Away Childish Things
by lettered

Summary

Harry gets de-aged. Malfoy has to help him.

Notes

- Icmezzo, you are the best beta. But not only that, you listened to me yammer about this fic ENDLESSLY and then you proved you listened because you talked to me about it! No one does that! Just you. So, thank you.
- This fic is for Fandom Trumps Hate and was written for tdcat, aibidil, and fmklyrmshnkly. Thank you three! Your generous donation helped me get my Harry/Draco mojo back. I hope this is something you can like. Special thanks to aibidil and franklyrmshnkly, whom I met in person. You really helped inspire me.
- Thank you to the Britpickers on the HD Discord! I could not have done it without you!

This fic is complete. I will be posting every four days until the entirety of the fic is posted. This is for final SPAG checks, but the story itself is done.
The last thing Harry remembered was talking to a snake. The snake had talked back—or sounded like it had—and then the glass had disappeared, and the snake had escaped. Dudley had blubbered like a baby, and Harry had got in trouble—or he thought he might have done, but that was when it started to get hazy, like grey swirls inside his own head.

The next thing he knew he was holding a stick inside a pile of clothes. Dropping the stick, he tried to get out, but the clothes were attached—well, not completely; the trousers, looped with a too-large belt, were falling off. The shirt was on over his head like a normal shirt, except three sizes too big, and a weird robe thing seemed to be clasped around his neck. His feet were in boots twice his size, and his hands were in large fingerless gloves. At least he still had his glasses, though they seemed too large as well, and Harry panicked for a second, thinking that he had shrunk. Once when Aunt Petunia had tried to put a jumper on him it had changed sizes, but it had never happened to his own body before.

The clothes definitely weren’t his, however, and when Harry looked around he saw he was in a room with a table that had strange equipment on it. Counters lined the walls, cabinets above them with glass doors. Broken glass was on the floor in front of him, not far from a tall man with pale hair staring down at him.

Uncle Vernon would definitely characterize this situation as “funny business.”

Meanwhile the blond man looked stricken.

“Er,” Harry said, holding up his belt and trying not to trip over the robe thing as he slowly backed away from the glass. “Where’s this?”

“Potter?” The man sounded stricken also.

Trying to decide whether he recognized the man, Harry backed up another step, the big boots almost falling off. He was fairly certain he would have remembered if any teachers at St Grogory’s looked like this bloke, for the man’s appearance was singular. He was tall and slender, like a straw, and pale too, as though the colour had been leaked out of his hair, eyes, and skin. His clothes were strange, like an outfit from one of Petunia’s costume dramas, but they seemed to be the right size. “Who are you meant to be?” Harry asked.

“Oh no,” said the man.

“Do you know where this is?” Harry asked, backing up another step. “Because I don’t remember getting here, and if you’ve kidnapped me . . .” Harry broke off because he didn’t quite know what would happen if he had, in fact, been nabbed. Vernon would probably thank the man for his efforts.

A door opened on the other side of the room.

“We’ve got to go,” the man said, his voice low. “Accio Potter’s wand!” The stick flew into the man’s hand, and then before Harry quite knew what was happening, the man was striding forward and grabbing Harry’s arm.
Then the world was swirling as Harry struggled.

The tables in the room swished away like a painting being mixed up. A loud *pop* filled the air, then a cold darkness. With a frigid squeeze that felt like thawing and expanding and being pushed very hard all at once, everything stopped.

Then the stars Harry saw before his eyes were dancing through a new room entirely. This room was much smaller, grey in the dim light.

“Fuck,” someone said. It was the blond man, and fire roared to life against one wall. Harry was busy jumping out of skin, while the blond man strode about saying, “Fuck, fuck, Merlin, fuck,” pointing a stick at various places in the room. Fire leapt up after him, burning on candles, and Harry realized the fire against the wall was in an old sturdy hearth.

“Finite incantatem,” the blond man said, pointing the stick at Harry.

Harry jumped again, quite certain he would catch on fire too, but nothing happened.

The blond man swirled his stick at Harry and said, “Juvenis recanto,” but despite the fact that the situation was superbly terrifying there was still no effect, which made the man’s next stick-swish and words more moderately terrifying. “Libera temporo,” the man said. Then he made another swish—a downward slash, and said, “Potia evanesce.”

“Um.” The man was obviously mental, and somehow he had a remote control flamethrower, but Harry tried to be polite, particularly with adults who were scary. “Have you gone mental?” he asked politely.

“Fuck!” said the man.

“All right, then,” Harry said, slowly edging away.

“I'll get a Cure-All. Stay here.” Turning on a heel, the man walked out of the room.

Harry wondered whether the man had knocked him out. He didn’t remember, but the fact remained that he didn’t know where he was, and he didn’t know the man. Harry wasn’t quite sure he had been kidnapped, as kidnapping on the telly was nothing like this at all. Whatever was happening, Uncle Vernon wouldn’t like it, which meant Harry was going to be in trouble. He had to get out. Fast.

As he tried to pull off the confining cloak, Harry quickly took stock of his surroundings. Books—old and new, leather-bound and gilt-edged—stuffed the bookshelves that lined almost every wall. A large wingback armchair with a flower pattern on its upholstery sat before the fire, and a soft-looking green rug was laid out on the floor in front of it. The wood floor shone in the firelight, which gave everything a warm, rosy glow. In the ceiling were two windows, which showed that it was night. At the far end of the room, near a wooden table with more books on it, was the door through which the man had gone. On the side near Harry was another door. There didn’t seem to be a telephone.

Ripping the cloak off, Harry kicked off the boots as well, shaking off the weird gloves. Once he could move a little better—despite the trousers—he headed toward the door opposite the one the man had exited, opening it to find a dark stairwell behind it. Harry didn’t remember having come upstairs, which probably meant the stairs led to a cellar, but the cellar was away from the man, and maybe there was a phone down there. Or a window. The man might come back any second, so Harry decided to risk it. Closing the door behind him, he took the stairs as fast as he could in the dark while holding his belt up high.

At the bottom of the stairs was a short hall, at the end of which there was a dim room with some
cabinets and tables. It wasn’t a cellar, because the windows in the room looked out onto the street. A lone, flickering streetlight in the distance lit things up enough to see a door on the other side of the room that looked like it went outside. A muffled sound came from above, then another one, louder.

Harry hurried toward the door, trying to hold his trousers on, glasses beginning to slip down his nose.

“Potter!”

Steps sounded on the stairs.

“Potter!”

Harry got his hand on the knob.

“Potter!”

Harry opened the door.

A sharp crack filled the street, and the blond man stood directly in front of Harry, whose mouth dropped open. “But you were just . . .” Harry looked behind him, but there was no one coming in from the hall that led to the stairs.

“Just where do you think you’re going?” the man demanded. He was holding some kind of phial with an orange liquid in it.

“How did you get here?” Harry asked, looking around the man to see if he could find another exit.

“What?” the man said, sounding irritated. “Potter, I’m trying to help you!”

Harry looked up at the man. “Is that what we’re calling kidnapping these days?”

The man’s mouth opened, then closed. His face changed colour twice—first pink, then a sickish grey. “Kidnapping?” he croaked.

“That’s generally what people call it when a kid gets nabbed.” Harry pushed his glasses up.

“Nabbed?” the man said, still with that stricken look.

“Isn’t that what you did?”

They stood there, Harry on the stoop and the man just outside of it, the frown smoothing out of the man’s face almost in slow-motion, as though he was realizing something one thought at a time. When his face finally stopped its incremental fall, the man looked almost soft, his eyes somehow shining in the dim light of the street. Then he swallowed hard. “Oh,” he said, quietly.

Harry wondered if the man was finally realizing he was absolutely mental.

“Potter, you . . .” The man swallowed again. “I haven’t nabbed you. It was a de-ageing potion. You’re thirty-one years old. The potion fell on you.”

“A potion?” Harry asked. “You mean chemicals?”

The man nodded.

“Is that how you appeared out of thin air? And made the fire?”
“No.” The man shook his head slowly, seeming confused by the question. “Those were spells.”

Harry’s mouth dropped open. “Spells?”

“Yes?” the man said, seeming even more confused.

“Like a—a magic spell?”

“Yes,” the man said slowly, brow furrowing. “Like a magic . . . oh.” Before, the man had seemed stricken, but now he seemed horrified, if his aghast expression was anything to go by. “Potter, you . . .”

The man sounded so worried that Harry almost wanted to reassure him.

“Potter.” The man shoved the phial he’d been holding in his pocket. “You do know what magic is?”

Harry frowned. “Pulling rabbits and things out of hats, cutting women in half. I never knew you could actually appear in thin air.”

“Cutting women . . . in half?”

“Like on telly.”

“Ah,” the man said. “Yes. Television.” The man paused, seeming to hesitate.

The man had fine, patrician features, a thin-lipped, well-defined mouth, and shoulders that gave him an air of elegance. All of this in addition to his light-coloured hair made him rather striking, the sort of man who could be on television himself, only Harry felt certain he had never seen him before.

“Magic is nothing like television. It’s . . .” The man’s hand twitched, but it stayed by his side—almost as though he was willing himself to stay still and speak very, very gently. “Do you at least believe me about—about the de-ageing?”

Harry thought about that. “It doesn’t seem very likely,” he said after a moment—but magic was a different story. It explained a lot of things, actually.

“Right.” The man drew a breath, then expelled it, as if at a loss.

It almost made Harry want to help somehow. Instead, he said “My uncle will be wondering where I am.”

“Right,” the man said again, but didn’t move. His shoulders sagged, and the furrow in his brow made him seem very unhappy, but he did not look at all as though he would let Harry go.

Harry thought about trying to leave again anyway, but the man was standing right there, and Harry didn’t fancy getting grabbed again. The man hadn’t wrenched Harry’s arm or anything, but it seemed likely a grown man who was unhappy would end up hurting him somehow. Besides, the man had already proven himself a kidnapper. “What are you going to do with me?” Harry asked instead, holding his belt with one hand so he could push up his glasses.

The man stared down at him, so Harry stared back. In addition to his notable hair-colour and slim figure, the man’s clothes seemed rather posh, despite being strange. He had on grey trousers and a grey waistcoat with a blue shirt underneath it, a blue square in one of the pockets, and a silver chain at his hip.

As Harry looked at him, the unhappy expression faded from the man’s face—almost as though it had
been folded up and put away, like a shirt. The man straightened his shoulders, squaring them up. He looked as though he had thought of something, or maybe decided something. When he spoke again his voice was firm. “You live with your uncle and aunt. Don’t you?”

“Yes. They’ve probably already called the police,” Harry added, even though he was fairly certain that neither Vernon nor Petunia would have done anything of the sort.

“And . . . a cousin?”

“What, are you spying on me in addition to kidnapping? Isn’t that called stalking?” Harry had heard of bad old men who did terrible things to kids. He didn’t know what kinds of things, but he wasn’t particularly interested in sticking around to find out.

Before Harry could decide what to do about that, the man backed up a step, twirled his stick and said something incomprehensible. “You might want to move aside,” he said.

Harry was wondering what the man could mean when he heard a rushing behind him—something coming—and he jumped to the left, just in time for a large owl to come swooping out of the doorway. The owl flew directly to the man and landed on his shoulder.

Harry could feel that his eyes were large, probably large enough to almost fit his too-big glasses. He couldn’t stop staring at the owl. It had magnificent eyebrows. And it had been inside the building! And it was sitting on the man’s shoulder, making the man look even more regal than before. Harry looked back into the doorway from which the owl had flown. “That was—where did it come from?”

The man had been drawing his stick out of his sleeve, but he stopped at Harry’s words, obviously taking in Harry’s stunned expression. “Ah,” the man said knowingly. “You haven’t seen one before.”

“I was just at the zoo, actually,” Harry said, shoving up his glasses. “Before I was kidnapped.”

“Of course,” the man said, sounding amused. Harry knew what the man saw: a boy too small and thin for ten-years-old, with over-sized clothes, no shoes, messy hair, a lightning scar, and glasses—though now that Harry thought about it, he didn’t know what the glasses looked like. Maybe they weren’t broken, for once, which changed the picture somewhat, but even though these clothes were bigger than most, Harry still knew what he probably looked like in them. Dudley’s hand-me-downs were always way too big as well. Before he had to start going to St Gregory’s, Harry often hadn’t owned shoes.

“Her name is Heloise,” the man said, as though having an owl on his shoulder was a perfectly normal thing. “Would you like to pet her?”

Harry’s eyes jerked back to the owl—Heloise.

Still seeming amused, the man held out his arm, and Heloise hopped onto it. Bending down, the man said, “Come and try.”

Harry had never really got to pet anything before, except for Mrs. Figg’s cats, and they weren’t very nice. Tentatively, he took a step forward, reaching out a hand. Touching Heloise’s head was like touching a pillow, only much softer than any pillows he’d ever had. Lately he’d been using an old pillow of Dudley’s, but before that he’d had a sofa cushion. Before that he’d had a pile of old towels.

“I used to pet her all the time,” the man said.

Something in his tone made Harry glance up. Looking wistfully at the owl, the man didn’t look like
he could be a bad old man. He looked...nice, and interesting, and still striking enough to be an
actor. Or a magician. Harry guessed he shouldn’t be surprised the man could summon owls.

The man was still looking at Heloise with that strangely rueful expression. “She probably misses
being petted.”

Harry tried petting Heloise’s wing. She fluffed up again, but otherwise seemed content, her eyes
falling closed.

“I’m going to move her to my shoulder,” the man said. “She’s rather heavy. Back up a step.”

Harry backed up, only afterwards realizing it put him back in the doorway of the building. It could
be a trick, but all the man did was move his arm, and the owl hopped back up onto his shoulder. The
stick slid out of his sleeve—Harry hadn’t seen him put it away—and then he waved it. “Accio quill,
ink, and parchment.”

Harry looked around for more magic, but had to duck when a small pot, a roll of paper, and a feather
came sailing out of the room behind him. The items stopped in the air in front of the man, floating
there at a wave of the man’s stick, which he again slipped into his sleeve. Opening the pot, the man
dipped the tip of the feather in it, then took it out, closed the pot, and slipped the pot in his pocket.
The feather and roll of paper he plucked out of the air, and then held out to Harry. “Write down the
name of your cousin.”

Harry felt like his eyes were popping out of his skull, and yet he somehow had it in him to look up
from the proffered quill and paper to say, “Why?”

“It’s a trick I learned from you, actually,” said the man. “Owls are terrific finders. If Heloise has your
cousin’s name, she can probably locate him even without an address—unless he happens to be
hiding.”

Harry scowled. “He’s probably just at home. Where I should be,” he added.

“Excellent,” the man said. “If your cousin is at home, then I will take you home.”

“If he’s not at home?” Harry said suspiciously.

“Then we can visit him.”

Harry eyed the owl, then the man, then the owl again. “I don’t particularly want to see my cousin,”
Harry confessed.

The man raised a brow, but not in a mean way. He was in fact being very polite. “You said your
uncle would be worried.”

“Er,” said Harry, because there was no way Uncle Vernon was actually worried. “He will be. But
my cousin won’t.”

“This will work better with someone of your own age. Perhaps when we visit your cousin, if you’re
still concerned about it, he can tell your uncle where you are.”

“But where am I?”

“Knockturn Alley. It’s in London.” The man looked over the shoulder that didn’t have Heloise
perched on it. “It’s not the best alley to be in at night, so if you wouldn’t mind—”
“We’re in London?” Harry looked around. The street was lined with buildings without spaces in-between—tall ones, short ones, most of them built of wood. Some of them looked quite crooked-y, like they shouldn’t be standing. Most had windows. Turning, Harry looked at the building they had been in—the one with the hearth and all the books upstairs. Actually, now that he thought about it, he wasn’t sure about having a hearth upstairs. Didn’t they have to be on the ground level? This wasn’t like any street in London he’d seen before.

The building they had come from was two storeys, with a big window on the front. The window had dozens of tiny diamond panes, like an old-fashioned shop.

“Potter.” The man was still holding out the paper and quill. “I know that you’ve disliked me from the beginning, and apparently that will never change, but I really do think it would be better if you listened to me for once. That way, I can prove to you what happened to you, so if you would please just write the name of your cousin, we’ll be well on our way.”

The man seemed annoyed. “Is this about the de-ageing potion?” Harry guessed.

Dropping his arms to his sides with the quill and paper, the man sounded testy. “Yes, of course, Potter. What did you think?”

“You really think I’m thirty-one?” Harry looked at him curiously as the man grew even more testy.

“I’ve already told you.”

“Do we know each other?”

“Yes, though that’s hardly relevant to—”

“What’s your name?”

“Draco Malfoy. Now what’s your cousin’s name?”

“That’s a funny name,” Harry pointed out.

“Hilarious,” the man—Mister Malfoy—said.

Shrugging, Harry held out his hand. “Give me the paper. I’ll write it.”

Rolling his eyes, Mister Malfoy handed over the quill and paper. “Heavens, you’re a trial, even at—how old are you?”

“Ten,” Harry said, bending so he could hold the paper against his thighs as he wrote Dudley’s name on it. His handwriting was appalling, but he supposed it didn’t matter. Either the owl was somehow magical and would find Dudley, or the man was making the whole thing up. Either way Harry didn’t see the harm, and secretly he rather wished he was thirty-one after all.

“Ten,” said Mister Malfoy. “Yes, that fits.”

Rolling the paper back up, Harry handed it to Mister Malfoy.

“Dudley Dursley,” Mister Malfoy murmured, reading the paper. “I feel as though I should have known. Maybe it was in one of those countless Witch Weekly articles.” Sliding out the stick, Mister Malfoy tapped the paper, then said something in another language. He held out the paper to Heloise, who took it in her beak. “Apologies for the lack of address,” Mister Malfoy said to the owl as she hove up off his shoulder, then took off into the night.
“How does she know where to go?” Harry asked.

“How does she know where to go?” Harry asked.

“Owl post delivery system,” said Mister Malfoy. “It’s how wizards deliver mail.”

“Wizards?” Harry said.

“Wouldn’t you rather be indoors?” Mister Malfoy asked. “And I can fix your clothes.”

“Er.” That sounded a little bit like Mister Malfoy might ask Harry to undress, and he wasn’t certain, but he sort of felt like some of the bad things that could happen with bad old men had to do with taking off your clothes. He couldn’t quite keep the alarm out of his voice when he said, “I’m fine, thanks!”


Harry tried to get out of the way, but the clothes were already shrinking.

“Reducio glasses,” Mister Malfoy added, and everything fit perfectly, more perfectly than any clothes or glasses Harry had ever had before.

The pants were some kind of breeches, made of something smooth and fine-threaded. The belt that had been doing such a poor job of holding them up had a gold-coloured buckle, done up over the soft tunic he was wearing. They were very nice clothes, Harry was realizing, not scratchy or falling apart at the seams at all, except for maybe the socks. Those were orange wool, rather knobbly, as though someone had knit them. Despite the fact that they were ugly, however, they were doing an excellent job of keeping his feet warm, even though he was standing on cobbles in the middle of the night.

“You shouldn’t be out here without shoes,” Mister Malfoy said, as though noticing the socks at the same time. “Really, Potter, haven’t we stood outside long enough?”

Harry hesitated. The clothes were rather nice, but perhaps they were a temptation—like sweets. At school they sometimes told you that you shouldn’t take sweets from strangers, though plenty of the teachers were strangers, and they wanted you to do whatever they said, or else you got in trouble. And Harry had noticed that strangers came up to him on the street more often than what seemed to happen to other people, only those strangers rarely offered him sweets, usually just tipping their hats and congratulating him for no reason.

None of those strangers had had owls, however—or at least, not owls that he knew of. None of them had appeared out of thin air, or made paper float, or said things about magic, or told him he was thirty-one.

“Right,” Mister Malfoy said in response to Harry’s silence. “Accio boots.”

Expecting it this time, Harry stepped aside for the boots that came floating out the door. “Reducio boots.”

Harry looked at the boots, then looked up at Mister Malfoy. If Harry was wearing boots he’d be more successful if he tried to escape. Even though he wasn’t sure he wanted to escape any longer, he supposed he might as well put them on, seeing as how they were now his size. Also, they were utterly fantastic boots, and Harry had never had shoes that fit before.

Sitting on the stoop, Harry began pulling them on.
“When Heloise returns, we’ll visit your cousin,” Mister Malfoy said. “If you still insist on going home after that, I’ll take you.”

Harry glanced up from lacing the boots. “You think I won’t want to go home because you think I’m thirty-one?” he asked, wondering whether he wore boots like this when he was thirty-one. He must be a cool grown-up, one with a cool job that paid rather well.

Mister Malfoy’s voice was light. “You’ve never really cared what I thought.”

“Am I a builder?”

“Pardon?”

“If I’m grown up,” Harry said. “What do I turn out to be? Do I build things?”

Mister Malfoy frowned.

Done with the boots, Harry stood. “I always wanted to build things.”

Mister Malfoy’s mouth fell open, and then his face did that thing where it changed, going soft all over. “Oh,” he said softly, sounding rather breathless.

“I’m not, then,” Harry said, trying not to sound disappointed.

“What...” Pity wasn’t quite right for what shone in Mister Malfoy’s eyes. Maybe he thought it was funny. “What did you want to build?”

“Er,” Harry said, because he’d never thought that far ahead. “Buildings? Mostly I wanted to drive a JCB.”

“A JCB?”

“You know,” Harry said. “They’re mainly yellow, and they’ve got a big shovel attached.”

“A shovel?”

“For digging things out. I always thought a crane would be cool as well. Those are for moving big things. They have a big tower, with a line and a hook at the end, and you can use the hook to move steel beams and things.”

“And...” Mister Malfoy swallowed hard. “Would you also drive a—a helicopter?”

Harry frowned. “I don’t know. Maybe.”

Mister Malfoy stared down at him, something strangely helpless in his expression.

“What do I do, then?” Harry asked. “If I’m really thirty-one.”

“You’re an Auror.”

“An Auror? What’s that?”

“But your parents were Aurors. You—”

“You knew my parents?” Harry asked quickly.

“How could you not know they...?” Mister Malfoy shut his mouth.
Harry moved closer, demanding, “Know what? What about my parents? What’s an Auror?”

“It’s not important right now, Potter.”

“But what did you—”

Just then, an owl came swooping down out of the sky.

“How lovely,” Mister Malfoy said, sounding relieved.

“What about my parents?” Harry said, louder, as the owl landed on Mister Malfoy’s shoulder once more.

“Thank you, Heloise. Go on.” Mister Malfoy said, shrugging his shoulder. Heloise hopped off of it and flapped back into the building, practically bowling Harry over in the process. “We’re going on a little trip,” Mister Malfoy said, turning back to Harry.

“But what about my—”

“Come along, Potter,” Mister Malfoy said, tone dismissive. “In good time.” Before Harry could scramble away, Mister Malfoy was grabbing his arm again and waving his stick. The street began to melt, greys and browns swirling together like a painting, like that other room with the broken glass.

Then there was black and that same cold, squeezing-freezing sensation, the feeling of being pushed through something too small, a sudden thaw directly afterwards. A swish of lights settled into a row of streetlamps, casting sallow light into another street. This street was nothing like the last—mostly because it looked like a normal street, with regular pavement and straggly bushes by a littered kerb on one side and a carpark on the other. On the side with the bushes was a large council estate, all concrete and windows.

Mister Malfoy was still holding Harry’s arm. “Finders Keepers,” he said, and the stick rotated in his other hand. “Stay by me,” he said, beginning to march in the direction the wand pointed and pulling Harry along.

Heloise was meant to find Dudley, and Mister Malfoy had said once she found Dudley they would visit him, but Dudley wasn’t in an estate. He was at Number Four Privet Drive, and even if Mister Malfoy had let Harry pet an owl, nothing about this seemed right.

Then again, if Harry was thirty-one, perhaps Dudley wasn’t at Privet Drive any more. If Harry was thirty-one, then Dudley was thirty-one as well. If the month was June, then the year would be . . . 2012. Even though John Major had just become Prime Minister, he was probably out. The Mitchell brothers on EastEnders were probably dead from stroke and poisoning. Piers Polkiss might have joined Take That, like he’d said he was going to do, and Harry didn’t know whether he had gone to Stonewall High, or what an Auror was, or what Mister Malfoy knew about his parents.

So, Harry followed Mister Malfoy, who seemed to be following his stick up a set of concrete stairs attached to the estate. They went up two storeys, then down a covered concrete hall open to the air on one side but filled with numbered doors and potted plants on the other. They stopped at door 127.

“Probably best to stay out of sight,” Mister Malfoy said, leading Harry to stand behind the plant, then pointing his stick at him.

“What are you doing?” Harry asked, but Mister Malfoy had already muttered something at him, and was then knocking on the door.

Someone opened it. Afraid for a reason he couldn’t quite name, Harry did as he was told and stayed
behind the plant.

“Are you Dudley Dursley?” Mister Malfoy asked politely.

The plant was some kind of bush. Peeking through its leaves, Harry could make out the person who had opened the door. He didn’t look like Dudley at all, for he was old like a grown-up, and his hair wasn’t nearly as blond as Dudley’s. He was quite large, however—sort of like how Uncle Vernon would look, if Uncle Vernon looked a bit more like Aunt Petunia.

“Who’s asking?” said the man. “Are you a friend of Harry’s?”

He didn’t sound like Dudley either, his voice much deeper, and yet something about the way he said “Harry” felt familiar, somehow. Almost like Uncle Vernon. Harry began to step out, but Mister Malfoy waved a hand, turning his back to Harry.

“Harry?” Mister Malfoy said, still waving behind his back.

“Harry Potter. Is he okay?” The man reached for his back pocket, and Harry saw that Mister Malfoy tensed, but the man only brought out a piece of paper and unfolded it. “I got this by owl, see,” the man said, “but there was nothing else on it.”

“Oh yes,” Mister Malfoy said. “I’m very sorry. That was a mistake.”

“See here,” the man said. “You’re a wizard, aren’t you? I can tell by those . . . clothes.” He waved a hand. “Is Harry all right? Are things—happening again?”

“Everything is splendid,” Mister Malfoy said, his tone smooth. “That owl was sent by mistake, and I’ve just come to apologize.”

“But it had my name on it. Who are you, anyway?”

The man sounded so much like Dudley in that moment that Harry started to come out, but Mister Malfoy waved at him again. “Just a representative for the Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes,” Mister Malfoy said. “No one important.”

“Look here,” Dudley said roughly. “What’s going on?”

“Duds!” someone called from inside the flat.

“It’s nothing!” Dudley called back.

“Is it something about that owl?” A woman holding a baby came to the door, and Harry knew who she was.

He’d never seen her in his life, and he didn’t know her name, but Harry knew who she was. She was Dudley’s wife. She was holding Dudley’s child, and standing there beside her—that was Dudley. He didn’t look or sound like Dudley, and yet the cadence of his speech was the same, the flavour of his movements. The scowl on his face was heart-stoppingly familiar, and Harry couldn’t get over the fact that the man—the old man, with a wife, with a child, with thinning hair—he was Dudley.

“Well, I should be going, then,” Mister Malfoy said, gesturing at Harry behind his back. “Thank you for your time, Mister Dursley.”

“Yeah, uh.” Dudley looked down at the woman, then back at Mister Malfoy. “Thanks. Don’t come back.” Then he shut the door.
Mister Malfoy whirled around. “We should leave.”

“But—” Harry glanced at the door.

“Immediately, Potter.” Mister Malfoy grabbed his arm. Before Harry could further protest, Mister Malfoy was swishing his stick and they were squeezing through blackness, the sensation almost familiar by now.

When they squeezed out again they were back in the room with the flower-print chair and the books everywhere, the fire still crackling merrily in the hearth.

Harry struggled for air but couldn’t think why. They’d been pinched through that cold black three times already. It had never hurt him before, but now he felt like his lungs were burning, because Dudley—

Dudley—

John Major wouldn’t be Prime Minister any more, and EastEnders might even have been cancelled, and Piers Polkiss might be in Take That. Take That might not even be a band any more. It was 2012, and Harry—

Harry was thirty-one.

Across the room, the books began to fly off the shelf.

“What—?” said Mister Malfoy, letting go of Harry’s arm.

The books were all flying everywhere, and Harry didn’t understand why.

“Oh,” Mister Malfoy said. “Potter, calm down.”

Harry still couldn’t breathe.

“Potter,” Mister Malfoy said, sounding a bit frantic. “Drink this!”

“What?” Harry tried to say, turning to look up at Mister Malfoy, who was holding out a phial. Harry couldn’t see it too well. When he reached out, he seemed to be shaking.

The walls were also shaking.

“Potter, it’s okay,” Mister Malfoy said. “It’s okay. Shhh—you’re okay.” Then Mister Malfoy was touching him, a warm hand on his shoulder, and Harry wasn’t sure why. Maybe it was so he could stop shaking enough to drink the orange liquid in the phial, so Harry drank it. The shaking stopped, and Harry could breathe again, the pressure on his lungs easing. The hand stayed on him anyway, touching his hair, smoothing down against his neck, over his shoulder, then starting up in his hair again. It felt very nice.

Harry wondered if that’s how Heloise had felt when he’d pet her.

“Shh,” said Mister Malfoy. “Harry, it’s okay. Please, you’re okay. It’s all right. You’re all right.”

Books littered the floor everywhere, and Harry realized it was a funny thing that had happened, and that somehow, that funny thing was him. “S-sorry,” he stuttered.

“It’s okay,” Mister Malfoy said, taking his hand away and standing up straight. Then his arm was moving, and Harry stumbled back, putting up an arm to protect his glasses.
Uncle Vernon never remembered to be careful of Harry’s glasses when there was too much funny business.

But, “Accio glass of milk,” was all Mister Malfoy said, and then, “It’s okay. Potter, the books have stopped.”

Slowly, Harry put his arm down, looking around the room. “What was it?” he asked, a little apprehensively.

The glass of milk floated into Mister Malfoy’s hand and he tapped it with his stick. “Accidental magic,” he said, holding out the glass for Harry. “Have some of this.”

“What was that other thing you gave me?” Harry didn’t particularly want to take the milk, but Mister Malfoy didn’t seem angry. Warily, Harry took the milk, still holding the phial in his other hand. He looked down into it. “Was it poison?”

“Why are you always . . .” Mister Malfoy stopped, then sighed. “It was that Cure-All I went to get for you earlier. I suppose it didn’t work.”

“I do feel better.”

“Right.” Pointing his stick at the books, Mister Malfoy began restoring them to the shelves by floating them over. “It’s meant to cancel the effects of minor potions or charms. It didn’t cancel the de-ageing potion, which means the potion is powerful. But it has to have been, to have lasted this long. The Cure-All doesn’t do anything for panic, so it must have just given you something else to focus on.” He wasn’t even saying anything to the books, just pointing at them.

“I wasn’t panicking,” Harry said, moving to set the milk and phial on the table so he could help pick up the books.

“Potter,” Mister Malfoy began, then stopped.

Harry looked over at him, picking up a book near the table. It was quite big and heavy, with brass metal bindings.

“Don’t bother about the books,” Mister Malfoy said abruptly, coming closer and taking the book. “Have a sit.” He crossed the room to pull out a chair at the table. “My mum always gave me warm milk went I went off.”

“But I didn’t.” Harry crossed the room to the table, partly because he still sort of thought he might get in trouble, but mostly because he hadn’t got in trouble at all, yet.

“My mum said it would make me feel better regardless,” Mister Malfoy said, his tone firm.

Harry didn’t really think about grown-ups having mums, but of course they did. He supposed Mister Malfoy’s mum must be very beautiful.

“What’s accidental magic?” Harry asked, sitting down but not drinking the milk.

“We can talk about it later.” Mister Malfoy waved his stick toward the door that didn’t lead downstairs—where he’d got the Cure-All from earlier, Harry realized. “Accio coffee.”

Harry looked around, but coffee didn’t materialize. “Where is it?”

“It has to brew first.” Mister Malfoy sat across from him. “Your cousin might be worried about you,”
he said. “You could write to him by owl to let him know you’re okay, though with the way you write at this age, he might not feel satisfied. I could brew a potion to simulate your adult voice, so you could call him on a mobile.”

“What’s a mobile?” Harry asked, since he didn’t particularly care about Dudley being worried.

Mister Malfoy smiled faintly—the first time Harry had seen him smile. It was nice. “A Muggle communication device,” Mister Malfoy said. He didn’t seem to have any problem at all with Harry asking questions, not like Uncle Vernon. “It’s a kind of telephone.”

“What’s a Muggle?”

The smile faded a bit. “Someone who isn’t magical.”

“Oh.” Harry thought about that. “Am I a Muggle?”

The smile went away completely. “Merlin’s toadstools.” Mister Malfoy’s expression was now deepening into a scowl. Perhaps he didn’t like questions after all. “Obviously, you’re not a Muggle. You should know this already. Your aunt and uncle should have told you. Dumbledore should have told you. Heavens. What did your aunt and uncle tell you happened to your parents?”

If someone had told him about wizards and magic and everything all at once, Harry might have answered that question in the most straightforward way possible, by simply telling Mister Malfoy the truth. However, Harry had had some time to think about it, so instead he said, “Did you know them?”

Mister Malfoy reared back. “Potter—just how old do you think I am?”

“Fifty?” Harry guessed, because all grownups were old to him. At the man’s incredulous look, Harry said, “Forty-nine?” Then he started thinking. The year was 2012. His parents had been dead nearly thirty years by now. “You’re thirty-one as well, aren’t you,” Harry asked.

“Thirty-two, but only just.”

“Why do you keep asking about my parents, then?”

Just then, the mug of coffee floated in. “Accio milk and sugar,” Mister Malfoy said, pointing through the door again. “Did you want to contact your cousin?” he asked.

Mister Malfoy shouldn’t get to avoid the subject. After all, he had brought it up, so Harry just shrugged. “Not really.”

“I think he’ll be worried,” Mister Malfoy said, catching the milk and sugar.

“I doubt it.”

Mister Malfoy looked up at him over his little white pitcher of milk. “Why not?”

“Dudley never much cared for me.”

“Of course, he does.”

“No. I’m fairly sure he doesn’t.”

“He’s your family,” Mister Malfoy said dismissively.
“If that’s meant to make him like me, I don’t think anyone told him.”

Picking up a spoon for the sugar, Mister Malfoy made a disbelieving sound. “What makes you think he doesn’t like you? Sometimes he doesn’t want to play games your way?”

“He beats me up a lot, for starters.”

The spoon clattered in the little sugar bowl. “He . . . roughhouses?”

“Him and his friends.” Harry finally tried a sip of his milk. It wasn’t that bad. “They beat me up all the time.”

“Ah.” Picking up the spoon, Mister Malfoy added sugar to his coffee, then slowly stirred. “What do you and your little friends do to retaliate? You’re very creative, I’m sure.”

“Er. We don’t do anything,” Harry said, neglecting to mention that he didn’t have friends at all. The fact that the Dursleys couldn’t tell Mister Malfoy anything about him was dawning on Harry, which meant that if he was careful, Mister Malfoy—who seemed so pleasant—might not even realize he was bad.

“Of course not,” Mister Malfoy said, looking amused. “You’re a perfect angel.”

That sounded sort of sarcastic, so Harry didn’t say anything in response. Instead he asked, “Who’s Dumbledore?”

“Heavens.” Mister Malfoy looked like he was swallowing a sigh. “You ask so many questions.”

“Sorry,” Harry said, even though he wasn’t really sorry. Uncle Vernon always said, don’t ask questions, but it had never made any sense to Harry. How would you ever find things out if you didn’t ask questions? Sometimes Harry thought Uncle Vernon was just afraid of answers. “Who is he?” Harry asked again.

“The headmaster of the school we went to.” Mechanically, Mister Malfoy took a sip of coffee. “Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry.”

“We went to school together?” Harry said, thinking for a second Mister Malfoy must have been a teacher there. But no, of course, they were meant to be the same age, which meant they had been in the same year.

“Yes, Potter. We went to school together.” Mister Malfoy’s mug made a harsh clack on the table. Standing up, he said, “If you’re feeling quite better, I can run some diagnostics on you, and we can see about reversing that potion.”

“I don’t want to reverse it.”

Mister Malfoy stared. “Pardon?”

“I don’t want to go back.”

“Potter,” Mister Malfoy said irritably. “You don’t even remember being thirty-one.”

“If you make me old, then ten-year-old me has to go back to Privet Drive, and to Uncle Vernon, and Aunt Petunia, and the cupboard under the stairs, and I don’t want to.”

“What are you . . . ” Mister Malfoy frowned. “Look, Potter. You’re not switching places. Ten-year-old-you is already there. In the past.”
Looking impatient, Mister Malfoy evidently decided to switch tacks. “Even if you did switch places, do you really want to leave thirty-year-old you in the past?”

Harry shrugged. “He’d probably handle it better than I could. And anyway, he’d get to go to school with you.”

“You already went to school with me.”

Harry just shrugged again. “I’d rather be here.”

“Merlin,” Mister Malfoy murmured. “I thought my memory had exaggerated how obtuse you were. No wonder we never got on.”

“We . . . weren’t friends?” Supposing he should have expected it, with how nice Mister Malfoy looked and how kind he was, Harry tried not to let his disappointment show.

Mister Malfoy just sighed. “I was used to getting my way. You obviously are too. There was no possibility, in retrospect, that we would work well together.”

“I’m not obtuse,” Harry said, obtusely. “I can clean. And I can cook very well. I’m not very messy or very loud. I can do the washing up, and sweep, and—and anything you want, really.”

“Yes, I’m sure you’re very talented.” Mister Malfoy didn’t seem at all impressed.

“And I don’t take up very much space,” Harry added. “I can—I’d only need a cupboard.”

“Potter, what are you talking about?”

“We can get on,” Harry said. “We can get on very well, and you don’t have to undo the potion, and I don’t have to go back.”

“You want to . . . live here?”

Harry nodded vigorously.

“But . . . why?”

Trying to think quickly, Harry said, “Well . . . Heloise is very nice.”

“You want to live here because of my owl?”

Harry nodded even more vigorously.

“Potter,” Mister Malfoy began, then stopped. “You,” he started again. “What do you mean you only need a cupboard?”

“To sleep in,” Harry said. “You can store other things in there. I’ll keep it very clean.”

“Potter,” Mister Malfoy said again, still seeming at a loss. His lips quirked, almost a smile, but then he swallowed it. “Potter, I would—I would never put you in a cupboard.”

“But I promise,” Harry begged. “I wouldn’t bother you.”

“Yes.” Mister Malfoy’s lips quirked again. “And if I kept you in a cupboard—tell me, Potter. Where
would you put your bed?"

“Oh, I don’t need a bed. I can use a shelf. Do you have a cupboard under the stairs? Those are good ones.”

“You mentioned that before.” The smile was growing now, but it wasn’t mean. Just—amused. “Do your aunt and uncle have a cupboard under the stairs?”

Harry nodded—not so vigorously now.

“And you like to play in it?”

“Er.” Harry hesitated. “Sometimes.”

“And what about all your toys?” Mister Malfoy asked, his voice amused as well. “Would they fit in there?”

Harry thought about the little plastic soldier he had. “I don’t need any toys,” he said quickly. He was sad to give up the soldier, but he’d much prefer to live with Mister Malfoy.

“Of course.” Mister Malfoy’s smile was even bigger—because he didn’t believe him, Harry realized. For some reason, Mister Malfoy didn’t believe he could live in a cupboard under the stairs. Perhaps he thought Harry would be too noisy. “I could—I could stay out on the roof,” Harry suggested next.

“Yes,” Mister Malfoy said, but he was humouring him now. Harry could tell. “Up there with Heloise?”

Harry had had a teacher or two like this—very nice teachers, who didn’t believe the things he said. In those cases, Harry had always assumed Uncle Vernon or Aunt Petunia had told them what a liar he was, but for the first time it occurred to Harry that maybe he just looked like a liar. He also always looked like he wasn’t tidy, because of his hair. Disappointment surged over Harry as he realized he didn’t have any way to make Mister Malfoy want to keep him.

“I’ll tell you what.” Mister Malfoy sounded more amused than ever. “If I can’t fix the de-ageing potion, you can stay in the cupboard all you like. How does that sound?”

“Yeah. Okay.” Mister Malfoy was talking down to him. Harry felt stupid, but it didn’t change the fact that Mister Malfoy was really cool, and could do magic, and hadn’t even punished him yet for the books.

“Excellent,” Mister Malfoy said. “Would you like to come with me into the lab?”

“You have a lab?” Harry perked up a little. “Like on the telly?”

“I don’t know,” Mister Malfoy said, heading toward the door that went downstairs. “What are labs like on television?”

Harry hurried to catch up, following Mister Malfoy, who lit up sconces on the wall as they went down the stairs. “They have big machines,” Harry said, hopping down the steps. Though he was downcast he hadn’t been able to convince Mister Malfoy to let him stay, he was very interested in the prospects of a magic lab. “And they have lots of glass things with things bubbling and test tubes. And they have a bed with straps and a way to get lightening.”

“I am afraid there aren’t big machines,” Mister Malfoy said. “Nor beds with straps.”
“That’s for Frankenstein,” Harry said. “Can you make a Frankenstein?”

“That depends,” Mister Malfoy said. They went through the short hall to the room at the bottom, and Mister Malfoy used his stick to light the lantern hanging from the ceiling. “What’s a Frankenstein?”

“It’s a monster,” Harry said, proud he knew something Mister Malfoy didn’t. “It’s got screws coming out of its neck, and a flat head, and it walks like this.” Mister Malfoy looked over, and Harry demonstrated with his arms, holding them out in front of him. Mister Malfoy smiled, and Harry’s arms dropped. “Or maybe that’s mummy arms. I forget.”

“It sounds rather like a ghoul.”

“What’s a ghoul?”

“Can you sit here, please?” Mister Malfoy said, and Harry realized he’d forgot to look around.

Harry had passed through the room earlier, but he hadn’t really paused for inspection. Several tables surrounded them, with cabinets and three hearths along the walls. The hearths all had pots in them—big round black pots, like the kind witches used, and the tables had the glass equipment Harry had imagined. Some of the glass spheres and tubes even had liquid bubbling in them, though nothing looked about to explode. Other things were on the tables as well—plants, powders, small bags and large containers full of what seemed to be beetles, feathers, and eyes. A stone dish with beautiful writing carved into it sat right next to a jar with a brain in it. Cutting boards, knives, spoons, feather quills and parchment were scattered between all the materials, and Harry knew his mouth was hanging open.

“Potter,” Mister Malfoy said, sounding amused. He was standing by a stool that was next to a table, so Harry went to sit on the stool.

“Why do you call me Potter?” Harry said, sitting down.

“What would you prefer I call you?” Mister Malfoy asked, turning away to clear a spot on the table.

“Er.” Harry pushed up his glasses. “My first name is Harry.”

“All right then.”

Mister Malfoy was still clearing the table, so Harry couldn’t see the expression on his face. Once all the jars were out of the way, he’d laid out a parchment with a quill beside it. Finally turning back, he said, “I’m going to do a little magic on you, Harry. It might tingle, but it shouldn’t hurt.”

Harry waited for Mister Malfoy to use his stick, but just as Mister Malfoy was lifting it, Harry grabbed his glasses. Taking them off, he put them on the table. Mister Malfoy was just a blur, now, but Harry could feel his inquiry. “So they don’t break,” Harry explained.

“It sounds rather like a ghoul.” he said, and Harry felt his heart race.

“Why on earth would I break them?” Mister Malfoy asked, sounding a trifle impatient. Though he was now mostly just a blob, Harry could tell Mister Malfoy was pointing his stick. “Sanguinem egritudo,” he said, and Harry felt his heart race.

“What’s it doing?” Harry asked.

“Checking your blood.” Mister Malfoy wrote something down on the parchment, then turned back to Harry, making another movement with his stick. “Lympha egritudo,” he said, and Harry’s heart stopped racing, but he felt a tingle on weird spots on his body.
“That tickles,” Harry said, shifting.

“That means it’s working. Stop squirming.” Mister Malfoy did a little swirl with the stick. The tingling stopped, and Mister Malfoy turned to make another note.

He cast some other spells, usually by waving his stick and saying weird words. Some were ticklish; a few made Harry go hot or cold. Several made different parts of Harry light up, which was really cool. None of them hurt. After each one, Mister Malfoy made little notes on his parchment, but after a while Harry began to get bored.

“What’s a ghoul?” he asked, when Mister Malfoy turned to write a note after the fourth or fifth spell.

“A magical creature.”

“There are magic creatures?” Harry was beginning to feel much better, despite the fact that Mister Malfoy was going to reverse the potion. He certainly wasn’t bored any more.


Something like energy raced through Harry’s body, sort of like the time he’d got his hands on one of Dudley’s sodas and drank the whole can all in one go. “What are ghouls like?”

“They have grabby hands.” Mister Malfoy seemed to find the question droll, which made Harry feel a little silly, but Mister Malfoy was indulging him with answers, so that was okay. “They dribble flesh,” Mister Malfoy added.

“Dribble? Like—like a bouncy ball?”

“No. flesh is always rotting off them. They’re always leaving bits of themselves places.”

Harry’s eyes went round. “Wicked! Did you ever touch one?”

“No.” Mister Malfoy waved his stick and the racing feeling ended. “Gross,” he added, turning to his notes.

“Why do you have a stick?” Harry asked.


The rush of energy raced through Harry again. “This one feels the same,” Harry said.

“That’s probably a good thing,” Mister Malfoy said, ending the spell and making a note.

“That stick you keep waving,” Harry said.

“I keep forgetting you don’t know anything about magic. Aetatis inpiscere.”

A hum started low in Harry’s toes and moved slowly up through him. It felt kind of nice. “What am I meant to know?” he asked.

“It’s a wand,” Mister Malfoy said, still moving the stick. “It helps direct magic.”

“Am I really a wizard?”

“Yes.” Mister Malfoy sounded amused.
“Then can I do magic?”

“*Finite incantatem.* Yes.” Mister Malfoy turned back to his notes, sounding even more amused. “You can do magic.”

“How?”

“You have, in fact, already done magic. Now, if you don’t mind, I’m going to touch your hair.”

Harry reached up to try to push his hair into some semblance of order. “I did try to comb it.”

“Did you,” Mister Malfoy said, his voice dry. “It just does this,” Harry said, still trying to tame it with his fingers. “I swear.”

“I don’t care if you always wanted to seem fashionable,” Mister Malfoy said. “I was going to look for potion residue.”

“Oh.” Harry stopped trying to comb his hair, but he kept his hands on his head. Covering his face seemed like a good idea for his next question. “Was it the books?”

“What?”

“You said I did magic. Was it the books?”

“Yes.”

Harry went tense, but Mister Malfoy didn’t sound angry. Confused, Harry stayed like he was—arms protecting his face, just in case.

“Magical children don’t get wands until later. It’s so they don’t get up to anything dangerous—or mischievous—but it means their natural magic is difficult to control.”

Harry, realizing his eyes had been closed this whole time, decided to crack an eye open to check what Mister Malfoy was doing.

“Harry,” Mister Malfoy said. “Are you all right?”

“Yes,” Harry said, realizing he must look like an idiot. His muscles were stiff as he forced his arms down, but inside he felt shaky.

“All right,” Mister Malfoy said. He reached out and touched Harry’s hair.

Harry jumped, landing half back on the stool and almost falling off. “Sorry,” he said quickly, straightening himself. “You can—I forgot; you can check for potion stuff. I forgot you were going to, sorry.”

“Harry,” Mister Malfoy said, then stopped.

Harry was beginning to realize Mister Malfoy paused like that when he was disturbed by something. It was very different to what Aunt Petunia did, which was to screech and shout and lock him in cupboards, and to what Uncle Vernon did, which was to grab him and shove him about. Once when he’d got very, very angry, Vernon had knocked over a plant and broken the pot, sending dirt flying in a streak across the floor. The way Mister Malfoy reacted made it rather hard to notice what things he didn’t like, but Harry was fairly certain Mister Malfoy hadn’t liked him falling off the stool. Harry didn’t even know why he’d flinched. Uncle Vernon had never hit him, so he didn’t have anything to
be afraid of.

“Harry.” Mister Malfoy’s voice was low. “Has anyone ever punished you for doing magic?”

“No,” Harry said, because he didn’t want Mister Malfoy to get the idea to punish him. “I’ve never done it before,” he added quickly.

“What happened with the books—that’s accidental magic.” Mister Malfoy’s voice sounded gentler now. “It happens when a magical child is scared, stressed, or hurt. You’re saying that’s never happened to you before?”

“No.” Harry shook his head vehemently. “Never.”

“Harry.” There was a pause, and Harry realized he’d closed his eyes again. “You know lying is bad, don’t you?”

Harry could feel tears behind his eyes, but he didn’t know why they were even there, so he didn’t let them out. He was very good at not crying. No one liked a crier—except for how Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia seemed to like Dudley. But that was different. Harry nodded.

“Most children your age have learned a bit more control.” Mister Malfoy’s voice was still kind, even though he was saying Harry was bad. Harry had heard that before, too. You’re under-developed, Harry, one of his nicest teachers had told him, her voice quite gentle. Harry hadn’t known what the teacher meant by ‘under-developed,’ but he had known that it was bad. “Usually only toddlers have magical accidents like that,” Mister Malfoy went on, “but I suppose you don’t have anyone to help you learn how to control it.”

“Sorry,” Harry said.

“Let me ask you again,” Mister Malfoy said in that low, gentle voice. “Has anyone ever hurt you when something—odd happened around you? Something that might have been you doing magic accidentally?”

“No,” Harry said, because it was true. He’d had to stay in the cupboard for days at a time, and he’d had to miss meals; Uncle Vernon had shouted, and Aunt Petunia had screeched; Uncle Vernon had grabbed him and shoved him around, but they had never punched him or used knives or anything like that. So Harry had never been hurt because of it.

“Harry.” Mister Malfoy’s voice went even lower. “Are you lying?”

The tears behind Harry’s eyes felt like pin-pricks. He guessed it hurt that Mister Malfoy didn’t believe him, but Uncle Vernon never believed him and that had stopped bothering Harry long ago.

“Harry.” Mister Malfoy’s voice was so quiet.

Harry shook his head no. He wasn’t sure he remembered the question.

Mister Malfoy stood there for what seemed like a long time. “All right,” he said, at last turning away. Picking up Harry’s glasses—his new glasses, which Mister Malfoy had magically shrunk—he held them out. “Put these on.”

Harry looked at the glasses, then up at Mister Malfoy, trying to decide whether it was some kind of trick. Unable to see Mister Malfoy’s expression to determine whether it was one or not, Harry snatched the glasses and shoved them on. Mister Malfoy was already turning away again. “Would you like some hot chocolate?”
His voice was light and normal, as though nothing had happened. Harry didn’t understand.

“Come along,” Mister Malfoy said in that normal way, sweeping off toward the stairs.

“What about the testing?” Harry said, sliding off the stool.

“We don’t have to do that now. It’s hot chocolate time.”

“I’ve never had hot chocolate,” Harry said, following Mister Malfoy up the stairs.

“What?” Mister Malfoy stopped so suddenly in front of him that Harry bumped into him.

“Sorry,” Harry said.

“How can you not have had hot chocolate?” Mister Malfoy said, starting up the stairs again.

“I snuck a marshmallow once, while Dudley was having it.” Harry followed along behind, keeping a larger distance this time, in case Mister Malfoy stopped again.

“You didn’t want any of the chocolate?”

“Aunt Petunia made it,” Harry said.

They got to the top of the stairs, but Mister Malfoy just stopped and looked down at him, his brow furrowed.

“I’m not her kid,” Harry explained, deciding Mister Malfoy looked confused. “I’ve got to earn my keep, so I had to do the washing up before I got any. But by the time I got them done, it was all gone.”

Mister Malfoy didn’t move, but Harry suddenly had the impression that he was getting angry. Really angry.

His face wasn’t going red like Uncle Vernon’s—not like Uncle Vernon’s at all. If anything, it was getting paler. Paler and paler, his mouth going hard and flat, instead of open and yelling. His hand, though—Mister Malfoy’s hand was closing into a fist, tighter and tighter, and the knuckles were white. It wasn’t moving, but Harry started backing up. He backed up until he was against the wall, wanting to block his glasses again—and yet, somehow, he knew that that would make Mister Malfoy madder still.

“Granger,” Mister Malfoy said. His voice was low just like it had been earlier, but also nothing like it. Then it had been warm. Now it was arctic.

What’s a Granger? Harry thought wildly, but he didn’t want to risk saying it.

Mister Malfoy strode over toward the hearth.

Though he was sort of afraid Mister Malfoy would do something to the fire burning there, Harry was relieved Mister Malfoy hadn’t come for him.

Over by the hearth, Mister Malfoy reached for something on the chimney piece, but stopped suddenly. “Fuck,” he said, low enough that had Harry not been listening closely to everything Mister Malfoy was saying and doing, he might not have heard it. Turning away, Mister Malfoy just stood there by the chimney piece for a long moment. When he turned around, he looked awful. Like Aunt Petunia in the morning before coffee, when she said the neighbours had kept her up all night.
Harry stayed up against the wall. Curse words were never a good sign.

“Harry,” Mister Malfoy said, and Harry flinched. Mister Malfoy came toward him. “Harry, don’t . . . it’s all right.”

Pressed up against the wall, Harry stayed very, very still.

Mister Malfoy stopped, staring down at him. The fire lit up his hair into a fantastic gold colour, and his eyes shown in the light. Even if he did look a bit like Aunt Petunia, he still looked sort of a like a famous actor. “Come into the kitchen,” Mister Malfoy finally said, his voice soft. “I’ll make you that hot-chocolate.”

But you’re so angry, Harry wanted to say but knew better than to say it. Slowly, he followed Mister Malfoy to the door on the other side of the room—trying to keep a safe distance, but not so far that Mister Malfoy would get angry again.

Behind the door was a little kitchen with white cabinets and yellow tile. Inset into one of the counters was a white sink, but Harry didn’t see any fridge or microwave. In one corner was an old-fashioned cooker, and in the other corner was a little table with chairs and a window open beside it with cheerful-looking curtains. Beyond that was another door—to the washroom, Harry supposed, or perhaps a bedroom. In all it was a quaint little place, and Harry liked it immediately. He’d still much rather stay here than Privet Drive, and Mister Malfoy was still much, much nicer. Even if he did get angry.

“Have a sit at the table,” Mister Malfoy said.

His voice was still soft, but Harry figured he’d better do what Mister Malfoy said, so he went and sat at the table.

Using the stick—his wand, Harry guessed—Mister Malfoy opened cabinets, pointed at things in them, and made them float around the kitchen. He got sugar, cocoa, and water into a pot and then the pot on the cooker, then started the cooker, only murmuring words now and then to make things go where he wanted. Then he got milk out of a cabinet and a little bottle of something that looked like vanilla.

Harry watched the whole thing with wide eyes, jumping a little when Mister Malfoy made a blue mug and a white one with flowers painted on it float toward him. After adding the milk and vanilla-looking stuff and stirring the pot a bit more, Mister Malfoy danced a trivet onto the table, then spelled the pot on top of it. Using his wand some more, Mister Malfoy made the hot chocolate pour in an arcing stream from the pot into each of the mugs, then gave the blue one to Harry. “I apologize for the lack of marshmallows,” Mister Malfoy said. “They’re a bit of a trick to transfigure safely.”

Taking the mug because he knew he was meant to, Harry watched to see what Mister Malfoy did.

Mister Malfoy took the white cup with the flowers and then watched Harry. “I promise it’s not poison,” Mister Malfoy said, making a big, exaggerated smile.

Harry couldn’t figure out why Mister Malfoy was talking to him like that—like he was talking to a baby or one of Mrs. Figg’s scared cats.

“Suit yourself.” Hitching an elegant shoulder, Mister Malfoy took a sip of chocolate. He didn’t look like there was a problem with it, and he didn’t do anything stupid or condescending after that like smack his lips.

Tentatively, Harry tried the chocolate.
It was very, very good. Hot, but not quite hot enough to burn—just hot enough to make the chocolate feel silky on his tongue. Hardly ever getting to have sweets to begin with, much less in a drink, Harry hadn’t really tasted anything like it before.

He took another, bigger sip. And another.

Though Harry was waiting for Mister Malfoy to tell him to slow down, Mister Malfoy just said, “Would you like to try some magic?”

Harry almost choked on chocolate. Struggling to keep it down, he coughed.

When he was done wheezing, Mister Malfoy said, “I’ll teach you.” He set something on the table with a small clack.

It was a wand—not the same light colour as Mister Malfoy’s wand. This one was darker and a little longer, and suddenly Harry realized it was the stick he’d been holding when he’d first ended up in these clothes. Harry looked from it back up to Mister Malfoy, then back down at the wand.

“It belongs to you,” Mister Malfoy said.

Harry swallowed hard. “It does?” Mister Malfoy nodded, and Harry tentatively reached out to take the wand on the table. When he touched it, the room brightened, a rush of warmth and energy rushing through Harry. “Wow,” he breathed.

“That means it’s yours,” said Mister Malfoy.

“What can I do with it?” Harry said, swishing the wand around as he had seen Mister Malfoy do.

“Probably not that.” Mister Malfoy grabbed their mugs, still full of hot chocolate—well, Mister Malfoy’s was almost full; Harry’s was half—and moved them to the side of the table near the window. “Try . . .” Mister Malfoy looked around. “Accio parchment,” he said, holding out his hand.

Harry opened his mouth, but he closed it when a piece of paper floated in from the other room and then into Malfoy’s hand.

“I—well, yes.” Mister Malfoy looked startled, then started to look pleased. “It takes a bit of practice, but I can do a number of small spells without it.”

“What else can you do?” Harry asked, feeling pretty excited about this. Maybe when Mister Malfoy took Harry’s wand away, he could still do some things—not things like knocking books around, just small things. Nice things that no one would see.


The door of the cabinet slowly creaked open.

“Alohomora,” Harry said, waving the wand at a cabinet that was closed.

It remained closed.

“You have to tap it,” Mister Malfoy said.

“Oh.” Tapping the cabinet with the wand, Harry said, “Alohomora.”

The cabinet didn’t open.

“Alohomora.” Harry tapped again, but the cabinet still didn’t open.

“Try to feel the magic inside you,” Mister Malfoy said. “What you felt with the books. That was good.”

Harry glanced up at him quickly, but Mister Malfoy didn’t look like he was tricking him, even though Harry was still pretty sure the books had been a bad thing. But Mister Malfoy didn’t look angry, still wearing that gentle expression. Turning away, Mister Malfoy waved at a different cabinet. “Alohomora.”

Harry thought about the books. He didn’t remember making them move at all. He didn’t remember anything about it. He remembered thinking that it was 2012, and he was thirty-one, and he didn’t know who the Prime Minister was, or anything that had happened since—

“Now, Harry,” said Mister Malfoy.

“Alohomora,” Harry yelled, poking the cabinet with his wand.

All the cabinets in the kitchen came open, slamming against their casings with a loud crack. Dishes inside jiggled with little tinkling sounds.

“I didn’t mean to,” Harry said, lowering his wand.

“That was fine,” Mister Malfoy said, going to close the cabinets. “You just need a little bit more control.”

“Oh.” Harry swallowed.

Turning away from the cabinets, Mister Malfoy looked down at him. “That spell was first rate, actually,” he added, after a moment. “Powerful. Most first years can’t do a spell that affects so many targets at once.”

“First years?”

“At Hogwarts,” Mister Malfoy said. “It’s nothing to be ashamed of. You . . .” Trailing off, he wet his lips. “You always had strong magic.”

Harry wasn’t ashamed, but he had been a bit afraid Mister Malfoy might get angry. He supposed at Hogwarts people were meant to be doing magic, as it was a school for witchcraft and wizardry. That there could be a whole school full of people doing funny business without getting in trouble for it seemed strange. If Uncle Vernon knew about it, he wouldn’t like it at all.

“Do you want to try something else?” Mister Malfoy asked.

Harry hesitated. “If it’s okay.”

“How about the parchment? You give the wand a little flick, like you would beckon with your finger. Then you say, ‘Accio parchment.’” Mister Malfoy flicked his finger as he said it, and the paper floated toward him. “Now, you try.” Setting the paper on the table, Mister Malfoy backed up.

After several tries, Harry got it. Then they did a spell to pour more cocoa, turn on the sink, make the trivet float, and stop the other spells. Mister Malfoy had to take out his wand to show Harry how to make the chair dance, and Harry tried it himself on the other chair. After twenty minutes both the
chairs were dancing, the curtains were floating, and the hot chocolate was pouring itself into itself over and over. Harry pointed at the table with the wand, shouting, “Tarantellegra!”

The table began to dance. Hot chocolate proceeded to spray everywhere.

“Finite incantatem,” Mister Malfoy said, raising his voice over the ruckus of the dancing table.

Eyes glued in horror to the chocolate splattering around the kitchen, Harry had thought Mister Malfoy was casting the spell, but the table didn’t stop dancing. Chocolate continued to spray everywhere.

“You remember it, Harry,” Mister Malfoy said, sounding as though something was wrong with him. “Do the stopping spell!”

Finally ripping his eyes away from the hot chocolate sprinkler, Harry looked up at Mister Malfoy.

He had chocolate on his face. He was laughing.

Harry’s jaw dropped open.

“Do it, Harry.” Mister Malfoy laughed some more, and it was such a nice sound, nicer than anything Harry had ever heard before. Way better than Take That.

Lifting the wand, Harry pointed at the table, then the chairs, then the curtains. “Finite incantatem,” he said. “Finite incantatem! Finite incantatem!” The tables and chairs and curtains stopped dancing. The hot chocolate also stopped pouring, but that was mostly because it was all over the kitchen now.

Harry looked up at Mister Malfoy. “Why aren’t you mad?” he heard himself say, even though he definitely hadn’t planned on it.

Mister Malfoy’s laughter faded, and for a second, he almost looked sad. “Oh, Harry,” he said, and stopped.

Harry knew he shouldn’t have said it.

Mister Malfoy looked down at him but didn’t say anything about it. Instead he turned away, and when he talked his voice was normal. “Let’s try a cleaning charm,” he said. “Like this.” Mister Malfoy swished his wand, saying, “Scourgify!” A little puddle of chocolate sucked up into his wand.

Harry wondered whether he should tell Mister Malfoy about the chocolate streaked on his face. Probably he could feel it. Pointing his wand at a puddle of hot chocolate, Harry tried the cleaning spell. The chocolate sucked into his wand too, but when Harry checked it, it didn’t drip or anything. “Scourgify!” he said, turning to another puddle.

“Excellent,” Mister Malfoy said.

“Scourgify!” Harry said, aiming at some chocolate that had spattered on the wall. It was much more fun than scrubbing or mopping, and Harry went on cleaning. Even though Mister Malfoy hadn’t been mad, Harry wanted to fix his mistake, figuring it was only right. Mister Malfoy had such a nice kitchen.

As Harry finished up, he realized Mister Malfoy had just been standing there, not doing anything. When Harry turned he found Mister Malfoy watching him, something that seemed unhappy filling his silver eyes. Harry checked to make sure all the chocolate was cleaned up, but the kitchen looked quite clean once again. By the time Harry looked back, Mister Malfoy was turning away, sliding his wand into his sleeve. “Harry,” he said decisively, sweeping off toward the cabinets. “Do you like
“Cake?” For the first time, Harry became aware of the profound emptiness in his stomach. It chose that moment to growl.

“Indeed.” Mister Malfoy took something out of one of the cabinets, but it looked much more like bread than cake, and Harry tried not to feel disappointed. “I’ve realized it’s our in-between birthday.”

“In-between birthday?” Harry asked, distracted as Mister Malfoy pointed at the cake and said something. An *incantation*, Mister Malfoy had said, when he’d taught Harry the spells. The bread went wobbly; then Mister Malfoy said another incantation.

“Yes,” Mister Malfoy said, moving his wand over the wobbling bread. “My mum’s and my birthdays were three days apart. Every day in-between was both of our in-between birthdays. Your and my birthdays are almost two months apart. Do you know what that means?”

*You’re old?* Harry wanted to guess, but it seemed rude.

“Cake, Harry!” Mister Malfoy announced. “It means cake.”

“Oh,” Harry said. He hoped it meant eating cake as well, but Harry could never be sure. Usually he didn’t get to have cake, unless it was the fruit cake Aunt Marge brought on holiday. No one else wanted to eat that cake, so Harry always got a little—even though he didn’t want to eat it either.

Mister Malfoy was still casting spells at the wobbly bread. It was looking more like a cake, in fact, with two round layers and something jam-like in-between. A soft white paste was coming from the tip of Mister Malfoy’s wand, and he was spreading it over the cake. Harry very much hoped it was icing.

Even if it didn’t taste like a cake, Harry sort of wanted some. He was pretty hungry, and he’d only had half of his hot chocolate.

Mister Malfoy must have seen the look on Harry’s face, because he hurried up with his incantations. Still, he took the time to add large flowers on the top in pink icing, making the bread-cake one of the most beautiful foods Harry had ever seen. Everything looked nice when Mister Malfoy was concerned, Harry supposed. Then Mister Malfoy used his wand to get out forks and plates and carry the cake over to the table. “Go ahead,” he said, handing Harry a slender knife without a point. “Cut yourself a slice.”

“I—I get to have some?”

“No, I made it all for myself.”

But Harry could tell Mister Malfoy was joking, so he took the knife and started cutting himself a slice about a fourth of the size of the cake.

“Um,” Mister Malfoy said, a little faintly. “Are you sure you want *all* of that?”

Uncertain what to do, Harry stopped slicing. He should have known he couldn’t get away with it—the few times he had ever got to have cake, it had only been the thinnest, most meagre slice. But Mister Malfoy had said . . . Harry took his knife out of the cake and began to cut himself a much more modest piece.

“I didn’t mean,” Mister Malfoy began, but stopped when Harry hesitated again. “Go on,” Mister Malfoy said. “You can have more later if you want some.”
Harry finished cutting himself the skinny slice. Mister Malfoy cut his own slice after that, and Harry finally took a bite. It was delicious, and it definitely did not taste like bread.

“In-between birthdays are the best,” Mister Malfoy said. “There’s cake every day. And presents. We can go wherever we like and do anything we please. Father always . . .”

Harry stopped chewing, wanting to hear what Mister Malfoy’s dad had done. Grown-ups had dads too, he realized. Mister Malfoy’s dad was probably the best.

“Well, we never had to be discreet on in-between birthdays, for one thing,” Mister Malfoy went on. “Harry, are you done?”

Harry quickly stabbed the remaining three bits of cake with his fork, shoved it into his mouth, and nodded.

“You must have been starving,” Mister Malfoy said. “Perhaps you should have real food. Let’s see what I have.” Going back over to the cabinet, he pulled out some chicken—which seemed disgusting, keeping chicken in a cabinet. But Mister Malfoy was magic, so maybe the cabinet was magically cold. Then from another cabinet he took out some vegetables, and Harry tried to rally, pretending vegetables weren’t the worst ever.

Looking over at him, Mister Malfoy laughed. “Don’t worry,” he said. “I used to hate vegetables. I’m sure I can make something good out of this.”

Harry had his doubts, but Mister Malfoy made a chicken pie out of it, and it was delicious.

In fact, Harry had never had food this good. Aunt Petunia mostly made him eat vegetables, and when he got to have meat it was usually the burned parts, or bits that were too dry. Not sure when he would get to eat again—and certainly not sure when he’d get to eat this well—Harry checked to see whether Mister Malfoy looked mad when Harry reached for another slice of pie.

“So you sure you’re hungry enough?” Mister Malfoy said, surprised.

Harry paused, waiting to see if that meant no.

“By all means, have more.” Mister Malfoy nudged the plate closer, and Harry helped himself to another thick slice.

And another.

“I suppose you’re still young,” Mister Malfoy said, sounding uncertain.

His mouth full of chicken and broccoli, Harry stopped the fork with another load of potato and gravy on the way to his mouth. He finished chewing, then swallowed. “Er. Yes?” he guessed, then shoved the four remaining bites of pie in his mouth. “Does that mean I can have . . .” Harry gestured at the cake.

“What?” Mister Malfoy said, surprised. “You still want—” Breaking off at the look on Harry’s face, Mister Malfoy stopped, then cut a big slice. “Of course,” he said, floating the slice over to Harry’s cake plate.

Harry had two whole plates. And at some point, Mister Malfoy had got him another glass of milk.

“You can have anything you want,” Mister Malfoy added.
Harry ate the second slice of cake, then reached for a third. The pause between eating lasted long enough for Harry to realize that his stomach ached, it was so full. Trying to finish the third slice anyway, Harry really struggled to get the last bites in. “Can I have more cake?” Harry asked, directly after he had finished.

“Oh, of course,” Mister Malfoy said again, then cut him another slice.

Harry managed about two bites, then dropped his fork onto his plate. It landed with a clatter.

Mister Malfoy smiled. “Had enough at last?”

“No,” Harry said stubbornly. “I’m still...” Picking up his fork, he loaded it up and tried to eat the bite. He honestly tried, but when it got to his lips, he just couldn’t do it.

“Don’t eat if you’re not hungry, Harry.” Mister Malfoy’s voice had changed from amusement to something like concern, but Harry didn’t want to look at Mister Malfoy’s face. He didn’t want to look at anything.

He felt so, so sick, his stomach tight over all the food, so tight it felt like bursting. His throat was beginning to dry up even as his mouth was watering. He didn’t understand why his mouth was watering; he couldn’t stand the thought of eating more. Even the smell of it was beginning to make him nauseated and then he realized—he was nauseated. His stomach was turning over in his body. He was going to sick up. Harry dropped the fork again.

“We’ll just clean this up,” Mister Malfoy said, but Harry could barely hear him, his stomach already heaving. “Do you want to—”

“Er,” Harry heard himself say, though even speech made him feel even more ill. His mouth already tasted like bile. “Can I—where’s the loo?”

“Just through there,” said Mister Malfoy, gesturing to the door behind them.

Harry lunged toward it, only just making it to the toilet before he began to sick up.

“Harry?” Mister Malfoy’s voice floated through the door. No doubt he could hear the horrible retching sounds.

Harry tried to say something, only he felt so miserable he couldn’t form any words. His throat ached, his mouth tasting awful. The cool porcelain of the toilet felt nice against his cheek, which he assumed was probably disgusting, but he rested his cheek against it anyway.

“Harry,” Mister Malfoy said, sounding urgent. “Can I—are you all right?”

“Fine,” Harry managed.

“Can I come in?”

“No,” Harry said, clutching the toilet. “I’ve just—I’ve just got to use the toilet!”

“Harry.”

Harry didn’t know what to say, so he sicked up again into the toilet bowl.

The door opened, and someone came in. Harry knew it was Mister Malfoy, but he felt too ill to look up, not to mentioned embarrassed. Even if Mister Malfoy wasn’t angry at him for sicking up, he was going to think Harry was an idiot for having made himself ill, and he’d be right. Harry didn’t even
know why he’d done it, only the food had been so good, and no one had taken it away.

Mister Malfoy said something, and the vomit in the toilet disappeared. The smell was gone too, which already made Harry feel a little better. “Accio flannel,” Mister Malfoy said, coming over to sit on the ground by Harry. Harry tried to flinch away, but Mister Malfoy said, “Shh,” then took off Harry’s glasses. “You’ve made yourself sick. You ate too much. Aguamenti,” he added, as the flannel floated into his hand. “Here.” Then a wet cloth was on Harry’s forehead, and Mister Malfoy was pushing Harry’s hair back as he wiped up the cold sweat.

“What,” Harry managed to say. “What are you doing?”

“Here,” Mister Malfoy said, giving him the flannel. “Wipe your face. Accio another flannel.” His hand stayed in Harry’s hair—Harry didn’t know what it was doing—as the second flannel floated into his other hand. “Aguamenti,” Mister Malfoy said, which Harry guessed made it wet, and then the wet cloth was wiping his neck, his stupidly sweaty hair.

Harry’s stomach felt much better after having dumped a portion of its contents into the toilet, but he felt all the wrong temperatures—cold but sweaty, a little light-headed. His mouth tasted terrible, and yet he couldn’t really think about it, because Mister Malfoy wasn’t angry. He wasn’t annoyed or telling him to hurry up, and for once, getting sick had been entirely Harry’s fault. Harry didn’t understand, and the worst part was the way Mister Malfoy kept running his fingers through Harry’s hair, because it felt nice.

Mister Malfoy murmured another incantation, and after a moment or two a glass floated in from the kitchen. “Drink this,” Mister Malfoy said, giving him the glass.

Harry took it and did what Mister Malfoy said, even though the thought of putting something else in his stomach sort of made him want to cry. The drink tasted mostly like water, except it took away the taste in his mouth too, making everything feel fresh again and clean.

After that, Mister Malfoy stopped touching him, and Harry became intensely aware that they were kneeling on the floor of the loo. “Sorry,” Harry said, for lack of anything better to say.

“I should have stopped you,” Mister Malfoy said, but he still didn’t sound angry. “I didn’t—I wasn’t thinking. Would you like to have a lie down?”

That was exactly what Harry wanted to do, and so he said immediately, “I’m not tired.”

“All right,” Mister Malfoy said.

Harry’s eyes slid to the toilet. “Er, sorry,” he said again. “About . . .” He waved a vague hand toward the toilet.

“Why don’t you put on your glasses,” Mister Malfoy said, handing them over. “Are you sure you wouldn’t like to lie down?”

“I’m feeling much better, really.” Putting his glasses on, Harry made himself stand up.

Mister Malfoy stared up at him, his look sceptical. After a few moments he stood as well, heading toward the door of the loo. “Come along, then.”

Harry followed Mister Malfoy out, suddenly feeling tired, like more had been expelled from him than just chewed-up food. Being in the kitchen made him strangely guilty, as though returning to the site of a horrible crime. Just the sight of the half-eaten cake on the table was making his stomach turn all over again.
“How about the sitting room,” Mister Malfoy suggested. “Would you like to sit by the fire?”

Harry perked up. They did not have fires very often at the house on Privet Drive. Aunt Petunia said they were a waste—of what, Harry wasn’t certain. Whenever they did have fires, Uncle Vernon fell asleep in front of them while Harry cleaned, and then there was never anywhere to sit by it.

In the sitting room, only one chair sat by the fire—the floral, wingback one, but Mister Malfoy pointed his wand at it and it stretched, becoming wide enough for them both to sit. Harry waited until Mister Malfoy sat down, then tentatively sat on the edge, still confused. Aunt Petunia used to tell Dudley he would “ruin his dinner,” when he ate too many sweets, but Harry had never understood it. Now he understood, not only having ruined his dinner but having ruined afters as well and having got sick on top of that, which was always a bad thing to do. He didn’t understand why Mister Malfoy wasn’t angry with him.

“How are you feeling?” Mister Malfoy asked.

Harry quickly checked Mister Malfoy’s face, but he didn’t even look a tiny bit mad. Shadows licked up the side of his cheekbones, making his skin gold. “I’m fine,” Harry said, realizing Mister Malfoy was waiting.

Mister Malfoy looked a little sad about that answer. “Harry.” His voice was so slow and measured that Harry immediately tensed up. “When you’re with your aunt and uncle, do you get enough to eat?”

“Yes,” Harry said immediately.

Mister Malfoy just looked at him.

Harry had been asked these questions before. “I never get sick,” he added. “I—it was an accident.”

Mister Malfoy’s jaw went tight, like he was clenching it.

Mister Malfoy was displeased, and Harry very much wanted to please him. He liked Mister Malfoy a lot. He liked him a whole lot, and he didn’t know why some things he said seemed to make Mister Malfoy frustrated, especially when the other thing Harry had said was about hot chocolate. It was confusing, and Harry wished it could be clear like it was with Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia, only he didn’t wish it was like that at all. That was confusing too.

“You do realize you’re . . . allowed to be ill. Getting sick isn’t your fault.”

“But I don’t get sick,” Harry said.

“Right,” Mister Malfoy said. “And you realize that if you did get sick, you sometimes need someone to—to help you?”

“But I don’t—”

“It isn’t a burden, Harry,” Mister Malfoy said abruptly. “No one should act like it’s a burden, taking care of you. Do they . . . ?”

Harry cut in before Mister Malfoy could decide what to ask. “But I don’t need anyone to take care of me.”

“Harry,” Mister Malfoy said again, even more softly. He paused for a long time. “I’m going to fix this potion as soon as I possibly can. But until then . . . ” Taking a deep breath, he leaned forward.
“Until then, you’ll stay with me. Do you understand?”

Harry nodded quickly, just in case Mister Malfoy changed his mind.

“I’ll do my best, but as you’ve probably gathered by now, I am a novice when it comes to children.”

Harry nodded to show he knew what the word “novice” meant, even though he didn’t. He hoped it meant someone who loved children.

“Therefore, you have to help me,” Mister Malfoy said. “You have to tell me if you want or need anything. Anything you want or need, I’ll give it to you. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” Harry said, even though he didn’t, really. He was pretty excited about getting to stay with Mister Malfoy, though. Maybe Mister Malfoy would never figure out the potion, and he could stay with him forever.

“That means you have to communicate,” Mister Malfoy went on. “You have to tell me if you don’t feel good. If you’re hungry or afraid or sleepy. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” Harry said immediately. “I don’t get afraid. And I’m hardly ever sick,” he added.

Mister Malfoy’s five-p eyes shone brighter in the firelight. “And Harry,” he added softly, “you don’t have to hide things from me. You don’t have to pretend to feel differently than you do.”

“I don’t,” Harry said.

Mister Malfoy looked tired. He looked really, really tired, and Harry wondered whether that was because Mister Malfoy thought Harry was pretending.

“Hardly ever,” Harry added, feeling guilty.

Mister Malfoy smiled a bit without looking like he wanted to smile at all, and Harry guessed he probably shouldn’t have said that. “You always told the truth in school,” Mister Malfoy said. “Even when no one believed you. Even when—when people hurt you for it. You always told the truth.”

“Oh. Why did people . . .?” Harry swallowed. “Was it Dudley?”

“Pardon?”

“Was Dudley—did Dudley and Piers go to Hogwarts too? I thought they were—they were ‘Muggle.’ ”

“No, Harry,” Mister Malfoy said. “Your cousin didn’t go to Hogwarts.”

“I’m glad,” Harry said.

“I should imagine so.” Mister Malfoy smiled faintly again. He still didn’t look happy about it, but it was a better smile than before. “I always admired how honest you were. I . . . never told you that before.”

“You admired me?” Harry said, shocked.

“Harry. Everyone admired you.”

“Why?” Harry said, because he couldn’t really believe it.
Mister Malfoy’s smile was almost a real one. “Would you like to try some more magic?” he said, instead of answering Harry’s question.

Few things could have distracted Harry from the subject at hand, but the offer of magic did.

“Accio Harry’s wand,” Mister Malfoy said, and Harry’s wand came floating in. Harry had forgot; he had left it in the kitchen. “A wizard should keep his wand on him at all times,” Mister Malfoy said, handing him the wand.

“Yes, sir,” Harry said, taking the wand.

“Harry.” Mister Malfoy hesitated again, and Harry tried to figure out what he had done wrong this time. Whatever it was, Mister Malfoy seemed to forget about it, because he leaned in toward the fire to cast a spell on it that made some of the orange flames blue, and when he spoke to Harry his voice was much lighter. “You needn’t call me sir,” he said.

“Oh,” Harry said, but then didn’t know what to call him.

“Just Draco is fine,” Mister Malfoy went on, still waving his wand at the fire. “Ignis verd,” he murmured, and some of the blue flames turned green.

“But.” Harry couldn’t help feeling a little bewildered. “Is that your first name?”

“First names are much nicer; don’t you think? Ignis rose,” Mister Malfoy—Draco added, and some of the green flames went pink.

“I guess,” Harry said. “Ignis lavande,” Draco said, then finally pulled away from the fire. “Would you like to learn the colour spells?”

Attention caught by the rainbow flames now arranged in the hearth, Harry took a moment to realize he was being asked a question. “Er,” he said, turning back to Mister Malfoy—Draco. “Yes, please.”

Draco walked Harry through each colour, each spell having a slightly different flick of the wand at the end of them. The words were hard to remember, but Draco didn’t make fun of him for forgetting. Instead, he repeated the words over and over, his voice becoming hypnotic in the warm glow of the fire. He demonstrated each of the movements again and again, at one point covering Harry’s hand with his larger one and gently moving with him to show Harry the flick to turn the chair orange.

They changed the floor green, and the ceiling blue, the bookcases purple with yellow polka dots. Draco made his own shirt yellow with orange stripes, then his hands blue, his hair pink. Harry smiled, and Draco looked so, so pleased. Then Draco did Finite incantatem, and everything went back to its normal colour, lit by the burnished gold of the fire and candles still lit around the room.

Draco looked like a painting, warm and kind and gold like a prince from a fairy tale, like something from a dream. A dream where Harry didn’t live in a cupboard and got to eat whenever he wanted, and no one told him he was a freak.

“Can you do more magic?” Harry asked impulsively.

Draco looked surprised. “Of course,” he said. “Is there anything in particular you’d like to see?”

“No, I just—I like it. When you do it.”
Draco just stared at him for a moment. “Why, of course you do,” he said, after a moment. “You’ll find I’m a very talented wizard. *Expecto patronum!*” A silver thread streamed out of Draco’s wand, puffing up into a shimmering cloud.


“That’s not . . .” Draco began, then waved away the cloud. “It’s a very difficult spell,” he said. “You have to be feeling just right for it to come out correctly.”

Harry realized Draco must be a very powerful wizard. Other people probably couldn’t even do it.

“Never mind about that one,” Draco said. “This one is always a crowd pleaser. *Ignis draco.*” He pointed his wand at the fire, which seemed to stream toward Draco’s wand. Soon the flames were weaving into the shape of a large lizard. Or dinosaur. Or—dragon, it was a dragon, like Harry had seen on a kite at the park, once, walking on the way home from school. The flames shimmered into sparks; then the sparks popped out, fading in the air.

Next Draco made the shadows dance into the shapes of big spindly-legged birds that kept falling over, which made Harry smile again.

“You think that’s funny, do you?” Draco said, feigning offence but in such a preposterously high voice that Harry smiled even more. Pointing his wand at his nose, Draco said an incantation that made his nose hairs begin growing out in ringlets. “No laughing!” Draco said, his high voice making the ringlets jiggle.

Harry laughed.

Draco beamed. “I said, no ‘laughing!’ From now on, only serious spells!” Then he pointed his wand at himself again. “*Finite incantatem,*” he said, but he missed on purpose, moving his wand at the last moment. “*Finite incantatem,*” he repeated, missing again. “*Ructo papillon,*” he said, and burped out a butterfly.

“Oh, no!” Harry laughed harder.

“*Finite incantatem,*” Draco said, and his nose hairs finally started ungrowing back into his nose. “I must find a way to stop all this nonsense. *Expecto patronum!*”

Harry recognized the incantation, but the spell was nothing like before. The whole room seemed to fill with the shimmering cloud this time, and from the tip of Draco’s wand the unspooling silver spun and spun until forming the shape of a glowing fox. “Say hello to Harry,” Draco told the fox, tapping on the butterfly to make it disappear. All of Draco’s nose hairs were back in his nose as well.

Meanwhile, the fox walked over to Harry’s side of the couch and sat down, looking up. The fox seemed quite thin, something wilder and savage about it than the foxes at the zoo. It looked like a fox who’d gone through the winter, cold, with barely anything to eat. Harry couldn’t take his eyes from it. “It can understand you?”

“She’s a Patronus,” Draco said. “She can help protect me if there’s trouble.”

“She?” Harry said, startled. “Does she have a name?”

“No. The spell changes form according to who you are or what’s most important to you at the time. Mine hasn’t always been a fox.”

Harry glanced at Draco. “What was it before?”
"A peacock.” For some reason, Draco looked a little sad about that.

Harry was going to ask him why, but the fox put its translucent silver paws up on the couch, then hopped up between them. Harry budged over to make room for it, which put a small smile back on Draco’s face.

“It’s okay,” he said. “A Patronus is incorporeal. She can’t feel you.”

Harry didn’t know what incorporeal meant, but he thought it sounded nice. “So, she can’t . . . I can’t, um.” Harry sort of wanted to pet it, but he already knew that was stupid. Draco had just said she couldn’t feel it.

“You can pet her,” Draco said gently. “She may be incorporeal, but I’m sure she would appreciate it nevertheless.”

When Harry tried to pet the fox, however, his hand went straight through her. He glanced up quickly to see whether Draco was laughing at him, but he wasn’t. Instead he had that strange look on his face—like he had with Heloise—something almost rueful in his expression. Harry tried petting the fox again, keeping his hand where the glowing lines of her fur was. Even though she looked so wild and hungry, he didn’t get the feeling she’d hurt him. Draco had said she was a protector, and something about her hunted look made Harry believe that she could fight.

The fox stood up, stepped into Harry’s lap, and curled into a ball.

“She likes you,” Draco said softly, and Harry’s chest went tight. Pointing his wand about the room, Draco extinguished the candles one by one. At last the room was lit only by the fire in front of them and the soft glow of the Patronus, and then Draco pointed his wand at the ceiling. “Celeste revelo,” he murmured.

Harry looked up and had to swallow a small gasp. The ceiling looked as though it was gone, full instead with stars.

Draco waved his wand again, extinguishing the fire. “Mum used to do this spell for me at night,” Draco said, looking up at the stars. Their light made his face look pale in the dark room. “Her side of the family all has celestial names.”

“Draco—is the name of a star?” Harry said, guessing what ‘celestial’ meant.

“A constellation. I forgot—most Muggles don’t pay attention to stars the way wizards do.” Pointing his wand upward again, Draco made silver sparks come out of it. They drifted upward, tracing lines between the stars. “This is Ursa Major,” he said, moving closer to Harry and pointing. “Do you see? It looks like a bear.”

Harry followed the line of Draco’s arm to the silver line connecting dots in the air. It looked more like a stick-figure dog than a bear, but Harry guessed maybe Draco wasn’t a good artist. “Sort of,” he said.

“She points up to Polaris.” Draco pointed his wand, making one of the stars glow larger for a moment. “That’s the north star.”

“I know that one,” Harry said. “We learned about it in school.”

“Very good,” Draco murmured, and Harry felt his chest expand. He’d never been a good student, but then, he’d never had a teacher like Mister Malfoy. He was sitting close now, and Harry could feel the warmth of Draco’s arm through his sleeve. He smelled nice, like cake and fire. “Polaris is
part of Ursa Minor,” Draco went on. “Draco’s tail is between the two bears.”

“Tail?” Harry was interested. He really was, but he also wanted Draco to keep talking because it sounded so nice, and the room was warm and dark, and Harry was really very tired.

“Oh, yes, Harry,” Draco said softly. “Draco is a dragon.” He moved his wand over the sky, connecting dots to draw a long worm-like shape with a box for a head.

Harry wanted to tell him it didn’t look like a dragon at all, but it looked so pretty up there, and Mister Malfoy vibrated a bit when he talked, like a low hum.

“Minerva threw him up there,” Draco said. “Twisted and injured, he tried to find his way out of the northern sky, but he froze instead.”

“That was mean,” Harry said, then realized his eyes had drifted closed. Making himself open them, he looked at Draco. “What else happened?”

Draco looked down at him, a smile turning softly on the side of his nice-looking mouth in the glowing starlight. “Well, there was a very vain queen named Cassiopeia,” he said, then told the story of the queen who was punished for her vanity.

“Yeah,” Harry said, feeling warmth settle across his back, then press up against his side. He was warm all around, and Mister Malfoy kept telling stories Harry could no longer hear but could feel in the rumble against him. Everything was dark, and a magic fox slept curled in his lap.

All in all, it was a very good day. Harry never wanted it to end.
Chapter 2

Thank you all for your very kind response to this story. I hope you continue to enjoy! If you want to talk, you can find me at letteredlettered on tumblr.

The next morning Harry woke up in a bed. A real bed, with a real pillow, and sheets, and everything.

At first, he thought the bed must be Dudley’s. One time when Harry had been forgot at home he had snuck up to Dudley’s bed to see what sleeping in one was like, only—this felt different. Cracking open his eyes, Harry felt around for his glasses, which were folded on a chest of drawers beside the bed. When Harry put them on, he saw a silver fox.

It had been watching him, but seeing that Harry was awake, the fox turned and trotted through the wall.

This definitely wasn’t Dudley’s bed.

Jumping up, Harry realized he wasn’t in his own pyjamas either. He didn’t even have pyjamas, just old shorts, and sometimes Dudley’s castoffs—but these were real pyjamas, soft and warm and cottony. White, with blue stripes. Mister Malfoy must have done it, and panicking, Harry remembered bad old men, but he was more concerned about the bed, which he shouldn’t have slept in. He’d told Mister Malfoy—Draco—that he would stay in a cupboard, and Harry didn’t know how he had got to the bed, but he had definitely slept in it.

Hastily, Harry tried to straighten the sheets, fluffing the pillow. He wondered if there was a bed-making spell, then wondered if all those things he remembered from yesterday were real at all. Draco had made a magic cake, and Dudley was thirty-one years old, and Harry could do magic—his wand. Draco had told him he should always have his wand, and Harry was frantically looking for it when there was a knock at the door.

Harry looked up. He was in a smallish room with just one window. The bed was in the middle of one wall and the door being knocked on was on the wall opposite. To the right of the door stood a cabinet with a large bowl and pitcher sitting atop it; to the left was a chest of drawers and another door. He was in a bedroom, and the second door was the cupboard, Harry guessed.

“Harry?” said a voice on the other side of the door. It was muffled but it sounded like Draco.

For a moment, Harry seriously considered diving into the cupboard. “Um. Yes?” he said instead.

“Do you mind if I come in?” Draco said, and it felt odd. Harry had never had anyone ask him anything like that.

“Yes?” Harry said. “I mean, no. I mean, I don’t mind.”

The door opened, and all thoughts of yesterday having been imagined flew out of Harry’s head. Draco stood there, looking extremely real, and Harry knew he couldn’t dream up anybody who looked quite like him. “Did you sleep well, Harry?” Draco said.
“I don’t know how I got in here,” Harry blurted.

“I brought you,” Draco said.

“I didn’t mean to sleep in the bed.”

“Harry.” Draco’s brow furrowed. “I put you in it.”

“Whose bed is it?”

“It’s mine. I was in the lab.”

Harry’s eyes went wide. Not only had Draco let him sleep in a bed, but it was his bed, and—Harry looked furtively at the rumpled sheets. He hadn’t really done a good job making it. He hoped Draco didn’t notice. “And... these?” He plucked at the pyjamas.

“I transfigured your clothes into pyjamas. Muggles... do wear pyjamas, don’t they?” Draco asked uncertainly.

Draco hadn’t carried him, Harry realized belatedly. He would’ve used magic. “Yes, we—they wear pyjamas,” Harry said.

“Good. I didn’t excel at Muggle studies, but I didn’t think I had failed so dismally.” Draco swung the door open further. “I’ve made breakfast, if you’re hungry.”

Eyes widening, Harry followed Draco out the door. The bedroom opened into the laboratory on the ground level, which Harry thought odd, with the kitchen upstairs, but then he thought about the multiple hearths on the ground level. Maybe things were arranged differently because the flat had a laboratory. Or maybe magic flats were different. Going up the stairs, Harry could smell the scent of bacon wafting down, and he tried not to go so fast up the stairs that he bumped into Draco.

In the kitchen, eggs were flipping themselves in a pan on the cooker, while oranges squeezed themselves into a pitcher. Bacon sizzled on another pan beside the eggs, and pieces of bread floated just over the flames, toasting. Milk and jam sat on the table, with sun was streaming in on them through the blue curtains. Harry thought he’d never seen anything look so nice.

When Harry sat at the table, the food started flying over to a plate in front of him. Draco sat in a chair across from him, food flipping onto his plate as well. All of it smelled delicious. Unfolding a napkin, Draco laid it on his lap, so Harry mimicked him. Then Draco poured a glass of orange juice with his wand, directing the glass in front of Harry. Draco poured another glass for himself and picked up a fork. Harry picked up a fork as well.

“Am I allowed to eat it?” Harry said, trying not to sound too excited.

“Yes, Harry,” Draco said. “You’re allowed to eat it.”

Harry tucked in immediately.

“Just don’t eat too much,” Draco added.

“I won’t,” Harry said, his mouth completely full.

“Now I know where you got those table manners,” Draco said, cutting his eggs before eating anything at all.

*What table manners?* Harry wanted to ask, but he was too busy eating. Everything tasted absolutely
fantastic, and Draco showed him a butter spell, which you could use to butter the bread and get jam on it. The bacon, to Harry’s disappointment, was on a dish in the middle instead of having floated directly onto his plate, like the toast and eggs.

“You never said how you slept,” Draco said, after Harry had got to eat a whole two eggs and a piece of toast with butter and jam.

“Great,” Harry said, his mouth full of toast.

“No bad dreams?”

“No.” Harry reached for another piece of toast. “I never got to sleep in a bed before.”

Draco’s fork clattered on his plate. Harry guessed maybe Draco’s table manners weren’t perfect either, since he was dropping cutlery on his dishes. Or maybe he knew how Harry had slept in Dudley’s bed that one time.

“I mean I was never allowed to,” Harry said. “Am I allowed to have the bacon?”

“Harry,” Draco said, sounding so upset that Harry looked up, his mouth full of the toast. Draco had a terribly distressed look on his face. Maybe Harry’s table manners really were just that bad. Or maybe he wasn’t allowed to have the bacon after all.

“Have the bacon,” Draco said. “Have—Harry, have all the bacon.”

There were a whole six strips of bacon, there. Harry looked from the dish back up to Draco, who still looked awfully distressed. “You said not to eat too much,” Harry said.

“Where did you sleep?” Draco asked. “If you—if you—you don’t sleep on a bed.”

Harry took another bite of toast, speaking with his mouth full. “I’ve a sleeping bag. Are you sure about the bacon?” Though Harry reached out for it, he hesitated.

“I’m sure,” Draco said, nudging the dish of bacon closer to Harry.

Stabbing a slice with his fork, Harry put the bacon on his plate and began cutting it up.

“Slowly, Harry.”

Draco’s voice was so low and rough that Harry looked up in surprise, his mouth full of bacon, but Draco was already standing, picking up his plate and turning from the table. Harry guessed Draco wasn’t hungry any more.

For a few minutes, Draco did things with the dishes—washing up, Harry guessed, even though with Scourgify it shouldn’t have taken that long. Maybe it was different with washing up. Draco’s back was to Harry while Harry polished off the bacon, but at last Draco turned around and said, “I’ll transfigure some clothes for you while you have a shower. You—you are allowed to shower, aren’t you?”

“Yeah,” Harry said, pushing the bacon around his plate to get some jam on it. “What, wizards don’t?”

“Wizards do,” Draco said, sounding very relieved about it.

After breakfast Draco wouldn’t let Harry even clean his plate, casting a Scourgify on it and putting it
away. If the washing up was really that simple Harry didn’t understand what had taken so long earlier, but he figured it was best not to argue. After that, Draco gave him towels and then left Harry in the bathroom, saying he’d put the new clothes in there with a spell.

No one had taken all the hot water first, so he got to have a nice shower, and sure enough, when he got out and got his glasses back on and clean enough from steam to see, he saw clothes were waiting, folded up on the seat of the toilet. Never having had clothes that fit before, Harry had never been too concerned about them, but these were very nice. The tan trousers felt soft and slick all at once, and the grey-green jumper wasn’t hot or scratchy at all. Harry was embarrassed that Draco had had to make him magic underwear as well, but he was grateful for it, and it was clean and fit for once, so it was really the nicest underwear he’d ever had. Draco had left socks and shoes, so Harry put those on as well.

Once dressed, he felt a little silly—like Dudley getting ready for one of those photos Aunt Petunia had taken of him in his Smeltings uniform. Still, being in clothes made especially for him felt very nice, and Draco was quite posh. Looking in the mirror, Harry tried to comb his wet, unruly hair, just so he would look like less of the urchin Aunt Petunia always said he looked like.

When Harry came out of the bathroom into the kitchen, Draco wasn’t there, but the silver fox was sat just outside the door. “Uh, hello,” Harry said, feeling a little foolish talking to it when it was incorporeal—that meant you could put your hand through it, he’d learned. The fox trotted over to the door that led to the sitting room, which Harry thought a bit odd since he’d seen that she could walk through walls. Guessing from this that the fox wanted him to follow her, Harry went on into the sitting room, then followed her down the stairs.

In the lab on the ground level, a hundred things were going on. Fires were in all the hearths with pots bubbling on them, spoons stirring in the pots. Knives chopped things on the tables; droppers pinched liquids into phials. Feather quills jotted notes on floating parchment, and Draco sat before a bulb of bubbling liquid, slowly shaking out packets of powder into a little bowl.

