy or a girl?"

Madam Pomfrey smiled, her stern exterior cracking just a little as she gazed at one of her most frequent patients. "We may determine both of those things in future appointments, if you wish."

Harry hopped off the bed, coughing to cover a snicker as Draco quickly held him steady with both hands; as though he wasn't capable of standing up without assistance.

Harry suspected that this was going to be a very long nine months.

....

Three weeks later, Harry was feeling great - but having problems he never expected to have. He finally decided to seek out Hermione to have a whinge.

They were both seated in the back of the library, at the last table next to the wall, piles of books all around them and a heavy Silencing Charm keeping their very private conversation truly private.

Draco was at Quidditch practice and had nearly made Hermione swear an Unbreakable Vow to not leave Harry's side until he returned.

"What did you want to discuss?" Hermione asked, still speaking quietly despite the Silencing Charm. "You looked rather frantic to speak with me," she couldn't help adding with concern.

"Draco is driving me mental," Harry stated without preamble.

Hermione bit her lip to hide a grin. "In what way?"

Harry moved a stack of books in front of him in case anyone in the library could lip read. "Ever since Madam Pomfrey confirmed the pregnancy, he's been so bloody worried about me that he can't sleep at night. His stupid Alpha tendencies are irrationally concerned that someone is going to attack me while I'm asleep, so he stays up all night to... to bloody guard me!"

Hermione snorted but then nodded in understanding. "I thought he was looking a little worn-out recently. I suppose the fact that there was an attack on you only exacerbates his anxiety?"

"Yeah." Harry paused and ran a hand through his messy hair. "I could handle the non-sleeping, and the tired grumpy behaviour that comes along with it, but he..." Harry sighed and knew it was a sign of how frustrated he was that he was actually talking to Hermione about this. "But he's too tired to have sex - and I am bloody gagging for it."

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Hermione laughed loudly in surprise then quickly clapped a hand over her mouth to stifle it at the look on her friend's face. "Sorry," she apologised, trying not to smile. "Is it pregnancy hormones which are causing you to... you know."

"Yeah, definitely," Harry replied unequivocally.

Ron and Hermione had been amazingly supportive of the pregnancy news when he'd shared it with
them. They hadn't looked surprised in the least, so Harry guessed they'd been expecting it ever since he mentioned that it was a possibility.

They were both concerned about the same things that Madam Pomfrey was worried about though; the media getting ahold of the information and then Harry's attackers returning.

It was a secret they were all going to keep for as long as they could; which they suspected would be until Harry physically started to show.

"You wouldn't believe the lengths I've gone to attempting to seduce him - even for just a blow job," Harry continued in frustration, seemingly unable to censor his words now that he'd started. "He either falls asleep before we get started or he tells me that he's too tired or he has to study or he has a headache - I can't take it anymore!" he cried in exasperation, dropping his head into his hands. "I know it sounds mental but I am desperate and all he wants to do is fucking cuddle!"

Hermione laughed and moved a tall stack of books in front of her so that they were both completely hidden in their little corner.

"What about, er… helping yourself?" she suggested, cheeks turning slightly pink.

Harry lifted his head and looked at her. "I've practically sprained my wrist trying to lessen the desire and it doesn't help. It's not enough; it's clearly not what my body wants."

"Ah, I see." Hermione sat back in her chair, thoughtful. "I'm not sure I have any solutions for you Harry, it may be something you're just going to have to suffer through until your body's needs change, or until Draco gets some proper rest."

Harry moaned and rubbed at his eyes. "Yeah, I thought as much."

"So how are you feeling - other than sexually frustrated?"

A reluctant smile pulled at Harry's lips as Hermione grinned at him in amusement. "Good. No morning sickness or anything like that, just sort of hungry all the time."

"Do you feel different?"

"Not really." Harry shrugged. "Draco said I smell differently though, as though my scent has changed slightly."

"Oh that's interesting," Hermione responded, leaning forward. "Can he smell the baby do you think?"

"Possibly." Harry's face lit up with a genuine smile; that familiar burst of warmth exploding in his chest which always accompanied thoughts of Draco being all paternal.

Hermione noticed the look on his face and smiled. "So how's Draco coping? Other than the not sleeping thing of course. He's always with you so I never have the opportunity to ask."

"I know," Harry said ruefully. "Sorry about that. Other than the night-guarding issue, I actually don't mind the overly-protective side of his behaviour," he added with an amused grin, "just in case you were worried that I was secretly annoyed."

Hermione laughed. "Oh I know you don't mind Harry, I can see it on your face every time he puts an arm around you or glares at another Alpha… It's quite entertaining. I've always said it was time someone looked after you for a change."
Harry grinned. "Draco's been rather calm about the baby itself, now that the pregnancy has been confirmed. He's very… practical about the whole thing. Hasn't told his parents yet though," he added with a smirk.

"I don't envy him that conversation," she said, eyes widening.

"Narcissa will be fine," Harry replied confidently. "I think she's very much looking forward to having grandchildren, it's Lucius that will be the problem."

"Because you're so young and still in school? Or do you think he'll only be upset because of the danger you're in right now?"

"Both." Harry snorted. "I don't really think he's the type to approve of accidents."

"Are you going to be there when he informs them of the impending bundle of joy?" Hermione grinned.

Harry laughed and nodded his head. "Yeah, I wouldn't leave him to do that on his own. We're going to tell them before Sophie McDougall's party next week. Draco thought it would be a tactical advantage to tell them about their future grandchild directly before attending a party to welcome a new baby. He thinks it will soften them."

Hermione nodded. "I think it's a good plan," she agreed. "Are you sure it's safe for you to attend though?"

"Draco will be with me, and I'm using my Invisibility Cloak for travelling between Hogwarts and their home."

"And Blaise will be there," Hermione reminded him with a roll of her eyes. "Does he still not know that you're pregnant?"

"He keeps asking but I refuse to confirm or deny it," Harry said blithely, falling back against his chair with a heavy sigh. "Pansy will be at the party too. I wish you and Ron had been invited, I'm going to be outnumbered."

"Yes, that is a fair number of Slytherins," she observed with a raised brow.

"It'll be fine, I'll just hang out near the food table and play with the new baby."

Hermione smiled affectionately at her friend, absently toying with the edge of one of the large texts in front of her. "You're going to be a great father Harry," she said with quiet confidence.

Harry looked up and smiled. "I'm going to try my best," he said.

By the time the night of the party had rolled around, Harry was ready to tear his hair out with exasperation.

Draco still wasn't sleeping and Harry still wasn't getting any.

Harry pulled his Invisibility Cloak out of his trunk, eyes on his mate as Draco slid a silk tie around
his collar while looking at his reflection in the mirror opposite him. Harry frowned concernedly at the
dark circles under his mate's eyes and the worrisome pallor of his skin.

He vowed to talk to Pomfrey about the problem; perhaps she could force Draco to take some
Dreamless Sleep in order to get through the night, at least a couple of times a week until he settled
down again.

"Are you sure you want to go?" Harry asked as he straightened and let the lid of his wooden trunk fall closed with a loud thud.

"Of course," Draco replied shortly, eyes still on his fingers as they deftly tied the deep blue tie.

Harry admired his Alpha, standing there in his perfectly tailored charcoal-grey Muggle suit with the blue tie that did beautiful things to his eyes, and instantly felt his cock stir in his trousers.

He walked over to stand next to Draco as the blond began to smooth his hair into place.

"You look amazing," Harry observed, green eyes tracking over his Alpha's fit body before coming to rest on his face. He smiled coyly at Draco with his best 'come-hither' look. "Can we be late?" he purred, reaching out to slide one hand under the back of Draco's shirt to run over smooth warm skin. Even just that small touch was enough to cause his groin to absolutely throb.

"Harry." Draco frowned in irritation and stepped away. "I just tucked that in. And no we cannot be late, we need to speak to my parents before the party, or have you forgotten?" he said tetchily, fixing his shirt with sharp, jerky movements.

Harry felt his temper flare hotly. Fuck he was at the end of his tether with his grumpy mate and this roller-coaster of arousal where he never got any relief.

"No, I haven't forgotten," he snapped back. "Fine, let's just go."

"Don't be like that," Draco said with annoyance. "You can't honestly think I would be in the mood directly before having this conversation with my parents?"

"Is that your excuse for the past month of no fucking as well?" Harry countered peevishly, hands clenching in his cloak as he held it in front of him like a shield. This was the first time he'd actually brought up how frustrated he'd been feeling and it felt liberating to finally get it off his chest - even if it wasn't quite as rational and eloquent as he'd been hoping.

Draco's eyes flared, but not with the guilt that Harry had been expecting. "Salazar, there are more important things than sex Potter! I am fucking exhausted and I don't have the energy for your little mind games right now. Don't you think I've put up with enough lately? What with the pregnancy and your life being in danger? A modicum of understanding would be appreciated here."

Harry gaped as Draco strode past him to the door and opened it; he was equal parts shocked and furious that Draco would speak to him like that.

Harry glared at the side of his stupid blond head for a moment before snapping his mouth shut and marching past him into the corridor. If Draco didn't want to listen then that was just fine. If he wanted to believe that Harry was just being utterly selfish and demanding for no good reason, then he wouldn't even bother to correct him, or to explain about the build-up of pregnancy hormones which were driving him mad.

Harry ground his teeth as he continued to walk at a brisk pace down the empty corridor. He could hear Draco behind him and, for some reason, his Alpha's silence was only serving to aggravate him
further. He wished Draco would just admit that he was being daft and that this 'not sleeping' thing just wasn't practical, and that it was negatively affecting their relationship in the meantime.

Why the fuck couldn't he see that?

Harry continued to seethe as he led the way to the Headmistress' Office. McGonagall had given them the use of her private Floo connection to travel to Malfoy Manor. She was well aware of the McDougall party as a few of the Slytherins were attending and she thought it best for Harry's safety to use the Floo instead of taking any chances with leaving the grounds in order to Apparate.

Harry uttered the password under his breath and walked up the spiral stone staircase and into the familiar office. Thankfully the room was empty.

He hadn't told Professor McGonagall about his pregnancy yet, and a part of him worried that she would see right through him if they were alone in the same room together.

Harry walked past the wide oak desk and snatched a handful of Floo Powder from the bronze pot on the shelf.

He completely ignored his Alpha as Draco watched him toss the silvery powder into the hearth and then enter the innocuous warm blaze which had sprung up in its place.

"Malfoy Manor!" he called out clearly before disappearing in a whirl of green flames.

Harry closed his eyes, unable to watch the spinning grates as they flew past in quick succession.

Minutes later, he was spat out of the ornate white fireplace of the Malfoy's front parlour. He stumbled over the hearth and onto the worn rug but remained upright, Invisibility Cloak still clutched in his hands.

He looked up and was immediately greeted by Narcissa's gently smiling face as she moved forward to clasp his hand in greeting.

"Good evening Harry," she said in her customarily quiet manner. "I trust you are well?"

"Uh yes, I… I am." Harry forced a smile as he followed her to the seating area and was just sitting down in his usual spot on the pretty sofa when the whoosh of the fireplace announced the arrival of his mate.

"Draco," Narcissa greeted with another soft smile, eyes sparkling dotingly as she looked upon her only child. "It's been too long my darling."

Draco shifted uncomfortably, eyes flicking to Harry before resting on his mother. "Yes, I apologise for not contacting you earlier, we've been kept rather busy."

Narcissa nodded and beckoned him over with a graceful sweep of her arm as she took a seat in one of the armchairs opposite the sofa. "Your father will be along shortly," she informed them, still smiling pleasantly.

Draco stiffly took a seat on the other end of the sofa and Harry pretended to look around the room when Narcissa eyed the obvious space between the two of them with an arched brow. Harry usually sat shoulder to shoulder with Draco and held hands whenever they joined the Malfoys in that room. At the moment they were sitting as far from the other as it was possible to be on the small sofa.

Narcissa looked as though she was about to question them when Lucius suddenly entered the room,
fiddling with the cuff of his crisp white shirt.

"Good evening," the Malfoy patriarch intoned distractedly as he walked over to sit beside his wife in the matching armchair.

Narcissa automatically reached over to assist her husband, deftly positioning the silver cuff-link with the large letter 'M' etched on it into place.

"Tea?" she asked the room at large as she finished.

"Yes please," Harry replied swiftly, relieved at the prospect of having something to occupy his hands instead of clenching them nervously in his lap.

Narcissa quietly requested some tea and biscuits from one of the house-elves while Lucius openly eyed the gap between the two mates, much the same way as his wife had.

"What's wrong?" he asked bluntly, gaze narrowing accusingly as he looked at Harry.

Harry wanted to roll his eyes; of course Lucius would immediately blame him. A hot wave of irritation rolled through him at the clear insinuation and, unfortunately, forced the next words from his mouth before he could stop them.

"Your son got me pregnant."

He heard a soft sigh beside him and glanced over to see Draco drop his forehead into his hand, eyes closed, as though he could block out the result of Harry's impulsive temper; the shock of which was now plainly written across both Lucius and Narcissa's stunned faces.

Narcissa was the first to recover.

"How did… pregnant?" she responded, as close to incoherent as Harry had ever seen her. "Are you certain?" she asked, glancing between them.

"Yes," Draco confirmed with quiet resignation, raising his head. "Madam Pomfrey verified the pregnancy herself."

Narcissa put a hand to her chest, staring in disbelief.

"How could you let this happen?"

Harry blinked in surprise at the furious glare directed his way from Lucius. It was a look he hadn't been subjected to from Mr. Malfoy in a very long time, and he couldn't help but feel rather hurt that the man could fall back on that distrust and hatred so easily.

"I… It was an accident-"

"Clearly," Lucius hissed, eyes practically throwing sparks in his anger. "How could someone in your position be so incredibly stupid?"

Harry swallowed and knew it was a direct result of his current emotional state that, instead of righteous indignation, he suddenly felt the hot prickle of tears in back of his eyes.

This wasn't how this was supposed to go; Draco was supposed to suffer the brunt of his parent's anger - not him. The blame was fifty-fifty after all; there would be no baby without their son's implicit involvement.
For the first time since learning of his pregnancy, Harry felt the sharp stab of regret.

He was barely three weeks into it and already he was emotionally and physically drained. Draco had been right; it just wasn't the right time…

He lifted his gaze to Lucius' condemning glare and suddenly hated the man for making him think such thoughts.

It made him want to lash out.

"I'll just get rid of it then, shall I?" he snapped crossly.

"Harry," Draco interjected warningly.

"I didn't fall pregnant all on my own, you know," Harry continued, ignoring his mate as he glared at Lucius.

"Harry," Draco cut in sharply, and then sighed wearily before adding, "no one is asking you to terminate the pregnancy."

"No, he's just implying that I'm a bit of a slag who somehow tricked you into impregnating me," Harry exclaimed spitefully.

A house-elf in a patched green tea-cosy suddenly appeared holding a silver tray of tea along with a small selection of biscuits, the look in her eyes turning apprehensive as she took in the palpable tension in the room.

Narcissa cleared her throat. "Yes, thank you Trinket," she said delicately. "That will be all."

Trinket carefully placed the large tray down on the table between them before bobbing a hasty curtsy and disappearing.

There was a minute of very uncomfortable silence, in which no one knew quite where to look or what to say. The mounting antagonism had been somewhat deflated by the appearance of the house-elf.

"How are you feeling Harry?" Narcissa eventually enquired, breaking the hostile silence.

Harry scratched uncomfortably at his scalp as he stared at the toes of his spotless black boots, unable to meet her gaze, not wanting to find that he'd lost her approval as well. "I'm… I'm fine."

Lucius exhaled heavily, obviously trying to get ahold of his emotions. "What's done is done," he finally said stiffly, as though he were being quite magnanimous about it. "Moving forward, we need to discuss how we are to protect this new Malfoy."

Harry immediately bristled. "He's half Potter as well."

Lucius' eyes narrowed. "Yes, and as you are unmarried and have no living parents, the child would be the sole Malfoy heir after Draco."

Harry frowned. "What does that mean?"

"It means the baby is legally a Malfoy."

"So… the baby becomes your property? Is that it?"
"Harry, that's not what he's saying-" Draco said tiredly.

"In legal terms, yes," Lucius replied sharply, as though Draco hadn't spoken.

"Father," Draco said, turning to him with a look of warning.

"I don't believe we need to be discussing the legalities of the child right at this moment," Narcissa inserted stridently, frowning at all three of them.

Harry abruptly stood. He'd had enough; he couldn't take one more minute of this conversation or the accusations flying around - especially because it felt as though his mate had abandoned him to the wolves without any hint of support. Draco hadn't even bothered to tell to his parents that he wanted this baby.

Or perhaps he'd changed his mind. It certainly seemed that way judging by his near silence.

Harry blinked back the tears which accompanied that thought and stubbornly lifted his chin.

"I'd like to go to the party now," he announced roughly. "I won't sit here and be reprimanded for something that was an accident, especially because you don't even know the full story. I know its poor timing but it can't be helped now. I am going to protect this baby - even if I'm the only one who wants it."

"You know that's not true Harry," Draco said, frowning.

"Feels like it," Harry replied stonily.

Draco sighed and rubbed at his eyes. "Perhaps we should just return to Hogwarts."

"No," Harry shook his head. "As much as there's nothing I want to do less right now than to attend a celebration for a new baby, there are too many people expecting us. It would be suspicious and people might ask questions - especially Blaise."

Narcissa rose from her seat and looked at Harry, expression set. "I shall escort you to the McDougall's. You have not been there before and Draco will remain with Lucius for a minute." She then turned to her husband and son, pale gaze uncompromising. "You are not going anywhere until you're able to be the caring wizards I know you are. This pregnancy news has come as a bit of a shock but that is no excuse to treat a member of this family so appallingly."

For the third time that night, Harry had to fight to blink back tears. He blamed it on pregnancy hormones and did his best to thwart the impulse.

Draco appeared somewhat chastised as he dropped his gaze to the floor, but Lucius looked as though he were about to protest vehemently - and then thought better of defying his strong-minded wife and closed his mouth again.

Narcissa fetched her pretty travelling cloak from where it had been carefully laid out over the back of her chair and clapped it around her thin shoulders. She waited while Harry carefully concealed himself beneath his Invisibility Cloak and then she held out an arm for him to take once he'd vanished from sight.

Without a word to his taciturn mate, Harry linked his elbow through hers, grateful for at least one ally.

He was so disappointed in how his Alpha had behaved that evening. He knew the lack of sleep and
the stress was a definite part of it, because up until then, Draco had been nothing but caring and protective of him, but Harry still couldn't help but feel hurt by the blatant abandonment.

Harry closed his eyes as Narcissa swiftly Disapparated the two of them away, leaving their recalcitrant Alphas behind.

....

Harry released Narcissa's arm as soon as the ground was safely beneath his feet again and silently followed her up the long tree-lined drive, openly goggling at the opulence of the McDougall's property from beneath the hood of his Cloak.

He'd thought the Malfoy's estate impressive, but it was nothing compared to the unashamed extravagance of Sophie McDougall's home.

The McDougall's resided in a strictly Wizarding Village, so they had quite a few magical touches around the grounds. There were hundreds of floating lanterns lighting the way along the gravel drive towards the massive stone building in the distance, which appeared to be at least five storeys in height. The drive was bordered on both sides by magical Ever-Blooming Cherry Trees, their froth of white blossoms a beautiful accompaniment to the glittering snow-covered grounds surrounding them. The windows of the massive home were shining yellow-warm in the dim evening light and the total effect of it all was quite breathtaking.

There were dozens of other finely dressed guests slowly making their way up the drive on foot and Harry was careful to stay out of their way in order to remain hidden until he was safely inside the house.

Harry frowned a little when Narcissa changed course and led him to the side of the house, to where a small stone bench seat was set back in the shadows a little ways away from the front entrance.

She sat down on the snow-dusted seat, wrapping her warm cloak around herself and keeping her watchful gaze on the passing guests. She murmured a quiet Silencing Charm before speaking.

"Are you and Draco quarreling over the baby?" she asked, surprising him with her candour.

Harry slowly sat down next to her, making sure to lightly brush her shoulder with his own so that she'd know where he was under his Cloak.

He sighed. "No, not really. He was upset at first because he was so worried about what that would mean for my safety, but when Madam Pomfrey told us the news..." Harry paused and felt a little of his ire melt away at the memory of Draco's soft gaze full of affection and love in the Infirmary. "He was pleased."

Narcissa smiled a little, gaze still on the gravel drive and the passing guests.

Harry kicked at the loose snow at his feet. "Ever since we found out though, Draco hasn't been able to sleep at night. For some reason he thinks I'm vulnerable while I'm sleeping and that something may happen to me, so he stays awake all night - whether he wants to or not - and it is wreaking havoc with his temperament. He's stressed and irritable, trying to protect me and keep up with his schoolwork while at the same time trying to catch a bit of sleep in between classes. So many times he's nodded off right in the middle working on an assignment in our room... I don't know what to do
except to force Dreamless Sleep down his throat and make him bloody sleep."

Narcissa tilted her head towards him, blond hair done up in an elegant chignon at the nape of her neck. "So Draco is worried about you and you are worried about Draco?"

Harry exhaled with a rueful smile. "Yeah, that about sums it up. So of course we're rowing all the time and saying things we don't really mean… and I really should be more tolerant of his behaviour towards me right now because I know he loves me, but…"

Narcissa nodded in understanding. "But you are only human."

Harry nodded in response, even though he knew she couldn't see it.

Narcissa was quietly contemplative for a moment before speaking. "I remember Lucius being very, very protective of me while I was pregnant with Draco," she eventually said. "If I left the house, he would always accompany me, and if he couldn't, then he would ensure that I had someone else with me, usually one of the poor house-elves was nominated for the job. It is an Alpha compulsion which is too instinctual to change - made that much worse by the inherent nature of a Nundu. I can't even imagine how much my poor son is attempting to cope with right now: having a pregnant mate whose life is in danger…" she trailed off and shook her head. "Draco does not like surprises, he never has, he prefers things to be carefully planned and calculated."

Harry smiled a little. "I know."

"Nevertheless," she continued firmly, "however he is feeling or however exhausted he is, there is no excuse for treating you poorly. He should realise what he is doing to you and make the necessary changes to fix it, such as speaking to the matron about sleeping potions or perhaps missing a day or two of classes in order to catch up on his sleep."

Harry nodded emphatically in agreement. "Yeah, I've told him that. I even told him that I would stay with him in our rooms so that he could sleep without worrying about me going to class without him, but he didn't want people to become suspicious."

"I will speak with him," she promised, flicking a sympathetic glance in his general direction. "If nothing else, the Christmas holidays are approaching and you and Draco are welcome to stay at the Manor for the duration. Draco will be able to relax there, knowing that at least Lucius and I are around to help keep an eye on you. Not that you particularly need looking after quite to that extent," she added with a tiny grin. "I think Draco sometimes forgets that you are the same man who defeated the Dark Lord."

Harry chuckled, feeling much better than he had earlier. He noticed Narcissa shivering and thought it was probably time to go inside.

"Shall we?" he said, standing, feet crunching in the snow.

Narcissa smiled as she stood. "Yes, I'm certain Lucius and Draco will be along shortly."

Harry followed along beside Narcissa as she walked back through the snow to the stone steps leading up to the brightly illuminated entrance.

"Thank you," Harry said quietly, embarrassed, but needing to say it, "for the talk."

"You are very welcome Harry," she replied, equally as quiet, smiling to herself as she delicately lifted her long robes to climb the steps.
The vast double doors were held open and flanked by about eight house-elves dressed in tiny blue and silver suits and holding trays of champagne.

Harry had never seen such well-dressed house-elves before and the sight made him smile.

Mrs. Malfoy handed off her cloak to one of the elves just inside the door and then gracefully accepted one of the glasses of sparkling champagne from another attending elf.

Harry ducked inside after her and then hid behind one of the large white pillars circling the entrance hall to remove his Cloak. He rolled it up in his arms and then returned to Narcissa's side as she casually waited for him; feigning interest in some of the artwork adorning the walls.

They joined the well-dressed crowd making their way into the ballroom located at the far north end of the home.

Harry stopped in the wide doorway and gaped at the magnificent room, the golden lustre of it practically causing him to squint. Every wall of the vast room was ornamented with elegant gilded mirrors and the wall space in between was also a burnished gold. The polished floor was gleaming nearly as brightly as the walls.

There were groups of witches and wizards scattered throughout, dressed in long elegant dress robes or finely tailored Muggle clothing. It seemed like the younger guests were the ones sporting the Muggle clothing and the older generation were in more traditional dress.

"Do close your mouth Potter, staring gormlessly is not your best look."

Harry turned to his right to see Pansy's smirking red lips and dark teasing eyes. "Good evening Parkinson," he said politely. He then raised his brow at her unashamedly exposed cleavage. "Classy as usual, I see."

Pansy laughed and immediately tucked her arm through his. "I like you Potter, you shall have to save a dance for me. Good evening Mrs. Malfoy," she leaned around Harry to greet Narcissa courteously. "Mind if I steal your date?"

"If Mr. Potter does not mind," Narcissa replied with a glance at Harry.

Harry smiled and shook his head. "It's fine," he said and was immediately tugged away by Pansy.

"Where's your gorgeous Alpha?" she asked as she led him towards the far wall, which had a large table spread with enough food to feed the whole of Hogwarts with, next to a pair of glass doors leading out onto a stone patio and the gardens beyond.

