Cauldron Full of Hot, Strong Love

Summary

In which a group of wizards' rights activists goes on the offensive after a prohibition against love potions, forcing the magical world to confront the horror of magic's role in sexual assault and the murky legal nature of consent. Ron, Hermione, Harry, and Draco are swept together to solve the case, and in the process they're made to confront their own love and lust—with and without potions.

Notes

Enormous thanks to my beta, tdcat, who has been instrumental in helping this daunting fic to see the light of day.

Content warning: There is no rape/non-con in this fic (there's one instance of non-graphic off-screen non-con of unnamed characters), but there is extended and in-depth discussion of
the nature of sexual assault and as such could be triggering.

Chapters alternate POV between the four main characters.

Come find me on Tumblr.
Tuesday October 28, 2008

Ron Weasley opened the door to the red telephone box, wondering what was so urgent that he’d been summoned to the Ministry by a stag Patronus before he’d even finished his morning tea. He closed the door and dialed 62442.

A woman’s voice echoed in the box, “Welcome to the Ministry of Magic. Please state your name and business.”

“Ronald Weasley. Harry Potter’s Patronus scared the pants off me and demanded that I come immediately.”

“Thank you,” the affectless voice replied. “Visitor, please take the badge and attach it to the front of your robes.”

There was a rattling noise in the metal chute, and Ron grabbed the square silver badge out of the telephone. It read Ronald Weasley, Urgent meeting with Deputy Head Auror. He pinned the badge to his magenta robes.

“Visitor to the Ministry, you are required to submit to a search and present your wand for registration at the security desk, which is located at the far end of the Atrium.”

Ron tapped his fingers on the top of the phone impatiently. The telephone box began to descend. He thought it was ridiculous that the magical entrance didn’t recognise him. What with how often he was here visiting his wife, his best mate, his father, and even his brother, he felt that the disembodied voice should welcome him as an old friend. “Good morning, Ron,” it should say, “and what’ll it be today? Hermione, Harry, Arthur? Percy?”

The box continued its creaking descent, and Ron’s thoughts wandered to the huge order of Halloween-themed Wildfire Whiz-bangs they’d received last night. He was going to have to adjust the type of spider legs in the pyrotechnic potion to get the Halloween colours. George had been brassed off when the stag Patronus interrupted their morning. Ron had promised George that when he was through with Harry he would get the extra supplies they would need to fill the order. Ron looked at his watch, wondering how fast he could finish here, get over to their supplier, and then back to the shop.

The telephone box bumped to a stop, and the voice said, “The Ministry of Magic wishes you a pleasant day.” The door sprang open.

Ron strode out of the box but was stopped in his tracks by an Auror standing in front of him behind a shimmer of wards. “Step back!” the Auror barked. “Restricted entrance!” Ron stepped back warily and looked around.

The Atrium was in chaos. A large contingent of Aurors huddled at the far end, past the War Memorial Fountain and near the Wideye Coffee kiosk. More than a dozen Aurors stood shoulder to shoulder, and another group was casting at the ground and the surrounding area.

Aurors had blocked off the Floos with magical barriers and stood guard interviewing each person...
who had arrived through the arrival Floos. Another contingent of Aurors stood at the departure Floos checking wands.

The Auror in front of Ron took a step towards him, and then recognition flashed in the Auror’s eyes and his eyes dropped to the visitor badge. “Mr Weasley,” he said, “Deputy Head Auror Potter is waiting for you. I just need to verify your identity.”

Ron, wide-eyed, held out his wand. He took a breath to empty his mind and reached out for the mental link to Hermione. *I’m here. Are you okay? What’s going on?*

The Auror cast a revealing spell and an identification spell.

*Oh, thank goodness you’re here,* Hermione’s voice sounded in Ron’s head. *I’m fine. It’s a Love Potion attack, we think. I just got to Harry’s office. See you in a minute?*

*Fuck,* Ron responded.

The Auror handed Ron his wand, then passed a long golden rod up and down his front and back. “Not that this will find what we’re looking for,” the Auror muttered under his breath, looking annoyed with the protocol. Then to Ron, he said, “Thank you, Mr Weasley, you can head to the lifts.”

Ron nodded his thanks and headed across the Atrium. *On my way now, see you in a minute.*

Moments of stress like this always made him grateful for the ability to talk to Hermione at any time. The next-best option was a Patronus, but that was an incredibly public method of communication. He supposed they could use the Muggle alternative of putting words into mobiles, but he wasn’t quite sure how that was supposed to work. Their families had objected to them taking on the soul bond. The objections had ranged from “It’s just so old-fashioned” to “Do you really want him/her in your mind?” to “It will cut you off from other people” to “What if you ever want to get a divorce?” But to Ron and Hermione, it had been an easy decision. Easy and instantaneous communication—tangible evidence of their commitment that was also practical. It had been intense at first, but since then Ron only ever thought about how glad he was for the bond. Never again would he feel isolation like when he’d left Hermione with Harry in the Forest of Dean.

He’d never quite get over being worried about Hermione, or Harry either, but he supposed that was what happened when you’d been on the front lines of a war.

He walked swiftly across the Atrium, boots clicking against the dark wood floor. The festivity of the Halloween decorations that adorned the Atrium—pumpkins bobbing along in the air above people’s heads, paper bats flapping around and landing on various surfaces, floating black candles, illuminated skulls—were in stark contrast to the crime-scene atmosphere provided by the Auror detail.

Ron reached the smaller hall beyond the Atrium, in which stood the lifts behind wrought golden grilles. The usual queue of people waiting for the lifts was missing, lending the scene an uncanny feel, like one of those American westerns Dean and Seamus liked with tumbleweed blowing through a ghost town.

A lift clattered open, and Ron entered, along with a dozen interdepartmental memos and a witch carrying a cup of Wideye Coffee. Ron nodded hello to the woman and leaned against the back of the lift. The witch fumbled with her bag. Levels seven, six, and five, at which the lift stopped but no one got off, had Ron cursing the Ministry for its failure to upgrade their lifts to match the functionality of their Muggle equivalents. The first time he’d visited Selfridges with the Grangers,
he’d been astonished to find that the lifts had buttons allowing riders to select a floor.

After the lift clattered away from Level five, the witch blew on her coffee and turned to Ron. “Crazy morning, isn’t it?” she asked politely.

“Sure is,” Ron agreed.

The woman, who looked to be about forty and wore Auror robes, gave Ron a weary look. “I got called in on my day off!” she said, then shook her head and took a sip of her coffee.

(“Level four, Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, incorporating Beast, Being, and Spirit Divisions, Goblin Liaison Office, and Pest Advisory Bureau.”)

“That’s too bad—” Ron began, but he noticed something had gone wrong. Her shoulders slumped almost imperceptibly, her eyes unfocused slightly, her skin went a few shades paler.

He drew his wand on instinct and was about to talk to Hermione over the bond when the witch dropped her coffee, splattering it all over the lift and burning Ron’s leg. She launched forwards, grabbing Ron’s robes and meeting his eyes with a lecherous gaze.

“Shit!” Ron said, as she pressed her lips to his with an off-putting and frankly horrifying intensity.

He aimed his wand at her from underneath her death grip and cast a nonverbal Stupefy. A jet of scarlet light hit her in the sternum. She flew against the wall of the lift and slumped to the floor, unconscious.

(“Level three, Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes, including the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad, Obliviator Headquarters, and Muggle-Worthy Excuse Committee.”)

Hermione! Ron’s heart was beating fast. I just Stupefied an Auror in Lift, he raised his eyes to the door, Lift 2. A love potion, I guess. Her eyes went wonky and she tried to jump me out of nowhere! It was bloody disturbing!

Oh my god! Hermione returned. Are you okay?

Fine. Could use some MacGruber’s Magical Mouth Rinse. Tell Harry? We’ll be there in a moment.

(“Level two, Department of Magical Law Enforcement, including the Improper Use of Magic Office, Auror Headquarters, and Wizengamot Administration Services.”)

The golden grille clattered open and Ron saw Harry running towards the lift, wand raised, Hermione and two Aurors at his heels.

Harry stopped abruptly, taking in the scene. Ron surveyed the lift—coffee everywhere, unconscious woman, him standing there like a bloody idiot.

Hermione stopped running and gave Ron a sympathetic look. You alright? she asked.

At the same moment, Harry snapped into Deputy Head Auror mode and began barking orders. “Johnson! Get Auror Sloane to St Mungo’s and stay to observe and interrogate her when she’s come to.”

Johnson ran up, nodded at Ron, and cast a Levitation Charm at the unconscious witch before throwing her over his shoulder and standing at the back of the lift.
Ron stepped off just before the lift clambered away.

“What the fuck is going on?” Ron asked, looking between Harry and Hermione. “How’d she get dosed with a love potion? Why her? I noticed as it happened, she got all slumpy and unfocused.”

“We don’t know,” Harry said.

“There was an, er, incident in the Atrium,” Hermione added.

“That’s why I called you both in,” Harry said, walking towards his office. “What happened in the lift?”

Ron grabbed Hermione’s hand as they fell into step behind Harry. She squeezed.

“After she got sedated and started acting like she was a prostitute I’d just paid a thousand Galleons, you mean?” Ron asked.

Harry snorted, looking at them over his shoulder, but Hermione frowned.

“She grabbed my robes and kissed me like some sort of demonic snogger,” Ron explained. “So I Stunned her. That’s it.”

“Robards is irate already,” Harry said, picking up his speed. “It’s not going to be pretty when he hears about Sloane.”

“What happened in the Atrium?” Ron asked.

Harry turned and gave him a dark look. “I’ll tell you in the office. It’s awful. And also kind of strangely hilarious, in an I-can’t-believe-this-actually-happened kind of way.”

“Harry!” Hermione admonished. But then she admitted, “The mental image is funny, but what happened to those people is terrifying, not funny.”

“Agreed,” Harry said, turning a corner.

Harry’s assistant, Thurstan Trumble, called out, “Deputy Head Auror Potter, the Minister for Magic is on his way up. Robards is gathering everyone in Conference Room Three.”

Harry slowed his steps. “Okay, great. Thanks, Thurstan.”

Another worker walked up, Levitating a tray of food. “Deputy Head Auror Potter,” she said, “do you need anything?”

“You could send tea to Conference Room Three; make sure you get that kind that the Minister likes. Thanks, Janice.”

Janice nodded and handed a Wideye Coffee from her tray to Thurstan. Thurstan accepted the cup, which was decorated with jack-o-lanterns, and thanked her.

Ron made the connection one second too late. “Don’t drink it!” he cried.

At the exact moment, Thurstan took a large gulp of his drink. He trembled, then looked at Harry with unfocused eyes. Thurstan lunged towards Harry and grabbed his arse.

After a shocked split second of watching Harry get groped by his subordinate, Hermione positioned herself to take aim and Stunned Thurstan. “Stupefy!” He slumped onto the floor.
“Fuck!” Harry yelled.

“It’s the coffee,” Ron said, “I forgot before because of the commotion. Shit, I should’ve said something before.”

Harry immediately pointed his wand at his throat. When he spoke, it echoed through all eight levels of the Ministry. “UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE, DO NOT DRINK ANY BEVERAGE OR EAT ANY FOOD THAT YOU DID NOT BRING FROM HOME. DO NOT DRINK ANYTHING FROM WIDEYE COFFEE.”

When Harry finished speaking, the building was eerily silent. Gradually, people began talking again, whispering about the edict.

If anyone in the Ministry had been unaware that there was a situation underway, they knew now. Bloody hell, Ron thought, that meant the *Prophet* would have the story within a minute. They’d probably issue a special edition, causing panic in the wizarding community through misinformation and half truths. He had to get word to Molly, because she’d worry when the special edition arrived. Who else was in the Ministry today? Arthur and Percy. Little Molly might be in the Ministry daycare. Ginny was in Wales. Bill at Gringotts. George at the shop. Charlie in Romania.

Ron raised his wand, closed his eyes, and thought of standing in the garden of the Burrow, Harry and George at his back, next to Hermione, taking the soul bond. He opened his eyes. “*Expecto Patronum!*” His terrier Fletcher burst from the tip of his wand and turned to him with an expectant tail wag. “Go find Percy and Arthur Weasley and give the message: I’m okay, with Harry and Hermione. Are you okay? Someone needs to contact Mum.” Fletcher ran off.

When he finished, Harry and Hermione were in conversation. Harry turned and called out, “Bernice, take Thurstan to St Mungo’s, and stay with him, okay?”

“Yes, sir,” an Auror said, and took Thurstan towards the lift.

“Alastair, hurry down to the Atrium and close Wideye, and all of the other cafes in the building, and bring the workers up to the holding rooms for questioning.”

“Yes, sir,” and another Auror was gone.

Ron quickly conjured another Patronus and sent it to George, letting him know what was happening and to tell Bill.

Hermione came to stand next to Ron and put her arm around his waist. A weasel Patronus bounded into the room and spoke in Arthur’s voice, “I’m fine, I’ve contacted Molly, let me know if you need help, stay safe.” A sardine Patronus swam in a moment later and spoke in Percy’s stilted voice, “I’m decent; things in chaos. Molly is home with Audrey today. I’ll contact Bill.”

Ron breathed out a sigh of relief, simultaneously marveling at how you could hear the semicolon in Percy’s words.

Janice’s eyes went wide. “Minister!” she squeaked. “You’re in Conference Room Three.”

Ron turned around. Kingsley Shacklebolt had just strode into the office. He carried with him an air of undisputed power and the Aurors shrunk away in awe as he passed.

“Thank you,” Kingsley said to Janice. Then, louder, “Robards! Potter!” His eyes landed on Ron and Hermione. “Senior Undersecretary Granger and Mr Weasley. Excellent. Follow me.”
The Minister’s robes billowed behind him as he turned into the conference room and took his place at the head of the table. On the way into the room, Harry whispered a report about Thurstan to Robards. Robards nodded with a frown and, as Head Auror, sat to the Minister’s right. Harry, Hermione, and Ron sat along one side of the long table. Kingsley’s assistant, Frostine Galway, took her place at his left, her stenographic quill and parchment at the ready. Susan Bones, Junior Assistant to the Minister, took a seat next to Frostine.

The conference room, though underground, had a magicked window that gave a view of a beautiful sunny day, as if they were a few storeys above ground. The walls were covered in the “M” and wand Ministry of Magic seal embossed in purple and gold. The conference table was dark wood and held a long line of candles that adjusted their brightness according to the current tasks of the people at the table. A miniature parade of little jack-o-lanterns meandered around the room at the ceiling. Ron spotted one that was carved to look like a gnome.

The far wall was covered in a large map of Britain, which displayed tiny diagrams of real-time events and information. There was a magical fire in Cornwall. St. Mungo’s was at 80% capacity. Puddlemere was playing the Harpies at Holyhead.

The tiny diagram of the Ministry of Magic building in London read, “Potions attack in progress.”

Hermione, looking at the map, nudged Ron’s knee. “At least there aren’t any attacks elsewhere,” she whispered.

Ron studied the map. It was a small consolation, he thought. Ever since the Romilda Vane incident, he had always been a bit touchy about love potions. And that was before this whole thing had even started. He shuddered, a bit, remembering the unseeing look in the Auror’s eyes when she launched herself at him in the lift.

Ron glanced at Harry. Harry looked tired, but like he was coping alright. Everyone around the table was serious, attentive. He wondered if his mum had received word about what was happening. He wouldn’t be surprised if Molly Weasley showed up in the Auror offices; she’d become very protective of Hermione these past months.

“Let’s get started,” Kingsley said. “The others can join us when they get to the Ministry.” He sat back in his chair, waved his wand to shut the door, and then sighed. He looked suddenly tired. “Someone tell me what in the name of Merlin is going on.” He paused. “Facts only, please. We’ll discuss theories after.”

Robards leaned forwards, bracing his forearms on the conference table. He cleared his throat. “At ten after eight this morning, the Auror department received an urgent summons to the Atrium. When Aurors arrived at the scene, two Ministry workers were on the floor, partially undressed, engaging in sexual intercourse.”

Ron’s eyes snapped up to find Hermione’s. She gave him a *can-you-believe-it’s-gotten-this-bad?* look. He hated seeing that look on her face, and yet somehow it was there frequently, even after the war. He reached over and squeezed her thigh under the table.

*I’m glad you’re here,* she said.

“Right in the middle of the Atrium?” Kingsley clarified.

“Yes,” Robards confirmed. “Well, near the Wideye Coffee kiosk at the back. We sent a contingent of Aurors to the Atrium to monitor people coming in and out. Then at 8:14, Smith in Magical Games and Sports called to report that he’d had to Stun his assistant. At 8:25, Mr Weasley arrived...”
on Level 2 with a Stunned Auror in the lift. At 8:29, Auror Potter’s assistant Thurstan Trumble launched himself at Potter and was Stunned by Ms Granger. Auror Potter issued a call to shut down food distribution in the Ministry at 8:30. The Stunned Aurors have been sent to St Mungo’s.”

Kingsley looked around the table, eyes landing on Ron. “Mr Weasley, why were you in the lift?”

“I called him in,” Harry said, “after the report of the incident in the Atrium sounded like a love potion.”

Kingsley nodded. “Mr Weasley, describe what happened in the lift?”

“Auror—Sloane, is it?” Ron looked to Harry. Harry nodded. “Auror Sloane,” Ron continued, “and I boarded the lift on level eight. She chatted a bit. Then she took a sip of her coffee, her skin went pale, her shoulders slumped, her eyes went unfocused, she grabbed my robes and kissed me. I Stunned her.”

“And why are we sure it was a love potion?” Susan Bones asked. “Just because all these people at least kissed, and at worst…” she trailed off. “It doesn’t sound like Amortentia.”

“No, it’s not Amortentia or another love potion,” Ron said. “Though the effect was similar. The way her skin went pale.”

“Love potions cause infatuation,” Hermione explained. “They might lead to…sexual relations, but not so directly, so this must be something else. It could be a lust potion, but I’ve never heard of people reacting to a lust potion quite like this.”

Kingsley tapped his fingers on the table. “So we’re likely looking at a related potion.”

“Yes,” Robards confirmed. “We’ve had some suspicions that there might be a new potion under development.”

“Why did the two in the Atrium end up having sex?” Harry asked. “The other incidents—in the lift, on level seven—didn’t end in sex.”

The room was quiet, and everyone looked to Ron. Good Godric, Ron hated to be put on the spot like this. He knew he was the only one with potions expertise in the room, but usually his potions expertise consisted of developing joke products and brewing up a batch of Ten-Second Pimple Vanisher. He was no good at theory, even with his advanced knowledge about love potions. Ron hoped that he wouldn’t be the only potions expert on this case.

Eventually Hermione spoke. “One of two reasons. Either the dosed person in the Atrium started kissing the other person and the other person allowed it to escalate, which seems unlikely because they were in the Atrium and even someone with less-than-honourable intentions would probably not allow that to happen in full view of the public, or they were both dosed.”

Robards sat back in his chair. “This is a disaster. They’ve been attacked on Ministry property. They could have STIs now, or be pregnant. They could bring us up in front of the Wizengamot for negligence and damages.”

Of course we care about a possible trial, not the damage these people have suffered, Hermione said, annoyed, over the bond.

There was a knock at the door. Everyone’s eyes turned as the door opened to reveal a pointy blond bastard. Great, Ron thought, just what this day needed.
“Excuse me for interrupting, Minister,” Malfoy said. “Auror Zane told me to come right in.”

“Mr Malfoy, excellent,” Kingsley said, gesturing him inside the room. “Thank you for getting here so quickly. Everyone, Draco Malfoy, who just received a doctorate in potions at Jussieu, was recently brought on as a potions consultant for the Ministry. Mr Malfoy, the Ministry is under a potions attack.”

Malfoy sat next to Frostine, adjusting his pristine robes. He looked up at Kingsley with a surprised expression. “What, under attack now?”

“Yes. People drink coffee from the Wideye Coffee kiosk in the Atrium, they take a sip, they grab someone near them and start kissing. Or groping, in the case of the man who got Auror Potter. There were two people this morning having sex in the Atrium.”

Malfoy’s eyebrows shot up in surprise and his gaze drifted to Harry. The git looked like he was trying to suppress a smile.

“This is serious, Malfoy,” Harry said, annoyed.

“I never said it wasn’t, Potter.”

Harry glared.

Oh, good, Ron said silently to Hermione. On top of everything else going to shit, we get to watch Harry and Malfoy bicker. It’s like the mid-90s.

Hermione turned to allow Ron to see her small smile.

“What I don’t understand,” Harry said, turning wisely away from Malfoy, “is that hundreds of people must have purchased coffee from Wideye this morning. We only had five people hit with the potion.”

“Four that we know of,” Robards corrected. “One we suspect. But you’re right. It must be a targeted attack.”

Ron frowned. Was there some connection between the victims that he was missing? He couldn’t think like that in a meeting like this. He’d need paper and time to treat it like a chess game if he was ever going to figure it out. And by then Hermione would’ve solved it.

“So Mr Malfoy,” Kingsley said, “people drink coffee. Mr Weasley reports pale skin, slumped shoulders, unfocused eyes. The person throws themselves at someone nearby, kissing and groping. We suspect the two in the Atrium who were having sex both ingested the potion.”

“Not a standard love potion,” Malfoy mused.

“We got that much already,” grumbled Ron under his breath.

“Excuse me, Weasley, do you have something to add?” Malfoy asked, like the great git that he was. When Ron only scowled at him, he continued. “Amortentia and other love potions do cause pale skin, but the immediate behavioural effect is infatuation with a given target, not propositioning the nearest person.”

“I don’t think,” Hermione said, “that the word ‘proposition’ is appropriate here. They did not proposition. They assaulted the people near them.”
“Either way,” Malfoy said, and he missed the way that fury crossed Hermione’s expression as he continued his lecture. “A love potion would cause a drinker to go pale, turn dreamy, and say something like, ‘I need to see Chambrs Cosworth right now. Where is he? Can you introduce me?”

*Is he* trying to enrage *me?* Hermione asked.

*I doubt he knows how intensely you despise Chambrs Cosworth,* Ron replied.

“Alright,” Kingsley said. “So it’s not a love potion, but some other, unknown potion that causes the drinker to engage sexual relations without consent,” he nodded at Hermione, “immediately with someone nearby.” He paused. “Ms Bones, will you go see if Harry’s assistant’s coffee is still out there, and bring it in as evidence?”

Susan nodded and left the room.

“Do we have any idea who the person dosed with the potion will target with their advances?” Kingsley asked. “Is it just the nearest person?”

“Well,” Hermione said, “Thurstan targeted Harry, and as far as I know, Thurstan is straight. Harry was nearest him, though I was nearby, and so were other women. I don’t know about the others. So it seems a reasonable hypothesis that it doesn’t have to do with the person’s true sexual attraction.”

“The two in the Atrium,” Robards spoke up. “I talked with their supervisor. She says they barely get along. At each other’s throats constantly. Not two you’d think would be secretly harboring sexual attraction. But that’s really just speculation.”

Susan came back Levitating Thurstan’s coffee cup, as if merely touching it would infect her with the potion. Kingsley waved his wand and the cup landed in front of Malfoy.

“For analysing, not drinking,” Kingsley instructed. “Unless you fancy jumping Potter.”

The group chuckled at Kingsley’s joke, but Harry turned red, and Ron noticed that Malfoy looked discomposed for a brief moment.

Kingsley furrowed his brow. “Alright, here’s what we’re going to do. Auror Potter, you’re in charge of the investigation. With Mr Weasley’s consent, you will work with Ms Granger, Mr Weasley, and Mr Malfoy. Harry, you’ve got an Auror, a politician, an industry expert, and an academic expert—it’s a perfect team.” Kingsley looked expectantly at Ron. Bloody hell. Ron nodded. Kingsley continued, “If you need anything else, let me know. Auror Robards, you’re going to go interview all of the employees from Wideye Coffee and then come help me deal with the fallout from this. Susan, I need you to get ready to deal with the *Prophet.* Frostine, get temporary full clearance for Mr Weasley and Mr Malfoy. Until further notice, you are employees of the Ministry. I want frequent updates!”

He stood and walked quickly from the room; Susan and Frostine scrambled to gather their things and follow him to the lifts.

Robards turned to Harry. “Auror Potter, do not rush headlong into this. This could be related to the on-going case, and if so they’ve come out of the woodwork and this is our chance to actually catch some of these arseholes. We can’t botch it. Take your time, do your research.” With that, he left.

The door slammed behind them, and the conference room was suddenly quiet.

Ron sighed. He was stuck working a case at the Ministry. There was a reason he hadn’t become an
Auror. He hated this sort of thing, although given the nature of the case, he’d rather be here than anywhere else. He just wished it hadn’t happened at all, and he could be at the shop making Whizbangs. Oh, fuck. George was going to be furious when he found out Ron couldn’t come back to work.

He considered sending Fletcher to give a message to George, but a look at the clock showed that customers would be starting to arrive and the arrival of a Patronus messenger was known to cause some commotion. Instead, he Conjured quill and parchment and scribbled a quick note apologising for his absence and promising to make it up by opening the shop the next three Saturdays. He Charmed the letter to fly itself to the Ministry Owlery.

When Ron finished his note, he looked around the table. Harry had his eyes scrunched shut the way he always did when concentrating about something. Malfoy was casting spells at the Wideye Coffee cup, murmuring under his breath. Hermione was looking at the two of them with amusement, waiting for Ron to finish his letter.

“So are we just going to sit here in silence,” Hermione asked, “or shall we get started?”

“You’ll notice I was not put in charge of this operation, Granger,” Malfoy drawled. “If I had been, I would be establishing a plan already.”

Harry opened his eyes. “I was thinking, Malfoy.”

“I know that’s difficult for you.”

Oh Merlin. Ron said to Hermione. Are they really going to do this?

I’m reminding you of the bet we had in sixth year, she replied. I still intend to hold you to your end of it.

Crap, Ron had hoped Hermione forgot about that. The loser had to sing “Cauldron Full of Hot, Strong Love” in front of the entire Gryffindor Common Room. He wasn’t sure how that translated to their lives now, but whatever it would be, it wouldn’t be good.

“Malfoy,” Harry grumbled. “You’re happy to have you here. Let’s try to be civil, okay?”

“Right-o,” Malfoy said, with a jaunty salute.

I propose a new bet, Ron said. How many hours until Harry hexes or punches him?

“You know the worst part of this?” Harry grumbled. “We can’t even drink coffee.”

“Yes, Harry. That’s the worst part,” Hermione said with uncharacteristic sarcasm. “Not the victims who were sexually assaulted this morning and who are currently in St Mungo’s.”

Harry flashed a cheeky grin at Hermione. “Okay, seriously though. What do you think is going on here? Have you had any new threats that you didn’t tell me about?”

“No,” Hermione said. She looked at Ron. “No, right?”

“No,” Ron agreed. “It’s been quiet for awhile.”

“What would the motivation behind an attack like this be?” Harry asked, fiddling with a quill.

“Why would anyone want people shagging in the Atrium? Do you think the people who got dosed
were chosen at random? Or do you think Robards is right, that it’s related to the on-going case?”

Hermione’s quill jotted notes down while Harry was speaking, but then she said, “Let’s do one thing at a time, okay? Have your Aurors heard anything?”

But Ron interrupted, “They have to be trying to get Hermione, right? They want to get nude photos of her.”

Malfoy lowered his wand from casting spells at the coffee cup. “I’m glad to hear your concupiscence for your wife hasn’t withered over the years, Weasley, but surely Granger isn’t attractive enough for all that?”

The three glared at him.

“Would anyone care to include me in this conversation?” Malfoy continued. “Chances are I will be more useful if I have an idea what’s going on. And why is Weasley even here? Is there some pressing need for professional jokesters on this case?”

Ron could feel his face flushing with anger; damn his fair skin. “And why are you here, exactly, Malfoy? Is there some pressing need for a pompous git who used to be a Death Eater?”

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, a shield appeared in the middle of the table above the candles. Hermione’s wand was raised.

Ron, she grumbled in his head. I agree he’s a git. But let’s set a good example, okay?

Ugh, fine, Ron answered. I hate being a grown-up.

Harry was giving them an odd look. “Are you two doing your secret head talking again?”

Fuck, Harry hated it when they talked over the bond and excluded him. They should’ve let Harry in on their soul bond. Only then everyone would be even more convinced they were polyamorists. Not that there was anything wrong with that. But that rumour had enough traction already after the “exposé” in Witch Weekly a few years back.

“Sorry, mate,” Ron said.

“Yes, sorry Harry. We’ll stop.” Hermione dropped the Shield.

“I cannot believe this fucking day,” Malfoy said, tipping his head back to look at the ceiling. “I’m barely settled in my new flat after returning to England, I get woken up by an urgent Floo call from the office of the Minister for Magic, I have to rush in here—because it’s not as if I could say no, could I?—and now I am stuck investigating a potions attack with this crack team of Gryffindor dimwits who are arguing like an old married threesome. Threesome? Or is it triple? Trio? Triple is the exact grammatical analogue of ‘couple,’ of course, but trio is probably better for flow. In any case, linguistic nuances aside, you’re bickering like old married polyamorists.”

Ron, having just been thinking about the jokes people cracked about them having threesomes, perhaps overreacted. “We are NOT having sex with Harry!” he bellowed.

Harry, Hermione, and Malfoy all silently turned to look at Ron. Malfoy’s face wore that infuriating smirk.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Harry swore. “Malfoy, I’ve never had sex with Ron, or Hermione, or Ron and Hermione. Though I fail to see how that is relevant. Ron and Hermione took the soul bond when they got married, so they talk to each other in their heads.” He turned to Ron and Hermione. “Let’s be sure to include Malfoy in the conversation, and to have conversations through actual talking—you know, with our vocal cords.”

Ron sighed. “Fine. It seems like we should assume that this is a new potion, given the similarities and differences from standard Love Potions.”

Malfoy sat back in his chair and said pompously, “Weasley, what makes you think you have any idea what kind of Potion this was? Did I somehow miss a few years of Potions classes in which you actually excelled? Did you manage to complete a Potions Mastery without running into me at all of the conferences and professional meetings? Did I miss your latest article in *Potions Today*?”

Ron glared. Leave it to Malfoy to be an arsehole at a time like this. “Can you stop being a git for one second, Malfoy? I learned about love potions working at the shop. We had love potions for sale, and I learned to make them. Then I developed an alternative product, and in the process I became quite a love potion swot. Turns out, I’m good at Potions when it’s being used in the real world, rather than in the ivory tower.”

“Very impressive, Weasley,” Malfoy asserted. “I, in contrast, only wrote a hundred-thousand-word dissertation on desire-altering potions, including love and lust potions. So good thing you’re here, or I’m not sure what we’d do.”

“Malfoy,” Harry said, “can you please stop being so rude? I know that might be difficult, having been in France for so long.” Harry looked at Malfoy consideringly for a moment. “Should we get an Unspeakable that works in the Love Chamber on the case?”

Malfoy smiled. “They tried to hire me. So I think we’re fine, Potter.”

“Can we stop bickering like third years?” Hermione asked, annoyed. “Malfoy—can I call you ‘Draco’?” Malfoy nodded once. She continued, “Draco, we’re all very impressed with your academic achievements; there’s no need to brag about them. Ron knows a ton about love potions, so you should be glad you have someone here who will actually be able to keep up with you on the topic.”

Hermione turned to look at Harry and Ron. “If Draco is going to be part of the team, we need to update him on what’s happened over the last year.”

“What, when you got love potions banned?” Malfoy said disdainfully. “That made the newspapers, even in France.”

Hermione glared at Malfoy. Ron could feel his latent anger over the entire fiasco rising to the surface. How dare Malfoy think he could say anything about it?

Harry held up a hand. “Look, Malfoy, you can’t be a prat about this. You really don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Well then explain it to me, *Potter*. How much could I have possibly missed? I read all about the Wizengamot hearing and Granger’s feminist crusade.”

Harry sighed. “It really is a long story.” He sounded knackered. Ron thought they should probably pop out of the Ministry to get some coffee, or they’d lose Harry to a narcoleptic haze. Either coffee, or Ron would have to owl George for a phial of Wise-And-Shine from their new line targeting
Hermione grabbed Ron’s hand under the table. “I think,” she said, “we should use a Pensieve. That way Draco can learn what happened, and we can scan our memories for any relevant information that might help the investigation.”

“Hermione, no,” Ron said, turning in his chair. The last thing in the world he wanted was for Malfoy to view their memories—any memories, really, but especially the memories from the last year. Sure Malfoy had changed, even if he was still a git. Sure he was giving money to all the right causes and publicly denouncing Blood Supremacy. Sure he funded the War Orphans Fund and gave money to Hogwarts for special programmes to help Muggleborn students. But that didn’t mean Ron wanted to share his memories.

Plus, maybe Malfoy was only doing those things to get his name favorably in the paper.

Harry nodded, and he and Hermione looked at Ron.

There was nothing for it. “Fine,” Ron grumped.

Harry started talking about going down to the Pensieve Rooms, which were near Obliviator Headquarters in the Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes.

I can’t believe we have to spend the whole day with Malfoy, Ron chanced saying to Hermione over the link.

We’ve survived worse, she replied.

I can’t wait for the end of the day, and it’s still morning, Ron whined. Can we open that elf-made mead and watch Never Mind the Buzzcocks tonight?

Definitely. She smiled.

“Harry,” Ron said, “how about you go tell Robards that we’re heading to the Pensieve Rooms, and Hermione and I will go get us some coffee from the Starbucks out on the corner.”

“Excellent,” Harry said, perking up at the mention of coffee. “See you two on level three. Malfoy, er, I guess you’re coming with me.”

“Alright, Potter,” Malfoy said, “I’m coming with you. If you insist.”

Harry glanced at Ron, looking mildly panicked, but left the room with Malfoy.

“Those two are bloody fucking weird, Hermione.”

Twenty minutes later, coffee in hand, Robards informed, waivers signed, and access to Pensieve Room 6 (the largest Pensieve room) secured, the four found themselves sitting around a large stone basin.

“Of course we had to get the room with the spider Halloween decorations,” Ron said, looking at the wall where a giant glittering web hung with a magicked spider in a purple top hat sitting in the centre of it.

Harry laughed, sipping his coffee reverently. “It’s not a real spider, mate. And even if it was, I know for a fact it’s not the biggest you’ve seen.” Ron shot Harry two fingers, to which Harry responded with a grin.
Hermione sat primly on one of the chairs that surrounded the Pensieve, and Ron could tell she was nervous. He reached over and rubbed her arm, trying to be comforting.

“Are we going to have to watch these two with their public displays of affection all day?” Malfoy sighed dramatically.

Ron looked incredulously at the git, and was slightly annoyed to see Harry give a small, reluctant laugh.

“Oh, grow up,” Hermione ordered. She raised her wand to her temple and pulled out a long, silvery strand of memory.

“Are you sure you want to be the one?” Ron asked, reaching towards her. “We can use my memories. Or Harry’s.”

“It’s okay,” Hermione said, finishing extracting the memory and placing it in the basin. “Neither of you were there for some of these.”

“Malfoy, have you ever used a Pensieve before?” Harry asked.

Malfoy fixed Harry with a withering look.

Ron snorted, Harry rolled his eyes, and they leaned over the basin, falling through to land in Harry’s kitchen, where a memory of Harry, Ron, Hermione, and George eating around the kitchen table played out.

“My kitchen? Is this necessary?” Harry asked.

“Yes, just wait,” Hermione replied.

“Hey look!” Harry enthused. “My World Cup mug! That’s been lost for months! When was this?”

“Early 2007. Shhhh,” Hermione said, and they all quieted, standing on the edge of the room to watch the memory.

“George,” memory-Hermione said, “you should not joke about that. It’s not funny.”

“Oh, come on,” he replied. “It’s just a love potion.”

“Love potions are not trivial. People end up taking them without knowing it, and sometimes they end up having sex with someone they never otherwise would’ve.”

“Sex isn’t a tragedy,” George said, popping a potato in his mouth. “Well, at least when you’re having it with someone who isn’t my little brother.”

“Hey!” Ron said.

Memory-Harry sat in silence, watching the proceedings like they were great entertainment.

“First of all,” Hermione claimed, “sex with Ron is fabulous, and I don’t require intoxication to give consent.” Harry groaned, and George pressed his hands over his ears. “Second of all, sex without consent is rape. A person under a love potion cannot give consent. Love potions produce only a simulacrum of consent that shouldn’t hold any legal or ethical weight.”

“Does that actually happen?” Harry asked.
“Yes!” Hermione was getting riled up now. “You know it happens, Harry—people have been trying to dose you with love potions for over a decade. Remember Romilda Vane? But in terms of it actually leading to rape, I just read a fascinating story in Witch Weekly about this awful case in which a young witch was snuck a dose of Amortentia by a wizard who had been stalking her, and it was awful. She’s trying to prove her case in front of the Wizengamot, but people keep asking her how she can prove that she didn’t consent, or prove that she was actually under the influence of a love potion. One of the Interrogators asked, ‘Well didn’t you have your wand?’ And the wizard who drugged her just picked the potion up at an average apothecary! You two need to take this seriously—I’m worried someone will get raped after being dosed with a WonderWitch love potion, and who knows if the shop will be held liable.”

Ron and George both looked worried. “Fuck,” Ron said. “Yeah, they’re no joke. Remember I hit Harry when I was dosed?”

“Yeah, that was fucked up,” Harry agreed.

“They’re not always used that way, though,” George claimed. “There are plenty of legal ways you can use a love potion.”

“Like what?” Hermione challenged.

“Well, couples who both agree beforehand to use it,” George said.

“A condition of consent is that it can always be revoked or renegotiated,” Hermione said, crossing her legs. “So you can’t give blanket consent for anything that could happen and then lose all faculties.”

“Blanket consent,” Harry snickered.

Hermione shot him a look.

“You remember that girl Julie I dated?” George asked. “She is obsessed with Magic Without Duty. Thinks it’s the most romantic thing ever. Wanted us to dress up as Wynefreed Poffe and Chambrs Cosworth for a Halloween party. Often asked me to bring home items from the WonderWitch line, if you know what I mean. She’s a girl—it’s not just blokes who think Love Potions are cool.”

“She’s a woman,” Hermione corrected, earning an eye roll from George. “And that is terrible logic. The fact that one woman approves of something doesn’t automatically make it okay. And don’t even get me started on that arse-trumpet Wynefreed Poffe.”

“Arse-trumpet?” George asked, looking around the room for confirmation of the bizarreness.

“Gender-neutral cursing,” Harry explained and George stifled a smirk.

“Seriously, George, don’t get her started on Wynefreed Poffe,” Ron advised, with the tone of a person who’d already heard quite a bit on the matter.

“Who is Wynefreed Poffe?” Harry asked, clueless.

“Oh, Godric,” Ron sighed, slumping into his seat and settling in for the long haul.

Hermione turned in her seat, grabbing her wine glass and taking a sip. “I’m glad you asked, Harry. Wynefreed Poffe is the main character in a despicable book by Parry Woodbrygge called Magic Without Duty. It is something of a wizarding classic.”
“Widely considered the most romantic book of all time,” George put in.

“How have I never heard of this?” Harry asked.


Hermione hopped up, grabbed a handful of Floo powder and disappeared. George turned to Ron. “Galloping gargoyles, Ron. I love Hermione, you know I do, but.” He let out a huge sigh.

“She’s right, you know,” Harry said, helping himself to another serving of potatoes. “You just don’t want to have to change your mind and admit you’ve been wrong.”

George glared at Harry. “Lighten up, mate.”

Harry opened his mouth to respond, but the Floo roared and Hermione stumbled in, carrying a red book.

“I want you to listen to this, actually listen to it, and think about how incredibly fucked up it is,” Hermione said. She sat down, propping the book on her knees. She pulled her wand and cast a Charm at the book, the pages of which flipped quickly until landing at a page. She started to read in a dramatic voice.

As memory-Hermione began speaking, Ron wondered how much wine she’d had before they entered the memory.

Wynefreed sat at the writing desk, quill in hand. Evered, I write, as I’m sure your inner eye already informed you, to invite you to tea tomorrow. My father is out of town, and I long for your company.

Just then, the door to the parlour opened with a bang. Chamburs Cosworth stood menacing in the doorway, his broad shoulders illuminated from behind. Wynefreed stiffened as the faint scent of sulphur dissipated into the room from Chamburs’s person. She took a breath to summon a calm exterior. “I must never let him know I’m afraid to face him,” she thought.

“Wynefreed,” Chamburs barked, his potions-stained fingers rising to grasp the door frame. “Shall we have a pleasant domestic discussion about what you said to me earlier?”

She turned, her eyes flashing with fury. “Get out, Master Cosworth. My father is not here to indulge your taste for elf-made mead.”

“I am aware that Baron Poffe is not in the house. In fact, he’s not in the county, is he?” Chamburs fixed Wynefreed with a blazing look. “Pity.”

“What is it you want, Master Cosworth? I am currently employed with other matters.”

Chamburs Cosworth sauntered into the room with a predatory air. “I have some suspicions of an olfactory nature.”

Wynefreed stiffened. She was not certain what he meant, but she did know that Potions Masters earned their deceptive and salacious reputation.

Chamburs approached the writing desk like a dragon approaching a hippogriff. He
peered over her shoulder. “You spend your time tracking the long-suffering Mr Yelverton.”

Wynefreed gasped. “How dare you—”

“I am not interested in your explanations,” Chambrs avowed. “I know the truth better than you do.”

And with those words, Chambrs grasped Wynefreed’s neck in his potions-stained fingers and tipped back her head, exposing her throat and opening her mouth. He opened a small glass phial and tipped a drop into her mouth.

“Veritaserum!” Wynefreed screamed, her fingers flying to her assaulted throat. “How dare you! What my father will say!”

But Chambrs only smiled with menace. “Now that you are helpless to withhold the truth from me,” he challenged, “why don’t you tell me what you smell, my dear?”

He pulled a larger phial from his robes and unscrewed the cap with care—almost lovingly. He brought it up to his nose and took an elaborate sniff. “I smell your father’s elf-made mead, anger, and Wynefreed Poffe.”

Wynefreed huffed, “That couldn’t be—Amortentia?” She was horrified. She was horrified not of what Chambrs Cosworth smelled in that phial, but of what she, herself, would smell. What she had been telling herself for far too long that she did not smell. But Amortentia, like Veritaserum, did not lie.

“Of course it is,” Chambrs menaced. He thrust it under her gaping nostrils. “What,” he insisted, “do you smell, Wynefreed Poffe?”

Wynefreed tried not to inhale, but that was impossible. Before long the fumes spiraled into her nostrils, and then she changed tactics, and tried to avoid answering. But it was no use—the Veritaserum flowing through her veins acted as a compulsion, and she was blurtting, ‘I smell books! And my dead mother’s perfume! And—and—sulphury potions fumes.” She sobbed.

Chambrs preened. He reached his potions-stained fingers towards her, and from those fingers dangled the phial of Amortentia. “Drink it.”

Wynefreed looked up at his dark eyes in terror. But inside that terror was a wild thrill such as she had never known. Before she could contemplate what was happening, she took the phial and raised it to her lips.

“Drink it, my dear,” Chambrs insisted, his potions-stained fingers pressing menacingly into her shoulders. “Drink it, I say, and let Amortentia set you free.”

Wynefreed whimpered, then drank. She felt joy, fear, madness, excitement, surrender to arms that were too strong, lips too bruising, fate that moved too fast. For the first time in her life she had met someone, something stronger than she, someone she could neither bully nor break, someone who was bullying and breaking her. Somehow, her arms were around his neck and her lips trembling beneath his and their robes fell onto the sitting room floor as the flames in the fire crackled beside their undulating bodies.

Memory-Hermione closed the book with a bang, placed it on the table, and looked up at her audience. “Are you fucking kidding me? ‘Drink it, I say, and let Amortentia set you free’?”
George looked like he was going to burst with wanting to talk, Ron looked uncomfortable, and Harry was pressing his lips together to quell a smile at the ridiculousness of it all.

“It’s romantic!” George finally contended. “She smells him!”

“Mate,” Harry said, “It’s not romantic. It’s rapey. He forces Veritaserum down her throat, forces her to smell the Amortentia.”

“Thank you, Harry!” Hermione said. “Though I will note that it is not only ‘rapey,’ it is rape. Merely smelling someone in Amortentia does not constitute consent for sex.”

“But he didn’t force her to drink the Amortentia,” George said, but he was losing vehemence.

“Wynefreed Poffe is a flawed character, and she made a bad choice to drink the Amortentia,” Hermione asserted. “But what happened there was not consensual sex. A person does not have to have acted perfectly to be raped!”

“Plus,” Harry said, “what happens if she wanted to have sex with him, drinks the potion, loses all rational faculties, and then he tries to stick it up her butt? There’s lots of ways to have sex; the potion makes negotiating it impossible.”

Ron burst out laughing. Hermione pointed at Harry enthusiastically, showing her agreement. George relented. “Fine!” he said. “Fine. It’s rapey, not romantic. Although I’m not sure how you stop people from getting raped if half of everyone thinks rape is romance.”

Hermione frowned. “Actually, I agree. That is the difficulty.” She sighed. “Somehow we need to convince our whole society that consent is sexy.”

“But what about smelling it?” Ron asked. “Isn’t it nice to see what Amortentia smells like for you? That’s sweet.”

Hermione softened a bit. “Of course. I love smelling it. But you don’t need to drink it to smell it.”

Ron sighed. “We should stop selling the love potions. Maybe we can make a different product that just lets you smell it? That way the old customs and traditions can sort of still survive, though changed. It’s the right thing to do, and I’m worried we’re going to be held liable.”

Hermione beamed.

George poured himself another glass of wine. “Whatever, little brother. I’m putting you in charge of it, so have fun with that.”

Harry looked thoughtfully at Hermione. “You should say all of this to Kingsley and have him bring it before the Wizengamot. Love potions shouldn’t be legal.”

Hermione was surprised. “You think he’s ready for that? You think our society is ready for that?”

“No,” George said. “It’s not. It would end up causing a huge commotion. You’d clear the way for an unregulated, illegal black market. And you would make enemies.”

Harry shrugged. “If we wait till everyone’s ready, it’ll never get done.” Hermione flashed a bright smile.

The memory changed, swirling silver and changing image, until they were standing on the edge of Kingsley’s office. Memory-Hermione stood in staid robes in front of Kingsley’s desk. The Minister
sat behind his desk, watching her with curiosity. Hermione was using her wand to project charts and statistics in the air.

“First I will give you a summary of how the law currently stands with regard to magically mediated sexual assault,” Memory-Hermione said. “Otherwise legal spells are illegal to use with the intent of manipulating another person into engaging in sexual acts. This includes, but is not limited to, *Confundus, Legilimens, Stupefy, Immobulus, Petrificus Totalus, Silencio*. Otherwise legal spells are also illegal to use with the intent of causing a person to forget sexual acts. This includes, but is not limited to, *Obliviate*. Spells that are specifically related to sex are legally considered to be a type of sexual activity, and therefore cannot be cast on another person without their express consent. This includes, but is not limited to, *Engorgio Phallus, Penetratio Totalus, Provocem Carnem, Genitalibus Excitare.*”

Ron fidgeted. His experience with sex spells was limited, but it was hard not to fidget at the memory of *Engorgio Phallus.*

“Magical objects are treated similarly,” Memory-Hermione continued, waving her wand to change the visual aid projected in the air. “It is illegal to use any magical object to manipulate another person into engaging in sexual acts. And moreover, the use of magical objects designed to increase arousal, desire, and sexual performance are legally considered to be a type of sexual activity, and therefore cannot be used on another person without their express consent.

“Potions, in contrast, are poorly regulated from the standpoint of preventing potion-mediated sexual assault. The law simply states that it is illegal to give another person any potion, including love or lust potions, without their express consent. And yet, love and lust potions comprise a large industry, and statistics show,” she waved her wand to change the visual again, “that most doses of love and lust potion are consumed without consent. So why does the Ministry continue to allow the sale of love and lust potions when we know that they are being used in illegal ways that we have no hope of prosecuting?”

Ron fiddled with the sleeve of his robe. With the benefit of hindsight, he wondered what hope they had of regulating or prosecuting any of this.

“A limited number of lust potions are restricted, including the Priapus potion, and many libido-increasing potions, erectile dysfunction potions, and premature ejaculation potions are available only through prescription from healers, rather than from apothecaries. And personal use of potions to perpetrate assault is also illegal; that is, otherwise legal potions are illegal to drink with the intent of manipulating another person into engaging in sexual acts. This includes, but is not limited to, *Polyjuice potion, Pheromone-increasing potion.*”

Ron grabbed Hermione’s hand, leaning against the wall of the office, as they watched her memory self convince the Minister for Magic that love and lust potions should be illegal. Even now, knowing the outcome as he did, he was amazed with her. She was so impressive, so driven, so strong. He slipped his arm out of her hand and around her waist, pulling her close and hooking his thumb under her trouser waistband.

*You usually do that when you want to have sex,* she said. *But I’ll be honest, watching these memories with Kingsley in the room really doesn’t really put me in the mood.*

*Malfoy and Harry in the room is okay, though?* Ron retorted.

*Eh,* Hermione mused. *I mean, if I was trying to get in the mood I’d rather they weren’t there—they just don’t put me off it as much as my boss. And if the two of them were to start going at it—*
Ahhhh! Stop! Ron shouted in her mind. La la la la!

I’m just saying, she said. I wonder if we’ll be around when I win that bet.

Ron tried to inconspicuously steal a glance at Harry and Malfoy. Malfoy was watching memory-Hermione’s presentation, now about sexual assault statistics, with interest. Harry, to Ron’s dismay, was looking at Malfoy.

Ron had to admit that Malfoy was a good-looking bloke. He looked like he just stepped off the pages of Warlock magazine. And, oh Merlin, Malfoy looked at Harry, and Harry snapped his eyes away.

Fuck it all. He was going to have to sing “Cauldron Full of Hot, Strong Love.” He’d better start working on memorising the lyrics, because if he was going to sing it, he was going to sing it right. I've got a cauldron full of hot, strong love, And it's bubbling for you! Say Incendio, but that spell's not hot—fuck, that’s all he could remember.

Memory-Hermione was now presenting expert opinions she’d managed to get on the record.

Ron glanced towards Harry and Malfoy again. Malfoy was looking at Harry out of the corner of his eye as Harry stretched his left shoulder, the one that always bothered him since he got hit with a Severing Hex in a duel a few summers ago.

Look at Malfoy’s face, he said.

Hermione did her best to look at them subtly, but this time Malfoy saw her looking and his eyes snapped away from Harry.

I called it TWELVE years ago, Hermione gloated.

Don’t boast, Ron chided, but poked his thumb playfully into the squishy flesh at her hip bone.

