For The Greater Good

by jadepresley

Summary

When Harry and Draco discover they’ve been bonded to one another, neither one of them is prepared for the secrets they slowly begin to uncover.

Together, they learn that they can’t escape their past, or the things that have been left hidden there, and that sometimes the only way to move forward is to look back.

Notes

Dear ustorycollector, When I got my assignment and saw I was writing for you, and read the things you had requested, I literally squealed with joy! This idea had been floating around in my head half formed for a while, but I always just pushed it away thinking it was too big for me to tackle, but when I saw your list everything just fell into place! I'm so thrilled to have had the chance to write this story for you, and I really hope you enjoy it! Thank you for your brilliant list and for giving me the inspiration to make this story come to life! x

So much love and thanks to the mods, for being so patient with me and granting my extension when I was dealing with Real Life Drama, and for running this wonderful fest!

Beta love! Oh good god I don't even know where to start. I'm not just saying this to be nice, okay? This story literally would not have happened without chibaken and dragonsandotters. There is no way I would have gotten through the (ridiculously complicated) plotting let alone...
the writing. Thank you guys for your encouragement. Thank you for reminding me that I could do this when I was certain that I couldn't. Thank you for being willing to point out my mistakes so that this could be as good as it could possibly be. Thank you for spending hours and hours working with me, sometimes until 4am, and for all your love and patience. I adore you both so much and am beyond grateful!

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

Harry edges forward slowly, wand drawn and held out in front of him as his eyes scan the final room of the decrepit building he’s been assessing. There are no windows here; the floor is scuffed up concrete, and there’s a chill that goes straight through his Auror robes, making him shiver. The whole place looks more like a teenager’s shady hangout spot than a crime den.

He casts a *lumos* charm, lighting up the rest of the room. Empty bottles of Muggle alcohol litter the floor and clink loudly as he kicks them out of his way. There are holes in the wall panels and graffiti covering the rest of the space. An old mattress is shoved into one corner, wiry springs peeking through the frayed fabric, and Harry wrinkles his nose at the questionable stains all over it.

A recent sweep of this predominantly Muggle area had shown higher than normal levels of magical energy. It was likely just a witch or wizard passing through, but Head Auror Clemens was in a foul mood today, and had insisted that it couldn’t wait until Monday, that somebody had to spend the dying hours of Friday afternoon checking it out. It was a shit assignment that no one wanted, even with the prospect of department promotions around the corner. The other Aurors had clapped Harry on the back gratefully when he’d volunteered. He wasn’t trying to be selfless; he just has nowhere else to be tonight and doesn’t feel like going home to an empty apartment again.

“I could have a pint in my hand right now if it wasn’t for you, you bloody shit.”

His partner, Blaise Zabini, isn’t as understanding about it, and Harry can feel his scowl without looking at him.

They’re an unlikely partnership, Harry knows, but they work well together. The two of them were paired up back when they’d both joined the Auror force right after the war, and Harry’d been completely narked off about it. He’d always imagined he and Ron going through training together, having a laugh and taking down bad guys. But Ron had decided to help George run his shop and Clemens had thrown Harry and Blaise together, and Harry had quickly discovered that in between training sessions, most of their assignments involved nothing but desk work anyway.

Harry had known very little about Blaise at first — he was a friend of Draco Malfoy’s, a Slytherin, and he and his mother remained neutral during most of the war. It wasn’t until a week after they started training that Hermione told him Blaise had come back and fought alongside the Order in the final battle, and that she’d heard from Kingsley that Blaise’d spent his seventh year laying low and protecting the younger kids from the Carrows.

Harry was surprised at first, but now that he knows Blaise better — knows how his mind works and how fiercely committed he is to protecting those who can’t protect themselves — he thinks it makes perfect sense.

Harry glances over at him. Blaise is tall and slender, always perfectly groomed and impeccably dressed; even the gold buttons on his Auror robes are shined perfectly. His hair is cropped short, his face always smooth. Harry, on the other hand — with his hair pulled into a messy knot at the back of his head, his Auror robes in a perpetual state of unkemptness, and the beard on his face getting thicker everyday — is Blaise’s polar opposite.

“I’m going to have to throw these robes away, you realise,” Blaise is muttering as he runs a diagnostic charm over the room. “I can *literally* feel the smell of this place seeping into the fabric.”

Harry chuckles. “Then you’ll only have— what? Eighty-six sets left?”
Blaise shoots him a dark look over his shoulder, but Harry knows he wouldn’t have come out here if he didn’t want to. The thing about Blaise Zabini is that if he doesn’t want to do something, not even Clemens has a hope in hell of making him do it.

He extinguishes the blue light of the diagnostic charm and turns around to face Harry. “Nothing,” he declares. “No traces left. As I suspected, this was a waste of time, and we’ve just spent an hour in this hovel for no bloody reason.”

Harry lowers his wand too, a little disappointed at the dead end, and he checks his watch. “It’s just gone five. You want to head back and do the paperwork now? Get it out of the way?”

“Christ, no, Potter,” Blaise scoffs. “It’s Friday night, and I need to go home and get ready to go out. If I don’t get laid tonight, I’ll start thinking even you’re a good option— and if that day ever comes, I’ll thank you to hex me immediately.”

Harry, though, only half hears him — he stares, frowning at the floor, as a wave of nausea passes over him. He swallows, trying to push the feeling away. Maybe the sandwich he ate at lunch was bad — Hermione is always warning him not to eat food from the Muggle food truck that’s parked across from the Ministry, but Harry can’t resist.

“Why do you look weird?” Blaise asks him.

Harry looks up. He’s not sure if the room is spinning, or if somehow there is now two of Blaise standing in front of him. He shakes his head, trying to clear away the spots suddenly clouding his vision. He doesn’t feel right at all. His magic is unsettled, an itch under his skin is forming, and he reaches frantically for the wall.

“Harry, what the fuck?”

Blaise sounds far away now. Harry stumbles, fingers grasping at the wall to hold himself upright, and he’s filled with the inexplicable need to get away from here. To get… to get somewhere. He doesn’t know where, but he needs, urgently, to go.

He tries to move forward — he has to get to the door — and he thinks he hears a shout, someone saying his name maybe, but it feels as though a heavy fog is settling over him, forcing him down, and then he’s falling, darkness creeping in.

And then there is nothing at all.

ooOoo

Harry heard a loud whistling noise somewhere close by, and he was sitting in a familiar compartment. Was this the Hogwarts Express? The world outside the window was racing past, a blur of green fields and blue sky, and he should have been more curious to know why he was there, but he knew somehow that this was where he was supposed to be. So he waited.

This was a dream, he thought, as he looked around. The edges of his vision were blurred slightly, not quite able to come into focus, and he felt strangely calm. He stretched his legs out in front of him, sinking lower into the seat. He may as well enjoy it while he was here.

Suddenly the compartment door slid open and his calm disappeared. He was nervous now. Uncertain.
The door slid shut, but Harry couldn’t see anyone.

“You came,” he heard himself say.

“I said I would,” came an irritated voice from in front of him. Harry couldn’t see them, but there was relief mixed with his uncertainty now that they’d shown up.

Harry was staring at the empty space. He waited for more words to come, from himself or from his guest, but silence stretched out between them.

“You’re a fool to be so trusting,” they finally declared. “How did you know I wouldn’t just keep this cloak?”

And that makes sense, Harry realised. He’d given this person his cloak so they could sneak in here.

“I don’t trust you,” he said, his voice sounding far away, though his mouth was definitely moving. “And I know you don’t trust me. But we want to help the same person, so I knew you’d show up.”

“Idiot Gryffindor,” was the muttered reply. “We can’t help, you realise,” they continued dramatically. “There’s nothing we can do. It’s utterly hopeless.”

“If there were really no hope, you wouldn’t have answered my owls,” Harry said confidently. “And you wouldn’t be here.”

“So I’m here,” they snapped. “Talk.”

“What I need from you,” Harry said, glancing to the compartment door to make sure no one was out there, “is to tell me everything you know about what Draco Malfoy did this past summer.”

Harry comes to slowly. His body feels heavy and groggy as he blinks his eyes open, the way he feels sometimes when he takes a nap and oversleeps. The room is fuzzy without his glasses, but he recognises the crisp white walls of St Mungo’s, and he can smell the strong scent of the magical cleaning solution that’s used on the floors. After many, many visits here, it’s all very familiar to him.

He pinches the bridge of his nose, trying to align his thoughts and focus on how he got here this time. He remembers being in the old building with Blaise, assessing that there was no danger, and he remembers the moment right before he passed out; there’d been a strange, overwhelming feeling of need that had consumed him out of nowhere. He realises abruptly that the itch is still there, just below the surface of his skin. He rubs at his arm. It’s not painful, but it’s making him unsettled and fidgety, and it’s becoming more irritating the more he thinks about it.

The door to his room opens. Harry gropes beside him to find his glasses and pushes them back onto his face.

“You’re a right bastard, you know that?”

Blaise walks in and stands at the end of his bed, still in his full Auror uniform, which means Harry hasn’t been out for that long — there’s no way Blaise Zabini would ever wear the same clothes more than one day in a row.

“My dick is furious with you,” he continues, crossing his arms, “and I’m not too happy either. What
was that about?"

“Blaise, honestly.” Hermione follows him into the room, coming to Harry’s left side and dropping a kiss on his cheek. “Are you alright?” she asks. “Penelope is on her way— the spell we put on the room notified us you were awake, but she had to finish up with another patient.” She’s watching him worriedly as he pulls himself up into a sitting position. Her curls are styled neatly back into a sleek bun, and she’s pulled one of Ron’s old hoodies over the top of an elegant black dress.

“You and Ron had a date tonight,” Harry groans, remembering. “Shit, I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be stupid, it’s fine.” She waves a dismissive hand in the air. “Ron’s back at home with Rosie— she’s thrilled obviously, because Ron is letting her have pizza for dinner. I’ll have to Floo him and let him know what’s happening shortly.”

“Still,” Harry says apologetically. “It was your date night; I’m sorry to drag you down here.”

“Excuse me,” Blaise interrupts. “What about my date?”

Harry rolls his eyes. “Casual sex with someone you haven’t met yet isn’t a date, Blaise,” he says. “I’ve told you that before.”

Blaise huffs. “Some poor girl is missing out on—” He gestures broadly to his face. “—all of this right now. I hope you can live with yourself knowing that, Potter. Knowing I had to Apparate your sorry arse out of that place and drag you here again.”

“Actually, I think I’ve probably just saved this imaginary girl from a night of hearing sleazy pick up lines,” Harry tells him.

“I’m a Zabini,” Blaise says proudly. “There is nothing sleazy about anything I do.”

Hermione is watching them from beside Harry and shakes her head. “You two are so odd,” she comments. “You’ve not even asked how he is,” she says to Blaise.

“He’s fine, Granger,” Blaise replies. “He lives to cockblock me, so he won’t be dying anytime soon. I’m half-convinced he only defeated Voldemort so we could be paired up at the Ministry and he could ruin my weekends.”

“You’re the most dramatic human being in the world,” Harry scoffs.

Hermione snorts. “Draco,” she offers as explanation when Harry looks at her curiously, and Blaise gives a rare chuckle.

“True,” he agrees. “You really should have more patience with me, Granger, when you have to deal with that man almost daily. He’s much worse than I am. In every sense.”

“It’s a photo finish,” Hermione mutters. Harry isn’t listening properly to them though; the itching has flared up again, like his magic is prickling him from just below the surface. He’s shifting against the bed trying to find relief from the uncomfortable sensation when the door opens again and Harry’s Healer, Penelope Clearwater, comes in.

Penelope looks much the same as she had in school— tall and willowy, with kind eyes and a permanent smile fixed on her face. She has her wand tucked behind her ear, and is holding Harry’s chart, but Harry knows her well enough by now to know that her soft exterior is masking one of the toughest and most efficient Healers St Mungo’s has.
“Back again?” she says cheerfully, flipping open the chart and flashing Harry her trademark grin.

“Of course he is— he’s obsessed with you,” Blaise offers unhelpfully.

“I haven’t been here in months,” Harry grumbles.

Penelope glances down at her notes. “Three weeks, actually,” she confirms. “What was it this time?” she asks Blaise. “Another top secret mission?”

“Not this time,” Blaise replies with a smirk. “We were in an empty room in no immediate danger, and he fainted.”

“Hmm,” Penelope says thoughtfully, tipping her head to the side as though considering Harry. “He’s getting less and less heroic, isn’t he? We might go a full month without seeing him one of these days.”

Harry isn’t sure how the strange friendship between his partner and his Healer first started, only that it’s based purely on them mocking him when he ends up in a hospital bed. Which does not happen that often, thank you, and when it does, it’s usually not his fault. He can’t help it if he never quite grew out of being accident prone.

“Alright,” Penelope says, seeing Harry’s petulant pout. “Now that you’re awake, I’ll take some readings, and I have a few questions we need to go through. Would you prefer to continue in private?”

Harry looks at Hermione and Blaise. Hermione will insist she needs to be there, and Blaise will just refuse to go without further explanation. They both care about him, in their own ways. “They wouldn’t leave even if I asked them to,” he says, shrugging.

Penelope nods, then plucks her wand from behind her ear and begins casting her diagnostic spells, her charmed quill adding notes on Harry’s chart as she goes.

Harry answers her questions robotically, so used to them now that he doesn’t even need to think about the answers. No, he isn’t experiencing any additional stress. No, he hasn’t been ill. No, he hasn’t been out of the country. No, he hasn’t experienced any unexplainable pain before this. It’s a familiar routine, one not dissimilar to the one he and Madam Pomfrey’d had in school.

“Okay, let’s talk about today,” Penelope says, waving her wand in a complicated movement without looking up and casting the next charm. “Can you describe to me how you felt both before and while the episode was happening?”

“I felt like I was going to throw up,” Harry says. “And I got dizzy. I sort of felt like I was far away, though I could see the room I was in. Then I just…” He frowns, looking down at his hands as he twists them in the sheet. “I had this urge, like an itch. I needed to get out of there. To get somewhere else.”

Penelope is watching him carefully when he looks up. “How do you feel now?” she asks. “Are you still feeling any of those things?”


Penelope is frowning at her chart, which he isn’t used to.

“What is it?” Harry asks uncertainly.
She scans the notes again, and then looks at Harry. “There’s an... unusual undercurrent in your magic that I picked up on just now,” she explains. “There’s nothing recorded to explain it in your medical history, and I’ve never seen it in your readings before. It’s very faint, but—” Harry glances at Hermione, and is reassured that she looks confused as well. “I need to know,” Penelope continues. “Have you ever performed, or allowed someone else to perform, any kind of bonding spell on you?”

Hermione makes a small noise of surprise beside him, and Blaise arches an eyebrow. “Wild night in Vegas you forgot to mention?” he asks Harry. “Do you have a secret husband we don’t know about?”

“No,” Harry denies at once. “I wouldn’t even know how to do a bonding spell. And I’d know if someone had performed one on me, wouldn’t I?”

“Not necessarily, no,” Penelope says, tucking her wand away and closing the chart. “There are a myriad of different bonding spells, the most common obviously being for marriage, but that leaves a much stronger trace than what I’m seeing here.”

“So it’s not a bond then?” Harry asks hopefully. “Is it some sort of curse?”

“It’s not a marriage bond, no,” Penelope corrects. “And no, I don’t think you’ve been cursed. Obviously I can’t confirm anything yet, because what I’ve picked up on is too faint, but based on what I can see, and the symptoms you’ve described, I do think you’re experiencing the effects of some other sort of bonding spell.”

“Is there any indication of the bond’s nature?” Hermione asks. “Is he in any immediate danger?”

Penelope shakes her head. “Again, I can’t say anything with certainty, but there doesn’t appear to be any immediate threat, no. I’ll continue to monitor him closely. Unfortunately, in this kind of situation, we have to rely on the symptoms to guide us; if they come back, I’ll be able to get a clearer picture of what effect the spell is having on him.”

“Can’t you just—” Harry searches frantically for the words. He hates the idea of there being something wrong with him that’s beyond his control, that’s potentially in the control of someone else. “I don’t know— do a spell? Figure out what it is? Surely there aren’t that many possibilities?”

“I wish I could,” Penelope says gently, “but the problem is, Harry, there are bonding spells for essentially every reason imaginable, and some are very, very subtle. There are, of course, some that have obvious requirements — things like the bondees being forced to remain physically touching — but that particular branch of bonding magic is very outdated, and if that were the case here, you’d be in immense pain. The most common of the more subtle bonds are those used for tracking. They’re very popular right now, particularly with parents on their teenagers. They leave minimal magical residue, so they’re hard to spot without a Healer reading, and considering your line of work and who you are, that seems likely. But even so, generally the caster needs to be present, so I don’t want to promise you anything until I get a better read on this.”

Hermione turns to him, a hand on his arm. “Harry, are you absolutely sure there was no one in that building? Is there any chance you could have missed something? Someone?”

“It was just me and Blaise,” Harry says. “We checked everywhere and cast all the normal spells, so unless he did it—”

“Oh, no, don’t look at me,” Blaise says, holding his hands up in front of him. “He causes me enough problems without having him stuck to me permanently.”
“Is it possible it was cast elsewhere?” Hermione asks Penelope. “Is there a chance it wasn’t even cast today?”

“There’s every chance.” Penelope nods. “It’s faint, which could either indicate it’s a weak spell, or that it’s been dormant and is only now starting to show itself — though that kind of thing is very rare — but even that much is speculation right now. All I can say at this stage is that there is some sort of bonding magic intertwined with Harry’s, and as he doesn’t know when it was cast or to whom he is bonded, we need to monitor this very closely.”

Harry slumps further down into his pillows. “I’m bonded to somebody,” he says miserably. Suddenly, his boring Friday night alone seems a lot more appealing.

“Most likely,” Penelope agrees. “Again, we need to determine what kind of bond this is, but the good news is that your symptoms are mild for any bonding spell. You should consider yourself lucky it’s been nothing more than a fainting episode.”

Harry isn’t feeling particularly lucky, and the looks on both Hermione’s and Blaise’s faces indicate that they share his feelings. “And if it gets worse?” he asks. “If you can’t work out what it is?”

“Then we will need to track down either the person you’re bonded to, so the spell will settle and we can work on it in a contained environment, or we find the person who cast it so they can remove it.”

She doesn’t need to say it, but the look on her face tells Harry all he needs to know — neither of those options are likely when they have no starting point.

“I’ll be writing a Healer’s Recommendation that you be given the next week off work and owling it to Head Auror Clemens,” Penelope continues. She holds her hands up as Harry starts to protest. “Just until we sort this out, Harry. We don’t know how serious it is, so I’d like you to come in each day so I can assess you. Ideally, we’ll resolve it much faster than a week, but I want to be sure we have enough time. Also, when you’re not here, I’d recommend staying with someone else, just as a precaution. With Hermione and Ron maybe?” she asks Hermione.

“Of course,” Hermione agrees. “You can stay as long as you need, Harry.”

Harry runs both his hands over his face in frustration, his beard scratching his palms.

“It was an abandoned Muggle shithole and you still managed to end up completely fucked, Potter,” Blaise says, clapping him on the shoulder. “You never fail to make me eternally grateful I’m not you.”

Harry looks up to glare at him, but Blaise is smirking and Harry can’t muster the energy. “I have to go,” Blaise announces. “Now that you’re not dying or anything else equally terrible on my watch, it seems like a good time to go. Owl me if you want.”

He says it nonchalantly, but Harry knows he wants to make sure Harry is okay.

“Here’s hoping you enjoy your night more than I’ve enjoyed mine,” Harry grumbles.

Blaise chuckles. “No doubt I will. I might Floo Draco and see if he wants to come out. We’ll see what happens.”

He’s gone a moment later with an elegant swirl of his robes, but Harry can’t focus on anything around him because the itching is getting worse and it’s driving him completely mad.

“Harry,” Hermione says. He feels her touch his arm again but it barely registers. “What is it?”
He drags his nails over his skin but it doesn’t help. The itching is so persistent. “I need— ” He 
swings his legs off the bed. He should follow Blaise, that's what he should do. “I need to go,” he 
says earnestly.

“Go where?” Penelope asks, moving close to him, her wand alight with a diagnostic charm. “Are 
you feeling compelled to follow Blaise, Harry?”

“Yes,” Harry says, but he knows that's not right as soon as he says it. “No. I—” He's confused. He 
tries to push off the bed. Hermione is holding onto his arm to stop him moving. “I need to go,” he 
says again. He can hear the urgency in his own voice and he doesn’t know how to get them to 
understand. “With him. Blaise. Not with him, but that way. I don't know.” He groans. It feels as 
though he's going mad. His magic, his body — all of it is trying to pull him, to make him get up and move, but Penelope and Hermione won’t let him.

“Harry,” Hermione says again, her voice strained with worry. “Harry, do you need to follow Blaise 
because he's going to see Draco?”

And the itching erupts further. It's everywhere, completely out of control and Harry needs to move, 
to follow, to go with Blaise now. It’s the only thing that will help, that will settle his magic and this 
feeling, he has to go, needs to go, because that's where…

“Yes,” he manages, realising what Hermione has said, what he needs, and it makes so much sense. 
Of course that's where he needs to go. “Malfoy,” he says, trying to push his way off the bed again. “I 
need to see Malfoy right now.”
Harry is pacing his living room with his hands clasped behind him to stop himself scratching mindlessly. His eyes dart to the fireplace every few seconds, his mood souring a little more with every moment that passes and it doesn’t come to life. His Auror robes and undershirt, along with his boots and socks, are laying in a discarded heap in the middle of the floor, flung off in an attempt to try to alleviate some of the irritation the moment he’d arrived home. Even the fabric of his trousers and pants is driving him mental, rubbing against his skin as he paces, flaring the itching sensation further. For Penelope’s sake though he’s refraining from doing anything about it right now.

Lucy, the tan coloured Crup Harry’d adopted not long after the war, is following behind him, tongue lolling out of her mouth as she pads across the carpet watching him curiously.

“Where are they?” Harry asks impatiently for the fourth time in two minutes, stepping over Lucy as he changes direction. He really can’t wait much longer. Whatever is happening, whatever this feeling is, makes no sense. There’s no logic right now; only the undeniable urge to see Malfoy slowly becoming harder and harder to ignore. “What if they’re not coming? I should go and find them.”

Penelope, who is still dressed in her lime green Healer robes after escorting Harry directly here from the hospital, is perched on the arm of his couch, wand pointed at him while she monitors his magic. She reaches down absently and scratches Lucy’s head when the Crup gives up on trailing Harry and switches her attention.

“They’re on their way,” Penelope says calmly. “Just a few more minutes, Harry. Try and take some steadying breaths. I’m right here if the bond causes you the pass out again, but the itching is a mental side effect, your brain’s way of trying to prompt you to action. It can’t actually hurt you. Right now, you’re okay.”

She’s wrong obviously, but Harry won’t point it out because she’s agreed to let him come home for this instead of forcing him to stay at St Mungo’s. He’s likely going to die any moment, though, if Hermione doesn’t hurry the hell up, and Penelope’s just sat there as though everything is fine. His eyes dart to the fireplace again, and he rolls his shoulders, stretching his neck to try and relieve some of the discomfort, but the irritation just flares further. It faded some at the hospital when he’d stopped thinking about it for a moment, but now the feelings are growing, becoming more and more intense.

He lets out a frustrated growl as another wave of dizziness passes over him, and Lucy gives a spirited bark in return.

“I’m going,” he announces, spinning towards the fireplace. He doesn’t need his shirt or his wand. He just needs to go. “They’re not coming. I’ll find him myself.”

“Harry, wait.” He hears Penelope get to her feet behind him, but before she can stop him, and before he can get to the fire, the Floo roars to life.

The green flames lap at the roof of the fireplace for a moment, and then Hermione appears among them, stepping out onto Harry’s hearth in that graceful way he’s never quite been able to master.

“He’s coming,” is all she says, but Harry already knows; Malfoy appears behind her and the effect on Harry is instantaneous. It’s like a cooling charm washing over him on a hot day, and he stumbles back, dropping onto his couch and exhaling in relief as the itching ceases. The magic under his skin settles, the dizziness disappears, and the urge to run vanishes completely.
He lets his eyes fall closed for a moment. Penelope is beside him, muttering diagnostic charms, but all his focus remains on the spot where he knows Malfoy is standing. He knows that this is fucking crazy, that feeling unparalleled relief at having Malfoy in the same room as him is mental, but none of that matters at all right now, as long as Malfoy stays right where he is.

“Did it help?” Hermione asks tentatively. She’s moved closer to Harry now and is crouching by his knees.

“Harry?” Penelope prompts. “I can see your magic has settled. How are you feeling?”

“Better,” Harry confirms. “So much better.”

“Excuse me,” comes a haughty voice. “But can someone please tell me what the hell is going on and why I’ve been dragged over here?”

Harry opens his eyes; Malfoy is stood by the fireplace still, arms crossed defensively over his chest.

“Didn’t you feel anything earlier?” Harry asks.

Malfoy looks annoyed. Of course, that could just be his face. “What exactly am I supposed to have felt?” he demands.

Harry leans forward eagerly. “If he didn’t feel anything maybe there’s no bond,” he says to Penelope hopefully. “He’d feel it too, wouldn’t he?”

Penelope looks doubtful. “I’m fairly certain we’re working with a bond, Harry. I still need to run some tests, see if I can pick up anything in Draco’s magical signature, but yes— it is unusual for bond effects not to be mirrored.”

“If not a bond though, what are the other options?” Hermione asks eagerly. She sits down on the couch beside Harry, placing a reassuring hand on his knee. “Is there anything else that could cause Harry’s symptoms?”

“Well, I think—”

“Excuse me.” Draco cuts across Penelope sharply. “What bloody bond?”

“You haven’t told him anything?” Penelope asks Hermione.

Hermione shakes her head. “I thought it would be best coming from you. I wasn’t sure I’d convince him to come if he knew the details, so I said it was top secret and then left the rest up to his natural curiosity.”

“Slytherin,” Malfoy mutters. Hermione gives him a smug look, and he rolls his eyes. Harry still thinks the two of them being friends is completely odd, even if it has been years, but he supposes it makes a certain amount of sense. Malfoy seems to like books and politics and talking about magical theory — and other things Harry and Ron yawn at — as much as Hermione does. They’d started corresponding after the war, and now they’re both Unspeakables in the Department of Mysteries. She’s always encouraging Harry and Ron to give him a chance, to try being friends, but as Harry regularly reminds Hermione, you can’t just forget how you used to feel about someone, and there’s probably too much bad blood between them to ever be more than casual acquaintances.

“Would you like to sit, Draco?” Penelope asks kindly.

Malfoy eyes the other couch that’s opposite Harry, where Lucy is currently dozing on her back, and
wrinkles his nose. “I’d appreciate if you could just tell me what this is about so I can go; Blaise is waiting for me to Floo him back.”

“Very well,” Penelope concedes. “Cutting straight to it—we suspect Harry is under the effects of some kind of bond, and we have reason to believe you’re the person he’s bonded to.”

Malfoy’s eyes go comically wide. He looks from Penelope to Harry to Hermione. “Potter is bonded to me?” he asks incredulously. “No.” He shakes his head. “That’s impossible. I’ve studied bonds, I’d know if I was a part of one.”

“We’re not certain of anything yet,” Penelope tells him. “But there’s faint traces of a bond showing up in my diagnostic readings of Harry’s magic, and he’s exhibited various symptoms this evening that indicate that’s what we’re dealing with.”

“Well, none of that has anything to do with me,” Malfoy insists. “It’s not necessarily me he’s bonded to.”

Penelope glances at Harry, looking for permission, and he nods. May as well get this over with.

“Harry experienced an overwhelming urge to come and find you specifically, Draco. When you arrived here just now, the symptoms he was feeling ceased bothering him completely.”

Malfoy stares at him, and Harry feels a flush creeping up his neck. He doesn’t hate Malfoy—he hasn’t for a long time—but he still doesn’t get along with him, and certainly doesn’t relish the idea of him knowing just how desperate Harry’d been to see him a few minutes ago.

“I’ve not experienced anything,” Malfoy says matter-of-factly. “It’s not a bond if it only goes one way.”

“That’s true,” Penelope agrees. “So, I’m hoping you’ll consent to allow me to run a few tests on your magic as well, just so we can see if my theory is correct.”

Malfoy looks reluctant. Harry sees him glance at Hermione, who gives an encouraging smile and a nod. Harry expects him to argue, to refuse. He’s already got a retort to throw at Malfoy on the tip of his tongue, but then—

“Yes, alright,” Malfoy concedes reluctantly. “I’ll consent to one test so it’s ruled out, and then I’m leaving.”

Penelope crosses the room at once, stopping a couple of feet away from Malfoy. He looks nervous as she raises her wand, and Harry is sort of glad he’s not the only one who’s uneasy. He doesn’t want to think about what the results of this test will mean. If they show a bond, Harry and Malfoy will have to figure out what to do next, what it means for the two of them. If Penelope is wrong, and Malfoy has no sign of a bond, then Harry will be even more lost, with no idea what’s causing his symptoms. He isn’t sure which option is worse right now.

He wonders again how this could have happened. He’s certain there was nobody else and no sign of magic in that building; even if he missed it, Blaise would have picked up on it. Which means whoever did this—whoever bonded or cursed or whatever they’ve done to him—has managed to sneak up on him somehow, and he has no idea when that could have happened. Harry feels a little sick at the idea that someone could so easily get to him; he knows he’s clumsy and accident-prone, but he’s meant to be sharper than this—better than this.

After several long minutes of tense silence in which Malfoy has sniffed haughtily four times—Harry was counting—Penelope lowers her wand, biting at her bottom lip.
“Well?” Malfoy asks at once, sounding less confident than he had before. “Was it clear? Can I go?”

Penelope glances at Harry, and his stomach sinks. He’s seen that look before. That’s her I’m sorry, but I have bad news look.

“I’ve picked up similar traces of a bond in your magic too, Draco. Fainter than in Harry’s, but not by much. It’s likely you’ll experience similar symptoms shortly if you two are to separate.”

Malfoy gapes at her. “That’s not possible,” he argues. “You must have… done it wrong. I’m not bonded to Potter.”

Penelope arches a brow at him. She’s sweet, Harry knows, but when she pegs you with her no-nonsense-excuse-me-are-you-questioning-me look, it’s best not to argue. She’s as scary as Professor McGonagall when she wants to be. Harry wonders if that’s who she learnt it from.

“What symptoms have you experienced today?” she asks Malfoy shortly.

“I told you, I haven’t experienced anything,” Malfoy insists indignantly.

“You’ve been perfectly well, all day?” Penelope pushes. “Nothing at all unusual?”

Something flickers over Malfoy’s face. It’s gone in an instant but Harry catches it, and Hermione and Penelope do too.

“Draco,” Hermione implores. “This is serious. If you’ve felt anything at all that could be relevant—”

“I was a little dizzy earlier this evening, that’s all,” Malfoy huffs. “But I hardly think that’s relevant. I just stood up too quickly.”

Penelope summons her chart and begins scribbling notes. “What time?” she asks. “How long did the episode last?”

“It wasn’t an episode,” Malfoy persists. When Hermione gives him a dark look, though, he scowls and says, “It was about an hour and a half ago, and it only lasted a few seconds, at the very most. Nothing of relevance.”

“It was about the same time as mine,” Harry murmurs. Malfoy’s head snaps around to look at him, like he’d forgotten Harry was there.

“It’s actually unbelievable that after all these years you’re still causing me so much trouble,” Malfoy says irritably. “How did you even let this happen? Aren’t you supposed to be a half decent Auror?”

“Me?” Harry asks incredulously. “How do we know this isn’t your fault! I was minding my own business, doing my job, and this thing hit me out of nowhere!”

“So, no then, to the half decent Auror question,” Malfoy drawls.

“If you two are quite done arguing,” Penelope cuts in patiently. “We need to discuss what we’re going to do next.”

Harry would very much like to continue being cross with Malfoy, but as they’re bloody bonded, he supposes there’ll be time for that later.

“Fine,” he says. “We have some sort of bond and don’t know where it came from. What do we do?”

“The first thing we’re going to try and figure out is what kind of bond it is,” Penelope informs them.
“You’re both too agitated right now for me to get the most accurate possible readings, so I’d like to start daily diagnostics first thing tomorrow, after you’ve had a chance to sleep on this and calm down a bit. Once I have more information on what kind of bond magic we’re dealing with, we can move on to working out how to remove it.”

“Okay,” Harry agrees slowly. “Okay, that… yeah, I guess that doesn’t sound too bad. Do we have to do anything in the meantime?”

“Well,” Penelope says hesitantly, “you’ll have to stay together tonight, obviously. You understand that, right?”

“What!” Harry and Malfoy exclaim at the same time. They glance at one another and then look away quickly, awkwardly.

“Honestly, boys, what did you think?” Penelope says, exasperated. “Harry, you felt the difference when Draco arrived here. Staying close is the safest option right now, for both of you, just until we understand more of what’s going on. It may prove to be unnecessary later, but let’s not leave anything to chance right now.”

“But—” Harry is suddenly very aware that he still isn’t wearing a shirt. That he’s half naked in front of Draco Malfoy. He keeps his eyes firmly on Penelope when he mutters, “I mean, we don’t have to stay in the… in the same bed, do we?”

Malfoy snorts. “You wish, Potter.”

“As long as you’re nearby, like you are now, you’ll be fine,” Penelope says. “I'm happy for you to stay home instead of the hospital, but you're not to separate under any circumstances. You’re not in any immediate danger, but don’t try and test your limits. Not yet.” She stands, reaching for her bag and slinging it over her shoulder. The front panel is almost completely covered in badges pinned to the fabric, and the flashing names of wizarding bands and Quidditch teams catch Harry’s eye as they rattle against one another. “I’ll need you both to come by St Mungo’s tomorrow at nine so we can get started. In the meantime, stay close to one another and if any other symptoms show up before tomorrow, Floo to St Mungo’s immediately, alright?”

Harry glances at Malfoy again, who looks like he’s about to burst a blood vessel from the effort it’s taking him not to snap right now. His jaw is clenched, his arms crossed once more, and his fists are balled under his arms. He’s so damn pointy, Harry thinks. Malfoy’s also working very hard not to make eye contact with anyone else, and Harry supposes that he’s going to have to be the adult in this.

“Fine,” he sighs. “We’ll stay here but we—”

“No,” Malfoy cuts in. “No way in hell I’m staying in this hovel. If we have to do this, we’ll stay in my apartment.”

“Draco,” Hermione says warningly.

“There’s nothing wrong with my place,” Harry snaps, glaring at Malfoy. He’s put a lot of work into this apartment, making it feel like a home after he sold Grimmauld Place, and he won’t have Draco sodding Malfoy saying a bad word about it.

“You two can figure that out on your own,” Penelope replies. “All I care about is that you’re in the same place and you stay that way. I’ll see you both tomorrow morning, alright?” She gives them a stern look. Malfoy seems defiant, but he gives her a curt nod.
“Yes, fine,” Harry grumbles again.

“Good. I’m trusting you’re both mature enough to deal with this sensibly,” Penelope says cheerfully as she steps towards the Floo. “Have a good night, gentlemen.”

ooOoo

Malfoy’s apartment isn’t what Harry expects. To be fair, he’s never really considered what Malfoy’s living room might look like at all before a few minutes ago. But now that he’s here, standing in the middle of it while dusting himself off from the Floo, he realises that it definitely isn’t what he would have imagined had he taken the time to wonder.

The room is more… welcoming then Harry would have imagined it could be. The mixture of soft lighting, an oversized sofa that looks like you could sink straight into it, and beige and white walls make Harry feel oddly comfortable right away, despite the cranky Slytherin currently over in one corner shuffling through bottles of amber liquid in a large glass cabinet.

It’s the kind of living room he imagines sitting in with someone he loves on a rainy night, curled up together under a blanket in front of the fireplace.

That thought brings him up short. Christ, what if Malfoy has a boyfriend? Harry is pretty sure he’s gay; Hermione has implied it a few times, and he can’t imagine any bloke being too pleased with having some stranger following their boyfriend around and staying in their apartment. Worse still, what if it’s someone Harry knows? What if it’s Theo Nott or some other Slytherin from school? He groans internally. This day is getting worse and worse.

He’s still not exactly sure how Malfoy ended up winning the argument on where they would stay tonight, only that he’s pretty sure Hermione is a traitor and tricked him into agreeing somehow. She hadn’t even offered to stay with them and make sure they didn’t kill one another, which he found kind of odd.

On the opposite side of the room, Malfoy drinks a generous portion of what looks like whiskey. Harry wouldn’t mind a drink right now if he’s honest, but he’s not going to ask Draco Malfoy for anything.

“Your Crup got its hair all over me,” Malfoy grumbles, inspecting the arm of his coat.

“She didn’t even touch you,” Harry replies, rolling his eyes. Lucy’s been bundled up and taken to Hermione and Ron’s while Harry is here. At least Rosie will have a good night, Harry thinks. She loves playing with Lucy.

He steps further into the room, away from the hearth, but pauses when he realises he’s not really sure what to do now.

“You obviously need to clean more, then, don’t you?” Malfoy says snidely as he refills his glass.

“Are you going to be a prick the whole time we’re dealing with this?” Harry demands. “You realise I don’t want to be here, right?”

“For all I know, Potter, you’ve done this on purpose,” Malfoy retorts derisively.

Harry gapes at him. “Why the hell would I do that?”

“I don’t pretend to understand your motives,” Malfoy mutters in his stupid posh voice. “All I know is that everything was fine until a couple of hours ago, and now my weekend plans have been ruined
by whatever mess you’ve got us into.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry this is inconvenient for you,” Harry says sarcastically. “How stupid of me not to consider how this would affect you when I was unconscious in a St Mungo’s bed earlier.”

“Yes well,” Malfoy sniffs. “At least you admit your stupidity.”

“Oh my g—” Harry breaks off and runs a frustrated hand through his hair. “Malfoy, neither of us like that this is happening. Can we just— can we just try not to kill each other until this is sorted?”

“Doubtful,” Malfoy mutters.

Harry glares at him, making Malfoy roll his eyes. “Yes, fine, whatever, Potter.” He sets his glass down and shrugs his coat off, tossing it over the arm of the couch. It’s such a small gesture, something Malfoy clearly does often, but Harry is distracted for a moment seeing him be so… so normal and casual. “I have things to do,” he says to Harry. “Don’t touch anything in here.”