"He's coming," Harry replied distractedly, noticing quite a few pairs of eyes tracking his progress across the room. He wasn't sure if it was because he was Harry Potter or because he was a male Omega, but he really didn't like the look in some of the men's eyes.

Harry tried shake off his unease, instead focussing on the cluster of Slytherins next to the table Pansy was leading him towards. He recognised two fourth year Ravenclaws as well, but Harry was the only Gryffindor, and there were no Hufflepuffs.

Pansy snatched two glasses of champagne off a passing tray and handed one to Harry just before they joined the group.

He was greeted by cordial variations of "evening Potter" from every single one of the Slytherins. Having dinner at the Slytherin table and the Thursday evening study sessions were clearly working
to improve his relationship with that particular house and he couldn’t help but be pleased.

"Good evening," Harry replied pleasantly before absently taking a rather large gulp of his drink.

He suddenly remembered that he shouldn't be drinking.

Too late; he coughed and spluttered a little as the alcohol trailed smoothly down his throat. He looked up, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand - and met Blaise Zabini's penetrating gaze.

Harry froze as the man's dark gaze flicked down to his mid-section and then back up again, a faint smirk slowly stretching his lips.

Harry turned away as nonchalantly as possible but knew his cheeks had probably flushed tellingly.

A pale hand suddenly reached in front of Harry and plucked the champagne flute clear out of his hand.

Harry looked up as Draco slid an arm around his waist and took a sip from Harry's glass, keeping it in his hand afterwards. Harry leaned into his mate's side, biting back a sigh at the relief his Alpha’s presence gave him. They hadn't been separated from each other by such a distance in a long time and, despite their current problems, Harry really wasn't fond of the feeling.

"Don't you look dashing Draco," Pansy drawled in observation, eyes running over his impeccable suit.

"And don't you look… tasteful," he commented wryly in return, brow arching.

"Thanks darling," Pansy replied with a wink. "Too bad all eyes are on Potter though. I think half the men here had an instant erection the minute he walked in. You should have seen the drooling as he accompanied me across the room."

Draco's eyes narrowed but his tone was flippant as he replied. "I'm sure the straight ones were staring at your tits Pans. Nice bit of wand work that."

"I don't need magic to enhance these beauties," she informed him smugly, giving her shoulders a little shimmy to jiggle said breasts.

Draco snorted and Harry rolled his eyes but couldn't help grinning back at her. He quite liked her brash personality - when it wasn't used to mock him or turn him over to evil Dark Lords, that is.

A loud tinkling bell suddenly echoed around the large room, garnering everyone's attention.

Harry turned to look towards the entrance doors and saw Sophie McDougall standing there holding a tiny bundle wrapped in soft white blankets. Standing to one side of her was a tall muscular man with red hair, who must've been her Alpha, and on her other side stood an older couple who looked to be her parents.

Harry smiled when he spotted little Gemma standing just behind Sophie, one hand clutching her mum's dress robes as she stared shyly out at the gathered crowd.

Sophie's husband welcomed everyone to their home with a warm smile, in fact he smiled quite a bit throughout his speech, and Harry wondered if he was a naturally merry person or if he was just flying high on 'new father' endorphins.

Sophie briefly welcomed everyone as well and told them all to come up and meet their new son,
Samuel, throughout the evening.

Everyone applauded and then either returned to their conversation or drifted over to the McDougall family to congratulate them.

Harry saw Professor Garrick across the room and waved to him with a smile. The professor was standing with a petite brunette woman who must've been his wife, Anna. Harry hoped his daughters were there as well so that he could finally meet them.

Harry turned to Draco to see if he wanted to visit the baby and caught his mate covering a yawn with one hand. "Hey," he said gently. "Want to sit down and I'll bring you some food? And maybe beg a house-elf for an espresso or two?"

Draco turned to him and Harry saw that his mate had definitely used some sort of concealment charm on the dark circles under his eyes.

His Alpha smiled tiredly and shook his head. "No, I'm okay," he said. "Let's go meet Samuel, I know you're dying to."

"All right." Harry decided not to argue even though his mate was clearly exhausted.

"I'm sorry about earlier Harry," Draco murmured into his ear, absently nodding at the people who acknowledged him as they made their way towards the happy family. "I didn't mean to let my father get carried away like that, I should've stopped him."

Harry slid his hand into his mate's and gave it a squeeze. "It's all right, we'll talk about it later."

Draco turned to him; grey eyes searching. "But we're okay, right?"

Harry smiled at the worry shining there and couldn't help but feel a little comforted by it. "Yeah, of course."

The tightness around Draco's eyes eased at his words and he nodded.

Harry pressed his lips together as they started walking again, concerned with just how bloody tired Draco looked. He knew he had to do something about it - for both their sakes. Just having Draco's arm around his waist was turning him on in a way it normally wouldn't have if it hadn't been for the lack of sexual contact wreaking havoc with his body.

They approached the McDougall family and Harry smiled in greeting at Gemma while Draco said good evening to the glowing parents.

"Hi Gemma," he said, kneeling down. "How are you?"

The girl smiled back without reservation. "Hi Harry Potter," she said.

"So do you like having a brother?"

Gemma immediately frowned and Harry had to stifle a laugh at her very cute pout.

"No," she said, eyes flicking to her mother for a moment to ensure that she hadn't heard. "He doesn't even do anything interesting, he just lays there and cries or sleeps. He's boring. But everyone thinks he's sooo fascinating."

Harry chuckled. "You're right," he said conspiratorially. "You are much more interesting."
"I know." She smiled and shifted in her shiny patent shoes, looking restless; clearly tired of standing next to her family while everyone cooed over her baby brother.

Harry had a sudden idea and smiled at her. "I have something you can borrow to make the party more fun - just for this evening though, and then you have to give it back."

Her eyes gleamed with interest. "What is it?" she whispered.

"Hold on, I'm just going to say hello to your parents and your new brother, then I'll tell you."

"Okay." She nodded, smiling.

Harry straightened and turned to the newborn baby cradled in Sophie's arms, Draco's conversation with Sophie and her husband floating around him, but he wasn't absorbing any of the words as he focussed on the tiny infant instead.

He smiled softly at the little boy as he slept peacefully, eyelashes fluttering every few seconds.

"Do you want to hold him?"

Harry blinked and looked up to see Sophie smiling at him. He would never have thought such a gentle look possible from her after the way she'd acted at that first Board meeting.

"Sure," he replied uncertainly; he'd never held a baby before and he really didn't want to drop him; he looked incredibly fragile.

But he ought to learn since he would be holding his own in nine months. That thought both excited and terrified him in equal measures.

Harry held out his arms, trying to mimic the way Sophie had had her arms positioned.

Sophie handed him over and Harry carefully pulled the little body in to his chest, making sure to support his frighteningly floppy neck.

Harry held his breath as blue eyes opened for a second to look up at him and then closed again, his little rosebud mouth moving as though chewing before he quickly settled back to sleep again.

Harry smiled, Samuel's body was so warm and he smelled so good. "Hi Samuel," he said to the slumbering newborn. "Be nice to your big sister and try not to steal all the attention, okay?"

There was a giggle from Gemma and Harry grinned at her as he unconsciously started to rock Samuel a little from side to side.

"You're a natural Mr. Potter," Sophie's husband observed jovially.

Harry looked up and smiled, feeling his cheeks flush a little in embarrassment.

"I'm John, by the way."

"Nice to meet you," Harry replied with a nod, "and congratulations."

"Soph did all the work," he answered honestly, slipping an arm around his wife's shoulders. "She was amazing."

Sophie rolled her eyes. "And John had to be restrained so that he wouldn't hurt the Healer - who was just doing his job," she said, poking him in the ribs.
John smiled self-consciously. "It's hard to sit back and see your mate in so much pain." He glanced at Draco. "You'll see Malfoy, one day it will be you watching Harry scream bloody murder. And I've heard male Omega's have a really tough time of it."

Harry swallowed and glanced at Draco, who looked slightly stricken.

"John." Sophie glared. "Don't say such things; you'll scare poor Harry into not having any children." She turned back to Harry holding her son. "You'll do fine Harry, you're strong."

Harry tried to feel reassured but he only felt nauseous.

He quickly turned back to gaze down at Samuel again, seeking reassurance in his warm weight and serene expression. Harry felt his expression soften and his heart melt a little.

He could do this, whatever happened, it would be worth it.

He glanced up to find Draco's assessing gaze on him and he smiled a little at the warm affection there. His Alpha looked affected by the sight of Harry holding the baby, he must have been thinking about how his mate was carrying their own child right at that very moment. He hadn't looked like that since the pregnancy confirmation in the infirmary.

"Do you want to hold him?" Harry asked.

Draco's eyes widened and Harry passed him over before his mate could protest.

Draco swiftly recovered and pulled the baby in to his chest. He stared down at him with both fear and wonder on his face.

Harry grinned and then spotted Narcissa and Lucius watching them from nearby. She smiled at Harry and he could see the slight sheen to her pale eyes, clearly moved by the sight of her son holding little Samuel. Lucius' eyes were also on Draco but Harry couldn't read his mood at all.

Harry turned back to watch his mate and had to force himself to not put a hand on his own stomach, the urge to connect to his growing baby nearly overwhelming him. He'd been so busy worrying about Draco and everyone's reaction to him being pregnant, that he'd hardly had the time to actually think about being pregnant; to enjoy it, or even to really anticipate their child's arrival on any level.

He was a bit saddened that his experience thus far had been somewhat tainted by everything else going on.

There was a gentle but insistent tugging at his trousers and Harry broke out of his wandering thoughts to find Gemma staring up at him impatiently.

"Are you done with the baby now?" she asked.

Harry laughed, as did Sophie and John.

"Yes, I'm all yours now," he replied. He glanced at Draco, who was still staring at the baby in his arms. "You okay if I entertain Gemma for a minute?"

Draco finally looked up and nodded. He opened his mouth as though to say something and then shut it again, before nodding once more.

Harry smiled, knowing Draco probably had all sorts of baby related thoughts running through his head. He touched his Alpha's arm briefly before turning his attention back to Gemma, hoping Draco
wasn't exhausted enough to accidentally drop the baby in his absence. Sophie's mild-mannered countenance would probably turn feral fairly quickly if he did.

He took Gemma's hand and steered her out of the grand ballroom and back into the large hallway. "Your house is very beautiful," he said to her as they walked past gilded paintings and red velvet wall hangings.

"Yes it is," she said solemnly, causing Harry to grin at the blunt immodesty that only a child could get away with.

He took her around the corner and stopped, looking around to make sure they were alone first before crouching down to her level.

"How would you like to be invisible?" he whispered. "Just for tonight?"

Gemma's eyes widened. "Invisible?" she repeated in a hushed voice.

Harry nodded and then brought out his Cloak from under his arm. "This is an Invisibility Cloak," he whispered seriously. "If you put it on then no one will be able to see you. You can sneak up on anyone's conversation and hear what they're saying without them knowing you're even there."

Gemma's eyes lit up as she smiled, greedily reaching for the Cloak.

Harry placed it in her hands but didn't let go as he looked her in the eye. "This Cloak is very special to me, my father left it to me, so I need you to take extra special care of it - and don't let anyone else use it or even see it, all right?"

Gemma nodded gravely and Harry knew she understood and that she would take care of his beloved Cloak.

"Don't take it outside but you're free to wander the house with it," Harry added, not wanting the Cloak to be dragged through the snow and slush.

"Thank you Harry," she replied, hugging the garment to her stomach, expression earnest. "I won't let anything happen to it."

"I know you won't," Harry replied with a smile. "Make sure you keep an eye out for me getting ready to leave later because I won't be able to find you."

Gemma giggled and nodded. She swung the Cloak around her tiny shoulders and everything south of her neck disappeared.

Harry grinned and reached out to flip the hood of the Cloak up over her head until not a trace of her could be seen. "Remember people can still bump into you, so stay out of their way or you'll be discovered - and no eavesdropping on me, okay?"

"Okay Harry," the disembodied voice replied cheerfully.

Harry straightened and listened to her shoes tap away on the hard flooring back towards the ballroom.

He chuckled and slipped his hands into his pockets as he also made his way back. He'd now solved the problem of where to keep his Cloak while he was at the party as well as giving his little friend something to keep her occupied with while her brother was showered with attention.
Harry stood in the doorway, idly watching the crowded room. He spotted Draco over with his parents at the far right side of the room, looking as though the three of them were having a somewhat serious conversation.

He hoped they weren't talking about his pregnancy because Gemma could be lurking nearby. He was fairly confident that they wouldn't discuss such a thing in a room full of people though. Being Nundu, they would be quite adept at keeping secrets.

Harry startled when something brushed against his neck and he turned to see a tall man he didn't recognise, apparently sniffing at his neck and invading his personal space in a way that instantly had him on edge.

"What are you doing?" Harry demanded with a frown, taking a step back.

The man, who looked to be in his forties, leered at him. "You smell delicious little Omega," he practically purred, looking drunk on Harry's scent. "I was hoping you would dance with me."

"No thank you," Harry quickly replied. "My Alpha wouldn't like it - and neither would I, for that matter."

The man's expression darkened and Harry felt his heart rate tick up in response.

"Harry, darling, you promised me a dance."

Harry nearly sighed in relief as Pansy suddenly appeared and grabbed him by the arm. She flashed a faux apologetic look back at the stranger as she dragged Harry away to the dance floor.

"You're welcome Potter," she smirked as she forcefully positioned Harry's arms around her and then nudged him to start dancing.

Harry smiled at her. "Thanks, you're a lifesaver. I hate dancing but it's worth it to be away from that handsy Alpha."

Pansy threw her head back and laughed. "You hate dancing because you're terrible at it Potter," she said, unashamedly taking the lead in their waltzing as she moved them across the floor amongst all the other couples. "You'd better get used to it because Draco loves dancing, all Purebloods do, and he will expect you to be presentable at your wedding."

Harry snorted. "Well I'm not a Pureblood and there isn't going to be a wedding."

Pansy narrowed her eyes. "You don't want to marry Draco?"

"I would if he asked but I don't think he's interested in marriage. I think Claiming me was enough for him. I really don't care either way."

Pansy narrowed her eyes disbelievingly. "I'll speak to him about it," she said decidedly. "He's just not thinking straight, which I meant to talk to you about," she continued blithely. "What is up with Draco lately? Are you keeping him up with wild animal sex every night or something? Because he looks completely worn out."

Harry almost replied with 'I wish' but wasn't about to get into a discussion about his sex life - or lack thereof - with Pansy Parkinson. He decided to go with just a few kernels of truth mixed in with deliberate evasion.

"No, he's just really worried about me getting attacked again and attaining high scores in his
N.E.W.T's," Harry replied smoothly. "All this stress is keeping him up nights. I'm about to demand some Dreamless Sleep from Pomfrey in order for him to get some proper rest."

Pansy nodded. "See that you do Potter. I worry about him - but don't tell him that."

Harry grinned. "I wouldn't dream of it Parkinson."

"That boy keeps too much to himself," she continued and then sighed. "All Slytherins do to an extent, but Draco in particular has made a nasty habit of it."

Harry also felt like sighing. "Yeah, I'm learning that," he said vaguely.

Pansy eyed him shrewdly. "I never would have thought I'd say this but, you're good for him Potter. You care about him but you also don't put up with his shit. He needs that."

Harry chuckled and then on a whim, spun Pansy out and back in before dipping her low as the last note of the violin faded away.

Pansy laughed in surprise and then smirked at him as he lifted her back up. "Nicely done Potter," she said, clapping along with everyone else as they applauded the string quartet. "Not bad for an Omega."

Harry snorted but didn't respond as he applauded the musicians, who nodded in acknowledgment before beginning the next piece.

Harry turned back to Pansy only to find Blaise suddenly standing in front of him.

"My turn," he said abruptly as he took Harry's hand for the next dance.

Pansy looked as though she was about to protest but another young man swooped in and asked her to dance.

"Don't do it Potter," she said over her shoulder before walking off with the smiling man.

Harry frowned and began to take a step back. "She's right, Draco wouldn't like it."

Blaise smirked and glanced over Harry's shoulder to the far side of the room. "I don't think he cares about much of anything right now Potter."

Harry turned and quickly spotted his mate sitting slouched over in a chair at the side of the room, head resting against the side of the armchair with eyes closed and lips slightly parted.

He was clearly fast asleep.

Blaise pulled Harry into his arms and began to dance before Harry could think of a response. He frowned at Blaise and decided to just allow the one dance and avoid making a scene.

"Just one dance Zabini," Harry warned.

"Of course," Blaise grinned triumphantly. "I do hope Malfoy isn't drooling over there, he'll be most embarrassed."

Harry glanced over at his Alpha with concern. "I'd wake him but really, he needs the rest."

"It's almost as though he's preoccupied with other things," Blaise said pointedly.
Harry turned back to face him, frown deepening.

"I noticed your faux pas with the champagne there Potter, I'm sure one little sip isn't going to-"

"Shh!" Harry hissed as they moved around the floor. He wasn't even really paying attention to what his body was doing as Blaise smoothly led him in the fast-paced waltz. "Don't say it."

"It's true though, isn't it?"

"I'm not telling you anything," Harry replied stiffly.

Blaise laughed. "I'm not an idiot Potter, I know."

"You're guessing," Harry shot back.

Blaise smiled and shrugged. "It's an educated guess - but I'll stop talking about it."

"Thank you." Harry hoped the song would be over soon, he didn't feel comfortable dancing with an Alpha who he knew was interested in him. Or at least, one that used to be interested in him - before the pregnancy. "I'm surprised you wanted to dance with me Zabini, I thought Alphas weren't interested in Omega's who are you-know-what."

Blaise arched a brow. "I'm not dancing with you because I want to shag you Potter, I just wanted to dance and make some of the other men jealous."

Harry relaxed a fraction. "Oh."

Blaise swung him around with a grin. "You're not that irresistible Potter."

Harry finally cracked a reluctant smile. "I'm hurt Zabini."

The Slytherin chuckled. "Knew you had a huge ego."

Harry laughed as Blaise spun him out and in, just as he'd done to Pansy.

Harry blinked, the spin suddenly making him a little dizzy.

Blaise paused, his smile replaced with a frown of concern. "You all right Potter?"

Harry's stomach churned and he quickly shook his head. "Just… just a little dizzy."

Blaise quickly took him by the arm and led him off the dance floor. "Come on, let's get you some fresh air."

Harry swallowed, keeping his eyes on the ground as he obediently followed Blaise through the room - which suddenly felt too crowded and too hot - and out through the glass doors to the huge stone patio.

There was a warming charm on the area but the air was still refreshingly cool on Harry's heated skin as he followed Blaise to one of the empty stone benches and sat down.

Blaise withdrew his wand and conjured a glass of cold water while Harry inhaled the frosty air deep into his lungs with relief.

"Thanks." Harry gratefully took the glass and gulped the cool liquid before handing it back. "Sorry about that."
Blaise vanished the empty glass and then waved his hand dismissively. "It's fine Potter. All jokes aside, you do need to take it easy for… for a while."

"For the next nine months?" Harry whispered with a wry smile.

Blaise smiled back. "Yeah, something like that."

"Well, I think I'm okay now." Harry exhaled determinedly and stood up - and then immediately buckled at the knees.

"Whoa!" Blaise quickly jumped in to put his arms around Harry, holding him upright. "Steady there Potter."

Harry blinked the spots from his vision, holding tight to Blaise's waist for balance.

"Silly Omega," Blaise murmured, pushing a few locks of hair back from Harry's forehead.

Harry swallowed and met Blaise's suddenly intense gaze. "Er…"

Unable to help himself, Blaise leaned in and inhaled Harry's neck before softly pressing his lips to the warm skin. "Salazer, you smell so good…"

Harry's heart jumped and his brain told him to push the Alpha away, but his body… his body was definitely saying something else as Blaise kissed his sensitive skin.

Harry couldn't hold in the breathy moan as Blaise's hand wandered down his back to cup his arse and bring his hips up into the solid line of Blaise's thigh. Harry flexed his hips against the firm muscle and was instantly hard.

Fuck, it had been so long since he'd been touched in this way and his body was craving it so fiercely; the desire overpowering any other rational thought. It was like sensory overload and he was instantly dizzy with want.

Blaise groaned as Harry started to rut against him, holding him tighter and pushing his own erection against any part of the delicious Omega that he could.

"More… please, more…" Harry gasped, groin throbbing and body lighting up from the inside.

Blaise ripped his mouth away from Harry's neck and swiftly pulled him around to the other side of the tall hedge next to the bench.

As soon as they were out of sight of the ballroom windows, Blaise lowered Harry to the snow-dusted ground and covered his body with his own.

Harry dazedly moaned his approval, his legs coming up to wrap around Blaise's hips as Blaise ground down into him, sliding the hard lines of their erections against each other.

Harry's body was singing its approval as Blaise's lips descended on his neck once more, causing him to writhe on the ground in bliss.

Blaise sat up, straddling Harry's thighs as he began to wrench at the zip on Harry's trousers.

"Yes…” Harry hissed in approval, voice sounding foreign to his own ears.

As soon as Blaise had Harry's trousers open, he shoved one hand down into his pants and wrapped his fingers around Harry's warm, hard shaft.
Harry arched up with a cry that was part pleasure and part unadulterated relief.

Blaise leaned down to mouth at Harry's neck again as he firmly stroked him with one hand.

"Fuck, Harry," he murmured against his skin. "I want you so much, want to make you come so hard…"

Harry closed his eyes and thrust up into Blaise's tight fist, moaning at the touch and the words; at this Alpha wanting his body so badly, wanting to give him such incredible pleasure. And Harry just wanted to take, take, take.

His body was screaming for it and had been for weeks.

"Oh Harry, I could come just from this," Blaise continued to murmur in an aroused stupor. "Wanted this for so long… Love you so much…"

Those three little words were like a bucket of ice water over the flames of Harry's arousal.

Harry's eyes flew open and his body stiffened, stopping its incessant thrusting. "Stop," he commanded, instantly horrified by his behaviour and what he'd been about to do, but his voice came out as a whisper and Blaise was too far gone to hear, or to even realise that Harry had stopped thrusting into his hand. "No - stop!" he demanded, voice quickly growing stronger as his head cleared and his body swiftly came back under his control.

Blaise frowned down at him in confusion, cheeks flushed and pupils dilated.

Harry felt a flicker of unease at the very strong hand that was still pinning him down by the shoulder. "Blaise," he said very firmly. "Let go of me."

Blaise's frown deepened as he slowly released Harry's quickly softening prick, but instead of moving off of him, he lay down more fully, keeping him in place with his body.

"But I know you want it Harry," he said, rolling his hips uncomfortably into Harry's flaccid cock. "I'll take care of you; clearly Malfoy isn't up to the task…"

Harry's unease quickly turned to anger. "Get off of me," he demanded, uncaring of how much noise he was making.

Blaise's confusion only seemed to grow. "You can't change your mind."

Harry's eyes widened in outrage. "I can do whatever the fuck I want with my body Zabini - now get off!"

Blaise's expression turned cross as he frowned, gaze hardening and losing some of its haziness, but Harry could see that he was still driven by his thick-headed Alpha nature.

"But you're an Omega," he said, frustrated and hard against Harry's hip. "You're made for this."

Harry's temper flared hotly and he jerked his body, trying to jostle the heavy Alpha off of him. He'd had just about enough of this. "Bollocks," he exclaimed furiously. "I don't want you to touch me."

Harry was ready for drastic measures, but he couldn't move his arms enough to get to the wand tucked into the waistband of his trousers. He practically growled in frustration. "Get the fuck off me!" he roared, vocal cords straining.

Blaise blinked, and Harry could see that his words may have finally started to register with the other
man.

Before Harry could say another word, Blaise was gone, and Harry was hit with a waft of cold air in his wake; as though a large bird had just flown over-top of him.

Harry scrambled to sit up and turned around.

Draco was on the ground, on top of Blaise, one hand on his throat and the other pointing a wand directly between his eyes, his face a mask of feral rage.

Harry zipped up his trousers as he hurriedly struggled to his feet and then ran over to kneel in the snow next to his mate. He wanted to place a hand on Draco's shoulder but was afraid of startling him and suffering the consequences of having Draco accidentally reacting violently.

"Draco, stop," he said quietly but firmly. "You don't want to hurt him."

"Like fuck I don't," Draco snarled, silver gaze locked on Blaise and hand tightening reflexively around his throat.

Blaise swallowed and was blinking rapidly, obviously coming out of his lust-filled haze to find this startlingly reality staring down at him.

"No, you don't," Harry repeated steadfastly. "It wasn't his fault. Well, not entirely."

"What does that mean?"

"Draco-" Blaise started hesitantly.

"No!" Draco shouted, pushing his hand further into Blaise's throat and causing him to choke off in surprise.

Harry gently wrapped his hands around Draco's forearm and eased the pressure a little, green eyes glued to Draco's intensely focussed expression. "Draco, look at me. Please?"

A muscle in Draco's cheek jumped as he stared down at Blaise before very slowly dragging his eyes away to look at Harry.

Harry nodded in encouragement, feeling as though he were convincing a man to back away from the edge of a cliff. He took a deep breath and let it out, stealing himself for what he had to tell his mate. "I encouraged him. I wanted him to touch me, and when I returned to my senses, it… it was hard for Blaise to stop."

Harry cringed at the absolute hurt that stared back at him from Draco's eyes.

