A home for Christmas

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/16807027.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Not Rated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>M/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character:</td>
<td>Draco Malfoy, Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, Astoria Greengrass, Original Child Character(s), Original Female Character(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>Adoption, accidental adoption, Orphanages, 25 Days of Christmas, Auror Trios, Lots of children, deafness, Sign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stats:</td>
<td>Published: 2018-12-02 Updated: 2019-05-25 Chapters: 22/25 Words: 50616</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A home for Christmas

by MotherBooker

Summary

High on a barely legal pain potion, Harry accidentally ends up adopting a child with Draco Malfoy.

Notes

So, since this is my first Christmas as an ao3 author, I thought I’d attempt a 25 days of Christmas fic! If you couldn’t tell by my other story, which I will hopefully be updating in about 2 weeks, I love parent!Draco, so it’s weaved it’s way into this little plot bunny. Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

Harry hissed in pain as the antiseptic potion was dabbed onto his wound, followed quickly by a Stitching charm. He watched in mild fascination as thin tendrils of magic weaved their way from one side of the wound to the other, gradually closing it shut.

He didn’t think he’d ever tire of watching magic at work.

Nicole, the Auror department’s office healer, put the stopper back on the potion bottle before tucking it back into her first aid kit and fixing Harry with a disapproving glare.

“You really should go to St Mungo’s.”

Harry sighed, more than familiar with this argument. It happened every time Harry got injured out on the field, which was at least twice a week.

He opened his mouth to speak, only to be silenced by Nicole raising a hand.

“I will not listen to any more of your protests, it is, after all, only your life that is at risk every time you refuse thorough medical examinations!” She exclaimed in an uncharacteristic burst of anger.

Nicole came from an Italian pureblood family - some sort of half sister to Blaise Zabini - so had been coached from a young age to take everything in her stride and with as little emotion as possible. Harry had seen her force calming potions down the throat of Auror Dawlish - a 6 foot 5 man made entirely from muscle - with a serene expression on her face, as if she was lounging on a beach rather than treating one of the most successful aurors Harry knew.

She was quite a scary lady, not that Harry would ever say it to her face, which was only magnified by her anger.

Nicole rummaged through her kit bag and pulled out a potion which was a bright pink that Umbridge would have been proud of.

“This is the strongest legal pain potion available in the Wizarding world. It is technically only permitted to be give out through prescription, but since you refuse to go to the hospital, I’m going to give you a dose to get you through the night.” She opened the bottle with a slight pop and poured it carefully into a measuring cup. “I expect you to keep this quiet.”

She held it out to Harry, pulling it back when he made to snatch it from her hands and down it.

“There is a reason it is only available through prescription.” She warned. “It has a similar effect to a very large quantity of firewhisky. Your mental reasoning will be effected, possibly your balance and speech too. You already look dead on your feet, so I expect you to ask Auror Weasley or Auror Greengrass to escort you to the Floo so you can go home and sleep through the worst effects of the potion.” She handed Harry the cup, watching as he downed it in one go.

Immediately, Harry stood, or attempted to. He cried out in pain and his leg buckled under the pain. Nicole was by his side and guiding him back towards his seat in an instant.

“It won’t kick in instantly. I want you to stand very slowly and carefully. Your wound was very big and very deep and since it refused to fix itself with the usual potions, you are going to have to let it heal naturally with the aid of pain potions. The effects of this potion stretch out - while you won’t feel high or drunk after tomorrow morning, the potion will still be in your system and will be
numbing the pain.”

Harry pushed himself up from the chair again, much slower this time. The fiery pain that had accompanied his previous attempt at standing had lessened and he was able to stand.

He grinned at Nicole. “Thank you, as always.” The healer returned his grin with a flat look.

“Don’t take any form of Dreamless Sleep or potions to increase sex drive in the next week. They react poorly with the pain potion.” She gave him a none to gentle push towards the door.

“Go and find someone to take you home and don’t let me see you back here for at least a week!”

The door to the medical room slammed shut behind him, leaving Harry alone in the corridor.

The majority of his team had already been sent home, as Harry had been the only one injured in the raid. Ron was down in the holding cells with Astoria putting away the suspect for the night, so the corridor was empty and silent, save for an obnoxious Christmas tune floating through the Head Auror’s slightly open door.

Through the door he could see Robards leaning back in his chair, bobbing his head along to the music and singing under his breath. A collection of small Christmas ornaments danced across the paperwork on his desk in time to the tune.

Harry chuckled at seeing his very proper boss so caught up in the Christmas cheer - despite it only being the first of December - and decided against asking him to escort him to the Floo.

Harry limped past the door quietly and made his way towards the lift. He didn’t need an escort, he thought, rolling his eyes. Nicole was just exaggerating the the effects to get him out of her workspace.

He eyed the buttons on the lift before making a split second decision and pressing the button for floor 6.

On floor six resided the Department of Child Welfare - or DOCW - and every Monday and Friday he would head down to visit the kids who were there and this Friday would be no different, injuries or not.

Many of the children were there for therapy sessions, as the Wizarding orphanages simply didn’t have the space for private sessions to take place. Others were there with parents battling over custody with hefty amounts of paperwork. The occasional few were there with guardians-to-be, all ready for their future parents to sign the paperwork to officially adopt them.

Harry loved visiting the kids playing in the waiting area. With his job, it was rare that he was able to spare a whole afternoon to go down to one of the orphanages and spend time with children, but he could visit the DOCW for half an hour or so after work quite easily.

As the lift doors opened, Harry could feel himself being slightly light headed as the potion began kicking in. On slightly unstable legs, Harry walked down the corridor to his left and made his way to the offices and waiting room, which were situated at the very end of the corridor.

The DOCW was brightly decorated in an attempt to make children feel as comfortable as possible. Inside every office, paintings and drawings made by the children who passed through were hung on the walls in hand-made photo frames from the arts and crafts events held monthly to raise money for the various orphanages. Harry’s favourite thing was watching children spot something they had made on the walls - the way they lit up was absolutely adorable and they always seemed a bit more
at ease afterwards.

All the seats in the waiting room had been donated and as a result, were well loved and slightly worn. For Harry, this only made it feel cosier more homely. The beanbags were a huge hit with the kids.

The seats were arranged in a large circle around a huge rainbow coloured mat. It was charmed to change its design based on the children playing with it and it was usually a cartoonish series of houses and twisting roads, as many of the children seemed to have an obsession with the small toy cars.

A small plastic set of drawers full of donated toys was sandwiched in between two sofas, with a drawer dedicated entirely to small toy cars.

The waiting room was quiet, with only two children playing together on the brightly coloured mat. Mrs. Wittle, one of the witches who worked at Puffskien Orphanage in Wiltshire, gave him a smile and beckoned him over.

Harry sank into the comfy sofa next to her, with a grateful sigh. At least the world wasn’t spinning any more.

“Long week?” She asked.

“Very.” He replied, pleased to find he wasn’t slurring his words.

“I can tell.” She murmured sympathetically. “You still have a cut on your hand.”

Harry didn’t quite trust himself to cast a safe healing charm and waved away her concerns. “What bring you here this late?” It was half six in the evening and he never usually saw her here this late.

“We’re here for moral support. One of our little ones is being adopted!” She wore a huge smile and seemed to be bursting to tell anyone she could. “These two,” She gestured to the pair on the mat, who were currently staging some sort of battle between a dozen nifflers and several plastic dinosaurs, “want to say goodbye to little Lissy before she goes off with her new daddy.”

One of children, a little boy, looked up and let out a happy cry. “Harry!” He flew at Harry and threw his arms around Harry’s neck. Harry winced as the boy, Joseph, his potion-addled brain helpfully supplied, but returned the hug all the same.

Harry knew Joseph quite well, given that he had been the one to save the three year old from his original home, where he was abused by his parents. Joseph attended child therapy sessions every Friday afternoon, which was why Harry had chosen to visit on Fridays.

The other child, a slightly older girl of about 6, called Joseph back over. “I’m gonna squish your nifflers!” She said.

Joseph hopped off his lap and hurried over to save his nifflers from a flat fate.

Mrs. Wittle sighed happily. “I love seeing them go to loving homes. Don’t get me wrong, I adore being around kids, but orphanages are always better when they’re empty.”

Harry made a vague noise of agreement, too focused on the voice coming from the room opposite their seat.

“What do you mean I can’t adopt her?” The voice cried, audible through the poorly warded door. It
was a voice Harry would recognise anywhere, if he wasn’t currently high on a pain potion and it wasn’t accompanied by a high pitched ringing in his ears.

The delight slid off Mrs Wittle’s face as she listened.

A female voice replied. “I will not let you,” Harry could easily imagine the sneer that came with the word, “adopt and corrupt this perfectly innocent little child.”

“Corrupt?” Came the other voice, sounding hurt and offended.

Harry stood and strode purposely towards the door, ignoring Mrs. Wittle’s mutters of confusion. It seemed like a brilliant idea to go in and help the fellow finalising the adoption. After all, who would refuse to assist a friend of Harry Potter?

The remaining rational section of his brain reasoned that there could be a legitimate reason why this man was not being allowed to finalise the adoption and going in to help him could potentially endanger the girl he was adopting. But, Harry thought, they’ve already passed the background checks and gotten this far in the process, so they probably didn’t have any sinister intentions.

Hermione would be so proud of him for his logical thinking!

The snobbish female voice came from the inside door again. “I know what you did and I can’t imagine what sort of curses you’ve used to make the other officials believe that you’re a suitable guardian for a child, but I won’t let you use them on me!”

Harry could hear muffled rummaging, presumably as the woman searched for her wand in her desk.

The other voice returned, lower this time. “I have reached this stage because I have been deemed a fit guardian. I have not done anything untoward.”

There was scoffing from the woman and Harry opened the door, fumbling with the handle before he lurched into the room. The three people in the room froze, taking in Harry’s exceptionally disheveled appearance.

The woman gaped, opening and closing her mouth like a fish, clutched an oversized piece of parchment in her hands.

“Mr Potter, sir!” She eventually let out, in an award and breathy tone reminiscent of a house-elf.

“Potter?”

Harry turned towards the other man, ignoring the woman.

Had Harry’s brain been working normally, he would have registered who exactly was in the office far earlier and would have responded with the appropriate amount of shock, given that he was stood opposite Draco bloody Malfoy in the middle of a DOCW office.

As it was, Harry’s only thoughts were ‘he has really, really shiny hair’ and ‘why are there two of him?”.

He turned back to the woman, who was still clutching the parchment. Harry reached over and picked it out of her hands, judging that by the way she was holding it away from Malfoy that it was of some importance.

At some point between Harry entering the room and him taking the parchment, the room had taken
He unfolded the parchment. The words on the page swum before Harry’s eyes, but he could make out boxes and several ticks. At the bottom of the parchment was a section empty except for what appeared to be a signature - although in Harry’s current state, it could have been the Mona Lisa and he wouldn’t know the difference - which was probably Malfoy’s.

“Wha...” Harry started, barely noticing that he was starting to slur his speech, but doing his best to speak clearly, “Wha’ seems to be th-the pro-ba-lem?”

He could see Malfoy watching him with a mix of apprehension and concern, but the woman stammered out a reply before he could speak.

“He wants to-to adopt this little girl.”

“So le’ ‘im!”

“But Mr Potter!” She gasped, as if she had mortally offended him.

I probably have he thought, a tiny shred of logic breaking through to his potion-fogged brain.

“An’-An’ how does ‘e ad... ad-yopt her?” His tongue felt heavy and fuzzy in his mouth and refused to cooperate as he forced out the words.

“It is quite simple Potter.” Malfoy’s voice was cool, but lacked the edge it had had in previous years. “I add a drop of my blood to that parchment, she signs it and I will be officially registered as Melissa’s adoptive parent on her birth certificate.”

“He is not fit to be her guardian!” The woman replied shrilly.

“Why no’? Maf... Maflee is a grea’ dada! I tr-tl-tlust him!”

The woman suddenly looked flustered. “Oh! I-I didn’t know you were friends!” She stuttered out a half baked apology to Malfoy and waved her hands at the paper. “Go on then, I’ll sign it for a friend of Mr. Potter’s!”

Malfoy reached a hand out for it, removing it from the shoulder of a small girl next to him.

She barely came above Malfoy’s knee and only came halfway up Harry’s thigh. She looked up at Harry shyly with bright brown eyes, one hand fisted in Malfoy’s trouser leg, the other holding a bright green, stuffed tree frog.

She raised her frog and gave Harry a tiny wave with it, hiding her face in Malfoy’s leg immediately after.

Malfoy watched Harry cautiously as he accepted the paper from him. With a flick of his wand, he pricked his finger, a little droplet of blood welling up and then dripping onto the document. It sunk into the paper, leaving a perfectly round circle of blood on the page. He passed it back to Harry, who winced as it rubbed over the still-gaping cut on his hand.

The woman smoothed the parchment out on her desk and with a quick flourish of her quill, signed the document. A paper by her elbow glowed and she pushed it towards Malfoy, who had come to stand in front of her desk.

The words on the page continued to swim and the ringing in his ears only seemed to be getting
louder.

He could make out the name Draco Malfoy in glowing letters at the bottom, below two greyed out names and another, larger bold name that Harry assumed was the child’s.

Malfoy let out a breathless laugh as he saw his name weave its way onto the document, crouching to scoop up the girl into his arms. He spun her around, smiling as she giggled.

“Can I go home with you now?” She whispered to Malfoy, her frog pressed against the side of his neck and her voice full of a nervous anticipation that Harry hadn’t realised small children were capable of.

He hugged her tightly and pressed a kiss to her dark hair. “Yes!” He swirled her around again, laughing along with her. “We’ll go get all your stuff then we can go home.”

Malfoy had clearly forgotten about the other two people in the room, too caught up in his obvious happiness to care.

He looks good when he smiles Harry mused, too far gone to realise who exactly he was thinking about.

His attention was drawn to the birth certificate, which had began to glow again.

Next to Malfoy’s name, another was forming.

Malfoy froze as he noticed too, shifting the girl onto his hip and snatching up the document.

“Why...” He started, glaring daggers at Harry, a vulnerable look in his eyes, “Why is your name on here!!”

Harry pulled it from his hands, swaying as the motion unbalanced him. He squinted and brought the certificate close to her face, making the words still long enough for him to read the new name and realise that it did, in fact, say ‘Harry Potter’.

“Bu’-bu’!” He protested, with very little idea of what he was trying to say, given that he had no idea how this had happened.

Malfoy turned on the woman sat behind her desk. “Why is his name there?”

“I don’t know!” She wailed, wringing her hands and looking like she wished she had never taken a job here.

***

Draco isn’t quite sure why fate chose for his life to lead to this.

Previously, he wouldn’t have complained; while not perfect, his life was good, he was happy and he didn’t have the looming threat of a serial killer hanging over his head.

Now, he was stood in a Ministry adoption office with an obviously high Harry Potter clutching a document that declared that the pair of them had just adopted Melissa Williams.

Of course, said 4-year old thought this was the funniest thing in the world - Harry Potter making wild and exaggerated gestures while the worker sat behind her desk tried desperately to rescue her multitude of potted plants from the weapons that were his arms. Some sort of blue fuzz was growing out of Potter’s left sleeve, curling around his forearm and towards his elbow - most likely the remains
of a failed hex, considering his profession and the numerous cuts littered across his exposed skin.

Lissy’s little hand slipped around his neck and she continued to laugh at Potter’s antics.

The ministry official - he hadn’t caught the woman’s name and, quite frankly, he couldn’t care less - finally came to her senses and shot a stunning spell at Potter. At the same time, Mrs. Wittle burst in, hand clutching her chest as she watched Potter’s erratic limbs freeze and his body fall to the floor.

“Dear Merlin!” She cried, “Whatever happened here?”
Chapter 2

Draco never expected to spend the years after the war in various Wizarding orphanages across Britain.

He first visited one the week after his trial, where he was pardoned for the majority of his crimes, largely due to Potter’s testimony, and was ordered to do a number of hours of community service for being an accomplice to an arsonist. Draco silently operated under the belief that he should have been punished for more than watching his aunt set Hagrid’s hut on fire, but he refused to look a gift thestral in the mouth, taking his extraordinarily light sentence and running with it.

He had had several options for his community service, but with the influx of orphans and a lack of staff in orphanages, most of those given community service were pushed to serve their time in the orphanages, rather than litter picking in Knockturn Alley.

Draco had been reluctant at first. He had no desire to clean up owl shit off shop windows for a month with the entire Wizarding world watching, but he had never really been around children and he doubted many would take kindly to the sight of him, when he looked so much like his father. His father who had killed so many over the last year or so and was currently in a high security cell in Azkaban, awaiting the Kiss. There was a possibility that a child would take one look at him and accuse him of killing their family and Draco wasn’t sure he could handle it.

Eventually though, his pride had won out and on a blustery and stifling August morning, he had found himself standing on the doorstep of Puffskein Orphanage.

Plants and pots of all sizes, shapes and colours were packed against the wall, buds shaking in the wind and dried, brown petals breaking away from their plants, dancing down the modest garden path.

He had knocked on the door after several moments (minutes) of hesitation, which he used to take in the exterior of the house. It was painted a pale shade of yellow, which was peeling in places and sullied by streaks of dirt. There were several extensions added on, which were wonky and completed haphazardly, with windows of all different sizes dotted all over them. It was chaotic, yet homely in a worn and well lived in sort of way.

He glanced up, watching the copper dragon on the weather vane spin in the wind, and his eyes were drawn to a window, where a young boy sat, head rested against the glass, knees drawn up and a book lying, forgotten, against his chest. Even from a floor below, he could see the tear tracks on the boy’s face and he felt his heart wrench. It was in that exact moment that any doubts he had about this were abolished.

It was terribly Gryffindorish of him, not to mention uncharacteristically impulsive, but as an ageing woman opened up the door, he swore he would stay long enough to help as many of the children find a home as possible.
Draco spent the first week getting to know the children and getting used to the orphanage, which was full to bursting with children from as young as 6 months to as old as 16 years.

There was little Daisy, the 6 month old baby who’d been dumped on the doorstep of the orphanage just days before Draco arrived. She’d taken a shine to Draco straight away, which she proved by slobbering all over his neck, and refused to let anyone but Draco feed her at lunch time.

There was Terence, a stubborn 2 year old who loved ducks and refused to answer to anything other than ‘Sir Quack’. He had a habit of sneaking to the bathrooms and sitting in half full tubs of bath water while the staff and Draco were otherwise occupied, which led to lots of strong locking charms and Draco investing in a paddling pool they could all play in outside.

There was the 2 year twins, Joseph and Adrian, who were completely identical, right down to the apparently cat-shaped freckles on their right wrists. They had a habit of speaking perfectly in sync that reminded Draco of the Weasley twins and seemed to be able to hold entire conversations with one another without saying a word.

There was 3 year old Evangeline, a stubborn girl who had a talent for silently appearing next to him and scaring the life out of him.

There was 5 year old Clara and her 6 year old brother Edwin. The pair were as thick as thieves and insatiably curious - Draco learnt very quickly to keep everything that wasn’t stuck down out of the reach of inquisitive finger, especially his wand.

There was a trio of 8 year olds - Benny, Lucia and Florence. They were a tightly knit group, given that they were the only survivors of a school group that had been attacked by Death Eaters at a zoo. Their parents had been chaperones and hadn’t made it out. Draco had been worried at first - they had every reason to hate him for being part of the group that had killed their family and friends - but they had welcomed quite quickly, the four of them bonding over a mutual love of board games. He kept Monopoly well away from them though - the first and last game had ended in tears and the board being flipped.

The other 8 year old was loud and boisterous Archie, who was described by most of the staff as a ‘Typical boy’. Everyone heard him before they saw him and could find him easily by following the eternal muddy footprints that he left behind. He was well liked by the majority of the kids there - with the exception of some of the older children and Terence, who didn’t really like anything but his ducks - despite his fondness of Weasley products.

The boy Draco had seen in the window was called Leonard, but went by Leo instead. The 10 year old was very quiet and didn’t seem to get on well with many of the other children, but Draco did manage to coax a little bit of conversation out of him about one of his many books.

There were five teenagers, all enrolled at Hogwarts, too. Lucy and Meg, two 13 year olds with an obsession of Quidditch that bordered on unhealthy, had taken to him immediately and had spent a solid hour on his first day there talking his ear off about the quality of the Magpie’s keeper.

The oldest three, Sebastian, Tammy and Jacob were 15/16 and seemed to have made it their mission to take care of the little ones. Not unsurprisingly, all three were in Gryffindor and weren’t his biggest fans. They reminded him of a younger Golden Trio.

The orphanage was also home to two stray cats, a young, bright orange kitten and an older grey one, which spent most of its time basking in sunlight and swiping at ankles.
The first few months of his community service seemed to fly by - once they got past their awkward first meeting at least - and he very quickly found himself sitting around a table with 12 children, a nosy kitten and other 3 slightly merry adults, including Mrs Whittle. The eldest three had chosen to stay at Hogwarts, while Lucy and Meg had decided to come back.

Since August, Daisy, Clara, Edwin and Archie had been adopted and several other children had come and gone, the newest two being 9 year old Sophie and 3 year old Millie.

Archie had only left two days ago and the building had felt horribly quiet since.

The staff at the orphanage had told him straight away it was best not to get too attached to the kids - they couldn’t save them all, no matter how much they wanted too - and initially, Draco had scoffed at the idea that he would get attached enough to be upset to see them leave.

That had changed when Daisy had been adopted a month after he had started.

It had been awful when he’d arrived the next day and wasn’t greeted with his usually sloppy kiss to the neck. He had came to the sudden and quite horrifying realisation that he missed Daisy and a month spent surrounded by children had turned him into a Hufflepuff.

Judging from the way Mrs Wittle and David, another member of staff, were knocking back the cheap champagne, they were just as affected by the lack of noise.

Officially, Draco had been assigned to maintenance work around the building and had been given a list of jobs to do, but he’d spent far more time in the company of the kids.

