Summary

A Veela comes to Hogwarts, saying that Harry is her mate. Unless he bonds with her she will die. That’s a problem for Harry, who is caught up with Quidditch practice and the Slytherin team captain, Draco Malfoy.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The sun was setting, sending light of red and gold across the Quidditch pitch. Broom inlays shone, as did the buckles on the chest that the Chasers were carrying. Their robes appeared more vivid than they had when they’d put them on. Ron smiled at Harry and he grinned back at him. There was no better time than now for the Gryffindor team to practice, when their colours were in the sky and everywhere around them. It was absolutely meant for them.

As usual, the Slytherin team did not agree.

They entered the pitch soon after. Montague stifled a yawn. Warrington dropped their chest on Urquhart’s foot and was promptly punched in the stomach. He fell to the ground, winded, and Vaisey kicked at him to get up. Ollerton walked ahead with the Slytherin captain. She was their reserve player but took the game a lot more seriously than some of those idiots did. They took their time walking over so Robins and Thomas set the chest down, sat on top of it, and waited.

Harry’s captain badge flashed red in the sunlight. Draco Malfoy’s shone silver.

“We were here first, Malfoy,” he said in a low voice.

“By a minute, Potter. It means nothing. Urquhart, I want the chests over there. We’ll be using the Bludgers today, Vaisey’s aim is off. Ollerton, see if you can get Warrington up. You’d think he’d been hit with a Knockback Jinx, if he can’t take a punch I don’t know how he expects to do in this sport...”

“Malfoy, we’re already using the pitch. We’ll be done in an hour and a half. Come back then.” Harry
folded his arms and behind him several of the Gryffindors did the same.

“I don’t believe you are using it. If I had found your lot up in the air throwing a Quaffle around, we would have left you to it. As it is you’re just standing here. Let us make use of the space, if you’re not going to.” Draco looked across the pitch and grimaced. “Ollerton, just hex him if he won’t stand up on his own! You’re half his size, don’t expect to get anywhere with him without magic!” he shouted.

His pale-blonde hair caught the light beautifully. The sun made his grey eyes appear deeper, and his skin seem to faintly glow. His emerald robes swayed hypnotically, not set off to the same advantage the Gryffindors’ were, but of much better quality than any of them could afford. At seventeen he was elegant as all the Malfoys, quieter than he had been before the war, more handsome than anyone had expected and just as smart as he had always been. When he stood this close Harry could hardly take his eyes off him.

Ginny stepped forward. “We’re not sharing the pitch with you again. We did that last week and your Keeper knocked Dean off his broom.”

“Ah. Well that is our mistake. Bletchley thought Thomas was going to deliberately collide with him. Stupid, I know, but it’s happened before. I can put him on the bench if you’re not comfortable with him in the air.”

There was a small explosion on the other side of the pitch, and they all turned to look. Warrington ran fearfully out of the cloud of smoke. It cleared to show Ollerton, holding her wand with one hand and coughing into the other. The ground at her feet was singed black. She gave a little wave and went on coughing.

“Good girl!” Draco called to her, smiling widely. “You Gryffindors had better watch out. If Vaisey doesn’t get his act together I’m giving her his place.”

“You should have put Vaisey on reserve from the start,” Harry told him.

Draco gave him a look that said he agreed. “Her mother’s a fright, doesn’t want her on the team. If Ollerton so much as gets a scratch she’ll be out of the game for the rest of the year. I might as well take the time to teach her properly and get her comfortable with all of it.”

“Yeah, we had that with Thomas-” Harry broke off when he was elbowed sharply in the side.

“I don’t think we need to be chatting with Malfoy just now. Can you hurry up and get rid of him?” Ron whispered a bit too loudly.

Draco smiled faintly. “I’m willing to keep to one end of the pitch, if you keep to yours.”

“Are you all alright with that?” Harry asked his teammates. Coote and Peakes nodded, Robins and Thomas were already cracking open the chest, Ron looked happy he wouldn’t have to talk to Draco much longer, and Ginny spun her broom around.

“As long as they don’t interfere with us, I don’t have a problem,” she said.

With that the captains shook hands and the two teams walked away from each other. Their usual hour and a half of practice passed without any problems. When they were done Harry thanked them all for their hard work, and together with Ron picked up the chest to carry it off the pitch. The Slytherins had longer practices fewer times a week and would be there for another half-hour. Peakes told a joke and Ginny laughed. Robins and Thomas were arguing about broom models. Coote kept offering to help carry the chest and Ron was about to lose his temper with him. With so much going
on around him, Harry had no reason to look up at their competition.

But he did, and found that Draco was looking back at him.

He raised his hand in acknowledgement and then went back to practice.

Harry’s face felt warm and he couldn’t for the life of him work out why.

Adeline sat quietly as they discussed her.

“Why have you waited all this time to bring her here? Did you consider the effect that this will have on not only the girl’s life, but Harry Potter’s as well?”

“Forgiveness, madame. We were unaware-”

“You should have come to us as soon as you discovered it. To think you waited two years, putting a child’s life at risk!”

“It seemed at first improper. Then your country was stricken with war. Adeline is precious to me, I could not have brought her to such a place where I thought she may be harmed.”

Gaspard spoke well, and honestly. Whether or not the headmistress believed his words was yet to be seen. She did not want them here, it was clear. Given a choice Adeline would have been elsewhere. Back in France, with her mama and papa and grand-mère. At Beauxbatons with her friends. Hogwarts was not as beautiful, though she had not thought it would be with that name. She and Gaspard were only here because the direst circumstances had forced them to be.

“Even if you had not come here yourselves, just sending a letter to let us know of her existence-”

“Adeline’s family must not be known. It was either bring her here or leave her in France to die. You must understand that I will not allow her to die. Not if it may be helped.”

The headmistress said nothing for a time. Then she sighed. “Yes, well...Harry must be informed, immediately. I think it’s best if she doesn’t see him right away-”

“Oui, oui, I agree with all my heart. Her reaction will be strong. Keep them apart for now.”

“She will be given her own rooms, of course. And you will be staying here with her...?”

“If madame allows it.”

“I do, against my better judgment. You understand that you are not under any circumstances to interfere with students or staff – and that extends to Mr Potter. Not a single class is to be interrupted by you. There will be no hexing, cursing, jinxing or otherwise untoward behaviour. You are not to use the school owls without permission. You are not allowed access to any room that does not directly concern you and your reason for coming here. And both of you, pay me mind.”

The headmistress stared hard at them. “Above all else, you are to allow Mr Potter’s feelings to develop however they do, naturally, and respect his free will. This is his decision to make. You will not make it for him. Am I clear?”

“Oui, madame.”

Adeline just nodded.
With another sigh, the headmistress moved closer to her. She looked into her eyes and face. Adeline looked up at her expressionlessly, noticing that the woman was very old and had many wrinkles. “So your name is Adeline du Maurier, is that correct?”

“With more emphasis on the ‘er’, it goes up, you see.”

“Thank you, Mr Gaspard. Adeline du Maurier...only sixteen, you are much too young...but we have lost younger. I hope that Harry likes you. It is a terrible fate you have been dealt.” The headmistress tutted and smiled, sadly but kindly. She reminded Adeline of her grand-mère, though she was much less beautiful.

Gaspard seemed relieved. He should not be. They had no idea how Harry Potter would react to her.

A bowl of mashed potato was jostled and Harry stopped it before it could tip over. He tried to cut up a sausage and speak to Hermione at the same time. The Gryffindor table was busier than normal, with people moving around and chattering so loudly it was hard to hear what Hermione was saying, even though she was sitting just across from him. He just kept nodding at her and began to eat the sausage indelicately. Someone jumped onto the table. Reflexively he grabbed his plate and held it in his hands, as other people’s shattered and went flying.

In direct contrast the Slytherin table was quiet and orderly. They murmured to each other as they ate and certainly didn’t have professors coming over yelling for them to stop dancing on the table’s cluttered surface. Harry scarfed down his food. If he was lucky he would get some more before it was all overturned or stepped on. Hermione was still talking; he would have to tell her that he wasn’t getting any of it. His eyes somehow met Draco’s, who was laughing at him from where he sat on the other side of the room.

It was hard to look indignant when your cheeks were full of food. Harry tried to swallow it all. Ron whacked him helpfully on the back and went back to his own shouting conversation with Seamus. Although he knew what he would see, Harry looked over at Draco. The other boy was laughing so hard he had to wipe away tears. Watching his perfect face get all twisted up in amusement, Harry couldn’t help but smile, and then laugh himself. This was ridiculous. All of it. Hogwarts, the differences between houses, the peas rolling around on the table, the sausage he’d just crammed into his mouth. It was mad. It was crazy. It was deafening. He loved it.

Hermione and Ron prodding at him only made him laugh harder.

Chapter End Notes

Oui – yes.

Grand-mère – grandmother.
The only reason he had gone to the school broom shed was because he’d run out of polish. Coote had no idea how to take care of his broom properly, as if it being magic was enough to keep it in the air and in one piece, and Robins had brought the wrong type, so Harry had been sharing his own stuff with them. Ordering a new jar would take at least a few days. The handle of his Firebolt was looking worn, so he had decided to risk whatever the school had managed to provide.

Draco was there already, papering his broom to prevent the wood from splintering.

It both surprised Harry and unsettled him.

“Potter,” Draco said in greeting.

Unsure of what to do, Harry lingered in the doorway. When Draco looked at him oddly he stepped into the shed, rummaging through drawers to find what he was after. At least half of the containers had to be older than him. Several had labels in other languages. Harry pushed them all aside and settled finally on *Ellerby & Jewkes’ Traditional Recipe Broom Polish*. He’d at least had the sense to bring his own cloth. He sat down on the bench across from Draco, quite aware that he was getting stared at.

“I wish they gave us better materials.”

“Huh?”

“You’ll see what I mean in a minute. That polish is too thick, it takes a long time to spread it evenly. Then it wears off the next time you fly in the rain. A few galleons makes a big difference. With brooms you really can’t afford to go for the cheaper option.”

