Letters

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Letters

by Selly87

Summary

When Harry Potter turned eleven he received a letter that changed his life forever. When Harry Potter, now a dashing handsome bachelor, Head of the Auror Department and loving godfather, is thirty-five history repeats itself.

Notes

On a recent trip back home, I took a trip down memory lane and sorted through all the letters my sister and I used to send each other when I was a teenager. It was fun and I wanted to somehow incorporate that into a story. Thankfully my ever so patient beta (wonderful friend and soulmate), Julz, offered to brainstorm with me and without her patience, insistence and support I would have probably abandoned this story along the way... But, you were right
there, pushing me, insisting that I keep going, making me write every.single.day. until it was
done. Thank you for all your honesty, thanks for all the laughs we had along the way, thanks
for listening to my complaints, thanks for helping me with research and always finding the
time to listen to my ideas and answer all my questions...most of all though, thanks for being
so utterly honest and sincere!!!

**Note 1:** I decided to change Scorpius' Date of Birth, so for the purpose of this story Draco
became a dad in his early twenties, which is non-canon, I know, but roll with me on this one,
please.

**Note 2:** EWE, because in my mind Harry never did get married to Ginny and while he
remained childless in my story, he does pour all of his love into helping Andromeda raise
Teddy.

**Note 3:** Canon paints Astoria as a loving mother and someone who every much changed
Draco's outlook on life, and I really wanted to incorporate that into my story, I hope it works
for you too.
An Unexpected Owl

Dear Mr Potter,

I hope this letter finds you well.

I understand you are very busy and I wasn’t sure whether to write to you at all, but I’m in need of your help. I was wondering whether you might agree to meet me at Hogwarts this coming weekend; Saturday afternoon, perhaps?

I realise that this is asking a lot of you, given the fact that you only know of me but don’t actually know me. However, I hope you will agree anyway. I promise to explain it all in person.

Sincerely,
Scorpius Malfoy

P.S. My father does not know that I’ve chosen to write to you and I’d rather you didn’t tell him. Thank you.

Harry wasn’t sure how many times he’d read the letter since a Hogwarts owl had dropped it off at Grimmauld Place yesterday morning. At first, he’d thought one of the teachers, maybe even Minerva McGonagall herself had written to him. Then he’d discovered the letter had been from Scorpius Malfoy and he’d been more than a little confused – and surprised. He couldn’t fathom why Draco Malfoy’s son needed his help, but he couldn’t deny that he was curious. Very curious.

“And you’re sure it isn’t a fake?” Ron asked, pointing at the letter.

Harry shook his head. “Cast an Authenticity Charm. It has his magical signature all over it; the boy is smart.”

“Maybe Malfoy is trying to trick you,” Ron suggested.

That idea had also briefly crossed Harry’s mind but he’d banished it, deciding it was utterly ridiculous. What reason did Malfoy have to trick him? The war was history, they weren’t friends but they no longer snarked at each other. Their relationship was one of amicable silence and toleration. “I don’t think so. Malfoy has no reason to do any such thing.”

“It’s Malfoy! When has he ever needed a reason to be a prat?” Ron said.

“Ronald Weasley!” Hermione slammed her palm down on the table, making both her husband and Harry jump with a start. She’d been calmly eating her sandwich and listening to the conversation, but clearly, Ron’s idiocy had riled her up eventually.

“Draco Malfoy hasn’t done anything wrong since the end of the war. Cut him some slack, won’t you? Sometimes I think you got stunned one too many times,” she snapped. Ron shot her a rather furtive glance; he knew better than to argue with his wife. After all, he still had to go home with her tonight and he didn’t particularly enjoy sleeping on the sofa.

Carefully folding the letter back up, Harry placed it in the pocket of his black trousers and rubbing his tired eyes, he rose to his feet. “I need some fresh air,” he mumbled, and without further ado he reached for his coat and exited his office, leaving his two friends to finish their lunch without his
company.

He headed down the corridor into the small hall and called one of the Ministry lifts. It arrived soon enough and a moment later he found himself in the Atrium. Several people greeted him as he passed, and while he nodded in polite acknowledgement, he didn’t stop for a conversation. Instead, he headed for the Floo, grabbed some green powder, and shouted his destination. It wasn’t long after that he found himself wandering the streets of Muggle London. He tried his best not to think of anything in particular, but Scorpius Malfoy’s letter and his plea for help persistently pushed itself to the forefront of his mind again and again.

_The boy definitely has bollocks_, Harry decided. He’d contacted him at his private address, asking for a meeting. Harry racked his brain for a while, wondering what kind of help Scorpius Malfoy might need from him. He couldn’t come up with anything that made any kind of sense, and so he soon gave up trying. He supposed he didn’t have any plans this weekend. There really was nothing stopping him from making a trip to Hogwarts to meet the boy. At the very least, it would put his mind at ease. Or would it?

Harry couldn’t help but wonder what Draco Malfoy was up to these days. He hadn’t given much thought to him and he couldn’t honestly remember the last time he’d seen Malfoy. He vaguely remembered reading something about the death of his wife, Astoria Greengrass, in the Daily Prophet several years ago, but it had been a quiet announcement and there hadn’t been much fanfare about it. He didn’t even know whether Malfoy still resided at Malfoy Manor or whether he had moved.

He and Scorpius, and possibly also Astoria, had apparently lived abroad for a while but Harry didn’t know any details, nor did he know for sure whether what he knew was even true. What he did know, it was easy to discern, was that Malfoy kept a quiet and solitary life. He’d seen him once or twice when he’d dropped Teddy off at King’s Cross to board the Hogwarts Express, but post-war that had been the extent of his encounters with Malfoy. There _had_ been the trials, of course. Back then, Harry had stood up for Draco and his family, and while Malfoy had thanked him in person sometime later — _there’d even been a handshake_ — they hadn’t kept in touch.

Much later that evening, long after Harry had finished his dinner, the fire in his living room roared to life and Hermione, dressed in pyjamas and a dressing gown, stepped out of the flames. With a silent cleaning charm, she removed the soot from her clothes and the carpet, and then placed her wand back in her oversized dressing gown pocket. Harry lowered his book and shot her an expectant look.

She often invited herself over, and short of blocking the Floo, there was nothing Harry could do about that. Not that he really minded her company. She cared and Harry loved her for it.

“Are you okay?” she asked, sitting down on one of the comfortable armchairs across from him.

“Why wouldn’t I be?” he smiled, “Draco Malfoy’s son is asking for my help, nothing out of the ordinary; just another day in the life of Harry Potter,” he shrugged and Hermione smiled, gathering that his sarcasm was his way of dealing with the unexpected invitation.

“Are you going to go?” she asked.

Harry nodded. “I reckon if he had the guts to write to me without his father’s knowledge, he must have a damn good reason to want to meet with me.”

“I spoke to Neville, you know,” Hermione said, “this afternoon,” she clarified before Harry could ask her when she’d taken the liberty to do so. “He’s an excellent student, very smart but quiet. He tends to keep to himself, studies a lot, and excels at pretty much all subjects.”

“Not much in common with his father then. You sure he’s not your son?” Harry laughed, wistfully
remembering all those times Draco Malfoy and his goons had done a spectacular job at making his school days memorable, though definitely not in a positive way. That was all in the past now though. While his time at Hogwarts had been anything but ordinary, he still didn’t want to change anything about it.

“I reckon Draco instructed him to focus on his education and keep out of trouble,” Hermione said, and if Harry flinched at her unexpected use of Malfoy’s first name, he didn’t show it. “Well, I’ll leave you be. Let me know what comes of your meeting with Scorpius Malfoy,” she added.

Rising to her feet, Hermione moved towards the Floo and grabbed some Floo powder. She was about to throw it into the crackling flames when Harry stopped her with a soft “Hey.” She turned and looked at him and he mouthed quiet thanks. She smiled and shrugged.

“Anytime. Good night, Harry.” With that, she vanished into the green flames and a moment later silence descended over the room. Harry sat in quiet contemplation for a moment and then turned his attention back to his book.
Return To Hogwarts

It was a little after two pm on Saturday afternoon when Harry apparated into Hogsmeade. As always, the village appeared quiet and sleepy though Harry knew it to be anything but. He passed a wizard, two witches, and a few older Hogwarts students on his way through the small wizarding town, and while they greeted him politely, they didn’t stop to inquire what he was doing in Hogsmeade on a Saturday afternoon. Harry had wisely chosen a pair of sneakers, light-blue jeans, and a black jumper. Somehow, he didn’t think showing up at Hogwarts in his Auror uniform would be a good idea; comfortable Muggle clothing seemed like a much safer bet.

It was with fond memories that he walked up the familiar path that led to the castle, and some half an hour after his arrival in Hogsmeade, he strolled through the open front gates. Distinct chatter came from the Great Hall and two seventh year students passed him on his way to the grand staircase. They gasped, discreetly pointed at him and whispered. Harry smiled at them and they instantly scurried off, clearly too shy to approach him.

Harry shook his head in bewildered amusement and climbing the stairs, he made his way to McGonagall’s office. He’d written back to Scorpius to confirm their meeting, and knowing that his old headmistress would not appreciate him stopping by without a visit, he’d owled to let her know he was coming. She’d offered to open the Floo in her office for him but he’d politely declined, choosing to apparate into Hogsmeade and then walk up to the castle, for old times’ sake.

Soon enough, Harry found himself at the entrance to the Headmistress’ office, his feet had carried him there without any conscious thought. Just as he was about to mutter the password McGonagall had given him, the familiar gargoyle moved and allowed him to pass. Harry laughed; of course, McGonagall had been expecting his arrival, and as he stepped into her office, he found his suspicion confirmed. The elves had prepared tea and coffee as well as fresh small cakes and waffles.

“I hope you’re hungry, Harry.”

“I am now, Professor,” he smiled and her lips pursed in obvious displeasure at his chosen form of address. “Minerva,” he quickly corrected himself and she smiled, clearly more pleased at his use of her first name. Harry still found it odd to call her that but he supposed times were different now.

“Sit,” she waved her hand into the general direction of the table and comfortable chairs that she had without a doubt conjured up herself. Harry accepted the invitation as well as the cup of tea she poured for him. He’d not indulged her as to why he was here just yet, deciding it was best done in person.

“You’re looking well these days, Harry. I hope you’re keeping out of trouble,” Minerva said between two sips of tea.

He chuckled, “more or less — as much as my job lets me anyway.”

“Ah yes, the life of an Auror with a department to run,” she smiled. “I suppose I still can’t convince you to join my staff as the Defence of the Dark Arts teacher?”

She asked every year and every year Harry gave her the same answer.

“I’m afraid not. After all, we both know you have a very capable teacher in Professor Xavier,” he smiled and swiftly changed the topic. “You could, however, tell me where I might find Scorpius Malfoy?”
“In the library possibly, or his dorm, perhaps. He didn’t join his fellow classmates on their trip to Hogsmeade today,” she replied. “I gather you being here is related to your inquiry into his whereabouts?”

Harry nodded, “He requested to see me.”

Minerva smiled knowingly, and though she didn’t ask for any details, Harry had the distinct feeling that she knew more than she let on. She’d always been like that; mysteriously quiet about what she knew and what she didn’t know. “Well, in any case, I should think you won’t have much trouble locating young Mr Malfoy on your own, Harry.”

For a moment Harry wondered whether she knew about the Marauder’s Map, then he remembered that if Dumbledore had known, she had most likely known too. Harry lingered for a while, indulging in the marvellous pastries the house elves had provided them with. The taste of the treats made him miss Hogwarts just a little bit, but not enough to back down and accept Minerva’s offer of a permanent teaching position; the occasional lecture once or twice a year suited him just fine.

Besides, his job as Head Auror left him with little free time as it was. Though the job often left him feeling tired, he wasn’t ready to give it up just yet. Still, he enjoyed the chance to talk to his former professor and a good friend. Even though their conversation remained mostly polite and cursory, Harry knew that should he wish to confide in his former mentor, she would listen intently before offering her opinion or help.

At about a quarter after three, Harry made his excuses and left Minerva’s office. Once outside, he produced the Marauder’s Map from his pocket, and tapping his wand against it he mumbled, “I solemnly swear I am up to no good.” He scanned the place with a trained eye and found Scorpius Malfoy soon enough. He was in the library, and by the looks of it, he’d deliberately chosen a quiet corner. “Mischief accomplished.” Folding the map up once more, Harry made his way to the library, and with a polite nod to the librarian, he scanned the place for Scorpius. A moment later he spotted a mop of white-blond hair, and as he approached the boy’s table, the young Slytherin rose to his feet.

Harry couldn’t help but notice that the boy was the spitting image of his father, and as he stretched out his hand shyly to greet his visitor, Harry momentarily found himself distracted by the familiar feelings of déjà vu. Harry quickly suppressed his thoughts and instead reached out to shake Scorpius Malfoy’s hand.

“Mr Malfoy,” he said, not quite sure how he was supposed to address the young wizard.

“Scorpius will do, Mr Potter, sir. Mr Malfoy is my father,” the blond boy replied with a shy smile and motioned for Harry to sit.

“Alright, in that case, please, call me Harry. And none of that ‘sir’ business please,” he said with a smile as he accepted Scorpius’ offer to sit down. He glanced at the boy’s parchment and books, and it only took him a moment to realise that he was working on an essay for his Transfiguration classes. “Hard at work, I see,” he said, casually waving his hand over the school work.

“It’s nothing,” Scorpius replied, “Pretty easy stuff,” he added as an afterthought. “Thanks for coming all the way to Hogwarts to meet with me,” he said and Harry smiled.

Harry ignored the polite thanks and instead watched as Scorpius hastily moved the books aside to make some room between them.

“I would have offered to take you to dinner down in Hogsmeade, but since you wrote that your father doesn’t know about your request to meet me, I thought it better not to take you out of school,”
Harry said and Scorpius nodded in agreement. “I must admit your letter left me most curious as to what you might need my help with. I was told you’re a very good student so I doubt it’s educational.”

“Learning comes easy, I find,” Scorpius replied, fidgeting a little with his hands. He was nervous, that much Harry was sure of, but he tried his best to conceal it.

“Lucky you; I hated writing essays, then again my classmate and best friend was Hermione Granger and for her, nothing short of perfection will do. Also, my transfiguration teacher was Professor McGonagall, your headmistress,” Harry laughed, hoping casual conversation would help break the ice between them.

“I don’t like it much either, essay writing that is,” Scorpius smiled shyly. “But I want to be good at magic, so I guess one doesn’t come without the other.”

Harry smiled. “Do you play Quidditch?” he asked and Scorpius nodded with vigour.

“I’m not on the Slytherin team though; I thought I might join tryouts next year.”

“Your father was. He and I played many matches against each other. Really good seeker too.”

“He told me. He said try as he might, there was no defeating you.”

Harry laughed. “He would have defeated me, but he was too busy…” Harry fell silent. The words ‘verbally abusing me’ had been on the tip of his tongue but he didn’t think those would go down well with Scorpius.

“Bullying you?” Scorpius offered.

“Well…” Harry hesitated, not quite sure how much he could, or should, tell Scorpius. He was a young boy after all.

“Father told me. He said he wasn’t exactly the nicest bloke in school; he didn’t want me making the same mistakes.”

“He had his moments. Then again, circumstances were very different when your father and I attended Hogwarts.”

For a while, Harry and Scorpius chatted amicably and the more Harry found out about the young wizard, the more he liked him. He was bright, smart, funny, and kind. He didn’t have many friends but resolutely and repeatedly stated that it didn’t bother him. Harry wasn’t quite convinced but he knew not to push the matter. Scorpius, while born a Malfoy, seemed not to share his grandparents’ view on Muggle-born wizards and witches and Harry silently decided that Draco Malfoy was a pretty decent father.

By the sound of it, he clearly loved Scorpius a lot and not only tried to spend as much time as possible with his son but also taught him values and beliefs he deemed important. Those values clearly differed a lot from the values Draco himself had been taught and in Harry’s eyes, that meant Draco Malfoy had turned his life around in more ways than one.

Some time into their animated conversation, Harry bit the bullet and asked Scorpius what he needed his help with. At that question, the boy instantly fell silent and remained so for the longest time. Harry decided not to precipitate, instead of giving Scorpius the time to gather his thoughts.

“To be quite honest, I’m not sure what I was thinking of asking for your help, but I guess you could
say I’m a bit desperate,” Scorpius finally said. “You see, I’m really worried about my dad. I know it’s been a while since Mother’s death and I thought he accepted that she’s gone, but maybe he hasn’t?” Scorpius looked unsure and without thinking, Harry reached out and patted the young boy’s arm, going as far as to squeeze it gently to offer silent comfort.

“Losing someone is never easy and accepting that they are gone is even harder. Some deaths are easier to accept, others not so much,” he said, hoping his words sounded as supportive as he’d meant them to. He could sense Scorpius’ pain at the memory of his mother, but he was a brave young man and kept his composure without the slightest sign of crumbling at the grim memory.

“I know. I miss her a lot, but I know I’ll see her again someday. I might have to wait for many years, but that’s alright. Anyway, she’s in my heart and that’s where she’ll always be.”

Harry swallowed past the lump in this throat and for a moment he saw a bit of himself in Scorpius. The only difference between them was that Harry had never met his parents at all and all the memories he had of them were those of other people. Scorpius, however, had spent many years with his mother before she had been prematurely taken from him, and Harry found that much worse than growing up an orphan.

For a moment both Harry and Scorpius were silent, but Harry soon enough sensed that it was up to him to pick up the conversation again. “So, you are worried about your dad,” he prompted and Scorpius nodded.

“He’s been rather withdrawn lately and he doesn’t brew as many potions as he used to, something I know he really loves to spend his time on. He’s also very quiet and mostly lost in his own thoughts. I can’t remember when I last saw him smile,” Scorpius explained and Harry, despite not having any children of his own, instantly wanted to shake Malfoy and remind him that children were much smarter than most adults gave them credit for. Apparently, Malfoy’s depressive mood was so obvious that even his son, despite spending most of the year at Hogwarts studying, had been able to pick up on it.

“And I suppose you want me to talk to your father?” Harry asked. It hadn’t been hard to guess and he smiled softly when Scorpius nodded, then hastily continued speaking.

“I know you’ve never been friends, but you’ve known my father a long time and – I don’t know, maybe an unexpected blast from the past is just what he needs to help him snap out of whatever is troubling him.”

“Well Scorpius, I can’t promise you anything, I hope you know that. Your dad might not even want to see or speak to me.”

“I know, but you are kind of my last resort. I don’t know what else to do. He’s quite good friends with Ms Parkinson but I honestly don’t think she cares enough to bother with him.” Scorpius looked desperate, sad even. He hid it well, but it was there in his eyes. If one bothered to look long enough one could see it and Harry had bothered. He wasn’t sure what it was, but despite his less than amicable relationship with Malfoy, he knew he simply couldn’t deny Scorpius his request. He had to try.

“If it doesn’t help, then at least I know I tried,” Scorpius mumbled quietly and getting up from the wooden stool, Harry rounded the table and sat down next to Scorpius. Not bothering with words, he simply pulled the boy into his arms and hugged him tightly. At first, Scorpius stiffened in his arms but relaxed gradually and even snuck his arms around Harry’s waist to return the embrace. They sat like this for a while, Harry mindlessly stroking Scorpius’ hair, allowing the blond boy to bury his face in his chest. Eventually, Scorpius pulled away and with somewhat flushed cheeks, he thanked
Harry.

“No need to thank me, I’ll see what I can do. No promises though.” With that, he rose to his feet and so did Scorpius.

“Please don’t tell my father I asked you for help,” he was quick to plead, and Harry laughed and tapped his nose.

“Your secret’s safe with me – Auror’s promise,” he said and with one last ruffle of Scorpius’ hair, he turned and left the library to return to Hogsmeade and then London. He wasn’t entirely sure why he’d so freely offered to help Scorpius, especially because he wasn’t really sure if he could be of any help at all, but he at least wanted to try. Giving up wasn’t in his nature; it had never been in his nature and he wasn’t about to make it a habit now.
Harry sat staring at the file folder in front of him, too distracted to focus on the work he should actually be doing. He was so lost in his own thoughts that Hermione had to snap her fingers in front of his face several times to pull him back into the real world. He had neither heard her knock on the door nor had he noticed her come in.

“Huh?” Snapping out of his thoughts, Harry refocused his attention on Hermione. If she was at all exasperated with his lack of attention, she didn’t show it. “We didn’t have a meeting, did we?” Harry asked somewhat sheepishly, and Hermione chuckled.

“I could say yes,” she said, the challenging look in her eyes soon replaced with mirth.

“Ah, but you wouldn’t be this mean,” Harry grinned and leant back in his comfortable desk chair, a rather extravagant Christmas gift from the entire department.

“Well not ordinarily, no – though if the circumstances required it, I might be,” she teased. “You’re normally not this frazzled; anything particular on your mind? Have you met with Malfoy yet?”

Harry shook his head. He’d told Hermione all about his meeting with Scorpius and how he’d decided to try and help the boy. A few days had passed since then and he had no idea how to go about meeting Malfoy. He figured a sudden dinner invitation could easily be misconstrued – not to mention that Malfoy would most likely reject it – and simply showing up on Malfoy’s doorstep seemed just as foolish.

What with Harry being Head Auror, Malfoy might even take offence, thinking Harry intended to make his life miserable. Then again, having requested a full background check on Malfoy hadn’t exactly been a very smart move either. So far Harry hadn’t been able to bring himself to actually read the file, but short of that, he didn’t have any other ideas. He didn’t know much about Malfoy, and while they silently tolerated each other, they weren’t what one would call friends.

“Harry, you’re honestly making a mountain out of a molehill,” Hermione sighed. She glanced at the folder on his desk. The official ministry crest and Draco Malfoy’s name on the cover made it fairly obvious what it was. “Have you read it yet?” she asked, motioning at the file folder in front of Harry.

Harry shook his head. “Feels wrong,” he muttered. Taking the file, he resolutely locked it into his desk drawer, figuring that he’d stop thinking about it once it was out of his sight.

“Harry, this isn’t one of your Auror cases. Scorpius Malfoy asked you for help, he didn’t ask you to investigate his father. You can’t approach this as though it’s a case you have to solve,” said Hermione.

“I know that, ‘Mione,” Harry said with a heavy sigh. He was running his fingers through his messy hair, attempting to bring some order into it, though one glance at Hermione told him he hadn’t succeeded. “Let’s get some lunch,” he said. He rose to his feet and rounded his desk to offer Hermione his arm. “Ms Undersecretary?”

Hermione shook her head and laughed. Getting up, she accepted his arm and together they left the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. On the way out, they bumped into Ron in the corridor and the redhead grumbled something about Harry stealing his wife…again.

“Don’t worry; she’s quite safe with me.”
“Yeah, yeah I know, not your type and all,” Ron muttered, but his eyes twinkled with amusement. “Just remember to grab me a sandwich, too busy to break for lunch,” he said, and then hurried after his partner who hadn’t waited up for him.

“Busy?” Ron knocked on Harry’s open door.

“Yes, but come in,” Harry said without looking up from his files, and dipping his quill into the black ink pot on his desk, he signed the parchment in front of him.

“If it’s a bad time…?” Ron hesitated.

“Not at all – Just give me two minutes,” Harry replied. Folding the parchment he placed it inside one of the file folders on his desk and then sealed it with a tap of his wand. His Head Auror seal appeared underneath the case number and with a rather lazy flick of his wand, he moved the folder onto a pile of file folders that looked much the same.

“Case closed,” he grinned and Ron frowned before slumping down on the chair in front of Harry’s desk. He drew his wand and pointing it behind him, he spelt the door closed.

“Business or pleasure?” Harry asked, leaning back in his own chair and allowing himself a short stretch. Merlin, how he hated paperwork. As Head Auror, he seemed to perpetually drown in it. Sometimes he truly wondered how he managed to get any field work done, and then he remembered that the only reason he got any field work done was because he specifically made the time for it.


Harry frowned but accepted the file folder anyway. Opening it, he skimmed over the information inside, frowning more and more as he read along. Halfway through, he closed the file folder and shot Ron a confused look. “Ron, I’m fairly sure you don’t need my help with this. It looks pretty straightforward. From the looks of it, a bit of a pain in the arse, but no need for me to get involved.”

“Malfoy doesn’t know this,” Ron replied with a grin worthy of a Slytherin, not that Harry ever intended to tell him that. Even more confused, Harry returned to skimming the information in the file, looking for a mention of Malfoy’s name.

“You think Malfoy is involved in some illegal potion smuggling ring?” Harry asked, not convinced Ron was making any sense.

“Merlin’s balls, Harry, are you being this dim on purpose?” Ron groaned. “Fine, let me spell it out for you. You need a reason to talk to Malfoy. I’ve just handed you one on a silver platter.”

“Why would I want to talk to Malfoy about the case if he isn’t involved?” Harry queried and Ron dropped his head on Harry’s desk with an exasperated groan. He clearly didn’t possess the sensitivity his wife did. Or maybe he simply didn’t want to be sensitive about this.

“Harry, please tell me you’re being deliberately slow because I swear I’m about a second away from hexing you!” Ron raised his head and ran his fingers through his flaming red hair, glaring at Harry.

“Fine, let me make this crystal clear for you. This,” Ron pointed at the case file in Harry’s hand, “is an as of yet unsolved potion smuggling case. You,” Ron pointed at Harry, “need a reason to talk to Malfoy who is – though you clearly don’t seem to remember – a bit of a genius when it comes to potions. Use this,” Ron once again pointed at the case file, “as an excuse to talk to Malfoy.”
“But…” Harry went to object but trailed off, finally realising what Ron had been so very obviously hinting at.

“Brilliant, the knut finally dropped!” Ron clapped his hands and getting to his feet he walked towards the door. “If you need me to take one of your cases in return, I’d be more than happy to. Though please, by all means, no rush; my desk is going to break in half as it is,” he said, then left Harry to his own devices.

Harry sat staring at the case folder in his hands for the longest time, unsure whether Ron was dumping an unwanted case on him or actually trying to help him. He eventually chose the latter, trusting Ron simply had his best interests in mind. Though Harry was fairly sure that what Ron really wanted to tell him was that he shouldn’t bother with this whole thing. Harry grinned to himself. He was quite sure Hermione was behind Ron’s lack of loud objections.

With newfound determination, Harry moved his other case files out of the way and placed the potions case in front of him. He then reached for his little black notebook and an ordinary Muggle biro and lost himself in the case file, studying all of it. When he was done with that he got one of the young trainees in the open plan office down the hall to fetch him all the evidence that had been collected. He inspected everything carefully, cast a few simple spells on the evidence, and took notes. Once he was sure that he knew everything there was to know about the case, he returned to his desk and reached for his official Auror stationery and quill.
Tea at the Manor

Malfay,

Though we haven’t kept in touch much — or at all really —, I sincerely hope this letter finds you well.

I find myself at odds with a case of mine and could very much use your expertise on Potions. Ordinarily, I would trouble Professor Slughorn at Hogwarts with such matters, but he’s otherwise engaged and unable to assist me.

I would very much appreciate if you could find some time to discuss the matter with me, as your input could lead to a successful closure of the case. Evidence has been collected and if you agree to help me, I am in the position to grant you access, should you wish to inspect the potion phials we have found, as well as leftover ingredients.

Looking forward to your response,

Harry Potter
Head Auror
Department of Magical Law Enforcement

Draco toyed with the letter that had arrived with this morning’s post, quite unsure of what to do with it. Never in a million years would he have expected to ever receive an owl from Potter, and to say that he was surprised would be putting it mildly.

While they’d long since put their differences aside, their paths hadn’t crossed in years. They simply didn’t seek out each other’s company. There was no reason to, except now Potter apparently had a reason to seek him out. He needed help with a case and he was asking Draco to help him solve it.

He and Potter. The idea of them working on an Auror case together; well, Draco wasn’t sure whether he found the mere idea hilarious or extremely off-putting. He couldn’t think of a single thing they had in common that might help them break the ice once in the same room.

They were neither friend nor foe. Draco wasn’t even sure ‘old acquaintances’ was a term he could use to describe his relationship with Potter.

Draco snorted. Relationship. The word alone was extremely ill-fitted when one tried to describe him and Potter in one sentence. Former classmates. That one worked, Draco decided, though barely. Even that wasn’t an adequate description because they’d fought on opposite sides of the war and had otherwise usually been at each other’s throats. Draco mostly because of his circumstances and the beliefs his family had forced on him, but still, they had never seen eye to eye. Admittedly, much of that had been his doing, but back when he’d first met Potter he’d only ever wanted to be friends. That plan had worked out spectacularly well, hadn’t it? Draco laughed to himself. It was a dry and hollow laugh.

In the end, Potter had still saved his life though. Draco had never quite understood it until Potter had spoken up for him and his family at the trials. “Everyone deserves a second chance”; the words still rang in Draco’s ears. Only Potter would spout such utter nonsense. He’d been right of course; even Draco could admit that now. He could also admit that he was grateful. Over the years his second chance had brought him much joy.
Draco’s eyes fell on the picture frame that stood on his desk, and he watched a beautiful young witch bend down to pick up a young boy, a young boy that looked the spitting image of him. She hugged and kissed him, and then they both smiled into the camera.

Draco sighed. Sadness, too — his second chance had brought him a lot of sadness, too. Deciding that dwelling on his wife’s death wasn’t what he wanted to do with his day, Draco reached for some stationary. He deliberately chose the one with the Malfoy crest. If Potter insisted on using official Ministry letterhead to show off, so could he. Draco knew he was being somewhat childish but he didn’t care.

Potter,

While I am most confused and utterly shocked that you still remember my name, I accept your request for help.

I am not exactly sure what it is you need me for, but I have a fully equipped Potions lab at the Manor.

I am available this Thursday and Friday afternoon. Please let me know which day suits your — undoubtedly — busy Head Auror schedule and I will make sure that the wards at the Manor allow for your apparition directly onto the grounds.

Sincerely,
Draco Malfoy

P.S. I don’t have a fancy title to brag with, so I won’t.

With a frustrated sigh, Harry tossed his jumper onto his bed and stomped his foot. He’d been trying to decide what to wear for his meeting with Malfoy for the past — Harry glanced at his Muggle watch — two hours and he didn’t understand why he was making such a fuss about it.

It’s not a date, Harry reminded himself. Still, showing up in his official Auror robes simply didn’t feel right to Harry. He was quite sure that wearing them would be the equivalent of handing Malfoy a reason to ridicule him somehow. Also, he didn’t want the tone between them to be quite this official.

“He’s not a teenager anymore!” Harry scowled at his own reflection in the mirror and with a sigh, he exchanged his black trousers for a pair of comfortable jeans and a white button-down shirt. Sorting through the mess he’d made on his bed, Harry opted for a dark-green jumper to go with his outfit. If anything it matched his eyes. He added a pair of white sneakers and eyeing himself in the mirror, Harry decided that he looked acceptable enough. If Malfoy wanted to mock his fashion sense — just like he’d always done back at Hogwarts — he could have at it for all Harry cared. Then again, Harry was fairly sure his fashion sense had improved greatly since then. For one, he was no longer wearing hand-me-downs.

With another glance at his watch, Harry flicked his wand to clean up the mess in his bedroom. He wasn’t expecting anyone, but he also didn’t fancy leaving a mess behind. He holstered his wand and made his way downstairs into his study where he shrunk both the case file and the crate of evidence. He stuffed both items into his pocket and then left Grimmauld Place to make his way to the nearest apparition point.
Some twenty minutes later — and perfectly on time for his meeting with Malfoy — he arrived on the grounds of Malfoy Manor pleased to find that the wards hadn’t resisted him. Then again, Malfoy had written to tell him he’d make sure they wouldn’t.

Walking up to the large front door, Harry took a deep breath and reached for the ancient-looking door knock. He knocked twice and waited, repeatedly telling himself not to be nervous because there wasn’t anything to be nervous about. He had an appointment with Draco Malfoy, there was absolutely nothing strange about that and it most definitely wasn’t a good reason to be edgy or tense.

The door opened a minute or so later and Harry was pleasantly surprised to find that Malfoy himself had opened the door for him. He had fully expected one of the house elves to have been tasked with his welcome.

“Well,” Malfoy drawled. “Are you just going to stand there and stare or do you plan to come in?”

Harry blinked and clearing his throat he apologised and hurried inside. At the same time, he allowed himself to take a good look at Malfoy, who, he decided, had most definitely aged very well.

“Surprised I opened the door myself?” Malfoy mocked, though there was no malice in his voice as he closed the door; he merely sounded amused — actually amused. Harry couldn’t help but wonder whether his surprise had been that obvious.

“A little,” Harry admitted with a smile.

“I’m not a lazy ponce, I’ll have you know.”

“Never thought you were,” Harry said and for a split-second, Malfoy smiled.

He doesn’t look that depressed to me Harry thought, but immediately pushed the thought to the back of his mind. Instead, he looked around the large entrance hall, noting that it didn’t look anything like he remembered.

“I redecorated,” Malfoy stated and Harry idly wondered whether his former classmate could read minds. Deciding that the idea was simply preposterous, but guarding his mind anyway, Harry mumbled another apology.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to stare.”

Malfoy’s response startled him. “Would you like a tour?” he offered and for a moment Harry was unsure whether Malfoy was mocking him or whether he was actually serious. “Unless you’re pressed for time and want to talk business only, in which case my study and Potions lab are this way,” Malfoy added.

“I wouldn’t mind seeing the place,” Harry found himself saying, surprised that their first meeting was going quite so well. He hadn’t expected this, though then again, he hadn’t expected anything really. He didn’t know Malfoy well enough to know what to expect and what not to expect.

“Come along then,” Malfoy said and walking ahead, he led Harry around the Manor showing him the drawing room, sunroom, winter garden, dining hall, ballroom, living room, library, and music room. Harry asked a few questions here and there but was mostly too surprised to speak. From what he remembered from his visit to Malfoy Manor it had been a gloomy and dark place, but there was no trace of that now. The place was bright and tastefully decorated. Most of the furniture appeared to be quite antique, and by the looks of it all, Malfoy had taken great care to preserve and restore it. Light flooded each and every room and there were no dark corners to be found. A large vase of fresh flowers stood in each room and he’d stared at the white lilies in the library for the longest time.
“The sleeping chambers and guest quarters are upstairs; the attic is filled with old furniture and broken toys Scorpius won’t let me throw away and the dungeons are now my own personal wine cellar. I have a second storage for potions ingredients down there. Unless you’re interested in all that too, this concludes our tour,” Malfoy said, leading Harry into his study.

“Is this your way of showing me you have nothing to hide?” Harry blurted out before he could stop himself.

Malfoy turned to look at him. “No, Potter, you looked interested. I’m merely trying to be a good host,” he scowled, and Harry wanted to slap himself. “However, if you must know, I don’t have anything to hide and if you don’t believe me, feel free to call in a squad of Aurors to conduct a thorough search of the place. Though if you really intended to do that, I am sure I have some rights and all that.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry apologised for the third time since entering the Manor. “I didn’t mean to sound accusing, I’m just surprised at your openness, I guess.”

“It’s called manners, Potter,” Malfoy said, but the faint smile that caressed his lips told Harry that he was merely mocking him — again. “Now, I believe you wanted my help with a case? Please, have a seat.”

Malfoy motioned to the small round table with its two matching chairs on either side. The table was right by the window and Harry was secretly glad that Malfoy hadn’t chosen to sit down behind his desk. Choosing a seat, Harry sat down and watched Malfoy sit down across from him. He crossed his legs and folded his hands in his lap. A moment later a house elf appeared.

“Will Master Malfoy and Mr Potter be requiring some tea?” The little elf asked.

“Yes, please, Tibby,” Malfoy responded. “Please prepare some scones as well.”

“Certainly, Master Malfoy, sir,” the elf nodded and with a pop he disappeared. Harry stared in utter disbelief, not sure whether he was dreaming or whether he had just witnessed Malfoy actually thanking an elf. The creature hadn’t appeared to be shocked and Harry, therefore, concluded that he was used to that sort of treatment.

“You’re full of surprises, Malfoy,” Harry found himself saying out loud.

“Why, thank you, Potter,” Malfoy smiled, actually smiled. Harry had never seen Malfoy’s eyes twinkle with mirth before, but he decided that it suited Malfoy, suited him a lot.

“So, care to enlighten me as to how I may be of assistance in your case?” Malfoy changed the subject and Harry nodded. He briefly rose to his feet and removing the shrunken crate from his pocket he placed it on the floor and restored it to its original size with a tap of his wand. He then took out the case file which now included his own personal notes, and enlarging that too, he sat down again.

“We’re dealing with a particularly nasty case of potions smuggling, possibly on an international level, it would seem,” Harry explained. “I’m having some trouble identifying some of the potions that may have been brewed or smuggled into, or out of the country. There are also some strange ingredients that I have been able to identify but I’m struggling to figure out what potions they might have been used in.” Harry paused, fully expecting Malfoy to make a comment on his lack of potions skills, but the comment never came and Harry found himself wondering whether Malfoy had really changed or whether he was just an accomplished actor.
“I think I can help with that,” Malfoy said. “I would, of course, need to see the phials and ingredients and perform a few tests, but my potions lab and library should hold some answers.”

“So, you’d be willing to help me?” Harry asked.

“For a price,” Malfoy nodded. “Yes.”

With a sigh, Harry pinched the bridge of his nose. “I’m afraid the Department of Magical Law Enforcement isn’t able to pay you, Malfoy, but if you insist I will pay you out of my own pocket.”

“Oh Potter, really?” Malfoy looked rather affronted. “I don’t need the Ministry’s or your money.”

“Then what is it that you want?” Harry asked.

“My name on the case report. I don’t wish to be some nameless informant, but your equal. That shall be my price.”

“That’s all you want?” Now it was Harry’s turn to look affronted. “I would have done that anyway. I’m not in the habit of passing somebody else’s hard work off as my own.”

“Well, as long as we’re clear.” Malfoy shrugged and their conversation was cut short by the reappearance of Tibby the house elf, who served them tea and scones.

“Will Master Malfoy be requiring anything else, sir?”

“No, Tibby. Thank you.”

“Master is most welcome, sir. Tibby will now tend to his other duties.”

“You do that. If I need you, I’ll call for you.”

“Certainly, Master Malfoy, sir.” With that, the little elf disappeared and Harry once again found himself confounded by what he had witnessed. Malfoy wasn’t anything like the boy he remembered. He was – Harry wasn’t quite sure what he was, but he couldn’t deny that he liked the changes he’d observed so far. Then again, he really should have known. He’d already met the man’s son.

“Cat got your tongue, Potter?” Malfoy pulled Harry back to reality, offering him a cup of hot tea. “Don’t worry, it’s not poisoned; wouldn’t dream of harming Britain’s Golden Boy, Head Auror Potter.”

“Ha, bloody ha, Malfoy.” Harry rolled his eyes and accepted the tea. He blew at it and then took a careful sip, nodding in approval.

“Darjeeling,” Malfoy stated, sampling his own tea and nodding in agreement. Harry silently noted that Malfoy had neither added milk nor sugar to his tea.

“I like it.” Harry smiled. “Admittedly, I mostly use tea bags to make tea.”

“You can’t make tea from tea bags. Tea bags are a crime!” Malfoy looked rather outraged. “This is how you drink tea,” he added more calmly.

“Duly noted.” Harry said, swallowing the rest of the sentence that had been on his tongue, maybe you could teach me. He wasn’t sure where that thought had come from.

For a moment they sat in silence each drinking their tea, then Malfoy directed their conversation back to Harry’s case, asking a few questions. Harry willingly divulged the information, providing as many
details as he could not see any point in keeping Malfoy in the dark.

Once they had finished their tea — *Harry had been very tempted to comment on just how much the scones tasted like the ones they’d enjoyed back at Hogwarts* — Malfoy took him to his potions lab and Harry took a curious glance around. The entire place was rather state-of-the-art, with plenty of space for potions brewing, an entire wall filled with row after row of books, and a massive open plan walk-in storage room for ingredients.

“How is it that you’re not a full-time Potions Master?” Harry asked as Malfoy examined the phials inside the crate.

“I am,” Malfoy replied. “But I brew on my terms. Also, I prefer research a lot more than mindlessly brewing potions. Anyone can follow the instructions in a book, but not many people know how to improve existing potions or even create new ones.”

“I see. Made any interesting discoveries yet?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know, Potter,” Malfoy said with a smirk and eyeing a particular phial, he uncorked it and carefully smelled it. “I want to say it’s Amortentia, but there’s something off about it,” he stated with a frown. Harry watched him worry his bottom lip, and then Malfoy rummaged about the crate but stopped a short while later.

“Are you looking for something in particular?” Harry asked.

“I don’t know,” Malfoy replied and placing the cork back inside the empty phial, he returned it to the crate. He then turned on his heel and scanning the bookshelf, he eventually pulled out a large red book titled Love Potions.

“I highly doubt the criminals I’m looking for are brewing love potions, Malfoy,” Harry found himself saying, and Malfoy looked up from the pages of the book and fixed his gaze on Harry.

“Oh, I wouldn’t be so sure, Potter,” he said.

“What? Are we dealing with a group of love-sick teenage wizards and witches brewing love potions?” Harry laughed but stopped immediately when Malfoy shot him an icy glare.

“Potter, please tell me you aren’t seriously that thick or I will be forced to question the Minster how you managed become Head Auror. Existing potions can be amended; all it takes is a skilled Potions Master or Mistress to do so.”

“I know that,” Harry defensively crossed his arms over his chest. “I just don’t see why anyone would want to brew Amortentia and sell it illegally. It makes no sense.”

“It’s not Amortentia, though,” Malfoy replied, flicking through the pages of the book in his hand. A short while later he sighed in exasperation and snapped the book closed.

“Amortentia causes a powerful obsession in the person who drinks it,” Harry mumbled and reaching for the case file, he reached for his wand and conjured a quill, taking a note.

“Yes, Potter, I am quite aware of that. Again, it’s *not* Amortentia. It appears to have some similarities to it, but it’s not the same potion.”

“What is it then?” Harry asked, beginning to wonder whether this case would turn out to be more complicated than he’d initially thought. He’d cast several revelation charms on each of the potion phials but they’d all come back negative or without any results at all. Then again, there were a
number of reasons why that could be the case. The quality of the potion and the amount left in the phial all played a part in how effective the spell was.

“That, Potter, I don’t know – yet,” Malfoy said with what very much sounded like a sigh. “But I have an odd feeling that you’re not going to like the answer when I find out,” he continued and Harry noted that he appeared to look anything but happy. “Since you and your team have failed to correctly identify any of the potion leftovers in the phials, I am inclined to believe that the potions were changed, their original ingredients either substituted or other ingredients added altogether. The brewing process could also have been changed.”

“Are you saying someone is inventing new potions?” Harry asked. He really didn’t like the idea of that.

“If my theory is right, I believe so,” Malfoy nodded. “Give me a few days to experiment a little; I may be able to tell you more.”

“Thank you,” Harry said without thinking. “I’d really appreciate that.”

“Thank me once I actually know something,” Malfoy replied, then asked if he could keep the evidence grate.

“Er…” Harry hesitated. “I suppose you could.”

“Great. I’ll stop by your office early next week. Say Tuesday. Either I’ll know more, or you’ll have to find a better Potions Master.”

“I have faith in you.”

“High praise, Potter, high praise indeed,” Malfoy smirked. Again, it wasn’t a mocking smirk, merely an amused one, given their complicated history.

“I suppose I should leave you to it,” Harry said, glancing at his watch and discovering that it was already eight pm. “I’ve already taken up way too much of your time.”

“I’ll live,” Malfoy said and offering to see Harry out, he left his potions lab, and then abruptly stopped in the middle of his study, causing Harry to almost bump into him. “If you’re hungry, I can let the elves know to add another plate to the dinner table,” he offered and for a moment Harry didn’t know how to react. Part of him wanted to accept Malfoy’s unexpected invitation to stay for dinner but another larger part him warned him that Malfoy was probably just being polite and not at all serious.

“I’ve…” Harry started but trailed off.


Harry didn’t know whether there was regret in Malfoy’s voice or whether he was imagining it, but either way, he wanted to kick himself. He didn’t have any plans; dinner back at Grimmauld Place would definitely be a lonely affair. “I’ll see you next week?” he asked instead, changing the topic in hope to cover up for his inability to either properly accept or turn down something as simple as an unexpected dinner invitation.

Malfoy nodded. “I’ll owl if I find something earlier. Come on then, I’ll show you out.”

Harry nodded and they walked to the door in silence. Malfoy opened it and stepping outside, Harry shivered a little. Maybe he should’ve brought a jacket, after all, only he really hadn’t expected his
visit would last this long. He turned and smiled at Malfoy, extending his hand. Malfoy stared at it for a moment but shook it anyway.

“Thanks again for accepting my request for help,” Harry said and Malfoy nodded.

“I quite like puzzles,” he replied with a barely-visible smile. Harry, unsure of what to say simply nodded, then turned on his heel and walked away. A few steps from the door, he concentrated on the apparition point nearest to his home and seconds later he was gone.
Harry,

Everything is well. Thanks for checking in; I do enjoy your letters.

I seem to spend most of my time with essay writing; I don’t know how many quills I have broken…ha-ha!

Most interesting class? Hm, that one’s easy. Third-year students start Curse Breaking with Professor Weasley and it’s a most intriguing subject, though rather difficult and sometimes definitely a little dangerous.

I don’t think father approves too much of the subject but I reckon my enthusiasm keeps him from objecting too loudly.

Yesterday’s class was particularly exciting. Professor Weasley placed a galleon on everyone’s desks and of course, most of us went straight for the gold. Half the class ended up with boils on their hands because the coin was cursed. It was also fake. Professor Weasley had a healing potion on hand though, so all ended well. Quite an illuminating lesson, really.

Right – I best return to my never-ending essays.

Looking forward to your reply,
Scorpius Malfoy

Harry smiled as he folded the letter that had arrived with this morning’s post. He had sent Scorpius a quick note to let him know that he had met with his father but hadn’t divulged any details just yet. He and Malfoy had only met once and it had all been about work. Harry figured there wasn’t much to tell — yet — and so he had focused on Scorpius instead. He quite liked him and wanted to get to know him a little better, understand him more.

He had been right in his assumption that Scorpius would mention being busy with his studies, but what Harry found most intriguing was that Scorpius Malfoy had a thing for Curse Breaking. He had heard about the class from Bill, of course. It was an intriguing new subject to be taught at Hogwarts, for it combined several aspects of Charms, Transfiguration, and Defence Against the Dark Arts. Sometimes his own job required him to do a little curse breaking himself but given his own history with curses, Harry wasn’t too fond of the subject and generally preferred to avoid it at all costs. The Auror Department had professionally trained Curse Breakers, much like Bill Weasley, and Harry was very glad to leave it to them to take care of all the curse breaking. There were, of course, occasions when it was unavoidable for Harry to get his own hands dirty, but those occasions were rare and Harry welcomed the challenge and change of pace they brought.

Scorpius’ excitement about the subject was fairly obvious and Harry suddenly found himself remembering his own days at Hogwarts. Back then, he had excitedly written to Sirius, telling him all about his Defence Against the Dark Arts classes. Back then, his letters had probably been just like Scorpius’ letter to him. Harry couldn’t help but wonder whether Scorpius also shared all his excitement over his classes with his father and decided that he probably did. Scorpius seemed to have
a close bond with his father, which made Harry — for reasons he couldn’t quite understand — feel just a little envious. Although, he really had nothing to complain about; he had Teddy and the two of them had a close bond, one Harry was very proud of. Teddy was his pride and joy.

With a sigh, Harry finished his morning tea. He levitated his empty cup and his breakfast plate over to the sink, quickly cleaned and dried the dishes, and then returned them to their rightful places. As he leant back against the worktop, Harry decided that he really missed Kreacher.

For the most part, Kreacher had been a cranky old elf and he’d muttered a lot of horrible things, but he had eventually warmed up to Harry. They’d grown to like each other and after the war, once Harry had started to redecorate the house, Kreacher had become fiercely protective of his new old home. He’d reprimanded anyone who didn’t take off their shoes at the front door, going as far as to banish them out to the front steps until they did. Harry couldn’t help but laugh at the memory. The one time Kreacher had banished Ron to the front step of Grimmauld Place, Ron had been so angry he practically had steam coming out of his ears. He had been ready to strangle Kreacher, and it had taken Harry the better part of the afternoon — as well as half a bottle of expensive Firewhiskey — to appease Ron enough to forgive Kreacher.

Sadly, Kreacher had passed away a few years ago, and although Harry had long since gotten used to the quiet of the house, he had his moments when he missed the grumpy old elf and his ramblings. Some evenings, Harry remembered fondly, they’d had some seriously interesting conversations. Kreacher, delighted to be the centre of attention, had shared a lot of stories with Harry, who had saved them all in his own personal Pensieve, lest he forget.

Harry had thought about getting a new elf, finding Grimmauld Place too big and too quiet and longing for some company in the evenings, but so far it had only ever been a thought. Creature of habit, Harry thought to himself and resolutely banishing his morose thoughts, he left the kitchen and slipped into his scarlet Auror robes. He had a mountain of work waiting for him at the office, a fact that filled him with a bit of dread rather than extreme excitement.

“Come in,” Harry responded to the knock on his door, trying and failing for the umpteenth time to dry his department-issued Auror robes. They stubbornly remained soaking wet and Harry loudly cursed the offending item with much vigour.

“Do you treat all your visitors with such colourful language?” A familiar, posh-sounding drawl came from the door and Harry spun around.

“Malfy,” he stated flatly, more in acknowledgement of the fact that Draco Malfoy stood in the doorway to his office rather than surprise. He forced himself to adopt a more reasonable tone; there was no need to take his frustration out on Malfoy. He was in a rotten mood but it absolutely wasn’t Malfoy’s fault, and he didn’t want to damage their tentative working relationship.

Another case was driving him up the wall and this morning’s visit to a suspect’s cottage just outside Canterbury had left him soaking wet. For once, Britain’s atrocious rains were not to blame. The reason was of entirely magical nature. Upon his return to the office, he’d changed into a dry set of clothes but his Auror robes stubbornly refused to comply. It simply didn’t seem to matter how many drying spells he hit them with, and at this stage he was about ready to rip the blasted garment to shreds.

“Potter, did you forget to take your robes off before your shower?” Malfoy asked, his amusement evident and Harry glared daggers. Or at least he hoped he was glaring daggers, because he was not amused, not even in the slightest.
“Ha, bloody, ha Malfoy,” he grumbled and fired another drying spell at his robes. Inevitably, this one was just as useless as the last ten spells he’d attacked his robes with.

“Practicing duelling then?” Malfoy mocked and Harry continued to glare.

“Malfoy, I’m not in the mood,” Harry stated monotonously, managing to resist the intense urge to set his robes on fire. It wouldn’t work anyway; they’d been doused with permanent Anti-Burn-Potion and were therefore fire- and flame-resistant. Instead, he holstered his wand and rounding his desk, he slumped into his chair and rubbed his sore temples.

“Sorry, Malfoy – please come in and have a seat,” he said several moments later when it occurred to him that Malfoy was still standing in his doorway, having neither left nor moved further into the room. He fully expected a mocking comment, but Malfoy simply nodded and strode into the room. He closed the door behind him, then took a seat in front of Harry’s desk and crossed his legs, sitting back comfortably.

“Were you able to discover anything?” Harry asked, for the first time actually looking at Malfoy, who appeared rather tired, though he hid it well. There were no dark circles under his eyes but that didn’t have to mean anything. Harry knew all too well that those could be hidden with a simple glamouring spell or a beautifying potion or cream.

“Yes,” Malfoy nodded, “and as I predicted, I don’t think you’ll like what I found out.”

Harry wanted to pull a face, but he resisted the temptation.

“First things first though,” Malfoy continued and drawing his wand he aimed it at Harry’s Auror robes and one wordless spell later they were dry. Harry gaped and Malfoy reminded him that this was unbecoming.

“How?” Harry asked, rising to his feet again to inspect his robes. They were as dry as they’d ever been.

“Traditional drying spells are ineffective when it comes to flame-resistant clothing,” Malfoy shrugged. “A simple *Finite Incantatem*, however, usually does the trick. If one’s clothes got wet by means of a spell that is, which is what I presume happened to your robes. Seriously Potter; are you sure you have the right job?”

“Show off,” Harry mumbled and leaving his robes be, he returned to his desk chair and sat down again.

“You’re welcome,” Malfoy pointedly ignored Harry’s comment and instead reached into his robes to take out two small potion phials. He placed the first one on Harry’s desk and slapped his fingers away when Harry instinctively went to reach for it. “This is ordinary Amortentia, I trust you know what it does.” It wasn’t a question, but rather a statement. Harry nodded anyway.

“This,” Malfoy placed the second phial on Harry’s desk, “is the kind of Amortentia that was left over in one of those phials you brought me last week. For lack of a better name, let’s call it Amortentia II.”

“You managed to brew it,” Harry said, his interest and curiosity instantly piqued, and Malfoy nodded.

“I did,” he said with a sigh, “and this is the part that you won’t like.”

“What does it do?” Harry asked.
“From what I gather, based on the interaction of the ingredients used, it doesn’t cause a powerful obsession but rather puts the drinker in a trance-like state, unable to resist when given instructions to do something,” Malfoy explained. Harry gulped and took a moment to consider what Malfoy had said.

“Are you telling me that this,” Harry paused to reach for the phial and this time Malfoy didn’t stop him, “is basically a liquid Imperius curse?” Harry eyed the phial in his hands with utter disdain, then looked at Malfoy. “How good a Potions Master does one have to be to make this version of Amortentia?”

Malfoy clasped his hands together. “Far above average; the ingredients are nearly the same but the brewing process is slightly different, much more delicate. It took me a good while to get it right.”

“This isn’t good,” Harry mumbled. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he registered that Malfoy hadn’t made a dig at his – at best – average potion skills, but he was too preoccupied with the news to really appreciate the gesture. “This isn’t good at all,” he repeated and setting the phial back down on his desk, Harry leant back in his chair and rubbed his suddenly tired eyes.

“Fuck,” he mumbled, then glanced at Malfoy, who refrained from commenting. “Kingsley, I mean the Ministry, well the DMLE really, put a trace on the three Unforgivable curses after the war. The moment you cast it, the Department of Magical Law Enforcement knows, we know,” he said, though he wasn’t quite sure whether he was talking to himself or to Malfoy.

“This potion is a rather convenient way to get around Ministry restrictions,” Malfoy remarked with a rather serious expression. “I’m still working on identifying the other potions, but I reckon they too are modified versions of existing potions.”

“Just for once, can’t I get a simple case of underage magic or a matrimonial disagreement that’s resulted in spell abuse? Hell, a rogue dementor sounds more appealing than this,” Harry sighed and getting to his feet, he crossed his office and opened the door. “Weasley, Andrews, Rowan, Justins, Kegan!” he hollered and a few moments later, five of his most senior Aurors stood in his office. If they were at all surprised to see Draco Malfoy in Harry’s office, they hid it well.

Malfoy remained silent while Harry updated his team on the new developments and the five Aurors listened carefully, nodding where appropriate, quietly taking orders from their superior. Weasley asked about the full list of ingredients required to brew the potion and once Malfoy finished supplying the information, Ron suggested that they contact their international liaison within the Department of International Magical Cooperation, just in case. Harry nodded and the team left shortly after, closing the door behind them on their way out.

Harry returned to his chair and sat down. He removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes, then sighed before putting his glasses back in place. He looked at Malfoy, who hadn’t said a word since Harry’s team of senior Aurors had departed from his office.

“Thank you,” Harry mumbled, sensing it was probably his turn to say something.

“You’re welcome,” Malfoy nodded curtly and rising slowly, he straightened his robes. “I better leave you to it,” he added, then motioned towards the two potion phials, “I’ll leave these with you,” he noted, and Harry glanced at the phial that contained the plain Amortentia.

“Not sure what I’m supposed to do with a love potion, but alright,” he smiled wistfully.

“Find a lucky…person and make them find you irresistible for one night?” Malfoy offered, although the mischievous glint in his eyes made it obvious that he wasn’t being serious. At least Harry hoped
Malfoy wasn’t being serious.

“I don’t think I’ll need a potion for that,” Harry laughed.

“Your present relationship status suggests that you do,” Malfoy winked and Harry frowned.

“Some things never change with you, Malfoy, do they?” Harry rolled his eyes, although he wasn’t offended that Malfoy was so blatantly mocking the fact that he was still unmarried and single to boot.

“I suppose not,” Malfoy laughed and with a billow of his robes, he vanished from Harry’s office. Harry stared after him for the longest time, then having finally managed to regain his composure, he focused his attention back on his work.

Malfoy’s findings had increased his caseload drastically, and he needed to urgently redistribute some of his open cases to some of his junior staff members. Also, he still hadn’t managed to put a serious dent into the horrendous pile of paperwork on his desk.
Harry eyed the magically enlarged dining table in the Weasley’s living room with the greatest respect. It was groaning under the weight of all the food Molly Weasley was serving them and by the looks of it, she was still adding dishes. Dinner at the Burrow was always a jolly affair and no matter how frustrating his day at work had been, Harry could always count on his adopted family to make it all go away. Tonight, the entire family, except for Charlie, including spouses and children, had descended upon the Burrow and there were children everywhere.

Harry smiled and felt right at home. Molly was most definitely in her element, though these days she was no longer alone in the kitchen. Fleur, Angelina, Audrey, and Hermione were helping her, while Arthur Weasley wisely kept away far from all the tumult, hiding behind the latest copy of the Daily Prophet. Bill had apparated over from Hogwarts and Percy stood in the kitchen doorway, engaged in a heated debate on Magical Law with Hermione, which by the looks of it, he was losing. It truly amazed Harry how Hermione managed to remain so entirely focused on her cooking charms, all the while putting Percy in his place, much to the amusement of Percy’s wife as well as his mother.

Ginny was entertaining the younger children with fantastic tales of her Quidditch career and George and Ron were laughing about George’s latest invention for Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes.

Harry relished in the buzz of it all and savoured every moment of his time surrounded by friends and family. Nobody paid any attention to him and that was what made it feel like home. He could do what he wanted when he wanted and say what he wanted when he wanted. Here at the Burrow he wasn’t Harry Potter, the Head of the Auror Department, and he most definitely wasn’t the Saviour of the Wizarding World; he was just Harry and would always be just Harry. Nobody ever treated him like he was anyone special, he was just another member of the family.

Walking over to where Arthur Weasley was reading the Daily Prophet, Harry sat down on the old sofa, which creaked beneath him. Arthur almost immediately lowered the newspaper, folded it, and grinned, “Harry, my boy. Nasty business that potion smuggling case you caught.”

Harry nodded. “We’ll catch those idiots.” He tried his best to sound convincing, years as an officer of the law had taught him how to, but if he was honest, he wasn’t too sure. The case was confusing and it worried him a great deal, but he didn’t let anything on.

“Of that, I have no doubt,” Arthur smiled and glancing around he made sure his wife wasn’t within earshot before leaning closer to Harry. “A word of warning, Molly has invited someone she told me you simply must meet.”

Harry instantly grimaced. “Not another blind date,” he sighed. Molly’s concern for him was endearing, but he hated the fact that she had made it her mission to find him a life partner. He was truly grateful that she didn’t blame him for never having married Ginny. She hadn’t even batted an eyelid when he had sat her down for a chat and told her that he preferred men. Following his coming out to her, she’d simply given him the biggest, warmest hug and told him that he was still very much part of the family. Two weeks later, however, Charlie had written from Romania, informing Harry all about his mother’s letter in which she was asking him whether he knew any handsome single gay wizards in Britain.

They had both laughed about it, but ever since then, Harry was stuck with Molly setting him up with various handsome wizards she deemed worthy of his time. For the three years that he had dated Milo she had given it a rest, but shortly after Harry had told her about their mutual decision to separate, she’d resumed her motherly duties of finding him a spouse. Sometimes he wondered why Molly
never bothered to set Ginny up, but he didn’t have the balls to ask her about it. He supposed he could but had simply never tried — and probably would never — to find out. He suspected Ginny had outright told her mother not to get involved in her love life.

“‘Fraid so, Harry, ‘fraid so,” Arthur laughed good-naturedly. “Just keep eating and nodding politely.”

“She’s never going to give it a rest, is she?” Harry grinned.

“You know my Molly,” Arthur chuckled, getting up when Molly called everyone to the table. One simply didn’t make the woman wait, at least not if one wanted to remain unscathed.

Before she permitted everyone to sit down, Molly pulled Harry aside and introduced him to a rather handsome-looking young gentleman. According to her, he’d arrived at the Burrow just a minute earlier and was apparently a good friend of some friend of hers Harry had never heard of. “Harry, please meet Leo,” she said, wrapping her arm around Leo’s shoulder, most likely to make him more comfortable, though Harry was sure that it was having the opposite effect. Harry smiled politely and extended his hand.

“Pleased to meet you, Leo. I’m Harry,” he said, shaking his impromptu blind date’s hand.

Leo smiled somewhat shyly. “Heard a lot about you, already,” Leo responded and Harry, in a bit to ease the tension between them, laughed good-naturedly.

“Ah yes, good old Molly Weasley probably told you a whole bunch of horror stories. Come on, let’s sit down for dinner. It’s not wise to let Molly wait.”

Harry and Leo chatted amicably throughout dinner, engaging in polite small talk, but Harry instantly felt that nothing further would come out of their meeting. While Harry knew that Molly thoroughly vetted his prospective dates to ensure that none of them were after his fame, she always chose somewhat shy and reserved guys and those simply weren’t Harry’s type. He supposed he could tell Molly, but he didn’t think she’d willingly set him up with somewhat of a bad guy. For that she was far too protective of him and Harry loved her for it.

Harry caught Molly surreptitiously sneaking a glance or two in his and Leo’s direction throughout dinner and judging by her big grin, she was probably already planning their wedding, bless her. He suppressed a sigh and continued to keep up the pretence that everything was going well.

After dinner, everyone lingered for a while and while Harry felt somewhat obligated to chat with Leo, he also made sure to grab a moment alone with Bill to ask about his classes at Hogwarts. Harry very much wanted to inquire about Scorpius Malfoy, the temptation was almost too great to suppress, but figured that he had no business doing so. He eventually returned to Leo’s side, suggesting that they head into London for a few post-dinner drinks.

Leo gratefully accepted and it was obvious to Harry that the frivolous madness that was dinner at the Burrow had rather shaken him up. It wasn’t everyone’s cup of tea, Harry knew that much, and so he dutifully said his goodbyes to everyone, firmly told Molly not to get her hopes up and then apparated them both to a small gay Muggle pub not too far from Diagon Alley. They found a quiet corner, ordered a few drinks, and chatted amicably for a while, but it quickly became rather undeniable that they would never be more than friends. Harry apologised profusely for Molly forcing them on a blind date, but Leo simply laughed it off, telling him not to worry. If anything, they’d enjoyed a good conversation and Harry had to agree that that much was true.
Around ten pm, Harry returned to Grimmauld Place and settling in the living room, he poured himself a generous glass of Firewhiskey. As he sat down in his favourite armchair, he instantly missed the buzz of the Burrow. In the immediate aftermath of his return from the Burrow the quiet inside Grimmauld Place was oppressing, the contrast too stark for Harry to smoothly adapt to it.

There had been a time when he had been convinced that he and Ginny would have their own madhouse here at Grimmauld Place, but he had quickly realised that they weren’t meant to be together. They had both realised it. Naturally, there had been a good few intense arguments between them, but that was just what Ginny was like. In the end, she had been more understanding and supportive than Harry could have hoped for.

The faint pop of a somewhat familiar-looking elf suddenly apparating straight into his living room caused Harry to nearly jump out of his skin in fright and in his haste to draw his wand, he spilt some of his Firewhiskey all over himself.

“Tibby is sorry. Tibby did not mean to startle Mr Potter, sir.”

“It’s alright,” Harry appeased the terrified elf. “I suppose you have a message for me?”

“Master Malfoy is asking if Mr Potter is available this evening. He apologises for the late hour,” the elf answered him meekly, still looking positively frightened over the fact that he had managed to scare a wizard. Harry lunged forward to stop the elf from wringing his large ears.

“Does he want to come over?” Harry asked, wondering whether distracting the elf might help defuse the tension between them.

“Master Malfoy is asking if Mr Potter is willing to visit him at the Manor. Sir have been drinking, Tibby can tell. Tibby can take Mr Potter to the Manor, sir,” the elf said proudly, his delight at being able to offer his services clear as day. Harry found it endearing and tried his best not to think of Dobby because that memory stung and Harry didn’t want to feel mopey tonight.

“Very well,” Harry shrugged and downing the last of his drink, he placed the empty glass on the mantelpiece above his fireplace. He was tired but also intrigued as to why Malfoy wanted to see him this late.

“If Mr Potter is ready, sir?” the elf asked and Harry nodded. He crouched down and a second later Harry felt the elf’s gentle touch and another second later they’d both vanished, only to reappear in Malfoy’s study. Harry tried his best to stand up straight but the alcohol he’d consumed, combined with the aftereffects of apparition, made him feel dizzy and he swayed a little. Feeling somewhat unsteady on his feet, he reached out for the chair in front of Malfoy’s desk and holding on to it, he took a deep breath or two.

“Bit inebriated, are you, Potter?” Malfoy snorted with suppressed laughter and Harry glared at him.

“I assure you, I am not drunk,” Harry said through gritted teeth.

“I can smell the Firewhisky on you, Potter,” Malfoy rolled his eyes mockingly.

“I blame your elf, he scared me half to death and I spilt some.”

“Yes, blame a helpless elf, why don’t you,” Malfoy shook his head. He got up and wordlessly vanished into his Potions lab. A moment later he returned with a phial.

“Drink that,” he said, all but thrusting the potion phial into Harry’s hands.
“What is it?” Harry eyed the unlabelled phial somewhat apprehensively.

“Merely something to help you sober up. I can assure you, I wouldn’t dream of trying to poison you,” Malfoy drawled.

Too tired to argue, Harry sighed and uncorking the phial, he gulped it down. He immediately recognised the familiar taste of a Sobriety Potion. A moment later, he felt less fuzzy and the gentle fog in his head cleared up.

“Did you brew this?” he asked and Malfoy nodded. “I guess I was drunker than I thought. My apologies, went on a date tonight,” Harry explained himself, though he wasn’t sure why. It wasn’t like he owed Malfoy an explanation. He was a grown man and whether he chose to drink or not was entirely his own decision.

“And it was so horrible that you decided to get drunk to forget all about it?” Malfoy asked with an amused chuckle. “I told you to put that love potion to good use.”

“It was a blind date. Didn’t know anything about it until it was too late.”

“Your friends trying to set you up?”

“Just one. It’s Molly Weasley’s thing. I don’t have the heart to tell her to stop.”

“Blimey, Potter, you really do have a saviour complex!” Malfoy mocked.

Harry pursed his lips and decided to swallow the snarky comeback was on the tip of his tongue. Instead, he changed the subject. “Why did you need me to come over this late?”

“I didn’t need you to come over. I just wanted to see if you would,” Malfoy replied with a smirk and Harry frowned, unsure whether Malfoy was mocking him or actually being serious for a change.

“Malfoy, I swear, if you called me here for nothing, I will hex you!” Harry growled, mildly annoyed at the ill-placed humour this late in the evening. Somehow this was exactly something Malfoy would do and Harry didn’t appreciate it one bit. All it did was to remind him of their petty Hogwarts rivalry and now, in his mid-thirties, he was decidedly too old to continue that moronic behaviour.

“Relax, Potter. I do have something for you. Potions lab?” Malfoy appeased him.

“This better be good,” Harry grumbled but followed Malfoy anyway.
Reminiscence

Harry stretched luxuriously and rolled onto his back. He blinked a few times and groaned when the bright sunlight hit his eyes. Squeezing them closed, he groped around for his wand but gave up when he couldn’t find it, deciding to go back to sleep instead.

“Are you planning to spend all day in bed?” Hermione’s voice pushed past the fog in his sleep-laden brain and rolling onto his side, Harry blinked and stared at Hermione’s blurred form with bleary eyes. She appeared to be leaning against the doorframe of his bedroom but without his glasses, Harry couldn’t be entirely sure. For all he knew, she could also be a figment of his imagination.

“That depends entirely on what time it is,” Harry mumbled after a moment’s hesitation and reaching for his glasses, he put them on. His vision cleared instantly.

“Almost noon,” Hermione said and Harry groaned, wondering when he had last slept quite this long. He honestly couldn’t remember. These days, getting up at nine in the morning on a Saturday constituted as a lie-in. “Must have been one heck of a date last night, Harry. Shall I let Molly know that she can keep planning the wedding then?”

Finally sitting up in bed, Harry glared at his best friend and pulled his covers up to his shoulders, conscious of the fact that he was naked under the blanket. “Would you mind?” he said pointedly, making no attempt at getting out of bed while Hermione was still standing in his bedroom.

“Nothing I haven’t seen before,” Hermione laughed but retreated anyway and Harry wondered when she had ever seen him naked. He supposed she had but he had probably suppressed the memory to save himself a lifetime of trauma. “I’ll be in the kitchen,” Hermione called from the hallway. “Ron’s picking the kids up at granny’s and knowing her, Molly won’t let them leave without lunch so don’t think you’re going to give me the slip. I want all the saucy details!”

“Fag hag,” Harry mumbled, only climbing out of bed when he was sure that Hermione had returned downstairs. He didn’t usually sleep completely starkers but he had arrived home so late last night that he hadn’t bothered with his pyjamas, opting for sleep instead. He headed straight into the en-suite bathroom and under the shower. He suspected his wand was in the pile of clothes beside his bed and too lazy to retrieve it, he shaved the Muggle way, brushed his teeth, and put on some fresh clothes. He then patted downstairs and into the kitchen where Hermione welcomed him with a cup of strong, steaming hot tea. She had also prepared him some sandwiches.

“Thanks,” Harry smiled, kissing her cheek on the way to his usual spot. He sat down at the kitchen table, sipped his tea, and then reached for a sandwich. Cucumber, cheese and chicken, his favourite, he noted as he bit into it. Hermione waited patiently until he had eaten half of it, then she sat down across from him and accosted him with an avalanche of questions.

“’Mione, please,” Harry sighed, itching to pinch the bridge of his nose. “Nothing happened. Leo and I had a few drinks and then went our separate ways. He’s not my type and I doubt me and my crazy adopted family are his. Bless Molly for trying, but there’s no spark there nor will there ever be.”

“You could at least give it a try, make a bit more of an effort,” Hermione pushed the subject, just like she always did, and even though Harry felt like glaring at her he didn’t because he knew she meant well. Just like Molly did. It was their way of showing him they loved him and he couldn’t take offence at that. Odd as it sounded, they were family and this was what family did. They wanted him happy, wanted him settled with someone who would love him and take care of him and only him. Harry truly appreciated their concern and their loving effort – it made him feel wanted, made him
stop despairing about ending up a grouchy old fool without anyone to share his life with.

“Doesn’t going for drinks constitute as giving it a try?” Harry asked hopefully, but Hermione clicked her tongue in obvious disagreement.

“Did you meet someone else then?” She continued to push the matter and Harry finished his sandwich agonisingly slow, deliberately leaving her hanging. She glared but waited patiently, probably sensing that he was just hungry. Then again, she was also the kind of friend who let him get away with stalling for time.

“I didn’t meet anyone else, I was home by ten,” he answered truthfully. “Malfoy sent his elf to ask me to drop by the Manor to discuss the case and I did. I got back very late, hence my still being in bed at noon. Is that explanation to your satisfaction, Undersecretary Granger?” he asked, swallowing a cheeky remark about how Hermione would make an excellent interrogator.

“Interesting. So, in the space of a little over a week, you went from not knowing how to approach Malfoy to jumping the second he calls?”

“Blunt as always, ‘Mione,” Harry rolled his eyes. “Malfoy made some important discovery, that’s all.” Harry frowned, not sure why Hermione was grilling him so mercilessly about this. Malfoy had indeed discovered something else that could possibly move the case ahead, although Harry had to admit that Malfoy could have waited until today to call him over. On the other hand, Harry wasn’t keen on the fact that someone was brewing potions with the same qualities as the Imperius curse and the sooner they caught the culprits, the sooner he could make sure they would rot in a prison cell. He couldn’t help but wonder whether Malfoy shared his sentiment on the matter and had therefore contacted him immediately upon making his discoveries.

“I just want you to be careful,” Hermione’s voice softened considerably and she reached out to place her hand on top of Harry’s forearm. “You two have a history, just don’t forget that.”

“What do you mean?” Harry frowned. Hermione sounded like she was hinting at something but he wasn’t sure.

“What I said,” Hermione merely smiled one of her knowing smiles. “A lot happened between you two back at Hogwarts, just don’t ignore that.”

“That was more than fifteen years ago, ‘Mione.”

“As long as you’re sure,” Hermione shrugged and getting up, she reached for his empty plate and carried it over to the sink where she cleaned and dried it before placing it back in the cupboard. As Harry watched her potter about his kitchen, he couldn’t help but smile. This was Hermione’s style. She would bring up something she thought he ought to think about, but she never pushed the matter beyond what he could accept; Harry was grateful for that. Feeling somewhat sappy he finished his tea, crossed the kitchen, and walked right up to Hermione, hugging her from behind. She yelped at the unsuspected ambush but laughed when he placed a kiss on her cheek.

“Thanks for everything, ‘Mione,” he mumbled, feeling truly grateful to count her among his friends. She had walked through fire with him, just like Ron had, and despite having a family of her own, she was still always there, mothering him, looking after him, making sure he was well. She squirmed in his embrace and loosening his hold on her, Harry allowed her to turn around in his arms. She cupped his cheeks with her wet hands and placed a gentle kiss on his nose, before pushing him away.

“Harry James Potter, are you absolutely sure that you’re gay?” she laughed, mocking him for his ill-placed affections, though Harry knew she secretly relished in it.
“Quite sure. While I can appreciate a woman’s beauty, your stunning beauty, it does nothing for my nether regions.”

“Too much information, Harry, way too much information,” she chided him, then announced her departure, saying she still had a few things to take care of before Ron and the children returned. “Feel free to come over for dinner tonight, if you don’t have any other plans,” she told him, then she made her way into the living room. Harry followed but stopped at the door and silently watched as the green flames in the fireplace roared to life. A moment later Hermione was gone and the room was quiet again.

For a moment, Harry allowed himself to feel a little sorry for himself. He had been single for way too long and if he was honest with himself, he really missed having a special someone. Unfortunately, in that department, things hadn’t quite worked out yet. Sometimes he wondered whether he simply didn’t make enough of an effort with the men Molly kept setting him up with, but in his heart, he knew that not to be the case.

He and Milo had been serious, very serious indeed, but his promotion to Head Auror hadn’t left him with a lot of free time. They had tried, by Merlin they had tried, but then Milo, following the completion of his training and a year as Junior Auror, had decided to forgo any further active Auror duty in favour of teaching Defence Against the Dark Arts at Hogwarts. What precious little bit of free time they had left had gone right out of the window. Milo was forever busy preparing classes and grading essays and Harry’s crazy schedule hadn’t left him with the luxury of apparating to Hogwarts to see Milo.

They had initially tried to make it work on weekends, but quite often, Harry had ended up having to work overtime. It had put a strain on their relationship soon enough and separation had been a mutual decision, though to this day they were still very good friends, which Harry truly appreciated. Just like when they had been an item, they still didn’t see each other often, but Harry enjoyed the fact that Milo was always just an owl away. He was an extraordinary listener, something Harry had always appreciated. Harry had very much neglected to stop by Milo’s quarter after his latest visit to Hogwarts, but that day he had been rather preoccupied with all things Scorpius Malfoy. He hadn’t even stayed to find Teddy but had since profusely apologised to them both. He had owled Milo a bottle of his favourite gin and Teddy had found himself the lucky recipient of an oversized care package, courtesy of one very apologetic godfather.

Resolutely shaking himself out of his reverie, Harry decided that there was no point in him pining over a non-existent lover and with a small sigh he made his way into his study. He owed a certain young gentleman a letter.

Slamming yet another book closed, Draco growled in frustration. He simply couldn’t find any potion that called for the use of *Adder’s Fork*. It irked him that none of the potion brewing books in his personal library made any mention of it and he could hardly start brewing an array of potions in the hope that adding *Adder’s Fork* to one of them might solve the mystery for him. Though, he was mildly tempted to do just that.

Instead, he replaced the book and skimmed over the various other titles of potions books he had in his possession. He was rather proud of that library and it had never failed him before which was why not finding anything tangible on the properties or the use for *Adder’s Fork* made him feel extremely vexed. He had found some information about it in *Britain’s Magical Reptiles and Where to Find Them* but it hadn’t answered any of his questions.

If anything, it had only added to the pile of questions he already had. Draco still had no idea whether *Adder’s Fork* ought to be ground into powder, chopped up, sliced, or added whole. He had found so
very little information on the benefits of this particular ingredient, that he presently hadn’t got the
faintest clue as to where to start his research. He knew the ingredients and brewing instructions to
most potions by heart and he had gone through them several times in his head, but absolutely none
required the use of Adder’s Fork. He had even gone as far as writing down the list of ingredients and
brewing instructions to several potions to see how Adder’s Fork might modify the potion but he
knew too little about the ingredient itself to make any kind of progress. Now, after consulting his
books, he was still none the wiser and it disturbed him greatly.

Draco was quite aware that he was probably getting a little bit too invested in Potter’s potion
smuggling case but he couldn’t help himself. The idea that someone had managed to adapt the
brewing process for Amortentia, as well as the potion’s list of ingredients, to create something that
was essentially a liquid version of the Imperius Curse did not sit right with Draco. A long time ago,
he had witnessed what people under the influence of the Imperius Curse were capable of doing, had
even used the curse himself, and it had left a nasty taste in his mouth. One also did not need to have
an overactive imagination to realise that this potion could very easily be exploited to gain sexual
favours of any kind and that idea gave Draco the creeps.

Deciding that he needed a break, Draco left his potions lab and found his way to the Manor’s music
room. Since Astoria had passed, he rarely spent much of his time in this room — it had been her
favourite place and the memory of being in the room without her made him sad. Today, however, he
desperately needed to take his mind off of things for a while. Taking his seat in front of the white
Grand Piano, Draco gently ran his fingers along the keys, enjoying the way they felt underneath his
touch. He wasn’t sure what to play and for a few long minutes, he simply sat in silence,
contemplating.

Eventually, he picked a piece he knew by heart and taking a calming breath, he moved his fingers
into position, closed his eyes and began to play. As the gentle music filled the room, he lost himself
in the memories of happier times. Times when Scorpius had still run wild around the Manor, dashing
from one room to the other, singing made-up songs and chasing after his toy broom. One of
Scorpius’ favourite ways of almost giving his mother a heart attack had been to slide down the grand
staircase’s bannister and no matter how many times Draco had reprimanded him and told him to
leave it be, there had simply been no stopping him. Now that his son was at Hogwarts, Draco sorely
missed those mischievous times.

Draco missed having Scorpius at home with him, but he knew that his son loved attending
Hogwarts. His enthusiasm practically leapt off every single one of his letters. Not a week went by
that he didn’t write with a detailed account of something new and intriguing he had learnt. Draco
couldn’t remember ever having felt this excited about his studies. Then again, his own school days
had been tainted by darker times, much darker times.

Draco also sorely missed Astoria. Their relationship had been one of convenience — *a sure-fire way
to get both their parents off their backs* — and while they had never been passionately in love, they’d
cared a great deal about each other. After the war, Draco hadn’t had many friends left and Astoria
had filled that void several times over. She had cared about the man he had vowed to become, not
the boy he had been. She had been there to keep him company, she had been his shoulder to cry on,
his rock, his voice of reason, his conscience, his everything.

They’d shared a very special friendship, a very close bond, and Draco really missed having someone
around to comfort him. Someone who understood him, someone he could have a debate with until
the early hours of the morning, someone who stimulated his intellect and gave it to him straight.
Someone who wasn’t afraid to stand up to him and fight for what they believed to be right. When
Astoria had passed, Draco had, for Scorpius’ sake, pretended that he had a handle on things but
lately being alone got to Draco. He had come to terms with Astoria’s death during Scorpius’ first
year at Hogwarts, had cried and mourned the loss of his beloved wife in the comfort of his own home, but even that didn’t make being alone any easier.