Halfway through January and barely a quarter of the way through the list, Mrs Wittle had pulled him to one side after a particularly entertaining game of Elefun.

“You’ve completed your hours of community service, you know.” She had informed him.

Draco had stared at her for several moments, speechless, until a small hand had tugged on his. He had glanced down to see Evangeline gazing up at him, eyes shiny.

“You’re leaving?”

Draco was quick to crouch down and reassure her, brushing away a tear that had found its way down her cheeks.

“Of course not!” He turned to look up at Mrs Wittle, “I would like to become an official volunteer here, I have been meaning to discuss it with you.”

“Very well, but you have some forms to complete first. I’ll see you in my office tomorrow morning?”

Draco nodded and hugged Evangeline as Mrs Wittle walked away and returned to whatever it was she had been doing in the first place.

A year later, Draco became an official member of staff there, after an eight month course and some serious discussions with Pansy, which mainly involved her encouraging him while accusing him of going soft.

It was two years later when Melissa first arrived at the orphanage.
Almost all of the children who had been there when Draco first arrived had left, having been adopted or come of age. Only three remained - Lucy and Meg, who were still inseparable and just as quidditch-mad, and Leo.

Draco had grown close to Leo and they regularly owled each other while Leo was away at Hogwarts. It was summer and they were in the middle of one of their chess games when the banging came at the door.

Draco had stood to answer it, knowing that David was out with the little ones in the garden and the rest of the staff were out. Leo followed closely behind him.

He opened door to an irate and obviously pureblood couple. They stood close together, noses turned up at the exterior of the building, which had improved massively since Draco had repainted and recharmed the walls a year or so ago.

The woman turned to him, regarding him with obvious contempt. “I was told you’d take unwanted brats in?”

He could feel Leo stiffen behind him and responded coolly.

“We take in children who have no other place to go, yes.”

“Semantics.” She waved a dismissive hand and none to gently pushed a small, rake thin toddler forwards. In her arms, she cradled a newborn - a boy judging from the blue blanket they were wrapped in and the badge saying ‘Its a BOY!’ pinned to it. A family crest was stitched into the corner of the shawl, but Draco didn’t recognise it.

“You can take her then, seeing as we have no use for a girl now that we have a boy to inherit and pass on the family name.” The man pulled a crumpled sheet of parchment out of his pocket and thrust it towards Draco.

“We’ve signed away all her rights, so we can be off now.” He turned to his wife and son, guiding them away without so much as a glance back at their daughter.

The girl let out a cough that wracked her whole body and began to cry.

Draco scooped her up and held her as her ‘family’ apparated away. She curled into his chest as she cried, coughs interrupting every so often.

He nudged Leo. “Go get David, tell him we’ve got a newcomer while I firecall Eleanor.”

Leo ran off through the house and Draco carried the sniffling child into Mrs Wittle’s office.

He sat on a chair in front of the fireplace, the girl on his knee and threw a handful of Floo powder into the fire, calling out Eleanor’s address and hoping she was in.

Eleanor answered almost immediately, smiling. “Draco! Good morning!.”

The smile slid from her face as she noticed the child on his knee.

“Ah. I’ll be right over.”

Seconds later, the social worker stood in front of them, dusting soot off her shirt.

“What happened?”
“Her family just dumped her on our doorstep a few minutes ago.” He replied. “Purebloods with a new male heir.”

“Typical.” She scowled. It was a case they were familiar with - family names meant everything to purebloods and their heir being female was, in their opinion, a disaster, as they couldn’t pass on the name. In most cases, they ended up dumped in all manner of places, so it was a relief that she had been brought her straight away. Judging the way Draco could feel every one of her ribs against his chest and how her coughs shook her entire body, a night on the streets would have killed her.

Draco handed over the document the man had given him.

“Melissa, is it?” She asked the girl.

She received no reply, as if she hadn’t been heard.

“Melissa?” Draco murmured, nudging her gently. She looked up at him questioningly. “Are you hungry, sweetheart?”

She continued to stare blankly at him.

“I think she may have a hearing impairment.” Eleanor said. “I’ll check St Mungo’s records and get the family investigated - there’s no way the poor thing’s been cared for properly.”

Draco nodded and stood, settling the child on his hip. “I’ll get her something to eat.”

Eleanor nodded before waving goodbye and flooing away.

Later that night, when Mrs Wittle has returned and Melissa had fallen asleep on Draco in the games room, Eleanor returned with a multitude of documents.

“Her full name is Melissa Williams, born 24th of December 1997, making her 2 years and 8 months old, and she is deaf. She was prescribed muggle hearing aids over 2 years ago, because she is too young to use the potion to correct her hearing, but according to the healer who saw her, the parents had no interest in using muggle devices. He gave me another set for her that are the same as her original ones.” She turned over the document in her hand. “He warned that they weren’t reliable, because muggle technology doesn’t interact well worth magic, but apparently they are pretty resistant and will come back on eventually if they stop working. She can also use sign language.”

Draco nodded. “Is the paperwork he gave us genuine?”

“Yes, I verified all of it - they have absolutely no claim over her at all and never will do. I recorded her arrival and placement here in the records too and set a message to the aurors about the parents. You’ll need to give some sort of statement to back up our claims, etcetera, etcetera - same as usual.”

Mrs Wittle let out a little sigh. “Thank god we’ve got the aurors to help us.” She said, relieved. “Now, lets go settle this little one in her new room - we’ve put her by you Leo - and let her get some proper rest.”

Christmas that year seemed much merrier than it had in previous years. All the children were fascinated by the idea of having a birthday and Christmas all in two days and Melissa had finally been given the all-clear by her healer a few days ago.

A year and a half later, during a summers day not dissimilar to the one when Melissa arrived, Draco
was shocked into speechless once more, something that hadn’t happened since he thought he was being kicked out of the orphanage.

It happened over one of his and Leo’s regular chess games. Draco had been eyeing up the board, trying to decide whether moving his bishop or rook would be more beneficial, when Leo had spoken.

“You should adopt Melissa.”

Draco had spluttered for several moments before falling silent and simply staring at him.

“Where did that come from?” He had asked eventually, watching the smug teenager warily.

“Come off it, she’s your favourite!” Leo scoffed, moving his knight and watching in satisfaction as Draco’s bishop was cut down and cast aside.

“I don’t have favourites.” This was only partly true. He wasn’t supposed to have favourites, but there had been a select few that Draco had been overly fond of over the years, including Leo.

Leo shook his head. “You do. I’m one of them, obviously, but you adore Melissa. You’ve done so much more than necessary for her - the sign language, testifying at her parents trial when I know you hate the ministry, accompanying her to every healer visit and helping with her speech therapy.”

“Mrs Wittle learned sign language too.” Draco protested weakly.

“Mrs Wittle would chop off her arm if one of us asked nicely enough, she doesn’t count.”

“Shouldn’t you be persuading me to adopt you, rather than Melissa? It’s not very Slytherin of you.”

Leo laughed. “There’s only 9 years between us. It’d be weird if you adopted me. Besides, you’re a neat freak - you’d kill me in a week.” Leo regularly blew things up and was permanently messy. He huffed as Draco’s other bishop took down his queen. “Melissa needs it more than I do, she has food intolerances and hearing problems that mean regular hospital visits - no one wants to adopt a child like that, it’s ‘too much work’ apparently.”

Draco scowled at the reminder of the couple that had visited the other week and had immediately discounted Melissa because of her hearing.

“See! You have a rather large soft spot for her, admit that at least.”

Grudgingly, he nodded. “Fine, I do, but I can’t just adopt her - there’s a mountain of procedures and paperwork that needs to be done. Besides, I don’t even know if she’d want me to adopt her.”

Leo smirked. “Checkmate. Talk to her if you really would consider adopting her. You might be surprised.” The teen stood, added a tally to his side of the score sheet and left, leaving Draco to his own thoughts.

“I’m taking advice from a teenager.” He muttered.

It wasn’t the first time Draco had contemplated adoption. Being gay, there were few options for him to have children and after spending so long around orphaned children, he didn’t think he’d ever consider having a child of his own blood when there were children without parents who could easily become his own.

He had always wanted kids and the longing for them had only increased as he spent time here.
And Melissa - he had grown unbelievably fond of the little girl and had actually thought (dreamed) about adopting her once or twice. She was such a wonderful, happy child despite what she’d been through. He marvelled at her ability to bounce back and trust others when she’d been let down by so many people - from family members to the ministry workers who’d looked the other way for a small sum. She, like all the kids who’d been through here, was far more resilient than him.

His only concern was the other children. Would they be jealous? Would they resent him for not choosing them? It had always held him back from ever seriously considering adopting one of children, but judging by Leo’s opinions and the usual reactions from the other kids when one left, it might not be a massive problem.

And then there were the typical questions anyone thinking about having kids would ask themselves - could he handle a child? Could he support himself and a child? Was he ready for a child? Did he have the time needed to care for a child?

He frowned as he packed the chess set away with a wave of his wand. He needed some time to think.

***

Five and a half months later, Draco found himself sat in a private room in St Mungo’s. Adopting Melissa had gone totally Potter shaped and Draco couldn’t wait for him to wake up so Draco could hex him without feeling any guilt.

Draco had planned to spend the day at the giant aquarium near his house - Melissa’s favourite place on earth. Instead, they were stuck in a white-walled hospital room that smelt strongly of antiseptic, with a faint scent of chocolate frogs lingering from Weasley’s visit.

Lissy was happily playing at Draco’s feet with her stuffed frogs that he had charmed to dance when she pressed their left feet. She giggled as the smaller two tap danced in a circle around her, before falling back down.

Draco was eternally grateful that children were usually easily pleased.

On the bed, Potter stirred, blinking blearily at him as he came round.

“Malfoy?” His eyes widened. “Fuck. I didn’t dream th-“

“Little ears!” Draco interrupted, covering Lissy’s ears and glaring at him.

Potter winced. “Sorry. Where are my glasses?”

Draco flicked his wand and levitated them over.

“Do you know what you’ve done?”

Potter shook his head.

“You’ve adopted a child. Why the hell were you wandering around the Ministry after taking a dose of that particular pain potion?”

“I’ve what?!” Potter gaped at him. “Listen, Malfoy, there must be some sort of mistake.”

Draco took the birth certificate out of his pocket and unshrunk it. “No, no mistake unfortunately.” Potter took the document and stared at it in silence for several minutes before speaking again.
“Can’t we just reverse it?”

“No we can’t just reverse it. I don’t know how adoption works in the muggle world, but it’s irreversible here, unless the person is deemed an unfit guardian later on.”

“What does that mean then?”

“It means, Potter,” he sneered, “that you need to pose as Mr Perfect Parent for as long as they want to check up on Melissa.” Draco leaned closer and lowered his voice.

“I refuse to let you ruin this for me. I want to give her a permanent home, I won’t let you take that away from her. I don’t care if we’ve become friends of some description over the last few years, I will make your life hell if you mess up.”

Potter nodded, running a hand through his hair. “What happened exactly? My memory is a bit... off.”

“Your blood got onto the adoption papers at some point, so the spell registered you as a second parent.”

Potter muttered something about luck and dragged another hand through his hair. “Shouldn’t you have called a healer?”

“Yes, but I’m presuming you weren’t prescribed the potion?” Potter’s guilty look was answer enough and Draco transfigured one of the empty frog cartons. Potter picked up the paper and grinned.

“Prescription documents, thanks Malfoy.” He looked thoughtful for a moment. “Or should I be Draco, now that we’re going to be spending so much time together?”

“As long as you don’t call me Ferret, I couldn’t care less.” He pressed the button to call a healer. “We will be off now, but I expect you to visit us tomorrow when you are discharged.” He nudged Lissy to her feet. “Come on sweetheart, say goodbye to Mr Potter.”

“Bye, bye!” She waved a blue frog at him and thrust her arms out at Draco. “Up please.”

He lifted her up and gave Potter his own nod goodbye.

***

They spent the day in the park instead, bundled up in scarfs, hats and multiple jumpers.

It was quiet, because every sane person was inside, away from the icy cold December breeze.

But, Draco thought as he watched a windswept, red nosed Lissy hop between puddles, shouting “Splash!” every time she landed, I quite like being insane.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Yay, chapter 3 is finally up (a day late but it’s here), I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Draco was awakened the next morning by a small and unexpectedly heavy weight landing on his chest.

He opened his eyes and cried out in shock when he found Melissa’s nose just centimetres from his.

“Morning Draco!”

“Morning, Lissy.” He replied. From the slithers of golden light peeking through his window, it was morning by the barest stretch of the imagination.

“Breakfast?”

Lissy nodded and jumped up and down on his chest. “Cheeri-toes with bananas?”

“Cheerios.” He chuckled, sitting up and taking the girl into his arms.

He manoeuvred them out of the bed and adjusted her on his hip, taking them down to the kitchen. He waved his hand, switching on the light, disturbing his cat, Butch, in the process.

She opened a disgruntled eye before hoping on the window sill and stalking out of the room, winding her way between Draco’s legs for good measure.

20 minutes later, after two spillages and a tail stepped on, an owl tapped on the window. Draco accepted the letter, cursing whoever was owling him at the arse crack of dawn and making him let in all the cold air.

He cracked open the letter and cast a watchful glance over Melissa, reassured that she wasn’t going to cause disaster in the few minutes it would take him to read the letter.

Dear Malfoy Draco,

I was discharged a few minutes ago and I knew I’d forget to send this if I didn’t send it now, so I’m sorry if I wake you up.

(Although from experience, I know four year old enjoy waking up at all hours)

Fancy meeting up at the ice rink near the Ministry? It’s muggle, but entirely kid friendly. See you at 12? We can discuss it over lunch.

I’ll take no reply as a positive answer,

Harry

Ps. I promised I’d take my godson for the day, so there’ll be an extra one
“Lissy?” She replied with a hum, too focused on removing the leg of her stuffed frog from underneath the snoozing cat.

“Do you want to go ice skating?” he grinned as she hopped up, eyes sparkling.

“Really?” Melissa had loved ice skating since she first went the year after she first arrived at the orphanage. It had mostly involved her clutching onto a penguin shaped support thing or someone’s hand and very little actually skating. Draco had spent most of the day on his arse, so he couldn’t say much.

They tried to go as often as possible, which was difficult on the limited funds the orphanage had, especially when Mrs Wittle refused to allow him to pay, despite him having more money than he could spend in four lifetimes.

Melissa jumped up and down on the spot, before she flew at Draco and hugged him.

“We’ll be going with Mr Potter and his godson too.” Draco was 90% sure that she didn’t hear him as she bounced around, humming a nonsensical tune, followed by a very confused Moggy.

Several hours later, they apparated outside the Ministry and walked into muggle London.

Melissa couldn’t seem to keep still, pointing out every little thing in the shop windows they passed. She laughed at the mechanical window display, where elves danced around among a multitude of presents, gazed in awe at the massive, twinkling tree next to the door of a toy shop and squealed at the velvety reindeers stood in another window.

She had become a near vibrating ball of energy as they walked, feet barely touching the floor as she bounced along. Her scarf blew into her face, fluttering in the wind as she continued to hop, tugging on Draco’s hand. “Hurry up please!”

“We should be almost there now, save your energy for the ice.”

She slowed for a moment, considering it, but resumed bouncing a mere second later. “I have lots and lots and lots and lots of energies!”

“If you say so.”

They rounded a corner a few minutes later and the sight was enough to freeze Lissy in her tracks. “Lights!” She cried, pointing at the towering fir trees that lined the rinks.

Each one was adorned with bright white lights and shiny baubles in reds and golds, that swayed in the breeze. Perched precariously on top of each tree was a giant golden star that glittered in the December sun.

The normal trees were wrapped in metres and metres of fairy lights, which changed colour every few seconds, creating a strange yet colourful contrast to the grey and foggy London sky.

There were two rinks - a large, oval one, packed with adults and teens, with the occasional younger child, and a smaller square one, full of kids with several parents. Melissa scooted closer to Draco, away from the crowd weaving around them. “Up please.”

Draco settled her on his hip and made his way across the crowded square, glancing around for Potter.
They made their way to the booth for skate hire, where Potter was waving them over, clutching the hand of a very bouncy, blue haired toddler.

Melissa waved at them from her vantage point on Draco’s hip, wriggling as they got closer to be let down. She ran the last few feet towards them.

“Hello!” She shouted, just inches from Teddy’s face. He jumped and shied away. She was used to the orphanage, where everything was loud and you had to shout to be heard.

“Lissy,” He put a hand on her shoulder and pulled her back gently. “You don’t need to be right up close to him to say hello, why don’t you try again, but a bit quieter this time?”

She repeated her greeting and Teddy smiled cautiously at her, but mumbled a “Hiya” back.

*Crisis averted* he thought with relief.

Potter nodded at him and Teddy gave him a small wave. He’d met him a few times before, when he’d accompanied Potter on the orphanage outings, but he’d not actually spent much time with him.

“Shall we get our skates on then?” Potter asked the kids, ushering them towards the booth.

After five minutes of queuing, during which Teddy and Melissa struck up a strange conversation about frogs and quaffles, they put their bags away and got their skates. Draco was soon trying to wrestle a pair onto Melissa’s feet. No matter how many times he did it, he could never remember exactly how to get them tied up properly.

When he had finally got them on her feet, he placed his hands gently on her face, tilting it up to look at her. “Usually rules ok? Stick close, don’t go off with anyone and let me know straight away if your hearing aid stops working.” It wasn’t much of a worry - it was a muggle area with very little magic, so it was very unlikely that it would short circuit.

She nodded and Draco pulled her purple bobble hat further down on her head, running his fingers over the familiar ridges of the hearing aid that looked over the top of her ear and pressing a kiss to her forehead. He stood, adjusting her matching scarf and helping her to her feet.

They hobbled over to Teddy and Potter, who were all ready to get on the ice.

“Are you sure you should be doing this Potter?” He asked. The man had only been out of hospital for a few hours! Draco wasn’t worried about him obviously, he just didn’t want him holed up in hospital when Draco had a house visit from social services scheduled in two days time.

*You keep telling yourself that* his traitorous inner monologue replied.

“It’s Harry, and I’m fine! There’s barely a scratch there now. Besides, Andromeda wouldn’t have let me out of the house if she thought I was putting myself at risk.”

Draco was quite confident that it wasn’t ‘just a scratch’ and that Potter hadn’t actually mentioned his hospital visit to Andromeda, but he said nothing more. The foolish idiot could deal with the consequences when Andromeda eventually found out.

Melissa and Teddy stepped on the rink first, wobbling on the ice as they shuffled along, avoiding some of the faster children speeding around the rink.

Draco and Harry followed behind them, lacking the sense of invincibility that seemed to be ingrained in all small children and clutching onto the side for dear life.
“You seem remarkably calm about this Harry.”

He shrugged, suddenly very interested in the lines in the ice. “Well, it is technically all my fault. I was told to go straight home, I didn’t, I accidentally got blood on the document and it happened. I don’t want to ruin this for you, I know exactly how it feels to not have a real family and I don’t want Melissa to lose you, which she will if I don’t help you prove we can provide a stable home.” He grinned suddenly, looking directly at Draco. “It could be worse - at least the company’s handsome.”

Draco’s flushed face had nothing to do with the cold of the rink.

Several hours later, the four of them staggered off the ice, finger and toes and noses frozen.

Draco was quite proud of himself. He’d only fallen over three times, unlike Harry, who had attempted to skate away from the wall and join in with Lissy and Teddy’s very slow game of tag and ended up flat on his face more times than Draco could count.

Cold and wet, they trudged over to one of the food carts, where Harry insisted on them buying hotdogs and hit chocolate.

With the orphanage, he had taken part in many trips to various muggle places - as they wanted to create a unprejudiced group of young people by giving them the best of both worlds - and had encountered plenty of different muggle foods, but he had yet to try hotdogs, purely because of their rather off-putting name.

Draco found them a table as far away from the ice rink as possible and sat the two children down. With some difficulty, he managed to pry the soggy scarfs and gloves off them and cast a surreptitious drying charm on them under the table before he tucked them away in his bag.

Harry returned with food and drinks. Hot food and drinks, that the they jumped on, near-starving after so long on the ice.

With the children sufficiently distracted, they struck up conversation again.

“When is the first check up thing?” Harry asked, swallowing a mouthful of chips.

“Two days time. It’ll be a service worker I don’t know, to prevent any sort of biased review. It will just be a very general check - is she being fed ok, is the house safe, is she being treated correctly, is it a stable environment, etc. They place quite a bit of importance on the relationship between the parents who have adopted child, because a split would cause far more famed than good and parents arguing all the time doesn’t create a positive environment for a child to grow up in.” Draco bit into the hotdog, pleasantly surprised to find it wasn’t actually that bad. “All you need to do is show up, get along with me and act like you would with Teddy when you interact with Melissa.”

Harry nodded. “Ok, but what about the press? The Daily Prophet will be running conspiracy theories for months if they think we’re in a relationship and have a child!”

“Social workers take a vow of secrecy - they can’t share anything with the press and they won’t think its unusual if you’re out with us in the Wizarding world, you’re always helping with the orphanages.”

They lapses into a somewhat comfortable silence, watching as the children chatted about something involving the Christmas trees and their tomato sauce.
Draco smiled as Harry swiped a chip from a distracted Teddy’s plate.

Things definitely could be worse.

Chapter End Notes

I’m having a slight issue with italics at the moment, so I will be fixing that soon.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

I am a terribly organised person. I apologise!

Unexpectedly, Draco was woken by his Floo chiming the next morning, rather than a hungry and excitable child.

He sat up, catching his still open book before it fell and cast a quick Tempus charm, blinking in surprise when he realised it was past 10 and Melissa wasn’t up. The Floo continued to chime and Draco pulled himself out of bed. He stumbled sleepily out of his room and onto the landing before pushing open the door to Melissa’s room.

The door creaked slightly as it opened and he freezed, hoping he hadn’t woken her up. When no sound other than soft, even breaths came from the room he opened the door further, resisting the urge to aww at the sight in front of him.