It looked like a million thoughts were going through Draco's head as he dropped Harry's gaze and then eventually turned back to Blaise, still lying wide-eyed beneath him.

He eased up his hand around Blaise's throat but kept his wand in place.

"You weren't stopping when Harry asked you to," he finally said, tone low and heated.

"I… I know," Blaise stammered, swallowing. "I don't think I would have… I wouldn't have hurt him."

Draco's flinty eyes narrowed in warning. "You might have taken him against his will."
Blaise opened his mouth but didn't know what to say to that as he stared wordlessly back at his housemate.

The hurt was back in Draco's eyes as he finally lowered his wand and slowly rose to his feet. "You... you'll have to get better control of your emotions if you're to... to live with us."

Harry's eyes widened. "What? No! Draco, that isn't what this is."

Draco turned to him with a frown as Harry stumbled to his feet, panicked. Blaise remained where he was, watching the exchange in wary silence.

"But you wanted him," Draco said, frowning.

Harry swallowed and took a step towards his Alpha but Draco didn't look as though he wanted to be touched, so he stopped, hands dropping awkwardly to his sides.

"I... I was desperate for anyone's touch," Harry tried to explain, cheeks flushing in embarrassment. "These fucking pregnancy hormones or... or whatever they are, were driving me crazy and I needed some relief."

"Why wouldn't you just come to me?"

"I tried!" Harry exclaimed fervently. "You've been so tired and cross lately."

"If you had told me..." Draco trailed off and suddenly glanced at Blaise as though just realising he was still there. "You can go Zabini, this doesn't concern you any longer."

Blaise got to his feet in a hurry, looking relieved as he dusted the snow from his clothes.

"Oh and Zabini?" Draco added threateningly as Blaise made to leave. "If I ever find you near Harry again, I won't hesitate to use my wand."

Blaise held up his hands in surrender as he backed away. "No problem."

Harry stepped aside to let him pass, not making eye-contact, his sole focus was on his mate. "Draco, I'm so sorry," he said as soon as the other Slytherin was out of earshot.

Draco exhaled hard and ran a shaky hand through his snow-flecked hair. "Do you know how close I was to losing control Harry? I've never..." he trailed off, voice rough and uneven, the emotion tearing at Harry's heart. "I don't wish to discuss this right now," he said quietly, not meeting Harry's gaze. "Let's just go home."

"All right," Harry replied tentatively. He knew he wasn't solely to blame for what had happened; it was a culmination of weeks of over-wrought emotions and stress, but he couldn't help but feel guilty for the look of devastation on his mate's face.

Draco turned and strode past Harry without making eye-contact, and then he unexpectedly slowed to a stop and glanced over his shoulder.

Harry hesitantly stepped forward, taking ahold of the hand which Draco had extended back to him.
Chapter 22

Draco’s face was drawn and weary, grey eyes dull, as he led Harry through the throng of nattering guests to the exit, causing Harry's insides to twist sharply with guilt every time he caught a glimpse of his mate's expression.

Harry mostly kept his head down and gaze averted as they made their way across the large estate; not wanting to attract any attention to the two of them, or to the fact that they were leaving early.

He didn't wish to speak with anyone, he just wanted to get back to Hogwarts and be with his Alpha. The build-up of tension and worry over what Draco was thinking was reaching breaking point; he was actually beginning to fear what this might mean for the future of their relationship.

Yes Draco's behaviour had contributed to Harry's erratic emotions, but Harry was the one who'd acted inexcusably. He had done something he had never thought he would ever do to a partner; to someone he loved.

What if he'd inadvertently destroyed the trust his Alpha had in him? What if this incident caused Draco's feelings for him to change? Would he be left pregnant and alone?

Harry was so distracted by his thoughts that he barely noticed the trip back to Hogwarts; it seemed like they were outside the McDougall's home, walking through the softly falling snow, and then suddenly they were traipsing up the stairs to the third floor corridor.

They walked through the doors into their private room and Harry hovered by the door a moment, feeling twitchy and uneasy, wanting to blurt out something - anything - to fill the quiet, to begin to apologise for his betrayal, but the growing silence was making it harder and harder to start.

Draco carefully sat on the edge of their bed, gaze on his folded hands. He finally looked up to meet Harry's gaze.

Harry nervously licked his lips and waited, wondering if this was the moment Draco told him that it was over.

"Are you all right?" Draco eventually asked. "Did Zabini injure you?"

Harry shook his head, pulse thundering in his ears.

Draco nodded and looked down at his hands again. He sighed. "I'm sorry Harry."

Harry was so positive that Draco's apology was a regretful dismissal that tears immediately sprang into his eyes. He swiftly clenched his hands into fists, trying to keep the tears from spilling over by sheer will.

"I… I understand," Harry finally replied, trying his hardest to keep his voice steady.

Draco glanced up with a frown.

"What do you understand?" He straightened when he caught sight of Harry's glassy eyes. "Harry…?"

Harry quickly wiped his eyes on the sleeve of his good shirt as Draco stood and came to stand in front of him.
"He did hurt you," Draco concluded, eyes narrowing.

Harry let out a choked sort of noise that was half laugh, half sob, as he shook his head. "No, he didn't. I promise."

"Then what's going on?" Draco asked in concern. He paused and then asked, "are you that disappointed with me?"

"With you?"

"Yes, for… for driving you into the arms of another Alpha."

Harry frowned in bemusement. "But I… You…. So you're not breaking up with me?" he finally managed to get out.

Draco blinked, clearly taken aback. "Breaking up with you?" he repeated incredulously. "Harry, do you not have any idea how mateships work?"

"I… what?"

Draco reached out and gently stroked two fingers down the side of Harry's neck and over the Claiming Mark, brow furrowed as he absently watched the path his fingers took. "This isn't some sort of flippant teenage romance Potter; we're bonded. I've claimed you as my mate and… and this is for life. You have every right to choose another Alpha should you so wish to - and," he quickly stressed as Harry opened his mouth to interrupt, "although you said you're not interested in Blaise, or any another Alpha, it would never be something that would cause me to walk away from you. For fuck's sake, you're carrying my child."

Harry gave a somewhat wobbly smile as Draco's hand dropped to gently cover his abdomen. "I'm sorry I hurt you," Harry said sincerely, covering Draco's hand with his own. "I don't care what you say about Alphas and Omegas; it still couldn't have been easy when I told you what I'd done."

Draco swallowed but held his gaze. "No, it wasn't. But if I'm honest, it was easier to hear that than to believe that Zabini had forced himself on you. If Gemma hadn't alerted me to the situation, I would never have known."

And then Harry suddenly understood the extent of everything that had gone wrong. "You were asleep, weren't you? So you weren't able to sense that I was in danger."

Draco nodded, clearly pained to admit that he'd made such a grievous error.

Harry sighed and gave Draco's hand squeeze. "We need to learn to communicate better, don't we? If I'd just told you how I was feeling then this wouldn't have happened."

Draco took a step back, pulling Harry with him. "Come on, let's go shower and get into bed. I'd rather be comfortable for this conversation."

"Yeah, all right." Harry smiled, optimism seeping into his body and filling that hollow ache that had appeared when he'd thought Draco was leaving him.

He followed his Alpha to the ensuite and they both stripped out of their fine party attire. Harry stepped under the hot spray of the shower next to Draco with a sigh and they silently soaped each other up, and washed each other's hair, matching smiles of relief on their faces and lingering looks filled with contentment in between the fleeting touch of lips and gentle caress of fingers.
Harry knew taking a shower with Draco would have driven him crazy only a few hours ago, but now he was barely half-hard as Draco tenderly washed every inch of him. It seemed his mad hormones were finally giving him a bit of a reprieve after the emotional stress of the evening.

Draco turned off the shower and they both towelled off before climbing into bed. Harry adored this part of the day; when he and Draco got into bed and talked, or fucked, or slept in a tangled mess of warm limbs. He thought it was the absolute best part of being bonded to someone.

"I'm sorry I'm too tired for anything more," Draco said quietly as they settled on their sides, facing each other.

Harry couldn't help smiling as he linked his hand with his mate's. "That's okay; I'm actually not in the mood for anything more tonight anyway."

"I'm going to start taking Dreamless Sleep," Draco abruptly declared with determination. "I know I'm being foolish and that you're not in any danger in our bedroom, and even if something were to come up, you can handle yourself. I just... can't seem to explain that to my more protective side."

"Good," Harry responded with relief. "We'll speak to Madam Pomfrey tomorrow. Do you think you'll need one tonight? I can get Kreacher to fetch one for you."

"No, I think I'll sleep tonight no matter what. Just promise not to leave our room if you wake before me?"

"Of course," Harry agreed, and then his lips stretched into a grin. "Believe me, I'll want to be right here," he said, patting the mattress, "once you've had a good night's sleep. I'm sure my crazy hormones will be back to normal come morning."

Draco smirked in response but he was beginning to look a little drowsy again, now that the immediate unrest had been resolved.

"Did you and your father talk after your mum and I left the Manor?"

Draco absently plumped the pillow under his head as he replied. "Yes, a little."

Harry raised his brow. "Anything you want to tell me about?"

"No." Draco smirked as he settled back down again. "But sufficed to say, I soon came to the realisation that as I was agreeing with my father, I was probably in the wrong."

Harry chuckled.

Draco's light-hearted expression suddenly faded. "You don't really believe I don't want this baby, do you?"

Harry winced with guilt at his mate's words. "I'm sorry I insinuated that in front of your parents. I know that's not true."

Draco exhaled, looking relieved, before turning onto his back and sliding an arm around Harry's shoulders. He pulled Harry in to curl around him, his dark head coming to rest on Draco's warm chest.

The last of Harry's lingering tension left his body on a sigh as he settled comfortably against his Alpha.
"I was so sure that you were going to leave me," Harry confessed into the quiet.

"Never."

Harry smiled against Draco's warm skin, hearing the smirk in his mate's voice. "Good, because no one else will want this daft pregnant Omega."

"Are you joking? A pregnant male Omega is like taking Amortentia."


"Yes and then he proceeded to get into your pants, so I doubt he was being completely honest Potter."

"Oh." Harry realised the truth of his Alpha's words as soon as he heard them.

Draco's chest rumbled under his ear as he chuckled at Harry's naiveté.

"Shut it," Harry responded around a grin. "I'm still learning about all this Alpha and Omega stuff."

A kiss pressed into his shower-damp hair was the only apology he was going to get.

Harry's thoughts began to flit back over the evening as he lay there. He frowned as something Draco mentioned in passing drifted to the forefront of his mind.

"Hey, did you say Gemma was the one to tell you what was going on? What did she see exactly?"

He desperately hoped she hadn't witnessed his shameful infidelity.

Draco stroked a warm hand down Harry's back when he'd unconsciously stiffened with unease. "All she saw was you shouting at Blaise who had you pinned to the ground. I don't believe she witnessed anything more than that." He paused. "Then she said something odd; she said she knows she wasn't supposed to go outside, but you looked ill so she thought you were leaving the party and followed."

Harry gasped and bolted upright. "Fuck, she still has my Cloak!"

Draco blinked up at him. "Your Invisibility Cloak?"

Harry nodded, swiping a hand through his damp hair in agitation. "Yeah, I lent it to her to have some fun with during the party. With everything that happened I just... I forgot." Harry shook his head, irritated by his absentmindedness. "I didn't even remember it when we left, how could I be so careless? I'm not supposed to be walking around in public without it. Your father will kill me if he finds out."

Draco snorted and reached out to tug Harry back down to him. "I won't tell him if you don't Potter."

Harry settled back into place with an exasperated sigh. "I suppose I'll just have to owl her about it tomorrow."

The two fell silent and Harry could feel Draco's breathing begin to even out and his heart rate slowing beneath his cheek.

Harry wasn't the least bit tired but he knew Draco desperately needed a good night's sleep, so he remained silent, staring up at the canopy over their bed and listening to the soothing sound of his mate finally getting some vital rest.
Harry woke with a gasp, eyes flying open and body jerking at the unexpected sensation of something warm and wet enveloping his morning hard-on.

Harry looked down to see Draco staring back at him, lips forming a smirk around his flushed erection.

Harry's head instantly dropped back onto the pillow with a moan, hips involuntarily twitching up into his mate's mouth.

He was fully hard now; cock suddenly throbbing with the need for release, and his body was throbbing with ecstasy at being presented with this long-desired attention from his Alpha.

It had been so long and he needed this so much that he knew he wasn't going to last.

Harry moaned and panted and arched his neck as he lost himself in the sensation of Draco's tongue gliding up his shaft, lightly swirling around the trembling head, and then running back down again, Draco's hand all the while grasping the base and moving in time with his wonderful mouth.

Harry arched off the bed, hands clamping down around fistfuls of sheets as he was, rather swiftly, brought to the edge of orgasm.

"Draco..." Harry gasped as his legs quivered and his hips continued to thrust between his Alpha's lips.

Draco moaned in response, the vibrations sending added jolts of pleasure shooting throughout Harry's body.

Draco began to suck in earnest and, as soon as he slid one spit-slickened finger into Harry's arse, Harry's whole world exploded in a shower of sparks that seemed to nearly blind him for a moment.

Harry groaned as he emptied himself down Draco's more than willing throat, his cock pulsing between Draco's lips as the Slytherin swallowed greedily.

Harry collapsed back onto the bed, breathing hard, eyes closed and body languid and utterly sated.

Draco sat up, licking his lips and smirking in amusement at his mate. "Well that had to be some kind of record Potter."

Harry smiled tiredly, eyes remaining closed. "I told you I was getting desperate. Believe me; I'll be wanting that again in about an hour."

Draco snickered and crawled up Harry's body, half draping himself across his mate.

"Oof! You're heavy," Harry complained half-heartedly as he slowly opened his eyes and fixed his Alpha with an ineffectual glare.

"Tough shit," Draco retorted with a grin. He absently ran a hand up Harry's side and then over his stomach, grey eyes tracking the movement. "Hey, I think you're actually starting to show."

Harry glanced down and saw that his mate was right; there was a small but noticeable swell to his
previously lean stomach. "I look bloated," he observed.

Draco snorted and continued to lightly run the tips of his fingers over the distinctive baby bump.

Harry's frown turned into a fond smile as he watched him. Despite Draco's seemingly cool and indifferent exterior, he really was quite sentimental at heart. He was going to make a brilliant father.

Draco's hand stilled over Harry's stomach and he suddenly looked up at him through pale blond lashes. "We need to get to breakfast or we'll miss it, so if you could just take care of this for me…" he drawled, suggestively pushing his neglected erection into Harry's thigh with a smirk.

Harry laughed and obediently maneuvered himself over his mate's sprawled body in order to return the favour.

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Harry sat at the Gryffindor table with his mate, absently scrawling a quick note to Gemma to ask if she - along with a guardian - could meet him in Hogsmeade to return his Cloak. He didn't trust the Cloak to be delivered by owl post or by any other means. He even offered to take Gemma to Honeyduke's to sweeten the deal; so to speak.

"How was the party?" Hermione asked as she poured herself a cup of tea with one hand and opened her Advanced Arithmancy text with the other.

"It was… unpleasant," Draco pronounced coolly, causing Harry to glance up from his letter writing.

Hermione instantly allowed her book to fall closed again, attention captured. "How so?"

Harry absently chewed the end of his quill, curious about how much his mate would divulge.

"Let's just say that taking a male Omega to a large party is not conducive to a relaxing evening."

"Ah…" Hermione's frown cleared as she nodded in understanding. "And would this have anything to do with Blaise Zabini?" she added in a hushed tone.

Harry started. "How did you know?"

"Well that answers that," Ron interjected wryly, a heaped spoon of hot porridge pausing halfway to his mouth as he grinned at Harry.

Harry flushed, realising his blunder. He glanced at Draco and his mate just shook his head at him with a smile that was more affectionate than exasperated.

"I would have worked it out on my own anyway," Hermione interrupted with a dismissive wave of her hand, "since he rather suddenly decided to leave Hogwarts."

Harry and Draco both turned to her in surprise.

Ron nodded in confirmation. "Yeah, the Slytherins were telling everyone that Zabini announced last night that he would be leaving to continue his education elsewhere."

"Did he say why?" Harry asked apprehensively.
"No." Hermione shook her head. "Complete mystery. Until now."

"Let's keep it that way, shall we?" Draco said, quiet yet firm, eyes calmly on his toast as he spread a healthy layer of marmalade over the melting butter.

"Sure no problem," Ron agreed, mouth full of porridge. "Always thought he was a bit of a wanker anyway."

Draco snorted in amusement but Harry couldn't help but feel a flicker of sympathy for Blaise. He may have been annoyingly persistent but he'd also confessed to being in love with Harry. Maybe it was just Harry's Omega hormones that had caused Blaise to think he was in love with him but it had probably felt real to the Alpha.

Harry noticed Hermione watching him and quickly returned to his letter, not really wanting to get into it over breakfast.

The four finished eating and prepared to head off to their first class of the day. Harry slipped his finished letter into his pocket and made a mental note to visit the owlery in between classes.

. . . .

Harry awoke the next morning and blinked at the shadowed underside of their four poster bed, wondering why he was awake so early.

He turned his head to look over at his mate and what he saw made him smile. Draco was fast asleep; little puffs of air escaping from between his parted lips and ruffling his blond fringe where it hung softly over one eye. His expression was serene and at peace, no worry lines creasing his pale skin as had almost become the norm since the start of Harry's pregnancy.

Draco had taken his first Dreamless Sleep Potion last night and it had obviously done the trick.

Harry turned onto his side, intending to snuggle in closer to his mate while he waited for Draco to wake, but an abrupt lurch in his gut had him suddenly sitting upright and then bolting for the loo.

Harry pushed the toilet seat up as he dropped to his knees on the cold floor and proceeded to empty the contents of his stomach into the porcelain bowl.

Once the heaving of his stomach subsided, Harry lowered his forehead onto his arm and closed his eyes, exhaling shakily. His stomach was still churning a little and he didn't want to move in case he triggered another bout of vomiting.

A weary smile of wry amusement tugged at his lips as he pressed his warm forehead against the cool skin of his arm; he'd prematurely thought this pregnancy thing was going to be easy but it looked like morning sickness had finally found him.

He took a few more steadying breaths before opening his eyes once more. It seemed his stomach was content enough not to induce any further retching for the moment, so he reached up with one hand and flushed the toilet before carefully rising to his feet.

He slowly padded back into the bedroom, on legs that were only slightly unsteady, and climbed in between the warm blankets beside his softly snoring Alpha.
Harry lay on his back and placed a gentle hand over his protruding stomach as he stared down at the soft curve of his belly. He rubbed soothing circles over his bump, hoping to ease the lingering nausea.

"Harry?"

Harry turned to see grey eyes blinking sleepily at him. "Hey, you're awake," Harry observed with a smile. "How are you feeling?"

Draco stretched his arms over his head with a jaw-cracking yawn. "Much improved," he eventually replied as he turned onto his side, pulling Harry's pliant body back against him and throwing a proprietary leg over his. He nuzzled into Harry's dark hair with a contented sound. "Thank you for staying even though…"

"Yes?" Harry prodded when Draco trailed off inexplicably.

Draco sat up and stared down at him with narrowed eyes. "Why do you smell like you've been sick Potter?"

"Oh." Harry blew out a puff of air. "Because I was; morning sickness has reared its ugly head."

"And I slept through it?" Draco replied, sounding troubled.

Harry rolled his eyes and sat up next to him. "Don't be stupid, there's no need for you to be with me, and you need proper sleep more than I need someone to hold my hand while I throw up."

Draco nodded, grudgingly conceding the point. "But you're all right now?" he asked, just to make sure.

Harry smiled and nodded. "Yes, I think I just need to eat something."

Draco's gaze flicked down to where Harry still had one hand resting over his stomach. "Then let's get you some breakfast mummy," he said with a smirk.

Harry rolled his eyes at him as he slid out of bed and walked to the wardrobe.

"What are we going to call each other?" Harry pondered aloud, pulling on his charcoal grey trousers and then frowning a little as he struggled to button them.

Draco shot him a smirk as he slipped his arms into a crisp white shirt. "You mean you don't wish for me to refer to you as 'the mother'?"

"No," Harry retorted with a glare. "I may be giving birth to our child but that does not make me female."

Draco snickered as he turned back to his dressing. "All right, you can be daddy - to the both of us."

Harry let out a surprised bark of laughter and threw a balled up sock at his wicked mate.

"Seriously, does it matter Potter?"

Harry shrugged as he buttoned his crumpled school shirt. "It could get confusing."

"We could be really progressive parents and have our children address us by our first names."

Harry snorted and shook his head. "I don't think so Malfoy. How about you be father and I'll be
dad?"

"If you like," Draco replied indulgently.

Harry smirked at him as he fastened his black school cloak around his shoulders. "It's because you're a posh bastard and I'm not."

"I didn't ask."

Harry laughed and threw his other sock.

The two eventually made their way down to breakfast, where Harry ate his way through a stack of dry toast; too scared to eat anything else in case it came back up again.

He flashed Draco a grateful smile when his Alpha passed him a cup of tea, which upon tasting, turned out to be peppermint to help settle his stomach.

Having a Potions expert as a mate was turning out to be more beneficial than Harry could have imagined; Draco seemed to know absolutely everything about different types of herbs and exotic ingredients, and which combinations would be beneficial and which would make you ill.

By mid-morning Harry's nausea had completely disappeared, but unfortunately that meant his hormones then decided he was well enough to attend to his other needs. Trying to concentrate in class in a fairly potent state of arousal was nearly impossible, especially with Harry sharing every class with his Alpha on Mondays; the close proximity in combination with maintaining proper class decorum was driving him spare.

Draco kept sending him suspicious glances all throughout Potions, which was not helping matters.

His Alpha seemed to be aware of his predicament and Harry wasn't sure if Draco found it funny or irritating…

Until he shoved Harry through the door of an empty classroom as soon as Potions let out.

Harry let out an undignified yelp of surprise as Draco yanked him inside and then pushed him up against the closed door with a satisfied growl, grey eyes gleaming.

Harry swallowed; his arousal quickly hitting new heights at the look in his mate's eyes. "So… you knew I was-"

"Yes Potter," Draco hissed, eyes narrowing. His lips twitched into a minute smirk before he leaned in and kissed him. Thoroughly.

Harry moaned, his school bag dropping to the stone floor as he wrapped his arms around Draco in response. He leaned back against the door, hips arching up into Draco's as he tilted his head to one side and opened his mouth to him.

Merlin, this was exactly what he needed.

"Yes," Harry gasped in approval as Draco moved his mouth down the side of his neck and latched onto the Claiming Mark; sucking and lightly scraping his teeth over it in a very possessive manner. "Fuck… Want you so much…"

Draco groaned in response, pushing the hard length of his erection against Harry's over and over again. He moved his mouth back to Harry's lips, tasting him thoroughly. "Mine…" he whispered
intensely. "You're mine Harry Potter."

Harry moaned, knees nearly buckling beneath him. "Yes," he agreed, catching Draco's bottom lip between his teeth and tugging. "Yours…"

Harry pulled away and latched onto Draco's arm, quickly pulling him along behind him towards the vacant professor's desk.

Draco arched a brow but didn't question him.

Harry withdrew his wand and quickly locked the door and threw a Silencing Charm at it for good measure. He turned back to his Alpha and then took Draco by the shoulders and pushed him back into the high-backed chair next to the desk.

Harry smirked at him as he began to unbuckle his trousers.

"What are you…?"

"I need you naked from the waist down Malfoy," Harry ordered as he stepped out of his trousers and began to toe off his shoes.

"Yes sir." Draco grinned and quickly complied, not needing to be told twice.

Harry's pupils dilated and his mouth watered at the sight of Draco's erect cock as the blond sat back and began to lazily stroke himself with one hand, hooded gaze on his Omega, waiting for Harry's next move.

Harry wandlessly conjured some warm oil into his hand and then kneeled in front of Draco, face level with his impressive erection. He reached out with his oiled hand and began to cover Draco's rigid shaft with the substance, running his hand up the length of it and then circling around the exposed head, then back down to fondle his bollocks, skin becoming slick beneath his touch as he thoroughly smeared the area with oil.

Draco's head tipped back and his hands clenched around the sides of the chair as he moaned in response.

Harry thought he was going to burst at the utterly gorgeous sight laid out before him: Draco looking completely debauched as he sprawled back half-naked in the chair, blond hair ruffled and cheeks flushed, breath coming in fast pants between parted lips which he kept licking every few seconds to moisten, grey eyes locked on Harry's hand as he slowly lubricated him.

Harry swallowed and hastily wrapped his oiled hand around his own prick, quickly spreading the last of it over himself before standing and placing a knee on either side of Draco on the chair.

He hovered over Draco's lap while his mate stared up at him expectantly. Harry smiled; feeling uncharacteristically seductive as he slowly took Draco's hand and guided it to his Alpha's cock, encouraging him to hold himself steady.

Draco swallowed as Harry placed a hand on each armrest and slowly began to lower himself onto his thick cock. Draco watched, transfixed, as Harry very, very gently began to loosen the rim of his arse with little pulsing pushes, allowing just the spongy slick tip of Draco's erection to press into his hole a little and then drawing away again before repeating this over and over again, allowing his arse to adjust to the intrusion slowly.

Harry's eyes fluttered closed as he continued; the firm broad push of his Alpha sliding inside just that
little bit was oh-so-good. His arms and thighs began to tremble as he held himself up, but it was
worth it.