“Hello, Harry,” Draco said, when Harry stopped, slack-jawed, in the middle of the room. “Would you like to come see?”

Harry came over to the bench where Draco was working, noting the floating spoon measuring out ooze and the sieve that appeared to be straining wiggling hairballs.

“I’ve been working on the de-ageing potion,” Draco said.

In front of him, Draco had powders and seeds and things that looked like mouse ears, but Harry didn’t know what any of it meant. He noticed, however, that Draco seemed tired. Harry hadn’t seen it earlier because he’d just woken up, and then he’d been so hungry. He should have noticed because Draco had said, I was in the lab, when he’d explained how he’d let Harry sleep in his bed. Draco hadn’t been to sleep at all, Harry realized. He’d been in here the whole night, chopping up mouse ears, except he’d stopped to make Harry breakfast and transfigure him clothes. For some reason it made Harry’s chest hurt like something that was really sad, only it shouldn’t have, because it was nice.

“I’ve narrowed down a list of ingredients based on those diagnostics I ran, but I’ve quite a bit of work left,” Draco said.

“Can I help?” Harry asked, even though he didn’t know anything about mouse ears.

Draco seemed to hesitate. “I’d like to run some more diagnostics, if that’s okay.” Moving aside,
Draco pointed at the floor, and a stool appeared there. Harry wondered whether the stool was from the other side of the room, or whether Draco had just made it out of thin air, but instead of asking, Harry sat down in it, guessing that was what Draco wanted.

“This first one may move your hair a bit,” Draco said, pointing his wand. “I see you did comb it, so I’ll try not to muss it.”

Harry put a self-conscious hand to his hair.

“It looks very handsome,” Draco added.

Feeling himself blush, Harry shifted in his chair. He bet all the girls found Draco very handsome too.

Draco cast the first spell, then after a moment said, “Excellent, Harry,” Draco said, even though Harry hadn’t done anything yet. “I’m just going to cast some spells—I won’t touch you. Let me know if anything feels uncomfortable.” Then Draco pointed his wand, saying an incantation.

Harry went on not doing anything, while Draco continued pointing his wand at him and saying incantations, making parts of Harry light up and his toes wiggle and so on. It was sort of interesting at first but eventually got to be right boring. The glowing fox sat on the other side of the lab, staring at him. “Is the fox watching me?” Harry asked.

“Hm?” Draco had a pencil behind his ear, and he was scribbling on a scroll-thing with a feather quill.

“The Patronum—us,” Harry said. “It was there when I woke up.”

“Oh,” Draco said. “I wanted her to monitor you in case anything happened to you. I would have asked, except—you fell so fast asleep.”

“Sorry.”

Draco smiled faintly. “That’s all right, Harry. You had a very long day. Does she bother you?”

“I guess not.” Harry thought about it. “Was she watching in—in the shower?”

“Ah, no,” Draco said. “She was watching the door, just in case you left.”

“Oh. Where would I go?”

“I don’t know, Harry,” Draco said, seeming very interested in his scroll-thing all the sudden. “Where were you going last night when I left the room to get that Cure-All?”

“I dunno,” Harry said. “Only then, I thought you’d kidnapped me.”

“And now?”

“What are you saying?” Harry asked. “I thought I was meant to be thirty-one, and that’s how I ended up here.”

“You are most definitely thirty-one,” Draco said, turning to him. “What I’m saying is that I know nothing about the way children’s minds work, and yet despite like my lack of experience, you are in my sole custody. Knowing what I know now, I’ve realized—that’s quite a big responsibility. If you were to be harmed, I would find it impossible to live with myself, and believe me. Living with myself is already hard enough as it is.” The scroll-thing snapped up behind him, the small thwip sound of paper slapping on paper sounding like definitive punctuation.
“Why is it hard to live with yourself?” Harry asked curiously.

Just then Heloise came swooping in from the doorway to the upstairs, and Harry wondered whether she’d slept up there, or if she hadn’t, how she’d got in. She had a brown paper package in her talons, which she dropped on Draco’s lap. Then she flapped over to land near the window, on a bar Harry hadn’t noticed before.

“Would you like to give her a treat?” Draco said, beginning to open the package.

Harry thought it was a rather neat way for Draco to get out of the question he’d been asked, but Harry was distracted by the prospect of feeding the owl. Owls ate rodents, Harry had learned in school. “Do you mean the mouse ears?”

Draco looked at him, startled, and then his lips twitched in what Harry recognized as a smile. “Accio owl treats.” A drawstring bag floated over to him.

On her perch, Heloise shifted from foot to foot.

“See if you can find a mouse ear in that,” Draco said, handing Harry the bag. “She likes them best.”

The bag didn’t have mouse ears at all, and Harry realized Draco was teasing him. The teasing didn’t feel mean, however, and when Harry went over the with the treats, Heloise took a bit of dried meat out of Harry’s hand quickly, without touching him with her beak at all. Glancing back at Draco, Harry reached out his hand toward Heloise’s head. “Can I?”

“Go ahead. She likes you,” Draco said, pulling a book out of the brown paper.

Draco had said that same thing about the fox, but Harry didn’t see why it couldn’t be true. Tentatively, he petted Heloise’s head again. She closed her eyes, head pressing down into her neck. Harry guessed that meant she liked getting petted.

“We’re done with the diagnostics for now,” Draco said, coming over toward the window. “I got this for you.”

“Go ahead. She likes you,” Draco said, pulling a book out of the brown paper.

Draco’s lips quirked again. “It’s an in-between birthday, remember? You get a present each day and anything you want to eat. And a bed to sleep in,” he added, sounding a little angry about that.

Maybe he didn’t like Harry sleeping in his bed after all.

But whatever, Draco had got Harry a present. Even though books were boring, Harry had had very few presents before, and the idea that Draco had got it for him made him feel a bit overwhelmed. “I haven’t got one for you.”

“What?”

“It’s your in-between birthday too, isn’t it?”

Draco opened his mouth. He seemed nonplussed.

“Isn’t that how you said it worked?”

Draco shut his mouth. “Yes. I—you needn’t worry about my in-between birthday, Harry. I’m thirty-two. That’s too old for in-between birthdays.”
“But you said I’m thirty-one.”

“You’re not thirty-one now,” Draco said, “and that means you haven’t had nearly enough birthdays. Aren’t you going to look at it?”

“What?”

“Your book.” Draco gestured toward the book Harry was clutching to his chest, so Harry took a look at it.

*Spells for Beginners, A Book for Underaged Witches and Wizards*, the front read. Underneath that, it said something about being in accordance with a decree about underage sorcery, but Harry’s eyes were getting tired just looking at it. He hated reading.

“It’s a spell book,” Draco said, as though Harry couldn’t read, when the problem was that he was bored by it. “I thought you could learn some more magic while I work on the potion.” He held out Harry’s wand.

“You’re not going to teach me?” Harry said, taking the wand and trying not to sound disappointed.

“I would love to,” Draco said, and he said it so sincerely that Harry believed him. “But I have to work on this potion. How about you read up until lunch-time, and then you can show me what you learned? I can help you with anything you need then.”

Excited by the prospect of lunch, Harry said okay.

The book had a few pictures, though Harry couldn’t quite tell how he felt about them. Pictures were much better than words, but teachers gave you books with pictures when they thought you were too stupid to read well. But the pictures in this book were a bit technical, sort of like pictures in a coursebook. Harry hadn’t got to use many coursebooks yet as he was just finishing up year six, but he’d thought secondary school was going to be all right. No one would know him there, so that would be better.

Then the pictures began to move, and Harry decided exactly what to feel about them.

Harry tried to read the book, but working out the letters one by one with his finger was so dull, and the moving pictures made the letters seem to jump around even more. For a long time—probably nearly fifteen minutes or so—Harry really worked at it, but after that he started just looking at the pictures. They showed the wand movements the words described, and he’d read enough about the first spell to figure out the incantation. Swishing the wand around, he tried to do the folding spell, using a flannel on one of the tables for practice.

It got boring eventually, but Harry was used to being locked up in the cupboard for hours on end. This was far more interesting than that. Draco looked busy, so Harry tried to learn the next spell, which was about making a cloud.

After a few hours Draco rolled up his scrolls, stoppered his bottles, put the quill down on the bench, and came over to where Harry was trying to learn the spells. “Are you finished already?” Draco said, smiling down at the book, forgot on the table.

“Er,” Harry said. “I can do the folding spell.”

“And *Aguamenti*?”

“Um.”
Draco didn’t stop smiling. “How about you show me all the things you learned?” he suggested, so Harry showed him the folding spell with the flannel.

And then tried to do the cloud.

“Like this,” Draco said. “Gather the water suspended in the air around you—” He showed Harry with his wand—“and _Frigua._” A cloud came out the end of his wand.

“_Frigua_,” Harry said, trying to mimic Draco’s movements. A cloud came out the end of his wand as well.

“Very good, Harry,” Draco said, smiling again. “What else did you learn? How about the dust-banishing one?”

“I don’t really know it,” Harry said.

“That’s okay. What about the drying charm?”

Harry shook his head.

Smile fading, Draco went over to look at the book. He flipped through it a bit, probably checking how much Harry hadn’t read. “You didn’t find the other spells interesting?” Draco said, turning back to Harry.

Harry tried to think of something to say. Draco had told him not to pretend things. “Maybe you could teach me,” Harry said finally. “You’re much better than some old book.”

“Oh.” Draco’s eyes widened a bit. “I forgot.”

“Forgot what?”

“You never much liked studying in school,” said Draco. “I always thought—you always had better things to do. Important things, some of the time. I always just thought you—” Draco broke off.

“That’s right,” Harry said quickly. “I never much liked studying. It’s—I don’t like it.”

“I thought you might like it if there were spells to learn.” Draco’s brow furrowed. “You do like magic, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Just not when you have to read it.”

Harry thought that seemed obvious enough, so he didn’t say anything.

“Has anyone told you you shouldn’t read?”

Draco sounded so concerned, to the point where he was beginning to sound like one of those nice teachers who said bad things about him. You’re under-developed, Harry. There’s something called attention-deficit, Harry.

“Has someone told you you can’t?”

“No,” Harry said.

Draco picked up the book again. “We could read together, if you like,” he suggested, holding it out.
“I can read,” Harry said, backing up a step. “I’m not a freak.”

“Of course, you can read; I meant—” Draco cut himself off. “Never mind, Harry. You don’t have to do a single thing you don’t want to, as long as you’re sure you don’t want to do it.” Turning away, Draco tapped on the book, and it disappeared into thin air.

Harry scowled at him, feeling a bit suspicious at the change in tone.

“Lunch,” Draco said next, his voice decisive. “What would you like? We could have a beef stew, or a turkey curry, or even another breakfast, if you like. What do you fancy?”

Still feeling wary, Harry felt pretty sure Draco was trying to placate him for some reason or other. Still, the idea of getting to pick what to eat was definitely attractive. “Can we have fish and chips?” Harry piped up, after thinking about it a moment.

Draco’s lips quirked. “Yes. Of course.”

*I*

“I think we need to go on a little trip,” Draco said, directly after lunch.

Harry wasn’t sure what to think about that. “A little trip” was usually a bad thing, like when the Dursleys had taken Harry to the doctor and he’d ended up with glasses. In the end, glasses had been an improvement, since he didn’t get headaches when he wore them and could see the words better when he read, but it didn’t stop making the letters jump. Furthermore, the glasses were uncomfortable to wear, and Harry had got beat up a lot for wearing them. But Draco was really cool and probably wouldn’t take him anywhere bad, except he was waiting to see Harry’s reaction, like adults did when they were tricking you.

Harry waited to see what Draco would do, but Draco just stood up, using his wand to clear the lunch things. “What do you think of that?” Draco asked as he began the washing up. “Would you like to get outside for a bit?”

“Where?” Harry asked suspiciously. Draco might be taking him to see Dudley again. Or worse, maybe he had found Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia. For the first time, it occurred to Harry that they would be really old by now. Or maybe dead.

Harry tried to decide whether he felt anything about that.

“To your house,” Draco said.

“I have a house?” Harry said, all other thoughts leaving his head.

Draco nodded. “I don’t suppose you’d appreciate me going there without your permission, but I need to check some things.”

“But I thought you said I could go with you?”

“Yes, of course,” Draco said. “I meant the permission of thirty-year-old you.”

“What do you need to check?” Harry’s brain was skipping ahead. “Do I have a dog?”

“A dog?”

“Yeah, a brown one? Or a white one, with black spots? And it hasn’t seen thirty-year-old me in days and days, so it needs to eat?”
“I don’t know, actually. You haven’t confided much to me about such things.” Seeing the look on Harry’s face, Draco added more gently, “But I think I would have heard about it if you had a dog. I don’t believe you do.”

“Oh.”

Draco’s tone went gentler still. “You used to have a beautiful owl, though, Harry.” Finished with the washing up, Draco started heading to the sitting room, so Harry followed. “The best-looking owl in the whole school.” They went downstairs.

“Did she deliver things?” Harry asked. “Like your owl?”

“Yes, and she was snow white.” Using his wand, Draco floated things from around the room into a bag. “Everyone was jealous of her.”

“What happened to her? Don’t I have her anymore?”

“She died, but she must have had a very good life. Do you know how I know, Harry?”

“How?”

“Because she had you for a friend.”

Though it was a cheesy thing to say, Draco sounded as though he meant it. He held his hand out, and Harry took it.

“Are you ready?” Draco asked.

Harry looked up at him. “To go to my house?”

“Yes.”

“I guess,” Harry said, and the room began to melt.

*

They pushed through the cold blackness onto a street with row houses. The street was neat and quiet with a little park on the other side, so Harry thought it was probably posh, even though the houses looked sort of rundown. The sign on the street read Grimmauld Place. “Can you see number twelve, Harry?” Draco said, still holding his hand.

“What?” Harry began, but even as he was saying it the houses began to shift, another house bulging in between two in the middle, like a bubble forming in mud. Then the house finally snapped into place, straightening out and standing to attention just as though it had been there all along. “Whoa,” Harry breathed.

“It’s rather fun, isn’t it?” Draco said, tugging Harry’s hand. “Come along.”

“What do you need to check?” Harry asked, going with Draco up the worn front steps.

“Hm?” Draco looked one way, then then the other, then tapped on the door with his wand.

He didn’t want to be seen, Harry guessed, and the door swung open.

“You’d better go first, Harry,” Draco said, letting go his hand.
“Why?”

“I don’t know if the wards will admit me on my own,” Draco said, “but it should recognize you, even if you’re not the right age.”

Harry had no idea what Draco meant, but he did what Draco said anyway, stepping into a long, dark hall. Draco came in after him, shutting the door behind him and then lighting gas lamps in the entryway with his wand. The lamps did little to dispel the gloom hanging in the house, which seemed full of rather more shadows than necessary. Harry didn’t understand why he would live in such a dismal place, though it did seem as though it had once been rather grand.

“Did it recognize me?” Harry asked, looking around as though some part of the house might nod to him or say hello.

“It must have done,” Draco said. “Upstairs, I think.”

“You said you needed to check something here,” Harry reminded him, as they climbed the stairs. “What is it?”

“Well, Harry.” Draco glanced down at him. “I’m trying to ID the potion that fell on you—that’s the best way to devise a cure, in most instances. Reverse engineering. But—Lumos.” A light shone at the end of Draco’s wand. They’d reached a landing with several doors, and Draco chose the one to the right. “I’m having trouble with the ID. It’s got to be quite complex, to de-age both your body and mind so thoroughly, and it’s looking as though it’s not temporary. It would really help if I could talk to the brewer—but of course, that’s impossible.”

“Why?” Harry asked. They were in what seemed to be an office. A desk stood in one corner by a window, while the opposite side had shelves full of weird odds and ends—bottles and phials, like in Draco’s laboratory, but also equipment, things that looked like microscopes and a hand mixer and possibly a nut cracker.

“Potter was trying to figure out something he thinks involved several different brewers,” Draco said. “If he knew who some of them were, he didn’t tell me. I was hoping we could find a clue somewhere here.”

“You call old-me Potter?”

Draco had been poking around papers the desk, but now he looked up, his mouth falling open a bit in surprise. “Only . . .” He began, then swallowed. “That’s what we called each other in school. I . . .” Draco turned back to the desk. “I was a bit of a prat, and I called everyone by surnames. Even my friends. It was—I thought it was cool.”

“And we weren’t friends,” Harry said, hoping maybe the answer had changed since they’d last talked about it. That had been a while ago; maybe Draco had just forgot what great friends they’d been at the magical school where they learned magical things.

“Ah, no.” Draco seemed to find something very interesting in the desk, because he leaned in to look at it, fiddling with one of the drawers. “You weren’t friends with prats, only—only the right sort of people, who you could always identify all by yourself.”

“Then who were you friends with?” Harry asked.

“The wrong sort,” Draco said, shoving the drawer back into the desk.

“But we’re friends now,” Harry said hopefully, wishing Draco would look over at him. He didn’t
know why. He just thought it would be nice, because Draco’s eyes were very nice, and Harry liked for Draco to be pleased. He hoped Draco was pleased about being friends, but Draco was busy opening another drawer.

“Oh, yes, we’re very good friends now,” he said, shoving in that drawer too. “But just for your future reference, I very much wanted to be your friend then, too, only you—I went about it badly. I was—I was rather terrible.”

“I don’t think you’re terrible,” Harry said, coming over to the desk. Draco said they had to look for clues.

“Yes, well.” Draco picked up some of the papers, rifling through them. “I would say your frame of reference is rather skewed, at this age.” Tossing the papers back down, he turned on his heel and headed toward the door. “Come along, Harry. There isn’t anything here.”

Rushing to catch up, Harry followed Draco back out to the landing. “What do you mean, my ‘frame of reference is skewed’?”

“Nothing,” Draco said, opening another door. Inside was a bedroom covered in a fine layer of dust. You certainly meant something, Harry wanted to say. Instead, he said, “Are you angry?”

“No.” Draco closed the door again and opened another door.

You seem angry, Harry wanted to say, but knew better than to say anything this time. This room was full of shelves and boxes but looked as if it was perhaps used more often, as there was not nearly so much dust.

“I’m sorry,” Draco said abruptly, turning toward him. “I’m sorry, Harry. I shouldn’t have—” He reached out, and Harry flinched.

Harry hadn’t meant to. He really, really hadn’t meant to, only Draco had seemed so upset; it had made Harry feel tense, like his insides were knotting up. A part of him had already been thinking of going to the cupboard, even though Draco would never send him there. Draco didn’t even know about the cupboard, but it was too late.

Draco pulled back, looking stricken. “I’m sorry,” he said again, his voice hoarse.

“For what?” Embarrassed, Harry pushed past him, looking in one of the boxes. Draco had said they needed a clue. The box was full of papers in folders, like old files. Harry moved on to the next one.

After a long moment, Harry heard Draco move. When Harry snuck a glance, Draco was looking at things on the shelves.

“I’m frustrated,” Draco said, after Harry had moved through two more of the boxes.

Draco hadn’t seemed to be making much progress on the shelves.

“I should have fixed the de-ageing by now. You were depending on me to fix it.”

“No, I wasn’t.” A little moodily, Harry pushed one of the boxes aside and started on the next. Most of them were filled with boring old files.

Draco turned to look at him. “I meant older-you. He was depending on me.”

Harry sort of hated older-him. Taking the folders out of the box, he looked at the labels on them, then
tossed them back.

“That was why he brought me to—where we were when you de-aged,” Draco went on, and Harry didn’t want to hear it. It sounded like a boring story anyway, except it was about him, so he couldn’t help being interested in spite of himself. Pretending like he wasn’t listening, he moved on to the next box. “I don’t know where we were,” Draco said, “when the potion fell on you. But he brought me because he—he thinks I’m all right at potions, and he needed my help. And—and I wanted to help him, except now I haven’t done, and I know he wouldn’t like me breaking into his house—”

“That’s the prat,” Harry heard himself snap, and he hadn’t meant to. He hadn’t meant to say anything at all, except then he started saying an awful lot. “He’s the prat, if you can’t go to his house when you’re trying to help him, especially as—” Harry shoved his glasses up—“as it’s my house and he’s me, and I say it’s all right.”

Draco stared at him.

Turning away, Harry started on another box. He mostly just wanted to be doing something that wasn’t looking at Draco’s long elegant face.

“You’re right, Harry,” Draco said. “Like I said, I was frustrated. I got irritable, and I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Harry said, turning from the box of files to the next, only to realize that there were no more boxes. “What sort of clue are we looking for, anyway?” he asked.

“Yes,” Draco finally moved to look at one of the boxes. “Something to do with some recent cases dealing with potions. He thought that there were different brewers, but that the cases were connected by a common element between them, such as someone to supply the ingredients.”

“Those ones are the most recent,” Harry said, pointing to a box.

Draco looked over at it, surprised, then took out one of the folders and began leafing through it.

After a minute or two, Harry went over there to help. The prospect of reading all those old papers wasn’t terrible exciting to him, but the folders had dates on them. He could help sort them. Getting started on the papers, Harry said, “You never told me what an Auror is. Is it a sort of barrister?”

Draco’s eyes slid over to him, then went back to the papers. “An Auror is . . .” Setting down the file, he picked up another one. Harry put the one Draco had already looked at back in the box. “Police,” Draco said abruptly, turning back to Harry. “It’s like a Muggle policeman, except for wizards. They find wizards and witches who are breaking the law, and they incarcerate them.”

“What’s incarcerate?” Harry asked, before he could stop himself.

“They imprison them,” Draco said, turning back to his papers. “They put them in wizarding prison.”

“Oh,” Harry flipped through the papers, reading the tops of them to try to determine whether they had anything useful. Most of them seemed to be about spells people should not have done, for one reason or another—you weren’t supposed to do spells in front of Muggles, he gathered, and you weren’t supposed to do magic when you were young. Harry wondered whether that was what the front of that book Draco had given him had been on about, when it mentioned a decree about underage magic. None of the papers seemed to be about murders or fires or bombs, which were the sort of things police had to deal with.

Harry wondered whether old-him liked being an Auror. He’d never thought about being a policeman before. “Do I make a lot of money?” he asked finally.
“Not at all,” Draco said, setting down another folder, which Harry put back in the box.

“Then why have I got a whole house?” Even if the house was narrow it was a lot of storeys, and it was in London. Harry didn’t know anything about real estate, but it seemed like kind of a lot for one person.

“Your godfather gave it to you.”

“I don’t have a godfather.” Draco didn’t say anything, so Harry guessed he hadn’t heard. “I said, I don’t have a godfather.”

“I’m sorry, Harry.” Draco’s voice sounded strained, but Harry couldn’t see his face. He was staring down at the papers, not looking at him. “You did.”

“Then how come I don’t know about him?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t know. Harry.” Draco whirled suddenly. “His name was Sirius Black.”

“Oh.”

“He loved you,” Draco added, his voice sounding unexpectedly urgent.

“How could he? I never met him.”

“But you will,” Draco said. “I think he must have wanted to meet you—very badly. He tried to find you—he tried so hard to get to you.”

“He can’t have been trying all that hard.” Harry took a step back. “Uncle Vernon is in the telephone directory.”

“He was imprisoned,” Draco said.

_Incarcerated_, went Harry’s unhelpful brain.

“For a crime he didn’t commit,” Draco went on.

Harry thought about that, and the fact Draco had been saying “was,” as though Sirius Black was no longer around. The heavy feeling of inevitability settled on Harry’s shoulders. “What happened to him?”

“He died,” Draco said, which was what Harry had been expecting to hear.

It was still disappointing.

“I’m sorry, Harry.”

Harry made himself shrug. “I don’t know him. I guess it will be sad later.”

“It’s all right to be sad now.”

“Do you expect me to cry about it?”

“No, Harry, I meant—” Draco sounded a bit like he might cry, himself. “I meant it’s okay to express how you feel.”

“I don’t feel anything.”
Silence filled the room like a slowly expanding balloon, like Number Twelve squeezing between Eleven and Thirteen.

“All right, Harry,” Draco said, his voice deflating the balloon in the gentlest way. “That’s all right. Would you like to sit with me? We can put these papers in proper order.” Sitting on the ground, Draco laid out the papers in piles.

For a while they worked on the files, sorting them out by date, then by case. Harry skimmed the tops of the papers, which still seemed mostly boring, but Draco read through a few of them.

“Many of these aren’t Pot—your cases,” Draco said, correcting himself, “and there are a great deal of files. I wonder if you were cross-referencing older Ministry cases to look for a pattern that matched your current suspect.”

“Cross-referencing” didn’t sound very much like him, but Harry didn’t say anything. Maybe he got smarter when he got older.

“If you did find a pattern you probably didn’t leave the relevant files in boxes. Would you like to see what else we can find?” Standing, Draco offered Harry his hand.

Harry looked up at it, thinking maybe Draco was going to pop them upstairs with the magical appearing spell. Instead, when Harry took his hand, Draco pulled, helping Harry to his feet—but then he didn’t instantly pull his hand away, and Harry tightened his grip. Petunia held Dudley’s hand all the time; sometimes friends did it at school, but no one had ever done it with him. Draco didn’t seem to mind it, however.

The second storey had some more musty bedrooms with a bathroom between them, and Draco stopped there to pick up some hairs from the drain of the sink. “What are you doing?” Harry asked.

“They might be necessary for the work I’m doing on the cure,” Draco said, putting the hairs into an envelope he had in his cloak.

“Some old hair?” Harry asked, making a face.

“Old hair, precisely.” Draco’s lips twitched into a smile. “These are hairs from your older self, which can help me determine how old to make you when we fix it. Don’t worry, Harry,” Draco added, apparently seeing Harry’s disgusted expression. “I’m just taking them as a precaution; we may not need them.”

Exiting the bathroom, they went on up to the top storey, opening the next door into a bedroom that appeared to be used regularly. Realizing that this must be the room old-him used, Harry wandered around a bit. A bed stood against the far wall with a small bedside table with a drawer in it. A large chest of drawers stood against the wall perpendicular, next to a comfortable-looking chair. The bed was messy, and clothes were strewn about, along with trainers, some dishes, and more papers. Harry went to go check out the cupboard while Draco began to investigate the room.

In the cupboard, long robes and cloaks hung on hooks next to some other clothes that seemed pretty nice. Harry tried on one of the coats just for fun, finding some weird gold coins in the pocket. Not wanting to steal, he put the coins back and the coat back on its hook. Three or four brooms stood in the corner, which seemed odd as Harry had never been a particular fan of cleaning, and the room outside was hardly immaculate.

When Harry left the cupboard to see what else was in the room, Draco was standing by the bedside table, holding a green square of cloth and a bundle of papers. A little frown between his brows,
Draco continued to stare at the green cloth as Harry moved into the room. Thinking the cloth must be important, Harry went over to him. “What’s that?”

“It’s nothing,” Draco said, shoving the cloth and bundle of papers into the drawer and then snapping it shut with his wand.

As he did so, Harry caught sight of a slender box on the bedside table. It seemed like it had to be electronic, seeing as how a cord was coming out of it, attached to something behind the table. It was the first electronic thing Harry had seen in the house, besides maybe the hand mixer. “What is it?” Harry asked, pressing the button on the front. A picture filled the black space on the top of the box—a brown-haired girl and a red-haired man.

“It’s a mobile.”

“You said a mobile was a telephone,” Harry accused, confused enough that he forgot all about the green cloth.

“It is a telephone,” Draco said. “It can hold pictures, too.”

“Who are they?” Harry asked, looking more closely at the brown-haired girl and red-headed man.

“Those are friends of yours. From Hogwarts.”

“I had friends?” Harry picked up the telephone—mobile—to look at it more closely. The bottom of the picture had a bar that said, ‘slide to unlock’.

“Of course you—” Cutting himself off, Draco looked down at him. “Yes, Harry,” he said seriously. “You had friends. Those were your two best ones.”

Harry remembered now; Draco had said Harry was friends with “the right sort.” In the picture the brown-haired girl was smiling, while the red-haired man was throwing his head back to laugh. “They look old,” Harry said. “Am I friends with them now?”

“Yes. You—you’re still friends with them now.”

“Do you think I might’ve talked to them about my cases?” Harry thought if he really had friends, he’d tell them everything—and they could do everything together, like solve crime and take laughing pictures. Every day they’d have fish and chips for lunch.

“You might have done.”

“So then, do you think they might know something?” Harry said. “Maybe we could call them to ask them about the potion brewer.” The bar at the bottom didn’t have an obvious way to slide it, but he tried doing it with his thumb. The picture changed to a different picture with a bunch of little pictures on it.

“Ah.” Moving away, Draco began to sweep up the clothes strewn about the room. “I don’t think that would be such a good idea.”

“Why not?”

Draco picked up the trainers off the floor. “When you came to me—about the case you were working on—you said . . .” Going to put the cloak and trainers he’d collected into the cupboard, Draco turned away from Harry. “You said others from the Ministry could be involved.”
“What’s the Ministry?”


“What does that have to do with anything?”

“It means . . . Harry, Granger and Weasley—your two friends—both of them work for the Ministry.”

“You’re saying I don’t trust my friends?”

“You said . . .” Flicking off the light in the cupboard, Draco turned to face him, and Harry was suddenly struck by how tired he looked. The spaces under his eyes looked smudged, as if with shadows or bruises. “You said I was the only one you could trust.”

“But you said we’re not friends,” Harry said.

“I don’t know why you said it. I’m just trying to—I just—you said it, so I’m . . . I’ll fix it. I can fix it, Harry. You said you trusted me, that I was . . . I don’t need anyone’s help.” The bags under Draco’s eyes made him look unhappy—rather desperately unhappy, and his mouth turned down.

“Except for mine,” Harry said.


Harry pushed his glasses up. “I trust you, too. For the record.”

Draco swallowed hard. “Let’s . . .” Walking over to Harry, he offered his hand again. Putting down the mobile, Harry took his hand. “Come along with me. I’ll show you the Floo.”

“What’s a Floo?”

Holding hands together, they went out of the room and down the stairs.

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A Floo turned out to be the hearth, which served as a magical transportation device. Draco said most wizards and witches kept Floo powder on their chimney pieces. Finding old-Harry’s, Draco took a pinch from the pot and threw it in the fire, which turned green. When they stepped inside it, it wasn’t hot at all, and Draco said, “Tailored Tinctures.” This whooshed them from the hearth in Number Twelve to one of the hearths in Draco’s laboratory.

“What’s Tailored Tinctures?” Harry asked.

“That’s where we are,” said Draco. “Would you like to help with more potions?”

Harry eagerly acquiesced, and they set about making something Draco called “indicator solutions.” They were potions you could use to test whether someone had eaten a particular ingredient, and Draco said he’d made them before for lots of things. He said he’d even made one to help Harry with his Auror work, but then he didn’t say anything more about it.

Draco had Harry stir some powders, then pull some wings off some dragonflies. The worst part was the sound they made if you didn’t pull them out just right; you could hear them crunch. Harry accidentally broke the head off one, but when he glanced quickly up at Draco to see whether he’d noticed, Draco was waving his wand. A small aquarium tank appeared, complete with fish swimming in it and a tiny squid. As it turned out, they had to scare the squid so they could get some ink from it.
“That’s not very nice for the squid,” Harry pointed out, once Draco had collected the ink.

“I’m not a very nice person,” Draco said, taking the metal bowl over to one of the black pots hanging on the bar over one of the hearths. The rim of the bowl lined up with the rim of the pot so that when Draco set the bowl on top, the bowl balanced perfectly on top of the pot and didn’t fall in.

“I think you’re nice,” Harry said, following him over to the hearth.

“Thank you, Harry.” Using his wand, Draco lit a fire underneath the pot, then started back over to his bench.

Harry followed him there as well. “You think my frame of reference is skewed.”

“I should not have said that.”

“Maybe you were right.” Harry pushed his glasses up. “The Dursleys aren’t very nice at all.”

“So I had gathered. How are you at chopping, Harry? We need those rat tails in quarter-inch bits.”

Harry shrugged. “Okay, I guess. Aunt Petunia has me chop the things that don’t need to be very small.”

“Do you remember the cutting spell I taught you when we made lunch?”

“Can I use it?” Harry said, feeling excited about getting to do magic again.

“You just need to keep moving the tails under the knife to ensure they’re the right length, and make sure your fingers don’t get caught.”

“Er,” Harry said, deflating a little. “I don’t know where I put my wand.”

“Here,” Draco said, drawing it out of his sleeve.

“Thank you, sir. I—I forgot it again.”

“That’s okay,” Draco said, his voice warm. “I’ll teach you a charm to keep it in your sleeve.”

“Like yours?” Harry said, head jerking up to see if Draco meant it.

“Yes.” Then Draco’s hand touched his shoulder, but it was in a nice way, and Draco was looking down at him with his silver eyes and pale throat and nice mouth. “We all have skewed perspectives. I should not have dismissed yours, especially as it—it means a great deal to me.”

“My perspective?” Harry asked, feeling a little confused.

“Yes, Harry. I value it—tremendously.”

“Oh,” Harry said, blushing a little. No one had ever said anything like that to him before, and it was weird how Draco’s hand hadn’t left his shoulder, but it was nice, too.

“Let me show you the chopping spell again. Just to be sure we’re safe,” Draco said, his hand slipping off, body turning slightly to show Harry the spell.

They went on like that for several hours—Draco showing Harry spells that chopped and stirred and scooped, brewing the potions until well into supper-time.
For supper they had fish and chips again, which Harry had asked for when Draco again told him he
could have anything he wanted. Draco hadn’t seemed excited to have it again, but he made it
anyway. Afterwards they had ice cream, because Draco said it was still their in-between birthday.

They hadn’t finished the potions yet, so Harry assumed they would go back downstairs after supper,
but instead Draco went to the sitting room and expanded the chair again with his wand. “There’s
something I want you to see,” he said, pointing his wand at the bookshelves to make a book float
over to them.

Fairly certain Draco was going to try to make him read, Harry warily sat on the edge of the couch
Draco had made, feeling nervous and annoyed. But Draco just put the large, fancy-covered book in
his lap and opened to a page in the middle. Out of the corner of his eye, Harry could see the page
was full of moving pictures, which made him feel even worse. Draco thought he couldn’t read at all.

“This is my Great Aunt Walburga,” Draco said instead. “She’s my mum’s aunt, on her father’s side.”

Harry instantly felt more interested. He bet Draco’s family was really cool.

When Harry looked at the picture, however, he saw a dour old woman frowning mightily at the
camera, then turning to snap at someone outside of the frame. Swallowing hard, Harry tried to think
of something nice to say. “She looks . . . very nice.”

Draco’s head went back, and he laughed, but it was a kind, rich sound, which Harry found
confusing but pleasant, nevertheless. “I think we can both agree she looks exactly like a vulture,”
Draco said, sounding amused. “She was tyrannical, too.”

“What does tyrannical mean?”

“A tyrant is someone who never lets you have any fun.”

“Oh. Do they punish you when you haven’t done anything wrong?”

There was a pause, and Harry looked up. Draco quickly turned the page. “I’m not sure. What sort of
punishment do you mean?”

“Like locking someone in a cupboard,” Harry said. “Sometimes for a whole week, and not getting to
eat proper meals.”

“Yes, I think that would qualify as tyrannical.” Draco’s voice was distant, as though he was thinking
of something else, and when he spoke again the tone was abrupt. “This book is quite heavy. I’m not
sure I want it on my lap this whole time. Would you help, Harry?”

Harry frowned up at him in confusion.

“If you sat closer, I could put this part of it on your lap,” Draco went on, demonstrating by budging
closer. “And here so we’re not squashed, I’ll put my arm around you this way, and you can turn the
pages.”

Draco’s arm slid around Harry’s shoulders. The book on Harry’s lap wasn’t that heavy; he wasn’t
really sure what Draco’s problem with it was, but now that he was sitting close to Draco it felt very
nice. Draco’s body was warm and solid, and he smelled like fish and chips and squid ink, and Harry
had never sat with anyone’s arm around him before, even though he’d seen other people do it all the
time.
“Here is Alphard,” Draco said, pointing out a picture of a man who looked about as dour as the tyrannical old woman. “He’s my great uncle, and not very important for the purposes of this family history.” He turned the page to reveal another old man. “And here is Cygnus Black, my grandfather on my mother’s side.”

“Black?” Harry said. “Like my godfather?”

“Precisely, Harry,” said Draco. “Now we’re coming to the point. Let’s get into the next generation. Here is Bellatrix, but we needn’t look at that old hag at all, and here is my Aunt Andromeda, who is quite pleasant, and here is my mum.”

“I want to look at your mum,” Harry said, because Draco was starting to turn the page. Draco went back, and Harry peered at the three portraits of the black-haired girl, the brown-haired girl, and the blonde. They looked young, between the ages of twelve and sixteen. “Which one is she?” he asked, but even as he was asking he already knew. The blonde girl was the most beautiful girl Harry had ever seen, and she looked exactly like a younger Draco.

Draco pointed her out. “You can’t see it in these pictures, but her eyes were blue.”

“Not silver, like yours?”

Draco must have found this amusing, because he smiled. “No, not silver.”

Besides the three individual portraits, the page had two other pictures of the three girls. In one of them they were posing nicely for a portrait, Draco’s mum smiling prettily and the black-haired one rolling her eyes. In the second, the brown-haired one and the black-haired one were turning to each other and drawing their wands, looking as though they were yelling. In that picture, Draco’s mum was still smiling that same pretty smile, but even though her mouth didn’t change her eyes did. They looked as though they were slowly freezing into ice, becoming a point of stillness with the action all around her.

“She’s so pretty,” Harry said, because she was.

“Yes,” Draco agreed.

“Do you love her very much?” Harry said, looking up at Draco.

“Yes, Harry.”

“Do you see her a lot? Where does she live? What about your dad?”

“I don’t have any pictures of my dad,” Draco said.

“Why not?”

The arm around Harry’s shoulders lifted, and Harry was certain he had said something wrong, but then Draco’s hand brushed in Harry’s hair. It swept the fringe away from his brow in a gentle motion, and then the arm was back around Harry’s shoulders, warm and reassuring. With his other hand, Draco turned the page. “You’re missing the point of this,” Draco said. “I didn’t want to show you my family history; I wanted to show you some of yours.”

“Mine?” Harry said, startled but beginning to feel excited.

“This is Sirius Black,” Draco said. “Your godfather.”
The portrait Draco was pointing to was of a young boy around Harry’s age. His hair was quite long and black, his expression annoyed. Both the expression and his hair reminded Harry of the black-haired girl from the previous page, as did his robes. Everyone else in all the pictures were dressed very nicely, but Sirius Black looked dishevelled, as if he didn’t care what he looked like. “Who’s that?” Harry asked, pointing to a portrait of a younger boy. He looked like he could be Draco, if Draco had dark hair and were not quite so handsome.

“Regulus Black,” said Draco. “Sirius’s brother. Both of them were great men, Harry.”

“You knew them?”

“No,” Draco said, “but I know about them.”

“Because of your mum?”

“No, because of you.” Draco gave Harry’s shoulder a squeeze.

“But we’re not friends.”

Draco’s lips twitched—something like a smile, but something like a frown too. “You’re very fond of reminding me of that fact.”

“It doesn’t seem right,” Harry said. “We should be friends.”

“I’ll tell you what,” Draco said. “If when you grow up you’d still like to be friends with me, I’ll agree to it.”

“I know I’d still like to be friends with you.” Harry looked down at the pictures. “Does this make us related? Because you have Blacks in your family?”

“I should hope not,” Draco said, closing the album.

“Oh.”

“Harry. I meant . . . parts of my family are so terrible, you wouldn’t want a part of it.”

“Which parts?”

“Bellatrix Lestrange, for starters.”

“The black-haired girl?”

“That’s the one.”

Harry thought she hadn’t looked so bad, but he supposed Draco knew better than he did. It seemed strange that Draco could have an awful family member and grow up to be so nice anyway, but Harry guessed Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia were technically members of his family, so maybe it didn’t make much of a difference.

“What really happened to my parents?” Harry asked. He’d been wondering about it since Draco had kept asking him about them the night before, and talking about their families reminded him.

Instead of using his wand, Draco stood to put the photo album away. “Your parents were wizards,” he said, putting the album carefully onto one of the shelves.

“Really?”
“Yes.” Draco seemed to be fiddling with the order of the books.

“What happened to them?”

“They... they died. They died defending you from...” Trailing off, Draco turned around and seemed to square his shoulders. He looked like someone from a horrible movie who was bravely going to be tortured, and Harry wondered whether he should have asked. But it was about his parents, and then Draco went on, “There was a man. He was—idiotic and powerful and arrogant. He thought he could—he was selfish and cruel, and thought he could control everybody, only he couldn’t. He couldn’t control your parents, or people like your parents, and they stood up to him, and they died for it.”

Harry tried to process all of that. “My aunt and uncle told me my parents died in a car crash.”

“Your aunt and uncle are filthy rotten liars,” Draco said vehemently, then turned back to the bookcase.

Harry stared at his back with wide eyes. None of the nice teachers had ever said anything like that to him before. Usually they remarked as to how having foster carers was difficult, but the Dursleys were really trying their best.

“They’re liars, Harry,” Draco said, selecting a different book from the shelf. He came back over to the sofa. “They’re liars, and you never have to go back to them, not if you don’t want to. I’m going to fix this.”

Not going back to Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia sounded nice. Draco was nice, except if he had really liked Harry, Harry would’ve been able to stay the age he was, when they were friends, instead of being thirty-one, when they weren’t. “What about the bad man?” Harry said, as Draco sat down next to him. “The one my parents stood up to? Did he get—incarcerated?”


“You mean he killed him?”

“Well.” Draco played with the edges of the book he had fetched. It looked old, but had a pretty cover, with green vines sewn into what looked like leather. “The bad man did end up dying, but really. He did it to himself.”

“Was it you?” Harry asked.

“Hm?”

“The very brave man.”

“Harry,” Draco said. “No.”

Harry tried to hide his disappointment.

“I’m sure you’ll meet him one day,” Draco said gently.

Harry didn’t care about meeting the very brave man. He felt fairly certain that Draco could have done it, had he been there, but Harry guessed it had happened a long time ago. His mind swirled with thoughts of the car crash he had always imagined and what Draco had said—Harry had always thought his mum and dad must have been good people, but to have Draco say it meant so much—Draco, who was kind and smart and strong and better than Aunt Petunia or Uncle Dursley ever
could be. Draco hadn’t known Harry’s parents—he was meant to be the same age as Harry—but he still thought Harry’s mum and dad were good, and they had been wizards. They had been magical like him, and Harry wondered whether Aunt Petunia and Uncle Dursley had known.

They must have known.

*Your aunt and uncle are filthy rotten liars,* Draco had said, and he’d sounded angry about it. He’d sounded really angry about it, but not at Harry, and something about that felt almost nice. Even though Draco really wished Harry was thirty-one, it still felt nice. Budging closer to Draco on the couch, Harry pretended to look at the book Draco had brought, thinking that perhaps Draco would put his arm around him again. “What’s that?” Harry said.

“Fairy tales,” said Draco.

“Oh,” Harry said, doing his best not to feel disappointed.

“Muggles have fairy tales, don’t they?”

“Right. Like . . . er.” Harry struggled to think of one. “Cinderella.”

“Cinderella is fantastic,” said Draco, which was even more disappointing, because Cinderella was dead boring. The idea that you could find out you had a magic godparent had always seemed so utterly unrealistic that Harry thought it was stupid. Draco went on, “I really like the part where the crows peck out the sisters’ eyes.”

“What?” Harry looked up at Draco, startled.

“That’s not in Cinderella.”

Draco’s brow furrowed. “I’m sure it is. I found the part where one of the sisters cut off her heel a bit disgusting though. Wouldn’t the shoe get bloody?”

“That’s not in Cinderella either.”

“Perhaps the Muggle version is sanitized.”

“What’s sanitized?”

“It means not as interesting.” Opening the book, Draco put his arm around him after all.

It felt so warm and good that Harry wanted to get even closer, which was stupid. It was so stupid, because Petunia was always cuddling Dudley, but that was because Dudley was a big baby. Harry didn’t want to be a baby, so he stayed where he was.

“When I was a boy my father used to read me these stories,” Draco said, checking the table of contents on the front and flipping open to a page. “Mum used to do it as well, but it was better when Father did.”

“Why?” Harry asked, because he wanted to hear all about Draco’s dad. Maybe he had been the brave wizard who had defeated the bad one—but if he had been Draco probably would’ve said. Maybe Draco hadn’t wanted to brag. Maybe—

“Father did all the voices,” Draco said. “I was wondering if you—would you want to listen to one of the stories?”

Harry had never had anyone read to him before, except sometimes in year one of primary school, when the teacher would read a book at the front of the class and show the pictures. “Would you do
the voices?” Harry asked, temporarily forgetting his reservations and squirming even closer. “Like your dad did?”

“Yes.” Draco’s arm curled around him, holding him warm and close. “I’ll do it just like Father did.”
Chapter 3

The next morning, Harry woke in a bed again. Blinking his eyes open, he reached for his glasses. When he put them on, he saw a silver fox, which stood up, turned around, and trotted off through a wall. This time Harry didn’t panic, finding his wand on the bedside table before he began to make the bed. Perhaps he should ask Draco about that bed-making spell. It was probably in that book Draco had given him, but Harry hadn’t read the book as he was meant to, and then Draco had made it disappear. Harry wondered whether Draco would like it if Harry asked for it back. Then again, he didn’t plan to keep sleeping in Draco’s bed. He hadn’t meant to sleep on it again this time; he must have fallen asleep and Draco had magicked him into it, as well as into a pair of pyjamas.

Harry half expected another knock on the door, just like the morning before. It didn’t come, so when he was done with the bed he opened the door and looked out of it to find Draco, working in the lab. His clothes were different than the day before, as posh as ever, but the smudges under his eyes were more pronounced.

“Good morning, Harry,” Draco said, smiling.

“You put me in your bed,” Harry accused.

The smile faltered. “You fell asleep.”

“Where are you going to sleep, if you keep moving me around?”

Draco waved his wand and the silver fox faded, sucking back into Draco’s wand. “I’m sorry, Harry,” Draco said quietly. “Next time I’ll ask your permission.”

“Where did you sleep?” Harry repeated, feeling petulant.

“You needn’t worry about me,” Draco said, in that quiet way. “I can—”

“Because you didn’t sleep.” Harry heard his own voice rise and wasn’t even sure why. “You stayed up all night working on some dumb potion to try and fix me!”

Draco’s eyes grew from five-p coins to fifty-p ones.

“But I don’t need fixing,” Harry heard himself saying, and he didn’t even know why he was saying it; it was like his mouth wasn’t connected to his brain. “I’m just fine! You just don’t want to have to spend time with me!”

“Oh, Harry,” Draco breathed.

“I’m going to the loo!” Harry shouted, stomping over to the hall with the stairs. “I don’t understand why it’s all the way upstairs!” he added, just because he felt really angry for no reason.

At the top of the stairs, the silver fox appeared. Harry wanted to yell at that too, because he knew Draco had sent it to follow him and he didn’t even know why he was saying it; it was like his mouth wasn’t connected to his brain. “I’m just fine! You just don’t want to have to spend time with me!”

After using the toilet, Harry put down the seat and sat on top of it, feeling miserable, mostly because he’d yelled at Draco for no good reason. Maybe Draco would find Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia and send Harry back to them until Draco got the potion worked out. Or maybe Draco would lock
Harry in a cupboard, even though that was tyrannical. Maybe Draco wouldn’t do any of those things, because he was the nicest, most magical man ever, but after this Draco certainly wouldn’t like him, and that made Harry’s chest hurt.

Not wanting to go back out there and look at the fox staring at him, and certainly not wanting to go back down to Draco, Harry finally decided to have a shower. Under the warm spray he tried not to think of anything, using Draco’s nice-smelling soap to scrub away at himself until he was really clean. Aunt Petunia always said he was dirty, and Harry thought she might be right.

When Harry got out of the shower, Harry put his glasses on to find that clothes were waiting for him and the pyjamas were gone, just like the day before. Knowing Draco must have spelled them in, Harry felt even more mortified than before, because it meant that Draco had found out Harry was showering and still liked him enough to make magic clothes for him. Feeling like the most complete prat in the world, Harry dried himself as slowly as possible and then tried to take even longer dressing, not knowing what he would do when he was finished.

Gradually, however, the scent of bacon and the sounds of something happening on the other side of the door lured him, and as there was nothing else to do in the bathroom, Harry finally opened the door and walked out of it.

In the kitchen, a pan of scones was floating out of the oven to hover over bacon frying itself on the cooker. A bowl of cream and another bowl with berries were already on the table, and Draco was spelling plates, cutlery, and napkins onto the table. “Would you like breakfast, Harry?” Draco said, as though nothing at all had happened.

Feeling humiliated, Harry mumbled yes, mostly because his stomach was twisting at the idea of not getting to eat the things making such delicious smells. Knowing that his face was probably red, Harry sat down at the table. The scones and bacon flew over, delicately floating down to his plate. “Thank you,” Harry mumbled, subsequently stuffing his face so he wouldn’t have to say anything more.

Draco sat across from him, barely making any noise. When Harry glanced over, though, Draco had a scone for himself and some berries. At least Draco was eating, even if he wasn’t sleeping. Because he was trying to cure Harry. Embarrassed and upset all over again, Harry took a swig of the orange juice, then tucked in to the bacon.

Harry understood why Draco wanted to find the cure. Even if Draco hated Harry’s grown-up self and loved Harry at ten, Draco would still be trying to fix it, because grown-up was what Harry was meant to be. It didn’t have anything to do with whether Draco liked him at all.

Knowing that didn’t change the fact that if Draco was just trying to do the right thing, that meant Harry at this age was the wrong thing. Meanwhile Harry had never been so happy or felt so good, which made being the wrong thing that much more depressing. And then he’d gone and yelled at Draco for it and ruined everything.

“Harry,” Draco said quietly.

Harry froze.

Draco gave him a small but definite smile. “The food is not going to disappear,” he said. “You can chew.”

What are you going to do about it? Harry wanted to ask, but he’d shoved basically a whole scone in his mouth, so he slowed down.
Draco wasn’t having fresh-squeezed orange juice, like Harry. Instead, he was drinking out of a mug that had a curl of steam coming from it. From the smell of it, Harry guessed it was coffee. Draco had had two cups of it already and now started pouring a third. “I thought we might go out again today,” he said.

For ‘a little trip’? Harry wanted to say in a nasty voice, but he didn’t say that either. Draco hadn’t taken him anywhere bad last time, even if it hadn’t exactly been fun. Maybe this time Draco would take him to the red-headed man’s house—but no. Draco said they had to be a secret. Like a failed science experiment. Harry reached for another scone.

“I know a place in Wiltshire,” Draco went on. “It’s lovely for a picnic. And I could teach you to fly. Would you like that?”

Harry had been going for more bacon, but now he froze again. “Fly?” he asked, his mouth full of scone.

The faint smile came back. “Yes. You used to fly all the time for a sport we played in school. It’s called Quidditch. Even when you were very young you were quite good. The best in our year, by far.”

Grabbing his orange juice, Harry took a sip to swallow the lump of scone in his mouth. “Do you fly—with your arms?”

“One generally uses a broom.”

Taking another sip of juice to wash down the rest of the scone, Harry swallowed again. “Like a witch?”

“Many witches do use brooms, yes. Some cultures more often use carpets, but I only know flying on a broom. Would you like to learn?”

“You’re not . . .” Harry worried his scone, crumbs dropping onto his plate.

“It would be my pleasure to show you, Harry.” Draco’s voice was deep and warm, which made it sound as though he really meant it.

Harry knew Draco was only saying it so they could pretend like nothing had happened earlier, except Harry wasn’t sure why Draco would want to pretend that, other than that Draco did want to forget it. And that almost made sense, because Draco was so kind and talented—he was a genius, really, with magic—except Harry had yelled at him. He should be sent to the cupboard for several hours for that at least. “Why are you . . .?” Harry began, but he couldn’t quite figure out what he wanted to ask.

“Because I haven’t got to fly in a long time,” Draco said in this perfectly friendly, reasonable voice. “You remind me of the times we were in school, and we flew so often then. I’ve realized I miss it.”

Harry shredded his scone some more.

“Will you come with me, Harry?”

“Why is your loo upstairs?” Harry blurted, which wasn’t what he’d meant to say at all.

“Pardon?”

“Your loo and kitchen,” Harry said. “Usually they’re on the ground level, aren’t they? Is it different?
“I mean, because you’re magic?”

“No,” Draco said slowly, confusion painting his features. “The first storey was built to be a flat. The ground level is a shop.”

“A shop?” Harry said, surprised. “What kind of shop?”

“A potions shop.”

“Like, with customers?”

The faint smile came back. “Yes, Harry. With customers.”

“But it doesn’t look like a shop. And I haven’t seen any customers.”

“Yes, well.” Standing, Draco began spelling his dishes over toward the sink. “The shop has lately been closed, so that the proprietor can address other matters.”

“What other matters?” Harry asked, before he could think. When Draco just looked at him, Harry realized that whatever a proprietor was, it was Draco, and Draco hadn’t opened his shop because he’d been trying to fix Harry. Maybe ‘tailored tinctures’ had been the name of it. “But it doesn’t look like a shop,” Harry said.

“It’s not the sort of shop where people come in to buy potions off the rack,” Draco said, directing the pans from the cooker over to the sink as well, then doing something that made a few bubbles float in the air. Soap, Harry guessed. “I brew to spec.”

“Spec?”

“Specifications. Bespoke potions, if you will. Like a tailor, but for drams and draughts.”

None of that sounded like English.

Looking over at him, Draco saw Harry didn’t know what he meant. “People come in and describe their specific problems,” Draco said. “I devise a special potion, just for them, and I draw up the cost. They agree to pay, and then I brew the potion and deliver it to them. Now then, Harry. Would you like to learn to fly, or would you prefer to ask questions all day?”

“You shouldn’t have to close your shop,” Harry said in a rush.

“I don’t mind it.”

“But you shouldn’t.” Harry meant to say it passionately, because he cared about Draco having to close his shop, but it just sounded aggressive. He poked the remaining bacon on his plate with his fork. “You shouldn’t have to close it or spend all night working on potions or—or entertain me, just because I—all because of me. You—it sounds like I dragged you off to wherever we got to anyway, when the potion fell on me, so you shouldn’t have to. That’s all.”

“Then you don’t want to go flying with me?” Draco said lightly.

“I want to—”

“Then why don’t you?”

“Because you’re having to—”
“For heaven’s sake. Do something for yourself, just for once.”

Draco’s tone was so exasperated that Harry’s mouth snapped shut.

Draco wasn’t done. “You deserve to have things you want. You should have got things you wanted. You should have—you deserved—” But Draco cut himself off and didn’t say any more, and Harry couldn’t see his expression as he was facing the sink.

Harry, feeling very bewildered, said, “Sorry.”

“No. Don’t . . .” Draco took a swift breath. “Don’t apologize to me.” Abruptly turning around, Draco strode over to him, pointing his wand as he went to drag the empty chair at the table so that it was beside Harry. It made a horrible dragging noise on the tile floor, and then Draco was sitting beside him, closer than you were supposed to sit at a table. “It’s your in-between birthday,” Draco said. “Pretend it’s like a holiday. You can do anything. Anything you want.”

“But holidays are awful.”

Draco got that stricken look, but folded it away swiftly, like a letter being sent off somewhere. “Holidays are happy,” he said, his voice soft and low. “Holidays are happy, and birthdays are happy, and magic is happy, when you’re doing it with good intentions, and with—with someone you care about. And someone who cares for you. Harry.” Draco reached out, hesitated, then slowly touched Harry’s hair, brushing his fringe aside.

Harry knew that Draco could see his scar. When Petunia had shaved his head, she’d left his fringe to cover it up because it was so horrible. Harry had always found his scar rather cool.

“You deserve to be happy,” Draco said. “You deserved a happy childhood.”

Harry was pretty sure he was going to get one, seeing as how he’d get to go to a magical school where he had friends. But maybe it wouldn’t be happy if Draco wasn’t one of them.

“Come learn to fly with me,” Draco said. “I promise you, the shop will be all right.”

Draco really wanted to do it, even if it was just to make Harry happy. Harry said okay.

*  

The place Draco knew in Wiltshire was full of rolling green hills, the kind that looked like should have sheep grazing on them, only they didn’t have sheep. The sky seemed bigger than it did from Privet Drive, and it was an outrageous colour of blue, with clouds streaked across it like they’d been dragged there by a comb.

They started on the ground, where Draco taught Harry “Up” and how to use the broom to do things like change direction. Sitting on a broom seemed sort of wild to Harry—it was so thin and narrow, it seemed like you should fall off. Even if you didn’t, it seemed as though it would be uncomfortable, but when he tried it, it felt natural, like something he was meant to do.

After zooming around a meter or so off the ground for a while, Draco showed him a Snitch, which was a little gold ball with wings you were meant to chase. That seemed odd as well—who cared about a little gold ball—but when it started whizzing around and they began chasing it, Harry understood instantly the thrill of following it.

Draco was much better at flying and could do lots of things, but Harry wasn’t sure Draco was as invested in chasing the Snitch as he was, because every time the Snitch whizzed past just out of
reach, Draco glided over and showed Harry a new trick. Sometimes Draco reached out to Harry’s broom-handle so they could do the trick together, in tandem, and usually he floated there until Harry could do it on his own.

At one point, Draco showed him how to do a spiral dive, which he said Harry had already mastered by first year. They did it again and again together, and Harry loved it—the sensation of the wind whistling through his hair, the ground rushing up toward him, even the dizziness of the spin. At last Draco said Harry should try it on his own, and that was when he fell.

Harry had seen the Snitch whizz by just under him, and he’d thought if he unhooked his legs he could kick it into arm’s reach, but he’d miscalculated. His broom was already spiralling and proceeded to spiral out from under him, and Harry was free-falling through the sky.

Harry was so high up he could see a weird pile of rubble in the distance. This was it; he’d failed at his first attempt at flying, which Draco had said he was really good at. Draco. He was very nice, and the ground was coming very fast, and Harry didn’t want to feel what it would be like to slam up against it, his body flattening out like a splattered bug on a windshield. The air rushing by no longer felt nice, but threatening—it was there, but he couldn’t grab onto it. Incorporeal, went his brain, and then—

He was drifting slowly, like a feather, and Draco was there, strong and warm. “Harry,” Draco said, setting him on his feet—on the ground, but not splattered like a bug at all. Perfectly normal. “Harry,” Draco said again, sounding frantic. He was touching Harry’s shoulders, his face, his hair. “Are you okay? Did you hurt anything?”

“I was trying to catch the Snitch,” Harry said.

“I know.” Draco stopped touching him. “You always—are you okay?”

“I think so.” Harry frowned, thinking about his body. He seemed to be all there. “Does incorporeal just mean you can put your hand through it, or does it mean you can’t feel it at all?” He was wondering whether air counted as incorporeal.

“What are you—heavens, Harry, you just fell thousands of feet. It’s all right to be afraid.”

“Why would I be afraid? You saved me.”

“Yes, but if I hadn’t been there—Merlin. You’re really not afraid.” Draco frowned. “No wonder you got sorted into Gryffindor.”

“What’s Gryffindor?”

“It means irrational. Harry,” Draco hesitated. “When you first de-aged, and you thought I had kidnapped you—were you scared?”

“Er, maybe a little,” Harry said. “But you didn’t kidnap me.”

“No, I didn’t. And all of this—finding out you’re a wizard, and there’s magic, and your parents, and you’re actually twenty years older than you are—none of it has frightened you, has it?”

“I made the books go off.” Harry looked up at him. “You said it was anxiety.”

“Don’t worry about the books, Harry. That was . . . normal.”

Draco looked so troubled that Harry at last understood what he was saying. Harry took a step back,
putting more green grass between himself and Draco. “You said it wasn’t normal. You said only toddlers did it.”

“Yes, but in times of high emotion—”

“You think I’m not normal.”

“I think you’re special.”

_Under-developed, Harry._ “You think I’m a freak,” Harry said.

“No.” Draco took a swift step forward. “Harry, no—”

“Because I don’t feel what I’m supposed to feel?” Harry said. “Did you want me to go off more?”

“No, Harry.” Draco gripped him by the shoulders. “Harry. I don’t want you to ever act in a way you don’t feel. Whatever you feel or don’t feel is okay; don’t let anyone tell you differently. Do you understand me?”

“I guess,” Harry said, because Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia seemed upset if he felt anything at all, but Draco seemed as though he had been saying Harry should be afraid.

“You have a good heart, Harry. That’s what matters. When I know you, you want to help people. You want to help everyone, all the time, and you don’t stop. You never stop caring about people, and trying to help, even though not—not enough people have cared for you.”

Harry understood what Draco was saying now too—what he was really saying.

Harry had often thought that Aunt Petunia and Uncle Dursley weren’t nice to him, but he’d thought it was because they weren’t nice people, and he wasn’t their son. He’d thought that his mum and dad must have cared; he’d hoped they’d cared very much. It had never occurred to him that anyone else should care. To hear Draco say so was startling, and Harry wasn’t certain what to think about it.

“Come,” Draco said gently. “Would you like to fly some more? This time, without falling off?”

“I didn’t mean to,” Harry said, as Draco turned to pick up Harry’s broom.

“I know that, Harry.” Draco handed Harry his broom, then moved farther away to pick up his own.

Harry followed. “I saw something while I was falling. Some old stones. I think there used to be a building nearby.”

Still turned away, Draco picked up his broom. “It was a house.”

“It didn’t look like house,” Harry said. “It was a bunch of rocks.”

“It was torn down.” Broom in hand, Draco kept walking.

Guessing Draco wanted to go over to the basket where their lunch was, Harry followed again. “Can we go look at it?”

“I don’t think that would be a good idea.”

“Why?”

Draco turned so abruptly that Harry almost bumped into him. “Have you noticed there aren’t animals
“Er.” Harry looked around. “I noticed there weren’t sheep.”

“There aren’t any. Not even insects. Nothing lives here—nothing wants to.”

*It’s a lovely spot for a picnic,* Draco had said. Harry had never been on a picnic, but he’d heard that ants ruined them. A place without ants would be pretty lovely, he guessed, but what Draco was saying didn’t sound so lovely. “What’s wrong with it?” he finally asked.

“The wizard who killed your parents lived in that house for two years. It became an—an evil place, and no one should ever want to go back to it. For years, not even the grass would grow here. The flowers are only just starting to return.”

Harry looked around, noting the bright patches of colour that dotted the countryside. It all looked so fresh and innocent, just like a painting. Paintings didn’t have insects either.

“But it’s not the land’s fault,” Draco added, more lightly. “It used to be a beautiful place—the most beautiful place in the whole world. I think—I think the land would like to know that there are boys on it, flying and playing Quidditch and having a good time. That—that used to happen a lot, here.”

“Oh,” was all Harry could think to say. Draco just looked so sad.

“Come, Harry,” Draco said, turning away again. “We’ll work on your feints.”

“Did there used to be peacocks here?” Harry blurted, not even knowing he had been going to ask.

Draco went still. “Yes, Harry,” he said, then flew up on his broom.

*For the next few hours, Harry and Draco flew about trying to catch the Snitch. Draco demonstrated various flying techniques every time the Snitch came near him.*

“You’re not actually trying to catch it,” Harry complained at one point. “You just keep showing me stuff.”

Draco looked surprised, his cheeks pink from the rush of the wind. “Did you want me to try to catch it?”

“I thought it was a game!”

“Oh, I just didn’t think you were fast enough.”

Harry was about to feel pretty dejected about that, since Draco was right, after all, but then Harry processed Draco’s tone, and the way Draco was looking at him, grinning. He was actually grinning, with teeth and everything. “I’m plenty fast enough,” Harry said. “Maybe you’re just not up for the challenge.”

“Me? I taught you everything you know.”

Then Draco put his nose in the air and looked like such a prat that Harry said, “Yeah. But you’re old.”

“You’re going to regret saying that.”
“Am I?”

“Oh, yes you are. Do you want to know why?”

“Wh—”

“Because the Snitch is right there!” Draco said, zooming off over Harry’s right shoulder.

Draco caught the Snitch three times after that.

“Now who’s old?” he called out, after the fourth time.

“It’s still you!” Harry called back.

“Let’s play with an advantage,” Draco said, whizzing back over to Harry to fly in a spiral around him.

Harry had to angle his broom handle downward, going toward the ground so he didn’t get crashed into. Draco kept doing it though, spiralling tighter and tighter, until suddenly he stood up on his broom and jumped off.

“Draco!” Harry called out.

“Hm?” Draco said, hanging from his broom by one hand. By then they were close enough to the ground so that when Draco let go, he dropped the remaining meter easily, landing on his feet.

Harry decided to try it.

“I don’t know,” Draco called up to him. “You’re so young, Harry; are you sure you want to try—”

Harry managed to get both of his feet up onto the broom. Now he just had to let go his hands, so he could stand on it like a skateboard, exactly as Draco had done, and—

He fell again, but not nearly so long, this time, and when he landed it was directly into Draco’s arms. “Easy, Harry,” Draco murmured, setting him on his feet. He must have cast something to make Harry lighter. “I said no falling this time.”

“You distracted me,” Harry accused.

Draco smirked. “I’m very distracting.”

“What’s ‘play with an advantage’?” Harry asked.

“I’m already playing with one, as I have years and years of experience, and you’re what—four years old? Five?”

“I’m ten.”

“Of course, you are,” Draco said, waving a hand airily.

Draco was being a ponce, but it was on purpose. Harry knew that he was being teased, but—it was in a nice way. As though they were friends, and Draco wanted Harry to laugh along with it. Mostly Draco seemed so worried and serious all the time, but Harry liked it best when he’d made his nose hairs grow or made the floor change colour.

“If you played with an advantage,” Draco went on, “we could be more even. Let’s try it this way.
You can cast offensive spells on me, but I can’t on you. I know plenty of good ones; I’ll teach them to you.”

“Oh,” Harry said. “Are you sure it’s okay?”

“Positive.” Draco beamed. His bright hair with his white shirt, open at the throat, made him look like a model in a photo shoot. “You have to beat me somehow, Harry.”

“I’ll beat you, all right,” Harry said, and Draco began teaching him spells.

Once they both got back into the sky, however, Draco didn’t seem to want to win very much. Whenever he got in grabbing range of the Snitch he would shout out to Harry a spell he could use to stop him, or if Harry tried a spell and it didn’t work, Draco would stop to remind him how to do it.

“You’re still not really trying to win,” Harry pointed out.

“I’m always trying to win.” Draco tossed his head. “You just don’t know me well enough.”

“Er.” Harry knew that wasn’t true, but he also knew you weren’t supposed to correct adults. “If you say so.”

“I’d just prefer to win against a worthy opponent,” Draco added.

After that, Draco stopped trying to help him. They were closer to an even match than they had been, since Harry could cast drafts of wind to carry Draco this way or that, though Draco knew a lot of manoeuvres to force his broom in the direction he wanted. Meanwhile Harry didn’t know nearly as much about manoeuvring, but he was small and found that meant he was faster than Draco.

After another half-hour or so of flying around, they found themselves within arms’ length of the Snitch. Harry’s arms were shorter, but he was faster. He thought he could get it if he just—

“Harry,” Draco said, his voice panicked. “Look over there!”

Harry looked where Draco pointed, seeing nothing but blue sky and rolling green. When he looked back at Draco, however, Draco was holding the little gold ball in his hand, smiling at Harry triumphantly.

Harry blinked in shock. “You cheated!”

“Verbal diversionary tactics are allowed,” Draco said, angling his broom down toward the ground.

Harry didn’t know what a verbal diversionary tactic was. He angled his broom down as well. “But that’s cheating!”

“That’s winning.” Near the ground now, Draco hopped off his broom.

“No.” Harry hopped off his broom too. “That’s cheating!”

Draco laughed, that soft nice sound that Harry liked so much. “You’re so shocked.”

“Because you cheated.”

“I forgot about your righteous indignation.” Draco started walking toward the lunch basket. “I am a Slytherin, after all.”

Harry didn’t know what righteous indignation was either, but as he followed Draco he decided to
ask about the weirder word instead. “What’s a Slytherin?”

“They’re cheaters, Harry. Do you want some lunch?”

Harry was interested in spite of still being mad. “What is there?”

“Mini beef wellingtons and spring salad,” Draco said, taking a blanket out of the basket and spreading it out with his wand. Glancing at Harry as he spelled more items out of the basket, he smiled. “No need to look so disappointed. You don’t have to eat the salad, and I brought treacle tart for afters.”

“I’m not disappointed,” Harry said, wanting to help with the lunch but unsure what to do. “Thanks.”

“Come sit with me,” Draco said, charming the dishes so that they floated into places on the blanket, then sitting down on the blanket himself.

Harry went over and sat, a little uncertain how people did things at picnics, but it was actually very much like eating in the flat above the shop—Draco spelled food onto Harry’s plate, and when they started eating, it was delicious. “I don’t believe you’re a regular cheater,” Harry said, after stuffing his face with some of the beef wellington. It was beef covered with pastry, he had discovered, and it wasn’t bad at all.

Draco raised one of his gold brows. “A regular cheater?”

“I don’t think you’d cheat at big things,” Harry said

“Hm.” Draco took a bite of his salad. “Is it really cheating if one finds an easier way to do things?”

Harry opened his mouth, then shut it. “You wouldn’t do things that you’re not meant to, is what I mean.”

Draco set down his fork, looking out over the hills. He had his knee up and set his elbow on it, and it made him look like a model again, or someone in a movie—perfectly posed for thoughtfulness. “When it comes to the big things you’re talking about, it can be unclear what one is meant to do. There isn’t exactly an instruction guide.”

“But that’s why you’re trying to make me old,” Harry said. “You’re working so hard at it because you’re trying to do the right thing.”

“You’re always very eager to ascribe motives to people.” Draco just kept staring off into the distance.

Harry didn’t know what “ascribe motives” meant either. “Anyway, when you said you thought the land would like it if people were here having fun on it, I’m not so sure the land would like it if one of them was having fun by cheating.”

Finally looking back at him, Draco smiled. “You’re funny, Harry. That’s something I never knew about you. You’re very funny.”

Harry hitched a shoulder. “No one ever wants to hear my jokes. Mostly I have to say them in my head.”

“I think at Hogwarts you say some of them aloud,” Draco said. “You could be very cheeky when you wanted to be.”
“Oh,” Harry said, wondering if that was why he and Draco hadn’t been friends. “Sorry."

“Don’t be. It was very grand. I was always so impressed by you.”

“By . . . me?” Draco had said something like that before, but Harry still had trouble believing it.

“Oh, yes. People would sit around the common room wondering what you would say next. Of course,” Draco went on, picking up his fork, “I always wished it was I they were gossiping about. I always wanted to say something shocking and clever, but I was much too afraid of getting in trouble to talk back to professors I didn’t like. When I said things I thought were shocking and clever to other students, I was mainly just being cruel.”

“Why?” Harry asked, because he had trouble believing Draco could be cruel.

“I was a cruel child.” Draco went on eating his salad.

“I don’t think you were.”

“How would you know?”

“Because you’re nice,” Harry said.

“You don’t think people can change, Harry?” Draco asked softly.

Harry thought of the Dursleys. “Not really.”

“I thought not. Would you like some of that treacle tart?”

“Yes, please,” Harry said, since he was just finishing off the beef.

Draco cleaned Harry’s plate with a tap of his wand, then charmed a large slice of the tart onto it. Then he cast a spell on it that Harry didn’t know and added a scoop of cream. When Harry tried it, the tart was warm, the cream was cold, and if he hadn’t decided it before, he would have decided then and there that magic was really wonderful, and so was Draco.

“I want to help with the potion,” Harry said, once he was halfway through the tart.

“Are you sure?” Draco wasn’t having any of the tart. “We can spend more time flying, if you like.”

“I’m sure,” Harry said.

“Very well.” Draco was looking at the hills again. “You always did the right thing, you know,” he said eventually. “Whether you had an instruction guide or not.”

“Er,” Harry said, since he wasn’t sure if it was a compliment. Draco’s voice didn’t exactly sound like it was, but it didn’t sound like it wasn’t either. “Thanks.”

Draco looked over at Harry’s plate. “Are you finished?”

Harry knew better than to ask for another slice, so he just nodded. Even though he wouldn’t mind more tart, he didn’t want to repeat an episode of vomiting, especially as there wasn’t a toilet nearby to sick up in.

Draco began to spell their dishes clean, directing them to the basket. “Then let’s go,” he said. “Off to do the right thing.”
Back at the lab, Draco had already brewed several potions. Draco must’ve stayed up most of the night to do it, as Harry was fairly certain they hadn’t been this far along when they’d stopped the night before.

“How come there are three?” Harry asked. “I thought you were making an indicator thing.”

“The indicator solution is to see whether you have been affected by a specific ingredient,” Draco said, pouring the three potions into low, shallow bowls. “I don’t know what ingredients were in the potion that fell on you, so we have to test for each ingredient it could possibly be.”

“Then there will be more than three?”

“There will possibly be—” Draco hesitated—“a great many.”

Harry thought about the smudges under Draco’s eyes and the way he had stayed up all night brewing things, and then the way he had said, *I can fix it, Harry. I don’t need anyone’s help.* Suddenly Harry felt terrible, and didn’t know what to do other than to straighten his shoulders and say, “What do I do?”

Draco smiled, his silver eyes kind. “You’ll need to put your thumb into each of these,” he said, indicating the bowls. “We’ll dry it off between each one. If your thumb changes colour, we’ll need to wait a bit before the next one.”

“What—what colour will it change into?” Harry kept his shoulders straight, even though he was a bit worried about having a differently-coloured thumb.

Draco seemed to find this highly amusing, for some reason. “The colour indicates a positive result. Don’t worry, Harry. It will go back to its normal colour.”

“Okay,” Harry said. “Should I—?” He gestured at the bowls.

“Try this one,” Draco said, pushing a bowl toward him. “Go slowly. It won’t hurt you.”

Harry dipped his thumb in, but nothing happened.

“That’s all right,” Draco said, gently taking Harry’s hand and drying his thumb with a flannel. “You did a good job.”

“All I did was put my thumb in,” Harry said, but he thought it was nice, the way Draco was holding his hand, gently rubbing it dry.

“We’ll try the next one,” Draco said, letting Harry’s hand go and setting the flannel aside.

The other two didn’t work either.

“Do you have to know what ingredients were in the potion that fell on me?” Harry asked, after Draco had dried his thumb again.

“Not necessarily.” Draco was already pulling out more ingredients—making yet another potion, Harry guessed. “But in general, it’s a good practice to treat the cause, rather than the symptoms. If I made a potion that just aged you up, it could lead to unexpected consequences.”

“Like—I could blow up?” Harry said, very interested in this, despite the possibility of not surviving.
“Probably nothing so severe,” Draco said. “If worse comes to worst, we can use those hairs I found. That would grow you to the age of the hairs, which is at most a few days and at least a few hours before the potion fell on you.”

“But something bad could still happen?”

“Potentially,” Draco said, taking out some green moss. “Would you sort this, Harry? Take out all the brown bits, and then try to make it flat.” Harry took the moss, and Draco went on spelling jars over to the workbench. “Ideally, we’d like to grow you to the age you should be, right here in this present moment. That way, you remember everything that happened right up to the moment the potion fell on you, as well as what happened after it.”

“You mean I might not remember being ten?” Harry said, jerking his head up from the moss.

Draco glanced over at him in surprise.

“I’m not going to remember Heloise and flying and—the dragon frozen in the sky, and everything?”

“I had no idea you remembered the dragon frozen in the sky,” Draco murmured.

“But you showed it to me,” said Harry, really distressed about this now. Maybe Draco wasn’t going to remember either, the way they had been friends. “And there was a queen who was really stuck-up, and they put her in the sky too. They put her in upside-down.”

Draco stared down at him. After a long moment he spoke, his voice soft. “I want you to remember.”

“Then don’t let me forget!”

Draco swallowed. “Very well. I won’t let you forget.”

“And in-between birthdays,” Harry said. “I want to remember them as well.”

A faint smile appeared on the side of Draco’s face. “Yes, Harry.”

“And your calling me Harry,” Harry went on. “I don’t want you to call me Potter if I get old.”

“You . . .” Draco’s hand reached out toward him, but then it stopped, a few inches from Harry’s face. “Yes,” Draco said instead, turning away slightly. “Of course.”

Draco lifted his hand to bring more jars over with his wand, but Harry grabbed his other hand. “You’ve got to promise,” Harry said.

Draco looked down at him, a strange look in his eyes that Harry couldn’t interpret. When he spoke, his tone was light, but his hand squeezed Harry’s tightly. “All right, Harry. I promise.”

“Good,” Harry said. Letting go Draco’s hand, he went back to sorting moss.

*

They didn’t finish brewing more indicator solutions by supper-time, mainly because indicator solutions were a very difficult thing to brew—even though Draco said they were lucky that they didn’t have to wait for the moon or stars or anything to make it work. When they stopped, Draco said that Harry should choose what to have for supper. Harry was getting the impression Draco was very done with fish and chips, but Harry couldn’t think of anything else besides the beef wellington, which had also been very good. “Er,” he’d said finally. “Hamburgers?”
A smile twisted on the side of Draco’s mouth, and from it, Harry guessed that Draco might not like hamburgers, but he made them anyway, and they were just as delicious as all the other food. For afters they had something called fondue; Harry pointed out he’d already had afters that day, but Draco didn’t seem to think that important. “It’s our in-between birthday,” Draco said. “We could have dessert for supper, if we wanted.” Then he made a fountain of chocolate and showed Harry how to float strawberries into it.

“Mum never let me eat with my wand,” Draco said, after he’d done some spells to twirl the chocolate onto the strawberries in different patterns. “She said it was indecorous.”

“Aunt Petunia says I’m rude.” Harry could feel chocolate on his face, but he didn’t care.

“I don’t think your Aunt Petunia is decorous. *Aguamenti*,” Draco added, pointing at a napkin. That was the water spell, and a little bit of water shot out of his wand to make the napkin wet.

“Does decorous mean boring?” Harry said, dipping another strawberry even though he had another full one waiting to go.

“Sometimes it means not being true to yourself, but other times it can mean being respectful towards others. Come, let me—” Leaning forward, Draco started wiping Harry’s cheek with the napkin.

Harry jerked away. “I can do it.” Grabbing the napkin, he accidentally forgot to concentrate on the loaded strawberry, which dropped on the table. He just didn’t want Draco having to wipe his face for him—speaking of Petunia, she always did things like that for Dudley, but that was because Dudley actually was rude, and also a big baby. Harry didn’t want to be a baby, and he especially didn’t want Draco thinking he was a baby.

Draco moved away quickly. “Of course. I didn’t mean to—” Abruptly, he stood. “I’ll begin the washing up. Would you like to learn more spells after you’re done with dessert?”

Harry picked up the strawberry he’d dropped and pointed his wand to the mess on the table. “I can help with washing up. *Scourgify!*”

“I’d like that.”

There was something so gentle and almost sad in Draco’s tone that Harry looked up from his last strawberry, but Draco had already turned away.

*  

That evening Draco didn’t make his nose hairs grow, but he did make the floor have fur. It purred when Harry stepped on it, and then Draco made their sofa float so that they weren’t sitting on the fur floor. He zoomed the sofa around the room for a while, then shrank the sofa so they could zoom out the window. On the roof, Draco enlarged the sofa again, and Heloise swooped down from wherever she had been, landing on one of the arms of the sofa. Harry got to pet her again, and Draco showed him more stars.

“I’m not going to fall asleep,” Harry said, right when he was about to fall asleep.

“Oh, really?” Draco said, his voice dry.

Harry realized somehow Draco’s arm was around him and his head had got on Draco’s shoulder, which was warm and firm and a little bony. The fabric of his shirt was silky, however, and Harry thought it was much nicer than a real pillow. Embarrassed, he made himself lift his head. “If I do, you’ll float me off into your bed, and you won’t have a proper place to sleep, and then you’ll just go
do potions all night.”

“How well you know me, Harry,” Draco murmured.

“It’s true.”

“Have you heard of bunk beds?” The arm around Harry tightened, then let go. “Will it suit you if I transfigure my bed into two beds? You can lie there until you hear me snore, to assure you I am asleep.”

“Do I get to sleep on top?” Harry said, pretty excited about the prospect of bunk beds.

“You can sleep wherever you wish,” Draco said, standing up. Once Harry had stood up as well, Draco pointed his wand at the sofa to shrink it. Instead of flying back in the window—which Draco said was not the safest thing on a transfigured, shrunken sofa—they did the disappearing thing, squeezing into blackness to appear again in the sitting room. Dropping off the sofa, they went downstairs, through the shop, and back to Draco’s bedroom, where Draco set about transfiguring the bed.

The result was much narrower mattresses and blankets, but Draco transfigured a fluffy towel so that they could both have pillows, and then he let Harry get into the top bunk.

“Draco,” Harry said, once they were both lying in the dark.

“Yes, Harry?”

Harry put his head over the side. “Have you slept in bunk beds before?”

“Not really.” Draco was lying there in the narrow bunk with his hands folded over the covers. He didn’t look like he was ready to sleep at all, but he had changed into pyjamas. Loose and white, they looked rather less posh than most of his clothes.

Putting his head back on his pillow, Harry closed his eyes. The pyjamas Draco had transfigured for Harry were much nicer, different than the white and blue striped ones he’d had before. These were green and silver, and felt a little slippery, like silk. They were the most comfortable things Harry had ever worn. “Draco,” Harry said, putting his head over the side again.

Draco opened his eyes. “Yes, Harry?”

“When you made new clothes and put them in the bathroom, were they the pyjamas? Did you just keep making new clothes out of the same clothes over and over?”

“No, Harry.” Without his glasses, Harry could only see a whitish blob as Draco’s face, lit by the moonlight streaming through the window by the bunk beds. “They were different. I put the old ones in the wash.”

“Oh.” Harry put his head back on the pillow.

He lay there for a while, but he didn’t hear Draco snoring.

“Draco,” Harry said, putting his head over the side again.

“Yes, Harry.”

“Do you really snore?”
“I’m not certain. Perhaps you’ll tell me, if you ever let me sleep.”

Draco was teasing. Harry was fairly certain, but he put his head back on the pillow anyway. “Draco?” he said, after another minute, looking back over the side.

“Yes, Harry?”

“Have you ever had a sleepover?”

“Pardon?”

“It’s when friends come over,” Harry said. “And they stay the night. Dudley had one once; it was awful.”

“Yes, Harry. I’ve had—sleepovers.”

“Oh,” Harry stayed hanging over the side. “Were they fun?”

“Harry,” Draco began, then stopped. “Yes,” he said finally. “They were fun.”

“Draco?” Harry hadn’t even bothered to put his head back on the pillow, this time.

“Yes, Harry?”

“Does this count?”

“Count for what?”

“A sleepover.”

“Yes, Harry. This is a sleepover. Without the sleeping part.”

“Draco?”

“Yes, Harry?”

“I’m glad that potion fell on me.”

Draco turned to look at him then, his face so pale in the dark. His hand came up, hesitated, then brushed aside the fringe over Harry’s forehead, revealing the scar.

Harry wished he was not on the top bunk. He wanted to be on the bottom one, lying next to Draco—or on the sofa again, with Draco’s arm around him, with his head on Draco’s shoulder. Sometimes, when Dudley had had nightmares, he used to run in to sleep with Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon. Harry had heard them talking about it. He’d heard them talking about how only babies slept with their parents, and only babies had nightmares, and Dudley needed to be tough and sleep in his own ickle bed.

Harry didn’t want to be a baby. He wanted to sleep with Draco’s arm around him anyway.

Draco took his hand away. “I appreciate,” Draco began, but his voice was rough. He cleared his throat. “I appreciate the chance to know you better, Harry. I feel like I didn’t—understand before.”

“Understand what?” Harry asked, his head still hanging over the side. He felt stupid for wishing Draco would touch him again.
“You,” was all Draco said.

Not really knowing what Draco meant, Harry put his head back on his pillow. His head had been starting to feel odd being upside-down. He tried to think about what Draco might understand, but he couldn’t concentrate, too sleepy and excited to think clearly. “Draco?” he asked, putting his head back over the side.

“Yes, Harry?”

“How do Snitches know where to fly?”

Draco huffed a laugh. “Go to sleep.”

“But how do they know?”

“Go to sleep, Harry. I’ll tell you in the morning.”

Harry put his head on his pillow and closed his eyes.

*

The next three days fell into a sort of pattern. Draco was always up before Harry, which gave Harry doubts about how much Draco slept. The bunk bed stayed, however, and even though Draco was always telling Harry to go to sleep when they were lying there, he always answered Harry’s questions until Harry actually slept.

In the morning, Harry would wake to the silver fox. Once he left the bedroom, he’d find Draco working in the lab. Draco was usually dressed by then, looking very posh just like usual, but Harry found out Draco would sometimes wear a long coat thing if he was up in pyjamas. A dressing gown, Draco called it, but that made it sound boring when actually it was very cool. Harry thought Draco looked like an important person in it, like possibly someone who solved crimes but in pyjamas and slippers. When Draco heard Harry say this, he transfigured Harry a dressing gown as well. Then they were both very cool, and Harry asked if he could keep it. Draco said Harry couldn’t because transfigured clothes didn’t stay together well, but it was Harry’s in-between birthday so on Friday a dressing gown came by owl post.

“Don’t you like it?” Draco asked, when Harry took it out of the brown paper wrap. “I thought you liked mine.”

“I do like it,” Harry said quickly.

“But?”

Harry didn’t want to complain when he’d been given such a nice gift, but Draco knew something was wrong. “Yours is green and silver.”

Draco’s lips did a weird thing. “I thought you might like these colours better.”

Harry looked at the red and gold silk. “It’s great,” he said, because it really was, even though Draco’s seemed less cartoonish and far more elegant.

Draco’s lips went even weirder. “You can have green and silver if you like, Harry.”

Harry looked back up at him. “You made me green pyjamas.”

“Yes, well—” Draco’s lips kept twisting. “I was amusing myself. But if you really prefer green—I
can arrange it.”

Harry finally realized Draco was trying not to smile. “What’s so funny?”

“Nothing. Only—I don’t think your older self will want it to be green.”

Harry glanced at the package. “But it wouldn’t be big enough anyway.”

“It’s a growing gown.” Draco said. “They’re meant to grow as you age. But never bother, Harry; if you like green you shall have green.”

“Why wouldn’t I like green? My eyes are green.”

“They are indeed. And you look extremely good in green.”

“I do?” Harry’s interest was piqued. “Do I look good in it when I’m old?”

“Let’s send this back, shall we?” Draco said, snatching away the red and gold gown, then sweeping off to rewrap it.

On Saturday, the green gown came, and Harry and Draco had breakfast after it arrived. Draco made a different breakfast every day. Harry never got to choose them, as Draco always started making them before Harry awoke, but all of them were delicious—Belgian waffles, and crepes, and then a fry up with kippers and eggs Florentine. All of them had bacon with them, even when bacon didn’t seem to go.

After breakfast they worked on potion things in the laboratory. Draco didn’t give Harry a book again, instead having Harry help with the indicator solutions. They made thirteen of them, and five tested positive. After the first successful one, Harry looked up at Draco and asked—trying to hide his disappointment—“Does this mean you can make a cure?”

“This is just one ingredient,” Draco said, “and it’s one I thought was probably in it anyway.”

“Oh,” Harry said. “What ingredient?”

“Crow’s feet. It’s in most potions to do with age.”

“Ew,” Harry opined.

“Come,” Draco said, heading off toward the stairs. “We have to wait for your thumb to fade.”

His thumb a bright purple, Harry had followed Draco upstairs to get their brooms. In the afternoon they usually did other things while ingredients for the potions simmered or dried. On two of the days they had gone flying at the green place in Wiltshire, and on one of those days Draco had showed Harry how wizards duel.

“Do people really do it?” Harry had asked, after Draco had shown him.

“Foolish people do.”

“Did you ever do it?” Harry asked, not because he thought Draco was foolish, but because Draco was often saying bad things about himself, and Harry thought maybe this was perhaps another bad thing in disguise.

“No, Harry,” Draco said. “I . . . thought I wanted to, once, but I was very much a coward. You can talk to snakes, by the way.”
“Yeah.” Harry went on eating the curry Draco had made for lunch. Draco never let him choose lunch anymore either, but everything Draco made was always the best thing Harry had ever tasted. Harry was beginning to suspect Draco didn’t much like Harry’s choices of meals, which was just fine with Harry. He’d never had so many nice foods before, or else he might’ve known to ask for things other than fish and chips.

“You already know?” Draco looked at him in surprise over his curry.

“I talked to one at the zoo. Then the glass disappeared, and it escaped. That was right before I came here.”

“Heavens, Harry.” Draco set down his bowl. “How did you not know you had magic?”

“I dunno.” Harry shrugged. “I just thought . . . I was really unlucky.”

“Unlucky? Because you talked to a snake and helped it escape? Harry. You weren’t unlucky. You were cool.”

“It didn’t feel cool,” Harry said. “Though I hope the snake got back to Brazil.”

Draco stared at him, and Harry realized that maybe Brazil seemed random.

“That was where it was from,” he explained.

Draco just kept staring at him. “Harry,” he began, his voice troubled.

The silence stretched out, and Harry noticed for himself what Draco had said about this part of Wiltshire—the way insects weren’t crawling in the grass. Birds weren’t flying in the sky. Nothing moved, except for the occasional lazy sway of grass in the wind, and Draco’s chest moving as he breathed.

“Was it,” Harry finally made himself say. “Was it wrong? The snake, I mean.”

“Harry,” Draco said again. Reaching out, he brushed aside Harry’s fringe again. He’d done that before, as though to see his scar. Harry thought it was nice, because his scar was cool even though Petunia said it was so ugly, but he didn’t know why Draco wanted to see it all the time, and just now it made him uncomfortable. “Harry,” Draco said again. “Nothing you do is wrong.”

Harry pulled away. “Some things are.”

“That’s not what I—” Draco’s hand faltered, but he put it down. “You’re special, Harry. You’re so, so special. Don’t you realize how . . .” But Draco didn’t finish, his voice drifting off, the look in his eyes almost helpless.

“It was just some glass,” Harry said, shifting his shoulders uncomfortably.

“Merlin.” Suddenly, Draco was pinching the bridge of his nose.

“What’s wrong?”

“You weren’t faking it. You were never—” Draco cut himself off again.

“Faking what?”

“Nothing, Harry. Just—sometimes, this is a lot to take in.”
“What is?”

“You. This.” Draco flapped a vague hand. “Never bother, Harry. I’ve brought us a pudding.” Going over to the basket, Draco brought the pudding out with his wand, then proceeded to transfigure it into ugly, wobbly animal shapes with his wand until Harry was laughing.

“I thought your mum said you couldn’t use your wand in your food.”

“My mum isn’t here,” Draco said, “and it’s our in-between birthday. We do what we please.” Then he made the pudding into a snake, and somehow made it say, *Take me to Brazzzzzzzzzzil, Harry.*

Harry laughed. “That’s not how it sounded!”

*I don’t care, Harry,* the pudding-snake said, sounding mostly like Draco. *Take me to Brazzzzzzzzzzil. Ssssssssave me from the glassssssssssssss.*

Harry laughed and laughed.

*

On the day it was raining in Wiltshire, they didn’t go flying, but did stop potion work so that Draco could teach Harry a game called Exploding Snap. They played it ten times, and Harry watched very closely to see whether Draco was cheating, but he didn’t seem to be. “You hated it so much last time,” Draco said, when Harry pointed this out.

“Because it’s cheating,” Harry said.

“Oh, yes, Mister Gryffindor, I forgot.”

“I’m not irrational,” Harry said, since that was what Gryffindor meant.

“But you’re much more fixated on how the game is played than winning, and that’s quite Gryffindorish.”

“Isn’t that the point of games?” Harry said, for once feeling a little annoyed with him.

“Some of them,” Draco conceded. “Have you ever played chess? I believe I’ve heard of a Muggle variation.”

“I don’t know how to,” Harry said. He’d heard of it before, but Dudley seemed to think it dull. For once, Harry had agreed with him.

“Your friend Ron Weasley is a genius at it,” Draco said, playing a card. “Quite the best in our year.”

“Ron Weasley?” Harry said, excited again about the idea of having friends. “Is he the red-head one?”

“Yes, the red-head one. It’s your turn, Harry.”

“What’s he like?” Harry wanted to know, playing his card without really thinking about it.

“Large.” Draco set another card on top of Harry’s.

“Is he nice?” Harry took his turn again.

“He’s much better than that, Harry. He’s good. Snap!” The cards exploded.
“What do you mean, he’s good?” Harry asked, not distracted by the explosion. The cards had already done that five times.

“Well,” Draco said, taking the cards in the pile and adding them to his stack. “He never poisoned anybody or gave them any cursed jewellery. He never tried to get good people fired or tried to control anyone’s mind. He never let maniacs into our school. I’d say Ron Weasley was first rate.” He shuffled the cards.

“I guess,” Harry said doubtfully. He wanted to tell Draco he seemed to have a skewed frame of reference, but he still wasn’t sure exactly what that meant, so he refrained. “Is he friends with the brown-haired girl? Granger?”

“Oh, yes,” Draco said, playing another card. “They’re married.”

“Oh.” Harry felt slightly disappointed about this. When Draco had said the brown-haired girl was his best friend, he had sort of thought he might grow up and have a girlfriend, but that hardly seemed plausible now that he thought about it. He didn’t even really want a girlfriend—not right now, anyway. Just the idea of one sounded nice. A sudden thought struck him. “Do I—” He swallowed hard. “I’m not married, am I?” He hadn’t seen any evidence in the house that anyone else lived there, but it had never occurred to him that he might—

“You’re a confirmed bachelor, I believe,” Draco said, his tone careless. “It’s your turn.”

Harry wasn’t exactly sure what confirmed bachelor meant, but he was pretty sure it meant single. “Good.” He played a card.

“Then you’re not interested in marriage.” Draco was looking at the cards.

“I’m ten.”


“I just mean it would be weird,” Harry said, putting a card down. “It would be weird if I was ten but had a wife.”

“Ah.” They went back and forth a few times—Draco, then Harry, then Draco. Suddenly Draco said, “Has anyone ever talked to you about having a wife?”

“Er.” Harry played one of his own cards. “Not really.”

“Yes. I thought not.”

They each put down cards, but neither of them was snap cards so they kept going. When Draco played a snap card he said, “You would like a wife in the future, I suppose.” Possibly he was asking to be distracting, since if there was a double-snap you could say “Snap,” and when the cards exploded, you got to keep them.

“What?”

“I asked if you thought you would want a wife when you were grown up.”

“Well,” Harry said, feeling a little uncomfortable about it. “I guess so. I mean. Doesn’t everyone?”

“I don’t think Hermione Granger did,” Draco said lightly, like a joke, but he was still playing through his series of snaps. He was going to win; his deck was better at this point anyway.
“I meant blokes.” Draco was finally done with the series, so Harry played a card, and the pile exploded. “Snap!” Harry called, and got the pile. “How come you’re not married?” he asked, thinking of it suddenly as he tried to shuffle the exploded cards into his remaining ones.

“Give me that,” Draco said. “I’ll shuffle for you.”

“What if you cheat?” Harry said, but handed them over anyway.

“I promise I shan’t.” Smiling drily, Draco took the cards and shuffled.

Sometimes Draco was weird, because who even said the word ‘shan’t’? But as Harry watched him shuffle he remembered his question. “Why aren’t you married?”

“I have no desire to have a wife, Harry,” Draco said, handing back the cards.

“Why not?”

“Your turn again,” Draco said. He seemed to be really into this game.

Harry played a card, and Draco played another on top. Harry played one on top of that, and it was a snap, so he kept going. Draco was silent as Harry played the next three cards. “Your turn, now,” Harry said, when the series was done.

“I’ve never met a woman I was interested in marrying,” Draco said finally, playing another card.

“Oh. Do you think you will?”

“I sincerely doubt it, Harry.”

“Oh,” Harry said again. Thinking that sounded sort of sad, he played another card. Maybe if Draco won the game, he would be happier. Or at least less distracted.

Draco put down a card, then said suddenly, “Our old Headmaster never married anyone. Some people are like that.”

Still thinking it sounded sad, Harry played another card. It was a snap again, so he played another, which was also a snap, and then another.

“He was beloved by many people,” Draco said. “Our Headmaster. And he loved many people in return.”

“Do you miss him?” Harry asked, at last done with the snaps.

“I didn’t know him very well,” Draco said, playing a card. “But I was with him when he died.”

“Oh,” Harry said, not knowing what to say.

Draco played another card, then another. “You were there as well, apparently. So you see, Harry. He wasn’t alone in the end. Snap!” The cards exploded, and Draco swept them up into his pile. “I think that’s probably the way he would have looked at it, anyway,” Draco said as he shuffled. “He always did have an odd way of seeing things.”