“I am impressed, Ms Granger,” Kingsley extolled. “You make a convincing case using flawless logic.”

Memory-Hermione smiled. “Thank you, sir.”

“I will bring this before the Wizengamot. Please prepare a proposal specifically tailored to them. We need to take into account the membership of the various committees and consider how best to make the argument to them. Let’s plan a strategy meeting for after you’ve had time to think about it.”

“Yes, of course. Thank you so much!” Hermione beamed.

The memory began to swirl, and they had the sensation of floating upward through the memory, out of the Pensieve, to land on the floor in Pensieve Room 6.

Ron, Hermione, and Harry turned to look at Malfoy, the only one of the group for whom this wasn’t old information.

Malfoy sat down, crossed one of his elegant legs over the other, and said, “I always thought that Chambrs Cosworth was a charlatan. And he gives Potions Masters such a bad name.”

Oh, thank Godric. Ron didn’t think he could sit through another iteration of Hermione convincing someone that Chambrs Cosworth was an arsehole. Because she would convince them. He just
didn’t want to have to sit through it.

“Giving Wynefreed a potion by force,” Malfoy continued. “That’s not on. And if he somehow knew, by her Amortentia scents or otherwise, that she secretly harboured feelings for him, he looks like an utter coward for forcing the issue with a potion. He ought to have convinced her, without resorting to potions, that she couldn’t continue resisting the strength of her attraction. He ought to have acted in a way that made her realise she no longer wanted to resist her attraction, but rather to give in to it.”

Harry choked—on what, Ron wasn’t sure. “Harry,” Ron said, “are you alright, mate?”

Harry, red in the face, tears in his eyes, nodded, coughing all the while.

*This is the funniest thing I’ve ever seen,* Hermione mused.

*Anything to lighten the mood from this crap,* Ron replied. *Even this whatever-it-is with Harry and Malfoy, I suppose.*

Malfoy was sitting serenely, like the huge twat that he was, smirk plastered on his face as he watched Harry cough up a lung.

“That’s actually one of the points I’ve been trying to make, Draco,” Hermione said. “Well not the bit about being a coward. But that it’s far sexier and more desirable and more attractive to seduce someone without the use of potions.”

“Much manlier, too. Don’t you think, Granger?”

Harry, who had finally stopped choking, started coughing again.

*Do you think we ought to do something?* Ron asked.

*Like what?* Hermione retorted.

Ron said, *Well. Watch this.*

“Alright,” Ron said, changing the subject. “I’m hungry. Let’s get lunch, shall we? Harry, do you mind if Hermione and I go alone? We just need a minute to talk about, er, something.”

Harry’s face immediately turned sympathetic. “Oh, of course. Are you two okay? I know the love potion memories aren’t the easiest to dwell on—”

“Oh, we’re fine. Just want some time to decompress,” Hermione added.

“Sure.” Harry turned to Malfoy. “Do you want to come with me to get some lunch? We can’t eat here because we’ve shut down all food production at the Ministry. Unless you’d rather hang out here. That is, without food.”

Ron watched as Malfoy slowly stood, brushed nonexistent wrinkles out of his robes, and grinned. Ron honestly couldn’t tell if that grin was supposed to be threatening, predatory, or seductive. Fuck, but Harry was in way over his head with this one.

“Excellent idea, Potter,” Malfoy agreed. “Shall we go?”

“Oh, sure,” Harry said, following Malfoy out of the room with a bewildered look over his shoulder at Ron and Hermione. “What do you feel like eating? There’s a great place for fish and chips—”
“Stop talking, Potter,” Malfoy said as he left the room, “we’re not eating fish and chips.”

When they’d disappeared around the doorway, Hermione turned towards Ron. She heaved an amused sigh, her eyes twinkling with humour amid an underlying weariness. “Let’s go,” she said, holding out her hand, and Ron took it.

Ron and Hermione sat at their usual table at their usual lunch spot. Ron often met Hermione for lunch during the week—usually on Tuesdays and Fridays, but subject to change given Hermione’s commitments on any given week.

Hermione took a bite of salad. “Draco seems…” she sighed. “I don’t know. What do you think?”

Ron forked one of her cherry tomatoes and it popped satisfyingly between his teeth. He hated mushy tomatoes. “He seems fine. Still a git, but I don’t think he’s dangerous. He’s not going to hurt the investigation. Or Harry. I don’t think he was ever really dangerous, was he?”

Hermione nodded. He knew they were both thinking of Bill’s scars. “No, not really,” she said. “Sometimes I still wonder what would’ve happened if he hadn’t been at the Manor that day.”

Ron nodded. “I’d rather work with him than most of the idiot Aurors that are straight out of training. I’m still going to hex him if he’s a prat, though,” he said thoughtfully, stabbing another tomato.

Hermione swatted him away. “Get your own salad!”

“Why would I do that when I have yours?” he asked with a lopsided grin. He turned back to his own plate. “What do you think about this case? Do you think it’s related to the previous threats?”

Hermione sighed, planting her elbow on the table and resting her cheek in her hand. “It’s hard to be sure, but it’s got to be, right? But the Aurors haven’t had any leads on the threats, either, have they? So that doesn’t help us much.” She raised a piece of chicken to her mouth, then paused. “What I’m really interested in is the composition and function of this new potion. It’s horrifying.”

Ron’s face was haunted, but in an attempt to be lighthearted, he said, “Think that was the first time anyone’s ever had sex in the Atrium?”

“No by a longshot,” Hermione said immediately.

“What?” Ron cried. “How can you be so sure?”

Hermione shrugged. “I mean, not like that. On the floor in the middle of everything….Those people are never going to get over that. I wonder if they had partners.”

Ron’s stopped chewing. “It’s bloody awful.”

“Could’ve been me,” Hermione said, trying and failing to sound unaffected.

Ron stiffened. He knew she was right; they’d both been trying to steel themselves against the possibility for months. And with this new potion….The idea of Hermione being hit with that potion and on the floor having sex with some faceless person made Ron’s blood boil. He could feel the heat in his neck and he knew that his freckles were currently lost in the red flush on his skin. But then he looked up at Hermione and saw the fear in her brown eyes, and his own discomfort fell away.
“Hey,” he said, reaching across the table and grabbing her hand. She looked at him with eyes that were trying to be strong. “Hey. If that ever happened, you know it wouldn’t mean anything. It wouldn’t mean anything about you, or about me, or about us—all it would be about is the potion. The potion would be doing it, not you.”

“I know,” she said, shaking her head slightly, as if she could maintain a purely rational stance by shaking off the messy human emotions. “Not important.”

“Plus,” Ron said, “Nadheer would never let it happen. Harry might actually kill him.”

Hermione smiled, looking to the door of the restaurant where Nadheer stood guard. “Maybe you’ll get hit with the potion,” she said mildly, stabbing a tomato, “You’re such a trollop anyway.”

Ron grinned. “That’s me. Feminist husband of Hermione Granger—if you want to call me a person of lax morals, epithets of any gender are appropriate.”

“Slag,” Hermione said.

“Scrubber,” Ron said.

The waiter, who had approached the table without them noticing, took a step backwards.

“Oh!” Ron said. “It’s not—”

“We’re just—trying to make light—” Hermione attempted.

“We’re married!” Ron finally yelled.

The waiter gave an exceedingly polite nod and hastily retreated from the table.

“Oh Merlin,” Hermione said, putting her hand over her eyes.

Ron laughed, though he was bright red again, and said after a moment, “So what are your thoughts about the new potion?”

Hermione frowned. “You noticed something was wrong in the lift before she acted, right? What did you see again?”

“She sort of slumped a bit, her eyes unfocused, skin turned pale.”

“I need to read up about libido-increasing potions, but my books are at home. The libido-increasing potions that are prescribed by Healers don’t have side effects like that, I’m pretty sure.”

“I read about that when I was trying to develop an alternative to love potions,” Ron said, around a mouthful of food. “You’re right, they don’t work like that, they just raise your overall randiness, they don’t make you want to jump someone right then. Although those are the kind that are actually legal. I’m not sure about the effects of illegal lust potions. I’m sure Malfoy will figure that out.” Ron paused. “And then boast about it for hours.”

“You’re right,” she conceded. “Solving the Potions puzzle isn’t why I’m here, is it?”

Ron grinned. “I know it’s hard for you to resist homework, but that wasn’t assigned to you.”

Hermione groaned, laughing. “I know! Okay. I will focus on the politics and Kingsley and think about our official response. Happy?”
“Ecstatic,” Ron said, his smile dropping off his face as he remembered exactly what they were discussing. “It’s a bit odd to watch the memories like that, isn’t it?”

“Extremely,” Hermione said.

“It’s going to be worse after lunch, isn’t it?” Ron asked.

“Well, if we’re going to bring Malfoy up to speed, we have to actually show him. But yes, it’s going to be worse.”

“Want to do shots before we go back?”

“Ron!” Hermione gasped, but she was laughing. “No, I don’t want to do shots on my lunch break when we’re about to go back into the Ministry to face not only Draco Malfoy, but also the Minister for Magic.”

“Oh fine. You’re always ruining the fun.”

Hermione reached across her salad and slapped Ron’s arm. He looked up at her with an adoring smile.

“Did you ever convince Harry to come to the Halloween party?” Hermione asked.

Ron sighed. “No. He’s determined to skip it! He’s still sore over the costume he got last year.”

Every year the Ministry put on a Halloween party for its employees. It was huge, with excellent food and brilliant decorations. The party used a variety of magical enchantments, the most exciting of which was the entrance to the party, which was magicked to Transfigure each person’s clothing into a costume on their way into the party. The problem was, no one got to pick their costume; the enchantments chose a costume for each partygoer. The costumes were always fantastic, but were not always appreciated by the wearer. Last year, Harry had walked into the party to find himself dressed as Cupid, wearing nothing but a tiny loincloth, a pair of wings, a quiver, and a bow. He spent the entire party trying to get people to give him more clothes, and eventually ended up putting on Ron’s king robe and leaving early. The Prophet had snapped a photo of him and put it on the front page. Rumour had it their circulation had never been so high for a single issue since the end of the war. (Harry would never agree to pose shirtless, not for the media’s lack of trying.)

“Well it was a bit much. Poor Harry. I told the head of D.A.P.P.E.R. that we needed to have the magic adjusted to make sure that people weren’t forced to bare more skin than they wanted to. I think he did it.” She paused. “I should check.” She pulled out a magical planner and flipped open the cover. She pressed her wand to the paper and said, “Ask D.A.P.P.E.R. about the costumes.” When she finished speaking, her words appeared briefly on the page, but then disappeared as they sorted themselves into the right place in the book, ready to remind her later.

“What’s D.A.P.P.E.R. a barmy acronym for, again?” Ron asked.


“Maybe if we get their word that there’s no chance of that happening again, we can get Harry to come. I think he’s worried he’ll end up dressed up as, like, an underwear model.”

Hermione laughed. “Harry would make quite a good underwear model, don’t you think?”

“Ew, Hermione! Don’t say that! He’s our best mate!”
“Draco’s already convinced we’re having threesomes.”

Just then, the waiter returned with a puritanical sneer, having clearly overheard that Hermione was discussing threesomes, with the bill. As he walked (quickly) away from the table, Ron said over the bond, *I think he’s hoping we invite him next time.*

Hermione laughed. They took their last bites, paid the bill, and stood to leave, Hermione slinging her bag over her shoulder.

When they got outside the door, they said hi to Nadheer as a small owl landed on Ron’s shoulder from where it had been waiting for them. “Hello, you polite bird,” he said, and untied the letter from its foot.

“I think I have an owl treat,” Hermione said, pointing her wand surreptitiously at her bag and casting a nonverbal *Accio*. An owl treat flew into Hermione’s hand, and she gave the treat to the bird.

Ron unrolled the parchment and leaned on the building out of the way of the passersby. “It’s from Bill. Fleur is sick and he needs someone to pick up Victoire from school. Think I can do it?”

Hermione’s face took on the slightest hint of annoyance. Ron knew that she loved being a part of the Weasley clan, but she felt that Ron was often asked to do more than his share of family responsibilities. “They ask you because they know you’ll do it,” she always said, “and they don’t want to listen to George or Ginny whining, or Percy’s pretentious excuses, or Bill’s Gringotts schedule, so everyone always asks you.” But this time, apparently not wanting to get into a fight, she only said, “If no one else can do it, we can make sure you get out on time.”

Ron Conjured a quill and wrote a note to Bill, tied it on the owl, and watched it fly away. He looked up at the sky, where the bird had finally disappeared from view.

“You know,” Hermione said, “you’re going to be a really excellent dad some day.”

Ron’s head shot down, surprised, to look at her. She was wearing a pensive expression as she looked at him, blinking against the sunlight.

“I love you,” he said, and grabbed her hand as they walked back to the Ministry.

When they got back to the Ministry, Hermione and Nadheer went with Ron through the Visitor’s entrance, Ron grumbling all the while about having to answer the questions from the disembodied voice even though he already had a badge. When they arrived in the Atrium, the scene was much subdued since the morning, but oddly deserted. One of the paper bats fluttered down and landed on Hermione’s head. She smiled as it flew away.

The same woman’s voice that spoke in the lift was saying, “The Ministry is under a special alert. See the detailed message above the War Memorial Fountain.” A few moments of silence passed, and then, “The Ministry is under a special alert….”

A message flashed above the fountain: “ALL NON-ESSENTIAL STAFF ARE DISMISSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. ESSENTIAL STAFF PROCEED WITH CAUTION, SUSPECT MALICIOUS POTIONS. ESSENTIAL STAFF, IF YOU ARE NOT CURRENTLY TAKING CONTRACEPTIVE AND STI POTIONS, PLEASE PROCEED TO THE HEALER STATIONED AT THE SECURITY DESK BEFORE REPORTING TO YOUR POST.”

Ron glanced at the Security Desk. Sure enough, there was a small queue of witches and wizards.
Most of them looked older, which made sense, because younger people were more likely to take
the potions as a matter of course. Ron grimaced, thinking about the breach in medical privacy that
Kingsley apparently thought was warranted.


“If Kingsley sent home all non-essential staff…” Hermione trailed off. “More people must have
been hit.” She looked at Nadheer.

“I haven’t heard anything,” Nadheer said, “but Auror Potter asked us to stick with you even inside
the building now.”

Ron grasped Hermione’s hand and started walking swiftly across the Atrium. He had to slow his
stride to match Hermione’s. She was walking fast, but couldn’t keep up with his long legs. They
reached the lifts quickly, nevertheless, and the ride to level three seemed to take ages.

After they’d passed through levels seven and six, Ron said, “You’re here all the time, but do you
ever just come to the Ministry and have that paralyzing fear where you feel like you’re Polyjuiced
and we’re on the hunt for a locket?”

Hermione smiled sadly. “At first it happened some.”

“I’m probably only feeling that way now because we’re trying to get somewhere quickly and it
reminds me of running out of here and Yaxley and—”

“I know.” She squeezed his hand. “At least this time we probably won’t end up dead, only
randomly having sex with people.”

“Hey, if we stick together, at least we’d probably only end up having sex with each other.”

Hermione laughed. “Much as I love having sex with you, I’d rather no one was watching and that I
was in my right mind.”

“You’re such a prude,” Ron teased. “Frigid, frigid Hermione Granger.”

Nadheer, trying to stay professional, looked away with a small amused smile.

Hermione fixed him with a glare before reaching over and pinching his arse, hard.

“Oi!”

“Frigid my arse,” Hermione grumbled, but she was smiling.

They finally reached level three and proceeded quickly to the Pensieve Rooms, where they found
Harry and Malfoy standing a bit awkwardly. Malfoy was reclining against the wall, his head leaned
back. Harry was pacing in front of the door. Nadheer took up guard a little way down the corridor.

“There you are!” Harry cried. “Better when you’re here and I don’t have to worry that you’re
ripping each other’s clothes off in public.”

“Likewise,” Ron said. At that, Malfoy’s eyes flew open and Harry’s eyes widened. “I mean,” Ron
stammered, “glad you’re both, I mean…Anyway! So what happened?”

Oh, real smooth, Hermione teased.

“Two more workers somehow succumbed to the potion—no one you know, but both on level one,”
Harry reported. “They were both Stunned before anything was er, consummated. Kingsley’s been through to see Gordon Brown.”

Hermione was surprised. “They think the Muggles are in danger?”

“No, I don’t think so, but the Muggles would be confused if people started randomly having sex in public places. I mean, it’s bad enough for us even though we immediately suspected it was a potion. So he and Robards wanted to warn them, even though they don’t think it likely that anyone would target Muggles.”

Ron grunted. “It’s funny—I just assume that any plots like this are going to be even more dangerous for Muggles.”

Malfoy suddenly heaved a dramatic sigh. “Yes, of course, because all social cleavages are about Light versus Dark magic and Pure versus Muggle Blood, is that right, Weasley?”

“I just meant it’s—”

“Even if it is some sort of Pureblood traditionalists behind these attacks, blood status doesn’t have anything to do with one’s position on love potions. This isn’t about Muggles.”

Hermione pressed her lips together. “You’re right of course, Draco, but be reasonable—Ron already knew that. He’s not an idiot. Harry, is that what Robards is thinking?”

“Robards is going on the assumption that they’re trying to hit high-profile Ministry workers: Kingsley, us, maybe some others. They’ve got a team of Aurors tailing Kingsley and testing all of his food and drink before he can eat it. He’s annoyed, as you can imagine.”

Hermione began to giggle. Ron and Harry turned to her with questioning expressions and Malfoy raised a querulous brow.

“Granger,” Draco said, “given your role here, I’m a little surprised that you would laugh at people being threatened with potions that would render them unable to resist sexual assault—”

Hermione managed to quell her giggling. “Sorry. I just—I think it’s the stress. And adrenaline. It’s not funny. It’s just—I’ve known for months that I’m a target and likely to be hit with an illegal love potion. Our whole life has been rearranged because we’re assuming that I will. I’ve been on contraceptive potions and even those nasty potions that protect against STIs, because we know that I could easily get hit, despite the Auror department’s best efforts.” She paused, looking at Ron, a bit manic. “We wanted to have a baby, but we are waiting because it doesn’t seem safe to go off the contraceptive potions, presuming I actually want Ron’s baby!” She paused. “But somehow it never occurred to me that they might try to dose Kingsley!” She pressed her hand over her mouth to stifle her laughter.

Harry started to laugh with her. He grabbed her hands. “Can you imagine him just suddenly stopping everything he was doing and propositioning the person next to him?” He laughed harder, causing Hermione to lose herself a bit more.

Ron was happy to make light of this whole situation, he really was. But the first part of Hermione’s explanation was sitting too heavy in his throat for him to laugh. He looked up at Malfoy, who was watching, bemused, as Harry and Hermione roared with laughter over a very serious situation. Malfoy caught Ron’s eye.

“They sometimes…get like this,” Ron said, waving his hand vaguely. “Feminists laugh, too.”
At that, Malfoy joined the laughter.

“At that, Malfoy joined the laughter.

“Alright, alright,” Harry finally said a few moments later. “We have some lovely memories to re-live. Let’s go in.” Hermione, finally calming down, walked through first, followed by Malfoy.

Ron grabbed Harry’s elbow. “How was lunch?” he asked, raising a brow slightly.

“It was fine,” Harry said. “Malfoy thinks he can figure out the potion easily enough, but he agrees that we won’t catch these people unless we have a good grasp of the entire situation, not just the nature of the potion, and that means finishing these memories.”

Ron nodded. “Anything else from Robards? Any leads?”

“Not yet. The memories of the workers at Wideye seem to have been wiped,” Harry said, walking in and taking his place around the Pensieve. “One of them vaguely remembers someone approaching the kiosk in costume.”

“Like, in a Halloween costume?” Ron asked, confused.

“Apparently,” Harry reported. “But we’re not sure it’s related, even.”

A knocking sounded at the door. “Excuse me,” a wizard in lime green robes said, poking his head in. “I’m Mediwizard Smith from St Mungo’s. We’re contacting all essential staff to confirm that you’re taking contraceptive and STI potions, as a precaution against the potions attack. I also have Ministry waivers for you to sign.” He waved his hand to indicate a cart that was wheeling itself along behind him, potions phials clanking against each other. He waved his wand, and four parchments soared through the air to each of them. “Sign those, please.”

Hermione grabbed the form and her eyes scanned it rapidly. She looked up. “The Ministry wants us to release them from liability in the case of a future potions attack.” She squeezed her eyes shut. “Those fuckers.”

The Mediwizard widened his eyes. “Look, I have nothing to do with those waivers, they just asked me to bring them around while I do the potions. If you have questions about the potions….”

“No, it’s okay,” Hermione said. “It’s not your fault.” She picked up a quill, signed the waiver, and Levitated it back to the Mediwizard. The others followed suit.

“So, if you please,” Mediwizard Smith said, “I need your names and potions status, and I can give you the potions if you need. You can come out in the hallway one at a time to maintain medical privacy.”

“There’s no need. Hermione Granger. Already taking the potions.”

The Mediwizard’s quill recorded her answer on a clipboard.

“Ron Weasley, already taking the potions.”

Harry glanced at Malfoy, then turned to the Mediwizard. “Harry Potter. Already taking the potions. The hazard of being around you two too often,” he joked. Ron tried to smile, but he suspected that it came off like a grimace. It was the truth—everyone close to them was taking the potions, even his parents and his ten-year-old niece. Ron tried not to think about the implications of that too much.

The quill finished recording the information as four eyes turned on Malfoy. Malfoy, face
inscrutable, slowly stood and sauntered across the room and into the hallway. The Mediwizard followed him out.

The three sat in silence for about a minute, and then Malfoy walked calmly back into the room, with absolutely no indication in his face or demeanour whether he had just downed a phial of potions, or if he’d already been on them. What a Slytherin.

Harry stared at the git—quite shamelessly, in Ron’s opinion.

“All right,” Hermione said, raising her wand to her temple to extract a memory. “So now we’re moving on to the Wizengamot hearing determining the restriction of love potions. Ready?”

The group nodded and entered the memory, landing in the Wizengamot courtroom.

“The first Pensieve memory I ever entered was a memory of the Wizengamot,” Harry said, looking around. Members of the Wizengamot and visitors to the hearing milled about, waiting for something to begin.

“Is this long?” Malfoy asked. “I’m sitting.” He found an empty seat and made himself comfortable, adjusting the way his robes fell behind him. The others followed him and sat.

“There we are,” Ron said, pointing.

Memory-Hermione was sitting next to Kingsley near the front of the room, and Ron sat next to Slughorn. Harry sat nearby, acting as Auror protection with a half dozen other Aurors in the room.

“When was this, again?” Malfoy asked, surveying the surroundings. “Elphias Doge looks like utter shite. Is he sick?”

“A little over a year ago. I’m not sure,” Hermione answered, unsure how else to respond.

Just then, the Chief Warlock, Diarmad Barrach, who sat in the very middle of the front row in the plum-coloured robes of the Wizengamot, stood, announcing, “Legislative hearing of the third of May, 2007.” He paused, and the Court Scribe’s quill began recording his words. “Into the petition of the Minister for Magic to reclassify love and lust potions under the Decree for the Restriction of Potions Brewed With Malicious Intent or Effect.


“First, the Ministry’s representative, Matilda Watson, will present the case for the restriction of love and lust potions. Ms Watson.”

An imposing witch with voluminous, curly white hair stood and walked to the front of the courtroom. She wore a set of smart and modern robes that seemed to echo her smart and modern argument.

“Witches and wizards of the Wizengamot,” she began, “I am here today to make a case for the reclassification of love and lust potions, including but not limited to Amortentia, Draught of Amour, and Elixir of Lust, as Controlled Substances, illegal to brew, sell, or purchase, under the Decree for the Restriction of Potions Brewed With Malicious Intent or Effect. This case, which has been submitted in written form, has been cosigned by the Wizarding Council for Civil Liberties,
the National Organization for Witches, and the Witches Reproductive Rights Federation, among other organizations.

“The case for the restriction of love and lust potions is simple. The use of these potions renders the drinker incapable of providing consent to sexual activity. All sexual activity that occurs as a result of love or lust potions is, therefore, and in a technical sense, rape.”

The assembled witches and wizards watched Watson in silence, listening with rapt attention to her radical words.

“In one modal use of the potions, a lovelorn person secretly doses their love interest. The person who ingests the potion becomes infatuated. This person is in no position to give consent in a way that passes legal muster. It is, in fact, already illegal to dose someone with a potion without their consent, though the easy availability of the potions and the fact that this seems to be their most common use puts into question whether the Ministry is at all serious about preventing this sort of behaviour.

“In another case—which statistics show is not a common use of love potions, but which is a case often invoked in hypothetical debates about the legality of love and lust potions—two people consent to the use of a love potion. Perhaps, the story goes, they are lovers who have fallen out of love but who don’t want to end their relationship. Perhaps they’ve been together for a long time and lost the spark. Perhaps they are a loving couple that just wants to experiment and see what happens if they throw back some potion.

“The fact remains, witches and wizards of the Wizengamot, that this is still a malicious and harmful use of the potion. A person who has ingested a love potion cannot revoke their consent. They cannot negotiate their sexual acts. They cannot be a willing participant in any sexual encounter.

“This might not comport with what you’ve been taught, but let me tell you the truth. All sex under the influence of a love potion is rape. All sex under the influence of a love potion is sexual assault.”

The memory changed, but this time it didn’t swirl and coalesce to a new scene; rather, it reminded Ron of watching movies when Harry or Hermione would do something called “fast forward.” A moment later, the witch named Matilda Watson was in her seat.

Chief Warlock Barrach stood. “Interested parties have been invited to argue against the proposed restriction. After that, the Wizengamot Interrogators will call experts to testify. First, we have Tobias Stickles from the Brewing and Apothecary Retail Federation.”

Ron snorted. “Tobias Stickles. It’s no less funny the second time around.”

Hermione shushed him, though Harry was smiling. Malfoy was not smiling. Ron suspected that with a name like “Draco Malfoy,” one was unlikely to poke fun at anyone’s name.

A slight but severe man rose to face the assembly. “Love potions,” he proclaimed, “compose a sizable portion of the annual revenue of British brewers and apothecarists. This has been the case for centuries.”

He flicked his wand, illuminating a chart. “As you can see here, love potions account for upwards of 5% of industry revenue. And this shows market size over time.” He flicked his wand again, changing the visual.
Malfy leaned forwards on the bench and leaned over Harry to smirk at Hermione, “Wow, you made a real enemy of one Tobias Stickles, didn’t you, Granger?”

Hermione shrugged, an unrepentant grin on her face. “Of everything about this situation, annoying Tobias Stickles is one outcome with which I am completely fine.”

Stickles continued, “This means that love potions are a 75 million Galleon industry! The Ministry of Magic cannot in good conscience pass legislation that will harm the livelihood of brewers and apothecarists.”

Stickles turned around dramatically, calling to mind images of Professor Snape. “Moreover,” he articulated, “love potions have been a standard part of British wizarding society for centuries, since even before the invention of Amortentia in 1498. It is a part of who we are, and if it has survived this long, why would you think we can expunge it from our society now?”

“We at B.A.R.F. do not deny that the Ministry has a compelling interest in restricting the brewing and sale of certain potions and potions ingredients. We support the restriction of addictive recreational potions, and those lust potions that are already restricted. Let it not be said that B.A.R.F. is unreasonable. But we cannot support the expansion of the restriction to include mainstream love potions. It will threaten the continued existence of our industry.”

With that, Tobias Stickles waved his wand, causing his illustrations to disappear in a shower of menacing sparks, as he took his seat.

Hermione sighed. “It sounds no less hyperbolic the second time around, does it?”

Chief Warlock Barrach stood. “Next, the Wizengamot welcomes Bertie Popkin from the Society for the Legalisation of Potions.”

Malfy crossed one of his legs over the other. “This should be interesting.”

Harry looked at him curiously.

“Pureblood traditionalists might support B.A.R.F.,” Malfy explained, “but in general, everyone hates the libertarian clowns at S.L.O.P.”

Harry laughed.

Bertie Popkin stood. He wore drab, outdated robes. He was fairly young, and his hair was even messier than Harry’s. He bounced on his toes as he asserted, “There is no higher social goal than to give every mentally sound individual an opportunity to make their own decisions.” He paused, looking around the room. “To make their own,” he paused, enunciating wildly, “decisions.”

“Oh, sweet Merlin,” Malfy murmured, and Ron couldn’t help but agree.

“This includes love and lust potions! If people are taking these potions of their own free will, and their use is not harming anyone else, what possible interest could the Ministry have in restricting their use? The Ministry contends that the use of these potions will inevitably cause harm, but giving a love potion to another person unknowingly is already illegal. So, I ask, what are we attempting to do here today? Protect people? No, because that is already accomplished with our current laws!”

Bertie Popkin ran a hand through his hair, causing it to stick up in a chaotic mess.

“And it must be said—witches and wizards of the Wizengamot, it must be said—that the restriction
of the brewing and sale of love potions would set a dangerous precedent! What about all of the other potions that you think should remain legal? What about contraceptive potions, impotence potions, libido-increasing potions? How, I ask you, are those potions functionally different than love potions? If we restrict the sale of love potions, the restriction of these potions is the next logical step—inevitable, really!—and we cannot have that! Think of the danger to our liberty!”

“The fact that some people will abuse potions should not be the basis for the prohibition of the potions for all people, including law-abiding citizens. It would be an indefensible assault on our liberties.”

Bertie Popkin finished, bounced on his toes one final time, and took his seat.

“These arguments are not even the slightest bit logical,” Hermione sighed, shaking her head. “Yes, Bertie Popkin, love potions are exactly the same as contraceptive potions. There’s absolutely no way to stop the slippery slope.”

Malfoy raised an eyebrow, amused, perhaps, with sarcastic Hermione. For some reason, people who didn’t know her well were always surprised when they witnessed her wit.

Chief Warlock Barrach stood. “Finally, we have Rosa Titcomb from the Society for the Protection of Incantational Traditionalism.”

A witch of about sixty took her place at the centre of the room. She wore immaculate makeup and puce robes; her hair, which looked to be magically coloured, was in a heavily styled bob.

Ron glanced at current Hermione and then at memory-Hermione. Hermione hated Rosa Titcomb. Current Hermione looked freely annoyed; memory Hermione also looked annoyed, but more guardedly so—you would need to know her well to realise how annoyed she was.

“Good afternoon,” Rosa Titcomb simpered. “I am here today to argue against no less than the annihilation of wizarding culture. Just that little thing: the annihilation of wizarding culture.”

She looked around, inviting the assembled group to join in her polite outrage.

“Love potions are part of our cultural history, our lore, our norms. They are in our stories. They are in our dreams, they are in our wishes and our desires.

“Imagine the young people, sitting in Potions lessons, eager to find out if they smell their paramour when they brew Amortentia. Imagine people everywhere, reading Magic Without Duty and wishing to, perhaps,” she paused to giggle, “reenact a certain scene.”

Ron looked at his companions, and saw that Harry and Malfoy had both turned to look at Hermione, who was tapping her fingers on her leg impatiently. It reminded Ron of her eagerness to answer questions during lessons at Hogwarts.

“Imagine a witch and wizard who have undertaken the sacred marriage vows, who desire to use the potion within the sanctuary of their marriage bed,” Rosa Titcomb said, with a confidential tone.

Hermione groaned. “The bloody marriage bed! Because of course, consensual use of a potion could only happen between a married witch and wizard.”

“How,” Rosa Titcomb continued, “can we even consider criminalising something that is so deeply a part of our culture and history? If we allow this type of restriction, we are allowing our culture to be thrown aside by young people with no regard for traditions, who do not understand what is at stake.”
She stopped, raised her hand to her chest. “I implore you, revered members of the Wizengamot. Do not forget from whence you came. Do not betray your culture, your ancestors, your heritage. Thank you.”

Rosa Titcomb sat, arranging her puce robes around herself and looking quite satisfied.

Chief Warlock Barrach rose. “That concludes the cases made by interested organizations. Next, we will allow Ms Watson to respond to their claims.”

The memory began to rush forwards again. “Draco, you’re smart enough to know why those arguments were absolute rubbish,” Hermione said, “so I didn’t want to waste time listening to this.”

Ron privately thought that the cases made by Stickles, Popkin, and Titcomb weren’t as easily dismissed as Hermione seemed to suggest, but he wasn’t about to say anything.

The memory coalesced on the Chief Warlock again standing. “Wizengamot Interrogators will now call for expert testimony. The first Interrogator will be Brunhilde Stokke.”

A witch wearing the plum-coloured robes of the Wizengamot rose and announced, “I call Ronald Weasley, of Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes.”

Memory-Ron stood, accepting a seat near the Chief Warlock that was used for testimony of those not accused of crimes.

“Mr Weasley, please describe your position and the circumstances of your expertise on love potions.”

“Hello,” memory-Ron said. “I am co-owner of Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes. We brewed and sold love potions until a few months ago, and I was in charge of the production of the potions. When we decided to stop selling the potions, I researched love potions further, and developed a line of alternative products that would allow us to recoup the lost revenue from the love potions.”

“And what type of alternative did you develop?” Stokke asked.

“I developed a potion that allows people to smell Amortentia, but not consume it. Or, rather, it produces the smells—just like Amortentia—but if one was to consume the potion, nothing would happen. It would pass through the body as harmlessly as pumpkin juice, only it would taste rather worse.” Memory-Ron gave a lopsided smile.

Ron was uncomfortable. It was strange to watch yourself like this. He had done a good job, but that didn’t mean he wanted to watch it again. He looked awkward up there—he wasn’t a smooth public speaker.

“So the purpose is only to allow people to determine how Amortentia smells to them?” Stokke prodded.

“Yes,” memory-Ron answered. “Much of the cultural significance of Amortentia is about the smells, not the administration of the actual potion. By developing this alternative, we allow people to continue experiencing Amortentia in ways that are culturally significant and harmless, while restricting the love potion, which is problematic.”

“How long did you practise these answers, Weasley?” Malfoy asked with an amused grin.

Ron couldn’t help it—he laughed. His speech did sound stilted, like he was reading—badly—from a script. “A lot,” he admitted.
“You did a good job!” Hermione insisted.

“And you’ve been selling this alternative potion for a few months now?” Stokke queried. “Have you seen changes in your sales?”

“We’ve been selling the new potion—which we’ve marketed as ‘Scents of Love’—for four months. We’ve seen slightly lower sales than we did with our range of love potions during this time period last year, but it was a less than 0.05% decrease in revenue. We hope that, with more effective marketing, the sales will increase to completely replace the lost revenue of the love potions.”

“Would other brewers and apothecaries be able to sell the alternative potion, or is it proprietary to Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes?”

“We hold a patent, but the instructions are available to any brewer or apothecary if they are willing to pay royalties, as is the common procedure with all new potions. And, of course, other potioneers are free to develop their own alternatives that remain within the law.

“We at Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes,” memory-Ron continued, “are convinced that the restriction of love potions is not only an ethical imperative, but also a prudent, forward-looking business decision.”

Malfoy let out a long whistle. “Weasley,” he said, “you are whipped.”

As one, Harry, Hermione, and Ron turned to glare at him. Malfoy, infuriatingly, just smirked at them.

“Thank you, Mr Weasley,” Stokke said, dismissing him with a wave.

Memory-Ron left the stand.

“Next,” Chief Warlock Barrach said, “Interrogator Ernest Hawkworth.”

A bearded wizard stood. “I call Horace Slughorn, retired Potions Master and Special Advisor to the Wizengamot.”

Slughorn heaved himself out of his seat and to the stand. “Hullo,” he wheezed amiably as he sat.

“Mr Slughorn,” Hawkworth asked, “given the nature of the potion, can a person who has ingested a love potion provide meaningful consent for a sexual encounter?”

Ron cringed, and recalled cringing the first time he’d heard Slughorn asked that question. They had to ask Slughorn about this. The man was ancient. Did he even know what consent was?

“Well, young man,” Slughorn said, “a person under the influence of a love potion can certainly agree verbally and physically to engage in a sexual act. But such agreement would not reflect their true state of mind. It is likely that a person under the influence of a love potion would agree to any
sexual proposition from the person to which the potion is linked.”

“Therefore,” Hawkworth continued, “is it possible for a person under the influence of a love potion to say no to a sexual act, or to withdraw consent previously given?”

“No, no, I would say not. The potion is too strong.”

“In your professional opinion, do you think a person’s preexisting sexual preferences and inclinations would survive with the potion? That is, would a person under the influence of a love potion be likely to engage in types of sexual activity that they otherwise would not engage in?”

“Yes, I think it is likely that a person under the influence of a love potion would be likely to do, well.” He paused, feigning sheepishness. “Well, they’d do anything, wouldn’t they?”

Ron couldn’t help it; he shuddered. Hermione grabbed his hand.

“Mr Slughorn,” Hawkworth implored, “some people might suggest that a person under the influence of love potion is only operating under lowered inhibitions, and therefore the actions that they undertake represent things they would always have liked to do, but which they were too inhibited to do.”

Slughorn shook his head. “Oh, no. If a wizard by the name of Vulmaro Brogni who lived in Italy and whom I’d never met, brewed Draught of Amour and threw in one of his hairs, and I drank the potion, I would become immediately convinced I was in love with someone named Vulmaro Brogni. Nevermind that I’d never heard of him before and nevermind that I’ve never been sexually interested in a man. That is the mechanism by which the potion works. It is absolutely not true that the potion only lowers inhibitions. If someone said that, they’ve confused love potions with Firewhiskey.” He chortled pretentiously.

“I really didn’t need to hear about Slughorn’s sex life,” Malfoy drawled.

Harry laughed. “Nor did I need to relive the memory. Ugh.”

The memory started to rush forwards again, and Ron watched, mesmerised, as the Wizengamot put up their hands to vote in fast motion. The memory returned to normal speed just as the Chief Warlock stood and pronounced, “The Wizengamot has spoken: love and lust potions, including but not limited to Amortentia, are now reclassified as Controlled Substances, illegal to brew, sell, or purchase, under the Decree for the Restriction of Potions Brewed With Malicious Intent or Effect.”

The memory ended, and Ron found himself landing on the floor in Pensieve Room 6, bumping into Hermione as they fell back into their seats.

“I’ll tell you why this ended up such a disaster,” Malfoy announced.

The glares he received would’ve cowed a more circumspect wizard.

“Three main things,” Malfoy continued. “You took it to the Wizengamot too soon. You should have undertaken a campaign to change hearts and minds first.”

Ron did not want to deal with this. Fucking hell.

“Second, the arguments presented by the organizations against the ban were weak, but they were also straw man arguments. You should’ve gotten people in there to make really good arguments against the prohibition. That way, if the Wizengamot still voted to prohibit, no one could question it. Third, you made it seem like a huge collusion between Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes and the
Ministry! Making royalties off the alternative! Which, did you know, one of the owners of Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes is married to the Minister for Magic’s Senior Undersecretary?”

Harry looked irate. “You know what, Malfoy—” Harry challenged, and Ron was transported back to Hogwarts, gearing up to try to keep Harry from pummeling Malfoy.

But Hermione stopped Harry’s righteous outrage by raising her hand. She sighed. “Draco’s right. I wish we’d had this foresight back then. I really thought it would blow over, and so did Kingsley. We were wrong.”

Malfoy grinned and waved his hand as if he was accepting a commendation.

Hermione rounded on him, and Ron could see a glint in her eye. “But unless you have a Time Turner, we’re stuck dealing with what happened in the past, and we’re all a little prickly about it, so do us a favor and keep your gloating to yourself.”

Malfoy raised his eyebrows, but shut his mouth.

“Allright,” she said, sitting up straight, “so, what happened after the prohibition is the most relevant part, from the perspective of this case.” Hermione raised her wand to her temple and extracted another memory.

“You okay?” Ron asked her, squeezing her hand.

She smiled, stoic and determined, and the group entered the Pensieve again.

They landed in Kingsley’s office, where a memory of Ron and Hermione talking with Kingsley, Harry, and Robards was playing out. “This was summer 2007,” Hermione informed them.

“There have been threats against Ms Granger,” Robards was saying, “that we’ve intercepted at the Ministry. Have you received any threats at your home?”

Memory-Hermione sat stiffly. “Yes. I have the letters here, except for the Howlers.” She handed a short stack of parchments to Robards.

He flipped through them quickly, Harry looking over his shoulder.

“You’d think they’d come up with another word for ‘cock,’” memory-Harry said, trying to lighten the mood.

Memory-Ron furrowed his brow at Harry, and Harry stopped talking.

“Allright,” Robards said. “Alright. These threats are specific and serious enough to justify action. We’re going to assign a group of Aurors to guard your home, and to escort you, Senior Undersecretary Granger, when you’re in public. So you will have an Auror guarding you from your home until you are safe in the Ministry.”

“Ohkay,” Hermione said.

“We’re also going to keep an eye on your families and on you, Harry,” Robards said. “Because of the way this was covered in the Prophet, people who want to blame someone will blame the three of you.”

“Well at least that’s a role we’re used to,” memory-Ron joked.

The memory changed, swirling in clouds of silver, until it rematerialised as Ron and Hermione’s
living room. Memory-Ron and memory-Hermione sat on the sofa, Ron’s arm around Hermione’s shoulder. She was reading a stack of parchments and he was watching a football game on the television.

The Floo roared. It was a Floo-order pizza. Hermione looked at Ron. “You ordered pizza?”

“No,” Ron said.

She stood and retrieved the box, reading a note affixed to the lid. Her face went pale and she peeked in the box. “Immature, disgusting cretins,” she said, passing the box to Ron.

Over memory-Ron’s shoulder, they could read that the note said, “ENJOY THIS, BITCH, SINCE YOU CLEARLY DON’T HAVE ENOUGH OF IT IN YOUR LIFE.”

Memory-Ron looked up at Hermione, confused. He opened the box. The pizza was covered in sausage. The side of the box had been marked at the pizzeria, “Extra sausage.”

He dropped the box and stood to hug Hermione. “They’re arseholes.”

“I know,” she said, her face blanched.

“Think the pizza is safe to eat?” Ron asked, looking at the box over his shoulder, but Hermione scowled at him and Vanished the box.

The memory swirled. It rematerialised as Harry’s kitchen, the three friends sitting around the table laughing and talking. There was a knock at the front door, and when Harry answered it, he looked down to find a box with a note affixed to the top that read, “Ron Weasley.”

“What is it?” memory-Ron called from the kitchen. When Harry didn’t answer, they joined him at the door.

“We shouldn’t open it,” Hermione said.

“Well, true, and I’m glad that’s your reaction, but I am an Auror so I can go through the procedure to check if it’s safe. Do you want me to do it later, so you don’t have to see what’s inside?”

Ron shook his head. “Go on with it.”

Memory-Harry pulled his wand and began casting at the box, surrounding it with a shimmering field of purple sparks. A couple minutes later, he pronounced it harmless. “Want me to open it?”

Ron declined, walking up to the box and pulling the letter off the top, reading aloud, “Because yours is missing.”

“That cannot mean anything good,” Hermione observed.

Ron lifted the lid of the box to reveal a dozen dildos.

The memory swirled. Hermione was in the WWN office, conducting an on-air interview.

“I am not against romance or sex,” memory-Hermione was saying, “only against sexual violence and sex in which participants cannot give true consent.”

“So the issue really comes down to one’s interpretation of consent, do you think that’s right?” the host asked.
“That’s right, Miranda,” Hermione answered. “And if you look at consensus among experts about what consent is, you’ll find that there is broad consensus on what consent requires.”

“And what is that broad consensus?”

“Well, first, consent can be withdrawn by any party at any point. Second, consent must be voluntarily given and is not valid if coerced. Third, consent to engage in one sexual activity cannot be presumed to apply to a different sexual activity. Fourth, past agreement to engage in a sexual activity cannot be presumed as consent to engage in the sexual activity again. Fifth, consent cannot be given by a person who is incapacitated. It doesn’t take much consideration to see that love potions are problematic on nearly all of these qualifications.”

“And is this view of consent reflected in the law?” Miranda asked.

“Well,” Hermione explained, “the law says that engaging in sexual acts without consent is illegal, but it doesn’t specifically codify what consent is. Over time, our views of consent and sexual assault have evolved.”

“Let’s take a caller,” the host said. “You’re on Wizarding Wireless Network.”

“Hermione Granger is a frigid whore who has no idea how the real world works. She needs to be fucked hard by someone who knows what they’re doing and if they can fuck some sense into her she’d realise she wants a love potion as much as—”

The host finally succeeded in disconnecting the caller. “We apologise for that outburst and won’t be taking any more callers today,” the host said, flustered.

Memory-Hermione sat in her chair for a moment as if she’d been hit with a *Petrificus Totalus* before she recovered herself. “Thank you, Miranda. I’ll point out that valuing consent in sexual relationships is not a new thing. People have valued consent in sexual relationships for a long time, in part because consent is sexy—it’s a turn-on to have sex with someone who wants to have sex with you.”

The memory swirled. They were in Ron and Hermione’s kitchen, and the memory showed Harry arguing with Ron and Hermione.

“I’m not leaving,” memory-Harry said, crossing his arms over his chest. “Not after the threats we intercepted today. I’m staying put, or you’re spending the night at my house.”

“Harry, Nadheer is here,” memory-Ron said. “It’ll be fine.”

Harry’s angry face morphed into worry. “I know, but Nadheer is not me. He’s also been working for eight hours already.”

“If you want to stay,” Hermione said, “of course you can. But I suspect that you’re acting on emotion, not reason.”

“Of *course* I’m acting based on emotion!” Harry yelled. “Today at work Robards tells me that an anonymous person issued a 50 thousand Galleon reward to anyone who could dose my best friend with a love potion and publish photographic evidence, with an extra thousand if her breasts are in the photo, and an extra ten thousand for full nudity!”

Memory-Harry abruptly stopped talking, looking as if he wished he hadn’t spoken so plainly. The three friends looked at each other in silence for a moment, and then memory-Hermione walked over to Harry and wrapped him in a tight hug.
They stood there hugging for a few seconds, and then memory Ron said, “I’ll make us some tea.”

“Want to play Pictionary?” Harry mumbled through Hermione’s hair.

“Not with you, you dirty cheat,” Hermione said with a laugh, though her eyes were a hint watery.

The memory ended, and the group landed back on their feet in Pensieve Room 6.

Ron immediately pulled Hermione into a hug. “I’m sorry you had to watch that again,” he whispered.

“Me?” she said with a sly grin, though she did feel a bit shaky. “I’m the stoic one of the group. You two are the ones who can’t handle the heat.”

Ron looked over her shoulder at Harry and Malfoy. Harry looked weary, but Malfoy looked shocked.

“Has it continued?” Malfoy asked.

“Has what continued?” Ron replied.

“The threats and harassment.”

“Yes,” Hermione said. “Though it’s been better since all of our mail is searched and an Auror follows me around all day and night.”

“Actually,” Harry said, thinking, “hasn’t it been a bit quieter lately? I suspect whatever group is behind the coordination of the harassment switched tactics and started planning for this potions attack against the Ministry.”

“Doesn’t that seem a bit too organised, Harry?” Ron replied. “Some wankers Floo-delivering sausage pizza doesn’t exactly speak to high-level organization.”

Harry shrugged. “Who knows?”

“What did you do with all of those dildos?” Malfoy asked.

Hermione opened her mouth, but then closed it. Ron could feel his face turning red. Harry looked suspiciously at the floor.

Malfoy raised an eyebrow, and then held up one hand. “Never mind. I do not want to know. I thought I was being facetious.”

It wasn’t that Ron thought there was anything improper about their dildo-related actions. There was nothing wrong with adults doling out dildos to their friends and keeping one for themselves because it would be a shame to let state-of-the-art magical dildos go to waste. It was just that he didn’t really feel like admitting it to Malfoy.

Harry looked mortified. “We didn’t use them together!” he clarified unhelpfully. “Separately! Actually, I have no idea what they did with their dildo and I don’t want to know.”

“Harry,” Ron hissed, “stop talking.”

Malfoy, though, didn’t say anything. He stared, eyes wide, at Harry, with an expression that was somewhere between amusement and shock. And something else Ron couldn’t—wasn’t going to try to—place.
“So, um, are we done with the memories?” Ron said, in a clumsy attempt to change the subject away from dildos and back to the safe ground of the protracted campaign of harassment and intimidation.

Harry jumped a bit, looking away from Malfoy and back to Ron. “Oh, er, actually. I have some more to add, and then I think we can be done. Hermione, Ron—you don’t need to watch these memories. Some of the Auror side of things.”

The look that Hermione gave Harry was so reminiscent of McGonagall that Ron suspected she might turn into a cat. “Harry James Potter,” she said, “when have we ever let you go off on your own to protect us?”

Harry had the sense to look penitent. “Alright, it’s just—you know how, when the patients aren’t nearby, Healers talk about them like they’re not human beings? That sort of thing happens with Aurors, too. And I don’t want you to feel, like, objectified or something.”

Malfoy snorted. Harry pretended to ignore him.

Hermione flashed him an amused smile. “Merlin forbid I should feel objectified while discussing arseholes who are trying to get naked photos of me. We can handle it.”

Harry sighed, looking apologetically at Ron, then raised his wand to his temple and closed his eyes. A moment later a silvery substance wisped out of his head. He flicked it into the basin and said, “Okay then. Let’s go.”

The group entered the memory, landing in one of the Auror conference rooms. “Morning briefing, right before the meeting we saw with Robards in Hermione’s memories,” Harry informed them just as the memory of Robards started talking.

“Allright, team. We’ve intercepted dozens of owls with letters making credible and specific death and rape threats against Hermione Granger, some of them also against her husband Ron Weasley. Ms Granger, as you know, is Senior Undersecretary to Minister Shacklebolt, and works on Level One. Mr Weasley works in Diagon Alley at Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes. The Granger-Weasley home is in Ottery St Catchpole. The two often spend time at the senior Weasley house, the Burrow, in Ottery St Catchpole, and with Harry Potter, Ms Granger’s Muggle parents in Oxfordshire, and Mr Weasley’s siblings, of which there are five.” Robards flicked his wand, and the locations of the family members were projected onto the wall.

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“Here is an example of the types of threats being made.” Robards waved his wand at the wall and a copy of a letter appeared on the wall.

Hermione Granger, bitch enjoy your frigid cunt today because tomorrow we’re going to find you in Ottery St Catchpole and fuck you in every orifice until you bleed. I’m going to drink your blood out of your cunt after I rip it open. You’ll wish you could get your hands on a Time Turner so you could go back and never stick your Mudblood nose into things you could never understand.

Robards placed his hands on the table. “How are we going to keep Ms Granger and Mr Weasley safe from assault?”

Ron had never seen that threat before. His face felt numb. His ears—his ears were ringing?