Melissa lay on her back, limbs out at all angles, with her biggest frog - Splat - snuggled into her side and the smaller blue one in her hand, dangling over the edge of her bed. Her quilt was bunched up around her waist, one foot poking out from underneath. She mumbled quietly and shifted, bringing her foot back under the quilt and knocking a third frog off the bed.

Draco crept into the room and picked the frog up, tucking it back under the covers. He pulled the quilt back up over the rest of her body, gently adjusting her arms into what was probably a much comfier position, before leaving to let her sleep a bit longer. She’d nearly fallen asleep in her pasta the night before after they returned from their day out with Potter - Harry he reminded himself - and she’d probably be asleep for another hour.

So much for ‘lots and lots and lots of energies’.

The Floo chimed louder and more insistently this time and Draco cast a quick ‘Muffliato’ to keep it from waking the sleeping four year old.

Draco shivered as he entered the drafty kitchen, the cool air from the open window dancing over his bare chest, cursing himself and whatever possessed him to leave a window open in December.

He opened his Floo, ready to make excuses to his mother as to why he was up so late on a Monday, when Harry Potter’s head popped up in the flames.

“Potter!” Draco cried out in shock.

“How many times? Harry. I’m beginning to think you can’t pronounce it.”

“Harry then. Why are you firecalling me? How are you firecalling me - it’s a warded connection.”

He looked sheepish for a moment, the expression warped by the flickering flames. “I got Mrs Wittle to give me the password, told her I’d forgotten it.”

“We could make a Slytherin and a politician out of you get - tricking an old woman and avoiding
questions all in one go. Why are you firecalling me?"

“I-er-wanted to talk a bit more about tomorrow?” It was more of a question than an answer, but Draco rolled his eyes and opened the Floo to allow Harry to step through.

He quite literally fell out of the Floo, sending up a cloud of black soot - how the hell did his fireplace end up so dirty? - and crashed into Draco’s chest.

“Fuck!” Draco winced as Harry shouted right into his ear, coughing on the soot and trying to draw into his lungs despite the rather heavy weight on his chest.

“Falling for me already Potter?” He rasped out eventually, letting his head fall back on to the cold kitchen tiles.

Harry laughed, which quickly dissolved into a coughing fit. “Isn’t it a bit chilly for sleeping half naked?”

He blushed, suddenly conscious of every bit of his bare skin that Harry was touching.

“Draco?” A small voice drifted into the room from the hallway.

He threw his arm out, fingers scrambling on the soot covered tiles as he tried to find his wand. “Stay there for a minute, sweetheart!” He called out.

“‘Kay!”

He eventually found his wand and pushed Harry off him, wincing at the state of his usually pristine white kitchen floor. He waved his wand, vanishing the soot that was still drifting in the air and siphoning off the layer that still covered the pair of them. He shook his head, sending more soot over his shoulder and the floor, like some sort of deadly dandruff.

A quick assessment of the kitchen reassured him that it was no longer a health hazard and he padded out into the hall, where Melissa sat on the stairs, Splat hanging loosely from her fingers as she rubbed tired eyes.

“Up please.” She lifted her arms up, brown eyes looking up at him imploringly.

Draco cast another cleaning charm at his hair before scooping her up in his arms. She buried her head into his neck, cold nose making him shiver.

“Break-fust?” She asked, voice muffled as Draco made the short trip back to the kitchen.

Harry still stood awkwardly by the fireplace, a small dusting of soot around his feet. “Morning Lissy.”

Her head shot up, smacking into Draco’s jaw, tiredness suddenly gone. “Harry!” She squealed.

She looked confused for a moment. “Where’s Teddy?”

“He’s with his grandma today, but I’m sure she’d be happy to let him come over if you want him to.”

She nodded so vigorously that Draco was surprised her head didn’t fall off and he refrained from admonishing Harry for inviting people into his home.

...
One firecall, two burnt pieces of toast and a small reunion later, four of them sat around the table in the kitchen.

Teddy and Melissa were squished together on one seat, a plate of toast balanced between them as they poured over a pop-up book.

“What are your plans for today?” Harry asked, spooning far too much sugar into his tea.

“Putting Christmas decorations up and hoping Butch doesn’t eat them.” He took a sip of his own tea - sugar free thank you very much - mouth curving into a smile as two heads popped up over the book.

“But dec-rating day is on 10! Mrs Wittle’s birthday. Dec-rating is her bestest thing!” Melissa frowned, looking at her advent calendar, which was propped up against the sugar pot. “It’s only 4!”

“Calm down, silly.” He laughed. “We’ll still be going to help Mrs Wittle decorate on the 10th, but I thought we should put our decorations up today to practice.”

“Tinsel?” Teddy asked, wiping crumbs off his face.

“We have tinsel, yes.”

Satisfied, the pair turned back to the pop up book.

“I didn’t-l-we,” Harry stammered. “We can go if you want. Decorating for her first Christmas in a real home should be special - I don’t want to indrude.”

Draco shook his head, draining the last bits of tea out of his cup. “Your name is on the papers too. As much as you seem to want to ignore it, it means something. You’re stuck with us. If you don’t join in with traditions now, when will you? You can’t play a part our little ‘family’ if you don’t get involved.”

Harry sighed. “If you insist.” But his cheeks were flushed and there was a tiny smile playing on his lips as he sipped at his tea and avoided Draco’s gaze,

•••

Once Draco and Melissa had changed out of their pyjamas, Harry and Draco began hauling bags of decorations out of the loft.

To Harry’s surprise, many of them were muggle, including the tree.

“You have a plastic muggle Christmas tree.” He said and Draco handed down a bulging box that was held together by several metres of duct tape.

“Nice to see your glasses are working.” Came the muffled reply, followed by several sneezes.

“But why?”

“I have changed since school Potter. You of all people should know this. “ his tone was hard and slightly hurt, making Harry feel a rather large pang of regret.

“I’m perfectly entitled to whatever sort of Christmas tree I want. I don’t need you to -“

“I’m sorry.” Harry blurted out, cutting off what would have probably been the start an argument.
Draco’s head shot up in surprise and he cursed as he smacked it on the hatch door.

“Little ears!” Harry reminded him with a snigger.

“Prat. I never expected to hear those words directed towards me, allow me some surprise.”

“Why wouldn’t I apologise to you? I had no right to say or imply that about you.”

Draco gave him a half shrug. “I overreacted. Besides, it’s my fault you have those preconceived notions of me - I was a right bastard at school.”

He pulled another bag down from the loft and handed it to Harry before stepping down the ladder. With a quick wave of his wand, the ladder folded itself up and the hatch locked behind it. “Forget it, let’s go downstairs.”

They levitated the bags downstairs between them, making their way towards the living room where Teddy and Melissa were playing with Butch the cat.

The three of them looked up as the decorations were floated into the room, Butch deciding it was the perfect time to attempt to scale Draco’s leg.

Harry laughed so hard his levitation charm failed, causing the bags to plummet before he stopped them with a cushion charm, as Butch tried to climb Draco’s leg, claws dangerously close to his bits.

Melissa and Teddy soon joined in, rolling around on the couch as Draco did his best to detach the cat from his jeans.

Several minutes of breathless laughter later, Butch wandered off, tail in the air and a chunk of Draco’s jeans still attached to one paw.

“Furry devil.” The irritated blond muttered, but his mouth was twitching and Harry knew he found it at least slightly amusing.

***

Bags were opened and their contents strewn across the carpet creating what looked like a festive bomb site.

The second the two adults had stood the tree upright the children had attacked it with a multitude of decorations, from muggle to magical.

There were the standard, shiny red and gold baubles that appeared to be exactly the same in both worlds. (Draco insisted their was a difference, but Harry couldn’t see it) One particularly large one had ended up in Butch’s possession and the cat was currently batting it around the living room into everyone’s ankles and under everyone’s feet.

There were the slightly eccentric Wizarding decorations, including the genuine fairy-dust-fairy-lights. They included a snowman who’s hat spun around a random intervals, a robin that would detach itself from the tree and take flight and, most strangely of all, a ghost version of Santa.

It was a classic, must-have Wizarding decoration apparently but Harry found it rather creepy.

And then there were the glass decorations. They were layered with several protective charms to stop them breaking and to allow the children to hang them up without worry. Each one was hand crafted and there was 20 of them, each one a gift from Narcissa from every Christmas since he was born.
Harry’s personal favourite was the green tinted penguin one.

It feature two of the majestic birds, heads curled towards each other, the tips of their beaks just brushing. Their glassy, webbed feet were millimetres from touching, only separated by a scrawny yet adorable grey chick. It’s much smaller beak was angled towards the right, gazing up at its parents, tiny wings spread ever so slightly. It had been the first one Draco had ever received.

When the children were satisfied with their decorating, Draco lifted Melissa to place the star on top, Teddy having been distracted by a large biscuit to avoid an argument.

They stood back to admire their handiwork, Butch hovering behind them.

The tree was leaning towards the right, just a little bit and it’s lower branches sagged under the weight of so many ornaments, given that the little ones could only reach so far. One section of the tree was sparsely decorated and many branches had more than one decoration perched on them.

It was perfect.

•••

Draco pulled a final box out of the last bag, the other having been folded away in the loft. He knelt down by Melissa on the carpet, murmuring her name to get her attention.

“T have a bit of an early Christmas present for you.” He said, handing over the box. She stared intently at the box for a minute or two, sounding out the words on the front.

“My-knee treeeeeee.” She said slowly. Draco nodded encouragingly. She had only started primary school this September and he was rather impressed she had managed to read the box.

“Mini tree!” She frowned. “Why’s it mini? Who shrinked it?”

“It’s mini because it’s yours to keep in your room.”

She fell quiet, staring at the box. Suddenly she threw herself at Draco, hugging him tightly. “Thank you!”

She pulled back, staring at the box in awe. “I’ve never had my own trees to decorate before.” She said, her voice quiet.

“Well now you do.”

•••

With assistance from a very eager Teddy, they managed to select the best decorations out of the ones remaining to hang on Melissa’s little tree.

It was an odd looking thing, as Melissa had insisted that even the broken ornaments needed a place to go, so it was a strange mix of dented baubles and headless figures.

On top on the tree sat a green, amphibious angel, which Harry had quickly transfigured when they realised they had no other star.

As he watched Draco help Melissa balance the frog-angel on top of the tree, Teddy on his hip, he thought that maybe it wasn’t so bad, being stuck with Draco Malfoy.
Harry shot up in bed, chest heaving as his nightmare faded. The image of Sirius’ cheerful, smiling face - topped with a crooked red paper hat - morphing into the cold, undead one of an inferi lingering at the forefront of his mind as he came to his senses.

A cold sweat chilled his skin, soaking the unfamiliar sheets bunched up around his waist. As he slowly came back to himself, the last vestiges of the dream slipping away, he could hear voices coming from outside the door and the clattering of dishes.

He was still at Draco’s, he remembered. He can’t quite remember who had suggested it, only that it had involved the visit from the social worker today.

The sheets were softer than his own and the quilt was a deep blue, with small clusters of silver sequins stitched at random across the material. It was much more...regal than his own slightly ratty and worn quilt at home, which was a simple red.

The room was decorated very plainly, with white walls and blue accents, a stark contrast to the cluttered walls of his own room. It was strangely calming when combined with the tinsel that Teddy had insisted on draping over every available surface.

The voices outside his door stopped and Draco and Melissa suddenly burst into the room, a tray with breakfast dishes wobbling in Draco’s hands.

“We made you break-fust!” The girl shouted gleefully, bouncing up onto the bed. Harry raised a questioning eyebrow, finding it difficult to imagine Draco Malfoy making him breakfast in bed, despite the strange sort of friendship they’d struck up over the years. “Oh?”

“She insisted.” Was all Draco said, but there was a small Christmas tree shape in the foam of his coffee that he was quite certain Melissa had nothing to do with.

... After Harry had dressed back into the clothes he had worn yesterday and Melissa had dug a jigsaw out of a box under the bed in the spare room, he and Draco finally sat down to talk.

“This is going to be the longest conversation we’ve ever had.” Draco remarked after they had sat in silence for several minutes, interrupted only by the occasional mumble from Melissa in the living room.

Harry found himself laughing and Draco seemed to relax.

“What’s the plan for today?”

“You don’t seem like the planning type.” Draco remarked idly, fingers twisting on the handle of his
cup. “One of my best friends is a social worker and I’ve talked so many adopting parents through what they can expect with the social worker visits, so I don’t know why I’m finding it so difficult to explain it to you and why I’m so damn nervous.”

Impulsively, Harry reached across the table and covered Draco’s hand with his own, squeezing it gently.

“Breathe. I don’t think you have anything to worry about - you’re taking brilliant care of her, you both adore each other and no sane person can look at you and call you a bad parent.”

Draco gave him a shaky smile. “I think I’m more nervous about them taking one look at my arm and taking her as far away from me as possible.”

“I’m still an Auror, even if I’m on injury leave. I’d have them arrested and investigated before they could say ‘Quidditch.’” Harry replied sharply, hand tightening on Draco’s. “You’ve changed since our school days. If that mark was any sort of reflection on your personality I wouldn’t have testified at your trial, I wouldn’t be sat here today and most importantly, you would never have been able to come close to adopting Melissa.”

Draco flushed. “I suppose, though no one would want to be the person to take a child away from the Saviour.”

Harry frowned. “I mean it. They have no reason to take Melissa away, regardless of me being here.”

Draco gave his a disbelieving look and Harry quickly changed the subject.

“So today then. What specifically will they be looking at?”

“They’ll want to check how she’s settling in, see how well she’s being looked after, make sure she’s living in suitable conditions etcetera.” He glanced down briefly at their hands. “Probably most importantly at the moment, they’ll be looking at the relationship between the parents, to ensure the child is living in a stable home. Obviously, a social worker can’t know the ins and outs of a relationship from an hour or so with the couple, especially in a planned visit, but if they have any sort of concern, they will conduct random visits within the next few weeks, on top of the scheduled ones.”

“What sort of questions will they ask?”

“They usually ask about the length of the relationship and the potential of biological children - obviously not a problem for us - because there have been so many cases of couples breaking up and putting the kid back in care or couples discovering they’re going to have a biological child and suddenly not wanting an adopted one anymore. It’s far more common in the Wizarding world purely because of the importance we place on blood.” Draco still refused to look at him, his words sounding rehearsed, like he’d said them a thousand times - although given what his job was, he probably had. “We should probably tell them that we’ve been together in secret for over 2 years, but we have long-term plans.”

Harry nodded slowly, squeezing Draco’s hand again. “Will they ask about our jobs, income?”

“Jobs - yes, especially due to the nature of yours. Income, probably not, given that we are well known for our riches.”

“They’ll ask Melissa questions too, won’t they? She’ll be okay though, right? She seemed to warm up to Teddy and me quick quickly.”
Draco laughed, a fond smile on his face. “She’ll definitely be fine. She’s a very friendly child, which is quite surprising considering how she started life. She’ll have no problem answering their questions.”

At that moment Melissa shouted from the living room, “Finished!” She came flying in moments later, grabbing their still-joined hands and pulling them into the living room with unexpected strength.

She pointed proudly at the jigsaw - a bouquet of flowers in a small, transparent vase - bouncing and beaming as she did so. “Do you have any more please?”

Draco nodded, summoning a few more boxes from somewhere up stairs. He pulled two particular ones out of the pile. “These two move when you finish them.”

Her eyes lit up and she carefully moved her completed one out of the way before she tipped the pieces of another onto the carpet. She rescued a piece that has bounced under the couch and sat down again.

“Easily pleased.” Draco murmured as he sunk down onto the couch, pulling Harry with him. He drew his feet up underneath him, elbow on the arm of the couch, hand supporting his head as he watched Melissa piece the puzzle together.

“They’ll ask you about her allergies too, and her hearing aids. She’s allergic to 4 potion ingredients - armadillo bile, rosehip, knotgrass and occamy eggshells. She’s also allergic to walnuts, fish and has had reactions to cows milk in the past, but we believe she’s grown out of that one, as she accidentally ate chocolate with dairy in two weeks ago and didn’t have a reaction. She has monthly appointments regarding her allergies and separate ones for her hearing. She used to have weekly speech therapy lessons when she first got her hearing aids, because she hadn’t learnt how to talk, but she only goes every two months now, because she can speak almost perfectly now, as you can see.”

Harry nodded in understanding. “Rosehip, armadillo bile, knotgrass, occamy shells, walnuts, fish and cows milk.” He glanced at Melissa, who had begun to sing something under her breath. “It’s a muggle hearing aid isn’t it? How does it work with magic?”

“There’s very little electric stuff inside it, unlike a muggle phone. They are battery powered and don’t need as much energy as, say, a remote control car, so they don’t react too badly with magic. They are surprisingly resilient too, for some reason they don’t succumb to magic like phones and cameras do. They’re fine here, because there isn’t much concentrated magic, but if she was to enter Malfoy Manor, they’d short circuit because the wards reach every inch of the property.”

“I didn’t know you were so familiar with muggle technology. And I mean that in the nicest way possible!” He hurried to correct himself.

Draco only laughed quietly. “I know you did and I don’t blame you for being surprised - Draco Malfoy, pureblood poster-boy, knows all about how muggle hearing aids work.” His fingers drummed against his leg and he seemed lost in thought.

They were startled by a knock on the door. Draco jumped up, waving his wand and shooting off cleaning spells, vanishing dust and stray balls of cat hair off the sofas. “I forgot the time!” He muttered, straightening cushions. “I didn’t realise it was so late.” He turned to Harry, “What are you waiting for? Go open the door!”

Harry got up, leaving Draco to his cushions and answered the door to a short man with thinning grey hair.
“Good day!” He greeted Harry cheerily, leaning forward eagerly, leaving Harry fearing he would topple over into the flower pot by the door.

Harry welcomed him in and the man stepped inside, glancing at the landscape paintings that hung in the hallway. He led him to the living room, where Draco had returned to his seat, now clutching his most likely cold coffee, and Melissa was still working on her jigsaw.

“Mr Malfoy, good morning. And little Melissa, how are you?”

Melissa gave him a smile. “It’s Lissy. I’m okay, look at my jigsaws!” The man gave suitably impressed noises as Lissy pointed out different parts of the completed jigsaw and the incomplete one.

“What’s your name?” She asked.

“My name is Bernard Jones, but you can call me Bernie, Lissy.”

She gave him another grin and returned to her jigsaws.

The man sat down on the other sofa and pulled out a set of papers from his pocket. He conjured a quill and ink pot and set them on his knee as Harry returned to his seat next to Draco, sliding a hand onto Draco’s bare ankle. Draco gave him a weak smile, which Harry returned with a reassuring grin.

Already, Bernie was jotting things down on his papers. “Now, gentlemen, I’d like to ask you a few questions. If I may call you by your first names?”

They nodded.

“Good, good. Now, there’s nothing to worry about, you know, this is just standard practice. I’ve done a little bit of background research and I feel confident that there will be no issues.” He dipped his quill into the ink again.

“Right, how has she been settling in?”

Draco answered. “Perfectly fine. She was ready to come and live here for weeks before we signed off the adoption papers. She seems to enjoy having more space to herself and she has been eating and sleeping fine.”

“Likes waking us up early, though.”

Bernie chuckled. “I have four of my own, I know all about the 5am wake up calls. I assume you are keeping up with all her medical appointments and catering to her allergies?”

They both nodded and Draco answered again. “Her next hearing appointment isn’t until early January, they’re rather busy this month, but there’s a newer model they want to try, one that has a higher resistance to magic.”

“Excellent news. And the speech therapy? I presume that it isn’t a priority now that she is speaking, and quite well at that?”

Draco nudged Harry with his toes and he hastened to reply.

“It’s still important, but her appointments are only every two months now, since her speech is much improved.”
“And how are you two doing? I must admit, I was quite surprised when I saw the two of you had adopted a child, I wasn’t aware you were together.”

“We’re getting used to it, but it isn’t too much of a change. We have my godson around quite a bit and we both spend time at the orphanage. It’s not the same as having Teddy over some times, but we aren’t having any trouble - it’s going well.”

Bernie nodded, turning over the page. “Wait until the teenage years! You’ll take that all back!”

Draco removed one of his hands from his cup and reached for Harry’s, linking their fingers. “We are both very public figures and we decided to keep our relationship quiet, to allow us to build a relationship without the scrutiny of the media. We’ve both always wanted children and we made the decision to adopt several months ago.”

“And future children? Obviously biology doesn’t allow you to have children of your own, but would you adopt more children in future, or perhaps use a surrogate?”

“At the moment I don’t think Draco and I will use a surrogate when there are already so many children in care. We have my godson, who will most likely come to live with us in a few years when Andromeda gets too old to look after him and we might adopt in future, if we want to expand our family.”

Bernie muttered to himself and continued to write.

“Schooling. Are you home schooling her or does she attend a Wizarding primary school?”

“She is enrolled in a Wizarding primary school and has been going since September. She’s been allowed to stay off school until January to allow her to adjust to life with us, but she still receives worksheets from the school with letters to us explaining what has been taught and telling us what events are coming up, like the Christmas fair in a week or so.”

“Brilliant, do you have some of the worksheets?” Draco summoned them from the kitchen and handed them to Bernie. He read through them and wrote a few more things down.

“Now Harry, there is one thing I am a tiny bit concerned about. Your job. I know you are currently on leave - and Draco, you are now working part time - but it is the nature of your job that has me concerned. You work as an Auror and you have quite a history of injuries. This is your most serious to date, correct?”

Harry nodded. “Usually, I only get a few scratches and very minor injuries, but we had an issue with one of the new recruits. He didn’t do a complete frisk search when we arrested one of the criminals and they managed to get hold of their extra wand and curse me.”

“Can you confidently say that your job won’t cause any disruption to the family?”