At last realizing what was so sad about the conversation, Harry said fiercely, “I don’t think you’ll be alone.”

“You won’t be either,” Draco said. “I’m sure you’ll find a very beautiful wife and have plenty of
very handsome babies.” Slowly, his stack finally in order, Draco played another card.

“You can be their godfather,” Harry said impulsively. “Like Sirius Black.”

“I think I would like that, Harry,” Draco said softly. At last, he looked up. “I’d like that very much.”

“Except you won’t be incarcerated,” Harry added.

“Right,” Draco murmured. “I’m certain you’ll see to that. It’s your turn, Harry.”

They went on playing Exploding Snap for the whole afternoon.

*

In the evenings, Draco had Harry choose supper. Harry only chose fish and chips once more. After that he choose to have mini beef wellingtons like they had had for their first picnic, then curry like they had had for their second picnic. Draco seemed amused by these choices but made them anyway, and Harry never ate until he got sick again. Afterwards they did the washing up together.

Usually they went to the lab for a bit after that, Draco setting out more things to simmer, soak, or dry overnight and mixing things together so they could blend the proper amount of time. Once he had to proof something, and another time some sea cucumbers had to go into a box to chill. He said that with the five ingredients they had already found, he thought he understood the original potion that had de-aged Harry, except for one ingredient. If they could find that one ingredient, Draco thought he could make a cure, but he also said it was that one ingredient that had made the original potion so powerful. It had to be something special and unusual—and maybe illegal—or else Draco would have figured out what it was already. Sometimes he wrote in a ledger, saying he was keeping track of what he was doing.

Once the potions had been taken care of for the night, Harry and Draco almost always went to the sitting room in front of the fire. There they had hot chocolate, and Draco taught Harry spells, or read to him from the fairy tale book, or played more Exploding Snap with him. When Harry asked to look at more photos, they looked at the rest of the album, but after that Draco said he hadn’t any more.

“Then can you tell me about your mum and dad?” Harry asked, budging closer on the sofa. Usually if he did that, Draco would put his arm around him, so it didn’t get squashed, but Draco didn’t do it this time.

“Why?” Draco said, lines beginning to appear between his brows.

Harry shrugged. “I haven’t any, so I wonder what it’s like.”

“Right, of course,” Draco said quickly. But then he looked into the fire and didn’t say anything at all.

“Were they nice?” Harry asked, even though he already knew they were.

“My mother and father,” Draco began, then stopped, like he sometimes did. “They loved each other very much,” he finally said. “And they loved me even more.”

“How did you know?”

Draco took a big breath, then let it out. Harry guessed Draco must miss his parents, and Harry wondered where they were. “Mother, she . . . we played together every day, before I left for Hogwarts. And once I got there, she sent me owls all the time—chocolates and jumpers and toys and sweets. Father, he—he never said anything about it, other than he expected me to do well in school.
and Quidditch, and make connections, and don’t let my brain get washed, and—and everything else, but I—I think in his heart he was just as worried and concerned as Mother.”

Draco played with something on his cuff, as if it wasn’t quite straight or even, but everything about Draco was always perfect, so Harry wasn’t sure what he was doing. Draco went on, “Father bought me almost everything in Diagon Alley, for my first day. He said he wanted me to be prepared, and that I—I was well off, and should look it, and that the other children should—they should look up to me. But I realize now that what he meant was that he wanted me to be comfortable and make friends, and that—that he was proud of me.”

Harry felt so full of questions, he wasn’t sure which one to choose. “What was he proud of you for?”

“For being his son.”

“Why did he think you would get brain washed? Is it a spell?”

“No, he—Father didn’t like Hogwarts very much. He was—he was very arrogant, Harry.”

“But what was wrong with it?”

Draco fiddled with his cuff some more. “Dumbledore,” he began, then stopped.

“The Headmaster?” Harry asked, pushing in so he was purposely squashing Draco’s arm, but Draco still didn’t put it around him. “The one that everyone liked?”

“Yes. But father . . .” Draco shifted, as though to relieve the pressure on his arm, but he still didn’t put it around Harry. Disappointed, Harry stopped pressing in. “He didn’t like Dumbledore.”

“Why not?”

“Dumbledore was very . . . he didn’t fall in line. Everyone else always did, around Father; you see, because my father was very important.”

“Oh.” Harry thought about that. “Because he was a very brave man?”

“Because he was rich,” Draco said.

“Oh.”

“But also . . .” Draco spoke again, quite suddenly. Harry waited, and finally Draco went on, “Father didn’t—he didn’t approve of Dumbledore’s lifestyle. He said—he thought it would . . . set a bad example for me.”

“What kind of lifestyle?”

Draco fiddled with his cuff, but Harry could see Draco wasn’t actually doing anything with it; he was just yanking it down, and sort of rubbing his arm, as though it was itchy or hurt him. “Remember I said—Dumbledore never married. That sort of lifestyle.”

“Your dad was mad at Dumbledore for not getting married?” Harry asked, surprised.

“That wasn’t the only reason,” Draco said quickly. “He just—Father very much wanted me to—to grow up and have a wife. In particular, I think he wanted—he wanted me to give him grandchildren and carry on the Malfoy name.”

“Oh.” Harry tried to think of something to make Draco feel better but couldn’t come up with
anything. “But he still loved you,” he thought to say at last. “And your mum.”

“Right.” Finally, Draco’s arm went around him, as though it had been squashed that whole time, but Draco had only just remembered this simple solution.

“You know because he gave you lots of presents?” Harry asked, still curious about what being loved would be like.

“Not only that,” Draco said. “Remember I told you my Father read to me?”

“With all the voices.”

“He wouldn’t have done that if he didn’t love me.” Draco’s arm squeezed tighter around Harry. “And he taught me how to fly.”

“Like you taught me?”

“Yes, Harry.” Draco smiled faintly. “Like I taught you.”

“He wouldn’t have done that if he didn’t love you?”

“No. I don’t think he would have.” Draco’s arm stayed tight around him.

“Did he make you breakfast?”

“We had house-elves for that.”

“What’s a house-elf?”

“It’s someone who wants to make you breakfast all the time,” Draco said. “They want to do all the washing-up, and all of the laundry, and clean up after you. If you don’t let them, sometimes they become very upset. You have to make sure there are enough chores for them to do.”

“Aunt Petunia must think I’m a house-elf,” Harry said.

“I must confess, Harry.” Draco looked very serious, his blond hair lit up by the firelight. “I am not fond of Aunt Petunia.”

“Have you ever met her?” Harry asked curiously.

“No,” Draco said slowly. “If I ever did, however, I am quite certain I would hex her.”

“Why?”

“Sometimes if you love someone, that’s something else you do,” Draco said. “You defend them. You want to hurt people who would hurt them.”

“Did your mum or dad ever hurt anyone? Because of you?”

“Yes.” Draco looked away.

“Who?” Harry asked, thinking this sounded exciting. “What did the person do to you?”

Draco didn’t say anything. When Harry glanced up at him, Draco was staring into the fire, and Harry couldn’t help the impression he’d made Draco sad. “Draco?” Harry asked.

Draco turned to look down at him, the old expression swept away into a blank, clean one. “Father
once hexed a dancing instructor because she insulted me,” he said, almost conversationally.

Harry thought about this, then remembered what Draco had said about hexing Aunt Petunia. “Would you hex Dudley?” Harry asked.

“Harry. I’d—” Draco cut himself off, then swallowed. After a long moment, he turned back to the fire. “I’d hex your cousin if you needed me to—but I doubt you’d need it. You’re pretty self-sufficient.”

Self-sufficient meant you could do everything for yourself. Harry had always thought being self-sufficient sounded great, but Draco hexing Dudley sounded pretty great as well, and Harry couldn’t tell which he preferred. Maybe it was best to be self-sufficient and also have a protector like Draco, who would help if you needed it. Harry looked up at Draco again, the gold light playing on his face. Harry wanted to sit closer to him, but he was already as close as possible. If he leaned some, though, more of Harry could be touching him. Thinking Draco might not notice, Harry tried it.

As Harry shifted, Draco’s arm tightened around Harry, drawing him in. Turning his head against Draco’s chest to check Draco’s expression, Harry saw that Draco was still just looking into the fire. He didn’t look bothered at all, so Harry tucked his head back in.

“What else did your parents do? Did they teach you magic? Did you play Exploding Snap with them? Did you . . . .” Harry tried to think of other things that wizards did. “Duel?”

“Both of them taught me magic. Mum played Exploding Snap with me—and lots of other games as well. Father taught me duelling.”

Restlessly, Harry moved his head to check Draco’s expression again. “What else?”

For a long time, Draco didn’t say anything. Then he said, “Everything they did, they did because they wanted me to succeed. They wanted me to be influential and well-liked, but it was never for themselves at all, no matter what it looked like. They thought that it would make me happy. That was all they ever cared about—making me happy.”

Harry couldn’t really imagine a pair of people who were entirely dedicated to making you happy. It seemed like more than you would need, only Petunia always seemed to want to make Dudley happy, but he never seemed to be. “Were you?” Harry asked. “Happy, I mean.”

“Sometimes.”

“Why weren’t you always happy?”

“Harry.” Draco paused after that, which usually meant he was upset about something. Harry couldn’t figure out what was wrong, except that maybe Draco didn’t like to talk about things that made him unhappy. Harry could understand that. He didn’t like to talk about the cupboard either, but mainly because it was dead boring. “When people want you to be happy,” Draco finally said, “it sets up an expectation. And when people have a lot of expectations of you, sometimes you worry you won’t meet those expectations.”

“You were worried?” Harry looked up at him. Draco was still looking into the fire. “When you were a kid?”

“All the time.” Draco appeared so fixated on the fire that Harry glanced to check whether something was wrong with it. “They,” Draco began, then paused again. “They wanted me to be someone I’m incapable of being.”
“An astronaut?”

This seemed to snap Draco out of it, causing him to look down at Harry. Petunia said that Dudley could be an astronaut, but Harry didn’t think Dudley could. “No,” Draco said, smiling faintly. “Not an astronaut.”

“Then what did they want you to be?”

Draco looked at Harry for so long that Harry thought Draco wasn’t going to answer. Draco’s smile had fallen away, his brow furrowing, mouth sagging down at the corners. Then Draco said, “They wanted me to be like them. I tried, and I couldn’t. In the end—I couldn’t.”

“I don’t want you to be like them. I like how you are.” Since craning his neck was awkward, Harry put his head back down, resting it on Draco’s chest.

“Harry.”

Draco didn’t say anything else after that, even though Harry waited. He could hear Draco’s heart beating here, a steady thump. Then Draco put his hand in Harry’s hair.

“Harry,” Draco whispered. “I like how you are, too.”
On Sunday morning Draco said, “I think we need to take another trip, Harry.”

Not finished with breakfast yet, Harry was still stuffing toast with jam in his mouth. “Where?” he said, his mouth full of crust.

“The Ministry for Magic.”

After chewing a bit more, Harry finally managed to swallow. “I thought you said old-me said he couldn’t trust people there.”

“Yes,” Draco said, picking up his dishes with his wand and taking them to the sink. “That’s why we’re going to use disguises.”

Harry, who had been about to bite off another bit of toast, paused, took the toast back away from his mouth, and said, “Disguises?”

“Yes.” Draco Scourgified the dishes clean and began to put them away by hand. “I’ve great ones in mind.”

“What do they look like?” Harry asked, trying not to sound too excited, even though he was.

Finally, Draco turned around. “Us.”

“What?”

Pointing his wand at the table, Draco cleared the jam and butter as well, turning to put them away. Coming back to the table, he fussied with the placemat, cleaning it with his wand even though it didn’t look dirty to Harry. Then he put his wand away, then took it out again.

Draco didn’t always like to answer questions, Harry had noticed, but unlike Uncle Vernon, he never told Harry not to ask. Harry was pretty sure Draco was going to have to explain this one though, so Harry waited quietly until Draco huffed and sat down.

“Do you remember all the files at Number Twelve?”

“Yes,” Harry said warily. “You said there wasn’t anything there.”

“I said you might have been cross-referencing something,” Draco said. “Some files that weren’t there. It occurs to me—it occurred to me—that those files might be at the Ministry, but if they were there . . . if they were there they would most likely be at your desk.”

“I have a desk?” Harry perked up. Having a desk made him sound pretty important.
Draco smiled faintly, just a twist at the side of his mouth. “Yes, Harry, you have a desk.”

“We’re going to see it?”

“That’s just it, Harry.” Draco was playing with the placemat again, his wand making the fringe at the edges dance. “The only person who would reasonably be going through your desk is you.”

“I’ll do it,” Harry said, because even though desks were boring, it was a police desk, and it belonged to a grown-up him. He wondered if he had handcuffs in it. Magic handcuffs.

“Right,” Draco said. “Only—if a ten-year-old Harry Potter was seen going through his desk, it might . . . provoke inquiry.”

Harry was pretty sure ‘provoke inquiry’ meant people asking questions, and anyway he understood what the problem was, if Draco thought they couldn’t trust anyone else.

“And I need to be with you,” Draco said, “because I read those other files, and I have a better idea of what to look for. Also, I know more about the wizarding world and could more easily field questions from anyone who stops us. Therefore, it makes sense if . . .” Trailing off, he fiddled with the placemat some more, and Harry felt his heart sink.

“You’re not bringing me.” He knew now why Draco hadn’t wanted to say it.

“No, you need to be there,” Draco said. “I’m not sure Auror security will allow me through, but the wards will recognize you, even if you’re young.”

“Like my house?” Harry asked, feeling much better about the whole thing.

“Exactly. Besides,” Draco added, another trace of a smile ghosting his cheeks, “I have no experience with breaking into the Ministry. It will be great moral support to go with someone who’s done it before.”

“I’ve broken in?” Harry felt his eyes go large. “But you said it’s the wizard government!”

“I’m sure you had your reasons.”

This did nothing to mollify Harry, even though Draco seemed amused by it. “Did I get—incarcerated?”

“Oh, no. I believe you got a medal for it.”

“But—why?”

“Things can be very backward in the wizarding world, Harry.” Draco stopped playing with the placemat. When he spoke, his voice sounded much firmer than it had done. “We’re going to break into the Ministry. But to do it—I have to be you, and you have to be—someone else.”

“You have to be me?”

“Yes,” Draco said. “You at thirty-one.”

“How?”

“There’s a potion called Polyjuice,” Draco said. “It allows you to temporarily change form to look like someone else. All I need is some part of your body from you at the correct age.”
“The hair,” Harry breathed.

“Yes.” Draco started playing with the placemat again, and Harry remembered how Draco had cheated a Quidditch. He hadn’t told the truth, which Harry guessed he should have expected. Aunt Petunia and Uncle Dursley had lied to him his whole life; it must just be something grown-ups did.

_You always told the truth, Harry. I admired you for that._

“That’s why you took it,” Harry said. “From my house; that was why you took the hair.”

Draco’s gaze flicked up quickly. “That—was only part of the reason, Harry. The other things I said were also true.”

“Then why didn’t we go before?” Harry asked. “To the Ministry. If you took the hair so you could be me—”

“Today is Sunday,” Draco said. “There will be fewer people there and so less of a chance of being questioned. Besides,” he added, sounding a trifle defensive. “I was hoping if I could narrow down the ingredients for the original potion, I wouldn’t have to find the brewer to make a cure. But now we’re down to that last ingredient, and I’ve no idea what it is. It’s got to be something I’ve never seen before, some kind of powerful magical substance . . .” He frowned, no longer worrying the placemat but looking so unhappy. “I don’t think I can make the cure without it.”

Harry looked at Draco, the downward twist to his mouth, the smudges still under his eyes. Harry didn’t think Draco slept very much on the bunk beds, even though whenever Harry had checked in the middle of the night, Draco had been lying there. He certainly didn’t snore.

Draco hadn’t lied, not really. He just hadn’t said everything, and Harry wondered how many things he was missing because Draco thought he wouldn’t understand. “It’s okay,” Harry heard himself say.

Draco looked up at him.

Harry went on, “If you had fixed me already, I wouldn’t know how to wizard duel, or play Exploding Snap.”

Draco’s lips pursed. “You would; you just wouldn’t know how to from me.”

“Knowing how to from you is better.” Harry finished his toast. “Who do I get to be?”

Draco swallowed what sounded like a little sigh. “Polyjuice is regulated. It’s illegal to take on someone else’s appearance without their permission.”

_Now_ Harry understood what Draco had been hesitant about. He could get the permission of a ten-year-old Harry, but he didn’t have the permission of the thirty-one-year-old Harry. Maybe Draco thought old-him would be mad, and once again Harry thought old-him sounded a bit like an arse. “But we’re being illegal anyway, right?” Harry said. “Because we’re breaking in.”

“Yes,” Draco said, somewhat hesitantly. “But it’s not just that it’s illegal, Harry. It’s—disrespectful.”

“Why?”

“It’s someone else’s body,” Draco said. “And you have to take a part of them to do it. And then to assume their identity; it’s . . . one shouldn’t do it. It’s—it’s . . .” He made a weird face. “Immoral.”
Harry didn’t want to be immoral. He knew that was bad, even though he still was a little unclear on what all was meant by it. “Then what do I have to—” Cutting himself off, Harry ogled. “You? Do I get to be you?”

Draco smiled faintly. “If you don’t mind.”

“Are you mental? I get to break into the Ministry and be you while you’re being me? And look in my desk and get asked questions and look fit while doing it? Why would I mind?”

Draco coloured slightly, his cheeks going pink. “Yes, well,” he said, standing hastily. “Finish up your breakfast, then, and we can be on our way.”

Draco was already leaving the kitchen, so Harry finished his breakfast in a flash, Scourgifying his plate so fast it left streaks of syrup still on it. Putting it away anyway, Harry rushed out of the kitchen, through the sitting room, and clambered down the stairs.

In the lab, Draco had two small beakers of something that looked a bit like mud—thick and oozing, with slow bubbles. “I haven’t yet added the hair,” Draco said. “It will work best if we change first into what we’ll wear when we’re each other—what we’re wearing now won’t fit either of us.”

“Oh,” Harry said, feeling disappointed in spite of his excitement. “I grow up short?”

Draco seemed to find this amusing. “Not at all.” Harry must have still looked concerned, because Draco added, “Don’t worry, Harry. When you see your older self, I imagine you’ll be quite—satisfied at the way you’ve turned out. Shall I go first?”

Harry wasn’t sure what Draco meant, but when he went into the bedroom Harry realized Draco was going to drink it in there, since he had to change his clothes first. After Harry figured it out, he sort of wished he’d elected to go first. Seeing himself be old wouldn’t be as nerve-wracking if he was already in Draco’s body. Everything was probably better in Draco’s body.

Fidgeting as he waited for Draco, Harry went over and looked at the remaining cup of sludge. It didn’t seem to smell at all, which was surprising. He sort of wanted to taste it, but in school they’d said little pieces of skin were falling off of you all the time and he didn’t want to contaminate it, so he didn’t actually touch it. Draco was sure taking a long time. Turning to the other things on the bench, Harry picked up a jar that seemed to be full of delicate wings.

Then the door was opening, and Harry was turning around, and a man was stepping out of Draco’s bedroom.

He looked awful.

Back ing up a step, Harry dropped the jar.

“Harry,” the man said. He was coming towards him. “Are you all right?”

Harry backed up another step and another, until he was up against the wall.

“Harry,” the man said again, this time higher-pitched, which didn’t look right coming out of that harsh, serious-looking mouth. He set his empty beaker on the lab bench. “It’s me.”

“But why do I,” Harry heard himself say, and his voice sounded too high as well. He took a deep breath. “Why do I look like that?”

“Like what?” The man looked angry, but the way he was talking wasn’t. “Harry—what’s wrong? I
thought you’d be so . . .” His voice faltered. “Impressed.”

Harry’s grown-up body wasn’t short. It wasn’t taller than Draco either, but it was wider, the shoulders and chest broader. It wasn’t big like Arnold Schwarzenegger was big—Uncle Vernon thought Arnold Schwarzenegger was tops—but he sort of looked like someone who could beat you up, if he wanted to. That wasn’t the awful part, though. The awful part was he looked like he did want to.

He had a mean face.

It was all sharp angles and harsh lines, with a moustache and a beard and hair past his ears, pulled up in back with long bits falling down by his ears. On someone else, it might have looked cool. Come to think of it, the whole body might have been cool on anybody else; only, Harry had hoped that he would look friendly and kind. And handsome. And elegant. And posh. Like Draco.

“It’s . . .” Harry swallowed. “It’s fine. I just—I didn’t expect to look like that.”

“But aren’t you—I thought you’d be happy,” Draco-in-Harry’s body said, finishing lamely.

“Why?” Only afterwards did Harry remember Draco saying he thought Harry would be satisfied.

“Because you’re so—you’re so . . .”

But Draco didn’t finish, and Harry couldn’t figure out what he’d been about to say. ‘Tough,’ maybe, because he did look that. Dudley would probably like to have such a body when he grew up, instead of the one he’d got. Harry tried to be glad he didn’t look like grown-up Dudley, but while grown-up Dudley had been round with greying hair, he hadn’t looked in the least threatening, and that was what this body was. It was threatening.

“It’s fine,” Harry said. “Sorry I broke the jar.”

“Harry, I don’t care about the jar.” Draco-in-Harry’s-body came a little closer, and now that he sounded less distressed and more concerned, he looked nicer too. The lines in his harsh face softened, though Harry still thought he looked a bit wild.

“How come I have a beard?” Harry blurted.

Draco-in-Harry’s-body touched the hair on the side of his chin, as though he had forgot it was there. “I asked you, once, but you . . . I thought it was because it looks . . . . You started wearing it that way when you were around twenty-eight.”

“Oh.”

“Harry, you . . .” Draco took another step closer, and with the way the brows went up and his jaw loosened up, he looked almost gentle. “You don’t think it’s . . . ?” But Draco didn’t finish the question, and instead went on, “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I just didn’t expect it,” Harry said. “Do I always dress that way?”

Draco looked down at himself, the frown back on the harsh, unforgiving face. This time Harry knew the frown wasn’t meant for him, but he still didn’t like it. He recognized the clothes, of course—Draco was wearing the scarlet robe, gloves, tunic, belt, breeches, and boots that Harry had worn when he had first shrunk down to his current age and size. He wondered whether Draco had the knobbly orange socks on, too. “Not always,” Draco said, sounding sort of at a loss.
“Er,” Harry said, once the silence had dragged out. “Do I still get to be you?”

“Yes. Yes, of course.” Turning, Draco pointed his wand at the jar broken on the floor, murmuring the incantation to repair it. Gathering itself together, the glass cracked back into shape, though the lovely clear insect wings were still all over the ground. Pointing his wand at those, too, Draco spelled them into the jar, then put the jar back on the bench. After picking up the beaker of muddy slime, he turned back to Harry. “I’ve laid out clothes for you on the bed. Remember to change into them first. Then you can add this,” Draco said, showing Harry a single golden hair, “and drink up.”

“Yes, sir.”

Draco grimaced. “Harry. I’m still Draco.”

“Right,” Harry said. “About that. We’re not meant to be friends, right?”

The face—Harry’s grown-up face—went cold, the expression flat, nothing like Draco would ever do. “Right,” Draco said, but he just sounded tired.

Looking at that face, Harry could believe they weren’t friends in a way he’d never been quite able to before, and it had reminded him of one tiny detail that seemed to be missing from this whole scheme. “If we’re not friends,” Harry ploughed on, “why would you come to the Ministry with me? If you’re going as me, and I’m going as you. Do other people think we’re friends?”

“Oh.” The cold expression melted. The eyes were very green, Harry noticed. He’d known already, but he hadn’t really known what it could feel like to have them looking at you like that, as though they could see right through you. It wasn’t a very nice feeling. “No one thinks we’re friends.”

Though Draco’s voice was gentle, Harry couldn’t help the way his shoulders slumped at this news. “But you do frequently come to me for potions consultations.”

“I do?” Harry perked up.

“You do.” The face smiled a bit, and that was nicer—far nicer than Harry had expected, actually. He seemed almost—good-looking, if he smiled like that. Probably that was just Draco underneath. “And the other Aurors know it. In fact, since I’m so good at it, the number of consultations I do are probably for the whole department—unless you work an exorbitant number of cases, which I wouldn’t doubt could also be true.”

Harry didn’t know what exorbitant meant, but he did get some information from this. “Is that why you’re the only one I can trust?”

“I don’t know.” The face smiled again. “Maybe you can tell me about that when you grow up.”

“Okay,” Harry said, reaching out for the beaker and the hair. “I’ll . . . I’ll try it.”

“Just a moment, Harry.” Draco let Harry have the beaker but withheld the hair. “You . . . you’ll see a mark. On my arm. It’s—it’s an old tattoo. Nothing to be concerned about—it won’t hurt you.”

Harry felt his eyes bug out. “You have a tattoo?”

“It was someone else’s idea.”

“Whose?” Harry thought about a sailor’s tattoo, which was a heart on the bicep with an arrow through it. They generally said “Mom”, but he was sure that was an American thing. “Was it your
“No. Don’t bother about it. It was from a very long time ago.”

“You don’t like it?” Harry had gathered this from Draco’s tone, but Harry was disappointed anyway. A tattoo sounded very cool, way better than some dumb old beard.

“I don’t like it at all, Harry. I wish I could take it off, but—it’s a part of my body, now, and so a part of me.”

“Then it can’t be that bad.”

“Oh, Harry.” The face went soft again, and a broad hand reached toward Harry’s forehead. Harry was so used to the gesture by now that even though the hand was attached to a different body, he knew what to expect, and the hand brushed Harry’s fringe aside. The thumb on the blunt-fingered hand brushed over Harry’s scar very gently, then pulled away. “You’d—you’d better go get ready.”

In the bedroom, Harry changed into the clothes Draco had laid out. Everything was too big and the buttons on the shirt took a while. Harry was embarrassed all over again that Draco had included underwear, and for the first time he realized all of his body was going to change into Draco’s. Turning bright red, even though no one could see, Harry quickly put on the pants and trousers. He wasn’t going to look at anything under the clothes, or anything. Except for the arm, so Harry left the cuff-buttons on the shirt open.

When he added the hair to the potion, the liquid swirled into something clear but tinged with amber, almost like tea. It didn’t smell like tea, though—it smelled like fire and something sweet. Putting the beaker to his lips, Harry took a deep breath, then made himself swallow the potion. It tasted like smoky caramel, like sugar that had burned in a pan. Then Harry’s limbs began to grow.

After a few moments, the stretching and tugging was done, and Harry looked wonderingly down at his hands. Everything was blurry.

Harry took his glasses off, and for the first time, he could see without them. The palms of his hands were long and elegant, nothing at all like old-him’s square ones, and the fingers were tapered, nails well-trimmed. Reaching his hand up, Harry checked his hair. It was silky and fine, just like Draco’s hair looked, not at all coarse. Harry ran his hand over his face just to make sure he was not wearing glasses, marveling at how easy it was to see everything without them.

The tattoo wasn’t at all what Harry had expected, but he didn’t know what he had expected since Draco’s responses had suggested it probably wasn’t a heart with an arrow through it. The only similarity to a heart was that the tattoo was red in colour, more like a scar than ink. The image, however, was what was most startling—a skull with a snake coming out of its mouth. It looked very cool, but even though Harry wanted to keep looking at it, he brought the sleeve down and closed the cuff button with his other hand. Draco didn’t like it. He probably didn’t want Harry looking at it.

Above the chest of drawers was a mirror, so Harry looked in it to see what he looked like as Draco. He looked very posh, just like Draco always did, but elegant and kind as well. It made Harry smile, and that looked even better. Satisfied with the potion’s work, Harry headed out of the bedroom and back into the lab with his empty beaker.

Draco—wearing Harry’s eyes—raked his gaze over Harry—wearing Draco’s body. It didn’t feel very nice at all, and Harry wondered whether his eyes were always so piercing when he grew up. “Very good,” Draco said, taking the beaker from Harry. “You’ll have to give me your glasses, Harry. I had no idea his vision was so bad.”
Harry turned back to get them.

“We’ll also have to . . .” Draco coughed a bit. “Er, they used to check wands at the Ministry. For security measures. A wizard’s wand is personal, but would you mind . . .” Pausing as though he couldn’t finish, Draco pulled his wand out of his sleeve, and at last Harry got it.

“Oh! We need to trade? Hold on.” Rushing back to the bedroom, Harry got his wand and glasses. As he held out his wand to Draco, he said, “Does this mean I get to—” But Draco was already handing Harry his own wand, which was slightly shorter and lighter coloured. Once Harry had it in hand, he didn’t feel the big surge he’d felt holding the dark-coloured one, but there was still a little something—not unpleasant. Still, Harry felt a bit disappointed; he had assumed Draco’s wand must be really cool. “Will it work for me?”

Draco had put the glasses on and was using them to look at Harry’s dark-coloured wand, but at Harry’s question he quickly slipped it away into his sleeve. “It should,” Draco seemed to hesitate again, then added, “You’ve used it before.”

“I have?” Harry tried swishing it around.

“Careful, Harry,” Draco murmured.

“Why was I using your wand?” Harry said. “If wands are so personal.”

“You needed it for something.” Draco turned back to the workbench, moving the jar of wings, cleaning up the empty beakers.

“I don’t think my voice is right,” Harry said. “Your voice was much nicer than this.”

“Harry.” Draco’s shoulders in Harry’s body slumped. “It’s going to sound deeper because the sound is reverberating through your own skull. Talking with your voice also sounds different to what I’m used to hearing when you talk.”

“Do I talk to you a lot?” Harry asked, trying not to sound eager. He just had trouble imagining what it was like, knowing Draco and not being friends.

“Sometimes you do,” Draco said gently. “But not often. Harry.” Draco finally turned back around. “We must . . . remain in character from here on out. Possibly we may be able to avoid talking to anyone else altogether, but you must . . . remember to call me Potter, and you mustn’t say things like . . .”

“Like what?” Harry prompted, when Draco faltered.

“Just don’t ask too many questions. And if I am . . . a little abrupt with you, it isn’t because I’m angry.”

“It’s because old-me is a git.” This would have been a point where Harry would push up his glasses; it felt strange to not have to do so any more. “That’s what you’re saying, right?”

Draco hesitated again. “I’m saying neither of us has ever been particularly nice to each other. While I’d like to try that at some point—now isn’t that time.”

Harry shrugged. “I can be rude if you want.”

Draco smiled, again making the face seem almost nice. “I have no doubt of that, Harry. Let’s go, shall we?”
They went.

* 

The Ministry of Magic was reached by a public toilet in London. They had to flush themselves in, which Harry thought was a joke at first. Once flushed, they arrived into a large hall, which had a fountain with statues in the middle. Harry wanted to stop to look, but Draco was striding on toward a set of golden gates at the other end.

A few people were in the hall—two men and a woman standing in a huddle and talking, two women sitting by the fountain, eating what appeared to be lunch. When Draco and Harry approached the gold gates, a little man popped out from behind a security stand. “Haven’t been in in a while!” the man said, beaming.

“Yes, hello,” Draco said in Harry’s voice, his tone brusque. “I’ve a guest, Draco Malfoy.”

“Malfoy?” The little man looked up at Harry, eyes widening slightly. He had tufts of hair behind his ears, which—along with his slightly rounded back—made him look sort of like a koala. “Isn’t that —”

“Yes,” Draco said, even more brusque. “He won’t cause trouble, on my honour.”

“If you say so,” the man said, looking sceptical. Turning back to Harry, he frowned. “Wand,” he snapped, holding out his hand.

“Oh,” Harry said, realizing this was the “security measure” Draco had mentioned. “Here,” he said, sliding the wand out of his sleeve.

Taking the wand, the man seemed to look it over. “Harry Potter’s got his eye on you,” he said, handing the wand back to Harry. “Don’t even think about causing trouble.”

“He wouldn’t dream of it,” Draco muttered. “Come on.”

Hastily putting his wand back into his sleeve, Harry followed Draco over to a lift. Once inside, Draco pressed the button for two and turned to Harry. The lift was otherwise empty. “That was very good Harry. How do you feel?”

“All right,” Harry said. “What did he mean when he said—”

“Shh,” Draco said, but he took Harry’s hand and squeezed once, hard, before letting go. “Not now.”

The door to the lift opened, revealing a long corridor with doors on either side.

“This way.” Draco led the way down the corridor, and Harry was just beginning to wonder how Draco even knew where he was going, when Draco murmured, “My father used to visit sometimes.”

Harry remembered Draco saying his father was important, and then they were at a set of heavy oak doors. Draco opened one, revealing a large room walled off into cubicles. The cubicles they could see in front of them had desks within them, as well as a chair at each desk and a filing cabinet beside. Although the desks were obviously used frequently, no one sat at them. In Draco’s body, Harry was tall enough to see over the cubicle walls. No one else appeared to be around, but if they were sitting at a desk they wouldn’t be visible.

Lifting his hand above his head, Draco said quietly, “Accio Harry’s quill.” A quill lifted from one of the cubicles and raced over toward them, then Draco began to walk in the direction from which the
quill had come. Harry guessed the quill had come from adult-him’s desk, so now they knew where it was.

“So, we’re not even walking to our desks anymore? Just float everything you need across the office, do you?” said a voice, before they’d got all the way there.

“Fuck,” Draco said, jumping.

“That’s a fantastic greeting, after not bothering to show for a week.”

The woman stood inside the cubicle they were just passing. She looked much older than Draco—like maybe forty or seventy or something, and she was short, but her body was broad—wide shoulders, thick hips. She wore big black boots, work trousers, and braces over a striped shirt.

“I see you finally brought your boyfriend,” the woman added, dark eyes sliding over to Harry.

Draco frowned, the expression fierce on Harry’s grown-up face. “He’s not my boyfriend.”

“So you always say. How’s Death Eater life treating you, Lucius-lite?”

“He’s helping me on a case,” Draco said quickly. “We’ll just be on our way.” He began leading them in the direction of what must be Harry’s cubicle, but the woman followed.

“That’s what I get? ‘Helping on a case’? And you owl fucking Robards, but you don’t owl me?”

“He is my boss,” Draco said.

They were at the desk the quill must have come from now, and Harry wanted to look at it, but he guessed with the woman there, it might look odd for Draco—who wasn’t Harry’s friend—to seem too interested. The desk was pretty messy, with papers scattered on it, an old coffee cup, three balloons, a bucket labelled ‘kidneys,’ and what looked like a pile of dead moths. Draco was looking through the papers while the woman stood there looking on.

“And what about him?” She gestured at Harry without really looking at him. “He your new partner? You’ll tell a former Death Eater what you’re working on, but you won’t tell—”

“I haven’t told him a thing,” Draco muttered, old-Harry’s voice making it sound like a growl.

“Then where have you been?”

“I believe I’ve already said.” Draco went on searching the desk, pulling out drawers. “I’m working on a case.”

“Which one?” the woman said, hand on her hip. “In case you’ve forgot in the week you’ve been away, Potter, we’ve got seven open right now.”

“A different one,” Draco said, moving on to the file cabinet.

The woman’s hand slid off her hip, her lips parting. Then she seemed to notice Harry watching her and frowned. “Well, what case is it?” she said, turning back to Draco. “If it’s the Ludville case, don’t worry about that. Mysteries has it under control. I’m sure it will all get cleared up—”

Suddenly Draco stood and turned, scroll in hand. “What are you doing here on a Sunday anyway, Savage?”

“Working,” the woman—Savage—said, almost too quickly. Then belatedly, afterwards,
“Obviously.”

“Obviously,” Draco echoed, then turned to Harry. “This is the potion I was telling you about,” he said, handing over the scroll. “Do you think you can find the brewer?”

Taking the scroll, Harry opened it up. It was filled with words, but it didn’t look like a potion. “Yes,” was all he said, since he was pretty sure that was what Draco wanted him to say.

“Fine,” said Draco. “We’ll be going, then.”

“Yeah, well—send a postcard next time, will you?” Savage said, stomping off.

Draco headed back toward the big oak doors, so Harry followed, stopping when Draco suddenly grabbed his hand. Letting go, Draco put his finger over his lips as a sign for silence, then went to the oak door, opened it, and closed it without going through. Taking Harry’s hand again, Draco led them to crouch against the cubicle wall.

A sudden crack filled the big room—like the sound they made whenever they pushed through cold darkness into another place.

“Quickly,” Draco whispered. Still holding Harry’s hand, Draco led them back through the cubicles, all the way back to where Savage had been standing when they had first seen her. This time she wasn’t there, and Harry understood the cracking sound must have been Savage doing the disappearing spell.

Finally letting go Harry’s hand, Draco began searching the desk in Savage’s cubicle, much as he had searched Harry’s. After a few moments of this, he placed a piece of parchment on the desk with a quill on top. Harry looked at the parchment, but it appeared blank. Draco turned to Harry. “Harry, may I have my wand?”

Drawing it out of the sleeve of his posh shirt, Harry gave it to Draco, who pointed it at the quill on the desk.

“Prior scribendo,” Draco murmured. The quill lifted up and began to write on the parchment.

This went on for only a few moments before the quill lay down again. Picking up the parchment, Draco blew on it, then folded it and slipped it into the scarlet robe.

“Accio the quill of Cecil Vance,” Draco said next, holding his hand up high.

Another quill rose above the cubicles so it could float to Draco’s hand, but Draco began walking swiftly in that direction, so Harry followed. They came to yet another desk, which Draco searched just as he had the last. He made that quill write things as well, took the paper it wrote on, then returned everything to look as it had been. Then Draco took Harry’s hand again and squeezed it.

“Just one more thing, Harry. You’re doing so well.”

Harry didn’t think he was doing so well, as Draco seemed to be following some sort of plan that Harry didn’t understand at all, but he kept quiet as they went back to old-Harry’s desk. There, Draco gathered up all the papers he had left lying there when Savage had been watching them, as well as several files from the cabinet.

“There,” Draco said. “That’s all we need. Hold my hand again, Harry.”

Harry put out his hand for Draco to take, and then they were squeezing through the cold black, straight into Draco’s laboratory.
“That was good,” Draco said, setting all of the papers onto one of the work benches. He took out the parchments he had folded up as well. “Do you have that scroll?” Harry handed it over and Draco took it, adding it to the pile. “You did so well,” Draco said again, coming back over to Harry. “How do you feel?”

“Are you going to tell me what we did?” If Harry hadn’t been in Draco’s body, he would have pushed up his glasses again.

“I . . . don’t know exactly,” Draco said, frowning. A frown on old-Harry’s face looked fierce, but it didn’t bother Harry as much anymore. “I’ll have to go through those papers. Would you like lunch?” he added, moving toward the stairs.

Draco always did that, avoiding questions. Harry stayed put. “What’s a Death Eater?”

“A bad person,” Draco said dismissively.

“What’s a Lucius-lite?”

“Another bad person.”

“Who was that lady? Who’s Cecil Vance?”

“They’re Aurors,” Draco snapped. “I should have thought that would be obvious.”

Draco had talked like that to Savage, and he’d sort of talked like that to Harry when Harry had first de-aged. He hadn’t really talked to him like that since, though, and it rather took Harry aback.

Draco had been heading out of the lab, but then he turned back to look at Harry. “Oh,” he said, almost sounding like Draco again, instead of old-Harry. “Harry,” he said, coming back. As he reached out for Harry’s hand, he began to change—slimming down, his shoulders narrowing. His hair grew blond from the roots, the beard on his face growing inward as his face thinned. “I’m sorry,” Draco said, and now sounded exactly like himself. “I’m—I’m just as lost in this as you, and I’m trying to make sense of it. I’m sorry I can’t explain everything, but I’ll—I’ll tell you as much as I know.”

“Maybe I can help,” Harry said. He still felt tall, so he must still look like Draco, and Draco was holding his hand. If anyone had been able to see them just then, they would have looked like twins.

Draco smiled his nice smile, the one that was a gentle curve and looked so kind. “I’m sure you’ll be able to. You and your friends were always solving mysteries at Hogwarts.”

Just then Harry felt himself begin to shrink. Draco’s hand started to loosen—either because Harry’s hand was growing smaller or because Draco was letting go. Harry’s hand tightened. “I liked being you,” he said, feeling himself grow even smaller, until he was swimming in Draco’s posh trousers and dress shirt.

“Harry,” Draco said, but then didn’t say anything else. Bending down, he carefully moved Harry’s hair—Harry guessed he had his scar back, and then Draco was putting Harry’s glasses over his eyes. “Reducio glasses,” Draco murmured, and the glasses fit themselves to Harry’s head. “Here’s your wand back,” Draco said, giving it over. “Go get changed. I’ll change as well, then make you lunch and tell you what I know.”

Harry gave Draco his own wand back, then went to do as Draco said.
Draco was right; he didn’t know much.

Gawain Robards was head of the Aurors and Harry’s boss. Draco had been owling him and signing Harry’s name to excuse Harry’s absence, which was something Harry hadn’t even considered until now.

Georgiana Savage had been an Auror for years, long enough that Draco thought she would no longer be interested enough in the work to come in on a Sunday. That was why he had decided he’d trick her into making her think they’d left. The spell he had done on her quill had simply made her quill copy the last thing she’d written, which had been a note to Cecil Vance.

Cecil Vance was a younger Auror about whom old-Harry had sometimes complained, Draco said. Vance’s mother was some kind of hero, but Draco didn’t seem to think much of Vance’s father, who had risen in the Ministry of Magic after her death. Since old-Harry had said Draco was the only person he could trust, that implied he didn’t trust anyone at the Ministry, which meant that either Savage or Vance could be involved in the case Draco was working on. Draco had taken the files from Harry’s desk to see if there were any connections to Savage, Vance, the papers they had seen in Harry’s house, or a potion that could de-age someone.

For lunch Harry asked for the mini-beef wellingtons again. Draco made one but had chicken salad for himself. As they ate, Draco saw Harry looking at it, and let Harry try it. It was very good—much better than any salad Aunt Petunia had ever made. When Draco saw that Harry keep looking at it, he made another one just for Harry, and didn’t make him finish the beef. Harry sort of wanted to finish them both, but he remembered that time he got sick and decided to save the rest for later.

Afterwards, Draco said he needed to look at the files. In the spirit of helping, Harry read a few of them, but after two or three of them he gave up. Draco was going to read them anyway; he could just tell Harry what they said. Maybe if they got in trouble, Harry could help with magic, so he decided to practice the spells he’d learned over the last week. In the evening, Harry got to have more chicken salad and beef wellington, and then Draco made them biscuits and tea. After dessert, Harry thought they might do something fun like they usually did, but instead Draco said he had to read more of the papers.

Harry practiced more of his magic. They were in the sitting room, but since Harry had to move around to practice on different things, Draco hadn’t made the floral wingback chair into a sofa. Eventually Harry got bored of practicing, even though it was fun. He wanted to sit by Draco but didn’t want to bother him. Those times Harry had fallen asleep, Draco had used his wand to carry Harry off to bed, but before that he must have fallen asleep beside Draco—against Draco, Harry realized, remembering the feel of Draco’s warm shoulder against his cheek.

The memory was so nice Harry sort of wanted to fall asleep that way again, but that was weird. People didn’t hold you in their arms when you were as old as Harry was; only babies needed to be held, and that was because they couldn’t walk. And Uncle Vernon was always saying to Dudley that big boys didn’t need to get cuddled either—even though Petunia was cuddling Dudley all the time, but that was because Petunia was annoying, and Dudley was horribly spoiled. It was weird to want someone to touch you, but Harry couldn’t help wishing Draco had made the chair a sofa. Then he could just sit by him, and that wasn’t weird. It was perfectly normal to want to sit by someone you liked. People did it in school all the time.

“Protracto,” Draco said, and Harry looked up to see the chair lengthen into a sofa. “Come sit beside me, Harry,” Draco said, and Harry wondered whether he’d seen Harry looking longingly at the chair.

Harry went to go sit beside him anyway.
“Would you like to read some more?” Draco asked, moving the papers so Harry could see them.

Harry didn’t really want to, but the way Draco was holding the papers meant that Harry had to get closer, so he could look at them. “Yes,” Harry said, budging over and pretending to look at the papers. After a moment he looked up at Draco, who was staring intently at the parchment. “Er,” Harry said, hesitating. He pressed closer. “Isn’t your arm getting squashed?”

Draco looked down at him, seeming nonplussed, and yet once he looked at Harry’s face he immediately said, “Oh yes, very squashed,” and pulled his arm out, settling it around Harry’s shoulders.

It felt so warm and good, and it wasn’t weird because it was just so they could read the papers, even though Harry wasn’t reading them. Instead he was thinking about spells, and Hogwarts, and solving mysteries, and how he could almost feel Draco’s heartbeat again. Harry’s eyes drifted closed, but occasionally Draco would shift so he could move onto the next paper, which would bring them open again. The next time they opened, Draco’s hand was in Harry’s hair.

“It won’t go straight,” Harry mumbled.

“Hm?”

“My hair.”

“Ah.” Draco’s hand stopped.

“You can’t get it to look nice,” Harry explained.

There was a pause. “On the contrary.” Draco’s voice was low and rumbly with Harry’s ear against his chest. “I always thought it very nice.”

“It was even messy on old-me.”

“I quite like it on old-you. Especially—” Draco cut himself off.

Harry looked up at him, but Draco was looking at the papers. “I liked it especially when it was long enough that you could wear it up. Just a moment, Harry,” Draco said, shifting under him and pulling his arm tighter around Harry to switch to the next paper. Then it went back to where it was, but the hand didn’t touch his hair again.

“You can try to straighten it out if you want,” Harry said, after a long moment in which Draco’s hand didn’t return to his hair. “I don’t mind it.”

Another pause, then another soft rumble. “I don’t mind it either, Harry.” Draco’s hand touched Harry’s hair again, fingers touching Harry’s scalp, the shell of his ear.

Harry closed his eyes again.

*  

“Harry.”

Something shook Harry’s shoulder, but Harry was warm, even if his head was on something kind of hard. He didn’t want to wake up.

“Harry,” said Draco’s voice. “Wake up.”
The low urgency in Draco’s tone at last made Harry open his eyes. He was still lying against Draco on the couch, and the hard thing was Draco’s elbow. The fire had gone quite low, and it was otherwise completely dark in the room. It must be quite late.

“I think I’ve found something,” Draco said.

“About the potion?”

“About the missing ingredient,” Draco said. “We need to go to your house.”

“Now?” Harry yawned.

“If I’m right, that means we’re that much closer to finding that ingredient,” Draco said. “Accio two robes.”

“What is it?” Harry asked, sitting up and trying to blink the sleep from his eyes.

“I still don’t know,” Draco said, “but I think I found the connection between the cases older-you must have found as well. If I’m right, I need to look at some of the files he had at Grimmauld Place to see if I can figure out how he found the place we went the night you de-aged.”

“Okay.” Standing up, Harry straightened his glasses, then covered another yawn.

“Reducio,” Draco said, pointing at one of the robes. “Put this on,” he said, handing it to Harry. “It’s cool outside and we can’t Apparate directly to your house.”

“Apparate?”

“That’s the spell we use to get places.”

Squeezing through the black, Harry guessed. “Okay,” he said again, holding out his hand.

Draco took it, and they Apparated.

* 

They appeared on Grimmauld Place exactly where they had before, only this time the street was dark, and Number Twelve was already standing there. Quickly, they went up the steps and opened the big door. Harry went in first again, but once they were inside Draco moved past him, up the steps. They went up to the room with all the boxes of papers in it, only it looked different than before.

The boxes were all open, papers spread everywhere. Things from the shelves were on the floor. Harry felt sure they hadn’t left the room this messy, but old-him certainly hadn’t been around here to move things, and Draco had said Harry wasn’t married. Harry supposed the red-head or brown-haired girl—Weasley and Granger, Draco had called them—could have come to his house when he wasn’t there, but that seemed strange.

“Harry,” Draco said, his voice harsh. His hand was reaching for Harry’s, when someone shouted.

“Stupefy!”

“Protego!” Draco said, almost at the same time. A burst of light moved in front of them, seeming to hit an invisible shield in front of Draco. Jerking hard on Harry’s hand, Draco shouted, “Get behind me!”
Standing in the hall was a man Harry had never seen before. He was holding a sheaf of papers, pointing a wand at Draco. “Finite incantatem!”

“Expelliarmus!” Draco shouted, at the same time as the man shouted something else.

They were fighting, Harry realized, and Draco was protecting him with his body.

“Protego,” Draco said again, and more light crashed into an invisible shield. “Confundus!”

Light flashed out from Draco’s wand, but at the same time a shadow came out of the man’s wand—a long, dark thing, unspooling like ribbon into a cloud. Harry felt suddenly afraid in a way he had not thought to feel before.

Still holding Harry’s hand, Draco squeezed hard. Then with the wand in his other hand, he said, “Expecto patronum!”

Harry watched for the silver fox, but it never came. Instead there was a silver deer—not even a grown-up one. It had a little tail and spots on its back, just the like that deer in that cartoon movie. It rushed at the black shadow, making it burst to pieces like shreds of fabric.

The man who was attacking them had broken into Harry’s house, Harry realized. The man must have been looking for the same papers they were. Drawing his wand, Harry leaned out from behind Draco’s shoulder. “Accio papers!”

The papers flew away from the man, who looked surprised.

“Stay behind me!” Draco said frantically, pushing Harry back. Lunging forward, he shouted, “Stupefy!”

The man, momentarily distracted by the flying papers, only narrowly blocked Draco’s spell, shouting, “Protego!” as he did it.

“Finite incantatem,” Draco shouted. “Expelliarmus!”

But by then the man had regained his footing and was already shouting something back.

Meanwhile the papers snapped into Harry’s hands. He knew Draco didn’t want him to get hurt, but Draco obviously needed help. “Tarantellegra!” Harry shouted, leaning out around Draco again.

The man, who had been in the middle of shouting something else, began to dance.

“Petrificus totalis!” Draco shouted, then grabbed Harry awkwardly by the wrist. “Let’s go!”

Then the black was squeezing them, colder and tighter than before, everything swirling away into nothing but cold. There wasn’t even air to breathe, and then they were in the sitting room, and stars were swimming in Harry’s eyes.

“Harry!” Draco fell to his knees, and then he was touching Harry’s shoulders, his hair, his hands, his chest. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Harry said, trying to step away, because Draco was acting weird.

Draco held on. “Don’t ever do that. Do you understand me? Don’t ever do that.”

“But I got us these,” Harry said, thrusting out the papers.
“You did.” Draco took the papers, but he didn’t seem to care about them at all. He set them on the floor and took Harry’s hands again. “But you mustn’t—you mustn’t put yourself in danger. Do you understand?”

“I wasn’t in danger,” Harry said. “You were there.”

Draco just looked at him, and Harry didn’t understand why what he had said would make Draco look so sad. “Harry.” Draco stood, and then Harry couldn’t see. His glasses were being pressed up against something soft and hard, and Draco’s hands were on his back. Warmth surrounded Harry, but he sort of felt like he was suffocating too, and then he realized Draco was hugging him. Draco murmured something, and Harry heard the word “brave.”

At last Draco let him go, and Harry pulled away uncomfortably. He wasn’t sure why Draco had wanted to hug him, as it seemed like they probably had more important things to do at this point. “Who was that man?” Harry asked, hoping they could get to work on the mystery.

Bending to sweep the papers off the floor, Draco picked them up and then began heading for the stairs. “That was Cecil Vance,” Draco said as Harry followed him downstairs. “I think it’s safe to say he’s involved. That was a dark spell he used.”

“Why didn’t the fox spell work?”

“It worked just fine.” Then they were entering the lab, and Draco went on, “We need to leave this place, Harry. It’s not safe here anymore.” Even as he spoke, Draco was packing the papers from Vance into a leather satchel. Then he pointed his wand about the lab, shrinking notes, bottles, and ingredients and adding them to the bag.

“What about Heloise?”

“Heloise can take care of herself,” Draco said.

“But your shop,” Harry went on, realizing he didn’t want to leave. It was such a nice place, nicer than any place he’d ever been before. He’d never even been inside any of the cupboards.

“The shop will be fine,” Draco said. “I’ll return once we get this sorted.”

“But where are we going?” Harry asked, following Draco around as Draco went into the bedroom.

Draco began packing clothes, and Harry recognized the scarlet robe he’d been wearing when he’d shrunk, that Draco had worn when he’d had Harry’s body. “You said I was the only one you trusted,” Draco said, adding the robe to the bag, then adding other clothes as well. “But I have to assume at this point you meant the only one you could trust who could also help you with this case. She might not have been able to help you then, but there’s someone who can help us now, and I know for a fact both you and I trust her.” Done with his packing, Draco put the bag on his shoulder, then reached out a hand for Harry.

“But who is it?” Reluctantly, Harry took Draco’s hand.

“You’ll see.”

Harry wanted to ask more questions, but the room was already swirling away.

*  

They Apparated into a new room with a loud pop. “Lumos Maxima,” Draco said, tossing the
resulting light up toward the ceiling. The room was nice, though not terribly large. It had a sofa and two chairs, with a low table and some bookcases. A kitchen opened up behind them and to the left was a hallway. To the right was a hearth and a large window. It was still dark out, and the blinds were drawn.

“Expelli—” someone began to shout, then broke off. A woman came in from the hall, lowering a wand. She had long grey hair and a white nightgown that reached down to the floor. She almost looked like something from a painting, despite having obviously just jumped out of bed—or maybe because she had just jumped out of bed. Her hair was a trifle wild, her eyes blazing. “Draco Malfoy,” she said, sounding dismayed. “Just what do you think you’re doing?”

“Andromeda.” Letting go of Harry’s hand, Draco said took a step away.

The woman’s eyes snapped down to Harry, then she took a swift step toward him. “What—” she stopped as quickly as she had begun. “That’s not Teddy.”

“No,” Draco agreed.

“But what . . .” The woman—Andromeda—took another step forward. Harry had heard the name before, somewhere.

Draco brushed Harry’s fringe aside.

Andromeda’s eyes widened. They were a deep brown, Harry saw, and then she looked back up at Draco. “What happened?”

“A potions accident,” Draco said.

“With you?” said Andromeda.

“That’s a bit of a long story,” Draco said, “and I’m sure Harry would like to know who you are. Do you mind if . . . we stay for a while?”

“You’re Draco’s mum’s sister,” Harry said. “I saw you in a photo album.”

Andromeda stared at him. “I’ll make a pot of tea.” Spinning on her heel, she went off down the hall, her white nightgown twirling away.

*

Ten minutes later, Andromeda, Draco, and Harry were sat in the kitchen, each holding mugs of tea. Andromeda also had biscuits, which improved her in Harry’s opinion, even though she seemed sort of stern. Draco had explained that she was Teddy Lupin’s grandmother, and Teddy Lupin was Harry’s godson. Harry couldn’t imagine having a godson, but he supposed his godson’s grandmother must be all right.

Draco had also explained to Andromeda about the de-ageing potion, and what had happened at the Ministry as well as at Harry’s house. “I’d gone with him to a warehouse,” Draco said. “P—Harry said he thought it might be the base of operations for an illegal ring he’d been trying to pin down. I’d . . . been helping him with potions identification before that. I suppose I never mentioned it to you.”

“But Harry did,” said Andromeda.

“He—he did?” Draco took a quick sip of his tea.
“Oh, yes. He was annoyed that you seemed to be the only one good enough at potions to help the department.”

“Ah.” Draco set his cup down with a clatter.

“And he was impressed with how willing you always were to help,” Andromeda went on.

“Old-me told Draco he was the only one I could trust,” Harry piped up, because even if old-him was a prat, at least he’d said that one nice thing.

“That makes sense,” Andromeda said, politely sipping her tea. “If Harry suspected the Ministry being involved, the best help would come from someone entirely outside of it. Harry,” she went on, putting down her tea and standing up. “You must be tired. I’ll make up Teddy’s bed for you.”

“I’m not tired,” Harry said, yawning directly after his words.

“You’ve had a very exciting day,” Andromeda said. Her kitchen was much larger than Draco’s, with marble countertops and dark wood cabinets. Harry didn’t think it as nice as Draco’s kitchen, but it was much nicer than Petunia’s. There was a fridge in it, as well as a telephone, though they looked old-fashioned.

“I’m going to help Draco solve the mystery,” Harry said.

“In the morning,” Draco said, standing also and picking up the satchel he’d brought.

Harry turned toward him. “You’re not going to leave me here—are you?”

“We’re both staying here tonight,” Draco said, putting out his hand.

Harry took it, and they followed Andromeda through the sitting room and down a hall. “Where is Draco going to sleep?” Harry asked as they walked through the wood-panelled corridor. The house was nice but seemed sort of old. “Are there bunk beds?”

“I’ll take the sofa,” Draco said.

“I want you to sleep in a bed,” Harry said, as they came into a bedroom.

The bedroom was very cool, despite the same wood-panelling. It had posters up, and the people in the posters were intimidating, but in a cool way, with Mohicans and pink hair and rings in their noses. They were holding things like guitars and drumsticks, and they looked like they might be screaming, but you couldn’t hear them. The chest of drawers was covered in stickers, and on the floor was a rug that snarled when you stepped on it. The bedcovers were silver, but changed colour when Andromeda turned the coverlet down.

“Teddy’s about the same, I see,” Draco said.

“Where is he?” Harry asked, looking around as though Teddy might materialize from the accordion wood door in the corner, which must lead to a cupboard.

“At Hogwarts,” Andromeda said. Turning to the chest of drawers, she said, “I’ll transfigure you pyjamas.”

Harry looked up at Draco. “Can we have bunk beds?”

“No, Harry,” said Draco. “We’re not going to ruin Teddy’s furniture.”
Thinking about this, Harry frowned. “Does that mean you ruined your furniture?”

“Wood weakens if you stretch it,” Andromeda said, “but Teddy’s bed is sturdy. It should work all right for a few nights.”

Draco glanced at Andromeda. “If you’re sure.”

Harry was still thinking about Draco’s furniture. “Does that mean your flower-chair is ruined as well?”

“You have a flower-chair, Malfoy?” Andromeda said, her tone a little mocking.

“Oh, stuff it,” Draco muttered.

“You call him Malfoy?” Harry said, looking from Andromeda to Draco. He’d thought Andromeda was Draco’s friend, but now he wasn’t so sure.

“Only to tease him,” Andromeda said. “He needs to be teased from time to time, or he becomes too self-pitying.”

“No, he doesn’t,” Harry said, drawing himself up and moving closer to Draco. “He’s fine as he is, thanks.”

“Harry,” Draco said, his tone gently remonstrative.

“You are,” Harry said, turning to look up at him.

Andromeda burst out laughing. “You haven’t changed in the least!”

Reaching for Draco’s hand, Harry moved closer, so he could put himself between Draco and Andromeda. He wasn’t sure he liked her after all.

“She means you were always very brave and protective of your friends.” Draco squeezed his hand. “It’s not a bad thing.”

“That’s not what I meant at all,” Andromeda said, still chuckling. “I meant he doesn’t like hearing bad things said about you.”

Harry looked up at Draco, who began to change colour.

“Unless he’s the one saying them,” Andromeda went on.

“Let’s get that bunk bed set up,” Draco muttered.

“Of course,” Andromeda said, her tone cheerful.

They both pointed their wands at the bed, transfiguring it in short order into a very cool bunk bed. Instead of splitting the coverlet, though, Andromeda went and got another one, and Draco made Harry take the pyjamas and go into the loo to change. “What did she mean about me not liking bad things said—”

“I don’t know, Harry,” Draco cut him off, sounding testy. “You’ll have to tell me all about it when you grow up.”

“But do you think that means—”
“I said I don’t know.” Then Draco looked at him, and his face went soft all over. “Come along, please, just get changed for me. We’ll sleep, and then in the morning we’ll figure out the ingredient, and when it’s all fixed, you can grow up and decide whether to be friends.”

“We will be friends,” Harry said, heading to the loo. “You promised.”

“Yes, I promised we could.” Draco turned to close the door, but before he did, he stopped to brush Harry’s fringe aside. Harry was used to him doing it, except Draco kept doing it all the time now, like he needed to see Harry’s scar frequently for some reason, and then—he did something weird. Leaning in, he let his lips brush Harry’s scar, and then he was backing out of the loo. “Change so we can go to sleep,” he said, and shut the door.

Harry stood there for a long moment, trying to figure out why Draco was so weird.

It took him nearly a minute to figure out he’d been kissed.

Harry thought he’d probably been kissed before. His parents must have done it. Bringing his hand up, he touched the scar. It didn’t feel any different. The kiss hadn’t felt good or special or anything like that, mostly just confusing, but Draco had kissed him. Draco had wanted to kiss him—because he liked him, the way Aunt Petunia was always kissing Dudley. Because she liked him.

And that, rather than the kiss, felt good and special and extremely nice—that Draco would want to kiss him. For no reason. With what hadn’t seemed like a lot of thought behind it—just an absent gesture, and Harry wondered if that was what it was like to have parents. Maybe that was what they did—kiss you just because they wanted to, and push you into bathrooms, and never answer questions or explain things fully. But despite that, maybe they still said nice things, and held you, and gave you good food to eat and a bed to sleep in. Maybe Draco was what having a dad was like.

If that was what it was like, Harry thought it would be all right.

The next morning, however, Draco was gone.
Chapter 5

Draco had left the silver deer behind.

Harry hated it.

“A fawn,” Andromeda had called it. That was what you called a baby deer; fawns had spots on their backs. Harry didn’t care; the fawn was dumb. It looked dumb, and helpless, and pointless. The fox had been much cooler. Harry didn’t understand why, if Draco was going to leave Patronus to spy on him, he wouldn’t leave the fox. A fox would do a better job than a fawn.

That morning, Harry had awakened to find the fawn without Draco below him on the bunks. A set of clothes had been laid out for Harry, set neatly over Teddy’s desk chair. The leather satchel Draco had brought was on the seat of the chair.

Heart sinking as he realized Draco must have already awoken and begun working on the case without him, Harry had made his way to the sitting room. Andromeda was on the sofa, reading a newspaper. “Where’s Draco?” Harry asked.

“He left.” Andromeda lowered the newspaper to turn the page. She had on a small pair of spectacles, looking at him over the tops of the rims. “There’s cereal if you want it. And I can make more tea, if you like.” She put the newspaper back up again.

“Left where?” Harry asked, beginning to feel worried.

“He’s working on figuring out that ingredient.”

“Without me?”

“Manifestly,” said Andromeda.

“But—but he promised we could do it together!”

“Did he?” Andromeda turned another page.

Harry was getting angry, now. “Aren’t you at least going to tell me where he went?”

Andromeda moved the paper aside quickly, looking a bit alarmed. “I believe he felt it too dangerous. Come,” she said, standing and setting the paper aside. “Let’s get that cereal.”

“I don’t want cereal.”

“And I didn’t fancy taking care of a ten-year-old once again, but here we are.” Andromeda headed off toward the kitchen, and that was the end of that.

*

Andromeda was magical too, so she didn’t think he was a freak, and she didn’t have any cats. That made her much better than most adults, even though Harry didn’t like the way she teased. She seemed to tease quite a lot, but he was never sure that she was doing it, and usually when it happened he was pretty certain it was him she was laughing at. Harry, who was very used to being teased in a mean way, didn’t find it funny. Draco hadn’t teased him a lot, but when he had, Harry had always felt in on the joke.
She did play a few games of Exploding Snap with him, which wasn’t nearly as interesting as playing with Draco, though she did tell Harry about her grandson Teddy. He was a Metamorphmagus, which meant he could change his appearance at will. Andromeda said this mainly resulted in him having blue hair and scales and occasional horns, but that sometimes he wouldn’t look like the same person from one day to the next.

When Harry asked why Teddy was his godson, Andromeda told him about Remus Lupin and her daughter, Nymphadora Tonks. “They both died in the war,” she said.

“What war?” Harry asked.

“Then Draco hasn’t told you,” Andromeda said, playing a card.

“Told me what?”

“There was a man named Voldemort,” said Andromeda, setting down her cards and picking up her tea. “An evil, arrogant individual who felt that Muggles and people who associated with them were inferior. He amassed power and a group of followers and began killing Muggle people.”

She said it all so calmly, like a history text. Harry swallowed hard. “Was he—Draco said a bad man killed my parents. Was it him—Voldemort?”

“Yes. Your parents fought him bravely.” Andromeda went on sipping tea. “But that was a long time ago. Voldemort returned when you were at school.”

“But Draco said a very brave man killed him,” Harry said, frowning.

“Oh, yes.” Andromeda sipped her tea. “That very brave man was you.”

Harry’s eyes went large. “Me?”

“You’re a war hero, Harry.”

Harry once more got the impression that Andromeda found something amusing.

“Did Draco neglect to mention it?” Andromeda asked.

“Maybe . . .” Harry swallowed again. “Maybe he didn’t know.”

“But everyone knows. Are you going to play your cards?”

“But I didn’t really—Draco said the brave man didn’t—he didn’t really kill him,” Harry said. “He said—I wouldn’t . . . I’m not . . .” a killer, Harry was going to say, but he didn’t know. He didn’t know who he was when he grew up—a policeman who wasn’t friends with Draco. For the first time, it occurred to Harry that he didn’t know what he was capable of.

“He deserved to die.” Andromeda put her cup down. “Do you know how many innocent people Voldemort and his Death Eaters slaughtered? We can pretend to be nice and claim that there are two sides to everything, that everyone deserves mercy and forgiveness, or we can face the reality that sometimes it’s necessary to make tough choices to bring about a better world.”

When the Polyjuice potion had hit his system, Harry’s skin had stretched out, growing in all directions to accommodate longer limbs, a bigger torso, a large head. Harry felt a little like that now, only it was only happening inside his mind—that stretching out feeling, as though his mind was separating from his body and the chair and Andromeda, sitting there with her tea. “What’s a Death
“Eater?” was all he asked.

“One of Voldemort’s followers,” said Andromeda. “They were a cult of people who did his bidding, carried out his murders, and aided his rise to power.”

Harry’s mind kept stretching, separated completely now, floating there above the table. “Was Draco,” he began, but he already knew the answer.

“Yes.” For the first time, Andromeda’s voice gentled. “You must understand, Harry; he was very young. His parents both were Death Eaters, and he wasn’t given a lot of options.”

“His parents,” Harry began, but he couldn’t feel his voice. His throat wouldn’t make the words come out; the words were with his mind—even though he could make his mouth move, just like a puppet.

“Harry,” Andromeda said, reaching for his hand.

Harry snatched his hand away, jerking back from the table. His chair knocked back, clattering onto the floor. The sudden sound made him start and look down. “Sorry,” he said, not sure how the chair had got that way.

“He didn’t tell me,” Harry said.

“I imagine he wouldn’t have wanted you to know.”

Harry backed away from her.

“Perhaps we can finish our game later,” Andromeda said softly.

“Draco wants to make up for his past,” Andromeda said softly.

“He didn’t tell me,” Harry said.

“I imagine he wouldn’t have wanted you to know.”

Harry backed away from her.

“Perhaps we can finish our game later,” Andromeda said, standing up. Her voice was kind, but she looked forbidding—tall, with straight shoulders, her grey hair swept up in a low bun. She wore a long, old-fashioned dress, and her nose was perfect, just like Draco’s. “You look as though you would like time to yourself. Will you be all right?”

Harry didn’t know. He didn’t know what he would like; he didn’t know anything. Draco hadn’t told him anything.

“Harry.” Andromeda started to come over to him, and Harry jerked away.

“Yes,” he said. “Time to myself. I would like—time to myself.”

Andromeda’s hand fell. “Very well then. I shall be in the garden, should you require biscuits or companionship.” She swept out of the room, leaving Harry in the sitting room with nothing but the glowing silver fawn for company.

The fawn had stood when the chair clattered to the floor, its legs looking wobbly under it. Now it stood there staring at Harry, its little silver ears perked, its tail up.

“What are you looking at?” Harry asked it angrily. “How come you’re not a fox?”

Harry didn’t know what to do with the information he had been given, so he didn’t think about it. Instead, he thought about the de-ageing potion. They had to find the missing ingredient, so a cure could be made, but the potion was somehow connected to other cases Harry’s older self had been working on. That meant criminals were involved. That was probably why Draco thought it so dangerous that he had left without him.
Harry’s grown-up self was a policeman, which meant he did things like chase criminals all of the
time. He probably had a gun and a car with a siren and a partner to back him up, but—Draco didn’t
have a partner to back him up. And what if the criminal was Cecil Vance; Draco didn’t have
Expecto Patronum to save him from the black cloud, because he had left his stupid fawn here. Harry
and Draco probably wouldn’t have even got away the first time if Harry hadn’t cast Tarantellegra.

The potion had fallen on Harry; he was the one who was the wrong age. And old-him was meant to
be the policeman, only he obviously hadn’t caught the bad guy. And old-him had furthermore
dragged Draco along to that warehouse. Draco probably hadn’t even wanted to be there in the first
place, seeing as how they weren’t friends.

Harry should fix this.

He couldn’t do something to help, though, because he was stuck in this house. It wasn’t even in
London. Draco had said they were in Dorset, last night when they were lying on the bunk beds.
Draco had also told him he should get some sleep, but Harry had kept having questions, and Draco
had answered all of them. Or most of them, except now Harry didn’t even know if Draco had told
him the truth. And Harry had no idea where Draco had gone.

Resolving to work on the mystery, Harry went back to Teddy’s room to look at the papers Draco
had left out on the desk. Rifling through them, Harry tried to remember the other files from his own
house on Grimmauld Place. Cross-referencing, Draco had called it, but Harry had never read the
files Draco had taken from his desk at the Ministry. Still, perhaps there was something in the papers
Vance had had that would help. After all, Vance was obviously doing something wrong, having
broken into Harry’s house and casting that spell Draco had said was dark. Maybe there was
something in these papers about him.

As much as Harry disliked reading, he could be really focused if he was intent on something.
Painstakingly, he read through each paper, following the letters with his fingers so they jumped
around less. He searched for Cecil Vance’s name, as well as addresses or any locations he could find
with a map.

Several hours later, Andromeda called him for lunch. She hadn’t asked him what he wanted, which
resulted in rather more cabbage than he ever would have asked for. There were also chicken and
dumplings, though, so that was all right. “You’ve been very quiet,” Andromeda said. “Have you
found Teddy’s video games?”

“Yes,” Harry said, shoving a dumpling in his mouth.

Much more carefully, Andromeda took a polite bite of dumpling, then wiped her mouth with a
corner of her napkin. She was watching him, Harry knew, but he pretended to be focused on his
food. The fawn was standing not far away, watching him also. “Would you like to talk?”
Andromeda said at last.

“Not really,” Harry said immediately.

“Draco is doing what he thinks best,” Andromeda said. “It’s okay if you’re angry, but it isn’t fair to
blame him.”

“I’m not angry,” Harry said, shovelling in more dumpling.

“Aren’t you?” But that was all Andromeda said. They went on eating. Afterwards, she had him help
with the washing up, but then she allowed him to go back to Teddy’s room, the little fawn trotting
dutifully behind him. When Harry slammed the door on it, it walked through the wood, looking a bit
miffed. Miffed on the baby deer just made it look pitiful.

Eager to get back to the papers, Harry eventually found a parchment about a case that seemed promising. It involved a warehouse, and Cecil Vance was the Auror who had made the arrest described in the report. All of it seemed fairly innocuous, which was probably why Draco hadn’t made note of it the first time they had visited Number Twelve and looked at all the files, but since Vance had attacked them, maybe Draco had thought the warehouse was worth checking out.

Harry had just found the address for the warehouse when Andromeda knocked on Teddy’s door. “I have made hot chocolate,” said Andromeda. “Draco seemed to think it was important you have some today.”

“I don’t want any,” Harry called, not even opening the door. His finger was on the address, but there was nothing he could do with it. If only he could get to London.

On the other side of the door, Andromeda didn’t say anything but didn’t sound as though she’d moved away either. Harry wished she would go so that he could think, but after a long moment she said, “My husband, daughter, and I used to sit in front of the fire and drink hot chocolate in the winters. It was a family tradition.”

“That’s nice!” Harry called, still hoping she would go away.

“Before that, I used to have it with my sisters,” Andromeda went on. “Narcissa used to make the fire rainbow-coloured.”

She still wasn’t going away.

Another long pause. “I imagine that for Draco, hot chocolate and sitting in front of the fire means family.”

Fire. Coloured fire.

Harry jumped up. Opening the door, he said, “Can we have marshmallows with the hot chocolate?”

Andromeda’s eyebrows rose in surprise at his sudden appearance. “Marshmallows are quite difficult to transfigure.”

“Yes, I know,” Harry said quickly, “but Draco says they’re part of the tradition.”

“Does he?” Andromeda said, still startled. She was holding a tray with mugs on it, steam curling out of the mugs in lazy swirls. “That’s something that must have changed.”

“Yes,” Harry said, “but it’s important. Can we make them in the kitchen?”

Andromeda looked down at him, her brown eyes measuring. “I suppose,” she said finally. “If it means so much to you.”

“It does,” Harry said, eagerly following her. The fawn got up on its spindly legs, following them both to the kitchen.

Apparently, transfiguring marshmallows required bones, which sounded disgusting to Harry, but Andromeda had chicken in the refrigerator, which she said would do. They took some of the meat off of the drumsticks so they could use the leg bones, and set them aside. Harry recognized Andromeda was being very nice about all of this, which made him feel quite badly when he said he needed to go to the loo.
Having Andromeda transfigure marshmallows was a distraction, of course, so that something would keep her away from the hearth.

Harry couldn’t think of a way to prevent the fawn from following him, but it wasn’t as though the Patronus would be able to stop him, as it was incorporeal. Dumping out the satchel, Harry grabbed the papers with the warehouse address and shoved them in, then slung the bag over his shoulder. Next, he rushed into the sitting room. Draco had said wizards kept Floo powder on their chimney pieces.

Andromeda’s chimney piece had pictures—loads of them, a pretty lady with purple hair, a boy with wings, and a friendly-looking man with his arm around Andromeda when she was younger. Standing on tip-toe, Harry looked around and behind the frames, moving them until he found the little bowl. It was sitting behind a picture of the purple-haired woman, only in this one her hair was brown, her face was sad, and her belly was big. The pot was an ugly thing that looked as though it had been made by hand, but in it was the same powder they’d used at Number Twelve.

Taking a handful of the powder, Harry threw it in the hearth. The green flames flared to life, and Harry crawled inside them. “Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place!” he shouted, and then was sucked into a narrow, sooty space and spat out the other end.

Rolling out of the hearth at Number Twelve, Harry tried to keep silent as he brushed the dust and soot off of his clothes and Draco’s nice leather satchel. Coming here was dangerous; Cecil Vance might be long gone, but that didn’t mean he wouldn’t come back or that other bad people working with him wouldn’t try to rob old-Harry’s house. Meanwhile, the fawn trotted out of the Floo looking perfectly clean. Harry guessed being incorporeal had its perks.

As quickly and quietly as he could, he climbed the stairs all the way to the top, stopping at the landing to listen for intruders. When he didn’t hear anyone, Harry continued to old-him’s room. The fawn, who had followed him up, continued to follow him into the room.

There had been gold coins in one of the pockets of a coat in the cupboard, which Harry retrieved and shoved into the satchel. Next, he found the small box on the bedside table, which Draco had said was a mobile phone. It still didn’t look like a phone to Harry, but it appeared undisturbed since last time. Harry guessed Vance hadn’t had a use for it—but Harry did.

When Harry pushed the button on the front of the box, the picture of the red-head man and brown-haired girl appeared again, as well as the bar that said, “Slide to unlock.” Having already figured out this part, Harry slid his finger on the bar, and the picture changed again to a sky with some smaller picture boxes on it. One of the smaller picture boxes was a drawing of a telephone, so Harry tried touching it, and yet another picture came up. This one looked almost familiar, numbers laid out like they would be on a telephone.

Harry didn’t know many phone numbers. Mrs. Figg’s was written down somewhere in a drawer at Number Four, Privet Drive, just in case, for emergencies. Other than that, Harry knew the number for Number Four and 9-9-9. He’d never really needed to call that many people. Sucking in a breath, Harry went ahead and tried touching the numbers for Number Four. As he touched them, they appeared at the top of the screen as though the device could feel which numbers he touched, just as it had felt the swipe.

Once Harry was done with the number, he put the mobile up to his face like a real telephone, hoping to hear it ring. When it didn’t, he took it away from his face, and then saw the little green telephone picture under the numbers. Harry tried touching it. Hearing the mobile make a bit of a sound, he put it to his face again.
After three rings, someone picked up on the other end of the line. “Hello?”

“How-hello,” Harry said, coughing so his voice sounded steadier. He glanced at the door, hoping that if there were any intruders in the house, they were on the ground level and couldn’t hear him. “Is—is Petunia Dursley there?”

“This is she,” said the voice, but it didn’t sound like her. The voice was older, and somehow much sadder.

“Er.” Harry didn’t know what to say. “I need a number for a taxi.”

“Who is this?” And suddenly, she did sound like Petunia, the bit of snap in her voice suddenly making her familiar.

“Er,” Harry said again, then realized if Petunia’s voice sounded older, his own voice should sound much older. Coughing again, he tried to make his voice sound deeper. “I’m—it’s your nephew. Harry Potter.”

“Harry!” A shocked silence followed, then a rushed: “Is Dudley okay?”

“He’s fine,” Harry said, still trying to make his voice sound deep. “I really need a number to call a taxi, though.”

“Why? Are you sure Dudley is all right?” Petunia’s voice was starting to climb in pitch. Harry wondered how he could have ever failed to recognize it.

“Yeah,” Harry said, then thought to add, “I saw him just last week. He’s fine.”

“You . . . saw him? H-how—how is he?” Petunia’s voice had that sad quality again, but as usual, she was only ever thinking about Dudley.

Harry could feel that old feeling—a feeling he’d all but forgot about in the week he’d spent with Draco, but he’d felt it for so much of his life he wondered how he could have forgot. It was that feeling like he might not be there at all, like he might not even exist. Most of the time it was just as well; Harry didn’t much like when Uncle Vernon noticed he existed. Sometimes, though, it felt like a dream—surreal, frightening almost. Like he was in the middle of a room screaming, but no one could hear.

“Harry,” Petunia said. “How is Dudley doing?”

“I said he was fine; didn’t I?”

“There’s no need to yell.” Petunia sniffed. That was familiar too, only she always used to sniff in disdain, like Harry smelled bad or something, and now she sounded—well, she sounded a little teary-eyed, and Harry almost felt badly. “What’s wrong with you, anyway? Are you ill? Your voice sounds terrible.”

“Er, yes,” Harry said, coughing again. “Quite ill! And I need the number to call to get a taxi, so I can—can go to the hospital.”

“Do people like you use hospitals? Isn’t there some kind of—” Petunia’s voice went disdainful after all. “Spell?”

She did know about magic, Harry realized. Your aunt and uncle are filthy rotten liars, Draco had said. Draco had neglected to mention he was one as well. Harry thought of something then. “If you
don’t get me that number, I might have to do something funny. Really funny. To Dudley.”

“You wouldn’t!” Petunia said, sounding shocked.

“Yes, I would,” Harry said. “Remember that time he tripped me, and I couldn’t walk for a week?”

“But—”

“I know all kinds of spells,” Harry went on.

After a moment, Petunia’s strained voice came again. “Just a minute.”

Harry waited, listening to a rustle over the phone.

“Why can’t you just look it up?” Petunia said.

“I haven’t got a phone book at the moment,” Harry said.

“I meant with your—whatever. Here’s the number. Are you ready?”

Harry hadn’t thought that far ahead. Drawing out his wand, he waved it into the room. “Accio biro,” he said, figuring if Draco could use Accio quill to find people’s desks from across the room, surely if there was a biro lying about, it would float to him.

Petunia hissed. “What did you just do?”

“I’m preparing my curses,” Harry said, opening the satchel to grab one of the parchments. A biro floated over to him, and Harry grabbed it. “Okay, I’m ready for the number.”

“0871 871 8710,” said Petunia.

Harry scrawled in the margins as she spoke, then said “Thanks,” when she was done.

“Is that all?”

“Yeah.”

“Yes, well.” Petunia sniffed again, but Harry was pretty sure that this one was a sniff of disdain. “Don’t die.”

“Er. I’ll try not to.”

“And tell Dudley—tell him Mummy loves him very much.”

“Tell him yourself,” Harry said, but the line went silent, and Harry realized she’d hung up.

After that, Harry touched the numbers for the taxi service, giving them the address for Grimmauld Place. They said it would be about twenty minutes, but Harry decided it would be best to wait outside, just in case someone was deciding to rob his house again. As he went to go stand at the kerb, the fawn followed him. “Why don’t you go wait inside?” Harry told it. “I’m sure you can be just as useless in there as you are out here.”

The fawn looked up at him forlornly.

After only about seventeen minutes, the taxi came. Opening the door in back, Harry read out to the driver the address he’d found among the papers they’d got from Cecil Vance—thirty-three Colville
Road. Though he tried to shut the door on the fawn, it got right in with him and jumped up on the seat beside him.

“What’s that?” said the taxi-driver. He was a friendly-looking old man with a salt-and-pepper moustache. “Some kind of hologram?”

“Yeah,” Harry said, pulling the door closed.

“Where’d you get it?” the driver wanted to know. “Is it new?”

“A man gave it to me,” Harry said. “He can do a lot of weird stuff.”

“Work for a tech company?” the driver said, pulling away from the kerb.

“Yeah,” Harry said, guessing he meant technology.

“This is a long way to go all by yourself.” The taxi started along Grimmauld Place, heading down the road. “Are you sure your parents are okay with it?”

“Yes, um.” Harry thought a moment. “The deer is a watcher thing.”

“Like a nanny cam?” the driver said, looking at Harry through his rear-view mirror. “That’s amazing! I should get one for my kids!”

The driver went on like that, mostly making conversation while Harry occasionally agreed to things. He’d had to ride in a cab once before when the Dursleys had forgot him at a Tesco, but that time the Tesco people had helped him call the cab. Uncle Vernon had been angry because he had had to pay the driver when Harry had got back to Number Four, and Harry didn’t really have an idea of how much a taxi cost. Still, he had to get to the warehouse, so he could find the criminal, who might or might not be Cecil Vance.

Harry wasn’t really sure what he’d do when he found him. He hadn’t got that far yet, but he had to do something.

The driver had been right; the ride was long. It was summer, though, so it would not be getting dark for a long time. Still, by the time they arrived at Colville Road, Harry was getting rather hungry for supper. “Here?” the driver asked, sounding sceptical. They’d arrived at an intersection with a bunch of boring-looking buildings. None of them had names or numbers on the front, and Harry wasn’t even sure which one was the right address.

“Yes,” Harry said, unbuckling and pulling out the gold coins. He handed them to the driver and started opening the door.

“What’s this?” said the driver. “It’s sixty-seven thirty-two.”

“Um,” Harry said. “Well, I haven’t got it.”

In the mirror, the driver began to frown. “You have to pay for your ride.”

“Well, I can’t,” Harry said, reaching for the door.

Suddenly the doors locked. “Do your parents really know you’re out?” the driver said. “Maybe we should—”

“Alohomora!” Harry shouted, tapping the door with his wand, which he had just slid out of his sleeve. The door popped open, and the driver looked on in shock as Harry slid out of the taxi.
“Come on, you stupid deer!” he called after him.

“Wait a minute!” said the taxi driver, opening the driver-side door and stepping out of it. “You can’t —”

Whirling around, Harry pointed his wand at the taxi. He only remembered one spell that seemed at all helpful. “Tarantellegra!” he shouted, and the taxi began to rumble and shake. Rearing up on its back tyres, it rocked back and forth, then spun.

As the driver backed away in horror from the dancing taxi, Harry ran toward the nearest building, looking for anywhere the number for the address might be posted. The fawn, however, seemed to have disappeared.

“Some help you are,” Harry muttered to himself, but just then he saw a door, and above the door it said thirty-three.

Pulling out the parchment from his satchel again, Harry checked the number. It was the correct address. Harry reached for the handle on the door.

A tremendous cracking sound filled the air.

Harry turned around to see what was happening, but someone was grabbing his arm. “Harry!”

Then he was being pulled closer, and Harry knew it was Draco. It was Draco’s strong arm going around him, Draco’s hard chest pressing against his face, Draco’s voice roughly saying, “Harry,” once more before the air popped again. The street and the dancing taxi and the door with the address all swirled away, and there was only Draco.

The black squeezed them into Andromeda’s house. “There you are,” said Andromeda, coming from the hall into the sitting room.

Draco’s arms were still around Harry. He slid the satchel off of Harry’s shoulder, so he could hold him closer. “Harry,” Draco said. “What were you doing? What did you think you were doing?”

“Helping you,” Harry said, trying to pull away.

“Give him room to breathe, at least,” Andromeda said.

“Helping me—Harry.” Draco pulled him close all over again. “Do you understand you could have been killed? What were you thinking, riding in a car with a stranger all the way across London?”

“It was a taxi,” Harry said.

“I don’t care,” Draco said, still clutching him. “He could have hurt you.”

“They’re generally safe,” Andromeda said, sounding amused. “But Harry—you shouldn’t have ridden in one all by yourself. How did you even find one?”

“I got a phone number from Aunt Petunia.” Draco was holding him so close that Harry was kind of talking into Draco’s hair, arching his neck around to look at Andromeda. Harry pushed away. “I called her on the mobile phone at my house.”

“I forgot all about your Muggle relatives,” Andromeda said, looking thoughtful. “I’m surprised they’re still around.”

“Don’t ride in taxis!” Draco said, still sounding frantic. “Don’t use mobiles! Don’t go to your house!
Harry, you went to a place where a crime had been committed. What if he was there? What if he hurt you?”

“I daresay Harry would have survived,” Andromeda said gently. “No one could ever stop him, even as a child.”

“Because he doesn’t know,” Draco said, still in that frantic way. “He doesn’t understand that—Harry.” Taking him by the shoulders, Draco held on very tight. “There are people who love you. Do you understand? You are loved. You are so loved. If you run away like that, you’ll—if you were ever hurt, you’d break their hearts. Do you understand me? Do you know there are people who love you?”

Harry squirmed out of his grasp. “Do you mean Granger and Weasley?”

“‘Granger and Weasley’?” Andromeda repeated, sounding dry.

“No,” said Draco. “Yes. Harry—I mean everyone. Everyone loves you. Do you understand that they care what happens to you?”

“Because I’m a war hero?”

Draco’s mouth fell open. His silver eyes were very bright.

“Andromeda told me,” Harry said.

Draco cast a glance toward Andromeda, but immediately turned back to Harry. “I’m sorry, Harry.”

Harry didn’t care. He didn’t care about what Andromeda said, about Voldemort, about Death Eaters, about being a hero. He didn’t care about things Draco had supposedly done, because Harry hadn’t been there. He didn’t remember any of that. What Harry remembered was Draco making hot chocolate and cake and teaching him flying and Exploding Snap and sleeping in bunk beds and Draco touching his hair. Harry didn’t care about other people loving him; he only cared about one thing. “You left,” he said, taking a step back.

“I needed to figure out the final ingredient,” said Draco. “I needed to track down Vance to do it. It was dangerous to—”

“Dangerous,” Harry snapped, “like riding in a taxi is dangerous?”

“Harry,” Draco said, but then he didn’t say anything else.

“That man in my house,” Harry said. “Vance. He would have hurt you if I hadn’t cast Tarantellegra. I think that’s a bit more dangerous than riding in a taxi. In fact, I think it’s a lot more dangerous. But it’s all right if you do it. Is that it?”

Draco was meant to say something about how he was older, how Harry was just a kid, but instead he just stood there, staring.

Harry could feel tears pricking behind his eyes and didn’t know why. He kept on shouting angrily. “Do you think that nobody would care if you were hurt? That no one’s heart would be broken? You think that nobody cares what happens to you?”

“Oh,” Draco said.

“Is it because you were a Death Eater?” Harry said.
Colour drained from Draco’s face. His eyes were very bright, like shining silver in a porcelain mask.

“Harry,” Andromeda said.

Harry whirled on her. “I don’t care! I don’t care what you say. I don’t care what he did. Did you think I’d like him less? Were you trying to make it so I didn’t care that he was gone?”

“Of course not,” Andromeda said.

“Then why did you tell me? You said he didn’t want me to know! Is that why we’re not friends when I’m grown-up?” Harry turned back to Draco. “Did old-me made you think that because you did one bad thing, you had to do everything yourself all the time, and no one would ever help you?”

“Tea,” said Andromeda. “I’ll make us some, shall I?” Without waiting for an answer, she swept out of the room.

Draco was still staring, his expression blank, his eyes still unusually bright. “It was much more than one bad thing,” he said finally.

“I don’t care!” Harry cried in frustration. “You’re a good person now!”

Something fell onto Draco’s cheek, and Harry realized with horror that it was a tear. Then with more horror he saw that the reason Draco’s eyes were shining so much was that they were full of tears, and Draco was crying, even if none of them but the one was falling down his face.

Draco felt bad, Harry guessed, which should have been all right. He had wanted Draco to feel bad for leaving him behind. “You said I could help you,” Harry said, just to reinforce the feeling, but suddenly he wasn’t as angry any more.

“Yes,” Draco said, but stopped. His voice sounded awful, like a sick person.

“And your dumb deer got lost, by the way,” Harry said, feeling awkward and perhaps a little sullen. He still wanted to be angry, but with Draco standing there crying it was kind of hard.

Draco was silent for a long time. “He let me know where you were,” he said finally.

“Oh.” Harry pushed his glasses up, but he didn’t want to look at Draco. Not really. Draco’s voice still had that sick sound, and Harry didn’t want to see if his eyes were still shining. It was all kind of embarrassing, really. Grown-up people—men, anyway—weren’t meant to cry. “It’s . . . so it’s a boy deer?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’m certain of it.”

“Er.” Harry didn’t know what else to talk about. “How?”

“Harry,” Draco said, and then he was there, pulling Harry into his arms again, pressing him tight against Draco’s long slim body.

Harry didn’t particularly fancy getting hugged again, but Draco was really messed up or sad or whatever, and anyway Harry had meant what he had said. He didn’t want Draco thinking he didn’t care, just because Draco had done something bad, or lots of bad things. Whatever, it didn’t matter, because Draco was a good person. The best person, really, and even though Harry was pretty certain
Draco was crying on him, being hugged wasn’t the worst thing ever.

It was kind of nice, actually.

“I was out of my mind,” Draco whispered. “Andromeda said you’d used the Floo; I didn’t know where you were. I thought—darling, I thought I’d lost you.”

You are loved, Draco had said. There are people who love you. No one had ever said anything like that to Harry before. Harry lifted an arm, fully intending to push Draco off of him, but that wasn’t what he intended at all. His arm went around Draco’s waist, then tried to hold him closer. Then he was doing it with his other arm too, and the tears were pricking behind Harry’s eyes again. “I don’t want you to leave me,” he heard himself say, and his voice sounded bad. It sounded so bad, with a big crack in the middle, and wet directly afterwards. His voice sounded wet.


It made the tears prick right through Harry’s eyes. He pressed his face hard against Draco’s chest so that the tears wouldn’t come, and he wanted to kiss Draco back—on the cheek, on the forehead, like Draco had kissed him. Harry had never done anything like that before, and it was weird, and awkward, and embarrassing. He didn’t know why he wanted to do it; it just sounded nice. It sounded so nice, like maybe Draco wouldn’t leave him again if he kissed him. Maybe Draco wouldn’t ever leave him, but when Harry pulled back enough to try it, his mouth was full of mucus from crying and his teeth were clenched so he wouldn’t sob, and he didn’t know how to pull Draco’s face down to him, so he didn’t try it.

Instead he put his face against Draco’s chest again, and discovered he’d made Draco’s shirt wet.

“Shh,” Draco said again, his voice a low hum. His hand moved in Harry’s hair. “It’s okay. I won’t leave you. I’m sorry.”

“I care what happens to you,” Harry said, just in case Draco didn’t get the point. “It’s—it’s my heart that’d break.”

“Darling.” Draco held him tighter.

The name made Harry feel embarrassed, like when Petunia called Dudley Duddy-kins and ickle-Duds, but for the first time Harry understood why Dudley didn’t complain more when Petunia did stuff like that. It felt almost nice, that someone could care so much that they would get this worried. Harry was very used to being called names, but he’d never been called a nice one.

The hug went on for rather too long, so long that the almost-kind-of-nice feeling faded. Harry could feel his body again, how awkwardly he was standing against Draco, how warm he was, how wet his shirt was. Harry couldn’t breathe, so he pulled away.

“I’m sorry I . . .” Draco hesitated. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about me.”

“It’s okay. Harry’s eyes were burning, but he wasn’t crying any more. His head felt too large, his nose stuffy. He was probably all red, but at least he wasn’t crying.

“It’s not,” said Draco. “I should have told you.”

“You thought I’d hate you.”

“Not . . . exactly,” Draco said, hesitating. His eyes were barely red at all. He didn’t even look like he’d cried, but colour had come back into his face, and his chin trembled a little.
“You thought I would think you were the wrong sort.”

“Oh, Harry.” Draco touched the side of Harry’s face, cupping his chin gently. “I didn’t—I didn’t care what you thought of me.” His hand fell away. “I just wanted you to be happy.”

“I was happy,” said Harry. “And then you left. On our in-between birthday.”

“Yes,” Draco said.

“I haven’t made tea,” Andromeda said, returning with a tray held in her hands. “I’ve made hot chocolate. Harry never got to have any.”

“Yes,” Draco said again. Going over to her, Draco took two of the mugs off the tray. “Thank you,” he said, looking into her eyes meaningfully.

“Harry was right,” said Andromeda. “I should not have told your secrets.”

“You were right as well. I should not have kept them.” Turning from her, Draco brought the mugs to Harry, handing him one.

“We should drink it in front of a fire,” Harry said.

Andromeda smiled. “Yes. I think we should.”

*

Eventually they had supper, then sat in front of the fire some more and burned some marshmallows. After an hour of this, Andromeda transfigured more pyjamas for Harry, Draco changed, and Andromeda went to bed. Harry changed as well and brushed his teeth with a transfigured brush, then went back to Teddy’s room. Andromeda had said the wood in Teddy’s bed would be fine for another night, so they got to have the bunk beds again, Harry on top and Draco on the bottom.

“I think I’ve got a way to fix it, Harry,” Draco said, when they were lying in the dark.

Harry’s heart dropped. “You mean—to grow me up?”

“Yes.”

Harry sat up to look over the side. “Did you find the ingredient?”

“No.” Draco lay there facing the bottom of the top bunk, his hands folded over the blanket across his midriff. “But I think I know what it is.”

“Well?” Harry demanded, feeling angry for some reason.

Slowly, Draco turned his head on the pillow to face him. “I think it’s something very powerful, Harry. That means counteracting it is going to be complicated. The solution I’ve devised—there are several parts to it. To make sure it sticks.”

Harry put his head back on his pillow. He had always known Draco would fix it. He was probably the best wizard in the whole world. Suddenly Harry didn’t feel angry anymore; he felt sad. “Will I remember being ten?” he asked, trying not to let his voice catch.

“You’ll remember it all.”

In the dim light from the windows Harry could see the posters on Teddy’s walls, all the people
screaming at drum-sets and guitars. Harry had got to have the coverlet that changed colour, but in the dim light, it just looked grey. “I don’t want to be thirty-one,” he said finally.

“Harry.” There was a long silence. So long passed that Harry thought Draco might have fallen asleep, but then he said, “I’ll tell you a secret.”

Harry wanted to put his head over the side to hear better, but instead he lay very still, hardly breathing so he would be sure to hear the secret.

“I miss you,” Draco said.

Frowning, Harry put his head over the side, almost wanting to put his glasses on so he could see Draco better.

“I’ll miss ten-year-old you, but I miss thirty-year-old you. I miss him right now.”

“But.” Harry bit his lip. He couldn’t help feeling betrayed. “You said—you don’t even like him! I mean—me!”

Draco turned his head to look back up at the bottom of the top bunk, instead of at Harry. “I said we weren’t friends. I may have even said you didn’t like me, but I never said—I never said I didn’t like you.”

“Does that mean you—you do like me? Old-me?”

“Yes, Harry. I—I like you. I like you—quite a bit.”

Harry’s voice rose. “Then how come I don’t like you?”

“Shh,” Draco said, but he brought up his hand to cover his face. “I knew I shouldn’t have . . .”

“Shouldn’t have what? Do you like him more than me?”

“Of course not, Harry.” Draco sounded aggravated. His face was still covered. “You’re the same person.”

“But grown-up me is a—a—he’s stupid. Why wouldn’t he like you if—”

“He’s not stupid,” Draco said, his voice almost sharp. “I—I haven’t been clear at all about liking him. In fact, I lied to him, the one time we—well, it didn’t count, and I wasn’t honest. I haven’t been honest; I’ve hid myself; I’ve been disagreeable, discourteous; I’ve been—I’ve been ungracious. I’ve been ungracious, but I only did it because—because I was afraid.”