He had spent all of his twenties with Astoria and after ten years of sharing a life with the woman who’d given birth to their beautiful son, the silence in the Manor was at times deafeningly oppressive. Once or twice he had actually seriously considered renting an apartment in the city, had even looked at a couple of places, but in the end leaving the Manor had always felt wrong.

He tried his best to keep the loneliness at bay, but somehow it always found a way to ambush him, especially this past year. He cherished Potter’s potions case more than he cared to admit. It kept him busy, kept him focused. He had little time to think and that suited Draco just fine. He and Potter were an odd match indeed but so far, they hadn’t been at each other’s throats, which had to mean something.

Harry set his coffee mug down and moved to open the kitchen window. Scorpius’ beautiful white-grey owl flew inside and settled on the kitchen table. It offered its leg to Harry, who hurriedly removed the letter it had carried all the way from Hogwarts. He opened one of the kitchen drawers and fed the beautiful creature some owl treats. To show its appreciation, the owl — *Harry wasn’t sure of its name* — gently nudged Harry’s hand with its beak, then left the same way it had come in.

Harry sat down and unfolding the letter he began to read:

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*Harry,*

*I fully understand that you won’t always be able to write back immediately and I don’t expect you to. Being Head Auror isn’t quite the same as being a student at Hogwarts.*

*Silly question, but do you sometimes wish that you could turn back time and be a student again? It seems us children can’t wait to grow up while you adults wish you could be young again.*

*So, father is helping you with a case. He hasn’t told me anything about that but I think it’s good for him to keep busy for a while, take his mind off things. The Manor is too big for him to be there all by himself, I wish he would get a full-time job or something.*

*Nothing major happened these past few days. Classes have been rather boring and our professors are still piling on the essays. It would appear the longer, the better. I’m considering permanently relocating to the library! Your Muggle quill is coming in handy; I’ve been using it since it arrived with your last letter — can’t get enough. Thank you so much! It’s probably just my imagination, but it feels like I’m getting through my essays much faster than before and with fewer ink stains on my parchments and hands too. Stefan is seriously jealous. He thinks dad sent it. I haven’t told anyone we’ve been corresponding, I don’t think it’s anyone’s business. They’ll just ask me if I can get them your autograph or something stupid like that.*

*Favourite Quidditch team? Why the Holyhead Harpies of course! Dad is convinced I chose them solely because he prefers Puddlemere United and its grounds for endless discussions between the two of us. He won’t accept any of my arguments and insists I’m doing it to spite him. I’m honestly not, but this little debate has become our thing, and I do so enjoy bantering with him. It’s frightfully easy to wind him up.*

*Right, back to my never-ending load of essays!*
I hope to hear from you soon.

Scorpius x

P.S. I hope you and my dad manage to solve the case! I’m keeping my fingers crossed.
Chapter Notes

Right, let's move things along a little, shall we?

Do note that this chapter contains some dialogue in Italian (as I was travelling in Italy while writing this particular chapter, hence the influence). I don't think I've overdone it, nevertheless, translations can be found in the notes at the end of the chapter.

Standing on the steps of Gringotts, Harry was about to head left toward the Leaky Cauldron when a very familiar blond mop of hair suddenly caught his attention. Harry was quite sure that the mop of hair belonged to Malfoy, and stepping behind one of the pillars at the entrance to Gringotts, Harry stared in surprise as he watched Malfoy swerve towards the entrance to Knockturn Alley. In an instant, Harry found himself overwhelmed by a flood of old memories, and despite knowing better, he found that his feet moved of their own accord.

Harry was well aware of the fact that Knockturn Alley was no longer the horrible place it had once been, but even that knowledge could not lessen his burning desire to find out what business Malfoy had there. _Borgin & Burkes_ didn’t exist any longer but Harry didn’t think Malfoy had chosen that particular alleyway because he wanted to go for a brisk walk and a bit of fresh air.

Ducking into an old doorway just past the entrance to Knockturn Alley, Harry’s eyes almost automatically sought out Malfoy’s recognisable white-blond hair and he moved to follow Malfoy further down the alley. When Malfoy briefly stopped in front of one of the shops, Harry quickly ducked into another doorway, but at the same time craned his neck to try and figure out what shop window Malfoy was looking at. For a moment it seemed like Malfoy might enter that specific shop but then he turned away from the display and continued walking.

Harry slowly counted to three, then emerged from the doorway and resumed trailing Malfoy, who seemed to be headed towards the very end of the alley. Harry’s curiosity grew by the second and he slowed to glance at the shopping window Malfoy had paused in front of. It held no notable display and with a frown, Harry focused his attention back on Malfoy. Much to his dismay, however, the blond mop of hair had vanished from his sight and Harry scolded himself for losing his touch. He hadn’t shadowed anyone in a while and most definitely not while wearing his official Auror uniform. The scarlet-red robes, the DMLE crest, and his Head Auror badge were a rather obvious giveaway when it came to shadowing suspects.

_Malfoy isn’t a suspect_, Harry reminded himself. Even though the rational part of his brain repeatedly told him that Malfoy probably had a very good reason to visit Knockturn Alley, the curious part of his brain wouldn’t let Harry turn around.

Heading further down the alley, Harry stepped out of an elderly wizard’s way and continued walking, wondering which shop, or house, Malfoy might have vanished into.

Harry had almost reached the last corner, when he suddenly and very roughly found himself thrust up against the brick wall of the building behind him. The surprise attack almost knocked the air out of his lungs, but his Auror instincts kicked in immediately and he automatically went for his wand.
His attacker was, however, a split-second faster. Long fingers tightly wound themselves around Harry’s wrist and Harry found his wand arm yanked above his head and pressed into the wall behind him. It rather hurt!

“You better have a bloody good reason for following me, Potter,” Malfoy hissed, his face inches from Harry’s and his expression utterly livid. His eyes were narrowed and he glowered at Harry, who wanted to shrink and disappear under Malfoy’s hard, unrelenting stare.

Harry blinked, surprised at how quickly and efficiently Malfoy had disarmed him without the use of a single spell. He tried to struggle free but it only resulted in Malfoy tightening his hold on him and Harry winced.

“Malfoy,” Harry said blankly. “Let go!”

“First you answer me,” Malfoy scowled, looking anything but pleased. Red-hot anger flashed in his grey-blue eyes and Harry wondered why Malfoy hadn’t drawn his wand yet. He had a clear advantage and nothing stopped him from doing so. Yet, strangely enough, he seemed content with using Muggle means to keep him restrained, which was rather unlike anything Harry expected Malfoy to do. “Do you do this with everyone who assists you on a case? Follow them around to wherever they go?” Malfoy hissed, fixing Harry with his iciest death glare.

Harry swallowed hard and shuddered. He opened his mouth to ask Malfoy once again to let go of him but his voice failed him and he inwardly cursed himself. He had enough experience chasing dark wizards not to react this way and he couldn’t understand why, when confronted with Malfoy, all his years of training and experience went right out of the window. It was like the logical part of his brain just stopped working altogether.

“What? Forgot how to speak?” Malfoy pushed, pressing Harry’s hand harder into the wall. Harry yelped and trying to flex his fingers, he attempted to get Malfoy to loosen his hold but to no avail. Malfoy stubbornly continued to keep him pinned to the wall, restraining him. He had an iron grip that was for sure, and Harry’s mind unhelpfully suggested that Malfoy would make an excellent Auror. He couldn’t remember how often he’d reminded his Auror trainees of the importance of restraining a wizard’s wand hand in close-contact combat situations, for it stopped said wizard, or witch, from using wandless magic to free themselves. The constant pain of proper restraint also made it very difficult to disapparate, transfigure one’s hand or transform into an animal. Sadly, most of his trainees failed to remember that all too important lesson and frequently found themselves in sticky situations when Harry personally took the time to put them through a series of practice drills.

“I didn’t mean to follow you,” Harry eventually said and Malfoy laughed. It wasn’t an amused laugh, but rather a hollow, disbelieving one. Then he unexpectedly loosened his hold on Harry’s wrist and less than a second later Harry found himself staring at the tip of Malfoy’s wand.

That did it and Harry found his bearings, his Auror instincts once again taking over. “Malfoy, put that away. Drawing a wand on an Auror in public is just plain stupid,” he reminded him, though silently he couldn’t help but feel impressed. Malfoy would most definitely make an excellent Auror. He possessed a natural poise that was terrifying, quick, and lacked hesitation. And all that without any formal training, Harry thought to himself.

“You’ll find that while Knockturn Alley is no longer the place to go for all things Dark Magic, nobody here will give a fuck,” Malfoy snarled and Harry sighed.

“Malfoy, be reasonable. What’s your plan here? Hex me and then obliviate me so that I don’t remember you caught me?” Harry pushed. “Put that wand away,” Harry repeated, eyes locked on Malfoy’s, whose grey orbs were still swirling with anger. He seemed to consider Harry’s words and
a moment later he holstered his wand and took a step back.

For a split second, Harry contemplated drawing his own wand. Off the top of his head, he could think of several spells he could use to disarm Malfoy but he really didn’t want their relationship to go down that way. That was what their relationship had been like when they’d attended Hogwarts and Harry absolutely did not want a repeat of that. He had chosen to follow Malfoy — dressed in his official Auror robes of all things — and Malfoy had every reason to be annoyed with him.

“I’m sorry,” Harry spoke, deciding he had to fix this immediately. “I saw you heading towards Knockturn Alley and curiosity got the better of me.” He wanted to say more, wanted to blame it on his job but he somehow knew that Malfoy would see right through that pathetic excuse and therefore didn’t even attempt to go there.

“And you, of course, thought I was up to no good and decided to follow me. Just like you used to do back at Hogwarts,” Malfoy snapped, crossing his arms over his chest.

Harry slowly let out a breath he hadn’t realised he had been holding. For a moment he wanted to lie, but he didn’t. What would be the point?

“Yes,” Harry nodded, hanging his head in shame.

“Well, over a decade later and you still don’t trust me one iota.” Malfoy’s lips pursed into a thin line and the anger that had been blazing in his eyes up until just a moment ago was replaced with disappointment and hurt.

“I really am sorry,” Harry mumbled. “For all it’s worth, I knew following you was the wrong thing to do, but I just couldn’t help myself.”

“Auror Potter,” Malfoy scowled, “I should just leave you sitting on your bloody potions case.”

“Let me make it up to you,” Harry offered and Malfoy raised a questioning eyebrow.

“And how do you propose to do that?”

“Lunch at the Leaky Cauldron?” Harry asked, hoping Malfoy would accept, but instead of doing so he merely laughed – just laughed. It was mocking and it felt a bit like a slap in the face but Harry resolutely kept his composure, said nothing, and swallowed the mild urge to hex Malfoy into next week.

“The Leaky Cauldron, really?”

Harry frowned. “What’s wrong with the Leaky Cauldron?” he wanted to know. The cosy wizarding pub was no longer what it once had been during the war. The new owners had renovated and redecorated, and while it was still a cosy little pub, it was a lot – well, cosier now.

“Well, put it this way – they don’t serve my kind of food.”

“What’s your kind of food?” Harry asked.

“Italian or French,” Malfoy replied with a shrug.

“Well, then lead the way. You pick the restaurant, I’ll settle the bill,” Harry smiled. Whatever Malfoy wants, he thought. If he wanted a posh Italian or French restaurant with exorbitant prices, he could do that. He owed him that much after his spectacular attempt to ruin their newly-formed acquaintance.
“And what exactly makes you think I want to have lunch with you?” Malfoy sneered.

“I offered to buy you lunch to make up for following you down Knockturn Alley, stop being such an aristocratic prick and start walking, Malfoy,” Harry fixed his gaze on Malfoy, boldly daring him to make another sarcastic remark.

Malfoy held his gaze for a moment then shrugged, and with a flourish of his robes, he turned on his heel and walked back into the direction of Diagon Alley. Harry followed and they silently walked towards the secret passage behind the Leaky Cauldron that led to Charing Cross Road. Content to let Malfoy take the lead, Harry watched him tap his wand against the red brick that opened the gateway and they both stepped through.

Malfoy resumed taking the lead and they walked in silence. Harry wanted to say something, fervently searched for a suitable topic they could talk about, but drew a blank time and time again. Somehow silence seemed to be the safer option, for now at least. Harry was quite intrigued as to where Malfoy was taking him but he refrained from asking, choosing to wait and see instead.

Some ten minutes later Malfoy abruptly stopped in front of the entrance to a small, quaint-looking Italian restaurant on Irving Street and Harry promptly walked into Malfoy.

“Potter,” Malfoy turned and glared. “Is paying attention really that difficult for you?”

“Sorry,” Harry muttered and motioned at the restaurant. “A Muggle restaurant?” he asked, pleasantly surprised. This was rather unexpected and Harry rather liked it. He glanced at the name over the door, La Cucina di Gio, but since he didn’t speak any Italian, he didn’t know what it meant.

Malfoy rolled his eyes. “Yes, Potter, a Muggle restaurant. They happen to serve the best Italian food in London.”

“You’ve been here before, then?” Harry asked. Suddenly, he was even more surprised and intrigued, very intrigued. Malfoy frequenting Muggle establishments was mind-boggling, yet after having met with Scorpius, Harry couldn’t deny that it made sense. I like this new you, Harry thought to himself, impressed with Malfoy’s obvious change.

Malfoy nodded and taking two steps forward, he opened the door to the restaurant, motioning for Harry to enter. Harry hesitated for a few seconds but when Malfoy didn’t budge, he accepted the fact that Malfoy was indeed trying to be a gentleman and was holding the door open for him to enter first. Harry stepped past Malfoy and into the restaurant, where he allowed himself a thorough look around. It was very rustic-looking but also quite inviting. Soft music played in the background and a few patrons were enjoying their meals in various corners of the restaurant.

A tall and tanned middle-aged man, clearly of Italian origin, approached them with a broad smile. Dressed in a pair of black slacks and a white button-down shirt, Harry suspected he was one of the waiters. He had his long hair tied back into a ponytail and the moment he spoke up, Harry realised that they had not been approached by just a waiter.

“Allora! Ciao, Draco, sono secoli che non ti vedo. Look at you, simply bellissimo,” the man said, and spreading his arms he engulfed Malfoy in a warm, welcoming hug and kissed him first on the right cheek and then on the left. Malfoy returned both the hug and the two kisses and Harry reminded himself not to gape. So, Malfoy was kissing and embracing Italian Muggles. He could handle that, he absolutely could. This was Malfoy right; his mind treacherously questioned his sanity.

“Allora! Ciao, Draco, sono secoli che non ti vedo. Look at you, simply bellissimo,” the man said, and spreading his arms he engulfed Malfoy in a warm, welcoming hug and kissed him first on the right cheek and then on the left. Malfoy returned both the hug and the two kisses and Harry reminded himself not to gape. So, Malfoy was kissing and embracing Italian Muggles. He could handle that, he absolutely could. This was Malfoy right; his mind treacherously questioned his sanity.

“Ciao, Gio, per favore, non sta esagerando un po’?” Malfoy replied in fluent Italian, and this time Harry’s mouth dropped open of its own accord, disbelievingly watching the exchange that was
taking place before him. He shook his head, idly wondering whether he was dreaming. Maybe Malf oy had hit him with a spell after all? He’d never seen Malfoy this friendly with another human being and certainly never with a Muggle. “Gio, this is Harry Potter, an old—,” Malfoy paused for a moment, clearly unsure how to describe Harry, “acquaintance. Potter, this is Gio, he owns the place,” he introduced and Harry dutifully held out his hand.

“Allora, Buongiorno, Signore Potter. Nice to meet you,” Gio smiled broadly. He accepted Harry’s hand but instead of shaking it, he used it to pull Harry into a welcoming hug. Harry stumbled forward and found himself greeted in much the same manner Gio had greeted Malfoy.

“Draco’s friends also are my friends.” Gio flashed him a big grin and laughed. “Draco, your favourite table,” he turned his attention back to Malfoy, and motioning towards the back of the restaurant, he led Malfoy to a small window table in a secluded corner.

Harry followed suit, still in a daze. This whole thing was surreal – absolutely and entirely surreal. He was quite sure that he was dreaming, or – and that seemed more likely – under a spell because not even his wildest dreams were that fantastic, Harry conceded. He watched Malfoy shrug off his robes and place them over the back of his chair before sitting down. Harry did the same with his own robes and sat down across from Malfoy. Gio placed two menus on the table in front of them then retreated behind the bar, politely giving them the time to peruse the menu and decide what they wanted to eat.

“You speak Italian,” Harry stated, disbelief written all over his face. He simply did not know how to keep the surprise off his face. The man Gio had greeted was not the man Harry thought he knew and he suddenly found himself questioning whether he knew Malfoy at all.

Lowering his menu, Malfoy smiled. “I do.”

“I never knew,” Harry shook his head.

“You never asked,” Malfoy shrugged. “I also speak French.”

“Why?” Harry found himself asking and Malfoy frowned.

“That was not what I meant, Harry thought to himself, but said nothing. Instead, he remained at a loss for words and Harry fumbled with his menu. He opened it and aimlessly leafed through the pages. It was a pathetic attempt to keep his hands busy and his mind focused on one task. So, it was true then, Malfoy had indeed lived abroad after the war. Long enough to apparently speak perfect Italian as well as French, though he supposed Malfoy could have learnt both languages as a boy. Harry had the burning desire to bombard Malfoy with a bunch of questions but he figured that Malfoy would take offence at such an interrogation. No, there had to be another, much smarter way to get the information out of Malfoy without making it sound like Harry was merely trying to cross-examine him.

“It’s in Italian,” Malfoy’s voice cut right through Harry’s musings.

“Huh?” With confusion written all over his face, Harry looked up from the menu he hadn’t been reading.

“The menu,” Malfoy pointed towards the thin black book in Harry’s hands. “It’s in Italian. I’ve pestered him about it, but Gio refuses to add an English translation.”

“Oh,” Harry said and taking a proper look at the pages of the menu, he realised that it was indeed written in a language he most definitely could not understand or speak. He thought he recognised a
couple of words and some of the drinks appeared familiar, but the rest was a blur of unknown words and phrases.

“Would you like me to recommend something to you?” Malfoy offered, and taking another glance at the menu, Harry felt that letting Malfoy take care of their lunch order was probably safer than trying — and most likely failing — to order something he’d enjoy eating. Resolutely closing the menu, Harry pushed it away from him, choosing to be bold.

“Why don’t you just order for both of us?” Harry suggested, giving up control completely, and Malfoy shrugged. *Just because I’m sorry for mistrusting him*, he thought to himself and decided to firmly believe the nonsense he was spouting in his own head.

“I can do that.”

“No sarcastic comment about how Head Auror Potter can’t even read a simple Italian menu?” Harry chuckled, entirely surprised that Malfoy had let the opportunity to mock him pass.

“There’s a time for mocking you, Potter.”

“Oh? And when would that time be?” Harry inquired with a grin.

“Why, when you least expect it, of course,” Malfoy smiled and turning his attention back to the menu he read it carefully. A moment later he looked up. “Anything you don’t eat, Potter?”

“I’m flexible. So long as you don’t expect me to eat snails, reptiles or other vile stuff.”

“Cat and dog okay then?”

“Malfoy, I sincerely hope that you are kidding.”

“Well...” Malfoy drawled, but the cheeky glint in his eyes was a dead giveaway. He returned to studying the menu and Harry glanced around the restaurant, but soon got bored and allowed his eyes to settle on Malfoy, who was intently studying the menu.

Harry shamelessly took advantage of the rare opportunity to give Malfoy an unrushed onceover. The Malfoy Harry remembered from their time at Hogwarts and been tall and slim; the Malfoy sat across from him now was still tall and slim but in a manlier way. He was devilishly handsome, too. Malfoy had since filled out a little — *in all the right places* — and his physique hinted at a muscular body. Harry momentarily wondered whether Malfoy engaged in some sort of regular physical exercise. Quidditch, perhaps? Harry wanted to ask, but such a question asked entirely out of context was nothing but a cheap pick-up line and he didn’t want Malfoy to misunderstand.

Harry felt that staring at Malfoy was all sorts of wrong, but he still couldn’t convince himself to stop. There was something about Malfoy that was quite intriguing and Harry was just a little hooked, maybe even obsessed. Malfoy had turned into a very attractive man indeed. His face was striking and Harry stupidly couldn’t help but wonder whether Malfoy’s cheeks were soft to the touch, for he failed to spot even a hint of stubble. His white-blond hair was longer than strictly necessary, but instead of falling loose around his face Malfoy had tied his hair back, and for a moment Harry’s mind wanted to trick him into believing that Malfoy looked very much like his father, but it wasn’t true. There were similarities, yes, but Malfoy’s face was softer, sweeter somehow.

Draco bit the inside of his cheek to hide his smirk. While he’d been checking the menu, he’d noticed Potter blatantly checking him out. At first, he thought that Potter was perhaps just curious, but his stare had most certainly turned appreciative and something about that fact made Draco want to tease
Potter mercilessly. After he’d so unjustly trailed him into Knockturn Alley, Potter deserved it too. After all, the only reason Draco had ventured down Knockturn Alley had been to find Salvatore. As an apothecary, the man knew everything there was to know about potions ingredients and Draco had hoped he might be able to provide him with some answers.

Unfortunately, Potter had decided to stalk him and he’d never made it to Salvatore’s little flat. Draco would have preferred to ask Snape, but short of waltzing into Professor McGonagall’s office at Hogwarts to talk to Snape’s portrait, he had no way of getting in touch with his old mentor. Somehow, he didn’t think the Hogwarts’ Headmistress would take too kindly to having her office invaded like that. Now he had no answers to a puzzle that was giving him a headache, had been followed by Potter, and the fact that the two of them were now sitting at a small table preparing to have lunch together was truly bizarre, to say the least.

Draco had long since chosen three courses for both himself and Potter and all he needed to do was to look up and wave Gio over, but for some inexplicable reason, he enjoyed being the centre of Potter’s attention. Perhaps, he thought, he enjoyed it a little too much, but he didn’t care. He knew he couldn’t play this game forever though and because he was kind of hungry, he cleared his throat and counted to three. When he looked up, Potter had, as Draco had suspected, averted his gaze and was now staring out of the window.

Draco failed to bite back an amused chuckle and the sound made Potter’s head snap back. For a moment their eyes locked and Draco boldly held Potter’s gaze. He did not want to be the one to look away first, but he needn’t have worried. Potter gave in and looking at the menu in Draco’s hands, he asked whether Draco had made a choice.

“I have,” Draco nodded. “Don’t worry, I won’t poison you today either.”

“The fact that you’re considering it is already quite worrisome.”

“You deserve it for stalking me down Knockturn Alley,” Draco glared and waved Gio over.

“I thought I’d already apologised about that? Also, I’m buying you lunch to make up for it.”

“I’m still going to make you feel miserable about it,” Draco said with a shrug.

“In that case, you might as well just tell me what you were doing in Knockturn Alley,” Potter said and leaning back in his chair, he crossed his arms over his chest. The overconfident look on his face was a stark contrast to the thoughtful look from moments ago when he’d so blatantly checked Draco out.

“Wouldn’t you like to know— Curiosity killed the cat, you know?” Draco teased and Potter was clearly about to retort something but fell silent as Gio had approached their table, holding a small notepad and pen. “Pronti?” he asked.

“Gio, per favore,” Draco chided.

“Scusa. In English then. What contorni will you have?”

“Arancini and Capunata, ”

“Molto bene, and the main course?”

“Fettucine Alfredo e Gamberetti and Ravioli Frutti di Mare.”

“Eccellente, wine?”
Gio nodded. He read the order back to Draco who confirmed it, then left to inform the kitchen.

“So much for English,” Potter huffed when they were alone again.

“Don’t blame me for you not knowing an ounce of Italian,” Draco shrugged, entirely unfazed by Potter’s fit of petty annoyance. “As for Gio, he’s not used to speaking English with me. You can’t blame him for that either.”

“Are you going to tell me what you ordered?”

“Potter, learn to be patient, would you?” Draco rolled his eyes.

“What did you do in Knockturn Alley?”

Draco fixed his gaze on Potter and glared. “You’re not going to give this a rest, are you?”

“Tell me and I will give it a rest.”

“Potter, last I checked it wasn’t illegal to visit Knockturn Alley. Frowned upon maybe, but not illegal.”

“I’m just curious,” Potter shrugged.

“I didn’t ask you what you did at Gringotts,” Draco challenged.

“There aren’t many things one can do at Gringotts, Malfoy. I was there on official Auror business, following a hunch,” Potter replied with an air of nonchalance that Draco didn’t remember Potter having. If Potter was at all surprised that Draco had obviously spotted him at the grand entrance to Gringotts, he didn’t make it obvious.

“What hunch?” Draco pushed.

“I figured all the gold those guys make from selling illegal potions – well, they have to keep it somewhere.”

“And you thought they might have opened a vault at Gringotts?” Draco asked.

“Yes, figured checking it out was worth a try. As it happens, my hunch was correct. Gringotts flagged a few suspicious vaults and I have asked the Head Goblin to keep me informed. Meanwhile, we can do some background checks on the owners of those vaults.”

“Respect, Potter. If you keep this up, I might actually start believing that you’re a half-decent Auror.”

“Coming from you, Malfoy, that’s high praise indeed,” Potter laughed. The sound of his laughter was rather pleasant to Draco’s ears, he decided, though he had no intention of ever telling Potter so.

“So, are you going to tell me what you did in Knockturn Alley then?” Potter rapidly turned the conversation back to the location of their unexpected meeting.

Gio appearing with their starters momentarily saved Draco from having to answer and he instead launched into a lengthy explanation of the two different dishes he’d ordered. He pushed the plate
with the Arancini towards Potter, insisting that he would, without a doubt, like it. Potter merely shrugged. He picked up his cutlery and dutifully tried the dish. Draco waited patiently and smiled when Potter nodded in approval.

“Delicious,” Potter said and Draco could tell he was about to repeat his earlier question, but Gio thankfully appeared with their bottle of wine. He poured a small amount into Draco’s wine glass and Draco tasted it. He took his sweet time before he eventually nodded, giving Gio permission to pour them both a generous glass of rosé. He then raised his glass in a toast and waited for Potter to do the same.

“To your case,” Draco said and Potter nodded. They gently clinked glasses and Draco found himself pleasantly surprised when Potter did not merely gulp the wine down like a brute. Instead Potter took a small sip and allowed the wine to linger in his mouth before swallowing it with an approving smile. “A fine wine,” he stated.

“I figured Butterbeer and Firewhiskey would be your thing,” Draco said, amazed that Potter enjoyed the wine.

“I haven’t had a Butterbeer in over a decade, Malfoy,” Harry frowned. “Though you’re right, while I do usually prefer to drink Firewhiskey, I can absolutely appreciate a fine wine.”

“Seems you’re not a complete oaf. Now listen, Potter, I’ll make you a deal. I’ll tell you why I went to Knockturn Alley if you truthfully answer me a question.”

“I want to say that this depends entirely on your question, but I won’t, though I will quite possibly regret saying this in approximately two minutes. Ask away,” Potter said between two bites of his starter and Draco was once again surprised. He hadn’t expected Potter to give in this easily. Of course, he could always refuse to answer once he’d heard the question, but Draco hoped he wouldn’t.

“Our sixth year in Hogwarts...” Draco started but trailed off as an unwanted avalanche of memories threatened to overwhelm his mind. He took a deep breath, locked them into a dark corner of his mind, and tried his best to control his emotions. “You knew I was up to something. Your eyes were practically always on me, and I’m sure that you followed me to the Room of Requirement on several occasions – not inside but you knew I was in there. I want to know how you did it. How did you follow me? I never saw you.”

Potter smiled, though the way Draco saw it, it was most definitely not a happy smile. It was more of a forced smile, one to disguise the fact that he too had to battle with the overwhelming power of unwanted memories. Suddenly, Draco rather regretted asking. The war was something he did not enjoy thinking about and he could tell that Potter shared the sentiment.

“I didn’t need to follow you to know you were in the Room of Requirement,” Potter answered his question.

“Are you a seer now, Potter?” Draco asked with a somewhat condescending sneer and felt a little bad for his rather childish behaviour.

“No,” Potter laughed and Draco felt his expression soften a little. That sound – he couldn’t deny that he liked the carefree sound of Potter’s laughter, try as he might. “I had a map. A map of Hogwarts. Still have it. It shows the entire castle and everyone who’s in it.”

“You still followed me though,” Draco said, only mildly surprised to hear that Potter had a secret map of Hogwarts. It explained a lot. Potter had always been extraordinarily apt at getting around the
castle faster than anyone else.

“I did,” Potter nodded. “I had a very unhealthy obsession with finding out what you were up to. Ron and Hermione thought I was barking mad. They later told me they wanted me carted off to St Mungo’s.”

“‘Had’? Seems to me you still do… Why else would you trail me to Knockturn Alley?” Draco couldn’t help but tease and reaching for his wine he took a small sip, then fixed his eyes on Potter. “Spit it out, Potter, you trailing me to the Room of Requirement,” he said and paused to set the wine glass down again. “How?” he pushed, determined to get his answer one way or another.

“You know how,” Potter replied with a smirk, then finished off his starter and leaning back in his seat, he sipped on his wine.

Visibly displeased with Potter’s answer, Draco crossed his arms over his chest and glared hard. He was about to give Potter a piece of his mind when Potter voluntarily spoke up again. “Remember how you broke my nose back at the start of the sixth year?” he asked.

Draco frowned, thinking back. Potter had hidden on top of the suitcase rack in the Slytherin carriage, eaves-dropping. Draco remembered hitting him with a Full Body-Bind Curse and then he had taken out all of his anger, frustration, hurt, and fear on Potter. Thinking back now, Draco could feel his stomach churn a little. He should have duelled Potter like a man instead of petrifying him and breaking his nose. Draco didn’t like the memory and he was about to push it away and ignore the feelings it gave him when it suddenly dawned on him. “That invisibility cloak of yours! You used that to follow me.”

Potter smiled, “I did. If you keep this up, we might just make an Auror out of you after all.”

Draco chuckled, “I don’t think anyone would take too kindly to being apprehended by a former Death Eater.”

“No one takes kindly to bring apprehended by me either, trust me, Malfoy. Especially not if they’re involved in some shady and illicit activities. Now, I believe you owe me an explanation?”

“That I do,” Draco nodded but decided to finish off his starter first. “A couple of the ingredients you guys collected as evidence are rather odd and I cannot make heads or tails of it. I’ve leafed through all my potions books and anything else I have that lists potions ingredients and their uses, but I haven’t been able to find an answer. I wanted to find someone who might be able to help. Back at Hogwarts, I would always ask Severus for his input whenever a potion or potions ingredients puzzled me, but I don’t think the Hogwarts Headmistress would appreciate me barging into her office, demanding to speak to one of the portraits. So, I thought of Salvatore, an acquaintance of mine. He’s a gifted apothecary. Fell in with the wrong sort during the war, but has since kept to himself. He knows everything there is to know about potions ingredients and I figured he might be able to shed some light on the whole thing.”

“And? Did you get any answers?” Potter asked, but before Draco could answer Gio interrupted them. He came to collect their empty dishes and Gio’s beautiful daughter brought their main courses. Draco briefly interrupted their conversation to introduce the two dishes to Potter, allowing him to choose between one of them and Potter opted for the Fettuccine Alfredo e Gamberetti, admitting that he quite liked shrimp. Draco was surprised by the choice, but he kept it to himself.

“Unfortunately, an annoyingly curious Auror decided to stalk me down Knockturn Alley before I could get any answers,” Draco resumed their conversation.
“I’m sorry,” Potter apologised. “Honestly, it was just curiosity and it was pure instinct that made me do it, not actual mistrust.”

“And I thought it was my boyish good looks that made you trail me,” Draco couldn’t help but tease and laughed when Potter nearly choked on his pasta. Potter coughed and spluttered and feeling a bit sorry for him, Draco reached for the water carafe and poured Potter a glass. Potter downed almost half of it, cleared his throat and for a moment it looked like he wanted to say something but decided against it at the last moment. Instead, he quietly resumed eating and Draco couldn’t help but wonder whether Potter was upset or angry. Draco hoped he was neither but didn’t know what else to say and therefore chose to eat his own meal in silence.

Chapter End Notes

**Allora! Ciao, Draco, sono secoli che non ti vedo. Look at you, simply bellisimo, —** Look who’s here! Hello, Draco, I haven’t seen you for centuries!

**Ciao, Gio, per favore, non sta esagerando un po’? —** Hello, Gio. Please, you absolutely are exaggerating.

**Allora, Buongiorno, Signore Potter. Nice to meet you, —** Well, hello there, Mr Potter.

**Pronti? —** Ready to order?

**Gio, per favore, —** Gio, please.

**Scusa. —** I’m sorry.

‘**Contorni’ —** means side dish or starter.

**Arancini —** small risotto balls stuffed with mozzarella and peas, dredged in breadcrumbs, and deep-fried

**Capunata —** is a sweet and sour version of ratatouille made with aubergines, it’s divine!

**Molto bene, —** Very well, good choice.

**Fettucine Alfredo e Gamberetti and Ravioli Frutti di Mare —** A dish of fettuccine (a type of pasta) with shrimp a dish of ravioli (also a type of pasta) stuffed with seafood.

**Eccellente, —** Excellent.

**Una bottiglia di vino rosé. —** A bottle of rosé, please.
A Duel Gone Wrong

Harry sat behind his desk, toying with his quill. He was a million miles away, his mind reeling. He tried to focus on a bunch of paperwork but had so far failed miserably and repeatedly. His thoughts were firmly stuck on Malfoy and they stubbornly refused to budge — a bit like a dog with a bone. It was infuriating, to say the least.

“I thought it was my boyish good looks that made you trail me”, the words repeated themselves persistently in Harry’s head, like the annoying earworm of a nineties pop tune long gone out of fashion. No matter how much he tried to distract himself, his thoughts always returned to Malfoy’s unexpected joke from their unplanned lunch a few days ago. He was rapidly becoming obsessed with trying to work out the meaning behind Malfoy’s throw-away comment.

Had it been a joke or had it not? Harry had no idea how many times he had asked himself that very question in the last forty-eight hours. He had begun to sound like a broken record and was thoroughly annoyed and fed up but couldn’t quite work out how to control himself. If it had been just a joke, why had Malfoy changed the topic so abruptly afterwards? Harry couldn’t really remember what Malfoy had rambled on about after he’d made that remark. He hadn’t really been listening, had just been nodding politely. In his desperation to try and understand Malfoy, Harry couldn’t help but wonder whether Malfoy had possibly been flirting with him. It had certainly sounded like it, but the mere idea made Harry want to laugh.

Malfoy? Flirt? With him? The idea was utterly absurd. The culprits of his latest case willingly walking into his office to surrender themselves was more likely to happen than that! Get a grip on yourself, Harry scolded himself.

Beyond irritated, Harry slammed his quill down on his desk and got up. He couldn’t focus on his paperwork and he couldn’t stop his mind from obsessing over Malfoy… again! This was rapidly getting out of hand. Frustrated, he left his office and headed down the corridor of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and straight towards the duel training room. The trainees mainly used it for practice sessions, but he desperately needed to take his mind off things. Somehow, firing a couple of curses at a bunch of duelling dummies suddenly seemed like a good idea. Finding the room empty, Harry drew his wand and began to move ten duelling dummies — a bit excessive but he didn’t care — into position at the other end of the room. He charmed each one to avoid, duck, and repeatedly attack him. Then with his wand drawn and at the ready, he got into position and started his practice session.

The dummies attacked mercilessly and Harry fired curse after curse, hex after hex, and protective shield after protective shield. He ducked, jumped, and skilfully evaded several blows. By the time he’d put the fifth dummy out of action, his perspired shirt clung to his chest, his face was flushed, and his breathing laboured. By the time, he had put the seventh dummy out of action, his left shoulder was throbbing rather painfully. He hadn’t managed to duck in time and one of the dummies had slammed its steel arm right into his shoulder, knocking him halfway across the room. For a moment Harry had seen stars, but with the adrenaline still coursing through his veins, he had somehow managed to push past the pain, determined to finish his training duel.

“Finite Incantatem!” Ron’s voice boomed across the room and the three remaining dummies instantly stopped moving and returned to what they’d once been, mere dummies. Harry turned around, facing his friend who stood in the door to the training room. “You okay there mate?” Ron asked him with a concerned look, and stepping further into the room, he closed the door behind him to avoid unwanted eavesdropping.

Harry nodded and pocketed his wand. “I was almost finished,” he attempted to explain himself.
“Seven out of ten in half an hour. You’re having a seriously bad day. That or you are bordering on suicidal,” Ron laughed and good-naturedly patted Harry’s shoulder. Harry’s self-inflicted injury throbbed; white-hot pain flashed through his entire body, and his knees buckled and gave in. He instinctively reached out and grabbed Ron’s shoulder to steady himself. “You alright?” Ron sounded concerned. He supported him with ease and Harry gritted his teeth. He nodded but had to close his eyes to focus on breathing through the pain.

Despite still wearing his glasses, his vision was blurry and he was seeing stars. “One of the dummies got my shoulder,” he mumbled, feeling rather faint from the excruciating pain.

“Let’s get you back to your office,” Ron said and slipping his arm around Harry’s waist, he supported him back to his office. Harry walked slowly, unsteady on his feet. They passed a trainee Auror on the way, who offered his help, but Ron waved him off. Once they reached Harry’s office, Harry slumped into his chair and leaning back he closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

“I’m getting too old for this nonsense,” he sighed and tried to unbutton his shirt. His shoulder protested heavily and wincing, he clumsily continued to undo the buttons with one hand. He quite firmly slapped Ron’s hands away when he tried to help. “I can take my own clothes off,” he frowned and Ron rolled his eyes at him, but seemingly knew better than to say anything.

Once the shirt was off, Ron drew his wand to conjure a mirror and Harry groaned when he saw the massive bruise that had started to form and covered his entire left shoulder. It looked positively nasty.

“I think I’d prefer a couple of crushed bones to his,” he sighed.

“Do you want me to say anything or not?” Ron laughed, disappearing the conjured mirror.

“Save it. I already know what you’re going to say. Just don’t tell your wife, she’ll have my balls.”

“If you don’t want his wife to know, I suggest you both close the door before you continue whatever this is,” Malfoy’s voice caused them both to jump and with his wand drawn, Ron spun around, glaring at Malfoy. Unperturbed, Malfoy pushed himself away from the doorframe and walked into the office, looking rather amused.

“This is not what you think it is, Malfoy,” Harry said blankly and reaching out he placed his hand on Ron’s forearm, squeezing gently. “Put that wand away and go back to work. I’ll see you and Hermione for dinner tonight.”

Ron looked at Harry, then glanced at Malfoy and with a shrug he holstered his wand and wordlessly left the office. Harry quite admired Ron for his calmness, even when faced with one Draco Malfoy. Then again, Ron was no longer quite the hothead he had once been. No, he had most definitely learnt from past experiences, had learnt that sometimes it was better to just do as told. He too had grown up and Harry suspected Hermione and their two children were a rather large contributing factor.

“That looks positively nasty,” Malfoy nodded at Harry’s dark-purple shoulder.

“It feels positively nasty,” Harry sighed. “And no, I don’t have an affair with Ron. Contrary to what you seem to believe, I’m not suicidal.”

“Just a joke, Potter, relax. I’m not going to run off to The Prophet to circulate rumours about Britain’s Golden Boy,” Malfoy said, and moving a few of Harry’s papers out of the way, he perched himself on the edge of Harry’s desk. “Want me to heal that?” he offered, and Harry looked rather surprised.
“You can do healing spells?” he asked, taken aback. Advanced healing spells — *Harry was quite certain it would take an advanced healing spell to fix his shoulder* — were notoriously difficult to learn and even more difficult to master. They required a lot of practice and patience, as well as high levels of concentration and a thorough understanding of human anatomy.

“I have a son,” Malfoy shrugged. “Children tend to injure themselves playing. It’s easier to learn a few spells than rush them to St Mungo’s every time they fall off something they shouldn’t have climbed in the first place.”

The thought of a young Scorpius driving Malfoy up the wall with his climbing escapades amused Harry, and trying to sit up a little straighter, he winced when the pain in his shoulder increased tenfold. His stomach churned, causing him to feel nauseous on top of his persistent dizziness. He swallowed past the urge to retch and leaning back, he closed his eyes and breathed deeply, trying to calm his unsettled stomach.

“Wasn’t even a real duel, practice dummy got me good. No bragging rights whatsoever,” he mumbled — *entirely oblivious to the fact that Malfoy had just rolled his eyes rather spectacularly* — and wondered why he’d felt the need to tell Malfoy exactly how he had sustained his self-inflicted injury.

“Here, let me take care of that,” Malfoy offered and half-opening his eyes, Harry was about to protest, insisting he was fine when Malfoy tugged his open shirt out of the way and placed his hand on top of Harry’s bruised shoulder. Harry shuddered a little at the unfamiliar touch, but otherwise, he remained completely still. Malfoy drew his wand and gently tapped it against the back of his hand. A second later a cool feeling of pleasant numbness spread through Harry’s shoulder and the pain slowly ebbed away.

Harry sighed and flicking his glance upward he looked at Malfoy. His lips moved rapidly and he looked concentrated as he repeatedly mumbled a spell that sounded rather complicated to Harry’s ears. The cool numbness intensified a little more and Harry felt his stomach settle and his dizziness subside. Relief and a pleasant sort of calmness surged through him and when Malfoy stopped his incantation, their eyes locked. Harry instantly lost himself in Malfoy’s intense gaze, the clear grey-blue orbs drawing him in, captivating him, and he shivered a little when Malfoy ever so slowly withdrew his hand.

“It’s badly bruised. I’m sorry I can’t heal it completely, but I’ve numbed the pain for now. You should be pain-free for a couple of hours at least,” Malfoy explained and Harry thought that his voice sounded low and somewhat husky. Momentarily not trusting himself to speak, Harry nodded, feeling as if in a trance. He quietly mourned the loss of Malfoy’s cool hand on his heated skin. It had been inexplicably soft, yet firm, a perfect mixture really. “You should probably have a healer look at it,” Malfoy suggested and blinking, he broke their eye-contact and holstered his wand.

“Only to have them tell me I need to rest and am unfit for active duty? No thanks; I’ll get some healing salve from the apothecary later.” Harry shook his head stubbornly and suddenly conscious that his chest was still bare, he hastened to button up his shirt again, surprised when Malfoy’s gaze fleetingly followed his hands.

“You are rather reckless; do you know that, Potter?” Malfoy frowned.

“Did you have a reason for stopping by?” Harry asked, resolutely changing the subject, not interested in Malfoy reprimanding him. Malfoy was, after all, the reason he had duelled the practice dummies in the first place. He had needed to distract himself from his own treacherous mind.

“I did, actually,” Malfoy nodded, surprisingly not pushing the matter — something Harry was most
definitely grateful for. Pulling a parchment out of a pocket in inside his robes, Malfoy unfolded it and handed it to Harry.

“Those other ingredients I couldn’t identify combine into a rather nasty potion.”

Harry accepted the parchment and his eyes widened as he skimmed over Malfoy’s findings. He worried his bottom lip for a moment, read over the list of ingredients again, then swallowed hard. Malfoy had taken the time to write a detailed report on how the different brewing process and the change of ingredients affected the original potion, and even though potions had never been Harry’s forte, — except, of course, for that brief time during his sixth year at Hogwarts — even he could understand what Malfoy was hinting at in his report. “Can you brew it?” he asked, lifting his eyes off the parchment and looking directly at Malfoy.

Malfoy nodded, “brewing it is the least of my concerns, what’s worrisome is what it does.”

Harry folded the parchment and placed it on his desk. He contemplated for a moment, then purposefully leant into Malfoy’s personal space. “Brew it,” he said with conviction.

“I beg your pardon?” Malfoy looked rather confused.

“I said brew—”

“I know what you said. What I don’t understand is why you want me to create something so vile,” Malfoy interrupted with a deep frown creasing his forehead.

“Because you’re gonna sell it.”

“What?” Malfoy spluttered and pushing off Harry’s desk, he resolutely stood and straightened up. He crossed his arms over his chest and fixed Harry with a hard glare. Harry wanted to look away but he didn’t. “Not a chance in hell, Potter. I refuse, I’m not—”

“Relax, Malfoy,” Harry tried to appease and getting to his feet he placed his hand on Malfoy’s forearm, much like he’d done with Ron earlier. Malfoy looked at it with both confusion and something that resembled contempt. Harry wasn’t sure whether it was because he was touching Malfoy or because of what he was asking. He sighed, and withdrawing his arm he attempted to explain. “I have an idea. It’s a bit crazy and possibly stupid, but I think it’ll work. For it to work I, however, need you to brew a couple of those potions and go undercover with me.”

“To do what?”

“Sell illegal potions on the black market. I’m hoping that if we offer those potions at a fraction of the price they’re actually worth, the guys we’re looking for will try to get rid of the competition. When they do, we’ll get rid of them.”

“You’re insane, Potter,” Malfoy shook his head.

“Probably,” Harry nodded with a smile, “but I want to get those guys and I’m really rather good at my job. The question is, are you game, Malfoy?” he asked and sat down again.

“Everything tells me that I should say no but I’m intrigued, so what the hell, let’s do it,” Malfoy shrugged and Harry grinned and clapped his hands.

“Excellent,” he grinned, delighted that talking Malfoy into participating in his insane plan had been this easy. If he was honest, he had expected a little more resistance but was quite glad that Malfoy had quite obviously developed a penchant for adventures since Hogwarts.
Kicking his shoes off in the hallway, Harry suppressed a yawn and slowly made his way into the kitchen to pour himself a glass of water. Dinner at Ron and Hermione’s had been a fun affair; the food had been wonderful and the kids had thoroughly enjoyed having him around as much as he had enjoyed being around them. Miraculously, Ron had kept his mouth shut about Harry’s little incident during his duelling practice with the dummies and had therefore spared Harry one of Hermione’s lengthy speeches about responsibility, sensibility, and stupidity.

Harry had heard it all a million times before and he knew that Hermione meant well, but he simply didn’t want to divulge the ridiculous reason behind his mad duelling practice. He still couldn’t make heads or tails of the whole thing and until he did, he didn’t see any reason to involve Hermione. As much as he loved and trusted her, she took her role as his best friend very seriously, and as such, her advice was blunt. She seldom minced her words and most of the time he loved her for it, but this time he wanted a little bit of time to himself.

Malfoy’s pain-numbing healing spell had started to wear off sometime towards the end of dessert, and while Harry had bravely managed to ignore the pain while in the company of his two best friends, now that he was at home, he really just wanted to scream. Instead, he gritted his teeth and sucked in a sharp breath. He reminded himself that he had endured worse and switching the light in the kitchen on, he was surprised to find a small package and a letter waiting for him on the table. With a frown, he reached for the letter and opened it. It was from Malfoy.

\[
\text{Potter,}
\]

\[
\text{My healing spell won’t last forever but I doubt you’ll sleep with that injury, so I took the liberty to brew you a couple of potions. I had my house elf leave them for you.}
\]

\[
\text{The pain-numbing potion has the same effect as my healing spell, I suggest you take it before bed.}
\]

Harry paused and put the letter down before he opened the package. Inside were several potion phials and two jars filled to the brim with a dark-green paste of some sort. There was a label on each phial and on each jar and picking up the letter, Harry continued to read.

\[
\text{In case you don’t want to drink the pain-numbing potion, in which case you are as foolish as you are stubborn, I’ve also included some Dreamless Sleep. And just for your information, it’s perfectly safe for you to mix the pain-numbing potion with the Dreamless Sleep. I brewed them myself and they are most compatible.}
\]

\[
\text{I don’t think your bones are damaged but just as a precaution, I brewed you a bone-strengthening solution. It should aid recovery, so do us all a favour – be a good Saviour and drink it!}
\]

\[
\text{In the jars, you’ll find Star Grass Salve. I’ve made that myself too, though I’ve somewhat improved the original recipe. Rub it over the bruise tonight and three times tomorrow and you should be fine.}
\]

\[
\text{Draco Malfoy}
\]

\[
\text{P.S. Next time you feel like duelling, I’d be happy to fire a few curses your way.}
\]
Baffled and confused, Harry stood rooted to the spot for several long minutes. He read the letter twice more, then slowly placed it back on the table, resting his hand on top of it. His other hand moved towards the potions phials and carefully picking one up, he inspected the label intently, marveling at Malfoy’s exquisite handwriting. It was quite different compared to the handwriting in his letter. The letters on the phial labels flourished more and Harry suspected it was Malfoy’s way to differentiate his potions from those brewed by others.

Without giving it a second thought, Harry uncorked the pain-numbing potion and downed the entire bottle. The relief was instant. Compared to the healing spell Malfoy had used earlier it felt quite different, but he was once again pain-free. The lack of pain made Harry just a little giddy. He picked up both the letter and the box of potions, made his way into his study, and sat down behind his desk. Putting the potions aside, he reached for a blank parchment and carefully dipped his quill into the ink, then hesitated for a moment. Brewing all these potions and preparing the Star Grass Salve must have taken Malfoy hours… He wasn’t sure what exactly he wanted to say to Malfoy, but he knew that Malfoy at the very least deserved a thank you.

Malfoy,

What an unexpected surprise!
Thank you— If you agree, I would like to treat you to another meal sometime?

Harry Potter

Harry folded the parchment twice and placed it inside an envelope which he addressed to Malfoy, then called out for Earl. A moment later a beautiful grey owl flew into his study and settled on his desk with a rather disdainful look in his eyes. Harry reached out to pet Earl, but Earl merely rewarded him with a not-so-gentle nip. He yelped and sucking on his finger, he glared at Earl, who returned the favour. “Really, anyone would think you and Hedwig were siblings,” Harry sighed and opened the top drawer of his desk. He took out a few owl treats and offered them to Earl in an attempt to appease the ill-tempered bird.

The bird accepted and once he had finished the treats, he was much more agreeable, even pushed his head against Harry’s hand. “I know it’s late, but would you please deliver this letter to Malfoy Manor?” Harry asked and Earl crooked his head sideways, then snatched the letter from Harry’s grasp and spreading his wings, he pushed himself off the desk with graceful ease. Harry just about managed to cast a spell at the window and it opened just in time for Earl to swoosh through and disappear into the night.

With a sigh, Harry stood and picking up the potions, he made his way upstairs and into his bedroom. Leaving the potions and his glasses on his nightstand, he headed into the bathroom for a relaxing shower. He stripped out of his clothes, stepped under the powerful jets of water, and closed his eyes. He simply allowed the hot water to cascade down over him and relished in how it seemed to wash all weariness away. He let his mind go blank and stood motionless for the longest time, until a particular thought, or rather a memory unexpectedly pushed itself to the forefront of his mind. He shuddered, frowned and his hand instinctively flew up to his injured shoulder. For a second it had felt like someone was touching him there, which was ridiculous since he was all alone in his home and there was most definitely nobody in the shower with him.

Get a grip, Harry reminded himself and resolutely banishing all his thoughts about Malfoy from his mind, he reached for the bottle of shower gel. He squeezed a very generous amount of the clear liquid onto his palm and languidly lathered himself up, then let out a soft sigh when his fingers
brushed along his cock. He paused. The brief temptation to wank distracted him but he gave up on the idea a few minutes later. It had been a long day; he was tired and all he really wanted was to sleep, not conjure up erotic images in his mind to help him get off. So instead, he washed off the shower gel, quickly washed his hair and once done, he turned the water off and stepped out of the shower. He reached for his towel and wrapping it around his hips, he got himself ready for bed. He dried his hair with the help of a little bit of wandless magic and rolled his eyes at the sheer mess of it.

Wet or dry, his hair always looked messy and untameable so Harry didn’t even try to brush it. Instead, he dried himself with the towel and placed it back on the towel rack before returning to the bedroom. He picked up the Star Grass Salve Malfoy had prepared for him and applied a copious amount all over the bruise, then dutifully downed the bone-strengthening potion.

Not bothering with his pyjamas or underwear, he crawled into bed and dimmed the lights with another wandless spell. He reached for the phial of Dreamless Sleep, uncorked it, and downed the clear liquid without hesitation. Turning the light off completely, he pulled the covers up to his nose, curled into a small ball, closed his eyes, and a moment later he was fast asleep, thanks to a perfectly brewed potion.
“Protego!” Malfoy yelled, successfully and with frightening ease, blocking a curse that had been hurling towards Harry with a practised flick of his wand.

“Thanks!” Harry shouted, ducked from a hex, and then fired a series of offensive spells, hoping to take out at least one of the six attackers currently trying their best to curse, mortally injure, or kill both him and Malfoy. He could feel the exhaustion creeping in and fought his hardest to keep it at bay, but he felt like he was fighting a losing battle. They had gotten themselves into a rather sticky situation and Harry felt responsible for having dragged Malfoy, who for all intents and purposes was a civilian, into the whole mess.

He and Ron had managed to get several people interested in the potions Malfoy had brewed, but none of those interested had fit the profile of the group they were after. That was, until a few days ago when everything had changed and they had received notice of a meet up at an old abandoned baroque building near Kensington. After a long and heated debate with his team, Harry had convinced them that he and Malfoy would initially go in alone. They had hidden under a glamour, of course. It wouldn’t do to simply march into the building looking like Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy. Ron and the others were to wait at a nearby location until Harry and Malfoy either returned to them, or Harry sent his Patronus to request backup.

Harry now woefully regretted insisting that he and Malfoy go to the meet up alone. The entire thing had been a setup from the start — *he still failed to understand how he hadn’t seen right through it but he was, at present, a little too distracted to contemplate the matter* — and only minutes after they had entered the building, a group of about six wizards had ambushed them in a sneak attack. They were at a distinct disadvantage, not to mention outnumbered by at least four.

Harry, who felt entirely responsible for making Malfoy part of his failed undercover operation, was rapidly going insane, desperate to get Malfoy out of harm’s way – preferably completely unscathed. Malfoy was, after all, neither a trained Auror nor did he work for the Ministry in any official capacity. He was also the only family Scorpius still had, and that thought weighed heavily on his mind.

“Malfoy, get the fuck—” Harry didn’t get to finish his sentence, having to duck from yet another curse instead. “*Expelliarmus!*” He yelled as he tried and failed to disarm one of their attackers.

“I can handle myself, Potter!” Malfoy cried out to him, and firing a series of defensive charges in quick succession, he made his point. For a moment, they were at an advantage, having forced the other wizards to use defensive spells rather than offensive. Harry followed with *Reducto* and *Relashio* and finally successfully took out one of their attackers. Malfoy fired a vicious *Expulso* at a nearby staircase and it blew into a thousand tiny pieces with a thundering crash.

Amazed at Malfoy’s instantaneous reaction and the force of his spell — *one Harry would have expected from a trained Auror, not a civilian like Malfoy* — but having no time to dwell on it, Harry simply grabbed Malfoy’s forearm and made a run for it, leaving Malfoy no choice but to stumble behind. Once out of the room, Malfoy freed himself with a forceful yank and they both dashed down the corridor and up the stairs to the floor above. They ran halfway down the corridor and ducked into an abandoned room where they stopped to catch their breath.

“This is a fucking nightmare!” Harry cursed under his breath and moving to the door, he wearily glanced around the corner, checking whether anyone had followed them up. He didn’t know how many of their attackers Malfoy had taken by collapsing the staircase but he was sure that the threat
was far from over.

“They obviously knew the Aurors were onto them and that the whole thing was a ruse to capture them,” Malfoy stated the obvious. For once his rather bored drawl did not drive Harry mad with the desire to curse him six ways to Sunday – no, he found it strangely soothing. “I think you have a mole in your department, Potter,” Malfoy added with disdain and frowning at Malfoy, Harry moved to the broken window and wordlessly conjured his Patronus. He sent the impressive stag on its way to call for backup, fervently hoping Ron and the others would arrive in time to help them sort out this madness.

“I think you may just be right...” Harry mumbled and raising his wand, he was about to cast a few protective spells around the room when they both heard muffled voices coming from the corridor. Moving back to the door, Harry craned his neck around the frame to see how many of their attackers were searching for them. He managed to make out three. “Fuck!” he cursed and looking around the room for a place to hide, he spotted an abandoned built-in wardrobe across the room.

Without a second thought, he forced a heavily protesting Malfoy inside the wardrobe and quickly pressed his palm firmly against Malfoy’s mouth to muffle his complaints. “Shut up, Malfoy!” Harry hissed insistently, pushing Malfoy even further into the corner. Malfoy spluttered indignantly and although Harry was certain that Malfoy was going to bite him, he refused to take his hand away, instead he upped the pressure somewhat. “Be quiet, Malfoy, or do you have a fucking death wish?” Harry growled as the voices coming from the corridor grew louder and louder.

The look on Malfoy’s face was a strange mixture of horror and panic and in any other situation, Harry would have grasped the opportunity to mock Malfoy, possibly even call him a ferret-face just for old times sake. Instead, Harry glared pointedly, raised a questioning eyebrow, and hoped that Malfoy had gotten the message. Malfoy nodded solemnly and Harry slowly removed his hand. “Not a sound,” he mouthed and Malfoy, eyes wide open, nodded again. The voices now no longer echoed from the corridor but were without a doubt coming from the same room. Both Harry and Malfoy stood still, barely breathing and most definitely not daring to move.

Harry thought that if they played their cards right, they might be able to ambush their attackers, but he wasn’t sure how to get that message across to Malfoy. Ordinarily, Harry used a special sign language he’d developed years ago with his team, but Malfoy wasn’t a trained Auror so that wasn’t an option. Still, maybe if he made the first move, Malfoy would realise what he wanted and react quickly enough for them to overpower those worthless scoundrels without losing out on the small advantage a sneak attack would give them. The smartest idea, of course, was to wait for Ron and the other Aurors to come to their aid, but when it came to smart ideas Harry had, admittedly, a bit of a hero complex and an impressive record of accomplishment to boot.

For the longest time, the voices outside sounded somewhat muffled. They weren’t clear enough for Harry to make out what the criminals were saying or whether their attackers were even speaking English, and much to his and Malfoy’s horror, they heard footsteps. Harry correctly deducted that there were now at least four people in the room with them.

“They have to be somewhere!” someone suddenly yelled, sounding angry, and Harry’s eyes widened in shock. He knew that voice, he had heard it too many times before not to recognise it immediately. Malfoy frowned, his eyes wide and questioning, and Harry desperately wanted to explain but his mind was reeling at a thousand miles an hour and he did not want to risk giving away their hiding place. The situation was precarious enough as it was.

The owner of the voice Harry had just recognised suddenly mumbled a spell, and much to both Harry’s and Malfoy’s shock half of their hiding place collapsed. They instinctively stepped closer
together, trying to take up as little space as possible, just in case another rogue curse ended up flying into their general direction. With nearly no leeway between them, Harry, now forced to stare at Malfoy, was getting increasingly desperate as he fervently racked his brain for a way to somehow share his plan with Malfoy.

There was a way, but it would require pressing himself up against Malfoy to whisper into his ear and Harry didn’t know how Malfoy would react to such a bold move. For all he knew, Malfoy would hex his balls off, or yell at him accusing him of molestation. No matter which way Harry twisted his crazy idea, there didn’t seem a good outcome either way, but since they were rapidly running out of time and Harry didn’t know whether and when Ron and the others would receive his Patronus, he decided to chance it.

Harry resolutely snuck both his arms around Malfoy’s waist and stepped an inch closer. Malfoy’s eyes widened and he looked positively stunned.

“Potter!” he mouthed, his breath hot against Harry’s cheek, causing Harry to shudder. Harry managed to somehow ignore him and pushing Malfoy up against the wall behind him, he firmly pushed himself against Malfoy and lifted his head. For a moment, he thought, their position almost looked like he was trying to kiss Malfoy and they stared at each other, both wearing an unreadable expression on their faces. Harry swallowed hard and cursed his gay brain halfway to Timbuktu when it chose exactly that moment to decide to tell him that Malfoy had wonderfully lush lips that looked very, very kissable indeed. The mere knowledge that some part of his brain thought of Malfoy in that way was enough to send Harry running for the hills but he bravely told his overactive imagination to shut the hell up. Instead, he pressed his cheek against Malfoy’s, attempting to get as close to Malfoy’s ear as he possibly could.

“Malfoy,” Harry whispered.

“Potter, what the fuck! This is hardly the place—” Malfoy’s breathing was ragged and Harry was sure that he was seconds away from being hexed into oblivion.

“Work with me, Malfoy,” Harry breathed and Malfoy shuddered. Harry’s brain went into overdrive, telling him some nonsense about Malfoy clearly getting a kick out them both pressed up against each other like this… Harry resolutely shut that thought down, forcing himself to focus instead of indulging in fleeting fancies that lacked common sense.

“Potter, I swear I will fucking kill—”

“Draco,” Harry mumbled in his desperation, hoping that his use of Malfoy’s first name would have the desired effect. It had; Malfoy’s entire body shook. Harry was sure it was white-hot rage, but Malfoy remained silent, not uttering a word.

“There are at least four of them out there, if we work together, we can try to take them out. One of them is one of my trainee Aurors, his name is Reid. I realise you’re not a trained Auror, but can I count on you? I cannot do this all by myself,” Harry whispered into Malfoy’s ear, his voice barely audible. For a terrifying few seconds, Malfoy simply stood there, all tense and apparently also frozen and speechless. Then, ever so slowly, his body relaxed and he nodded, signalling that he was up for the challenge of working with Harry in a mad attempt to defeat four, or possibly more, criminals, one of them being a rogue Auror trainee.

Harry loosened his hold on Malfoy and pulling back slightly, he locked eyes with Malfoy. His expression was indescribable but he held Harry’s gaze and sucking in a shaky breath, Harry nodded. Malfoy reciprocated the gesture and they readied themselves, then attacked on Harry’s mark. The
rest was a complete blur of defensive and offensive spells, cries and yells, culprits attempting to flee and the old building protesting heavily at the amount of magic it had to endure.
A couple of days later Draco sat in his living room at Malfoy Manor, staring at the headline of *The Prophet*. Despite already having read the article several times over he still found it hard to believe. When he had asked Potter to give him credit for his help in the case, *this* had most definitely not been on his mind.

The entire front page of the newspaper featured a photo of him in torn robes, messy hair, and dirt covering his face and clothes. His wand hand was visibly bleeding but he still had a firm grip on his wand, which he had kept steadily trained on the piece of scum he had helped to arrest. Sometime after the messy battle, he had ended up being the one to escort ex-Auror trainee Finlay Reid into the Ministry. Reid had been a feisty one, struggling with all his might, spluttering nasty threats, and dirty Death Eater insults, but Draco had put an end to that with a rather complicated binding spell. The silver bonds had tightly wound themselves around Reid’s wrists, securing them behind his back. At first Reid had tried to fight the bonds, but he had quickly realised that Draco had spelled the bonds to tighten every time he struggled and so he had soon given up. Getting him into the Ministry had been rather easy after that.

In the background of the picture Harry Potter, Ronald Weasley, and four other Aurors could be seen struggling with the other transgressors, but the focus of the picture was most definitely on him. Admittedly, he looked worse for wear but nobody seemed to care about that, not with the headline that came with the article.

Seven Arrested in High Profile Potion Smuggling Case

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Draco Malfoy Secret Undercover Agent for Auror Department

According to Harry Potter, Head Auror of the British Auror Department — or so the article quoted Britain’s Golden Boy — Draco’s invaluable input had helped to identify strange, and potentially extremely dangerous, potion concoctions. In addition to that, his consent to go undercover with a team of expert veteran Aurors had led to the successful arrest of a cunning potion smuggling ring. The article went on to provide more details of the case and then speculated on whether Draco was in fact an Unspeakable or Hit Wizard working exclusively for the Auror Department under Harry Potter’s expert guidance. Draco had snorted a bit at that, knowing that Potter had most definitely not instructed the press to print that, and even though it was complete poppycock it was still a lot better than *The Prophet* labelling him a former Death Eater. There was no mention whatsoever of his past involvement with Voldemort and his subsequent, but short-lived, career as a Death Eater and Draco couldn’t help but wonder whether Potter also had something to do with that. Somehow, he wouldn’t put it past Potter and his hero complex to forbid *The Prophet* to bring up his less than positive involvement in the war.

Folding the newspaper, Draco, failing to keep a smug grin off his face, placed it on the sofa next to him and uncrossed his legs, just as a very familiar owl flew in through the open window. It was his son’s beautiful white-grey owl, Beau, and as it let go of the red letter in its beak, it floated in the air, tore itself open and Scorpius’ clearly overexcited voice instantly boomed through the living room:

“DAD, YOU ARE FREAKING BRILLIANT!”
YOU ARE SERIOUSLY THE COOLEST, MOST INCREDIBLE DAD ANYONE COULD WISH FOR!

I LOVE YOU!

GO, GO, GO, AUROR DRACO MALFOY!”

Draco couldn’t help but laugh at the fact that his son had sent him a Howler. Usually it was supposed to be the other way around, parents sending their children Howlers, but after conspicuously glancing at today’s Prophet’s front page, even Draco had to admit that Scorpius had a plausible reason to send him a Howler, funny though it was. He basked in the sound of Scorpius’ familiar voice and vowed to take a trip to Hogwarts soon. He missed Scorpius too much to wait until he would be home for the Holidays, which were still several months away.

“Don’t you think you went just a bit over the top with that interview, Potter?” Draco asked much later that afternoon as he sat in Potter’s office. It had taken him twice as long to get to the Ministry as usual. Shortly after the arrival of his son’s owl, a swarm of owls had descended over the Manor and he had found himself forced to get the elves to deal with all the sudden and ridiculous increase in post. He figured the elves weren’t at all delighted with their task but they were too polite to say anything. Except of course for Tibby, who had shot him a reproachful look but hadn’t said anything. Probably for fear that he might end up having to wring his own ears or iron his hands, not that Draco condoned that kind of attitude. Astoria had taught him a great deal about respecting those around you and he’d lived by that moral code for too long now to change anything about it.

Then, upon his arrival at the Ministry, a hungry bunch of reporters had ambushed him, verbally attacking him with so many questions he hadn’t known which one to answer first — or how to answer for that matter. The few times that his picture had made it into The Prophet had been for reasons he preferred not to remember. As for the other times he had been in the news? Well, the announcement of his and Astoria’s nuptials, an official wedding photo with a brief statement, then the birth of his son, of course, and the obituary upon Astoria’s passing — all those had well and truly been unavoidable. But apart from those few times, he had kept to himself. The war had given him an almost unquenchable desire for anonymity, privacy and as much time away from the public eye as possible. The less the reporters saw of him and his family, the less they were inclined to fill The Prophet with nonsense, dragging the Malfoy name through the mud once again. For Scorpius’ sake, he reminded himself.

He had tried to act rather nonchalant about the whole hype but instead of it having the desired effect of calming the crowd, the reporters had applauded his cool, calm, and collected demeanour. They had naturally — and, of course, wrongly — concluded that this hadn’t been the first time Draco Malfoy had assisted the Auror Department. Although he had vehemently rejected the notion that he was on the Ministry’s payroll, it had been a losing battle and if he was completely honest, he was just a little afraid of what tomorrow’s headlines may bring. For the first time ever, he truly understood why Potter had tried his best — but failed — to shun the papers during the war.

The commotion his appearance in the Ministry Atrium had caused resulted in the Security Department notifying Magical Law Enforcement and — much to Draco’s initial embarrassment, though he had no plans to admit that to anyone any time soon — no one other than Potter had come to his rescue. Potter had expertly dealt with the ruthless vultures, otherwise known as reporters, and Draco had looked on in silent amazement. Potter had been calm, collected, confident, authoritative, and assertive — everything one would expect a Head of Department to be. It had forced Draco to further change his opinion of Potter.
“I’m just glad that for once I’m not the centre of attention,” Potter laughed heartily. “Or do you think I enjoy all this paperwork?”

“ Comes with the job, doesn’t it?” Draco replied with an amused grin.

“Yes and no,” Potter shrugged. “I could get one of the Junior Aurors to take care of a large portion of it for me and spend more time in the field, but then I’d also be in the papers a lot more. For the next five minutes the press has a new Golden Boy and I’m not at all inclined to set the record straight. Besides, you handled yourself admirably — much better than most of my first-year trainees during their first duel,” Potter smiled and Draco watched him rise to his feet, idly contemplating whether Potter was praising him for the sake of it or actually giving him a serious compliment.

“Tea?” Potter asked, heading towards the door. Draco nodded, though he highly suspected that any tea the Auror Department brewed was probably vile and undrinkable. Still, Potter had saved his arse earlier in the Atrium, the least he could do was to try and be polite for five minutes. Biting back a snarky response was hard but Draco forced himself to do so anyway.

Several minutes later, Potter returned levitating a tray with two mugs, a bowl of rock sugar, and a tea pot in front of him. He gently set the tray down on his desk and handed one of the mugs to Draco. Their fingers brushed ever so slightly during the exchange and Draco tried his best to ignore the feelings they aroused in him as the unexpected warmth of Potter’s touch flashed through his entire body. He instantly found himself thrown back to the night he and Potter had hidden in that old wardrobe and Potter had hugged him, pressing both their bodies so very tightly together. Don’t be stupid; it wasn’t a hug, he was trying to save our arses, Draco chastised himself.

He distinctly remembered that he had been horrified when Potter had, without much of a warning, gone for a very much unexpected embrace. Not because he found the idea of Potter’s body pressed up against his own revolting, but rather because he had been afraid of how his body might react to being in such proximity to another man. Since Astoria’s passing, he had indulged in a few secret escapades with other men, but it had never been more than a fling. He had never allowed any of the encounters to grow into anything serious, too afraid of how Scorpius might react when he found out that his father rather preferred men and had always done so. There had been one guy, a tall, dark-skinned wizard from Italy with jet-black hair he had rather liked and it had turned into an extended holiday fling but Draco had eventually, and rather resolutely, cut all ties when it had become apparent that Leone was very much interested in pursuing a serious relationship.

Draco resolutely pushed the memory of his past flings, along with that night Potter had locked his arms around him, out of his mind before they got out of hand and he started craving a repeat of Potter’s firm and muscular body snugly pressed up against his own. Feeling his blood rush south, Draco pulled himself together and focused on the tea mug in his hand. He lifted the mug and was about to take a careful sip when, rather unexpectedly, the familiar smell of his favourite tea leaves assaulted his nostrils.

“Darjeeling,” he breathed, looking up at Potter with mild astonishment. Potter merely shrugged and smiled.

“Yes, and it’s not tea bags either. Though I’m sure that this brand of Darjeeling isn’t what you’re used to.”

Draco frowned and taking a careful sip of the hot beverage he had to admit that it exceeded expectations. If he was honest, which he could be, it was well above average. “The Auror Department buys Darjeeling tea leaves?” He queried, finding it rather hard to believe that the Ministry of Magic would bother to spend money on fine tea.
Potter laughed. “Merlin no, they buy tea bags, the cheapest. This is my own personal stash. After I had some at the Manor, I thought I would try it. I must say I’m rather enjoying this blend.”

Draco opened his mouth to respond but when his words failed him, he hastily took a sip from his tea instead.

“I’m not completely ignorant, you know, Malfoy.”

“Could’ve fooled me,” Draco muttered into his tea.

“There’s a lot you don’t know about me, Draco.”

Potter’s unexpected use of his first name nearly caused Draco to spill his tea as he suppressed an unwanted cough. Much to his dismay, and mild embarrassment, he found his nether regions reacting rather inappropriately and couldn’t help but wonder how Potter managed to bring out the randy teenager in him. He shuffled in his seat and throwing one leg over the other he purposefully rearranged his robes, desperately willing his cock to stop showing an interest in Potter in that way. He really, and absolutely, did not need to add an infatuation with Potter to his list of troubles. He did not want to either.

Much to his consternation, ever since he had caught Potter checking him out over lunch, he had found himself getting rather strange ideas about them both. Most of the time it was just a fleeting thought here and there and he managed to ignore it, but ever since that incident, the thoughts had become more insistent and it took Draco a lot more effort to banish them to that very dark corner of his mind that he usually kept under lock and key. Trying to distract himself further, Draco decided it was for the best if he kept the conversation going.

“Like what?” he asked. He didn’t think Potter was that much of a mysterious person and looking at the man presently sitting across from him, he raised his eyebrow in a silent dare.

“What would you like to know, Malfoy?” Potter asked with a smirk worthy of any Slytherin, and just like that they were back in familiar waters, using each other’s last names just like they always had. Draco relaxed. A lot. He also tried to come up with something, anything, he wanted to ask Potter, but he drew a blank and silently cursed himself.

Inevitably silence descended over the room and Draco focused his full attention on his tea, studiously avoiding looking directly at Potter. He suddenly couldn’t remember why he was sitting in Potter’s office in the first place. They had solved the potions case, he had no real reason to be here, he could have just as well stayed home, except the influx of owls had made it nearly impossible for him to focus on anything at all. Not even as simple a task as answering his son’s Howler.

Harry tried his hardest to hide his bemusement; Malfoy was acting rather odd and thoroughly out of character. While he was doing quite a good job at glamouring is behaviour, it hadn’t escaped Harry’s notice that Malfoy was, suddenly, being extremely vigilant about not meeting his eyes. He couldn’t quite fathom why but rather relished in the opportunity to be able to take a closer look at Malfoy.

Harry wasn’t quite sure what had brought on the sudden change in Malfoy, but he suspected that he had yet to fully process a bunch of reporters accosting him upon stepping into the Ministry’s grand Atrium. At this stage of his life, Harry couldn’t care less about all the reporters that were always swarming all around him, had dealt with it for most of his life. Even now, seventeen years after the war, any remotely noteworthy case his department dealt with received an avalanche of attention – more attention than the same type of case might achieve overseas. Most of the time it was much to his dismay and he often found himself inside The Prophet’s editor-in-chief’s office requesting that he
reign in his horses as to avoid overly affecting the case with ludicrous headlines and out-of-line speculations.

As Head Auror he had also quickly learnt that avoiding the press was a definite no-go and had, out of pure desperation, taught himself how to deal with aggressive reporters. He had learnt that most of them were out for blood, most of all Rita Skeeter, of course. However, he had managed to get a handle on her and, strangely enough, they had come to tolerate each other. Harry could, however, still remember the few times Malfoy had been in the papers and it had never been for a good reason. His father’s arrest had been a hard blow for him as well as the trials, but he had always managed to keep his head held high, a character trait Harry truly admired. Post-war, Malfoy had mostly kept out of the papers, save for the one or other official announcement that was customary for pureblood families.

Taking a sip from his tea, Harry eyed Malfoy. He appeared to be rather on edge and not even Harry’s offer to divulge some of his secrets — *a desperate attempt at lightening the mood between them* — could get him to relax fully. Still, Harry pretended not to notice and they sat in silence, each drinking their tea and lost in their own thoughts.

Harry wasn’t quite sure why Malfoy had stopped by the department today, but he felt it would be counterproductive to their growing tentative friendship to attempt to point this out and therefore kept his thoughts firmly to himself.

Instead, he took the liberty to instruct his eyes to give Malfoy an appreciative once-over. Ever since their insane undercover operation, Harry was sure that there was something very wrong with his brain. He couldn’t quite get the feeling of pressing himself up against Malfoy out of his head and it did funny things to him, very funny things indeed. Harry mostly tried to ignore his loopy head, but if Malfoy’s unexpected and rather flirty comment over lunch the other day had at all thrown him, this well and truly blew all proportions.

What freaked Harry out the most wasn’t even that it had felt strangely good to be so close to Malfoy, but that he couldn’t get Malfoy’s lips out of his head. He hadn’t even *tasted* them, didn’t know what they would feel like pressed up against his own, but they were lush, so wonderfully lush. Even now, Harry found his eyes inexplicably drawn to Malfoy’s lips and looking at them did nothing for his composure. He couldn’t quite comprehend where his sudden crush — *for that’s what it seemed to be* — was coming from. It made no sense at all and it rather complicated things a lot, too much even.

Harry was truly grateful for the fact that he had, after serving Malfoy tea, returned to his chair behind his desk, otherwise he would have a serious problem explaining the obvious bulge in his trousers. He cursed the fact that he seldom wore his robes in the office and as such his only option of hiding his current, and very much unwanted, arousal was to remain seated and calmly resume drinking his tea.

After what felt like forever, Malfoy setting down his mug a little too enthusiastically tore both men out of their respective thoughts and their eyes locked. For a moment neither man moved, the air between them charged and crackling… Harry wasn’t sure with what exactly but it felt like just about anything could happen. He sucked in a sharp breath, unsure of what to make of the situation. Malfoy’s expression was unreadable but captivating to say the least.

Harry cleared his throat and they both looked away. The moment, if it had in fact been a moment, between them faded instantly. Malfoy resolutely stood. He hesitated for a moment then nodded as if to ascertain they’d just enjoyed a rather wonderful conversation.

“I should get going, I have taken up enough of your time already,” he said and Harry almost automatically rose to his feet. Malfoy nodded again, then spun around on his heel and headed for the door. He already had his hand on the doorknob, ready to pull the door open, when Harry
instinctively called out to him.

“Malfoy?”

Slowly turning around, Malfoy shot him an expectant look.

“Would you like to have dinner some time?” The words had left Harry’s mouth before he had the opportunity to properly contemplate them. Calling Malfoy’s name to stop him from leaving, that had been impulse, asking him to have dinner together, well Harry had no idea out of which dark corner of his mind that thought had escaped. It hadn’t at all been his intention. Or had it? Harry wasn’t so sure anymore.

Malfoy clearly hesitated for a moment, then raised an eyebrow questioningly. A strange sort of smirk was ghosting around the corners of his mouth. “Are you asking me out, Potter?”

Harry pointedly ignored the question, he had no idea how to answer it anyway. But he had to admit that the idea of a date with Malfoy wasn’t off-putting at all. The fact that he thought like this led Harry to believe that he’d indeed lost his marbles, every single one of them.

“I’ll cook,” he said instead, the words seemingly coming out of his mouth without his permission. He still wasn’t sure what had possessed him to be this bold, but it wasn’t like he had a Time Turner to help him take back his words and he idly wondered whether he had received a curse to the head during that duel in Kensington several days ago. It seemed like a plausible explanation for his present delusions. Asking Malfoy out, are you completely insane? he asked himself, confused by his own actions.

Malfoy stared at him for the longest time. “Trying to poison me now the case is over?” he asked with the cockiest grin Harry had ever seen.

Harry rolled his eyes in immediate response. He figured he’d already lost his mind, there was nothing else he could do to make this moment between them any worse. A moment later, Malfoy’s unexpected acceptance to his invitation made Harry’s head spin and he instinctively found himself gripping his desk for support.

“What the hell. I’ll chance it. Saturday night. Your place,” Malfoy said and with those words Malfoy opened the door and left, leaving Harry to look on in his daze. Apparently, he had a dinner date — with Malfoy, no less. Next stop, Janus Thickey Ward, he told himself. The insane workload of a Department Head was finally getting to him then, wasn’t it? It had only taken seven years. Harry wondered whether that was a new record for any Ministry employee, and sinking back into his chair, he rested his forehead against his desk, closed his eyes, and breathed deeply. A dinner date with Malfoy. Merlin help him, they were bound to kill each other well before dessert.
A Bout Of The Jitters

“Fuck this!” Harry snapped, flinging the kitchen towel across the kitchen. His ambient magic flared violently and disrupted the wireless for a second.

“Bad day at work?” Hermione asked, casually leaning against the doorframe of his kitchen.

Harry turned around and frowned. “When did you—? Never mind!” he glared at the burned pot in front of him and taking his wand out, he banished not only the contents but also the pot without as much as a second thought.

“That bad?” Hermione asked tentatively and Harry jumped a mile when he felt her hand on his previously injured shoulder. It had healed completely, thanks to the salve and the potions Malfoy had prepared for him, but ever since Malfoy’s healing spell his skin seemed to be more sensitive to touch. Harry suspected much of that was his imagination — especially since that wardrobe incident.