“It is extremely rare for an Auror to die on the job, especially as we’ve come so far in medicine over the last decade. There’s some upheaval at the moment because we are rounding up the last few of the unconvicted death eaters, but there are a very small number left and I have requested to be taken off all cases that involve death eaters to ensure this doesn’t happen again.”

“Very reassuring.” He folded up some of the papers and shrunk them down to go into his pockets. “I have a few questions for Lissy herself, but then I will be off.”

The girl looked up at her name, watching Bernie closely as he knelt down next to her. “I’m going to ask you some questions, alright?”
“Kay.”

“Do you like living here?”

Lissy beamed. “Yep! Draco always makes us breakfast and I get to have my own room and there’s space for all my froggies and I can play with Butch the cat!”

“How did you get the bruises on your arm?” He gestured his quill at her arm, where the sleeves of her jumper had ridden up, showing purple bruises.

“We went ice-skating and I fell over and so did Harry and he said a naughty word that Draco said I’m not allowed to say.” She giggled as Harry turned bright red.

“Why didn’t you use bruise ointment?” The question was directed at Harry and Draco this time and Harry, recalling the list of allergies Draco had told him and several incidents with a very clumsy Teddy, answered.

“Standard child bruise ointment contains rosehip, which she is allergic to. We haven’t bought the rosehip free version yet, but we plan on stocking up on it in future.”

Satisfied, Bernie stood and shook hands with the two men. “I shall floo to arrange a further meeting, but I believe that may be the last one, you are obviously providing a good home for her. I hope you have a good day, gents.” He gave Lissy a wave as Draco led him to the door.

The door clicked shut and Draco returned to the living room, practically throwing himself onto the sofa. “That went better than I expected.” He murmured, his head coming to rest on Harry’s shoulder.

“I told you that you had nothing to worry about.”

“I know, but I was expecting him to care more about who we were than he did. It’s rather strange, being treated as a perfectly normal, average person.” He yawned.

“I wouldn’t call you a perfectly normal, average person.” Harry said, laughing as Draco pinched his side.

He yawned again, raising a hand to rub his eyes. Harry nudged him. “Sleep for a bit, she had you up at the crack of dawn again didn’t she? I’m perfectly capable of watching her.”

Draco nodded in agreement, already dozing on Harry’s shoulder.
Harry trudged into his living room, plate of toast in hand, and crashed straight into Hermione, who had just stepped out of the Floo.

“Hermione!” He cringed as a slice of toast clung to her Weasley jumper for several seconds before landing at their feet.

“Harry. It’s nice to see that you’re alive, since you haven’t even owled us since you got injured!”

The Floo flared to life again and Ron stepped out. “I told you he was fine, ‘Mione.”

She glared at the side of his head as he helped himself to some of Harry’s toast.

“I’d also like to know why Patrick from DOCW was telling me to congratulate you and Draco Malfoy on adopting your first child together?”

“Sit down, I’ll make some more tea.” Harry handed Ron his plate of toast, vanished the slice on the floor and returned to his kitchen.

I can’t believe I forgot to tell them he thought, cursing himself as he waited for the kettle to boil. Shame and guilt knotted his insides as he stirred the tea and removed the teabags. They were his best friends and they told each other everything, he had no excuse for leaving them in the dark when he’d told Andromeda several days ago.

He returned to the living room and sat down, doing his best to avoid the crumbs Ron had managed to blanket the couch with. “I guess I got a bit distracted over the past few days, I really should have flooed as soon as I got out of St Mungo’s.”

“Why didn’t you tell us you were dating Malfoy? You know we don’t care that you’re bisexual and even if we aren’t on the best of terms with him, we would have still been supportive.” Hermione sounded hurt and wore a small frown. His guilt intensified. Angry Hermione he could handle, upset Hermione made him feel like the worst person in the world.

“We know he’s changed, mate, and as long as you’re not going out with Voldemort, we don’t care who you’re with - you’re a grown man, you can make your own decisions.”

“We aren’t dating.”

Hermione looked sceptical. “So you expect us to believe that you accidentally adopted a child.”

“Er... Yeah?”

Ron rolled his eyes. “It’s honestly not surprising, knowing your luck and your history with Malfoy. You’re still obsessed with him - you mention him every other week!”
“I don’t talk about him that much!” Harry protested.

“You do.” They replied in unison.

“It’s always Malfoy this, Malfoy that. ‘I saw Malfoy buying stuffed animals on Monday, what do think they’re for?’” Ron’s impression of Harry’s voice was surprising accurate and had Hermione snorting into her teacup.

“What was it last time?” She asked Ron, laughing.

“Malfoy was in Gladrags the other day. He never shops there!”

“Fine, fine.” Harry sighed. “Maybe I do talk about him a lot. But that had nothing to do with it! It was the potion I was on, it was really strong and I didn’t know what I was doing, the woman was going on about him being a death eater and I just jumped in.”

“I still don’t understand how that led to you adopting a child.”

“I had a cut on my hand and my blood got onto the paper. I had no idea until Draco told me when I woke up.”

“Only you, eh?” Ron elbowed him playfully.

“Honestly Harry! How do you even get into these situations?”

Harry relaxed, comforted by their playful digs at him. He still felt guilty for keeping them in the dark and Hermione was probably still hurt, but it obviously was quite the end of the world.

“Are you finally going to use this as an opportunity to ask him out?” Ron asked.

Harry choked on his tea and Ron thumped him on the back unnecessarily hard. He swatted Ron’s hands away and flicked him for good measure.

“What?”

“Don’t play dumb Harry, we aren’t blind. We’ve suspected that you’ve had a thing for him for a while, your reaction to this situation only confirms it. You’d be trying everything to get rid of him if you still hated him, but you’re pretty relaxed about it. I assume you’ve spent the last few days with them, which is why you haven’t answered any of our floo calls?”

“I had to stay, they had a social worker visit and both parents had to be there!” He ran a hand through his hair. Besides, Harry thought I think the last thing on Draco’s mind is a relationship at the moment.

“So you’ve accepted the role of parent already? Does this mean mum will be making extra jumpers this year?”

“I doubt Draco will want to wear a Weasley jumper.”

“He let small children paint on his face at that Ministry fundraiser last year, mate. I reckon he’d wear a jumper if the kid asked him to.”

“What’s their name?”

“Melissa, but she prefers Lissy.” He smiled absentmindedly. “She definitely has him wrapped around her little finger.”
Hermione muttered something that sounded suspiciously like *seems like it’s not just him.*

“So when can we meet her?” She asked, brushing crumbs from the corner of Ron’s mouth.

“I’m not sure…” Harry replied hesitantly. “I don’t even know if Draco will want me to be around once he knows there won’t be anymore visits - he might not want her to get attached to you if he doesn’t intend to have anything to do with us later on.”

Hermione scoffed. “Don’t be ridiculous - he’s quite clearly letting you get attached to her and vice versa, getting rid of you would only hurt Melissa, which he won’t want. And as if I would let Malfoy keep us away from your child!”

Harry obviously didn’t hide his doubt as well as he thought he had, because she continued. “Ask him. You’d get so much further by just communicating with people. I think you’ll be surprised.”

With those words, she stood, glancing at the clock as she pulled Ron up with her. “We’ve got to go, we promised Bill and Fleur we’d babysit Victoire so they could go Christmas shopping.” She kissed him on the cheek.

“You better keep us updated next time you get injured, or we’ll hunt you down and drag you to St Mungo’s ourselves.” She threatened as she threw the Floo powder into the fireplace. She called our her destination and stepped into the flames.

Ron went to follow, but hesitated.

“Astoria will murder you if you don’t let her know you’re ok before you come back to work, I’d owl her as soon as possible.” He clasped him on the shoulder and followed his girlfriend through the floo.

***

Draco and Melissa jumped at the sound of the front door opening, followed by footsteps up the stairs.

Melissa lifted her head off Draco’s chest, where she had been snoozing since Draco had closed the book they had been reading. “Who’s it?” She murmured.

“I think it’s Astoria.” He replied. She often arrived unannounced and let herself in, revenge for Draco doing the same to her and walking in on her and her then-girlfriend. He shuddered slightly at the memory.

A few seconds later, a familiar head of blonde hair popped around the door. “How’s my favourite ex-fiancé today? And little Lissy of course.”

“I think it’s Astoria.” He replied with a grin. It had become their normal greeting since they had managed to persuade their families to end the betrothal contract after the war. His mother still clung to the hope that they would ‘come to their senses’, but he supposed he couldn’t have everything.

“Astoria!” Melissa shouted, suddenly wide awake. She hopped off the bed and ran to hug Astoria, who swung the girl around. “I’ve brought brownie mix again!” She staged whispered to Melissa.

Draco groaned as she took the shrunken box from her pocket and handed it to the girl, who cheered and ran out of the room. “She’s going to be bouncing off the walls. I swear you put something in that mix.”
Astoria smirked. “It wasn’t me who left them on the side in reach of tiny fingers last time.”

Draco scowled at her. “You weren’t the one who had to try and get 7 small children into bed. David had taken the day off too and Mrs Wittle had that horrible cold - I had to do it by myself!”

She only shrugged. “You chose to work with kids. Now come on lazy-bones, we are going to make brownies and discuss why you never told me that you’ve adopted Melissa with Harry.”

About an hour later, the three of them were sat on the carpet in the living room around a game of snakes and ladders.

Melissa had a smear of batter across her right cheek and her nose, as well as chocolate crumbs around her mouth. Astoria, being the big child she was, was in a similar state. A plate, empty save for a few minute crumbs, sat in between him and Astoria and had had brownies on it just seconds ago.

Draco himself still had half of his in his hand, but the other two had seemingly inhaled theirs. The rest were on the top most shelf in the kitchen, out of the way of hungry little hands.

“So Draco, care to tell me why you didn’t tell me that Melissa has two parents, rather than the one she was supposed to have?” Astoria rolled the die and moved her counter.

“We’ve been busy.” It was true - they’d barely had a spare minute since he’d adopted Melissa.

“You found time to whine at me about Harry when you were busy in sixth year, it’s a poor excuse.”

He rolled his eyes. “Fine, I wanted Harry to tell Weasley and Granger himself. If I told you, you’d be blabbing to Weasley before Harry could tell them in person. I’m pretty sure he hasn’t even spoke to them since he got injured, so I doubt they’re too thrilled with him anyway. It’d be worse if they found out from you.” He thought for a moment as he rolled the die and moved his counter up a ladder.

“How do you know about it?”

“One of Hermione’s friends from DOCW told her to pass on his congratulations for you two, said he’d heard about the adoption.”

Melissa rolled a six and took another go, which landed her on the longest ladder on the board.

“How do you feel about it, honestly?” Astoria asked, quieter this time.

“Annoyed, mostly, that things have been taken out of my control again, that I can’t seem to do anything without someone interfering.” He frowned at the board and moved his piece down a snake, which stuck its tongue out and hissed. “But it’s not too bad. Melissa enjoys spending time with him and Teddy.”

“And you enjoy spending time with him.” It wasn’t a question and to his horror, Draco could feel his cheeks heating up. “I knew you had a crush on him!”

“I don’t have a crush on him!” He hissed, but Astoria only cackled and moved her piece up a ladder.

Melissa rolled again and landed at the end. “I win!” She cheered and high-fived Draco.
“You know Lissy,” Astoria began slyly, “I think the winner should get another brownie, don’t you think?”
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Hermione and Ron will be meeting Melissa in the next chapter, so stay tuned. :)

After his conversation with Ron and ‘Mione the day before, Harry resolved to ask Draco about what would happen when the social worker visits were officially over. Would he still let Harry to visit? Would he want nothing to do with him? It had barely been a week, but he’d already become ridiculously attached to the small, frog-loving girl.

He also didn’t want to have to leave Draco. He’d done a lot of thinking last night and had come to the conclusion that maybe he was a teensy tiny bit attracted to Draco. He wasn’t going to act upon it, obviously. Draco had far too much on his plate without Harry trying to start a relationship with him.

Harry also valued their friendship. Scattered conversations at various fundraising events for orphanages over the years had led to a strange sort of half friendship - they would greet each other but hadn’t quite reached the stage where they exchanged Christmas cards. Now that they had been thrown together though, Harry was confident that he could call Draco his friend. He enjoyed their conversations and their friendly bickering, and if that was all he ever got, he’d be content.

*Are you sure?* A small, traitorous voice in the back of his mind said, one he personally called his ‘inner Hermione’. He quite firmly ignored it.

*If only young me could see me now* he mused. A few years ago, the idea of being even remotely friendly with a Slytherin, much less Draco Malfoy, would have been horrifying, but Harry liked to think that he’d grown up since then.

***

Draco was just helping Melissa put on her left glove when Harry tumbled through the floo, sending up another cloud of black soot.

“For Merlin’s sake.” He muttered, vanishing the soot from the air and Harry’s clothes.

“Thanks.” the other said distractedly, wiping a thick black layer of dirt and ash off his glasses and onto his grey jumper.

“You’re a mess Potter.” He aimed another spell at him, this time one designed for removing stains off wool.

“You’ll have to teach me that spell.” Harry gave him a crooked grin and handed over a small brown cake box. Draco lifted the lid, almost moaning aloud at the heavenly smell that floated out of the box. Inside were two cupcakes, topped with a swirl of white frosting and little sugar decorations.

One had a black top hat, trimmed with a piece of red strawberry lace, two little chocolate chips for eyes, a triangle of orange icing for an nose and more chocolate chips to form a smile. The second had three chocolate buttons going down the centre, a red and green scarf shaped piece of icing at the top and two shards of chocolate sticking out at the sides for arms.
Together, they formed an unbearably adorable snowman that almost looked too good to eat.

“Ooh! ‘Nowman!” Melissa gasped, peering into the box over Draco’s arm from her vantage point on the stairs. “Can I eat his head?”

Draco laughed at Harry’s poorly-concealed horror, more than used to the violent-yet-innocent statements and queries children made.

“Where did you get these?”

“Molly - Ron’s mum - likes to practice her Christmas baking early. Her kitchen looks like something blew up in it. She went a bit overboard - Charlie’s partner is lactose intolerant, so she’s trying out every recipe she can to make it perfect for them.” He pulled another box out of his pocket and unshrunk it. “I’ve got biscuits too.”

“Are you sure she’d want me to have it?”

“She insisted on me taking them specifically for you two. I told her this morning when I went over for breakfast about Lissy. She’s also expecting you over for dinner tomorrow evening, but I told her that might be a bit too much.”

Draco gently batted Melissa’s fingers away from the cakes. “I’ll think about it. Who will be there?”

“Not many, there’s usually a lot of us on Sundays, but there was an incident with testing out a new product in George’s shop and half of his employees are still recuperating, so some of them are helping out over the weekend. Bill’s daughter will be there, she’s the same age as Teddy and Teddy will be there too.”

Draco nodded. “Were the cakes the only reason you came, or do you just enjoy destroying my clean kitchen?”

Harry looked sheepish. “I’m sorry about the kitchen. But there is a reason I came.” He offered one of the biscuits to Melissa, who looked to Draco for permission before taking a snowflake shaped one out and taking a very large bite out of it. “I go back to work tomorrow and I wanted to, y’know, spend my last day off with you two. And check when the next date for the social worker visit.” He was avoiding Draco’s eye, fiddling with the lid on the box.

“Ok.” Draco said simply, standing up and closing the cupcake box. Melissa whined in protest. “We can eat them later.”

He returned his attention to Harry. “We’re heading to the Christmas market in Mystic Ally.” It was a smaller street just off Diagon, home to the majority of the divination shops in England. It always smelt of lavender and incense and everything was overpriced, but it’s Christmas market was the best, so Draco could put up with the nauseatingly overpowering scent of cheap incense for an hour or so.

“You can come with us if you like?”

Harry nodded and transfigured his jacket into a heavier coat. Draco picked Melissa up, brushing stray crumbs out of her scarf. “I can apparate is from here.”

Harry took his hand and they apparated.

•••

Melissa wandered a few feet in front of them, zipping between stalls, but constantly glancing back to make sure the two of them were behind her. Witches and wizards whispered amongst themselves as
they passed, but the pair were more than used to it and ignored the glares and mutterings.

Harry already had a bag full of small gifts for various Weasley’s and was currently standing at another stall enquiring about a set of penguin gloves. He had steered clear of the cakes stalls, telling Draco it was treason to eat baked goods that weren’t made by Molly Weasley.

Having tasted one of the biscuits, Draco could see why.

Draco had only purchased a few things - a book for Melissa, a pair of earrings and a matching bracelet for his mother and a box of Astoria’s favourite fudge. He had spotted a few small things that he wanted to get for Melissa as part of her Christmas present, but with the small child almost constantly watching him, there was no way he’d be able to get them now.

Harry stuffed his newly purchased gloves into another bag and joined Draco once more. “Why doesn’t the hearing aid short circuit when you apparate, but it does when you floo?” He asked, digging through his bags in search of Merlin-knows-what.

“There’s a higher concentration of magic with flooing. Without floo powder, they have relatively similar concentrations, which won’t cause problems with the hearing aid, but Floo powder increases the concentration. It contains magic and builds up within the floo network, so the hearing aid short circuits almost instantly. Apparation is also quicker than flooing, so it isn’t exposed to magic for as long.”

Harry nodded in understanding. “What is it that makes it so resilient to magic?”

“Healers aren’t quite certain, but they do believe that the thick protective plastic is one of the main reasons why - muggle electricity doesn’t go through plastic, so they have theorised that the plastic blocks most of the magic from getting to the important components inside.”

Harry nodded again, but this time he appeared to be deep in thought.

“So do you reckon the Cannons could secure a top three finish this season?” He asked, changing the subject quite rapidly.

Draco scoffed. “Not a snowball’s chance in hell. Have you seen their abysmal attacking formation? And they’ve got Stones back as keeper again - they did surprisingly well after his injury. But do you know who’ll definitely start climbing up the table? The Magpies. “

“Oh of course you’d say that!”

They continued their rather heated debate over the quidditch league, while keeping a watchful eye over their 4 year old.

***

“Froggy!” Melissa pointed at a stall on their right, where a very familiar toad sat upon a box, nestled in a worn and faded Gryffindor scarf.

“Trevor’s a toad actually.” Neville Longbottom said, leaning his forearms on the table and watching Melissa as she stared, transfixed at the toad.

“Can I touch him please?”

“You might want to check with your parents first.”
Melissa turned around, bouncing on the balls of her feet, hope written all over her face.

“Go on.”

Longbottom’s head shot up at the sound of his voice. “Malfoy! Harry!” He looked over at Melissa, who was gently stroking the gap between Trevor’s oversized eyes with a careful finger. “So this is your little girl. Luna told me all about her yesterday. I must say Harry, you certainly get yourself into some situations.” He laughed and offered Melissa some strangely coloured treat. “Trevor loves these.”

She took it and held it out to the toad, squealing in delight as his tongue darted out to take it.

“Malfoy.” He turned his gaze onto Draco and he could suddenly see why so many people feared the once clumsy and quiet boy. Gone was the pudginess in his face, revealing a sharp jaw, which housed a stubbly beard. His eyes were hard when they had crinkled with laughter just seconds earlier. Draco was quite horrified to realise that he actually found Longbottom somewhat attractive.

“I’ll be watching you - I still don’t quite trust you.” And then the war hero persona was gone, replaced by what Draco assumed was normal ‘Neville’. “Interested in buying any plants today? I have some wonderful cacti that double as a living defensive system.”

Draco declined politely, while Harry inspected strange looking orange vine that was growing around a stick that had been stuck into its pot.

Melissa gave Trevor one last pat on the head as they headed off, a forlorn look on her face. “Can we see Trevor again?”

Neville answered before Draco could even open his mouth. “Of course you can. I’ll be at Harry’s family’s house tomorrow, if you’re coming for dinner. I’ll bring one of his friends along too if you like.”

Draco couldn’t say no when faced with such optimistic faces.
Chapter 8

I have a terrible cold and if I’m not sneezing all over my screen, I’m asleep in front of it, so I apologise for the lateness of this chapter. Thank you for all the comments and kudos!

Melissa had spent all day talking about Trevor the toad.

The night before, she had hopped all the way up the stairs to bed and had requested that they read her Frog On A Log book. She had read it twice herself, sounding out the words slowly and carefully, beaming with pride when she pronounced and read them correctly, then insisted on Draco reading it to her three times before she fell asleep against his side.

Despite her later than usual bedtime, she was up and about as early as ever, jabbering on about the dinner Draco had agreed to yesterday.

Currently, she was sat at the kitchen table, swinging her legs and attacking a sheet of paper with her paints, while Draco washed the dishes left over from breakfast. He was washing them by hand, rather than using a spell. His mother called it a terrible habit, doing one’s dishes by oneself, but Draco found the repetitive and methodical motions calming.

He was interrupted by a tapping on his leg. Melissa stood to his right, cup held aloft. “Clean please?”

He took the cup and poured the brown-green water down the sink, wincing as it splashed back onto his face and several of his clean plates. He refilled it and handed it back. “Thank you.” She murmured before scrambling back onto her chair, splashing water all over the tiled floor.

“Can I see your picture?” He asked, leaning on the table, avoiding the wet paint splatters. Her eyes widened and she lunged over the table, arms barely reaching half way as she covered her picture. “No! ‘S not finished!”

He raised his hands in surrender. “Okay, but we have to leave soon and we still need to tidy this up, so if you want to finish it and show Harry, you’ll need to hurry up.”

She nodded, tongue poking out in concentration as she was drawn back to her painting, still hiding it from Draco. He chuckled and returned to his dishes.

•••

Draco apparated, Melissa holding his hand, and landed at the bottom of the Burrow’s garden path. The girl seemed to vibrate with excitement, squeezing his hand and holding her picture - which she hadn’t let him look at yet - to her chest.

The exterior of the Burrow had the same homely feeling that the orphanage had had when Draco had first visited, with its mismatched boots by the door, uneven windows and wandering chickens. It comforted him, but it wasn’t enough to subdue the rising doubt and fear in his chest.

Why was he doing this? Their families had hated each other for generations and while Draco no
longer held the dislike he once did for the family, he couldn’t say the same for them.