He starts to move away, and Harry instinctively steps towards him. “Wait, where are you going?”

Malfoy gives him an odd look. “To my room, Potter. Is that alright with you? Or has the bond affected your mind, too?”

Harry scowls, embarrassed. “We should talk about this, don’t you think? Try and figure out what's caused it. Besides, you heard Penelope — we have to stay close.”

“She certainly did not say you had to be needy and cling to me all weekend,” Malfoy retorts scornfully.

“I just meant we should stay nearby!” Harry exclaims in frustration. “In the same room at the very least. I don't fancy another trip to St Mungo’s if the bond plays up again, and I'm sure you'd rather not lose consciousness.”

Malfoy purses his lips into a thin line. It makes his face seem sharper, more severe.

“This is utter shite, Potter,” he finally declares, turning around and dropping onto his sofa, crossing his arms petulantly. “You are ruining my life.”

“I'm ruining your weekend at the very most.” Harry sits down on the other end of the sofa. He sinks straight into the deep cushions and struggles to right himself. When he looks up, Malfoy is smirking at him. “Shut up,” he grumbles.

“So what exactly do you propose we do until tomorrow?” Malfoy says, his voice taking on a whiny tone. “I'm bored.”

“How Hermione deals with you on a daily basis I have no idea,” Harry says, shaking his head. “You're acting like a child.”

Malfoy leans his head against the back of his sofa, arms still crossed, and closes his eyes. “Takes one to know one,” he mumbles, lips twitching like he's trying not to smirk.

Harry doesn’t take the bait this time, which he thinks is very mature of him. He looks around the room some more instead, determining he doesn't care if Malfoy thinks he's nosey. If he’s stuck here and Malfoy won't talk about the bond properly, he’ll look all he wants.

“You don't have any photos in here,” he observes, taking in the expensive looking paintings on the
walls. “Do you live alone?” he presses. Malfoy doesn't say anything, which Harry decides is even more annoying than when he’s grumbling like a five year old. “How long have you had this place?”

Malfoy remains silent, eyes closed, like he’s fallen asleep. Harry grits his teeth in irritation.

“Are you ignoring me?” he demands.

Nothing.

“You're a huge git, you know that right?”

Silence.

Harry reaches for one of the throw cushions, a stupid mocha-coloured thing that’s dotted with dark stitching, and he tosses it at Malfoy’s face. Malfoy makes a loud noise of surprise and sits upright.

“What the—” he demands. “Potter, you imbecile! Do you have no manners? Who the hell goes into another man's home and throws his decorative cushions?”

“You were ignoring me!” Harry protests.

“Get used to it. If you touch any more of my things, bond or not, I’ll throw you out!”

“You can't do that.”

“I'll do whatever I want!”

Harry stands up, furious. “You know what. Fuck you. I didn't ask for this. I don't want to be anywhere near you, so just… just get over yourself, alright!”

Malfoy glares at him, and then he plucks the cushion from the floor and leans over to put it back where it came from, taking a ridiculous amount of care to make it straight. Harry wonders how he can be screeching at Harry one moment, and then so calm and careful with a damn cushion the next.

He’s just about to snap at Malfoy that the cushion is fine, it doesn’t need to be straightened anymore, when another urge hits him. He groans. Fuck. He’s been ignoring it until now, because there is no way in hell that he’s going to do that with Malfoy around. No bloody way. He decides to keep ignoring it, even though it’s getting harder to. It’ll be fine.

Unfortunately, trying to ignore the problem seems to make the urge even stronger.

“What’s wrong with you?” Malfoy asks, glancing up at him.

“Nothing,” Harry snaps, shifting onto his other leg. “Nothing, I’m fine.”

Malfoy narrows his eyes. “I don’t believe you. You’re being weird”

Harry shoves his hands in his pockets for something to do with them. “It’s fine,” he says again. “Go back to fussing with your pillow.”

Malfoy rolls his eyes. “If you’re going to be strange and not tell me why then I’m going to make dinner. I’m hungry.” He stands up to walk away, but then he pauses. “I’ll be in the kitchen. Come or don’t. I don’t care,” he says nonchalantly, but Harry sees a flicker of relief on his face when Harry moves to follow him.

Interesting. Maybe he’s not as indifferent about this whole thing as he’s trying to act.
He follows Malfoy into the kitchen, glad that Malfoy is facing the other way as he winces at the uncomfortable pressure when he walks. He just has to ignore it, he resolves. Think about other things, think about absolutely anything else and not tell Malfoy that—

“I need to use the bathroom,” he blurts out loudly. Malfoy turns back to look at him, and Harry hopes his face isn’t as red as it feels. “I, er— I need to use your bathroom,” he says, managing a much calmer volume this time.

“Second door on the left,” Malfoy says, disinterested.

Harry bites down hard on his lip. Fuck, why does this have to be so bloody humiliating? Of all the people in the world he could end up bonded to, why does it have to be the one who would take any chance to absolutely delight in Harry’s embarrassment?

“Penelope said not to risk pushing the limits of the bond yet,” he mutters. “So, I mean… should we…”

He sees comprehension dawn on Malfoy’s face. “No,” he says at once, shaking his head. “I am absolutely not going to watch you in the bathroom, Potter.”

“I’m not asking you to bloody watch!” Harry snaps back.

“It sounds like that’s exactly what you’re asking me to do,” Malfoy says. “And I’ll have no part in your strange kinks.”

It’s just about all Harry can bear. He has a pretty high tolerance for embarrassment, but when Draco Malfoy is concerned, apparently all his patience flies out the window.

“You know what? Fine,” he snarls. He mutters obscenities under his breath as he turns and stalks down the hallway, finding the bathroom door and wrenching it open. It slams loudly when he closes it. Good. He hopes that pisses Malfoy right off. Maybe he’ll slam it again on the way out, even louder.

The thought cheers him minutely as he undoes his trousers, though he still curses all the gods and anyone else who might be listening that this day ever happened. Malfoy is just as big a prick as he was in school. Harry bets he’s actually loving this, loving the chance to piss Harry off as much as possible. No matter what Hermione says, Malfoy was a twat in school, and he’s a twat now.

He’s standing in front of the sink washing his hands and wondering if there’s some way he can fuck with the pretentious looking bowl of potpourri Malfoy has on the countertop when the first wave of dizziness hits him. It comes on faster than last time, making the room spin uncontrollably and all at once as his vision starts to blur and his head begins to throb. He stumbles away from the sink, groping through the haze to try and find the door. Shit, he needs Malfoy. Needs to find him now. He manages to gets to the door, his hands shaking while he tries to open it. His fingers are damp with sweat and they slip when he turns the knob. He lets out a shuddering breath and forces his hand to hold it tighter. When he manages to pull it open, he lurches forward, only to be met by a solid, gasping barrier in his way.

He and Malfoy both lose their footing, and for the second time that day, Harry ends up in an inelegant heap on the floor, the pair of them a tangled mess of arms and legs.

“Shit,” he pants in a low voice. The haze and the dizziness have stopped as quickly as they started, and Harry looks up at Malfoy who is still trying to catch his breath. “That was a… really bad idea.”
Malfory’s chest is heaving too, a thin film of perspiration visible on his brow. He snaps out of his surprised stupor and pulls himself away from Harry, scooting across the hall until his back hits the opposite wall. “What was that?” he asks, his voice coming out breathy. “I was in the kitchen and then everything went… strange.”

Harry pulls himself onto his knees, takes a moment to make sure the dizziness is definitely gone, and then gets to is feet. He pauses, looking down at Malfory uncertainly, but then he holds a hand out in offer. Malfory eyes him for a moment, and Harry thinks he might bat it away or tell Harry to go fuck himself, but then he reaches up and slides his palm against Harry’s.

His hand is warm and clammy against Harry’s, but it also feels sort of… nice, in a way Harry can’t explain. He swallows, then wraps his fingers around Malfory’s and helps him to his feet.

“That,” Harry says, dropping Malfoy’s hand quickly and stepping away from him, hoping this bond hasn’t given Malfoy some sort of Legilimency power or something that would let him know Harry had thought it was nice holding his hand. “That is what will happen if we separate at all before this is fixed.”

ooOoo

They eat in silence at opposite sides of Malfoy’s kitchen table, the only sounds in the room the clink of cutlery against plates and the occasional sound of a car passing by on the street outside. Malfoy didn’t complain once about having to cook for Harry as he’d made the dinner, so Harry decides not to make a fuss now about how dry his chicken is. He’s not particularly hungry anyway, after what happened before, and he chances a glance at Malfoy as he pushes his food around his plate with his fork. Malfory still looks as deathly pale as he had outside the bathroom. He’d moved mechanically around the kitchen while he was cooking, shaking his head when Harry tried to speak to him, not quite able to meet his eye. It’s shock, Harry thinks, and he’s not surprised; he’d only felt the effects of the bond himself a few hours ago, and it had definitely left him shaken. And now knowing they can’t even be in separate rooms for a few minutes? He’s surprised, if he’s honest, that they’re both not more worked up.

He puts his fork down and pushes his plate away, giving up on trying to stomach anything else. Malfoy has already done the same, and is nursing another whiskey. He’s staring at a spot on the far wall, eyes not quite focused, one of his fingers tapping idly against the glass in his hand.

“We could Floo to the hospital,” Harry suggests, making Malfoy snap out of his reverie, “if it’ll make you feel better. You seem a bit shaken.”

Malfoy rolls his eyes — the first sign of him acting like himself in the last hour — and Harry finds it oddly relieving.

“Don’t be stupid,” Malfoy says dismissively. “You know they’ll just say the same thing Penelope did, and probably try to make us stay there. Besides, I really don’t fancy seeing my name in the Prophet tomorrow morning linked to some ridiculous new scandal if I’m seen there with you.”

Harry frowns. “What do you mean?”

“Oh come off it, Potter. Surely you’re not that dense,” Malfoy scoffs. He rises from the table and collects their plates the Muggle way, moving them to the benchtop. Harry watches as he gets rid of their scraps and rinses everything in the sink by hand, facing away from Harry. The navy blue shirt he’s wearing is tucked neatly into his fitted trousers, and Harry’s eyes wander without permission down the length of Malfory’s slender back, settling on his arse. It’s certainly not the first time Harry’s noticed the way Malfoy looks from behind — every Ministry event they attend Malfoy is wearing
trousers that hug him so tightly it makes Harry’s mouth water — but as he always does when he finds himself staring, Harry hastily averts his eyes and looks absolutely anywhere else. He will not get caught staring at Draco Malfoy’s arse, no matter how perfect it is.

Malfoy turns, looking expectant, and Harry realises he must have said something else.

“Sorry, what?”

Malfoy makes an annoyed noise. “I said you do understand what people will think if they find out about this, don’t you?”

Harry frowns again. “Er… that we were both attacked?” he offers.

Malfoy very barely avoids another eye roll. “No, Potter,” he says slowly, like he’s speaking to a child. “They will assume it’s some kind of romantic bond, and naturally, because it’s you, we’ll end up being front page news while they analyse everything we do.”

Harry baulks. “They’ll think we’re… married?”

“Maybe.” Malfoy shrugs. He leans casually back against the bench, crossing his arms. “Obviously there are other bonds for people who are romantically involved, but the papers will create some cock and bull story out of this that’ll make my life harder, so I’d appreciate if you would at least try to refrain from doing anything that will make this public.”

“Why do you just assume it’s me who’ll leak this to the papers?” Harry asks irritably. “I can be very discreet, you know.”

Malfoy snorts. “You’re about as discreet as a Niffler in a gold shop, Potter. I have a hard time believing you could keep anything a secret.”

“I can keep secrets,” Harry says defiantly. “I have plenty of secrets.”

“Prove it. Name one.”

Malfoy quirks an expectant brow at him as Harry splutters. “I— that’s not— if I tell you then it’s not a secret anymore!”

“But if you don’t tell me then I won’t believe you,” Malfoy points out.

He looks like he’s trying not to smile, and Harry realises Malfoy is teasing him, and he isn’t quite sure what to do with that. “I don’t— I won’t tell anyone, okay? I hate being in the Prophet.”

Malfoy is just watching him. Harry shifts awkwardly in his chair and runs his hand through his hair, a habit he’d picked up after seeing the memories of James doing it in Fifth year that he hasn’t been able to shake.

“You said you studied bonds,” he says, hoping it will distract Malfoy and he’ll stop bloody staring like that. “Did you ever see anything like this?”

Malfoy pushes away from the counter and retrieves his whiskey from the table. “Maybe,” he says. “But I don’t know enough about this one to say anything for sure.”

Harry smirks. “Draco Malfoy admitting he doesn’t know something?”

“Shut up,” Malfoy grumbles. He drains his glass, and Harry finds himself staring at his long, pale neck, at the way his throat bobs as he swallows. Christ, Harry really needs to get laid soon if he’s
already ogling Malfoy’s bloody neck after just a couple of hours with him.

Malfoy summons the half-full whiskey bottle, fumbling slightly when he catches it; he’d had at least three while he made dinner, and Harry realises as he watches Malfoy pour another that he’s probably getting a little bit tipsy.

The prospect of an intoxicated Malfoy is definitely intriguing. Would he be different? Funny, maybe, like Ron when he drinks? Or affectionate like Hermione? Uncle Vernon used to get really angry when he’d had too much sherry. Harry flinches at that memory and pushes it away. He doubts Malfoy would be like that, but still, it’s probably not the time to risk loss of control; they don’t know anything about this bond yet, or how dangerous it might be. He definitely needs Malfoy sober enough to get to St Mungo’s if anything goes wrong.

“I’m kind of tired,” he says, rolling his shoulders to stretch them. It’s not a lie — this whole evening has drained him and he’s pretty sure he could sleep for three days. “I wouldn’t mind turning in for the night.”

Malfoy just shrugs and puts his glass down on the sink. “Fine. Come on.”

Harry hastens out of his chair as Malfoy walks from the kitchen. “Where are we going?” he asks.

Malfoy doesn’t answer him, and Harry realises it was probably sort of a stupid question. He’s led down the hall, to the last door on the left.

“I’d offer you the guest room but that’s clearly not a good idea,” Malfoy says wryly over his shoulder as he pushes open the door.

Harry pauses on the threshold, glancing around as Malfoy kicks his shoes off and throws them into a cupboard. “This is your bedroom?”

Malfoy sighs in exasperation as he crosses the room. “Obviously, Potter.”

“I just mean it’s not what I expected.”

Malfoy glances up from the drawer he’s rifling through with an amused look on his face. “Not what you expected?” he repeats. “Do you think about coming in here often, then?”

Harry flushes. “No, of course not,” he says quickly. “I just meant that it— you know what, never mind.” He’s not sure when he’d turned into such a bumbling mess around Draco Malfoy, but he decides he’s blaming the bond.

He takes a tentative step inside. Malfoy’s bedroom matches the rest of the house, all beige and white and welcoming. His bed is huge, and Harry idly wonders if it’s comfortable, and then his eyes fall on a soft looking sofa by the window.

“Why do you have a couch in your bedroom?” he asks curiously.

“It gives me another place to fuck,” Malfoy says seriously, and Harry absolutely does not need to hear that, so pretends that he didn’t, busying himself with pulling his overnight bag from his pocket and unshrinking it. He desperately hopes Malfoy isn’t aware of what a mess he’s been since he arrived. Interestingly, Harry doesn’t remember ever hearing Malfoy swear like that before, and he isn’t sure why it fascinates him so much, but he thinks he sort of wants to hear it again. He makes a mental note to try and get him to say fuck again once he’s more himself and not a flustered mess.

He finds his pyjamas, only realising once they’re in his hand that he now has to put them on. And he
can’t leave the room.

He glances up; Malfoy is pulling his own pyjamas from a drawer. They look silky and expensive, the kind of pyjamas that would slide off someone’s shoulders easily as you kissed their collarbones and their neck and…

*What the fuck?*

The bond is messing with Harry’s head, obviously. He does not think of Malfoy like that. Merlin, if Penelope doesn’t have a solution tomorrow, he doesn’t know what he’ll do.

“Are you just going to fucking stare at me, Potter?” Malfoy asks irritably, and Harry feels the same thrill at the use of the curse word again. It just sounds so… filthy, coming out of Malfoy’s posh mouth.

Malfoy has tossed his pyjamas onto the bed and is fiddling with the top button of his shirt. “While I usually don’t mind an audience,” he continues, “you’re the last person I would’ve expected to want to watch. Is this another one of your odd kinks?”

“Fuck off, Malfoy,” Harry grunts. “We’ll just… we’ll just both turn around, okay?”

Malfoy rolls his eyes but snatches up the pyjamas and turns around. “Fine, Potter. Wouldn’t want to offend your delicate sensibilities with something as indecent as nudity.”

Harry ignores him. He dresses as quickly as he can while Malfoy has his back turned — spinning around as well, dropping his trousers to the floor, and kicking them away before pulling on his flannel pyjama bottoms. He yanks his shirt off next and pulls on the faded Weird Sisters T-shirt he likes to sleep in.

“Er… are you done?” he asks tentatively, gathering up his clothes in his arms. He waits for a reply, but only hears silence. “Malfoy? Can I turn around again?”

Still nothing.

Harry turns his head slowly, hoping he’s not about to get hexed in the face...

“What the fuck?” he demands when he sees Malfoy already sitting in his bed under the covers.

Malfoy smirks. “I wanted to see how long you would stand there for. I must say, it didn’t take much time before you tried to get a look at me, did it, Potter?”

Harry grabs his bag and shoves his clothes into it. “I was *not* trying to get a look.” He tosses his bag to the floor again and then looks back up at Malfoy. “Where am I supposed to sleep?”

Malfoy nods towards the couch, which now has a folded blanket and a pillow on one arm. Malfoy must have conjured them while Harry had his back turned. He stomps over, aware of Malfoy watching him as he does, and tries to get himself settled. The blanket is warm and soft and smells like jasmine. Harry burrows down under it, sinking further into the comfortable cushions of the couch and he forgets for a second that he’s in Draco Malfoy’s bedroom.

Forgets until he glances to his left and sees Malfoy still watching him from his bed.

“You better not snore,” Harry says, because he doesn’t know what else to say.

Malfoy snorts. “Please, Potter. As if I would.”
He lies down, rolling onto his side so his back is to Harry. Harry hears him mutter something and the lights are extinguished. The glow from the street lamps outside casts shadows over the room, and Harry can just make out Malfoy’s silhouette on his bed.

“So, what do you think caused this?” Harry asks, rolling onto his back and staring up at the darkened ceiling. He twists his fingers into the blanket then settles them on his stomach. “The bond, I mean. How do you think it happened?”

“Pillow talk, Potter? Really?” Malfoy murmurs in a sleepy voice.

“Oh my god.” Harry yanks the blanket up to his shoulders and turns his back to Malfoy; even if Malfoy can’t see it, it makes Harry feel better. “You know what? Forget it. We’ll figure this out tomorrow.”

ooOoo

“You need to stop this,” Draco heard himself hiss, his voice cold. “I don’t want your help!”

He was in a dark corridor, the only light coming from bracketed torches that cast long shadows across the walls and floor. He glanced around nervously, though he wasn’t sure what he was so afraid of. Was he dreaming? This felt familiar, but he was sure he’d never been down this corridor before.

He could feel himself glaring; he was annoyed with the person in the alcove, but there was something else mixed with his irritation. Something that felt almost like hope. He knew them, he was sure of it, but he couldn’t see their face.

“I’m just saying,” they said stiffly, their frustration rolling off them in waves, “you have options. You have a choice here, Draco. If you would just talk to him—”

Draco’s hands were quick, and he reached into the shadows to cover their mouth. “Stop,” he said again in a low growl, the undeniable urge to protect them mixing with his anger. “I don’t know why you keep pushing this, but you’re going to get us both killed if you keep talking like this.”

They yanked his hand away furiously. “I’m trying to stop you from getting fucking killed!” they retorted. “But you seem determined to make sure you end up dead, so I don’t know why we’re bothering.”

They made to pull away, but Draco grabbed their wrist. “We?” he asked. “What do you mean we? You said this was your idea.”

Silence followed, heavy and terrifying.

“What’s going on?” he demanded. “Have you been talking to someone about me?”

“I’m not supposed to tell you,” came the uncertain reply.

Draco’s grip tightened unconsciously. This was important. He could feel that it was significant. “Tell me,” he said. He needed to know, and lowered his voice to a soft murmur when he said, “Please.”

They looked torn but then—

“It’s Potter,” they admitted quietly. “He… he was the one who came to me and suggested this. He wants to help you, Draco. He wants to get you out of this.”
“I hope you’re joking.”

Harry grimaces, shrinking back a little under Penelope’s furious glare. He’s never had her anger directed towards him before. Realistically, he knows she won’t curse either of them, but she’s not a person he wants to be on the wrong side of, even if he is an Auror, and judging by the look on her face right now he really doesn’t want to chance it. He’s glad when Malfoy flinches a little too; at least he’s not the only one she scares a bit. Penelope’s stood in front of them both with her arms crossed over her chest, her wand tucked behind her ear again, and her expression absolutely livid.

“It was only for a minute,” Harry hastily explains. “We got angry, and I went into the bathroom alone and we—”

“You got angry,” Penelope deadpans. “Of course you got bloody angry; this is a shit situation, but you’re adults! Deal with it like grown ups instead of risking your damn lives because your pride is a bit stung, for Christ’s sake! You could have been seriously hurt!”

“We know,” Harry assures her. “It was stupid, but we made sure we stayed close the rest of the time.”

Penelope yanks her wand free and points it at the exam bed against the far wall of the room.

“Both of you sit there,” she says briskly.

Harry and Malfoy move wordlessly to sit, the old bed creaking under their combined weight. Malfoy is watching Penelope, looking a little nervous, but when he notices Harry staring he quickly averts his eyes and becomes very interested in a poster of a happy wizarding couple announcing the benefits of a new contraceptive spell.

Penelope wordlessly begins casting her diagnostic spells. She mutters to herself as she works, and Harry catches words like “idiots” and “children.” Any other time, he’d probably tease her a little and point out that she’s being a bit unprofessional, but right now, knowing he fucked up after she trusted them to look after themselves, and with her wand pointed at him, it really doesn’t seem like the right time to push her.

Malfoy shifts beside him as her magic weaves between them, and Harry wonders what he really thinks about all of this.

He’s much too dressed up for a hospital check up, Harry thinks. Doesn’t he own casual clothes? He’s wearing a pale blue button down shirt with a stiff collar and pressed trousers. The sleeves are rolled up just below his elbows, the Dark Mark almost completely faded away. When he’d caught Harry staring at it earlier he’d given him a challenging look, almost daring Harry to say something, but it didn’t make Harry angry to see it. Harry felt glad more than anything that it was almost gone. Malfoy’d looked like he didn’t quite believe him when he said that out loud, but he’d let it go.

Last night, Harry had found out that Malfoy does snore after all. Not loudly, and not in an annoying way, but when Harry had woken up once or twice in the night, panicking for a moment before he remembered where he was, he could definitely hear the soft sounds Malfoy was making. Harry had let them lull him back to sleep. It was sort of comforting, knowing someone else was right there. Not because it was Malfoy. Harry just hasn’t shared a bed or even a room with someone in ages, and he realises he’s missed it.
They’d shuffled through the rest of the morning awkwardly, Malfoy seeming as unsure as Harry did on how they were supposed to be acting. The bathroom situation had been the worst part. Neither one of them have showered, opting instead for cleaning charms, and after much blushing and sniping at one another, they’d managed to both take turns using the loo with the held of silencing charms.

It’d felt odd standing beside Malfoy at the sink as they brushed their teeth, so Harry had rushed through that, not sure what to do with the uncomfortable feeling it gave him to see their reflections side by side in the mirror, ruffled with sleep and acting out a scene that was so domestic. He hadn’t meant to make such a mess with the toothpaste, and Malfoy’d glared and made a point of loudly and dramatically casting cleaning charms on the sink afterwards.

Penelope’s quill and medical chart are hovering beside her now as she works, the quill scribbling quickly as each spell assesses them. She’s still scowling as she follows the notes, flicking her hair out of her face twice before throwing it up into a messy ponytail with an irritated huff.

“Well,” she says after several long minutes, “the news is not ideal, unfortunately. The connection between the two of you has definitely strengthened since yesterday.”

Harry’s shoulders slump in disappointment. “It’s worse?”

“No worse,” Penelope corrects. “It doesn’t appear to be affecting you when you’re together; there’s no visible or physical symptoms other than the magic of the bond itself, so I’m confident it’s nothing more than a proximity bond meant to force the two of you to stay close.”

“That sounds worse,” Malfoy mutters.

“Can you remove it?” Harry asks.

Penelope’s expression softens for a moment. “No,” she tells him. “I still don’t know exactly what kind of spell it was, and without that information it’s too risky to start experimenting with counter curses. Have you had any luck figuring out how this could have happened? Who might be involved?”

She looks at them expectantly, and Harry glances at Malfoy. They haven’t talked about it at all, and he realises now how stupid that is.

“No yet,” he admits. “We’re… working on it.”

Malfoy snorts, and Penelope looks like she definitely doesn't believe him. She closes her eyes and rubs the bridge of her nose.

“What are your plans for the rest of the day?” she asks, her voice tight like it’s taking all her control not to tell them off again.

“Why?” Malfoy immediately asks.

“Because,” Penelope says, waving her wand and banishing the medical chart, “I want to know what the two of you will be doing and where you’ll be. I’d like to be able to find you if I need to, in case you do something idiotic again.”

It’s a fair comment, Harry feels. “I guess we’ll just be at one of our apartments. I don’t have any plans,” he says.

He glances at Malfoy, whose lips are pressed into a thin line. “I’m supposed to have dinner with my mother tonight,” he says stiffly.
“What? You didn’t tell me that,” Harry says.

“I thought this would be resolved today,” Malfoy shoots back irritably. “Obviously I’ll have to cancel.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Harry argues.

“What am I supposed to do, take you with me?” Malfoy scoffs, like it's the most ludicrous thing he’s ever heard.

“What’s so ridiculous about that?” Harry asks indignantly. “I’m a great dinner guest.”

“Boys,” Penelope says warningly, cutting off whatever remark is on the tip of Malfoy’s tongue.

Harry takes a breath. He doesn’t know why he’s pushing this, just knows that he hates the idea of Malfoy having to cancel because of him, of not seeing his family and it being Harry’s fault. “Malfoy, you shouldn’t have to miss out on seeing your mum because of the bond. I’ll come with you and just stay out of the way or something.”

Malfoy rolls his eyes. “Merlin, fine, if you’re so desperate for me to take you to my mother’s, I will.”

Harry grins. He’s not sure why he has the impression he’s just won, but he feels triumphant all the same. “Will I have to wear dress robes? How formal are Malfoy dinners?”

“For fuck’s sake,” Malfoy mutters. “It’s just dinner, Potter.” He glances at Harry’s T-shirt and faded jeans. “You can’t wear that though. Mother would have a fit if someone walked those things into her house.”

“Right, good,” Penelope says much more cheerfully. It’s one of Harry’s favourite things about Penelope — she doesn’t hold grudges. He’s lucky too; he imagines any other Healer would have gotten pretty sick of how much work he is by now. “That’s settled. Keep getting along like this and we’ll have no problems.” She tucks her wand back behind her ear. “Be back here tomorrow at the same time. In the meantime, I’ll keep researching and consulting with a couple of my colleagues, and the two of you should dedicate some time to trying to figure out who might have done this. And,” she adds, pausing at the door and giving them a warning look, “if I find out you’ve done anything like last night again, I’ll have you checked in here until the bond is removed, do you understand?”

Harry and Malfoy nod in unison.

“I’m sorry,” Harry tells her, “that you have to deal with all of this.”

“I know you are, but this is not a joke,” she warns. “This could very well be your lives you're messing about with. Don’t screw this up. If I have to follow you both around or drag you back here, I will.”

Harry believes her. He lets out the breath he was holding when she says goodbye and slips from the room, shutting the door behind her.

“Well, she’s bloody terrifying,” Malfoy announces, sliding off the bed and smoothing out imaginary creases on his shirt. “Blaise is obviously insane.”

“Mm,” Harry agrees. “Wait, Blaise? What about him?”

“She’s right; we do need to be more careful,” Malfoy continues, ignoring his question. “And we need to try and figure out how this happened.”
“That’s what I’ve been saying,” Harry mutters under his breath. He slips off the bed as well and follows Malfoy to the door.

“We’ll go back to my apartment obviously,” Malfoy is saying. His hand is on the doorknob and he looks at Harry. “I’ll go first this time. Remember to keep up, but don’t get too close until we’re at the Floo’s.”

Harry rolls his eyes again. “Is this really necessary, Malfoy? Nobody even noticed us on the way in.”

“Yes,” Malfoy says firmly. “It is. I told you I won’t walk through a busy ward, or anywhere else with you, Potter. I don’t need a scandal following me around because of you.”

“Fine, whatever,” Harry sighs, “Go on then. I’ll be right behind you, pretending I’m not following.”

Harry can’t be bothered arguing right now. He’ll follow ten paces behind Malfoy this time, as Malfoy had when they’d arrived.

And if he happens to notice Malfoy’s arse as he walks, well that’s not Harry’s fault.

ooOoo

It’s been years since Harry has seen Narcissa Malfoy. The last time was right after the trials, just minutes after she’d been sentenced to two years on house arrest. She’d pulled Harry aside in the courtroom and thanked him for saving Malfoy’s life and for speaking on their behalf. Malfoy had stood awkwardly at her side, his hand protectively holding the crook of her elbow, and had mumbled his own thanks. Harry had been so tired at that point, so exhausted from trials and interviews and funerals, and he’d just wanted to get back to his bed at the Burrow, so he’d accepted their thanks, shook their hands, and left as quickly as he could.

It wasn’t until later he’d learned Lucius had passed away in Azkaban the night before the trial. Heart failure, the Healers had ruled. Harry’d wondered if Narcissa and Malfoy knew he was gone during the trial. They certainly hadn’t shown any signs of distress. Harry had made a point to ask around after that to find out how they were doing — asking Malfoy directly was out of the question obviously, even though he’d bumped into him a few times in Diagon Alley — and he had subtly kept an eye on what they were up to and how they were being treated.

It was the decent thing to do, he’d told himself, to make sure they were okay. They weren’t to blame for Lucius’s actions, and they’d made the right choices in the end.

He remembers seeing in the Prophet that she’d sold the Manor a week after her house arrest was finished, though the location of her new home had been kept a secret for security reasons. He also knows that while the Malfoy vaults were essentially drained for reparations, the two Black vaults that were in Narcissa’s name though had been deemed as separate, and she and Malfoy had kept them and the small fortune inside them.

Harry’s first thought when he sees her is that Narcissa is just as he remembers — tall and slender, with an intimidating, penetrating gaze, and hair that is the exact same white-blonde shade as Malfoy’s.

Malfoy had owled ahead to let her know Harry would be joining them — after grumbling for an hour about the state of Harry’s hair and his beard and what she would think of him — and she nods politely at him when he steps inside. To his surprise, Malfoy walks straight up to Narcissa and wraps his arms around her in a tight hug. Harry shifts uncomfortably, dropping his eyes so as not to intrude on what feels like a personal moment. He’s never imagined Malfoy as being affectionate, and Narcissa has always come across as too poised and rigid to be like that. He glances up as they pull
apart, and Malfoy presses a kiss to her cheek.

“Are you alright?” he hears Narcissa murmur quietly.

Malfoy nods. “Fine,” he assures her.

She studies him for a long moment before turning her attention back to Harry. “Mr Potter, it’s lovely to see you again,” she says politely, and Harry isn’t sure if it really is lovely to see him or if she’s just being nice. “I am sorry it’s under such unpleasant circumstances. Draco has, of course, given me a brief summary of your situation.”

Harry gives her a wan smile. “It’s not so bad,” he says, shrugging. “I mean,” he adds hastily when Malfoy raises an eyebrow at him, “I mean it’s not ideal, obviously, but it’s fine, overall. He’s… we’re fine. It shouldn’t be for much longer.”

“Your Healer has a way to remove the bond?” Narcissa asks hopefully.

“Er, well, no,” Harry admits. “But we’re all working on figuring this out. I’m sure we’ll crack it really soon.”

Malfoy snorts. “Shall we move to the dining room, mother?” he asks.

Harry follows the pair to the adjoining room, casting furtive glances around as he does. Narcissa’s house is decorated just like Malfoy’s, and he makes a mental note to tease Malfoy later for the hand his mother obviously had in styling his apartment.

They seat themselves around a polished oak table, laden with silver plates and cutlery. Harry can feel Narcissa watching him and the back of his neck heats under the scrutiny. He isn’t sure why he’s so nervous; the urge he’s feeling to make sure he doesn’t mess this up must be because of the bond. Yes, that makes sense, right?

A house elf wearing a pink pillowcase and matching oven mitts serves them something Harry can’t pronounce but smells delicious. She chattered happily about what a joy it is to have such lovely guests and blushes when Malfoy thanks her for his meal.

Narcissa sips at her wine and then asks Malfoy, “And how is Blaise? You’ve not mentioned him in your recent letters.”

Malfoy’s lips quirk. “He’s pining still. It’s getting ridiculous.”

“What?” Harry frowns at him. He sees Blaise everyday. He’d know if he was interested in somebody. “Pining? For who?”

Malfoy gives him a disbelieving look. “Come off it, Potter. You see the two of them together all the time.”

“See who together?”

“I believe Draco is referring to Healer Clearwater,” Narcissa tells him, swirling her wine. She glances up at Draco. “That is still where his affections lie, correct?”


“Christ, Potter. How oblivious are you?” Malfoy scoffs. “Surely you’ve seen through his idiotic lies
about going out and sleeping with every woman he sees, because he’s too nervous to make a move on the one he wants? Have you ever actually seen him hit on anyone, ever?” Malfoy is staring at him with comically wide eyes. “You honestly haven’t realised they have the hots for one another?”

“Language, Draco,” Narcissa sighs, not looking up from her dinner.

“Sorry,” Malfoy says, not sounding very sorry at all. “But honestly, Potter, how do you get through each day being this unaware? Those two have been pining over one another for at least a year.”

Harry is about to argue, but then he thinks back to all the times Blaise has hung about with him when he’s been taken to St Mungo’s, the fact that he constantly complains about being there but stays anyway. In most cases, he can probably leave after an hour or two, but he always stays longer than is necessary. He and Penelope are always throwing banter back and forth that, now Harry thinks on it, could easily be seen as flirting.

He snaps his mouth closed, and Malfoy looks at him with a smug expression.

“I do hope Blaise finds his courage and commences courting,” Narcissa comments thoughtfully. “He really is such a nice boy.” She gives Malfoy a pointed look, and he rolls his eyes.

“He’s straight mother; it was never going to happen with us. Blaise has no desire for me to be one of his imaginary sexual conquests, and nor do I.”

Harry chokes on his wine while Narcissa sighs loudly in exasperation — she’s evidently used to Malfoy’s comments. Harry on the other hand has to grab a napkin and cover his mouth as he coughs, turning away from the table and trying to catch his breath.

“Problem, Potter?” Malfoy asks as Harry tries to regain his composure.

“No,” Harry says, his voice rough from coughing. “No, I’m fine, sorry. Er, what… what were we saying?”

His cheeks feel hot and he absolutely needs to get a hold of himself but Malfoy talking about ‘sexual conquests’ while his mother is sitting right there is about all he can handle.

Thankfully, Narcissa doesn’t let Malfoy continue, and she sets down her knife and fork. “I’m sure the pair of you have considered the many repercussions of this situation already,” she says, “but I feel I should ask what your plan is should the press find out about your current predicament.”

Harry glances at Malfoy. They’d talked a little this afternoon, mainly ruling out a list of people they didn’t think were involved — such as Blaise, Ron, and Hermione — but they’d found themselves no closer to determining who it actually could have been. He knows Malfoy doesn’t want it to get out because people might think it’s romantic between them, but what they’ll do if people do start talking isn’t something they’ve discussed yet.

“We haven’t really worked that out,” Harry admits. “We don’t want them to find out, obviously, but I suppose if they do we’ll deal with it when it comes. I don’t think many people would believe that we’re dating anyway. Not with our history.”

“Draco,” Narcissa says softly, turning her eyes away from Harry. “You know what will happen if the journalists begin writing about this. This is something you need to prepare for in any way you can. After all your hard work—”

“It’s fine, mother,” Malfoy says stiffly. “We’re being discreet. You don’t need to worry.”
“Wait, what will happen?” Harry asks, looking between them. “I thought you said people would just think we’re romantically involved.”

“That’s one possibility, of course,” Narcissa agrees. “But, Mr Potter, as you’ve said—the two of you have a history, and as such, it’s much more likely the public will assume the worst when they hear about this.”

“I mean, yeah, maybe,” Harry says. “We knew it was a possibility that they would think we attacked one another.”

Malfoy scoffs. “No one is going to think you attacked me, Potter,” he says derisively.

“Oh.” Harry blinks in understanding. “You think… you think they’ll accuse you of doing this?”

“It’s a very real concern, Mr Potter,” Narcissa says gently. “While our name is certainly not spoken with the same vitriol it was a few years ago, it would only take one scandal for the public to turn on Draco, which would likely undo all the hard work he’s done to build a good life for himself.”

“Mother,” Malfoy says warningly.

“It’s important he understands, Draco,” Narcissa says more firmly this time. “You are a good person, and you don’t deserve to lose everything you’ve worked for because of this.”

“She’s right,” Harry says, making them both look back at him. “I hadn’t… I didn’t think of that,” he tells Malfoy. “I should have, I’m sorry, but if this does get out, I’ll make sure no one thinks you had anything to do with it. We can… speak out together or something, or I’ll do it on my own, so people know the truth. Either way, I’ll make sure this doesn’t get blamed on you.”

He means it too, and it was stupid of him not to think of it himself, not to realise Malfoy is worried. Whoever did this is probably trying to get revenge on Harry—someone he’d arrested, or a Death Eater sympathiser maybe—and it’s unfair Malfoy has been dragged into it, so he feels responsible for making sure it doesn’t get any more out of hand.

Narcissa is looking at him much more warmly now. Her expression has softened, the lines on her face are less taut, and her shoulders are relaxed. She must have been worrying about this since Malfoy had told her what happened, and the relief she’s showing now that she knows Harry is going to make sure Malfoy is okay makes him feel even guiltier for not thinking of it sooner.