Memory-Harry looked like he was waging an inner war against the possibility of storming out of the office and going after the letter writer like a lone ranger, but he managed to calm himself down.
Staring at the list of names on the wall, Harry asked, “Sir?” When Robards looked up, Harry continued, “Do you think everyone on that list, including me, is in danger, or that these are the locations where Hermione and Ron might be attacked?”

“We have received no threats against anyone other than Ms Granger and Mr Weasley.”

Harry nodded, but he didn’t look relieved.

“Auror-strength wards on all of these residences, sir?” Auror Zane asked.

“Yes,” Robards said, aiming his wand at another wall, where a plan for warding the residences appeared. “With Muggle-protocol wards in place for the senior Grangers. Mac, I want you to choose a Junior Auror and take on the warding.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What else?” Robards asked.

“Auror protection of Ms Granger and Mr Weasley, sir?”

“I agree that’s necessary at this point, but the question is what level of protection. Does it merit someone tailing her twenty-four hours a day? That’s going to get mighty interesting, considering that Aurors assigned to her inside the Ministry would need high-level security clearance due to her work with the Minister.”

“Moderate security,” memory-Harry suggested. “Someone to guard her house, but not follow her around inside, tail her in public, leave her once she’s safely inside the Ministry, meet her outside at the end of work. And undercover Auror protection at Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes—Ron isn’t as much of a target, but the nature of the shop is too risky. It’s filled with explosives and potions—someone could do real damage there.”

“Reasonable plan, Potter,” Robards said. “Does anyone disagree?”

“What about the family members, boss?” Auror Sloane asked.

“Well,” Robards said, “they’re getting extra protection on their homes. If we receive any threats against them, we can reassess. Potter, watch your back. Due to the nature of your…fame and history, you would be a likely target. Auror Lehri, I am assigning you to head the team guarding Ms Granger and Mr Weasley.”

Nadheer nodded.

The memory swirled, but landed them right back in the same office. This time, Harry and Robards were the only Aurors in the room, and memory-Harry was screaming.

“THE PROTECTIONS ARE NOT ENOUGH!” he yelled. “EVEN WITH THE AURORS INTERCEPTING THEIR POST, THESE ARSEHOLES MANAGED TO GET A GIANT BOX OF DILDOS TO RON AT MY HOUSE! THEY’VE ALREADY HAD TO CLOSE THEIR FLOO! THEY’RE ALREADY BEING TAILED BY AURORS! IT’S NOT WORKING! YOU’RE GOING TO LET HERMIONE GET ATTACKED!”

Robards sat quietly through this diatribe. “Are you quite finished, Auror Potter?”

Memory-Harry just looked at him, arms crossed over his heaving chest, still fuming.
“I’ll have you remember, Harry, that the Auror force is not to blame for your friends’ endangerment—whoever is behind the threats is. If you want to help them, let’s find the culprits. Until then, their protection is excellent. You’ll notice that even the post monitoring has been successful—had you not been there, the dildos would’ve been opened by Aurors in the Ministry and disposed of before they fell into the hands of your friends.”

“No,” Robards stopped Harry with a raised hand. “No. If you want to keep your security clearance for this case, you will calm down. Because you’re acting like a worried parent, and you know how helpful worried parents are around investigations.”

The memory swirled. They landed once again in the same office. This time it looked like another morning briefing, if the assembly of coffee-drinking Aurors was any indication.

“We’ve received an anonymous tip from someone involved in the potions industry that there are people developing a new type of love potion that is somehow more malicious than Amortentia,” Robards said. “This person didn’t want to be identified, but became convinced that the potion under development is dangerous. They said it involves moonstone.”

“We need more information from the source,” memory-Harry insisted.

Robards sighed. “I agree, Auror Potter, which is why it’s unfortunate that the source is anonymous and did not give us any way to contact them.”

“How did they contact you?” an Auror asked.

“They sent a post owl with a warded letter. The letter could only be opened by me, and after I finished reading it, it Vanished.”

“What else do we know?” Nadheer questioned, and Ron felt bad for the man. He’d been following Hermione around for months, under a barrage of constant threats, but with no clues or evidence with which to hope for a conclusion to the case. He had almost nothing to work with, and was tasked with protecting two very high-profile civilians who were often to be found with the two most high-profile people in magical Britain.

“They said that the group thinks they can exact some sort of vigilante retribution through the new potion. The source used the phrase, ‘they say they will teach that bitch a lesson.’”

“Well what are we supposed to do with this information? It’s not very helpful, is it?” memory-Harry asked.

“I agree that it’s not ideal, Auror Potter. But as we move forward, we remember Mad-Eye.” Robards pointed to a giant gold plaque on the wall of the office that read,

CONSTANT VIGILANCE

In memory of Alastor “Mad-Eye” Moody, 1942–1997

The memory ended, and the four landed back in the Pensieve room.

Ron and Hermione rounded on Harry. Hermione’s hand was on her hip. Harry took a step backwards.

“What the fuck, mate?” Ron said. “Why didn’t you tell us about the tip on the new potion?”
“I—I didn’t want to worry you! And I can’t tell you details about ongoing investigations without Robards’s permission! And you saw—it’s not like I really knew anything, anyway.”

“Still,” Hermione chided, “you could’ve told us. You’d expect us to tell you if we heard something!”

“Alright, I’m sorry, okay?” Harry held up his hands. “I won’t do it again.”

“So some potioneer got spooked about how illegal and dangerous this new potion is,” Malfoy said, “and submitted an anonymous tip to the Ministry that is so vague as to be almost useless. We can assume that means that if they had given any more information, it would also give away their identity, don’t you think, oh Chosen Auror?”

Harry glared at Malfoy, but nodded.

“But we can assume that the new potion the source referred to is not just a love potion, but something different, and that we should consider the moonstone.” Malfoy Conjured a parchment and a prissy-looking quill and began to scribble some notes. “I need to get that coffee into my lab and run some tests on it.”

“Coffee,” Harry moaned. “I wish I had a cup.”

“Draco,” Hermione said. He stopped scribbling and met her eyes. “There’s one more thing I think you should see.” She tapped a purple folder with her wand, and at the touch, the folder unsealed, revealing a stack of papers inside. She handed the folder to Malfoy.

On the front of the folder, Ron had scribbled, “You amaze me. Don’t give up,” and a little heart. He could feel his face turning red. Merlin, he hadn’t ever considered that Malfoy would read that.

But Malfoy opened the folder without commenting on Ron’s saccharine scrawl. He pulled out the first parchment.

Ms Granger,

I just wanted to let you know that I am so grateful for your work. I know you’re getting a lot of crap right now. I don’t have much of substance to say, but I want you to know how much I respect you. The work you’re doing is so important!

Ena Sprem
Liverpool

Draco set the parchment on the table and reached for the next.

To Hermione Granger:

I was sexually assaulted with a love potion in school. I have spent six years trying to pretend it didn’t happen, and on the rare occasion that I tell people about it, they don’t even agree that what happened to me was rape.

I can’t tell you how much it means to me to have seen you in the public eye talking about this. You make me feel like I’m not crazy.

In solidarity,
Isobel Burns
The next item in the folder was a photo of two children. One of them, a girl, waved at the camera wearing a shirt that said, “ASK ME ABOUT MY FEMINIST AGENDA.” A boy stood next to her holding up a peace sign. His shirt said, “YOUR BODY YOUR CHOICE.” Their mother had scribbled on the back of the photo:

Thank you for being a role model for all of us.
Niamh Cooper (and Lottie, 10, and Augustus, 8)

Malfy put the photo on the table and glanced at the next item, an article cut out of Witch Weekly titled, “If You Romanticise Chambres Cosworth, You’re Having A Rape Fantasy.” The next was a cover story about Hermione from Tempus Magazine. A flattering photo of her smiled from the cover next to the words, “Hermione Granger: An Intimate Look at the Unintimidated Reformer.”

Malfy flipped through the rest of the letters and put them back in the folder, handing it to Hermione. Ron clenched his teeth—if Malfy belittled Hermione’s folder of hope, Ron would have to hex him.

But Malfy simply said, “Impressive, Granger. I reckon we’d better find the arseholes who are trying to hurt you.”

She nodded, seemingly satisfied that Malfy understood what was at stake.

“Alright, so what do we do next?” Ron asked.

Malfy gave an imperious look and said, “Well, Weasley, I’d say you three can bring me gifts of fealty while I figure out what type of potion we’re dealing with.”

Ron rolled his eyes.

“Did anyone notice anything from the memories that you think worth noting or exploring?” Harry asked. “I was hoping we’d see some clues while we were bringing Malfy up to speed, but honestly, nothing is jumping out at me.”

“The anonymous tip about the moonstone will probably be useful,” Malfy replied, “once I’m in the lab.”

“Do you think the Ministry is doing enough to protect essential staff?” Hermione asked. “If these people are trying to target me, or Kingsley, or Harry, by just dosing as many innocent people as necessary—” She sighed. “I’m really not comfortable with the waiver they had us sign. It’s like we’ve all just legally agreed to get raped.”

“You know how the legal department is,” Harry grumbled. “They’re probably beside themselves with worry about what will happen with the workers who are already victims, especially the two from the, er, Atrium.”

Ron glanced at his watch. “I need to leave to go pick up Victoire. And I should probably stop by the Burrow and talk to Mum after that.”

Hermione nodded. “Alright, you go on ahead, I’ll meet you at home later.”

Ron stood and began to tidy the mess they’d made in the room.

“So Potter,” Malfy said, “am I allowed to carry the potions evidence in the coffee cup out of the Ministry, or are you going to insist on coming home with me?”
“I am not going to insist on coming home with you,” Harry sneered, “I am going to act as an Auror guard to maintain the integrity of the evidence. This isn’t a joke, Malfoy.”

Malfoy smirked. “Of course it’s not. I wonder how strong this potion is. I wonder if it can affect you through skin penetration—that is, if you touched it.”

“No,” Ron said, “the first coffee splashed on my leg and I—” but Malfoy and Harry were paying him no heed.

“First of all,” Harry said, “I know what penetration is. Second of all, are you suggesting I am such an incompetent Auror that I am going to accidentally dose myself with evidence while escorting you to your lab?”

“I suggested no such thing!” Malfoy snapped.

Hermione looked at Ron. Oh, come and stir my cauldron, she sang in his head. And if you do it right, I’ll boil you up some hot, strong love, To keep you warm tonight!

Ron shook his head with a smile.

Ron Apparated just outside the wards of his house. His annoyance at not being able to Floo home had mostly faded now that it had become habit, and when he got his bearings, his first sight was Nadheer standing guard.

Nadheer walked forwards, waving his wand to allow Ron through the wards. At first, an Auror had followed Hermione around all day and another Auror had been stationed at Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes. But then, when the threats escalated, the Auror protocol had increased. Now, one Auror was at their home at all times, plus an Auror with Hermione, and an Auror at the shop.

“Hey, Nadheer. How’s your day?”

“Better here than at the Ministry,” he said with a smile. “Nothing to report here.”

“That’s what I like to hear!” Ron smiled and clapped Nadheer on the back. He looked forward to the end of this nonsense, when they could actually hang out with him. They’d gotten to know their contingent of Auror guards so well, but the Aurors were always working and unable to enjoy their company.

Ron walked inside. “I’m home!”

“I’m in the living room!” Hermione called.

Ron took off his robes and boots and walked across the house. Fuck, what a day.

Hermione was curled up on the sofa, a blanket tucked over her legs, books and papers scattered over her lap and the sofa. Her wand was stuffed in her hair. Ron’s chest constricted with how much he loved her, and with relief that they’d made it through the threats of the day. As much as he pretended he’d be fine if she got hit in a potions attack, he knew he’d be an utter mess if it actually happened.

“Hey,” he said, and she looked up with a smile.

“I’m trying to research the legality of those waivers,” she said, “because I know if I spend my time researching the potion, Draco will feel like I’m stepping on his toes, but I can’t sit here and do
“Mum sent me home with food,” Ron said, holding up a dish.

“Oh, excellent. How is everyone?”

“Victoire is upset with a boy named Roger, and Roger called her bossy. Roger also pulled her hair. I did not tell her that Roger probably fancies her, even though he clearly does, because I don’t want her to think people show romantic interest through violence.”

Hermione smiled. “You’re such a good feminist.”

Ron laughed. “But Roger totally does fancy her. Anyway. I dropped her off with Fleur, who is sick but on the mend, and then I went to the Burrow. Mum sat me down with a mug of tea and made me give her a minute-by-minute rundown of the day. She’s furious, of course, and mad that all of us at the Ministry were in danger today. She said she needed to do something, so she made a week’s worth of lunches for you, me, Harry, dad, and Percy, and—get this—she warded each individual lunch, so there’s no way anyone could spike it with a potion.”

“She warded the lunches?”

“You know it.”

Hermione laughed. “I love your mum.”

Molly was outraged at the harassment against Hermione and Ron, and had been spending most of her time worrying about them. Hermione suspected that Molly secretly loved Chambers Cosworth, but she’d been nothing but supportive of Hermione and the cause.

“I called my parents,” Hermione said. “They’re good. They spent the entire call telling me about how they’re packing for a trip to the British Dental Association conference. The trip isn’t for ten days, but my mother read a tip that you should roll your clothes instead of fold them, so she’s planning to try that.”

Ron snorted. “Did you tell them about the attack?”

“No,” Hermione said, sounding uncertain. “I hate to worry them. They’re already shaken up about me being under constant Auror guard.”

Ron nodded. “I’m going to go serve up this food. Shepherd’s pie, I think.”

He walked into the kitchen and set the dish on the counter. He waved his wand and two plates flew out of the cupboard and landed next to the dish.

“Do you want wine?” Ron called.

“Do you have to ask?” Hermione yelled back.

Ron grabbed a bottle and poured two glasses. He was grabbing a spoon to serve the dinner when Hermione’s voice called, “So how long until we accidentally walk in on Harry having sex with Malfoy?”

Ron began to laugh loudly, happy to let it out after holding it in all day. “I don’t know—tomorrow? Harry’s not very patient, is he?”

Hermione’s laugh echoed through the house.
“When did Harry last see Malfoy?” Ron asked, serving the shepherd’s pie.

“I don’t know,” came the reply. “Maybe last spring at that charity function at the Ministry? Didn’t he say something about that?”

“Malfoy is good-looking,” Ron yelled.

“Your teenage self would be horrified to hear you say that!” she called with a laugh.

“Well I’m not blind, woman!”

Ron Levitated the plates and glasses into the living room. He didn’t feel like a proper at-table meal, he felt like collapsing on the sofa and not moving for hours. Hermione seemed to agree, reaching for the wine glass and balancing a plate on her knee. She waved her wand and the papers and books piled themselves neatly on the floor next to the table.

“Did you convince Harry to go to the Halloween party?” Ron asked.

“No,” Hermione sighed. “Though I did confirm that D.A.P.P.E.R. has changed the costume magic, and after I told Harry that he said he would at least consider it.”

“Good,” Ron said, tucking in.

“So you think Malfoy will figure out this potion quickly?” she asked, taking a sip of wine.

“Yes, I’m sure he will. Because he won’t miss an opportunity to boast about it.” Ron chewed.

“What’s Harry’s plan for tomorrow?”

“Well, depending on how much Malfoy discovers, they may interview some of the big Potions suppliers. It seems like a long shot, but we have to do something. Nadheer says you and I shouldn’t go out in the field like that, so Harry and Malfoy will go. We can work in the Ministry, look at any new leads that Robards or Kingsley have. Unless you want to go back to the shop tomorrow?”

“No,” Ron said. “No, I’m staying with you.”

“You’re just saying that because you want to be the one standing next to me if I’m hit with this potion,” she said with a half smile.

“You bet your sweet arse,” Ron said, returning her grin. She’d taken off her jumper when she got home, and her camisole was low enough to show the curve of her breasts. She saw him looking and raised an eyebrow.

Earlier in the day—with all of the sexual assault and terrible memory reliving and discussion of Harry having sex with Malfoy—Ron would’ve claimed that he wouldn’t be able to even think about sex for a week. Or at least a day. But perhaps he was still young and virile enough that even all of that nonsense couldn’t suppress his hormones for long.

He set his plate aside. “Want to finish dinner later?” he asked. He leaned over, wanting to touch her, but her plate was in the way, so he grabbed it and set it aside.

“Smart man, taking away the plate instead of the wine,” she joked, taking a big sip of wine before putting it on the table behind her. She rose up on her knees and straddled his lap.

“Consider this my enthusiastic consent,” she said with a laugh, burying her head in his neck and kissing under his ear.
“Fuck, please stop talking about consent,” Ron breathed, grabbing her hips and shifting her closer. She pulled back, her hair wild around her shoulders, her brown eyes looking at him intently. “No, I don’t think I will stop talking about it,” she said. “Because I want to tell you,” she paused to kiss his nose, “exactly,” she kissed his dimple, his stubble scratching her lips, “what I want you to do to me.” “Oh Merlin,” Ron moaned, bringing his hands up to her face. “Yes, keep talking about it.”

Chapter End Notes

*Magic Without Duty* draws heavily on a controversial scene from *Gone With the Wind.*

The Priapus potion and *Engorgio Phallus* come from *birdsofshore’s Higher and Higher (Temptation).* *Pentetratio Totalus* was the brainchild of *noeon* and comes from *The Slickening.* Hermione’s work on love potions was partially inspired by *blumearts’s* amazing *fan art.*

Huge thanks to *Synonym4Life* and other members of the Drarry Discord for plot brainstorming, and to *frnkyrmrshnkly* for being my final eyes.

Come find me on *Tumblr.*
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Huge thanks to Nova for French translation, to Pie (potteresque_ire) for science help, and to tdcat for being a fantastic beta.

Wednesday October 29, 2008

An eager mouth was on Draco’s cock. His back arched up in ecstasy, and he reached down, digging his fingers into the messy black hair on the head between his legs.

Potter’s head.

Draco moaned, grabbing at Potter’s bare shoulders and pulling him up to meet face-to-face. Intense eyes met his, and Draco pressed their lips together. Potter was a good kisser, such a good kisser, and Draco held Potter’s head close to his own with fingers in that messy hair. Draco could feel the hard press of Harry’s cock on his thigh, and if he just pressed his hips forwards—yes, like that—then Potter would respond with—yes, like that. So good.

This time Potter was the one moaning. “Draco,” Potter cried, and Circe, it felt amazing, the way their bodies fit together, like they had been foretold in a prophecy or the stars or some such ridiculous nonsense.

Then Potter was pulling his head back despite the—no, don’t go—pull of Draco’s fingers, and his eyes were looking straight into Draco’s. Potter’s lips curled into a half-smile, and he said, sincere and real, “I’ve missed seeing you.”

The words crashed into Draco like a tsunami, causing his whole world to tilt on its axis—I’ve missed seeing you, I’ve missed seeing you—and Draco was about to respond, to ask, to tell, but the world-axis kept tilting well past where it should have stopped tilting and—.

Draco woke up, gasping as if he’d just emerged from being underwater for far too long. He sat up, heart racing, and leaned forwards to bury his face in his hands. Fucking hell. Bloody fucking Merlin’s shitty bollocks. Draco was nearly hyperventilating and had an erection that recalled teenage mornings in a Slytherin four-poster. He took a deep breath. Then another. Sort the breathing first, then the cock.

When he got his breathing under control, Draco took his cock in hand. I will not think of Potter. He stroked, trying to imagine his last lover, but green eyes were staring at him. No. Draco would wank to memories of Nagini before he’d wank to Potter. Today, of all days. Think of...but he couldn’t think of a single man. There must be men. All the men he knew in England and France. Kingsley Shackleton. Oh Merlin, no. Think of a headless image from a lad mag. That would do. Yes, that would do nicely. A nice firm arse, a broad shoulder. But then, a voice saying, “I’ve missed seeing you,” and Draco’s head lolled to the side as he spilled hot and sticky over his hand.

Fuck.
Draco Apparated just outside the wards of Harry’s house. He took a breath that was supposed to be calming and smoothed his robes. He knew he looked impeccable. These robes were from Allemand’s in Paris and they suited his complexion and stature perfectly. Had Draco been preparing to see any other person, the knowledge of how good he looked would have settled his nerves. Not this time, because he knew Harry would fail to even notice.

No, Harry would be too preoccupied thinking about all of the worst mistakes of Draco’s life, thinking about the mark on his arm, thinking about boots crunching his nose.

Or maybe Draco was the one who couldn’t stop thinking about those things. Harry made him fixate.

He knocked.

A full minute later, the door opened to reveal Harry Potter, shirtless in pyjama bottoms, eating a banana. He looked half asleep.

Draco, keen to wriggle himself right under Harry’s stupidly perfect and taut skin, pulled out his pocket watch and gave it a long glance.

“Oh, shut up,” Harry said, yawning. “It’s not that late. What are you doing here so early? We don’t need to be at the Ministry for another forty minutes.”

“I solved the potion last night,” Draco said, relishing that fact. “I thought you’d want to know. And it will change our plans for the day.”

“Alright,” Harry said, “Let’s get some coffee.” He took another bite of that mocking banana. Was Harry trying to make that look so sexual? Surely there were other ways for Harry to get his daily potassium.

Draco walked through the hall with purpose, not looking at the sitting room as he headed straight to the kitchen.

“Did you sleep well?” Harry asked, like an utter ninny.

“No,” Draco said, sitting down at the long kitchen table and placing his parchments in front of him. “Do you care?”

Harry shrugged. “It’s just a thing people ask. In the morning.” He waved his hand and the Peck’s Prodigious Percolator began to grind and brew, filling the room with the aroma of coffee.

“I find it amusing that someone who still wears cloaks from the nineties has the most expensive magical coffee maker on the market,” Draco said.

Harry turned and leaned against the counter. “I have my priorities in order.”

Draco couldn’t stand the sight of him. “Is that so.”

Harry’s face flickered with something unreadable, and he turned his back to Draco, Summoned a loaf of bread, and popped slices in a Muggle toaster. “I’m tempted to brew ten pots of coffee, Shrink them, and carry them with me today, since we can’t drink anything from the Ministry. Can I get you something?”

“No.”
Harry took out butter and jam. Actually, no, that wasn’t jam—that was Welch’s Grape Jelly. The oaf.

Draco could hear the chriiiick chriiiiiick of Harry’s knife on the toast. This was too bizarre; Draco should never have come here. He looked down at his parchments. Potions puzzles he could handle. Potions puzzles were excellent.

Harry Levitated two plates and two mugs to the table. He’d served Draco buttered toast and coffee even though Draco had said no. Somehow, that was just like Potter.

The toast looked good, though, and thankfully Potter had the foresight not to put Welch’s on it. Next time he’d have to bring Harry a jar of Christine Ferber’s Cassis D’Alsace et Violette.

But there wouldn’t be a next time.

Draco scowled at his toast. He was hungry, though. So he picked up a slice and took a bite.

“So you’re back in England,” Harry said, and Draco had to take a moment. Because, honestly, and as many times as Draco had said something to the contrary, Harry was really not that dumb.

Draco looked up and glared. He held his hand out to the side, as if to indicate his body’s position in space. “Seem to be,” he said.

“Why did you come back?” Harry asked, chewing his toast-with-Welch’s.

They were absolutely not going to talk about this. Draco held up his parchments. “I have a consultancy contract with the Ministry. See, I have a doctorate in potions.” He tried to adjust his tone to mimic Snape talking to Longbottom in Potions.

Harry rolled his eyes. Good, Draco had managed to annoy him.

Harry said, “This isn’t going to be weird with us, is it?”

“And whyever would it be weird with us, Potter?”

At that, Harry smiled a bit sadly. “I don’t know, Draco. Where to start.”

“We’ll start with love potions,” Draco said, pulling the conversation back to a place where he could have the upper hand. He tapped the pile of parchments on the table to jostle them into perfect order.

“Love potions,” Harry echoed.

“Yes, how much do you know about how love potions work?”

Harry still looked sleepy, the stupid berk. He sipped his coffee. “Love potions make the drinker infatuated, but it’s not real love. It wears off with time, so the drinker would need continuous doses to continue the impression of love. I know what I smell in Amortentia.”

Draco took a large bite of toast in hope it would mask the extent to which he’d like to know what Harry smelled in Amortentia.

Draco swallowed. “So you know nothing. Alright. There are three main types of love potions, which are different than lust potions. The first type of love potion—which is most commonly referred to, but least commonly used—is Amortentia. There is no commercial version of Amortentia because the magic is linked to the brewer. Any person smelling Amortentia will smell
what most attracts them, which acts as an enticement to drink the potion. Almost like the sirens. When we smell the potion but don’t drink it, we’re acting like Odysseus tying himself to the mast of his ship to hear the song without throwing himself into the rocks.”

Harry looked straight at Draco. “In this analogy, the infatuation is the shipwreck.”

“Yes,” Draco continued. He could lecture on this in his sleep. He had done so, plenty of times, while teaching students fresh out of Hogwarts and Beauxbatons at Jussieu.

“Amortentia is tied to the brewer through part of the brewing process. If the brewer were to drink the potion, he or she would exhibit an infatuation with him- or herself. If the brewer gave the potion to someone else, the drinker would exhibit an infatuation with the brewer.

“Amortentia, then, is what we call a static-vector potion. Do you know what that is?”

Harry was watching intently, and that was a bit distracting. “No.”

“A static-vector potion is a potion that is brewed so as to only work in a predetermined direction. For example, Polyjuice is a static-vector potion—when it’s fully brewed and you’ve added DNA, it can change the drinker’s appearance into that of exactly one other person. Likewise, Amortentia can give the drinker an infatuation with one person, the brewer.”

“What about something like Pepperup? Is that static?” Harry asked, and Salazar, it really was like Draco was back at the front of the classroom for Potions 101.

“Pepperup is a scalar potion; it has no directionality at all, it just cures the cold of any person who drinks it. But stop changing the subject—we will never get through this.”

“Sorry for showing interest—you’re worse than Snape.”

“The other two categories of love potions are also static-vector potions, but they’re brewed differently and can be sold commercially. The second kind is typified by Draught of Amour. Like Polyjuice, it requires DNA matter added at the end. So anyone can brew it, then DNA matter is added, and the drinker will become infatuated with the person to whom the DNA belonged. The third and most common type of love potion is the kind that you used to find lining the shelves of shops like Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes. They also have a single vector, which is activated by a Charm. Have you ever bought one?”

Harry shook his head no.

Draco raised his eyebrows. “Really? I suppose you didn’t need to, did you?” Harry scowled. Draco continued, “I don’t know a single person who didn’t buy a love potion at least once during school. I suppose being the Chosen One has its perks. Anyway, the box had instructions for Charm-activation, and the Charm would link the potion to the Charm-caster. The person who consumed the potion would become obsessed with the Charm-caster.”

Draco pressed his fingertips together. “Surprise test: Is this potion from the Ministry yesterday a static-vector potion?”

Harry’s eyebrow quirked in amusement. “Er, no, professor.”

Oh, Circe and Salazar. No. Nope. He was not even allowing his brain to process that.

“Right, because it has directionality, meaning it causes the drinker to target another person, like the love potions do, but it could be any person. We call that a dynamic-vector potion. They’re not too
common, but imagine if there was a potion similar to Polyjuice that would allow you to look like anyone you chose, or that would allow you to look like the person standing near you when you drank it.”

“So that’s more like lust potions, then,” Harry said, and Draco privately thanked Merlin that Harry had finally woken up.

“Right, lust potions are rarely static-vector. In fact, I’ve never seen a static-vector lust potion, though I could easily make one.”

Harry gave him an odd look, which Draco ignored.

“So,” Draco continued, “the new potion is dynamic-vector. And my analysis of the potion shows that it does, indeed, seem like a combination of love and lust potions.”

“Not Amortentia,” Harry said, “because then it would be tied to the brewer.”

Draco smiled; he couldn’t help it. He loved when students demonstrated understanding. “Correct.”

“What I don’t understand,” Harry said, “is that Slughorn taught us that Amortentia is the most powerful love potion in the world. And that it’s the most dangerous. That doesn’t seem to be the case.”

Draco nodded. “That’s a myth. It stems from romantic delusions, I think.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, Amortentia is strong, but its use is limited. Like I said, it can’t be sold commercially, it has to be given by the brewer. But all of that increases its mythic status—the lovelorn jilted wizard, hiding away toiling over the potion, giving it to his love interest. And the smells just add to the mythic romance quality.”

“It really is just the stuff of a bad romance novel, isn’t it?” Harry asked. “So when you analysed it, the potion wasn’t just a really strong lust potion?”

Draco took another bite of toast. “No. Lust potions don’t make you lose your mind like that. Generally love potions affect the mind more than lust potions, which affect the body. With the Priapus potion, the worst of the lust potions, the drinker experiences an enormous and persistent erection for up to six hours.”

Draco did not raise his eyes to meet Harry’s.

“It’s dangerous,” he continued, “because the person is distracted and can’t be trusted to Apparate or do any risky magic, and because they really want to get off—but they are still of sound mind.”

“So you think this new potion is just a combination of love and lust potions?” Harry asked, sipping his coffee.

“Well, that’s what you’d think. But even then, the drinker would become infatuated with someone, and therefore they would be of unsound mind, and they’d be physically affected by increased blood flow to the genitals, an erection if they have a penis, but still—they wouldn’t just try to copulate with the person closest to them.” Draco grabbed the knife.

Harry coughed. “So.”
Draco smirked. He had loved making his students uncomfortable when he taught about this, and he loved making Harry uncomfortable even more. “Can you think of any other substances that might be used to get someone to have sex?”

Harry chewed a bite of toast for a moment, and then his stupid green eyes widened. “Roofies?”

“Very good, Potter,” Draco said didactically, taking a sip of coffee. Harry’s coffee really was very good.

“Since when can you combine potions with Muggle drugs?” Harry said, alarmed. Harry had suddenly morphed from student mode into Auror mode.

“It’s a fairly new branch of study—pharmapotions. That’s why I went to France. Well, that’s part of why I went to France. I studied under the foremost pharmapotions scholars in the world. The moonstone was key to figuring it out; that tip from the anonymous source was helpful. There was a huge amount of moonstone in the potion, much more than you’d need for a standard love or lust potion. The only explanation for that is that they were using the moonstone to bind a pharmaceutical. You see, only certain magical potions ingredients can bind to Muggle pharmas. Moonstone is one of them.”

Draco looked up at Potter, who was staring out the window.

“You’ve stopped listening, haven’t you?” Draco asked, taking a bite of toast. And good grief—he’d spread Welch’s on his toast without thinking about it.

“I’m listening! Pharmapotions. What other pharmapotions are there?”

“Oh, well, potions are generally more efficient than muggle drugs, but in some cases we can achieve better results by combining them. For example, Muggles make really excellent synthetic insulin and other hormones. And certain Muggle diseases sometimes affect vulnerable wizards, but magical beings can’t just take standard Muggle drugs because that threatens their magical core, so we need to formulate magical cures that incorporate the Muggle pharmaceutical solutions….You’re not listening again.”

“How did you figure out that it’s roofies?”

“I haven’t. That’s my guess. I need to do NMR spectroscopy to confirm. Funny enough, I don’t have a nuclear magnetic resonance spectrometer in my flat.”

Draco didn’t have anything in his flat. He’d been hoping to spend this week unpacking and buying new furniture and housewares from the shops in Diagon Alley. But instead he was doing this.

“I suspect, though,” Draco continued, “that it’s flunitrazepam—‘roofies,’ as you so elegantly call it, sometimes called the date rape drug—or another sedative. It makes sense, right? The sedation of the pharma combined with the lust and infatuation of the potions. The benzene compound could counteract the ashwinder eggs, eliminating the static-vector property we would expect from the rose thorns. Meaning it causes the drinker to attack anyone in the vicinity.”

“Fuck,” Harry said.

“Quite.”

Harry pulled out an iPhone and started pressing it with his stupid fingers. Of course Harry was an early technology adopter. Draco wanted to be an early technology adopter. He’d bought one of these new iPhones when he was in France, because he had worked with a big group of Muggles
and Muggleborns, and Draco loved to be at the front of a trend.

Except he couldn’t get the screen to select things properly and had ended up trying to press the screen with his wand. And then it had stopped working. His coworker Éloïse had tried to fix it, but she pronounced, “Il est foutu. Complètement grillé.”

But Harry, the git, was fine, tapping away. “Wikipedia says flunitrazepam impairs cognitive function—hey, that can also contribute to the love potion thing of people being of unsound mind—lack of concentration, confusion, and anterograde amnesia.”

“That means they don’t remember when they wake up,” Draco said. Fuck, this really was bad.

Harry grimaced, and kept reading, his thumb scrolling on the tiny screen. “It can cause slurred speech, vomiting, excessive sedation, impairment of balance and speech, coma, death.” Harry put down his phone. “Merlin, Draco.”

Harry was worried. He was probably thinking about Granger and Weasley. Draco suppressed a sigh.

“We already knew that the potion was a disaster, Harry. This doesn’t really make it any worse, and now we understand how it works.”

Harry nodded, seemingly trying to gather his wits. Draco really should not find that as endearing as he did.

“One more thing, though,” Draco said. “We can’t magic away the effects of Muggle pharmaceuticals. That is to say, we could develop a potion or charm to counteract a given drug, but this is a new branch of study and we haven’t developed those potions and charms yet for more than a handful of drugs. We certainly don’t have a way to counteract the effects of flunitrazepam. Which means that people who are hit with this potion are going to have to stay in St Mungo’s under Healer care until the drug passes through their system—which takes 18–26 hours for this drug.”

Harry rubbed one of his hands over his face, scratching it against his stubble. Draco’s brain, which was apparently very good at multitasking, was thinking both about how to develop a potion to counteract flunitrazepam (it would have to simultaneously counteract the effects of the love and lust potions, and would likely require a healthy amount of castor oil) and how badly he wanted to lick Harry’s stubble.

Fuck.

The Floo chimed, but that wasn’t a regular Floo chime. Draco jumped and turned to look at the fireplace. It was shrieking.

Harry jumped up. “Sorry, that’s the lovely sound of an urgent Auror Floo call.” Harry waved his wand and the Floo roared green.

Robards’s head appeared in the flames. Without any preliminaries, he reported, “Potter, Granger was hit with the potion.”

Draco watched as every muscle in Harry’s gorgeous back contracted with stress and worry. “Did it—is she—” Harry babbled. “Did she—”

Draco surreptitiously pulled his wand and Disarmed Harry. Harry, in his worry, didn’t notice. Draco stood and walked closer.
Robards interrupted the stammering. “Auror Lehri Stunned her right away. We don’t think anyone got photos, and even if they did, they wouldn’t have caught much. She’s recovering at St Mungo’s. Get over there to check in with her and Weasley. Update Malfoy.” And the Floo flames cut off.

Harry turned around, his eyes manic and glistening. He stood there in his stupid pyjama pants with his stupid sexy bare chest and turned on the spot, as if he were going to Apparate away. Halfway through his turn, he realised he didn’t have his wand.

Draco grabbed Harry’s forearm, and Harry turned, frenzy in his eyes. Draco held out Harry’s wand. “You can’t go to St Mungo’s without getting dressed,” he said simply.

Harry looked from his wand in Draco’s hand to Draco’s face back to the wand. He nodded once and walked out of the room.

Draco scanned the room. Harry wouldn’t remember to do anything in this state. Draco cast some quick Charms to clean the dishes and gathered up his parchments and Harry’s stupid iPhone. He held out his wand. “Accio Harry’s wallet.” A shabby wallet zoomed into the room and landed in Draco’s outstretched hand.

Harry burst back into the room looking minimally dressed. At least he’d put a shirt and trousers on, but really that was all that could be said for what he was wearing. Then Harry was grabbing Draco’s arm and Draco was being pressed into nothingness from all sides, Harry’s hand warm and firm.

They landed at the St Mungo’s Apparition point.

“You know, Potter,” Draco said, pulling his arm out of Harry’s grip, “It’s impolite to grab someone and transport their body across hundreds of kilometres without their express consent.”

“It wasn’t hundreds of kilometres,” Harry said, but his face was blank, not teasing, and Draco hated it. “I live in London. It wasn’t far.”

“Don’t accuse me of hyperbole in order to distract from your assault.”

“Calling you hyperbolic is not an accusation, it’s a fact,” Harry said, but his eyes were on the entrance. “I need to see them.”

Potter had that gormless Gryffindor look to him—that look that immediately preceded monumentally stupid behaviour. Draco took a firm grasp of Harry’s arm; a Slytherin could not allow Potter to take action with that look in his eyes. Draco pulled him through the window that read “Purge and Dowse, Ltd.”

Draco didn’t let go of Harry’s arm, just walked him up to the welcome desk, where a harried-looking wizard asked, “How can I help you?” without looking up.

Draco glanced at Harry, who was looking off in the direction of the lifts. Draco sighed, pulled out Harry’s wallet, opened it to flash the Auror badge. “Harry Potter here to see Hermione Granger. Auror business.”

When the wizard heard “Harry Potter,” he didn’t just look up, he jumped straight out of his chair. “Auror Potter!” he cried, attracting the attention of everyone in the room. The moron.

“Hermione Granger,” Draco said. “Now.”
Harry tried to take off without Draco, but Draco still had his arm and led him into the lift. Draco finally let go of his arm, and Harry began to pace.

Draco stood straight, his pure-blood upbringing not allowing him to lean or pace or fidget. He knew he looked good standing there, with his gorgeous French robes, but he found himself wishing that he could be more like Harry. That he could own his emotions and just spew them everywhere. Whilst pacing in a lift, for example. Maybe if he could do that, they wouldn’t have always acted like such gits around each other.

And of course Harry was beside himself—it was Hermione, his best friend, his family. After what Harry, Hermione, and Ron had been through during the war, Draco could understand how Harry would be intensely attached to them. Nothing could ever come between them. No one ever could. Draco sighed.

“Potter—Harry. Robards said she’s okay. I’ve analysed the potion. She’ll be a little sedated, maybe she’ll feel a bit hung over. Otherwise she’ll be normal. Alright?”

Harry turned green eyes on Draco, pushed his glasses up his nose. “Okay,” he said simply.

The lift dinged, and they got off. A tall south Asian man in Auror robes called out. “Harry!”

“Nadheer,” Harry exclaimed, relieved, and walked towards the man, but then walked right past him into Room 9.

Draco followed, nodding at the Auror apparently named Nadheer as he passed. Granger lay on the bed. Weasley was sitting on the edge of the bed looking ready to hex anyone who so much as approached his wife. Weasley’s parents were there, too. Arthur Weasley sat in an uncomfortable-looking side chair, and Molly Weasley was fussing with Granger’s blankets.

“Harry!” Weasley called, stepping away from the bed to pull Harry into a tight hug.

Draco stood just inside the door watching Harry embrace his oldest friend, the friend he chose over Draco. Weasley’s eyes were scrunched tight over Harry’s shoulder as they squeezed each other, as if holding on for dear life.

Draco couldn’t help but feel jealous, even though he was a grown wizard and such things were unseemly.

Draco also couldn’t help but wonder if really there had been something to those polyamory rumours in the Prophet.

Everyone wanted to hug Harry, that much was clear, but apparently even these maudlin Gryffindors weren’t going to all pile on for a group hug, so Molly consoled herself with approaching Draco while Harry wrapped one arm around Hermione’s shoulders.

“Mr Malfoy,” she said politely, “good to see you. Thank you for your work on this case. Arthur and I have been beside ourselves with worry these past months. Parents don’t want their children to be targets of campaigns of hate.”

Draco held out his hand. “Call me Draco. I’m glad to be here, and working on the case. We’ve figured out the potion.”

Molly shook his hand, her hand plump and sure in his. She looked straight in his eyes for a beat too
long, nodded, and then stepped away to hug Harry. Draco really didn’t want to know what she’d been looking for in his eyes.

“We didn’t figure out the potion,” Harry said, and Draco turned to find Harry’s eyes on him. “Malfoy figured out the potion. It’s got Muggle drugs in it.”

Everyone in the room stopped and turned to look at Draco. There had been a time, once, when Draco would’ve relished being the authority to which this group turned, but now he couldn’t enjoy it at all.

“Muggle drugs?” Molly gasped. “Like their version of potions? Is she going to be okay? Muggle drugs can drain a magical core, they have terrible effects, I once heard of a wizard down in Canterbury—”

Draco held up his hand. “Yes, it’s a pharmapotion. Looks to be a combination love potion, lust potion, and pharmaceutical. Likely a sedative—I suspect flunitrazepam. It shouldn’t have any lasting effect once it’s out of her system.”

“The date rape drug?” Weasley asked, and sweet Merlin, Draco really had thought Weasley was a dunce. He’d always wondered why Granger put up with the Weasel. Damn it, Draco hated to be wrong. Of course, Draco had thought Harry was a dunce, too. But then, he knew why people put up with Harry.

“Yes,” Draco said. “But we need to test it to be sure. Make sure you don’t have any alcohol, Hermione. If it’s flunitrazepam, it won’t wear off for 18 to 26 hours.”

Hermione smiled. “Will do. I suspect the Healers wouldn’t give me booze even if I wanted it.”

Weasley stepped away from Harry and was back at the bed wrapping his arm around his wife.

Harry suddenly looked unmoored, standing alone in the middle of the hospital room, so without thinking, Draco stepped up next to him.

“What happened?” Harry asked. Then, louder, “Nadheer!”

Nadheer entered the room. Draco had never met him before, except briefly in the Pensieve, but he looked like shit. Draco wondered how he’d gotten such a thankless assignment as protecting the Chosen One’s best friends.

Then Harry walked up and wrapped Nadheer in a hug. “Thank you,” Harry said, and Nadheer patted Harry’s back.

Harry must have a thing for him! Draco took a breath and told himself to pull it together—this man was just a coworker. But maybe Harry was having an office romance. That’d explain his insane commitment to his job.

“So what happened?” Harry repeated.

It was clear to Draco that Harry was looking for a friend explanation from Hermione, not an Auror explanation from Nadheer, but being Harry’s subordinate, Nadheer answered.

“Sir, Ms Granger and I left the home in Ottery St Catchpole at 8:16 AM. We Apparated to the Apparition point down the street from the Ministry. Ms Granger wanted to stop at the cafe for a coffee, since we wouldn’t be able to stop at Wideye.”
“Which cafe?” Harry interrupted, looking at Hermione. “Magic Beans on Whitehall Place?”

Hermione nodded.

Nadheer continued, “Nothing seemed amiss at the cafe. She ordered and we walked down the street. She sipped the coffee as we turned onto Northumberland Ave. I’ve been watching her closely ever since yesterday, and Mr Weasley had given me tips on the warning signs of a love potion. I noticed her symptoms right away and Stunned her before she’d done anything, though she had locked eyes with a passerby.” Nadheer gave an apologetic look to Hermione.

She shrugged and gave him a smile, but she seemed so small in that hospital bed. Hermione Granger usually didn’t seem small.

“You know what this means, Hermione?” Harry asked.

“You need to take a leave from work,” Molly said.

“They must have been following you, if they knew where you were likely to go,” Arthur said.

“We need to stockpile some Love Potion Revealer,” Ron said.

But Harry caught Hermione’s eye and cried dramatically, “No coffee!”

Hermione and Harry started laughing.

The Harry and Hermione duo was quite the show, Draco was learning. Draco wanted to pinch the bridge of his nose. He really did. But, stoically, he did not.

Weasley didn’t appear amused today; his entire demeanour was oozing with concern for his wife, no time for laughter.

Harry turned to Draco. “Remember? I told you at breakfast that I should shrink down a few litres of coffee for the day before I left home!”

Draco smiled at Harry, then it occurred to him with a shock that there was something really intimate about this suggestion, in front of other people, that they’d had breakfast together. That they’d come together. That there was a Harry-and-Draco. Draco felt his stomach lurch. Of course, there was no such thing.

Granger was giving Weasley a look.

Harry managed to stop laughing. “What happened then?”

“I sent a detail of Aurors to Magic Beans and all along the route from there to the Ministry, and we Apparated here. The Healers Ennervated Ms Granger and administered antidotes to love and lust potions, but she’s not quite right yet. They’re running tests to see why.”

“That’s due to the Muggle pharmaceutical,” Draco said.

Nadheer nodded. “I should report this back to Robards.”

He seemed like a very competent and nice Auror. He had gorgeous skin and thick, shiny black hair pulled into a bun. Draco really hoped Harry wasn’t shagging him.

The rest of them began to talk all at once, conjecturing about the case and the best course of action. Draco’s eyes fell on Weasley, the only one in the room who wasn’t talking. He just sat on the bed,
looking awful. Everyone else was paying attention to Granger.

Merlin help him, but Draco was feeling sorry for Weasley.

Draco reached out and touched Harry’s arm. Harry turned. Draco didn’t say anything, just inclined his head at Weasley. Harry turned to look, and must’ve seen the same thing as Draco, because he immediately went over and threw his arm around Weasley’s shoulders in a comforting gesture.

Draco couldn’t deal with this. He stuffed his hands in his robe pockets—something one should never do because it looked petulant and ruined the lines of the robes—but Draco needed to leave. He turned to leave the room.

“Draco,” Hermione said. Her voice was just the tiniest bit slurred.

He turned. “Tell me about the pharmapotion,” she said. “How are you going to confirm if it’s flunit—fluni—I can’t quite make my tongue work right now.”

“Flunitrazepam. And that’s what’s affecting your tongue, if I’m right.” Draco smiled. “Nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy.”

Granger’s eyes lit up. “I wish I could come.” She was disappointed, stuck in this bed, not allowed in the field, living under threat of violence for over a year. Even if her views on love potions were overly simplistic, Draco felt bad.

“When the case is solved, you can come. I’ll show you all around Jussieu Département d’Études Magiques.”

Draco could feel Harry’s eyes on him, but he didn’t turn around.

“Twill love that!” Hermione said. “I’ve always wanted to attend their lectures. Sometimes I think—” she sighed. “Sometimes I think I should’ve gone into science and not politics.”

Weasley, who was looking a bit more cheerful now, called, “Oi! Don’t make me go get the purple folder of hope!”

Granger smiled. “I know. It’s just that this is a crock of dirty flobberworm pants.”

“Let’s not get worked up now,” Molly said. “We will keep you company.”

“Yes!” Arthur enthused. “I almost forgot, Hermione! I went and bought a Muggle board game! It’s called *Settlers of Catan*, and according to the box, we want to build extensive roadways!”

Hermione smiled, and Draco found his eyes drifting to Harry. Harry had finally exhaled. The sight of his family handling the situation with a competent Auror in the room seemed to have finally broken through his worry.


Arthur was Unshrinking a box from his pocket, then poking the contents with his wand. Draco, too, was surprised that the pieces weren’t scurrying away. Then again, he supposed he had no idea what Muggle board games were like.

A Healer walked into the room and greeted everyone.

“Tell her about the pharmapotion,” Harry said.
Draco turned to the Healer. “Draco Malfoy, Potions consultant with the Ministry,” he held out his hand and she shook. “The potion she’s been dosed with is likely a combination of Love Potion, Lust Potion, and a Muggle pharmaceutical called flunitrazepam. It is a sedative. It will wear off with time. She cannot have alcohol.”

“Noted, thank you,” the Healer said, her quill scribbling notes onto Hermione’s chart across the room.

Harry hugged Granger and Weasley, whispered “Keep an eye on Ron” in Arthur’s ear, and then joined Draco. As they left the room, they heard Molly saying to the Healer, “Can you please check for damage to my daughter-in-law’s reproductive system? You never know with these lust potions —” The door to Room 9 closed behind them.

Harry sagged against the wall.

“Are you alright?” Draco asked. He didn’t really know why he was asking—it was not as if he had any idea what to do if Harry said no.

Harry looked up at him, surprised, and managed a small smile. “I’m okay. Better now. They’ll be testing her food and drink now, and she’s safe in St Mungo’s. We’ve got to solve this case.”

He had his signature determination in his green eyes, and it was one of those rare moments when you could actually believe that he’d killed Voldemort at seventeen. Most times, these days, he was just Harry.

“So what do we need to do now?” Harry asked, and Draco was surprised he was being asked.

“Are you authorised to make a Portkey?”

Harry Potter was, of course, authorised to make a Portkey. They stood at St Mungo’s Apparition Point, and Harry searched through a rubbish bin for something to turn into a Portkey.

“We could use your shoe. It’s not worth much,” Draco observed.

Harry snorted. “You’re welcome to do the digging through the rubbish if you like,” he said, and Draco shut his mouth. Harry eventually settled on an old magazine, which he rolled into a tube so they could grasp it easily.

“Where are we going?”


“Why?”

“Two reasons: I can test the potion to see if the pharmaceutical compound is, in fact, flunitrazepam, and I can talk to my directeur de thèse.”

“Your what now?”

“My thesis advisor. He’s at the forefront of pharmapotions research, and I suspect that if a group of British wizards invented a pharmapotion, they must have been researching the work of Jérémie Dufresne. He may have met them.”

“Alright,” Harry said. “Use my wand to make the Portkey, since you have a wand-restriction for it. I don’t know the coordinates and I can’t speak French. If I try to do it, it’ll end up like the first time
I Flooed.” He held out his wand.

Draco’s mind went completely blank. *Here use my wand?* What was Harry trying to achieve with this? Was it a trick? If Draco used Harry’s wand for a restricted spell, would Aurors pop out to cart him off to Azkaban? He couldn’t *honestly* just be offering Draco his wand?

Draco had lived in a dormitory with Greg, Vince, Theo, and Blaise for seven years, and he had never used any of their wands. Was this a Gryffindor thing? Did they just have a big basket in the common room where everyone threw their wands, grabbing one when the need arose? He’d used his mother’s on occasion, but *never* his father’s. Draco shuddered to imagine what Lucius would’ve said if Draco’d as much as *touched* his wand. Draco had been in relationships, had plenty of sex, and he’d *once* used a partner’s wand—and *that* had been in the middle of sex, fumbling for lube, and they’d said, “Stop looking for your wand, here use mine,” and Draco hadn’t thought twice because shagging was imminent. And in the war—well, it didn’t do to think about wands in the war.

“Draco?”

Fuck, he’d just been standing there gaping. He took Potter’s wand and whispered, “*Portus.*” The wand worked beautifully for him, of course.

He couldn’t help but remember watching Harry use Draco’s wand like it had chosen *him.* Good grief, he thought, *listen to yourself.* He sounded like he wanted to swap wands with Potter like some barmy Hufflepuff twats on *Newlywed Wizard.*

The magazine glowed briefly. “Ten seconds,” Draco warned, handing Harry his wand and grasping the end of the magazine. His index finger brushed Harry’s. Harry looked up and caught Draco’s eye. His eyes were so green.

Then Draco felt the tug behind his navel, grabbed Harry’s elbow, and they were sucked through space, landing at an Apparition Point inside Métro Jussieu. The landing was rough, and they bumped into each other’s chests.

They each stepped back. Harry looked around as they walked past the Muggle-repelling Charms and into the crowd of Muggles leaving the Métro.