As far as he knew, this was all some elaborate scheme to humiliate him - he would walk through the door and straight into a Weasley prank - as some form of delayed revenge for the shit he’d given them over the years.

They were, however, Gryffindors and Draco didn’t think it was possible for them to come up with such a long winded and dramatic plot of revenge - they simply didn’t have the patience.

Harry had mentioned Fleur would be there. How would she react to him? He was, after all, the reason why her husband was affected with partial-lycanthropy and had been part of the group that had almost killed her while she was pregnant, near the very end of the war.

And George Weasley. Death Eaters had killed his twin, his other half - he wouldn’t even want to look Draco in the face.

Arthur Weasley had nearly been killed by Voldemort, had lost countless friends by the hands of other Death Eaters and had lost a child.

There was no way he could do this. It was a huge mistake. Draco’s fear overwhelmed him and he reached for Melissa, to apparate them far away, only to find that she was dashing up the path to knock on the door.

He cursed under his breath and hurried to follow her, stopping next to her just as Molly Weasley opened the door.

“Draco! Oh, it’s nice to see you.” She bent down to Melissa. “Oh don’t you look adorable!” She straightened out her green rain coat and opened the door wider.

“Come in, come in! Out of the cold. Harry’s in the living room.” She pulled a biscuit out of her apron, handed it to her and sent her off towards Harry with a pat on the back. She turned a sharp gaze onto him. “You young people, not an ounce of fat on any of you! At least you’re feeding your little one, she’s a precious little one, she is.” She gestured inside. “You too! I will feed you even if I have to tie you down!”

Draco followed her into the warmth of the house, not missing the lull in chatter as he walked in, removing his scarf.

“Draco, over here!” Surprisingly, it was Granger who had called him over. She was curled up on one of the sofas in the corner, Harry on the one adjacent and Weasley on the floor, Teddy in between his legs.

He sunk down on the couch next to Harry and was attacked by Melissa not seconds later as she leaned over him to thrust her painting in Harry’s face.

“Look! Look!”

“He can’t see it when it’s pressed against his face, sweetheart.”

She shuffled back and handed the painting over. “It’s a froggy family!”

The picture consisted of three different sized ovals, one small one and two bigger ones. They had black splodges for eyes and lines of a different shade of green for legs. They were sat on a blue pond and a bright yellow sun had been painted in the corner. At the bottom, Harry’s name had been printed in clumsy, 4 year old handwriting. The ‘r’s were backwards and the name was written on a
slant, but Draco couldn’t have been prouder.

“For you!” She said, uncharacteristically shy as she pushed it towards him. He could hear someone *aww* in the background as Harry thanked Melissa and hugged the little girl. She scrambled back onto Draco’s lap and hid her flushed face in his neck.

He rubbed her back reassuringly as she clung to his jumper, clearly overwhelmed by so many unfamiliar faces. The conversation had lulled again and Draco glanced up to see most of the Weasleys staring quite openly at him - Luna was sat on the floor with Weaslette and Neville, debating over a board game, the trio oblivious to the rest of the room.

Quite suddenly, everyone had something to busy them.

Another toddler ran across the room, white-blondé hair flying behind her as she dodged between family members. She practically attacked Teddy as she hugged him, knocking the wind out of Ron - he couldn’t call *all* of them Weasley - and crying “Teddy-Bear!”

A much calmer French woman followed behind her, scolding the child gently as she peeled her off Ron. She removed the coat from the girl’s shoulders and banished it, presumably to the coat rack, before kissing her cheek and fixing her with a stern look.

“Behave.” She nodded to Draco. “Eet eez nice to met you.”

She turned on her heel and disappeared into what Draco assumed was the kitchen, from the magnificent smells floating out from within.

The girl introduced herself as Victoire and pulled Teddy up off the floor, the shy boy surprisingly compliant.

“Can Lissy play too?” He asked Draco, tugging on his trousers.

“If she wants to.” He replied, secretly hoping she would refuse and he could keep using her as a sort of shield and avoid any awkward conversations. As he predicted, however, she scrambled down from his lap and followed the other two, disappearing from view a few moments later, which filled Draco with a sense of anxiety for several different reasons.

“She’s so small.” Granger murmured into her cup, staring after the trio. It was true - Melissa was almost 5, yet she was only just the same size as Teddy, who was slightly tall for his age, having inherited his father’s lankiness.

Draco felt compelled to answer her. “Malnutrition. It stunts her growth.”

Granger gasped quietly and Draco felt Harry stiffen besides him.

“Oh, I didn’t know! The poor thing.” She scowled suddenly and Draco was quite forcefully reminded of the slap she had given him in 3rd year. “I can’t understand how anyone can do that sort of thing to a child! The Ministry’s laws and procedures surrounding child cruelty are ridiculously lax - parents are sent off with a slap on the wrist and the child is handed back to them, then people are shocked when the child turns up in St Mungo’s or is found dead.” She fiddled with her mug, still scowling. “Of course, things are starting to improve - we have more social workers and a few recent cases have had actually involved prison sentences. Your donations have had quite an impact on the Child Welfare charity, you know.” She looked up at him now and the eye contact made him vaguely uncomfortable. “We may never be the best of friends Draco, but I can recognise that you have changed and I admire how you’ve turned your life around. I have a feeling we’ll be seeing a lot of each other in future.”
Then she grinned at him, insisted that he called her by her first name, dragged the other two men into the conversation and that was that.

***

The afternoon passed with out any incidents, aside from a small yet confrontational meeting on the way to the bathroom between him and Percy Weasley, and he soon found himself sat at the dining table next to Harry and Melissa with Hermione opposite him.

As the afternoon had passed, Draco had slowly relaxed, but there was also a steadily rising sense of guilt.

They had all been so welcoming, more welcoming than he deserved at least, and it made him feel sick when he thought about the way he had treated them in the past. It didn’t feel right to him, to be sat here with people he’d spent the majority of his life looking down his nose at as if they were old friends.

Melissa, on the other hand, was having the time of her life with her two new friends - Tina the toad and Victoire Weasley. They’d spent the afternoon giggling over who-knows-what and cradling Tina (Another one of Neville’s toads) and Trevor like a treasured artefacts. The flighty toads had lapped up the attention and Draco had sworn he had seen them smile.

As he was pulled into a conversation about muggle technology by a curious Arthur Weasley - who had been just as welcoming as Molly and Harry, much to his surprise - he found himself feeling that same homely feeling again, the same one he had felt at Hogwarts, at the orphanage.

Next to him, Melissa’s face lit up at the veritable mountain of peas in the dish in front of her, drawing a laugh from the table.

He reckoned he could handle the guilt he felt around the slightly overbearing, yet well-meaning family if it made Melissa so happy.
Today was Harry’s first full day back at work and while he loved his job, he was dreading it.

Yesterday, he had spent the morning at the office, signing off the paperwork Astoria and Ron had completed on their case, but as always, his return to work had brought with it an army of press. He’d fought his way through the atrium, signed the papers and got out of the Ministry as quickly as possible - a routine that had become something of a tradition for his first day over the years.

He was more than relieved to arrive at the Burrow, to relax in the familiar sofas and take in the familiar smell of Molly’s baking.

He was also pleasantly surprised to find the Weasley’s were so welcoming to Draco and Melissa. Having them there, especially Melissa with her adorable drawing, had helped to relieve some of the tension that his impending return to work was creating, but there was one thing that Draco had mentioned that had left him more tense than before.

Melissa had been *starved* when she was with her birth parents.

She had been neglected.

Her growth was stunted as a result.

It had uncomfortably reminded him of the health assessment he’d had to go through before he had officially become an auror. It had involved a lengthy conversation with a healer - sworn to secrecy - about his childhood, about how what his relatives had done to him was classed as abuse, the effect it had had on his development and growth.

It had hit far too close to home and had left Harry wanting nothing more than to protect Melissa from everyone and everything, which he wasn’t doing by returning to work.

Work was where he got injured and while the odds of death were small, he was known for defying the odds - it was sort of his thing. His next mission could be the last, something that had never really been at the forefront of his mind until now. He couldn’t give up his job, he loved his work, but he could suddenly see all the risks involved, far more clearly than before now he had Melissa to think about, which scared him.

It was all he could think about as he stumbled through the floo and weaved his way through the crowds in the corridors. He walked into the office he shared with the other 2 thirds of his auror trio, barely realising he’d made it there until Astoria was hefting a mountain of paperwork into his arms.

“You don’t get to laze about at home for a week without consequences!” She said in a sing-song
voice, laughing as Harry groaned. “Now, Nicola needed help with the paperwork authorising a new batch of polyjuice, so I’ll see you later!”

She practically bounced out of the room, leaving Harry alone in their office with the knowledge that they were probably going to be holed up in the very small potions supply closet for a while.

Ron staggered into the office, clutching at his leg. “Those damn Mystery workers!” He cursed. Attached to his leg was some sort of half-duck-half-niffler thing, claws buried in the material of his trousers as it attempted to reach his belt. “Harry! Good to see you, mate! Where’d Astoria wander off to?”

“Gone to help Nicola with the polyjuice forms.”

“But the polyjuice forms went out in September.” He groaned in realisation. “Not again. Last time it was the girl from the canteen - she wouldn’t serve me for a month after they split up!”

“Not all of us find our soulmates in school, Ron.” Ron’s face adopted the soppy grin that always followed a mention of Hermione and Harry rolled his eyes. “Fancy helping me with this paperwork?”

Ron snorted. “You’re on your own, I’ve been doing your share of the paperwork all week. You owe me lunch.” He peeled the duck-niffler off his calf, poking a threatening finger at it as its arms swung forward towards his watch. “Watch yourself, you tiny demon.”

He backed out of the door as the creature swung back and forth in his hand, presumably off to return the wayward creature.

Harry smiled, still worried and tense, but steadily feeling more comfortable.

***

Draco had decided to take Melissa on their long-awaited trip to the aquarium. She had been a million times with the orphanage, had seen and named every single fish in there, right down to the minnows, but she still lit up every time it was mentioned.

“Ready!” She called breathlessly, missing out the last two steps as she jumped down the stairs.

“Be careful on the stairs.” He admonished as he tied his shoes. She hummed in response.

“Can we go now? Please?”

He laughed and held a hand out to her. “We’ll apparate, ok?” The child nodded eagerly and took his hand.

They landed in an empty side street and were soaked immediately in the pouring rain.

“Run!” She giggled, setting off up the street, following the same route she’d followed a million times. Draco dashed after her, his much longer legs catching up with her much smaller ones in seconds.

They burst through the doors to the aquarium, rain water dripping into their eyes and all over the carpet in the reception. Melissa was breathless with laughter, doubled over, shoulders shaking. “We’re like fishies!”

Draco snorted, wiping water out of his eyes and peeling her raincoat off. “Let’s get you dry.”
A man from behind the reception desk hurried over. “We have a cloakroom where you can put your wet clothes - you aren’t the first to come in looking like drowned rats.”

They paid for their entry tickets and put their coats away. Draco dried them off with surreptitious drying charms and they made their way through to the fish.

Melissa’s excited babbling ceased the second they stepped into the first hall, mouth open and eyes wide as she stared in awe at the fish.

The tank arched upwards and over, creating a glass hallway behind which hundreds of fish swum around. It led into a circular room, where there were individual tanks of fish and a table with fish-shaped jigsaws in the centre. Past there was a much longer corridor, with separate rooms dedicated to specific breeds coming off.

It wasn’t the largest aquarium, but it was definitely Melissa’s favourite and they could (and had) spend hours there.

She currently had her face just millimetres from the glass and was pointing at a bright yellow, flat looking fish. “It looks like a ducky.” She whispered, breath fogging up the glass. She wiped at the moisture with her sleeve instantly, not wanting to miss a second of the ‘action’.

A ray glided along the sandy base of the tank and then swam higher, sliding over the glass next to Melissa’s face. It had a pure white underbelly and a tiny little face - it looked like a very friendly ghost and evidently, Melissa agreed, if her mumbles of “Ghosty” were anything to go by.

They continued on at a very slow pace through the first corridor as Melissa marvelled at every animal, beaming.

Draco didn’t exactly share the same fascination with aquatic creatures as Melissa, but he would spend as long as she wanted here, watching the sheer joy on her face and forgetting about the rest of the world for just a little while.
A longer chapter! More Harry and Draco action in this chapter, since there was very little in the last two.

“Are we going to see Harry today?” Melissa asked around a mouthful of toast. “We haven’t seen him for *ages*!”

“We saw him at the Weasley’s house on Monday. It wasn’t ages ago.” Draco smiled at her petulant look and dusted crumbs off her cheek. “But he said he would come over and help us decorate at the orphanage on his lunch break.”

“Yay!” She cheered, waving her slice of toast in the air and showering herself in crumbs. She took another bite, a pensive look replacing her smile. “Do you think Mrs Witty will have her special snowman biscuits?”

Draco knew perfectly well that Mrs Wittle - ‘Witty’ to Melissa - had already prepared her traditional snowman shaped bakes, having received a photo of them alongside her weekly letter. They were, after Astoria’s special brownie mix brownies and peas, Melissa’s favourite food and Draco often wished he possessed any sort of baking talent so he could make them for her more often than once a year.

“I think she might do.” He replied, hiding his grin behind his coffee mug as she cheered again, dancing her way to the sink with her empty plate. “Go and get dressed - there’s clothes on your bed - and then we can head over a bit early. You want to see Leo don’t you?”

She nodded vigorously and ran out of the kitchen.

•••

Melissa let go of his hand the second they landed on the damp front lawn of the orphanage and set off running up the path. In her arms she held onto the first frog teddy she had been gifted. It was quite big, about the same size as her face, and it was styled after a tree frog; bright green with wide orange eyes. It was her favourite, despite its slightly flat face, and she had quite appropriately named it Splat, after a little bit of help from Leo, who had given her the frog in the first place.

Draco often wondered where exactly her obsession with all things aquatic came from, whether it stemmed from that gift, or whether it came from something else entirely. That gift had been a starting point - every other gift she received from then on seemed to be related to frogs or fish, something which had always amused Mrs Wittle to no end.

Melissa knocked on the door, frog under her arm, waiting eagerly for the door to open. When it did, she launched herself at the boy on the other side.

“Leo!”

The teenager caught her in his arms and swung her around. “Hey, Lissy-Loo.”
She giggled at the nickname, arms around his neck as she hugged him tightly. “Missed-ed you!”

“I missed you too.” He looked up over Lissy’s shoulder. “Hi Draco!”

With Lissy still clinging to his neck, he turned around and walked into the building. “Terence is here too, remember the toddler with the ducks?”

Draco laughed. “How could we forget - accidental magic powerful to break through locking charms, got into the bathrooms all the time no matter what we used. Is he still duck mad?” Him and Melissa would make quite the pair if they got along well.

Leo let Melissa down as they entered the living room, where Mrs Wittle was already stacking shoe boxes full of decorations next to a bare tree. On the couch was a trio of three year olds - Jess, Nadia and Ralph - who had obviously been tasked with cleaning the dusty baubles. They had a packet of muggle cleaning wipes between them and were performing their job with a concentration Draco didn’t often see in small children. They wiped the dust and bits of dirt off the baubles and placed them in a separate box, counting them aloud as they did so.

Draco was certain 12 didn’t come after 9, but he didn’t correct them, too amused by their haphazard counting and careful handling on the ornaments.

“Happy Birthy-day!” Melissa hugged Mrs Wittle’s legs, nearly knocking the older witch over.

“Oh, hello dearie!” Mrs Wittle chuckled as she stooped to return the hug. “It’s nice to see you again, Lissy, it’s been very quiet around here with out you.”

There was a thundering on the stairs and several more children flooded into the living room, attacking him and Melissa with hugs.

Draco accepted the hugs - and wouldn’t his father just love this, his pureblood, Slytherin son being hugged by half a dozen children - laughing and tickling some of the closer ones.

When the violent attack had ended and the small huddle of children had mostly dispersed, Draco wished Mrs Wittle a ‘Happy Birthday’. “And how old are you today? 26 is it?”

Mrs Wittle laughed loudly, swatting at his shoulder. “Oh you charmer, you! I’m 73 if you must know, practically ancient!” She suddenly put her hands on her hips. “Now, you are an hour early, so run along! I have it on good authority that there is a pile of biscuits in the kitchen ready to be eaten, so off you pop!”

They hurried out of the room and towards the kitchen.

“No more for you Leo! Don’t think I didn’t spot you swiping two before!” She called after them.

Leo scowled as Draco raised an eyebrow at him and reluctantly handed his biscuit over to Jess, who had followed them in.

***

A few hours later, the decorating was in full swing.

It was tradition for the children who had been adopted within the last year to come back on Mrs Wittle’s birthday to help out with decorating and see the other children that they’d become friends with. Often, children would come back with their adopted families more than once, like Meg and Lucy, who had returned every year since they’d been adopted by an old couple a few years ago.
It had started over 2 decades ago apparently, when Mrs Wittle had first opened the orphanage after her own daughter had passed away. Decorating at Christmas with her daughter had been the highlight of her year, so the child who left made a point to return on her birthday to decorate with her to make sure she was always surrounded by children at Christmas.

There were still children - adults now - from all those years ago who to this day visited Mrs Wittle on her birthday. Many of them brought their own children along, adopted and biological, which led to quite the crowd.

They would set up a gazebo in the garden and transfigure the dining room table into one four times its size to accommodate for all the guests. Food would be brought by the visiting families, anything from sandwiches to full roast chickens, and shared so no one had to cook if they didn’t want to. It was stored in the kitchen by Mrs Wittle - how she kept up with the amount that came in Draco didn’t know - and kept under statis charms until they had finished - Draco and Melissa had brought chips from the chippy down the road, which were both Draco’s and Mrs Wittle’s favourite things in the world.

The work would be divided between people - children were in charge of the multiple trees that were set up around the property, those of age were in charge of putting up lights on the exterior of the building and hanging the decorations up on the walls inside.

This year Draco was watching over the children as they decorated the tree in the living room, stopping small squabbles over what decoration went where before they could escalate. They were few and far between though, so he was mostly just there to pass decorations over and eat the biscuits that Mrs Wittle had left behind while she went to help with the tree in the dining.

Melissa, who had been bursting with excitement just an hour ago, was slowly looking more and more upset, despite tree decorating being one of her favourite things to do.

“What’s up, sweetheart?” He asked, pulling her over to sit next to him when she walked past to get another decoration. She hid her face in his side and shook her head violently.

“No.”

He hugged her and rubbed his hand comfortingly over her back. “Come on, you love decorating, so why do you look so sad, eh?”

Leo, who was helping the small ones reach the higher branches, looked over inquiringly, but Draco shook his head at him.

Melissa mumbled something into his side.

“I can’t hear you, sweetheart, you’ll have to sit up a bit.”

“Where’s Harry? He pro-mist he’d be here and everyone is but him.”

Draco had been wondering the same thing himself - it was, after all past 5, when Harry’s shift finished at 4. “I’m sure he’ll be here soon, he’s probably just stuck at work.” He tipped her chin up so she was looking at him. “Don’t worry about it - if he’s not here in another half an hour I’ll send him a message, ok?”

“‘Kay.” She murmured.

“Go and help Terence with that box of baubles, and don’t worry.” He kissed her forehead and she hopped off the couch to help her newfound friend.
Harry peeled the last Dipper off his auror robes and dropped it into the open cage that Terry Boot from the department of mysteries was holding open. He should have left over an hour ago to meet Draco and Melissa at the orphanage, but the unexpected escape of hundreds of the DOM’s newest hybrid creature had held him back.

They were a cross between nifflers and ducks - Harry had been pleased to find our his initial assessment of them had been correct - and had been created with the aim of more effective frisks of criminals when they were arrested, which was where their name came from - ‘dipping’ into pockets. They had been in development for a while, after several incidents with concealed items injuring aurors, but Harry’s injury last week had sped up the process, resulting in a sea of the strange looking creatures descending on their offices.

It had taken over three hours to retrieve all 648 of the creatures and return all the wands they’d snatched and Harry wanted nothing more than to go home and sleep.

But he’d promised Melissa and he hated to disappoint her.

So he’d healed up the bites and scratches and forced himself through the floo.

He landed in what he assumed was the dining room, where a gaggle of children and Mrs Wittle were decorating a giant tree with a vast assortment of shiny baubles.

“Oh, Harry!” The woman hurried over to greet him.

“Sorry I’m late.” He said sheepishly. “Happy birthday.”

“Oh, nonsense, it’s better late than never! Draco’s through there with little Lissy, go on.”

He nodded in thanks and waved to the little ones gathered around the tree as he passed.

In the living room the tree was almost finished - there was barely a branch visible. Draco was sat on the couch overseeing the decorating and eating the head of a snowman biscuit, while Melissa was jumping around the tree with a variety of ornaments.

He watched the rest of the children from his position in the doorway, wondering how many of them had lived like he had as a child before they arrived here.

He studied Melissa closely, wondering how anyone could starve and neglect such a wonderful child.

She was noticeably smaller than some of the other children, but Harry realised his initial potion hazed assessment of her height was a bit exaggerated. He couldn’t bare to imagine what she would have looked like when she first arrived, how different she must have been to the lively and rosy cheeked girl in front of him.

Draco looked up and noticed him standing in the doorway and gave him a wave. “Melissa?” He called.

The girl turned to face Draco, a glittery snowflake in her hand. “Yeah?”

“Look who’s here.”

Melissa spun round, her face lighting up when she saw Harry. “You came!” He suddenly found himself with an armful of child as Melissa hugged him tightly.
“Thought you’d left us.” She muttered, burying her face in his neck. The worry in her voice tugged at his heart.

“I’m not going to leave you.”

Melissa remained glued to him as he took a seat next to Draco on the couch. She seemed content to squeeze the life out of him while she watched the rest of the children finish off the tree.

“I told you he’d come.” Draco said to Melissa as he pried her hands from around Harry’s neck and handed her her frog instead. “You didn’t need to panic, sweetheart.”