“Thank you, Mr Potter,” she says sincerely. “We both appreciate that.”

Malfoy isn’t looking at either of them; his cheeks are tinged red and his eyes are cast down as prods at his food with his fork.

“Dessert, I think,” Narcissa says, breaking the uncomfortable silence that’s fallen over the table. “I’ve had your favourite prepared, Draco.”

“Oh, I love apple strudel,” Harry chimes in. “I haven’t had it in ages.”

He realises what he’s said too late.

“How do you know what my favourite dessert is, Potter?” Malfoy asks, frowning at him.

“Oh, er.” Harry has no idea, though he’s certain if he brought it up with Ron or Hermione they’d cite his obsession in sixth year. “You must have mentioned it,” he says lamely.
They both know it’s a lie, but Malfoy doesn’t say anything else, and Harry spends the rest of the meal trying to pretend he can’t feel Narcissa’s curious eyes darting between he and Malfoy.

ooOoo

When it’s time to say their goodbyes to Narcissa, they all make their way to the front door. Harry tries to pretend he doesn’t notice as Narcissa pulls Malfoy aside and bends low to whisper in his ear, or that whatever she says makes Malfoy’s eyes dart to him for the briefest moment. He also ignores the strange twisting sensation in his stomach when Malfoy offers an arm to Side-Along him back to his apartment.

When they land, Malfoy un-wards the front door and Harry follows him back inside. Harry hasn’t made a fuss about going back to his own place yet; it seems easier to just go along with this arrangement for now, though he does miss Lucy and the comfort of his own bed. Malfoy’s apartment isn’t so bad, he supposes, and the couch is pretty comfortable.

He’s hoping Malfoy will agree to just go straight to sleep and that he won’t mention the uncomfortable moment at dinner, because Harry really has no idea how the fuck to explain away what he’d blurted out, and he knows that if Malfoy pushes him on it, he’ll get defensive and they’ll fight. He really, really doesn’t want to argue, especially after Narcissa explained just how much this could cost Malfoy. Harry doesn’t like him all that much, but he certainly doesn’t want to be the reason Malfoy’s life is ruined.

He’s about to suggest they turn in for the night — Malfoy still hasn’t said anything to him — when the Floo chimes.

Malfoy glances at his watch and then at Harry. “You better not have given anyone my Floo co-ordinates, Potter,” he warns as he makes his way to the fireplace.

“You’ve literally been with me all day, you know I haven’t,” Harry grumbles. He throws himself onto the couch as Malfoy kneels on the hearth to answer the call. He wonders if he should cast a silencing charm to give Malfoy some privacy, but then Blaise’s head appears in the flames, his signature grin plastered on his face.

“Evening, lads,” he greets happily. “Still alive, I see.”

“It’s after ten, Blaise; what do you want?” Malfoy asks wearily, running a hand through his hair and leaving it mussed the way it had been this morning.

“Just checking in to see how my two favourite people are doing,” Blaise says, looking between Malfoy and Harry. “Doesn’t look like either of them are here though.” He chuckles to himself, and Malfoy and Harry roll their eyes in unison. “I’ll be honest,” Blaise continues, “when Penelope said she thought you two would be fine, I had my doubts, but you both seem to be alright. I’m impressed.”

Malfoy glances over at Harry with an ‘I told you so’ look on his face. Harry bites back his grin.

“What was that?” Blaise demands loudly, calling their attention back to him. “You two just had a moment, I saw it! Are you getting along now?”

“Of course not,” Harry says, leaning forward and propping his elbows on his knees. “But what was that about Penelope? When did you see her?”

“At the hospital on my lunch break today,” Blaise replies slowly, looking between Harry and Malfoy. “There was… er, paperwork I had to sign, that I forgot to do after I hauled your arse in their
last night. Why?”

Harry shrugs. “Oh, no reason. I just wondered if you ever see her outside of the times you so nobly volunteer to take me to St Mungo’s.”

Blaise narrows his eyes. “You’re being weird, Potter. What did you do to him, Draco? Why is he being weird?”

Harry looks at Malfoy, who is still perched on his knees at the hearth, looking back at Harry. He quickly turns away when Harry catches him though, and makes a face at Blaise.

“Potter is always weird, what are you on about?”

“Well, yes, I know that,” Blaise agrees. “But he’s definitely being stranger than usual.”

“I’m still here,” Harry points out. “I can hear you.”

“I’ve got to go, Blaise, he’s getting sulky,” Malfoy says. “Everything is fine. I’ll see you soon.”

Blaise looks like he wants to say something else to Harry, but he ends the call, the flames disappearing and leaving the fireplace empty and cold once again.

“You didn’t want to talk to him?” Harry asks as Malfoy pulls himself to his feet.

Malfoy is looking at his hands and frowning. “I got ash on me,” he says irritably.

“So do a cleaning charm,” Harry tells him. “You have your wand.”

“I did a cleaning charm this morning, Potter. They’re not a replacement for proper bathing. Please tell me you do understand that and that you don’t live your life thinking a quick cleaning charm everyday is all you need.”

“Yes, I know that,” Harry retorts, resenting Malfoy’s judgemental gaze. “It was just a suggestion. We don’t really have a lot of other options at the moment, though, do we?”

Malfoy is not quite looking at him now, an odd expression on his face that makes Harry suddenly very uncomfortable.

“What is it?” he asks uncertainly. “Now you’re being weird.”

Malfoy seems to be struggling to find the words he wants, opening and closing his mouth several times.

“I— I mean, there is another option that we could try,” he says slowly.

“What do you—” Harry cuts himself off, feeling the back of his neck warm as he realises what Malfoy means. “Oh. Oh, you want to… you think we should… right. Right, okay. Er—”

“It just seems… necessary,” Malfoy offers, still looking at his sooty hands. “For hygiene purposes.”

“Right,” Harry agrees, his mouth dry. “Right… for hygiene. So you want… you want to shower… with me?”

Malfoy’s head jerks up, his eyes wide. “I didn’t say anything about together, Potter,” he snaps defensively.
“Well you implied it!” Harry shoots back. “How am I supposed to know that’s not what you meant?”

“I— Potter, in what world would I ever want to shower with you?” Malfoy demands. “What sort of logic is that? That’s not what I was saying at all!”

Harry juts his chin out defiantly, refusing to be made to feel bad. “That’s what it sounded like you were saying,” he argues. “It’s not my fault you weren’t clear!”

“Well, whatever, Potter. Be a prat if you want, but I need to shower. Alone,” he emphasises. “I don’t plan to go without one for the duration of this bond, even if you do.”

His hands are on his hips, his face set in a defiant scowl as he looks down at Harry expectantly. Harry wonders if he should point out that the soot is now on his trousers, but decides to leave it.

“God, fine,” he grumbles, getting to his feet. “But if this is weird...”

It’s definitely weird.

He follows Malfoy to the bedroom first, where they retrieve their pyjamas, and then to the bathroom. After several minutes of snapping and embarrassing negotiating, Harry stands with his back to the shower, staring at the bathroom door and listening to the sound of water hitting the tiles as the heat from the shower slowly begins to heat the room up.

He can hear Malfoy moving about, and then he hears a change in the water’s rhythm, and he rubs nervously at the back of his neck. Malfoy is just behind him, naked and washing himself. He’s probably all... all soapy and wet.

Harry’s traitorous cock gives an interested twitch, so he tries desperately to think about other things — his job, Lucy, Ron and Hermione — but the sound of the water drowns out all other thoughts, and he’s half hard in his jeans before he has a chance to protest.

He absolutely doesn’t mean to start imagining what Malfoy’s skin would look like all flushed red from the hot water, with his hair dripping wet and falling over his forehead. He certainly doesn’t mean to picture Malfoy’s naked body pinning his own to the slick, tiled wall of the shower.

He swallows thickly and tries to discreetly push down the growing bulge in his trousers. He needs to stop this; he’ll look like a total pervert if Malfoy realises he’s standing there, cock hard just from listening to him shower.

He balls both his hands into fists at his sides, refusing to touch any part of himself, and he begins counting Hippogriffs in his head to force his mind to focus on something else. He gets to three hundred and eleven by the time the water finally shuts off. He breathes out a soft sigh of relief, but then he hears the shower door open, followed by a rush of steam and he tenses as he realises it’s his turn to strip down.

“You’re up, Potter.”

It’s an innocuous enough comment, but Harry has a momentary panic thinking Malfoy knows about the situation in his jeans, and is about to throw out a slew of defensive remarks until he realises Malfoy only means it’s his turn.

Malfoy, being the worst human in the world, is only wearing a white towel wrapped around his waist. He turns to face the door, looking away from Harry, and Harry is left to stare at the long length of Malfoy’s bare back, at his deceptively broad shoulders and his still slightly damp skin. The
towel is sitting much too low on Malfoy’s hips, and Harry can see the spot where his back dimples at the base of his spine, and Christ, Harry realises. He’s in so much trouble.

He turns his back on Malfoy as he quickly pulls his clothes off and gets into the shower. He doesn’t think Malfoy will turn around, but this whole thing is making him more self-conscious than he’s been in years, and he’s determined Malfoy will not ever find out about the effect he’s having on Harry.

He turns on the water and immediately steps under the spray. The hot water cascades over his face and shoulders, and his body begins to relax, the tension in his muscles draining away as his eyes fall shut. It’d be perfect if not for the fact that Malfoy is just a few feet away listening to him. That, and the fact he’s still bloody hard. He glances over his shoulder, peers through the fogged up glass door, and sees Malfoy stood stiffly in the same spot. His hair is still a little damp, and it’s stuck to the back of his neck. Harry looks away quickly. He gives his cock a light stroke, the sensation making his eyes flutter. He can’t do it, though. He knows how loud he is when he comes — there’s no fucking way Malfoy wouldn’t know what he was doing. Harry briefly considers casting a wandless silencing charm, but the sound of the water stopping would be even more obvious, and Malfoy would almost definitely turn around to investigate.

Maybe he can wait for Malfoy to sleep, but wanking in Malfoy’s bedroom while Malfoy is asleep a few feet away seems even worse than doing it in his shower. He reluctantly pulls his hand away from his cock again and takes his time cleaning himself, giving it time to go soft. Harry isn’t sure how long he’ll last not being able to touch himself. If this is going to be what they do from now on, showering in the same room until this is resolved, he thinks he’ll likely go crazy before the person who cast the bond has a chance to do him in.

ooOoo

“Potter!”

Harry turned away from the lake and saw Malfoy storming toward him across the grounds, a scowl on his face. He glanced at the castle, and though he couldn’t see any other students, he edged further behind the sprawling tree he was under so that he was obscured from the prying eyes of anybody who might be looking out a window.

Malfoy stopped a foot away from him and crossed his arms.

“What the fuck is your problem?” he demanded

Harry blinked. Not only because Malfoy so rarely confronted anyone on his own, but also because he had never heard Malfoy curse before, and it was oddly exciting to hear that posh, proper accent saying that word.

“Since when do you swear?” he asked. He crossed his arms too and leaned casually against the trunk of the tree.

Malfoy’s scowl faltered for a moment. “I— none of your business! Answer my question!”

“What was your question?”

Malfoy looked murderous. “You know what my question was, Potter. Don’t be an arse.”

“You know, this is the most you’ve yelled at me in weeks,” Harry said conversationally. He tilted his head to the side, observing Malfoy. “It’s the most life you’ve shown, too. I was starting to think you’d turned into a zombie.”
Malfoy’s expression morphed from shocked to confused then back to furious again in the span of a second. “I—you can’t—what the fuck is a zombie?”

“Muggle term,” Harry explained. “Sort of like… an inferi.” He uncrossed his arms and pushed off the tree, taking a step closer to Malfoy. “That’s what my problem is, Malfoy. You’re not yourself this year. I know something is going on with you.”

Malfoy paled and took a step back. “You don’t know anything,” he said uncertainly.

“No,” Harry admitted. “I don’t know any of the details, but I can tell something’s very wrong, and—” He paused, but it was now or never. “And I want to help you. I know she’s told you I want to help.”

He expected Malfoy to be surprised, or to sneer, or to turn and walk off. Malfoy was proud, and probably scared, and Harry knew it wasn’t going to be easy to convince him.

What he did not expect was the punch that landed squarely on his jaw. Harry staggered back in shock, one hand reaching behind him to steady himself on the tree, the other going to cup his jaw.

Malfoy crowded close to him, face furious, and Harry felt the first flicker of nervousness.

“You don’t know what the fuck you’re meddling in, Potter,” he hissed. “You’re doing your usual Gryffindor thing of rushing in before thinking without giving a fuck about who else you put in danger.”

“I didn’t—”

Malfoy shoved him, and Harry’s shoulder dug painfully into the bark. “Stay away from Pansy,” he snapped. “It’s one thing to keep risking your own life, but I won’t let you drag her into it too.”
Harry’s groggy when he wakes on Sunday morning, similar to when he woke in St Mungo’s the other day. His sleep was restless and sporadic, and he kept having strange dreams about Malfoy. Which is normal, he reminds himself as he follows Malfoy down the hall to the kitchen for breakfast. It’s totally normal to dream of people you don’t like when you’re forced to be around them all the time. It’s nothing to worry about. Not at all.

Malfoy waves his wand as Harry drops into one of the chairs, levitating bread, cereal, and other bits and pieces to the table. Harry watches discreetly as Malfoy sits down opposite him and pours himself a glass of juice, his hair still messy from sleep and his pyjamas rumpled. He rubs tiredly at his eyes and then glances up at Harry.

“What?” He doesn’t snap or sound annoyed, just weary. Maybe he didn’t sleep either.

“Nothing.” Harry says quickly. He reaches for the bread and jam to give himself something to do. He’s not particularly hungry, but he’s nervous Malfoy is somehow going to find out about the things Harry has been thinking about him.

Harry’s still holding out hope that the Floo will flare up at any moment, or that an owl that isn’t from Hermione checking on them will arrive at the window, summoning them back to St Mungo’s to have the bond removed. Until that happens, though, he’s going to have to figure out a way to control his bloody thoughts and his body's reactions to said thoughts.

“Potter!”

Harry’s head jerks up at the sound of Malfoy’s annoyed voice. Malfoy is watching him impatiently, and Harry’s eyes are immediately drawn to a small smudge of jam on the corner of Malfoy’s mouth.

“What?” he asks distractedly, dragging his gaze up.

Malfoy shakes his head. “How the hell does Blaise put up with your daydreaming every bloody day? You’re infuriating.”

“Blaise likes me,” Harry tells him with a smirk. “He thinks I’m charming.”

“He does not,” Malfoy disagrees. “He thinks you’re a menace.”

Harry takes a bite of his toast and tries not to stare at the jam still on Malfoy’s mouth, or imagine himself leaning over to lick it off.

Anyway,” Malfoy continues, oblivious to the internal crisis Harry is currently dealing with as he realises he wants to drag his tongue over his ex-nemesis’ mouth. “As I was saying before you so rudely ignored me— About last night—”

“Look, I don’t—”

“I appreciate you go—”

They speak in unison, then both break off and stare at each other.

A grin creeps across Harry’s face when he realises Malfoy isn’t going to tease him for the dessert thing, and he sets down his remaining toast. “Are you trying to thank me for going last night,
Malfoy?” he asks.

Malfoy reaches for his juice, pursing his lips. “I suppose that’s one way to look at it,” he sniffs, before taking a long drink.

“Well, you’re welcome,” Harry says genuinely. “It was... nice.”

Malfoy snorts. “Again, that’s one way to look at it.” He sets his glass down, tongue swiping his bottom lip to catch a stray drop of juice. “Do you have anything you’re required to do today?”

Harry forces his eyes away from Malfoy’s mouth. He hesitates. “Er. Well…”

“Out with it,” Malfoy insists, waving an impatient hand. “I’m not going to chance annoying Penelope again if you storm off in a strop.”

“I’m supposed to have lunch with the Weasleys today,” Harry tells him. “We have lunch every Sunday.”

Malfoy makes a face, and Harry is ready to argue, to defend his family, but then Malfoy sighs. “I suppose it’s only fair, since you came to my mother’s for dinner,” he concedes unhappily.

“I— really?”

“Yes, Potter, you prat,” Malfoy replies irritably. “I’m a reasonable man. I’m sure I can withstand one afternoon with Weasley and Hermione.”

“I’m glad you think so,” Harry says happily. “But just so you know, we’ll be going to the Burrow, and most of the family will probably be there.”

He chuckles at the way Malfoy pales even more.

ooOoo

Harry’s nervous at first about how Ron and Malfoy will get along, but really, he should have known better. Ron is probably the most easy-going person he knows, and after eyeing Malfoy for moment, he simply sticks out his hand and says, “Heard you’re bonded to Harry. Too bad,” before going back to drawing at the kitchen table with Rosie.

Harry and Malfoy are the second last to arrive; Ginny hasn’t shown up from Quidditch practice yet, which Harry is quietly pleased about because it means Molly is distracting everyone from him and Malfoy — huffing about “that damn captain, always overworking the players, doesn’t she know how important family time is?”

George and Angelina aren’t here — Roxanne has the Flu — and Bill and Fleur are in France visiting Fleur’s family, but Charlie and Percy are in the living room chatting with Hermione, and Arthur is dutifully listening to Molly rant about Gwenog Jones.

Harry gestures for Malfoy to sit down at the kitchen table, and then slides in beside him and grabs a piece of parchment and a coloured pencil.

“How’s the shop?” he asks Ron. He begins doodling on his parchment, though he’s watching Malfoy out of the corner of his eye. His face is blank as he casts his eyes around the room, but Harry can tell he’s nervous.

All the Weasleys had greeted him cautiously, but they were friendly enough. Hermione had told
them the situation in advance, and Harry suspects they’re all under strict instructions to behave.

“Yeah, alright,” Ron says. “Finished testing the new fireworks yesterday. Reckon we’ll start selling them in a week or so.”

“That’s brilliant,” Harry says enthusiastically. “We can use them for Christmas, like last year. The kids will love it.”

“Mm,” Ron agrees absently. “The kids.” He peers at his drawing, head cocked to the side, studying it intently. When he seems satisfied, he nods to himself and then looks up at Harry and Malfoy.

“What about you two though, hey? Bet this is a right nightmare for you both.” He’s gestures between them with the pencil in his hand, and Harry notices the end is chewed.

Harry glances at Malfoy, waiting for him to speak first; he wants to know his answer.

“It’s… fine,” Malfoy says tentatively. He hesitates, and then rolls his eyes. “Though I’m hardly going to insult him in a house full of Weasleys, am I?”

Ron chuckles. “Good point. You can tell me how awful he is when this is all over. Has Penelope told you when she’ll be able to remove it yet?”

Harry shakes his head. “She won’t try until she knows what kind of bond it is. We’re still trying to figure out how it happened. We saw her again this morning, and she doesn’t seem any closer to working it out.”

“So, stuck like this ‘til further notice,” Ron says. “Bloody bollocks, I reckon.”

“Daddy!” Rose gasps, looking up for the first time since Harry and Malfoy sat down. “You’re not supposed to say that word in front of me! Mummy said!”

Ron grins and ruffles her hair, and she squawks in protest. “Sorry,” he says. “I won’t say it again, I promise.”

“That’s what you always say,” Rose says dramatically. She looks over the table to Harry and Malfoy. “Uncle Harry, your friend doesn’t have any parchment! He’s not drawing.”

Malfoy looks startled when Rose clambers half over the table to thrust a piece of parchment in front of him. She divides up her pencils and pushes a few of them to him as well.

“There you go!” she says happily. “Now you can draw too! I’m Rose, by the way. Mum says you’re Draco and she works with you, and she said that you and Harry are stuck together. Here, use the blue one.” She picks up a blue pencil and thrusts it to Draco. “Blue is my favourite but I’ll let you use it.”

Harry looks expectantly at Malfoy. “Er… thank you,” Malfoy says. He accepts the pencil and gives Rose a small smile. “I’m not very good at this though,” he warns her.

“Oh, that’s okay,” Rose reassures him. “Neither is Uncle Harry.”

“Hey!” Harry pouts at Rose while Ron and Malfoy chuckle.

“Well, you’re not,” Rose says matter-of-factly. “Look! You did the sky red!”

Harry peers at his drawing appraisingly. “I think it looks rather artistic,” he says, tilting his head to the side and closing one eye. “Like a sunset. I bet I could sell this, Rosie, red sky and all, and be a
real, proper artist.”

Ron snorts. “People would probably pay for it too, even with the colours all coming out of the lines. Now this, on the other hand—” He holds up his own picture — a stick figure girl with red hair and a pale blue dress — and Rose squeals with delight. “This is real art.”

“That’s me!” Rose claps happily. “Uncle Harry, Draco, look! Daddy drew me! I want to show Mummy!”

She slides down from her chair and takes the picture from Ron, darting from the kitchen to find Hermione, and Ron points to himself proudly.

“Artist,” he says smugly.

Harry scoffs. “Amateur.”

“You realise you’re both ridiculous, I hope,” Malfoy points out.

“Course we are,” Ron says happily, leaning back in his chair, rocking it precariously onto two legs. “But I’m still a better artist. Although—” He picks up Rose’s drawing and holds it up. “Rosie is the real talent in the family.”

The picture is of two people, seemingly joined at the hip, one with a scribble of wild black hair, and the other with straight yellow hair. They’re wearing shirts that match the ones Harry and Malfoy are wearing now.

Harry snorts. “Well, I don’t think you’ll be getting that one tattooed on you any time soon.”

“Oh, I dunno,” Ron muses. “It has a certain wow factor to it. Wonder what Hermione would think.”

“Tattooed? What do you mean?” Malfoy asks.

Oh, right. Malfoy didn’t know. “Er, yeah. Ron has a couple of Rosie’s drawings tattooed on him,” Harry explains.

“Yep,” Ron says proudly. He rights his chair and without waiting for further questions he pulls off his shirt and turns around. On his right shoulder blade are three stick figures whose hair resembles Ron, Hermione, and Rose’s. They’re holding hands, and the magic imbibed in the ink allows the stick Ron and Hermione to swing stick Rosie between them as she laughs happily.

Ron turns to show Malfoy the one over his heart — messy purple handwriting that reads ‘to dad i luv u from rosie.’ He’d left the spelling mistakes on purpose, saying he wanted to remember the moment she handed him the note exactly as it was, forever.

“That’s— er, wow,” Malfoy says.

“I know,” Ron says happily. “Harry has one too, don’t you Harry?”

Malfoy’s head snaps around to look at him, and Harry flushes. Luckily, he’s saved from questioning by the back door banging open, letting in a burst of cool air and Ginny wanders in with a backpack slung over her shoulder.

“Harry!” she says happily when she sees him. He stands up and hugs her. “Still bonded to Malfoy, huh?” she asks, dropping her backpack onto an empty chair. She’s dressed in her Harpies training robes, her hair mussed from the wind and a streak of dirt across her cheek.
“Yep,” Harry agrees.

“Rotten luck for you,” she says, grinning at Malfoy. “Stuck with this prat.” She pokes Harry in the stomach and he winces. He always forgets how strong she is.

“It’s been alright,” Malfoy says, more confidently this time. “You play for the Harpies now? That’s fantastic, congratulations.”

“Excuse me, Ginevra,” Ron says crossly. “I am here too, you know.”

“Yep, for about a year now,” Ginny says. “We had a brilliant training session today, I can’t wait for next week’s game.”

“Oi!” Ron flicks a pencil at her, which she catches before it can hit her. She throws it back, hitting him in the nose, and gives him an exasperated look.

“Yes, hello, Ronald! Merlin’s pants. What do you want? You have my attention.”

“Good,” Ron nods, crossing his arms. “Mum’s furious that you’re late,” he tells her matter-of-factly. “Says she has half a mind to contact your captain herself and tell her off for working you too hard.”

“Fuck, she would too,” Ginny groans. “I better go and get this over with then,” she says. She glances at the loose parchment spread across the table as she leaves. “Nice picture, Harry,” she comments before walking out.

Harry grins smugly at Ron, who scowls and begins muttering about athletes sticking to what they know.

“Is Hermione still here?” Malfoy asks as Harry sits back down.

“I’m here, yes.” Hermione comes in from the living room, Rose tailing after her with Ron’s picture still clutched firmly in her hand. Hermione kisses Malfoy on the cheek, and then hugs Harry. “How are you both doing?”

“How are you both doing?” Harry tells her. “We’re… We’re trying to get along.”

Ron snorts and Hermione smacks his arm. “Be supportive,” she instructs.

“No hitting!” Rose chimes in.

“I’ve been doing some research,” Hermione continues. “It’s difficult to know what exactly I should be looking for, since we don’t know whether this is more than a proximity bond or how it was caused, so I’ve been looking into as many different kinds as I can. That way when we work it out, I’ll hopefully have the right information on how to deal with it.”

“Hermione, you don’t have to do that,” Malfoy says before Harry has a chance to. “There are thousands of bonds. You’ll be researching forever”

“Oh, it’s fine. I want to help,” she says, waving him away. “Besides, not all bonds have the requirement of staying close, so that narrows it down.”


She grins at him, and then summons a plate of biscuits from the counter to the table.

“Thank you,” Harry tells her gratefully. “We appreciate you wanting to help us.”
An odd look flickers over Hermione’s face, but it’s gone in a second. “How did it go with Penelope?” she asks, offering them a biscuit and then selecting one for herself and one for Rose. “Did she have any new information?”

“No,” Harry says, shaking his head. “It’s stronger, but there are still no new symptoms. We don’t want to risk testing the effects yet though.”

“Good.” Hermione nods in agreement. “As long as you both stay safe and listen to Penelope’s instructions, you’ll be fine until we figure this out.”

“If you figure it out,” Ron chimes in unhelpfully. “Maybe you’ll be bonded forever.”

“For fu - Ron! Why would you say that?” Hermione demands.

“Herm— ow!” He laughs rubbing his arm where she smacks him. “I was kidding, they know I was kidding!”

“You’re terrible,” she huffs. She moves the plate of biscuits out of his reach. “You get none of these now, as punishment.”

“Ooh, Dad’s in trouble,” Rose whispers loudly.

“Unfair,” Ron declares. “I’ve been dreaming about Mum’s baking all week!”

“Well, that’s what you get for not being supportive,” Hermione says, taking an indulgent bite of her own biscuit.

“Oh!” Harry says suddenly, interrupting Ron and Hermione’s bickering. Ron’s comment had reminded him of something. “I totally forgot to tell you, Malfoy. I had a dream about your friend night before last. It was really weird.”

Malfoy frowns at him. “Which friend?” he asks slowly.

“Parkinson. We were back at school — down in the dungeons I think — talking. I mean, you two were talking, I was sort of — well it was like I was you, I don’t know, but Merlin, she’s terrifying, even in a dream. Do you still talk to her?”

“You dreamed about Pansy Parkinson?” Ron chortles. “Please don’t tell me the details, I don’t want to lose my appetite.”

“Not like that!” Harry protests, glancing worriedly at Rosie, who has gone back to colouring in her drawing of him and Malfoy. “I’ve had a couple recently actually. In one we were on the Hogwarts Express, and in another Draco was just telling me not to talk to her, but none of them were like… like that.”

Ron is still laughing, and Hermione is looking between he and Malfoy, but Malfoy is looking strangely at him.

“What?” Harry asks uncertainly. He’d thought Malfoy might think it was funny, but maybe he and Parkinson don’t talk anymore. Blaise has mentioned her a few times over the years, but he’s never mentioned if Malfoy and her are still friends. The sound of loud voices heading towards the kitchen surrounds them, and one by one the Weasleys file in. He nudes Malfoy with his elbow. “What?” he says again.

“Nothing,” Malfoy says, not meeting his eye. “Forget it.”
Harry is going to push, but then Charlie catches his attention and starts telling him about the dragon reserve. By the time lunch is over, Harry has forgotten about the strange moment.

ooOoo

Harry isn’t sure if it’s him who has done wrong, but Malfoy acts completely weird towards him for the rest of the afternoon and evening, barely talking, barely even looking Harry’s way. He’s glad when Malfoy agrees to an early night again, though he doesn’t think Malfoy slept at all last night, judging by the black circles under his eyes. When he’d asked over breakfast, though Malfoy had just mumbled that he was fine and turned his back to make himself a coffee, and then stared out the window for a long time. Harry’s been wracking his brain, replaying the whole afternoon at the Burrow, but he’d really thought everything was fine. He’s sure none of the Weasleys would say anything offensive, and even if they did, why would Malfoy take it out on Harry?

When they leave for St Mungo’s that morning, Harry hasn’t even been able to get a single rise out of him by teasing him. Malfoy snapping back and being snarky is something he understands, something he knows how to handle. But Malfoy refusing to take the bait, grunting his replies, and telling Harry he’s fine when Harry demands to know what’s wrong makes Harry feel… unbalanced.

He’s tempted to walk beside Malfoy through the long corridors of St Mungo’s, just to see if Malfoy will get annoyed at him for being too close in public, but that feels like he’d be going too far.

Penelope is already in the exam room when they arrive, smiling much more warmly than she had yesterday. “Good morning,” she says happily, rolling up the sleeves of her robes and brushing her hair out of her face. Malfoy makes a noncommittal sound, and Harry just nods.

“Or not so good, by the looks of it,” she says, summoning their chart as they sit beside one another on the bed. “Has something happened?”

Harry begins to say no, but Malfoy cuts him off. “There’s a new symptom.”

“What?”

“What?”

Harry and Penelope speak in unison, both staring at him.

“What are you talking about, what new symptom?” Harry demands. “I haven’t felt anything!”

“Are you sure, Draco?” Penelope asks gently. “Perhaps the stress of the situation is just—”

“It’s not stress,” Malfoy insists firmly. “We’re sharing dreams.”

A long silence follows his announcement, broken finally by Harry's nervous laughter. “That’s ridiculous. We haven’t shared any dreams.”

“Draco, how do you know?” Penelope asks.

“Yesterday,” Malfoy informs them, “Potter told me he had a dream about one of my old friends. Everything he described— I had the same dream on the same night.”

“What the fuck?” Harry exclaims. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

“I was processing,” Malfoy says mildly.

“Processing,” Harry deadpans. “You spent all afternoon and last night processing, and you came to
the conclusion that dropping this on me now was the best thing to do.”

Malfoy at least has the decency to look a little abashed. “Look, Potter. I don’t—”

“It’s a mind bond,” Penelope says suddenly.

“That’s— yeah,” Malfoy agrees, shoulders slumping. “That’s what I’ve been thinking… It would make the most sense.”

“What does that mean?” Harry demands. “Our minds are bonded?” Jesus Christ, what the fuck has Malfoy seen if he has access to Harry’s mind?

“Potentially, in some sort of capacity. Whether it extends beyond sharing dreams I don’t know, but —” Penelope waves her wand with a flourish and a heavy, old book appears in her hands. She flips through the pages quickly. “Here it is,” she announces. “I was only reading about this one last night. Due to their intricate and delicate natures, mind bonds that have been unsettled by outside magic or miscast will force the Bondees to experience uncomfortable and sometimes painful physical symptoms if they separate, as a way to force them to remain in close proximity while the magic of the bond resettles itself.”

She looks up triumphantly. “This is why it’s getting stronger,” she tells them. “And why the initial magic was so faint. The bond has, somehow, been unsettled, and it’s forcing you to stick close by until it rights itself. And—” She glances at the book again, flips the page and skims, and, then looks back up at them. “I was correct the other day. The reason the effects are so strong when you’re apart is that this bond must be quite old and has somehow remained dormant until now.”

“This is—” Harry rubs tiredly at his face, processing this new information. “How can this be happening? We can’t be apart and now he’s seeing my dreams. Wait.” He rounds on Malfoy. “Is that why you look so tired? Did you not sleep last night so I wouldn’t see anything?”

Malfoy rolls his eyes. “Don’t be ridiculous,” he says, but the yawn that follows gives him away. He scowls and crosses his arms, refusing to look at Harry.

“Bloody hell. What do we do now then?” Harry asks Penelope. “Do you think there’ll be more than just the dreams, or is this as bad as it’ll get?”

“As the bond magic settles, we’ll get a clearer indication of what other aspects characterize the bond itself,” Penelope says. “This is good though,” she adds. “This is progress. We’re getting closer to figuring this out.”

Good is not the word Harry would have chosen to describe learning that Malfoy can see his dreams, which he would definitely rather keep private. Merlin, what if he has a dream about the things he’s been imagining when Malfoy’s in the shower?

Harry rubs at his face. “Why would it have been dormant?” he asks wearily. “Is that normal?”

“It’s not unheard of, but that’s one of the things we’re going to find out. Let’s take your diagnostics for today,” Penelope says, looking pointedly at Malfoy, “and then we can discuss why I wasn’t told about this as soon as it was discovered.”

The way Malfoy flushes reminds Harry of when he’s just got out of the shower, his skin tinged red — but he quickly pushes that thought away. It’s too dangerous now, if their minds are linked. He’ll need to have better control of his thoughts. Plus, he’s still mad at Malfoy for being a secretive prat and hiding this from him.
Penelope is humming quietly to herself as she begins casting, a content smile on her face. Harry wonders if it’s just their progress she’s happy about, or if there’s something else.

“Have you seen Blaise?” he blurts out, remembering what Malfoy had said the other day.

“No,” Penelope says indifferently, still writing her notes. “Why?”

“Oh, he mentioned you the other day,” Harry says casually. “I thought maybe you two had talked.”

She doesn’t look up from her chart, but Harry notices the subtle change in her expression. “He mentioned me?” she asks casually. “Saying horrible things, I suppose.”

Beside him, Malfoy snorts. “You two are ridiculous.”

“Me?” Harry asks, affronted.

“No.” He points to Penelope. “Her and Blaise.”

“Excuse me?” Penelope says sharply, a bloom of colour touching her cheeks. Harry has never seen her blush before. “What is that supposed to mean?”

Harry grins slyly. “Oh, I think you know.”

“She definitely knows,” Malfoy adds.

“I— you both need to be quiet,” Penelope declares. “Right now. This spell is very… complicated. You can’t talk while it’s working.”

Harry laughs, enjoying that he gets to tease her for once. Malfoy catches his eye and gives him a half smile, but then Harry remembers he’s pissed off because Malfoy is a liar and the moment is ruined.

“Let’s just get this done,” he says bitterly. “So we can leave and go back to ignoring each other.”

ooOoo

Harry, unfortunately, has never been good at giving people the silent treatment, even when he’s mad at them. Maybe it’s to do with his Gryffindor-esque nature, but when something is bothering him, and that thing is stood right there in front of him, he can’t just keep quiet for very long.

“Why the fuck didn’t you tell me?” he demands the moment they arrive back at Malfoy’s apartment. “You didn’t think I had a right to know what the hell was going on?”

“We still don’t know what’s going on,” Malfoy says wearily. It’s only just gone noon — they had to stay with Penelope longer today so she could drill them more about the dreams — but Malfoy goes straight to his liquor cabinet and pulls out a bottle of Firewhisky.

“I had a right to know!” Harry snaps. Malfoy pauses mid-pour and looks up at him.

“I really didn’t think you’d be this upset about it,” he says slowly, looking more and more uncertain.

“Well, I am,” Harry counters. “Bet you thought it was really funny, didn’t you? Bet you had a right old laugh behind my back. Stupid Potter, hasn’t even realised we’re sharing dreams.”

“Oh yes,” Malfoy growls sarcastically, his eyes darkening. “Not sleeping last night because I didn’t want to risk seeing whatever strange things happen in your head was a real fucking picnic for me, Potter.”
“If you’d just told me, we could have figured something out!”

“Like what?” Malfoy scoffs. “You would’ve stayed awake too, and then I’d have to feel like rubbish today and deal with you being sleep-deprived. That sounds bloody perfect.”

“We could have slept in shifts or something, I don’t know!” Harry retorts. “The point is, I had a right to know and you kept it from me!”

Malfoy throws his whisky back in a single gulp. “Fuck you, Potter,” he says, his voice scratchy from the burn of the liquor. “You know now, so it’s fine.”

“It’s not fine, and you’re a bastard.”

“Yes, that’s me,” Malfoy drawls, dropping onto his couch. He kicks his shoes off and slumps against the pillows. “Draco Malfoy— total bastard.”

Harry glares at him, and then, deciding Malfoy can go fuck himself, he stomps across the room and grabs the Firewhisky. Ignoring Malfoy’s protests about how expensive it is, he takes a long drink straight from the bottle. Harry has never enjoyed Firewhisky — why would people want their alcohol to hurt them? — but he ignores the intense burning feeling in his throat as he swallows, and then he drinks some more.

“That’s not water, Potter, Jesus Christ,” Malfoy says. “You’re going to end up drunk.”

“Good,” Harry decides. “That’s exactly what I want. To be drunk so I can pretend this isn’t happening.”

“As healthy as that sounds, you are not going to use my good Firewhisky to drown your sorrows,” Malfoy protests.

“Aren’t I?” Harry mocks, and then proceeds to take another swig. He’s sort of getting used to the taste now. It’s definitely not nice, but that’s not what this is about.

Malfoy is glaring at him, and Harry wonders who would win if Malfoy were to leap up right now and try to wrestle the bottle away from him. Malfoy is taller than him by at least half a foot, but Harry thinks his Auror training would give him skills and strength Malfoy doesn’t have. Maybe. Malfoy doesn’t move though, or try to fight the bottle away from him though. He just sighs and closes his eyes.

“Whatever,” he grunts. “Get pissed. I don’t care.”

“I’m going to,” Harry shoots back. “Because I want to, not because you told me to.”

“You tell yourself whatever you need to to feel better,” Malfoy says tiredly. “I’m going to nap. You stay awake.”

“You don’t get to nap!” Harry walks around the coffee table and drops down beside Malfoy, jabbing his shoulder with his finger. He’s probably sitting just a little too close, but Malfoy can just shut up and deal with it. “You have to keep me company after what you did.”

“After what I did,” Malfoy mimics. “I don’t owe you anything, Potter. We’re not friends.”

Harry stares at him for a long moment — so long that Malfoy cracks one eye open to peer at him.

“What?” he asks. “You look like I just kicked your Crup. We’re not friends.”
“Well, excuse me for thinking so,” Harry replies bitterly. It shouldn’t bother him this much — it’s true, after all — but hearing Malfoy say it upsets Harry even more than the dreams being kept secret, which is ridiculous.

“Merlin, you can’t possibly be drunk already,” Malfoy groans.