“This is a Muggle University?” Harry asked.

“Yes, but they have a department of magical studies and one of the best potions programmes in the world. They also have some of the best Muggle sciences in the world, and a formal exemption from the Statute of Secrecy, so some of the Muggle scientists here work with wizards. That’s how we are able to study pharmapotions.”

“How does that work?” Harry asked, stepping off the escalator and squinting into the sunshine. “How do you explain it to the Muggles?” There were bikes and trees lining the entrance to the Métro.

Draco thought about the best way to explain that. “Well, it’s not that different than how we deal with Muggle parents of magical children. There’s an office at the French Ministry of Magic that explains and binds them to secrecy. In fact, Jussieu pays the Muggles who work with wizards a bonus. Our Muggle coworkers love magic.”

Harry was giving Draco a strange look. “You actually like these French Muggles.”

“Of course. They’re excellent scientists. They helped me with my work.”
Harry continued to look at him.

“I thought I’d told you about my work with the charities and the lobbying and the Foundation for Intermagical Science and Technology. It’s been in the papers.”

Draco was honestly confused; he knew he’d talked about this with Harry before, that night at the Ministry function.

“I thought— I thought you were trying to redeem your name,” Harry said. “I thought you didn’t particularly care about Muggle issues, but nor did you care about pure-blood biases, so you did what would clear your name. I didn’t think you were friends with Muggle scientists.”

Draco could feel himself getting angry. He could feel the red flush of his pale cheeks and ears. Take a deep breath. He couldn’t scream at Potter right now. They were in the middle of a crowded Muggle street. They needed to go work on the case. People were in danger of sexual assault. Pharmapotions. Ignore Potter’s stupid face.

Draco turned abruptly and began walking towards the Atrium. Let Potter dawdle behind him like a dimwit and get lost in the crowd in Paris.

But Harry caught up. “Hey—” Potter’s stupid voice called, “I didn’t mean—”

Draco finally slowed when Harry grasped his elbow. He pulled away. “You did mean. The war has been over for more than a decade, Potter. I was a child. I was a fucking bellend, but I was just a child.”

“You should say arse kettle. Or toe fucker.”

“What?” Draco was incredulous now.

“Gender-neutral swearing.”

Draco stared at Potter for a moment before turning forwards and beginning to walk quickly on the path he’d walked so many times. On the path he’d walked peacefully so many times, with Harry Potter on a whole separate land mass.

Harry caught up with him halfway up the red steps. “Draco, I’m sorry. I just—”

Draco turned, his eyes flashing with anger. “Didn’t I rant to you for an hour about how F.I.S.T. has the potential to save the planet from global warming? And to cure cancer? Because I remember sitting with you at that Ministry party and talking about it in detail and for way longer than was reasonable at a function of that type.”

“Yes, you did—”

“You thought that was an act? Some ploy to get the Chosen One to think highly of me, so maybe you’d say something nice about me in the Prophet?”

“No, I—”

“Just stop talking. As always, I don’t want to talk to you.” Draco opened the door and walked into the colourful Atrium. Potter stopped to look up at the rainbow of colour. Draco didn’t wait for him, heading down a hallway to a staircase.

Harry followed him, and Draco tried to calm himself down. He was going to see his advisor, some
of his old colleagues. He couldn’t walk in there like a schoolboy in the middle of a row with a rival.

Draco turned. At the end of the hall he could see the janitor’s closet complete with plastic yellow bucket ("Attention! Sol glissant!"—idiotic Muggles), that Muggles would see, but he grabbed the mop handle, which opened the door into a hidden corridor. A shimmering sign on the wall read, “Département d’Études Magiques.”

Harry was struggling to keep up. Good.

“Bonjour, Barbara!” Draco said with a cheerful tone, waving to the department coordinator. He suspected even Barbara would be able to tell he wasn’t actually cheerful.

“Draco!” she said, surprised to see him, but Draco had already turned right at the corner where a plaque on the wall read “Bureau des Etudes en Potions.”

Before long they stood in front of a door that read “Jérémie Dufresne, Responsable Pédagogique.”

Draco turned to Potter. “Do not embarrass me.”

Harry gave him a blank look. “I’m the Deputy Head Auror. I think I can handle it.”

Draco took a breath. His worlds had never collided like this before, and leave it to Harry Potter to be the one to cause the collision. He knocked.

"Entrez!"

Draco opened the door. “Surprise,” he said with a smile.

Jérémie looked up. “Draco! Qu'est-ce que tu fais là? Tu viens de nous quitter, non? Ou est-ce qu'on était à un différent pot de départ?”

“Mon premier cas avec le Ministère britannique est arrivé plus tôt que prévu. Je suis là dans un cadre officiel. Je te présente Harry Potter, chef-adjoint du département des Aurors.”

Jérémie raised one eyebrow. He was intrigued. “M. Potter, c'est un honneur de vous rencontrer.”

Harry held out his hand. “Pleased to meet you.”

Draco knew that Harry didn’t understand a word of French, but let the prat suffer.

“Qu'est ce qui t'amène à Jussieu ?” Jérémie asked, looking between Draco and Harry.

It was odd to be here with Harry. Never before had any part of his personal life entered this office, and now he was standing here with Harry. Jérémie didn’t know a thing about Draco’s personal life, and now he was looking at Harry. Draco wondered if Jérémie had known he was gay. He wondered if Jérémie was wondering that now. Fuck, Draco wanted Jérémie to think of him as a rational mind floating in space without a messy human life and body. And why were his thoughts rambling like this? He was here on business.

“Il y a un nouveau philtre d'amour sur le marché,” Draco said, but then he noticed that Harry was glaring at him. “Un problème, Harry?”

“Can you please translate for me or speak English, like someone with proper manners?” Harry was annoyed.

“Oh je suis désolé, I didn’t realise that you can’t understand French. My sincere apologies. Jérémie, ça te dérange si on passe à l'anglais pour le bien de mon collègue?”
“Of course not,” Jérémie said.

“As I was saying, there’s been a new love potion developed in Britain. We suspect that it’s in retaliation to the legislation classifying love potions as illegal controlled substances. In any case, I analyzed the potion and determined that it combines the effects of a love potion, a lust potion, and a pharmaceutical. I suspect it’s a sedative like flunitrazepam.”

“Mince,” Jérémie replied. “What is the magical binding agent?”

“Moonstone,” Draco said.

“And is it static?”

“It’s a dynamic-vector potion!” Harry put in, clearly eager to show off his knowledge. Draco couldn’t help but half smile at him. He really should not find Harry as adorable as he did. He was meant to be annoyed at him.

But Jérémie had no reason to be impressed with Harry and just continued on. “So when someone drinks the potion, they…”

“They exhibit symptoms of love and lust potions—pale skin, dilated pupils—and sedation—slumped shoulders, slurred speech, and they attempt to engage in sexual intercourse with whomever is closest, we think. It hasn’t been subjected to rigorous testing.”

“Bon dieu,” Jérémie replied. “That is sexual assault. The brewers should be imprisoned. And it will be a serious setback for the reputation of pharmapotions.”

“Je sais,” Draco said. “That’s one reason we need to get this case solved as soon as possible.”

“Actual human bodies are on the line,” Harry challenged. “The main issue here is not the reputation of your field.”

Jérémie looked at Harry. “I assure you, Monsieur Potter, that I am perfectly capable of simultaneously being fascinated by the academic puzzle, concerned about the reputation of my field, and devoted to helping the people who are in danger of dosage.”

Jérémie had not gone to Hogwarts, but he was a Ravenclaw to the core. Harry would never understand his motivations.

“I assume you have a sample of the pharmaceutical for the NMR.”

“Yes, I’ve already isolated it,” Draco replied, patting his robe pocket.

“Sir,” Harry said with his Auror tone, “have you had contact with any British wizards who showed any especial interest in love or lust potions? Or in binding sedatives with potions? Or any suspicious behaviour at all?”

“I remember a group of young British wizards at a couple of seminars. We did a series of public seminars on bonding pharmaceuticals to magical agents,” Jérémie replied. “I will go find the records and try to recall the details while you analyse the sample. Bien?”

Draco nodded. “Excellent, merci.”

“Any time, you know that my students are my students forever, not only until graduation. Come find me when you’re done in the lab. It was nice to meet you, M. Potter.”
Harry nodded, and Draco led the way out of the office and towards the lab.

At the door to the lab, Draco turned. “Have you ever been in a Muggle lab before?”

“Draco, I stopped Muggle school when I was ten. No.”

“Lab safety is not a joking matter,” Draco lectured. “Much like in a Potions lab, only in here there are enormous machines and chemicals, and you should imagine them all slowly rotting your body from the inside to remind yourself that lab safety is not a joking matter.”

Harry held up his hands, “Okay, okay!”

They walked through the door. Draco handed Harry a lab coat.

“What’s this?”

“Lab coat. Stop asking idiotic questions.”

Draco handed Potter a pair of safety goggles, and to Harry’s credit, he didn’t ask what they were, just shoved them onto his face over his glasses. Draco snorted.

“Oh, shut up. Like you look any better in this get-up.”

Draco inwardly smirked. He did look good in the lab gear. He’d been propositioned four times in this very lab. He was so very annoyed with Potter, and what better way to process that annoyance than by making Potter sick with lust? (Without the aid of any potions, of course. He wasn’t a barbarian.) Draco slowly unbuttoned his robe, removing the warded pharmaceutical sample from the pocket as he did so. He hung his robe and pulled on a lab coat, making sure to choose the kind with the good collar. He smoothed the front and donned a pair of goggles.

He turned. Sure enough, Harry was staring at him like he’d been hit with the new potion. Draco pulled two gloves out of a box and handed the box to Harry, and they pulled on the blue disposable gloves.

Draco walked across the lab and stood next to the computer workstation, leaning his weight just slightly so that his leg would look longer as it emerged from the coat. He leaned over to start the session and input his parameters.

He gestured to the machine. “This is the NMR. I’ve already magically isolated the pharmaceutical compound. I need to put the sample into this tube.” He held up one of the NMR tubes. Oh, what the hell, he was really going to torture Harry today. If he didn’t, it would be a total waste of a day. He picked up a swab and cleaned the tube, stroking it suggestively, but subtly enough to maintain deniability.

Harry’s eyes snapped to Draco’s. Ha.

Draco ceased wanking the test tube and walked over to the sample preparation area. He dismantled the protection and stasis spells that he’d put on the sample and Levitated it out of its container. He cast a few Charms to dissolve the sample and Levitated it into the NMR tube. Harry had moved closer and watched over Draco’s shoulder. Draco just barely suppressed a shudder at the sensation of the heat coming from Harry’s body. But no, he was still angry with Potter. He’d always be angry with Potter.

“Then I add deuterated chloroform.”
“Deuterated,” Harry echoed with a snort.

Draco squeezed the deuterated chloroform into the tube and capped it. He gave it a little shake, and walked over to the workstation. “I click ‘Routine Spectroscopy’, then ‘Insert new sample.’”

“You don’t have to do any sort of preparation before inserting it? No lubricant?” Harry asked, like a complete twat. He was trying to get a rise out of Draco, or a laugh, and Draco was not going to give him the satisfaction.

“So then the tube goes into the auto-changer.” Draco dropped the tube into one of a rectangular array of circular holes. “Then we tell the computer its position in the carousel.”

“It’s important to know which hole it’s going in,” Potter quipped cheekily. Draco wanted to slap him.

Draco walked over to the computer workstation and used the mouse to input the position and the solvent they had used.

Harry looked shocked. “You’re—you’re using a mouse.” He had always been a master at stating the obvious.

Draco turned, an annoyed scowl on his face. “Would you rather that I pretend to be a clueless pure-blood around electronics? Even though this is my career and I spent the better part of a decade studying this? Would it better comport with your preconceptions if I said, ‘I say! Take a look-see at this thingamabob! It must run on ekeltricity! Imagine that! Chortle, chortle. Muggles are so quaint! How do I make it go?’” Draco turned back to the computer and said in his regular voice, “I select the position from the drop-down menu and click ‘Submit.’” Click. Draco looked pointedly over his shoulder at Harry.

And Merlin help Draco, because Harry was amused. “Did you just say ‘chortle’ in place of laughing?”

Draco didn’t answer, but stood to show Harry the workings of the machine. “Watch,” Draco commanded. “The auto-changer picks up the sample.” Whirrrrr. “And then it brings it over and places it into the probe.” Whirrrrrrr.

“Reminds me of those claw crane games they have in Muggle arcades,” Harry said.

Draco had no idea what a claw crane or an arcade was, but he wasn’t going to let on after he’d just been gloating about the extent of his Muggle assimilation.

Churr churr and the machine sucked down the sample.

“Now we wait a few minutes.” Draco figured he may as well show off and give Harry a pointless task. “Want to help?”

Harry raised his eyebrows in a sign of excitement. He looked absolutely preposterous, lab coat over threadbare jeans, wild black hair, safety goggles over his glasses. Draco wanted to eat him.

“Sure,” Harry said.

“Sit here,” Draco indicated a chair in front of a different computer. “This computer can bring up Muggle research articles. Type ‘flunitrazepam’ in this field here.” Draco pointed, and then spelled it aloud.
Harry sat and typed with as much elegance as one would expect given Harry’s general level of elegance, but he eventually got the word typed and clicked, “Search.”

Draco looked over Harry’s shoulder, and he could smell that spicy Harry smell. What was that smell? Nutmeg? Allspice? And why did Harry always smell like it?

“This one?” Harry asked, pointing at a clearly irrelevant search result.

“No,” Draco said, “we want one with spectra. This one.”

Harry clicked, and an image of a journal article popped onto the screen. “Carbon-13 and Proton NMR Studies of 1,4-Benzodiazepines.” Harry gave Draco a hard look. “You actually understand what all of this means?”

“Yes, of course. It’s like you aren’t listening when I tell you over and over that I am a Doctor of Potions with a concentration in Pharmapotions.” Draco really was getting tired of having to repeat this.

Harry looked back at the screen. “The Journal of Heterocyclic Chemistry. Why can’t we have the Journal of Homocyclic Chemistry. This is discrimination!”

Harry’s face was written with pure amusement.

Draco just stared at him. Stupid, immature git. Whose ear looked really delectable.

Harry, slightly chastened upon not earning a laugh from Draco, looked back at the article. “What’s this?” he asked. “Runes?”

“Molecular structure,” Draco said. “Scroll down and find the spectrum for flunitrazepam.”

Harry scrolled aimlessly for a bit until Draco informed him, “Spikes on a chart, Potter, spikes on a chart.”

Harry kept looking, eventually landing on the spectra.

“Look at Figure 2,” Draco said. Harry looked, but Draco suspected it meant nothing to him. Good.

The NMR machine ceased whirring and a chart popped up on the screen.

“What’s it mean?” Harry asked.

“This curve called the FID represents the excited nuclei relaxing back down to their default level.”

“That’s too easy,” Harry said, “I’m not even going to bother.”

“Then that goes through a Fourier transform,” Draco clicked, “and this is the spectrum. And look,” Draco pointed at the screen, “C_{16}H_{12}FN_{3}O_{3}. Flunitrazepam. Does it match the one you found in the article?” Draco looked over his shoulder.

Harry compared the two, then sighed. “Fucking roofies. As if love and lust potions weren’t bad enough already. Who are these used arse rags?”

Draco crinkled his nose. “Used arse rags?”

“Gender-neutral swearing. I told you.” Harry cocked his head with a smile and stood. “Are we done here?”
“Wait, I just want to use the software we have in the magitech lab, then we can go see what Jérémie turned up about these used arse rags.”

“You can’t just mimic my ridiculous swearing,” Harry said as he followed Draco in pulling off his goggles and lab coat. “You have to come up with your own.”

“Why can’t you just say arsehole?” Draco asked. “Everyone has an arsehole.”

Harry laughed as he followed Draco out of the lab and into a room full of computers down the hall.

“You’re going to love this,” Draco said, and he was slightly horrified how much he was enjoying sharing this part of his life with someone he knew from Hogwarts. He would’ve enjoyed showing it to anyone, even Greg, right? “Snape would’ve thought this was a potions travesty. Makes the art of potion-making much too easy.”

Harry’s eyes twinkled. “It makes potions easy and Snape annoyed? Sounds like my kind of thing.”

Draco sat down in front of a computer with an enormous screen. The screen shimmered, and Harry reached out to touch it. Draco slapped his hand away. “Magical screen, don’t touch. You’re like a ten year old.

“So you simulate the brewing of a potion, and it tells you what the outcome of the potion is. It means you don’t have to test it on living creatures first.”

“Wow,” Harry said, looking at Draco, not the screen.

“Alright, I’m going to give it my best guess at how to make this potion. We’ll see if it works.”

Harry sat quietly, watching Draco work. Draco methodically input ingredients (2 Ashwinder eggs) and instructions (Stir clockwise six times), and Harry, less methodically, distracted him.

“Why would someone make this potion? I just can’t understand the motivation. They wouldn’t make a potion like this solely to embarrass and discredit Hermione, would they?”

Draco (2 minced rose thorns) muttered, “What do you mean? It’s obviously about power” (let sit five minutes).

“But if you wanted potion-mediated rape, there’s already love potion and lust potion,” Harry said, spinning in his chair.

“I don’t want potion-mediated rape. You use such sloppy pronouns. But Harry, it doesn’t need to make rational sense. There are about a billion ways to rape someone with magic. The easiest would be Imperius, but even if one was squeamish about Unforgivables, Stupefy would do just as well. But it’s not about the easiest way to achieve penis-in-hole. It’s about power. People do fucked up things. This potion is a fucked up thing.” (7 peppermint leaves, torn.)

Harry hummed his agreement. “And they do want to embarrass Hermione, and anyone else they think is like her.”

“Of course,” Draco said (Stir anti-clockwise eight times, pausing one second each half-turn), “because they don’t want people questioning power relations.” (Powdered pearl dust.) Draco paused and looked at Harry. “This is part of why I think that banning love and lust potions is a fool’s errand. It’s not going to stop rape. Rape only takes the flick of a wand.”

“But if love potions are legal,” Harry said, “it seems like the Ministry is doing a wink-wink-nudge-
nudge about rape’s legality.”

“I suppose that’s true,” Draco said. “Though if they wanted to crack down on rape, they could change the way it’s prosecuted, and actually listen to victims. Stop with all this, ‘But you had a wand, didn’t you?’ nonsense. They wouldn’t need to criminalise love potions to do that.”

“But the Wizengamot wouldn’t do that, so it’s not a viable solution.”

Draco sighed. “The Wizengamot is a disaster, I think we can agree on that.” (Stir with metal rod five times clockwise.)

“Everyone agrees on that,” Harry said.

“Alright,” Draco said, trying to focus on the procedure for the potion, “I just need to bind the flunitrazepam to the moonstone.” He started to mutter under his breath as he input the compound, “C sixteen H twelve…” When he finished he found Harry’s green eyes on him.

Draco looked away. “Look,” he said, indicating the magical screen. Instructions for brewing the potion appeared neatly formatted on the left, and on the right was a list of symptoms.

“Affects brain function, motor skills, endocrine system,” Draco read. “Immediate symptoms: sexual arousal….” He trailed off. “This is wrong. It should also list pale skin, infatuation. What did I miss?” Draco scanned the list of ingredients—they were all there. “This doesn’t make sense.”

“Explain the problem to me,” Harry said, “as if I could help.”

Draco felt a rush of magic, but he couldn’t be bothered to check what Harry was doing.

“When love and lust potions are combined, it should cause symptoms of each, there should be pale skin, but it’s only listing the physical symptoms of lust potions.”

Draco turned to see a giant silver stag staring at him intently. He jumped.

“Deliver message to Ron Weasley,” Harry said, and the stag ran off.

“Did you just ask Weasley to help me with a potions problem?” Draco said, momentarily too shocked to be affronted.

Harry shrugged placidly. Draco forced himself to turn back to the screen, puzzling over the results. But then Harry was exclaiming, “Fletcher!” Draco turned, and a terrier Patronus was licking Harry’s face.

The dog opened his mouth, “Probably the pearl dust, mate. Did you use colloidal or powdered? Large-batch potion or small? If you’re doing a large batch, you need colloidal pearl dust or it won’t work.” The dog sat in mid-air and twisted around to lick its bollocks.

Harry smirked at Draco and held his hand out for Fletcher to sniff.

Draco knew there must have been more humiliating moments in his life. Like the ceremony to take the Dark Mark, for one. But just now, this seemed worse.

Colloidal fucking pearl dust, the dog-weasel said. And he was right.

Draco turned back to the computer and made the necessary adjustments.
“You should probably thank Fletcher,” Harry said. “He likes belly scratches.”

“Shut the fuck up, Potter.”

Draco kept his eyes trained on the magical screen. There. Now it was right. Immediate reaction: Pale skin, dilated pupils, sexual arousal, infatuation, muscle relaxation, lack of coordination, sexual seeking. Yes. Draco waved his wand and a copy of the potion instructions and the effects appeared on a parchment. He folded it and put it in his pocket, only then looking up at Harry.

Harry, the berk, was still smirking.

“The three of you are really weird with those Patronuses, you know,” Draco said with poor humour.

Harry shrugged. “Well, mobiles don’t work well in the Ministry, or St Mungo’s, or Diagon Alley. And I don’t have a soul bond.”

“You’re jealous,” Draco observed.

“We are not having threesomes!”

“Merlin and Circe, Harry, I never said you were. I said you were jealous of what they have.”

Harry sighed. “I’m not jealous,” he grumbled like a jealous person.

“You wish you had what they have with someone,” Draco guessed.

Harry looked up, but his eyes were unreadable. “I guess I do.”

Draco pushed back against the annoyance that was threatening to bubble up. “You know you actually have to make that happen. It won’t just fall in your lap.”

Harry pressed his lips together and stood up. “We’re done here, yeah? Let’s go.” And without waiting for an answer, he turned and walked into the hallway.

Draco sighed, still annoyed, but also embarrassed. Harry always had him saying too much. He walked into the hallway, resolved to talk about only the case.

“Let’s see what Jérémie turned up,” Draco said, leading the way down the maze of halls. When he reached the door, Draco knocked.

“Entrez!”

Draco entered the office and placed the instructions for the potion on Jérémie’s desk. “It was flunitrazepam.”

Jérémie scanned the parchment and clicked his tongue in disapproval. “A nasty potion. Let me work out the antidote for you, Draco, Monsieur Potter. You have more pressing matters than this desk work.”

“Thank you so much, Monsieur Dufresne,” Harry said.

Draco wished he could stay at a desk and work out the antidote; it was exactly the sort of puzzle that he loved. Antidotes to compound potions were complicated, but antidotes to compound pharmapotions were even trickier. Magical reversal of the effects of the pharmaceutical could sometimes be accomplished through a potion that would isolate and vanish the particles from the
person’s body, but more often the antidote needed to reverse the effects of the drug one-by-one. Of course, Jérémie was right. Draco needed to help Potter explain this potion to the Ministry and provide potions expertise in finding these criminals.

“Yes, thank you so much,” Draco said. Jérémie nodded with a smile, waved his wand to Duplicate the parchment, and handed the original to Draco.

“Did you discover any leads for us?” Draco asked.

“I looked through the records of the public seminars, but we had many guests and a disorganised sign-in process, so I couldn’t find anything there. But I have a hunch. I remember a group of young men. They spoke of Hogwarts, and can’t have been much older than 20.”

“Yes?” Harry said, eager. “What can you tell us about them?”

“I can do better than tell, Monsieur Potter. Why don’t I give you the memory?”

Excellent. Memories could not be requested by law enforcement, but they could be taken if offered freely.

“We thank you for your generosity,” Harry said, rifling through a pocket of his robes. “I just need to find a form for you to sign and we can take the memory.”

Harry pulled a small something from his pocket and waved his wand to Unshrink it. It was a folder. The front of the folder read, “Releases, Exemptions, Documents, Transfers, Applications, Permits, and Evidence.”


Harry pulled out his wand and Duplicated the form, placing the duplicate in front of Jérémie. “I need you to fill in the shimmering boxes and sign at the bottom.” He rummaged in his robe again and produced an empty phial.

Jérémie Conjured a quill and filled out the form. Then he raised his wand to his temple and extracted a memory, directing it into the phial.

Harry waved his wand at the form and then at the phial. They each glowed red for a moment as Harry magically linked the memory to the release form and to the case.

Harry Shrunk the folder and pocketed it along with the form and the phial. He held his hand out and Jérémie stood to shake it.

“It was nice to meet you, Monsieur Potter. I hope to see you again sometime.”

“You too. Thank you for your help.”

Jérémie stepped towards Draco, his arms out for a hug. Draco smiled and embraced him. He was going to miss working here.

“Je t’enverrai l’antidote directement au Ministère britannique, un hibou prendra trop de temps. Trouve une excuse pour que le Ministère m’engage pour une conférence. Et Anne et moi comptons sur toi pour notre soirée de Noël! Le 19 Décembre!” Jérémie glanced at Harry. “If you like, bring
Monsieur Potter. You can take him to see the lights at the Champs Elysées.”

Draco kissed his cheeks. Of course Jérémie thought there was something between him and Harry.

“Bye, and thanks again. I’ll see you in December, if not before.”

Draco followed Harry into the hall, the door closing behind him. “What now?” Draco asked.

Harry’s face broke into a huge smile. “We go to Hogwarts.”

After a fast (and awkward) lunch at Draco’s favourite spot, Le Buisson Ardent, Harry grabbed a copy of *Le Monde* that had fallen onto the ground next to a bin. They walked into an alley and Harry turned it into a Portkey to Hogwarts.

“It’ll activate in ten seconds,” Harry said, rolling up the paper and holding it out to Draco. “When was the last time you were back?”

“I haven’t been.” Draco grasped the paper.

“Not since the battle?” Harry was surprised.

“Well, not intentionally—I would’ve gone back. But there hasn’t been a reason to. I’m sure it doesn’t come as a surprise to you that invitations to events haven’t been forthcoming.”

Draco felt the tug behind his navel and attempted to quickly fill his lungs with air before he was pulled into nothingness. A moment later, they were deposited outside the Hogwarts gates.

“So what’s the plan?” Draco asked. “We go in and show this memory to McGonagall and see if she knows who these wizards are?”

Harry shrugged. “Yeah. Do you have a better idea?”

“I suppose not.”

Harry pulled his wand and produced a Patronus. “Message for Minerva McGonagall. Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy are at the gates on official Auror business. Can we come see you?” Harry’s stag bounded towards the castle.

“She’s not going to like it if that stag interrupts a Transfiguration lesson.”

Harry laughed. “True. I don’t think she teaches many classes anymore, though. Only N.E.W.T.-level. She says it’s odd, not really knowing the students until they’re sixteen.”

Of course Harry knew all of the Hogwarts gossip, and for some reason that made Draco feel awful and, well, jealous. *He* should have that relationship with Hogwarts. He had loved Hogwarts and his time there, at least before things went to shit. He loved academics. He loved all of the traditions and the barmy castle. He loved showing off. Sometimes it was impossible not to wonder what things would have been like if Tom Riddle had never been born. Draco, Doctor of Potions, age 28, should be in correspondence with his old professors. He should be sending them articles and they should be sending owls about how proud they are of his latest accomplishments. He should be collaborating with Snape on cutting-edge potions research. He should be doing guest lectures in Muggle Studies classes about working with Muggle science and technology in pharmapotions research.

Instead, he hadn’t been back in ten years.
A cat Patronus ran up to the gate. “Mr Potter! What a pleasant surprise. I’ll adjust the wards so you can come through. I can meet you in my office in fifteen minutes. The password is ‘Aberlour.’” The cat vanished efficiently the moment it was done delivering the message.

Not a word about Draco. It couldn’t possibly have been a starker contrast from his return to Jussieu and his warm welcome from Jérémie. At least he knew how to manage these things properly, now.

Harry gestured for Draco to try the gate. Draco reached out, half expecting it to shock him, or for the ghost of Albus Dumbledore to appear with twinkling, disappointed eyes. But it just clicked open.

He held the gate open for Harry and followed him through.

And wasn’t it just fitting that when he finally came back, it would be with Harry? When had Draco ever had an experience at Hogwarts that didn’t somehow relate back to Harry Potter?

Harry was walking up the path, and Draco couldn’t help but admire what the intervening years had done for him. If Draco were honest, there had always been something appealing about Harry, even when he was a scrawny and speccy eleven-year-old, but now he’d grown into all of the idiosyncrasies of his appearance. His wild hair looked somehow fashionable, in the way that people bought a new, highly advertised product from Sleekasy’s called Bed Head. His glasses set off his intense green eyes. His Muggle t-shirts, instead of hanging off his bony frame, pulled tight across his shoulders and showed off musculature that Draco assumed was a credit to Auror training protocols. Harry didn’t seem like the type to exercise in his free time. And his arse… Draco wondered about the dildo Harry had apparently taken from the hate mail and what he—

“Are you coming?” Harry looked over his shoulder, turning those green eyes on Draco.

“Yes,” Draco said, catching up. “Let me ask you a question.”

Harry gave him a wary but amused smile. “Sure.”

“How’d you end up such a feminist? Do you just do whatever Granger tells you, even after all this time?”

Harry narrowed his eyes.

“I don’t mean it like it’s a bad thing!” Draco amended. “I’m just curious.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Because it’s so suspect that it requires an explanation. Well, you pick up your friends’ interests, you know? And Hermione really is right most of the time, and she makes a compelling case in most of her arguments. When I came out, we used to talk a lot about sexuality. I dunno. There’s no big story. It just happened.”

Draco hummed in acknowledgement.

Suddenly Harry turned towards him with suspicious eyes. Draco was uncomfortably reminded of sixth year. “You agree, don’t you? You better not agree with these utter bloody floorboards who sent her sausage pizza?”

“Well,” Draco started, but Harry interrupted.

“Oh my god!” he yelled. “You do! Are you a wizards’ rights activist? Please tell me you’re not. Oh my fucking god, Draco.”
“What? No!” Draco cried. “Merlin, let me finish.”

Harry shut his stupid accusing mouth and waited, still suspicious.

“I largely agree with you, and I think the people who are attacking Granger are absolutely insane. But I don’t agree with everything Granger says. She…” Draco sighed. He didn’t want to make Harry mad. “Things aren’t as clear-cut as Hermione wants them to be.”

Draco watched his step as they walked up the rocky path.

“Like what?” Harry challenged. “Rape is pretty clear-cut.”

“Well, no. It’s not. I mean, if someone Imperiuses someone and makes them have sex, that’s clear-cut. But in some of the other cases? I don’t know. I just don’t think it’s always clear. Merlin, Harry, what about Firewhiskey? What if Hermione and Weasley got pissed—really pissed—and, Salazar help me, had sex? They’ve been together for over a decade, they must’ve had sex at least a dozen times. But if you believe what Hermione says, it’s impossible for a person to give true consent in that case. So is that rape?”

“Well, no, because they have a history and went into it knowingly and they’d stop if the other wanted.”

“Ah, ah!” Draco corrected. “Past consent doesn’t imply future consent. Intoxicated people cannot give consent.”

Harry frowned.

“Whatever,” Draco said, with uncharacteristic casualness, trying not to seem like a zealot. “I agree in general. But Hermione doesn’t help her cause by doing things like making all love potions illegal.”

Harry whirled around. “You think they should be legal?” He was aghast.

“Merlin, Harry! How well has making them illegal worked out for you? It is already always illegal to give someone any potion without their consent! Personally I’d kind of like to try a love potion just to see what it’s like. And who’s to say I can’t?”

Harry tripped. “You’d—you’d want to use a love potion?”

“I’m not talking about this with you. In my view, this is something that someone should talk about and consider and explore only with a committed partner.”

Harry scowled. “You’re such a prat.”

“Would you want to try a love potion, Harry? Or a lust potion?” Draco asked, turning on him with blazing eyes. “Because I know you—you’re an intense person—you’d probably love it. It would intensify all of your feelings and take you out of your worries and anxieties so you could focus on having perfect, hot sex.”

Harry had stopped walking, and was staring with an incredulous and annoyed look.

“You don’t need potions to have hot sex,” Harry countered.

“Who said anything about me needing them? All I said was I’d be interested to try.”

“I meant, like, the general you.”
“Sloppy pronouns again.”

“Oh, fuck you,” Harry spat.

“With or without potions?” Draco said, purposely trying to annoy the self-righteous twit.

At that Harry actually growled, turned away and stormed off towards the castle. Draco sighed and followed.

After a moment, when they’d reached the greenhouses, Harry turned. “You know what I think? I think you, like most middle-aged women, have a thing for Chambrs Cosworth.”

“First of all,” Draco said, starting to enjoy riling Harry up, “how dare you stereotype middle-aged women like that? You’re sexist and ageist to boot.”

“What is it about you that makes me want to hit you in the fucking face?” Harry said, staring directly into Draco’s eyes.

“Second of all,” Draco continued, ignoring Harry, “who cares if someone has a thing for Chambrs Cosworth? You can’t get angry at someone for their desires. Merlin knows, it’s not like we choose our desires.”

Harry narrowed his eyes.

“Personally, as I already told you yesterday, I think Chambrs Cosworth is a coward and an unethical potions master and I would never romanticise him.”

“Of course you can’t get upset at someone for their desires,” Harry said, throwing his hands up. “But you can teach them better by talking about why Chambrs Cosworth is such a pile of Erumpent intestine.”

“Let me ask you something, Harry,” Draco said.

They’d nearly reached the steps to the castle. Harry stopped and turned, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Would you like it if someone forced you to admit feelings you’d been trying to keep under wraps?” Draco leaned forwards. “Would it turn you on if you found that you couldn’t lie—you had to admit your feelings? Would it get you hard if the person you couldn’t admit to yourself that you wanted persuaded you to give in to your desires and then fucked you on the rug until you couldn’t remember that your name was Wynefreed Poffe?”

Harry stood, mouth hanging open, red cheeks, at the bottom of the steps to the doors of Hogwarts. He closed his mouth once, then opened it again.

Draco smirked, whirled around, and walked quickly up the steps and into the castle. Harry could catch up. Draco really wanted to look back and see if Harry was adjusting his trousers, but he wouldn’t give Harry the satisfaction.

In about a minute, Harry had caught up and the two walked in silence through the castle, barely noticing the students in the corridors (had they really ever been so young?) or the Halloween bats and pumpkins that bobbed along the ceilings.

They reached the statue of the gargoyle on the third floor. “Aberlour,” Harry said, and the gargoyle stepped to the side, revealing the circular staircase.
Draco, in a display of uncharacteristic poor manners, pushed forwards to walk first up the stairs. They reached the oaken double door, and McGonagall’s voice sounded. “Come in!”

Draco opened the door and stepped through, wishing now that Harry had ascended first. But McGonagall gave them both a wide smile.

“The prodigal sons,” she said, her mouth twitching.

Harry stepped forwards and wrapped her in a hug; she patted Harry’s back fondly. Harry stepped away and Draco wasn’t sure what to do. He held out his hand.

She shook it with a smile. “I’d heard that the Ministry coaxed you back to British soil. I’d love to hear all about Jussieu and the logistics of their intermagical programmes.”

Draco smiled. He knew a peace offering when he heard it. “I’d love to tell you about it, and I’m happy to be back. Though I didn’t expect to be on a case this soon.”

McGonagall frowned and indicated for them to take a seat.

Harry snapped into Auror mode, which, honestly, was something Draco would never get tired of watching. “An unknown person or persons has developed a new potion that combines the properties of love potion, lust potion, and a Muggle sedative called flunitrazepam.”

She pressed her lips together, a sure sign of disapproval. “That’s what people were hit with at the Ministry yesterday? I saw the papers.”

“Yes,” Harry said, “though yesterday we didn’t know exactly what the potion was. We think they’re targeting Hermione, and maybe Kingsley, because of the new restriction on love potions.”

“That hasn’t died down?” she asked, raising her eyebrows in surprise.

Harry sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “No. In fact, Hermione got dosed with the potion this morning.”

McGonagall’s face went pale. “Is she—”

“She’s fine,” Harry assured. “She’s at St Mungo’s with Ron and Molly and Arthur.”

“Goodness,” McGonagall said. “So what can I do for you?”

“We’ve been to see one of Draco’s professors, Jérémie Dufresne, at Jussieu. He recalled having seen a group of young recent Hogwarts graduates at a public seminar.”

“He is at the forefront of pharmapotions research,” Draco explained, “so I guessed that whoever designed this potion must have been studying his work.”

“He’s given us a memory. We’d like you to watch it with us, and tell us if you recognise the wizards.”

McGonagall nodded, her face serious. “I’ll get the Pensieve.” She stood and walked over to a cabinet.

Harry was fishing in his pockets again, pulling out the phial of Jérémie’s memory and the shrunken folder. He restored the folder to its original size and flipped through the contents until he located a form titled, Time-Limited Contract to Consult: Permission to View Evidence. Harry Duplicated the
form and placed it on McGonagall’s desk.

McGonagall returned, Levitating the Pensieve basin.

“I just need you to fill out this form,” Harry said apologetically.

“Of course,” she said, Conjuring a beautiful peacock quill and making short work of the form. She handed the completed form to Harry. “Shall we?”

Harry uncorked the phial and tipped the memory into the Pensieve. They entered the memory.

They found themselves in a large lecture hall, one Draco had been in many times before, with tiered seating and a large magical blackboard at the front of the room.

“That’s Jérémie,” Draco said, pointing, and McGonagall nodded.

The hall was filled with a diverse crowd of magical people. They were of varying ages and appeared to be from a wide range of places, if their attire was anything to go by. A group of African wizards sat in one row wearing traditional wizarding attire—Draco couldn’t remember which part of magical Africa that type of hat belonged to, and he could almost see the disappointment in his Magical Traditions tutor’s eyes, even though it had been nearly two decades since he’d sat those lessons. He was certain that the headwear and the embroidery on the robes of the group of blond people in the front was Norwegian. Most of the rest of the crowd seemed solidly French, but in the middle towards the back of the hall was a group of quite young wizards who seemed probably British.

Harry had found them, too, and he was nudging Draco in the ribs to point.

“Muggle pharmaceuticals will not affect a potion,” Jérémie lectured in English, “if there is not a magical agent with which to bind.” He waved his wand and a list appeared behind him. “There are five conditions that must be met for a potions ingredient to act as a binding agent for pharmaceuticals.”

“Excuse me, sir,” said one of the young wizards Draco had his eye on, and he was, indeed, British. Harry pointed, trying to get McGonagall’s attention, but she shushed him. “Mr Potter, my powers of observation are as good as ever, I assure you. Stop being a distraction.”

Draco retroactively rescinded every bad thing he’d ever said about the woman.

“If the magical agent is found in a potion in a smaller quantity than is needed for the binding of the pharmaceutical, can the quantity of the agent simply be increased? Or will that affect the efficacy of the potion?”

Jérémie smiled. “That’s a good question. It depends on the magical agent and on the potion. We must calculate a formula that includes a number of variables. We’ll get to that shortly.”

Jérémie started to move on, but the wizard interrupted. “But sir, for example, if moonstone were used as the binding agent.”

“As I said,” Jérémie said, and Draco could tell he was annoyed at the interruption, “we will get to that. Moonstone is an excellent binding agent.”

“But sir, if moonstone were increased ten or twenty times in a love potion in order to bind a pharmaceutical, would that affect the efficacy of the love potion?”
“Likely not,” Jérémie answered, “because the excess moonstone would be bound to the pharmaceutical and, therefore, inert. But I must ask that we keep questions until the end.”

Draco scanned the group of British wizards for their reaction. They each appeared to be studiously taking notes; one flipped through a textbook. One whispered something to the wizard who had asked the questions, and they both smiled.

The memory ended, and Draco found himself back in McGonagall’s office.

McGonagall walked behind her desk from the Pensieve and sat abruptly in her chair. “Godfrey Hilliard, Clement Belby, Oliver Fawley, Thomas Peckham.”

Draco’s eyes widened. He hadn’t expected that to be so easy. “They didn’t even disguise their appearances?”

“Hubris, Mr Malfoy,” McGonagall mused, “is as powerful a drug as those Muggle pharmaceuticals you study.” She snapped her fingers and a tray of tea appeared. She poured them each a cup and took a sip. “They’re Ravenclaws.”

“ Fucking hell,” Draco said, forgetting himself for a moment.

Harry shot Draco a look.

“Sorry—” Draco began, but McGonagall cut him off.

“I quite agree, Mr Malfoy,” She sighed. “Since you are long out of Hogwarts, I don’t mind telling you that I believe Ravenclaws are like Fugu.” At their blank stares, she continued, “The culinary delicacy of pufferfish. Pufferfish are wonderful and healthy, but if they’re bad, which isn’t often,” she paused, “they’re deadly.”

Draco loved this woman more by the second.

“Professor McGonagall!” Harry said, shocked.

“Oh, don’t act so surprised,” she said with a small smile. “We all know that each house has it’s own particular brand of evil. Evil Gryffindors just blow things up without thinking.”

At that, Harry began to laugh. Draco couldn’t help but smile.

“What would Evil Hufflepuffs do?” Harry asked, mirth in his eyes.

“You must know that Hufflepuffs are behind every gang in magical Britain,” she said. “But Ravenclaws can be so calculating.” She sighed. “In any case, let me tell you about these Ravenclaws.”

Draco couldn’t help but notice that no one wondered about the propensities of evil Slytherins.

Harry Conjured a parchment and pulled a dictation quill from his robes. “Do you mind if I take notes?”

“Of course not,” she said. She took a sip of tea. “There was a student named Emilia Stone. She was a Ravenclaw, and she was bright and pretty. She still is, I’m sure—I think she’s working at a foundation in Wales. She came to my office one day to report a troubling encounter she’d had with Godfrey Hilliard.”

McGonagall pressed her lips together. “Godfrey was also a Ravenclaw, one of the top in his year
and a prefect. He was a year or two above Emilia. Godfrey asked Emilia to the Yule Ball, and she turned him down.”

“Oh Merlin,” Harry said with a sigh. “And he retaliated?” Harry was getting worked up now. It was annoying. And adorable. And Salazar help Draco.

“Mr Potter, if you would stop jumping to conclusions and actually let me tell this story.” She fixed Harry with a chastising look, and really, Draco ought to send her a bottle of whisky.

Harry looked like a student caught talking out of turn and smiled for her to continue.

“Godfrey didn’t do anything straight away, though Emilia said she could tell he was angry. A week later, he took away house points in the corridor for some sort of imagined infraction. The next week, he assigned her detention, to be served with him in one of the classrooms.”

“Prefects can assign detention?” Harry asked.

“Technically yes. But they can’t supervise them. So Emilia came to me and reported this, and I cancelled her detention and called Godfrey in. He was—” McGonagall paused, considering her words. “He was defensive. I talked about the rules and abuse of power, and he seemed to think I was in cahoots with Emilia. It didn’t seem right—he didn’t seem right. It seemed like we should do something.”

Harry fiddled with the hem of his robes.

McGonagall continued. “Since the war, we have made Muggle Studies a required course. In the upper years it focuses on cultures and current events. At the time, those lessons were taught by the heads of house, so Filius taught current events to the upper-year Ravenclaws. I asked him if he would focus a lesson on sexual harassment, which he did. Filius came to see me after—it did not go well. Godfrey and some of his friends had spent the entire class pushing back, making Filius and some the women in the room uncomfortable.”

“What sort of things were they saying?” Harry asked, sounding again like an Auror.

“Filius said he would say something about how businesses in the Muggle world are trying to stop supervisors from harassing their subordinates, and then Godfrey would ask, ‘What about the men?’ And they would address that, and then Filius would explain what the Muggle phrase, ‘No means no,’ means, and Godfrey would ask, ‘So a man can’t try to persuade a girl to go out with him? So you’re criminalising courtship?’ Things like that. Filius was displeased with the way that it went, but we weren’t sure what else we could do. We kept a close eye on the group after that, but they graduated not long thereafter.”

“Doesn’t seem like very sound logic, for a group of Ravenclaws,” Draco observed.

McGonagall gave a sad smile. “Logic falls away in times of high emotion, Mr Malfoy,” she said, “even for Ravenclaws. I can only guess they felt threatened, or victimised in some way.”

“Did the students display any other suspicious or discriminatory behaviour? Disdain towards Muggles?” Harry asked.

McGonagall shook her head. “No. Peckham and Hilliard are Muggle-born.” She looked at Harry with curiosity. “It’s been ten years since the end of the war, Mr Potter. Ten years since you were in school. I doubt you even know the things the kids these days say.”

Harry quirked an eyebrow. “Try me.”
“Fuck bloodlines, fancy a shag?” McGonagall said.

Harry’s mouth dropped open.

Draco began to laugh uncontrollably. Harry and McGonagall turned to look at him. McGonagall seemed amused, but Harry fixed Draco with a look that seemed to urge him to act like a professional. Draco managed to stop laughing.

“What says that?” Harry asked, incredulous.

“Everyone, as far as I can see,” McGonagall replied. “An enterprising Hufflepuff named Kit Armstrong put it on stickers—I’m not sure where it originated, but in 2006 every student had one of those stickers. Reminds me of the sixties—make love, not war. Well, of course, we banned the stickers because of the profanity. But then Erica Macmillan, who was a seventh year and had a father on the Board of Governors, prompted an inquiry into whether Hogwarts was sufficiently ‘sex positive.’ It’s not a year that I’d want to relive.”

Harry was smiling now. “So?” he asked. “Is Hogwarts sufficiently sex positive?”

McGonagall raised an eyebrow. “Some changes were made to better serve the student population.”

“A very politic answer,” Draco observed. “Like what?”

“Well let’s just say that prefects are no longer assigned by gender, and Gryffindor tower no longer boobytraps boys trying to enter the girls’ dorm.”

“What?” Harry exploded. “No fair!”

Draco turned to him. “You are almost thirty years old, and last I knew, gay. What do you care about teenage boys getting into the girls’ dorm?”

“I’m bi!” Harry yelled, and then they both remembered where they were and turned to see McGonagall staring at them while she sipped her tea. She looked frightfully amused.

“In any case, gentlemen,” she said, “I don’t think anti-Muggle sentiment has much cultural currency these days. I seem to recall that Godfrey Hilliard and his friends had those stickers, before we banned them.”

“What happened after you banned the stickers?” Draco asked.

“Oh, the students were upset. Some of the Hufflepuffs said we were infringing on their free speech. I told them that they were underage and that Hogwarts was not a sex house. Eventually, Filius got so annoyed at hearing it that he Charmed the castle to rain on any person who uttered the words, ‘Fuck bloodlines, fancy a shag?’ So then the students started saying FBFS.” She sipped her tea. “They think we don’t know what that means,” she said, mirth in her eyes.

Harry let out a small gasp.

“What?” Draco asked.

“I—” he turned to look at Draco. “I think I heard someone say that in my office last week, but I didn’t know what it meant.”

“So out of touch, Potter,” Draco said with glee. Nevermind that Draco was as out of touch.

“I commiserate, Mr Potter,” McGonagall said, “I am fairly sure I heard someone say it in the staff
room last week.”

Harry huffed an unbelieving chuckle. “You’re shitting me.”

“I assure you I am not.”

Harry, face completely blank, stared at McGonagall, who stared back, face serious.

“So that’s what you can remember about Godfrey Hilliard and his crew?” Draco asked. “Anything to know about the others? Godfrey is the ringleader?”

“In fact, that’s hard to say,” McGonagall mused. “They were a pretty quiet group, and I don’t recall the others fawning after Godfrey. It may be that Godfrey was the only one who ended up having a conflict with us.”

Draco nodded and finished his tea.

“Mr Malfoy,” McGonagall asked, “you’ll have an antidote for this potion soon?”

“We should have it very soon. My mentor from Jussieu offered to work out the instructions.”

“And the other people who have been dosed with the potion?” she asked, looking at Harry.

“All but two were Stupefied very quickly, before they could, er, do anything. Until the antidote is ready, they need to stay in the care of Healers at St Mungo’s until the effects of the flunitrazepam wear off. The two who were, er, indisposed…” Harry trailed off. No one really knew what was going to happen with the two who had been having a bit of how’s your father in the Atrium.

“And Ms Granger?” McGonagall asked.

“She was fine when we left this morning,” Harry answered, “a little sedated.”

McGonagall nodded. “I’m going to go see her.”

“I’m sure that’s not necessary,” Harry said politely.

She glared at him sternly. “Ambitious women need to stick together with other ambitious women, Mr Potter. And I care about all of my former students, especially those of you for whom I acted as Head of House. Is there anything I could bring?”

“She seemed to have everything she needs,” Harry said, a little at a loss.

“Very well, then,” McGonagall replied. She waved her wand and a moment later a bottle of whisky came zooming through the air and into her outstretched hand.

“I must advise you,” Draco said, amused, “though I admire your spirit, as it were, Hermione is not allowed to have any alcohol until the flunitrazepam wears off.”

McGonagall frowned. “Very well. I’ll have to bring the whisky another day. If there’s nothing else I can help you with, gentlemen?”

Harry stood. “Oh, no. Thank you for your help.”

Draco stood, mimicking Harry. “Yes, thank you. It’s nice to be back.”

McGonagall turned her gaze to Draco. “Yes, it is nice to see you. Perhaps you’d like to come and
give a guest lecture to our N.E.W.T.-level Potions class? I’m sure they’d love to hear about your work with pharmapotions, and about the career you’ve chosen.”

Draco could feel his chest constrict. “I—” he stammered, “I—yes, I would love that.” He held out his hand, and the formidable woman shook with a firm grip.

That handshake, more than anything else, felt like Draco was back from France. It felt like he was home.

He knew he was smiling like a loon, and refused to look at Harry.

Harry hugged McGonagall, and they walked out of the office.

“So, guest lecture, yeah?” Harry asked, as they headed down the corridor, paper bats swooping over their heads. “I never asked you what you wanted to do when you finished your degree. Do you fancy teaching?”

“Not really,” Draco said. “I mean to say, I like teaching, but there’s only one school in Britain—Hogwarts—and the new Potions Master is nowhere near retirement. Plus, I am not exactly the most patient of people. I rather think I might hate it as much as Snape did, dealing with idiot students day in and day out.”

Harry chuckled.

“I like figuring out puzzles,” Draco said, “and consulting for the Ministry will give me some good puzzles. The rest of the time, I can do independent work. I have research, and I can take on clients. It will be quite a nice lifestyle, really. And if I can do some guest lectures…” he trailed off.

“Honestly, I can’t ask for much more than that.”

“I’m happy for you,” Harry said, but he didn’t sound particularly happy—he sounded…cold.

“Do you begrudge me a successful career?” Draco asked, shocked. “Do you honestly think I still deserve to be paying for my mistakes in the war? That somehow this is too good for me?”

Harry whirled around. “What? No! When did I say that?”

“You seemed really put out that I was happy,” Draco accused.