He opened his eyes again and looked at Draco as he went a little lower, a little deeper. Draco's grey
gaze was glued to where his body joined with Harry's, where he was actually inside his mate; that
pinkened rim swallowing him up and squeezing in all the right places.

Draco's hands snapped to Harry's hips as Harry suddenly sank all the way down in one motion.

They both groaned under their breath at the sensation.

"Fuck… you're so tight…" Draco uttered in a wrecked voice.

"It's… been awhile," Harry replied faintly, wriggling in place; revelling in Draco's warmth and the
wiry feel of his pubic hair pressed against his skin. He felt so full and so perfect. He'd missed this; the
physical and emotional connection of their mateship.

"If you don't move soon Potter, I will hex you," Draco threatened between clenched teeth.

Harry emitted a sound suspiciously similar to a whimper as Draco involuntarily flexed up into him.

"Plus… we'll be… late… for class…" Harry panted brokenly as he rose up, Draco's cock sliding
nearly all the way out. Harry purposely squeezed around the tip and then dropped back down in one
fluid movement.

Draco moaned long and loud, hands clenching on Harry's hips.

Harry levelled Draco with a penetrating stare as he began to ride his Alpha at a faster pace, watching
as pleasure flickered across Draco's flushed face and strong hands tightened reflexively on Harry's
hips, encouraging his fast, undulating movements.

Harry was breathing fairly hard by this point, fringe stuck to his damp forehead as he pushed himself
up and down over and over again. He desperately wanted to take himself in hand but he had to keep
his hands on the chair's arm rests for leverage.

Draco seemed to read his mind as he suddenly moved one hand from Harry's hip to firmly wrap
around his swollen prick, which was bobbing luridly in time with his movements.

Harry made a keening noise in the back of his throat as Draco squeezed his hand. Harry raised
himself up, his oiled shaft thrusting smoothly through Draco's fist, and then lowered back down, his
mate's cock filling him brilliantly from below.

He altered his angle slightly and suddenly Draco was hitting that fucking perfect spot inside of him
that seemed to light up his entire body and it was almost too much; too many sensations and too
good…

Harry moaned, hands slippery with sweat as he gripped the armrests, uncaring of his knees pressing
uncomfortably into the wooden chair beneath him.

"Harry… fuck, I'm close…" Draco rasped, closing his eyes as though he couldn't watch any longer
without coming.

That last thought caused Harry's arousal to spike and everything south of his waist to tighten;
teetering on the edge of orgasm.
"Yes…" Harry hissed, increasing his pace and causing his Alpha to groan. "I want you to. Want to see you come….

Draco growled low in his throat and wanked Harry fervently, twisting his hand over the head of Harry's prick, attempting to coax his orgasm from him in swift, firm strokes; just the way he knew Harry liked.

Harry gasped and moaned and clenched around his mate as his bollock tightened, preparing to spiral into an orgasm that he could feel coming on like a freight train.

Draco suddenly jerked beneath him, both hands flying to Harry's hips and tightening almost painfully, holding him in place, while he thrust up into him once, twice, and then a third time, finally freezing in place as he cried out.

Harry moaned at the feel of Draco's cock pulsing inside him, flooding him with warmth. He hurriedly wrapped his own hand around his cock and quickly finished himself off with firm, brisk strokes, eyes locked on Draco's expression.

With a low moan, Harry came all over his hand as well as Draco's chest; painting his pale skin in stripes of sticky white.

Harry collapsed forward with a gasp, arms braced on Draco's shoulders and damp forehead pressed to his mate's.

The only sound in the empty classroom was the sound of their heavy breathing as they came down off such an intense and gratifying high.

Harry swallowed and opened his eyes. "That was rather… intense," he commented weakly.

Draco's mouth flickered with a faint smirk, arms tightening around Harry as he placed a soft kiss to the corner of his lips.

Harry smiled in response and sat back. "We're late," he said with an unconcerned glance towards the door, the noise of the corridor blocked by the Silencing Charm.

"I think we can skive off History of Magic - just this once."

Harry was about to nod in agreement when his stomach suddenly rumbled ominously.

"Are you unwell again?" Draco immediately asked, his playful expression turning concerned. "Was I too rough?"

Harry laughed and shook his head. "No, you were perfect. I'm just hungry," he assured. "I didn't really have much to eat at breakfast."

Draco breathed out in relief and then smiled. "All right, let's hit up the kitchens instead of attending class."

"Deal." Harry grinned and carefully extricated himself from the warm comfort his mate's lap, the promise of food spurring him into action.

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Harry shivered as the Notice-Me-Not charm trickled down over his body in a cool wash of magic.

Hermione nodded in satisfaction as the concealment charm took effect. "That will have to do until we get your Cloak back Harry. Now no one will see you unless they know you're there.

"Thanks." Harry slipped his gloved hand back into his mate's as Draco stood beside him just inside the Hogwart's gates. "You know, people will recognise Draco and then assume I'm there anyway," he pointed out as they started walking.

Harry had received Gemma's reply, agreeing to meet in Hogsmeade on Saturday, and of course Draco wasn't about to let him to go on his own, and then Ron and Hermione wanted to join them for added protection, as well as to do some Christmas shopping, and then somehow Pansy Parkinson weaseled her way into the group as soon as she heard the word 'shopping.'

So that's how such a motley crew of Slytherins and Gryffindors came to be walking through the thick snow to Hogsmeade on that bright and crisp winter's day. The mood was decidedly cheerful amongst them despite the threat of danger hanging over Harry's head, it had been such a long time since any sighting or mention of his attackers that it was beginning to feel like a distant memory; one that was beginning to feel more and more distant and less and less imminent.

The little town of Hogsmeade was already fully decorated for the holiday season, and the sight never failed to fill Harry with a warmth that felt like home; like sitting by the fire with a large cup of hot chocolate.

Christmas, before he'd found out that he was a wizard and before Hogwarts, had always been awful; he'd even come to resent the holiday season. He always had more chores to do around the house in preparation for guests and dinner parties, and at the same time, he had to watch his cousin get more gifts than he could handle - or appreciate - while Harry didn't receive anything. Sometimes he would get a pair of old socks or a toothbrush in a colour that Dudley had rejected at some point.

Worse than any of that though, was the fact that he also had to spend more time locked away in his cupboard or in the second bedroom upstairs in order to keep his existence a secret from the majority of his aunt and uncle's friends.

Harry firmly pushed those memories aside as he took in the fairy lights glittering merrily from every shop window in Hogsmeade and strung around the bushes of the high street gardens.

Thankfully, Hogwarts and the Weasley family had shown him what Christmas should be like, and Harry had slowly begun to look forward to the holiday season as he grew older and began to accumulate things to be thankful for. And next year, he would get to teach his own child about Christmas.

This year would be his first Christmas with his mate, and next year… well next year would be their first official Christmas as a family.

"I'd remove your hand if I were you Potter; you're being a bit obvious."

Harry blinked out of his sentimental reverie and looked at Draco in bemusement.

The blond pointedly looked down to where Harry had unconsciously placed his hand over his stomach in a very affectionate, expectant mother sort of way.

Harry flushed and quickly removed it. "Bugger," he muttered under his breath.

Draco smirked and leaned in close to his mate's ear. "You're lucky we put that charm on you," he
whispered, grey eyes glancing around to see if anyone on the street had taken notice as their small group strolled up the snow-covered footpath.

Harry followed his Alpha's gaze to scan the Saturday morning shoppers. "Sorry," he finally murmured back when it didn't appear as though anyone was looking at them. "I didn't even notice I was doing it. What?"

Draco was gazing at him with a sad look in his eyes. His mate shook his head and stared straight ahead of them again. "I hate that you have to hide it, that this whole experience is tainted because of them," he growled under his breath.

Harry nodded, fully understanding his Alpha's frustration and sorrow. "Hopefully the Aurors find them soon," was all he said in reply, dropping his head onto Draco's shoulder and giving his hand a squeeze.

"Ugh! Would you two stop being so bloody nauseating?" Pansy exclaimed with a roll of her eyes as she pushed her way in between the two mates, her long dark hair flowing in the breeze from underneath a pair of white fuzzy earmuffs. Hermione narrowed her eyes at Pansy while Ron just shook his head in amusement. "Now," Pansy continued, unperturbed, as she slipped her arm through Draco's. "I am taking Draco Christmas shopping with me while you three Gryffindors do… whatever it is Gryffindors do. We can meet up for lunch at the Three Broomsticks in two hours, yes?"

"I am not-"

"Oh for Salazer's sake Draco," Pansy interrupted tetchily before Draco could finish protesting. "Your Omega is under a concealment charm which will work a lot better if you two split up. If people see you, they will automatically look for Potter, and then this will all be for naught. Potter will be perfectly safe with those two until we meet up in a couple of hours."

Harry could see the warring of emotions occurring behind his Alpha's cool façade. He hoped Draco would agree so that he could purchase Draco's Christmas gift without him seeing.

"Harry?" Draco asked, turning to his mate and clearly not wanting to make a decision on this himself.

Harry shrugged nonchalantly. "It's fine with me. We're going straight to Honeyduke's to get my Cloak, so I'll be completely hidden after that."

Draco sighed and then nodded. "Pansy does have a point; people will assume you're with me if they see me. You'll have much better luck blending in without me next to you. Are you sure you're all right with this though?"

Harry smiled. "Yeah, I'll be fine. Ron and Hermione will take good care of me," he teased. "Besides, what could happen in two hours?"

Pansy began to drag Draco off up the street before he could change his mind - or comment on Harry's words, which seemed rather like a bad omen.

Ron laughed as he came up beside Harry, Hermione stepping up to his left, unconsciously flanking him on either side as they watched Draco walk off up the street with Pansy.

"She is really bossy," Ron commented, breath coming out as white mist in the cold air.

Harry grinned; having come to appreciate her brash personality. "Yeah, she is."
"I do believe you've been hanging out with those Slytherins a bit much Harry," Hermione concluded, and Harry wasn't sure if she was joking or not. "Come on," she continued, tearing her eyes away from the two refined Purebloods strolling up the street arm in arm. "Let's go get your Cloak so that I can relax."

"Yeah mate, I wouldn't want to suffer Malfoy's wrath if we lost you," Ron added in an undertone as they started making their way towards Honeyduke's. "Now that he's an Alpha, he can be really scary."

Harry snorted. "And when have you seen him scary?"

Ron shrugged and jammed his hands into his cloak pockets as he dodged an elderly gentlemen in a dark purple cloak. "He's just really intense when it comes to you."

"And he's given us enough threatening speeches about keeping you safe when he's not around that I'm surprised I'm not having nightmares," Hermione added, hiding a grin in her woollen collar.

"Are you serious?" Harry asked, hoping Draco wasn't being unduly excessive about his role as Alpha when Harry wasn't around.

"It's fine," Hermione said, giggling. "He thanked us for looking out for you as well."

"And apologised for being a git in the past," Ron admitted charitably.

Harry's brows rose in disbelief. "He did? He never told me that," he said in surprise.

"It was bloody awkward," Ron said with a shrug.

"But appreciated just the same," Hermione inserted favourably.

Harry smiled to himself as they approached the bright yellow and blue shopfront of Honeyduke's; coloured bits and bobs sparkling and emitting smoke in the large window, the enticing aroma of vanilla and sugar and toffee wafting out with the patrons as they opened and closed the door with the merry jingle of the bell.

Harry glanced around the street as they approached the door and suddenly spied a familiar blond head standing on the other side of the road, watching them. Pansy was occupied with looking into a shop window and Draco was clearly keeping an eye on Harry and his group until they entered the shop.

Harry acknowledged his mate's presence with a shake of his head and a wry smile. He caught Draco's answering smirk as Hermione opened the door at his back and held it open. Harry turned and walked inside ahead of Ron, the warm air and wonderful smells enveloping him like a cosy hug.

Harry spotted Gemma over by a vibrant display of Turkish Delight, her kind grandfather standing next to her, smiling dotingly as she pointed out her favourite flavours.

"Over there," Harry said, pointing out the little girl whom his friends had yet to meet.

The trio walked through the shop with ease; it wasn't a Hogsmeade weekend for the rest of the school so the popular sweets shop wasn't as crowded as it normally would have been.

"Hullo Gemma," Harry greeted with a smile when the little girl turned to see the trio come up behind her.
"Harry!" Gemma squealed and threw her arms around Harry's middle, startling him.

Her grandfather chuckled and shook his head. "I'm afraid she has already had her fair share of lollies and is a little… overexcited."

Harry laughed and hugged her in return. "These are my best friends," he said, kneeling down to her level and pointing to Ron and Hermione. "This is Ron Weasley."

"And Hermione Granger," Gemma finished for him with a roll of her eyes. "Everyone knows who they are Harry; they're as famous as you."

"Did you hear that 'Mione?" Ron exclaimed with a grin. "We're as famous as the great Harry Potter!"

Hermione just shook her head, but was having trouble hiding her amusement; lips twitching dangerously.

Harry laughed as he straightened and shook Stuart Goodfellow's hand in greeting.

"Good to see you again Mr. Potter."

"You too Mr. Goodfellow."

Mr. Goodfellow plucked a cloth bag up from off of the floor and passed it to Harry. "Your Cloak my boy."

Harry took the bag and hugged it to his chest. "Thank you for bringing this to me," he said sincerely, glancing at Gemma to include her in his appreciation. "I would be heartbroken if I lost it. Thank you for taking care of it for me."

"I'm sorry I took it outside," Gemma said quietly, expression turning contrite.

Harry quickly shook his head. "No, you did the right thing Gemma." He smiled. "You were quite the hero, if I'm not careful, I'll be out of a job."

Gemma giggled and Harry grinned at her, relieved to see that she wasn't harbouring any lingering guilt over it.

"In fact, I owe you a treat," he added. "If that's all right with your grandfather, of course. He might think you've had enough."

Gemma turned to Mr. Goodfellow with wide imploring eyes - and who could resist that?

Her grandfather chuckled. "Yes, you may choose one more sweet with Mr. Potter, just don't tell your mother."

"Yes!" Gemma crowed, grabbing onto Harry's hand and dragging him off to a lurid pink section of the shop, leaving the others behind.

"Honeyduke's Caramel and Sea Salt Fudge," Harry read off of the pink and green box that Gemma reverently picked up with both hands.

"These are my favourite," she explained.

"Good choice."
"I know."

Harry laughed and led the way up to the front counter to pay for it. He spotted Ron loading up on his own stock of sweets to take back to Hogwarts while Hermione trailed after him, attempting to talk him out of buying quite so much.

It was good to see that some things never changed; despite going through a war or pairing off with their chosen mates, some things - like Ron gorging himself on sugary treats - could be relied upon to stay the same no matter what.

Harry counted out one Galleon, three sickles and thirteen knuts to the cashier, who appeared a little star-struck to be serving Harry Potter.

Harry ignored her shaking hands and smiled kindly when he took the purchased box of fudge. "Thank-you," he said before turning back to Gemma to hand over the pink and green box.

"Thank-you Harry!" she said elatedly. "Would you like one?"

Harry accepted the small square of toffee-coloured fudge while he waited for Ron to pay for his purchases.

Afterwards, Harry bid farewell to Gemma and her grandfather, promising to see them again at Christmas.

The trio left the warmth of the shop behind and walked back outside. They ducked into the closest side street and Harry donned his Invisibility Cloak.

"Where to now Harry?" Hermione asked the air where her friend had just been standing.

"I need to get Draco a present while he's not around, but I have no idea what to get," he lamented.

"Clothing?" Hermione suggested, pursing her lips.

Ron scoffed. "Harry isn't equipped to make those kinds of decisions for Malfoy."

"Hey!" Harry exclaimed, affronted.

"What about a scarf or something?" Hermione persisted. "Or perhaps a hat?"

"Have you ever seen Malfoy in a hat 'Mione?" Ron replied sceptically.

Harry sighed. "I think I could manage to pick out a nice scarf but, it just doesn't seem like enough…"

"You're looking for something expensive?"

"Not necessarily," Harry replied, beginning to feel a little stressed over the decision. It was their first Christmas together and he wanted it to be memorable.

"Don't worry Harry, when you see it you'll know," Hermione assured him. "How about we just try a few different shops and look at everything?"

Harry nodded and then remembered that they couldn't see him. "Yeah, all right."

Their first stop was The Paper Hound and Harry slipped into the nearest row of books to remove his Cloak. He tucked it under one arm and began to wander the shop; the faint scent of dust and ancient paper assaulting his senses.
Harry smiled to himself as he remembered that this was the site of his first 'date' with Draco.

Hermione walked up to him. “What about a book on becoming a father?” she whispered to him.

Harry wrinkled his nose. "Bit too..."

"Sickly?” Hermione conjectured with a grin.

"Yeah." Harry sighed and looked around at all the subject headings stuck haphazardly on the over-stuffed shelves. "Maybe a Potions book?"

Hermione followed him into the appropriate section, reading the titles over his shoulder. "Is he going to pursue his Potions Mastery?"

Harry scanned the titles, frowning in concentration. "He's not sure," he replied without looking up. "He definitely wants to do something Potions related, but not sure what that is yet. He said he liked the idea of working at the Ministry though."

"Did he?" Hermione replied in surprise. "I would've thought he'd dislike the Ministry."

"Oh he does, intensely," Harry answered, glancing up with a smirk. "But the Ministry also intensely dislikes the Malfoys so he thinks it would be great fun to work there."

"To spite them?"

"Mm hmm..." Harry confirmed with a nod.

Hermione chuckled as Harry reached for a large blue tome. "He's such a nutter."

"I think you mean arsehole," Harry said with a grin as he opened the shiny book cover and scanned the Table of Contents. "But I sort of love that about him."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "You're quite the pair," she muttered.

"What about this one?" Harry asked, showing her the book.

"Rare Potions for Healing Purposes," she read aloud. "Sounds fascinating, is he interested in Healing?"

"He's interested in anything to do with unfamiliar Potion formulas, but I've noticed that he particularly likes to put the healing ones to good use. He's always suggesting this or that for me and inspecting the potions that Madam Pomfrey prescribes for me."

Hermione smiled. "Sounds perfect then," she agreed.

Harry smiled, feeling successful; he had high hopes that his mate would really enjoy this dusty book of potion recipes. "Great, let's go. I'll just get a few more things to add to his gift and then I'm done. What about you? What are you getting Ron?"

The two walked back through the shelves to the front counter, where Ron was seated in a large squishy armchair by the window, looking bored.

"Not a book," Hermione observed dryly.

Harry laughed and set about paying for his book and then tucking the bag under his Cloak.
The three of them spent the rest of their time wandering the different shops and buying gifts for family and friends. Harry even purchased a sparkly unicorn for Gemma. He also added a soft cashmere scarf for Draco along with some very expensive white chocolates.

He put everything into the cloth bag that Mr. Goodfellow had given him and then the three of them made their way to The Three Broomsticks.

Harry felt exhausted, his legs and feet tired and achy, as he collapsed into the booth with his friends. They each ordered a drink while they waited for the two Slytherins.

"Speaking of careers," Hermione broached as she relaxed into the worn leather seat, "what are you going to do while Draco is off curing the wizarding world of terminal illnesses?"

Harry blew on the top of his peppermint tea, expression thoughtful. "Well, for the next twelve months I won't be doing much of anything except for… well, you know. After that, I dunno, I was thinking of maybe opening my own business."

"What sort of business?" Hermione asked with interest as she took a sip of her Butterbeer.

Harry paused, unaccountably shy. "Erm, I was thinking maybe some sort of magical education centre for Muggle-borns. I mean, we take Muggle Studies at Hogwarts to expand a student's knowledge of Muggles, but what about the kids from Muggle families who don't know anything about the magical world until they're suddenly thrust into it at eleven years old?" He paused and shrugged. "Just an idea. I would've appreciated something like that."

Hermione pushed a wayward curl out of her eyes as she nodded. "That sounds like a great idea Harry."

Harry smiled, slightly embarrassed but pleased. "I haven't really worked out the details yet, but I think I want to run it as a non-profit society. I wouldn't want to charge people."

"Would it be classes or just a collection of books and information?" Ron asked curiously, almost finished with his tall pint of Butterbeer already.

"I think both," Harry replied thoughtfully. "So people can come anytime and hang out and read, or attend information sessions at specific times."

"And you would teach them?"

"I'm not sure." Harry took a sip of his tea, emitting a blissful sigh before continuing. "I like teaching so yeah, maybe. I like the idea of working my own hours too, you know? So if I want to be at home then I can just stay home, or if I feel like working, I can do that too."

Hermione nodded. "Something flexible would be great as a new fa- Uh, you know."

Harry grinned, feeling a tiny fizzle of excitement as he slid a hand over his stomach beneath the table where no one would see it.

"And if you call it the Harry Potter Centre for Muggle-Born Children, then it'll be a success for sure," Ron interjected, grinning.

"Branching out into philanthropy Potter?"

The three of them glanced up to see Pansy arching one perfectly manicured eyebrow down at them.
Harry looked past her to the bar and saw Draco ordering some drinks. He relaxed at the sight of his mate, relieved to see that he was all right. Harry'd been a bit concerned that he wasn't the only one with a target on his back out of the two of them.

Harry fixed his gaze back on Pansy who was now removing her cloak and hanging it on the hook next to their booth. "Yes Parkinson, something you wouldn't know anything about."

"And does Draco know you want to spend loads of his money on charity work?" she drawled disdainfully. "And on children - ick!"

"You're a child," Hermione replied with a roll of her eyes. "You're the only one who isn't eighteen."

"Speaking of which," she replied, instantly brightening. "I will be holding my eighteenth birthday party next month and you're all invited."

Harry wanted to laugh at the look on Pansy's face; as though they should all be falling at her feet, thanking her for the honour.

"I'll have to check my social calendar," Hermione replied dryly, causing Ron to snort into his glass.

Draco approached the table then and slid in next to Harry as he placed his and Pansy's drinks down.

Harry smiled when Draco leaned in and kissed the side of his neck, one hand squeezing his thigh and then remaining there, the warmth from his hand seeping through Harry's trousers and warming his skin.

"You all right?" Draco murmured into his ear.

"Yeah, just happy to be sitting down."

"Well, Draco is thrilled about my upcoming celebration," Pansy sniffed. "He knows what my parties are like."

Draco smirked into a small glass of what appeared to be cranberry juice with a slice of lime. "Pansy's events truly are renowned in Slytherin, you should be honoured to be extended an invitation," he replied. "You're probably the first Gryffindors ever to be invited."

"Wow, lucky us," Harry answered, voice dripping with sarcasm.

Draco snickered and then pinched his leg.

"Ow!" Harry yelped and then laughed. "Sorry Pansy," he said, grinning. "Of course we'll be there. Ron never refuses free food."

Ron opened his mouth to argue and then shut it again. "It's true," he allowed with a shrug.

"What are everyone's Christmas plans?" Hermione asked round the table.

"We're spending Christmas Day with Draco's family and then Boxing Day at The Burrow," Harry replied with a glance at Draco who nodded.

They'd had that discussion ages ago and Harry had expected a bit of an uphill battle to get Draco to come to the Weasley's, but he'd been surprisingly agreeable.

Harry caught Hermione glaring at the arrogant Slytherin and quickly intervened. He didn't think his friends would ever entirely get on with the Slytherins, especially Parkinson, but as long as there wasn't any bloodshed then he could live with it.

"I need to select my replacement for Gryffindor Seeker," Harry said, abruptly changing the subject to the first thing that popped into his head. "I was thinking of asking that fourth year who tried out for Chaser and didn't make it. He wasn't aggressive enough for Chaser but he was really fast, definitely had some flying skills."

"Yeah, he was good," Ron acknowledged with a nod, looking relieved to have the subject come around to something he was interested in.

"Why do you need a new Seeker?" Pansy enquired with narrowed, calculating eyes; rather like Rita Skeeter on the verge of the next big headline.

Harry froze, instantly realising his blunder.

"Harry isn't allowed to play Quidditch right now," Draco replied smoothly. "Those men who attacked him managed to sneak onto Hogwarts grounds before and they could do it again. A Gryffindor match means they’d know exactly where to find Harry and when. It's too risky."

"And you just… agreed to that?" Pansy asked Harry sceptically. "You're the most pigheaded, stubborn wizard I know."

Harry swallowed and leaned into Draco. "I only agreed because Draco agreed to step down as Slytherin Seeker as well."

Draco stiffened minutely, but outwardly he merely smiled and nodded.

Pansy arched a brow at the two of them but then turned to her fancy fizzing drink with a flick of her long hair. "Quidditch is such a barbaric sport," she commented airily.

A waiter arrived to take their orders then and Harry shared a look of relief with Ron and Hermione before placing his order.
"You're the youngest Seeker in a century, this is your last possible year to play for Gryffindor, and you've suddenly decided not to play? What in Merlin's name is going on Potter?"

"Erm..." Harry's heart pounded and his palms were sweaty as he gazed back at his Head of House as she stared at him from across her wide desk with narrowed, disbelieving eyes. "I... I can't play because I, uh..." Harry trailed off, mouth dry, regretting his decision to decline Draco's offer of moral support on this one; his mate was always a lot more articulate under pressure. The right words just weren't coming to him. He really should have planned his speech in advance. Why the fuck didn't he write it down before-hand?

McGonagall sighed and waved a hand, summoning a silver tray loaded with a steaming pot of tea, two cups, and a plate of shortbread. "Here Potter, have a drink and a biscuit."