“I’m not,” Harry protests. He doesn’t think he is, anyway. He’s not a lightweight, after all. He definitely feels warmer, but that’s probably because his throat is currently on fire. He takes another drink, because maybe this will be the swallow when it starts tasting good and then burn fades. He wrinkles his nose. Nope, still awful.

“How can you say we’re not friends?” he wants to know after a moment, nudging Malfoy’s knee with his. “After these last couple of days, surely we’re not enemies anymore, right?”

“Christ, you’re one of those drunks,” Malfoy says, giving Harry a withering look. “You’re going to get all soppy and emotional, aren’t you?”

“I’m not drunk,” Harry argues, though he’s suddenly not so sure. The Firewhisky is strong, and he doesn’t usually drink much. A little voice whispers that he definitely shouldn’t keep drinking, because he’ll likely do or say something stupid, but the warning is drowned out by his brain shouting that it needs a break from this shitty situation. Besides, if Malfoy doesn’t even consider him a friend after all this, what the hell is wrong with him?

“Potter!” Malfoy’s voice breaks into his thoughts. Harry hadn’t realised he’d zoned out. He refocuses and looks at Malfoy.

“Huh?”

“Why do you look so miserable?” Malfoy asks warily. “If you start crying, I swear to god…”

“I’m not going to cry, Malfoy, you idiot,” Harry huffs. “I just don’t understand you.”

“Of course you don’t. You don’t know me.”

“Well, whose fault is that?”

Malfoy stares at him. “What?”

“I’ve been trying to talk to you since this happened, and you give me nothing! I learnt more about you from your mother at dinner than you’ve told me.”

“I—” Malfoy looks sort of nervous now. “Well, I don’t know anything about you either, so why should I tell you about me?”

“Are you seeing anyone?” Harry presses.

Malfoy doesn’t seem to think this is a strange place for Harry to start his questioning, so Harry doesn’t let himself feel embarrassed that this was what he blurted out.

“Are you?” Malfoy retorts. There’s a defiant look in his eye, like he’s challenging Harry, like he doesn’t really believe Harry will tell him anything.

And fine, Harry decides. If he wants to know, Harry will tell him, and maybe in return he’ll actually learn something about Malfoy too.

“I’m not seeing anyone now. I haven’t dated in ages,” Harry confesses, settling back against the
couch cushions. “My last relationship — I don’t even know if I can call it that — but it ended badly. I knew we didn’t work from the start. He was kind of a jerk, and not in a good way.”

“How does one be jerk in a good way?” Malfoy asks, looking over at him with an arched brow.

“Like y—” Harry cuts himself off. “I don’t know,” he says instead, crossing his arms over his chest. “I forced it though. I was just really desperate for someone to love me, you know? And so I convinced myself that everything was good and that I was happy, but really, I still felt just as lonely as I do now.”

He looks at Malfoy. “I suppose you probably think that’s pathetic, don’t you?” he asks challengingly.

Malfoy rolls his eyes. “I’m not a monster, Potter, you arsehole. Though I do think you’re delusional if you think the whole wizarding world doesn’t love you.”

Harry shakes his head. “No. They love the idea of me. They love the stories. But they don’t… they don’t know how I take my tea in the morning, do they?”

“Excuse me?”

Harry flushes. He hadn’t meant to say that. Bloody Firewhisky. “It’s just this thing I believe. And Emmet — my ex — never knew. It’s… nevermind, you’ll think it’s stupid.”

“That’s definitely possible,” Malfoy agrees seriously. “But you should tell me anyway.”

“You’re a prat, you know,” Harry tells him. Malfoy just smirks, making Harry sigh. “Fine,” he concedes. “It’s just... The way you take your tea is one of those small details about yourself that no one else would really know unless they asked. But... someone who really gives a shit about you would know — they’d ask or they’d notice — because they’d care enough to want to know. And Emmet... well, he just never cared enough about me to learn how I take my tea.”

When Harry looks up, Malfoy is staring at him like he’s grown a second head.

“Forget it,” he says quickly. “You don’t understand. I—”

“Give me that.” Malfoy snatches the Firewhisky from Harry’s hands and takes a long drink from it. Harry tries not to stare at the way his throat bobs as he swallows, but his eyes seem to be acting of their own accord.

“Are you alright?” he asks when Malfoy finally pulls the bottle away from his mouth. A single bead of Firewhisky escapes and trickles down Malfoy’s chin, and Harry’s head is filled with images of himself leaning forward to lick it away. He wonders whether Firewhisky would burn the same way if it came off Malfoy’s skin.

“You’re an idiot,” Malfoy announces.

Harry scowls. “I knew you’d be a prat,” he says. “I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“No. You’re an idiot if you think I wouldn’t understand,” Malfoy says. “You think it’s been easy for me? Look at who I am, Potter. My ex—” A dark look crosses Malfoy’s face. “He was horrible. Treated me like rubbish, and maybe that’s as much as I deserve, I don’t know. But I put up with him for months because I didn’t want to be alone, and maybe I didn’t think I’d ever find anything else.” He takes another long drink, wiping the back of his hand over his mouth afterwards. “I knew it wasn’t right from the start. All of my relationships have been like that. It always feels like—”
“Something’s missing.” Harry doesn’t realise he’s spoken out loud until he glances up at Malfoy again.

“Yeah,” Malfoy agrees slowly, frowning. “Yes. That’s exactly what it’s like.”

Silence falls between them. Harry wants to say something, but what they’ve just shared feels significant, and he doesn’t want to ruin it. But the gap between them seems to be widening with every passing moment, and Harry needs to make sure Malfoy doesn’t retreat away from him.

“You do deserve more,” he blurts out. It isn’t what he was going for, but it’ll have to do. “You do,” he says again. “Your ex was an idiot, and you’re a good person, and you deserve someone who appreciates that.”

Malfoy laughs softly. “Someone who knows how I take my tea, you mean,” he smirks.

*No milk, one sugar*, Harry thinks, and then freezes. Where the fuck did that come from?

The afternoon sun is streaming through the window, indicating that it’s very much still daytime, but Harry feels sort of fuzzy from the Firewhisky. “I’m tired,” he says. “I think I need a nap.” He looks at Malfoy, at the dark circles under his eyes. “You should have one too,” he suggests.

“The dreams,” Malfoy reminds him warily.

Harry shrugs and stands up. “I’m too drunk to dream,” he says. Which he isn’t sure is a real thing, but it definitely sounds like something that could be true.

Malfoy stands as well and puts the bottle down on the coffee table. “What if… what if something else happens? Another symptom?”

Harry blanches. “Do you think it will?”

“I don’t know,” Malfoy says slowly. “Probably not… but, well, Penelope did say not to risk it, didn’t she?”

Harry opens and closes his mouth. Malfoy is looking at him with a strange, hopeful expression.

“Maybe… do you think maybe we should stay in the same bed,” Harry says tentatively, watching Malfoy carefully for a reaction. “For proximity. For the bond.”

Malfoy doesn’t look horrified at all. “Yes,” he agrees slowly. “For proximity. And the bond. In case something goes wrong, or it gets worse.”

Harry nods seriously. “Exactly. It’s… it’s the responsible thing to do, right?”

“Yes,” Malfoy says again. “Good thinking, Potter. Come on.”

Harry follows him toward the bedroom, and he’s no longer sure that the swirling in his stomach has anything to do with the alcohol.
Draco was sat at the edge of one of the Hogwarts courtyards, surrounded by other Slytherins. This was where they gathered on days it didn’t rain and they wanted to escape the common room. Draco had never understood why; there was little shade during summer, and no protection from the wind in winter. The way leafy vines twisted and snaked their way up the stone pillars that surrounded the courtyard often reminded him of the Manor courtyard — one of the places he was actively trying not to think about if he could help it — and he found himself wishing he could sit elsewhere.

It was quite sunny today, but as he looked around, Draco realised everything felt sort of foggy around the edges.

He meant to try and figure out why, but then he glanced between two of the pillars, out towards the lawn, and caught sight of a mop of dark hair. Potter and his friends had just left the castle. Granger and Weasley looked like they were bickering about something, and Potter was a step behind them, looking at an old piece of parchment.

No wonder he gets shit marks if that’s what he hands his assignment in on, Draco thought to himself. The trio had found a shady patch of grass and sat down, right in Draco’s line of sight. Potter was still looking at his parchment, but then he froze, and a second later he looked straight up at Draco.

Draco narrowed his eyes, and Potter got a stupid grin on his face, blushed, and looked away.

Bastard, Draco grumbled to himself. He had no right to sit there looking so... so fucking good, while Draco was on an uncomfortable bench, tired and irritated and wishing his friends would shut up. If Potter didn’t stop looking up at him every few seconds, Draco would storm over there and snog that stupid grin off his stupid face.

Wait, what?

Punch, he meant he’d punch him again. Draco hastily checked that his friends hadn’t somehow heard the ridiculous direction his thoughts had just taken, but no one was paying him any mind.

He cast a sideways glance at Potter again, who didn’t even have the decency to look abashed when Draco caught him staring. He grinned instead, and Draco was horrified when an odd, swooping sensation overtook his stomach. It was followed by the uncomfortable, urgent need to be nearer to Potter. Merlin, what the fuck?

“I have to go,” he announced to his friends, standing hastily. Somebody said something, asked him where he was going maybe, but he hitched his bag higher on his shoulder and made a beeline for the castle without answering.

He would not sit here like an idiot and feel strange things while looking over at Harry bloody Potter.

When he got to the castle stairs, he paused and looked back over his shoulder. Potter was on his feet, heading in Draco’s direction, and just like that, all the tension left him. He stepped inside and hurried down the corridor, wondering if Potter would catch up before the next bell rang.

ooOoo

A loud tapping noise pulls Harry from sleep on Tuesday morning. He’d forgotten to close the curtains the night before, and the early morning sunlight is streaming relentlessly through the
window. He burrows further into his pillow, hoping it’ll go away, and exhales softly as the comforting smell of jasmine meets his nose.

He feels overtired and stretches his legs out as he tries to remember why he’d gone to bed so early.

When his foot brushes against a leg that is definitely not his own, his eyes snap open and the Firewhisky and confessions all come crashing back to the forefront of his mind. Malfoy. He’s in bed next to Draco Malfoy. He turns his head and sees messy blonde hair peeking out from beneath the blankets, and he remembers their conversation and his pathetic reasoning as to why they needed to share a bed. Christ, Malfoy is going to bloody murder him.

He slowly edges his leg away from Malfoy’s. They’d definitely woken up at some point last night — he thinks he remembers casting a tempus and seeing it was around ten. They’d both stumbled to the bathroom and then the kitchen, eaten something Harry thinks was dry biscuits, and then fallen back into bed without speaking a word. But he isn’t sure that in the light of day Malfoy will appreciate having Harry Potter less than a foot away from him.

He’d dreamed about Malfoy last night. They’d been back at school and Harry was watching him, trying to get his attention. Merlin, even in his dreams he’s pathetic. He’d known it was possible Malfoy would see things when they’d decided to sleep at the same time, but he hadn’t thought it would be him pining over Malfoy like a schoolgirl with a crush.

Harry edges slowly toward the side of the bed, hoping he can slip out before Malfoy wakes up. He feels like it will be much worse to have shared that dream and have Harry is in bed with him.

He’s about to lift the covers away from himself when the tapping on the window gets louder, followed by an angry hoot.

“What the fuck is that noise?” Malfoy sounds half asleep, his voice muffled by his pillow. He rolls onto his side, yawning loudly. It isn’t until he opens his eyes properly that he notices Harry, and jumps backwards in surprise.

“What the fuck, Potter? Have you just been sitting there staring at me?”

“Of course I haven’t,” Harry lies. “There’s an owl at your window,” he adds to change the subject.

Malfoy grunts irritably and rolls over onto his other side, tugging the blankets back up over his shoulder and curling himself into a ball. “Go and get it then. I’m not getting up.”

Harry, more delighted than he should be that Malfoy isn’t furious to have woken up beside him, rolls from the bed and pads to the window. When he gets the latch unlocked and slides it open, the owl swoops forward and lands on the window frame, giving him an annoyed look.

“What are you doing? Have you just been sitting there staring at me?”

“Of course I haven’t,” Harry lies. “There’s an owl at your window,” he adds to change the subject.

Malfoy grunts irritably and rolls over onto his other side, tugging the blankets back up over his shoulder and curling himself into a ball. “Go and get it then. I’m not getting up.”

Harry closes and locks the window again, then unrolls the letter as he moves back towards the bed. He recognises Penelope’s rushed handwriting at once. Healers are just like Muggle doctors — they all seem to have the same, untidy way of writing. He quickly scans the note, and his stomach drops.

“Malfoy,” he says loudly, an edge of panic to his tone. “Get up. We need to go to St Mungo’s right now.”

“It’s not even that late,” Malfoy whines from beneath the cover.
“Malfoy,” Harry says again, leaning over the bed to prod Malfoy in the back. “We need to go now. Penelope says she’s figured something out about the bond.”

ooOoo

“I did try to Floo,” Penelope says as she leads them to her office, Harry and Malfoy hurrying to keep up with her brisk pace. “But I got no answer. Thanks for getting here so quickly.”

She ushers them inside and closes the door, casting a silencing charm before she sits down at her desk. Harry and Malfoy exchange a glance as she gestures for them to do the same.

“What’s going on? Why do you look like you haven’t slept?” Harry asks warily as he sits, noticing how frazzled she looks. Her robes are rumpled and her hair is a mess of fly away strands, and she has dark circles under her eyes. “Is this about the dreams?”

“No.” She shakes her head as she pushes their case notes across the desk towards them. They both lean forward, but Harry doesn’t understand most of the medical jargon he’s looking at. “And I’m fine, but I’ve been assessing the magic that’s intertwined with your own since yesterday,” Penelope says. “During yesterday’s analysis, I was able to extract a single strand of magic from each of you that contained evidence of the bond, and using that, I’ve been able to confirm that there are absolutely no foreign components attached to either sample, and no indications of the magic being hostile.”

“That’s not possible,” Malfoy says at once. “That can’t be correct.”

“Wait, what does it mean?” Harry asks impatiently, feeling as though he is missing something significant.

“No foreign components means that the bond magic doesn’t belong to another witch or wizard— it belongs to us,” Malfoy explains, still reading Penelope’s notes.

“And the fact it isn’t hostile, well that means it had to have been cast willingly,” Penelope adds. “By both parties.”

Harry gapes at them. “But that’s… that’s not possible.” He shakes his head vigorously. “No. It’s just… it’s just not possible.”

“That’s what I said,” Malfoy mutters.

“We’d know,” Harry argues. “We’d remember if we’d done something like this. No matter how long ago it was.”

“Exactly,” Penelope says solemnly, looking between them with her ‘I have more bad news’ expression. “It means that the memories are gone.”

ooOoo

The rest of their day is confusing and unpleasant; hours and hours of being poked and prodded by Mind Healers that Penelope has brought in to consult on their case. The same comments are repeated back to them over and over — the bond has been dormant, but we don’t know why or for how long;
it’s unsettled; it’s forcing them close to try and right itself; it could only have been cast by two willing participants, and are they absolutely sure they don’t remember doing it?

Harry is surprised with Malfoy’s patience throughout the whole process; he answers the same questions repeatedly without any fuss, and the only indication he’s getting frustrated are his lips, which are pursed in a thin line as repeated diagnostic charms are cast over him.

It’s Harry who becomes worked up when Penelope suggests bringing in the other Healers, and Harry who insists that anyone allowed access to the notes must sign a binding contract that will prevent them from leaking any information about the case.

It’s for his own privacy, he tells himself. The brief look of gratitude that flashes over Malfoy’s face and makes Harry feel like he’s done something brilliant is just a bonus.

They haven’t talked about what this means yet. It’s too big, too much, and Harry doesn’t know where they’d even begin. Not that they’ve had much opportunity to talk, anyway, with Healers in their faces for most of the day. Now, though, they’re given a few brief minutes alone Penelope has had ham and cheese sandwiches brought up for them from the hospital cafeteria, and left them alone in an exam room to eat while she makes a call.

A heavy silence stretches out between them, an uncomfortable barrier that neither is willing to breach. Harry eats, not really tasting his food, and not looking anywhere in the direction of Malfoy’s seat. They both sigh in relief when Penelope comes barrelling back into the room to announce she’s been able to secure them an appointment tomorrow morning with England’s most renowned expert in mind bonds. When she sheepishly implies that the Healer only agreed because of who Harry is, Malfoy doesn’t even have a single dig at him regarding the obvious special treatment, and Harry’s grateful; he doesn’t think he could deal with a fight right now.

After several more hours of sitting on uncomfortable hospital chairs and dealing with seemingly endless questions and assessments, Penelope finally lets them leave, reminding them again to be on time tomorrow morning for their next appointment.

They Floo back to Malfoy’s together. Harry hasn’t given any more thought to the fact that they’re still sleeping here; quite frankly it just doesn’t matter to him now.

He feels strangely bereft as they step over the hearth. A part of his life has been removed. Stolen. He’s not let himself think much about it throughout the day, but as he sinks onto Malfoy’s couch, the reality hits him — someone obliviated him. They took away his memories, his chance to know why the fuck he and Draco Malfoy would bond themselves to one another.

Penelope has managed to answer one question — who cast the bond — but that answer has left them with a million more mysteries, and unless this Healer tomorrow is some sort of goddamn genius, they’ll likely never figure out the truth.

“So, what do you think?” Malfoy asks suddenly, sitting down beside him.

Harry looks up in surprise. “What?”

“It just doesn’t seem possible, does it?” Malfoy states “Why would we, of all people, ever need to create a mind bond? And why would someone want us to forget about it?” His hands are squeezed into tight fists on his knees, and he’s staring, slightly unfocused, at a spot on the wall. “What if it’s to do with him?” he says, a hint of panic in his voice. “Voldemort. What if he caused all of this?”

“Malfoy, calm down,” Harry urges. “Voldemort has nothing to do with this.”
“Maybe he created the mind bond,” Malfoy worries loudly, as though he hasn’t heard Harry. “Maybe it was set to trigger at some point in the future to ruin our lives, because he knew how much we hated each other.”

“I don’t think forcing me to bond to a bloke I didn’t get along with in school was how he wanted to ruin my life,” Harry points out. “He was more about murdering me. Besides, we already know that the bond was cast by two willing participants — that means we did this on purpose. The magic wouldn’t look the way it does if we’d been forced, right? That’s what you said, remember. Just try and calm—”

“Why did someone want us to forget it, Potter?” Malfoy says a little hysterically. “What the fuck happened to us?”

“Malfoy, I don’t know, but you… you need to calm down, okay?” Harry says, frowning at Malfoy in worry. “Why don’t we sleep on it and talk tomorrow when we’re less worked up, yeah?”

“I won’t be sleeping tonight, Potter, don’t be fucking stupid,” Malfoy snaps.

“Well, you need to do something to keep your mind off—” Harry breaks off and looks at Malfoy thoughtfully. Malfoy definitely needs something to get his mind off this, something that will help him relax. “I have a brilliant idea,” he announces.

After sending an owl to Ron and Hermione, updating them on the day's events and asking how Lucy is, Harry Apparates himself and a very reluctant Malfoy to the street he lives on, landing side by side in the alley behind his apartment building. It had taken ages to convince Malfoy to come with him. Harry didn’t want to ruin the surprise and had refused to tell Malfoy where they were going, and Harry thinks it was his curiosity that won out in the end.

It’s gotten dark now, and there’s nobody around on the street as Harry leads Malfoy towards the lock up garage he rents. It’s not far from his home, just a minute down the road.

“What is this, Potter?” Malfoy asks skeptically, looking over his shoulder back down the street. “Your apartment is back that way.”

“We’re not going to my apartment,” Harry tells him. He stops in front of the garage and pulls out his wand. This is a mostly Muggle neighbourhood, so standard locking charms would probably suffice, but he has the door completely warded just in case. As he takes down the protective charms, he glances at Malfoy, who is still rigid and tense. Harry hopes this works to distract him. He knows they need to deal with their situation, to figure it out, but there isn’t a lot they can do before they see the specialist Healer tomorrow, and until then he just… well he really wants to make Malfoy feel better.

“Are you mental?” Malfoy demands when Harry removes the last charm and the creaky old door slides up.

Harry flashes him a grin. “Come on, it’ll be fun. Have you ever been on one?”

“No I most certainly have not,” Malfoy says, his incredulity making his accent even posher. “And I don’t ever plan to be on one. Was this your big plan? Getting me on that thing and letting it kill me?”

Harry laughs and grabs two helmets from a shelf. He holds the black one out to Malfoy.

“It’s just a motorbike, Malfoy,” he assures him. “And I’m very good at riding it. I promise you'll be fine.”
“No,” Malfoy says, and he takes a step back. “Nope, no way, not a chance in hell.”

“Please?” Harry asks. “I really think it’ll help.”

“A distraction is not a solution,” Malfoy snaps, though he glances at the proffered helmet uncertainly.

“No,” Harry agrees gently, “it’s not. But we can’t do anything to fix this right now, Draco, and I promise this will be more fun than just sitting back at your place, twisting ourselves up in knots trying to figure it out.”

Malfoy is staring at him defiantly, but then his shoulders drop a little. He swallows, and he reaches out tentatively and takes the helmet. “This better not mess up my hair,” he warns Harry.

“It definitely will,” Harry replies happily as he slides his own helmet on. He climbs onto the bike. He’s never ridden it with someone else, and isn’t really sure how much room Malfoy will need. He slides forward a little further than he normally sits. “Get on,” he says, gesturing behind him.

Malfoy hesitates for another moment, but then he steps forward and climbs on behind Harry.

“What do I hold onto?” he asks.

“Me,” Harry says at once without thinking. “Put your arms around my waist.”

There’s a beat of silence, and then Harry feels hands on his hips, sliding slowly around to his middle.

Of course, when he’d said it, he hadn’t considered that he would end up with Malfoy’s body pressed up against him. A terrible oversight, on his part. He can feel Malfoy’s chest against his back, his spread legs nudging against the back of Harry’s.

Probably not his best idea, he thinks as his cock twitches.

“Are we going or not?” Malfoy asks impatiently from behind him.

“Yeah, yes, sorry,” Harry says hastily. He starts the bike, the sudden loud roar of the engine reverberating around the small garage, and Harry thinks he hears Malfoy swear behind him. “Hold on, okay?” he tells him loudly over his shoulder.

Malfoy’s arms tighten a fraction as Harry rolls the bike forward slowly. He pauses to close the garage door, then with a loud rev of the engine, he takes off down the street. Malfoy clings to him even harder and Harry can feel the bracket Malfoy’s legs have created around his own tighten even more.

He sticks to back streets as he heads farther away from the main part of the city. The rows of houses become fields, the street lights becoming few and far between, and they keep going until the town is just a bright dot illuminated in the bike’s mirrors. Malfoy’s tight hold has loosened on him somewhat, and Harry thinks he might actually be enjoying this, so he slows down.

“I’m going to disillusion us, okay?” he says. “Just to be safe.”

“What for?” Malfoy asks. “There’s no one out here.”

“Just don’t freak out, okay?” Harry beseeches, casting the spell. He can’t see Malfoy’s arms when he glances down now, but he can still feel them. “This is perfectly safe, I promise.”

“Potter, what are you——”
Harry launches the bike upwards into the sky, and he hears Malfoy’s loud shout of surprise. He continues ascending, the cold air whipping against his face, the fields below becoming tiny, dark blurs. It’s a clear night tonight, thankfully, so they can see for miles, the light pollution far behind them. The stars are rarely visible at night in the city, and Harry loves to come out here to where everything feels untouched and clean.

“You okay?” Harry yells over his shoulder.

“Fuck you, Potter,” Malfoy yells back, but Harry thinks there’s an odd sort of affection in the way he says it. Or maybe he’s just hearing what he wants to hear.

Harry’s loses track of how long they fly. At one point Malfoy rests his chin on Harry’s shoulder, making Harry’s stomach swoop, but it only lasts a moment before Malfoy pulls away. He wonders if it’s too weird to ask him to put him back, and decides it definitely is.

His fingers are slowly going numb on the handlebars; the air getting colder the higher they climb. Neither of them are dressed properly for cold weather, so Harry veers the bike around and begins flying towards the road where they’d taken off. He’s slowed down considerably now, but Malfoy is still holding firmly to his waist. And he might be imagining it, but he thinks Malfoy has edged closer to him again. He can feel the hard press of Malfoy’s chest along the length of his back, pushing slightly into him, and he’s pretty sure he would remember if he’d had Malfoy’s crotch pressed against his lower back before now.

He slows down a little more, taking his time with their descent. He wants to draw the evening out a little longer, savour the way it feels to have Malfoy behind him like this. He might never get another chance, and that bothers him immensely.

When they finally touch down on the deserted country road again, Malfoy’s fingers flex against him as Harry drops the disillusionment charm, but he doesn’t loosen his grip, and Harry grins.

The ride home is quicker than Harry would like; there’s not a lot of traffic around, and if he slows the bike down any more they may as well be walking and Malfoy will probably realise what he’s doing and hex him in the face. All too soon they pull into the garage, and Harry lets out a low exhale of disappointment when Malfoy’s arms release him and he slides off the bike. He pulls off his helmet, and Harry snorts when he catches sight of Malfoy’s mussed-up hair.

“Shut up,” Malfoy grumbles, trying to smooth it down with his hands. Harry wishes he wouldn’t; he rather likes the way it looks like that.

“We can stay at your place if you like,” Malfoy offers when they get back on the street, gesturing towards Harry’s building. “I mean, it’s right there, so…”

Harry smiles. “Yeah,” he agrees. “Yeah, okay.”

They walk in silence. Harry is still feeling the buzz from flying, and feeling finally returning to his fingers. He senses that Malfoy wants to say something, but he doesn’t push it. There’s still so much to talk about, to figure out, but maybe just for the rest of tonight they can maintain this calmness. He imagines that once tomorrow comes, once the specialist starts giving them answers, all hell will break lose and any semi-friendship they’ve managed to create will be damaged. So for now… well, for now, Harry just wants to hang on to this.

He tries to remember how he’d left his place, whether he’d cleaned up his laundry and his dirty dishes, but it’s too late now because Malfoy is stood behind him at the front door.
“Where’s your Crup?” Malfoy asks, glancing around when Harry lets them in.

“Still with Ron and Hermione,” Harry tells him, feeling a pang of guilt at not having gone to visit her. “I’ll have to go and see her soon.”

“Hmm,” Malfoy hums. He begins to edge his way around the room. He brushes his fingers over things as he looks at them. “I wanted a Crup when I was a child, you know,” he says quietly. “My father never cared for them though.”

“That’s too bad,” Harry says, watching him closely from the couch. “They’re great pets.”

He’s still thinking about the bike, about the way Malfoy had felt pressed against him, and wondering what would be an acceptable amount of time to wait before asking him to get on it again.

“So, when did you get the bike?” Malfoy asks from across the room.

Harry startles, panicking that Malfoy has read his mind, but he’s still looking at photos on Harry’s mantle. “Straight after the war,” Harry tells him. “It was Sirius’s originally, and it was part of what he left me when he died. I spent some time fixing it up and getting it going again. I er…” Malfoy glances over at him, and Harry gives him a sheepish smile. “It’s not technically legal for me to have a flying motorbike, so if you could not mention it to anyone…”

Malfoy snorts. “Of course it’s not legal; what appeal would anything have to Harry Potter if it wasn’t against the rules,” he says sarcastically.

Harry chuckles. “My boss would kill me if he knew. I don’t take it out very often, just to be safe.”

Malfoy sits down beside Harry, definitely closer than is necessary. “Why did you take it out tonight then?” he asks.

“I just thought you— I mean we— could use the distraction,” Harry replies. “Why did you agree?”

Malfoy hesitates. “I don’t know,” he says. “You said my name—“

“I did?”

“—and… I trust you.”

“You do?”

Malfoy is looking at him now, like, really looking, and his grey eyes are bright and intense. He nods. “Yes. I do.”

He’s so close, so tantalizingly, temptingly close. Harry’s mouth is dry, his heart is racing, and suddenly he knows that the only thing he wants is to kiss Draco Malfoy. He needs to touch him, to taste him, needs to know what it feels like to have Malfoy’s fingers in his hair and their chests pressed together.

Malfoy’s tongue darts out, and he drags it across his bottom lip, drawing Harry’s eyes to it. He’s so close now that Harry can feel his warm, uneven breaths when he murmurs, “Thank you for tonight. I needed it.”

Harry can only nod; he’s not sure he remembers how to speak. Malfoy is right there and he’s not pulling away. He wants this too. Merlin, when had this even started? Harry has no idea. Is it normal to want someone so fucking badly after just a couple of days? Out of practically nowhere?
The thought brings him up short.

It’s not normal at all. To be this desperate to be near someone, to want to be so close to a person he’s barely spoken to in years. That’s not what Harry is like. He’s the kind of man who takes weeks to warm up to someone, who takes his time and doesn’t get invested, because he knows chances are good that things will end badly.

He’s not the kind of man who goes from nothing to being on the verge of mounting someone on his couch so quickly.

Which means—

“It’s the bond,” he says, hating himself immediately. He pulls back reluctantly. “We— this isn’t how we’d be acting without the bond, right?” he clarifies. “What if this is just… just the bond trying to get us to…”

Malfoy sits back and rubs at his neck. He looks disappointed. “It’s not that kind of bond, Potter,” he says.

“But it… what if it is? You and I have never…”

Malfoy doesn’t move away. He reaches out and puts his hand on Harry’s knee. “It’s not that kind of bond,” he repeats. “But if you’d rather wait until this is sorted out so you’re sure—“

“We might hate each other again when we find out what happened to us,” Harry points out.

Malfoy flinches and withdraws his hand. “Possibly,” he says a little stiffly.

“It’s just… it’s too fast, isn’t it?” Harry says, only realising after he does that maybe Malfoy isn’t quite as desperate to be close to him. Maybe it’s just Harry acting like a total idiot and wanting to throw himself at the other man.

“It is a lot,” Malfoy agrees slowly. He sighs. “Maybe we should turn in for the night, and deal with this tomorrow.”

“The dreams?” Harry asks.

Malfoy shrugs. “The worst you’re likely to see is yourself naked,” he says seriously, making Harry flush.

“I don’t have a couch in my room,” Harry tells him, because he’s not sure what else to say. Did Malfoy just admit to having dirty dreams about him?

“Ah,” Malfoy says thoughtfully. His lips twitch. “Well, I suppose I’ll just have to stay with you then. For the proximity. And safety.”

Harry’s stomach flips again.

“Right,” he agrees, licking his lips. “For the proximity.”

ooOoo

He wasn’t sure why he was there, but he knew he couldn’t leave. He had to wait, had to do this. It was the right thing to do, he kept reminding himself. Why the fuck was it so terrifying then? He heard the faint sound of footsteps and pressed himself more firmly against the wall of the corridor, hoping his disillusionment charm was strong enough to hide him if it was Severus out looking for
him again.

The footsteps drew nearer, and Draco was sure the person was in the corridor now, but he couldn’t see anyone. Were they disillusioned too?

“Malfoy?”

He heard Potter’s tentative voice and exhaled. This was it. He could do this. He dropped the charm and stepped forward before he could stop himself, and a moment later Potter appeared from beneath a cloak.

He almost rolled his eyes — of course Potter had a fucking invisibility cloak.

“I got your note,” he told Draco. “Did you think more about my offer?”

Right to the point then. Draco supposed that was for the best; this wasn’t going to be easy — may as well get it over with.

“I did,” he said. “And I’ve made my decision.”

Potter was leaning closer to him, and Draco’s stomach erupted with butterflies. He was really doing this. He just had to say it. That’s it. He swallowed, the words getting stuck in his throat.

“Malfoy?” Potter prompted, his voice low.

“Yes,” Malfoy said in a rush. “Yes, I accept your offer. I want you to help me get away from the Dark Lord.”

ooOoo

The specialist Healer is a large, balding man in his late sixties. His name is Jasper Thistlefoot, and he has small eyes like Uncle Vernon’s and a nasty looking scar that runs from beneath his left eye down to his jaw. He also has a loud booming laugh and toothy smile, and he keeps calling both Harry and Draco “son.”

He’s been running diagnostics on them for about an hour, and while Penelope is generally silent as she assesses, Healer Thistlefoot has so far told them about his wife, how they met, their two kids Liz and Marie, and why he thinks the Chudley Cannons are finally going to break their losing streak this season.

Harry’s not sure if it’s just what the man is like, or if it’s a tactic to keep their minds busy while he works. Either way, it’s an effective distraction and Harry’s grateful.

Healer Thistlefoot has just moved his wand to Draco when the door bursts open and Hermione darts in.

“Harry!” she exclaims, darting forward and throwing her arms around his neck. “Where the hell have you been? I tried to Floo you last night after I got your owl and you never replied! I assumed you were asleep, but you didn’t call back this morning either. Ron and I have been so worried. Are you both alright?”

Healer Thistlefoot looks like he’s about to tell her off, but Harry cuts in before he can. “It’s fine,” he assures him. He squeezes Hermione’s hand and gives her a tight smile. “I’m sorry, we were out late last night and slept in this morning, so we had to rush here.” He decides not to mention the part where he woke up with his legs tangled with Malfoy’s and his cock achingly hard. Needless to say,
his shower had been much, much colder than usual. “Sorry to have worried you.”

Hermione is still holding onto his hand. She looks quite exhausted now that Harry looks at her properly, like she hasn’t slept at all.

“Are you alright?” Harry asks. “You look tired.”

“Don’t worry about me,” she insists in a voice an octave higher than normal. Her eyes dart between Harry and Malfoy, her free hand fidgeting at her side. “This is just— can I do anything? Can I help somehow?”

“Nothing to be done, lass; I’m all finished here,” Healer Thistlefoot announces, lowering his wand and stepping away from Draco. “If you don’t mind, I need a moment with the lads to discuss the results.”

Harry tenses nervously as Thistlefoot sends a Patronus to Penelope, calling her back. Usually he wouldn’t mind Hermione being here for things like this, but he feels like this is something he and Malfoy need to deal with alone.

“Do you mind waiting outside?” he asks apologetically.

“Of course not,” she says, though she doesn’t let go of Harry’s hand.

“Hermione, we’re really fine,” Harry assures her. “I promise, you don’t need to worry.”

“Right, yes,” she says, stepping away reluctantly. “I’ll be right outside if you need anything. I’m here for you both.”

“She’s acting strange,” Malfoy murmurs to Harry when the door closes behind her.

“She’s just worried about us; it’s what she’s like,” Harry reminds him.

Penelope arrives with their updated case notes, and Healer Thistlefoot settles himself on one of the guest chairs in front of Harry and Draco.

“Well,” he begins. “There’s definitely strong evidence of your memories being removed. The magical residue that’s been left behind is faint, but it belongs to someone with a great deal of power. They were the one to Obliviate both of you.”

“Can you tell who it was?” Malfoy asks. His fingers are wrapped around the edge of the exam bed so tightly that his knuckles are white, and Harry knows he’s still worrying this might be to do with Voldemort.

“I can’t identify who it belongs to, no,” Thistlefoot says. “I can tell that the magic is several years old, though, and that the mind bond has reacted badly with the Obliviation spell. This is why it was dormant for so long; the two spells are not designed to be used in conjunction with one another, and when they were combined, the mind bond was forced into a hibernative state.”

“Do you have any other information about the bond, Healer?” Penelope asks, looking up from the notes she’s taking.

Thistlefoot nods. “I can see that it’s an outdated version of a standard linking bond. Many of the older Pure-Blood families still prefer to use these older versions of spells — tradition and all that. You won’t find it in many modern medicine journals. When it’s cast correctly and the two minds are given the chance to accept the link and let it grow, the things that can be shared are quite varied. It
usually starts with something simple, like being able access the other’s mind more easily using Legilimency, but depending on what the two participants are trying to do, it can be expanded, allowing them to share thoughts and even speak to one another telepathically.” He holds out his hand and Penelope hands over their files. His eyes skim over the notes quickly. “Healer Clearwater mentioned that you don’t remember the casting, and I—”

He breaks off and frowns.

“Healer Thistlefoot?” Penelope prompts. “Is everything alright?”

“I didn’t see this note earlier. It says here the two of you have reported sharing dreams.”

“Yes,” Malfoy answers. “It began shortly after the effects of the bond showed themselves. That sounds consistent with the bond you’re describing.”

“Can you tell me more about them?” Thistlefoot presses, still frowning.

“It’s just the two of us in fifth, maybe sixth, year,” Malfoy begins.

“Sixth,” Harry adds. He glances at Malfoy. “Your hair got really messy in sixth year and you stopped slicking it back,” he explains, embarrassed.

“Right,” Malfoy says. He looks at Harry curiously, and then drags his eyes back to Healer Thistlefoot. “So it’s us in sixth year at Hogwarts, usually conversing with one another. There have been one or two that featured an old friend of mine, but nothing that seems significant so far. I’ve seen things from Potter’s point of view, and vice versa.”

“I’d thought that maybe what we’re seeing — the dreams — could be our minds showing us what we should have done back then,” Harry says. He’s not shared that particular thought with Malfoy yet, and he purposely doesn’t look his way now.

“Well, son,” Thistlefoot says. “While it is possible for mind bonds to create imaginary scenarios as a guide, based on the information I’ve collected today, that’s definitely not the case here.”

Penelope makes a small noise of surprise. “You don’t think—”

Thistlefoot nods at her and then looks at Harry and Malfoy with an expression similar to Penelope’s bad news face, and Harry knows this won’t be good.

“The things you’ve been seeing — these images — they’re not dreams at all,” Thistlefoot informs them. “What you’re both seeing are the memories that were removed, trying to force their way back into your consciousness.”
Harry isn’t sure where Penelope got Firewhisky from, or if it’s even allowed to be in St Mungo’s, but he’s grateful for the glass she hands him. His hands are trembling as he raises it to his lips and sips at the burning liquor. He thinks he might be in shock — he’d definitely heard Thistlefoot say that word earlier — or denial, or something like that, because even though he knows what he heard, his brain is refusing to process it right now. He’s staring at the cupboard that’s attached to the wall on the opposite side of the room, counting the medical journals that are lined up on it. Twenty-six. He decides to count again just to be sure. There are fifteen bound in black leather, eight in red, and three with a faded brown trim. Maybe he should ask to read one. Penelope likes him — she would probably let him borrow one for a couple of weeks. If he learns a bit more about Healing, maybe he won’t need to come in quite so often. Blaise probably wouldn’t appreciate that, he thinks. Not if he’s looking for excuses to come here.