Harry watched with disgust as the polish oozed onto the cloth, so slowly he had to turn the container upside down to get anywhere with it. He thought that he could hold it over his head and not get polish in his hair for a few minutes, at least.

There was a soft chuckle from Draco. “It’s really that bad. I’ve only ever used it twice – I bought some polish from Bletchley, once, just so I wouldn’t have to. I was here for half an hour before you came in. Far from being coarse, this paper’s so soft I could wipe my nose with it.”

His broom wasn’t showing the work at all. It was an older model and would need a lot more maintenance than Harry’s own Firebolt. A Nimbus 2001. Draco had been using it since second year. “I’ve been meaning to ask...” he trailed off, not knowing how to say what he wanted to.

“Ask me, then.”

“Why are you still using that broom? Your parents could have bought you a better one by now. It must be a bit of work.”

Draco sighed, quietly but it made Harry feel as though he had done something dreadfully wrong. “I love Quidditch,” he said.

“Do you?”

“I do. When Montague stepped down and I became captain it was like a dream come true. I was happiest when I was playing. It was safe. No words or politics. No glares and insults from people I
didn’t even know. I didn’t have to think about the war at all. What happened... There were rules, goals. That made it all so much easier. I didn’t know what I was doing except when I was on the pitch.”

He ran a hand gently across the broom resting in his lap. “Now, it’s different. People have gotten used to me again. I can graduate and get a job. The world isn’t as frightening as it was half a year ago. When I was struggling Quidditch kept me focused, kept me sane, made me happy. And it was something that I started selfishly. I never would have joined the team if it weren’t for the brooms my father bought for all of us – Nimbus 2001s. I keep it now to remind me that I can make something beautiful out of the terrible parts of myself. And to remind me not to act so foolishly, so selfishly again. I replaced a boy as Seeker who might have enjoyed Quidditch just as much as I do. I...” Draco looked at Harry. “I regret that.”

Harry didn’t know how to respond. The polish came out of the container all at once, sliding thickly off the cloth and onto Harry’s leg. “Shit!” He tried to pick it up with his fingers but the gooey mass slipped away again, making even more of a mess. He kicked his Firebolt away and tried to grab the container, but it flew out of his hands like it wanted nothing to do with him. “Argh!”

Draco was laughing the way he had at dinner. It was a nice sound and Harry stopped to listen to it. Polish oozing through his fingers and running over his thigh, cloth bundled on the bench beside him, too coated in polish to be of any use, he just forgot all of this about himself and looked at Draco.

Whose laughter slowly stopped as he looked back.

There was something there between them.

Harry wanted nothing more than for Draco to walk over and kiss him.

His lips looked soft...his cheek too...and his hair...Harry wanted nothing more than to touch all of him that he could see. His heart beat quickly. He felt dazed, but electrified at the same time. Polish dripped from his fingers to the floor.

Draco stood, slowly, and that alone sent fire moving through Harry’s body. He breathed out and Harry had never heard anything as mesmerising. His heart was beating so quickly that Harry thought he might die. A step forward, and then another, and then...!

A hand in his hair. Harry pushed up against it. Nothing felt as good as Draco’s fingers in his hair, his palm pressing against the top of Harry’s ear. Just that felt amazing. What would it be like to kiss...he really, desperately wanted to, and now...

Draco was trembling slightly. Harry wanted to soothe his fear away, take his face in his hands and comfort him, touch him...but his fingers were covered in that polish. He couldn’t touch Draco, could only wait to be touched by him. It was disappointing and felt somehow wrong. He wanted to give just as much as he was given, if not more. And he was not able to...

The polish container clattered to the ground.

Draco’s hand drew suddenly away.

He turned, took his broom, and left.

The office had changed since Professor McGonagall had moved into it. There were bookcases stretching up to the ceiling, filled with neat rows of dull-coloured books, blues and greens and browns and greys. The furniture was all made from the same medium-brown wood. The desk
stretched around a chair with a gap in it so you could get in and out. There were huge scrolls of parchment piled on top of it, with quills and inkpots scattered between them. The chairs were full and red with golden trim. An elaborate rug lay across the floor, again in Gryffindor colours. The image of a lion was engraved into the platform beneath the stairwell. It appeared that even as headmistress McGonagall still had a fondness for her old house.

Seeing this, and her kindly smile, Harry felt at ease. He didn’t know why she had asked him here but it couldn’t be anything too serious. He hadn’t gotten detention once since Voldemort had been defeated – which made him wonder at any connection...

“There is a very important business, Mr Potter,” McGonagall started by saying. “And I’m afraid that it concerns you.”

“Me?”

“Yes, Mr Potter. Regrettably.”

Harry stood up quickly. “Is it about Vol-”

“No! No, no, no, no, no, sit down! The Second Wizarding War is over and always will be. No, what I am talking about are the visitors that we have to the school. They have come here to meet you. Their circumstances are very...unique. It is a young girl and her guardian. The girl is a Veela, I trust that you have paid enough attention in Professor Binns’ classes to understand what that means?”

“Yes, Professor McGonagall,” Harry said as the gears in his mind whirred and clicked.

“Then you will know that a full-blooded Veela has only one mate in their lifetime. On their twelfth birthday they are presented with an image of that mate. The Veela then has to seek out that person and partner with them – in a physical or a romantic sense – at which point they will come into their full magical ability and their lifespan will lengthen to that of the average wizard’s. If they fail to partner with their mate, what happens?”

It was like he was in class. “They die, Professor McGonagall.”

“Yes... Very tragic. In any case, this girl has come here to retrieve her mate. And that person, Mr Potter-”

It all suddenly made sense.

“No,” he whispered.

“I’m afraid, is you.”

“No, it can’t be.”

“I’m sorry to say that it is.” McGonagall was both concerned and sympathetic. “Now, it remains your choice whether to partner with the girl or not – as you are not a Veela yourself, you will neither gain nor lose anything by doing it – and I want to make it very clear to you that you do not have to. The girl’s family understand the risks associated with her birth. You are not killing her if you refuse, and it will not do well by either of you to accept just for the sake of accepting. I will, however, encourage you to meet with the girl before making your decision. I am led to believe that you are single at present?”

The words wouldn’t come out. Harry just nodded.
“Well. There might be a chance of happiness for both of you.” McGonagall sat back in her chair.
“Her name is Adeline du Maurier. The man who has travelled here with her is Gaspard, a distant cousin. He, at least, speaks English fluently. Do you know any French?”

Harry shook his head.

“That is a shame. I wonder if perhaps we could teach it here, as English is taught at both Beauxbatons and Durmstrang...” For a moment McGonagall was lost in her thoughts, but she soon shook them off. “Well. We will arrange a meeting. For now please act as you would normally. This is not a burden that you have to bear. It is just another event in an extraordinary life.”

It was just another thing that Harry hadn’t asked for and gotten anyway.
It was dark when the Gryffindors made their way onto the Quidditch pitch. The Slytherins were already there, practicing their launches and landings. Urquhart moved too stiffly. Ollerton’s form was good but a gust of wind would knock her off-balance. Harper was following directions effortlessly. Draco stood off-side, shouting out to them all, telling them to do it again, praising them only when they really deserved it.

“When are you going to be finished?” Ginny asked him as they approached.

Draco’s eyes flicked to Harry and then he looked back at his players. “Another hour. Go to the field near the greenhouse.”

“The Hufflepuff team practices there and you know it.” Harry held on to his broom tensely, the tips of his fingers beginning to turn white.

“Go bother the Hufflepuffs, then.”

“Come on, Malfoy. Just share the pitch with us like last week,” Ron wheedled.

“We were here first. Warrington, push off a bit harder! Bletchley, just like that!”

Harry was beginning to get angry. “You said it yourself it didn’t matter who was here first. Let us use the pitch.”

“I said that a minute was of no consequence. An hour is something vastly different. Now could you leave us in peace? I don’t know how you can expect me to show you courtesy if you’re not going to show it yourself.”

It would have been very satisfying to grab Draco by the collar and physically throw him and his team off the pitch, but even in his anger Harry knew better than to do that. Instead he turned to his teammates. “We’ve got as much reason to be here as they do. Up in the air. Head for the side they’re not using, we’ll practice around them.”

“You can’t do that!” cried Draco.

“Robins, Weasley, release the balls before you go.”

They obeyed him without question. Soon Slytherins and Gryffindors alike were dodging Bludgers and tossing the Quaffle to each other, more out of habit than meaning to do anything with it. Draco screamed in frustration and took to the air. Harry, with a joyless smile, went up after him.

A Bludger swooped at him and he neatly dodged it. It went after Vaisey next, who looked like he was missing his bat and very nearly tumbled off his broom. Then it was Thomas’ turn. He flew a few circles around it and it left him alone. The Quaffle was passed from Urquhart to Montague before it was intercepted by Ginny, who threw it to Robins, who rushed for the goalposts which Bletchley suddenly had a mind to guard. With some nice, complicated manoeuvring, the Gryffindor Chasers got the Quaffle past him and began to hi-five each other.

Harry circled the pitch, watching everything that was going on but not doing anything about it. He
was proud of his team for holding itself together without him. They were friends off the pitch, which must have made a difference. They worked together instead of for themselves. The Slytherins tried to do the same, but they just didn’t have the intelligence or skill that the Gryffindors did. Ollerton had talent, Draco did better as a Chaser than he ever had as a Seeker, and Harper knew a few tricks, but otherwise there wasn’t much to recommend them. They had plenty of strength but all that would get them was some people in the infirmary.

In the spirit of fair play, Coote gave his bat to Urquhart. Each team now had one to direct the Bludgers with. As there was no Snitch flying around, Harper had evidently decided to act as a fourth Chaser, but he was absolutely useless and hindered his teammates more than he helped them. Ollerton alternated between assisting him and playing as a fourth Chaser for the Gryffindors, as Harry had yet to get involved. With her help they scored another goal, only for her to intercept a shot right after and take the Quaffle back to the Slytherins.