“Frustration does not a good cook make, Harry,” Hermione chided softly and turning around to face her, Harry leant back against the worktop and sighed. She was right. He didn’t have much of a penchant for cooking, but whenever he approached the process calmly and with the intention to let distraction take over, he usually managed just fine. Today, however, his mind was whirling at a hundred miles an hour and it didn’t appear to want to slow down any time soon.

“I’m fine, just a bit on edge, that’s all,” Harry assured her and although she nodded, he knew that Hermione wasn’t buying his pathetic excuse. Then again, he had no idea how to go about telling her that he had invited Malfoy over to have dinner with him. He supposed she’d be understanding. She had been just that when he’d followed up on Scorpius’ request to check on his father, but this — a dinner date with Malfoy was all sorts of insane. Harry felt the almost irresistible temptation to send Malfoy an owl and cancel on him. He could always lie and say that the Auror Department had caught an urgent case and he had to work overtime.

“You know, you are a decent cook, but if your heart’s not in it you’ll probably end up burning the water,” Hermione said gently and Harry fully expected her to ask why preparing a mere meal bothered him so much, but the question never came. Harry was more than a little grateful and made a mental note to buy Hermione half of Flourish and Blotts for Christmas. “I’ll leave you to it,” she said with what Harry knew to be a knowing smile. As she turned around ready to leave, Harry instinctively stopped her before she could reach the door.

“Thanks,” he called after her and she turned her head, flicked her loose bushy hair out of her face and winked.

“You know, you make a mean salmon,” she offered a bit of unrequested advice and before Harry could question that cheeky glint in her eyes she had vanished from his sight. A moment later the fireplace in the living room roared to life and Harry couldn’t help but think that she already knew why he was this frustrated. Maybe she had no idea about the specifics but she had most definitely guessed that he was frustrated about a dinner date, Harry was sure of that. Women, and especially Hermione Granger, apparently had a sixth sense for such things.

Draco leant casually against the bar, drink in hand, and surveyed the clientele. He seldom frequented bars, but this place he didn’t find utterly abhorrent. Compared to some of the places he had visited in the past, this one was a rather upscale bar and its patrons weren’t only well-dressed, but also reasonably well-behaved. If ‘reasonable’ constituted public snogging and some rather indecent touching, that is. Then again, Draco was willing to turn a blind eye on those rather in-your-face
public displays of affection. While it wasn’t his cup of tea, he didn’t see any reason in denying others the pleasure. It was, after all, a gay bar.

Besides, the night was still young so the snogging and public displays of affection that distracted one’s attention now were nothing compared to what the place would look like in a few hours after the consumption of copious amounts of alcohol. Presently, the dance floor was only half-full but the music was rhythmic with a steady pulse. The men were quite good-looking and Draco very much enjoyed the view. Usually, Draco’s only reason for coming here was because he wanted company for the night, but today he had no such inclinations. It made him wonder why he had bothered going out in the first place.

He suspected Potter’s unexpected invitation to dinner was messing with his head. Admittedly, Potter was a fit bloke, Draco could concede to that much. Why his body suddenly found itself inappropriately responding to Potter’s presence was a complete mystery to him. A not entirely unpleasant mystery, but a mystery all the same. Draco suspected he simply needed to get laid, but tonight he couldn’t honestly find it in him to make the effort. Not that finding a willing sex partner for the night required a lot of effort; he knew how to get what he wanted and no one had ever turned him down before. He was quite apt at working his charm and boyish good looks to his full advantage and most men found him irresistible.

Taking a slow sip from his drink, a 2004 Barolo, Draco’s eyes settled on a couple. One was blond, the other one had brown, nearly black hair. They were kissing passionately and Draco rather appreciated the sight. The couple stood to the side of the dance floor, half in the shadows, with the blond guy leaning back against the wall and the brunette guy tightly pushed up against him. Their hands were roaming over each other’s body’s and they appeared to be thoroughly enjoying themselves, entirely oblivious to the fact that Draco was watching them with mild curious interest. He took another sip from his wine and shuddered as the image in his mind changed, morphing into one Harry Potter pushing him up against the wall, kissing him roughly and passionately. Possessively.

Draco felt a tremor run through his entire body and resolutely turned away from the snogging couple. He forced the images in his mind to disappear before his body decided to betray him and his cock told him just how immensely it enjoyed the idea of allowing Potter to ravish him. Draco shuddered again, wondering whether his undercover mission with Potter had resulted in him unknowingly taking a curse to the head, making him loopy. He knew the best way to rid himself of his unhealthy obsession would be to find a random bloke and shag him senseless but not with all the will in the world could he convince himself to make a move on anyone around him.

Dejected, Draco plied himself with more alcohol. He wasn’t sure whether he was trying to get himself drunk or whether he was just drinking for the sake of it but he didn’t care either way. His eyes continued to wander around the bar and eventually settled on a very good-looking tanned man with somewhat unruly black hair. Draco guessed he was in his late twenties and when their eyes met a short while later, Draco was all but tempted to head over there and introduce himself to the stunning stranger. His brain, however, decided to thwart his plans by reminding him just how much that stranger looked like Potter and Draco groaned inwardly. He placed his wine glass on the bar with so much venom that he thought it might shatter and without as much as a backward glance, he left the bar.

He shivered as the cold breeze outside hit him with full force and wrapping his coat tighter around himself, he began his brief walk to a nearby apparition point. The walk and the cold sobered him up a little and he arrived a short while later. He was about to get himself home to the Manor when Potter broke his concentration, distracting him from visualising his destination. With a heavy sigh, Draco forced the image of Potter’s face and his way too green eyes into a dark corner of his mind and
deciding that he was in no fit state to apparate anywhere without quite possibly splinching himself, he continued walking and wondered whether he was slowly but surely losing his mind.

A widower at thirty, a single parent with a rather dark past, and an unhealthy obsession with the Saviour of the Wizarding World. Draco sighed. He momentarily contemplated checking himself into St Mungo’s to test for Spell Damage but dismissed the idea as insane almost immediately. A couple glasses of Firewhisky were bound to set him on the straight and narrow, Draco was sure of that. He surreptitiously glanced around himself and when he was sure that the streets were empty, he focused his attention on the Manor and disapparated into the dark of the night.
Eyeing himself in the full-length mirror, Harry nodded approvingly. A pair of snug-fitting black jeans and a dark-red button-down shirt were neither too formal nor too casual for the occasion. He undid the top button and slipped into his favourite white sneakers, bending down to tie the laces. He had tried his best to manage his unruly hair at least somewhat but neither the charm that was his grandfather’s hair potion nor Muggle hair products did much in that department and he had eventually given up. At least his Muggle cologne didn’t fail him and the notable scent of grapefruit peel, juniper, and oakmoss made him feel rather confident about his appearance.

Holding his hand out, Harry summoned his wand from the nightstand with a wandless spell and holstering it, he made his way downstairs, just in time for the doorbell to announce that Malfoy had arrived. Harry glanced at his watch. Malfoy was, of course, exactly on time. Not a minute late, not a minute early. Harry hadn’t really expected anything else. Taking a deep breath, Harry took a calming breath and hoped, quite fervently so, that tonight wouldn’t end up a total disaster.

He still couldn’t quite comprehend what had possessed him to ask Malfoy on a date, for this was what tonight undoubtedly was. It was most definitely not a casual dinner between friends. They were not friends, had never been friends, and not even the uneasy truce they had called after the war could change anything about that. Scorpius’ letter had certainly given Harry a reason to seek Malfoy out and the potions smuggling case had given them the opportunity to work together, but he still didn’t look at Malfoy and see a potential friend. If he was honest, Harry wasn’t entirely sure what he saw when he looked at Malfoy, but whichever way he twisted it, he did not see them ever settling on a platonic kind of friendship. For that, they were both too emotionally charged when in the presence of one another.

Nevertheless, Harry could not deny that he was excited about spending the evening in the company of a handsome man, because Malfoy was just that – unequivocally handsome, strikingly so. Malfoy, Harry could admit that much now, had always been rather stunning, even back at Hogwarts. There was something about his height, his white-blond hair, his angular, yet not overly sharp features – not to mention the way he carried himself – that simply drew Harry in. Malfoy fascinated him, had always fascinated him, though lately even more so than back when he had been a lanky teenager. Back then Harry had been too preoccupied to really take note of Malfoy’s masculine grace, but the last few weeks had given him many opportunities to do so.

Harry had felt incredibly self-conscious about Malfoy coming to Grimmauld Place. He had spent most of last night and the entire morning cleaning – well, scrubbing – the house from top to bottom. No matter where one looked, one wouldn’t find a single speck of dust; Harry had made perfectly sure of that. The entire house gleamed from top to bottom and Harry was convinced that in all the years he had lived here, his humble abode had never been cleaner. Taking another deep breath to further calm his frazzled nerves, he reached for the doorknob and resolutely pulled the door open.

His breath caught at the sight of Malfoy. He looked like he had stepped right off the front cover of a fashion magazine. Dressed in bespoke black cotton trousers that clung to all the right places, Malfoy donned a white button-down shirt and a grey cashmere jumper, as well as semi-formal black dress robes. Overall, Harry thought, Malfoy looked like someone a proud boyfriend ought to parade around town. He was a welcome sight, breathtakingly beautiful. *Hiding you away would be a shame,* Harry mused and at that thought, Harry swallowed hard and was suddenly acutely aware that he was not only blocking the doorway preventing Malfoy from entering, but had also opened the door without as much as saying hello.
Hastily rectifying the situation, Harry stepped aside, “Malfoy. Come in.”

“And there was me thinking you were going to let me eat on your doorstep,” Malfoy said with an air of haughtiness that made Harry want to both slap him and slam him against the wall. He couldn’t quite decide which one of the two options he wanted more, but kept his cool and watched Malfoy step across the threshold and into the hallway.

“I doubt you’d do that of your own volition,” Harry laughed more confidently than he felt.

“Too right you are,” Malfoy said and looked around the hallway.

“Dinner is ready; the dining room table is all set.” Harry smiled, motioning towards a door at the end of the long hallway corridor.

“What, I don’t get a tour? Where are your manners, Potter? I showed you the Manor.” Malfoy looked rather affronted and looking somewhat embarrassed, Harry apologised profusely.

“It’s just your average London townhouse, but if you want to see the place, be my guest,” Harry said and realising that he hadn’t offered to take Malfoy’s robes, he mentally slapped himself. “Can I take your robes?” he asked, rectifying the situation immediately.

“Thought you’d never ask,” Malfoy rolled his eyes and elegantly slipping out of his dress robes, he handed them to Harry, who dutifully placed them on a padded coat hanger inside the walk-in cloakroom-come-broom cupboard by the door. “I also brought a bottle of Firewhisky, seeing since you didn’t divulge what food you’d be serving which made it rather impossible to choose an appropriate wine to bring.”

“When you asked, I didn’t know what I was going to make. I do have some wine to go with dinner though. You really do think I’m a complete country bumpkin, don’t you?”

Malfoy shrugged but the smirk on his lips affirmed Harry’s question. Rolling his eyes, Harry decided to ignore the silent dig, and accepting the bottle of Firewhisky from Malfoy, Harry glanced at the label. Ogden’s Old, Single Malt Scotch Firewhisky, 21-years-old. His eyes widened. “This is not a cheap bottle,” he stated, not entirely sure whether he had meant to say that aloud, and Malfoy huffed.

“I don’t drink cheap alcohol,” he gave Harry a pointed glare, though Harry thought it rather lacked its usual sting. There was an odd softness in Malfoy’s glare, one Harry couldn’t quite place.

“I didn’t mean it like that,”

“Then, how did you?” Malfoy raised a questioning eyebrow at Harry.

“Just that you obviously spent a pretty knut on this,” Harry shrugged.

“More like a pretty galleon, Potter,” Malfoy said, an amused smile ghosting around his lips. “Now, do I get to see the house or are we going to spend the entire evening exchanging pleasantries in your hallway?”

“Well, come on then,” Harry grinned. “If it’s a tour you want, a tour you will get.”

“It’s all very Muggle,” Draco stated sometime later once Potter concluded the tour around the house and they walked into the dining room, where Potter’s dinner was waiting for them. Potter had closed the connecting door between the dining room and the kitchen, but Draco wasn’t really dying to see the kitchen. Instead, he glanced around the room, taking in the interior and the décor which matched
the rest of the house perfectly. He knew that Grimmauld Place had once been his mother’s ancestral home, but couldn’t for the life of him remember whether he had ever visited the Black family home and as such would have included many old pieces of furniture, artifices, heavy drapery, and top-to-bottom curtains all around the place. If he had, he had been too young to remember anything about it. In any case, the place didn’t much look like a pureblood family home. Then again, Draco doubted Potter would feel comfortable in an ancient pureblood home. No, Potter had clearly made it his own and Draco idly wondered whether Potter had had help or if he indeed possessed some sort of sense of style. His choice of clothing suggested that he had, at the very least, learnt how to dress since leaving Hogwarts. Still, Draco could hardly resist the temptation to ask Potter, to mock him a little, but he refrained…for now anyway.

Instead, he turned his attention back to the dining room and noted Potter had obviously slightly shrunk the dinner table, which was set for two. A bottle of white wine stood in a wine cooler on the table and a basket with what appeared to be homemade bread stood in the centre of the table. It smelled rather delicious. Potter had wisely covered the serving bowl for the soup and Draco figured that Potter had also put a Stasis Charm on the starter to keep it hot. There was no sign of the main course or the dessert and Potter had forgone any silly table decorations, which Draco appreciated endlessly.

“Is that a compliment or an eloquent way of telling me that you hate the place?” Harry asked.

“It’s not awful, quite tastefully decorated actually,” Draco replied with a genuine smile.

“Coming from you that’s high praise indeed, Malfoy,” Harry laughed and much to Draco’s astonishment, he pulled out a chair and motioned for Draco to sit. Draco hesitated for a moment but took his seat eventually. He was pleasantly surprised; Potter had most definitely made a great effort to prepare for their dinner. Not only was the table impeccably set with the cutlery, dishes, and wine glasses all in their right places, but Potter also possessed exquisite table manners.

On top of that, Potter was extremely well-dressed; those black jeans left absolutely nothing to the imagination and Draco thought that they suited Potter like a second layer of skin. The dark-red button-down shirt nicely clung to Potter’s torso and arms and Draco couldn’t help but wonder what had happened to the boy he had gone to Hogwarts with and tormented for the better part of seven years. Once or twice during the tour, Draco had firmly reminded himself that, as a guest in Potter’s house, it would not be acceptable for him to slam Potter against the nearest wall and have his wicked way with him. He also had to remind himself that any thoughts of this nature were thoroughly inappropriate and would do nothing to aid his cool composure.

Potter most definitely looked like he had learnt a thing or two about clothes and his cologne was…well, Draco couldn’t deny that Potter smelled good too, very good indeed. He smelled of grapefruit, juniper, and something that was either musk wood or oakmoss or maybe even a mixture of both. It was simply divine and did extremely treacherous things to Draco’s mind.

“I hope you’re hungry,” Potter interrupted Draco’s train of thought and with a practised flick of his wand, he removed the Stasis Charm from the soup bowl and served Draco a bowl of steaming hot soup. “Creamy asparagus. The pita bread goes with it, it’s filled with spinach,” Potter explained before Draco could ask.

As Draco picked up his spoon and sampled the soup, he idly wondered whether he was really having dinner with the one and only Harry Potter or a polyjuiced version of The Saviour, Britain’s Golden Boy…Man even! Draco couldn’t quite comprehend just how much Potter had changed over the years. Granted, he had too, they both were in their mid-thirties, after all, but whenever he heard something about Potter it had been because The Prophet was reporting on his heroic deeds as Head
of the British Auror Department. This Harry Potter – well, Draco wasn’t familiar with this version of Harry Potter. He had never seen this version of the man he had, once upon a time, so desperately wanted to befriend.

They ate their soup in comfortable silence, each clearly lost in their own thoughts, but still exchanged a smile here and there. Ordinarily, Draco would find this disturbing but with Potter, he felt a strange sense of calmness. When Potter returned from the kitchen with two plates of what he proclaimed to be coconut and macadamia crusted salmon with quinoa and pumpkin salad, Draco did a double take and outright questioned from which restaurant Potter had ordered the food. He hadn’t meant to break the silence in quite such a dramatic way, but Potter’s choice of food for the main course had made him momentarily forget all about his good manners and he hadn’t been able to comprehend how it was possible that the man in front of him could possibly be this skilled in the kitchen.

“I did not order the food,” Potter looked so affronted that Draco instantly felt just a little bit bad for insinuating that Potter couldn’t possibly have cooked this good a meal. “If you must know, my uncle and aunt forced me to cook for them every day from a very young age. All the things you get your house elves to do for you, I had to do for the Dursleys,” Potter said rather coolly and Draco swallowed hard and wanted to kick himself for his ill-placed mockery.

“I’m sorry,” he couldn’t help but apologise. The idea that someone had treated Potter as nothing better than a house elf when he had been just a child irked Draco more than he cared to admit to himself or anyone else — *fatherhood changed one a lot*, Draco thought to himself. He had, of course, read the stories, but had always figured that those trumped-up tales of what had transpired between Potter and his Muggle relatives had been designed to sell more papers. Back in the day, it had always been a struggle to guess which of the articles in *The Prophet* were exact and which were ridiculously embellished versions of the truth. These days the paper had become marginally more reliable but its reporters still enjoyed going above and beyond trying to dress up stories to make them more appealing to their readers.

“It’s okay,” Harry shrugged and Draco decided that it wasn’t all right, it really wasn’t. “Just means I don’t particularly like cooking—” he paused, took a sip of his wine, then continued, “though I do occasionally make exceptions,” he added with a sincere smile.

“How you aren’t married or at least with someone who worships the ground you walk on is beyond me,” the words had left Draco’s mouth before he had been able to stop himself and he instantly wanted to slap himself for his idiotic comment.

Reaching for his glass of wine, Draco busily stared into it, then took a large swig of the cool drink and picked up his fork, intent on resuming the meal. Maybe, just maybe, Potter would ignore his veiled compliment.

“Why, Malfoy, you’re full of praise today,” Potter chuckled and Draco sighed inwardly. “Sadly, most of Wizarding Britain worships the ground I walk on. It’s kind of difficult to tell who’s for real and who isn’t.”

“The Weasley girl was for real.”

“As it turns out, hers was the wrong anatomy,” Harry laughed and the sound was music to Draco’s ears. It was the sincere, carefree laughter of a man who was perfectly comfortable in his own skin. “Surely you didn’t miss that, Malfoy, it was frontpage news,” Potter baited him.

“I didn’t,” Draco smirked but sobered up when he wistfully remembered the slight pang of jealousy, he had felt at reading the article in which Potter had bravely outed himself to the world and confessed that there would never ever be a Potter-Weasley wedding. He had, quite openly so, explained how
he had come to terms with his sexuality and how Ginny Weasley had supported him every step of the way. It had been almost nauseatingly perfect and Draco had very nearly tossed the paper into the fireplace after reading the article. Draco reckoned that he had embellished that part of the story a little, but when a series of photographs of Potter and the Weasley girl, being just friends, had appeared on the front pages of *The Prophet*, even Draco had been able to tell that the woman didn’t hold a grudge against Potter over his sexual preference.

After the war, Draco hadn’t had the freedom of choice. He and his family had narrowly avoided Azkaban, in part only because of Potter. Getting married to a respectable young woman from a prominent pureblood wizarding family had been his only hope to wash some of the dirt off the Malfoy name. His family had made the decision that he should marry as soon as possible, and he had never told a living soul that he preferred men, exclusively so. It just hadn’t been up for debate and after the war, he had been too exhausted to really care about getting his own way. He had been grateful to be alive and even though his parents had made a few rather regretful decisions on his behalf, he had — *if only to give them peace of mind* — allowed them to make just one more decision on his behalf.

Granted, both his father and his mother had objected vehemently to his choice of wife, but for once in his life, he had chosen not to listen. His parents had wanted him to marry Daphne Greengrass, Astoria’s older sister, but he had put his foot down and married Astoria instead. In the early days of their marriage, he had often wondered whether Astoria had, on some level, known about his preference for the male gender. He had been so sure that she must have known, but she had never said a word and he had never gone behind her back. There had been times when he had been almost desperate to take a lover, but he had always resisted. It wouldn’t have been fair to Astoria and their son, that’s what he had always told himself.

“Potter, pray tell, why is there no dashing Mr Potter then? Or at least a significant other. You must have suitors lining up to go on a date with you.”

Draco was acutely aware that their conversation was headed into dangerous waters, but he was curious, so very curious. The rational part of his brain told him to drop the conversation and talk about the weather instead, but the irrational part of his brain, the one who had taken immense pleasure in making Potter’s school days unnecessarily difficult, insisted.

Potter didn’t immediately answer. Instead, he reached for his wine and momentarily toying with the glass, he looked at Draco. Their eyes locked and Draco couldn’t help but think that Potter’s eyes were way too green. It was such an intense green that Draco felt rather dizzy and had to break their eye contact to blink several times. Potter’s emerald green eyes did unspeakable things to his sanity, things Draco did not want to contemplate.

“I don’t exactly have the time to date,” Potter said eventually, and Draco wanted to scoff and tell him that he obviously had time tonight but those words remained unspoken.

*Probably for the better*, Draco thought. He knew that Potter’s answer had been a load of poppycock, a pathetic attempt at answering a question he didn’t want to answer. Normally, Draco would make a snide remark, because, well, that was what he did whenever he talked to Potter, but tonight he refrained. Instead, he nodded, quietly accepting the answer and they continued their meal in silence. At least for a while.

At some point, while Potter tipped back the rest of his wine, Draco allowed himself a furtive glance, marvelling over Potter’s features. He was rather handsome and acknowledging that wreaked havoc with Draco’s already frail sanity. When Potter caught him looking, he stilled and their eyes locked for what felt like an eternity. The air around them crackled in a way, Draco had never ever
experienced before. He didn’t quite understand what the air around them was charged with, but it felt like high-voltage electricity. He could feel his entire body reacting to Potter’s intense gaze and worried that he might lose control over his actions, Draco forced himself to break the eye contact. He cleared his throat, noticed that they had both finished their wine and reaching for the bottle, he poured them both a generous glass.

“Thank you…for this wonderful meal,” he said quietly, raising his glass in a toast. Potter followed suit and they clinked glasses.

“There’s still dessert,” Potter then said, his voice low and husky and Draco almost choked on his drink. He was sure that the dessert he had in mind wasn’t the dessert Potter had in mind. Or maybe? He did look somewhat suggestive and his voice did not at all sound like it usually did. Briefly closing his eyes, Draco pushed that thought far out of his mind, firmly telling himself to get a grip. This was getting out of hand and he had to put a stop to it before he might possibly do something extremely stupid.

“You and your dad look so alike,” Malfoy said and Harry looked up from where he was crouching beside the fire, adding two more logs to the hearth. He wasn’t sure when Malfoy had gotten up from the couch, but he was now standing in front of the mantelpiece, looking at the collection of Harry’s photographs. That was Harry’s thing, he had photographs of his family in every room of the house. Somehow it made him feel less alone.

Rising to his feet, Harry glanced at the picture in question. It showed his dad on a broom in full Quidditch gear, laughing heartily, Snitch firmly held in his right hand. “Except for my eyes,” Harry found himself repeating the words he had heard so many people say to him. “I have my mother’s eyes,” he added very quietly and Malfoy ever so slowly turned to face him. “Everyone always says that,” Harry mumbled and swallowed hard, unable to comprehend how he and Malfoy could just stand there and look at each other while the air around them crackled with an invisible force that seemed to be driving them closer and closer together.

“Green,” Malfoy mumbled, setting his glass of Firewhisky down on the mantlepiece just next to Harry’s dad’s photograph. “Very green,” he murmured and Harry shuddered. “So very green.”

Their eyes locked and Harry opened his mouth to say something, but he drew a complete blank. Instead, he shamelessly allowed himself to drown in Malfoy’s grey-blue eyes, wondering how he had never noticed just how incredibly clear they were, like two deep pools of fresh quell water. Then again, except for that time in the wardrobe, he and Malfoy had never been close enough for him to get a thorough look at his eyes.

Feeling a tremor of excitement rush through his veins, Harry bit his bottom lip and dropped his gaze to Malfoy’s lips. His mouth went dry and he flicked his tongue across his lips, then looked back up and into Malfoy’s eyes. He was surprised to find them burning with such intense desire that it made his head spin and absolutely all rational thought escaped him.

Almost as if someone else was controlling his movements, Harry took a cautionary step forward, then stopped, waiting, hesitating. He glanced down at Malfoy’s lips, then back up at his eyes, seeking permission for what he was about to do. Malfoy didn’t budge. He simply stood there, his body seemingly frozen to the spot, yet his eyes shone with such intensity that Harry threw all caution to the wind and closing the short distance between them, he pressed his lips against Malfoy’s. He instantly marvelled at their incredible softness and his lips tingled as he imagined pushing his tongue between Malfoy’s silky lips to seek out and duel its counterpart.

He was acutely aware that Malfoy still hadn’t moved, or responded to the kiss, and even half
expected Malfoy to hex his balls off, but just as Harry was about to break the kiss, long, slender fingers wound themselves into his hair and he felt Malfoy hungrily deepen the kiss. His lips parted and his tongue insistently pushed against Harry’s lips, demanding passage. Harry obliged and slightly parting his lips, he allowed Malfoy’s warm, wet tongue to push past his lips and into his mouth.

He met it with his own and as both their tongues touched for the first time, Harry shuddered and moaned into the kiss. His eyes fell closed and his hands almost automatically gravitated to Malfoy’s slender hips. He drew Malfoy closer, not wanting there to be an inch of air between them and as their bodies crashed together, Malfoy trembled in his arms and groaned into their kiss. He deepened the kiss further still, his tongue expertly winding around Harry’s, teasing, playing. Harry tasted chocolate and whisky and something that was, had to be, uniquely Malfoy and marvelled at how it was possible that Malfoy was such a good kisser.

He tightened his hold on Malfoy’s hips, drawing him even closer, if that was at all possible. Malfoy’s hand at the back of his head and his fingers, which were tightly wound in his hair, held Harry in place, giving him enough leeway to move in unison with Malfoy as they kissed but absolutely no way to break the kiss.

When Malfoy’s free hand rested on his back, Harry shuddered and when said hand slowly slid down to his arse, squeezing ever so gently, he bucked his hips. Malfoy’s tongue teased over his teeth, the top of his mouth, and every single inch of his tongue before he expertly withdrew. Harry’s tongue followed and he explored the hot cavern that was Malfoy’s mouth. He ignored the burning in his lungs for as long as it was humanly possible but knew that they would eventually have to break apart and when they did, Harry immediately craved more.

They both panted and opening their eyes, they blinked and stared disbelievingly.

“Fuck, that was —” Harry mumbled, trying to find the right words to describe what had just happened, but unable to do so. That had been one hell of an explosive first kiss and Harry was sure that he had never experienced anything quite like this. His entire body was on fire and he wanted Malfoy with every fibre of his body. Loosening his hold on Malfoy’s hips, he pressed his palms against Malfoy’s chest and pushed him backwards. Malfoy didn’t object and so Harry continued until the back of Malfoy’s legs hit the large sofa. Another push had Malfoy falling backwards and Harry dove right after him. Malfoy’s right leg dropped off the sofa and both their groins clashed together. Harry groaned and feeling Malfoy’s very prominent arousal, sent even more blood rushing south.

Looking down at Malfoy, Harry wondered whether he would complain about his weight crushing him but all he did was to frame Harry’s face with his hands and draw him in for another kiss. Their lips met in a frantic attempt to fuse together, their tongues duelled and Malfoy’s hands roamed down Harry’s back, insistently tugging at his shirt. When Malfoy’s warm hands finally connected with his own skin, Harry bucked his hips, pressing his erection firmly against Malfoy’s, drawing a long moan from him.

As if possessed they both started tearing at each other’s clothing, desperate to feel skin on skin but unwilling to stop kissing, to stop touching, to stop exploring. When Harry insistently attempted to tug Malfoy’s jumper over his head, they very reluctantly, and only briefly, broke their kiss, and then both proceeded to clumsily unbutton each other’s shirts. Malfoy was first to fumble with Harry’s jeans and was astonishingly quick to unbutton and unzip them.

Lying on the couch didn’t get them anywhere, however, and eventually, Malfoy found his voice. “Get off,” he ordered and they both stripped, hungrily drinking in each other’s naked bodies. Harry
instinctively searched for scars on Malfoy’s chest but found none. His eyes fell to Malfoy’s forearms but the Dark Mark had faded into an almost unrecognisable scar. Their eyes locked and the stared for the longest time, then they both simultaneously dropped their gazes to each other’s crotches and licked their lips appreciatively.

“Of course, it’s perfect,” Harry breathed, shuddering, unable to take his eyes of Malfoy’s cock. It was big, it was long, and it was hard, very hard, judging by the amount of pre-come that was leaking from its tip. It was also very beautiful and Harry wanted it, wanted it very much.

He licked his lips and pushing Malfoy back onto the sofa, he attacked his mouth, kissing him deeply. Their naked cocks crashed and slid together and Malfoy groaned and bucked his hips upward. Harry followed with a thrust of his own and he could feel Malfoy’s body tremble beneath him as he trailed sloppy wet kisses down Malfoy’s chin and throat, down his chest and past his navel until his lips were only inches away from Malfoy’s beautiful cock.

He looked up at Malfoy, silently questioning, waiting for permission. Malfoy gave it without the slightest bit of hesitation and wrapping his fingers around Malfoy’s cock, Harry gave it a couple of strokes, then leant forward and lapped at the tip, eager to taste. Malfoy tasted salty and sweet and bitter and perfect, oh so perfect. Harry moaned and unable to resist he sucked the velvety tip into his mouth, engulfing it with his lips and flicking his tongue against it.

Malfoy groaned loudly, his hands flew to the back of Harry’s head and he bucked his hips. Harry steadied him with his own two hands and glancing up, he caught Malfoy staring at him, mesmerised. Without breaking their eye contact he bobbed his head and Malfoy trembled beneath him, shuddered, and threw his head back into the cushions with a loud and unrestrained groan.

Harry could feel his own cock swell even further if that was at all possible, and he was desperate for some relief but he didn’t want to stop sucking on Malfoy’s cock. And he didn’t. Relaxing his throat muscles as much as possible, he took Malfoy in deeper, letting him slide in and out of his mouth while he pressed his tongue against the underside of Malfoy’s cock, feeling the large vein pulse beneath his touch.

Trusting Malfoy not to choke him, Harry relaxed his hold on Malfoy’s hips and slid his fingers down to Malfoy’s balls, stroking them, rolling them in his palm. Malfoy tensed, bucked his hips almost violently and let out a near guttural groan. Harry could hear him pant and it simply added to his determination. He bobbed his head faster and releasing Malfoy’s balls he wrapped his fingers around the base of Malfoy’s cock, moving it up and down in unison with his sucks. Malfoy’s thrusts into his mouth faltered and his fingers twisted into Harry’s hair. It was almost painful but Harry didn’t care. He desperately wanted to taste Malfoy and it wasn’t long before he got his wish. Malfoy tensed beneath him, the taste in his mouth changed and —

“Potter—Harry— I’m—”

Unable to string a coherent sentence together, Malfoy groaned and pushed himself deeper inside Harry’s mouth. Harry almost gagged but managed to adjust and another flick of his tongue later, hot streaks of Malfoy’s come filled his mouth. He eagerly swallowed most of it, gently suckling on Malfoy’s cock until he hissed, unable to take more of the stimulation. Harry slowly let Malfoy’s spent cock plop from his mouth, and looking up he smiled. Malfoy’s eyes were half-closed and he had the goofiest of silly grins on his face. He was panting, his chest rising and falling rapidly as he tried to breathe in enough oxygen.

Harry was painfully aware of his own burning erection and his desperate need to come. He moved up and pressed his lips against Malfoy’s in a leisurely kiss. Malfoy responded and then, despite floating in post-orgasmic bliss, his long, slender fingers found Harry’s cock and firmly wrapped
themselves around it. Harry shuddered and thrust into Malfoy’s hand. Malfoy increased the speed of his strokes, resolute in his mission to bring Harry some relief. Harry was most grateful that Malfoy didn’t bother to tease him, didn’t bother to prolong his desperation, and despite his best efforts he barely lasted two minutes before his entire body spasmed.

“Draco—” It was little more than a whisper, but only just so. Another firm stroke and Harry came with one last thrust into Malfoy’s fist. Utterly spent he fell against Malfoy, who caught him with ease and they both simply lay in each other’s arms in post-coital bliss. Without the slightest care in the world, they drifted off into a light slumber, ignoring the mess between them and the fact that they had managed to entangle themselves in a heap of tired limbs.
Draco morosely sipped on his butterbeer and watched as Scorpius enthusiastically dug into his dessert. He idly wondered about the last time he had felt as carefree as Scorpius did right now and much to his dismay, not one single moment stood out to him and his mood instantly worsened. Though, if he were entirely honest, – which he really did not want to be – working with Potter and just generally spending time with the annoying git had given him a taste of what carefree felt like. Potter really wasn’t all that annoying – but ignorance was, after all, bliss.

Or had he felt carefree because Potter had given him a purpose outside of being a responsible father to Scorpius? “Have the Hogwarts kitchens stopped serving treacle tart or are you just afraid that I will steal it from you?” Draco asked with a roguish smile. Something about the sight of Scorpius, mouth full of the sweet treat, his lips covered in syrup, and dotted with crumbs of shortcrust instantly lifted his mood. Funny how children, even annoying teenagers, had that kind of power over their parents.

Ordinarily, Draco did not make it a habit to visit Scorpius during the school year, but recent events had driven him to leave the Manor behind, and since he didn’t see the point in leaving the country, a visit to Hogsmeade for some quality time with his son had been a perfect choice… excuse. Scorpius had been rather stunned to see him, but his surprise had quickly evaporated only to be replaced with pure excitement as he had dragged Draco all over Hogsmeade before they had finally settled in the Three Broomsticks for lunch.

“You hate treacle tart with a passion,” Scorpius rolled his eyes. “Therefore, I’m not worried.” “That I do,” Draco laughed. He did truly hate that dessert with a passion, it did absolutely nothing for him. He wasn’t even sure why, but he had never grown on him. He could not fathom why Scorpius regularly proclaimed that he could not live without it. “Your mother did too, actually. She couldn’t stand it. She had a thing for chocolate fudge cake; it was her guilty pleasure.” “Are you insinuating that I’m not your son?” Scorpius grinned, a challenging but cheeky glint flickering in his eyes.

“Oh no, you are definitely mine – of that I have no doubt,” Draco chuckled. “Cast a bloodline spell, if you want.” “Isn’t that like really advanced magic?”

Draco nodded. “Very. In my day none of my classes at Hogwarts covered it, it just wasn’t taught – still isn’t, I believe, though I’m sure there are books about it in the library. Madame Pomfrey should know all about it too; she’s a trained healer.”

“Can you cast it?”

Draco shook his head. “I’d have to consult a few books,” he admitted truthfully. That sort of magic was beyond him. Bloodline spells were notoriously tricky to cast and usually only used when there was doubt about ancestry in inheritance disputes.

They fell silent. Draco continued to drink his butterbeer — though he would have preferred something stronger — as he watched Scorpius stuff another big spoonful of his favourite dessert into his mouth. Scorpius looked every bit the carefree teenager he ought to be and just seeing him like this made Draco feel lighter. When it came to his son, Draco always worried to the degree that his heart
ached and his head throbbed, and he often asked himself whether all parents felt like this.

The knowledge that there was no Dark Lord lurking in the shadows threatening his family with a Dark Mark brought immense joy to Draco’s heart. Astoria’s pregnancy had come as an utter surprise to them both, and while it had been quite the shock to the system, they had been overjoyed at the prospect of bringing a tiny human being into the world. Prior to their marriage, they hadn’t made any plans to procreate, despite the pressure from both Draco’s parents to continue the bloodline.

Back then, Draco would have been happy to let the Malfoy line end with him but when he had held his son for the first time, he had felt such a powerful rush of love that it had brought tears to his eyes and he had wept like a child. Scorpius had been a joy to be around since the day he’d been born, and despite all the obstacles that parenting regularly threw in his way, Draco was sure about the fact that he wouldn’t ever want to change a thing. He loved Scorpius with all his heart and then some.

*Harry Potter.*

The name burned in Draco’s mind with the intensity of fire. Potter was the reason he was sitting here now, watching his son grow up a normal boy – well, as normal as a thirteen-year-old wizard could be. Potter was also the reason he had fled the Manor, fled London, seeking respite in Hogsmeade and distraction in Scorpius’ company.

That blasted dinner date. Draco shuddered inwardly as he recalled their locked eyes over dinner, surreptitiously flirting, the tension they had both felt clearly visible. Then, of course, there had been that kiss, the passion behind it and the fierce need with which they had torn at each other’s clothing and the intensity with which they’d made love… Draco wanted to think of it as fucking, but the word refused to form in his mind. He resolutely banished the thoughts, closing his mind to the memory and not allowing himself to go back.

Waking up on Potter’s couch, their naked bodies curled together like they belonged, like they were a perfect match – it had terrified him so completely that he hadn’t been able to resist the fear of the aftermath of what they had done. Instead, he had scrambled off the sofa and hastily gathered up his clothes. He had ignored Potter calling his name repeatedly, hadn’t even stopped long enough to put his clothes back on. No, he had just grabbed some floo powder, thrown it into the flames, and vanished. Anything to escape the consequences of having slept with Potter, of having given in to his carnal desires without the slightest shred of hesitation.

Draco jumped nearly a mile out of his skin, spilling his butterbeer, as a sudden stinging hex hit him square in the thigh. All thoughts of Potter fled his mind and he glared at Scorpius, who was grinning like a Cheshire Cat.

“Scorpius,” Draco said carefully, trying to sound as composed as possible and quite possibly failing miserably. “Did you just hex me?”

Scorpius looked the epitome of innocence as he replied, “Me? Never, father; why would you ever think I could do something so horrible? I love you, you are the smartest, brightest, most wonderful —”

“Oh, shut it,” Draco sighed, but an amused twinkle in his eyes gave him away instantly. He wasn’t angry, not even in the slightest. If anything, he was even a little grateful. He had completely zoned out on his son and Scorpius, being a true Slytherin and an only child, did not take lightly to being ignored, least of all by his father.

“Are you working on another case with the Auror department? Is that why you were miles away?”
“Hmm? No, just preoccupied with something. It’s of no matter,” Draco brushed off his son’s concerns. He could tell that Scorpius didn’t look convinced, but he could hardly tell him the truth. The boy was thirteen, for Merlin’s sake. There was no way he would ever give Scorpius any reason to worry about anything that went beyond his education at Hogwarts and how to spend his free time or what treats to buy with his monthly allowance.

Draco’s childhood had ended prematurely and the day Scorpius had been born, he had vowed his son would get to enjoy all of the things the war and the Dark Lord had denied him, had taken away from him and everyone else of his generation.
We Need To Talk

Harry,

Dad visited me on Sunday, quite the surprise! We had lunch at the Three Broomsticks and enjoyed a walk around the lake afterwards but—I don’t know.

Something’s off and I’m worried! Half the time I tried to talk to him he was miles away, lost in his own world. Did something happen on the case? Is he working on something else with you? I’m not sure you can tell me, but please?

I asked him if he was okay but he said he is fine. I don’t buy it! He looks so tired, like he hasn’t slept in days and it isn’t like him to show up out of the blue in the middle of the school term. In first year, he did that twice a month, but not since.

I wrote him a letter too, told him to tell me what was bothering him but he hasn’t replied. I really hope all’s okay. Help!

Scorpius x

Harry put down the parchment with such a heavy sigh that Earl shot him a most reproachful look, then flew out of the room to find a quieter place to rest.

Unable to concentrate, Harry had left the Auror Department early, taking a mountain of paperwork home with him and delegating his other duties to several senior Aurors. Kingsley Shacklebolt had been less than pleased to find out that Harry had postponed their scheduled meeting, but Harry hadn’t – quite purposefully so – lingered long enough to give Kingsley any opportunity to question him on what was going on. The last thing he needed right now was anyone asking him questions he couldn’t possibly answer, even if those questions came directly from the Minister of Magic himself.

Since his arrival at home, Harry hadn’t as much as looked at his paperwork and now that he had received Scorpius’ letter, he had even less of an inclination to focus on his work. He had sent Malfoy three owls but until now he hadn’t received a single response.

In his first owl, he had asked whether Malfoy was okay. In the second, he had told him they needed to talk, and with his last owl he had somewhat lost the plot and written all but four words:

Draco—

What the fuck!

He had toyed with the idea to instruct Earl to peck Malfoy with his beak until he foolishly stopped ignoring him but had eventually decided against it, quite sure that Malfoy would simply stun Earl to get the owl to stop. Harry couldn’t understand why Malfoy was refusing to talk to him, and the memory of Malfoy practically fleeing his arms, not even stopping long enough to put his clothes back on, stung rather painfully. The fact that Malfoy was ignoring all of Harry’s attempts to talk to him stung even more – more than he cared to admit to himself.

He had tried to work out whether their rather intense encounter had been the result of years of pent-up emotions or a mere one-night-stand, but somehow neither label fit what he had felt and
experienced the night that he and Malfoy had kissed and made love in his living room.

Since coming to terms with and accepting his sexuality, Harry had by no means been a saint. He had had his fair share of one-night-stands, but not one of his former lovers had ever run out on him like Malfoy had, with complete panic written all over his face. Raking his fingers through his messy hair, Harry sighed. He felt like he was close to going insane. He had repeatedly gone over the evening in his head, wondering where it had all gone wrong. Their kiss – that had been mutual. Sure, Harry had been bold enough to make the first move, but Malfoy hadn’t stopped him. It had been him who had deepened the kiss, had taken things to the next level.

They had both torn at each other’s clothes, desperate to remove that unwanted barrier between them. They had both been aroused beyond all rational imagination. That blowjob – there was no way Malfoy hadn’t enjoyed that. His reactions and the sounds he had made had been so natural, so utterly unrestrained, so full of desire, need, and want. This had been what he had truly wanted, not something he had done because…Harry didn’t know why anyone would willingly want to sleep with someone if they didn’t enjoy it.

Hell, Harry couldn’t remember when he had last come that hard from a simple hand job, because not even a wank could do to him what Malfoy’s hand had done to him. Malfoy’s hand on his cock…it had felt like fire. Each stroke had felt like white-hot flashes of pure unadulterated pleasure repeatedly shocking his entire body. It had felt so good, so very good. Perfect, really. Like it had been meant to be.

Groaning, Harry shuddered. The mere memory had made him hard and his erection was now painfully straining against his Auror uniform, which suddenly felt too tight.

Frustrated, Harry slammed his hand on the desk, and rising to his feet, he made his way upstairs. He stripped out of his uniform and eyeing his weeping cock, he briefly contemplated taking care of his problem but decided against it. Instead, he fetched a change of clothes and dressed in a pair of jeans and a blue jumper. His exasperation at the entire situation caused his erection to falter somewhat, and feeling grateful he put his shoes on, grabbed his wand, and stormed back downstairs.

If you won’t acknowledge what happened, I’ll make you, he thought angrily. Not bothering to properly consider his decision, he yanked the front door open and stepped outside, drawing the door closed behind him. Taking a deep breath, Harry focused on his destination and a second later he disappeared into thin air, only to reappear on the grounds of Malfoy Manor less than a minute later.

The wards didn’t immediately expel him and considering that a positive sign, Harry steadily walked down the driveway leading up to the Manor and knocked at the large door before his bravery abandoned him entirely. Now that he stood in front of Malfoy’s door, he realised that he was probably acting a bit impulsively but it wasn’t like he could change that fact now. Acting impulsively was his speciality and while getting older had allowed him to get a better handle on his emotions, he didn’t always succeed in thinking things through before acting

Harry didn’t have time to continue to berate himself as Malfoy opened the door, and sensing that he was about to slam it right into his face, Harry quickly stepped forward and placed his foot in the door. He doubted it would stop Malfoy from slamming the door into his face but he decided to take that chance. There was always magic.

“What?” Malfoy asked, showing his obvious displeasure at the sight of his unexpected visitor.

“We need to talk.”

“Potter, if I wanted to talk, I would have responded to your owl.”
“Malfoy,” Harry hissed, aware that he sounded angrier than he felt.

“Potter,” Malfoy said through gritted teeth, clearly unimpressed, though Harry was sure he had seen a flicker of uncertainty in his eyes. “I’m rather busy now.”

“I don’t care,” Harry said flippantly. He had the distinct feeling that Malfoy wouldn’t willingly invite him in this time around, and not wanting to have this conversation on the threshold of Malfoy’s rather impressive home, he resolutely pushed his way inside.

“Ever heard of trespassing, Potter?” Malfoy snarled and turning to face him, Harry found himself staring at Malfoy’s wand. He simply shrugged.

“Hex me for all I care.”

“Potter,” Malfoy’s voice was a low growl now and his eyes flashed with pure annoyance.

“Draco,” Harry defiantly stared at Malfoy. “Go on, do it. If having sex with me was so vile that hexing me will make it all better, have at it,” he challenged, his mouth braver than his heart. “Let me know if you’d like me to contact one of the Obliviators in my department to help you forget,” he added, out of spite and out of hurt.

They both stared at each other and after what felt like forever, Malfoy finally slowly lowered his wand. Harry felt relieved and straightened up a little. He had trusted in his gut instinct when he had goaded Malfoy which admittedly had been seriously stupid but—

Harry didn’t get to finish his thought – instead, he watched with utter disbelief as Malfoy side-stepped him and strode across the entrance hall, walked off down the hall, and disappeared into his study, clearly intent on ignoring Harry’s very existence. Oh no, Harry thought, you will not. Anger flared in the pit of his stomach and stalking after Malfoy, Harry—tempted to draw his own wand and hex Malfoy just to get him to pay attention—entered the large study.

“Would you fucking stop running away from me!” he snapped from the doorway and Malfoy spun around and shot him an icy-death glare. “Whatever did I do to you to make you run this fast? Is the memory of sex with me this revolting to you?” Harry asked, his voice much softer than before, unconsciously letting some of the hurt he felt shine through.

Malfoy sighed and turning to the window, he looked outside, keeping silent for several minutes. Harry wanted to stomp his foot, wanted to yell and scream, wanted to grab Malfoy, wanted to shake him, wanted to throw a temper tantrum of epic proportions, but he did none of that. Instead, he took a few cautious steps into the room and towards Malfoy.

“Don’t,” Malfoy spoke without looking at him.

“Draco,” he said softly, and Malfoy turned to face him.

“It was just sex, Harry, drop it, okay? Nothing to talk about,” Malfoy said, his voice soft, suddenly lacking the coldness it had been laced with before. His eyes didn’t meet Harry’s and he turned back to looking out of the window, crossing his arms over his chest.

Harry shuddered at Malfoy’s unexpected use of his first name and boldly moving closer, he stopped about two feet from Malfoy. “I don’t believe that,” he insisted quietly. “It didn’t feel like just sex.”

Malfoy gave a hollow laugh. “If it wasn’t sex, then what do you think it was?” he asked, continuing
to look out of the window. “Hearts and flowers?”

“It was sex, but it wasn’t just sex,” Harry said with determination.

“Merlin, Potter, what is it you want? That I drop at your knees and declare my undying love to you just because you sucked my cock?” Malfoy scoffed and Harry momentarily found himself at a loss for words. Malfoy’s words stung and his chest constricted a little as he tried to make sense of Malfoy’s sharp invalidation of what had happened between them. I didn’t imagine that it was more, Harry thought stubbornly.

“Would you look at me please?” he eventually said quietly after an extended moment of silence. Malfoy remained motionless for the longest time. He suddenly turned, and as their eyes met, Harry searched Malfoy’s eyes for a hint of something… anything, but Malfoy was apparently an extremely gifted Occlumens, for Harry failed to decipher any kind of emotion. Malfoy’s clear grey orbs were just that; two grey orbs staring back at him, calmly holding his gaze, lacking any sort of emotion. His eyes were entirely devoid of anything, not even an ounce of contempt burned in them and Harry swallowed hard.

“Why did you flirt with me if it was just sex?” he forced himself to ask, thinking he might be able to push Malfoy to show him something, anything.

“For fun,” Malfoy drawled. He sounded bored, or rather pretended to sound bored. Harry had no idea; he merely, and rather stubbornly so, clung to the little bit he had learnt about Malfoy since their first meeting several weeks ago. The man that stood before him now wasn’t the man who had helped him with his potions case, wasn’t the man he had eaten lunch with, wasn’t the man he had gone undercover with, and most definitely wasn’t the man Scorpius had described in his letters – Harry was sure of that. This man, this version of Malfoy, was an empty shell, void of anything. He was hiding behind a refined mask of indifference, so carefully sculptured that Harry couldn’t help but wonder whether Malfoy believed the nonchalant responses that came out of this mouth.

“You and I. That wasn’t your first time with a man,” Harry pushed, determined to break past the barrier Malfoy had built around himself. He had no intention of giving up; he wanted the truth, one way or another.

For a split second, the hint of an emotion flickered in Malfoy’s eyes — annoyance perhaps, or fear even — but it was gone almost immediately.

“What if it wasn’t? Sad you weren’t the one to pop my cherry?”

Harry laughed. “I’m not even going to justify that with an answer.”

He held Malfoy’s gaze with more confidence than he felt and taking a step closer, he reached out and placed his hand on Malfoy’s forearm. He could feel the slight tremor going through Malfoy and watched intently as Malfoy looked down at his hand on his arm. His expression was unreadable, but it was a slight improvement from the cold expression he had donned just minutes ago.

“What are you so afraid of, Draco?” Harry asked, his voice soft and low. “You wanted it as much as I did.”

Taking yet another step forward, Harry closed the gap between them and Malfoy’s gaze flickered upward and settled on his. “Tell me you didn’t enjoy it. Tell me you didn’t want it as much as I did, because I don’t think you can,” he whispered, steadily holding Malfoy’s gaze, silently challenging
Malfoy opened his mouth but no words came out. He simply kept his eyes fixed on Harry’s and it was Harry’s turn to shudder. Malfoy’s gaze was intense, it burned like fire, but Harry simply couldn’t, *didn’t want* to look away. Something seemingly crumbled inside Malfoy, and with a low growl, he grabbed Harry and walked him backwards until Harry found himself trapped between Malfoy’s oversized mahogany desk and Malfoy himself.

“I enjoyed it, I wanted it,” Malfoy hissed, his face inches from Harry, eyes blazing with molten heat. “Is that what you wanted to hear, Potter? Does it help you sleep soundly at night? Is it that important for you to know? Yes, I like men, Potter. What *fucking* difference does it make?”

Harry shuddered, the words rushing straight down to his cock, and with his eyes still locked on Malfoy’s he grabbed Malfoy’s hips and pulled, closing the distance between them. “Why run?” he breathed shakily.

“Because it’s what I do. I don’t stay. Not ever. Not for anyone. No exceptions. Not even for Head Auror Potter,” Malfoy whispered, his voice a low snarl, his lips now so close that Harry could almost feel them as Malfoy spoke. “Can you deal with that?”

Harry found himself nodding, though he didn’t understand why, and groaned when Malfoy’s lips came crashing down on his in a rough, bruising, claiming kiss. Harry tightened his hold on Malfoy as if afraid he would break the contact between them, but he needn’t have worried.

Malfoy thrust against him, blatantly letting him feel his erection. Harry’s blood rushed south so quickly that he felt dizzy and his head spun. His entire body felt like Malfoy had set it on fire and he trembled at the sheer force of the sensations that rushed through him, never having experienced anything quite so intense before. His lungs burned with the need for oxygen and his hands moved to Malfoy’s arse, cupping it, pulling him closer against himself still, if that was at all possible. He was desperate to melt into Malfoy, to disappear inside him, never to emerge again.

The dizziness increased and a firm tug in the pit of his stomach pulled him into the darkness. A second later he found himself horizontally sprawled out on a massive four-poster bed in what he assumed was Malfoy’s private bedroom.

“Fuck me,” he mumbled, thoroughly stunned that Malfoy apparating them to his bedroom without the slightest warning hadn’t resulted in him splinching himself.

“Oh, believe me, I intend to,” Malfoy smirked and Harry felt himself slowly return to the real world. He stared at Malfoy and acting purely on instinct, he reached up, determined to pull him down for a kiss, but Malfoy was faster. He caught Harry’s hand and moved it next to his head, firmly pressing it into the bedsheets. “No-uh,” he grinned mischievously. “My bed, my rules.”

Harry groaned, bucking his hips upward. Malfoy met his thrust with ease, using his body weight to hold Harry down. He was surprisingly strong and despite finding it a complete turn on, Harry glared. He was torn between liking his position and hating Malfoy for having almost absolute control over him, at least at this moment. Malfoy chuckled, leant down and captured Harry’s lips in a kiss. This one was gentle, slow, tender, almost loving even. Harry sighed and lost himself in the kiss, his eyes falling closed and his limbs relaxing.

They kissed and kissed and kissed some more and when Malfoy finally pulled away, Harry’s head was spinning. Again, and even worse than before. He gulped in a large breath and watched Malfoy sit up, straddling his thighs. He began to slowly unbutton his shirt and Harry trembled with every button that came undone.
“Like that, don’t you?” Malfoy teased as he slowly revealed his smooth but firm chest. Harry itched to touch the pale skin but Malfoy slapped his hand away. Harry pulled a face and Malfoy laughed.

“No fair,”

“Patience, Potter, patience,” he winked and Harry sucked in a sharp breath.

“Right now, I don’t feel very patient,” he admitted.

“That shall be your problem to solve,” Malfoy teased, slipping out of his shirt, and discarding it over the side of the bed. He leaned forward and braced himself on his arms, ever so slowly leaning down to capture Harry’s lips in yet another tantalising kiss. Harry wound his fingers into the soft bedsheets beneath him, marvelling at their softness. They were pure silk, no doubt. He desperately wanted to touch Malfoy, wanted to run his fingertips over the pale flesh, but somehow managed to resist the temptation…for now.

Malfoy rocked his hips, pressing his erection against Harry’s, then pulled away from the kiss and running his palms down Harry’s chest, he pushed his hands underneath Harry’s jumper, fingertips ghosting over hot skin, teasing, tormenting.

“That’s torture,” Harry mumbled and Malfoy’s amused laughter went straight to his groin, causing him to buck his hips almost violently. Sweet torture, Harry amended in his head and moaned.

“Who knew you were this sensitive…” Malfoy whispered and mumbling a near-inaudible spell, he vanished Harry’s jumper. Applying gentle pressure, he ran the flat of his hands up Harry’s chest, brushing his thumbs over Harry’s nipples.

“Fuck, Malfoy,” Harry gasped, quivering underneath Malfoy’s ever-teasing, completely unsatisfying touch.

“Delectable,” Malfoy smiled and with one swift move, he lapped at one of Harry’s nipples, flicking his tongue across the sensitive nub then grazing his teeth over it, biting gently. Harry groaned, and this time, try as he might, he could not stop himself from touching Malfoy. His hands all but flew to Malfoy’s sides, stroking alongside them and up his back, across his shoulders and down his arms. Malfoy stopped, looked up at Harry, then slowly kissed along his sternum and collarbone towards his neck. He licked his way to Harry’s ear, breathing hotly, then sucked at that sweet spot just behind Harry’s earlobe. Harry melted into a puddle of…of something. Fucking hell, Malfoy, you are killing me, he thought to himself.

Harry clawed at Malfoy’s back, groaning, bucking his hips, his cock twitching in its confines, desperate to get out.

“Tell me, just how badly do you want this?” Malfoy murmured into Harry’s ear. “If this is all it takes to turn you into such a beautiful wreck, what will happen when I push my cock into you and fuck you, huh? Tell me, Harry.”

Harry wanted to respond but his words failed him and he groaned in frustration, unable to comprehend why Malfoy had such an effect on him. It was like he had him bound under a spell, bound tightly to respond to his every touch, his every kiss, his every word. “Please,” Harry found himself mumbling the word, not entirely sure what it is he wanted, but shocked at how easily he had surrendered so completely and so willingly. While he liked to bottom, he had never ever begged before. Not for anyone. Except now he had. And not just for anyone. But for Malfoy. Out of all the people in the world, he was begging Malfoy. Sweet wreckage, he sighed.
“But of course,” Malfoy whispered against his lips and another mumbled spell later, they were both naked and Harry thought he might just come this instant, but Malfoy seemingly anticipated that and his slender, long fingers expertly and firmly wrapped themselves around the base of Harry’s cock, squeezing tightly.

Harry sighed with relief and wrapping his arms around Malfoy’s neck, he pulled him down for a demanding kiss, and parting his legs slightly he let Malfoy slip in between them. Their erections lined up almost perfectly and Malfoy thrust forward, rubbing his cock against Harry’s, causing delicious friction. They kissed, both entirely oblivious to anything but the feel of each other’s tongues duelling ever so passionately and their slick erections sliding against each other, their precome a suitable substitute for lube.

The sensations were wonderful but not enough to push them over the edge, and soon desire and frantic need took over. Harry’s hands firmly cupped Malfoy’s arse, guiding him to increase the force of his thrusts. Soon enough lack of oxygen forced them to wrench their mouths away from each other. As Malfoy’s now nearly black eyes locked with Harry’s, they both shuddered at the sheer force that was driving them. For a moment Harry thought he saw more than raw desire and lust in Malfoy’s eyes but the emotion was gone so fast that Harry really couldn’t be sure. Not in his current state or frame of mind.

“Magic or fingers?” Malfoy spoke without breaking their gaze but stopping his thrusts.

“Fingers,” Harry mumbled. He didn’t like the feeling of a stretching spell or a lubricating charm, never had, doubted he ever would.

Malfoy nodded and reaching forward, he summoned a phial of clear lube from his nighstand and kneeling between Harry’s legs, he gently nudged them further apart. Harry sucked in a shaky breath and bending his legs at the knees, he exposed himself fully to Malfoy, who licked his lips appreciatively.

“Beautiful,” he whispered, and a jolt of excitement shot through Harry, making his toes curl against the silk sheets beneath him. He looked up at Malfoy, watching him intently as he coated his right hand with lube and then wrapped it around Harry’s straining erection, teasingly running his long fingers up and down the shaft and his thumb across the leaking head.

Harry’s entire body shuddered and he arched his back. The fingers of his left hand curled into the silken bedsheet, holding on to it in a desperate, almost pathetic, attempt to ground himself. His right hand moved to rest on top of Malfoy’s, stopping his movement.

“Too close,” he sighed and Malfoy stilled his hand. He focused his gaze on Harry, a soft smile — *the kind of smile Harry had never ever seen before, at least not on Malfoy’s face* — curled his lips upward. His hand, ever so slowly, slipped out from underneath Harry’s and trailed over Harry’s balls, fondling them gently in his lubricated hand. Harry suspected the lube was Malfoy’s own concoction since it felt unlike anything he’d ever experienced before. It was warm, not at all sticky, and coated his most private parts in a pleasant hotness he couldn’t quite describe.

Unable to tear his gaze away from Malfoy’s, he continued to focus on him, lost in the sensations of Malfoy’s fingers as they slipped into the crack behind his balls, brushing against his perineum, applying ever so gentle pressure.

“Please,” he mumbled again, more insistent this time. At this point, he wasn’t even sure what he was asking for or why he was asking but the raw desire in Malfoy’s eyes had stripped away his ability to feel embarrassed about anything. Harry didn’t think he had ever felt so wanted, so desired. Malfoy’s eyes were on him and only on him and everything he did was to ensure that Harry enjoyed himself.
He found it confounding that Malfoy should be such a selfless lover, but it was the single most alluring thing he had ever experienced.

Harry moaned as Malfoy’s index finger lightly rubbed over his entrance, drawing circles. Harry bucked his hips, trying but failing to get Malfoy to push his finger into him and hissed with mild annoyance when Malfoy refused to comply.

“How very wanton you are,” Malfoy whispered, still smiling, still not breaking their eye contact. Harry wanted to scream, wanted to shout, wanted to impale himself on Malfoy’s finger but he did none of those things. Malfoy’s index finger returned to his entrance, drawing circles again, but this time with more pressure. Harry sucked in a shaky breath, then moaned as Malfoy resolutely and without any warning pushed his finger into the velvety heat of Harry’s arse.

Harry could feel his entire body shudder and tremble, repeatedly. Malfoy pushed his finger further inside, slowly filling Harry, stretching him, preparing him.

“Draco—” Harry breathed. “This isn’t my first time,” he added quite unnecessarily.

“Is a hurried fuck really what you want, Harry?” Malfoy asked, his voice low and questioning and his eyes fixed on Harry’s as he withdrew his finger a little, then pushed it back inside.

Harry shook his head.

“Thought so,” Malfoy smiled knowingly and his left hand found Harry’s. He untangled it from the bedsheet and slid his hand into Harry’s, interlacing their fingers, squeezing just firmly enough to keep Harry grounded as he began to rhythmically move his finger, repeatedly pulling out and pushing in. He soon added a second finger and Harry groaned, tightening his grip on Malfoy’s hand. He breathed deeply, relaxing, allowing the sensations to wash over him. Malfoy insistently thrust inside him, then scissored his fingers to stretch Harry a little further.

For a moment Harry thought he might come just like that and his cock twitched, but Malfoy squeezed his hand, redirecting his attention and focus. He added a third finger and for a second Harry felt full, almost too full, then his muscles relaxed, allowing the intrusion and his hips moved in unison with Malfoy’s thrusts.

Malfoy took his sweet time preparing him and just when Harry thought he couldn’t take it anymore — his entire body covered in a fine sheen of perspiration, his breathing uneven and shaky — he stopped and pulled his fingers from inside Harry’s body. He drew his hand away from Harry’s and picking up the phial of lube, he added some more to his hand, then wrapped it around his by now undoubtedly painfully hard erection. Harry’s eyes dropped down to Malfoy’s cock, and he licked his lips as he watched Malfoy stroke himself, preparing himself. He vividly remembered just what Malfoy had tasted like and it forced a breathy groan past his lips.

Harry had no idea how Malfoy was so utterly composed. He was rock-hard and the tip of his cock glistened with a thick layer of precome, more oozing out with each stroke Malfoy gave his cock. One, two, three, Harry counted, then Malfoy stopped and shuffling forward, he grabbed Harry’s ankles, pushing his knees up to his chest and his thighs tightly against his stomach. Harry let him. Malfoy shuffled another little bit and taking hold of his cock, he positioned himself at Harry’s entrance.

Harry’s body shook as the tip of Malfoy’s cock pushed against the now loose ring of muscle and breathed as Malfoy slowly slipped inside, stretching Harry wide open. If Harry had felt full before, he had no way of describing how he felt now. He shuddered, tremor after tremor rushing through him as Malfoy pushed into him, leaning forward, bracing himself on his arms, his biceps flexing as
they supported his weight.

“So tight, so wonderfully tight,” Malfoy breathed and before Harry had a chance to let the words sink in, he found his lips captured in a breath-taking kiss. His eyes fluttered closed and he moaned into the kiss as Malfoy withdrew about halfway, then thrust back inside. He reached for Harry’s left hand and pulling it up to rest beside Harry’s head, he did the same with Harry’s right hand. His fingers slipped between Harry’s, easily entwining both their hands.

Harry relished in the way Malfoy pushed his hands into the mattress, holding him down as he set a slow rhythm, thrusting into Harry, then pulling out again and repeating that again, and again, and again.

Malfoy broke away from the kiss, trailing soft kisses, licks and nips alongside Harry’s jaw and his neck. He lapped at Harry’s earlobe and Harry moaned then trembled as Malfoy sucked the sensitive skin just behind his earlobe into his mouth, grazing his teeth along it, intent on leaving a mark.

Harry curled his toes, feeling like he was on the verge of exploding. What Malfoy was doing to him, the way they were making love — *Harry refused to think of it as fucking because they weren’t fucking, it didn’t feel like fucking* — it robbed Harry of every coherent thought he had, his mind focused entirely on the now, on this moment. He had never felt so in sync with a lover, had never before felt such a strong connection. It felt like they were meant to be doing this, meant to be this way with each other, not just now but tomorrow and the day after and the day after that and the day after that and every day and *oh sweet mother of mercy, Malfoy was his undoing*, Harry realised and didn’t even feel ashamed when a low, languid moan escaped from deep within his chest.

“Draco —” Harry murmured.

“Yes, Harry?” Malfoy replied, breathing hotly into his ear as he spoke.

“Don’t stop.”

“Won’t,” Malfoy assured him and returning to his mouth, he captured Harry’s already swollen and very red lips in another fierce kiss. The speed of his thrusts increased and he moved just that little bit, and as if he had a mental map of Harry’s insides in his head, he hit that sweet spot deep inside of him and Harry melted into a puddle of pliable goo, pure ecstasy surging through his veins and flashes of white-hot electric shocks setting his every fibre alive.

As if on cue Malfoy’s thrusts increased in both speed and force. He repeatedly brushed that oh so heavenly place of unadulterated pleasure and with each thrust, Harry’s entire body trembled, shook, and shuddered. Malfoy wrenched his lips away from Harry’s, and squeezing Harry’s hands tightly, very tightly, he spoke with a low, shaky voice, “Look at me, Harry.”

Harry forced his eyes open and as they locked with Malfoy’s, he came undone at the seams. There was something so entirely right about this, then, that Harry felt like he was in heaven like he had finally found the one place he belonged. “Draco,” he sighed, reciprocating the fierce way Malfoy was squeezing his hands, desperately needing that connection to ground him.

“Come for me, Harry,” Malfoy whispered, his eyes so full of desire, full of want, full of his own need to come. Harry let out a guttural groan, one he didn’t know he had been holding and his entire body spasmed, every muscle in his body flexed over and over, every nerve ending on fire, every pore oozing perspiration. Barely three thrusts later, Harry lost all control as his orgasm tore him over the edge and streak after streak of his come coated his and Malfoy’s chests.

He tightened around Malfoy’s cock, making it nearly impossible for Malfoy to thrust into or pull out
of him. The sheer tightness was however enough to draw Malfoy over the edge as well, and he
arched his back and his entire body trembled as he filled Harry with his come. Their entwined hands,
slick with sweat, slipped and Harry found the air knocked out of his lungs as Malfoy collapsed on
top of him, panting hard, his breathing uneven and uncontrolled.

Harry wrapped his arms around Malfoy’s waist, holding him tight as they both tried to regulate their
breathing, riding out their orgasms. For several minutes, neither one of them moved, quite content to
just stay this way, Harry almost squashed into the mattress and Malfoy still deeply sheathed inside of
him.

Still, eventually, they had to move and move they did, but only grudgingly so. Harry didn’t like the
feeling of Malfoy slipping out of him, it left him feeling oddly empty, and Malfoy, in a rather atypical
fashion simply slid off him but made no move to leave or clean up the unbelievable mess they had
made.

As if there was some unspoken agreement between them both, Harry rolled onto his side and Malfoy
spooned around him, holding him tight and pushing one of his legs between Harry’s. Harry brought
one of his hands to his stomach to entwine it with Malfoy’s and Malfoy buried his face in the nape of
Harry’s neck. That was how they fell asleep, locked in a lover’s embrace, oblivious to anything
around them, just tired, exhausted, sated, and blissfully happy.
Music Is The Key

Chapter Notes

I've not been posting any notes along with each chapter on a regular basis, but I would just like to take a moment to thank everyone who's been reading this story so far and leaving me comments along the way. Your wonderful support, your comments and your thoughts on each chapter and the development of the story...it honestly means the world to me. I do respond to all comments but I would just like to add a very public declaration of love to everyone who has been reading this story. You are amazing people!

Also, I would like to once again thank my darling beta Julz for her continued hard work on each chapter, she's been going over this story with a fine toothcomb ever since I started writing it back in August and again ever since I finished it and started posting it. Babes, without your support, patience, love and all the time and effort you've continuously given me, this story would have never been written! I love you so much, you're such a wonderful person, a quirky ray of sunshine. You fill my heart with love. Thank you so much for being my beta and my friend!

Now, I'll try to to keep this note shorter than the actual chapter, but I would just like to say that while writing, I kind of had this piece of fan art in mind. The Draco in the artwork is not thirty-five years old, far from it, but my warped mind kind of ignored that.

Draco’s fingers gently and with practised ease flew over the piano keys and the soft, happy melody of Beethoven’s No. 8 Sonata filled the Manor’s large music room. The piece reminded him of a time when a young Scorpius had chased butterflies on the Manor’s grounds and he, Astoria, and their little pride and joy had enjoyed wonderful summer afternoons as a family. A smile that stubbornly refused to budge forced his lips to curl upward, and he was not at all inclined to fight the feelings that came with it. He felt good, inexpressively good.

“I didn’t know you could play,” Potter’s familiar voice floated to him over the music. Jumping with a little start, Draco stilled his fingers and turned his head to find a half-naked Harry Potter, dressed in all but a towel and his unruly dark hair still damp, leaning against the doorframe to the music room.

“There are a lot of things you don’t know about me,” Draco said softly, giving Potter an appreciative once-over. He let his gaze ever so slowly travel from Potter’s face down his chest and to his groin. There he paused a moment, then slowly looked up again and met Potter’s eyes, wetting his suddenly dry lips.

“How long have you been standing there?”

“A while – don’t stop on my account,” Potter said with a casual shrug and pushing away from the doorway, he walked into the room, only stopping once he had reached the grand piano.

“You did interrupt,” Draco rolled his eyes and giving Potter another once-over, he trailed his fingers over the piano keys to distract himself from the sudden need he felt to reach out and run his fingers over Potter’s skin, exploring it all over again.
“Is this your preferred attire when you’re a guest in other people’s homes?” he asked, nodding towards Potter’s lack of clothing. He really, and quite desperately so, wanted to remove that towel. Potter looked so much better naked. Downright ravishing. Wanton even.

“Only when my host vanishes my clothes and doesn’t return them,” Potter shrugged, and reaching out, he trailed a single finger along the piano keys in his immediate reach. “Play something,” he requested quietly.

Draco thought for a moment, then nodded and moved his fingers into position. He closed his eyes, concentrated on the piece — another one by Ludwig van Beethoven — and then began to play, vaguely registering the low gasp of amusement that escaped Potter’s lips. Draco opened his eyes again and looking at Potter, he locked eyes with him as he played, feeling completely at ease. Ordinarily, he hated playing for an audience, but today he didn’t mind.

Potter looked at him with surprised admiration, appearing to be in a bit of trance. The music was rather wonderful, but it was a short piece and when Draco finished playing, Potter looked rather dazed, his eyes a shade or two darker than before. Draco couldn’t help but wonder if watching him play had turned Potter on. He slowly moved to the side, making room for Potter to sit in a silent request to further close the distance between them. Potter accepted the invitation, sitting down with his back facing the piano and his feet stretched out in front of him.

“When did you start playing?” he asked.

“At the age of three,” Draco answered. “I had lessons for three hours a day every day until I started Hogwarts. This might come as a bit of a surprise to you, but I played at Hogwarts, too.”

“You truly are full of surprises, Draco Malfoy,” Harry laughed softly, and Draco noted that his eyes were dancing with mirth as he spoke.

“And you are very distracting, sitting here like this,” Draco mumbled. His fingers left the piano keys and instead hovered at the hem of the towel, Potter had wrapped around his hips, not quite touching but teasing enough for Potter to shudder and his stomach muscles to flex.

“As I said, I wouldn’t if you hadn’t vanished my clothes earlier.”

“Would you like them back?” Draco asked with an amused grin, instantly aroused at the memory Potter’s vanished clothes conjured in his head. Sex with Potter had felt out of this world amazing, a truly mind-blowing experience, a million times better than their first encounter and, if Draco was entirely honest, better than any other time he’d been with anyone else.

“That depends entirely on what you expect me to do with them after I get them back,” Potter chuckled and the soft laughter sent a pleasant shock of excitement through Draco’s body. How Potter managed to affect him so easily was beyond Draco’s ability to comprehend.

“Wear them?” Draco suggested. “This is what one usually utilises clothes for.”

“And leave?” Potter asked rather apprehensively, and Draco sighed softly. When he had woken earlier spooned tightly around Potter’s naked body, he had briefly contemplated apparating Potter back to his home and leaving him there, but had eventually decided against it. Potter had looked so utterly peaceful and relaxed curled up there on the bed that Draco hadn’t had the heart to kick him out.

Instead, he had gone for a shower and after slipping into a change of clothes, he had made his way downstairs into the music room. Now that Potter appeared to show an interest in talking about their
heated love-making, Draco felt a little pang of regret at having chosen not to throw Potter out of his bed when he had had the chance to do so. “Can we talk about what happened?” Potter pushed softly and Draco could tell that he was adamant about getting answers.

“What’s there to talk about?” Draco asked, trying but failing to remain nonchalant about the situation – because that had worked so well for him earlier.

“Draco. I swear, if you’re going to insist it was just sex again, I will strangle you with my own bare hands,” Harry hissed, though there wasn’t a hint of anger in his voice, only mild frustration and a little hurt maybe.

“Potter—” Draco sighed, resigning himself to the fact that he would not be getting out of this conversation. “Harry. If it’s hearts and flowers you want, I’m sorry, but I don’t do that.”

“I don’t,” Potter sighed, “want hearts and flowers that is.”

“Then what?” Draco pushed, against his better judgement. “We had sex, we both enjoyed it. Can’t we just leave it at that? I think we are both old enough to be mature about this.”

Potter ignored Draco’s question, and instead asked one of his own. “What are we, Draco?”

Draco groaned. “Is this an Auror thing? Do you need everything to be black and white?”

“No, I don’t,” Potter sighed, “but I would still like to know what we are.”

“You tell me,” Draco replied with a hollow laugh. He had tried to figure out what he and Potter were but had failed miserably. Here he was – thirty-five years of age and a widower with a teenage son. And then there was Potter – unmarried, openly gay, with successful career at the Ministry. All these years, their lives had been so vastly different from one another that Draco found it virtually impossible to describe their relationship. Once upon a time, he had desperately wanted to be Potter’s friend. That hadn’t worked out at all.

Instead, he had been very successful at becoming Potter’s nemesis, had gone as far as fighting on the wrong side of the war, only to eventually — when it had been almost too late — come to the realisation that all the nonsense about blood purity had done nothing but taken innocent people’s lives. After the war they had gone their separate ways, and now their paths had mysteriously crossed again. It had resulted in a wonderful partnership — from which the Auror department and Draco’s family name had benefited greatly. Apparently, they were also extremely compatible in bed. The absurdity of it all made Draco laugh.

“What’s so funny?” Potter frowned.

“This. You and me. Us.” Draco replied.

“I see,” Potter said, confusion still written all over his face.

Draco sighed, and briefly weighing his options, he chose honesty. “I’m sorry. I don’t have an answer for you. I don’t know what we are.”

Potter smiled. “To be honest, neither do I. How about friends?” he offered.

“With benefits?” Draco chuckled and Potter gave a non-committal shrug. Being friends with Potter sounded nice, a chance to make up for lost time and maybe a chance to right some of the wrongs that had kept them from ever enjoying a close relationship. As for the benefits, Draco couldn’t deny that it was something he really wanted. Potter was truly marvellous in bed.
If you've never heard *Beethoven Sonata No. 8*, listen to this piece, it's a truly beautiful work of art and I listened to it a lot while working on this chapter.

When Harry asks Draco to play something and Draco chooses another piece by Beethoven, I had *Für Elise* in mind. It may be cliché, but the composition is rumoured to be a "love letter" of sorts, therefore, I found it a fitting choice. Also, it is rather lighthearted. If you're now wondering whether Beethoven is my favourite composer, I must disappoint you, though I do like several of his pieces. My favourite composer would be *Ludovico Einaudi* and if you're interested I would like to recommend, *Divenire*, which is one of my favourite pieces and I listened to it a lot while writing "Letters".
Kingsley’s Request

With an inaudible sigh of relief, Harry filed out of the large boardroom alongside the other department heads. He was most thankful that the long meeting had finally finished. It had taken him every ounce of self-control to stop himself from zoning out and ignoring the mindless chatter that had filled the room for the better part of the last three hours. Each Head of Department had stood to give a brief presentation on what was happening within their respective departments and within several minutes of it, Harry had felt weary and uninterested in the tedious talk and dullness all around him.

His presentation had taken him about ten minutes, and since he had gone first, he had spent the rest of the meeting trying his hardest to listen to everyone else while simultaneously also trying to ignore the ambiguous owl he had received from Malfoy this morning. He had a fairly good idea of what Malfoy had hinted at in his message but an interdepartmental meeting really wasn’t the best place to contemplate the specifics of Malfoy’s rather suggestive invitation.

“Harry?” Minister Shacklebolt’s familiar voice forced Harry to push any and all indecent thoughts about Malfoy out of his mind. Instead, he stopped walking and waited for the Minister to catch up with him.

“Minister,” Harry said, feigning as much enthusiasm as he possibly could without overdoing it.

“Mind if I join you in your office for a private chat?”

Harry very much minded; he craved a strong cup of tea and he had been looking forward to a moment of peace and quiet following the meeting, but that was now well and truly out of the question. For a moment, Harry found himself yearning for a simple position as Auror that came without any of the responsibilities that he, as Head of Department, was plagued with daily. But then he reminded himself of all the freedom his senior position afforded him and that put a proper downer on his mindless flight of fancy. He did rather enjoy the fact that he, for the most part, could come and go as he pleased. He was also rather proud that his department had won the Best Department To Work For Award and Most Efficiently Run Department Award for the last seven years running. He wasn’t entirely sure whether his department kept voting for him as Best Head of Department because they really admired him that much or because he was Harry Potter, but at this stage, he hardly cared anymore. That Award looked rather good in his office and he had grown accustomed to seeing it stand on that small shelf in his office.

“Of course not,” Harry smiled, hoping he looked sincere enough to avoid any suspicions. Shacklebolt knew him quite well so tricking him wasn’t as easy as say, tricking a stranger, or even his direct superior. Then again, Cox was a bit of an imbecile and Harry had quite possibly, once or twice, already told him so. The fact that he was Harry Potter was most definitely the reason Cox hadn’t fired him for his insolence. Then again, Harry didn’t really think of it as insolence – he thought of it as the blunt truth. Cox disagreed, but Harry didn’t give a crap.

Shacklebolt smiled, seemingly happy enough with Harry’s deception, and they made their way through the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and past the open-plan Auror cubicles. Harry unlocked his office with a lazy flick of his wand and as the door swung open, he motioned for Shacklebolt to enter first, then followed suit, closing the door behind him. He shrugged off his Auror robes and levitating them to a coat hook, he stepped behind his desk. Shacklebolt, without waiting for an invitation, took a seat in front of Harry’s desk and Harry sunk into his own chair.

“Harry, my boy—” Shacklebolt said with a smile and Harry cringed inwardly. He wasn’t a boy any more but neither Shacklebolt nor Arthur Weasley managed to shake the habit. “Is everything
Harry frowned, idly wondering how to answer the question. To him, it sounded rather like a trick question. Answering it too quickly and too nonchalantly would most definitely arouse suspicion — *Shacklebolt had after all once been an Auror himself and a bloody good one at that* — and taking too much time to deliberate over it would surely have the opposite effect.

“I can’t complain; everything’s good,” Harry settled for the middle ground.

“You sure? You seem a bit distracted lately,” Shacklebolt pushed and Harry involuntarily clenched his fists in his lap.

Life was splendid. He had a fantastic job, great friends, a delightful teenage godson, a wonderful home and for the past two weeks, he had been engaging in mind-blowing sex with Draco Malfoy on an almost daily basis. Everything was all right. Perfect really. It couldn’t possibly be better. Except, he couldn’t very well tell Shacklebolt that he was shagging Draco Malfoy and that this was the reason for both his recent distraction as well as his exceptionally good mood.

“Paperwork,” Harry desperately tried to laugh off Shacklebolt’s suspicions. The last thing he wanted was Kingsley grilling him about his private life. Friends or no friends, there was a limit to how much Harry was willing to share with the man who had fought so hard to protect him during the war. “You wouldn’t believe how much paperwork a Head of Department has to deal with every day.”

