You open always (petal by petal)

by birdsofshore

Summary

Harry’s not the kind of person who pays for sex. He really isn’t. Until he is.

Notes

Bixgirl1, I was equal parts delighted and intimidated to receive my assignment to write for you. Your sign up was a treasure trove of inspiration and I dearly hope you find plenty to enjoy here.

Thank you so much to my betas, lq_traintracks and dicta_contrion, for their extraordinary patience, kindness, and skill. Any remaining mistakes are entirely down to me. Thank you also to the mods for their support and their tireless work running this beloved fest.

The title comes from e.e. cummings’ poem, somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond.
See the end of the work for more notes.
Harry’s breath curled into the air in white plumes as he crossed the street, and he pushed his hands deeper into the pockets of his jeans. He’d had one drink too many to Apparate, and besides, he liked the walk from the Dumbledore Arms back to Grimmauld Place. It took him past a shabby cinema with peeling posters on display, a motorbike shop which Harry secretly regarded as the original source of Sirius’s bike, and then... then there were two routes he could take. The first, and most direct, took him past a disused bus garage and some grotty-looking flats. The second was a bit of a detour, to be honest, but Harry sometimes walked that way anyway, past some offices and a laundromat until he came to the street where neon signs flashed outside a string of little bars and shops.

His pulse quickened a little as he turned the corner, but he cast his eyes down at the pavement, not letting himself look. Not yet.

It was stupid to feel this way, this thrilling mixture of nerves and excitement, and the sharp little twist of shame beneath. He was only walking home; he wasn’t going to do anything, even if one of the boys called out to him, as had happened in the past. Harry wondered, not for the first time, if they knew – if they could tell, just from looking, that he sometimes thought about men.

He let his eyes flick up ahead of him briefly. There were often three or four young guys dotted along the street, but tonight there was only one, under a street lamp which cast a pool of light around him. A hot shiver danced along Harry’s spine and he turned his eyes down again. Past the kebab shop, then another glance to the end of the street. The boy was tall, lean, his jeans tight and black, only a thin t-shirt stretched over his torso despite the chill of the night air. Harry looked a little longer this time, long enough to take in the suggestive pose, the way he leaned back against the wall with his hips jutting forward.

Harry imagined his own steps slowing down, thought of himself stopping beneath the street light without trying to hide the fact that he was looking. The way he would let his eyes linger on the boy’s narrow frame, before asking, “How much?”

Harry’s heart thumped guiltily in his chest, and he glanced around to see if anyone else was about, but there was nothing wrong in walking down the street. He would never actually do any of the things he sometimes thought about. He would never take this boy home, have him stand before Harry while he slowly peeled off the tight shirt, unzipped the clinging jeans and eased them down over the boy’s skinny hips...

No. Harry wouldn’t do that. It seemed wrong – it was wrong, surely – buying another person, as though they were an object for sale. Doing whatever you wanted with them, just using them for your own pleasure. Harry’s skin prickled all over with heat, and he closed his eyes for a second, to chase the image away. No. He knew all about being used, and he wasn’t the kind of person who would treat someone that way. He was a trainee Auror, for fuck’s sake - his job was to protect people, not prey on them...

Harry was only a few yards away now. He looked over at the slim figure again. Merlin, this boy was beautiful – rangy and elegant, and the lamp gleamed on his pale skin, the halo of his silvery hair, like a model on a runway. There was something so striking about him: striking, and familiar, and–

The boy adjusted his position against the wall, and Harry saw the outline of the Dark Mark, standing out sharply against the milk-white of his arm. Harry felt a jolt of adrenaline in his chest and at the same moment, the boy turned his head at last. Of course he was familiar. It was Draco Malfoy,
dressed in Muggle clothing. Draco Malfoy, looking so fucking provocative, so perfectly desirable, that the shock of it made Harry stop in his tracks.

Dismay flickered over Malfoy’s face, then his eyes hardened. “I suppose you’ve come to gloat.”

“What?” Harry’s voice sounded strange. “No.”

“What, then? What do you want?” Malfoy looked at him through narrowed eyes and Harry couldn’t stop the flush that was sweeping up from his throat.

“I was just walking home.” Harry didn’t know why it sounded so unlikely. It was true. “I live that way, OK?” He gestured. “Kind of... over there.”

There was something tense about Malfoy’s body, as if he was ready for a fight, ready for anything, and his eyes swept over Harry with a calculating gaze that made Harry want to get out of there, fast.

“I’ve got to go,” he said, but Malfoy put out a hand to stop him.

“No,” he said, and his expression was different now, it was knowing, and Harry didn’t like it at all. “You came to look, didn’t you?” Malfoy went on.

“No!” Harry said, and it bloody came out sounding far too emphatic. He should just leave, should just walk away, and–

“You came to see what’s on offer.” Malfoy was watching carefully, looking for Harry’s reaction and nodding at what he saw. “Yes.”

Harry opened his mouth to deny it, but Malfoy’s mouth was curling into a mocking smile and it made Harry feel things – things that were hatefully familiar and horribly new at the same time. Malfoy’s expression was so tormented, it had Harry wanting to reach for his wand, but he also couldn’t help noticing the fullness of Malfoy’s lips, and the promise contained in his lowered lids.

“Well, have a good look, Potter. Everything you see here is for sale.” Malfoy leaned back against the wall again, tilting his head to one side, and it was a bloody good job he had never looked this way in school, because Harry didn’t think he would have made it through sixth year without going insane. A flash from a nearby sign – OPEN 24 HOURS – reflected on Malfoy’s high cheekbones, making them bloom neon pink. The light gleamed on his hair, on the swell of his bicep, on the white t-shirt, throbbing with colour and a seedy sort of glamour.

Harry opened his mouth to deny it, but Malfoy’s mouth was curling into a mocking smile and it made Harry feel things – things that were hatefully familiar and horribly new at the same time. Malfoy’s expression was so tormenting, it had Harry wanting to reach for his wand, but he also couldn’t help noticing the fullness of Malfoy’s lips, and the promise contained in his lowered lids.

“Because I’m good at it.” He let his gaze rake over Harry’s face. “Very good.”

Harry tried to keep his face neutral, but really, that was a large part of the problem. He could fully believe that Malfoy was good at his job. He had no trouble imagining it at all.

But Malfoy hadn’t finished. He held out his forearm to Harry, his fist clenched, the black lines of the skull and snake as stark and sinister as ever, and Harry had to fight the urge to flinch away from it.

“And you know what?” Malfoy said, his voice edged with bitterness. “It’s rather hard to get a
Ministry job with this on your arm.”

Harry looked at Malfoy, the haughty way he held his chin, the way his Adam’s apple bobbed sharply as he swallowed.

“Right,” Harry said. There was quite a lot he could say about that, but it didn’t seem likely to lead to anything constructive. He hadn’t seen Malfoy since the trials, since the Ministry had requisitioned the Manor and the Malfoys had apparently gone to ground. He’d wondered, once or twice, what they were all up to, but bloody hell, he’d never dreamed–

“Seen enough yet?” Malfoy asked. “I must say, I’d never have guessed you’d have to pay for it, Potter–”

Harry’s hands tightened into fists in his pockets. “I’m going now,” Harry told him.

He could feel Malfoy’s eyes on him as he walked away. “I’ll see you again,” Malfoy called, tauntingly, but Harry didn’t look back.

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It was just after eight p.m. and Harry could feel every one of the sixty hours of training he’d done that week. He rolled his aching shoulders as he walked, feeling the left one settle into place with a click, as it often did since getting on the wrong end of a Confringo during a raid. He needed the walk home to unwind, but as soon as he got there, he was going to shower, maybe have a couple of beers, and watch Malawi thrash Brazil at Quidditch.

Grimmauld Place had never quite seemed like home, despite Harry’s best intentions. After the war, it always seemed easier to spend time at the Burrow, or, after Ron and Hermione got married, at their place, a scruffy old farmhouse near Oxford that glowed with warmth and magic and comfort. Grimmauld Place felt unwelcoming in comparison, with a sad, neglected air, and sometimes Harry had the weirdest feeling that the house resented him being there, that it was somehow disappointed in him, But he was trying to make the best of it. He really was. He would finally put up that picture this weekend, the one Hagrid had given him for his birthday, of dragons flying at sunset. He would ask Neville round for a meal – Harry hadn’t seen him for weeks. And he would–

The brittle, splintering sound of breaking glass made Harry’s head snap around to the block of flats on the other side of the street. A woman threw open a window and stuck her head out, scanning the street before she spotted Harry, still in his uniform.

“Oh! Hurry!” She sounded breathless. “I think they’re killing each other.”

Harry’s wand flew to his hand, and he crossed the street at a run. “Where? How many?” He should call for backup, really. But by then it might be too late.

Her face was pinched and anxious. “Next door to me. Just the young chap who lives there and another one, I think. He’s always noisy, but not like this.”

Harry took the stairs two at a time, pausing on the landing of the third floor to get his bearings, until a muffled thud and a groan from inside one of the flats let him know where he was needed. The door was locked, but with a burst of intense focus, he managed to push the wards aside for long enough to allow him to Apparate in.

Inside, possessions were strewn about, a table lay on its side, and two wizards were grappling with each other. Harry froze for a moment, staring at the compelling sight of Draco Malfoy pressed up against the wall, wearing only an open shirt and his underwear. Then Harry took in Malfoy’s furious
expression and the other man’s hand wrapped around Malfoy’s throat.

“Auror Department,” Harry yelled, and the man started to turn, wand drawn.

One of his meaty hands still lay around Malfoy’s narrow throat, possessive and brutal, and something inside Harry roared into life. A spell leapt from Harry’s wand – a Stunner – then another, and another, fast and satisfying, and as the first one hit, the man’s eyes rolled right back into his head.

Malfoy lurched to the left, away from the path of the spells, and it was a good job he did, for Harry must have used more force than he intended. His target’s body fell to the floor in a boneless slump, and when Harry’s final jet of red light hit the wall of the flat it blew a hole right through the bricks, blasting them apart with a sickening crunch of rubble.

Harry whipped around, on the alert for further attackers, but the flat was empty except for Malfoy, who stood panting, his eyes a little wild and his chest heaving with exertion.

“What the bloody hell?” Malfoy asked.

Harry stepped towards the unconscious wizard and checked his pulse. “His wand was drawn. I needed to immobilise him.”

“Yeah, but…” Malfoy gestured at the place where the wall used to be. He looked a little bit impressed, but mostly pissed off.

“He was going to cast.” Harry drew his brows together. He didn’t quite know why he’d reacted with such force, only that the sight of the man’s hand on Malfoy like that had been intolerable. “He was choking you, for god’s sake.” He looked around at the ruin of the flat. A curtain fluttered at the broken window, while a bottle lay on its side, spreading a dark, sticky stain over the carpet. “What happened here? Whose flat is this?”

Malfoy ran a shaky hand through his hair. “I live here. We had a disagreement.”

“I can see that.” Harry operated the charm on his belt to call for backup. “What was it about? Who is he?”

Malfoy tilted his chin. “I didn’t get a name.”

“Did he break in?”

Malfoy shook his head. He pulled at his shirt, drawing the material together over his chest. “I met him about an hour ago.”

Harry felt himself flush. Of course. The man was one of Malfoy’s customers. “So you brought him back here for…” Harry didn’t want to think about what they’d been doing. “How did the fight start?”

Malfoy sounded disdainful. “Quite often, people think they’ll leave without handing over the Galleons.” He picked up a pair of jeans from the floor and started pulling them on.

Harry frowned. Was Malfoy really saying it was normal for people to try to cheat him? “They do what?”

“They fuck me and then don’t pay, Potter. It’s not the kind of thing I’d want to call the Aurors for, know what I mean?” Malfoy asked, as he fastened the jeans with a wriggle. His hipbones jutted out above the waistband, and Harry wondered when he’d last had a decent meal. “Anyway, that’s easily
fixed…” Malfoy bent over the prone figure and put a hand in the man’s robes.

“Malfoy.” It came out very gruff. “You can’t take his gold while he’s unconscious.”

Malfoy straightened up, a money pouch in his hand. “If I suck someone’s cock for half an hour, Potter, I expect to be paid in return.”

The image flashed into Harry’s head, unwanted but inescapable. Malfoy, on his knees, his cheeks hollowed… Merlin. Harry grimaced and shook his head.

“What?” Malfoy looked indignant. “I’m only taking what he owes me.”

Harry would imagine Malfoy charged pretty fancy prices for a blow job. It was only fair, though, if the man had got what he wanted…

But as Malfoy undid the pouch, his face screwed up. “Fuck. The bastard’s only got a handful of Knuts.” He threw the purse to the ground.

Harry’s temples were starting to throb. He was so tired – too tired for any of this.

“I need to get home.” He nodded at the wizard on the floor. “Someone will be along to take him down to the cells. Where will you go?”

“Go?”

“You can’t stay here.” Harry gestured at the wall.

Malfoy shrugged. “I’ll patch it up a bit.”

“It won’t hold, Malfoy. Walls and windows – that’s complex spellwork. You can’t stay here tonight; it was snowing earlier.”

Malfoy’s shirt still hung open, and he rubbed his arms as if feeling the cold for the first time. Something about him looked slightly lost, but then, Harry supposed his evening hadn’t quite gone to plan.

“Get someone in to fix it tomorrow, and then claim it back from the Ministry.” Harry knew that was the right procedure with this kind of thing. Although he wasn’t sure if it applied to damage caused by trainee Aurors who weren’t even on duty at the time…

Well. If the Ministry wouldn’t pay for it, Harry would.

But Malfoy’s brow was furrowed. Of course, Harry thought – it didn’t take a genius to work out that Malfoy might not have the money to pay a Charms specialist up front.

“Do you rent this flat?” Harry asked. “Your landlord should deal with repairs. Tell him to send the bill to us.”

“Oh. Right.” Malfoy looked around at the debris and bit his lip. “The landlord, he’ll pay, will he?”

Harry felt guilt settling, clammy and wretched, in his stomach. “Get it seen to tomorrow, Malfoy, it should be fine. You can stay with friends or something, yeah?”

Malfoy let out a sarcastic laugh. “Yeah. Of course, there are loads of people wanting to let me move in with them.”
Hell. Robards was always on at Harry about the rules, but there was nothing about this in the 
trainee’s handbook.

“It’s fine.” Malfoy tilted his chin. “I’ve slept out before. I’m not bad with a warming charm.” He 
looked very young, all of a sudden. His shirt still hung open and Harry could see the ridges of his 
ribcage.

Bloody hell. “Look.” Harry was going to fix this and go home. “It was my spell that did most of it. 
I’ll get you a room at a hotel.”

Malfoy gave him a look of disgust and began to fasten his shirt. “I don’t need your charity.”

Harry tried not to stare too obviously at the run-down flat. He took in the messy, narrow bed in one 
corner, the tiny kitchen with one gas ring. You could probably fit Malfoy’s whole flat into one of the 
bedrooms at Grimmauld Place. It suddenly seemed obscene for Harry to be living there all by 
himself, rattling around like a marble in a tin.

“OK. Well…” Harry took a deep breath. “Come back to mine,” he said.

Malfoy looked surprised, but pleased. “Oh,” he said. His hand stilled on his button, and his eyes 
flicked up towards Harry’s, appraisingly. “All right,” he said, his voice a touch softer than Harry had 
ever heard it before. “I knew you’d ask me, Potter. When you’d had a chance to think it over.”

“No, no, no.” Harry put up a hand. “I just mean a place to sleep, Malfoy, for god’s sake.”

“Yeah. I need a place to sleep. And in return, I don’t mind doing something for you.” The way he 
spoke made it all sound so easy. He dropped his voice. “Nobody has to know.”

“No. I didn’t mean that.”

“It’s OK,” Malfoy walked towards Harry and stopped, one hand on his hip. Harry could smell his 
cologne, something fresh and enticing, could see the peak of his nipple through the thin shirt and the 
way his mouth glistened as his tongue darted out to wet his lips.

“I know you want to. I’ve known since I saw you on Duke Street.” Malfoy’s words were confiding, 
intimate, and for a moment Harry thought about how it would be to just take what Malfoy was 
offering.

“You’re wrong. I don’t want to.” Harry’s palms were prickling with sweat. Malfoy was much too 
close, and Harry had a horrible feeling that he might do something stupid.

“Everyone wants to, Potter.” Malfoy raised his hand, reaching out, and it felt like everything was 
going in slow motion. Harry imagined the touch of Malfoy’s cool fingers on his cheek, on his jaw, 
slipping down the line of his throat and under his collar. It would feel so good, too good, and then 
anything might happen, if Harry let it–

His wand was in his hand again without his knowing how it got there. “Don’t,” Harry gritted out. 

Malfoy stood perfectly still.

“Don’t touch me,” Harry said quietly.

Malfoy dropped his hand. He spoke quietly, too, but now it held the edge of a threat. “All right.” 
There were splashes of pink forming on his pale cheeks and he jutted his chin towards Harry. “But I 
don’t need rescuing.”
“It’s not–” Harry shook his head in frustration. He took a step back and found he could breathe more easily with a little distance between him and Malfoy. Part of him wanted to tell Malfoy to forget it, to go and sleep in the gutter for all he cared. But there was no way he could let Malfoy head out for the night with nowhere to go. He’d get robbed, or stabbed, or worse. It was Harry’s fault, and he was going to put it right. “Come to mine. Just for a bit. There’s loads of space.”

Malfoy looked doubtful, studying Harry’s face. He was clearly reluctant, but Harry thought he could still be talked into it.

“We can find a way for you to pay me back,” Harry went on, and Malfoy narrowed his eyes, as if weighing up his options. “I mean, it’s not necessary, from my point of view,” Harry told him. “But if it bothers you, or something.”

Malfoy took a moment to digest this, then gave a curt nod. “Fine, then,” he said. “Let’s go.”

Harry let out a breath. “Do you want to, you know, get your things?”

Malfoy slipped his feet into a pair of shoes and scooped up a cloak that was draped across the sofa. “This’ll do. I’ll come back for some stuff in the morning.” He seemed to take a moment to gather himself together, then stood up straight and held his arm out with a mocking smile. “Lead the way, Potter.”

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It wasn’t the smoothest Side-Along Harry had ever performed; Malfoy was thrown against him as they landed in the hallway of Grimmauld Place, and took a moment to find his balance. Malfoy’s body was strong, as well as skinny, and something else, too… Malfoy felt alert, every muscle tensed in readiness.

Malfoy straightened up, but he was standing much too close, the space too narrow for two people, unless those people knew each other far better than Harry and Malfoy did. They weren’t touching anymore, but Harry could still feel the heat of Malfoy’s body pressing against him, such a contrast from the chilled skin of Malfoy’s arms.

“Here we are,” Harry said, taking a step back and wondering what felt different about Grimmauld Place. There was something about it, something new, and he didn’t know what it was, exactly, but–Malfoy’s mouth twitched into a smile. “Here we are,” he repeated, and unless Harry was imagining it, his voice was slightly derisive, and Harry forgot what he had been thinking about.

“Well, come on,” Harry said, and stumped along the threadbare carpet. He kept meaning to get new carpets fitted, but somehow it had never happened. He was intending to show Malfoy into the drawing room, but at the last minute changed his mind and took the stairs down to the kitchen. It would feel less awkward down there, surely, round the scrubbed wooden table, with a kettle boiling on the ring.

The kitchen didn’t look too bad, with the gas lamps lit, and the damp smell was far less noticeable in this part of the house. It was one of the places Harry actually enjoyed spending time. He busied himself with mugs and teabags, and then turned to find Malfoy looking rather weary, still standing in the doorway.

“Sit down,” Harry told him. “I’ll make something to eat.”

Malfoy hesitated, his eyes wary. “Don’t trouble yourself,” he said. “I can just go to bed, if you show me where to sleep.”
Harry looked at him, taking in the dark circles under his eyes, the hollows of his cheeks and the narrowness of his wrists where the bone jutted out.

“Sit down,” he repeated. “I’m just going to have some toast. You need to eat something; you probably didn’t get time earlier…” He trailed off, thinking about what exactly Malfoy had been busy doing that evening, heat swarming over his skin. Harry turned his back again and got out the breadknife. “Toast,” he said, firmly.

It turned out Malfoy could really pack it away when it came to food. He made short work of four slices of Harry’s finest doorstop toast, thickly spread with butter and marmalade. Harry leaned against the counter and munched his own slices steadily. This was weird. Draco Malfoy was sitting in his kitchen. Eating toast. Fucking weird. Malfoy gave Harry a lopsided smile as he licked a bit of butter off his thumb, and Harry’s stomach did a horrible kind of flip. The house still felt off in some way Harry couldn’t pin down. Maybe he was imagining it – something in the walls, in the air, a kind of soft thrumming all around. It wasn’t a bad feeling – the opposite, really – but it made him feel unsettled.

Malfoy had regained a little colour in his cheeks, and he gulped gratefully at the hot tea Harry placed in front of him until it was gone, setting down the mug and trying to hide a long yawn.

“Bed, then?” Harry asked, and could have bitten his own tongue off at the way that sounded. Malfoy didn’t say anything, but Harry saw one eyebrow flicker. The other interpretation of Harry’s words seemed to hang in the air between them, and Harry swore he could feel Grimmauld Place give a purr of interest.

“I’ll show you where you’ll be sleeping,” Harry said firmly, before either Malfoy or the house could get the wrong idea.

As they climbed the stairs to the first floor, Harry’s heart sank a bit. This part looked especially run down. Harry had repainted these walls after moving in, but you would never have known it. They seemed to have turned out exactly the same grimey, faded yellow colour as before. Harry had also prised off the most grotesque of the house-elf heads from the walls, but there was one he hadn’t been able to shift, a hapless elf whose plaque bore the name of Slanker, and as they passed it, Harry heard Malfoy draw a sharp breath.

“Hell’s teeth. This is Great-Aunt Walburga’s house!”

Harry stopped on the landing. Malfoy was wide-eyed, looking around. “It is, isn’t it? This is the Black family home.”

“Yeah, it is, but don’t keep screeching or you’ll wake the old bigot up. Her portrait’s still upstairs; if you try to take it out of the house she yells like she’s being murdered and nothing on earth will shut her up. Believe me, I have tried.”

“Merlin, Potter, what have you done to the place?”

“I didn’t do anything. It was already in a right fucking state when Sirius left it to me,” Harry told him.

Malfoy stared at the peeling paint and the tide mark of damp on the wall outside the bathroom.

“I’ve improved it. A lot,” Harry added firmly, thinking of the endless Boggarts he had chased away, the persistent leak in the roof he had finally patched up, and the Bundimun infestation that had eaten its way through half of the third floor bathroom before Harry got a witch in to see to it.
“This belonged to my family.” Malfoy sounded accusing, which was a bloody cheek, really.

“Well, it doesn’t now. It belongs to me.” It wasn’t like Harry had asked for his godfather to die and leave him a dirty great useless house, for god’s sake, but that’s how it was. “Anyway, if it still belonged to your family, it would have been seized by the Ministry after the war. Like—” Harry broke off. He had been about to say, Like Malfoy Manor. But maybe that wasn’t the most tactful subject to bring up. Not with Malfoy standing there looking all fierce and offended. Harry wouldn’t have mentioned it at all if Malfoy wasn’t being such a pain in the arse about everything.

The drawing room door was ajar, and Malfoy peered into the darkness. “I remember now. There was a stuffed Grindylow in a case in this room,” he said with a shudder. “Used to scare the shit out of me.” He turned back to Harry with an suspicious look. “It’s not still there, is it?”

Harry shook his head. “A lot of stuff was cleared out before I inherited it. I’m still trying to shift the rest of it.” He thought of the mummified Lethifold in the loft.

Malfoy wrinkled his forehead. “I haven’t been here since I was… I think I must have been four or five. When Walburga died. There were sort of black and grey drapes hanging all over the place, for mourning. All stiff and cobwebby. Looked even more ghastly than it does now.”

Harry had had enough of this; he didn’t need to be told what a mess it was, for god’s sake. “Look, do you actually want to stay the night here, or were you just planning to hang about on the landing for a while insulting my house?”

Malfoy looked as though he was struggling not to bite back with a retort. He blinked, then lifted his chin. “Yes, yes, I’ll stay.” He pulled the drawing room door firmly closed, making sure it clicked shut. “As long as there are no stuffed things in my room,” he said firmly.

Harry led him up to the third floor. He thought Malfoy could have the guest room with the pale grey, kind of silvery wallpaper – it was crap, because all of the rooms were crap, but maybe it was a bit less crap than some of the others. It was large, had a decent view of the garden, and quite a nice fireplace. Not that Harry cared what Malfoy thought anyway, but there was no point giving him more things to complain about. He swung the door open and stood aside to let Malfoy go in.

Malfoy didn’t say anything at first, but he looked like he was trying not to wrinkle his nose. OK, so it smelled a bit fusty, but Malfoy’s flat was hardly a palace, Harry thought.

Harry flicked his wand towards the large, lopsided wardrobe, opening the doors and directing sheets and blankets to fly out and unfold themselves in mid air, spreading neatly over the mattress. A couple of lumpy pillows followed, and the bed was ready.


Malfoy was still silent.

“Unlike your flat,” Harry told him, just to make it clear.

Malfoy’s jaw tightened, and he shot Harry a resentful look, but all he said, rather stiffly, was, “Yes, thank you, Potter, it’s fine.” He sank down on the bed and Harry noticed again how bone-tired he looked.

“I’ll let you get some sleep.”

It had somehow become rather late, and instead of doing any of the things he had looked forward to
doing after work, Harry got undressed and got into bed himself.

The skimpy curtains didn’t reach all the way across the windows in Harry’s room, and tonight the sky was clear and dark. As was his habit, Harry picked out the constellation of Orion, then followed the line of Orion’s belt to find the twinkling Dog Star.

*Sirius*. The brightest star in the night sky.

Harry propped his hands behind his head and stared, unsmiling. He remembered the time when Sirius had been the brightest, the best, the most dazzling thing Harry could have dreamed of. He had promised Harry a life together, a longed-for future, and then....

Harry screwed his eyes shut and felt tears pricking behind his eyelids. The worst of it, the actual worst thing to deal with was that sometimes Harry felt so angry with Sirius, even now, for sodding off and leaving him. For dying, for bloody dying, just like everyone else. He hadn’t been so special after all.

The only thing he had left Harry was this place – a house he couldn’t seem to get on with. He had thought, in the past, about moving on. Selling up and finding a new home, a fresh start. But it felt like giving up. He felt he owed it to Sirius, to the house itself, to keep trying, but he didn’t think he would ever understand Grimmauld Place.

As he began to drift off, quite done in by the week at work and the events of the evening, he felt the house thrumming gently to itself again. It was such an odd sensation, not at all like the usual sullen reluctance that Harry felt every time he came home. He lay there for a while, suspended between consciousness and dreams, and suddenly he was able to put his finger on what was different. Grimmauld Place felt expectant. That was it, he could definitely feel it, in a way that made the hairs on the back of his neck stir.

What on earth is it playing at now? Harry wondered. It made him feel wary, like the house might be up to something. *Bugger*, he thought. And, *I should probably tell Hermione about this*. But before he could think very much more, exhaustion pulled him under and he slept the sleep of the dog-tired.

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In the morning, the house was silent as Harry got ready for work, and the whole thing – half-destroying Malfoy’s flat with a spell, then bringing him home and feeding him toast – seemed so unlikely that Harry started to wonder if he had dreamed it all. There were no answers to be had from the third floor landing, and the door behind which Malfoy might have stayed the night was a little bit open anyway, so in the end Harry just pushed it a couple more inches and looked inside.

He noticed two things at once: first, that the bed, once a rather meagre double, was now twice its usual size.

Second was the fact that Malfoy was laid out across it, on his front and apparently fast asleep. His hair lay in a soft sweep on the pillow, and his bare legs stretched over the mattress, the sheet having ridden up as far as his knees. Harry just stood and stared, his eyes travelling over Malfoy’s body almost against his will, lingering on the exposed skin, the lean muscle of his calves, and the shape of what was hidden under the bedclothes.

*He’s naked*, Harry thought, the idea somehow fixing him to the spot. He could see the smooth skin of Malfoy’s shoulders and the ridge of his shoulder blades where they peeked out above the sheet. Harry knew he shouldn’t be looking, but he couldn’t seem to stop himself. Even the nape of Malfoy’s neck was fascinating, the hair clipped very short there, making Harry wonder how it would
be to run his fingers over it. And lower down, he could practically see the shape of Malfoy’s arse, covered only by thin cotton.

_Fuck._ Harry pulled his eyes away, angry with himself. Angry with Malfoy for looking this way, for being naked in Harry’s stupid house. The walls felt like they were purring again, a low ticklish hum of interest, and Harry hated Malfoy being here like this, in fact it was the worst idea he’d ever had to invite him. When Harry let himself look at Malfoy again, Malfoy was lying on his side with his eyes open, damn, damn, damn it to hell.

“Morning, Potter,” Malfoy said, and his eyes were horribly knowing, as though he could tell exactly how long Harry had been standing there looking.

“What did you do to the bloody bed, Malfoy?” Harry snapped, because obviously that was the main problem. He’d been staring because he was trying to work out how Malfoy had gone to sleep on a perfectly normal double mattress, and woken up on some kind of super-luxury-king sized affair.

“The bed?” Malfoy asked, propping himself up on one arm to look at it with an amused expression. “Bit of an improvement, isn’t it?”

“You can’t just come in here and start Transfiguring stuff to suit yourself, you know.”

“I wasn’t actually aware I had done it, but…” Malfoy lifted pale arms over his head in a stretch, revealing a dusting of fine hair in his armpits. “Whatever happened, I had a fantastic night’s sleep.”

Malfoy had a sodding nerve, making himself at home, changing the furniture around and all the rest of it. He did seem to have made a good job of it, though. The bed looked a whole lot more inviting than Harry’s was, and the room didn’t smell stale any more; it smelt of fresh linen and warm skin. But Malfoy had no right to be lying there so perfectly at ease, as if he couldn’t care less whether he was dressed or naked, as if he had never felt so at home as stretched out on Harry’s sheets…

“I was thinking,” Malfoy said. He dropped one hand to his chest, where the sheet was draped. “About what you said about me paying you back.” His fingers brushed gently to and fro over his own skin, as though lazily scratching an itch.

“I said you didn’t need to,” Harry growled.

“I know.” Malfoy wrinkled his nose. “But really, it’s only fair… some kind of payment, you know, for letting me stay. It would make me feel a lot better about it.” He took the sheet between his fingers, keeping his eyes on Harry’s the whole time. Harry could feel beads of perspiration on his top lip. If Malfoy pulled down the sheet, Harry would…

He would…

_Fuck._ He didn’t exactly have a plan right now.

But Malfoy didn’t move the sheet at all. Instead, he just kept watching Harry with his eyes half-closed, looking as if he really, actually wanted Harry to say yes, as if it would make him happy or something. He was looking at Harry as if they were sharing a secret, like they both knew that Malfoy could throw back the sheet at any moment, and that he would be completely naked underneath. That he could just peel the sheet away, and Harry would be able to see everything, all of that creamy skin, the lean curves and the tight muscle, right there on that massive bloody bed, every inch of Malfoy, waiting for Harry.

The room felt too hot, drops of sweat gathering at Harry’s temples, and now the house was doing that thing again, the same but worse, so that Harry could feel the walls pulsing with some kind of
“So if you think of anything,” Malfoy continued. “About how I could do it?”, and the way Malfoy spoke made it sound like a challenge, like exactly the kind of thing that Harry would do without thinking twice.

And oh, Harry could so easily let himself do this, could so easily take advantage of what Malfoy was offering. How simple it would be, to lie down next to Malfoy and let himself do everything he wanted. Harry didn’t know how to do very much, but it wouldn’t matter, would it? Not if Malfoy was doing this to pay Harry back. Merlin, Harry wouldn’t even need to touch, just looking would be enough.

Malfoy lay back on the pillow, his eyes daring Harry to make a move. It would be so good, wouldn’t it, and Malfoy had said that nobody needed to know. Harry wet his lips, and then as Malfoy tilted his head a little, Harry saw the shadow of a bruise on his neck. It was a fat oval, the size and shape of a thumbprint, and Harry realised with a twist deep in his guts that it must have been from that bastard customer of Malfoy’s.

God, what was Harry thinking? This was sick, totally sick. There had to be something seriously wrong with him, coming in to leer at Malfoy while he was a guest in Harry’s house. Malfoy had no choice about any of this, did he? He didn’t have any money, but he still felt he had to pay. So he offered Harry the only thing he could give him – sex. And Harry was fucked up enough to actually consider it.

A wave of anger and self-hatred washed over him. “You stayed here one night, that’s fine,” Harry told him, and his voice came out much more roughly than he’d intended. “Now you need to get your flat fixed up, or find somewhere else.” He sounded disgusted, and he was – at his own weakness.

Malfoy looked for a moment like Harry had Hexed him. He sat up, pulling the sheet up over his chest, and his face took on the haughty look Harry had seen before. “Of course. That’s what I was planning.”

Harry let out a sigh. “Good.”

“Your landlord can’t chuck you out for an accident.”

“Can’t he? Great. That’ll be very comforting to remember, when it happens. But that’s fine,” Malfoy said sourly. “I’ll be glad to be out of that old place.”

Harry felt another lurch of guilt. “Hold on. Yesterday, you said–”

Malfoy didn’t meet Harry’s eyes. “I’ve remembered someone I can stay with. It’s no problem,” he said, too quickly to be convincing.

Harry was pretty sure he was lying, but he didn’t see what the fuck he could do about it. There was a throbbing tension in his temples, and he needed to get to work. “Look, I’m not saying you can’t stay a bit longer, but–”

What was it Harry wanted to say? *Don’t sleep naked?*

*Don’t look at me that way?*
Don’t have those legs and those eyes and that mouth and–

Ugh. The whole thing was impossible.

“It’s probably best if you go,” Harry said, and the words felt like cold, hard pebbles in his mouth. Malfoy just nodded, his hair flopping forwards onto his face.

“Go and get your flat sorted,” Harry continued. “Your landlord doesn’t have to know. I can pay for the Charms to fix the damage—”

“No.” Malfoy spat the words out. “I told you, I don’t want handouts.”

Harry let out a short huff of breath. Malfoy was so bloody stubborn. “All right then. But if you needed to stay another night while you’re working things out…” He swallowed hard. “You can, OK? Don’t sleep on the streets.”

“I’ll be fine, Potter. I’ll be gone in five minutes.”

“I’m late for work.” Harry turned to go, then turned back. “Eat something before you go.”

Malfoy waved a dismissive hand.

“Just eat something, Malfoy.” Harry frowned. “Everyone needs to eat. There’s bread and eggs, probably some bacon and stuff. I always buy too much, it’ll only go off otherwise. Have what you like.”

Malfoy didn’t answer, but reached for the shirt which was lying on the floor.

“I’ll see you… sometime,” Harry told him.

“Yeah, right,” Malfoy said, his face twisted into something scornful.

Harry’s fists were clenched at his sides as he left. That was the last time he would try to help Malfoy out, that was for certain.

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“You all right, mate?” Ron bent over Harry as he lay on the mat, winded.

“Yeah,” Harry managed to pant out.

“You’re all over the place today,” Ron told him. “That Propellio should never have got under your guard.”

Harry pushed himself up on one arm and took some ragged breaths. “Just lost focus. I’ll be fine in a minute.”

Auror Travis walked over and stood looking down at Harry. “Take a break, Potter. You’re duelling like a piece of shit. Come back when you can block a first year charm without hitting the mat.”

Harry took another shallow breath, his eyebrows drawing together. Bloody Travis. Harry didn’t want special treatment – but the trainee supervisor pulled him up on every little thing so that Harry had to be twice as good as everyone else. He got to his feet, ignoring the dull pain in his ribs, and brushed down his scarlet practice robes. “I’m fine. I don’t need a break,” he said.

“Less of the attitude.” Travis regarded him with dislike. “OK, then… you pair with McCarthy.
Expulso drill. Ten each, then swap. You’d better make sure you don’t lose concentration, Potter, or we’ll be scraping bits of you off the walls.”

Merlin. But at least McCarthy wasn’t so bad, flashing Harry a sympathetic smile as she joined him at the mats. Somehow Harry managed to get through the forty minutes until lunch without losing any major parts of himself, although his ears were ringing and he reckoned he was going to feel like he’d taken a Bludger to the ribs for a day or so.

He and Ron took the lift to the canteen and joined the queue of hungry Ministry workers.

“So what did Robards want when he called you in first thing? He seemed pretty pissed off.” Ron accepted a bowl of soup from the serving wizard. “Pumpkin and leek again? That’s the third time this week.”

Harry suppressed a sigh. Surprise surprise, it turned out that according to Robards, going alone to answer the cry for help last night had not been at all the right thing to do.

“You ask to be treated like everyone else, and then you go and pull this sort of shit. You’re a bloody trainee, Potter, if you happened to have forgotten – and even Senior Aurors work with a partner.”

“Some procedural crap,” Harry said, taking a plate heaped high with lasagne.

“Not again. What was it this time? Oh.” Ron had reached the witch doling out chips. “Yes, please, Ange.” He gave her a smile evidently intended to charm. “Few more?”

Rather than answer, Harry moved along quickly, past bowls of rhubarb crumble and jugs of custard. By the time they’d filled their trays and found a vacant table, Ron had thankfully forgotten what they’d been talking about, telling Harry instead all about the match last night and how he’d really missed out by not seeing the way the Malawians had flown.

It wasn’t that Harry didn’t want Ron to know what had happened, exactly... it was just that it hadn’t yet seemed the right moment to tell Ron that Malfoy had ended up naked in Harry’s guest bedroom.

OK, he definitely didn’t want Ron to know.

It was way too complicated to explain. Harry should never have got involved. Except that maybe, if Harry hadn’t stepped in, Malfoy would have been found dead in the morning. Throttled to death by some cheating arsehole, some fucker who had picked Malfoy up, used him for sex, and then didn’t even think him worthy of payment…

Harry sighed. Malfoy would be long gone by the time Harry got home, anyway, and he need never think about it again. He wouldn’t walk that way home any more. Malfoy had made his choices, and none of it was anything to do with Harry–

“Mate?” Ron’s voice cut into his thoughts and Harry realised he’d been staring into space. “Blimey, you’re miles away. What is the matter with you today?”

Harry gave himself a little shake. “Nothing. Just tired.”

“Yeah.” Ron looked at Harry’s plate. “Are you going to eat that? Because if not, I can probably–”

“Oi,” Harry said, pulling the plate closer. Auror training was so intensely physical that their appetites were usually pretty impressive. Today was no different, even if Harry did have things weighing on his mind. “No, I’m having it. Go and chat Angie up if you want seconds.”
Ron pushed his chair back and stood up. “I think I will. You want anything else?”

“Coffee with a shot of Reviving potion, if they’ve got any,” Harry said. “Get through the afternoon.”

“We all need a break. Thank Merlin it’s the weekend, right?”

Harry thought about it. He hadn’t made any firm plans yet, and the prospect of spending more time at Grimmauld Place on his own suddenly made him feel a pang of self-pity in his chest. He forced a smile. “Yeah. Great.”

Ron strolled off towards the counter again, whistling, and Harry turned his attention to his forkful of lukewarm lasagne.

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They finished at five on Fridays, and Harry turned down the offer of drinks at the Cat and Cauldron, taking the Floo straight back to Grimmauld Place instead.

It was worse than he’d expected. The house wasn’t just empty and a bit shabby; it felt heavy with disappointment, and slightly offended, as if Harry had done something to betray it.