A Bludger flew at Harry and he dodged it. Just seconds later another Bludger was sent straight at him. He looked down to see that Draco had taken the bat from Urquhart. He shouted something that Harry couldn’t hear and sent another Bludger at him. It made contact with Harry’s broom and wood splintered up and out. Whether it had been Draco’s intention or not, he had just made him even angrier.

Harry flew at Draco as fast as his broom would go. The rush of air hurt his ears and cut at his face. It meant nothing if he could see Draco’s eyes widen at that last moment before he hit him.

CRACKKK!

They impacted heavily. Bits of wood flew out and drifted to the ground. Ginny screamed. Draco wrenched forward and into Harry’s shoulder. Harry gripped at him, holding on to his robes in a desperate effort to keep him from falling. They were at least fifteen metres above the pitch. Draco’s hands found Harry’s arm, and he clung to it like it would save his life. Finally Harry could see where their brooms had ended up. Draco had fallen off his and it was about to plummet. Harry’s was battering against the back of his knee, and he shifted to sit back down on it. Frightened senseless, Draco pulled at Harry like a drowning man, making it that much harder for Harry to get him onto the back of his broom.

But he did and once he had Draco quickly regained himself. Harry found himself being punched in the back and sides. Each blow didn’t hurt, but together they stung as well as just really annoyed him. He turned his head to tell Draco so, and was hit sharply in the jaw, causing him to lose his balance and the broom to spin over.

Draco had control of it now, and was holding Harry up by his robes, himself upside-down. He clawed at the material, desperately trying to lift Harry up, tears streaming down his face. The image fixed in Harry’s mind. As his robes slipped through Draco’s fingers, he felt his legs being grabbed by someone below him. He was thrown over the person’s broom and brought safely to the ground.

“Oof, gentle,” he said breathlessly as he was pushed off the broom.

His saviour had been Ron, who was bright red and shaking as he looked down at him. More than once he opened his mouth to speak, but he didn’t say a thing.

From here Harry could see the stars. His heart pounded wildly and he had the strangest urge to grin.

Draco stumbled over to him, his face covered in tears and his hair a mess, taking his wand out and hexing Harry once, twice, three times.
When Harry had curled up on his side, throwing slugs up onto the pitch, Draco fell to his knees and covered his face in his hands.

“Why did you do it, you git?” he sobbed.

When she first saw him, it felt like coming home.

His hair was messy and badly cut. There were scrapes along his cheek and jaw. One eye was swollen and glittering green. His glasses looked too young for him, awkward circles on a confident face. She saw that they were slightly bent. His taste in robes was dreadful, but he wore them well. Harry was beautiful to her.

He did not look happy. She would make him happy.

“Adeline du Maurier?” His voice was also beautiful. Soft like a flower.

“All emphasis on the ‘er’, Mister Potter, it goes up-”

Adeline waved for Gaspard to be quiet, not taking her eyes once from Harry’s face. When he looked from him to her, she ducked her head and faintly blushed. He smiled oddly. She hoped he did not think her strange. This was an overwhelming experience and she did not know quite what to do.

“You are...two years younger than me?”

She nodded.

Harry moved forward in his seat and she saw with delight that his hand almost touched her arm. He breathed out and her wide eyes returned to his face, all of her trembling with fear. He did not look happy. He was not happy with her. His green eyes looked deeply into hers.

“I’m sorry,” he said and her heart shattered.

“Mister Potter, what does this mean?” Gaspard stepped forward. “Do you refuse her? When you know nothing of her beside her face?”

Adeline felt as though she was falling into a deep and dark pit with no one to save her from it.

“No. I am not refusing her. I just...can’t accept her...not now...”

“Explain, Mister Potter! I demand you do!”

“There is...” He would not say. Harry held Adeline’s hand within his own and she was instantly revived. “I would like to get to know you. I don’t think that it will change anything, but... You are here and I will give this a chance.”

“Ahh, bénédictions.”

His hand was very warm. He was a very warm person. A tear fell from Adeline’s eye. As it curved down her cheek, she smiled at Harry, and nodded.

At the first sight of him she was in love.
“Ah, bénédictions.”
“Ah, blessings.”
Gaspard is glad that Harry has not outrightly refused Adeline.
Typical of the season, it was raining heavily when Harry went to the pitch with his broom. Water ran down his face, catching on his eyelashes, running over his glasses, dripping from his chin and the folds of his robes. The ground was muddy, but it didn’t matter. He wouldn’t be walking on it. He mounted his broom and flew up into the air, the cruel weather battering at him, gusts of wind trying to blow him over and rain falling so densely that he could hardly see.

Practice had been cancelled because of the conditions. The Slytherin team had evidently decided not to risk it as well and there was no one on the pitch. It was all his today. He was free to do what he wanted. The rain crashed loudly past his ears and they quickly ached. It was so cold his hands were red and numb, and he couldn’t stop himself from shivering. His broom was so sensitive that every time he shook it swayed. For some reason that made him laugh. His laughter was rough and choking. Though he knew it wouldn’t do anything, he wiped at his face with his sleeve.

Near blind, Harry relied on his memory of what the pitch looked like as he flew. More than once a tower came out at him unexpectedly and he had to get around it at the last minute. His broom had survived the impact with Draco with only minor, repairable damage. It looked worse than it was, with splintered wood sticking out of it that occasionally stabbed at Harry’s hands. Just as Draco had said the polish was melting off, slicking the handle and making him lose his grip. The sense of danger was familiar so he welcomed it. He knew he was being reckless but he just didn’t care.

Someone was shouting. The sound barely reached him. Wiping at his eyes uselessly, Harry looked down to see who it was, but he couldn’t make them out. When it became clear they weren’t going to shut up he flew to the ground, his head throbbing painfully.

It was Draco. He was furious. His hair was wet and limp, his skin was blotchy, he was shaking, whether from the cold or because he was angry Harry didn’t know. He shouted at him. The words hurt Harry’s already smarting ears. He pulled a scarf tightly around his neck, as if to choke him. Then he tore Harry’s broom from his hands and began to walk back to the castle.

That made Harry angry and he rushed after him, pulling him roughly by the shoulder. Draco hit him hard in the chest and tried to keep the broom away. They struggled, feet slipping on the muddy ground. Draco fell and Harry took the broom back, but he got up and knocked him over. The rain continued to fall. They gasped and choked and finally Harry, tiring of it all, surrendered the broom and sat up, breathing heavily.

Draco stood first and pulled him up. With the storm still going on around them Harry crushed him into his arms and pressed their mouths together, hard. It was rough, and hurt, but Draco let him do it, grabbing on to the front of his robes fiercely. They stumbled together and their faces parted but they didn’t let go of each other, not until they were back in the safety and warmth of the castle, and reality struck Harry like a blow to the stomach.

Quidditch practice for the Gryffindor team was on Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday and Saturday, so Harry agreed to meet with Adeline on the days that it didn’t run. He wasn’t sure why but the meetings were held in McGonagall’s office. Gaspard was always there to supervise them. He spoke for Adeline, who Harry was beginning to suspect was mute, or didn’t know any English.
If this went on much longer he would learn some French, if for no other reason than to make the girl laugh. She smiled a lot. But there was always adoration – which made Harry feel uncomfortable – or fear – which made Harry feel guilty – behind it. If he could just hear her laugh, he might fall in love with her and that would fix everything. More than once in the past week he had wished that Veela magic went both ways.

The floral teacup in his hands clinked against the saucer. He thought he saw Gaspard flinch. “Sorry. So, Adeline. You’re a student at Beauxbatons?”

As they had to every question Harry had asked, Adeline nodded and Gaspard gave extra information. “She is a fourth-year, Mister Potter.”

“How do you like it there?”

“It is a beautiful place. She likes it very much.”

There was a moment of silence and Harry put his cup down on the table. It clattered. He gave them a smile that was both sheepish and friendly. “I know someone who used to go there, but she’s already graduated. Fleur Delacour. We were in the Triwizard Tournament together—”

Adeline’s solemn eyes swung to Gaspard, and his own became sad. “She knows Mademoiselle Delacour and what she has done. If you would not talk of her. Her heart is young and...sensitive.”

“Oh. Right. I’m sorry.”

“There is no need for apologies. You have not met a Veela before, there are not many in your country, this we understand. There is much...it is trying.”

The man who wouldn’t speak about himself was more of a puzzle than the girl who wouldn’t speak at all. All Harry knew was that he and Adeline were distantly related, though he was not a Veela himself. He had plain brown hair, a young face, and was tall. His clothes were, like Adeline’s and this tea set that they had brought, of a fine quality. He was polite but very expressive. He didn’t seem to notice how beautiful Adeline was and stood beside her with one hand resting on her chair. He acted all at once like her servant, her friend, her teacher and her brother, and if she spoke at all Harry had no doubt it was to him. Gaspard...he hadn’t even said what his last name was. Du Maurier?

Honestly Harry would much rather talk to him than to Adeline, who just stared at him and nodded at everything he said. He’d had enough of this even before the war.

“Mister Potter, may I ask...”

“Er. Yes?”

“We are wondering at your...injuries. You play Quidditch. Is it such a dangerous sport?”

Harry touched the scrape on his cheek, having forgotten that it was there at all. His fingers, too, were bandaged. He hadn’t bothered to go to the infirmary to get them healed. His side was bruised because Draco had hit him. His face had been scratched by his broom when they were fighting for it. They were marks that had been left on him because Draco had been angry and scared and worried and wasn’t afraid to show him that the only way they both really felt comfortable with.

Now that Harry thought about it, he had met Adeline and Gaspard the day after his collision with Draco at practice. They had actually never seen him without bruises and scrapes. They probably thought he was violent, or at least careless. And he wasn’t. Not normally.
“No, no, not at all. I’ve just had a few accidents this week.” He laughed and hoped it sounded genuine. There was no way he could tell them the truth – not when he didn’t know what it was himself.