People are still talking somewhere near him. Penelope is touching his shoulder, but he isn’t sure he wants to hear what’s being said.

It’s ridiculous, the whole thing. Ridiculous and impossible.

He lets a brief flash of last night’s dream cross his mind — Malfoy accepting his help — but his head starts to spin, so he pushes it away immediately. No. It doesn’t make any sense, and the Healer is obviously wrong.

“Harry?”

Penelope is nudging him now. He drags his eyes from the bookshelf and looks at her. Her brow is creased with worry, accentuated more than usual because her hair is pulled back into a tight bun on the top of her head.

“I’m sorry, Harry,” she’s saying. “I know this is a lot to take in, but we need to talk about what we’re going to do next to help you both.”

Both.

Right. Malfoy is here too. He’s still sat right beside Harry, an identical glass in his hand. He’s staring at the same bookshelf Harry had been looking at, his eyes a little unfocused. Healer Thistlefoot claps him on the shoulder, breaking him out of his trance.

“Right, lads, this is a shock, I know, but let’s hold it together for just a few minutes while I tell you what your options are now.”

“We have options,” Malfoy says. It’s not quite a question — more a statement of disbelief.

“Course,” Thistlefoot says. “I don’t have a six-month waiting list for nothing.” He chuckles to himself and Harry tries to give him a smile, but all he manages is a tired sort of grimace.

He wishes it were last night again. Wishes he were back on his bike with Malfoy holding onto him, back when the reality of what was happening was still a problem for future-Harry. He stares down into the glass he’s holding. He swirls the amber whiskey a little, wondering if he should just down it, when Malfoy elbows him.

“Listen,” he mutters at Harry irritably.
“As I was saying,” Thistlefoot says, “The way these two spells have reacted is what’s caused your current predicament. The bond was a strong one, though not fully developed, and when the obliviation spell tried to alter parts of your mind, the two clashed. The memories weren't removed, but they were buried along with the bond inside your mind. And now that the bond is gaining strength and coming out of its dormancy, it’s allowing the memories to reveal themselves again.”

“We’re not a hundred percent certain why the bond has only just now started to show itself,” Penelope interjects. “But it likely has to do with the two of you reaching a state of mental stability you didn’t have before. You’ve both been through so much, and the healing process following such events is often lengthy, so it makes sense that this would happen at this point in your life.”

“What do we do then?” Harry asks dejectedly. “You said we have options.” He just wants this over with. He wants to leave, drink, go to bed, and pretend this is a bad dream.

“The good news is,” Thistlefoot says, and Harry perks up a little, “there is a potion I know of that may work.”

“A potion. What would it do?” Malfoy asks.

“It would cancel out both branches of magic,” Thistlefoot explains. “It’s designed to counteract magical interferences of the mind, and it’s incredibly hard to brew, but I have done it once before. It wouldn’t work on a proper case of obliviation, but in this instance — when the spells are flawed — the chances of success are high. It would work almost immediately, which means the bond would be removed completely, and the obliviation would be reversed. You would, however, be hit with a flood of memories all at once. It’d be incredibly disorienting and confusing, and you’d suffer from an extreme headache and nausea, possibly even a loss of consciousness as your mind rights itself. But at the end of it, you would have the memories back and be bond free.”

“How long?” Harry asks. “How long would it take to brew?”

“A week.”

“We’ll give you two some privacy to discuss this,” Penelope says. Thistlefoot looks like he wants to say something more, and Harry is grateful when she ushers him out.

“Do you think it was him?” Harry rounds on Malfoy as soon as the door shuts. “Voldemort. That was my first thought. Who else would do this to us?”

“The Order,” Malfoy says flatly. He’s fiddling with the cuff of his sleeve. Harry is about to jump to the Order’s defense when Malfoy adds, “Do you really think anyone on his side would just obliviate us and send us on our way? If a Death Eater had been in our minds and seen the things we spoke about back then, we wouldn’t be alive.”

He has a point, but Harry can’t imagine who from the Order would have done this. “Do you think someone did it to protect us?” he asks.

Malfoy shrugs. “I don’t know. Why would they? And why would you be trying to help me in sixth year?”

“Do you think maybe… maybe someone didn’t want that to happen?” Harry ventures.

“Maybe we didn’t want it to happen,” Malfoy says.

Harry considers this. There’s no one coming to mind that would do this, no one who had been in the Order anyway, but if the memories they’ve seen are to believed, Harry definitely reach out to him,
and Malfoy had definitely accepted his help.

“I’m not going do it,” Malfoy announces suddenly. “I’m not taking the potion.”

“What?” Harry gapes at him. “Why the hell not?”

“Someone obliviated us for a reason, Potter,” Malfoy says. “I don’t know why we created a bond, and I don’t know what happened to make us forget, but I don’t want to know.”

“But… but how can you just not want to know?” Harry asks incredulously. “Aren’t you curious?”

Malfoy gives him a weary look. “I have a good life now, Potter. I’m happy. It took me a long time but I’ve moved on from the war. I don’t want to start reliving whatever it is we lost.”

“You don’t want to dredge up memories from that year,” Harry realises. “In case they’re bad.”

“Of course I don’t!” Malfoy exclaims. “That was one of the worst years of my life, Potter. If there’s more, if something even more terrible happened, I just… I don’t want to know.”

Harry gets it. Of course he does. That year was awful for him too, but for different reasons. He knows how bad it was for Malfoy, knows that there’s a possibility they might see terrible things, but —

“I’m terrified too,” Harry admits quietly. “But… I think I really wanted to help you back then, I can tell from what we’ve seen. I’ve always thought I should have helped you, Malfoy, more than I did, and I want to know why I offered to, and then it didn’t happen.”

Malfoy is staring at him, his expression unreadable.

“It makes me feel like part of me is missing,” Harry continues. “But I wouldn’t feel right if only one of us took the potion, if only one of us knew what happened, so—” He looks at Malfoy again. “If you don’t want to, I won’t push it, because I get it. I do.”

Malfoy slides off the bed and starts pacing the room. Harry keeps quiet. He knows what he wants to happen, but he means what he said, and he won’t force it. He remembers Malfoy that year, remembers how thin and gaunt he’d become, how he’d walked around like he was trying to shrink into the crowd. He’d been scared, Harry knows now, and that had been because of the things he remembers. Whatever’s been taken, whatever they’ve forgotten, could potentially be so much worse than the memories they still have. Malfoy’s right— the things they’ve lost were removed for a reason, and Harry’s scared too about what that reason might be. But not knowing will likely drive him mental. Not knowing what he did, why he didn’t get to help Malfoy, or why they bonded themselves to one another will weigh on his mind for the rest of his life.

Still, how can he go ahead with it if Malfoy doesn’t?

“Okay,” Malfoy says suddenly.

Harry sucks in a breath and holds it in anticipation.


“I am?”

“As unlikely as that is, yes,” Malfoy drawls. “We can’t move forward from this unless we know what we’ve left behind.”
Harry smiles. “That was... very profound,” he teases.

“Shut up. Don’t make me change my mind.” Malfoy rubs at his temple. “Call the Healers back, would you? I need to sit down.”

He drops back onto the bed, still pressing his fingers against the side of his head, like he has a headache, as Harry calls Thistlefoot and Penelope back into the room.

“Hermione had to leave,” Penelope explains when Harry asks. “She got a message from Ron that Rose wasn’t feeling well. She seemed quite distressed to go, but asked me to tell you both that she’ll come back to see you as soon as she can.”

Harry gives her a grateful smile.

“So, boys, let’s hear it — what did you decide?” Thistlefoot asks.

Harry glances at Malfoy, who nods curtly. “We’re going to take the potion,” Harry says. “We understand the side effects, but we want to be rid of the bond and get our memories back.”

“I’ll begin brewing today,” Thistlefoot declares immediately, grinning like Harry has just announced the Canons won. “It’ll take a week, as I explained, so I’ll need you both back here in seven days. Healer Clearwater and I spoke in the hall, and we would like you to drink it here in the hospital. You’ll have a private room, of course, away from the general hospital population, so that we can keep this as quiet as possible. Otherwise, there’s no preparation needed on your part. Continue what you’ve been doing; stay close to each other, and in a week’s time this whole ordeal will be over.”

“We’ll have Counsellors on standby for you both indefinitely, should the recovered memories be traumatic in any way,” Penelope tells them gently. “Obviously we have no idea what to expect. And I don’t say that to scare you, but I want you to know that if the memories do distress you in any way, we’ll be ready to help you deal with it.”

“Thank you,” Harry says. He feels a little nauseous at the idea of having to see a Counsellor again; he’s not needed that sort of help in ages. “Can we... is it alright if we go? This is just a lot, and I think we both need some time to process.”

“Of course,” Penelope says. “Come back, though, if you need anything. Alright?”

Neither one of them speak until they’re at the Floos, when Malfoy stops mid step, his expression morphing into one of shock.

“What?” Harry says at once, panicked. “What’s wrong?”

“The dreams — memories — we’ve been seeing. I just realised.” He looks at Harry with wide eyes. “Pansy was in them.”

ooOoo

Malfoy doesn’t have Pansy’s Floo address, though he has been to her house once before, so he side-along Apparates Harry to a small alleyway between two brick buildings as soon as they’re out of St Mungo’s. A cat darts out from behind a line of rubbish bins and hisses at them before disappearing back down the alley.

“Should we talk about this before we go charging in there?” Harry asks as they step onto the tree-lined street.
“We’re not charging,” Malfoy says determinedly. He looks left, then right, then strides off, Harry hurrying to keep up. “And we don’t need to talk—we need to get answers.” He glances over his shoulder at Harry and gives him a wry smile. “And shouldn’t the Slytherin be the one asking the Gryffindor that?”

Harry snorts. “Probably. I don’t know anything anymore.”

The house Malfoy leads him to is not what he expects. It’s a tall, thin building, with a white fence sectioning it off from the road and a garden full of brightly coloured flowers bordering the cobbled path that leads to the front door. It’s the kind of house he would expect someone like Lavender Brown to live in, not Pansy Parkinson.

“How long since you’ve seen her?” Harry asks as they cross through the gate.

“We owl occasionally,” Malfoy says. “But we stopped spending a lot of time together during the war, and things... well, they never really went back to normal.”

“Are you nervous?” Harry asks.

“About seeing Pansy?”

“About what she might know.”

Malfoy looks from the door to Harry. “Of course not.”

“Really? I am.”

“I—” Malfoy shifts his feet awkwardly and casts his eyes down. “Well, alright, I suppose I’m a little worried, but she would have told me if there was anything to know.”

“Yeah,” Harry agrees unconvincingly. “But what we’ve seen…”

“Let’s just do this,” Malfoy cuts in. He knocks loudly on the door and then steps back, his hands clenched at his sides. A moment later, they hear the lock being unlatched, and then Pansy Parkinson is stood there in front of them. She’s different from how Harry remembers, and not only because she’s wearing a Muggle football jersey and black tights. Her hair is lighter now, almost blonde, and she has a silver stud in her nose. If he passed her on the street, he doesn’t think he’d recognise her.

The expression on her face though, the way her features morph when she sees them, is one hundred percent Hogwarts-Parkinson.

“Why are you here?” she asks immediately.

“Hello to you too,” Malfoy drawls. “I see your manners haven’t improved.”

“Cut the shit, Draco,” she says, folding her arms. “What’s going on?”

“We need to talk to you about something,” Harry offers. “We’re hoping you can give us some answers.”

Pansy turns to him, and her glare is icier than anything Malfoy has ever thrown at him. “I wasn’t speaking to you,” she snaps.

Harry’s confused by the hostility. He’d known they hadn’t liked one another in school — the whole trying to give him up to the Dark Lord thing had pretty much given that away — but Harry assumed they’d moved past that by now. He certainly has.
“Can we come in?” Malfoy asks. “It’s important, Pans. Please?”

She definitely wants to say no. She looks between them both, her top lip curled in distaste, but then she makes an annoyed noise and steps aside, gesturing for them to come inside.

“This place is nice,” Harry offers, looking around.

“Don’t touch anything,” she instructs as she ushers them into her living room.

It’s different to Malfoy’s living room — Pansy’s has the distinct impression of actually being lived in. A coat is strewn over the back of one of the couches, and a half-full mug of tea rests on the coffee table. There are a couple of framed photos of Pansy and a dark haired man, but the majority of the wall space is taken up by pictures of a little girl with dark curls and huge smile.

“How’s Max?” Draco asks as he sits down.

“You didn’t come here to ask about my husband,” Pansy sniffs. “Tell me what you want, and why the fuck the two of you are together.”

“It’s kind of a long story,” Harry says.

“You have—” She looks at her watch. “—fifteen minutes. Max and Eden will be home then.”

“It’s about sixth year,” Malfoy says tentatively.

Pansy stands up. “Get out,” she says, pointing to the door. “Now. Go away.”

“Pansy, what—”

“It wasn’t bad enough you fucking left me in that school after everything I tried to do for you,” she snaps. “Now you want to come into my fucking home and make me relive it? No. Fuck off, both of you.”

“Pansy, just listen,” Malfoy says. “We don’t know what happened. We’ve been stuck together for the past week because we have some sort of mind bond linking us. We just found out our memories were modified, and that’s why we don’t remember the bond being made.”

Pansy is glaring, looking between them like she wants to hex them both into oblivion. “What the fuck are you talking about?” she demands.

“It’s a long story,” Malfoy tells her gently. “But we have the mind bond linking us, and we’ve just found out we were obliviated at some point. When the two spells combined, well, they reacted badly, and now we’re seeing flashbacks to sixth year. We’ve both seen memories of you, Pans, and so we were hoping you could tell us… well, anything really, about what was happening back then.”

Pansy narrows her eyes. “Are you high?” she asks. “Is that what this is?”

“We’re not bloody high!” Malfoy says, exasperated. “We’ve lost our fucking memories. Why would anyone pretend to bonded to Potter?”

“Hey,” Harry interjects. “I’m right here.”

“Don’t pout,” Malfoy says dismissively. “Do you want answers or not?”

“Not if you’re going to be bloody rude,” Harry grumbles.
“Potter, let me handle this.”

“Fine, whatever. Handle it.”

Pansy is watching them. She blinks. “You’re actually serious,” she says slowly. “Well, who the fuck obliviated you?”

“We don’t know,” Malfoy says. “Can you tell us what you know?”

“Wait, wait, you said you’re bonded,” Pansy backtracks. “Who did that?”

“Apparently we did it ourselves,” Harry says miserably.

Pansy sits back down, looking between them. “You really don’t remember,” she murmurs. Then — “You absolute fucking idiots!”

“What —”

“Weeks,” she says to Malfoy. “Fucking weeks I tried to help you, and everything was finally moving forward, and it was going to be okay, but then he—” She points accusingly at Harry. “— just stopped helping, and you didn’t seem to give a fuck, even though I’d risked my goddamn life by going against my family and agreeing to work with him! And now you’re telling me you were fucking obliviated? That you cast some stupid bond and neither of you ever bothered to fucking tell me about it?”

“We don’t remember, Pans,” Malfoy says pleadingly. “We have no idea what happened, but if I fucked up, I’m sorry.”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” she mutters. “I need a cigarette.”

“You smoke?” Malfoy asks, surprised.

“Not anymore,” she snaps. “See what you fucking do to me, Draco Malfoy, you areshole?”

“Pansy,” Malfoy says quietly. “Please. We’re so bloody confused by this. Can you tell us what you know?”

She sighs dramatically. “This is the weirdest fucking day of my life,” she says, rubbing at the back of her neck. “Look, okay, fine. Before we went back for sixth year, I got an owl from Potter asking me to meet him on the train back to school. I was fucking furious, because he signed it with his damn name like an idiot, and if my parents had found it they’d have called me a blood traitor and left me to the Dark Lord to deal with.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry says weakly.

“I already yelled at you about it,” she says. “Though I suppose if you don’t remember that, I could do it again.”

Harry gives her a wan smile, which she doesn’t return.

“He kept writing— said it was about helping one of my friends. I knew, obviously, who he meant, because I’m not fucking thick. I didn’t know, though, whether I should meet him, and even on the train I still wasn’t decided, but then he accidentally ran into me in the corridor and left me with his cloak, so I went.”

“You agreed to help?”
“I gave you my cloak?”

“You know how much I cared — care — about you, Draco,” she says irritably. “I knew something was going on, and I didn’t want you to get killed. And Potter — as fucking annoying as he is — wanted to help too. So I agreed to talk to you and try to convince you to listen to him.”

“Pansy,” Malfoy says softly. “I don’t—”

“Forget it.” She waves him away. “It’s in the past. So you agreed, eventually. You were stubborn as fuck and I very nearly murdered you myself a few times, but you agreed to talk with Potter. And things were different for a while. I don’t know what you two were doing or what your plan was, or if you even had one, but I could tell you were different. You had hope again, so I knew it was going well. But then it just... stopped.”

Harry and Malfoy exchange a nervous glance.

“It was almost overnight, and you went back to being a mess again. I tried to talk to you and ask what was going on, but you acted like I was crazy, which I suppose makes sense now,” she says thoughtfully.

“I remember that,” Malfoy says quietly. “I had no idea what you were on about.”

“Pansy,” she says thoughtfully. “So then I approached you—”

“In the library,” Harry remembers. “Shit, yeah I remember that too. You demanded to know why I wasn’t helping Malfoy and I thought you’d gone mental.”

“That’s when we started to grow apart,” Malfoy says sadly.

“Well, I was confused and hurt,” Pansy says. “And then our seventh year started, and Potter was gone, and you were basically just a zombie, not willing to talk to anyone, and then you left too. That year was—” She shudders. “Everyone thinks the Slytherins had such an easy time of it, but the Carrows were hurting anyone who didn’t fall into line. We were fucking scared, and I was angry. I hated you for leaving me, and I hated Potter for giving up on helping you. That was why I—”

“Why you said what you said during the battle?” Harry offers.

“Yes,” she says stiffly. “Not just because I was angry though; because I was scared for my life and my family and my friends. The things they did to students that year— I thought it would stop if the fighting just ended. It was stupid of me, obviously.”


“I didn’t ask for your forgiveness,” she sniffs.

“Well, whatever, too bad. You have it.”

Pansy snorts, and Harry thinks it’s almost a laugh. “He’s annoying, isn’t he?” she comments to Malfoy.

“Yes,” Malfoy agrees. “But Pans, you didn’t know we’d cast a bond? Or who might have wanted to obliviate us?”

“No,” Pansy says, crossing her arms over her chest and giving them a dark look. “After everything, apparently you forgot to tell the only person who was helping you both.”
There’s an owl from Hermione waiting when they get back to Malfoy’s apartment, with a note asking if she can come and see them to make sure they’re alright. Harry writes a rushed reply, saying they need some time to talk, but he assures her that they’re fine. He thinks they are anyway. They seem okay, but maybe they’re both still processing and it just hasn’t really hit them yet. He doesn’t feel like he’s about to freak out or anything, but he can only speak for himself.

“I don’t understand,” he says after sending the owl away, sitting down at the kitchen table while Malfoy brews tea. “Why didn’t I tell Ron and Hermione about any of this?”

“I have no idea,” Malfoy replies. He sets the steaming pot, the sugar jar, and the milk on the table, then takes the seat beside Harry. Harry reaches for the sugar, spooning way too much into his mug. “Maybe you did,” Malfoy says. “Maybe they were obliviated, too.”

“I thought of that, but if they had been, we’d been seeing flashes of them too, wouldn’t we?” Harry says. “You’d think even if I didn’t tell them about whatever we were up to that they’d notice me acting differently, disappearing to talk to you and everything.”

“You used to stalk me,” Malfoy points out, shrugging. “Maybe they just thought you were doing that.”

“I did not stalk you,” Harry argues, though he knows he definitely did. Except now, he’s not so sure what his reasons were.

“Are we doing this then?” Malfoy asks tiredly. “Talking about it?”

Harry swallows nervously as he stirs his tea. “I think we should,” he replies. “I don’t really know where to start though.”

Malfoy lifts his mug to his lips, a thoughtful look on his face. “You wanted to help me,” he says after a moment.

“And then I didn’t,” Harry reminds him. It’s the one part of this that’s bothering him the most that he needs an answer to. If he’d decided to help Malfoy, to try and keep him safe, did he just not follow through, or did something else happen?

“Someone might not have wanted you to,” Malfoy suggests. “I did think maybe…” He trails off uncertainly.

“What?” Harry prompts.

“Well, I mean, it was just a random thought, but what about Dumbledore?”

Truthfully, Harry’s considered that already, and he can’t say for sure that Dumbledore wouldn’t have done something like oblivi ate a student if it helped his plans to defeat Voldemort, but—

“I just feel like Dumbledore would have found some way to let me know what he was doing,” Harry tries to explain. “It was just the way he did things. And… well, from what I do remember, he wanted to help you, didn’t he? Wanted Snape to help you too.”

“I suppose,” Malfoy concedes. He’s not convinced, and Harry doesn’t blame him, but he just can’t shake the feeling that there’s more to this.

“What if I just gave up,” Harry says, the thought making him feel sick. “What if I was just a
complete fucking prick and abandoned you?” He’s getting worked up, he can feel it, but he can’t stop himself. “God, what if this whole thing is my fault and I somehow fucked you over? What if everything could have been different for you?”

A warm hand covers one of his, and he looks down to see Malfoy’s fingers resting there.

“Calm the fuck down, Potter. Of the two of us, I seriously doubt you would be the one to do anything even remotely awful.”

He doesn’t pull his hand away, wrapping his fingers around Harry’s instead.

“I hurt you,” Harry says. “In the bathroom. The Sectumsempra.” Malfoy flinches at the memory, but he still doesn’t pull away.

“I was going to hurt you, too,” he points out. “You just got in first.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry tells him. “I’m sorry I did that.”

“I’m not angry about it,” Malfoy says. “I never was, annoyingly. Snape told me you didn’t know what it would do, and it didn’t scar. Besides, I was a terrible person back then.”

“You were scared,” Harry argues.

“I was a prick in school Potter. I’m not going to pretend to have been something I wasn’t.”

“Well, you grew out of it at least. I like the way you are now.” Malfoy arches a brow at him and Harry can’t help but smile. “Well, okay; you didn’t completely grow out of it. But you’re a prick in a good way now.”

Malfoy squeezes Harry’s hand and leans closer. “How is one a prick in a good way?” he asks quietly.

“I’m not sure,” Harry says a little breathlessly, his pulse jumping. They’re much too close again. Malfoy is actually holding his hand, and Harry can feel himself swaying forwards. They’ve only just found out what’s going on. They should… they should talk, right? Panic? “What’s happening right now?” he asks stupidly.

“Do you always talk this much?” Malfoy murmurs. His free hand is on Harry’s knee, his thumb making small circles. They’re almost nose to nose; Harry can make out the individual flecks of dark grey dotted throughout Malfoy’s irises, and he’s mesmerized by the kaleidoscope of different shades, unsure how he’s never noticed before.

“We shouldn’t,” he says, partly because he knows this is a bad idea, and partly because he’s terrified of how badly he wants to. “We don’t know what will happen—the memories—what… what if you hate me after this?”

“That’s a yes, then,” Malfoy says, “to the talking thing.”

He laughs softly, still looking intently at Harry, his lips parted slightly. Harry means to say something else in protest, but then he can’t remember why he’d thought this was a bad idea, because Malfoy’s just licked his own bottom lip and it’s wet and glistening, and Harry’s pretty sure if he doesn’t taste it he’ll die...

He almost jumps out of his chair when the Floo roars to life in the other room. Malfoy pulls away from him scowling when they hear Blaise’s voice calling out to them.
Harry groans. Fucking hell, did they almost…?

He follows Malfoy to the living room, and they find Blaise’s head bobbing in the green flames.

“You both look pissed off; did I interrupt something?” he asks, grinning.

“Fuck off, Blaise. It’s a bad time. What do you want?” Harry asks.

Blaise’s smirk widens. “Oh, I did interrupt!” he says happily. “I’d apologise, but I’ve been telling Draco for years you two should be doing the nasty and he’s never listened, so it’s your own fault.”

Malfoy’s cheeks are flushed when Harry looks at him. “Blaise, what do you want?” Malfoy asks through gritted teeth.

Blaise shrugs indifferently. “Just checking in, thought I’d let Potter know what he’s missing at work.”

Harry’s barely thought about work since this happened, and he almost groans aloud thinking of all the paperwork he’s sure Blaise is letting pile up on his desk. “Is Clemens pissed I had to take more time off?” he asks.

“Nah,” Blaise says. “I mean, he’s not thrilled that he can’t know what’s going on, and I’ve been getting shit assignments because I won’t tell him, but he’ll get over it.”

“Sorry,” Harry offers.

“Oh, you’ll be doing all my filing when you’re back to make it up to me, don’t worry. What’s going on with it though?” Blaise asks casually. “The bond and that. You both all good?”

“You worried about us?” Malfoy asks, a sly smirk appearing on his face.

“Don’t be stupid,” Blaise dismisses. “I’m just bored.”

“That’s interesting, because at St Mungo’s, Penelope said you’ve been bugging her for updates on us,” Malfoy says. It’s a lie, but Blaise looks surprised for a second before he quickly rearranges his features.

“Please,” he scoffs, not denying it. “You two are so self-involved. One little bond and you think the whole world revolves around you.”

“You care about us,” Harry teases, glad for the light-heartedness after such an intense day. “I think that’s lovely.”

“I think you’re both mental,” Blaise says, rolling his eyes. “I have to go.”

“To owl Penelope?” Malfoy asks innocently.

“Fuck off,” Blaise huffs. “I take it all back. I don’t like you two together.”

The flames disappear, leaving the fireplace cold and empty again.

Harry chuckles, but quickly sobers when he glances at Malfoy and sees his face still a little red. “He was just kidding, right?” Harry asks. “About saying that stuff to you?”

Malfoy doesn’t look at him. “Obviously, Potter. Come on, I’m starving. I want to cook something, and we can discuss which arsehole has done this to us and ruined our lives.”
Harry follows, mind replaying all the times Blaise had tried to get him to come out for drinks with him and Malfoy. He’d always thought Blaise was just being polite, but now he’s wondering what his real motives were, and what else he could have possibly missed.

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“You were being a prat earlier, Draco” Harry said irritably as Draco approached him. He was sat by the lake, and Draco paused before sitting down next to him.

“What imagined thing did I do now?” he asked, eyeing Harry.

“I heard about what you said to Ron,” Harry said.

“Oh, do you mean when he tried to hex me?” Draco asked dryly.

“He— what?”

“How convenient that when he told the story, he didn’t mention that part,” Draco drawled.

“I— I’m sorry,” he said sheepishly. “I shouldn’t have assumed.”

“No, you shouldn’t have,” Draco agreed. “Don’t worry about it. I shouldn’t have said that to him. I just reacted.”

“It’s probably better you did,” Harry said, and Draco’s head snapped up. “I just mean, we’re keeping this quiet, so it’s better you keep acting like…”

“Like myself?”

“Yes,” Harry agreed. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Draco said, shrugging. “I know the way I’ve been.”

“You’re not like that now,” Harry pointed out.

Draco sighed. “I’m still the same person. I don’t— I’m trying, alright? And I can see the flaws in everything I was raised to believe. But I don’t want you thinking I’m something more than I am. You shouldn’t be doing this if it’s only because you think I’m someone else.”

Harry just rolled his eyes. “I know perfectly well who you are, Draco. I can see the changes in you, even if you can’t.”

They sat in silence for a long moment, looking out over the lake. The sun was setting behind the forest, and the sky was a brilliant shade of orange above the trees.

“Are we completely mental to do this?” Harry finally asked, looking over at Draco.

“Of course we are,” Draco said with a humourless laugh. “But we’re going to do it anyway, aren’t we?”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed. “Yeah, we are.”
Harry blinks owlishly when he wakes the next day, the brightness of the room hurting his eyes. He squints and lifts a hand to rub at his face, turning his head to burrow further into the pillow in hopes of escaping the harsh morning light. He’d been dreaming about Malfoy again, and he’d quite like to go back to that.

Maybe it was just the fact he now knew they were memories that was making him see the dreams in a new way, but something about this one had felt different. They’d been friends, he could tell. Well, friends may have been a stretch, but they’d had a rapport, they’d gotten along, they’d seemed to know one another. Harry feels a stab of envy towards that version of himself. It was ridiculous, obviously, because logically he knows that whatever tentative relationship they’d managed to establish back then had been based purely on Harry’s attempts to help Malfoy, and that the events of sixth year had ended up scarring them both anyway. But he can’t help but long for what he’s seen, to wish he remembered more of it, to wonder what it had been like to be “Harry” and “Draco,” who trusted one another enough to have a mind bond, and not “Potter” and “Malfoy,” forced together against their will.

Despite what the Healers have said about the bond, part of Harry is still nervous that this — whatever it is between them — might be because of the bond, and it terrifies him, because nothing, with anyone before this, has ever felt like the same way. And when this is done, when the bond is gone and they have their memories back, What if he can’t find anything like it again?

So it’s better, he tells himself, to stop dwelling on the friendship he’s seeing, and on the things he’s feeling, and to just keep a safe distance before he gets any deeper into this.

He shifts, trying to get more comfortable, and it’s then that he realises there’s something curved around his waist, holding him tightly in place. His eyes snap open. He glances down and sees a long, pale arm wrapped around him, and he swallows thickly as his mind whirrs, trying to work out what to do.

Should he wake Malfoy? Should he try and move the arm, slip out of bed? Maybe he could get to the couch, and then he could just tell Malfoy he hates his mattress and had moved during the night.

He tenses when he feels Malfoy move behind him. Malfoy mumbles something sleepily, his fingers clenching and unclenching against Harry’s stomach, and he shifts forward so that Harry can feel Malfoy’s chest pressed against his back.

Harry holds his breath, waiting for the moment Malfoy wakes up and freaks out, but he only nuzzles his face against the back of Harry’s neck, making Harry shiver, and then his breathing evens out again. He’s sending warm puffs of air over Harry’s skin, and his arm relaxes around Harry’s waist.

And oh fuck, Harry feels himself getting hard. Christ, this is just what he needs. He should move, should do something, but also… he really doesn’t want to move. It feels good, having Malfoy wrapped around him like this. Feels normal and nice. He doesn’t think he’s ever done this with anyone before, not anyone he really likes.

It’s probably the bond, he reminds himself sharply as he reaches down to adjust his pyjama bottoms. He bites back a groan when he pushes down his half-hard cock. Merlin, he really needs to get off soon or he might actually go mental. How long has it been now? Christ, it feels like months.

“Stop moving,” comes a mumbled voice. Harry jumps in surprise, quickly pulling his hand away
from his dick.

He stays silent, waiting for Malfoy’s outrage, but it doesn’t come. “‘time is it?’ Malfoy asks instead, and Harry swears he feels Malfoy’s lips graze the back of his neck.

“Not sure,” he says, trying to keep his voice steady. “Just woke up.”

“Mm, ‘kay.”

His arm tightens, and he sighs softly, and Harry is completely hard now. Shit. He’ll have to have a cold shower this morning. Again. He really, really misses hot water.

Malfoy’s voice is rough, like he’s half asleep still, when he asks, “Is this okay?”

“I— I don’t know,” Harry replies honestly.

“Should I—”

“No,” Harry says quickly. “Don’t… don’t move.”

They lie together in silence, Harry’s heart beating wildly, his cock maddeningly hard. He isn’t sure what the fuck is going on, but he doesn’t want to be the one to break the moment.

He can feel the soft rise and fall of Malfoy’s chest against his back. He’s tempted — so bloody tempted — to reach back and touch him, but he balls his hands into fists and forces himself to stay calm.

“Do you think we were friends?” Malfoy asks suddenly.

He’s thinking about the dream; he must have seen a glimpse of the dynamic Harry’d seen too.


“Why?”

“Just— the way I talked to you. I don’t know, I can just tell.”


“I don’t know.” Harry hesitates, and then adds, “I think… I think whatever has been taken away is significant though. Something big must have happened; something that would affect the outcome of the war.”

It’s the only thing he can come up with, the only explanation that makes any sense. And maybe it was for the best — maybe it was the reason they’d won in the end — but it still feels wrong that he’s missing so much, that part of his life was erased.

“When we find out who did this we’re going to track them down, and you’re going to use your Auror powers to arrest them,” Malfoy determines, before yawning loudly.

“Auror powers,” Harry chuckles. “I don’t get a say in what cases I’m given, Malfoy. My boss doesn’t give a shit about who I am. I can’t arrest anyone without his approval.”

“He’s obviously a smart man. You’re much too reckless.”
“You’re the one who just told me to arrest someone!”

“Well, I’m annoyed,” Malfoy sniffs. “And tired. I’m going through a traumatic event.”

Harry laughs softly. Malfoy feels so warm behind him, so relaxed, and so with bated breath, he tentatively edges back slightly so his back is pushed more firmly against Malfoy’s chest. He exhales in relief when Malfoy’s arm around him tightens.

“It’s weird to think we ended up like that,” Malfoy ponders. “Friends, or whatever it was.”

“I wish I knew how it happened,” Harry says. “How we went from cursing one another in bathrooms to that.”

Malfoy is quiet for a long moment, and Harry is about to apologise when he says, “I wonder whether, if we’d kept our memories and stayed friends, we would have eventually ended up like this.”

Harry is glad Malfoy can’t see his face as it reddens. “Maybe,” he says. “Maybe it’s just the bond though.”

“It’s not the bond, Potter,” Malfoy says quietly. “You’re just using it as an excuse.”

“Because it doesn’t make any sense. We hate each other.”

Malfoy’s hand starts to drift down Harry’s stomach, feather light touches that make him shudder. “We haven’t hated each other in a long time,” he whispers. “Even longer than we both thought, apparently.”

Harry tries to say something, but his mouth goes dry when Malfoy’s fingers toy with the waistband of his pyjamas.

“Turn over,” Malfoy murmurs, close to his ear. “I want to see you.”

He lifts his arm away as Harry shifts, rolling onto his back and then his other side so that he and Malfoy are almost nose to nose. Malfoy isn’t quite touching him now. Harry hopes desperately that he will.

Malfoy looks fucking gorgeous in the mornings. He’s wearing the ridiculous silk pyjamas again, and Harry thinks they’re supposed to be classy, but on a mussed up, early morning Malfoy, they’re making Harry want to do filthy, completely unclassy things to him.

“Something happened to us,” Malfoy murmurs. “And I know we’re supposed to be thinking about next week, but I think we need to make the most of this before we remember.”

“You think one of us is responsible?”

“I don’t know what to think,” Malfoy admits. He reaches up and runs the pad of his thumb down Harry’s cheek, eyes bright, and Harry’s breath escapes him completely. “Except that I really want to kiss you, and I want the chance to do it before everything becomes even messier than it already is.”

Harry’s eyes go wide. “You do?”

“Fucking obviously, Potter. What do you think I’ve been trying to do for the last two days?”

“What if we regret it?”
“And we might not,” Malfoy whispers, resting his hand on Harry’s hip.

“Don’t you want to know though, what it’s like?”

He does, he desperately does, and so it’s Harry who groans and closes the distance between them. He presses his lips to Malfoy’s with no hesitation, moaning brokenly as he finally learns what they taste like.

Malfoy makes a soft sound in the back of his throat, and then he’s kissing back with one hand on Harry’s hip still, bunching in his pyjama bottoms as his tongue darts out and swipes across Harry’s lip.

Harry’s pretty sure that’s the moment his brain short circuits. A wave of lust crashes over him, and he wants, needs, to be closer to Malfoy. He surges forward, any hint of restraint he’s been holding onto melting away as Malfoy groans into his mouth and clutches his hips tighter, and he lets Harry have his mouth.

It’s fucking magnificent. Harry’s only regret now is that they haven’t been doing this every minute of every day since this situation started. Malfoy’s mouth is hot and wet and fucking perfect, and he makes the most incredible sounds. Their lips move together like they were made for this, like they’ve been waiting all along for this exact moment, and they mould together effortlessly.

Harry’s hand slides behind Malfoy’s head to cradle the back of his neck, his fingers carding through the soft hairs there. He’s never had a first kiss like this. His cock, already hard before, is aching now, straining against the fabric of his pyjamas, desperate to be touched, and Harry realises he’s instinctively begun to roll his hips.

“Wait. Malfoy, wait.”

Harry manages to pull himself back, panting heavily. Malfoy’s lips are swollen and wet, and his tongue darts out to lick across his bottom lip as he looks up at Harry.

“It’s… it’s a bit much, isn’t it?” Harry says breathlessly, dragging his eyes away from Malfoy’s mouth. “This— I mean, we’ve never kissed before now, and I feel like we’re about to… well, we should slow down a bit, shouldn’t we?”

He can tell Malfoy wants to say no. Harry can’t see it or feel it, but he’s pretty sure from Malfoy’s ragged breathing and the look in his eye that his own dick is just as hard as Harry’s. Malfoy is right — he’s too fucking noble, and Harry wants to scream at himself. Malfoy takes a deep, shuddering breath and nods.

“Yeah. Yes, I—” He clears his throat. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to get so carried away.”

“No, it was me too,” Harry says quickly. He’s still cradling Malfoy’s neck, still has one of his legs inserted between Malfoy’s, whose chest he can feel heaving against his own. “We should probably…”

“Yeah, okay.”

Harry pulls his hand back and extracts his leg, shuffling away so that he and Malfoy have space between them. His body is screaming at him, and his cock is throbbing. He tries to rearrange the blankets discreetly to hide it, but Malfoy catches the movement.

“Potter, you don’t have to be embarrassed that you’re hard. After a kiss like that, I’d be worried if you weren’t.” He rolls away, swinging his legs over the side of the bed and heaving himself up.
“Come on, I’m starving. Eating might distract me from how much I want to rut up against you right now.”

“Jesus, Malfoy,” Harry mutters. “Don’t hold anything back, will you?

“Oh come off it,” Malfoy says. “You felt that too. It went from zero to a hundred in half a second.” He reaches down and adjusts himself, and Harry’s eyes follow the movement hungrily. “It’s weird how it felt so—”

“Overdue?” Harry suggests as he follows Malfoy from the room. He tries not to stare at the perfect curve of Malfoy’s arse in pyjamas, but apparently his eyes have a mind of their own, and they devour the sight greedily.