*Don’t be ridiculous, Harry,* he imagined Hermione saying. *How can a house feel offended?*

It *did,* though, and it made Harry feel all shifty and uncomfortable. He nearly turned around and went straight out again, but instead squared his shoulders and climbed the stairs to his room to change out of his uniform. It only took a minute to pull on a pair of joggers and an old jumper, but rather than heading down to the kitchen, he paused on the landing and listened.

There was nothing to hear, of course. Harry could tell that Malfoy had gone from the way Grimmauld Place felt, and he had to remind himself he should be relieved to have the house to himself again.

Maybe he should check Malfoy hadn’t done anything else stupid to the room before he left. *Or maybe you just want to see if he’s still there,* a little voice suggested. He climbed the stairs, walking slowly and hesitating outside the silver-grey room before opening the door.

It was completely empty, with everything back to normal, as if Malfoy had never been there. The miserly-looking bed, the smell of neglect. There was certainly no pleasurable hum of anticipation… only the sulky, brooding air of hurt feelings.

“I haven’t *done* anything,” Harry said. It was so bloody unfair. He let the door slam behind him and stomped downstairs to the kitchen, his boots scuffing on the bare treads of the stairs.

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Perdita Tanglefoot was crooning her finest on the WWN, Harry had cracked open a bottle of Harpstring, and the homely smells of roast chicken, rosemary and thyme were spreading through the room. Harry wiped his hands on his apron and sipped at his cold beer. It wasn’t *so* bad here – not all the time. Maybe he would have another go at the hall and stairs this weekend, blast that final house-elf head to bits if that was the only way to get it off, and get some new curtains for his room. Harry gave the gravy another stir. He was lucky to have a house of his own; it could be a hell of a lot worse.

And if it got a little lonely sometimes, well, it was nothing Harry couldn’t handle–
A loud crack startled the hell out of him and he spun around to see a dishevelled Draco Malfoy appear and fall heavily against the kitchen table.

”Shit,” said Malfoy. He had a large leather case with him, rather like an old-fashioned doctor’s bag, and was bleeding profusely from a cut on his cheek.

“What the–?” Harry asked.

“I’m sorry,” Malfoy panted. “Shit,” he repeated. He straightened up, but held onto a chair for support.

“How did you get in?” Harry demanded. There was no way anyone should have been able to Apparate through the wards. “God, you’re bleeding.”

Malfoy put a hand to his face and flinched when he saw the blood.

“Hold on,” Harry said, getting his wand out of his pocket. “Stay still a minute.” It was a nasty gash, but he was able to knit the skin together with a couple of spells.

“I Apparated without thinking,” Malfoy said. “Give me a minute and I’ll go again.”

“But what’s happened? How did you get in?” Harry persisted. An unpleasant suspicion occurred to him. “Did you do something to the wards when you were here last night?”

Malfoy gave him a filthy look. “No, I bloody didn’t. I came here in a panic – I wasn’t thinking straight. My arsehole of a landlord had me at wandpoint, if you want to know.”

“What?” Harry noticed Malfoy’s hands were shaking. “Sit down a minute,” Harry told him, pulling out a chair. “Are you hurt anywhere else?”

Malfoy sank into the chair with relief. “I don’t think so.” He put his head in his hands. “What a mess.”

Harry rooted in the fridge for another bottle of Harpstring and passed it over. “Here.”

Malfoy took a long, grateful swig.

“I’ll Floo the Aurors,” Harry told him.

“No!” Malfoy looked aghast. “Please, don’t do that.”

Harry frowned. “Why not? What the hell happened?”

Malfoy shook his head. “I waited till it was dark, then went back to the flat to get my stuff. I knew he’d never pay for the repairs, but it was high time I moved on anyway. I was just packing a bag when he arrived.”

Malfoy took another gulp of beer. “He went completely nuts when he saw the damage. Said if I paid up there and then, he might just mess my face up a bit rather than kill me.” Harry saw a shiver run right through Malfoy. “As you can see, he made a start on that. Of course I didn’t have any money. He knocked my wand out of my hand and then–” Malfoy broke off and took an unsteady breath, then said in a detached voice. “He said he would enjoy cutting up a dirty whore like me.”

“Is he still at the flat? I’ll go myself,” said Harry, fury rising up in him, hot and fierce, ready to Apparate on the spot–
“No.” Malfoy grabbed Harry’s arm. “He’ll have gone. For god’s sake leave it or you’ll make things worse. The Aurors would twist it round and make it my fault somehow. It’s OK. I fought him off – I don’t need a wand to hurt a man. I managed to grab my bag and my wand and then Apparated to the first safe place I could think of.”

“He needs locking up.” It came out low and rough, and Malfoy blinked at the sound. “I can make sure he can’t do anything to you,” Harry told him.

“I told you before,” Malfoy snarled. “I don’t need rescuing.”

“He’s a psycho, Malfoy. It’s not just you that needs to be kept safe from him.” Something else occurred to Harry, and he squinted at Malfoy. “You Apparated to the first safe place you could think of?”

“Yes, of course.” Malfoy nodded.

“Which happened to be my kitchen?”

Malfoy looked furious. “I told you I wasn’t thinking straight. There was a wand at my throat.”

Harry tried to keep his face neutral, but honestly, he had no idea how he should feel about this.

Malfoy scowled, but his cheeks were turning pink. “It’s not my fault your stupid wards let me in. You’d better get them checked. Anyway, I’ll go now. Thanks for the drink.”

*He came to Grimmauld Place. To me,* Harry thought, and he felt the house give a little flutter.

“Wait.” Harry held out a hand. “You can’t go out there now.”

“I can do what the fuck I please.” Malfoy’s eyes flashed defiance.

Harry sighed. “You need Dittany on that cut, or it’ll scar. I’ve got some upstairs.” Malfoy might be the most difficult bugger Harry had ever met, but there was no way he could let him walk out like this. He was pretty sure Malfoy had nowhere to go, despite what he said, and he knew bloody well that Malfoy would end up on the streets if he let him leave. Harry looked at Malfoy, the pulse jumping in his narrow throat, his skinny hands clenched in his lap.

“Besides, I’ve made too much roast chicken,” Harry told him, and watched Malfoy’s nostrils flare.

“Is that what I can smell?” Malfoy asked, quite aloof. Perdita Tanglefoot was still singing in the background, something about taking a chance.

“Yes,” Harry said. “Far too much for one person to eat. You might as well have some.” He waited a minute, then when Malfoy didn’t move, he passed him another beer.

“OK, then,” Malfoy said. He looked doubtful, but: “I can stay for a while, I suppose.” He managed to make it sound as though he was doing Harry a favour.

Harry opened the oven door and peered at the roast. Another fifteen minutes and it would be about ready. Just enough time to put the veg on to boil.

As he moved around the kitchen, getting out plates and cutlery, part of him was wondering what on earth he had let himself in for. He didn’t see what else he could do – he couldn’t turn Malfoy out on the streets again, could he? But Harry didn’t feel exactly confident about where things were going from here. He tried to pretend Malfoy wasn’t there, lose himself again in the rhythm of preparing the
meal, but it was hard, when he could feel Malfoy’s eyes on him as he washed a few extra sprigs of fresh herbs for the gravy.

“Why do you cook like a Muggle?” Malfoy asked.

Harry frowned. “It’s just cooking. You don’t have to use magic for everything.”

“You don’t have a house-elf to do it?”

“No,” Harry said. “Kreacher’s retired. He was getting really old.”

Malfoy gave a quiet snort at the word retired, but didn’t say anything.

“Besides, I enjoy it,” Harry said. “I was brought up by Muggles, you know?”

“Muggles? Really? When you were a child?”

“Yeah,” Harry told him. “I had to do all the cooking, and I got pretty good at it.”

“Muggles made you work for them? You?” Malfoy sounded truly appalled.

Harry laughed. “That wasn’t the half of it,” he said. He hadn’t intended to get into this with Malfoy at all. “But the point is, magic is great, but sometimes it… kind of distances you from stuff.”

He began to chop the thyme and sage in a way that would have made Snape proud. “I like to be hands on with stuff, you know?” Harry said. “It’s more satisfying. I like things that feel real.” He rocked the blade over the herbs, deft and rhythmic, then looked up to see Malfoy staring at his hands, watching every movement. Malfoy’s eyes looked a bit glazed, but then, Harry thought, he was probably still in shock from what had happened earlier. And there was a strong possibility he hadn’t eaten all day.

Harry checked the oven again. “Nearly ready,” he said, trying to sound as though chatting with Draco Malfoy while making dinner was something that happened all the time, and not really fucking weird.

The worst of it was, the house felt sodding gleeful.
Chapter 2

It was horribly awkward at first, sitting across the kitchen table from one another and tucking into herbed chicken and carrots. Malfoy had taken off his jacket, and underneath he had on one of the thin, tight t-shirts Harry had seen him wear under the street light. The lamps wouldn’t seem to burn properly, no matter how much Harry fiddled with them, instead smouldering with a soft glow that made Malfoy’s eyes shine silver. And when Harry went to get the water glasses out, he couldn’t find his everyday ones with the thick bottoms, but only a pair of fancy cut glass goblets that he didn’t know he owned.

What with the music, the food, and the fancy tableware, it started to feel like some kind of date, and Harry didn’t quite know how to handle any of it, let alone Malfoy holding a fork in his elegant fingers and eating the chicken slowly, as if it was the best thing he’d had in a long time. Harry shifted in his seat uncomfortably. Sitting in silence was making everything worse, so he returned to the subject that was bothering him most.

“So what’s your landlord’s name?”

Malfoy shook his head. “You don’t need to know that.”

“Why don’t you want to report him?”

“Trust me, Potter, the DMLE are not interested in protecting people like me. And you get used to that kind of thing happening, when you do the work that I do.”

Harry speared a piece of chicken with his fork. “Why not get some kind of job, then? I know what you said about Ministry posts, but there’s other stuff you could do.” He knew some Death Eaters took on menial work after Azkaban. He remembered seeing a hunched figure washing windows in Diagon Alley once. The sleeves of his robes had fallen back as he worked, and Harry had stopped in his tracks, jolted by the sight of the Dark Mark right there in broad daylight. The wizard had seen him staring, of course, and covered it hurriedly, but it had been hard to forget the pinched, anxious expression on his face.

Malfoy took another draught of beer. “The only jobs people like me can get don’t pay enough.”

Oh, of course. That was it: Malfoy was too high and mighty to do any ordinary kind of work. “You could always spend a bit less, you know. I know you’re used to luxury, but...”

Malfoy looked extremely offended. “I don’t fucking spend it, Potter. Why do you think I’m living like this? You saw my flat.” He gestured to his boots, which Harry now noticed were looking pretty worn out. “You think I like getting wet feet every time it rains? I send gold to my parents. They can’t get any kind of work at all – well, my mother had a job helping a family with their garden, but someone found out she was a Malfoy and that ended pretty quickly, as you can imagine.”

Harry felt an unpleasant churn of anger and guilt. The Malfoys had made their choices, hadn’t they? They’d sided with Riddle, and now they were paying for it.

“They don’t spend a lot, either,” Malfoy told him. “Not that it’s any of your business. But my father has a lot of Healer’s bills.”

Harry pushed away his plate; the meal seemed tasteless, now. He knew the sad physical state of most people after they came back from Azkaban.
Malfy clenched his skinny hand on the table as he spoke. “The Ministry took our house, our vaults... I’m surprised they didn’t take the clothes off our fucking backs. But I suppose you weren’t thinking of that, when you were testifying against my father.”

“I spoke for your mother,” Harry said. “And for you.” The image of Malfy in the court, pale and tense, still made him feel ill. “I couldn’t speak for your father,” Harry went on grimly. “He was responsible for too much suffering.”

Malfy’s face was stony. “I know what he did. He’s still my father. You wouldn’t understand.”

That cut deep. Harry tightened his hand into a fist, the nails digging into his own flesh to stop himself from saying or doing something he’d regret.

“I should go,” Malfy said. “I need to work.”

“Don’t go out there again tonight,” Harry said, his anger flaring up again at what had happened to Malfy. “Not unless you’ll tell me where I can find that piece of shit.”

“Who, Lennox?” Malfy said, and cursed under his breath as he realised what he’d said.

Harry’s face hardened. “Lennox, is that it? What’s his first name?”


“I’m going to find him,” Harry said. If Malfy went out tonight, he would follow him. Maybe use the cloak.

“Hell, you’re a stubborn bastard,” Malfy said. “All right. I’ll stay in.”

Harry let out a breath. He didn’t know why it felt so important that Malfy was safe, but it did.

“Sleep here tonight,” he told Malfy.

Malfy looked sceptical. “You said—”

“Forget what I said.” Merlin help him, if Harry couldn’t control himself for one night in order to keep Malfy off the streets... It would be fine. However, he couldn’t sit there looking at Malfy’s stupidly fascinating face any more, so he got up to clear the plates.

“I’ll make tea,” he said, dumping the washing up in the sink while he filled the kettle and rummaged in the cupboard for biscuits. Malfy sat silently, accepting the tea with a nod and giving a dubious eye to the packet of Hobnobs Harry pushed towards him.

“You don’t have to eat them. They’re Muggle biscuits,” Harry told him, and maybe part of him was still itching for a fight.

“That’s fine,” Malfy said stiffly, taking one and biting into it.

Drinking tea and dunking biscuits was usually a cosy, comfortable thing. This wasn’t. There was all kinds of tension in the air, and Harry couldn’t stop thinking about the details of Malfy’s risky lifestyle. “So when did you start…?” There didn’t seem to be any possible way to put it. Sucking cock for money? Whoring yourself out?

Malfy sat and let him squirm, regarding Harry coolly.

“Doing this?” Harry finished, feeling rather lame.
“Do you really want to know?” Malfoy said, one eyebrow cocked up.

Harry nodded.

“If you’re sure. After the trials I managed to find a job in a restaurant, as a general drudge helping out in the kitchen,” Malfoy said. “I thought it wouldn’t be so bad because I’d at least get fed while I was working.” He looked at Harry as if daring him to sneer. “The money was shit, though, and I was always getting in fights with one of the waiters – some prick who thought he was too good to work with scum like me. In the end he set out to get me sacked, and a good waiter is harder to replace than a mediocre dogsbody.” A cynical smile twitched at the corner of his mouth.

“So I was going from bar to bar, cafe to cafe, trying to find somewhere that would take me on. I even tried Muggle places, but either they didn’t need staff, or they wanted some kind of paperwork.” He wrapped his hands around his mug of tea as if to warm them. “In the end I hadn’t eaten for twenty-four hours and my mother sent an Owl saying they didn’t have enough gold left to heat the house. My father had something wrong with his chest and it was several degrees below that winter, do you remember?”

Harry did remember. He’d spent most of it at the Burrow, enjoying roaring log fires and being stuffed to the gills with Molly’s cooking.

“The last bar I tried was owned by a Slytherin who’d been in the year above us. He didn’t have a job for me, but after he had a good laugh at the state I’d got myself in, he asked what I’d do for twenty Galleons.”

He sat for a moment, staring at nothing, then lifted his chin and looked Harry in the eye. “Turns out, I would do quite a lot.”

“Shit.” Harry hadn’t meant to say that out loud, but it came out anyway.

“Apparently it was a bit of a fantasy for him. He said he’d always wanted to shut me up by stuffing my bratty little mouth full of his cock when we were at school.”

He stopped when he saw Harry’s expression and gave a grim smile. “You don’t want to hear any more of this, do you?”

“No, go on,” Harry said. It wasn’t easy to hear, but at the same time, he wanted to know.

“I went back the next week when I still hadn’t managed to find work and my father had Healer’s bills to pay,” Malfoy said airily. “He and the chef took turns with me.” He sounded like he was talking about the weather, but Harry could see a muscle jumping near his eye.

Harry felt all churned up just listening. It seemed monstrous that people could go ahead and buy sex, offering Malfoy money for a fuck as casually as Harry would order a sandwich. But there was a terrible, shadowy part of him that wondered what it would be like to do just that.

Malfoy continued. “The chef was an ugly bastard, but I gritted my teeth and got through it. They gave me a nice handful of Galleons to send to my parents. After that… I don’t know, it got a lot easier. I learned to switch off a bit, in my mind.”

Harry didn’t know what to say. He would have struggled to believe, when they were at school, that Malfoy would ever end up in such a depressing situation.

“And I found out where to get the right potions. You know, the kind you need when nothing except magic can possibly induce you to get it up for the bloke that’s paying.”
“There are potions for that?” Harry felt horribly naive.

“There are potions for everything, Potter. Very useful. You feel dead inside, mind you, but your cock stays hard all damn night.”

Malfoy finished his tea and held out his mug for a refill. “Don’t look so bloody stricken, Potter. I’m good at my job, I work hard, and my parents and I can eat, most of the time. But I’m talking too much. It must be the novelty of it; in this line of work, people aren’t usually much interested in what I have to say.” He helped himself to the last hobnob. “Do you have any more of these?”

Harry was pretty sure they were the last, but when he looked in the cupboard, there was another packet he hadn’t noticed before, standing up neatly. That was odd. But everything was odd at the moment. And he was never going to complain about surprise biscuits.

“So what about you?” Malfoy looked down his nose at Harry. “I don’t need to ask. You’re an Auror now, the picture of heroism, of course.”

Harry rubbed the back of his neck. “I’m a trainee.”

“Oh, they made you do that, did they? I’m surprised they didn’t just appoint you Minister for Magic after the trials and have done with it.”

“They didn’t make me.” Harry said. “I wanted to. I didn’t want to be treated any differently, and Ron and the others were going into training, so why not me?”

“And naturally you’re top of the class, sailing through everything, the pride of the department.”

Harry rolled his dodgy shoulder, making a small grimace as it settled into place. “Er. Not really.”

There was no way he was going to moan about work to Malfoy, though. Not after what he’d just shared with Harry. “I do OK. Most of the time.”

“So have you always lived here on your own?” Malfoy asked.

“Yep,” Harry said. “Just me.”

“No other half?”

“Nope.”

Malfoy leaned back in his chair, stretching his legs. “I used to think you’d be the marrying type.”

“Apparenty you were wrong,” Harry said, a bit tight-lipped. Malfoy certainly did know how to pick his questions.

Malfoy gave a sly smile. “I sort of worked that out when I saw you on Duke Street.”

Bloody hell. Was this where every conversation was going to lead? “I was walking home, Malfoy.”

Harry rubbed his hand over his jaw. “It’s only up the road from here.”

Malfoy snorted. “It’s about a mile away.”

The Quidditch came on the radio, and Harry reached over to turn up the volume. “I want to hear this,” he said, and Malfoy took the hint and stopped talking.

Harry wasn’t really listening to the match, though – instead, he was thinking hard. It wasn’t so unusual not to have a partner, was it? Or maybe it was; Harry didn’t know. He only knew that he
was done with women. His last attempt had been particularly disastrous. Serena had been cute, and funny, and clever. They got on well, and laughed a lot together, but—

He clenched his hands around the mug, remembering.

When they went to bed, nothing seemed to go right. They were both mortified to find that Harry couldn’t even get hard. Just thinking about the considerate way she’d tried to hide her disappointment, her kind reassurances that it didn’t matter, made him want to bang his head against the table.

He was pretty sure he wouldn’t have that problem with a man.

He flicked a glance at Malfoy listening to the radio, long legs sprawled out in front of him. His jeans stretched tight over the muscle of his thighs, and his long, narrow fingers, resting in his lap, just skimming the thick bulge at his crotch...

Yep. Pretty damn sure.

Harry tried to pay attention to the match for a while, but his attention kept wandering. What he hadn’t been expecting was that he had a certain amount of respect for Malfoy after hearing his story. Harry would never have expected Malfoy to cope so resourcefully. And he wasn’t going to criticise Malfoy for being loyal to his family, either.

Malfoy laughed at the commentary on the radio, then caught Harry’s eye to share the joke, and hell, the way he looked as he did it made something restless squirm inside Harry. He didn’t think he had ever seen Malfoy like this, all relaxed and comfortable, and Harry thought for a moment that it wasn’t all bad having Malfoy here. And then realised that he was bloody staring again.

Harry stood up abruptly and went to finish the washing up, submerging his hands in the soapy water. He didn’t know what the hell was the matter with him, getting so hung up on thinking about stuff that he was missing the game. Grimmauld Place was feeling off again, too – giving out a tickly, impatient sort of energy. As soon as the match finished, it was time for bed, Harry thought. Before things get any weirder.

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Harry was just settling down to sleep when he remembered the Dittany. Hell. For a minute, he considered forgetting about it and just letting himself nod off, but he knew that wasn’t really an option. Dittany had to be used within twelve hours to be effective, and what with the wound being on Malfoy’s face, he’d imagine it was even more important to apply it quickly.

He got out of bed again and pulled on the pair of joggers he’d been wearing earlier, then rummaged around in his chest of drawers until he laid his hand on the small glass bottle containing the tincture.

His footsteps sounded over-loud on the stairs, but the idea of trying to creep up there felt even worse. He knocked as soon as he reached Malfoy’s door, two short knocks, very business-like, and then without waiting for an answer announced, “I’ve brought the Dittany,” before Malfoy could get the wrong idea.

“Oh.” Harry couldn’t tell if Malfoy had been going to sleep or not. “Come in.”

The room was lit by a single candle. Harry took a moment to adjust to the darkness, and then saw Malfoy had been reading in bed, a slim paperback lying beside him.

The bed was bloody enormous again. Of course it was.
Malfoy looked as if he was naked under the covers, but he pulled the sheet up over his chest as Harry came closer.

“I brought the Dittany,” Harry repeated, more quietly this time. The whole room felt hushed and intimate, with the candle flame wavering in the darkness, and Malfoy’s eyes all sleepy, with heavy lids.

“Thank you,” said Malfoy.

“Was it you who made the bed massive?” Harry half-whispered.

“No,” Malfoy replied, and for whatever reason, Harry believed him, but it didn’t stop him feeling pissed off. The wards, the stuff in the kitchen, and now the bloody bed again.

“Why does stuff keep happening to my house when you’re here, Malfoy?” It came out sterner than he’d expected.

Malfoy’s face was serious. “I don’t know.”

Harry searched his face, but could find no clues.

“Can I have the Dittany?” Malfoy asked.

“Uh. Yeah.” Harry felt in the pocket of his joggers and handed over the phial and a soft clean cloth.

“Oh,” said Malfoy, surprised. “It’s not the kind you swallow?”

Harry remembered that Snape had always given Dittany by mouth, but Harry had come to rely on Hermione’s little bottle. “No, it’s a tincture,” he told Malfoy. “It’s brilliant stuff. Saved me plenty of times.”

Malfoy opened the stopper and sniffed gingerly. “So you just–?”

Harry gestured. He could see the spot where Malfoy had been cut, the cheek still swollen and tender-looking, marring the smooth skin. “Just dab a little over the place, you don’t need much. Try not to get it on the rest of your face, though – it can sting a bit. Well, a lot.”

Malfoy wrinkled his nose and looked at the bottle again, then looked up at Harry. “It’d be a lot easier if you did it.” He said it flatly, as if he didn’t expect Harry to agree.

But Malfoy was right. It would be far easier if Harry helped. And this was pretty important – this was Malfoy’s face, and Harry, of all people, knew how exactly much of a burden a scar could be.

“Yeah, OK.”

A flash of surprise crossed Malfoy’s face, but he didn’t say anything, just held out the bottle.

Right. Harry sat down on edge of the bed. This was no big deal; it was standard healing procedure after all. It was only that it felt strange to be so close to Malfoy, in this quiet, still room that was filled with the sense of a breath being held.

Harry dripped a little of the Dittany onto the cloth and touched it to Malfoy’s face. Malfoy inhaled sharply and Harry felt a stab of sympathy – he knew the sting of Dittany on tender flesh all too well.

“It won’t hurt for long,” he said. “And it really does work. You don’t want a scar on your face,” he told Malfoy, and Malfoy’s eyes flicked up to the scar on Harry’s forehead and lingered there.
Sitting so close like this, he could smell the scent of Malfoy’s body, and hell, it was warm and tempting. Maybe this had been a terrible idea. He could feel the house watching. Waiting. Harry added another drop to the cloth, his hand shaking a little, and dabbed again at Malfoy’s cheek. It was a clean cut, at least, and he could see the Dittany flattening the wound already. “What did that bastard use to do it?” Harry asked.

Malfoy screwed his eyes shut as Harry stroked the cloth along the line of the cut. “Diffindo,” he said, and Harry recoiled. That was a spell you’d use on a thing, not a person. The rotten fucker had sliced into Malfoy’s flesh as if he was nothing more than a piece of meat.

Harry added one more drop, pressing the cloth to the wound for the last time, making sure no trace of swelling remained. Malfoy closed his eyes for a moment, and Harry let the tips of his fingers brush over the skin of his cheek. Yes. It felt so good – full of life and warmth, so smooth, and– The main thing was that it was healing, of course. That was all he wanted to check.

Malfoy held himself very still, his eyes travelling over Harry’s face, his eyes, his mouth. There was a hint of stubble at Malfoy’s jaw, and when Harry made the barest motion to brush his thumb over it, going against the hair growth to feel the intriguing roughness there, he could hear Malfoy’s breath hitch. The cut had not reached so far down Malfoy’s face, but Harry still found his thumb moving, searching, until it was resting right by the corner of Malfoy’s mouth. Harry would only have to make the smallest movement to drag his thumb over the soft pad of Malfoy’s bottom lip.

The candle was throwing insane shadows around the room, the flame quivering and leaping about. Malfoy’s face looked almost unearthly, with his high cheekbones and the angular shape of his chin. Harry felt like anything could happen. Malfoy shifted on the bed, turned his face towards Harry’s hand just a fraction, so that his lips brushed Harry’s palm, and at the same time, the sheet slipped down to his waist. The candle flickered, illuminating Malfoy’s torso and Harry pulled his hand away and looked down, suddenly afraid of what he might see, remembering the stark slash of a curse which split Malfoy across the ribs.

Lennox wasn’t the only person to slice Malfoy open, was he? He wasn’t even the first.

“When I… oh, hell. I cut you, too.” Harry stumbled over the words, but Malfoy seemed to know exactly what he was thinking of.

“In the bathroom?”

“Yeah,” Harry said. The glimmering light made it impossible to see properly, shadows moving across Malfoy’s skin and then casting them into darkness. “There weren’t any scars?”

Malfoy shook his head. “Snape healed me, remember? At first you could see something... but that was years ago.”

Harry knew he should feel relieved, but what he felt was closer to disbelief. The cuts had been so deep – how could something like that not leave a mark? He wanted to pass his hands over Malfoy’s ribs, his chest, to check the skin was unmarred, but he held still.

“I’m sorry,” he said, the words feeling all tangled up in his throat. Why had he never said this before? There could have been scars. He could have killed Malfoy.

“So what?” Malfoy said. “I broke your nose, remember? I stamped on your face.”

Harry remembered quite clearly, with an internal wince at the thought of the crunch, the sight of Malfoy’s boot coming down. He could still feel the furious, impotent anger at having to lie there and
take it.

“I enjoyed it,” Malfoy told him, his voice low and confiding, and there was something breathtaking about the honesty of that. “It felt good, at the time,” Malfoy continued. “I bet you enjoyed it, too. Hurting me.”

“No,” Harry said firmly. “I didn’t. I’m not like that.”

But Harry knew he had often thought about hurting Malfoy, and even now part of his mind was picturing what it would have been like if he had left scars. He remembered exactly where the slashes were on Malfoy’s chest, how the deepest one stretched from left to right. If Malfoy had scars, Harry could trace his fingers over them now, smoothing the Dittany carefully across the ridge of his collarbone, down, down, all the way across to the nipple. He imagined pushing Malfoy down on the bed, to hold him still when the sharp sting of the tincture started to gnaw at his flesh. He would track the path where the curse had ripped at Malfoy, deeper and more vicious than the cut he’d just helped to heal, seeking it out with his lips, savouring the taste of it, and he could picture all of this so clearly. What kind of fucking thoughts were these?

Harry stood up abruptly. “The cut’s fine now. It should be all healed by the morning.” He picked up the cloth and the bottle, his sweaty fingers slipping on the glass.

He stood in the doorway for a moment, looking back at the great expanse of bed and how comfortable it looked. How excessive for just one person to sleep in. “Don’t do anything else to the room,” he told Malfoy sternly.

“It’s not me doing it,” Malfoy said, frustration evident in his voice, and Harry wished he didn’t believe him, but he did.

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Harry woke to the sound of a bird singing outside his window, and just for a moment, he wasn’t sure where he was. It didn’t seem like something he heard very often at Grimmauld Place – in fact, he couldn’t remember ever having seen a bird in the garden before, but there it was, opening its throat and giving voice to a high, pure sound.

Harry had a long soak in the bath, then, when there was still no sound from what he was now thinking of as Malfoy’s room, he went out to get some bits for breakfast from the bakery a few streets away. When he returned, he could hear Malfoy moving around upstairs, the floorboards creaking.

I should probably go and see how he is, Harry thought. The cut might need more Dittany after all, although the thought of applying it made his stomach tighten with unease. At least it was late enough that Malfoy wouldn’t be lounging around in bed.

His knuckles had barely touched Malfoy’s door before it swung open. Malfoy was standing in front of a mirror, looking at his reflection, and he was wearing – oh, god almighty – he was wearing a formal shirt that fitted snugly over his torso, along with a pair of sharply tailored tweed trousers. He looked so clean cut and handsome that Harry couldn’t speak for a moment, until Malfoy looked round and raised an eyebrow.

“Sorry,” Harry said. “The door just opened. I.” He had to clear his throat before he could continue. “Wanted to see if you were OK?”

Malfoy regarded himself in the mirror again. The shirt was beautifully crisp, unbuttoned at the throat, and tailored to perfection. The clothes were so fucking classy, and the combination of that with
Malfoy’s edgy sensuality was doing terrible things to Harry’s brain.

“What do you think?” There was a small pile of clothes lying on the bed. Malfoy reached for a waistcoat and slipped it on, buttoning it deftly with his long fingers. “Better with, or without?”

Holy Merlin. The waistcoat fitted beautifully, accentuating Malfoy’s neat waist and making him look endlessly tall and lean as well as effortlessly elegant. Malfoy looked over his shoulder with a quizzical expression. “Potter? How does it look?”

There was no way Harry could answer that with any degree of coherence. Instead, he managed to force out, “Where did you get that mirror?”

It was a full-length one with a charmed decorative frame, silver snakes writhing sinuously around the edge as Harry watched.

“Fuck knows,” Malfoy told him, turning to the side, presumably to see what his arse looked like in the trousers, and that was really not helping. “I needed one, so I went to have a look around the other bedrooms…”

Harry’s eyebrows drew together. Did that mean Malfoy had been in Harry’s room? It wasn’t like he had anything to hide in there – well, not unless Malfoy had looked under the bed and found that copy of Male Model Monthly. But Harry’s room was private. And a bit of a mess.

“Anyway,” Malfoy went on. “I couldn’t find one, but when I came back, there it was…” He gestured to the mirror.

Harry looked around, frowning. He didn’t want to believe these things just kept happening; Malfoy must be doing something, and he had no right to interfere like this in Harry’s house. The whole room looked lighter and more airy, and there was no trace of the damp smell that permeated the other rooms. “Did you clean up in here?” Harry asked suspiciously.

Malfoy looked more offended by this than by anything else Harry could have said. “I did not,” he said. “I’m a whore, not a cleaner.”

Harry felt his face flushing. He knew quite well what Malfoy did for a living – Malfoy didn’t have to keep mentioning it.

“And I need to get ready and get to work.” Malfoy began rolling up his shirt sleeve, folding the crisp cotton back until his Dark Mark was revealed, and then met Harry’s eye in the mirror. “What?” he asked, impossibly haughty.

Harry stared at the tattoo, the brutal lines of it. “Just surprised you’re, well. Flaunting that.” It seemed like the last thing Malfoy would want people to see.

“Flaunting it?” Malfoy asked, his mouth twisted into a sneer. “Of course, you think I should be hiding it away. Well, tough. I can’t get rid of it, so it’s here to stay.” He rolled up the other sleeve.

“Besides, it’s good for business.” He glanced at Harry’s face and saw his look of surprise. “Oh yes, people like it. Often, they don’t know what it is, and they think it’s hot. Some kind of bad boy thing, I suppose.”

Harry swallowed uncomfortably. The Dark Mark held no glamour for him, but he’d be lying if he said he couldn’t see the appeal that Malfoy was talking about – especially with what he was wearing today. On one hand, Malfoy’s outfit, which made him look like he’d just walked into Claridge’s, on the other, the rebellious-looking ink on his arm.
Malfoy carried on. “Or sometimes, they know perfectly well what it is, and then they like it even more, the kinky bastards. Makes them feel better about what they’re doing.” He gave Harry a scathing look. “The degradation of it, you know. Me selling myself. They think I deserve it.”

He turned to the mirror again and nodded in approval. “Definitely the waistcoat. I thought it was time to dig out the last of my good clothes. After slacking last night I’ll head to Chelsea today. Pull some rich blokes.”

_I’m a rich bloke_, Harry thought, against his will, and possibly, the same idea came into Malfoy’s head, because he looked at Harry questioningly.

“Do you think they’ll be interested?” He tilted his head to one side and stood there, posing for Harry to look at, just like the first time he had seen Malfoy under the street light.

Harry’s mouth was horribly dry. “How the hell would I know?”

Malfoy gave a little snort, as if to say they both knew precisely what bollocks that was, and pulled out a comb, smoothing his hair into a neat wave at the front.

“I thought we could go back to your flat together,” Harry said. “Pick up some more of your stuff.” And if they ran into Malfoy’s landlord, well, Harry would relish the chance to teach him a lesson. He could feel his wand arm tingling pleasurably at the thought of it.

“Forget about it,” Malfoy said. “He’s probably sold it all. Or burned it. I packed most of the important stuff before he arrived, anyway.” He tucked the comb away, then met Harry’s eyes coolly. “You want me out of here, is that it? I’ll leave today. I can work all day and get enough cash together for a cheap hotel or something–”

“No. Stay here,” Harry told him. “You need that money for your parents, right?”

“Well.” Malfoy seemed to waver. “I…”

“Just fucking stay here until you get sorted.” Harry rubbed a hand over the stubble on his chin. Having Malfoy here seemed to make him a bit nuts, but he could stay out of Malfoy’s way, surely, and it was better than the alternative. At least he’d know Malfoy was coming back somewhere safe when he’d finished working each night.

Malfoy still looked reluctant, but Harry guessed he wasn’t stupid enough to turn down the offer. “As soon as I’ve saved up some Galleons, I’ll be gone. It won’t take long. If I can just stay tonight…”

Harry scowled. “I said you could, didn’t I?”

“All right.” Malfoy stepped towards him, and Harry’s nostrils flared as the scent of Malfoy’s cologne reached him. “I doubt I’ll be back till late, but I’ll be quiet.” He was close enough to touch Harry, and for a moment Harry thought he was going to. “Thank you,” he said. “For letting me stay. And for…” He drew a finger across his own cheek, tilting his head to show Harry where the skin was perfectly smooth and pale once again. “For last night.”

Harry nodded. “It’s OK.” He could still feel the scratch of Malfoy’s stubble against his fingers. The fresh warmth of his skin.

Malfoy hesitated, his gaze lingering on Harry’s eyes, then his lips. “Will you be awake? When I get in.” He looked as if he wanted to say more, but stopped himself.

A horrible thought occurred to Harry about what Malfoy might be thinking. “Malfoy. Don’t bring
anyone back here.”

Malfoy flinched. “Of course not.”

Harry hadn’t even thought of this before. It was bad enough seeing Malfoy getting dressed up to go out, but the idea of seeing him coming back with some bloke… *hearing* him…

“Good,” Harry said firmly. “I mean it.”

Malfoy looked away, his cheeks flushing and his lips pressed together. When he looked up at Harry again, he wore a tight little smile. “I would never dream of upsetting our Saviour with such immoral goings on,” he said.

Harry felt his hackles rising. Malfoy had turned up in his kitchen last night, injured and terrified. Harry had the decency to take him in, and now...

“Don’t call me that,” Harry told him, his voice not entirely steady.

Malfoy pointed his wand at the pile of clothes on the bed and directed them back into his case. “By the way, if your house wants to do any more stuff for me while I’m out, I’d like somewhere better to put my clothes.”

Now he was acting like nothing had happened, and behaving like the little shit he was at school. Like he was deliberately trying to piss Harry off. And it made Harry want to punch something.

Malfoy leaned to study his own face in the mirror, and lifted his hand gingerly, to touch his cheek where the gash had been. For a moment, he looked quite blank. Then he threw his shoulders back and gave a curt nod. “All right then, Potter,” Malfoy said. “I’ll be going.”

Harry turned away and walked down the stairs before he could say something he’d regret. But Malfoy called out to him.

“Maybe have a think about why my job really bothers you so much. If Harry Potter isn’t getting any, nobody else can either. Is that it?”

*Shitting hell.* Harry took a sharp left turn into his bedroom, and then he did punch something – he took an ill-advised swipe at the door and it hurt so much it brought tears to his eyes. He could feel the house clattering around him in alarm. Why did Malfoy always leave Harry feeling so bloody angry and frustrated? Like no-one else Harry had ever met. And Harry had just invited him to stay for as long as he needed.

Fuck my life, Harry thought, and went to look for the Dittany for the gash across his knuckles.

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The house felt sulky again after Malfoy had left, and Harry was in a pretty foul mood, to say the least. He ate breakfast alone in the kitchen – if you could call it breakfast when it was now approaching one in the afternoon – then headed out to get away from thoughts of Malfoy and the house. He might mooch round the shops, maybe watch the game, then call in at the Dumbledore Arms and see who was around. As he stepped out into the brisk December day, buttoning his coat, he thought of Malfoy in his shirtsleeves. Did Malfoy actually own a decent coat? Probably not. Or was it just him being an idiot, freezing his arse off in his determination to show off the goods?

Harry was not going to think about Malfoy all day. No way. He had *no interest* in what Malfoy was doing – probably sliding his arse onto a bar stool somewhere, next to some smug, rich wanker.
Smiling in that way which was still half smirk, the way that made Harry want to push him up against a wall and teach him a bloody good lesson.

Yeah. That was what Harry was not going to spend the day thinking about. He shoved his hands deep in his pockets and scowled at an advert for aftershave, a huge poster with a man’s bare torso blown up as big as a house. He was going to make the most of his day off, and not think about any of that crap at all.

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It was after midnight, and Harry was about ready to fall into bed, but the minute he stepped into Grimmauld Place, there was that eager feeling again, making the hairs on his arms prickle. This time, though, he had the idea that the house had been waiting for him to get back. It even felt as if it was pleased Harry was home...

Well. That had never happened before. It was… it was really quite nice, if Harry was honest. The old place was not so bad – maybe he was just taking a while to get used to it, and vice versa. A smile tugged at his mouth as he took the stairs to the second floor bathroom. He’d had a few rounds at the pub with a couple of the other trainees after the game, and now he needed to piss before getting ready for bed.

He threw open the door, hand on his flies, and stopped dead in the doorway.

The bathroom was already occupied. Malfoy was in the bath, steam rising up all around him, the picture of loose-limbed relaxation, but as Harry burst in, Malfoy’s eyes flew open and he sat up in alarm, his hand scrambling to reach for his wand. However, all that Harry registered at first was the fact that Malfoy was naked. Right there. Naked. And wet. And naked.

“Shit,” Harry said.

Malfoy exhaled in relief when he saw Harry and let his wand hand go limp. “Oh, it’s you,” he said. “God, for a minute I thought...” He laughed to himself.

There were bubbles, but it looked like Malfoy had been in there for quite a while, and they weren’t hiding much. The air was wreathed with fragrant, heady steam, water droplets glistening on Malfoy’s skin, and Harry tried to speak again, but all that came out was, “Nnnngh.”