Much to Harry’s relief, Shacklebolt took the bait and laughed good-naturedly. “Try Minister for Magic, Harry,” he said with mild chagrin. Apparently, he despised paperwork too. “Anyway, it’s good to hear that you’re keeping on top of things. I did want to talk to you about another matter though.”

“Oh?” Harry said, and reaching for his tea mug, he sighed. The Stasis Charm he had put on it before the meeting had worn off and the tea was now cold. He flicked his wand at it, hitting it with a reheating charm and took a careful sip.

“Draco Malfoy,” Shacklebolt said and Harry instantly choked on his tea. He coughed and spluttered violently, spilling half of the tea over his Auror uniform. He put the mug down with a shaking hand and tried to clear his throat. Reaching for his wand, he hit himself with a drying charm and took a deep but shaky breath.

“Are you all right?” Shacklebolt asked, looking rather alarmed.

“Yes,” Harry mumbled, “yes, overdid it on the reheating charm, tea was too hot,” he lied straight through his teeth, and coughing again he finally succeeded in clearing his throat.

“Gave me a right fright there you did, my boy.”

“Don’t worry, Kingsley – it takes at least a Dark Lord to try and do me in,” Harry attempted a distracting joke and Shacklebolt laughed. “What is it about Draco Malfoy you wanted to talk to me about?” he asked, trying to keep the unease he felt at bay.

He hadn’t told anybody, not even Hermione or Ron, that he and Malfoy were — well — shagging. While Harry doubted that Shacklebolt knew anything about the status of their relationship, confusing as it was, he also absolutely did not want to sit in front of Kingsley thinking about Malfoy. Since their relationship was rather intimate, any thoughts about Malfoy usually ended with Harry’s trousers growing painfully tight, and he absolutely did not want to have to deal with an unwanted erection while Kingsley Shacklebolt was in his office.
“Well, I saw the glowing report you gave Cox about Mr Malfoy helping you out with that potion smuggling case. *The Prophet* described Mr Malfoy as Britain’s new Golden Boy and your right-hand man. The picture of that arrest was an absolutely marvellous media ploy, Harry – I applaud you. Nicely played, if I may say so. What do you think about keeping Mr Malfoy on retainer? We do need a potions expert, I believe. I’m afraid I still can’t authorise a full-time position, but I can most definitely green light a position on an as-needed basis.”

“Why is this coming from you and not Cox?” Harry frowned.

Normally he had such discussions with his direct superior, the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, not the Minister, who rarely found a reason to get involved in Auror business these days. Then again, Cox, despite supposedly running the entire Department of Magical Law Enforcement, hardly ever got involved in anything. Most days, Harry felt like he wasn’t just running his own department, but keeping the rest of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement in check as well.

“I think he’s probably still a bit intimidated from the last time you lashed out at him about the lack of funds for a permanent potions expert position. You can be rather fierce, Harry; you do know that, right?”

Harry pursed his lips, figuring it best that he didn’t reply to that. He only lost his temper when it came to the idiotic bureaucracy that impeded the execution of his job. “I can ask Dra—, I mean Mr Malfoy,” Harry said, hoping his almost-slip had gone unnoticed. “I’m not sure whether he is interested in working for the Auror Department, but I can try to add a bit of zest when selling him the idea.”

“See that you do. He would be a good fit, seems to have an impressive knowledge base at his disposal,” Shacklebolt smiled. “Do mention that he would, of course, get paid for each consultation.”

“Obviously,” Harry replied, though he doubted that Malfoy had any use for the Ministry’s money. “I’ll schedule a meeting and let you know,” he added and nodding, Shacklebolt rose to his feet.

“Well, I must run. According to my secretary, I have a ton of appointments today.”

Harry got up as well and rounding his desk, he walked Shacklebolt to the door, opening it for him. They wished each other a good day and then the Minister left and Harry closed the door behind him. He leaned back against it and taking a deep breath, he briefly closed his eyes and let out a hollow laugh. Malfoy as Potions Expert Liaison for the Auror Department. Working under him. *He prefers to be on top,* Harry thought with a shudder, remembering last night’s encounter. The memory didn’t do much for his sanity and he resolutely distracted himself with his frustration over the fact that every time he had a case involving potions, he had to either bother Professor Slughorn at Hogwarts or Severus Snape’s portrait in Minerva’s office at Hogwarts. Both options were highly inconvenient and time-consuming.

The Healers at St Mungo’s were generally too busy, too overworked, or didn’t have the knowledge he required, and Hermione didn’t have time to spend hours in the library investigating for him. Harry laughed again. Potions Expert Liaison for the Auror Department. The mere idea that Malfoy would agree to that, pay or no pay, well – Harry found it amusing.
Draco sighed with exasperation as Potter pulled away from his advances for the third time that evening. Looking up, he fixed Potter with an icy glare. “Pray tell, Potter, what is it now?” he demanded to know, trying – really trying – to keep the bite out of his voice, though the frustration was evident on his face.

“Could we have a conversation?” Potter asked and with a sigh, Draco sat back on his haunches, indefinitely pausing his assault on Potter’s neck and his many attempts to get him naked.

“A conversation,” he repeated slowly. “Potter, I told you – I am not going be the person you run to when you’ve had a shit day at work. That’s what your actual friends are for,” Draco accentuated the word in a pathetic attempt to remind Potter what they had agreed on a couple of weeks ago when Potter had invaded the Manor in his quest to get them to talk.

“You could be my actual friend, you know,” Potter mumbled and Draco resolutely chose to ignore that comment. It made him feel funny. He had wanted to be Potter’s friend, well over two and a half decades ago. While he had certainly got over that rejection, the thought of it still stung, especially when he was in Potter’s company.

“What is so terrifying about us sitting down together to have a conversation?”

Draco sighed and getting up off the couch, he moved towards the fireplace and reached for the open bottle of Firewhiskey. He retrieved his glass and poured himself a generous amount, then almost unconsciously also poured Potter a refill and handed him a glass. He returned the bottle to its previous place and staring into the amber liquid in his glass, he remained silent, unsure of how to answer that question. Something about simply having a conversation with Har— Potter did terrify him. It wasn’t like he couldn’t think of anything they could talk about. He could, in fact, think of plenty of things they could discuss. It was more like— Actually, Draco had no idea what it was like.

It terrified him that they got on so uncharacteristically well. On the few occasions that they had met up for dinner before apparating either to the Manor or to Potter’s place to engage in some seriously mind-blowing sex, the conversation had flowed so naturally that Draco found himself lying awake at night, unable to sleep, imagining having such a conversation over perhaps, say breakfast, or even afternoon tea in the Manor’s winter garden.

“What is it with you and talking?” Draco sighed again, and taking a rather large sip of his Firewhiskey, he closed his eyes as the strong drink mercilessly burned down his throat.

“I like talking to you, with you,” Potter replied and opening his eyes, Draco looked at Harry. He wanted to plead with him not to go there, but the words failed him. “I like it a lot.”

“Pot— Harry,” Draco exhaled softly as the burn in his throat gradually subsided.

“Draco.”

The fact that they had progressed to using each other’s first names on an almost regular basis irked Draco immensely. It felt a touch too intimate, a little bit too private. Potter’s use of his first name only added fuel to that funny feeling in the pit of his stomach, yet he couldn’t resist the temptation of doing the same to Potter. In a move that was quite unlike him, Draco combed his fingers through his hair, thoroughly messing it up, and to suppress another sigh, he took another swig of his Firewhiskey. After a spell of silence that lasted too long to be comfortable, Draco finally relented.
“Fine, let’s talk,” he said and returning to the sofa, he sank back into the soft cushions and pulled his legs up. “How was your day at work?” he asked sarcastically.

Potter laughed and his eyes twinkled with amusement. “Now that just sounds like we’re a couple.”

“We aren’t, though,” Draco said pointedly. He knew this whole let’s-have-a-conversation-thing had been a cunning distraction, had felt it in his bones. Damn you, Harry Potter, you should have been in Slytherin, you sly fox, he thought.

“Would it be so bad if we were?” Potter asked, casually taking a sip of his Firewhiskey. Draco froze and his fingers clenched tightly around his glass. His ears rang and his chest tightened considerably, making it rather difficult to breathe easily. His mouth suddenly felt too dry and his heart was beating too fast. The soft hairs at the nape of his neck stood up and a cold shiver ran through his entire body.

“Are you out of your bloody mind, Potter?” And just like that, it suddenly felt perfectly right to use Potter’s last name.

“No,” Potter shook his head. “In case you hadn’t noticed, I like you, Draco, and I think you—”

“Don’t you dare! Don’t you fucking dare go there!” Draco hissed, his eyes blazing with anger.

“Dare what?” Potter challenged him outright and with obvious determination. “Dare tell you that I like you? Dare suggest that I think you like me too? Dare say aloud that this whole friends-with-benefits charade is a load of cock and bull? Dare admit that there’s something between us we ought to talk about instead of just beating around the bush like two lovesick teenagers unable to get their acts together? For fuck’s sake, Malfoy, we’re both adults, thirty-five-year-old adults. Haven’t we done enough of avoiding the real issue?”

Draco pinched the bridge of his nose, closed his eyes, and took a slow and deep breath, willing himself to relax, willing himself not to explode, willing himself not to reach for his wand and hex Potter into the last century. “Why ruin a perfectly good thing?” he asked quietly when he eventually opened his eyes again.

“What are you so scared of?” Potter pushed. After his earlier outburst, his voice was now inexplicably soft and sitting forward, he put his glass of Firewhiskey down on the coffee table in front of the couch, then scooted across. Draco watched passively as Potter placed his hand on his thigh and the innocent touch sent an unexpected flash of electricity through his entire body. He shuddered, gasped, and stared down at Potter’s hand which felt like it was burning a hole through his trousers and into his skin.

“I’m not scared,” Draco mumbled distractedly, and meeting Potter’s eyes, he stared right into the green orbs and sighed softly.

He didn’t move when Potter shuffled even closer, and he didn’t flinch when Potter gently placed his hand on his neck and lightly stroked his cheek with his thumb. “I don’t want to be your friend, Draco,” he breathed and Draco wanted to blink but found it too hard to tear his eyes away from Potter’s piercing gaze. “I want to be your boyfriend, partner, I don’t know, whatever term you’re comfortable with, I guess.”

Draco wanted to laugh. The idea of having a boyfriend at the age of thirty-five sounded all but preposterous, yet something in his stomach fluttered pleasantly and so insistently that he couldn’t quite ignore it. He also couldn’t ignore Potter’s lips, which were ever so gently pressing against his own, kissing him. He sighed and despite his best efforts not to give in, he melted into the kiss. His eyes fluttered closed, his free hand sought out the nape of Potter’s neck and his fingers wound
himself into Potter’s hair. They shared the gentlest of kisses, but much to Draco’s dismay, Potter pulled away before he had the chance to deepen the kiss.

“I don’t do boyfriends—” Draco mumbled, still dazed from the kiss as he reluctantly opened his eyes and looked at Potter. His vision was somewhat blurry but clear enough to focus on Potter’s intense green eyes and the way they tore at his defences, gnawing, digging, wearing down his resolve.

“Draco—” Potter sighed. “I’m not looking for romantic walks in the parks and roses on Valentine’s Day or candlelight dinners with a view of the Eiffel Tower.”

“Then what is it you want?”

“A partner, someone who will have dinner with me and still be there in the morning to have breakfast, someone to watch a movie with, someone to have a stimulating conversation with, someone to talk Quidditch with, someone who will laugh with me and be snarky the next minute, someone who might play the piano for me if I ask nicely enough.” For a moment, Potter fell silent and simply looked at Draco. Draco wanted to look away but something made him hold Potter’s gaze. “Have breakfast with me…tomorrow morning.”

“Don’t you have to work?”

“I can be late.”

“This is a very bad idea.”

“What? Being late? I’m Head of the Auror Department, Draco, I can come in late.”

“No, you idiot,” Draco rolled his eyes. “You and me. This. Us. Making this a thing.”

“Why?”

“You’ll regret it.”

“I don’t think so.”

“You’re insane,” Draco sighed.

“Maybe,” Potter shrugged and Draco feebly tried to come up with another good reason, why it would be such a bad idea for them to date on top of shagging each other six ways to Sunday. They, despite their history, hadn’t killed each other yet, and Draco had to admit that much of his hesitation stemmed from the fact that his circumstances had never allowed for a serious relationship with another man.

Or was it a simple case of that, even after Astoria’s death, he had never bothered to look for someone who matched his intellect, interest and had an idea of what it might be like to be a single parent raising a teenage son? Bringing a little bit of distance between Potter and himself, Draco took a long hard look at the man sat beside him, patiently waiting for an answer, a commitment to advance their relationship. Draco had no doubt that Potter was sincere, the look in his eyes said so, and it forced the last of Draco’s resistance to crumble. Because, contrary to what he had been telling himself, he did like Potter. Possibly liked him just a little bit too much.

“There’s one thing, Potter. One rule, one condition.”

Potter nodded. “Anything.”
“Scorpius. My son. He has always been and will always be the most important person in my life. He is my life. Do anything that will harm him and, I swear, it will be the last thing you’ll ever do.”

“I understand. You have my word.” Potter promised.

Sighing softly, Draco reached out for Potter’s hand and loosely entwined their fingers. He stared at their linked hands for the longest time, before finally speaking. “What’s for breakfast tomorrow?” he asked and Potter laughed heartily. The pleasant sound made Draco’s lips curl upward into a smile. Boyfriend. He scoffed silently. That word sounded ridiculous. They were both in their mid-thirties for Merlin’s beard. Partner. That was something he could live with. But not boyfriend, never that.

“Whatever you want. I’ll cook,” Potter grinned, his eyes twinkling with amusement. He gently tugged at Draco’s hand, pulling him closer and Draco let him. They sealed the end of their conversation and the start of their relationship with a heated kiss.

Harry stretched luxuriously and rolling onto his side, he blinked a few times, then allowed his gaze to settle on the sleeping form of the gorgeous man that lay beside him in his bed. He sighed softly and the temptation to reach out and tug a stray strand of Draco’s hair behind his ear was almost too great to resist, yet at the same time he was terrified to rouse Draco. Harry greedily and unashamedly drank in the sight that presented itself to him, grinning stupidly as he did so.

He had never actually seen Draco asleep before and it was an almost breath-taking sight, one he was quite sure few had been privy to. Draco looked utterly carefree, free of any worry, he looked completely relaxed and at ease. His lips were slightly parted and he was breathing evenly. Harry hoped it was a sure sign that Draco was fast asleep. The more Harry looked, the more he thought that sleep stripped at least five years off Draco, giving him a more youthful look, taking some of life’s worries away from him.

“Are you a perv, Potter,” the soft insult, spoken without the slightest bit of malice, startled Harry out of his thoughts. Refocusing his attention, he found himself looking into Draco’s sleep-laden grey-blue eyes. He responded with a raised eyebrow, chuckling softly. “Is watching people sleep one of your crazy kinks?” Draco asked, his voice deliciously low and rather sexy.

“Not to my knowledge, though after today I might have to re-evaluate my kinks,” Harry found himself grinning and it was Draco’s turn to chuckle softly. His eyes twinkled with mirth and hesitantly reaching out, Harry brushed the back of his fingers over Draco’s cheek, marvelling at the softness. He stared for a moment, then boldly closed the gap between them and pressed his lips against Draco’s, lingering, waiting for a response.

Much to his delight, he didn’t have to wait long. Draco returned the kiss with a casual playfulness, Harry hadn’t experienced before. At least not from Draco. They looked at each other for a moment, then Draco stretched languidly as though he was perfectly content lying here in Harry’s bed, as though it didn’t matter that this was the first time they had ever woken up in the same bed after spending the entire night together.

“I distinctly remember someone promising me breakfast in bed in return for me agreeing to spend the night,” Draco drawled, his voice low and luxuriously sexy.

“Breakfast in bed?” Harry smiled, amused. “Did I say that?”

“Yes,” Draco said, boldly holding Harry’s gaze, daring him to disagree. Harry laughed.

“Kicking me out already? And here I thought you might enjoy a round of lazy morning sex—”
Harry winked suggestively, pleased with himself when Draco’s eyes darkened a shade or two.

“For future reference, Potter, I don’t engage in any sort of physical activity before breakfast,” Draco mumbled and closing his eyes, he buried himself under the heavy duvet and Harry firmly tried to ignore the fact that he was completely naked. He stared for a moment, then pushed his part of the duvet back and swung his legs out of bed, sliding them into his slippers.

He got to his feet and taking his robe off the hook behind the door, he swung it over his shoulders, loosely tightening it at the front, then made his way downstairs and into the kitchen. He had no idea what Draco liked for breakfast, or more importantly, what he didn’t like, and as he reached the kitchen, Harry hesitated for a moment. He stood in the doorway when the realisation that he had left his wand upstairs hit him.

Holding his hand out, Harry chanced a wandless, wordless spell to summon his wand. Moments later, it obediently flew into his hand. He grinned and flicking it at the wireless, he allowed music to fill the kitchen as he set about making breakfast. He pottered about the kitchen, opening various drawers and cabinets, taking fresh bacon, eggs, and other things out of the fridge, and toasting the bread with a lazy flick of his wand.

The upside of living alone and without a house elf was that he had become quite apt at the use of various household spells, and was able to cast most of them without even having to utter the words. He fried the bacon and the eggs without the use of magic, added four halves of tomatoes and some sliced mushrooms to the frying pan, and boiled water for tea and coffee, not sure which Draco preferred in the morning.

He was about to flick his wand at one of the cabinets to produce two plates and a large breakfast tray from the pantry when two arms slid around his waist and a strong body moulded itself against his back. Harry tensed for a split second, then, as warm lips nuzzled against his neck, nipping gently, he relaxed.

“Didn’t you want breakfast in bed?” He asked, resuming his breakfast preparation as though the fact that Draco Malfoy was standing in his kitchen, hugging him from behind was the most normal thing in the entire world.

“Thought I’d check what’s taking you this long,” Draco mumbled into his neck, then pulled away and leaned against the worktop. Harry turned his head sideways and burst out laughing at the sight of Draco dressed in his spare bathrobe, which he had obviously robbed from the en-suite bathroom.

Draco raised a questioning eyebrow at Harry and biting his lip, Harry smirked.

“You look…**dashing**,” he snorted, then tried his hardest to suppress his laughter and winced when Draco clipped him around the head, then fixed him with an icy glare.

“This,” Draco motioned at the robe he had covered his naked body with, “is a horrendous piece of clothing which I should like to burn. Unfortunately, it appears to be the only thing in your possession I can wear.” The expression on Draco’s face was one of obvious distaste and Harry couldn’t contain his laughter any longer. He instantly found himself clipped around the head again, but this time much firmer than the first time.

“Ow. Do you get off on physical punishment?” He asked as he rubbed the back of his head, then stared wide-eyed as Draco undid the belt of his robe and with a shrug of his shoulders, he gracefully let the offending clothing item slip to the floor. Swallowing hard, Harry stared at Draco’s naked body, instantly feeling his own body react to the sight.

“If you’re hoping for a taste of this, **forget it**,” Draco glared pointedly, then turned on the back of his
heel and wordlessly sauntered out of the kitchen. Harry’s jaw dropped and he stared in utter disbelief, wondering what on earth had just happened. He was quite sure that he had just hallucinated, but then his gaze fell to the crumpled bathrobe on the floor. His hand accidentally connected with the frying pan and he hissed as the hot material burned his skin, instantly leaving an angry red mark behind.

“I’m going loopy,” Harry mumbled to himself and turning the fire off, he moved to the sink and thrust his hand under cold running water, sighing at the instant relief it brought. The icy water took the sting out of the burn. He looked out of the kitchen window and into the empty back garden, allowing himself a moment to make sense of the last twelve hours or so. Apparently, he had managed to convince Draco to try dating and not only that but he had also convinced him to stay the night and have breakfast. To top it all off, Draco Malfoy appeared to have no qualms about stripping in his kitchen and sauntering about the house as though he owned it. Surreal. That was the only word Harry could think of to describe this current situation.

With a sigh, Harry pulled himself back into the real world. He turned the cold water off and reaching for his wand, he finished preparing breakfast and loaded everything onto the tray. He cast a non-spillage charm on the coffee and tea, as well as the two glasses of fresh orange juice, procured two teacups and two coffee mugs and somehow manoeuvred the two plates laden with steaming hot breakfast onto the tray as well. He found a corner for the toast, cast a Stasis Charm at the tray to keep everything hot, then levitated it and carefully made his way upstairs.

He found Draco sitting in his bed, tucked under the duvet with a book titled Must-Know Duelling Tactics for Trainee Aurors that he had clearly grabbed from Harry’s nightstand, where it had been catching dust, in his hand. When Harry entered with the breakfast tray, he looked up and sat perfectly still as Harry carefully set the tray down on the bed. “I come bearing peace offerings,” he smiled, fervently hoping Draco would accept a full English breakfast as an adequate apology.

“I like my morning coffee with some sugar,” Draco said casually, after taking his sweet time and with a nod, Harry raised his wand and was about to mumble the spell when Draco raised his hand, stopping him. “I don’t like my sugar summoned,” he remarked with the straightest poker face Harry had ever seen. Harry gaped and was about to object, was about to say that it didn’t make a bloody difference whether the sugar was summoned or not when Draco raised a pointed eyebrow, a silent challenge. With a sigh, Harry nodded. Turning on his heel, he made his way downstairs to fetch the sugar for the drama queen who had taken up residence in his bed.
Apologies for the slight delay in updating, a short trip for Christmas and an unwanted chest infection had me in no mood to start up the computer to send the files to my beta. 

But... here we are now and I have a brand new chapter for you. I hope you'll enjoy it. x

Harry,

Would you believe it? I’ve no essay assignments this week! It seems our professors have finally taken pity on us and eased up on the massive workload they’ve been torturing us with these past few months. Maybe they’re finally tired of reading all those parchments? I doubt it. They’ve probably realised that even a crazy amount of homework isn’t going to stop us from getting into trouble.

I suddenly find myself dreading next year and there’s no way fifth year is going to be any fun at all! Oh well, I guess the library is going to continue to be my best friend.

Dad finally answered my letter, took his sweet time, he did. Normally he makes a point to write every week, but well, you know... I don’t know what you said to him (if you said anything at all?) or maybe I should expect another frontpage article and picture about a case you two solved... He did mention he might help you with more cases in the future, something about his knowledge on potions...

Anyway, dad sent the biggest care package ever! He stuffed so many of my favourite sweets and treats in the box I feel sorry for his owl; that package was heavy, very heavy. I’ve shared some with my classmates already, but there’s no way I’ll finish the rest until the end of term!

Scorpius

P.S. Thanks again for that book on curse-breaking, that stuff seems quite advanced, but just reading about it is exciting. Sending you some chocolate frogs in return. Haha! Bet you haven’t eaten those in years.

If only you knew, Harry thought as he finished reading Scorpius Malfoy’s latest letter. As always, his feelings about his studies, his father and the book Harry had sent him a while back — Harry’s haphazard attempt at distracting the boy from his father’s sullen mood — was radiating off the parchment. It filled Harry with an odd sense of pride at knowing that Scorpius was mostly happy with school and life in general. He was rapidly growing attached to the boy and even though they had only met once, their regular correspondence was something Harry truly relished. He had already accumulated a thick stack of Scorpius’ letters; they were all neatly filed away in a folder on top of his desk in his study.

Idly reaching for one of the chocolate frogs, Harry unwrapped it and staffed it into his mouth before it could jump away. Scorpius had been right – he hadn’t eaten one of these since his Hogwarts days
and for a moment Harry allowed himself to reminisce, thinking back to all the good times he’d had while at the school. While he had ended up fighting for his life every single year, there had most definitely been a good few happy memories. Most involved Ron and Hermione, some were mindless conversations he’d had with Dumbledore, Remus Lupin, and some of the other professors. He fondly remembered his aptitude for Defence Against the Dark Arts and Quidditch and then suddenly found himself sorely missing his old broom and a Snitch.

He couldn’t remember when he had last taken the time to go flying. When Teddy had been younger, before he had gone off to Hogwarts, he had made a point out of taking the time to do all the fun things a godfather should do with his godson. Now that Teddy was a teenager, he preferred to spend time with friends of his own age. Even over the summer, he would spend most of his time at the Burrow or Shell Cottage, always up to no good. Last year he had helped out at Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes for a bit and Harry was convinced that George Weasley had finally managed to corrupt the boy. He had always been smart and funny but his working experience at the joke shop had turned him into a deviant boy and whenever Harry looked at him, all he could see was a younger version of Sirius Black. They didn’t look alike but in spirit, the two were cut from the same cloth, Harry was sure of that.

Cutting his reverie short, Harry reached for an empty parchment and choosing a quill over his Muggle pen, he dipped it into a bottle of black ink, then started composing his response to Scorpius, losing himself in the writing, reassuring the boy about his studies and that OWLs were still a long time away. He thanked Scorpius for the sweet treats and expressed his genuine delight over the fact that Draco had sent him so many treats. He also reminded his young friend to remember to spend some time with friends, away from his books and the library, and by the time he had finished the letter, he had filled two parchments front to back.

He idly wondered whether Draco had told his son anything about him and their relationship, but dismissed the idea almost instantly. Draco hardly ever mentioned his son and Harry hadn’t pushed the subject, leaving it up to Draco to start sharing things about that part of his life. While he didn’t have any children of his own, Harry could understand the fierce protection Draco felt for his son. Draco’s actions, as well as the way Scorpius talked about his father, left Harry with no doubt that Draco would give up everything to ensure his son’s wellbeing.

Feeling rather melancholic, Harry also composed a long letter to his Teddy, realising that he hadn’t written to the boy in a shamefully long time. His letter to Teddy filled four parchments and contained a soft plea asking his godson to look out for Scorpius Malfoy and a promise to visit soon, very soon. By the time Harry had finished Teddy’s letter, his writing hand was rather sore and flexing his fingers repeatedly, he summoned Earl and asked him to deliver both letters to Hogwarts.

As Harry watched Earl’s retreating form from the window of his study, he couldn’t help but wonder whether he would ever have children of his own. There had been a brief time when he had thought that he and Ginny would have a Quidditch team of children running around the house, but his own personal choices had left him childless. He often thought about Teddy as his son, rather than his godson, but somehow it wasn’t the same. Of course, there were always Hermione’s and Ron’s children, but they weren’t his either. While he didn’t regret his choice to be true to himself instead of forcing himself into a loveless marriage with his Hogwarts sweetheart, there were times when he sorely craved a handful of his own children. Too much love and nobody to give it to, Harry thought to himself and sighed.

Lost in his thoughts, Harry allowed himself to momentarily indulge in a fleeting flight of fancy. He pictured Draco and himself standing on Platform 9¾, watching Scorpius board the Hogwarts Express. The ridiculousness of it all made him laugh and he decided that he simply needed to get out of the house. Grabbing his coat, he left Grimmauld Place and decided to head into the office. There
was still a pile of paperwork he had to take care of and that had to be better than sitting at home, going stir-crazy. Distraction was still the best remedy, for almost anything.
Eyes narrowed and blazing with white-hot anger, his empty wand hand clenched into a tight fist, Harry glared at his godson. “When I told you I’d stop by for a visit, I most definitely did not mean receiving a howler from your headmistress in the middle of a meeting with the British Head of the Muggle Department of Defence, summoning me to her office to inform me that you hexed two Slytherin students into oblivion, putting them into the infirmary,” he growled furiously. “What were you thinking, Teddy?”

“They deserved everything they got,” Teddy, hair messy and bright blue, replied defiantly as he lounged lazily in a chair in front of Professor McGonagall’s desk. Harry wanted to slap that brazen look in his eyes right off his face but instead of giving in to the urge, he merely clenched his fists a little tighter and dug his heel into the stone floor in a desperate attempt to ground himself. Teddy’s attitude, his posture, and the way he shrugged his shoulders with such blatant disregard for Harry’s anger and possibly the whole situation drove Harry to the ends of his sanity.

“They deserved everything they got,” Teddy said flippantly, and Harry momentarily closed his eyes. When he opened them, he glared at the old Sorting Hat on the shelf beside Minerva’s desk and shook his head. That tattered old thing was most definitely going barmy. With that mouth and that attitude, Teddy belonged in Gryffindor and not Hufflepuff.

Teddy’s words made Harry’s blood boil and his temper flared up so violently he was struggling to contain his emotions. He was livid – no, at this stage, he was beyond livid. He was fuming and he was about to let Teddy know that the boy had gone too far.

Harry brought his hand firmly down on Minerva McGonagall’s heavy oak desk, leant forward and fixed his seething eyes on Teddy. “I am not in the mood to be messed with, Edward Remus Lupin. You will show me some respect, young man, and you better start now,” Harry snapped, deliberately using his godson’s full name, something he almost never did. He was rapidly losing the end of his tethers with Teddy’s insolent behaviour and having no prior experience with his godson behaving in such a shameful way didn’t make things any easier. He felt more than a little out of his depth, and after having tried his best to approach the situation with a certain level of calmness and getting nowhere, he had seen red and lost his temper.

Much to his dismay, Teddy didn’t seem to care whether his godfather was calm or angry. Teddy appeared utterly unaffected by the entire situation and resolutely continued to insist that he had acted in self-defence, and only self-defence, which Harry knew not to be the case. He had been an Auror long enough to know when somebody was lying, and while he was sure that Teddy hadn’t acted without a reason, he simply couldn’t understand why his godson was shutting him out, refusing to tell him what had really transpired between him, Scorpius Malfoy, and those two Slytherin boys that were know laid up in the infirmary.

From what Minerva had told him upon his arrival, Teddy had been involved in a rather serious altercation with several fifth-year-Slytherin students. For some reason, they had seen fit to bully
Scorpius Malfoy and for some reason Scorpius or Teddy, Harry wasn’t entirely sure who the perpetrator was, had retaliated with a series of horrid hexes. Minerva had also summoned Draco Malfoy to Hogwarts and, or so Harry hoped, he was currently giving his son a verbal bollocking of a lifetime. How the boys had managed to coordinate their stories was beyond Harry. How the whole situation had escalated into Teddy sending two of the bullies into the infirmary was also something Harry found incomprehensible. Teddy had most definitely gone too far and for that Harry had little sympathy. His eyes fell upon the faded scar on his hand, the one that read *I must not tell lies* and he shuddered. Defending himself in a duel was one thing, lying and not accepting responsibility for his actions was another thing altogether.

Harry had been a teenager once too and Teddy’s present situation reminded Harry of a time when he himself had lost his temper and had gone too far in a duel with a fellow student. That student had been Draco Malfoy and even though he had, at the time, firmly believed that he had precedent the moment he had uttered that dreadful spell, he had realised that he had taken things far beyond what was acceptable. The fact that Teddy refused to see reason and acknowledge his own faults drove Harry up the wall.

"Don’t," Harry snarled warningly, pleased to see that Teddy’s bright blue hair paled somewhat as he struggled to control his emotions. Relaxing his rigid stance somewhat, Harry combed his fingers through his hair and sighed. He leaned back against Minerva’s desk, relieved that she wasn’t in the office with them at this point in time.

It was bad enough that Hogwarts’ former headmasters were watching his and Teddy’s verbal altercation from their portraits, undoubtedly with rapt interest.

“Teddy… I really hope you realise that if those two boys suffer lasting spell damage, you are liable for what you did. Short of finding you a good solicitor to speak on your behalf in front of the Wizengamot, I won’t be able to do anything for you. If you thought my job might be able to make this go away, then I’m sorry, but I don’t have that kind of power.”

Harry watched as Teddy’s hair paled even further. Gone were his bright blue locks, his hair was now a weak mouse-grey. Teddy gulped visibly. He looked a lot less like a defiant teenager now that Harry had pointed out the official repercussions his actions could have. He shrank in his seat and his hands firmly grabbed hold of the armrests, squeezing tightly. His eyes were wide and pale, glimmering with fear and fixed on Harry in a desperate but silent plea for help. Just like that the overconfident teenager was gone, replaced with the scared child that Teddy still was. It didn’t matter that he liked to pretend that he was mature enough and could take care of himself, he was still a child and he needed guidance and support and love. He also needed to learn a lesson and pay for his unacceptable behaviour.

“They said some pretty mean stuff about Scorp,” Teddy whispered and Harry sighed.

“Still, it’s no reason to go all out and lose your temper like that,” Harry chided, though he was a lot calmer now that Teddy had started talking. He allowed his expression to soften further, glad to finally be getting somewhere.

“It wasn’t like that,” Teddy mumbled, looking rather ashamed.

“Then tell me what happened,” Harry pushed and dragging the empty chair next to Teddy closer to the boy, he placed his hand on top of Teddy’s and squeezed gently. “Tell me so I can understand,” he encouraged.

“I—” Teddy hesitated.
“Yes?”

“As I said, they really said some rather nasty stuff about Scorp. He lost Slytherin a couple of house points after getting into a bit of a heated discussion with Professor Xavier in DADA the other day. I wasn’t there obviously but he told me later. Those guys started picking on him, saying some mean stuff about his dad working with the Auror Department. He ignored them for the longest time but when they started about his mother, I could tell he was close to losing it, so I stepped in. Those Slytherin boys clearly didn’t appreciate a Hufflepuff messing with them and well you sort of know the rest…I think,” Teddy confessed, looking every bit like a terrified little child and not at all like a nearly seventeen-year-old young wizard. Harry was sure that Teddy had left out a few facts, but this version appeared to be a lot closer to the truth and he was willing to accept it.

“As far as your choice of spells goes, I’m tempted to offer you a position as Trainee Auror once you pass your NEWTs but I hope you know that you really went not one but several steps too far. A few stinging hexes, a jelly-legs curse, nobody would have said anything about those, but no, you chose to go all out and send those boys straight to the infirmary!” Harry sighed. “I would have expected your rebellious phase two or three years ago, not now. What am I supposed to tell your grandmother?”

“She doesn’t know?”

“No yet,” Harry shook his head. He owed Minerva a big thank you for contacting him and only him about this whole mess, instead of sending Andromeda Tonks a howler outlining her grandson’s misdeeds at Hogwarts and possibly risking giving the poor woman a heart attack.

“Are you going to tell on me?” Teddy asked, looking rather subdued now that Harry had finally wrenched the truth from him.

“That depends entirely on your cooperation. I expect you to compose a letter of apology to Professor McGonagall and include a full confession. I also expect you to apologise to those two boys. There will, without a doubt, be detention, which you will accept without any backtalk.”

“A-and what you said, about y-you know, that there might be trouble with well, spell damage and, and—” Teddy trailed off, looking positively depressed. His skin had a rather sickly green tint to it and his hair had by now turned completely grey. Overall, he looked like the epitome of misery itself.

“Fortunately for you, Madame Pomfrey is a superb healer, so you’ll have nothing to worry about. But know this, your actions were reckless, unacceptable, and truly horrid. I really thought—” This time it was Harry’s turn to trail off. While he had always spent a lot of time with Teddy, the boy wasn’t his son and he hadn’t raised him, not completely. He supposed that, in a way, Teddy had long since accepted him as a substitute father, but still…

“I’m sorry,” Teddy’s apology was quiet, his words whispered so low that they were almost inaudible, but Harry knew them to be heartfelt and honest. “I will apologise to those boys,” he added, his voice a little firmer now and Harry squeezed his godson’s hand in silent support.

“Your parents would be so proud of you. Heck, I’m proud of you. You are a fine young man, Teddy,” Harry praised and pulling Teddy into an awkward hug, he reassuringly patted him on the back and was about to let go again when Teddy suddenly reciprocated the hug, wrapping his arms so tightly around Harry that he momentarily struggled to move. Harry smiled softly and ruffled Teddy’s hair affectionately. He was pleased to see it regain some of its usual unusual colour.

“Thanks, Harry. I love you,” Teddy mumbled into their tight embrace and Harry swallowed past the lump that formed in his throat, wondering if that was what it felt like to be a father.
“I love you too, son.”

The words were out of Harry’s mouth before he could stop them and they had never felt so right, so true. So he wasn’t Teddy’s biological father but it still felt like Teddy was his son, like they were family. They had a close bond, a special kind of relationship Harry cherished above all. Teddy was his pride and joy, even if he was a naughty teenager with the ability to take Harry’s emotions on a maddening rollercoaster ride.
“Are you angry?”

Draco turned sharply and facing his son, he gave him a long, hard look. “You tell me,” he prompted, decidedly more calmly than he felt. To say that he had been annoyed to receive Professor McGonagall’s howler, informing him of his son’s misconduct, was a grave understatement. From what he had gathered so far, Scorpius was covering up for Harry Potter’s godson who had apparently come to his rescue, and neither the Slytherin Head of House nor the Hufflepuff Head of House were inclined to believe either boy’s story and had handed the boys off to the headmistress to deal with them as she saw fit.

Professor McGonagall had told him straight away that she suspected the boys were covering up for each other and that she would not stand for a third-year Hogwarts student and a sixth-year Hogwarts student sending their fellow students to the infirmary, unconscious. Draco had arrived at Hogwarts, furious with his son, furious with the situation, and furious with one Harry Potter for being involved, albeit not directly.

“You are angry,” Scorpius stated flatly, pushing his hands deep into the pockets of his black school uniform slacks.

“I think I have a good reason to be, don’t you?” Draco said. He was angry enough to yell at Scorpius, angry enough to shake him until the truth all but spilt out of him, but he knew that it wouldn’t solve any problems and was therefore resolutely forcing himself to remain calm. Well, as calm as he possibly could, given the situation.

“They deserved it,” Scorpius mumbled, kicking at a random pebble.

Draco coolly raised a questioning eyebrow at his son, who had the decency to look away, now defiantly kicking at the earthy ground with his foot. “Scorpius Malfoy. Exactly what did those boys do to deserve getting knocked unconscious?”

Much to Draco’s dismay, Scorpius remained tight-lipped and refused to respond.

“Fine, be that way,” Draco shrugged and turning his back on Scorpius he started walking towards the Black Lake, resolutely ignoring his petulant teenage son. He had barely walked some sixty feet when Scorpius called after him.

“Dad! Wait!”

Smirking to himself, Draco continued walking, albeit at a slightly slower pace, leaving it up to Scorpius to catch up with him.

“I kinda lost Slytherin some house points,” he confessed.
“And you will lose Slytherin some more for your actions today,” Draco replied, slowly coming to a halt. “Incidentally, how did you lose your house those points?”

“Got into a debate with a professor—” The words spilt from Scorpius mouth as one big string of word vomit and he looked rather sheepish.

“Which professor?” Draco asked, hiding his amusement. While he had never lost his cool in front of a professor — at least not in class — he’d had his fair share of confrontations with professors during his time at Hogwarts. Scorpius had, however, a bit of a temper on him, something Draco blamed on the years they had spent in Italy when Scorpius had been much younger. It usually took some doing to rile him up good and proper, but when one managed to push him past his boundaries he turned into a rather loose cannon.

“Professor Xavier.”

“Defence Against the Dark Arts?” Draco continued to try and hide his bemusement, suddenly reminded of how Harry Potter had given Professor Umbridge a world of grief in their fifth year. Draco had to admit that her teaching style had been appalling, that she didn’t have the slightest understanding of Defence Against the Dark Arts, but as far as he knew Professor Xavier had trained as an Auror. Instead of going into active duty he had, however, chosen to become a professor at Hogwarts, taking up the open position as full-time Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher – a job he had been doing rather well for many years now.

“It’s just, I had a different opinion and he wouldn’t let me make my point so I got a bit angry and snapped. I called him a moron in front of the entire class. He didn’t take too kindly to that and docked a few house points.”

“I hope you apologised?” Much to Draco’s relief, Scorpius nodded.

Since Professor Xavier hadn’t bothered to write to him about the incident, he assumed that Scorpius’ professor had forgiven his misdeeds.

“The rest of the story?” Draco demanded and for a moment Scorpius fell silent but eventually relented, albeit with a heavy sigh.

“I don’t even really know those idiots, I mean obviously I know they’re in Slytherin but beyond that, I have no idea who they are. They had an issue with me losing Slytherin some house points. I ignored them for the most part, but they got pretty mean, said some rubbish about you working with the Aurors, said that now that you’re involved with the ministry, I seem to think I can do just about anything, and just got really spiteful and started trash-talking mum, so I got mad.”

“By all means; don’t stop now.”

“Well, you know, I blew a fuse, told them to piss off.”

Draco frowned at his son’s choice of language but said nothing.

“They wouldn’t and kept saying some shit about how I wasn’t gonna be able to run crying to mummy and, and that’s when I lost it and— and— and—” Scorpius stumbled over his words, stammering his way through his confession, but Draco remained unfazed. He simply crossed his arms over his chest and waited for his son to continue.

“Teddy did duel with them, but I cast that spell, that, that, you know, that—”

“Resulted in your two fellow housemates ending up in the infirmary, unconscious?” Draco asked
and Scorpius nodded. He looked rather ashamed.

“They insulted mum, and, and, that’s, I just got so mad. Teddy took the blame for me, said no matter whatever you or anyone else said to keep my mouth shut and he’d say it was all him, because, well, it’s not like a third-year like me is supposed to know this kind of spell and well, he thought it better —”

At that point, Draco tried his best to contain his irrational fears about raising a teenage son without the influence of a mother, but it wasn’t easy. Scorpius had always — despite being exceedingly smart — been somewhat of an opinionated wild child. Astoria had somehow, in some way managed to control him just a little, but it hadn’t made all that much of a difference.

Draco had been much the same, only when he had been young times had been very different and his father had made it very clear that he wasn’t to be a wild child or have an opinion. Scorpius also had a quiet and thoughtful side, but his unpredictability was stronger and sometimes Draco couldn’t help but wonder just how Scorpius had managed to end up in Slytherin. He didn’t really seem to belong there, though he had never complained.

While Draco had never discouraged Scorpius from voicing his thoughts and ideas, the prospect of having to deal with a rebellious teenage son all by himself terrified him. So far, things had worked out well for them both, but apparently Scorpius had finally decided to start his phase of turning into a terrible teenager. Granted, those boys had provoked him by insulting the memory of his mother, but still, it wasn’t a good enough reason for such an outburst. And it most definitely wasn’t a good reason to sit back and allow someone else to take the blame.

Draco couldn’t help but wonder if Astoria would have known how to deal with Scorpius’ antics and for a moment, he missed her badly, missed her so much his chest constricted painfully, making it almost impossible to breathe. But for Scorpius’ sake, he pulled himself together and suppressed his own misery.

“And you figured telling someone else to take the blame for your mistake was all right? Or accepting somebody else’s offer to take the blame for you, or whichever way you two boys played it,” Draco fixed his son with a hard glare. “I’m disappointed, Scorpius, I really am. Standing up against bullies, talking back to a professor, a bit of strife with another student, it’s all good and well, it’s what children do, but escaping punishment by letting someone else take the blame for your own mistake? I raised you better than this. At least I thought I did.”

“I’m sorry,” Scorpius had the decency to look thoroughly ashamed and Draco couldn’t help but think that maybe, just maybe, the two of them would be fine, even if Scorpius decided to turn into a rebellious punk now that he was a teenager and even if he had to grow up without his mother’s love.

The day they had both buried Astoria, Draco had vowed that he would shower their son with enough love to make up for her untimely departure.

“I will tell the headmistress what really happened.”

“I expect no less. You really deserve the detention you’re about to get and then some.” Draco couldn’t say that he felt sorry for his son. Scorpius had crossed a line and deserved everything he had coming his way.

“Next time you decide to duel with a bunch of fifth years from your own house, keep to those hexes and jinxes that’ll result in writing lines for a couple of hours, or maybe scrubbing a few classroom floors, not those that could actually get you expelled. For once you have your age on your side and me to sweet talk your headmistress, but that won’t always be the case. Taking responsibility for one’s
actions is what makes a man, not hiding behind a friend, not pushing away the blame and looking on in silence.”

“I know, dad. I messed up – I do know that.”

“As long as you know that,” Draco said pointedly and letting his arms drop to his side, he spread them apart, inviting his son in for a hug. Scorpius all but buried himself in his robes, refusing to emerge for the longest time. Draco hugged him tightly, as tight as he could without constricting Scorpius’ ability to breathe. While he felt fiercely protective of Scorpius, he refused to allow his son to get away unscathed. That wasn’t the way things worked in the world. Actions had repercussions and the sooner Scorpius learnt that, the better.

Still, he couldn’t help feeling a bit overwhelmed at the rush of love he felt for his son as they stood near the Black Lake, arms wrapped around each other, lost in a tender father and son moment. Somehow, for that short moment, time appeared to stand still and Draco didn’t want to ever let go of his son. Did he have to grow up so fast? Draco could hardly believe that the boy was already thirteen. If only there was a spell or a potion to keep them young forever.
Harry stood by the Quidditch pitch, enjoying a precious moment of silence, lost in memories he, given half a choice, would rather forget forever. No matter how many years had already passed since he had finally defeated Voldemort, no matter how happy the occasion was, somehow a hint of bittersweet sadness always tainted all his visits to Hogwarts. Following the war, the castle had lost its innocence, or so it felt. He still loved the place, but a sense of melancholy always nipped at him whenever he set foot onto the grounds.

Today, he felt exhausted and emotionally drained. Dealing with Teddy had rather taken it out of him and the conversation they had both had with Professor McGonagall hadn’t been an entirely pleasant one. At some point, Draco Malfoy and his son had joined them in Minerva’s office and much to Harry’s astonishment, Scorpius had confessed that it had been him who had cast that blasted curse which had resulted in two students from his own house now spending several days in the infirmary under Madame Pomfrey’s rigorous care.

Following his confession, Scorpius had looked rather ashamed while Teddy had initially vehemently insisted that he had been the one to cast the curse, not Scorpius. Draco’s son had pointedly told Teddy to shut up, had stood up straight and confessed his wrongdoings. Harry couldn’t help but smile at the memory and after what he had witnessed, he now had the utmost respect for Scorpius Malfoy. He was also rather impressed with Draco’s abilities as a father, given that circumstances had forced him to raise Scorpius on his own. Looking after a teenage boy wasn’t the easiest thing in the world to do, Harry could attest to that.

Through exchanging letters with Scorpius, Harry had already learnt that Draco had raised him the right way. Scorpius had a big heart, an amazing sense of humour and a distinct sensitive side to him as well as a refreshing cheekiness. After having seen him bravely stand up and admit his mistakes, Harry couldn’t help but feel that Draco had done a marvellous job at raising the boy, had taught him the true value of honesty. Somehow, and Harry found that rather strange, Draco’s aptitude at parenting made him even more alluring, made him want Draco even more.

“Reminiscing about old times?” A familiar drawl pulled Harry back into the real world and turning his head, he found Draco standing beside him.

“Maybe,” he shrugged. “Quidditch was always fun,” he added, suddenly feeling a little nostalgic as he recalled holding on to his beloved Firebolt, chasing after a tiny, very much elusive winged golden ball with a stubborn mind of its own.

“Debatable.”

“Well, if you’d spent less time insulting me and more time actually looking for the Snitch, you might have enjoyed the game a lot more too,” Harry teased and Draco’s imminent eyeroll did not escape his notice. “You might have also actually won a game or two,” he added with a smirk that was very much worthy of a Slytherin.

“Delusions of grandeur. I see you still appear to be under the illusion that out of the two of us you’re the better Seeker,” Draco fixed him with a challenging glare and Harry couldn’t help but laugh.

“You want a rematch?” he offered half-teasing and half-serious. Draco raised a questioning eyebrow at him, and then, much to Harry’s astonishment shrugged and with a rather elegant swoosh of his robes he stalked towards the Quidditch equipment shed.
“Ready to lose, Potter?” Draco called out over his shoulder and for a moment, Harry stared in utter disbelief. Was Draco Malfoy of all people really offering him a rematch, a silly game right here on the Hogwarts Quidditch pitch, for old times’ sake?

“Who are you and what have you done with the real Draco Malfoy?” Harry questioned as he jogged after Draco, trying to catch up with him.

“Locked him in a broom cupboard somewhere on the third floor,” came the prompt reply and Harry watched with confused incredulity as Draco unlocked the equipment shed with his wand and then vanished inside. A few minutes later he emerged with two practice brooms and a little box that contained a practice Snitch. “Be prepared to pay me in sexual favours, Potter,” Draco whispered, his voice low and husky, as he thrust a broom into Harry’s hand.

Harry squirmed, blinked several times, and cursed his body for reacting so easily to Draco’s deliberate torment, a very Slytherin-like tactic to gain the upper hand.

“Are you serious?” he asked, somewhat dazed, watching as Draco swung himself onto the back of his borrowed broom with graceful, practised ease.

“Of course I am,” Draco grinned devilishly. “I hope you enjoy the misuse of a variety of bondage spells – you should know I’m rather good at them,” he added and dropping the box which still contained the Snitch to the ground, he drew his wand and freed the Snitch. Harry watched as it spread its wings curiously, then gaining confidence it fluttered into the air and briefly hovered between them, first circling Draco, then him, then vanishing out of sight entirely. In a daze, Harry watched Draco push himself off the ground, ascending high above the pitch.

“Bastard,” Harry murmured and swinging himself onto his own practice broom, he followed Draco into the air, easily catching up with him. So, a thirty-five-year-old Draco Malfoy had challenged him to a Quidditch match, what else was new? Since he was apparently stuck in an alternate universe, one where Draco Malfoy, his current lover, behaved like a silly teenager, he might as well enjoy the ridiculousness of it all. The fresh breeze and the breath-taking view of the Hogwarts grounds brought back an avalanche of memories and Harry gripped his broom tighter, determined to enjoy this moment of silliness between them both. “I see, you still play unfair,” he called after Draco, who slowed his broom to a standstill and turned to smirk at Harry.

“Not my fault you’re so easily distracted, Potter,” he drawled then dropped himself into a steep fall, then pushed his broom to the limit and raced to the other side of the pitch, leaving a confounded Harry to once again stare after him.

A minute later Harry finally awoke from his stupor and inwardly admonished himself for allowing Draco to unsettle him this easily. He chased after Draco, determined to get the upper hand. There was no way in hell Draco would be walking away from this game with his fingers wrapped around the Snitch. He had never ever let that happen before and he wasn’t about to start now.

“What’s with the morose face, Potter?” Draco teased as he handed Harry a glass of well-aged Firewhiskey, grinning when Harry looked at him with an expression of complete and utter dispiritedness. “You did lose fair and square,” he added as he slid back into his seat across from Harry in a quiet corner of the Three Broomsticks. Following their impromptu little Snitch-chasing competition, exhaustion and hunger had pulled them into the direction of the cosy pub. After a hearty meal, a glass of Firewhiskey seemed like a perfectly good choice to round off the evening with.

“That I did,” Harry mumbled, eyes firmly fixed on the amber liquid in his glass. He was still rather shocked at the fact that he had lost against Draco. He had been so sure of himself, so sure that it
would be him who would be closing his hand tightly around the Snitch, showing Draco that there was no way he would ever let a Malfoy beat him at Quidditch. What irked Harry the most, however, was that Draco’s victory hadn’t even been a chance win. Draco had most definitely spotted the Snitch well before he had even caught a glimpse of that blasted winged golden ball.

They had chased each other around the pitch for the better part of an hour and although Harry had tried his hardest to focus his attention on finding the Snitch, he had repeatedly ended up distracted by Draco’s lithe form, idly wondering why he had never noticed before just how good Draco looked on a broom. He was an excellent flyer and had, on more than one occasion, pulled a daredevil manoeuvre with such ease that Harry had hovered high above the ground, his fingers tightly clasped around his broom, praying that Draco wouldn’t end up in a heap on the ground.

“Tying you up is going to be so much fun, Potter,” Draco whispered, sounding so utterly provocative that Harry jumped half a mile and spilt some of his Firewhiskey all over himself as Draco ever so gently brushed against his hand, aimlessly toying with the hem of his jumper and teasing along the inside of his wrist, sending involuntary sparks of excitement down Harry’s spine.

With a frown, Harry sat his glass down on the table and shook his hand dry. “I lost and you still want me to pay up? How does that even make sense?”

“Well—” Draco drawled and pausing for emphasis he fixed Harry with such a smouldering gaze that Harry instantly felt dizzy and just about horny enough to jump Draco right there and then. “I need to make sure you’ll never forget the day you lost the Snitch to me.”

“Oh, trust me, there’s no chance I will ever forget this humiliation,” Harry mumbled and reaching for his drink, he took a large gulp, determined to drown his sorrows. His day had turned into a complete nightmare and not even Draco’s company improved it in the slightest bit.

“Better to cement it in your brain,” Draco smirked and with a gentle snap of his fingers he conjured a miniature version of a very thin silvery rope that coiled itself in his hand like a snake.

Harry straightened his back almost instantly as his trousers grew painfully tight in response to the images of him and Draco that pushed themselves mercilessly into the forefront of his mind. They were a sure promise of what would undoubtedly be a night to remember.

“I’m going to have so much fun with you, Potter,” Draco whispered, his voice low and with definite intent. Harry bit down hard on his bottom lip to suppress a shameless moan. He shuffled uncomfortably in his seat and stared at the conjured rope with what he hoped was apprehension but knew to be excitement.

“Harry James Potter, you sneaky bugger you!” A familiar voice cut right through the spell Draco’s promise had cast over him and his anticipation waned and his arousal faltered. He whipped his head around to take in the rapidly approaching figure of his former long-term partner and the current DADA professor, Milo Xavier.

Harry had just about enough to time to rise to his feet before two strong arms engulfed him in a tight hug. He awkwardly returned the enthusiastic greeting and studiously avoided looking at Draco, but was most definitely very aware of the fact that Draco had fixed his piercing grey-blue eyes on him and was staring at him with slow-burning jealousy. He pulled out of Milo’s embrace and put a little bit of distance between them.

“At Hogwarts again and didn’t even bother to stop by and offer me some respite from reading essays. I’m disappointed, love.”
“Erm—” Harry said, flushed with embarrassment at the once so familiar nickname and the situation in its entirety. Milo had picked a rather unfortunate moment to interrupt, though he seemed blissfully oblivious. “Didn’t stop by for pleasure,” Harry finally managed to force the words out and Milo eyed him disapprovingly. For a moment it looked like Milo would give him an ear-bashing for not having the decency to stop by before his departure, but much to Harry’s delight, his ex-boyfriend simply shrugged and dropped the matter altogether.

“Did you sort out everything with Teddy?” he asked instead and with the kind of genuine concern Harry appreciated. He nodded.

“Detention for the next month and his Hogsmeade privileges have been revoked until after the Christmas break. He also has to write two formal apology letters,” he replied, still conscious of the fact that Draco was watching him like a hawk, listening to their conversation.

“Seems fair enough,” Milo nodded, and it was then that his gaze fell on Draco, who had neither risen to his feet nor made any other attempt to infuse himself in the conversation.

Harry watched him glance back and forth between Draco and himself and was about to make a move to introduce the two men to each other when Milo beat him to it and good-naturedly stretched out his hand in greeting. “Mr Malfoy, a pleasure,” he said and Harry looked on silently as Draco rose to his feet and accepted Milo’s handshake.

“Professor Xavier,” he nodded curtly. “My apologies for Scorpius’ insolence in class the other day, he told me all about it. Rest assured I have had a serious word with him about it.”

“Nonsense, it’s all good and forgotten. The boy has a very curious mind, that’s all,” Milo smiled and Harry watched with the utmost confusion, unsure whether Draco was putting on a very good show or whether he hadn’t noticed Milo’s earlier slip of the tongue.

Never in a million years, Harry thought to himself.

“Anyway, apologies for barging in like this and taking possession of Harry. Force of habit; it’s rather difficult to focus on anything but him when he’s around.”

Harry winced inwardly and made a mental note to teach Milo a thing or two about sensibility the next time they met. If he lived to see the day, because if Draco’s expression was anything to go by, Harry was presently in deep trouble, very deep trouble indeed.

“No matter,” Draco replied with a smile that Harry knew to be utterly fake for it didn’t reach his eyes at all. “Old friends, I presume.”

Milo laughed heartily. “Something like that. Please, excuse me, I must run.”

“I’ll see you,” Harry said quietly and Milo shot him a beaming smile. Much to Harry’s horror he also reached out and placed a warm hand on his arm, squeezing gently. “Don’t be a stranger, Harry,” he added pointedly and to anyone who didn’t know how Milo usually spoke to him, the scene looked very much like Milo was inviting him to spend the night some time.

Harry nodded almost automatically and just like that Milo turned away and left the Three Broomsticks. Taking a deep breath, Harry turned to face Draco, who regarded him with a raised eyebrow and a rather curious expression.

“Old friends, eh?” he scowled and then his expression hardened into something quite indescribable. All Harry knew was that he had seen that face once before. It had been when he had sought out Draco at the Manor to confront him about the first time they had slept with each other. He instantly
knew it to be foreboding of something unpleasant and every single muscle in his body tensed.

“Draco—” Harry sighed.

“Don’t even bother,” Draco held up his hand. “If you'll excuse me, I must return to London,” he added coolly, and stepping away from the table, he walked out of the pub without as much as a backward glance. As the door fell closed behind him, Harry desolately slumped down onto his chair.

“Fuck,” he mumbled to himself. Something told him it was pointless to follow Draco.
Jealousy Is An Ugly Friend

With a low sigh, Draco lowered the book he had been reading and he looked at Potter, who stood in the doorway of his living room. “Which part of don’t bother do you have trouble understanding, Potter?” he asked with mild annoyance. He had successfully managed to ignore Potter for two consecutive days, but apparently, his luck had run its course. Damn that stupid Gryffindor persistence, he thought darkly and glowered at Potter.

“I see, we’re back to last names. Must you behave like such a petulant child, Malfoy?” Potter snapped, crossing his arms over his chest in a defiant I’m-not-going-anywhere-until-you-talk-to-me stance. Draco wanted to laugh. Harry— Potter looked much like Scorpius whenever Draco reinforced the rules or actively forbid something. Granted, he didn’t often say no to Scorpius but whenever he did, the boy looked a lot like Potter; determined, defiant, stubborn, insistent on getting what he wanted when he wanted it.

“Insult me, why don’t you. It’ll just make me more inclined to talk to you.” Draco glared, wondering what had possessed him when he had woven Potter’s magical signature into the Manor’s ancient wards. It meant that Potter had unfettered access to the Manor’s access to the Manor, the ability to unlock the front gates and use the Floo as he pleased. Should’ve undone that spell, Draco reproved himself. You didn’t though, did you now? a treacherous voice echoed in his mind and Draco swallowed an angry growl.

“Don’t you think you’re overreacting just a little bit?” Potter asked, and walking further into the room and stopped behind the sofa, wisely leaving a little bit of distance between them both. For now, at least.

“Am I now?” Draco replied with a cold expression. “Forgive me. Here I was — under the impression that my son’s professor was your old friend.”

“Merlin’s beard, Draco! Milo Xavier — my ex! And yes, we are friends,” Potter said with clear exasperation. Unfolding his arms, he braced them on the sofa’s backrest. “I would have explained that to you in the Three Broomsticks, but you chose to stalk off in a huff and ignore me for the last two days.”

“I Don’t. Stalk,” Draco said slowly, accentuating every single word as if to make a point. He was just about ready to throw his book at Potter’s head in the hope it would either knock him unconscious or shut him up. Preferably both. “Is Professor Xavier aware of the fact that he is, in fact, your ex then? Because to me, it seemed like he didn’t get the memo of your breakup.”

“Malfy, I swear,” Potter hissed. “Milo and I have been history for a long time. We’re friends. Nothing more and nothing less.”

“Very good friends indeed.” Draco scowled and watched warily as Potter rounded the sofa and walked up to him, stopping just inches in front of his armchair. He didn’t really want Potter this close, but short of hitting him with a curse, he didn’t think Potter would return to his previous position — or preferably just outside the Manor’s gates — of his own volition.

“Are you jealous?” he challenged brazenly. As Potter leant forward and braced himself on the armrests of Draco’s favourite armchair, Draco couldn’t help but suck in a sharp breath. Potter had rather rudely and suddenly invaded his personal space and was practically pushing his face into Draco’s. The familiar scent of Potter’s Muggle perfume instantly assaulted his nose and he had to fight to keep his composure. Part of him wanted to punch him, but another, more prominent part-
wanted to snog the life out of him.

“Potter, know one thing: I do not play second fiddle in a relationship. Not for you, not for anyone,” Draco glared with as much venom as he could muster now that Potter was so treacherously close to him. He really didn’t want to have this discussion. Not now, not ever. The rather intimate exchange between Potter and Professor Xavier had already firmly burned itself into his retinas and try as he might, he could not remove it. That ridiculous pet name repeatedly rang in his ears along with Professor Xavier’s request for Potter not to be a stranger. Bah, Draco thought, hardly able to control the urge to apparate into Hogsmeade, make his way up to Hogwarts and invade Milo Xavier’s personal chambers to hex him into oblivion.

“Draco, listen to me,” Potter said with a heavy sigh. His voice had dropped to a low whisper and Draco blinked. He vehemently refused to allow Potter’s bedroom voice to affect him, but unable to avert his eyes, he stubbornly held Potter’s gaze. “I’ll say it again, Milo is my ex. We broke up about a year after he started teaching at Hogwarts. I trust you can do the maths, but it’s been six years. We are friends, and only friends; Milo is just a rather affectionate guy, that’s all. I have never, nor will I ever cheat on the person I’m in a relationship with, and I was rather under the impression that we’re in a relationship.”

When Potter finished, painfully uncomfortable silence descended over the room and Draco knew he should say something, anything, but he was genuinely stuck for words. Judging by the expression on Potter’s face, there was absolutely no way he was lying, Draco knew that much. He suddenly felt rather foolish for making up his mind about Potter’s and Professor Xavier’s relationship status without listening to reason first.

It wasn’t really like him. It wasn’t at all like him. They had been sharing a moment when Milo Xavier had interrupted them with his cheerfulness. Something inside him had just snapped when he had seen Potter in the arms of another man and all rational thought had escaped him. An ugly green fire of jealousy had burned so fiercely in his chest that he had chosen to run, run from feelings he wasn’t ready to admit.

He wanted to blame his irrational behaviour on his lack of experience in the relationship department but a persistent voice in his head reminded him that he had been married for a little over a decade and how different was that relationship really from any other? He knew he should apologise but the words — or any other words for that matter — refused to make it past his lips. Instead, he continued to sit in silence, holding Potter’s gaze, suddenly so terrified of the depth of his feelings for Potter that he, once again, wanted to run — bolt, escape, abscond, flee. When did you get under my skin like that? he asked himself repeatedly as his heart hammered in his chest and he stared into Potter’s intensely green eyes, which made him feel just a little light-headed and dizzy.

“You are a moron, Malfoy, do you know that?” Potter’s voice eventually cut through the silence. He was smiling softly and Draco fervently wanted to lean in and capture those delicious lips in a deep, searing kiss, but Potter’s mocking insult distracted him momentarily.

“You’re insolent, Potter,” Draco growled.

“Oh, gonna spank me now, Malfoy?” Potter teased and with one swift move, he straddled Draco’s thighs, bringing their bodies close enough for Draco to drop the book in his hand carelessly onto the floor and wrap his arms around Potter’s waist instead. He drew him closer and Potter brought his lips within half an inch of Draco’s.

“I believe you said something about wanting to cement your recent victory at Quidditch in my mind. Make sure I never forget who the better seeker is. Are you gonna be a man of your word, Draco Malfoy, seeker extraordinaire?” Potter whispered and Draco’s entire body shuddered involuntarily at
the blatant challenge. He could feel Potter’s breath on his lips and squeezed his hips firmly. Draco
closed the small gap between their mouths and pressed his lips against Harry’s. Much to his delight,
Harry didn’t disappoint and he returned the kiss with fervent enthusiasm.

Draco lost himself in that kiss, relishing in the soft lips that moved against his own and the hot, wet
tongue that persistently sought entrance to his mouth. He groaned into their kiss as Harry ground his
crotch against his own and tightening his hold on Harry’s hips, he focused his attention on his bed
and a second later they both disappeared from the living room with a quiet pop. They reappeared on
top of his bed and Harry groaned underneath him.

“I really wish you wouldn’t do that,” he sighed.

“Would you rather climb the stairs?” Draco grinned, mischievously.

“Yes,” Harry replied sincerely. “One of these days you will splinch us.”

“It’s disappointing how little trust in my abilities you have, Potter.”

“I trust your abilities just fine, but I’m quite attached to my bits and would rather not end up in St
Mungo’s to have them reattached. I’m really not prepared to have that awkward conversation with
the Healers there.”

Draco laughed heartily and settling on Harry’s thighs, he placed his hand on top of Harry’s chest,
then slowly slid it down to his groin, cupping his erection through his tight jeans and squeezing ever
so gently. “Don’t worry, your bits are safe with me,” he whispered and Harry bucked into the touch
and groaned.

“What a relief,” Harry mumbled.

Rubbing Harry’s hardness through the rough material of his jeans, Draco braced himself on his
unoccupied hand and leant down, bringing his face closer to Harry’s. “I’m afraid you’re going to
have to wait a while to get any kind of relief, Potter,” he breathed against Harry’s lips, voice low,
speaking with intent.

The involuntary shudder that shook Harry’s body was delectable, and Draco resolutely claimed
Harry’s mouth in a possessive kiss. He felt Harry’s hands lock around the back of his neck. It was a
desperate attempt to keep Draco from breaking away from the kiss, though Draco had no intention of
doing any such thing. Instead, he wholly committed himself to the kiss, allowing the intimacy of it to
swipe him up and away. There was just something about kissing Harry that set his entire body on
fire, drove him wild with lust and made him completely unpredictable. Somehow, being with Harry
meant that he lost all his inhibitions.

By the time he did finally, but grudgingly, draw away from the kiss, his lungs were burning with a
distinct lack of oxygen and his head was spinning considerably. He thought that Potter probably felt
the same and gulped in a few deep breaths. It was a half-hearted attempt to pace himself. He then
drew his wand and with a shaky swoosh and a silent spell he vanished all of Harry’s clothes in one
go.

“I also wish you wouldn’t do that,” Harry frowned and Draco chuckled.

“Don’t worry, I just banished them to the floor,” he smiled devilishly.

“What’s wrong with just taking them off, one by one?” Harry teased deliberately.

“Takes too long.”
“You’re something else, Draco Malfoy.”

“And you need to shut up, now,” Draco responded and bending forward, he pressed his lips against Harry’s abdomen, relishing in how the muscles underneath the skin flexed at his simple touch. He flicked his tongue against the warm skin, tracing an irregular pattern, thoroughly enjoying the breathy sigh that fell from Harry’s lips.

“Gods, Draco yes, please, yes,” Harry moaned underneath him and Draco nipped at the warm taut skin, biting gently. Whatever Harry had been about to say turned into an incoherent moan. The low moans that left Harry’s lips were simply divine and Draco thoroughly enjoyed the power he had over Harry, the ability to transform him into a quivering wreck with hardly any effort at all.

Sometimes it is just too easy to shut you up, Draco thought to himself, smirking against Harry’s skin as he slowly kissed, licked, and nipped his way upwards, pausing only to assault both of Harry’s nipples along the way. The low moans that left Harry’s lips were simply divine and Draco thoroughly enjoyed the power he had over Harry, the ability to transform him into a quivering wreck with hardly any effort at all. Look at you now, Head Auror Potter, not so fierce anymore, huh?

Draco thought with a smirk.

By the time he had reached Harry’s neck, still kissing, nipping, and licking at the sensitive flesh, Harry had wrapped his arms around his neck and wound his fingers tightly into his hair. Without stopping his assault on Harry’s neck, he closed his hands around Harry’s wrists and pulled them away and above his head, resolutely pushing them into the pillows, holding them tight. He sucked Harry’s earlobe into his mouth and nipping at the soft flesh, he pressed his crotch firmly against Harry’s, knowing fully well that his trousers would cause delicious friction, rubbing up against Harry’s hard cock like that.

“You relinquish your power too easily, Harry Potter,” he breathed into Harry’s ear.

“Only in the bedroom,” came the shaky response and Draco gave a throaty little laugh. He lifted his head a little and locking his eyes on Harry’s green ones, dark with lust and anticipation, he captured Harry’s lips in another heated kiss. He ran his fingertips along every inch of Harry’s skin he could reach, but stopped each time Harry tried to touch him too. Each time he broke the kiss and moved Harry’s arms back to where he wanted them, over his head.

“This isn’t working, Potter — you have an obedience problem,” he mumbled against Harry’s lips and sitting up, he snapped his fingers gently and conjured long silvery ropes. They were much like the ones he had conjured in the Three Broomsticks, except that these were most definitely not a miniature version of the real thing. He idly let them slide through his fingers, relishing in the soft, velvety feeling of the ropes against his skin. Harry astonishedly held his gaze, watching him with rapt interest. Draco gently flicked his hand and the ropes coiled once around the headboard, lying innocently on the bed. He crooked his head sideways, a silent question in his eyes. He had no idea whether Harry liked this, had no idea whether he would permit him to use restraints, but he wanted to, Merlin he wanted to tie Harry to his bed so badly.

Draco was about to vanish the ropes when Harry entwined both their hands and squeezed gently, effectively stopping him from being able to get rid of the conjured magical ropes.

“Don’t,” he said, steadily holding Draco’s gaze. “Use them, I trust you.”

Three words were all it took to set Draco’s entire body on fire with a deep, primal kind of anticipation. Three words that reminded him of his stupidity, of his lack of patience and willingness to listen to Harry’s explanation to a perfectly natural situation, of his stubborn insistence to ignore Harry. Suddenly the words he hadn’t been able to say before simply fell from his mouth.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered.
“What for?” Harry asked with a frown.

“Being an idiot,” Draco sighed.

“I don’t care,” Harry said softly and the expression on his face told Draco that he really meant it. He leant down to capture Harry’s lips in another kiss, and mid-kiss, he flicked his hand in the general direction of the ropes and they slithered over the bedsheets and wound themselves around Harry’s wrists, gently but insistently pulling Harry’s arms up and stretching them over his head. Draco pulled away from the kiss and watched Harry flex his fingers, wantonly looking up at Draco.

“OK?” Draco asked and to his relief, Harry nodded. “I can cancel the spell any time,” he added, surprised to find Harry shaking his head.

“No, don’t; I want this.”

“As you wish,” Draco smiled and moved to climb off the bed, pleased to find Harry’s gaze following him with curious anticipation. He pulled his charcoal-grey jumper over his head and slowly and deliberately unbuttoned the shirt underneath, intently watching as Harry’s gaze followed his fingers and he swallowed hard. “You’re beautiful,” he whispered, drinking in Harry’s naked form, sprawled out on the bed, wrists securely tied to the headboard, patiently waiting for whatever it was Draco had planned.

Draco shrugged his shirt off his shoulders, allowing it to drop to the floor where it landed in a careless heap. As his hands moved to unbutton his trousers, he kicked his shoes off, then pulled both his trousers and boxers down together, slowly stepping out of them. Harry opened his mouth to say something but Draco shook his head, motioning for Harry to remain silent. Harry nodded in quiet obedience and with a pleased smile, Draco climbed back into the bed and straddled Harry’s thighs.

Holding his hand out, he summoned a small golden ball from his nightstand and when he showed it to Harry, he gave a soft laugh. It was the Snitch Draco had caught several days ago. “Hogwarts is missing a Snitch,” Draco chuckled softly, shuddering as the golden ball reacted to his touch and softly spread its wings, buzzing in Draco’s hand. He lowered his hand and the wings insistently fluttered against Harry’s neck.

Draco slowly let go and allowing his hand to hover above the Snitch, he directed it to flutter down to Harry’s chest, its wings teasing Harry, who gasped at the unfamiliar, but clearly wanted sensation. “When I’m done with you, you’ll never look at a Snitch the same way again,” Draco whispered, laughing softly. Harry moaned softly as the Snitch fluttered across his stomach, teasing his belly button and his eyes widened when Draco shifted and moved to push Harry’s legs apart and kneel between them.

With his hand he directed the Snitch further down, allowing the wings to gently flutter along the line of hair below Harry’s belly button, dangerously close to his erect cock, which now twitched with anticipation. There he paused, thoroughly enjoying Harry’s little gasps and the way he tugged at his bonds. Ignoring Harry’s erection, Draco directed the Snitch to flutter over the insides of Harry’s thigh, teasing relentlessly. Harry’s hips bucked and his eyes pleaded with Draco, insistently, repeatedly. Draco half expected him to beg, to breathe out a shaky please but miraculously Harry remained silent, except for all his little moans and shaky breaths.

Draco continued to tease, ever so slowly allowing the Snitch to move along Harry’s skin, which was starting to perspire as Harry strained against the ropes, pulling, tugging. His hips bucked up, desperately seeking out more stimulation but Draco did not give in, refused to give Harry what he so desperately wanted.
“Patience, Harry,” he whispered, chuckling when Harry’s cock twitched and fresh precome leaked from its tip. “That turns you on, doesn’t it? When I call you Harry,” Draco teased and Harry groaned but bit his lips, still refusing to speak. “Let’s see how much of this you can take before you beg, shall we?” Draco gave a throaty laugh and flicking his hand ever so gently he allowed the Snitch’s wings to brush against the base of Harry’s cock and moving his hand up and down, almost as though as he was giving Harry a hand job, he licked his lips at the beautiful sight of Harry’s cock twitching each time the Snitch’s wings brushed against it.

Harry’s hips bucked of their own accord, and Draco watched as Harry’s fingers twisted around the ropes, firmly holding on to them, clearly needing them to ground himself. Pearls of sweat had formed on his forehead and Draco knew that it was taking him every single ounce of self-control to stop himself from talking, from begging for more.

“My, you’re such a good boy, Harry,” Draco whispered, deliberately teasing, wanting to see how much it would take for Harry to crack. He increased the speed at which he moved his hand and the Snitch’s wings beat faster, more insistently. He trailed the buzzing Snitch along Harry’s cock, all the way to the tip and as the tender wings connected with the sensitive tip, Harry’s hips bucked violently and a loud groan fell from Harry’s lips as he harshly yanked at the bonds that tied him to the bed.

Draco half expected to hear his name, an insult or a desperate please, but miraculously Harry continued to remain silent, not a syllable leaving his lips. Determined to win this battle of wills, Draco flicked the Snitch to move along the underside of Harry’s cock and down to his balls, where he let it drop against the sensitive skin. He bent forward and sucked Harry’s cock into his mouth, engulfing it in the delicious wet heat that was his mouth. That did it.

“Fuck, Draco—” the words slipped past Harry’s lips and with a chuckle, Draco bobbed his head, letting Harry’s cock slide in and out of his mouth. He ran his free hand up and along Harry’s stomach, enjoying the feel of how the muscles clenched beneath his firm touch. Slowly withdrawing his mouth from Harry’s cock, he licked his swollen lips then flicked his hand upwards.

“Catch,” he instructed and the Snitch flew up towards the headboard. Harry snatched it, wrapping his fingers tightly around it, squeezing so hard that his knuckles turned white. Holding his hand out, Draco silently summoned a small phial of lube and uncorking it, he tipped a generous amount onto his hand, coating his fingers with it. He allowed the empty phial to drop beside the bed and falling backwards onto his free hand, he supported himself as he wrapped his hand around his own throbbing erection.

He hissed at the relief the touch brought and lazily stroked himself, making sure that Harry could see exactly what he was doing. He let his hands slip past his balls and in-between the crack of his arse where he sought out the puckered ring of flesh, teasing himself for a moment before pushing first one finger into himself, then another, preparing himself.

He caught Harry’s gaze, watching as he stared, unblinking and mesmerised, licking his lips in quiet appreciation. The sight made Draco want to come there and then and he had to squeeze the base of his cock to contain his excitement somewhat. Deciding that he was fully prepared, he took hold of Harry’s cock and positioned himself above it. He ever so slowly sunk down onto it, groaning at the feeling of Harry stretching him wide open, his muscles burning hotly, stubbornly resisting the intrusion and flexing repeatedly before finally relaxing, engulfing Harry’s cock and closing tightly around the pulsing flesh.

Draco hesitated for a moment, but decided that this was as good as it was going to get. He started to move, slowly, pulling himself off Harry’s cock, then impaling himself again, groaning at the sheer effort it took him, but loving the feeling of having Harry so deeply sheathed inside him for the first
He caught Harry’s still incredulous look and mentally patted his own shoulder, knowing that Harry had most definitely not expected that. With a grin, he flicked his hand and the Snitch in Harry’s hand started buzzing, his wings extending through Harry’s clenched fingers. For a moment Draco thought that Harry might let go but he only tightened his hold on the Snitch, a devilish smile playing across his lips. Draco mirrored it and leaning forward, he placed his hands on either side of Harry’s head, bracing himself on his arms as he moved faster, increasing the speed with which he impaled himself repeatedly on Harry’s cock, ensuring to clench around it as he moved up and relax as he slid down.

“You didn’t expect that now, did you?” he whispered, his lips brushing against Harry’s, the strain of holding himself on top evident in his voice. Harry nodded ever so slightly and pressing his lips against Harry’s, Draco kissed him hard, groaning into the kiss as he angled his position just a little bit in the hope that Harry’s cock might brush against that sweet spot deep inside of him, sending him spiralling out of control. It took a few attempts, but when he finally managed, the sensations shooting through his body almost made him collapse in a heap on top of Harry, who watched him intently, evidently drinking in the sight, savouring every drop of it.

Before long, Draco’s thighs burned from the sheer effort it took to keep moving, but he pushed past the pain, ignored the shaking, ignored the muscle spasms. He had every intention to last through a heated love-making session with his bound lover, so clearly enjoying being at his mercy. He desperately wanted to touch himself, but he needed both his hands for support. Torn, he fixed his gaze on Harry, pleading, though for what he wasn’t sure.

“Release me,” the words were barely louder than a shaky breath but to Draco’s ears, it sounded like Harry had screamed them. With a soft sigh, Draco mumbled the spell that loosened the bonds and letting go of the Snitch, Harry ran his hands up his shaking arms, kneaded his tense shoulders and then slid them down his back, before settling on his hips, gripping firmly, guiding Draco’s faltering movements. The relief was almost immediate and focused and rejuvenated, Draco settled into an even rhythm, allowing Harry to set the pace for him. Several moments later, Harry’s hand wrapped itself around his cock and stroked in perfect unison with Draco’s movements.

Draco shuddered, his entire body spasming, shaking.

“I’m gonna—” He breathed, slipping down a familiar one-way-street, headed for the edge, his orgasm insistently pulling at him. Harry thrust his hips upward, meeting him halfway, taking more of the strain off Draco’s aching thighs. Slipping further and moving faster, Draco closed his eyes and groaned, mesmerised that Harry had such a powerful effect on him, now even more so than before.

“Come for me, Draco,” Harry whispered and that was the final straw for Draco, who had been holding on by a mere thread. His buttocks clenched almost painfully and his entire body shook and shuddered as he lost every ounce of self-control and finally slipped past the point of no return.

Harry’s rapid pumping of his cock pulled him over the edge and he came on a guttural groan of Harry’s name, falling forward against Harry, not even in the slightest bit worried that he might crush Harry beneath him. He barely registered that he needn’t have worried, for Harry was a trained Auror and even on the brink of his own orgasm, his ability to react quickly hadn’t diminished one bit. Harry feebly thrust upward, burying himself deeply inside Draco, then came too, filling Draco with his come, shaking, groaning, lost in the throes of his orgasm.

Exhausted, sated, and beyond sleepy, Draco just about managed to roll onto his side, sighing as doing so caused Harry to slip out of him. He insistently pulled Harry with him and with a grudging groan, Harry followed, curling into Draco’s tight embrace. Draco briefly wondered whether he was getting too old for pulling stunts like that, but sleep insistently tugged at his every fibre and he
couldn’t resist. *Most definitely too old*, he thought, then drifted off, grateful that Harry summoned the throw over them both to keep them warm. Winter was coming.
“You certainly look—” Ron started, momentarily pausing to look for the right word to describe the slightly over-the-top smile that Harry, try as he might, could not remove from his face. “—happy. Anyone to blame? The stack of papers on your desk most definitely isn’t the cause of your chirpiness,” he commented as he walked into Harry’s office and made himself at home on the comfortable though rather plain armchair in front of Harry’s desk.