“Maybe you were afraid because—”

Draco talked right over him. “I’m like that, you see; I’m selfish. I’m so selfish and cowardly; I’m cowardly—”

“You aren’t—”

“I’ve only thought about what I might feel,” Draco said firmly. “I didn’t understand how—how opening yourself up could possibly be difficult for you as well. I thought everything had to be so easy for you. I only thought about myself.”

“You’re not a coward,” was all Harry could think to say.
“I think you’ll find that I very much am one.”

Lying back down on his pillow, Harry bit his lip as he thought this out. “If you fix me so I grow up, I’ll know you like me.”

“Yes.” Draco didn’t sound terribly excited about this.

“Let’s do it,” Harry said, hanging back over the side.

Draco turned to look at him again.

“You’ll see. I’ll still like you.”

Draco’s eyes shone silver in the dim light. “We will see,” he said softly.

Harry put his head back on the pillow and stared at the ceiling, willing himself to remember how much he liked Draco when he grew up.

*

The next morning, they had cereal again for breakfast. Harry tried to convey with his reaction to this that he was not nearly as impressed by Andromeda’s breakfasts as he was by Draco’s, but Harry didn’t actually want to be rude to Andromeda, so he wasn’t sure Draco got the message. Afterwards Draco said they were going back to his shop.

“I set up more wards yesterday, and no one has been there,” Draco said. “It should be okay long enough for me to finish the final steps.”

“Finish?” Harry asked. “You mean you already started it.”

“Harry,” Draco said gently. “I’ve been working on it all week.”

“But we were doing tester potions,” Harry said. “To see which ingredients were in it.”

Draco just looked at him.

“I’ll clear the table,” Andromeda volunteered. Picking up their dishes with her wand, she moved over to the sink.

Harry pushed up his glasses. “Then we weren’t doing tester potions?”

“We were,” Draco said quickly. “You put your thumb in all of them.”

“But you were making the other one as well.”

“I was making several things. Just in case, Harry.” Draco’s face looked tired and miserable.

Harry remembered how Draco had taken those hairs. He had also brewed the Polyjuice, sometime when Harry hadn’t seen it. He’d been planning the trip to the Ministry, and brewing the cure, and being a Death Eater. Harry didn’t know what else. “Okay,” was all he said, because he wasn’t even sure why he felt bad that Draco hadn’t told him. It just would have been nice to know.

“I’ll gather what we need,” Draco mumbled.

A few minutes later, the washing up was done and Draco was back with the satchel over his shoulder.
“Well, Harry,” Andromeda said, putting out her hand. “It’s been very nice getting to know you at this age. You’re a lot more emotionally intelligent than I expected.”

“Aunt,” Draco said sharply.

Harry had been shaking her hand, but now he faltered, looking over at Draco.

“Draco is right,” Andromeda said, letting go Harry’s hand. “I should have expected it. Once you make up your mind about someone, you don’t unmake it easily.”

“Aunt.” Draco made a hissing sound.

Harry rather thought Andromeda was teasing again, but this time at Draco’s expense. Harry didn’t like it.

Andromeda turned to Draco, a smile at the side of her lips. “You’ve got to admit he’s quite stubborn, if nothing else.”

“He’s standing right here,” Harry said, annoyed.

Andromeda just smiled at him. “I was referring to your older self.”

“Yes, well. I’m about to be my older self.”

“That will hardly prevent me from speaking my mind,” said Andromeda. “You’ve already made up your own mind about me, after all, and as I’ve said, I doubt your opinion of me will change.”

Harry gave her his best glare.

Andromeda grinned, the first time he’d seen her do it. It made her look friendly, when she had merely looked stately before. Crinkles appeared beside her eyes. “It’s a very positive opinion.”

“Yes, thank you,” Draco said coldly. Turning to Harry, his expression softened. “Are you ready, Harry?”

“Very,” Harry said, giving Draco his hand. Together, they Apparated away.

*  

Harry was quite pleased to get back to Draco’s laboratory. Over the last week it had begun to feel almost like a home to him, even though he knew he was not allowed to stay. Draco said that it would take a while for him to finish everything, so Harry went to the bedroom to see if the bunk beds were still there. Even though he now knew the stretching wasn’t good for the wood, he liked how Draco had made them for him. The bedroom also had the dressing gown Draco had got for Harry. Draco had said it would grow when Harry did, which Harry guessed would be happening soon. Harry sort of wanted to wear the dressing gown when he got the cure, just so he would remind his older self how nice Draco had been, but that was probably weird, so Harry hung it back up after petting it for a moment.

When Harry came back into the lab, Draco wasn’t doing potion things. Instead he was writing in a book.

“What’s that?” Harry asked.

“Remember I said the solution has several steps?” Draco glanced over, and Harry thought that he looked really tired. “I’m writing every step down in this ledger to make sure everything is done
properly."

"What are the steps?"

"The first part is a potion that will make you grow up. I think your adult self will know how to find the missing ingredient. Once you get it, we’ll add it to a different potion."

"The one to make it permanent?"

"The one to make it permanent," Draco agreed, turning back to the ledger.

Harry waited for Draco to suggest something for Harry to do, like chop ingredients or stir a pot, but Draco didn’t say anything. In fact, he seemed to sort of forget that Harry was there, becoming completely absorbed in writing. That was okay. Usually Draco paid attention to him, but Harry had noticed that sometimes Draco got really distracted, especially by potions.

Heloise had a perch in the lab where she sometimes slept, but she wasn’t there, so Harry went upstairs to the kitchen to check the window. Draco said that was usually the window he left open for her, just in case she wanted in when he wasn’t home. Sometimes she tapped on Draco’s bedroom window, but Draco said he didn’t let her sleep with him. He said she made a mess.

Harry didn’t see Heloise, so he went to look at the photo album again, the one with Sirius Black in it. The best photo of Sirius was one in which he was turning to smile rakishly at the camera, while the smaller boy Draco had said was Sirius’s brother waved his arms in the background. The arm waving and something about the smile made it seem as though Sirius was about to do something devious. The album also had Andromeda when she was young, but Harry wasn’t very fond of her, so he skipped over those to look at more pictures of Draco’s mum instead.

Eventually Draco came upstairs and asked Harry what he wanted for lunch. He seemed to be startled when Harry asked for the chicken salad again. It was good salad, even though Andromeda’s chicken and dumplings were better. Harry would never tell anybody. He’d defend Draco’s magic cooking to his grave.

After lunch, Draco asked Harry if he wanted to help, so they went back downstairs to the lab, and Harry helped with potions things. A few hours later, they had a potion that was white with glimmers of silver.

"Does it look like the potion that fell on me?" Harry asked.

"Not quite," Draco said. "This one is a bit different."

"Because it’s temporary?"

"Yes, Harry."

Harry looked at the potion again. It almost seemed to shimmer in the light, like a pearly sort of cloud. "Am I going to drink it?"

"We’re going to sprinkle it on, just like the first potion. You need to go on and change into your big clothes now, Harry, but come back out, afterwards." Draco began taking clothes out of the satchel, which seemed to be bottomless, just like Mary Poppins. The scarlet cloak, breeches, belt, tunic, boots, and fingerless gloves were all there. "We have to make sure you sprinkle it on just right," Draco went on. "I’ll help you."

Taking the clothes, Harry went into the bedroom to change. When he came back out, Draco was sat
at the workbench, writing again.

While Draco was still basically the most handsome man Harry had ever seen, just now he looked sort of terrible. His skin, which was usually so clear, just looked a pasty white, and his hair looked limp and almost mousy-coloured. His shoulders sagged and there were those circles under his eyes, almost like a skull, and it made Harry’s chest ache. Maybe Draco was tired. Maybe he was sad ten-year-old Harry was going away, only to be replaced by a Harry who apparently hated him.

Harry wanted to tell Draco that he didn’t hate him. He wanted—he wanted Draco to hug him again. Harry wondered whether he should try hugging him himself. He wondered whether he would have hugged his dad.

Instead of trying it, Harry hiked up the breeches and shuffled in the boots across the room. “Do we have to do it now?” Harry asked, when Draco looked up.

“I think—I think that would be best.” Picking up the parchment he’d been writing on, Draco folded it and set it down next to the pearly white potion. “A good potions master always writes down everything he does. This parchment is a quick summary of what we’re doing, while the ledger has more extensive instructions.”

“Er,” Harry said, not sure what Draco wanted. “Do I have to read it?”

“Not right now,” Draco said. “I thought that once you’re older and need to look for the final ingredient, these documents might help your search.”

“Can’t I just ask you?” Harry said, pushing up his glasses.

Draco looked away. “I’m trying to make things as easy as possible.”

“You still think I won’t like you.”

“Harry.” Turning back to him, Draco moved Harry’s fringe aside, his eyes bright.

Harry thought Draco might kiss his scar again, but he didn’t. Instead, he stood up, picking up the potion bottle. “We best get to it, Harry.”

For some reason, Harry could feel tears sting behind his eyes. He wanted to say something—I’ll miss you, or something like that, but he couldn’t think of the words. Again, he wanted to hug him, but Draco wasn’t doing it and initiating felt so awkward. At a loss for what else to do, Harry grabbed Draco’s hand.

Leaning in, Draco kissed Harry’s forehead after all; then his lips moved to Harry’s ear. “I’m sorry,” he whispered.

“What—?” Harry reared back, but Draco was already sprinkling the potion on him.

And on himself.

Harry grew, memories crashing into him in a rush—Hagrid, Hogwarts, Ron, Hermione, Dumbledore, Voldemort. Auror training, Savage, Robards. Draco Malfoy, Cecil Vance, illegal potions, the warehouse. The glass bottle falling off the shelf. He could remember being a child, the confusion of seeing Dudley all grown-up, Draco making cake, making his nose-hairs grow, making a Patronus whose meaning Harry now understood.

Harry could feel his body again, fitting into his clothes, too many scars forming against his skin, his
hands feeling the command of magic, the beard on his face. The glasses were too small. Taking them off, Harry instinctively reached for his wand, magically affixed inside the sleeve. “Engorgio,” he said, and put them back on.

“Who are you?” said an imperious voice.

Harry whirled around.

Before him stood a child with blond hair, grey eyes, and a fierce scowl. Realization sank in Harry like a stone.

“Shit,” he muttered.
Chapter 6

June 2003
Harry Potter: 22 years
Draco Malfoy: 23 years

The first time Harry saw Malfoy after the trials was two weeks after Harry became an Auror, and it happened because the Auror Department didn’t have a lab with people who did potions research. Instead it had a little room called Records and Filing, where an old man called Kirkley Zidwidley would look up the origin of an old spell if you asked nicely (and loudly).

When Harry asked Savage—because Savage knew everything—why they didn’t have a lab, or at the very least a potions consultant, Savage said—in typical Savage fashion—“Ask the gaffer.” When in response Harry headed toward Head Auror Robards’ office, she waved her hands frantically and said, “I didn’t mean actually ask!” This was also typical Savage, and Harry hadn’t learned yet that just because Savage knew everything didn’t mean she always gave the best advice.

When Harry asked Robards—because Robards was Head Auror—why they didn’t have a lab, Robards frowned, stirred his tea, and said, “Did Savage put you up to this?” Harry also hadn’t known at the time that Robards had it out for Savage. In fact, Harry hadn’t known at the time that the entire Auror Department was a tangle of petty squabbles, one-upmanship, and red tape, but over the years Robards made it fairly clear with his frowns and his tea and his, Did Savage put your up to this?

Harry came out of Head Auror Robards’ office disappointed in life, the Aurors, and most of all in this stupid case he couldn’t solve because the one extra potions class he’d taken at Auror Academy was hardly enough to determine the use of this particular potion. The Department of Mysteries was too busy for Auror problems, Harry had learned. He would have to do the research himself, which wouldn’t be a problem except that he’d be stuck at his desk trying to figure it out while Muggles were dying on the streets.

Savage took pity, and then took Harry to Slug and Jiggers in Diagon Alley. “This is what good Aurors do for a lab,” Savage told him. What Savage meant was that good Aurors bribed Diagon Alley apothecary merchants to do their research for them.

“But how can they charge you?” Harry had asked later. “Can’t you just say you’re an Auror? Isn’t it the law?”

“You’re cute.” Savage had sat on the edge of Proudfoot’s desk and turned to look at Proudfoot, the only other Auror who had worked there as long as she had. “He’s cute.”

“Dreamy,” Proudfoot agreed.

Savage turned back to Harry. “Sure,” she said. “It’s the law. And it’ll take them two months, and they’ll apologize, and just have so many orders—even though half those apothecaries are dead empty, most of the time. And you’ll ask what you can do to expedite the process and they’ll say they couldn’t possibly go any faster, and then you’ll wave those sweet Galleons under their noses. All the sudden, boom. Done Friday.”

“That’s not right,” Harry had said.

“Neither is Labour,” Savage had said.
The proprietor of Slug and Jiggers was an awful little man named Abel Alby, who was so delighted to meet Harry he almost fell over. Savage had already witnessed at least three dozen encounters like these, but still seemed incredulous that anyone could be delighted to know Harry. “Alby,” she said, waving a bottle of silvery liquid in Alby’s face. “The potion.”

Alby’s delighted demeanour dropped completely. Turning to him, he said shrewdly, “It’ll cost you.”

The brew was called Dream Dram, and Harry had linked it to a string of Muggle deaths. What he was trying to find out was what exactly the potion did, as arresting his current suspect without that detail was likely to backfire. While Savage haggled about the bribe, Harry saw a man in back trying to slink off behind the shelves.

The blond hair was lank, lacking shine. The shoulders were spikier than Harry remembered, and the clothes were quite notably un-posh—but Harry would know him anywhere.

Stalking over to the back, Harry didn’t wait for Malfoy to turn around. “What are you doing here?” he said.

The shoulders went stiff. “I work here,” Malfoy said, after a long moment. His voice was tight but just as supercilious as it had always been.

“Doing what?” Harry demanded.

“Delighting our guests.”

Malfoy still hadn’t turned. Annoyed, Harry grabbed his shoulder to force him to do it, but as soon as Harry touched him, Malfoy jerked away, stumbling into a stack of the boxes on the floor. In the process he’d turned around.

He looked ghastly.

“Malfoy.” Harry’s hand dropped in surprise.

Sneering, Malfoy gathered up the boxes and turned away.

Harry followed him to the front of the shop, but when Malfoy went into the work room behind the counter, Alby stopped Harry. “Oh, I am so sorry, Auror Potter,” said Alby. “That’s restricted.”

“Malfoy’s back there,” Harry told Savage, gesturing to the work room.

“Lucius.” Savage drew her wand.

“No,” said Harry. “Draco.” Harry turned to Alby. “What’s he doing here?”

“Oh, little lord Malfoy?” Alby looked smug. “He works for me.”

“Works for you?” Harry didn’t know why he felt so surprised. Malfoy had to get a job somewhere, hadn’t he, with both parents stripped of all their fortune and sentenced to Azkaban. Harry hadn’t thought about it before, though, and working in a shop seemed so . . . unMalfoyish. Harry would have thought Malfoy would go off to France or something. Study abroad. Like the third son of a duke in one of Aunt Petunia’s movies, someone who had no profession and no money, but always wore posh clothes and still talked like an entitled twat.

“Yes,” said Alby, looking smug. “Oh, little lord Malfoy, won’t you come out and great our guests?”

Harry frowned. Even if Malfoy had been a prat and a Death Eater and just generally the worst,
calling him that seemed out of line.

But Malfoy came out to the front, still looking ghastly. His skin was pulled so tight over his face his head looked like a skull, and Harry realized what had made his shoulders look so sharp—Malfoy was thin. Rather desperately thin, and he’d always been wiry. It wasn’t a good look on him. Neither were the hollows under his eyes, which reminded Harry of sixth year. His mouth was a sullen little line, but that wasn’t any different to how he used to look.

He used to look good, Harry realized with a start. With his stupidly blond hair and his ferrety little face; he’d looked careless and posh and arrogant and bright, and now he was a dull dishwater thing with no shine. For Harry, coming to understand that he fancied blokes at uni had for the most part been a useful revelation, but being aware of it at times like this seemed inconvenient. Regretting how Malfoy looked now was what Hermione would call superficial.

“Tell our guest, Harry Potter, what you do here, working for me,” said Alby.

Malfoy sneered at the counter.

“Little lord Malfoy stocks the shelves!” said Alby, apparently too thrilled with this fact to force it out of Malfoy. “He sweeps the floor! This is how we treat former Death Eaters, isn’t it, Auror Potter?”

Harry didn’t know. Most former Death Eaters were in Azkaban, but a portion of them had been involved in crimes that could not be proven. Only their association with Death Eaters was verifiable fact, and while that association was enough to implicate them, it was not enough to convict—especially not in the case of Draco Malfoy, for whom Harry had testified. Death Eaters who weren’t sent to Azkaban were sentenced to restrictions on their magic, limited to a number of years that suited the crimes with which they could reasonably be associated.

The restrictions were the reason illegal potions trade was booming. Potions could be brewed with little to no magic, and their effects could be quite magical indeed. Thus, in order to wield the power to which they had once been accustomed, some of those placed under magic restriction turned to brewing. Draco Malfoy had got ten years of restrictions. He still had six years to go.

Putting the years together in his head, Harry grabbed the phial of Dream Dram from Savage. “Do you know anything about this?” he said, shoving the phial under Malfoy’s nose.

Malfoy made an ugly face—uglier than the skull face he had on anyway. “More than you.”

“What do you know?” Harry demanded.

“I don’t have to tell you.”

“I can assure you,” said Alby, smugness turning to alarm, “I don’t know anything about criminal activities. I am merely his employer!”

Malfoy shot him a scathing look.

“Listen.” Savage moved in toward Malfoy as well. “This potion has been linked to a chain of Muggle deaths. If you know anything, you should come clean.”

Harry would have said it was impossible a moment ago, but Malfoy went a shade paler.

“Come on, Malfoy,” said Harry.

Malfoy mumbled something.
“What’s that?” said Savage.

“I don’t know anything!”

“You just said you did,” said Harry.

“I meant,” Malfoy began, then stopped. He didn’t look snobbish any longer, just miserable all over.

“What did you mean?” Harry said.

“I don’t employ criminals!” Alby’s voice was shrill. “I thought he was reformed!”

“Malfoy,” said Savage.

“I meant Potter’s a dullard at potions!”

The entire shop went silent.

Then the little bell above the door rang.

“Get out,” Savage told the customer at the door, pushing them and shoving the door closed.

“Excuse me,” said Alby. “I have a right to my clientele.”

“What do you mean?” demanded Savage, coming back over to Malfoy.

Malfoy was still looking ill, but now he also looked annoyed. “It’s obviously a potion to get inside people’s minds while they’re sleeping.”

Harry looked down at the phial. “What?”

“It’s got Pensieve fluid in it,” Malfoy said, impatiently. “And coca.”

“How do you know?” said Savage.

“You can tell by looking,” Malfoy said. “Didn’t you ever take a potions N.E.W.T.?”

Harry looked at the phial again, then back up to Malfoy. “Did you?”

Malfoy looked defiant. “I would have aced it.”

“Yeah,” said Savage. “I’ll bet. Come on, Potter. That was what you needed.” She started heading toward the door.

When Harry turned to follow, Alby grabbed his sleeve. “I don’t employ criminals,” he assured Harry.

“No,” Harry agreed. “He’s just a ponce.”

When they got back to the Auror Office, Savage went over to chat with Proudfoot instead of going over the case files as Harry had expected. “New consultant in town,” Savage told Proudfoot, grabbing the phial of Dream Dram from Harry.

Sometimes being new and working with an Auror who had years of experience was a bit of a whirlwind.

Savage tapped the phial on Proudfoot’s desk. “He’ll do it for free.”
“Free?” Proudfoot, who had been leaning back in his swivel chair, suddenly sat up straight.

“Free,” said Savage.

It all went downhill from there.

* 

May 2004

**Harry Potter:** 23 years  
**Draco Malfoy:** 23 years

Everybody knew that Savage and Proudfoot were the Aurors who got things done. No one knew quite how they did it, other than that they’d worked in the Department for decades and knew basically everything: where to look for suspects, who to ask for favours, when to file paperwork and whether to forgo paperwork in favour of alternative methods. After Harry’s first visit to Slug and Jiggers, Savage and Proudfoot knew who to go to for potions consulting—Harry Potter, because he had an in with Draco Malfoy.

“I don’t have an in,” Harry protested, the third time Savage dumped someone else’s illegal potion case on him. He tried to give the files back. “Ask him yourself.”

“But Harry,” Savage said, walking away, “you got his father arrested fifth year! That makes you practically mates!”

Savage knew Harry would never willingly neglect a case—not when a brew was on the streets getting people killed. Swallowing a sigh, Harry added the file to the growing stack on his desk. That was how he became the go-to person for illegal potion cases, and how Draco Malfoy became the unofficial potions consultant for the entire Auror Department.

Over the following year, Malfoy didn’t get any easier to work with. He was always sullen whenever Harry went to him for help and sneered just as much as he always had. But he always did help, and he never charged, and usually he was able to give some useful information within a few days at the very most.

Abel Alby, however, was the opposite of helpful. Though he still fawned all over Harry, he actively tried to prevent Harry from dealing with Malfoy, obviously missing the pay-offs Savage used to give him in exchange for help with potions ID. Furthermore, he was always saying awful things to Malfoy, things Harry tried not to listen to but couldn’t help but hear: Alby telling Malfoy what a waste of space he was, how no one wanted him. Meanwhile Malfoy was constantly working in clothes that didn’t fit him, still too thin and not allowed use magic.

It reminded Harry of something terrible he didn’t like to think of, so he didn’t think of it.

When Head Auror Robards found out Harry was going to Malfoy for potions consulting, Robards asked whether Savage had put Harry up to it, then made a policy against working with former Death Eaters. Over tea, Robards claimed that it looked bad for anyone in the department to be seen with those who had served the Dark Lord. What he really meant was he was ashamed that he hadn’t been able to break the Imperius spell on himself when Robards had served Voldemort in the puppet regime, and also that Harry’s records on cases made everyone else look bad. In fact, Harry’s record was so good it looked like something could be wrong with the leadership, since Harry so frequently had to work around the system to get things done.

Harry tried to work within the system. He tried to obey Robards’ new policy as he sought out an ID
for a new brew on the streets. Wood-Eye Lye worked as a counteragent to Veritaserum, but Harry didn’t know who was brewing it. He went to potions experts at Hogwarts, St. Mungo’s, and Auror Academy to see if any of them could identify something about the brewer by looking at the potion. He tried all the potion-shopkeepers on Diagon Alley and even wrote to a potions expert in France. Almost none of them could ID the Wood-Eye Lye as quickly as Malfoy probably could, and those who could wanted to charge exorbitant amounts. The department didn’t have the money to pay them, and Harry wasn’t keen on bribing people, unlike Savage.

When Harry talked to Hermione, she said, “It takes a while to distil potions ingredients, Harry.”

“But Malfoy can usually tell something about it just by looking at it,” Harry said.

“Maybe he has less to lose by being wrong.”

“But he isn’t wrong,” Harry said. “His information’s always good.”

Hermione just shrugged. “He was always rather skilled at potions,” she pointed out.

“But he can’t be the best.”

“Why not?”

Because he’s Malfoy, Harry wanted to say. Instead, he said, “Robards says we can’t use former Death Eaters for consultation.”

Hermione frowned. “Did Malfoy do something?”

“He let Death Eaters into Hogwarts, tried to kill Dumbledore, and poisoned Ron,” Harry reminded her. “So yeah, I’d say he did something.”

Rolling her eyes, Hermione said, “He’s already been sentenced for that. Last I heard, he was following the restriction and keeping his head down. You said so yourself.”

Harry had said that—not about the restriction, since he hadn’t really thought about that, but he’d told Hermione about his first encounter with Malfoy at Slug and Jiggers and Malfoy’s subsequent assistance. “He hasn’t done anything wrong,” Harry said reluctantly. “Other than be Malfoy. Robards is just obsessed with image.”

“I’m sorry,” Hermione said sympathetically.

“Are you sure you can’t help?” Harry said, since that was the reason he’d come to Hermione initially.

“I’m . . .” Hermione swallowed. “I can try.”

“No,” Harry said, because he recognized that look. Hermione would do it for him. She would do anything for him. “I shouldn’t have asked.”

“Harry—”

“You’ve got more important things to worry about,” Harry said. Hermione had a job in the Department of Mysteries, working as an Unspeakable. Ron was having to work at the joke shop as he put himself through uni, while Hermione’s salary paid for their house. On top of that Hermione was pregnant; the Granger-Weasleys were barely going to have time for themselves, much less for Harry.
Hermione had her own life, now, and Harry’s heart broke a little to realize that things would never again be as they were at school, where their lives had belonged to each other. He could rely on Hermione to always be his friend, but he shouldn’t expect her to do his homework and solve his mysteries, as she once had done. He was meant to be on his own, now, a grown-up, with his big dusty house and a house-elf who didn’t want him. If his job was more about stupid policies than saving lives, it was his own damn fault.

Hermione looked worried and stressed and so much like she loved him, as though she wanted to make his every problem go away. “I can still help you.”

“I know you can, Hermione.” Taking both her hands, Harry squeezed them. “You always did. It doesn’t mean you always should. This is my problem, not yours.”

“But—”

“Take care of your family.” Squeezing again, Harry let her go.

“Harry,” she said, a little sharply. “You’re my family.”

“And this is my job,” Harry said. This was his life, and fuck Robards if he was going to stand in Harry’s way.

*

When Harry broke Robards’ policy to see Malfoy, however, Malfoy wasn’t exactly keen on helping.

Harry hadn’t deluded himself that Malfoy was doing potions ID for him over the past year out of the goodness of his heart. Malfoy was doing it because Harry had kept him out of Azkaban and testified at his mum’s trial. Even though it hadn’t saved Narcissa from Azkaban, Harry’s testimony had shortened her sentence. If only the potionologist at St Mungo’s had been a criminal too, Harry wouldn’t have to deal with Malfoy’s bullshit.

But criminal or not, Malfoy kept muttering about having to put the potions on the shelves in order, when they were already in order alphabetically.

“They need to go by colour,” Malfoy said petulantly.

“People don’t look for potions by colour; they do it by name,” Harry said.

Malfoy grit his teeth.

“Just do the bloody potion, will you?” Harry said, holding out the phial of Wood-Eye Lye.

Malfoy spared it a glance. “It’s got lye,” he said, then turned back to the shelves.

“Come off it, Malfoy,” Harry said, pulling Malfoy back around to face him. “I know it’s got lye; I need to know something in it that would help me identify the brewer. I know you can do it.”

For the first time, Malfoy hesitated. “I can’t,” he said finally.

Harry looked down at the potion. “Because distilling potions takes weeks?” he asked, thinking this particular potion must be more difficult than the other ones he’d brought to Malfoy. Perhaps this meant Harry might use the potions master at Hogwarts for consulting after all.

Malfoy glanced toward the front of the shop, then back at the floor. “I already told you. I have to order the shelves.”
Harry glanced toward the front of the shop as well. “Where’s Alby?” he asked suddenly.

Malfy mumbled again.

“What?”

“Away. Heavens, Potter. Were you always this deaf?” Malfoy lifted his eyes for the first time, then, and Harry saw that they were flashing, irises glinting like steel in the sun. Colour was high on his cheeks, and for the first time Harry realized Malfoy was angry.

Either that, or embarrassed.

Taking out his wand, Harry and pointed at the shelves. “There,” Harry said, putting his wand away as the phials on the racks all flew out and danced around each other. “Will you do it now?”

Malfy’s lips parted slightly, mouth hanging open as he watched the phials reorder themselves and settle back on the racks, now in order by colour. When the phials went still, Malfoy’s mouth snapped shut. Snatching the bottle in Harry’s hand, he strode away.

“Hang on!” Harry said, following him, but Malfoy was just going to the front of the shop, into the work room behind the register.

Setting the Wood-Eye Lye on the table in the centre of the room, Malfoy began pulling jars from the shelves.

“What are you doing?” Harry asked.

“Baking a cake,” Malfoy said scornfully. “What does it look like I’m doing?”

It looked like Malfoy was preparing to do something to the Wood-Eye Lye. “Can’t you just . . . I dunno, taste it?”

“You really are a dunce at potions,” Malfoy said, jerking a cutting board off of a shelf, then slamming it on the table. “The lye is a diversionary tactic to make it harder to discern the potion’s key ingredients, and the dust from the wooden eyes makes it dangerous to test, even though the lye is highly diluted.”

“There are really wooden eyes in it?” Harry said, and Malfoy glared.

Apparently, Malfoy was going to have to do something to the potion in order to identify the ‘key ingredient,’ which Harry supposed wasn’t that odd if the very make-up of the potion was meant to disguise its contents. Hermione had said fully distilling the potion would take a long time, but Malfoy probably wouldn’t be slamming things about like this if it was a week-long project. Harry decided to help.

After Malfoy snapped at him to use magic—Harry could use magic after all, and Malfoy still couldn’t—they fell into an almost peaceful rhythm, chopping, mashing, sifting, and mixing.

“Excellent,” Malfoy said, when Harry gave him the volcanic ash he’d mixed with slime from a bowl of mashed slugs.

Harry almost felt chuffed—but didn’t, since it was Malfoy. Malfoy added a drop of Wood-Eye Lye to the mixture, then added another to the berries mixed with seaweed and dragon pus, and then yet another drop to the black powder and bones.
“It’s got crocodile tears,” Malfoy said, looking into the berry mixture.

“Crocodile tears?”

Turning over the bowl, Malfoy pressed the berry mixture through one of the magic sieves. Clear liquid dripped out the other end, and Malfoy caught a few drops of it in a clean phial. “Here,” Malfoy said, handing Harry the phial. “There’s a shop in Knockturn Alley called Mortensen’s Menagerie. They sell exotic animal parts and might be able to figure out where these came from.”

“Of course, you would know the shops in Knockturn Alley,” Harry said, taking the phial.

“Right.” Malfoy turned away abruptly, beginning to clear the table.

Harry hadn’t even really meant it as an insult, but he could tell Malfoy had taken it as one. Instead of retaliating, however, Malfoy just kept clearing the table, putting the ingredient back in jars, scraping off the cutting board. Since Malfoy had just helped him, Harry felt a bit badly about having said it, even if it was Malfoy’s own fault that he had taken it personally. Coughing a little, Harry said, “How did you do it so fast?”

“It’s because I’m so evil,” Malfoy said. “I know all sorts of dark tricks. Such as how to quarter berries.” He shoved the cutting board back onto its shelf with a thud.

“Come off it, Malfoy.”

“Off what?”

Harry watched for a minute as Malfoy slammed jars back in their places and shoved knives back in their drawers.

“I went to talk to the potions master at Hogwarts,” Harry said, trying to make his voice sound conciliatory. “I asked her how long it would take for her to identify a useful ingredient in this potion.”

“Did you forget you had a slave who would do it for free?” Malfoy said, scrubbing at the table with a rag. “Or maybe you just didn’t want to have to look at my pasty Death Eater face.”

“Malfoy,” Harry said. “Look at me.”

“I don’t actually have to,” Malfoy said, squeezing cleaner onto the table and then scrubbing even harder. “Despite popular opinion, I still have my free will, even if you—”

“Malfoy.” Harry grabbed Malfoy’s elbow.

“Don’t touch me,” Malfoy said, wrenching away.

His face had gone livid, just after Harry had been thinking that his face wasn’t as pasty as it had been. It had filled out a bit since that first time Harry had seen him here, and even if it was still thin and yes, pale, he still had the same features he’d had in school. Where Harry hadn’t realized he was good-looking. Twisted with anger as it was now, Malfoy’s face didn’t look so good. Harry forgot what he’d been about to say.

“Malfoy!” Abel Alby stood in the doorway, a fierce frown on his scrunched-up face. “You’re meant to be reordering that shelf!”

Harry waited for Malfoy to reply that the shelf was already done, but no answer came. Turning to
look at Malfoy, Harry saw that Malfoy had gone still, his head tipping down. He just stood there, staring at the table, a sullen look on his face.

“Get back to it,” Alby demanded, but Malfoy just went on standing there.

Harry frowned, unsure of why Malfoy wasn’t afraid of mouthing off against the supposed Hero of the Wizarding World, but against a mean-faced gnome-man he was apparently pale and tongue-tied. “It’s already done,” Harry told Alby.

“Harry Potter,” Alby said, voice dripping with false amiability. “So glad to have you back in our shop! You needn’t concern yourself about little Death Eater worms. So sorry I was out—how may I help you?”

“You already know it was Malfoy’s help I needed,” Harry said. He’d been coming here for nearly a year to get Malfoy’s help with potions ID; he’d never needed Alby once.

“Oh, I see,” said Alby, his voice still so oily. “But you understand how difficult it is for a business when its employees are being harassed and distracted? Work doesn’t get done, you see. I’ve already had to file a complaint to Head Auror Robards about this. I wouldn’t want to have to file another.”

“I’m sorry.” Harry blinked. “Did you just—threaten me?”

“Of course not, Auror Potter.” Alby was beginning to look alarmed.

“I think you did,” said Harry. “It sounded like a threat. You said you’d complain to Robards again if I talk to Malfoy.”

“It’s just . . .” Alby wrung his hands together. “Little lord Malfoy is very distracted from his work, you see; he doesn’t get things done—”

“Your damn shelf is arranged by colour,” Harry said, “just like you asked.”

“But Auror Potter.” Alby turned wide, innocent eyes up to him. “He was meant to arrange the shelf by viscosity, not colour.”

Harry turned to Malfoy, but Malfoy was just glaring at the floor, his jaw set.

“He’s always getting things wrong, you see,” Alby went on. “Or it’s possible he’s doing it deliberately—he was a Death Eater, after all, and you know how devious they are.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “I’d know if Malfoy was plotting something. He probably just misunderstood.”

Malfoy snorted softly.

“But you see how hard it is to find good help!” Alby said in his most placating way. “You understand my worry.”

“Whatever,” Harry said, picking up the bottle of Wood-Eye Lye. “I just came to get this ID’ed.” He started heading out of the back room, Alby trailing behind.

“Of course, Auror Potter. Only, we small business owners have to contend with so much. Surely you can understand—”

“Don’t go to Robards,” Harry said, his hand on the knob of the door. “If you do, I’ll know.”

“But—”
Harry opened the door and stepped out of Slug and Jiggers, slamming the door behind him.

Outside, Diagon Alley was bright, and Harry felt glad to be out of the dim little shop with that horrible little man and Malfoy. As Harry made his way to Knockturn Alley to check out the place Malfoy had mentioned, he realized he again felt almost sorry for Malfoy, having to deal with Alby. Now that Harry knew Alby had been the one to complain to Robards about Harry seeing Malfoy, Harry thought it made perfect sense. Robards might be less obvious than Alby in his smallness and pettiness, but both of them were alike in their concern with the appearance of things, their shallow attempts at politeness while they undermined decent people just trying to do their jobs—

Harry stopped at the intersection of Diagon and Knockturn. Malfoy wasn’t a decent person.

People passed by on the street, a wizard with an owl on her shoulder. Two teenaged witches ate Fortesque’s ice cream cones. An older witch held a young boy by the hand, the boy tripping along behind her and staring in wonder at everything they passed. The first time Harry had come to Diagon Alley Harry had found it so strange, so fantastic. It had hardly seemed real.

Malfoy wasn’t decent, but he wasn’t the same prat Harry had known in school. Harry wasn’t the same person either, and the wizarding world as an adult wasn’t what Harry had expected when he was a child. With a loud crack, Harry Disapparated.

“Fuck!” Malfoy said, almost dropping the phials he was holding.

“What’s a spell I could use to arrange them by viscosity?” Harry asked him.

Malfoy frowned. “Pardon?”

Harry took out his wand. “I’ll do it for you. What’s the spell?”

“Auror Potter!” Alby said, rushing into the back of the shop. “Back so soon?”

Harry turned on him. “You’re punishing him.”

Alby feigned confusion. “I can’t think what you—”

“You’re punishing Malfoy,” Harry said.

“Potter,” Malfoy said.

“Well,” Alby said, disgruntled. “He was a Death Eater—”

“Yes, and you would like me to think it’s about that,” Harry said. “Everyone would like me to think it was about that. I almost wish it was, as it would make some sense. But no, this is about the fact that you used to get Galleons from Savage for your potions consulting, and now you don’t. Malfoy is costing you, so you’ve told him not to help me, and you punish him when he does.”

“Potter,” Malfoy said again, more loudly.

Alby managed to look highly affronted. “I would never forbid someone in my employ to speak to an Auror! How dare you suggest—”

“So, you don’t forbid it,” Harry said. “You make him put the shelves in an arbitrary order, then claim he misunderstood you and make him do it again.”

“He did misunderstand,” said Alby. “I very clearly told him to—”
“Malfoy is smarter than that,” Harry said. “He’s smarter than that and he’s cleverer than you; he’s better at potions than you, and you resent him for it, and you won’t let him do his fucking _job_ because you’re too much of a—”

Malfoy moved to stand in front of Alby, face to face with Harry. “You should leave.”

Harry reared back. “What?”

“You’re not helping,” Malfoy said, his voice harsh.

“Draco Malfoy is a former Death Eater!” Alby said loudly, coming out from behind Malfoy. “How dare you defend him against—”

“I’m not defending him,” Harry snapped. “I’ve merely—”

“For Merlin’s sake, Potter,” Malfoy said, rubbing his forehead as though his head hurt. “Just for once in your life, stand down.”

Harry turned back to him. “But you—”

“I’m what?” Malfoy demanded. “I can handle it; I was handling it. I’m not one of your little friends! Go pick a fight with someone else.”

“But I wasn’t—”

“You’re always picking a fight!”

The way Malfoy said it made Harry finally stop and take notice. Malfoy was pale, trembling almost—with anger or something else, Harry wasn’t quite sure. Malfoy’s eyes were bright. “Malfoy,” Harry said, and stopped. He had picked a fight, he realized, and it had never really been about Malfoy.

“Head Auror Robards will hear of this!” Alby said furiously. “You’re disrupting my business!”

“Just go,” Malfoy said. “Before you make it worse.”

“Malfoy,” Harry said again, but wasn’t sure what to say.

“Go,” Malfoy said.

Harry went.

*

**July 2004**

**Harry Potter:** 23 years  
**Draco Malfoy:** 24 years

For the infraction of breaking Robards’ asinine policy against communicating with Death Eaters, Harry was desked for a month. For the further infraction of threatening an innocent (“Innocent, my arse,” said Savage) shopkeeper, Harry was desked a second month.

For two months in a row, Harry filed paperwork for the department. He watched cases come across his desk, unsolved because some Aurors were incompetent, unfinished because other Aurors couldn’t get the resources they needed, incomplete because of Robards’ red tape and Cecil Vance’s prudish refusal to work with others and sometimes, even because of Savage’s wilful negligence for
the rules. The bureaucracy of it all made Harry sick.

At the end of the second month, a new brew called Ragerade came on the black market. Ragerade could make you stronger, but also put you into a berserker rage for up to six hours. Fights had already broken out on Diagon Alley, Gothat Way, and Havanold Avenue. Those who drank the brew were worn-out after the rage and easily arrested, but the dealer for the potion remained elusive. Aurors Vance and Kidder were assigned to the case, and they weren’t going to do anything about it.

Harry’s two months were up. Time to solve some cases.

* 

The worst Robards could do if Harry went to Malfoy was sack him, and Harry doubted that would happen. Sacking Harry Potter would look bad to the press, and Robards was all about image. Harry could get suspended again, but that could also look bad when Harry solved this case—particularly since Harry knew reporters at the Prophet. Lee Jordan had begun working there two years ago.

As it happened, Harry was not the one who got sacked.

“Where is he?” Harry asked, advancing towards Alby.

“I’ve told you,” Alby said. “Little lord Malfoy isn’t my business any more, and I’m glad to be rid of him. He was more trouble than he was—”

“You sacked him because he helped me,” Harry said, “and you weren’t getting paid under the table by Aurors anymore.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Alby said, “but Aurors paying upstanding shopkeepers under the table sounds a lot like bribery, and bribery is something I would certainly report to Head Auror—”

“Where is he?” Harry said, his voice even lower and steadier. He took another step closer.

“I told you, I don’t know,” Alby said, his voice trembling as he edged away.

Leaving Alby shaking, Harry tracked Malfoy down by writing his name on a parchment, adding a tracking spell to the paper, then having the paper delivered by an owl at the post office. Search-by-owl was a trick he’d learned from Savage early on, and it didn’t fail him this time. Malfoy was working at Mr. Mulpepper’s Apothecary—right next door to Slug and Jiggers, but Harry didn’t care that Alby had lied. At least Harry wouldn’t have to deal with that tosser any more.

Instead, Harry had to deal with Mrs. Mulpepper, who abruptly burst into tears when she learned he was looking for Malfoy.

“Don’t sack him,” Harry said quickly.

“Oh, yes,” said a low, laconic tone. “We wouldn’t want me to get sacked because of Harry Potter.”

Draco Malfoy stood in a doorway, an insouciant shoulder leaning against the frame. He was still too thin, his hair still dull. The way he lounged there, however, as though he hadn’t a care in the world—when Harry had got him sacked from his last job and was on his way to getting him sacked in this one—reminded Harry so much of the way Malfoy had looked in school that Harry swallowed hard. He looked away.

“Oh, oh, oh,” cried Mrs. Mulpepper. “I took a chance on you, Draco Malfoy! And the whole time
you’re committing nasty, dirty crimes under my nose?”

Harry never knew what to do around crying. Probably he should move closer, pat her shoulder or something, only he didn’t know Mrs. Mulpepper very well. She might take it the wrong way. It might make her cry harder. She might hug him or something, and Harry didn’t know what to do with hugs that weren’t from Hermione, Ginny, or Molly. Strangers were always trying to hug him, ever since the war ended, and it made Harry intensely uncomfortable to be touched so familiarly.

Draco Malfoy stopped leaning in the doorway, having the grace to look a little awkward. “Mrs. Mulpepper—”

“I told you,” Harry said. “I’m not arresting him. I—he’s helping me,” he went on, desperate for the crying to stop. “Malfoy’s helping me with something.”

Malfoy shot Harry a sardonic look, but Mrs. Mulpepper sniffled. “Helping?”

“Yes! Malfoy, he’s . . .” Harry coughed. “He’s been a great help. He’s very . . . helpful.”

From the doorway, Malfoy snorted.

“I need a potions ID,” Harry explained.

“Potions?” Mrs. Mulpepper looked up at him, sniffling. “ID?” Her eyes widened. “Oh, but Auror Potter, sir! I could help you with that! Remember how I helped you last time—”

“Er.” Harry definitely remembered. When he’d been searching for someone besides Malfoy who could help him with the Wood-Eye Lye, Mrs. Mulpepper had been eager to assist. She had also been fantastically bad at it, pouring things in and out of the Wood-Eye Lye for an hour before Harry had realized she had no idea what she was doing.

“It’s a dark potion,” Malfoy said, finally coming out from the doorway. “It’s dark and evil and terrible, and only someone who’s eaten the flesh of a unicorn and drunk the tears of babies can ID it. Isn’t that right, Potter?”

Malfoy wasn’t looking at him any longer. He also wasn’t looking sullen any more, his face a blank mask. His eyes grey eyes looked brighter with his skin so clear. Hastily, Harry turned back to Mrs. Mulpepper. “That’s right,” he added intelligently.

“B-baby tears?” Mrs. Mulpepper said.

“Newborn baby tears,” Malfoy said, his tone almost bored. “They taste delicious. Potter, you better give me that potion before puppies die and the blood of innocents is awash in the streets.” Not even looking at him, Malfoy held out his hand.

Mrs. Mulpepper just looked so heartbroken. “You swore to me you were trying to reform!”

“No one ever truly reforms,” Malfoy told her, still in that flat voice. “Come, Potter.” He wiggled his fingers.

Harry put the phial of Ragerade into Malfoy’s hand. “Is there some place we can go so as not to be disturbed?” Harry asked. “We—uh—need to get to work on that—that evil.”

“No, we don’t.” Malfoy handed the phial of Ragerade back. “It’s got swamp-thing bogies in it.”

Harry took the potion back. “That was quick.”
“How could you tell?” Mrs. Mulpepper said, her puffy red eyes curious. “You didn’t even distil it!”
Malfoy shrugged carelessly. “It must be the Dark Mark. It can sense the life force of evil creatures.”
Mrs. Mulpepper’s eyes widened. “Really?”
“Oh, yes,” Malfoy said. “Especially in bogies.”
“Malfoy,” Harry said sharply.
Malfoy scowled at him, looking spiky. “I’m not allowed to use magic,” he bit out. “All I have is potions.” He seemed to be saying this to Harry more than Mrs. Mulpepper, but Mrs. Mulpepper was the one who responded.
“I’m sure having been a dark wizard is a part of it,” she said.
Malfoy went spikier than ever. “I’m sure.”
“Thanks,” Harry said, tucking the phial away. “I’ll just be going, then.”
“Ooooh,” Mrs. Mulpepper said, beginning to look excited that Harry Potter was in her shop, now that she was done with crying. “But don’t you need potions? Plenty of potions for your Auror work? A Confusing Concoction for your enemies! A Sprinkle Spray to get away!”
“No thanks,” Harry said, heading toward the door.
“But you’ll be facing down such dark terrors! And saving the blood of innocents! And puppies!” Mrs. Mulpepper called, as Harry finally made his way out of the door.
He was outside only a moment or two when Malfoy stepped in front of him. “Stop coming to my work.”
Harry opened his mouth.
“You’ve already cost me one job,” Malfoy went on. “You can’t cost me another.”
“Alby had no right to sack you,” Harry said.
“And yet, here we are, with the fantastic Mrs. Mulpepper to keep me company.”
“You got sacked because of me.”
“Oh, really?” Malfoy’s tone was perfectly polite, and Harry rolled his eyes.
“I mean that I can help you, if you want it,” Harry said. “Robards might not be enormously fond of me right now, but Shacklebolt—”
Malfoy cut him off with an annoyed noise. “You are not getting the Minister of Magic involved in my job as a shopkeeper’s assistant.”
“Why not?”
“Because I haven’t asked you for it, you dolt!” As if surprised at his own name-calling, Malfoy looked around the street. People were stopping to look at them—the former Death Eater and Harry Potter, facing each other down on the pavement. Harry was used to people staring and had resigned himself to it, but Malfoy looked uncomfortable. Malfoy gestured to a side alley and strode into it,
Harry following. “I don’t need help from you,” Malfoy said, his voice low. “I’ve got it taken care of myself.”

“You didn’t have Alby taken care of.”

“I was taking care of it,” Malfoy hissed, “if it hadn’t been for you.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry said.

“What?” Malfoy snapped.

That was about the response that Harry could have expected from Malfoy, but it didn’t change the fact that he was really was sorry. Harry spread his hands. “You helped me, and you got sacked for it. I’m sorry. You deserved better.”

Malfoy began to get a strange look on his face. “Well—yes. I did.”

“Look, Malfoy,” Harry said, annoyed with the whole situation but realizing that for once, he was not all that annoyed with Malfoy. “You’re the best there is at potions ID.”

The strange look on Malfoy’s face blossomed. He lifted his chin a little. “Well—yes. I am.”

Harry was beginning to recognize that look—that very strange look, with Malfoy’s nose in the air. Malfoy was preening, just like he used to do. For all that Harry had hated that expression in school, it looked much better than Malfoy scowling and being sullen, and Harry wanted to look away. He didn’t want to think that Malfoy looked better in any capacity. “I’m trying to say that I need you to do this,” Harry went on, feeling annoyed. “Robards doesn’t want me talking to you, but I need to, so that I can help people.”

“What about the puppies?” Malfoy was beginning to smirk—an honest to God, old-fashioned Malfoy smirk, just like the ones from school. It made him look less gaunt—healthy, almost. Good. It made Harry furious. “This is serious, Malfoy.”

“I understand,” Malfoy said airily. He just kept smiling in that light-hearted way, and Harry was so aggravated, and Malfoy looked so good like that, that Harry could feel heat begin low in his chest, spreading up his neck toward his face. Fuck. “But we have to stop seeing each other like this,” Malfoy went on in that light, teasing voice.

“Malfoy,” Harry said, even more mortified than before.

“I think you need to come to my flat.”

Harry could feel himself flush red.

With a dramatic flourish, Malfoy produced a small scroll from a pocket in his robe. The robe itself was a drab little thing, threadbare and grey, just like the shabby clothes Malfoy wore underneath it.

Harry remembered the way Malfoy used to dress—everything new with a perfect fit. The restrictions prevented Malfoy from doing magic now, so he couldn’t tailor his clothes, and he didn’t have the galleons for those expensive fabrics that made you want to touch. Harry had never wanted to touch in school. He hadn’t. Malfoy was a prat; he was a prat, a Death Eater prat, and Harry could feel his intense blush slowly fading away.

“I’ll just jot down my address on this note you were so kind as to send me,” Malfoy was saying,
smiling like he thought this was all some kind of joke. Producing a biro from a pocket—and it was strange to see Malfoy with a biro—he scribbled on the parchment. “Then you may call on me to your heart’s content, and I shall provide my services to the best of my—”

“You’ll provide your services whenever I want,” Harry said, snatching the paper out of Malfoy’s elegant hand. “You’re still a former Death Eater, Malfoy, even if you happen to be tops at potions.”

The expression on Malfoy’s face fell, wiping clean and settling into that mask Harry had seen earlier. “Oh yes,” he said blankly. “I forgot.”

Harry hadn’t meant it like that. Christ. “Malfoy—”

“No, thank you for reminding me, Potter.” With that empty expression, Malfoy’s face had gone back to looking skull-like, and Harry didn’t understand how it possibly could have been so attractive that he would lash out. “It slips my mind sometimes,” Malfoy went on, “but not with people like you here to remind me. Thank you ever so much for putting me in my place. Is that all?”

“You’re the one who wanted to talk.”

“Right. My mistake.” With that, Malfoy stalked down the alley, back toward Mrs. Mulpepper’s.

Harry glanced down at the parchment in his hand. Draco Malfoy, it read, in Harry’s own messy scrawl. Then, underneath, in small precise handwriting: 357 Knockturn Alley, 1st Storey, for any time the great Harry Potter needs expert advice.

Crumpling the parchment, Harry shoved it in his pocket. He had some swamp-things to track down. Then he had to face Robards and tell him he’d not only violated his suspension but again broken the policy for which he’d been suspended, all so he could talk to Draco bloody Malfoy. Those swamp-things had better be worth it.

* 

December 2004

Harry Potter: 24 years
Draco Malfoy: 24 years

Malfoy’s flat was above Potage’s Cauldron Shop, a rickety building in a row of shops. The flat was tiny, consisting merely of a small sitting room with a hearth, a kitchen with yellow tile and a loo in the back, and what must have been Malfoy’s bedroom behind the sitting room.

The first few times Harry had called by Floo, Malfoy had snapped at Harry to get his head out of the hearth. Some cauldron or other was always bubbling there, so Harry had got in the habit of Apparating directly in. Malfoy didn’t take kindly to this, but Malfoy didn’t take kindly to much at first. Harry guessed Malfoy must have been still offended at Harry having called him a Death Eater outside Mr. Mulpepper’s, even though he was one, because Malfoy eventually settled down.

In fact, dealing with Malfoy could be almost pleasant. Without Alby or Mrs. Mulpepper to contend with, their meetings were quite efficient, as Malfoy was a stellar potions consultant. Sometimes, Harry thought Malfoy was the only person he knew who worked as hard as he did.

Obviously, that wasn’t true, as Harry knew Hermione and Hermione had always worked harder than him at everything, but Hermione was split between work and family and her political obligations, whereas Harry really only had his job. Meanwhile, Malfoy only seemed to have potions. His sitting room was filled with tables stacked with glassware and potions ingredients. Whenever Harry went
over there, Malfoy always seemed to be working on something new—boiling things on his cooker, measuring powders in the sitting room. Once, Harry even found him mixing tinctures in the toilet.

Malfoy grimaced. “You try brewing a cure for vampirism in seven hundred square feet with only three cauldrons,” he’d said.

“You’re brewing a cure for vampirism?” Harry asked, a bit worried Malfoy might be a vampire. Every time Harry saw Malfoy, he looked better than that first day Harry had seen him at Slug and Jiggers. He’d filled out a bit; his hair had some life, his cheeks some colour. Even his clothes fit a bit better, but in Harry’s opinion Malfoy was still worryingly pale and a bit too slender, compared to what he had been in fifth year. Maybe this was just what Malfoy looked like grown-up, but Harry didn’t like it.

It reminded him of the way Malfoy had always been sweeping or scrubbing or stocking shelves when Harry had first seen him again at Slug and Jiggers—when Malfoy had looked just like a skeleton, and Alby was always saying awful things to him. It reminded Harry of dark spaces and spiders and an ache in his stomach that wouldn’t go away. Harry didn’t like to think of it.

Malfoy just rolled his eyes. “I’m not a vampire, Potter.”

“Then why are you brewing a cure?”

“Because one doesn’t exist yet, of course,” Malfoy said, in his pretentious way, turning back to the tincture in the toilet.

“Andromeda says you’ve been visiting,” Harry said, mostly to change the subject, but partly also because he found it an object of curiosity.

“Does she? I can’t think why.”

“Because you’ve been visiting, you prat.”

“Thank you for informing me,” Malfoy said. “I have no idea what I would do without you.”

Christ. Malfoy was so impossible sometimes. “Here,” Harry said, taking out the phial of bubbling goo in his pocket. “If you don’t want to make conversation.”

“Is that what we were doing?” Malfoy asked innocently, but he took the potion, and twenty minutes later explained that it was a petrification poison made from elkhorn coral.

“Will you be spending Christmas with Andromeda?” Harry thought to ask, just as he was about to leave. When Andromeda had mentioned Malfoy visiting, Harry had been thinking about how awkward it might be to have to see Malfoy there when Harry went to visit Teddy.

“I’m spending it with Mother.” Malfoy turned away, the subject closed.

Last Harry had heard, Narcissa Malfoy was in the Janus Thickey Ward, suffering mental collapse after time served in Azkaban. Malfoy didn’t want to talk about it, Harry guessed. He Apparated away.

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**June 2005**

**Harry Potter:** 24 years

**Draco Malfoy:** 25 years
Over the next six months, Malfoy’s flat became fuller and fuller with potions ingredients and brewing equipment, crowding out any other sort of comfortable furniture, except for a floral-print chair Malfoy had shoved into a corner and never seemed to sit on. At first only the table tops appeared crowded, but gradually the spaces under the tables began to be filled with boxes, sacks, and stacks of jars. Meanwhile the shelves around the perimeter of the sitting room were becoming stuffed with books, and all of these things seemed to be advancing faster than the amount of meat on Malfoy’s bones or the quality of Malfoy’s clothes.

“Are you going to teach a potions class?” Harry said, gesturing at the stocks of supplies under the tables.

“It’s inventory,” Malfoy said, his voice patronizing.

“Inventory for a potions apocalypse?”

“You never know.” Malfoy put his stupidly straight nose into the air.

“Seriously, Malfoy. What are you doing? Besides brewing cures for vampirism?”

“That was last year.”

“Malfoy.”

Malfoy’s nose came down and his derisive voice returned. “One does not become proficient at potions without practice, Potter. Did you think I was born a genius at it?”

“Sort of.”

Malfoy began to smirk, and Harry realized his mistake too late.

“I meant,” Harry began.

“You think I’m a genius.”

“No, I don’t.”

“You said I was tops at potions.”

“I never said that.”


“Then tell me what this is,” Harry said, taking out the blue powder he’d brought for Malfoy to ID. It was the reason he was here, after all, not—whatever they were doing.

“Admit it,” Malfoy said. “You want me to ID it because I’m tops at potions.”

“If you don’t want to,” Harry said, starting to put the powder back in his pocket.

Malfoy wilted. “Oh, give me that,” he said impatiently, snatching the bottle out of Harry’s hands.

Harry had to hide his own smirk. He’d learned long ago that Malfoy was easily distracted by potions. Like a crow with shiny things, Malfoy just couldn’t keep away. “They’re calling it Slumber Slam,” Harry said, watching as Malfoy took the bottle of powder over to a table and tapped some of it out on a glass plate. “It makes you sleepier and sleepier, but we’re trying to figure out what the point is. I mean, I can see how exhausting someone might make them easier to rob or something, but that’s not
Malfoy put the plate under what looked like a microscope. “Then how is it being used?”

“Like I said, we’re still not sure,” Harry said, “but the people on it have been doing weird things.”

While Malfoy bent over the microscope, Harry wandered around, looking at Malfoy’s things. He had a Pensieve, brains in jars, cases of beetles, bottles of eyes, something that looked like Wheatabix, neatly dissected in a pan. *Practice*, Malfoy had called it, and Harry suddenly realized Malfoy probably hadn’t got to go to uni. His parents’ fortune had been seized, and no way did a magical university admit a former Death Eater under scholarship.

Harry struggled to remember whether Malfoy had ever talked about what he had wanted to be when he grew up but could not recall. At Hogwarts Malfoy had always been talking. He’d said a lot of things, but Harry had learned early on not to listen.

“It leaves you open to suggestion,” Malfoy said, standing up from the microscope and giving Harry back the bottle of powder. “It’s got scopolamine in it.”

“What’s that?” Harry asked, putting the bottle in his pocket.

“A drug from the flower of a Central American tree,” Malfoy said.

“So, I need to find out who has access to those trees,” Harry said.

“That’s not all. This powder was crushed in the same Pensieve the first potion you brought me was brewed in—the one that influenced people’s dreams.”

“Dream Dram.” Due to Malfoy’s behaviour earlier, Harry really would have liked to conceal the fact that he was impressed, but he was finding that difficult. “How can you tell?”

Distracted by the powder, Malfoy didn’t seem to notice. “Pensieve fluid leaves a residue and is unique to the individual. If you’re dealing in mind magic, which that is—” he nodded at the bottle in Harry’s pocket—“you’re probably going to want to brew in a Pensieve, and if you’re careful enough—which I am—you can start identifying different Pensieves.”

“I arrested the brewer of Dream Dram,” Harry pointed out.

“There was either more than one, or you just arrested the dealer.”

Harry, still impressed and sort of overwhelmed by the hole blown wide open in his case due to this new intel, accidentally blurted, “You really are tops at potions.”

“What?” Malfoy said, which meant he was truly startled. Malfoy almost always said "pardon".

The naked surprise on his face was embarrassing. Malfoy was meant to take it as a joke; they’d been joking before. Hadn’t they? “What did you used to want to be when you grew up?” Harry said instead.

Malfoy looked bewildered. “What did you say—before?”

“When we were kids,” Harry said. “Before you became a Death Eater and all that. What did you want to be? I mean, you definitely didn’t want to be a shop boy in an apothecary.”

Malfoy’s expression hardened up, like melted water instantly freezing over. “It’s my life’s ambition. Working in a shop.”
“I didn’t mean . . .” Releasing a breath, Harry gave it up. Malfoy had always been impossible. “You know what? Never mind.”

“Did you need anything else?” Malfoy asked in that arctic tone.

“No,” Harry said. “I guess I don’t.”

*

April 2007
Harry Potter: 26 years
Draco Malfoy: 26 years

In the years since Harry began going to Malfoy’s flat for potions consultation, they developed a sort of rhythm. At first, Harry viewed using Malfoy’s expertise as a stop-gap until the department could shell out for a proper research lab, or until Harry found an actual potions master who could do the job in a respectable, official way. Eventually, Harry gave up on this idea. Robards was displeased with the way Savage cut corners, but Harry—through four years working for the department—had learned that it was the only way to get things done, and besides, Malfoy was not an actual cut-corner. In fact, he was a lot more respectable than most of Savage’s informants, who may or may not actively be committing crimes, and no other person could identify potions ingredients or the hidden signatures of brewers like Malfoy could.

“Hidden signatures?” Harry asked, the first time Malfoy had brought it up.

“Yes, hidden signatures,” Malfoy said impatiently, dumping the contents of a plate into a container, sealing the container, and putting it into a fridge. “What do you think I’ve been doing all this time?”

Harry was momentarily distracted by the fridge, as wizards didn’t usually have them. Malfoy had to have one, he guessed, as he didn’t have magic to keep food cool.

Malfoy snapped his fingers in front of Harry’s face. “I’m sorry,” Malfoy said, not sounding sorry at all. “Am I boring you?”

“Er.” Harry watched as Malfoy wiped off his plate. “I interrupted your dinner.”

“That’s never bothered you before.”

“I’ve never done it before.”

Malfoy just gave him a look.

“Well, if I had you could have told me,” Harry said, feeling disgruntled.

“Would it have stopped you? Sorry, Auror Potter, you’ll have to wait to save the world, as I’m busy eating?”

“And puppies,” Harry said.

“What?” Malfoy snapped.

“Saving the world and puppies,” Harry said, but Malfoy just looked confused, and Harry realized Malfoy hadn’t remembered that conversation from the alley outside Mr. Mulpepper’s. Of course he hadn’t; it hadn’t been a special conversation, and Harry only remembered it because—“I’m sorry anyway,” Harry said, just to make himself stop thinking. “You should eat more.”
“I should what?”

Harry felt a blush begin to start low in his chest, threatening to rise up toward his neck. Malfoy’s weight and colour had continued to improve over the past year. Harry had tried not to notice, but it still bothered him. It bothered him that it bothered him; it bothered him that it reminded him of things he didn’t like to think about.

“What business is it of yours how much I should eat?” Malfoy’s voice was low and furious.

“I don’t know.” Harry had no idea why he thought about it so much. He felt strangely blank inside.

“You have no idea what it’s like to not have enough,” Malfoy said. “Do you.”

Malfoy wasn’t actually asking him a question, and Harry didn’t take it as one. He wasn’t thinking of himself at all, because this had nothing to do with him. Malfoy was a grown-up, after all. “Why don’t you charge for consultation?”

“Excuse me?” Malfoy looked appalled.

“If the problem is money,” Harry said. “Alby got away with it.”

“You want me to solicit bribes? I’m a Death Eater, Potter!”

“No bribes,” Harry said. “I mean, I’m sure the department would be paying a researcher to do it, if Robards didn’t have a stick up his arse.”

“I don’t want your fucking money,” Malfoy snapped. “I want to get by on my own, without anyone telling me I don’t deserve more. I want to do magic without the threat of getting in trouble for it. I want—” Chest heaving, he cut himself off. His face was splotchy with colour.

Harry just watched, feeling strangely empty inside, a sense of detachment—because this still had nothing to do with him. He should pity him, Harry supposed. Hermione would pity him. Harry wasn’t as nice as Hermione, he guessed.

Malfoy took another big breath, but when he spoke, his voice was different—softer, somehow.

“Haven’t you ever . . . in the war, when no one believed you. Didn’t you want to—prove yourself?”

“I guess I did prove myself.” Harry shrugged. “Everyone believed me in the end.”

Malfoy’s face twisted in impatience. “I meant—how you felt. What about when you were on the run—no place to sleep, hardly anything to eat, and you were be hunted. How was it then?”

Harry’s eyebrows went up. “Have you become a psychologist, Malfoy?”

Malfoy grimaced. “I’m trying to talk to you.”

“Are you on the run?” Harry persisted. “Are you being hunted?”

Malfoy frowned at him.

“It’s not the same thing, Malfoy.”

“I never said it was,” Malfoy bit out.

“Then why are you trying to get me to talk about it? It’s in the past.”
“Right.” Malfoy’s shoulders went down a bit, and Harry hadn’t noticed that until then, they’d been tensed up. But Malfoy didn’t look like he was relaxing—he looked defeated, and Harry didn’t think about why.

Harry had been a different person when he was a kid—an orphan, locked in a cupboard. He’d been a different person at Hogwarts as well—a student, fighting a war. Now he was an Auror. He had a job and friends and wizarding world peace. Everything was so much better; Harry didn’t think about those other things.

_You never talk about your feelings_, Ginny used to say.

_Maybe I don’t have any_, he’d said when they broke up.

“So,” Harry said, because he didn’t want to talk about it any longer. “Can you still ID that potion for me?”

“Give it to me.” Malfoy flung out his arm, hand open toward Harry, even though his body was still turned away.

“What?” Harry said, surprised.

“Whatever stupid potion you want ID’ed,” Malfoy said. “Just give it to me.”

“Oh.” Still feeling strangely empty, Harry fumbled in his robe for the little bottle.

Malfoy found the hidden signature in question, which was that the Forgetfulness Potion had giant tortoise scales in it. Harry almost suggested Malfoy take a little of the potion, before he remembered the substance was illegal and causing all sorts of problems with people’s minds. Just, Malfoy sounded like he could use a little forgetting. Some things were so much better when you never thought about them at all.

*  

**November 2007**

**Harry Potter:** 27 years  
**Draco Malfoy:** 27 years

Harry was always last to leave the Auror Office, and he thought there might have been poison in his tea.

A suspect had given it to Harry two days ago, before her illegal faeries had burst out of a cupboard and Harry had arrested her. In spite of the faeries, Harry had thought nothing of the tea, but he’d felt strange since that evening. Over the past day, he’d developed a weird cough and random chills, and Harry had nothing better to do than pursue the tea lead to uncover possible further wrongdoing.

No one was waiting for him at home. Even Kreacher worked at St. Mungo’s now, and the only thing Harry ever did at Grimmauld Place was sleep and wish he could go back to work. Sometimes he brought work home because even the sleeping part was impossible. It would certainly be impossible now, with this pressure against his sinuses. As Harry began gathering his things—tucking his wand into his sleeve, his case files into a satchel—it never once occurred to him that Malfoy wouldn’t be up at this hour. Malfoy was always up.

“Heavens!” Malfoy said, and jumped.

“I have a problem,” Harry said, then stopped to look at Malfoy.
For once, Malfoy wasn’t stirring a tincture or measuring powder out into spoons. Instead, he was sat in the floral-print chair, which had been drawn up near the hearth. Books rested around him, scrolls spread out in all directions. Harry could tell Malfoy was working—he had a quill in hand even with a book in his lap, and notes were scribbled on a parchment beside his elbow in fresh-looking ink. That Malfoy was apparently a swot wasn’t what gave Harry pause.

It was the way Malfoy looked, curled in that chair, the book in his lap. Firelight was kinder to his face than Lumos, painting the pallor into a soft gold colour, highlighting all of his best features—the straight forehead, high cheekbones, his thin, distinctly-shaped lips. He looked like a painting someone would do of what home was meant to be.

Fuck.

“What the hell are you wearing?” Harry said.

“It’s called a dressing gown,” Malfoy drawled, slipping a bookmark between the pages of the book. “How nice of you to call—and without warning, too. I do so love that.”

“Sorry,” Harry said, too distressed about how Malfoy looked to actually feel sorry.

“Never bother, Potter. I am entirely at your disposal, of course.” Putting the book aside, Malfoy stood, revealing the full dressing gown. It was green and silver, nicer than anything Harry had seen Malfoy wear since school. Under it, Malfoy wore white pyjamas that should have fit better. The neckline had fallen entirely too low, revealing far too much of Malfoy’s chest, and Harry was angry at the neckline, at the skin it revealed. He was angry at Malfoy, for wearing too-loose pyjamas.

Malfoy pulled the dressing gown tighter about himself, concealing the offending pyjamas. “Did you have a potion for me to ID, or did you come to admire me in my nightclothes?”

A sudden violent flush coursed up Harry’s neck, into his cheeks.

Malfoy smirked.

“I was dosed with something,” Harry gritted out, realizing that must be why he was reacting this way. “I had tea.”

“Oh my days.” Malfoy put a hand to his heart. “Not tea.”

Harry wanted to shake him. “I think it was some kind of poison; I need to find out what kind.”

Malfoy put out his hand.

Harry looked at it.

“The tea,” Malfoy said, wiggling his fingers.

Malfoy’s fingers were slim, long, and elegant. They looked like a painting as well. “Um.”

Malfoy put his hand down. “You don’t have it.”

“I didn’t know it was poison at the time.”

“You didn’t go back for a sample?”

“It’d all been cleaned up.”
Malfoy scowled, his hands down by his sides. It made the robe—*dressing gown*—fall open a bit, and Harry made himself look away from the slim body inside of it.

“What do you expect me to do without a sample?” said Malfoy’s disdainful voice. “Why didn’t you go to St. Mungo’s?”

Another chill wracked through Harry. His head hurt; his nose felt stuffy, his muscles weak. “I don’t need a cure,” he said. “I need to know what poison it is. I thought you could . . .” Harry trailed off miserably, because Malfoy was right. Harry had no idea what Malfoy could do without a sample. “This was stupid,” he muttered, getting his wand back out so he could Apparate.

“Potter,” Malfoy said, and his hand was on Harry’s arm.

Harry looked down at it. He didn’t remember Malfoy ever touching him voluntarily—not since Malfoy had clung to him as they were flying out of the Fiendfyre.

“Sit down,” Malfoy said, taking his touch away.

Harry looked at the chair. He wanted to leave, because Malfoy was annoying, and his dressing gown was annoying; his cosy-looking chair was annoying, but Harry felt weak and tired. So tired.

“Just sit down, Potter,” Malfoy said, sounding as annoyed as Harry felt. “I’ll try to find out what’s wrong.”

Harry sat down, and Malfoy disappeared. The chair really was very comfortable.

After a few minutes, Malfoy returned with a tray with a bunch of little bottles on it. “These are mainly diagnostic,” Malfoy said, setting the tray beside the chair. Holding out a small bottle of bright orange liquid, he said, “Drink this.”

Taking it, Harry looked at it suspiciously. “What is it?”

“It’s poison I’ve made, just for you.” Malfoy sounded annoyed and impatient, but not necessarily unkind. In fact, he looked a bit amused. “Go on.”

Tipping the bottle back, Harry drank it in one go.

“Good,” Malfoy said, taking the bottle away. “That was a Cure-All. Now we’ll work on the diagnostics.”

“What kind of Cure-All? I’ve never heard of that, before.”

“That’s because I made it. I’ve made all sorts of things, had you ever bothered to ask. St. Mungo’s would have been lucky to have me, would they ever deign to hire a Death Eater.”

“You’ve made things such as?”

Malfoy glared at him, and Harry wanted to roll his eyes.

“Malfoy,” he said. “I’m asking.”

Surprise filled Malfoy’s face, followed by something almost like the beginnings of an unplanned smile. As soon as it started, Malfoy angled his face away. “Well. Well—I don’t suppose you could possibly understand. They’re all very complicated, and you’re such a dullard.”

Harry was too tired to be annoyed. “Try me.”
“Well,” Malfoy said again, then didn’t say anything else. Suddenly, he swooped toward his little tray and grabbed a bottle of blue stuff. “This is an indicator solution,” he said, not looking at Harry. “You put your thumb in it, and we’ll use it to determine whether you’ve had a certain kind of poison.”

Malfoy just kept looking at it, not saying anything else. “Okay,” Harry said slowly. “Are we going to do it?”

“Yes,” Malfoy said, looking startled out of a reverie. “Yes, we’ll . . .” Hastily, he grabbed a bowl on the tray, then poured some of the blue liquid in. “And then we’ll—” He reached toward Harry, stopped, then thrust the bowl toward him. “Put your thumb in, and I’ll time it.”

Harry put his thumb in, while Malfoy timed it with a silver pocket watch, looking at the watch instead of at Harry. The firelight made the room quite warm, and Malfoy still looked like a painting, kneeling at Harry’s feet. He didn’t have anywhere else to sit—Harry was sitting in the only chair in the room.

“Good,” Malfoy said, after a minute. “You can take your thumb out.”

Harry took his thumb out, which made Malfoy say, “Good,” again. Taking a flannel off his tray, he began to reach again, then stopped and gave Harry the flannel. “So you can dry your thumb.”

Malfoy snatched something else off the tray—a bottle of red pills. “I haven’t got a name for these yet. If you’ve got anything cursed in your lungs, they’ll make you sneeze it out.”

“George Weasley is good at naming things.”

It didn’t provoke the reaction Harry expected, as Malfoy merely tipped his face down and played with the bottle a bit. “Yes, well. I haven’t—patented it yet.”

“I don’t care. I’ll sneeze out whatever.”

They went on like that, Malfoy describing his pills and potions, making Harry drink things and eat things and stick out his tongue, then dip his fingers in things. Harry didn’t have anything else to pay attention to, so he paid attention to Malfoy. In Harry’s memories from Hogwarts, Malfoy’s voice was nasal and annoying, but it wasn’t. Though it was light and quick and pleasant to listen to, it also had a low timbre layered under it that made his voice quite resonant, almost hypnotic. And Malfoy’s eyes were a striking colour. Like sickles, Harry thought, and felt worse than ever. His nose was dripping.

“Here,” Malfoy said, reaching toward the tray and then handing Harry a green handkerchief square.

Harry wiped his nose. “How many things do you have on there?”

“I’d have a lot fewer if I could use magic,” Malfoy said, stacking the bottles and things to one side of his tray. “I could probably do all of this with just a few spells.”

“You don’t need magic.”

“Potter, everyone needs magic.”

“Not everyone.”

“I forgot; you’re a defender of Muggles,” Malfoy said, picking up his pocket watch again.

“I just meant you’re clever enough to get around it.”

Malfoy froze. “You really were poisoned,” he said, his voice strange after a long moment.
Harry perked up a bit. “You can tell?”

“No,” Malfoy said, then put his fingers on Harry’s wrist.

Harry tried to jerk away. “What—”

“Hold still.” Malfoy was looking at the pocket watch. “I’m getting your blood pressure.”

“Why do you need my—”

“I said, hold still.” Malfoy’s steady fingers pressed more firmly on Harry’s clammy skin.

No one had ever done anything like this to him before—feeling his pulse, kneeling beside him. Even at St. Mungo’s they mostly cast spells at you to find out what was wrong. Diagnosis by potion must be a little more hands-on, and Harry didn’t know what to do with his confusion, his embarrassment. He shouldn’t be reacting like this, particularly to Malfoy. Particularly when his whole body felt like a dish rag—but that was probably why. He’d been poisoned. Otherwise he wouldn’t be reacting to Malfoy at all.

“Good,” Malfoy said, then let go of his wrist.

Harry sagged in relief.

Then Malfoy’s hand covered Harry’s forehead, and Harry tried to jerk away. Malfoy’s other hand latched onto Harry’s shoulder, Malfoy’s right hand still on Harry’s brow. “My hands aren’t made of snakes, Potter,” Malfoy said. “They’re just hands, despite common rumour. I’m trying to get your temperature.”

Malfoy’s hand felt cool and soothing against Harry’s hot skin, only Harry didn’t remember being hot. He’d had chills. He’d felt cold, hadn’t he, except he could feel the sweat at his temples, and Malfoy’s hand was magical. Harry remembered those long, slim fingers, and this was a bad idea. This was such a bad idea, and Harry was ashamed, so deeply ashamed of how good this felt.

_You’re awkward about touching_, Ginny had told him once, but he wasn’t. He wasn’t; he was perfectly normal about it; it was just that it was _Malfoy_, and no one had ever done this to him before—maybe Molly. Maybe Hermione, once, or Madam Pomfrey. Harry wanted to crawl out of his skin. He wanted to curl into Malfoy’s touch.

“Shh,” Malfoy murmured, and then took his hand away. “I know what’s wrong with you.”

Harry was terrified that Malfoy knew exactly what was wrong with him. He didn’t even know himself.

“You have a cold,” Malfoy said, sounding amused.

“What?”

“A rather common cold,” Malfoy said.

“No, I don’t,” Harry said immediately.

“Ah.” Malfoy looked at him, his expression inscrutable. “Then would you mind telling me why you’re shaking like a leaf?”

“I don’t get sick,” Harry said, because he didn’t. He just felt bad from time to time, but not like other people. He’d never even been sick when he was a kid—not like Dudley, helpless and crying and
getting his bogies everywhere. That just never happened to Harry.

“Potter,” Malfoy began, then stopped. He picked up something on the tray. “This is a topical analgesic. I can rub it on your throat, so you can—”

“I don’t need anyone taking care of me,” Harry said, practically leaping out of the chair.

Malfoy stared at him.


Slowly, Malfoy got to his feet. “Potter,” he said, his voice soft and warm. “What the fuck is wrong with you?”

_I’m sick!_ Harry wanted to say. _The poison tea!_ But the tea hadn’t been poisoned. Harry didn’t want Malfoy touching him, but Harry wasn’t sick. He’d never been sick, except for that time all the bones in his arm broke second year, but that had been Malfoy’s fault, and that time he’d died in the forest, only that had been Voldemort’s fault. It wasn’t Harry’s fault; he hadn’t _done_ anything.

“You crack in whenever you like,” Malfoy was saying in that deceptively calm voice. The dressing gown had come undone and was hanging open. “I’m at your beck and call; no matter what I’m in the middle of, I drop everything. I’ve done _everything_ you’ve ever asked, and I’m still—what am I, to you? Some kind of leper?”

“No,” Harry said, unable to explain. “It doesn’t—it hasn’t anything to do with you.”

If anything, this seemed to make Malfoy even more angry. “I see,” he said icily.

“I meant,” Harry said. “I’m not used to . . . being sick.”

“How wonderful for you.”

“Malfoy.”

“Do you require further services?”

The tone and the word choice made Harry want to flinch. Instead, he held out the handkerchief.

Malfoy actually did flinch. “I don’t want that.”

“What should I—”

“Burn it, for all I care. I don’t want to touch anything you’ve touched.” Malfoy turned away, and it all seemed very dramatic until Harry realized if he had a cold, he’d probably infected Malfoy’s whole flat with germs.

“Sorry,” Harry said, stuffing the handkerchief into his pocket.

“Go away.” Malfoy’s back was still turned, but every part of him radiated displeasure, from the set of his shoulders to the fist by his thigh.

Harry thought about the topical analgesic, since he truly did feel poorly. It would probably ease the ache in his throat, or at least alleviate the cough. Harry thought about how Malfoy said he would rub the cream onto Harry’s throat, and then he did what Malfoy had told him to do and went away.

*
The next day, Harry took his first sick day ever, but did not spend it at home. Instead he went to the Diagon Alley post office, sending Draco Malfoy five galleons and a note that read:

_Malfoy,

I’m sorry I didn’t take that topical cream stuff, because I think I need some after all. The 5 galleons are for the whole bottle if you are able to send it. My address is 12 Grimmauld Place, London. I understand if you can’t.

Thanks,
H.P._

* 

An hour later Harry was back at Grimmauld Place when an eagle owl arrived with a package. Harry was pretty sure she was the same eagle owl Malfoy had had back in school. Harry remembered so many instances of seeing that owl in the Great Hall, bringing Malfoy packages from Narcissa; he’d never thought it would ever bring a package to him. When the owl stuck her leg out, Harry detached the package, then gave her an experimental stroke on the head. He’d never replaced Hedwig, mostly because nothing could replace her. The owl closed her eyes and dipped down her head when Harry petted her. He tried petting her again.

Inside the package was a note, five galleons, a bottle of burgundy liquid, a packet of pink powder, and a tube labelled _Cold Cure: Topical Analgesic Cream_. The note read:

1) Take three sips of the burgundy liquid every morning, noon, and night
2) One teaspoon of the powder whenever feeling stuffy, not to exceed one teaspoon per four hours
3) Apply cream to chest and throat to ease coughs and burning

_Feel better, Potter,
Draco Malfoy_

Harry followed Malfoy’s instructions to the letter.
Having established a correspondence by owl with Malfoy was convenient. Over the next year, Harry owled Malfoy potions to ID from time to time, though Harry still visited plenty in emergencies or when he thought the case needed more explanation than could be conveyed by note. Or when it was late and no one else was in the office, and Harry thought Malfoy would be awake.

Harry kept all correspondence from Malfoy in the table with the drawer beside his bed, along with the handkerchief and the paper with Malfoy’s address that Malfoy had given Harry so long ago. Keeping these things made sense, just in case Harry forgot where Malfoy lived or had to blow his nose. As for the correspondence, Harry might need it for a case some day to remember which potion was which, even though most of Malfoy’s notes just said things like, they used tropical butterfly wings, and good luck, Potter, and never send me intestines in a bag again, Potter.

A few times Malfoy called by Floo with his potions ID, but the first time Malfoy visited Grimmauld Place, Harry was surprised.

“Oh, hullo,” Malfoy said, as though he hadn’t been the one to ring the bell. He looked perfectly comfortable standing there on the stoop, as though he belonged there. Holding up three phials, he wiggled them, then said, “I have a solution to a little problem of yours.”

“What?” Harry said.

Malfoy smirked. “Wood-Eye Lye. Last time you came to see me you mentioned it was proliferating again, despite your having put away the brewer ages ago. Here’s Veritaserum,” Malfoy said, wiggling just one of the phials. “Here’s Wood-Eye Lye, and here’s an indicator solution,” he went on, wiggling each of the next two phials. “The indicator solution will detect whether anyone has had any potions with crocodile tears in the past seventy-two hours—crocodile tears being a rare but operative ingredient in Wood-Eye Lye, if you recall.”

“Come in,” Harry said, opening the door wider.

“I suppose I don’t mind.” Still smirking, Malfoy sauntered into the house. “Is it always so dark in here?” he asked, as Harry shut the door.

“I—don’t usually have visitors.”

Malfoy appeared to be taking a survey of the territory. “I see you’ve removed Great Aunt Walburga.”

Harry glanced at the wall where the portrait used to be. Instead there was a painting of a field of flowers with thestrals grazing. “Luna painted over it.”

“And how is Lovegood?”

“She’s good,” said Harry. Malfoy just looked so comfortable and lazy, as though making normal conversation and visiting each other were something that they did all the time. “How’s . . . your mum?”
Malfoy turned away. “I suppose I could have Floo’ed, but administering the indicator solution is a process of some delicacy. I didn’t imagine you could handle it without explicit instructions.”

“Fine,” Harry said. “Come on.” He led Malfoy down the long, dark hall to the kitchen, where he Lumosed the lights on and pulled out a chair, indicating for Malfoy to sit at the table. “I didn’t know you were making an indicator solution,” he said, watching as Malfoy set the phials on the table. “That’s going to be a big help questioning suspects.”

“Yes, well.” Malfoy sat down gingerly beside him at the table. “I’m not in the habit of broadcasting my intentions. I prefer to be unpredictable.”

All of Malfoy’s over-confident insouciance seemed to have slipped away, replaced with a stiffness that was almost hesitant. Harry guessed the question about his mum had set him on edge; Malfoy didn’t like to talk about it. Feeling a bit bad for having asked about her, Harry said, “It’s still a help, nevertheless.” Harry picked up the phial Malfoy had said was an indicator solution. It was a smoky dark liquid that almost seemed to move of its own, like a rolling mist trapped inside of glass. “You said something about the administration process?”

“Yes. You’ve got to pour the solution into something—not too shallow, so they can submerge their thumb past the first knuckle. Then you’ve got to make them hold it in there for forty-six seconds per stone they weigh. If they take it out and their finger’s changed colour, they’ve taken the counteragent. If it hasn’t, they haven’t.”

“What colour does it change?” Harry asked curiously.

Malfoy blinked. “Really?” he asked. “I’ve gone to the trouble of creating an absolutely brilliant solution to all your problems, and what makes you curious is the colour?”

“Let’s test it.” Harry stood to get a glass for the indicator solution, but once he was at the cabinet, he realized only a very small glass would allow them to submerge their thumbs deeply enough, since the phials were narrow and didn’t hold much liquid. Digging through the cabinet, Harry found a few shot glasses, which he’d forgot he had. He never used them, since no one was ever here to use them with. It was a shame, since he’d had a bottle of good Firewhiskey someone had given him that he’d been meaning to drink for a while. “Hey, do you fancy some Firewhiskey?” Harry heard himself ask. Maybe he’d been thinking about Malfoy’s mum.

“Ah.” Malfoy sounded uncertain, and Harry glanced back at him. “Yes,” Malfoy said quickly. He wet his lips. “Yes, I’ll—I’ll have some. Of that.”

Removing three shot glasses, Harry got the Firewhiskey and poured them each a shot, then took the phial of indicator solution and poured it into the third glass. “Do you want to be the variable or the control?” Harry asked, after he’d had a shot.

“Um.” Malfoy was looking at Harry as though he’d grown a second head. “I’ve already tested it,” he said at last. “It’s perfect.”

“What’s the matter, Malfoy?” Harry asked. “Scared?”

“No.” Scowling, Malfoy drank his shot, and Harry had to turn away from the long pale line of Malfoy’s throat as he knocked it back.

“I’ll be the control,” Harry said, grabbing the Veritaserum and preparing to take the three drops on his tongue. “No questions,” he added, after he’d done it.

“I never promised anything,” Malfoy said, tossing his head. The dim light of the kitchen caught in his
hair as he took the Veritaserum from Harry. “I hope you don’t go into every interrogation blindly hoping you don’t get asked questions when you’re on Veritaserum.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Come off it, Malfoy. You wouldn’t question me while I was on Veritaserum.”

“How do you know?” Malfoy said, his voice lofty.

“Because it’d be immoral.”

His cheeks going pink, Malfoy tilted his head back to let out the drops on his tongue.

Looking away, Harry picked up the phial with the milky grey substance. “Besides,” Harry went on, “this isn’t an interrogation. I’m literally handing you the counteragent to Veritaserum, so you don’t have to tell the truth if you don’t want.” Harry handed Malfoy the phial. “What kind of Auror does that make me?”

“I think you’re probably a damn good one,” Malfoy said, then immediately flushed red. “Give me that,” he said, taking a quick sip of the Wood-Eye Lye. “You weren’t meant to ask me any questions before I had the counteragent,” he added, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

Harry smiled, thinking he’d never seen Malfoy look so uncivilized.

Malfoy’s eyes went large, and Harry looked around to see what had made him look so surprised. There wasn’t anything there, though, and Harry guessed the Wood-Eye Lye must have a bad aftertaste. “Why did you start growing a beard?” Malfoy said suddenly.

Harry felt himself smile again. “I said no questions.”

This time, Harry knew why Malfoy looked so surprised. “You can resist Veritaserum.” Then he rolled his eyes. “Obviously. I should have known.”

“It comes in handy,” Harry said, even though his ability to resist Veritaserum wasn’t necessary in answering questions about his beard. Working most days, he didn’t really see the point in shaving. He hadn’t been on a date in over a year. Having a beard was just easier; the most he had to do was keep it trimmed and shave around the edges to keep the short-boxed shape. He hadn’t had a haircut in a while either, but Malfoy didn’t need to know Harry was just lazy. Let him wonder.

“So much for being the control,” Malfoy said witheringly.

“I’m still the control,” Harry said, still amused. “The test is for whether you’ve had the Wood-Eye Lye, not whether the Veritaserum is working. Besides, I have to actively fight Veritaserum for it not to work. You go first,” Harry said, nudging the shot glass with the indicator solution in it toward Malfoy. “I want to see what colour your thumb changes.”

Malfoy seemed annoyed, but he took out his pocket watch and put his thumb in the solution. “Why do you care so much what colour it is?”

“Because it’s magic.” Harry shrugged. “It’s cool.”

“Cool? Potter, are you six?”

“No,” Harry said, because of the Veritaserum. “So, how long do we have to wait?”

“About nine minutes,” Malfoy said. “Is this something you’ll be able to administer at work?”
Sighing, Harry got up to get more Firewhiskey, then poured them each another shot. “Probably,” he said, putting the cap on the bottle, “if Robards doesn’t get in my way.”

“Why would he get in your way?”

“He always gets in my way,” Harry said, then explained a bit about how Robards seemed more impressed with sucking up to higher-ups in the Ministry than actually solving cases, and how Robards didn’t want Harry to be too good at his job, because it made him look bad.

“I expect there are other Aurors who feel the same as you do.”

“Yeah,” Harry said. “But Ron just started at the Department.”

“I read that in the Prophet,” Malfoy murmured. “I would have thought that was a good thing.”

“No,” Harry said, forgetting the Veritaserum. “I mean, yes.” He scrubbed his face. If Veritaserum had made him say no, then there was something wrong with Ron working there, even if he hadn’t realized it. Fuck. Harry couldn’t talk to Hermione about it. He couldn’t talk to anyone. “He’s just—he doesn’t know anything. About how that place works,” Harry said, and then he found himself talking, about how the Auror Department worked.

He hadn’t been able to talk about any of it for so long. For the last year Ron had been going to Auror Academy, and Harry hadn’t wanted to disillusion him. And yet, watching Ron learn the ins and outs of the department was in some ways so wretched, like going through it himself all over again—learning Robards wasn’t going to back him up. Understanding how much red tape he had to wade through to get a warrant for someone he knew was guilty. Finding out he didn’t have the equipment he needed to properly test evidence required to make an arrest. But having to listen to Ron get angry about it was frustrating as well, when Harry had already moved long past ire into acceptance.

“I can see how that would be very frustrating.” That low resonance in Malfoy’s voice made it surprisingly soothing, when he was not being snide.

“Right,” Harry said. Then there was Savage, who was teaching Ron all the short-cuts, how to break all the rules—just like she’d taught Harry. Over the years, however, Harry had become less and less sure of Savage’s methods. She got things done, but sometimes Harry wondered at what cost. And yet, when he tried to look into her sources, he felt bad for questioning her—when she’d been in the department for so long and done so much good. Checking up on her seemed such a waste of time, when far more important cases were piling up, and when Savage for the most part was taking dangerous criminals off the streets.

“And it seems like it would be difficult,” Malfoy said quietly, “looking into it when no one else seems to care as much as you do.”

“Right,” Harry said again. And then there was the salary, which was terrible. So what if Savage cut corners, when she didn’t get paid half enough for the work she did? And then there was Ron, with two kids now. Ron had known the pay of course, but he hadn’t expected to be working all these hours, even though Harry had tried to tell him. I thought that was just because you’re—you know—you, Ron had said.

Malfoy hummed in understanding.

“And then there’s Vance,” Harry said.

“I’ve heard of him,” Malfoy said. “His mother died in the war.”
“Yeah,” Harry said, “and he thinks it means he can get away with doing nothing. But he and Robards are best mates, for some reason, and Vance ticks Ron right off. And I’ve tried to tell Ron he can’t do anything against Vance, because Robards will take it out on him, but he thinks I mean physically take it out, when that’s not how Robards works. He’ll just—he’ll undermine you. For years. Over and over, until you feel so worthless, even when you’re doing the best job you can.”

“And you don’t want that to happen to Weasley.”

The word “Weasley” drew Harry up short, and he finally realized what he was doing.

Fuck.

And Malfoy was just sitting there, his big eyes so clear, his mouth gone soft with understanding.

Fuck.

Standing up, Harry picked up his shot of Firewhiskey and poured it down the sink. Coming back to the table, he picked up the phial of the Wood-Eye Lye and drank the rest of it.

Malfoy looked a little panicked.

“You said you wouldn’t ask questions,” Harry said.

“I—” Malfoy stopped himself and swallowed, immediately looking guilty. “It wasn’t meant to be a question,” he said weakly.

Harry frowned.

“I think,” Malfoy said, his voice rushed. “I think my thumb might be done.” Pulling his thumb out of the indicator solution, Malfoy stood abruptly, stumbling back and pushing in his chair. Malfoy held up his dripping thumb. “It’s cerulean!”

“Christ.” Harry rubbed his scar. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d talked so much to anyone. Goddamn Veritaserum.

Goddamn Malfoy.

“I’ll—I better go,” came Malfoy’s hesitant voice.

Christ. It wasn’t even Malfoy’s fault. Harry had drunk the Veritaserum and the Firewhiskey. Malfoy hadn’t planned it at all. He’d done nothing wrong; Harry had just—babbled like a fool, and he wasn’t even sure why he’d done it. Malfoy had just . . . been there. And he’d asked—sort of. Not really. Christ.

“I’ll—I’ll see myself out, shall I?” Malfoy stumbled over his words. “I know the way. I hope that—that indicator solution works out.”

“Malfoy,” Harry said, and Malfoy froze.

“I won’t tell anyone,” Malfoy blurted.

Harry frowned again. “Of course, you wouldn’t.”

Malfoy swallowed.

“Who would you tell?”
Malfy’s face fell a bit, but then his mouth settled into a line. “Right.” He began walking down the long dark hall.

“Malfoy,” Harry said again, following him.

Malfoy stopped in the dark foyer, his shoulders stiff.

“I’m sorry I went on like that,” Harry said. “I shouldn’t have.”

“It’s inconsequential to me.” Malfoy hitched a shoulder. “It’s not as though I care.”

“And thank you,” Harry went on. “For the indicator solution.”

“Yes, well—”

“And for listening.”

Malfoy shut his mouth.

“How do I get more?” Harry asked. “Of the indicator solution?”

“I have a whole cauldron of it,” Malfoy said. “Heloise can bring you whatever you need.”

“Thanks.”

“Potter.” Malfoy swallowed. When he spoke, his voice was lower and more hesitant than ever. “I can—I can be good. At listening.”

“You had better go,” Harry said, opening the door.

Malfoy went, and Harry closed the door. Jesus. He was going to have such a fucking headache over this.

*

April 2009

Harry Potter: 28 years

Draco Malfoy: 28 years

Malfoy’s indicator solution for Wood-Eye Lye worked beautifully. Harry’s problems with the Auror Department, however, persisted. Harry didn’t want to complain to anyone, so he didn’t—except for Malfoy, just every once in a while. Most people didn’t understand the intricacies of his cases anyway, and those who did—such as Savage and Ron—were also part of the problem. And then there was Auror Vance.

Auror Vance had always been a thorn in Harry’s side, but mainly because he was incompetent and lazy. Over the last year, however, he’d become irrationally obsessed with due diligence and proper protocol—especially when it came to Harry’s cases.

“Vance shouldn’t even be looking at your cases,” Ron groused.

“Robards is having him process the paperwork for the whole department,” Harry had explained, trying to be patient.

“But why?” Ron had said. “He’s a field Auror! Shouldn’t he be in the field?”
Harry didn’t bother explaining again that Robards liked things the way he liked them, and they were stuck with Vance for the foreseeable future, no matter how obstructive he was. When Vance began sticking his nose in it with Malfoy’s potions consulting, however, Harry threatened—for the first time in his Auror career—to take it up the ladder.

Harry never liked to use the fact that he was personal friends with Minister Shacklebolt as leverage, but Vance had threatened Malfoy. Harry’s only recourse was to threaten Vance in return, so he had done, but Vance of course had not been pleased. He’d go straight to Robards, and this had the potential to get ugly—particularly since Robards had never been pleased about Malfoy’s consulting, right from the beginning.

This had the potential to get very ugly indeed.

After arguing with Vance, Harry Apparated straight from the Auror Office into Malfoy’s sitting room.

Malfoy wasn’t there.

“Fuck,” Harry muttered.

“You rang?” came a sultry voice—only it wasn’t sultry. It was Malfoy, and he was likely annoyed, because he always was when Harry visited.

It wasn’t a visit anyway. Harry had important things to discuss.

“To what do I owe this pleasure?” Malfoy was leaning in the doorway, which seemed to be one of his favourite past-times. He was standing by the door to the downstairs, which led to Potage’s Cauldron Shop, and he looked good. Each time, Malfoy’s clothes were still a little nicer than they used to be, his hair a little shinier, his face a little fuller. Fuck. He looked too good.

“I know I’m pleasant to look at,” came Malfoy’s laconic voice, “but did you have a potion you needed ID’ed, or not?”

“No,” Harry said.

Malfoy’s lazy brows went up.

“You ID’ed a potion for Cecil Vance,” Harry said.

“Oh, my dear Potter.” Malfoy feigned disquiet. “I had no idea we were meant to be exclusive.”

“Quit it,” Harry snapped, because Malfoy kept doing this. He kept doing it, the lazy teasing, that low voice, the smirking and the knowing glances. He did it more and more, every time, and Harry couldn’t stand it. He couldn’t stand it.

“Quit what?” Malfoy swaggered toward him. He fucking swaggered. “Quit ID’ing potions for other blokes?”

“Malfoy,” Harry said, “Vance thinks you might have broken the magical restriction.”

The provocation went out of Malfoy’s body like a candle suddenly snuffing out. Malfoy’s face fell, and something in Harry’s chest twisted. “I haven’t.” For once Malfoy sounded so unguarded.

“I know,” Harry said, taking a step toward him.

“But I,” Malfoy began. “I couldn’t. The Ministry has tracking charms on me.”
“I’m sorry,” Harry said. “I . . . might have led him to believe you could get around them.”

“But—why?”