“Are you OK?” Malfoy asked, and Harry wasn’t sure, but Malfoy was quite likely laughing at him. Harry wasn’t OK, not at all, in fact it felt like the room was tilting around him. He was going to have some kind of spiritual experience, standing there looking at Draco Malfoy – either that or a heart attack. Christ almighty, he needed to get out of there right now.

“Gnnnnnff,” he said, intelligently, and stepped backwards out of the bathroom, fumbling the door closed as he went.

Harry stood on the landing, his heart thudding a mile a minute. Oh, god. Oh god. He was never going to get the image out of his head, every detail of the scene branded into his mind. Malfoy’s hair had been soaking wet as if he’d just dunked it under before Harry came in, pushed back from his face with rivulets of water running down his throat, his shoulders, and onto his chest. And Harry was pretty sure there had been an actual candelabra at the tap end of the bath, which presumably Malfoy’s house had thoughtfully provided for Malfoy, so he could lie there in luxury, all soapy and wet and completely fucking naked.

Malfoy called out to him through the door. “It’s tough shit if you want to use the bathroom, by the
way. This is the best bath I’ve had in years and I’m not moving for anyone,” Malfoy said, and Harry could imagine him closing his eyes and tipping his head back in satisfaction.

“There is a lock on that door,” Harry managed to say.

Why was this happening to Harry? Did he really deserve to come home and find that? Was this his reward for taking Malfoy in, to have to walk innocently into his own bathroom for a piss and find some sodding erotic vision in there waiting for him? And Harry had stood and stared like a complete pervert.

Harry stomped downstairs to the little toilet next to the drawing room. It was dingy and cold, with a malevolent-looking spider lurking in one corner, and the light switch had never worked properly. Why the hell did Grimmauld Place never give Harry a candelabra? It was his bloody house! And suddenly it dawned on Harry that the house had known, it had bloody known that Harry was going to walk straight upstairs and find Malfoy in the bath looking like that. That was why Grimmauld Place had felt so happy and pleased when Harry got home – because it was trying to ruin his life.

He zipped up and went to flush the loo, and the sodding flush came off in his hand. Harry kicked the toilet, hard, near where the bowl met the floor. It gave a satisfying clank, but it also sent a jolt of pain throbbing through his big toe.

Harry thought of the way Malfoy had jumped when he came in. He’d thought Harry was someone else – presumably his landlord. Even when he was soaking in the bath, Malfoy couldn’t relax totally, because of that bastard. Harry knew what Malfoy had said, but he didn’t care; Harry was going to find him. And when he did, Lennox was going to wish he hadn’t.

Harry limped upstairs to his room, where he stripped off his clothes angrily. He didn’t need this. He didn’t need any of this. When he closed his eyes, he could still see Malfoy naked, every inch of him feeling like an ultimatum, and he didn’t reckon he had much chance of ever forgetting it.

He threw the last of his clothes on the floor, but as he pulled back the covers, he hesitated. Maybe he couldn’t have what he wanted. But he could have something else. His cock was more than half hard already, and he was too bloody wound up to lie down. Instead of slipping under the covers, Harry got up onto the bed and knelt there in the dark room, a strip of moonlight shining in past the curtains onto his bare skin. He didn't touch himself – not yet. Instead he closed his eyes and let the images come into his head.

Malfoy’s arrogant features, softened in pleasure as he lay back to enjoy the bath.

Harry’s hands brushed against his thighs, his cock twitching to full hardness. He didn’t have to do this. He could stop himself thinking about Malfoy. He’d stopped himself before, after all. Pretty much every time he’d wanked since he first saw Malfoy on Duke Street, thoughts of Malfoy had flashed into Harry’s head, but Harry had never let himself dwell on them.

The beads of water on Malfoy’s pale skin. The shift of his muscles as he moved his position, the water lapping around him.

But tonight it didn’t feel like he could stop. It felt like it was going to happen whether he wanted it to or not.

His mouth, the bloody insolent curl of his lips.

Harry was harder than ever and he let his hand stray to his balls, cupping the weight of them, breath hitching at the heat sparking under his skin. It wasn’t right, was it, to touch himself while thinking
about Malfoy? Not if Malfoy was going to go on staying here. It would only make things weird between them. More weird. Also, it just seemed downright wrong – Malfoy had put up with different men pawing him all day, and then when he got home, he couldn’t even relax in the bath without Harry wanking over him.

But still the images came: Malfoy’s nipples, puckered into two tight little knots. The sleek skin of his stomach and the breath-stealing ridge of his hipbones.

And there was more – there were all of the things Harry wanted to do to Malfoy’s body – so many things. He didn’t even know how to do all those things, but Malfoy would know. The way Harry liked to imagine it, Malfoy would show him everything, and it wouldn’t matter that Harry was practically clueless.

Harry’s blood pumped through his veins in an incessant rhythm. He couldn’t stop thinking about Malfoy, any more than he could stop his heart from beating.

And then there were things Harry hadn’t seen, but could imagine all too well: Malfoy’s prick and balls, heavy and beautiful, bobbing in the water.

Harry’s own cock was aching, jutting out obscenely between his thighs, and he couldn’t remember why he was trying to resist. What was the harm in it? Malfoy wouldn’t care, because Malfoy would never know, and it would only be this one time that Harry would give in and let himself do it. He sat back on his heels and spread his legs, and finally, he let himself reach for his cock, his hand wrapping around it in a gratifyingly firm grip.

Harry barely managed to stifle a moan under his breath. Damn it, he needed a privacy spell right away. Malfoy was only across the landing. He fumbled for his wand in the pile of clothes on the floor and cast the strongest charm that he knew, his hand sweaty against the wood. When he took his cock in his fist again, rolling the foreskin back, he let out a grunt, not bothering to be quiet at all. He was so turned on that within a few strokes he started thrusting into his hand, the noises spilling from his mouth almost animalistic.

Too fast, thought Harry, and made himself slow down, rolling his balls against the palm of his hand, letting out a moan at the little shocks of pleasure it sent right through his core. Why did Malfoy have to be the hottest thing he’d ever seen? Harry wanted him so badly, hungered for him deep in the marrow of his bones, and he felt a burst of hot anger towards all the men who’d paid to have him that day. They hadn’t held back, had they? Hadn’t thought about Malfoy or cared about what was right. They’d just handed over their money and taken what they wanted.

You could do that, too, whispered a dark little corner of his mind, and Harry screwed up his face even as his cock leapt at the thought. He needs the money, the devious voice went on. He’d thank you for it.

Oh, hell. Malfoy, willing. Malfoy, compliant, grateful, even.

Don’t pretend you wouldn’t love it, the voice told him, and his orgasm ripped its way out of him, one shudder of release after another, as Harry groaned his satisfaction, long and loud, into the stillness of the room.

Afterwards, when the immediate high had drained from his body, he felt shaky and unsettled. The whole thing was getting out of hand. It was the situation with the house that was the real problem. The other thing about Malfoy – Harry could get that under control. Probably. But he really needed to do something about the house.
He needed to use the loo again and pulled on a jumper and some pants, resigning himself to facing the first floor spider. There was no way he was going to risk another glimpse of Malfoy. But as he made his way across the landing, the bathroom door opened and Malfoy was there, a pair of cotton trousers slung low on his hips. Harry carried on down the stairs, but Malfoy called out to him. “Potter.”

He sounded mocking, and Harry was not going to stop to find out why. “Night, Malfoy.”

“Did nobody ever tell you your privacy charms are complete shit?”

Harry stopped in his tracks, then looked back at Malfoy in dawning horror.

Malfoy looked as if he might burst out laughing. “I guess not.”

“What the hell?” Harry demanded, his face starting to burn. “My charms are not shit.” He had cast the spell, hadn’t he? Yes. He bloody had. And that one had always worked in the past.

“Sorry to be the one to tell you.” Malfoy didn’t look sorry at all. “Sounded like you enjoyed yourself, anyway.”

This couldn’t be happening. Malfoy had to be lying – he must have found out what Harry had been doing some other way. Nobody had ever complained at Hogwarts, after all, and Harry had used hundreds of privacy charms there…

But then, thought Harry, with a sinking feeling, he’d always been sort of quick and pretty quiet at Hogwarts. Most of his dormitory masturbation had been a utilitarian, get-the-job-done kind of thing. He’d never been thinking about Draco Malfoy, for a start. Oh, shitting hell. It was quite possible that Harry really was shit at privacy charms, but this was the first time it had been a problem.

Malfoy just stood there, looking like… like Harry’s worst nightmare, basically. He was not only utterly provoking, he was disgustingly hot. And now he had heard Harry wanking over him. Loud wanking, for fuck’s sake, with grunting, and oh, hell. Harry wanted nothing more than to bang both their heads against the ugly, peeling wall.

“Well,” Harry said, his face now blazing with heat and stiff with anger. “I’m sorry, but obviously I didn’t mean for you to hear that.” He turned and carried on down the stairs, muttering through gritted teeth. “I suppose not listening didn’t occur to you? Or locking the bathroom door, or–”

Malfoy called out again. “Potter.”

Harry wasn’t going to stop again, really he wasn’t, no matter what Malfoy said. He especially wasn’t going to stop while Malfoy was standing there half-dressed, laughing about Harry’s wanking noises.

“Harry,” Malfoy said.

Harry stopped.

“Don’t be sorry,” Malfoy told him, and Harry still didn’t turn around, even though he really wanted to. Malfoy sounded different, and Harry wanted to see what his face looked like when his voice was like this, all husky and sort of unguarded...

“I’ve been with six different blokes today,” Malfoy told the back of Harry’s head, “and hearing you… that was the first time I felt anything.”

What? What the hell? Was Malfoy serious? Harry couldn’t think of a single thing to say, so he stood
there with a rushing in his ears, trying to think of a smart answer. Of course Malfoy wasn’t serious. How could he be? He was just taking the piss again, trying to embarrass Harry even more, and—

Harry spun around again, ready to have it out with Malfoy for once and for all, but Malfoy was gone, leaving only the sound of his footsteps padding softly up the stairs to bed.

Harry stood there for a moment, wondering if his life could possibly get any more messed up, when he felt something tickling against his fingers and looked down to see leaves – a bloody vine was twining itself around the banister. There were buds, and shoots, and as Harry stared, the plant put out a tendril, then another, then burst forth with a handful of ludicrously cheerful pink flowers, the blooms like little trumpets. Another creeper unfurled, arching up and up, using the banister for support until it was around the corner and out of sight, apparently making its way up the stairs, its deep pink blooms pouring forth a rich, honeyed scent.

“My life is impossible, and my house is sprouting,” Harry said in blank disbelief, and he felt the house give a little quiver of pride.

It was getting too much. More than anyone could handle. Harry would speak to Hermione about it. She would know what to do – about the house, that was. He wouldn’t mention the rest of it. No way.

~*~

Harry could smell something was not quite right as soon as he and Ron returned from the shop.

“Hermione, are these lentils meant to look like this?” asked Ron, looking dubiously into the depths of their range cooker.

Hermione dropped her book. “We were supposed to take that out half an hour ago!”

Ron grabbed a tea towel and yanked the dish out, then dropped it with a loud curse on the side. “It’s really bleeding hot!”

“Well it would be, genius.” Hermione flapped around Ron, ushering him to the sink to run his hand under cold water. “Oh, god, Harry, I don’t know why you keep coming here. We’ve cremated the food again.”

“It was nothing to do with me this time,” Ron protested. “The lentil thing was all you.”

“Only because I took over after you messed up the rice salad.” She turned to Harry. “Honestly, who burns rice?”

“That does take a special talent,” Harry said, grinning as he took a seat at the kitchen table.

“You were meant to be watching the lentils, Hermione, not reading.” There was a tussle as Ron snatched his hand out of the water to examine it.

“It’s going to need healing, Ron, it’s blistering up. Pass my wand. It’s research. Goblin employment law. Do you know, Harry, there’s no legislation regarding Goblin pensions, and many of them carry on working well past their hundredth birthdays—”

“It’s Sunday!” Ron protested. “None of us have to work today, and Harry came for lunch, not to hear about all that—”

“I’m fine,” Harry reassured them. “I just wanted to catch up with what you’re doing and have a
drink, so don’t worry about it.”

“Good point,” Ron nodded, frowning at his burnt hand. “Let’s have a beer.” He reached into the shopping bag and pulled out a handful of bottles. At that moment, however, the catflap banged and Crookshanks ran in, wet and muddy, heading straight between Ron’s legs.

Ron swore again, nearly tripped, and lost his grip on the beers. Two rolled harmlessly across the floor, but the neck of the third smashed, spilling beer over the stone tiles in a foamy puddle. Crookshanks miaowed in offended tones, and darted off into the hallway, leaving a trail of small but filthy prints behind him.

Hermione let out a wail.

“That bloody animal!” Ron looked at the floor.

“It’s not his fault,” Hermione protested. “Oh, look at the mess.”

Harry grabbed a cloth and began to swab up the beer. “It’s not that bad.”

“Something like this always happens when we have people round,” Hermione said.

“Yeah, it does,” Ron agreed, wrapping his arms around her. “But if they’re real friends, they won’t give a shit.”

Hermione laughed and buried her face in his chest. “Remind me why I married you?”

“Probably my superior skills at ordering takeaway,” he told her. “Pass me The Folder, would you?” he said, loftily.

“Get it yourself,” Hermione told him, “while I mop up after Crookshanks. Where has he gone now?”

“He’ll be on the sofa,” Harry said helpfully, passing over The Folder, a rather grand name for the dog-eared file containing a selection of local takeaway brochures. “Rolling on his back and getting comfy.”

“Shedding hair. And fleas,” Ron reminded him.

“This whole house is a disaster area lately,” Hermione moaned, but she was hiding a smile. Harry had never quite sussed out why his two best friends worked as a couple – they argued all the time, for a start – but they were still bloody crazy about each other, and one of Harry’s favourite places in the world was sitting at their kitchen table.

“It’s Sunday. Traditionally, that means curry day,” Ron announced, brandishing his favourite takeaway menu, and hunting around amongst the things piled up on the table. “Hermione, where is the phone?”

“Pass. I think I saw it sometime last week?” Hermione said. “Don’t touch that pile, Ron, that’s all the reading I need to get through tonight.”

“This is what happens when your wife does three jobs as well as studying for a Masters degree…” Ron said.

Hermione started moving some of the books and papers around herself. “These are your revision notes, Ron, nothing to do with me at all– Oh, I’ve been looking for this!” she said, grabbing a dusty cloth-bound volume and leafing through the pages. “I’ve got a meeting with the Minister on
Tuesday, Harry, to hopefully deal with this Goblin pension business, and I think I forgot to tell you, I secured another five years of funding for the House-Elf retirement home, so that those whose families won’t pay can still access the facilities—"

“Here it is,” Ron held up the phone triumphantly. “Naan or rice?”

“Both?” suggested Harry.

“Yes, definitely both,” Hermione nodded. “I suppose we’d better clear this table a bit if we’re going to eat soon, the dining room is even worse.”

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Over tandoori chicken and basmati rice, Harry decided the time was right to broach the subject of Grimmauld Place.

“My house is being weird,” he told them.

“ Weird? In what way?” Hermione asked. “Ron, don’t eat all the lime pickle, you know it gives you indigestion. And I want some.”

Harry tore off another chunk of naan. “It seems… kind of... excitable. There are flowers and things growing up the stairs, and it keeps adding bits of furniture and stuff.”

“Really?” Hermione looked fascinated. “Has it ever done that before?”

Harry shook his head. “No. In fact, until recently… I would have said it was sulking.”

“Sulking?” Hermione asked. “What on earth have you done to it, Harry? You must have hurt its feelings in some way.”

“What?” Harry put down his fork. “Are you being funny?”

“Of course I’m not. Old wizarding houses can be very sensitive, you know.”

Ron nodded. “My Great-Uncle Bernard, he pissed off his house once, and when he came home, the door was gone. Just like that! He couldn’t get in.”

“Is this for real?” Harry asked. “What happened?”

“He had to move,” Ron said through a mouthful of rice. “The house never forgave him. His wife was inside at the time, as well. Very sad.”

Harry blinked in horror. “So you’re not going to tell me I’m imagining the whole thing?”

“Certainly not,” Hermione said. “It sounds genuine and I think you should take it quite seriously.”

Bugger. So Harry told them. It sounded totally ridiculous, but he told them about it from the beginning, about the way the house always felt brooding and resentful, to the extent that Harry would often avoid going there. How his attempts to smarten it up never seemed to work. And how the only room that was bearable (well, up to this week when the house started fannying about sprouting candelabras and stuff), was the kitchen.

“Oh, Harry,” Hermione sighed. “It all makes perfect sense. First of all, when you moved into Grimmauld Place, you changed a lot of things around, didn’t you?”
“Of course I did,” Harry said. “I wasn’t living there with all those elf-heads and all that creepy shit that was all over the place. There was a massive cabinet on the third floor that was Cursed, for god’s sake! You had to walk past with your arms pinned to your sides so you didn’t accidentally brush against it.”

“Yes, I know, but the house probably didn’t like you interfering with things at all. Then you sent Kreacher away—”

“I didn’t bloody send him away! It was you who said he’d worked for others all his life and it was time for him to get looked after for a change. They keep him in luxury at that retirement home, you know they do.”

“I know, Harry, but Grimmauld Place must have felt you were eradicating every trace of the Black family. Generations of tradition, wiped out. And then you didn’t appreciate the house…”

“Because it’s a grotty old dump!”

Ron looked solemn. “I hope you’ve not been talking about it like that where it can hear you, mate. My Great-Uncle Bernard had to move to Peckham, you know? You don’t want to end up living in Peckham.”

Harry felt a pang of guilt. How was he supposed to know that wizarding houses were so highly-strung? “I do like some parts of it. I like being in the kitchen, OK? It’s not so much of a misery in there.”

“Yes, well, you love cooking,” Hermione told him. “And you’re very good at it.”

“Unlike certain people,” Ron added, dodging the bit of poppadom Hermione threw at him.

Hermione continued, as if it was all perfectly simple and not completely bloody bonkers that a house might get a bit touchy. “Grimmauld Place will be able to feel that you like spending time in that room, and it’s probably responding to that, you see?” She helped Harry and herself to some more chicken. “But you said that the house was different lately. What’s been happening?”

Harry wasn’t sure if he wanted to tell them, now. Why wasn’t anyone on his side? Nobody offered to have a word with the house about how it was upsetting Harry, did they? “It’s started changing things around,” he said, feeling sullen. “Making some rooms a bit nicer.”

Hermione reached out and put a hand on his. “But that’s wonderful. It sounds like it’s getting used to the idea of being owned by you.”

Harry squirmed in his chair. If he did want help with this – and he did – he could see he was going to have to say a bit more. “It’s not doing that stuff for me,” he said. “I’ve had someone staying over.”

Hermione looked delighted. Ron, however, raised his eyebrows, his fork halfway to his mouth. “Who?”

Harry made a face, and Hermione quickly patted his hand. “You don’t have to say any more if you don’t want to.” She gave Ron a meaningful look. “I’m sure Harry will tell us when it’s the right time.”

“Who?”

He sighed and traced along the pattern of the tablecloth with his finger. “It’s complicated.” He glanced up and felt another jab of guilt at the sight of their concerned faces. Oh, fuck it. “It’s
Malfoy.”

Ron spluttered on his mouthful, and Hermione’s eyes became very wide.

“I just said he could stay the night,” Harry explained. “He didn’t have anywhere to go.”

“Malfoy’s been sleeping at yours? Draco Malfoy?” Ron choked out.

Hermione didn’t say anything, just looked at Harry with an expression he often saw her wear. He suspected it was the one she used when she was trying very hard not to tell Harry what a bloody idiot he was being.

“It’s only til he sorts himself out,” Harry explained. “He’s… had a few problems.”

“OK,” Hermione said carefully.

“OK?” Ron asked. “Malfoy’s having sleepovers at Harry’s, and all you say is OK?”

“The house keeps doing things when he’s around. Candelabras, and flowers and things.” Harry was not going to mention the bed. Or the mirror. Although what he had said sounded bad enough. “And everything feels different.” God, this was awkward. “And it’s really pissing me off,” Harry concluded.

“Of course it’s pissing you off. How could you invite Malfoy to stay–”

“Shut up, Ron,” Hermione told him. “Harry can have whoever he wants staying over.” She gave Ron a meaningful look. “Can’t he?”

Ron looked as though there was a lot more he wanted to say, but Hermione didn’t break eye contact.

“Can’t he, Ron?”

“Yeah,” Ron muttered. “Course he can.”

Hermione put down her fork and rummaged in the pocket of her skirt, where Harry had long suspected she had installed one of her nifty Extension Charms, and came up with a small book of parchment and a self-inking quill. “It’s definitely since Malfoy came that the house started being this way?” She began to jot things down. Candelabras. Flowers, Harry read. “What kind of flowers?” she asked.

Harry shrugged. “Pink ones. Climbing all over the place.”

Ron gave a snort but didn’t comment.

Hermione made another note and then tapped her quill thoughtfully on the parchment. “So, when you left Grimmauld Place today, how would you say the house felt?”

Oh boy. Harry wasn’t proud of this, but when he had woken up that morning, he had brought himself off again, thinking about Malfoy. He hadn’t meant to, but he couldn’t bloody help it – the mere idea of Malfoy listening to Harry wanking, and possibly liking it, had been too much for him.

Harry had brought himself off, quietly, and when he came, he shoved his face into a pillow so as not to make any sound. And when he tried to open his bedroom door, he couldn’t at first, because it was bloody stuck, with flowering vines growing over the doorway, and quivering tendrils trying to push their way under the door.
The house had felt all edgy and excited and—Harry was *definitely* not going to tell Hermione any of this.

Harry cleared his throat. “It seemed… fairly cheerful?” he said, and, yes, he had asked for Hermione’s help, but was it entirely necessary for her to look like that, like she knew all about it and he wasn’t fooling anyone?

Hermione’s quill moved quickly across the parchment, but this time she squirreled the notebook away in her pocket before Harry could get a look at what she had written.

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When he got back to Grimmauld Place, Harry could hear voices. Malfoy had promised no bringing anybody back, but Harry could hear voices coming from one of the upper floors. He took the stairs two at a time; he was going to kill Malfoy. But then a thought occurred to him: what if Malfoy was in the middle of business with a client? Could Harry really burst in and interrupt? They could be doing anything, anything at all, and Harry would *see*, and—He felt a grim kind of fury gnawing at him.

He had reached the second floor, and now he could make out snatches of the conversation, which sounded more like a fight. *Oh.* Of course—he should have known. The sound was coming from the fourth floor, where Harry had, after much effort, managed to relocate the portrait of Walburga Black.

“*Harlot! Bringing shame and degradation to the House of Black!*”

Oh, hell.

“*Foul, tainted hussy! Polluting the noble blood your Mother gave you with your filthy ways!*”

Harry strode up the remaining stairs to find Malfoy standing in front of the portrait, looking stunned as Walburga’s jaundiced face spat insult after insult. Harry yanked at the curtains, trying to wrestle them closed.

“*Deviants!*” Walburga cried, her voice rising to a shriek, one bony finger pointing in accusation. “*Inverts! Sodomites! Befouling this place!*”

Harry tugged with all his might, so hard he thought the fabric would rip.

“*You sicken me with your sinful acts!*” the portrait screeched at Harry, spittle flecking her thin lips.

“Enough,” Harry growled, and with one colossal heave he managed to get the curtains shut, then stood breathing hard as Walburga finally fell silent.

“Fuck me, she’s a mad old bitch, isn’t she?” Malfoy asked, his voice cracking a little at the end. Harry could understand why—an encounter with Sirius’s mother tended to leave you feeling shaken at the best of times.

Harry put a hand to his lips. “Shhh,” he urged, jerking his head towards the stairs. When they reached the floor below, Harry let out a sigh. “It’s usually safe to talk down here without disturbing her. She’s a bit deaf these days, I reckon.”

Malfoy looked paler than usual, his face pinched.

“I’m making tea if you fancy one,” Harry said.
Malfy wrinkled his nose reluctantly. “I need to work.”

Harry had intended to keep his distance today. Malfy was sleeping there, sure, but that didn’t mean they had to spend any time together. However, something about the thought of Malfy going out to offer himself for money straight after what Walburga had said felt especially bleak. Nobody deserved that. And surely they could have a cup of tea together without any drama.

“There’s a new packet of Hobnobs,” Harry said, but Malfy still hesitated.

“The chocolate ones,” Harry said.

Malfy’s mouth twitched into a half-smirk. “Oh, you know how to tempt a man,” he drawled.

“Yeah, well, it doesn’t take much to tempt you,” Harry said, and then felt that annoying heat rising up again. He turned away and started down the stairs so that Malfy wouldn’t see his cheeks flushing.

“I’m actually very choosy.” Malfy said it lightly, but Harry felt a shiver on the back of his neck as he headed to the kitchen, as if Malfy was watching him as he walked downstairs.

The kitchen usually felt welcoming and safe, but now... Malfy leaned against the wall, his hips jutting forward. It was the same pose as the night Harry had first seen him, under the streetlight, and it left him with the same helpless, dry-mouthed, tight-chested feeling.

Now Harry took a proper look at him, he could see why Walburga would be especially incensed. Malfy was wearing a thin, clinging shirt, and a pair of his usual jeans – so tight that Harry couldn’t imagine him ever getting them off again without help.

*Keep it casual. Nothing weird.* Harry gave himself a little shake and passed Malfy the biscuits. “Here.” They were just going to stand here in the kitchen and have a quick chat. No problem.

Malfy began to open the packet. “Oh, wait.” He put the biscuits down and started patting the pockets of his jeans. “Before I forget. I’ve got some gold for you. You know, rent.” He found a wad of notes in his back pocket and offered it to Harry.

Harry raised his hand in protest. “I don’t want that.”

Malfy frowned. “I know it’s that Muggle paper stuff, but you can easily get it changed. They do it at Gringotts now.” He thrust the roll of cash towards Harry again.

Harry shook his head. “I mean, you don’t have to give me any rent. I know you’re saving for another place.”

Malfy’s forehead creased. “Well, for food, then.” He gave Harry a small smile. “Chocolate biscuits.”

“It’s fine,” Harry said. “As long as you can put up with the other residents, you can stay.”

Malfy looked blank for a moment before he caught on. “Oh. My great-aunt.”

“Yeah, her. Put your money away, OK?”

Malfy looked jittery again as he slid the Muggle notes back into his jeans. “She knew who I was, right?”

Harry set about chucking teabags into mugs. “I reckon she did. She seems to keep tabs on everyone
I have no idea how she does it."

You think she’d be glad of a visitor. Oh well." Malfoy helped himself to a biscuit. "Deviant. She
got that bit right." He forced out a laugh.

Harry swallowed. "I’m sorry she said those things to you."

Malfoy lifted his chin. "I’ve heard a lot worse. I’m sure you have, too. At least when it’s a portrait,
they can’t try to kick the shit out of you afterwards." He bit into the biscuit, but he must have caught
Harry’s look of dismay, because he went on, "Or do they not give you grief about it? Being the
Chosen One and all."

"Don’t fucking call me that," Harry told him. "Does who not give me grief?"

Malfoy waved the hand with a hobnob in. "People. You know, for being queer."

"I’m not—" The urge to deny it was like a reflex. But Harry stopped himself. It was pointless. Malfoy
knew. He knew. It was bloody stupid feeling embarrassed about it anyway. He swallowed again,
trying to push down the tightness he felt rising in his throat. "I don’t really think anyone knows about
that, to be honest."

Malfoy’s eyebrows shot up. "Oh really?"

Harry folded his arms. "I don’t see the need to go around talking about it." That was all it was. He
had no problem – did he? – with telling Ron and Hermione. Close friends. It was just that there was
nothing to tell, so far. If he met someone, then there would be a point to having the discussion… but
until then, it would basically just be telling them what Harry thought about when he had a wank, and
he didn’t think anyone needed that information.

"Oh right, so not talking about it means nobody can tell?" Malfoy gave a snort.

Harry felt the old familiar anger swirling in his stomach. Malfoy had a nerve, taunting Harry about
this, of all things. Of course Malfoy knew about Harry. Harry tried not to do anything to give it
away, but it was impossible, what with Malfoy looking the way he did, and being bloody naked in
beds and baths and just being there all the time, making the house vibrate with a giddy excitement
that echoed something thrumming in Harry’s own chest.

"You’re bent, Potter," Malfoy went on. "You’re bent as a nine-Knut piece. Big fucking deal." He
gave Harry a look dripping with scorn.

Harry stared at him. Part of him wished he didn’t care about any of it. That he could be like Malfoy –
sort of blatant. You could tell, somehow, just from looking at him. Harry didn’t know how, but you
could. Maybe it was in the tilt of his head, the way he carried himself with such arrogance and grace.
Or maybe it was the way his eyes slid over Harry’s body at times, checking him out quite openly. He
wore his sexuality on his sleeve, and it was somehow the most arousing and also the most unsettling
thing Harry had seen in his life.

"Just shut up, Malfoy."

"I get a lot of men," Malfoy went on, "they don’t want to admit it. Not even to themselves." He
leaned over to the table and took another biscuit. "So they’ve got the whole thing, you know: wife,
charming children, nice smart house. And every so often, they come looking for me. They pay me to fuck
their brains out in some alleyway, and then they trot off home again. Kiss their darling wife goodnight. All very civilised."

He bit into the biscuit with relish, crunching it with even white teeth. “Tossers,” he said.

The kettle was starting to simmer on the hob, but tea didn’t seem to be a priority any more.

“That’s how you’ll end up, you know,” Malfoy said. “If you keep trying to pretend you don’t want the things you want.”

“I told you to shut up.” Harry took a step towards him, his hands clenching into fists.

Malfoy stood his ground, giving Harry the most insolent, the most bloody provoking look… “You think people don’t notice you staring?” He drawled the words out. “Looking at pretty boys like you want to gobble them up?”

Fucking hell. Harry found himself taking a step closer, so that he was in Malfoy’s space, with his jaw jutting forward. He wanted to mess Malfoy up. Bang his head against the wall. Shake him till his stupid teeth rattled…

What made Harry feel especially mad was the feeling Malfoy was one hundred per cent right. Harry was probably being an idiot thinking nobody could tell. The looks Ron and Hermione sometimes exchanged probably meant they had discussed this very thing – that they had talked about Harry being gay. Hell, he could imagine it so clearly.

“Don’t say anything, Ron – leave it to Harry. He’ll tell us in his own time,” Hermione would have said.

Harry couldn’t bear it, somehow – and this was all Malfoy’s fault. Everything had been fine until he had come along. Absolutely fine. “You think you’re so fucking clever.”

Malfoy didn’t budge an inch, just stood there, with that arrogant look, and Harry was going to do him some serious harm if he kept it up with that sneery expression.

“I don’t think I’m so clever,” Malfoy said, his voice lowered to a threatening whisper. “But I know a man who needs a good hard fuck when I see one.”

Some ragged piece of resistance inside Harry gave way, washed away in a surge of adrenaline, and it felt risky and fantastic. He pushed Malfoy hard against the wall. Malfoy looked surprised, but not at all displeased, as if having roused Harry’s temper was exactly what he was hoping for. Malfoy just stood and waited, something gloating about the curve of his mouth and an electric tension in his body, simmering against Harry’s palms as he kept him there against the wall. Harry felt the house give a leap of elation and it was it, that was fucking it, the whole thing was insufferable. He would wipe that look off Malfoy’s face if it was the last thing he did. Harry’s hands twisted into fists, wrenching at the fabric of Malfoy’s shirt, and then his mouth was crushed against Malfoy’s mouth, and oh holy fucking hell yes.

Nothing in Harry’s life had prepared him for this, the rightness of it jolting through his body like a drug. Malfoy’s mouth was hotter than sin, his teeth clashing against Harry’s with a satisfying pain, and when Malfoy responded with fierce, hungry kisses, Harry’s body roared approval. He found himself cupping Malfoy’s throat, his jaw, holding him in place with his hands so he could carry on taking exactly what he wanted.

Oh, god. It was so good, so good. Malfoy groaned into Harry’s mouth and arched against him, and Harry thought he might come, just from that. Just from the sounds Malfoy made, the lush warmth of his mouth, and the wild, breath-stopping feeling of his tongue sliding against Harry’s.

There was a breathy whistle from behind them as the kettle began to boil, steam forcing its way out.
There was no way Harry was going to stop, but as the sound became shrill and insistent, he reached out with one hand, groping for the kettle, still panting into Malfoy’s mouth. There was a scalding slap of heat against Harry’s palm as he misjudged the distance, knocking it from the stovetop, but thankfully the kettle sputtered into silence.

Malfoy pulled Harry in by the hips, bringing their bodies flush together. Holy Merlin. Harry’s erection strained inside his jeans, craving friction, closer, harder, and Malfoy was letting him, Malfoy was actually letting him do this. He nuzzled open-mouthed along Harry’s jaw, leaving a trail of thrilling wet heat, while Harry clutched at him, hands shaky with disbelief as they slid over narrow hips to palm the sinful curve of Malfoy’s arse. The denim was soft against Harry’s fingers as he mapped every inch, his breath coming in short gasps. He wanted to have Malfoy, right here against this wall. He wanted to rip off those tight jeans and fuck him, quick and dirty and desperate, then lay him down so he could worship every inch of Malfoy’s body with his mouth.

Malfoy hit a sensitive spot on Harry’s throat, tugging a low rumbling moan from Harry’s chest. Harry’s fingers dug into the firm muscle of Malfoy’s arse, and then he felt it.

The roll of money.

It was still tucked into Malfoy’s back pocket. Money from all Malfoy’s previous clients. Of course Malfoy would let Harry do this – this was what Malfoy did for a living. He would let Harry do anything. As long as he paid.

Harry froze, the deep rolling thrills replaced by a cold trickle of guilt. He had let himself do what he wanted without thinking. He had taken advantage of Malfoy – used his body for his own needs. He pulled away roughly.

“What?” asked Malfoy. “What is it?”

“I’m sorry,” Harry said, and his whole body ached at the lack of Malfoy’s touch.

“What the fuck?” Malfoy asked.

“I can’t,” Harry growled, incensed with himself for being so weak in the first place. “I don’t think it’s right to– to buy someone. To pay to make them do what you want.”

“You arsehole,” Malfoy spat the words out. “What is wrong with you? I’m not asking you to pay.”

Oh god, that was worse. Malfoy still felt he owed Harry; he was doing this to pay him back for letting Malfoy stay. Harry had refused to take his money, so Malfoy was trying to settle his debts another way.

“No. I don’t want you to. It’s wrong,” Harry said. Malfoy was a guest in his house, for Merlin’s sake. This was the one place he should be safe. Not have to use his body in payment. Harry’s face screwed up in disgust at what he had done. “I’m sorry. I feel sick that I even touched you.”

“That made you feel sick?” Malfoy’s eyes burned with fury. “Well, isn’t that just wonderful.”

“Not like that. I meant–”

“I know what you meant.” Malfoy wiped his hand across his mouth. “This is so fucked up. I can’t stay here any more.”

“Don’t say that,” Harry told him. “You can stay. It’s my fault.”
But Malfoy’s wand was in his hand. He cast Accio, and Harry ducked as Malfoy’s leather bag hurtled into the room and landed at his side, followed by a flurry of clothes and other belongings, which piled themselves swiftly into the case.

Malfoy fastened the case with a snap, then snaked his hand into his back pocket again and pulled out the roll of money. “There,” he said, throwing it down on the table. “We’re done,” he told Harry.

“No,” Harry said. Where would Malfoy go?

Malfoy took the case in his hand, then set his jaw. His eyes were shining pure silver, but he looked straight ahead, and wouldn’t meet Harry’s gaze.

“Don’t,” said Harry, but Malfoy was already turning on his heel, and with a crack as sharp as a gunshot, he was gone.

Harry swayed backwards. Malfoy’s sudden absence felt like an assault.

And the bloody house had of course taken the opportunity to go nuts. The rest of the kitchen was bare plaster, but the wall where Harry had pinned Malfoy now flamed with a burnished copper colour.

Malfoy’s money lay on the table where he had flung it. Harry stood and stared at it, a cold hollow feeling settling in his chest.
Floo powder really stung when you got it in your eyes, especially when you’d hardly slept the night before. Harry made his way to the Ministry lifts, rubbing at his face furiously and trying to blink the gritty stuff away. Maybe if he got busy at work, these thoughts would leave him alone. The ones about how Malfoy’s mouth had tasted, and the things Harry would do to taste it again.

Bloody Auror Travis was waiting at the lifts – the last person Harry ever wanted to see, let alone first thing on a Monday morning.

Travis didn’t speak, but nodded curtly, and pressed the button for level two. Harry found a space in the corner, then budged up to make room for a small witch carrying an enormous stuffed fish, several feet long.

“Level six,” she told Travis. The lift jerked into motion, and the witch pulled an apologetic face as her fish jostled Harry, a scaly fin ending up in his armpit. “Faulty Portkey,” she explained. “Taking it back to complain.”

The lift seemed wonderfully spacious after the witch and her cargo departed, and Harry breathed out and leaned back against the wall, giving his sore eye another rub.

Travis gave him a sour look. “Ready for this morning’s test, then, Potter?”

Shit. Shit shit shit shit shit.

“Yeah,” said Harry, nodding. “Yeah. One hundred per cent ready.”

Shit. Why had Ron not reminded—Actually, Ron had reminded him. On Friday. And Sunday. Shiiiiiiit. What had Travis said last time Harry had fucked up an exam? There could be no special treatment given, not when so much was at stake. Not even for you, Potter.

The lift arrived at level two and Harry followed Travis to the DMLE, glowering gently to himself. Even the back of Travis’s head was annoying, the way his hair was all bristly and the same length all over, like he measured it with a ruler and trimmed it nightly. He probably did.

“All right, mate?” Ron stood in the doorway of the break room, holding a mug of coffee.

Harry gave a terse nod. “Fine. You?”

“Yup.” Ron jerked his head. “Come in here a minute.”

The room was otherwise empty, and Ron shut the door behind them. “Made you a brew.”

“Thanks.” Harry took the offered mug.

“Weekend OK?” Ron asked.

“I only saw you yesterday,” Harry reminded him.

“Yeah, I know.” Ron swigged at his coffee. “Thought we could have a quick catch up, though. Just us.”

“OK…” What was up with Ron, for god’s sake?
Ron glanced at Harry awkwardly. “Err. So. How’s everything at home?”

Oh. Harry did know what this was about, after all.

“Things going all right with, err…” Ron seemed to be having trouble getting the words out. He waved his hand. “You know.”

“With Malfoy?” Harry asked.

“Yeah.” Ron nodded gratefully. “Yeah, with him. How’s all that going? Because, I just wanted to say, it’s fine with me, if you… you know, have people to stay over, blokes, or anyone, and there’s nothing wrong with–”

“He’s gone.” Harry took a gulp of too-hot tea and nearly burnt the roof of his mouth.

“Oh.” Ron peered at Harry’s face, taking in his swollen eyes. “Oh, mate.”

“It’s fine.” Harry said, not looking at him.

“Oh. Well. Bloody hell.” Ron rubbed a hand through his hair. “Well, I can see you’re a bit cut up about it.”

“Ron, I’m fine.” It came out sounding way too aggressive, but if Ron didn’t shut up, Harry wasn’t sure what he might do.

“You don’t look fine, you look like–”

“I had a disagreement with some Floo Powder, OK? And I forgot to study for Travis’s bloody test.”

Ron rummaged in his robes. “Ah, I can help you there. Hermione got me onto these revision cards, yeah? They’re colour-coded, and–” He pulled out a handful of cards, rather bent from being squashed into his pocket. “Here, have a look.”

Harry waved them away. “Thanks, but I reckon it’s a bit late now.”

Ron’s mouth turned down at the corners. “Fancy a pint later?”