“*Voyons,*” Gaspard said under his breath.

Harry didn’t know what that meant.

He picked up his teacup with clumsy hands.

“‘French declarative word order is subject-verb-object, although if the object is a pronoun it precedes the verb.’ Well, you’ve already lost me there... ‘Some types of sentences allow for or require different word orders, in particular inversion of the subject and verb like-’ I can’t even say that! ‘-when asking a question rather than just-’ Look, I can’t say that either... ‘Both questions mean the same thing, however, a rising inflection is always used on both of them-’ ARGH!”

Why did learning a language have to be so difficult? Harry took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. Maybe he should just learn the words, Adeline would probably understand what he meant... He flicked through the book and found a table of numbers in English and French. He almost cried with relief. This looked manageable, if a bit useless. It was all just a gesture anyway.

“*Un, deux, trios, quatre,*” he stumbled over the words, “*cing, six – ah, good, that’s the same – sept, huit, neuf, dix!*

He didn’t have to know French to know that wasn’t what it sounded like.

He slumped over the book, thinking again that it was a shame Hermione was too busy to help him. Being Head Girl was a lot of work. Ron wasn’t interested and honestly Harry didn’t think be much good at it anyway. There was no one else to ask. Not Ginny, he didn’t want to make his situation even more complicated by bringing his ex-girlfriend into it. Not Neville, he knew a bit of French but was helping Professor Sprout at the greenhouses. Not Seamus, they’d get distracted talking about Quidditch like they always did. Not Luna, because these days he could never find her when he wanted to. Not Dean, not Justin, not Dennis, not anyone. He just had to fight through this on his own.

“*Un, deux, trios, quatre...*

Harry hardly recognised the words as the ones he’d just been speaking. He did, however, recognise the voice that spoke them, and it sent his heart racing.

“*Cing, six, sept, huit, neuf, dix.* Don’t speak a language if you’re just going to ruin it for everyone in earshot, Potter.”

“Malfoy. You know French?”

“It’s disgraceful not to.” Draco sat down at the table, not looking half as affected as Harry felt.

Had he forgotten that they’d kissed the other day? Well, it couldn’t really be called a kiss...more a violent collision of their faces. But the way Draco had clung to him, soaked through but still somehow warm, and leaned into him as they walked back, and been so reluctant to let go, that meant something. There was something Harry couldn’t name, or didn’t want to. Something that ran underneath all their fighting to contradict it, making a punch seem like a kiss and an insult an endearment, and causing Harry to look at his bruises with a fondness he knew wasn’t healthy.
Was it just that he couldn’t deal with a normal life? Quidditch practices instead of battles, cleaning spells instead of *Expecto Patronum*, professors who didn’t want to harm him, clumsiness he could afford, security instead of constant vigilance?

Did he need the excitement? Was that why he kept doing these things with Draco?

Because it was exciting. Challenging. Frightening. Dangerous. Not just to Harry, who still had to live up to people’s expectations, and Draco, who might be disowned by his family if he didn’t live up to theirs, but to Adeline, the girl who had so much more to lose.

He could never let himself forget that she existed.

“*Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.* If I’m going to help you with your French, Potter, I expect you to pay attention.”

“What?”

“Comment?”

“You’re going to help me? W-why?”

“Because you can’t do anything on your own,” Draco said, as if it was obvious. “Now, tell me what you’re doing this for so we can get on with it. Did you make a bet with Granger? Get a difficult bit of homework? Or are you planning to transfer to Beauxbatons?”

Harry couldn’t tell him the truth. Just as he couldn’t tell the truth to Gaspard and Adeline.

“I, er, found a recipe for a potion, but I can’t read it.”

“Is that all? Then just show it to me and I’ll translate it for you—”

“No!” Harry said too quickly. “It’s, erm, a bit embarrassing.”

For a minute Draco looked like he was deciding whether or not to believe him. Then he shook his head and picked up the book that Harry had been reading. His slender fingers brushed across the page. His eyes appeared silver in the candlelight. The collar of his robes cast a shadow along his jaw. His voice when he spoke French was strange and beautiful. Harry wondered how Adeline, a Veela, could be nothing like this. How they could be completely different. How one could hold his fascination and the other barely tempted it.

But he knew the answer to all of his questions. It was that something.

Chapter End Notes

“*Voyons,*” Gaspard said under his breath. This is a word that has a few different meanings. It comes from the French verb *voir*, ‘to see’. Either Gaspard is saying ‘let us see’ – he isn’t sure of Harry but he’ll wait to see how things turn out. Or he is saying it sarcastically, more like ‘yeah right’ – he knows that Harry is lying.

“*Un, deux, trios, quatre,*” he stumbled over the words, “*cing, six – ah, good, that’s the same – sept, huit, neuf, dix!*”
One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten!
Pronounced something like - ahh, duhr, twah, katr, sank, seese, set, wheet, nurf, deese!

“Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. If I’m going to help you with your French, Potter, I expect you to pay attention.”
This old French expression means ‘the more it changes, the more it stays the same’. Draco is saying that even though they have become older and are different people, Harry still gets distracted easily.

“What?”
“Comment?”
Draco repeats what Harry said back to him in French. Comment is ‘what’ when you didn’t hear or can’t believe what someone has said.
He was most beautiful when he could not see her. So Adeline watched him from a distance. He went to classes, ate his meals, talked with his friends. She watched all of this. There was nothing else for her to do and nothing else she wanted to do.

Gaspard despaired of her. He would no longer come to help her with her hair, or try to amuse her, or say ‘bonne nuit, ma chère Adeline’ the way he had for years. Although he was always there, he spoke less and less every day. At first she did not notice. Then she thought it of little importance. As long as he stayed by her she would not mind his moodiness. Her attention was turned away from her attendant to the boy who would be her mate.

It pleased her that the marks on his face were fading, though they had not completely disappeared. When she found out what had made them, she would destroy it. If it was his broom she would snap it viciously in half. It could not be allowed to harm him again. She dreamt of his gratitude. He would thank her with a kiss on the cheek. Oh, yes. It would be wonderful when he came to love her.

Two weeks passed before Adeline realised that he might not.

There was a boy. A beautiful boy, with hair lighter than she had ever seen and elegance that reminded her of home. Though they were in different houses he and Harry met often. When they sat apart they watched each other. When they sat close they touched. Arms and hands and shoulders. Just as often as they laughed they became angry. Adeline couldn’t understand it. Were they friends or enemies or somehow both? She did not go near them, because she was afraid.

At night they studied in the school’s library. The boy was teaching Harry, who learned slowly and frustrated both of them. They shouted, and then fell silent, and then the boy spoke quietly and touched Harry’s face. As Adeline watched, horrified, he took out his wand and healed the marks there. And then, worse. They smiled at each other like lovers.

It was very, very frightening and she did not know what to do.

“Mon Dieu,” said Gaspard, but he did not sound surprised. When he touched Adeline’s shoulder she shrugged away his hand and didn’t look at him as she walked over to Harry and the boy.

“Adeline!” Harry was surprised to see her, and panicked. If it was possible for her to be angry at him she would long have been. “What are you doing here?”

She glared at the boy. He remained composed. “Potter, if you know who this girl is could you think to introduce us?”

“Er...”

Harry couldn’t even say her name! Adeline du Maurier, the girl he was going to love or murder! He couldn’t say it!

“She is, perhaps, French?” There was no emotion in the boy’s eyes or in his voice. “Voyons. C’est une fille, bien sûr. On revient toujours à ses premières amours. Bonsoir, mademoiselle.”

“Arrêtez de parler.”
It did not escape her that this was the first time Harry had heard her voice. She hoped he would be charmed by it.

“Vous êtes malheureux.”

“D’accord! Tu m’as volé!”

“I don’t know what you’re saying, but can we calm down? Adeline, there’s nothing to be worried about-”

“N’est-ce pas?” The boy smiled faintly. How spiteful he was!

“Malfoy, that’s really not helping.” Harry stood and moved over to Adeline, standing between her and the boy. What did he mean by that? Was he taking her side? Was he protecting the boy? Was he simply trying to be fair? It was so hard to understand him! She wanted very much to cry.

“Adeline, this is Draco Malfoy. He’s in my year. He was helping me learn French so that I...could speak to you.”

You could do that already! She wanted to scream. If Harry knew the slightest thing about her, he would understand the mistake that he had made. But she said nothing, to punish him for his ignorance. Let him feel guilty for what he was doing to her.

“This is Adeline du Maurier. I hope I said that right... She’s, er, she’s a Veela, and I’m...”

It was with some fascination that Adeline watched the boy turn paler than he had been already. His eyes went wide and when he touched his forehead, his fingers were trembling. Had Harry not told him? Then, she should not be angry. He was a victim in this, just like her. They were the same. As she stared at him, her anger turning to pity, she wondered if love did not like those who were beautiful.

Harry’s hand twitched but he did not move it. He turned away from the boy, and it dismayed her that he would have to. Did they care about each other that much?

She had her answer the next moment.

“Cherchez la femme,” the boy murmured.

Adeline stared at him as he picked up his books and walked away, past her and Harry and a silent Gaspard. He did not look at her once.

The day dragged on. Professors spoke about things he didn’t care about. Lunch, like breakfast, had no taste. Robins tried to talk to him about practice and he cancelled it. There was an assignment he hadn’t done but he turned down Hermione’s offer of help. His friends were kind, concerned, but he didn’t really hear them. He felt numb, except when he saw Draco. Then he hurt.

As they walked out of class Ron said something to him. Harry was spacing out, holding his books loosely and staring at the ground. Not so much thinking, because there was too much to think about. Just walking and staring. Then he was being dragged out of the hallway and pushed against a wall. Ron’s face as he looked back at him had all those familiar emotions – anger, worry, frustration.