“Why were you so late?” Her question was muffled by the frog covering her mouth.

“Well, someone in my workplace accidentally let a lot of little creatures lose and I had to help find them all.”

“Little creatures?”

“Yep. They were like nifflers, but with duck feathers and wings. They took people wands and their watches, so me and my work mates had to make sure everybody got their stuff back. I didn’t forget about you at all.”

“I like nifflers.”

Harry laughed. “I’m sure you do. Why don’t you go and put that last snowflake on the tree, it looks like the boy over there wants to talk to you.”

A teenager, probably about 15 or 16, was stood by the doorway, waving in their direction and frantically trying to get their attention.

“Oh! But stay here please!” She hung the snowflake next to a glass bowtruckle figurine and then followed the boy out of the room, leaving Harry alone with Draco.

“Who was that?” Harry asked, taking a biscuit from the plate Draco offered.

“Leo, he’s been here since I first came here. The pair adore each other.” A wistful smile crossed his face. “It was him who encouraged me to adopt Melissa, but I probably would have adopted the pair of them if he’d let me. Said it was weird because I’m only 9 years older than him.”

Harry nodded in understanding as he snapped the head off his biscuit.

“You never said that Melissa was starved by her birth parents.” He murmured, aware of the other, curious children still in the room.

Draco shrugged, feigning nonchalance. “You never asked.” Harry only looked at him. “Fine. I don’t really enjoy talking about it. I was there when she was handed over by her so called parents,” he sneered at the word, “and I hate knowing that there are people in this world who will treat a child like that. I would have told you if you had asked, but I really prefer not to remember what she looked like when she first arrive.” Draco twisted his hands in his lap, the usually composed man suddenly fidgety.

“I was abused as a child.” Harry began quietly. Draco tensed next to him. “I was sent to live my my mother’s sister after my parents were murdered. My aunt had been jealous of my mother for having magic, for being the family favourite, so she hated me by default. Her hatred fuelled her husbands and her sons. They...” His breath hitched and he stuttered over his words. Draco’s hand slipped
across the small distance between them, linking with his own.

“Go on.” He whispered, pulling Harry’s hand into his lap and tracing circles with his thumb over the back of his hand.

“They forced me to do all the chores. They’d lock me up in the cupboard under the stairs without meals for days on end if I made the smallest of mistakes. I had to watch as they gave my cousin everything.” Draco squeezed his hand. “I thought I’d deserved it, they told me often enough that I did, I didn’t even know that it was abuse until a few years ago. Before I was fully qualified as an auror, I had to undergo a series of medical assessments and my healer was concerned about my stunted growth. They asked if-if I’d been abused as a child. I told them no, of course, but I told her about my childhood and she told me that it did count as abuse.” Draco wrapped his other hand around their joined ones. “I’d thought it was just normal. No one did anything about it, Dumbledore knew what my relatives were like and he kept sending me back, the Weasley’s didn’t do anything when Ron told them I had bars on my window. I assumed that because no one did anything to stop it that there was nothing wrong with what they were doing.”

“You haven’t told anyone else this, have you?” Draco murmured, still cradling Harry’s hand in his lap.

Harry shook his head.

“Thank you, then, for trusting me enough to tell me. I can’t express how sorry I am about the way I treated you in school - I assumed you were waited on hand and foot and now I feel like a terrible person.”

“It’s one of the main reasons why I help out at the orphanages. I don’t want any children to grow up like I did, thinking it was normal to be treated as less than human.” He looks Draco in the eye. “If you think I’m going to forget about you two after these visits are over, you are completely wrong. I want to be around to help her - I trust your parenting skills, but you aren’t getting rid of me that easily.”

Harry watched Draco’s face carefully, waiting for any sign of anger, disbelief, waiting for him to turn around and tell him to get lost, that he wasn’t needed.

Instead, Draco simply said “Good.” and pressed a feather light kiss to his knuckles as they watched the fairy lights change colour on the tree.
“Draco, how wonderful to see you.”

The cold voice came from behind him and he dropped the the paper-like butterflies in shock.

“Mother!” The aristocratic woman stood in the doorway to his living room, presumably having flooed into the kitchen. Her elegant robes were a deep purple, almost black, and were clearly high quality. Her entire appearance seemed to ooze wealth - from the delicate clasp in her hair to the gold lining on her robes - and she looked very out of place in his modern and mostly muggle house.

“You didn’t say you were visiting.”

“I was not aware it was necessary to notify you every time I want to check up on you.” She stepped over their game and pointed her wand at the couch, casting a very strong cleaning charm before sitting down on the very edge, hands joined in her lap.

Upstairs, Draco could hear the sound of the toilet flushing. He could practically feel his mother’s gaze on his back as he picked up the little butterfly shaped pieces he had dropped.

Just minutes before, he had been playing the wizarding version of the muggle game Ele-fun with Melissa. The game consisted of a pile of butterfly shaped pieces of fabric, three nets and a magically powered elephant. The butterflies went inside the elephant and were blown out of the trunk by a charm that replicated a muggle fan. The aim was to catch as many butterflies as possible, which should have been easy for Draco with his years of seeker training, but the tiny butterflies seemed impossible to catch. Melissa had won every round so far.

There were footsteps on the stairs and then Melissa ran back into the room, closely followed by Butch, who had two butterflies stuck in his collar. The pair stopped short at the sight of his mother on the couch.

An awkward silence followed as the child and the cat stared at her. His mother stared right back, face impassive.

“Biscuits. We have biscuits.” He herded the cat and Melissa in front of him. “Come on, we have biscuits in the kitchen.”

He closed the door behind them and breathed a sigh of relief. His mother made him feel like he was 13 all over again and he usually had a week or so to prepare himself for her visits, so he really needed a few moments to collect himself.

Butch hopped up onto the counter, rubbing her head along his arm as he reached up to get the biscuit tin out of the cupboard.

“How’s that?” Melissa asked as she peered into the tin, eventually deciding on a custard cream that was missing a corner.

“That’s my mum.”

“I didn’t know you had a mum! Is she nice? Does she make biscuits like Terence’s mums do? Will she play with me?”

As far as he knew, his mother had never set foot in a kitchen, let alone cooked anything. He
crouched down next to her.

“My mother isn’t like Terence’s mums. I don’t think she will play with you, sweetheart.” She frowned and Draco hurried to continue. “My mother isn’t a very fun person, but Harry will still be coming later and he can play, ok?”

She nodded. “Can I have another biscuit, please?” She took a digestive and hopped back out of the kitchen. Butch jumped off the counter and weaved through his ankles before following her. Wishing he could hide in the kitchen forever, he did the same.

His mother was observing Melissa, a faint sneer of disapproval on her face.

“I don’t understand why you insist on wearing those ghastly muggle clothes.”

Both he and Melissa were wearing jumpers and muggle jeans, which made him feel absurdly undressed in comparison to his mother.

“It’s impractical to wear robes at work - they get caught on things too easily and they get in the way. You don’t get to dictate what I wear anymore, mother.” He hissed.

“Your job too - I must ask you, when do you plan on getting a real job?”

*That’s rich coming from someone who’s never worked a day in their life* he thought. “My job is a proper one.”

She sniffed. “If you say so.” Her eyes fell on Melissa again. “Why do you have a child in your house?”

“I adopted her. I told you I was adopting a child when I saw you last.”

A flash of outrage flitted across her face. “I assume you were merely attempting to get a rise out of me, I didn’t realise you were serious.”

“Have a biscuit and be quiet mother.” He stood, depositing the biscuit tin in her lap, ignoring her affronted gasp. “Why don’t we have another game Melissa?”

Harry fell out of the floo and into Draco’s kitchen, thankfully without a cloud of soot.

He could hear Melissa’s shrieks of laughter from the living room and felt a smile creeping onto his face, replacing the scowl that his stressful morning at work had left. He couldn’t wait to see her again, despite having only seen her yesterday.

He most definitely hadn’t expected to see Narcissa Malfoy sat in the living room, scowl on her face as she watched her son and Melissa play with some sort of elephant.

“Harry!” She dropped the net and ran over to hug him. “Draco’s mum is here! But she doesn’t make biscuits like Ron’s mum or Terence’s mums.”

Narcissa glared at them, the image less threatening than it would be due to the cat shaped biscuit jar sat in her lap.

“Narcissa. It’s good to see you again.”

She inclined her head towards him politely. “Why are you here Mr Potter?”
“To play with me!” She pulled him further into the room and handed him a net.

“I know when I am not wanted. Please owl me, Draco.” She stood and placed the jar on the table before leaving the room. There was a faint ‘whoosh’ from the floo in the kitchen.

“Oh thank Merlin, she’s gone.”

“I thought you got on well with your mother.” Harry was curious - Narcissa had risked her life in the forest for Draco, what had happened?

Draco sighed heavily and pressed a button on the blue elephant, sending little butterfly shapes up into the air through the trunk.

“You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to.” He hurried to say, but Draco only shook his head.

“It’s okay, I want to tell you.” Draco reassured him, reminding Harry of the night before. He was glad to find nothing had changed between them, that things hadn’t suddenly turned awkward, but also strangely disappointed.

“My mother is a difficult woman. I love her, of course, but she is very set in her ways. She shared my fathers views on blood and muggles when he was alive and she still operates under the belief that muggles and muggleborns are lesser.” He paused as they counted out their butterflies and announced Melissa as the winner.

“I don’t hold those views anymore, I still value many of the pureblood traditions and most of my family history, but I’ve learnt that blood doesn’t matter anymore - it never did. My mother feels very strongly about how I’m living my life - she disagrees with my job, my clothes, my house. Her visits are tiring. I hate having to explain myself to her and how she makes me feel inferior because I’m making my own decisions.” He dragged a hand through his hair and packed the game away as Melissa scurried off to get one of her books.

“Sit down, I’ll get us lunch.” Harry grabbed his wrist as he sat, tugging the blonde man down next to him.

“Lunch can wait for a bit, I’d like to know more.” He urged quietly as Draco rearranged himself on the couch so he was lying across it, head leaning against Harry’s thigh. Harry’s hand found its way to his hair, carding it through. “She risked her life several times for you during the war, what changed?”

“I made her break the betrothal contract between me and Astoria. Most purebloods are betrothed when they are young because it is part of our ‘duty’ to continue the family line. Obviously, me and Astoria couldn’t be less suited to each other, considering we’re both about as straight as Granger’s hair.”

Harry chuckled. “Hermione used that phrase herself once, about Astoria. You two have more in common than you think.”

“Strangely, that isn’t as horrifying as it once would have been.”

Melissa came back into the room, a small pile of books under her arm. “I’m gonna read to Butch!”

The cat uncurled itself from its position by Draco’s feet and leaped off the couch to stand by Melissa. She giggled and pet her head. “Good kitty.” She opened her book, Frog on a Log, and began reading it painstakingly slowly to the cat.
“So you broke the contract.” Harry prompted.

“I broke the contract and came out to her. She was less than pleased and still insisted that I should follow tradition and find a wife, so I put my foot down. She thinks I’m a disappointment to the family, not that she’s ever said so to my face, but I have had plenty of pureblood witches asking me to reconsider marriage and to stop shaming my family.”

“Is she homophobic?”

“Not openly, it wouldn’t be good for her reputation after all.” He sneered, fiddling with the sleeves of his jumper. “She prefers to pretend I’m straight and just a bit rebellious.”

“I’m sorry.” He murmured, suddenly feeling guilty he pushed.

“It could be worse - my father could still be alive, she could have disowned me completely, she could be dead herself.” He shrugged, avoiding Harry’s gaze.

“It still isn’t right.”

“I can live without her support. I have Melissa and Teddy and the rest of the children at the orphanage. I have Astoria, Blaise and Mrs Wittle.”

“And me.” Harry added. “You have me too.”

Draco looked up at him through his fringe, smiling. “Yeah, I have you too.”
“It’s Christmas. Can’t the criminals take a bloody break?” He whined.

Harry’s head hit the desk with a dull ‘thud’ and he groaned as his muscles protested against his movements. Across the room, Astoria was in a similar position, slumped over her desk and snoring softly.

Ron - the cheerful bastard - was sat on the edge of his desk, dipping his fingers into the icing of another of Mrs Weasley’s ‘preparation cakes’ and humming under his breath.

“Why are you so happy?”

Ron popped a chunk of cake into his mouth and chuckled. “Because,” he said as he swallowed, “I’ve finished all my reports for the week and I’ve managed to get Boxing Day off.”

“How have you finished all of your reports? And how did you get even more time off?”

Ron tapped the side of his nose in a knowing fashion, smearing red icing on his face. “I’m not running off to cosy up with every gay female in the office every day or spending my lunch breaks with small children. And Robards is quite partial to mini Christmas puds.”

“Astoria’s going to kill you for giving away her puds.”

Ron only laughed. “With the way mum’s churning them out, she’ll be set for the rest of the year.”

Grumbling, Harry sat up straight and dug his quill out of his pocket. “Best get started if I want to get it in before tomorrow.” He pulled a stack of paperwork towards him, half of which was filled in with his messy handwriting, and flicked to the last page he had written on.

Quill in hand and ink pot to his right, he set about tackling his mountain of steadily building paperwork.

...\n
“Draco?” Melissa called from her bedroom. “I can’t find my sock!”

Spelling his hair dry, Draco stepped out of the bathroom and crossed the landing, stepping over the cat lounging in the middle of the floor.

Melissa stood in the middle of her room, a sock crumpled in her hand and a blue frog under her arm.

“What colour is it?”

“The green ones with carrots on! I asked Splat and Butch but they haven’t seen it either!”

“Accio green sock with carrots on.” The sock in her hand flew towards Draco and after another few moments, a second flew through the door. “There you go.”

Thanking him, she jumped backwards onto the bed, landing on her back and pulling her socks on.

“Which froggie are you going to bring with you?”

“Nhgg!” She grunted as she pulled her other sock on, almost rolling off the bed. “Timmy.”
“Make sure you put him in the bag before we leave, it’s on the table.” She nodded, head under the bed as she dug out her wellies. She sneezed as she pulled back. “Found them!”

He nodded. “Go and do your teeth and then I’ll brush your hair and we can go.”

“Kay.”

Draco went downstairs, closely followed by a hungry and loudly complaining cat. “Yes, yes - food is here kitty cat.” He filled her bowl, scratched her head and placed it in front of her. She attacked it with gusto, the bell on her collar jingling as she ate.

He checked the contents of his bag, mentally ticking off items. They were planning a trip to the local park with some of the kids from the orphanage while Mrs Wittle and David painted some of the upstairs bedrooms in preparation for two new children that were meant to be arriving in two days. He’d offered to get some of the children out from under their feet for a while and they had readily agreed.

He had several stacks of sandwiches in separate boxes and bottles of water for lunch, as well as a small first aid box - it wouldn’t be a trip to the park without someone falling over. There was money for ice cream in his pocket, tissues, wipes and extra gloves too.

Melissa came running down the stairs, skidding to a stop in the kitchen with Timmy the Teal frog in her hands and her orange wellies on her feet. “Ready!”

“Good girl, pass me that box on by your advent calendar and then I’ll do your hair and we’ll be ready to go.” She passed the box over and stuffed Timmy into the bag.

She sat on the chair as Draco brushed her heart-shaped brush through her brown locks, the repetitive motions soothing. When he was very little his mother had let him do the same to her hair and he had spent hours learning how to make little plaits and braids. He was glad to find those skills very use now.

He tied her hair up and slipped in the clip she handed him before banishing the brush back to her room. “All done.”

Draco closed his Floo, slung the bag over his shoulder and apparated them to the orphanage.

•••

They landed outside the door, which was promptly opened by 8 year old Max, revealing a huddle of snuggly dressed children, with Leo at the back sporting his well worn Slytherin scarf.

“Oh good, you’re here.” Mrs Wittle was crouched down, helping Jess with her mittens. “There’s five of them and Leo, of course. Usual tracking spells on all of them, you’ve got lunch and muggle money, be back by three at the latest ok? Max and Phoebe have appointments.” She handed over the portkey, clapped her hands and made a shooing motion. “Out, out! I’ll see you lot later - behave!” They filed out and the door closed behind them.

Draco held the paper plate out to the group. “Every get a hold of it, it’s ready to leave in a minute.” The squished together around the plate, jostling each other as they held on.

It activated and they lurched as they were transported to a small, densely packed group of trees. They staggered as they landed, some of them toppling over and landing on the cushion of leaves. “Everyone ok?”
He received a jumble of affirmative replies and helped Phoebe off the ground, doing a mental head count as he did. There were seven children - 5 year olds Phoebe and Dylan, 8 year old Max, 9 year old Sammy, 14 year old Beth, 15 year old Leo and, of course Melissa - all accounted for.

“Right, we know the rules. This is a muggle playground, so please don’t talk about magic - we only portkeyed in because this little bit it made for wizards to get here. Don’t run off, I don’t want to lose any of you. If you need to toilet, tell me and Leo or Beth can take you. Don’t go anywhere without letting me know first. Keep away from the duck pond and the ducks. Leo I’m looking at you.” The teen gaped at him.

“I was only 10 when I walked into the lake! It was ages ago!”

“Anyway - we’ll stop and have lunch when you feel like it and we’ll get ice creams afterwards. Ok?”

There was a chorus of “ok!” and Draco nodded. “We’re going to walk along the path and to the play areas now, keep hold of your football until we get there, Dylan, we can play on the grass there.”

They exited the small group of trees and crossed the muddy field to the path. There were very few people walking along the path, given the stop-start drizzle and the biting wind. The kids chatted amongst themselves as they walked, sticking close to one another.

“I didn’t know you had a boyfriend.” Leo remarked. “I feel wounded Draco! I told you when I asked Lydia Edwards out in September and you didn’t even bother to tell me you were dating anyone!”

“You told everyone that would sit still long enough to listen about Lydia Edwards.” Beth muttered.

“I don’t have a boyfriend!” Draco protested.

“We may be young but we aren’t blind, Draco. You were holding hands and practically snuggling on the couch the other day and you’ve adopted Melissa with him.”

“He’s not my boyfriend. And he didn’t mean to adopt her - it was an accident.”

“How do you adopt a child accidentally?” Beth laughed, running a stick along the railings surrounding the pond. “There’s no use lying to us. You’re here all the time, you can’t hide it forever.”

“He really isn’t my boyfriend.”

Leo and Beth shared a disbelieving look. “Of course he isn’t. We definitely didn’t see you kissing his hand. You did nothing of the sort. In fact, I could even say it looked like you positively loathed each other!” The insufferable pair laughed.

You wish he was your boyfriend though his traitorous mind whispered as he sat himself down on a bench, watching Phoebe and Max taking turns on the slide. Next to him, Dylan was instructing the rest of the children in a game of catch with some odd rules Draco wasn’t paying much attention to.

Draco did have to admit his feelings for Harry were far more than platonic and had only been reinforced with Harry’s actions since the start of the month. He didn’t expect his feelings to be returned of course, Harry was unlikely to want to tie himself to Draco further, no matter what he said about the past. He had still committed those crimes and a week or so spent in such close proximity couldn’t erase that.

He promised to stick around though. He wants to stay even when the visits are over. The voice
whispered again. He wants to stay because he empathises with Melissa. He reminded himself. It’s not for me.

A ball flew at him and he barely had time to catch it and save his face from what would be irreparable damage. Beth pulled him off the bench and took the ball back. “Join in! Phoebe and Max are coming over to join us anyway.” She pointed behind him to the pair that were running over.

Beth threw the ball to Melissa and the game started again, their laughing and joking making Draco forget about his feelings for Harry for just a little while.
**Chapter 13**

Chapter Notes

I’ve realised there’s not been a lot of Harry/Draco interaction in the last few chapters, but I hope to change that in upcoming chapters. Wednesday’s chapter will probably be quite short, as I will have very little writing time. As always, thank you for the wonderful comments and kudos!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Butch! No!” Melissa ran after the cat, which had several pieces of paper in her mouth. “She stole my snowy-flakes!”

The cat hopped up onto the couch next to Draco, paper snowflakes dangling from her mouth as she snuggled up to his leg. “Get one of her treats out of the cupboard, she should drop them for that.”

“Kay.” She pouted, casting a longing glance at her poor snowflakes before she rushed to retrieve a treat.

She returned and crouched down in front of couch, holding the treat out like a peace offering. “Please, Butch, give me the snowy-flakes!”

The cat sniffed at the treat tentatively, leaning forward with her whiskers twitching. She seemed to realise she couldn’t hold onto both the snowflakes and a treat and sat glaring at the offending food. Melissa thrust the treat forward again, wafting it under her nose. The cat appeared to decide and dropped the paper, snapping up the treat instead.

Melissa grabbed them eagerly, frowning slightly when she lifted them. “Wet.”

Draco waved his wand over Butch’s head and the paper snowflakes fluttered as the magic washed over them, straightening them out and drying them. “There you go.”

He turned to the cat, who had returned to its position by his thigh, curled up with her tail tucked underneath her body. “Leave them alone, you’ve got your own toys, kitty.” He scratched her head, receiving a low purr in response.

“Thank you!” She straightened up and clambered back onto the other couch, where she had a pile of coloured square paper stacked on the arm and a pair of red safety scissors on top of a cushion. She scooped up her pile of papers and dropped them on Draco’s lap the returned to pick up the scissors, holding them out in front of her, pointy end downwards like she’d been taught to. She handed them to Draco and then clambered up onto the couch next to Butch, rubbing the cat between the ears.

“Can we hang the snowy-flakes up?”

“If you want to. There’s space in the hall and in your bedroom.”

“Can Harry hang them up in his house too?” She took a piece of green paper from the top of the pile and began to fold it in half.

“You can ask him when we see him later, but I think he’ll agree.”
She grinned and folded the paper in half again before taking the scissors from Draco’s hand. Her tongue poked out the corner of her mouth as she concentrated on her task. She brought her scissors to the closed edges of the paper and cut different shapes into it, letting the little scraps of paper that came off fall into her lap in a shower of green.