“Maybe,” Harry shrugged.

“Actually, got Bill and Fleur coming over tonight. How about tomorrow?”

“Yeah. Why not?”

Ron slapped Harry on the arm. “It’ll be fine. You’re not the worst-looking bloke, you know? And you’ve got to be able to do better than–”

“Ron,” Harry said, warningly. “Leave it.”

“Yeah. Course.”

A small bell flew in and performed a circuit of the room at the level of Ron’s head, making him duck, then whizzed out into the corridor again, chiming incessantly as it went. “Ugh, the morning bell always goes for me,” he said. “Time to go, I guess.” Ron drained his coffee and tucked the revision cards back into his robes. “Good luck.”

“Yeah, you too.”
Harry knew it was going to be no good the minute he sat down at the desk. He hated all this. There were vicious criminals out there, right now, and Harry wanted to be out in the field, for god’s sake, not swotting over a training manual as if they were back in school. His wand arm kept twitching with frustration, and that was before he had opened the paper and started to read the questions.

Which form is to be used for logging a suspect’s initial statement?

Which three spells are advised for containing an outbreak of Acromantulas? Please give full reasons for your answers, and include a diagram of the wand movement for each spell.

What was the purpose of the Animagus Registration Act of 1944?

Harry glanced around the room. Everybody else was dutifully scratching away with their quills. This was so pointless. If a Dark Wizard was blowing people to bits, Harry wasn’t going to stop and think, Ah, which spell does page 492 of the training handbook advise? They’d all be dead by the time he’d worked it out.

Good Aurors followed their instincts, Harry thought mutinously. And his were telling him to get out of there. He put his quill down and pushed his chair back with a sharp squeak. Travis looked up, frowning, but Harry didn’t care. He didn’t want to make a big scene, but he couldn’t stay here another minute. He walked to the door.

“Sit down,” Travis told him. “There are no breaks till the exam is over.”

“Remembered somewhere else I need to be,” Harry said, and kept on walking.

He took the Floo, not caring that his eyes were stinging and streaming again. He was so fucking angry. With himself. With Malfoy. With the whole world. Riddle was dead, but the consequences of his madness went on and on, and bloody on. What kind of world was it where someone couldn’t get a job because of a mistake they’d made when they were a child? A horrible, stupid, ugly mistake, one that Malfoy would wear on his arm for the rest of his life.

Harry knew exactly where he was going first. He probably knocked on the flat door a bit too roughly, because the face that peeped through the crack – an unkempt, bearded wizard in his thirties – looked worried even before Harry stuck his boot in the narrow gap and pointed his wand at the man’s jugular.

“Lennox,” Harry said.

“No,” protested the wizard.

“Open this door,” Harry told him.

“Who are you?”

“Auror Department,” Harry said. He was already going to be in the shit. Why worry about it now?

The wizard looked doubtful, but he opened the door another few inches, and Harry was in.

Malfoy’s old flat didn’t look much different to when he’d last seen it. The wall had been patched up, but Harry could see they’d made a pretty bad job of it.

“You live here?” Harry asked.

The man nodded, dumbly. So much for the possibility that Malfoy had moved back, and this was
one of his clients.

“Name?”

“Wolfgang Blenheim.”

“Where’s Lennox?”

“I don’t know anyone called Lennox!” the wizard protested.

“Know anyone called Malfoy?”

A shake of the head.

“Seen a blond wizard, my age? Tall, skinny…” Harry gestured grimly to his forearm. “Marked.”

Another shake. The man looked terrified, and Harry was starting to regret having thrust the wand at his throat to begin with.

“Last question. Who’s your landlord?” This wizard didn’t know a Lennox, but maybe it was the same man operating under a different name?

The wizard blinked. “I only met him once. I just moved in here.”

“You got his name, though?”

The wizard pushed his hands through his greasy hair. “I’m not sure. I can’t remember.”

“I suggest you think a bit harder,” Harry told him, an edge to his voice, and the man nodded.

“Carlton? Maybe. It began with a C, definitely. He’s got a sharp kind of face. Black hair.”

“All right. That’s fine.” Harry turned to go, then turned back and jerked his chin. “That wall’s probably going to fall down the next time there’s a strong wind.”

The wizard’s eyes widened, but he just nodded again.

“If your landlord won’t fix it, report it to us.”

“Thank you,” the man said, opening the door in obvious hopes that Harry would leave quickly.

God, what a mess this all was. There was no need for Harry to take it out on this poor bloke. “Thank you for your help,” Harry told him. “I’m sorry I disturbed you.”

Carlton. Carlton. There would probably be plenty of Carltons, and it might not even be the same bastard who’d messed with Malfoy. Unless… could Carlton – or something like it – be his first name?

Back at the Ministry, Harry went straight to level two and used his wand to get past the security gate and into DMLE Admin.

“Hello, Potter, back again?” asked a mocking voice. “Let me guess... You’ve come to talk me into getting some more files for you.”

“Hello, Winifred,” Harry said.

Winifred raised one arched eyebrow. “What is it this time?”
“You know last week I was looking for a Lennox?”

Winifred leaned back in her chair. “I remember. And no, I will not bring out everyone beginning with L so you can have a nose through. You’ll get me fired.”

“Can you check again – this time for a Carlton Lennox? Or something similar to that.”

“I could do…” Winifred tapped a quill against her red-lipsticked mouth. “But what’s in it for me? You know I’m not meant to hand out files without a B118.”

Harry swore under his breath. “Please, Winifred? It’s important.”

“How about that drink you promised me? I’m free tonight.”

Harry forehead wrinkled. “I don’t remember promising anything like that.”

“Don’t you want to be a gentleman and take me out for a drink to say thank you?”

Harry parked his bum on the corner of her desk. This looked like it was going to be more of an involved effort than he’d hoped. “Why don’t I buy you a coffee from the canteen?”

“But I want to go to that new place on Diagon. The cocktail bar.”

*Oh, hell.* “I’ll happily buy you a drink sometime… as a friend.”

Winifred pouted. “You’re so mean.”

“I… really don’t think I’m your type, Winifred. Please. Could you just have a look for Carlton Lennox? Or something like it?”

She uncrossed her legs slowly. “Oh-kayyyyy,” she said. “But you look *just* my type from where I’m sitting.”

Harry wiped his brow with the sleeve of his robes as Winifred sauntered off into the stacks of files. *Please let it be there.* He didn’t have to wait long until she reappeared.

“Nope,” said Winifred. “No Carlton Lennox. Nothing like it, either.”

“Carl Lennox? Or Charles, maybe?”

“I said nothing.” Winifred put her hand on her hip. “Do you think I didn’t check already?”

Dammit. Harry had spent practically the whole morning on this, and for what?

“Carlton Lennox is a terrible name, anyway,” Winifred told him. “It’s one of those names that’s two surnames smashed together, like one of the heroes in those stupid romance novels, and it’s always a Quidditch player, or a Healer or something—”

Harry slammed his hand down on the desk. “That’s it!”

Winifred raised her eyebrow again. “Hmm?”

“Two names that both sound like surnames. Try Lennox Carlton.” He got to his feet, too wired to keep still. “Bloody hell, I just assumed Lennox was his last name. I bet that’s it.”

Winifred looked amused. “Well, it sounds just as terrible that way round.”
“Please, Winifred.”

The sound of her heels clicked away into the stacks and she returned after only a minute with a green-covered file. “How about Lennox Carlville? Will he do for you?”

Harry grabbed the file impatiently. The photo showed a sharp-faced wizard with black hair and piercing blue eyes. As Harry looked, Carlville’s mouth twisted into a sneer, and a bitter rage rose up in Harry’s throat as the photo looped again and again. This was him; Harry would bet on it.

He flicked through the contents of the file. Illegal potions, ward-breaking, two counts of affray. All minor stuff that had got him a few short stays in Azkaban. Harry noticed that he was currently on probation after an incident in Knockturn Alley. A new conviction for Assault at Wandpoint would not go down well with the Wizengamot. Not to mention the threats he’d made on Malfoy’s life. He looked up. “Winifred. You’re a wonder.”

“Yes, I am,” she said, holding her hand out for the file.

Harry flipped the file closed. Carlville’s face leered at him from the front cover, and Harry remembered the gash on Malfoy’s face, and the repulsive things Carlville had said. Harry scanned every inch of the photo.

*I’ll remember you, and you’d better hope I don’t find you,* Harry thought.

“You know, you look even more handsome when you scowl like that,” Winifred told him. “All smouldering. Have you got, like, a brother or something? Someone who’d appreciate a fine witch when he sees one?”

“I owe you one for this,” Harry told her, handing the file back. “No brothers, but how about Metcalfe, he’s new? Tall, fit, rides a motorbike.”

“Send him on up,” Winifred said, her glossy red lips curving into a smile. “I’ll do the rest.”

Harry was whistling to himself as he walked out into the corridor.

“Ah, there you are, Potter.” The crisp tones of Gawain Robards were like cold water poured on Harry’s good mood. “Apparently I need to have a word with you. In my office.”

~*~

Malfoy wasn’t at the pick-up spot on Duke Street. He wasn’t in the other rent boys’ hang out Harry knew about, the one near the sauna. He wasn’t at the Leaky Cauldron – not that Harry had thought he would be – nor anywhere else in Diagon Alley, as far as Harry could see. He wasn’t in the Co-op buying biscuits. And as Harry had discovered earlier, he wasn’t back at his old flat.

He could be in some Knockturn Alley dive. He could be in a bar on the Brompton Road wearing that bloody suit. He could be at a punter’s house, or in the cells at the DMLE, or in an alleyway with his hand down someone’s trousers – he could be anywhere. He could be dead in a bloody gutter and Harry would never know, not till he read it in the *Prophet.*

Malfoy probably didn’t want to be found – but Harry just wanted to see him. To tell him that he was sorry. To check that he was all right, that he wasn’t sleeping rough, that nobody had cut him up with a knife. And to tell him that Grimmauld Place was sulky and miserable without him.

Harry shoved his hands deeper into his pockets and strode along gloomily. Maybe it was good news that Harry couldn’t find Malfoy. Maybe it meant that he had found somewhere safe to stay and was
lying low for a bit.

*Take a couple of days leave, for Merlin’s sake, Robards had said. Sort your head out.*

How could Harry sort his head out when he didn’t know if Malfoy was dead or alive?

*I can’t keep covering for you. I can sign you off for this morning with stress, but when you come back, you need to sit that exam and pass it.*

Well, Harry had never asked anyone to cover for him. And if being an Auror was all about shuffling pieces of paper and passing pointless tests, he wasn’t sure he wanted to be one.

He started to head back to the house, his legs feeling heavy, boots scuffing along the ground. He made the detour that took him along Duke Street one last time. There were two figures standing next to the kebab shop, looking fed up and cold, but neither of them was Malfoy. One of them was the kind of boy Harry would have been interested in, once upon a time… youngish and a bit edgy-looking, with his hair slicked back, his eyes darting restlessly up and down the street. But now he held no interest for Harry. He didn’t have what Malfoy had. He didn’t know Harry like Malfoy did.

Harry could sense the brooding atmosphere at Grimmauld Place before he’d even stepped inside. There was a chill dampness in the air that got under his collar and made him give a little shudder as he hung his coat in the hall. He walked slowly up to the third floor, his footsteps sounding hollow on every stair. The door was ajar, but when Harry looked in at the silver room. Malfoy wasn’t there. Of course not – Harry hadn’t been expecting him to be. He had only wanted to check. Just in case. But in his absence, the room had furnished itself with a mound – no, a mountain – of cushions and pillows, piled up on the bed in a decadent heap.

Harry glared at the ridiculous collection. There must be two dozen of them – tastefully decked out in silks and satins, and, in the case of the topmost cushion, trimmed with an inordinate amount of tassels. Where was Grimmauld Place getting all these things from? Was it transfiguring cobwebs and black beetles into flowers and furnishings? Or was it summoning stuff secretly from another location, and there was someone else’s very poncy house which was suddenly bereft of cushions?

The thing was, you couldn’t look at this bed without imagining Malfoy lounging elegantly on top of it, which was no doubt exactly what the house had in mind. Harry could picture it all with a feverish clarity. Malfoy’s pale skin against rose-gold satin, the angles of his body starker than ever amidst the opulent display. Harry would crawl across the bed slowly, locking eyes with Malfoy until he felt the yielding whisper of silk beneath him. The cushions looked made for the slow, sensuous tumble of lips and skin, but with Malfoy, it would be more like bruising kisses and bodies straining, urgent and relentless.

Harry thought of his own room, no doubt danker and more dismal than ever, and scowled as he took his wand and vanished the cushions, every last stupid one of them.

~*~

There was either a draught coming from under the door, or around the window frame, or possibly both, as Harry sat at the lopsided desk in the corner of his room. His quill made a thin, scratching sound against the parchment.

*Dear Hermione,* he wrote.

*Is there anything you can do to help Malfoy find some kind of job with decent wages? He needs to support his parents, and he’s having to*
There was a painful knot of tension at Harry’s temple, and he stopped to massage it while he considered what to say. He didn’t think Malfoy wanted Harry to broadcast the fact he was working as a prostitute.

to take on work that isn’t safe.

Harry stared into space as a mixed up snarl of anxiety and regret, and, if he was honest, jealousy, twisted right through his guts. Malfoy was probably out there, right now, sprawled naked on someone’s bed, someone who’d paid him to be there. Someone who had none of Harry’s bloody hang-ups.

And if that person turned out to be dangerous... Well. There was absolutely nothing Harry could do to protect him.

The lamp spluttered and went out, leaving an acrid tang in the air, and Harry had to cast several times before it would relight.

I don’t know where he is at the moment, but I’m hoping I’ll be able to find him again.

He had to keep hoping. Harry cupped his hands together and blew on them as he wondered how best to persuade Hermione to help. He thought of the weariness on Malfoy’s face after he’d been out earning, and the determined way he spoke about supporting his parents.

I think he would work hard, Harry wrote. It’s just that no-one will give him a chance.

Christ, was that rain coming in? The window was firmly closed, for god’s sake; it wasn’t meant to rain inside houses! A particularly icy gust of air skittered around Harry’s ankles.

I hope you can help, he finished. Thanks.

He signed his name at the bottom, then added:

p.s. My house actually hates me now. I think it’s raining in my bedroom.

Later, after Harry cast some charms to keep off the worst of the weather and climbed under the chilled covers of his bed, Star-Sirius blinked at him through the gap in the curtains.

“Yeah, you can fuck off,” Harry said aloud, and turned on his side, bunching the covers over his head so he couldn’t see anything at all.

He slept fitfully, struggling to escape from a nightmare in which Malfoy was covered in silvery blood like a Hogwarts ghost and fading out of sight into nothingness. Harry woke, shaky with adrenaline, telling himself it was only a dream. It didn’t mean anything had actually happened to Malfoy. But when he eventually dozed off again, he was mocked by different – but no less unsettling – dreams, in which Malfoy, now very much alive and well, slipped under the bedcovers, his breath humid against Harry’s skin as he whispered salacious things in his ear.

He woke for a second time, alone, with a cold weight in his chest that felt cruel after the memory of Malfoy’s touches. It was first light, streaks of pale gold cutting through the grey outside, and Hermione’s owl was tapping politely on the window.

Harry,

I’ll have to give Malfoy some thought. I’ll be honest, it might not be the easiest thing to find work for him, but I’ll see what I can do. Is he still staying with you, then? You know if you ever want to talk
about any of this, we’d love to have you over for dinner takeaway.

Meanwhile, I haven’t forgotten about Grimmauld Place, I promise. Have you spoken to Kreacher about any of it? He lived there for centuries; he probably knows the house’s secrets better than anyone.

I’ve been researching Pureblood houses and their magic, but I’d really like to come over and see the type of things that the house is doing. Shall I pop in on Wednesday before I start work? Ron said you were having a bit of time off.

Are you OK, Harry? I’m worried about you. I’m sure we can get all of this sorted out. Please, just don’t do anything hasty.

With love,

Hermione

Harry rubbed his hand over his bleary face. Kreacher. Of course. Harry hadn’t visited him for nearly two weeks, anyway, and he had a knack for making Harry feel bad when he didn’t see him for a while… But of course the old bugger would have some idea about what was going on. He must have seen a few things over the years.

Harry showered in a bathroom that seemed to have grown several years of cobwebs overnight, and when he went back to his room to get dressed, there was a fat, warty toad sitting balefully in a small puddle in the middle of Harry’s bed.

“Well, isn’t that just brilliant,” Harry said darkly, considering banishing the toad to the arse end of nowhere. In the end, he carried it downstairs and let it hop away into the wilderness of the garden.

Harry Apparated to just outside the tall iron-wrought gates of Kreacher’s new residence. Dobby Memorial Retirement Home, read the brass plaque on the wall. Harry touched his wand to the plaque as he spoke the password, “A free elf,” and the gates swung open.

“Mr Kreacher? He’s resting in the conservatory, I believe,” a young witch dressed in starchy white carer’s robes told Harry, pointing across the hallway to a light-filled room.

Kreacher was reclining on an elf-sized lounger with his eyes closed, his ancient face wearing an expression of peace that Harry had certainly never seen in his years at Grimmauld Place. The sun streamed in through the many windows, bringing a soft glow to the room and warming Kreacher’s limbs, which protruded from the small fluffy robe wrapped around him.

Harry was impatient for answers, but then again it seemed pretty selfish to disturb the old elf, so he looked around for a seat that would support his weight. All the furniture was house-elf sized, so Harry settled down on the floor next to a low table and picked up one of the magazines that lay there. House-Elf Monthly, he read. Make your ears your best feature with our new makeover tips, promised the cover. Check out the latest styles in teatowel fashion!

Hmm. Perhaps he should come back later. As Harry shifted restlessly on the floor, Kreacher’s eyes flickered open, and for a brief moment Harry saw his creased old face brighten into a look of pleasure.

“Hello, Kreacher,” Harry said.

Kreacher’s lips pressed together and his eyes slid away from Harry. “So Harry Potter has remembered his duties after all this time,” he muttered. “Kreacher wondered if he had forgotten all
about his old servant, leaving him neglected here in this place for months on end without a single
visit—"

“It’s been about ten days,” Harry said. “And there’s no way you’re neglected here.” Straight away
he felt bad about being short with Kreacher – he’d only just got there. But he was so wound up
about everything, and the elf knew how to get under his skin.

As if on cue, a carer came in with a tray of fancy looking juices and cordials. “How was your nap,
Mr Kreacher? Would you like anything to drink?”

Kreacher screwed up his face in disdain, but extended a bony finger towards the tray. “Perhaps
Kreacher could manage one of the pink ones.”

The carer helped the elf to sit up on the lounger and got him comfortable, with his drink at his elbow.
“I’ll leave you to enjoy spending time with your visitor. Just call if you need anything.”

“So how are you feeling?” Harry asked.

“Harry Potter asks how Kreacher is feeling. Kreacher is six hundred and thirty years old, Kreacher
has been cast off and abandoned in this dreadful place like a worn-out broom, while the Potter boy
lives in Mistress’s house all alone, meddling with the precious things, mixing with people Mistress
would never approve of—”

Harry felt a stab of irritation. “But it’s not Walburga’s house anymore. It’s mine.”

Kreacher’s eyes passed slyly across Harry’s face. “Ah, Kreacher is old and forgets.” He looked
pointedly at the drink which the carer had set within easy reach. “Kreacher is so thirsty. Kreacher has
been left here in the hot sun all morning with nobody to bring any water—”

Harry resisted the temptation to roll his eyes. “They just came with a drink for you. Look, it’s right
there.”

“Kreacher must rest. Healers say Kreacher is worn out from centuries of slaving for wizards. Now
wizards must serve Kreacher.” His bloodshot old eyes glinted.

*For fuck’s sake,* thought Harry, but he got up and passed the drink to Kreacher all the same. “There.
Listen, I didn’t come to argue, I wanted to see how you are, and to ask you something.”

“Kreacher knew Harry Potter wanted something. Harry Potter never does anything for Kreacher
without wanting something in return, even though he lives in luxury in the ancestral home, while
Kreacher is exiled, after all those years of faithful service—”

*Just ignore him,* Harry thought, but the urge to bite back was too strong. Luxury, indeed. He’d bet it
wasn’t raining in Kreacher’s bedroom... “Kreacher, you agreed you wanted to come here. Hermione
said you couldn’t sign the papers fast enough.”

“Kreacher was tricked by the Mud—” Kreacher broke off with a cough as he saw Harry’s face
warning him not to go there. “By the Muggleborn, Granger. He never knew it would cost so much to
stay here.”

“I pay for everything!” Harry said indignantly. “It doesn’t cost you a penny!”

Kreacher started to slurp his drink with a loud, slightly obscene sound, his leathery ears quivering as
he did so. He didn’t speak again until the glass was completely drained. “So Harry Potter has come
to ask Kreacher’s advice. Kreacher is very wise and could certainly help if he wanted to, Kreacher is
not surprised that Harry Potter comes to beg for help–"

“Kreacher,” Harry said, as politely as he could through gritted teeth. “Please listen, Draco Malfoy came to Grimmauld Place and the house keeps doing things for him. Nice things. And it seems very… disappointed with me.”

Kreacher stopped in mid-mutter, his sparse white eyebrows rising up across his bald head. “Miss Cissy’s boy? At Grimmauld Place?”

“Yes,” Harry said. “Is that why the house likes him? Because he’s Narcissa’s son?”

Kreacher took on a look of deep cunning, his mouth working as if chewing something over. “Harry Potter has never appreciated my Mistress’s house, no, he is ungrateful for Master Sirius’s gift–”

“I am not!” Harry protested, but he knew deep down this was not far from the truth.

“What is the Malfoy boy doing there, Krecher wonders? Krecher has ways of finding out, Krecher will–”

“That doesn’t matter,” Harry went on quickly, deeply opposed to the thought of Krecher discovering anything about him and Draco. “I just need to know what to do about the house. Is there some way of making it less annoyed with me?”

“The house needs protection, yes,” Kreacher nodded to himself. “It needs a family, and Harry Potter neglects it, just like he neglects poor old Kreacher.”

“Is it because he’s a Black?” Harry persisted. “The house doesn’t want me there, is that it? It would rather be owned by Malfoy?” Harry was surprised by the lump that came to his throat at the thought. It was his house. Sirius gave it to him. Not Malfoy.

Kreacher looked more secretive than ever. “The ancient magic still holds. The Potter boy lives all alone, just like Master Sirius, nasty and proud, he was. Perhaps Harry Potter will leave and then nobody will care for my Mistress’s house again. Master Harry must stay at Grimmauld Place, oh yes, and the house makes sure of it–”

“By putting toads in my bed? None of this makes any sense!”

One of the carers stood in the doorway. “It’s time for your massage now, Mr Kreacher.”

Kreacher made a small grumbling sound, but he began to slowly lift himself from the lounger.

“You're welcome to wait here, Mr Potter,” the carer suggested, but Kreacher shook his head.

“Krecher will play bingo after his massage. Harry Potter should go now.”

Harry got to his feet. What a complete waste of time; he might as well have asked the toad for answers. He strongly suspected the elf enjoyed being as unhelpful as possible. “Well, enjoy yourself, Krecher,” he said, with an edge of bitterness.

Kreacher gave him a crafty look. “Harry Potter is not Krecher’s master any more. Krecher does not have to enjoy himself just because Harry Potter says so.” He turned to the carer. “Krecher hopes it will be apple pie at lunchtime, and nothing with nuts in. Krecher cannot abide nuts, nasty, crunchy little things, they make Krecher’s teeth hurt–”

“It’s sherry trifle today,” the wizard replied.
Kreacher began to mutter again, but Harry could see a look of sly contentment on his face as he shuffled off. He watched as the carer took the old elf’s arm to support him as they left the conservatory. The staff seemed to have new uniforms, a rather shapeless tunic that reminded Harry of— but no. Surely it must be a coincidence that they looked a little like pillowcases?

~*~

A busy bar on Diagon Alley was not where Harry had intended to end up that evening. But he had promised Ron they’d have a pint together, and Harry really didn’t want to let his best mate down, not after everything else he’d managed to mess up lately. It was nice enough to see Ron—they both seemed to be avoiding tricky subjects like the DMLE, Grimmauld Place, or Slytherins in general, but the place was too loud and far too crowded, and after a couple of drinks Harry was wondering if the only way to face going back to his toad-producing house was to get shit-faced first. When Ron said he was going to call it a night, Harry stuck around to finish his drink. And maybe order another, and another. He needed something—anything—to take the edge off this restless agitation that was needling at him.

He glowered at the remains of his pint. *Ask Kreacher,* Hermione had said. Yeah, that had been a brilliant suggestion. He took another long pull of his beer, draining it, then glanced up as a flash of something caught his eye.

_Holy hell._ It was Malfoy, his silvery hair gleaming under the lights, the hard lines of his torso defined by a battered-looking leather jacket. Harry felt an overwhelming rush of relief—*he’s alive*—which set something inside his chest singing. _Thank Merlin._ Malfoy was moving through the room with practised ease, navigating the crowds with a look of focus on his face, and all Harry’s instincts were alive with the desire to go to him. A wave of need tugged him to his feet, but instead of pushing through the throng of customers towards Malfoy, Harry just stood, swaying on the spot a little. It wasn’t the drink. He didn’t know what it was, only that he had never felt like this before in his life. He had never wanted anything so badly—and he had never felt anything was quite so hopeless.

Malfoy was still moving through the crowd, drifting further away with every moment, and Harry narrowed his eyes as he saw a wizard put his hand on Malfoy’s arm to stop him. Malfoy looked around, his expression aloof, eyes flicking up and down the person speaking to him. Harry couldn’t see the other wizard’s face, but he was a thick set man with a head of curls. Was it someone Malfoy knew, or—Harry’s hand went instinctively to his wand—was it someone willing to pay for what Malfoy had to offer?

The man beckoned to another wizard standing nearby. This second man joined them, wearing a leering look that made Harry want to *Incendio* something. Holy Merlin. The two of them were definitely trying to pick Malfoy up. And although Harry couldn’t hear what was being said, he could read the body language, and Harry would bet they both wanted Malfoy, both of them together. Harry felt a surge of misery rising up inside him, and he made a sound like a whimper at his own helplessness. Was he going to have to stand here and watch Malfoy leave with these men? He felt like something inside him was going to tear apart just thinking about it. But what option did he have?

The first man gripped Malfoy’s shoulder, then—good god—he ran his hand down to squeeze Malfoy’s bicep. Like he was checking out the merchandise. Harry’s wand arm was thrumming with the need to blast something. The second wizard stepped closer and snaked a possessive hand around Malfoy’s hip. It was clear that both men regarded Malfoy as their property now, and *fuck,* that was hot as well as terrible, the thought of them having their way with him. Harry’s hands were in fists at his sides, as he struggled with a vicious kind of madness trying to fight its way out from inside him. He watched Malfoy tilting his head as if to consider what was being said, and then the first man turned so that Harry could see his face for the first time.
Wait.

Harry knew this man.

It had been in May. A raid near Clerkenwell and, as often happened, Harry and a couple of other trainees had been drafted in as back up. They were looking for potions, but what they found was this wizard, a couple of accomplices, and all sorts of sleazy stuff. There were so-called love potions – not the daft kind sold in pink packets that only third years believed worked, but the real thing. They found photos of some high-profile people in compromising positions – a couple of Ministry officials, a Quidditch player. Presumably blackmail material. And the last, which still made Harry feel cold inside when he thought about it, was porn, of a rather unpleasant kind. It wasn’t the worst stuff out there – not animals or kids or anything – but there was just something degrading about it, something sadistic, in a way that turned Harry’s stomach.

He had looked forward to hearing the wizard had been locked up, but the case was dismissed before it came in front of the Wizengamot.

“Lack of evidence,” they had said.

Bullshit, thought Harry. There’d been plenty of evidence. Someone had clearly bribed someone, or someone had been blackmailed, or worse. Harry sometimes dreamed about being Head Auror one day and scything through all the corruption and bureaucracy. Clearing out all of the old dead wood, all the relics, and replacing them with a new, efficient, principled Auror service… Harry got quite carried away at times, thinking about it. It was one of the things that made him persevere with training when he was having a bad day.

He had long forgotten the wizard’s name, but he knew his face – rugged and worn, with cold lifeless eyes. And he knew with certainty that this was the same damn bastard, pawing at Malfoy’s muscles and, from the looks of it, trying to haggle him down on a price. All of this flooded through Harry’s mind in a couple of seconds, and then his body was in motion, pushing through the crowds with savage intent.

It took no time at all for Harry to cross the room. He swatted the wizard’s arm away from Malfoy, staring him full in the face. Harry didn’t know what he was going to say until he heard the words coming out of his mouth, a low, emphatic growl: “He’s already taken.”

He felt Malfoy’s start of surprise but didn’t break eye contact with the first wizard. He met Harry’s gaze belligerently.

“What the hell?” The man stood his ground, his beery breath blowing over them.

“He’s taken,” Harry told him in a tone of pure certainty. “He’s coming with me.” Just saying it made the blood surge around his body.

“What’s your game?” the man snarled.

“No game,” Harry said. “Time for you to leave.” His magic seethed at his fingertips, wanting to flood out and send this bastard flying across the room.

“Why can’t you find your own whore?” the man asked.

Harry did look at Malfoy then, to see if he minded being spoken about like that, but Malfoy was just staring at Harry with his lips parted, his pupils wide and black. Harry gazed back at him, and thought that he had never seen anything more incredible.
“We had a deal,” the wizard said. His friend had melted into the crowd long ago, but this man was evidently more persistent. He made as if to take Malfoy’s arm again, and that was it; in that moment, Harry felt he would kill this man rather than let him do the things he wanted to Malfoy, and it must have shown in his eyes, because the wizard took a step back in alarm.

“’I know you, don’t I?’” Harry told him, letting his wand slip into his hand, so easy and sweet.

The man seemed to recognise him at last. He made an attempt at a sneer but backed away further.

“I’m pretty sure I told you to leave,” Harry said. A sense of his own power throbbed through his body, and it was such a rush. He felt Malfoy’s hand move to the small of Harry’s back, just resting there against the fabric of Harry’s shirt, cool and steady, and there was nothing—the man couldn’t do with Malfoy at his side. “I think you’d better make sure neither of us see you again,” Harry told the wizard, and with a grunt of defeat, the man finally turned to go, darting a look behind him to make sure Harry wasn’t following.

Malfoy let out a breath in a soft huff. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes running all over Harry’s face, lingering on his mouth, then back up to his eyes. “Merlin, Potter,” he breathed. His hand was still resting against Harry’s spine, and he used a gentle pressure to guide Harry towards the back of the bar. “Let’s get out of here.”

Harry allowed himself to be steered towards a back exit and out into the cold of a frosty night. There was a narrow passageway leading to Diagon Alley, lit by the dirty-orange glow of a single lamp.

“I think you should probably put your wand away, don’t you?” Malfoy asked, biting his lip, and Harry realised he was still gripping the length of holly in his hand. He tucked it away, and when he looked up again, Malfoy was standing closer, his eyes soft and silvery, almost liquid in the dusky light.

“Do you want to go back to your place, or…?”

“Or what?” said Harry. He told himself he didn’t know what Malfoy meant. But he did. He knew it with every beat of his heart. With every breath he drew into his lungs he craved the release that Malfoy was offering.

Malfoy leaned in, resting one hand against the wall next to Harry’s head. “Some people want it outside,” he said, his voice throaty. “Somewhere like this—an alleyway. I think they like the idea of getting caught.”

Yes, Harry could understand that. He could smell Malfoy’s skin, the fresh, clean fragrance of his cologne and the heady scent of leather, and it made him want to bury his nose in it and grind against Malfoy, right here where anyone could walk past and see. He wanted to claim him—to grab Malfoy and hold him hard and rut up against him in this grubby alleyway and come all over him. And—hell—Harry could do that. All he had to do was hand the money over, like anyone else, and he could do that and anything else he felt like. Anything. He wanted Malfoy so badly it made him shake. Harry was trembling all over, and he hadn’t even touched Malfoy yet. This wasn’t normal, surely? Harry had just threatened a man to make him get away from Malfoy. It frightened him, the things he might do to Malfoy if he were to let himself get started.

It wasn’t too late to turn this around. “I know what you’re thinking,” Harry said. He couldn’t look Malfoy in the eye and lie to him, so he looked at the ground. “But I just didn’t want you to go with that man. He’s a sleazy bastard.” He glanced up at Malfoy’s face and said quickly, “I’ll pay you, of course. Whatever he was going to pay. I’ll pay double—just don’t go with him. Not now, or in the future.”
Malfoy’s jaw tightened and he spoke low and dangerous. “This shit? Again? I’ve told you, I’ll never take your money unless I can give you something in return. You’ve rescued me enough times.”

Harry opened his mouth to explain, but Malfoy put a hand up. “Stay away from me, Potter,” he hissed. “If you don’t want what I have to offer…” His face twisted in an expression that looked painful. “Well, plenty of other people do.” He spat the words out viciously as he turned to go back into the bar. “Don’t worry, I can easily find those two again and tell them that you changed your mind.”

Harry’s hand shot out before he was aware of what he was doing, and connected with Malfoy’s wrist. “No.” He held Malfoy there, feeling him struggle, the knobs of bone at Malfoy’s wrist shifting under his fingers. Harry didn’t let go, and after a bit Malfoy stopped trying to pull away.

Part of him still knew it was wrong, but it was hopeless trying to resist. Harry couldn’t stop himself, couldn’t control this need for Malfoy, so deep and fierce that he felt it in his bones. He did want it, more than he would have believed possible. He wanted it so much he ached for it, every nerve in his body singing the same desperate note of longing.

“OK,” Harry said, and it felt like a dive into madness, but there was nothing he could do. It had been inevitable from the moment Harry had seen him standing on Duke Street.

Malfoy’s face was still hard and closed. “OK what, Potter? OK, I go back to the club, find those wizards and let them fuck me every which way?”

“No,” Harry said firmly. He was still clutching Malfoy by the wrist, and they were both breathing hard. “No. I want you,” Harry told him, and now he had said it the first time, it felt like he might not be able to stop saying it. “I want you so fucking much,” he said, and Malfoy just looked at him, with an expression Harry couldn’t fathom. He stared at Harry, his features especially haughty in the washed out light, and Harry still holding onto Malfoy like he might get away. Then Malfoy grabbed Harry by the back of the neck with his free hand and kissed him, so deep, so demanding, that it felt almost savage.

Harry closed his eyes and gave way to the overpowering need pounding in his blood. The last ragged shreds of his scruples fell away, and he let them go without hesitation. He was going to do this. That’s all there was to it, and nothing was going to stop him.

“If you want me,” Malfoy said, breaking away for a moment, and Harry gave a short nod. “You’d better take me home and have me.”

Harry’s head was so full of Malfoy’s lush taste, the wiry strength of his body, he didn’t know how he found any space in there to focus on Apparating, but he managed to Side-Along the two of them to the hallway of Grimmauld Place, where the house greeted them with wild eruptions of flowers bursting forth from the ceiling.

They moved towards the stairs, Harry still trying to kiss Malfoy as he worked to remove Malfoy’s jacket and his own shoes. They stumbled at the bottom of the stairs and ended up half-sitting, half-lying across them, with Harry on top of Malfoy, tugging at Malfoy’s shirt and moaning at the expanse of smooth warm skin he found beneath. Luxurious, thick carpet sprang up beneath them, cushioning the treads of the stairs, and a riot of hothouse perfume drifted down from the flowered ceiling.

“Wow. Your house really wants us to fuck,” Malfoy panted, sliding his palms over the muscles of Harry’s thighs. Harry couldn’t even get Malfoy’s jacket off and he wanted – needed – to feel Malfoy pressed beneath him like this with nothing in the way.
“Uhhh,” Harry groaned, getting unsteadily to his feet and pulling Malfoy up the stairs. “Want you.” They reached the first floor.

“Too many stairs,” Malfoy said.

“I know,” Harry tried to kiss him again, greedy and desperate, but this time it was Malfoy who yanked Harry towards the stairs. “Bed. This way.”

“Uh– it’s been raining in my room recently,” Harry told him as they reached the second floor landing. “Keep going.”

“Shit,” Malfoy pushed Harry up against the wall and worked open a couple of buttons on his shirt, his fingers smooth and sure against Harry’s skin. “Can’t wait.” Petals fluttered down on their heads from above, Malfoy’s breath hot on Harry’s jaw. “We could do it here,” Malfoy told him.

“Oh hell, yes,” Harry said, as Malfoy undid another button, and pressed a wet, open-mouthed kiss to Harry’s collarbone which pulled a breathless sound from Harry. “Oh fuck, yes, Draco.”

Malfoy obliged, snicking another button free. “You’re going to come so hard,” he told Harry, then he palmed the bulge of Harry’s cock, slow and dirty, and Harry let out a sound he had never heard himself make before, a groan of longing and desperation, mixed with amazement.

“Oh, god,” he gasped out, but before Malfoy could do it again, a blood-curdling sound came from above.

“Filth!” it shrieked.

“No,” Harry moaned. “Not now.” Not now, when Malfoy’s hands were working at Harry’s belt, and Harry’s fingers were sliding over the warm skin of Malfoy’s back. But it was too late. They had woken Walburga.

“Degenerate acts!” she screeched from the fourth floor. “Foul debauchery!”

“Yes,” Malfoy said, sounding delighted about the prospect as he wormed his hand down the back of Harry’s jeans, grinding up against Harry with his knee between Harry’s thighs, hard and filthy, and Harry started to realise that unless they moved, he was going to have his first orgasm ever – with another bloke, that was – standing on the stairs with someone’s mad old Great-Aunt yelling slurs at him.

He tried to drag Malfoy up the remaining few steps and into the grey room, but their legs got tangled and he fell heavily onto the stairs, pulling Malfoy with him.

“Fuck,” Malfoy said, his head banging against the bannister even as the house sprang into action with carpet and cushions and startling tangles of greenery. “Oh, fuck,” he said, as Harry clambered on top of him and mouthed at Malfoy’s collarbone, rolling his hips recklessly with his jeans half open and pre-come spreading across the front of his underwear. He dragged his erection over the thick ridge of Malfoy’s cock, gripping his skinny shoulders and gasping as Malfoy grabbed Harry’s arse and ground back against him, frantic and messy and a bit wild.


Harry felt his balls drawing up and with two more thrusts, he was coming, his face buried in Malfoy’s hair, his hands fist in Malfoy’s shirt and the shocking, sweet release of it pulling a desperate groan from somewhere deep inside him. Malfoy arched up against him, smearing Harry’s come across the cotton of his boxers, and then Malfoy’s fingers were digging into his arse, hard
enough to make him yelp. It took a moment for Harry to realise that Malfoy was coming too, actually coming like Harry, just from this urgent, clumsy frothing.

Walburga was still frothing herself into a paroxysm of hate, but Harry didn’t give a shit. Malfoy squirmed roughly underneath him, and Harry lay there feeling like he had warm, liquid honey pumping lazily around in his veins instead of blood, with Malfoy panting out the last of his orgasm in Harry’s ear. He felt incredible, and Malfoy was the hottest thing in the whole fucking universe, and nothing else mattered.

“Potter.” Malfoy’s voice was all breathy and ragged, and he sounded like Harry had done something clever, instead of tripping Malfoy up and then jizzing in his pants before they’d even got their clothes off. Malfoy lay there for a minute, then worked his hand into his jeans to get at his wand and cleaned them both up.

As the cool magic of Malfoy’s charm washed over Harry’s skin, the doubts started to creep in. Was this the kind of thing Malfoy normally got paid to do? Surely there weren’t many others as stupid and inexperienced as Harry? Or maybe Malfoy had loads of virgins paying for his services. And oh, god, was it over now? Harry had come, which seemed kind of like it was over, so did that mean Malfoy would leave now? He couldn’t think of a way to ask.