“What’s going on with you?” he asked, nearly shouting. “Just tell me! Tell Hermione, I don’t care! Tell someone! We’re your friends, we’re meant to help you with your problems, but we can’t if we have no bloody clue what they are!”
“It’s nothing-” Harry tried to move away.

Ron pressed down on his shoulder with surprising strength, keeping him in place. “Try again,” he said grimly.

“It’s-”

“It’s not nothing. Dammit, Harry! Seamus says you’re depressed. Are you depressed?”

“What?” Harry was stunned, that his friends had been worried enough to talk to each other about him, and that Ron was completely serious in asking him this question. “No! I’m not depressed, why would you think that-”

“Look, mate, is this about Malfoy? Because I don’t think he’s good for you. You flew into each other that one time at practice – you’re lucky no one died, let alone got seriously hurt – and right after that you came back with bruises all over you, and then you were talking for a while and that’s fine, it’s better than you trying to kill each other, and now all of a sudden you’re not and you’re falling apart in front of me. He’s a bastard, you shouldn’t let him get to you like this-”

Harry pushed his arm away and glared at him. Ron stared back in shock.

“What, you’re mates now?”

“No! It’s just, er...”

He couldn’t tell him the truth...

...why couldn’t he? Why had he insisted on lying to everyone? Not telling McGonagall that he didn’t want to meet Adeline, not telling Adeline about what had happened with Draco, not telling Gaspard where his scratches had come from, not telling Draco why he wanted to learn French, not admitting to himself that he...yes, that he liked Draco. More than he ever thought he would. It was lying that had gotten him in this mess after all. Why couldn’t he trust Ron, his best friend, with everything that was happening?

So Harry told him, and what he didn’t say, Ron was able to figure out.

“Bloody hell,” he said and patted him awkwardly on the shoulder.

It didn’t change anything, not really. But it made Harry feel much better.

Adeline thought often about her death. Would it be here, in this unfamiliar bed? Would Gaspard find her in the morning and cry for her? How would she be taken home, to her mama and papa, and grand-mère, who she missed so much? Gaspard would carry her all the way back to France. Only he would be allowed to lift her. None of these strangers could come near her once she was dead. Harry and the boy, they could keep away. She did not want them to miss her.

Her fingers curled on the pillow and she pressed her face into it. It was too dark to see anything but she kept her eyes open, waiting for them to adjust, hoping that when they did she would see something that she already knew was not there.

There was movement at the doorway and she knew it was Gaspard, come to see her once before she went to sleep. She continued to gaze into the darkness. He had not been saying his goodnight to her for the past week, so she thought that he would leave. Instead he came to sit on the side of her bed. He smelled, as he always had, like bread and spices. She had not realised how much she missed him
until he had returned.

Gaspard said nothing, and after a time Adeline looked at him. He was looking at her already. She could see his eyes, brown and common and beautiful. They were not laughing. They always used to laugh. She missed the times when they had laughed together.

She sat up a little, her long black hair swaying to hide her face and reveal it again. Gaspard did not say anything. Perhaps he was sad. He reached out and laid a hand on her cheek. His skin was coarse and she could feel the calluses on his fingers. He had worked hard in his life, before he had come to take care of Adeline, and then she had forbade him do it. If Gaspard was to work, she would work also. If she could not he would not either.

As though he was remembering that with her, Gaspard smiled. It was good of him to do. She had missed him smiling at her.

“Bonne nuit, ma chère Adeline,” he whispered.

His hand fell away and she seized it, holding it in both of her own. Adeline looked into his eyes. She did not know what she was trying to say, but Gaspard always understood. She held his hand more tightly.

His smile disappeared. No, that was not what she wanted...

He looked very sad. Adeline had made him sad. She did not want that either...

He stood up and left the room.

She wanted to go after him, but she stayed in the darkness, waiting for people who would never come.

Chapter End Notes

“Mon Dieu,” said Gaspard, but he did not sound surprised.
“‘My God,” said Gaspard, but he did not sound surprised.
This is a common exclamation in France, kind of like ‘whoa’ or ‘gosh’.

“Well. It’s a girl, of course. One always returns to his first loves. Good evening, young lady.”
By this Draco means that he’s not surprised Harry is learning French for a girl, because he’s liked and dated girls in the past. He’s already accepted that being who he is, and a man, his feelings for Harry might not be returned.

“Arrêtez de parler.”
“Stop talking.”
Adeline does not speak as politely as Draco.

“Vous êtes malheureux.”
“You are unhappy.”
Draco continues to speak respectfully, using the word vous, ‘you’, which is formal.
“D’accord! Tu m’as volé!”
“Of course! You have stolen from me!”
Adeline uses *tu* instead of *vous*, which is casual and in this case impolite.

“N’est-ce pas?” The boy smiled faintly.
“Is there not?” The boy smiled faintly.
Draco is just trying to rile Adeline up by suggesting that he and Harry are in a relationship, as punishment for her being rude to him. It works and she thinks that he is ‘spiteful’.

“*Cherchez la femme,*” the boy murmured.
Another proverb, literally ‘look for the woman’. It means that when there are problems with men, there is always a woman responsible. It’s because of Adeline that Harry lied to Draco and, he thinks, a relationship between them can’t happen.

“*Bonne nuit, ma chère Adeline,*” he whispered.
“Goodnight, my dear Adeline,” he whispered.
Gaspard uses *ma chère* instead of *ma chère*, which is used between friends. This shows that their relationship is not a friendship, exactly, though they are not lovers either. He feels very strongly for her.
The Gryffindors flew through the clear blue sky, their shadows following them across the ground where their captain stood and watched. They were so used to these drills that Harry didn’t need to direct them. They just flew, aware only of each other, not of the perfect weather or the shadows they were casting. It was amazing to watch them so high up, knowing what it felt like to be a part of it.

They were a team. They worked together without questions or doubt or insecurity. Every person in the team had to trust and support the others or they couldn’t move forward. It was never a single player that won the game. There weren’t any heroes in Quidditch. That was one of the reasons Harry loved it as much as he did.

He didn’t notice the Slytherin team at first, and then he was about as happy to see them as he’d ever been. Urquhart and Vaisey booed the people flying overhead. Montague walked too fast for Ollerton, who was clinging on to the chest more than she was holding it up. Harper wasn’t with them. He was notoriously arrogant and thought that he didn’t need to practice. Warrington was pale, sneezing, and looked like he would throw up at any moment. Bletchley stuck close to Draco who just ignored him.

There was a reason Slytherin hadn’t won the Quidditch Cup in six years.

As they approached Ron broke formation and landed next to Harry. He held his broom like a weapon and stood slightly in front of him. Harry was glad to know his friend was looking out for him, but he wanted to talk to Draco, not scare him away.

“We’ll be using that end of the pitch today.” Draco’s voice was completely devoid of emotion. He turned and went on like Harry had disappeared. “Vaisey, Urquhart, do shut up. Montague, put the chest over there. Ollerton, you’ll play as Keeper and I won’t hear a word from you about it Bletchley, if you keep going on about your girlfriend you’ll be benched in the next match. I don’t care how the Ravenclaws are practicing. We should only care about ourselves. Alright, hurry up. The Gryffindors are in the air already.”

And with that they began to walk away.

It was nearly a minute before Harry realised that he could run after them.

The pitch was hard underneath his feet, not made for walking on. He was closer, and closer, and finally close enough to catch onto Draco’s arm. Draco spun to face him with anger that Harry was actually glad to see. Anything was better than that emotionlessness he’d shown ever since he’d found out about Adeline. Anything was better than being ignored.

“What?” he hissed.

“Just...I wanted to talk to you.” Harry found he was a little out of breath. Not from the run, but from the thrill of running after someone.

“I don’t believe you.”

“To explain—”

“I can’t believe you!” Draco was suddenly much angrier and Harry couldn’t understand why. “You can’t do this, Potter! You’re not the type to do this! I’ve left you alone, alright? Why couldn’t you do the same for me?”
“Wh-what?”

“You think it’s okay to do this at practice, the only time when I have no option but to talk to you? With everyone watching? Do you want to make this more complicated? I left you alone so you could go off with your Veela, keep being the hero everyone wants you to be. I tried to make this easy! *Fuck you, Potter!*

He was close to tears. Harry wanted to hold him and comfort him. But Draco turned and walked away for the second time. Still not understanding what he was trying to say, Harry ran after him again, and Draco shook off his hand with such force that Harry took a step back.

“What are you trying to say?”

“Merlin, Potter, I’m not speaking French!”

“I’m sorry...about that. I’m sorry that I didn’t tell you I was learning French so that I could speak to her-”

Draco laughed. “I don’t think you had any problems there.”

“What do you mean?”

Draco stared at him like he couldn’t understand how he could be this stupid. “She had an accent. French isn’t her first language. Don’t tell me you didn’t even know that about her, Potter? You should be talking to her instead of wasting your time with me.”

Harry hadn’t thought for a minute that Adeline might not be French. She lived in France with her family – Gaspard spoke French fairly often – she’d spoken easily with Draco – what did all of that mean? It was true. He didn’t know anything about Adeline. His mistake had hurt all of them.

“If it’s not about that, why did you stop talking to me?” he asked.

For a few moments Draco just stared at him. Then he shook his head. “Because she’s a Veela. Because I won’t die without you. Because you were going to choose her eventually, and I just...I wanted to make it easier...for you, and for me as well. Whatever was between us, it was nothing. It doesn’t matter. Go and marry that girl and don’t worry about me. Because I know you will. It was-”

“Nothing?” Harry was shaking with emotion. How could Draco have made this decision for him? How could he have put both of them through this, just because...because...

Draco looked relieved that he finally understood. “Yes.”

If there was nothing between them, he would make it something.

That was all Harry could think of in that moment.

He put his hands on Draco’s shoulders and pulled him roughly over. One moved to the back of Draco’s neck, firmly but not cruelly, and his hair was soft underneath his fingers. His heart beat quickly. His body understood even before his brain did exactly what was about to happen. Harry leaned down and kissed him.