“Maybe,” Harry shrugged. He wasn’t exactly ready to share any details about the changes in his relationship status with his best friend, especially considering whom he had chosen as a partner. He suspected Hermione probably had her suspicions — one hardly managed to keep things from her for too long — but she was smart enough not to ask.

“Do I even want to know?” Ron asked.

“Probably not,” Harry smirked, absent-mindedly toying with a stack of memos on his desk. He had successfully ignored them for the last two days, but what with all the other paperwork that was piling up on his desk, he really couldn’t ignore them any longer. Most of them contained summaries of mindless meetings he refused to attend.

Years on the job had taught him how to efficiently distinguish between important meetings, which rarely took place in a meeting room, — or were scheduled in advance — and meetings that were held for the sake of holding a meeting. There were of course meetings he, try as he might, could not get out of, but as for all the others? Since it was ministry policy to keep a record of all things discussed, he simply subscribed to those meeting updates and that was that. It was common knowledge among the other heads of departments, as well as his staff, that his door was always open.

“In that case, I actually just stopped to ask if you’re joining the training field trip for the first years.” Ron dropped the matter and just like that, he returned to discussing official Auror business. Merlin, I love you, Harry thought, eternally grateful that Ron, for all his dorkiness, knew when to push for information and when to let it go.

Harry shook his head. “I trust you to put them through their paces.” While he usually enjoyed the department’s training excursions, he thought it better not to join this quarter, knowing Ron was perfectly capable of dealing with a bunch of overeager, excited Aurors-In-Training.

“I think I can pull a couple of surprises out of my hat. Have you got the examination papers ready?”

“I wish,” Harry sighed. “Do you think I could burn all this? Then I might get them done,” he asked, flicking a hand at the stacks of brown file folders on his desk.

“If you want Cox to fire you,” Ron laughed. “I do not pity you. I would not want your job, not in a million years, though if Hermione had anything to say she would force me into a desk job in a heartbeat.”

“I’m not sure if that’s a compliment or an insult,” Harry frowned. While Ron did not want his job, he most definitely wanted Ron’s. Or at the very least more time in the field, just a little bit. Sadly, signing off on closed cases, reviewing case reports submitted to him by his senior Aurors, authorising undercover work and raids, along with a seemingly never-ending list of other duties, rested entirely on his shoulders, and just as Shacklebolt continued to refuse to give him the budget for a full-time potions’ expert, his duties weren’t going to change any time soon. If anything, each quarter seemed to bring new duties, more responsibilities, and a never-ending stream of changes.
“I wouldn’t dare to insult you, Harry; you are my boss after all,” Ron teased and Harry rolled his eyes. “How about some lunch?”

“If you’re going out, grab me something, would you? If you’re heading to the canteen, forget about it.” The mere thought of the ministry’s canteen food was enough to thoroughly spoil Harry’s appetite.

“Heading out. Coffee too?” Ron asked, rising to his feet.

“Please.”

“But of course, boss,” Ron laughed and Harry fired a rather mild stinging hex after his friend’s retreating form. Ron’s reaction was, however, impeccable. He dodged the hex with almost no effort. A true Auror, Harry mused, then took a deep breath and tackled the stack of notes still in his hand.

“Rogue wizards now robbing libraries or have you suddenly developed a curiosity for books that’s more important than gracing me with your company? If so, we should head to St Mungo’s to have you checked for spell damage,” Draco scowled as he walked into Harry’s study, finding him sitting on the floor cross-legged, practically drowning in a sea of open books. Nearly all of them were heavy tomes. An endless supply of parchments lay strewn about, some empty, some with inexplicable notes scrawled upon them.

“Neither,” Harry replied without looking up from a thick volume of *Dark Arts — The Essentials*, he was currently studying in hopes of getting some inspiration for the monstrous task of writing the questions for the exam papers that would decide over the future of his first-year Auror trainees.

“Considering that you are Head of the Auror Department your talent for time-keeping is abysmal,” Draco scolded, carefully stepping through the mess on the floor with a frown firmly in place. He wordlessly dropped a paper bag in Harry’s lap, then fought his way over to Harry’s desk, sinking into the rather large desk chair with a soft sigh. “I don’t even know why I bother. Especially since you deem it appropriate to stand me up.”

At that statement, Harry paused in his mission to unpack the food Draco had dropped in his lap and pushing the sleeve of his shirt back, he checked the time, swearing under his breath when he realised that it was already half eight in the evening. “Fuck, Draco, I’m—”

“We had dinner arrangements,” Draco interrupted with an accusatory glare. He silenced Harry with a raised hand, resolutely cutting Harry’s attempt to launch into a lengthy apology short. Right now, Draco did not want to know why Harry was sitting on the floor of his study, still dressed in his Auror uniform, instead of donning a casually smart outfit suitable for a dinner date. “Apparently I’m not important enough for you to remember that.” Draco fixed Harry with a hard glare that had Harry shrink in utter shame, then yelp when a rather uncomfortable stinging hex hit him right above his crotch.

“Did you just—?” he asked, looking rather stunned.

“Yes, I did. Though you deserve much worse for your insolence. I have never been treated with such utter lack of respect.”

“Draco, I—” Harry faltered, not entirely sure what to say. He doubted Draco was interested in an apology. Then again, the fact that Draco was here in his house, with food, instead of sulking at the Manor firmly ignoring him, spoke volumes.

“Eat your food and count your lucky stars that I didn’t aim that hex any lower. Believe me, I wanted
to, but I’d be hexing myself in the leg with that,” Draco advised, then flicked his wand and summoned a bottle of Firewhiskey from the living room, as well as one glass. The fact that he had only summoned one glass did not escape Harry’s notice. Still in the doghouse then, he thought morosely but obediently turned his attention towards the food Draco had brought him.

As he stuffed a slice of bruschetta with tomato and basil into his mouth, he surreptitiously glanced in Draco’s direction but Draco had his attention firmly fixed on the glass of Firewhiskey in his hand as he purposefully continued to ignore Harry. On his second bite, Harry cursed the fact that he had brought his work home with him. He also cursed his own sloppiness which had resulted in him forgetting time completely.

Half an hour passed by before Harry attempted to have another go at an apology.

“Draco?” he called out softly and much to his surprise, Draco rewarded him with attention and a curiously raised eyebrow.

“What do you have to say for yourself?”

“Nothing. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to stand you up.”

“Yet you did,” Draco frowned, idly toying with his half-empty Firewhisky.

“I’m sorry.”

“You do realise that I’ll make you pay for this, don’t you?”

“I figured you might limit yourself to that stinging hex,” Harry said, though he didn’t feel hopeful at all. Draco’s laughter was both surprising and affirmed his suspicions that no, Draco would most definitely not leave it at a mere stinging hex. This was just not how Draco Malfoy dealt with things.

“What is it that is so much more important than having dinner with me, then?” Draco asked, painfully aware that his actions tonight were perfect proof of just how much he had changed in the brief time that had passed since he and Harry had formalised their relationship. Ordinarily, he made a point not to stand for this sort of behaviour and when realisation had hit him that Harry wasn’t running late but had indeed stood him up, he had been livid. But something inside him had made him give Harry the benefit of the doubt, instead of instantly condemning him.

“Nothing is more important than dinner with you,” Harry sighed.

“Laying it on a bit thick here, aren’t you, Potter?” Draco couldn’t help but mock.

“I’m working on the exam papers for the first-year Auror trainees,” Harry said with a weary and tired smile. “However, it is not an excuse for forgetting time and standing you up,” he added, grimacing as he flexed his sore muscles. He was most definitely getting too old for spending hours on end sat on the floor doing research, though if he were honest, he had no rational explanation for what had possessed him to move his work to the floor. Possibly the sheer number of books needed for his task.

“No, it is not,” Draco asserted. “How are you getting along then?” he wanted to know, and for a split second he felt tempted to move himself to the floor, but resolutely resisted that temptation. There were limits to his leniency and giving up the comforts of a desk chair in favour of an uncomfortable, unforgivingly hard floor was one of those limits.

“So far I have a list of questions that I reckon my senior Aurors will have to research to answer and a list of questions that is so easy a seventh-year Hogwarts student would have no trouble answering them,” Harry sighed and pushing himself to his feet, he stretched himself, wincing when his bones
cracked in protest. “I wish I could pawn this task off on someone else; sadly, this is most definitely part of my job description.”

“Can I see your questions?” Draco asked with mild curiosity and with a shrug, Harry bent over and picked up several parchments in his vicinity. “They suck,” he mumbled as he took several careful steps towards Draco and handed them over.

“As usual, no faith in your abilities,” Draco rolled his eyes.

“It gets harder with each year I have to do this. The trainees tend to stick together and compare notes, which means that reusing previous exam papers is never an option. So, no, at present I have zero faith in my abilities,” Harry said desolately, yelping when he slipped on one of his many Muggle pens strewn about the floor. He flailed his arms, trying to grab hold of his desk, or anything really, but only reached into thin air.

Draco’s reaction was immediate and without the slightest bit of hesitation, almost as if it was second nature, he thrust his hand out and with a complex motion of his hand, he slowed Harry’s fall, gently setting him down on the floor and thus preventing any injury.

Harry took a deep breath to calm his rapidly beating heart and scrambled back off the floor. “Thanks,” he mumbled and steadying himself on his desk, he reached for Draco’s empty whiskey glass and poured himself a generous amount before taking a large gulp of the strong beverage to calm his nerves. That had been surreal.

“You’re welcome,” Draco shrugged, turning his attention towards the parchments in his hand.

“Where did you learn that?” Harry asked, now calm enough to let curiosity take over.

“I have a son, remember?” Draco smiled without looking up. “Scorpius had a penchant for climbing trees and then falling out of them when he was younger. I lost count of how many times I had to slow his fall to prevent serious head injuries.”

“Remind me to thank Scorpius then,” Harry grinned. This would make for a good story to tell Scorpius about in his next letter.
I'm afraid this is just a fairly short chapter, however it does move the story along rather nicely. *wink* Also, I better run before I get slaughtered.

“Get up, lazy arse,” Draco mumbled against the side of Harry’s neck, pressing a gentle kiss against the warm skin. Harry’s alarm had rather rudely interrupted his light slumber, dragging him from the depths of pleasant unconsciousness back to the dreariness of reality and the fact that it was already morning. He and Harry had spent half of the night working on those blasted exam papers. Harry had done the lion’s share of it all — *it was his job after all* — only occasionally asking for advice as well as insistently quizzing Draco on his knowledge of Defence Against the Dark Arts, Transfiguration, and Charms. There had also been the occasional question related to Herbology and Potions.

Draco’s repeated gentle reminders that he was neither an Auror nor had completed his final year at Hogwarts fell on deaf ears. Harry had, however, positively jumped at his suggestion to include a few common-sense questions into the exam. It had been a very Slytherin suggestion to make but Harry’s enthusiasm for it had amused Draco endlessly. By the time Harry was finally satisfied with the exam papers, having scribbled down the last question — *a trick question* — it had been two in the morning and Draco could not remember the last time he had stayed up this late.

Stretching his tired limbs languidly in bed, he nudged the back of Harry’s thighs with his knee, wondering whether perhaps a bit of rough treatment might rouse Harry from his current comatose state, but to no avail. Harry did not budge even an inch.

“I honestly don’t know why I give a fuck, but you’re going to be late for work,” Draco mumbled, firmly shaking Harry. “As I said, your regard for time is abysmal,” he added with distaste, frowning at the sleeping form of the man he had become so accustomed to sharing a bed with. “Harry Potter!” he snapped directly into Harry’s ear, pleased when he finally got a response as Harry shuddered in his sleep.

Much to Draco’s dismay, however, Harry did not wake up. Instead, he curled into an even smaller ball, pulled the heavy duvet even tighter around him, and all but vanished underneath it.

“Five more minutes. I’m tired,” came the pleading, muffled response and unable to resist, Draco gently clipped Harry around the head. Harry groaned in disapproval and rolled onto his front, reaching out to wrap his arms around his pillow and burying his face in it.

“You are unbelievable,” Draco sighed and decided to try a gentler approach once again. He slipped under the duvet and sought out the pleasantly warm skin of Harry’s back, peppering his shoulder blade with gentle kisses and nipping at the skin between it and Harry’s collarbone. “Get up, you’ll be late for work,” he whispered, wondering yet again why he cared so much about whether Harry was on time for work or not. It was not like he himself had anywhere pressing to be at this ungodly hour of the morning after less than half a night of sleep. If anything, he was the one who should be offended by the fact that Harry’s horrible Muggle alarm clock had so roughly dragged him from his sleep.

“Don’t care.”
“Get up.”

“Hmm, no.”

“Get up.”

“Five more minutes.”

“Why are you avoiding getting out of bed?” Draco questioned, his exasperation rising rapidly beyond anything he could control.

“’Cause it’s cosy and I love you.”

Draco froze at the sleepy response, momentarily forgetting to breathe as his ears rang with Harry’s half-coherent statement. He was quite sure that Harry had no idea what he’d just said — or did he? — but he couldn’t help the feeling of dizziness that swept over him, causing his stomach to twist violently and his vision to blur. It took every single ounce of his energy to force himself to keep breathing evenly and easing away from Harry, he firmly clasped a hand over his mouth and swallowed hard, willing the sudden bout of nausea that had washed over him away.

He had not at all been prepared to hear those words, hadn’t even allowed himself to think about the possibility of hearing them…or saying them. The mere idea terrified him. Feeling the sudden, irresistible urge to escape, he resolutely pushed the duvet back and slipped out of bed. He reached for his morning robe and throwing it on, he tip-toed out of the room, firmly ignoring Harry repeatedly calling his name.
“…and then he ran, again,” Harry concluded his summary of the last couple of weeks. He had well and truly laid it all bare for Hermione and she hadn’t even asked for it, he had just felt the need to vent to somebody and Hermione was a great listener.

His sleep-shrouded Freudian slip had resulted in Draco escaping a confrontation — yet again — and try as he might, this time Harry had found it impossible to deal with the situation all by himself. Draco being Draco, was arduously dodging his every attempt at them having a civilised conversation about what had transpired and Harry had well and truly reached the end of his tethers.

He could not understand Draco, and while he hadn’t meant to confess the depths of his feelings to Draco in the way he had, it didn’t make them any less true. He had fallen hard and deep for Draco and he knew that Draco’s feelings for him went beyond mere lust. He didn’t expect Draco to say the words in return but he wanted to explain, wanted Draco to know that he didn’t have to feel pressured.

For the last three nights, he had apparated to Malfoy Manor only to find the heavy wrought iron gates buzzing dangerously when he reached out to unlock them. It had made him beyond furious; so much even that he had attacked the gates with an angry *Relashio*, only to learn — the hard way — that the ancient wards protected the Manor by throwing the jinx right back at him. He had just about managed to dodge the jinx but had still taken a tumble, twisting his ankle painfully as he had gone down with a strange shrieking sound. To remind him of his own stupidity he resolutely refused to use magic to heal his ankle and had instead taken to limping about.

The only benefit of his injury had been that Cox had taken pity on him and pushed their meeting to the end of next week. Harry was almost eternally grateful for the fact that he didn’t have to deal with the man for a while, though if he were honest, he wasn’t entirely sure whether Cox had moved the meeting to give him the opportunity to recover or whether Cox didn’t want to or was afraid to see him. Both were valid possibilities and either one of them suited Harry just fine.

It had taken him several days of sulking but he had eventually managed to convince himself that he needed someone to talk to. Hermione had been his first choice. She had been supportive but not intrusive from the very beginning, and since he trusted her explicitly it had been rather easy to pour his heart out to her. For the last hour, she had listened patiently, nodding here and there, but not once interrupting him as he told her everything about Draco and how their initially professional partnership had progressed from tentative friendship to a relationship.

When she finally spoke, Hermione’s voice was soft and without the slightest bit of reproach at the mess he had managed to get himself into. Apparently, she didn’t care that he had been dating Draco Malfoy of all people and if she did — which Harry doubted because at this stage he had known her long enough — she hid it well.

“Thanks for telling me,” she simply said, taking a sip from her tea. “To be quite honest, I had my suspicions,” she smiled and Harry couldn’t help but roll his eyes at her.

“I figured you might,” he sighed. “Can you tell me what to do?”

“Talk to him?” Hermione offered.

“It’s not like I haven’t tried,” Harry said desolately, staring into the flickering flames of the fireplace in his living room, trying his hardest not to remember the first time he and Draco had kissed — in this
very room — and made love. Draco had run then too. And that time he had thought Harry was still with Milo Xavier. Draco Malfoy, Harry had come to learn, was very good at running from things he didn’t want to face.

“Try again?” Hermione suggested and trying to ignore his pounding headache, Harry reached for his tumbler of Firewhiskey and took a rather large sip. He had tried tea but had quickly realised that, to bare it all to Hermione, he needed something stronger than tea.

“How? He is ignoring my owls and he has clearly removed my magical signature from the Manor’s wards.” Harry absent-mindedly stroked his ankle, which was slowly getting better but still sore, especially when he walked long distances or remained standing for too long. “I really did mean it, you know,” he mumbled, pulling a grimace as his heart twisted painfully. Yes, he had been half asleep when he had told Draco that he loved him for the first time, but that hadn’t made it any less true. He had known for a while but hadn’t brought it up, figuring it was too early to discuss feelings of this magnitude with Draco. Clearly, his subconscious had other plans for him and Draco.

“I know you did, Harry,” Hermione’s reply was soft and comforting and her gentle squeeze of his knee reassuring. “I support you, you know. If you’re happy I really don’t care who you date and you needn’t worry about Ron. He’s all talk but if you tell him he’ll be chuffed for you. He might grumble a bit and crack an inappropriate joke or three but he won’t renounce your friendship.”

“After nearly two and a half decades, I should hope not.” Harry smiled wistfully and finally tearing his gaze away from the dancing flames of his fireplace he focused on Hermione. “Thanks ‘Mione, you always were and will always be the most amazing woman I know.”

“Charmer,” she chuckled. “Just a thought, but have you tried floo’ing to Malfoy Manor?” she then asked and Harry frowned at her. He was about to remind her of the fact that Draco had locked him out of the wards when she held up her hand to stop his imminent protests.

“Removing someone from the wards of an ancient place like Malfoy Manor and blocking them from the Floo isn’t the same thing. While including your magical signature in the wards of the Manor also gave you access to the Floo, removing you from the wards did not automatically block you from floo’ing to the Manor.”

“Forgive me, but I’m rather lost.”

“I figured you might be,” Hermione smiled. “Would you like me to explain it to you in detail?”

“I think I’ll pass,” Harry rejected her offer. Still, she had ignited a glimmer of hope in him and while he had no idea whether her suggestion would work, it made him feel a little better. He felt tempted to ask his best friend if she intended to gift him with a book on ancient wards for Christmas but suppressed the urge to do so. Somehow, he had the feeling that she would do so anyway.

“You know, Harry, Draco Malfoy is an extremely gifted wizard, he would know that removing you from the wards wouldn’t necessarily block you from using the Floo to get to him. So, if he hasn’t blocked the Floo, I think you should take that as a sign that he wants to talk but perhaps just doesn’t know how to.”

“That or he’s getting senile,” Harry couldn’t help but laugh. “Don’t let him ever know I said that, he’ll burn me alive.”

“I’ve no doubt about it,” Hermione chuckled. “Don’t go tonight. You’ve had a bit too much of that stuff,” she motioned towards the Firewhiskey in his hand, “and matters of the heart should always be discussed with a clear mind.”
The Elephant In The Room

Chapter Notes

Again, just a short chapter, but I didn't feel that it was necessary to write more to that scene. Some of you may beg to differ in which case *enters witness protection*...

“Are we going to talk about the elephant in the room, or are you just going to resume brewing that potion, pretending that I don’t exist?” Harry asked with a certain level of exasperation as Draco stubbornly remained silent and continued to stir the potion in front of him. Harry highly doubted that the brew — no matter how complex — required quite that much attention.

He had been pleased to discover that he had indeed been able to enter the Manor via the Floo but frustration and anger had long since taken the place of his initial delight. Draco was thoroughly testing his patience and Harry wasn’t sure how much longer he would be able to keep his cool. Flicking his wand to banish that cauldron was rapidly looking like a very good idea.

Moving further into the room, Harry stopped at the exquisite ebony workbench and bracing himself on it, he relished in the smooth feeling of the expensive custom-made piece of furniture. The wood was cool to the touch and it somewhat tempered the myriad of emotions coursing through him.

“You never cease to amaze, Head Auror Potter,” Draco spoke, eyes still focused on the potion in front of him.

Wondering whether there was a compliment hidden there somewhere, Harry wisely chose to ignore the snarky dig. “Contrary to what you may think, Draco, I’m not entirely brainless,” Harry replied, deciding that right now was not the time to confess that it had been Hermione who had solved the problem for him. “Am I to assume that you purposefully refrained from blocking me from the Floo then?” he pushed.

“If it makes you feel better,” Draco shrugged and reaching for a small silver flask, he poured something into his cauldron. Harry watched, captivated, as the liquid from the flask briefly floated on top of the potion, then dispersed. A second later the potion’s colour changed from dark, almost black, to the clearest turquoise Harry had ever seen.

“Must you be like this?” Harry sighed, trying, but failing, to ignore the constricting feeling in his chest as his brain attempted to rationalise the situation. It tried to rule over his heart and emotions, possibly to spare him the heartbreak Harry figured was imminent. “I meant what I said to you the other day, you know?”

His question — albeit rhetorical in nature — went unanswered as Draco resumed acting like absolutely nothing was amiss, like Harry hadn’t told him that he loved him and like he wasn’t running away from facing the facts, barricading himself in his Manor instead.

“What are you so fucking afraid of? That I run to the Daily Prophet and proclaim my undying love for you in a front-page exposé?” Harry said, the vexation in his voice now plainly evident as his heart fought back, refusing to accept logic and reason, but instead desperately wanting to sort this out. “Draco——” Harry sighed. “If you don’t feel the same, I’ll understand, I’m not here to push you, I just— I care about you, about us. I want a chance to explain. Can we please talk like the adults we
are?” Harry begged, fervently trying to keep his growing desperation out of his voice, but knowing that he was failing miserably.

Resisting the urge to slam his hand onto the table, Harry instead ran it through his hair and exhaled softly. He hesitated for a moment, then, not knowing what else to do, turned around and headed for the door. He stopped in the doorway and turning back he found Draco looking at him. Their eyes locked and Harry felt the intense urge to walk back into the room. He wanted to grab Draco by the collar and force him to acknowledge that they had something to talk about, force him to listen, force him to admit that he too had feelings that went beyond simple infatuation and the love of good sex.

Instead, he took a deep breath and as he opened his mouth, he thought he could feel his heart break slowly. “If you’re going to break up with me over this, Draco, at least have the decency to tell me to my face instead of playing this game of hide and seek. If you absolutely must, send an owl,” with that he resolutely turned and made his way back to the entrance hall of the Manor where he grabbed a handful of Floo Powder and tossing it into the flames, he called out his destination and left.

He stumbled out of the fireplace in his kitchen a few moments later and he blamed his burning eyes on the coal dust. Blinking furiously, he dusted himself off and headed upstairs into this bedroom. He stripped out of his clothes, headed for the shower, and stepping into the large shower cubicle, he stood under the powerful jets and let the hot water cascade down over him. Steam filled the bathroom and Harry couldn’t come up with a plausible reason as to why he was crying, yet refused to acknowledge the tears.
A Portkey

Harry warily eyed the familiar owl that had flown into his office. It had perched itself on his desk and was eyeing him with a bit of disdain. Ministry regulations stipulated that owls had to leave all mail at the owlery, but this owl was rather special. It didn’t like anyone telling it what it could and could not do. Harry had wisely informed the owlery to let it pass.

“Can I refuse your letter?” he asked the owl and instantly found himself the unwanted recipient of a rather unfriendly peck of a very sharp beak. “Ow,” he winced and sucked his now bleeding index finger into his mouth. “You’ve never been this vicious before,” he sighed and absent-mindedly reached into his left top drawer to produce some of Earl’s favourite treats. He held them out to his winged visitor in hopes of appeasing the clearly ill-tempered bird.

Much to Harry’s astonishment it ever so gently snatched a treat from the palm of his outstretched hand and swallowed it. Acting on instinct alone, Harry reached out to stroke the owl, marvelling at the softness of its feathers. “Give that letter here then,” he mumbled and the owl dutifully extended its foot and hooted softly. The moment he detached the letter, the owl spread its wings and took flight, swooping out of his office. “Great, let’s get this over and done with then,” Harry muttered. It was a feeble attempt to encourage himself to face the music.

Several days had passed since his disastrous attempt of talking to Draco about his slip of the tongue and in order to distract himself from the end of his relationship, he had buried himself in work, dividing his time between mountains of paperwork — since he had taken up the position of Head Auror his desk had never been this devoid of case files — and putting the Auror trainees through their paces until they actually begged for mercy.

He had been about to give them a proper bollocking to teach them about the realities of being an Auror when Ron had quite literally dragged him away to rein him in. Being the good friend that he was, he had insisted that Harry accompany him into the field instead. Harry had thoroughly relished the opportunity to be part of the action and had willingly joined Ron and his team on a raid to confiscate illegal wand woods. It had been a rather straight-forward raid and nothing unusual had happened but not being stuck in his office had done Harry a world of good.

Realising that he still hadn’t opened the letter in his hand, Harry forced himself out of his reverie. He broke the familiar red seal, — a beautifully slanted M for Malfoy — pulled out a parchment and was rather surprised when a signet ring fell out of the envelope and landed on his desk. Picking it up, he instantly recognised it as the ring Draco always wore on his right ring finger. It bore the elaborate Malfoy crest and absent-mindedly running his finger over the letter, Harry unfolded the parchment.

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Harry,

The ring you’re holding is a portkey. It will activate tomorrow at 10 am.

Please trust me.

See you.

D.M.

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The message was short and it instantly filled Harry with curiosity. He twisted the ring in his hand, mindlessly toying with it and smiled as it slipped onto his ring finger as though it belonged there. He
reread Draco’s brief note, and couldn’t help but wonder where the Portkey would take him tomorrow. The more he thought about it, the more exotic the possible destinations became and he laughed at his ridiculously colourful imagination.

Despite it all, however, he couldn’t help the feeling of slight apprehensiveness he could feel growing in the pit of his stomach. He didn’t know what to expect and his overactive imagination only proved to make matters worse. Knowing that he wouldn’t get a scrap of work done — he was too distracted — he checked the time on his Muggle watch. Three in the afternoon was a little bit early for the Head of the Auror Department to stop working for the day, but he gave in to the temptation anyway. Some ten minutes later, Harry stood on Whitehall. Not knowing what to do with himself, he hesitated for several moments, then shrugged and started walking. He doubted that a long walk through Central London would stop him from thinking, but it was a million times better than sitting at his desk in his office, brooding away.

He aimlessly strolled down Horse Guards Ave down to the Victoria Embankment and stood by the low stone wall, looking out over the River Thames. He let his eyes wander but not settle. People bustled by but he paid no heed to them. Eventually, the London Eye drew his attention and Harry couldn’t help but wonder why he had never bothered to enjoy the view himself. He found himself imagining whether he might manage to persuade Draco to ride the monstrosity with him and the ease with which he could picture Draco’s disdainful expression and imagine the entire conversation frightened him.

Harry found himself clenching his fist, suddenly terrified to lose Draco’s signet ring and feeling queasy he resumed his unplanned walking tour of London. Heading along the Victoria Embankment, he eventually turned onto Great George Street and the next time he bothered to check where he was, he was surprised to find himself standing at the gates to Downing Street, the residence of the Muggle Prime Minister. He nodded towards one of the guards — one of his Aurors in Muggle Police uniform — then resolutely turned around and entered St James’s Park. He found an empty bench near the lake, where he sat for the longest time, wondering what would happen when that portkey activated tomorrow morning.

By the time Harry finally arrived back at Grimmauld Place, it was late in the evening. He was cold and quite frankly starving. At some point during the second part of his walk he had ended up in front of Gio’s restaurant but not even the loud protests of his rumbling stomach had managed to convince him to enter without Draco. It just didn’t feel right.

Once at home, Harry settled for a sandwich and some tea, then headed into his study to distract himself with catching up on his personal correspondence. At the top of his list was Scorpius Malfoy; he owed the boy a lengthy response. Sleep would most definitely not come easy tonight and as he sat down behind his desk, he wondered whether he would get any at all.
Harry stood in his kitchen with Draco’s signet ring firmly clenched in his fist. He had thought about putting it down on the table but his hand refused to relax, refused to let go. Drawing his wand, he cast a Tempus charm and eyes fixed on the clock floating in front of him, he stood waiting. Two minutes to go. He hadn’t slept a wink last night and at this stage, his nerves were well and truly frayed. The four cups of coffee he had consumed this morning hadn’t helped either. If anything, they had only wired him up some more. At some point, he had attempted to distract himself with paperwork, but the reports had made no sense to him and he had been too fixated on the time to really let go and focus on something else.

With less than ten seconds to go, Harry drew in a deep breath and closing his eyes, he braced himself for the familiar pull of the portkey as it activated and tugged at him, transporting him through a violent blur of nothingness. He managed to keep his nausea at bay but even though it had been more than twenty years since his first portkey travel, Harry could not shake the feeling of discomfort and was relieved when the journey ended only a few minutes later.

He landed rather gracefully — practice did apparently make perfect — and still clutching Draco’s signet ring, he looked around. He stood on a gravelled driveway, facing a beautifully imposing villa that looked to be at least a hundred years old, if not older. With its many pillars and the open balcony above the entrance, it had a distinct Roman feel to it. Several large, old trees, palm trees, and evergreen shrubs in oversized terracotta flower pots flanked the building, giving it a distinctly Mediterranean feel. The lawn on either side of the gravel road appeared meticulously maintained and to Harry’s left, a white marble pavilion reflected the bright sunlight. It made Harry squint as he looked around, trying to spot the very person who had invited him to this obviously secluded place. Despite the sunshine, the temperature was low and Harry inwardly shivered at the cold but was too preoccupied to really let it affect him.

“Draco?” Harry called out and taking a few cautionary steps towards the villa, he realised that the front door stood open. Walking towards it, he stood in the doorway and peeked inside. “Draco?” he called out again, boldly stepping into the entrance hall and looking around. White marble seemed to be the common theme and several doors, light-brown in colour, a staircase with a jade-infused marble bannister and two hallways forked off the entrance hall. Unsure about what to do or where to go, Harry contemplated for a moment when he heard a voice.

“Come upstairs,” an unfamiliar female voice drifted down to him and not needing anyone to tell him twice, Harry bounded up the stone stairs only to find himself standing in a gigantic sitting room. The floor appeared to be marble also, leaving Harry with no doubt that in terms of the decoration money had not been an issue. An array of cream-coloured sofas and armchairs filled the room, which felt airy and welcoming. In stark contrast to Malfoy Manor, there was not a single piece of dark furniture around. Chestnut-brown was the darkest colour he had spotted so far.

As Harry’s gaze drifted around the room, he found himself staring at a large portrait of a beautiful young woman above the fireplace. He instantly recognised her as Astoria Malfoy (née Greengrass), Draco’s deceased wife and the mother of his son, Scorpius. She sat on a swing underneath a beautiful old oak tree, with a book in her hands, but she was looking at him. She smiled warmly and her chocolate-brown eyes twinkled with mirth. She raised her hand in a gentle but silent greeting and Harry, mesmerised and surprised alike, found himself doing the same.

“He’s outside on the terrace, waiting for you,” Astoria said, her voice as soft as her smile. Looking towards the large open windows, Harry spotted Draco, who stood with his back to him. Draco had
dressed, quite uncharacteristically for a Malfoy, entirely in white, and unable to resist the temptation, Harry crossed the room and stepped out onto the terrace.

“Hi,” he said, his voice quiet and low, still unsure what to make of this whole situation or how to approach it.

“Have a look at this view,” Draco invited him closer and walking up to him, Harry looked out over the stone banister, instantly stunned by the natural beauty that opulently sprawled itself before his eyes; mountains, forests dotted with houses and villas and a sky so vibrantly blue that Harry found himself squinting again. Beneath him a clear blue lake stretched out into both directions of a narrow valley and boats of all sizes and shapes floated around on it.

“Where are we?” he wanted to know, his voice barely a whisper. The view was mesmerising and to once again be in the company of the man he loved took his breath away. He simply didn’t dare to speak any louder for fear that he had finally fallen asleep at the kitchen table and all this was but a dream.

“Moltrasio,” Draco answered him, his eyes fixed on the majestic mountain range in the distance, with its snow-covered mountain tips.

“Sounds Italian.”

“We are in Italy,” Draco affirmed, slowly turning to face Harry, who had torn his eyes away from the stunning view in favour of looking at Draco. “Welcome to Villa Astoria,” he smiled faintly, raising the glass of deep-red wine in his hand in a silent toast, then taking a sip.

Unsure of what to reply to that, Harry remained silent but unable to tear his gaze away from Draco’s, he allowed himself to drown in those clear grey-blue eyes, losing himself in them as his heart twisted painfully and skipped a beat at the same time. His stomach churned and fluttered all at once. A million emotions, he had no hope in hell to identify or control, for that matter, threatened to overwhelm him all at once and Harry felt a little dizzy. He reached out and placed a steadying hand on the terrace’s stone railing.

Letting the minutes pass, they both stood in silence, looking, drowning in each other’s eyes, until the burning sensation of his curiosity was too much for Harry to bear and he opened his mouth with the very intention to ask Draco what they were doing here, in Italy, in a villa named after Draco’s wife.

“She was my best friend, you know,” Draco spoke before Harry had the chance to utter his first syllable. “She was my partner in crime. I loved her, in some way at least. After the war, she turned my world upside down. When we married, I thought ours would be a traditional pureblood marriage but she surprised me at every turn. Scorpius, he was a surprise too, her surprise. She was a ray of sunshine, bright, funny, smart, outspoken, determined. She never ran out of ideas when it came to entertaining Scorpius. We used to have the craziest debates until late into the night and I lost every single one of them. The concept of backing down was not in her vocabulary. When she had an opinion, she would make damn sure you were listening.”

“Why are you telling me all this?” Harry asked, surprised at Draco’s complete honesty and the intimate details of his life with Astoria he was suddenly sharing. Up until this point, Draco had never divulged much information about his life with Astoria. Then again, Harry had never really asked. Draco ignored his question and continued.

“She had real poise. She knew, you know? She knew about me being gay, but never once said a word… A few days before she passed, she called me to her bedside and told me her dying wish. She said she wasn’t worried about Scorpius growing up without her, but insisted that I promise her to
find someone who would love me at least as much as she had always and would always love me, if
not more.” Draco paused and with a wistful smile he took another sip of his wine.

“I never bothered, you know, never bothered to find someone. I was content in my own little bubble.
When I told her about what you said and how I reacted she called me — How did she put it? A
complete dunderhead, yes, I believe those were her words. Can’t say I’ve ever been called that
before.” Draco paused again and feeling the sudden urge to return the signet ring to Draco, Harry
silently held it out to him. Draco smiled and as he took it from Harry’s hand, his fingers ever so
lightly brushed against Harry’s skin, setting it on fire. “She’s right you know. I am a complete idiot. I
ran from a good thing. I ran from you in a blind panic and not for the first time either.”

“It wasn’t your finest moment, admittedly.”

“Shut it, Potter, I’m not finished.”

“Sorry.”

“If I promise you not to run, would you say it again?”

“Say what again?” Harry asked, suddenly feeling rather mischievous as his brain cells clicked into
gear once more and he realised that Draco was attempting to apologise to him. Apologise and
possibly confess his feelings?

“Potter,” Draco scowled, “do not make me hex you again.”

“Malfoy, you wouldn’t,” Harry countered, bemused, but sobered up rather quickly when Draco took
a step towards him, reducing the gap between them to a mere few inches. Their eyes locked and
Harry’s breath instantly caught in his throat. His heart started thumping wildly and he drew in a
shaky breath as he mentally tried to prepare himself to consciously repeat the words that had sent
Draco running for the hills.

“I love you,” it was barely a whisper, but to Harry, it felt like he had shouted the words at the top of
his lungs.

“I love you too,” Draco’s response was almost instant, completely devoid of a snarky remark, just
four little words, an emotion laid bare, a confession, a promise. It was so beautiful that Harry’s heart
skipped several beats.

Without the slightest hesitation, Harry found himself lunging forward and sliding his arms around
Draco’s neck, he pulled him into such a fierce kiss that the wine glass in Draco’s hand crashed to the
floor. Much to Harry’s delight, Draco reciprocated and they embraced tightly. Their lips met in a
rough and passionate kiss, a silent seal, a physical affirmation of what they felt for each other. It was
bold, it was sexy and for the longest time, neither one of them could get enough of the other.

“I have to admit it’s rather strange seeing you dressed all in white,” Harry mused aloud and Draco
laughed with genuine amusement.

“Believe me, I couldn’t agree more.”

“Any particular reason for this peculiar un-Malfoy-like attire?” Harry inquired, the curiosity evident
in his distractingly green eyes.

Given the circumstances, everything had worked out well. After Draco’s initial confession they had
enjoyed a rather luxurious lunch and a leisurely stroll through the villa’s impressive gardens before
returning to the sitting room on the second floor to sit by the fire, which Draco had lit for them to ward off the wintery chill of the afternoon. Astoria was suspiciously absent from her portrait, though Draco knew her not to have wandered far. Just far enough to give them privacy, far enough to not be privy to their conversation.

They hadn’t broached the subject of Draco’s rather spectacular avoidance of those three little words again, but Draco wasn’t worried. Not anymore. Something told him that they were okay, more than okay, and that Harry had forgiven him for his rather foolish handling of the entire situation. Apparently, the way to Harry Potter’s heart was a surprise portkey trip to Italy, a heartfelt confession on a terrace overlooking Lake Como, and a scrumptious Italian meal. While he hoped not to have to resolve to pull such stunts again, Draco most definitely filed the discovery away for future reference.

He had also most definitely learnt a lesson or two about taking a leap of faith and jumping over one’s own shadow. Looking back now, he couldn’t quite comprehend what about Harry’s confession had terrified him so much that he had done everything humanly possible to push Harry away. It wasn’t like he was still married, and something told him that Scorpius would have no objections to him being in a relationship. Then again, Draco wasn’t ready to cross that bridge yet.

“Astoria,” Draco shrugged, “she wanted nothing dark in this place and that included furniture, magic of course, and clothing.”

“And being the good and obedient husband, you, of course, did as you were told.”

“It wasn’t up for debate. Astoria wasn’t that kind of woman.”

“I have the feeling I should get some tips from this woman; she seems to know you so much better than I do.”

Draco scowled, not liking Harry’s mischievous smile one bit. “We were married for a decade, what do you expect?”

“So, what you’re saying is that if I want to have any hope of getting to know you, I must marry you and then spend a decade living in your pocket, is that correct?” Harry teased, cheeky confidence written all over his face.

Draco sighed. “That is not at all what I meant, Harry, and you know it. I shall from now on, however, endeavour to be less elusive.”

“That would be nice.”

For a moment silence descended over them, but Draco could tell that Harry had something on his mind. He had never been particularly good at masking his emotions. It was dead obvious that Harry wanted to ask him something but was for whatever reason holding back.

“What is it then?” Draco said with mock-exasperation. “You’re practically bursting with the effort it’s taking you to keep it inside.”

“I don’t want to prod,” Harry said with a shrug, the hesitation still evident in his voice.

“I whisked you away to Italy and told you that I love you — I think you’re allowed to prod a little.” Draco found himself smiling and gazing into his wine; he took a small sip, savouring the taste.

“When you make it sound like that...” Harry laughed and Draco couldn’t resist the temptation of the delicious throaty sound. It had a strange effect on him, one he couldn’t quite describe. He was feeling rather good, still pleasantly sated from their lunch and comfortably warm in their little cocoon here by
the fire. “There were rumours about you, Astoria, and Scorpius leaving England for a few years. Somehow, I always thought you went to France, but when you took me to Gio’s restaurant and showed off your Italian, I— “

“I didn’t show off!” Draco glared but conceded at Harry’s protest. “When I came of age the ownership of the Manor transferred to me, ancient wards and all. When I married, father and mother moved to Chateau D’Malfoy in the South of France. As for Italy, Astoria was always rather fascinated with it. I bought her this place for our first wedding anniversary.”

“You do realise that the first wedding anniversary is paper, right? One does not normally gift villas,” Harry mocked good-naturedly and while Draco felt like furrowing his brows into a deep frown, he laughed instead.

“The deed was written on paper.”

“Draco Malfoy, you’re the strangest person I have ever met in my entire life.”

“Ah, but you—” Draco bit his lip and swallowed the rest of the sentence, suddenly unsure whether that kind of joke was appropriate, given that they had only just sorted out their differences in that regard.

“Say it,” Harry pushed softly.

Draco hesitated for a moment, then shrugged, deciding he was too old to play games. “Ah, but you love me.”


“Trust me, Potter, if anyone had told me I’d once be saying these three words to you, I would have shipped them off the St Mungo’s, post haste, but you seem to have somehow wormed your way underneath my skin, and for some completely inexplicable reason I like you there.”

“Aww, you say the sweetest things.”

“Doesn’t he?” Astoria chimed in from her portrait and Draco glared up at her, thoroughly displeased that she had chosen exactly that moment to return to her favourite portrait frame. “Drake, darling, loosen up, will you?” she continued, clearly unperturbed by her husband’s icy death glare. “You don’t intimidate me, sweetheart, you never have,” she laughed sweetly, gently swinging back and forth on her swing.

“Would you stop embarrassing me already?” Draco found himself hissing through gritted teeth as he fought hard to stop himself from flushing. “You are impossible.”

“Yes, dear, I recall you telling me this before,” Astoria laughed again and Draco could tell that their conversation affected Harry, who was now politely gazing into the crackling flames of the fireplace. He was clearly trying his best to pretend that he wasn’t witnessing a private conversation between two people who quite obviously knew each other inside out. Strangely, it didn’t seem to matter that one of them was already dead and that he, therefore, had nothing to be worried about.

“I clearly didn’t tell you often enough,” Draco sighed and looking up at Astoria with pleading eyes, Draco fervently hoped that she would understand and give them a little more privacy. She did and with a nod, she wandered out of the frame, leaving them alone once again. Once undisturbed, Draco didn’t really know what to say to Harry and so they both sat in silence, Harry still lost in the dancing flames of the fireplace and Draco slowly drinking his wine. It felt like comfortable silence, but Draco still couldn’t shake the feeling that there was something on Harry’s mind, something that preoccupied
“Are you okay?” Draco asked as he slipped under the bedsheets and curled up behind Harry, spooning him.

Dinner had been a rather quiet affair and although they had chatted about a few of Harry’s recent cases, Draco still couldn’t shake the strange feeling that Harry’s heart wasn’t quite in it, that he was miles away. He was attentive, actively participated in their conversation, and had most definitely enjoyed their late-night stroll around the nearby village, but at the same time, there was a certain kind of distance in his eyes. The longer it lasted, the more worried Draco got. He was kind of grateful for the fact that they were now lying in the dark and he could no longer see that thin fog of distraction in Harry’s usually so vibrant eyes.

“You loved her very much, didn’t you?” Harry’s question took Draco by surprise and he remained silent for a moment, contemplating how to best answer Harry’s unexpected inquiry. Distractedly, he trailed his fingers down Harry’s upper arm, along the crook of his elbow and down his forearm. When he reached Harry’s hand, he interlaced their fingers and squeezed gently.

“Yes,” he replied, pressing a kiss against the nape of Harry’s neck. “Is that what had you so distracted this evening? I never loved her in a passionate sort of way, you know. We had a very close bond, because of Scorpius, but it was never romantic love.”

“I’m jealous,” the words were barely audible but in the silence of the night, Draco caught it anyway. Harry’s surprising confession resulted in a painful tug in Draco’s chest and not really knowing how to react, he settled for sarcasm.

“Of my dead wife who’s mocking me from her portrait?”

“It’s nice to have someone who knows you well enough to call you out on your bullshit.”

“Would you like me to mock you even more than I already do? And here was I thinking that you would want me to try and be more lenient,” Draco mumbled. He resumed nuzzling Harry’s neck, kissing him gently to distract him further.

“Could you?”

“I doubt it. Anyway, I would have thought that your friends call you out on your bullshit on a regular basis.”

“You mean Hermione and Ron? It’s not the same. They notice a lot, especially Hermione, but there’s also a lot I can keep from them if I really try. I always wanted to find someone who would notice all the little things they don’t.”

“Who knew, Harry Potter is a great romantic after all,” Draco whispered and pressed another few kisses against the nape of Harry’s neck while his hand idly explored, drawing irregular patterns over Harry’s arms, his side, his stomach, and his chest.

Harry’s only response was an amused chuckle and after a moment of silence — during which Draco continued his gentle assault on Harry’s neck and the surrounding area if only to give his mouth something to do — Draco did a doubletake when Harry suddenly apologised. “Sorry.”

“What for?” Draco found himself asking, astonished.

“Being mopey?” Harry offered. Draco chuckled against Harry’s deliciously warm skin and relished
in the shudder that he could feel surge through Harry’s body.

“You’re weird,” he murmured and continued with his mouth’s exploration of Harry’s neck and shoulder.

“Is that supposed to be a compliment?”

“Yes. Absolutely.”

“In that case, you’re weird too.”

“Match made in heaven then,” Draco laughed.

“Quite possibly so. I worry about my sanity.”

“You should.”

“Gee, Draco.”

“I know, I say the sweetest things.”

Harry’s only response was a groan and Draco sniggered with genuine amusement. Somehow, Draco thought, there wasn’t much of a difference between the way he and Harry conversed with each other and the way he and Astoria had conversed before her death. But he wasn’t about to tell Harry that. Not now anyway. Perhaps, not ever. He figured showing Harry that he could be the person Harry really wanted would have far more of an effect and so he quietly vowed to make it his mission to notice all the little things about Harry, from the most mundane things he did all the way to all those strange things he said and did all the time.

“Harry,” he spoke softly and Harry hummed in response. “I promise to call you out on your bullshit on a regular basis and I promise to notice all the little things,” he whispered and in response to that Harry shuffled, turned in his arms and kissed him hotly.

Draco allowed the kiss to happen, rolled onto his back and pulled Harry on top of him. For the rest of the night, talking was the one thing they didn’t do.
A bit of a time jump from the last chapter to this one, but I felt it necessary to move the story along, otherwise I would only have mind-numbing fluff or filthy smut for you (and yes, I realise most of you would probably not mind that at all...)

“Tell me again why I let you talk me into this?” Draco sighed, shooting Scorpius a reproachful look. He tightened his hold on the handrail as the doors to the carriage slid closed, signalling that the train was about to leave the station and vanish into a dark tunnel. He could think of far better ways to spend his time than being stuck on the London Underground. Shagging Harry Potter senseless was one of them, enjoying a good meal with the man was another. As the list in his head grew longer and Draco realised that most of the ‘better ways to spend his time’ included Harry’s company, he resolutely reined his thoughts in and focused on Scorpius.

“Because you’re an awesome dad?” Scorpius offered with a cheeky grin.

“Buttering me up isn’t going to earn you any plus points here, young man,” Draco admonished, eyeing his surroundings with distaste. The crowded carriage, the loud chatter inside, and the train’s noise were grating on Draco’s nerves.

According to Scorpius, his Muggle Studies professor required them to use Muggle transportation over the holidays and then write an essay about it. Fresh off the Hogwarts Express and home for the Christmas holidays, Scorpius had therefore politely demanded that they take Muggle transportation all the way home to Wiltshire.

Scorpius also hadn’t given Draco the chance to contemplate the impact of his request before he, overeager and clearly too hormonal for his own good, had already started to drag him off towards the information desk. Draco had just about enough time to shrink Scorpius’ trunk into a more manageable small suitcase before he had found himself amidst a crowd of Muggles rushing into various directions. By the time Draco had comprehended that using Muggle transportation to get home to Wiltshire would take them nearly three hours, he had vehemently refused to participate in Scorpius’ educational experiment.

Much to the amusement of the middle-aged lady at the information desk, a heated discussion, which Scorpius had eventually won, had ensued. Draco had attempted to resolve to anything from bribery to threatening with house arrest yet somehow, Scorpius had still convinced him to head to the ticket counter to purchase the tickets required for their journey home. He had idly wondered just when Scorpius had turned into a miniature version of Astoria and that had been the exact moment that he had crumbled and given into his son’s ridiculous demands.

Draco wholeheartedly regretted his lack of backbone, but there was no going back now. Instead of heading to a designated Apparition Point, they would be taking the tube, a train and finally a bus.

Admittedly, Draco didn’t understand half of the schedule the lady at the information desk had handed Scorpius. It wasn’t that he had never taken Muggle transportation before, it was just that he had never bothered to really understand it. But since his teenage son appeared to know what he was doing, Draco decided to take a backseat, at least for the time being. He wasn’t entirely sure whether
allowing a thirteen-year-old to oversee their journey home was responsible parenting but Scorpius was his Achilles’ heel and he often gave into his son’s requests.

*Besides*, he thought, if worse came to worse, he could always resort to using magic to somehow get them back to the Manor. He wasn’t entirely convinced that it was an entirely sane decision, but he had made worse decisions in his life and the knowledge that, should they get lost, he could always apparate them home, gave him at least a little bit of comfort.

“Come on, dad, we need to get off this train,” Scorpius insistent tugging at his sleeve, pulled Draco out of his musings and back into the real world. Following his son off the train, he vaguely registered that they had reached Paddington Station.

“Now what?” he asked, trying to keep his exasperation to a minimum as he continuously tried to dodge the throng of people pushing past them in a bid to either get on or off a train.

“We’ve got to walk to Paddington Station, the actual train station that is; this is the tube station. Our train leaves from platform 10 in about ten minutes,” Scorpius replied with an air of confidence that actually surprised Draco. Much to his astonishment, he found himself getting just a little bit excited at the prospect of going on an adventure with his son. At the very least it meant that they would be able to spend quality time together and after several months apart, that seemed like as good an excuse as any to let Scorpius get away with all this nonsense.

“Come on then, we better not miss that train,” he said with a smile that now came quite naturally. The silly grin on Scorpius’ face did not escape his notice and they both made their way through the underground station and towards the exit that would lead them up to Paddington Railway Station.

“…and by the time he finally relented and allowed me to apparate us home, it was nearly ten pm,” Draco concluded the tale of his and Scorpius’ adventure with British Muggle transportation.

Harry bit his bottom lip and tried his hardest to suppress his laughter but not even Draco’s icy death glare could keep his eyes from dancing with amusement. “I wish I could have been a fly on the wall.”

“I’m rapidly regretting telling you about all this,” Draco sighed while taking a sip from his Firewhiskey. With Scorpius fast asleep in his bed at the Manor, he had risked floo’ing over to Grimmauld Place see Harry and enjoy a nightcap with him. They hadn’t seen each other in several days and Draco sorely missed his company. He had been busy preparing the Manor for Scorpius’ arrival and Harry had been busy working his way through a never-ending stream of paperwork — *and useless meetings he couldn’t get out of* — before everyone dispersed for the Christmas holidays. Except for a handful of Aurors who had to remain on duty in case of an emergency, most Ministry employees would be off. Harry would be off but on call.

Things had gone surprisingly well for them both in the relationship department these past few weeks, but neither Harry nor Draco felt the need to go public about their relationship. They were content to remain in their little bubble of secrecy. Their relationship still felt too new and they didn’t want to share it with the public — not yet anyway.

At a recent charity Quidditch match between the Holyhead Harpies and Puddlemere United, a photographer from *The Prophet* had photographed them sitting together in a VIP Box and to avoid wild speculations, Harry had issued a formal statement to the press. In it, he explained that following Draco’s invaluable assistance in sending a nefarious gang of potions smugglers to Azkaban, they had remained on friendly terms and occasionally saw each other outside of work. Since Harry had issued the written statement on his official Head Auror stationery, *The Prophet* and any other wizarding
publication had accepted his explanation. They wisely chose not to question a senior ministry official and Draco applauded them for their sense of propriety.

When Draco had read the article including the statement, he had practically doubled over laughing. He had, quite uncharacteristically for him, spent all evening questioning Harry about the exact details of those friendly terms — wanting to know, in minute detail of course, what they entailed. Mildly annoyed but mostly amused Harry had played along and for a while, it had become a wicked little game between them as they mercilessly mocked each other about exactly what the friendly terms of their relationship were.

They were fairly at ease in each other’s company and following their little hiccup that had ended with an unplanned weekend in Italy, they had soon settled into a comfortable routine. It entailed sharing a meal at Gio’s restaurant once a week, Harry spending most weekends at the Manor and Draco occasionally popping to Grimmauld Place for a nightcap and a leisurely breakfast the following morning before Harry headed off to work.

On a couple of rare occasions Draco, under the pretence of advising on a potion supposedly found at a crime scene, had even joined Harry at the office for lunch. Harry figured his senior Aurors probably had their suspicions about the nature of their bosses’ relationship with the department’s new potions expert liaison — at least he hoped they did, if only to prove they were decent Aurors — but also knew that they were far too professional to question him directly, or gossip about his relationship status.

Having told Hermione about his and Draco’s relationship, Harry had felt obliged to sit Ron down for a chat too. It had taken him a while to gather up the courage and after some hesitation, he had finally decided that Friday night drinks at the Leaky Cauldron were as good as any opportunity to come clean. Much to Harry’s surprise, Ron had taken the news surprisingly well. It had taken him a moment or two to recover from the shock, but once he had, he had been astonishingly supportive. Just like Hermione had predicted.

Naturally, Ron used every opportunity he got to mock Harry, but it was all good-natured camaraderie and Harry found that he had no objections. The four of them had gone out for dinner once and Harry’s worries about it being a tense affair had been completely unfounded. There had been some uncomfortable silence at the beginning, but Draco had been on his best behaviour. He hadn’t made a single remark about Ron’s hair and in return, Ron hadn’t mentioned anything about that dratted incident with a ferret in their fourth year.

By the time Gio had served them dessert, Draco and Hermione had been engaged in a friendly discussion on the current political climate. Listening to them had been surreal at first, but after a few minutes Harry had shrugged it off as one of those oddities of life and turned his attention to discussing an open Auror case with Ron. While Harry didn’t think that Ron and Draco would ever be close friends, it meant a great deal to him that they both tried to at least to tolerate each other.

“Are you listening at all?” the exasperation in Draco’s voice cut right through Harry’s trip down memory lane and snapping out of his reverie, he looked rather apologetic.

“I wasn’t actually, I’m sorry,” he apologised. “What were you saying?”

“I asked you what you were doing on Christmas Day!” Draco glared, clearly offended, and Harry averted his eyes sheepishly.

“Not sure. Depends on how wild dinner at The Burrow is and how much homemade mead the boys ply me with. If it reaches irresponsible levels, Molly won’t let me apparate home,” Harry shrugged, mindlessly toying with his glass of Firewhiskey and allowing the amber liquid to swirl around his
glass. Up until now he had studiously avoided broaching the subject of Christmas with Draco and was therefore just a little surprised that Draco had decided to make the first move.

“Well—” Draco drawled. “If you can resist getting completely and utterly inebriated, how would you like to spend the afternoon at the Manor with me and Scorpius?”

Harry’s initial response to that question was to gape at Draco, wondering whether he had really heard right.

“Close your mouth, Potter, you look like an imbecile,” Draco instantly reprimanded him and blinking several times, he obediently closed his mouth.

“Did you just ask me to—” He tried to ask, still trying to make sense of what he had heard.

“Yes, I asked whether you would like to spend Christmas Day afternoon with me and my son,” Draco rolled his eyes.

“Uhm— Aren’t you going to spend Christmas with your father and mother?” Harry asked warily. While he had made his peace with Narcissa — she had after all kind of helped him defeat Voldemort, even if it had been for her own selfish reasons — he wasn’t exactly excited about the prospect of being in the same room with Lucius Malfoy. There was just something about the man that gave him the creeps. Not even the fact that Lucius Malfoy no longer devoted his life to the dark arts could change that lingering feeling, though he suspected telling Draco that might result in a rather uncomfortable discussion.

“No, Christmas is just me and Scorpius, it’s always been just me and him — well since Astoria passed anyway. I will take him to France for the New Year though. Just for a few days.”

“Well, I don’t know. I mean, are you sure? It’s Christmas, how are you going to explain me being there? I’m not family…”

“I was gonna tell him that you are daddy’s boyfriend. Perhaps not using quite such an unfortunate phrasing, but something along those lines,” Draco smiled and Harry did a double take, staring in utter disbelief.

“I beg your pardon?” he finally said, certain that he’d fallen asleep and was having a rather strange dream about Draco inviting him to spend Christmas at the Manor with him and Scorpius as well as planning to tell his son about their relationship.

“For Merlin’s sake, you thickhead! I asked you if you want to spend Christmas with me and my son! Potter, you are infuriating, to say the least!” Draco shot him a glare. It was evident that he was fighting a losing battle between keeping his patience and drawing his wand to hex Harry for his slowness. “I also said I would tell Scorpius about us…our relationship.”

“Hex me,” Harry mumbled, as the realisation that he wasn’t dreaming and that Draco indeed planned to make their relationship public to his son finally hit him. A second later he hissed and spilt some of his Firewhiskey. Draco’s mild stinging hex had hit him square in the shoulder. “What the fuck, Draco!”

“You asked for it, Potter, I just gave you want you wanted,” Draco said with an air of refined grace that instantly made Harry want to lunge forward and throttle him.

“You can’t just drop such a bombshell on me!”

“What kind of bombshell?”
“Telling Scorpius…”

Draco raised a questioning eyebrow and for a moment Harry could have sworn that he had seen a flicker of uncertainty in Draco’s grey-blue eyes. Draco concealed his apprehension almost instantly and Harry hated that Draco had the ability to shut his emotions off like that.

He sighed. “I’m sorry. You surprised me, that’s all. I didn’t think you would want to tell him…yet.”

“Now is as good a time as any,” Draco shrugged. “I’m not in the habit of making snap decisions, I think you of all people should know that.”

“Debatable,” Harry muttered under his breath, unable to disguise the wicked grin that crept onto his face.

“Excuse me?”

“You do occasionally…make snap decisions.”

“Oh? Do elaborate, Potter.”

“I can think of a few snap decisions you’ve made since we started dating,” Harry teased with a rather devilish smirk playing around the edges of his lips and a cheeky glint in his bottle-green eyes.

“I think you need another hex, Potter. You have a filthy mind.”

“Like you don’t,” Harry threw back challengingly but regretted his words instantly when an invisible hand — effectively controlled by Draco’s wand hand — grabbed his crotch and squeezed firmly enough to border on being almost painful.

“Fuck, Draco,” he protested.

“You were saying?” Draco asked, looking perfectly nonchalant.

“I said—” Harry gasped when Draco’s conjured invisible hand insistently rubbed alongside his growing erection, deliberately teasing. “I said— sp—spending Christmas with you— and Scorpius— would— would— be won— wo—wonderful,” he forced the words passed his lips as he firmly dug one hand into the cushions of his sofa and clenched the other so tightly around the whiskey glass that he worried it might shatter from the sheer force.

“I thought you might like the idea,” Draco smiled sweetly and Harry watched as he slowly rose to his feet and he placed his own empty whiskey glass on the mantelpiece above the fireplace. Then he flicked his hand and banished the teasing invisible hand.

“Sweet dreams, darling,” Draco said ever so softly, then stepped into the flames and called out his destination.

And just like that Draco was gone. Yet another vanishing act.

“You did not just do that…” Harry mumbled to himself, unsure whether to be excited about Draco having decided to tell Scorpius about their relationship or vexed about Draco giving him a hard-on
and then walking out on him. He decided to be both and downed the rest of his Firewhiskey to calm
his frazzled nerves. “Fuck, Draco Malfoy, you play a good game,” he said to the empty room and
spread his legs a little, desperately needing to give his throbbing erection a little more room. He
briefly contemplated taking care of his rather prominent predicament but decided against it. Instead,
he poured himself a refill and drank his Firewhiskey in comfortable silence.
Dear Readers,
I'm just going to leave this here for you and run as fast as I can.
*Do. Not. Hate. Me.*
Love, Selly x

“Tibby!” Draco yelled into the empty room as a wave of intense irritation washed over him, taking in the mess in Scorpius’ room. The boy’s bed looked like a pack of crups had torn through it several times over and Draco fought the urge to retrace his steps and flee the room. Open books, parchments, quills, Christmas decorations, sweets wrappings, Scorpius’ Hogwarts robes, a colourful array of his favourite Muggle clothes — *all undoubtedly dragged out of his wardrobe and trunk* — and an odd array of toys, as well as his broom and all the cleaning gear that came with it, lay strewn all over the floor.

“Master Malfoy called,” Tibby answered several seconds later as he appeared in front of Draco in the centre of the room with a faint pop, swaying dangerously when he almost slipped on a rainbow-coloured marble glass ball.

“My son has only been home for four days. Why does his room look like someone repeatedly cast a Reductor Curse around the place?” Draco asked, shuddering as he took another look around the room. How was it possible that Scorpius desk was even messier than the floor and his bed combined? Draco knew that Scorpius hadn’t as much as looked the homework he had to complete over the winter break.

“Tibby is frightfully sorry, Master Malfoy. Master Scorpius has forbidden Tibby to clean his room.”

“And why would that be?” Draco inquired.

“Master Scorpius says that when Tibby cleans his room, he cannot find anything.”

“I doubt he can find anything *now,*” Draco grumbled, carefully stepping further into the room. “Why is it that you listen to a rebellious teenager?”

“Tibby is *sorry,* Master Malfoy,” the elf said apologetically, wringing its ears with a worried expression.

“Oh, stop it, Tibby,” Draco sighed. “This isn’t your fault. You don’t understand teenagers. Neither do I for that matter, though. I think it’s impossible to understand them.”

“Master Malfoy wishes for Tibby to clean Master Scorpius’ room, yes?”

“No. That won’t be necessary. I’ll take care of it. If he has a problem with it, tell him to talk to me.”

“But Master Malfoy mustn’t do Tibby’s job,” Tibby complained, staring up at him with big wide eyes and looking rather pained. Draco thought the expression was quite comical.

“I’m not doing *your* job, Tibby, I’m doing *Scorpius’* job. How he manages to survive at Hogwarts
without you is a mystery to me,” Draco shook his head. “Go on, Tibby; I’m sure you have enough to do.”

“If Master Malföy is sure?” Tibby looked rather uncertain.

“Quite,” Draco smiled, dismissing his faithful house elf.

Tibby nodded obediently and disappeared to tend to his other duties. With a deep sigh, Draco drew his wand and carefully took a couple more steps into Scorpius room.

“It’s moments like this when I wish your mother was still around,” Draco mumbled under his breath, and conjuring a black bin bag from the kitchens below, he summoned every single empty sweet wrapping and all the broken quills. He banished them into the bin bag and setting it aside, he flicked his wand and directed Scorpius’ broom and the cleaning supplies to return to the small broom cupboard adjacent to Scorpius bathroom.

With a suspicious glance at the bathroom door, Draco wondered what mess he would find if he was to step in there. He quickly decided that he would probably suffer a heart attack and decided not to chance it — at least for the time being — he summoned each piece of strewn-about clothing and inspecting each item, Draco pilled all the dirty clothes on the floor at the foot of Scorpius’ bed.

The clean clothes Draco hit with a refreshing charm, then levitated them into the wardrobe. Toys found their way into a designated trunk and all the Christmas ornaments ended up in their respective boxes. The unwrapped, uneaten sweets Draco piled onto Scorpius nightstand and the books found themselves returned to the large bookshelf across the room in Scorpius’ reading corner. Draco fixed the bed with a lazy flick of his wand, removed a rather large ink stain, and fluffed the pillows. Used and unused quills alike found themselves returned to the quill holder on Scorpius’ desk.

With yet another flick of his wand, Draco summoned all the scattered parchments into his hand and walking across the room to Scorpius’ desk, he easily sorted them into several piles. All empty scrolls ended up neatly rolled up in the parchment holder and those with writing on them ended up on another pile in the centre of Scorpius desk.

Wanting to respect his son’s right to privacy, Draco tried his best not to read anything written on the parchments and was just about to turn his attention to the bathroom when he found his eyes drawn to a very familiar scrawl. Blinking a few times, Draco shook his head wondering whether he was seeing things. Knowing he was treading on dangerous waters, he hesitated for a moment, then allowed curiosity to get the better of him and reached for the parchment that had caught his attention.

He skimmed over what he quickly realised to be a letter, and when he reached the bottom of the page he stared at the signature with complete and utter disbelief. Flicking his glance back to the top of the parchment, Draco read the letter in full and was at once overcome with fury as he tried to come up with a single good reason as to why his son and his partner appeared to be the best of friends. The tone of the letter was carefree and full of inside jokes, Draco had not a hope of understanding, and the more he looked at the parchment in his hand, the more maddened he felt.

“Harry Potter, you may have survived Voldemort but you will not survive a father’s wrath,” Draco forced the words through his gritted teeth, and folding the parchment, he transferred it into his robes. With his hand so tightly clenched around his wand that it pulsed with a reflection of his anger, he turned on his heel and strode out of the room. From the corridor he apparated down into his study and transferring a copious amount of Floo powder into his fireplace, he called out his destination.

Minutes later he stepped out of one of the many fireplaces in the Atrium of the Ministry of Magic and headed for the lifts. Possessed with anger, his consciousness barely registered where he was and
what he was about to do. It was as if his mind was on autopilot. Nothing and nobody were going to stop him from wrapping his hands around Harry Potter’s throat and squeezing the life out of the slimy, lying, cheating bastard. Yes, that was exactly what he was going to do. The killing curse was too kind for Harry fucking Potter; besides the git had a thing for surviving those and Draco wasn’t going to chance it. No, it was much better to do it the Muggle way – wrap his hands around Harry’s neck, squeeze with all his might, and watch as the life slowly drained out of Harry bloody Potter as he struggled to breathe.

Draco reached the Auror department in no time, and striding into Harry’s open office, he slammed the door closed with such a bang that the hinges groaned in protest. He disarmed a very surprised-looking Head of the Auror Department with a casual flick of his wand and a wordless *Expelliarmus*.

He caught Harry’s wand easily and miraculously managed to resist the urge to snap it in two. Instead, he tossed it across the room, far out of Harry’s reach. He pointed his own wand at Harry, who sat in his chair, quill in hand, looking entirely gobsmacked.

“Draco—” he mumbled, confusion written all over his face. “If this is your idea of some afternoon delight—”

“Shut up, Potter,” Draco glowered. “How dare you! How *fucking* dare, you!” He hissed, eyes blazing with anger, face flushed with wrath, wand steadily trained on Harry’s chest. “I told you quite clearly, I told you Scorpius is the most important person in my life and you promised. How fucking dare you go behind my back and betray me like this?”

Harry’s gaze flickered between Draco’s face, Draco’s wand, and the somewhat crumbled parchment he had dragged from his robes.

“I was prepared to tell Scorpius about us, I was prepared to formally introduce you to him. How dare you!” Draco’s voice grew louder and louder and Harry found himself shrinking into his desk chair with each angry word that left Draco’s mouth.

“Your department’s security is a complete and utter joke, Potter, I hope you realise that,” Draco hissed and approaching Harry he towered over him, poking his wand into Harry’s chest with enough force to hurt. Harry suppressed the yelp that wanted to escape past his lips and bit the inside of his mouth instead. “You’re lucky I’m no longer the person I used to be, or I wouldn’t think twice about using an Unforgivable on you, you cheat!” Draco snarled. “My son is *not* for your entertainment!”

“Draco, I can expla—” Harry feebly attempted to get a word in edgewise but Draco’s furious expression was enough to silence him.

“Explain what exactly?” Draco snapped.

“It’s not what you think—” Harry sighed.

“Not what I think?” Draco’s hollow laugh startled even him.

“Then what is it?” he demanded and unfolded the parchment in his hand.

“*Dear Scorpius, I can tell you’re excited to be home for the holidays soon. Food, food and more food, a ton of presents (I’m sure!), celebrations, snow and most of all no homework...is there anything better than this? I suddenly find myself wanting to be a thirteen again...*” Draco read from the parchment in his hand and Harry visibly paled with each word that left Draco’s mouth.

He’d had an inkling what had Draco in such a fury, but had fervently hoped that it wasn’t true. Now that Draco had confirmed his suspicions, he felt rather sick. It had occurred to him that he should
probably tell Draco about all those letters, had even written to Scorpius about it, but the boy had implored him not to say anything.

“Must I continue?” Draco snapped.

“Exactly how long has this been going on?” he pressed, still glowering at Harry, still poking him with his wand, still looking like he was merely drawing out the inevitable, which was that he planned to hex Harry into oblivion, or quite possibly kill him.

“Since before you and I started working on that potions case,” Harry whispered, seeing no point in keeping the truth to himself.

“Please let me explain,” he pleaded.

“What for? Do you really think I need a detailed explanation of how you went behind my back and wormed your way into my son’s life? Of how you betrayed me?” Draco spat, his usually pale grey-blue eyes dark with raw anger and a fiery fury Harry had never seen before.

“I didn’t, it’s not like that. Please let me explain. Scorpius and I—”

“There will be no Scorpius and you!” Draco snapped, poking his wand against Harry’s chest to accentuate every word.

Harry fervently wanted to wrap his fingers around Draco’s wand and wrench it away from him, but his hands would not obey his brain. Try as he might, he couldn’t come up with the right words to get Draco to listen to him.

“I have no words to express how utterly disappointed I am in you, Potter. This level of betrayal is beyond anything I can accept. I jumped over my own shadow to make this – us – work, and you? You go behind my back, pretending to be best friends with my son, pretending to be friends with the one person who means the world to me! Scorpius is the only person I have left, he is my family. you had no right to take him away from me, no fucking right! I’m absolutely disgusted.”

“I didn’t pretend,” Harry said quietly. “We are friends. If you’d just let me explain—”

“I’m not interested in any of your lies,” the contempt in Draco’s voice was so strong that each word felt like a slap in the face and a stab in the heart at the same time.

Harry desperately wanted to say something but words failed him and so he stared in silence as Draco lowered his wand and then wordlessly turned to leave.

“Draco, please,” Harry suddenly found some of his composure and jumping to his feet he rounded his desk, ready to dash after Draco to stop him from leaving, to somehow find a way to explain, but Draco’s blank stare had him stop dead in his tracks. There wasn’t a single emotion evident on Draco’s face or in his eyes. He looked neither angry nor sad. In fact, he looked like he didn’t care at all.

“Do not follow me. I don’t ever want to see you again,” he said quietly, then opened the door and left.

“FUCK!” Harry growled, slamming his fist on the desk. He braced himself on the heavy wood, then with one angry swipe, sent every single one of his parchments, case files, and memos flying across the room.
“Dad.”

Upon hearing the familiar sound of Scorpius’ voice, Draco took a deep breath and turned away way from the window. He couldn’t quite remember how long he had been staring out over the grounds of the Manor but with everything that was going through his mind, it seemed trivial to care about time. Taking a deep breath, Draco took a moment to take a proper look at his son.

Scorpius was casually leaning against the doorframe of his study, emitting a strange kind of coolness, and Draco wistfully remembered his own teenage years. His father would have never allowed him to stand like this. He would have never dared to stand like this either, too afraid of where his father’s cane might land.

As he took in Scorpius’ windswept, tousled hair that was getting just a little too long, and his chiselled cheeks flushed bright pink from the cold, Draco couldn’t help but wonder where the little boy who’d loved nothing more than hanging on to his father’s coattails had disappeared off to. He suspected Scorpius had grown at least three inches since he had started his third year at Hogwarts. He was clearly rapidly turning into the same lanky teenager Draco himself once had been.

“You don’t look too happy, dad. Is everything okay?” Scorpius asked with a rather alarmed expression on his face as he straightened himself up and Draco couldn’t help but admire Scorpius’ ability to read faces, a skill he had clearly inherited from his mother. “I’m sorry I’m a bit late. Ms Hutchinson had to drive slowly. All the roads are really icy.”

“Did you have a good time with Corey?” Draco forced himself to smile.

“Yeah,” Scorpius nodded enthusiastically. “It was good to catch up again. Even if Corey can’t stop mocking me about my posh boarding school in the Highlands of Scotland. You would think he would be bored of that by now, but well…”

Draco smiled. Scorpius’ Muggle friends from his primary school had no idea that he was a wizard. Muggle friends. Draco laughed inwardly. How times had changed. His son had Muggle friends, used Muggle transportation, and could distinguish between Muggle and Wizarding money in his sleep.

“Why don’t you have a seat?” Draco resolutely forced himself to face the rather difficult conversation he was about to have with his son. He motioned towards the two comfortable armchairs that stood in front of his fireplace, inviting Scorpius to enter the room.

“Something happened,” Scorpius said matter-of-factly, and walking into the room, he flung himself into one of the armchairs. “Go on, do your worst. Are granddad and grandmama coming over for Christmas after all?”

“No, they’re staying in France.”
“Phew, that’s at least *some* good news. New Year’s Eve at the Chateau it is then,” Scorpius sighed, pulling a rather discontented face. “Though I could honestly really think of cooler ways to ring in the New Year.”

“Such as?” Draco arched an eyebrow. He knew he really ought to scold his son for the way he was talking about his grandparents but couldn’t quite bring himself to do so. Scorpius did have a point. His mother doted on Scorpius whenever she could and Scorpius generally let her, though Draco knew that his son couldn’t stand that his grandmama still treated him like he was a little child. Lucius Malfoy and Scorpius – well, those two were a different matter altogether. Despite always trying their best, they never seemed to be able to find a common topic to talk about.

Scorpius was usually on his best behaviour and made every effort to impress when it came to manners and etiquette. He always asked all the right questions, and mostly kept his opinions to himself, but there inevitable always came a time when his father would start lecturing Scorpius about this, that or the other. When he then finally said something that Scorpius wholeheartedly disagreed with, Scorpius never shied away from telling his grandfather so. That then generally resulted in his father turning on him, lecturing him about what a terrible job he was doing at raising Scorpius all by himself and that he should’ve found himself another wife by now.

Draco shuddered at the thought of forcing Scorpius to spend Christmas with his grandparents, shuddered at the thought of having to listen to his father pontificating on and on about things Draco no longer understood or agreed with. No, only spending New Year’s Eve together as a family was much more sensible.

“The fireworks in London of course. Duh, dad, you *are* getting old.”

“And you’re getting rather brassy for your age.”

“Slytherin prerogative,” Scorpius shrugged and Draco didn’t know whether to laugh at that or scold his son.

He did neither and deciding not to draw out the inevitable any longer, he reached for the parchment on his desk and walked over to where Scorpius had sprawled himself out over the armchair.

“I came across this while cleaning your room today,” Draco said, handing the parchment over to Scorpius, who took it cautiously.

“Why would you clean my room?” he asked with a frown.

“Because it looked like a pack of crups ripped through there and you forbid Tibby to clean up, which by the way you will *not* do again. You can tell Tibby what stuff he shouldn’t move, but not to stay out of your room entirely,” Draco replied.

“At your age, you should be able to keep your room at least semi-tidy and I’m afraid until you’ve learnt that skill, Tibby will continue to keep your room from turning into a wasteland. Although, I’m starting to think that the more sensible option here would be to just let you drown in your mess until you can’t stand it anymore.”

“Seriously, Dad, I’m on holiday; cut me some slack. Besides, it’s not a mess. It’s organised chaos,” Scorpius groaned and unfolded the parchment in his hand. Less than a second later his brow furrowed and his expression darkened considerably. “Dad, what the—! Why are you going through my mail?”

“I didn’t. The letter was lying openly on your desk.”
“That still doesn’t give you the right to snoop through my correspondence!” Scorpius snapped with a thunderous expression and jumping to his feet, he defiantly held Draco’s gaze, deliberately challenging him.

Draco took a deep breath, reminding himself to keep his cool.

“I did not snoop, Scorpius, do try not to be insoulet,” he said firmly, but with a calm composure that took every ounce of his willpower to maintain. A few hours had passed since he had returned from his impromptu visit to the ministry. He had forced himself to calm down enough to hopefully last through a rather uncomfortable conversation with his son.

“Now, would you please tell me why you are corresponding with Mr Potter behind my back?”

“What I write to whom is none of your business,” Scorpius raised his voice, fists clenched tightly at his sides, face flushed with anger and eyes blazing with a fury Draco had never seen before. “I can’t believe you would actually go through my mail and then fucking lie to my face and tell me you didn’t! What kind of father does that!”

“Scorpius Malfoy, control your mouth or you will spend the rest of your holidays in your room under house arrest. And believe me, I will make sure that you won’t be able to leave your quarters. I do not want to hear such filth coming from your mouth ever again!” Draco scolded, feeling beyond irritated.

Scorpius had never spoken to him like this before, had never used bad language in his presence. Sure, they’d had arguments and disagreements before, but Scorpius had never shown such blatant disrespect towards him.

“If you think that you have the right to tell me whom I can be friends with and whom I cannot be friends with, you’re dead wrong, father!”

“You will find that, as long as you’re underage and living under my roof, I actually do have the right,” Draco snapped, his exasperation at the whole situation finally seeping into his voice, despite his best efforts to control himself. “I’ll ask again, why are you corresponding with Mr Potter behind my back?”

“That’s none of your business!” Scorpius spat. “We’re friends.”

“And why, pray tell, is that something you cannot tell me about?”

“What do you care? You’ve already decided it’s inappropriate for me to be friends with Harry, which honestly is rich coming from you, Dad. You work with the man, you hang out with him, yet you tell me that I can’t be friends with him. How about I tell you not to work with him? Or hang out with him? I wonder how that would go down!”

“Scorpius Hyperion Malfoy, you will go to your room immediately and stay there until you work out how to show me some respect. I’m a very tolerant man, but I will not be spoken to in this way!”

“Scorpius Hyperion Malfoy, you will go to your room immediately and stay there until you work out how to show me some respect. I’m a very tolerant man, but I will not be spoken to in this way!”

Draco admonished his son, shaking with the sheer effort it took him to control his emotions and the level of his voice. He really wanted to considerably raise his voice but he was sensible enough to know that this wouldn’t improve the situation at all. It was already out of hand.

“I will do no such thing!” Scorpius retorted and still clenching Harry’s letter he stormed out of the study, leaving Draco standing by the fireplace, looking thoroughly gobsmacked. It took him a moment to gather his bearings and when he did, he instantly hurried out of his study, intent on following Scorpius. Much to Draco’s dismay his son had, however, already vanished from sight.
“Why does parenting always have to be such a challenge?” he mumbled to himself and heading to the entrance hall, he made his way up the grand staircase, sure that Scorpius had run off up to his room to be alone.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Is Draco a better father than Lucius was or is he overreacting? Maybe it's Scorpius who is out of line?
“Scorpius?” Harry asked rather perplexed as he approached Number 12 Grimmauld Place on foot, only to find a shivering half-frozen teenager sat on his doorstep.

The boy looked a sorry sight and Harry’s heart twisted painfully. Scorpius had wrapped his arms tightly around his legs and was rocking back and forth in a desperate attempt to keep at least a little bit warm. His blond hair, soaked with melted snow, clung to his face, giving him a drowned puppy kind of look. His trembling and slightly blue lips were a stark contrast to his very pale skin.

“How long have you been sitting here?” Harry questioned and drawing his wand he unlocked the front door to his home with a silent unlocking spell. He seldom returned home the Muggle way but today he was glad that he had done so, although, had he floo’ed home his wards would have informed him of the fact that someone was camping out at his front door.

“A couple of hours, I guess. I’m not sure,” Scorpius shrugged.

“Let’s get you inside before you catch a cold or worse,” Harry said resolutely and flicking his wand against the door, he swung it open while offering his free hand to Scorpius, helping the boy to his feet. Scorpius gladly accepted the help and gingerly followed Harry into the warm house. “Does Dra — your father know you’re here?”