Harry reached for one of the crumbly biscuits while she poured tea for the both of them. "Thank you," he mumbled, pulling his cup towards him but leaving it on the surface of the desk, afraid he might spill it in his nervousness.

"Is Mr. Malfoy behind this unexpected decision?"

Harry choked on a laugh, trying not to spray crumbs all over his lap. "No, he's not. I promise." He swallowed and looked at her with a raised brow. "Do you really think Draco Malfoy could make me stop playing Quidditch just so Slytherin could have a win?"

McGonagall smiled into her tea, acknowledging his statement with a slight nod.

Harry lifted his teacup and carefully set it on his knees, hands wrapped around the delicate blue and white china. He sighed as he stared into his cup. "The reason I can't play anymore is..." He took a fortifying breath. "Is because I'm pregnant."

Professor McGonagall's lips parted in shock and her teacup fell from her fingers and dropped onto the desk, not shattering but splashing hot tea all over the place.

Harry was about to reach for his wand but the Professor had the mess cleaned up and a fresh cup of tea in front of her before he could put his own tea down to help.

She leaned back in her chair, gaze assessing as she swiftly schooled her expression into something a little more neutral. "And..." she cleared her throat. "This was a planned decision between the two of you?"

Harry flushed as he shook his head. "No, er... it just sort of happened." He quickly shut his mouth, realising that prattling on about this particular subject could turn rather awkward.
McGonagall arched a brow, unperturbed. "I would've thought the two of you would be more responsible than that Potter. Especially as this will place both you and your unborn child at risk from your attackers should they decide to make a second attempt."

"It truly was an accident Professor," Harry argued, feeling a sharp pang of unfairness. He hated talking about his personal issues but knew his head of house would have to be told the whole story or else she would think less of him, and that was something he couldn't stand the thought of.

"I sort of have trouble with small spaces," he continued after taking a breath. "And when I went into heat, Ron took me to that small heat room attached to our bedroom and locked me in. I've never really talked about it so it wasn't Ron's fault. I've spoken to Draco about it though, so when he found out, he quickly came and released me." Harry paused, lifting his chin slightly, gaze strong and uncompromising. "It's unfortunate that it happened the way it did, but we're both excited to be fathers and have been taking extra precautions ever since; such as not playing Quidditch."

The Headmistress nodded slowly, pensively. "And who else knows of this? I assume not many as I have not seen it in The Prophet."

"Only a few close friends," Harry affirmed, his anxiety easing a little as it appeared McGonagall wasn't about to scold him. "Ron and Hermione, Professor Garrick, and Draco's parents. Oh and Madam Pomfrey of course."

"Professor Garrick?" McGonagall repeated in surprise. "You've grown rather close with the professor then?"

"He's a friend of Draco's family," Harry replied carefully. "And yeah, I really like him. He's a brilliant DADA professor."

McGonagall was beginning to look a little less gobsmacked now. "Yes, he does seem quite popular with the students," she noted.

Harry grinned and took another biscuit. "Yeah, that's because he's fit. Draco doesn't like me saying that though."

A faint smile finally broke through McGonagall's stern façade and Harry felt the last of his nerves melting away.

"And how is your health Mr. Potter?" she enquired before taking a sip of her cooling tea.

Harry smiled, giving in to the urge to slide one hand over his stomach. His jumper still adequately covered the bump but in a thin t-shirt it was now quite noticeable.

"I'm great," he replied enthusiastically. "Bit of nausea in the morning but it doesn't last long, and Madam Pomfrey said the baby is really healthy."

McGonagall's expression softened. "You seem very happy Harry," she finally surmised in one of those rare occasions when she actually used his given name. "In light of this news, I suppose I will have to accept your resignation from the team. It's a real loss for Gryffindor."

Harry smiled ruefully. "Yeah, I know. I wish I could've played but the baby comes first," he said unapologetically. He paused and his green eyes sparkled impishly. "If it helps, I forced Draco to step down as Slytherin Seeker as well."

The Headmistress actually laughed, looking inordinately pleased by the news.
Harry popped the rest of the biscuit into his mouth and chewed, enjoying the flavour of the delicious Scottish shortbread now that he wasn't gripped by anxiety.

"Have you thought about when - or even if - you will announce your pregnancy?"

Harry washed down the shortbread with a sip of tea before replying. "I'd like to keep it a secret for as long as possible, until they catch those two men if possible. Though that doesn't seem likely anymore," he ruminated with a sigh. "I don't want to stop attending class so… I guess as soon as I can't hide it anymore, I'll just let the news spread on its own?" Harry frowned thoughtfully as he stared down into his cup. "I really don't want the publicity or people trying to push their noses into my family's business. They already judge Draco in nearly every article written about us and I don't want it to bother him." He looked up into McGonagall's sympathetic gaze. "We've thought about finishing school and then going away for a year or two; leaving the country until things calm down a bit."

McGonagall clasped her hands together on her desk's stained ink blotter and leaned forward with a serious expression on her lined face. "People will always be interested in you Harry; I'm afraid leaving the country and then returning - with a Potter-Malfoy child no less - will be of interest regardless of how long you stay away."

Harry sighed heavily as he placed his empty cup back on the desk. "Yeah, I guess. It'd be a nice break for us though. Then we can come back when we feel ready to face the media circus again."

The Headmistress nodded, gaze flicking downwards as Harry reflexively placed a protective hand over his stomach. "That sounds like a sensible plan Mr. Potter," she said with approval.

Harry smiled a little. "It was Draco's idea."

"You certainly have a wise Alpha," she remarked sincerely. "I always believed Mr. Malfoy had the potential to be an exceptional wizard once he was away from Voldemort's influence. He seems a much stronger man these days; unafraid to think for himself or to make his own choices."

"He is." Harry's smile grew as he nodded in agreement, the press' harsh criticisms of his mate ringing in his ears as he added, "and despite what some people think, he cares about me, more than I could possibly put into words."

McGonagall smiled. "I assume he is ensuring you take extra precautions with your safety elsewhere, not just on the Quidditch pitch?"

"Yeah, him and his father," Harry replied with a roll of his eyes. "I wear my father's Cloak everywhere outside of Hogwarts and I don't go anywhere on my own. The only time I'm alone is in the loo."

McGonagall's thin lips twitched with amusement. "And even that small mercy will be taken from you once you have a child Mr. Potter. I hope you're ready for it."

Harry laughed. "Is anyone ready to be a parent?"

McGonagall smiled in response and then seemed to shake her head in wonder. "I must admit Mr. Potter, I can hardly believe that I am sitting here discussing the fact that you will soon be a father. It seems like only yesterday that your father was announcing Lily's pregnancy. " She paused, the memory clearly playing in her mind. "They were overjoyed at the prospect of becoming parents," she recalled, tone gentle. "Much like yourself Harry."

Harry swallowed past the sudden lump in his throat and nodded.
McGonagall cleared her throat and straightened in her chair, the ancient wood creaking as she shifted her weight. "Forgive me Potter; I must be growing sentimental in my old age. Do keep me apprised of your progress and if you have any problems, please notify me immediately."

Harry stood, brushing the crumbs from his trousers, recognising a dismissal when he heard one. "Thank you professor," he said sincerely, and then added with a smile, "I'll let you know if it's a boy or a girl in February, if you want."

"Thank you Potter, I look forward to it."

Harry smiled and turned to leave her office.

"Potter?"

Harry turned to glance back over his shoulder.

"You're not about to wander the corridors alone, are you?" she asked pointedly.

Harry smiled and shook his head. "No, Draco is sitting just outside the door."

McGonagall pursed her lips, attempting to stop the responding smile as she nodded in acknowledgment. "Enjoy the holiday break Potter; sounds like you're going to need it."

Harry grinned and turned away, eager to let Draco know that everything was all right.

. . . .

Harry startled as a fluffy tail whipped in front of his eyes and he suddenly had the strangest urge to swat at it.

"Don't forget you are still Harry Potter, you are still human within the cat."

Harry blinked away from his tantalising tail and looked to Professor Garrick, who was watching him closely from a chair by a large window in the Shrieking Shack, opaque beneath a layer of filth.

Harry tried to calm his mind like the professor had taught him, like all the books had said when discussing desires and reactions whilst in your Animagus form.

Once he had a handle on his mind again, he quietly looked to the professor and waited.

"Good." Professor Garrick nodded in approval, smiling. "Very good Harry. Now I want you to go to the other side of the room and lie down next to Draco."

Harry flicked one rounded ear and then did as he was told. He padded over to the other side of the large, cobweb-ridden room and laid down next to his mate, who was in human form and seated on an old sofa which Draco had cleared of dust prior to deigning to seat his pretentious arse on it.

Draco smiled down at him and his smile was only slightly tinged with strain.

Harry butted his head gently into Draco's leg, trying, in his own cat-like way, to comfort his mate, to show him that he was okay and to remind him that no harm was going to come to the baby.

Draco's expression softened a little. He glanced up at the professor. "Do you think I would be able to touch him?"
Professor Garrick stood and walked closer, blue eyes appraising Harry as he lolled on the ground next to his mate. "Yes, but move slowly. He is still new at this and could lash out at any contact that he does not initiate himself."

Draco nodded and turned back to Harry, whose large emerald cat eyes were gazing back at him demurely. "Don't bite me Harry," he muttered as he leaned forward and slowly extended a hand to stroke the top of Harry's white and black spotted head.

Harry felt a flicker of amusement deep within him at his mate's tentativeness, but it quickly faded as Draco's scent filled his sensitive nostrils. He lifted his nose and sniffed at the arm in front of him, Draco's fingers all-the-while combing softly through his thick fur.

Harry suddenly felt the urge to cower away from the alien touch but also to lean into it. His tail flicked anxiously against the dusty floorboards as he tried to decide what to do.

"Careful now Draco," the professor said warningly, voice low. "I don't think Harry knows quite what to do."

Draco ceased his petting but kept his hand in place.

Harry blinked and then after a moment's hesitation, bumped his head up under Draco's hand, clearly requesting for him to continue his stroking.

Professor Garrick smiled and Draco resumed his gentle petting.

"I think you will be fine in your other form with him," Professor Garrick observed thoughtfully, watching them. "Will you be experimenting with that over Christmas?"

Draco chuckled as Harry began to purr. "Yes, while we're at the Manor. My father will be there as well to help keep my little Potter-kitten in line."

Harry's purring instantly ceased and he issued a soft growl.

Draco snorted, amused, but slowly withdrew his hand from Harry's head and sat back just in case.

The professor nodded, watching Harry carefully, wand out and at the ready. "I wouldn't mock him just now Draco, his mindset is that of a very irrational teenager and I'm not sure what effect the pregnancy might have on that aspect. It could intensify those unreasonable responses to an even greater degree."

Draco nodded, keeping his eyes on Harry as his mate cocked his large feline head to one side, regarding him shrewdly.

"All right Harry," Professor Garrick announced calmly. "I think that's enough for tonight, we don't want to wear you out."

Harry tore his gaze away from his Alpha and stood, shaking his large body and settling his fur back into place. He licked his lips, careful not to catch his tongue on his sharp teeth, like he did the first time he successfully transformed. He concentrated as hard as he could on his human form, ignoring his four paws grounded to the floor and imagining his human body again; reminding himself that he had two feet, legs with slightly knobbly knees, narrow hips and leanly muscled chest, long neck, and a head of messy dark hair, his lightning bolt scar, and his Claiming Mark…

He continued to visualise every minute detail about himself in order to enact the magic required to make the change.
Harry closed his eyes as he felt the transformation begin to take effect. His magic crackled around him and he could feel his body changing shape.

"Well done Harry," Professor Garrick congratulated with a smile as Harry opened his eyes to find himself back to normal.

Draco swiftly stood and put an arm around Harry's waist as he swayed a little.

"Whew, that was... intense," Harry surmised feebly, leaning into his capable mate with a tired smile. He looked at Draco. "I think I almost bit you."

Draco laughed at the bewilderment in Harry's tone. "Yes, highly undeserved as well I might add."

Harry raised his brow, his green eyes slowly gaining more and more focus as he returned to himself. "I doubt that Malfoy," he responded suspiciously. "Don't forget I saw you disrespect a Hippogriff once."

Draco snorted as Professor Garrick stepped forward and ran his wand over Harry's body, checking his magical levels and doing a quick general health assessment.

Draco's smirk faded at the tiny frown on the professor's face. "Something wrong?"

The professor's expression smoothed over as he shook his head. "No, not really. His levels are lower than a normal expectant Omega at this stage, but I attribute that to the fact that he is a male Omega. Pregnancy is known to tax males much more than females."

"Should he stop transforming?" Draco asked sharply.

"No, not yet," the professor replied lightly as he finished his scans. "I would give it a couple more months. But Harry," he added sternly, looking to his student. "No more than one transformation per fortnight and always make time for sufficient rest afterwards. I want you to go straight to your room tonight and have something to eat, preferably chocolate, and remain lying down or at least seated for a couple of hours."

"Aye aye," Harry responded, tone wry but weak. He definitely felt a little more drained than the last time he'd practiced.

Draco frowned but kept quiet, which Harry was surprised and eternally grateful for. He just wanted to return to their room and rest with his mate now.

The three of them exited the room and slowly made their way through the dimly lit tunnel and out into the evening air. What was left of the Whomping Willow was frozen above them, its incessant and angry thrashing had been somewhat dulled by damage sustained in the final Battle but it still packed a punch when it wanted to. Opening the hidden door always petrified it for a few minutes in order for the occupants to make a safe departure.

Harry walked between the two Alphas, his feet heavy with fatigue; it was arduous enough walking through the deep snow without the added exhaustion from Animagus training.

"Looking forward to Christmas Harry?" Professor Garrick asked as they trudged through the snow.

"Yeah," Harry replied breathlessly, pulling his coat further around himself for warmth. "Mostly I'm looking forward to having a break from Hogwarts. It's just so tiring keeping this secret and pretending that I'm not exhausted by the end of the day, not to mention the crazy hormones and hiding my morning sickness and..." He trailed off, realising he was on a bit of an uncalled for rant.
"Er, sorry, didn't mean to whinge like that."

"I think you've earned the right to complain Harry, you're dealing with a lot this year."

Harry snorted. "And last year, and the year before, and the year before that…"

Professor Garrick chuckled. "You're doing well though Harry; there aren't many who could cope with what you've had thrown at you and live to tell the tale. Or at least come out of it still sane."

"Oh no, he's completely mental," Draco refuted with a smirk. "He just hides it well."

Professor Garrick laughed while Harry elbowed Draco sharply in the side.

"Ow, you oaf," his mate exclaimed with indignation.

Harry grinned and Draco's faux outrage turned into an affectionate smile as he slid a strong arm around Harry's shoulders to help support him. His Alpha always somehow knew when he needed assistance without him having to ask. Harry was happy with their unspoken arrangement because he'd always struggled with asking for help, and with such an intuitive mate, he never had to.

The three fell silent as they pushed onwards through the snow and then up the wide entrance steps, careful of the ice frozen over the stone.

They walked through the huge doors and parted ways in the warm Entrance Hall.

Harry groaned under his breath as he eyed the vast staircase ahead of him.

He nearly cried out in surprise when Draco suddenly scooped him up into his arms and started to climb the steps. "Put me down!" he ordered immediately, cheeks heating in embarrassment.

"As long as you keep pushing yourself to the limit Potter, I will do whatever I think is necessary for your health and wellbeing," Draco replied evenly. "And the health and wellbeing of our little plonker."

Harry opened his mouth in outrage but then couldn't help but snort with laughter. "Don't call him that."

"Him?"

"Or her." Harry crossed his arms over his chest as Draco reached the top of the staircase and headed down the corridor to the next set of steps.

Draco glanced at him. "Do you have a feeling of what it could be?" he asked nonchalantly, clearly curious.

Harry relaxed his stiff posture a little, softened by Draco's discernible interest. "Not even a little," he admitted. "But it's early days."

Draco nodded, carefully navigating the steps with his mate in his arms.

Harry smiled and decided to just go with it, relaxing into his Alpha's strong embrace with a sigh and closing his eyes.

"I could get used to this," he murmured.

He felt his mate's responding chuckle reverberate through his chest. "You'll be too heavy when you
reach seven or eight months Potter."

Harry was too sleepy and comfortable to be offended; he made a mental reminder to send a Stinging Hex at his mate first thing in the morning.

. . . .

"Would your parents be terribly offended if I wore my joggers to dinner?" Harry asked, standing in the middle of Draco's bedroom at the Manor and staring at himself in the floor-length mirror. It was just easier, not to mention more comfortable, to wear his casual clothing now that his belly was continuously extending outwards and making buttoning his fly so difficult. Apparently male Omegas started to show much earlier than females as their bodies needed time to shift and alter internally to accommodate the foetus.

"I would be offended," Draco replied without looking up. He was sitting on the end of the bed, pulling on black socks and looking impeccable in his black trousers and plum-coloured shirt.

Harry sighed. "Fine," he capitulated sullenly. "But fair warning, I won't be able to eat anything because my trousers will be too tight and then I'll probably faint because I won't have eaten a thing for hours."

Draco laughed and finally turned to look at his mate. "Salazer, can you hear yourself Potter?"

Harry scowled as he slipped out of his soft grey joggers and picked up the charcoal-coloured trousers laid out over the chair next to him. "Yes I can," he replied acerbically.

"Then you can hear how ridiculous you're being. You do remember you're a wizard, right?"

Harry glanced up, fingers struggling with the small black button. "What do you mean?" he replied with a huff, irritation colouring his tone.

Draco stood and calmly walked over, withdrawing his wand as he went. He pointed his wand at Harry's waist and whispered, "Sartor Dimisso Capite."

Harry watched as his trousers gently stretched to accommodate his small baby bump, the button miraculously then re-buttoning itself with ease. Somehow the fabric had changed too; feeling softer against his skin than it had just moments before.

"I'm going to have to learn that one," Harry muttered, glancing up at his mate somewhat sheepishly. "Thank you. And er, sorry."

Draco smiled and lifted his hand to drag his fingers over Harry’s Claiming Mark, lightly running the tips of his fingers over the silvery scar in soft soothing strokes. "You can repay me later," he murmured in amusement. "I just want you to be comfortable while enduring dinner with my parents."

Harry smiled and stepped forward to press a chaste kiss to Draco's lips. "I will. And I promise to behave."

Draco smirked. "Why? My parents won't."

Harry laughed as he returned to dressing for Christmas Eve dinner, feeling much calmer. He knew he was becoming moody and that it was mostly to do with the pregnancy, but he couldn't help
lash out sometimes or sniping irrationally at his mate. Luckily Draco took it all in his stride, and more often than not his gentle mocking quickly snapped Harry out of it again.

About ten minutes later, he and Draco ascended the stairs to the entrance foyer and were greeted by a house-elf bearing a silver tray which held one glass of wine and one glass of water.

"Wonder which one is yours?" Draco whispered aside with a smirk.

Harry grinned and reached for the water, wondering if the stern little elf would've allowed him to take the wine instead.

Draco took the glass of red and they both wandered onwards through the house towards the large dining room in the east wing.

Harry gazed at the huge assortment of Christmas decorations as they walked, appreciating the sophisticated and beautiful detailing involved. The richly coloured silk ribbons, delicate baubles, and fragrant Spruce garlands adorned the walls, and nearly every piece of available furniture was embellished with something festive. It was all very tasteful and refined though of course; no gingerbread men with silly faces or sparkling snowmen, only the most elegant of colours and materials had been used. The effect was stunning in its opulence and grandeur, as though Harry was strolling through one of London's poshest hotels.

As lovely as it was, he knew it would never compare to the familiar warmth and cozy atmosphere of The Burrow.

The two mates entered the formal dining room together and Harry smiled in greeting at Narcissa where she was seated at one end, wearing a long crimson-coloured dress that did wonders for her fair complexion.

Harry avoided eye contact with Lucius, who was standing next to a long table laden with drinks along the far wall. He still felt a bit awkward around Draco's father; the last time they were together was the day of Sophie McDougall's party when Mr. Malfoy had said some rather horrible things about the pregnancy.

Harry took a seat midway down the table, carefully placing his water down next to the complicated layout of plates, bowls, silverware and empty crystal flutes - and a myriad of other things which Harry had no idea what to do with.

"Good evening Harry," Narcissa said while he frowned down at the table in bewilderment. "How have you been feeling?"

Harry looked up and couldn't help but smile at her warm expression. She looked cheerful, but also invigorated, as though hosting Christmas for her son and his mate was all she could've asked for.

"I'm fine; just a touch of morning sickness now and again," Harry replied. He glanced up at Draco as his Alpha took the seat next to him. "Erm, I've been a bit emotional too," he continued, turning back to Narcissa. "Poor Draco has to put up with my mood swings."

He thought he'd better put a caveat on his behaviour just in case he made an arse of himself at some point during his stay.

Narcissa smiled in amusement. "And he shall put up with it, right darling?" she said, turning to Draco with one pale brow arched. "Harry will be the one giving birth so I believe you may cheerfully suffer the odd bout of irrational behaviour now and again."
"Careful how you answer that Draco," Lucius interjected warningly as he joined them, seating himself at the head of the table, his long pale hair pulled back in a low ponytail over dress robes the same colour as his wife's.

Draco closed his mouth with a smirk and wisely remained silent, causing Harry to snort as he reached for his water.

Harry nearly upset his drink when a house-elf suddenly appeared next to his elbow with the first course.

"Oh er, thank you," he said to the elf, who frowned censoriously at Harry's acknowledgment of his presence.

Draco snickered as he picked up a small fork from the left-hand side of his place setting. "Don't speak to the help Potter," he uttered out of the corner of his mouth.

Harry grinned as he carefully selected the same fork as his mate. He was too hungry to be bothered by anything else at that point, and the hors d'oeuvres looked and smelt delicious.

"How are your classes Draco?" Lucius asked as he took a sip of wine.

"They're going well," Draco replied officiously. "Top marks in Potions, of course."

"Tied for top," Harry corrected, knowing Draco shared the honour with Hermione.

"Hush you," Draco responded with narrowed eyes.

Harry laughed before spearing a chunk of warm crab cake onto his fork.

"And classes are going well for you also Harry?" Narcissa enquired politely. "It mustn't be easy concentrating with everything that's been going on this year."

Harry paused with his fork in the air. "Uh, not too bad. I mean, I'm passing everything but my marks aren't anything like Draco's. Except in Defence," he added as an afterthought. Harry put the bite of crab cake into his mouth and nearly groaned aloud at the wonderful flavour.

Narcissa smiled gently. "I am pleased that Michael is your professor, I know he will look out for you both."

Harry nodded as he swallowed. "Yeah, I'm not sure how we're going to explain why I'm no longer taking part in spell work anymore. Professor Garrick has been ensuring that we do a lot of theoretical study lately, but he can't keep it up forever."

"We were thinking of possibly faking an injury," Draco interjected as he used his knife to gracefully slice off a bit of crab cake. "That way, no one will question why Harry isn't taking part in class or Quidditch anymore."

"A sensible plan." Lucius nodded, wiping his mouth on one of the silvery cloth napkins.

"How long do you plan to keep the secret though?" Narcissa asked, looking concerned. "If you intend to finish the year then the truth will become quite obvious."

Harry set his fork down and pushed his plate aside, not wanting to fill up when there were still nine courses to go. "As soon as they catch those two nutters," he said bitterly. "Not that we'll be taking out a page in The Prophet to announce it," he added. "But I won't be actively hiding it from the other
Draco squeezed his thigh under the table. "I propose no more talk of such things; it's Christmas Eve and my first Christmas with my mate, so I ask that we only speak of cheerful things henceforth. Harry needs a break from the stress, and so do I."

Harry smiled gratefully at his Alpha as a house-elf appeared to collect his plate. "Here here," he said in quiet agreement.

Draco returned the smile and left his hand where it was while the house-elves brought in the soup course.

"May we speak of the baby then?" Narcissa asked, eyes softening at the mere mention of her future grandchild.

Harry's smile grew into a wide grin. "Yes, of course."

"Have you planned where you are going to have the baby?"

Draco shared a look with his mate before replying. "We were actually planning to ask if we could possibly have the birth here," he said. "We would prefer the extra security of the Manor as well as having you and father here for assistance. Then, once Harry has sufficiently recovered, we will begin looking for our own home."

"You would be more than welcome here my darling," Narcissa instantly replied, tone warm and eyes sparkling; clearly pleased. "We will bring in the Clan Healer for you as well."

Harry looked up with interest as he swallowed some of his delicious smoked haddock and corn chowder soup. "Is that just in case the baby comes out in Nundu form?"

Narcissa smiled gently and shook her head.

"The baby will be born in human form," Lucius answered from his end of the table. "Nundu children do not generally transform until they are around the age of two or so."

"Oh right," Harry replied, remembering.

"The Clan Healer is brought in because *Draco* may inadvertently transform," Lucius explained, pale gaze flicking to his son for a moment.

Harry's eyes widened in surprise as he turned to his Alpha. "Really?"

Draco shrugged uncomfortably, swallowing his soup. "It's been known to happen when Nundu are under a lot of stress."

"As you know, Alpha Nundu are very protective of their mates," Narcissa clarified, "and if the birth is a difficult one, then there is the increased risk of them transforming under the strain of the situation." She paused and looked up at her husband with a tiny smirk. "They feel useless during the birth because there is nothing they can really do to stop the pain for their mate and it is... challenging for them, to say the least. I remember Lucius being in more distress than I when I had Draco."