“Er… that was a lot quicker than I meant it to be,” Harry said, moving over so that he didn’t squash Malfoy. He could feel his ears getting hot.

Malfoy laughed and started to sit up. “Yeah. Don’t worry, I’m not going to charge you for that one.”

“Oh.” Harry pushed up on his elbows. “I mean… you can do. I liked it.” He felt embarrassed to say exactly how good it had been for him.

“Mmm. That one was just to take the edge off, yeah?” Malfoy said, his voice low and conspiring, and Harry felt a bubble of hopefulness rising in his chest.

“Yeah?” he asked, and Malfoy must have seen his look of surprise because his lips twitched in amusement.

“You’re not spent yet, are you, Potter?” He took Harry’s hand and pulled. “The benefits of being nineteen. Come on. Can you stand up and walk without nearly knocking me unconscious again?”

He led Harry up the remaining stairs and into the silver-grey room, closing the door behind them. Bloody hell. The house had really gone all out. A few enchanted candles bobbed gently near the ceiling, while the bed was gigantic, practically filling the room, and topped with the whitest, softest linen Harry had ever seen. Malfoy pushed Harry down onto it and climbed on top of him, working at the remaining few buttons of Harry’s shirt.

Hell. Harry still felt loose and nerveless from his orgasm, but it seemed as far as Malfoy was concerned that the evening was only just beginning. The candlelight flickered over his sharp features and Harry felt desire stirring again, sure and irrepressible.

“What do you want?” he asked Harry, stroking his thumbs along the inside seam of Harry’s jeans till he reached the top.

“I want you naked.” Harry sat up and reached for Malfoy. “I want to see you,” he said, but Malfoy pushed him back down on his back.

“You will,” he said, taking hold of Harry’s jeans where the flies hung open and pulling them down, watching as the denim inched down over Harry’s thighs. Harry was more than half hard again, now,
and Malfoy made a hungry sound in his throat as he looked at the bulge stretching the white fabric of Harry’s boxers.

“And when I’m naked. Then what?” Malfoy whispered. “Tell me, and I’ll do it.”

It was almost too much. It was like everything he’d ever dreamed about and never had, coming all at once in one big, unconceivable rush. He realised he had no idea what Malfoy charged for this – it could be ten thousand Galleons – but it didn’t matter. Harry would pay anything, anything at all.

He was hard, now, faster than he knew it was possible to be, and when Malfoy palmed Harry’s cock this time, tracing the outline of the shaft through the fabric and dragging his fingertips over the head, they both watched, and Harry felt his erection give a powerful twitch against Malfoy’s hand.


Harry didn’t say anything. His body would speak the truth for him – had done ever since he saw Malfoy on Duke Street.

“Tell me what you want, Potter,” Malfoy said. “Anything. Do you want to fuck me?”

Harry groaned. “Yes,” he said. He wanted it so badly. But a little voice in his head whispered, You don’t know how.

Malfoy was nuzzling at the bulge of Harry’s cock, rubbing his cheek against it and then pressing open-mouthed kisses against the cotton, and Harry thought that he might not even last that long a second time.

“Maybe something else first,” Harry said.

“Yeah?” Malfoy asked. “Do you want to fuck my face? Or come all over me? You can do anything to me, Potter, anything you want.” Malfoy’s pupils were wide and inky-black. “You know what I thought of, when you came over in the bar, with that fuck you expression, and your magic blazing all around you? I wanted to get down on my knees for you, right there. I wanted to take your cock in my mouth and suck you while you stood there, in front of all those people.”

“Oh my god.” Harry could picture it perfectly. Malfoy kneeling at his feet, fingers opening Harry’s belt buckle, unbuttoning his flies. Nuzzling Harry’s cock, everyone knowing, everyone seeing, that Malfoy belonged to Harry.

Of course, Harry wasn’t stupid; he knew Malfoy was just doing his job when he said things like that. Things that made Harry feel powerful and attractive, in a way he’d never felt before. But, god, Malfoy was good at this. It felt real, not just something made up to please a customer.

Malfoy shifted until he was sitting on top of Harry, so Harry could feel the solid length of Malfoy’s prick. Malfoy was hard again – and it was so easy to pretend that he was hard for Harry, even though Harry knew it must be one of those potions Malfoy had told him about. Malfoy rocked slowly back and forth, watching Harry’s face and biting at the fullness of his own bottom lip, and something insatiable rose up inside Harry.

“Suck me.” It came out very gruff, and Harry had to remind himself he wasn’t the kind of person who ordered other people about, even if he was paying them. “Will you? That’s what I want.”

Malfoy wet his lips. “Yes,” he said. He pulled his shirt off over his head, Harry’s eyes following helplessly as his muscles shifted, all angles. “I’ll suck your cock, Potter,” and his mouth curved into the most incendiary smile Harry had ever seen.

Harry pulled him down for a kiss, and, oh god, this time the filthy-sweetness of it sent arousal
spiking through him. This time he could think about how it would feel to have the plump softness of Malfoy’s lips, the wet heat of his mouth and the slow seductive slide of his tongue, not against Harry’s own mouth, but around the length of his cock.

He moaned against Malfoy’s lips, his breath coming harder, his hands clutching at the sleek skin of his back, until Malfoy pulled away. He stood facing Harry, unfastening his own belt and watching Harry’s face as he unbuttoned his jeans. God, Malfoy was beautiful – just looking at him set a raw need seething inside Harry. Malfoy clearly knew the effect he was having, watching Harry with lowered lids as he coaxed the jeans down from his hips. But there was also a hint of something else – his expression wavered for a moment, as if Harry might not like what he saw, and Harry wasn’t sure he could stand how untrue that was.

“You’re so hot,” Harry said, his tongue stumbling over the words, never taking his eyes from Malfoy. “I could come just from looking at you.”

Malfoy smiled again, slow and indecent, as he hooked his thumbs into the waistband of his briefs. The bulge of his erection curved up and to the right, stretching out the fabric of his underwear. His Adam’s apple bobbed, and as he eased the material down, there was that same uncertain look – even the tilt of his chin reminded Harry of times when a younger Malfoy had been desperate to impress.

“You’re pleased with what you’re getting for your Galleons?” Malfoy asked. The tone was light, but Harry felt like the answer might actually matter to him.

Harry’s mouth was so dry, the words wouldn’t come, and he didn’t know what to say anyway; there were no words how to express what Malfoy looked like and how he made Harry feel. It was all mixed up, the harsh stabs of desire, and the dull ache in his chest at the fact Malfoy was only doing this because Harry was paying him to. So he just nodded, and it felt like the most inadequate answer ever.

But just then, the ceiling spat another flurry of petals at them, and Malfoy gave a surprised snort. Petals tumbled down over Malfoy’s shoulders, across Harry’s chest, and onto his thighs. Malfoy laughed, standing naked with baby-pink petals in his hair, his cock straining upwards, flushed and perfect.

Harry reached out, curling his fingers around Malfoy’s waist, where the skin was milky-pale, and let the pad of his thumb brush Malfoy’s jutting hipbone. Malfoy’s cock jerked, a slick bead of precome forming at the slit, and Harry couldn’t wait any more. He knelt on the bed, ready to wriggle out of his own boxers, but Malfoy put one hand on his chest.

“No. Let me do it.”

Harry’s breath caught in his throat as Malfoy reached for Harry, and another cascade of petals fell onto the bed.

“Merlin,” Malfoy laughed, then tugged at Harry’s boxers so that Harry’s cock bounced free. Malfoy took his lip between his teeth again. “Look at that,” he breathed. “Sweet Merlin, look at you.”

Harry knew, he knew damn well that Malfoy must say this to all of his customers. He knew Malfoy didn’t really think Harry was anything special to look at, that he wasn’t honestly getting anything from this. But it felt so real. Harry longed to believe it, longed to forget that this was a business transaction, that he had bought the right to have Malfoy say these things and to look at him that way. Oh, god. Harry choked off a strangled sound, and then Malfoy was pushing him down on the bed and swallowing Harry’s cock.
Harry forgot everything. He forgot that this was Malfoy’s job and that Harry didn’t believe in paying for sex. He forgot their past and who they were; there was only pleasure, pure pleasure, rolling over him in great unstoppable waves and washing all else away. Harry forgot to breathe, until Malfoy pulled off, panting, to wipe his mouth, his face flushed with heat and his pupils wide.

“Tell me how you like it,” Malfoy said. “I can go slow… really slow.” He gave a lingering lick over Harry’s slit, pulling a rough whimper from Harry’s lips. “Or I can suck you so hard you’ll think you’re going to pass out.”

Harry made an incoherent sound.

“Tell me, Potter,” Malfoy urged, but if he kept doing that, letting his breath blow hot and damp over the head of Harry’s cock, Harry might never be able to speak again.


Malfoy ran his tongue around the crown, lapping at it slowly, hot bursts of pleasure radiating from Harry’s thighs. He slid down inch by inch, till Harry was enclosed in the tight wet velvet of Malfoy’s mouth. He’d never dreamed – never. It made his fantasies seem pitiful in comparison.

He couldn’t help the noises he was making, didn’t care, he was simply trying to stay afloat. Just when he thought he would go under, Malfoy pulled off, slowly, so slowly it was something like torture, and Harry scrabbled at the sheets, his body arching upwards with the fierce need to be inside the fucking rapture that was Malfoy’s mouth once more.

Malfoy sank down again, a slow, sensuous suck, deeper and deeper, until Harry could feel the head of his cock pressing at the entrance to Malfoy’s throat. Harry choked for breath, his body jerking. Then Malfoy hummed a little sound of satisfaction around his cock and a ferocious joy roared inside Harry, making him clutch the sheets so wildly that he felt the fabric rip apart.

Malfoy pulled off and it felt like a terrible loss not to be in his mouth any more. “Fuck, that’s hot,” he said, his eyes running over Harry. “Are you always like this?”

Harry tensed up. Did other people not react this way, then? Well, he guessed they didn't usually rip the sheets, but how could you not go crazy for it, when it was this good?

“Hold on,” Malfoy said, sitting back and looking at Harry.

Harry’s breath was coming in shallow bursts, drinking in Malfoy’s face – pupils wide, his lips plump and rosy-slick. There was a little crease between his eyebrows, though, and Harry thought maybe Malfoy had stopped because Harry was going to come. This was probably as far as Malfoy would allow him to go, and he almost wanted to cry out in frustration at the thought. His cock jerked pointlessly in mid air, once, twice. He didn’t think he’d be able to look at Malfoy’s mouth ever again without thinking of what it felt like to be inside it.

“Potter…” Malfoy said. His words came out in a whisper. “Is this the first time anyone’s done this to you?”

Harry felt his throat tighten with unease. Of course. Of course Malfoy would guess. Harry’s reactions were probably making it blindingly obvious. And of course Malfoy would find it hilarious that The Boy Who Lived was pretty much a virgin. Harry was damned if he was going to lie about it, though.

“Yeah,” Harry said, defiantly. “There’s loads I’ve never done. I’ve never had a blow job.”
Malfoy’s eyes scanned Harry’s face, but he didn’t speak.

“You can laugh now,” Harry told him, propping himself up on one elbow. “I don’t give a shit.”

Malfoy’s face was proud and serious. “Do I look like I’m laughing?” he asked, but Harry couldn’t work out how Malfoy looked. He seemed almost angry, his eyes glittering and his full mouth unsmiling.

“Don’t lie to me, Potter. You’re telling me I’m the first?” Malfoy asked. He was holding Harry’s knees apart, and as he spoke, he pushed them a little wider and let his gaze drop, his eyes running shamelessly over Harry’s cock and balls, then down to where Harry’s arsehole was exposed. It sent a deep thrill of heat coiling in Harry’s core, mixed with a little squirm of embarrassment, to have another man look at him that way.

“The first to suck you,” Malfoy repeated, staring at the drops of pre-come collecting on Harry’s belly, and Harry nodded.

“Yeah,” he said, and Malfoy choked off a curse before dipping his head down and doing something that made Harry’s whole body sing with bliss.

Oh, holy hell. Did Malfoy like the idea or something? He was pleased Harry had never done this before? Harry didn’t get it, but he didn’t care, as long as Malfoy carried on doing that. Malfoy looked up at Harry with his lips stretched around Harry’s cock, a look of hungry sensuality on his face, and Harry realised what utter shit he’d been talking before about not being the kind of person who paid for sex. Of course Harry would pay for this – he would pay anything for this. He didn’t give a fuck if it was wrong. Not when Malfoy made it feel this good, when Malfoy was so very dedicated to his work that Harry could even pretend that Malfoy wanted it, too.

It felt as though Malfoy was dragging his tongue over every nerve ending in Harry’s body. Harry’s blood was pounding, euphoric, like pure Felix Felicis running through his veins. Malfoy pushed Harry’s legs wider, and took Harry deeper, and Harry was vaguely aware of the house going crazy around them, petals and flowers and god-knows-what-else popping into existence, and so many sounds spilling from Harry’s mouth. His hands clutched at Malfoy’s hair, his body arching upwards, his balls tightening as he felt his pleasure build in an unstoppable rush.

Malfoy let out a long moan around Harry’s cock, a sound that could have been pain or intense pleasure, and Harry looked down to see Malfoy stroking his own prick, his fingers moving over the shaft as he sucked Harry with a worshipful intensity. It was too much. Harry wondered briefly if it was possible to die from a blow job, and then he was gone, gasping at the pleasure flooding his whole body. He emptied himself into Malfoy’s beautiful mouth, his cock jerking again and again, a great rolling wave of desire and release that left him helpless against its force.

Malfoy made noises, too, appreciative sounds that vibrated through Harry with the last throbs of his orgasm, and then, as he pulled back: “Ah, fuck,” Malfoy groaned. “Oh yes,” and Harry lay, quivering and astonished, as Malfoy started to come too, fistng himself with short urgent strokes and watching Harry as he did so. The sight of Malfoy – his hair all messed up, lips and cheeks flushed from his exertions, panting out his orgasm with his long fingers wrapped around his prick – was so compelling that Harry felt one final twitch from his own spent cock.

Malfoy flopped down on the bed next to Harry, eyes closed and lips parted. His face and chest were flushed a gentle pink and he ran a slightly shaky hand over his face. Harry wished he knew what Malfoy was thinking, wished he knew the right thing to say, but at the same time, he felt so damn good that he couldn’t stop smiling.
“That was incredible,” Harry said. He wanted to kiss Malfoy again, to touch him, but he didn’t know if it was OK or not. Maybe the deal was off, now that Harry had come a second time? Malfoy opened his eyes, then, and lay still with his chest rising and falling, but after a minute he flicked Harry a glance, and a secretive smile pulled at the corners of his mouth.

“Look at the room,” Malfoy said, and Harry did, and holy shit, the house had run amok. The ceiling had given birth to a giant, pendulous chandelier, dripping with glittering crystals, and in the corner was - there was a kind of tree. With fat pink buds all over it.

“This is ridiculous,” Harry said.

“Your house loves me,” said Malfoy, smirking, and Harry really wanted to kiss him, kiss him and push him down on the bed and nuzzle his neck, and run his hands all over Malfoy’s body, feeling the creamy skin and the firm muscle, and god, Harry wanted to touch his cock, see how quickly Malfoy could get hard again, because after all, they were both nineteen and Harry reckoned he could get another erection just lying here next to Malfoy and thinking about how good his skin smelled, so fresh and warm and just a hint of musky sweat. But instead, what Harry said was, “How much do I owe you?”

Malfoy looked for a moment as if he’d been struck. Almost as if he’d forgotten that Harry was paying him. Hell. Harry had only wanted to let Malfoy know that he wasn’t going to be like those other people, the ones who wouldn’t pay up afterwards, but now he was worrying he’d said something really out of line. Before he could work out what to do, Malfoy’s face smoothed out and he said, very coolly, “Ten Galleons.”

“That’s not enough,” Harry blurted out, horrified. Ten Galleons? That was about fifty quid. He had pairs of trainers that cost more than that. And it wasn’t like he ever spent much on clothes.

Malfoy rolled on his side and looked at him. “That’s how much it is, Potter.”

Harry didn’t know what to say. Malfoy had made him feel better than pretty much anything in his entire life. For ten fucking measly Galleons.

Malfoy was still watching him, and there was something almost wistful about his eyes. “Seemed like you had a good time.”

Harry nodded forcefully.

“Well...” Malfoy looked away for a moment, chewing his lip, then looked back at Harry and raised an eyebrow. “If you wanted to pay me more...” Malfoy held Harry’s gaze and trailed his forefinger over Harry’s chest. “I can give you a special price for the whole night.”

The chandelier seemed to give a tinkly shiver, catching the light and spinning dizzying rainbows across Malfoy’s pale skin.

The whole night. Oh, god. Harry wasn’t sure if he would survive. The whole night. That was hours and hours of obscene, wonderful possibilities. Malfoy let his finger brush over the nub of Harry’s nipple, watching Harry’s face as a fresh wave of arousal rippled through him. “Do you want me to stay?”

“Yes,” Harry said, the word seemingly pulled out of him.

“You want to do it again?” Malfoy brushed Harry’s nipple again, slow and deliberate. “Something different, this time?”
Harry did, more than he could say. In fact, Harry could already imagine his cock stirring hopefully. But he could see now that Malfoy had bruise-like shadows starting to gather under his eyes, and Harry wondered how long he’d been working when Harry found him at the bar. Merlin, Harry might be the latest in a long string of customers Malfoy had needed to satisfy that day.

“I definitely want you to stay,” Harry said. “I’ll pay for the whole night. But can we just sleep for a while first?”

Malfoy looked surprised. “You’re tired?” he asked. “Are you sure? We can carry on if you want to.” His eyes trailed over Harry’s body, resting on his chest, his stomach, then down to his soft cock, lying curled against his thigh. Harry wasn’t sure if anyone had ever looked at him that way before, in that kind of open appraisal, and it made him feel shivery and strange and as though he wanted to pin Malfoy to the bed and show him exactly what Harry’s body could do.

But instead, Harry looked at the hollows of Malfoy’s face. The shadows around his eyes, as though he’d had a rough night, or no sleep at all, the night before. “Yeah,” Harry said. “Yeah, I’m really tired. We should sleep.”

“OK,” Malfoy said, his face a little wary, as if this was a situation he wasn’t used to dealing with.

There was a heavy, soft blanket waiting at the foot of the bed and Harry reached down and draped it over the two of them. It felt so strange, lying here with Malfoy, and yet also deeply satisfying, in a way Harry hadn’t known he’d needed. The candles seemed to burn a little softer, dimming the light in the room, and Harry let out a long breath and shifted his head on the pillow.

God, there were so many feelings simmering within him. He felt a deep, warm gratitude alongside the familiar tug of desire. And that desire was far more tormenting now he knew exactly how it felt to have Malfoy. There were twinges of guilt, which he did his best to push away, but strongest of all at that moment was this harsh ache to make sure Malfoy was all right. He had given Harry so much of himself that evening, and taken so little in return. Harry wrestled with the need to pull Malfoy close, to hold him. Could he do that? It was different, wasn’t it? It wasn’t sex. Maybe Malfoy would say that wasn’t what he was there for. Harry started to speak, then stopped again.

Malfoy was looking at him with a teasing expression. “What? Did you change your mind about sleeping already?”

“Can I... “ How could it be so hard to ask? “Can I hold you?”

Malfoy snorted. “I thought you were going to ask for something really kinky, then.”

Harry flushed angrily. He might have known Malfoy would laugh. Malfoy probably thought he was hopelessly naive, and inexperienced to boot. But Malfoy shifted on the bed and casually slid a leg over Harry’s thigh, and when Harry tried putting an arm round him, slipping it around Malfoy’s shoulder to draw him in a little closer, Malfoy didn’t say anything more. Harry lay there with his heart thumping like an idiot, and after a minute Malfoy turned so that he was tucked in next to Harry, his chest pressed up against Harry’s side and their faces close enough that Harry could feel Malfoy’s breath skimming over his cheek.

Harry wondered at first how he would ever sleep, with the whole of Malfoy’s glorious nakedness lying pressed against his. He let his lips brush against Malfoy’s jaw, a little bit of Malfoy’s hair tickling Harry’s nose, and fuck, that was good, good enough to think, sod sleeping, but he forced his breathing to slow until his body felt calmer. Auror Training, he thought, remembering the techniques they had learned for keeping still and quiet on long stakeouts. He supposed it did come in useful sometimes.
Malfoy’s body soon softened into sleep, and that was a wonder all of its own, feeling his wary watchfulness ease enough for him to rest. After Malfoy was asleep, Harry stayed awake a little while, watching the dazzle of the chandelier make Malfoy’s cheekbones shimmer gold, green, violet, red, and back again, until Harry’s own eyes were drooping with tiredness.

*If we slept in my room, perhaps that would get rid of the puddles,* he thought. Something gentle was falling on him in soft silent drifts, but Malfoy was warm and relaxed in his arms, and it was too overwhelmingly comfortable to stay awake any longer.

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Harry didn’t know what time it was, and he didn’t want to open his eyes to find out. The bed was the most comfortable he could remember ever sleeping in, and the covers were so warm, and smelled so good, and–

Something tickled his nose, and when he lifted a hand to scratch, he found hair. Someone’s hair. *Draco’s* hair, oh god, and then he remembered everything. Draco seemed to have turned around while they were sleeping, but Harry was holding him tight, his arms wrapped around warm skin, his lips nuzzling into Draco’s neck. Harry took a long breath, drinking in the smell of Draco’s skin, hair, all of him, and he smelled fucking *glorious.* His chest was pressed against Draco’s back, and oh fuck, that was Draco’s arse, right there against Harry’s cock, and Harry was hard already – well, of course he was.

His hips twitched, just enough to make his cock jerk with delight at the position it found itself in, nestled against smooth, muscled buttocks that were warm and firm and so damn perfect that Harry wanted to rut up against them for the rest of his life. He pictured himself grinding against Draco’s bare arse, slow and dirty, and his cock gave a fervent *yes* to the whole idea, but Harry knew for sure that it would be really inappropriate to do anything at all while Draco was asleep.

*But you’re paying for it,* a voice in his head pointed out.

No. It *was* definitely wrong. Even if he was paying for the whole night, even if Draco had said he could do anything, even if Draco was right there, pliant and willing, and–

Draco shifted in his sleep, pushing back against Harry and rolling his hips, and Harry froze, not knowing what to do. Draco stilled for a moment, then did it again, sending ripples of heat and want through Harry. Merlin, he should probably move away, but it felt so good, and maybe if he didn’t touch Draco, it would be OK?

Draco thrust back, slow and deliberate, against Harry’s erection, and keeping still was such sweet torture that a moan escaped from Harry’s throat. He would have to move away, any minute. Then Draco took Harry’s hand, the one laying on his chest, and moved it down to his own very hard cock.

Harry’s heart gave a little leap. “You’re awake?”

“Mmm,” Draco replied, wrapping Harry’s hand around his shaft and wanking it slowly up and down.

*Oh, hell.* It was like the best dream ever, in the quiet, dark room, their bodies all loose and sleepy, only one candle burning softly in the chandelier now. Harry’s hand moved in a lazy rhythm, his lips pressed against the nape of Draco’s neck, and it was perfect, so perfect, no worries, no guilt. Draco must want this – yes? To wake up in the night and get hard just from Harry’s body pressing against him. Harry groaned at the thought, and thrust against Draco, a long, delicious slide between the cheeks of his arse.
Harry didn’t need to worry about his inexperience, either. He knew how to wank. Oh Merlin, did he know. Draco’s erection felt so thrilling, so new, but so right, in Harry’s palm, and Harry took his time, learning the differences. Draco’s foreskin was a little tighter than his, the glans more flared, and, oh god, he was really sensitive around the crown. Every time Harry rolled the foreskin over it, Draco gave a gasp of pleasure, and Harry thought he had never heard anything so incredible. He was dizzy with it, how easy it was to make Draco feel good, and how much he wanted to, more than anything.

Harry wrapped his other arm around Draco’s chest, pulling him closer as his cock lay snug against Draco’s arse, rocking up against it with easy, shallow thrusts, and Draco seemed to like that too, in fact he seemed to like everything Harry did. Draco was going to come – Harry could feel it, the tension rising up inside him and about to spill over. Harry stroked him right down to the root and held him there for a moment, Draco’s whole body tense and ready in his arms, and it was everything. Draco pushed back against Harry, rolling his hips with a deep, satisfied groan, as if he loved the feel of Harry there behind him.

Harry wanted it to last forever, just the two of them there in the warmth and dark. But he also wanted to make Draco come, to make him dive over the edge into release. His lips moved hungrily over Draco’s neck, memorising it all: the feel, the smell of him, every catch of Draco’s breath and the way his cock throbbed in Harry’s hand. Harry stroked the circle of his fist over the crown again and felt his whole body tighten in anticipation. He could feel the pleasure surging up through Draco, pleasure that Harry had given him, and – fuck – Harry was going to come as well. Draco arched his back and came, spurting over Harry’s fingers, the broken, urgent sounds he made so impossibly hot, Harry holding him tight, thrusting against the heat of Draco’s body and never wanting it to end.

And then Harry remembered he was paying for this, that he had bought this experience with cold hard cash, and he thought something inside him might shatter. He still clung to Draco as his own orgasm hit, burying his face in Draco’s hair, his cock pulsing between the cheeks of Draco’s gorgeous arse, but he told himself this would be the last time, that he wouldn’t let himself do it any more.

Even in his own head, the words were flimsy and hollow.
Chapter 4

The light streaming into the room was soft and golden, and there was a sweet chirruping sound close at hand. Harry woke with a feeling of optimism he hadn’t felt for some time, and sat up eagerly to see a spotty brown bird perched on the curtain rail, opening its throat and singing its heart out. Harry blinked slowly. Grimmauld Place had been busy in the night. The tree in the corner had now borne fruit, succulent clusters of pink that looked ripe for the taking. The bird stopped in its song long enough to fly to the top of the tree where its mate sat, then began again, regarding Harry with one black beady eye as it sang.

But the bed was empty, its lavish size far too big for Harry alone. The bedroom door stood open, as if someone had left in a hurry.

_I can give you a special price for the whole night._

The night was now over, clearly, and Malfoy had gone. Last night, caught up in the moment, it had seemed as though Malfoy had enjoyed what they did. The sounds Malfoy had made with Harry’s cock between his lips, the way he had fisted himself, as though just the act of sucking Harry off had brought him that close to the edge. And then that sleepy hand, reaching to place Harry’s over the rousing heat of Malfoy’s erection at four a.m. Malfoy had seemed like _Draco_, and Harry had even let himself think of him that way… But now it seemed clear that it had all been all wishful thinking. The bird sang on, and on, idiotically, as if there was anything to sing about. Harry reached for his clothes, intending to get dressed and get somewhere far away. There was no way he could stay here with the house mocking him like this.

He was jabbing his foot into the leg of his jeans when Malfoy appeared in the doorway, padding silently on bare feet.

“You’re awake,” he said, leaning in the doorway.

Harry’s heart did a ridiculous kind of gallop. “Uh. Yes.” Maybe the night wasn’t over. Maybe the whole night included some of the morning as well? Malfoy was wearing a white bathrobe, his hair damp and tousled. He certainly didn’t look as if he was going anywhere. Malfoy’s eyes wandered over Harry’s bare torso, and fuck, just that simple thing made Harry’s nipples harden with interest. But it wasn’t like Malfoy would be interested in what Harry looked like – Malfoy was probably noticing Harry’s scars. As well as the faded outline of the locket, there was a jagged slash on his ribs, and a recent gash across his bicep from training drills that Harry hadn’t thought needed healing at the time. Auror training wrecked your body, Harry thought, rotating his dodgy shoulder.

“You’ve seen the thrushes, then. And your house has made breakfast for us,” Malfoy said, looking amused. “You should come and see.”

“What? Bloody hell.” Harry stood to pull up his jeans.

“Hold on.” Malfoy gave him a look of mock-disapproval. “Shower before breakfast.” He gestured to a door on the landing, which when Harry had last looked inside, had been rammed full of old knackered broomsticks and a few sets of robes that might have been fashionable in Merlin’s day.

“That’s a cupboard,” Harry told him.

“Not any more.” Malfoy smirked. “I’ll see you downstairs,” he said, and wandered off again.

Harry frowned. It wasn’t that he was unhappy to see Malfoy still there. Not at all. Nor to hear that
there was breakfast waiting for them – he was bloody starving. It was just the feeling that Malfoy and Harry’s house were in cahoots somehow.

The door of the former broom cupboard – and it had been a cupboard, Harry had seen it with his own eyes – opened to reveal a gleaming shower room, complete with piles of fluffy towels and a robe with H embroidered on the chest. The shower began pumping out water as Harry walked in, and he could see his favoured brand of soap waiting for him on the shelf.

Well. This was certainly a pleasant change. Harry just had the suspicious feeling that when something seemed too good to be true, it probably was – and then something else occurred to him. *Malfoy hadn’t been paid yet.* Of course he was still here. He wasn’t going to leave before Harry had given him the gold, was he?

Harry nodded grimly to himself. He could fix that very easily, as soon as he went downstairs, and then Malfoy could go whenever he wanted. Harry shrugged off his clothes and stepped into the shower, letting the jets play over his skin. Malfoy would leave and everything would get back to normal. The house could go back to spitting toads at him if it wanted. Harry didn’t care. And there was no way he was ever going to pay Malfoy for his services again; it messed with Harry’s head too much.

Even if, at the time, it had felt like the best thing that had ever happened to him.

Harry reached for the soap and as he worked it into a lather he could feel the house giving little exuberant flutters all around him, completely misreading the situation as usual, just like that stupid, hopeful bird. He stuck his head under the water and rubbed at his face. Harry was going to get to the bottom of this, once and for all, and if the house didn’t start behaving itself, well, Harry would bloody move to Peckham.

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Harry could smell it long before he reached the kitchen, and his stomach started to rumble. *Bacon,* and cooked to perfection, if he wasn’t mistaken. He took the stairs down to the kitchen at an eager pace, and then stopped still in the doorway at the sight within.

Malfoy was sitting at the table, still wearing the robe, his hands cradling a mug of coffee. And the table itself was laden with – well, with pretty much everything Harry liked to eat in the morning, and a few things besides. Malfoy waved a hand. “Not bad, eh?”

“Grimmauld Place did this?” Harry asked. There were dishes of crispy bacon, eggs every way you could imagine, crisp toast oozing with butter, pastries, fresh berries, a cafetiere of hot coffee...

Malfoy nodded.

“*It can cook?*” Harry asked indignantly. “The times I’ve slogged away in this kitchen after work, and the whole time, the house can make bleeding waffles, and–” He waved his hand at a jug full of a frothy green concoction. “What is that? Some kind of milkshake?”

Malfoy sniffed it cautiously. “Seems to be juice.” He poured a glass and handed it to Harry, who took a swig and then spluttered furiously.

“Jesus, Malfoy, you fucking liar. That’s not juice!”

Malfoy looked offended. “I never said it was fruit juice. I think it might be kale.”

“My house still hates me,” Harry said.
“It looks very nutritious,” Malfoy told him. “Maybe your house wants you to be healthy.”

“Is the food OK, or is everything here horrible?” Harry asked.

Malfoy shrugged. “I didn’t have any yet. Just some coffee while you were in the shower.” He took another sip. “It’s excellent coffee.”

Harry looked at Malfoy’s empty plate. “You waited so that we could eat together. You didn’t have to do that.” He would bet Malfoy hadn’t eaten the night before, when Harry found him in the bar...

“It’s hardly a big deal,” Malfoy frowned. “Merely a little thing called manners, Potter.”

“Well, I’m starving,” Harry said. “Let’s not wait any more.”

Harry tucked into bacon and eggs, then helped himself to croissants and fruit. It was all bloody tasty, and the coffee was fantastic. It seemed Malfoy’s weakness was pastries, but he managed to make space for some scrambled eggs as well.

“Mmfff, that was really good,” Harry sighed, pushing his plate away.

Malfoy topped both of their mugs up with coffee and smiled at Harry, his eyes approving. His robe was resplendent with an embroidered D to match Harry’s, and Harry had this terrible, tormenting vision of what it could be like if Malfoy wasn’t here because he was paid to be. If he was here because he lived here, and Harry came down every day for breakfast to find him sitting here, or woke up with Malfoy next to him, their limbs in a tangle and Malfoy’s eyes all sleepy-warm and–

Oh, god, he still hadn’t paid.

“I’ve got your money,” Harry said in a rush, fumbling in the pocket of his robes.

Malfoy put his coffee down with a bump, spilling a little on the table.

“How much was it for the night?” Harry asked.


“Yeah. I can give you the Galleons right away. You just didn’t tell me how much it would be.”


“Of course.” Malfoy didn’t meet Harry’s eye. Instead he looked at the plates of pastries, the jugs of juice. The little vase of wildflowers in the middle of the table. “Say twenty all together.” He made a dismissive gesture. “Nothing really happened, after all.”

Nothing. Well, OK, Harry expected it did seem like nothing to Malfoy, a bit of a fumble in the night, half-asleep… He took five of the ten-Galleon pieces and handed them to Malfoy.

“And here was me thinking you had learned to count,” Malfoy said, his expression sour. “That’s too much, Potter.”

“I want you to have it.”

“I’ll take what I earned,” Malfoy said curtly, separating twenty Galleons and depositing the rest on the table as if it was tainted. “Well, I’ll get dressed and go.” He got to his feet.

“You don’t have to leave,” Harry said. “Have some more to eat.” But even as he said it, he knew it was no good.
“Nice idea.” Malfoy gave a rather thin smile. “But I had better get back to work. My father has some rather large Healers bills to pay.”

Harry knew he should really do the decent thing and ask about Lucius’ health, but what he asked Malfoy was: “Do you work in the mornings, then?” It probably sounded a stupid thing to say, but he didn’t know. He’d never thought that maybe you could have Malfoy any time you wanted. That you could buy him for a whole day. Maybe even longer.

“I work any time, Potter, for the right price.”

“What is the right price?”

Malfoy’s face was very still, but a muscle jumped in his cheek. “For how long are we talking?”

“Uh. Well.” To hell with it. He was only asking. He was interested to know the price, that was all. “A day,” Harry said. “A whole day. Till this time tomorrow.”

Malfoy looked at him steadily, his pupils wide. He took a moment to reply. “A hundred Galleons,” he said.

It sounded like a challenge. And Harry hadn’t meant to do this – he really hadn’t. But the thought of Malfoy going out on the streets again, meeting god knows who out there… and, if he was being honest, it wasn’t only the danger of it, it was partly the thought of other men with Malfoy, paying for his body, doing what they pleased… It made his blood feel like it was boiling in his veins. No way was Harry going to let that happen right now. No fucking way.

It was nothing at all. For the price of a few golden Galleons, Harry could keep Malfoy safe, and put his own mind at rest. Harry looked at Malfoy, who stood perfectly still, his face arranged into a look of indifference.

All right. There was also the fact that Harry just wanted him. Was that so fucking wrong? He just wanted Malfoy. The time he’d had already wasn’t nearly enough, and part of him was sick of trying to do the right thing.

“OK.” said Harry. “Can we do that? I’ll give you the gold now.”

There was a moment where he thought Malfoy was going to refuse – he looked so proud and serious – but then he nodded, and Harry had never been so grateful in his life for his laden vaults at Gringotts. Malfoy watched as Harry Accioed a pouch of coins from upstairs, then counted out five of the large twenty-Galleon pieces. “There,” Harry told him.

He handed over the money, their fingers brushing together with a brief electric thrill, followed by the cold, hard clink of gold. Merlin. That was it. Harry felt not the stab of shame he was expecting, but a hot surge of excitement. Malfoy was his for a whole twenty-four hours, and this was possibly the best and worst idea Harry had ever had.

Malfoy stared at the money in his hand, then at Harry, and just for a moment he looked a little overwhelmed.

Well, Harry could understand that. He’d imagine Malfoy didn’t often get such large sums of money all at once.

Malfoy flicked his wand. “Mobiliargent,” he said, and the gold flew upstairs, presumably to his trunk. As soon as the money was out of sight, Malfoy let his eyes slide slowly back to Harry. His pupils were wide and his face looked slightly flushed.
“Well, here I am,” Malfoy said, leaning over Harry, and putting one hand on the back of his chair, his voice low and smoky. “So what’s it to be, Potter?”

Harry knew exactly what he wanted. He could feel it blazing through him, the desire to have Malfoy, to know him, inside and out.

“I want to fuck you,” he said, and the words made shivers of heat ripple over his skin.

“God,” said Malfoy. “Yes,” and he really sounded as if he meant it. As if he wanted Harry almost as much as Harry wanted him. His face was glowing with it, and Harry stood to kiss him, pressing him back against the table, a plate tumbling onto the floor. One hand was in Malfoy’s hair, the other pulling at his bathrobe so that it gaped open around his chest. Harry kissed Malfoy with hunger he had never known for anyone else, moving from Malfoy’s mouth to the sharp line of his jaw and then down, mouthing at his neck, his shoulders.

Harry knocked a coffee mug flying as he pushed Malfoy’s legs apart and stood between them. He was still nowhere near as close as he wanted to be. Part of Harry’s brain still couldn’t believe that Malfoy would let him do this – not even for a hundred Galleons. But it was really happening. He had bought Malfoy for the day – the whole day – and he could do what the hell he wanted. He felt a feral kind of greed welling up inside him, and his teeth and lips worked across the skin of Malfoy’s throat, pulling purplish marks to the surface.

“Uh. You’re mine,” Harry panted, and part of him was horrified at what he was saying. The other half was more turned on than he had thought possible. “Aren’t you?” he demanded.

Malfoy made a low sound in his chest, tilting his head to allow Harry better access to his neck. “Yes,” he said, his voice rough. “All yours.”

“You’re mine for the day,” Harry insisted, gripping Malfoy by the wrists, the words a kind of snarl. “The whole day.”

“Merlin, yes.” Malfoy was taking small, shallow breaths, and this was madness but it really felt as though he liked what Harry was saying, as if he liked the idea of being Harry’s.

Harry looked at him, drinking in the flushed skin and lowered lids, then lunged at his mouth again, finding bitter coffee mixed with the sweetness of apple pastries, the solid barrier of Malfoy’s teeth giving way to the yielding softness of his mouth.

Every cell in Harry’s body was flaming with need for him, but either he was going mad, or that was Hermione’s voice in the hall.

“Harry? Are you up yet?” she called.

“Since when have you had a fountain in the front room, mate? Interesting decor choice.” Damn it to hell, it was Ron as well, their footsteps coming down the stairs. “I think he’s in the kitchen, Hermione.”

They only had a second, and Harry used it to pull his robe closed. Malfoy just froze, his face a mask of unease.

“Here he is–” Ron appeared in the doorway and visibly shrank away from the sight of them. “Oh shit.”

Harry could only imagine the scene they made together. Malfoy himself looked like an illustration for the word debauched – sleepy-eyed, with grazes on his jaw from Harry’s stubble, his bathrobe half
off, and a string of love bites trailing from his throat to his collarbone.

Hermione’s head peered around the door. “What– Oh my god!” And then it seemed like everyone was talking at once.

“Harry! I’m so sorry, we Flooed in like usual. I thought you were expecting us!”

“I forgot,” Harry said, and he really hadn’t meant that to come out so roughly.

“We’ll come back another time,” Hermione assured him, backing out of the kitchen, but Ron had sunk down on the stairs and was blocking her path.

“Shall I go?” Malfoy asked Harry.

Harry shook his head. “No.” To Hermione, he added, “Talk later, OK?”

Hermione nodded, talking very fast. “Of course, it was only some stuff I found out about the house, but we’ll come back– Ron, what the hell are you doing down there?”