Carefully placing the scissors down first, she unfolded the paper, revealing a green snowflake shaped piece of paper. “Done!”

“Very pretty.”

“Can you make some too? We need lots and lots.”

He cast a duplication charm on the scissors and took a pair for himself. “What colours should I do?”

“Red please! I’m gonna do white and green ‘cause they’re Christy-massy colours!”

He laughed and extracted a few red sheets from the pile and set about copying what Melissa had done.

***

“Where do people get these ideas from?” Harry asked, staring at the interview transcript from the suspect they had apprehended early in the day.

His confession under Veristiserum detailed his plans to take over the Ministry from the inside through his office in the Department of Foreign Policy. He had planned, with his friend who was a freelance potion historian, - Harry didn’t even know that was a profession - to smuggle in vials of a little known Peruvian potion that was invented in 48BC and was said to act as an alternative to Imperio. He had intended to place the vials within a crate of Arctic Doxies, a subspecies found within the arctic circle, so that the vials remained at the temperature they needed to prevent the potion being released too early.

From there, he was going to retrieve the vials and smash them in the atrium, where the liquid would evaporate, due to its low boiling point, and effect every ministry worker in the building. He was then planning to use the thousands of wizards as an army so he could take over Wizarding Britain and, eventually, the world.

“Says here he was quite partial to a firewisky with his morning coffee, so it’s not too surprising. Magical alcohol has many side effects.” Astoria ran a finger across a line on his case file as she spoke.

“But still. Arctic Doxies and some outdated mind control potion that evaporates at room temperature?”

Astoria shrugged. “We’ve seen stranger. Draco Malfoy getting his face painted.”

“You - self-appointed queen of lesbians - under the mistletoe with Roger Davies at the Christmas party last year.”

Astoria rolled her eyes. “I hate that stuff.”

Harry glared at them. “Work please! What actually was the potion?”

“Fluorine. It’s more of a muggle thing, but it’s a gas at room temperature, so it would have been easy for someone looking to make money off the suspect to pass it off as that potion. The wix in the
potions lab also followed the recipe his friend claimed to have found - it was some sort of fix-all medical remedy, nothing to do with mind control. It was actually used for meditation once upon a time."

“Interesting. Any sightings of the friend yet? There’s nothing on here about His whereabouts?” Ron flicked through his own file, marking things with a muggle highlighter that Hermione had given him as part of a set for his birthday.

“There’s a Floo redirection in place for people calling about it and there will be a notice in the Quibbler about reporting sightings of him with a picture of the suspect tomorrow,"

“Who’s turn is it to have the floo calls to be directed to their house?”

“Yours Astoria.” Ron replied without looking up from his highlighting. “Right, so we can’t do anything now - we’ll be discussing the case with the ministry’s prosecution lawyers tomorrow, no one will be calling in until tomorrow - so we can try the new recipe my mum found for chocolate cupcakes.” He pulled a box out of his drawer and placed it on the desk in front of Harry.

“Do you ever think of anything other than food?” Astoria asked, exasperated, but she reached into the box and took a cake out, moaning almost obscenely as she tasted it. “Your mother is a queen amongst women.”

Ron puffed up in pride, grinning as he took a cake of his own. “Go on, Harry. You can take one for Melissa too. And Malfoy.” He added the last bit on rather begrudgingly - an afternoon spent chatting together wasn’t quite enough for the pair to have reconciled all their differences. “He looked almost underweight on Sunday. I reckon he could do was a cake or two.”

Astoria choked on her cake as she laughed, spraying crumbs across the carpeted floor. “Oh Merlin! You sound like your mother!”

Ron paled, mouth agape as he realised exactly what he’d said. Harry couldn’t hold back his laughter anymore, struggling for breath as he and Astoria were bent double, tears of laughter in their eyes.

“Shut it you two!” The scarlet faced man threw a balled up wad of paper at them, but the corners of his mouth were twitching and soon he was laughing along with them.

•••

“Draco!” Harry called through the floo, taking note of the green snowflakes stuck on the fridge.

Draco appeared in his line of sight a few moments later, tiny bits of coloured paper stuck to his black jumper.

“Harry, good to see you. Melissa can’t wait to see your house, she’s been making you decorations all day. I can’t wait to see your house - I’ve not been in the old Black house since I was little.”

Melissa came dashing into the living room with her usual energy, clutching Splat the frog and a pile of red, green and white papers to her chest. “I’m all ready to go!” She smiled at Harry’s head in the fireplace. “Hiya!”

Harry returned her greeting and passed a slip of paper through the floo connection. “My house is under Fidelius, so you’ll need that when you apparate over. I’ll see you in a minute Lissy?” The girl nodded, papers rustling as she did so.

He waved to her and ended the call.
Several minutes later, there was a knock on the door and he welcomed the pair into the house.

It had changed dramatically since he moved in permanently after Auror training. Gone were the outdated and peeling wallpapers, instead the walls were painted in light colours with various photographs hanging from them in silver frames. Across the top of the walls were tiny hand painted images of various magical things, from snitches to billywigs.

The gothic and oversized wall scones had been replaced with magically powered lights similar to muggle ones.

The curtains over Walburga’s paintings had been permanently sealed shut and her painting had finally been removed from the wall and hidden away in the shed at the bottom of the garden.

He’d updated the kitchen too, fitting in more magically powered muggle appliances and replacing the cracked and stained tiles.

All the bedrooms had been cleaned out and refurbished and overall, it was worlds away from the house Sirius had been imprisoned in for most of his life.

It wasn’t very festive, however, but he hoped Melissa could help with that.

“It’s certainly changed.” Draco mused, running a hand over the space where Walburga used to be.

“Great Aunt Walburga was a woman of few talents and interior design was not one. Of course, her husband had no say in it, but he was quite the artist - he painted a portrait of her once - so I wager he could have done a better job. He had some sort of idea about colour at least. “

“I didn’t know he was an artist. But I think Melissa could have done a better job than she did, it really was horrible until Dean Thomas and Luna got their hands on it. They painted all the little pictures around the top of the room.”

“There’s no dec-rations on the tree!” Melissa gasped as if the very idea personally offended her.

The tree was quite bare, he had to admit. He’d put the plastic tree up a few days ago and draped tinsel around it, but he’d never gotten any further.

“I’ve got some baubles upstairs, you can put them on before we have dinner. There’s a paper chain set in the library too, Teddy started making them when he came over the other day but he never finished.” She nodded and dropped her snowflakes onto the couch before climbing up to sit next to them.

“When can we see Teddy again? I like Teddy. His hair goes funny colours.”

“There’s a muggle reindeer farm I heard about the other day. I could pick Teddy up and then you two if you want.”

“Of course.” A soft smile flitted across Draco’s face as Lissy beamed and Harry felt his heart flutter almost uncontrollably.

Chapter End Notes

I used to make paper snowflakes like Melissa does to decorate my house with at Christmas when I was little, so it’s a tried and tested method she’s using. :)
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

I am a terrible author. I have been so busy in the past few days and I wasn’t able to update this, so I apologise.
(This also isn’t the greatest chapter)

Melissa had been ready to go for almost an hour, all wrapped up in a scarf, gloves and a hat in preparation for their trip to the reindeer farm that afternoon. She’d talked non-stop about seeing Teddy again since Draco had agreed to the trip and had even produced a drawing of the two of them to give to him when he arrived with Harry.

They were due to arrive any moment now, but with Melissa asking “Will they be here soon?” every two seconds, the minutes were crawling by. She opened her mouth again to speak, but she was cut off by the floo flaring to life and Teddy stepping out of it, closely followed by his godfather, who managed not to go flying across the kitchen.

“Teddy!” Melissa shot across the room and squeezed Teddy into a hug. Teddy returned her hug, albeit much more gently, and allowed her to pull him into the living room, where she’d left her drawing.

Harry took his glasses off and wiped a thick layer of soot off the lenses. “I hate floo travel.” He grumbled. “I don’t know how Teddy manages it so often. There’s never a speck of dirt on him!”

“You know, most wix use repellent charms on their clothing to stop them from getting covered in soot. Teddy’s wearing wizarding clothing with those charms woven into the fabric.”

“I use impervius!”

“Which is just for water, not dirt.” He rolled his eyes and flicked his wand at Harry’s glasses, which he still held in his hands. “Lutum repellat.”

The remaining smudges of soot fell away as a layer of magic settled over the glasses, repelling it.

“Why don’t they teach this sort of stuff at Hogwarts? Sure, I can transfigure a beaver into a sapling, but when is that useful? Surely it’s better to teach standard house keeping spells and cleanliness charms than cat-to-furniture ones.”

Draco shrugged, picking up his scarf from the table and winding it around his neck. “School can’t prepare us for every aspect of adulthood, but I think it would certainly be beneficial for them to teach that sort of stuff. I learnt most of them from Mrs Wittle when I started working at the orphanage.” He smiled faintly. “She likes her charms, Mrs Wittle does. I doubt there’s a charm that she doesn’t know.”

The two children came running back into the room, Teddy holding the picture Melissa had drawn. He held it out towards Harry, grinning from ear to ear. “Look! Lissy made me picture!” He lifted it up higher for Harry to see. “And I can keep its!”

“Very nice Teddy Bear. Did you say thank you to Lissy for your picture?”
“Yep! I sayed tank you!” He turned to Draco. “Can we goes now please?”

“If everyone’s ready, then of course.”

Teddy let Harry shrink the picture and put it in his pocket, then gripped onto his and Melissa’s hands. “We is ready!”

Draco laughed as Melissa took his hand then linked his other with Harry’s. “Let’s go then.”

A faint blush spread across Harry’s cheeks and he apparated them.

***

“Can we get some rainy-deer food? Please, Draco!” Melissa looked up at him, eyes hopeful. Even if Draco wasn’t already getting his change from the woman behind the gift shop counter, there was no way he would have been able to refuse.

*If his father could see him now* he though, highly amused, *a Malfoy defeated by a four year old.*

“What are you grinning about?” Harry asked him as he purchased his own paper bag full of reindeer food.

“Nothing, just wondering how my father would react to this. I’m certain he’s rolling in his grave right now.”

Harry snorted. “I’d pay money to see the expression on his face.”

They followed the two children out of the entrance/gift shop and out into the cobbledstone stable-yard.

The wooden stables had been converted into a cosy cafe, with tables both outside and inside, as well as two small shops - one selling jam and the other selling food sourced from the farm. Small Christmas trees were attached to the exterior walls, decorated with strings of multicoloured lights.

It was relatively quiet - a few people were milling around with children and others were going in and out of the café and shops.

“Where are the rainy-deers?” Melissa asked, reaching to take the bag of food off Draco. He pointed at the signpost in the middle of the yard. “See that sign up there?” She nodded, focusing intently on the words. “What’s it say?”

“‘Reindeers this way’, so we need to go that way,” he pointed off to the left, where a path separated the café and jam shop. “And we’ll find the reindeers.”

“Dat way!” Teddy pointed in the same direction and marched forward, arm linked with Melissa’s.

Draco and Harry followed close behind and Draco briefly considered linking arms with Harry like Teddy and Melissa, but decided against it.

When they followed the path, they found themselves standing in front of a wooden fence that continued on in both directions further than they could see. Behind it was a massive field - probably around the same size as the extensive manor gardens in Malfoy Manor - that held a small herd of reindeers. There were two large sheds filled with hay and straw set back away from the fence for the animals, allowing them to keep away from the crowds of people they likely experienced every day.

There was a small crowd gathered at one specific point on the fence and the four of them headed
“...As you can see,” a woman stood on a small stage, wearing an elf jumper and holding what Draco believed was a muggle mikey-phone. “Don’t climb on the fences please! These fences are low enough allow you to feed the reindeer while preventing them from jumping out, but we don’t want people inside their pen. All of our reindeers are quite comfortable with humans, so don’t worry about being bitten - their tongues may tickle a little, but they won’t hurt you.” She put her hand over the fence, offering the food in her palm to the reindeer that were gathered near her.

“Just keep your hand nice and flat, like I’m doing now, and they’ll lick it right off!” She withdrew her hand and pressed on a soap dispenser that was hung on the wall next to her. “Please do make sure you wash your hands at the sinks here or in the toilets by the café after feeding the reindeers. Remember not to poke or prod at them through the fence, they like being poked as much as we do - not a lot. If you have any more questions for me, feel free to ask and please do take a look at the fact files for each reindeer to learn more about them and their personalities!” She waved and stepped down off the stage after washing her hands.

“Oh!” The two children gasped in unison as one of the reindeers wandered past and sniffed at them over the fence. It withdrew its head and continued leisurely along the fence to another family, who were holding handfuls of food out to it.

Melissa stared, open mouthed, as more reindeers trotted over, jutting velvety noses over the fence.

“Shall we feed some then?” Harry asked, opening the bag of feed and offering to Teddy and Melissa. They nodded eagerly and held their hands out. Harry tipped a small handful into each of their hands and folded the top of the bag back over. “Right, we’ll need to lift you two up, because you can’t reach over the fence, ok?”

“Kay!” They chimed together, allowing Harry and Draco to pick them up.

Melissa cradled her pile of feed to her chest but lost a few little nuggets, the tiny bits of reindeer food rolling out from between her fingers and falling right down the neck of his jumper. “Thanks Lissy.” He muttered, shifting uncomfortably as the bits of dry food got stuck between his skin and jumper.

She leaned forward and held her hand out to the reindeer that had stopped in front of them. More bits of food spilt over the side of her hand as the deer pushed its face into it, tongue darting out and scooping up half of the little cubes in one go.

Next to them, Teddy was doing the same, albeit with much more hesitance. His reindeer was smaller, its antlers only half formed, and was making quite a mess as it sniffed at the pile of food, knocking most of it to the floor before licking a few last bits of his hand. “Wet!” He giggled, pulling his hand back. “Harry! Deer made my hand wet!”

“We’ll wash them in a little bit Teddy Bear.”

“But den they’ll be more wetter!”

“He’s right, you know.” Draco laughed as Harry scowled at him.

“You’ll still need to wash them though Ted.”

The boy pouted but held his hand out for more of the reindeer food.

Melissa wriggled in his arms as she giggled, the reindeer licking at her hand insistently. “Tick-lee!” She cried.
She pulled her hand back and the reindeer trotted off again to another family, antlers bobbing up and down with each step.

“You two can feed Teddy’s one!” She suggested as Draco set her back down.

“Ok!” Harry agreed eagerly and reached into the bag Draco still held.

Draco, on the other hand, wasn’t too keen. Putting his hand near the mouth of a large animal was the last thing he wanted to do after the incident with the hippogriff in 3rd year. “I don’t think I will, Lissy.”

“Oh.” She frowned and tilted her head. “Why not?”

“I’m not a big fan of deers, sweetheart.”

“Like I don’t like bugs?”

“Yeah, a bit like that.”

“Oh.” She said simply. “I don’t have to play with the bugs when the other kids at the orphy-nage do, so you don’t have to feed the rainy-deer.”

Draco found himself thanking whatever deity had seen fit to bless him with this adorably sweet child. He crouched down and hugged her tightly. “How about we get some hot chocolate when we’ve finished here?”
Yay! Chapter 15 is finally up - 3/5 of the way through.

In this chapter I mention that Melissa’s hearing aid is coated in a water proofing potion. Since I haven’t managed to weave this in, I thought I’d explain it now. In my eyes (aka, made up magical theory) a spell is pure, concentrated magic, which would disrupt the mechanisms in the hearing aid and stop it working if one was cast directly on it. However, a potion would have a much more diluted concentration of magic because it is a compound of various ingredients, many of which wouldn’t be inherently magical (eg, armadillo bile wouldn’t have magic because it’s produced by a non-magical animal but dragons blood would have a concentration of magic in because it comes from a magical creature).

[Think about it like a pure element vs an element that has been diluted with water - much lower concentration in the diluted one]

My logic is that a simple potion for waterproofing something wouldn’t have a high enough concentration to disrupt the mechanisms inside the hearing aids, unlike a spell, so she is able to use the hearing aid in the bath. Also, Leo and the rest of the Hogwarts aged orphanages not being in school will be explained in the next chapter.

“Aaah!” Melissa shrieked as she knocked Draco’s carefully measured bowl of flour off the kitchen counter, covering herself and the floor in it.

“It’s in by bouth! It’s in by eyes!” She cried, rubbing at her face. “Can’t see!”

Draco dropped his spoon and picked his wand up, rushing to crouch in front of Melissa. She had begun to cry, tears leaving tracks in the flour covering her face.

“Hey, hey, shhh, it’s ok.” He murmured, wiping her tears away as he siphoned the flour off her with his wand. He cast an Anti-irritation charm on her eyes and she hiccuped, burying her face into his shoulder.

“Scary.” She whispered.

Draco hugged her tightly against his chest and pressed a kiss to her temple. “I know, sweetheart. You’re okay now.” He could feel her heart beating rapidly against his chest, slowing as she began to calm down. His own heart was thumping against his chest - he knew how much it terrified her when her hearing aid stopped working and she couldn’t hear, so not being able to see would be even more frightening for her.

She continued to snuffle quietly, head on his shoulder and he rocked her gently. “Do you want to get a bath while we wait for the gingerbread men to bake?”

She lifted her head off his shoulder. “Bubbles?”

“Certainly.” He stood, shifting Melissa onto his hip. There was flour all over them and the floor,
which sent up small white clouds as he walked out, leaving behind floury footprints.

Once upstairs, Draco had a bath ready with a few flicks of his wand and soon Melissa was happily splashing in the water, covered in bubbles rather than flour and playing with her trio of yellow rubber ducks, albeit slightly less enthusiastically that usual.

“What if they stop working again today?” She asked quietly, watching Draco as he used a series of very specific charms to remove the flour from his clothes. He hated baking.

“Your hearing aids?” She nodded, sliding one of her ducks along the edge of the bath before making dive back into the water with a splash.

Draco left his wand on the edge of the sink and crouched down next to the bath. She handed him the shampoo bottle and leaned forward so he could reach all of her hair.

“We’re only going to the orphanage, you don’t need to worry. How many times have they stopped working in the orphanage, eh?”

“None.”

“And they’re working now, aren’t they? Because of the waterproofing potion that’s on them. They aren’t going to stop working, sweetheart, and even if they do, I have the spare one with me so we can switch them straight away.”

“Are you sure?” She tilted her head back and looked up at him, fear in her eyes.

“I’m absolutely certain.” He replied, using jug they kept by the bath to rinse the soap suds out of her hair with water. “Now, why don’t you get dried so we can go and get the gingerbread men out of the oven? We need to take them over to the orphanage so we can ice them with everyone else.”

“Aren’t we making a-nuder set of them?”

“Another.” He corrected her ask he lifted her out of the bath and wrapped her in a fluffy yellow towel - the ducky towel as they called it. “We were going to, yes, but I think we’ve done enough baking today, haven’t we? We don’t want any more accidents do we?”

She shook her head and waddled out of the bathroom to her bedroom to put her now clean clothes back on.

They landed outside the orphanage, Melissa carrying a box with 2 dozen gingerbread in. She was frogless - Draco had managed to persuade her to leave them behind, lest they get sticky.

The door was opened by Leo and Beth, who were covered in flour, butter and what appeared to be half a batch of biscuits. “Draco, Melissa! Come on, we’ve just put the last batch in. Fancy helping with the icing?”

Melissa nodded eagerly and passed the box over to Draco before running into the building. Draco followed at a more sedate pace and entered the kitchen, which looked like something had blown up in it.

Flour covered the table, where biscuits had been rolled out and cut into shapes. Chunks of left over biscuit batter stuck to the table where the flour was thinner. Trays of cooked biscuits were dotted about all over the kitchen. Boxes filled with biscuits and labelled by flavour were stacked up on a
relatively clean section of the countertop.

Surprisingly, it was a lot cleaner than last year. Draco still shuddered at the memory of cleaning up afterwards. Egg did not wash off the ceiling easily.

Mrs Wittle and David were packing up the ingredients scattered across the counters, donned in aprons that equally messy as Leo’s and Beth’s. Mrs Wittle turned to greet him, dusting flour off her hands as she went to hug him.

“No!” Draco laughed, hands out in front of him. “I’ve only just gotten clean!”

“Nonsense! You’ll have icing in your ears by the time you get home - you’ve still got flour on your jeans!” She batted his hands away and hugged him tightly, transferring flour and other squishy ingredients onto him. Thankfully, he was wearing his ‘baking jumper’ which had faint stains from spills over the years that he’d never quite managed to get rid of, via magical or muggle means, and small singe marks from the first few attempts he made a cooking and baking.

“Right, if you help us to tidy everything up, we’ll be able to get all of the icing out and start decorating. Beth, be a dear and tell everyone to start washing up. Leo, you help us clear the floor and set those two high chairs up.”

They made quick work of the kitchen with the help of several well placed cans vigorous cleaning charms. Soon, they had the biscuits laid out in boxes in the middle of the table and a clean tray had been set in front of each seat.

On the countertops were the rest of the biscuits and another two trays, so the adults could help speed up the decorating process.

The biscuits were for a Christmas fair that the primary school the children went to was holding. They had a stall each year where they sold their biscuits to raise money. They made most of the biscuits from scratch, but there would often be parents from the school who would donate biscuits to them. The school was one of only three Wizarding primary schools in the UK, so their events would draw quite a crowd and they needed lots of biscuits - hence the huge amount they had made.

A small stream of children, with freshly washed hands and sleeves rolled up, flooded into the kitchen and took seats at the table. They were all familiar faces, with the exception of the two children who had arrived the other day, and Draco chatted with them as Mrs Wittle passed out tubes of icing to everyone.

“Right, we have some rules, which some of you already know.” David began, passing a tray to Phoebe, who had complained hers was dirty. “Don’t eat anything. Everyone can put one biscuit aside for after tea. The tubes of icing are spelled to stop you from eating directly from them. Share the biscuits out too, don’t keep them all to yourself. There are plenty to go around. You can ice them however you want and we’ll put some other little decorations out too, which again, you need to share. Okay?”