Lucius slid his empty bowl aside, a house-elf immediately appearing to collect it from his Master. "That may be an accurate assessment," he conceded in response, eyes glimmering in amusement as he gazed back at his wife.
Narcissa smiled as her own bowl was swiftly taken away and replaced with the next course.

"I've heard that male Omega's almost always have complicated births, so I'd be glad to have the Clan Healer there," Harry said tentatively, setting his spoon down.

Draco stiffened beside him and Harry gave Draco's hand, which was still lying on his thigh, a quick squeeze.

"You will be fine," Narcissa replied firmly. "You are young and strong, and you will have anything you require at your disposal. We will ensure that you are comfortable and taken care of to the best of our ability."

Harry smiled shyly; body filling with liquid warmth at the sincere care and consideration with which Narcissa treated him. He truly felt as though he was a part of her family; as though she loved him as a son.

"Thank you," he said sincerely; hoping those two words conveyed just how deeply he was touched by her consideration and kindness.

It must have worked because Draco flashed him a warm look that shone with gratitude and pleasure.

Harry smiled back before digging into the third course. He hadn't even noticed the elf placing the fish in front of him. He inhaled the wonderful smell of the salmon before placing a juicy bite into his mouth and, again, nearly moaning aloud at the rich flavour which burst forth onto his taste buds.

"When is your due date Harry?" Narcissa asked absently as she cut into her fish.

Harry swallowed before replying. "Around the twelfth of August. Ron's told his parents about the pregnancy, er, Ron Weasley that is, and Mrs. Weasley is hoping for the baby to come a day early, because then they would share a birthday."

He glanced over at Narcissa, wondering what she thought of his adoptive family.

She smiled serenely as she took a delicate bite of salmon. "I know you and our grandchild will be in good hands with Molly Weasley," she commented. "Isn't that right, dear?" she added, looking pointedly at Lucius.

Harry turned to glance at him and nearly chuckled at the look on his face; as though he were having trouble swallowing.

"Yes," he finally replied stiffly, as though with great self-control. "I believe the Weasley family know a thing or two about rearing children."

Draco snorted and then smiled apologetically when Harry glared at him.

"Are you hoping for a boy or a girl?" Narcissa asked, clearly wishing to chivvy the conversation onwards.

"Er..." Harry stared at his food as he replied somewhat reservedly. "I'll be happy with either, but... I am sort of hoping it's a boy. I can't help envisioning a son with Draco's colouring and who is also a Nundu." He stopped and shrugged, suddenly embarrassed. He hadn't even told Draco that little fantasy.

Lucius smiled, for perhaps the first time all evening. "Another Malfoy for the Clan would be a very welcome addition," he said proudly, then paused, glancing at his wife for a brief moment before
turning back to Harry. "That is, if you are allowing the child to take both names."

Harry stopped chewing in surprise; he was quite shocked that Lucius wasn't demanding that the child be a Malfoy. Narcissa must have had quite the chat with him in order for him to suddenly show such open-mindedness.

Draco cleared his throat. "We have already discussed this father, and the child will be taking both names."

"Hyphenated," Harry added, still reeling at Lucius Malfoy's progressive behaviour. "Haven't decided in which order though, we just want to see what will sound best once we pick a given name."

Lucius nodded, looking as pleased as it's possible for him to look while still carefully schooling his austere features.

"And will you be sharing these possible name choices?" Narcissa asked with a coy smile.

"Merlin, no," Draco exclaimed, causing Harry to cough in order to cover a laugh. "You will hear the name when it is official - and not before. But be warned, we've already decided to break with tradition and not go with a family name; from either side."

"Oh?" Lucius replied, brow arching in a way which was very reminiscent of his son.

"Yes," Harry confirmed with a nod as his grumpy little house-elf returned with the next course (which appeared to be some sort of wild game accompanied by roasted vegetables). "It'll probably be something horribly Muggle, like Bob."

Draco laughed at his father's stricken expression. Even Narcissa was smirking into her napkin.

Harry grinned; feeling that same happy, warmth washing over him again. A feeling which gave him hope for his future with Draco's family. Perhaps over time, Harry would feel as comfortable with the Malfoys as he did with Ron's family. It would always be a different sort of feeling to that of being with the Weasley's, but Harry thought he could learn to love them both for their singly quirky ways. Even Lucius; if he continued to demonstrate a willingness to be less intolerantly Pureblooded.

"He's joking father," Draco finally reassured when it appeared as though Lucius wasn't quite certain.

Harry stared at Lucius as the man's lips twitched into an unexpected grin.

"Bob Malfoy," he muttered and then chuckled, pale eyes on his plate.

Harry gaped incredulously and then bit his lip to keep from laughing; he didn't think he would stop if he got started.

Unfortunately Draco couldn't conceal a snort next to him and Harry instantly began to laugh. Soon Draco and Narcissa were both laughing along with him, Narcissa's eyes sparkling with mirth.

Lucius merely smirked at the three of them and then began to eat his dinner, utterly composed.

Once they were all under control again, Narcissa dabbing at her eyes with a napkin, they fell into a comfortable silence as they enjoyed the remainder of the meal.

Harry frowned when, after enjoying a small bowl of citrus-flavoured sorbet, the house-elf brought out a large roast and more vegetables. Draco whispered in his ear that it was a palate cleanser and Harry rolled his eyes. Molly Weasley made just as much food, if not more, but it was not delivered
with such pomp and circumstance. Harry knew which one he preferred, but he also couldn't help but appreciate the traditional ways of Draco's family.

After another course of salad, sweets (including treacle tart), and then fruit and cheese, Harry was completely full. He couldn't have eaten another bite if he'd wanted to.

They all adjourned to the parlour room for after dinner drinks and it was all very cosy and warm next to the large fire that the house-elves had kindly lit for them.

Harry leaned against Draco's side on the sofa and it wasn't long before his eyes fluttered shut. He never managed to stay awake past nine anymore, and with his Alpha's arm around him, warm and strong, Harry quickly fell asleep.

After a lazy Christmas morning lie-in with his mate and a hearty breakfast, Harry, along with Draco and Lucius, journeyed outside into the snow blanketing the Manor grounds.

For the first time in a long while, Harry was feeling energised and cheerful. A night of not having to remember to keep his secret or pretending that he wasn't worn out and exhausted had done wonders for his mental and physical well-being.

Now Harry was planning to practice his Animagus transformation to see how he felt with his mate in Nundu form. Lucius was there as back-up in case there were any problems.

Harry walked down the front entrance steps, careful of the ice, and then moved forward in order to put some space between him and the other two.

He stopped and closed his eyes, taking deep, calming breaths. He could only successfully transform when he was calm and focussed.

He concentrated on the image of his snow leopard appearance and how it felt to be in that feline form; with four large paws, long fuzzy tail, short rounded ears, whiskers, twitchy nostrils and large all-seeing eyes…

Harry felt his body beginning to shift and transform. No incantation, or even a wand, was required to transform, it was more a learned skill than a spell.

When Harry opened his eyes once more, he was lower to the ground and suddenly the world around him was full of innumerable smells and sharp sounds, even the vibrations under his paws from the hundreds of creatures walking and burrowing into the earth miles away suddenly became a part of his awareness.

Harry blinked and shifted his tightly coiled muscles, instantly on the alert. He heard a noise behind him and turned to see a very large black cat. Standing next to the cat was a tall human with pale hair, the smell of magic thick about them both.

Harry started to growl low in his throat but then stopped as the scent of the cat drifted into his nostrils. He knew that scent and it cleared some of the fog from his mind. This was his mate. His Alpha.

Harry instantly dropped his chest to the snowy ground, bum in the air and tail swishing, ready to pounce; ready to play.
Draco’s grey eyes gleamed knowingly back at him from the face of the dark cat as he leaned back on his haunches, front legs shifting the weight back and forth between them in a well-known dance, deciding on just the perfect moment to make his move.

Harry could feel his whole body vibrating with anticipation. And then he suddenly couldn't wait any longer; he attempted a funny sort of leap, with all four legs pushing him into the air at once, took a useless swipe through the air with one paw towards his mate, and then turned and ran. He felt distinctly uncoordinated and awkward for the first few strides, as he'd never attempted a sprint before, but he soon got the hang of it and dug in with a growl of satisfaction.

Draco leapt forward, swiftly taking chase. He held back, just off Harry's pace, in order to not end the game too quickly. He was much larger and had much longer legs than his mate's snow leopard.

Harry pounded through the snow, paws throwing up snow in his wake, green eyes bright and sparkling with delight as Draco took pursuit. This was thrilling and exhilarating, almost like being on a broom, locked in a battle of Seeker against Seeker.

Harry veered sharply to the right but didn't make it very far before Draco reached out with one paw and knocked his back feet out from under him.

Harry fell onto his side in the soft snow and then rolled onto his back with an unhappy hiss. He glared up at his mate as he stood over him, Draco's black tail slashing the air and a smug expression on his face.

Draco slowly lowered his massive head and swiped his tongue up the side of Harry's furry cheek in what was clearly a tender show of affection.

Harry felt his ire melt but his cat-like mischievousness kicked back in and he immediately used his mate's unguarded moment to flip over and make a dash for it between his legs and back towards the house.

He could hear Draco pounding along behind him and he emitted an involuntary little chirrup of glee at the thrill of the chase. Draco jokingly called him his kitten and he really felt like it in that moment. He also felt a bit more clear-headed this time around, like he was able to retain his more human thoughts and memories rather than being reduced to his animal counterpart's simple emotions and primal needs.

Harry halted before the steps, where Lucius was still standing in his human form, watching them closely. Harry sat down, breathing heavily. It was the most activity he'd done in his Animagus form thus far and it had certainly taken its toll; both magically and physically.

Draco walked up beside him on silent paws and stood watching with a sharp, assessing gaze.

Harry waited until he had his breath back under control and then transformed into his human self. He made sure to concentrate on appearing with his clothing on; a rather embarrassing mistake he'd made on more than one occasion in the Shrieking Shack with Professor Garrick. Draco was not best pleased with his mate appearing naked in front of another Alpha.

Harry opened his eyes and blinked down at himself, relieved to see that he was fully clothed, including his thick winter cloak.

He smiled faintly up at Draco, who was still in his Nundu form. "I'm all right," he reassured a little breathlessly, knowing that his mate would want to hear it from him. "Just a bit tired, that was a lot of running."
Draco seemed to relax a little at his smiling mate and nodded in acknowledgement.

Harry pushed his damp fringe out of his eyes with a shaky hand. They were meant to return to the parlour soon to open presents and Harry was more than ready to sit down for a while, even after such a short bout of transformation he was completely knackered. He didn't think he would be attempting it for much longer before yielding to his mate's wishes and taking a break until after the baby was born.

Harry remained sitting in the snow for another moment in order to recover before attempting to stand. A secret - slightly horrified - part of him rather hoped that Draco would carry him back into the house.

Harry glanced up when he suddenly noticed Draco stiffening beside him, his dark nose pointed into the air and sniffing.

Lucius straightened from where he was leaning against one of the entrance pillars, uncrossing his arms and peering down the long drive towards the black, wrought-iron gates.

Harry turned to look and his heart leapt into his throat when he recognised the man standing on the other side. The end of the drive was a fair distance but he would recognise that tall, burly form anywhere; it was one of his attackers.

"That's him…" Harry said faintly, staring. "That's one of the men who tried to kill me."

A loud snarl next to Harry made him flinch and then Draco was off, sprinting down the snow-covered drive without a moment's hesitation.

"Draco!" Harry shouted, pushing to his feet, terrified. He began to stagger after his mate but Lucius was suddenly in front of him, a hand to his chest.

"Stay here Potter," he ordered sharply.

Harry looked up at his father-in-law with urgent eyes. "Help him! The other man's probably there too."

Lucius nodded and immediately transformed into his Nundu form before dashing off after his son.

Harry withdrew his wand and began to stumble after them through the snow. His muscles felt like rubber and his magical levels were dangerously low, but he knew if he remained on the grounds he would be protected by the wards, and there was no way he was going to just sit idly by and watch.

Harry kept moving, pushing his glasses up on his sweaty nose as he watched Draco finally reach his attacker through fogged lenses. The man had by now transformed into his Nundu form and was standing with head lowered and teeth bared.

Draco leapt into the air and the other cat rose up on his hind legs, front paws out with claws extended, ready to meet him.

Harry's hand clenched around his wand as the two huge cats fell to the ground; snarling and clawing.

Harry hadn't been sure what to expect when Draco galloped off to hurl himself into battle, he'd never seen Draco fight before, and while the other cat was slightly larger in size, they seemed to be fairly evenly matched in skill.

Lucius had finally reached his son and, just as Harry suspected, his other attacker suddenly emerged
out of the surrounding garden in his Nundu form.

Lucius leapt through the gates, passing through the black bars which dissipated like mist at the touch of a Malfoy. He latched his jaws onto the neck of the other cat and dug in his front paws, violently wrenching his victim over into the snow.

Harry kept moving, ignoring the stitch in his side and the slightly faint feeling pulling at him.

The four cats were locked in a heated battle as Harry approached the gates, the white snow under their feet quickly becoming spattered with droplets of blood.

Harry didn't move any closer and kept his eyes glued to Draco; he was now familiar enough with his mate's Nundu form that he could recognise him from a distance, and he wanted to be ready in case Draco needed him.

He didn't think he'd ever been this worried about someone he loved before, and the possibility - however small - that Draco could be killed was at the back of his mind, no matter how hard he tried not to think about it.

Harry raised his wand when Draco was suddenly flipped onto his back and pinned down. He was trying to aim a *Stupefy* at the large Nundu on top of his Alpha when Draco suddenly used his back legs to push into the angry cat's stomach and successfully shoved him off.

Harry breathed out in relief but didn't lower his wand.

He jerked his head to the right at the loud yowl of pain that suddenly rent the cold morning air. Lucius had received a rather large gouge across his shoulder as he'd been thrown to the ground. He remained lying in the snow, breath coming out in pained huffs and back legs trying valiantly to gain purchase in the snow in order to get back on his feet.

Harry watched with a frown as the other Nundu grabbed ahold of the thick scruff on the back of Lucius' neck and then threw Lucius' injured body over his back, as though to carry him off somewhere.

Harry's eyes widened as he realised the other Nundu was going to attempt to cross the boundary into Manor grounds. Harry took a step back, wand at the ready, as he realised that the man would be able to breach the wards simply because he was touching a Malfoy.

The Nundu narrowed its dark eyes at Harry, zeroing in on its prey with an intensity that chilled Harry to the bone.

"*Stupefy!*" Harry cast as soon as the beast crossed through the misty black gates.

His spell hit its intended target but Harry didn't have the strength to make it stick, the cat's stride merely faltered for a moment and he quickly shook it off.

Harry took a few panicked steps backwards and nearly stumbled to his knees, the attempted stunner having taken the last of his energy. He glanced past the Nundu to where Draco was still fighting and knew that his Alpha was too preoccupied to help him.

The Nundu tipped Lucius off of his back and then continued to stalk forward, as though toying with Harry.

Harry raised his wand, his hand shaking with the effort. "*Protego!*" he cast, vainly attempting to erect a shield around himself.
The shield swept around him in a bright white glow but quickly flickered out.

The Nundu suddenly sprang into the air and Harry ducked to one side to avoid the long claws headed for his chest and throat.

The Nundu's claws caught Harry's cloak instead and the cat didn't waste time in jerking Harry over into the snow onto his back, knocking the wind out of him.

Harry let out a moan and then instinctively tried to curl onto his side, one arm wrapping around his stomach in a valiant effort to protect the baby.

The Nundu sank one set of claws into Harry's thigh to hold him still, the nails sinking deeply into the flesh of Harry's leg.

Harry cried out and knew he was dead as the cat's oval eyes targeted his exposed throat.

Suddenly Lucius was there, leaping into the side of the Nundu with a loud thud that seemed to echo across the grounds.

The large cat was knocked away from Harry's prone body and Harry couldn't stifle the involuntary scream as the claws embedded in his leg were suddenly dragged through his flesh before detaching as the cat was sent sprawling into the snow.

Harry forced himself into a sitting position and quickly pressed both hands to the wound, which was now bleeding copiously.

He thought was going to be sick when he caught a glimpse of bone within the jagged wound.

Harry dizzily looked to where Lucius seemed to be beating the life out of the other Nundu with renewed ferocity. Lucius had the other Nundu on his back and had managed to claw deeply into his soft underbelly. The wound across Lucius' shoulder didn't look quite as bad now, the flow of blood having slowed to a trickle.

Harry glanced over at Draco with a whimper as the pain in his leg became almost unbearable.

Like his father, Draco also seemed to have the upper hand now as he snarled down at the Nundu laid out beneath him. There was a large gash across the Nundu's eye and cheek, effectively blinding him in one eye.

The Nundu screeched in pain and, surprisingly, Draco suddenly moved away from him.

Harry grit his teeth and watched through a haze of pain as Draco suddenly transformed back into his human self. His mate withdrew his wand and then deftly Stupefied the cat.

As soon as the cat was immobilised, Draco turned and ran to Harry's side, dropping to his knees in the snow, expression writ with fear as he looked at Harry's mangled thigh.

"Harry…" he choked out brokenly, hands hovering uncertainly near the wound.

"Help your dad first," Harry bit out through the agony. "I'm okay."

Draco looked as though he didn't believe him for a second but nodded jerkily and then quickly transformed and rushed off to assist his father.

Harry exhaled shakily, forcing himself to remain conscious; he needed to know that his mate and father-in-law were out of harm's way before he did anything else.
Draco easily assisted his father in subduing the remaining Nundu; holding him down while Lucius transformed into human form and *Stupefied* him. Lucius was bent over and in some obvious discomfort from his shoulder wound when he stepped back, breathless but keeping a vigilant watch on the two motionless Nundu.

Harry was surprised that they were taking the time to stun the men instead of killing them outright. Harry had thought a Nundu's reputation for bloodlust would know no bounds when it came to matters such as this.

Draco instantly transformed and ran back to Harry, who was by now surrounded by a frighteningly large pool of deep red blood.

"*Prohibere sanguis,*" his Alpha cast softly as he kneeled next to him and held his wand above the wound, his hand trembling. Whether from fear or adrenaline, Harry wasn't sure.

Harry inhaled sharply when the lacerations in his leg suddenly felt as though they were on fire. Draco quickly took his hand and gripped it hard.

Harry glanced down to see that he was no longer bleeding profusely.

"I'm taking Harry back to the house," Draco said as his father limped up beside them. "I don't think Trinket will be able to heal this, and... and we'll need someone to check if the baby is all right."

"I'll have your mother call the Healer," Lucius replied, sounding drained. "We'll have to contact the Board as well, to deal with... other matters."

Draco nodded without looking up. He used his wand to carefully levitate Harry from the damp snow-covered ground and into his arms, holding him as gently as possible.

Harry lifted his head and caught Lucius' gaze. He could see the concern there; a concern for his son's mate that ran deep enough for Lucius to have risked his own life in order to save him.

"Thank you," Harry said to him with unreserved feeling, "for saving my life."

Lucius appeared slightly astonished but nodded in acknowledgment. He quickly turned away and refocussed his attention on the prisoners, preparing to move them to the Manor dungeons, Harry supposed.

Harry tried to breathe through the pain as Draco began to walk with him back to the Manor.

He looked up at his mate's face, his heart swelling with love even under all the distress and suffering. "The baby's okay," he whispered reassuringly.

Grey eyes dropped to meet his gaze and Harry hated seeing the expression of anguish and vulnerability on his love's face.

"The baby's okay," Harry repeated confidently before finally drifting into unconsciousness.
Well I can’t believe this is the final chapter after over a year of writing this labour of love. I’m actually quite sad that it’s all over now. Thank you to everyone who read it, left kudos, or took the time to review - it means the world to me. I’ve left the door open just a little for a sequel in case I want to delve into this world again though.

Hope you’ve enjoyed the world of the Nundu Clans as much as I have.

Cheers,
Constance xx

Harry awoke with a choked gasp, eyes flying open and hands clenching around fistfuls of damp, white sheets.

"Harry." Draco instantly appeared in his line of vision, leaning over him with concerned eyes.

Harry focussed on his Alpha as he exhaled unsteadily, drinking in the sight of him as he tried to calm his racing heart.

"Are you in pain?"

"No, I…” Harry shook his head, trying to shake the lingering images of the nightmare from his mind. "Bad dream."

Draco carefully sat on the edge of the bed. "About what happened this morning?" he asked, forehead creased with worry.

"Yeah," Harry breathed out, his heart rate beginning to return to normal. "Except instead of my leg, he clawed my stomach and…” he trailed off, knowing Draco would be able to fill in the blanks.

Draco immediately slipped onto the bed to lie alongside his mate and gently placed a hand on Harry's stomach. "The Healer said the baby was fine," he said quietly, gaze on the slope of Harry's pregnant belly beneath the sheet. "Just as you said."

Harry felt the knot in his stomach ease a little at the confirmation. "And my leg?" he asked, flexing his left leg a little. The pain was gone but the muscles felt stiff and bruised.

"Maggie healed it for you. Unfortunately there's a bit of scarring."

Harry smiled a little at the anxious expression on his mate's face. "I don't care about that," he reassured, then reached out a hand to brush Draco's dishevelled fringe out of his eyes. His mate looked exhausted but also as though his entire body was practically vibrating with unease. "Maggie?" he questioned, continuing to comb his fingers through Draco's soft hair, hoping to soothe the tension out of him.
"The Clan Healer," Draco answered, eyes falling shut under his mate's touch. "You'll like her, she's quiet and listens well, but she's also very intelligent and extremely competent. I trust her."

"If you trust her to bring our little plonker into the world, then I do too."

Draco slowly opened his eyes and looked at him with a tired smile.

"Are you all right?" Harry asked with a frown. "I mean, besides the obvious, did anything else happen? You seem really… tense."

Draco's gaze skittered away from the sudden scrutiny. "I'm fine, just tired."

Harry narrowed his eyes. "No you're not," he replied shortly. "Now tell me what's going on. If it's not me or the baby, then something else is bothering you. Is your father all right?"

Draco swallowed, still not quite meeting Harry's eyes. "Father is fine. It's… those…" He hesitated and Harry gently began carding his fingers through his mate's hair again. Draco sighed and tried again. "While those vile men are still alive and in this house, I won't feel…. settled."

Harry frowned sympathetically, recognising just how difficult the situation was for his Alpha. "I thought you were going to kill them," he admitted quietly.

"We couldn't," his mate replied tightly, expression darkening. "We have to bring them before the Board for a proper sentencing first. Nundu are not allowed to pursue acts of revenge and execution without the Board's consent or knowledge, or else we drift into dangerous territory again. We don't want to associate ourselves with the Clans of the past who did whatever they pleased, including raping and killing whenever it struck their fancy."

"But you wanted to kill them," Harry construed, already knowing the answer.

Draco nodded, grey eyes flashing with something Harry had never seen in his Alpha's eyes before; something dark and dangerous.

"When will they be brought before the Board?"

"Tonight."

"Tonight?" Harry repeated in shock. "But it's Christmas day."

"The sooner the better," Draco replied tersely.

Harry paused and really looked at his mate; his pupils were slightly dilated and there was a distracted quality to his gaze, as though he couldn't quite concentrate properly. If Harry didn't know better, he'd think Draco had been drinking. And his Alpha's body was so stiff and rigid, as though he was on the verge of lashing out or flying into a rage.

Harry slid his hand down out of Draco's hair and cupped his warm cheek in one palm. "I love you," he said with quiet fervour.

Draco buried his face in the side of Harry's neck and Harry immediately wrapped his arms around his Alpha. Draco inhaled his scent and Harry hoped it would help to ease his anxiety.

"I hate feeling like this," Draco murmured, lips moving against Harry's warm skin.

"Like what?"
"Like… like a part of me is no better than the Dark Lord."

Harry swiftly pressed a kiss to the top of Draco's head. "Because you want to take the life of those men?" he asked, wanting his mate to talk about it, having learnt the hard way that communication was vital in their relationship.

Draco exhaled, his warm breath puffing across Harry's neck. "I don't just want to end their lives; I want to make it..." He paused and swallowed hard. "Painful. I want to torture them, I want to ensure that they suffer."

Harry understood just how hard it would be for Draco to have those conflicting feelings. His mate so wanted to be better than the boy he was in their early years at Hogwarts, and to get away from the Malfoy reputation for being advocates of Voldemort, and then to actually have those kinds of dark desires eating away at him… it would be so difficult to deal with, not to mention frightening.

Harry licked his lips, arms tightening around his mate. "But, you only want them to suffer because of what they did to me."

"Isn't it appallingly abhorrent to want someone to suffer though?" Draco replied, voice muffled. "Doesn't the fact that I want to rip them limb from limb disgust you?"

Harry sighed, distraught to hear such self-hatred and humiliation coming from his Alpha. "But it's not without a reason," he answered. "When you were on trial before the Board, I wanted whoever was responsible to be punished."

"But you didn't want to kill Daphne Greengrass with your bare hands," Draco pointed out.

"No, but then I'm not Nundu."

"Exactly, you're not a monster," Draco said, voice hard.

Harry held him still when Draco began to pull away. "You're not a monster," he said censoriously. "When Sirius was killed, I wanted to hurt Bellatrix so much that I cast the Cruciatius Curse at her. I wanted her to suffer as much as I was."

Draco pulled back a little to look into Harry's face, grey eyes searching. "Did you want her to die?"