“I’ll be all right in a minute,” Ron said, putting his head on his knees. “It was just a shock.”

“Yeah, I’ve been meaning to tell you a few things,” Harry said, and a pang of guilt caught him under the ribs.

“I’m a hundred per cent fine with all of it!” Ron said. “Happy for you.” He looked up, then caught sight of Malfoy again – rumpled, love-bitten and half-naked – and gave a little whimper.

“I think perhaps I should go,” Malfoy said, but Harry gripped him by the wrist to show exactly what he thought of that idea.

“We’re going. Goodbye, Malfoy,” Hermione said with a bright smile. “Ron, for goodness’ sake, get up, can’t you?” she hissed in frustration.

Ron managed to get to his feet, and Hermione began shoving him up the stairs. Ron’s voice trailed back down, sounding slightly plaintive. “Did you know Harry had a fountain in his front room?”

Harry didn’t wait for their unexpected guests to get to the Floo. He simply held Malfoy by the hips and Side-Alonged the two of them upstairs in the moment between one heartbeat and the next, Malfoy cursing in surprise as they landed. He had misjudged the spot though, because Malfoy was wedged against the rickety dressing table that stood in the corner, with Harry leaning over him. There was a horrible moment as the table seemed to disappear with a pop, but a rather grand polished oak desk flickered into existence in its place immediately.

Malfoy nodded in approval. “Better,” he said, planting his arse more firmly onto it.

“I want you.” Harry’s stomach clenched with urgency as he pushed Malfoy’s robe off his shoulders and resumed his greedy explorations. Malfoy’s body was like a model’s – all lean strength and elegant jutting angles. Harry wanted to learn it by heart, to discover every inch and worship it. “Can I?”

Malfoy nodded, a small moan escaping as Harry worked his way down to the tender nub of his nipple and flicked over it with his tongue, feeling it tighten.

“Why don’t you – ahh – fuck me right here?” Malfoy said. “I’ve never done it on a desk.” His lips curved, filthy and encouraging, and Harry almost believed it, the whole beautiful lie of it.
But Malfoy had no idea. “I’ve never done it at all,” Harry told him flatly. “I’ll probably be crap.”

Malfoy looked as though he might hex somebody. “You talk some shit, Potter,” he said. “Of course you won’t be crap.”

“You don’t know that.”

But Malfoy was nuzzling at Harry’s jaw, pressing open-mouthed kisses against the sharp stubble. “You remember… in the bar, when you came over.” He breathed the words against Harry’s skin. “Do you know how hard you got me?” Malfoy asked him.

Harry’s mouth fell open, lost for words, and Malfoy let his teeth drag over his skin.

“How can you have no idea how hot you are?” Malfoy sounded angry, and his hands splayed over Harry’s ribs, moving down to the sensitive skin of his waist. “You fucking claimed me.”

Harry felt a deep shiver of desire at the words. He remembered exactly how it had felt: the sense of his own power, his magic pulsing within him. His cock jerked as Malfoy ran his hands lower, his thumbs tracing the V of muscle at Harry’s hips.

Malfoy shook his head. “There’s no way you’d ever be crap.” He moved his lips close to Harry’s ear and whispered slowly and with total conviction. “No fucking way.”

God, Malfoy was clever at what he did, at how he took care of his customers, because Harry felt that certainty surging within him again. He felt it deep in his core, potent and undeniable. It was there, in the heaviness of his balls, filling out his erection, firing the swirling need in the pit of his stomach. He could feel it tingling in his palms as he lay them on Malfoy’s skin: the knowledge that Malfoy was his for the taking.

Who cared if it was one of Malfoy’s ploys? Why shouldn’t Harry let himself enjoy how it felt? Malfoy’s hands were too persuasive, and his eyes, and lips, and the thick line of his cock as it pushed up between the folds of the robe. When was Harry ever going to get this chance again? He’d be an idiot not to savour it, to make the most of every minute.

He stripped the robe away from where it still hung around Malfoy’s hips and threw it to one side. There was magic crackling around them in the room, the house up to its tricks again, but Harry only had eyes for Malfoy. He wanted to see everything. He wondered if he could push Malfoy’s legs apart, to could get a better look at him. It felt wrong to be staring this way, dirty, even, but Malfoy seemed to like it, leaning back on the desk and inviting Harry to look some more. Malfoy’s cock was flushed and heavy, his balls high and tight and almost hairless, with just a dusting of soft golden fuzz. Then, without even being asked, Malfoy opened his legs for Harry, actually drew up his knees on the desk, and holy Merlin, for a second, Harry could see the shocking, secret sight of Malfoy’s arsehole. It made him shake with a jolt of arousal that rocked right through him.

“What do I do?” Harry asked him, more roughly than he intended. “To get you ready.” He wasn’t completely clueless. He knew there were things you needed to do first.

Malfoy nodded. “There’s a spell,” he said. “It’s quite simple.” But his voice sounded… Harry wasn’t sure, but it didn’t sound good.

“Is that the best way?” Harry let his hands rest on Malfoy’s knees, and somebody was trembling, and Harry didn’t quite know if it was him or Malfoy.

“It’s the quickest way,” Malfoy said, but Harry could see there was something he wasn’t saying.
“Do you like it, though?” he asked. Harry used just the lightest bit of pressure, so that Malfoy’s knees parted a little wider, and there it was again, pink and tightly–furled. His throat was almost too dry to speak. “Is it good for you?”

“For me? No,” Malfoy said, and he smiled, as if Harry had done something clever or surprising. “I like it slower. So I can feel it.”


“With your fingers. Working me open,” and oh god, the thought of Harry’s fingers, right there, touching Malfoy in his most private, most intimate place…

“Fingers?” Harry asked. He slid his hands to Malfoy’s thighs, his thumbs brushing over the taut muscle. Not touching him anywhere else. Not yet.

“Fingers. Or your mouth,” Malfoy told him.

Oh fuck. “My mouth?” Harry asked, and his voice cracked with surprise. His mouth. Sweet Merlin, his mouth, on Malfoy’s arse… “You’d actually let me do that?”

Malfoy smiled again, slow and compelling. “Yes, Potter. I’d actually let you do that.”

“And it feels good?” Harry asked. “For you, I mean – you like it?”

This time Malfoy laughed. “Yeah. Yeah, it feels–” He laughed again. “It feels good, all right.”

God, there were no words for how Harry felt. “That’s what I want,” he said. “I want to do that to you.”

Malfoy’s smile became positively indecent, and when he moved to lay back, a pile of pillows popped into existence beneath his shoulders. “All houses should be like this,” he announced.

Harry’s hands were shaking properly now, but he helped Malfoy arrange himself comfortably on the desk.

“Another pillow,” Malfoy said, clearly expecting his demand to be met, and one obligingly appeared for him to prop himself up with. “Now I can watch,” he told Harry, settling back with his hands behind his head, and as if Harry wasn’t turned on enough already, now he had the thought of Malfoy’s silvery eyes, watching Harry do these things to him… He began to sink to his knees, only to find a chair waiting for him at the perfect height.

“Your house thinks of everything,” Malfoy said, and oh hell, Harry could feel the pleased flutterings of Grimmauld Place all around him as he leaned in to cup the cheeks of Malfoy’s arse with both hands, the muscles taut against his palms. God, Malfoy was so hot like this, held open for Harry and waiting, his pupils so wide there was only a rim of silver around the edge. He still couldn’t quite believe that Malfoy was going to let him do this, but he wasn’t going to wait to see if Malfoy changed his mind.

Harry drank in the sight of him, memorising every inch, and then he bent his head and licked a broad stripe from beneath Malfoy’s hole right up to his balls.

Malfoy made the most extraordinary sound and bucked up off the desk like a wild thing. So Harry did it again. And again. And it was so fucking good, he pressed his face right in and really started to go for it. Malfoy had said slow, but Harry didn’t think he could go slow. Not when Malfoy’s arse was like this – so clean and sweet, with just a hint of something more, like a pure essence of
masculinity that made Harry want to rub his whole face down there.

Harry may not have known what he was doing, but he was determined to make up for it with enthusiasm. Dear god, yes. He let the point of his tongue run around Malfoy’s rim, again and again and again, savouring the way Malfoy’s hole fluttered against him, and then swiping the flat of his tongue up and down, pressing his face between Malfoy’s cheeks and groaning softly. Malfoy was making noises, lots of noises, and Harry thought this was a good sign, but what did he know?

“Am I doing it right?” Harry asked, and Malfoy made an incoherent sound, half-laugh, half-moan, then spread his legs wider and pushed his arse towards Harry’s face.

_Uhhh._ Harry took that as permission to do what the hell he liked, and it felt fantastic. He layered soft licks over the wrinkled ridges around Malfoy’s hole, and god, that tasted so good it made his cock ache. But lapping at the hole itself, licking and kissing and sucking and licking some more, and seeing Malfoy’s reactions to all of that… that was so damn hot that Harry thought his head would explode. He shouldn’t be doing this. Not any of it. He shouldn’t be paying for sex. He shouldn’t be messing around with Draco Malfoy. And he certainly shouldn’t be burying his face in Malfoy’s arse and trying to stick his tongue as far in as it could go. But thinking about how wrong it all was only made Harry want to do it even more.

Malfoy was still moving around a lot, and when Harry rubbed the scruff on his chin against Malfoy’s crack while sucking at the rosy pink furl of his hole, Malfoy thumped on the desk with his hand and made a sound that was more like an animal than a person. Harry dearly wanted to push his whole tongue inside, to fuck Malfoy’s arse that way, but either he was doing it wrong, or Malfoy’s body wasn’t ready yet.

And then something loosened, so that the point of his tongue slid right in, and Harry gripped Malfoy’s arse cheeks so hard that it was probably going to leave bruises. Oh god, he could never get enough of this taste. Malfoy’s body was squirming madly, but Harry was not going to let go, not unless Malfoy told him to stop. His tongue was partly inside, the soft crinkled skin of Malfoy’s entrance surrounding Harry’s tongue, and Harry moaned against his hole and tried stubbornly to push deeper inside.

Everything started getting impossibly good and wet, and Harry wondered for a moment if it mattered how messy it was, whether Malfoy minded that there were slurping sounds and that Harry’s chin was getting wet with saliva. But he couldn’t stop. He thrust his tongue in as far as he could, and oh, the noises Malfoy was making, and the addictive taste of his body. Harry wanted to lose himself in it forever, his senses brimful as he gorged himself on Malfoy’s arse. Harry pushed his face in so that he could hardly breathe, until all he could hear, taste, see, smell was Malfoy, and it was so good, so good… Then Malfoy’s legs began juddering, and Harry froze as Malfoy pushed him away and lay back, gasping for air.

What had he done? “I’m sorry,” Harry stuttered.

Malfoy gave a strangled kind of laugh. “No need to be sorry.”

“Did I do something wrong?”

Malfoy looked down at Harry, his chest heaving. “I was about to come.”

“From me doing that to you? But….” Neither of them had laid a finger on Malfoy’s cock.

“God,” laughed Malfoy, wild-eyed and still trying to catch his breath. “You were so into it,” he said.
Of course Harry was. How could anyone not be? “Can I do it again?” Harry asked. “I want you to come.”

Malfoy propped himself up on his elbows, his cock jutting out, obscene and perfect. “I thought you were going to fuck me?”

But Harry couldn’t believe how close Malfoy had come to falling apart, just from Harry’s mouth on him. “Later. I don’t want to stop doing this. You said I could use my fingers, too.”

Malfoy closed his eyes briefly. “Merlin, you’re going to kill me, Potter.” He looked down at Harry, his face fiercely sensual. “OK. Do what you like. You and that mouth of yours.”

Harry needed no second invitation. He spread Malfoy wider, his hands pulling Malfoy’s cheeks apart so that he could see him, really see him. Even looking felt so filthy and arousing, his head spun with it. He bent to give another lick, tracing around the rim, then pulling back to watch the effect of Malfoy’s hole fluttering, apparently seeking his tongue. Or maybe something more. Sweet Merlin, Harry was so hard, his cock leaking onto the leather of the chair Grimmauld Place had so kindly provided, but all his attention was on Malfoy as Harry stroked a tentative finger over the place where his tongue had just been.

Malfoy made a sound half gasp, half groan, and in another moment Harry’s fingertip was sliding into his arse, just like that, and Malfoy was taking it. Harry drew his finger back just so he could see it pressing inside again, and this time, it slid in further, up to the knuckle, and it was slick and warm and tight and amazing. Malfoy started to moan, his hips pushing up, and Harry wondered what would happen if he tried pushing his finger in and licking Malfoy, at the same time, and the answer was that Malfoy started making noises like he was dying. It was getting sloppy as hell, Harry’s tongue swiping all around Malfoy’s hole and up to his balls, while his finger drove in as deep as he could get it.

Malfoy started trembling, and Harry felt a furious need to make the most of it before Malfoy came. He lunged at Malfoy’s arse without mercy, alternating fingers and tongue inside of him, and there was something so uninhibited about the whole thing that it made Harry want to howl. He couldn’t imagine being like this with anyone else, ever. How could he show another person his gross, savage desires? Only Malfoy. When Harry had dated in the past, he’d always felt the women saw him as Harry the hero, Harry the Auror. But Malfoy understood the greed and the rawness inside of him. With Malfoy, he could do anything, and the thought made him harder than ever.

There was no way on earth Harry was going to stop taking his fill of Malfoy’s arse, but the pressure in his balls was becoming intense. He thought of how it would be to come just like this, his face pressed to Malfoy’s sweet hole, and his cock jerked an emphatic yes at the suggestion – hell, Malfoy had touched himself, after all, while he was sucking Harry.

He wrapped one hand around his cock and tugged. Fuck, no, this would not take long. He buried his face in Malfoy’s arse, working deep inside him, and Malfoy crooned a high, desperate sound, his whole body tensing as his arse clenched around Harry’s tongue. Malfoy’s body arched up, a fierce splash of come landing on his stomach, and Harry felt his own orgasm rushing up from the soles of his feet. He felt the house’s magic shimmering around him, the floor seeming to sway, the chair itself thrumming under him. Malfoy arched up again, crying out, and they were both coming, and everything was so wet and dirty and delicious that Harry could hardly stand it.

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They were lying on the bed, with the house occasionally spitting out a flurry of petals and adding to the fruit on the tree, so that the branches were laden and heavy, while the thrushes had made a messy
kind of nest, and were hopping around fussing with it. Harry had ended up resting with his hand in Malfoy’s hair, and at some point he began sifting through it lightly, curling the strands around his fingers and then letting it go. Malfoy just lay there, watching him, with an expression Harry couldn’t describe.

“So, how come you’ve never done this stuff with anyone before?” Malfoy asked, and Harry tried not to go stiff with awkwardness.

“I’ve been with a couple of women,” Harry said. “It wasn’t very good, though.” There was no point in lying. “Actually, it was pretty awful.”

“But… men.” Malfoy spoke in a low voice, even though there was no-one else to hear, and it made Harry’s skin prickle with a weird jitteriness to be talking about this. “What about men?”

Harry had never shared this with anyone. Why the hell would he tell Malfoy? But he propped himself up on one arm and tried to think how to explain.

“I thought… I thought I might be too nervous to be able to do anything.”

Malfoy snorted, a huff of breath on Harry’s neck.

“Yeah, well, I knew you’d laugh.”

“Oh my god.” Malfoy’s shoulders started shaking with amusement. “You? Nervous?”

Harry’s eyebrows drew down. “It’s not that funny.”

“Yeah, you were really fucking nervous with your tongue up my arse.”

Harry’s neck flushed with heat. “Shut up.”

“You are such a dickhead, Potter.”

“And you’re an arsehole. Did you actually want to know the answer, or do you just like the sound of your own voice?”

“Both,” Malfoy smirked.

Harry grabbed a pillow and pushed it onto Malfoy’s face until he reared up and grabbed Harry around the chest, grappling with him and trying to push him over. They struggled together, yelping and laughing, until Harry managed to flip Malfoy onto his back and got him pinned firmly to the mattress.

Malfoy gave in, going limp underneath him, his face pink and still smug, as though this was what he’d planned all along. Harry leaned over him, panting. “Are you going to listen now?”

“Depends if you have anything worth saying.”

Harry bent to kiss the irritating smile off his face, but when he resurfaced, Malfoy was still smirking.

“Or whether it’s just more crap about how Harry Potter is so shy and sensitive, and not a complete slut who loves rimming.”

They wrestled some more. Harry besting Malfoy easily by pinning him in a shoulderlock until he managed to get a good handful of Harry’s hair. The unscrupulous bastard yanked hard enough to make Harry to loosen his grip, and before Harry knew it, he was on his front with his arm behind his
back and Malfoy sitting triumphantly astride him. To make it worse, Malfoy had managed to produce his wand from somewhere. He trailed it tauntingly along Harry’s spine, down towards his backside, and Harry really wasn’t sure if he wanted Malfoy to know that it was starting to make him hard...

“Got you,” Malfoy said gloatingly. “Shall I try out a few hexes, or are you going to surrender?”

“Merlin,” Harry panted. “All right. I surrender.” Malfoy gave his arm an extra little twist, then let him free and flopped down on the bed next to him.

Harry promptly used a wandless Expelliarmus, and grinned as Malfoy’s wand flew to his hand with a satisfying slap.

“Smug git,” said Malfoy, snatching it back. “All right then, I’ll listen attentively while you spill all about your gay crisis.”

“There’s not a lot more to say. It took me ages to work out that it was men I was into, and then I didn’t know what the hell to do about it. So I just sort of... I guess I didn’t do anything.”

In the past he had wondered whether he just hadn’t met the right person. The thing was, that made no sense, even to Harry. That Malfoy, finally, had seemed like the one. But then, Malfoy didn’t exactly feel like a choice. Malfoy was more like a compulsion.

“What about you?” Harry asked. “Did you always know you were gay?”

Malfoy looked at him without speaking for a while, his eyes scanning Harry’s face. Then, “Yeah,” he said. “Yeah, I always knew.”

“I wish I had,” Harry said. “I think it would have been easier.”


“Well, I don’t know,” Harry said. “But maybe. And maybe I could have got to do this sooner.”

Malfoy let out a harsh laugh. “Don’t be stupid. As if we’d ever have got together.”

Harry frowned. “I was thinking generally, I mean, maybe I could have enjoyed myself in bed with someone before I was nineteen. I didn’t mean that we–”

“Yes, I know, you don’t have to tell me,” Malfoy cut him off. “You would never have gone anywhere near me.” He was quiet for a moment, pressing his lips together, then he added, “And vice versa, obviously.”

He lay silently, staring into space, till Harry asked, “How did your friends take it?”

“What?” Malfoy looked as though he’d been miles away.

“At Hogwarts. About you being gay. Did you tell them? Did they stick up for you?” Harry wasn’t going to lie – part of him felt anxious about seeing Ron and Hermione again now that things were out in the open.

“Oh,” Malfoy still looked a little lost. “Those friends.” Harry waited for him to continue, but after a minute he sat up abruptly and ran a hand through his hair, smoothing it down. “I’m going to make some tea,” he said, reaching for a shirt and slipping it over his shoulders. “You know what, Potter? You should owl Granger and Weasley and apologise.”

Harry sat up too. “I will. Maybe tomorrow.”
Malfy turned to look at him, a furrow between his eyebrows. “You should ask them to come over again later.”

“I–” Harry reached for him, but Malfoy dodged his arm and started to button his shirt. “I don’t want to,” Harry said. “Not right now.”

“Granger said something about the house, didn’t she? Don’t you want to hear what she found out?”

“I want to stay in bed.” Harry swallowed. “I want to fuck you,” he told Malfoy. “I want to do everything to you.”

Heat flared in Malfoy’s eyes for a moment, but he turned his back on Harry and finished buttoning his shirt. “When you’ve got friends who care about you like that. Who’ll stick by you rather than piss off at the first sign of trouble. Don’t take that for granted, OK?” He stood up and pulled on a pair of pants. “Don’t fuck it up. Because people like that don’t come along very often.” His face looked grim, and Harry wondered, not for the first time, what had happened to all Malfoy’s friends. Crabbe was dead, obviously, and he knew Pansy Parkinson’s family had fled to France after the war, but where were bloody Goyle and Zabini? Where were all the others who’d been happy to fawn over Malfoy when his family were wealthy and favoured?

Harry’s hands were clenching in his lap, and as he made to get up, his shoulder twinged with a sharp jab of discomfort.

“You should get that bloody shoulder looked at, Potter.”

“What?” Harry’s eyebrows shot up.

“It bothers you sometimes, doesn’t it?” Malfoy sat down on the bed next to him. “Usually when you’re all tensed up. Come here.” He arranged Harry in front of him and began to work on the shoulder, massaging it with firm, sweeping strokes using the palm of his hand. Hnngh. Malfoy’s hands were strong and clever and Merlin, it was good.

“Where did you learn to do that?” Harry asked, gasping as Malfoy hit a tender spot. He didn’t ask how the bloody hell Malfoy even noticed Harry had a problem with his shoulder.

“My mother suffers with pain since the war. Sometimes massage helps. It’s especially bad in cold weather.”

Harry pictured Narcissa, wearing one of her beautifully tailored outfits, sitting with perfect posture and closed eyes as her son’s hands moved gently over her back. Then Malfoy dug his thumbs into the muscle of Harry’s shoulder, kneading away at the stiffness, and Harry’s mouth fell open at the intensity of it. Oh, god, the pressure and then the sweet relief...

“He tortured her, you know,” Malfoy said conversationally. “Not long before he died – he was pissed off with my father about something. Cruciatus.” His hands faltered in their rhythm, and lay still on Harry’s shoulder for a moment. “It’s bothered her ever since.”

“Fuck,” Harry said, feeling himself tense up again. “I’m sorry about it.”

“Shhh. Bastard’s dead now,” Malfoy said, soothingly, and stroked along the line of Harry’s shoulder in smooth, fluid strokes, leaving it warm and loose and feeling better than it ever had since he injured it.

“You should take better care of yourself, Potter.” Malfoy let his hands track down Harry’s back, mapping his spine, finding another knot of tension along his ribs and digging at it skilfully until it
was gone. “A daily massage before bed and a decent night’s sleep would have your shoulder sorted in no time.”

Harry let out a groan at what Malfoy’s hands were doing.

“And a damn good orgasm every night,” Malfoy said quietly, right next to his ear.

At that moment he couldn’t imagine anything better. Harry closed his eyes and imagined what it would be like to have Malfoy here every night, and part of his brain was racing ahead and working out if he could actually afford it. Hmm. He could imagine what his vault manager at Gringotts would say about that. But once a week? Harry could totally afford to have Malfoy come over once a week, if he wanted to. Or maybe Saturdays and Sundays. Or–

“I can leave,” Malfoy said suddenly, letting his hands drop down to his sides. “You know, if you don’t want me here when your friends come back.”

“No,” Harry said.

“I know you’d rather put off seeing them, but–”

“No.” Harry sighed and turned around to face Malfoy. “You’re right. I’ll owl them, but I don’t want you to leave.”

Malfoy looked away, a crease between his eyebrows, and Harry thought he could guess what he was uncomfortable about.

“Don’t worry,” Harry said. “I haven’t told them about what you do for work. That’s your business.”

“Ok,” Malfoy said slowly. “But then…”

“They’ll just think you’re…” Harry took a deep breath. “You know. That we’re seeing each other.” It would be really stupid to have a lump in his throat from saying that.

“Don’t you mind?” Malfoy asked, looking sceptical.

“No,” said Harry. I wish we were, he thought, and that was a bit of a shock. But it was true - fuck, it was true. He wouldn’t say it, obviously. He couldn’t imagine anything more awkward for Malfoy than one of his customers overstepping the mark like that.

“Do you mind them thinking that?” Harry asked.

Malfoy looked at him briefly, and Harry thought he was going to say something insulting, he looked so scathing. “No,” he said eventually, his jaw very tight.

Harry wanted to ask what was wrong, wanted to lie down and kiss Malfoy some more, wanted to ask if they could forget about Ron and Hermione and just spend the afternoon fucking instead. But he owled Hermione while Malfoy made tea, and got a reply almost immediately.

Of course I’ll pop over. No need to apologise. We shouldn’t have barged in like that. We’ll be there in half an hour.

Ron was quite right: there was a fountain in the drawing room.

“Tell it to move,” Malfoy said. “It would look fine out in the courtyard there.”

“Er,” said Harry, addressing the room rather self-consciously. “Can this go somewhere else? It’s
making the sofa wet.”

Malfoy frowned. “Be polite.”

“Er. Please,” Harry told no-one in particular, and the fountain gave a sort of shake and then popped out of sight. Harry raised his eyebrows. “Thanks. And would you mind clearing up a bit? The carpet’s soaked.”

The air around them suddenly went dry as a bone – Harry could feel it sucking up all the moisture in his mouth – and then everything was back to normal, and it was just his rather uninspiring front room again.

“Did the Manor do weird shit like this?” Harry asked, and then wished he hadn’t. He hadn’t meant to remind Malfoy about his family home, or more precisely, the fact it had been sold.

Malfoy looked at him as if he’d suggested they go and bathe in the fountain. “No,” he said, very disdainfully. “Of course it didn’t.”

The Floo chimed and Harry called, “Come through.”

Hermione’s head emerged. “Oh, you’re there!” she said, looking pleased. “Is it OK?”

She and Ron scrambled out of the fireplace, and she gave Harry a warm hug that smelled of coconut shampoo. “Hello again, Malfoy,” she said.

Ron looked uncomfortable, but he slapped Harry on the back as if he hadn’t seen him for weeks. “Harry! Good to see you.” He turned to squint at Malfoy. “All right?”

“Tea?” Harry asked. “Or do you fancy a beer?”

“Oh, I won’t stop,” Ron said hastily. “A load of Doxies hatched out in the training room – must have been eggs in the curtains. Anyway, they sent us home early, so I thought I’d drop in to say hi. Again.” He cleared his throat.

“So I’ve been meaning to tell you,” Harry began, the words tumbling out. He hadn’t imagined it going quite like this, but better late than never. “I like blokes,” he said firmly. “A lot. I’m gay, in fact.”

“That’s brilliant!” Ron said, nodding heartily. He shot a look at Hermione. “And, er, such a surprise!”

Harry glanced at Malfoy – he was looking a little anxious, as if wondering whether he was going to have to dodge a hex any minute.

“Doesn’t bother me, obviously,” Ron said. “I’d be a bit of an idiot if it did, what with Charlie and everything.”

“Whoever you want to be with, it’s fine with us, Harry,” Hermione told him.

“Yeah!” Ron agreed. “Unless it was like, someone really terrible.” There was an awkward silence, before Ron rushed on, “I mean, like a troll, or a– a banshee or something.”

Bloody hell. Maybe this had been a mistake, Harry thought, not missing the fact that Hermione was gesturing at Ron to shut the fuck up. It would have been easier for everyone if Malfoy hadn’t been there… and Malfoy wasn’t even Harry’s boyfriend. It was hardly fair to put him through this.
Malfy got to his feet. “I just remembered, I need to go and check on the… on the birds.”

But Harry hadn’t wanted Malfoy to think he was ashamed of him. He wasn’t ashamed. “Please stay,” Harry told him.

“What birds?” asked Hermione.

“Just some birds that happen to be upstairs,” Malfoy said airily. He turned to look out of the window.

“I’ve got to be off myself,” Ron said. “Like I said, I just came for a quick hello. I’m meeting Webster for a pint. But if you want to come along later, Harry, we’ll be at the Golden Snidget.” He made the squinting face again, which Harry realised was his attempt to smile at Malfoy. “And er, Malfoy, too, of course. Yeah.”

“All right,” Harry said. “I don’t think I’ll make it this time, but thanks.”

Ron patted Harry’s shoulder. “Come back to work soon, will you mate? I miss you.” He gave Hermione a kiss. “Right. Goodbye, er, everybody,” he told them, then folded his long limbs into the Floo.

Hermione gave Harry another quick hug and whispered apologetically, “Don’t mind Ron. He’ll get used to it.” Out loud she said, “I’d love some tea.”

Harry poured her a cup and added just a dash of milk, the way she liked it. She was already taking out her notebook and quill, along with a small stack of books. The uppermost was titled, *Runic Residences and Bewitched Buildings*.

“I got hold of these, and they’ve helped me with more of an idea of what might be happening with Grimmauld Place,” she said.

She looked at Malfoy, who was still standing stiffly by the window. “Will you sit down, Malfoy? It might be helpful to talk to you as well.”

Malfoy shrugged. “Of course.”

“So Harry, the house has seemed rather sensitive lately, yes?”

Harry nodded. “That’s an understatement.”

“But since Malfoy has er, been visiting, it’s been more cheerful, is that correct?”

Harry nodded again. “If you can call spitting out random fountains and chandeliers cheerful, yup.”

Hermione tapped her quill against the parchment. “Yes, the fountain. What had been happening when that appeared?”

Harry glanced at Malfoy, trying not to blush at some of the vivid images from the day. He couldn’t remember whether it had appeared before or after he had his tongue buried deep in Malfoy’s arse. “Er. Well.”

“I mean just generally!” Hermione looked rather flushed herself. “I don’t need any details.”

“Hmm.” Harry could feel heat rising up from his collar. “Malfoy and I were getting on quite well at that point.” He heard a snort from Malfoy’s direction, but kept his eyes firmly on the floor.

Hermione made a note, and Harry really didn’t want to think about what she was writing. “Yes…
“you see, the fountain…” She sighed. “Malfoy. You’re familiar with Pureblood traditions, obviously.”

Malfoy took a very elegant sip of tea. He could easily have been sitting in the drawing room of the Manor, except Harry didn’t think he wore such skintight jeans in those days. “Indeed.”

“The symbolism of the fountain.” Hermione raised her eyebrows.

Malfoy’s lips twitched. “Yes. I did wonder.”

“What?” Harry asked.

“Have there been other things with the same connotations?” Hermione asked Malfoy.

“Well, there was a lot of honeysuckle growing up the stairs at one point. And there are two thrushes nesting in a tree upstairs.”

Hermione’s quill moved rapidly.

“Would anyone mind telling me what this actually means?” Harry asked.

Hermione exchanged a quick glance with Malfoy. “I think your house might be… preparing for a wedding, Harry.”

Harry was mid-gulp of tea, and he nearly choked. “The fuck?” he managed, once he could speak again.

“Fountains are traditionally used for nuptial celebrations,” Malfoy told him apologetically. “Honeysuckle would be given as a courtship gift. A sign you’re rather serious about the person, in fact.”

Harry stared dumbfounded. His house was in cahoots with Malfoy. He knew it. And their aim was to make a complete fool of him. “All this stuff is to do with Pureblood weddings, then? All the vines and chandeliers and stuff?”

“No, not all,” Hermione said. “A lot of the magic seems to be the house’s own invention. It’s been quite creative, don’t you think? But the connections with marriage and courtship give a rather big clue about the house’s intentions.” She put down her quill. “OK, here’s what I discovered. Magical homes are designed to protect the families living in them, but they also depend on their owners for protection. For instance, if a house has been unoccupied for a while, as Grimmauld Place has… it begins to feel under threat. And when a wizarding property feels that way, it can trigger some pretty ancient kinds of magic.”

“Grimmauld Place isn’t empty now, though. I’ve been living in it for about a year, if nobody had noticed,” Harry said.

“Sure, but you’ve not exactly been positive towards it, have you? It feels neglected, and the other thing that’s probably bothering it… well, a house wants a family in it. A single person might up and leave.” She looked at Harry anxiously. “Or they might die.”

Harry just about managed to hide the quick jab of grief in his ribs.

“I’m sorry,” Hermione went on. “But the house has had a hard time of it, too. First Walburga dying and leaving it empty, then Sirius… It’s experienced a lot of trauma.”

“Trauma!” Harry said, in scornful disbelief.
“Shhhhh,” for goodness’ sake,” Hermione told him. “It can hear you, you know.”

“So you’re saying the house wants me to get bloody married, so it can get over some painful experiences it’s had?”

“It… certainly seems to be hinting that way.”

“Well, isn’t that just wonderful? I know – why don’t we ask Kreacher to be a bridesmaid? He’d look great in lace.” Harry turned to Malfoy. “Why didn’t you tell me any of this? I suppose you think it’s really funny.”

Malfoy rolled his eyes. “Why would I know what was going on? The Manor either doesn’t have the same magics placed on it, or never needed to use them.”

Harry glowered at them both. “I suppose it’s just a coincidence that Malfoy’s mother was a Black. I suppose it’s nothing to do with Grimmauld Place wanting him to be its Master, instead of me? How come it keeps giving me toads and cobwebs while it makes piles of silk cushions for him?” Harry asked, his voice rising. “Does it explain that in your bloody books?” Harry knew he was behaving badly, but this was all kinds of humiliating, and frustrating, and it made Harry want to chuck stuff around. It was his house. And the thought of Malfoy ever wanting to marry him was a fucking joke.

Hermione’s forehead creased up. “You don’t feel the house has truly accepted you? But you can sense the house’s moods.”

Harry gave an irritated sigh. He certainly could. Every single bloody one of them.

“The house does recognise you as its Master! None of us can feel that – can we?” She looked at Malfoy for confirmation, and he shook his head.

“It wants you to be happy here,” she went on, “and it obviously thinks Malfoy can help with that. It’s trying to be as welcoming as possible to him. Look–” She broke off to leaf through one of the books in the pile. “House Magic Through History says that a house imbued with protective enchantments will be… where is it now… Yes. Especially hospitable to eligible suitors and worthy paramours.”

This time it was Malfoy who was caught mid-sip, and Hermione waited for him to stop spluttering before she continued. “Grimmauld Place wants you to stay, Harry. It’s doing all it can to keep you here.”

Harry felt so mixed up over all of it, a lump began to swell in his throat. “If the house wants me to stay, why does it keep being horrible to me?”

Hermione shook her head in exasperation. “Oh, Harry. It’s probably been feeling hurt and muddled. It has got feelings, you know?”

“Well, no, I didn’t know until a few days ago, because nobody thought to mention it to me!” Harry protested. It was all so unfair – everybody else always knowing things, all the time.

Malfoy cleared his throat. “I’ve stayed here a few times now–” He fiddled with the cuff of his shirt, glancing at Hermione to see how she would react. “We’ve not exactly got along smoothly for the whole time.”

You can bloody say that again, Harry thought.

“If your house thinks I should stay around, it makes sense it might be pissed off if we fight.”
“I think Malfoy’s got it,” Hermione said. “I don’t mean to pry. But when you owled saying the house hated you… Well, that was the same day Ron said you were falling apart at work because Malfoy had left.”

Malfoy’s eyes looked very piercing all of a sudden. “Falling apart?” he repeated, his diction terribly precise.

Harry was going to go to that pub and kill Ron. “I had an issue with some bloody Floo powder. It was nothing to do with—”

They were both staring at him. Hermione looked kind and concerned, while Malfoy probably couldn’t believe his luck at what an idiot Harry was making of himself, and Harry was not going to waste his energy on a stupid argument. “Whatever. OK? You win. Malfoy gets in a strop and storms off, so my house rains on me. Fine. Fabulous.”

“I did not get in a strop,” Malfoy said, narrowing his eyes.

“Well, I wasn’t falling apart. I was having a bad day at work—”

“Was it really raining in your bedroom?” Hermione interrupted.

“It’s probably still doing it,” Harry told her.

“Can I have a look round?” she asked. “If you can tear yourself away from this riveting argument. I’ve never experienced house magic like this before, and I’ve been reading so much about it this week, I’d love to see.”

Harry let out an exasperated breath. “All right.” He gave Malfoy a surly look. “I presume you won’t bother joining us, Malfoy?”

Malfoy gave a tight smile. “I’ve seen rather a lot of your house’s magic already, thanks, Potter.”

Harry and Hermione ascended the first flight of stairs together. The honeysuckle, if that was what it was, was blooming nicely, the powerful scent rising up around them as they went. As soon as they were out of earshot of the drawing room, Hermione hissed, “Harry!”

“What?” Harry asked.

“When did Malfoy start looking like that?” she asked.

Harry felt a rumble of unease in his chest. “Like what?”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “You know perfectly well what. Talk about growing into your looks.” She tried to smile, but her forehead was creased with concern. “I know you’ve been... getting on well, and I’m happy for you, but…”

“But?” They stopped on the landing, keeping their voices low.

“This isn’t just about his looks, is it? I know you’ll say not to fuss, but I do worry, Harry. I know you haven’t had a great time in the past, dating, and—”

“It’s not just about his looks,” Harry said firmly. He didn’t know exactly what this was about – his whole attraction to Malfoy – but he knew bloody well that it was nothing so straightforward. It felt like Malfoy could give him something that nobody else could. And you know what? Harry could even let himself believe that he could make Draco happy, too. If he just had a fucking chance. But
Draco would never think of him that way, not in a million years. “It’s… it’s a bit complicated. But it’s not just that.”

Hermione looked at him, her lips pursed, then smiled and squeezed his arm. “Well. OK. We really are pleased for you, even if it takes a little getting used to…”

“It’s OK,” Harry said. He hadn’t realised how shitty it would feel to have Hermione try to be kind about a relationship with Malfoy that wasn’t even real… “So do you want to see the house, or was this just a ploy to get me alone and interrogate me?”

“No, I really do want to see.”

Harry opened his bedroom door. “Be my guest.”

Hermione took out her notebook as she walked inside. Harry showed her the rain (which seemed to have settled down into a light mist), the candelabra, the many flowering plants, and the new shower room, but he didn’t show her the silver-grey room. It felt… well, private. He wanted Malfoy and himself to be the only ones that knew about the way that room had transformed for them. However, when he opened the shower room door, and Hermione exclaimed in surprise, Harry heard a familiar screech from upstairs, like a bagpipe warming up.

“Ah, shit. We woke Walburga,” he told Hermione with a sinking heart.

“Vileness! Disgusting perversions!”

“Oh god,” Harry said. “Come back down and finish your tea. She’ll get bored and drop off to sleep again if we leave her.”

“All over the house! Shameless acts, unnatural and filthy, morning and night!”

“My goodness,” Hermione’s eyes were wide. “You have been busy, Harry.”

Harry’s ears were burning as he led the way back down to the drawing room. “Let’s pretend she never said that, OK?”

As they entered the room, Hermione was once again all cool professionalism. Malfoy sat leafing through the books Hermione had brought.

“Mother’s in this one,” he said, holding the pages up for them to see. There was a picture of Narcissa in the gardens at Malfoy Manor, captioned *Mrs Malfoy with her enchanted roses*. “They bloomed all year round, you see – they were quite famous amongst Herbologists.” He sounded quite offhand, but Harry could see his hand shaking as he turned the page.

Hermione took up her quill again. “Malfoy, I hear you’re looking for work?”

He looked up at her in surprise. “Yes. Yes, I am.”

What a gem she was, Harry thought. If anyone could help, Hermione could. She took down various details, such as Malfoy’s OWL results, and Harry let himself zone out for a moment, just watching the movement of Malfoy’s lips as he answered, utterly distracted by all the lush possibilities of his mouth. Malfoy glanced over and caught Harry looking, and – *fuck* – Malfoy’s eyes sparked with interest.

“And what particular skills do you have?” Hermione was asking, and Malfoy couldn’t suppress a smirk at the look on Harry’s face.
Hermione looked from one to the other of them and tutted. She tried to look disapproving, but Harry saw her lips twitch. “I’m talking about skills that would transfer to the workplace.”

Ah. Little did she know what skills Malfoy used in his current workplace. If she knew that Harry was paying him to be here, that Harry’s mouth was dry just thinking about what Malfoy would do to earn his Galleons after she left… would she write that down in her little book, too?

Harry looked at Hermione, and felt an uneasy throb of guilt. She thought that he and Malfoy were dating – no, more than that, that they were in a relationship. That they were maybe falling in love. If she knew the truth, she’d be horrified, wouldn’t she?