“Mm,” Malfoy agrees. “Bit more intense than other first kisses. But I suppose that’s you, isn’t it? Always have to outdo everyone.”

“Shut up,” Harry says half-heartedly. “You were there too. I didn’t feel you pulling back.”

Malfoy makes another noise of agreement but doesn’t say anything else. Harry spots an owl waiting for them on the kitchen window sill, and he removes its letter as Malfoy starts breakfast.

“It’s Hermione,” Harry tells Malfoy. “She wants to see us; sounds worried. We should probably go and visit her today, don’t you think? She deserves some answers after all her help.”

“That woman is going to age prematurely if she keeps worrying about other people so much,” Malfoy comments as he summons a mug. “Remind me to tell her that.”

ooOoo

They Floo to Ron and Hermione’s straight from St Mungo’s. Today’s session with Penelope had been more like a therapy session, Harry thinks. Penelope had fired off question after question about how they were coping and what they were feeling. Harry is pretty sure his face had been bright red when Malfoy’d casually mentioned that they’d opted to start sleeping in the same bed. Penelope hadn’t commented, other than to ask if it had been because of bond symptoms, but Harry knows her too well to think she won’t store it away to use later.

He and Malfoy step through the Floo together when they arrive, so practiced at it now that they barely stumble when they land on the hearth. Malfoy’s hand brushes Harry’s briefly, and his stomach does that strange flip-flop thing again. Before he has time to make sure no one has noticed though, he has an armful of Rosie.

“Uncle Harry! I missed you!”

Harry grins, spinning Rose around and then kissing her forehead as he sets her down. “I missed you more,” he declares grandly. “I missed you so much I thought I might weep.”

Rosie giggles. “I missed you so much I thought I’d die!” she shoots back.

“What?” Harry demands in mock outrage. “In that case, I’ll have to make sure I come and see you much sooner next time. It’s been days!”

“Yes!” Rose laughs happily. “You’ll have to come over every single day!”

“Not bloody likely,” Ron says, flinging a tea towel over his shoulder as he walks into the room. “About time you two showed up.”
Malfoy frowns. “Weasley, do you have food in your hair?”

Ron reaches up, ruffling his hair and making a thin dusting of flour fall to the floor.

“Huh,” he says. “S’pose I’ll have to shower.”

“We were baking!” Rosie tells Malfoy excitedly. “We made mum’s favourite biscuits to cheer her up!”

Harry looks worriedly at Ron. “Is something wrong with Hermione?”

“Hey, I’ve got a brilliant idea. I remember you’re an excellent drawer,” Malfoy says to Rose, “Do you want to show me how to do it?” He gives Ron and Harry a curt nod as Rose drags him to the other side of the room where her pencils are, and Harry returns it with a grateful smile.

“What’s going on?” Harry asks Ron quietly. “She owled this morning to check in, but we were, er...” He glances at Malfoy, who is sitting on one of the small Rosie-sized chairs at her drawing table. “Occupied,” he finishes.

Ron makes a face at him. “I don’t even want to know what that means. She’s in her office. She’s been a mess since yesterday; this whole thing has really freaked her out, but yesterday seemed to push her over the edge.”


“I think she feels responsible,” Ron explains. “She cares about you both but can’t do anything to help. And now knowing you and Malfoy were up to something in sixth year, but we never picked up on it— she just feels guilty.”

“Fuck,” Harry says. “I mean, I have no idea why I didn’t tell you guys anything, but I was such a prat back then.” He runs his hand through his hair and sighs. “Are you both mad at me?”

“Nah,” Ron assures him. “We know you were prat. Still are a bit, aren’t you?”

“Helpful,” Harry grumbles. “She’s in her office you said? Should I talk to her?”

“Yeah, I reckon you should. She thinks she’s let you down.”

“Like she ever could,” Harry scoffs.

“I told her that,” Ron says. “But it might help coming from you.” He gestures to Malfoy. “You’ll be needing your, er, friend, won’t you?” he says, making a face again.

“Draco’s not so bad,” Harry says. He realises what he’s said when Ron groans.

“Ugh, Draco,” he says. “I see, so that’s a thing now, is it?”

Harry blushes. “Fuck off. It was a slip of the tongue. I didn’t mean to say it.”

“Go comfort my wife,” Ron demands. “Go on.”

Harry laughs and gestures for Malfoy to come with him. Malfoy murmurs something to Rose who barely looks up from the picture she’s drawing, and they make their way down the hall to Hermione’s office. Harry remembers when Ron and Hermione had first moved in and were trying to decide what to do with the spare room — Ron had just recently learned about the concept of a ‘man-cave’ and was hell bent on making it his ‘Ron-cave’ — but in the end they’d compromised,
Hermione getting the room as her office in exchange for something Harry definitely didn’t want the details of, but which always made Ron grin like an idiot and Hermione blush.

“Just so you know,” Malfoy murmurs from behind him when he stops outside the door, “Rose reminded me about your tattoo, and I want to see it when we get back later.”

Harry swallows; Malfoy’s breath is hot on his ear, and he nods. “Okay,” he manages. He knocks on the door, pushing it open when he hears Hermione reply that it’s open.

“Hey,” he says, poking his head in. “It’s just me and Malfoy. Can we come in?”

She’s sitting on the floor by her bookshelf, rummaging through an old box beside her. “Yes, of course,” she says.

Malfoy looks uncertain, but he steps inside, and Harry shuts the door behind them. “You two talk,” he says. “Pretend I’m not here.” He moves to sit down on the couch by the window, picking up what looks like one of Ron’s Quidditch magazines and begins to flip through it.

“What are you looking at?” Harry asks Hermione as he sits down beside her, peering in the box. It’s full of what looks like old textbooks and journals, along with various Gryffindor coloured scarves and badges. “What is this?”

“My old school things,” she tells him, pulling out a large photo album.

“These are all your old Hogwarts things?” Harry asks, reaching for one of the books. “Wow. I think I tossed most of my books.”

“No, of course not,” Hermione says. “These are just my things from sixth year.”

Harry looks at the book in his hands — Advanced Potion Making — and winces, dropping it back in the box. He doesn’t look up, but he can feel Malfoy’s eyes on him. Hermione begins flipping through the photo album. Harry sees photos of himself, waving at the camera. Ron and Hermione in Hogsmeade. Neville and Ginny in the Gryffindor common room. Photos of the castle, and the forest, and the Great Hall.

“I never realised you took so many photos,” he says.

“You had a lot of other things on your mind,” she replies quietly.

“It’s funny—I remember all of this,” he says. “It’s like the only memories I’ve lost are the ones with Malfoy and Parkinson.”

Hermione makes a small noise that Harry interprets as agreement. “You two seem to be getting along better,” she says.

“Why is everyone so surprised by that?”

“I’m not. You’ve fought me on being his friend for years,” she points out. “I always knew you would get along, if you just tried.”

“Mm,” Harry agrees, deciding that now isn’t the time to go into more detail. He glances over at her again; she’s staring at a photo of Harry, Ron, and herself — she’s stood between them with her arms around their shoulders and they’re all laughing. It was one of the first days of sixth year, before his meetings with Dumbledore had started, before he knew about his mission. Maybe even before Malfoy. He wraps an arm around her shoulder. “Hey,” he says. “All of this— it’s not your fault,
okay? There’s nothing you could have done. It wasn’t your job to look after me in school.”

He squeezes her shoulders and she sniffs. “I’m sorry,” she says sadly.

“No, I’m the one who’s sorry,” he tells her. “I was a secretive bastard, and I kept things from you guys that I shouldn’t have. I thought I was a better friend than this, but... I wasn’t. You shouldn’t feel bad or think you could have done anything more, I promise.”

“Oh, Harry,” she says softly, flinging her arms around his neck. Harry can feel her uneven breaths on his skin, can feel her body shaking as she cries. “I love you both — you and Draco — so much. You know that, right?”

“Of course I do,” Harry assures her. “I love you too.” He rubs his hand in circles over her back. He looks over her shoulder at Malfoy, who is watching them with a soft expression on his face. “It’s going to be okay— all of this will be over in a week, and then everything’ll go back to normal. Well.” He thinks of this morning, thinks of Malfoy’s hand clutching at his hip, and of his mouth, and of the sounds he makes that Harry is pretty sure he’ll die without, and he knows things will definitely never be the way they were before. “Things will be normal-ish, anyway.”

Hermione lets out a wry, watery laugh. She pulls back from him and wipes the back of her hand over her reddened eyes. “We’ll deal with that when it comes. Just know I’ll be here for you both, no matter what.” She puts the photo album away and sends the box back to its place on her shelf with a wave of her wand. “Come on.” She stands up, offering her hand to Harry, who accepts it and clambers up.

“Stop worrying,” he murmurs as he pulls her into another hug. “It’s going to be okay. Malfoy and I are fine.”

When they separate, she turns to Malfoy, striding over to him and pulling him up into a hug as well. Harry doesn’t hear what she whispers to him, but he flushes and pats her back awkwardly.

“Right, well,” Hermione says determinedly, “enough of me making this about myself. Would you like some lunch?”

On the way back to the living room, Harry hears a loud bark, and then tiny footsteps come zooming down the hall, and Lucy barrels into Harry’s legs.

He reaches down to scoop her up, hugging her to his chest. “Hey Lucy-girl,” he says affectionately. “How are you? Do you miss me?”

Hermione continues on to the living room, leaving Harry and Draco in the hall with Lucy.

“Potter,” Malfoy says, narrowing his eyes as he watches Harry pet her. “Your Crup is called Lucy.”

“I know,” Harry says, setting her down when she begins squirming to get away. She hates being off the ground for too long. “I named her.”

“Why is your Crup called Lucy?” Malfoy demands.

“I don’t know,” Harry says, trying to remember what his reasoning was. “She didn’t have a name when I got her from the rescue place, and it just sort of jumped into my head. Why?”

“You stole it. Oh my god, you stole my name,” Malfoy mutters.

“What are you talking about?”
Malfy shakes his head and laughs. “Forget it, you bloody prat. Let’s go.”

ooOoo

They have lunch with Hermione, Ron, and Rosie, most of it spent soothing Hermione everytime she starts watching Harry and Malfoy and tearing up again. Harry isn’t sure how many more ways he can reassure her that they’re both fine and she doesn’t need to blame herself, but nothing seems to be working. Not that they are fine; Harry’s pretty sure he and Malfy have barely scratched the surface of the things they need to talk about, especially after this morning. But he’s resolutely trying not to think about that right now because Malfy keeps looking at him with a fiery glint in his eyes, and Harry doesn’t want to ruin whatever he has on his mind by bringing up their predicament.

After they eat, Rose insists that Harry and Malfy try the cookies she and Ron made. As far as baked goods go, they’re definitely not the best Harry has ever had, but he dutifully eats three. He then glances at Malfy, worried he’ll say something when Rose hands him one, but Malfy finishes it without showing any sign of dislike, and then compliments Rose warmly on her baking prowess.

Something warm and tingly spreads through Harry’s chest as he watches Malfy interacting with her, and he finds himself imagining this as a regular thing. He and his friends and Malfy having lunch on the weekends, all going to the Burrow at Christmas, Malfy taking him to his mother’s regularly for dinner…

He shakes himself out of his daydreaming; he’s getting ahead of himself. They’ve kissed once under the influence of a bond—it’s too much too fast. And on the off chance he and Malfy don’t hate each other after they take the potion next week, Harry doesn’t want to scare him off by slipping up and telling him they should start picking out bloody curtains or something.

His palms itch to touch Malfy again, though, especially when he keeps looking at Harry in that way, and by the time they’re finally saying goodbye to Ron and Hermione — disentangling from Hermione’s hugs and stepping into the Floo — Harry thinks he might go mad if he doesn’t get to taste him soon.

He turns to Malfy when they step out onto the hearth, intent on asking if maybe they can try kissing again if Harry promises to control himself, but suddenly Malfy’s hands are fisted in his shirt and he’s backing Harry up until his back hits the wall.

“Do you have any idea,” he growls in a low voice, “how fucking good you look in those stupid Muggle jeans?”

His mouth is hovering over Harry’s, his pupils are blown wide, and he presses himself right up against Harry, who can feel the hard outline of Malfy’s erection against his leg.

“Holy shit,” Harry manages to whisper. He hadn’t given any thought to what he’d put on this morning, summoning whatever bits of clothing were at the top of his bag because they were running late, but he’s pretty sure he’s going to wear these jeans every day from now on. His hands are on Malfy’s hips, and Harry knows with absolute certainty that if Malfy kisses him right now, his self-control will disappear. His cock is already half-hard, his breath coming in short, sharp pants as Malfy very slowly and deliberately rolls his hips.

“We— we should—”

Malfy’s hips stop and his expression drops, like he thinks Harry’s going to stop him.

“We should go to the bedroom,” Harry finishes.
He thinks for half a second of silence that he’s somehow read this completely wrong, that he’s said the wrong thing, but then Malfoy has him by the wrist and is dragging him down the hallway to the bedroom. He pushes Harry through the door first, kicking it shut behind him.

“Get on the bed,” he instructs, fingers already tugging at the buttons of his own shirt. A shiver runs through Harry at the command, and he does as Malfoy says. He’s not sure what’s about to happen, so he doesn’t know whether he should get naked or just lie down. He decides to just pull his shirt off and then he sits in the middle of the bed, watching hungrily as Malfoy stalks forward, shirtless now too with an intent look in his eye. He climbs onto the bed and hovers over Harry, then presses a hand to Harry’s chest to push him onto the pillows. Harry lets himself fall and Malfoy follows, capturing Harry’s lips in a surprisingly gentle kiss. Harry kisses him back eagerly, opening his mouth when Malfoy nips lightly at his bottom lip.

When Harry’s legs fall open Malfoy fits himself between them. He’s using one hand to hold himself up, and the other cups Harry’s jaw, fingers threading softly through his beard. Despite his demands a moment ago and his forwardness in the living room, Malfoy moves slowly now. Harry matches his pace, resisting the urge to wrap his arms around Malfoy’s back, pull him down hard, and rut mindlessly against him until he comes. He wants to—Christ, he wants to—and he still has no idea where this side of him is coming from. He’s never moved this fast, never wanted to. Never felt like he’s missing someone before he’s ever even touched them. None of the men he’s dated in the past have made him feel the way Malfoy does, and whether it’s really the bond or not, he doesn’t know. What he does know is that being near Malfoy is making the parts of himself that he’d long thought broken seem less… less fractured somehow.

His hands are on either side of Malfoy’s neck as their tongues move together languidly. His cock is hard and desperate for friction, but just this is brilliant too, and Harry thinks he could lay like this, just kissing, touching, exploring unhurriedly for hours. Malfoy’s mouth fits over his perfectly, their lips melding together like two pieces of a puzzle that were made to be joined.

Harry makes a noise of disappointment when Malfoy breaks the kiss, but it quickly turns into a groan when Malfoy tips his head to the side and drags his lips over Harry’s throat.

He finds a particularly sensitive spot where Harry’s neck and collarbone meet, sucking harder when Harry moans, and Harry can feel the smirk Malfoy is wearing at finding a weak spot.

Malfoy’s hand trails down Harry’s throat, down his chest, and Harry’s breath hitches when he begins to finger the waistband of his jeans.

“Is this okay?” Malfoy hums against Harry’s neck, pressing his palm to Harry’s stomach.

Harry answers him by reaching down between them and unbuttoning his jeans. Malfoy groans, and then his mouth is back on Harry’s and he’s pulling the fly of Harry’s jeans down, knuckles brushing Harry’s cock.

“Oh,” Malfoy mumbles against Harry’s mouth. “Get them off now.”

Harry lifts his arse off the bed to shuck his jeans away, lips chasing Malfoy’s when he pulls back to try and give Harry more room. He kicks his jeans off the bed, and then Malfoy’s fingers are back on the waistband of his pants. Harry’s stomach clenches in anticipation. He hasn’t jerked off in a couple of weeks now, has been almost constantly sporting a hard on for the last few days, not wanting to risk doing anything about it. He prays silently that he lasts more than thirty fucking seconds and doesn’t make a total fool of himself.

That’s about the moment his brain completely stops working, because Malfoy’s hand slips into his
pants and wraps around his cock.

“Oh, fuck,” Harry chokes out, hands scrambling to clutch at the sheets, fisting them as Malfoy begins to stroke him. “Oh my god, Malfoy.”

Malfoy chuckles. “You’re bigger than I thought you’d be,” he says teasingly.

“Fuck off,” Harry replies, hips arching up off the bed, pressing himself closer to Malfoy’s hand. “This is still a terrible idea,” he adds.

“Should I stop?” Malfoy asks, nipping at Harry’s bottom lip again, flicking his wrist on his next upstroke.


“I feel like the fact I have my hand on your cock means we’re past last names,” Malfoy muses conversationally, his hand continuing its slow, torturous strokes. “Don’t you think?”

“I can’t right now.”

“What, think? Is that a new thing for you?”

“Oh my god, will you shut up and just— nnng!”

Harry breaks off when Malfoy — Draco — speeds up, his eyes closing as he’s brought closer and closer to the edge.

“You gonna come?” Draco murmurs in his ear. His teeth graze Harry’s earlobe, and his breath is hot in Harry’s ear. “You gonna come for me, Harry?”

It’s his name that does it — Draco’s voice whispering his name in his ear like making Harry come is the most important thing in the world. His orgasm tears through him, and his hips buck wildly as Draco coaxes him through it, kissing Harry’s neck and jaw and the corner of his mouth as he rides out the last waves of pleasure.

*Holy shit.*

Draco pulls his hand out of Harry’s pants as Harry shudders, wiping the sticky mess covering his fingers on the fabric of the underwear. He looks down at Harry smugly. “Still think this is a terrible idea?”

Harry grins. “Yes,” he replies. He reaches up, and then in one quick movement he flips Draco onto his back. He smirks down at him as he finds the hard bulge in Draco’s trousers and cups it. “But it would rude of me not to return the favour, wouldn’t it?”

“Christ,” Draco groans, throwing his head back as Harry palms him slowly. “You better be able to get hard again fast, Harry, because we’re doing this again.”

Harry pushes his hand inside Draco’s trousers without hesitation. Draco’s prick is heavy and hot in his hand, already slick with pre-come, and as Harry begins to stroke him slowly, his own dick twitches with renewed interest. Merlin, he hasn’t been able to go more than once so quickly in years.

“Don’t worry about me,” Harry assures him, leaning down to nip at Draco’s neck. “I’m just getting started.”

ooOoo
“Show me your tattoo,” Draco demands, sitting up suddenly several hours later.

Harry reaches for the blankets Draco’s knocked away in his haste and pulls them back up to his waist. He feels sticky and sort of gross, but he’s laying with his arm propped behind his head, legs tangled with Draco’s, and he really doesn’t want to move from this bed ever again.

“Where is it?” Draco asks, eyes roaming over Harry’s chest. “I must have missed it before.”

“To be fair, you were a little preoccupied,” Harry points out.

“Show me,” Draco demands again, prodding his stomach.


Draco shuffles over, giving Harry room to roll onto his stomach. He hears Draco’s small noise of surprise when he spots it. Draco clambers on top of him, so that he’s straddling Harry’s legs, and then his fingers are skimming Harry’s skin lightly, tracing over the lines that are now a permanent part of Harry.

“Teddy drew it for me, ages ago,” Harry explains. He rests his arms under his head and props his chin on them so his voice isn’t muffled by pillows. “I kept the original— it’s still in my office— and when Ron found out about wizarding tattoos a couple of years ago while Charlie was visiting, he and I decided to get them.”

Draco is still touching his back. His cock is resting on the back of Harry’s thigh, and Harry tries to pretend it’s something else; even if he gets hard again, he doesn’t think he has the energy to fool around so soon.

“It’s a dragon,” Draco murmurs softly.

“Yeah,” Harry agrees. “I mean, Teddy has probably drawn me hundreds of pictures, but this one was always my favourite.”

“A dragon,” Draco repeats quietly.

Harry tries to look back over his shoulder to ask Draco if he’s alright, but then Draco flips him and his mouth claims Harry’s before he can get the words out.

“Fuck you, Potter,” Draco growls into his mouth.

“I’m back to Potter now,” Harry manages, arms instinctively wrapping around Draco’s back. “What did I do?”

But Draco doesn’t answer him, and Harry’s cock apparently hasn’t received the memo that they’re probably too tired for this to be any good; it twitches with interest again when Draco ruts against him, and Harry gives in quickly.

The rest of the weekend follows in a similar fashion. Now that they’ve started this, now that they’ve tasted one another, they don’t seem to be able to stop. It’s like they’re desperately making up for lost time, while also trying to get their fill of one another before Tuesday.

They really need to talk about what’s going to happen, but they’re both avoiding it. Harry does try to bring it up once on Friday morning, when they wake up after spending the previous evening learning all the ways they can make each other moan with their hands, but then Draco crawls underneath the blankets and licks the underside of Harry’s cock before taking it in his mouth, and the words die in
Harry’s throat.

Draco, too, attempts to bring it up once — later that night. They’re in the kitchen cooking dinner, and he looks uneasy and nervous, so Harry backs him up against the pantry door and drops to his knees, returning the earlier favour. Draco’s fingers twist in Harry’s hair as he thrusts shallowly into Harry’s throat, and whatever he is going to say is lost in a garble of moans and pleas for more.

They assure Penelope they’re fine at their regular appointments, that they don’t need to talk about what’s going to happen on Tuesday. They listen to her list the side effects of the potion again and the names of various counsellors she thinks will be best suited to helping them deal with any trauma they may feel, but Harry finds himself too distracted by Draco’s leg, which is pressed firmly against his, to focus on much else.

In the back of his mind, Harry is terrified about what’s going to happen, but he’s pushing that away in favour of getting his fill of Draco before they learn the truth.

Whatever it is, whatever happened, Harry knows it’s probably going to hurt. Maybe before he could have dealt with it okay. But now? Now he’s somehow found himself falling for Draco fucking Malfoy after little more than a week stuck with him, and he doesn’t know if he’ll be able to take it if things go badly.

It shouldn’t be this way. It’s not normal to feel like he can’t bloody live without someone he’s spent barely any time with, but as he watches Draco move around his apartment, sees him smile and laugh, listens to him open up about his life, Harry’s chest aches painfully at the thought that something might pull them apart.

Maybe not, though, his brain offers hopefully in the middle of the night as Draco sleeps peacefully, draped half over his chest. Maybe it won’t be a big deal.

But Harry knows it’s going to change them, whatever it was that happened. For them to have been pushed into bonding with one another — it had to have been significant.

It’s raining on Monday night, and they drag Draco’s blankets into the living room and order Muggle takeout. Curled up together in front of the fireplace on the floor, feeling full and sleepy and using the couch as a backrest, Harry finds himself doubting for the first time whether taking the potion is really the right thing to do. They could just go on like this, could find a way to make it work and continue living in the bliss they’ve found these past few days. Who would it hurt, really, if this was their life?

“It would be nice,” Draco murmurs in agreement when Harry admits what he’s thinking. He’s leaning against Draco’s chest while Draco’s fingers card lazily through his hair. Harry’s eyes feel heavy as he stares into the flames of the fireplace, and he thinks he’ll sleep soon if Draco doesn’t stop making him feel so relaxed. “But neither of us could live with not knowing what happened,” he reminds Harry softly.

Harry knows he’s right, but it doesn’t make his chest ache any less.

Draco hugs him, propping his chin on Harry’s head, hugging him tighter.

“I’m sorry,” Harry hears as sleep pulls him under. “For whatever I did to you.”

ooOoo

Harry wakes to the feeling of a hot, wet mouth on his prick. He groans, keeping his eyes closed as his hands fumble to find Draco’s head, twisting his fingers in his soft hair.
“Jesus,” he says. “Good morning to you too.”

Draco makes a sound like a soft laugh and runs his hands over Harry’s stomach and chest, rubbing lightly over his nipples with the pad of his thumb, and then settling them back on his hips. He sucks slowly, like he’s in no rush, his tongue wrapping around Harry’s cock with every bob of his head.

Harry’s head is propped awkwardly against the couch, and he shifts so he’s sitting properly, stretching his sore neck. He opens his eyes and sees Draco looking up at him, sprawled naked between his legs with his mouth around Harry’s prick. The fireplace behind him has long since gone out, and the early morning sun is streaming through the lounge room window.

It’s today, Harry suddenly remembers. Everything is going to change in a couple of hours.

“Harry.” Draco pulls off him, making Harry let go of his hair. “Don’t think about it, okay? Right now, we’re just two men who are going to fuck one another stupid on a Tuesday morning. That’s all you need to worry about.”

“But—”

He forgets what he’s about to say when Draco takes him back into his mouth, swallowing Harry’s prick until Harry can feel himself in the back of Draco’s throat. He lets out a strangled whine, his hips thrusting. Draco drops his hands to Harry’s hips and holds him place, not letting him move as he licks and sucks him until Harry can feel the familiar heat building at the base of his spine. He’s so close, so incredibly close—

Draco pulls away again, and Harry’s hips cant upwards, trying to follow the heat of Draco’s mouth.

“What are you—”

Draco pushes himself up and straddles Harry’s legs. He leans in close, and Harry thinks he’s going to kiss him.

“I want you,” he whispers against Harry’s mouth instead. His hand is cradling Harry’s cheek, his thumb drawing slow circles over Harry’s skin as his warm breath puffs over Harry’s lips. Harry closes his eyes, hands sliding over Draco’s hips and back to cup his arse. They haven’t done this yet, haven’t fucked properly. It wasn’t a conscious decision they’d made together — more the fact that every time they began to touch one another, they’d become so desperate they hadn’t managed to wait long enough to get that far. And maybe it’s a terrible idea, maybe they shouldn’t, but right now, it’s everything Harry needs.

“You can have me,” Harry murmurs.

Draco whimpers as Harry trails a finger down the crevice of his arse, and he sounds so lovely, so needy for Harry, that Harry isn’t sure he’ll be able to deny his feelings if he looks at Draco right now, so he keeps his eyes firmly shut.

“I’m going to ride you,” Draco tells him.

Harry swallows hard and nods. “Okay.” In truth, the times Harry has found himself imagining how this might go he’s always pictured himself spread out and being fucked by Draco, but this is good. This feels right.

When he reaches Draco’s hole, he finds that Draco is already slick and ready, and his eyes snap open.
“Did you—”

“Mm,” Draco agrees, eyelids fluttering when Harry pushes his finger further inside. “While you were asleep.”

“Holy fuck,” Harry whispers, the image of Draco working himself open beside him on the living room floor making his cock throb even harder. He adds a second finger and Draco presses down onto his hand. Harry could push his cock into him right now — he’s so wet, so ready — but he takes his time fingering him, lets the picture of Draco above him slowly fucking himself onto his hand, his prick bobbing between them, last just a little longer.

“Please,” Draco whispers, wrapping his arms around Harry’s neck. “God, please do it.”

Harry grips Draco’s hips again as Draco shuffles further forward. He sits up on his knees, reaching behind him to take Harry’s cock in his hand, and then slowly, so fucking slowly, he guides himself down. His eyes never leave Harry’s as Harry breaches the tight ring of muscle, and he uses his weight to sink down onto Harry’s prick like he was fucking made to do this.

They groan in unison, pausing for a moment as they both adjust.


Draco begins to roll his hips slowly, and Harry’s breathing becomes shaky and broken as he clutches him. He finds Draco’s mouth with his own, kissing him hungrily, desperately, savouring the way he tastes and sounds and feels.

He’s not going to be okay after this. Harry doesn’t think he’ll ever be okay again if Draco walks away from him. Harry wants him in his life, he fucking needs him, and he feels a burning sting in his eyes as he realises this is likely the only time he’ll ever get to have Draco like this.

He makes himself look at Draco’s face as he rides Harry. Draco’s lip is pinched between his teeth, his eyes closed. As though he can sense Harry watching him though, he opens them and begins to move faster.

“Draco,” Harry gasps, fingers digging into Draco’s hips. “Draco— fuck— I don’t— oh god, I don’t want to lose you.”

He doesn’t mean to say it, and he wants to take it back immediately when Draco stops moving abruptly. He’s looking at Harry with a pained expression on his face, but then he slides his hands into Harry’s hair, leaning forward to capture his lips in a soft kiss.

“You won’t,” he promises Harry. “You can’t.”

“You don’t know that,” Harry says.

Draco begins to roll his hips again — slow, drawn-out thrusts that let Harry’s cock slip almost all the way out of him before he lowers himself back down. Harry stifles the urge to buck wildly as Draco drags his lips across Harry’s jaw, intent on drawing this out.

“You won’t,” he promises Harry. “You can’t.”

“Don’t know that,” Harry says.

Draco begins to roll his hips again — slow, drawn-out thrusts that let Harry’s cock slip almost all the way out of him before he lowers himself back down. Harry stifles the urge to buck wildly as Draco drags his lips across Harry’s jaw, intent on drawing this out.

“Shut up,” Draco says, his mouth sliding over Harry’s as he speaks, “and fuck me.”

Harry exhales a shuddering breath, and then he wraps one arm around Draco’s waist, and in one swift movement he flips them so that Draco is flat on his back. Harry hovers over him, arms bracketing Draco’s head, their faces barely a breath apart. Draco’s chest is rising and falling rapidly, his eyes half-closed and dark with lust. His cheeks are flushed slightly, and it makes Harry’s heart
race knowing that he’s the cause.

His cock is so hard, but he doesn’t press back into Draco just yet. He wants to — Christ, he wants to — but he needs a minute first. Harry kisses him instead, kisses the sharp angle of his jaw and the curve of his cheek, kisses across his forehead. He kisses every part of Draco that his mouth can reach, tracing the shape of Draco’s features with his lips.

If this is it, if this is all that Harry’s going to get, he’s going to commit every damn detail of it to memory, so that not even the strongest obliviation charm can take away the image of Draco spread out beneath him like this.

Draco makes a soft, needy sound, and Harry pulls back to look at him. They stare at one another for a moment, and Harry bites down hard on his own lip. How is he supposed to live without this? He catches Draco’s mouth again, and tries to pour everything he’s feeling, everything he isn’t supposed to say, into the kiss. Draco pushes his tongue into Harry’s mouth, moaning when Harry’s meets his, hands scrambling at Harry’s sweat-slicked back to bring him closer.

Without releasing Draco’s mouth, Harry reaches between them to guide his cock back inside Draco. Draco groans when Harry bottoms out, and Harry’s breath catches at the sight of his eyelids fluttering when Harry begins to move.

One of Harry’s hands finds Draco’s, and he links their fingers together; the other strokes Draco’s cock. They go slowly, moving together, synchronised as though they’ve done this a hundred times before.

Harry’s orgasm finds him in no time at all. It builds slowly at first, his muscles clenching in anticipation, his lips hovering over Draco's but not quite kissing him as they pant into one another’s mouths. But then it crashes over him with an overwhelming, world-shattering jolt of pleasure. He hears himself yell loudly, but he can’t say for sure what he says, because everything around him is lost for a moment as he rides out the waves of his release. His hand is still wrapped around Draco’s cock, and he’s dimly aware of the hot, sticky mess from Draco’s own orgasm covering his fingers.

Draco is kissing him, and Harry lets himself stay lost, just for a minute more, as Draco claims his mouth. It’s a desperate, hungry, mournful sort of kiss.

It’s a goodbye.

Harry rests their foreheads together, eyes shut tightly. He reaches up to cup Draco’s cheek, but he can’t bring himself to say anything. He isn’s sure there’s anything they can say.

They stay that way for a long time, ignoring how sweaty and filthy they both are, just laying together, savouring the quiet morning and letting time slip by.

Finally, Draco shifts beneath him.

“We need to go,” he murmurs sadly. “We’re going to be late.”

Harry feels a little sick as he rolls off of Draco. That’s it then. It’s done.

“Yes,” he agrees. “Yeah, okay.”

ooOoo

Penelope is waiting for them at the staff when they arrive. She asks how they are, and when they can both only shrug in reply, she leads them without another word to a ward in the hospital Harry has
never visited. He can tell she wants to ask more questions, and he appreciates her restraint. Several people look their way curiously as they walk, but Draco doesn’t seem to care, and Harry ignores them.

The room Penelope takes them to feels much more clinical than the others Harry has seen. There are no posters or art decorating the walls, no plants or guest chairs. There are only two beds, about three feet apart, with plain white sheets and high silver railings on one side, and a short metal cabinet between them.

“Sorry,” Penelope says, having noticed Harry casting his eyes around the bare room. “I know it all feels kind of sterile in here, but this ward is rarely used, and as we don’t know what will happen we wanted somewhere private for you both, so…”

“It’s fine,” Draco assures her, not looking at Harry. He hasn’t looked at Harry once since they got off the living room floor. “What do you need us to do?”

“Healer Thistlefoot will be here in just a couple of minutes with the potion,” Penelope says. “Get yourselves comfortable and once he’s here, he’ll run through the side effects with you both one last time, and then you’ll drink the potion.” She glances between them, and maybe she senses some tension because she adds, “I’ll give you two a minute to talk until he gets here, okay?”

Harry moves to one of the beds and kicks off his shoes before climbing onto it. It’s just as uncomfortable as it looks. Harry considers casting a cushioning charm, but he decides that’s probably not what’s important right now. He sits back against the single pillow, staring at one of the plain walls, hands twisting in his lap.

“You okay?”

He looks over at Draco, who is sat on his own bed, his legs crossed beneath him. Harry’s chest aches.

“I guess so,” he replies. “It’s just…” Awful. Horrible. I’m going to miss you. I don’t want to lose this. “…weird.”

“Mm,” Draco agrees quietly, not looking away from him. “Weird.”

“Hey,” Harry says, wishing the beds were closer so that he could reach out and take Draco’s hand. Wishing he hadn’t waited until this moment to find the courage. “If… if it was me, and I did something to hurt you—”

“Harry…”

“No, just let me say it,” Harry says. “I’m sorry, okay? I just want you to know that now, while you’ll still listen to me.”

“I’m not going to hate you, Harry,” Draco says. “You’ll probably hate me. And if that’s the case… I’m sorry too.”

Harry wants to tell him that he’s pretty sure there’s nothing that could make him hate Draco, that after less than two weeks together, Draco is so firmly wrapped around his heart that Harry’d likely walk in front of the Knight Bus if it would make him happy. But that’s not normal, is it? an unwelcome voice whispers in his mind. It’s not how things work — falling for someone this quickly, this intensely. People don’t get this attached when they don’t have a bond linking them, forcing them together. Whatever he’s feeling — whatever he thinks he’s feeling — it has to be nothing more than a result of what’s happened to them.
He wants to get up and go to Draco, to have Draco reassure him again that it’s definitely not that bond, but then the door opens again and Penelope and Healer Thistlefoot come in, the latter clutching two vials of purple liquid. He’s wearing green Healer robes, but they’re gaping open and a black T-shirt that says “Vegas or bust” is visible underneath.

“Morning, lads,” he says, his mood much too cheerful for the current atmosphere of the room. He strides over to them and hands them each a vial. “No point wasting time, eh?” he says. “I’m sure you’re both eager to get this done. So, side effects. I know Healer Clearwater has gone over what you’re likely to feel today, but I want to remind you again, because it’s going to be intense. Once you ingest this potion, the effects will be almost instantaneous. The whole process will likely take several minutes, though it does depend on how much has been removed, so it may be longer. You’ll be hit with a flood of memories. You might find it disorienting, and you’re likely to suffer from an extreme headache as well as nausea — but again, this is dependent on the number of memories. You might also lose consciousness, but we’ll be right here to monitor you, should that happen.”

He turns around to look at Penelope. “Anything to add?” he asks her.

She gives Harry and Draco a warm smile. “Just that you’re both going to be fine. Whatever you recover today, it doesn’t change who you both are, or what you’ve achieved since then. Alright? I want you both to hang on to that thought.”

“Thank you,” Draco murmurs, staring down at his vial.

“Is Hermione here?” Harry asks. “She owled last night and said she would meet us here.”

“I haven’t seen her yet; I’m sorry, Harry,” Penelope says gently. “Do you want to wait?”

Harry looks at Draco again. He’s hunched slightly, like he’s trying to make himself smaller. His face is paler than normal, and despite the relatively small distance between them, Harry has never felt further away. He looks nervous, and Harry can’t bear to make him wait any longer.

“No,” Harry says finally. “No, let’s just get this over with.”

He looks down at the vial in his hand, and then back at Draco.

“It’s going to be fine,” Draco says, though Harry can see from here that his hand is shaking. He lifts the vial. “Cheers, yeah?”

Harry mimics the gesture. “Cheers,” he whispers, and then they both lift the vials to their lips, eyes locked on one another, and drink the foul tasting potion together.
Chapter 8

Hermione runs through the long halls of the empty ward, her midnight blue Unspeakable robes billowing behind her. Her eyes dart frantically into each room as she passes them, and she lets out a strangled noise of relief when she spots Penelope and Healer Thistlefoot talking quietly in a hallway, skidding to a stop when she reaches them.

“Where are they? Are they…”

She hears Harry and Draco before she sees them. The door the Healers are stood in front of is open, and Hermione can see her friends lying on the hospital beds when she approaches. Harry moans loudly, though neither he nor Draco appear to be awake.

“It knocked them out,” Penelope explains when Hermione asks what happened. “It’s a common side effect, and we have spells monitoring their brain waves for any signs of abnormal distress.”

Hermione sags against the door frame, watching the two of them, their faces held in identical expressions of discomfort.

“I got held up at work,” she says breathlessly. Her stomach twists uncomfortably. “I wanted to be here before they… before it…”

Penelope rubs Hermione’s back soothingly. “They’re going to be fine,” she assures her, just as Draco lets out a pitiful whine. “That’s normal,” Penelope adds. “They’re regaining a lot of memories, judging by how quickly they passed out. It’s an uncomfortable process.”

Hermione can’t do anything but gaze at Harry and Draco, biting down hard on her bottom lip and hoping it’ll be over soon.

ooOoo

”He’s being stubborn,” Pansy snapped, arms folded defiantly over her chest. “He’s lucky I haven’t killed him myself with all the attitude he’s been giving me.”

Harry slumped against the wall. “I really thought he’d listen to you,” he said. “I thought you and he were… you know…” He trailed off suggestively.

Pansy made a face at him. “Ew, don’t be fucking weird, Potter. Draco is gayer than you are.”