It was nothing like the first time. This was warm and gentle and they were so close, closer than they’d ever been when they were fighting or talking or studying together. Draco held onto his robes and kissed him back, and Harry could feel his chest rising and falling against his own, and this was such a nice thing to do he wished they’d done it long before. He angled his head and Draco stepped
in closer, and he hadn’t realised they could be closer than this, because it seemed like so much already, more than he could ask for, more than he ever knew he could experience.

Eventually they parted, but neither could bring himself to move away. Draco’s hair brushed across his cheek. Harry’s fingers played at his nape. They could hear each other breathing. It felt so comfortable.

And then awareness slowly crept in.

They were on the pitch. With their teams. Who were watching them. They had just been arguing. About Adeline, who still needed to be considered. People were going to talk. They needed, even more now, to talk. There was reality to deal with. Beyond this moment of happiness there were problems for both of them.

Draco stepped backwards, and turned around, and walked over to his teammates.

Feeling as though he’d been hit with *Obliviate*, Harry did the same.
Grieved

The tea had gone cold. Harry sipped at it out of politeness and because there wasn’t much else he could do. He had thought Adeline might speak to him now, even in French, but she did not. She just stared at him with accusation in her eyes. Gaspard was also silent. He had neither the cheerfulness nor the enthusiasm he’d had in their past meetings. He also looked like he hadn’t slept in days. Harry wondered briefly if Gaspard was a werewolf.

“So, Adeline, you’re not actually French.”

A pause.

“She is French.”

“But French is your second language?”

A long pause.

“She is French. Her family is English.”

“So why do you live in France?”

No answer.

Harry set his cup down on the table and leaned forward in his seat. He wanted Adeline to speak so that they could properly understand each other, without relying on Gaspard for translation. He felt like he wasn’t getting through to her when he needed to. “I can’t understand if you don’t explain it to me.”

Gaspard made a choking sound, and Harry saw him clench his shaking hands into fists. The man stared at something on the other side of the room as if trying to calm himself. Something flickered in Adeline’s eyes, but the emotion was gone before Harry could identify it.

“I want to talk,” Harry tried again, “but I need you to talk back to me. If we can’t do that there’s no point in me being here.”

Absolute silence.

He sighed and stood up, pushed the teacup further onto the table, smiled at Adeline to show her that he still wanted to be friendly, and walked out of the office. Just as Harry was thinking what to do next, there was the sound of someone running after him. When he turned he saw that it was Gaspard. Even more than he looked tired, he looked angry.

“You–!” he cried and threw a fist out at him.

It made contact with Harry’s jaw. Startled, he took a few stumbling steps backward. He had bitten his tongue and knew that it was bleeding. He stared at Gaspard with surprise and confusion.

Gaspard struck again, quickly but Harry saw it coming and was able to half-dodge the attack. His shoulder was hit instead of his face. Another attempt, getting him in the chest and almost winding him. Harry cried out in pain – partly because it hurt and partly because it was what Gaspard seemed
to want. Clutching at his chest, he blocked the next punch and Gaspard stepped back, breathing thickly.

“‘Je ne peux pas comprendre si vous ne pouvez pas me l’expliquer.’ Non, non! Ridicule. Tu nous blâmer, pourquoi? Adeline est innocente!” He said in French, speaking so quickly Harry didn’t think he would have understood him even if he had ended up learning it.

“Gaspard—”

“Say it properly! It is Gaspard! Gaspard et Adeline du Maurier, it goes up, it is like this!” When he was angry his accent became so strong that Harry could almost not understand him. His brow furrowed and he looked down at the ground, like it would tell him what to do next.

“Why did you hit me?” Harry asked simply.

“For what you have said! And what you have done!”

“What did I say?”

Gaspard was visibly surprised to be asked that question. “You asked her to explain. She has made it very clear to you. If you looked at her you would know.”

“But I have been looking at her...” he trailed off when Gaspard shook his head. “Alright. What did I do?”

“You – you – you have made her love you! And now she...now she...will...”

A look of such overwhelming sadness came over his face that Harry was forcibly reminded of the war, and the people who had survived it. They had been surrounded by so much loss that many couldn’t even speak about it. They knew the truth – that people they loved had died, as well as others, and they had not – and weren’t able to lie to themselves about it. All they could do was grieve for what they had lost. Gaspard looked like them. That was a terrible thing.

He spoke softly. “Why does Adeline live in France?”

“She...she has lived there since she was un enfant. Her family is nobility. They spent much time in France before they took her there to live. A pure Veela line, it was not safe for them in England. Also there was the war.”

“You’re related?”

“Pas vraiment. Many times by marriage.”

“So you are not a Veela?”

“I am part-Veela. It does not show. I can do little things. I do not find them very beautiful, vous comprenez? It is good.” Gaspard smiled.

“You speak a lot of French...” Harry wasn’t sure how to phrase this question.

“Ah, oui. I am French. I grew up in La Roche-Guyon, a small place near Paris. My family lost their standing and are now common. When I was ten years old we met with Adeline’s family. Their servants did not treat her well, pas bon. They thought that as she was quiet she was stupid. She is not stupid. I listened to her and became her friend. When she was older I became her tutor. When she was at school I would go to La Roche-Guyon and work for my family. When she returned I was
her...ah...accompagnement...confident...” Gaspard couldn’t find the right word.

“You looked after her.”

“Yes. I brought her here.”

There was that expression again. It hurt Harry to see it.

“Adeline might not die. There is still a chance-”

Gaspard stepped forward, his eyes wild. “No! There is not! To me, Adeline is – everything! I would choose her over anyone! My own mère, I would not think! It would be Adeline! She is – my first choice, always! You love this...Draco, you will choose him! There is no chance! I know it!” Tears formed in his eyes and he touched his face. “She will die. I will take care of her, even in death. Then I will die myself without her.”

It didn’t surprise Harry to hear that the man loved Adeline. It had become clear in the way that he acted around her – ‘listening’ to her when she did not speak, touching her on the shoulder or arm from time to time, his recent tiredness, his attack on Harry, which had come when Adeline was not with them, the way he described his life around her. But he hadn’t expected the intensity of his feelings. He hadn’t thought once about the possibility that Gaspard couldn’t live without her. He was in his early twenties, old enough to have a life of his own, family, friends and a partner. It hadn’t even occurred to Harry, who suddenly felt so much worse about this whole situation.

“Does it have to be me?” Harry asked him quietly.

Gaspard fell to his knees, overcome with sorrow, and spoke just as quietly. “She will only allow it to be you.”

There was nothing to be done.

Once you got used to the idea of dying, it wasn’t such a terrible thing. Knowledge did not change things. The flowers on the school grounds were still beautiful. The sunlight felt just as warm as it had before. She looked the same, felt the same, sounded the same. It was better, Adeline thought, to be happy. Gaspard would never forget her if she was sad.

It made the time pass more quickly if she enjoyed herself. So she went into the kitchens and ate the cakes the elves made for her. The headmistress taught her some spells and she practiced them. Wherever she went, she changed the colours of everything, making them pretty reds and oranges and pinks and creams. The school banners were dreadful so she changed those. Whenever she passed them they were back to normal so she just changed them again. One day these people would learn that it needed to be done.

She no longer sought out Harry, but found him now and then. Like Gaspard he looked tired and did not speak much. But he held hands with the boy and smiled at him and was happy. It was good for her to see.

Everything was sorted – her death, her mate, her homesickness. Everything except for Gaspard. He did not look well. His eyes were dark underneath. He never smiled. He spoke only when he needed to, or to say his goodnight to her. They had never needed words between them but he had always spoken to her because she liked to hear his voice. It had been like music to her, that never ended or became boring. Even better when he laughed. Now he did none of those things.

He was sad already that she would die. But she was not dead. When she stood in front of him it was
like he could not see her. She could not understand it. It hurt Gaspard enough that he couldn’t even pretend to be happy? He had always done whatever she wanted. But now it was hard for him to do easy things. He spilled tea and burned his hand. Then when she bandaged it he looked at his hand like it would die as well. He fell on the stairs. He hadn’t used magic in the last week and she wasn’t sure why. He didn’t notice things. It was very worrying.

When she asked Gaspard if he would watch the Quidditch with her, he did not answer. Harry and the boy were captains and they were playing against each other soon. She excused Gaspard the first time, but when she asked him again and he did not answer, she became angry. A third time and she could not stay silent.

“GASPARD!”

He went very still. That was good.

“How dare you be sadder than I am about what is going to happen! How dare you try to care more about me than I do about myself! How dare you not sleep! How dare you be careless! How dare you burn yourself and fall! How dare you forget that you are a wizard and that magic is befitting of you! How dare you not answer me when I ask you a question! How dare you forget who you are, and who I am!” Adeline said those last three words individually and was pleased with the way it sounded.

“Mercredi,” Gaspard breathed. “Je m’excuse mille fois! Je ne savais pas...tu as raison, bien sûr. Je voulais seulement-”

“Yes, yes, Gaspard, that is enough.”

“Adeline...”

He always said her name like it was very important. She smiled at him and kissed him on the cheek. “You will take me to the Quidditch. You mustn’t forget, or I won’t forgive you.”

“Oui. Vous voulez un peu de thé?”

She kissed him on the other cheek and was delighted to see him blush. He really was very handsome.

“Yes, I would like that.”

Chapter End Notes

“‘Je ne peux pas comprendre si vous ne pouvez pas me l’expliquer.’ Non, non! Ridicule. Tu nous blâmer, pourquoi? Adeline est innocente!”

“I can’t understand if you can’t explain it to me.’ No, no! Ridiculous. You blame us, why? Adeline is innocent!”

Gaspard repeats what Harry said earlier. The statement angered him because he thought that Harry was the one at fault and shouldn’t blame Adeline, who is the victim and has done nothing wrong. He uses tu which is informal and out of character for the very polite Gaspard. As is punching people.