And Malfoy, he thought that Harry was only interested in him for sex. A simple transaction of Galleons in return for access to the pleasure his body could give. But holy hell, there was so much more than that going on here. Harry glanced over at Malfoy. He was nodding, his face serious as he listened to Hermione, his long fingers fidgeting in his lap, and Harry felt such a tug in his chest, almost painful, and the word smitten came into his head. That was what he was, he thought with rising panic. He was fucking smitten. And if Malfoy knew, imagine how horrified he would be.

There was something ironic about the situation, Harry realised. But it wasn’t funny at all. It was a great big fucking mess. And his house was plotting against him.

He was stuffed.

“Well, I’ll do what I can,” Hermione was saying, beginning to gather her books up and tuck them away into her pocket. Harry could see from his face how much this meant to Malfoy. “As you’re well aware,” she told Malfoy, “it’s not the easiest task, but perhaps— Hold on.” She stopped short and waved her hand impatiently. “What am I thinking?” She snatched her notebook up again and scribbled a hasty line.

“What is it?” Harry asked.

Malfoy looked as if he wanted to hope, but didn’t quite dare… not yet.

“It’s so obvious,” Hermione told them. “I know exactly the thing.”

“What is it?” Malfoy asked, a feverish look about him.

Hermione hesitated. “I’d better not say anything until I’ve spoken to the person I’m thinking of…” She nodded slowly. “But really, I have to say I feel quite optimistic.” She got to her feet. “I’ll go now. I promise I’ll owl as soon as there’s any news.”

Malfoy stood as well. “Thank you.” He didn’t say any more, but he looked pink and pleased as he reached out a hand for Hermione to shake.

Harry got up to give her a hug. “Thank you,” he said. He kissed her forehead. “You’re the best.”

Now Hermione looked pink and pleased, too, as she stepped towards the fireplace. “Thank you for the tea, and the tour, of course. I’ll, er, leave you to your shameless acts,” she said, one eyebrow arched, and then the Floo whooshed and she was gone.

Harry turned to see Malfoy advancing on him, his face glowing with excitement.

“What do you think?”

“If she feels optimistic… “Harry shrugged. ”Well, all I can say is that she usually achieves what she
Malfoy gave Harry a hard push on the chest so that he stumbled backwards, sitting down on the sofa.

“Hey,” Harry said, annoyed, then made a muffled sound of surprise as Malfoy climbed astride Harry’s lap and began to kiss him. *Fuck, yes.* Malfoy’s mouth was hard against his, moving hungrily as Harry’s hands slipped under Malfoy’s shirt, his thumbs skimming over Malfoy’s narrow waist and down to his hip bones. God, they still had the rest of the afternoon, and the evening, and the whole of the long night.

Harry let his head fall back against the sofa, already lost in the feel of Malfoy, the taste of him. Malfoy’s hands were in Harry’s hair, and just the touch of his long fingers brushing over Harry’s scalp made him want to squirm with pleasure. Harry gripped him by the hips and settled him more firmly on Harry’s lap, so that Malfoy could feel what he was doing to Harry, feel Harry’s cock lengthening and hardening, trapped in his jeans–

The distinctive rap of an owl’s beak on the window made them both startle. “Ignore it,” Malfoy said, grinding down against Harry’s erection, and oh hell, he was hard, too, the bulge of his cock sliding shamelessly up against Harry’s.

The owl tapped again. Lord knows Harry wanted to ignore it, but– “It could be Hermione,” Harry said between kisses.

“You’re joking. She’s only just left,” Malfoy said.

“I mean it. She’s fast,” Harry said, and Malfoy broke away reluctantly.

Harry didn’t recognise the bird, an imposing and rather ragged looking beast, but Malfoy made a sound of dismay and moved quickly to the window.

“My parents’ owl,” he said, letting the bird in and taking the envelope it held clasped in its foot. He scanned the letter in a moment, his face clouding. “Oh, hell,” he said.

“What is it?”

“My father. He’s much worse – I should go to him.”

“What do you need?” Harry asked. “Shall I order a Portkey?”

Malfoy shook his head. “I’ll Floo to Diagon Alley and then Apparate in a few jumps. It’s not so very far.” He ran a jerky hand through his hair, then Summoned his boots and cloak and hurriedly put them on. He stepped towards the Floo, then turned back.

“Hell – you’d paid for the whole day. I’ll give you back your Galleons, of course.”

“Please don’t. Use them for anything you need.”

Malfoy looked as if he was about to protest, then flicked his eyes up to Harry’s. “Very well. But I’ll make up the rest of the time later.” He reached over and touched Harry’s face, his long fingers trailing over Harry’s jaw. Harry thought for a moment that Malfoy was going to say something more, but instead he turned away. “I must go.”

The fireplace flared green, and Harry thought that he had never hated the smell of Floo powder so much. The house seemed to sag miserably in the moments after Malfoy left. Harry couldn’t say he blamed it. He found himself going upstairs to the silver-grey room, scowling at the honeysuckle on
The birds were perched in the tree together, preening, and Harry just wasn’t feeling up to watching it. He threw open the window and jerked his head. “Off you go,” he said. The birds cocked their heads at him, apparently weighing up their options. “There are plenty of trees out there,” Harry told them, and they flew out, twittering softly and sadly to each other.

He lay down on the bed, staring up at the chandelier. The cold, showy brilliance of it seemed to be mocking Harry now he was the only one there to witness it.

He wondered what Malfoy would find when he reached his parents. Harry couldn’t bring himself to wish Lucius well – he didn’t have it in him to be that charitable. But for Draco’s sake, he hoped things were not as bad as they sounded in the owl.

At least Malfoy might soon have a better way of supporting his family. Maybe with more funds, Lucius could get better care, and his health might improve again… But something else was tugging at his thoughts, too. It was starting to sink in that if Hermione did manage to find work for Malfoy – and he didn’t doubt that she would – then Malfoy wouldn’t need to sell himself for money any more. He’d be free. Completely free. And that would be the end of him and Harry.

A nauseous heaviness settled in his stomach. Harry wanted to feel glad for Malfoy. And part of him did, he really did. It was what he had wanted for him from the start. But right now, here in the room his house had created for them to be together… he also felt so fucking lost.

God, Harry was a selfish, heartless swine. He kept thinking about how unfair it was – that this one day with Malfoy was all he would ever have, and all these fucking things had got in the way of them being together. His eyes and his throat were stinging and he curled up on the bed, his hands bunched into fists at his sides. He thought of how it might have been if he hadn’t sent that owl to Hermione. If they’d have gone back to bed, and Harry could have lost himself in the pleasures of Malfoy’s body one more time.

He felt Grimmauld Place give a sort of deflated sigh around him, and he spoke out loud, his voice sounding raw and scratchy. “Don’t do anything, OK? Because I’m not sure I could stand it right now.” There was no reply, of course, but Harry imagined that he could feel the house listening all the same. “I didn’t want him to go, either – it’s not my fault this time.”

There was a silence, then the quiet ploomf of something landing on the bed beside him. Harry looked down to see a woollen blanket in rich shades of gold and burgundy.

My god. The house had given him a blanket. Like a bloody shock victim or something. Harry felt the urge to laugh, but it probably wasn’t a great idea to hurt Grimmauld Place’s feelings, and maybe sleeping for a while wasn’t the worst thing he could do.

“Er. Thanks,” he said, pulling the blanket over himself. It was very soft and rather worn, as though it had been used for years and passed down as a treasured possession. When he drew it up to his chin, he could smell woodsmoke and furniture polish, as if the blanket had come straight from the Gryffindor common room. He didn’t think anything could give him comfort right now, but his body sank into sleep faster than he would have guessed.
When Harry woke up, it was dark and he had that unsettling sense of disorientation he always got from falling asleep during the day. He wandered down to the kitchen and put the kettle on to boil. He wondered how Lucius was doing now, and, most of all, how Draco was coping. He felt so useless stuck in London, not knowing what was happening or if there was anything he could do to help. He even thought for a while about tracking them down... But for god's sake, if Lucius was dying – possibly even dead, he thought grimly – the last thing the Malfoys would want was bloody Harry turning up on their doorstep.

Harry thought about asking Grimmauld Place for some food, but knowing his luck, it probably wouldn’t oblige now that Malfoy was gone. And in fact, the idea of cooking something himself was more appealing. He searched through the fridge and found a few bendy parsnips and an onion. Soup. That would be OK. The reassuring rhythm of peeling, chopping, slicing, stirring, occupied his mind for a while, but when the soup was made and he had eaten a steaming bowlful, the misery and the frustration crept back in like old friends.

He should go back to work tomorrow. Really throw himself into it. Be the best fucking Auror there’d ever been, pass all their bloody exams and set to work cleaning the streets of scum like Carlville and that sick bastard who’d tried to pick Malfoy up in the bar. That would be as good a way as any to forget – train hard and work hard and leave no time for dwelling on the infuriating allure of Malfoy’s face.

He washed up by hand – spells always seemed to leave a weird residue, and banging the saucepans around in the sink was far more satisfying. When Malfoy Apparated in, his cloak billowing around him, Harry dropped the soup bowl he’d been drying, letting it smash on the floor at his feet.

Malfoy leaned against the wall for a moment, breathing heavily, as if the last jump of his journey had taken a lot out of him.

“How was it?” Harry asked.

Malfoy shook his head grimly. “Bad.”

“Is he...?” Harry couldn’t put it into words.

“Dying?” Malfoy said. “Probably.” He rubbed a hand over his face. “I don’t give a shit.”

Harry didn’t say anything, just looked at Malfoy’s slumped shoulders.

“Is it OK I came back?” Malfoy asked.

“Yeah, of course,” Harry told him. “It was just unexpected – I forgot the wards let you in. Sit down. There’s soup.”

Malfoy didn’t seem to hear him. “The bastard kicked me out.”

“What?” Harry said in disbelief.

“Mother tried her best, but he’s old and mad and twisted up with hatred. He could give Walburga’s portrait a run for her money.”

“Merlin.”
Malf...
jeans off, Harry found that he couldn’t wait either.

It felt a bit like a scuffle, like something that might have happened between them a long time ago. But this time, instead of elbows in ribs, there were shaky fingers fumbling with buttons. Instead of hexes crackling into the air, there were hot urgent breaths and the desperate slide of lips over skin. Malfoy was soon naked, and Harry scrambled out of his pants and socks, his gaze never leaving Malfoy as he lay on the bed, eyes half-closed.

“Come on then, Potter,” he said. “I’m all yours.”

Harry felt the words throb through him, deep delicious shivers rolling down his spine. Malfoy had one arm thrown above his head, the Dark Mark standing out black as pitch against the white sheets, and Harry felt his cock twitch as he let his eyes linger on it.

Harry knew what Malfoy had said about his customers liking it. But this wasn’t some cheap fantasy as far as Harry was concerned. It was far more than that.

He crawled across the bed until he was on all fours over Malfoy, and oh, god, that was a compelling thing: to have Malfoy under him like that, all the defiance and tension contained in Malfoy’s body stretched out beneath him. Harry shifted his weight so that their erections brushed together, a rolling heat building in his gut as he watched Malfoy’s pupils blow wide with pleasure.

Malfoy’s Dark Mark was staring Harry in the face, now, and it stirred up all kinds of feelings in him – a lot of anger, for a start. But there was also a primal kind of arousal, an instinctive reaction to the sight of something that was so very much part of Malfoy. Harry found himself wondering what it would be like to run his tongue over the harsh black lines, and then he was doing it, tracing the shape of the skull with trembling lips. A week ago this would have seemed like the sickest, most twisted thing possible. To touch his lips to this – this despicable symbol of stomach-churning hatred.

But Harry did it. He pressed his mouth to it almost in worship, relishing not the Mark and all it stood for, but the things it had failed to destroy: the taste of Draco’s warm skin, still smooth, still so full of life and potential, beneath the taint of the ink.

Malfoy watched Harry. “What are you doing?” he whispered.

Harry let the point of his tongue follow the line of the snake. “It’s part of you,” he whispered. “It’s all part of you.”

Malfoy made a low, urgent sound. “Inside me,” Malfoy told him. “Do that when you’re inside me.” He gestured with his fingers and a tiny phial flew from the pile of discarded clothes into his hand. “Use this,” he said, and Harry poured a little of the contents into his palm. It was silky and warm, and he quickly smeared it over himself, covering his cock from root to tip, then dribbled some more onto his fingers, and oh hell, Malfoy was there, waiting, his legs drawn up for Harry and a hungry look on his face. Malfoy’s hole was just as astonishing as before, swallowing Harry’s finger greedily while Harry stared, his eyes nearly popping out of his head at the filthy-hot-wrongness of touching Malfoy there.

“Yes,” Malfoy said, urging him on. “Yes, more, harder,” and when Harry managed to coax the tips of two fingers into the snug heat of his arse, Malfoy closed his eyes and moaned. Harry pushed his fingers deeper, watching Malfoy’s cock twitch and leak against his stomach, and fuck, it was because of Harry, because of Harry’s fingers inside him. He buried his face in Malfoy’s hair for a minute, overwhelmed and afraid that he might say something stupid because of how much it was making him feel. Harry couldn’t stop thinking of how Malfoy would soon be stretching around his cock, wondering if he would moan like that again and ask for more, and how Harry would stand it without
losing his mind–

“Oh. Oh fuck yes, damn you, now,” Malfoy said, and it was too soon and not soon enough.

Harry felt impossibly clumsy, but he managed to get himself lined up at Malfoy’s entrance, and just the sight of his cock resting there against Malfoy’s hole made a kind of growl rise up in his throat. Malfoy still seemed so tight, but everything felt very slippery: slick with sweat, and pre-come and whatever was in Malfoy’s little phial. Malfoy hooked one leg up so that it was over Harry’s shoulder, and fuck, this was actually going to happen. Malfoy was going to let Harry do this – Malfoy seemed to want Harry to do this, and Harry let out a bloody ridiculous whimper. He could feel the head of his cock straining against Malfoy’s body, and then, with a sudden breathtaking slide, he was partly inside.

Oh, hell. Malfoy was breathing hard, and as Harry pushed in another inch, Malfoy closed his eyes and made a rough sound, and Harry couldn’t tell if it was good or bad. Harry had a desperate urge to roll his hips, to go as deep as he could, but he held himself still, shuddering, shivering trails of pleasure radiating out from his spine.

“Oh, fuuuck,” he said. It came out sounding scared, and honestly, he was. He was scared of how good it was – he didn’t know what to do, or how to be, with the intense sweetness of Malfoy’s arse gripping him hot and tight, and Malfoy’s rangy body under him.

“Fu-uck,” Harry said, again, his voice cracking, thinking of the times he’d imagined what it would be like to do this, and how pathetically, hopelessly, he had misjudged how good it would be.

He pushed in some more, and the deeper he got, the better it felt. and he almost felt like crying or something stupid like that, because how could he have got to be nineteen years old and have no bloody idea how good this could be?

Malfoy clenched around him and that heightened everything more than Harry could have dreamed. When Malfoy thrust upwards so that Harry slid all the way in – every single inch, deep inside – it felt so impossibly good that Harry had to close his eyes tight. He held himself still as he could, trembling, feeling like he might come already, like the fearful intensity of being inside Malfoy could all be over in seconds.

Malfoy’s mouth had fallen open, and oh god, Harry couldn’t believe how he looked. His face was almost blissed out – as if Harry being inside him was something amazing.

“Uhhhhh,” Malfoy groaned, and he shifted on the bed, arching his back and drawing Harry just that bit deeper into him. As he moved, the Dark Mark flashed in Harry’s face again and Harry remembered what he had said.

_Do that when you’re inside me._

He captured Malfoy’s wrist and pinned it to the bed. They were both breathing hard, Malfoy watching him with heavy-lidded eyes. Harry bent his head and slowly, deliberately, kissed the black lines of the Mark. He kissed the empty sockets, the bloodless lips of the skull. He kissed the grotesque coils of the snake, and as his tongue sought out the lines he had once found so repellent, something visceral took over and he started to fuck into Malfoy.

At first it was slow, tentative, his hips searching for a rhythm, but not for long. As Malfoy moaned his encouragement, Harry went deeper, and harder, leaning back to watch Malfoy’s reactions, and Malfoy let out a hiss of approval.
“Do it. Go ahead and do it,” Malfoy said, his voice imperious, but something about his eyes were pleading, like he really needed Harry, and hell, that was hot, stirring up the savage yearning that he had never felt with anyone except Malfoy. “Give me all of it, Potter,” Malfoy told him, and Harry knew, of course, what that meant in purely physical terms. But it felt like Malfoy also meant something else – that Harry could let go of all the things that he had tried to keep hidden inside for so long, and that Malfoy would take it.

There was no way Harry was going to last – he felt himself tilting towards the cliff-edge of orgasm with every stroke. He tried to hold back, to keep something in reserve so that it would last longer, but Malfoy was having none of it.

“Come on. Give me everything,” Malfoy urged, his fingers digging into Harry’s back, and Harry did. Not just his desire and longing, the needy wanting and the hunger. Harry gave him his anger, too, the cruel frustration, the guilt and the shame. The disappointment, the jealousy. He even gave Malfoy his burning grief for those who were lost. He poured all of it into this act of fucking, let it out in the furious pounding of his hips, driving into Malfoy with more force than he knew he was capable of. He gave Malfoy all that he had, and Malfoy didn’t just lie there and take all of it – Malfoy thrust up to meet him, gripping Harry’s arse and demanding more with every stroke.

It was like a torrent of power flooding through his core. Only Malfoy could give him what he needed – this stormy, raging, relentless joy. And in that moment, he could give Malfoy what he needed, too. Harry slammed in deep and Malfoy let out a long guttural sound of satisfaction, his face screwed up and his muscles standing out in knots. Harry drew his hips back and slammed in again, achingly deep and achingly close and then, holy shit, Malfoy’s cock jerked wildly and he was coming. He cried out, stomach tightening as a long strand of come flew up and hit his chest and throat. Malfoy was coming, clenching around Harry where they were joined together, and it was the most incredible thing in the whole fucking world.

Malfoy arched upwards, his gorgeous face contorted with pleasure, come splashing over his chest and stomach and that was it, that was everything Harry had ever needed. He was going to come, too – hot trails of pleasure building and building into an unstoppable rush. It flooded through his core, pulling unbridled sounds from his mouth. Everything was hot and tight and slippery and he was so deep, so deep inside Malfoy, coming and coming and coming.

Afterwards, Harry was so relaxed he could barely move. His back was damp with sweat, both their chests smeared with spunk, and it felt fantastic. He could feel his cock softening inside Malfoy and there was even something shivery and intimate about that.

He lay there for a minute, eyes closed, completely boneless, before realising he was probably too heavy for this to be comfortable for both of them. Malfoy lay still as Harry rolled off, then shifted on the bed, letting out a low growl of contentment. A flicker caught Harry’s eye and he lifted his head to see a log fire burning in the fireplace, aromatic smoke drifting in lazy spirals towards them.

“Mmm,” Malfoy said appreciatively. “That’s so fucking good, Potter,” and Harry didn’t like to ask if he meant the fire or the sex. Malfoy’s eyes were all sleepy, his long limbs stretched out in an elegant sprawl. He looked sated, for the first time since Harry had met him, his haughty features softened into something intensely sensual.

Harry groped on the floor for his wand and cleaned them both up, then let himself flop back on the bed. His body felt so loose and contented, he thought he could curl up here with the fire warming his bare skin for a week and not need a single thing.

But Malfoy was looking uncertain now; he rolled onto his side and gave a little dubious grunt.
“What is it?”

“That was your first time,” Malfoy said. He stroked a knuckle over Harry’s shoulder, then let his thumb rub over the place where the pain used to be, as if smoothing away even the memory of it. “And it was… well. Kind of…” Malfoy raised an eyebrow. “Rough?”

“Yeah,” Harry told him, and a grin started to stretch across his face, wide and appreciative. “Yeah, it was. It was exactly what I wanted.” And it was. Fast and messy and desperate and a bit raw. It was real, so real, and he couldn’t imagine it having been any different.

Or… was it? Despite the fire warming his legs, Harry felt a chilly finger of doubt trailing over his skin. Malfoy had certainly seemed to enjoy himself. My god, yes. But...

Harry thought about the potions Malfoy said he needed to take, and how they muffled every feeling. He looked at Malfoy’s face, still glowing with satisfaction and a sheen of sweat. Surely… But Malfoy would pretend, wouldn’t he? He couldn’t just lie there and look bored – not if he wanted happy customers.

“Those potions…” Harry said. “Did you take them this time?” This was probably a terrible mistake, but he had to know if this was what it seemed. He was going to remember it forever, and he wanted to be sure whether he was remembering something real, or just a piece of pretty make-believe.

“Potions?” Malfoy said in disbelief. “My god, Potter.”

Harry scanned his face, searching for any sign that Malfoy was going to lie to him. “Did you?” he asked stubbornly.

“No, I didn’t take any potions. Merlin, you’re an idiot.”

Harry didn’t get why he was an idiot. But he didn’t care. That meant Malfoy had wanted it – really wanted it and enjoyed it – and that was all Harry wanted to know.

He didn’t ask this time if he could hold Malfoy, simply rolled over and tucked their bodies together, his leg thrown across Malfoy’s, his hand resting on his shorn nape, his nose finding a home just above Malfoy’s ear. His hair smelled of sea breezes, as if one of the stops on his journey had been near the coast, and Harry thought of all Malfoy had been through that day.

The fire flared up brightly, crackling as a log fell and then settling down again to a steady glow.

“What happened to the thrushes?” Malfoy asked sleepily, and Harry remembered guiltily having shooed them out earlier.

“They went into the garden,” Harry said. Well, it was true.

“They probably like it out there with the fountain,” Malfoy said in a low mumble, sounding half asleep already. In another minute he fell silent and still, his chest rising and falling in a slow, hypnotic rhythm, and it wasn’t long until Harry followed suit.

But when the owl tapped against the window, they were both instantly alert.

“Oh god, no,” Malfoy said, and Harry knew he was expecting to hear the worst about his father.

“It’s OK; it’s Hermione’s owl,” Harry told him, trying to feel pleased about it. “She often works late.”
The letter attached to its claw was addressed to Malfoy, not Harry. Harry watched him scan the contents rapidly, his expression shifting from anxiety to elation as he read. “Hell and Fiendfyre. She’s done it!” He read the letter again, eyes flicking across the parchment. “She’s set up an interview for me. Tomorrow.”

“What kind of work is it?” Harry asked.

Malfoy shook his head. “It’s... a surprise. I’ll tell you tomorrow.”

“What? Why won’t you tell me?”

Malfoy folded the letter and tucked it away. “It might not even work out,” he said. “I don’t want to jinx it.” His eyes were shining, and Harry wished more than anything that he could feel happy for him without this awful sense of stupid bloody selfish despair.

“It’s someone you know,” Malfoy told him, and that was not much of a clue, because Harry couldn’t think of a single soul he knew that might offer Malfoy a job. When they lay down again, bare legs twining together on the fire-warmed sheets, Harry’s feeling of contentment had evaporated. All that was left was the thought that this was the last time he would fall asleep next to Malfoy.

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Next morning, the Malfoys’ owl woke them quite early with a message. Harry opened the window and passed the parchment to Malfoy, his throat tight with apprehension. But Lucius had rallied. The Healer pronounced him out of danger... for now. Malfoy read the letter twice, then scrunched it up and set it on fire with a dismissive flick of his wand. “Fighting with me must have done him good. He’ll probably go on for years,” he told Harry, looking as though he didn’t know if that was good or bad news.

It was still dark outside, and Malfoy pulled Harry down onto the bed and kissed him, maddeningly slow and sensual, with their limbs laced together and the house thrumming happily all around them. Harry felt dizzy with it, and after a while Malfoy climbed on top of him and rode him with lazy, lingering strokes, bringing Harry to the edge several times, gasping and groaning, before Malfoy finally led him over the brink.

It was all like the most idyllic dream – the kind of dream you fought to get back to, cursing the sun for daring to wake you. The kind of dream that could really fuck up your day.

When they woke again, Harry knew he’d had far longer than the twenty-four hours they’d agreed to, but Malfoy was still there, still naked, still apparently willing, and though Harry felt guilt laying heavy in his gut, he didn’t say a thing. If he had a year, it wouldn’t be long enough for all the things he wanted to do to Malfoy. They showered in the new bathroom, fucked in the shower, and then Harry got on his knees and took Malfoy’s cock between his lips, water sluicing down over his back in a thrilling cascade.

Harry didn’t know if he was any good at it, but Malfoy made plenty of noise, and grabbed handfuls of Harry’s hair and even thrust into his mouth, just as though Harry was doing it right. Malfoy leaned back against the cold tiles as Harry worked a finger into his still-slick, still-tender arse, almost undone by the feeling of his own come inside Malfoy’s body. Harry twisted his finger in, right up to the knuckle, and Malfoy clenched around it – once, twice, three times – as he came down Harry’s throat, his face all screwed up with tension before relaxing into what looked like something blissful.

Harry kept his eyes wide open, trying to lock it all away in his memory. The salty-sharp taste of Malfoy in his mouth. The way his thighs trembled, how he sounded half-wrecked. How he looked
down at Harry and arched his back as he pushed between Harry’s lips … oh god, it made him long for a Pensieve, so he could dive into its silver waters and at least relive it that way.

At long last, Malfoy said he was hungry, so Harry went down to see if the house had made breakfast. When he returned with a tray full of pastries, bacon rolls and coffee, the silver snake mirror had made a reappearance and Malfoy was getting dressed in front of it, examining himself as he did so.

“Grimmauld Place is at it again. It knew I needed the mirror today before my interview,” Malfoy said, taking large bites from a pastry in between buttoning his shirt. Harry came and stood looking over his shoulder, fitting his body against Malfoy’s arse and breathing in one last lungful of cologne and warm skin.

“I think the mirror should stay,” Malfoy said, smirking at their reflections. “Think of all the things we could do with it.”

But once you get this job… Harry had to look away, bury his face in the nape of Malfoy’s neck. You won’t need to come back. Will you? Harry’s throat stung with all the things he couldn’t say. Questions he daren’t ask.

Malfoy was wearing his tightest jeans and the waistcoat, cinched in over a fitted shirt, his hair smoothed into a messy quiff. He looked so handsome that it made Harry’s chest ache, but he felt he ought to mention it.

“Listen, I’m probably not the one to judge. But is that the best outfit for an interview?”

“Trust me,” Malfoy said, and for the first time, Harry had a twinge of doubt about exactly what work Malfoy would be doing. Surely Hermione wouldn’t have set him up for something dodgy? Would she?

Malfoy looked at their reflection in the mirror, leaning back against Harry and looking as though he was suppressing a smile. Harry looked too, swallowing down the lump in his throat. They looked fucking good together, Harry thought. They looked like a couple. No-one would know that Malfoy was only there because Harry was paying him.

“Just think,” Malfoy said, apparently reading Harry’s mind. “If this works out… no more standing on street corners freezing my arse off. No more sleazy bastards feeling me up. No more potions so I can pretend I’m actually into it.” He laughed.

“Will you– will you miss anything about it?” Harry asked, and he knew, he knew it was a stupid question, but he had to ask. He had to ask, because it really had seemed like Malfoy enjoyed being with him some of the time. Like it meant something to him as well.

Malfoy made a contemptuous sound. “Are you kidding?” he asked, and well, that was pretty clear.

Harry straightened up and stepped back, away from Malfoy. It felt like something was ripping apart. But it was time. It would only get worse – feel worse, even worse than this – if he waited. “You’d better be going,” he said, and he tried to say it casually, to sound like it meant nothing to him, but it came out sort of strangled. “Don’t be late.”

Malfoy turned away from the mirror to look at Harry. “You’re coming, right?”

Harry shoved his hands into his pockets. “Me? No. Why would I? You’re all sorted now.”

Malfoy’s eyebrows drew together. “I thought–” He stepped towards Harry, and ran his hand slowly
down Harry’s chest. “I just thought you’d be coming with me,” he said, his voice low.

Harry looked at Malfoy’s splayed fingers, felt the warmth seeping through his shirt. “You don’t have to do this any more,” he told Malfoy. “You know I’ve had what I paid for.”

Malfoy stood very stiffly, his hand frozen on Harry’s chest. “Oh,” he said.

“It was fantastic, I mean…” Harry stopped and swallowed hard. He couldn’t put into words how good it had been. Not without making a complete fucking idiot of himself. “But now, you don’t need to carry on… you know.” Harry gestured.

Malfoy pulled his hand away. “No. I see.” He blinked at Harry. “I–” He stopped short, the words choking off.

“What?” Harry said.


“Sure,” Harry said, and he could feel the house all around him humming a low, keening, vibration of loss.

Malfoy turned away and folded a shirt into his case. Harry knew he should say goodbye, knew he should leave and not stand there like a tosser, staring at Malfoy while he packed, but his body felt weird and numb, and his feet didn’t want to work right now.

Malfoy added his comb and his bottle of cologne, then picked up the final things from the dresser. Something shiny, that clinked together with a bright, brittle sound. Harry’s Galleons. Or what was left of them after Malfoy had visited his parents. Malfoy weighed them in his hand, stony-faced, before turning away to place them with his other belongings. He fastened the case with a brisk snap, then whipped back round, an unnatural flush staining his cheeks. “You know, I had this stupid idea that you were different.”

Harry looked at him, not sure what was going on. He’d thought after what Malfoy had said, that he would be relieved to be released from his duties. Delighted, even. But Malfoy looked livid, his eyes flashing.

“Different?” Harry began.

“I thought you were actually interested in me,” Malfoy told him. “You know, as a person.” He shook his head and a bitter kind of laugh came out. “You just liked paying for it. Right?”

“What the hell?” Harry said.

“Yeah, yeah,” Malfoy ground the words out. “The kinky thrill of fucking a whore. Even better – a whore that’s a Death Eater. I’ve seen it a hundred times before. I don’t know why I thought this was anything else.”

“That is not what this is about,” Harry said, his brows drawing down.

Malfoy took a step nearer and shoved Harry in the chest. “So what is it about?” He didn’t wait for an answer, but jutted his chin close to Harry’s face. “You ask if you can hold me all night. Kiss me like you’ll die if you don’t have me. Parade me in front of your little friends, let them think I’m your boyfriend.” He forced the word out like it was something obscene.

“I– I didn’t–” Harry began, but he had. He had done every one of those things.
“Then there’s your stupid house with all this ‘eligible suitor’ crap, spitting rose petals wherever I walk.” Malfoy’s nostrils were flared, his voice lowering to a threatening rasp. “What am I meant to think? You look at me like I’ve dropped from the sky or something, do you know that? You fucked me with bloody stars in your eyes.” His face was twisted up with anger. “And as soon as I get the chance to make a half-decent life for myself, you don’t want to know me any more.”

Harry looked at Malfoy in utter confusion. He’d tried so fucking hard not to let Malfoy see how much this all meant to him – well, clearly, that hadn’t worked. But did Malfoy want him to be interested?

“I thought– I thought this was just business for you,” he told Malfoy. “I thought you were going along with it for the money. Or because you owed me or something. Trying to make me feel good.” Harry stumbled over the words. “I tried not to show that it was more than that.” He swallowed hard. “It was a lot more than that. To me.”

Malfoy’s face screwed up with disbelief. “Potter, you are such a fucking idiot.”

“Hey,” Harry growled, but Malfoy’s hand was pushing at his chest again.

“Yes, you are.” He made an exasperated gesture. “Listen to me. I’ve been hard for you day and night since you brought me here. Told you again and again you didn’t have to pay for it.” Malfoy was right up in Harry’s face again, and it felt maddening and totally arousing. “You’ve had me close to begging, you bastard. Merlin, how can you be so clueless?” Malfoy’s fists were clenching at his sides. “You took me apart with your tongue – I was there on that bed, losing my mind for you, and you think I was going along with it for the money?”

Harry stared in disbelief, and then a wild, fizzing elation started to flow through his veins. This meant something more to Malfoy. God, Harry was all shaky with adrenaline, and stupidly turned on, and bloody bewildered, all at once.

And happy. He could feel the startling sweetness of it radiating through him. Harry thought that as soon as this had sunk in properly, he might feel fucking stupendously happy.

“How could you think I didn’t want to be with you?” Harry asked him. “I want you more than anything.” It was only a few simple words, but he couldn’t believe how it felt to say them to Malfoy. “I didn’t know I could have you, not unless I paid.”

Malfoy’s face flickered with an emotion Harry couldn’t name, but he didn’t miss the soft flush creeping over Malfoy’s cheeks, or the way his eyes burned, the silver almost molten. “You drive me fucking insane,” Malfoy said in a low voice, not bothering to hide the way his gaze latched onto Harry’s mouth.

“Oh god,” Harry said. He was hard, his whole body aching for Malfoy’s touch. What if Malfoy had left without having this conversation? Harry would never have been able to do this again: he tilted his head and met Malfoy’s mouth, slow and searching at first. It was real. It was all real – everything he had felt. Malfoy’s desire for him had never been a charade. The tenderness Harry had been sure he’d imagined, that was real, and god, his heart clenched almost painfully at the thought of it. And the messy brutal stuff, oh yes, that was real too, and Harry was glad. So glad.

Harry deepened the kiss, letting Draco feel how much Harry wanted him – and he was Draco now, not Malfoy. Harry could think of him that way at last. He kissed Draco, not trying to hide any of it, and that was something new and astonishing all by itself. The kiss was starting to turn hungry, Draco making rough sounds in his chest that had Harry wanting to throw him on the bed, when Draco’s wand buzzed in his pocket, vibrating against Harry’s leg.
“Ugh. The interview. I set an alarm,” Draco said, muttering *Finite* before kissing Harry again. And again.

“We need to go,” Harry said, his lips still moving against Draco’s lips, his hand on the back of Draco’s neck.

“Mmhmm,” Draco said, opening his mouth to let Harry’s tongue slide in, sweet apples and bitter coffee and the sharp salt tang of Harry’s own desire.

“Ahh.” Harry pulled away, just enough to get some air. “Draco. We’ll be late,”

Draco nuzzled Harry’s jaw. “We?”

“Yeah,” said Harry. “I’m coming with you, right?”

“Right,” Draco said, and Harry could feel him smiling against Harry’s skin, while Grimmauld Place rippled with happiness and relief around them.

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They were only about two minutes late, and that was partly because they Apparated to the wrong end of the Haymarket. The sun was shining, a beautiful fresh winter’s day that had Draco’s cheeks and nose flushing with the cold, and Harry felt stupidly light-headed, like he might do something idiotic if he wasn’t careful. He wanted to pinch himself, to see if this was really happening. That Draco was actually with him because he wanted to be. Because he wanted *Harry*. Harry smiled, relishing the sun on his face, until Draco nudged him.

“We’re late, remember?” Draco smirked. “You can stand there looking like a first year at Honeydukes later.” He led the way to a glass-fronted building and took a deep breath before stepping into the foyer.

“Sixteenth floor,” he said, making his way across the marble floor with long strides, and just watching him *walk* – Harry couldn’t help it, there was something about the way he moved. He couldn’t pull his eyes away, and Draco turned from pressing the lift button to find Harry’s gaze burning into him.

“Merlin, Potter,” he said in a low voice, his eyes flicking around the foyer. “Maybe don’t give me *that* look right now, hmm?” His lips twitched into a half-smile. “Wait til we get back to yours.”

They began the journey to the sixteenth floor in silence, only the quick bob of Draco’s Adam’s apple in his throat hinting at any nerves. Harry watched in the mirrored walls of the lift, stiffening in surprise as Draco began to roll up the sleeves of his shirt to reveal his Mark.

Harry didn’t say a word, but Draco could probably read his thoughts from his expression.

*What are you doing? Do you want this job or not?*

Draco met his eyes in the mirror. “If they can’t accept who I am from the start, there’s no point trying.”

The lift pinged softly, and Draco squared his shoulders. “I won’t say good luck,” Harry told him. “You don’t need it. You know you can do this.”

Draco shot him a grateful glance and the door slid open to reveal a spacious lobby area. A young man sat on a sofa flicking through a magazine, and wearing something that looked like an expensive
grey kimono. “Can I help you?” he asked.

“Draco Malfoy to see Mr Tomar,” Draco told him confidently.

“Of course. He’s expecting you.” Kimono Man stood up and shook Draco’s hand. “I’m Sacha.” He looked doubtfully at Harry. “You can wait here.”

“No, he’s coming too,” Draco said, and they both followed Sacha into an airy office with a stunning view of the London skyline. Dean Thomas was bent over a table strewn with glossy photographs.

“Harry!” Dean straightened up and held out his arms in welcome. He was wearing a black shirt and a pair of tapered trousers patterned with a riot of roses, and in Harry’s opinion, he looked pretty damn sharp.

“Dean?” Harry took the handshake that was offered, then smiled as Dean’s other arm wrapped around him. “Do you work here?” He couldn’t keep the surprise from his voice.

“Didn’t Hermione tell you? No?”

Harry made a wry face. “Nobody told me anything, as usual.” He was desperately trying to think what it was Dean could be doing here. Last he heard, he would have sworn Dean had a little market stall in Bethnal Green, and now he seemed to be doing very nicely for himself indeed.

Dean broke away from the hug and turned his attention to Draco. “Ah, look who else is here.”

Sacha gestured. “This is Draco Malfoy. Draco, meet Dean Thomas,” he announced grandly, only he said it with a French accent, as Draco had done in the lobby. Deeeen Tomar.

“Yes, I know who this is,” Dean said, and he didn’t sound impressed. He squared his shoulders and walked over to Draco, sizing him up. “Well, well, well.”

“Deeeen Tomar? Really?” Harry asked, and Dean shrugged.

“I know,” Dean said. “This industry. It’s madness,” but now his attention was firmly fixed on Draco. “OK. Look at that face,” he said.

“And the rest,” added Sacha, openly staring at Draco’s legs in tight denim, and Harry felt a rumbling of displeasure at the sight of another man looking at Draco that way.

“Turn around,” Dean told Draco, and they all watched as Draco turned around slowly, in a kind of disdainful, elegant slouch, keeping eye contact with Dean for as long as possible.

“Fuck. Yes,” Dean said. “You know, I think you’re going to make us all a lot of money.”

What the hell? Was Dean a pimp? No, surely not. Dean was a nice, honest, decent guy. Harry had known him for years, for god’s sake. And pimps didn’t usually have smart offices with arty photos on the walls. Did they?

“Let’s try out a few things,” Dean said.

“Like what?” Harry asked.

“Don’t worry, it won’t take long,” Dean assured him. He walked to the windows and began to pull down the blinds, while Sacha bent over a bag and rummaged inside it.

Harry stepped closer to Draco, his heart pounding with adrenaline. “What is this?” he asked in a low
voice.

Draco’s eyes were bright with excitement. “This is me getting a job, Potter,” he told Harry. “Is that OK with you?”

Harry stuffed his hands into his pockets. Of course, Draco was free to do whatever he wanted. But no, it wasn’t bloody OK with him if Draco was going straight from the streets to some kind of upmarket escort agency. And no way was anyone going to test anything out with Harry standing right there. He glared around the room and noticed Sacha had taken a rather swanky camera from the bag and was fiddling with the lens, while Dean looked at Draco again with narrowed eyes.

“Perfect,” Dean said. “Shall we have his shirt off, do you think?” Dean asked Sacha, and Harry couldn’t hold his tongue any longer.

“Is it porn? Is that it?”

Everyone but him burst out laughing.

“Stripping, then,” Harry insisted, his mind running riot. “Are you going to be a stripper?” Stripping was far safer than prostitution, but Harry wasn’t sure his brain would actually be able to take it. He’d probably have some kind of aneurysm if he ever saw Draco doing such a thing.