“If he knew I wouldn’t be here,” Scorpius sighed, wrapping his arms around himself.

“He must be worried sick about you,” Harry shook his head, closing the door behind them both to keep the warmth inside the house. It was uncharacteristically cold outside.

“I doubt that. He grounded me.”

“What happened?”

“We had a bit of a fight,” Scorpius answered with a nonchalant shrug of his shoulders and judging by his subdued demeanour, Harry was quite sure that the argument between Draco and his son had been anything but a *bit of a fight*.

“So, you decided to run off?” he smiled, not needing to ask to know that Scorpius and Draco had fought about those blasted letters.

“Come on through to the kitchen, I’ll make you a cup of tea.” Harry motioned down the hall, towards the kitchen.

“I’m sure you’re probably starving too, I think I can make you a sandwich or two. But first things first,” raising his wand, Harry pointed it at Scorpius and hit him with a strong drying charm, spelling all the icy chill out of his clothes. Next, he cast a warming charm around the boy to stop him from shivering and clattering his teeth.

“Thanks, that feels *loads* better,” Scorpius grinned.

“You’re welcome. A hot cuppa tea will make you feel even better,” Harry winked and holstering his wand, he led the way and walked into his kitchen where he grabbed the kettle and filled it with
water. He drew his wand to ignite the fire and placing the kettle on the hearth, he levitated two mugs onto the table and rummaged about the cupboard for some black tea.

He dropped a teabag into each mug, trying to ignore Draco’s mocking face that instantly appeared before him. That is not tea, it’s tea-flavoured runoff water, a voice that sounded remarkably like Draco’s resounded in his head. Resolutely pushing the memory away, he instead busied himself with preparing two ham and cheese sandwiches for Scorpius.

Several minutes later, they were both sat at the kitchen table. Harry was nursing his tea and Scorpius was wolfing down his food with such speed that Harry couldn’t help but wonder when the boy had last eaten a proper meal. Then again, he was a teenager and Harry knew from experience — he had watched Teddy eat plenty of times — that teenagers managed to scarf down incredible amounts of food.

“I should tell your dad you’re here.” Harry sighed, knowing that he should really get to his feet and floocall Draco, but not quite able to bring himself to do so.

I don’t want to see you ever again; the harsh words rang in Harry’s ears causing his insides to twist painfully.

“He found out about me and you writing letters today,” Scorpius mumbled between two large bites. “Flew off the handle about it too.”

“Well—” Harry started, watching Scorpius scoff on his food with a level of admiration. “Don’t hate me for saying this, but I did tell you that we should have told him.”

“He wouldn’t have understood,” Scorpius shook his head. “He looks at me like I’m five years old or something. Like I don’t notice stuff. Don’t get me wrong, he’s a great dad when he’s not snooping around my mail that is, but… I don’t really know how to explain it.”

“Scorpius,” Harry said firmly and with a frown. “I am quite certain that your dad didn’t snoop around your mail.”

“He said he was cleaning my room when he found one of your letters on my desk,” Scorpius sighed and reached for his tea. He fished the teabag out and added some milk. “He could’ve asked me if I want him to clean my room.”

“You know, Scorpius, I’m not a parent, but I think he just did that because he loves you not because he wanted to spy on you.”

“I know that,” Scorpius, both hands now wrapped around his tea mug, grumbled, and after a while, he made a bit of a confession. “Harry. It was me who flew off the handle, actually. He only got mad when I used some bad language. I mean I’m sure he was mad about the whole thing but he was trying so hard to remain composed. I was a bit of an arse, really.”

“If you can admit that to yourself and to me, you might want to consider apologising to your dad. He loves you very much, you know. On that note, we should really tell him that you’re here,” Harry said softly and this time he did rise to his feet.

“Stay here, I’ll floo call him to let him know,” he instructed and walking around the table, he patted Scorpius on the shoulder, then left the kitchen and headed for his study. Grabbing some floo powder, he crouched down in front of the hearth and threw it into the flames, calling out for Draco’s study at Malfoy Manor. Much to Harry’s surprise, the flames did not turn green and not even a second load of floo powder changed anything about it.
With a heavy sigh, he got to his feet and walking over to his desk, he grabbed a piece of parchment and a Muggle pen and was about to scribble a quick note to Draco when his eyes fell upon the sleeping form of Earl. Knowing how much his faithful owl hated it when someone roused him from his sleep, Harry abandoned the parchment and Muggle pen and drew his wand instead.

He took a deep breath to compose himself and momentarily closed his eyes to draw on a familiar memory. With a wordless spell and a flick of his wand he conjured his Patronus and as the bright mist of the spell flowed out of his wand and slowly took the shape of his father’s Animagus form — a magnificent, stately white stag with an imposing set of antlers — an eerie calm flooded Harry.

His Patronus stood before him — expectantly, patiently — digging its left front hoof through the air and looking at him with warm, understanding eyes.

“I need you to deliver a message to Draco Malfoy at Malfoy Manor,” Harry said softly and the stag nodded. “Please tell him that his son Scorpius is with me and that he is safe. Tell him to come by and pick him up.”

The stag nodded again and approaching Harry, it nuzzled him with its big snout, then gracefully galloped through the wall and vanished out of sight.

For a moment Harry simply stood, looking at the spot where his stag had stood only moments ago and sighed softly. He hoped that the sight of his Patronus would calm Draco somewhat. He was sure that Draco had by now discovered that Scorpius was missing and was frantic with worry. Harry’s heart contracted painfully in his chest at the thought of Draco probably having a panic attack as he cast all sorts of detective and tracking spells to find his son.

He pushed the thought from his mind and when Harry turned around, he was surprised and a little shocked to find Scorpius standing in the doorway of his study, hands still clasped around his mug.

He was about to tell Scorpius that he had informed his dad, but the young boy spoke first.

“I’ve never been this close to a Patronus,” he said with awe. “I really wish I could cast one.”

“It’s a rather advanced spell, but if you really wanted to learn it, I suppose I could teach you,” Harry said with a smile.

“You would?” a shimmer of excitement and hope shone in Scorpius’ eyes and he grinned widely when Harry nodded.

“Under one condition though,” Harry stipulated, “only if your dad is okay with that.”

Scorpius smile faded slowly and a worried frown took its place. “I just didn’t want him to know that I worry about him,” Scorpius admitted sheepishly after a moment of silence. He stared past Harry and into the brightly flickering flames in the fireplace. “That’s why I insisted we didn’t tell him.”

“Maybe try telling him that?” Harry offered.

“I’m not sure he’ll listen. He’ll probably rip me to shreds for running away.”

“You know he will. That was rather reckless of you,” Harry chided though there was no malice in his voice. “He’s probably worried sick about you, frantic with worry.”

“I just got so mad,” Scorpius sighed.

“Come on, we’ll go sit in the living room while we wait for your dad. I’ll make us some more tea and you can watch some television if you like or we’ll chat.”
“Can you tell me a bit about your work?”

“It’s mostly paperwork these days,” Harry laughed. “I doubt you’d find that interesting.”

“I’m sure you solved some interesting cases you could tell me about,” Scorpius pushed and his pleading grey-blue eyes melted Harry’s resolve almost instantly. He found himself wondering how Draco managed to resist those begging puppy-dog eyes. Then again, judging by some of the tales Draco had shared with Harry, it seemed like he didn’t resist. At least most of the time.

It was a little over an hour later that Harry’s living room fireplace roared to life and Draco gracefully stepped out of the green flames. He brushed the soot off his clothes and straightened himself up. He regarded Harry with a stone-cold, emotionless expression, but his demeanour softened a little as his eyes fell onto the sleeping form of Scorpius, curled up on the sofa beside Harry.

He stood motionless for several minutes, eyes fixed on Scorpius, and Harry could practically feel the terror ebb away from him. Harry couldn’t even begin to imagine what Draco must have felt like when he had discovered that his son had run away from the Manor, but he could most definitely sense the feeling of tranquillity that settled over Draco as he continued to drink in the sight of his sleeping son.

Carefully closing the book in his hand, Harry rose to his feet and cautiously took a step towards Draco but stilled instantly when Draco’s charcoal grey eyes pierced him with a bone-chilling glare.

“Draco—” Harry mouthed, but Draco raised a silencing hand.

“Don’t. There’s nothing you can say that will make me forgive you for what you did,” he said, his voice quiet but so menacing that Harry felt like Draco had slapped him in the face and cut him with a knife at the same time.

“Please, let me explain.”

“I don’t want to hear it, Potter,” Draco said, suddenly sounding ever so weary.

He appeared to have aged ten years since this afternoon and Harry desperately wanted to reach out, wanted to place a hand on Draco’s forearm, wanted to beg him to listen, wanted to plead for forgiveness, but instead he stood rooted to the spot, simply watching as Draco drew his wand and levitated Scorpius’ sleeping form into the air. Holding his wand steady, Draco wrapped his arm securely around his son’s waist, then turned his head to look at Harry.

“Lower the wards so I can disapparate,” he requested coldly and every single fibre inside Harry wanted to refuse, wanted to spell the doors closed and block the Floo until Draco gave him a fighting chance to explain this whole mess — and to apologise — but instead he nodded and drawing his own wand he mumbled a series of spells to lower the wards of Grimmauld Place so that Draco could leave with his son.

And leave he did.

Standing alone in the centre of his living room, Harry sighed heavily and reinstated the wards that protected his home. Then, feeling like every ounce of energy had drained from his body, he sunk to the floor in front of the fireplace. Dropping his wand at his side, he pressed the balls of his hands against his closed eyes and silently cursed the entire mess. His eyes burnt as they filled with tears but he refused to give in to the sensation.
He had well and truly fucked up but he wasn’t going to cry about it, he told himself. Not tonight, at least.

Crying out in frustration and agony, he allowed every miserable emotion, he had ever felt in his entire life, to wash over him. The sheer force of it almost knocked him out, but he stubbornly endured the mental and physical anguish of it all. It was a bittersweet kind of torture and his mind repeatedly replayed the scene of Draco and his son apparating away. He focused his eyes onto the dancing flames in his fireplace and then summoned a full bottle of Firewhisky with a wandless spell.

Not even bothering with a glass, Harry clasped his hand firmly around the neck and raised it in a mock-toast.

“Congratulations, Harry Potter, single two days before Christmas,” he mumbled, then took a few obscenely large sips from the bottle, hoping the intense burn of the drink would numb the all-consuming stabbing pain in his chest.

Everything had fallen apart and it was entirely his fault.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I would like to note that I am fully aware that Grimmauld Place is under the Fidelius Charm and as such Scorpius shouldn't be able to find the place unless explicitly told where it is, however while writing this, I had it in my head that considering how many years have passed since the war and how long Harry has lived in the old Black residence, he had more than enough time to work out how to break the charm or amend it in some way to allow people who didn't mean him any harm to find him / contact him at his home. I hope this thought process makes sense to you, dear reader.
“Why aren’t you asleep, Dad?” Scorpius’ sleepy voice drew Draco out of his thoughts and turning his head, he couldn’t help but smile at Scorpius’ rather dishevelled appearance. His hair was sticking out into all directions and his eyes were barely open. He had managed to completely crumple his Slytherin-green silk pyjamas and was barefoot.

“I could ask you the same thing, young man,” Draco chided softly, rising from his seat behind his desk. He put his glass of wine down and rounding the large mahogany desk, he walked up to his bleary-eyed son. Upon closer inspection, Scorpius looked more like he was sleep-walking. “Come on, back to bed with you, it’s nearly morning.”

“Might as well stay up then,” came the mumbled response and Draco chuckled softly.

“You’ll be a grouchy pain in the backside long before it’s time for breakfast,” he chastised and wrapping his arm around Scorpius’ shoulder, he pulled his son along, intent on returning him back to his bed where he belonged.

Scorpius had never been a morning person and he doubted that fact would change any time soon.

Upon their return to the Manor, Scorpius had woken up briefly. Just long enough to change his clothes and crawl into bed and Draco hadn’t begrudged him the desire to sleep. Scorpius has mumbled something about wanting to talk but had been fast asleep before he had been able to say anything else.

Draco, unable to take his eyes off his sleeping son, had stood by his bed and watched him dream for the longest time. It had felt oddly calming, even more so than the arrival of Harry’s Patronus with the message that his son was safe.

The impressive white stag had found him on his knees in the entrance hall, clutching his wand and tethering on the very edge of a panic attack.

When he had realised that Scorpius hadn’t stormed off to his room, he had simply returned to his study, assuming his son had run off to someplace else to cool off.

The Manor was big enough for that.

When Scorpius had, however, missed dinner, and the house elves had informed him that they hadn’t delivered any food to wherever Scorpius was hiding, Draco had started to worry and had abandoned his own food in favour of combing the Manor, top to bottom. His search hadn’t yielded any results and upon consulting the wards, Draco had learnt that Scorpius wasn’t anywhere on the grounds. He had instantly apparated into Wiltshire to check whether Scorpius had perhaps gone off to his friends but that, too, had been a fruitless search.

Frantic, he had then returned to the Manor, rechecked the wards and cast every single tracking and tracing spell he had been able to think of.

Harry’s Patronus had calmed him somewhat and the message that Scorpius was all right, albeit with the very man Draco still wanted to murder, had sent a steady wave of relief coursing through his body.
A high-pitched yelp caused Draco to abandon his reverie and tightening his hold on Scorpius, he saved him from stumbling on the stairs and proceeded to half-guide and half-carry Scorpius back to his room and his bed.

Once there, Scorpius dutifully crawled under the covers and curled onto his side, facing Draco.

“What time is it?” he asked sleepily, boxing one of his many pillows into place.

Draco idly cast a wandless Tempus charm and the clock read four forty-two in the morning. Banishing the conjured clock, Draco smiled and ruffled Scorpius hair affectionately.

“Way too early for teenage boys to be awake,” he whispered, tugged Scorpius duvet a little bit tighter around him, then straightened up. His muscles were stiff and every single bone in his body ached. He didn’t feel like a thirty-five-year-old father but rather like a someone in his late eighties or early nineties. Today fatherhood had well and truly taken it out of him.

“Can you stay for a while?” Scorpius asked and Draco looked down at his son.

“Aren’t you a bit too old to need me to stay with you? I promise there are no boggarts hiding under your bed, I checked your room myself before you came home for the holidays,” he teased affectionately and Scorpius rolled his eyes at him.

Draco laughed.

“I owe you an apology,” the rather serious tone of Scorpius’ voice sobered Draco up instantly and without a second thought he sat down on the edge of his son’s large four-poster bed.

“My choice of language this afternoon was really unfortunate, dad. I’m sorry,” a pair of clear grey-blue eyes looked up at him and Draco nodded.

“Apology accepted. But promise me one thing: never, ever run away again. You very nearly gave me a heart attack,” Draco chided with a stern look. “And as you like to remind me, often and unnecessarily so, I’m no longer the youngest, so you might not want to play with my poor heart like that unless you want to permanently live with your grandparents in France.”

“I’m sorry. I don’t know what I was thinking.”

“Probably nothing,” Draco sighed. “I can’t promise you we’ll never have another fight, Scorpius, but I hope you know that you’re the most important person in my life and that I love you very much. You disappearing like this absolutely scared the living daylights out of me.”

“I’m really sorry, Dad. I didn’t think. I was just so angry.”

“What’s done is done, Scorpius. I just hope you learnt a valuable lesson.”

Scorpius nodded and for a long moment silence descended over the room.

Despite the quietude, Draco remained seated.

He wasn’t sure whether Scorpius had fallen asleep or not, but for the second time that night, something stopped him from leaving his son’s side and leaning back against the bedpost behind him and closed his eyes for a moment or two. He was tired, exhausted even, but sleep stubbornly remained elusive.

“Dad?” at the hesitant question, Draco slowly opened his eyes and fixed them on Scorpius, who had
now sat up in bed.

“Do you really have a problem with Harry, I mean, I guess, Mr Potter and I writing letters to each other?”

Draco signed softly, taking a moment to think about how to best answer the question. A minute later he shook his head. “No, I don’t have a problem with that. What made me angry was that you didn’t tell me about it.”

“Harry, I mean Mr Potter—”

“You can call him Harry if that’s what you’re used to, I don’t mind,” Draco cut in and Scorpius nodded.

“OK. Well, Harry wrote to me early last month, telling me I should tell you but I refused.”

“May I ask why?”

“Well, it’s a bit complicated—” Scorpius mumbled and Draco watched him play with his duvet cover, picking and pulling at it.

“Try me,” he encouraged with a smile.

“You know, most of spring and summer you seemed rather sad and depressed. I think you tried to hide it from me, but honestly, you did a really crap job, Dad. I noticed and it worried me but I just didn’t know how to talk to you. I kind of figured you would be embarrassed if I talked to you about it. When third-year started, I decided I had to do something and because I was a bit desperate, I wrote to Harry and asked him for help. He came to Hogwarts and we met and I asked him whether he might look in on you and he promised that he would. I really enjoyed talking to him and so we kept writing and then you two started working together and well, suddenly, you were so much happier so I figured you didn’t have to know… I didn’t even tell Stefan or the other boys in my dorm. I kind of enjoyed my little secret,” Scorpius fell silent, and Draco didn’t really know what to say to that. He was rather gobsmacked.

He hadn’t really expected to hear what he had just heard and wasn’t quite sure how to feel about the whole thing. Sure, he had been rather absent-minded over the summer, and maybe even a little withdrawn, but he had really thought that he had done a good job to hide his desolate mood from his son. It had hit him out of nowhere and he hadn’t known how to deal with it, but his desperate desire to preserve his son’s innocence had made him try his hardest to keep his own sadness from Scorpius. Apparently, he had failed spectacularly at assuring his son that he was a capable parent, so spectacularly that Scorpius had seen it fit to contact Harry Potter of all people to ask for help. Draco couldn’t help but wonder just how badly he had screwed things up during the summer and the knowledge that his son had been so utterly worried about him made his heart ache painfully.

“Well, thank you for your honesty, Scorpius,” Draco eventually said, rather slowly and somewhat reluctantly.

“Please don’t be mad at Harry, he didn’t tell you either because I made him promise me not to tell you. He is a man of his word,” Scorpius pleaded and Draco sighed softly as he slowly rose from the bed.

“Get some sleep, Scorpius, we’ll talk more tomorrow,” he said and bending down he placed a gentle kiss on his son’s forehead, then resolutely left the room with his mind and heart and everything else
in turmoil.

Not bothering to return to his study, he headed straight for his own bedroom and slipping out of his clothes, he slid under the cool sheets and leant back against his headboard. He suddenly had a pounding headache and with a heavy sigh he closed his eyes and took several deep breaths, hoping that they might ease the tension in his skull and every other part of his body. Why did parenting have to be so hard? Why did relationships have to be so complicated?

When the strain of the last twenty odd hours stubbornly refused to subside, Draco growled angrily. His frustration only added to his headache and reaching for his wand, he summoned a phial of Dreamless Sleep potion from his bathroom. He uncorked it and downed it without the slightest bit of hesitation. The relief was almost instant and sliding into a horizontal position, he rolled onto his side and wrapped his arms around a pillow. He dragged it to his chest and closing his eyes, he allowed sleep to claim him. Within seconds he was fast asleep, finally giving his body the rest, it so desperately needed.

Chapter End Notes

I listened to a lot of classical music while writing the last few chapters. I felt like I needed inner calm to write about the turmoil going on inside my characters' heads and hearts and *Metamorphosis II* by Nicolas Horvath rather stood out. It most definitely got some repeat play. Incidentally, "metamorphosis" is "a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one" and things are starting to change, big time and the changes are more defined than before.
Father And Son

Chapter Notes

A little more of Draco's and Scorpius' relationship. I had such fun writing them together and I do hope you enjoy reading about their antics as much did writing about them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“But Master Malfoy has never decorated the Christmas tree before!” Tibby objected vehemently, staring at Draco horrified with disbelieving and wide eyes.

Draco thought that the elf’s expression was rather comical and couldn’t help but smirk with amusement.

“I will this year, Tibby;” he said calmly, firmly ignoring the unmistakably familiar snorted laughter from an amused teenager that came from somewhere behind him.

“Is Master Malfoy feeling all right? Is Tibby to go and fetch the Family Healer?”

“There is nothing wrong with me, Tibby, and I most definitely do not need a Healer.” Draco rolled his eyes at the house elf, who clearly didn’t know what to make of the entire situation.

Draco sighed and briefly wondered whether crouching down to Tibby’s level might improve the situation, but dismissed the idea almost instantly. Tibby was a smart elf; he would understand, eventually. Draco wanted to remain hopeful. Tibby was the sort of house elf who simply didn’t enjoy unexpected changes, he wasn’t very good at handling them on the spot.

“I will decorate the Christmas tree myself this year, Tibby. You may take care of the rest of the Manor – I won’t stand in your way,” he reiterated patiently.

“Very well, if Master Malfoy absolutely insists,” the elf said meekly and with a snap of his fingers, he vanished from the room.

The second Tibby was gone, Scorpius burst into laughter and Draco turned to face his son. Scorpius had sprawled out on the large sofa, leisurely lounging among the cushions looking quite comfortable and at home.

“Too much giggling potion with your pumpkin juice this morning?” he asked with a raised eyebrow.

Scorpius’ laughter was rather infectious, but Draco resisted to give in to the temptation. Contrary to his son’s complete lack of restraint, he still possessed the ability to remain composed.

“You and Tibby should have your own TV show, Dad. Like some entertainment show for children or something. Our Muggle Studies professor showed us this movie called Mrs Doubtfire, it’s really old but really cool, and she had something like that going too, you’d be fantastic at it,” Scorpius grinned and Draco raised a questioning eyebrow.

He hadn’t the slightest idea what Scorpius was talking about. None of what the boy had just said made any sense to him. Sure, he knew what a TV was and had watched the one or other movie with Scorpius at the cinema in town but that was as far as his knowledge went.
“I know that the *International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy* is covered in-depth at Hogwarts in your first year. If you have forgotten all about it, I would be happy to lend you a book from my personal library to brush up on your knowledge in the matter.”

“Oh, Dad,” Scorpius sighed, “thanks, but no thanks. It was just a figure of speech.”

Draco frowned.

“Exposing magical creatures on Muggle television is a figure of speech? You *astound* me, Scorpius, and quite frankly so does your Muggle Studies professor. I do rather worry about her qualifications as a teacher.”

“One of my many talents is to astound my father on a regular basis,” Scorpius grinned mischievously and Draco watched him draw his wand to summon an apple into his hand.

He was about to remind Scorpius of the rules for the *Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery* but didn’t get a chance to as Scorpius spoke first.

“Just think of it as practice,” he shrugged, spinning his wand around with his fingers at a dizzying speed and sending tiny colourful sparks flying into all directions.

“If you get a howler from the *Department of Improper Use of Magic*, you can deal with it yourself. If they confiscate your wand, I won’t be getting involved. Then again, one of your best friends is the Head of the Auror Department, maybe he can help you,” Draco said nonchalantly and that seemed to do the trick.

Scorpius had the decency to at least pale a little at the idea of having his wand taken off him and instantly stopped mindlessly toying with it. *I still got one up on you, little one,* Draco thought.

Turning his back on his son, Draco hid his smug grin. Apparently, a little bit of intimidation always worked. Maybe his father’s parenting methods hadn’t been all for nothing. Except, Lucius Malfoy had never been one for balance, his ways to intimidate had always been frightening and never teasing. *Nah, I’m still the better parent,* Draco mused and then resolutely stopped comparing his parenting skills to those of his father.

Instead, he drew his wand and set about decorating the large Christmas tree in the living room.

After a moment of contemplation, he decided to start with the enchanted fairy lights and levitating them out of their boxes he, one after the other, placed them on the branches of the nearly thirteen-foot-tall balsam fir evergreen pine tree he had procured well before daybreak and with the help of Tibby and another house elf. It looked stunning and filled the entire living room with a distinct smell of forest and freshness.

“Want me to help?” Scorpius offered.

“You can put up the ornaments if you like,” Draco nodded.

Rather exhausted, Draco gingerly climbed off his broom and grimaced as his entire body protested vehemently to even the slightest movement.

As he flexed his fingers trying to get some feeling back into the slightly numb digits, he couldn’t help but wonder what had possessed him when he had agreed to go flying with his *teenage* son. They hadn’t been in the air longer than two minutes when Scorpius had challenged him to a high-speed chase high above the Manor grounds. He had of course stupidly agreed, and absolutely regretted that
“Dad, for *your* age that was actually not too bad; you’ve still got it in you,” Scorpius grinned as he landed a few feet away and Draco idly found himself wondering whether hitting his son with a stinging hex would get him in trouble with the newly founded *Department for the Care of Underage Wizards and Witches*.

“Excuse me?” he said instead, fixing Scorpius with a glare. “I’ll have you know I’m a very decent flyer.”

“Oh, Dad. Just admit it already. You aren’t getting any younger, you know,” Scorpius teased mercilessly and Draco’s wand hand itched just a little. Maybe not a stinging hex, maybe just a temporary silencing charm? *Petrificus Totalus* seemed a little over the top… A tickling jinx perhaps? Levitating Scorpius into the air and letting him dangle upside down until he admitted his insolence and apologised?

*It’ll be summer before that boy will ever relent and admit to anything, he absolutely is his mother’s son,* Draco mused and at last, a non-magical resolution to put an end to Scorpius’ cheek occurred to him.

“I think I really should invite your grandparents to join us tomorrow,” Draco said with solemn seriousness and Scorpius’ cold-flushed cheeks instantly lost some of their colour.

“You wouldn’t do that!” he gasped, eyes wide in horror.

“Why not? You get to spend Christmas with me – it’s only fair that I get to spend the holiday with my parents,” Draco pushed.

“Dad…” Scorpius’ expression was a picture, Draco couldn’t help but savour. It was something indescribable, something between horrified, shocked, and downright terrified of the prospect of having to share the dinner table with his grandfather.

Draco held his son’s gaze for the longest time, looking for all intents and purposes as though he was serious. Eventually, however, he did take pity on Scorpius and wrapping his arm around Scorpius’ shoulder, he gave him a reassuring pat.

“Come on, let’s head back inside and get some hot chocolate,” he said, and just like that Scorpius relaxed visibly.

Brooms in hand they silently trotted through the heavy snow back up to the Manor. After chasing each other around the skies for the better part of an hour, neither Draco nor Scorpius were all that sensitive to the bitter cold anymore.

Still, the artic temperatures were rather unpleasant and now that dusk had started to settle around them, the wind had picked up considerably. While their warm winter robes warded off the worst, they were both chilled to the bones by the time they reached the Manor’s opulently decorated and very warm living room. They peeled themselves out of their warm robes, winter boots, jumpers, and woollen socks and one of the Manor’s elves popped in to remove their wet outdoor garments.

As if on cue, Tibby had clearly continued to decorate the room and a pleasant concoction of fresh pine, dried oranges, cinnamon, and vanilla assaulted Draco’s senses as he seated himself in his favourite armchair by the fireplace. Scorpius took up residence on the sofa, once again sprawling out all over it as though he was the king of the world.

As if on cue, Tibby appeared with pastries, Christmas cookies, and a large mug of hot chocolate for
each of them.

“Would you fetch me a bottle of Ogden’s Olde, please, Tibby?” Draco asked and with an affirmative nod, the elf disappeared only to reappear several seconds later, holding a bottle of Firewhiskey from Draco’s study. Accepting the bottle, Draco opened it and added a bit of the fiery drink to his hot chocolate.

“Can I have some too?” Scorpius asked from the sofa and Draco quirked an eyebrow at him.

“I should think not.”

“Oh, come on, Dad,” Scorpius stuck out his bottom lip in a pout. “It’s nearly Christmas.”

“Not a chance, young man,” Draco shook his head. “You may have me pegged for a pushover but I draw the line at underage alcohol consumption.”

“As though you never did it when you were my age,” Scorpius rolled his eyes, petulantly sipping on his hot chocolate and chewing on a marshmallow.

“Yes, well, never in front of my father,” Draco said, realising too late the implication his response carried.

“Are you saying it’s okay if I do it behind your back?” Scorpius smirked with a devilish and irritatingly smug Slytherin glint in his eyes.

“I’m not even going to justify that with a response,” Draco shook his head and placing the bottle of Firewhisky on the small table beside his armchair, he made a mental note to draw a magical age line around every single bottle of alcohol in the Manor. Thirteen was decidedly too young for Scorpius to be sampling hard liquor.

“I’m a Slytherin, Dad, what do you expect?” Scorpius shrugged. He looked rather pleased with himself.

Draco shook his head, not quite sure what to respond to that. Scorpius had a point. He was a Slytherin.

“Next you’ll be telling me you’ve got yourself a girlfriend,” he sighed, taken aback when Scorpius spluttered on his hot chocolate, coughed, and instantly sat up straight.

“How did you—?” he asked with a panicked expression and Draco frowned.

For a moment he wasn’t sure whether Scorpius was having him on or whether he was serious. Scorpius’ face had turned a lovely shade of red and there was a certain kind of panic in his eyes that led Draco to believe he had inadvertently discovered one of his son’s secrets.

Suppressing a sigh, Draco idly wondered whether there was an end to teenage troubles. He felt the sudden urge to turn back the time to when a five-year-old Scorpius had been content to chase after conjured miniature dragons instead of requesting alcohol with his hot chocolate and confessing to having a girlfriend all in one evening.

“You’ve got a girlfriend?” Draco eventually asked and for a split second he couldn’t help but wonder whether Scorpius might have told Harry about his girlfriend in one of his letters. The idea that Harry might have known about Scorpius’ girlfriend before him filled Draco with both fury and sadness.
He should have said something, he thought to himself. Harry was an adult and the Head of the Auror Department, too. Compared to a teenager, he should have had a better sense of responsibility than that. The fact that he had said nothing about his friendship with Scorpius hurt Draco in more ways than he dared to imagine.

“Well— uhm— erm—” Scorpius stuttered, his eyes darting around the room, looking anywhere but at his father. It was somewhat amusing to watch but Draco knew better than to laugh or make an inappropriate joke.

With a small sigh, Draco abandoned his armchair and moving over to the couch, he sat down next to Scorpius.

“Go on, out with it then; I won’t bite your head off, I promise,” he vowed, raising three fingers in a mock-oath.

“Uhm—” Scorpius studiously avoided his gaze and focused his attention onto his hot chocolate instead. “We’re not really together, Dad.”

“Just a crush then?” Draco asked and Scorpius gave a non-committal half-nod.

“We’re friends. Good friends,” he mumbled between two sips of hot chocolate.

“But you like her,” Draco prompted.

Scorpius merely nodded.

“Look, if you don’t want to talk about it, it’s okay we don’t have to,” Draco tried to reassure his son. He felt as much out of his depth as anyone and not for the first time he desperately wished for a guidebook on how to raise a teenage wizard as a single parent.

His teenage crushes hadn’t exactly been a topic either of his parents had ever shown any interest in. They had also never liked Astoria much and while his mother had gracefully kept her silence, his father had been rather vocal in expressing his dislike. He and Lucius had debated over it nearly every night at dinner and each argument had been uglier than the previous one, but Draco had stubbornly stood up to his parents and married Astoria anyway.

“It’s not that I don’t want to talk about it—” Scorpius sighed and as he finally raised his head and met Draco’s eyes, Draco was surprised, and worried, to discover an element of fear flickering in his son’s eyes. “I think— I’m worried you might not approve,” he confessed quietly, averting his gaze yet again.

“And why would I do that?” Draco pressed. He couldn’t come up with a single good reason as to why he might forbid Scorpius to discover the joys of having a crush on a girl, of asking her out and enjoying every aspect of that first puppy love.

“Uhm—” Scorpius continued to hem and haw.

Taking a good long look at his son, Draco wondered what was so embarrassing that had Scorpius all clammed up.

“Look—” Draco started, intent on putting his son at ease, when suddenly the penny dropped and straightening himself up a little, Draco cast a longing glance at that bottle of Firewhiskey next to his armchair. He felt tempted to get up and pour himself a glass. The way this conversation was going, he couldn’t help but feel like he desperately needed some Dutch courage.
He hesitated for a moment, torn between getting that drink and therefore drawing out the inevitable, but then decided that he could do this, that he could handle having the talk with his son.

“Scorpius—” he started again and this time his son looked at him.

Taking a deep breath, Draco braced himself for what he was about to say.

“It’s okay to like boys, Scorpius, I’ve no problem if you have a crush on another boy. Really, I’d be a bit of a hypocrite if I disapproved of that,” he said with more confidence than he felt, mentally preparing himself for just about any reaction from his son, except for the one he got.

“What the fuck, Dad! I’m not gay!” Scorpius exclaimed. Then, after a moment of confusion, he frowned deeply. “Wait, hang on— do you mean— are you saying what I think you’re saying? Dad, are you gay?”

With a sigh, Draco got up and decided to pour himself that glass of Firewhiskey after all. He summoned a glass from the minibar across the room and catching it with ease, he poured himself a generous amount. Two small slips later, he slowly turned to face his son.

“Yes,” he simply said, figuring there was really nothing else he could say. Denial wasn’t an option he even remotely wanted to consider.

Scorpius’ frown increased tenfold as he tried to process what he had just heard and Draco suppressed the urge to launch into a lengthy explanation. Instead, he patiently stood by the fireplace, waiting. It was painfully obvious that he had most definitely misinterpreted Scorpius’ unwillingness to talk about his crush, but now that he had confessed his deepest darkest secret, he could hardly take it back again. A part of him wanted to but it was too late for that. Also, he had raised Scorpius to be an honest young man, which meant that he himself had to be a good example.

“That’s… oh wow!” Scorpius eventually said, running his fingers through his hair as he evidently found his voice again. “What about mum?” he wanted to know and Draco sighed. He had most definitely opened a can of worms.

“She always knew.”

“And she didn’t mind?” Scorpius asked, slowly losing the frown.

Much to Draco’s horror, the persisted curiosity of a five-year-old child replaced it and Draco could practically smell that Scorpius was now burning with the intense desire to ask no less than a thousand questions.

“Evidently not,” Draco replied. “I did love your mum, you know,” he added cautiously, worried that Scorpius may misunderstand.

“I know you did. I think you still do.”

Draco found himself nodding at that.

“She was my best friend,” he affirmed.

“That girl, you know, the one I like. She’s kind of my best friend too.”

Draco was surprised at the sudden change of topic. Apparently, Scorpius had no intention of making him suffer through a million questions. At least not tonight. He gratefully took the bait and couldn’t help but think that he had severely misjudged Scorpius. His son was clearly more perceptive than he
had given him credit for. Aged only thirteen, he seemed to have the maturity of a seventeen-year-old. Sometimes at least. Draco couldn’t help but wonder whether Scorpius being an only child was the reason for that. Or was it because he had lost his mother at such a young age?

Resolutely putting his Firewhisky down on the heavily decorated mantelpiece above the fireplace, Draco, for the second time that evening, took a seat next to Scorpius. “Tell me all about her. I want to know everything,” he said.

“Well—” Scorpius smiled. “Where to start?” he mused and there was no trace of his earlier shyness.

“At the beginning. How did you meet?”

“Uhm, well, she’s a third-year too, so we have loads of classes together,” Scorpius said, then paused for a moment. “She’s a Hufflepuff, Dad.”

Draco merely shrugged.

“Go on.”

In his opinion, dedication, patience, and loyalty were good values to have.

“Her name is Zendaya Thomas,” Scorpius proceeded and Draco frowned. The last name sounded familiar. Quite familiar. He racked his brain for a moment, then remembered.

“Dean Thomas’s daughter,” he mumbled in recognition. Dean Thomas had been in his year, a Gryffindor, just like Harry. He was, if Draco recalled correctly, also black. Dark-skinned, Draco silently corrected his thoughts. These days, Draco wasn’t quite sure of the appropriate term to use. The realisation of that made him laugh.

“What’s so funny, Dad?” Scorpius asked with a confused frown.

“Nothing, nothing at all,” he smiled, encouraging Scorpius to tell him more about that Zendaya girl.

As he listened, vaguely registering that Scorpius’ crush was apparently half-American, he couldn’t help but wonder just what his dad would say to that. He was sure he would have a few choice words about Scorpius’ taste in women but the very idea of Granddad Lucius’ displeasure only motivated Draco to support Scorpius to be friends with whomever he wanted to be friends with. That’ll teach you, Father, Draco thought with amusement. Black. Hufflepuff. Half-American. Muggle-born. This was bound to give Granddad Lucius a heart attack, not that Draco was in any rush to tell on Scorpius.

Then again, judging by the way Scorpius kept going on and on about this girl, Draco idly wondered whether it was time to have a certain conversation with his son. He wasn’t particularly looking forward to giving Granddad Lucius a lecture on safe sex but he was even less inclined to become a grandfather while still in his thirties, or forties for that matter.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts about Draco's unexpected coming out? Thoughts about Scorpius' almost girlfriend?
Drunken Confessions

Topping up on his Christmas mead, Harry emptied half the glass with one large gulp, then filled it again. It had been well over two decades since Molly and Arthur Weasley had first welcomed him into their family home. The first time he had set foot into the cozy, quirky building just outside Ottery St Catchpole, he had instantly fallen in love with the place. It was so full of warmth and love, full of everything that was good about friendship and family.

Everyone he loved and cared for had gathered under one roof — except for one man — but for the first time ever, Harry didn’t want to be here. He had tried but he hadn’t been able to talk his way out of attending. Ron had, for whatever inexplicable reason, seen right through every single one of his excuses and told him to pull himself together and be on time. He hadn’t wanted to know why Harry was in such a foul mood but he had made it very clear that he wouldn’t tolerate Harry’s absence from the annual Weasley Christmas dinner.

Despite all that, Harry didn’t want to be at the Burrow. This year he didn’t want to join into the frivolous Christmas celebration. He couldn’t find it in him to enjoy the spirit of Christmas, the merry laughter and mouth-watering food Molly had cooked up. The sweet smell of pastries, Christmas cookies and mince pie made him nauseous and all throughout dinner he had merely picked at his food, only taking a tiny bite here and there. Every now and then he had vanished most of the food on his plate with a subtle flick of his wrist and a wandless, wordless spell.

After dinner he had put up a brave front, resolutely ignored Hermione’s worrying glances, and done his best to mingle. He had managed for a while, but all the merriness was making him weary. He just didn’t have the strength to pull a pretence. He really wanted to leave, wanted to simply disapparate to Merlin-knew-where but he even in his pleasantly inebriated state he was smart enough not to resolve to such a level of foolishness.

His adopted family wasn’t stupid. A disappearing act would immediately result in an intervention, led by none other than Molly Weasley. Harry did not want to explain to everyone how he had fallen in love with Draco Malfoy and then screwed it all up by listening to a thirteen-year-old teenager who didn’t want his father to know that he was friends with Harry Potter.

Turning his attention back to the alcohol in his hand, he frowned at it. Ordinarily, he hated mead. It was too sweet and too thick but tonight it dulled the ache in his chest. The pleasant dizziness, he felt, distracted him from the spectacular cockup that had inevitably led to the downfall of his and Draco’s relationship.

With a heavy sigh, Harry emptied his glass and giving up on it all together, he reached for a full bottle of homemade mead and decided to drink straight from it. Alcohol-induced oblivion was better than watching Ron attempt to dance with his wife while murdering several Muggle Christmas carols. Drinking himself into an alcoholic coma was better than the excited screams of all the children that had descended upon the house, along with their parents.

Every nook and cranny of the house creaked and groaned at the sheer effort it took to contain so many people under one roof. Every single member of the Weasley family, plus spouses and children, had descended upon the Burrow, including Teddy and his grandmother. Everywhere Harry turned, he could spot a mob of red hair.

Out of solidarity, even Teddy had changed his hair colour to a flaming shade of red and from afar he looked just like another member of the Weasley family. Judging by how heavily he was flirting with Victoire Weasley, Bill and Fleur’s daughter, Harry had no doubt that Teddy would eventually
become a member of the Weasley family.

Deciding that he wasn’t nearly drunk enough to continue observing the high-spirited Christmas celebrations, let alone think about pretending to join in, Harry escaped outside.

Once in the back garden, he breathed deeply and allowed the icy cold to engulf him. Somehow, the wintry chill accelerated his drunken state and swaying a little, he slowly moved towards a stack of old wooden crates. He sat down and taking a generous swig from his bottle of mead, he blearily stared off into the dark. He could still hear the buoyant chatter coming from inside the Burrow but it was just dull background noise that he easily managed to ignore.

*Finally, alone.*

It felt good to get away.

Letting out a soft sigh, Harry drew his wand and aimlessly drew messy patterns that followed no order into the cold, hard snow. He took a swig of mead every now and then but made no attempt to move back inside. The cold was slowly seeping through his warm clothes and under his skin but at this stage, he was too drunk to care. A little voice at the back of his mind suggested that he cast a warming charm, but despite holding his wand, he didn’t cast the spell. Instead, he huffed out breaths of vapour and thought about nothing at all.

*Tried* to think about nothing at all.

“Cheers,” the sound of a glass clinking against the bottle in his hand momentarily pulled Harry out of his drunken stupor. Lifting his head slightly, he turned to look at who had sat down next to him.

“Charlie. Didn’t know you had a twin,” he mumbled and a low rumble of laughter filled his ears.

“Wow – Harry, mate, I don’t think I’ve ever seen you this banjaxed.”

“Hmm,” Harry nodded noncommittally. He was not particularly interested in starting a conversation, but too polite to say so. Hoping that his actions might give him away, he took another swig of mead and continued to draw aimless patterns in the snow.

“Believe it or not, Mum’s asking about grandchildren again. Had to get out for a while,” Charlie sighed.

“You’d think what with being *gay* she’d give me a break but oh no, not a chance. I asked her if she doesn’t think she has enough yet and you know what? She just gives me this incredible look and says, completely nonchalantly, of course, *Charlie, you can never have enough grandchildren.* I swear, I love her to bits, but she’s driving me up the wall. Does she still keep setting you up?”

“Hasn’t for a while,” Harry mumbled and frowning he sniffed at the air, momentarily trying to figure out where that smell was coming from. It was very familiar indeed. Glancing sideways at Charlie, he fixed his eyes on the glass of wine in Charlie’s hand, eyeing it suspiciously.

“What are you drinking?” he asked. Despite his glasses, he didn’t trust his eyes anymore. His vision was blurry but he couldn’t care less. He wasn’t in any hurry to move anywhere.

“Rosé, why?”

“No reason,” Harry shrugged, lifted the bottle of mead up, he held it quite close to his face and eyed it carefully. There wasn’t much left and with a determined few gulps, he emptied the bottle and
dropped it into the snow.

“Draco drinks that with dinner. Makes me drink it too.”

“Draco?”

“Uh-huh,” Harry nodded absent-mindedly.

“As in Draco Malfoy?”

“Hmm.”

“You’re dating Draco Malfoy?”

“Was.”

“I see.”

Silence.

Harry burped loudly. He was suddenly acutely aware of his bladder protesting the copious amount of alcohol he had consumed and gingerly raised himself up. He swayed dangerously on two unsteady feet, blinked several times, and willed the Burrow into focus but it stubbornly remained all blurry.

“Need some help there, Harry?” Charlie asked and shaking his head, Harry took a step forward and promptly landed face first in the snow. Swearing in frustration, he tried to get up but failed.

“You do need help,” Charlie stated the obvious and Harry wanted to tell him to shut the fuck up, but somehow his mouth would not form the words.

“I might actually do,” Harry mumbled instead, somewhat grateful when two hands gripped him tightly and pulled him back up onto his feet.

“There. That’s better. Just how much did you drink tonight?” Charlie asked and reaching out, Harry steadied himself on Charlie’s shoulders. He blinked a few times and wished that Charlie’s second head would disappear, it was distracting. It took a few attempts but he finally managed to focus on Charlie and grinning stupidly, Harry somewhat leant against him.

“You are quite handsome, aren’t you, Mr Dragon Tamer?” he mumbled, poking Charlie in the chest with each word. “Nice strong arms. I’m sure you’ve nice abs too. Draco has nice abs. And strong arms.”

“Gosh, you are so pissed,” Charlie roared with laughter and a sudden bout of dizziness caused Harry’s stomach to churn violently. Leaning forward he unceremoniously retched, vaguely registering that he was vomiting all over Charlie’s shoes. Just as he was about to apologise a wave of blackness washed over him and he slumped against Charlie.
Blinking one eye open, Harry blearily stared at the familiar head floating in his living room fireplace.

“Harry, mate, mind if I come through?” Charlie’s transient head asked.

“Only if you have hangover potion,” Harry groaned and closing his eye again, he threw his arm over head to shield his eyes. The glare of the fire was making him dizzy and the effort it took to talk made him want to throw up. He wasn’t quite sure why he wasn’t in his bed — or how he had made it home for that matter — but was, quite possibly, still too drunk to care. He vaguely remembered Christmas dinner at the Burrow but drew a definite blank when it came to the rest of the night.

“Coming right up,” Charlie laughed and a moment later he stepped out of the fire with two potion phials.


“Must you shout like this?” he complained and giving opening his eyes another shot, he held his hand out, silently requesting the potions. He made a feeble attempt at sitting up but when a wave of nausea threatened to make him throw up all over Charlie’s shiny dragonhide boots, he wisely chose to consume the two potions in a horizontal position.

The relief was instant. The Sober-Me-Up potion dissolved the rest of the alcohol in his system and the Anti-Hangover potion to took care of his nausea and pounding headache.

“Ugh, I haven’t needed those in a long time,” he sighed and sitting up he slowly got to his feet.

“Any idea how I got home?” he asked, not sure if he wanted to know the answer.

“I got Ron to help me side-along you back here,” Charlie shrugged, “You were pretty insistent on sleeping on the floor in the living room, made a big ruckus when Ron tried to get you upstairs, so we just left you here. Figured we’d rather not risk you drawing your wand on us.” Charlie grinned and Harry grimaced.

“Thanks, and sorry for the trouble.”

“No big deal,” Charlie laughed, “though Ron’s thoroughly pissed with me; he figures I plied you with hardcore Romanian liquor.”


“Coffee sounds good. Merry Christmas, by the way.”

“Nothing merry about it,” Harry muttered under his breath and leading the way into the kitchen, he went about preparing two cups of very strong coffee, one for each of them.

“How come Molly let you go? It’s Christmas morning,” he asked a while later as he placed a cup of steaming hot coffee on the kitchen table in front of Charlie and holding on to the other one, he sat down across from Charlie.

“I told her I was gonna go make her some grandbabies,” Charlie laughed.
Harry did a doubletake and nearly spilled his hot coffee all over himself.

“You what now?” Harry gapped, then rolled his eyes when Charlie’s laughter filled his ears. “Figures you’d say something like this to wind me up.”

“Relax, Harry, mate. I’m a grown man – I can come and leave whenever it pleases me. Even on Christmas morning,” he reassured and Harry shot him a withering, Slytherin-worthy glare.

For a short while silence descended over the kitchen and Harry idly wondered why Charlie had come over. To check on him, that much Harry was sure of, but he suspected that his honorary older brother had an ulterior motive altogether.

Something had most definitely happened at the Burrow last night, but since he couldn’t remember anything at all, Harry saw no point to even try to rake his brain for clues. Instead he blew on his coffee and took a few careful sips, relishing in the reinvigorating power of caffeine.

“So, uhm, you’re dating Draco Malfoy then, huh?”

The second the words were out of Charlie’s mouth, Harry choked on his coffee. An involuntary hand jerk resulted in the coffee cup sailing right out of his hand and into his lap. Jumping to his feet, he swore loudly and repeatedly, treating Charlie to an unexpected array of extremely colourful language. Drawing his wand, he gingerly pointed it at his own groin and hit himself with a Drying Charm, followed by several Burn-Relief Charms.

“Fuck!” he groaned and not bothering to excuse himself, he disapparated from his kitchen straight upstairs into his en-suite bathroom. There he wrestled himself out of last night’s jeans and his boxers to survey the damage. Thankfully most of the coffee had spilled over his right thigh but just to be sure Harry accio’ed some burn salve from his Auror Field Case and applied it to his cock and all the surrounding area.

Once he was sure that he had covered every square inch, Harry headed out into his bedroom and pulling a pair of loose tracksuit bottoms out of one of the drawers of his wardrobe, he returned to the kitchen where Charlie had taken the liberty to clean up the spilled coffee and make him a new one.

“All bits still intact?” he joked and Harry shot him a poisonous death glare.

“How do you know about me and—?”

“Draco Malfoy?” Charlie asked with a wicked grin that instantly reminded Harry of George. “You told me last night.”

Groaning, Harry sat down and subtly casting a shield charm on his nether regions, he picked up his fresh cup of coffee and nursed it slowly, studiously avoiding looking at Charlie.

“Look, mate – I really don’t care who you date, all right? We all deserve to be with someone who makes us happy and if Draco Malfoy makes you happy then who am I to judge?”

Not quite knowing what to say to that, Harry remained silent and continued to sip his coffee. After a long moment of contemplation, he finally looked at Charlie and smiled cautiously. “Thanks, Charlie.”

Suppressing the sudden urge to spill his guts out to the man who had helped him come to terms with his sexuality by patiently answering a million and one questions, Harry let his eyes wander around the kitchen.
“Always,” Charlie smiled. “I don’t know if I may be overstepping a little here, but last night when I asked if you and Malfoy were dating you kind of said was so I assume something happened and well, if you don’t mind me prodding, is there anything I can do to help?”

Harry shook his head and setting his coffee cup down on the table, he wrapped his hands around it.

“It’s fine, I’m okay,” he said quietly and was about to change the subject and offer Charlie some breakfast when Charlie took his coffee cup from his hands and his big warm hands squeezed around his own.

“You clearly are not…fine, that is. Look, I know we blokes don’t really like to talk feelings and all that, but, uhm, even I can concede that sometimes it helps. You seriously look miserable, mate, and I think we both know that I’m a pretty good listener.”

Before Harry had the chance to do anything about it, a choked sob escaped his throat and much to his horror hot tears followed suit. They rolled down his cheeks and he could do nothing to stop them. He flushed with embarrassment and looking away, Harry stared at nothing as he willed himself to somehow control his emotions.

Except, his heart stubbornly refused to listen to any logic. Instead the silent tears increased in quantity and his entire body started to shake with the sheer effort it took him to force down the sobs that so desperately wanted to escape his throat.

“Shit, alright, a cry it is then,” Charlie’s voice cut through.

Harry continued to berate himself, continued to remind himself of his position at the Ministry and the fact that it had been him who had screwed up in the first place.

When two strong arms wrapped him into the safest and most comforting bear hug he had ever received, he couldn’t control himself any longer. The flood gates opened completely and he clung to Charlie and sobbed like a heartbroken teenager.

“Right, that’s it, let it all out,” Charlie’s soothing voice washed over him and he wrought his fingers into Charlie’s flannel shirt and did just that.

Harry had no idea how much time had passed since he had broken down in a flood of tears in Charlie’s arms, but he didn’t really care.

A tiny part of him still felt embarrassed but he mostly just felt relieved, like a heavy burden had lifted off his shoulders. Charlie had simply let him cry, let him sob. He hadn’t once admonished him or asked him to keep it together.

Once the tears had finally subsided, he had splashed some cold water onto his face and while Charlie had brewed fresh coffee, Harry finally spilt his guts to him. He had told him everything, starting with how he had received Scorpius’ letter and ending with how Draco had found out. He described every little obstacle in-between and Charlie listened to his story and did not interrupt him once.

“Well, one thing’s for sure. You really do love the man,” Charlie eventually said with a warm smile after taking a moment to process everything Harry had told him.

Harry simply nodded and renewing the shield charm on his nether regions, he picked up his coffee and reached for a slice of buttered toast. It wasn’t exactly a scrumptious Christmas morning breakfast but then again, he really didn’t care and neither did Charlie, apparently.
“I’m not a father, but I can understand why Malfoy, uhm, why Draco reacted the way he did. In his mind you should have told him, regardless of his teenage son’s request for you to keep quiet about it. In his eyes, you’re supposed to be the responsible adult, yet to him you acted like a secretive teenager and he feels betrayed.”

“He could at least give me a chance to explain, though.”

“Look at it from his perspective, Harry. To him, there’s nothing to explain. To him, you lied, you kept your friendship with his son a secret from him and because you were dating, he now feels like he can’t trust you. When he told you he never wanted to see you again, his reaction was most likely fuelled by anger and not at all thought through.”

“I just want to apologise,” Harry sighed and setting his coffee down, he finished off his toast, then exasperatedly raked his fingers through his unruly black mop of hair.

“Give him a few days to calm down, then try again. Maybe send him a letter explaining it all… Just don’t go making excuses for why you did what you did. ‘Fess up to it, ink on parchment,’ Charlie offered and Harry laughed hollowly.

“Charlie, you have no fucking idea how bloody stubborn Draco Malfoy can be. He would probably burn the letter and lock Earl in his dungeons, just to spite me.”

“If he loves you even a fraction, he will let you explain,” Charlie said and Harry couldn’t help but wonder why he was so confident about that.

The way he looked at it, Draco had blocked his Floo connection and had most definitely — again — removed him from the wards at the Manor. For all Harry knew, Draco might have even cast a non-detection spell around the Manor to ensure that Earl couldn’t find the place.

“Maybe I should send him another Patronus,” Harry mused.

“Just give him a bit of time to cool off. Maybe wait till after the New Year, then get him to meet with you some place neutral and explain. My advice would be that you make it clear to him that you have no expectations, that you just want to explain and apologise. That leaves the quaffle in his ring, so to speak,” Charlie smiled and Harry wanted to laugh at the ridiculous Quidditch metaphor.

“You sure working with dragons is what you will do for the rest of your life? Maybe you should think about becoming a therapist,” Harry grinned and Charlie roared with laughter.

“Been around a bit longer than you, mate. Got a fair bit of life experience on me, that’s all. And probably a bit more experience with men too,” Charlie grinned and raising his coffee cup in a mock toast, he winked. “Feeling better now?”

“Loads,” Harry nodded. “Hey hang on, you’re a dragon tamer – can’t you sort out Draco for me?”

“I’m afraid my experience is limited to taming real, fire-spewing dragons.”

“Oh, Draco spews fire alright,” Harry sighed.

“It’ll all work out in the end, trust me,” Charlie sounded so reassuring that Harry couldn’t help but believe him.
What's everyone's opinion on Harry's and Charlie's relationship?
When The Silver Scorpion Burns

Chapter Summary

A/N: This chapter contains a fair bit of angst, but I promise you, nobody dies and everything angsty will be resolved over the next few chapters.

Draco,

I’ve given up on counting how many attempts I’ve made to write this letter. Suffice it to say I’m drowning in a sea of balled up parchments. Well, I might be exaggerating a little, but you’ve seen what my study looks like when I get invested in something.

OK, maybe humour isn’t the right way to go about this, but I don’t have a better idea, so bear with me?

Look, Draco, I know you’re fighting mad that I didn’t tell you about me and Scorpius corresponding, but I honestly didn’t keep this from you because I didn’t want you to know. I do realise that Scorpius is just a child. He is relatively mature for his age but a child all the same, so when he asked me not to tell you anything, I didn’t think – I just went with it.

I know I should have told you, but… I don’t have a but.

I should have told you and I didn’t and I really am sorry about that. Hurting you and keeping secrets from you was never my intention, I swear. I care too much about you to ever hurt you in that way and knowing that I did, well, the feeling is unbearable.

If only you’d meet with me, we could talk. I absolutely get that you’re angry and feel betrayed, and I know I’m begging here, but give me a chance? Please.

I miss you. A lot. I miss having you around, I miss the sound of your voice and your touch. I miss you snarking at me and I miss waking up next to you. I’m not normally one for overly romantic declarations of love, but you really mean a lot to me. I love you. I really do.

The last few months have been somewhat of a whirlwind of strangeness and I know this whole relationship stuff isn’t (wasn’t?) really your cup of tea to begin with but I’m not ready to give up on you. I refuse to give up on you, on us. We make a rather odd couple but you’re good for me. You are a challenge, in every sense of the way. With you, nothing’s ever dull and now that I’ve had a taste of that, I want more. I want everything, Draco, and I want it with you.

To be quite honest, when you asked me if I wanted to spend Christmas Day with you and Scorpius, you completely threw me. I didn’t expect you to want me to meet Scorpius so soon. I know how important he is to you, which is why I really do understand why you were so utterly mad about the whole thing. I imagine if we were to reverse our roles, if it was Teddy and you, well, I might have quite possibly hexed you into oblivion.
If hexing me would make you feel better, would make you less angry, I will let you do it.  

Please, give me – us – a chance, if only to talk. A dinner, perhaps?

I’ll make time.

Love,  

Harry

Folding the *Prophet* neatly, Draco reached for his teacup and stood up.

“Is Master Malfoy finished with his lunch?” Tibby asked, appearing in the room as if on cue.

“I am. Thank you, Tibby,” Draco nodded and stepping away from the table, he approached the window. He looked out over the grounds of the Manor but his attention refused to settle on anything in particular.

“Master Malfoy is most kind to be saying such wonderful words,” the elf chirped, “Tibby will be clearing the table so,” he added and Draco gave a pensive nod.

Taking a careful sip from his hot tea, he let his gaze wander over the green, meticulously maintained grass, the pebbled walkways, the stone plant pots, and the large naked trees in the distance. The snow had melted away just after Christmas, but the weather stubbornly remained horribly cold and unfriendly.

Most days, it was extremely windy and rainy and just looking out at those big grey clouds, hanging low in the sky, was enough to dampen Draco’s spirits for the day. Winter was a truly depressing time and Draco couldn’t wait for temperatures to climb and for spring to brighten the days.

The Manor’s gardens were magnificent and opulent at the best of times, but in spring, as well as autumn, they were especially grand and breathtakingly beautiful. The ancient magic woven into the Manor’s wards encouraged the growth of a multitude of flower blossoms; some local, and some rather exotic.

Astoria had always insisted on keeping all windows and doors open. She had loved the scent of spring wafting through every single room of the Manor, attaching itself to curtains, armchairs, rugs, and tapestries all around the place. Over time, Draco adapted to Astoria’s habit of perpetually spelling all the windows in the Manor open until it was too cold to do so and the moment spring came knocking, he found himself doing the same.

With a heavy sigh, Draco resolutely pushed the memory away. Winter was depressing enough, he didn’t need any sombre thoughts to make things even worse. Instead, he distracted himself with his tea, a fine blend of black tea leaves from a small tea farm in India.

Scorpius didn’t really care much for the gardens unless he was circling high above them on his broom, and Draco had never really gotten the chance to show Harry the gardens.

The new year had come and gone and his and Scorpius’ visit to France to spend time with his parents had gone by rather uneventfully. Astonishingly, Lucius had given neither him nor Scorpius a hard time. Draco suspected that it had been his mother’s doing. She was the only one who had ever truly been able to control his father even just a little. The four of them had spent a rather enjoyable, if at times a little awkward, New Year’s Eve together.
Scorpius had even managed to defeat his grandfather in a fierce game of Wizarding Chess. It had been nothing short of a miracle, especially since Lucius Malfoy hadn’t even as much as bat an eyelid when his grandson had proceeded to do a victory dance around the drawing room of Chateau D’Malfoy.

While Draco knew his son to be a good player, he couldn’t help but wonder whether Lucius, what with his advancing age, was slowly going soft. Had he graciously allowed his grandson to win the game? Despite his intense curiosity, Draco knew better than to question his father on the matter. No good would come out of it, he was sure of that.

A few days later, after their return from France, he and Scorpius had spent an entire day shopping in Muggle London and of course in Diagon Alley. After much insistence from Scorpius, they had ended up with matching father and son outfits from a rather popular high-end Muggle fashion boutique and it had left Draco wondering how it was possible that Scorpius had the ability to make him seethe with anger as well as exploit all his weak spots to his advantage.

Even though he had already spoilt Scorpius with a multitude of presents over the holiday, Draco hadn’t been able to resist the temptation to spend an obscenely large sum of money on supplies and new clothes for Scorpius. It wasn’t like Scorpius really needed all the things they had purchased, but Draco rather enjoyed spoiling his son from time to time. He had drawn the line at a new racing broom though, reasoning that there was nothing wrong with Scorpius’ current broom and despite being disgruntled at first, Scorpius had eventually given up begging.

While the Manor always felt just that little bit too big when Scorpius was away at school, this time around it felt especially big, almost oppressing even, and it made Draco restless.

A few days after Scorpius’ departure, Draco had received a rather long letter from Harry, and while he had read the whole thing from start to finish — several times actually — he simply couldn’t bring himself to sit down and compose a response, couldn’t bring himself to be in the same room with Harry.

At this stage, his anger at the whole secret quill and parchment fiasco had mostly dispersed. A rather large part of him, located right in the centre of his chest, sorely missed Harry’s company but he just couldn’t shake the feeling of hurt and betrayal.

It still hurt and Draco — though if ever asked he most definitely planned to deny it — wasn’t very good at dealing with that. Somehow, denial seemed like the more sensible option, even though it really wasn’t. He knew that much, was mature enough to have come to that conclusion, just not brave enough to act on it.

Something inside of him wanted to jump over his own shadow and give Harry another chance but his pride wouldn’t let him.

*He’s good for you*, a voice in his head tried to reason on a daily basis, but Draco shut it down almost immediately. He didn’t want to think about it. Why did relationships have to be so difficult and why did he have to be so utterly terrible at them?

With yet another heavy sigh, Draco found himself reaching to touch the pendant of a silver scorpion that hung from a delicate necklace around his neck. It had been a present from Astoria for Scorpius’ first birthday and after she had put it on him, Draco had never taken it off again. He fondly caressed the embedded emeralds and smiled as the memory of him cradling his baby son to his naked chest flashed through his mind. Astoria had charmed the necklace with an ancient protective spell that was to alert him should anything ever happen to Scorpius, should Scorpius ever find himself in mortal danger.
In the twelve years, Draco had worn the pendant around his neck, always hidden away under his clothing, the protective charm had never once activated. Then again, Scorpius had never once been in trouble before. Bruises yes, scratches too, of course, but never any broken bones and most definitely no threat to his life.

It was for that very reason that Draco nearly jumped half a mile out of his skin when the pendant suddenly heated up considerably and all six emeralds glowed brightly.

Not entirely sure what to make of that, Draco stood, rooted to the spot, until a persistent tugging at his robes made him glance downward at a completely agitated house elf.

“Master Malfoy, Master Malfoy! The headmistress of Hogwarts is fire-calling!” he squeaked and Draco’s insides churned with a sense of foreboding.

Discarding his teacup on the windowsill, he turned on his heel and rushed out of the room.

“The entrance hall fireplace!”

He vaguely registered Tibby giving him directions and breaking into a sprint, Draco dashed down the long corridor of the Manor, with his robes billowing behind him. He practically threw himself onto his knees in front of the large hearth and panted, hastily gulping down a few large breaths to appease his burning lungs and thumping heart.

“Professor McGonagall, what happened?”

“Mr Malfoy, I’m afraid I’ve bad news,” the headmistress’ floating head spoke, her voice gravelly and her expression more serious than usual. Her own distress was evident and even though he didn’t know what had happened, Draco felt his heart shatter into a million tiny pieces, there was no way this was good.

“Is my son alright?” Draco pressed, inexplicably feeling like someone had punched him in the gut and he was still trying to recover from the heavy blow.

“I’m afraid Madame Pomfrey— she— We had to bring your son to St Mungo’s—”

“Which department?” Draco interrupted curtly.

“Magical Accidents and Emergencies,” Professor McGonagall responded immediately and an intense wave of nausea washed over Draco. He swallowed the urge to retch but couldn’t stop his body from shaking.

“Mr Malfoy, I urge you to—”

“I’ll be less than ten minutes,” Draco said curtly, rising to his feet as though in trance.

“Very well, Madame Pomfrey will meet you in the entrance hall,” Professor McGonagall replied and her head disappeared from the fireplace.

Draco turned around and was about to call out for Tibby, when the elf appeared at his side, clearly sensing that his Master needed him.

“Tibby, I need you to take me to St Mungo’s now,” Draco implored the house elf.

Apparating into London with his mind in such turmoil was bordering on suicide and he wasn’t going to take a chance, not when Scorpius needed him, not ever. Tibby merely nodded and reaching out he
wrapped his long fingers around Draco’s wrist, squeezing tightly.

A second later, Draco felt a familiar tug in his navel and both he and Tibby vanished into thin air.

Several moments later, they reappeared inside the hospital near the entrance, and staggering slightly, Draco took a moment to steady himself before looking around for a familiar face.

A rather flustered-looking Madame Pomfrey came running towards him and Draco instantly felt all colour drain from his face. It took something quite serious to rattle good old Pomfrey and twisting the fingers of his wand hand into his robes, he clenched them tightly, not caring whether he was going to destroy the garment or not.

“Mr Malfoy,” Madame Pomfrey welcomed him, her voice even but somewhat strained.

“My son?” Draco asked quietly and tensed when Madame Pomfrey reached out to squeeze his shoulder. She didn’t seem to care that he was several inches taller than her.

“Given the circumstances, your son is doing well. He was in a lot of pain so the healers have put him under for the time being. He’s suffered several broken bones and some deep cuts but he’ll be fine.”

“What the bloody hell happened?” Draco demanded to know, his entire body rigid yet shaking with fear. Several broken bones? Some deep cuts? Had Scorpius attempted to wrestle a werewolf or just taken a very unfortunate tumble off his broom? And why wasn’t Pomfrey able to take care of him in the Infirmary? Why St Mungo’s? Nothing made sense, Draco’s head spun, and yet another wave of nausea washed over him.

“Let me take you to your son, I’ll explain then. Do follow me,” Madame Pomfrey said. Moments ago, she had looked quite ruffled but now she was calm, collected and very authoritative. Exactly like Draco remembered her from his days at Hogwarts. Some things did never change.

Draco nodded solemnly and quietly accompanied the mediwitch to the department for Magical Accidents and Emergencies. Once through the doors, he instantly scrunched up his nose at the strong metallic scent of blood, the antiseptic scent of cleaning solution and the sickeningly sweet smell of an array of potions, Draco did not care to identify.

He allowed Madame Pomfrey to lead him down a wide corridor and into a private hospital room. Two healers and a nurse stood at Scorpius bedside, talking quietly between themselves.

The sight of his son’s unmoving body instantly robbed Draco of his ability to keep his composure. Rushing forward, he fell to his knees at Scorpius’ bedside and a wretched sob escaped his throat.

“No! Not Scorpius, not my boy,” he screamed.

“Draco,” Madame Pomfrey addressed him insistently and a firm hand placed itself on his shoulder and squeezed much firmer than before. “He’s just sleeping, he’ll be fine.”

“What? How?” Draco mumbled, not able to form a coherent question at all. He couldn’t take his eyes off Scorpius. His body shook and nausea threatened to overwhelm him. He had no idea how he was keeping it at bay.

“Your son got involved with some rather ill-mannered wild venomous tentacula,” Madame Pomfrey explained, “hence the broken bones and the cuts. Thankfully, he wasn’t exposed to too much of the poison but it will take a while for the antidote to take effect.”

“Wild venomous tentacula?” Draco asked, confused and unable to really make sense of what he was
hearing. Reaching out, he gently lifted Scorpius’ hand into his own and rubbed circles over the back of it with his thumb.

“Merlin knows what possessed the boy, Draco, but if it hadn’t been for young Mr Lupin, I dare say this could have ended a lot worse.”

“Mr Lupin?”

Draco turned his head and looked up at his former mediwitch. “As in Teddy Lupin? Harry Potter’s godson?”

“The very one,” Madame Pomfrey nodded and Draco frowned.

“What does he have to do with this?”

“Just thank him, Draco. He risked his life to save your son,” Madame Pomfrey said quietly and tightening his hold on Scorpius hand, Draco furrowed his brows.

“Is he, is he…alright?”

“The healers are doing their very best,” Madame Pomfrey sighed, “it’s critical. They’re having a hard time trying to neutralise the poison, there’s too much of it for his body to deal with.”

Briefly closing his eyes, Draco sent a silent prayer to whoever might be listening before turning his gaze back to Scorpius.

“What on earth did you two boys do?” he mumbled, fervently trying, but failing, to wrap his mind around what had happened.

He couldn’t fathom why Scorpius would voluntarily choose to handle wild venomous tentacula of all things. The potted venomous tentacula in the Hogwarts greenhouses was temperamental enough to do serious damage, but wild venomous tentacula? One had to have a death wish to try and tackle that. Surely Scorpius knew better than to venture into the Forbidden Forest to seek out a poisonous, volatile plant that, without an ounce of hesitation, crushed your bones and poisoned you with its bite?
Harry was certain that this was the fastest he had ever run in his entire life.

When Ron dragged him out of his meeting with all the department heads and Minister Shacklebolt to tell him that Teddy had been admitted to St Mungo’s Department for Magical Accidents and Emergencies and was in critical condition after a nasty encounter with some vicious wild venomous tentacula, his blood had run cold and for several seconds, it had felt like his heart had stopped beating altogether.

It had taken a minute or two for the news to sink in properly and although Ron had kept talking, he hadn’t heard a single word of what his friend had said.

He vaguely recalled something about Andromeda, unreachable, and abroad but at that point, his feet had already taken on a mind of their own and he stormed off down the corridor and towards the lifts. He made a dash for the first available lift, apologising profusely when he knocked a stack of papers out of a secretary’s arms in the process.

The journey down to the Atrium had been short – it had taken several seconds – but to Harry, it felt like hours. The moment the doors had opened, he raced through the throng of witches and wizards straight toward the multipurpose fireplaces that allowed for both floo travel and apparition. He tried his best to dodge people but his mind had been so focused on getting out of the Ministry and over to St Mungo’s that he had inevitably sent a few people flying out of the way.

Once outside the Ministry, Harry ran all the way to St Mungo’s. Apparating had occurred to him, but a sensible little voice in his head told him to put his trust into his own two feet instead. His mind was not capable of focusing on anything and today was not the day Harry wanted to splinch himself. All he wanted was to find out exactly what mess Teddy had gotten himself into this time.

By the time he had reached the hospital, Harry was completely out of breath. Forced to stop in the hospital’s large entrance hall, he braced himself on his knees. He tried to fill his protesting lungs with some much-needed oxygen. Being an Auror required that he kept at least somewhat fit, but since he spent most of his time behind an office desk, his endurance had suffered somewhat. Or possibly even a lot. He made a mental note to rectify the issue, then focused his attention on finding his way through the maze of hospital signs.

When his lungs had recovered enough to allow him to resume moving, Harry made a beeline for the Department of Magical Accidents and Emergencies, entirely oblivious to the fact that his Auror robes were probably drawing the attention of the entire hospital.

At first, the nurses, backed by the healers-on-duty, refused to grant him entry to Teddy’s treatment room and no amount of exasperated explaining made them waver. His name, his relationship with Teddy, his Auror Badge, his senior position at the Ministry, none of it had been enough to convince

Angst, yes. Deaths, no, I would have marked it in the tags otherwise. Get yourself some chocolate first. Dementors are ugly things.
anyone to let him through to see his godson.

Harry had been about to lose his rag when, with a little bit of Madame Pomfrey’s divine intervention, the department’s chief healer had eventually relented and allowed him into the room to see Teddy.

The sight of his godson had brought Harry to his knees and with a gut-wrenching sob, he had begged to know what was going on and why Teddy looked like he was dead.

Post-war, the sight of a near lifeless body was more than Harry could handle and it sometimes made him wonder whether he had chosen the wrong career altogether.

No amount of reassurances from Madame Pomfrey and the team of healers managed to calm him and eventually one of the hospital nurses had resolutely forced several drops of an anti-anxiety drought down his throat.

He hadn’t swallowed it willingly but she had squeezed his nose shut and after running out of oxygen, he had to open his mouth to breathe. The second he had done so, she had administered the drug and while it had eased his panic considerably, Harry still felt unsettled.

He had managed to focus his attention on the healer-in-charge for long enough to find out that Teddy had a worrisome amount of venom in his system. The wild venomous tentacula had crushed several of his ribs — which had led to him suffering serious internal injuries — and the healers had informed Harry that Teddy would have to remain in a potion-induced artificial coma for at least a week.

The whole thing was a nightmare of epic proportions and more than Harry’s frazzled mind could handle. The nurses tried to coax him away from Teddy’s bedside, tried to get some food into him, but he brusquely told them to mind their own business, told them that he wasn’t about to leave Teddy, not even for a second.

At some point they had given up and grateful for the peace, Harry had dragged a chair over to Teddy’s bedside and proceeded to wait out the night. He felt helpless and hopeless and the only thing that kept him from going insane was the fact that he was at Teddy’s side.

Standing in the door to Teddy’s temporary hospital room holding a cup of very strong hot coffee, Draco took in the scene before him.

Teddy, like Scorpius, was in a potion-induced coma and while the healers had reassured Draco that they fully intended to wake Scorpius up tomorrow, they had also divulged that they would be unable to do the same with Teddy.

To the untrained eye, it appeared as if Teddy was merely fast asleep, but the deathly pale colour of his skin and the whitish-grey appearance of his hair were an obvious clue to the fact that something was seriously amiss.

Bandages covered his arms and legs and he was receiving a steady supply of a complex mixture of medicinal potions straight into his bloodstream, something healers at St Mungo’s only resolved to doing in extreme cases. Seeing Teddy like this, seeing his lifeless body and what it had done to Harry, tore at Draco’s heartstrings.

Stepping into the room, Draco quietly approached Harry, then hesitated for a moment. He didn’t need to see Harry’s face to know that he was thoroughly distraught. He was still in his full Auror uniform but had discarded his scarlet robes. They were currently haphazardly resting at the foot of Teddy’s hospital bed. He had perched himself on a rather uncomfortable-looking chair, which he had dragged to Teddy’s bedside, and sat with his shoulders slouched forward. One hand rested gently on
top of Teddy’s and the other repeatedly and ever so tenderly stroked through his godson’s hair.

If Draco didn’t know any better, he would have said that Harry looked every bit like Teddy’s father.

Taking a deep breath, Draco reached out and placed his hand on Harry’s shoulder, squeezing firmly. He could feel Harry tense beneath his unexpected touch, but it didn’t discourage him from trying to provide some sort of comfort. At this point in time, he couldn’t care less about what had happened between them. All he wanted to do right now was to ease some of the pain he knew Harry felt.

“It’s just me,” Draco said quietly and managed a small smile as Harry briefly tilted his head upward to look at him.

“I brought you coffee,” he said, offering the cup to Harry, who gratefully accepted it.

“Have you eaten anything?” he asked softly, glancing at the permanent Tempus charm that hoovered over medical chart holder above Teddy’s bed. It was past midnight and he had an inkling that Harry hadn’t eaten or had some water since his arrival at the hospital sometime in the late afternoon.

“Not hungry,” Harry mumbled. He took a sip from the coffee cup and sighed. Hearing Harry’s distress twisted Draco’s guts and a vice-like grip seized his heart.

“He will be fine, you know,” Draco, not knowing what else to say, tried to reassure.

Harry’s hollow laugh made his heart contract painfully, adding to the distress he already felt. Realising that his hand was still resting on Harry’s shoulder, he gave it another gentle squeeze.

“You are a moron,” Draco couldn’t help but reprimand himself. The sight of Teddy’s fragile body was oddly sobering.

So, Scorpius and Harry were friends. So, they regularly wrote letters to each other. So, they hadn’t told him about it. So, they had both acted like teenagers. What else was new?

Compared to Teddy fighting for his life, compared to the bundle of misery that Harry was, his reaction to the whole thing had been trivial and his petulant insistence not to give Harry a fighting chance to explain himself seemed stupid.

He had let his own pride get in the way of spending a wonderful Christmas with both Scorpius and Harry. They could have been enjoying quality time together, eating dinner, snarking at each other, sharing a bed together…

If he hadn’t allowed his pride to get in the way, maybe none of this would have happened?

Nobody’s perfect, least of all you, a tiny voice that sounded just like Astoria chided him, and Draco pursed his lips to suppress a sigh.

“Join me for a walk?” he asked, acutely aware of the strange silence between him and Harry. He hoped that Harry would agree to accompany him but he could tell by the way Harry’s eyes were flickering between him and Teddy and he was torn in his decision.

“He’ll be fine. Trust me,” Draco repeated his earlier words.

They made him feel like a fool.
From the very start Harry had put all his trust in him; he, on the other hand, had been standoffish and suspicious, but most of all scared. Scared to admit his feelings for a man whom he had known for more than two decades and who, against all odds, seemed so right for him that it was downright terrifying.

He had run – not once, not twice, but three times.

And for what?

To hold a grudge while his son and Harry’s godson lay in separate hospital beds recovering from injuries that could easily have been fatal?

Despite all his faults, Draco decided right there and then that he was too old to play games, too old to keep holding on to all this bitterness. Harry hadn’t kept his friendship with Scorpius a secret with the intention to hurt or embarrass him in any way, Draco knew that much, it was just somehow so much easier to admit that to himself than to tell Harry the same thing.

“I could actually do with a stretch of legs,” Harry interrupted Draco’s train of thought and with a nod, Draco withdrew his hand from Harry’s shoulder and held it out for Harry to take instead. Draco pulled Harry to his feet and watching him stretch his stiff muscles, he mustered a little smile.

“Let’s go then. I hear the streets of London are a treat at midnight.”

Harry laughed softly, and this time it was an amused laugh rather than a hollow, emotionless laugh.

On their way out of the room, Draco skilfully drew his wand and keeping it behind his back, he summoned his Patronus to keep Teddy company in Harry’s brief absence.

Chapter End Notes

Are Harry and Draco getting somewhere or is this just comfort? What are your thoughts?
“It hurts,” Scorpius grimaced, “it really hurts.”

“How bad is it?” Draco asked as he stirred some brown sugar and powdered vanilla extract into Scorpius’ banana and walnut oatmeal dish, then placed it on the nightstand next to Scorpius’ bed.

“Excruciating, torturous, unendurable,” Scorpius replied with a pout and looked up at his father from under lowered lashes.

With a smile, Draco reached out to brush a stray strand of Scorpius’ hair out of his face and tugged it behind his ear. His blond locks were messy and in desperate need of a trim. At this stage they reached well past the nape of his neck and Draco made a mental note to drag Scorpius to a hairdresser before sending him back to Hogwarts once the healers agreed to sign the discharge papers.

“I doubt it’s quite that bad, though I am impressed by your advanced vocabulary. Nevertheless, I brewed you a pain-numbing potion last night. It’s not very strong, but it’ll make you feel better.”

Draco had wisely asked the healers for permission first and given his excellent credentials — and his recent involvement with the Auror department to bring down a potion smuggling ring — they’d had no qualms about allowing him to brew a specialised pain-numbing potion for Scorpius.

Reaching into his robes, Draco produced a small potion phial and uncorking it, he added three drops to Scorpius’ food.

“Must I eat this?” Scorpius grumbled with a look of distaste.

“If you don’t want to, you don’t have to,” Draco shrugged, “but since both your arms are currently wrapped in bandages and you are therefore incapacitated, do not for one second think that I’ll run out to buy you a sandwich later today when you tell me that you’re starving.”

“There should be some sort of law protecting injured children from advantage-taking parents,” Scorpius sighed but dutifully opened his mouth when Draco offered him a spoonful of oatmeal with half a slice of banana and a small piece of walnut.

“Yum, it’s actually not too bad,” he smiled and Draco mentally ticked the father-won-again box.

Kudos to Tibby, who clearly knew how to turn a vile but healthy dish into something a fussy teenager recovering from a stupid dare-induced accident would eat.

The healers had remained true to their word and some thirty hours after Scorpius’ admittance to the hospital, they had woken him from his potion-induced coma.

For the first few hours Scorpius had been grumpy and teary-eyed but a mixture of healing potions, specially designed to pep him up, had eventually rejuvenated him to the point that he was happy to sit up in bed. The Skele-Gro was working well and the bones in his left arm were gradually growing back together while the healing pastes slowly healed the deep cuts on his right arm, right side, and left lower leg. The healers were positive that he would walk away from all this without any lasting marks.