“I— what?” Harry spluttered. “I’m not gay!”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I forgot you were obsessed with saving him out of the pure goodness of your heart.” She rolled her eyes dramatically. “Look, I don’t care why you want to help him. Deal with your identity crisis in your own time. I just want him out of that house and safe.”

“So do I,” Harry said. He rubbed at the back of his neck and stifled a yawn. Merlin, he needed a good night’s sleep. “Just try one more time?” he suggested. “If it comes down to it, you can tell him I asked you to do this, but I don’t think he’ll like that very much.”

“Understatement,” Pansy muttered.

“If he still won’t come to me himself after that, well, then I guess I’ll have to go to him. I know you
think he’ll respond better if he gets to act like it was his idea, but I don’t know how much longer we can wait for him to come around.”

Pansy slid off the desk she’d been perched on and picked up her bag. “Fine,” she said. “I’ll corner him tonight. If he comes to you before I get to owl you about it though, don’t be a prat.”

“I’m never a prat,” Harry grumbled, pulling out the Marauder’s Map to check it was clear to leave.

“Right,” Pansy scoffed, slinging her bag onto her shoulder and turning toward the door. “Just like you don’t have a huge fucking crush on someone who’s supposed to be your enemy, right?” She paused and looked at him again, ignoring his spluttered arguments. “Look, he needs to know he can trust you,” she said. “And that you’ll trust him. Give him that, and he’ll start to come ‘round.”

ooOoo

“Potter!”

Harry turned away from the lake and saw Malfoy storming across the grounds with a scowl on his face. He glanced at the castle, and though he couldn’t see any other students, he edged further behind the sprawling tree he was under to obscure himself from the prying eyes of anybody who might be looking out a window.

Malfoy stopped about a foot away from him and crossed his arms.

“What the fuck is your problem?” he demanded.

Harry blinked. Not only because Malfoy so rarely confronted anyone on his own, but also because he had never heard Malfoy curse before, and it was oddly exciting to hear that posh, proper accent saying that word.

“Since when do you swear?” he asked. He crossed his arms too and leaned casually against the trunk of the tree.

“Since when do you swear?” he asked. He crossed his arms too and leaned casually against the trunk of the tree.

Malfoy’s scowl faltered for a moment. “I— none of your business. Answer my question!”

“What was your question?”

Malfoy looked murderous. “You know what my question was, Potter. Don’t be an arse.”

“You know, this is the most you’ve yelled at me in weeks,” Harry said conversationally. He tilted his head to the side, observing Malfoy. “It’s the most life you’ve shown, too. I was starting to think you’d turned into a zombie.”

Malfoy’s expression morphed from shocked to confused to furious all in the span of a second. “I— you can’t— what the fuck is a zombie?”

“Muggle term,” Harry explained. “Sort of like… an inferi.” He uncrossed his arms and pushed off the tree, taking a step closer to Malfoy. “That’s what my problem is, Malfoy. You’re not yourself this year. I know something is going on with you.”

Malfoy paled and took a step back. “You don’t know anything,” he said uncertainly.

“No,” Harry admitted. “I don’t know any of the details, but I can tell something’s very wrong, and —” He paused, but it was now or never. “And I want to help you. I know she's told you I want to
He expected Malfoy to be surprised, or to sneer, or to turn and walk off. Malfoy was proud, and probably scared, and Harry knew it wasn’t going to be easy to convince him.

What he did not expect was the punch that landed squarely on his jaw. Harry staggered back in shock, one hand reaching behind him to steady himself against the tree, the other going to cup his jaw.

Malfoy crowded close to him, face furious, and Harry felt the first flicker of nervousness.

“You don’t know what the fuck you’re meddling in, Potter,” he hissed. “You’re doing your usual Gryffindor thing of rushing in without thinking— and without giving a fuck about who else you put in danger.”

“I didn’t—”

Malfoy shoved him, and Harry’s shoulder dug painfully into the bark. “Stay away from Pansy,” he snapped. “It’s one thing to keep risking your own life, but I won’t let you drag her into it too.”

“She wants to help you as well!” Harry snapped back, rubbing at his jaw. “God, she’s right; you are a stubborn fuck.”

Malfoy glared at him. “She did not say that.”

“I— well, no, not exactly, I was paraphrasing, but that doesn’t make it any less true.”

“I fucking hate you.”

“Good,” Harry shot back. “I fucking hate you too.”

They stood staring at one another, both glaring furiously. Eventually, Harry sighed.

“Look, Malfoy, I’m sorry. I don’t want to fight with you. I really do want to help you.”

“Why?” Malfoy demanded. “Why the fuck would you want to help me, Potter? Is this just your insatiable Gryffindor need to save people?”

“Maybe,” Harry agreed. “Or maybe it’s the Slytherin part of me thinking you’d be a good ally and trying to get you on my side. The Sorting Hat did almost put me there, after all.”

Malfoy’s glare fell away for a moment. “What?”

“I’ve never told anyone that,” Harry admitted. “Well, except Dumbledore, years ago. Feels weird to say it out loud.”

Malfoy was looking at him with a strange expression, like he wasn’t sure what to feel. “What are you doing, Potter?” he asked, the fight seeming to disappear from him. “Why are you doing this?”

“Because it’s the right thing to do,” Harry told him. “And I think even though you’re a bastard, you don’t deserve what they’re dragging you into.”

“How do you know I’m not going willingly?” Malfoy challenged. “Maybe I’m just as evil as everyone thinks.”

“That’s possible,” Harry said. “But I saw you over the summer, at Borgin and Burkes.” Malfoy
tensed, but Harry pressed on. “And I’ve seen you since then; and I know you’re up to something, and I know you don’t want to do it, and I just feel like someone needs to step in and do something. And to be perfectly honest with you, Malfoy, I wouldn’t be doing this if I didn’t think there was at least some good in you.”

ooOoo

“Why are you following me?” Malfoy demanded, rounding on Harry in the empty corridor. Harry pulled himself up short before they collided.

“I saw you leave the courtyard,” he explained.

“Yes, and?”

Harry shrugged. “I thought we could talk about everything.”

“Merlin, Potter.” Malfoy grabbed him by the sleeve of his robes and yanked him into a nearby classroom, locking the door and casting a silencing charm behind him. “You can’t just go talking about this any time you want!” he snapped. “People’s lives are literally at stake; do you not understand that?”

“Of course I understand it,” Harry shot back, shaking his arm free from Malfoy’s grasp, offended at the implication he’d risk anyone’s life. “That’s why I want to help you.”

Malfoy stared at him. Harry waited for him to say something else, but it became clear after several long moments that he wasn’t going to.

“So, have you made a decision yet?” Harry asked him.

Malfoy swallowed nervously and looked away from him. “No, I haven’t.”

“Look, Malfoy. I get that this is probably tough for you, but I—”

“No,” Malfoy snapped, taking him by surprise. “You don’t get it, Potter. This isn’t tough for me, it’s fucking impossible. Do you understand what you’re asking me to do? You’re asking me to turn my back on my family and friends and the only life I’ve ever known. You’re asking me to go against the most powerful fucking wizard in the world, who by the way, lives in my fucking house and eats at my goddamn dining table. You’re asking me to accept the help of the one fucking idiot—stupid enough to go up against him, who is so bloody reckless he’ll probably end up dead in six months anyway, and then everything I’ve given up will have been for nothing and I’ll be dead too! Do not stand there and say to me you ‘get that this is probably tough for me,’ because you have no idea what it’s like, Potter, you idiot!”

Malfoy’s chest was heaving as he finished his rant, and Harry could only stare at him, mouth slightly agape. He scrambled for something to say — for the right thing to say.

“Just fuck off, okay, Potter?” Malfoy said, pushing past Harry toward the door. “I’m done with this.”

“Mal— Draco, wait.” Harry grabbed his arm before he could leave, pulling him up short and forcing Malfoy to turn and face him. “I’m sorry, okay?” he said quickly. “I hadn’t thought of it like that, and you’re right; I don’t know how hard this is for you. But I still think it’s the right thing to do. I know you don’t want to do whatever he’s making you do, and I know you’re not evil, even if you
are a bit of a prat, and so I want to help you. I just… I don’t want you to end up dead because you made the wrong choice, okay?”

Malfoy pulled away from him. He looked anguished, torn. Harry wished he knew what he was thinking — wished he knew what he could say to assure Malfoy that he meant it.

“I need more time,” Malfoy said quietly. “Just let me think, okay?”

He hurried from the room without waiting for Harry’s reply.

ooOoo

“How are they?” a soft voice asks from behind Hermione.

She glances up from her seat by the bed and sees Blaise stood in the doorway. He’s dressed in his Auror uniform, though the top two buttons are undone, making him look much more casual than usual.

“As well as can be expected,” Hermione replies. “There were so many memories it made them pass out.”

“How long has it been?” he asks, moving to stand by Draco’s bed.

“At least half an hour.”

Blaise lets out a low whistle. “Penelope said this kind of thing usually only takes a few minutes.”

“They must have lost a lot then,” Hermione says quietly, tears welling in her eyes again. She blinks them away and looks at Blaise. “Did you… did you know anything, about whatever it was they were up to back then?” she asks carefully.

Blaise shakes his head. “No,” he says, showing a rare flicker of sadness. “No, I didn’t know a thing.”

ooOoo

“I got your note,” Harry said earnestly, bunching his invisibility cloak up in his arms. “Did you think more about my offer?”

“I did,” Malfoy said. He looked determined, but the flicker of nervousness in his eyes betrayed him. “And I’ve made my decision.”

Harry’s fists were clenched with anticipation. Malfoy opened and closed his mouth once, but no words came out.

“Malfoy?” Harry prompted in a low voice.

“Yes,” Malfoy said in a rush. “Yes, I accept your offer. I want you to help me get away from the Dark Lord.”

Harry could have cheered. “Really?”
“Yes, really. Why would I say it otherwise?” Malfoy snapped irritably.

“This is brilliant,” Harry replied happily. A hundred ideas and problems and half-thought-out solutions were buzzing around in his head all at once. “We’ll have to be careful, but I have some ideas of what we can do. I’ll talk to Dumbledore, and—”

“No,” Malfoy cut in sharply. “Not Dumbledore. I don’t want him involved.”

Harry frowned. “Why not?”

“I don’t trust him,” Malfoy admitted. “I won’t do this if he’s a part of it, Potter.”

Harry hadn’t expected that. Most of his plans had involved Dumbledore somehow, but he nodded anyway. “Alright,” he said slowly, not wanting Malfoy to change his mind. He could come up with another plan. It was fine. “Alright, no Dumbledore.”

“And I need to know my parents will be safe,” Malfoy added. “I don’t want them hurt.”

That Harry had been expecting. “Your father is in Azkaban,” he said. “He’s probably safer there than at home.”

Malfoy arched an eyebrow at him. “Do you really think I would have left my mother alone, Potter?”

“Oh,” Harry said, understanding the implication right away. A surge of anger coursed through him. “So, he’s not… How did he—” Harry broke off; they could come back to that. “Actually, no, now isn’t the time. Look, not having Dumbledore’s help will make it harder, but we can still do this.” He looked at Draco with a determined glint in his eye. “If we work together, we can come up with a plan, and we can do this, Malfoy. You’re going to be okay.”

And then Malfoy’s lips quirked, and Harry thought he almost smiled. And despite how nervous and uncertain he seemed, Harry was sure that maybe Malfoy finally believed him.

ooOoo

“Is this part of your master plan to save the world?” Malfoy drawled, sitting down beside Harry on the bank of the lake. “Sending me owls to come and sit with you by the lake in the middle of the night?”

“That’s not why I owled you,” Harry said, glad it was dark enough to hide his flush. “We’re going to… strategize.”

Malfoy snorted. “Gryffindors don’t strategize.”

“How would you know?” Harry challenged. “You don’t even know any of us that well.”

“Yes, well, there’s a reason for that.”

“You know, if you’d stop being such a prat and actually got to know some of us, you might realise we’re not that bad.”

Malfoy glanced over at him and wrinkled his nose. “Ugh, are you sure it was Slytherin the hat said and not Hufflepuff? Because I’m having my doubts.”

Harry laughed. “Shut up, you tosser,” he said, bumping Malfoy’s shoulder with his.
They fell into silence as they both stared out across the moonlit lake. The water looked so eerie at night, the calm surface being disturbed every so often by something they couldn’t see. The giant squid maybe, or perhaps the merpeople.

“Are you still doing… whatever you’re doing?” Harry asked quietly.

He heard Malfoy swallow. “It’s the safest thing to do right now,” he replied. “Keeping up appearances and all that.”

Harry made a noise of agreement, even though he was itching to demand Malfoy stop whatever it was, to come over to his side and be done with Voldemort. That wasn’t how things worked though. All the fighting in this war, all the rebellion — it was going to have to be sneaky.

“Just… be careful, yeah?” Harry said. “Don’t do anything stupid.”

“I’m not a Gryffindor,” Malfoy reminded him. He pulled his legs up and hugged them to his chest, propping his chin on his knees. “You’ve been meeting with Dumbledore,” he said.

“What? How do you know that?”

Malfoy didn’t look at him, just continued to stare out at the water. “I pay attention.”

Harry made a noise of agreement, even though he was itching to demand Malfoy stop whatever it was, to come over to his side and be done with Voldemort. That wasn’t how things worked though. All the fighting in this war, all the rebellion — it was going to have to be sneaky.

“I— yeah. Yeah, okay.” Harry paused and then asked, “Are you not going to ask if I’ve told him about what we’re doing?”

“No,” Malfoy said, turning his head to look at Harry. “No, for whatever idiotic reason, I think I trust you.”

“Really?”

“Mm.” Malfoy looked back at the water and didn’t say anything else.

Harry fidgeted nervously. This… alliance, or whatever it was, was still brand new — even just sitting here like this was strange. Harry wanted so badly to convince Malfoy to go through with this, to commit to changing sides for good. But as much as he wanted that, and as significant as a declaration of trust from him was, there still had to be limits.

“I— I don’t think we should tell each other what we’re doing,” Harry ventured. “I mean, we’re sort of doing that now anyway, avoiding it, and I’ll probably need to know more further down the line to be able to help you, but I don’t think it’s safe yet. Just in case.”

He didn’t add that if he knew exactly what Malfoy was up to, he’d likely want to stop him, which would probably mess things up further for them both. He wasn’t a complete Gryffindor, after all. He could make well-thought-out decisions.

“I agree,” Malfoy said. He suddenly sat up straight and turned an accusatory look on Harry. “Are you coming back here next year?”

Harry opened his mouth to say yes, and then thought of his lessons with Dumbledore, of the plans he knew were probably in motion — things that involved him but hadn’t been revealed to him yet. “I
don’t know,” he said honestly.

Malfoy’s shoulders sagged and he pulled his legs to his chest again. “No,” he said quietly. “Me neither.”

He looked much more vulnerable than Harry had ever seen him. Maybe this was all he’d been waiting for — for someone to reach out, to help him. Something warm unfurled in Harry’s chest upon realising that Malfoy really must trust Harry to let himself be seen like this.

“It’s going to fine,” Harry assured him. “Everything is going to be fine.”

ooOoo

“I brought you both tea,” Penelope says softly. “Thistlefoot had to take an emergency Floo call, but he’ll be right back.” She hands Blaise and Hermione each a steaming styrofoam cup. Hermione smiles gratefully and pretends not to notice Blaise’s fingers lingering on Penelope's when he accepts his cup.

“Can you see any changes?” he asks her.

Penelope draws out her wand and points it first at Harry’s temple, and then at Draco’s, her brow furrowed in concentration as she murmurs a spell.

“No,” she tells them after a minute, stowing her wand back in her robes. “Still the same.”

“It’s been almost an hour,” Blaise comments. “How is it possible they didn’t realise they’d lost this much? Wouldn’t they have blank spots in their memories?”

“No, not necessarily,” Hermione sighs.

“Whoever cast the spell must have really known what they were doing,” Penelope adds. “If someone is careful enough, they can remove small sections of memories, making it seem as though the full picture is there, even though half of it might be missing. Now their brains have to knit it all back together. We never considered this much might be gone, though. I’m worried about what it is they’re seeing, what trauma there might be.”

The three of them fall quiet again. Hermione reaches out and takes Harry’s hand when he groans, and she prays silently that it’s almost over.

ooOoo

“You look tired,” Malfoy commented, glancing over at him as they walked.

“M’fine,” Harry muttered, trying to fight back a yawn and failing. Malfoy raised his eyebrows at him. “Shut up,” Harry grumbled.

They were walking around the far side of the lake. It wasn’t that late yet, but it was dark, and any prying eyes from the castle would have a tough time seeing them this far away.

“Is this another one of those ‘strategizing’ meetups?” Malfoy asked. “Or are you just making excuses to be in my company?”
“We have to plan!” Harry argued, immediately too defensive. “I said I’d help you, didn’t I? And I will!”

They paused to watch a group of owls swooping low over the forest and disappearing into the trees, evidently out for a nightly hunt. It was getting colder by the minute, and Harry regretted not bringing a warmer cloak; he was rubbish at warming charms. He wondered what Malfoy would say if Harry asked him to cast one over them both, and he was startled to realise that he probably would let Malfoy do that, let Malfoy use his wand on him.

“It’s fine, you know,” Malfoy murmured as they started to walk again. “That it’s not all figured out yet.”

Harry looked up sharply. “It is?”

“I didn’t agree to let you help me because I thought you were some sort of bloody genius, Potter. I know how things like this go. It’s about waiting things out, being clever in your moves, finding the right moment.” Malfoy shrugged. “This helps, though. Knowing I’m not, you know, alone or… or whatever…”

He trailed off awkwardly, and Harry felt his cheeks heat.

“Okay,” he said, not knowing how else to reply. “Okay, yeah. Good.”

He opened his mouth to ask if Malfoy wanted to head back inside, but yawned loudly again instead. He clapped a hand over his mouth to try and stifle it, but it was no use.

“For fuck’s sake, Potter!” Malfoy snapped. “Why aren’t you bloody sleeping?”

“Why aren’t you sleeping?” Harry shot back, looking pointedly at the dark circles under Malfoy’s eyes.

“I asked you first,” Malfoy huffed, and Harry almost laughed at how petulant it sounded. He quickly sobered when he considered the question. Something must have shown on his face, because Malfoy added, “You don’t have to tell me. I was only asking because you look like shit, and your yawning is annoying.”

They walked on for a few more minutes. Harry crossed his arms against the chill of the night air, stepping carefully along the damp bank of the lake.

“After what happened to… to Sirius,” he finally said, “sleeping sort of… scares me a bit. Voldemort got into my head and tricked me, and Sirius died. I don’t want that to happen again. Dumbledore says there’s no chance he’ll try again, but I dunno. I can’t help but worry.”

Malfoy’s expression was unreadable. Harry really wasn’t sure it was wise to tell him this, but he wanted Malfoy to trust him more, and he’d wanted to tell someone who wouldn’t fly into a panic and insist he learn more Occlumency immediately.

Malfoy, thankfully, didn’t lecture him or run away in horror. “You could try a dreamless sleep potion,” he suggested. “You can’t use them all the time or they lose their effectiveness, but they’re good on occasion.”


“Shut up, Potter. Don’t make it weird,” Malfoy sighed, looking away from him. But Harry could tell
he was smiling too.

ooOoo

“Why aren’t you scared?”

It was only a whisper, but Harry glanced around cautiously to make sure the aisle of books they stood in was truly empty. It would be hard enough to explain to anyone about why they were talking at all, let alone why they whispering things like that.

“What do you mean?” he asked when he was sure they were alone.

Malfoy pulled a random book down and began to flip through it, leaning back against the shelf. Harry could tell he wasn’t reading it, just trying to act like he didn’t really care.

“Malfoy,” he prompted. “What do you mean?”

When he still didn’t reply, Harry reached out and slid the book from his hands, closing it and setting it back on the shelf. Malfoy didn’t try to stop him, instead crossing his arms over his chest and staring at the floor.

Something about the defensive way he was stood — about the way he wouldn’t meet Harry’s eye — made Harry want to reach out and pull him into a hug. He held back though, controlling himself as he waited for Malfoy to explain.

“There’s a war coming,” Malfoy finally said softly. “And you act like… like it’s not a big deal. But you’re going to be in the middle of it—you must know that.” He lifted his eyes and met Harry’s. “Why aren’t you scared?”

Harry swallowed. God, Malfoy had no idea, did he?

“Forget it,” Malfoy said hastily. He dropped his arms to his sides and looked away again. “It was a stupid question. I need to g—”

Harry acted impulsively, reaching out and taking one of Malfoy’s hands. “Malfoy,” he said quietly, squeezing his fingers gently. “I’m fucking terrified.”

Malfoy blinked. “You are?”

Harry didn’t know if Malfoy’s surprise was because of his confession or the gesture, but he hadn’t pulled away, and his fingers twitched — as though he was trying to stop himself from squeezing back.

“Yeah.” Harry nodded.

Malfoy let out a low breath. A sigh of relief.

“Yeah,” he said. “Me too.”

He didn’t let go of Harry’s hand until nearby footsteps made them jolt them apart. It wasn’t a big deal, Harry reminded himself. He held his friends’ hands all the time when they needed comforting. Though... his heart never beat quite this hard when he took any of their hands, and he wasn’t quite sure what to make of that.
“You’re in a mood,” Harry commented happily, dropping onto the ground beside Malfoy. He’d come to think of this spot as theirs now. No one else ever seemed to come down this far, and it made him feel giddy to think of them having their own spot. “You were glaring at me for almost all of dinner. What’s wrong?”

“I’m annoyed at you,” Malfoy sniffed, turning his head. “Go away.”


He nudged their shoulders together but Malfoy ignored him, turning his nose up like a prat and crossing his arms.

“Come on,” Harry whined. Feeling bold, he dropped his head onto Malfoy’s shoulder and looked up at him. “Please tell me?”

Malfoy glanced down at him and narrowed his eyes. “What are you doing, Potter?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” Harry said. He lifted his head and reached over, disentangling Malfoy’s crossed arms. Ignoring Malfoy’s huff of surprise, Harry grabbed his hand and linked their fingers together again. He’d been thinking of the way it’d felt since yesterday, and was relieved to find he hadn’t imagined how nice it was.

Malfoy stared at their hands. “Right, so. This is a thing that’s happening now, is it?” he asked slowly.

Harry shrugged. He hoped Malfoy couldn’t hear his erratic heartbeat. “It seemed to help when you were upset yesterday.”

“I’m not upset now though,” Malfoy pointed out. “I’m annoyed at you. It’s different.”

“Well, this is really all I’ve got,” Harry said. “I’m good at pissing people off, but I’m rubbish at fixing it.”

Malfoy made a noise of agreement. “If you insist on knowing,” he said. “You look really tired again. That’s why I was annoyed.”

Harry grinned at him, surprised. “You’re worried about me?”

“You just need to sleep more,” Malfoy muttered.

“That’s not a no,” Harry pointed out.

“Potter, you look like you’re about to pass out from exhaustion.”

“Like you can talk,” Harry retorted. “You’re starting to look like a ghost, you’re so pale.”

“Well, you look like a Hufflepuff.”

“You look like a Hufflepuff.”

Malfoy snorted. “Low blow,” he said, and he was definitely trying not to laugh.
His fingers flexed against Harry’s, and he moved their joined hands to rest on his outstretched leg. There was something about holding hands that was so calming, so reassuring. Whether it was the simple pleasure of physical contact that helped, or the fact that it was Malfoy beside him, Harry didn’t know. But he felt some of his tensions easing as they sat together watching the lazy ripples of the lake, while the moon slowly moved across the sky above the trees.

When they rose to walk back to the castle later, the grounds dark enough to hide them, they didn’t let go of one another until they got right to the castle doors.

ooOoo

“I’ll catch up,” Harry said to Ron and Hermione after class, “Forgot something.”

His friends hurried back to the Common Room, keen to try and nab the best chairs by the fireplace, but Harry turned and went the other way. He’d just seen Malfoy moving quickly down a corridor, and Harry thought he’d looked upset about something.

He threw his cloak on, just to be safe, and went after him. He wasn’t searching long, but when he found Malfoy, he wasn’t alone.

A sandy-haired Slytherin boy was backed up against the wall. Malfoy had his hands bunched in the boys robes, and his expression was furious.

“I wasn’t talking about you, Malfoy,” the boy spat, trying to wrench free. “I was talking about Potter. Let me go, you maniac!”

“What kind of moron,” Malfoy said in a low, dangerous voice that Harry hadn’t heard in a long time, “sits in a classroom full of students and a Professor and announces they’re going to try and hex Dumbledore’s fucking pet student?”

“No one heard, who cares,” the boy argued. “And it’s not like I can get in trouble for just saying I’m going to do it. Look, if it makes you feel better, I’ll wait a while before I go after him, so no one will know it was me.”

“No,” Malfoy said darkly. “You’re not going to do it at all.”

“What the fuck, Malfoy?” the boy snapped. Harry could see Malfoy’s grip on the boy’s robes tighten.

“You’re a Slytherin,” Malfoy said. “Slytherins do not act like Gryffindors— announcing their plans and making scenes. If anything happens to Potter now, no matter when it does, it’ll come back to you and to our house, and it’ll make all of us look bad. If you want to keep being one of us, I suggest you pull your head in.”

The boy gaped at him.

“But you hate him,” he protested. “You should be happy someone wants to hurt him.”

Malfoy gave him a hard shove against the stone wall, and then let him go. “Get back to the Common Room,” he said. “And if I hear any more of this, from anyone, you’ll be answering to me. Do you understand?”

The boy looked like he was going to argue, but then he thought better of it and stalked away, very
narrowly missing Harry when he went past him.

Malfy watched him go, then sighed and leant down to pick up his bag from the floor.

“What the hell was that?” Harry asked, pulling off his cloak.

Malfy spun around, wand drawn, then relaxed when he saw it was Harry. “Potter,” he said wearily, lowering his wand and slinging his bag over his shoulder. “Of course you're here right now. Why wouldn’t you be?”

“Did you just tell off a Slytherin for threatening me?” Harry asked, grinning.

“No,” Malfy sniffed, starting down the corridor. “I told off a Slytherin for threatening to bring the good name of our house into disrepute.”

“I don’t believe you,” Harry said happily, falling into step beside him. “You were defending me.”

“Get over yourself, Potter,” Malfy replied, rolling his eyes. “I would never.”

“You would though, because you just did it.”

“You’re infuriating,” Malfy said, sighing again.

Harry laughed. “Do you want to go down to the lake?” he asked.

ooOoo

“Should we be worried?” Blase asks again. Healer Thistlefoot has just finished another reading. He pockets his wand and notes something down on his chart, before smiling over at Blaise.

“Not at all, son,” he says. “Everything is reading as normal. It’s just a lot of information they’re processing. It’s not only images they’re getting back, you know. Every thought they had when they first experienced these memories was lost too, and they’re gaining it all back. They’ll wake up when they’re ready.”

He gestures for Penelope to join him in the hall, and they step outside, murmuring quietly to one another.

“What do you reckon?” Blase asks Hermione. “Are you worried it’s taking so long?”

She shifts in her chair, her back starting to ache from sitting still for so long. She rubs the pad of her thumb over Harry’s palm gently. “I feel like I’ve done nothing but worry about these two for years,” she says.

ooOoo

Harry’s cloak was spread out on the ground like a blanket, and he was lying on it with his arm propped beneath his head as a pillow. Malfy was sitting beside him, steadfastly refusing to do something as filthy as lie down outside.

“You’re already sitting on the ground, what’s the difference?” Harry pushed.
“You have no sense of dignity, Potter,” Malfoy sniffed. “Decent people don’t just lie about in the dirt.”

“I’m on my cloak! We both are! What does it matter if you just shift a little and lie down instead of sitting?”

“It absolutely matters. I won’t do it.”

“Please?”

“No.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “You’re ridiculous. Five minutes ago you were fighting some boy in the hallway for threatening me, and now you won’t even lie down next to me.”

“I already told you, that’s not what happened,” Malfoy replied. “And even if it was, those two things are completely unrelated.”

“Are they, though?”

Malfoy glanced down at him. Harry refused to look away, despite the colour he could feel pooling in his cheeks. Something — Harry wasn’t sure what — but something was happening here, and whatever it was felt significant. Malfoy was regarding him with something like a mix of trepidation and intrigue.

“You’re so annoying,” he finally said. He scooted forward, then dropped down beside Harry so that their shoulders were touching. “Happy?”

Harry smiled. “Yes. Was that so hard?”

“Don’t push it, Potter,” Malfoy warned. He stretched his legs out, brushing Harry’s as he did, and then he didn’t pull them away as he settled into a comfortable position.

“You don’t have to call me that you know,” Harry said, staring straight up into the branches hanging over them.

“What else would I call you?” Malfoy asked, as though Harry were mad.

“Well, I mean, technically my first name is Harry, so you know, you could call me that.”

Malfoy’s leg moved a little closer to his. Harry pretended not to notice.

“Why would I do that when you have a perfectly good last name I can use?”

Harry let out a noise of frustration. “Well, can I call you Draco at least?”

“You may not,” Malfoy replied.

“You can’t technically stop me,” Harry pointed out, tilting his head to the side to look at him.

“Merlin, I should have let him hex you,” Malfoy muttered under his breath, closing his eyes.

“Right, it’s decided,” Harry declared. “I’m calling you Draco.”

“I’m not calling you Harry,” Draco warned. “Ever.”
“You will,” Harry replied happily. “Draco,” he said again, just to try it out.

“It’s too cold for this,” Draco complained. “I’m going to go back in.”

“No, wait.” Harry grabbed his arm to stop Draco from sitting up, and then, biting down on his lip as his stomach erupted in butterflies, and terrified that he was making the entirely wrong assumption, he moved onto his side so that he and Draco were completely pressed together. He lifted his head and laid it on Malfoy’s shoulder, holding his breath.

Draco had gone still. Harry, meanwhile, was rapidly thinking through all the excuses he could use to explain what the hell he was doing. He was about to move before Draco could throw him off, but then Draco shifted his arm. He moved it from its awkward position in between them and lifted it over Harry, wrapping it around his shoulders and pulling Harry closer so that his head ended up resting on Draco’s chest.

Thankfully, they couldn’t see one another’s faces from this angle, but Harry didn’t think he’d actually mind if Draco saw the idiotic smile that was plastered across his face right now. He slowly relaxed as he felt Draco’s tension fall away, the steady rise and fall of his chest against Harry’s face so soothing that he thought he could probably fall asleep peacefully just like this.

When Draco reached up with his other hand and took one of Harry’s, twining their fingers together and resting them on his stomach, Harry realised that the tiny niggles of a crush he’d felt before had disappeared, leaving in their place feelings he had no idea how to deal with.

Thankfully, Draco didn’t seem interested in analysing any of it right now.

“Maybe I won’t go in just yet,” he murmured.

ooOoo

“You were being a prat earlier, Draco” Harry said irritably as Draco approached him. He was sat by the lake again, and Draco paused before sitting down next to him.

“What imagined thing did I do now?” he asked, eyeing Harry.

“I heard about what you said to Ron,” Harry said.

“Oh, do you mean when he tried to hex me?” Draco asked dryly.

“He— what?”

“How convenient that when he told the story, he didn’t mention that part,” Draco drawled.

“I— I’m sorry,” he said sheepishly. “I shouldn’t have assumed.”

“No, you shouldn’t have,” Draco agreed. “Don’t worry about it. I shouldn’t have said that to him. I just reacted.”

“It’s probably better you did,” Harry said, and Draco’s head snapped up. “I just mean, we’re keeping this quiet, so it’s better you keep acting like…”

“Like myself?”

“Yes,” Harry agreed. “Sorry.”
“Don’t be,” Draco said, shrugging. “I know the way I’ve been.”

“You’re not like that now,” Harry pointed out.

Draco sighed. “I’m still the same person. I don’t— I’m trying, alright? And I can see the flaws in everything I was raised to believe. But I don’t want you thinking I’m something more than I am. You shouldn’t be doing this if it’s only because you think I’m someone else.”

Harry just rolled his eyes. “I know perfectly well who you are, Draco. I can see the changes in you, even if you can’t.”

They sat in silence for a long moment, looking out over the lake. The sun was setting behind the forest, and the sky was a brilliant shade of orange above the trees.

“Are we completely mental to do this?” Harry finally asked, looking over at Draco.

“Of course we are,” Draco said with a humourless laugh. “But we’re going to do it anyway, aren’t we?”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed. “Yeah, we are.”

He reached out and took Draco’s hand without any hesitation. It was becoming more and more familiar, the feel of Draco’s palm pressed against his, Draco’s fingers flexing as he tangled them with Harry’s, the little half-smile they both did when one of them reached out. It was definitely Harry’s new favourite thing.

“My friends think I’m stalking you,” Harry told him casually, stretching his legs out in front of him.

“You are a bit,” Draco replied. “You’re obsessed with me, Potter.”

“Shut up,” Harry said. “And don’t call me Potter.”

His command was interrupted by a yawn. He tried to stifle it, but Draco heard, of course.

“You’re still not sleeping,” he sighed.

Harry shrugged. “I’m fine,” he said.

“Did you try the dreamless sleep potion?”

“Yeah, once,” Harry said. “But without a real reason, Madam Pomfrey wouldn’t give me more than a single dose.”

“You didn’t tell her?”

Harry shook his head. “I don’t want anyone else to know.”

Draco squeezed his hand. “No one would think badly of you, you know. After what happened… it’s understandable.”

“No,” Harry said more firmly. “I can deal with it; it’s fine.”

Draco sighed again; Harry could tell he wanted to argue, and he was grateful that he didn’t push it.

“If you won’t do that,” Draco said slowly. “Maybe there’s something else you could try. I… I had an idea while I was studying this morning.”
“If it’s Occlumency, forget it,” Harry said flatly. “I’m not going down that road again.”

“It’s not,” Draco assured him. “Well, it is, but it’s not like what you’re thinking.”

The idea of someone probing around in his head again — seeing the things he was scared of and worried about — made Harry feel a little sick. He was about to tell Draco so, but then Draco said, “It’s a mind bond.”


“You’ve heard of bonding spells, yes?” Draco asked, and Harry nodded. “Well, there’s one that two people can use to link their minds. They both have to be willing, obviously, and have their minds open to it for it to work, but once the magic is in place, they would be able to share thoughts, dreams, or anything really, with enough practice. Depending on how much they want to do with it, they could even learn to talk through it. But the reason I thought this might be helpful for you, is that it would let whoever you were bonded with access your mind — and they could use their Occlumency to shield it at night, so you wouldn’t have to worry about the Dark Lord getting in.”

“No,” Harry said. “No, I don’t want anyone seeing what’s in my head, Draco. I appreciate you coming up with this, but no.”

“But see, that’s why this is so perfect,” Draco said. “The person would only need to project their Occlumency through the bond and into your mind— they wouldn’t need to dig around or see anything at all. It would just create a barrier, so anyone else trying to get in would be blocked.”

“I— really? Would that really work?”

Harry’s heart was racing. Was it really possible that someone else could protect his mind? That he could sleep without fearing what he might see, or who might be seeing it?

“It’s an old spell,” Draco said. “But it would work. You just need someone you can trust who can do Occlumency well enough. Can Granger do it?”

Harry blinked. “Hermione? I thought you meant you would do it.”

“What?” Draco looked startled. “Me?”

“Well, yeah,” Harry said. “You’re good at Occlumency, right? And... and I trust you not to go poking around in my brain. You don’t have to, obviously,” he hastily added when Draco kept staring at him like he’d gone mental. “I just thought...”

“You’d want me to do it?” Draco asked quietly. “You’d be bonded to me?”

“Yes,” Harry said firmly. “I would.”

He watched as Draco swallowed, as he bit down hard on his lip while he continued to stare at Harry.

“Merlin,” he whispered. He lifted their joined hands, and Harry’s heart very nearly stopped when Draco pressed his lips to Harry’s fingers. “What are you doing to me, Harry?”

ooOoo

“You’re worried, aren’t you?” Hermione says as she watches Penelope take another diagnostic
reading. Penelope murmurs a spell under her breath before lowering her wand again.

“I’m preparing myself for every possible outcome, so I can help them when they wake up,” she replies evenly. She glances over to the other side of the room. “Where did Blaise go?”

“He went to get you a coffee while you were checking on them,” Hermione says. “Said you looked like you needed it.”

“A thinly veiled insult probably,” Penelope mutters to herself, and Hermione gives her a tired smile.

Healer Thistlefoot is just down the hall, taking another Floo call. Hermione makes a mental note to remind Harry when this is all over to thank the Healer for fitting him and Draco into his schedule at such short notice.

“Hey,” Penelope says, levitating Blaise’s empty chair and placing it beside Hermione’s. “Are you okay?”

Hermione nods. “I’m just nervous,” she replies.

Penelope sits down, twisting her hair into a messy knot as she does. She looks so tired, and Hermione wonders how many hours she’s worked today already.

“There were some awful things that happened to both of them that year,” Penelope says quietly. “It’s just so hard to believe there could be more.”

Hermione can only make a small noise of agreement.

ooOoo

"I can sort of feel it,” Harry said, leaning back against the cold, stone wall. It was raining, and they couldn’t go to the lake, so they were sitting at the top of the stairwell of the Astronomy Tower. Harry was grateful there were no classes up here tonight, and that they’d been able to go through with the bond.

The ritual itself hadn’t taken long, just a few murmured chants while they clasped hands, followed by the spell. Harry had a felt a chill run through him when it’d happened, and Draco said the book where he’d found the bond said that was normal, that it was their magic twining together.

Harry didn’t feel all that different, but he could definitely sense the hum of something in his head, like a thread that was hovering just out of sight. He thought he could probably latch onto it if he wanted to, but right then he was content just knowing it was there.

It was nice, he thought, knowing he was connected to someone. Knowing he could sleep tonight without fear of anyone getting inside his head against his will.

“Me too,” Draco agreed, “but the book says we won’t notice much more unless we work on it and actively try to use it.”

Draco’d transfigured his cloak into a blanket, and they now had it draped over their legs against the chill. The tower wall wasn’t the most comfortable thing to lounge against, but Harry found that with Draco pressed up beside him, his hand on Harry’s thigh under the blanket, he didn’t care so much.

“How are things going with Dumbledore?” Draco ventured quietly. “I know you can’t really talk
“about it,” he added, seeing Harry’s expression. “I just…”

“You’re worried about me,” Harry guessed.