Harry moved closer. Malfoy just looked so bewildered, and Harry didn’t know what to do. If Malfoy had been Hermione, Harry would have hugged him. But Malfoy wasn’t Hermione, and Harry didn’t hug other people unless they were Molly Weasley—he certainly didn’t hug Draco Malfoy. That would be just ridiculous. Harry said at last, voice cracking, “I was trying to say you could get around the tracking charms, but you never would, and that that proved you could be trusted.”

“I don’t understand.” Malfoy frowned, his brow furrowed in such a poignant way. “How could I get around them?”

“Malfoy.” Harry took another step. He was standing very close to Malfoy, now. “I think you could do anything you wanted, if you put your mind to it.”

Malfoy looked up at him. His face was so clear, his eyes luminous. Harry licked his lips. “I came to warn you. Vance has it in for you.”

“In for me?” Malfoy bit his lip. “He doesn’t even know me.”

Harry hesitated, then tried to speak as gently as possible. “Because you were a Death Eater.”

“Ah.” Malfoy’s face began to cloud over.

“Malfoy.” Harry reached out, but Malfoy moved away.

“Forgive me,” he said, sounding blank. “I was functioning under the assumption that I was a normal person. How silly of me.”

“You are a normal person,” Harry said, his aggravation so reflexive that he didn’t even notice he was calling Malfoy normal. “Vance is just a ponce.”

“Oh, but he’s correct,” Malfoy said, moving farther away. “You remembered the important things. I am a Death Eater, aren’t I; I’m glad you’ve kept it in mind.”

“I haven’t,” Harry said. “We’re talking about Vance.”

“Are we?” Malfoy whirled on him. “You told Vance I could slither my way out of my punishment, that I could be doing all sorts of base, despicable things—why, because I’m cunning aren’t I? I’m insidious; I’m sly.”

“You know that wasn’t what I said. I was trying to defend you.” Harry was beginning to get annoyed.

“Yes,” Malfoy said. “Good on you. You’ve defended your Death Eater scum, and now that you’ve warned me off; you’re free to—”

“Malfoy,” Harry said, incredulous. “How could you possibly think I think of you as scum?”

Malfoy suddenly looked so naked, his eyes large and his brows up like the wind had been knocked from him. “Don’t you?” he asked, his voice cracking.

“Of course not,” Harry said.
“Then what am I?” Malfoy asked.

Harry lips felt dry. His whole mouth suddenly felt dry, and he pulled his lower lip between his teeth to wet it. “Uh,” he finally said, intelligently. “Tops at potions?”

“I meant—besides that.”

Malfoy’s bright eyes held Harry down, and Harry couldn’t think of what to say. The people in his life and what they had been to him seemed to all flash by in a blur, and in the end the only ones who were left were always Ron and Hermione, because they’d been there through everything, and they were left in the end. Everyone else felt like they were just passing through—except for Malfoy, who had been there as well.

For the first time in a long time, Harry thought about Dudley. Harry had heard Dudley had got married. Good on him. Harry should have sent a card.

After a long pause, Malfoy’s voice was quick, the words rather sharp. “Never mind. I—forget I asked.”

“Malfoy,” Harry said, trying to think of something to say. “You’re an excellent potions consultant.”

“Right.” Malfoy drew himself up, tossing his head a bit. “I’ll bet Vance is just jealous. Admittedly, he has a lot to be jealous of.” Then he added, in his most priggish voice, “Thank you for the warning, Auror Potter.”

“Don’t be like that,” Harry said.

Malfoy tilted his head, every bone in his body completely disingenuous. “Like what?”

“I was just trying to warn you.”

“And I thanked you for it—what’s the matter with that?”

“Fine,” Harry said, taking out his wand to Apparate away.

“Potter,” Malfoy said, stopping him

Harry sighed. “Yes, your highness?” he said, because he was too tired to deal with Malfoy acting like a twat.

Malfoy’s eyes flashed at the dig, but he didn’t say anything else bratty. Instead he said, “Do you remember that time you asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up?”

“Yes,” Harry said warily, not sure where this was going.

“A Fiendfyre fighter.”

Harry stared at him, unable to process this answer. Most normal fires could be put out with Aguamenti or other water spells. Most magical fires had counter spells or charms, so the Fiendfyre Force at the Ministry was only four people. They flew out for the most terrible fires all over the country, sometimes invisibly helping with the Muggle ones too, just because they did what they could to help. Harry heard there had been Fiendfyre fighters at the battle of Hogwarts who’d put out the fire that had burned down the Room of Requirement.

“Do you want to know why I wanted to be a Fiendfyre fighter?” Malfoy asked.
Harry still remembered flying away from there, Malfoy clinging to him, shaking in terror.

“I wanted to be a hero.”

“Malfoy,” Harry said, realizing that he shouldn’t have told Malfoy he was an excellent potions consultant. He should have told him he’d forgiven him—for everything, for the past. He should have told Malfoy he was a decent person.

Malfoy turned away. “Don’t bother me anymore. I was remodelling.”

“You help people,” Harry said. “What you do, helping me with potions—it helps people.”

Malfoy paused, his back still to Harry, his shoulders a strong, proud line. “Good night, Potter,” he said, then went down the stairs.

*

March 2010

Harry Potter: 29 years
Draco Malfoy: 29 years

Malfoy got his magic back on the same day his mum died.

As soon as Harry heard, he put the potion from his latest case in his pocket and Apparated to Malfoy’s flat.

The flat was a disaster, the wall between the sitting room and Malfoy’s bedroom pulled down, lying in rubble on the floor. Malfoy was nowhere in sight, and Harry checked downstairs, just to be sure. Several times over the past year, it had looked like Malfoy had come up from there—but he wasn’t there either. Potage’s Cauldron Shop was gone, however, hollowed out as though it had never been there. Empty walls surrounded three empty hearths, the shop window still fitted with diamond-shaped panes that faced the street. Harry wondered how long the shop had been closed down.

Apparating to Mr. Mulpepper’s Apothecary, Harry didn’t find Malfoy there, either. When he asked Mrs. Mulpepper, she looked at him strangely. “Draco hasn’t worked here in two years,” she said, but Malfoy had never told Harry that. Malfoy had never told him anything. Are you saving for a potions apocalypse? Harry had asked once, but Malfoy had just said he was practicing. It had taken him almost four years to answer a stupid question about what he wanted to be when he grew up, and nearly a year later, Harry still remembered the answer.

I wanted to be a hero.

Christ. His mum. Malfoy’s mum.

Desperate, Harry went to the post office, scribbled Malfoy’s name on a parchment, then rolled it up, cast the tracking spell, and gave the scroll to an owl. Too impatient to wait for the owl to return, Harry popped home for a broom, then activated the tracking spell, Apparating to follow the owl. After ten minutes of flying, Harry knew where they were going. Sending the owl back, Harry Apparated the rest of the way.

During the trials, magical investigators had found that evil magic still lingered around Malfoy Manor, and the manor had been destroyed as a result. Narcissa had been released five years ago—almost a year before the first time Harry had seen Malfoy at Slug and Jiggers. As far as Harry knew, she’d been in the Janus Thickey Ward ever since.
He’d never quite been sure whether to believe that there was evil magic surrounding the manor, but as he arrived there, he could see that it was true. Everything for miles surrounding the manor was dead, except for sad, straggly patches of grass that looked as though they were struggling to grow. Harry had to walk almost the entire perimeter of the ruins before he found Malfoy, sitting between remnants of stone walls, his head in his hands.

“Malfoy.” Harry didn’t know why he was so relieved, as though something frantic had be pushing him this whole time, and only now did he feel like he could breathe. Sinking down to the ground, Harry sat next to him, broom cast to the side.

“Go away,” Malfoy said, his voice stuffy and garbled.

“Malfoy,” Harry said again, touching Malfoy’s arm.

“I said go away!” Malfoy flung his arm out, but he had to bring his face up to do it, and Harry saw it—Malfoy’s red eyes, his red face, every part of him puffy from crying.

“Oh,” Harry said, and the energy that had been driving him before made itself known by its sudden and complete absence. Harry felt like everything stopped, just stopped, his heart momentarily seizing in his chest. “Malfoy,” Harry breathed.

Malfoy sobbed, and Harry didn’t know what to do.

Harry had no idea what to do. He’d never been any good around people who were sad.

Now that Harry thought about it, he had no idea why he’d come. He knew nothing about mums dying, after all. He knew nothing about mums. He knew nothing about Malfoy, apparently, and that stung somehow, a weird sort of hurt in the leaden fog that had entered Harry’s chest.

So, Harry sat there as Malfoy cried, wishing he could remember what Ron did when Hermione cried. He couldn’t remember. When Hugo cried, Hermione hugged him, but that wasn’t the same.

Eventually, Malfoy stopped crying. They sat there for an hour.

Then they sat there for two.

Clouds moved in the sky, patient and white, as though nothing was going on beneath them. The absence of life was strange after a while, without the sound of birds, without even insects to crawl among the stones. Harry thought about doing a spell to make the grass grow. He couldn’t decide if it would make Malfoy feel any better.

At last Malfoy stood. “Thank you,” he said, as though Harry had rendered a service, instead of sitting there stupidly, feeling useless.

“You broke the wall.” Harry stood, still stupid and useless. “In your flat.”

“I told you.” Harry was afraid Malfoy would sound heartbroken, but instead, he sounded petulant. “I’m remodelling.”

Harry scanned back in his memory. “That was almost a year ago.”

“Remodelling takes a long time,” Malfoy said irritably.

Reaching into his pocket, Harry pulled out a bottle. “I brought a potion,” he said, holding it out.
“I’m not taking happy pills, Potter.”

“No, I meant . . .” Harry hesitated. “For you to ID.”

Malfoy’s head snapped up. “What.”

“You don’t have to,” Harry said. “But I thought . . . if you wanted to get back to normal, you could.”

“Fucking what?”

Harry knew he’d done the wrong thing. It seemed insensitive, now that he thought about it; it was just what Harry would have wanted—something to occupy him, keep him busy. He'd gone so crazy after Sirius’s death partly because there had been nothing to do. At least after Dumbledore had died, Harry had known exactly what to do. Then with Remus and Tonks and Fred and everybody, the only thing to do had been to go on.

“Do you even think of me as a real person?” Malfoy demanded. “A real human being, with real feelings?”

Harry looked at the bottle, trying to think about real feelings. It had hurt Malfoy, bringing him this; Harry could tell that much. It was obvious why. Malfoy thought Harry thought of him as a machine who was only good for potions consulting, for getting work done. Harry should feel guilty about that. He should regret it, and yet the only thing he could think was that he was the machine. He was the one without real feelings, because he couldn’t feel anything just now at all.

“Fuck you,” Malfoy said. Grabbing the bottle out of Harry’s hand, Malfoy threw it at the rubble of his former home, where it smashed into dozens of pieces and splattered green potion everywhere. “Fuck you, Potter. Fuck your potions, fuck your fucking Auror uniform, fuck your stupid scar, your clueless—” Malfoy gulped for air. “Clueless—” he tried to say, but he didn’t finish, choking on another sob.

Malfoy was crying again, but then he was coming closer, and Harry was sure Malfoy wanted to hit him. He even thought Malfoy might have done it, because Malfoy’s hand sort of made a fist and then sort of—brushed against Harry’s chest, but the blow was so weak and pathetic Harry didn’t know what it was. Then Malfoy just stood there, inches from him, crying, and Harry still didn’t know what to do.

“You can hit me,” Harry said finally, because it was something he understood, even though it didn’t seem like Malfoy really wanted to.


“Okay,” Harry said.

“Fuck.” Malfoy made that awful choking noise again. “Can’t you just . . . ?”

But Harry wasn’t a real person with real human feelings; he didn’t trust himself to know what Malfoy wanted, to be whatever Malfoy needed, not when he’d already fucked it up so badly. Fairly certain at this point that anything thing he did would be hurting Malfoy, Harry tried not to move.

Malfoy was standing so close, and tears were running down his face, arms wrapped tight about himself. Harry tried not to even breathe, lest his breath get on Malfoy, and then Malfoy would remember that Harry’s way of saying ‘sorry your mum died’ had been to bring him a job to do.

Eventually, though, Harry was going to have to Reparo that bottle and get the potion back out of the
ground and into the glass. It was evidence.

After another few minutes Malfoy’s breath began to even out again, and Harry relaxed a fraction. “Fuck,” Malfoy said, humid breath puffing into Harry’s face. “You can’t, can you.”

“I’ll do anything you want you want me to,” Harry croaked.

“Fuck,” Malfoy said again. His voice was soft. “I’ll bet you would. Harry Potter, saviour of the fucking world.”

“Malfoy,” Harry said, reaching out.

“Don’t.” Malfoy pulled away, his steps puffing up dust. Drawing his hawthorn wand from his sleeve, he pointed at the broken bottle on the ground. “Reparo.”

The glass bottle snapped back into shape.

“Potius extractus,” Malfoy went on, and the green liquid floated up from the rubble, coalescing into a wobbling mass. “Decantum,” Malfoy said, and the mass went into the bottle. “Accio cork.”

Harry watched, strangely compelled. He’d seen Malfoy do magic before. He’d seen plenty of people do magic before, but Harry hadn’t seen Malfoy do it since school. Malfoy hadn’t done magic since school, and Harry felt as though he couldn’t look away. Malfoy remembered everything, his wand-work elegant and fluid, his incantations spoken almost in a rhythm. He looked as though he’d never stopped casting, and something in Harry ached. His heart felt like it was twisting, and he didn’t even know why—because Malfoy looked beautiful like that, under the blue sky, casting magic among the bones of his former self.

Then Malfoy put the cork in the bottle and slipped the bottle into his pocket. “I’ll get you the ID by tomorrow.”

“You don’t have to,” Harry said quickly.

“No, you were right.” Malfoy turned away. “It will be a fine distraction.”

“Malfoy,” Harry said, but didn’t know what else to say.

“I’d like to be alone now,” Malfoy said, moving farther away. “If you don’t mind.”

Harry said okay.

*

The next day Harry got a package from Malfoy—the green potion, together with a note:

This potion causes extreme terror. The signature ingredient is jaguarundi saliva, which is rare enough that it should easily lead you to your brewer.

Please conduct further business with me through owl or by appointment. I expect to be extremely busy in the coming months.

Malfoy

*

May 2011
**Harry Potter:** 30 years  
**Draco Malfoy:** 30 years

After Narcissa’s death, Malfoy was no less helpful with potions ID, but they conducted almost all business by owl. Harry understood why Malfoy had sent that note. Harry might not be a real person with real human feelings, but he knew what it was like to lose someone. Your whole world rearranged itself, taking on entirely new priorities. Apparently, Malfoy’s priority was to open a shop.

On one of the few appointments Harry made, Malfoy had told Harry this, explaining that he was very busy seeing clients and brewing potions for them. He’d been working on commissions on the side ever since Mr. Mulpepper’s and finally had the inventory to open his own storefront, which should increase his clientele. He said this seriously, instead of in that flaunting, carefree way Malfoy used to laugh at him, and Harry didn’t know how to tell him that he missed it. Malfoy’s entire tone was business-like, so Harry tried to be professional in return. In darker moments Harry reminded himself that Malfoy was a former Death Eater who had let more Death Eaters into Hogwarts, which should have made Harry care much less what Malfoy thought. It didn’t.

Tailored Tinctures opened on the ground level, where Potage’s Cauldron Shop used to be. Malfoy put his bedroom down there too, which made the sitting room upstairs twice as big, though Malfoy only seemed to fill it with more books. Having the bedroom downstairs made sense, Harry supposed, as Malfoy practically lived in the lab that took up the main floor of the shop, but Harry found it inconvenient that the loo was upstairs.

About a year after Narcissa’s death, Harry was fiddling with a potion bottle in the Auror Office, trying to get the tiny stopper out. Having taken the bottle from the potions dealer he had just arrested, Harry was fairly certain the powder was illegal, but he hadn’t yet figured out whether the brew was one the department was already tracking or whether it was completely new. Mainly he was avoiding taking the powder to Malfoy, as the cool way Malfoy treated him annoyed Harry without Harry being able to explain why. It’d been a year since Malfoy’s mum, and yet it felt somehow like Malfoy was still angry with him.

When Harry finally got the bottle open, however, the pink powder inside immediately whooshed up into his face. Funny. The powder hadn’t looked very mobile. Swallowing a sigh and hoping the powder wasn’t going to make his skin fall off or his nose turn inside-out, Harry spelled the powder off his face and back into the bottle. At least the powder hadn’t made him blind or stop breathing— yet. As usual, the Auror Office was empty this time of night, so no one else had been exposed to the powder, and Harry figured it best to go to Malfoy and find out whether Harry was going to grow lizard skin.

Malfoy was working in his lab when Harry Apparated in. Harry had been hesitant to express how much he liked the way the place looked because he was pretty sure the reasons he liked it were not normal. It had to do with the Great Hall at Hogwarts and Molly Weasley’s kitchen—the way everything in them was magic and always reminding you they were magic, the way everything was always moving and floating and doing things on their own, a thousand things happening and yet most of them so mundane. It was so different to a cupboard full of spiders, and different again to the Auror Office, where things were always moving but sometimes wanted to kill you or get powder in your face, or if they didn’t were adding to piles of paperwork whose growth was stressful in their own way.

Cauldrons were always on the hearths in Malfoy’s lab, knives always chopping, spoons always stirring. The best part was always Malfoy, at times a point of stillness in the madness and at other times a little bit mad himself, rushing between the cauldrons, knives, and spoons. In the heat of the hearths his face was often flushed, his eyes bright; using the knives and spoons, his fingers were long.
and lean and capable. He looked a proper weight, finally, just heavy enough for the weight to stick to his bones but not enough to take away from the slender whipcord shape of his body, tall and tough and nearly perfect in every way.

Sometimes Harry had to take a breath, just looking at him. Harry still thought it unfair that Malfoy had been fit in school and that he’d somehow managed to become so again. There should be more wrong with him. He’d served the Dark Lord, after all.

Malfoy finally straightened from the scattered notes he’d been scribbling when Harry had cracked in. “Hullo—” Malfoy paused, as if startled to see him. “Potter.”

“I know I don’t have an appointment,” Harry said, before Malfoy could snap at him. “I’ve got a bit of an emergency.”

Something worked in Malfoy’s face. He stood up, coming closer. “Are you all right?”

“I don’t know,” Harry said. “It’s this powder. Don’t open it,” he added, as he handed the bottle over. “It exploded on me when I tried.”

“Maybe you should have been more careful.” The comment sounded like Malfoy should be annoyed, but his voice was concerned. Taking the powder, he asked, “What does it do?”

“I don’t know.”

“Now I know you really should have been careful,” Malfoy said, but he smiled, almost warmly.

“I will next time.”

Malfoy’s eyes went softer, and Harry’s heart skipped a beat.

He didn’t know what was happening. “Er,” Harry said, coughing a bit. “So—how will you ID it? If you can’t open the bottle?”

“Oh,” Malfoy said, glancing down at the bottle as if he’d forgot it was in his hand. He set it down on the lab bench. “I’ll probably cast a containment field and look at it in a bubble.”

“Right.”

“Where did it land on you?”

“What?” Startled, Harry turned from the bottle back to Malfoy, who was closer than Harry had expected.

“Did it touch you?”

Malfoy’s voice was low and silky, and the way he said touch you made heat zing up Harry’s spine. These days Malfoy practically ignored Harry once Harry handed the potion over, except here Malfoy was standing too close and saying touch you just like a prayer.

Fuck. Harry had to be crazy. Malfoy was just trying to figure how the potion might affect Harry.

Apparently, this was how.

“I’m . . .” Harry wet his lips. “Yeah, it—it got on my face. I think—I think it’s doing something to me.”
“Where on your face?” Malfoy said.


Malfoy’s lips parted. “Show me.”

“Here.” Harry pointed to his cheek. “And here.” He pointed to his jaw.

“Here,” Malfoy breathed, his finger on Harry’s lips. His eyes had gone so dark. “What’s it doing to you?”

“Malfoy.” Harry’s voice was just a little panicked, and then Malfoy moved closer, and closer.

Malfoy took his finger away. He was breathing Harry’s air; Harry could feel the humid puff of Malfoy’s breath. He could taste it.

“It’s making me,” Harry said breathlessly. “It’s making me—”

Malfoy took advantage of his open mouth, brushing Harry’s lips with his.

Harry heard himself make a high, tight sound.

“Potter,” Malfoy said. “Fuck, Potter.” And then Malfoy’s lips were softly pulling on Harry’s lower lip, drawing it into Malfoy’s mouth—hot and wet and soft and oh.

Oh. Oh. Malfoy was kissing him. Malfoy was kissing him.

Harry opened his mouth.

Releasing Harry’s lip, Malfoy’s mouth closed over his, lips moving over Harry’s in such a slow, hot gentle way that Harry shuddered. Oh God. He hadn’t done this in so long. No one had kissed him in so long. He’d been too busy; he’d been too focused. He’d been disinterested, because there was no one he’d wanted to kiss—but he’d been wrong. He’d been wrong, because there was Malfoy, the lazy wet thorough exploration of Malfoy’s mouth on his.

Glasses, Harry was thinking. He should take off his glasses, so he could kiss Malfoy deeper, so he could get so close to Malfoy that there was no separation between them.

Malfoy didn’t seem to care. One of his hands slid up along Harry’s jaw, his temple, until Malfoy’s thumb was brushing Harry’s scar. The other snaked inside of Harry’s robe, finding Harry’s waist, pulling him closer, pulling him up against Draco’s lean hard body. Harry went; he’d go anywhere. He’d do anything Malfoy wanted.

Jesus, Malfoy.

Malfoy.

Something about this was terribly wrong, because Malfoy was a Death Eater. Malfoy was a Death Eater, and that fact hadn’t even occurred to Harry when they’d started kissing, but it should have. It should have—even though it might not have stopped Harry from kissing him. Malfoy’s tongue swept Harry’s lower lip, a teasing touch, and Harry knew it wouldn’t have. It definitely wouldn’t have. Malfoy being a Death Eater wouldn’t have stopped Harry at all.

But now Harry was considering it, and Malfoy didn’t like him. Malfoy didn’t like him; he’d been terse with Harry every time Harry had tried to talk to him, ever since his mum died. Malfoy didn’t like him, and Malfoy’s tongue was slipping in gently against Harry’s, a hot gentle tease that was so
soft and spare that Harry heard himself make another needy, wanting sound.

Disappointment curled through Harry, a sadness that settled behind his eyes and pricked at them. He pulled away. “Something is in the powder.”

Malfoy’s eyes were still closed, his lips still wet. “What?” he said, opening his eyes as if with effort. They looked dazed with lust.

“The powder.” Harry really should have extracted himself from Malfoy’s arms, which were still around him, but he couldn’t find the wherewithal to do it. It must have been the powder. “It’s an aphrodisiac. A love potion. Something like that.”

“Do you mean . . .” Malfoy licked his lips, cherry red from kissing. “You don’t want . . .?”

“Malfoy.”

Malfoy’s eyes lowered to Harry’s own lips. “You look as though you want it.” Malfoy pressed subtly closer, hips lining up with Harry’s. He whispered, “You feel as though you want it.”

Harry did want it. He felt like he was gagging for it. It was the powder.

“Harry,” Malfoy breathed. He kissed Harry again.

Harry hadn’t really noticed before that they still always called each other by surnames, but he certainly noticed now. He had to find a way to snap Malfoy out of it; Harry was already losing himself in this kiss—the coaxing, soft, gentle way that Malfoy’s lips explored Harry’s own, as though savouring every single touch, every single taste. Malfoy kissed as though Harry’s mouth were something hot and precious to be persuaded and adored.

Ripping himself away from that heady warmth, Harry panted. “You’re a Death Eater.”

“What?” Malfoy’s voice cracked, but the words seemed to have broken through the haze.

“You’ve always hated me,” Harry reminded him. “You wanted to turn me over to Voldemort.”

“But.” Malfoy’s gaze dropped to Harry’s lips, his expression troubled. “Now I want.”

Harry picked up the bottle off the lab bench and put it into Malfoy’s hand. “The powder,” Harry said. “It’s making you want that. If you fix it, it will go away.”

Malfoy looked at the powder as though he had never seen it before. “Are you sure?”

“I’m positive,” Harry said. “Malfoy. You need to fix it.”

“Right.” Finally, Malfoy looked away, a slight frown between his brows. “I’ll . . .” As though at a loss, Malfoy turned back to Harry, reaching for him again.

Harry took a step away. “You can do it, Malfoy,” he said. “You always can. You’re so good at this.”

Malfoy licked his lips again.

“You said you were going to cast a containment field,” Harry said, encouraging.

“Right,” Malfoy said again. “Right.” Dazedly turning away, Malfoy moved to the other side of the room. Taking out his wand, he cast a bubble of Protegos around the bottle on the bench.
“What can I do?” Harry asked.

“Don’t . . .” Malfoy shuddered, then took several shallow breaths, not looking at him. “Don’t say those things. With your voice. Those things you—don’t do words.”

“Should I leave?”

“Stay,” Malfoy said. “I need you.”

“But—”

“Harry,” Malfoy said. “Words.”

Harry’s mouth shut with a little click. Malfoy had called him Harry again. His voice had been so gentle, and Harry realized he had liked it. He wanted Malfoy to be like this with him—to be tender, to call him Harry. It was the powder.

Harry watched as Malfoy cast spells on his hands to protect them, then thrust them through the magic shield charms to open the bottle. The pink powder poofed everywhere, just as it had done to Harry, but afterwards it settled down into the invisible curve of the shield charm. Malfoy cast a few spells at the pile of pink, then funnelled the powder back into the bottle with his wand. Dispelling the shields with another wave of his wand, Malfoy took the bottle and began to run what Harry now recognized as diagnostics.

Fuck. Malfoy had kissed him. Harry knew it had been the powder, but it had felt so real. He could still feel the ghost of Malfoy’s touch, Malfoy’s lips searing Harry’s, Malfoy’s hand tugging at Harry’s waist. Harry had felt himself respond. He’d wanted to respond—and yet, he had been the one who had been able to break through the compulsion of the powder. Who and what Malfoy was had reminded him—because, for a moment, Harry had forgot it. He’d forgot everything, everything between them, except for the taste of Malfoy’s lips against his, the press of Malfoy’s body against his own.

He’d forget it again. Harry knew for a fact that he would, that Malfoy letting Death Eaters into Hogwarts didn’t have anything to do with why he’d stopped Malfoy from going further. He’d forgiven Malfoy for that long ago, and anyway, even if that was who Malfoy once had been, it wasn’t who Malfoy was now. The only reason Harry had stopped Malfoy had been because they were under compulsion of the powder. Harry would never do anything like that when someone wasn’t free to make their own choices. Without the powder, Harry wasn’t even sure what he would choose.

He’d missed Malfoy, Harry realized with a start. He’d missed him since his mum died, when Malfoy had stopped teasing Harry like a pet he sometimes tolerated having around.

“I need your hair,” Malfoy said from across the room, still not looking at him.

After glancing at the powder under his little microscope, Malfoy had begun doing things with potions ingredients, mixing and stirring and mashing things. “How much do you—”

“Words,” Malfoy said, bending over his microscope.

At a bit longer than chin-length, Harry’s hair was only just long enough to pull back. When he did, tying as much as he could back so it wouldn’t sit on his neck and overheat him, the bits in front usually escaped, hanging around his face. He’d been meaning to cut it, as the annoyance of having it in his face outweighed the annoyance of having to get haircuts—and make nice with the haircutting people, who all wanted to hear what it was like to be Harry Potter. Oh well. Pointing his wand at his
head, Harry cut the whole back part off, then tried to take it over to Malfoy.

“Don’t come any closer,” Malfoy snapped. “Put it on the table.”

Harry put it on the table.

“Accio Potter’s hair,” Malfoy said, holding up his hand. The whole mess of hair came flying into Malfoy’s palm. Malfoy’s eyes widened as he looked at it. “Heavens, Potter, why did you—” Malfoy cut himself off, having accidentally looked up.

Malfoy hadn’t looked at him since he’d kissed him. His expression was absolutely crestfallen.

Self-conscious, Harry put his hand to his shorn head. He probably shouldn’t have done it like that. He’d just wanted Malfoy to get what he needed.

Jerking his gaze back to his mixing, Malfoy went on doing whatever it was he did. It seemed a lot more extensive than a usual ID. Harry wanted to ask, but Malfoy had told him to be quiet, and besides—Malfoy was probably brewing some kind of cure for this.

After twenty minutes, Malfoy finally said, “I’ve produced a cream.” Holding it up, he set it on the lab bench beside him. “You’ll need to put it everywhere the powder touched you.”

“What about my—”

“Without talking,” said Malfoy.

Clothes, Harry had been about to say, but instead he closed his mouth and took a step toward the lab bench.

Malfoy closed his eyes, his brow lined with frustration. “Do it over there, Potter.”

Harry paused, about to point out he still had to get the cream, but then he realized Malfoy meant for him to use magic. Malfoy also wanted him to be quiet, so Harry drew his wand and concentrated on the cream. It shot across the room into his hand, and Harry set about applying it to his face. Meanwhile Malfoy took a cauldron off the fire, decanted it into a phial, cast a cooling spell, and drank it down.

After another minute, Malfoy came over to where Harry was applying the cream. He carried the bottle of powder, setting it down on the table next to Harry. “You don’t need to put it on your clothes,” Malfoy said.

Harry had already got it on his face and neck and ears, everywhere he thought the powder had touched his skin. It didn’t seem to be making him feel any different, so he was only just starting to apply it to his tunic. He stopped at Malfoy’s words.

“There’s a spot . . .” Malfoy bit his lip, then touched behind his own ear, indicating a spot on his skin. “Here.”

Harry put some of the cream there.

“Yes,” Malfoy said. “Good. I think that’s all of it.”

Capping the cream, Harry put it on the table beside him.

Malfoy looked away. “The powder’s got siren tongue,” he said. “Sirens don’t live in Europe anymore, so it should be easy to . . .” Trailing off, Malfoy licked his lips again. “It’s got some of the
same ingredients of Amortentia as well, and chili peppers, which as you know are . . .” Malfoy turned to Harry again, as though he was forcing himself to look at him. “You know I didn’t mean—to do what I did.”

“Can I talk now?” Harry said.

“That powder is powerful.” Malfoy looked down at the little bottle of pink. “It’s powerful, and it’s dangerous. In the wrong hands, it could make anyone do anything. It could make them a slave. We were lucky you got most the powder off you; only the molecular residue was affecting me.” He looked up. “I had no control over my actions. You know I wouldn’t have done it otherwise. It meant nothing.”

“I don’t think the cream worked,” Harry blurted, because he still didn’t feel any different.

“Of course, it worked. The powder causes anyone wearing it to become irresistibly attractive to anyone who sees them. I’m not attracted to you at all now, so it’s obviously working.”

“But . . .” Objections were swirling around in Harry’s head, and he was having trouble pinning one down. “You drank something. With my hair in it. Isn’t that why you’re resistant?”

“That was because I’d already been affected,” Malfoy said impatiently. “Once it takes hold of your system, it doesn’t matter if the object of desire washes off the powder; they’ll continue to be an object of desire until the victim is cured. Therefore, if someone sees a person wearing the powder, the cure has to be tailored to the victim, not to the individual wearing the powder, even after the powder itself is neutralized.”

Harry opened his mouth to ask another question, then closed it. *Victim*, Malfoy had said. People who saw someone wearing the powder were the ones affected. The person wearing it wasn’t affected at all.

“If you’re going to ask about the cream,” Malfoy said, “it’s better to neutralize something like that completely rather than risk it getting spread somewhere else. It’s all rather complicated for your tiny brain, Potter. I’ll write up handling instructions for it, so you can take care of this and any other samples you encounter.”

“That wasn’t what I was going to say.”

“Then what?” Malfoy said, still sounding irritated.

Harry had forgiven Malfoy for letting Death Eaters into Hogwarts. He’d forgiven everything, not because Malfoy’s behaviour had been in any way acceptable, but because Malfoy was a different person now. He had grown up; they had both grown up. The past would always be between them, but it didn’t have to rule their lives.

“What is it, Potter?” Malfoy went on. “Having had these Death Eater lips touch your perfect saviour skin, would you like to enact some form of punishment?”

Harry stared at him. “I said that so you’d stop.”

“Do you think I wanted to go on? Believe me, the last thing I’d ever want is to taste your scarred face, your righteous, Gryffindor—”

“Jesus,” Harry said. “Are you twelve?”

Malfoy shut his mouth.
“You don’t have to put Dementors in the sky to write out the fact that you weren’t into it. You can just say you weren’t into it, and that’s fine. Do you think I’d hold a grudge against you?”

Malfy’s lips pressed together, his eyes a little too large in comparison to the vitriol that had been spilling out of his mouth not moments ago.

“It was a kiss, not the end of the world.” Harry knew Malfoy had just been being defensive. He knew it, but goddamn. Dredging up the Gryffindor thing just seemed like so much effort, like maybe Malfoy hadn’t changed so much after, like maybe he still thought of Harry as some sort of enemy, even after everything—though maybe it was the kissing in particular that had set Malfoy off. Now that Harry thought about it, probably Malfoy had a homophobic streak about a mile wide. Malfoy had been raised a pure-blood, so it was understandable, just—Harry had sort of thought Malfoy had got over the way he was raised, his petty prejudices. Hearing Malfoy act this way after everything was—

It was painful, Harry realized. He was feeling pain. It hurt, particularly since he’d just realized how much he himself hadn’t minded kissing Malfoy. He hadn’t minded in the least.

“Your hair,” Malfoy began, then stopped. His tone was completely different to what it had been.

“What?”

“Why did you cut it all off?”

“Malfoy,” Harry said, running his hand over his shorn head. “You said you needed it.”

Malfoy looked heartbroken.

Fuck. Harry didn’t understand what Malfoy’s problem was, and Harry didn’t want to deal with it. He didn’t want to deal with Malfoy’s ridiculous mood swings and his tetchy defensiveness and his horrible sensitivity, because the pain in Harry’s chest still ached and he didn’t like it. He didn’t like dealing with this sort of thing. Swiping the bottle off the table, Harry put it in his pocket. “I have to go take care of this,” he said. “If there’s more of it out there, it will cause problems.”

“Of course,” Malfoy said. Fuck, his voice actually trembled.

Harry rolled his eyes. “Stop fussing, Malfoy. You’re the only one making a big deal out of it. Just pretend it never happened.”

“Yes.” Malfoy squared his shoulders. “Yes.”

“And send along those instructions when you get the chance,” Harry added.

“Yes,” Malfoy said again. He lifted his chin.

Well, he looked better anyway. “Thanks for the help,” Harry said. He Apparated to the Auror Office, where he could bury himself in work and not think of anything to do with Malfoy. Putting it in the past with all the other things he’d decided to forget about and ignore, Harry went to work.

*  

June 2012

Harry Potter: 31 years

Draco Malfoy: 32 years
In May of 2012, Harry arrested a suspect named Lorica Ludville and questioned her under Veritaserum. What she said changed the course of Harry’s life.

Ludville was a pretty brunette with a Lumos-lit smile and bright brown eyes, who babbled that her boyfriend had a desk job but had made a boat-load of cash on the side, investing in potions trade. That was how Harry had found her in possession of the latest new brew on the streets, a thought-hearing pill called Whisper Wisp, but something much bigger was coming, she said. A supplier her boyfriend knew had a line on a new ingredient that would make them filthy rich, she said. She didn’t know who the supplier was, she said, but her boyfriend was Cecil Vance.

Vance was part of an illegal potions ring. According to Ludville, he had been for years. This was absolutely huge.

Enough people knew that Harry wasn’t keen on Vance that Harry knew he needed help taking Ludville’s statement. That way, Harry could be absolutely clear on the fact that the witness hadn’t been tampered with. Ron wasn’t around, and he was Harry’s best friend anyway, so Ron wasn’t exactly the objective observer required for such a situation. Neither was Savage, but she could at least help, so Harry told her what was going on.

Savage went pale. “I shouldn’t be surprised,” she’d said, after a moment. “Should have known all Vance’s sticking-to-protocol bullshit was just to cover something up.”

“Still,” said Harry. “I never would have thought it.”

“Hmph,” Savage grunted, turning thoughtful. “Did you use the indicator solution? You know Wood-Eye Lye is making the rounds again.”

“Again?” Harry asked, startled. “I thought we’d eradicated it.”

Savage shook her head. “Just keeps popping up. Like a weed.”

“Why would Ludville lie about Vance, though?”

“Could hold a grudge. Who knows.” Savage shrugged. “Better check, just to be safe.”

“Zidwidley collected my indicator solution a few months ago,” Harry said. “You know how Robards always wants any unauthorized brews under lock and key.” Dammit. Harry was going to have to go to Malfoy for more.

Malfoy had been perfectly cordial since the incident with the siren tongue powder, still helping Harry with potions ID, never complaining about anything. And that was a problem, wasn’t it, because Malfoy wasn’t a perfectly cordial person; he was clever and capable and at times, even charming, but he wasn’t nice. Now, however, he was nothing but polite and professional with Harry, and Harry didn’t know whether the attitude was a result of just flat-out homophobia, dislike for Harry personally, still grief over his mum, or some combination of all three.

Trying to figure it out hurt like a physical ache. Harry wasn’t used to dealing with this kind of emotional turmoil; usually he could shut out people and things who made him feel this way—but not Malfoy. Some nights, Harry still dreamed of the way Malfoy had kissed him.

“You know how I always listen to Robards,” Savage said, opening a desk drawer.

Harry snapped out of it. “You have some indicator solution?”

“Don’t tell Zidwidley.” Savage winked. “I’ll administer the solution; you take Ludville’s statement.”
But when Harry went to question Ludville again, Savage held up Ludville’s thumb, and it was cerulean. That meant she’d taken Wood-Eye Lye, and none of her statement was admissible. She would have to be questioned again once the Wood-Eye Lye wore off, and Savage took over her case from there. Harry turned to figuring out why Ludville would falsely implicate Vance, who—when Harry questioned him about it—claimed to have never heard of her.

Harry sort of wished he could put Vance under Veritaserum as well, only he didn’t have proper cause to suspect a fellow Auror when the witness who had testified against him had already been proven to be a liar. Just in case, however, Harry went to ask Savage for some of that indicator solution the next day. When she wasn’t at her desk, he opened the drawer where he’d seen she’d kept it and reached for the bottle.

Apparently, Savage kept all kinds of things in there, because when Harry opened the drawer a Niffler jumped out, causing Harry to drop the bottle of indicator solution. Harry Accio’ed the Niffler, Reparo’ed the bottle, cast an extraction spell on the puddle on Savage’s desk, and was about to decant the solution back into the bottle when he saw the cerulean stain.

Harry knew how the indicator solution worked. He’d tested it himself, all those years ago with Malfoy—if someone hadn’t had any crocodile tears, nothing changed colour. Which meant that either Savage’s desk was covered in crocodile tears, or something else was wrong. Decanting the solution back into the bottle, Harry followed it up with a disillusionment.

The indicator solution was in fact cerulean paint. Nothing else about the paint other than the illusion was magical; it would not have any effect on anything, other than painting things cerulean. But that meant that anyone being tested for Wood-Eye Lye could look as though they had tested positive, since their thumbs would definitely change colour in the paint. That meant that countless true testimonies under Veritaserum could have been made to look like lies, and that meant Ludville had been telling the truth about Vance. For some reason, Savage had used the paint to make it look like Ludville had been lying.

Ludville had been taken to Azkaban for holding to await her trial. When Harry went to the prison, however, he found that Ludville had been transferred. “Who signed the order?” Harry asked, afraid that he already knew. Only a few people were authorized to transfer prisoners out of Azkaban.

“Head Auror Gawain Robards,” said the goblin at the gate.

* 

“What did you do with Ludville?” Harry asked Robards later that day.

Robards was having his afternoon tea, just as he always did, as though nothing in the world could ever go wrong. “I’m afraid you’ll have to be more specific.”

Harry grit his teeth. “Lorica Ludville. The person I arrested yesterday for possession of a highly illegal brew. For some reason, she’s already been transferred out of Azkaban.”

“Oh, her,” Robards said, sipping his tea.

Harry resisted the urge to throw something. “Yes, her, or were there other suspects parading around here saying that Auror Vance is a part of an illegal potions ring and has been making money off it for years?”

“That was disproven,” Robards said calmly, stirring his tea a bit. “She’d had that Veritaserum counteragent.”
“Right.” Purposely forcing his shoulders to relax, Harry took a deep breath. Then another. “I just feel like,” he began, in his most earnest voice, “someone like that—someone who would accuse one of our own, is someone we should keep an eye on. I wouldn’t want her making any more false accusations.”

Robards’ eyes narrowed.

Harry did his best to look innocent.

Setting his cup and saucer down with a clatter, Robards said, “The Department of Mysteries has been working on a case involving Ludville for months. Your arrest interfered; I issued the transfer to Mysteries as a gesture of our willingness to proceed at their future discretion. Nothing more can be done, Auror Potter. The Unspeakables have it from here.”

“I see,” Harry said.

He did see. The Department of Mysteries was a black hole into which information went and never came out again; whenever Unspeakables became involved, the Auror Office had to drop everything and let them take the reins. Harry had complained about it before, and so had Robards—it was one of the few things on which they agreed. If Robards wanted to make a case disappear, all he had to do was claim it had been turned over to Mysteries.

Hermione was an Unspeakable, but though she was Harry’s best friend, she was dedicated to her job. She would never reveal anything about one of their cases—not even whether the case was actually theirs. Robards had led Harry straight up to a dead end. There was nowhere left to go.

This case was bigger than Ludville, however. According to Ludville’s statement, Vance had been involved in illegal potions trade for years—and Savage hadn’t just happened to have cerulean paint at her desk. It was possible she’d used it before, and she and Vance were connected somehow. Going to Kirkley Zidwidley at Records and Filing, Harry asked (loudly) to see every case in which Savage had administered the indicator solution.

“We don’t sort that way,” said Zidwidley. “You’ll have to find them yourself.”

Harry started taking files home—at first just a few, until he found a pattern. The cases in which Savage had administered the indicator solution all involved potions, and each potion contained an ingredient from somewhere in the region of the Gulf of Mexico: the crocodile tears in Wood-Eye Lye, the jaguarundi saliva in the fear potion, even the chili peppers in the siren tongue powder.

Harry remembered looking into ingredients from that region before. The Slumber Slam had had scopolamine, a chemical extracted from a Central American tree, but Harry had investigated Slumber Slam long before Malfoy had developed that indicator solution. Harry had to go farther back in time, getting more old cases from Records and Filing. Slowly, the office at Grimmauld Place became full of boxes as Harry found other connections: the petrification poison made from elkhorn coral, found in the Caribbean Sea, the tortoise scales in the Forgetfulness Potion, the coca in Dream Dram. Even the swamp-things whose bogies had been in the Ragerade were swamp-things from Florida.

The Gulf of Mexico was a big area, but something connected each of the cases; Harry just had to figure out what. Although the potions had all been made by different brewers, they could have the same supplier for ingredients—someone who frequently travelled to the Gulf region, for instance, or who had connections there. Furthermore, several of the cases had hints of something else Ludville had said—that there was another ingredient this supplier was looking for, something more powerful and precious than any of the rest of the illegal ingredients combined.
The problem was that Harry just wasn’t smart enough to put the parts of this case together. A couple years ago, he would’ve taken the problem to Malfoy. Malfoy was brilliant and so clever, he’d see all the connections instantly, except Malfoy only took meetings by appointment, now. Harry didn’t know what to put down for an appointment—*talk to me about Auror things?* They used to do that, sort of. *Just talk to me like you used to* was the appointment Harry really wanted to make, but it was too pathetic even for him. At the same time, Harry didn’t want to go to Malfoy without an appointment; he’d done that with the siren tongue powder. That powder had started something that felt like an ending, and Harry didn’t care to repeat the experience.

Savage and Vance were involved; Robards likely was too. Best to leave the Aurors out of it—even Ron; Harry didn’t want to put Ron in the middle of everything. Besides, Hermione had always been the one who figured everything out. Harry didn’t expect her to solve the case, but he needed another pair of eyes. Going to her one night when Harry knew Ron was at a stake-out, Harry began to explain the situation.

They sat in Hermione and Ron’s kitchen, the kids asleep, surrounded by pictures the kids had made, Hermione’s frazzled notes to Ron on their message board, and the leftovers of Molly’s treacle tart on the table. “Oh, the Ludville case,” Hermione said. “Don’t worry about that. Mysteries has it under control. I’m sure it will all get cleared up in the end.”

“Er,” Harry said. Carefully, he set his fork down. “Are you sure you were meant to tell me that?”

Hermione’s brows knit in confusion. “Tell you what?”

“Nothing,” Harry said, because he had finally realized what had been bothering him about the pictures all around them. “Did Rose do that?” Harry said, nodding his head at one of the pictures.

“What? Oh.” Hermione turned around to look at the picture. “Yes, she’s becoming quite the little artist.”

“I didn’t know she painted,” Harry said. “That’s a very pretty colour.”

Hermione laughed, looking at the arching cerulean lines of her daughter’s painting. “Oh, Harry, how unlike you to notice.”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed. “Where’d you get that paint?”

Ron had brought it from work, Hermione said.

*

Harry had planned to ask Ron about the paint, but when he went to Ron’s desk the next day, Ron wasn’t there. Harry fully intended to sit down and wait, but instead he found himself rifling through Ron’s desk. He knew he shouldn’t; he needed to ask, but he’d asked Hermione why she had told him about the Ludville case, and she’d acted weird. Harry was ninety percent on his way to believing she was under Imperius. He needed to find another ten percent assurance before he set about trying to prove his best friend was lying.

Harry wasn’t sure what he was looking for—maybe cerulean paint. Maybe cerulean paint disguised to look like indicator solution. Maybe indicator solution not disguised to look like anything, so Harry could make himself believe that Ron wasn’t in on whatever Savage had been up to—because Ron wasn’t. He couldn’t be. Instead, Harry found a pair of diamond earrings. Two seconds later, Ron found Harry.

“What are you doing, mate?” Ron asked.
Harry very much wanted to shove the earrings in a drawer and pretend he hadn’t seen.

“Oh,” Ron said, before Harry could try anything of the sort. “Don’t tell Hermione, okay?”

“What?”

“These,” Ron said, grabbing the earrings out of Harry’s hand. “They’re meant to be a surprise.”

“A surprise?” said Harry, surprised.

“For our anniversary,” said Ron. “Aren’t they great?” Smiling at them, Ron put them back in the drawer.

“Ron,” Harry said. “How could you possibly afford them?”

Ron’s face fell a bit. “I’ve been saving.”

“But,” Harry said. “For diamonds?”

Ron was beginning to look uncomfortable. “I have been saving. Even more than I realized.”

“More than you realized,” Harry said slowly.

“The money was just in my account. I figured I’d better use it.” Ron shrugged. “Hey—what were you looking for?”

“Paint,” Harry said. “I was over at your house last night. Hermione said you had some.”

“Funny thing!” said Ron. “I thought I had some potions in that drawer, left over from another case. But a bit ago when I was cleaning it out, I found out it was just paint. I don’t remember putting it in there at all!”

“Yeah. Funny. You know,” Harry went on. “I’ve been looking into the Ludville case.”

“Oh, the Ludville case,” Ron said. “Don’t worry about that. Mysteries has it under control. I’m sure it will all get cleared up in the end.”

Harry pointed his wand. “Finite incantatem,” he said, putting strength enough into the disenchantment to cancel Imperius.

“Er, mate.” Ron was looking at Harry as though Harry had gone mental, then his shoulder relaxed. He rolled his eyes. “Did George do something to me?”

“Your teeth were flashing different colours,” Harry said, because that had actually happened last year.

“Again? That wanker.”

“So nothing on Ludville, then?” Harry asked, checking whether the disenchantment had worked.

“Oh, the Ludville case,” Ron said. “Don’t worry about that. Mysteries has it under control. I’m sure it will all get cleared up in the end.”

Some bastard out there must think Ron a right idiot.

The thing was, Ron could be clueless. He could be absolutely daft. He could be careless—even
careless enough to take cerulean paint from Savage, illusioned to look like indicator solution, and not be aware that it was under illusion at all. He could be careless enough to leave it in his desk and not realize the illusion had worn off, enough to conclude he’d put paint in there without realizing.

But Ron would never, ever be careless enough to see money simply appear in his account and think nothing of it. Anyone who thought so didn’t know Ron, didn’t know what he had had to do to save enough for uni and for Auror Academy, to save enough for his kids and Hermione and the lovely home they had. That they thought Ron would take that money and go buy diamond earrings with it was just goddamn stupid.

Someone, however, must have thought it was believable, because someone had planted evidence in Ron’s desk and then put money into Ron’s account so that, if a part of this whole plot became uncovered, Ron would look like he had been bribed to take part in it. Ron was meant to take the fall, and to make it work, they’d done something to him. It wasn’t Imperius, because the Finite Incantatem would have worked.

Whatever it was, they’d done it to Hermione too. Her words about Ludville had been exactly the same as Ron’s; she never would have even mentioned the case on her own.

If both Hermione and Ron were being mind-controlled with something other than Imperius, this was much bigger than Harry had initially thought. It had potential to involve more than just the Aurors, and Harry already suspected Robards of being involved. Harry needed to talk to someone at the top.

*  

“What is it, Harry?” asked Kingsley Shacklebolt, his expression serious and warm.

Harry had tried not to ask the Minister of Magic for too much, but he was getting desperate. Explaining the situation, Harry tried to present the evidence as objectively as possible, without letting his previous animosity for Vance or Robards get into it.

“Oh, the Ludville case,” Shacklebolt said, when Harry was done. “Don’t worry about that. Mysteries has it under control. I’m sure it will all get cleared up in the end.”

Even his expression was the same as Hermione’s and Ron’s had been.

*  

The mind-control was a potion, Harry concluded. The other cases he’d connected to Ludville, Vance, Savage, and the illegal potions ring had to do with potions; they involved some fairly powerful brews. Ever since former Death Eaters had been sentenced to magical restrictions, potions had arisen as an alternative to magic.

That didn’t mean a former Death Eater was necessarily behind all of this. Several different brewers were involved, according to the case files, but Harry still hadn’t been able to figure out what connected them, beyond the fact that the source for key ingredients was in the region of the Gulf of Mexico. This suggested that the common element was a supplier, not a brewer.

However, the fact that potions were being used as cover-up made it that much more difficult to get to the bottom of what was going on. Even though Harry suspected Vance, Robards, and Savage, he couldn’t hold them all at once to question them; if Harry got to one of them, that one might warn the others. Obliviating them might not even work if a potion had been developed that could resist Obliviation, and for once Harry couldn’t rely on other Aurors or anyone in the Ministry to help. If there was a supplier behind it all, Harry had to find out who it was before trying to tell anyone else,
or else Harry risked them getting away.

To find out where the mind-control potion was coming from, he set up tracking spells on all his suspects—Robards, Vance, Savage, Ron. The first few nights turned up nothing, but on the fourth night, Harry tracked Vance across London to a warehousing district Harry knew of no reason for Vance to visit. Apparating so that he was a few blocks away from Vance’s signal, Harry followed his wand to a warehouse on Colville Road. Apparently, Vance was inside.

Through a few incantations, Harry learned that the warehouse was unplottable. The anti-Apparition wards would allow someone to Disapparate from the warehouse, but not allow them to Apparate into it. After fifteen minutes, the tracking spell on Vance started leading Harry away. As Vance had not exited, he must have Disapparated from within. Harry dismissed the tracker, casting a Notice-Me-Not, and entered the warehouse.

It was a lab.

Everything about it should have reminded Harry of Malfoy and his potions, but to Harry it seemed nothing like. This place was cool and clinical, whereas—despite how distant Malfoy had grown—Tailored Tinctures always seemed warm, inviting, a cheery place where magical things happened. Here, the mixing and stirring and sifting seemed somehow sinister, the white tile floor gleaming with harsh light, the high ceilings lined with sterile glass cabinets filled with potion after potion. Equipment for brewing—cauldrons, Pensieves, ladles, beakers, spoons, were lined up along the counters.

At least some of these had to be the potions responsible for controlling Ron and Hermione. Others were likely potions involved in other cases, all of them tied together somehow through the mysterious supplier that was trading in illegal substances from Central America and the Southern U.S. Here might even be the big new ingredient that Ludville had said would bring Vance so much money, except Harry would never be able to identify it. He didn’t know enough about potions.

Finding a small, hidden space in a cabinet between two potion bottles, Harry set up a Seeing-eye Ball, which would allow him to see anything going in the lab remotely. Next, he used the sickle in his pocket to make a Portkey linked to the location, knowing he would have to come back. He wouldn’t be alone.

*

“You don’t have an appointment,” Malfoy grouched when Harry Apparated to Tailored Tinctures. Malfoy was working, just like always—looking breathtakingly beautiful, just like always. Harry took a moment, just to breathe.

Malfoy sighed, putting aside the moss he’d been sorting and finally meeting Harry’s eyes. “What is it, Potter? I hope you haven’t poisoned yourself again.”

“I need you to come with me,” Harry said.

A look of naked surprise crossed Malfoy’s face in a way that made him look strangely vulnerable, bright grey eyes too wide in his narrow face. Then the mask slipped in place—that old mask that made him no less lovely, just completely inaccessible. Sometimes Harry wondered what he had done to make Malfoy dislike him so much. “I’m not going anywhere with you,” he said coldly.

“Right.” Harry took a deep breath. “I know you hate me, Malfoy.”
“I don’t hate you,” Malfoy snapped. Head bowing, he went back to his moss.

For a moment, Harry watched how the firelight from the hearths played in Malfoy’s hair. “I know you dislike me intensely.” He paused, half hoping Malfoy would dispute that as well, but he didn’t. “But you’re the only one I can trust right now.”

Malfoy’s head jerked up as though on a string.

“Please,” Harry said.

Malfoy stared at him. He stared at him so long that Harry began to imagine a coffin with what he felt for Malfoy inside of it, nails being hammered all around the rim of it to fasten a cover on, one after another. Christ. It still hurt, that Harry cared this much.

“What do I need to bring?” Malfoy said at last.

“I just need you,” Harry said.

That wide-eyed, startled look passed over Malfoy’s face once more, then tucked away again, like a mist that had never been. “When?” he said, but his voice wasn’t so steady as before.

Harry cast the spell to activate the Seeing-Eye Ball he’d set up in the lab. Seeing that no one appeared to be in the lab, he said, “Now.”

“Yes.” Putting down the moss, Malfoy came toward him, then stopped, almost hesitant. “Do you want me to—shall I Side Along?”

“We can’t get there by Apparition. I made a Portkey.” Harry held a coin in his gloved hand.

Malfoy looked at Harry’s outstretched hand. He licked his lips.

“For fuck’s sake, Malfoy,” Harry said, angrier than he had thought he could be at Malfoy’s homophobia and his obvious memory of that stupid fucking kiss. “I’m not going to molest you.”

Malfoy took his hand.

They both spun into the warehouse, the coin dropping to the floor. Malfoy stepped away, looking up at the glass cabinets. “Where are we?”

“Some kind of lab. I think different brewers are making the potions here, but I think there’s a common element—some kind of supplier.” Harry moved to open one of the cabinets, even though he still didn’t know what to look for. Even just being next to Malfoy made him feel more capable, though. Malfoy always solved everything. “We have to figure out who they are.”

“Why didn’t you just bring these potions back to my lab?”

“Look how many there are,” Harry said, gesturing to the cabinet. “Besides, I don’t want anyone to know we’ve been here.”

“You’re saying this area isn’t secure?” Malfoy went a shade paler. “There aren’t . . . Auror guards?”

Harry gave him a look. “I told you I didn’t trust anyone else.”

“But . . .” Malfoy bit his lip.

Sighing, Harry came back over to him. “Look, whatever illegal potion trade’s going on here, I think
some people at the Ministry are connected somehow—some of them might not even know they are, but I can’t tip them off. I don’t want anyone but you knowing that I know about this place. I’ve told you—you’re better at this than anyone I’ve ever met. No one else can do it.”

“Yes, you’ve told me,” Malfoy bit out, “because you know it will always make me your slave.”

Harry frowned in incomprehension. “Malfoy,” he started to say, but Malfoy was already moving away. Harry grabbed his arm.

“Don’t touch me,” Malfoy said, whirling to jerk his arm out of Harry’s grasp.

Harry let go, but he still tried to move closer to Malfoy. Meanwhile, Malfoy backed away, all the way up to the cabinets against the wall, the open glass cabinet above him. “I never made you a slave,” Harry said, still not understanding why Malfoy was the one acting angry, why Malfoy was the one acting hurt.

“Oh,” Malfoy said. “As if you didn’t expect me to drop everything, just because you arrive in the middle of the night in all your Auror splendour and say ‘Malfoy, I need you,’ ‘Malfoy, I trust you more than anyone’.” His voice was bitter, mocking. “Did you really expect me to refuse?”

“Is this because of that stupid kiss?”


“Malfoy,” Harry said, reaching for him.

“I said stay away!” Malfoy moved aside just as Harry was moving forward.

Harry stumbled over his own feet, gripping the cabinet for balance, knocking over one of the bottles inside.

It cracked open on his head.

The potion seeped into his hair.

“Oh, fuck,” Malfoy whispered, but Harry was already forgetting.

He was forgetting the kiss, Narcissa’s death, Cecil Vance; he forgot Wood-Eye Lye and Savage and Aurors, the academy, uni, Hogwarts, Hermione, Ron. Then Harry forgot Malfoy, and he was a boy in too-big clothes holding a stick.

A blond man stood there looking stricken. “Potter?”
“Who are you?” said an imperious voice.

Harry turned to see Malfoy, looking ten or eleven years old. “Shit,” Harry said.

Malfoy looked him up and down. “Well? What’s happened? Why am I in these clothes? You’re an Auror, aren’t you?”

“I’m, er . . .” Harry grabbed the parchment the elder Draco had left on the table, desperately hoping it might tell him what to do. Temporary—Draco had said this would be temporary; this was just like Malfoy, not telling him what would really happen.

“What’s happened?” said Malfy’s little voice, louder now. “Where are my clothes?”

“Potter,” read the note, and Harry was surprised that the surname stung. He’d been a child when he’d demanded Draco call him Harry. Apparently, Draco hadn’t believed Harry could possibly feel the same way when he grew back up.

“I was able to discern that potions from several different cases are linked through ingredients originating from a region they have in common, namely, the Gulf of Mexico. As that area is also the location of the fabled Fountain of Youth—”

“Why aren’t you answering me?” Malfoy demanded. “What’s going on?”

Harry skipped down the page. —“It is my belief that the supplier you spoke of has access to Life Water, said to be generated from this Fountain. The Water’s mythical properties are the only explanation for my inability to counteract—” Jesus, Draco had written a fucking essay, so stilted Harry’s brain hurt just looking at it. He skipped down again. “As you have no doubt already surmised, the Fountain of Youth is said to literally encapsulate age. It is the only substance known to do so—”

“Where are my parents?” Malfoy’s voice had ascended in pitch.

Harry skipped again. “Unfortunately, said nature of this cure will leave you in the company of my former self for some time. I am aware this presents a terrible inconvenience, as his callow self-absorption will no doubt make outrageous demands for your attention. I regret—”

“Look at me when I’m talking to you,” Malfoy said, then ripped the parchment out of Harry’s hand. “What is this?”

“His callow self-absorption” was burned behind Harry’s eyes like a brand, and the only thing Harry could think was, don’t let him see. “Accio parchment,” Harry said.

“No!” Malfoy held onto the parchment, which pulled him up on tip-toe as it strained toward Harry’s hand. “What is it? What’s going on? Where are my mum and d—”

“I’ll tell you; I’m sorry; let go.” Harry yanked on the parchment, but Malfoy still held onto the other end. “Malfy—Draco. Let go.” With a final tug, Harry got the parchment away.
“I demand you tell me what is going on this instant!”

“You’re thirty-two years old,” Harry blurted.

Malfoy’s eyes went wide.

“You’ve been de-aged,” Harry went on. “There was a potion. It was an accident. Sort of. You’ve . . .” Harry waved the parchment, high enough to be out of Malfoy’s reach. “You’ve explained it all here, but I haven’t had the chance to read it yet.”

“I’m thirty-two?” Malfoy asked.

“Yes,” Harry said, remembering how hard this had been for him to believe. He wasn’t sure he’d ever believed it entirely; he’d just trusted Draco so completely that it hadn’t mattered.

“Well.” Malfoy sniffed in a way Harry hadn’t seen since school—that arrogant little head tilt that put Malfoy’s nose above everyone else, only now Harry could see how bright Malfoy’s eyes were. None of his tears had fallen, however, and Malfoy went on, “Why didn’t you just say?”

“Er,” Harry said.

Malfoy put out his hand. “Well?” he said again. “Hand it over.” His fingers wiggled, and Harry felt dizzy at exactly how much Malfoy looked like his elder self in that moment, demanding a potion be put into his hand. As Harry hesitated, Malfoy went on, “You said I’ve explained it; I should get a chance to read it.”

“Um.” Harry took a step back.

“It’s for me.”

“And who are you, anyway? You never answered me. You’re extremely uninformative for an Auror. Who’s your boss?”

Harry had been folding the parchment and tucking it into his robe, but now he couldn’t help himself. He smiled. “Gawain Robards.”

“Never heard of him. He must not be very important.” Malfoy sniffed again. “Look here, Auror . . .” Malfoy paused significantly, eyebrows up. When Harry didn’t say anything, Malfoy put out his foot as if to tap it, but he was wearing grown-Malfoy’s shoes, which were probably a bit too big for his little foot to lift easily. “Your name?”

Imagining Malfoy’s foot tapping inside the big shoe, Harry’s smile deepened. Oh God. “Harry,” he said, taking pity on Malfoy’s poor foot.

“Auror Harry,” Malfoy went on. “I wrote that letter; I should get to—wait a minute. Auror Harry?”

“Yes,” Harry said, trying to hide the smile. This wasn’t fair. Malfoy had not teased Harry at all when he’d been de-aged; he had taken Harry so seriously and been so kind. This wasn’t kind at all—but Harry couldn’t actually help it if tiny Malfoy was hilarious.

“Thirty-two years old. And that scar. Merlin’s beard!” Malfoy snapped his fingers. “You’re Harry Potter!”

“Yes,” Harry said.

“We went to school together, didn’t we?” Malfoy didn’t even wait for an answer. “Of course, we would know each other. You’re famous, and I’m—well. We were friends, then? I always thought
we would be. Father must be so—well, but you’ll have met my father, wouldn’t you have? You know how he is. Anyway, he said I should get to know you. Were we in the same House? Did we play Quidditch?”

It wasn’t quite so funny, now.

“Well?” Malfoy said impatiently.

Harry’s eyes darted down to see whether Malfoy’s little foot would start trying to tap again, but it didn’t. “Let’s do something about those clothes,” Harry said, taking out his wand. “Reducio clothes. Reducio shoes.”

“Oh, thanks,” Malfoy said. “That’s much better.”

He was like grown Malfoy in miniature, with his neat little trousers and his neat little dress shirt—his little face. Harry remembered thinking when he’d met Malfoy as a kid that Malfoy was pointy, but now he seemed so soft, Malfoy’s cheeks round with childhood fat. Oh God. This was terrible.

“So, you’re an Auror,” Malfoy drawled. Putting a hand in a pocket, Malfoy began strolling around the lab. “What is this place? I’m not Minister for Magic, yet, I reckon.” Picking up a beaker on one of the lab benches, Malfoy pretended to look at it, while his gaze slid to Harry as if to judge his reaction. Malfoy looked as though he thought he was being subtle. “You didn’t know I was going to be Minister for Magic? Well, I am. I expect it’ll take another decade or two.”

“I thought you wanted to be a Fiendfyre fighter,” Harry said without thinking.

Malfoy set the beaker down with a clatter. “Who told you that?” he asked.

Harry didn’t know how he was meant to communicate with all the years and history between them, with everything Harry knew that Malfoy had experienced and seen. When Harry had been a child and Draco had been the adult, Draco had known just what to do.

“I suppose I did,” Malfoy went on. At least he seemed content to answer his own questions, for the most part.

Harry remembered that from school. Malfoy liked to hear himself talk.

Wandering between the lab benches again, Malfoy went on, “I imagine I was drunk if I said anything like that. I’m an adult, after all; I must drink alcohol. I suppose that means we go out drinking together—are we very good friends, then?”

Malfoy was pretending not to look at him again, and Harry didn’t know what to say.

I miss you, Draco had said the night before, when Harry had still been a child.

I like you.

If Harry had learned anything through his experience being a child, it was that he didn’t understand Draco at all. Not even a little bit.

“More like acquaintances then?” Malfoy said, sounding so casual that he was very obviously disappointed. He was poking through the objects on the lab bench as if he already knew he lived here—running his finger along the edge of the empty Pensieve, poking balls of fluff and curling his lip at them. Absently, he picked up a dried flower and smelled it, as though he didn’t even notice he was doing it.
“I consider you a friend,” Harry said at last.

“Hm. That’s not surprising,” Malfoy said, setting the flower down. “I imagine I spend more time with you than Vince and Greg. You know them, of course?”

“Er,” Harry said. “I knew them.”

“They’re my best friends.” Malfoy had picked up a jar, but once he saw the brain in it, made a face and put it back.

Harry shouldn’t ask. He knew he shouldn’t ask, because he didn’t need to know; he was getting to see a version of Malfoy with all of his defences down and personal questions were not fair. Harry couldn’t help himself. “If they’re your best friends, why don’t you spend time with them when you’re grown up?”

“Well, I don’t know what I do as a grown-up.” Malfoy said, moving around some rocks on the bench, “only neither of them likes to read. Can you imagine not liking to read?”

“Er,” said Harry.

“The problem is,” Malfoy went on, stacking the rocks to build a little castle, “not many wizarding families we know have kids my age. There’s Vincent and Greg—and Pansy, of course, but she’s a girl. They’re all right, but I expect when I get to Hogwarts I’ll meet people whose interests are similar to yours and mine. And Theo’s. Though I bet it would have been easier to meet people if they only let people from wizarding families into Hogwarts. Have we got that changed, yet?”

“You want Hogwarts to be pure-blood only so you can have friends your age who read?”

“Yes, exactly,” Malfoy said, looking up from the rocks. “You understand.”

Harry didn’t. “What about the kids who aren’t pure-bloods who read?”

Malfoy gave a lazy shrug. “I’m sure we could have even less in common than I do with Vince and Greg. I just wish Greg would pick up a book a time or two. It’s very boring having no one to talk to you about things you’ve read. Theo reads, but he doesn’t . . .”

Harry had been wondering whether he might manage to read the elder Draco’s letter while the younger one babbled, but he looked up at Malfoy’s change in tone.

Malfoy was stealing another glance at him, his cheeks for some reason pink.

“That doesn’t matter,” Malfoy said, hastily turning back to his rock tower and knocking it over with a clatter. “He’s probably old and boring at this point anyway. Not like us. I bet we’re very interesting.”

Harry looked at Malfoy’s tense little shoulders, the way he’d stopped playing with the things on the table, but Harry could not for the life of him remember a single thing about Theodore Nott.

When Malfoy spoke again, his voice was so falsely bright it sounded like a joke—except Malfoy was a child, and children never seemed to notice how horribly obvious they were when they lied. At least, Teddy and Rose never had. “I expect I’m married then?” Malfoy said.

Oh.

_I have no desire to have a wife_, Draco had told him, and now Harry understood what it meant—only
that couldn’t explain Nott. Malfoy was too young to like Nott in that way. Harry had been twenty and just stumbling out of a three-year relationship with Ginny when he realized he’d liked blokes; realizing he in fact preferred them had taken even longer. No way did Malfoy know anything about that now.

“Don’t tell me,” Malfoy said. “I prefer not to know.”

“You’re not married,” Harry said, partly out of morbid curiosity to see how Malfoy would react.

“Really?” Malfoy turned around in surprise. “But—I’m thirty-two. I’m engaged, at least, aren’t I?”

If Malfoy knew he were bent he’d be relieved, as Harry had been. Instead he sounded worried. “Not that I know of.” Harry remembered what Malfoy had told him. “You’re a confirmed bachelor.”

“Confirmed?” The worry was beginning to sound like alarm. “But—” Cutting himself off, Malfoy swallowed hard. “I don’t have a—” Malfoy stopped again, his eyes widening. He looked Harry up and down. “I—we’re not roommates, are we?”

Oh.

Fuck.

Harry could feel blood rushing in his ears, but he knew he had interpreted wrong. He must be interpreting wrong. “We’re not roommates,” Harry said, trying to speak without inflection, because no way was a ten-year-old talking to him about whether his grown-up counterpart was sleeping with him. Just no way.

“And I—I live alone?”

“You live alone.”

Malfoy still seemed tense. “I suppose . . . I suppose . . .” Then he was shrugging awkwardly, turning back to the lab bench, pressing on a balance scale and releasing it, just to see it pop up. “I’ve got to be busy with my job and such, if I’m to be Minister for Magic. No need to settle down right away. I was always saying to Mother—do you know, Harfang Munter wasn’t married until he was nearly seventy. He was too busy fighting duels and running Durmstrang and working on martial magic to bother with girls. Gilderoy Lockhart isn’t married, and not because he couldn’t be. He’s got more important things to do.”

“You’ve got more important things to do,” Harry agreed, because it was true. Malfoy was ten; Harry didn’t see how he could be this obsessed with marriage.

“Right. See?” Malfoy perked up a bit, and yet didn’t seem to be at all interested in the important things he might be doing. “What does Father have to say about that?”

“I have no idea,” Harry said, because he really didn’t.

Malfoy shrugged again. “I don’t suppose that matters. I’m obviously my own person. I bet I’ve done all sorts of things he wouldn’t expect.” He pressed the scale again, absently watching it jump. “What’s Dad up to, anyway?” He whirled around. “He’s not Minister for Magic, is he?”

“No,” Harry said. “He isn’t.”

“Good,” Malfoy said, then looked surprised that he had said it. “I mean to say . . . I—I don’t want to be the Minister’s son, that’s all.”
“You want to be the Minister.”

“That’s right.” Sounding disinterested, Malfoy turned back to the scale.

Harry couldn’t help himself again. “And what about Fiendfyre fighting?”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Malfoy jabbed the scale, hard, making the chains that held the weighing platform jiggle when the platform popped back up. “I wanted that when I was six, or something. People who work jobs like that are going nowhere. And anyway, if I told you that when I was drunk, I obviously expected you never to bring it up again; it’s embarrassing.” Malfoy didn’t sound embarrassed. He sounded as though he was quoting something.

“I think maybe I should read this letter,” Harry said, watching as Malfoy moved along the bench to poke at a bag of powder.

Malfoy frowned at him. “I still think I should be allowed to read it. I wrote it, after all. Say, why are we here anyway? It doesn’t look at all like the clubs or expensive restaurants where I imagine we usually hang out. I imagine we have a box at Ilkley Moor Stadium. We have a box at Oberon’s Theatre as well.” He looked around. “Wait a minute—is this where Severus lives?”

It felt like a punch to the gut.

“Merlin,” Malfoy babbled on, walking over to another table to flick his fingers on a series of phials hanging on a stand. “I wonder what he’s up to. No wonder we never got invited here. Mother always said he lived like a monk. What sort of professor was he? Tough, I should think. Father always said we should respect him. I suppose he was all right, but I always found him rather cross, didn’t you? At least he could have bothered to wash his—”

“Malfoy,” Harry said, not meaning to sound sharp but sounding that way anyway. “Stop.”

Malfoy swiped the phials, hard enough to make them all rock violently, clinking together, but not quite hard enough to break them. “You’re not going to be an adult on me, are you? We’re the same age. In fact, if I remember correctly, I think I’m probably older than you.”

“Malfoy, you’re ten.”

Malfoy made a face at him. “Eleven.”

“Right.” If Draco had de-aged the same amount as Harry had, Malfoy would be eleven. Christ, what had Draco done? The letter had mentioned an exchange. He’d traded away his age.

“Well?” Malfoy said.

“Well what?” Harry suddenly felt exhausted.

Malfoy put his nose into the air. “You’re the one who told me to stop.”

“I’m going to read this letter,” Harry said, swallowing a sigh as he pulled the folded parchment out of his robe. “So, if you could just—be quiet. For a few minutes.”

“What do you expect me to do?”

“Can’t you . . .” just sit there quietly, was what Harry had meant to say, except it felt so much like what had been said to him in his childhood—what Snape had said, what Petunia had said. Don’t ask questions, Vernon had said. When Harry had been the one who was a child, Draco had never once
told him not to be a nuisance, even though Harry probably had been. Draco had almost always given Harry things to do, never once even seeming like he was entertaining Harry for the sake of entertaining him—except that first time he had taken Harry flying, and even then, he hadn’t just been trying to keep Harry busy. He’d been trying to make Harry happy.

Casting about, Harry found Draco’s wand sitting on the bench next to a leather-bound ledger. Draco must have set it there just before administering the potion. “Here,” Harry said, taking the wand over to Malfoy. “Do you know any spells yet?”

Malfoy’s eyes went large, his mouth falling open a bit. “Do you mean I can—” But then Malfoy snatched the wand, as though Harry might take it away. “Of course I know spells. I’m not a Muggleborn. Can I . . .?” He’d begun pointing the wand, but again looked up at Harry. His cheeks were pink with excitement. “What about the decree for underage magic?”

“The Ministry’s not going to know you’re under-aged,” Harry pointed out. “They think you’re thirty-two.”

Malfoy was waving the wand before Harry had finished talking. “Wingardium Leviosa!” he said, swishing it at a beaker.

It didn’t move.

“Um. Usually that works.” Malfoy wet his lips. “Wingardium Leviosa!” It still didn’t move.

“Maybe don’t point it at glass,” Harry suggested, because of how violently Malfoy was waving his wand. With the way Malfoy was doing it, if the beaker ever did levitate it was going to go crashing down again almost immediately.

“I know what I’m doing,” Malfoy said, brow scrunched in concentration. “Wingardium Leviosa!”

“Do you want me to—”

“I can do it. Wingardium Leviosa!”

Everything stayed on the table, calm and completely uninterested in Malfoy’s wand thrashing hopelessly through the air.

Harry hesitated. “So, I’ll leave you over here, and I’ll go over there and read that letter.”

“Wingardium LEVIOSA!!!” Malfoy yelled.

Harry edged away, unfolding the parchment and moving near the window to read it. For some reason, seeing Draco’s small, perfect handwriting made Harry’s heart clench in his chest, just like that opening greeting—Potter,

I was able to discern that potions from several different cases are linked through ingredients originating from a region they have in common, namely, the Gulf of Mexico. As that area is also the location of the fabled Fountain of Youth, it is my belief that the supplier you spoke of has access to Life Water, said to be generated from this Fountain. The Water’s mythical properties are the only explanation for my inability to counteract the potion that fell on you. I say this not in arrogance but in compliance with the magical laws governing thaumaturgical chemistry; a cure is not possible without this key ingredient.

I was able to deduce the exact amount of Life Water used in the potion in proportion to each of the other ingredients, which you will find listed in the leather-bound ledger to the right of this note. With
this information I was able to develop a cure, which I am 100% certain will prove effective once the Life Water is obtained.

On the following page in the ledger, you will find exact details for finalization and administration of this cure. I have already brewed most of it, which you can find in the locked cabinet under the third lab bench. All that is required is that you add the proper amount of Life Water and then allow the final product the appropriate time to mature. The third page of the ledger contains a complete set of instructions as well as additional information you may need. I apologize for the complexity and the length of time for this cure.

As you have no doubt already surmised, the Fountain of Youth is said to literally encapsulate age. It is the only substance known to do so, and therefore without the Water, the years of your life are lost to this universe. The only way I could restore to you the entirety of the time you had lost, as you requested, was to give you my own years. This is not only necessary for you to obtain the Life Water but for the cure itself, as you will see on page 3 of the ledger. Since you are better equipped to obtain the Life Water than I, I determined that we should make this exchange sooner rather than later.

Unfortunately, said nature of this cure will leave you in the company of my former self for some time. I am aware this presents a terrible inconvenience, as his callow self-absorption will no doubt make outrageous demands for your attention. I regret that I can offer little by way of advice in dealing with him. You know how spoiled he was and how hateful he could be. I apologize in advance.

I do not expect you to forgive his ignorance or his bigotry; nevertheless, I do have a request. Please leave him in the company of Andromeda and especially Teddy as little as possible. You at least are well acquainted with his warped prejudice, whereas my aunt and cousin only have vicarious knowledge of it. I cannot bear the thought of my cousin being subjected to him. They are my only family.

Draco

“Look! Auror Potter, look!” Malfoy was excitedly looking over his shoulder at Harry, his wand held aloft. A feather was floating in the air about a foot from it. “I did it! I did Wingardium Leviosa!”

“That’s great,” Harry said, folding up the parchment and putting it back in his robe. He went over to Malfoy. “Look, you’re still doing it.”

Malfoy beamed up at him. “That’s nothing!” Loosening the hold of his wand on the feather, Malfoy re-aimed. As the feather floated lazily back to the table, Malfoy shouted at the table, “Wingardium Leviosa!”

“Whoa,” Harry said, putting his hand on the table. “You’ll make the whole table fly up with that one,” he said, even though he could already see the spell wasn’t going to work.

“Yes. I had better not get too crazy. Things might get out of hand.” Putting down his wand, Malfoy eagerly turned to Harry. “I’m very good at magic. I have a practice wand.”

“I’ll bet you do,” Harry said. “You’re one of the most powerful wizards I know.”

Malfoy’s eyes went larger, his cheeks pinker. He opened his mouth to say what Harry could only imagine was Really?!!, but then he visibly checked himself. Instead he tossed his head. “I’m not surprised at all.”

“Your wand work is good,” Harry went on, “but it’s at potions you really excel. You’re the best
“Potions master!” Malfoy’s nose snapped down. “Like Severus?”

“Just as good as Severus,” Harry said. “Maybe even better—but you were right. The man should have washed his hair more.”

“And he should wear more colours.”

“Right,” Harry agreed. “Always with the black. What was up with that?”

Malfoy began to beam again. “It doesn’t do any favours for his skin tone. He should be wearing jewel tones.”

“Right. Jewel tones.”

Malfoy bit his lip. “Mum says—she said I should wear a muted palette.”

“Er.” Harry was quickly feeling out of his depth, but he wanted to keep the conversation going so that the happy look would come back to Malfoy’s face. “Muted palette?”

“It means mostly grey. She used to dress me in . . . well.” Bowing his head, Malfoy licked his lips. “Too much colour is flamboyant, she says.”

Oh. Oh. “You look fantastic in colours,” Harry said quickly. “You don’t wear enough of them, in my opinion.”

Malfoy tilted his head to look up at him. “Do you mean—when I’m grown up?”

“And at Hogwarts,” Harry said immediately.

“But Mum says I have to wear a uniform.”

“I saw you without your uniform.”

Malfoy flushed, dropping his eyes back down, and Harry realized what he’d said.

Really, though. How could Malfoy be so gay? At eleven? The older version of Draco had made it pretty clear that his father was against it—but then, maybe that was why. If Malfoy knew he was, had always known it, the way he knew that he was a boy and he was a wizard and he liked Quidditch, and there was Lucius Malfoy actively informing him he couldn’t—Harry’s heart twisted in his chest. “I meant,” Harry said, just so Malfoy didn’t get the wrong idea, “we didn’t always wear uniforms on trips to Hogsmeade, and there was the Yule Ball, and you played Quidditch.”

“I did?” Malfoy did that thing where he got excited and then pretended he didn’t care. “I mean, obviously I did. I was Slytherin, wasn’t I?”

“Oh, yes,” Harry said. “You made Seeker second year—quite an accomplishment.”

Malfoy’s face fell. “What did I play first year?”

“Er,” Harry said. “First years don’t generally play.”

“But Father said—well.” Biting his lip, Malfoy doodled with his wand on the lab bench. “Never bother about that. What did you play, then? No, wait. Let me guess.” Malfoy looked at Harry out of the corners of his eyes, as if he didn’t want Harry to see him looking him up and down. “You were
Keeper,” he pronounced triumphantly, after a moment.

“Nope,” Harry said. “Seeker.”

Malfoy’s face fell again. “They replaced me?”

“I wasn’t on your team, silly.” Harry smiled to show he was teasing. “I was in Gryffindor.”

“Gryffindor,” Draco said, sounding like he didn’t know what to think of it.

“It was the best House,” Harry said. “You want to come upstairs? You can show me more of that magic you know.”

“Gryffindor is not the best house,” Malfoy said, but he followed when Harry headed toward the stairs.

“Sure,” Harry said. “Ravenclaw is great; I just wouldn’t say it’s the best.”

“Slytherin is the best,” Malfoy said, as they began to climb.

“Oh, Slytherin,” Harry said, pretending he was surprised. “How come they never won the House Cup, then?”

“What—pardon?” They were at the top of the stairs, now, and Malfoy turned to face him. “We didn’t ever win it?”

“I guess because Gryffindor was always winning it.” Harry shrugged as though it was no big deal—which it wasn’t, any more, only it obviously still was to Malfoy.

“I bet it was stolen,” Malfoy said petulantly.

“You’re right on that.” Harry looked around at Draco’s sitting room. The poor floral-print chair was sagging in the middle, over-stretched from too many enlargement spells, the little table beside it. Not wanting to ruin the chair completely, Harry cast a Summoning spell for a sofa to come over from Grimmauld Place to use instead. “Let’s have somewhere to sit, shall we?”

“What is that?” Malfoy asked, horrified.

Most of the furniture at Grimmauld Place was crap, but the couch was all right. Luna had helped Harry pick it, which was why it had stage coaches and dogs and cabbages printed all over it, but it was very comfortable. Carefully, Harry moved the floral chair over to a corner, so he could work on fixing it later, then moved the couch in front of the hearth, beside the little table. “It appears to be a sofa,” Harry said, sitting down. “I think if you sit on it, you’ll discover that it actually is one.”

Malfoy folded his arms. “I don’t think you’re funny.”

“I’m hilarious. You told me so.”

Malfoy unfolded his arms. “When I was drinking?”

“You didn’t tell me so last time we had drinks together,” Harry said. “But you did tell me one time when we were having lunch. Do you want to sit with me?”

Malfoy stomped over to the couch as though it was an extremely arduous journey, then flopped down into it as though exhausted. “I don’t understand how I could be friends with a Gryffindor,” he said, so dramatically that Harry half expected him to throw a hand over his brow. “Aren’t they all
“brutes?”

“A little,” Harry said.

“We wouldn’t even have ever slept in the same part of the castle.” Malfoy pretended not to sidle a glance over to Harry. “Did we?”

“No,” Harry said, to this very unsubtle question. “We never did.”

“Heavens.” Malfoy heaved a noisy sigh.

Harry looked at him for a little while, Malfoy’s body sprawled on the couch, his head thrown back as he pretended not to watch Harry in return. “Were you going to show me some of your magic?”

“You’ve already seen it,” Malfoy said. “I’m not a child. I’m thirty-two.”

“Right,” Harry agreed, “but I haven’t seen the magic you could do when you were eleven in twenty years.”

“You’re trying to embarrass me,” Malfoy said—sounding embarrassed, but also suspicious, and a little pleased. “When I grow back up you’ll use it to make fun of me.”

“Not at all,” said Harry, trying to think of something else that would capture Malfoy’s attention—anything else. His mind, however, was blank of ideas, which meant that the words from that awful letter surfaced in Harry’s mind.

_I do not expect you to forgive his ignorance or his bigotry._

Harry put his hand over his chest, where the letter rested inside his cloak.

_You at least are well acquainted with his warped prejudice._

Christ. Harry’s hand clenched on his own chest.

_You know how spoiled he was and how hateful he could be. I apologize in advance._

How could he? About a child. But of course, Draco never would have said such things about another child. He never could have—not with the way he had treated Harry as a child. He’d been so kind, so generous, so fiercely protective. Now that Harry had grown up again and could see his own child-self through Draco’s grown-up eyes, Harry knew; he knew what it had looked like, that Draco had seen what Harry’s childhood had been. Draco had seen it, and he’d done everything he could to make something safer and kinder, something loving for a child who had never had a glimpse of what real love could be.

The only reason Draco thought he could say such ugly things was that in this case, the child was himself.

Magic roiled inside of Harry, and this was why he didn’t like to feel anything. Sadness always felt like rage, something difficult to control; tears pricked behind his eyes at the same time as his fingertips crackled over his heart.

“Are you all right?”

Harry’s eyes popped open, the magic and the tears instantly shrinking to a hot, hard lump in his throat. A face was above his, big grey eyes peering down at him. “What are you doing?” Draco asked.
“Nothing,” Harry said, taking his hand off his chest.

“You’ve got a rather dark look, you know. I mean, with that beard, and everything.”

Harry swallowed a sigh. “I know.”

“I didn’t mean it as a bad thing. I bet . . .” Malfoy’s cheeks went pink again. “Well. It’s cool, is what I mean to say. That scar. Did you get that when you—you know—killed him?” Malfoy was kneeling on the couch, his face still hovering over Harry’s. His eyes were on the scar.

“My mum defeated Voldemort.”

“Really?” Malfoy reared back.

“She loved me so much that her love protected me, and it defeated him.”

“Oh.” Malfoy bit his lip, eyes flicking back up to the scar. “Can I . . . can I touch it?”

“Yes,” Harry said, because his plan was to say yes to Malfoy whenever he possibly could.

Tentatively, Malfoy reached a finger out—and then his finger was on Harry’s forehead, tracing the lightning bolt scar. The scar had not ached since Voldemort’s death, and yet Malfoy’s finger made it feel sensitive. No one had touched him there in so long, except that when Harry had been a child, Draco had kept moving Harry’s hair to look at it. Maybe he’d just been reminding himself the child he was dealing with was Harry Potter, but when they’d both been adults, he’d never looked at it. He’d mentioned it a few times, but only when he was angry—after his mum had died. After that kiss.

“Draco,” Harry said, catching Malfoy’s hand by the wrist. He pulled Malfoy’s hand away. “You know your mum loves you, don’t you?”

“What?” Malfoy said, blinking. “Of course, she does.”

“She loves you,” Harry said anyway. “So much. She could have defeated Voldemort as well—that’s how much she loved you.”

“My mum would never have fought the Dark Lord,” Malfoy said, pulling away and dropping back down to sit on the couch. “She’s much too smart.”

Harry waited for Malfoy to realize he’d just called Lily stupid, but Malfoy didn’t seem to notice.

“Anyway, the Dark Lord wasn’t as bad as people make out. He wasn’t dark at all, really. Or a lord. He was—a political opponent.” The way Malfoy pronounced the words, Harry could tell he was quoting this time. “But people didn’t like his ideas.” Malfoy’s eyes slid to look at him sideways again. “But you knew that. Didn’t you.”

“I don’t like his ideas either.”

“Really?” Malfoy didn’t actually sound interested.

“I think he was a very bad man,” Harry said.

“Well. That’s all over.” Malfoy didn’t seem to want to talk about it any longer, but then he said, hesitating a little, “Father is very political.”

“Aren’t you?”
“I’m eleven. I mean . . .” Malfoy shrugged. “I imagine things are different when I’m thirty-two.”

“You mean, you think you’ll get interested?”

“I must do,” Malfoy said carelessly.

“Why must you?” Harry asked.

“Because,” Malfoy said, then paused. “Because Father says—isn’t that what grown-ups do?”

“Get interested in politics?”

“I mean, important grown-ups,” Malfoy said, irritated. “People of statues in the wizarding world. People of—of influence.”

“People of stature,” Harry said.

Malfoy scowled at him. “Those people get statues made of them; don’t they?”

“Do you really want a statue to be made of you?”

“Of course I do,” Malfoy said, sounding even more irritated. “Do you think I want to grow up to be some kind of shop-keep or clerk? Obviously I’m going to be someone important.”

“I think being a shop-keep sounds rather nice,” Harry said.

Malfoy’s lip curled. “Well, what do you know. You’re in law enforcement.”

“Law enforcement can be pretty important, sometimes. The current Minister for Magic was in law enforcement.”

“Really?” Malfoy’s interest seemed perked. “Who is it?”

“His name is Kingsley Shacklebolt.”

“Never heard of him,” Malfoy said dismissively, but then he went on. “He really went from being an Auror to Minister for Magic?”

“He really did.”

“Do you think I—” Malfoy’s eyes widened. “Am I an Auror?”

“No,” Harry said. “You’re a potions consultant.”

“Potions consultant! What’s that?”

“You identify potions for the Auror Office, so we can keep dangerous brews off the streets.” On Malfoy’s frown, Harry added, “Sometimes you develop potions to help us, too. You cured me, once. Several times, actually.”

“Like a Healer?” Malfoy seemed curious—far more curious than he had seemed when he’d talked about becoming a person of stature.

“Better than most Healers I’ve encountered,” said Harry.

“I should think so,” Malfoy said dismissively, but his next question conveyed an eager interest. “Can a Healer be Minister for Magic?”
“I suppose so,” Harry said. “I don’t know if it’s ever happened.”

“What about a famous Quidditch player?”

“That seems less likely.”

“A dragon tamer?”

“What happened to being a Fiendfyre fighter?”

Malfoy rolled his eyes. “Honestly, Potter, I was six. Do you always bring up things I said when I was drunk?” His cheeks went pink again. “Don’t answer that.” He tapped his wand on his thigh. “Do you—do you think a Fiendfyre fighter could be Minister for Magic, though? I’m not asking because I—never bother. Forget about it.” The tapping went on. “Do you think . . . ?” The tapping stopped. “Never mind. I know how to do Lumos. *Lumos!”* He held aloft his wand, which didn’t light. Shaking it, he held it out again. “*Lumos!”*

“You’re holding on too tight,” Harry said, trying to make his voice as soft as he did for Rose. Reaching out to Malfoy’s wand with one hand, Harry touched Malfoy’s little white knuckles with the other, tugging his fist a bit. Malfoy’s grip loosened, and Harry repositioned Malfoy’s grip on the wand. “Do you feel the magic inside you?”

“I . . .” Malfoy frowned. “I know how to do it,” he said, pulling his hand out of Harry’s.

“Yes,” Harry said. “You’re very good at magic.”

Malfoy blushed, then thrust his wand up again. “*Lumos!”* The wand remained dark.

“Let me do it with you.” Harry waited for a moment to Malfoy to acquiesce, but then he saw that Malfoy wasn’t going to, and if Harry waited a second longer, Malfoy was going to put his nose up and insist he could do it by himself again. “Like this.” Harry had spent enough time with Teddy and Rose and Hugo that he knew how to do a spell with a child. Leaning a little behind Draco’s back so he could reach, Harry curled his arm around Draco’s shoulders, lining up with Draco’s arm, then put his hand on Draco’s. “Now we lift it up like this,” Harry said, raising his arm with Draco’s. “*Lumos.*”

“*Lumos,”* Malfoy repeated.

“*Lumos.*” They did it again.

“*Lumos.*” A feeble glow lit at the top of Malfoy’s wand. “I got it!” Malfoy said, jumping a little against Harry. He turned to look up at him. “I got it!” Malfoy’s eyes were shining.

“Yes,” Harry said, letting go of Malfoy’s hand and moving back. “You did.”

“I told you I knew how to do it! *Lumos!”* The wand lit up again.

“Very good,” Harry said.

“*Lumos.*” Malfoy bounced in his seat some more. “*Lumos, lumos, lumos!*”

Taking out his own wand, Harry pointed it at the hearth. “*Incendio.*” Fire flared to life in the hearth, filling the sitting-room with warmer light.

“Can we do that one?” Malfoy asked.
He meant the fire spell, and Harry had spent enough time with Teddy and Rose and Hugo to know the answer to that question. “No,” he said, and put his wand away.

“But I’m thirty-two.”

“Not right now, you’re not.”

“But I’m good at magic.” Malfoy pouted. “You said I was.”

Harry laughed. “Does that usually get you what you want?”

Face scrunching to scowl up at him, Malfoy demanded, “Does what get me what I want?”

“Whinging about it.”

“Merlin’s toadstools.” Malfoy pushed him away. “You’re no fun.”

Harry smiled. “Do you want to show me the colour spells on the fire?”

“Colour spells are boring.” Draco rolled his eyes, but he pointed his wand at the fire. “Ignis azul.”

A lick of flame flickered to blue, but after a moment, went back to yellow-orange.

“It usually works.”

Harry wanted to tell him that shaking his wand as though it was malfunctioning wouldn’t actually help, but Draco’s shoulders stiffened every time a spell didn’t work. Having known Lucius, Harry would have guessed Draco was bracing himself for criticism, but now Harry wasn’t so sure. Apparently, Lucius Malfoy had read his son stories with funny voices and hexed dancing instructors just because they said negative things. Meanwhile, Draco seemed to react badly to positive words as well, as though encouragement was just another reminder that he’d failed. He was so proud, and too hard on himself by far.

Harry again thought of the letter, those scathing words about this small child, who wanted to turn the fire blue just to impress someone he didn’t know.

“Ignis azul,” Draco said again, and the fire turned blue. This time it stayed that way, and Draco turned to him excitedly. “I did it!”

“Yes,” Harry said. “Very cool.”

“That’s nothing.” Draco tossed his head. “Ignis verde!”

Harry willed the spell to work, wondering how wrong it would be to try some wordless, wandless magic, just to give the flames a bit of a nudge. “Wow,” Harry said, when a few of the flames turned green. “It’s just like Floo fire.”

“I told you I could do colour spells,” Draco said, lifting his chin. “Any six-year-old can do them.”

“I couldn’t,” Harry said, “when I was six.”

“I suppose I was rather advanced for my age.”

“You taught me how.”

“I—what?” Draco’s attitude of nonchalance dropped right off, which made Harry smile. Sometimes,
when they were both older, Harry could see cracks in the façade Draco seemed to show to the world, but at eleven Draco was so completely obvious. His eyes were large, as though hungry to hear of something clever he had done.

“Oh, yes,” Harry said. “I was ten. You taught me the colour spells, all of them.”

“Oh,” Draco wiggled in his seat, as though trying to shake himself out of seeming incredibly pleased. “Well, I’ve always had a talent for—wait a minute, when you were ten? Kids don’t get their Hogwarts letters until they’re eleven. Did we—did I get to meet you before going to school?” Draco frowned. “It must happen very soon after this; I have my letter already. When’s your birthday?”

“July thirty-first,” Harry said. “Do you know, that makes it our in-between birthday?”

Draco’s frown deepened. “Our in-between what, now?”

“Birthday,” Harry said. “Our in-between what, now—”

“Was I drunk?”

“No?” Harry was unsure where this obsession Malfoy had with being drunk came from. “I was just going to say, since your birthday is at the beginning of June and mine is at the end of July, that means we get almost two whole months of in-between birthdays. In fact, it’s our in-between birthday right now, which means—” cake, Harry had been going to say, but Draco interrupted him again.

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Malfoy shifted uncomfortably. “I’m not a baby.”

“I—didn’t say you were.”

“Mum made that up to indulge me,” Draco said. “She obviously thought I was some kind of mewling infant in need of cossetting, but I’m eleven now. I’m off to Hogwarts soon. How do you think the other wizarding children will react if they see my mother mollycoddles me? I—I mean . . .” Draco scowled. “How do you think they did react if—well, they didn’t. Obviously. As I’m sure you know. Father told her—well, he got her to leave off that kind of thing, I’m sure.”

Harry swallowed hard. “I don’t know,” he said. “She still sent you chocolates in the Great Hall.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “Naturally, she sent me chocolates. It’s my favourite—I just mean, she stopped dressing me up like her little doll.” He added quickly, “Not that she ever—she didn’t dress me. Except when I was a baby. I mean, that would be weird. But we used to—well, never bother. I’ve got my hair cut, and Malkin’s going to be making me a whole new wardrobe as well as my school robes—you know Malkin, of course?”

“Yes.”

“And I’m going to get an owl,” Draco went on. “So, you see, I’m not some fussing nursling.”

Harry’s throat felt thick. “I never said you were.”

For a moment Draco looked startled. “Well, then—” Breaking off, he frowned. “Then, you needn’t speak about Fiendfyre fighting or in-between birthdays or anything like that then, and you needn’t try to embarrass me by bringing up . . . other embarrassing things.”

“Draco,” Harry said, but found that he couldn’t say anything else.

Draco lifted his chin some more. “Obviously, I’ve learned my lesson—never to tell you things when
I am drunk.”

“You weren’t drunk,” Harry said, a bit too roughly.

“I was,” Draco insisted. “When I’m grown up I’m very sophisticated. I’ll bet I hold my liquor excellently. I’ll bet I have liquor all the time, and . . .” He paused, apparently thinking up more parts for his story. “And I have political enemies who try to make up bad things about me, but they’re not true, and I just laugh in their face. Like this—ha ha ha!”