Draco wanted nothing more than to give Scorpius a sound piece of his mind. He also wanted to dish out a lengthy list of punishments but he figured his wrath could wait until Scorpius had recovered a
little more. Overall he was doing well, but Scorpius found the restricted use of his arms depressing and it was up to Draco to think of ways to entertain his son.

Reading was therefore out of the question, and due to his other injuries, getting out of bed was also off the table. As a result, Scorpius didn’t sleep well or for long periods of time. Instead he slept at odd hours, often waking in the middle of the night to complain of headaches as the antidote worked to slowly rid his body of the wild venomous tentacula’s venom.

Initially, Draco had requested that the healers prescribe Scorpius some Dreamless Sleep, but they had refused, citing possible side effects between the potion and the antidote. Draco had been disgruntled but knew better than to start a fight with a team of trained and certified mediwizards and mediwitches. He had quietly done his own research and learnt that Dreamless Sleep interacted negatively with the antidote given to treat wild venomous tentacula poisoning, especially when large quantities of the latter were necessary to treat poisoning.

To distract Scorpius from his pain, his general uncomfortableness, and his inability to sleep for more than a couple of hours at a time, Draco had taken to reading to him. They were mostly pouring over Scorpius’ school books, which wasn’t the most distracting of topics, but somehow it worked. For once, Draco was rather grateful for Scorpius’ natural curiosity when it came to soaking up new knowledge. He was engaged, asked a million and one questions, and thoroughly tested Draco’s knowledge on a large variety of subjects.

“Dad?”

Scorpius’ sudden request for attention, made Draco lower his book — *Potion Forensics: A Potions Master’s Approach To Crime Scene Investigation* — and turning his head slightly he smiled at his rather dishevelled, sleepy son.

“Awake again?”

“Hmm,” Scorpius nodded and scrunching up his nose, he complained of its itchiness.

Draco laughed softly and reached out to dutifully scratch his son’s nose.

“Better?” he asked.

“Much. Thanks.”

“Hungry? Need the bathroom? Want something to drink?” Feeling more like a nurse than a father, Draco diligently checked in on his son’s needs. Scorpius declined food and a trip to the bathroom but requested a few sips of cool water. Draco slipped a bookmark into his book and placing it on Scorpius’ nightstand, he rose to his feet and fluffed up Scorpius’ pillows. Once Scorpius sat upright and comfortably propped up against the pillows, Draco reached for his water cup and helped him to take a few sips.

“Dad?”

“Yes?”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Always,” Draco inclined his head as he sat down again.

The visitor’s chair was so utterly uncomfortable that not even a cushioning charm brought much
improvement or relief. He barely managed to resist the temptation to transfigure it into an armchair, however, the unforgivingly hard chair also had its’ benefits. At least, it kept reminding him to get up and stretch his sore limbs every so often.

“Did you, uhm, did you and Harry fight?”

Standing at the open door to Scorpius’ hospital room, Harry quietly watched the loving exchange between a father and his son. He had just been about to knock to announce his presence, but something about the sight that had greeted him had stopped him in his tracks. It just hadn’t felt right to interrupt the tender moment between Draco and his son.

Leaning against the doorframe, Harry felt his chest constrict and his heart clench painfully. For the past few nights, Draco had stopped by Teddy’s room to bring him a strong coffee and put his mind at ease with repeated reassurances before suggesting that they take a walk together. Harry relished the short time he got to spend with Draco, even if they didn’t talk, not much anyway. He absolutely needed Teddy to wake up and each day that passed by without any discernible improvement drove Harry a little closer to the brink of insanity. Doing nothing wasn’t something he knew how to handle.

Realistically it had only been a few days, but since Teddy’s injuries were rather serious, the healers absolutely refused to even consider reducing any of the potions that ensured Teddy remained fast asleep. While Harry was sensible enough to understand that, a small, selfish part of him desperately needed to be able to interact with Teddy, even more so now that he had witnessed Draco’s interaction with his son.

He sorely missed goofing about with Teddy and even though he wasn’t sure whether Teddy could hear him, he insisted on talking to him. He shared articles from the Prophet and the one or other chapter from Teddy’s school books. Mostly, however, he just talked to Teddy about anything and everything, hoping that the sound of his voice might aid the healing process.

As he stood there by the door to Scorpius’ room, Harry knew that he should really reveal himself. He knew that Draco would be furious if he caught him eavesdropping but somehow Harry just couldn’t bring himself to raise his hand to knock. Especially because Scorpius had just asked Draco a question that Harry most definitely wanted an answer to. Though if he were honest, he was sure he knew the answer already.

“What makes you say that?”

Draco’s evasion of the question was a downright Slytherin move and Harry bit his tongue to stop himself from smirking.

Well done, Draco, he thought, instantly remembering all those times Draco had deflected one of his questions with a question of his own. He was extremely good at that.

“Oh come on Dad; I’m not stupid.”

Scorpius’ bored eyeroll was the perfect Slytherin countermove and Harry had no doubt that this exchange between father and son was evenly matched.

“I never said you were.”

“Then tell me.”

“If you must know, yes, we had a…disagreement.”
Harry instantly felt the strong urge to enter the room and set the record straight. Draco’s stubborn and continued silent treatment was hardly something one called a disagreement. It wasn’t like he hadn’t tried to talk to Draco, it was just that Draco had rebuffed him each time he had done so.

“Can’t you forgive him?”

“Are you two still talking behind my back?”

Again, diversion. Harry shook his head. It was most definitely Draco’s favourite move whenever he was stalling for time.

“No. Well, I wrote him a letter after Christmas but I haven’t received a response yet. You didn’t forbid him to write to me, did you?”

Accusation. Harry couldn’t deny that he liked Scorpius’ boldness. He had no qualms about standing up to Draco or at least trying to.

“I did not. I expect Harry is probably just busy.”

“He has never been so busy that he didn’t find the time to write to me.”

Harry could tell that Scorpius’ was quite upset over the fact that he hadn’t answered his letter but he simply hadn’t been able to bring himself to pen a response. He had tried to, but each time had picked up his quill, his brain supplied him with unwanted memories of how Draco had stormed into his office and basically torn him apart. The fact that he had pointedly refused to engage in any kind of conversation the night he had stopped by Grimmauld Place to pick Scorpius up.

So, instead of writing to Scorpius, Harry had written to Draco instead. He was still stubbornly waiting for an answer, stubbornly ignoring that little voice in his head that tried to tell him that he and Draco were history. He wasn’t ready to accept that, wasn’t ready to give up. It would take more than Draco’s stupid stubbornness to get Harry to back off for good.

“Well, I don’t know why he hasn’t answered your letter, but I guarantee you I haven’t forbidden him to write to you.”

“You know what, Dad, you’ll probably ground me for saying this, but I think you’re being a bit stupid – or a lot, actually. Harry is cool. You wrote to me to tell me you are friends, who cares that he and I are friends too? You really do act like he committed a capital crime when all he did was honour my request.”

“If adults always did everything children asked of them this world would be a funny place indeed.”

Draco’s sigh was unmistakable and Harry quietly conceded that he had a point.

“It would be…more fun indeed.”

Scorpius’ flippant comeback made Harry want to laugh and he bit the inside of his mouth to stop himself from giving in to the urge.

“Seriously, Dad, give him a chance, all right? Friends are important and you’re most definitely not getting any younger. I’m at Hogwarts for most of the year and with mum gone, I sometimes really wonder who you talk to all day. The walls? Tibby? Your potions cauldrons? Books? The flowers in the gardens?”

“How would you feel about Brussel sprouts for dinner?”
The abrupt change of topic made Harry smile. Draco was good at those too. Though now that Scorpius had pointed it out, Harry did wonder what Draco did at the Manor all day. He wasn’t sure whether Draco had kept in touch with any of his old Hogwarts classmates, but he highly doubted it.

“Are you trying to poison me? Because if so, I will yell until the healers come.”

“Kindly refrain from constantly pointing out my age then.”

“What? To me you’re ancient.”

“Gee, thanks, I will remember that next time you want something from me, like say a new broom maybe.”

“Cruel. You’re just cruel.”

“Why, Scorpius, thank you for the compliment.”

This time, Harry had to clasp his hand over his mouth to stop himself from laughing. The easy banter between Draco and Scorpius was entertaining to say the least, but it also made him miss Draco’s company. It hadn’t taken much for him to fall in love with Draco’s snarky comments and dry sarcasm. They were a part of him Harry had grown to love and it took him every ounce of self-control not to walk into the room and demand Draco’s attention.

Yes, he wanted Teddy to wake up, wanted him to recover completely but apart from that he also wanted Draco. He wanted – no – needed him back.
It was a few days later that Harry practically flew down the corridor to Teddy’s room in a blind panic, resolutely ignoring the burn in his lungs. Andromeda had fire-called him at the Ministry to let him know that Teddy had taken an unexpected turn for the worse. He had instantly dropped everything and made a dash back to the hospital, arriving there in record time.

“Is he okay?” he panted as he finally skidded to a halt in front of Teddy’s room and an ashen-faced Andromeda, who appeared to have aged at least ten years since Harry had delivered the news of Teddy’s accident to her.

“The healers are still with him,” she said flatly and Harry instinctively reached for the door. However, Andromeda stopped him before he could try and turn the doorknob.

“They’ve locked the door.”

Harry frowned, confused.

“Why? He was— he was fine this morning.”

“It’s— It’s not looking good,” Andromeda said quietly, her voice breaking as she spoke, “they say it’s the venom. There’s too much of it and the antidote can’t counteract it quickly enough.”

“Wha—?” Harry tried to process what he had just heard, but both his brain and his heart refused to accept even the tiniest possibility that something might happen to Teddy.

“I need to get in here,” he said stubbornly, once more reaching for the doorknob.

“You can’t. They’ve locked the door. Only a healer can open it,” there was literally no emotion in Andromeda’s voice as she repeated herself. She sounded distant as if she had removed herself from the situation and was merely stating cold hard facts.

“Bollocks!” Harry snapped in annoyance, feeling the irritation at having to wait in front of a locked door bubble up in the pit of his stomach. “I want to see him. I’m not standing out here waiting around!”

Drawing his wand, Harry aimed it at the door and was about to mutter a series of Ministry-grade unlocking spells when the long, slender fingers of a very familiar pale hand wrapped themselves around his wand and gently pushed it downwards, aiming it at the floor.

“Let the healers do their job, Harry. They’ve called in Healer McEnroe, he is the very best in the field of plant poisonings and counteracting venoms.”

Harry looked at Draco and frowned. He desperately wanted to know why Draco had such intimate knowledge of his godson’s condition and current treatment but no matter how hard he tried, his brain and his mouth were unwilling to cooperate. All he could do was stare.

“There was quite a commotion on the ward, it was rather difficult to ignore,” Draco answered his unasked question. “He will be fine, trust me.”
Harry’s head started to spin and he felt dizzy. He had no idea how many times Draco had repeated those very reassurances to him in the last few days. It had become something of a mantra to Harry, something that lulled him into what he knew to be a false sense of security. Still, right this minute, he couldn’t help but cling to those very words as though they were the only lifeline he had.

“Take Teddy’s grandmother for some tea, she could use the distraction.” Draco’s suggestion was all but a quiet whisper, but Harry found himself nodding.

As Draco let go of his wand, Harry, acting on autopilot, slowly turned to face Andromeda and finding his voice again he offered that they head to the hospital’s coffee shop to get some tea.

Much to his astonishment, she accepted without the slightest bit of resistance and wrapping a protective arm around her, Harry cast one last wistful look at the locked door to Teddy’s room and then briefly at Draco. For a split second, he contemplated thanking Draco for diffusing what would otherwise have turned into a rather ugly situation but the words refused to form and so he settled for a simple nod. Draco reciprocated the gesture, then slowly walked away down the corridor. Harry took one last glance at him, then focused his attention on Andromeda and taking her to the coffee shop for some much-needed tea.

“You love him, don’t you?” Andromeda’s sudden question broke the silence between them.

They’d both sat down at a small corner table, but Harry had no idea what to say to Andromeda and so he had opted for silence instead. His head was in turmoil and he was beyond exhausted. At the unexpected question, however, he jerked his head up and looked Andromeda straight in the eye.

“I can tell by the way you looked at him,” she said before he had the chance to ask how she had guessed his secret.

Merlin, he couldn’t help but wonder, are all purebloods so damn good at mind-reading or is it just that I wear all my extreme emotions on my sleeve for everyone to see?

“If you already know, why ask?”

“Curiosity. I wondered if you might deny it.”

“I’m not ashamed,” Harry shrugged and he really wasn’t.

In the eyes of everyone around them, he and Draco were a rather unlikely match but he had never much cared for what people thought about him. As Head of the Auror Department, he had a certain sense of responsibility to act within the norms of what everyone expected of him in that role but at the same time, he had always been privileged enough not to have to justify his actions. Or if people had demanded his justification, he had resolutely ignored them. At least whenever that option had been a possibility.

Years ago, his coming out had resulted in quite a bit of furore, but he had been quick to feed the press a load of compelling information about recently resolved cases, as well as upcoming drastic changes within the department. While the press, and especially the Prophet, had still found a way to incorporate his sexuality into almost every single one of the articles, his professionalism had forced the press to act in the same manner. Instead of an entire frontpage article dedicated to speculations about his love life, his frequent press releases had kept them busy printing actual news.

“You shouldn’t be,” a hint of a smile ghosted around Andromeda’s lips.

“I didn’t think you’d be this—” Harry broke off, unsure what he had been about to say.
“Supportive?” Andromeda offered, “I think my marriage was a perfectly good example of my open-mindedness.”

Harry gave a soft chuckle.

“You and Draco’s mother— I mean, you and Narcissa Malfoy aren’t exactly on speaking terms now, are you?”

“We’ve— We’ve made our peace, sort of at least. Call it a truce, a tentative truce,” Andromeda shrugged. “I think we’re both too old to care about past grudges and misconceived ideologies.”

“I didn’t know you and your sister had—,” Harry paused and searched for a suitable word, “had come to an understanding.”

“Eloquently put,” Andromeda smiled, “ours wasn’t exactly a teary-eyed reunion of long-lost sisters, you know? It’s more like we send each other Christmas cards and the odd letter here and there. We’re very much still trying to find a way to communicate.”

“Oh.”

“Speechless, huh?” Andromeda laughed quietly and bringing her teacup to her lips, she took a few careful sips of the hot beverage. “So, tell me, are you secretly in love with my nephew or does he actually know how you feel about him?”

“He knows. We— We dated for a while,” Harry stumbled over his words. For a moment he had felt tempted to lie and tell Andromeda that he and Draco were still dating, but Harry had no doubt that she would have seen right through his little façade of make-believe.

“Dated? What happened?”

“It’s all rather complicated,” Harry sighed.

“I’ve tea and I’m willing to listen,” Andromeda shrugged and Harry suspected she was dying for any sort of distraction that would stop her from worrying about Teddy for at least five minutes.

And so, despite not really wanting to talk about it, Harry found himself telling his godson’s grandmother absolutely everything.

As he talked and Andromeda listened, one cup of tea turned into two and eventually three.

Once he had finished spilling his guts out to her, Harry fell silent and gnawing at his bottom lip, he watched Andromeda carefully, trying to gauge what her reaction might be.

“Well, to put it bluntly, I think you’re both idiots. Draco made a mountain out of a molehill and you are letting him get away with it. You are the Head of the Auror Department, I would have thought that you know how not to take no for an answer. Or have you forgotten all about fighting for those you love? Has it been that long already?”

Harry gaped. He had expected just about anything, but not that. Andromeda certainly hadn’t minced her words and as much as it pained him to admit it, he found himself agreeing with her. So far, he had made a haphazard attempt at talking to Draco and he had most definitely not put his foot down and demanded that Draco get over his extended streak of stubbornness for just long enough to give him the chance to explain.

These past few days he’d had many opportunities to talk to Draco but he hadn’t taken any of the
countless chances Draco had so subtly given him.

Suddenly, Harry couldn’t help but wonder whether Draco kept inviting him to go for a walk because it was his way to offer him a chance to talk.

“Forgive me for stepping on your toes, but waiting has never resulted in two people sorting out their differences, Harry. So, if you really love him, stop waiting and start chasing after what is rightfully yours.”

Harry was about to fish for an appropriate response when a nurse approached them to let them know that the healers had finished with Teddy and that they could now go and sit with him. She was also kind enough to put them at ease about Teddy’s condition, letting them know that the team of healers had successfully managed to stabilise him and that they expected improvements in his health from here on.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts about Draco talking Harry "off the ledge", so to speak? Does Andromeda have a point or is she just meddling?
Stretching his sore and protesting limbs, Draco glanced at Scorpius’ sleeping form and sighed. He was exhausted. Truly exhausted.

These days, a full night’s sleep had become a luxury he could only dream of. He hadn’t seen the inside of his bedroom in over a week, let alone relished in the pleasure of sinking into an ocean of soft cushions and burying himself underneath a thick duvet and his winter quilt.

As Scorpius usually slept for several hours at a time in the early hours of the morning, this had become Draco’s preferred time to apparate to the Manor for a refreshing shower, a change of clothes, and a hearty breakfast.

Allowing himself a yawn and yet another stretch, Draco startled somewhat at the unexpected knock at the door.

Abandoning his futile attempt to coerce his muscles into a more relaxed state, he headed to the door, which he had left ajar, and pulled it open.

To say that he was surprised to find Andromeda Tonks standing in front of him was a perfect understatement.

He was, of course, aware that she spent most mornings in the hospital, giving Harry a chance to go home and shower — and probably also take care of some business at the Ministry — but they hadn’t exactly spoken to each other. The extent of their interactions, so far, had been the one or other courteous nod whenever they passed each other in the corridor. Draco had the ominous feeling that, somehow, this was about to change.

“I wonder whether I might have a word with you, Mr Malfoy,” she said quietly and nodding, Draco slipped out of Scorpius’ room and into the corridor. Her formal address had taken him by surprise but was certain that he had successfully managed to hide it.

“What is it you would like to discuss, Mrs Tonks?” Draco asked equally as formal.

“A short walk, perhaps?”

Draco merely inclined his head at the suggestion and easily fell into step beside his aunt, as she led the way down the corridor. As they walked in silence, Draco realised that in all the thirty-five years of his life he had never once actually spoken to Andromeda Tonks. Up until now, of course.

Back when he had been a young boy, Andromeda and her life choices had been a taboo topic at any and all family gatherings and he had known better than to ask questions. Curiosity, his father had repeatedly told him, was unbecoming. Another reason as to why he and Astoria had raised Scorpius to ask as many questions as he wanted.

As they reached the end of the corridor, Draco abandoned his memories and pushed open the door leading out to a small, roofed balcony. In a gentlemanlike gesture, he held the door open for Andromeda to step outside first, then followed, gently letting the door close behind him.

The fresh, wintry morning chill that engulfed him instantly offered a bit of respite from the
unpleasant hospital smells and the everlasting dreariness that clung to the air everywhere inside the hospital. Draco had never particularly liked hospitals and the only time he had ever enjoyed entering one had been the day he had checked Astoria into the maternity ward two days before giving birth to a healthy baby boy, the spitting image of his father.

Deciding that they had been silent for way too long, Draco decided to kickstart the conversation.

“Any particular reason you would like to speak with me?” he asked, telling himself that he wasn’t at all nervous. He was a grown man, for heaven’s sake, and despite being his aunt, Andromeda Tonks was just an elderly woman. He was quite sure that he could deal with anything she threw at him.

“A small personal matter,” Andromeda replied. “May I speak frankly?”

Draco inclined his head slightly in affirmation, giving her the go ahead.

“It has come to my attention that you and my grandson’s godfather were, up until recently, engaged in a romantic relationship.”

Sucking in a sharp breath, Draco instantly crossed his arms over his chest and pursing his lips, he held Andromeda’s gaze, trying to gauge what she was playing at.

“Well, you certainly don’t beat around the bush, do you, Mrs Tonks?” he eventually said and though her statement had irked him, he kept his tone neutral.

“I am rather of the direct nature. Always have been,” Andromeda replied, eyes sparkling with something that could only be described as a glint of cheekiness.

Draco felt his annoyance increase tenfold.

“As you already pointed out, Mrs Tonks, Harry and I were in a relationship – we aren’t anymore. Any of your concerns about our prior romantic involvements are therefore quite unnecessary.”

It took Draco every ounce of self-control to keep his tone at a level one could consider friendly or at the very least devoid of snark. The cheek of Andromeda Tonks to involve herself in matters that were most definitely none of her concern.

In his current, constantly sleep-deprived state, Draco really wanted to make a snide remark and ask her outright why she thought she had the liberty to talk to him about his personal affairs.

Yes they were family, but given the Black family history, she was hardly able to use that as an excuse. They had never been close and she had never invoked her rights as his aunt.

“I don’t have any concerns about you and Harry being in a relationship, Draco.”

Andromeda Tonks’ frivolous use of his first name caused Draco to furrow his brows in a frown and fix her with an angry molten glare. He felt the almost unquenchable desire to correct her and insist on her addressing him as Mr Malfoy but she continued to speak before he had the chance to open his mouth.

“I do, however, have an issue with you acting like a complete and utter imbecile. From the way Harry spoke about you, I was able to gather that he is smitten with you, head over heels in love with you, in fact. Why then, do you hide behind a stubborn excuse to be miserable and alone when you could enjoy the company of a respectable young man? Everybody makes mistakes, Draco. Stubbornly refusing to give a chance at redemption only leads to misery, which, I was under the impression, you, of all people, had enough of in your life.”
Clenching his fists tightly, Draco glared at Andromeda, piercing her with his flaming eyes. He was seething, could feel his blood boil underneath his skin, and the fact that Andromeda so easily held his gaze, didn’t blink, and most definitely didn’t look away, only fuelled his rage.

“How dare you!” he hissed.

For a split-second, he felt the intense urge to draw his wand but he knew better than to give in to the foolish urges.

“Easily. I care a great deal about Harry and the fact that he is miserable makes me miserable too. And you, Draco, don’t exactly look the epitome of happiness to me either.”

Andromeda’s continued use of his first name thoroughly irked Draco but he still forced himself to keep his cool.

“Harry put you up to this, didn’t he?” he asked with a small sigh.

“Are you barking mad? He would have an angry outburst of epic proportions if he knew I was talking to you about his personal affairs. He hates it when people meddle in his life.”

“Why are you then? Talking to me, I mean.”

“Draco, are you happy?”

Andromeda’s deflection of his question momentarily stunned Draco into silence.

“I don’t see how that’s any of your concern,” he eventually answered.

“It’s a simple enough question,” Andromeda said with a shrug and pulling her robes tighter around herself, she sheltered herself from the cold. Draco vaguely remembered the freezing temperatures but he was too angry to really feel the frosty winter coldness.

“I am,” he replied curtly and with a challenging glint in his eyes.

“Are you really? Because, and you may blame this on my life experience, you look anything but happy.”

“My son’s in hospital, what do you expect? That I dance with joy and sing at the top of my lungs?”

“I was rather under the impression that Scorpius was improving,” Andromeda said and when she suddenly reached out to place a somewhat wrinkly and aged hand on his forearm, Draco froze.

“Hate me, Draco, curse me if you must. For all I care wish me the black death but don’t make yourself any more miserable than need be, for your son’s sake and your own,” she added quietly, squeezing his arm gently before withdrawing her hand.

“Think it over. If you really can’t find it in you to forgive him, so be it, but at least think it over,” Andromeda held his gaze and for a moment, Draco thought, it felt like she was deliberately allowing him a glimpse into her soul.

Draco couldn’t say that he really knew her, but from what he had witnessed so far, he could tell that she was a fiercely passionate woman. He honestly couldn’t quite comprehend why she bothered to care about whether he was happy or not. They were practically strangers. But as they stood out there in the cold, sharing a rather intimate moment of what felt like building bridges, Draco couldn’t help but feel that, despite her tough love stance, she had, in the last five minutes, shown more interest in
his life than his own mother had ever done.

“I’ll leave you to your thoughts,” Her words were soft and as she turned to leave there was a definite smile playing around her lips.

When the door closed behind her, Draco slowly uncrossed his arms and braced himself on the balcony’s railing. He felt like he had just had the most surreal conversation of his entire life and finding that his anger had all but dissipated, he looked down at the streets of London. He could sense the magical barrier that enabled him to look out over the city but stopped others, especially muggles, from seeing him.

Taking a deep breath, Draco made an important decision, one he knew would change his life forever.

Chapter End Notes

Was this perhaps the final push Draco needs? Or did Andromeda step over the line?
“You didn’t really need my help with that potions case, did you?”

Draco’s sudden and rather direct question startled Harry out of his thoughts and he took a rather long moment to consider his answer.

Up until now, they’d walked alongside each other in complete silence. Since Teddy’s admission to the hospital, walking in silence and quietly enjoying each other’s company had somehow become their thing.

Every night, sometime around midnight, Draco would show up in Teddy’s hospital room. He always brought a strong cup of hot coffee along with him which he always offered to Harry.

A proverbial olive branch of sorts, Harry thought.

Along with the coffee came reassurances that Teddy would be fine, that he would wake up, and that the poison from the wild venomous tentacula wouldn’t get the better of him like it had already tried to once.

Up until tonight, they had always walked in silence, never straying too far from the hospital.

Each night Harry desperately wanted to talk to Draco about what had happened between them, wanted to grasp the opportunity to make things right, and each night he spent most of the walk trying to gather up the courage to start that conversation.

By the time he was ready to make his move, Draco would suggest that they return to the hospital and he would nod in agreement, quietly letting yet another opportunity to apologise slip by.

Tonight, however, it seemed that Draco had decided that it was time to break the silence and venture into the unknown waters of possibly attempting to fix the crack in their relationship. That, or he simply wanted to talk.

“Well to be bluntly honest, after your son asked me to, how shall we say, befriend you, I couldn’t think of a single good reason to show up on your doorstep…or ask you to meet with me for that matter. Ron—”

“Weasley?”

Turning his head to look at Draco, Harry shot him a half-hearted glare.

“Do you want me to answer your question or not?” he questioned.

“Go on then,” Draco rolled his eyes and Harry shook his head in mock-exasperation.

“As I was saying, Ron picked up that potion smuggling case and even though it initially looked straightforward, he suggested that I involve you and ask you for advice. As you very well know, the case turned out to be anything but straightforward. So I wouldn’t say that I didn’t need your help with the case, but yes I’d originally intended to use it merely as a ruse.”

“Who would have thought, a Weasley with a good idea,” Draco chuckled and Harry couldn’t resist
elbowing him in the side.

“If you can manage to call me Harry, do you think you might manage to call Ron by his given name? It’s been well over a decade and a half.”

“Honestly, Harry, you have no idea how easy it is to revert to calling you, Potter.”

“How old are you, five?”

“Possibly,” Draco laughed and the sound was music to Harry’s ears. He immediately fell silent and enjoyed.

They hadn’t strayed all that far from the hospital, but lately Harry’s days were cruel and unforgiving. More than a week had passed since he had last slept in his own bed and he spent the bulk of his time at the hospital, keeping watch over Teddy.

After he had finally gotten hold of Andromeda to tell her about Teddy’s accident, they had quickly fallen into an easy routine. She usually showed up at around five in the morning to give Harry the opportunity to head home to have a shower and change his clothes and then into the office to deal with the most urgent paperwork; the bare minimum, the things he couldn’t delegate to others.

Once he had dealt with the most pressing matters, which he usually managed by early afternoon, he returned to the hospital to take over keeping Teddy company until the following morning. Between the two of them, the shift change worked like clockwork. His new schedule had already become his norm. This was what his life was like and he didn’t question it.

These days he barely found the time to eat properly, or regularly for that matter, and only ever allowed himself a short nap late at night. The entire situation was taking its toll on him, but he stubbornly refused to admit defeat. The prevalent black circles under his eyes got progressively worse with each passing day but Harry ignored them – simply pretended they didn’t exist.

Tonight Draco’s carefree laughter and the fresh midnight air, albeit bitter cold, was reinvigorating and relaxing. Harry relished in it.

Coming to a halt, Harry took a long look at Draco. When Draco stopped walking and turned to face him, Harry smiled and when their eyes met a shock of electricity surged through Harry. He vowed to refuse to part company with Draco until they had finally sorted out their differences.

He was weary and tired and had had enough of being this close to Draco without being able to touch or kiss him; it was driving Harry mental. With everything that was going on, Harry simply had no room for mental. Something had to give. He wanted – needed their relationship back, and tonight he was hellbent on getting his way.

*Even if it takes an Incarcerous,* he mused.

Deciding to break the silence, Harry spoke up. He did so exactly that the same moment that Draco also decided to speak up.

“Harry—”

“Draco—”

Harry smiled and inclining his head, he motioned for Draco to go first. Intrigued, he watched him hesitate, obviously trying to find the right words.
When Draco finally spoke, it was a question rather than a lengthy explanation.

Harry had expected no less.

“Would you believe me if I told you that I never expected to fall for you?”

Harry found himself nodding his head and answered without the slightest bit of hesitation.

“You flirting with me was rather a big surprise.”

“What can I say, I like a man in uniform who follows me down dark alleys thinking I’m up to no good,” Draco joked and Harry rolled his eyes.

“Seriously though, Harry, enough of the dancing around each other like teenagers. I’ve been a stubborn fool. The other day I got a good talking to from someone who shall, for the time being, remain nameless, and it finally opened my eyes to my own moronic stupidity. Do you know what Scorpius told me? My son said he wrote to you because I seemed depressed. He told me he was worried but had no idea how to talk to me about his feelings. Can you imagine how utterly miserable I felt after he told me that? My thirteen-year-old son is worried about me when it should be me doing all the worrying!”

“To be honest, when I first received Scorpius’ letter I thought it was an elaborate prank of some sort or other,” Harry sighed. “The parchment had his magical signature all over it, and after some contemplation plain old curiosity kicked in and I decided to just go with it.”

“Did you by any chance ask him how he figured that I of all people would be able to get you out of your funk?”

“I didn’t. I reckon he figured—” Draco trailed off and shrugged his shoulders. “You know what, I actually have no idea what he figured.” Draco sighed and after a moment’s silence, he changed the subject altogether. “Did you know that he has a girlfriend? Your mate Dean Thomas’ daughter.”

Harry shook his head. “Nope, I didn’t know. He never told me in his letters. Then again, I never asked. I figured thirteen was a bit young for all that. You’re okay with him dating a Muggle-born?”

“Muggle-born. Half-American. Black. Hufflepuff. He’s gone all out on that one. Ticked all the boxes,” Draco grinned and the strange happiness that radiated off him was a stark contrast to the Draco Malfoy Harry had once known. He couldn’t help but send a silent prayer of thanks to Astoria, who had most definitely and without a shadow of a doubt, played a big part in changing Draco so drastically.

“But to answer your question, hell yes, I absolutely am okay with his choice of girlfriend. Bring it on, I say. Call me crazy, but I hope they get married and have a bunch of babies. I would love to see my father’s face, it would make my day.” Draco laughed some more.

Harry gasped in mock-horror. “Alright, who are you and what have you done with the real Draco Malfoy?”

“If you’re that worried that I’m a polyjuiced version of the real thing, then ask me something only I would now,” Draco smiled, eyes twinkling with mirth.

Harry chuckled. Draco had a warped sense of humour and despite not really having any doubts about the person presently stood before him, Harry thought for a moment, then settled on a rather intimate question.
“What did you say to me just before we kissed for the first time?”

It was rather cliché and bordering on corny but Harry couldn’t care less.

“I told you that you look just like your dad,” Draco’s answer was immediate, spoken with confidence and without the slightest bit of hesitation. “Do I pass the test?”

“You do,” Harry nodded, then took a deep breath and braced himself for what he was about to say next. “Look, Draco, I know I wrote it all in the letter, though I’m not sure if—”

“I read it,” Draco said.

“Well then, for all it’s worth, I never meant to keep my friendship with Scorpius from you. He’s an amazing boy, you know? He’s bright, witty, clever, sensitive, caring… I know I should have told you and I know keeping it from you wasn’t right. I hurt you and—”

“Harry?” Draco interrupted.

“Hmm?”

“Shut up.”

“I wasn’t fin—”

“Really, shut up,” Draco insisted and Harry found himself swallowing hard as Draco’s eyes piercing grey-blue eyes settled on him.

Captivated by Draco’s intense stare, Harry’s feet moved of their own accord and he took a step closer. It surprised him that Draco did the exact same.

They stood like this for several minutes, eyes locked, neither willing to break the moment. Harry desperately wanted to continue his apology but words failed him. What he really wanted to do right now was to push Draco back against the house front behind him and kiss him senseless. It was the only thing he wanted to do and the more he thought about it, the more the idea consumed him, setting every single fibre in his body on fire.

“Potter, are you going to kiss me any time soon or are we going to stand here getting frostbite?”

Even though Draco’s words had been a mere whisper, Harry’s ears burnt. It felt like Draco had shouted the question at the top of his lungs.

“I am,” he mumbled. “I absolutely am going to kiss you.”

“Less talking then,” Draco advised with a sly grin, and it was right there and then that Harry decided that he needed to shut Draco up immediately.

With a low growl he placed both hands on Draco’s shoulders and pushing him back against the house front behind him, he pressed his body against Draco’s and felt his hands lock around his waist. Their lips were so close that they were almost touching and Harry could feel Draco’s breath on his lips. He hesitated for a moment, stared at Draco’s lips as though he had never seen anything quite this perfect. Unable to resist the temptation any longer, he finally closed the small gap between them and kissed Draco tentatively.

A soft sigh vibrated against his lips and less than a second later, a wave of passion threw them off course. They let it engulf them and soon enough they were engaged in a heated duel, tongues sliding
together and against each other, exploring, re-exploring, claiming, reclaiming. The feeling was intense and maddeningly perfect.

Harry’s fingers wound themselves into Draco’s soft white-blond hair and he held his head in place as they kissed. Draco’s hands snuck underneath Harry’s warm Auror robes and gripped his hips, pulling him an inch or so closer.

Groaning into the kiss, Harry relished in their close body contact and suddenly it felt like a bubble of heat — *more effective than any warming charm* — had cast itself around them, keeping them warm. The bitter cold didn’t matter anymore. In fact, Harry wasn’t even sure whether they were still outside or whether they had accidentally apparated back inside the hospital.

When they finally broke away from the kiss, they were both breathless and Draco’s eyes were almost black with desire, mirroring Harry’s feelings exactly. Their eyes locked and with a soft, contented sigh. Harry gently massaged the nape of Draco’s neck, loving the soft feel of silky hair and smooth, warm skin underneath his fingertips.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered and Draco frowned.

“Are you apologising for kissing me?”

“No. I’m apologising for not telling you about those letters. I am supposed to be a responsible adult. I should have told you,” Harry said, feeling better now that he had said the words he had been meaning to say ever since Draco had found out about his and Scorpius’ little secret. Apologising in a letter and saying the words were two different things altogether and his heart felt so much lighter. It was like a weight had fallen off his shoulders and the stone that had been pressing down on his chest had finally lifted.

“As far as boyfriend etiquette goes, you failed exceptionally, yes,” Draco nodded, “but apparently – and these are my son’s words and not mine – I’m not getting any younger and I don’t think I’m going to fall in love with anyone else anytime soon. I’m therefore willing to give you a second chance. Besides, the fact that my son likes you speaks in your favour.”

“How very generous of you, Malfoy,” Harry laughed. Slowly, more of the tension from the last few weeks seeped out of him, including some of his current worries about Teddy’s health. It most definitely hadn’t escaped his notice that Draco had used a certain four-letter-word and for some strange and inexplicable reason it made him extremely giddy.

“I can’t help it, it’s just how I am.”

“I think you’ve gone loony,” Harry rolled his eyes at the pompous answer.

“You know what, I would feel inclined to agree. Why else would I willingly date Harry Potter, my obnoxious Hogwarts nemesis and the Auror department’s paper-pusher extraordinaire?”

“Because I’m devilishly handsome in uniform and you’re in love with me?” Harry offered with a wicked grin.

“I think we should go back inside to check on Teddy and Scorpius,” Draco elegantly dodged the question in perfect Slytherin-style.

“I knew it. You are hopelessly in love with me,” Harry laughed and continued to do so even when Draco resolutely pushed him away and stalked off into the direction of the hospital.

“Admit it, you love me,” Harry called after him, moving swiftly to catch up with Draco.
“Against my better judgement, yes,” Draco mumbled and feeling rather giddy, Harry grabbed Draco’s hand and interlaced their fingers.

Draco sighed with mock-exasperation but did not pull away, at least not until they reached the entrance to the hospital. As they slipped through the window shopfront and into the hospital’s main hall, he gently tugged his hand away and they silently walked across the hall and took the lift to the department for plant poisoning. The healers had moved both Scorpius and Teddy there two days after their admittance.

“Do you think they somehow did this on purpose?” Harry asked once they had reached Teddy’s room.

He instantly spotted Draco’s Patronus and smiled at the rather large but extremely beautiful scorpion perched on the bed near Teddy’s head. It sat there every night from the moment he left Teddy’s bedside to join Draco on their nightly walk up until long after he had returned.

“They better not have done this on purpose, because believe me, I will ground Scorpius for life if I find out this was anything but an accident.”

“While you’re at it, you might as well ground Teddy too,” Harry sighed.

“I rather think that’s your job, not mine. You’re his godfather after all.”

“Point taken,” Harry nodded. “Are you coming inside?”

“I’ll go sit with Scorpius for a while if you don’t mind. I’ll check in later, okay?”

“Alright,” Harry said and quickly glancing up and down the department’s corridor, he made sure that they were alone. When it became apparent that they were, he boldly drew Draco in for a brief kiss.

“Living on the edge, Potter, eh?” Draco teased then turned around and walked off into the direction of Scorpius’ room, vanishing inside.

Leaning against the doorframe of Teddy’s room, Harry stared after Draco for a good few minutes, then resolutely returned to his godson’s bedside to keep him company. He wasn’t sure whether Teddy was at all aware that he was there, and every time he asked, the healers weren’t able to confirm or deny. All they ever said was that the cocktail of potions and charms that kept Teddy asleep was a rather complex one.

As he reached out to gently take Teddy’s hand into his own, Harry noticed that Draco, yet again, hadn’t cancelled the Patronus charm that now kept Teddy and him company. He couldn’t help but wonder what wonderful memory Draco was so focused on that his Patronus remained in full corporeal form for such a long time. Judging by the form of Draco’s Patronus, he suspected that the memory was in some way related to Scorpius.

A small smile played across Harry’s lips.

_It’ll all work out in the end, trust me._

Charlie’s words resounded in his head and Harry’s smile grew just a bit more.

Now all he needed was for Teddy to finally show definite signs of improvement.

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Chapter End Notes
Well? Am I forgiven for all the angst I created? If so, I shamelessly demand hugs, kisses and loads and loads of love.
“You’re seriously going to ground me for the entire summer holiday and revoke my Hogsmeade privileges for a whole year?” Scorpius shrieked several days later.

The healers had finally decided to wake Teddy up and despite being a little weak, he was well and truly on the mend. Now that Teddy had regained consciousness, trying to keep Scorpius away from him was practically impossible. As such, the nurses had very kindly transformed Teddy’s room into a two-bed hospital room and Draco suddenly found himself spending most of his time in the same room with his son, Harry, and Teddy Lupin.

The four of them made an odd group but Draco frequently found himself battling a headache as he tried to understand just what Scorpius and Teddy were talking about. They seemed to have a language of their own, made up of words and phrases that sounded entirely alien to Draco’s ears. They appeared to be speaking English, but Draco wasn’t entirely sure. He mostly put on a brave face and endured the avalanche of teenage hormones. Harry seemed to share his sentiments, but at least his job demanded that he disappeared for several hours at a time during the morning and afternoon.

“Yes, I’m seriously going to ground you for the entire summer holiday and revoke your Hogsmeade privileges. You’re also going to write me a four-page essay on why following through on a dare that involves the Forbidden Forest and wild venomous tentacula is an incredibly stupid thing to do,” Draco replied flatly.

Scorpius, who sat cross-legged at the foot of Teddy’s hospital bed, looked at him with a most incredulous expression. If Draco was at all irked by it, he did a fine job of concealing it.

“I will not! Not a chance in hell!” Scorpius objected vehemently. “This is completely unfair! I get enough homework at Hogwarts, I don’t need you to add to that. You’re not my professor!”

“Since you seem to have ample time to get yourself entangled in rather unfortunate situations, I reckon you do not get enough homework,” Draco said coldly.

Harry, who was leaning against the wall near the door with his arms crossed over his chest, couldn’t help but wonder exactly how much effort it was taking Draco to remain this calm about the entire situation.

“You are of course right, I am not your professor. I am however your father and unless you would like to complete your wizarding education at Castelobruxo in the Amazon rainforest, you will do as I say.”

At hearing that last sentence, Harry had to bite the inside of his mouth hard to refrain from doubling over laughing. Trust Draco to resolve to making threats to get Scorpius to comply.

“I absolutely and positively hate you,” Scorpius scowled.

“I can live with that, Scorpius,” Draco said with a nonchalant shrug. “What I cannot live with, however, is the idea of losing you, my only son, because you stupidly decided to follow through on an idiotic dare. Are you at all aware that your cousin here risked his life to save you? Have you taken a moment to consider the implications of that?” Draco fixed his son with a glare that had Scorpius sensibly avert his eyes and glance at Teddy’s hospital-issued blanket instead.

Harry watched as Scorpius uncrossed his legs and drew his knees right up to his chest, hugging them tightly. He mumbled something, but his voice was so low that Harry didn’t catch a single syllable.
Neither did Draco apparently.

“What was that now?” Draco questioned.

“I said I’m sorry,” Scorpius repeated.

This time his voice was a little louder but he still sounded rather meek and there was most definitely a level of dejection in his words.

“I fail to see how a simple sorry is an appropriate solution to this mess,” Draco challenged and for the first time, his irritation at the whole situation showed in his voice. He’d held back for the longest time, wanting Scorpius to recover before he gave him a good talking to, but now that he had started, he barely managed to contain his anger.

“Em, Mr Malfoy, if I may say something?” Teddy, who up until now had been rather quiet and pensive, piped up and Draco quirked a questioning eyebrow at him. “I honestly think there’s no need for punishments.”

“Oh? Shall we just pretend you two boys had an unfortunate accident while flying then?” Draco asked, his voice dripping with sarcasm, and Harry idly wondered whether he should step in to try and mediate.

He’d had a lengthy discussion with Teddy about everything that had happened and hadn’t imposed any punishments on Teddy yet. He wasn’t quite sure what was appropriate, and whether to punish Teddy at all since he hadn’t been involved in the dare but had been the one to come to Scorpius’ aid when it had all gone horribly wrong.

“That’s not what I meant, Mr Malfoy,” Teddy said, drawing Harry’s attention away from his thoughts and back to the conversation.

“I think Scorpius learnt his lesson already. We had a bit of a chat last night and he really does understand that trying to tackle wild venomous tentacula wasn’t his smartest move.”

“That’s certainly one way of putting it,” Draco scoffed and pushing himself away from the wall, Harry took a couple of steps into the room. He stopped at Draco’s side and placing his hand gently on Draco’s arm, in what he hoped was a calming gesture, he decided that maybe it was time for him to leave the sidelines and join the game instead.

“Maybe we could leave off the punishment,” Harry suggested tentatively, mentally preparing himself for Draco’s murderous look.

“What side are you on exactly, Harry?” Draco questioned, whipping his head around to look straight at Harry, intense grey-blue eyes burning with annoyance. “The let-the-kids-do-whatever-they-want-without-having-to-face-the-repercussions-side or the I’m-a-sensible-adult-and-Head-of-the-Auror-Department-side?”

“Neither?” Harry offered but Draco’s scowl only deepened.

With a sigh, Harry withdrew his hand from where it was still resting on Draco’s arm and looking back and forth between Teddy and Scorpius, he eventually turned back to face Draco.

“I think they faced the repercussions already, Draco,” he said quietly. “Skele-Gro is horrible, I can attest to that, and spending nearly two weeks in St Mungo’s isn’t all it’s cracked up to be either. They’ve missed a ton of classes, have parchment after parchment of essays to write and a few rather unsightly scars to remind them of their stupidity. Scorpius, I think, has learnt that his fellow
classmates will sometimes dare each other to do insane things and doing them doesn’t necessarily result in popularity. Teddy, I know, has learnt that jumping head first into a situation, even if one means well, is not at all a sensible thing to do and that battles, even if only fought against a vicious plant, should never happen without the appropriate backup. Those lessons are valuable life lessons they’ll keep in mind for the rest of their lives.”

After a long pause, during which Draco closed his eyes, shook his head, and pinched the bridge of his nose, he finally relented.

“You win this one, Potter,” he said and frowned at the triumphant grin on Scorpius’ face.

Harry, knowing that giving in didn’t come easily to Draco, wisely decided to keep his expression neutral.

“Well seems like one good thing came out of all this…” Scorpius said with a hint of mischief gleaming in his eyes.

“And, pray tell, what might that be?” Draco asked with a sigh, his lingering exasperation plainly evident.

“You and Harry are finally talking again,” Scorpius replied flippantly. “Though I bet it’s not all you’re doing!” he added and Teddy groaned and theatrically throwing his head back into his pillows, he rolled his eyes at the ceiling.

“Scorpius, I’d keep my mouth shut if I was you,” he warned.

“Apart from talking to each other, what else would Harry and I be doing?” Draco inquired and crossing his arms over his chest, he waited expectantly as Harry fought to keep an embarrassed flush off his face.

Draco had told him all about how he had inadvertently come out to his son over the Christmas break and he couldn’t help but think that Draco had just unwittingly opened a gigantic can of worms.

“You know what, Dad, I’d rather not think about it but as long as you’re merry and gay—er—I mean happy, I really don’t care.”

Harry coughed and spluttered at Scorpius’ clearly deliberate slip of the tongue and when Draco fixed him with a glare, he raised both his hands in defeat.

“Don’t blame me for this,” he attempted to defend himself.

“And who else if not you?” Draco inquired.

“Them?” Harry suggested feebly, trying his hardest to ignore Teddy’s continued theatrical performance as he covered his face with one of his pillows.

“Yeah, Dad, blame us, although if you can admit it, I suggest blaming yourselves. You’re frightfully obvious. I mean come on, one would have to be blind, deaf, and stupid not to notice that you two clearly have the hots for each other.”

“The what now?” Draco’s confused expression was a picture and unable to keep a straight face, Harry snorted with laughter but yelped a second later when a discreetly aimed stinging hex hit him square in his right arse cheek. He sobered up and rubbed his throbbing arse cheek gingerly.

“The hots,” Scorpius rolled his eyes in mock-exasperation. “You know, be smitten with, hanker
after, be partial to, be sweet on, take a shine to— You don’t understand any of that, do you, Dad? Fine, in simple terms, you love him, he loves you. Potato, potahto. Dad, you do know Harry’s gay, right? You can’t possibly live that far behind the moon.”

Draco’s only response was strange sound between a strangled cry and a muffled splutter of indignation and Harry idly wondered whether he stood a fleeting chance at leaving the room before Draco managed to hit him with a full Body-Bind Curse. He got his answer almost immediately when Draco turned and fixed him with a glare that had Harry take a cautionary step further into the room instead of closer to the door.

“Don’t even think about it, Potter,” he hissed and Harry found himself nodding in instant submission.

“I do know that Harry is gay, yes,” Draco then said, rather suddenly but calmly and composed. “And your point is, Scorpius?”

“Oh, come on, Dad, don’t be purposefully thick now. You told me yourself that you’re gay too. Besides, as I said, one would have to be blind, deaf, and stupid not to notice that there’s something going on between you two.”

“Something going on?” Draco repeated carefully, letting his son’s obvious dig at his mental faculties slide. For now, anyway.

Unable to stand it any longer, Harry decided to step into the lion’s den. Snake’s lair, he amended in his head.

“We might as well just tell them, Draco,” he said carefully and convinced that he would regret uttering those eight words until his dying day.

“What? That you’re an item?” Teddy, who had finally emerged from underneath his pillow, asked bluntly and with a very distinct disregard for any sort of delicacy.

“Why on earth did I ever think becoming a father was something I’d enjoy?” Draco muttered under his breath and with a feeble glare at Harry, he quite uncharacteristically slumped into one of the empty visitor’s chairs at Teddy’s bedside.

“Potter, your godson is a terribly bad influence on my son.”

“Blame it on me, why don’t you. Never mind that it was your son who started this in the first place,” Harry laughed.

“Well, Scorpius, I reckon your father will hex me into oblivion for saying this, but yes, we are dating.”

“Yes!” Scorpius punched the air gleefully then smacking Teddy’s foot hard enough cause him to wince slightly. “Hand it over, T-Bird, I knew I was right!”

Harry and Draco looked at each other, looked back and forth between the two boys on the hospital bed and finally back at each other again. They frowned and shook their heads.

“They…” Draco sighed.

“Indeed…” Harry nodded, and after a brief pause, “Come on, Draco, let’s go fill out those transfer forms for Castelobruxo. I think they could both benefit from some time in the Amazon rainforest. It’s supposed to be wonderfully wet.”
“Excellent idea,” Draco grinned and getting to his feet, he pointedly ignored Scorpius’ and Teddy’s loud protests as he followed Harry out of the hospital room and let the door fall closed behind them.

“That was surreal on so many levels,” he mumbled, leaning against the wall opposite Teddy’s room.

“Tell me about it,” Harry nodded and standing just a smidgeon too close to Draco, he touched his hand to Draco’s wrist, his fingers idly caressing the soft skin on the inside, pleased when Draco’s breathing hitched up a notch.

“Potter, there are people…here.”

“I’m not doing anything,” Harry shrugged but removed his hand anyway. “Are you okay with them knowing?”

“I’d have preferred telling them rather than having them wrestle the news out of us through secret bets and sneaky tactics designed to make us trip up.”

“Honestly? I expected nothing less from your son; he’s a Slytherin after all,” Harry grinned and Draco glared at him.

“You are utterly impossible. I honestly don’t know why I put up with you.” Draco rolled his eyes.

“Because you have the hots for me?” Harry offered and Draco sighed exasperatedly.

“I’ve nothing to say to that.”

“You could show me later?” Harry teased.

“I think you could benefit from a few well-placed stinging hexes,” Draco frowned as his wand hand twitched and he fought back the urge to hex Harry.

“I’m not really a fan of those, Draco, they don’t turn me on. I do like ropes though. And winged golden snitches.”

“Merlin, save me. My son has turned into a devious monster and my boyfriend isn’t above announcing his weird sexual kinks in the middle of a hospital corridor.”

“All your fault,” Harry laughed and shuffled a little closer. He glanced first left, then right, checked that the air was clear, then pressed his lips against Draco’s in a brief kiss.

“I thought you hated that term?” he mumbled.

“It’s growing on me, believe it or not.”

“Hmm, I think this would be the perfect opportunity for me to tell you that I love you,” Harry grinned, thinking it safer to bring a little more distance between himself and Draco before anyone started getting suspicious. At present the corridor was empty but that could change any moment. The nurses and healers usually chose the most inappropriate moments to appear seemingly out of nowhere.

“And now you of course expect me to say it back, right?”

“It would be nice,” Harry said with a seemingly nonchalant shrug. He felt like he didn’t especially need to hear the words. At this very moment, Draco’s eyes were quietly reflecting the words right back at him and that meant more to Harry than a spoken promise.
“Love you,” Draco whispered, his eyes never leaving Harry’s as he gave voice to his feelings.

Both men stared at each other for the longest time, fighting against the urge to clash against each other in a passionate kiss.

“There has got to be a broom cupboard somewhere around here,” Draco mumbled.

“I doubt they keep brooms on the wards, but a storage room maybe, or an empty hospital room…” Harry nodded in affirmation and turning on his heel he resolutely walked off in search of one or the other, knowing that Draco was hot on his heels.
A chapter of pointless smut, you're welcome. And actually, it's not pointless because I thoroughly enjoyed myself writing this for you, so please, pull up a chair, get yourself some cookies and enjoy.

“Did you…?” Draco asked breathlessly as he forced himself to break away from a passionate battle with Harry’s lips and tongue. He had roughly shoved Harry up against the nearest wall the instant the door to the empty private hospital room had closed behind them.

“Not yet,” Harry shook his head.

He drew his wand, aimed it at the door, and mumbled a series of locking charms, a privacy charm, a Ministry-strength repelling charm, and an extremely powerful silencing charm.

“Doors secure, Master Malfoy, sir,” he grinned lopsidedly, sheathing his wand back into its holster.

“Perfect,” Draco mumbled.

He grabbed two fistfuls of Harry’s Auror uniform, spun him around, and resolutely walked him towards the bed, where he gave him a gentle shove.

“What will you be missed at work?”

“What will you be missed at work?” Harry shrugged.

He yelped as he lost his balance and tumbled backwards, finding himself sprawled out on top of the bed with Draco climbing up onto the bed after him and straddling his hips.

“Why is it that you always seem to end up on top?” Harry asked with a mild frown.

Draco crooked a curious eyebrow at him.

“Might be because you’re naturally submissive… Like relinquishing control, Potter, don’t you?” he teased with a mischievous smirk.

“There’s no good way of answering this that won’t give you ammunition for years to come,” Harry laughed.

He reached up, ran his palms over Draco’s chest, up to his shoulders, then interlaced his fingers behind Draco’s neck and tugged, forcing him to bend forward.

“Best put that mouth to better use, Malfoy.”

Not resisting the invitation, Draco placed both his hands on either side of Harry’s head and bracing himself on his arms, he slowly leaned down and captured Harry’s lips in a wonderfully lazy kiss. He gently sucked at Harry’s bottom lip, loving the smooth feel of it against his own lips.
As their mouths moved in unison, he lost himself in the familiar feel of excitement that was now slowly rising from the pit of his stomach and up into his chest, steadily filling him with the irresistible need to deepen the kiss. With an ever so sly move, he teased his way into Harry’s mouth, sought out his warm, wet tongue and tempted it into action, moaning softly into the kiss when the tip of Harry’s rather agile tongue caressed his own.

It was a playful yet intense kiss and rolling his hips against Harry’s, Draco felt instant gratification when he drew a languid moan from Harry’s mouth. He sighed into the kiss. Harry’s hands travelled down his back, insistently tugged at his shirt and jumper until he managed to expose warm skin. Harry teased with his fingertips and his nails, his touch ever so slight, sending shudder after shudder through Draco.

Reluctantly drawing away from the kiss, Draco lifted his head just high enough that he could look into Harry’s chartreuse green eyes. He watched them darken ever so slightly as they filled with lust and anticipation and smiled. Shifting the weight of his upper body onto his right arm, he removed Harry’s round glasses, pushing them up and off his face.

“Hey,” Harry protested softly but made no attempt to stop Draco.

He blinked several times and tried to adjust his vision. For a moment Draco was all but a blurry shadow, then his vision sharpened a little and Draco came into focus once more.

“Are you sure you’re an Auror? It’s so frightfully easy to disarm you…” Draco mocked.

He redistributed the weight of his upper body once more and braced himself on both his arms.

“Corny, very corny,” Harry chuckled and squeezing Draco’s hips ever so gently, he moaned in appreciation when Draco pushed them down, rolling them against Harry’s.

“And in any case, you haven’t disarmed me just yet. I still have my wand.”

“For now,” Draco smirked and sitting up, he reached for Harry’s tie, undoing the knot with frightful ease before pulling it out from underneath Harry’s jumper.

“There are much better uses for this than you wearing it around your neck,” he teased, mindlessly toying with the silky garment as he confidently held Harry’s gaze, leaving him with no doubt as to what he was referring to.

“I can think of a very good use for it,” Harry said. He caught the smooth fabric with ease and wrapped it around his wrist. Shuffling a little, he first propped himself up on his elbows, then sat up completely. This forced Draco to straddle his thighs instead of his hips and if he was at all irked by the sudden change in position, he didn’t let it show.

Toying with the tie, Harry playfully hung it around Draco’s neck and grabbing both ends, he pulled him into a distracting kiss. Draco relented, though Harry couldn’t be sure whether it was truly due to his diversion tactics or simply because Draco chose to yield to him. He suspected the latter.

Either way, Harry wasn’t above using the narrow window of opportunity to his advantage. He broke the kiss and in a swift and almost dizzying move, he reversed their positions and flipped Draco onto his back. The flicker of surprise and excitement in Draco’s eyes sent a thrill of anticipation surging through Harry’s spine and leaning down, he brushed his lips against Draco’s. He lingered for a moment but not long enough for Draco to draw him into yet another mind-twisting kiss.

Pulling away just a little, Harry took a moment to gaze into Draco’s eyes, trying to identify some of the emotions he could see in those expressive clear grey orbs. They sparkled with feverish
anticipation as well as an element of curiosity. There was a level of admiration for Harry’s rather sneaky Slytherin move and something that Harry couldn’t quite identify, though he was sure that it was for his benefit and only his. He instantly felt privileged to be privy to such raw and intense emotions.

Grudgingly tearing his eyes away from Draco’s, Harry pressed his lips against Draco’s cheek, like he had done so many times before, and marvelled at its softness. Trailing a series of soft kisses against the warm skin, he nipped at Draco’s earlobe. He teasingly flicked the tip of his tongue over the sensitive flesh and felt inexplicably pleased when Draco shuddered beneath him.

“Draco,” he murmured, pausing as he felt him tremble beneath him.

“Do you trust me?” he asked and after a moment of hesitation, Draco nodded.

“Yes,” he said on a shaky breath and lifting his head Harry looked into Draco’s eyes, now dark with intense desire. He couldn’t help but seek out a nonverbal confirmation to back up his words. He found it instantly and with a nod, he dragged his tie from around Draco’s neck and covered his eyes with it, using it as a blindfold. Draco tensed for a split second but after drawing in a shaky breath, he relaxed slowly.

“OK?” Harry asked and Draco nodded in response. They had never used a blindfold before and there had been a moment where Harry had been hesitant to try, but eventually, he had given in to his own curiosity and now he was more than turned on.

Draco had so very willingly surrendered, making quite an effort to show his trust.

“Let this be my way of apologising to you…again,” Harry whispered, bringing his lips close enough to Draco’s to brush against them but not close enough for a kiss.

“Just…lie back and enjoy,” he added, then kissed Draco deeply, passionately, and without the slightest bit of restraint.

He almost expected Draco to grab hold of him, but to Harry’s surprise he remained perfectly still, except for the occasional shudder that went through him as Harry set out on a mission to explore.

While he trailed tender kisses along Draco’s jaw and down the side of his neck, he threaded his fingers through Draco’s silky-smooth hair, massaging his scalp. Intent on trying to rob Draco of all his faculties, Harry sat back a little and cast a wandless warming charm around the bed. He took another look at Draco, all sprawled out on the bed, blindfolded, waiting, anticipating, and felt a rush of love.

“You have no idea just how beautiful you are,” Harry mumbled and gently pulling Draco up, he divested him of his dark blue cashmere jumper. He tossed it over to the nearby visitor’s chair and allowing Draco to lie back down, he slowly unbuttoned Draco’s shirt, following the trail of exposed skin with his mouth, kissing, licking, nipping, tasting the familiar skin, relishing in the little shaky moans that now escaped Draco’s lips at a regular rate.

Once he had unbuttoned the shirt completely, he ran his palms from Draco’s hips right up to his shoulders, pushing the shirt off them as best as he could. He leant forward, trailed a series of small kisses along Draco’s neck, and with his face buried in the crook of Draco’s neck, he inhaled deeply and mumbled a wandless spell to banish the shirt.

Running his hands over Draco’s taut arms, he interlaced their fingers and pulled his arms up to frame his head. He bowed down, brought his lips to the inside of Draco’s left wrist, and trailed a long line
Draco’s breath hitched several times and he alternated between low moans and tiny shudders. Each sound served Harry with an almost painful reminder of just how badly he wanted Draco. His erection strained against his black trousers, leaking large amounts of precome into his boxer briefs.

Gathering every single ounce of his willpower, he ignored his own needs and proceeded to kiss nearly every square inch of Draco’s exposed skin. He spent an excessively long amount of time on teasing Draco and although he half-expected Draco to snap at him, telling him to get a move on, he was surprised at the level of Draco’s resolve.

He decided to up the stakes, shuffled in-between Draco’s legs and squeezing his hips firmly, he undid Draco’s belt and popped the top button of his trousers open. He took his sweet time undoing the zipper and used his teeth to slowly drag it down. The musky scent of Draco’s arousal instantly assaulted him and unable to resist Harry buried his face in Draco’s crotch, breathing in deeply. He was so very tempted to use magic to remove the rest of Draco’s clothing but resisted the urge. Lifting his head slowly, he looked up at Draco’s face and caught him licking his lips, then focused his attention on Draco’s shoes, socks, and eventually his trousers and boxers.

Once Draco was fully naked, Harry took a moment to simply admire the beauty of the moment. It resulted in a rather extreme increase of his heartbeat and a sharp intake of breath. He wanted Draco’s cock so badly but at the same time, he was nowhere near finished with what he had set out to do. He was a little surprised when a barely audible plea made it past Draco’s lips.

“Please.”

It was a divine mixture between a whimper and a moan and Harry couldn’t help but notice that Draco was grasping at the bed covers, holding on tightly.

“Please what?” Harry whispered.

He hadn’t expected that. Hadn’t expected that Draco would beg him to continue touching him.

So soon, Harry mused with a smile and felt drunk on the power he presently held over Draco.

“Do something. Don’t just…stare at me,” Draco spoke, his voice a lot firmer now than only seconds ago.

“How do you know I’m looking at you?”

“I can feel your eyes on me.”

“Can’t help it, you are beautiful.”

Draco’s sigh was one of pure exasperation and crawling forward just a little, Harry pressed what he hoped was an appeasing kiss against Draco’s lips. He lingered just long enough for their kiss to catch fire, fuelled by what Draco wanted but wouldn’t say and Harry intended to give.

When he pulled away, Draco grumbled. Harry, spurred on by wanting to drive Draco well and truly crazy, continued his quest to set Draco’s entire body on fire.

He kissed, licked, and nipped his way down to Draco’s left hip and sucked at the soft flesh, using just enough force to leave a red mark, but nothing of a more permanent nature.

For a moment, he felt tempted to trail a series of small kisses along Draco’s thick long shaft, teasing
his erection, but he resisted and pushed Draco’s thighs further apart instead. He kissed the inside of his thighs, pleased to discover that Draco’s little moans of pleasure were now a practically continuous stream of enthusiastic noises. They drove him wild and he wanted Draco to never stop.

“Ready to fall apart?” he whispered and pulling and pushing the bottom half of the duvet up, he manoeuvred it underneath Draco’s buttocks, raising them just enough to give him a perfect view of a completely exposed Draco. He trailed his index finger along the underside of Draco’s erection, pleased when the simple action wrenched a groan from somewhere deep inside of Draco.

Scooping up a generous amount of precome, Harry brought it to his lips and tasted it, making a rather appreciative sound.

“Fuck, Draco, you taste so good,” he mumbled and leaning down he flicked his tongue over the tip of Draco’s cock, which was a deep-reddish purple and glistened with precome. Draco rewarded him with an almost violent buck of his hips and a low languid groan.

The temptation to suck Draco’s long, hard cock into his mouth was almost overwhelming but Harry took a deep breath to calm himself. He found it in him to resist and instead ran his wet finger along the extremely sensitive skin just below Draco’s balls and towards his hole. He teased, mercilessly circling his finger over the taut ring of muscle but never once attempted to breach.

Draco looked remarkable. His mouth was hanging open slightly, panting, desperately trying to get enough air into his lungs. While he could have removed the makeshift blindfold at any time, he clearly chose not to do so. Instead, his fingers remained tightly woven into the bed covers. A fine sheen of sweat covered his entire body and his stomach muscles were tense and tight, flexing every so often.

Harry decided that he was well and truly overdressed for what he was about to do, and feeling impatient, he used a wandless spell to divest himself of his own clothing.

Still kneeling between Draco’s spread legs, he shuffled into a slightly more comfortable position and ran his fingertips along the insides of Draco’s thighs, right up to his groin. Then, not pausing for effect, he assaulted the sensitive skin with his mouth, relishing in the slightly salty taste as he dragged his lips, teeth, and tongue across the pale flesh.

He worked his way upwards agonisingly slow and Draco rewarded him with yet another shaky plea. Harry had no doubt that he desperately wanted and needed more than he was currently getting. He kissed along the underside of Draco’s weeping cock and teased. He flicked his tongue along the tip, lapped up some more of the precome, then covered Draco’s body with his own and pressed a firm kiss onto his slightly parted lips.

“Turn over,” he mumbled against Draco’s lips and giving him just enough room to manoeuvre onto his front, he waited until Draco settled, then kissed his neck before he worked along Draco’s shoulder and trailed his shoulder blade. Finally, he moved down his spine until he reached his lower back.

There Harry paused for a moment and shifting his weight, he trailed one finger along the crack of Draco’s buttocks, gently slipping in-between, once again seeking out that tight ring of muscles. He pushed, persistent enough to let Draco feel his finger but not insistent enough to penetrate. The drawn-out mewl that left Draco’s mouth went straight to his cock, causing it to twitch with anticipation, need and hunger.

He ignored his own needs, shuffled to reduce the burn in his thighs, then bend forward and pushed Draco’s buttocks apart. He stuck his tongue out and flicked the tip against the pink flesh. Draco
thrust his hips forward, then pushed backwards, surprised at the unexpected attack. For now, the pillow muffled his groan but Harry knew that it wouldn’t cloak Draco’s cries of pleasure for much longer. At least not with what he had in mind.

With a sly grin, Harry repeated his earlier action and this time he lingered and teased the tight muscle, pleased when it began to first flex and then loosen underneath his tongue’s persistent assault. Draco’s moans grew louder and more insistent and he attempted to push back against Harry’s face, but Harry wisely kept him grounded.

“Fuck, Harry,” Draco cried out in ecstasy and squeezing his hips, Harry pushed his tongue past the loosened muscle, repeatedly thrusting it into Draco, fucking him with his tongue. A series of incoherent sounds, whispered pleas and long, loud groans, along with a few colourful expletives, left Draco’s mouth as he rode wave after wave of the intense pleasure Harry’s very ambitious tongue provided.

Briefly pulling away, Harry insistently tugged at Draco’s hips and with difficulty he moved to onto all fours. Harry paused for a second to drink in the sight of Draco, braced on his forearms, half lying, half kneeling on the bed in a position of complete and utter surrender. He felt his heart swell with an unexpected wave of love and covering Draco’s body with his own, he hissed when his erection moulded itself against the crack between Draco’s buttocks, easily slipping in between. He pressed a kiss against Draco’s neck and lingering for a moment, he closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. He relished in the moment of pure bliss, then pulled back a little and nipped at Draco’s earlobe.

“Can you take a little more?”

Draco’s answer was a sharp intake of breath, followed by a low moan and a small nod.

“Hmm, good, because, fuck, Draco, you are so gorgeous like this,” Harry mumbled and trailed a series of wet kisses down Draco’s spine, just like he had done earlier. He nipped at the soft but firm flesh of his buttocks and Draco responded with a low growl that turned into a delicious, long moan as Harry slid his tongue down the crack and licked his way to the still loose muscle.

He teased it with only the very tip of his tongue and since Draco was now on all fours, Harry slipped his hand around Draco’s hips and closed his hand around Draco’s throbbing erection. He gave it a few experimental strokes, then insistently pushed his tongue into Draco at the exact same time that his thumb rubbed over the tip of Draco’s cock.

The sound Draco made vaguely resembled a choked scream of delight. He then repeatedly panted Harry’s name. The sound was music to Harry’s ears and increasing the speed of his thrusts and strokes he brought Draco right to the very edge but stopped when Draco placed his own hand above Harry’s, stilling his strokes. Slowly withdrawing his tongue, Harry paused, placing a couple of gentle kisses on Draco’s lower back.

“Harry.”

“Hmm?”

“Want you inside me.”

Harry shuddered.

Inside Draco was exactly where he wanted to be and rolling off Draco, he lay on his side and pulled Draco against his body, pleased when he moved willingly. Knowing that Draco was more than prepared, Harry wrapped his hand around his cock and guiding it to Draco’s entrance, he positioned
himself, then grabbed Draco’s hip and slowly pushed inside, groaning at the velvety heat that instantly surrounded him, drawing him deeper inside.

“Fuck,” he murmured and reaching up he resolutely pushed the blindfold away, suddenly desperate to look into Draco’s eyes.

Draco turned his head and blinked a few times before locking eyes with Harry, who thought he might just come right there and then. Pulling Draco just that little bit closer against him, he sought out his mouth and kissed him, pouring all his emotions into the kiss. It felt like his entire body was alive, buzzing with need and want. Every fibre burned with white-hot pleasure and the intense desire to stay exactly in this position, sheathed deeply inside Draco, kissing him, loving him.

He blindly groped for Draco’s hand and once he found it, he entwined their fingers, squeezed tightly and withdrawing a little, he thrust into Draco, slowly, unhurriedly. Draco groaned into the kiss and wrought the fingers of his other hand into Harry’s hair.

Harry was quite aware that they were both tethering on the very edge. There was no way they would last longer than a few minutes, but he was determined to make the most of it, to draw it out for as long as was humanly possible.

They had never made love like this, with practically every single inch of their bodies touching, so intimately moulded against each other. They kissed, they shuddered, fingers tightly entwined, squeezing, holding, refusing to let go. They moaned, whispered incoherent nothings and Harry thrust repeatedly and despite the intensity of the moment, somehow managing to set an even rhythm.

Lack of oxygen to their lungs forced them to break their kiss and they settled for drowning in each other’s eyes instead.

“Come for me,” Harry mumbled between two shaky breaths and thrust that bit harder, finding that magical spot deep inside Draco, the one that sent him spiralling right out of control.

He could feel Draco tighten around his cock and it made holding out so hard…so very hard.

One…two…three thrusts later, Draco finally lost all resolve, though Harry wasn’t sure either one of them had any to begin with. He clamped tightly around him as he came on a low groan of Harry’s name. That proved too much for Harry and the sensations of Draco’s orgasm swept him away. He gave into his own and shot streak after streak of hot come into Draco, filling him.

Unable to keep his eyes open, Harry let them drop closed and squeezed Draco’s hand almost painfully as he rode out his orgasm. He had used his arm to prop himself up so that he could kiss and look at Draco but it gave away now and drawing Draco just that little bit tighter against his own body, he buried his face in the nape of Draco’s neck.

“Mine,” he growled possessively. “You’re not walking away ever again.”

“Yours. Not walking away,” Draco affirmed without hesitation and just like this — knowing that his world was once again right as rain — Harry shifted a little and slipped out of Draco.

Before Draco could complain, he pulled him tightly against his body, pushed one leg between Draco’s thighs and with a tired mumble, he renewed the warming charm he had cast earlier, then allowed himself to drift off into the land of slumber.

Chapter End Notes
Now would be a good time to have that cold shower you were thinking about halfway through this chapter... ;-) Just saying.
“Draco Malfoy, you’re not easy to track down,” Harry sighed as he entered a quaint-looking, walled rose garden with a small square water fountain at its centre and four stone benches, one on each side of the fountain. Rose vines wrought themselves around specially designed arches and inside the garden — despite spring’s mild temperatures — it appeared to be several degrees warmer. He relished in the warmth.

After arriving at the Manor, Tibby had kindly informed him that Master Malfoy was outside in the gardens and Harry had spent the better part of the last hour trying to locate said gardens.

Along the way, he had learnt a valuable lesson, namely that locator spells did not work on the Manor’s grounds. He had also learnt that Malfoy Manor had more than just one garden. Hidden away inside the large formal gardens that encompassed most of the Manor’s grounds were a hedge maze garden that had filled Harry with instant apprehension, a wildflower garden, a vegetable garden, a water garden, a botanical garden, a tropical garden, and a Japanese garden with a beautiful pagoda.

Looking up from his book, Draco shot him an amused grin.

“Did Tibby not tell you where to find me?”

“Oh, he did tell me alright,” Harry rolled his eyes, “the bloody elf said you were in the gardens.”

“I see,” Draco said with a flicker of silent delight in his eyes.

“Did you have a nice walk across the grounds then?” he asked with an air of nonchalance that irked Harry enough to contemplate the use of a stinging hex.

“Very nice indeed,” Harry said with as much sarcasm as he could muster. “Care to enlighten me why locator spells don’t work on the Manor grounds?”

“They work.”

“They do not; I tried. Neither standard locator spells nor Ministry-strength ones told me where to find you,” Harry said, feeling mildly exasperated.

He had forgone this morning’s load of paperwork in favour of heading into the field to observe some of his trainee Aurors and had spent the afternoon stuck in a ridiculously boring meeting with the Head of Magical Law Enforcement. Cox had droned on and on and on about a seemingly never-ending list of tasks he needed Harry to take care of and while he had pretended to diligently listen to the bane of his existence, Harry had planned the man’s early retirement and his relocation into a wooden casket buried six feet under.

Once he had finally been able to leave the meeting, he had found himself wondering whether he was doing Cox’s job. He had tried to come up with a single thing that Cox did not delegate to him but had repeatedly drawn a blank.

“Hmm, yes, I suppose the spells you most likely used wouldn’t work, that’s true indeed,” Draco nodded.
He placed a silver bookmark in the shape of a snake inside the book and snapping it closed, he rose from one of the stone benches by the water fountain and walked over to Harry.

“The Manor’s wards restrict the use of standard locator spells. However, if I wanted to find you inside the Manor or anywhere on the grounds, I’d simply cast *Quaeso Harry Potter* and my wand would lead me right to you.”

“You could have mentioned that a little earlier,” Harry grumbled with a frown, trying not to let Draco’s carefree laughter affect him in the slightest.

“That spell won’t work with me. I am the Master of the Manor, you would have to cast *Quaerite Dominum*, seek ye thee Lord, if you wanted to find me. Of course, I could always cast *Celo Dominum* to conceal myself from you and then that spell wouldn’t work either.’”

“Is that how rich pureblood families play hide and seek? By casting spells to find and conceal each other?” Harry asked, irritated that Draco was always so secretive when it came to the wards at Malfoy Manor.

He did divulge information, however only when asked directly, and his explanations were usually so complicated that they ended up giving Harry a headache. He had made the effort to read an entire book — *he had borrowed from Hermione* — about ancient wards for traditional wizarding homes but he had only understood half of the drivel it had contained.

These past few months he had started to spend more time at the Manor but it seemed that no matter how much he walked around the place, he still frequently lost his way and found himself stuck in some part of the Manor. On two occasions he had been unable to find his way back into the main part of the Manor and after brooding for an hour or two, he had eventually dispatched his Patronus to ask Draco to come and get him. His embarrassment had supplied Draco with several days’ worth of ammunition to affectionately ridicule him.

“That, Harry, would be cheating, so no, this is *not* how rich pureblood families play hide and seek. Scorpius and I never used magic during the game,” Draco answered, then in a rather surprising move, wound his fingers into Harry’s hair and drew him in for a breath-taking kiss. Harry had just about enough time to file Draco’s little revelation away for future contemplation, then melted into the kiss with a contented sigh.

As Draco’s tongue teased its way past his lips and snuck into his mouth, Harry felt his mild annoyance dissipate. Reciprocating the kiss, Harry let his hands rest on Draco’s hips and pulling him closer, he relished in Draco’s rather intimate way of welcoming him...*home*, he wanted to say — after a long day at work. Draco always had something special waiting for him and Harry never managed to guess in advance what it was. Some days it was just a kiss and other days it was a potion to relieve his stress or a scrumptious dinner to elevate his mood. On days that he felt and looked sour, Draco would crack a little joke and on those days that he was entirely too hyper, Draco would glare at him and mock him thoroughly.

A couple of months had passed since Teddy’s and Scorpius’ accident, but they had made up good and proper. Harry felt they were stronger than ever. There was a deep sort of understanding between them and a level of intimacy Harry didn’t know how to describe. It left him feeling warm and fuzzy and content and like he had found the one thing that had always been missing in his life.

“I shall let Tibby know to be more specific next time,” Draco mumbled against Harry’s lips a moment later as he slowly withdrew from the kiss.

Harry flushed a little with embarrassment.
“Erm— uhm— Well, thing is, he may have offered to take me to you but I— uhm— figured— uhm — I’d find you by myself,” Harry stammered his way through a confession he hadn’t been prepared to make.

“Hmm, lesson learnt then: trust the house elf,” Draco grinned and his cool grey-blue eyes twinkled with mirth.

“Come on, I’m sure you’re starving,” he added and a few seconds later, Harry felt the familiar pull of side-along apparition as Draco took them back to the Manor and straight into the dining room.

Chapter End Notes

I guess Draco is still a sneaky Slytherin, eh?

The word *quaeso* is Latin and loosely translates into "seek". It is of my own creation and although I studied Latin for six years, my grammar sucks, though a tiny part of my brain told me that I used the correct conjugation of the verb.

*Quaerite Dominum* is a Latin phrase, that as Draco explains means *seek ye thee Lord* and while the meaning, I guess is more of a biblical nature, I thought it fitting since Draco is essentially the Lord (Master) of Malfoy Manor.

The phrase *Celō Dominum* is of my own creation and as you can derive from the above phrase *Dominum* means *Lord or Master* while *Celō* translates into "conceal, hide, cover, veil, keep secret". I think the message of the meaning of said "spell" is clear from the context.

There, this concludes your free lesson and excursion into the confusing realms of the Latin language from an entirely unqualified Latin teacher. If anyone has any suggestions to improve the phrasing, leave me a comment. I'd be most grateful.
Sometime later that evening, Draco found himself sitting on top of Harry’s bed, comfortably propped up by several pillows and his legs crossed at the ankles. An open case file with the logo of the DMLE on the front rested on his thighs and he was idly perusing a few photographs, looking for clues.

After they finished dinner at the Manor, Harry managed to talk him into accompanying him back to Grimmauld Place and for reasons he still couldn’t quite comprehend, Draco had given in.

It seemed that these days Harry’s skills of coercion had improved massively.

It was either that or Draco’s ability to resist was faltering and he was loath to admit to the latter.

Glancing sideways at Harry, who was frowning at a parchment, Draco suddenly remembered Scorpius’ letter. It had arrived at the Manor this morning, weirdly enough addressed to both him and Harry. He had intended to show it to Harry over dinner but they had started talking about the potions case he was consulting on. What had started out as a mere conversation had quickly turned into a heated debate and he had forgotten all about it.

Returning the photographs into the file folder, Draco flicked it closed, moved it onto the nightstand, and got off the bed. The letter was in his robes and those were downstairs. He knew that he could simply summon the letter, but he suddenly wanted a cup of tea and said craving could not be satisfied with a spell. Unless, of course, he summoned Tibby from the Manor, which he thought a little excessive.

“Want some tea?”

Looking up from the parchment in his hands, Harry nodded.

“Please. Thank you.”

“Ever so polite, Mr Potter,” Draco chuckled.

“Figured I’d brush up on my manners now that we are dating again. Wouldn’t want you to be embarrassed to be seen in public with me,” Harry’s haphazard response and his self-deprecating joke resulted in Draco rolling his eyes. Heading towards the door, he left their bedroom and headed downstairs.

Halfway down the stairs, he stopped in his tracks and with a frown, he realised that he had once again thought of Harry’s bedroom as theirs. In the last few weeks, he had, quite unconsciously so, come to think of Harry’s place as their place. He certainly didn’t act like he was a visitor and Harry didn’t expect him to. Draco pondered for a moment and tried to work out how he felt about that. Their relationship had progressed rather naturally. Harry had thoroughly crawled under his skin and Draco found that he liked him there.
After Scorpius’s and Teddy’s release from St Mungo’s, they had immediately returned to Hogwarts to catch up on all the missed classes and what with not having to spend all day at the hospital anymore, he and Harry had quickly fallen into an odd kind of routine. They spent weekdays at Grimmauld Place and weekends at the Manor. Most nights, Harry ended up cooking them dinner while Draco sat in the kitchen, watching him. They would chat about work, potions, Scorpius’ grades at Hogwarts, and Teddy, of course.

Whenever their opinions on a topic were drastically different, they indulged in a brief spat to solve the matter. On those weeknights that Harry was too tired to cook, Draco would apparate to Gio’s to bring food home and they ate in front of the fireplace in the living room.