Harry held up his hands. “I do not want to fight with you right now. We’re supposed to be figuring out why a group of Ravenclaws decided to attack the Ministry with a fucking pharmapotion, not bickering like dueling twelve year olds.”

Draco stared at him for a moment, then shoved his hands in his robe pockets and shook his head, walking away.

After a moment, Harry followed, and they walked out of the castle in annoyed silence. When they emerged out the front doors, Harry turned abruptly left.

“Where are you going?” Draco asked.

“To see Hagrid,” Harry replied. “I always visit Hagrid when I’m here.” Then Harry’s accusing eyes, full of fire, found Draco’s. “You want to say something discriminatory about half-breeds or something? Because honestly, I can’t handle that. You don’t need to come. You can fuck off for all I care.”
Draco narrowed his eyes. “Maybe someday, when we’re about a hundred and twenty years old, you will finally stop expecting me to act like a bellend every other second.”

“Don’t say bellend,” Harry said.

Draco closed his eyes and sucked in a desperate breath in a plea for strength. Then he opened his eyes and glared at Harry. “No, you know what? No. No more creative expletives. Maybe someday you will finally stop expecting me to act like a bellend, you son-of-a-bitch motherfucking cunt twatface knobfucker ass-in-a-hat bastard assmuncher bollocks-fondling bullshit butt-pirate jizz-covered fuckbag!”

Harry, who had been annoyed at the beginning of this web of profanities, had amused eyes by the end. He stared at Draco. “Jizz-covered fuckbag?”

“Yes, let’s go see the half-breed, you jizz-covered fuckbag. I am not going to be discriminatory.”

“Unless you’re talking about fuckbags. You’re happy to discriminate against them.”

Draco groaned and held his hand out to indicate that Potter should fucking go. He did, and Draco followed, still annoyed, dozens more gendered profanities swirling through his mind, should he need them.

Harry led the way through the grass towards the gamekeeper’s cottage, which had been rebuilt after the war. It was larger now, Draco noticed. Harry knocked on the door.

A moment later, the door opened to reveal Hagrid’s huge form. “Harry!” he cried.

Harry smiled, reaching out his arms in an embrace that didn’t even cover the expanse of Hagrid’s front.

Hagrid smiled fondly and patted Harry’s head. Then he noticed Draco.

“Mr Malfoy,” he said stiffly, “what a surprise. Come in, you two! I’ve got tea and rock cakes.”

Harry walked in without so much as a backwards glance at Draco. Draco sighed, supposing he couldn’t much expect anything different, considering what he’d just called him. He wondered the last time anyone had been so rude to the Saviour. Fuck—Draco really had a way of stepping in it, didn’t he?

Harry flopped into one of the enormous chairs around a table. In the center of the similarly enormous table was a Screechsnap plant, the pot of which was decorated with a brown paisley bow.

“I didn’t know you were comin’ today, Harry,” Hagrid said, pointing his wand at the kettle. “What brings yeh here?”

“Did you see about the potions attack at the Ministry?” Harry asked.

Hagrid nodded. “Nasty business.”

“That it is,” Harry agreed. “Malfoy is on the case as the Ministry’s potions expert. We were here to ask McGonagall about some suspects.”

“The suspects are at Hogwarts?” Hagrid asked, surprised.

“No, recent graduates,” Harry said, accepting a rock cake and passing the plate to Draco.
Draco shifted uncomfortably in his too-big seat. He’d never had a social call with a giant before. He took a tentative bite of the cake and—oh, horrid. Hagrid turned to face the hob and Harry quickly pulled his wand and cast a nonverbal spell at his cake. Then he turned annoyed eyes on Draco, sighed, and cast at Draco’s cake, too. Draco took a small bite and was surprised that Harry had managed to make it edible.

Hagrid turned back around. “And how are the people who were hit?” he asked, pouring water into a tea pot. The tea smelled like something Draco hated—lapsang?

“They’re alright,” Harry said with a sigh. “Hermione got dosed this morning.”

“What?” Hagrid yelled, knocking a piece of crockery off a shelf.

“She’s fine,” Harry said, casting a lazy Reparo, “we had an Auror with her, and he Stunned her before she could do anything, er, untoward. But I know. I’m upset, too. Ron, Molly, and Arthur are with her at St Mungo’s.”

Hagrid clicked his tongue in disapproval, pouring them each a truly enormous mug of tea. “How’s Kingsley takin’ it?”

“As well as can be hoped, I suppose,” Harry said.

Draco picked up his tureen-sized mug of tea and smelled. Merlin, but he hated lapsang. Hagrid turned back to the hob to tidy up the kettle and Draco watched as Harry surreptitiously cast at his mug. Draco held out his mug and Harry begrudgingly cast at Draco’s mug, too.


“It can’t be easy for ‘im,” Hagrid said, taking his seat at the table.

Draco sipped his tea, despairing of the inane Gryffindor small talk. Draco hated small talk, and he had no idea how Harry was so competent at it. It was not as if Harry were a small-talk type of person—every time Draco talked to him, they immediately jumped into topics that qualified as whatever the opposite of small talk was. Large talk? Profound talk? Topics that actually required brain power? But Harry was also able to sit at a table in a half-giant’s cottage and shoot the breeze about how difficult it must be for someone to deal with something. Merlin.

“No, I’m sure he’s beside himself,” Harry said, stating the obvious. “And of course there are the political ramifications, as well as the fact that two people were victims of sexual assault on Ministry property yesterday.”

“Terrible,” Hagrid said, sipping his smelly lapsang. “So who are the suspects, or that must be classified, right?”

“Well,” Harry said, “if you don’t mind signing a form, I can talk to you about it.”

“Well tha’s no trouble, no trouble at all,” Hagrid said.

Harry again reached into his robe pocket for the R.E.D.T.A.P.E. folder. When he had it Enlarged, he flipped through for a moment until he located a form called Release of Evidence in Ongoing Case During the Course of an Interview.

Hagrid located a quill that must have been from a hippogriff and filled in the form.
Harry tucked it all away, and then said, “We have reason to believe that four recent Hogwarts graduates may be involved in the development and illegal administration of this potion that you read about in the paper. Their names are Godfrey Hilliard, Clement Belby, Oliver Fawley, and Thomas Peckham.”

Hagrid frowned.

“Did you teach them?”

“O’ course!” Hagrid said, taking a sip of his tea. “Had ‘em in Care of Magical Creatures years three through five. They weren’t the most gregarious of students, were they?”

“What do you mean?” Harry asked, taking a cautious sip out of his mug, which was larger than some Crups Draco had met.

“Well,” Hagrid stopped, thinking. “They were kind of isolated—loners, like. They kept to themselves. Sometimes other students would join their group for awhile, or for certain things, but the four o’ them were always part of it. They were surly-like.”

“Really?” Harry asked, clearly interested. “Do you recall any incidents with them?”

“Not really,” Hagrid replied, biting into one of the rock cakes. “When they were older, I remember seeing them out on the grounds a lot, and they often had those Muggle contraptions with them, those computers. Lap toppers?”

“Laptops,” Harry confirmed. His face scrunched up. “They had laptop computers?”

“Yeah, I definitely remember that. Thought it was unusual.”

“Is that standard among students now?” Draco asked.

“No,” Hagrid said. “It’s gettin’ more common now, but a few years back, almost none o’ the kids had ‘em. Even now it’s not real common. It’s right expensive to get one of the magically charmed kinds that can work in a place like this.”

“What were they using laptops for?” Harry asked, looking at Draco.

“Do I look like a Seer, Potter?” Draco asked, still annoyed about earlier.

Harry rolled his eyes and turned back to Hagrid.

“I’m not sure, Harry,” Hagrid said. “I just remember them out on the grounds during their free time, shading their scroons from the sun.”

“Screens,” Harry said. “Well, that’s interesting.”

From there, the conversation veered into a rambling discussion about the current well-being of every Gryffindor Draco could ever remember meeting. Draco tuned them out after learning that someone named Dedalus Diggle had recently suffered a bout of Scrofungulus.

In all of the thought he’d given to Harry Potter over the last ten years, Draco had never really wondered what Harry was like as an Auror. He knew from reading the *Prophet* that Harry had been successful, rising through the ranks of Aurors very quickly. But one couldn’t tell from reading the papers whether Harry’s ascent through the ranks was due to merit or to the magical world’s insistence on viewing Harry Potter as special. Or maybe it was a political move—it would
certainly look good for the department to have Harry Potter as one of its leaders.

But now that Draco was watching Harry work, he had to admit that Harry was good at his job. Harry interviewed people without ever putting them on their guard. He didn’t overlook small details, he followed protocols, he made good decisions under pressure, he asked the right questions. Draco hadn’t even realised that Harry was planning to interview Hagrid until Hagrid was agreeing to sign the form.

Draco could never do that. And wasn’t that a bit humbling, if not entirely unexpected.

Harry had that kind of personality that just made people want to tell him things. People wanted to serve him tea and chat about the ailments of people neither had seen in over five years. People wanted Harry to listen to them, and to smile at them. They wanted to laugh with him. Draco couldn’t help but wonder whether that was what his reaction to Harry had been all these years. Was he just another person in a long queue of people wanting to have a moment of Harry’s green-eyed gaze? And wasn’t that another humbling thought?

Eventually, after Harry and Hagrid had discussed the pregnancies, deaths, physical ailments, and various other causes of celebration and grief relating to every person they’d ever known in the magical world, Harry finished his mug of tea. (And how had he managed that? Had he Vanished some of the liquid when Draco wasn’t looking? There must have been a litre of tea in there.)

“We’d better be going, Hagrid, but it was so great to see you,” Harry said, picking up his mug and placing it in Hagrid’s sink.

Draco drew his wand and Levitated his own mug to the sink. “Yes,” Draco said, extending his hand, “thank you for your hospitality.”

Hagrid took Draco’s hand in his enormous one and shook, laughing. “I dunno about any ‘hospitality,’ but yer always welcome. Any friend o’ Harry’s is a friend o’ mine.”

Harry hugged roughly one-quarter of Hagrid’s middle, and made some vague promises about coming back soon, and soon they were back on the Hogwarts grounds.

Harry looked happy, really happy, just from an inane chat with a half-giant. And for some reason that made Draco feel like a pile of flobberworm dung—like a jizz-covered fuckbag. Because, really, Harry never looked like that after talking with Draco. Draco didn’t chat.

Salazar. Being around Harry was hard. It made Draco want to run back to Jussieu.

Harry turned to smile at Draco. “See? Always visit Hagrid,” he said. “So computers, eh? What do you think? How much do you know about them? You seemed pretty adept with the magical one in the lab.”

“I—I know how to use them. That is, how to physically operate them.”

“That’s what she said.”

Draco’s jaw dropped open, and he stared at Harry’s stupid face. Harry was oscillating between preposterous joking and sudden anger—it was difficult to keep up. “Are you quite done?”

Harry, unrepentant, flashed Draco a blithesome smile.

“I know how to operate them,” Draco continued, “but I don’t honestly know what Muggles do with them outside of the lab. With their, what is it? Enternets?”
“Internet,” Harry corrected. “And I don’t really know either. I mean, I know how to use it. I have an iPhone and I have a laptop that I use for email and Google and stuff, but I have no idea what Muggles do with their computers. They seem to spend all their time on there, and I know for sure that email is not interesting enough.”

Draco considered. “Probably naked pictures.”

Harry laughed. “Probably.”

They began walking towards the gate, where they could Apparate back to London. The sun was low in the sky—the day was almost done.

“What do you want to come Google these Ravenclaws with me?”

Was Potter speaking another language, or was he botching up the word “ogle”? Because if it was the latter, that was an odd request.

“Excuse you?” Draco asked.

Harry looked at him and laughed. “Google is how you search the internet. Maybe we can find these morons. If not, we’ll have to turn it over to our internet experts at the Ministry, but to be honest I hate handing over cases.”

“You have a computer?”

“Yeah, it’s at my office. Let’s go back to the Ministry.”

“Alright. Let’s Google.”

Harry turned, and the look on his face—for just a brief moment—was blinding in its affection and intensity. Draco smiled.

They reached the gate and walked through.

“Ministry Apparition Point?” Draco asked.

“Yeah. See you in a minute, yeah?”

Draco nodded, and they each spun on the spot, the world narrowing down to blackness, and then—pop!

A battalion of Aurors guarded the Apparition point, wands and instruments drawn, but they recognised Harry, and when Harry grabbed Draco’s bicep possessively—and wasn’t that interesting?—the Aurors parted and they walked through unimpeded.

There were even fewer people in the Ministry today than yesterday, but then, only essential staff were allowed in the building. The lack of people combined with the Halloween decorations gave the place an eldrich feel, like the Atrium was the setting of one of those gothic wizarding novels Narcissa liked, and not an actual place.

“Are you going to the Ministry Halloween party on Friday?” Draco asked, ducking to avoid a particularly enthusiastic jack-o-lantern. “Minister Shacklebolt sent me an invitation.”

Harry, inexplicably, looked haunted by the prospect. “Er, no.”
Draco didn’t inquire further, though he wanted to. They reached the lifts and Harry tapped his foot impatiently.

As they stepped on, Harry said, “Can you believe McGonagall uttered the phrase, ‘Fuck bloodlines, fancy a shag?’”

Draco looked, and Harry’s face was gleeful. Draco laughed.

“That meeting was very…educational. I think that perhaps my younger self underestimated McGonagall.”

Harry laughed. “She’s great.”

“I want to drink whisky with her.”

Harry smiled. “Yes, yes, you definitely do. Drinking whisky with McGonagall is one of my favourite things in the world. Ron calls it ‘Drinks with Min.’ Make sure it’s Scotch whisky, though, not Irish.”

Draco’s face fell at the mention of Ron and the reminder of his outsider-status in England. It was amazing how he could feel happy to be home, while at the same time feeling more excluded than he’d felt in a foreign country with a different language.

(“Level three, Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes, including the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad, Obliviator Headquarters, and Muggle-Worthy Excuse Committee.”)

Harry turned to Draco. “Do you ever just feel like the woman who is saying these things in the lift is a huge bitch who is being really rude by not greeting you personally?”

Was he on potions? Draco did his best to arrange his face in a scowl. “No, Potter. Also, bitch? Gendered cursing.”

“Fuck,” Harry said.

(“Level two, Department of Magical Law Enforcement, including the Improper Use of Magic Office, Auror Headquarters, and Wizengamot Administration Services.”)

Harry strode out of the lift toward his office, and Draco followed close behind. Not that he and Potter were on excellent terms today, but it seemed somehow safer to be closer to Harry while walking through a room filled with unfamiliar Aurors.

“Potter!” a voice bellowed.

Draco turned—it was Robards.

Harry stopped quickly. “Head Auror!” he cried, trying to look cheerful. Draco wondered briefly whether anyone would be able to tell that Harry was only trying to look cheerful, or if that was something unique to him.

Robards walked up close, and hissed in a low voice, “Do you remember the part of this assignment where I told you to check in with me often? I haven’t seen you all day! What have you been doing?”

Harry flashed a repentant grin, then said, “We figured out the potion, the antidote’s on its way, we got admissible Pensieve evidence, and a list of suspects from Minerva McGonagall.”
Robards grunted his acknowledgement, still frowning. “I’m needed elsewhere, but I am getting the full story from you when I get back.”

When Robards had left, Harry continued to his office, glancing briefly at the empty desk where his assistant should have been sitting. When they got inside, Harry closed the door and waved his hand to invite Draco to sit.

Harry sighed as he sat at his desk and looked up at Draco, almost like they were friends. “You could’ve reminded me to check in with Robards.”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “You can’t be serious. If that’s reasonable, then you could’ve reminded me to check whether the pearl dust was colloidal.”

Harry smiled, shaking his head slightly as he reached into his desk drawer and took out a silver computer.

“It’s a—an iBook?”

Harry smiled, and Draco could swear it looked fond. “Close. MacBook. But it’s an iPhone.”

“Why did you get a MacBook?”

Harry shrugged. “It matched the phone. Okay, bring your chair around here so you can see.”

Draco moved closer.

“Alright,” Harry said. “This is Google. You type what you want in this box.”

“A million Galleons, my family name in good social standing, true and everlasting love.”

Harry turned slowly, looking at Draco’s eyes, and then started laughing. “Yes, well. Not quite like that. If I type, ‘Godfrey Hilliard,’ let’s see.”

Harry typed and clicked, “Search Google.”

“Why didn’t you click, ‘I’m feeling lucky’?”

Half of Harry’s mouth turned up, indenting a dimple into his cheek. “Because I’m not feeling lucky.”

A few results turned up, including some Hogwarts alumni stuff.

“There’s Hogwarts stuff on the internet?” Draco asked. “Can’t any Muggle access it?”

“Well yeah, but the Ministry has about a hundred wizards working to implement Muggle-repelling and other spells on the internet. Like with non-digital space, it’s possible to conceal parts of it from Muggles. They can cast Repello Muggletum and other spells on keywords like ‘Hogwarts’ or ‘Muggle,’ or on whole websites.”

“So we can only see this because we’re wizards?”

“Yeah,” Harry confirmed. “I’m surprised you haven’t read about that in the Prophet.”

Harry clicked the first search result. “We’re just looking for…” He paused to look at Draco. “There are, like, code names on the internet. I don’t really know. We want to find some reference to something like that, so we can try to look that up and find his anonymous activity online.”
“Do you think it’s going to be that easy?” Draco asked.

“Well, probably not,” Harry admitted. “But maybe. They’re wizards, too—their Muggle tech skills aren’t likely to be super advanced.”


For a few minutes they read the comments carefully, and sure enough, someone referred to Godfrey Hilliard as “wizthewiz.”

“Google it,” Draco instructed, as if he had any idea what was going on.

Harry dutifully typed it into the box.

“You’re feeling lucky,” Draco urged.

Harry turned with a stony face.

Draco shrugged. “I just want to see what it does.”

Harry sighed and clicked, “I’m feeling lucky.”

Up came a video titled, “He’s the wiz - the wiz!” People dressed in garish costumes started dancing and chanting, “Go see the wiz, the wiz!”

Harry and Draco watched, mesmerised, for a moment. “He’s the Wiz, He’s the man, He’s the only one, Who can give your wish right to ya!”

Harry came back to his senses and urgently clicked to stop it. He said under his breath, “I told you I wasn’t feeling lucky.”

They had to look through six pages of search results before they found something. A link to something called magit.com referred to someone called wizthewiz.

Harry clicked. They began to read, then Harry’s eyes flew away from the screen to lock onto Draco’s.

Fuck.
Thursday October 30, 2008

Hermione Granger stood in front of her wardrobe, trying to decide on a set of robes that would make her look authoritative, but not frumpy—put together, but not trying too hard. She frowned at her clothes. Perhaps she was asking too much of them.

She selected a set of beautiful ivory robes she’d purchased last fall. Ivory was a bit of a bold choice—she would stand out—but you know what? Fuck them all.

A groan sounded behind her, and she turned to see a long freckly leg sticking out from beneath the patchwork quilt on the bed. “Why do we have to get up so early?” Ron mumbled.

“I told you, you don’t need to. I need to get up early because there are going to be a series of meetings today and I need to get in early enough to research the information that Harry sent last night.”

Ron sat up with difficulty, swinging his legs over the side of the bed. “No, no,” he murmured, eyes still shut, “I’m awake. I’m coming.”

Hermione laughed and placed her robes on a chair. She walked up to him, wrapping her arms around his back. He rested his head on her breasts.

“Are you sure you want to go in today? It would be reasonable to stay home,” Ron said, sounding slightly more awake. “No one would think poorly of you for it.”

“The Healers gave me the antidote at 7 o’clock yesterday evening. I’m completely fine now.” She threaded her fingers through Ron’s red hair, brushing it away from his face.

“I know you’re physically fine. I’m saying you don’t have to go in.”

“Meetings,” Hermione said, smiling as Ron wrapped an arm around her back, pulling her closer between his legs.

“Other people could sit in meetings.”

She pulled his head back to look up at her face. “I have to go back to show them that I’m fine, that they don’t rattle me.”

“They rattle me,” Ron murmured.

“You really don’t have to come in with me, though,” Hermione said. “You could come in later, or go to the shop until we need you. Auror Zane is on duty. I won’t be alone.”

“That’s what you said yesterday, and look how well that turned out.” Ron stood, stretching his long arms up towards the ceiling and leaning back slightly until his sternum cracked.

Hermione wrapped him in a hug, and his arms came down to wrap around her.

“Do I smell?” she asked.
Ron leaned down to nuzzle his head in her neck. “Nope. Faintly of St Mungo’s.”

She laughed, and Ron walked into the bathroom. She began to dress, stepping out of the joggers she’d worn to bed. If she hurried, she’d make it to the office before the others arrived, and then she’d have time to research the computer link Harry had written out on parchment and sent over with his owl Nestor. She’d have to tease him for not thinking to send the link over mobile or email. Maybe she should give an interview to one of the media outlets—the Prophet? Or maybe WWN. She should check what their responses had been.

Hermione Summoned a book, the cover of which read “Spellbound Books’ Enchanted Diary, 2008,” flipped open the cover, pressed her wand to the page. “Ask Imogen about stories in the news yesterday and this morning. Ask Kingsley about interview.” Her words appeared on the page and then vanished into the book.

“You want eggs?” Ron called from the bathroom. “Or crumpets?”

Hermione smiled. “Both!”

Hermione stepped off the lift on Level 1 flanked by Ron and Auror Zane. Each of them were holding one of her elbows, and honestly this was getting a little ridiculous.

“Please stop touching me,” she said, as kindly as she could muster.

“Sorry,” Auror Zane said, letting go immediately, but she continued looking around the corridor as if a nefarious potion was about to jump out. Which, maybe it was.

Ron let go, too, but he didn’t apologise.

Hermione walked briskly down the purple-carpeted hall, her ivory robes and her protective crew billowing after her. When she reached her office, her assistant Imogen Booth was waiting.

“Good morning, Imogen,” Hermione said with a smile. “You’re here early.”

Imogen rushed forward to wrap Hermione in a hug. “We were so worried yesterday.”

Hermione tried not to stiffen too much at Imogen’s hug or her concern, though truthfully this was all quite a enough to deal with without having to deal with everyone else’s emotions, too.

“I’m fine,” Hermione said, offering a reassuring pat on Imogen’s back.

Imogen pulled away with a smile. “So happy to see that with my own eyes. You have some little gifts from well-wishers in your office—they’ve been thoroughly checked by the Aurors, so they’re safe.”

Hermione nodded. “Is Minister Shacklebolt in yet?”

“Not yet. No one has been in yet this morning.”

Ding-ding.

Hermione reached into her robe pocket for her diary, and when she opened it, the first page read, “Ask Imogen about stories in the news yesterday and this morning.” She looked up. “Did the Prophet run a story about me getting hit with the potion?”

“Yes. Nothing terrible in it. I’ve put copies of all of the stories and a transcript of what was on
"Excellent, thank you. I am going to try to research something right now before the day begins—
I’m sure it’s going to be non-stop meetings.”

Imogen nodded. “I’ll try to keep people away as long as I can, but I imagine Minister Shacklebolt
will be in before too long. Mr Weasley,” she said, turning to Ron, “Auror Potter asked me to send
you down when you got here.”

Ron smiled at Hermione. “Sounds good. I’ll go to Level 2 and get a report from Robards and
Harry. Call me if you need me?”

“She said, and reached out to squeeze his hand briefly before opening the mahogany
door that read, “Hermione Granger, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister for Magic.” She walked
into her office, leaving Auror Zane in position outside the door.

Blissful quiet. She knew it wouldn’t last, but she’d better use the time to get done as much research
as possible.

Her eyes fell on a pile of gifts on a table near the door. She smiled.

There was a pumpkin carved with a venus symbol, with a twinkling purple light inside it. She
pulled the card off and read “A jill-o-lantern for you. Don’t give up! Love, Susan.”

Next to the pumpkin was a bottle of Scotch whisky. She pulled the card off and read, “Hermione,
Your work is making a difference. Mr Malfoy wouldn’t let me bring this for you yesterday. As
always, owl me if you’re feeling discouraged. With esteem, Minerva.”

Hermione could feel tears prickling behind her eyes. She knew she must be smiling like a loon, and
she was glad for a moment of privacy.

If she was honest with herself, Hermione wasn’t sure if she’d be able to keep going if it weren’t for
the support of people like Minerva McGonagall—people she respected and who cared about her,
who were always there to lift her up.

She picked up a card on the table next to the whisky and opened it. “Dear Ms Granger,” it read.
“Please accept the sincere condolences of everyone at S.L.O.P. We are horrified and saddened at
this illegal use of a potion, and we hope you find the perpetrators quickly. We are prepared to offer
meaningful contributions to help make sure this never happens again. Respectfully, Bertie Popkin,
Society for the Legalisation of Potions.”

Hermione snorted and threw the card in the trash. She sat at her desk, placing her diary to the left
of her computer and her wand to the right of it. She had tucked the note from Harry carefully in the
diary, and she pulled it out now.

_Hermione,

Long story, but Draco and I got a list of suspects in the attack. We looked them up on
Google, and we found this. I will warn you, it’s pretty disturbing. Look for the
username ‘wizthewiz’, we think that’s the username of one of the suspects. I’ll bring
this to Robards and Kingsley first thing tomorrow.

www.magit.com/r/WizardRights

Hope you’re feeling better, and see you tomorrow.

Love, Harry_

Hermione turned on her computer, and a photo of her, Ron, and her parents on holiday in Bondi
Beach appeared on the screen. She clicked to open a browser.

“Hey, good morning,” a voice called from the door.

Hermione looked up. “Hi Susan,” she said with a smile.

“Imogen said you’re trying to work so I won’t bother you for too long, I just wanted to say hi. Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine.”

Susan narrowed her eyes as if trying to decide whether Hermione was lying, or if she had lost all ability to judge her own fineness. “I’m not sure I believe you. You and Ron want to come over for dinner tonight so we can talk about it? Terry is dying to hear about the potion. We’re worried about you.”

“That sounds great,” Hermione said. “And really, I’m fine.”

Susan cocked her head to the side. “Mmhmm,” she said, and left.

Hermione sighed, and turned back to the computer, typing in the url Harry had owled. A page loaded with a list of topics. She narrowed her eyes, trying to take in the unusual format. The topics were flagged with categories: “Marriage/Bonding,” “Discrimination,” “False Accusation,” “Charms, Potions, and Objects.”

She clenched her teeth together and clicked on the first thread, “List of falsely accused wizards.” Her eyes scanned the screen; there were links to spreadsheets of wizards who had been “falsely accused” of sexual assault, rape, or brewing love potions. She clicked back, and under the label “Charms, Potions, and Objects,” clicked a thread titled, “Hermione Granger’s Love Potion Inquisition.” It had 476 comments and 3485 upvotes.

She could feel a chill creep up the back of her neck as the page loaded, and a green circle on the side of the screen read, “403 users here right now.”

At first, it was a lot of nonsense she’d seen plenty of times before—she was a feminist on a mission to discredit all men, she wanted to criminalise natural wizard behaviour, she needed “a good fuck,” she was a misandrist. But then she clicked through to the next page and saw mention of a potion.

*If these “everything is sexist” witches want to ban our centuries-old potions, we’ll just have to make better ones. Have you heard of Blattax yet? Your witch (or wizard, whatever, lol) won’t be able to deny her thirst for your cock after she drinks it*

She kept reading, her shoulders hunched and tensed.

*Wizards, don’t look away! Before we know it, Hermione Granger will have made all sex illegal. We’ll all have to have babies using the Foecunditas spell when she takes away our rights! DIAF*

*We can’t let that happen, mageslag285. Your cock ought to convince her about that, amiright. We need some vid of her choking for it*
That’s the idea, wizthewiz. Blattax her with the cameras snapping. She’s a cunt but I’d not say no to her cunt on video right, did you see that article on AVFW?

*

mage I got into Wideye, pm me, we can try to target anyone who might be buying coffee for the witchist shrew

*

wizthewiz, did you see the new article on AVFW?

She could feel her shoulders tensing. She could feel a cold anger shooting down her spine. Inhale, she thought. Deep breaths calm the parasympathetic nervous system. She closed her eyes and breathed. When she felt slightly more in control, she copied the url and pasted it into an email to Susan. She pushed her chair back, looking away from the screen, her skin prickling with anger, fear, and sadness. She shouldn’t be feeling sad; these idiots shouldn’t be able to get to her. But they had.

On top of everything else, Hermione felt daft—she hadn’t even considered looking for the potions suspects on the internet. They knew internet usage was growing among magical people. That was why they had a group in the Invisibility Task Force working on legislation to regulate spells cast on the internet. But she had thought people used the internet for research and other useful things, not…this. She sighed—she’d been away from the Muggle world for too long.

Their gall in putting this online was a shock. They must be confident in their ability to avoid detection, which meant that the Ministry’s regulation of the internet was sorely lacking.

There was a knock on the door. She looked up, and Kingsley was standing there. A large paper bat had landed on his shoulder, creating quite an image, as he was wearing elaborately embellished deep purple robes. She heard her diary sound ding-ding. She glanced at it quickly, “Ask Kingsley about interview.”

“Good morning, Minister.”

“Hermione,” he said with a blinding smile. “You’re a welcome sight this morning—it’s good to have you back.”

She smiled. Kingsley was a good Minister, and kind. He didn’t always have the most nuanced understanding of issues, but he always listened and considered what she had to say. People generally trusted him, and they respected his history as an Auror and war hero and his inside knowledge of security issues. She was grateful to work for him every day.

“Have you seen the information that Harry found on the internet?” Hermione asked.

His smile faded into a frown. “Yes, I was just talking with Robards. He’s going to send Harry and Malfoy up so you can research this organisation they mentioned—did you see? A.V.F.W.?”

“Yes, but I haven’t had a chance to look it up.”

“A Voice For Wizards,” Kingsley said ruefully. “I wasn’t aware we didn’t have a voice. I thought my voice was fairly powerful, but apparently I was wrong.”

Hermione crinkled her nose. “Alright. We can research it.”
“Excellent! I’ll send Susan in, too,” Kingsley said. “Let’s see if we can’t find any more information about these potions attacks. Blattax, they’re calling it?”

“Looks like it, sir.”

“Alright, I’ll check in with you later. I’m off to talk to our friends in the League of Undercover Digital Internet, Technology, and Ethernet Suppression department about working with MLE. This is a disaster.”

“One more thing, Minister,” Hermione said, and he turned from where he’d been about to leave. “I think I should give an interview for damage control,” she said, and Kingsley raised an eyebrow. “To show that I’m okay and that I’m not intimidated. We need to present a calm face.”

“Politically, it makes sense,” he said slowly. “But I don’t want you to feel like you need to do it, if you’re not ready.”

She gave what she hoped was a reassuring smile, inwardly annoyed that people kept assuming she wasn’t ready for what she was telling them quite clearly she was ready for. “I want to.”

Kingsley smiled. “Of course you do. Have Imogen set it up. Maybe on the Lee Jordan Show?”

Hermione smiled. “Perfect.”

Kingsley nodded and left the room.

Hermione walked to the door. “Imogen.” Her assistant looked up. “Can you please get me an interview on Lee Jordan’s show this afternoon? We could do it after lunch. No callers, just an interview.”

“Of course,” she said, and Hermione went back to her desk.

Hermione looked up to see the door to her office opening, and Susan entered, carrying her laptop. “Here to research some arsehole wizards’ rights group!” she cried with a little hand flourish. Hermione laughed and gestured for Susan to come in.

“Harry found the people behind the potions attacks on the internet—I just sent you the link. You know that internet legislation you’ve been working on? This group is on there blatantly planning the attacks against me. I guess they assume that we aren’t up on internet stuff and that they’re anonymous? They’re certainly not being very careful about it.”

Susan sat down on a chair in Hermione’s office and clicked on her laptop. “I’m going to read it,” she said, sticking her wand in her hair, which was pulled back in a messy bun.

Robards just sent us up to help research A.V.F.W., Ron said. Be right there.

“Merlin’s beard,” Susan said after a moment, looking up with a look of horror. “Don’t these websites have anti-violence policies?”

“I don’t know,” Hermione said. “I don’t know anything about them. If they were talking on a Muggle website, if the wizards had used Muggle-repelling charms, the Muggle policies and procedures wouldn’t really apply, would they? The Muggles would never even know it was happening. But this looks like a magical website, and we have practically no legislation about this.”
“Yep,” Susan said, balancing her laptop on the arm of the chair and pulling her leg up. “These fucking arseholes. This is exactly why we’ve been trying to get legislation passed.”

“I know. We’re going to need to hire more people for L.U.D.I.T.E.S.,” Hermione said. “Kingsley said he was going to talk to them about interfacing with MLE.”

The door opened and Ron walked in, flashing Hermione a big smile that eased some of the stress she could feel in her stomach. Harry and Draco followed him. Harry quickly approached Hermione, reaching for her hands and pulling her out of her seat into a warm, very-Harry hug.

“It is so good to see you out of a hospital bed,” he said, his face pressed on the side of her hair. “I’m sorry I had to send you that horrible webpage.”

“It’s okay,” she said, and she could almost feel the concern and affection coming off Harry’s body in waves—maybe it was his magic and she could feel it. She could never be sure with Harry. He didn’t like to focus on ways that he was different, but she knew he was even if they didn’t discuss it.

Harry wasn’t letting go—he wasn’t a big casual toucher, but with Hermione, it wasn’t casual. She was probably one of the only people he really touched on a regular basis. She squeezed back, and looked over his shoulder to see Draco giving them a look that seemed almost—pained?

“Are you okay?” she whispered, and Harry pulled back to give her what she assumed he meant to be a reassuring smile, though she was not reassured.

“Good morning, Draco,” she said.

“Good morning, Hermione,” he said stiffly. “I admire your robes.”

“Thank you,” she said, craning her head subtly to try to get a look at Harry. Harry was staring at Draco, as she’d guessed. And what exactly was going on, there? They were like whiplash, constantly vacillating between outrageous and seemingly unintentional flirting and outraged and intentional fighting. Hermione wished she had more mental energy to spend on those two, but this was not a day for extra mental energy.

Hermione sat behind her desk. “Alright,” she said, “so we’ve got to research A Voice For Wizards.”

Harry sighed. “It sounds like some sort of riff on the Little Mermaid.”

Susan, Draco, and Ron stared at Harry blankly, but Hermione laughed. She reached into her drawer and pulled out crisp white paper and her note-taking quill that not only organised information by colour, but also automatically rearranged writing into a logical ordered outline as the writer added thoughts to the page. She woke up her computer and waved her wand to project the image on the screen onto the wall.

She opened Google, and as she began typing “A Voice for Wizards,” Draco spoke up. “I advise against informing it that you feel lucky.”

She looked up, bemused, to find Harry snickering.

She clicked on the first article, titled, “The Truth About Love Potions,” and they all began to read.

_Hermione Granger’s vendetta against love and lust potions relies on a number of lies and assumptions. We will set the record straight in this article._
Statistics show that most instances of non-consensual love and lust potion dosage are perpetrated against wizards by witches. It is not the case in typical love potion use that wizards dose witches and then instigate sexual encounters. Indeed, Hermione Granger’s husband’s shop used to sell love potions under the WonderWitch line, not the WonderWizard line. And if Hermione Granger and the Shacklebolt administration believe that sexual encounters under the influence of love potions are illegal, it is witches whom they should be locking up in Azkaban. Under the current system, witches have much more power than wizards!

Oh, Lord. She hadn’t realised she was on a vendetta. She couldn’t believe she had to keep reading this.

“Haven’t I said,” she addressed the room, “over and over again, that potion-mediated sexual assault is perpetrated against people of all genders and that, therefore, it’s not even helpful to frame this as a witches’ issue?”

“I thought you had that printed on a t-shirt,” Harry said, smiling.

She sighed and turned back to the article. It went on to say that the majority of reported cases of potion-mediated rape were false accusations (“regret-sex incidences”), that people who had been dosed with love or lust potions retain the ability to fend off a sexual attack (“they still have their wands, don’t they?”), that consenting adults should be able to agree to use a love or lust potion, and that the marriage contract properly construed gives spouses the legal right to non-consensually dose their spouse with love and lust potions.

They were an extreme version of the same arguments she’d been having nonstop since she began this, apparently, vendetta. It mostly echoed sentiments she heard from mainstream people, though it was a fringe opinion in this day and age to argue that the marriage contract enabled potion-dosing one’s spouse without express consent.

She was starting to get really annoyed at having the same debates over and over again.

“You know they’re using the statistics that exclude the—”

“Hold on, we don’t read as fast as you,” Ron said, grinning at her, and turning his eyes back to the wall.

Hermione sat back as the others finished reading. She could handle a debate on this in her sleep, not that it would do much good, apparently, as it seemed that no one ever listened to her, anyway.

She glanced at her mobile—there was a text from her mum. “How are you feeling today?”

She texted back, “Feeling fine, lots of meetings today.”

“I don’t think they’re even trying to make a logical argument,” Harry suddenly said, “because this article is just a mess of stuff, almost like it’s just to give talking points to someone who already agrees. They’re like, ‘Wizards don’t dose witches with potions,’ and then one second later they’re like, ‘You can’t have been raped because you had a wand and could’ve protected yourself.’”

Susan hummed her agreement. “You’re right, Harry. They don’t care about logic. They care about making arguments that will rile people up.”

Draco crossed his legs and looked at Hermione. “The argument here about consensual usage is weak, but I haven’t yet heard you make a compelling argument against that point.”
Hermione still wasn’t quite sure what to make of this Draco Malfoy who had returned from France. She knew he’d been making a point of having the “right” political and charitable affiliations, but it was hard to know how much to make of that. She trusted that he was committed to this case, but she wasn’t convinced of much beyond that—like his motivation for wanting to debate her.

“Magical people have been using love and lust potions consensually for hundreds and hundreds of years,” he said. “It’s not just habit, it’s part of our history, it’s part of our lore. By making them illegal, you immediately enrage traditionalists. You essentially claim that all of their use—and their ancestors’ use—was problematic. They’re defensive. They don’t want to hear unnuanced accounts about how all use of love and lust potions is evil. Because they remember the tale of their great-aunt Hilda and her romance with William Brutus something-or-other—that’s Malfoy ancestor lore, by the way—and how they handed out phials of love potion at their marriage bonding.”

Hermione frowned. “That argument is not logical. It assumes that just because something has always been, it has value. But the fact that something has historically been true shouldn’t give it any definitive legal weight, especially in the face of arguments of real harm being done now, today, in 2008.”

“You’re not listening to what I’m saying,” Draco challenged, raising an eyebrow. “I’m saying that traditionalists will think your logic is flawed because they have anecdotal evidence to show that not all use of love and lust potions is evil. They think they can easily disprove your argument, and that therefore everything you say is misguided.”

Hermione was getting annoyed now. “But the reality is that the rational, logical case against love and lust potions is incontrovertible. I am right about this.”

Draco tilted his head to the side a fraction. “So you honestly believe that if you took a love potion and had sex with Weasley here—Circe help me—it would be rape?”

“It wouldn’t be consensual,” Hermione countered.

“And therefore sexual assault?”

“Legally, yes.”

“Even though neither one of you minded.”

“Who’s to say neither one of us minded?”

“Well you’re married, aren’t you?” Draco said. “Therefore you’re willing to have sex with each other.”

“You’ve clearly never been married, mate,” Ron piped up.

Hermione turned in her chair to glare at Ron, and shot a rubber ball at him out the end of her wand.

“What?” Ron cried, grinning unrepentantly, rubbing his head where the ball had hit.

“Don’t listen to Ron,” Hermione said. “But don’t tell me you think rape is a legal impossibility inside a marriage?”

“Of course not, I’m not a cretin,” Draco snapped. “But you still haven’t convinced me that the solution is to ban all love and lust potions rather than inflicting harsher punishment on those who break the law and give another person a potion without their express consent. Hell, make the punishment worse for people who illegally dose someone with a love or lust potion. Lock them up,
for all I care. But making all love and lust potions illegal? It’s a recipe for making enemies of those who have always used them responsibly, or who have dreamed of trying them someday, or who have fond memories of their family lore.”

Hermione was tapping her wand on the desk now, and tiny pink sparks flew out of the end. She looked straight at Draco. “Because they don’t get punished. People come forward and report potion-mediated assault and they are ignored. Magical Britain makes it very clear through its actions, if not its laws, that potion-mediated assault will not be prosecuted.”

“So then change that,” Draco said.

“But changing that is impossible!” Hermione cried. “That would require changing the socialisation of every person in our society. It would require that victims trusted that they would be heard. It would require that law enforcement and judges and Aurors all believed what they were saying. It would require a sexual culture that didn’t assume consent was a mood-killer. It would require a background of people understanding consent and knowing how to apply it to their relationships. It would require all of that at the minimum to actually get people who abuse the law punished. That’s impossible. Changing the legality of the potions is possible.”

“And great job it’s done, too,” Draco said pointedly.

Hermione pressed her lips together, trying to keep a lid on her annoyance lest her unintentional magic proceed beyond the pink-sparks stage. She was presenting a perfectly logical case and Draco was trying to shoot her down with illogical talk about traditions and how people would feel.

He was making an argument that wasn’t based on logic at all! It was based on—politics. Fuck. She was supposed to be the politician.

She sighed and slammed her head back against her chair.

“You know what, Malfoy?” Harry sneered, and oh shit, Hermione hadn’t been paying Harry any attention at all, lost in her argument with Draco as she had been. She opened her eyes and Harry was furious. He must have been getting progressively angrier over the course of their discussion.

Draco turned towards Harry. “What, Potter?”

Oh sweet Merlin’s hard left nipple, Ron said, and Hermione found she agreed.

“Hermione doesn’t need this today. You’re being petulant, and acting the spoilt brat who always gets his way.”

“What?” Draco cried, losing his cool for the first time. “Hermione is smart and I’m engaging her in an intellectual debate about something that she cares about. If I didn’t do that for fear of upsetting her, I’d be a huge bellend—sorry, not gender-neutral, I’d be a huge, oh fuck it I don’t know, toe cruncher—because then I’d not be taking her seriously because she’s a woman! She asked us here to look at this organisation and I’m trying to help!”

“This crazy wizards’ rights group doesn’t even make that argument, Draco!” Harry yelled.

For a moment everyone just stared at each other in silence.

“Well,” Susan spoke up, looking between Harry and Draco, “I feel like I should be wearing my yellow and black tie.”

Hermione smiled and looked at Susan gratefully.
“Perhaps we should take a step back and remember that we’re just trying to get a feel for A.V.F.W.,” Susan continued.

Harry slumped into the corner of the sofa. Draco nodded, as if to indicate that they should proceed.

“It’s alright, Draco,” Hermione said. “You have a point. We should’ve considered the response more carefully, even if I am right—and I am right.” She smiled. “But this group just wants to make it all about wizards, and to morph everything I say into an imagined attack upon them. Right?” She looked around the room.

They all nodded.

“Do you think we should bring in the leader of this group for questioning?” Harry asked. “Who is the leader of this group, anyway?”

Hermione clicked on the “About Us” link at the bottom of the page, and a picture loaded onto the screen.

“Zacharias Smith?” Ron yelled in disbelief. Harry frowned, Draco looked like he was trying to bite back a smile, and Susan began laughing.

“Oh, Circe,” Susan laughed. “It’s just—of all the people to be heading this organisation, of course it’s Smith. Hermione, do you remember when he claimed that Padma owed him a dance at the Yule Ball?”

“I’m just going to slam my head against the desk for awhile,” Hermione said, resting her forehead on the desk. “Fucking Smith.”

“So let’s bring the bastard in and question him,” Ron said, as if he had any power over Ministry interrogations. “Maybe he’s in cahoots with the people behind the potion attacks!”

Susan pulled her legs up to sit cross-legged and said, “This website is not advocating violence or vigilantism, though. I’m not sure what we’ll accomplish by interrogating Smith.”

“Probably nothing,” Hermione said. She looked at Harry. “Would we be casting Stupefies at a manticore to bring him in?”

Harry frowned. “I don’t know. I mean, we can’t hold him, but we can bring him in for questioning. The people who advocated violence did mention A.V.F.W., but that doesn’t really mean anything. I don’t think we’ll find anything from Smith, but it might be worth a try.”

“Alright,” Hermione sighed. “Is it okay if I come to the meeting with Smith with you?”

“Sure,” Harry said, “I’ll just need to send some Aurors to bring him in. Can I send a memo?”

“Sure,” she said, handing him a parchment and quill. “Make it after 2pm, because I’m giving an interview to Lee Jordan right after lunch.”

Ron’s head whipped in her direction. Hermione! Ron objected. It’s too soon, and that’s too much to ask of you.

“I am perfectly capable of handling it,” she said aloud, startling the people in the room who had not heard Ron over the soul bond. She glared at Ron.

Ron widened his eyes as if to say “ooookay,” but he said nothing out loud. He did turn to look at
Harry, as if for backup, but Harry wisely looked straight ahead. Harry had gotten quite good at avoiding their squabbles.

“This is my career,” Hermione said. “I can’t let them win.”

“Alright,” Ron mumbled, but his face was red with frustration and worry. Hermione was never sure what to make of Ron’s concern these days. She understood it—she had just spent yesterday in St Mungo’s, after all—but it was her job, and sometimes Ron seemed to act like it was something he could protect her from.

“So Hermione and I will have a meeting with Zacharias bloody Smith about wizards’ fucking rights after she gives an interview to Lee,” Harry said, sending off his memo and running a hand through his hair. “Let’s get some lunch, we’ve got a busy afternoon coming up.”

Susan stood up. “Let me know if you need me later, but I have to run and have a meeting with D.A.P.P.E.R. about the party tomorrow.”

Hermione smiled and waved her out.

Harry groaned. “I wish everyone would shut up about the bloody party.”

“Why do you have your wand in such a twist about the Halloween party?” Draco asked.

Harry’s face contorted into an expression that recalled some kind of injured wildlife.

Ron, however, perked up. “Oh! Oh! Malfoy doesn’t know about the party last year!”

Harry’s eyes narrowed, but Ron continued. “So when you enter the party, you walk through a bewitched doorway that Transfigures your clothes into a costume. Last year, the magic turned Harry into Cupid and he had to walk around half naked. He had, like, a quiver and wings, but no shirt. It was bloody brilliant. Hilarious.”

Draco’s mouth dropped open in an expression of pure joy, but before he could say anything, Harry rounded on him with a pointing finger. “Don’t say a word. I am still mad at you about—something. Making Hermione’s morning difficult. Don’t even try to take the piss about that stupid fucker Cupid.”

“Harry, we told you that D.A.P.P.E.R. adjusted the magic to make sure there’s less skin exposure,” Hermione said, trying not to smile.

“It’s still going to turn me into, like, I don’t know—a stripper? A sexy construction worker? Blimey, I don’t even know Hermione—I just know it’s not going to be good!” And with that, Harry flopped back onto the sofa.

With a wave of her wand, Hermione Summoned hers and Ron’s lunches that they’d brought from home, and Harry pulled a Shrunken lunch from his robes.

“Are we not going out for lunch?” Draco asked, sounding awkward and eminently polite.

“Molly made us tamper-proof lunches,” Harry muttered. “They’re warded.”

“Weasley’s mother made all of you warded lunches?” Draco asked.

Hermione was about to offer to go out with Draco, even though she really shouldn’t because of the whole being-a-target-of-a-major-potions-attack thing, when Harry spoke up. “I brought you one,”
he said quietly. “But if you’re going to take the piss about the lunches being warded or something, I’ll bloody well keep it for myself.”

Draco sat down, folding his hands on his lap. “I would like—thank you.” He looked like the politeness cost him quite a bit of energy.

Harry, his face as pinched as Draco’s, pulled out a second warded lunch and Levitated it until it was floating in front of Draco’s sternum.

*Mother of Merlin, Ron said. Could these two be any more awkward?*

Hermione attempted to smother her grin by focusing on waving her wand at her lunch.

A moment later, Hermione looked up to find Draco holding his lunch. “How do I dismantle the wards?” he asked stiltedly.

“Oh,” Harry said. “You won’t be able to. Unless you marry into the family. I mean. It’s a kind of family ward. I’ll do I for you.”

“What?” Draco asked, clearly confused. “You’re not in their family.”

“Oh, well. After the war, Molly and Arthur officially adopted me. Because, you know. Um. In case of emergencies, and medical proxies, and stuff.”

Hermione picked up half of a sandwich, Charmed against sogginess, and watched the proceedings with interest.

*This is better than a WWN programme, she said to Ron.*

Draco’s face had taken on a suddenly weary expression. He sighed, holding the lunch out towards Harry. “Of course. Blood before,” he waved his hand around vaguely, “whatever.” He seemed annoyed, but mostly resigned.

Harry’s brow crinkled as he stared at Draco, but eventually he just waved his wand to un-ward Draco’s lunch, and turned to his own.

“Well,” Harry said awkwardly, “I love these biscuits!”

The next few minutes were spent in tense silence, as the sound of un-soggy sandwiches and crisp chocolate biscuits being eaten filled the office.

Imogen knocked on the door. “Ms Granger, the Aurors have delivered your mail.” She walked across the office, glancing at the silent eaters, and placed them on the desk.

“Thank you!” Hermione said, after swallowing a large bite of sandwich. She opened the first card; on the front, a cute little crup sat in front of a huge pile of bones. As she watched, the crup wagged its tails, ran forward and picked a bone off the pile and settled in to chew it, pressing one paw onto the bone to hold it in place. She opened the card—the inside read, “Don’t give up!” Scrawled underneath was a message. “Hermione, We love you, stay safe. Love, Parvati and Lavender.”

Hermione smiled and handed the card to Ron, who used one finger to scratch the crup’s head. The crup looked at Ron, tilted its head, and went back to chewing the bone. Ron passed the card to Harry, who chuckled and passed it to Draco. Draco stared at it like he had no idea what they expected him to do with it or say about it.
Hermione, amused, grabbed the next item off the pile. This parchment looked more official.

Dear Ms Granger,

We are writing as a courtesy to inform you that we, the Magical Sex Workers’ Rights Federation, have filed a formal complaint with the Wizengamot and will be presenting our case in a feature spread in an upcoming issue of Witch Weekly.

Sex work has long been stigmatised and misunderstood by the broader witches’ rights movement. You and other members of the sexual assault prevention community refuse to understand the culture of magical sex work. In particular, you refuse to recognise that potions have an important role in magical sex work.

Love and lust potions are necessary to the human rights of magical sex workers. Lust potions are used by magical sex workers and their clients. By criminalising this important facet of sex work, your policies are forcing sex workers to rely on black market, unregulated products that endanger their health and livelihoods.