“Say it properly! It is Gaspard! Gaspard et Adeline du Maurier, it goes up, it is like
this!”
Et means ‘and’. The more emotional he becomes the more his languages mix together.

“She...she has lived there since she was *un enfant*.”
“She...she has lived there since she was a child.”

*“Pas vraiment. Many times by marriage.”*  
“Not really. Many times by marriage.”
Gaspard doesn’t consider himself related to Adeline, or at least not enough for it to affect them.

“I do not find them very beautiful, *vous comprenez?*”
“I do not find them very beautiful, you understand?”
He uses *vous*, back to speaking politely to Harry. This might be out of habit.

“Their servants did not treat her well, *pas bon.*”
“Their servants did not treat her well, not good.”

“When she returned I was her...ah...*accompagnement*...*confident*...”
It’s interesting that Gaspard can’t find a word even in French for the relationship between him and Adeline. He describes aspects of it – *accompagnement*, he accompanied her places, *confident*, she confided in him. But it’s clear that he does much more than that.

*“Mercredi,”* Gaspard breathed. “*Je m’excuse mille fois! Je ne savais pas...tu as raison, bien sûr. Je voulais seulement.*”
“Wednesday,” Gaspard breathed. “I apologize a thousand times! I did not know...you are right, of course. I only wanted-”
In French *merde* is a swearword. To cover yourself when you begin to swear inappropriately, people change it to *mercredi*, which means Wednesday. Gaspard is older than Adeline and doesn’t want to swear in front of her – I liked the idea that he just says ‘Wednesday’ and doesn’t even bother with *merde*. He speaks informally to Adeline. They’ve known each other for a long time.

*“Oui. Vous voulez un peu de thé?”*  
“Yes. Want some tea?”
*Voulez-vous* is ‘do you want’ and is formal. When the words are flipped around it becomes informal. It’s also notable that Gaspard and Adeline are speaking different languages. They’re fluent in both, but speak the one that comes most easily to them. They communicate well with each other.
The game had almost been a disaster. Harper hadn’t showed up, so Ollerton was taking his place as Seeker and Bletchley was off the bench and in a bad mood. Warrington, the git, had hexed Ron, taking him out of the game with no consequences since Slytherin didn’t have their reserve. That meant Creevey had to play as Keeper. He was good but nervous; he’d never played that position in a game before. Harry had expected any number of things to go wrong.

But it had worked out well. Ollerton and Creevey were both talented and came out of reserve with just as much skill and even more enthusiasm than the listed players. Ollerton had taken off after the Snitch a couple of times, and feinted more than once, convincingly. She was actually more of a threat than Harper had been. Creevey moved around too much at the goalposts, but successfully kept the Slytherins from scoring any points. Ten minutes in and the score was 30-0 with Gryffindor in the lead.

Ginny threw the Quaffle clear across the pitch and Thomas caught it, scoring a clean goal and causing Bletchley to swear enough for Madam Hooch to call a foul and give Coote a free shot with a Bludger. He was clearly tempted to send it at Bletchley, but instead chose Warrington as his target, who swung at it wildly and sent it straight into Vaisey.

But just as Gryffindor was feeling confident, Draco came swooping in with Montague behind him and Urquhart positioned at the other end of the pitch. He got the Quaffle from Ginny and did a bit of back-and-forth with Montague, finally getting it to Urquhart, who did not go for a goal like everyone was expecting, but pulled back at the last second and sent it to Vaisey, who got it back to Draco, who got it past Creevey who had fallen easily for their play. He hi-fived Vaisey, smirking. He glanced up at Harry and they gave a little wave to each other before flying in different directions.

Harry didn’t want to catch the Snitch just yet. If they were going to win he wanted it to be spectacular. Both he and Draco had trained hard for this, and Adeline and Gaspard were watching in one of the towers. He wanted to make it count. But if he wasn’t careful Ollerton would catch the Snitch when he was looking the other way. So he kept an eye out for it, did some manoeuvres to make her think he was after it, and waited for the Gryffindors to get a score he could feel proud of.

50-20, Bletchley had really wised up. Some nice work by Warrington with a Bludger and Robins dropped the Quaffle, letting Urquhart score another goal. 50-30, Creevey flew quickly but just not quickly enough, this was why he should stay still and conserve his energy. He gave Harry an apologetic look, and Harry smiled back at him. He was trying his best.

A brilliant play by Thomas and Robins, Harry wanted to know when they’d been working on it because he’d never seen it before, two goals near at once. 70-30, Creevey kept the Quaffle out again and avoided a Bludger sent his way. 90-30, a repeat by the Chasers, who knew they could pull it off a second time? Bletchley bashed into Robins when she flew close to him and another foul was called. A free shot at the goals. Unfortunately Thomas was distracted at the last second and missed the hoops. That was fine. They could afford to make one or two mistakes.

Harry flew after the Snitch, passing Ginny who grinned at him, proud of herself and her team. He lost it and rose up above the pitch again. Slytherin scored another goal, smashing Creevey into a post in the process. No foul was called but Creevey looked a little shaken. 90-40, Peakes rallied a Bludger with Coote and sent it at Draco, but it was intercepted by Vaisey, whose aim seemed to have improved since practice. The tail of Ginny’s broom was hit and she spiralled. It was a smooth recovery but the Slytherins scored again. They were catching up.
Ollerton went after the Snitch with a speed she hadn’t shown before, and Harry caught up with her, obscuring her vision just long enough for the ball to flutter away. She frowned at him and he smiled in apology. A good-natured girl, out of place in Slytherin, she smiled back.

90-80, Bletchley hit the Quaffle back at someone and another foul was called. Draco was warned that if he acted up again it would be an immediate forfeit. After a quick talk with his captain Bletchley was more subdued. In a rare show of initiative, Urquhart set up a shot at the goal for Montague, bringing the two teams up to a tie. This was more challenging than Harry had anticipated. Strength worked for the Slytherins, against all reason.

There was a commotion in one of the stands. It seemed that Harper had turned up, to be abused by all his housemates. After a minute they went back to chanting, having pulled Harper’s green jumper off him and waved it about as a flag. Montague scored another goal which put Slytherin in the lead. Warrington was basking in the attention of the fans and didn’t notice a Bludger collide with Urquhart, who fell a short way in the air before recovering. Draco shouted at him.

When Gryffindor took back the lead, Harry would try to catch the Snitch. Half an hour into the game was the point when people started to tire and make mistakes. Particularly if they’d been beaten as much as they had today. Peakes and Coote were still in good form and saved Robins from a Bludger. As a Beater he should have known better than to let his guard down, but Vaisey was hit by the other Bludger and wrenched forward. He looked hurt but didn’t say anything. Harry knew he wouldn’t be much use for the rest of the game.

Ginny raced across the pitch with the Quaffle herself, hoping that Bletchley would underestimate her. He didn’t and it was tossed back to the middle. Draco grabbed it and scored another goal. Creevey looked stressed that the Slytherins were winning and that was affecting his performance. 90-110, Robins tricked Urquhart into sending the Quaffle to Thomas. 100-110, Ginny went one-on-one with Draco and came out the winner. 110-110, a Bludger hit Montague just as he was about to shoot for a goal. The Quaffle went from Robins to Ginny to Thomas and back to Robins who got it past Bletchley. 120-110 with a lead for the Gryffindors. Time to catch the Snitch.

As if it sensed the end of the game was drawing near, the Snitch glimmered at one side of the pitch. Harry signalled to Ollerton – wanting to give the girl a fair chance, she’d played so well and on a broom that was even older than her – and tore after it, the wind whistling past his ears. The cheers of the crowd faded out as he focused on the winged ball. He passed Vaisey and Draco, too quickly to communicate anything to them and too intent on catching the Snitch to do it anyway. In this moment it was all he cared about.

At least until Ollerton picked up behind him, veering left and right in an effort to throw him off. When that didn’t work she drew up beside him and reached out for the Snitch herself. Harry’s arm was already outstretched. A tower was coming up ahead of them but they ignored it. Ollerton waited until the last minute to pull away, but Harry waited to the last second, and was rewarded with the familiar feel of the Snitch in his hands. He circled the pitch with it outstretched and the Gryffindors in the stands burst out into cheering.

The win was announced, 280-110 to Gryffindor. The players landed on the pitch, with Madam Pomfrey rushing over to Vaisey, Urquhart, Ginny and Creevey, the people who had been seriously hit during the game. Ron came over with her to celebrate the win with them. Thomas was beaming. Robins hugged Creevey, who blushed. There were hi-fives and handshakes and excited conversation going on all around. A few of the Slytherins offered words of congratulation. Bletchley went off to look for Harper, who could expect to be in the infirmary sometime soon.

Draco came straight over to Harry and flung his arms around his neck. Harry hugged him back, laughing. They kissed once, twice, a longer third time, and Harry touched their heads together, even
as Draco turned to look at someone else. He grinned like an idiot. Winning was so much better when he had someone to share it with. Although his team had lost Draco congratulated him wholeheartedly. It had been a game for both sides to be proud of – granted, with more fouls than you could really be happy with and injuries across the board.

He kissed Draco’s hair and released him, going to hug Ron, whose head had returned to its normal size. Ginny came over and he was about to tell her all the things that she’d done right when there came a scream from one of the towers. Heart sinking, he turned to see which one.

It was Adeline’s.
The place where they played Quidditch was very odd. It was an oval shape marked by different coloured seating areas with tall towers between them. The ground was striped and there were metal circles atop poles at both ends. It was colourful but simple. If there was a reason for that, Adeline couldn’t think of it.

She saw that they were much higher than everyone else. That, at least, was impressive to her. Gaspard took the seat next to her and the headmistress stood at the back of the tower room. She was here to help Adeline understand the game, but did not like heights. This was amusing. The headmistress was at once like her grand-mère and unlike her.

The players walked out onto the pitch, carrying their brooms. They were so small they looked like dolls. Adeline clapped her hands together, excited to watch Quidditch for the first time. It was not as popular at Beauxbatons as it was here. Flying was not popular either. Instead there were horses.