The fake, jeering laugh was so familiar to Harry from Hogwarts that it, too, felt somehow painful. “I was a child,” he heard himself say.

“What? I mean. Pardon?”

“The potions accident,” Harry said. “The potion fell on me; I turned into a ten-year-old. You told me those things because—you told me it was our in-between birthday, and you made me a cake. I was the one indulged; I was the one cosseted, because I was alone and neglected, and you were kind. You cared for me. Your mum—don’t you know—don’t you know your mum does that because she cares for you?”

“Well,” Draco said, sounding unsettled. “Of course, she cares for me. She’s my mum. You turned ten?”

“No one thought you were a mewling infant,” Harry said. “No one thought you were—” He couldn’t remember the other name Draco had called himself. “Wizarding children, if they saw how much your mother cared for you, they were jealous of you; they wished they had mums like yours.”

“Obviously, they’d be jealous,” Draco said, sitting straighter. “No other mums are half as good as mine.”

“Was it your father?” Harry said, because he couldn’t seem to stop himself. “Was he the one who called you those things?”

“Father?” Draco said sharply. “My father wouldn’t say that. My father thinks I’m brilliant. I’m going to be important just like he is. I don’t know what this ‘potions consultant’ business is, but it’s—it’s probably—it’s probably a stepping stone. It’s a stepping stone to something better; I’ll ditch it once my career . . . takes off. It will take off, and then I’m going to do much better things. I’ll do things at a desk with papers, and I’ll have—I’ll have eight secretaries, and everyone will be afraid of me. And. And I’ll get married to a beautiful pure-blood woman, and I’ll love her just as much as Dad loves Mum. More. And—and I’ll be Minister for Magic, and—”

“Stop.”

Draco stopped, his lovely grey eyes very round, his pink mouth an ‘o’.

Harry had never snapped at a child before—not Teddy, certainly not Rose or Hugo. Even when they frustrated him, he could always keep in mind that they were children and did not deserve harsh words. But precisely because Draco was only a child, Harry felt strung tight inside, because Draco didn’t realize he was perfect. Tailored Tinctures was perfect; his potions consulting was perfect; Draco Malfoy was one of the best men that Harry knew, and Draco didn’t even realize it.

Perhaps this was why Snape had acted the way he had; maybe this explained Petunia, seeing Lily in Harry’s eyes. Perhaps it hurt too much, seeing a younger version who had no clue, when the older version was so important to you.
“I say.” Draco swallowed hard. “You’re not angry, are you?”

“No,” Harry croaked. “I’m sorry. Draco—I’m so sorry.”

Draco scowled. “If you were the one who got turned into a kid, what’s happened now? You look fairly old.”

Harry took a deep breath, then another. “You were trying to cure it,” he said, more calmly. “You need an ingredient only I can get, so you—you developed a potion to switch our ages.”

“That doesn’t sound right. Why couldn’t I just get the ingredient myself?”

“It’s... an Auror thing,” Harry said, a little helplessly, not knowing how to explain. “There’s... a ring of illegal brewers; they’re using the same supplier. This particular ingredient—it’s very dangerous, and you didn’t know where it was being kept...”

Draco looked extremely interested in this. “Some kind of dark artefact?”

“No,” Harry said. “But it’s very powerful.”

“Dark objects can be very powerful. ‘Dark’ sounds like it’s a bad thing, but it’s not. It’s just a different type of magic—you know, like night is different than day.”

Draco was quoting again. “Magic shouldn’t hurt people,” was all Harry could think to say. The catch in his voice made it hard to go on.

Meanwhile, Draco just shrugged. “Sacrifice is necessary for great reward.”

Harry closed his eyes.

“I say,” Draco said again. “Is there something wrong with you?”

“No,” Harry said, trying not to sound as weary as he felt. Putting out the fire in the hearth with a wave of his wand, he said, “I’ve got to get to work on finding that ingredient. Do you—how would you feel about doing some more spells with your wand while I read over some of the instructions your older self left for me?”

“I suppose,” Draco said. “Have you got spell books?”

“Um.” The sitting room was full of books, but Harry didn’t know what Draco had, and who knew whether any of the books were appropriate for children. Remembering the book Draco had given his younger self, Harry said, “Accio Spells for Beginners.”

“Heavens.” Draco rolled his eyes. “You don’t mean the Wellbeday primer, do you?”

The book Draco had given Harry’s younger self floated over from the bookcase. ‘Wellbeday’ was embossed on the bottom in gold letters, either the author or publisher.

“That’s for beginners,” Draco went on, sounding irritated. “I learned all those by the time I was five.”

“Well,” Harry said, holding the book and feeling a little like when he was eleven and Hermione was scorning him for not having read Hogwarts, A History. “Want to look at the bookshelves and see if there’s something you like?”

In answer, Draco went over to the shelves. Harry considered concealing the bottom shelf that had
some of Draco’s notebooks and the photo album. Since Draco had made it clear he didn’t think much of the shop or the flat, finding out that it belonged to him would be another conversation, and Harry wasn’t sure his battered heart could take it. In the end, however, he could not bring himself to so blatantly conceal the truth, even from a child. Especially from a child.

Luckily, Draco began by perusing the books at eye-level, seeming to find several volumes of interest there. “This looks good,” he said, pulling out a white one with a red stamp on the spine. He’d almost got it off the shelf when he said, “Oh! Fleetmoss and Sewell. I’d wanted to get that one,” and began tugging at a maroon one with a faded cover. “Hey!” Then he hopped—literally hopped to the next shelf over. “Is this—” Pulling a crumbling grey book-shaped box off the shelf, he opened it to reveal a leather book inside with gilt-edges. When he flipped open the cover, the pages produced the soft tones of a flute. “Bright’s Music of the Spheres. I’ve been looking for this. And you’ve got Hornley!” Stuffing Music of the Spheres and its box on the shelf on top of the row of books, Draco grabbed another one.

“Er,” Harry said. “So, I can leave you to it?”

“But?” said Draco. “Oh! You’ve got the Sword and Steed series. And it’s complete! Well, of course it’s complete; it’s got to be . . . 2012.” Draco turned to him eagerly. “Did King Aegis ever defeat the warlocks? And did Maid Faunla ever reveal she was part Veela?”


“Then why do you have it?”

“I . . .”

“Oh! I wonder if you have the—yes! You have Tides of Atlantis!”

“I never knew how much you liked to read,” Harry said, a little helplessly.

“Oh, yes, I love—” Draco cut himself off. “I mean, I like it well enough. I’m—don’t make any jokes about Ravenclaw; you already said I ended up in Slytherin.”

“I wouldn’t make any jokes.”


“Cool.” Smiling faintly, Harry took his wand out of his sleeve. “Expecto Patronum.” He didn’t have to find a happy memory for the spell to work, since Draco was standing right there, the light from the book shining on his face and the wonder in his eyes so readily apparent. The silver fox shot out the end of Harry’s wand and trotted over to Draco, who snapped the book closed in surprise. Harry wasn’t surprised at all; his Patronus had been a fox since the day Narcissa died.

“Why did you do that?” Draco said, staring blankly down at the fox.

“I’m going downstairs to take a look at the potion I’ll need to make with that ingredient,” Harry said. “She’ll keep you company.”

Draco looked up at him quickly. “It’s a she?”
“Yes.”

“I wonder what form mine will take. Not many people can cast full Patronuses, but my mum can. Hers is a dragon.”

Harry kept his faint smile. “Very impressive.”

“Much more impressive than a fox,” Draco said. “Lots of foxes are scavengers, you know. They don’t even fight for themselves, not like dragons.”

“But foxes are smart,” Harry pointed out. “And determined. They’ve got to be, to survive the winter.”

“Dragons can be whatever they want,” Draco said. “Because they’re dragons.”

“Dragons protect what’s theirs. Foxes have to go out looking for what they want.”


Harry smiled. “That’s all right. Tell my Patronus if you need anything; I’ll be just downstairs.”

But Draco was already poring over a new book with wood etchings on the covers and did not respond.

*

Downstairs, Harry reread Draco’s letter—that hateful letter,

*his callow self-absorption—how spoiled he was—how hateful he could be—his ignorance—his bigotry—his warped prejudice. I cannot bear the thought of my cousin being subjected to me.*

*They are my only family.*

Opening the ledger the older Draco had left on the lab bench, Harry checked to make sure all the instructions were there. The first page had a list of ingredients in Draco’s meticulous hand, the second a description of the potion he had made for the cure, the third an explanation of how the cure would work, the fourth a summary of how he’d traded their ages, using a potion he’d developed called Age Exchange. Harry skimmed the second and third pages, making sure he understood the instructions and could do what Draco was saying.

Once the Life Water was added to the potion Draco had prepared, the cure would take a full twelve hours to mature, after which the cure had to be administered all at once. Frowning, Harry pulled the ledger closer to read more carefully.

Life Water is meant to remove age, not add it. Think of it as a jealous dragon, hoarding years. Meanwhile, the 20 years that will be supplied to you by the Age Exchange potion are only temporary. By biomagic calculation, those years still belong to me, and thus do not contribute to your age in linear temporal space.

When the cure is administered to me, the Life Water within it will attempt to collect my age as well, but due to Age Exchange my own age will in fact be inaccurate; I’ll be younger than I’m meant to be. As time is linear, so is the Life Water; therefore, it will seek my most recent years—which I gave to you with Age Exchange. If you are in the vicinity (which I will explain further on the following page), the Life Water in me will become attracted to the excess of age within you. However, because Life Water seeks true age—linear time—the Life Water in me will draw years out of the grasp of Life
Water in you, rather than attempt to extract the age I gave you through Age Exchange.

Once your “true” years are released, I have added a reagent in Age Exchange that will detect age is being released within you, which will trigger Age Exchange to give me back my own years. My regaining my own age will negate the attraction that caused the Life Water in me to seek you out, but only after your years have been released. In short, the cure, if administered to me, will attempt to steal years from you and thereby trick the Life Water in you into releasing your age; once the trick is played, all reactions will cease.

Here’s another way to think about it: normally Life Water in you would absorb your age, and Life Water in me would absorb my age. However, the Age Exchange makes it so that my Life Water seeks you out, and once it encounters you, my Life Water wants the age your Life Water is hoarding. They work to cancel each other out.

Christ.

Harry set the ledger down. Taking off his glasses, he rubbed his eyes. His head hurt from concentrating.

Draco had established specific properties of the Fountain of Youth without even having any of it available; it was meant to be mythical stuff. What was more, he’d done all this without Harry even seeing, because when Harry had been helping him, they’d mostly been doing indicator solutions and diagnostic tests.

Christ. Harry had always told Draco he was a genius at potions, and he’d meant it, but he’d never realized Draco was this good. Draco could have written papers. He should write papers, and Harry thought about what adult-Draco would say—No one wants papers written by a Death Eater. Then Harry thought about what child-Draco had said, about being a scholar, and wondered how many things Draco didn’t do because other people had stopped him.

Child-Draco pretended it didn’t matter to him. He pretended he didn’t want to be a Fiendfyre fighter; he pretended he wanted to be married; he pretended he wanted to be Minister for Magic. Harry hadn’t thought of Draco as someone who wouldn’t go after something that he wanted; Draco had worked so hard to become so good at potions. He’d bought his own shop; he’d renovated it himself. He’d developed cures and indicator solutions and so much more, but when he’d finally told Harry what he wanted to be, it had nothing to do with potions.

Tapping on the ledger with his wand, Harry cast the reading spell. Draco’s adult voice read him the ingredients and notes all over again, though Harry had to recast it after the first page because he’d stopped listening to the content and had started just listening to the voice. Draco’s child voice was high and sweet, but Draco’s adult-voice made Harry ache, like Harry was an instrument somehow tuned to respond to the same frequency as Draco’s tenor. Harry loved it. He was ashamed of how much he loved it; it was stupid.

Harry wondered what other things Draco wanted and had never reached for.

*  

The next page of the ledger contained information about what the cure would do once administered. Harry had hoped that once Draco drank the potion he would instantly age. The reality appeared far more complicated.

All of my tests indicate the Fountain of Youth is not meant to work in reverse. Therefore, the potion that caused your lost years worked painlessly through natural processes. Age Exchange is similarly
innocuous, as it has not changed our true ages permanently. The process I have devised to return both of us to our proper age, however, works against the natural purpose of the Life Water, and therefore caution must be taken to ensure no lasting damage.

This solution I have devised relies so heavily on the linear nature of time that to attempt to restore all of our age at once would be folly. I have engineered the cure such that the reaction is provoked at intervals. Each reaction will result in the addition of one year—one “true” year to you, from the Life Water within you, and one year returned to me from the store I gave you through Age Exchange. However, because you—though through chemical trickery—are your proper age, you should feel no effects. I, being my younger self, will experience ageing one year at a time, with significant gaps between.

In addition to separating the ageing process into manageable steps one year at a time, the cure I have devised should provide protection from the possible psychological and physical damage ageing in this way may cause. One element of this is the dose of anaesthesia I have included in the cure, as well as a slight time delay. If administered properly, my younger self should fall unconscious over intervals of time, then experience the age restoration while comatose. After a consistent period of time spent unconscious (expect three hours), he will wake up one year older, with memories of that year intact.

Because the Fountain of Youth is a naturally occurring phenomenon on Earth, it is bound by Earth’s time magic. Therefore, each orbit of the Earth around the Sun (one year, in case you’ve forgot your astronomy) is a powerful unit of time the Life Water should recognize, which is why I engineered the cure to age my younger self one year at a time. Traumatic events may slow the ageing process, but do not let this alarm you. If my younger self doesn’t age a full year during any of the steps, he should regain lost time in the next step, as the Life Water will naturally revert to the annual unit.

Because the Life Water in me will react to the Life Water in you, you must be close to my younger self for the first reaction—no farther than 10m. That first reaction will build a temporal bridge between us, which means that the Life Water in me may more easily find the Life Water in you; each reaction will strengthen this connection. Therefore, the distance you may keep from my younger self will become an ever-increasing radius. By the time he reaches 18 you should be able to go anywhere within London and have the cure still be effective; by the time he reaches 25 you should be able to go anywhere in the UK. I understand you may have Auror business to conduct, and likely there will be other reasons you wish to maintain distance.

The temporal bridge I mentioned has the negative effect of strengthening the hold the Life Water has on your age, as it becomes familiar with the Life Water in me forcing it to release year after year. This means that the intervals at which my younger self will fall unconscious will be increasingly longer. After he drinks the cure, the first period of unconsciousness should happen almost immediately. After that, the next period will be a few hours hence. By the time he reaches 18, the gap between these periods should reach almost the length of a day; it may be 2–3 days per interval by the time my correct age is reached. Therefore, the cure shall take a total of several weeks.

After Harry was sure he understood the contents of the ledger, he checked the cabinet where the potion Draco had prepared should be. It looked just as Draco had said it should: yellow-brown sludge in a pint-sized bottle. With the Life Water added, this would be the cure that would restore both Harry’s and Draco’s ages permanently.

The first place to look for the Life Water would be the warehouse where the potion that had started it
all had fallen on him, but Harry wasn’t sure what to do with Draco while Harry was gone. Draco’s adult self had said he wanted to spend as little time as possible in Andromeda’s company, but he hadn’t said he shouldn’t be put in Andromeda’s company at all.

Of course, Andromeda would forgive anything that child-Draco did or said; she might not have had first-hand experience with his “warped prejudice,” but she’d had experience enough with her sisters. She would know what she was getting into—but that wasn’t what Harry was worried about. The issue wasn’t whether Andromeda could forgive Draco. The issue was whether Draco could forgive himself.

Reading that letter, Harry wasn’t sure whether Draco could, and Harry wanted to save him from it. He wanted to save Draco’s elder self from everything; he wanted to give child-Draco the cure and have him grow back up into someone who had some happy memories of Harry Potter in his childhood. He wanted Draco to grow back up into someone who understood that he was more than his mistakes, that he could be loved in spite of them—he could be loved for the person he had become because of them.

As such, Harry was reluctant to leave Draco with Andromeda, but the only alternatives Harry could see were to leave Draco alone or bring Draco with him to the warehouse. Despite the Seeing-Eye Ball and various protections Harry could set up, bringing him would be potentially dangerous. Then again, Dumbledore had sent Harry into dangerous situations all the time. When Harry thought about what could happen to child-Draco, he wondered how Dumbledore could have done it. Dumbledore must have had his reasons, and yet Harry felt certain adult-Draco would never do that. Andromeda might have. Hermione wouldn’t. Draco had lost his mind over Harry riding a taxi, and Harry was beginning to suspect that Dumbledore wasn’t the best example for how a grown-up should act.

That meant leaving Draco alone. Harry wasn’t terribly excited with this option, either, but as it seemed the most viable, Harry proceeded to make preparations. First, he checked the wards on Tailored Tinctures and Draco’s flat above it. Draco had been right to worry when they’d seen Vance at Grimmauld Place; if Vance—or Savage, since she’d seen them both at the Auror Office—thought that Harry knew about the potions ring with its illegal supplier and saw Draco with Harry, they might try to silence Draco as well. But neither Vance nor Savage had been here, and Draco’s wards were fairly good. Harry added a layer of his own just to be sure, feeling his magic mingle with Draco’s in a way that made his toes curl.

Next, he owled Andromeda, letting her know what had happened. Harry had linked her to the wards so that they could alert her if anything went wrong, and he made it clear she should not come to fetch Draco unless any of his wards alerted her, or if she did not hear from Harry within three hours. Harry didn’t expect his trip to the warehouse should take longer than that. After that, all that remained was to put protections on Draco himself.

When Harry popped upstairs, he found Draco curled in the flower-print chair with three books in his lap. Other books were spread out all over, and Harry was reminded of adult-Draco studying potions, tea steaming by his elbow. Harry couldn’t help checking to see whether Draco had found the photo albums, but a glance showed Harry that Draco had not only failed to discover them, he hadn’t seemed to get past the first shelf. Harry’s Patronus was wrapped in a ball by Draco’s feet, looking sleepy. Draco didn’t even look up at the cracking sound.

“I’ve got to leave for a bit,” Harry said, trying to make it sound as though he were going nowhere special and that Draco would not be in danger if left alone.

Perhaps he needn’t have bothered, as Draco didn’t say anything. Perhaps he hadn’t heard.

“Draco,” Harry said.
“Hm,” Draco said. The little hum didn’t even sound like a question.

Harry came closer. “I need to leave for a bit.”

Draco turned a page.

“Draco,” Harry said, much louder and close to Draco now.

“There’s no need to yell,” Draco said, without lifting his head out of his book.

“I’ve got to go,” Harry said.

“All right, already,” said Draco.

During this conversation the fox had unwrapped from its ball, shaking itself out for a yawn. Now it stood there staring at Harry, as though accusing. Draco didn’t look at him at all, reminding Harry a bit of Rose. When she was angry with Ron or Hermione, she stopped talking to them completely. “Have I done something wrong?” Harry finally asked, at a loss.

Draco turned another page.

“Draco.”

“Heavens!” Draco jumped, then looked back up at him. “Wh—pardon?”

“Why are you—” ignoring me, Harry was going to say, then remembered Teddy instead of Rose. When Teddy was angry, he yelled. When he was listening to music, though, he ignored everyone. It wasn’t malicious, Harry had learned; he simply turned the rest of the world off. It’s called being a teenager, Andromeda had said. Draco was eleven, but maybe you could do it then as well. Harry, having not had much experience with being a normal teenager, had had to take Andromeda at her word.

“Did you need something?” Draco placed a bookmark in the pages of his book with the same precise care that his adult self always did it. “You could have said.”

Harry could have said something indeed; he’d just been waiting for Draco to pay attention to him. Harry swallowed, remembering that he hadn’t wanted Draco to worry. “I’ve got to leave for a while, and I want to cast a few protection spells on you to keep you safe while I’m gone.”

Rolling his eyes, Draco began reaching for his book again. “Merlin’s toadstools, I’m not seven.”

“I would feel better about it.”

“Better about what?” Draco began to scowl, his brow bunching up. “Say—where are you going?”

“I need a special ingredient to cure you.”

“The dark artefact?” Draco put aside the book, looking interested now. “Where are you going? What is it?”

Harry was going to have to explain it all at some point, seeing as how the cure apparently had to be administered to Draco and not him. “It’s called Life Water,” Harry began.

“From the Fountain of Youth?” Draco jumped up. “They’ve found it? Someone’s found it? You’ve got to—no, wait, don’t tell anyone. Do you know how filthy rich that could make us? It could make us famous. We’d be—” Draco appeared to search for a word—“influential.”
“I’m not going to sell it, Draco. I’m going to use it for your cure.”

“But you know where it is?” Draco said eagerly. “Is it in the Caribbean? I’ve heard it’s in the Caribbean. Are you going to the Caribbean? I want to go to the Caribbean. Some of the spells are different in the Americas, you know, and they’ve got coconuts—”

“I’m not going to the Caribbean,” Harry said. “I think that supplier I mentioned may have smuggled some of it into a warehouse here in London, and I’ve got to go check to see if it’s there.”

“A warehouse? That doesn’t seem very exciting.” Sounding disappointed, Draco crossed his arms. “Is he a dark wizard? A powerful one?”

“I don’t know who the supplier is,” Harry said. “I just know that there are people who may know we know about the Life Water who wouldn’t want us to find it.”

“That’s why it’s dangerous,” Draco said musingly.

Harry could already see Draco’s little mind working. He had that familiar gleam in his eye—the one he got as an adult when Harry handed him a new potion, the one Draco had got when he’d first de-aged, when he was inventing something new about his adult life. Harry recognized that look from school as well—Malfoy used to look like that whenever he was inventing some new torment for Harry or his friends. “Draco,” Harry said. “You can’t come with me.”

“Why would I? You just said—” Draco’s eyes widened slightly, and then he snapped his fingers, just as he had when he’d realized who Harry was. “But I’m thirty-two! I bet I do all sorts of dangerous things, don’t I, because I’m clever and know how to handle them.”

Draco wouldn’t even have got the idea, Harry realized, if Harry hadn’t given it to him. Knowingly entering into a dangerous situation had never been child-Draco’s idea of fun. It hadn’t been Harry’s either, exactly, only it had never once deterred him.

“I’ll bet I should come with you,” Draco went on. “I bet I’m all sorts of help.”

“You are,” Harry said. “You’re a huge help to me. But Draco, you only remember the spells you knew at eleven. If we encountered anyone who wanted to stop us from getting the Life Water, you could be hurt.”

Draco opened his mouth, seemed to think better of it, then closed his mouth. His lips pursed, his forehead furrowed in thought. “Well, what about you?” he asked, after another moment. “Since I’m usually helping you, don’t you need someone else to help you? And I bet you don’t know anyone half as clever as I am—”

“I don’t,” Harry interrupted.

Draco’s chest puffed up. He looked so pleased.

“Which is why I can’t risk you,” Harry said. “If you were hurt when you’re eleven, I won’t have thirty-two-year-old you to help me anymore.”

“And I am your best friend.” Draco bit his lip. “I suppose you wouldn’t want to lose me.”

“I definitely don’t.”

Draco still looked pleased, but his gaze had dropped. He was looking at Harry sideways, once again pretending he wasn’t looking at all. “Would you be very sad?”
“Yes.”

“Would you . . . find someone else to help you with your Auror work?”

“There isn’t anyone else.”

“I don’t suppose there is,” Draco said. “Would you . . . ” He trailed off. “You’d cry a lot, I expect.”

Harry wasn’t sure what to say, since he didn’t really cry that often in general. He’d barely even cried when Dumbledore died, but then again, he hadn’t got much of a chance to. “Probably,” Harry said belatedly, because Draco made it seem as though this might convince him to be happy staying here. “I’d . . . be sad I never . . .” Harry swallowed. “I never told you how much you meant to me.”

“Now don’t go getting soppy on me.” Coughing a bit, Draco turned away. “But,” he added, “you could tell me now. How much I—I mean,” he went on, his voice sounding a bit odd. “What if I don’t survive?”

Harry stared at him, Draco’s tense little back. The tips of his ears were red, and Harry didn’t really know what Draco was asking, but he was sure Draco himself didn’t quite know what he was asking either. Earlier, Harry had been convinced Draco was asking whether his grown-up self was sleeping with Harry, but this seemed different. Draco wanted to know whether Harry cared for him, and yet it still seemed to embarrass him. Possibly with Lucius discouraging anything remotely homosexual, he’d also censured discussions of feelings.

“A lot,” was all Harry could think to say. “I care about you a lot.”

“But do you . . .” Draco turned towards Harry a fraction, looking out of the corners of his eyes again. His face was splotchy with colour. “Do you like other boys—do you have other friends,” he said in a rush, “you like as much as me?”

Harry looked down at Draco, his bright eyes, his shock of white-blond hair. “I don’t like anyone the way that I like you,” Harry said, his voice a little hoarse. “I don’t think I ever have.”

Draco’s face went redder, and he turned away again. “Well,” he said, sounding deeply troubled. Then he didn’t say anything else, and for the first time Harry realized that discussing his feelings for an adult with an eleven-year-old might not be appropriate, even if the adult and eleven-year-old in question were the same person. Maybe especially since they were the same person.

“Draco,” Harry said. “I’d like to do those shield spells on you.”

“No.” Draco moved away.

“Draco,” Harry said again, stepping closer. “I didn’t mean,” he began, but he’d definitely meant it. He didn’t know how to finish.

“I don’t care if you care about me,” Draco said. “I don’t care anything about you.”

Harry’s mouth fell open in surprise. “Draco?”

“I don’t know you, do I?” Draco whirled around. “I don’t even know if I’ll like you when I do meet you. Maybe—maybe nothing you’ve told me is true!”

Draco didn’t sound angry. He sounded scared.

“I’m only eleven!” Draco went on, as though reading Harry’s thoughts. “I—I haven’t done anything
yet. I don’t have to be your friend.”

“No,” Harry agreed quietly. “You don’t have to.”

“I don’t have to do anything! I haven’t done anything. And you can’t make me.”

“I can’t.”

“When I get to Hogwarts, I’m going to ignore you. I’ll make friends with other people—people Mother and Father will like. They wouldn’t like you. And I don’t like you either.”

“All right,” Harry said, his throat feeling thick.

“I won’t ever like you. I’ll stay far away from you. And then—and then I’ll be Minister for Magic. And get married,” Draco added as an afterthought. “You’ll see. You’ll see I never cared for you at all.”

Harry waited for more, but Draco was apparently done. “Can I put those protection spells on you now?” Harry asked, after another moment.

“But.” Draco’s shoulder sagged. “Didn’t you hear? What I just said?”

“I heard. I still want you to be safe.”

“But I’ve said—I’ve said I don’t care. About you.”

“That’s all right,” Harry said. “I’ve often thought you didn’t.”

“You have?” Draco’s eyes went wide.

“Yes,” Harry said. “It didn’t matter to me. I still cared for you.”

“Oh,” Draco said breathlessly. Then he straightened up, puffing his chest out a bit. The colour began to fade from his cheeks. “That’s—that’s all right, then,” he said, repeating Harry’s words. “I mean . . .” He flapped a hand. “You can feel however you want. I expect—well.” Looking considerably more satisfied with every moment that passed, he went on, “Well, I’m going to grow up to be discreet. That’s what Father says. Discreet means you never let anyone know what you’re thinking.”

“Yes,” Harry agreed. “You’re very discreet.”

“There, you see?” Draco lifted his chin up some more. “Dad said I could be discreet. Mother was afraid I couldn’t do it.”

“Well,” Harry said. “You’ve done it.”

“Yes. I’m probably the most discreet person you know. I bet you never know what I feel at all.”

“I bet I don’t.”

“I’m a complete mystery,” Draco said happily. “I’m . . . discriminating.”

“You certainly discriminate.”

Draco preened, his nose in the air with that happy little smile. It broke Harry’s heart.

“Can I shield and ward you, now?” he asked, trying not to sound wretched.
“I suppose,” Draco said airily. “If you must.”

“I must,” Harry said, drawing his wand.

Draco flinched anyway when Harry began casting, and Harry tried to make the spells even gentler, wrapping the protection spells around Draco like something warm and soft. He wasn’t sure whether Draco had expected to be hurt for some reason—the things Draco had told him already about Lucius didn’t make it sound as though Lucius would draw his wand on his son, but you never knew with these things. Meanwhile Draco’s eyes were luminous; he watched the movement of Harry’s wand with his lips slightly parted.

“There,” Harry said, putting away his wand. “All done.”

The spellbound look faded as Draco glanced at his hands and feet, as though he could see the magic on them. “No one’s going to try to kill me, are they?” he asked, sounding a little shaken.

“No,” Harry said. “It’s just an extra precaution. My Patronus will stay with you.”

“Oh.” Startled, Draco glanced down at the fox, who had been scratching behind her ear for most of this time, watching them without much interest.

“All right,” Harry said, putting his wand away. “I shouldn’t be gone for very—”

“Maybe you should take someone with you after all,” Draco said abruptly, looking from the fox back up at Harry. “Maybe you should take—aren’t there other Aurors? You have to take care of me, after all. Or—my father could go with you. He’s very good at magic. And with dark magic. Perhaps we could—”

“I’ll be fine,” Harry said, smiling a little.

“But.” Draco bit his lip, and Harry could tell that he was conflicted. Harry remembered being angry at his older self for not being better friends with Draco. This Draco was worried about the opposite.

“It will be all right.” A moment later Harry Apparated, leaving Draco wrapped in so many safety shields that he probably wouldn’t be able to sneeze without Harry knowing.
Chapter 9

It was all right.

Harry Apparated to Grimmauld Place first, fetching his Invisibility Cloak. After putting it on, he Apparated to the street outside the warehouse on Colville Road. Still under the Invisibility Cloak, Harry activated the Seeing-Eye Ball. When he saw that no one seemed to be inside the warehouse, he made his way there quickly.

Inside the lab, Harry located the cabinet he’d been under when he’d knocked the potion over. The broken glass had been removed; the sickle he had used as a Portkey was gone. Whoever had been coming into the lab right after Harry had de-aged must have found them.

Finding the Life Water was easier than Harry had thought it might be, mostly because it was in the cabinet next to the potion that had fallen on him. After confirming it was the Life Water through one of Draco’s diagnostic spells, Harry grabbed a bottle of it. He then cast a Ward Record on the Seeing-Eye Ball so he would be able to see whether anyone came in or out of the room.

Once he was done, he Disapparated, hopefully no one having detected his presence at all.

*  

After Apparating back to Tailored Tinctures, Harry took off the Invisibility Cloak, and Draco came running down the stairs, his wand held high in his fist. The silver fox streaked behind him. “Who is it? Who’s there? I know Incendio!”

“Draco,” Harry said, as Draco hurtled into the room. “It’s me—it’s Harry.”

“Oh.” Draco caught himself against a lab bench, wavering there as though he still wanted to lunge forward. “Well then, are you . . . all right?”

“Draco.” Harry came out from around the lab bench, noticing that Draco was very pale. “I’m all right.”

“No one attacked you?” Draco still looked like he was going to fall over.

“No one attacked me,” Harry affirmed, beginning to take another step forward.

Draco must have misinterpreted, because he flung himself against Harry. “I thought dark wizards were going to come for me,” he said, clutching Harry’s robe. “I thought Muggles were going to get me.”

“How could Muggles hurt you?” Harry asked, staring down at Draco in bemusement.

“They’ve invented mechanical weapons,” said Draco. “Because they don’t have magic. They have an Adam Bomb. It has clouds made of mushrooms—fungus mists. They killed a whole town. They just wiped it out. Not a small town, either. It was—it was the size of Oxford. And then they did it again.”

“Draco,” Harry said again. He tried to peel Draco off of him, but again Draco must have misinterpreted the movement, because he pressed his face harder against Harry’s chest. Remembering how Draco had held him after he thought Harry had been in danger, Harry put his arms around Draco. It hadn’t really occurred to him at the time that Draco had done that because he
had been terrified, and touching Harry had made him feel better. “Muggles aren’t going to drop bombs on you,” Harry said.

“But they could,” Draco said, finally easing up a bit. “Or they could have shot one at you.”

*I thought you didn’t care about me,* Harry wanted to say, but it so obviously wasn’t true. Draco had managed to work himself into quite a state since Harry had left, which Harry supposed he should have predicted, only he didn’t see how he could have. Draco had always seemed worked up in school, but Harry had thought that it was just because Draco hated him, and not because Draco had too many strong emotions he had difficulty controlling. “I’m not in danger from any Muggles,” Harry said, experimentally petting Draco’s hair.

“I didn’t mean what I said,” Draco said in a rush. “You’re my friend. I mean, when I grow up—when we grow up, you’re my friend.”

“Yes.”

“And.” Draco tipped his head to look up at Harry. “And you don’t think I’m a freak, do you?”

Harry stepped back, taking his hand out of Draco’s hair. “Who told you that?”

“No one,” Draco said. “I just don’t want you to think that I am.”

“I don’t,” Harry said. “Who told you that? Was it your dad?”

“My dad?” Draco yanked himself away from Harry, his whole face a frown. “Why do you keep thinking Father would say bad things to me?”

Harry didn’t know what to say.

“My father is the best. Don’t you know—” Cutting himself off, Draco went through a series of expressions. “I suppose you don’t know after all,” he said finally. “You haven’t got a dad, have you?”

Draco had said things like that to Harry almost all the way through Hogwarts. Harry had always assumed Draco was making fun of him, but now he wondered how many times it had happened because Draco was honestly unable to understand what it might be like. “No,” was all Harry said. “I don’t.”

“Oh, well.” Draco drew himself up. “Let me tell you—fathers don’t insult you. They teach you how to be smart, and do magic, and get ahead in life. They know everything—well, mine does, anyway. *He* knows I’m not a freak, and—and he’s even taught me how to avoid people thinking I am one.”

Oh. Harry’s heart constricted painfully in his chest.

“Some people are brainless, you know.” Draco had put on that drawling tone and had his nose up in the air again—possibly feeling very confident, now that he got to teach Harry all about what having Lucius Malfoy for a father was like. Apparently, he’d forgot about Muggles dropping the A-bomb, which Lucius had likely taught him as well. “They cast sturgeons at you if you’re—if you do certain things, so you don’t do them. You be discreet, and then you can get ahead.”

“Sturgeons?”

“They’re a fish,” Draco said. “It’s a saying. ‘People cast sturgeons’. It means they’re not nice.”

“Sturgeons,” Draco said, looking haughty. Actually, he looked like he was about to start tapping his foot.

“Right,” Harry said. “What if you want to do something that’s important? More important than whether people are nice to you.”

“You’re not getting this at all,” Draco said. “It’s probably because you don’t have a dad—I guess it’s good you had a mum, then, who made you famous. It doesn’t matter whether people are nice to you, it matters whether you can get ahead. And you can’t do that if no one likes you.”

“But what about . . .” Harry swallowed again. “Being true to yourself?”

“Merlin’s toadstools. What do you even mean?”

“Like,” Harry said, because he didn’t know how to win this argument with an eleven-year-old. Hell, he wasn’t sure he could win it with an adult. “Does it really matter if you get ahead, if you can’t be yourself? If you can’t do what you want to do?”

Draco rolled his eyes. “Don’t be a nit. You can’t be yourself if you’re not ahead. You can’t do what you want to do—you’ll be in a hovel, and you’ll have no money, and everyone will be casting sturgeons. How could you possibly be yourself then? Once you get ahead, then you can be yourself. Merlin, I’m worried for you, not having parents to teach you this kind of thing. I—I must have mentored you a bit, did I?” Looking very pleased about this, Draco went on, “Took you under my wing, did I? A bit like Vince and Greg.”

Harry couldn’t help himself. “You took Crabbe and Goyle under your wing?”

“I’ll have to, won’t I? They can’t make friends on their own. And Vince can barely read. Who else is going to help them?”

Harry knew he should stop, but he couldn’t. “Why does anyone need to help them? Shouldn’t they be left on their own?”

Draco’s brow scrunched up. “That wouldn’t make me a very good friend, would it?”

“No,” Harry murmured, a warm feeling spreading through his chest, where the ache had been. “It wouldn’t.”

“Besides,” Draco said. “They’ve got to do well, haven’t they? Us pure-bloods have to stick together, or mongrels will take over the earth.”

The warm feeling abruptly vanished. “Don’t use that word.”

“What? Mongrel?” Draco shrugged. “I didn’t say the other M-one. You’re not going to be a coward about it, are you? I thought you were in Gryffindor.”

“I have to work on this potion.” Feeling sick to his stomach, Harry turned away. He’d put the Life Water on the lab bench when he’d arrived, but he’d almost forgot about it completely when Draco had launched himself into his arms. Walking back over to the bottle of water, Harry tried to tell himself that these were not things Draco felt.

These were simply things that Draco had been taught, like children were taught about Father
Christmas. Kids believed in Father Christmas not because of evidence presented, but because someone they trusted had said that it was true. Someone Malfoy trusted had told him these things, and he had clung to them as a foundation of his world, but it wasn’t who Draco was. It wasn’t. Harry had seen it in who Draco had grown up to be—someone who helped Aurors and loved his mother and loved Teddy, someone who always fought his own battles and had served his time for mistakes that he had made. Draco didn’t really believe these things; he couldn’t. They still hurt to hear.

The silver fox sat with her tail curled under her, staring up at Harry with a knowing look. She’d probably get along great with Draco’s fawn, Harry thought, and waved the Patronus away.

“Can I help?” Draco asked, swaggering over to the lab bench where the water was. “I’m excellent at potions. What am I saying? You know that. I’ll bet I help you with that as well. Were we Severus’s favourite students?”

“Pretty sure you were,” Harry said, pulling a piece of parchment and quill towards him. “I’ve just got to dash out a note.”

“To whom?”

“Actually, you can help,” Harry said, hoping to distract Draco as Harry wrote to Andromeda. Waving his wand to call Heloise, Harry said, “You can give the owl a treat.”

“Owl?”


Heloise, seeming to recognize Draco even in his younger form, flew straight to him, landing on his shoulder in a way that made Draco stumble back. “Whoa,” Draco said, but Heloise just used her beak to ruffle Draco’s hair. “What’s she doing?” Draco asked, patting his hair.

“She likes you,” Harry said.

“Well,” Draco said. “I’m not sure I like her—ow!” Heloise gently closed her beak on the shell of his ear.

“Try petting her.”

“I will, if she stops biting me.” Tentatively, Draco reached his arm across his chest to lift up to his opposite shoulder, gently touching her wing.

Heloise made a soft noise of contentment, and delighted, Draco glanced up at Harry to see whether he’d noticed Draco’s success.

Harry smiled. “She likes you a lot.”

Draco beamed.

“Her treats are hanging in that bag on that perch over near the window,” Harry said, mostly because it would take minute or two for Draco to walk over there with Heloise on his shoulder, and that would give Harry a moment to finish the note to Andromeda.

Once Harry was done with the note, he took it over to Draco and Heloise, who was happily
“Snatching treats from Draco’s hand. “She really does like me,” Draco said eagerly, looking up at Harry.

“Yes.” Harry tied the note to Heloise’s leg.

“I want to keep feeding her,” Draco said.

“You can feed her when she comes back,” Harry said. “All right, Heloise, time to go now.”

They sent the owl off, and Draco followed Harry back to the bench with the Life Water on it. Thinking how terrible it would be if the bottle broke, Harry thought of something else for Draco to do. “These are instructions your older self left for me,” Harry said, handing Draco the ledger.

“I thought you didn’t want me to see?” Draco was already taking the ledger, looking at it curiously.

“I just wanted a chance to read to find out what was going on.” Harry just hoped that Draco didn’t remember that there had been a letter also. There was no way he was ever going to let Draco’s younger self read it. “That’s about the cure to age you up,” Harry said, nodding at the ledger in Draco’s hands, “so you should read it now.”

Luckily, Draco appeared distracted by the ledger, wandering over to the window to read. Taking out one of Draco’s graduated cylinders, Harry began getting ready to add the final ingredient to Draco’s cure—and his own.

The potion Draco had prepared was a sickly yellow-brown, but when Harry added the Life Water, it abruptly changed to a stormy blue, the whole mixture beginning to swirl. According to his notes, Draco had expected this. Harry had no idea how Draco could have predicted the colour for a potion he’d never brewed, but Harry was relieved nevertheless. Opening the cabinet under the lab bench, Harry put the potion there and locked the cabinet. Unfortunately, the potion would have to mature for twelve hours before administration. The rest of the Life Water he locked into another cabinet, just for safe-keeping.

This most-important task accomplished, Harry felt a wave of relief—quickly followed by a wave of hunger. He hadn’t eaten since returning to his normal age—which meant Draco hadn’t eaten either. The wave of hunger dissipated into a wave of panic, as Harry realized he was solely responsible for Draco now, and most children were horrible at feeding themselves. No wonder Draco had lost his mind over the taxi; taking care of kids was terrible.

“Draco,” Harry said, going over to where Draco was reading by the window. Draco didn’t respond.

For a moment, Harry fully convinced himself that Draco had fainted from hunger, but then he remembered what Draco had been like last time Harry had interrupted Draco while he was reading. “Draco,” Harry said more loudly.

“It sounds horrible,” Draco said.

Harry thought about A-bombs and Lucius Malfoy’s repression—presented to his son as a kindness—and the fact that Draco apparently despised his younger self. Alarmed, Harry tried to remember whether Draco had said any of those awful things in the ledger—but no, they’d only been in the letter. “What does?”

“This so-called cure!”
“Oh,” Harry said.

“It’s going to last weeks!”

“Only a few.”

Draco asked, “Why would grown-up-me design something so appalling?”

“He did his absolute best.”

“His absolute best looks like rubbish.”

Don’t talk about him that way, Harry wanted to snap, but that wasn’t fair. “He’s tried to make it as painless as possible,” Harry said.

“It doesn’t sound painless. Maybe we need a second opinion. My mum says always get a second opinion.”

“This is your opinion. And it’s the best one there is, because you’re the best potions master there is.”

Draco looked as if his aversion to suffering was warring with his arrogance. “What about Severus?” he said finally. “Did I talk to him?”

“Professor Snape is dead.”

“What?” Draco said, shocked. “How did he die?”

“He died for someone he loved.”

Draco appeared to think about this. “He loved someone? I thought he might be . . . er.” His eyes darted away, then he drew himself up. “But Mum and Dad like him. They don’t think he’d be a bad influence. Not like the Headmaster at Hogwarts. Did you know the Headmaster of Hogwarts never even got married?”

“Yes,” Harry said carefully. “I did know that.”

“Mum said . . . she said we should pity him—Severus. Because he hadn’t any family. She said he never got married because he was too much of a swot. He couldn’t find anybody to love him. It’s the worst thing in the world, to have no family, you know. But—” Draco bit his lip, casting his eyes down. “But then you do know. Don’t you.”

“It’s all right,” Harry said, because Draco wasn’t trying to mock him or rub it in. “I get to have friends.”

Draco’s gaze darted up. “Like me?”

“Like you.”

“Severus was our friend,” Draco said, seeming troubled. “I bet he would have made it so it wouldn’t hurt.”

Draco was afraid, Harry realized finally. “It’s going to be all right,” he said. Experimentally, he put his hand on Draco’s shoulder. “Adult-you made it so you’ll be unconscious for most of it.”

“Maybe I don’t want to be unconscious,” Draco said petulantly.
“I’m sorry,” Harry said. “It’s going to be all right.”

“But how do you know?”

“Because I’ll be right there with you.”

Draco bit his lip. “You will?”

“Of course, I will,” Harry said, taking his hand off Draco’s shoulder. “Come on. Aren’t you hungry?”

“Oh,” Draco said, looking as though hunger was an entirely new concept to him, but interesting nevertheless. “I suppose—yes, I could eat.”

“What would you like to have?”

“Um.” Draco considered it further, the distress fading out of his face. “Shall we go to The Floating Monk?”

“Er,” said Harry.

Draco began to look excited, his fear over the cure apparently forgot. “I imagine we pop off to France and Belgium for lunch all the time, once we master over-ocean Apparition, but for now I figure we had better take it easy. You should change your clothes, though. I can’t imagine a uniform is suitable attire.”

Harry tried to picture saying ‘suitable attire’ as an eleven-year-old and couldn’t. In some ways Draco was strikingly like Hermione when she had been eleven, only she’d never talked about popping off to France or Belgium, and The Floating Monk was one of the most upscale restaurants Harry knew about. “I’m afraid,” Harry said, trying to think about how he should phrase this, “we shouldn’t go out.”

“Because I’m a kid? Oh, well.” Draco frowned. “I assume my political enemies would use it as a way to embarrass me.”

“How about we go to the kitchen and see what we have.” They went upstairs to the kitchen, where Harry began opening Draco’s cabinets. He didn’t know how to make nice lunches like Draco had done for him, not ever having taken time to learn many domestic spells. “You made a chicken salad, once,” he said, thinking that one couldn’t be too hard. “Would you like that?”

Draco, who had followed him into the kitchen, made a face. “I detest salad. Do you call this a kitchen?”

“It’s my favourite kitchen,” Harry said, because it was. He liked Molly’s kitchen almost as much, but this one was so small that it was cosy, and it usually had Draco in it. “How about a sandwich?”

“I’ll have a croque monsieur,” Draco said, opening a drawer and looking at its contents.

“What’s that?”

Draco glanced up at Harry, startled. “I thought it was a sandwich.”

“What does it have on it?”

“Well, I don’t know,” Draco said, moving onto the next drawer without closing the first. “Ask a house-elf.”
“How about turkey,” Harry said. “I know how to make that.”

Draco made another face. “No, thank you.”

Harry tried to think about the foods that Draco had made for Harry’s younger self. He must have liked them when he was younger, even if he imagined as an adult that he ate caviar and truffles all day. “Curry,” Harry said.

Draco was wandering through the kitchen, opening all the drawers, taking things out and leaving them there. “I don’t care for curry,” he said, frowning at a can-opener. Probably he’d never seen one. Draco must have it left over from his time during the magical restriction.

Perhaps Draco had adjusted his tastes for Harry, making more common dishes he thought a child would like. Probably young Draco was used to eating very posh things, only Harry didn’t have much experience making posh things. “Fettuccini alfredo?” Harry suggested, because at least it had a fancy name, and he knew that he could make it.

“I don’t like it.” By this time, Draco had opened all the drawers in the kitchen, looking into them without much interest. Now he was leaning to look out the window.

“Why don’t you suggest something?” Harry said, trying not to feel impatient.

Draco pulled his head out of the window. “We have a roast at Christmas.”

Harry looked in the cabinet, which had chicken, flour, sugar, bread, and an assortment of vegetables in it. “That takes hours to cook,” he said, because even if he could transform the chicken, the rest wouldn’t work out.

“Oh,” Draco said.

For the life of him, Harry couldn’t think of anything else remotely posh that he knew how to make. “Beef wellingtons,” Harry suggested because Malfoy had made them, even though Harry was sure he couldn’t make them.

“I don’t care for those.”

“Then I guess I can’t make anything you want,” Harry said, losing his patience, “unless it’s fish and chips.”

Draco’s eyes went round, his mouth falling open. “Fish and chips?”

Harry turned back to the cabinet. “We’re having turkey sandwiches.”

“Do you mean—fish and chips like they have at the Leaky Cauldron?”

Harry turned back to Draco, who was standing there with very ill-concealed longing in his large eyes.

“I wouldn’t mind,” Draco began, then swallowed. “I mean. It’s terribly dodgy, isn’t it, the Leaky? They let Muggles in. But I saw someone eating fish and chips there, through a window, once, and it seemed very—well, I suppose I could . . . I could stomach it. If forced.”

Harry stared down at him. “You’ve never had fish and chips?”

“We have fish all the time, but—not like that. I got to have chips once with Aunt Bella. Mum doesn’t—it’s very greasy, isn’t it?” Draco asked hopefully.
“Yes,” Harry said slowly, beginning to think he’d misinterpreted this whole conversation. “Very greasy.”

“I suppose.” Draco hitched a shoulder carelessly. “If that’s all you can make.”

Harry hid a smile. “I can certainly make that.”

* * *

Heloise came back during supper, and Draco walked away from the table because he wanted to pet her. When he didn’t come back to the kitchen, Harry cleared Draco’s dishes and cleaned up.

By the time Harry was done, Draco appeared thoroughly ensconced in reading. Harry went to check on the potion downstairs, leaving his Patronus with Draco. The potion appeared fine, so Harry came back upstairs, lighting another fire in the hearth. Thinking of what Andromeda had said about Draco and hearths, Harry cast a few of the colour spells again and opened up the ledger to read it again. He wanted to make sure he understood the cure, but he found himself mostly just looking at Draco’s handwriting. Everything about it was neat, precise. Controlled.

Draco must not have been as absorbed as Harry had supposed, because after a moment he closed his book and came over to the sofa. “That book said it’d take a full twelve hours for that cure to mature,” Draco said, nodding at the ledger as he sat down on the sofa. “I suppose that means we have to stay here. You never said where here was. It doesn’t belong to Severus, does it.”

“No,” Harry said. “It’s a shop. A very reputable shop. The best shop, I think. It makes potions to order.”

“It must be expensive, then,” Draco said approvingly.

“I should think so,” Harry said, closing the ledger. “We came here to work on the cure.”

“I suppose I needed ingredients.” Draco didn’t sound very interested, and Harry didn’t correct him. “That book.” Sounding troubled, Draco nodded again at the ledger. “I use a lot of words, don’t I?”

“I told you.” Trying to be reassuring, Harry set the ledger down on the side table. “You’re very clever.”

“Am I . . .” Draco stared at the fire. Seeming to muster up courage, he turned to Harry. “Do you think I’m a swot?”

Not sure what Draco was really feeling versus what his parents might have encouraged him to feel, Harry tried to speak carefully. “A bit of one.”


“You’re definitely in Slytherin.” Harry said, making his voice reassuring, now. “The Hat said it almost before it went on your head.”

“Good.” Draco turned back to the fire, which still had its green and blue, plus the yellow and red of natural fire.

All the House colours, Harry supposed.

Draco turned back to him again. “And do you . . .” He hesitated, licking his lips. “Do other people know? That I’m a swot, I mean. I don’t go around—reading, do I?”
“I,” Harry said. “No.”

“Good.” Draco turned back to the fire again. Harry thought he wasn’t going to go on, but suddenly Draco added, “It doesn’t do to be too clever. You don’t know—you don’t have parents to tell you. But it’s important to be intelligent, but not—not bookish. People think you’re boring. Or a prig. Severus . . .” He darted a look at Harry. “That was what Mum meant about Severus. She said he was too clever by half, and people were always—they always made fun of him, because he’d be off in corners by himself, reading.”

“Yes,” Harry said, feeling a familiar sting. “I think—I think people made fun of Snape. And it wasn’t right.”

“Mum doesn’t want that to happen to me,” Draco said. “She says I mustn’t always go about quoting things from books.”

Harry thought about Hermione at eleven, always quoting *Hogwarts, A History*. Malfoy had ridiculed her so cruelly, but it had never occurred to Harry that Malfoy hadn’t done it because he was intrinsically a prick. He’d done it because his parents had told him that was the way the world worked—but Harry had already known that. Lucius and Narcissa had also told Draco that Muggleborns would ruin their whole culture, and for the first time, Harry understood why Draco had believed them. Growing up with only Crabbe and Goyle for friends—even Parkinson—Draco must have felt like an alien, someone so completely different.

Harry had never thought that someone who grew up with parents who loved him and children his age who didn’t bully him could be lonely, but Draco was. He was so desperately alone.

“You don’t tell anybody, do you?” Draco said quietly. “About the books. I just assumed you knew, but—you keep it a secret. Don’t you?”

“I would never tell anyone anything about you that you didn’t want me to share,” Harry said.

“We keep each other’s secrets.” Draco nodded once, sharply. “I thought as much.”

Harry wanted to tell Draco he shouldn’t have to keep reading books a secret. He wanted to make this version of Draco feel that way adult-Draco had made Harry feel, when Harry was a child, when Draco had hugged him and said, *You are loved. You are so loved.*

Draco was staring into the fire, looking troubled. “Have I told you,” and then stopped.

“Pretendous?” Harry said.

“. . . Pretendous?” Harry said.

“He thinks Father pretends to be more important than he is,” Draco explained. “You don’t think that, do you? Father’s the best man there is. *And* he’s better-looking than Theo’s dad. Theo’s probably just jealous. He says blood purity doesn’t matter, but if that were true, I don’t see why he would . . .”

“Why he would what?” Harry asked.

*Nothing.* Draco’s cheeks were pink. “I was just . . .”
The blue flames finally faded in the hearth.

“I wanted to be his friend,” Draco said.

“He didn’t want to be yours?” Harry said softly.

“I guess not.” The unhappy look on Draco’s face tugged at his soft cheeks, making his eyes so big, his pink mouth a little bud.

“Because of your father?” Harry guessed. “Or because of blood purity?”

“Nothing like that. He thinks I’m . . .” Draco bit his lip again. “He just got the wrong idea about me; that’s all.”

Harry remembered the other time Draco had mentioned Nott, the way he’d begun talking about marriage directly after. Something sank in Harry’s chest. “Is he the one who said you were a freak?”


“You aren’t,” Harry said immediately.

“Well of course, I know I’m not.”

“No, Draco, I mean . . .” Harry stopped, remembering how awful it had been for him to come out, how Ginny had coaxed him into facing what he was—so gently, so kindly. He had tried to fight it every step of the way. “When did this happen?” Harry asked instead.

“A couple weeks ago,” Draco said, apparently not noticing that he hadn’t mentioned anything specific happening, other than Theo ‘getting the wrong idea.’ “It doesn’t matter,” Draco went on, tossing his head. “I’ll meet other boys at Hogwarts. I’ll make much better friends with them, and then—that will show him.”

Draco had met other boys at Hogwarts. Draco had met Harry.

“We’re best friends, aren’t we?” Draco went on. “I bet everyone at Hogwarts is jealous of us. They all want to be friends with us, but we’re very selective of who we’ll be friends with. We’ve got Vince and Greg—I’ll call them Crabbe and Goyle at school, of course, and I imagine we’ll have Pansy, even though she’s a girl. Who else do we have? Are we friends with Ravenclaws? I bet we’re friends with Ravenclaws; it’s good to have smart allies.”

“Why do you call Vince and Greg Crabbe and Goyle?”

“Those are their surnames.” Draco frowned at him. “But you must know that. Don’t you know that everyone uses surnames in business? No one calls Father ‘Lucius’; they all call him ‘Malfoy’—except for Mum. Except Mum doesn’t call him Lucius; she calls him—” Draco cut himself off.

“Anyway, business associates use surnames, and our professors will use surnames. So, in school, I plan to start using surnames. I imagine we call each other by surnames in school—and still do, in public. I bet in private we . . .” Draco darted a look at Harry, pretending he wasn’t doing it.

“I’ve said I wanted you to call me Harry,” Harry said. “I like calling you Draco.”

“Yes, I thought—I thought that might be the case. Anyway,” Draco went on, his cheeks a bit pink, “using surnames is convenient, isn’t it? Harry. That way you know which family everyone is from,
which is important. Imagine being a ‘Smith’.”

“I know a Smith,” Harry said. “He’s okay.”

Draco put his nose up. “How terribly common.”

“Potter isn’t that unusual either, you know.”

The nose came down. “I’m not talking about the frequency of the name, ugh. There’s so much you have to learn. You are a legacy, even if your mother was a—” Draco cut himself off again, looking quickly at Harry as though to check whether he was offended. Draco went on more slowly, “I just meant you’re from a good family. Even if you never got to know them, Harry.”

“Thank you,” Harry said. “I think.”

“Are you sad?” Draco asked, looking interested. “That you didn’t get to know your parents?”

“Sometimes,” Harry said.

“I think it would be awful,” Draco went on. “Family is more important than anything. It’s all right, though.” He settled in on the other side of the couch, leaning against the arm and sprawling his legs out, the picture of a miniature little adult at ease, his hands folded over his chest. “Since we’re best friends, I imagine we Malfoys are like a surr-. . . surr-. . . adopted family. You could come to our house on hols. I bet you’ve done that loads of times. Isn’t my mum the most beautiful woman alive, Harry? You must love her very much. She makes people feel comfortable. She always wants everyone to be comfortable, even people who are never comfortable, like Severus. Can you tell me about a Christmas we’ve had?”

“I don’t think I could.”

“That’s all right. Have I told you about the one where Dad got me a dragon? It was in an egg. Selling dragon eggs is illegal, you know, only Dad wasn’t illegal when he got it. It ‘fell into his hands.’ Only it got confiscated. He almost got arrested.”

“So that’s how you know so much about confiscating illegal dragons.” Enough time had passed since Norberta that Harry could feel amused.

“Yes. I know about a lot of things, Harry.” Draco checked Harry’s expression, as though to make sure Harry believed him, then he looked back into the fire. “Have I told you about my dance instructor? Father hexed her.”

“You did tell me that, actually.”

“That’s because we’re such good friends. I imagine I tell you everything. You didn’t have a dance instructor, did you? I bet you wouldn’t, having been raised by Muggles. What was that like? Terrible, I expect. You must love coming to our house in the summer. Have we played Quidditch on the greens?”

“We have.”

“That’s what I thought. It’s exactly what I thought would happen, when I went to Hogwarts. I would make good friends with a boy who would play Quidditch with me, and he’d come home with me on hols. It wouldn’t be Vince or Greg, because we’re already friends, and they don’t read, and it can’t be Theo because—well, now you know about Theo.” Draco looked back at Harry. “I’m glad it’s you.”
“Draco.” Harry’s voice caught in his throat.

Draco sat up from his sprawl, glancing at Harry and then mimicking his posture exactly. Harry’s arm was along the back of the couch, so he brought it down to his lap. Draco looked at Harry’s hand with interest, then jabbed his finger on the mark that said *I must not tell lies.* “This is an unusual scar,” he announced.

*I always admired how honest you were,* Draco had told him, but Harry couldn’t bear to tell younger Draco the truth. He couldn’t bear it; Harry’s heart would break in half, and he didn’t know what would happen to Draco’s. Certainly, he wouldn’t be sitting here with Harry in front of the fire. Draco wouldn’t want to be near Harry at all, and Harry didn’t know whether adult-Draco would want to after this either.

“How did you get it?” Draco was saying. “Were you tortured?”

“After a fashion.”

Draco looked at him with open interest. “Are you tortured a lot?”

“Not so very much anymore.”

Facing the fire again, Draco appeared thoughtful. “I shouldn’t like to be tortured,” he said at last, then turned his big grey eyes back to Harry. “Could you tell me about being an Auror, Harry? I imagine it’s very interesting.”

“Not all the time,” Harry said, but he chose a story to tell Draco anyway. It was about the Ragerade, mainly because Draco’s identification of that potion had proven invaluable. Harry didn’t tell Draco why he’d been on suspension, but he told Draco that he had been on suspension, and that no one else had been able to help until he’d asked Draco, and then Harry had tracked down the brewer, who’d been keeping swamp-things in his back yard in Sussex.

Draco leaned back on the couch again, falling so quiet during this story that Harry was half sure Draco had fallen asleep. As soon as Harry was done, however, Draco shot up, a bit of hair falling over his forehead. “I’ve never seen a swamp-thing,” he said. “Are they big?”

“Yes.”

The hair was almost falling into Draco’s right eye. “I wonder how I know what their bogies look like.”

“Well, you did say that you know lots of things.”

“Oh,” Draco said. “Right.”

Unable to resist, Harry moved the lock of hair.

Draco looked at him in surprise. “Mum always does that.”

“Does what?”

“Moves my hair off my forehead like that.”

“Oh,” said Harry.

“It’s all right,” Draco said, smoothing back his hair himself. “I had to have my hair cut, but they let me keep that bit. I’ll probably slick it when I go to school, since I had to get it cut anyway.”
“Why did you have to have your hair cut?” Harry asked, remembering Draco had said something about it before.

“Because of school.”

“That’s not for another few months yet.”

“Don’t be daft. I’m thirty-two.” The words didn’t have any real scorn in them, and Draco sounded sad, almost. He looked across at the fire crackling in the hearth. “Ignis rose,” he said, pointing his wand at the fire, and the flames went red. “Dad said I should get used to short hair.”

“Your father always wore it long.”

“Yes, but . . .” Draco put his hands on his cheeks, almost as though to feel whether they were hot. Harry guessed they were, as Draco’s cheeks had gone quite red. Turning back to Harry, Draco said, “You—if I tell you a secret, you won’t tell?”

“I won’t tell.”

“I—I liked to wear ribbons. In my hair. Mum would plait it. It—we knew it wasn’t—no one ever saw us, except Father. It was just for fun.”

Harry was careful not to change expressions. “I think your hair would look very nice with ribbons,” was all he said.

“But boys don’t wear ribbons,” Draco said miserably.

“Some boys do,” Harry said steadily. “I know a boy who’s got tattoos all over, and at least five piercings, and he always wears a braid on one side, and it’s always got something in it—twine or beads or a ribbon. He’s got the biggest muscles you’ve ever seen.”

Draco’s eyes were wide.

“He tames dragons,” Harry added, just in case Draco still thought Charlie Weasley was too girly.

“Wow. You really know someone like that?”

“Yes.”

“Is he good-looking?”

Harry tried to hide a smile. “Very.”

“And his wife—doesn’t mind? About the ribbon?”

Harry’s smile fell away. “He doesn’t have a wife.”

“Oh.” Draco flopped back into his corner of the couch, but this time he curled up instead of sprawling out. After a while, he said, “I used to want to be a dragon tamer.”

“Why did you change your mind?” Harry asked.

“It doesn’t pay enough,” was all Draco said.

Draco looked so small there, curled up in the corner, watching the fire. Harry wanted to tell him being a dragon tamer would be all right. He wanted to tell him everything would be all right.
Looking at the fire as well, Harry rubbed the scar on his hand.

“I miss . . .” Draco’s voice caught oddly.

“You miss your mum?” Harry asked quietly.

“I miss my hair,” Draco said, choking back a sob. He turned his face into the arm of the couch, pressing it there.

Harry didn’t know what to do. When he had cried when he was ten, Draco had held Harry in his arms and made him feel that everything would be okay. Awkwardly, Harry patted Draco on the back. “It will grow back,” he offered finally.

“No,” Draco said, coming back up for air. He sat up on the couch, twisting to face Harry. “I shan’t ever grow it back, ever. People like Theo—well, I’m not going to have big muscles; I’m scrawny, and I’m not ever going to tame dragons. I’ve got to have short hair forever, and I’ve got to wear grey, and I’ve got to—to be discreet; I’ve got to pretend . . .” He took a shuddering breath, and then another.

“Did someone call you scrawny?”

“Why are you always saying someone told me things? I know what I am!”

“But you’re not scrawny,” Harry said. “You’re perfect.”

“But I’m not perfect,” Draco went on, sounding slightly hysterical. “I’m the opposite of perfect! And Mum said—she said I can’t have hysterics! She said—she said I can’t cry,” Draco cried.

Harry bit his lip. “Now that’s just silly.”

“She says—she says the toilet is the only place you can cry at Hogwarts, because in the dungeons you have your mates; in the corridors someone might see—and—and—”

“That’s ridiculous,” Harry said, putting his arm around Draco’s shoulders. “People are allowed to see you cry.”

“But they’re not.” Draco gasped for breath, and Harry thought he might be hyperventilating.

Not knowing what to do, Harry squeezed Draco’s shoulders tighter. He didn’t know what had brought this on at all.

“They’re not,” Draco went on, “because I’m—what if they find out I—and there are all those other kids; they’re going to—I don’t want to go to school!”

Oh. “You’ve already been to school,” Harry said, trying to be soothing. “You’re thirty-two.”

“Father said—he said the Headmaster is unnatural. That he’ll—he’ll put nasty ideas into my head.”

“I don’t think that’s true.”

“You don’t understand,” Draco wailed. “I already have nasty ideas!”

“Draco.” Harry felt his magic gather up inside him. He didn’t know what to do with it.

“And what if—what if Headmaster Dumbledore—what if he knows? What if he finds out? What if other kids find out about—about—about the ribbons?”
“They don’t,” Harry said, trying to push his magic back. Now was not the time to have the conversation about how none of the ideas that Dumbledore had were nasty.

“But what if they do? What if other kids don’t like me? What if I don’t have friends? What if they hate me?”

“I like you,” Harry said. “I like you so much.”

“Yes.” Draco sniffled. “I suppose that—I suppose it turns out all right. In the end. But I can’t help . . . I’m so worried about it.”

“Here,” Harry said, conjuring a handkerchief. “Blow your nose. It’s okay to be worried about school, Draco. My godson was terrified of it.”

After blowing his nose, Draco looked up at him with watery eyes. “He was?”

“Yes. He’s a Metamorphmagus. He was afraid all the kids at Hogwarts would ask him rude questions about it.”

“A Metamorphmagus?” Draco blew his nose again. “I’ve never met one.” His look turned thoughtful. “Can he make his skin have scales?”

“Questions like that,” Harry pointed out. “He thought people would say stuff like that to him.”

“That’s not rude.”

“It’s a bit intrusive isn’t it? Like someone telling you that you can’t wear ribbons in your hair.”

Draco made a face at him. “Father told me I couldn’t. It wasn’t intrusive; he was protecting me. He told me so people wouldn’t mock me.”

“But Teddy can’t help being a Metamorphmagus, any more than you can help wanting ribbons.”

“I don’t want ribbons anymore; I’m not pathetic.” Draco appeared to be over his little outburst, moving on to curiosity. “His name is Teddy?”

“Yes,” Harry said, taking his arm off Draco’s shoulders.

“And he’s your godson? How did you get a godson?” Draco seemed far more interested in this than in learning how to be polite to people.

“A professor I loved very much,” Harry said. “And his wife. I loved her as well, and—they had a son, and—and they asked me.”

“Oh. You must have made swell marks,” Draco said, wiping his nose.

Harry smiled. “Not very.”

“Well.” Draco appeared to be thinking. “Did the kids ask mean questions? At Hogwarts, I mean. To Teddy?”

“Some of them did,” Harry said.

“Why?”

“Because some kids aren’t nice.”
Looking away, Draco started playing with the handkerchief, which was a bit gross. There was snot all over it. “I’m not nice,” he said suddenly.

Harry was silent.

“Mother says I need to try to be more gracious. And Father thinks I’m too . . . disagreeable. He says you have to be agreeable, so—so other people agree with you.”

“Sometimes I wasn’t nice,” Harry said, after a long moment. “There are times when you shouldn’t be.”

“Oh, no.” Draco sniffled. “Mother says—she says it doesn’t matter what you feel on the inside. On the outside you always have to be courteous. It’s this thing called decorum—like decorating. That’s what being discreet is about, you know. You decorate so people don’t know, only—I’m not good at it yet. Mother says everything on my insides always comes out.”

“I quite like your insides, though,” Harry pointed out.

“That’s because you’re a Gryffindor. If you were cunning, you could decorate, and then you’d get what you want. Gryffindors don’t get what they want because they’re—they’re blatant. I can’t be blatant, especially because I’m—well. I’ve got to decorate, is what I’m saying.”

“Your mother and father tell you how to act a lot.”

Draco cast his eyes toward the ceiling. “See, you don’t know, because you’re an orphan. They’re trying to help me. They’re moulding me.”

“Right,” Harry agreed. “But they seem to be moulding you into who they want you to be, rather than who you want to be.”

“Don’t be so utterly daft,” Draco said, sounding disgusted. “I want to be like them. I want to be just like Dad.”

“Then maybe you better start growing back your hair.”

Draco glared at him, his eyes beginning to flash.

“I’m sorry!” Harry put up his hands. “I just meant—you’re a different person than your father. You can’t be him. You have to be you.”

“I know; I just . . .” Draco flung himself back into the corner of the couch, sprawling out again. He moved around a lot, and Harry wondered whether Draco had too much energy to sit this long on the couch. He didn’t appear to want to leave however, for he went on to say, “I just wish I was more like him.”

“I’m glad you’re like you,” Harry said. “I like you better.”

“You do?” Draco slid a look over at him again.

“Immensely,” Harry said, wishing he could think of things that would make Draco feel less restless and morose. When Harry had been ten, Draco had thought of all sorts of things to keep him entertained—making the floor grow fur, flying the couch around. Somehow Harry thought Draco wouldn’t appreciate those things. He’d think that Harry was patronizing him.

“My dad loves my mum a lot,” Draco said.
“That’s a good thing,” Harry said, because Draco sounded miserable about it.

“I know,” Draco said, sounding even more miserable. “He loved her so much—he indulged her. When it came to me, I mean. He let her—well, you know about the ribbons. And we played with dolls.” He shot up, sitting straight so that he could face Harry. “You won’t tell anyone about that, either, will you?”

“Of course not.”

Slumping back against the arm of the couch, Draco went on, “Father let it go on too long. The ribbons and the dolls. He—he fell down on his job moulding me, and he’s worried other boys won’t like me in school. Well, and that girls won’t like me either. It’s very important that girls like me. I’ve got to take one to a dance, if there’s a dance at Hogwarts. That’s how Father and Mother started courting.”

Harry swallowed hard. “Some boys who didn’t like you in school may learn to love you after it.”

“But Father’s right; don’t you see? I’m not ever going to love a girl the way that Dad loves Mum. I know I never will.”

*You don’t need to love girls,* Harry desperately wanted to say, but he didn’t.

“And Father loves me, as well,” Draco went on. “He loves me so much. So much, he would do anything for me. He just wants what’s best for me, and I—I’m going to disappoint him.”

“You’re not a disappointment.”

“But I’m going to disappoint *him,* and that’s all that really matters.”

“Maybe,” Harry said. “But you don’t disappoint me. Remember that, when you grow up. You far surpass every expectation I ever had of you.”

“Well, of course I surpass everyone else’s expectations.” Draco put his nose up, even though the rest of him was slumped against the side of the couch.

“I miss you,” Harry said in a rush.

Draco turned toward him. “I’m right here.”

“I mean older you. I miss him.”

“Well, then, what am I? Mushy peas?”

“You’re much younger, for one thing.”

“Oh, my days,” Draco said, rolling his eyes.

“Are you hungry again yet?” Harry asked. “We’ve yet to eat cake.”

“Cake?” Draco perked up.

Cake was one of the few culinary transfiguration spells Harry knew; he’d done it a few times for Teddy. “Come on,” Harry said, standing up. “How about you tell me another Christmas story while I make one for us?”

“Why would I tell you a Christmas story?” Draco asked, following Harry into the kitchen.
“Because you’ve told me holidays are happy,” Harry said. “I like hearing about you being happy.”

“You’re weird,” Draco said, but told him a story anyway.

*

Harry’s cake was not as nice as Draco’s had been, but it was nice enough. Draco pronounced it not nearly as good as the cakes made by house-elves at the Manor, but he took two slices of it, so Harry counted it a win. He rambled through the entire dessert, and when they went back to the sitting room, he went on rambling in front of the fire for another hour.

“I think it’s time for bed,” Harry said, after the hour was up.

“I don’t have to have a bed-time. I’m thirty-two.”

This was becoming a common refrain. “Right,” Harry agreed, standing up, “but I’m knackered, and I’m going to bed. We’re going to start your cure once the twelve hours are up, so you might want to get some rest before we do.”

“I’ll stay up,” Draco said. “Where are you sleeping?”

“There are bunk beds.”

“Bunk beds?” Sounding interested, Draco got off the couch.

“They’re downstairs,” Harry said, heading to the bookcase. He started looking for that fairy tale book, the one with the leather cover and vines all over it that Draco had read to him. “I thought you might like to read a book.”

“Right,” Draco said, sounding confused, “but I’ve got three over there. And six there.” He pointed to the piles near the floral chair.

“Sure.” At last, Harry found the book and pulled it out of the shelves. “But I thought maybe we could read together. How about this one?”

Draco made a face at him. “Why do you even have that book? It’s for babies.”

Harry looked down at the book, trying not to let his face fall.

“And how would we even read together?” Draco went on. “What if one of us has to turn pages at a different rate? It sounds inconvenient.”

“I meant,” Harry said, also trying not to sound helpless or disappointed or any of the things that he was feeling, “I could read to you.”

“Oh my days.” Putting his hands on his hips, Draco looked at him in utter disgust. “This is because you don’t have parents, isn’t it? Parents do that when you’re seven, Harry. When you’re eleven you’re grown up, and no one reads to you unless you’re pathetic. I always have to teach you things, don’t I?”


Draco followed, announcing, “I’m not going to sleep. I want to see the bunk beds,” as though Harry might call him on it.
They went through the lab to the bedroom, where Harry reinforced the sagging bed with more enchantments to keep it a bunk bed. He also Reducio’ed pyjamas for Draco, careful to avoid referencing the fact that the pyjamas in fact belonged to Draco’s older-self. Younger-Draco had already mocked the size and furnishings of the bedroom, and Harry didn’t fancy Draco going through another breakdown when he learned how deeply he’d disappointed Lucius by living behind a shop.

Draco made Harry leave so Draco could put on the pyjamas, seeming to have forgot he’d said he wasn’t going to sleep yet. Harry transfigured his Auror robes into pyjamas for himself, and when he went back in, Draco had already claimed the top bunk. “I thought you weren’t going to sleep,” Harry pointed out.

“I’m not,” Draco said. “I’m going to read. Accio Tides of Atlantis!” Wildly, Draco waved his wand from the top bunk. “Accio Tides of Atlantis! Accio Tides of Atlantis!”

“Maybe you could have got it when we were looking at the bookshelves,” Harry said, trying not to sound annoyed at him.

“Accio Tides of Atlantis!”

Sighing, Harry grabbed Draco’s arm as it flung out from the bed. “Like this.” With one hand, Harry loosened Draco’s tense fingers on the wand. With his other, Harry helped Draco make the snatching gesture for Accio. “Accio Tides of Atlantis,” Harry said.

“It’s not going to work if you say it,” Draco said.

“I think it will. Your wand likes me.”

Eyes widening, Draco looked down at his wand. “It does?”

“Yes. We’re friends.

Draco looked back at Harry, then at the wand, then at Harry. Draco bit his lip. “I could tell,” he said finally, his voice soft.

“Really?” Harry asked, annoyance having mostly worn off into amusement. Draco was always saying he knew everything.

“The magic—hums. More. When you—when you do it with me. It’s like that when my Mum and Dad help me with my practice wand.”

Harry didn’t know what to say.

The Tides of Atlantis bumped Harry on the shoulder, then floated neatly into Draco’s lap. “Lumos!” Draco said. “You can turn off the light, since you’re going to sleep,” he said, opening the book and snuggling down onto his pillow. “You better not snore.”

“All right.” Harry got into bed.

“Harry?” Draco said, one minute later.

Young-Draco was nothing like Harry had been, but he was a much bigger chatterbox, even if he did like to read, so Harry had almost expected this. “Yes, Draco?” Harry asked, amused that he found himself saying it in the same way that Draco had to him.
“Do you want to read my book?”

“No,” Harry said. “You can read it.”

“It’s really good,” Draco said.

“I’ll just go to sleep,” Harry said, not expecting to sleep at all.

Draco put his head over the side, just as Harry himself had done when he was ten. “But it’s stupendous. There are fish-people—I don’t think fish-people are real; they’re made-up, but I think maybe there used to be fish-people, and anyway there are mermaids, so fish-people could be real.”

“Also,” Harry said, “there are swamp-things.”

“Don’t be a nit. Swamp-things aren’t related at all. Here.” Draco handed the book over the side of the bed, so Harry had to grab it or leave Draco’s small hand holding an enormous tome. “You can use my wand, too,” Draco said, handing that over the side once Harry had taken the book. The wand was still emitting light, flashing in Harry’s eyes.

“I have my own wand,” Harry pointed out.

“Yes,” Draco said, waggling the wand toward Harry’s face. “But my wand is your friend, and mine’s already Lumos’ed, so you don’t have to cast one. My Lumos is really good.”

Harry took the wand, just so the light would stop shining in his face. Draco moved his head and shoulders back to his bunk.

“How do you like the book?” Draco asked, after another minute.

Harry been holding onto the book and wand until Draco asked for them back. “Um,” Harry said. “I can’t see. I took off my glasses.”

“Well, that’s silly. Accio them.”

Sighing, Harry picked his glasses up off the table beside the bed.

After another minute, Draco demanded, “Have you got to the part where the fish-king has to sell his daughter, or they’ll rise the island above the sea again?”

“Not yet.”

“That’s chapter four,” Draco said. “Chapter four’s the best so far.”

“Er,” said Harry. “I started at the beginning.”

“Don’t start there,” Draco said. “Start at chapter four.”

“Okay.”

“What page are you on?” Draco asked a moment later.

“Seventy-three.”

“Right,” Draco said. “They’re long chapters. I read fast. What’s happening?”

“Um,” Harry said. “Chapter four?”
Draco put his head over the side again. “But what does it say?”

“Er,” Harry said. He looked down at the page. “Queen Alisbah—”

“Alisbah.” Draco’s head and shoulders disappeared again.

“Queen Alisbah is eating and the King’s just received a message from a crab.”

“Don’t summarize,” Draco said appearing over the side again. “Read it.”

Harry read a sentence for him, following along with his finger so the letters wouldn’t jump, which was hard while holding the wand.

Draco had disappeared again. “Now read the next part.”

“Draco,” Harry said. “Do you want me to keep reading to you?”

“Yes, please.”

“Oh, my God,” said Harry.

“What?” Draco appeared again.

“Never mind. Do you want me to do voices, too?”

“You do voices?” Draco seemed interested.

“I can try.”

“No one does them as good as Dad,” Draco said. “I guess you can give it a go.”

“Well, thanks for your permission,” Harry said, but read the next two pages.

“You’re not a good reader at all,” Draco said, after the two pages were up.

“So I’ve been told,” Harry said, wanting to scratch his eyes out.

“I better come down there and help you.”

“Draco,” Harry began, but Draco was already climbing down the side of the bunk bed, which didn’t have a ladder.

“Budge over,” he said, when he got to the ground.

“There isn’t room,” Harry protested.

“Don’t whinge,” Draco said. “Of course, there’s room. Budge over.”

Draco was already starting to get on the bed on top of the covers, so Harry budge over as much as he could. “Read it to me,” Draco said, picking up the book again and handing it to Harry.

“I thought I read terribly,” Harry said, opening the book.

“You do,” Draco said.

Harry had got through two sentences when Draco said, “You don’t need to put your finger like that. I’m not four.”
Draco always seemed eager to list the ages he wasn’t. “I was doing it for me,” Harry said.

“Why?”

Harry sighed. “It’s hard for me to read.”

Draco looked up at him quickly. “Like Vince?”

“I imagine so.”

“Then . . .” Draco’s small brow scrunched with sorrow. “You don’t like to read?”

“Draco . . .” Harry swallowed another sigh. “Not really.”

“But.” Draco’s eyes searched his. “But we . . .” He bit his lip. “I must help you,” he said, settling back against Harry. “I help you in school, don’t I? I’m the one that reads to you. Do you like it, Harry? Do you like it when I read to you?”

“I’ve liked it when you read to me.”

“I can hold the book for you, Harry.” His voice eagerly solicitous, Draco grabbed the book away. “I’ll keep your place, so you can look at the letters. That’s what I do for Vince. I’m a good friend, aren’t I?”

“Yes,” Harry said faintly.

“I’ll bet I like doing it for you. I like doing it for Vince—I like helping him. And you help me, don’t you? I bet you help me in other ways. I bet you’re clever in other ways. Aren’t you, Harry?”

“I . . . reckon.”

“I like you, Harry,” Draco whispered. “I like it when we read together like this. Do you like it as well?”

Harry took a deep breath. “Draco—”

“And I’m still discreet, aren’t I?” Draco breathed. “No one ever knows.”

Oh, God.

“I never do anything weird,” Draco went on. “You don’t think I’m a freak, do you?”

“No,” Harry said tightly. “I don’t.”

“Because you know I’m just helping you read. I do it like this with Vince. He doesn’t think I’m a freak. He knows I’m just helping him.”

“All right, Draco.”

“What’s this word?” Draco poked at the book. “We’ll say it together. ‘Remem—’”

“Remember.”

“Very good.” Draco beamed at him. “Now I’ll read you the next part, and you’ll get the hang of it.”

Draco read for a while. Harry had got so used to Draco’s light voice droning on that he felt himself nodding off, when finally Draco said, “Now you read it. I’ll keep your place with my finger and help
you when you don’t know the words.”

“I know the words. It’s just the—never mind,” Harry said, because he didn’t want to bother explaining. He’d never been able to explain it well anyway; only Hermione had seemed to get what he was talking about, and that was fifth year. She’d taught him the reading spell then, which had helped a lot.

Harry read for a while, until Draco’s finger fell off the page, his head against Harry’s shoulder. Careful not to wake Draco up, Harry pointed his wand, Levicorpus’ing Draco back up to the top bunk.

* 

Harry woke to his wand ringing to alert him that the potion had matured.

“Draco,” Harry said, after fetching the cure from the locked cabinet. He turned on the light.

Draco was spread out every which way on the bed at angles that couldn’t possibly be comfortable. His hair was spread out too, his pyjama shirt riding up on his narrow waist.

“Draco,” Harry said again, shaking him by the shoulder. “Wake up.”

“Mum,” Draco said, and opened his eyes. “You’re not Mum.” He frowned.

“It’s four-thirty,” Harry said. “The cure is ready.”

“Oh.” His hair sticking up all over the place, Draco rubbed his eyes. “Right.”

“Do you want to stay in bed?” Harry asked.

“I’ve brought it here. The instructions say you’ll go to sleep when you age up, so you won’t feel it at first anyway.”

“A year at a time, right?”

“A year at a time.”

Draco yawned. “At least I don’t have to go to school. Again, I mean. I mean, I can get first year all over with in—how long? A few hours?”

“Yes.” Harry held up the potion. “It’s turned a nice colour,” he said, because the swirling storm in the glass had resolved into something almost completely clear, with just a trace of blue. This matched the colours that adult-Draco had predicted, so Harry was feeling pretty good about it.

“Give it here,” Draco said, holding his hand out and wiggling his fingers. When Harry gave him the bottle, Draco turned it, as if to look at it in the light. “I have to drink the whole thing?”

“Yes.”

“Well. It better not taste gross.” Then without further ceremony, Draco tipped his head back and started drinking. “It’s not that bad,” he added, after a long draught.

“Do you feel okay?” Harry asked anxiously.

“Worried about me, are you?”

“Yes.”
Draco’s smirk softened a bit. “It’s okay, Harry. I won’t tell anybody you can’t read.”

“Don’t be a ponce,” Harry said. “Drink your potion.”

Draco took another long sip. “There’s quite a bit of it,” he said.

“Are you still okay?”

“Heavens,” Draco said. “Stop clucking about. You’re worse than Mum.”

“Draco,” Harry said, because at some point, Draco was going to remember about Narcissa—but Draco was tipping back the bottle again, drinking the rest.

“Well,” Draco said, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. “That was—”

Then the bottle dropped, and Draco slammed back onto the bed.

“Draco!” Harry said, the glass crashing to the ground. Harry didn’t care, because Draco was lying there motionless on the top bunk, and Harry didn’t know what he’d given him. Draco had made the potion; Harry hadn’t known what was in it. Harry had trusted Draco, but what if he couldn’t? What if Draco had put something in there to hurt himself so he could fix Harry; it sounded like something Draco would do. Draco had done it before—he’d done this, made himself a child.

Harry looked at Draco’s prone body, feeling for a pulse, putting a hand by Draco’s nose and mouth to try to feel whether he was still breathing. The pulse was steady, and Harry could feel Draco’s soft breath. Taking a deep breath of his own, Harry tried to calm himself down.

Fuck.

He should have called someone. He shouldn’t have tried to do it by himself, only Draco didn’t want anyone to see him this way, and Hermione and Ron were still under the influence of something, and Harry didn’t know who else was involved. The only thing that remained was to wait and hope the potion worked.
June 2012

**Harry Potter:** 31 years
**Draco Malfoy:** 12 years

Three hours later, Harry had cleaned up the glass and transfigured clothes for Draco to wear when he woke up. Draco’s instructions had said to stay within a radius of ten meters, which had Harry too worried to leave long enough to have a shower, but he’d Scourgified himself, then transfigured his clothes back into his Auror robes. The robes had been under enough spells by this point that he was going to need to get new ones, but Harry wasn’t worried about that. He was worried about Draco, who hadn’t moved.

His face had changed, though. It hadn’t quite changed fast enough or dramatically enough for Harry to see Draco’s flesh actively move, but his face had got a bit longer. Some of the baby fat had melted away.

Harry had changed the bunkbeds back into Draco’s original bed, mostly so Harry could see Draco more easily. He’d also enlarged Draco’s pyjamas, because Draco was meant to be twelve after this first bit, and twelve was larger than eleven. Harry didn’t know how much larger, because he’d been smaller then as well, so Harry had just guessed. Draco had seemed to grow into the pyjamas without dying or suffering severe bodily harm, so that was good. That was great. Harry made himself breathe.

A gasp filled the room, and Harry jumped off the stool he’d brought into Draco’s bedroom from the lab. Draco was sitting straight up in bed, as though he hadn’t fallen back at all. His face definitely looked older.

“Draco,” Harry breathed.

“Potter,” Draco spat, in such a familiar way that Harry flinched. If Harry hadn’t been losing his mind, he might have thought about how much Draco hated Harry after first year and decided how he would handle it. Harry hadn’t forgot it, but he hadn’t let himself think about it. Maybe a part of him had even hoped it wouldn’t happen, but it had to. It had to, if he was going to get his Draco back. “Yes,” Harry said.

Draco’s lip curled. He struggled with the bedclothes, then finally untangled them from his legs. “I want some clothes.”

“I made some for you,” Harry said, gesturing. “There.”

Getting off the bed, Draco went over to the clothes, picking up the dress shirt with two fingers, as though it were covered in slime. “Hideous. Exactly what I’d expect from you. Well—are you going to watch me change, or what?”

Harry closed his eyes, taking out his wand. “*Expecto Patronum*,” he said, thinking of a time when Draco had liked him. The silver fox came out, and Harry left it in the room with Draco, afraid to leave him alone in this state.

“I don’t need your ugly fox spying on me, you old perv!” Draco called as Harry went out.
Harry waited in the lab outside the bedroom for five minutes, then ten. “Draco?” he called, knocking on the door.

“I’m not done yet!” came the strangled voice inside.

Harry waited another five. “Draco—”

“Leave me alone!”

“I’m going to come in,” Harry said, opening the door.

Draco sat on the floor by the bed, his knees up with his face against them. He’d changed his clothes, and the silver fox was sitting beside him, looking forlornly at Draco’s shaking shoulders.

“Oh,” Harry said.

He knew now what he should have done, when he’d found Draco this way after his mum had died. He should have touched him. He should have held him. He should have called him darling, because he was.

Harry knew that Draco wouldn’t welcome it now. Harry knew it, but the urge to touch him was there, when it never had been before. He didn’t know whether it was because of what Draco had done when Harry had been young. Whatever the reason, Harry felt as though something had opened up inside of him, as if he could finally access a part of himself that had been closed for so long before.

Harry tried it, sitting on the floor beside Draco. “Draco,” he said, experimentally putting his hand on Draco’s shoulder.

“You were meant to be my friend,” Draco sobbed. He didn’t shake Harry off. If anything, he leaned into it a bit.

Tentatively, Harry put his arm around Draco’s shoulders, and Draco just—melted, going boneless against him, face pressing into Harry’s chest.

“Oh,” Harry said again, feeling overwhelmed. He tried holding Draco to him.

“Why didn’t you like me? You said you would like me. You said you would—”

“Shh,” Harry said, because Draco had said it to child-him. “I do like you. I do.”

“You don’t,” Draco said. “You like Weasel and that—that—”

“Please don’t say it,” Harry said, holding Draco tightly.

“Say what?” Draco wailed. “What does it matter? I don’t care what you want me to say! You don’t like me!”

“I do,” Harry said again, stroking his hair. “Just not—right away.”

“When?” Pulling away, Draco sniffled. “Next year?”

Harry hesitated. “A—a bit longer than that.”

“Fuck.” Draco had turned away, but his gaze darted toward Harry. “I’m twelve; I can say fuck. I don’t normally cry either. I’m nothing like I was when I was eleven. Forget everything I told you. I
“I didn’t even like you anyway.”

“But I still like you.”

“What about Weasel?” Draco said sourly.

“I like him too. Not . . .” Harry swallowed. “Not the way I like you.”

“Why—why did you pick him anyway? He’s not cool. He’s got freckles. He’s not at all good-looking.”

“Draco,” Harry said. “I didn’t pick him. Ron was kind to me. His mum was kind to me.”

“His mum,” Draco said, appalled.

“I never had a mum before.” For some reason, Harry wanted to explain—not to excuse his actions, but so that Draco would understand. He wanted Draco to understand the way that Harry had acted toward him had nothing to do with Draco liking boys or ribbons or books; it had to do with the way that Draco had acted. “I never had anybody who was kind to me,” Harry went on. “Not really. Ron was kind. You were—Draco, you were cruel to him.”

“He laughed at me.”

“No, he didn’t.”

“Yes, he did! On the train! He laughed at my name!”

_You’ve got to admit, it’s a ridiculous name_, Harry wanted to say, but he refrained. “You tried to get Hagrid arrested.”

“He was doing something illegal! Why should my dad almost be arrested for it, and not your stupid groundskeeper? He’s an oaf anyway!”

“Draco.” Harry stood up. “Please don’t call him names.”

Draco leapt to his feet as well. “Why shouldn’t I?”

“You tried to get me in detention!” Harry blurted.

“I got in detention as well!”

“Oh God.” Taking off his glasses, Harry rubbed his eyes. Then his face. His whole jaw itched, with the beard. He should shave it off. Fuck. He did not want to go down this road. He did not want to argue with Draco about every single thing that had happened at Hogwarts. It would make them hate each other again. It would destroy the distance they had come; it wasn’t fair. Christ. It wasn’t fair.

“You still like me though,” Draco said after a while. “You still like me even though I got you in detention.”

“Yes.” Harry put his glasses back on. “I still like you.”

“Better than Weasley.”

“I didn’t say—” His voice too loud, Harry cut himself off. “I didn’t say I liked you better, just in a different way.”
“I’m more intelligent, I expect.”

“Probably,” Harry said, turning around to face Draco again. “But he’s stronger and braver than you, and never bullied anyone, so that’s three points to your one.” Draco’s face fell, and Harry regretted it instantly. “Draco, I’m sorry. You’re a good person. You—if you could know the things you’ve done for me . . . I just. It’s really hard, when you’re cruel about people that I care about.”

“Weasel was cruel to people I care about. He bullied Crabbe and Goyle.”

“That wasn’t bullying, because they were physically—you know what, it doesn’t matter. Ron fought back because Crabbe and Goyle were awful to us, just like you were awful to me.”

“But you still like me,” Draco said.

“Yes,” Harry said, drawing a deep breath. “I do.”

“Why?”

“Because when you grow up—”

“When I grow up.” Draco’s voice was oddly steady. “How about now?”

Harry looked at him helplessly. “You’re a child.”

“A child you don’t like.”

Harry didn’t know what to say.

“It’s all right,” Draco said, lifting his chin. “I don’t like you either. You’re much different than I expected, although—I wish I’d found out you couldn’t read. I could have used that against you.”

“You don’t mean that.”

Draco’s chin jutted out farther. “Yes, I do.”

Harry turned away. He couldn’t get drawn into this; he had to think. Draco was a child, and the potion was going to age him up again in another few hours, and Harry had to make sure he was safe. It didn’t matter what Draco said; it didn’t matter. He was still the same person. He was the same person. Harry sighed, turning back to Draco. “Are you hungry?”

“Not if I have to look at you.”

“Draco. I’m thirty-one. Don’t act like I’m the same person.”

“I will if I want to.”

Harry stared at the ugly expression on Draco’s face. “Let’s go to the Leaky Cauldron,” Harry said suddenly. “It still might be dangerous to go out, but we’ll wear disguises.”

The sneer fell away. “Pardon?”

“You still like fish and chips, don’t you? Turns out, everybody likes fish and chips. Let’s go to the Leaky Cauldron, and you can have fish and chips the way they’re meant to be had, and I’ll get you a Butterbeer.”

Draco made another face.
“Don’t pretend you don’t like Butterbeer,” Harry said. “I saw you drink it at The Three Broomsticks.”

“I go to The Three Broomsticks?” Draco perked up. “When we go to Hogsmeade?”

“Third year,” Harry said.

“Are we friends then?”

“Not yet.”

Draco looked disgruntled. “It’s morning. That’s too early for fish and chips.”

“The Leaky will serve anything,” Harry said. “Come on. It will be fun.”

“That’s because the Leaky is second-rate. Father says.”

“Right,” Harry said. “So, come there and slum it with me, and you can think about how much better you are than all the Muggles. You can even tell me how much better you are than all the Muggles. Just don’t tell anyone else—especially the Muggles.”

“You’re mocking me.”

“A little.”

“But . . .” Draco bit his lip. “You’re meant to be my friend.”

“Right,” Harry said again. “But sometimes friends mock each other. You mock me all the time.”

“I do?” Draco’s eyes went large. “But how is that different than—?”

“It’s different,” Harry said. “It’s different when I know you’re teasing, when you never say things that will really hurt me.”

“Like what things?”

Harry felt like he shouldn’t have to explain this, and yet he understood better now why he did. “If I tell you,” he said, “are you just going to use it against me?”

Draco opened his mouth, then closed it and shook his head. “I—I won’t. I’ll take an Unbreakable Vow, if you like.”

“No, don’t Vow about things like that. Just—try to do your best.” Harry looked down for a moment, trying to think about why, when they were children, Draco had seemed so truly awful. Catching sight of the scar on his hand, Harry ran his thumb over it. I will not tell lies. Sucking in a breath, Harry looked up. “It hurts me when you say unkind things about Ron and Hermione and Hagrid. It hurts me when you say unkind things about my parents.”

“Oh. I see.” Draco sounded troubled. “Is this . . . what Mother meant? About people not liking me if . . . if I’m indecorous?”

Harry thought Narcissa was fucked up about being decorous. Being kind wasn’t about hiding who you were, it was about being kind, but Harry didn’t know how to explain that he thought it was terrible that Narcissa and Lucius had encouraged Draco to hide himself. The worst part of it was, Narcissa and Lucius had wanted to protect Draco, and that was understandable. They’d even been trying to make Draco get along with people better, and in some ways that went hand-in-hand with
being a good person—but it wasn’t the same. Harry didn’t know how to say all that, so what he said was, “I’d say you’ve been indecorous. Yeah.”

“Oh.” Draco scowled, but the expression was directed at the floor and looked rather pensive.

“So,” Harry said. “Will you go to the Leaky with me?”

“What sort of disguises?” Draco asked suspiciously.

“As an Auror, I sometimes have to make sure people can’t recognize me,” Harry said. “So, I know a bunch of glamours—just things to make you shorter or taller, change the colour of your hair, the length of your nose, that sort of thing.”

“Can I have black hair? And I want to be taller. And I want to have a beard. And green eyes.”

“So, like a supermodel then.”

“Pardon?” Draco said, oblivious.

“Sure,” Harry said. “The beard might be a trick, but I can do all that. Will you go with me?”

“I suppose,” Draco said. “Can you give me a scar?”

*  

They went to the Leaky. Harry gave Draco black hair and green eyes and a foot in height but didn’t manage the beard or the scar. Just to ‘amuse himself,’ as adult-Draco had said, Harry gave himself blond hair and grey eyes, fixed his eyes so he didn’t have to wear his glasses, and hid the beard and scar. At the inn, Draco did make fun of the lighting, and the floor, and the furniture, and Lucille, the waitress. He also peevishly said something about reading the menu to Harry, but once they got their Butterbeers he said, “You like Butterbeer as well?”

“I love Butterbeer. It’s the best part of being a wizard.”

Draco took a great big sip, the foam sticking to his upper lip. “I’m sorry I tried to get you in detention,” he said, smacking his lips.

“Apology accepted,” Harry said, having a sip from his own pint.

“What was that thing?” Draco went on. “When we were on detention. In the woods.”

“Professor Quirrell,” Harry said.

“Oh.” Draco took another sip, then set down the pint. “You know Zabini, of course.”

“We’ve met,” Harry said, uncertain where this was going.

“Isn’t he the best-looking bloke at Hogwarts?”

Oh God. A part of Harry wanted to laugh.

“He’s in Slytherin,” Draco went on. “And he reads. I’ll bet he’s the one I become best friends with, since you turned out a pillock.” Draco glanced at him. “No offence.”

“None taken,” Harry said, taking a sip of Butterbeer because otherwise he really was going to laugh. Being with Draco at this age was like being on a whirlwind. Also, he was just so, so gay. Harry
didn’t understand why he’d never noticed.

“His mum does modelling,” Draco went on and, for the next fifteen minutes, proceeded to wax eloquent on the merits of Blaise Zabini.