Harry had pestered him several times about inviting his two best friends to join them for dinner at Gio’s and after some hesitation, Draco had given in. Hermione Granger had, of course, continued to embrace their relationship with open arms, while Weasley had, albeit being mostly supportive, settled for polite indifference.

Harry had also attempted to drag him to the Burrow to formally introduce him to the rest of the family, but Draco had vehemently refused, stating that he could not take that many Weasley’s all at once and Sunday dinner had gone ahead without him. The mere idea of a crazy family dinner with nearly a dozen children running about the place wreaking havoc had terrified him.

To appease Harry, he had, however, bravely agreed to a compromise and the following Sunday Molly and Arthur Weasley had arrived at Grimmauld Place for dinner. The four of them had shared a rather awkward meal together, though by the second glass of expensive Italian wine the atmosphere had improved considerably and by the end of dessert, they had all shared a few laughs. Arthur Weasley had instantly given them their blessing but Molly Weasley had been a lot harder to crack. She had grilled Draco about his intentions to the point that Harry had stepped in and told her to rein her horses in. He had explained to her, again apparently, how happy they were together and that Draco had no sinister intentions. Sometime later, Harry had leant in and whispered into his ear that while the Weasley matriarch now believed that Draco didn’t have any sinister intentions, he most definitely had sinister intentions and intended to show Draco just how sinister those intentions were as soon as Molly and Arthur left through the Floo. The memory of those words made Draco shudder still.

_Thoroughly entangled_, Draco thought and with a soft chuckle, he continued to make his way downstairs. On the way to the kitchen, he retrieved Scorpius’ letter from his robes, then set about making two cups of tea, one for Harry and one for himself. He levitated both cups onto a tray and hitting them with a Non-Spillage Charm, he carefully picked up the small tray and carried it upstairs with him.

“Doing it all the Muggle way, eh?” Harry teased and moved his files out of the way and onto his nightstand as he accepted his tea.

“Drink your tea, Potter,” Draco purposefully ignored the good-natured dig and resuming his previous position on the bed, teacup in hand, he took Scorpius’ letter out of his trouser pocket.

“I almost forgot, Scorpius wrote. The letter arrived this morning and is addressed to both of us.”

“He does know that I don’t actually live at Malfoy Manor, doesn’t he?” Harry asked with a bemused expression.

“He explains in the letter.”

“Read it to me?”
Dear Dad, Dear Harry,

I've got a crazy load of essays to finish before Friday (This should make you extremely happy, Dad, no opportunity for me to get into any kind of trouble!) so one letter addressed to the both of you will have to do. I'm sending it to the Manor —

Seriously Harry, when are you moving in with us? The place is big enough and you and dad aren’t getting any younger, you know. You can have the entire east wing if you like. It’s not like we’re using it and I’m sure dad doesn’t mind at all. I mean, I guess you’re probably sharing dad’s room, which is a weird thought but whatever…

Anyway, the east wing could be your haven, perhaps? In case you and dad argue… Which I assure you will happen, he’s not easy to live with, you know? If you need any help, I’d be more than happy to offer some advice. I do have some experience in that department and there are some things you absolutely need to know about my father before you commit to living with him under one roof.

Dad, — I know you want to ground me right now, and if you do, I’m just going to spend Easter at Hogwarts and not come home, but I reckon you should just ask Harry to move into the Manor already. You’ll be thirty-six this year!!!

I don’t know if this makes me the most uncool teenager in the history of uncool teenagers (Teddy says it does!), but I’m still so happy for you both. I’d love to tell Zendaya about you (She won’t go blabbing to the whole school, I promise!) but only if it’s okay with you, Dad. And, of course, you, Harry.

Uhm. If I’m not grounded for my cheek, I’d really love to see you two over the Easter break and if you both came to pick me up at King’s Cross, well that would be super cool. I understand though if you don’t want to, uhm, come out to everyone about your relationship just yet.

I miss you.

Love,
Scorpius

Once he had finished reading the letter to Harry, Draco folded it up and placed it on the nightstand next to his tea.

“I reckon he’s suffering from the aftereffects of the venomous tentacula poison. He’s clearly gone loopy.”

“Hmm, I don’t know. We could go and pick him up at King’s Cross,” Harry said with a shrug and it didn’t escape Draco’s notice that Harry had completely avoided making a comment about Scorpius’ suggestion that he move into the Manor.

“Unless of course you don’t want everyone to know?” he added in a lower voice and Draco noted the uncertainty and Harry’s clear worry that he might reject his suggestion outright.

They had yet to breach the subject of letting the public know, but Draco was painfully aware of the fact that if they wanted their relationship to continue to grow, they wouldn’t be able to hide behind
Harry’s job for much longer. It rather restricted the number of times they could show themselves in public together and what they could and couldn’t do.

Still, Draco couldn’t help but wonder just how the public would receive Harry’s choice of life partner. And then there was the frightening idea of coming out as gay this late in life. Gay and in a serious relationship with Harry Potter, the Head of the Auror Department and the wizarding world’s golden boy...man, no less.

Somehow Draco couldn’t see that going down without at least some sort of a shitstorm. He didn’t know whether he was ready for that kind of public scrutiny. Since the end of the war, he had mostly tried to stay out of the papers, only making a statement when it had been unavoidable. And those unavoidable occasions, well, he could count them on one hand. His engagement, his wedding, Scorpius’ birth, and Astoria’s death. More recently, of course, the high-profile potions case he had consulted on, the one that had started everything, the one that had turned his life upside down.

“I’m not going to push you, Draco, whenever you’re ready is fine by me,” Harry’s voice cut through Draco’s contemplation and he realised that he had been quiet for too long. Looking up from Harry’s hand, which was resting on his forearm in what was meant to be a comforting gesture, Draco sighed.

“I don’t care what they’re going to write about me, the press has never treated me particularly well. I am, however, worried about how the other students will treat Scorpius. Teenagers were trouble when we were young, I can’t imagine it has improved much since then. I’m pretty sure it’s only gotten worse. I mean, it’s not like being gay is that big of a deal in our world, it’s never really been, but you aren’t exactly the friendly guy from next door, now are you Harry? And we do have a bit of a complicated history,” Draco honestly confessed his concerns.

“Don’t you think Scorpius is resilient enough to deal with whatever might happen?”

“Resilient, yes. He’s proven that to me several times already. But he does also have a bit of a temper. I can absolutely see him hexing his classmates if they make inappropriate comments about his dad and his dad’s boyfriend.”

“Can you blame him?” Harry’s laughter was somewhat infectious and Draco couldn’t help but smile.

“Not really.”

“Maybe we should talk to him first, set some ground rules for how far he’s allowed to go?” Harry suggested and Draco deliberated for a moment. Scorpius was fiercely loyal to his family and the last time anyone had dared to make a nasty comment about his late mother, those two bullies had ended up in the infirmary.

Draco was under no illusion that, if anyone chose to make fun of his and Harry’s relationship in front of Scorpius, he would react drastically. His letter left Draco with no doubt that his son was his and Harry’s biggest fan and would walk through fire to support them both. It was more than he could ask for but it also meant that he worried.

“Are you saying you want to make certain concessions? Allow certain spells?” Draco inquired with an amused grin. “That would be, you know, positively Slytherin of you.”

“Well, I’m dating a Slytherin; some of his slyness may have rubbed off on me now. Besides, if your aptitude for stinging hexes is anything to go by, I reckon Scorpius has got them down to an art,” Harry smirked. “He’ll never agree to simply stand by and let someone verbally abuse his beloved dad.”
“You do realise that he’s going to find a way to get around the rules, don’t you?”

“He wouldn’t be in Slytherin if he didn’t at least try to find a loophole, though if you like I could ask Hermione to draw up a contract. No amount of Slytherin cunningness would get him out of having to stick to the rules then.”

“Oh, but where would be the fun in that?” Draco laughed and reaching for his tea, he emptied it.

“The closeted Slytherin in me wants to answer your question with yes but the out-and-proud Gryffindor won’t stand for it,” Harry grinned.

Draco expectantly watched him shuffle closer and allowed him to steal a kiss.

“Draco, if—if you’re ready, I mean if you’re okay to tell the world about us, I can try and pull a few strings, you know, in terms of what we’ll let the papers print, but I’m afraid I can’t stop them from writing stuff completely.”

Lying back against the pillows, Draco folded his arms behind his head and looked up at Harry.

“I don’t want to make an official statement or give an interview,” he said earnestly.

“Not now or not ever?”

“No ever.”

“Oh,” Harry’s crestfallen face made Draco want to mentally slap himself and with a sigh, he reached out and pulled Harry into his arms, relishing in the comforting closeness. He loved the feel of Harry’s body casually resting against his own.

“That’s not what I meant, Harry,” Draco said carefully. “I am okay with the world knowing about us, I just don’t want to be the one to issue a statement or purposefully seek out the press to give an interview.”

“I see,” Harry said, and Draco gasped as his hand slipped underneath his polo shirt, absent-mindedly drawing, stroking, feeling, exploring. “You want us to act like a normal couple then? See how much we can get away with before we end up on the front page?”

“Hmm,” Draco nodded.

“What about picking Scorpius up at King’s Cross then?”

“At the end of the school year,” Draco mumbled and closing his eyes he decided that he didn’t want to do any more talking. All he wanted to do was to lie here on Harry’s bed with Harry’s head resting on his chest and Harry’s fingers drawing circuitous, indiscernible patterns across his skin. This felt good, this felt safe, this felt right, this felt like love. This is love, he corrected himself.

Comfortable silence blanketed the room and Draco rolled his eyes when, quite sometime later, Harry mumbled a wandless spell to dim the lights.

“You are so fucking lazy, Potter,” he murmured, combing his fingers through Harry’s hair, and massaging his scalp.

“Why thank you, Malfoy, I love you too.”
We Did It

Chapter Notes

Well, my dear readers, I'm afraid we've come to the last chapter. But fear not, there is an epilogue waiting for you to enjoy.

“We made the front page,” Harry laughed, dangling the Saturday edition of the Prophet — *which Earl had dutifully delivered to his study* — in front of Draco, who appeared lost in a world of his own. His morning coffee stood abandoned on the kitchen table in front of him and Harry fully expected him to fix him with an icy death glare. He wasn’t at all prepared for the bemused grin he got instead.

“That didn’t take them long,” Draco said, glancing at the photograph of them exiting Gio’s restaurant, deliberately holding hands and sharing a rather passionate kiss.

“We made it frightfully easy,” Harry shrugged and stealing Draco’s coffee mug, he took a sip of the hot liquid, relishing in the instant surge of energy that shot through him. “Want to know what it says?”

“You’re most definitely worse than a child on Christmas morning and since I actually have some experience in that department, I find your enthusiasm for being front page news extremely worrisome,” Draco grimaced. “If you absolutely can’t stop yourself, go on, torture me with their speculations on how I am force-feeding you Amortentia, or worse — how I’ve got you under the Imperius Curse.”

“Are you?” Harry laughed.

He returned Draco’s coffee and summoning his own mug, he poured himself some coffee. With the newspaper still in hand, he casually leant back against the kitchen worktop and took a few sips of his favourite morning beverage.

“Am I what?” Draco frowned.

“Force-feeding me Amortentia?” Harry clarified.

“The choice is between a love potion and an unforgivable curse and you’re worried about the former?” Draco raised a questioning eyebrow at Harry in an unspoken *are-you-quite-sane* challenge.

“I can fight off the Imperius,” Harry said with a nonchalant shrug. “So, if you wanted to make me your sexy house boy, that wouldn’t get you anywhere. A love potion, however… There are a million and one ways you could slip that one by me.”

The look of sheer astonishment on Draco’s face did not escape Harry and falling silent, he gave Draco the opportunity to ask the question that he was so very clearly dying to ask.

“You can fight off an Imperius curse?”

Harry nodded, then smirked.
“Learnt it in our fourth year from a Death Eater disguised as Mad-Eye Moody. I believe you and he had a rather furry disagree—”

“If you want to keep all your dangly bits, do not go there,” Draco warned with an extremely venomous glare.

“Article then?” Harry wisely changed the topic and Draco rolled his eyes in mock-exasperation.

“Do what you cannot stop yourself from doing and put me out of my misery already so that I can go back to bed and pretend this morning didn’t happen,” he sighed and emptying his coffee mug, he stood to get a refill.

“Brace yourself,” Harry chuckled and setting his own mug down on the worktop beside him, he unfolded the newspaper and began to read.

“Harry Potter finally in love? On Wednesday evening, we spotted the Head of the Auror Department, Director Harry Potter, 35, holding hands and sharing a rather intimate tell-all kiss with his partner after the couple enjoyed a romantic meal at a charming Italian trattoria. Our Saviour’s significant other, none other than Draco Malfoy, 35, seems equally as smitten with Harry. In a brief statement to the paper, Mr Potter confirmed the relationship. He stated that he and Mr Malfoy have put their differences aside and became friends when he invited Mr Malfoy to consult on a high-profile potion smuggling case that resulted in the arrest of seven perpetrators, including a trainee Auror in October of last year. Following the collaboration, Mr Potter says, he and Mr Malfoy continued to spend leisure time together and eventually developed romantic feelings for each other. The couple asks that the public respect their right to privacy and refrain from inappropriate speculations and ill-willed gossip. They also ask the public to respect their respective families’ right to privacy and will not make themselves available for exclusive interviews.”

“That is actually a rather decent article,” Draco conceded many minutes after Harry had stopped reading and pierced Harry with a reprimanding glare. “I thought we weren’t going to make an official statement though?”

Harry sighed.

Knowing better than to print a disrespectful article and a sorry excuse for news reporting, the editor-in-chief at the Prophet had wisely contacted him for comments on Thursday morning. Harry had taken one look at the original article and immediately threatened legal action, citing false reporting, defamation of character on two counts, frivolous gossip, and wilful libel as grounds for a successful lawsuit.

“I’m sorry, I had to.”

“Go behind my back?” Draco raised a questioning eyebrow.

“I didn’t. I just couldn’t let them print what they initially wanted to print. It was full of speculations about the state of my mental health along with rather twisted insinuations about your sexual preference and the authenticity of your marriage,” Harry explained, looking rather apologetic.

“I know you said you didn’t care what they wrote about you or me or us, but I couldn’t let Scorpius read that nonsense. He doesn’t deserve to pay the price just because well over a decade and a half after the war, people still want to know everything about me.”
Harry didn’t know what to make of the blank expression on Draco’s face and holding his gaze, he searched Draco’s eyes for something, anything. A clue as to how he felt or something that would tell him that Draco was about to explode, or hex him, or kill him. He wanted Draco to kiss him but he knew better than to ask for that.

“Let me get this straight, you did this for my son?”

Harry nodded. “Don’t be mad.”

“How can I freaking be mad when you tell me something like that?” Draco sighed. “You should have told me before you did what you did, but I’ll let this one slide. Dating the Head of the Auror Department apparently has its perks.”

“It absolutely does,” Harry smirked. “On a different note altogether, what about your parents?”

“What about them?” Draco asked entirely too nonchalant.

The wicked grin and the sly glint in his eyes filled Harry with a healthy dose of trepidation.

“Do they know?”

“I should think they’ve looked at the front page of the Prophet by now,” Draco said with a shrug and Harry groaned, instantly swamped with dread and a distinct level of desperation. He fully expected to receive a howler from Lucius Malfoy himself, threatening to murder him any second now.

“You didn’t tell them,” he said flatly. “I’m a dead man walking, your father is going to kill me.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Harry,” Draco rolled his eyes.

Much to Harry’s dismay that horribly wicked smile reappeared and his eyes sparkled with mischief.

“It’s called comeuppance, you know.”

“Remind me to never ever get onto your wrong side. Death by Prophet,” Harry mumbled and reaching for his coffee, he hastily took several sips of the hot, black beverage.

He set about preparing breakfast and resolutely tried to ignore Draco’s laughter, though he couldn’t deny just how much he enjoyed the sound of Draco’s carefree, and very vocal, amusement.

Along with Draco’s snide remarks, his dry humour, and snarky comments, it was a distinctly wonderful sound. One, Harry decided, he had already grown immensely accustomed to.

As he stood there preparing toast and sipping on his coffee, he couldn’t help but remember Scorpius’ letter and how his innocent little request had turned both his and Draco’s lives upside down.

Harry suddenly found himself remembering a quote he was sure he had once read somewhere.

*More than kisses, letters mingle souls.*

Draco’s unexpected embrace startled him somewhat, but a moment later he relaxed and leant back.

“Remind me to thank Scorpius sometime,” he mumbled.

“Hmm, sure. Why?” Draco asked and Harry shuddered with delight when he pressed a kiss against his neck.

"More than kisses, letters mingle souls."
“His letter made this happen.”

*The End*
“Come in,” Harry called out.

The unexpected knock at his office door was a decidedly welcome distraction from a particularly boring pile of paperwork that he couldn’t seem to make sense of.

He had no meetings scheduled for the afternoon and didn’t expect any visitors but was most grateful for the interruption, even more so when he found himself looking into a pair of grey-blue eyes that sparkled with a sense of mischief.

They belonged to an extremely good-looking young man with a tall, well-built frame, shoulder-length platinum-blond hair, high cheekbones, and a smile that stretched from ear to ear.

“Scorpius! What a perfect surprise!”

Harry stood promptly and rounded his desk. He pulled Scorpius in for a hug which he enthusiastically returned.

“Draco complained just this morning that he never gets to see you anymore. How is Oxford treating you these days?”

“They’re drowning me in exams, assignments, and papers,” Scorpius sighed. “Death by Quill!”

Harry chuckled. It sounded like the title of an Agatha Christie-style wizarding crime novel.

“Any regrets yet?” he asked.

“About magical med school? Plenty. Mostly that now that you’re the Head of Magical Law Enforcement, there’s no way I’ll get away with hexing my Muggle professors. They’re even worse than the professors at Hogwarts.”

“I’ll just pretend that I didn’t hear anything about your planned crime spree on unsuspecting Muggles,” Harry laughed. “And just for the record, as Head of the Auror Department, I wouldn’t have let you get away with that either.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep my wand sheathed,” Scorpius grinned.

“Do you have time for coffee? I’m meeting Teddy and Victoire later. We’re heading to Zendaya’s concert tonight. It’s the only reason I’m in town really. I thought we could hang out for a bit and catch up? It’s been a while…”

“Only if you promise me to come by the Manor on Saturday to spend some time with your dad, otherwise I’ll never hear the end of it. You know how your dad gets when you favour me over him; I’ll be the one in the doghouse, not you.”

“Can we make it Sunday instead? There’s a lecture on Saturday morning I want to attend.”

“As long as you show up, I don’t care which day it is,” Harry smiled and getting his robes, he threw them on and holstered his wand.

“Come on, I’m taking the afternoon off for you.”
“I feel…special,” Scorpius laughed as he headed towards the door.

Harry resisted rolling his eyes and following Scorpius, he locked the door behind him with a wandless spell before turning to let his secretary know that he would be out of the office for the remainder of the afternoon.

“Well, you be back later, Mr Potter?” she asked and Harry shook his head.

“I’ll be in tomorrow, Madelaine. If anyone’s looking for me, have them leave a note. Anything that requires immediate intervention, try the Head of the Auror Department first and if it’s unavoidable you can reach me through the usual means, though I sincerely hope an afternoon away from my desk won’t end with a terrorist attack of some sort.”

“Alright, have a good afternoon with your son, Director Potter.”

“I will,” Harry smiled and decided that there was really no point to remind Madelaine to call him Harry. He smiled when he felt Scorpius hook his arm around his.

“Come on, Papa, let’s go.”

“Alright, I’ve got a confession to make,” Scorpius broke the comfortable silence that had settled over them as they drank their coffees, huddled away in a quiet corner of a Muggle coffee shop not too far away from Whitehall.

“I came to your office with ulterior motives.”

Harry chuckled. He had been trying to gauge how long it would take Scorpius to confess to the real reason he had so unexpectedly stopped by.

“I figured as much. It’s never just coffee with you. Spit it out then, what’s on your mind?”

“Well, well, I might be overstepping a couple of lines here—”

“I’m well used to it by now. Nothing shocks me anymore when it comes to you, Scorpius.”

“I’m going to take that as a compliment,” Scorpius frowned and the expression instantly reminded Harry of Draco.

Scorpius had most definitely grown into a fine young man. He was, without the shadow of a doubt, the perfect likeness to his father, his shoulder-length hair being the only exception.

He had graduated from Hogwarts three years ago with an utterly impressive set of NEWTs and upon seeing his son’s exam results, Draco had sat down at his desk. He had been at a complete loss for words. Following his graduation, Scorpius had almost immediately enrolled at Oxford Med School where he was taking an undergraduate course in Muggle medical training, combined with advanced schooling in Potions, Herbology, Transfiguration, Charms and Defence Against the Dark Arts at the nearby St Mungo’s School for Magical Maladies and Injuries.

Harry took a good long look at Scorpius and wondered yet again how it was possible that the boy was still standing upright at the end of each day. And how did he find the time to have a girlfriend, especially one that was just as busy with her life as he was, if not more.

He knew that the training Scorpius was undergoing was almost unforgivingly cruel and exhausting. St Mungo’s School for Magical Maladies and Injuries had expanded and was now located at Oxford
Scorpius had at first toyed with the idea to study across the pond in America, but Draco had vehemently opposed that idea. He had even gone as far as threatening to disinherit Scorpius should he decide to leave the country for such a long time. The fact that transatlantic Portkey travel had become very convenient in recent years hadn’t fazed Draco in the slightest and he had stubbornly forbidden Scorpius to leave Britain for longer than a month at a time.

Harry had wisely stayed out of that conversation and refused to give his opinion even when asked to pick sides. They had both tried their best to persuade him, had tried to make him pick sides but Harry had, possibly for the first time in his life, kept his mouth shut. He did not want to be in Scorpius’ doghouse and he most definitely did not want to be in Draco’s. He was getting too old for all the grovelling it took to get back into Draco’s good books.

Realising that he had gone off into his own world, Harry pulled himself back to the present and reached for his coffee.

“What’s your ulterior motive then?” he asked, noting that Scorpius had gone quiet, something he only ever did when whatever he had on his mind was extremely important to him.

“Uhm. Well. I was wondering, and this may seem a little strange, but what are your thoughts on marriage?”

“Marriage, huh?” Harry said with a knowing smile. He had wondered when Scorpius would breach the subject with either him or Draco.

“Well yes, what do you think about it?”

“I think it’s a wonderful commitment between two people who really love each other. Of course, it isn’t really a decision you should make on a whim but if you’re with the right person, I’d say go for it,” Harry, despite his lack of first-hand experience in the matter, answered truthfully and looking at Scorpius he tried hard to figure out what he was playing at.

“I agree,” Scorpius nodded and Harry watched him closely as he put his coffee mug down and idly twisted his Malfoy signet ring around his right ring finger.

“Are you planning to ask Zendaya to marry you?” Harry asked.

He wasn’t entirely sure how Scorpius would react to his blunt question but there was no eloquent way of going about the whole thing.

“Eventually,” Scorpius shrugged. “In a couple years maybe. I think we’re a bit too young for that kind of thing now. I still have three more years of med school, then foundation training at St Mungo and unless I stick with the general wards, one or two more years of speciality training.”

“Then why ask me what I think about marriage?” Harry scrutinised, entirely at a loss as to what the point of this conversation was. If this wasn’t about Scorpius asking for advice, then what was it about?

“Scorp, I’m hardly the most knowledgeable person on the matter. I think your dad has got more experience, if only marginally so, but he did walk down the aisle once.”

“Did you ever want to get married?” Scorpius asked, entirely disregarding Harry’s comment about having no experience in the matter.
Harry thought for a moment, then nodded.

“A long, long time ago. I was a bit younger than you are now. It was just after the war and everyone expected me to marry my Hogwarts sweetheart. I honestly thought I would, but I quickly realised that she wasn’t the one for me.”

“Was there never anyone else?” Scorpius pressed and Harry frowned, wondering why Scorpius, whom he for all intents and purposes thought of as his adoptive son, was suddenly showing such rapt interest in his past.

“There was for a while, but it didn’t work out.”

“Would you ever consider getting married? Now, I mean,” Scorpius next question threw Harry completely and as the penny finally dropped, he found himself at a loss for words. He was therefore grateful when Scorpius continued to elaborate on his question and he didn’t have to fish for a suitable answer. “I mean you and Dad. Would you do it? You’ve been together such a long time now, is it even important? Have you ever talked about it? Is it something you would want?”

“You know what, Scorpius, I think your dad and I got married when he managed to convince me to move into the Manor. That was no easy feat,” Harry laughed.

He felt rather out of his depths. Scorpius’ question was intimate and had been entirely unexpected and the only way Harry knew how to deal with it was to hide behind a mask of humour to lighten the mood. He could, however, tell that Scorpius was not in the least bit amused.

“I’m serious, Harry,” Scorpius pointed look was so full of determination that it once again reminded Harry of Draco. When Scorpius made up his mind about something he too was like a dog with a bone.

Like father, like son, Harry mused, then sighed.

He turned his attention to the coffee mug in front of him and aimlessly toying with it, he stalled. The truth was that he had thought about marrying Draco a few times. He just didn’t know how to approach the matter and so he had never actually brought it up in a conversation. Neither had Draco though. It seemingly wasn’t something they needed to discuss. Or was it?

After initial teething problems at the beginning of their relationship, they had quickly found their groove and it had become quite apparent that neither one of them had any plans to go anywhere.

There had been one time when he had seriously contemplated proposing to Draco, had even almost brought a ring but in the end, he had dismissed the idea as a fleeting fancy. Something had told him that Draco would most definitely not appreciate having that kind of surprise sprung on him.

Or had he just told himself that because he had been too afraid that Draco would turn him down?

Thinking back, Harry wasn’t so sure any more but he knew that he owed Scorpius an honest answer and he intended to give him one.

“You know what, Scorpius, I’m not sure if I should even be telling you this, but since the three of us made a deal to always be honest with each other, and you’re most definitely not a child anymore, I will tell you. Yes, there was a time when I really wanted to get married, have children and live a completely normal life. But that was a very long time ago. Yes, there also was a time when I thought about marrying your dad, but, Scorpius, when you get to my age, you start to realise that dressing up, inviting a bunch of people to your home or a church and signing a contract on a piece of parchment isn’t the most important thing in life.”
“What is the most important thing in life then?” Scorpius asked.

Harry, in a bid to once again stall for time, signalled the waiter to bring them more coffee. He stubbornly remained silent until their coffee arrived and then idly toyed with a bag of sugar before he finally relented and answered Scorpius’ question.

“Despite all the things that happened between Draco and me and despite our turbulent childhood, we still found each other. I found someone who loves me more than I could ever have hoped for. I found someone who lets me love them with everything I’ve got and then some. I have somebody to come home to every single night of the week. I had the opportunity to get a glimpse at what being a dad is like. That Scorpius, is and has been for a while, more important than getting married,” Harry said and falling silent, he noticed that Scorpius was no longer looking at him but staring off across the room.

Upon taking a closer look, Harry thought that it looked strangely like Scorpius was fighting back the urge to cry. It made Harry’s own eyes burn, but he blinked a few times, swallowed past the lump in his throat and reaching out he placed his hand on Scorpius forearm and squeezed gently.

“Are you sure becoming a healer is the right choice for you? Maybe a career in journalism might be worth considering?” he joked, trying to lighten the mood between them.

“I’m sorry, I was just curious, I guess,” Scorpius apologised and turning his head he fixed Harry with a small smile. “I’ve never told you or Dad this, but the day you and Dad confessed to dating, well, that was the day I stopped missing Mum quite so much.”

Clearing his throat, Harry picked up his coffee and took a few sips. He had most definitely not expected quite such a frank heart to heart with Scorpius. They were close, there was no denying that, but usually, Scorpius chose to have these types of conversations with his dad and Harry didn’t blame him. They were a well-attuned team and Harry was, for the most part, very happy to remain on the sidelines.

“Dad, I think you should ask Harry to marry you.”

Draco choked on a piece of tender fish fillet and coughing and spluttering he reached for his water glass and napkin. He took several sips of water, then carefully dapped his mouth with the napkin. His eyes settled on Scorpius and he tried to work out whether his son was taking him for a ride or whether he was being serious.

“I beg your pardon?” he eventually managed to ask.

“I said, I think you should ask Harry to marry you.”

“Yes, I heard you the first time, Scorpius, but thank you for reiterating. Excuse me, for being frank, but are you taking mind-altering potions? Have you finally cracked under the pressure of that insane medical training you insist on putting yourself through?”

“I can assure you that I am quite sane, Dad, and I’m absolutely not taking any mild-altering potions.”

“Then pray tell where is this folly of yours coming from?” Draco asked, carefully folding his arms across his chest as he continued to eye Scorpius suspiciously.

“It’s not a folly. I’m dead serious, Dad,” Scorpius response and his confident demeanour threw Draco just a little. He held his gaze with ease and there was even a little bit of a challenge in his eyes.

“I think you’ll find that Harry and I don’t need a marriage contract to be happy. If there’s one thing
I’m not worried about then it’s him leaving,” Draco said calmly but candidly after a moment of consideration. Unfolding his arms, he picked up his knife and fork and resumed eating.

“Don’t tell me you never thought about it, Dad,” Scorpius voice was low but insistent, and Draco sighed. Putting his cutlery down again, he reached for his wine and took a sip.

“Where is this coming from, Scorpius? Why are you suddenly so insistent that Harry and I get married? I assure you, we are quite happy with the way things are.”

“I’m sure you are but, well, you and Mum, that wasn’t exactly a real marriage now, wasn’t it?”

Taking a deep breath, Draco reminded himself to remain calm. “I think you will find that you’re the living proof that your mother and I had a real marriage. If we hadn’t consummated it, you wouldn’t be sitting here.”

“Dad, for the love of all things magical, must I remind you that you are gay with a capital G. I know you loved Mum and I’m not disputing that you and she had many good years together, but it’s hardly the same as your relationship with Harry now is it? Marrying your best friend for the sake of pretence and marrying your soulmate – well I know what I’d prefer.”

“Well, thanks for clarifying my sexuality for me,” Draco scoffed, unable to keep the sarcasm out of his voice.

“Could you like, not be like this, Dad? You remind me of grandfather and that, I assure you, is not a good thing,” Scorpius sighed.

“It rather feels like an insult, indeed.”

“I’m sorry for stepping on your toes—”

Allowing himself a small laugh of amusement, Draco shook his head.

“I’m quite used to it by now, although you never cease to amaze me, that much is true. Your mother and I created a monster, indeed.”

“Would you, maybe, at least consider it?”

“Consider what?”

“Marrying Harry.”

“Oh, for the love of Salazar Slytherin, Scorpius Hyperion Malfoy, what in Merlin’s name has gotten into you? Have you not enough things to worry about at med school? And with your girlfriend? Seriously, if this is some weird way of you wanting my blessing to propose to Zendaya, please just come right out and say it. There’s no need for such underhanded tactics,” Draco snapped, thoroughly exasperated.

Scorpius rolled his eyes, then continued in a lower voice. “I’d just really love for Harry to officially be part of the family, that’s all, Dad. I know it’s not a huge difference, but don’t you think it is a nice commitment to each other?”

Stunned for words, Draco stared at his son. He had no idea how to or what to respond to that with. Harry was part of the family and had been for a long time. They had raised Scorpius together, they lived together — although the fact that he had persuaded Harry to leave Grimmauld Place to Teddy and his girlfriend and move into the Manor was one Draco still marvelled about every so often —
and shared every aspect of their lives together.

Heck, he had even relented when Harry had tried talking him into getting two dogs. He really failed to see how getting married would, or could, improve the situation. They had chosen each other a long time ago and having a signed parchment to prove their commitment didn’t change that fact.

There had, of course, been a time when he had considered asking Harry to marry him. Back then he had even bought a ring. It had been sometime around the time he had tried to convince Harry to move into the Manor. Harry had repeatedly and pointedly resisted, insisting that Draco move into Grimmauld Place instead.

At his wit’s end, and desperate for them to share one domicile rather than two, Draco had seriously considered resolving to unscrupulous Slytherin tactics to change Harry’s mind about living at the Manor.

A marriage contract would have, under ancient pureblood laws, forced Harry to live at the Manor.

In the end, he hadn’t been able to go through with such a sneaky marriage proposal and after some moping, he had eventually chosen to withhold sex, which had been as tortuous for him has it had been for Harry. It had worked though. A month later Harry had given in and had officially moved into the Manor.

“Accio stick,” Draco said and held his hand out for the wooden stick he had just tossed several yards across the lawn. Catching it with ease, he dangled it in front of rather bored-looking German Shepard. He glared at the dog, who merely tilted his head sideways and curiously held Draco’s gaze as if to challenge him.

“You’re supposed to fetch that stick. Seriously, Severus, what kind of dog are you?”

“Not a stick-fetching one, that’s for sure,” Harry piped up from behind as he approached from the Manor and Draco turned around to face him.

“You’re early.”

“I missed you so I skipped a rather boring meeting in favour of coming home to you,” Harry shrugged and drawing his wand, he conjured a squishy green ball, which he offered to Severus. The German Shepard immediately rose to his feet and began jumping up at Harry to get to the ball.

Laughing, Harry held it high above his head and well out of reach of Severus, who, in the space of several seconds, had turned back into a puppy. He teased the dog for a while, then tossed the ball as far across the lawn as he could. With a loud bark, Severus chased after it and Draco fixed Harry with an icy stare.

“Why?” he asked, exasperated. “What’s wrong with fetching a stick?”

“Don’t ask me,” Harry shrugged. “I’m not a dog. But I reckon he knows it pisses you off, so he just doesn’t fetch it.” he laughed and Draco continued to glare.

“It’s all your fault, you know. He’s always liked you better.”

“How exactly is this all my fault?” Harry frowned. The irony of Draco’s statement made him want to laugh. When they had first brought Severus home, something in the German Shepard’s eyes — and the fact that his fur was completely black — had reminded them both of a man they both admired a great deal. Unable to settle on a name, calling the dog Severus had become their little inside joke and
somehow that name had stuck.

“You spoiled him from day one,” Draco’s accusation reminded Harry of a petulant child and he chuckled.

“Of course. Because cooking a special meal for Jamie twice a day doesn’t fall in the spoiling category,” he ribbed Draco.

Severus was more than happy with high-quality dog food but Jamie, their two-year-old Golden Retriever was a different story altogether. He would only eat meals that Draco cooked especially for him. Harry still failed to understand how Draco managed to brew even the most difficult of potions without as much as batting an eyelid but was a hopeless case when it came to making food. Well, had been a hopeless case.

A few days after they had brought Jamie home — back then he had still been a tiny puppy — the dog had fallen seriously ill and refused food and drink. Draco, worried sick about him, had brewed one potion after the other in a desperate attempt to save his life.

Somehow, Jamie had grown accustomed to Draco spoon-feeding him every day and once he had recovered from his ailment, they had attempted to feed Jamie the same type of dog food Severus ate, but the wilful little puppy had pointedly refused to eat anything that didn’t come off Draco’s place. This had ended in Draco forcing Tibby to teach him how to cook after Harry had pointedly refused to take on that job, reasoning that he didn’t have a death wish.

The house elf had been positively horrified at the idea but Tibby’s need to please his master had been too great and he hadn’t refused his Master. The one time that Harry had sneakily watched from the kitchen door, he had felt truly sorry for Tibby. A mere five minutes into the cooking lesson, it had become abundantly apparent that the house elf clearly had the patience of a saint.

“Jamie is special,” Draco merely shrugged and picking up the ball, Severus had returned with, he tossed it in another direction and the German Shepard excitedly dashed after it.

Harry watched for a moment, then turned his attention back to Draco and gave him an appreciative once-over. Draco had dressed in a pair of plain black trousers and a thin light-blue cashmere jumper which accentuated his grey-blue eyes rather nicely. As far as clothes went, it wasn’t anything special but Harry found himself drawn closer to Draco.

It was as if some magical force was pulling him towards Draco and unable as well as unwilling to resist, Harry closed the short distance between them. He snuck his arms around Draco’s waist and pulled him into an embrace.

“So are you, you know,” he whispered, leaning in to kiss Draco on the lips. Draco responded as though it was second nature and Harry sighed contently.

“Love you.”

“Getting a bit sentimental there in your old age, Potter, aren’t you?” Draco teased but brought his arms up and loosely rested them on Harry’s shoulder, making no secret of the fact that he was clearly enjoying the closeness.

“Just a smidgen, maybe.” Harry shrugged and as he drowned in Draco’s eyes, the world around them slipped out of focus for just for a moment. He wasn’t quite sure where this sudden gushiness of his was coming from, but he suspected his conversation with Scorpius was the trigger.

It stubbornly refused to leave him alone and just the other day he had even caught himself indulging
in a daydream of walking down the aisle together with Draco. It had left him with a funny feeling and for the remainder of the afternoon, he hadn’t been able to stop thinking of Draco as his husband.

That evening, forced to attend a boring Ministry function, but glad to have Draco at his side in silent support, he had wondered what it would feel like to introduce Draco as his husband.

At some point, he had almost slipped up and introduced Draco as such. Much later that night he had contemplated telling Draco all about his conversation with Scorpius but for some inexplicable reason he had chickened out at the last minute.

They were both in their forties now, what was the point in getting married?

It wasn’t like a piece of parchment was going to really change anything between them.

Or could it?

Could a vow, taken in front of everyone they knew and loved, really have that much of an impact?

Scorpius’ persistent questions about whether he wanted to marry Draco had really put a bug into his ear and try as he might, he couldn’t stop thinking about it, could not shake the notion that maybe, just maybe, getting married was exactly what was missing. Not that he really thought anything was missing.

The whole idea was most definitely messing with his head and he could tell that Draco had a suspicion that something was amiss with him.

Over the last few days, he had been trying to talk to Harry about it, but so far Harry had managed to rebuff Draco without having to suffer through an intervention. He also knew that his luck in that department was running out. Draco had once made him a promise to notice all the little things about him and he did. Draco noticed absolutely everything. It was practically impossible to sneak anything at all past him.

“Sentimental lunatic or not, I love you too,” Draco whispered and blinking several times, Harry resolutely forced himself to return to the real world.

“You seem a bit preoccupied, are you sure you’re okay?” Draco’s concerned expression caused Harry to inhale sharply.

Why did Draco have to be so perceptive about everything all the time?

Was his absent-mindedness so obvious that Draco felt the need to persist in his quest to find out what was bothering him?

If he was quite honest, he relished in the fact that Draco was intuitive enough to notice such matters, but Harry didn’t have the foggiest clue how to start the *Hey-Draco-let’s-get-married* conversation with Draco.

Really, how did one talk to one’s partner of over half a decade about the possibility of getting married without turning it into an outright proposal?

“I’m fine,” Harry mumbled, yet again choosing to keep his troubles to himself.

When a sudden wave of intense craving for something he would probably never get to experience washed over him, he found himself almost automatically withdrawing from his and Draco’s embrace.
“I’m sorry, I’m just a bit tired today. Weird few days at the office. If you don’t mind, I’m going to lie down for a while,” he excused himself and hurriedly returned to the Manor. He deliberately ignored Draco calling after him asking if he was all right.

Sitting down on Harry’s side of the bed, Draco placed Harry’s favourite mug on his nightstand and gently ran his fingers through Harry’s messy hair. Leaning down, he placed a gentle kiss on his temple and smiled when Harry mumbled something incomprehensible in his sleep.

“Wake up, sleepyhead, it’s almost dinner time,” Draco whispered, trailing a series of kisses from Harry’s temple along his cheek down to his neck.

“I made you some tea,” he coaxed.

“Hmm, I could get used to this kind of alarm clock,” Harry mumbled.

Draco smiled and watched his eyes flutter open. He blinked a few times and the silly smile that insistently tugged at the corners of his mouth tempted Draco into stealing a kiss, which Harry willingly gave.

“Feeling a bit better?” Draco asked, relieved when Harry nodded.

Harry’s absent-mindedness hadn’t escaped his attention. He had tried to talk to Harry about it but every time he did Harry gave him a haphazard excuse and changed the subject.

Experience had long since taught him not to force Harry into a confrontation but he was worried and his patience was wearing thin.

Draco highly doubted that Harry’s work was the reason for his recent inattentive disposition and he couldn’t think of any other good reason that would have Harry this pensive about things.

“You aren’t coming down with something, are you?” he asked, resting the back of his hand against Harry’s forehead, instinctively checking for a fever, like he had done so many times when Scorpius had been little.

“Old age?” Harry joked and Draco rolled his eyes.

“While that is highly likely, I doubt it’s what’s really bugging you.”

Harry’s deep sigh told Draco that he was onto something and a nagging little voice in his head told him to keep prodding.

A well-rested Harry was far more likely to divulge his secrets than a cranky, tired one.

“Can’t ever slip anything past you, can I?” Harry asked as he shuffled into an upright position and resting back against the pillows, he reached the tea Draco had brought him.

Draco watched him carefully and tried to gauge whether he might get away with pushing the matter after all. Harry was most definitely hiding something and the fact that he wouldn’t share irked Draco more than he cared to admit.

“Whatever it is, spit it out already, Potter,” he eventually said, choosing to chance his luck.

“It’s nothing,” Harry mumbled. He pointedly avoided to look at Draco and stared into his tea instead.

“Harry. I don't much care for being lied to, you know that,” Draco pushed, sounding brusquer than
he had intended to.

“You’ll think I’m stupid,” Harry mumbled and Draco couldn’t help but chuckle.

“I’ve been thinking that since we were eleven, you’ve yet to change my mind,” he teased.

“Gee, sometimes I really do wonder why I’m with you…” Harry rolled his eyes, but there was no trace of indignation at his childish dig in his words or the way he was looking at him.

“Well, I couldn’t be sure now, but apparently it’s because I love you.”

“And just like that, you make me go from wanting to strangle you to wanting to shag you,” Harry grinned, eyes twinkling with mirth and a spark of desire.

“Three words is all it takes to get you horny?” Draco laughed. “I know I’m good, but I didn’t think I was **this** good.”

“Might also be the fact that there’s a gorgeous blond man currently sitting on the edge my bed, looking positively edible,” Harry winked.

Holding Harry’s gaze, Draco slipped his hand underneath the duvet and placed it on Harry’s bare thigh, just above his knee. He caressed the soft, warm skin on the inside of Harry’s thigh and Harry’s breath hitched up a notch. Draco watched as Harry’s eyes darkened slightly, filling with desire and a definite need to take things further.

It pleased him immensely that even this long into their relationship, it took virtually no effort to turn Harry on. A well-placed touch, a steady gaze, a brash promise, a deliberate play on words, or a veiled suggestion was all it ever took.

Boldly moving his hand, he insistently pushed Harry’s legs apart and purposefully moved his hand further up. Still holding Harry’s gaze, he rather intentionally brushed his fingertips against the steadily growing bulge in Harry’s boxers. It was just a fleeting touch but it was enough to get Harry to tighten his hold on his mug and lick his lips with definite anticipation.

Kicking his shoes off, Draco shuffled onto the bed and withdrawing his hand, he straddled Harry’s thighs, intentionally sitting on top of the duvet, rather than pushing it away.

“You are stalling **and** trying to change the subject,” he whispered, his eyes never leaving Harry’s as he removed the mug from his grasp. He carefully set it down on the nightstand, then interlaced their fingers, linking them firmly together.

“I rather like this subject,” Harry shrugged and raising Harry’s hands above his head, Draco pushed them against the headboard. Leaning in, he brought his lips frightfully close to Harry’s.

“I know you do,” he mumbled seductively, “but first I want to know what’s gotten into you lately.”

“I was rather hoping you might…get into me that is,” Harry replied and Draco inhaled pointedly, then resolutely shook his head.

“Nope, not working.”

“We both know that’s a lie,” Harry challenged.

“Well, now you know what it feels like.”

“Touché!” Harry chuckled. “Fine, you won’t give this a rest, anyway, but don’t tell me I didn’t warn
“Warn me about what?” Draco raised a questioning eyebrow and letting go of Harry’s hands, he slid off his thighs and comfortably settled on his side of their massive bed.

“Well, Scorpius stopped by the office the other day and we had a rather interesting conversation over coffee—”

Draco sighed.

“I think I have an idea about where you’re heading with this. Believe it or not, my son and I also had a very interesting conversation over dinner on Sunday. He didn’t by any chance suggest that you should ask me to marry you, did he?”

“Not in as many words. But he was rather interested in how I feel about marriage in general and especially about marrying you.”

“And how do you feel about that?”

Shuffling around, Draco moved into a position that would allow him to see Harry’s face and was surprised to find Harry looking at him with a rather odd expression. It wasn’t difficult to guess what was going through Harry’s mind and suddenly Draco thought he knew what Harry had been distracted with.

“He got you thinking, didn’t he?” Draco asked softly, not in the least bit surprised when Harry simply nodded.

“I thought about it once before.”

“Did you want to ask me?”

Harry nodded.

“Why didn’t you?”

“I guess I chickened out,” Harry shrugged. “Anyway, we’re happy together, what does it matter whether we’re married or not? It’s probably a bit late now anyway…”

Draco knew that it was more of a rhetorical question, but he responded anyway.

“I wouldn’t have turned you down, you know. I’m not sure exactly how I would’ve handled the surprise of a proposal but I definitely wouldn’t have turned you down.”

Harry’s wide-eyed expression was one that fell somewhere between utter bewilderment and complete shock.

“Harry, is getting married something you want?” Draco pushed.

Now that they had broached the subject he simply needed to know for sure.

“I’m not sure what it’s going to change,” Harry shrugged and Draco watched as his eyes drifted around the room, not settling on anything but just roamed aimlessly.

“A lot,” he stated and sitting forward he caught Harry’s left hand in his own. He wrapped his fingers around Harry’s bare ring finger and stroked it softly. He watched, mesmerised, how his touch drew Harry’s eyes down to their hands and how it stayed there, seemingly transfixed.
“You were married before, I guess I didn’t ask because I didn’t think you’d want to do it again,” Harry’s words were barely audible but Draco caught them anyway and though he wasn’t sure whether it was entirely appropriate, he couldn’t stop himself from chuckling softly.

“I’d marry you in a heartbeat,” he stated, allowing a moment of silence between them, allowing for the words to sink in.

The second the words had left his mouth, Draco knew them to be the truest words he had ever spoken. After Scorpius’ completely unorthodox suggestion, he had found himself thinking about the idea of him and Harry getting married and it had filled him with a strange sense of longing. A strange craving to experience what it felt like to marry the person you loved with every fibre of your being. He had loved Astoria very much, but theirs had been an entirely different kind of love. What he and Harry had simply didn’t compare. Theirs was a kind of love that Draco, to this day, still struggled to describe.

“You would?”

Draco nodded.

Marrying your best friend for the sake of pretence and marrying your soulmate, well I know what I’d prefer, Scorpius words rang in his ears.

Reaching for his wand, Draco summoned a rather ancient-looking ornate oak treasure chest from the adjacent dressing room. He pointed his wand at it and mumbled a complicated unlocking charm, smiling when the chest promptly sprung open. Reaching inside, he pulled out an inconspicuous-looking small black satin box and handed it to Harry, who looked downright gobsmacked. Draco instantly made a mental note to savour this moment forever. The look on Harry’s face was one he wanted to remember until he took his dying breath. Over the years he had seen a lot of different expressions on Harry’s face, but this one, this one was unlike anything he had ever seen before.

“Remember when I tried to get you to move into the Manor with me?”

Harry inclined his head slightly and Draco could tell that he was still lost for words and most likely would be for a while.

“You kept saying no and I was running out of ideas to convince you. Being married to me would have forced you to live at the Manor, as per ancient pureblood laws. I won’t lie, the temptation was there but knowing you wouldn’t have forgiven me such an underhanded move, I never did ask you to marry me back then. Anyway, you relented eventually and I put this away and never looked at it again. I always thought we had everything, but maybe this is the missing piece.”

Falling silent, Draco intently watched Harry toy with the closed ring box, clearly unsure what he was supposed to do with it.

“Open it,” he suggested with a smile and after the longest moment of hesitation, Harry finally did.

He flicked the box open to reveal a stunning, custom-made platinum wedding band, less than half an inch in width, with an intricate infinity symbol made up of deep-green brightly sparkling emeralds.

“This is—”

“Marry me, Harry,” Draco interrupted whatever Harry had been about to say and noted that he sounded a lot more confident than he felt. Still, he stubbornly sought out Harry’s eyes and held his gaze, waiting patiently.
“Yes,” Harry answered without the slightest bit of hesitation and breathing a small sigh of relief, Draco reached for the ring inside the box and gently pushed it onto the third finger of Harry’s left hand.

“Mine, forever,” he whispered, not breaking their eye contact.

“Yours, forever,” Harry nodded and they gave in to the urge to stupidly smile at each other.

Suddenly unable to resist, Draco found himself pouncing forward like a leopard claiming its prey and captured Harry’s lips in a fierce and passionate kiss. It quickly grew into a heated battle of the tongues as they pulled at each other’s clothing, all at once desperate to be naked, desperate to be as close to each other as humanly possible, desperate to be one. The ornate oak treasure chest flew to the ground with a loud thud and so did the empty ring box. Next, the duvet slid off the bed. One item of clothing after the other followed swiftly.

They moved with the familiarity of experienced lovers, ragged breaths turned into low moans and those turned into loud groans as Draco took his time preparing Harry, then pushed inside, sheathing himself deeply inside him. They kissed, thrust, embraced, and stared into each other’s eyes with inexplicable awe. They tried to make sense of what had just happened, yet before they could do so their orgasms washed over them with such force that any attempt to try and form a coherent thought was fruitless. Post-orgasmic bliss lulled them into that sweet place between wakefulness and slumber and wrapped in a tight embrace they gave in to the urge to nap and for the longest time, they simply lay on the bed in an entangled heap of limbs.

“Draco?”

Harry whispering his name softly drew Draco back towards consciousness and with some effort he batted his eyes open, sleepily staring at Harry.

“Hmm?”

“What the fuck did we just do?” Harry questioned and try as he might, Draco couldn’t stop the silly grin that spread across his face.

“I think we got engaged.”

“So, this wasn’t a dream then?”

“I don’t think so.”

“We’re getting married.”

It was more of a statement, but Draco responded anyway.

“Absolutely.”
Harry stood in front of the large French windows of his study on the second floor of Malfoy Manor and watched a steady stream of wedding guests dutifully filling into the large marquee in anticipation of what the *Prophet* had dubbed *The Wedding Of The Century*.

He chuckled as he remembered cringing at the headline when he had first seen it and when he had complained, Draco had only laughed and boldly risen to the challenge.

*If they want their Saviour to have the wedding of the century, we’ll give them exactly that,* Draco’s words still rang in his years and Harry couldn’t help but smile.

He had tried, in vain, of course, to convince Draco that a small intimate ceremony, with only their closest friends and family present to witness their nuptials, was all he wanted but there had been no reasoning with Draco. He had been so fiercely determined to transform their special day into *the* event of the century that Harry hadn’t had the heart to change his mind.

*I’m only planning to marry you once, Potter,* Draco had said and despite the ridiculousness of it all, Harry had found himself relenting. He had silently watched from the sidelines as Draco had, with a cool-headedness that was most enviable, thrown himself into planning their wedding.

Draco had absolutely refused to involve a professional wedding planner, stating that those imbeciles never got anything right anyway. Instead, he had literally organised the entire event from scratch, diligently taking care of every single detail and surprisingly never forgetting to involve him and ask for his opinion. Not that Harry had the slightest idea about flower arrangements and seating charts and when he had tried to give his opinion about the wine list, Draco had hit him with a stinging hex that had thrown him on his arse.

But now the big day was finally here and—

“Are you trying to work out if there’s still time to run?” Draco’s humorous question reverberated around the room and Harry half-turned to face his soon-to-be-husband.

His breath caught in his throat and he let his eyes roam over the stunning man stood in the doorframe of his study. Draco looked immaculate. There wasn’t a hair out of place and his midnight blue bespoke wedding dressrobes folded around him like a second layer of skin. The midnight blue and silver striped tie and his single-breasted silver-grey waistcoat were a stark contrast to the dark robes but perfectly accentuated Draco’s pale skin, blond hair, and clear grey-blue eyes, which twinkled with mirth.

As Harry’s eyes settled on the dark-red rose that filled Draco’s buttonhole — *a silent homage to their Hogwarts days* — Harry couldn’t help but smile. Draco had been strangely amenable to his suggestion that they should wear a small token in each other’s house colours.

“You’d hex me on the spot,” Harry laughed.

“I’m not so sure,” Draco grinned and entering the room, he joined Harry at the window. He briefly glanced outside at the slowly thinning stream of people entering the marquee.
“You invited the entire Auror department and half the Ministry is here too. Even my father wouldn’t dare to curse you.”

“I’m positively terrified that he’s here – so terrified, I may just accidentally vanish myself during the vow recitals,” Harry sighed.

The idea of Lucius Malfoy sitting in the front row next to Narcissa and Scorpius, watching him and Draco get married, filled Harry with a sense of dread. He couldn’t quite understand why Lucius Malfoy had agreed to attend their wedding in the first place, though he highly suspected that Draco had something to do with it.

Draco dropped his voice to a whisper. “You know, my mother knows how to put the fear of God into her husband, he wouldn’t dare to utter a single phrase of disapproval. Besides, he hasn’t killed Scorpius over his choice of girlfriend, nor did he kill me when he found out that I’m gay, so I think you’re safe.”

Harry had nothing to say to that and falling silent, he found his eyes magically drawn to a picture frame that stood on his desk. It was a very old moving photograph of his parents, happily dancing in front of a water fountain and smiling at the camera. Right next to it stood a picture frame with a photo of Draco and a then fifteen-year-old Scorpius. The two of them were also standing in front of a small water fountain and had their arms slung around each other’s shoulders. They were laughing at the camera and it was Harry’s favourite photograph of Draco and Scorpius. The strange likeness of the two photographs filled Harry with a mild sense of calm and intense longing at the same time.

Everyone he loved and treasured was at the Manor today. Everyone was waiting for him and Draco to walk down the aisle together.

He tried to tell himself that he wasn’t a young man in his teens anymore and that it was ridiculous to miss his parents quite this much but no matter how hard he tried, he just couldn’t get a handle on his emotions. The two people he desperately wanted at his wedding couldn’t be there and it filled him with sadness.

“I know you miss them,” Draco’s voice was still only a whisper but Harry didn’t need him to speak any louder. The knowledge that Draco knew exactly what was troubling him, even though he hadn’t said a single word, calmed him just that little bit more. It didn’t lessen the pain and the almost overpowering burning he felt in his chest, but it did somehow make him feel lighter.


“They’re all in here. Your parents. Sirius. And everyone else who left too soon,” Draco’s voice was ever so soft as he reached out and placed his hand on Harry’s chest, right above his heart.

Holding Draco’s gaze, Harry brought his hand up to rest on top of Draco’s and they stood in silence, enjoying one last quiet moment together before the madness of the day swept them away.

“I honestly never thought this day would come,” Harry mumbled, squeezing Draco’s hand ever so gently but not removing it from his chest. He glanced down at his engagement ring which he hadn’t taken it off since Draco had put it there and his lips curled into a smile. The scintillating emeralds caught in the sunbeams that were streaming in through the windows and it looked beautiful, mesmerising even.

“Does it get any easier the second time around? You seem entirely unperturbed by this whole thing.”

“I wouldn’t know. I never married the love of my life before,” Draco replied and Harry chuckled.
softly.

“And I can assure you, I’m most definitely not unperturbed by the whole thing. I’m just better at keeping myself together, I think.”

“I wish you weren’t,” Harry sighed.

“Look at me.”

At the soft prompt, Harry lifted his gaze to meet Draco’s and inhaled sharply.

Draco’s eyes were wild with nervousness, clear grey-blue orbs filled to the brim with anxiety and a strange kind of worry. He looked positively vulnerable. At the same time, Harry also saw anticipation, excitement and love mixed in with all the other emotions and he didn’t need Draco to say anything, he knew. This today, was the right thing to do. It was what they both needed.

Harry wanted to stay like this forever. Just him and Draco, enjoying a moment of complete peace. But it wasn’t meant to be. Hermione, Ron, and Scorpius poked their heads into the room and interrupted their special moment.

“Did you two decide to get started on your vows without everyone?”

“Weasley,” Draco’s tone was warning.

Ron instantly took a step back and Harry couldn’t help but laugh. The best way to describe Draco’s and Ron’s tender truce was that it was mostly based on Harry restraining Draco and Hermione restraining Ron. While they didn’t exactly hate each other, Draco never managed to not snark at Ron and Ron never managed to not rise to the bait. They were as bad as each other.

“Don’t let my dad bother you, Ron; he’s all bark and no bite. Always has been. He’s a harmless poodle,” Scorpius grinned, then yelped and glared daggers.

Harry suspected a stinging hex. Those were still Draco’s favourite form of instant revenge. He didn’t even need a wand to cast them nor did he have to utter the incantation and they always hit the right person at the right time.

“Now, now, gentlemen, please don’t kill each other,” Hermione appeased and Harry wholeheartedly supported her suggestion that they head downstairs and into the marquee.

After all, the ceremony was due to begin shortly.

Draco watched, mesmerised. The thin tongues of bright gold and light silver the wedding registrar had conjured repeatedly and elaborately wound their way around his and Harry’s clasped hands, forming an intricate web.

With Astoria, he had chosen to simply sign a marriage contract, but for Harry, Draco had wanted something special, something completely different, something that would make their nuptials as memorable as possible.

Certain that Harry wasn’t familiar with ancient magical marriage bonds, he had spent months researching, refusing to give up until he had found the perfect spell. There were a few different magical marriage vows, some more common than others, and finding the right one hadn’t been an easy feat.
An unbreakable vow then had been Harry’s first response after Draco had told him all about the spell that would link their magical cores to one another in a soulmate bond, for to him that was what they had become. It had taken Draco every ounce of self-control not to hex Harry into oblivion there and then.

Trust you, Potter, to put an ancient magical marriage bond in the same category as an unbreakable vow, he had said with a sigh before proceeding to clearly outline the differences between the two spells.

“You may now recite your vows,” the registrar suddenly advised and as Draco’s eyes caught Harry’s, he felt captivated and for one infinite moment it was as if they were one.

Everything around him paled and the only person he could see clearly was Harry.

He could feel his heart pounding in his chest and couldn’t help but wonder whether Harry, being this close, could hear it too.

The warm pulsing of the golden and silver tongues of magic, tightly wrought around their clasped hands, was sending tiny shocks up Draco’s arm, and inhaling deeply, he reminded himself that everyone inside the marquee, including Harry and the registrar, was waiting for him to recite his vows.

“Harry, falling in love with you is, undoubtedly, though surprisingly, the best thing that has ever happened to me, but I cannot promise you, that I will always be who you want me to be.

I might brood, I might be stubborn, I might be wrongheaded.

I might mock you and I might be snarky.

I might be all the things that irritate you about me and more.

But, today, here, and with all our friends and family as witnesses,

I promise you, and I do so with all my heart, that I will always tell you the truth, and that I will not keep secrets.

I promise to stand by you and support you through whatever comes our way, always.

I promise to respect you and cherish you, but above all, I promise to love you for the rest of both our lives.

In perpetuum et semper.”

As he concluded his vows, Draco realised that he had not once stumbled over his words or hesitated in his recital.

The realisation hit Draco with such force that he momentarily forgot to breathe. Harry’s eyes shone with unshed tears and Draco’s heart continued to pound in his chest, obstinately refusing to give him even the tiniest break.

He craved the calmness he had felt when he and Harry had walked down the aisle together, with their hands loosely linked through entwined fingers and smiling at the guests seated on either side of the red carpet leading from the entrance of the marquee right up to the ceremonial podium.
Unable to resist, Draco mouthed an *I love you* at Harry and squeezed his hand that little bit tighter. In response, the magical bonds, that surrounded their linked hands, buzzed but the moment Harry started to speak, Draco didn’t notice it anymore. All he was able to focus on was the sound of Harry’s steady voice as he confidentially recited his own vows.

“Draco, today is a miracle. It is a miracle that, out of all the people in the world, we have found love with each other.

Our journey to this point has not been an easy one, to say the least, but it is a journey that I will always cherish.

Amazingly, two of the most important parts of my life started with a letter. The first one was my invitation to attend Hogwarts. The second one was Scorpius’ letter, asking me to meet with you.

Both changed my life in ways I could have never imagined.

I have never and will never love anyone the way that I love you.

You have brought me so much happiness.

You gave me the chance to be a father to the most wonderful child a man could ask for.

You made dreams that I did not even know I had come true.

You are the missing piece and I will be forever grateful for those two fateful letters that brought us together.

You are my world and while things might not always be perfect, I cannot wait to start the rest of our lives together.

In perpetuum et semper.”

Blinking furiously, Draco fought hard to keep his composure and he couldn’t help but wonder how it was at all possible that he was feeling so many things all at the same time. It was truly overwhelming and to his own astonishment, he found his every single one of his emotions reflected in Harry’s sparkling green eyes.

Harry’s vows had taken him on a whirlwind trip down memory lane and he barely took any notice of the fact that the registrar was now swishing his wand above their linked hands, confirming both his and Draco’s vows.

“May all that has gone before you and the commitment you have made today now give you the promise of everlasting love.

May you find the strength to meet life's adversities; reverence for that which is beautiful; and respect for all.

In the presence of your family and friends, you have joined yourselves in marriage.

I declare your marriage bond valid and binding and rejoice to recognise you as husband and husband.

Una in perpetuum et semper.

You may kiss.”
Draco wasn’t sure whether time was now moving painfully slow or surging past in a blur.

The thin golden and silver bonds of their marriage bond melted together and for a moment their sparkle was so vivid that Draco’s eyes hurt.

Then they separated into two bonds and as their hands fell apart, one thin tongue wound itself around Harry’s left ring finger, while the other wound itself around Draco’s left ring finger. They grew smaller, then with a hiss, transformed into two simple platinum wedding bands.

They were married.

Legally married.

Harry was his husband.

He was Harry’s husband.

For the longest time, Draco simply stared at Harry, wondering whether he should say something but finding himself unable to form a coherent sentence.

Deciding that action spoke louder than words, he simply lunged forward and with as much grace as he could muster, he wrapped both his arms around Harry and pulled him into a fierce kiss.

Harry’s bemused chuckle rang in his ears but he responded without the slightest hesitation.

They kissed.

Draco was vaguely aware of the sudden eruption of cheers inside the marquee as all their wedding guests applauded with vigour.

He didn’t care.

Instead, he deepened the kiss and melted against Harry.

_Married._

_Husband and Husband._

_Forever._

Scorpius rose to his feet, drew his wand, and gently knocked it against the champagne flute in his hand. The clear sound of the vibrating glass rang around the marquee and over the course of a few moments, the chatter at each of the tables gradually quietened down. Scorpius pointed his wand at his throat and cast a wordless Amplifying Charm.

“If I could have everyone’s attention for a few moments, please?” he began, letting his eyes wander around the large room and all the people that had come to the Manor today to witness his father’s and Harry’s wedding ceremony.

While he had initially pushed them to take the plunge, they, by the looks of it, didn’t appear to have any regrets whatsoever.

Seated at the head table facing all the wedding guests, they looked every bit the happy couple Scorpius knew them to be.
His father and Harry had been whispering quietly to each other, but the moment he had asked for everybody’s attention they had fallen quiet, expectantly looking at him.

Well, truth be told, Harry looked expectant.

His father, on the other hand, had a slightly apprehensive expression on his face.

Scorpius smiled; trust his father to worry about what was about to come.

“I’d like to say a few words to both my Dad and Harry. Dad had me swear an oath not to divulge any embarrassing secrets – though, seriously, Dad, you needn’t have worried; I am a respectable best man. I would merely like to take this opportunity to congratulate you and Harry on your wedding. It was a wise decision really. I do wonder who gave you the idea,” Scorpius teased and grinned deviously.

Harry’s soft snort and his father’s scowl, though by no means sincere, were well worth it.

“Dad, a few words for you first. You are, whether you believe me or not, the most amazing dad I could have ever asked for. I could give you a list of all the reasons why, but we would still be here tomorrow. You sacrificed everything, including your own happiness, for me, not once, not twice but as often as you thought it necessary. For the longest time you always put me first, so watching you fall in love truly was a privilege. While I never expected my letter to Harry to have this outcome, looking at you both now, I only wish I’d sent it earlier.”

Scorpius paused to clear his throat and took a long look at his dad. His scowl had all but vanished and his facial features had softened considerably. He was smiling and Scorpius had no doubt that Harry was the reason for his relaxed state. He had that unique ability. Harry’s hand was resting on top of his, squeezing gently, and apparently, the simple gesture was enough to put his dad at ease.

Or maybe it was the fact that the two of them had just gotten married a few hours ago and this was the aftermath of the intensity of their newly formed marriage bond?

Whatever it was, what mattered most to Scorpius was that they both looked carefree and untroubled.

He reminded himself that he had yet to address Harry and swiftly continued. “Harry, you asked me once why I chose to send that letter to you and, honestly, I couldn’t tell. I thought about it, of course, but all I can offer you so far is that one, I was a teenager and teenagers frequently do things without thinking, and two, it was sixth sense of course. I mean you should have seen that gleam in Dad’s eyes when he told me about how he made your life at Hogwarts miserable, I knew there was something else there—”

Scorpius trailed off and looking at his girlfriend, who sat next to him, he inclined his head to her. She nodded and with a smile she gracefully rose to her feet and drew her wand to cast an Amplifying Charm on herself. Zendaya stepped out onto the dance floor, casually smoothed out her beautiful silver ballgown, which looked stunning against her dark skin and mesmerised, Scorpius fell in love with her all over again.

Someone brought Zendaya a bar stool and handed her a guitar. She elegantly sat down and strummed her guitar, letting the sweet tunes, amplified by magic, fill the marquee.

Still swept away by her beauty and grace, Scorpius cast an inconspicuous glance at his dad and Harry, thinking that he understood exactly how they felt about each other.

One day, he thought to himself, then resumed his speech.
“Dad, Harry, I happen to know that you both had some trouble with choosing the music for your first dance and I know you, in the end, decided not to have a first dance, but look, you just can’t get married and not have a first dance. So, uhm, Zendaya and I put our thinking caps on and we found you the perfect song, so if you could step out onto the dancefloor, please? We’d like to give you our wedding present.”

Harry watched Scorpius’ girlfriend expertly pluck her guitar and as the gentle strums filled the marquee, he shot Draco a questioning look.

“Did you know about this?” he asked in a hushed whisper.

Draco shrugged. “Not a clue. Did you tell him that we scratched the first dance?” he asked and cast a wary glance from Scorpius over to his girlfriend and back to Scorpius, who stood patiently, waiting for them both to make their move.

“I might have mentioned it,” Harry mumbled and Draco groaned.

“You bloody well know he’s a meddler. Seriously, Potter, don’t make me regret this union less than twenty-four hours into our marriage.”

“Shall we just find out what it is those two have in store for us?” Harry grinned, entirely unfazed by Draco’s snarky remark.

If anything, he enjoyed the fact that nothing seemed to have changed between them. Draco still enjoyed snarking at him and he still enjoyed letting Draco get away with it.

“I suspect they want us to have our first dance,” Draco sighed and moving his chair back, he got to his feet, pulling Harry up with him. “I had an inkling we wouldn’t get away without one.”

“Better not step on my toes then, Malfoy,” Harry teased, following Draco out onto the dancefloor.

“Coming from you, Potter, that’s rich,” Draco snorted.

Harry went to reply something equally as snarky, but Scorpius interrupted him when he formally announced their first dance.

“Honoured Wizards and Witches, please join me in welcoming the happy couple for their first dance as a married couple.”

“More like first dance ever,” Draco muttered under his breath and yelped when Harry firmly elbowed him in the side. “Oww. What the fu—”

“Language! It’s our wedding day,” Harry chuckled.

They had danced together before — privately and at one or the other official Ministry function — but it had always been something of a disaster with Harry struggling not to step onto Draco’s toes as they moved together to the music.

Harry didn’t think of himself as an accomplished dancer, but he also knew that he wasn’t entirely useless. Yet, somehow, each time he danced with Draco, the sheer ease with which Draco moved across the floor distracted him from paying attention. His feet only barely touching the ground and each move precise and well-practised. If he was honest, Harry hadn’t expected anything else.

“You just wait, Potter, you just wait,” Draco said with a pointed glare.
He moved with an air of sophisticated grace and sliding his right hand around Harry’s waist he drew him close. Harry gasped at Draco’s deliberate show of possessiveness.

“Left hand on my shoulder,” he hissed and grateful for the reminder, Harry — who could never remember which hand should be where — followed his husband’s instruction.

The realisation that he had just thought of Draco as his husband sent a pleasant shudder of excitement through him. He placed his left hand on Draco’s shoulder, slipped his right hand into Draco’s left and folded his fingers around Draco’s palm.

“My husband,” he mumbled, unable to resist the temptation. “Do you reckon to say this will always feel strange?” he asked and let his hand slip from Draco’s shoulder to his upper arm. “My husband,” he repeated, simply because he could.

“No idea, you’re my first husband,” Draco’s eyes twinkled with mischief and Harry rolled his eyes. “I’ll let you know when it stops feeling weird though if it ever does. Now, what exactly are we dancing to?”

“Beats me,” Harry shrugged and snuck a look at Zendaya. She caught his eye and raised her eyebrow in a silent question.

Giving her a slight nod, Harry gave her the go-ahead, though he wasn’t exactly sure whether he and Draco were ready for whatever Scorpius and his girlfriend had planned for them.

He turned his attention back to Draco and as their eyes locked, his lips curled upward into a silly smile of pure and unadulterated happiness.

Draco mirrored it and they began to sway to the music, instantly quite oblivious to the fact that they were once again the centre of attention.

Harry let the music wash over him and his hand slipped from Draco’s arm down to his waist. He pulled him a few inches closer until their bodies were so close that he couldn’t be sure whether they were still dancing or merely standing in the centre of the dancefloor swaying to the music. He rested his chin on Draco’s shoulder, pressed their cheeks together and as he closed his eyes, he felt himself float away, bewitched by the beauty of the song.

“Just to think what I might have missed, looking back how did I exist, I dreamt, still I never thought I’d come this far, but miracles come true, I know ’cause here we are, two less lonely people in the world…” Draco half-sang half-whispered in his ear and Harry chuckled.

“Since when have you turned into such a complete sap?”

“Don’t worry, I’m just as worried as you are about this irksome development. I suspect it’s a side effect of the spell we used for our marriage bond,” Draco mumbled and pulling back just a little Harry pressed a kiss onto his lips, which Harry returned with vigour.

“Scorpius was right, you know, you can’t get married and not have a first dance,” Harry whispered and captured Draco’s lips in another kiss only seconds after they had finished their previous snog.

“Finally, alone,” Draco sighed as he stepped outside onto the roofed terrace. He joined Harry at the bannister and handed him a glass of Firewhiskey.

It was nearly two am and it had taken them until well after one am before they had been able to get away. Loathe to wait until the early hours of the morning, they had opted to travel straight to Villa
Spending a few days hidden away in Italy prior to their honeymoon had been Harry’s idea and Draco had agreed wholeheartedly. Moltrasio was quiet at this time of the year and apart from those closest to them, nobody knew about this place. It was the perfect hideaway for a newly married couple.

“Yes, finally,” Harry smiled and clinking his glass against Draco’s, he took a sip of Firewhiskey and grimaced a little as the strong drink burned down his throat. His eyes never left Draco’s and Draco felt a pleasant shudder tingle down his spine as he thought about the remainder of the night.

He watched as Harry placed his drink on the bannister and loosened his tie before taking it off completely. Harry toyed with it for a moment, then carelessly discarded the silky garment on top of his heavy wedding dressrobes which he had thrown over the back of a nearby chair.

Unable to resist, Draco moved a little closer and expertly undid the two top buttons of Harry’s dress shirt with one hand. He had already deposited his own robes and his waistcoat over the back of his favourite armchair by the fireplace and the lack of formal attire made him feel a lot more comfortable.

Apart from Tibby, who was hiding away somewhere in the house, they were completely alone for the first time in many, many hours. They had tried to sneak away an hour after their first dance but their friends had foiled their numerous attempts to flee their own wedding.

“Better?” he mumbled and Harry nodded, then picked up his drink.

Draco found himself mirroring his husband’s actions but paused with the glass halfway to his lips.

“We are married,” he said and Harry laughed.

It was a carefree and unrestrained laugh and it was music to Draco’s ears. It was also infectious. With a grin, Draco indulged in his drink and relished in the familiar burn as the high-percentage liquor burned down his throat, leaving a pleasant tingle in its wake.

“That we are. You definitely succeeded in making it the event of the century, I’m quite sure of that,” Harry chuckled and Draco shrugged.

He stepped closer to Harry and sneaking his arm around his husband’s waist, he drew him close against his own body and set his drink down on the bannister. Looking up at the night sky, he sought out the brightest star and pointed it out to Harry.

“They were watching tonight,” he whispered, pressing a kiss to Harry’s neck.

He inhaled deeply and closing his eyes, he decided to stay right there, with his face buried in Harry’s neck.

“Everyone who couldn’t be there, they were watching,” he mumbled against Harry’s warm and sensitive skin. Harry smelled ridiculously good and Draco never wanted to part from him.

“I’m not five, you do know that, right?” Harry’s throaty laugh was delectable and Draco briefly toyed with the idea to apparate them straight into the bedroom. Instead, he waved his wand hand and the lights inside the sitting room dimmed and soft music started to play.

“A little bit of make-believe never hurt nobody,” Draco said, still unwilling to detach himself from his husband. He knew quite well that Harry appreciated his words, even if he was too proud to admit to it at this moment.
“I’d intended for this to be our first dance, but Scorpius had to thwart my plans,” he sighed into Harry’s neck.

“It can be our second first dance,” Harry offered and pulling back he stared at Draco, who instantly lost himself in his husband’s eyes.

“Green, very green,” he said, He was vaguely aware of Harry’s amused chuckle closing the small gap between them, he captured Harry’s lips in a fierce kiss. “Mine, forever.”

“Yours, forever,” Harry replied, then surrendered to Draco, who let his emotions rule over the kiss and plunged his tongue deeply into Harry’s mouth, claiming and reclaiming what was already his and would now forever be his.

Suddenly, something about kissing Harry was different.

Somehow it all felt new and exciting. Like they were doing all of it for the very first time.

He supposed it was foolish but, in a way, it was also true.

Remembering that he still had something important in his pocket to give to Harry, Draco resolutely broke the kiss several minutes later and willed himself to calm down. He took a few deep breaths and reaching into his trouser pocket, he pulled out a somewhat crumbled and folded parchment.

“I don’t normally make it habit to play owl, but Scorpius gave me this for you,” he said quietly, steadily holding Harry’s gaze.

Harry took the parchment with a questioning gaze and unfolding it, he smiled at the familiar scrawl. Scorpius’ once so elegant handwriting had deteriorated quite a lot since he had started studying medicine.

“Would you like me to read it out loud?” he asked and Draco shrugged.

“Entirely up to you.”

“Hmm, okay,” Harry nodded and clearing his throat he began to read and Draco tried not to laugh at the ridiculous opening line.

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Dear Harry Potter-Malfoy,

Welcome to the family!

I know neither you nor Dad will be changing your names (it would sound ridiculous anyway, so please, don’t even think about it!), but, for the duration of this letter, humour me.

I was going to ask you this in person but given our history, a letter seemed more fitting. I did a bit (a lot, actually) of thinking and after a rather long conversation with Dad a while back, I was wondering whether you might agree to become my stepdad of sorts (this sounds weird, I know, but bear with me as I endeavour to explain it).

There’s a spell for it, an ancient bond (let Dad explain to you the magic and rules behind it, I haven’t fully grasped it yet myself, despite your new husband’s best attempts at trying to make me understand) we could invoke to make this happen. While it wouldn’t change my birth certificate or anything, it would link us both together (again,
ask Dad!) and you and I would be family, if not by blood then by magic.

It is something I would like very much and knowing you, I think you’d like this too. I would, for all intents and purposes be your son, your legal son.

I’ve been toying with the idea for a while but I never really knew how to talk to you about it. Anyway, if you agree, we could do it when you and

Dad return from your honeymoon.

This is probably a bit much to take in, but mull it over and let me know.

Love,

Scorpius

“He said our relationship started with a letter from him to you, so he wanted our marriage to start the same way,” Draco explained unnecessarily, but fell quiet when he saw the silent tears that were rolling down Harry’s cheek as he looked up into the night sky.

Harry fixed his gaze onto the brightest star in the sky and Draco inhaled sharply. He wanted to say something, reassure Harry in some way, but was stuck for words.

He had known about Scorpius’ wish for a while now and every time he saw how Harry and Scorpius interacted with each other, he wanted to sit them both down and perform the incantation right there and then. They shared a unique bond and Draco knew he would never fully understand it. Funnily enough, it didn’t irk him. He loved the relationship his two favourite people had.

Scorpius had most definitely grown up to become a fine young gentleman, someone who was honest, heartfelt, bright, and full of love. He was proud to come from a long line of wizards and witches but paid no heed to those who still believed that purebloods were in any way superior to other wizards and witches.

Draco fondly thought of Scorpius’ girlfriend. They had officially started dating in their fifth year and had been inseparable ever since. Not even Zendaya’s decision to follow her dreams and become a singer could convince Scorpius to give up on their fairy-tale romance.

He didn’t shy away from hard work, was responsible and no matter how busy his studies kept him, he always found time for his girlfriend and his family, especially his family.

Draco liked to think that, up until now, he had done a rather decent job as a father but he wasn’t above admitting that he couldn’t have done it alone. Astoria had been there for the first nine years of Scorpius life and then Harry had taken over to help him safely guide Scorpius through those treacherous waters known as the rebellious teenage years.

Harry had, for all intents and purposes, become Scorpius’ second father and Draco could honestly say that he had never, not once, been jealous of their relationship.

“How long did you know?” Harry’s sudden question startled Draco out of his thoughts and he focused his attention on Harry.

“A couple of weeks,” Draco sighed. “I know it sounds eerily familiar, but he swore me to secrecy, he was adamant to tell you himself.”

“I’m not angry,” Harry said quietly.
“You’re not?”

“No. He isn’t a teenager anymore.”

Draco searched Harry’s eyes for something discernible, something that would give him a hint as to what his husband wanted to say but was struggling to find the right words for.

“Are you okay with this? With me adopting Scorpius?” Harry finally asked.

“Absolutely and unequivocally,” Draco answered and reaching out, he slid his hand along Harry’s neck, curled his fingers into his husband’s unruly black hair and wiped the half-dried tear stains on Harry’s cheek away.

“He wanted you to be my husband, he wants you to be his other dad. I don’t see anything wrong with that. He hasn’t forgotten his mother and he isn’t doing to spite me. He just loves you that damn much. You left an impression on him a long, long time ago.”

“You did too, you did too,” Harry mumbled and Draco knew that whatever else Harry might have wanted to say, or ask, simply didn’t matter anymore.

He allowed Harry to initiate a kiss and as they melted against each other, lips locked, tongues exploring.

It was the kind of kiss that told Draco that they had done enough talking for the rest of the night. It was time for something else, something more important. He tightened his hold on Harry and wholly succumbed to the kiss, handing the reigns over to Harry.

The (Actual) End

Chapter End Notes

Well, my dearest readers, this is it.

First of all, massive thanks for sticking with this story until the bitter end. Thank you so much for all the kudos and all the comments I received; some of you moved me to tears, some of you made me laugh so hard my sides hurt. Thank you! I am eternally grateful.

Once again, massive thanks to my beta. Without her this story would have literally never been written. She made me do it and she stuck with me until the bitter end. Talk about a true soulmate.

The line of the song that Draco sings to Harry during their first dance from the song "Two Less Lonely People In The World" by Air Supply. Somehow, in my mind, it fitted both their moment and the relationship perfectly. I couldn't have asked Scorpius for a better song choice for his parents!

Now, on to the next adventures!

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