Dean waved a hand, still choking back laughter. “Harry, you’re brilliant. OK, Draco, keep the shirt on for now so Harry doesn’t freak out. Just a few test shots. If you can walk up and down for us, so we can see how you move?”

Draco blinked once, standing perfectly still, then began, his shoulders strong and fluid, his legs moving across the floor as though it was lucky to have him walking on it. His whole body oozed a defiant confidence; he looked dangerous, and so startlingly hot that Harry had to choke back a sound like a low rumble of need in his chest.

“Yes,” Dean said. “That’s it.”

Sacha snapped shot after shot, the hypnotic clickclickclick of the camera, the flash reflecting off Draco’s skin and the dazzling white of the shirt at his throat. When Draco reached the end of the office, he paused in front of the camera, aiming an insolent look right into the lens, then turned and walked back.

“Watch it,” Sacha warned. “Keep that up and you’ll melt my Nikon.”

“It’s fashion modelling, Harry,” Dean said simply. “I’m hiring for my latest collection. We need runway models and a couple of people for photoshoots. If the camera loves that bone structure even half as much as I suspect it will, he’s hired.”

Fashion. Of course – Dean’s stall at Bethnal Green had sold clothes he had run up on a Muggle sewing machine, although he’d obviously come a long way from there. And Draco, working as a model. Why hadn’t this been bloody obvious to Harry?

Harry gazed around Dean’s office again. The arty photos were all of different garments, he now realised, shot from unusual angles – a close up of the sharp crease of a lapel, the gauzy hem of a dress fluttering in the breeze.

Dean saw him looking. “Bit different from when I was at the market, eh? My stuff’s a mix of Muggle and wizard – same heritage as me, yeah?” He grinned. “It’s a great combination. Muggles buy it and they don’t quite know why the cut is so flattering.” He leaned back on his desk with an
amused look. “They say it’s my special magic. The latest designs are selling out as fast as we can get them on the shelves.”

“That’s amazing,” Harry said. “I had no idea, but I’m thrilled for you.”

“I could be offended you hadn’t heard of my fame,” Dean said. “But you never were much into fashion, were you, Harry?” He grinned again, his eyes sliding across Harry’s scruffy boots, and Harry snorted in agreement.

Draco and Sacha had opened the blinds again and were looking at the images Sacha had taken. “Any good?” Dean asked.

“Oh, yeah,” said Sacha, with relish. “God, I can’t wait to get him into your clothes. Can you imagine him in that fitted white suit – or the shirt with that sheer material – or the silver coat?”

Hell. Visions of Draco wearing magically-enhanced, beautifully-tailored fashions swam into Harry’s head, and he felt a need to adjust himself in his jeans. He walked over to the window and stared out at some pigeons on a ledge, who were fighting over what looked like half a burger, until the urge subsided.

“Are you free the weekend after next?” Dean asked Draco. “We’ve got a big show coming up. If that goes well I’ll use you in Paris next month. And I need someone to do a shoot for GQ on Thursday.”

Draco looked pleased but tense. “I’m free that weekend, yes. And on Thursday.” He hesitated, his fingers tapping against his thigh. “I’ve been pretty much free for a while, actually. Because of this.” He held out the arm with the Dark Mark.

Dean frowned at it. “Hmm. Well, we can cover that up, I’m sure. With makeup or something.”

Sacha interrupted. “God, no, are you mad? Leave it like that.” He pressed a hand to his chest. “It’s so edgy. People will go crazy for it.”

Dean tipped his head to one side. “Yeah. I have to agree, Sacha’s right. Don’t worry about it.”

Draco chewed at his lip. “So, it wouldn’t bother you to work with someone like me?” he asked. He sounded quite offhand, but there was a tinge of anxiety to his tone that made Harry feel as though his ribs were too tight. It made him want to go to Draco’s side, but he guessed Draco would prefer him to stay out of it for now.

Dean let out a long breath. “Well, if we’re on the subject, you were a prick. Let’s not pretend otherwise.”

Draco looked at him, his whole face full of an uneasy sort of shame.

“But, you know.” Dean went on, “I saw and heard a lot of what went on when I was locked in your bloody cellar. You were a prick, but you were also shit-scared, Malfoy. You were as messed up by what was going on as the rest of us.”

Draco kept his head up, but Harry thought he could see his chin trembling slightly.

Dean looked him over silently for a while, then said, “Hermione came to see me. You wouldn’t have got a foot in this office if it wasn’t for her, I can tell you. She said we’ll never be over the war if we can’t let go of old grudges. What do you think of that?”
Draco nodded. “I agree. Let’s face it, she’s smarter than either of us.” He hesitated, his lips pressed together, then told Dean, “For what it’s worth... I’m sorry about the cellar.”

Dean let out a long breath. “OK. So, I don’t know if you’re still a prick or not. What I care about from now on is whether you’re a reliable worker, and whether you can make my clothes look as good as you do those cheapo jeans.”

Draco laughed, a mixture of amusement and relief, and Harry couldn’t help it; he didn’t know how Draco felt about Harry touching him in public, but he walked over to where Draco was standing, slipped his arm around his waist and let it rest there. He could feel Draco’s muscles tensing warily for a second or two before he relaxed against Harry’s side.

Dean tapped a finger to his lips. “Seems like you and Harry are putting the past behind you, too.”

Draco flicked a glance at Harry that made heat flare in his belly. “Yeah,” Draco said. “Maybe.”

“Or was that kind of always bubbling under?” Dean gave a wicked grin. “Honestly, now? I seem to remember, Harry, you spent most of sixth year following Malfoy about, and—”

“Oi,” Harry protested. “Putting the past behind us, yeah?”

Dean pulled out some paperwork and he and Draco began discussing makeup tests, Portkeys, and contracts. It sounded like Draco was going to be quite busy for a while. It was all happening so fast and Harry was over the bloody moon. He thought, not for the first time, that if Hermione was on your side there was nothing that couldn’t be done.

It also sounded like Draco was going to be quite busy for a while. “Will he be working tomorrow?” he asked.

Dean shook his head. “No. Starts Wednesday.”

Right. If Harry had his way, neither of them would be leaving the house tomorrow – hell, if he could persuade Grimmauld Place to provide snacks up there, neither of them would leave the bed.

After that, Harry supposed he should really think about getting back to work himself.

When Draco had signed on various dotted lines, he and Harry walked back to the lift together, Draco’s face glowing with relief. “So,” Harry said, as they stood waiting. “I feel like I should have guessed, but I really wasn’t expecting that. You’re a model now.”

Draco closed his eyes for a moment. “Salazar. It’s true.”

“How do you feel about it?”

Draco nodded slowly. “It’s good money. I think it’s quite an opportunity.”

“You don’t mind all of the photos and things? People staring at you?” Harry thought how uncomfortable he would feel if it were him.

“Fuck, no. People look all the bloody time, anyway, whether or not I want them to. I might as well get paid for it.” He stared into space for a moment, then tilted his head. “So what do you think? Do you think I’ll be any good at it?” His voice was casual, but his eyes flicked anxiously to Harry’s face.

“I think you’ll be amazing,” Harry said simply.

“I expect you think it’s a bit…”
“A bit what?”

Draco’s lip curled in a way Harry knew all too well from school. “Tawdry.”

“Fucks sake, why would I think that, Draco? That took some guts, what you did in there, you know? Why would I think there was anything wrong in it?”

Draco traced a shape on the floor with his boot, then said in his haughtiest voice, “My father would say it’s unspeakably vulgar.”

Harry felt an aching weight in his chest. How could anyone treat their child this way? “Do you want to do this? Is it something you want to try?”

Draco frowned. “I.... Yes.”

“That’s all that matters.”

Draco lifted his chin. “Is it?”

“Of course it is. Fuck what anyone else thinks. It’s your choice.”

Draco pursed his lips. “The way I see it... if they like the way I look, and me wearing his clothes makes people want to buy them, well…” He shrugged. “That’s fine by me.”

“It’s fine by me, too.”

Draco looked at him, his lids lowered. “Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Harry said firmly.

The lift arrived, and as Draco stepped inside, he had regained some of his poise. As the door closed, Draco hooked a finger into Harry’s belt loop. “So, Potter... are you fine with fucking a model?”

“Uh. Yes,” said Harry.

Draco tugged at his belt loop, sending a shiver of arousal down his spine. “Just like the ones in that magazine under your bed.”

_Dammit_ Trust Draco to have seen that. “I want to see you in a magazine,” Harry told him, reaching out for Draco’s hips and stepping closer until he could feel the heat from Draco’s body. Sixteen floors. He could kiss Draco now, press him up against the wall of the lift, against the cool mirrored surface, and unbutton that waistcoat and then the shirt... “Bloody hell, you got the job. We should celebrate. Don’t you think?”

Draco reached for Harry’s wrist, slipping his fingers under the sleeve of Harry’s jacket and rubbing his thumb over the thin skin, where the blood pumped hot and insistent. “Take me back to yours for some base acts. The baser the better.”

Harry was only too happy to oblige.
Chapter 6

The Ministry didn’t open til ten on Wednesdays and Draco wanted to buy a new pair of boots with some of his earnings, ones that didn’t let in the rain, so they headed out early. Walking down Diagon Alley was always a chaotic experience, but one that Harry very much enjoyed, still feeling a little of the wonder of discovering it for the first time. However, that day it was particularly busy.

“Look at that.” Harry nudged Draco, pointing at a witch selling some kind of colour-changing pet from a stall outside Flourish and Blotts. They were about the size of a tennis ball, fluffy, and judging by the high-pitched sounds, extremely squeaky. “Do you want one?”

Draco snorted. “Piss off,” he said, his eyes flicking around the crowds. Harry had noticed there was always a wariness about him when they were out together. It made him want to hunt down all the people who had made Draco feel that way and Hex them into tiny pieces. He couldn’t put his arm around Draco – uniformed Aurors were not supposed to indulge in public displays of affection – but he could walk close, their arms brushing together with every step.

“Harry…” called a familiar voice and Harry turned to see Winifred from the admin department, walking arm in arm with a handsome young man wearing motorbike leathers. “Hi, Harry,” she repeated.

“Winifred, how are you?” Harry asked. “Hi, Metcalfe.”

“I’m fine. What about you, stranger?” Winifred raised an eyebrow. “It’s been ages since you turned up trying to get me to do questionable things.”

Harry coughed. “I’m sure I’ll require your help with paperwork again at some point, don’t worry.”

“That’s OK.” Winifred smirked, squeezing Metcalfe’s leather-clad arm. “I’ll survive.” Metcalfe luckily seemed to be finding the whole exchange amusing. Then she noticed Draco standing to one side. “Oh,” she said, her eyes wide. “Are you two…?”

“Together?” Harry asked. “Yep.” And Merlin, it made something joyous spark in his chest just to say it.

“Hello,” Draco stretched out his hand. “I’m Draco.”

“Winifred. Don’t I know you from somewhere?” Winifred asked, and Harry could feel Draco tensing next to him, his wand arm twitching as though he might need to defend himself in a hurry.

“He was in Vogue Italia this week,” Harry told her. “I bet you keep up with fashion, right?”

“Oh my god,” Winifred said. “That’s it. Wearing that incredible shirt. And your hair all…” She gestured vaguely to her own do.

The results of Draco’s latest photoshoot for Dean had been the stuff of nightmares for Harry. Draco wore a diaphanous shirt, a pair of tight underwear and some battered boots, his hair slicked back with something that made it shimmer pure silver. Harry couldn’t get the bloody images out of his head, and it was making things very hard at work. In all senses of the word.

“That’s him,” Harry said. “Are you coming to Dean’s show on Saturday?” He still couldn’t quite bring himself to say Tomar, but he was building up to it. “Draco will be on the runway.”
“I’d love to, but do you know how hard it is to get tickets for those things?” Winifred asked.

Draco cleared his throat. “I might be able to help you there.”

“Are you serious?”

“Here.” Draco drew out two glossy tickets from inside his coat and offered them to her. “If you’d like them. Dean sent me a few this morning.” He turned to Metcalfe. “You might be interested – there are a lot of leather pieces in the new collection,” he said, and Harry suppressed a groan at the thoughts this conjured up. Draco’s new job was going to kill Harry. No – it was going to annihilate him.

“Merlin!” Winifred said. “Thanks so much – you’ve made me a very happy witch, I can tell you. I have to get to the office, now, but it was delightful to meet you, Draco.” She leaned in to kiss Harry on the cheek, but as she drew close, she murmured in his ear. “Nice catch, Potter.”

Harry ducked his head, his ears feeling hot, and Winifred laughed as she waved goodbye.

Draco seemed a little more relaxed after meeting Harry’s colleagues, and Harry felt a bit lighter in his chest, too. Nobody had freaked out at the fact Harry was with a bloke. And Winifred either didn’t know who Malfoy’s family were, or didn’t care.

Draco led Harry over to the window of Gwydion’s Potions and peered at the bottles and phials on display. “Ah, good, it’s in stock.” He ducked into the crooked little shop, stooping down to avoid hitting his head on the doorframe.

“Two jars of Olibanum Ointment,” he told the shopkeeper. “For your shoulder,” he explained to Harry. “It will work wonders.”

“Nine Galleons and sixteen Sickles,” the shopkeeper said, and Draco waved Harry’s gold away when he offered it.

“I earned more than you this week,” he said, giving Harry a smirk and slipping one of the jars into Harry’s pocket. “And I’ll send one to Mother. It’s the best thing for her pain, but we couldn’t often afford it before.”

“Your mother…” Harry said as they left the shop, realising at last what was wrong. "The tickets you gave Winifred were for her, weren’t they? Does that mean she’s not coming?"

Draco pressed his lips together. “Not this time. She’s too anxious about appearing in public. And Father had a few things to say about me making a cheap spectacle of myself…” He gave a tight smile. “You can tell he’s feeling better, at least. Funny how he managed to get over the idea of disowning me when the next lot of Healer’s bills came in.”

He sighed, then dug in his pocket and brought out a few more of the glossy printed tickets. “Here. Dean sent spares. One for you, of course.” He hesitated. “I was wondering if Granger – Hermione, I mean – whether she might like one?”

Harry nodded. “Yeah. Why don’t you owl her? I think she’d be pleased.”
Harry wanted to grab Draco’s hand and hold it all the way back to the Ministry, and damn the regulations. Instead, he let his fingertips trail briefly over Draco’s palm, their arms bumping together. As they approached the steps of Gringotts, Draco paused, only for a second, but long enough for Harry to feel his arm stiffen suddenly.

“What is it?” Harry asked.

Draco’s face was rigid. “Nothing,” he told Harry, but Harry scanned the knot of people outside Gringotts and saw a face he recognised – black hair, blue eyes, sharp features – disappearing into Knockturn Alley.

“That’s him, isn’t it?” Harry demanded. “That bastard Lennox Carlville.”

“Who?” Draco asked, but his face looked bloodless, and Harry knew. He dived into the crowds and was at the entrance to Knockturn in no time.

Carlville was wearing a blue cloak – there, in the doorway of the apothecary’s. Harry’s wand was already in his hand. “Get back!” Harry shouted to people nearby as the spell reached his target with a rippling stream of light. Carlville was jerked towards Harry in an instant, the spell yanking him across the ground as if he were being drawn to a magnet.

“Harry.” Draco was at his side. Someone was screaming. Harry cast again, and Carlville fell to his knees, his face pinched with surprise.

“You evil bastard,” Harry told him. “I knew I’d find you.” He cast a third time, and Carlville’s limbs went rigid and drew in on themselves, his knees folding, his hands twisted into claw-like shapes. Harry didn’t stop until Carlville had buckled into a tight ball, motionless on the dirty floor of the alleyway.

“Merlin,” breathed Draco. “What was that?”

“Advanced Body Bind,” Harry told him, panting slightly from the effort of the spell.

“Is that really necessary?” Draco asked.

“It is him, right?”

Draco nodded.

“It’s necessary,” Harry said grimly. “OK, time to go about your business,” he told a couple of elderly witches who were loitering nearby, muttering in tones of horror to each other.

Draco looked at Carlville again and swallowed. “Fuck, Potter, you are quite scary sometimes.” He looked at Harry with lowered lids and Harry felt a ripple of heat pass between them.

“I’d better take him in,” Harry said reluctantly. He didn’t want to go back to work and deal with a whole load of paperwork. He wanted to drop Carlville like a stone in the middle of the Thames and go somewhere private with Draco where they could make each other forget all about this kind of shit. Forget about everything, except breath on breath and skin on skin. But he had work to do.

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“Potter?” Robards’ voice echoed along the corridor and into the training room. “Where the hell is Potter?”
Harry was doing practice drills with Ron, but they broke off, panting for breath, and dropped their wands to their sides as Robards flung the door open with a bang.

“Potter, that is not how we apprehend a suspect.”

Harry and Ron exchanged a look. Harry reached for his towel and rubbed it across his arms and face, soaking up the perspiration.

“Er, no,” he told Robards. “I got a bit carried away.”

“Merlin help me!” Robards scrubbed a hand across his face. “We need you to come and do a counter spell. Nothing is shifting that Body Bind.”

“Oops,” Harry said, not sounding sorry at all. What a shame that was for Carlville. He’d bet it was awfully uncomfortable being scrunchied up like that for this long.

“So what’s the story?” Robards folded his arms, waiting for an answer.

“Uh?”

“There’s always a story with you, Potter. What do you have against this wizard?”

“Did you Priori his wand?” Harry asked.

“Of course we did. Standard procedure. Plenty of incriminating stuff on there. He won’t be seeing daylight for quite a while.”

Harry let out a sigh of relief. Draco wouldn’t have to give evidence. Wouldn’t even have to make a statement. “I’ve been looking for him for a while, that’s all.”

Robards closed his eyes briefly. “Come and tell us what the hell his name is, then, and get him looking like a wizard again instead of a sardine in a tin.”

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“Hi, Latisha, how’s your nan doing? Any chance of an extra sausage? Oh, you’re an absolute star.” Ron grinned as the witch piled mash onto his plate and ladled on gravy.

“Does Hermione know you sweet talk all the canteen witches to get extra food?” Harry joked, as they moved along to the puddings.

“Mate, she tells me to do it. You know we can’t cook to save our lives. If I eat loads at work it saves a fortune on takeaway.” He broke off to speak to one of the serving witches. “Is that jam roly poly? Yeah, go on then, a big slice if you’ve got one. Ta.” Ron accepted a bowl and went to sit down.

“So what happened with that suspect? Did Robards tear you a new one?”

Harry shrugged. “Pretty much, yep.”

Ron looked at Harry, his forehead furrowed as he scooped up a forkful of mash. “You’re not going to bugger off again, are you?”

“Nope,” Harry said firmly, and he meant it.

Before returning to work, he had thought about leaving for good. Had even spoken to Draco about it. But it turned out Draco had some strong feelings on the matter, to the extent of telling him not to
be such a dick.

Harry had felt his eyebrows drawing down. He’d expected a bit of sympathy, not insults, for god’s sake.

“Just put up with the crap for a couple of years.” Draco had put on a mocking whiny voice. “‘Oh, I don’t like the exams. I don’t like the paperwork.’ Tough fucking shit. It’s a job most people would dream of; you don’t get to moan because parts of it are a bit hard.”

He was right, of course, which just made it more annoying.

Harry poured some water for himself and Ron. “We both know I’m never going to do things exactly by the book.” He frowned. “I think even Robards knows I’m never going to do things by the book. So I guess I’m always going to be getting hauled in for disciplinary stuff.”

Ron nodded and began attacking his sausage. “Yep. Can’t see that changing.”

“If they don’t like it, they can… well, they can get rid of me, I guess.” Harry stopped to consider this while chewing another mouthful of shepherd’s pie. “Maybe they will. And I’ll go and do something else. But I reckon they won’t, because… I don’t want to sound big-headed, but I think I could be a bloody good Auror if they just got off my back a bit.”

“Course you would. You’d be brilliant. But what about the exams? You going to be OK with those?”

“I’ll have to be. I know I’m no genius, but I’m not exactly thick, either. I think I can pass. I just don’t like studying – I mean, who does?”

Ron pulled a wry face, and they both laughed.

“OK, we do know one person,” Harry said. “But I can get through it if I knuckle down. Maybe you can show me those colour-coded things you’ve got.”

“Course I will.” Ron chased the last smears of gravy around his plate with a sausage. “You know, I’ve not seen you cheerful like this for months. What with training getting you down, and the house… You’ve had quite a year.”

“Yeah,” Harry said. “But things are getting better.”

Ron sat back and looked at Harry with a careful expression. “It’s Malfoy, too, isn’t it? That’s why you feel that way.”

“Er.” Harry pushed a pea around his plate. “Yes. Yes it is.”

Ron rubbed the back of his neck. “Well… I’m glad. As long as he’s treating you properly.” He leaned forward and pointed his fork at Harry. “You deserve someone who makes you happy. Remember that, all right?”

Harry smiled, shy and pleased. “All right.”

Ron gave him an affable slap on the arm. “Good. He looks a right tit in that magazine shoot, though.”

“You saw that?” Harry’s eyebrows shot up.

“Course,” Ron said. “Hermione bought a copy. Says she’s interested in the charms Dean uses, or
something.” He wrinkled his nose. “She’s never been into fashion before.”

“She can come along to the show on Saturday; I nearly forgot.” Harry looked at Ron, unsure as to what his reaction would be. “Draco’s got tickets. Front row. He wondered if you’d want one?”

“Me? God, no. Catch me watching a load of show-offs strut around—” Ron broke off and coughed. “Uh. I mean. Perhaps not for me. But I bet Hermione will be chuffed.”

Harry nodded. “Good. He said he’d send her an owl.”

“Great. Er, you don’t mind me not coming? If you think I should show my face, you know, I can totally be there… It’s just, fashion, you know.” Ron waggled his eyebrows. “Not really my thing.”

“No, it’s fine. You know it’s nearly half past, you’d better finish that,” Harry said, pointing at Ron’s pudding. “It’s Disarming spells this afternoon. I have a feeling I might do all right.”

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Harry’s knee bounced up and down as he let his eye scan the crowds seated on either side of the runway, an eager mix of Muggles and wizards who were sipping sparkling wine, chatting, or flicking through the glossy brochures that had been left on every chair.

“Harry,” Hermione said. “Relax. It’ll be fine.”

Harry knew he was being ridiculous. He had no doubts Draco would be brilliant. He was just bloody anxious for him.

“Can he really make a living doing this?” Harry asked.

Hermione raised her eyebrows. “Are you kidding? Of course he can. Dean pays very well for his shows, and the people who model for him go on to be wildly successful.”

OK. That somehow made it worse, because there was more at stake. What if something terrible happened at the show? Did models ever fall over? What if people caused a scene when they saw who was up on the catwalk? What if they jeered, or shouted abuse, or–

The lights dimmed and the audience quietened their conversations to a murmur of anticipation.

“Stop worrying, Harry,” Hermione whispered. “Try to enjoy it.”

A drum beat began, low and steady, making the hairs on Harry’s arms stir, and an even worse thought occurred to him.

What if Draco just looked really fucking hot and Harry had to sit here and watch helplessly for twenty minutes?

Harry wiped his palms across his jeans, grateful for the cover of darkness. A single spotlight flicked on, illuminating a doorway at the other end of the runway, and Harry leaned forward, not wanting to miss a moment. The drum beat on, becoming insistent, and a figure stepped in front of the light and stood for a moment, framed by the doorway, a sharp, spare silhouette.

Harry’s mouth was instantly dry. Draco. His hair was slicked back severely to accentuate his high cheekbones, and his body looked as tightly-strung as Harry had ever seen it.

The audience seemed to be collectively holding their breath as Draco began to walk along the runway. His eyes were fixed on a spot in the distance as he moved with an aggressive hauteur, the
narrow-beam spotlight illuminating his skin and making it gleam, catching on his hair, the swell of his bicep, the jut of his hip. More spotlights beamed down onto the catwalk, so that for the first time, Harry could see what Draco was wearing.

“God,” said Hermione under her breath, and Harry felt a ripple of excitement go around the room. The clothes were simple enough: a pale grey sleeveless top, and a pair of leather trousers, low on the hip. But they were cut to fit Draco like a glove, and the way he moved in them – the bold, fluid, provocative walk – set desire roaring through Harry, a bright flame of it.

The driving throb of a bass guitar joined the music as Draco reached the end of the catwalk and stopped, turning on the spot towards the rows of people. He stood, eyes burning, one hand on his hip, and hell, how the clothes clung to the sleek lines of his body: the neckline of the vest slashed in a V over Draco’s collarbones, the leather emphasising the muscular curve of his arse. As he turned again, pivoting to display the clothes from another angle, the black snarl of the Dark Mark was vividly apparent, his forearm facing the crowd. Harry heard a woman behind him gasp, then someone hissed, “Look!” and for the first time, Harry saw a look of uncertainty cross Draco’s face.

“Look! On his arm,” repeated the woman. Someone sitting nearby hushed her, but Harry saw Draco freeze on the spot. The Muggles in the audience wouldn’t know what the Mark was, of course, but they were staring just the same, weighing up the fierce beauty of his face and his challenging stance. Shit. Harry could feel the length of his wand in his pocket, quivering in readiness to channel his magic. It wouldn’t be ideal to use it here, of course, not with all these Muggles about. But he would do whatever he had to if trouble broke out.

Draco swallowed, his shoulders stiff with tension, his gaze skimming across the crowd, and then his eyes found Harry’s. For a second, he looked taken aback, as if he hadn’t truly expected to see Harry there. He blinked, looking very young all of a sudden.

Harry couldn’t speak, but the thought blazed out from every pore of his body. You’re so fucking beautiful.

Draco’s eyes ran over Harry as if he was thirsty for the sight of him. Harry held his breath, and then from somewhere in the crowd came an appreciative whoop. Draco seemed to recall where he was, and shifted back to his model pose, chin held high, his eyes sweeping across the room with a haughty insolence. The lights strobed all around, and as Draco turned and walked back towards the doorway, stalking along the runway with arrogant grace, several people in the audience began to applaud.

Draco didn’t miss a beat, just kept walking, but Harry could see his confidence returning with every step. As Draco passed, he gave Harry a look of such smouldering promise that Harry heard the blood rushing in his ears. Draco disappeared through the doorway with one last effortless stride, and the crowd fell quiet. Harry sagged in his seat as a line of other models came and went, earning a smattering of polite applause. But barely a minute passed before Draco appeared in the doorway again, and it felt as though the crowd sat up a little straighter in their seats to get a better look.

“Who is that young man?” asked a woman to his left, consulting her brochure.

“Must be Dean’s latest discovery,” said her companion.

“Always such fast outfit changes at these shows,” marvelled the first woman. “How did he get into that suit so quickly? It’s like magic!”

Hermione smiled and nudged Harry, but Harry couldn’t take his eyes off Draco. He appeared again and again, each time looking so fine that Harry feared the next outfit might push him over the edge.
He couldn't help but notice the skillful cut of the clothes, but there were also little touches that hinted at Dean's charmwork. A shirt covered with intricate embroidery that changed colour just subtly enough to be mistaken for a trick of the light. A coat of shimmering fabric that Harry was pretty sure moved by itself, draping and flaring to reveal Draco's figure. And a pair of loose silk trousers that must have been held up by magic so as not to slide from his hips as he walked. Draco wore leather, and brocade, and tweed, and leather again, all with the same contemptuous poise, until Harry had to resort to holding Dean’s fancy brochure over his lap to hide the tent of his erection.

He half-wanted to hex Dean and his wickedly flattering designs. He had dressed Draco in clothes that looked fit for a Pureblood lord, clothes for a risk-taking hedonist, clothes that made him look like the pampered plaything of a very rich man. Harry had never had much interest in clothes up to now but even he could see the artistry and drama of Dean’s work – the cut, the textures of the fabrics, the opulent trims of feathers and beads and fur. Some of the models had Draco’s body type – tall, lean and athletic – but Harry noticed Dean also liked to show how different kinds of people looked wearing his clothes. There was a curvy model with a pillowy stomach, her generous bum looking fabulous in a snug black satin skirt; a small, skinny, rather nerdy-looking guy; and a very refined-looking older gentleman who walked with the aid of a cane, his pure white hair gathered onto his head in a bun.

The finale saw all the models return to the runway, each one dressed in shades of black and grey. Draco wore a heavy overcoat, his narrow chest bare underneath. As he paused at the end of the catwalk, his eyes sought Harry’s again, and found Harry watching with a hungry reverence. Draco turned on his heel, radiating satisfaction, and struck his final pose, all angular defiance, before the lights flicked out, leaving the room in total darkness. The sound of applause grew, echoing in the darkness, until low lights came on again around the room, illuminating the now-empty catwalk, and people started to get to their feet, still applauding. The noise reached a crescendo as Dean stepped onto the runway, wearing a velvet jacket and the broadest smile Harry had ever seen.

Dean turned from side to side, acknowledging the crowd and pressing kisses to his fingertips.

“Bravo!” Hermione called, and Harry realised he was the only one still sitting down. He reached for his jacket and held it awkwardly in front of his erection as he got to his feet. Dean gave an extravagant bow, then left the runway, waving as he went, and the applause died away to be replaced by the excitable conversation of the crowd.

“Are you all right, Harry?” Hermione asked, not bothering to hide her amusement. “You look quite dazed. Dean’s a genius, isn’t he? Hold on, there’s Luna.” She stuck her arm in the air and waved to get Luna’s attention.

“I’m just going to…” Harry didn’t know what the fuck he was going to do, but he couldn’t stand there and make polite chit chat, that was for sure. He made a vague gesture that hopefully implied some kind of plan.

“You’re going to find Draco?” Hermione asked. “Tell him he did brilliantly, won’t you?”

Harry nodded.

“And thank him for the ticket. You should… you should come over soon. The two of you. We could try to cook something half-edible.” She looked so earnest, it made Harry want to hug her.

“OK.” Harry said. Wow. He wasn’t sure what that would be like, sitting at Ron and Hermione’s kitchen table with Draco… but it was something they’d have to work out. “Thank you. That would be great.”
As Hermione went to speak to Luna, Harry made his way through the crowds, feeling unsteady on his feet but moving with determination towards the backstage area. A skinny boy wearing a lanyard put up his hand as Harry reached the cordoned off space. “You can’t come in here,” he said in a prissy voice that made Harry’s wand hand twitch.

Harry felt his jaw tightening as he looked the boy up and down. “I need to speak to–”

“Uh-uh. No-one’s allowed through here without an official lanyard,” the boy told him, and Harry had to remind himself that hexing people wasn’t acceptable without a very good reason.

“Hey, aren’t you Harry Potter?” asked a young witch wearing what had to be one of Dean’s outfits, a profusion of tiny feathers shivering all over her blouse as she moved.

Harry shook his fringe down to hide his scar, an automatic reflex by now.

“You are,” the girl said. “Dorian, let him through. It's Harry Potter.”

The boy pulled the rope aside for Harry. “He should have said. How was I meant to know? He just looks like an ordinary bloke.”

“How did you expect him to look, you spanner?” the girl asked, shaking her head apologetically at Harry.

The backstage area seemed to be teeming with exhilarated people, but he couldn’t see Draco anywhere. Harry stopped a tall woman with a clipboard.

“Where’s Draco?” he asked, and she gestured to a corridor.

“Try that way,” she said.

Harry’s pulse quickened with anticipation as he made his way down the corridor and knocked on the single closed door at the end.

Draco called out, “Yes?” and Harry opened the door and stepped in.

Draco was bent over a sink, splashing water on his face. He was shirtless and barefoot. He was also alone. Harry wanted to pin him in a bruising kiss, to feel the strength and potency of Draco’s body pressed against his. But a weird nervousness thrummed in his chest and he stood in the doorway, not knowing what to say.

Draco straightened up and stood looking at Harry with his brows drawn down. Harry could see the tension in his body, his muscles taut, Adam’s apple bobbing.

“Shut the door,” he told Harry, and Harry kicked it closed.

“Come here,” Draco said, and Harry went to him, drawn like a fish on a line. Part of him still couldn’t quite believe that Draco would want him; just the idea of it made him dizzy. Draco’s shoulders rose and fell, his nostrils flaring. “Now fucking kiss me,” demanded Draco, and Harry leaned in, took Draco’s face between his hands and kissed him, deep and lingering and greedy, so that Harry felt like the pounding music from the catwalk was still throbbing through him. When Draco broke away they were both breathing heavily.

“I saw you watching me,” Draco said, his voice low and intense. His eyes ran all over Harry’s face, a smear of silvery makeup across his cheekbone.
Harry nodded. He wanted to press his lips to the sharp contours of Draco's jaw, lick his way down Draco's neck and over his torso. But Draco had seemed so unattainable on the catwalk, under the spotlights' brilliance. As unattainable as he had the very first time Harry had seen him on Duke Street, and he couldn't quite lose that feeling. “You were so hot,” he told Draco, rasping the words out through his dry throat. “So hot I nearly couldn’t stand it.”

“You had a hard on through the whole show,” Draco told him. “I could see it written all over your face.” He palmed Harry’s cock through his jeans, letting out a hiss of approval as Harry bucked into his hand.


“All those people sitting there watching, and you....” He kissed Harry again, hard and heartfelt, and then broke away. He held out the arm bearing the Dark Mark. “When they saw this…” Harry felt him suppress a shudder. “I heard the crowd. I thought for a minute–” His shoulders curled in on themselves. “Fuck.”

Harry took hold of Draco’s wrist and pressed his lips to the pulse that was beating there, hot and swift. Draco’s skin was so pale, he could see the traceries of veins running from his hand, up towards the shape of the death’s head. Their path was obscured in places by the stain of the ink, but they emerged clear and true at the other side, travelling on up Draco’s arm, towards his heart. Harry looked up at him and saw the tension visible on his face. His own heart thumped against his ribs, but he held Draco’s gaze as he kissed a line along his forearm, savouring every inch, not faltering as he reached the snake and then the skull.

Draco let out a harsh, needy sound. “Harry,” he said, and Harry’s breath hitched at the sound of his name on Draco’s lips.

“Have you finished work now?” Harry asked.

Draco nodded.

“Good.” Harry said, pulling Draco to him, his voice a low rumble. “Home.” He gripped Draco hard around the hips and turned on the spot.

The cold rush of Apparition made him wince, but he consoled himself with the thought of their bodies tangled together, the two of them covered with a sheen of sweat. The distraction didn’t improve Harry’s Apparition technique; they landed with a jolt that threw them together, Draco’s elbow knocking into Harry’s ribs.

But what startled Harry most was that they were not in their customary room, Draco’s silver-grey room with the giant bed. In thinking of home, he had apparently pictured his own bedroom, and the house barely took a moment before responding with a great giddy leap of delight. Harry could feel it thrumming through him before anything visible happened, a heady rush of joy that made the walls feel as though they were swaying, and then gentle threads of light began to trace around the room, touching everything in their path with muted gold.

Harry let go of Draco and took a step backwards, his eyes wide as the room started to shimmer and shift around them.

At first the changes were hesitant, as if the house was uncertain as to how Harry would react. But with each alteration, it seemed to grow in confidence, until spiralling trails of light were racing around the room. The walls slowly turned a pale ivory, then deepened to a warm, faded bronze. The shabby furniture shook itself and stood up straight, a rich patina blooming from the wood until the
pieces gleamed like beloved antiques. A thick rug took root under their feet and spread across the floor like a soft red puddle, and Harry’s bed creaked under the strain of doubling in size, an elegant carved post sprouting from each corner to support the lush canopy unrolling itself up above. Last of all, fat buds of material grew at the windows, then blossomed, unfolding themselves into generous curtains, so that Harry would only see the stars – and their reminder of the past – when he chose to.

The smell of stale neglect was gone, replaced by something far more inviting. The house seemed for a few moments to strobe through several different scents, trying them on for size – woodsmoke, spiced oranges, Italian leather, fresh coffee – before settling on fresh linen sheets with just a hint of the cologne Draco wore.

Even after all this time, magic – the impossible, heart-racing wonder of it – could still get Harry right under the ribs. He turned slowly on the spot, drinking in every bit of it, reaching out his hand to touch a bedpost. It was real: solid, polished wood that felt like it had been there for centuries. Everything about the room spoke of understated luxury, an oasis of sensual comfort. If Harry had ever doubted that Grimmauld Place recognised him as its owner, he knew better now. He could feel the buoyant glow of satisfaction radiating from every brick, the last traces of hurt washed away in the house’s pride at welcoming its master – and its master’s paramour – home. The room was perfect. And it felt like his.

“Merlin,” said Draco, his voice hushed. “That is quite something.”

And there was more. “Where the hell is that music coming from?” Harry asked.

Draco looked out of the window. “There’s a fucking grand piano playing itself out in the garden. The birds are sitting on it, watching.”

Harry didn’t stop to look, but took hold of Draco’s hands and walked him backwards, pulling him down onto the bed. “We were interrupted,” he said, and the music fell silent, leaving only the sounds of uneven breaths and whispered encouragement. Harry gasped as Draco stripped off the last of Harry’s clothes and knelt above him, naked and hard and trembling.

“Harry,” he said, his voice rough and feverish, and he propped himself up on his arms, moving so that his prick slid over Harry’s thigh, all heat and smooth-hard-sleekness, then across Harry’s cock, dragging along the length of it, sparking delight in every nerve.

Harry let out a tangled sound of need and disbelief. “You don’t know how good that feels.” He looked down to watch the sticky slide of their cocks rubbing against one another, and god, the sight was enough to make him hard for a week. “I want you so damn much.”

“Yes. But I’m going to make you take it slow.”

Harry gave a groan of protest even as the words flooded him with heat.

“I’m going to suck your cock,” Draco told him. “Then I want you to get me ready with your tongue.”

“God. Please.” Harry barely recognised his own voice, hoarse with desperation.

“Yes. You’ll get me so wet and then I’ll ride you. Deep, and slow, and…” Draco dragged his cock over Harry’s again, his own breath hitching in his throat. “We’ve got the whole night.”

This was it: Harry was going to die. His previous nineteen years on earth had failed to finish him off, but Draco Malfoy was going to fuck him to death.
Draco pressed a kiss to his forehead, running his tongue over Harry’s scar, Harry’s eyes fluttering closed at the feel of Draco’s lips against the sensitive skin. He’d never known anything to do with his scar could feel good. Draco moved lower, to the locket-shaped welt on Harry’s chest, layering hot kisses across it, glancing up at Harry to watch his face. The hex-slash over Harry’s ribs was faded now, but Draco’s tongue sought that out, too, and trailed along it, slow and lingering, until Harry was arching towards him, craving the touch of his mouth.

Humid breaths blew across Harry’s skin as Draco slid further down, maddeningly slow. “Draco.” It came out like a growl of want, and Harry threaded a shaky hand into Draco’s hair and tugged, just enough to make Draco’s breath quicken.

Draco kissed his way down, down, down, Harry’s stomach clenching with need. Draco nuzzled against Harry’s balls, letting out a rumble of satisfaction and then finally – oh god – he sucked Harry’s cock into his mouth, watching with dark, hungry eyes that made Harry feel he was turning liquid with desire, and it was so good, so good that Harry was weak with it.

Draco pulled off slowly, his cheeks hollowing. “What happened to the petals?” he asked. “I liked the petals.”

Grimmauld Place obliged them instantly with a gentle rain of blossoms that fluttered down, pale and soft and pink.

“I think your house has forgiven you,” Draco breathed. He shook a petal from his hair, then bent over Harry again, his beautiful mouth so hot, so tormenting, and the house swayed around them, every brick shivering with delight.

There wasn’t a single toad in sight.

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! You can show your appreciation for the author in a comment here or on livejournal. ♥

This story is part of an on-going anonymous fest hosted at hd_erised@livejournal.com. The author will be revealed January 8th.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!