“I always thought Oliver Wood was the best-looking bloke at Hogwarts,” Harry said suddenly.

“Oliver Wood?” Draco looked scandalized. “He’s a fifth year.”

Harry raised his brows. “You don’t think older people can be good-looking?”

Draco turned bright pink. “Well, obviously—” Looking at Harry, Draco broke off, and turned an even deeper shade. “I just meant . . . I was talking about people in our year.”

“Michael Corner, then,” Harry said.

“Pfft,” Draco said, then added dreamily, “Zabini’s going to get a piercing.

“He does get one.”

“Pardon?” Draco’s back shot up ramrod straight. “Where?”

“Eyebrow.”

Draco made a little noise, sinking back into the booth. “I bet it looks so good.”

Why Narcissa emphasized discretion with her son was becoming very clear, and yet, if Harry ever got to hear Draco talk this way at school, several things might have also become very clear. Harry wanted to be sad about it—he was sad about it, only he was pretty delighted about the fact that Draco had decided he didn’t need to be discreet around Harry, even after the disaster of first year. “It does,” was all Harry said.

Thinking of something, Draco straightened up again. “Do I get a piercing?”

“No—at least. Not that I know of.” Harry hadn’t noticed one when he’d Polyjuiced into Draco, but he’d been eleven, and probably hadn’t noticed a lot of things. He certainly hadn’t looked under any of his clothes, so Harry had no idea of what Draco’s body looked like, other than what he remembered from when they were both the proper age.

“Oh course not.” Draco slumped again. “I wouldn’t, you know. That’s not discreet at all. But I—well, never bother.”

“I think you’d look absolutely smashing with a piercing,” Harry said.

“You do?” Draco looked pleased, but then said, “Well. Of course. Everything looks good on me.”

“Yes,” Harry agreed. “Here’s our food.”

Lucille set down the fish and chips, and Draco’s eyes went very round. “Wow,” he breathed. “I can see the grease.”

“Yeah, you can.” Harry grinned. “Tuck in.”

* 

After the Leaky, Harry and Draco walked back to Tailored Tinctures, where Harry took off their
disguises. The next year should be coming soon. “Do I change these clothes?” Draco said, plucking at his trousers.

“I could enlarge them,” Harry said. “Or we could find other ones, since you think they’re hideous.”

“I don’t really think they’re hideous,” Draco confessed, making a face. “I was . . .”

“Upset.”

Draco heaved a noisy sigh. “I was mad at you. But I think even if eleven-you is a ponce, grown-up you is probably okay.”

“See, that’s the kind of mocking that’s okay,” Harry said. “Eleven-year-old-me probably was a bit of a ponce.”

“I wish . . .” Draco bit his lip.

“You wish what?” Harry asked, hoping maybe Draco would say something about not being cruel or not being a bigot.

Draco let out another big breath. “I wish you’d shaken my hand on the train. I would’ve . . . it would’ve been different.”

“I’m sure it would have.” I wish you hadn’t been an arse to Ron, Harry wanted to say, but instead he said, “I wish I’d taken your hand as well. I think . . . I think we could have taught each other things.”

Draco raised a brow. “Like how to read?”

“And that’s the kind of mocking that’s not—”

Harry never finished his sentence, because Draco collapsed on the floor.

*

June 2012
Harry Potter: 31 years
Draco Malfoy: 13 years

Another three hours passed, during which Harry moved Draco back to the bed, enlarged Draco’s clothes, and tried not to worry.

Second year. Harry remembered fighting a basilisk, brewing Polyjuice, attending a party of ghosts. He remembered meeting Dobby, Dumbledore getting kicked out, Colin Creevey turning to stone. Harry tried to remember Draco. There was a Quidditch match, trying to figure out whether Malfoy was Slytherin’s heir. Draco calling Hermione a Mudblood.

Fuck.

Draco had been a child. A child, and Harry had forgiven him so long ago. He’d not forgot—Harry was never going to forget; it shouldn’t be forgot, neither by Harry nor by Draco, but Draco had changed. He’d changed so much, into the person who had told Harry it was immoral to Polyjuice into someone without their permission, the person who said that Ron was a good man, the person who’d done everything he could to make sure child-Harry felt loved and safe.

Sitting up, Draco gasped.
Harry braced himself.

“Potter,” Draco said.

“Draco,” Harry said, his voice very careful.

“Ugh.” Draco flopped back on the bed. “Can’t you just—go away?” He put his hands over his face.

“I need to make sure you’re okay,” Harry said, edging closer.

“I can’t believe I lost that Quidditch match. Wait.” Draco shot up again, looking around the room in confusion. “Who was the Heir of Slytherin?”

“Er,” Harry said.

“What happened to the—all the kids turning to stone? Why—” Draco turned blazing eyes on Harry. “Why did Gryffindor win House Cup?”

“So, there was a basilisk,” Harry began.

“A million last-minute points again?” Draco said, getting out of the bed. “And—” He stopped. “Fuck, you stole Dobby?”

“Um,” Harry said, taking a step back. “Your dad freed him.”

“He would never—what the hell is wrong with you? Do you exist to make my life miserable?”

Harry shouldn’t say it. He really shouldn’t say it. He wasn’t twelve. “You know, you really lost that Quidditch match on your own.” Apparently, Harry was twelve.

“Fuck you,” Draco said, throwing himself back on the bed. Honestly, he didn’t even sound that upset, just tired.

Harry edged closer again. “Are you all right? Does anything hurt?”

“I said fuck you,” Draco said, covering his eyes with his arm. “Why do you have to be so . . . ugh.” His face had got even longer, finally losing the rest of the fat. Harry could see those high cheekbones now, the sharp little chin. His nose had got wider, but not very; it was more defined than it had been before. His skin wasn’t that clear, pale colour, instead going a bit splotchy now. Suddenly, Draco took his arm off his eyes, propping himself up with his elbows on the bed. “Did you and your little friends tie up Crabbe and Goyle and leave them naked in a cupboard?”

“Er.”

“You do exist to make my life horrible. What was the point of that?”

“We were trying to figure out whether you were the heir of Slytherin.”

“Whether I was—” Draco sat up further. “You thought it was me?” he said, sounding a bit pleased.

“Well, I mean.” Harry hesitated. “That means I thought you were trying to murder people, so possibly not something to be proud of.”

“Murder people, ugh.” Draco lay back down. “I would like to murder you.” Then he covered his face with a pillow.
“Draco,” Harry said, after this had gone on three minutes at least.

Draco didn’t say anything.

“Draco,” Harry said, moving closer. Maybe he hadn’t been paying attention; maybe something was actually wrong.

Draco took the pillow off his face. “Are you saying we still become friends?”

“Yes.”

“But when? I got on the team, and Pucey doesn’t even act like I’m worth—ugh.” Draco put the pillow over his face again.

Harry barely remembered Adrian Pucey, Chaser for the Slytherin Quidditch team. He’d been two years ahead of them and rather good looking, now that Harry was thinking about it. He’d been tall. Black-haired. “What happened to Blaise Zabini?” Harry asked.

“Zabini’s too busy with his girlfriend,” Draco said, while Harry struggled to remember anybody having a girlfriend second year. If anyone had, he supposed, it would have been Zabini. “Why am I even talking to you about Zabini?” The pillow muffled his voice. “I don’t want to talk to you about anything.” Draco took the pillow off his face. “A basilisk, you say?”

“Yes.”

“In the school?”

“Yes.”

“Heavens. Dumbledore deserved to be sacked.”

“But Salazar put it there,” Harry pointed out.

“Salazar Slytherin?”

And the journal your dad gave Ginny let it out, Harry wanted to add, but didn’t.

“How do you even know that, about the basilisk?” Draco asked, propping himself up again.

“Er,” Harry said. “So, I sort of killed it.”

Draco’s jaw literally dropped. “What.”

“There was a sword in a hat,” Harry began.

“Ugh,” Draco said, flopping back and pulling the pillow over his face again. “Why are you like this? Why do you hang about with that Mudblood?”

“Don’t call her that,” Harry said, managing to keep his voice calm.

“Why?” Draco pulled the pillow off his face. “Is she your girlfriend?”

“No. She got married to Ron.”

Draco made a retching noise. “Ugh, they got married? But what is the hair going to look like on their children?”
“Rose has got red hair,” Harry said. “It’s really big.”

“I’ll bet,” Draco hugged the pillow.

“It’s the most beautiful hair you’ve ever seen.”

“It’s ginger.”

“Let’s go to Diagon Alley,” Harry said.

“Pardon?” Draco sat up again.

“That was fun,” Harry said, “going to the Leaky. We should do something else fun.”

“Anything is better than hearing about Weasley and Granger’s brats,” Draco said, throwing the pillow aside. “Do we have to wear disguises again? I want to look like Professor Lockhart.”

“Liked him, did you?”

“What are you talking about? He was rubbish.” But Draco blushed.

“But he was quite good-looking,” Harry said.

Draco’s colour deepened. “Whatever.”

* * *

“I’m not going in there,” Draco said.

They’d done a bit of shopping in Diagon Alley, Draco looking like Gilderoy Lockhart and Harry looking again like Draco, just because he could. Draco had eased up some, only saying ‘Why are you like this’ three or four more times, and only saying ‘Go to hell’ once. He’d dragged his feet a lot though and looked like he wished he had a pillow to throw over his face. Harry felt like he should have known that thirteen-year-old Draco was a drama queen, but somehow, he’d missed it. Harry didn’t suppose anybody else would go to the trouble of dressing up as a Dementor just to scare someone they liked to torment.

Draco had stopped whinging altogether when they got to Flourish and Blotts, so Harry still knew the way to Draco’s heart, he guessed. Then they’d got more fish and chips at the Leaky, and now they’d stopped in front of Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes. “You can’t make me. There’s no way I’m going into a shop run by—” Draco stopped talking, his attention caught by something in the window.

Among all the boxes of spells and bogie potions and gag limbs, George had set out a cloak from their line of novelty clothing. Rain clouds shrouded the shoulders of the cloak, and sheets of heavy rain poured down the length of it, making the whole thing look like shimmering grey. Every so often the clouds would part a bit. The cloak would grow brighter, the rain slowing. Only drips dropped down the cloak—and then a rainbow would appear across the length of it, brilliant colours shining for just one moment before the clouds came back.

Draco stopped talking just as the rainbow appeared, staring at it with naked longing. Then before the clouds even returned, he’d turned away. “Everything in there is appalling,” he announced.

“Sure,” Harry said. “But do you want that cloak?”

Looking frightened, Draco demanded, “What cloak?”
“The one in there,” Harry said. “With the rain.”

Draco feigned a shudder. “You wouldn’t catch me dead wearing anything with moving pictures on it. Don’t you know that’s for children and cheapskates?”

“You mean,” Harry said, “because it hasn’t got a muted palette? Because of the rainbow?”

“Mum says Muggles have completely ruined rainbows,” Draco said, putting up his nose. “For everyone.”

“How have they ruined them?”

“Well, I don’t know,” Draco said, bringing his nose down. “Only Mum says they have, and you shouldn’t put them on things, or wear them, like Mum says I can’t wear pink anymore, because Muggles have—well.” Draco sniffed. “You’ll never catch me wearing such things.”

“I think you’d look terrific in pink,” Harry said. “I think you’d look fit in that cloak as well.”

Draco looked stunned, and immediately covered it up. “You can’t find me fit,” he snapped. “You’re a bloke.”

“Sure, I can find you fit,” Harry said. “Everyone found Professor Lockhart fit.”

“Well.” Draco tossed his head. “That’s different. He’s in wizard magazines.”

“I bet you could be in magazines as well,” Harry said. “I know what you look like when you’re older.”

Draco’s face changed colour in big blotches. “I’m going in there,” he blurted, darting into Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes.

Following him inside, Harry got the cloak from the window and brought it to the register. Draco said he didn’t want it, but Harry bought it anyway.

*

Draco had quite liked Weasley Wizard’s Wheezes, which Harry had thought he might. Lots of it was rather mean-spirited, and Draco himself had always been rather mean-spirited, sometimes in funny ways. Draco and George should probably never meet as adults, and Draco wanted to buy all sorts of horrible odds and ends to prank people with. Harry bought them all, even though Draco wasn’t going to have time to prank anybody at this age, and then they went back to Tailored Tinctures.

“How are you feeling?” Harry asked. “Are you going to want to eat before the next—”

“I feel it coming now,” Draco said.

“Does it hurt?” Harry felt himself begin to panic; Draco’s voice had sounded so—”

“Shite,” Draco said, dropping the Wizard Wheezes bags, then falling to the floor.

*

June 2012

Harry Potter: 31 years

Draco Malfoy: 14 years
Draco gasped.

Then kept gasping.

Harry rushed over to the bed, where he’d laid Draco out after he’d fallen. This time was not like the other times—Draco was grasping his arm, which was bleeding. “Draco!” Harry cried. “Accio dittany!”

The dittany came shooting in from the lab, but by the time it got there, the bleeding had stopped. Scabs had formed almost instantly on Draco’s arm, and Draco had fallen back on the bed, unmoving. “Accio flannel,” Harry said, setting the dittany aside. Casting a quick wetting spell, Harry began cleaning the blood that had already come out, keeping his eye on Draco’s arm. The scabs faded in colour—brown, then tan, then the pale colour of Draco’s skin. Then they were scars.

Buckbeak. Harry had had no idea the scratches had been bad enough to scar.

Third year. Dementors, Lupin, Sirius, the Shrieking Shack. Harry could barely remember Draco at all in it, but he’d been there. He’d tried to get Hagrid fired—again. Draco, Crabbe, Goyle, and Flint had dressed as Dementors. Draco had seen Harry outside the Shrieking Shack and had reported on him to Snape.

“We never become friends. Do we?”

Harry’s head snapped up. He’d still been sitting on the bed, waiting for Draco to wake up, but Draco hadn’t gasped and sat up like he had the first two times. His eyes were open, but he was just lying there, looking down his nose at Harry. It had got longer, his nose.

“We do.” Harry swallowed. “It . . . takes a long time.”

Draco sat up. “You want that Mudblood chit.”

Standing up, Harry moved away. “I told you not to call her that.”

“You do,” Draco went on, getting out of the bed as well. “But she marries that snivelling Weasel idiot.”

“Draco.” Harry closed his eyes.

“You threw mud at me.”

“You were making fun of Ron! Again!”

“He deserves to be made fun of.”

Fuck. Harry didn’t know if he could keep doing this. Maybe he should have got Andromeda, except—Harry remembered how Draco was with him, when Harry himself had been a kid. God, Draco was so beautiful, and he’d tear himself to pieces if Harry gave up on him. He’d punish himself; Harry knew that Draco would, and Draco didn’t deserve it. He’d already been punished. He deserved to have a life now. They both did.

Pushing down his other emotions, Harry tried to keep his voice level. “It’s close to supper-time. You should eat something.”

“Why are you always trying to feed me? I’m not friends with you. Why can’t you just leave me alone?”
Draco’s face was twisted into an ugly expression Harry remembered well from school. He just hadn’t remembered it hurting like this. “All right,” Harry said, turning and walking from the room.

“Where are you going?” Draco demanded immediately, following him.

Harry looked over his shoulder in surprise, but Draco never seemed to notice or care when he contradicted himself. An explanation that Harry was doing exactly what Draco had told him to would probably not be welcome just now, and for the first time, Tailored Tinctures and Draco’s flat felt too small. Harry felt like he couldn’t breathe. He wanted to get out, but he couldn’t leave Draco alone here. Upstairs would be better at least, away from that bedroom where Draco had awakened over and over again hating him.

As Harry went upstairs, however, Draco followed him, his voice accusatory the whole way. “Where are you going?” he asked again. “Why are you keeping me here? I’ve half a mind to go back to Mother and Father; I don’t care if I’m thirty-two. What are you doing?”

Harry was sitting on the sofa, picking up the ledger again. He wanted to cast the reading spell again and listen to adult-Draco’s voice, wrap himself up inside it and hear it over and over again on repeat.

“What are you doing?” Draco was standing directly in front of him, hands on his hips as he looked down at Harry on the sofa. “Why are you looking at that? Why aren’t you paying attention to me?”

Harry touched the writing, all those careful letters. “Stop it!” Pushing aside Harry’s hand, Draco grabbed the ledger out of Harry’s lap, slammed it closed, then threw it at the hearth.

“Fuck,” Harry said, choked. Magic moved through him, charging up his spine as though with an electric current. It filled up his nerve endings, making him feel as though all of him was crackling with a dangerous energy, and fuck. Fuck. Fuck, what if he let it go; what he lost his temper with this child, who didn’t understand? Draco was so small; he wasn’t the person that Harry knew, and Harry desperately wanted to protect him, but what if he couldn’t? What he couldn’t protect him and keep him safe and make him feel loved, and the reason he couldn’t do it was that Harry was too fucked up himself?

“What’s wrong with you?” Draco demanded.

“Nothing.” Harry felt like he was struggling for air. “Nothing’s wrong. Draco.” Making himself take a breath, he wound the magic tight inside himself, electric wire wrapped over and over again so tightly that the wire cut, and what was beneath could not be seen. “Draco,” Harry said hoarsely. “Come sit with me.”

“I don’t want to sit with you,” Draco said. “You don’t like me! And I don’t like you. I don’t understand why you keep pretending.”

“I’m not pretending,” Harry said.

“Yes, you are. You’re friends with Weasel-boy, not me.” Draco’s eyes had an almost manic light in them, and Harry realized Draco must be feeling the claustrophobia as well. Harry tried to imagine living three years in the space of a day, trapped with someone you thought hated you. No wonder
Draco was behaving this way; this wasn’t healthy. “And you’re still friends with him,” Draco was going on, throwing his arms up in disgust. “You talked about their kid; I know you see them—you’re still friends!”

“Yes,” Harry said.

“Why!” Draco stamped his foot. He actually, literally, stamped his foot. “What’s so special about Weasel? What’s he got I haven’t got?”

“Kindness,” Harry said dully, even though he shouldn’t.

“He hasn’t got anything.” Draco’s voice was vicious, his features still contorted in that hateful way. “He hasn’t got anything except—except that Mudblood. That’s what you really want, isn’t it? Her.”

“I love them both equally.”

“You want to fuck her.”

Harry looked up, hardly able to believe anything so vulgar could come from a child’s mouth, but Draco was fourteen. He’d got taller, his face longer. He was old enough to say it, if not mean it.

“That’s what it’s really all about, isn’t it,” Draco went on, driven by some invisible force. His words came as though he’d been pushed down a rapid on a river and couldn’t stop, spilling from him in a tirade. “You want to fuck her. You want to make babies with her. You want to marry her and do everything you’re supposed to do, except guess what, Potter, she’s not right. She isn’t a pure-blood; she won’t give you pure-blood babies. You wouldn’t be doing your duty, because she’s a filthy fucking—”

“I don’t want pure-blood babies,” Harry said.

“It’s your fucking duty,” Draco snarled. “You have to.”

“No,” Harry said. “Actually, I don’t.”

“That’s what’s wrong with you,” Draco said savagely. He leaned in. “That’s what you don’t understand; you’re a stupid little orphan; you don’t know anything about your duty. You think you can do whatever you want, and you want—” Suddenly, his voice was catching. “You want—you want her.”

“No,” Harry said. “I’m gay.”

Draco froze, looking absolutely wild for a moment. “What?”


“I know what it means!”

Harry probably shouldn’t have added that last part, not with a fourteen-year-old, but what the hell. Draco was already throwing bigoted slurs around, why not.

“You can’t.” Draco’s voice had changed completely. He didn’t sound angry any longer. He sounded horrified.

“I can,” Harry said. “I do.”

“But it’s . . .” Draco took a step back, then another. He back up against a column of the hearth, then
looked up at it as though it had attacked him. “It’s—it’s an abomination.”

“No. It’s not.”

“Yes, it is!” Malfoy’s horror seemed to be slowly morphing into panic. “It is! It’s a sickness! You’re—you’re sick!”

“No,” Harry said again. “I’m not.”

“You are! I—you could infect me. I need to—I want to go home!”

Fuck.

“I want to go home this instant!” Draco yelled.

“You can’t.”

“Fuck you!” Draco rushed toward the stairs. “Fuck, you, I don’t care if I’m thirty-two! I’m going home!”

Harry took a second to close his eyes, thinking about how Draco had treated Harry when Harry was eleven. Draco had had been so gentle and so kind, and here was Harry trying to drop the homosexual agenda on a fourteen-year-old. Maybe he should have thought this through, first.

_There isn’t an agenda_, Ginny had told him once, when they’d been arguing about it. She’d said that she thought he might be bisexual, and he had been so convinced he wasn’t. _There’s just you and what you feel. You have to follow your heart, Harry. Even if it doesn’t lead to me._

_We’re not talking about my heart_, Harry had snapped at her. _We’re talking about my dick._ Fuck, he’d been such an arse.

_You better start using one of them!_ Ginny had shouted back.

Damn. He’d been twenty. That kid was fourteen; it wasn’t fair.

What Narcissa and Lucius had made him believe was far less fair.

Harry went downstairs.

Draco was pulling things off the chimney piece of one of the hearths and throwing them on the floor.

“Draco,” Harry said, feeling dull and exhausted.

“Get away from me,” Draco said. “You’re sick.”

Bottles and phials crashed to the floor. Adult-Draco was not going to be pleased, Harry thought distantly, but adult-Draco would only blame himself. He probably thought his younger self should be punished for saying hateful things, rather than forgiven for his obvious terror. Harry had thought himself so grown up at fourteen. It seemed so young, now.

“I’m not sick,” was all Harry said.

“You’re a fucking pervert,” Draco said, throwing more things. “I want to go home.”

Harry watched as liquid, powder, and bones began to make a pile on the floor.
At last finding what he was looking for, Draco took a pinch of the powder and threw it in the hearth. Green flames erupted in the dark fireplace, and Draco bent his head into them. “Malfoy Manor!”

The green fire licked around his shoulders.

Draco moved deeper into the fireplace. “Malfoy Manor!”

“Draco,” Harry said.

Climbing all the way into the fireplace, Draco said, “Malfoy Manor! I said, Malfoy Manor!”

Harry looked at him, feeling as though a chasm separated them and Harry was frozen. He couldn’t even move to reach across.

“Why isn’t it working? Malfoy Manor!” Crawling out of the hearth, Draco grabbed the whole pot of Floo powder from the chimney piece. His fistful lit up the whole lab this time, the green flames making a bursting sound before licking happily at the sides of the stone hearth. Draco climbed in again. “Malfoy Manor. Where’s my house? Malfoy Manor! Goyle Park!”

Shit. Harry didn’t know what had happened to Goyle’s house, or Crabbe’s, but Draco was already rattling off other names.

“Harrow Hall!” Draco yelled. “Tanglewood Abbey!”

The green fire whooshed. Draco disappeared, and the hearth went dark.

Shit.

Harry had no idea what Tanglewood Abbey was, but Draco’s disappearance propelled him into sudden action. Grabbed a handful of Floo powder, he threw it in the fireplace. Putting his head in, he said, “Tanglewood Abbey,” then pushed himself farther into the hearth to come rolling out the other side.

“Pansy!” Malfoy was yelling, stomping around a well-appointed sitting-room. “Pansy! I want to talk to Pansy Parkinson!”

“Draco,” Harry said, rushing after him.

“Pansy!” Draco yelled, running away. “Get in here, Parkinson!”

“What’s all this yelling?” a woman said, coming into the sitting-room.

Harry thought he should recognize her, but the only thing he was sure of was that she had no connection to Parkinson. Parkinson’s father had gone to Azkaban; Harry had no idea what had happened to her or her mother or sisters.

“Pansy!” Draco was yelling.

“Sorry,” Harry said, going after him. “Auror business!”

“Harry Potter?” asked the woman.

“Pansy!” Draco was still running around. “Where are you? Where are your parents? Where are your house-elves?”

“I say,” said a man coming from the dining room. “What’s going on?”
“Accio Draco,” Harry said, and Draco came flying over the table, right by the man’s head.

“Do not Accio me!” Draco flailed through the air. “Where’s Pansy? Where’s my house? I want to go home!”

Harry grabbed him, trying to contain Draco’s thrashing long enough to Disapparate.

“Draco?” said the woman, coming in from the sitting room. Harry recognized her now—Florina Fortescue, sister of Florean Fortescue. Their ice cream empire had made the family filthy rich; they’d probably bought the Parkinson place after the Parkinsons had abandoned it. “Like the Death Eater?” Florina asked.

“How horrible,” said the man—her husband, Harry was pretty sure. “Having the same name as him.”

Malfoy stopped wiggling long enough for Harry told hold his wand steady.

“Obliviate,” Harry told the Fortescues, then Apparated back to Draco’s sitting-room.

“I want to go home,” Draco said.

“I know.” Harry tried to extricate himself, but Draco clung to him.

“Where’s my house?” he kept saying. “I want to go home.”

Draco had called him an abomination. He’d called Harry sick and perverted. Draco was fourteen, and he was clinging to Harry’s robes, Draco’s fists making wads of Harry’s Auror cloak, and Harry didn’t know what to do. Draco had said he’d hated him; he’d tried to run away from him. He couldn’t want to be touched—but Harry wanted to comfort him. He still wanted to, after everything. Tentatively, his hand touched Draco’s hair.

“Where’s my house?” Draco demanded.

Harry kept his hand on the short hairs at Draco’s neck.

“Where’s my house?” When Draco pulled back, his eyes were wet. “Why won’t you tell me?”

“Malfy Manor was torn down,” Harry said.

“Because—” Draco gulped. “Because of me?”

“Draco. Of course not.”

“Did Mum and Dad disown me?”

“No,” Harry said, confused. Pulling away, he tried to look into Draco’s eyes, but Draco’s head was down. Harry tried stroking those short hairs—just a little, barely a touch. Draco’s nape was still so delicate. “They would never,” Harry said, because Draco seemed to need some kind of reassurance. “They loved—they love you, Draco. They love you so much; they’d never disown you.”

“But I . . .” Draco bit his lip. “I didn’t get married.”

Harry was still confused. “You thought they would disown you for that?”

“Well, I . . . and you . . .” Draco scrubbed his face. “I hang about with you, so don’t I . . . don’t we . . . ?”
Realization tore through Harry like a shockwave. He took a careful step away, then another. “No. We don’t.”

Draco’s head jerked up. “We don’t?”

Mutely, Harry shook his head. “You’ve never—I’ve never even told you that I am,” he said. “We’ve never talked about it.”

“But I would have—how could I not have . . . ?” Draco looked so miserable.

“It just never came up,” Harry said.

“But, you’re saying . . .” Draco took a step back, looking even more miserable. “You’re saying I hang about with poofs all day and I don’t even get to—I’m not even—!”


“I’m not discreet.” Draco flapped his arms wildly. “Mother was right—I’ll never be discreet! Parkinson says I couldn’t keep a secret if someone paid me! Zabini says I’m subtle as a hurricane! Even Crabbe says I should be more circumspect, and Crabbe doesn’t even know what the word circumspect means! Am I for real hanging out with masses of poofs despite everything Mother and Father have said, and I’m not even snogging any of them?”

The world felt like it was slowly turning upside down. “Um,” Harry said faintly. “I’m not sure.”

“Why aren’t you, though? I thought we—you said you were my friend.”

“I said friend.” Harry’s voice felt choked. “Not—not boyfriend.”

“But why wouldn’t we be? You’re fit; you already said I’m fit; I’m frolicking about with poofs, aren’t I, I’m a bloody potions consultant; I’ve fucked up everything; I’ve botched all of it; I’ve done nothing Father said I should—why wouldn’t I just fuck all the rest? Why wouldn’t I shag whomever I please? Why wouldn’t I shag you?”

“Um,” Harry said again, even more faintly.

“Is it so I can be Minister for Magic, really? Do I really think that’s going to happen, if I’m hanging about with a boy-lover like you?”

“Not a boy-lover,” Harry said. “Just a regular poof.”

“What difference does it make?” Draco flapped a hand at him. “My house was torn down.”

“But not because you’re gay,” Harry pointed out.

“There.” Turning back to him, Draco sneered. “So, I am one. I’ve told you that, have I? And you believe it; you think I’m a boy-lover too.”

“Don’t say boy-lover,” Harry said.

“I can say whatever I please—nothing matters! Everything is ruined. My life is a disaster!” Draco took a heaving breath. Then another. And another. “Where are my mum and dad?” he said, in a completely different tone—high pitched, but so quiet. “Do they—” His voice broke. “Do they even speak to me?”
“Your dad’s in Azkaban,” Harry said.

“Ha!” Malfoy barked out a wild laugh. “Ha ha ha! No, where is he really?”

Harry just stood there.

“No one would dare—this is a joke, right? You’re playing jokes? This is a joke,” Draco said frantically, beginning to pace about. “It’s all a joke; you’re going to Pensieve it for all your friends; you’re going to laugh at me for believing that I would—well, I haven’t. I’m not a poof. My father isn’t in Azkaban!”

Harry felt a bit like he might sick up.

“He isn’t!” Draco said again.

His eyes were so wide they looked like mirrors, rimmed with red.

“No,” Draco said, then pushed him.

Harry stumbled back.

“Why would you say he is? How could you say that?”

“Voldemort returned,” Harry said. “Your father sided with him.”

Draco shuddered at the name, but then let out a loud “Ha!”, this time in triumph. “You’re wrong. You killed him! You said so—you killed him!”

“No,” Harry said steadily. “I said my mum defeated him. And then he came back again—on the back of Quirrell’s head. Then he came back again and opened the Chamber of Secrets. And then he came back for real fourth year.”

“He couldn’t though. He was dead! And who comes back on someone’s head!”

“Voldemort,” Harry said. “Your father sided with him.”

“But they wouldn’t put Father in Azkaban for that,” Draco said. “For siding with a political opponent? It’s not a crime to have an opinion. Especially when it’s the right one!”

“Voldemort wasn’t a political opponent,” Harry said. “He was a megalomaniac who staged a coup and killed a lot of people in the process.”

“But my father never killed anyone.”

“Draco,” Harry said.

“He didn’t! Name someone! Name someone he killed!”

“I don’t have names.”

“See! You’re lying!”

Harry spread his hands. “Even if he never did it by his own hand, he was responsible. Dozens of witches and wizards died in the war.”

For a moment, Draco appeared nonplussed. “War?”
“After the coup, some of the wizarding community resisted his rule. A lot of them died, before—before Voldemort was defeated for good.”

“But there was a war!” Draco said excitedly. “People die in wars! It’s not—it’s not as if it’s murder; my dad wouldn’t—he wouldn’t do that!”

“Draco,” Harry said. “Plenty of people who weren’t involved in the war were killed by Voldemort and his followers. Dozens of innocent Muggles were killed.”

“But Muggles aren’t people!”

Harry remembered how Draco had looked sixth year. Harry knew now that Draco had been afraid, that his paleness had been dread, the pinched lines by his eyes and mouth weariness, his sneers his only defence against a horror that had been eating him from the inside out. All the life had seemed sapped from him then, weighing his shoulders down, and Draco now looked nothing like he had then. His face was frantic, vital with distress and panic. This was not the slow sucking power of terror over time; this was the abrupt and violent collapse of a whole world.

Harry said, speaking with effort, “You don’t believe that.”

“Yes, I do!” Draco said. “They’re not people! If he was killing them—they—they—they probably deserved it! They’re—they’re—it’s like killing a house-elf!”

“You would never kill a house-elf,” Harry said, feeling exhausted all over again.

“I would! I would!” Draco’s eyes were wild. He seemed to be vibrating with energy.

Harry wondered how he could have possibly missed how out of his mind Draco became when he was upset. When Draco grew up, Harry guessed, he’d learned to control it better. “Dobby,” was all Harry said. “Would you kill Dobby?”

“I—” Draco choked. “I would,” he said, and then began to cry. “I would! I would! You stole him. Father wouldn’t—he couldn’t—I’d do it! It wouldn’t matter! I’d kill anybody!”

“No,” Harry said. “You wouldn’t. You couldn’t. Not even if you tried.”

“You don’t know! You don’t know what I could do!”


“You don’t!” Draco pushed Harry again, right in the stomach.

Harry stumbled back another step.

“You don’t know anything!” Draco said again. “My father would never kill anyone! I could kill anyone I wanted! I don’t faff about with poofs! And my house wasn’t torn down!” His hands were balled into fists and he was hitting Harry with each emphatic statement, blows landing on Harry’s arms, his stomach, his chest. “He would never do it! He’s my dad.”

“Draco,” Harry choked, remembering when Draco’s mum had died, the way Draco had pushed him. Harry caught his wrist. With his other arm he pulled Draco to him, expecting it not to work, expecting Draco to pull back and hit him again, but he didn’t. Instead he shuddered in Harry’s arms, and then began to cry.

“Shh,” Harry said, trying the hair-petting thing again.
Draco cried harder. “My dad didn’t kill anyone.”

“All right,” Harry said, holding him close.

“He didn’t.”

“Shh.”

Eventually Draco stopped crying, but somehow, he was still shuddering, as though dry sobs still wracked his body. “Where’s my mum?” he asked, after finally going still.

Harry could feel himself stiffen up. Draco could most certainly feel it too.

He pulled away, his face aching red and wet all over. “Where is she?”

Harry began to get that empty feeling, as though at last having hit capacity on what he was able to feel once more.

“Where is she?” Draco said, his voice at a dangerous pitch. “Don’t you dare tell me she’s in Azkaban; don’t you dare—”

“She isn’t,” Harry said. “She’s dead.”

All the fight went out of Draco’s body, his features all going slack at once. His mouth hung open. “But—but she’s only thirty-seven.”

Harry didn’t state the obvious.

“Was it . . . ?” Draco swallowed hard. “Was it the Dark Lord? Did she—what you said—did she—”

“No,” Harry said quickly. “The Dark Lord didn’t kill her. She—it was . . .” But then Harry didn’t know what to say, because the Prophet had claimed Narcissa had died of a broken heart, but people didn’t die from broken hearts. Not really, and Harry hadn’t asked Draco what had really happened to her. He hadn’t wanted to make Draco say it.

“It was what?” Draco demanded.

Harry licked dry lips. “She died of a broken heart,” he said at last.

“People don’t die of broken hearts!”

“I don’t know!” Harry said, the words spilling out of him. “I’m sorry! I didn’t ask. You were hurting, and I wanted—and after that, you wouldn’t . . . we didn’t . . . you didn’t want to talk to me about it. You didn’t want to talk to me at all.”

“I don’t ever want to talk to you!” Draco cried. “I hate you!”

The hearth was empty. The floral-print chair had eleven-year-old Draco’s books spread out on it. Harry had meant to tell him he should put them away, but he hadn’t. It felt like forever ago that they had been sitting in this room, Draco bouncing restlessly on the couch. It was never going to be like that again.

“I hate you.” Draco was beginning to cry again. “I’ve always hated you. I will always hate you; you’re a liar.” Draco’s crying had sounded gut-wrenching before, but it was even worse now—he’d cried so much already, there weren’t even tears now, just these mutilated sharp sobs that wracked his body over and over again. “You’re a liar,” he said. “I hate you.”
When Harry reached out, Draco scrambled away. “Don’t touch me,” he said raggedly.

“I won’t.” Taking out his wand, Harry waved it in the air. “Expecto Patronum,” he said, and the silver fox shot out.

Leaving the fox in the sitting room with Draco, Harry went to the kitchen, going through the cabinets. Draco had said he didn’t like turkey, so Harry made the sandwich with ham, then poured a glass of milk and warmed it with a spell. Going back to the sitting room, he put the milk and the plate with the sandwich on the little table beside the sofa. “It will make you feel better,” Harry said, because that was what Draco had said his mum had said.

Draco stalked over to the table, picked up the glass and plate, then threw them into the hearth. “What are you going to do now?” he mocked.

Taking out his wand again, Harry banished the broken dishes, then cleaned up the food with spells as best he could. Then he went into the kitchen, made another sandwich, and poured another glass of milk.

Draco broke those one as well, using his wand, that time.

Harry cleaned up again, considering giving up. Instead, he went back into the kitchen and got another sandwich and another glass of milk, then brought them out to Draco.

This time, Draco ignored them, sitting stone-faced on the couch. The fox was sitting beside him on the cushions, looking at Draco intently. Harry thought about whether he should leave Draco alone, then Draco spoke. His voice was leaden. “Who’s flat is this?”

“Yours,” Harry said hoarsely.

Draco just stared at him.

The fox put a careful paw on Draco’s thigh.

“Get off me.” Trying to push it off, Draco’s hand went right through it. His lip curled in an ugly expression. “Get it off me.”

Harry waved the fox away. She would watch, but she would stop trying to interact. “I’ll be downstairs,” Harry said.
June 2012  
**Harry Potter:** 31 years  
**Draco Malfoy:** 15 years

When Harry’s Patronus appeared to him downstairs, Harry went upstairs to find Draco catatonic on the couch. Though Harry laid him out, he left Draco there. The sitting room was more open than the bedroom, and Harry didn’t want Draco to feel trapped.

After making sure Draco was safely arranged on the couch, Harry enlarged Draco’s clothes again. The sandwich was gone, so probably Draco had eaten, but Harry got out water biscuits just in case. Then Harry had a quick shower and changed his own clothes, summoning them from Grimmauld Place. Dressed and clean after a day of watching Draco age, Harry set to work fixing the floral-print chair. He’d always liked that chair. He hoped it was salvageable, and trying to repair it was better than sitting there watching Draco be unconscious. That was all Harry really wanted to do.

“*Incendio.*”

The chair lit on fire.

“Draco!” Whirling around, Harry found Draco sitting up and looking at him blankly. Turning back to the chair, Harry drew his wand. “*Aguamenti!*” Water splashed from Harry’s wand over the flames, effectively dousing them. The top of the chair was charred.

“*Incendio,*” said Draco’s bored voice.

The chair remained half-burnt and flameless. Draco had set fire to something else, Harry realized, spinning again to find the table on fire. “*Aguamenti!*” Harry said, causing water to rain down on the table.

“*Incendio. Incendio. Incendio.*”

The books were on fire.

“Draco! *Expelliarmus! Exaero! Exaero! Exaero!*” As Draco’s wand came hurtling into Harry’s hand, air whooshed from the direction of the bookcases into Harry’s wand, depriving the flames of oxygen. The fires shrank, then died out, and Harry cast the spell to release the captured air back into the room. Draco’s heart would break, Harry thought wildly, if the books got wet.

Then he looked down at the hawthorn wand in his hand, the warm friendly tingle in it that he remembered. He also remembered the last time he’d disarmed Draco, how that had been the key to defeating Voldemort—having control of the Elder Wand. Harry had never told Draco about it. He hadn’t needed to know. Putting the wands away, Harry went back over to the sofa.

Draco was just sitting there, staring at the hearth. His eyes looked empty, lifeless. Like gravestones.


“Draco.”

“My father was there, wasn’t he? That’s what you meant about him killing people. My father killed Cedric Diggory. How about that.”
“Peter Pettigrew killed Cedric,” Harry said. “It happened before your father got there.”

“I wish he would have been there. I wish he had killed you too.”

“You don’t mean that.”


Magic flowed through Harry. It poured out from Harry’s heart, filling up his fingertips as though they were sizzling. The heat behind his eyes let him know what was happening. He wasn’t angry. He was going to cry. “Draco,” he said, and even his voice sounded wet.

“You’re a queer; don’t infect me with your queer—your queer . . . hands! I’ll bet—I’ll bet . . .” Draco cried some more. “I’ll bet you were fucking Diggory, weren’t you? Weren’t you? I bet that’s why you’re so sad he died; I bet that’s why you—my father—my dad,” Draco said, but he didn’t finish. “Oh Merlin.” Covering his mouth with a hand, Draco sobbed again, a horrible wracking sound.

*You are loved,* Draco had told him. *You are so loved.* Draco had shielded Harry with his body when Vance had tried to attack; he’d read to Harry with all the voices. He’d taken Harry flying, and taught him the colour spells. He’d made cake and hot chocolate, and Harry remembered Draco with that splash of chocolate on his face, smiling down at Harry.

It had been a long time since Harry had had to concentrate this hard to cast a Patronus.

*Expecto Patronum.* The silver fox appeared. “I’ll be downstairs,” Harry said.

*

The time between each unconscious spell was growing longer now, just as Draco had said it would. Fifteen-year-old Draco had come into being quite late in the evening; therefore, the wait for the next spell of unconsciousness was through the wee hours of the night.

Harry knew he should have used that time to do something constructive—sleep, or work on the illegal potions case, but he couldn’t. Ron and Hermione were being controlled; he needed to help them, and Draco was up there alone, convinced his father was a murderer. Draco had seemed so pleased about it on the train after Cedric had died, when they’d all been going home. Draco had said Voldemort would come for Mudbloods and Muggle-lovers first; he’d known Voldemort had killed Cedric, and he’d known his father was on Voldemort’s side.

That phrase from Draco’s letter, warped prejudice, kept going through Harry’s head, because it was true. Draco was warped; he had been warped by his parents. Harry didn’t know how to reconcile the over-emotional child who apparently fell in love with a new boy every year with someone who would laugh at Cedric’s death.

The fact that Draco was dealing with it alone, that Harry couldn’t help him, was still painful.

* 

June 2012

Harry Potter: 31 years

Draco Malfoy: 16 years
Harry’s Patronus alerted Harry when Draco fell unconscious again.

Harry left Draco on the sofa, but Harry still couldn’t bear to go to sleep. He didn’t know whether Draco had slept, whether falling unconscious counted. Instead, Harry worked on the chair some more, trying to restore the charred bits. Next, he worked on the table, then the books. Draco had cast the fire spells across the middle of the row of bookshelves, but the flames hadn’t had a lot of time, so only the books on those shelves were singed. They seemed mostly salvageable, but Harry had no clue how to go about restoring the burned parts. Maybe Draco would know.

This time Harry heard the gasp, followed immediately by, “Dad!”

The fight at the Department of Mysteries. Lucius Malfoy had just been sent to Azkaban. Absolutely nothing Harry could say would make this any better.

When Draco had gone unconscious this last time, Harry hadn’t dismissed his Patronus. Casting it in this state was difficult anyway, and having the fox around was comforting. The fox was lingering by the couch where Draco was, looking a bit ragged.

“I’ll be downstairs,” Harry said, but when he headed toward the door, Draco was up, then blocking his way.

Fifth year had been kind to Draco. He’d got even taller, his forehead higher, his cheekbones sharper. His lips had thinned, but his mouth was closer to that definite shape Harry remembered so well. When Harry had seen Draco at Slug and Jiggers that first time, he’d realized Draco had been fit at Hogwarts. Harry realized it now as well.

“Give me my wand,” Draco said, blocking Harry’s way.

“I don’t want you to hurt yourself.” Or your books, Harry didn’t add, because books didn’t seem important right now—but they were. They were to Draco. They would be important to Draco, so they were important to Harry.

“I’ll hurt you,” Draco said, but Harry knew Draco now and thought that Draco sounded afraid. He looked afraid, and Harry remembered what Draco said about Harry having ‘a dark look.’ At eleven, Harry had been terrified of himself. Standing in front of an adult and threatening him like this was taking a lot of courage, and Harry’s heart clenched.

“He doesn’t stay in there,” Draco went on. “The Dementors aren’t even at Azkaban. He’ll escape, and I—I’ll show you. I’ll—I’ll help the Dark Lord, and then he’ll—he’ll help us, and—and.” Draco stopped, his eyes shining with tears. Each time Draco cried himself raw, he went unconscious again and aged a year, then looked as if he hadn’t cried at all.

Harry was worried about what it was doing to Draco inside, how it was fucking with his mental state, but they’d already started down this path. They couldn’t stop. “I’ve made you breakfast,” was all Harry said. “It’s in the kitchen when you want it. I also put some clothes over on the table—those are getting worn out.” Harry gestured to the clothes Draco was wearing. “You can also have a shower. The towels in the loo are fresh.”

“Why are you . . . Why are you here?”

“I have to stay in a radius. It said in the ledger. And I want to make sure you’re okay.”

“But why?” A tear finally escaped from Draco’s eye, but he dashed it away.

Harry wondered why he hadn’t been able see when they were both in fifth year how vulnerable
Draco had been, but Harry already knew the reason. Harry had been vulnerable himself, more vulnerable than Draco ever had been, but in a completely different way. When you were sixteen it was hard to know people other than yourself. It was hard at thirty-one as well, but some things were easier. Some things were so much easier. “I like you,” Harry said.

“You hate me,” Draco said. “And I hate you. Even if you changed your mind . . .” Draco took a big wet breath. “If you changed your mind, I’d still hate you. I’ll hate you forever; don’t you see? Why don’t you just leave?”

Harry reached out his hand, and Draco flinched away. “I’m not going to hurt you,” Harry said, then put his hand on Draco’s shoulder. “Eat your breakfast,” Harry said, squeezing, then letting his hand fall away. He moved to push past, but Draco caught Harry’s hand.

“This scar,” Draco said, bringing Harry’s hand up. Draco looked down at the raised bumps for a moment, then back up at Harry. “She gave it to you?”

“After a fashion.”

“Pity,” Draco said, dropping Harry’s hand. “It’s a pity you didn’t learn your lesson. I wish she’d have done it over your whole body.”

“She did it on the inside,” Harry said, then went downstairs.

*  

After a while, Harry came back upstairs. Draco was in the burned chair, a book on his lap. “Give me back my wand,” he said, as Harry crossed through the sitting-room.

“No,” Harry said, going to the kitchen. He made fish and chips, which he brought out to Draco.

Draco threw the plate on the floor, right at the fox, who skittered aside even though the plate and food went right through her.

Harry spelled the food off the floor onto the plate, then charmed it clean. “I’ll just leave this in the kitchen under a warming spell for you,” he said, because Draco had obviously eaten some of the breakfast—though a precious little.

“I hate your fucking fox,” Draco yelled after him, as Harry went back to the kitchen.

When Harry re-emerged, Draco had thrown his book aside and was curled up in the chair, his arms around his legs.

“Do you want to go outside?” Harry asked.

“What the fuck for?”

“I just thought you might not want to be cooped up all day.”

“Oh, no, it’s so much better being locked in prison with you. Has anyone ever told you that scar on your head is fucking ugly?”

“You have,” Harry said. “Many times.”

“Well—it is.”

Harry hadn’t really thought that Draco would go outside with him, but suggesting it had given Harry
an idea. Getting out his wand, he cast the spell to call Heloise, who came from the open window in the kitchen. As soon as she got to the sitting room, she went straight for Draco.

“Why . . . ?” Draco began, but then uncurled his body and reached out to pet her.

Heloise closed her eyes, pushed her neck in, and hooted a little hoot. The side of Draco’s mouth twitched, and Harry left them alone.

* 

Twenty minutes later, the wards alerted Harry that something was moving through them. Harry had to call back the owl and take away the notes Draco had written. “Goyle is in Azkaban,” Harry explained to Draco. Goyle had got off in the post-war trials with a magical restriction, just like Draco, but he’d broken it two years in and been arrested. After he’d been released he’d done it again and been arrested again. “Crabbe is dead.”

“This is some kind of psychological torture,” Draco announced. “If I had my wand I’d Legimens you and find out what’s really going on.”

Harry took out Draco’s wand. Then he handed it over.

Draco’s eyes went wide, darting from the wand to Harry’s face and back again. Then, just as he’d done when he was eleven, he snatched the wand from Harry’s hand, as if certain Harry holding it out was some kind of trick. Immediately, Draco pointed the wand at Harry’s head. “Cru— . . . C-Cruc— Imperio!”

“You’ve got to mean it,” Harry said gently.

“I do!” Draco was shaking. “I do! I—Imperio!”

“You’re holding your wand too tightly.” Harry was a bastard for what he wanted to say; he knew he was a bastard, and then he went and said it anyway. “Would you like me to help you?”

“Legimens!”

Harry didn’t even try to block it. He’d never been good at Occlumency, and he didn’t even particularly want to be, right now. Instead he thought of Draco kneeling before him when Harry had had a cold, Draco listening to him while they tried out the Wood-Eye Lye. He thought of Draco sitting before the fire, teaching Harry colour spells, then casting his Patronus.

Draco ripped himself out of the memory. “I,” he said, looking shocked. “I can cast a Patronus? A full one?”

“A very good one.”

“But.” Draco bit his lip. “It’s—that one. It was yours. Mine, it wouldn’t be a . . .” Looking at Harry in horror, Draco began backing up. “It couldn’t be a . . . it’s not.”

“Mine changed to match yours. Not the other way around.”

“But . . . why?” Draco looked absolutely panicked.

“My magic knew what I felt before I did,” Harry said. “I’m—not very good at knowing what I feel. But once I figure it out, I’m stubborn about it.”

“But . . .” Draco’s eyes sought out Harry’s Patronus. She had a wary eye on Heloise, who had gone
to perch on the back of Draco’s chair when Harry had taken away her letters. “But what do you mean, it knew what you felt?”

“Draco,” Harry said, and he didn’t care if it was inappropriate. “I think you know.”

“No.” Pressing his lips together, Draco shook his head, backing up until he was bumping into the wall of books. Heloise gave a concerned little hoot. “I don’t know. I can’t—we’re not. We’re not; I wouldn’t—”

“We’re not,” Harry said. “But I am.”

“Good!” Draco shouted. “Because I’ll never let you touch me!”

“Okay,” Harry said. “But it probably won’t change how I feel. I said I’m stubborn.”

“It’s not fair,” Draco said, sinking against the shelves. “I’m not a poof.” Then he was on the ground, knees up with his arms wrapped around them. His wand was still clenched tightly in his hand. Heloise fluffed her feathers, unsettled, then opened up her great wings to make the awkward flaps that closed the distance between her and Draco.

Harry’s Patronus licked her lips.

“I’m not a poof.” Draco’s voice sounded awful.

“I’m going to take your wand,” Harry said, because Draco was going to get mad again and start burning things. Half expecting resistance, Harry went to take Draco’s wand, but Draco let it go easily.

“I’d never be with you,” Draco said, lifting red-rimmed eyes to Harry. “I’d—I’d fuck other men. I’d do it in front of you. I’d make you—I’d make you watch, so you’d know I’d never—I’d make you watch me fuck them.”

“I thought you weren’t a poof.”

Draco gulped, his chest heaving for breath. “I’d do it—I’d do it just so you’d know that disgusting as it is, depraved as it is, I’d rather do it with anyone who isn’t you.”

“It’s not disgusting,” Harry said. “It’s fun.”

Draco’s mouth dropped open in shock.

“Anyway,” Harry went on. “You couldn’t make me watch. My magic is stronger than yours; there’s no way you could make me stay.”

“I’d,” Draco said blankly. “I’d make a—a freezing potion, a sticking potion, so you couldn’t go anywhere; I’d . . .” He still looked shocked.

“You’re right,” Harry agreed. “That’d probably work. You’re tops at potions.”

“Why are you . . . why aren’t you . . . ?”

Draco had said those things to hurt Harry, or at least anger him. He didn’t understand why it hadn’t worked. “I don’t want the person you are at sixteen,” Harry said, trying not to sound harsh about it. “He’s a bit of a pillock.”

“Fuck.” Draco put his forehead down on his knees. Heloise flapped a bit, tapping his arm with her
“Have your lunch,” Harry said, then went down the stairs.

* 

**June 2012**

**Harry Potter:** 31 years

**Draco Malfoy:** 17 years

Evening had fallen by the time Draco fell unconscious again, the gaps between ageing-up beginning to stretch into days instead of hours. Harry’s Patronus alerted him that Draco had gone down, and Harry went upstairs to enlarge Draco’s clothes and make sure he was comfortable for the hours he’d be unconscious. Just as Harry was getting Draco arranged, however, Draco gasped, which wasn’t right. It was too soon, but Draco was still unconscious, clutching his left arm.

Harry covered Draco’s right hand with his own, covering the Dark Mark that had newly appeared on Draco’s skin.

*I’ll help the Dark Lord,* Draco had said, *and then he’ll help us.*

*I wish I could take it off,* he’d told child-Harry. *But it’s a part of my body, now, and so a part of me.*


Sectumsempra.

Fuck.

The pain of the Dark Mark apparently having dissipated, Draco’s hand slipped off his arm, but Harry didn’t let go of Draco’s hand, turning it so he could hold it. Spelling the chair across the room so that it was by the couch, Harry held that hand for the next two hours and fifty minutes, waiting for the screams to start.

Somehow it was even worse than Harry had remembered, the sound that Draco made when it happened. Harry had remembered screaming, but that had been Moaning Myrtle. Draco just made a low soft gasp, and Harry had also forgot the way the blood had spattered. It sprayed out into Harry’s face, his hand, his chest, soaking both of them, and Draco’s hand yanked out of Harry’s, scrambling across Draco’s chest.

Snape had come right away the first time it had happened, and Draco’s ageing was being sped up a good deal, so it should already be over, but it wasn’t. Draco was still scrambling at his wet shirt, his breath coming in little hitches. “What?” he gasped out. “What—?” He was looking at Harry, fully awake.

Harry held up his wand.

“Don’t,” Draco cried, his face a rictus of terror.

Harry performed the disrobing spell, opening Draco’s shirt. The wounds were knit together, but only just. Harry remembered seeing it in the bathroom, the spell that Snape had cast to close the cuts, but it should have progressed further than this. Snape had said there might not even be scarring, but these wounds were barely scabbed over.
Traumatic events may slow the ageing process, Draco had written, but do not let this alarm you. If my younger self doesn’t age a full year during any of the steps, he should regain lost time in the next step . . .

Do not let this alarm you.

Bloody fucking hell. Harry hadn’t been that worried about it, possibly because Draco hadn’t written, when you rip my body open, I may not fully recover.

Fuck.

“Why?” Draco asked him, still looking at him in horror.

“I’ll.” Harry swallowed. “I’ll get a salve. You should—you’ll get better.” Then he Apparated, feeling like a coward for doing so, but if Draco was really only going to be half cured during the interval before he aged again, he needed—fuck, what did he need? Salve, bandages, fresh clothes, fluids, dittany, a Healer; that was what he needed. Harry could get someone from St. Mungo’s, then Obliviate them.

Frantic, Harry began Accio’ing things from all over Draco’s lab, making a pile that he put into a bowl, then took with him when he Apparated back upstairs.

Draco was trying to sit up.

“Don’t!” Harry said, nearly dropping the bowl. Rushing to the couch, Harry put down the bowl and got on his knees.

“G-get away from me,” Draco said feebly.

“Lie back.”

“Don’t touch,” Draco tried to say, but Harry was already touching him, trying to get him to lie down. This was an absolutely stupid fucking idea, which Draco proved when he shook himself away from Harry’s grasp and cracked one of the scabs open, beginning to bleed again.

“Let me help you,” Harry begged, taking his hands away.

“Like you have already?”

Casting a quick healing spell on the scab, Harry got it closed up, then opened one of the jars he’d grabbed. “This is a salve; let me put it on you; let me—”

“I said don’t touch me.”

“I won’t hurt you; I’ll be careful; let me—”

“You won’t hurt me?”

“Draco,” Harry said. Magic was racing through him, pricking behind his eyes again.

“Merlin,” Draco said, sounding a little shaken. “Don’t fucking cry. I’m the one you tried to murder.”

That’s why I want to cry, Harry wanted to say, but didn’t. Instead he put down the salve and opened the bottle with the orange liquid in it. “Drink this.”

“Not on your life. Some kind of poison; is it? You’ve already tried to kill me enough.”
Harry swallowed hard. “It’s a Cure-All. You made it; you developed it. You’re really good at potions—” He cut himself off because Draco was trying to lie back down on the couch, his face going white as he adjusted positions. “At least let me . . .” Corking the Cure-All, Harry set it down and tried to arrange the cushions for Draco underneath.

“Why the fuck were you trying to kill me?”

“I wasn’t.” Harry wished he could hold Draco’s hand at least. “I was . . . I didn’t know what the spell did.”

“Why did you cast it if you didn’t even—what the fuck is wrong with you?”

“I’m sorry. Draco, I’m so desperately sorry.”

Draco turned his face away. “I’m glad I got blood all over the fucking sofa, anyway. It’s fucking hideous.”

Harry made a strangled sound, wanting to laugh but sort of afraid he might burst into tears. Draco was still covered in blood. Harry could smell it on both of them, that pungent animal smell with the trace of metal underneath, like a butcher’s shop.

After Sectumsempra, Harry had had to have detention with Snape. He’d missed the final Quidditch match, but Gryffindor had won anyway. Harry had gone into the common room and they’d all been celebrating; Ginny had rushed to him with her eyes lit up. Harry had kissed her.

“I kill Dumbledore,” Draco said. “Don’t I.” Listlessly, he looked up at the ceiling. “I’m a murderer, just like my dad.”

“You didn’t kill Dumbledore.”

“Jolly good, failed in that as well, all right then.” Draco closed his eyes, then opened them. “Did I get Death Eaters into the school? I was trying to do that one as well.”

“That one you did.”

“Right,” Draco said. “And they murdered people. So, I’m a party to murder after all. Yay.”

“They didn’t kill anybody, in that instance. Well, actually, they did. One Death Eater accidentally killed another Death Eater.”

“But . . . not Dumbledore?”

Harry looked down at his hands, the scar. *I will not lie.* “Snape killed Dumbledore.”

“So, Snape’s a murderer.”

“He did it to save you.”

“To save me,” Draco said, incredulous.

“Yes.”

Just Draco’s head turned on the sofa, his body still draped across it. “You said he died for someone he loved. Who?”

“My mum.”
Draco frowned. “What, did she suddenly come back up from the dead? I’d believe it, with all this.”

“No, she . . .” Harry looked down at his hands again. “He did it to save me, so I could defeat Voldemort.” Draco flinched at the name. “But he did it because he loved my mum.”

“Your mum.”

“Yes.”

“A Mudblood.”

Harry’s gaze lifted, but Draco just turned his head back on the sofa to stare at the ceiling. “Please let me clean you up,” Harry said.

“Want to get your hands on me, do you?” Draco said, sounding tired and defeated. “I suppose you always did.”

“You know it isn’t like that.”

“Do I?” Draco’s voice had gained energy, now. “When did you decide you liked me, Potter—after you ripped me open? What is it? You like me having been your victim? That get you off? Because I can’t figure it otherwise, why you like me, how we could ever be friends after you’ve done this.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry said.

“You already said that.” Draco looked away, toward the sofa cushion.

The blood was drying sticky on Harry’s uniform, in his hair. He could feel it in his fingernails, on the hand that had been holding Draco’s.

“I’ll take that Cure-All,” Draco said suddenly.

Uncorking it, Harry held out the phial, but Draco winced as he reached toward it. “Let me,” Harry said, standing up.

“No,” Draco said, snatching the phial, but then he had it in his hand and he was lying flat on his back, an impossible angle to drink the potion.

“Let me,” Harry said again, touching Draco’s hair. He slid his hand under Draco’s head, helping him lift a bit without cracking the cuts on his chest. Taking the phial from Draco’s hand, Harry held it to Draco’s lips. Draco let him, feebly drinking down the potion. A bit of the orange liquid dribbled out the side of his mouth, and when he was done, Harry cleaned it for him with his wand. Reaching down to the bowl he’d brought from downstairs, Harry took a flannel and wetted it with a spell. “Please let me,” he whispered, wiping Draco’s face, his neck, where pools of blood had dried.

“For fuck’s sake,” Draco said.

“Yes.” Harry wet another flannel, then put it on Draco’s forehead, leaving it there while he pointed his wand at Draco and cleaned him up. The Cure-All looked like it had helped; the wounds were still the same, but Draco’s colour was better, and he seemed to have a bit of more mobility as Harry cleaned him. “I want to put this salve on you,” Harry said, when the cleaning was done. “It has dittany and a localized anaesthetic.”

“Then use magic,” Draco said irritably. He sounded better as well.

“There isn’t a good spell for that,” Harry said, opening the salve and putting his fingers in. When he
reached out to touch one of Draco’s scabs, Draco flinched. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

“Harry Potter, King of Irony. It’s cold, you wanker.”

The salve didn’t feel cold to Harry, but Draco’s wounds were hot, the skin around the red and inflamed. Taking his fingers away, Harry cast a warming charm on the salve, then touched Draco again. He mostly stayed still while Harry applied the salve, but Draco still jumped when Harry’s fingers touched his abdomen. Glancing up to make sure he hadn’t hurt Draco, Harry met Draco’s eyes. “It tickles,” Draco said, sounding humiliated.

“Sorry,” Harry whispered, then applied the rest of the salve. “Can I...?” he began. “I want to bandage you.”

Draco turned away, his jaw clenched. “If you must,” he said finally.

Harry got the bandages out, along with the tape.

“Is this some kind of kink of yours?” Draco asked, once Harry began to put the bandages on.

“Draco,” Harry said, holding one of the bandages steady so he could tape it. “Absolutely nothing about this is kinky.”

“But it could be.” Draco’s voice was dull, neither interested nor mocking, and Harry glanced up again to make sure he was okay.

“I wish I’d known how much you’d thought about that kind of thing at this age,” Harry said, reaching for another piece of tape. “Things might have turned out differently.”

“How so?”

“I might have thought differently about the size of my dating pool, is all.”

Draco shifted under Harry’s hands, but when Harry checked, Draco didn’t appear to be in pain. “How so?” Draco said again. “Would you have wanted to date me?”

Harry turned to pick up another bandage. “Probably not.”

“But you would have thought about it.”

“You were a real git to me,” Harry said, taping the bandage. “So maybe not. But you were pretty fit, so maybe so.”

“So. Who else would you have thought about dating?”

Harry glanced up, but Draco wasn’t looking at him. “Probably Adrian Pucey,” Harry said, picking up a piece of tape.

Draco’s head whipped over to look at him.

“Careful,” Harry said. “I don’t want you to break your scabs.”

Draco sagged a bit under Harry’s hands, but seemed to be feeling the pain less. “Who else?” he demanded.

“Michael Corner.”
“I suppose,” Draco said after a pause.

“Anthony Goldstein.” Harry picked up another piece of tape.

“Ew, Potter, no,” Draco said, squirming under him. “You’ve appalling taste.”

“Well,” Harry said, putting on the last bit of tape. “Obviously.” Standing up, he began casting cleaning spells on himself.

“Do I have scars?”

Harry looked over at Draco, whose head had turned on the couch to watch as Harry cleaned. “I don’t know,” Harry said, finishing up the rinsing spells.

“How can you not . . . ? You really haven’t seen me?”

“No.”

“When do I become discreet, then?” Draco turned to stare back up at the ceiling. “When does that happen?”

“It happens.”

“Well, why couldn’t it have happened when—why couldn’t I have—why wasn’t Dad more discreet? About—about following the Dark Lord, about what he thinks about Mud—why couldn’t he have just . . . ?”

“I wouldn’t say he was decorous,” Harry volunteered.

“Hush up about my father,” Draco snapped.

“All right.” Harry began to gather the supplies he’d brought back into the bowl. “I’m going to change my clothes. I don’t think we should change yours, since that will require moving you, but I’ll bring you a clean towel. And you need to drink something.”

“Alcohol.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“I’m seventeen.”

“I’m thirty-one,” Harry said, then Apparated downstairs to get changed.

*  

When he came back into the sitting-room, Draco was lying in the same position on the couch, staring into nothing. “Here’s the towel,” Harry said, laying it over him. “And here’s the juice.”

“I can do it,” Draco said, when Harry started sliding his hand under Draco’s head to lift it up. But Draco let Harry do it after all, and Harry held the glass for him. Draco got three sips of it down before dribbling.

Harry spelled him clean again.

“Can I at least get my wand back?”
Harry took it out and handed it to him.

“*Incendio*,” Draco said, but he was pointing it into the empty hearth, and the fire that sprang to life there was quite normal.

“Shall I read you a book?” Harry asked, pulling the chair a bit away from the couch, so that they could both see the fire.

“I would rather die.”

“Shall you read me a book?”

“I only read books to people who are my friends.” For a while, Draco watched the fire, the dancing flames making odd shadows on the floor. “How did Vince die?”

“A fire.”

“Vince really loved fire,” Draco said, almost wistfully. “When he learned Incendio he was so happy. He was good at so very little.”

“You were a good friend,” Harry said.

“What are you talking about? I was a terrible friend. I made him be a girl; I made him . . .” Trailing off, Draco began to tear up again. “Shite. What was the point? What was the point of anything? Snape dying, and Dumbledore—do you know, he told me once . . .” Draco’s voice was hoarse. “Dumbledore told me once that desire is a ghost that lives within you. You can’t kill it. It doesn’t change or grow old. And if you ignore it, it will haunt you. He said the only way to put a ghost to rest is to give it what it wants.”

“That sounds like Dumbledore.”

“Father said—” Draco hesitated, glancing at Harry, then back at the fire. In a blank tone he went on, “He said Dumbledore was deviant.”

“I think that Dumbledore had a ghost that didn’t grow old,” Harry said.

“I guess Severus did as well.” Draco stared into the fire. “He killed Dumbledore and it didn’t even do anything. Dad is still in Azkaban.”

“No,” Harry said. “That got him out. You got to have Lucius seventh year and a bit after. But there were trails eventually, and he got sentenced.”

Draco closed his eyes. “I’m going to go to sleep now.”

Firelight played over Draco’s young, tired face. Harry watched him as he dreamed.

*  

“Do you ever get punished for this?” Draco said, next time Harry woke him to feed him water biscuits and juice. “Slicing me open, I mean.”

“I got detention,” Harry said. “Which meant I didn’t get to play the last Quidditch game.”

“Let me guess,” Draco said, leaning back from the cup of juice. Harry let him go. “Gryffindor still wins House Cup.”
“Yes,” Harry said.

*

“I’ve got to go to the loo,” Draco said an hour later.

Harry leapt out of the chair. “Let me help.”

“Another kink of yours,” Draco said sardonically, but he let Harry help. A combination of magic and walking with Harry’s arm around his shoulder got Draco through the kitchen and to the door, but there Draco said, “Let me do it. You eviscerated me, at least let me piss in peace.”

Harry let him, anxiously waiting by the door. When Draco came out, he let Harry take him back to the sofa and help lay him back down.

“Thanks,” Draco said, already sounding half-asleep.

*

A few hours later, Draco woke up again. “Still here,” he murmured, looking at Harry in the chair by the firelight.

“Always,” Harry said.

*

“I feel another year coming on,” Draco said, opening his eyes.

“I’m here,” Harry said.

“Should old acquaintance be forgot,” said Draco. “That thou canst never once reflect on old long syne.”

Draco was quoting the song people sang at New Years. He was trying to be funny.

His eyes closed.

*

June 2012

Harry Potter: 31 years
Draco Malfoy: 18 years

Draco gasped, and Harry started awake. He must’ve fallen asleep, which was good, he guessed. He hadn’t slept at all in the past forty-eight hours.

“These bandages are disgusting,” Draco said, ripping them off.

Underneath his skin was pale. He’d got a bit of hair on his chest, just a light dusting of blond. The scars across his torso were long and thin, raised white that looked almost silvery in the pale light of the room. It was late afternoon, and the fire had gone out. Harry’s heart ached at how beautiful Draco looked. Even the scars were lovely. Draco’s shirt was stripped to his waist, still covered in blood.

“I’ve put new clothes on the table.” Harry turned away, ashamed for even having looked.
“I’m having a shower.”

When Draco stood, however, Harry watched, making sure Draco moved all right, that no other lasting damage had been done. Draco appeared to have healed as he should, walking without trouble, and Harry looked away again, waiting until Draco had grabbed the clothes, gone into the loo, and started the tap.

While Draco was in the bathroom, Harry made them lunch, thinking about what Draco would remember now. Seventh year. From Ginny, Harry had learned what Hogwarts had been like during that time. Draco hadn’t been the same, she’d said—not like he’d been in fifth year, terrorizing everybody, but Crabbe and Goyle had been worse. Draco had come home for hols and hadn’t identified Harry; Harry had disarmed Draco and gained control of the Elder Wand. If the cure had aged Draco back up to when it should—a full year, plus the extra few days after the Sectumsempra—Draco should remember the Fiendfyre, Voldemort dying, his family safe.

When Draco came out of the shower, he was dressed in fresh clothes. These fit him, as he had his wand, and his hair was still wet, dripping a bit at the temple. His hair was short, just as he’d said it would be when he was young, and he looked like a slightly smaller, softer version of his older self. His face and body had finally resolved into the general shape that Harry remembered, but he was so desperately young that just looking at him made Harry miss him.

“I think you should go now,” Draco said, just as Harry was finishing the chicken salad.

“Go?”

“The ledger said the radius would be increasing with my years. It also said the interval between my steps in age would be increasing, which we’ve seen. You’ve heavily implied that whatever caused this accident poses some kind of threat, and the ledger said you’d have Auror business. Hadn’t you better go take care of that?”

“How long did you rehearse that speech?”

“I said it over and over to myself in the shower, just so I could get it right. Don’t you wish you had been there,” Draco added, but there was barely malice in it; it sounded like a barb merely for the sake of form.

“You’ve gone and defeated him, haven’t you? There’s no other large bodily injuries we’re waiting on, are there?”

Looking down at the chicken salad Harry had made, Draco made a face, which made him look so much like he had at eleven that Harry revised his opinions on how much Draco looked like his adult self. When Harry didn’t answer, Draco looked up with some alarm. “Are there? I don’t chop my arm off, do I?”

“No.”

“I’m eighteen.” Draco drew himself up. “This is my flat.”

It’s his flat, Harry wanted to say, but that wasn’t fair. The flat belonged to Draco, even if he wasn’t the correct age, and Draco was right. Since Draco wouldn’t be ageing up for at least a day, and Harry could be some distance from him when Draco did it, Harry should go do what he could to see if he could bust the illegal potions ring. Hermione and Ron were still under whatever potion had caused them to act the way they had.

“All right,” Harry said. “But you have to let me come visit you.”

“Am I going to be able to stop you? Merlin, you nursed me like I was some kind of . . .” Draco
didn’t finish, making another face at the salad instead.

“I don’t suppose you could stop me,” Harry agreed. “I just don’t want you to disappear. Or fight me every time.”

“Fight you? Have you gone mental? You killed the fucking Dark Lord, you wanker. Who in their right mind would want to fight you?”

“You always seem to.”

“I draw my wand on the Hero of the Wizarding World? That’s what they’re calling you, isn’t it? Right. I become daft, is what you’re saying.”

“You don’t draw your wand,” Harry said. “You—verbally spar.”

Draco stared at him. “You want to come visit and not have me verbally spar with you.”

Now that Draco had put it like that, it sounded ridiculous.

“Do you know me at all? Have I become a complete sad sack? Don’t answer that.” Draco made a snorting sound. “Not verbally spar,” he said under his breath. “What else do you think I’ve got left?”


“Merlin’s toadstools,” Draco breathed. “I’ve become a Hufflepuff. I thought the torture was all done.”

“I’ll check on you tomorrow.”

“In a week,” Draco said.

“Tomorrow,” Harry said.

“Two days,” Draco said.

“Tomorrow.”

“Day and a half.”

“Tomorrow morning,” Harry said.

“Tomorrow morning,” Draco said, “but take your gross salad with you.”

“I made it for you.”

“You’re not even going to do that much for me? Take your manky salad so I don’t have to smell it any longer?”

“You made it for me when I was little,” Harry said.

“Right. We’ve already established I become a tasteless idiot, also known as Hufflepuff. But I shouldn’t have to put up with your salads yet.”

“Seems like the least you could do,” Harry pointed out. “You tried to kill my best friend, got two of my favourite professors killed, and always called my other best friend bigoted slurs. And she got tortured at your house, so it seems like salad isn’t that big of a deal, in the scheme of things.”

“But I hate salad.” Draco’s voice was sour, but his eyes were cast down. “I heard about Professor
Lupin. I—I really liked him. As a professor.”

Harry took a deep breath. “It’s ancient history. I shouldn’t have brought it up.”

“But it’s not ancient history. For me.” Draco’s eyes were still on the ground.

Harry took another breath. “I’ll take the salad.”

“And you’ll come tomorrow?” Draco looked up, not sounding so put out about it now.

“I’ll come tomorrow,” Harry agreed.

“You’re still here,” Draco pointed out after a moment.

“You were right,” Harry said. “About there being a threat. You shouldn’t—don’t leave your flat without changing your features. And don’t mess with the wards. And I’m leaving my Patronus.”

“Prisoner in my own home, am I?” Draco said, tone again sardonic.

“And call me if you need my help.”

“Merlin, Potter,” Draco said, rolling his eyes. “I’m not five.”

The refrain was so familiar, Harry finally felt comfortable leaving.

He took the dressing-gown with him. Adult-Draco had given it to him; despite the almost two weeks Harry had spent in Draco’s flat, it was the only thing there that really belong to Harry.

* 

That night Harry checked the warehouse on Colville Road with the Seeing-Eye Ball. Observing that no one seemed to be in the lab, Harry returned with his Invisibility Cloak and picked up the Ward Record, drawing memories from the Eye back into a jar. Harry would have to review all the records of the past few days in a Pensieve to see whether anyone else besides Vance had gone into the warehouse, so Harry put a new Ward Record on the Seeing-Eye Ball to record anything that happened that night or the next day.

After nearly two weeks of not living in it, Grimmauld Place felt darker and lonelier than ever. Draco’s flat was cozy and comfortable in comparison, and Harry missed it with an ache that was not rational. He missed Draco with an ache that was not rational; he was so worried whether Draco was okay, whether anything had happened during eighth year that would hurt him.

Harry wasn’t kidding anybody. Draco had had to stay in Azkaban to await his trial; then there’d been the trial, then the destruction of the Manor, then the magical restriction. For the next ten years of memories, he wouldn’t be allowed magic. All of it would be painful for him.

Harry wanted Ron and Hermione so desperately it hurt.
By the next morning, Harry hadn’t found anything useful in the Ward Record. Before going to Tailored Tinctures, Harry stopped by to see Andromeda. He had sent her that owl when he had left eleven-year-old Draco alone, so Harry could go to the warehouse. The note had explained the cure and what was happening with Draco, but Harry had been frazzled while writing it, and he wanted to update Andromeda to let her know what was happening with Ron and Hermione, the potions case, and Draco's cure.

“You did sound frantic, yes,” Andromeda agreed, when Harry finished his explanation.

“I had to leave him alone,” Harry said. “He was only eleven.”

“Eleven-year-olds can stay home alone for a few hours without killing themselves,” Andromeda said, sounding amused. “I should imagine you got left on your own more often than that.”

“That’s different.”

“Why?”

“Because I didn’t have anyone to love me,” Harry said, stating the obvious.

“Oh,” said Andromeda, sounding so much like adult-Draco in that moment that Harry shook his head.

“Andromeda just raised her brows slowly.

“He was,” Harry insisted. “I mean, he wasn’t. But he was—he wasn’t what you’d expect.”

“Let me tell you what I’d expect.” Andromeda had eyes that always made him feel like she was looking at a part of him that he didn’t know he had. “I didn’t get to meet my nephew until after she was sentenced, but I knew Cissy.” Harry realized she meant Narcissa. “She was the quiet one. Even when Bella and I were screaming at each other, Cissy was placid and lovely and polite. She did everything Mum and Dad ever told her to, except for when she married Lou. Every emotion she ever had she wound inside herself so tight she never looked like anything except the prettiest little picture you ever saw.”

“Lou?” Harry said.

“Don’t tell Draco I told you.” Andromeda smirked. “Anyway, it had to come out somewhere, all of that emotion. Where do you think she put it? Certainly not her husband; she had to be perfect for him as well. Twenty-three years of love, passion, affection, loneliness and heartache. She put it all in him.”

“Draco.”

“He was the love of her life. That’s why she went mad in Azkaban—she couldn’t stand the thought
of him being on his own. Without her.”

“How do you know?”

“Harry.” Andromeda suddenly looked so tired, the lines beside her mouth drawing her whole face down. “She told me so. When she was in Janus Thickey. Do you know what worried her the most?”

Harry had had no idea that Andromeda had visited Narcissa at St. Mungo’s. Why did this family hide so much?

“She worried she had damaged him. Psychologically. That her obsession had made it so that he couldn’t get on without her.” Andromeda’s voice was flat. “That was why she did it.”

Harry didn’t want to hear. He couldn’t bear to hear.

“She wanted him to go on,” Andromeda said, “and he has. He will.”

“Yes,” Harry said hoarsely. “I—I want to help him.”

“Good.” Andromeda was never particularly warm—a little too sharp, a little too honest to feel exactly motherly. But you could feel it when she approved of you, and usually she told you exactly what she thought. Except when she was visiting her sister, apparently. Just now Harry could see that she approved, and for the first time when it wasn’t a holiday, he thought about hugging her.

“Harry?”

Harry turned at the sound of the new voice, already knowing who it was. “Teddy,” he said, his whole heart filling up. “I thought you were coming back tomorrow.”

“Gran said you might need my help, so I could come home early if I wanted.”

Harry looked over his shoulder at Andromeda, who shrugged. “It was his choice,” she said.

“She told me Uncle Draco was eleven,” said Teddy.

“He was,” Harry said. “He’s nineteen today.”

“Weird,” was all Teddy said.

“I like your hair,” Harry said. Teddy’s hair was curly and green today, shaved on half his head. He had on ripped-up jeans and a black t-shirt with some kind of band on it, probably a Muggle one.

“How was Hogwarts this year?”

“Good,” Teddy said. He didn’t tend to be particularly talkative, though Harry had had some experience to prepare him for Draco’s verbosity, since Harry knew Rose Granger-Weasley.

“Thank you for coming,” Harry said. “I mean, to help me.”

“Sounds like you don’t need it.”

“I appreciate it, nevertheless.”

“It’s cool.” Teddy shrugged. “Does Draco have piercings?”

“Of course not,” Harry said.
Teddy just shrugged again. “He said he did. He said he was pretty wild. Leather trousers, and all.”

“Leather. Um.” Harry swallowed, glancing over at Andromeda, who had sat down again to read the paper. “Trousers?”

“I know.” Teddy made a face. “So, he was a git when he was eleven, right? He always told me he was a git.”

“He wasn’t.”

“You sure? He makes it sound like he slaughtered puppies, or something.”

“You know Draco,” Harry said. “Imagine him slaughtering anything.”

“True,” Teddy agreed. “Draco’s very particular about smells.”

“Teddy,” Harry said in a rush. “You know I love you—right?”

Teddy frowned at him, the long eyebrows he had on today slanting down, the soft mouth pursed. Usually Teddy didn’t change his mouth, unless he really wanted to look like someone else. He said that was the hardest part. “Ye-es?” he said, with some hesitation. “Are you—is something wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong,” Harry said. “I just wanted you to know.”

Teddy went on frowning. “Is something wrong with Uncle Draco? I mean. Besides the whole being nineteen thing.”

“I just figured I don’t—I don’t say it enough, that I love you.”

“Is something wrong with Gran?”

“Harry’s working through some things,” Andromeda said, rustling her paper.

Teddy turned his frown on her, then looked back at Harry. “No one has cancer, do they?”


“Sometimes.” Teddy snorted.

“And I wanted you to know,” Harry went on brokenly. “I wanted to tell you and get better at telling you, and for you to never doubt that—that I love who you are. Exactly who you are. Anyone you want to be.”

“Great, because I’m thinking about being a vampire.”

“No,” Andromeda said, paper rustling again.

“I’d love you as a vampire,” Harry said.

“What about a koala?” said Teddy.

“No,” Andromeda said.

“I’d love you as a koala.”

“What about a vampire koala?”
“That could be interesting,” Andromeda said, “but no.”

“Can I hug you?” Harry said.

Teddy looked at him incredulously. “Are you sure no one has cancer?”

“Harry’s trying to have emotions,” Andromeda said. “Let the poor boy have them.”

“He’s my godfather,” Teddy told Andromeda. “Not a poor boy. It’s all right, Harry.” Turning back to Harry, Teddy walked up and put his arms around him. “Pay no attention to Gran. She loves you, too.”

“I wouldn’t love a vampire koala,” Andromeda said.

“I love you so much.” Harry couldn’t help squeezing him.

“You think I don’t know that?” Teddy said. “You must be nuts. You’re crushing me.”

“Sorry,” Harry said, letting him go.

“That’s all right,” Teddy said. “You want to practice hugging? You can practice on me.” Teddy looked at him sardonically, which was his general look. “You know I love you too, right?”

“Yeah.” Harry hugged him again, this time more gently. “Yeah, I know you do.”

“Just to reiterate,” Andromeda said from behind her paper, “no vampire koalas.”

Harry brushed his lips over the shock of green hair so Teddy wouldn’t feel it, trying not to hug him too hard.

*

Harry had decided to come in the front door of Tailored Tinctures instead of Apparating in as usual. He really should have been doing that from the beginning; only he’d always wanted Draco right away when he’d needed a potions ID. Draco had been correct; Harry really had treated Draco as though Draco was at Harry’s beck and call. That could change—only now that Harry was walking into Tailored Tinctures, he didn’t see Draco, and Draco didn’t come when he called.

Harry checked the bedroom, but the bed didn’t look slept in, so when Harry took the stairs it was two at a time.

“Do you knock?” Draco said, when Harry burst into the sitting-room, and the drawl sounded so much like adult-Draco that Harry’s heart stopped for a moment. Curled up in his floral-print chair with a book in his lap, Draco didn’t look so different from his grown-up self either. Marking his place, Draco slowly closed the book. “You look like shite,” he observed.

“Are you okay? How are you feeling?”

“Calm down, Potter.”

Draco’s mouth had got thinner. His hair had a bit less shine. “All right,” Harry said, after a long moment. “I’ve calmed down. Are you okay?”

“My father and mother are in prison and I can’t do magic. Do you think I’m okay?”

“What can I do?”
Draco angled his face away. The line of his jaw had got sharper also, Harry realized. “You’ve done enough, thanks.”

“Do you need anything to eat? Your stores have got low. I’ll go shopping for you. I can pick up fish and chips.”

“Potter,” Draco said quietly. “I meant it. Let me do something on my own, for once.”

The words reminded Harry so much of something Draco had said when he was older, when Harry was trying to defend Draco against Alby, that Harry was startled.

Slowly, Draco stood. He had got even taller. “You testified for me at the trial. Why did you?”

“It was the right thing to do. And your mum saved my life.”

“But why did you testify for me?”

“I told you,” Harry said. “It was the right thing to do. And you didn’t identify me, when they brought me to the Manor, and I know you knew it was me.”

“How?”

Harry shrugged. “You always know it’s me.”

“Then it wasn’t . . .” Draco angled his face away again. “You didn’t—it wasn’t because you’re bent?” he said in a rush.

“What?”

“Nothing,” Draco said, but then he went on. “Your testimony. It wasn’t . . . ? Because?”

“Draco,” Harry said slowly. “I didn’t know I was gay until I was twenty.”

Draco frowned. “But you said.”

“I said I was gay.”

“But how could you not . . .?” Draco’s face was splotching up with colour. “I mean. Didn’t you . . . ? And, and Oliver Wood. You said—and he was—I thought you meant—?”

Draco was stumbling over his words, and yet for once he seemed to be speaking on the subject in a way that wasn’t oblique or completely bigoted, which was a first. “I realized Oliver was attractive after I left Hogwarts.”

“But—but I was talking about—we were talking about—I mean, I thought you were talking about . . . ,” Draco looked so mortified, but he pressed on. “It was about blokes in school, wasn’t it? You mean, you didn’t, in school—at all?”

Harry’s heart was twisting in his chest. “He was attractive in school. I just didn’t realize it. I looked back on it afterwards—how he looked—and realized he was.”

“But how could you not—? Didn’t you want—?”

“Draco,” Harry tried to say it as gently as he could. “I didn’t know what I wanted. I thought I wanted Ginny Weasley.”
“But I thought—I thought you were born with it!” Draco pitch was rising. “If you could like a girl—if you could—if you got to choose, why—why would you—why would you choose to be—why . . .” Draco’s face contorted. “I thought you were like me!”

“Draco.” Harry didn’t know what else to say, and Draco was standing there, looking as though he was going to cry all over again. “Can I,” Harry began, reaching out. “Let me.” Then Harry’s hand was on Draco’s shoulder, and Draco was letting him come closer, and Harry was hugging him.

Harry knew this confusion. He was so familiar with it, and when Draco was eleven and every year he’d remembered since then, Draco had talked around this as though it were perfectly acceptable to talk about which boys you found cute as long as you didn’t mention being attracted to them. If Draco had ever mentioned it directly, he’d hurled slurs and insults, some of them as vicious as anything he’d ever said about Muggles or Hermione, and Harry had just assumed it would be a while until Draco outgrew that. Perhaps he never had, and yet he’d talked about it so gently with Harry over that game of Exploding Snap, when Harry had been eleven and it hadn’t even occurred to him that gay people existed.

Now Draco was talking about it, and Harry wondered whether having lost the war, lost his parents, and lost everything else, Draco felt he was finally allowed to be himself. More had to be repressed in Draco than simply liking blokes, and Harry felt like maybe this had been the key all along; all of this had had to happen for Draco to finally grow up to be the person Harry had grown to love. Holding onto Draco tighter, Harry touched Draco’s hair, those short hairs in back, and willed for him to be okay.

Draco shifted in Harry’s arms, nearly of a height with Harry now, turning so that they were face to face. Draco’s breath was there on Harry’s beard, his big bright eyes looking into Harry’s glasses—and then Draco’s lips were there, clumsily closing over Harry’s. “No,” Harry said, pushing him away.

“Draco.” Harry’s voice felt raw. “I can’t.”

“You said . . .” Draco’s chest heaved, as though breathing were difficult.

“You’re nineteen,” Harry said helplessly.

“But you said.”

“You’re a child.”

“I’ve been in a war. I’ve seen people murdered. How can you say—how can you?”

“Because you’re not—we’re not . . .” Harry felt as speechless as Draco.

Draco’s lips looked really red.

“You don’t remember the things about you that I remember about you,” Harry said at last. “We’re not—on the same footing. It’s not right.”

“Of course, it’s not right! It’s fucking queer!”

Harry looked at Draco’s shining eyes, his red mouth, his contorted expression. His thin chest was still moving too rapidly. “I’m going to leave,” Harry said. “I’ll come back tomorrow.”
“I don’t want you to come back,” Draco yelled. “Get out!”

“I’m going,” Harry said, turning to go down the stairs.

“I don’t ever want to see you again!” Draco yelled down after him, then slammed the door.

Tomorrow, Draco would be twenty.

*

**June 2012**

**Harry Potter:** 31 years  
**Draco Malfoy:** 20 years

Harry showed up at Tailored Tinctures the next day with a Pensieve and shopping. The Pensieve he left downstairs; the shopping he brought upstairs, where he knocked on the door. Draco opened the door, and Harry almost dropped the bags.

Draco proceeded to lounge in the doorframe—he’d picked up this habit around now, then—and he had long hair. Tied up. In back. With pieces falling down. Around his face. He looked—he looked . . He should have looked like Lucius, perhaps, though Draco’s hair was neck-length, not past his shoulders as Lucius’s had been. Draco didn’t look like Lucius. He looked like a girl. He could have been mistaken for one, walking down the street.

Harry felt guilty that it was just about the hottest thing he’d ever seen.

It was probably sexist, or something. Hermione or something would say it was sexist, maybe. Ginny would shrug and say it was because Harry was bi, but Harry knew bi people who weren’t into boys who looked like girls. Apparently, Harry was into it. Apparently, he was very, very into this boy looking like a girl.

Harry could feel his cheeks turning red.

“I see we’ve learned to knock,” Draco drawled.

“I’ve brought—shopping.” Harry thrust out the bags, because maybe then Draco would take them and—and go away.

Draco’s eyes flicked down at the bags, then slowly dragged back up.

Fuck.

“I can see that,” Draco said, still in that lazy way. “What part of ‘don’t come back here’ didn’t you register?”

“Um.” Harry licked his lips, and then Harry saw that Draco’s ears were pierced. Several times. One of them was, anyway; Harry couldn’t see Draco’s other ear with the way his head was angled. Harry couldn’t see any earrings in the ear that was visible, just little holes. Draco would have woken up with the holes; his older self didn’t necessarily have earrings sitting about waiting to be worn. Harry had never noticed Draco having any piercings when Harry had first met him again at Slug and Jiggers, but Teddy had said Draco had had them. Draco had told Teddy he’d had them, and Harry wondered whether Draco would ever have volunteered anything like that to Harry.

“Is something the matter with my face?”
“You said that I could,” Harry said stupidly. “Come back. And that you wouldn’t . . .”

Draco raised a brow. “Verbally spar?”

“You said you’d let me.”

“You’re a bit pathetic,” Draco said, pushing off the door frame. “You know that?” Turning, he walked back into the sitting-room. Harry had been so distracted by the hair that he hadn’t noticed that Draco was wearing that stupid white pyjama top and Muggle jeans. How did adult-Draco even have Muggle jeans? Did twenty-year-old-Draco go out and buy them? For the one whole day he was going to be twenty? Did he have leather trousers, too?

Draco looked good—scorchingly good, in a way that made Harry feel guilty for being here at all—but when Harry kept looking at him he saw the thinness of Draco’s thighs, the boniness of Draco’s shoulders. When Draco turned back around to face Harry, Harry saw the way Draco’s collar bones jutted out and thought of how Draco had looked at Slug and Jiggers—a sick colour, his hair lacking shine, his whole face hollowed out. Harry put the shopping on the table. “You should eat something,” he said, even though he remembered the way Draco had lashed out that time he’d told Draco he should eat more.

“Yes, thank you. As you can see, I’m fine here,” Draco said, gesturing around the room, “so maybe you should go.”

Books were spread out everywhere. Harry could see some of the ones that had been burned, laid out carefully, as though for a project. “I never saw you when we were nineteen,” Harry said. “Or when we were twenty.”

“And yet I have to look at your face every day in the Prophet. I’m sure I don’t care about your courses at uni, or what you ate for breakfast, or whether you’re for the Tornadoes or the Harpies, and yet someone must care, since it’s the only thing consistently in the headlines.”

“What were you doing?” Harry asked. “The year you were nineteen, I mean.”

“I thought I would be fucking, mainly.” Draco looked away, idly doodling with his wand over one of the burned books. “But as it turns out, no one wants to fuck a Death Eater.”

_I want to_, Harry almost blurted, but managed to contain himself. “Er.” Harry licked his lips. “So, what have you been doing instead?”

“Living homeless, snatching crusts of bread from rubbish bins, that sort of thing.” Draco went on idly doodling over the book, which was slowly repairing itself.

“Draco,” Harry breathed.

“Now you’re worried for me.” A ghost of a smile touched Draco’s lips, turning them slightly. “That’s sweet.”

“Look at me,” Harry said, coming closer.

“Why? You keep staring at me as though I ‘almost killed your best friend and got your two favourite professors killed, and kept calling your friend a Mudblood and had her tortured at my house’, so why do I need to look at you? I know what you think.” Draco glanced up at him from under his lashes—just like he used to do when he was eleven when he’d pretend he wasn’t looking, only this was different. “Despite what you’ve told me.”
“That’s...” Swallowing, Harry tried again. “That’s not how I’m looking at you.”

Draco’s eyes swept over him. “Then how are you looking at me, Auror Potter?”

“I’m...” Harry swallowed again. There seemed to be a lump in his throat. “Are you really homeless?”

Turning away, Draco snapped the book shut. “I got a Muggle job. If you must know.”

Harry felt a swell in his chest, realizing with a start of surprise that the feeling was pride. “How did you do that?”

“I obviously couldn’t do it on my own.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“No,” Draco agreed, tilting his head. “You’re right. I’d probably kill those poor Muggles, wouldn’t I? Or at least I’d torture and maim them. Maybe I would rape their children—who knows the kind of monster I am. A boy-loving bigot; how’s that for a bogey-man?”

When Harry had met Draco again at Slug and Jiggers, he’d talked this way—not with the homophobic slurs, just with the bitingly sarcastic self-criticism. Harry always used to think Draco was quoting the things he’d heard other people say, the things he thought other people thought of him. Now Harry was fairly certain Draco had been saying the things he thought of himself—even the things that he knew weren’t true. Draco thought that people should think those things. He thought that he deserved it.

The one good bit to come out of this realization was that Harry no longer desperately wanted to shag twenty-year-old-Draco, which was a relief. Harry had never been attracted to someone this much younger than him before, and he didn’t like how lecherous it made him feel.

“I’ve gone and shocked you,” Draco said.

“No,” Harry said, a little roughly. “You’ve just... reminded me of you. When you’re older.”

“I hope I’ve at least got fucked by then. Wouldn’t it be sad to go through all this, and still be a virgin.”

Harry didn’t know what to say to that, so he thought he’d better change the subject. “What Muggle job have you got?”

“Maybe that’s my own business,” Draco said, his gaze dropping again. “Leave me some decency, at any rate.”

Swallowing again, Harry took another step closer. “I was wondering if you could help me with a case I’m working on. The supplier—the illegal potions ring I mentioned. You always help—later, when you start potions consulting, so I—”

Draco’s head jerked up. “I’m really a potions consultant?”

“Yes. Draco,” Harry said, a little impatiently, “I didn’t lie about everything. I just let you think—some things—that weren’t exactly true.”

“That’s a very Slytherin definition of lying.” Draco had opened the book and was doodling with his wand again.
“Will you help me?”

“Why should I?”

Harry shrugged. “You always do.”

“But why?”

“I don’t know,” Harry said. “At first, I thought it was because I’d helped your mum, and maybe you were afraid you could get in trouble if you didn’t help me. But then . . .”

“Then,” Draco repeated.

Harry hadn’t really noticed Draco’s voice changing. Harry hadn’t pinpointed the age, but it had definitely changed. It now had that timbre that made Harry feel as though something had been strummed inside him every time that Draco spoke. “Then I started to think you did it because you wanted to help. Because you’re a good person.”

“Ah,” Draco said in that quiet way he had. “You don’t think I did it because I wanted you to fuck me.”

Harry finally lost his patience. “Draco, not everything in the world is about how gay you are.”

“Maybe not,” Draco said. “But there was meant to be a high point in losing my father and my mother and my home and my friends and everything I ever cared about. The high point was meant to be getting to snog whomever I want, only I’ve found that’s a bit hard to do when no one wants to snog you back.”

Harry was about to snog him just to prove him wrong, so instead he said, “Have you tried snogging any Muggles? I doubt they care you’re a Death Eater.”

Draco’s lip curled, and oh, right. Draco was still a bigot. That hadn’t changed yet, then, just because Draco was hot. Harry couldn’t even be sure it had changed by the time Draco got to be thirty-two. They’d never discussed Muggles; they’d barely even touched on the subject when Harry was eleven.

“Are you going to help me or not?” Harry said finally.

“Because I’m such a good person?” Draco made another face, and he looked younger then. “Why not. Lead on.”

Downstairs, Harry showed Draco the memories from the Ward Record, explaining that the Seeing-Eye Ball watched the lab, while the Ward Record recorded everything the Eye saw. You could speed through the memories, like a fast-forward, but you had to watch carefully to make sure you didn’t miss anyone coming or going. Draco had a Pensieve in the lab, and Harry had brought his own over, so together they could examine all the memories twice as fast.

“That’s it?” Draco said, sounding disappointed. “You want me to look in a Pensieve for hours on end?”

Harry raised a brow. “Did you think the life of an Auror was glamorous?”

“I thought it would be something to do with potions. I thought—” Draco cut himself off, starting again. “I thought since I can’t use magic, I’d find a way around it by—” He stopped again.

“You do use potions when you help me usually. And you’re not under restriction anymore, so you
can use magic if you want.” Since Draco still didn’t look happy about it, Harry added, “You don’t have to help me if you don’t want.”

“Whatever,” Draco said, sounding more like he had when he was thirteen than he did when he was thirty-two. “I’ve nothing better to do.”

“Good,” Harry said, and they got started.

* *

**June 2012**

**Harry Potter:** 31 years  
**Draco Malfoy:** 21 years

When Draco was twenty-one, Harry knocked on the door to Draco’s sitting-room. Draco opened the door looking more beautiful than ever, his hair even longer. Harry could only tell from the wisps spilling down, but Draco’s hair was long enough for him to have tied it back in a knot without anything to fasten it. Holy fuck.

He was still too thin, though—thinner than last time, and Harry remembered thinking Draco’s face had looked like a skull, when Harry had seen him at Slug and Jiggers. Harry didn’t want Draco to look like a skull. He wanted him to look like a gorgeous happy boy who always got enough to eat and wasn’t afraid to wear his hair down. With ribbons in it. Harry wondered if Draco ever did eyeliner.

“I’ve brought you fish and chips,” Harry said, thrusting the greasy bag at Draco, mostly so that it would block the view of Draco’s gorgeous neck.

Draco went pale. His face changed. “Take it away,” he said, but it wasn’t in a snarky voice. His face wasn’t a sneer, either. He was looking sick, actually. “I mean it, Potter. Take it away.”