Harry nodded, remembering the feeling of rage and unfairness and hatred that had boiled up within him when Bellatrix had run away, laughing and taunting his pain. "Yeah, I did."

"I don't think you would have done it though."

Harry sighed, shaking off the memory. "Perhaps not if I'd had time to think about it first, but in the heat of the moment I… I really don't know. It was much more straight-forward with Voldemort."

"But you didn't actually utter the curse that took his life," Draco pointed out.

"No, perhaps not, but that was my intent. It was him or me, and I always knew that at some point I would have to kill him. I not only accepted that fact but I wanted to do it."

Draco slowly laid his head down on the pillow, staring unseeing across the room. "But you're not filled with this sadistic impulse which sometimes feels as though it's barely under your control."

"No, I'm not," Harry replied honestly. "But I'm not repulsed by it in you."

Draco's dubious gaze swung back towards him.
"I know this response in you has been triggered by a very specific situation and that once it's been
dealt with, you'll return to your normal self," Harry said with conviction.

Draco frowned, almost appearing peeved. "But how can that not bother you?"

"Because when I accepted a mate who was a Nundu, I accepted everything about you. I may find it
difficult to watch later today when-"

Draco's eyes widened in horror and he quickly cut him off. "You're not coming to the Board meeting
Potter. I won't allow it."

Harry quickly quashed his irritation; he knew Draco wasn't trying to usurp command over him, he
was simply showing a concern for his Omega's wellbeing.

He took a deep breath. "I'm coming and you can't stop me," he said firmly.

Draco quickly sat up. "I don't want you to see me like that."

Harry could read the fear so clearly in his mate's eyes and it pulled at his heart. He sat up with a
wince, feeling a bit bruised in places other than his leg.

"Harry…"

"No, tell me what's going to happen. If you warn me in advance then it won't be so shocking."

Draco sighed and rubbed at tired eyes. "The men will be brought before the Board," he eventually
began to explain, "who will then sentence them to death." He paused and looked up. "My father and
I will then be invited to come forward and carry out the sentence. In whatever way we deem
appropriate."

"And if you don't do it, then the Board will do it? Or someone else?"

"Yes, I suppose so, but that has never happened. Harry…" Draco sighed again, looking so very
weary. "I have to do it."

"Or you'll forever feel like you didn't have closure?" Harry replied with a frown, wanting to
understand.

"If I don't end their lives with my own hands, then I'll forever feel uneasy and… and weak, like I
couldn't do it. As though by not doing it myself, I am somehow condoning the horrors they inflicted
on you. On my mate. I know it's primitive but it's an inborn instinct that I can't fight - none of us can.
This is the only way that we can safely co-exist with the rest of the wizarding world. This way we
get rid of the Nundu who cause real harm while the rest of us are able to release the beast inside that
is screaming to get out when a member of our family is threatened or harmed."

Harry reached out for Draco's hand when his voice broke and entwined their fingers.

"I want to be at the Board meeting with you," Harry persisted quietly. "I can't let you go through that
alone. Nothing you do in that room will make me reject you or turn me away from you. We're in this
together Malfoy. I'm carrying your child for fuck's sake," he added, repeating Draco's words back to
him.

That prompted a tiny smile from his mate and Harry squeezed his hand.

"I've been through a war Malfoy; I'm not some sheltered, innocent child."
Draco distractedly reached out to stroke his fingers over Harry’s Claiming Mark, as though it wasn’t even a conscious movement. "I love you so much," he murmured quietly. "I don’t know what I would’ve done if something had happened to the two of you today."

Harry’s responding smile was all tenderness and warmth, chest swelling at the reminder of their little growing family. "Whatever happens to you, happens to me too," he said. "We’re a family."

Draco met his fiercely affectionate gaze and finally nodded in acquiescence. "Yes, we are."

Harry stood at the side of the room next to Narcissa, one hand on his stomach and the other clutching his wand. He knew that no harm would come to either Draco or Lucius, as the prisoners were chained to the floor with thick iron bands looped around their necks, but he needed the comfort of his wand humming with magic against his palm to help reassure him.

The entire Nundu Board was present, a grim expression on every face. Instead of sitting along a table, they were standing in a semi-circle in front of the two men from the Norwegian Clan. There were no children at this meeting and the only other Clan members present were some of the Nundu Aurors who had been searching for the men, as well as Professor Garrick, who was standing at Harry’s side.

None of them seemed out of sorts about being called away from their families on Christmas Day. It was like this matter took precedence over everything else and was something they all felt very strongly about.

It warmed Harry that so many Clan members were there in support of them. He’d gotten off to a rough start with the Clan, but now he could see the Nundu people becoming like an extended family of sorts; people who all looked out for each other and who understood how hard a life lived in secret was.

Hugh Sloane cleared his throat but the room was already silent; the tension so thick in the air that Harry could feel it pressing in on him.

Draco was standing near the Board members with his father, eyes narrowed and sharply focussed, not taking his gaze from the two men for a second. Lucius appeared a little more composed than his son but still carried the impression of being on-edge, hands clenched into fists at his sides.

Harry swallowed his unease and vowed that he would not interfere with the Clan’s ways or speak unless he was asked to do so.

"Thank you all for coming on such short notice," Hugh began gravely, nodding at the Aurors in particular. "This will not take long."

The two men shifted angrily, their chains dragging noisily on the marble floor.

Hugh turned to them with sharp eyes. "Mathias and Jakob, this is not a trial. You are both guilty for the attempted murder of Harry James Potter." He paused, gaze flicking between the two of them. "If you would like to explain your actions, we will give you the chance to speak now before your sentence is carried out. I must remind you though, that whatever you say will not change the judgement that has already been passed."
Hugh flicked his wand sharply, removing the silencing charm on the two burly men.

"You are all foolish!" Mathias instantly spat in heavily accented English. "Celebrities cannot be a part of Nundu Clan. Harry Potter will be the death of us all!"

Jakob nodded sharply in agreement next to him.

"And so you took it upon yourselves to kill him in order to resolve your concerns?" Hugh replied contemptuously. "That is not the way of the new Clans."

"We have families to protect," Jakob argued, glaring at the Board Chair. "You should think of your own family Mr. Sloane."

"We have heard the other Clans talking," Mathias interjected insistently. "And they desire this male Omega for their own. Our secret will not last long if Harry Potter is being fought over by other Nundu."

Harry stiffened; he hoped that wasn't true, that the man was exaggerating for the sake of pleading his case. He pressed his hand a little more firmly against his pregnant belly, a surge of protectiveness welling up inside of him.

Draco snarled and Lucius laid a calming hand on his son's shoulder, all the while scowling darkly at the two Norwegian men.

Hugh held up a hand to silence them. "We will keep the secret just as we always have. Mr Potter and Mr Malfoy are taking precautions and making plans to ensure the safety of our people-"

"It won't work!" Mathias snapped, pulling at his restraints. "It is only a matter of time."

"Enough of this!" Lorcan Hipwell snapped, losing patience. "They're guilty, let's get on with the sentencing."

"Lorcan is right," Perpetua Bagnold spoke up next to him, voice calm but quietly firm. "We have the sanction of the Norwegian Clan to carry out the death sentence, we don't need to sit here and listen to this vitriol. They will not convince us of anything here."

Sophie McDougal nodded in agreement, arms crossed over her chest and a glare fixed firmly on her face as she stared at the two prisoners. She was dressed in stunning red robes and looked like she had come straight from an elegant Christmas party.

Hugh exhaled heavily, appearing just as irritated by the two men but clearly trying to remain calm and professional. He flicked his wand to silence them once more as they opened their mouths to protest.

"Yes, I believe we've heard enough on the subject now to understand their reasons - unfounded and irrational as they may be," Hugh proclaimed sombrely before turning back to the chained men. "Because of your decision to pursue the assassination of Harry Potter, you will now be executed by the wronged family, in this case Mr. Potter's mate and father-in-law." Hugh paused to stare at them intently. "You claimed to have done this to protect your families, but because of your foolish actions you are now leaving them without an Alpha and your children without a father. This is not the way to go about rectifying concerns which we may have with other Clans."

Hugh turned towards Draco and Lucius, giving them a slight nod of consent.

Harry swallowed and took an unconscious step closer to Narcissa. It was all happening so fast and
he wasn't sure he was ready to witness what was sure to be a brutal execution.

The two accused men instantly transformed into their Nundu forms with a loud roar that echoed round the room and caused Harry to flinch, the magically enhanced metal bands around their necks expanding to accommodate the change.

Harry's gaze darted to his mate as Draco transformed in response to the two men's rapid change, a snarl escaping his mouth as he bared large pointed teeth at them and froze into a lowered stance, muscles shifting, ready to attack.

Harry shivered at the intense look in his mate's eyes; it was the unblinking stare of a hunter voraciously staring down its prey. There was no trace of the cool, sarcastic, caring man Harry knew.

Lucius transformed next to his son while the Board members moved back, allowing the two Malfoy men some room.

It was then that the whole situation struck Harry as exceedingly archaic; akin to a time when lions were brought into the arena and publicly slaughtered. It just felt so wrong, so socially unacceptable in a way that went against everything Harry had been brought up to believe.

A protest bubbled up within him in response but he quickly swallowed it down, reminding himself that the two men had tried to take not only his life but the life of his unborn child as well. Draco needed this and Harry had accepted Draco as his Alpha, which meant he'd accepted everything that went along with that choice.

This was still justice, just not in a manner that he was used to.

It was never more clear than in that moment just why Draco had had such reservations about telling Harry the truth about his heritage. Yes Draco was the aloof, sarcastic, loving man Harry had fallen in love with but he was also the ferocious predator standing in the centre of that room.

He glanced over as Narcissa laid a gentle hand on his shoulder, her pale unwavering gaze on her husband and son.

Harry thought he saw a flash of understanding in her expression but a commotion in the centre of the room had him turning back around just in time to see Draco and Lucius leap forwards.

Harry felt a flicker of fear for his mate lance through him and his hand clenched around his wand, but he needn't have worried. It looked like the bands around the prisoner's necks also prevented them from fighting back; all they could do was make noise and try to move away, but they didn't lift a paw to claw back or attempt to bite as Draco and Lucius tackled them to the floor.

Draco had his ears pinned back to his head as he sunk his claws into the other Nundu's back and shoulder. He then swiftly rolled them over so that the prisoner was pinned beneath him on the floor, the thick chains clattering jarringly on the marble floor.

The pinned cat - Mathias - hissed up at Draco, baring long pointed teeth, dark eyes glaring ferociously.

Draco emitted a wild call that caused the hair on Harry's arms to stand up and a foreboding shiver to run down his spine.

Harry forced himself to keep his gaze on his mate as the two Nundu carried on a sort of intense staring contest, which lasted mere seconds but felt like an eternity.
Harry waited, breath held, for something to happen.

In the blink of an eye, Draco suddenly shifted and his right paw had lashed out, claws extended, as he savagely ripped into Mathias' exposed underbelly.

The cat screamed in pain and outrage, twisting in Draco's iron grip in a futile attempt to break free, all the while blood oozing in a thick stream of red from his wound and pooling onto the marble floor.

Harry blinked in shock as Mathias suddenly transformed back into his human form.

Draco growled low in his throat. The man had barely returned to his human self before Draco had lurched forward and attached his huge jaw around the man's fragile neck, sharp teeth sinking deeply into his flesh.

Harry gasped before he could stop himself and then watched in horror as Draco began to shake the man like a ragdoll, his hands coming up to clutch uselessly at Draco's fur, to push him away or hold on, Harry wasn't sure.

Draco continued to shake Mathias violently, jaws firmly clamped around the struggling man's throat, blood running in rivulets from the deep punctures and staining the fur around Draco's mouth.

Harry thought he was going to be sick. It was so much more horrific to witness when the victim was in human form; so much more unnatural and gruesome.

Draco stopped shaking him and placed both front paws on the man's chest, curled claws piercing the skin to hold Mathias' body in place.

Harry was barely aware of Lucius standing over the other man and enacting his own revenge. There wasn't a sound coming from the other pair and somewhere in the back of his mind, Harry suspected that Jakob was already dead.

There was so much blood: all over the prisoner, wetting Draco's fur, pooling on the light marble flooring beneath them…

Mathias' breathing was a wet-sounding gurgle in the quiet of the room and Harry's breath hitched with dread as he continued to watch. He just wanted it to be over with already.

Draco growled low in his throat and then lunged forward. He sank his teeth into Mathias' mangled throat as the man lay limp beneath him and then wrenched his head back, tearing half the man's throat away with the ghastly sound of ripping flesh.

Harry stared in shock, knowing his expression was utterly horrified but he couldn't help it.

The sharp coppery scent of blood reached his nose and suddenly the sight and smell was too much for him.

Harry clapped a hand over his mouth to keep from being sick all over the floor. He swiftly turned and strode from the room, ignoring Professor Garrick as he called after him with concern.

He tried to walk and not run, but as soon as he cleared the doorway he broke into a sprint, hand still clamped over his mouth, and ducked into the nearest guest room.

He darted into the ensuite and threw the toilet seat up before spewing the contents of his breakfast into the bowl with a sickening splash.
Thankfully it didn't last long; being away from the overpowering smell of blood, as well as the sight of Mathias' mauled and contorted body, was already helping to lessen his nausea. He cast a quick wandless charm to cleanse his mouth of the foul taste of sick and then sat on the cold tiled floor, bending his head forward to rest on bent-up knees.

He closed his eyes and took a few deep steadying breaths, trying - and failing - to wipe the grisly images from his mind.

He began to feel a bit detached; as though the macabre horrors he'd just witnessed hadn't actually happened, like they'd just been part of some gory film he'd watched and hadn't been real life.

Because how could he have simply stood there and watched that?

He continued to sit in silence for a while, taking measured breaths as his stomach slowly settled, before eventually pushing to his feet and slowly walking back out into the guest room.

He sat on the edge of the bed, feeling cold and shivery, trying to get his whirling thoughts under control.

A light knock at the door startled him out of his scattered ruminations and he looked up.

Draco was standing in the open doorway, evidently fresh from the shower; hair wet and the warm smell of lavender soap wafting around him.

The cautious and fearful expression on his mate's face instantly drove every other thought from Harry's head.

Harry stood and silently opened his arms.

With a choked sound of relief, Draco rushed into his mate's embrace and held on tight.

Harry wrapped his arms around Draco's waist and buried his face into his firm chest as the world righted itself once more. He closed his eyes as the warmth from Draco's body seeped into his chilled skin, thawing the numb detachment that had taken residence there.

"You don't hate me?"

Harry's arms tightened around his mate. "No, never."

"But I disgust you…"

Harry pulled back and forced his Alpha to meet his steady gaze. Harry's confidence was immediately restored; his mate was in distress and he needed to fix that as quickly as possible.

"I won't lie and say that it wasn't a shock to see that kind of violence from you, but those men knew what they were planning to do to me was wrong and they did it anyway. They were fully aware of the consequences."

Draco's eyes tightened with anguish. "But you were so repulsed that you were physically sick," he said, gaze flicking towards the ensuite where he clearly scented what Harry had been doing in there earlier.

"I think that was more to do with smelling blood while pregnant than the fact that I couldn't stomach what was happening," Harry replied slowly.

He didn't know whether that was true or not, but he didn't want to upset Draco any more than he
already was. He knew his Alpha wasn't proud of what his instincts had compelled him to do, so there really was no point in discussing it any longer and furthering Draco's guilt.

Hopefully they would never have to go through something like this again.

Draco sighed, the tension in his body releasing just a little. He dropped his head and nuzzled into the side of Harry's neck, lips searching out the Claim Mark and softly pressing kisses to the smooth, scarred skin.

Harry tilted his head away with a tiny shudder of pleasure, his body also leaking tension the longer he stood in his Alpha's embrace.

"Let's go back to my room before my parents come looking for us," Draco murmured against his skin.

Harry nodded in agreement and Draco instantly Disapparated them to his bedroom and sealed the door so that no one could disturb them.

Harry suddenly needed skin on skin contact with his mate and it seemed Draco felt the same way, as, without discussing it, they both removed all of their clothing and then climbed under the bedclothes.

They moved to the centre of the bed and faced each other, legs and arms entwined.

"Are you all right?" Harry asked, realising he hadn't asked how Draco was feeling after the execution.

A flash of what almost looked like shame passed over his mate's face.

"What is it?" Harry pressed with a frown when Draco didn't reply.

Draco's gaze dropped to the Claim Mark on Harry's neck and held there as he answered. "I... I feel fantastic," he admitted so quietly that Harry almost missed it. Draco took a breath and tried to explain when Harry didn't know what to say to that admission. "The stress and anxiety that I've been living with since the first attack is finally gone; I won't have to take Dreamless Sleep every night, that determination and rage and desire to end those men's lives has just... vanished. I just feel so... so..."

"Good?"

Draco nodded, gaze returning to Harry's face. "Yes, like I can finally be happy again."

Harry felt as though his heart was breaking at his mate's words. Draco's sentiments demonstrated just how much they'd been through in their relatively short relationship.

"I'm sorry I'm such a troublesome Omega," Harry mumbled apologetically.

A trace of Draco's familiar smirk flickered around his mouth. "Just as you knew what you were getting into when you chose a Nundu mate, I knew what I was getting into when I chose the Boy-Who-Lived."

Harry's answering smile faded as his memory was suddenly triggered. "Speaking of which," he broached hesitantly, not really wanting to burst Draco's happy bubble so soon. "Do you think it's true that other Clans are talking about me?"

Draco sighed and his arm around Harry's waist tightened a little. "I'm not sure. I haven't heard anything, and neither has anyone in our Clan because they would have notified my family straight
away if someone was planning to challenge us for you."

Harry nodded. "So maybe he was just bluffing?"

"Perhaps." Draco's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "I will have them look into it though. Hugh will no doubt be making enquiries to ensure that there are no new threats on the horizon." Draco's gaze dropped to Harry's softly rounded belly. "Now that they know you're pregnant, they will become that much more invested in protecting us."

"You told them I was pregnant?" Harry replied in surprise.

Draco smirked. "Harry, for the entire meeting you were resting one hand on your stomach, which was clearly sticking out further than usual under that thin jumper. It was quite obvious. Sophie's already passed on her congratulations in fact. Don't worry, they will keep it a secret for as long as you like."

Harry breathed out in relief. "I guess it doesn't need to be kept secret any longer…"

"But?"

Harry smiled and snuggled down into the warm bed. "But I like the whole world not knowing about our little plonker yet."

Draco chuckled and pressed a kiss to his forehead. "Then let's wait until after New Year's."

....

Harry smiled sleepily as he leaned back against his Alpha on the squishy sofa and listened to Molly Weasley chastise her husband over the box of Muggle Christmas crackers which he had charmed to create an inappropriately exuberant explosion at the dinner table. Meanwhile, George was adding something to the hot apple cider from a silver flask and Ron was stealing a few more mince tarts while their mum was otherwise occupied. All the while the wireless was quietly playing Christmas carols in the background along with the comforting clink of the dishes washing themselves in the kitchen.

Hermione smiled at Harry from where she was seated in an old armchair next to the crackling fire, Ginny on the floor at her feet having her long hair plaied while she played with her new Puffskein. Harry's answering smile was cut short by a wide yawn.

"Harry dear, are you all right?" Molly paused in her reprimanding to ask with concern. "You're not over-exerting yourself are you?"

Harry chuckled and shook his head. "Do you really think Draco would allow that to happen?"

The worry vanished from Molly's eyes in an instant as her gaze switched to his Alpha seated directly behind him, arms securely wrapped around Harry's chest.

Instead of being concerned about Harry having a Malfoy and a Slytherin for a partner, she'd silently reserved judgment until she'd spent some time with the two mates and witnessed for herself just how good a match they were. She had seen in an instant not only how caring and attentive Draco was
when it came to Harry, but also how he teased him and didn't cater to his every whim.

The fact that Harry would soon be giving birth to a baby that was half Malfoy also added a lot of points in Draco's favour. There was nothing Mrs. Weasley loved more than new-born babies.

Molly smiled warmly at Draco before turning back to her husband, who had returned to his search for the missing Debenhams crackers.

Harry rubbed one hand over his small rounded belly with a slight groan. "I ate way too much, I think I would be this fat even if I wasn't pregnant," he grumbled.

Draco's answering chuckle reverberated against his back.

"I say enjoy it Harry," Ron said enviously as he sat on the floor next to his sister to offer the Puffskein a mince tart. "It's the only time you can eat anything you want and not care about the consequences."

Hermione snorted. "Since when has that ever stopped you?"

Harry laughed and linked his fingers through Draco's overtop his stomach. Somehow it felt as though his belly had actually grown since yesterday. At this rate, he would be absolutely enormous by spring - and he wasn't due until August.

"Do you have any possible names yet Harry?" Ginny asked, glancing up from her fluffy little pet, which was currently devouring the mince tart with enthusiasm.

"Yep," Harry replied without elaborating.

"Boy and girl names?"

"Of course."

Ginny huffed in exasperation, causing Harry to laugh.

"We're not telling anyone any names until it's official, but we've definitely decided on a boy's name," Harry finally disclosed, taking pity on her. "And we have two girl's names that we both like."

"And you're finding out the sex in a couple of months?" Hermione asked, glancing up.

Harry nodded in confirmation. It wasn't just the fact that he and Draco wanted to know the sex so that they could purchase appropriate clothing, they wanted to be prepared in case it was a male because that would mean a Nundu child.

If it was a boy, then they would almost certainly be moving out of the country. They'd been doing a bit of research in preparation, searching for the most appropriate locations for safety and anonymity. Harry really didn't want to leave his and Draco's respective families but he was willing to do just about anything to protect his mate and his child.

If it had to be just the three of them for a while, then that's what they would do.

As though reading his mind, Draco gave his hand a gentle squeeze.

"I believe it's time to get this one off to bed," Draco announced before placing a tender kiss to the back of Harry's neck.

Ron rolled his eyes while the girls watched with slightly gooey expressions on their faces.
Harry just smiled; feeling on top of the world after everything that had happened yesterday. How could he not feel great when the threat to his safety had finally been removed and his adoptive family had welcomed his mate whole-heartedly into their home?

It had been such a wonderful day spent with the Weasley's; from the delicious late-morning breakfast and snowball fight in the garden to the heaps of wizarding games by the fire, all capped off with a huge dinner and the unwrapping of gifts. Harry and Draco had received an honorary Weasley jumper for their future little one and Molly had promised to stitch an initial onto it once their baby had a name.

Harry sent Draco a grateful smile as he got to his feet, very nearly grunting with the effort to get off the low-slung sofa. He hated leaving early but that was just another part of being pregnant he was learning to live with.

The two mates bid farewell as they slipped into their thick winter cloaks and fur-lined boots by the door, the entryway a cosy catastrophe of brightly coloured wellies and puddles of melting snow along with a vast collection of woollen cloaks with hand-sewn patches and scraps of parchment and chocolate frog wrappers spilling out of the pockets.

Harry loved it all. He dearly hoped they could visit for Christmas next year even if they weren't living in the same country.

Mrs. Weasley gave him an especially long and tight embrace before letting him return to Draco's side, her eyes glassy with emotion as she pulled back.

"Goodbye Draco dear," she said, turning to him with a smile, knowing he probably wouldn't appreciate a crushing hug from her this early on in their association.

"Goodnight Mrs. Weasley, thank-you for having me," he replied politely as he slipped a warm hand into Harry's.

She nodded in response and Harry waved one last time at the gathered group before turning away to walk out into The Burrow's front garden, holding tight to his Alpha's hand while the stars twinkled overhead in the clear night sky.

They were heading back to a mostly empty school for the last few days of the Christmas hols. Harry had wanted to spend a bit of time there and really soak it all in since it was his last Christmas at Hogwarts and the castle had been more of a home to him than anywhere else.

Draco looked up, following Harry's gaze as they walked down the front path. "Beautiful night," he observed.

Harry glanced at him with an amused smile. "Feeling sentimental are we?"

Draco dropped his gaze to Harry's and something in his expression made Harry frown.

Draco exhaled, breath puffing out in a white cloud in the cold evening air. He suddenly stopped walking and Harry paused, watching as his Alpha shoved both hands into his pockets, looking uncharacteristically uncertain.

"What's wrong?" Harry asked uneasily.

Draco swallowed and dragged his gaze back up to Harry's face, looking as though he had to force himself to look his mate in the eye. "You mean so much to me Harry," he began quietly, his comment taking Harry by surprise and only serving to increase his trepidation.
"Draco, you're scaring me…"

Draco huffed out a shaky laugh as he removed one hand from his pocket and held it out.

Harry frowned at him before looking down and then promptly freezing when he saw the deep blue ring box sitting on Draco's open palm. Harry's gaze flew back up to Draco's nervous grey eyes as he stared at him in disbelief.

"Is that…?"

"Your Christmas present," Draco answered with a faint smile.

He opened the ring box and Harry stared, gobsmacked, at the simple gold band nestled in a bed of white silk. He was too shocked to state that he'd already received more than enough gifts from his Alpha that Christmas.

"Will you marry me?"

Harry tore his gaze away from the polished ring to look up at Draco's face, taking in the happiness glowing in his eyes, tempered only by a slight hint of apprehension, as though Harry might actually refuse him.

That last thought caused Harry to suddenly smile.

"Aren't you supposed to be down on one knee?" he replied cheekily.

Draco snorted and arched a single brow. "Not in these trousers Potter, they cost more than your Firebolt."