Moreover, we would like to point out that by criminalising a practice that has long been a part of sexual relationships, you are making unfounded assumptions about your ability to speak for all well-intentioned people. We speak for those sex-positive magical people who object to the devaluing of our sexual culture and desires.…

Hermione sighed and put the letter down even though it looked to go on for another few pages. She couldn’t deal with that right now. There was one letter remaining.

Dear Hermione Granger,

I was so sorry to read in the paper that you had been attacked with a potion. I thought that, in the wake of that, you might need some encouragement. I wanted to let you know that your work with love potions has quite literally saved my life. My partner had always purchased love potions from apothecaries and had used psychological manipulation to convince me to take the potions because “if I didn’t take the potion, I didn’t love them.” I thought I was in love, I really did. When the potions became unavailable, I couldn’t bring myself to engage in any kind of sex anymore. I hadn’t realised that our relationship was only surviving because of the potions. My partner became violent, and I realised what a toxic relationship I was in. I was able to call MLE and escape from the abusive situation. A few months have passed, and I am still struggling, but life is looking up. Thank you for all you’ve done.

An anonymous supporter
Liverpool

Hermione sighed and ran her hands through her hair. She let out a laugh that she suspected sounded a bit unhinged.

“What’s wrong?” Harry asked, looking up from where he’d been pretending to look at his sandwich while really looking at Draco.

“Nothing,” she said, and tucked the letter into the Purple Folder of Hope.

After lunch, Hermione kicked them all out so she could prepare for the interview with Lee. She knew that he would be fair and wouldn’t try to present her in a negative light, but she couldn’t help being a bit nervous.
She picked up the stack of articles about yesterday’s attack that Imogen had left on her desk that morning.

*Senior Ministry Official Hit with Mystery Potion*, the front page of the *Prophet* read. A photo of her standing next to Kingsley at a charity event the previous year was printed under the headline.

She scanned the article. “Senior Undersecretary Hermione Granger, 29, was subdued by an Auror and brought to St Mungo’s after accidental consumption of an illicitly administered malicious potion. Ms Granger has been in the public eye for her role in the reclassification of love and lust potions as Controlled Substances, illegal to brew, sell, or purchase, under the Decree for the Restriction of Potions Brewed With Malicious Intent or Effect. Head Auror Gawain Robards claims that this event, though unfortunate, reveals the effectiveness of the Auror Force’s protocols in protecting Ms Granger and other members of the Minister’s high-ranking staff.”

Well, that wasn’t too bad. Let them give a platform to Robards to drone on about how talented the Aurors were, rather than the protracted campaign of harassment waged against her.

She flipped through the others—*Granger in St Mungo’s After Illegal Potioning*, screamed one—and thankfully, they were all about the same.

Imogen’s voice sounded in the office. “Mr Jordan and his crew are here.”

Hermione waved her wand to open the door to her office, and Lee Jordan walked in, followed by three assistants carrying a variety of magical radio equipment.

“Oh, sorry, sorry,” the assistant said. “I should’ve asked first. I was just going to cast the *Alta Voce* charm.”

“Excuse me?” Hermione said.

The assistant seemed to notice something had gone amiss. “Our female guests generally appreciate a Voice Lowering charm so that they don’t seem so shrill—”
Hermione held up her hand. “That won’t be necessary.”

That utter cuticle sucker, presuming to cast at her without her consent in order to make her sound less objectionable by virtue of sounding less like a woman!

Lee gave an apologetic nod. “Sorry, most of our guests—”

“Don’t mention it,” Hermione interrupted. And maybe if she embraced masculine modes of dialogue—interruption, say—she’d seem authoritative despite her helplessly octaved voice. She inwardly rolled her eyes. Not everyone could have a voice that was deep and melodious like Kingsley Shacklebolt’s.

“Alright then,” Lee said without missing a beat. He really had the perfect personality for this type of in-the-spotlight career, his voice bright and reassuring. As she considered the pleasant tone of his voice, Hermione now found herself wondering how many charms he was using to make it sound like that.

“I assume we’ll discuss how you’re feeling and how you’re moving forward,” Lee said, settling himself in the chair opposite Hermione’s desk.

“Yes,” Hermione answered. “I don’t want to get into a deep debate about love potions today.”

Lee laughed. “Good! Even with preparation, which I didn’t have time for today, I don’t think I could debate you. Are you ready?” She nodded. “We’ll go live in ten seconds.”

Hermione took a deep breath to try to keep her body calm, though she could feel the flutter of nervousness in her gut.

Lee held up eight fingers. The assistants waved their wands at the magical equipment.

Oh Merlin, Hermione, Ron’s voice sounded. Hermione jumped.

Oi, shhhh! I’m going live on WWN in six seconds!

Ron shut up. Lee held up four, three, two, one.

“Good afternoon, magical Britain and welcome to The Lee Jordan Show! I’m Lee Jordan and it’s Thursday the thirtieth of October, 2008. It’s just gone one pm and we’re coming at you live from the Ministry of Magic. I’m here with Hermione Granger, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister for Magic. Good afternoon, Hermione—may I call you Hermione?”

“Oh course,” Hermione said with a smile. “I’m glad to be here, Lee.”

Lee dropped his voice at least a third of an octave. “Yesterday,” he paused, “you were hit with a malicious potion and had to spent the day recovering in St Mungo’s. Hermione, tell us, how are you feeling?”

“I’m feeling excellent, Lee,” Hermione said, hoping her voice sounded upbeat. “The Healers at St Mungo’s did an amazing job, as always, and I was home before the day was out.”

“I believe I speak for all of magical Britain when I tell you how relieved I am to hear that,” Lee said. “What do you know about yesterday’s attack?”
“It was part of an ongoing attack at the Ministry that began Tuesday morning. Minister Shacklebolt and Head Auror Robards are on the trail of the criminals, and the Ministry is doing everything in its power to protect everyone in magical Britain from the potion attack.”

“And has it been confirmed that this attack is in retaliation against the prohibition against love potions?”

“It has, Lee. It amounts to not much more than a pathetic, violent temper tantrum. Their purpose is to silence me and other members of the administration.”

“And how are you coping?” Lee asked, his voice dripping with sympathy. “This is not the first time you’ve dealt with this type of attack, if I remember correctly.”

“To be honest, it sucks,” Hermione said. She was afraid she wasn’t concealing enough emotion. “It really sucks, and I try not to think about it too much, because I can’t do anything about it. This is my new normal.”

Lee hummed in an understanding manner. “Do you think the people behind the attacks are trying to scare you? To get you to stop working on this issue?”

“How can I give up now?” Hermione asked with a smile. “The reclassification of love potions is done, but there is still an enormous amount of work to be done. I’m not going anywhere.”

“And what keeps you going, Hermione?”

“I try to focus on the tremendous outpouring of support for this work fighting against magical sexual assault. That incredible encouragement continues to inspire me on a daily basis.”

“How do you ever doubt,” Lee paused, letting the word ‘doubt’ echo into his magical microphone, “whether change is truly possible?”

“I never doubt that,” she said, glad for a topic she could answer easily. “Change may be slow, but look at what we’ve already accomplished. Twenty years ago, it was legal for a spouse to non-consensually dose their spouse with a love potion. Ten years ago, the prohibition against administration of a potion without express consent was extended to apply to marriages. One year ago, love and lust potions were reclassified as illegal to protect people from potion-mediated sexual assault. We see slow and gradual change in both the law and in cultural attitudes, and I have nothing but hope for the future.”

Lee gave Hermione a smile, the first of the day that she thought was a real, genuine smile, and then spoke. “Thank you so much, Senior Undersecretary Granger. You and the other victims of the potions attack have the well wishes of everyone at WWN. We will now check in with Gert for an update on the dementor sighting in Cornwall. Gert?”

Thirty minutes later, the WWN had finally cleared out of her office, and Hermione let her head fall back on her chair.

Ron, she spoke over the bond. I’m done with the interview.

How’d it go? he asked.

Fine, uneventful.

Malfory and Harry keep staring at each other when they think the other isn’t looking, and then like
two seconds later they keep snapping at each other. Harry just called him a ‘pretentious pig pickle.’

Hermione laughed. *I can’t tell why they’re angry at each other.*

*Have they ever needed a reason?*

Hermione supposed that Ron was right. *True. Ask Harry where the meeting with Smith is?*

Hermione stared at the ceiling. When she’d been promoted and moved into this office, she, Harry, and Ron had attempted to bewitch the ceiling to look like the sky—an ode to the Great Hall. What had actually happened was that Ron, who had experience with this sort of magic from his work at WWW, had turned half the ceiling into a beautiful skyscape, while Hermione and Harry had gotten a case of the giggles and turned the other half into a scene that sort of looked like a bunch of constellations having an orgy on a Renaissance-style tableau.

She smiled.

*Harry says the meeting is in Interrogation Room 3 in ten minutes, and you should come to Level 2.*

*Be there in a minute,* she replied. *What are you and Malfoy going to do while Harry and I are with Smith?*

*Officially, we’re going to keep researching wizthewiz and the others on that websote. Unofficially, I’m planning to discuss every lover Harry has ever had to see if I can get Malfoy to crack.*

Hermione laughed. *Careful. Hard to tell with Malfoy. He may explode when you try to crack him.*

She stood up, tidied her desk, and tucked her diary into her robe pocket. This morning she hadn’t anticipated that she’d be interrogating Zacharias Smith. She wondered for a wild moment whether she should dig up her old Prefect badge, just for old times’ sake. Probably not. Politicians weren’t allowed to be funny—or vindictive. At least not outwardly.

Hermione walked out of her office, and waved her wand to ward the door. Nadheer stepped forward.

“Nadheer!” she greeted. “I didn’t expect you this early. Where’s Auror Zane?”

Nadheer smiled. “She’d been working twelve hours. I’m rested and ready for duty.”

Hermione called to Imogen, “I’ll be with Auror Potter on Level 2.”

As she walked towards the lift, Nadheer stood next to her, looking especially vigilant after yesterday’s attack.

“Have you heard of a group called ‘A Voice for Wizards’?” Hermione asked in a quiet voice.

Nadheer never took his eyes away from his systematic scanning of the corridor. “Can’t say that I have.”

Hermione sighed. “Seems like they think, I don’t know, that this love potion legislation is somehow taking away their rights? They want to flip the logic on its head.”

Nadheer hummed. “When things are made more equal, the people who are no longer privileged tend to think they’ve been wronged.”
“Isn’t that the truth,” Hermione said, leading the way out of the lift and toward the Auror Headquarters. She saw Harry standing outside his office waiting for her.

“Harry!” she called.

He looked up and without any pleasantries asked, “Do you think we’re going to enjoy this a little too much?”

“What, interrogating Smith?”

“Yeah, I just feel like I need some sort of scolding before I go in so I won’t abuse my power.” His lips quirked into a lopsided grin.

“I can do that,” Hermione said. “Pretend I’m Professor McGonagall, ready?”

“Wait, hold on,” and Harry bent his knees so he was a few inches below Hermione’s eye level. “Okay, go!”

“Mister Potter,” Hermione said, with her best Scottish brogue, “I do hope you understand the weight of your responsibility and the extent to which all of Hogwarts and the Ministry are counting on you to make restrained, protocol-respecting decisions whilst interrogating Mr Smith. Do I make myself clear?” She peered down her nose.

“Crystal clear,” Harry responded. Then he stood and asked in a whisper, “Do you want a scolding, too?”

She nodded, a small smile on her lips.

“Ms Granger,” Harry began, and she wasn’t quite sure who he was trying to imitate because he sounded like a cross between Gilderoy Lockhart (pre-Obliviation) and the centaur Firenze. “You occupy a position of importance in the magical world, and it is therefore your duty to act with comportment and circumspection. You are the representative of justice, and must act accordingly.”

Hermione nodded solemnly, then laughed. “Representative of justice?” she asked.

Harry laughed. Over his shoulder she could see Ron sitting on one of the chairs in front of Harry’s desk, and Malfoy in the other. It looked like they were vying for control of Harry’s laptop, and oh my god—what a scene. Two pure-bloods trying to do internet research.

“Do you think we can secretly surveil the two of them trying to Google?” Hermione asked in a whisper. “Because I am really sad we can’t watch that.” She watched as Draco grabbed the laptop away from Ron. “They’re not going to kill each other, are they?”

Harry, apprehensive, looked over his shoulder. “I’m more worried about the laptop, honestly.”

Hermione laughed and followed Harry down the corridor into Interrogation Room 3. Zacharias Smith sat behind the table, three paper bats circling behind his head just outside of his frame of vision.

“Smith,” Harry said, holding out a hand.

“Harry,” he said, shaking Harry’s hand with his right and then grasping their clasped hands with
his left. “Excellent to see you,” he declared, pumping his hands wildly.

*Oh, sweet Circe,* Hermione thought. She took a breath and extended her hand. “Mr Smith.”

“Ms Granger,” he said, crushing her hand.

Harry and Hermione sat in the seats opposite Smith. “We’ve brought you in today,” Harry said, “in your capacity as the leader of the group A Voice for Wizards.”

“Founder, not leader,” Smith corrected with what some people, not Hermione, would’ve called a winning smile.

“Founder, then,” Harry agreed. “We’ve discovered online activity of the suspects involved in the potion attacks on the Ministry, and the suspects referenced your organisation.”

Smith turned to face Hermione. “I am so glad to see you fully recuperated,” he said. “I wonder if now you’ll be better able to commiserate with the plight of wizards who have for centuries been dosed with love potions by witches?”

Hermione opened her mouth, then closed it. She knew that this group wanted to make everything about wizards, but she hadn’t quite expected that level of…transparency.

“Mr Smith,” she said carefully, “I have always empathised with each and every person who is a victim of a love potion, regardless of their gender.”

“Then why do you assume that witches are the victims of potion-mediated sexual assault, even though we know that love potions are witches’ weapons?”

“Let’s not be hasty,” Harry said, and Hermione thought that Professor McGonagall really would be proud of that.

“I fail to see how I’m being hasty, Harry,” Smith continued like an utter wanker, and fuck it—Hermione had just thought a gendered epithet. Was “wanker” even gendered? Maybe not gendered, but it was definitely about genitalia. And oh Merlin, now she was thinking about Smith’s genitalia. This was the exact opposite of what was supposed to happen by avoiding gendered curses.

“My work on love potions,” Hermione said in a measured voice, “is not intended to be about witches or wizards, but to protect people of all genders, including wizards, from sexual assault.”

“Then explain to me why your last public speech referred to witches to the exclusion of wizards forty-three times.” He smiled in that Hogwarts-debate-society way that made Hermione want to throw something.

“It is true,” she said slowly, trying to choose her words carefully, “that witches are in a relatively less powerful position in our society, and that therefore this issue will affect witches in particular ways, even as we are committed to protecting all people. It is also true, according to the best statistics available, that witches who illegally dose wizards with love potions are less likely to commit sexual assault.”

“You actually think that witches aren’t having sex with wizards once they dose them with the potion? And then they end up pregnant and the wizards have no say about the future of their progeny.”

“That is a crime and that is exactly what we’re trying to prevent,” Hermione said, starting to get exasperated. “No one should be getting pregnant or doing any impregnating whilst under the
influence of a love potion. The goal is to stop that from happening altogether.”

“But wizards have been using love potions responsibly for centuries,” he said, without missing a beat. “We can’t take away that right.”

“But you just said—” Harry started.

“You can’t think you can just take away our rights like that, Ms Granger. Treating half of the magical population, the stronger half at that, with too much continuing disregard is not a very good idea. Thinking they will never come out swinging is a stupid, stupid way to go. Of course, we at A.V.F.W. would never advocate violence, and the potion attack is an unfortunate outcome perpetrated by people on the fringe.”

“So wizards should be able to administer love potions, but not witches?” Hermione asked, her neck hot with anger.

“I never said that,” Smith smiled. “I’d appreciate it if you didn’t put words in my mouth. In any case, if you’re going to say that love potions are illegal, what’s next? Love potions are used to enhance sex for wizards, and with a stroke of a quill, you took that away. What’s next, we ask? Are you going to take away contraceptive potions, so that we cannot have sex without the worry that witches are trying to trick us into impregnating them? Are you going to outlaw sex toys? I ask you, Ms Granger, how long until wizards are prohibited from personal use of sex toys? How long until I get carted off to Azkaban for a session of personal exploration with a dildo?”

Hermione stared at him for a moment. Smith, infuriatingly, leaned back in his chair, as if to say, “Checkmate.” Hermione, at a bit of a loss, turned to Harry and saw him, also bewildered, staring at Smith.

“Listen, Zacharias,” Harry finally said. “I think we’ve gotten off topic here. Neither Hermione nor the Shacklebolt administration have any intention of prohibiting contraceptive potions or sex toys. We’re here today to talk about the potions attack on the Ministry, and the role of your organisation in inciting that violence. You have a responsibility to act in such a way as will not incite violence in your members.”

“Well that’s an interesting point, Harry,” Zacharias said, putting his hands behind his head and stretching. “A Voice for Wizards does not have members.”

“That’s not relevant,” Harry said, starting to raise his voice. “You put out material that people read, and you have a responsibility to not cause violence. What do you know about these attacks?”

“I don’t know anything about these unfortunate attacks,” Smith said, shaking his head with a little frown on his face. “I so wish I could help you.”

Harry sighed. “Look, Zacharias. Innocent people have been dosed a potion that caused them to get raped. In the Atrium of the Ministry. If you have any information, we would very much appreciate your cooperation.”

“And I very much regret that I am unable to help,” he said.

“Mr Smith,” Hermione said, attempting to coax her voice into reasonable tones, “you’re spreading misinformation on that website. I wish you would take a moment to think about how you’re contributing to the climate.”

For the first time since they started the meeting, Smith suddenly looked annoyed. “You really think that’s true, don’t you?” he scoffed. “Your misinformation,” he said, jabbing his finger in the
air, “is our truth.”

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?” Hermione snapped.

“Wizards are at a systematic disadvantage in this witchcentric society,” he asserted. “A witch so much as says one word, and a wizard can be thrown in Azkaban for rape.”

“That is not—”

“She says he gave her a love potion. How can anyone know if he did? She regrets having sex and invents wild narratives to explain away her responsibility!”

“Excuse me—”

“When actual rape does occur—which it does, unfortunately, though less often than you would have people believe—witches’ accidental and wandless magic can prevent pregnancy, their magic can shut that whole thing down.”

“Mr Smith!”

“In fact, what happens in most of these regret-sex incidences is that potions—if they were administered, and we can never be sure whether they were, of course—increase the enticement of what the drinker wanted all along. The potions might cause the sex, but they don’t cause the desire that undergirds the sex. Moreover, what we’ve discovered is that many witches deliberately drink love potions in order to avoid having to make decisions about consent. Your blame is entirely mislaid.”

Hermione had thought that when people used the expression “to see red,” that it was a metaphor—hyperbole. But no. The entire room was red, Smith was sat in the middle of it like a Muggle image of a devil, and Hermione’s back was flaming so hot that the only explanation was hellfire.

She stood up abruptly, her chair scraping against the floor and giving off an ear-splitting shriek that she thought entirely appropriate as symbolism of the meeting. She turned around, her ivory robes billowing behind her, walked out the door, and used her wand to slam it (not wanting to take a chance that a nonmagical slam would fail to be sufficiently dramatic).

She walked past Nadheer and leaned against the wall outside of the interrogation room. She tried to focus on breathing. The air in the corridor seemed cooler, and she closed her eyes, her ears ringing with anger and the throbbing of blood.

Hermione wanted to believe in basic human kindness and rationality. She really wanted to. She wanted to believe that if everyone had full and accurate information (and the background of a solid education, and nutrition, and healthcare, and all the other things required for basic human flourishing) and came together to discuss an issue, that they could actually listen to each other and come to an agreement of some kind. Sure, there would always be differences—differences were important, too—but she believed that people could come to a basic understanding about what needed to be done.

She had thought, after the war, that a focus on debate and logic would prevent another Voldemort. She had thought that people, disgusted with the senselessness of war and the loss of human life, would look to dialogue and logical discussions about the proper course for the future.

This was why she kept laying out her arguments, step-by-step, logically. This was why she went on WWN and gave interviews to Witch Weekly and the Quibbler and gave speeches to the Wizengamot and to the public. This was why she had agreed to act as the Supreme Mugwump of
the Model International Confederation of Wizards at Beauxbaton last fall. This was why she got out of bed every morning even though she kept getting attacked with sausage pizza, and dildos, and potions laced with fucking roofies.

She had been able to use logic to convince Ron, and George, and Kingsley.

But *that*.

Zacharias fucking Smith sitting blithely across a table, completed unconcerned with the actual, demonstrable harm caused by his words. Completely unconcerned with having a good-faith debate. Completely unconcerned with logic.

If *that* was what she was up against, well. That was another can of worms, as her father would say.

She opened her eyes and walked briskly down the corridor until she reached the stairwell. She could hear Nadheer trailing silently behind her. The stairwell was mostly deserted, as most people used the lifts. Every once in awhile you’d see someone come up the stairs with a number shimmering next to them in the air—a Pedometer Charm. But for the most part, the stairwell was empty.

She sat on the top step and pulled her mobile out of her pocket. It was the expensive kind from the Magical Apple store in Diagon, the kind that claimed to work even in magically saturated places like the Ministry. In reality, it only worked half the time, but she supposed it was a feat that it worked at all.

She pressed the button above the keyboard and scrolled to contacts.

A moment later a voice answered. “Hello?”

“Hi Dad,” Hermione said, smiling at his voice. “Is it a bad time?”

“Never a bad time for you, pumpkin! How are you feeling?”

“I’m totally fine,” she assured. “The Healers gave me an antidote last night and I’m back at work.”

“I’m in good hands,” she said, glancing up at Nadheer with a small smile. “Dad, are people fundamentally good?”

She could hear his sigh crackling as the phone tried to keep its connection through the magic in the air. “I don’t know,” he finally said with a sad laugh. “You want a daddy answer or a grown-up answer?”

“A dad answer,” she said. “I think I already know the grown-up one.”

“Maybe, sweetheart, we just need to assume and believe that people are fundamentally good, even if we don’t think it’s true, because it’s the only way to go on.”

Hermione huffed a laugh. “Like Santa Claus.”

“Exactly,” he said, and Hermione could tell by the tone of his voice that his eyes were crinkled with love and affection. “I believe in Santa. I know he exists, because I am him.”

Hermione felt the tears that had been building up, just in case they were needed, breach the levy of
her eyelids and stream down her cheeks. She watched as the fat drops landed on her ivory robes.

“Hermione?”

She wiped her cheek with the back of her hand. “I love you, Dad. I have to go back to work. Dinner Saturday?”

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world. You call any time you need, okay? I love you, too.”

“See you then. Bye.” She pressed the button to end the call and watched as a flood of hot tears streamed off her cheeks.

Ten minutes later, her splotchy face charmed away with a quick *Tranquillitas Faciem*, one of the charms that had been in constant use in the girls’ dormitory in fifth year, Hermione walked back down the corridor. Nadheer trailed along behind, the picture of professionalism.

Harry was waiting for her.

“You okay?” he asked, concern etched across his face.

“I’m alright,” she said, honestly, knowing that she didn’t have to put on an act for Harry. “What happened with Smith after I stormed out very unprofessionally?”

“He said your hysteria was evidence that you were threatened by what he was saying,” Harry said, his face twisting into a grimace.

Hermione snorted. “What’d you say?”

“I tried to make McGonagall proud and grilled him on his knowledge about the attacks, but he claims to know nothing. Honestly though, I don’t think he was lying. I really don’t think he knows anything. He’s just an utter cauldron fucker.” Harry paused. “Is ‘cauldron fucker’ gender neutral?”

Hermione laughed, a real, bright laugh, and she heard Nadheer snort behind them. Harry wrapped his arm around her waist as they began to walk towards his office.

“Hey, Harry?”

“Yeah?”

“Is everything okay with you and Draco? It’s just that it seems a little…tense? Awkward? Dizzying?”

She could feel Harry’s muscles tense where his arm rested against her body.

“Yeah, yeah. We’re fine. You know. That’s just Malfoy.”

Hermione turned to look at Harry, but his face didn’t give anything away. “Alright,” she said simply, as they approached his office.

Ron stood leaning against the doorjamb. He’d not worn any robes today, and he had his arms crossed across his chest, his strong forearms visible and marred with freckles and scars and Hermione’s chest constricted for a moment with just how much she loved him. Then she noticed one of his long legs was tapping a foot and she wondered what was wrong.

“What happened?” she asked, and before she could process anything he’d bounded forward and
pressed her into a warm hug. He brought one hand to her head and pressed her face into his chest. He smelled like home—both in the sense that Ron was home, and in the sense that he actually smelled like their house, and faintly of the jam they’d put on their crumpets that morning.

“We found some new bullshit,” he said quietly. “It’s just—it’s better when you’re here. I didn’t want to interrupt your meeting.”

“Okay,” Hermione said, “I’m okay.” She pulled away and raised onto her toes to press a kiss to Ron’s lips. She pulled away and Harry patted Ron on the shoulder in an encouraging sort of way. She walked into the office.

Draco sat in the far chair frowning at Harry’s laptop. He looked up and caught Hermione’s eye and looked strange—compassionate? Jesus, what had they found?

“They’re planning to attack the Halloween party tomorrow,” Draco said without preamble.


“With the Blattax potion,” Draco informed. “Well, read it yourself.” He waved his wand, and the screen projected onto the wall.

It looked similar to the webpage they’d been looking at earlier. In the center of the screen,

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There’s a big Halloween party at the Ministry on Friday. It’s a perfect chance to see witches dressed as slags and throw some Blattax into the mix right? We can get footage of HG gagging for someone’s dick, and it’ll be chaos, everyone in costume, no one will know what’s going on, and we can slip right out. PM me, I have PJ
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“Fuck,” Harry said. “Fuck.”

“Why is he talking about his sleepwear?” Ron asked.

Harry paused his outrage to flash Ron a grin. “PJ is a street name for Polyjuice.” Hermione tried not to smile.

“Oh. Fuck. So you cancel the party,” Ron said, sensibly, like someone who wasn’t used to dealing with Ministry bureaucracy. “Right?”

“Not my call, mate,” Harry said. “But probably not. We couldn’t lay a better trap to catch them if we tried. We can’t let that opportunity pass.”

Hermione was still staring at the screen. “They’re quite brazen, aren’t they?”

“I’ve got to call Robards over,” Harry said.

“And Kingsley,” Hermione added.

“Wait, there’s another thing,” Draco said with uncharacteristically sloppy language.

“You really don’t need to see the other thing,” Ron said quickly, “either of you.”

Harry crinkled his brow. “Ron, I’m the Auror in charge of the case, I think I ought to see whatever it is.”

Hermione frowned—Ron knew how much she and Harry hated being coddled. “We’re looking at it.”
Ron sighed and closed the door to Harry’s office with his wand. Draco clicked on the laptop and the projected image changed. It was Hermione’s face, her mouth open—and how had they gotten that photo? They must’ve taken it while she was talking or eating or something—on a naked body, hands grasping toward three men who, naked backs to the camera, appeared to have just covered her in semen.

Harry had a look on his face that was an order of magnitude scarier than the look he’d had on his face when he’d actually killed Voldemort. Draco had his lips pressed together, eyes focused on the floor. Ron was—Ron was so angry that the filing cabinet behind Harry was shaking—it looked in danger of exploding.

Hermione quickly waved her wand and the image on the wall disappeared. She took a breath. “Well. That certainly wasn’t my body. My breasts—well, actually, any breasts that haven’t been magically enhanced—have never looked like that.”

But the others didn’t seem inclined to laugh or make light of it. Or maybe they just hadn’t seen many breasts in their lives. Knowing these three, that was probably true.

The filing cabinet stopped shaking, but Harry and Ron still looked like they could kill without picking up a wand.

“I’m going to kill them,” Harry said, confirming Hermione’s thoughts.

“Hey, remember me,” Hermione said, waving her arm. “The one who’s head was put on a naked body? I’m perfectly okay and not a damsel in distress. None of you get to save me.”

Draco gave Hermione an amused grin, and she was glad to have him in the room.

“That photo isn’t a big deal—it’s the raving of lunatics,” she said primly. “The attack on the Halloween party is another story. Let’s get Robards and Kingsley in here.”

Harry nodded and ducked out of the office, calling for Thurstan to fetch the Head Auror and the Minister for Magic.

Ron let out an enormous sigh and ran both hands through his hair.

“Hey,” Hermione said. “It’s alright. We’re going to catch them.”

Ron lowered his long arms to his sides and looked at her with an expression she wasn’t used to seeing. It looked like pure resignation. “I’m just so angry,” he said. “I can’t believe these arseholes.”

“I know.” She walked up to him and wrapped one arm around his waist. “I was just crying in the stairwell. It’s shitty.”

“It’s shitty,” Ron repeated, and his eyes looked watery.

Draco sat quietly, pretending not to watch them.

A moment later, Harry came back with Robards and Kingsley.

“The suspects in the Blattax case are planning to launch a potions attack during the Halloween party tomorrow,” Harry informed. “Draco, can you put that back on the wall?”

Draco complied.
After a moment spent reading, Kingsley grinned. “Looks like we need to plan for a Halloween showdown.” He looked a bit eager, and Hermione wondered whether he missed the Auror work that he’d traded for a life of politics, negotiation, and concession.

Ron grinned. “Guess you’re going to have to go to the party after all, Harry.” Harry scowled at him.

“All the people at the party…” Hermione said, trailing off.

“Their safety will be our first priority!” Kingsley reassured. “Gawain, surely we can come up with a plan to keep the guests—both the Ministry employees and the notable people who received invitations—safe while we allow these criminals to walk into a trap. Or do you think we need to keep the wizarding public away from the party, with only Aurors posing as party-goers?”

Robards frowned, considering. “I believe we can apprehend the criminals with minimal risk to the party-goers. We can have the Blattax antidote on hand, and we can station Aurors throughout the party. If we told everyone that the party was off—there’s no way we could keep it quiet. Too many people are coming to the party. We can create a plan to quietly apprehend the criminals while keeping everyone safe. The partygoers won’t even know that an arrest has been made.”

“Excellent,” Kingsley responded. “You might need to bring D.A.P.P.E.R. in—to inform them what’s going on,” Kingsley continued. “We may need to adjust the party plans.”

“Should we get rid of the costumes, Minister?” Harry asked hopefully.

“No, no, we can’t do that. People love the costume magic—that’s the whole point of the party!” Kingsley enthused.

Harry’s face fell. “How are we going to deal with the fact that they’re planning to use Polyjuice?” Harry asked. “If it were me planning this attack, I’d be Stunning Ministry workers and posing as them to get into the party.”

“We could set up an identification check at the entrance to the party,” Hermione suggested, “checking magical signatures. We could apprehend them right then.”

“The only things I could charge them with, if we did that,” Robards said, “are criminal impersonation and identity theft. We would have no way to prove in court that they’d been connected with the attacks on the Ministry earlier in the week.”

Kingsley nodded. “We need to apprehend them further into the proceedings.”

“Let me get this straight,” Draco said from behind Hermione. “You want to use a Ministry party filled with the wizarding public to lure a group of criminals, and then allow said criminals to begin committing a potion attack that is illegal on several counts, just so you can catch them in the act?”

Robards, raising his eyebrows, looked Draco in the eye and said wryly, “Welcome to the rule of law, son.”

Harry sighed. “It’s our only choice if we want to be able to arrest them on charges that stick.”

Kingsley nodded. “We can figure out their identities at the check-in, but we can’t let on that we’re on to them or they’ll call off their plans. We can pretend we’re checking Prior Incantato or something that they wouldn’t be worried about getting through.”

“Why on earth would the Ministry be checking Prior Incantato at the entrance?” Ron asked. “It
wouldn’t help party security at all.”

Kingsley smiled and clapped Ron on the shoulder. “Ah, that’s where you’re wrong, Mr Weasley. These criminals already think the Ministry is incompetent. We have the advantage of being able to implement whatever we like—it will look like just another bit of pointless bureaucracy.”

Robards nodded. “So we want people to think we’re checking Prior Incantato while we’re actually checking magical signatures. We’ll need to locate our Aurors who can say the incantation for one spell while performing another spell, and we’ll need to get the legal team on that to make sure we’re not infringing on anyone’s rights.”

“I’m sure we can just write it into the waiver they sign on the way in,” Kingsley agreed. “Something like, ‘By entering the premises, guests waive their right to privacy with regard to their identity and magical signature.’ We’ll bury it on the back of the page. No one will read it.”

Hermione watched as Robards and Kingsley hatched the outline of a plan, and it occurred to her how terrifying they would be if they were using all of the power at their disposal for anything but noble ends.

“So we get them inside the party,” Robards said, nodding now. “We know who they are, but they don’t know we know who they are, and we follow them surreptitiously until they make their move, then we block the attack and quietly arrest them. Best case scenario, the guests never even notice.”

“I want to be part of the team,” Harry said, and Hermione was about to object when Draco said, “That’s a terrible idea” at the exact moment Robards said, “Absolutely not, Potter. You are the most high-profile guest at any event. It would bring down the whole operation.”

Hermione watched Harry’s face fall—he hated to be sidelined, and he hated to be reminded of his fame, so this was a twofold blow—and heard Draco exhale, relieved, behind her. Interesting.

“Gawain,” Kingsley said, “I want you with a team of your best Aurors today, coming up with a plan that details every contingency. At the end of the day I want to see maps of the hall and plans for every possible outcome. I want to see every paper bat and floating lantern accounted for in your plans.”

“Absolutely,” Robards agreed. “Potter, you can help with the planning.”

Harry’s eyes darted to Draco. “Yes, sir. Can I finish up a few things here with the rest of the team before I come?”

“Sure, we’ll meet in Conference Room Four,” Robards said, striding out of the room.

“Don’t worry, Ms Granger, Mr Weasley,” Kingsley said, kindness in his voice. “Tomorrow they will be behind bars.”

Hermione nodded, and attempted to smile, as Kingsley left the room.

“And for every one of them that you put in Azkaban,” Draco muttered, “you’ll inspire ten more, like the hydra’s heads.”

Harry whirled towards Draco.

“What?” Draco implored, holding up his hands in a conciliatory way. “It’s true! These idiots with the photoshorping are probably completely unrelated to the people doing the Blattax attacks.”
“Photo**shop,**” Hermione corrected.

Draco pointed at Ron. “You said it was photoshop, are you trying to embarrass me?”

Ron’s face flushed, and Hermione laughed.

“It’s like the blind leading the blind,” she observed. “It’s *photoshop.* And I hate to say it, but I think you’re right.”

“But that doesn’t mean we should let these idiots get away!” Harry yelled. “So explain to me, Draco, why you think it’s helpful to say that it will inspire more idiots? Do you think we should let these arseclowns attack us without any retribution?”

“Of course not!” Draco yelled. “It’s just a shitty situation.”

“Fucking hell,” Harry cried, slumping into the other chair.

“‘Arsèclowns’ is a good one, Harry,” Ron put in pointlessly, and he reached out to grab Hermione’s hand.

*I’m okay,* she said.

*I know,* he replied, but he squeezed her hand.

“What happened with Smith?” Draco asked, reaching to place the laptop back on Harry’s desk, and Hermione watched Harry’s eyes track Draco’s stretch.

“Smith is a bucket of flobberworm mucous,” Hermione said factually.

“Oh, Merlin,” Harry said, leaning forward on his elbows. “I’d almost forgotten about Smith. What a fucking pile of towering fucking shite.”

“That bad?” Ron asked.

“Let’s see,” Hermione said, holding up her left hand and ticking points off on her fingers, “he said that love potions are ‘witches’ weapons’—”

“Oh, sweet Merlin,” Ron said.

“He said that wizards are tricked into having babies, he said that making love potions illegal takes away wizards’ rights, he implied that it’s perfectly ethical for wizards to dose witches but not for witches to dose wizards, he said that on the off chance that a witch is raped her magic will somehow prevent a pregnancy. Oh! He said that witches can’t be raped because our wandless and accidental magic will prevent it. He said that it’s inevitable that wizards will rise up because they’re stronger. He basically said that witches are to blame with everything wrong with our society.”

Harry sat up straight. “Don’t forget the part where he said that witches deliberately drink love potions because they don’t want to make decisions about sex. Or that he called rape ‘regret-sex incidences.’”

Draco crossed his legs and raised an eyebrow. “How long was this meeting? He said all that?”

“It was jam-packed with horrific comments,” Harry said.

“Did he know anything about the Blattax attack or the attackers?” Ron asked.
“He says he doesn’t, but it’s hard to be sure. I grilled him on it pretty hard, though, and he didn’t say anything. He kept calling them a fringe element and saying that they don’t reflect the views of his organisation. He says he would never condone violence, which is funny, given that his entire website reads like an incitement.”

“I’m sorry I had to walk out,” Hermione said. “I know you don’t like Smith any more than I do.”

“Oh, it’s okay,” Harry said. “He wasn’t attacking me personally the way he was with you. Anyway, it’s my job.”

“Still, I shouldn’t have left you there alone.”

Harry stood and grasped Hermione’s shoulders. With a big smile, he said, “It’s fine. Leave me alone with Smith. Any time I can actually relieve some of the stress on you, I’m happy to.”

Ron walked forward and wrapped one arm around each of them. “We’ll get through this. We always do.”

Suddenly, Hermione heard Draco muttering behind them. “So this is it? The batty plan stirred up by Shacklebolt and his minions? Let criminals into a Ministry party? What if they use a potion to disguise their magical signature? Then you won’t even have any clue how to identify them at the party.”

Draco stood, and began to pace the side of the office, shooting contemptuous looks in their direction every so often. “No one involved in this is being at all logical. Smith isn’t logical. The criminals aren’t logical. Shacklebolt and Robards aren’t being logical. These idiots with the charming people’s heads onto naked bodies aren’t being logical. Harry bloody Potter is not being logical, though that’s nothing new. Even you, Hermione!”

Hermione turned around, taken aback by Draco’s sudden outburst. “I am being perfectly logical!” she maintained. “It’s just that there aren’t a lot of good options. Politics is about choosing between poor options.”

Draco stopped pacing at that, and he leaned against the desk muttering under his breath about getting “back to the lab” and how “potions ingredients are straightforward.”

Harry stared at Draco for a moment, as if Draco were a puzzle he was trying to solve. Eventually Harry turned away from Draco and grabbed Ron’s elbow. “Oh! Mate! I forgot to tell you the best part about Smith!”

Hermione couldn’t quite remember what the best part about Smith was—the only best part she could remember was when she slammed the door on her way out.

Harry turned to her with glee in his eyes. “The sex toys!”

“Oh, yes,” Hermione said, and she chuckled.

“So,” Harry said, “Smith is making some sort of preposterous argument about how making love potions illegal is taking away wizards’ rights. So he’s like, wizards use love potions in the bedroom, so what are you going to take away next? Contraceptive potions? Sex toys?”

Ron began to laugh, and Hermione said, “It was quite the slippery slope argument.”

“Wait, wait,” Harry said, “so he actually says, I swear to Merlin, ‘How long until I’m carted off to Azkaban for satisfying myself with a dildo?’” Harry burst into laughter, and Ron joined him,
grabbing Harry’s bicep for support.

Hermione looked at the two of them and thought of how Smith had looked, sitting at the table, pretentiously uttering the word “dildo.” She began to laugh with them.


Ron threw his head back with the force of his laughter, and Harry almost fell over before he grabbed Ron’s waist to steady himself.

Then, without any warning, Draco launched himself off the edge of the desk at Harry. His face was red with an unreadable emotion.

“Well Salazar forbid someone mention taking away a sex toy, Potter.”

Harry stopped laughing, as if someone had cast Silencio at him, and he turned with a shocked expression. “What?”

“Sounds to me like you have something in common with Smith, Potter! That precious dildo that you absconded with! From the harassers! The harassers’ dildo! Who even knows where it’s been! And you’re perfectly content by yourself with your criminal dildo!”

Harry stared at Draco for a long moment, his features turning stony.

Wait, what? Ron said. What’s going on?

Harry’s face was red now. “Excuse me, are you jealous? And I think I know how to sanitise a dildo!”

Hermione stared at Harry, and then her eyes flitted to Draco, who was now so red that even the tips of his ears were flushed—he put any Weasley to shame.

“JEALOUS? Me!? Why would I be jealous?” Draco shouted.

Oh, Godric, Ron said. It’s happening.

Harry’s face was contorted in fury. “I don’t know, Draco!” Harry yelled—and he was really screaming now, Hermione considered casting a Silencing Spell on the office—“I’m pretty sure you don’t get to be jealous of a fucking dildo after fucking me once and then running back to France the next fucking day!”

Jesus and Merlin, Hermione responded. She cast the Silencing Spell.

Draco laughed maniacally. It recalled the film genre of Muggle psychological thriller. “Oh that’s comical, Harry. I am the one who ran out?” Draco pointed his finger wildly. “I asked if I could stay the night! Are you going to pretend you don’t remember? We weren’t even drunk! Even Hermione Granger, Patron Saint of Consent, would have approved of it! Well, at least she’d approve of the consent element. I’m not sure she would approve of the rest of what we got up to that night.” Draco turned to Hermione. “No offense, Granger—you do seem rather less prudish than I would’ve guessed.”

Hermione blinked and inclined her head in a bewildered yet magnanimous sort of way. “Er, when did you two…?” she trailed off, waving her hand between the two of them.
“In the spring after the charity function at the Ministry,” Harry grumbled, looking remarkably like what Hermione remembered of Vernon Dursley from King’s Cross station. He turned to Draco and bellowed, “Of course I remember! How could you say that!”

Am I hallucinating? Hermione checked.

Nope, Ron replied gleefully.

“I asked you if I could stay the night!” Draco cried, and the way that he punctuated the words—I asked you if I could stay!—conveyed incredible vulnerability and rawness.

Hermione watched as Harry’s eyes widened, as he saw the same emotions she’d just seen.

“You told me you had to go back to France! You said you had a meeting at 2pm!”

“I said I didn’t have a meeting until 2pm and I asked you if I could stay!”

“You were going to leave!” Harry shouted, and he looked an absolute wreck, angry and emotional and defensive.

“Do you remember what you told me?” Draco was pacing again. “You told me that you had to go see Ron and Hermione in the morning.”

Ohhhh, Ron said.

Oh, Harry, Hermione said.

“After the war, I went to all of the fucking events!” Draco yelled. “I gave money to all of the causes! I did everything just how you would’ve wanted me to! I made friends with people I never before would’ve even considered talking to!”

Draco stopped pacing, and his stillness was somehow more menacing than his movement. He crackled with suppressed magic. He was so angry that his face wouldn’t have looked out of place in a carnival house of horrors. “Oh, perfect,” Draco said, and now his voice was quiet and dangerous. “Let’s hear what the Saviour has to say about my actions after the war. Excellent. Go ahead, pass judgment on me, oh juridical one.” He waved his hand in an inviting manner.

Harry pressed his lips together, face red, but said nothing.

“After the war, I went to all of the fucking events!” Draco yelled. “I gave money to all of the causes! I did everything just how you would’ve wanted me to! I made friends with people I never before would’ve even considered talking to!”

“Oh, well done, Draco. Do you want a prize?” Harry hissed. “Maybe I’ll make you a badge.”

“Shut up and let me finish!” Draco hollered. “I did all the ‘right’ things! And then I needed to decide how to spend my life because I didn’t want to sit around at the Manor commanding House-Elves for decades! So I applied myself to academics and got into the programme at Jussieu! It’s the best programme in the world! I couldn’t have done that in Britain! I would know bupkis about pharmapotions if I’d stayed in England! I wanted to make something of myself that didn’t rely on my family name or fortune! So yes, I’m such a coward! A complete coward! Blah, blah, blah, some jokes about the French being cowardly!”

This is really not how I’d imagined this happening, Hermione said.
“I don’t care about any of that!” Harry shouted.

The other three in the room all stared at Harry, because honestly—how could he even claim not to care about all of that?

“I mean, of course I care about that, but that’s not what I’m talking about! It’s irrelevant! You were running back to France!”

“But I had time! We could’ve had sex at least three more times before I had to go!” Draco threw his hands up.

“Fucking hell, Draco, it wasn’t about how many times we could have sex!”

“I never said it was! I was just making a point! You said you had to go see Ron and Hermione!”

“I did have to go see Ron and Hermione! They were being threatened and harassed and I am an Auror and their best friend!”

Draco’s face faltered. He apparently hadn’t realised the love potion debacle was already underway at the time of their tryst. “But I sent you an owl! I sent you an owl a week later! Do you know the last time I sent an owl to someone I fucked? A week later?”

Harry stared, tight-lipped.

“Never!” Draco screamed, throwing one hand up. “Never!”

“What the fuck, Draco?” Harry shouted. “Do you want us to commend you for sending an owl after you fuck someone? Because that seems pretty standard practice, like basic manners!”

Draco’s blond hair actually raised off his head, like his magic couldn’t be contained and had to find any way out of his body. “And you?” he shrieked. “You didn’t even respond to the owl! How’s that for manners? And then you’re going to stand here and lecture me for my basic manners! When you don’t have any!”

Harry crossed his arms over his chest, and a small wind storm—a tornado, nearly—seemed to come into existence right above his head, swirling his hair like a Mr Whippey.

“I was trying to be an adult!” Draco yelled. “Something that you have no idea how to do! I was trying to communicate! But you wouldn’t know anything about that! They should call you the Boy Who Lived to Fail to Communicate!”

“Oh all the sorry Boy-Who jokes I’ve heard in my life, Draco, that has to be the worst!” Harry looked up at the ceiling for a moment. “And I do too know how to communicate!”

“Oh really? Because it seems to me that you have no idea how to communicate without a fucking Patronus. Because you’re so jealous of Hermione and Ron’s fucking soul bond that owls seem too pedestrian to you, is that it? Too mundane? Too prosaic for the Saviour?”

Oh, bloody shite, Hermione, Ron said.

“I think you’re jealous of the Patronus and angry I’ve never sent you one!” Harry cried.

“Well apparently I ought to be jealous,” Draco shouted, “since you seem to have released your bloody stag on every other person in England!”

That’s what she said, Hermione asserted.
“I didn’t respond to your bloody owl,” Harry yelled, “because I couldn’t stop thinking about you and I didn’t want to make it worse!”

_Hmmmmmm_, Ron said.

“You told me during sex—right in the fucking middle of fucking sex—that you had missed seeing me!” Draco’s anger crackled off his arms. “And then you wouldn’t let me stay the night! And you wouldn’t respond to my owl! You’re a—a cad! A scoundrel!”

“I _had_ missed seeing you! _I have_ missed seeing you!”

“No! No! You’re embarrassed! You send Patronuses to everyone under the sun, but you’re too embarrassed to send one to me. Salazar forbid that Harry Potter is seen fraternising with a Death Eater! Shagging one, no less!”

“I am not embarrassed! Draco, I don’t give a damn what anyone thinks about me! Have you seen my shoes?” Harry asked, shooting his foot out wildly. “I don’t care about that. _Fuck everyone_ else. I cared that you were _running back to bloody fucking France_!”

If Rita Skeeter were here, Ron observed, she would _die of heart failure_.

“You talk about France like it was on another planet! Did you forget that you’re a fucking _wizard_, Harry? You probably did! I know how you never remember to cast basic spells for mundane tasks. We have fucking Portkeys, and you can afford it—France is about a one-minute trip away!”

“It’s a long flight for Nestor!” Harry yelled. “He has a weak wing!”

Draco leaned forward. “You named your owl _Nestor_?”

Harry rolled his eyes, then added, “_I have_ missed seeing you.”

“No!” Draco cried. “No! You don’t get to do this to me! Not after completely ignoring me and having utterly erratic behaviour ever since I got back! One second you’re almost flirting with me, and the next you’re blowing up and borderline violent! No!”

“Me?” Harry screamed. “That’s _what you’re_ doing!”

_Well_, Hermione said, _if they start trying to point fingers, we’ll be here all day._

“Seriously, Draco,” Harry yelled, “you walked into the Ministry like you’d never seen me before, as if the last time you saw me your cock wasn’t up my arse! And my mouth!”

_The details are a bit gratuitous_, Ron decided.

Draco pressed his lips together and the effect was somewhat inappropriate outside the context of, say, a vampire costume. “What did you expect me to do, Harry? You kicked me out and didn’t even return my owls!”

_He has a point_, Hermione said.

Draco continued, “Did you want me to waltz into a meeting with the Minister for Magic and walk over and start snogging you? Or maybe launch into a dramatic monologue in which I was the jilted lover and you were the jiltee?”

_That can’t be a word_, Ron said.
“You pretended I didn’t exist!” Draco screamed.

“You pretended I didn’t exist!” Harry bellowed back. He took a breath. “And what was I supposed to do, Draco? YOU WENT BACK TO FRANCE!” Harry growled, and sparks appeared at his fingertips. “I’m not sure if you knew, but it’s like, this whole other country.”

“You fucking arsehole!” Draco shouted. “Well, I moved back! I’m back! I moved back! I uprooted my whole fucking life for you, and you are a fucking piece of disgorged shoe-gum!”

Nice use of a nongendered curse, Ron granted.

Draco, face set in anger, pushed past Harry and through the door, slamming it magically behind him as Hermione had done to Smith earlier.

The silence in the room was deafening, and Hermione could hear the crackling of the sparks at Harry’s fingertips as they slowly dissipated over a long, wordless minute. When the sparks had snuffed out, Harry’s whole body seemed to slump in on itself, like a week-old balloon.

“Oh, Harry,” Hermione said with compassion and exasperation, reaching out her hand.

Harry jerked upright. “I’m—I’m sorry, I should’ve told you, I’m sorry.”

“Mate, it’s fine,” Ron said.

“No, it’s just. I—we can talk later. I just. I need to get out of here. I can’t be here right now.”

Ron’s brow was scrunched in worried solicitude.

“I’m going to go,” Harry babbled, eyes manic. “I’m going to go get a coffee. I’ll make sure it’s safe—the coffee won’t rape me. I’m going to get a coffee, and then I’m going to go help Robards with the plans for the party tomorrow.”

Harry looked around his office to see if there was anything he needed to bring with him. “I’m going. I’ll talk to you later, okay?”

And with that Harry rushed out of the office.

Ron slunk onto the sofa and Hermione sat next to him. She reached for his hand and threaded her fingers through his long freckly ones.

After a minute of silence, Ron let his head thunk back onto the sofa. “Well,” he said, “this has been a nice, quiet day.”

Hermione let out a low chuckle. Then she turned to face Ron, folding one leg up onto the sofa and tucking her foot under her bottom.

Ron cracked open one eye to look at her and gave her a tired smile.

“Don’t you be afraid, come and take a sip,” she sang, her eyes twinkling with mischief. “Of this steamy, tasty treat!”

Ron groaned dramatically and threw an arm over his eyes.

“What’s in my cauldron full of hot, strong love will make your life complete!”