Draco made a face. “Yeah, well, you’re worried about me too. I know you still follow me sometimes with that bloody map.”


Harry huddled closer to him, trying to stay warm against the draftiness of the stairwell.

“This is hard,” he murmured. “Us being… this… friends…”

“It was never going to be easy,” Draco reminded him. “We’re supposed to be fighting for different sides of this war.”

“We’re not though, are we?” Harry asked hesitantly. “I mean, you said you’d let me help you. I know we haven’t figured out how I can do that yet, but I still want—”

“Harry,” Draco cut in. “Relax, okay?”

Harry reached down and placed his hand over Draco’s, his stomach swooping when Draco flipped his own hand over and linked their fingers together.

“Are you still working on it?” Harry asked. “The… thing you’re meant to be doing?”

A shadow passed over Draco’s face. “I guess… sort of,” he admitted. “It’s hard. I need to keep going, to make progress, for the sake of my parents. But also I… I don’t want to do it.”

They both fell silent. The wind was howling outside the tower. It was nice, sitting with Draco, listening to the rain falling heavily, using another one’s body heat to fight the chill. He wondered if they’d ever get to do anything like this without having to be so secretive about it. He tried to imagine a world where Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy could be friends, or anything else — but then for some reason images of the things Dumbledore had shown him flashed through his mind, and he couldn’t picture anything but fighting.

“Tell me something about when you were a kid,” Harry blurted out. “Something happy.”


“No,” Harry retorted. He let go of Draco’s hand and leaned forward slightly, nudging Draco until he got the hint and lifted his arm to put it around Harry’s shoulders. Harry scooted himself closer so he could rest his head against Draco’s chest. “Just tell me something nice. I want to know things about you.”

Draco’s arm tightened. “Hufflepuff,” he murmured, his chest shaking slightly as he chuckled. “Fine, though. If you insist. My parents,” he began, “used to throw me a huge dinner every year for my birthday. It was ridiculous really, but all the Pure-Blood families do it. It was more like a ball, really, than a child’s birthday party. All my friends used to love them. I think it made them feel grown-up and important, but I always preferred the day after. My parents were relaxed by then because the party was over and they didn’t have to worry about impressing anyone, and they’d spend the whole day with me doing whatever I wanted. Flying on the manor grounds, or picnicking. One year they even agreed to take me to the seaside.”
Harry tried to picture Lucius Malfoy at the beach, and then quickly banished that thought from his mind.

“It was always very... casual,” Draco continued. “They’d both be at ease and smile a lot. I guess it made me happy to see them that way. I know… I know what you think of them, and I’m not defending anything they may have done, but they’ve always made me feel loved.”

Harry tilted his head so he could look up at Draco's face. “What were you like?” he asked.


“So, the same as now then.”

“The one thing I never got though,” Draco said, ignoring Harry, “was a Crup. I don’t know what it was about them, but I was obsessed from about the age of five. I wanted one so badly, but my father wouldn’t allow it. He said they weren’t an appropriate pet for a Malfoy. When I was about eight, I was so cross with him that I told him when I grew up, I’d get one and call it Lucy just to spite him.”

“Oh, Merlin,” Harry chuckled, his shoulders shaking with laughter. “You absolutely have to do that.”

“Maybe,” Draco agreed. “You know,” he adds softly, “I think my mother would like you.”

“Probably,” Harry said sardonically. “She’d love me if I wasn’t the guy her boss keeps trying to kill, right?”

Draco sighed. He hugged Harry closer and rested his chin on Harry’s head. Harry thought Draco might get mad at him for his comment, but then he said, “I’m glad I have you. You… you’ve made everything bearable. I feel like I can actually breathe when I’m with you.”

Harry’s chest swelled, and he stretched his arm around Draco’s waist, burying his head into his chest; he didn’t trust himself to look up right now. He knew what he would do, knew the line they’d cross, and they couldn’t do that. It was too dangerous.

“Me too,” he said quietly. The words weren’t the ones he wanted to say, didn’t begin to cover what he meant, but he hoped that somehow Draco understood.

When he felt Draco’s arms tighten around him, and the soft brush of lips on his head, Harry was certain that he did.

ooOoo

“What?” Harry demanded, grabbing Draco’s arm. “Draco, what’s wrong?”

He was paler than usual, and was refusing to meet Harry’s eye. He stood like a statue — staring unfocused out across the lake.

“Draco!” Harry tried again, barely holding back his panic. “Talk to me, please. What’s happened?”


Harry’s stomach dropped. That was impossible. There was no way Draco could know. “What are you talking about?” he ventured slowly. “You’re not making any sense.”
Draco suddenly snapped out of his trance. He spun towards Harry and grabbed him by his scruff, backing him up against the rough bark of the tree behind him.

“You know what I’m talking about,” he hissed. “Fucking horcruxes, Harry!”

“What— how do you know that?” Harry spluttered, trying to push Draco away.

“We weren’t being careful enough,” Draco snapped. “We got too comfortable with the bond, and when my Occlumency slipped for a minute last night, I saw one of your memories with Dumbledore.”

“You were in my head?” Harry demanded furiously. “What the fuck? You swore I could trust you, Draco!”

Draco looked murderous. “You fucking know it wasn’t on purpose,” he spat. “We both slipped up, and now I know what the fuck you’re up to.”

He let go of Harry and yanked his wand out of his pocket, letting out a frustrated shout as he threw a furious curse across the lake. The water erupted where the magic hit it, like an enormous rock had been dropped, causing a splash.

Harry stayed pressed against the tree, torn between anger and wanting to reassure Draco.

“You’re not doing it,” Draco declared, rounding back on Harry. “There’s no fucking way you’re going after those things; I don’t give a fuck what Dumbledore wants. If the Dark Lord finds out about this—”

“He’ll what?” Harry shot back. “He’ll kill me, Draco? You think I don’t know that? He’s going to keep trying, whether I’m working to stop him or not!”

Draco strode forward so that he was in Harry’s face again. “No!” he insisted. “You can’t fucking do this, Harry!”

“Don’t tell me what I can and can’t do,” Harry snapped. “You think I want this? You think I’d do it if I had any other choice? Of course I wouldn’t! But I fucking have to!”

“You’re not—”

“You think it’s any different with you?” Harry yelled, all his frustration seeming to bubble over at once, shoving Draco’s chest. “You think I like knowing you’re working for him, that you’re doing something in the castle for him? You think I don’t want to beg you to fucking stop every day? I don’t though, because I fucking know that you’re doing what you have to do in order to survive for right now!”

“That’s different!” Draco argued.

“It’s fucking not. We both have our roles to play in this stupid fucking war, and it’s unfair and I hate it, but I know this is how it has to be. I’m doing what I have to with Dumbledore to stop Voldemort, and you’re doing what you have to so you can protect your family and keep yourself alive. What the fuck else are we supposed to do?”

“I don’t know!” Draco yelled back, deflating as he did. “I don’t fucking know,” he whispered.

Harry exhaled slowly, closing his eyes, and then he reached out and grabbed Draco, pulling him against his chest. Draco buried his face into Harry’s neck, clinging to him as Harry wrapped his
“Fuck,” Harry said softly, hugging tighter. He could feel Draco’s uneven breaths on his skin. “I don’t know what to do, Draco,” he admitted, and he wasn’t sure he’d ever be able to say that to anyone else.

“I want to protect you,” Draco mumbled against his neck. “But I don’t know how.”

“This is all happening because I wanted to protect you,” Harry reminded him. “I was supposed to have a plan to get you away from all this, not make it worse. And now you know the one thing he can’t find out about. I’ve made everything a hundred times more dangerous for you. How can you go home now, knowing what I’m doing? What if he gets in your head?”

“I can’t abandon my parents,” Draco whispered, pulling back to look at Harry. It seemed like an effort for him to say the words. “If he thinks I’ve betrayed him, the things he’ll do to them—”

“I’d never ask you to,” Harry assured him. He cupped Draco’s face with his hand, stroking his thumb over the soft skin of his cheek. “But I can’t walk away from my mission, either.”

“You’re so bloody noble,” Draco murmured with a humourless laugh. He reached up and put his hand over Harry’s, leaning into his touch. “We were doomed from the start, weren’t we?” he sighed.

Harry swallowed uncomfortably. “No,” he insisted. “Not doomed. It’s just… just bad timing. It’s too dangerous right now.”

“We both already know too much,” Draco said. He tangled his fingers tightly in the front of Harry’s robes, like he couldn’t bear to let Harry go. “You know the Dark Lord will use this if he finds out. All of it,” he adds, giving Harry a pointed look. “Not just what you’re doing. Me, as well.”

“He’ll use you to lure me out,” Harry realised in horror. “No.” He shook his head. “No, I can’t let that happen, Draco. The things he’d do if he found out…”

“We’ve really fucked ourselves, haven’t we?” Draco lamented.

Harry couldn’t speak. He was fucking terrified. He didn’t know what they were going to do now, didn’t know how they could move forward. He’d thought he knew what he was doing, thought it would be so easy to just bring someone over from the other side, to work together and find a way to make everyone safe. It had been naive, he realised now, to think things could ever be so simple. They were in the middle of a war, poised on opposite sides of the battlefield, and by trying to bring Draco over, Harry had just thrown him into the line of fire. And now he had to make it right. They had to fix it somehow — before Voldemort could get to Draco.

“Harry.”

He lifted his eyes to Draco’s, and a sick feeling washed over him, knowing that this moment marked the beginning of the end for them.

“I know what we have to do,” Draco said reluctantly, his expression pained. “And you’re not going to like it.”

ooOoo
“An hour and a half,” Blaise sighs.

“They’ve calmed down considerably,” Healer Thistlefoot points out, clapping Blaise on the shoulder. “Not long now, son, I’m sure of it.”

Hermione wonders how he can be so calm, so cheerful. But then, he’s just doing his job, isn’t he? He won’t have to deal with the fallout that follows when Harry and Draco wake up.

Hermione arches her back, stretching her neck to the side to try and ease some of her stiffness. She should stand up and walk around a bit, but she ignores the aching in favour of staying by their beds.

“Hermione.” A soft hand on her shoulder startles her, and she looks up. Penelope smiles kindly. “I’m sorry, Hermione, but we’re going to need you and Blaise to wait outside, okay?”

“What? Why?” Hermione protests, holding Harry’s hand tighter. “I want to be here when they wake up!”

“So do I,” Blaise chimes in. “Why can’t we stay?”

“Guys, I understand, I really do,” Penelope says sincerely, “but we don’t know what state they’re going to be in when they wake up. We don’t know what they’ll have seen or how they’ll react. It’s safer for everyone if you wait outside. I promise, as soon as they’re both up to it, you’ll be the first to see them.”

“But—”

“Come on,” Blaise says, standing up. “She’s right, Granger. I personally don’t want to end up hexed in the face because one of them is in a bad mood.”

Hermione doesn’t want to move, but she lets Penelope take her hand and lead her away from Harry’s bed. She knows that her being there will probably make it worse for Harry and Draco, but it’s so hard to walk away.

“I’ll update you both as soon anything happens,” Penelope assures them. She gives them a regretful look as she closes the door on them.

Hermione sinks into one of the plastic chairs lining the wall outside the rooms, dropping her head into her hands.

“They’re going to hate whoever did this to them,” Blaise comments, dropping down beside her. Hermione’s chest feels tight. She thinks Blaise is probably right.

OOOoo

“What about the bond?” Harry asked.

It had started to rain a few minutes ago, just a light drizzle, but a trickle of water made its way down Harry’s nose and to his lip. He ignored it. The cold didn’t bother him at all; the last hour had left him feeling completely numb already.

“I suppose we’ll need to remove it,” Draco said, pushing his wet hair out of his eyes. “I don’t remember seeing the instructions on how to do it in the book, but I’m sure I could find them. I imagine it will be ridiculously complicated. Removing bonds always takes a lot longer than casting
them."

Harry nodded slowly, considering that.

“It only gets stronger if we’re using it though, right?” he asked after a minute. “So we don’t necessarily need to worry about removing it.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well,” Harry said slowly. “If we’re going to be… to be obliterated—” He broke off. It wasn’t a word he’d ever considered particularly sinister before, but now it left a bad taste on his tongue. “If that’s what we’re going to do,” he continued, “we can probably just leave it.”

Draco frowned at him. “You want to stay bonded?”

“I’m just saying, it will make things less complicated.” Harry clarified. “If we don’t use it, nothing will happen with it, and we won’t remember it anyway.”

“I suppose,” Draco agreed. “You know. We don’t both necessarily need to do this. It’s just my mind we need to hide from the Dark Lord. You don’t have to do it too.”

Harry shook his head. “I can’t,” he said. “I don’t… I don’t think I could do what I have to do if I were thinking about you there, with him.”

“You’d do something recklessly Gryffindor-like and come save me, wouldn’t you?” Draco joked.

“Probably,” Harry agreed. “Merlin, even now, everything inside me is fighting against this, Draco. It’s feels so fucking wrong for you to have to go back to that.”

“I don’t have a choice,” Draco sighed, taking Harry’s hand and kissing his palm. “And you need to go and save the world. I’ll be okay. I promise, I will.”

They both knew it was an empty promise. Harry’s heart was fucking shattering at the idea that something might happen to Draco, that he might get hurt, or worse, and Harry wouldn’t even have the memories, wouldn’t know that he should be devastated by it. It seemed unbelievable that he wouldn’t remember this feeling, wouldn’t remember how he felt about Draco. Harry glanced over at him, at the wet mess of blonde hair and sharp angles, at the soft pale skin, the deceptively strong arms. Merlin, Harry just wanted to touch every part of him.

He just squeezed Draco’s cold hand instead, pushing away his desires. It was too late for that now. Going down that path would only make this harder. He dropped his head onto Draco’s shoulder.

“We’ll have to get someone to help us,” Draco was saying. “Someone competent we can trust. Do you have any ideas?”

“Yeah,” Harry sighed regretfully. “I know who to ask.”

ooOoo

He wasn’t ready.

He never would be, he knew, but fuck — he was trembling, and he wanted to run, and the only thing keeping him in place was Draco’s hand linked with his.
Harry glanced around the unused classroom. It was dim and dusty and completely plain. It didn’t feel right to be ending something so important in such an unremarkable place, but he supposed it wouldn’t matter in a few minutes; when he walked out of here, it would just be an old room again, wouldn’t it?

“It’s not fair,” he said. “I’ve only just found you.” He looked up at Draco, who was watching him with a sad smile on his face. “One day,” Harry said determinedly, “we’ll find each other again. Promise me we will.”

“Of course we will,” Draco murmured, stroking his thumb over Harry’s hand. “It’ll be okay.” It wouldn’t be, of course it wouldn’t, but Harry appreciated the lie all the same.

He drew Draco in toward his chest, running his hands slowly up and down his back, trying to savour it — the way he smelt, the way they felt pressed together, how warm Draco always seemed to be. All were things he’d committed to his memory, things he’d carried with him constantly since this began. And all of it would be gone.

“You know I’m yours, don’t you?” he asked, turning his face so that his lips brushed Draco’s neck. “I think I always will be.”

“I know,” Draco said, his voice hitching. “You’re mine, and I’m yours. Even if we don’t remember.”

Harry let out a shuddering breath. “We are doing the right thing, aren’t we?”

“Yes,” Draco agreed. “It’s for the best. No matter how much we hate it. It’s… we both have the best chance of surviving this way.”


“Wait.”

Draco grabbed his robes and yanked him forward, pressing their lips together. His kiss was not soft, or loving. It was bruising and possessive. Hungry. Desperate. The kind of kiss Harry would never forget under any other circumstances. It was a goodbye kiss, he knew.

Harry clung to Draco, arms around his neck, and pulled him closer. He knew that no matter how fiercely he tried to memorise this feeling, no matter how badly he wanted to keep the knowledge of how Draco felt and tasted locked away inside him to warm him on dark nights, in just a few moments, it would be gone.

They drew apart, breathing heavily, and Harry rested his forehead against Draco’s. Their hands came together between them, fingers finding one another. The lump in Harry’s throat felt like it might choke him, the pain in his chest threatening to cripple him; and the only silver lining he could possibly see in this was that at least he wouldn’t remember the way it felt to be forced to say goodbye.

“One day, when all of this is over, it’ll be you and me again, and that’s all that will matter,” Draco whispered brokenly.

“I’ll find you again,” Harry promised. “Somehow.”

They were more promises neither of them could hope to keep, but the idea that maybe, one day, they might exist side by side again was the only thing helping Harry keep his nerve.
Draco swallowed thickly, his eyes shimmering. “Please stay safe, Harry,” he said in a low, desperate voice. “Please.”

“You too,” Harry replied. “And... and whatever you have to do to survive — just do it, okay?”

Draco nodded. His hands were shaking as he trailed his thumb over Harry’s bottom lip, tracing the shape slowly.

Harry began to tremble again. Still clutching his hands, Draco looked up and gave a curt nod.

“You’re ready?”

Harry dragged his gaze from Draco, but he refused to let go of his hand. “Yes,” he forced himself to say. “Yeah, we’re ready.”

“And you’re you both certain you want to do it this way? Once you do, the terms of the Unbreakable Vow will begin. I won’t be able to tell you anything about this, not unless somehow you find out on your own.”

“No, you were right,” Harry said. “It’s better to have it. For our safety as well as yours.”

“Are you absolutely sure, Harry? It’s not too late—”

“We need to do this,” Harry said. “Please just— just do it before we talk ourselves out of it.”


Harry gripped Draco’s hand tighter, terrified and broken all at once.

“I love you,” he whispered.

He heard Hermione’s muffled sob behind them, but Harry couldn’t look away from Draco’s face.

“I love you too,” Draco said, eyes shimmering. “I’ll always fucking love you.”
Chapter 9

The first thing Harry is aware of is that he has a throbbing headache. He reaches up to rub his temple, blinking his eyes open. The brightly-lit room slowly comes into focus, and he shifts himself up a little to try and figure out where he is, but the movement makes his stomach roll, and he realises he’s going to be sick.

Some sort of bowl is shoved into his hands just as he throws up. He’s dimly aware of a hand on his back, rubbing soothing circles, but the nausea and the ache in his head won’t let him focus on anything else.

He’s panting when he finishes being sick, chest heaving. Someone takes the bowl from his hands and hands him a cold glass of water. He sips at it, not trusting himself not to be sick again.

“Harry?”

He looks to his left and sees Penelope watching him nervously. Right, he’s in St Mungo’s. He closes his eyes, casting his mind back to how he got here this time, and that’s when everything comes crashing back.

The bowl is back in his hands again, and he throws up a second time, his body reacting violently to the influx of information. Pictures flash through his mind, strange memories that belong to him but he’s never seen before dancing across his consciousness, foreign thoughts echoing in his own voice around his head, the same word repeating over and over.

Draco.

Whatever Harry had been expecting, whatever he’d thought they were going to see, this had never crossed his mind. He wouldn’t believe it if he didn’t have the memories flitting through his brain right now. He’s reeling; it doesn’t feel possible.

He remembers whispers and touches, feelings of longing and the clasp of hands, the pain of deciding to separate. Christ, it’s all too much. He slumps back against the pillows with a groan. His head feels like it’s been hit with forty bludgers in a row.

“Drink this,” Penelope says, as though she’s read his thoughts. “It’ll help with the headache.”

A vial is lifted to his lips and he drinks the liquid in one gulp, the refreshing coolness taking effect immediately.

“Thank you,” he manages.

He lets out a shaky breath and opens his eyes. Penelope is stood at his bedside, watching him anxiously.

“Are you alright?” she asks, and he’s grateful she avoids her usual ‘how do you feel?’ because he wouldn’t have any idea how he’s supposed to answer that.

He nods slowly. “Yeah, I— It wasn’t anything like… It wasn’t what we thought it would be. It—”

He breaks off. How can he explain? It isn’t just the memories themselves that have left him reeling; he also remembers exactly how it had all felt, feels the same crippling ache in his chest as when they’d said goodbye. And he has no idea what to do with that, no idea how to process the unfamiliar
feelings.

"Harry?" Penelope prompts gently. "All your vitals and readings are showing as normal. The bond magic is gone, but we just need to know now if there’s anything that might have affected you mentally. Draco told us there was nothing unusual, but I need to hear from you as well."

Harry’s head jerks up at the mention of Draco’s name. He’d forgotten he was here in the room, too. Draco is sitting up in his own bed, hands resting in his lap as Healer Thistlefoot jots down notes on a chart beside him. He glances over at Harry, then turns his head away quickly. Harry does the same, his face feeling hot. Fuck. How the fuck are they supposed to deal with this?

“It was nothing bad,” Harry mumbles to Penelope. “I’m fine.”

The door opens then, and he looks up to see Hermione standing there, nervously watching them both. Her eyes are red-rimmed, and he can see from here that she’s shaking. She looks terrified.

“Hermione,” he whispers. “You knew.”

“I’m so, so sorry,” she blurs out, her voice cracking. “I’ve wanted to tell you both for years, but the Vow— I thought it was a good idea at the time, to protect you both, but then I couldn’t even hint at anything to anyone! So I had no way to ever let you know, and you’d never have believed it anyway, and I’m just so sorry, to both of you. I’m so, so—”

“Hermione,” Harry says again, cutting her off. He holds his arms up. “Come here.”

She darts forward and throws her arms around his neck, sobbing against his shoulder. “I’m so sorry,” she repeats as he rubs her back.

“Perhaps we could have a moment?” Draco says quietly from his bed. Healer Thistlefoot and Penelope murmur something in reply, and then they leave, and the three of them are alone.

Hermione pulls back from Harry with a sniff, then slides off his bed to go to Draco.

“I’m sorry,” Harry hears her say again. “You both must be so angry with me.”

“No,” Draco says quietly. “No, not at all.” He hugs her tightly, and Harry is filled with relief that Draco isn’t cross with her either.

Hermione sits back on the foot of Draco’s bed, wiping her eyes on her sleeve. "I’ve looked for a loophole for years,” she tells them. "I’ve tried so hard to find a way to let you know what happened, but there was no way around the Vow other than for you to find out on your own.” She shakes her head sadly, and Draco reaches out and puts his hand on her knee. “After Harry came and told me what was going on, and when I saw you together, I just couldn’t believe how fast it had all happened,” she continues. “You were just… you were both so in love; I don’t know how I hadn’t seen it before then.”

Harry feels himself turning red, and he avoids looking at Draco. “Was that—” He clears his throat. “Was that where you got the idea for your parents?” he asks.

“Yes,” she confirms. “I want you both to know that I never would have done it if you hadn’t been so sure. You were convinced that the only way to move forward and protect each other was to give up what you had.”

“This is why you’ve pushed us to be friends for so many years,” Harry realises.
Hermione nods. “Look, I — I don’t know what you saw, but the day after I obliviated you was the
day the incident with Katie Bell happened. Harry had been acting strangely the whole day, really
restless and erratic, and I assume you must have been the same, Draco.”

“Makes sense,” Draco mutters. “I remember feeling like I just needed to *do* something, to act, and I
already had the necklace so I just… just did it.”

“You were confused,” Hermione offers gently.

“It’s not an excuse,” Draco says. He gestures to Harry. “Did he tell you about the bond before you…
beforehand?”

Harry tries not to be bothered by the fact that he’s become “he” instead of “Harry”; he’s got too
many feelings swirling through him right now, and he’s trying to stay calm, and being upset by
Draco avoiding his name won’t help anything.

“No, he didn’t,” Hermione sighs. “Maybe if I’d known, I might have hesitated, or researched more...
I don’t know. But I mean—” She looks hopefully between them. “It brought you back together in the
end, didn’t it? So maybe… maybe it’s not all bad.”

Harry doesn’t know what to say to that, but he’s saved from having to find the right words when
Penelope knocks softly on the door and comes back inside.

“Are you guys doing okay?” she asks.

“I’d like to request a separate room,” Draco replies stiffly. “If that’s alright.”

“What?” Harry stares at him, but Draco refuses to meet his eye. He slides out of his bed and gathers
up his things without waiting for Penelope’s reply.

“Draco—” Hermione ventures, but he silences her with a look.

Penelope is frowning, but she nods slowly. “I’ll be right back, Harry,” she says, leading Draco from
the room.

Harry stares at the door for a long moment after they’ve disappeared. He wants to go after Draco, to
say… well, he doesn’t know what. But watching him leave hurts.

“He’s just in shock,” Hermione assures him gently. “You both are. Give it some time, and you’ll be
able to talk about this properly.”

ooOoo

Harry lies awake well into the night, not bothering to attempt sleep. Penelope had insisted that both
he and Draco needed to stay overnight for observation, and Harry suspects she’s worried that one of
them might suddenly freak out. Harry’d given both Healers a brief summary of what he’d seen, and
while Healer Thistlefoot had considered it great news and said they were lucky the memories weren’t
traumatic ones, Penelope had bitten down hard on her bottom lip and looked at Harry with concern.
She knows more of their history than Thistlefoot does, and Harry supposes he can’t blame her for
being worried that it might be too much for them to deal with.

Harry rolls onto his back and stares up at the ceiling. Not having Draco beside him feels odd. The
room feels… emptier with his bed vacant. He thinks of all the things they’d said to one another
leading up to this — this morning, and over the past few days. Thinks of the way he’d felt with
Draco, the panic he’d barely kept at bay when he’d realised how bloody fast he was falling for him.
He lets out a quiet, humourless laugh; at least it all makes sense now, in a way. This must be why nothing has ever worked out with anyone else, why nothing until this thing with Draco has ever felt right. Why he’s always hesitated to give his heart away — maybe he couldn’t, because it had already belonged to someone else.

The thought makes his face heat, and he pushes it away.

Sixth year, all those hours he’d spent following Draco after the incident with Katie, stalking him — Harry had been so sure he was up to something without really understanding why; he’d always just felt a pull, a need to follow him and know what he was doing that he hadn’t understood.

Merlin, it’s too much. Harry turns onto his stomach and buries his face in his pillow, trying to dim the memories that keep demanding attention.

The Harry from sixth year, the one he remembers so clearly now, was undeniably and completely in love with Draco Malfoy.

And as he finally begins to drift off to sleep, Harry realises that despite how overwhelming this all is, and even though he has no clue what they’ll do next, he thinks it’s sort of nice that his heart never really let go of Draco, and that he got the chance to fall in love with him all over again.

ooOoo

“How nice of you to finally join the land of the living. It’s almost lunch time, Potter.”

Harry yawns and rubs at his eyes as he gradually wakes. Blaise is sat beside his bed with his feet propped up on Harry’s mattress and his arms crossed casually. He smirks at Harry, and Harry knows immediately that Draco must have told him.

“How nice of you to finally join the land of the living. It’s almost lunch time, Potter.”

“Don’t,” Harry groans, throwing his arm over his eyes. “Don’t even start.”

Blaise chuckles. “Your lack of faith in me is wildly offensive.”

“Wildly accurate,” Harry mutters, then sighs in resignation. “Go on then, get it over with.”

“Oh no,” Blaise assures him. “I’m going to save this one. There is literally years’ worth of material here that I can use against you both, and I don’t want to waste any of it while you’re still in hospital.”

“God, you’re annoying,” Harry sighs, reaching to get his glasses from the side table. “Why are you here?”

Blaise shrugs. “I suppose it’s possible I give a shit about your well-being. It’s unlikely,” he adds. “But I can’t rule it out as a possibility.”

Harry chuckles and pulls himself into a sitting position. His headache is completely gone now. It had come back last night briefly, but another dose of Penelope’s potion had helped considerably, and he feels fresher after a good night’s sleep.

“So, Potter,” Blaise says, arching his eyebrows at him, “what the fuck are you going to do now?”

“Oh, god,” Harry groans. “I have no bloody idea.”

Blaise pulls his feet down and leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees. “It kind of makes sense, don’t you think?” he muses, cocking his head to the side. “In a really fucking strange sort of way, obviously.”
“How?” Harry demands. “How does any of this make sense?”

“Well, you both were always fucking mental about each other, weren’t you?”

“We hated each other!” Harry insists.

Blaise shrugs. “It’s a very fine line between love and hate, Potter,” he says. “Don’t you forget that.”

“Oh my god, you’re giving me love advice now,” Harry mutters.

“You should listen to me, I’m very wise,” Blaise informs him.

Harry snorts. “Right. Why have you been brushing up on Muggle sayings anyway?” he asks. “Any reason? A certain half-blood Healer maybe?”

Blaise narrows his eyes and sits back in his chair. “You can fuck right off,” he declares.

“I should be asking what it is you’re going to do,” Harry throws back at him.

Instead of getting defiant, Blaise gets a thoughtful look on his face, and then gives a slow, lazy grin. “Marry her, I think. One day. If she’ll have me.”

Harry gapes at him. “This is literally the first time you’ve even admitted how you feel! You haven’t even asked her out yet!”

“Well,” Blaise says, standing up and smoothing down his shirt. “I suppose I’d best be off to do that then, shouldn’t I?”

Harry can only laugh in disbelief, falling back against his pillows as Blaise strides to the door.

“Blaise,” he calls, before Blaise can leave. “Is… do you think he’ll want to talk? To me, I mean. About… about all of this?”

Blaise’s smile falters. “Sorry, Potter,” he says. “He’s already checked himself out and gone home.”

Harry’s heart sinks. He’d thought, maybe, that they’d be able to try and figure this out, to work out what the hell to do next. But if Draco has left without saying anything…

“He’s just trying to sort his head out,” Blaise says. “He takes his time to process things. Give him a couple of days, okay? And Potter,” he adds. “What you both felt — what you had — it’s still there, so just relax, okay? You’ll have what you had before, if you want it.”

And then he’s gone, leaving Harry staring at a closed door.

He sighs, and wonders if his life can get any stranger. He’s in love with Draco Malfoy, and Blaise Zabini is doling out relationship advice. He pulls the blankets back up over his head. He’s going back to sleep.

ooOoo

Three days later, and Harry is going a bit spare. He’d signed out of St Mungo’s quickly the other day, assuring Penelope he’d come back if anything out of the ordinary started happening again, and then he’d gone back to his apartment alone. He’s not due back at work until Monday, and he’s not really sure what to do with himself other than amble about his apartment. It feels different now, being on his own after spending every moment practically joined at the hip to someone else. He doesn’t like it, and he misses Draco terribly. He’s had to sleep on the living room couch every night, because his
bed still smells like Draco, and he's constantly about five seconds from snapping and going to see him.

He reminds himself over and over to give him space, give him time. Draco takes a slower approach to dealing things, and Harry doesn't want to risk fucking this up. He hasn’t figured it all out himself yet, hasn’t quite determined what the things he feels will mean moving forward, only that it’s bloody intense.

Hermione and Ron have owled several times to check in, but Harry has declined their invitations to go and stay with them. He just wants to see Draco again.

He doesn’t know what he’ll do if Draco doesn’t get in touch, if he decides it’s all too much and that he doesn’t want anything to do with Harry. He’s pretty certain the only reason he’s been able to cope with losing Draco once was that he hadn’t remembered it. Maybe he could ask Hermione to obliviate him again, he thinks darkly as he paces his living room.

That’s about the point when he realises he needs to get out of his apartment and get his head straight. He closes his eyes and spins on the spot, and he doesn’t know why he’s surprised when he finds himself in front of the gates of Hogwarts.

He sends a Patronus to the headmistress, who opens the gates for him, and then makes his way towards the lake. He doesn’t see anyone as he circles around to the spot he’s looking for, and he assumes it must be lunch time and that all the students are in the Great Hall.

It looks the same as it always did. The ground is littered with leaves from the huge tree towering over the water, and there is an old piece of parchment scrunched up by the lake’s edge. He wonders if someone else has since discovered this spot, some other couple who sneak down here to be alone. The thought makes him smile.

He sits down and leans against the tree, stretching his legs out in front of him and looks across the calm water.

So many things have happened in this spot. It’s baffling to him that had he come back here a year ago — hell, even a few days ago — he might have sat in this very spot with no idea of how significant it was.

It’s a relief though; he’d decided that this morning. A relief to understand himself a little better, to know that he isn’t broken or destined to be alone — he’s just… already found someone. He smiles wistfully, leaning his head back against the bark and letting the late afternoon sun warm his face as it begins to set across the water.

“I always knew you were a sentimental bloody Hufflepuff.”

Harry’s eyes snap open. Draco is stood in front of him, eyebrows raised in amusement and a takeaway coffee cup in his hand.

“I went to your apartment,” he explains, taking a step forward as Harry scrambles to his feet.

“How— how’d you know I’d be here?” Harry asks, horrified at how breathless he sounds at the sight of Draco. He dusts himself off to give himself something to do with his hands.

Draco shrugs. “Just had a feeling,” he says.

The stand in silence, staring at one another. Harry can feel the heat pooling in his cheeks, and he’s pretty sure he’s never felt this awkward before. He wants to grab Draco, snog the life out of him,
hold onto him and declare that he’ll never agree to something so stupid as being obliviated ever again, but he makes himself stay put.

“So, I think we should probably talk,” Draco says quietly after a moment, and Harry nods.

“Yeah,” he says. “Yeah, yes, we should.”

Harry gestures to the ground and sits down again, crossing his legs beneath him as Draco does the same.

“I don’t know where the fuck to even start,” Draco says lightly, and Harry laughs.

“Christ, me neither,” he admits. “This is insane, isn’t it?”

“Mental,” Draco agrees. “I’m sorry I sort of… disappeared,” he offers. “After we found out about the obliviation, I think I sort of prepared myself for the worst, but I never expected to find out that we were… you know… and I panicked a bit.”

“I get it,” Harry says. “It’s fine. We… what we were, it was…”

“Intense?”

Harry snorts. “Yeah, just a bit,” he agrees. “Every time I think about it all, I know it was me, and I remember it all perfectly, but I still feel sort of… disconnected from it. You know?”

“Mm,” Draco murmurs. “It’s like I’m watching myself on one of those Muggle boxes. It’s sort of nice though, to know I wasn’t just being completely mental these past few weeks.”

Harry tilts his head to the side curiously. “What do you mean?”

“Oh come off it,” Draco snorts. “You were there. I was a bloody mess over you after two weeks. It’s not normal for things to go that fast.”

Harry’s chest swells. “I was too,” he admits.

Draco smiles. He begins to pick at the grass, pulling out strands and flicking them away idly. “You named your Crup Lucy,” he says.

Harry bites back a grin. “I didn’t mean to steal your name,” he says. “It just came to me when I got her.”

Draco shakes his head, still smiling. “I was never able to get one because I work such ridiculous hours. It’s nice that someone got to use the name.”

Harry doesn’t want to presume and announce to Draco that he can share Lucy, but it’s right on the tip of his tongue.

“Can I ask you about something?” he ventures instead. “About… during the war?”

Draco looks up, his smile fading, and nods. “Alright.”

“At the Manor,” Harry begins, “did you… do you think that was why you didn’t give me away? Do you think you were protecting me?”

He’d been nervous to ask, thinking Draco might laugh it off as ridiculous, but the question has been stuck in Harry’s head since he thought of it yesterday.
Draco looks thoughtful. “I think... I really think that I would have done anything for you, anything to keep you safe. And I’ve always remembered everything about when you were brought in that day. I desperately wanted you to win of course, I hated Voldemort, but I also just had this... overwhelming urge to get you out of there alive. I didn’t understand it then, obviously, but now I think I do.”

Harry nods slowly. “The fire,” he says. Draco winces, but doesn't ask him to stop. “That was how I felt too.”

“You would have saved anyone,” Draco comments.

“Maybe,” Harry concedes. “But the way I felt when I thought you might die... I can’t explain it. I just had to stop it happening.”

Draco gives him a wry smile. “Seems impossible that we didn’t know, doesn’t it?”

“Blaise is going to be unbearable about this, you realise,” Harry jokes. “He’s already warned me.”

Harry suddenly remembers the rest of Blaise’s words in St Mungo’s the other day. He bites down hard on his lip to stop him blurting out his next question.

“What is it?” Draco asks.

“I—” Harry takes a breath. “Blaise said the other day... that what we had, what we felt— it’s still there, and we could have it, if we wanted to... the way it was before.”

“You’ve been taking love advice from Blaise?” Draco asks sceptically. “Not your wisest move.”

“Shut up,” Harry grumbles. “What I’m trying to say is, would you... would you want that? To feel it again?”

Draco regards him silently for a moment, the moment stretching out between them, the anticipation making Harry’s heart race faster and faster. And then, a smile spreads across Draco’s face.

“I think,” he says softly, his eyes flickering to Harry’s lips, “that I already do.”

Harry lets out a shuddering breath of relief, and then he sits up on his knees. Draco’s eyes darken as Harry leans toward him, and Harry’s heart almost stops when Draco’s tongue darts out and swipes along his own bottom lip. Harry closes the distance between them, unable to wait another second, and captures Draco’s mouth in a soft kiss. He cups the back of Draco’s head with his hand as Draco’s mouth opens to him, the soft sigh of relief he breaths out mirroring Harry’s own feelings at finally being here again.

Harry knows that their choice had been the right one, that it was likely the reason they’d been able to survive the war, but there are years and years they’ll never get back. They have one another again now though, and that’s more than Harry’d ever dreamed of getting when he was sixteen and deciding to give up the one thing that made him happy. So, he decides, it doesn’t matter what happened before. All that matters is this, right now.

Harry’s tongue pushes insistently into Draco’s mouth, and Draco reaches one hand up to Harry’s jaw. The other, however, is held out to the side, trying not to spill the contents of the coffee cup.

“Put your fucking coffee down,” Harry growls against Draco’s mouth. “So I can push you down and snog you properly.”
“Oh,” Draco says, pulling back. “I forgot. It’s not coffee— I got it for you.” He holds it out to Harry. “Too much sugar, too much milk, and a dash of lemon because you prefer it that way when you’re unhappy, and I wasn’t sure how you’d be when I found you.”

Harry stares at the cup, and then looks up at Draco. “You know how I take my tea?” he whispers.

Draco gives a careless shrug and smiles. “That’s what someone who gives a shit does, right?” he says. “They remember the important stuff. Like how you take your tea.”

And Harry doesn't know what to do with the rush of affection he feels for Draco at that moment, so he leans in and kisses him like it’s the first time again. The tea probably spills, but that doesn’t matter, because Draco’s hands are wrapped around him, and he’s kissing Harry back like he never wants to stop, and Harry’s quite certain that he doesn’t ever want to either. And he knows, he knows, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that this is a moment he’ll never forget.

End Notes

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