Harry laughed and then abruptly threw his arms around his mate's neck, startling him. Draco only just managed to move the ring out of the way before it ended up in the snow.

"You're such a posh wanker," Harry choked into the soft wool of Draco's cloak, arms tightening around him.

"Is that a yes?"

Harry laughed and nodded.

Draco pulled back after a moment and opened the ring box again. This time, he immediately plucked the ring out and slid it onto Harry's waiting finger - which trembled only a little.

Harry smiled as the cool metal warmed to his skin. He looked up at Draco with a curious smile. "I didn't think you wanted to get married."

"Whatever gave you that idea?"

Harry shrugged, feeling embarrassed.

Draco's answering smile was decidedly fond. "And you thought you'd just accept that and never complain? How very… Gryffindor of you."

A slow smile spread across Harry's face as he took in Draco's amused expression. "It wasn't end of the world stuff to me," he reasoned.

Draco smiled and pushed a stray strand of dark hair away from Harry's eye before stepping back and
crossing his arms over his chest. “I'll wait.”

Harry blinked at him stupidly.

"Don't you want to tell the Weasley's your news in person?"

Harry knew his cheeks would be sore by the end of the night because he couldn't seem to stop grinning like a loon. "I knew there was a reason I was marryying you," he teased as he spun back towards The Burrow, pulling Draco along with him.

"You mean besides being pregnant with my baby?" Draco drawled.

Harry laughed, his exhaustion but a distant memory now as he strode up the path to tell his adoptive family the good news.

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IT'S A BOY!

MONDAY EXCLUSIVE: Our inside source at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry has leaked the exclusive news that Harry Potter, Boy-Who-Lived, is expecting a baby boy this summer! The Wizarding World has been in a tizzy ever since it was announced that Mr. Potter and his mate (infamous Death Eater Draco Malfoy), were expecting a little bundle of joy, and it has now been confirmed that the Potter/Malfoy baby is a boy! This reporter will be waiting with baited breath until our first glimpse of the famous little one who will surely capture our attention and our hearts as Harry Potter himself has done. Note: Mr. Potter was unable to be reached for comment.

Betty Braithwaite - The Evening Prophet - 11 May 1999

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Harry grunted as he gradually lowered himself onto the warm grass, one hand on his lower back and the other firmly clasped in his Alpha's strong grip.

"You are really not selling the whole pregnancy thing Harry," Hermione teased as she watched him slowly and awkwardly manoeuvre himself to the ground.

Harry flipped her the bird as Draco sat back against the large willow tree and then pulled Harry to sit in between his bent-up knees, upper body reclining back against Draco's chest.

"I may need to re-think the whole having children plan," she mused.

"Don't tell mum," Ron interjected distractedly as he rummaged around in a newly opened box of Bertie Botts.
Hermione rolled her eyes as she reached over and plucked a red jellybean out of his hand.

"I can't believe this is our last day at Hogwarts," Harry said with a sigh, unable to keep the melancholy out of his voice.

The others followed Harry's gaze as he stared out over The Black Lake, each lost in their own thoughts for a moment; reflecting on everything that had happened over the years on the ancient castle grounds. There were some fairly awful memories, but a lot of very good ones too, especially for Harry, who grew to the age of eleven without really knowing what love felt like until he attended school.

Now he was leaving Hogwarts with not only some very special memories and life-long friendships, but also with a loving mate by his side and a baby on the way.

He never would have dreamed that his school days would've ended quite like this, but he also knew that he wouldn't change a thing.

Harry smiled when he suddenly noticed Draco absently toying with Harry's gold engagement ring. Harry was planning to buy a matching ring for Draco as well so that they each had one; he wanted the world to know that his mate was taken just as much as Draco wanted to growl at the world at large to tell them that Harry belonged to him.

They hadn't set a date for the wedding yet but they weren't in any rush, they wanted to have the baby and figure out where they were living first. The wedding could wait. They'd both already agreed that it was to be a small affair, with only close friends and family members present.

"I'm sure McGonagall will let you visit." Hermione eventually said, gaze still taking in the sight of the beautiful grounds. The lake positively sparkled in the summer sun and the sound of the birds chirping and bees buzzing were a soothing soundtrack to it all as they sat there contemplating life; as you inevitably do after your school leaving ceremony.

"I wonder what they'll do with our room?" Harry ruminated aloud.

"Wait until the next male Omega attends Hogwarts?" Ron offered with a crooked grin.

"Hopefully they leave them empty so that Harry and I may use them on kinky weekends away from the children," Draco said with a smirk.

Harry laughed while Ron made a disgusted face.

"What's the matter Weasley, never played 'Gryffindor Virgin' and 'Naughty Slytherin' bedroom games before?" Draco asked ingeniously.

Harry and Hermione laughed and Ron lobbed an Every Flavour Bean at Draco's head.

"You are going to visit though, aren't you?" Hermione asked, expression sobering.

"Visit Hogwarts?"

"No, visit us if you move away."

Harry heaved a sigh and shifted on the grass. He never felt comfortable anymore now that he was seven months along and felt as big as a house.

"It's not a question of if anymore 'Mione," he replied. "We both want to have some time alone with
Harry had been expecting the media frenzy surrounding his pregnancy but it had surpassed even *his* expectations. The press were relentless in attempting to get photos of a pregnant Harry with his Alpha. He and Draco had taken to not even leaving school grounds after the news broke in *The Prophet*. Luckily, the Hogwarts wards had been adjusted to keep reporters out during the leaving ceremony, and now they only had a few hours left of blessed peace and quiet before walking out those gates to face the inevitable mob.

Draco had said the other night that they would probably be moving countries even if they *weren't* having a boy, because it was just too much; too much scrutiny and stress, especially for a family that had a very critical secret to keep.

Harry had nodded in agreement, wishing - not for the first time - that he wasn't so bloody famous.

He settled back against his Alpha with a sigh, giving Draco's hand a gentle squeeze. He knew Draco was a little more on edge today because they finally had to face the world without the safety of Hogwarts behind them. Draco had been less and less tolerant of other people around his mate the closer Harry got to his due date, he really only bore Ron and Hermione's presence near his pregnant Omega now without snapping.

"The Ministry still pushing you to join the Auror training program?" Ron asked before popping a mottled green jellybean into his mouth and promptly grimacing.

"Yeah," Harry exhaled, dropping his head back onto Draco's shoulder. "They won't take no for an answer."

Hermione pursed her lips, looking infuriated on his behalf. "I don't know why they expect you to continue to put your life on the line for them when I think that everyone can agree that you've risked your life enough times already. I understand offering a position to you initially, but how many times have you refused them now?"

Harry couldn't help but smile at his friend; she would make a brilliant human rights lawyer. "Including this morning?" he replied dryly. "Four times. Although, to be fair, I didn't actually answer the last two, I just Incendio'd them."

"Well I sent a reply on your behalf," Draco interjected casually. "It said 'get fucked.'"

Ron laughed and then paused. "Uh, you're joking, right?"

Draco merely arched a brow in response.

Harry snorted. "He thinks he's invincible to the Ministry now that he's my mate."

"That's probably true." Hermione smiled as she took the box from Ron and offered Harry and Draco some jellybeans. "But I wouldn't test it *too* much."

Draco sorted through the pile of jellybeans which he'd poured into his hand and then chucked the rejections back into the box. He passed half of the acceptable ones to Harry before popping the rest into his mouth.

"I hope your hands are clean," Ron grumbled as he took the box back.

Harry chewed on the flavourful jellybeans as a wave of nostalgia washed over him. He was excited for the future but he also knew that he was going to miss this.
They sat in silence for a while before Harry's rumbling stomach prompted Draco to tell them that it was time to go.

Harry hugged Ron and Hermione - as well as he was able to with his massive stomach - and smiled at them both with glassy eyes, not needing words to say how much their friendship had meant to him during his time at Hogwarts. They knew they were the reason he had managed to escape certain death on more than one occasion.

What they didn't know was that they wouldn't be a part of his life in the same way that they had once been; he had loyalties to a new family now. One that he was willing to do anything for, including holding his best friends at arm's length in order to keep his family safe.

Harry stepped back and took his Alpha's hand before the four of them proceeded towards the front gates together…

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**EPILOGUE**

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Harry took a sip of his tea while gazing over the rim of the cup and through the window at his mate. Draco was currently bounding across the vivid green lawns of Malfoy Manor in his Nundu form, his father directly behind him.

Draco had to spend every morning working off his excess energy now that Harry was overdue by nearly a week.

Harry set his cup down with a sigh, one hand absently rubbing his lower back. Draco wasn't the only one ready for this baby to come; he was so tired of feeling uncomfortable and achy, not to mention bloody hot now that they were in the midst of an oppressively warm summer. Draco did everything he could to make Harry feel as comfortable as possible, with lots of massages and bringing him anything he needed or wanted but Harry's discomfort was making him rather difficult to live with.

Harry felt bad about being so grumpy all the time but Draco never complained and Harry vowed that he would make it up to him once he was feeling more like himself again.

"Can I get you anything?" Narcissa quietly enquired from across the small round table in the sunny conservatory.

Harry smiled wanly at her. "No thank you, I think I'll just go for a bit of a walk. My back is beginning to ache from sitting for so long."

"I'll have Trinket bring you some pain reliever potion in the front parlour when you're ready."

Harry nodded gratefully. He was only permitted two mild pain reliever potions per day and he was definitely ready for his first.

Narcissa picked up her own tea in pale hands and smiled softly at the sun glinting off Harry's
engagement ring. "I wanted to thank you Harry," she said before taking a sip of her Earl Grey.

"For what?"

Narcissa smiled gently, cupping her warm teacup in both hands. "For giving my son such a wonderful life."

Harry blinked in surprise, cheeks heating under her warm regard.

"You have given him everything he could have wished for, and what more could a parent want for her child than that?"

Harry smiled in response, cheeks still flushed with embarrassment. "I love him," he finally replied with a shrug, as though that simple response explained everything, and perhaps it did, because Narcissa's expression warmed even further at his humble words.

She turned away to finish her breakfast and Harry pushed himself to his feet, trying not to groan at the ache that seemed to be spreading from his lower back to his hips and even up to his neck.

"I'll let Draco know where you are when he comes back inside," Narcissa said as Harry slowly made his way to the door.

He nodded in acknowledgment and then focussed on walking out into the hall, stretching his legs to the fullest stride possible to try to work out the kinks in his ligaments and muscles. He kept getting muscle spasms in his calves and in the arches of his feet, so he was trying to keep as limber as possible to avoid the debilitating cramps.

Now he knew why Narcissa had only gone through this once. He was out of breath moving from the rear of the Manor to the entrance foyer -and that was moving at a snail's pace. He was also at the point where he didn't even perform elemental magic anymore because it was too draining; any magic he had available was being consumed by the developing baby.

Harry paused to lean against the wall and catch his breath before moving onwards to the front parlour. He had originally planned to take a turn about the garden, but he quickly realised that would be too much for him until he took his potion.

Harry inhaled sharply at the sudden stab of pain that ripped across his swollen abdomen.

He quickly placed both hands on his stomach and held his breath, waiting to see if it happened again. He knew male Omegas had very fast deliveries and he wasn't taking any chances by brushing this off.

When it happened again, the pain was much worse and Harry stifled a gasp as he stumbled sideways into the wall, stretching his legs to the fullest stride possible to try to work out the kinks in his ligaments and muscles. He kept getting muscle spasms in his calves and in the arches of his feet, so he was trying to keep as limber as possible to avoid the debilitating cramps.

The front door of the Manor was abruptly thrown open and Harry squinted up at the sunshine
streaming through the open doorway to see an enormous black cat standing there. The cat swiftly transformed back into his Alpha and Draco ran over, vanishing the spilt water with an absent wave of his hand before crouching down next to his mate.

Harry couldn't stop the whimper of relief that overwhelmed him at the sight of his Alpha. He reached out for him and Draco quickly scooped Harry up into his arms, lifting him as though he weighed nothing at all.

Harry closed his eyes and tried to concentrate on his breathing like the books had instructed him to do. He knew Draco would take care of the rest.

He was only vaguely aware of Lucius and Narcissa appearing in the foyer and speaking to Draco while Trinket was sent to fetch the Clan Healer. After a very hasty conversation between the three Malfoys, Draco turned and began to carry Harry up the stairs.

Harry could barely focus through the haze of pain that refused to abate. His contractions were not sporadic, they merely held steady with no breaks in between, as his makeshift womb was not meant to push the baby out in the same way that a female's was. Their baby had to be delivered by caesarean and it had to be quick for the health of not just the baby but for the carrier as well.

Harry opened his eyes when he felt a sudden brush of cool air, as though they'd just stepped outside. Draco had carried him into a large room which he'd never laid eyes on before. It was reminiscent of the Room of Requirement which Draco had conjured so long ago when they'd had their first conversation, except much cleaner and more welcoming, almost like a secret grotto in a lavish Scandinavian spa. It was made entirely of stone and had a small, soothing waterfall emptying into an emerald pool in one corner, and then a large raised platform covered in furs in the other corner. There were no windows but the room was lit with multiple wall sconces and the water in the pool reflected the flickering light up onto ceiling above.

Harry was in no state to fully appreciate its beauty though; besides the stabbing pain, he also felt hot and dizzy as Draco carefully laid him out on the thick pile of furs.

"Hold on Harry," Draco murmured, sounding distressed. It was just the two of them now as Lucius and Narcissa were not permitted to enter the birthing room. Draco would not be in his right mind and could lash out if there were too many people around his suffering mate - regardless of whether they were family or not. "Maggie will be here any second and the pain will stop."

Harry squeezed his hand as though it was a lifeline, emitting another helpless cry as the pain overwhelmed him.

Draco swallowed thickly and turned sharply when Trinket suddenly appeared with the Clan Healer in tow.

"What took you so long?" Draco snapped furiously.

Trinket's large ears drooped with shame before she left the room, quietly closing the door behind her.

"Let me help Draco," Maggie said in her faint Scottish lilt, knowing just how to handle an Alpha Nundu in this situation.

Harry looked up at her through stinging eyes as she slowly approached the side of the platform. She was tall, with Auburn hair that shone red in the firelight. She had hazel eyes and lots of freckles, and gave such an aura of self-assuredness that Harry felt instant relief at her presence, even though this was only the second time they'd met.
"Hello Harry," she greeted, holding his gaze as she set down a worn canvas bag full of supplies and carefully extracted a glass phial full of blue liquid. "I need you to drink this for me; it will give your magic a much-needed boost."

Harry writhed on the furs, not wanting to take his hands away from his stomach.

Draco quickly took the phial from her and held it to Harry's lips. "Drink this Harry," he instructed firmly, placing a hand on Harry's shoulder to keep him from turning away.

Harry clenched his eyes shut but obediently opened his mouth and drank the syrupy potion when the glass was pressed to his lips, the liquid dripping thickly down his throat.

"Draco," Maggie said proficiently, taking the empty phial back from him once Harry had drunk every last drop. "I need you to remove his clothing for me."

Draco's eyes flared with outrage for a moment, clearly not wanting anyone else to see his mate's naked form, but it only lasted for a second and then he swallowed and nodded in compliance.

Draco withdrew his wand and quickly vanished every stitch of Harry's clothing; leaving his mate completely nude except for his glasses.

Harry barely acknowledged the spell; he was in too much pain to care about how exposed he was to an almost complete stranger.

"Good Draco," Maggie murmured as she swiftly prepared some more potions and raised her wand. "Now, I need you to sit with Harry and concentrate on lending him your strength and magic through the bond as much as you can."

Draco carefully climbed onto the platform, gently sliding Harry's upper body into his lap and resting his fingers over the Claiming Mark.

Harry moaned and just wanted it to be over with. He really didn't think he could take much more.

Maggie muttered spells under her breath while pouring thick topical potions over Harry's stomach and then dabbing some of the liquid onto the centre of his forehead, over his heart, and the bottoms of his feet. She finished and then stepped back to withdraw her wand.

Harry struggled to stay still. He looked up at Draco pleadingly and gripped his hand as he let slip an involuntary cry of pain, trying to choke it back so that he didn't distress his Alpha, but it was so hard to stay quiet when it felt like he was being ripped apart from the inside.

Draco bent forward and kissed his sweaty forehead, expression concentrated as he forced his magic through their bond; the buzz of what felt like tiny electric currents running from Draco's fingertips to flood Harry's body at every point of contact.

Harry followed his mate's gaze when Draco glanced at the Healer and his grey eyes suddenly filled with what looked like barely controlled anger. At a glance, Harry realised that Maggie was raising her wand to make the first incision.

Harry's gaze quickly flew back to Draco's face, not wanting to watch Maggie split him open. He knew he wouldn't feel it because of the numbing potion but he didn't think he could watch.

Draco locked his gaze with Harry's and held steady.

It felt as though they both needed the other's support to get through this; not just the Omega needing
his Alpha, but Draco needing Harry to help keep him grounded too.

Harry felt a warm, tingly sensation over his stomach and knew Maggie was casting the first spell. He gasped as the pain seemed to ratchet up a notch.

Harry tried to breathe through it, his vision blurring around the edges as the room swam in and out of focus. He concentrated on Draco, holding his gaze as he felt his Alpha's strength and magic leaking into him. He tried to concentrate on that feeling, to encourage it and welcome it, knowing he needed the support to make it through, but it was so hard to focus beyond his own suffering.

And then, Harry unexpectedly felt as though all the blood in his head had drained away. His eyes slowly drifted closed and there was an odd sensation of falling. The sharp, intense pain began to just float away…

He breathed a tiny sigh of relief as he was finally released from the grip of that relentless agony. He could faintly hear Maggie shouting something to Draco but couldn't understand the words as they passed over his head.

He felt warm breath on his ear and Draco was there, whispering fervently. He couldn't comprehend the words but the feeling behind them was clear: love and compassion and encouragement.

The warm breath moved down the side of his neck and his senses were snapped back to full alertness when his Alpha suddenly bit down over his Claiming Mark, piercing the skin and jolting Harry back to the present.

Suddenly everything flooded back in as though someone had turned up the volume, sending his senses into overdrive, and Harry cried out, trying to writhe away from whatever was hurting him.

Draco soothingly kissed his neck and then his cheek, whispering in his ear while his grip on Harry's hand tightened; the magic passing between them intensifying with Draco's palpable determination.

Harry gulped in a shuddering breath and held on with everything he had. He didn't want to fall into that floaty world again where there was no pain, because he knew that wasn't a good place to be.

He eventually forced his eyes open again and Draco exhaled in relief.

Then, without warning, the intense pain all but disappeared; the abrupt cessation causing the breath to catch in Harry's throat.

After a moment of complete bewilderment, a faint crying could be heard in the cavernous room, echoing off the walls.

The sound seemed to focus him again, reminding Harry of what he was there for and why he'd gone through all that suffering.

He looked down and his heart skipped a beat when he saw Maggie cradling a very small baby in one arm. She deftly used her wand to clean him and sever the umbilical cord in quick efficient strokes.

Harry was stunned into silence, and he couldn't stop staring; nothing else seemed to matter now that he'd laid eyes on his tiny son.

"Is he all right?" Draco asked from above, voice tight.

Maggie smiled reassuringly as she conjured a soft plaid blanket and bundled him into it. "He's fine Draco; very healthy." She slowly moved towards the two new fathers and held the bundle out to
Draco. "Meet your wee bairn."

Harry felt his heart swell with emotion as Draco gathered their new-born son into his arms and carefully pulled him in tight to his chest, gazing in wonderment at his little face, which was flushed from crying. Harry knew Alpha Nundu needed to hold their new-born children as soon as possible to learn their scent and imprint on them in return. Narcissa had warned him about that particular trait so that he wouldn't be offended when he wasn't the first to hold their baby.

Maggie smiled and then quietly returned to healing Harry's stomach as Draco leaned down to inhale the scent of his son, grey eyes wide and in awe. The baby stopped crying and snuffled in surprise at the strange touch of Draco's nose against his sensitive skin and then the touch of his lips as Draco softly kissed the top of his small head.

Draco smiled and reclined back on the bed, shifting the baby towards Harry so that he was in between the two of them.

Harry tentatively reached out to touch his tiny hand, swallowing thickly as he gazed into his son's eyes for the first time. They were a beautiful clear blue (for the moment), and his head was topped with a fine, blond fuzz.

Harry smiled; completely enraptured. He was perfect.

Maggie stepped back after finishing up with Harry and then cleaned the surrounding furs on the platform, which had become covered in blood and other fluids during the caesarean. She then flicked her wand once and Harry was suddenly dressed in soft, loose pyjamas.

She sheathed her wand and then began to pack her medical bag, keeping her distance from the new family. Draco would be feeling quite protective for a time and she didn't want to overstep her boundaries and upset him.

"Have a name yet gentlemen?" she asked quietly as she placed the empty phials back into her bag.

Harry glanced up, blinking away tears. "Liam," he replied softly.

Draco cleared his throat, still gazing at his son. "Liam Severus," he elaborated, and then glanced up at the Healer. "Named after a man who did a lot for Harry and I during the war."

Maggie nodded. "Liam Severus," she repeated with a gentle smile. "I like it."

Draco smiled and turned back to his tiny son, who now appeared to be falling asleep in his arms.

"Liam Potter-Malfoy," Harry murmured.

Draco kissed his cheek and Harry smiled back at him, feeling dazed and exhausted, but happy.

"We did it," Harry suddenly uttered in amazement.

Draco and Maggie both chuckled at the look of disbelief on Harry's face.

"Draco?" Maggie spoke up, waiting for Draco to make eye contact before continuing. "Harry is not to move around too much for the next two weeks, and if you can carry him everywhere for the next twenty-four hours, that would be best. His abdomen is healed but he will be sore for a while and there is a chance for complications if he pushes things too soon. I will leave some potions with Trinket to bring to him three times a day for the next seven days." Draco nodded in understanding and then she glanced at Harry as she closed her bag. "You're my first male Omega delivery Harry,
and I don't mind saying that you gave me a fright for a moment there," she said with a wry grin. "Luckily you have a great bond with your Alpha so everything turned out fine."

"Congratulations," Harry responded before yawning.

Maggie laughed. "I think you'd better sleep now. I will come back for a couple of check-ins but I don't foresee any problems with you or wee Liam."

"Thank you," Harry murmured sleepily as he snuggled into Draco's side, keeping one hand clasped around his son.

"I'll let your parents know that everything went fine Draco and that they will see you when you're ready," Maggie said as she picked up her bag.

"Thank you," Draco said sincerely, flicking a grateful glance up at the Healer before turning back to his son.

Maggie smiled and gazed at the new family for a moment before quietly slipping outside.

Draco adjusted his position a little more comfortably on the furs so that he could slip an arm around his mate's shoulders.

"Don't go anywhere while I'm sleeping," Harry instructed before he could allow himself to drift off.

"I won't, I promise," Draco replied with a kiss to the top of his head. "You should rest now Harry, I'll watch over Liam while you're sleeping."

Harry smiled contentedly as he swiftly fell asleep.

Harry closed his eyes and turned his face up towards the sun as he reclined back on the chaise lounge, the heat of the bright beams warming his skin.

A quiet gurgle caused him to open his eyes and look down his son. Liam was cradled in his arms in a soft white blanket, a spot of drool dribbling down his chin as he squirmed a little. He was not a baby who liked to stay still, and he was only a week old.

"Want me to take him?" Draco asked as he set down some tea next to his mate and sat in the adjacent chair. The question was directed at Harry but his affectionate gaze was glued to Liam.

Harry smiled and shook his head. "No, he's fine, he'll drop off again in a second. Thanks," he said, reaching out with one hand for the tea.

Draco stretched out on his chair with a sigh, closing his eyes and enjoying the pleasant warmth of the August sun as much as his mate. They were both fairly exhausted after a week's worth of spotty sleep patterns.

"So," he said casually, "made any definitive decisions yet?"

Harry sighed as he absently watched Liam's eyes flutter closed. "No not yet, but this wonderful sunshine is making me think that somewhere with lovely warm beaches would be nice."
Draco smiled, eyes still closed. "There are less Clans in warmer climates as we tend to prefer cooler temperatures, so that would be a plus."

Harry glanced over. "But you don't want it hot either."

Draco opened his eyes and turned his head to look at his mate. "I want to be where we're not going to be disturbed, so I would put up with it if I had to."

"Hmm..." Harry hummed in thought. "Maybe I'll look at Newfoundland again, we already know there aren't any Clans there and it certainly isn't hot."

"And it isn't too far from home."

Harry grinned at him. "Yeah, there is that too."

Draco smiled and reached out to touch his cheek. "We don't have to make any decisions today Harry, my parents are quite agreeable for us to live here with them indefinitely."

Harry chuckled and looked down at his sleeping son, knowing all too well how much Narcissa loved having her first grandchild in the house with them. Even Lucius was showing a tender side that Harry had never seen before; the man clearly adored his new grandson.

"I know," Harry replied. "And wherever we go, it won’t be for forever; one day we'll return home again."

Draco smiled and closed his eyes once more, settling more comfortably into his chair. "Wake me if you need me to take him."

Harry smiled fondly at his mate before turning to look out over the beautiful grounds of the Manor, taking advantage of the rare moment of peace and quiet to thoroughly enjoy it. Everything was in bloom, the sun was shining and the peacocks were out in full force. The very weather and lush gardens gave an air of new beginnings and endless possibilities.

Harry looked down at his son with a smile. He couldn't wait to see what the future would hold for their resilient little family.

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