Gaspard chuckled and she looked at him. A smile spread slowly across her face. It was a wonderful day! Harry and the boy were to play Quidditch, and Gaspard laughed for her! Adeline couldn’t have hoped for a better last day than this.

She had woken up, knowing somehow that she was going to die today. There was a mild pain that moved around her body. Now, it was in her left hand. She laid it flat on the arm of the chair. After a moment Gaspard took it and held it. He didn’t know what she did. He had just done it. She wanted to cry, even though she was happy.

It felt like nothing else, dying.

When the game began Adeline curled her fingers around Gaspard’s, watching the figure that she knew was Harry. She would always know him, even if he was not hers. The boy she could tell from his hair. It looked white in the sun. Beautiful. Both of them.

Ten minutes in, the pain moved to her neck. She wished to rub it but did not want to Gaspard to know. The headmistress explained that a goal had been scored. Adeline nodded. It made her neck hurt much more.

Twenty minutes in, the pain had moved to the right side of her face, fortunately the one Gaspard could not see. She didn’t so much as blink in case something happened and he became aware. The headmistress cheered when Harry’s team scored a goal and muttered when the boy’s team did. That made Adeline smile. That hurt her face so much that she wanted to cry out.

Thirty minutes in and the game was almost over. Harry flew around the pitch, chasing after something she could not see. The headmistress was sure that he would win. Adeline had her pain controlled and Gaspard still held her hand. Then, everything at once. Harry caught the thing. The headmistress and everyone cheered loudly. The pain moved to her head, inside of it, and it felt like there was a knife there.

“She! Ahhh!” she cried out. Her hand fell out of Gaspard’s. She went forward, onto her hands and knees on the floor. Her world was pain. She felt like her organs would rise up out of her throat. She coughed, and choked, trying to find relief. It was too hard to think. There were explosions of pain
along her neck and spine, and she bent oddly, not caring if it hurt her later, just wanting to hurt less now.

She was crying. How could she not? It hurt so much. Dying should not be like this. It should be graceful, elegant, quiet at least. She did not want this to be the last of her, twisted up on the floor and sobbing.

Her hair was pulled back to show her face, and she realised that Gaspard was looking at her, but then the pain doubled and she couldn’t think of him anymore. It felt like all the bones in her hand were breaking, and then the other. She screamed loudly and found relief in that, but just as she tried to do it again the air fell out of her lungs and she couldn’t breathe. It was not dignified, but she pressed her face to the floor, to support herself and to assure herself that she was surrounded by things, even if she could not see or feel them.

She gasped for air. Her left eyelid twitched and then her right eyelid. The bones broke in her feet. The explosions went down her legs. Moving became too hard. Her twisting slowed and came to a stop. It had not helped her. This was death, of course she could not fight it. The moment she surrendered she experienced such clarity of mind that if she could, she would have screamed again in relief.

Harry’s face. Harry Potter. He was not her mate. He was someone else’s. But he cared for her and was here for her and he was crying and touching her face.

Gaspard was rubbing her arms and legs like she was suffering from cramps of the muscle. Maybe it had helped. She had not noticed. It was too late now. Her heart was pounding furiously and very soon it would stop.

“She is still, why is she still? Pourquoi? Cela ne devrait pas être. Non, non, non, non.”

“Gaspard, stop! She’s looking at me. Here!”

“Je ne peux pas. This is...she is...she is what? Adeline!”

Gaspard’s face replaced Harry’s. There. That was what she wanted. For him to look back at her when she looked at him. For them to feel the same and be the same to each other. He was the most important person. He was everything. She stared at him, incapable of doing more than that, and hoped that he would understand.

He began to cry, but kept gazing at her through his tears.

He did.

He understood.

It was always Gaspard, only Gaspard, who could do that.

A tear fell from her eye and he wiped it away. Leaning in close, he kissed her on the lips. Why had he never done that before, when she loved him so much? Why had she never asked him to, if he did not do it himself? She could only feel the pressure of his lips on hers, could not kiss him back or know really what the kiss was like. It meant more that it had happened. Gaspard understood that.

His hand caressed her face and he continued to cry. She had never seen him cry before. He was still handsome. Every day he had become more handsome to her. Every moment. She loved him so much. So much. So, so much and so dearly.
Her mouth opened. She felt that it did. She tried very hard to speak. Three little words. She needed to
tell him. Even though he knew, she needed to say it. She put all of her effort into that one little thing.
A sound came out, but before she could shape it, her eyes lost focus and everything blurred together
and then it was nothing.

Harry had known death, but this was worse. He had seen the Cruciatus Curse, but this was worse.
He watched people grieve, but this was worse.

The sound Gaspard made when Adeline’s eyes dulled was one he had never heard before and
couldn’t even describe. He sat for a moment, stroking her hair, and then he curled over into himself
and sobbed silently. He allowed himself only seconds. And then he turned Adeline so that she lay
more naturally on the floor.

She had been in so much pain, but no part of her was injured. If you didn’t see her eyes you could
think that she was just sleeping. Her face was pale, but her skin had always been light. A part of
Harry expected her to breathe in suddenly and sit up. It did not seem as though she was dead.

“Potter,” came Draco’s voice and Harry looked numbly up at him. He took his hand and was pulled
to stand and then into a tight hug. Accepting the comfort, Harry hugged him back, pressing his face
into Draco’s shoulder and fighting not to cry any more than he already had. That was Gaspard’s
right, to mourn. Adeline had meant so much more to him.

The man spoke quietly in French and after one sentence Draco’s arms tightened around Harry. He
found that he was glad not to have learned French. Hearing those words would have been too much.

When he was able to pull away from Draco, Harry saw with some surprise that McGonagall was
also affected by what had happened. She stared down at Adeline’s body with sadness in her old
eyes. Adeline did not speak, and Harry still didn’t know how she had managed to communicate. But
it was true that she had become important to him even without words.

He had liked her. But it wasn’t love. It wasn’t enough.

Gaspard spoke the same words over and over, and Draco took Harry’s hand and held it.

A moment later they were repeated. By Adeline.

Chapter End Notes

“She is still, why is she still? Pourquoi? Cela ne devrait pas être. Non, non, non, non.”
"She is still, why is she still? Why? It should not be. No, no, no, no."

“Je ne peux pas. This is...she is...she is what? Adeline!”
"I cannot. This is...she is...she is what? Adeline!"
The tea was good, perhaps made better by the company. Draco sat next to Harry, with McGonagall on his other side and Gaspard and Adeline across from them, and a low table in the middle, on which sat a vase of red roses and the Quidditch Cup.

Draco was in his element, using a teacup that was worth more than Harry would spend on clothes in a year. Whenever Harry’s clattered or he drank from it in a way that was somehow wrong Gaspard would flinch and Draco would elbow him in the side. He really couldn’t win. At least Adeline found it amusing. She laughed more now than she ever had before her...er...death. It made Harry wonder if she was like this at home, and if the Adeline he had known wasn’t the same Adeline everyone else did. He supposed it was one thing to meet someone and another to meet someone you thought your life depended on. In her position he would have been nervous too.

“So, you’re going back to France.”

“Oui. There is no need for us to be here. Adeline needs to speak to her family. I hope they will understand this...bizarre situation.”

Harry still didn’t understand it himself. He was Adeline’s mate, but because Gaspard had fulfilled the requirements of that role before he’d even come into it – loving Adeline and wanting to take care of her for the rest of his life – and then Harry hadn’t partnered with her, it had fallen back onto him. Not without Adeline suffering a lot first. But she was happy now with what she had earned. Happier, Harry felt, than he ever could have made her. It had worked out for all of them, almost suspiciously well.

What price had they all to pay for love? Harry had been punched often enough for him to worry about permanent damage. Draco had dealt with the emotional pain of leaving Harry, so that he could be happy. Adeline had died. Gaspard had lost the one he loved the most, and regained her. They had sacrificed and they had acted selfishly. They had fought for things and they had given up. They had loved and hated and somehow ended up the better for it all.

The teacup clattered again. Draco leaned over and took it out of his hands, setting it on the table. “Merlin, Potter. If you can’t hold it properly don’t do it at all. How many times do I have to tell you?”

“Mieux vaut tard que jamais,” Adeline remarked.

Draco laughed at whatever she had said. Harry had hoped he would translate for him today, but apparently in vain. “Vouloir, c’est pouvoir.”

“Bon sang ne saurait mentir,” said Gaspard. “Maintenant, stop teasing him. He does not know what you are saying.”

“What, me? You were talking about me? What were you saying? Draco?”

“Nothing I haven’t said to you before. Calm down.”

If anything that just made Harry worry more.
After all the crying they had done, they laughed together, making sure their memories of each other were good before they went their different ways. The tea was drunk. An hour passed. Finally Harry felt able to say goodbye. He didn’t know if he would see Adeline and Gaspard again. He’d never been to France before and wasn’t planning on taking a trip there anytime soon. This was goodbye for him.

Gaspard shook his hand and called him ‘Mister Potter’ again. Harry thought about it for a moment before he hugged Adeline. She patted his back and laughed in his ear. It was a lovely sound. When they separated, she kissed him on both cheeks.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

All he could do was smile.

Chapter End Notes

“Mieux vaut tard que jamais,” Adeline remarked. A proverb! She remembers that Draco loves them. It translates to ‘late is worth more than never’. Better that Harry receive lessons in etiquette later in life than not at all.

“Vouloir, c'est pouvoir.”
‘To want, that is to be able’ – when there’s a will, there’s a way. Teaching Harry to drink tea properly seems like an impossible task but Draco is set on doing it.

“Bon sang ne saurait mentir;” said Gaspard. “Maintenant, stop teasing him.” Literally ‘what’s bred in the bone will come out in the flesh’ – good blood never lies. Draco can try as hard as he wants but Harry is never going to improve. Wow, Gaspard. Maintenant is the French word for ‘now’.

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