Ron pulled his wand a shot a cloud of snowflakes at her.
Hermione laughed, dodging the flakes. “I’ve got a cauldron full of hot, strong love!”

Chapter End Notes

Huge thanks to frnklymrshnkly and tdcat for helping me think through Hermione and to tdcat for amazing betaing, as always.

Much of Smith's and A.V.F.W.'s language is taken verbatim from real-life men's rights activists and organizations.

*Alta Voce* is for gracie137.

Come find me at Tumblr.
Friday October 31, 2008

Harry Potter woke up feeling like utter shit. His head throbbed, his eyes stung. He felt like he had a hangover, except no—this was brought on by his own stupidity. If Voldemort was no longer around to sabotage Harry’s life, Harry would sabotage it himself.

He was alone, in bed.

He’d spent the last year in a state of constant worry about his best friends, his anxiety about Hermione and Ron’s safety eating away at him until he felt the last shreds of his sanity and resolve crumbling away.

And then, in the middle of all that, Draco. For a few shining hours, Draco.

They’d both been sat at table 10 at the War Orphans Charity Gala and Harry had actually enjoyed talking to someone—really enjoyed talking to someone—for the first time in months. He’d found himself sitting at that table smiling daftly as Draco prattled on and on about all manner of things, and he found himself telling story after story about Auror training and ridiculous things that had happened in public when his fans got out of hand. And Draco had laughed, his face bright and shining, and Harry had felt lost in it. He’d ignored everyone else at the function to the point of undeniable rudeness, sitting at the table next to his once-nemesis. And as he stared at Draco’s pointy face and blond hair and sharp grey eyes and listened to him talk about his work with the Foundation for Intermagical Science and Technology on finding a cure for Muggle cancer, Harry had realised that the feeling he’d had of something missing was gone, and it was Draco.

And he had completely bungled it.

Harry groaned and pressed a pillow over his head.

He woke up to the sound of Ron and Hermione tumbling through his Floo. Sometimes having amazing friends was a real wand in the eye.

“Harry!” Ron bellowed. “Get your arse out of bed, we brought bagels!”

Harry dragged himself downstairs. He stared at his friends, who had made themselves at home in his kitchen. “Feel free to let yourselves in,” Harry said with a smile.

Nadheer was sealing the Floo. “Good morning, Deputy Head Auror Potter. The Floo is secure, I
will wait outside.” He walked down the hall to the front door, perfectly following protocol. It wasn’t the first time he’d guarded the Granger-Weasleys at Harry’s house.

Hermione looked up from where she was spreading cream cheese. She had on her we’re-not-letting-you-mope face. “You’re up! Can you make the coffee?”

“Sure,” Harry said, yawning. He aimed his wand at the percolator and the smell of the grinding beans nudged him closer to wakefulness. Harry leaned back against the counter, ready for the onslaught.

It was Ron who finally said it. “So you fucked Malfoy.” He didn’t sound accusing or disbelieving—he sounded neutral, maybe a bit amused.

Harry, who was still feeling broody about the whole thing, couldn’t help but relish the chance to fluster Ron. “Well actually, he fucked me.”

But instead of getting embarrassed, Ron, the sneaky chessmaster, turned the tables. “Oh, yeah? Do you want to hear all about how Hermione and I were positioned the last time I went down on her? When was it, ‘Mione, Tuesday?”

Hermione’s face lit up with suppressed laughter. “I don’t know, I think Harry wants to hear about the time you wanted to use the Oscilatio Maxima mode on the dildo.”

Harry scrunched up his nose and held up both hands. “Okay, okay! Point taken! Merlin.” He had no idea if they were having him on, and he absolutely did not want to find out.

“You could’ve told us,” Hermione said, her eyes on the cream cheese.

“I know,” Harry said, Summoning mugs from the cabinet. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know what to make of it, you know? I really thought it was a one-time thing because he was in France. I mean, it was a one-time thing because he was in France.”

“Oh, you are not that daft, Harry,” Ron said, his face written with disbelief. “That posh prat is completely obsessed with you, mate. Merlin’s pants—he’s worse than you were in sixth year about him!”

Harry rolled his eyes at the jab, but his lips twitched into a ghost of a smile. “I hurt him, though,” Harry said, remembering his despondence about the whole situation. “He thinks I rejected him. Somehow I don’t think Draco Malfoy has much experience being turned down.”

Now it was Hermione’s turn to fix him with an incredulous stare. “You do realise that to him it probably seems like you’ve done nothing but turn him down since you first met. Of course he’s a little sensitive about it.”

“Also, mate,” Ron said, “and I say this in the most loving way possible, not everyone is as obsessed with that blond git as you are. I’m sure he’s been turned down plenty.”

“Am I insane?” Harry suddenly asked, waving his empty mug into the air. “Have I lost my mind? Because I haven’t been able to stop thinking about him for months but like, he’s not a good person, is he?” Harry’s tone clearly expressed that he was looking for someone to deny this statement.

Hermione shook her head. “You have to answer that yourself, Harry.” She inclined her head, looking at him with curiosity. “I don’t think you’re insane, though. I think it makes sense.” She waved her wand to send a plate with a cream-cheesed bagel Levitating to Ron. “In fact, I suspected you two would get together before the end of school.”
“That’s true,” Ron put in. “She bet me.”

Harry’s eyes widened, looking between his two best friends. “Hermione!”

“What?” she said, sipping a steaming mug of coffee Ron had passed her.

“You—why didn’t you tell me?” Harry asked.

“That would’ve gone over well,” Hermione said, grinning. “I can imagine it now. ‘Hullo Harry, I know you think you’re straight, and also I know you’re grieving and fighting a war and expecting to die, but I just wanted to let you know I think you really, deep down, want to fuck Malfoy, who by the way is fighting on the opposite side of the war.’”

Harry groaned and threw his head back. “See, it is crazy!”

Ron laughed. “No. It would’ve been crazy if you’d done it then. It’s not crazy now. And anyway, we’re Gryffindors, what the hell do we care if it’s crazy.”

“That’s the problem though, isn’t it?” Harry said, licking cream cheese from his lip. He walked to the cupboard to fetch some capers. “He’s not a Gryffindor. He’s going to run away in some sort of Slytheriny self-preservation ploy. Because he thinks I’m going to hurt him.”

“So don’t ‘urt ‘im,” Ron said, his mouth completely full of bagel, but his face wasn’t mocking. Could it be that easy?

“How do I convince him of that?” Harry asked with a frown.

“How can you possibly think we have any idea how to woo that bastard?” Ron asked. “This is all you, mate. You’ll figure out a way to bag the ferret.”

Harry sighed. “Do you two—what I mean is. Do you approve?” It sounded so dumb when the words came out of his mouth, but he really wanted to know the answer.

Hermione walked up to him and placed her hands on his biceps. “You don’t need our approval. But for what it’s worth, we think he’s probably good for you.”

“Only because the pair of you are totally barmy, mind,” Ron added.


Ron patted Harry on the back as they settled with their half-finished breakfast at the table.

“So it’s Halloween party day,” Ron said, reaching for a banana. “Harry, do you want me to hit your chest with a Depilatio in preparation?”

Harry flicked his wand and Vanished Ron’s shirt.

“Oi!”

Harry spent the morning listening to excited murmurs about the Halloween party flit around the Ministry. Kingsley and Robards had decided to let non-essential staff return to work, since they had a stock of the antidote on hand, but all food service was shut down. They’d put up a notice in the Atrium that said, “No food service available at the Ministry until further notice—do not get dehydrated! An Aguamenti is always safe!”
After sitting at an excruciatingly bureaucratic meeting in which Harry was told that he was not allowed to take part in any of the operation to catch the Blattax attackers because of his status as a “public persona,” Harry walked despondently to the lift while his team of Aurors prepared to execute the operation. He wanted to be working! He wanted the chance to catch these bastards who were after Hermione! He wanted to show Draco that he could do his part, just as Draco had figured out the details of the potion!

What a day. Kicked out of his work because of his fame, Draco furious with him, and about to get dressed in Merlin-knows-what costume.

“Excuse me, sir! Deputy Head Auror Potter, sir.”

He turned around. Eve Zane was following him, an apologetic look in her eyes. “I’ve been assigned as your security.”

It wouldn’t do to get mad at her. It wasn’t her fault that he was being treated as if he weren’t even an Auror. As if he hadn’t killed Voldemort, for Merlin’s sake! Not that he could say that, of course. Somehow the whole having-killed-Voldemort thing was the biggest crock of shit. Every time someone else brought it up, he hated it, and the fame affected his life in a myriad of annoying ways. But if he was ever to bring it up, he’d sound like an insufferable braggart. It was like he got nothing good out of the whole thing whatsoever.

Well….

“Alright, Eve. Let’s do this. The sooner this party is over, the criminals are apprehended, and we’re all safe at home, the happier I’ll be.”

They stepped into the lift and rode in silence to Level 8, where the Ministry Ballroom was located. The lift was piping in ominous organ music with some sort of creepy gulping noises every few seconds. Harry couldn’t believe these fools at D.A.P.P.E.R.—they’d put spooky music playing in the lifts, as if the Ministry hadn’t been on lockdown until today. Spooky music was the last thing the Ministry needed right now.

When they stepped out at the Atrium, a magical fog was swirling along the floor. It quickly obscured their feet.


“Deputy Head Auror Potter?” Eve asked.

Harry turned, noticing her tone. “Auror Zane?” he responded.

“You’re under strict offers to be off duty, sir. The Head Auror tasked me specifically with making sure you enjoy the party and leave them alone.”

Harry sighed, and they walked across the Atrium to the entrance of the party.

There was a queue outside the entrance, and the Aurors had done a good job making the entire setup look unobtrusive. Harry would never have guessed that there was a serious operation underway.

Ron and Hermione stood near the queue waiting for Harry. Nadheer and Bernice were with them, standing guard, but trying to look casual. Harry cringed. If he were a criminal, he would be able to guess Nadheer and Bernice were Aurors in about two seconds. It was the only explanation for their
behaviour unless they were, say, visiting in-laws.

Harry and Eve approached the group.

“Auror Lehri, Auror Taylor,” Harry hissed authoritatively to Nadheer and Bernice, “aren’t you supposed to be undercover? You need to loosen up!”

“And you are not supposed to be working at all,” Eve reminded him.

Harry pressed his lips together to keep himself from opening his mouth again. He glanced at Ron and Hermione. They looked remarkably fine with being here, with being used as human bait in an Auror operation. They looked happy even, standing there with each other; Ron’s long arm draped over Hermione’s shoulder, hanging down in a way that suggested he’d probably been surreptitiously grabbing her breast when no one was looking.

“Are you two ready?” Harry asked, attempting a grin. “What do you think I’ll be this year?”

“I’m half convinced it’s going to make me Wynefreed Poffe,” Hermione said, joining the queue.

Harry laughed. “If it is, you’ll have to have wanton sex in front of the fireplace.”

Hermione snorted.

A witch dressed as something odd—a cauldron?—handed them each a waiver to sign. “Just standard procedure for the wand check we’re going to perform on the way in,” she said in a chipper voice. “You’ll be able to recognise the Ministry workers from D.A.P.P.E.R. because we’re all wearing Beedle-the-Bard themed costumes. So just find one of us if you need!”

“The hopping pot!” Ron enthused, pointing at her.

She flashed him a huge smile. “Yes, sir!”

They each signed the form that they knew would waive all of their rights once they walked through the door. The hopping pot gestured for the first of their party to hand over their wand to Auror Johnson, who stood by the entryway in full Auror robes. Nadheer, who was stuck to Hermione like glue with a determined look on his face, went first. Auror Johnson cast at the wand, returned it to Nadheer, and gestured him through the entryway.

When Nadheer walked through, he became a purple Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Bean. Harry smiled; Nadheer’s determined expression was at odds with his Violet Beauregard appearance.

Hermione was next. Auror Johnson cast at her wand, and Harry was impressed with his colleague’s skill. Not many wizards, and not even many Aurors, could cast one spell while speaking another, but Auror Johnson had a flair for casting. He waved Hermione through. When Hermione entered the ballroom, her clothes Transfigured into a low-cut, sparkling, fabulous gown, with a turquoise collar—immediately recognizable as Celestina Warbeck.

Ron let out a wolf whistle and Hermione indulged him with a dramatic twirl. Nadheer, as bean, watched intently, eyes scanning the room. Harry nearly laughed—a paranoid Every Flavour Bean.

It was Harry’s turn. He handed his wand to Auror Johnson. “Nice work, Auror,” he said, and Johnson smiled, checking Harry’s wand and waving him through.

Oh Merlin, the moment of truth. Harry’s stomach felt cold and tensed with anticipation. Actually his stomach was clenched—he was sucking it in to try to make it look good on the off chance he
walked through and found himself starkers.

Harry took a breath, closed his eyes, and walked through. It…it felt like he was still fully covered in some type of fabric. No suspicious breezes. Good. There was a mask over his eyes. He opened his eyes, peering through holes in black fabric, and looked down with apprehension.

He was wearing tights the colour of his skin, a green, short-sleeved leotard, a red waistcoat sort of thing, and a—yes, that was definitely a yellow cape. He pulled the mask away from his eyes so he could look down for a better look and saw a big “R” embroidered on his left pectoral. Oh, Merlin, he was Robin.

Ron fucking better be Batman. Harry could handle that.

Harry took a few steps away from the entryway and, oh wow, this costume really left nothing to the imagination. He was going to kill the people at D.A.P.P.E.R., even if he wasn’t bare-chested.

Harry reached around his midsection, searching for where the costume had hidden a wand pocket. It was on his right side, by his belt.

Ron came through next and Harry crossed both fingers beneath his cape. Ron, with a big smile on his face (And how dare he smile? How could he be so cocky? Just because he had always gotten respectable and sensible costumes, like a king?), walked through the entryway, and—he was not Batman. He was dressed in flamboyant wizarding robes with a little jaunty cape on the back. Harry had no idea who he was supposed to be.

Nadheer, standing beside Harry, laughed. “It’s Celestina Warbeck’s second husband. See the hairstyle?”

Harry looked back to Ron, and sure enough his hair had been styled into a sort of pompadour. Harry laughed.

Aurors Zane and Taylor walked through next, turning into a red and yellowish bean, respectively. Fucking hell. D.A.P.P.E.R.’s barmy magic was going to give away the whole operation, identifying all of the undercover Aurors by making them look like they belonged together in a box at a shop. Jesus, Merlin, and Circe.

Harry was afraid to look around the room, because he knew that when he did, he’d see someone dressed as Batman. He just knew it. He took a deep breath, trying to recall some of the tips from the anger-management pamphlets that Hermione tended to tuck into his work bag.

Harry as party-goer noticed that the ballroom looked incredible, but Harry as Auror noticed that it also looked like a terrible place for a bust. The floor was covered with swirling, magical fog. The tables were covered with black tablecloths and were decorated with tall, drippy candles. At each place setting sat tins that seemed to be party favours, and magicked spiders crawled around creepily on the top of the table, carefully avoiding the plates and the edge of the table.

Served Ron right for getting a modest costume, Harry thought.

A giant moon hung in the middle of the dance floor taking the place that, at a Muggle party, would be occupied by a disco ball. The moon threw luminescent moonbeams all over the dance floor. Bats, similar to the ones that had been swooping around the Ministry all week, flew around the ceiling, hanging upside down from the rafters and wafting down to delight the party-goers.

Hundreds of large jack-o-lanterns lined the perimeter of the room, floating along in a little procession and slowly spinning around to reveal all sides of their elaborate carvings. Party-goers
kept wandering over to the pumpkins to admire them.

From an Auror standpoint, it was a nightmare. There were people everywhere, and most of them were members of the general public. It was difficult to identify the Aurors, except for those who were supposed to be incognito, whom it was easy to identify because they were dressed as matching confections. The pumpkins would create a terrible mess if they were hit with a stray spell, the bats added confusion to everything, and the light was too dim and the fog too foggy for proper visualisation of the area.

And then there was the music. At the moment, loud music was playing a bewilderingly annoying tune. “Is that the Monster Mash?” Harry asked, and Hermione laughed.

“Sure is,” she said. “You know how important it is to create an inclusive atmosphere. We’ve had a number of meetings with D.A.P.P.E.R. about how to avoid creating a chilly climate for Muggleborns.”

Harry fixed her with a disbelieving expression. “And playing the Monster Mash will alleviate the chilly climate?”

Hermione smiled. “Well not on its own, of course. It’s also about optics.” Then she frowned. “Don’t ever go into politics, Harry.”

A bat landed on Harry’s shoulder, and he instinctively reached to swat it away, but his cape got tangled in his movement and the bat screeched in his ear.

“Gaaah!” he yelled. “I liked these things better when they didn’t talk!”

“I hear you, mate,” Ron said sympathetically, casting an eye towards the tables that were crawling with spiders. But then Ron’s eyes caught the party favours and perked up; he used his wand to Levitate one of the favours off the table. “Check it out!”

Harry took the proffered tin. The lid read, “Scents of Love, by Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes. Complimentary sample provided by the Ministry of Magic.”

“Oh wow, the Ministry ordered these? Must’ve been a huge boon to business,” Harry said, handing the tin back to Ron.

“Do you mind if I smell it?” Ron asked apprehensively.

Harry took a step backward straight into one of the beans. “Go ahead!” he said, steadying himself and apologising to the red bean.

Ron wrenched the lid off and inhaled deeply. His eyes turned a bit dreamy and his face broke out in a big smile. “Want to smell?”

“Nope,” Harry said.

Ron raised an eyebrow. “Alright,” he said in a quiet voice. Ron’s intonation of that simple “Alright” seemed to say a lot more than one word had any business saying. He screwed the lid onto the tin and, with a wary look at the spiders, Levitated it into place on the table.

“Who are you supposed to be, anyway?” Ron asked, grabbing a canapé that looked like an eyeball off a floating platter.

Harry sighed. “Robin.” At Ron’s confused face, he added, “He’s a superhero.”
“Is he like Superman?” Ron’s eyes lit up; he loved Superman. Many a pleasant evening had been spent watching the various incarnations of Superman for television and cinema.

“Kind of,” Harry prevaricated, because clearly Robin was not anything like Superman.

“Oh, wait, he’s the one that goes with Batman, right?” Ron’s eyes were sparkling now, and Harry glared at him.

Just then, Hermione made a sort of strangled sound behind him and Harry thought she’d somehow been hit with the potion, even with three Aurors, Harry, and Ron standing around her in a human barrier.

But when he turned, she wasn’t hurt. She was trying not to laugh. Harry followed her eyes and—of fucking course.

There was Draco. Batman. Draco.

Harry let out a deep sigh of resignation, and he heard Ron utter behind him, “Ohhhhhhh.”

Draco walked over, and fuck it all to hell because Draco looked like a tall drink of water in that bloody Batman costume. And if that was the analogy Harry was using, then Harry must be in a desert because oh sweet, buggering Merlin.

The thing about Draco was, he wasn’t even objectively good looking. He was tall, sure, but he was slightly too thin and definitely too bony. From the side, Harry could see Draco’s scapula jutting out and his pointy chin. His chin was definitely too narrow and his neck was too long. But, just—something about human anatomy that defied classification or explanation made him the most attractive thing in the world. Maybe it was his attitude, or his confidence. Yes, that must be it, everyone always said that attractiveness was about confidence.

But the truth was that right now Draco looked anything but confident. He looked vulnerable.

And standing there in that godforsaken Robin costume, Harry was forced to wonder whether the thing that made Draco so appealing was just that—he was Draco.

He was Draco and they’d been clashing heads since they were eleven and they understood each other’s histories and they’d both faced the horrors of war and the less visible but just as real horrors of surviving a war. They’d both had shit childhoods, and what some people might call “baggage” could also be called “shared experience.” It was the knowledge that they’d each hurt each other in the past and that they could see in each other’s eyes that they didn’t want to do it again.

It was Draco.

In a Batman costume. A Batman costume that clung to his body like a second skin. It was pulled so taut across his chest that Harry was convinced he could see Draco’s nipples, and that caused him to question his own sanity—because was his subconscious manifesting nipples? Maybe he needed a Healer.

But then Draco walked towards their group and, well okay, right, those really were his nipples. On the bright side, that meant that Harry wasn’t losing his grip on reality. On the other hand…

“Hello,” Batman said.
“Hey, Malfoy,” Ron greeted. “Nice costume. You look like a guy that Superman would beat up.”

Draco narrowed his eyes. “Don’t mock me. Who the hell is Superman? Is he like the Great Flipendo?”

Ron grinned. “Yeah, no. He’s not like the Great Flipendo at all. Muggle Superheroes are way cooler. You’re Batman, by the way. Harry’s like your little gay sidekick.”


“So this is…” Draco trailed off, his eyes dragging sinuously slowly along Harry’s body, from cape to bootie. “These two literary characters are…”

“Coworkers!” Harry cried, not wanting Draco to freak out at their coordinating costumes, but then realised he sounded too intense. "They're coworkers."

Ron, in a valiant effort not to laugh, changed the subject. “Malfoy, mate, do you have that Toastmasters Potion?”

Draco nodded. “You’re lucky I had a phial and that I’m feeling generous, Weasley. It’s terribly tricky to brew.” He reached for where his robe pockets would be, but ended up with a handful of cape. “Where is all the stuff that was in my pockets?”

Hermione raised her hand to her mouth to hide her grin. “Check your utility belt?” she suggested innocently.

Draco, with as much of his Malfoy dignity as was possible to retain, unhooked one of the compartments on his utility belt and pulled out a potions phial. He inspected it for a moment, then handed it to Ron.

“Is it labeled, ‘BAT POTION’”? Hermione asked cheekily.

Easy for her to quip, Harry thought—she was dressed in a perfectly respectable costume. She looked gorgeous, actually. She didn’t look like a kitsch 70s crime-fighting superhero.

Bernice, the yellowish bean, jumped forward and grabbed the phial. “I’m sorry, Mr Weasley sir,” she said, “I can’t let you drink that. This entire operation is about potion poisoning.”

Harry whirled around, his yellow cape twirling behind him. “Don’t assume Malfoy is being malicious because of his role in the war. I trust him.”

Draco’s eyes widened.

“Deputy Head Auror Potter,” Bernice said, “I would have said that no matter who the potion came from. How can you even be sure it’s him?”

Harry turned to scrutinise Draco, which was harder than usual, given the mask covering half of his face.

But Harry could recognise Draco’s icy grey eyes anywhere, even through slits in a bat mask. And, funny, those grey eyes didn’t look so icy just now. They looked like stars in the night sky.

Harry forgot what he was supposed to be doing.

Draco’s mouth curled up in a smirk. “Ask me something only I’d know.”
Where were we when I almost killed you? What did you say that day you saved my life? Did you lower your wand? Did you fuck me, or did I fuck you?

“Er, what did you do to me on the Hogwarts Express sixth year?”

Ron choked.

Draco’s smirk curled impossibly smirkier. “Hit you with a Body-bind, stomped on your nose until it broke, covered you with your invisibility cloak, and left you to ride back to London unbeknownst to anyone in a position of authority.”

Harry smiled. “It’s him.”

Harry thought he heard Ron mutter, “absolutely bonkers, these two,” but he couldn’t be sure.

“Be that as it may,” Auror Taylor said, “even if this is Mr Malfoy, that doesn’t mean someone couldn’t have tampered with the potion.”

“I really need it, though,” Ron said with an alarmed look.

“Why, exactly, do you need a public speaking potion?” Harry asked, suddenly realising this was what they were discussing.

“Er, nothing, Harry. I’ll explain later.”

“Would he be able to take it if I ran some tests on it?” Draco asked, and Harry was staring at Draco’s nipples again. Bernice inclined her head, then nodded her acquiescence. Draco cast some identification spells at the phial, including one that made the air around the potion shimmer blue to indicate that it was, indeed, a phial of Toastmasters potion. Bernice satisfied, Draco handed the phial to Ron.

A commotion at the entryway caught their attention and Harry watched as an imposing Poseidon, flanked by a number of beans, strode across the ballroom towards them. Up close, he could see that it was Kingsley. Behind him came Arthur Weasley dressed as Gilderoy Lockhart and Molly dressed as a ghoul.

“Kingsley!” Harry said with a smile. “You look…godly.”

Kingsley smiled, his crown and turquoise robes glimmering in the moonlight.

Molly gestured at her and Arthur’s costumes. “Isn’t it great? We’re gadding!”

Ron laughed, but Hermione pressed her lips together. “Isn’t it a bit…disrespectful of disabled people? Some of these costumes aren’t quite culturally sensitive.”

No one seemed to pay her much mind.

Kingsley’s eyes briefly glanced at Harry’s and then Draco’s costumes. “Are you enjoying the party?” Kingsley asked, and Hermione began talking about some details they’d been concerned about.

Harry stopped listening and found his eyes wandering to Draco’s forearms, of all things. He could see the muscles flexing through the grey lycra as Draco moved his arms. Harry’s traitorous mind transported him back to another time he could remember watching Draco’s forearms. That time there hadn’t been any lycra.
He looked up at Draco’s face, trying to find any indication there as to Draco’s mood. It was difficult because the mask restricted Harry’s view to Draco’s mouth, the red of his too-thin lips standing out against the paleness of his too-sharp chin.

Draco was right—Harry had been impolite. He should’ve answered Draco’s owl. He’d just been so scared about the whole thing. To let another person into your life like that, to really let them in—it had felt like jumping off a cliff. And Harry had sort of had enough with the jumping-off-a-cliff feeling, since the war. It was easy to do his job, hang out with his old, safe friends, occasionally find someone in a bar to fuck. It was easy.

And also, it was not enough. He knew it wasn’t enough. But this—Draco—was scary. Not Draco the person; Harry wasn’t scared of him. But jumping in wasn’t safe. Harry could end up hurt.

So he hadn’t answered the damn owl. And he’d told himself that Nestor’s weak wing couldn’t handle the journey. That Draco had run away from him by going back to France and didn’t deserve a letter, anyway. That he didn’t want Draco, really.

What a pile of bullshit. Harry could almost hear Nestor’s indignant squawking.

Harry stared at Draco’s mouth and wondered how to convince him to let Harry try again, how to be a Gryffindor, how to not fuck it up this time. Because that mouth with its too-sharp words and its talking about Harry as if he were a normal person and its delicious, talented tongue…

Suddenly Ron was elbowing Harry in the ribs and Harry’s eyes jumped away from Draco’s mouth. Kingsley was saying in a low voice, “…in that case, I’d better bid you farewell and good luck. Let’s get these scoundrels in custody. They’ve ruined our whole week—I am quite looking forward to having them in a cell. Arthur, Molly, come with me, we can’t be near them.” Louder, he said, “Enjoy the party!” and walked away.

“What happened?” Harry asked.

Draco smirked. “Weren’t paying attention, Deputy Head Auror Potter?”

His fucking mouth!

Harry tried to get his body to stop being magnetised to Draco so he could talk to the others without getting an erection in this very thin leotard and tights. Deep breath.

“The criminals just came in,” Ron whispered. Harry looked up at the Every Flavour Beans and Nadheer gave a small gesture towards his ear, indicating that they’d gotten the news over the Communication charm.

Harry, distracted as he was, didn’t lose his Auror instincts. He kept his eyes away from the entrance. “What are they dressed as?”

“Cowboys,” Hermione said with a snort, looking away from the entrance. Harry could tell that she’d just tensed up, even as she tried to project an image of calmness.

Cowboys. That cheeky magical entryway.

The four stood around awkwardly for a moment, not sure what to say in the face of the palpable awkwardness from the operation and from the previous afternoon’s screaming match.
“Do these insane Ravenclaws actually think this is a good plan?” Draco said, glancing towards the cowboys. “The place is swarming with Aurors, we’re in the Ministry, the Minister for Magic is here, there are Auror guards at the door. How can they possibly be so idiotic?”

Hermione looked briefly over her shoulder. “They must honestly think they can do it without anyone knowing anyone unusual was here. If we hadn’t been tipped off....”

Harry fought off a shudder. He didn’t want to think about if they hadn’t been tipped off.

A witch dressed as a Muggle police officer ran up and asked Harry for his autograph. How had she even recognised him, with this stupid mask and all? He grimaced and complied, not daring to look at Draco. He braced himself for a “famous Potter” comment, but nothing came. What, Draco wasn’t even going to snark at him anymore? That was not okay.

The music changed and Harry recognised the unmistakable opening chords of “Thriller.”

“Oh come on,” Harry said. “They seem like they’re trying way too hard with the Muggle Halloween tunes.”

(“It’s close to midnight, something evil’s lurking in the dark. Under the moonlight you see a sight that almost stops your heart.”)

Draco’s mask jostled, as if he were doing something with his eyebrows. Dammit, Harry hadn’t realised how much he relied on those expressive eyebrows to read Draco. “Michael Jackson isn’t a Muggle.”

Ron nodded. “Yeah, mate. Percy used to have a poster of him in his bedroom doing the dance to this song on a constant loop.”

Harry scrunched his nose and exclaimed, “Wait, Percy?”

Just then, Winston from the Office of Misinformation, a Muggleborn, walked past, shouting upon seeing them, “TO THE BATCAVE!”

Draco, still bewildered about his costume, inclined his head slightly. “What’s the proper response to that interjection?”

“I think,” Hermione responded, “you should yell, ‘To the batmobile!’ and Harry, you should say like, ‘Holy cowboys, Batman!’”

Harry and Draco stared at her.

“Right,” she said. “Well, no one’s forcing you to be in character.”

The purple bean—Nadheer—stepped forward. “We’re going to casually walk across to where the drinks are set up, and we’re going to give Hermione plenty of space to allow the cowboys a chance to attack.”

Hermione, looking a bit anxious, pursed her lips together and whistled the theme from High Noon. Harry, recalling the movie night when they’d all watched it at Dean and Seamus’s, smiled. Hermione gave him a nervous grin.

Harry, for the first time, chanced a glance at the cowboys. They were mingling by the drinks, and didn’t appear to have figured out that they were being watched. They seemed relaxed. Harry noticed that one of them had the face of Joe from Misuse of Muggle Artefacts. His spurs jangled as
he walked.

Harry thought of the time he’d Polyjuiced as workers to infiltrate the Ministry, and he suddenly felt old.

Nadheer began to lead their group across the room.

Ron walked stiffly next to Hermione, and Harry realised that there was no chance the cowboys would ever think they could sneak her a potion if Ron was standing there like that. Harry glanced at Draco and inclined his head towards Ron. Draco nodded, and they each grabbed one of Ron’s elbows, pulling him slightly away. Ron jumped at first, but when he saw that he was being guided by Batman and Robin, rather than attacked, he relaxed.

The yellowish bean—Bernice—stayed with them, while the purple and red beans stepped back a distance from Hermione and started to chat.

Ron crossed his arms across his flamboyant robes. “It’s hard to send her out like bait in a trap,” he whispered. “I always want to be able to go help her.”

Harry glanced at Draco, wondering if he was also remembering that day at the Manor, Hermione screaming in one room while Ron screamed behind a locked door, trying to get to her.

“She’s safe, Weasley,” Draco said. “Look how many Every Flavour Beans are here protecting her. And she’s not going to drink the potion. She’s smart.”

Ron blew out a huge gust of air. “I know.”

“We should pretend to be talking,” Harry said in his Auror voice.

“We are talking,” Draco responded.

“So have you two fucked yet?” Ron asked, his hands shaking with nerves as he watched Hermione. “Again, I mean.”

“Ron!” Harry groaned.

“Right, sorry. Just trying to distract myself, here. You should, you know. Don’t be a couple of morons any more than you two are generally a couple of morons. Perfect for each other, really, in your complete pratness.” He dragged his eyes away from Hermione. “What?”

Harry, feeling his face flush, resolutely did not look at Draco. He glanced at Hermione. She was standing near the drinks, looking for all the world like she was about to burst into a rendition of “You Charmed the Heart Right Out of Me.” The purple and red beans were about six paces away from her. Kingsley, as Poseidon, stood next to someone—Susan?—dressed as a gorgon.

Harry turned away, knowing that the cowboys would be keeping an eye on him and Ron. Draco whispered in a bored manner that he must have perfected during his seven years in the Slytherin common room, “Cowboys are approaching Hermione. She seems to know them.”

Harry was proud that he didn’t immediately turn to look, and he felt Draco touch his elbow, grounding him. “They’re chatting with her.”

Harry slowly turned his body so he could have an uninhibited view of Hermione, though he tried to keep his eyes on Draco. Usually that wasn’t a problem, but at the moment one of his friends was in danger.
“How many Gryffindors does it take to stir a cauldron?” Draco said, apropos of nothing.

Harry’s eyes flitted to Draco. “How many?” he asked with half a grin, turning back to watch as a cowboy made small talk with Hermione.

“How many?” Harry asked.

“Just one,” Draco said. “He puts his wand in the cauldron and the world revolves around him.”

Harry laughed despite himself. Ron stood, still as a statue, unhearing, his freckles stark against his unusually pale skin. One of the cowboys gestured to the drink table, and Hermione nodded.

“How can you tell if a wizard is a pure-blood?” Draco asked.

“How?” Harry asked.

“Don’t worry,” Draco said. “He’ll tell you.”

Harry looked at Draco. Draco’s mouth was curled up in an amused smirk, and Harry started to laugh.

He stopped laughing when Ron grasped his elbow with a death grip. Harry turned his head as surreptitiously as he could manage and saw a cowboy Levitating two drinks as he walked back to Hermione. The cowboy gestured, and Hermione took the goblet.

Then, everything happened very quickly. A green Every Flavour Bean—Harry had no idea which Auror was in that costume—took out a camera and took a photo of Hermione taking the drink. The flash startled the cowboys, who turned to look at what happened, drawing their wands. A blue bean cast a spell at the goblet Hermione was holding, wrapping it in a spherical shield and Levitating it out of her hands and away from the commotion.

Three other beans (puce, neon green, and black) cast at Hermione, surrounding her in a shimmering, Auror-strength shield.

The cowboys, realising that they had been surrounded, did exactly what Aurors were taught in training that criminals do when they’re surrounded—they lashed out wildly. One of the cowboys immediately aimed for Harry and Ron and a red jet of light flew toward them.

“Expelliarmus!” Harry yelled, but his spell didn’t find its mark because Draco pulled his arm and pushed Harry behind him. Ron was hit with the curse and fell to the ground. Harry knelt down, checking Ron’s pulse. He was fine—it had just been a Stupefy. Harry stood up, and Draco’s arm pushed him back again.

“Stay back, you stupid git!” Draco hissed. “They’re targeting you; stay out of their line of sight.”

Just then, Kingsley seemed to decide he’d had enough. He took a step forward, and that step radiated magical power. He cast at the criminals and it must have been an Immobulus because they suddenly looked like characters on telly in slow motion. Hermione, the only one who hadn’t been immobilised, ran. The blue and green beans grabbed her and dragged her towards a rear exit.

Hermione looked over her shoulder with a concerned look on her face, trying to find Ron and Harry.

Kingsley, his golden Poseidon crown reflecting the light, turned to the table next to him, which was decorated with a bronze statue of Merlin. He wrenched the statue off the table with his left hand while casting at it with his right—and transfigured it into an enormous trident.

He raised the trident into the air and waved it in a wide circle. As he did so, a huge wave of water
crashed out of the punch bowl, and the water surrounded the criminals in a vortex, swirling around them like a malicious tsunami.

The power of the water deafened the room with a loud Roar, like a huge storm at the seaside, and Harry’s eyes widened as Kingsley, trident raised, fire in his eyes, shouted, “Incarcerous!” Thick, golden ropes appeared in the center of the tsunami, wrapping themselves around the four criminals.

The onlookers watched with wide eyes as the swirling water obscured the view of the criminals’ capture, and once the criminals were tightly bound, the tsunami crashed into them with a Crack!, splashing over their heads and onto the floor, soaking the fog-drenched floor with an inch of water and leaving a bundle of dripping wet cowboys in its wake.

The music became gradually audible as the roar of the water diminished.

(“When it comes through your door, Unless you just want some more, I think you better call, Ghostbusters.”)

Draco slowly lowered the arm that had been keeping Harry back. He looked to the side, out of his bat mask, to catch Harry’s eye. “I assume Weasley’s okay, because if he weren’t you’d be on the floor worried?”

“Yes,” Harry said, feeling his arms shake from the adrenaline. “He was just Stupefied.” Harry dropped to his knees, cradled Ron’s head on his legs so he wouldn’t bang it when he came to, and waved his wand. “Ennervate.”

Ron gasped, then went from recumbent to standing so quickly Harry wondered whether he’d Apparated. “Where is she? What happened?”

Harry stood. “She’s fine, the Aurors had her out of the room before it was over,” he reassured, grabbing Ron’s arm in a steadying manner. Ron was strangely quiet for a moment, and Harry realised that he must be talking to Hermione.

After a few moments, Ron turned. “They got them?”

Draco pointed. “The criminals are in custody.”

“What the bloody hell happened?” Ron cried. “Why is there water everywhere?”

Harry started to laugh. “Robards is going to kill Kingsley.”

“No Kingsley did this?” Ron asked. Draco joined Harry in his laughter.

Four Every Flavour Beans took the cowboys away, and another three (the yellowish—Bernice—the red—Eve, and an unidentified grey one) rushed over to Harry.

“Deputy Head Auror Potter!” Eve greeted. “We’ve set up a temporary command in the Atrium. We need to take you and Mr Weasley for testimony and a visit with a Healer.”

Harry turned to look at Draco, who stood stoically in his Batman costume, revealing no emotions from behind his mask. Harry didn’t want to leave him.

“Auror Potter,” Eve repeated, holding out an arm, and Harry was being led away by a red bean with one hand on the small of his back. He couldn’t break eye contact with Draco as he walked away, and it felt scary, it felt permanent, it felt like last chances, it felt like watching Draco walk out of Harry’s house to cross the Channel.
“Harry,” Ron said, bringing him back to the present.

Harry looked away from Draco and he could see on Ron’s face that Ron had some idea of what was going through Harry’s mind. “It’s not too late, mate,” he said, quietly. Then Ron’s eyes brightened. “You know what?” He reached into the pocket of his ridiculous robes and pulled out the potions phial Draco had given him earlier. He waved his wand to Conjure a second phial, uncorked the Toastmasters Potion, poured half in the empty phial, and handed it to Harry, whispering, “For nerves. For bagging the ferret.”

Harry couldn’t help but laugh. He tucked the potion into his belt.

They followed the beans out of the ballroom. Changing the subject, Ron asked, “So what the hell did Kingsley do?”

“Broke about every protocol we’d had in place for the operation,” Bernice muttered.

“Dashed any hope we had of a quiet apprehension,” Eve grumbled.

“Turned into a Greek god of the sea and swirled them in a fucking tsunami?” Harry said, laughing. “He looked like he was having the time of his life over there.”

“Not even an active Auror,” Bernice mumbled.

Ron grinned.

They reached the temporary command the Aurors had set up in the Atrium, where Hermione was being examined by a Healer.

“Really, I’m fine. I didn’t even get hit,” she was saying. Then she jumped up. “Ron!” She ran and wrapped her arms around Ron’s neck. “Oh, I was so worried. I didn’t see you when I was leaving and—”

“Just a Stupefy,” he said, running his hand over her hair.

Hermione pulled her head away to look at Harry. “I saw them bring the criminals through bound together with an Incarcerous.”

“They probably took them up to the holding room while the formal charges are filed,” Harry said, looking towards the lift.

Robards, who had just walked up, held out his hand in a stop gesture. “Deputy Head Auror Potter, you and your friends have just been attacked. You’re off duty for the rest of the day, and your orders remain to enjoy the party. We have nearly every Auror working here today, and we have it under control. Sit down and let the Healer check you. Auror Zane, you don’t need to follow Potter around anymore.”

“I’m fine!” Harry said, but he and Ron were pushed into seats and Healers were casting diagnostic charms at them.

“Elevated heart rate,” Harry’s Healer said, and the diagnosis appeared on a parchment.

Harry rolled his eyes. Couldn’t put anything over on these Healers.

Ron was fine, despite having been hit with a Stunning Spell, and Robards asked Ron and Hermione to accompany him to Level 2 to give testimony and sign some paperwork. “You understand, Harry,
we had civilians in the line of fire, we need to fill out the R.E.D.T.A.P.E.”

Harry nodded, hugged his friends, and watched them walk away. He felt relieved—for the first time in days he wasn’t worried about an imminent potions attack. But he also felt numb, or alone, or something. When the war had first ended, he’d always felt numb. Over time the numb feeling diminished and he spent more and more time laughing with Ron and Hermione and less and less time staring blankly, unfeeling. But sometimes...

He needed to go back to the party, both because that was the order from his boss and because he was a “public persona,” as he’d been reminded earlier, and his presence would help to calm the party. He stood, bade farewell to Eve and Bernice, and walked back into the party.

He didn’t even try to stop himself from locating Draco. It was harder than usual, since his signature blond hair was obstructed by the bat mask, but somehow Harry located him almost instantaneously. He sighed—he’d always been helplessly attuned to Draco. Maybe it would make him feel better if he pretended there was some kind of tracking device in that bloody utility belt.

Draco was standing with a group of Ministry workers—Harry thought maybe he recognised one of them (dressed like a house-elf) from the Invisibility Task Force, and another (dressed like a troll) looked like Daphne Greengrass.

They looked cosy. Harry didn’t know any of them. He plopped down at a table despondently, his yellow cape catching on the edge of the chair.

He felt like complaining about everything. His best friends were off comforting each other and being each other’s, like, next-of-kin—they didn’t need Harry at all. He couldn’t do his job today because of his stupid fame. He was wearing a Robin costume, and didn’t even have a Batman. The criminals were caught, but they were probably not the same people that had been harassing Hermione and Ron for the last year, so those attacks weren’t likely to stop. Anyone he would’ve wanted to talk to about this was dead. And add that to the list of things to whine about: apparently even at age twenty-eight he was still maudlin enough to whine about having lost his parents, godfather, Remus, Tonks, Dumbledore. He didn’t even have any coffee.

And he had no idea how to fix this thing with Draco.

A wizard dressed as a manticore approached and asked Harry shyly for an autograph. Harry was sure that his face was deformed into an obvious scowl, but he signed and tried to smile. The manticore left, and Harry let his head drop onto the table.

He heard a clink of of a glass hitting the table near him and raised his eyes enough to see a whisky snifter had been placed in front of him. He sat up.

“Professor McGonagall!”

“I’ve asked you numerous times to call me Minerva, Harry,” she said with a small smile, raising her own snifter.

“Sorry,” Harry said, “I just—I can’t! You’re Professor McGonagall. It would feel wrong. Why aren’t you wearing a costume?”

She looked exactly as she usually did. She raised an eyebrow. “Being an expert at Transfiguration has its perks.”

Harry laughed, looking down at his Robin costume. “I thought they were charmed to resist being Transfigured back until the end of the party.”
“They are, indeed,” McGonagall said, sipping her whisky. “That’s why one needs to simply adjust the magic on the way through.” She winked.

Harry laughed and raised his glass, taking a small sip. He knew it was a bad idea to try to match Minerva McGonagall dram for dram, so he’d better pace himself.

“Let me ask you a question,” she said, her voice soothing his homesick soul a bit. “Why are you sitting alone acting for all the world as if your Aurors did not just take the criminals into custody?”

“Ron and Hermione had to go with the Aurors to give some testimony.”

She just stared at him, as if that wasn’t the end of his sentence. Apparently one never grew out of the need to fill the silence if Professor McGonagall was looking at you like that.

“I’m just—everything is so frustrating. This potions case, and the way people have been treating Hermione.”

She kept staring at him, as if he still hadn’t finished his sentence.

Harry frowned. “And I’m lonely?”

“Is that a question or a statement, Mr Potter?”

Harry looked up at her. “A moment ago you called me Harry.”

“Well, when one acts like a child…” She trailed off, waving her hand.

Harry smiled, and took a small sip of his whisky.

“And Batman?” she asked crisply.

Harry spluttered on his whisky. “What?”

“And Batman? Where is Batman, Mr Potter?”

Harry propped his elbows on the table and dropped his head into his hands. “Draco. He’s over there chatting with a house-elf and a troll.”

When she didn’t answer, he looked up. She was staring at him, waiting for him to continue again. God dammit, he felt about twelve.

“He’s mad at me,” Harry said, and if he didn’t sound like a daft git.

“And do you deserve it?” she asked.

“Obviously,” Harry said, taking another sip of whisky.

“You know what I think, Mr Potter?”

“What?” he said, quite curious, if he was honest. Maybe Professor McGonagall could solve all his problems.

“You’re a long time dead.” She widened her eyes slightly. “And if memory serves, you’re about twenty-eight now, so.” She stood, clapped him on the back, and took a step away.

Harry watched, not quite sure what to make of that. She turned. “Oh, and Harry. As a matter of
interest, the magic used in the entryway is fairly complex, as you can imagine. There are Charms that take a basic reading of the person, sometimes of their mental state or occupation, and determine an appropriate costume. Other Charms identify couples, so as to turn the Granger-Weasleys into Celestina and her notorious second husband. The magic, you see, would never costume two people as a couple willy nilly. If one person merely fancied another, or was in the throes of unrequited love, say, the magic wouldn’t even pick up on that.” She fixed him with an encouraging smile.

She walked away, and Harry glanced at Draco. Draco caught Harry’s eye, then turned back to the house-elf he was talking with.

The magic knew something he didn’t. They were, apparently, enough of an item for the magic to recognise it. That was…something. He’d thought being dressed to coordinate with Draco was just another instance of the world out to get him, just one more box to tick on the list of ways to ensure Harry had a bad day.

He took one more sip of whisky.

Maybe he could figure out a way to work it out with Draco. It wasn’t too late. You’re a long time dead. He glanced back at Draco.

Draco really looked incredible in that lycra.

Focus. Why was Draco mad? Draco was mad because Harry had made him feel unwanted by telling him not to spend the night. Draco was mad because Harry didn’t return his owl. Draco was mad because he was jealous of Ron and Hermione (and the dildo) and felt vulnerable, like Harry was ashamed of him.

Harry sat up straight. He suddenly knew exactly what he needed to do. He reached to his belt pocket and grabbed the phial Ron had given him. He downed it in one sip. He felt his nerves and apprehension completely melt away as the potion trickled down his throat. He saw the Scents of Love in front of him on the table.

The first time he’d smelled Amortentia had been in Slughorn’s lesson, and he’d smelled treacle tart, broomstick handle, and the Burrow. His favourite food, his favourite activity, his favourite place. It had been such a straightforward combination of things to smell.

But the thing about Amortentia is that it’s not stable across a lifetime. As people change, what attracts them changes.

One time, shortly after the war, someone had brought a phial of Amortentia to the pub, passing it around so everyone could smell. It had been like a high for his friends, who were still struggling after the end of the war. Harry had eagerly grabbed the phial from Parvati and inhaled deeply, waiting to be transported to a happy place.

He’d smelled nothing.

He hadn’t gotten out of bed for a week after that pub night. Eventually, Ron and Hermione had broken through his wards and found him in bed, staring at the ceiling. They’d crawled into bed with him, one on either side, and held him. After awhile—Harry was never sure how long it was—he’d said, “I smelled nothing in the Amortentia. I think I’m dead, or inhuman. I think he killed me, after all.”

Ron’s eyes had widened and Hermione’s brow had scrunched, and they’d each held him a bit
closer. The next day, Hermione brought a mind healer. Harry didn’t even remember her name, only that she had pleasant brown eyes and that he hadn’t wanted to be looking at pleasant brown eyes. “Harry,” she’d said, “Amortentia registers what we’re attracted to. You are depressed, and therefore, right now, nothing attracts you. You’re alive. You’re all here.” He had a vague memory of grabbing Hermione and crying. And crying and crying, in relief and also in agony.

The third time he’d smelled Amortentia had been when Ron was perfecting the recipe for Scents of Love. He hadn’t intended to smell it—he was still terrified of what he’d (not) smell and he tended to stop listening and turn numb whenever anyone talked about smelling Amortentia—but he’d walked into Wheezes to see Ron and he’d been hit with a huge waft of Amortentia from a batch Ron was working with. “What’s that smell?” Harry had said, and Ron’s eyes lit up with excitement. “You can smell it?” he’d cried. “It’s Amortentia! What do you smell?” Harry had smelled treacle tart and broomstick handle. Ron had clapped Harry on the back and they’d laughed and smiled, revelling in the fact of Harry smelling anything.

This time, he unscrewed the lid with zero trepidation.

He could still smell treacle tart; if he thought about it, he could isolate the rich, lemony sweet aroma. He could still smell broomstick handle; if he concentrated, he could smell the grounding, earthy aromas of wood and polish.

But those smells couldn’t compete with the palpable, unambivalent smell of Draco. Harry had only been with Draco that one time, but apparently his subconscious remembered it well—he smelled Draco’s hair, this orangey sort of clove smell that Harry assumed might be in Draco’s hair potions, and he smelled Draco’s skin, some musky smell that must be filled with Draco’s pheromones.

And, Merlin, he smelled sex—it smelled like Harry’s bed had smelled before he’d bungled everything up by telling Draco it’d be better if he left.

The smell was intoxicating. Harry’s cock swelled, and Merlin that was going to be a problem in this costume.

Harry pulled out his wand. Like most people, he had a standard memory that he always used when casting a Patronus. It was a memory of Ron and Hermione’s wedding—Harry standing to the side, watching his best friends kiss after they’d successfully taken the soul bond, surrounded by dozens of his friends and family and a feeling that the war was over and life was good.

But this time, his head swimming with the Scents of Love, his stag burst eagerly from his wand without having to spare one thought for his standard Patronus-memory. The stag stared at him attentively, one ear twitching. Harry smiled and quietly gave it instruction.

Harry turned in his seat at the table, watching as his stag ran across the crowded ballroom to where Draco was standing. Harry’s stomach was full of jitters despite the potion he’d taken, but it felt like the good kind of jitters. He saw the moment when Draco, who appeared to be bored in conversation with a troll, saw the silvery stag out of the corner of his eye. Draco’s cape twitched behind him as he turned towards the Patronus. Even behind the bat mask, Harry could see Draco’s grey eyes widen.

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“Draco Malfoy,” the stag said in a loud voice—Harry’s voice—effectively hushing the crowd. “I, Harry Potter, am completely, stupidly, daftly in love with you.” Draco didn’t move a muscle. “And I know that’s a stupid thing to say,” the stag continued, tilting its head and antler, “when we’ve only been on one semi-date, but I just opened this stupid tin of Scents of Love and was bombarded with the smell of you.” Draco took a slow step forward.

“I’ve been a git,” the stag said, following Draco as he began to stalk across the floor, “and I will
probably always be a git. And you’re a git, too. But.”

Draco reached Harry’s chair and grabbed him by his lycra-clad arms, pulling him out of his seat. Draco put his hands on Harry’s face and pulled him in for a rough kiss.