Harry lowered the bag.

“I’ve got to—” Draco covered his mouth and rushed back toward the kitchen.

Banishing the food, Harry came into the sitting room and closed the door, then followed Draco into the kitchen. He was in the loo, kneeling before the toilet. “Draco!” Harry rushed toward him, but Draco put out a hand.

“Don’t,” he said. “With that smell, don’t—come near me.”

“Smell?”

“You still smell like it.”

He meant the fish and chips, Harry realized. Taking out his wand, Harry pointed it at himself, then got a glass and put water in it. He didn’t know what trick Draco had used when Harry was eleven to make the water feel like it cleaned your mouth, but he took the glass anyway and hovered outside the door. “Can I come in?” he asked. “I’ve done a Smell Dispel.”

“No.” Wearily, Draco stood, then came out and took the water.

Harry glanced back into the loo. “You didn’t sick up.”

“I thought I would.”
Are you pregnant? Harry thought wildly, but some things were impossible even with magic. It’d be better if they weren’t impossible, actually, then maybe Narcissa and Lucius wouldn’t have fucked Draco up so badly with the notion that having a pure-blood wife was an absolute imperative. “But you like fish and chips?”

Draco shook his head. “Not anymore.”

Harry tried to think this through, because Draco had really seemed to like them quite a lot when he’d been younger. Even as a teenager, he hadn’t complained when Harry had made them. And he’d complained about basically everything else Harry did. “Did your taste buds change?” Harry asked, trying to come up with an explanation.

“No.” Draco walked from the kitchen back to the sitting room, where books were still all over the place.

Harry trailed uselessly behind him. “Then . . . did something bad happen? With fish and chips?”

“Yes, something bad happened.” Draco flung himself down into the sofa.

He still had the one from Grimmauld Place, Harry realized with a start. It still had stagecoaches and dogs and cabbages on it, though now it also had blood. Draco hadn’t bothered to clean it, which seemed unlike him. “What happened?” Harry said, edging closer.

“I don’t have to tell you.”

Draco had on his dressing gown over Muggle clothes, only he was wearing it differently than he had when he was older. When he was older, Draco had worn that dressing gown wrapped about himself, closing himself off. It had made him look prim and proper in a way that had made Harry want to muss him. Now Draco wore it loose, completely open. It had flapped about his ankles when he walked, and now with the way he was sprawled on the sofa it made him look decadent, like something from a magazine. The sharp lines of him were still visible underneath, elegant and precise, and with the softness of that hair, he—he was far too thin. Harry wanted to hold him and feed him soup. Thinking that such treatment would not be welcome, Harry said gently, “You don’t have to tell me. But you could.”

“Why are you so obsessed with me?” Draco put his arm over his eyes. “Why can’t you leave me alone?”

“I want to make sure you’re okay,” Harry said. “And you said you’d help me look at more of those memories in the Pensieve.”

Draco took his arm off his eyes, but he turned to look at the cushions on the sofa, instead of at Harry. “I work in a Muggle restaurant,” he said suddenly. “All I’ve had is grease to eat for the past two years.”

“But you’re so—” thin, Harry had been about to say, but then he had realized he probably shouldn’t comment on Draco’s weight.

“At first it was all right,” Draco went on. “Free food, and everything. But then I couldn’t stand to eat it, and I didn’t have money to buy other things, and then—it got to be that I couldn’t even stand the smell of it, so I developed a potion so I wouldn’t have to, and then I couldn’t smell anything and I just . . . Jesus.” Draco turned to look a Harry, a lock of hair falling across his face. “I just feel so ill, all the time.”

Harry looked at him in incomprehension.
Draco must have misinterpreted the expression, because as Harry watched, Draco’s face began to contort with its old rage. Suddenly, he sat up straight.

“Go ahead and stare,” he spat. “It’s what I deserve; isn’t that what you’re thinking? I should be starving, after what I’ve done; shouldn’t I? That’s what you all were thinking, when you took away my magic.”

“That wasn’t what I was thinking. Draco,” Harry said, still not quite over the shock of it. “You said, ‘Jesus’.”

Draco made another face. “I’ve been hanging about with Muggles, haven’t I? I did what you said after all; I fucked one. What do you think of that?”

Harry tried not to think of that at all, as interest and pity and jealous all seemed to have reared their head in equal measure in response to Draco’s comment, and that didn’t seem like an appropriate reaction at all. Swallowing hard, Harry licked his lips. “I didn’t mean you should fuck just anyone,” he said finally, since Draco made it sound like he’d pulled someone off the street, just so he could do it.

Draco rolled his eyes. “His name was Erik; he was fit. He said he liked me; he had green eyes, so I fucked him.”

“Today?” Harry asked, so confused. “Are you mental?”

“But you said—the green eyes. I thought,” Harry began, but he didn’t know what he’d thought.

Draco stared at him. “Potter,” he said, then seemed like he had to start again. “Potter, do you really think my fetish for green eyes began when a potion turned me into an eleven-year old? It began when I was actually eleven. Christ, you’re so fucking clueless.” Draco stood, turning his back on him.

Harry watched Draco walk over to the table, where more of the burned books were laid out. “Are you all right?” Harry asked at last.

“I’m fine.” Draco turned around to face Harry again. “Or did you think Muggle-Erik would infect me? No. You thought I thought Muggle-Erik might infect me. You’re worried I feel debased.”

“No,” Harry said. “I asked because people can still hurt you. Whether they’re Muggle or not.”

“Don’t worry, Potter,” Draco said, looking down at one of the books. “He used plenty of lube.”

“That’s not what I meant, and you know it.”

“I’m not sure what you meant. How much lube do you use?”

“Why do you talk like this?” Harry blurted, unable to contain it. “How come you’re always so—”

“Slutty?”

“Destructive. You want to make people hate you.”

“No. I want to make you hate me. You, specifically.”

“But why?” Harry asked, feeling so gutted. “I know we have our history, but you know that I—” He
didn’t know how to even say it, the things he felt for Draco, so Harry didn’t try. “Why can’t you just get over it?”

“Could you? When we meet again, is everything instantly forgiven?” Draco’s eyes slid over to him, gazing at him sideways around the long single curve of loose hair. He looked away. “I thought not.”

Harry looked down at the sofa, the table beside it. The table had a book on it, probably one Draco had been reading, not repairing. The book was leather-bound with vines on the cover and fairy tales inside.

When Draco spoke again, his voice was soft. “When you spend fifteen years of your life pretending you don’t want something—never even talking about it, never even allowing yourself to look . . . and suddenly everyone telling you that you couldn’t have it is gone, and you can not only look; you can touch—Potter. Why wouldn’t my every waking thought be about sex?”

“That’s not what I—”

“And then imagine ten of those years, wanting something very specific you know you can never have, for more reasons than just—because you hated me Potter; you rejected me, and you were friends with the wrong people. When that happens, you take that want and bury it so deep that even thinking about it hurts. Just like Dumbledore’s ghost.” Draco looked down at his hand on the book, grey light from the window making a sort of halo around his slim body, lighting up his dull hair. “When it hurts that much, you grow to hate it. You really hate it. All the way, deep down. Sexual attraction and hate are basically the same things to me, Potter. And I hate you,” he murmured. “I’ve always hated you very, very much.”

Harry still felt gutted, as though Draco had taken all of his insides and put them into the future, where it seemed impossible that Draco could feel this way, leaving Harry in the present completely empty, scraped raw. Then Harry opened his mouth and said the most incomprehensible thing he could have imagined saying. “Can you take down your hair.” His voice was so choked he didn’t even feel like he could make it sound like a question, at the end.

Draco’s gaze snapped over to him. “What?” he said sharply.

“Can you take it down,” Harry said again. “I—I want to see it.”

Slowly, not breaking eye contact, Draco lifted his arms, reaching behind his head. He untied the knot, and his hair came down in a long, curving river, then spread out. It was straight, but not as straight as Harry had imagined, a few curves in it causing it to come out a bit by Draco’s face, instead of hanging lifelessly down. It no longer had that gleam it used to have, parts of it gone that colour of brown that almost looked grey, the shade of a mouse.

Draco looked even more like a girl, like this, the sharp features of his face softer somehow, more feminine. Harry thought he was definitely sexist, and that Draco was the most beautiful person he’d ever seen.

As slowly as he’d taken down his hair, Draco began to smirk. “Like it, do you?”

“Yes,” Harry said, not quite breathing properly.

“What do you want to touch it?”

“Yes,” Harry said breathlessly.

Draco took a step toward him. “Perhaps we should—”
Harry took a step back. “We can’t. I can’t.”

“I’m twenty-one.”

“I’m thirty-one.”

“You keep telling me your age.” The smirk came back, a hint of a smile by one cheek. Fuck. Draco was so fucking gorgeous. “I was going to suggest that we go down to the lab and get to work on those memories.”

“What?” Harry said stupidly.

“You’re the one who misinterpreted.” Reaching back, Draco began tying up his hair again. “Then again, you’re the one who so desperately wants to shag me.”


“You just assumed I was talking about you,” Draco went on. “You always were so arrogant, Potter.”

Draco was lying. Harry knew Draco was lying, but Harry couldn’t figure out why he would—particularly after he’d just told him a truth he’d been hiding half his life, apparently. Then again, Draco had said he hadn’t wanted to kiss him directly after he’d kissed him, during that incident with the siren tongue powder.

“Are you going to be too distracted?” Draco smirked again. “Do I need to wear a hat?”

“No,” Harry managed to say. “So, the upshot is, I should have brought a salad.”

Startled out of his smirk, Draco almost laughed a real laugh. Then he coughed. “Yeah,” he agreed. “Maybe you should have.”

They went downstairs to the lab to look at memories.

*

June 2012

Harry Potter: 31 years

Draco Malfoy: 22 years

When Draco turned twenty-two, Harry entered Tailored Tinctures to find Draco in the lab. The second Harry put his foot in the door and saw Draco, however, Harry froze.

“Don’t look so disappointed,” Draco said, barely even looking up from his magic microscope. “It was never going to be permanent.”

Draco was bald.

More correctly, his head was shaven, just a light fuzz on top where all that hair had been. Given Draco’s light colouring, the fuzz was darker in colour than Harry would have expected, had he expected this at all. “But,” Harry said. “Why?”

“Mum’s getting out,” Draco said, taking out a slide and pushing in another.

As far as Harry knew, Narcissa didn’t live with Draco after Azkaban. As far as Harry knew, she was admitted straight to Janus Thickey. Harry swallowed hard, wondering how much Draco knew at this point, wondering how much Harry should tell him. “I thought she liked your hair? Wasn’t she the
one who—” Harry stopped himself, thinking perhaps he shouldn’t remind Draco that he knew about the ribbons. “I thought your dad was the one who made you get it cut?”

“Mum would know what it meant if she saw it long.” Draco switched the slides again, still focused on the microscope. “She was always keen like that.”

“And you don’t want her to know what it meant.”

“I don’t want her to know I resorted to shagging Muggles, because I needed cock just that badly? Not particularly.” Draco reached for another slide, and Harry was beginning to think the microscope was just an excuse, so Draco wouldn’t have to look at him. “I told you not to sound disappointed,” he went on. “I tried something. It didn’t work.”

“What do you mean, it didn’t work?” You got shagged, didn’t you? Harry wanted to add. Not sounding disappointed was proving difficult.

Finally, Draco looked up, and he looked absolutely terrible. It was not the lack of hair—his hair had made him look so gorgeous that having it all shaved off should have made him look a lot less gorgeous, but that wasn’t the problem. In fact, the lack of hair brought out the delicacy of his features, the sharpness of his jaw. He would have looked just as good as ever, except that now the thinness had verged into skeletal territory. There were large hollows under his eyes, nearly purple on his pale skin. His eyes were too big. Harry felt like he could see individual bones in Draco’s hands.

“I always thought that maybe if I could shag a bloke—just one; it didn’t matter whom—then maybe I could get it out of my system.” Draco was speaking slowly, his words very measured. “I wouldn’t want to do it any longer, and I could be what my parents wanted. I think we both know it doesn’t work that way.”

“That’s not a reason to stop,” Harry said, coming closer. “Of course not,” Draco said, his tone derisive. “But I discovered something else.” Carefully, he stacked one slide on top of another. “Shagging blokes isn’t as good as I thought it would be.” His eyes flicked up, taking in Harry’s expression. “It’s good. You were right; it can be—fun. But it’s not the be-all, end-all of my existence. In fact, I’ve discovered, it’s farther down on the list than I thought.”

“But it’s a part of you.” Harry took another step closer. “So is my hair. I can cut it off. Unlike some parts of me.”

“But why?” Harry asked. “You don’t have to.”

Draco began fiddling with the slides again, stacking another one on top of the other two. “I told you my every waking thought was about sex, but it wasn’t true. I think about it a lot, but not as much as I think about—Mum and Dad. Crabbe and Goyle. Dobby and peacocks and playing Quidditch on the greens, dancing lessons and coloured fire, Father reading me books. Do you understand me? Give me the choice to fuck a thousand blokes. Give me the choice to fuck the man of my dreams.” He lifted his eyes back to Harry. “I’ll still choose Mum every time.”

“Do you really have to choose? Do you really think she’d disown you if—”

“Disown me?” Draco said, appalled. “Potter, there’s nothing to disown. We don’t have a house; we don’t have any money for her to take away.”

“Do you really think she would take away her love?” Harry came closer, close enough now to put
his hand on Draco’s shoulder. Harry knew better than to do it. “Draco, she loves you so much.”

“You think I don’t know that?” Draco looked up at him incredulously. “I’m not talking about her love; I’m talking about her—do you know what it would do to her, if she knew I was fucking Muggle blokes? Maybe she’d be a bit disappointed, but that’s all right. I can live with that. It’s—she’d think I was unhappy. She’d think I must be, to go and do something like that; she’d think she’d done something wrong to make me this way. She loves me so much that she can’t even blame me. She’d blame herself.”

“Is it—because it’s Muggles?” Harry asked. “If you found someone magical to be with . . .”

“It’s blokes,” Draco said. “Haven’t you understood any of this? Potter. If you—you who are rich and famous and as good as pure-blood, and the most celebrated wizard of our time—and for some reason you wanted to be with me, and we had a stork brought us a miracle pure-blood baby so that my mum could have the pure-blood grandchildren she’d always wanted—don’t you understand? That still wouldn’t be enough, because I’d be with a man. She’d still think someone was wrong with me; she’d still worry that I wasn’t happy, and she’d still blame herself, because she—she dressed me up when I was a child, and she let me put on her cosmetics.”

“But she’d still love you,” Harry pointed out.

“But she wouldn’t be proud of me, and that’s all I—fuck. You’re never going to understand this.”

“No,” Harry said slowly. “I don’t think I ever will.”

“You were raised completely different than I.”

“Yes. I was.”

“Then I don’t know how to explain it to you.” Draco massaged his temples for a moment, as though his head ached.

Harry wished he could take that ache away.

At last Draco put down his hands, opening his eyes and looking about the lab. “At least I get this place,” he said. “I’ve had my eye on Potage’s Cauldron Shop a while, but I didn’t think I’d get it.”

“Your mum won’t be disappointed you’re a shop-keep?”

“Probably,” Draco said, finally rising from his stool. “But I’ve got to make enough money to keep her somewhere, and it should be comfortable, and she shouldn’t have to work.”

Draco didn’t know about Janus Thickey, then. Harry didn’t think Narcissa had been released before she died, which meant Draco had never kept her anywhere. Harry remembered how much he’d let Draco assume when he’d been eleven, the problems it had caused, and yet Harry couldn’t seem to find it in himself to tell Draco the truth just now. Anyway, Draco was still talking.

“I’ve just got a job at Slug and Jiggers—you know, the potions shop on Diagon? I wanted Mr. Mulpepper’s, but she wouldn’t take me. No one wants to hire ex-Death Eaters.” Draco looked around the lab again. “But this is all right, actually. It’s quite good, in fact. Better than I expected. Did you want to look at the Ward Record memories?”

“They’re right here.” Harry set the jar on the table, hesitating. “I hate your job at Slug and Jiggers,” he said, after a moment. “Your boss is abusive.”
Draco looked away, lips pressing together. “You see me there, then.”

“In about a year.”

“And I’m so attractive, you just can’t stay away. Is that it?” Draco still wasn’t looking at him. He didn’t sound as though he meant it.

“It’s not like that.”

Draco turned to face him. “Then what is it like?”

Harry swallowed a sigh. “I needed a potion ID’ed.”

“Ah.” Draco’s gaze drifted to the jar on the table, where the memories swirled in lazy silver strands. “Sort of like you need memories Pensieved.”

“Not really,” Harry said. “I want you to help me with Pensieving so I can be near you.”

“I hope you don’t say things like that when you come to me for potions ID,” Draco murmured.

“I don’t,” Harry said. “I didn’t even realize that was why I was always coming to you. Not for a long time, anyway.”

“But your magic knew.” Draco nodded across the room at Harry’s fox, who was snoozing in a ball and not paying them any mind. “We’ve become good friends, your Patronus and I. I think she’s in love with me.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” Harry muttered.

Draco shifted uncomfortably. “Let’s get to work, shall we?”

“I just,” Harry said, pushing his glasses up. “You’ll let her see you be a shop-keep, but she can’t see you be gay? Is being gay so much worse?”

Draco stared at him for a moment, the silver fox uncurling and letting out a big yawn. “I really do mentor you on the ways of having parents, don’t I?” he said, but his voice was not unkind. “In the scheme of things, it’s more important that Mother have a roof over her head than be proud of me. It’s more important that she have food to eat and the cushions she likes and the robes she—Potter. If I had to prostitute myself to every Muggle on the street so that she could have her bonbons, I’d do it.”

“Er.” Harry’s stomach went tight. “You didn’t—you’re not, are you?”

Draco rolled his eyes. “I’m destitute, Potter, not craven. The point is, I would. Her safety and her comfort are more important than that she be proud of me. Once I’ve got that sorted, though, she’ll want to think I’ve got a proper life—as much as I can as a shop-keep—so I’ll keep my hair cut and not fuck boys, and that will be that.”

Harry thought of what Andromeda had said, of Narcissa going mad, thinking she had ruined her son. “But—isn’t her top priority your safety and comfort?”

“Now you’re getting it.”


“Shagging blokes is a luxury item. You see? Not a necessity. We can’t live without me being a shop-keep, or something of that sort. But we can live without me shagging blokes.”
“Bonbons are a luxury item.”

“Yes,” Draco said, sounding highly annoyed, “but they’re for her.”

“But don’t you think she’d want luxury items for you?”

“Exactly, Potter. That’s why I never let her know what I really want or who I really am, and we both of us pretend I didn’t play with dolls when I was six.”

Harry stared at him, thinking that that couldn’t be what Narcissa wanted. It probably wasn’t what Narcissa wanted at all, but Draco wasn’t going to believe what Harry had to say. Maybe Narcissa wouldn’t even have believed him either; she was just as warped as Draco was. “That’s fucked up.”

“Yes, well.” Draco put his nose up. “If you had had parents, you would understand.”

Harry stood there, trying to think of a way to tell Draco that Narcissa ended up in Janus Thickey, until he realized that it didn’t matter. It didn’t matter to Draco. Maybe he’d have to spend a little less money to buy her bonbons, but—scratch that. He’d still buy her bonbons; he’d probably still go see her every day after work, every morning once he got Tailored Tinctures. He’d still wear his hair short and pretend he didn’t like blokes, because what mattered was that his crazy Mum in the Janus Thickey Ward not worry about him. A life of his own didn’t matter to him at all, and Harry wondered if it ever would.

“Let’s take a look at those memories,” Harry said.

They got to work.

*

**June 2012**

**Harry Potter:** 31 years  
**Draco Malfoy:** 23 years

Over a week had passed since Draco had turned eighteen and Harry had gone back to stay at Grimmauld Place, but Harry had come every time his Patronus had alerted him that Draco was a new age. When Harry came on the day Draco turned twenty-three, Draco was already in the lab again.

“So, we’ve met again,” Draco said, when Harry opened the door to the shop.

“I wasn’t sure if you’d remember.”

Draco gave him a strange look. “You’d thought I’d forget? Also, I just got these memories; for me, it happened barely four days ago.”

“I meant, I wasn’t exactly sure when it happened—whether you’d remember on this interval or the next.”

“Harry Potter.” Draco clicked his tongue. “How could you forget the exact date of our reunion; I’m appalled.”

“Well,” Harry said, setting down the jar of memories for them to review. “It wasn’t much of a reunion.”

“Indeed. You were quite rude.”
“I was rude.”

“Yes.” Draco lifted his chin in the air. “You failed to adequately admire my genius.”

“If you want me to tell you you’re tops at potions every time we meet,” Harry said, settling in in front of his Pensieve, “you’re going to have to wait.”

“I—” Draco blushed. “How long?”

“Guess you’ll just have to wait and see.” Harry poured half the memories into the Pensieve, leaving the other half for Draco. Harry waited for Draco to take the jar and pour out the memories, then said, “How’s your mum?”

Draco made a face. “Why are you asking, if you already know?”

“I don’t know,” Harry said.

Huffing a breath, Draco rolled his eyes. “I meant, I have to have told you about it sometime in the future.” Harry watched as Draco arranged himself to dip his face in the Pensieve, and Draco glanced back up. Catching Harry’s expression, Draco lifted his face back up. “Don’t I?”

Harry shook his head.

Draco’s face went a bit pale, his eyes beginning to flash, and now Harry recognized Draco’s anger when he saw it. “That whole bit about being friends—that was a lie as well? You didn’t tell me about my mother, and now you—”

Harry held up his hands. “All I knew was that she was in Janus Thickey,” he said. “I didn’t lie about being friends. It just—hasn’t happened yet.”

“I know it hasn’t happened on my timeline; I’m talking about yours.”

Harry didn’t know how to say this. “It hasn’t happened on my timeline yet either.”

“The fuck are you talking about, Potter.” Draco stood up, his voice so flat that the words didn’t sound like a question.

“You said we could be,” Harry said. “When I was little. You said if I grew up and still wanted to be your friend, you would be. So, once you remember—”

“Once I remember? You think we’re friends in the future because I promised a child? What the fuck is wrong with you?”

A lot. Probably. But Draco would remember that eventually as well, so Harry didn’t say anything.

“What the fuck made you think I’d keep my promise?”

“You will,” Harry said.

“I’m a fucking Slytherin! What the fucking hell makes you think I’d ever keep a promise?”

“You’ve kept the promises you’ve made to your parents.”

Draco’s his lip curled in disdain. “Have you heard anything I’ve said? I’ve kept none of my promises; I fucked Muggles, Potter—Muggle blokes; I’ve sucked their cocks; I’ve smoked fags; I got piercings; I worked in a Muggle restaurant; I’m a shopkeeper’s assistant! I’ve kept none of them!”
Harry pushed his glasses up. “I didn’t mean those kinds of promises.”

“What other kinds are there!” Draco flapped his arms.

“I meant the way you—you always care what they think, and you always want to please them. And the way you want to take care of your mum—”

“She’s my mum!”

“But that’s what I mean,” Harry said. “When you love someone, you always try so hard for them, and you never quit. You stop thinking about yourself, and you’d—you’d do anything, sacrifice anything, and—it’s not a verbal promise. It’s a deeper kind of promise.”

“When I love someone! I don’t love you!”

“Trust me,” Harry said wearily. “I’m well aware of that.”

Draco stared at him, his chest heaving, his eyes bright, looking a bit more like he had when he was thirteen than he had in some while. “So, you don’t even know,” he said finally, his shoulders slumping. “You don’t even know if we become friends.”

“I know,” Harry said. “We do.”

“But you don’t know—”

“I know you,” Harry said. “I know you, whether you love me or not. You meant it.”

“What if . . .” Draco’s voice trembled. “What if I’ve changed? With all this?” He gestured wildly, as though flapping his hands about could encompass the last week of growing older and everything had come with it. “What if I’m—I’m not the same person? When I remember?”

Harry frowned. “You’re worried you won’t feel the same as you did when you said that?”

“I’m worried you—” Draco looked away, his cheeks going pink.

Harry’s heart twisted, and he wanted to hold him. He’d never wanted to hold someone as often as his hands itched to touch Draco. “I’m going to feel the same.”

“But what if—”

“Draco,” Harry said, cutting him off. “I already feel the same. I swear to you. It’s not going to change.”

“And yet. You still won’t snog me.”

Draco still looked awful, pinched and pale just like Harry remembered from that first time in Slug and Jiggers. Somehow, he was still beautiful to Harry. In Draco’s thin lips Harry could remember the warm smiles cast down on him, when Harry was a kid; in Draco’s big grey eyes, Harry could see the eager, precocious boy Draco himself had been. In Draco’s high brow, Harry could see the man who was often angry and even more often afraid and the man who hid it behind a veneer of beauty and calm. In Draco’s hair Harry could see the long and short and everything in between, Draco’s struggle to find himself, and Harry wanted him. He wanted him.

The words came out before Harry knew what he was going to say, and then they were there, and he couldn’t take them back. “I’ll snog you.”
Draco’s jaw dropped a fraction, his raised brows making his eyes so big. “You will?”

“Yes.”

“Oh.”

They stood there.

Harry took a step toward him, then another step. Draco’s chest was rising and falling rapidly, his eyes gone even larger, his cheeks already tinged with pink. He licked his lips, and Harry reached out to touch his face. “I’m twenty-three,” Draco blurted.

“I don’t care.” Harry took off his glasses and put them in his pocket.

Harry really shouldn’t be doing this, but if he was going to do it, he should do it right. He should kiss Draco like Draco deserved; Harry should show Draco how Harry really felt, how much Harry cared. That wasn’t what Harry did.

It started out that way, Harry’s thumb brushing the corner of Draco’s jaw, just under the ear, stroking along Draco’s jaw to his mouth. Harry leaned in, angling his face so they didn’t bump noses. His lips gently brushed Draco’s, and Draco made a little gasping sound, letting his mouth fall open. So Harry did it again, brushing Draco’s mouth with his, gently pulling Draco’s lower lip with his own lips. But Harry could have more; Draco was opening his mouth against Harry’s, and Harry could have it, so Harry opened his own mouth and kissed him deeper.

And deeper, pressing into him until he was pushing Draco, and Draco was stumbling backwards, clumsily backing up until Draco was at the wall between two of the hearths. Harry slammed him up against it. “Oh,” Draco breathed, shocked. His eyes were very round, his lips very wet.

Harry wanted to devour him, all of him. He thought he might do it; he thought Draco might let him. Harry swept his tongue in and tasted the inside of Draco’s mouth, stroked Draco’s tongue with his own. Draco made another surprised sound, high-pitched and needy in the back of his throat. Draco was holding on as though for dear life, but kept letting Harry press deeper and deeper, opening up for him, soft and pliant and everything Draco usually was not.

Feeling as though he was burning in a fire that was too hot, Harry ripped his mouth away, gasping for fresh air, pressing his forehead against Draco’s as Draco sucked in a breath as well. They stayed like that, panting. Harry thought that if he caught his breath, he might regain his sanity with it.

“Potter,” Draco whispered. His hand came up, touching Harry’s scar. Then his lips brushed Harry’s, warm and soft. “Potter, please.” Draco pressed against him. His whole body was trembling.

“Please.”

Harry pulled away, but Draco’s jaw was there, and Harry’s lips brushed it, and then he was kissing his way to that spot at the corner of Draco’s jaw. Draco was giving it to him, turning his head so that Harry could have it, and Harry kissed him there, sucking just a little, until Draco made a low, hot sound that sent thrills down Harry’s spine. Then he pulled away.

Draco clutched at Harry’s arms.

“That’s how I feel.” Harry took out his glasses, sliding them back on. “I promise, it won’t change.”

Draco’s eyes widened, his face flushed, his lips still parted. “Oh my days. You’re not—you’re not stopping are you?”
“You don’t feel the same.”

“I’ve wanted you my whole life,” Draco said, still clutching him.

“There’s more to a relationship than wanting.”

Draco stiffened. “Yes. Well.” Carefully, he took his hands from Harry. “I wouldn’t know.”

“I’ll show you, if you’ll let me,” Harry said. “But right now, you don’t—you don’t know me the way that I know you. It isn’t fair to you. And it isn’t fair to me.”

Draco ground his teeth. “I’m not interested in being fair.”

“I am.”

“Why do you have to be so . . .” Draco pressed his lips together, breathing hard through his nose. His eyes were bright. “Fuck,” he said, expelling a breath. He leaned in close, forehead almost touching Harry’s again, but Harry’s glasses were in the way. “Why do you always have to be so bloody hot,” he muttered.

“So you’ll like me,” Harry murmured back, kissing the corner of Draco’s mouth.

“But it’s not fair.”

Harry smiled against Draco’s skin. “I thought you weren’t interested in being fair.”

“Don’t you want to just—can’t we just—with our clothes on,” Draco breathed. “We could just with our clothes on—and I promise I wouldn’t touch you—well, maybe a little. And we could just—snog —”

“Draco,” Harry said, smiling again. He felt a little bad about it but couldn’t help feeling amused as well. “It’s not a negotiation.”

“It could be.” Draco brushed Harry’s lips with his own.

Pulling away again, Harry took a step back. “No,” he said. “It can’t. I want you. I want the you who remembers me—all of me. You’ll be him in a week or so. It’s not that long to wait.”

“But I’ve already waited. Twelve years!”

“You never did tell me whether that got you what you wanted,” Harry said, smiling again.

“Whether what got me what I wanted?”

“Whinging about it and pouting.”

“I’m not—” Draco cut himself off with a huff. “Who wants to dry hump you anyway,” he said, turning away. “I don’t even care.”

Harry still couldn’t help feeling amused. “Let’s look at those memories from the Ward Record, shall we?” he asked, going back over to his Pensieve.

“Merlin, are you serious right now?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?”
“Ugh,” Draco said, and Harry didn’t tell him he sounded exactly like he had at thirteen. Draco wouldn’t appreciate it, even if it was true. “Do I really go on helping you?”

“Yes.”

“Do you ever even pay me?”

“No.”

“Ugh,” Draco said again. “I don’t know why I would.” Then he put his head in the Pensieve, as though that wasn’t to help Harry as well.
June 2012
Harry Potter: 31 years
Draco Malfoy: 24 years

When Draco was twenty-four, he and Harry found the illegal supplier responsible for the warehouse and the potions ring.

They were both examining memories from the Ward Record in Tailored Tinctures when Draco’s hand gripped Harry’s shoulder, yanking him out of his Pensieve.

Draco had been subdued that morning. This had made Harry wary, such that when Draco pulled him out of the Pensieve, Harry was sort of prepared for another argument about how they weren’t going to dry hump in Draco’s shop. Meanwhile, Draco was saying, “Look, Potter, look!” and tugging on his arm. Since Draco seemed to want him to, Harry stood, then Draco pushed him over toward Draco’s Pensieve and shoved Harry’s face down in it. Harry plunged into the filmy grey of memory, which eventually resolved itself into the same warehouse lab he had been watching hour after hour, day after day.

In the memories, Vance had already gone in and out of the lab a few times. Harry had told Draco to separate those memories, but Vance was not what Harry and Draco were looking for. Neither Savage nor Ron were either, because Harry already knew Savage was involved, and Ron was being controlled. What Harry needed was the supplier, because that had to be someone outside the department. If Harry could find the supplier, he should be able to more easily trace everyone who was involved and where all the contraband ingredients were. He should also be able to find whatever mechanism was controlling Ron, Hermione, and Shacklebolt, and get to the bottom of the whole thing.

When Draco shoved Harry’s face in the Pensieve, Harry was half afraid that whatever he saw would not be helpful. Maybe another Auror had got mind-controlled into being involved. Maybe Robards knew about the warehouse. Harry did recognize the figure who entered the lab in the memory, but it wasn’t an Auror. It was Abel Alby.

Harry took his head out.

“He could be the supplier,” Draco said. On Draco’s timeline, Alby had only just sacked Draco. “It makes sense; he was always disappearing at weird times, but I never knew why. I didn’t try to find out; I didn’t care—where are you going?”

Harry had stood, pouring the memories back into the jar. “I’ve got to question him.”

“Excellent.” Draco put his arm out. “Side-along?”

Harry glanced at it, then up at Draco’s face. “You’re a civilian.”

“And I’m helping you,” Draco said. “Let’s go.”

Harry looked at his arm again.
Draco put it down. “I’m going. That spineless little worm, I want to see him taken down. I want to see him—” He bared his teeth, a brutal expression that Harry remembered from the teenage version, but never from Draco in his twenties. “You can’t stop me.”

“You know that I could,” Harry said. He couldn’t take Draco with him—not because of protocol. Draco could be hurt.

“You won’t,” Draco said. “You know what he did to me.”

Harry wavered.

“I won’t do anything,” Draco said, detecting his advantage. “I’ll be a bystander. Bystanders are allowed. I just want to see. I promise.”

Harry still wasn’t sure.

“You always want to help me,” Draco said. “This time I’m asking.”

Harry put out his arm. Smiling, Draco took it, and they Disapparated to Slug and Jiggers.

*  

“Harry Potter!” Alby said, bustling forward.

Harry stepped in front of Draco on instinct, Alby’s oily voice recalling enough instances of Draco getting called names that Harry instantly felt the urge to protect him. “I’ve got a few questions for you,” Harry said.

“As you know, that little Death Eater no longer—” Alby cut himself off, apparently having caught sight of Draco.

Harry expected Draco to still be smirking or to make some kind of snide comment, but he was just standing there, looking oddly blank.

“Little Lord Malfoy,” Alby said, sounding significantly less pleased.

“He’s a bystander. Come on, we’re going in there.” Pointing his wand at Alby, Harry hauled him by the collar toward the work room behind the register, then pushed Alby in with a flick of his wand. When Harry turned back, Draco was still just standing there. “Draco?”

Licking his lips, Draco followed.

“The warehouse on Colville Road,” Harry said, pointing his wand at Alby. “Why were you there?”

“I don’t know what you—”

Harry flicked his wand again, freezing Alby’s vocal cords. “Listen to me carefully. Do you know who that is?” Nodding over toward Draco, Harry went on, “You know what he can do with potions. He engineered an indicator solution for Wood-Eye Lye, so I’ll know if you’ve taken it. If you have, he, you, and I can wait together until it wears off and I can administer Veritaserum. Or you could just answer my questions right now, and we can get this over with.” Harry released Alby’s vocal cords.

“Auror Potter,” Alby said, wheezing for breath and sounding a little squeaky. “Am I under arrest?”

“Not at all. This is a friendly chat. Now tell me what I need to know, or I’ll start using my hands instead of my wand.”
“I was just getting—ingredients for my potions!” Alby looked excited about this explanation. “For my little shop! How do you think I get ingredients for my little shop? They’re in that warehouse!”

“And who else knows about it?”

Alby glanced at Draco, who was hovering somewhere behind Harry.

Harry flicked his wand again, an invisible collar slowly drawing Alby up on his toes, rising and tightening around his neck. “Who else?”

Alby gurgled. “I—Mrs. Mulpepper!”

Harry glanced back at Draco, who was just standing there in back, his eyes gone very large. When Harry met Draco’s eyes, however, Draco gave a slight shake of his head. Harry knew Draco well enough now to read it. Draco had been working for Mrs. Mulpepper for a few weeks, now, and didn’t think she could be involved. Alby might have even said something like that just to take revenge on competition.

“Try again,” Harry said, tightening the collar.

“I—Auror Vance!”

“Good.” Harry released him. “Who else?”

Alby glared at him, rubbing his throat and glancing back at Draco.

“He won’t help you,” Harry said. “You tormented him for two years. He’s had seven to think about getting back at you. You know how smart he is, how creative. You know what he could do to you.”

Alby gulped. “I—could let you in,” he said desperately. “Auror Vance is involved in it. All kinds of Aurors are involved! I could get you a cut. When they see my shipments come in—if they know it’s for me—they look the other way, and they get a cut! It’s just the reagents; it’s not the brews—they still come for the brewers; it’s the brewers who are the real—”

“Don’t make me collar you again.” Harry didn’t even bother with his wand, raising his hand instead. His wandless magic was far less powerful, but for some reason, little men like Alby were often more afraid of what Harry could do without it, when he used it like a threat. They knew Harry had killed Voldemort, and most of them didn’t know how. Harry used it to his advantage. “Who are the other Aurors?”

“Proudfoot. Savage.”

“Who else?”

“No one.”

Harry’s hand squeezed.

“Head Auror Robards!” Alby squealed.

“Good.” Harry kept his hand squeezed, then used his other hand to hold his wand to Alby’s sweating temple. “Tell me what you’re doing to Auror Weasley.”

“I’m not doing any—”

Harry’s hand tightened into a fist, and Alby made a choking sound. “Tell me.”
“I have no—”

Alby was going to deny it again, so Harry increased the hold of his magic on Alby’s neck.

“Potter.”

Someone’s hand was on Harry’s arm. Harry jerked his head to look, and Draco was standing there, his face as white as a sheet, his eyes enormous. “Potter,” Draco said. “He can’t breathe.”

Harry looked at Draco uncomprehendingly.

Draco’s eyes darted to Alby, so Harry looked as well. Alby’s face, which had been red, had lost its colour, slowly going grey.

“Harry,” Draco whispered. “Stop.”

Harry dropped his hold. Alby slumped, taking big gasping, heaving breaths, and Harry’s hand blindly reached for Draco’s. Harry found Draco’s cold, bony hand and squeezed tightly, then took his wand from Alby’s temple as well. “Auror Weasley,” Harry said again, facing Alby but still clutching Draco’s hand. “Tell me what you did to him.”


“Where do you keep it? Is it in the warehouse?”

Alby shook his head, so Harry raised his wand.

Draco’s squeezed Harry’s hand.

“Where is it?” Harry demanded.

Alby’s eyes moved to a cabinet in the right corner of the room.

“Draco,” Harry said, still holding his wand on Alby.

“Yes.” Giving Harry’s hand a final squeeze, Draco moved toward the cabinet.

“Is there an antidote?” Harry asked Alby.

Alby still had his hands on his throat, eyes darting about the room in panic.

“He’s not here to stop me now,” Harry told Alby, still pointing his wand. “Is there an antidote?”

From behind him, Draco’s voice said, “It’s got Sphynx spinal fluid.”

Harry moved so that he could see both Draco and Alby at the same time, still pointing his wand at Alby. Draco was leaning down to sniff an open phial in his hand, the cabinet open just behind his head. “Can you do it?” Harry asked.

“With that magnificent lab I’ve got?” Draco capped the phial. “Don’t be absurd, Potter. Of course, I can do it.”

“I’m going to Obliviate him,” Harry said. “After we get the antidote, I can get Kingsley back on our side.”

“Kingsley,” Draco said, shocked.
“I haven’t done anything wrong!” Alby wrung his hands. “That’s not my Imperius potion; I’ve—I’ve—I’ve been Imperiused! It was him!” Suddenly straightening up, Alby thrust out his hand, pointing at Draco. “He must have put it in my cabinet when he was working here! He’s been controlling me the whole time! He’s nothing but a snivelling conniving—”

Harry waved his wand again, and Alby began vomiting slugs. Turning back to Draco, Harry made sure he was ready with the sample. “Do you have what you need?”

Draco had gone pale again, looking from the slugs sliming their way out of Alby’s mouth, back up to Harry.

“He’ll be all right.” Harry waved his wand. “Finite incantatem. They’re just slugs.”

“But don’t you . . .” Draco bit his lip. “Don’t you want to question me?”

“Question you?”

Draco’s eyes darted toward Alby, and Harry’s heart froze for a moment in his chest. When it unfroze it beat too rapidly, filling Harry up with the need to touch Draco all over again.

“No,” Harry said. “Draco, no. You worked here seven years ago.” Draco’s mouth opened to protest, possibly because in Draco’s memory, he’d only just stopped working here recently. “Even if it were then, you wouldn’t have done it. You’d never do something like that.”

“How do you know?” Alby demanded, slime still drooling out of his mouth. “You can’t know with Death Eaters! You just can’t—”

Pointing his wand, Harry casting a simple silence spell. It didn’t stop Draco from staring at Alby, Draco’s eyes so big, his brows up, lips slightly parted, as if he still couldn’t quite believe what was going on. Slowly, he turned to Harry, and Harry could tell that Draco had the same question. How do you know?

“It’s a stupid plan, for one thing,” Harry said. The fact that Draco didn’t understand how Harry could trust him felt like a sharp pain in Harry’s chest. “You’d have no reason to, for another. And most importantly, you wouldn’t. I know you wouldn’t.”

“Yes,” Draco finally said, still looking like his whole world was tilting on its axis.

“I’m going to Obliviate him now,” Harry said.

“Wait.”

Draco was coming over to them, still holding the phial of Imperius potion. His lip curled, and Harry wondered whether Draco was going to want to do something to Alby. Draco had said he wouldn’t, but maybe he was going to do something small, like spit on him or a Bat Bogey Hex, and Harry wasn’t certain he should let him. Harry understood why Draco would want to, but it wasn’t justice; petty revenge wasn’t something Harry often let get the better of him, which was why he was glad Draco had stopped him from choking Alby harder. Even if Harry had just been doing what was necessary to get information out of him.

But Draco’s lip wasn’t curling at Alby, Harry saw after a moment. Draco was making a face at the slugs on the floor, stepping carefully around them until he was beside Harry. “Can you un-silence him,” Draco said, more like a demand than a question.

Harry waved his wand.
Draco stood in front of Alby, his shoulders square. “I didn’t deserve the way you treated me,” he said.

Alby made a face that was uglier than Draco’s. “You’re Death Eater scum. Murderer and a bigot and a—”

“I’m a terrible person,” Draco agreed. “But I have a sentence, and I’m going to serve it out,” he went on, not remembering that on this timeline, his sentence had already been served. “And my parents are serving it out, because we were terrible and wrong, and we deserve it. But we don’t deserve you.”

Alby’s face was mottled with different colour—red from exertion but still green from the slugs. It made his skin seem almost purple, contorted with rage, and in that moment, he reminded Harry of Vernon. Alby began to demand, “What makes you think you deserve any—”

“Harry Potter,” Draco said. “He thinks I’m smart.”

“That’s not all I think you are,” Harry pointed out.

Draco put his nose in the air. “And attractive.”

Harry wanted to laugh, because Draco was not actually attractive in that moment—looking so pale and thin and worn, with hollows under his eyes and that snooty look on his face. “Yeah,” Harry agreed, smiling. “Is now okay?”

“Do it,” Draco said loftily.

Alby began to protest. “You can’t—”

Harry slipped his arm through Draco’s, pointing his wand with his free hand at Alby. “Obliviate,” he said, and they Disapparated.

* *

At Tailored Tinctures, Draco slid his arm out of Harry’s, walking over toward one of his lab benches with the Imperius potion. “I think I can devise an antidote in an hour or two,” he said, putting the phial into one of his stands. “I already have a few ideas; I think I can just—”

Harry strode across the lab toward Draco. Catching his hand, he yanked Draco to him. “This is for you right now,” Harry said, taking off his glasses with his other hand. “Not you when you’re thirty-two. Do you understand?” Not waiting for an answer, Harry kissed him, mouth closing over Draco’s, already hot and heavy. Draco was stiff and stunned against him, and Harry didn’t care, licking Draco’s lips with his tongue until Draco opened his mouth with a bewildered little sound. Harry’s tongue pushed in, sweeping the inside of Draco’s cheek, one long hot stroke along Draco’s tongue until Draco was shaking in his arms, and then Harry pulled away. “Do you understand,” Harry said, pressing his forehead again against Draco’s, panting two inches from his mouth.

“No,” Draco said, sounding small. “No, I don’t understand. Maybe you better do it again, just so I—”

“Yeah,” Harry said, and he kissed him again. Draco was ready for it this time, opening his mouth, but Harry was shoving against him anyway, tipping Draco’s head back so Harry could kiss him more deeply. Draco was letting him, bending almost backward, just like a girl in one of Petunia’s stupid movies. Fuck. Harry wanted to slam him down on the lab bench.

He eased up, finally drawing away, putting his glasses back on.
Dazedly, Draco blinked his eyes. His lips were wet and red from kissing, just like a movie as well. Even with his sallow skin, pulled tight over his sharp features, even with the hollows under his eyes and that dull hair, he was beautiful. “Have you reconsidered the dry humping?” Draco said, sounding dazed as well.

“Fuck. Maybe.”

Draco clung to the front of Harry’s robe. “Does, um—” Draco licked his lips—“confronting criminals really get you that turned on?”

“No.”

“Then was it . . .” Draco licked his lips again. “Was it because I stopped you from torturing someone?”

“Yes. Partly.”

Draco’s gaze swept down. He was still holding onto the front of Harry’s robes. His voice was quiet when he said, “I feel like you have higher standards than that.”

Harry sucked in a breath. The truth was, he couldn’t be certain that he would have liked twenty-four-year-old Draco in this way, had he got to know him. But Harry did know that he liked him now, so that was what Harry said. “I like you.” He took Draco’s hands, prying them off his cloak. “I like you so much.”

“I know,” Draco said, sounding troubled.

Harry leaned in again. He wanted him so badly, and he was right there.

“I.” Draco took a step back. “Potter,” he said, then stopped. “I—I have a boyfriend.”

For a moment, Harry’s mind went wild, because he thought Draco meant he had a boyfriend now, in the present timeline, until he remembered that Draco must mean he had one in his own timeline, when he’d been twenty-four. Harry knew very little about that time in Draco’s life, but for seeing Draco every other month to make Draco ID his potions. “But your mum,” Harry heard himself saying, thinking more rationally now. “I thought—you weren’t going to—because of your mum.”

Looking miserable, Draco shrugged. “I thought I could give it up. I meant what I said—it’s not as important to me as my mum is. I thought that I could stop, for her, but I couldn’t. I just—want it, sometimes. So badly.”

Not just sometimes, Harry was thinking. Draco wasn’t saying he fucked men occasionally. He was saying he had a boyfriend, which meant he likely did it on the regular. He did it enough that he didn’t want to kiss Harry, even though Draco had to know he and his boyfriend were on a different timeline than the present, which meant it wasn’t cheating—unless. Unless Draco and his boyfriend were still together, in the present, now. Harry didn’t actually have any way of knowing; Draco never told him anything; Draco could be married by now and Harry wouldn’t have a fucking clue, except that hopefully he would have seen some evidence of it over the past three weeks. But it was the fucking Black family, so who the fuck knew.

Draco was going on, “I always thought that—that I could stop. But I never could. And now . . . she’s in hospital, and I just . . . she’s not even going to know, if I’m careful, if people don’t find out. I thought—if I was discreet enough—” Harry winced—“I could make her be happy, and I could have what I need as well.”
“Good,” Harry found himself saying, then saw Draco’s face. “Not keeping it a secret from her,” Harry backtracked. “But going after what you want—it’s good. I always thought—that’s always how you came across to me.”

“My Patronus turned into a fox.”

“Nothing wrong with a fox.”

“You don’t understand.” Draco looked like he wanted to put a pillow over his face. “Foxes are loner animals. Not pack animals. Not like a wolf. Not like a dragon.”

“But dragons are sort of—” nuts, Harry had wanted to say, but didn’t, because of Draco’s mum. It was true, though. Dragons had been bred basically to the point of insanity, sort of like—border collies. If you didn’t give them something to hoard and protect and fight for they got violent. Charlie liked them, but he’d always been a bit nuts as well. “I just mean,” Harry said, “foxes are neat.” And really pretty, he wanted to add, but didn’t.

“It feels so selfish.” Draco looked miserable, and Harry wanted to hold him again. He wanted to kiss him again, and Draco had just told him he had a boyfriend.

“Being who you are isn’t selfish.”

Even though Draco looked wretched, he still rolled his eyes. “I’m a selfish person, Potter, or haven’t you been paying attention these thirteen years?”

“I’ve been paying attention.” Harry swallowed. “How is . . . your boyfriend? Are things . . . good?”

Draco angled his face away. When he spoke, his voice was very quiet. “His name is Rohit. He’s a Muggle.”

Harry stared at him.

“I don’t know!” Draco said, even though Harry hadn’t said anything. Draco pressed his hands against his eyelids. “I have to shop in Muggle places—because of the restriction, and he—he always took my order for coffee, and he always smiled at me, and he was—he was nice, and funny, and he’s—fuck, he’s so good-looking—”

“You’re dating a Muggle barista?” Harry must have been pretty messed up, because somehow, the idea of Draco dating a Muggle barista was kind of turning him on. Maybe Ginny would know what the fuck was wrong with him; she was always saying stuff like, it’s because you’re bi, or that’s how homoeroticism works, but he really hoped she wasn’t going to say something like, maybe you should consider polyamory, because that wasn’t it. He didn’t like the thought of the Muggle barista Rohit and Draco being together.

Just. The thought of Draco being open enough to be with someone like that made Harry want him more.

“I don’t know how it happened.” Draco flapped his hands. “I don’t know why he likes me!”

“Draco,” Harry said. “It’s okay.”

“It’s not okay!” Draco flapped some more. “What would Mother say? And you want to kiss me!” Abruptly, he deflated. “Oh, what’s the point. Mother’s dead anyway; you said she was. Rohit’s probably dead too, considering my luck. And you’re—well. Well, you’re not dead, and you like me. So—whatever. We can shag, if you like.”
“Er.” Harry glanced down at the lab bench. “Maybe we should get to work on this potion.”

“All right.” Draco plopped down defeatedly on the stool next to the bench. “If you want to be practical about it.”

“I do.”

“Then don’t kiss me,” Draco grouched. “It’s very distracting.”

“All right,” Harry agreed. “I won’t.”

He didn’t.

Draco made the antidote, and their whole world opened up.

*

**June 2012**

**Harry Potter:** 31 years  
**Draco Malfoy:** 25 years

Once the antidote to the Imperius potion was administered to Kingsley Shacklebolt, Harry could finally bring evidence against Vance, Savage, and Robards to someone who would listen. Shacklebolt oversaw distributing the antidote to top officials, while Harry gave Ron and Hermione the antidote himself. Hermione became responsible for weeding out those in the Department of Mysteries who were under the Imperius potion versus those who had illicitly been involved with Alby’s supply ring. Harry and Ron took on the Auror Office, since there was no way to know who had been acting under the potion and who had been acting of their own accord.

They brought Alby in for questioning, which clarified a lot of things. Robards had been involved, but only in turning a blind eye. He’d assigned all the cases of illegal brews that had come across his desk but never encouraged pursuit of where the brewers were getting their ingredients. Whenever anything got close to Alby, Robards simply turned it over to the Department of Mysteries, where Hermione found one Unspeakable responsible for covering up anything that could trace back to Alby. Robards and the Unspeakable were put on suspension pending further investigation.

Vance himself had become involved with Alby in 2008, which was also when Robards had put him in charge of reviewing everyone’s reports. Using the red tape provided by Robards, Vance had been able to manipulate witnesses and files such that connections between cases would remain unseen. He had also been the one to supply his fellow conspirators with the paint disguised as indicator solution, as well as distribute the paint-disguised-as-indicator-solution to unsuspecting Aurors.

Ron had figured it out before Harry. Knowing Harry was working on the Lorica Ludville case, Ron had started looking into it when he’d found the false indicator solution in his desk. Vance had happened to see Ron find it and had been able to slip Ron the Imperius potion before Ron had figured out who was responsible. Vance had had to control Ron from then on.

Vance was also responsible for Imperiusing Savage. Though Savage had ignored some of the hints that various illegal brews cases were connected, when evidence was shoved directly under her nose, she’d gone to Robards. Robards had passed the evidence onto Mysteries, but Savage hadn’t dropped the case, and that was when Vance had begun to use the Imperius potion on her as well. When Harry had been out for a week following the transfer of Lorica Ludville out of Azkaban, Vance had grown worried that Harry had figured something out. He had sent Savage to the Auror Office to search Harry’s files to find out when he knew, which was when Draco Polyjuiced as Harry and Harry
Polyjuiced as Draco had encountered her.

When Savage reported having seen Harry in the Auror Office, Vance had broken into Grimmauld Place in hopes of stealing evidence that would lead Harry to the warehouse, not knowing Harry had already been. Savage had left out the fact that Draco had been with Harry, because Vance had only commanded her to tell him about Harry.

All of the Imperius potion involved—as well as all the questioning, which involved Veritaserum—required a lot of the antidote as well as indicator solution for Wood-Eye Lye. Draco spent most of the interval in which he was twenty-five making potions for the Ministry.

“Well,” Draco said, looking a little mystified about it all. “I said I wanted to be important.”

“Are you all right?” Harry asked. He’d come to check on Draco once his Patronus had told him Draco had aged again, then he’d told Draco about the potions he needed.

“I’ve helped crack the case of the century, Abel Alby will get what’s coming to him, I’ve broken up with my boyfriend, I’ve got a million potions to brew and only this shop to do it in, and your Patronus keeps following me about mournfully like I’m a carcass she’d really like to gnaw on but doesn’t get to. How do you think I’m doing?”

“You’ve broken up with your boyfriend?” Harry’s interest perked. “Rohit?”

“Armen. If you must know.”

“Armen?” Harry said blankly. His heart felt like it was squeezing. “You . . . had another boyfriend?”

“I’m allowed to have more than one. As long as it’s consecutive and not concurrent.”

“You had a consecutive boyfriend? Was he . . .” Harry didn’t know why it mattered; it shouldn’t matter. “Was he a Muggle?”

Draco’s face angled away. “Muggleborn.”

Harry’s heart was still squeezing—except now, for some reason, it was also lifting in his chest. Oh God. There was no reason he should feel happy; Draco had a boyfriend, and Harry wanted that boyfriend to be him, for Christ’s sake. And yet Harry felt happy anyway, and he knew that it was pride. He also knew that pride, if he expressed it, would be humiliating for Draco just now, so Harry held it in, but he still felt it. He felt it all through him, as though he was a pitcher filled with something soft and silver and perfect, all the way down to his toes.

“Stop looking at me like that,” Draco said, sounding peevish.

“Like what?”

“Like you’re incredulous I could keep from insulting a Muggleborn long enough to date one.”

Harry searched for words. “You’re bad at interpreting my expressions.”

“I know what you think.”

“Do you?” Harry said. “Or are you thinking of the other Harry? The one who’s twenty-five?”

Draco grimaced.

“You know how I feel about you. Do you really think I go around thinking those kinds of things
“I don’t know!” Draco exploded. “I don’t know why you would even—you’ve just asked me what I wanted to be when I grow up, as though—as though I had thousands of choices arrayed before me and I saw the one where I was a Death Eater and my parents were in Azkaban and that was the choice I consciously selected! And then you insulted my working in a shop!”

Harry vaguely remembered that, mostly because Draco had answered the question of what he wanted to be when he grew up years later. “I wasn’t trying to insult you,” Harry said, spreading his hands. “I was trying to get to know you.”

“But why would you? You still hated me!”

“Because I was interested,” Harry said. “Not like I am now, but—I was still interested.”

“But why?” Draco said, looking appalled. “Granger was tortured at my house! I let Death Eaters into Hogwarts! I tried to give you to—V-voldemort. I did horrible things—I . . .”

When Draco didn’t sound as though he planned on finishing, Harry said, “That was years ago.”

“For you!”

“Draco,” Harry said slowly. “That was years ago for you as well. You’re twenty-five. That was eight years ago for you.”

Draco still had that wrecked look on his face. “It’s not enough,” he said, his voice catching. “It’s not ever going to be enough.”

Harry had been sitting on one of the stools in Tailored Tinctures’ lab. Now he stood, moving over to Draco. “Come here,” he said, but when he tried to pull Draco into his arms, Draco pulled away.

“I’ve got to do these potions,” he said, sniffing a bit.

“Draco,” Harry said, reaching out.

“Just—not right now,” Draco said, shrugging away. “Not today.”

Harry watched him for a moment, Draco laying out the jars of sand and dragonflies and troll mucous. “I’m sorry about your break up,” Harry said suddenly. “With Armen. I’m sorry you were hurt.”

“I wasn’t hurt.”

“Then it was okay?”

Draco slammed down the pestle into the mortar, whirling around. “I don’t know this you, yet; I haven’t met you! You are not privy to every detail of my life just because you’re in love with me!”

In this man, Harry could see the child Draco had been—the pink cheeks, heaving chest, and abrupt defensiveness that came out of nowhere like a slap in the face. “All right,” Harry said.

“Harry,” Draco said, his voice breaking.

“Draco,” Harry said. “I understand. I’ll come back next time, when you age again.”

“No,” Draco took a deep, noisy breath. “The cure is obviously working; you don’t need to keep checking on me. You can take your Patronus.”
“Oh,” Harry said.

“I’m not trying to—” Draco bit his lip, casting his eyes toward the ceiling. “I’m not rejecting you, Potter; I just need time. I need to be the person you remember, because—because wanting you on two different timelines, it’s too much for me. It’s confusing; I can’t—I just need time.”

_You want me on two different timelines?_ Harry wanted to ask, but he had already known that. At twenty-one Draco had said Harry was his ghost, the one Dumbledore had mentioned. And at seventeen Draco had told Harry that Dumbledore’s ghost was desire. “All right,” Harry said. Taking out his wand, he waved his Patronus away. “Tell me if you need me.” Harry turned to go.


Harry left him alone to make his potions.

*

**June 2012**

**Harry Potter:** 31 years

**Draco Malfoy:** 26 years

Alby’s testimony helped bring down Clint Matinsky, a Florida man who had been on MACUSA’s watch-list for a decade. Before then, MACUSA had never been able to prove anything. Matinsky had been shipping Alby the illegal ingredients, corresponding with Alby via two enchanted typewriters that printed messages long distance. This meant the Auror Office was able to confiscate years of records detailing who was involved in the illegal supply chain.

Two months ago, the nature of the correspondence had changed, Matinsky claiming he had found something that would revolutionize the industry of potions. When MACUSA questioned him, Matinsky claimed to have discovered the Fountain of Youth, but upon further investigation, the U.S. Auror found that the fountain had been discovered by a young witch Matinsky had murdered for the information.

The Fountain had been discovered before, but it was a protected under the U.S.’s Secret of Secrets Act, much like the U.K.’s _It Was Lost for a Reason_ Statute. Places like Atlantis, El Dorado, and Avalon were said to be protected under such laws, as well as naturally occurring magical things such as the tree of gold apples, the Fountain of Youth, and love springs. People could know about them but should never be able to find them. This would draw into question their existence, which would further protect the magic places.

Aurors impounded the warehouse on Colville, collecting all the potions and ingredients. While the Life Water was immediately handed over to the Department of Mysteries, many of the confiscated items remaining needed to be identified before they could be properly handled. Had Robards still been in charge, even he would have ceded to the argument that a potions consultant would be required to deal with everything. Thus, Draco’s position within the Ministry became official, and he was offered a stipend for the work as well as a title.

Famously, Draco accepted the title but refused the stipend, a fact so startling it made the first page of the _Daily Prophet_. “Former Death Eater performs pro-bono work for desperate Ministry,” ran the headline, with the subtitle, “and looks younger than ever while doing it!” The article quoted Draco as saying, “I’ve been doing this work for Potter for free for ages.” When the reporter pressed for an explanation, Draco had gone on, “Because it’s the right thing to do.” The reporter was very complimentary, which Harry found particularly satisfying since the by-line was Lee Jordan.
June 2012

Harry Potter: 31 years
Draco Malfoy: 27 years

The next day the cover of the Prophet featured Draco as well, this time with the exclusive story of how he’d become younger through a potions accident involving the recently uncovered (shocking!) illegal potions supply ring (more on page eleven). Draco told the reporter (not Jordan this time, but Susan Bones, which Harry found just as pleasing) how he had been helping Harry when the accident happened, and how he had managed to develop a cure. He didn’t say anything about Harry turning young, which Harry appreciated, although Harry wasn’t actually sure whether Draco was doing it for Harry. Since Draco had neglected to mention Harry’s de-ageing, Draco could make it sound like he’d devised the whole cure at the age of eleven, which made everyone think he was a genius.

Harry was sort of all right with that, though. After all, Draco was a genius, and he was also a cheater at Quidditch. Some things didn’t change.

That night, Harry Apparated to a normal street with pavement and straggly bushes on one side and a carpark on the other. On the side with the bushes was a large council estate, all concrete and windows. He went up two storeys on a set of concrete stairs attached to the estate, then down a covered hall until he came to a door with the number 127 on it, where he stopped and knocked.

The door opened, and Harry found he couldn’t say anything.

“Harry?” Immediately looking alarmed, Dudley looked over his shoulder into the flat, then back at Harry. “Is everything all right?”

“Yes,” Harry said, but found he couldn’t say anything else.

“Do you . . . you want to come inside?” Dudley opened the door wider.

“I’m fine where I am, thanks.”

Dudley stood there in the doorway, hand still on the doorknob. “Look here. A fellow came by, a few weeks ago, one of your sort—that’s not to say—I only mean—he was—” Harry didn’t help him, and Dudley gulped—“magical, and there was an owl, only he said it hadn’t anything to do with you, only—are you okay?”

“I spoke to Aunt Petunia,” Harry heard himself say.

Dudley’s mouth fell open. “I’m . . .” He swallowed hard. “Sorry.”

“She misses you,” said Harry.

“She can go right on,” said Dudley.

“You don’t have to forgive her,” Harry said. “For whatever she—you don’t. And you don’t ever have to see her again or talk to her. I just think—she loves you. She still loves you, and I thought you should know. In case you didn’t.”

“Yes,” said Harry. “Congratulations.”

“You came here just to say that about Mum?”

Harry hesitated. "Yes. No." He didn't know what he had come to say. "I came to say—I forgive you. Not because you deserve it. I don't know; maybe you do, but that's not why. I forgive you, because life's too short, and I don't want to be a person who holds grudges, and I don't want to be defined by . . . I don't want to be defined by anyone but me. So I forgive you; that's what I came to say."

Dudley stared at him. Then he blurted, "Have supper with us. I mean, sometime. Julia would—I mean. I would really like it. If you had supper with us. Sometime."

"Yeah." Putting his hands in his pockets, Harry turned away. "Sometime."

"Harry," Dudley called out, and Harry turned around. "Thank you. For—for all of it. For my life, and for Julia, and for—for my mum and dad. You didn’t have to do it."

“Yes, I did.” Harry walked away.

*

**June 2012**

**Harry Potter:** 31 years

**Draco Malfoy:** 28 years

Two days later, the sixth page of the *Prophet* had a blurb about Draco Malfoy publishing in *Biomagic Daily* and getting a large grant from the Avalon Institute to continue his research on properties of age.

Harry had been a bit harassed by reporters when the article had come out about the potions accident, but Harry was used to that. About Draco, Harry was more worried, since Draco was not prepared for being famous after the quiet life he had lived—but then again, it was Draco. He’d said he’d always wanted to be important, and a part of Draco had probably meant it, despite all the other parts at war with himself. Harry hoped that all of this meant that Draco could become closer to the person he wanted to be, a person he really was, instead of what his parents had hoped for him. There was no way Draco would ever completely lose that initial conditioning, but he could still change.

Harry had to believe that, considering what his own life had been.

*

Three weeks after Draco had turned eleven-years-old was the first time Harry, Hermione, and Ron got to spend a whole evening together, instead of the brief snatches of time they had been stealing to see each other.

“I’m just sorry you had to go through so much of it alone,” Hermione said to Harry, after they got done talking about some of the statements the Auror Office was still taking.

“I’m just sorry I didn’t figure it out before Vance got to me,” Ron said. “That Imperius potion was some powerful stuff.”

“No one has to be sorry,” Harry said.

“Guess it’s a good thing Malfoy figured it out,” Ron said. “I reckon he’s always wanted to be famous. He deserves it, I guess. He’s really done some good work.”
That bright feeling came back to Harry’s chest, and now Harry knew that he was feeling pride—not just for Draco, though. Ron as well.

“It must have been really hard for him,” Hermione said. “Being an eleven-year-old with you.”

“Um, Hermione,” said Ron. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but Harry’s excellent with kids. He lets Hugo climb all over him, and he actually listens to Rose, instead of saying, ‘uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh.’”

“I listen to Rose!”

“Uh-huh,” said Ron.

Hermione smacked him, then turned back to Harry. “I didn’t mean it would be hard for him to be with you specifically,” she said. “I meant, he must have been so scared. Did he ask for his parents?”

“Yes.”

“Oh shit,” Ron said, apparently just realizing that this may have been an issue. “Did you tell him?”

“After he remembered third year,” Harry said.

“And I’ll bet he wanted to go back to the Manor as well,” Hermione said.

“Man, Hermione.” Ron flopped back into the sofa. “You’re making this sad.”

“It is sad,” said Hermione.

“Malfoy Manor getting torn down is not sad,” Ron said. “You were tortured there, and Voldemort lived there, and Dobby was kept there against his will—not to mention Luna and Ollivander and that lot, and it was ugly anyway.”

“It was his home,” said Hermione.

“Did I mention you were tortured there?”

“It might have come up.”

Sometimes Ron and Hermione went on like this. In fact, usually Ron and Hermione went on like this, after Rose and Hugo were in bed and just the three of them were alone together. Harry never minded, but he used to wonder why they asked him to visit when he had so little to contribute, and they always had each other. It had taken him a while to realize that they didn’t need him to help them or save them or bring up interesting things for them to do; he didn’t need to say things or do things so that they could remember why they liked him. Having Harry around made Ron and Hermione happy, for whatever reason. He could see it in their faces when he was around them.

“The accident didn’t happen to Draco,” Harry said suddenly.

“Um, mate,” Ron said, mostly just sounding curious. “‘Draco’?”

“It happened to me.”

They stared at him. Harry hadn’t got a chance to tell them what had really happened; Hermione had been dealing with the mole in the Department of Mysteries, and he and Ron had been cleaning up the Auror Office. There had been so many hours of questioning people and taking sworn testimony and then having to talk to people about what to tell the press, and then there’d been tracking down
brewers Alby had supplied who hadn’t been caught; they’d been working with MACUSA to make sure information about the Fountain of Life was on lockdown.

“I turned into a ten-year-old,” Harry went on. “It was the Life Water, but Draco didn’t know where the Life Water was, and he knew getting it might be dangerous, and the cure he’d thought up needed two people to have had Life Water, so they’d work against each other. So he traded our ages, I got the Life Water, put it in the cure he’d made, and now he’s ageing up.”

“Oh!” Hermione covered her mouth.

“Mate,” Ron said.

“Draco was there,” Harry said. “He took care of me. I told him there wasn’t anyone else I could trust, since I knew you two were under some kind of influence, and Shacklebolt as well, which is why he didn’t go to you for help.”

“How terrible,” Hermione breathed.

Ron glanced down at Hermione. “Harry’s been saying Malfoy’s much better for a while now,” he pointed out. “And he’s been doing IDs for the Ministry not-for-profit all this time. And you’re calling him Draco,” Ron went on, turning back to Harry. “So, was it okay?”

“Yes,” Harry said.

Hermione was still horrified. “Ron. He was ten.”

Something seemed to dawn on Ron. Harry felt pretty certain Ron was remembering what Harry’s life must have been like at ten, and what Hermione had probably explained to Ron that it might have done to Harry.

“Draco took care of me,” Harry repeated.

“I’m glad. I’m grateful to him.” Hermione put a hand on Harry’s shoulder. “Are you okay?”

Harry wanted to say yes and be done with it, because he didn’t know how to describe the things he was feeling. He tried anyway, because he was thinking of the boy who could describe his feelings but had been told not to, had been told he shouldn’t. “I think I understand better now,” Harry said, speaking with effort. “What it would have been like. To have.” Harry sucked in a breath. He could feel the magic swirling in him, never knowing where to go. “To have people who loved me. At that young age.”

“Harry.” Hermione put her arm around his shoulder, her voice soft and wet.

“Fuck.” Ron stood up. “Mate.” Then he came around on the other side of the sofa, so he could put his hand on Harry’s other shoulder.

“I think I might be sort of messed up,” Harry said.

“Shit, man,” said Ron. “Yeah, you are; we love you. You are. It doesn’t matter. So are we; we love you.”

“We love you,” Hermione said. “Harry, we—”

Harry could feel her looking up at Ron—the way she sometimes did when she was talking to Harry, as though Harry always had to be handled so carefully. Harry didn’t want to look at her. He was
remembering what Draco had said, when Draco was eleven. You’d cry a lot, I expect, Draco had said, when Harry had been talking about what Harry would do if he lost Draco.

“Have you thought about,” Hermione began, but then couldn’t seem to finish. “I mean, when you say, ‘messed up’—”

“She means,” said Ron, “are you thinking about getting help?”

“Er.” Harry ground his teeth. “I’m talking. To you?”

“He means professional help,” Hermione said.

“Oh.” With a sudden sinking feeling, Harry realized they had talked about him before. Ron and Hermione had had this conversation about him, because they had already known.

“It’s all right,” Ron said immediately.

“We love you so much,” said Hermione. “And sometimes we’re afraid that you’re—you seem detached, sometimes, and we worry—we worry . . .”

“We worry you don’t know how much we love you,” Ron put it, and Hermione made a soft little sound.

She was crying. “That’s right. We worry you don’t know how much we love you,” Hermione said, “how much we care about you. And if you think you’re messed up—you can tell us, and we’ll help you, we’ll help you get help, and we’ll still love you. We love you as you are. Just as you are.”

“And if you changed, we’d love that too,” Ron added.

“We only want you to be happy,” Hermione agreed.

“I could,” Harry said. “I could try. What I said—” Harry took a breath. “About being—” Another breath. He couldn’t look at them. “About being loved. I wanted you to know that the first person—the first person to help me understand what that could feel like was Hagrid. And then it was the two of you.”

“Harry.” Hermione made a choked sound.

“And I wanted to thank you for that,” Harry said. “And tell you that—that you mean everything to me. Everything. Because—because you’re my family. And family is—it’s the most important thing.”

“Yeah, it is,” Ron said, squeezing Harry’s shoulder.

“We’ll always be your family,” Hermione said, her beautiful brown eyes bright.

“Mate.” Ron leaned in so he could put his arm around Harry and hug him as well. “Always.”

* 

**June 2012**

**Harry Potter:** 31 years  
**Draco Malfoy:** 29 years

Harry was alone in Grimmauld Place when Heloise came. Harry used to take work home with him just because there was nothing else to do if he was stuck by himself besides eat and listen to the wireless. Sometimes he’d go out flying. Sometimes he’d visit Dumbledore’s grave. That was about
the extent of his evening activities if he wasn’t with friends.

Tonight, Harry was trying to read *Tides of Atlantis*, which was an absurdly slow-paced book about the intricate politics of fish-people, mermaids, and pirates. There were lots of details and descriptions and names, such that even if Harry hadn’t had dyslexia he’d probably have trouble reading it, except Draco had whizzed through it at eleven. Harry had cast the reading spell, and the author’s voice wasn’t that bad, but he was wondering if there could be a way to moderate the spell so that the text was read in someone else’s voice. Harry didn’t have his favourite sofa, so he didn’t have anything better to do than invent a new spell.

Then the tap came at the window, and Harry opened it. When Heloise came in, Harry’s heart jumped into his throat and lodged there until he got the note unfolded. The intervals between Draco’s age-jumps had not been increasing in a mathematically predictable way, not that Harry would be able to calculate it even if they were. He hadn’t been much better at maths than he had at reading, and then Hogwarts hadn’t taught it anyway. Draco could be twenty-eight by now, or he could be thirty-two and remember everything.

When Harry got the note open, it had three words in Draco’s cramped, careful hand:

*I need you.*

Harry put his hand on Heloise and Apparated.

*

Draco wasn’t in the sitting-room; he wasn’t in the kitchen. Heloise flapped off out the window, while Harry Apparated to the lab. Draco wasn’t in it, which meant that he was in the bedroom. Despite how much Harry wanted to, he was hesitant to burst inside, so he knocked.

Draco opened the door, looking gorgeous and miserable all at once. His skin was pale, lips chapped, eye rimmed with red, as though he had been crying—but his size was good. He was no longer gaunt at all, similar in shape to the Draco that Harry remembered, except that he wasn’t. Harry knew what age this was. “Your mum,” he said.

Draco’s eyes slid away from Harry’s, and Harry remember what had happened—how Draco had been crying, and Harry had just stood there. Draco obviously remembered it as well, because this moment was almost a mirror of that one—both of them just standing there, Draco beginning to wrap his arms around himself.

Harry stepped forward, reaching out for Draco’s waist, wrapping his arm around it, pulling Draco to him. “Draco,” Harry whispered, his other hand on the nape of Draco’s neck so that he could pull Draco’s head into the crook of his own neck, so he could feel Draco’s forehead against the side of his throat. Draco shuddered against him, and Harry slid the hand at Draco’s neck into his hair, pulling Draco closer with the arm around his waist, then stroking the small of Draco’s back. Harry pulled back to kiss Draco’s forehead.

Draco’s breath made a guttering sound. “Fuck.”

Harry stroked Draco’s back some more, running his other hand through Draco’s hair over and over.

“I don’t.” Draco shuddered. “I don’t want to live through this again.”

Narcissa had died in March. Narcissa’s death would have happened two-and-a-half months ago for Draco, unless the “traumatic event” had caused the cure to go wonky again and pulled Draco from unconsciousness. Harry wished he could have been there when Draco had awakened; Draco
wouldn’t have had to write a note and send Heloise. He understood why Draco didn’t want him there, but still.

“I’m here.” Harry brushed his lips over Draco’s hair. “This time, I’m here.”

“Why? Last time, you wouldn’t—” Draco pulled away, swallowing. “You wouldn’t,” he choked.

“I’m sorry.” Harry pulled Draco closer again, his hand in Draco’s hair letting Draco know he could put his head back against Harry’s chest, his face against Harry’s neck if he wanted. “I’m sorry,” Harry said again. “It’s stupid. It’s going to sound so stupid to you.”

“What?” Draco pulled away to look up at him.

“I didn’t know what to do,” Harry said. “I wanted to help you—but I didn’t know how. I didn’t know what you wanted.”

“I wanted you,” Draco said, tugging at Harry’s robes.

“Right,” Harry said, despite the fact that his heart swelled at those words. He stroked Draco’s back. “Right. But I didn’t know.”

Draco shuddered again, but he still wasn’t crying—not exactly. Somehow it was worse, the way he was shaking. “I’ll tell you what to do,” he said. “I’ll tell you what to do, if you’re so fucking clueless.” His tone was almost savage, but he was still holding onto Harry so tightly, Harry wasn’t sure he could have got away even had he wanted to.


Draco made a horrible noise, sort of like a sob, but without tears. “H-hold me,” he said. “Hold me until I—until I forget her.”

“I don’t think I can do that.” Harry pressed his lips against Draco’s hair again.

“Then what good are you?” But Draco didn’t sound as though he meant it.

“Let’s try something different. I’ll hold you until it doesn’t hurt to remember.” Wrapping his arms around Draco tight, Harry Apparated them both upstairs, sitting down on the sofa with Draco. “Incendio,” Harry said, casting the spell at the empty hearth. Then he began to cast the colour spells.

“Don’t,” Draco said, shuddering against him. “Please don’t. I can’t.” He hid his face against Harry’s neck, burying himself there, as though to burrow deeper. “Please. I can’t.”

“All right.” Waving the fire away, Harry wrapped his arm around Draco again, pulling him so that he was against Harry’s chest, both Draco’s legs up on the sofa so that he could rest against Harry’s body.

Harry felt like he could lose himself in petting Draco’s hair. He thought that he could do it forever, and then he thought of those lonely nights at Grimmauld Place. This would be enough activity for Harry—just getting to touch Draco like this. It would have absorbed him completely, he wouldn’t need anything else.

Eventually, Draco stopped shuddering, so still that Harry thought he might be sleeping. Draco’s breathing hadn’t changed, though, although the light in the room had. “Do you want Andromeda?” Harry asked, after another fifteen minutes or so.
“I don’t want anyone to see me.” Draco’s voice was dull, and Harry went back to stroking Draco’s hair.

“She wouldn’t think any less of you, you know,” Harry eventually said.

“I can’t bear for anybody to see me when I’m like this.”

Harry paused. “But you sent for me.”

“Potter.” Draco sounded almost annoyed. “You always see me when I’m like this. You always—you cut me open when I was like this.”

“Sorry.” Tentatively, Harry touched Draco’s hair again.

“Being cut open felt better than this.”

Harry very gently traced the shell of Draco’s ear, and Draco shuddered.

“You really didn’t,” he began, sounding tense. Sitting up, Draco pushed away a bit to look at him. “You really didn’t know I wanted you to touch me, that day at the Manor?”

“I’m . . .” Wetting his lips, Harry tried to think about how to say it. “I’m kind of fucked up,” he said, because that had worked with Ron and Hermione. They had known what he had meant.

“You?” Draco looked at him incredulously. “You, hero of the Wizarding World, fucked up?”

“A bit, yeah.”

“Well,” Draco said loftily. “I knew it, but hearing you say it is just—” Suddenly, Draco seemed to give up on the pretence of acting haughty, unceremoniously slumping back into Harry. He picked up Harry’s hand, the one that hadn’t been in Draco’s hair, and found the scar. 

Tracing it with his finger, Draco sat like that a little while, reminding Harry of the way eleven-year-old Draco had sat with him on the sofa and poked his scar. Maybe Draco was remembering as well. When Draco spoke again, he’d obviously been thinking about what Harry had said. His tone had completely changed. “You don’t know when people want you to touch them?”

“I—sometimes,” Harry said. “Sometimes I don’t—it’s like I don’t know. What I feel. It’s like I can’t—I can’t feel anything. But sometimes I do—feel things, and I can’t—I just can’t—it doesn’t come out. I don’t know how to . . . make it come out.”

“And you don’t know what other people feel either, then?”

“Not really.”

Draco kept tracing that scar. “I see I shall have to be very explicit with you, then.”


“All right, well.” Dropping Harry’s hand, Draco sat up, moving away so that he could turn and face Harry. “First of all—” Draco squared his shoulders. “First of all, I’ve always wanted you to touch me. Always. My whole life. Both lives—the one from these past three weeks and the other one, ever since I was eleven. Sometimes I wanted to make you angry enough to hit me, Potter. Just so I could have you touch me.”

“Oh.”
“Secondly.” Draco’s eyes darted down to Harry’s hand, and then he snatched it up, as though Harry would take his hand away. “Secondly,” Draco repeated, “I’ve never told you this, but I’ve always admired how honest you are. There were times when—I always wished I could be as honest.” He squeezed Harry’s hand, hard, Draco’s thumb pressing into the scar. “Thirdly,” Draco went on.

A strange light was in Draco’s eyes, an almost manic energy. He was still upset about his mum, Harry realized. Draco was a little off, but it didn’t mean he wasn’t being sincere.

“Thirdly,” Draco repeated again, softening his grip on Harry’s hand. “I became convinced that if you couldn’t—you couldn’t even comfort a boy who was crying his eyes out because he just lost his mum—if you really hated me that much, you would never feel anything different for me. Before that, I’d thought—I’d thought maybe, just maybe, if I waited long enough and tried hard enough, maybe—in ten or twenty years or so—maybe you could come around enough to—to at least—at least kiss me. Once. God.” Draco looked away. “I was so pathetic. That was as high as my aspirations went. All I wanted was for you to kiss me.”

“I’ll kiss you more than once.”

“I know.” Draco started petting his hand, just like Hermione had done. “I know that now, but—I didn’t then. I was—I was—it hurt so much, because with you, I wanted—I wanted.” Draco’s breath hitched, which seemed to cause his whole expression to change, breaking down. “I—I don’t want to live in a world without my mum in it.”

“Oh, Draco.” Harry pulled him close again. “Shh,” Harry murmured, stroking Draco’s hair. “Shh.”

“I loved her,” Draco said. “I loved her, and I loved you; don’t you see? I loved you, and I thought—I thought if I couldn’t—I couldn’t have her anymore, then maybe I could—then you could be the thing that I could have.”

“Shh,” Harry said. “You have me.”

“You wouldn’t even touch me.” Draco seemed to be crying about that almost as much as his mum. “I know. I’m sorry. I’ll touch you now.” Harry rubbed his back some more.

Draco surged up, tear-stained eyes face-to-face with Harry’s, and then Draco kissed him. It was a very messy kiss. Draco’s face was wet, his mouth too full of mucous. Harry held onto him and kissed him back, until Draco pulled away. “I’m disgusting. Sorry. I shouldn’t have—”

“I think you’re beautiful.”

Draco gave a weak laugh. “I’m a fucking mess.”

“I think fucking messes are beautiful,” Harry said, wrapping his arm around Draco again and resisting the urge to wipe his face. Harry was pretty sure Draco’s saliva was in his beard, which was kind of gross, but he didn’t want Draco to see him wipe it away. “Did the round for this year just start?”

“It’s about to end,” Draco said.

“You should have owled me sooner,” Harry said.

“I was trying to stick to the resolutions I’d made when Mum died.”

“What resolutions were those?” Harry cuddled him closer.
“First, stop losing it over Mum. Second, stop losing it over Harry Potter.” Draco twisted in his arms to look up at him. “I was obsessed with you, you know.”

“How obsessed were you?”

Draco settled back into Harry’s arms. “You’ve met me, haven’t you?”

“But, um.” Harry was trying not to pry too much, because he still remembered Draco saying he wasn’t privy to every detail of Draco’s life, except Draco had said that he was in love with him.

“You said,” Harry said, trying to think of a way to remind him of it that didn’t put Draco in a corner. “You said—you felt differently. Than you’ve said. Before.”

“Harry. I was in love with you since that day you came back to Slug and Jiggers just so you could yell at Alby on my behalf.”

Harry sat up straight, spilling Draco out of his arms.

Draco grimaced. “What did you want me to do? Throw myself into your arms?”

“Maybe the second time around, yeah.”

“I had a boyfriend.”

“Oh. Right.” Harry leaned back, and Draco was settling back against his chest. “Wait a minute.” Harry sat back up, spilling him again. “Why did you have a boyfriend if you were—if you felt that way?”

“I didn’t think I was ever going to get you, idiot. And anyway. You yelling at Alby, I realized I had—I had more than just feelings of—of attraction. I liked you. But it wasn’t until that day—that day I came to yours, with the indicator solution.” Draco looked down, blushing a bit. “Do you remember?”

“Of course, I remember.

“You started telling me about your work, and you just... you were so concerned. For Ronald Weasley. And I’d always been jealous of him; I wanted someone to care for me that way, and—and you were also so concerned about the integrity of your work—rightfully so, apparently. Anyway.”

Draco blushed more deeply. “I kept thinking about—I kept thinking, what it might be like, if that was—in the evenings, if you came home and told me about your work, and I told you about my success in potions—which would be extensive, of course. I always had a big imagination. And you would talk to me and I would listen, and you would be so—so righteous and good and honest, the way you always are—”

“I was on Veritaserum at the time.”

“I’m not talking about that kind of honest. I’m talking about the way you are to people. The way you were to me. Back then.” Draco’s gaze dropped again.

“I thought you thought I was just using you. For potions consultation.”

“I did think that.” Draco picked up Harry’s hand again, touching the scar. “But you were clear about what you wanted from me. You were respectful of me and my abilities. You... praised them.”

Draco glanced at Harry quickly. “I go quite weak for praise, in case you haven’t noticed.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”
“You treated me like a human being, but you didn’t fear me or pity me. No one else treated me quite like that.” Draco was now exploring the rest of Harry’s hand—the knuckles, the palm. The curious stroking of his fingers sent shivers up Harry’s spine.

“Um.” Harry pulled his hand away. “Maybe you shouldn’t.”

Draco looked up at him swiftly, his expression stricken, but then he saw Harry’s face, which must have made the fact that he was getting turned on pretty clear. “Oh,” Draco said, beginning to smile rather wickedly. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Um,” Harry said again. He licked his lips.

Suddenly, Draco clutched Harry’s hand again, his hand claw-like. Something in his face looked pained. “Stay with me?” he panted. “Through the next year? I don’t want to wake up alone.”

“Yes,” Harry said, as Draco’s eyes rolled back, and he fell onto the sofa, unconscious.

* 

**July 2012**

**Harry Potter:** 31 years  
**Draco Malfoy:** 30 years

Harry was making supper when Draco woke up at the age of thirty. Harry heard a moan from the sitting-room and hurried in, trying not to look too anxious. Draco had gone through ten iterations of waking a year older from unconsciousness without him there; he could handle it fine.

“Fuck.” Draco covered his face.

“Everything all right?” Harry realized he hadn’t wiped his hands when he’d run out of the kitchen. “Accio towel.” He cleaned his hands as Draco sat up.

“This is so fucking confusing.”

Thinking he knew what Draco was remembering, Harry sent the towel back to the kitchen. “That kiss?” he asked.

“That fucking kiss.” Draco sagged back into the sofa.

“Was it part of your resolution?” Harry asked. “To pretend it didn’t matter to you?”

“You pretended it didn’t matter to you!”

“I shouldn’t have. I was—confused.”

“You’re confused,” Draco said disdainfully. “When do you even start to want me? After that potion accident turned you into an eleven-year-old?”

“I wanted you when you kissed me,” Harry said. “I had some trouble—processing. I thought—I thought the powder had affected me.”

“I told you the powder didn’t have an effect on the one wearing it.”

“Right,” Harry said. “But by the time I understood that that meant that what I felt was—just me, you were already talking about your Death Eater lips and my horrible Gryffindor skin.”
“I never said it was horrible,” Draco said sullenly, not quite looking at him.

“Whatever it was you said.”

Draco scowled at him. “I said that it was perfect. You’re always perfect. Everything about you is—fuck.” Leaping off of the sofa, Draco began to pace. “How does this even work? We’re not even friends yet.”

“I’m not perfect.”

“Don’t I know it!” Draco waved his arms, never too concerned with contradicting himself. “How does this work?” Stalking over to Harry, Draco bared his wrist, then pointed at it with his wand. Before Harry could do anything, the cuff-button on Draco’s dress-shirt was pulling open, the whole sleeve furling like some kind a furious wind was whipping it up Draco’s arm. Draco thrust the Dark Mark in Harry’s face. “How does this work?” Draco snarled.

Harry looked at the Dark Mark, then at Draco. Looking at the Dark Mark again, Harry remembered Draco getting it the second time, the cry of pain, Harry holding his hand over Draco’s. Harry remembered Sectumsempra—the second time, but he also remembered the first, and the Astronomy Tower, and Snape, and everything. “It works like this,” Harry said, wrapped his hand firmly around Draco’s wrist. Harry pulled Draco’s arm closer, bent down, and kissed the Mark.

Draco yanked his arm away, stumbling back, his arm across his chest as though Harry had burned him. He looked at his arm, then up at Harry in horror. “How can you?”

“Because it’s a part of you.”

“I don’t want you to touch it.” Draco looked devastated. “I don’t want you to ever have to touch it.”

“All right,” Harry said, because if it made Draco feel this badly, he could avoid it.

“You don’t understand.” Draco’s devastation almost looked like panic. “You don’t understand; I’ll profane you.”

Harry’s shoulders sagged. He wasn’t sure he could do this any longer. He wasn’t sure he could stand it, how little Draco thought of himself. “Draco,” he said quietly. “I’ve already been profaned.”

“You don’t understand,” Draco said. “You’re perfect. Everything about you is perfect, and right, and just, and good, and I’m—”

“I’m not perfect!” Harry yelled, finally losing his temper. “I’m hurt! I’ve been hurt! You don’t profane me. Draco, you heal me.”

“But how? You said I was a Death Eater when I kissed you; that’s what you thought of! You said it, Potter!”

Harry looked away. “I’m going to leave,” he said, more quietly now. “Come to me when you remember.”

Draco’s eyes were bright. “I don’t understand how that much can change.”

“Then don’t come back to me.” Harry Apparated away.

*

July 2012
Harry Potter: 31 years  
Draco Malfoy: 32 years

Harry regretted what he had said.

He shouldn’t have given Draco an ultimatum like that. He’d lost his temper, and he’d wanted Draco to remember, and Harry hadn’t felt able to explain just how imperfect he was. The truth was, Harry knew that he had problems. He knew he was what Ginny would call *emotionally dysfunctional*, because she’d been trying to help him with it for years, and he had never listened to her. He just didn’t really understand what was normal, what should be normal, what was the way the world just worked and what was *him*.

Six days after leaving Tailored Tinctures for the last time, Harry was getting worried. Maybe Draco just didn’t want to see him, but maybe something had happened. Maybe something had gone wrong with the cure. Maybe Draco was lying there, unconscious, waiting for the final year and he was just—never going to wake up, and Harry would get another horrible letter about Draco hating himself and sacrificing himself for Harry. Again.

On the seventh day, Harry was alone once more in the evening, trying to decide whether he could go over there, after what he’d said, whether that would be allowed. He was still dressed, mostly, but after he’d got home from work he’d taken off his boots and robe and belt and put on the dressing-gown Draco had given him. It had grown with Harry’s body, just as Draco had said it would. Then the doorbell rang.

Draco was on the stoop, looking extremely pristine in the evening summer light. He had on his typical “muted palette”—blue-grey dress shirt with well-fitting trousers and waistcoat, both of which were dove grey. His hair shone in the sun. He was beautiful.

“Still no manners, I see,” Draco said, presumably because Harry was just standing there with the door open, staring.

“Shit.” Harry opened the door wider. “Come in.”

Draco stepped in, his movements so precise, just like Harry remembered. “It’s still dark in this foyer.” Taking out his wand, Draco pointed it at the ceiling. “*Lumos Maxima,*” he said, tossing the light up at the ceiling.

Draco began lowering the wand, but Harry caught Draco’s hand, wrapping his own around Draco’s and the wand. “*Perma,*” Harry said. It would make the light last longer. Harry wanted to see him.

“Still hums,” Draco said, pulling his hand away. With his other hand, he pulled something else out of his pocket, then tapped it with his wand, casting an enlargement charm. A picture frame grew in his hand, about the size of his palm. “I brought this for you,” he said.

“What?” Confused, Harry took it anyway.

“It’s still our in-between birthday.”

Harry looked down. The picture in the frame was of Sirius, the picture that Harry had liked the best when he’d been eleven, the one in which Sirius was smiling rakishly, with Regulus behind him, unhappily waving his arms. “You remember,” Harry said, voice catching.

“Harry.” Draco touched his arm, and Harry finally looked up. “I’m so glad that you’re okay. I was so worried I—I wouldn’t get you back again.”
“You were worried.”

When Draco spoke, his voice was low and warm, the same tone that Harry remembered him using all the time when Harry had been eleven, but not so very much since then. “You have to admit that you were the more adventurous of the two of us,” Draco said. “Riding in taxis all by yourself.” He smiled.

“Oh God.” Harry’s voice caught.

“Harry?” Draco’s brow knitted up, and Harry could feel that tell-tale heat behind his eyes. Fuck. Fuck.

“Harry,” Draco said, his voice sounding exactly like comfort should sound. “Oh, my darling. Harry.” Then Draco was pulling Harry to him, guiding Harry’s head, just like Harry had tried to do for him, only the way Draco did it was perfect, because he was murmuring and stroking Harry’s hair and saying things like, “Harry, don’t cry,” and, “I’m here. It’s me. Shh. I’m here.”

“Fuck,” Harry said.

“Darling.” Brushing Harry’s fringe aside, Draco pressed a kiss to Harry’s scar. Then he did it again, holding Harry and murmuring things, little things that Harry couldn’t hear, and yet the tone soothed him. Draco’s hand in Harry’s hair soothed him; the warm hard length of Draco’s body soothed him.

Harry’s hands hurt from clutching him too hard. “I thought.” He gasped for breath. “I was afraid I might not get you back.”

“I remember.” Draco’s fingers stroked Harry’s hair. “I remember you, Harry. I’m sorry I said you were perfect. You’re just as fucked as I am, aren’t you? The bright side is, you have me, and I’ll take care of you. I’m very good at taking care of people, Harry. You’ll see.”

Now Draco sounded like he was eleven and thirty-two, so much so that Harry let out a choked laugh.

“Don’t cry,” Draco murmured, drawing him in again. “Hasn’t there been enough crying? I thought there was going to be snogging. I feel that you deserve snogging, Harry, after all that you’ve done.”

“Don’t.” Harry made himself swallow his tears back, the choked little sob that was threatening. “Don’t say that you were a burden. I loved you—all through it. Do you understand? I loved all of you.”

There was a pause. “All right, Harry.” Another pause. “Don’t you want to be snogged? I’m very good at it, but you haven’t got a chance to find out about that. You’ve been snogging me, mainly. Except for those two times I threw myself at you, and I was a mess, those times. That was spur of the moment. I’m very prepared now. I’ve come very prepared to snog.”

“Um. Okay,” Harry said, hesitant, because his head felt full of snot and his eyes ached from crying, and his mouth was much too wet with tears and mucus. He didn’t actually much feel like snogging, but it was Draco—his Draco—and he felt like he’d wanted to snog him forever. He set the portrait of Sirius down, then leaned in toward Draco.

“What are you doing?” Appalled, Draco pulled away. Making his wand reappear, he pointed it at Harry’s face, saying incantations that made Harry’s head and mouth clear, his eyes feel rested and at proper moisture levels.
Harry felt like he’d never even cried at all. “What was that?”

“Just freshening spells.” Draco took Harry’s glasses, focusing on folding them and putting them aside as he said. “My mum used to do it for me. As you can imagine, she had to do them—rather frequently.”

“Draco,” Harry said, reaching for him.

“Yes.” Then Draco was kissing him.

Despite what Draco had said, Harry had sort of expected that he would be pushing Draco up against a wall at some point, but that was not what happened. Draco had been correct—Harry had done the kissing up till this point. The other times they’d kissed, Draco had wanted to be kissed, and by Harry Potter, but Draco had not wanted Harry the way that Harry wanted him. Draco had been unable to, not having the same memories, or the time to process.

Now Draco wanted him. Harry could feel that Draco wanted him, because Draco’s lips were sucking his, then his teeth were nipping Harry’s bottom lip, causing Harry to gasp in surprise. Then Draco’s tongue was darting in, slipping along the underside of Harry’s upper lip, then pulling away, teasing, as Draco’s mouth closed over Harry’s and apparently had its way with him. Harry was not at all a talented kisser, just a very dedicated one, but Draco was good at it—unexpected and surprising, causing Harry to gasp and fall back and then lean forward, trying to catch the flash of tongue he’d missed. Fuck.

Fuck, Draco was backing him up against Luna’s painting, and a part of Harry felt like he’d not even been kissed at all. He hadn’t got enough kissing; Draco had been teasing him; Harry leaned in to try to have more.

Draco pulled away. “You see, Harry?” Draco’s thigh was between Harry’s and Harry wasn’t even sure how it got that way. Draco’s mouth nibbled up the length of Harry’s jaw, along his beard. “I’m so good at snogging,” he whispered in Harry’s ear. “You’ll never want anyone else again. Isn’t that right? Do you like it, Harry?”

Harry made a stuttering sound, partly because it was just so unbelievably hot, but partly also because Draco sounded eager—eager and hopeful and a little vulnerable. Harry hadn’t heard him sound like that in weeks, which for Draco had been years. This was what Draco sounded like with his defences down, when he was completely open—when he wasn’t hiding or blocking anything, when he was confident enough in what he was doing that he could be himself.

*Harry* had made Draco feel that way—confident. Eleven-year-old Harry had done it as well, because Draco had finally seen what he could offer Harry.

“Yes.” Harry was still panting. “Yes, I like it. I like it—a lot.”

“Good.” Draco kissed the spot under Harry’s ear. “Because I promised you I’d never leave you, and I’m never going to.”

“I thought . . .” Thinking was difficult, with the way Draco’s teeth were teasing Harry’s ear. “I thought—Slytherins couldn’t be relied upon to keep their promises. That’s what you said.”

“Don’t listen to anything I said before this. It was all rubbish.”

“Then when you said—uh.” Harry had to stop, because now Draco’s was *sucking* on his ear—“When you said we could be friends when we both grew up. When you promised.”
“Yes?” Draco’s lips hovered right over Harry’s ear.

“Did you really mean it?”

“What do you think?”

“Yes?” Harry guessed.


Chapter End Notes

- Thanks once again to icmezzo for your encouragement and beta.
- Thanks once again to tdcat, frnklymrshnkly, and aibidil, without whom this fic would not exist.
- I am letteredlettered on tumblr. In four days, I'll do a post to solicit asks about head canons and writing process and thoughts about this fic if you are interested, though you can ask at any time and I'll try to answer.
- If you wish to share this fic with others, feel free to do so by reblogging this post on tumblr.
- I have been shocked and a little overwhelmed by the response to this fic. For those who read along and told me what you thought, from the bottom of my heart, thank you. You built my confidence to a degree that is truly inspiring. I am glad you liked my story enough to share yourselves a little bit with me.

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