“I’m sorry, I should’ve let you stay,” the stag continued as they kissed, coming to a stop right next to Draco’s cape. “I want to make it work, with you. For the first time in a long time, I actually want more. I’m ready. For you. Draco Malfoy. Whom I love. And to whom I just sent a Patronus across the ballroom. Did you like my grammar there?”

Draco pulled away from the kiss—just a couple of centimetres—and started to laugh. Harry, face bright red, but flushed with happiness that outweighed his embarrassment, smiled widely back at him.

The stag continued, “Because I can’t stop thinking about how you look in that blasted Batman costume, and the way that bat mask looks like someone made a frame just to show off your stupid, smirking, perfect mouth. I’m going to shut up now.”

Draco, an awed smile on his face, pressed forward, crushing their lips together and running his arms down Harry’s shoulders.

But then, two Every Flavour beans—an orange and a teal—who had been on the far side of the ballroom, ran into the path cleared by the stag and tackled Harry and Draco to the ground.

Harry pulled his wand and forced the insolent beans off with a Knockback Jinx. “What are you doing?” he screamed.

“IT’S A LOVE POTION ATTACK, SIR!” the orange bean—Auror Bell, just out of training—cried.

“What?” Harry huffed, laughing. “No! No, it’s not. And if it was, shouldn’t you have Stupefied me?”

“But, sir, you’re Deputy Head Auror Potter, sir—”

Harry sighed. “It’s okay. It’s okay, Auror Bell. I understand. We’re not on potions.” Harry stood.

“You’re not?”

Draco stood, brushing himself off. “Most certainly not. For one, our pupils are not dilated out of the normal range. Secondly, our skin has not gone pale. Third, we’re not exhibiting any—or, rather, much—evidence of being of unsound mind. Fourth, we are not showing lack of coordination or muscle relaxation.”

“Oh,” Auror Bell said, her face flushed red against the orange of the bean costume. “Well, er. Carry on.”

But turns out that being tackled to the ground by a team of belligerent beans is a fairly good cure for a lust haze. Harry didn’t much feel like carrying on. He inclined his head towards the exit, and Draco nodded.

Harry walked to the rear exit and Draco followed him. Harry could feel hundreds of eyes on the back of his head, and he walked with as much dignity as his cape and tights allowed.

When they reached the narrow corridor, Draco grabbed his elbow and pulled him around. Draco’s
face was luminous. He looked happy and that vulnerable anger that had been clouding his face all week was gone. Harry was full of wonder and pride that he had effected such a change.

Harry pulled at Draco’s hip, eager for another kiss.

“Wait,” Draco said, pressing an elegant finger on Harry’s sternum. “I have something for you.”

Harry gave a lopsided smile and stepped back.

“Fucking costume,” Draco mumbled, “I put it in my robe pocket this morning, but…” He fiddled with his utility belt, popping open compartments until he found a jar. “At least the utility belt has an Undetectable Extension. This is for you.”

Draco held out the jar, and Harry took it, feeling a jolt of magic and arousal as their fingers brushed.

Harry frowned at the jar. “Christine Ferber’s Cassis D’Alsace et Violette?” he asked, confused.

“At your place you have Welch’s.”

“Yeah…”

“Welch’s is pedestrian, flavourless gelled sugar.”

“Why are you insulting my jelly?” Harry asked, and then his eyes widened. “Oh. Oh. You want jelly at my house. For mornings. Because you want to stay, and I’m not going to let you leave.”

“I don’t want jelly at your house, Harry.” Draco smiled. “I require a proper jam.”

“You—you packed this even before I sent the Patronus.”

“You are incredibly skilled at stating the obvious,” Draco drawled, but his smile didn’t look like a sneer.

“I’m sorry,” Harry said, and it sounded like the words burst from his mouth unbidden. “I’m so sorry, I was scared, it’s scary and it’s not safe and I was a coward and I know you think I’m supposed to be the Gryffindor prat who runs into things without thinking but I just—I’m sorry.”

Harry leaned forward and kissed Draco’s pointy chin. “I’m so sorry.”

“I’m sorry,” Draco whispered. “I should’ve realised, I shouldn’t have antagonised you once I came back and—.”

But Harry was tugging at Draco’s bat mask, and whatever else Draco wanted to say was lost in the frenzy of kisses that Harry pressed to the line of Draco’s neck and jaw. Draco backed up until his cape was pressed against the wall of the corridor and he leaned his head back. Harry pressed closer, his lips on a quest to taste every inch of Draco’s skin. Harry pressed his nose into Draco’s cheek, scratching it against Draco’s fine, pale stubble.

Harry moaned. “You smell—“

Draco huffed a laugh. “Did you really smell me in the Scents of Love?”

“I opened the tin and it smelled like I had my nose in a pot of Draco and sex.”

Draco laughed again, and Merlin, Harry loved to make Draco laugh. Draco leaned down to suck on Harry’s neck, and Harry’s breath hitched.
“What do you smell in Amortentia, Draco?” Harry asked, breathless.

Draco’s face flashed an anxious, shuttered sort of look. Harry could tell he didn’t want to answer. But then Draco exhaled and said, “Same thing I’ve smelled since that Potions lesson in sixth year. You. You smell spicy like nutmeg or allspice or something and where do you even get that smell?” Draco pressed his face into the crook between Harry’s neck and ear and inhaled deeply.

“You smelled me then?” Harry asked, momentarily shocked, but then he worried that maybe he shouldn’t risk embarrassing Draco after he’d just admitted something like that. “Did I embarrass you back there, with my Patronus?”

“Oh, it was embarrassing alright,” Draco said, pulling back to look at Harry. “But not for me. I loved it.”

The corner of Harry’s lips curled up into a small smile. “We can fix this.” He sounded a bit like he was trying to convince himself.

“It’s done,” Draco said, pulling off Harry’s mask and kissing his scar. “It’s fixed. We’ll break it again.” He kissed Harry’s temple. “We’ll fix it again.”

“You were right,” Harry blurted.

Draco stopped kissing, a smirk on his face. “While I’ll never get tired of hearing that in any context, I’m going to need more information to know which instance of my absolute rightness to which you’re referring.”

Harry snorted. “About Chambers Cosworth.”

Draco’s eyebrow quirked in confusion, and Harry realised how glad he was to be able to see Draco’s eyebrows again now that the mask was off. Not that he hadn’t enjoyed the mask in its own way. But a solid quarter of Draco’s expressiveness seemed to reside in his eyebrows. Harry reached up and traced the curve of Draco’s pale, mocking brow with his finger.

“How Chambers Cosworth should’ve known how much sexier it would’ve been to convince Wynefreed. To stand by and watch as she got so worked up about it that she couldn’t control herself any longer and would do anything to be with him, would blurt out any truth without Veritaserum, would pull up her skirts without love potion—because of nothing but the strength of her desire for him.”

Draco looked at Harry ravenously. Harry’s finger was still on Draco’s eyebrow, and Draco looked like he was about to devour him, and Harry had never been so turned on in his life. Chambers Cosworth was an idiot, in addition to being a rapist. He was fucking daft, because this was so much better.

Draco spun them around so that Harry was pressed against the wall and kissed him deeply, pressing the length of his long, lean body against Harry’s front. Harry groaned. These bloody costumes were somehow both fabulous for this—because he could feel every inch of Draco’s skin and the hard press of Draco’s cock against his hip—and also terrible for this—because though their cocks were visible and easy to feel, they were also hermetically sealed. Harry’s fumbling fingers reached under Draco’s cape to find the fastenings for the utility belt, while Draco’s fingers messed with the ties on Harry’s red waistcoat.

The utility belt hit the ground and Draco pressed his torso into Harry’s, pushing the waistcoat away.
“Do you know how many times I’ve thought about this these past months?” Draco asked, breathless, pressing another kiss to Harry’s neck.

“With the superhero costumes?” Harry asked with a smile.

“No, that’s quite outside the fantasy.”

“I kept dreaming about it,” Harry confirmed. “It’s been torture.”

Draco hummed. “I dreamt about it, too. I’ve never wanked so often in my life.”

Harry laughed, and the sound echoed through the corridor. “Me too. It didn’t help much, did it?”

Draco didn’t answer, but he started kissing Harry again, and he kissed like he could never get enough.

And even though Harry had been wanking for months over the memory of their first time together, this was so much better than that night after the Ministry. That night had been great. The best sex Harry had ever had. Crazy good enough for him to think about it constantly for months.

But this? This was lust fueled by the knowledge that Draco really wanted him, that this wasn’t a one-off thing, that Draco cared, that he’d moved back, that he’d bought jam to keep at Harry’s house. That Draco wanted Harry enough to have told him all of those things out loud. To have kept trying, to have gotten angry, to have yelled, to have expected better.

The last time it had been a dizzying combination of pleasure combined with intense doubt and vulnerability. It had been an explosion of magic and pleasure at the same time as, *When will he leave? Why is he doing this? Is he trying to hurt me?*

This time it was still a dizzying combination. But the dizzying combination was the explosion of magic and pleasure at the same time as, *He wants me. He chose me. He moved back. He bought jam.*


Draco’s clever fingers unfastened Harry’s cape and it fell to the ground. Draco pushed the waistcoat off Harry’s shoulders, leaving him a short-sleeved green leotard and tights. Harry felt momentarily self conscious, imagining what he looked like in that ensemble with his erection straining against the lycra.

But Draco just stared at him with those ravenous eyes and let out a small laugh. “Of course you somehow manage to look utterly sexy even in that.” Draco reached up to untie his own cape, and Harry saw his cock pressing a bulge into his costume.

Harry reached for Draco’s cock and asked with a grin, “Is this the bat signal?”

“Oh Salazar, stop talking about bats, Harry.”

“I just realised we’re still in the middle of a corridor in the Ministry,” Harry said as Draco grabbed at Harry’s leotard. “We work here,” Harry added with very little conviction.

Draco stopped, looking around the corridor. He walked quickly towards a door, waving his wand to Levitate their discarded costume items, which flew along behind him in a strange sort of processional. Draco opened the door. It was a supply closet. Harry, the capes, masks, utility belt, and waistcoat stepped in behind him. Draco closed and locked the door.
“Is this the bat cave?” Harry asked, cheekily. He looked around, then added, “It’s, er, a bit small. For what I had in mind.”

Draco turned with a predatory grin. “And what, exactly, do you have in mind?” Then he waved his wand, a frown of concentration on his face, and the closet enlarged. He waved again, casting a Cushioning Charm on the floor.

“You want to know what I have in mind?” Harry asked, smiling. “Well, I have a whole secondary list of things in mind for when we have a proper bed, but for now…getting out of all this blasted lycra. Your perfect, wicked mouth on my cock. You fucking me. Or I could fuck you—I’m not picky about logistics as long as it’s you and me and someone’s getting fucked.” He paused. “Although I’m not crazy about the power dynamics of Batman fucking Robin, maybe Robin should fuck Batman. I’ve got to be a good feminist, you see.” He smiled a lopsided grin. “What do you want?”

“Good grief, Harry. The feminist imperative is to tell me what you want, not what you think you should want.” He leaned down to suck Harry’s neck.

Harry laughed, breathless. “True. I want you to fuck me.”

Draco’s mouth curled into a smirk. “Sounds perfect to me.” He dropped to his knees, pressing his mouth into the green fabric at Harry’s groin.

Harry sucked in a breath, running his hand through Draco’s hair. He hadn’t expected Draco to just—immediately—comply. It made him nervous. “You don’t have to,” he said.

Draco looked up, and his grey eyes were fiery. “I asked you what you wanted, and you told me. I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t want to.” His eyes brokered no questioning.

“Al—alright,” Harry said. “If you can manage to get this bloody costume off.”

Draco mouthed Harry’s erection through the fabric, and Harry thought he might just come right then into the lycra. But Draco grabbed his wand and waved it, leaving Harry naked and his clothes in a neat, folded pile on the floor.

“That’s too bad,” Harry laughed. “I was kind of hoping you’d pull the tights off with your teeth.” But then his joking comments were lost in a gasp as Draco swallowed Harry’s erection into his hot, wet mouth, and suddenly all Harry could think was hot, wet, tongue. He ran his fingers through Draco’s fine hair, and moaned as Draco’s hand moved from the base of his shaft to his perineum.

“Your fingers,” Harry breathed with a low chuckle, “are so fucking—I don’t know. Nimble. Nggggghhhhh.”

Draco laughed around Harry’s cock, and if that wasn’t a perfect sight Harry wasn’t sure what was. Draco swirled his tongue in some sort of maddeningly good twist and Harry’s body was on fire and he felt like he wanted more more more. Suddenly Draco’s fingers were pressing against Harry’s rim, and he must’ve Conjured lube when Harry was lost in the throes of lust because his finger was pressing inside and oh Merlin fucking Circe that felt good.

“Draco!” Harry cried.

Usually, when people sucked Harry’s dick, he spent half the time feeling guilty, like he was making the other person do this thing that didn’t actually give them any pleasure. And who did he think he was taking like that from another person? He much preferred having mutual sex where he could give and take in relatively equal measure, so it would feel fair. So he wouldn’t feel guilty.
But Draco had been smouldering when he asserted that he would never do something he didn’t want to do, and somehow, this time, it didn’t feel like a transaction.

Draco’s nimble fingers pressed inside Harry and Harry jumped, nearly banging his head on the wall of the storage closet, when Draco located his prostate.

“Jesus, fuck, Draco,” he breathed. “You can fuck me now.”

But Draco, apparently, was in no rush. He pressed his fingers forward inside Harry with one hand as he sucked with his mouth and used his other hand to massage Harry’s balls and oh my god Draco was going to kill him, wasn’t he?

“Draco! Draco, stop.”

Draco stilled the moment Harry said stop, but didn’t move away.

“You can fuck me now,” Harry breathed, thunking his head back against the wall again.

Draco pulled his mouth off Harry’s cock with a deliciously filthy slurp. “I know I can,” Draco said. “But I wanted to keep doing this.” He moved his fingers, which were still inside Harry’s arse, in a come-hither motion.

Harry moaned. “Ahhh, yessss, and you’re so good at it,” he hissed, “but I’d like you to fuck me now. Please. I want you to fuck me now. Want more. Want you.”

At that, Draco removed his fingers and stood up, leaning in to kiss Harry.

“You’re still wearing a Batman costume,” Harry observed with a smile, mumbling against Draco’s lips.

Draco laughed.

“I don’t know the spell to make you naked and fold the clothes neatly,” Harry said, “so unless you want me to Vanish them, leaving you without any clothes to wear out of here, you’d better do it yourself.” Harry held out his hand and his wand zoomed through the air and snapped into it. He handed his wand to Draco.

“Do you know how hot it is that you let me use your wand?” Draco said, staring at it.

“Is that a euphemism?”

Draco smiled and waved Harry’s wand. He was now naked, and he dropped the wand to the floor with a clatter.

“You are so fit,” Harry breathed, dragging his eyes down Draco’s body.

“I don’t know about that,” Draco said. “I’m bony and skinny.”

“Yeah, I suppose, but it’s somehow perfect.” Harry smiled and Draco looked at him like he was a wonder.

“How do you want to do this?” Draco asked, pumping his fist over his own cock, which was hard and glistening with precome. “You’re still on the protection potions, right?”

Harry’s eyes were transfixed on Draco’s hand. He looked up. “Yes. Honestly, I don’t care. I’d do it in the middle of the Great Hall if you would just put your dick in me.”
Draco laughed. “Do you think the floor is too hard?”

Harry’d had enough of the dilly-dallying. He lay back on the floor, pulling his legs up. Draco stared at him for a moment with wide, grey eyes, then pounced on him, and Harry was glad for the Cushioning Charm on the floor. Draco growled in Harry’s ear and then licked under his chin, his tongue scraping against Harry’s coarse stubble, as he lined up his cock and pressed inside.

“Oh fuck that’s good,” Harry yelled, and Draco threaded his fingers through Harry’s, squeezing tightly. Draco was holding himself back, waiting for Harry to indicate he should continue.

Harry reached one hand around Draco’s back and pulled him close, whispering, “Please, now, come on.”

Draco obliged, thrusting forward and dropping his head down onto Harry’s sweat-slicked shoulder. “You,” Draco said, panting, “are maddening, and I love it.”

Harry moaned. “You’re maddening, too. Harder.”

Their bodies rocked together, finding a rhythm, and they finally stopped talking for once—the room filled with moans and sounds of skin and sex.

“This is what I smelled in that Amortentia,” Harry breathed, burying his face into Draco’s neck.

“Fuck, Harry,” Draco mumbled, biting at Harry’s throat.

His nerves alight, Harry could feel his orgasm approaching and tried to unclench his muscles; he didn’t want this to end. He let out a breath of air and grabbed at Draco’s back. He could feel the muscles in Draco’s back moving under his fingers, and Draco’s perfect mouth at his neck, and he pressed his nose into the side of Draco’s face, nudging it up. “Kiss me,” he said.

Draco did, biting at Harry’s lower lip and reaching between their bodies to grasp Harry’s cock with a strong grip. Harry moaned into Draco’s mouth.

He couldn’t quite wrap his mind around the fact that Draco seemed as lost as he did. Draco’s blond hair was messy, falling in Harry’s eyes. His face, which he often held in an aristocratic sort of composure, was scrunched, sweaty, flawed—perfect.

There was nothing between them, Harry thought as his mind flickered in and out of consciousness, the pleasure coursing through his body. Not physically, though that was true too, but there was nothing looming over them, no things unsaid, no worries, and it felt so free.

Draco moaned in Harry’s ear and that sound combined with everything else finally pushed Harry over the edge in a haze of blinding pleasure. His hot come spurted between them. Draco let go of Harry’s cock and braced himself on two forearms, thrusting into Harry with a sort of all-consuming intensity that took Harry’s breath away. Harry reached one hand between their bodies, which were smeared with come, and squeezed one of Draco’s nipples.

“Harry,” Draco whispered, and his body fell heavily on top of Harry, his head pressing into the crook of Harry’s neck, as he came with a moan.

Harry brought his clean hand up to Draco’s hair, running his fingers through it. After a long minute, Draco pushed himself off Harry and they sat in the middle of the supply closet floor, naked, sweaty, and covered with come.

Draco smiled, and Harry was so far gone. The sight of Draco, naked, smiling, made his chest
constrict like he’d been trapped in Devil’s Snare.

Harry smiled back; he was sure he looked like a daft idiot. He waved his hand to clean them up, the slightly unpleasant tingle of the Scourgify ghosting over his body. He saw Draco squirm at the sensation.

“You moved back.” Harry grinned harder. “I wouldn’t kick you out this time, even if you still had to go back to France.”

“After all this,” Draco said with a smirk, “you’re not going to get rid of me that easily, Potter.”

“So we—” Harry didn’t know how to phrase this. “I don’t do well with open relationships. I’ve tried, but.” He looked up at Draco and figured he may as well be honest. “I want to be exclusive, no fucking anyone else.”

Draco smirked. “Agreed. I’m an only child, Harry—I don’t share very well.”

Harry laughed.

“So that stunt with the Patronus was pretty cute,” Draco said, “but that’s really not the best way to communicate, is it? Too public.”

“I agree,” Harry said. “You need a mobile.”

Draco raised one brow, but the effect was ruined somewhat by the fact that he was sitting naked and cross-legged in a supply closet. “Harry, I’ve had a mobile since 2005.”

“Are you shitting me?”

“I shit you not.”

“But—” Harry began to laugh. “That was part of what freaked me out—that we’d have no way to communicate.”

“Are you shitting me? All this was caused by miscommunication about communication?”

“It sounds like maybe we need to communicate better,” Harry said, and he could tell that he was still grinning. He really was feeling much too happy. “Via mobile.”

“Well you know, communication is a big part of consent. Hermione would be very proud of us.”

Harry laughed, but then his grin faltered. “Were you really very jealous of them? I assume it was them you were jealous of, and not the dildo.”

Draco leaned back, bracing his long arms behind him and stretching his back. Harry got a bit distracted; really, he could watch that all day. Harry almost jumped forward to press his face into Draco’s lap where his cock was nestled against his leg. He’d not had nearly enough chance to explore Draco’s cock today, what with Draco paying such excellent attention to his.

“Don’t make any premature conclusions about my jealousy, Harry,” Draco said with a smile. “The thought of you gallivanting around England with that blasted dildo whilst I suffered alone in France really did cut me to my very core.”

“Gallivanting around England? Did you think I was using the dildo while visiting the Tower of London? Penetration at Stonehenge?”
Draco let his head fall back and he let out a small, self-deprecating laugh.

“Do you want to know a secret?” Harry said, rising onto his knees.

Draco raised his head a few inches. “Always. I’m a terrible gossip.”

Harry walked forward awkwardly on his knees and leaned over Draco’s torso, which, if one looked carefully, bore a faint array of scars that had caused Harry a momentary freakout back in May. “I didn’t use the dildo,” Harry said. “I took it because it really is a state-of-the-art magical dildo and I couldn’t let it go into the Ministry’s dusty evidence locker. I didn’t particularly want a dildo.”

Draco smirked a truly terrifying smirk. “Oh, really?” he asked with glimmering eyes. “What did you want?”

Harry smiled and leaned forward to meet Draco’s lips with his own. They kissed languidly for a few moments, then Harry sat down again.

“I was jealous of them,” Draco said quietly. “But tell me the truth, Harry. Shouldn’t I have been?”

Harry opened his mouth, gearing up for a display of indignant outrage, but Draco cut him off with a raised hand.

“I don’t mean about the threesome rumours. Although there have been times I’d wondered…”

Harry shut him up with a glare and Draco continued, “No, what I mean to say is, if you’re being honest, don’t you think you’ve used them to isolate yourself from the rest of the world?”

Harry sighed and ran a hand through his hair. It felt sweaty. “I—yes. But you have to understand that they’ve been with me through a lot. Even after the war, there have been times….And they’re there anytime I need them, no questions asked. So it’s been easy to, to just not try very hard with other people. With dating.”

Draco watched him intently, just listening.

“I’ve not been—” Harry stopped. “I sometimes get depressed, since the war. I’m usually fine, now. Hermione and Ron get it, they know how to handle it, and we make each other laugh, but other people don’t usually get it right, with me. They worry too much, or they think I won’t be able to laugh about things. I don’t know.” He shrugged. “Ron and Hermione get it.”

Draco, naked, with elegant shoulders hunched as he leaned back on his hands with elbows slightly hyperextended, turned shrewd eyes on Harry—Harry marveled how anyone could look supercilious in such a position. “They love having you as part of their lives,” Draco said, and it wasn’t a question. “They’d be happy to feed you supper every night, and they’d never feel like you were interfering.”

Harry nodded. It was true.

“But maybe that’s the wrong question,” Draco mused, inclining his head thoughtfully, and Harry remembered the way Draco was in the Potions lab in Jussieu. This man he was doing this with wasn’t the bully from Hogwarts first year or the scared teenager from the war—though those parts of him were still there. He was a brilliant, keep-you-forever-on-your toes swot who loved solving puzzles. Harry smiled. He had a vision of Draco on a stage accepting an award for curing Muggle cancer, Harry standing to the side as the supportive partner, and Merlin Harry wanted that.

“Maybe the real question is what’s best for you,” Draco said. “Don’t you think you need to stop being scared of moving on? Of looking for more? Because other people might be good for you,
“Yes,” Harry said with a sigh. “You’re always right, Professor Malfoy, sir.”

Draco groaned, throwing his head back. “Fuck, Harry, do you have any idea how hard I find it to keep my composure when you address me so lasciviously? I nearly lost it in your kitchen the other day when you called me sir. In your fucking pyjamas. I fucking hate you.”

Harry laughed, delighted to hear confirmation that he could drive Draco batty—it was only fair, really, given the power Draco had over him.

But then Harry sobered. “I’m just so worried about Ron and Hermione lately, is all. And that’s not paranoia, as you well know. That worry is based in reality.”

Draco frowned. “I know.”

“The political blowback from this…” Harry trailed off. “It feels like it will never end. You were right, about the hydra. We’ve still got popcorn-faces like Smith spreading their vile nonsense all over the internet.”

“Popcorn-face?” Draco smiled, then sighed. “I know. It will get better.”

“Are you just saying that to make me feel better?”

“Obviously.” Draco pushed himself forward to a seated position. “It’s politics, Harry, what the fuck do you think will happen? Hermione chose dealing with people like Smith on a daily basis as her career. She must be insane. Janus Thickey Ward.”

Harry frowned. “But it’s important. And there aren’t enough women in politics, and therefore our policies end up intentionally and unintentionally biased against witches.”

“I know that, Harry, I’m not daft. I’m just saying, if getting rid of the gender gap in politics requires people to deal with what Hermione has dealt with for the last year—”

“She thinks that means she needs to do it even more,” Harry said.

“I’m merely not holding my breath. From a life satisfaction standpoint, it is completely irrational behaviour for a witch to go into politics and then push for these types of reforms.”

“But men do it and seem happy enough,” Harry said. “Not that I understand—I’d rather be dead.”

“Two clear explanations for that,” Draco said with a grin. “One, most wizards don’t advance this type of controversial reform, and even if they did they wouldn’t be subjected to campaigns of retaliatory hate in the same way witches are. And two, we wizards must be at least ten times more likely to be power-hungry, smug megalomaniacs.”

Harry watched as Draco’s mouth twitched and he thought about all of the power-hungry, smug, megalomaniac wizards they’d both known. Harry burst into laughter.

“I suppose we ought to go back to the party,” Draco said with a sigh, “even though we have no hope of concealing the nature of our extracurricular activities.”

“Yeah, let’s get back,” Harry said. “I’m starving.” He glanced at the neat piles of their clothes and looked at Draco in horror. “How the bloody hell are you supposed to put tights on? Do you know a spell for that? I’ll be stuck in here all day!”
“Did you learn nothing in the Gryffindor dorms, Potter?” Draco drawled, picking up his wand and casting at the tights. Harry watched, transfixed, as the tights flew through the air to slide sinuously up his legs. They came to rest securely around his hips.

“That should not be as hot as it was,” Harry said with awe.

Draco laughed. “I am not opposed to costumes and role play in general, though I would not have chosen,” he paused, waving his arm indistinctly at Harry, who was now stepping into the leg hole of a green, short-sleeved leotard, “that. But somehow.” He scrunched his brow in thought. “Somehow it does it for me.”

Harry, pulling his arm into the left sleeve while the right sleeve hung below his nipple, grinned. “Maybe I do it for you.”

“May the fates take pity on me.”

“So are we boyfriends now?”

The look on Draco’s face must have rivaled Medusa’s. “I strictly forbid you from ever uttering that word again.”

But Harry, with a look of pure amusement on his face as he pulled on his waistcoat, waited for a more substantive answer.

Draco smiled a tiny smile, seemingly in spite of himself. “We can be paramours. Or beaus. Or suitors.”

Harry pulled on his cape. “Partners.”

Draco’s mocking smile fell from his face, leaving him looking surprisingly and appealingly open. “Partners.”

Harry smiled. “Partners.” He tied on his mask.

“If you utter the word ‘howdy’ even once,” Draco said slowly, “the consensus on ‘partners’ is broken.”

“Hey partner, are you going to get dressed? You’re still starkers.”

Draco smirked. “You really will never fully internalise that you’re a wizard, will you?” He waved his wand, and the clothes from the floor disappeared, then reappeared on his body. He waved his wand again, and the bat mask zoomed into his hand.

Harry rolled his eyes. “You could’ve helped me!”

“Ah, but if I had, I wouldn’t have this excellent memory of you stepping inexpertly into a leotard.”

“Hey Draco?”

Draco raised one of his brows, and then obscured it as he pulled on his bat mask.

“I’m still buying Welch’s.”

“Merlin help me.”
When they got back to the ballroom, a little mussed but fully clothed, there were a lot more people dancing. The music was now “Magic Works,” by the Weird Sisters. Thankfully, the enthusiastic dancing allowed them a low-profile entrance into the room.

While they were gone, food had appeared at the tables (and was mostly eaten and abandoned), so Harry and Draco walked to a pair of available seats.

A moment later, Professor McGonagall walked over, a twinkle in her eye. “Mr Potter, Mr Malfoy,” she greeted.

Harry could feel his face turning red. It must be obvious that they’d just been fucking, right? She must know. He had a horrible feeling that he was about to lose House points from Gryffindor. He glanced at Draco, but Draco, maddeningly, looked totally at ease.

“Nice to see you, Headmistress McGonagall,” Draco said, holding out his hand.

She shook it briskly. “I wanted to ask you if you’d be willing to come to the N.E.W.T.-level potions lesson on November the eleventh. I spoke with our Potions professor, and on that day they will be discussing recent advances in applied potions and would very much appreciate a guest lecturer. What do you say?”

Draco smiled. “I believe my schedule is open. I’d love to. I’ll send you an owl to confirm?”

“I’ll look forward to it,” she said. She turned her eyes to Harry. “If you can get the day off, you’re welcome to come along, Mr Potter. You’re always welcome at Hogwarts, and there’s a biscuit with your name on it in my office.”

Harry smiled. She began to walk away, then turned and caught Harry’s eye. She glanced at Draco and winked at Harry.

Harry snorted, and took a bite of potato.

Susan Bones (a gorgon) wandered to the table with her husband Terry Boot (Hercules), and Hermione’s assistant Imogen (a banshee) came with them. Soon the table had attracted a ragtag group: Thurstan (a dragon), who seemed to relax when he saw that Harry wasn’t upset about the arse-grabbing incident; Millie Bulstrode (Circe), an Obliviator; Janice (a fairy), the Auror office assistant; Percy (Hogwarts Head Boy), telling anyone who would listen about recent happenings in the International Magical Office of Law. It wasn’t the crowd Harry would’ve imagined back in Hogwarts, but he was overwhelmed by a sense of happiness and belonging and possibility. The sense that things in the future didn’t have to be the way they’d always been.

Draco grabbed Harry’s leg under the table and squeezed.

Harry noticed Ron and Hermione approaching the table. They looked glad to be done with whatever they’d had to do up on Level 2, and Harry grinned at them.

Ron plopped into the chair next to Harry, and Hermione sat next to him. Ron glanced at Harry out of the corner of his eye and then squinted. He raised off his chair a few inches to lean over and investigate Draco molesting Harry under the table. Harry felt Draco tense slightly next to him.

“Finally came to your senses, then?” Ron said, and apparently satisfied with Draco grabbing Harry’s thigh, tucked into his food.

Hermione looked at her plate with a suppressed smile on her face, and Harry suspected that Ron had just talked to her over their soul bond.
“Yep,” Harry said happily. “He bought me jam.” Ron quirked an eyebrow and gave Harry a look.

“Oh,” Susan said with a smile from across the table. “You two missed Harry’s public declaration of love. I’m sure they’ll run a giant photo and full transcript tomorrow in the Prophet.”

Ron’s mouth dropped open, and Harry laughed.

Draco whispered in Harry’s ear, “Do you care about the Prophet? I hadn’t considered…”

Harry turned. “I don’t give a rat’s arse about the Prophet. Will your parents care?”

“I don’t give a fuck,” Draco said with a slow, tantalising smile.

Fuck this costume to hell, because Harry was getting another very obvious erection.

“I think it’s time for Ron’s special performance,” Hermione suddenly announced, hopping up from the table to go talk to the witch controlling the music. She was out of earshot, but she waved her arms as she spoke, indicating the dance floor and pointing at Ron.

Ron groaned, his face slightly red. “Never make a bet with Hermione,” he informed the table. “Never.”

Draco raised an eyebrow at Harry, but Harry shrugged. He had no idea.

Ron took out the Toastmasters Potion and quickly swallowed it. The embarrassed flush disappeared instantaneously from his face. He walked into the middle of the dance floor, cast a spell at his throat, and waited. Hermione ran up to kiss his cheek briefly, but then she walked to the side of the dance floor and watched with an expectant smile.

The music started to play, and Ron sang. He held out his arm, pointing it at Hermione.

I’ve got a cauldron full of hot, strong love
And it’s bubbling for you!
Say Incendio, but that spell’s not hot
As my special witch’s brew!

Harry began to laugh, and pretty soon their entire table was doubled over with laughter, even Draco. “This song really is fucking disturbing, when you think about it,” Harry said, tears of mirth in his eyes.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, Harry,” Draco managed to say with a straight face, “there’s nothing untoward about my ‘steamy, tasty treat’.”

Harry laughed harder.

I’ve got a cauldron full of hot, strong love
That’s about to be unfurled
Got a flavour that beats anything
You’ll find in the Muggle world!

Harry, who’d completely lost it when Ron sang “unfurled” with extra emphasis, was pulled out of his seat by Draco, and everyone joined Ron on the dance floor.

Molly and Arthur danced very near Hermione, keeping a close eye on her, and Harry smiled.

Hermione was twirling Percy, Susan and Terry were doing some sort of tango, Imogen and
Thurston were pressed close together. Harry wrapped his arms beneath Draco’s cape and pulled him close. Harry was a terrible dancer, but he wasn’t an idiot—he appreciated any excuse to press their lycraed bodies together. Draco smiled.

*Oh, come and stir my cauldron
And if you do it right
I’ll boil you up some hot, strong love
To keep you warm tonight!*

“Will you come over to my place after the party?” Harry asked.

“It depends,” Draco said with a smirk, “will you keep me warm tonight?”

Harry laughed. “I dunno. Will you stir my cauldron?” he asked, as suggestively as he could, though he suspected it didn’t work because Draco had to rest his head on Harry’s shoulder to cope with his peals of laughter.

Draco picked up his head. “I’ll come over. And we’ll keep the costumes and Robin can fuck Batman like you wanted before.” Harry smiled. “And in the morning,” Draco continued, and his tone made it clear that there would very much be a morning, “we will eat jam.”

“I’ll show you the dildo,” Harry said. “If you want.”

The heat in Draco’s smile could probably have boiled a cauldron, as Ron’s voice cracked in the background with his enthusiasm on the high notes.

*Oh, such thrills await
’Cause, together, we are ready to proceed
Drink from my cauldron full of hot, strong love
It’s all the magic you’ll ever need!*

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**One year later**

Harry was in the kitchen, making dinner. It was Tuesday, which meant he was making pasta. Draco was very particular about certain things, and a regular supper schedule was one of them. Harry was not particular about that, but to be honest, he liked not having to think about what to make, since it was already decided.

Their quirks suited each other surprisingly well.

A large pot of water sat on the hob, ready to be Charmed to a boil. Harry pressed his thumbnail into the papery peel of a few garlic cloves to coax the peels away, and spelled a knife to mince them. The aroma filled the air, and Harry smiled. He Summoned the bottle of wine that Draco had selected that morning. Draco didn’t trust Harry to pair the wine with the food, so he did it in the morning before leaving for work. Harry poured a glass.

He walked to the cupboard and pulled out the guanciale Draco got from that Italian deli he liked. Harry heard the Floo roar. “Hello!” he called.

Draco walked in a moment later, looking immaculate, as always, in stark contrast to Harry’s end-of-day frazzled look. “It smells amazing,” Draco said. He took off his robes and flicked his wand, sending them to the wardrobe.

“Did you miss me?” Draco said, leaning elegantly against the counter. “Were you forced to resort
to the dildo in my absence?”

Harry smiled, throwing the guanciale on the chopping block and setting a knife to chop it. Draco cracked jokes about that blasted dildo every single day. Even though they’d used it together (*Merlin*, Harry really preferred sex with human beings to whatever that thing was made of), Draco still couldn’t let it go.

“How was work?” Harry asked.

“How was work?” Draco asked. “I’m saving that news for later, though. First tell me all the mundane and horrifyingly boring things that the Saviour did today.” He smirked and Summoned a wine glass.

“Well,” Harry said, “er, not much. I talked to Hermione. She’s feeling good.”

“Not ready to pop yet, is she?”

“I should hope not,” Harry frowned, a crease of worry between his eyes as he pulled a box of spaghetti from the cupboard. “She still has a few weeks to go. My godbaby needs to stay inside as long as possible.” He looked up at Draco and smiled.

After the Blattax attacks, Ron and Hermione had decided to take a long holiday, which was something they had never done before. Harry had wondered guiltily whether they had felt they couldn’t because of him. But he had Draco and was doing well, and they went to Australia for a full four weeks. They’d also, it turned out, used the opportunity to get Hermione pregnant. They were thrilled, everyone was thrilled for them. Draco was a bit apprehensive about the idea of an infant—and its associated fluids—in his house.

Draco walked close to Harry and put a hand on his elbow. “Godbaby will be fine.” Then he walked away, muttering about having to learn babyproofing charms.

It had been complicated, learning how to have a relationship with both Draco and Ron and Hermione. Draco continued to have moments of jealousy, and he would sometimes end up yelling about it. Hermione and Ron were happy for Harry to have a partner, but they weren’t used to Harry having obligations that were separate from theirs. Harry sometimes struggled to know how to fit it all in. He didn’t like missing things with Ron and Hermione or the wider Weasley clan, but he also kind of just wanted to sit around in bed with Draco every minute he wasn’t at work.

But even with those challenges, it was also true that Draco fit into Harry’s life and even into Ron and Hermione’s lives. Draco grounded Harry when worry about Hermione and Ron threatened to consume him. Draco played chess with Ron (an enormous relief to both Harry and Hermione, who took the opportunity to laugh at stupid Muggle telly that the others could never understand). Draco could debate any political issue with Hermione, and he was able to give her perfect practice for debating the opposition. (Harry sometimes got upset at watching the two of them fight, and Draco had to keep explaining, “For the love of Salazar, Potter, she asked me to argue as if I were my father, I don’t believe all of this, calm down!”) Draco was steadfastly and Slytherinly protective of Harry, which was a bit of a relief to Ron and Hermione, who felt they could worry less about him. Harry found all of that a bit off-putting because he could take care of himself, really, but he saw the way Draco raised his eyebrows and caught Hermione’s eye when he said as much. Harry supposed that his friends’ protectiveness had less to do with his competence and more to do with lingering anxiety about his life always being in danger.

Harry smiled and waved his wand to boil the water. He dropped in the spaghetti and Summoned a skillet for the guanciale and garlic. The garlic wasn’t strictly called for in an authentic carbonara, but fuck if Harry was going to leave out garlic.
“Did you see the Prophet?” Harry asked.

“Yes!” Draco said, sitting at the table. “Is that all over, then?”

The Wizengamot had finally ruled on the case of the two Ministry workers who had been hit with Blattax and copulated in the Atrium (“copulated” seemed to be the word of choice in media reports on the incident). The two victims were entitled to damages from the criminals, who had been in Azkaban for the past year (Godfrey Hilliard, who had indeed turned out to be the ringleader, would be in Azkaban for twenty years). Kingsley and Robards were thrilled that the Ministry hadn’t been found negligent or liable for damages.

Hermione’s face got pinched when she talked about the whole thing, because while she was happy that Blattax was no longer threatening her, she didn’t strictly believe in imprisonment as punishment or deterrent. Harry had noticed that she was reading Muggle criminal justice books about rehabilitation in her spare time. The last time Harry had been at their house, he’d seen a stack of books by the couch—Healer Spock’s Baby and Child Care, Transforming Environments and Rehabilitation: A Guide for Practitioners in Forensic Settings and Criminal Justice, The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding, and Offending and Desistance: The Importance of Social Relations.

This was the last case to be heard by the Wizengamot about the Blattax attacks. Which meant that the ordeal was finally over.

“It’s over,” Harry said, turning to flash a smile at Draco.

Of course, Hermione had still been receiving threats, especially after she gave an interview in Witch Weekly about magical objects complicating sexual consent. The Granger-Weasley mail was still screened by Aurors. Hermione still had an Auror guard when she was in public, though Robards had recently suggested that it might be time to declare that the need for the Auror guard had passed. The whole thing still made Harry nervous.

Harry grabbed a bowl from the shelf and Summoned four eggs. He flicked his wand and two eggs cracked into the bowl, the shells Vanishing in the air. The other two eggs cracked and only the yolks fell into the bowl, shells and whites Vanishing. He reached in a drawer and selected a cheese grater, grating parmesan into the bowl with the yolks. He grabbed a pinch of salt and threw it in the bowl, then waved his wand to grind some pepper.

It was impossible to guess which cooking tasks Harry would use magic for; it drove Draco crazy.

“I spoke to Jérémie,” Draco said, taking a sip of his wine. “He’s willing to come to Hermione’s meeting.”

Hermione had been so impressed with the intermagical programme at Jussieu that she was on a mission to convince Kingsley to sign off on a task force to plan the implementation of a similar programme in England.

“Oh, great,” Harry said, stirring the spaghetti by hand as he Charmed a whisk to beat the eggs. “We’ll have to have him over for dinner while he’s here.” Harry turned around to look at Draco. “He won’t judge my cooking too hard, will he? I don’t think I can make, like, soufflé.”

Draco laughed. “How’d the meeting with L.U.D.I.T.E.S. go?”

Harry sighed. He wasn’t sure how he’d ended up tasked with heading the interdepartmental initiative between the MLE and the League of Undercover Digital Internet, Technology, and Electronic Suppression. He suspected it was thanks to his Muggle upbringing and facility with his
iPhone. It wasn’t hard to look like a tech genius in the Ministry of Magic. He’d been stuck training MLE employees how to use Google and teaching L.U.D.I.T.E.S. employees how to think strategically about crime prevention and apprehension. On top of everything, he’d started getting hassled by a group of young wizards who were concerned about net neutrality and maintaining a free and open magical internet. Harry honestly couldn’t care less about any of it, unless he needed it to solve a case.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Harry grumbled. He Vanished the pasta cooking water and Levitated the pasta into the bowl. He grabbed a spoon and stirred by hand.

Draco laughed gleefully. He found the whole thing very amusing, and still took every opportunity to declare that he was “feeling lucky.”

It had been the cause of one of their frequent fights. Harry had been annoyed about something and Draco asked him to do something on the internet, and when Harry had taken out the laptop, Draco had demanded that Harry “click that he’s feeling lucky,” and Harry had just snapped. “Oh my god, Draco!” he’d yelled. “What the fuck is wrong with you! Do it yourself, then. I know you know how! I watched you with that fucking NMR machine! But no! You insist on making me do it, and then you try to micromanage my Googling!” Draco had snickered at the phrase “micromanage my Googling,” and Harry had stormed out of the room.

“Andromeda can’t make it to Teddy’s first Quidditch game this weekend,” Harry said, “and she was hoping we could go.”

“He’s not even playing,” Draco said. “He’s a first year!”

“She thinks it’s important for him to have people around,” Harry said.

Draco’s eyes softened. “Alright. Let’s go. Who’s playing?”

“Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw.”

“Damn,” Draco said, sipping his wine. “Well, I’ll root Ravenclaw and you’ll root Hufflepuff, obviously. Get ready to get clawed, badger.”

Harry laughed. “What the fuck.”

“Laugh now. Pretty soon you’ll be cowering beneath our pointy beak deliberately stabbing you in the badger mouth.”

“Ravenclaws do not talk like that.”

“You’re such a Hufflepuff,” Draco sighed.

Harry finished stirring the guanciale into the pasta and Levitated the bowl to the table. Draco waved his wand to Summon plates, forks, and napkins.

Harry pulled a pasta serving spoon out of the drawer and carried it to the table, serving them each a healthy portion of carbonara.

“This looks amazing,” Draco said, twirling the spaghetti with his fork.

“Thanks,” Harry said around a bite of pasta. It was good. The garlic was the right call.

“Ministry Halloween party tomorrow,” Draco said with a smirk.
“Oh Godric,” Harry moaned, “don’t talk to me about it. What do you think we’ll be this year? Sonny and Cher?”

Draco shrugged. “Cher is a very talented witch.”

Their forks clinked as they ate in contented silence.

“So what’d you want to tell me about work?” Harry asked.

“Oh, yes.” Draco swallowed, his eyes shining with excitement. “One moment,” he said, standing to walk out of the room. He came back a moment later waving a parchment in the air.

“Is that what I think it is?” Harry asked, eyes wide. Draco slid the parchment across the table next to Harry’s plate.

Draco Lucius Malfoy and Ronald Bilius Weasley are hereby granted permission to brew and sell the potion submitted to this board on the twelfth of August, 2009, known by the name “Erotes Potion.”

“Holy shit!” Harry yelled, standing up to lean over the table and press a kiss on Draco’s lips. Draco looked pleased with himself.

“So did they end up approving the contract along with the potion?” Harry asked.

“Yes!” Draco enthused, twirling more spaghetti.

After the Blattax attacks, Draco had decided to take it as a personal challenge to come up with a formulation of an intense love and lust potion that did not run afoul of Hermione’s standards of consent. At first, Harry couldn’t understand why Draco cared so much. “What the hell do you need this potion for, Draco? Are you not happy with our sex life?” Draco had whirled around pointing his finger wildly. “This has nothing to do with our sex life! You know I love our sex life!” Harry had yelled, “Well then why are you exerting all this energy on this?” Draco had burst, “It’s a puzzle!” And then Harry had realised—Draco really just loved puzzles. He felt there was a solution, and he was going to find it. That was just the way Draco was.

Turned out, Harry kind of loved that.

At first, Draco focused on adjustments he might make to the potion itself. Maybe he could adjust the manner of the infatuation, or the type of physical lust. But each time he had an idea, he would invite Ron and Hermione over for supper, explain it in detail, and Hermione would shake her head. “No,” she’d say, “that’s not true consent! No. The drinker would have to be able to change their mind.”

Eventually, Draco had realised that he would not solve the puzzle by adjusting the potion itself. But what if he tied the potion to some other type of magic? Maybe he could use a magical object worn during sex that could counteract the effects of the potion? Hermione was not convinced.

Then one evening, the four were eating supper, and Ron mentioned off-hand that they had developed a waiver for one of their new joke products—before the buyer could use the product, they had to sign the waiver. If they didn’t sign the waiver, the product would remain inert.

Draco’s eyes had gone wide. “Weasley!” he’d cried. “That’s it! We make a contract! Not like a legal contract! But an agreement between the two parties! They agree in advance what they’re willing to do in bed. When the parties sign the contract, the potion will activate and the contract magic will connect with the potion! Then the negotiation part of the consent would be, as it were,
non-negotiable—people would have to negotiate, or else the potion wouldn’t activate!” He started muttering under his breath something about “dual-drinker static-vector formulations.”

Hermione had tilted her head to the side, and it was the first time she hadn’t dismissed him out of hand. “So the contract magic would make it so that the drinker wouldn’t desire anything that they hadn’t previously agreed to?”

“Yes!” Draco had said. “It’s perfect!”

“Hmmm,” Hermione had said. “But how would the drinker change their mind?”

Draco thought for a moment. “We could formulate the magic to enhance and amplify desires that the person already has and that they’ve explicitly agreed to in the contract, and then the magic would stop if the underlying desire changed throughout the encounter. So desire without agreement wouldn’t do anything—that’s some Chambrs Cosworth bullshit. And agreement without desire wouldn’t do anything. But with desire and agreement, the contract magic would activate the potion.”

“Could you do that?” Harry’d asked, incredulous.

“I think we could,” Draco mused.

“But would those changes make the potion useless, from the perspective of those who’d be interested in a potion like that?” Ron asked. “Why would anyone want to take it? How would it be better than just having sex?”

“Isn’t that pretty obvious, mate?” Harry asked. “People love getting out of their own heads, and there’s all this cultural and romance baggage on top of that, plus they’d wonder if it would make sex better.”

Draco grinned at Harry, clearly pleased with him. “It would be contract magic more than potions. I need to go to the library.”

Harry was never sure, later, if Hermione had just agreed because she’d been so glad to hear someone else as excited as she was about libraries, but agree she did.

Ron, who had experience connecting contract magic to potions because of the WWW products, worked with Draco over the next months to develop the potion. It was a strangely interdisciplinary project, with Draco seeking Hermione’s opinion throughout the process and even hiring a magisexologist to help design a comprehensive contract. They’d hired a lawyer to make the case for why the potion deserved an official exemption from the prohibition against love and lust potions.

They weren’t sure what the Experimental Potions Review Board would make of the Erotes Potion, though. There wasn’t much precedent for this type of approval. The clinical trials were conducted at St Mungo’s, and Hermione had made Harry and Draco promise they wouldn’t even think about trying the potion until such time as it had been pronounced safe and legal by the proper authorities. She had almost made them take an Unbreakable Vow, she had been so serious.

Draco had been ranting for months about how he wanted to submit Firewhisky to the review board and see if it would get rejected, because “Good grief, Harry, the Erotes potion is a thousand times more respectful of consent than alcohol, and doesn’t the Ministry understand how ridiculous this is?”

But here it was. Safe and legal.
“Amazing!” Harry said, laughing. “Wow, that didn’t even take as long as I’d anticipated to get through the maze of bureaucracy.”

“Weasley and I are going to give that interview to Witch Weekly next week,” Draco said. “We’re going to tell them that we won’t accept any royalties off of the potion, as a sign of goodwill to all of the pro-love-potion organisations that have felt wronged.” Draco took a sip of wine. “A bunch of tripe, of course, but maybe it will help calm the vitriol against Hermione.”

“You do realise Chambers Cosworth would hate this potion,” Harry said, chewing his spaghetti. “It’s nowhere near rapey enough.”

Draco smiled. “That’s the whole point, isn’t it?” He frowned. “In all honesty, I’m fairly certain I would hate the Erotes Potion, too. I don’t particularly enjoy being out of control of my faculties.”

Harry hummed. “Me too,” he said, and they continued to eat in silence. Every few minutes, Harry glanced at the parchment. He swallowed. He looked up at Draco, who was also looking at the parchment, his face a little flushed.

“So did you want to—”

“Do you have any—”

They chuckled in an apprehensive way and then nodded at each other. Jesus fuck, they were actually going to take the potion. Harry began to laugh nervously.

“I feel it’s my duty, as the inventor, to subjectively assess the potion,” Draco said, his lip quirking into a smile.

“I want to see what it’s like,” Harry said, still laughing. “But I’m feeling strangely nervous about it at the moment. As if we haven’t already fucked in, like, every manner possible.”

“That’s what you think,” Draco said darkly. “You haven’t seen the list of sexual activities that we need to approve or disapprove yet. Honestly some of things on that list are a turn-off just to read.”

“We can just, like, choose the things we’ve already done, yeah?” Harry asked.

Draco nodded and stood. He raised an eyebrow to ask whether Harry was coming.

Harry tripped in his haste to get out of his seat.

Chapter End Notes

I read Embers while writing this story, and while I had a contract in my notes before I read it, the ultimate version here owes much to the brilliance of the as-yet-still-mystery author, to whom I send my love. If you haven't read it and are into magical consent, go read it now!

Thanks to all of you for your comments while I was finishing this, it's been such a rewarding but challenging project and your comments have kept me going.

Find me on Tumblr.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!