“Okay!” They chorused.

“Let’s start then!” They all reached into the boxes and placed plain biscuits on their trays.

Some went straight in, taking one biscuit and starting right away, while others carefully selected their biscuits, taking one of each shape before beginning.

This was definitely one of Draco’s favourite things, watching them ice biscuits painstakingly and seeing their creativity. For him, it was when the Christmas season truly began.
“I guess I’m just in time then?” Came a voice from the door.

Harry stood in the kitchen doorway, a very large box under his arm.

“Harry!” Melissa shuffled her chair back and ran to hug him.

He gave her a one armed hug in return. “Molly Weasley had a lot of biscuits left over, so she insisted I bring them over.”

“Ooo, thank you Harry, love.” Mrs Wittle bustled over and took the box, which she opened to find boxes of wonderfully smelling and already iced biscuits. “I must send her some flowers and a box of chocolates for Christmas.”

“Can Harry decorate some biccies too?” Melissa asked, dragging Harry to the table.

“If he wants to. We’ve got plenty to go around.”

She sat back down and allowed Harry to push her chair back in. “Look at my tree!” She held up the half-iced biscuit, which was outlined in green and had splodges of different colours for baubles. “It’s brilliant Lissy.”

She beamed and returned to her biscuits, tongue poking out in concentration.

“Tea, anyone?” Draco received three affirmative replies and set about making drinks.

“You’re early.” He remarked to Harry as he handed over his drink.

“I know, the lawyer had something come up in one of her other cases, so we left early. The trial’s been set back until after January, so the Prophet was in uproar because he isn’t being charged until the new year.” Harry sighed and leaned his head on Draco’s shoulder. “I’ve never been so glad for the weekend.”

“I doubt you’ll be saying that tomorrow. You offered to help with the stall, remember? Very chaotic.”

Harry groaned. “I forgot about that.”

“Melissa will be extremely disappointed if you don’t do it.”

Harry snorted. “Very slytherin, using our child to persuade me. But I wasn’t going to go back on my word.”

Draco’s stomach did a funny flip as Harry referred to Melissa as their child and he hoped that it wasn’t just a slip up on Harry’s part, that on some level, he really did think of her as their child, rather than just one he’d accidentally adopted with his one-time enemy.

Draco cleared his throat and took a sip of his drink. “How about we get started on some of these biscuits then?”
Harry had arrived at Draco’s earlier that morning with Teddy and Victoire. They had spent over an hour helping Draco make festive biscuit boxes for the fair, although the three children had decorated themselves more than the boxes and had ribbons and stickers all over them.

“Can we go yet?” Victoire asked, peeling a sticker off her Christmas pudding jumper.

“In a minute.” Harry and Draco were shrinking down the last few boxes and attempting to make the children look a bit more presentable.

“Teddy, you look like you’ve been attacked by some sort of Christmas monster.” Harry laughed, gently pulling the bits of ribbon out of his hair.

“I’m not a christy-mas monster!” He pouted and crossed his arms.

“Of course you’re not a monster, Teddy Bear.” Harry ruffled his hair and pulled a smile from the green-haired toddler.

“All done.” Draco said, pocketing his wand and the tiny tub full of their festive boxes. “Ready to go?”

He received a chorus of “Yes!” in reply and picked up Melissa, removing a piece of red ribbon from behind her ear.

Taking hold of Teddy - who linked arms with Victoire - and Draco’s hands, Harry apparated them to the fair.

•••

“Oh don’t you all look precious!” Mrs Wittle cooed, hugging each of them in turn when they landed.

There was a dress code that came with running a stall - Christmas jumpers. Harry loved the idea - festive jumpers were his favourite part of Christmas thanks to Molly Weasley - and was wearing the one she had made him last year. It was a bright red and had the body of a reindeer knitted on to it. He had completed his outfit with reindeer antlers and a red nose that had been charmed to light up when he tapped it.

Draco had said he was a bigger child than Melissa, but not even he could frown about Christmas jumpers when faced with a flashing reindeer nose.

Draco had simply opted to wear an elf jumper, having been persuaded by Melissa to match with her.

The three children looked adorable, all dressed up in their little Christmas jumpers.

Melissa was an elf like Draco - a much more cheerful elf - and had a cute little hat and jingly elf boots to match her jumper.

Victoire was a Christmas pudding and was also wearing a Weasley jumper that she had been gifted the year before. It had been a bit on the small side, but with the help of Andromeda and a few
resizing charms, it fit perfectly. She also had a sprig of holly made from felt and wool pom-poms clipped in her hair that she had made in school with her teachers.

Teddy was dressed in one of his mum’s old Christmas jumpers, which had been made by Ted Tonks. It was bright green and had a string of fairy lights stitched into it that flashed every time he moved. He made a very adorable Christmas tree, especially with the glittery star headband he wore.

“Come on, come on!” Mrs Wittle - dressed as a snow woman - led them to their stall.

The fair took place on a field down the road and consisted of stalls from all sorts of wizarding businesses - from Weasley’s Wizarding Wheezes to a florist that had a small store front in the local muggle village. The school had plenty of their own stalls too, with a chocolate and alcoholic tombolas, raffles and various games to raise money for better sports equipment.

Currently, only the stall owners were there to set up, but there would be crowds from all over the Wizarding world flooding in within the next hour when they opened.

Leo and Beth were already at the stall and laying out the biscuits with some of the other orphans - all wearing gingerbread men jumpers.

“Dear Merlin.” Draco muttered as they made their way over and spotted the huddle of gingerbread men.

“Grinch.” Harry replied, grinning at his confusion. “You were all for Christmas spirit yesterday!”

“I enjoy decorating biscuits, not dressing up as one.”

“I like eating biscuits!” Victoire chimed in, running ahead to meet the children gathered at the stall.

Leo and Beth waved at them in greeting. “Hi Draco.” Leo smirked. “Hello Harry.” The two teens shared a glance and, much to Harry’s surprise, Draco blushed.

“What?” He asked in confusion.

“Nothing.” All three replied, Draco blushing harder and the teens looking far too innocent.

“Why don’t you two get on with your school work and leave the biscuits to us?” Draco suggested quickly, avoiding Harry’s eye.

Beth groaned. “I have a two-foot transfiguration essay on the change that occurs at a molecular level in various different animal transfigurations. I hate transfiguration - Percy Weasley is so boring.”

Percy had taken up McGonagall’s transfiguration position when she officially became Headmistress and as much as Harry loved the Weasley’s, even he had to admit that a double lesson with the man would put him to sleep and he had quite enjoyed most of his transfiguration lessons.

After the war, more than the teachers had changed. Because of the extensive damage to Hogwarts, they hadn’t been able to fix everything in time for the students to return. The Great Hall was as good as new, as was the Quidditch pitch and the first three floors, but half of the castle was unusable. Over the last five years, they’d fixed a lot of it over summer and during the festive season. Students got extra time off school - usually all of December - and lots of extra school work and reading so that more of the school could be repaired.

“I remember doing that essay. There’s a chapter at the very end of the *Standard Cellular Occurrences During Spell Damage* which pretty much does the essay for you.” Draco replied,
beginning to unshrink the boxes.

“I’ve never even heard of that book! Why did you use it for a transfiguration essay?” Harry had a sneaking suspicion that Draco was a male version of Hermione - a perfectionist and a bookworm.

Draco rolled his eyes. “Some of us wanted to understand the spells we were doing a little better.”

“Some of us.” He mimicked, laughing. “You mean you and Hermione.”

Draco glared at him and turned back to Beth. “I’ve got a copy of the book you can borrow, if you like.”

“Please! I’ll do some of my charms reading instead of that essay now.” She pulled Leo off towards the parchment-covered table that had been set up a few metres behind the stall.

A few, smaller gingerbread children gathered around them and started piling up the boxes into separate piles, as instructed by Draco.

The gift boxes all had little ribbons stuck on top of them and were decorated in three designs, each one for a different flavour of biscuit - white with green trees for plain, vanilla biscuits, red with white stars for gingerbread and green with white reindeers for chocolate. There were also plain gold and silver ones for people to take a selection away with them.

Personally, Harry didn’t see the need to have different boxes for different flavours, but Draco insisted it made everything a lot easier.

They worked in a sort of conveyer belt system as they packed the gift boxes. They were stood on both sides of the stall, creating two lines and ‘increasing efficiency’ according to Draco. Harry suspected he was finding this a bit stressful.

The first two children were opening out the boxes, making sure the bottoms were folded down properly, opening the lids and checking there was a sticker marking the flavour on the back before passing it along and taking the next box.

The next two were in charge of putting the biscuits in. They had to put in six biscuits all matching the flavour on the box before passing it along to be sealed and labelled with a price tag.

Harry was in charge of that bit, charming the ‘10 sickles’ labels onto the tops of the boxes so they could be removed easily. The boxes were then stacked together on the end of stall, behind a hand-drawn sign that had been designed by Leo.

They were just finishing adjusting the display of about 30 boxes and the rows of biscuits in the centre of the stall when people started to arrive.

Draco froze, almost dropping the box he was moving.

“You ok?” Harry asked, gently removing the box from his hands and setting it down on the table. They were mostly alone now, Mrs Wittle having taken the kids off around the stalls before things started to get busy. Phoebe was still hovering around the stall, having put herself in charge of their makeshift till.

Draco sighed heavily and his shoulders dropped slightly. “Just worried.” He ran a fidgety hand through his hair, which Harry caught in his own and squeezed gently - Draco would kill him for letting him mess up his hair. “Last year there were some people who refused to buy from us because of me, because I’m a death eater...”
“Were a death eater. And not by choice either.” Harry interjected hotly.

“Fine, because I was a death eater. I don’t like doing the fundraising things like this because we make less money for the orphanage became people don’t want anything to do with me.”

“Listen,” Harry squeezed Draco’s hands again, making him look at Harry’s face, rather than the floor. “You sold out both times you’ve been on the stall, Mrs Wittle told me. The stall always sells out. They make the same amount of money, you aren’t reducing the amount they’re getting. Don’t worry so much.” He smiled and was relieved when the corners of Draco’s mouth twitched in a tiny smile in return. “Besides, why would you want prejudiced people like that donating to the orphanage?”

“I suppose you’re right.” He murmured, finally squeezing Harry’s hand in return.

A group of old ladies wandered up to the stall and Harry reluctantly released Draco’s hands to serve them.

“How can I help you?”

Chapter End Notes

I had the pleasure of helping run a cake stall at a Christmas fair once - it was absolute hell and I would never do it again, no matter how much anyone paid me. Colour coded boxes for the flavours were a life saver with a busy crowd.

The bit about the Hogwarts students having extra time off - During high school (Brit here, so it’s a bit different) we had a new school building built and we got an extra month off school during summer while it was being finished and got extra work over the holidays, which is where that idea came from.
Chapter 17

“I have glitter in places no one should ever have glitter.” Draco grumbled, attempting to make a clear spot on the couch so he could sit down.

“Grinch.” Harry muttered, tugging him down and laughing when he, quite rightly, let out a very manly shriek.

“Potter! These jeans are new! I’ll never get this stuff off!”

“We’re all covered in it. Who’s idea was it to use Weasley’s Everlasting Glitter anyway? I love the twins, but this was designed with driving parents insane.” It was part of their new craft range and was designed so it didn’t fall off when it had been stuck to something, like the cards they were making. In theory it was great - no shower of glitter when you took a card out of an envelope or stuck a drawing on the fridge - but it stuck to everything. Skin, walls, carpet and even the two orphanage cats, who had being rolling around in piles of it all day and currently resembled furry muggle disco balls.

“Leo bought it on a Hogsmeade trip, the menace.”

“Leo’s not a menace!” Melissa protested, crossing her very sparkly arms.

“Who’s calling me a menace?” Leo asked as he walked back into the living room, also coated in glitter and closely followed by Teddy, who had taken quite a liking to Leo over the weekend.

“Draco is!” Melissa squealed, giggling as he mock glared at her.

“Traitor.” He muttered playfully, sliding off the couch and onto the worn living room carpet next to her. “And do you know what happens to traitors?”

“No.” She was still giggling, leaning forwards over the multitude of pens on the floor in front of her.

“They get tickles!” She shrieked in laughter as he lunged forward and wrapped his arms around her waist, tugging her onto his lap and tickling her sides.

She wriggled, trying and failing to escape his insistent fingers. She gasped, breathless with laughter.

“Stop! ‘M not a traitor!”

He relented, laughing along with her. “You sure?”

“I’m sure!” She grinned up at him, glitter smeared across her nose and left cheek from Draco’s jumper. “You’re sparkly!”

“You mean sparkly, sweetheart.” He tried to brush some of glitter off her face, but only succeeded in covering his thumb in it. “How’s your card going?”

Card making was another one of their Christmas traditions at the orphanage. It was rather like a muggle secret santa, but with handmade cards. It was more affordable and fun for the kids - all of them, right down to the little toddlers, could join in.

Today, they had commandeered the living room and dining room to make them. The supplies were spread between the two rooms, so children were constantly in and out of both rooms.

Melissa was in her element. She absolutely adored drawing and making things, which made this one
of her favourite things about Christmas, besides the present giving.

She was a very careful and considerate artist - every felt tip had its kid put back on straight away, all pencils were handled with unbelievable care, making sure she didn’t press too hard and break the lead and each little bit of cut out paper was done with so much care. Even the paints she had at home were immaculate, which she had been given by Draco for her very first Christmas at the orphanage two years ago.

It was adorable, the unusual amount of care she had for the craft supplies, yet heartbreaking at the same time. Draco knew very well why she cared so much for her belongings, in a way that was so much more gentle than a child of her age usually did - she had had so little while she lived with her birth parents that she had needed to make the most of every little thing she had. It still made him angry knowing that her pathetic excuse for a family were still having that effect on her.

“Good! But I need more glitter!”

Draco groaned and let her climb down off his lap to run off to the other room to find more.

“There’s more glitter on your jumper than her card.” Harry said as Draco stood back up to return to his place on the sofa.

“I’ll rub it on you if you don’t shut up. You can’t expect us to show up at the Weasley’s for dinner looking like this, can you?” Draco whined, shaking glitter out of his sleeve.

“George normally shows up still covered in whatever potion he’s been testing out and if Charlie comes round, it’s usually straight from a day of heavy labour and that man sweats like nobody’s business.”

“Very reassuring.”

“Cheer up Draco, least it’s not that toffee stuff David got covered in last year when he tripped and landed in the sweet box by the fireplace.” Leo chimed in, coming to sit on the arm of the chair next to him. “Do you think Phoebe will like this?” He asked, showing the two men the card he was making, looking uncharacteristically shy and uncertain.

It was a black card and Leo had drawn on the front with a white pencil. His drawing was of an incredibly detailed polar bear looking up at the top left hand corner of the card, which Draco assumed he was going to complete with a sky.

“It’s brilliant Leo. Phoebe loves her polar bears, so I think it’s a great idea.” Draco replied. He was, as usual blown away by Leo’s artistic talent - Draco very little creative talent himself and admired anyone who was able to use pens and pencils to create something so beautiful.

“I didn’t know you were an artist!” Harry exclaimed in wonder, reaching over Draco to take the card for a closer look. “You know, one of my friends runs a small art school with his husband - I’m sure I can get him to offer you a few sessions there if you like.”

Leo blushed deeply and looked down at his hands. “It’s really not that good. Besides, I wouldn’t be able to pay for something like that.”

Draco nudged his knee and handed the card back. “You really are a great artist, you know. I’m not just saying that.”

“You wouldn’t have to pay for it, he’d give you them for free.”
Leo wrinkled his nose. “I don’t like getting things for free all the time - I don’t like the special treatment I get just because I’m an orphan.”

“You’re a terrible slytherin, honestly. No slytherin ever complains about free stuff!” Draco said jokingly.

Leo huffed, but smiled. “It still wouldn’t be fair for me to get free sessions when the rest of the kids here won’t.”

“Dean loves kids - he’d do a free session for all of you just to spend more time around children.”

“Maybe it would be ok.” Leo replied hesitantly. The teen hopped off the arm of the couch. “I’m going back to help Alex make paper springs.”

“Would you really do that for them?” Draco asked, slightly awed at Harry’s easy display of generosity. It was a value that had never been instilled into him as important, growing up as a pureblood and it amazed Draco to see how Harry was able to constantly be so selfless.

Harry looked quite surprised that Draco thought he could be lying. “Of course! Dean’s always doing free sessions for school kids. Art was kinda his way of de-stressing during school, so he wanted to see if it helped other kids.” Harry shrugged. “Him and Seamus are looking to adopt in the new year too, so it wouldn’t do any harm to introduce them to some of these orphans first, would it?”

“You really are something else, Harry Potter.” Draco murmured, suddenly feeling a very strong urge to kiss the awkward grin off his face.
“Glitter.” Draco growled, staring at the offending sparkly dust covering his kitchen worktop and the bottom of his plate.

They’d bathed and showered as soon as they’d returned from the Weasley’s - who, as Harry predicted, weren’t fazed by their glittery state - and Draco had made sure that he’d removed every speck of glitter from his and Melissa’s skin with the ‘Glitter Removal Gel’ George Weasley had provided.

(His shop had had to stock up on the stuff lately - apparently people had complained about the glitter. Draco couldn’t imagine why.)

And yet, he was still finding glitter everywhere. They hadn’t even made any cards in his house!

“Lissy?”

“Yeah?” She replied, pancake halfway to her mouth.

“Why is there glitter all over the counter?”

She shrugged. “Don’t know.” She tilted her head to the side and appeared to think deeply - or as deeply as a four year old could - while chewing on her breakfast. “Oh!” She exclaimed at last. “You put your bag on there yesty-day!” She looked triumphant and nodded decisively before returning to her pancakes.

Draco briefly recalled dumping the bag in question on the side prior to carrying a half asleep Melissa up the stairs for a bath before bed, then putting it in the hallway and going to bed himself. “Thank you.” He murmured to Lissy as he passed on his way to the hall.

There he found his bag - still containing the card Lissy had made, her allergy medicine and spare hearing aid - which glittered in the morning sun that was filtering through the window, mocking him.

“Damn glitter.”

•••

“It’s snowing!” Melissa gasped quietly, awe evident in her voice as they landed, having apparated to the alley near the Leaky Cauldron from home.

Tiny, delicate and pure white snowflakes drifted down to the ground in front of them, sticking to their scarves and eyelashes.

“Does this mean we can make snowy-men when we get back home?” She asked, jumping up and down in excitement.

“If it sticks, of course we can. There’ll be plenty of snow by the time we get home if it does.”

She cheered and spent the rest of the short walk to the Leaky trying to catch snowflakes on her tongue.

They entered the pub, bringing with them a gust of cold wind and several of the more resilient snowflakes. The pub was as dingy as ever, sporting the same, albeit much older, regular drinkers at
the bar and the same lingering smell of cheap whiskey. Some work had obviously gone into it since he’d last visited about 8 years ago - the bar was visible, rather than hidden under a thick layer of crumbs and dust and most of the glasses lined up behind the bar were transparent, rather than translucent and grimy. His ‘inner pureblood twat’ urged him to turn back out the door and cast every cleaning charm he knew on himself, but he continued on, clutching onto Melissa’s hand as hard as he could without hurting her as the steady lull of conversation dipped with their arrival.

He drew the child closer, mindful of the venomous glares he was receiving, and hurried her along, weaving through chairs. He wanted to get out of the door and into the little yard that led to Diagon Alley before someone said something, but luck - as per usual - wasn’t on his side.

“Oh! Death eater! Who the fuck let ye’ near a child? Kidnap her did ye’, scumbag?”

Melissa suddenly looked scared and lifted her arms up to Draco to be picked up. He complied, scooping her up and allowing her to hide her face in his neck. “Don’t worry, Lissy.” He murmured, stroking her back and ignoring who ever was shouting across the pub and quickening his pace. He was so, so close to the door and they spoke again.

“I’m talkin’ to ye’, ye’ bastard!” The man shouted, standing up from his table in the middle of the pub, beer sloshing over the side of his pint glass as Draco risked turning around. “So’ one,” he started again, slurring, “some one better ge’ th’ or-aur-aurors!” The drunken man began to advance forward, when Draco’s ginger saviour stepped in between them.

“I doubt you want to hurt him.” The ginger-haired man began, crossing his arms in a way that must have seemed more menacing from the front than behind, because the drunkard stopped and suddenly appeared uncertain.

“Ye’-ye’ must be mad, Weasley!” The man spluttered, splashing half his pint over another patron as he gesticulated wildly. “He shouldn’t ‘ave a bloody child!”

“I know perfectly well that the child is in safe hands and currently, the only person that is endangering them is you. I’m sure Tom will escort you out.” With that, the ginger-haired man slung a heavy arm around Draco’s shoulder and guided them through the last few metres to the door and out of the pub before releasing him.

The man looked directly at him and Draco paled. He hadn’t seen Bill Weasley since he was in 6th year.

“W-Weasley.” He stuttered, still stroking Melissa’s back comfortingly. “Thank you, you didn’t have to do that. You shouldn’t have done that, you have no reason to after what I did and I’m so-“

Bill cut him off with a quiet chuckle. “That’s all in the past, Malfoy. It is no one but Greyback’s fault that I ended up like this, I know you would have been killed, your whole family would have been killed if you hadn’t have fixed that cabinet. I don’t blame you - you couldn’t have known Greyback was behind sent through. I was angry at you, for the longest time I was angry with everyone - for not stopping Greyback, for being so against me marrying the woman I loved, for judging Fleur, for signing our family up for a war, for starting the war in the first place. That list could go on and on.”

He gave Draco a smile. “Besides, you definitely aren’t the same boy from Hogwarts - Harry’s been singing your praises all month and so have the rest of my family. Vicky won’t stop going on about you - she’s fascinated by your hair, did you know?” He raised his wand to the wall and tapped the brick that transformed it into an archway.

“I don’t think I trust you completely yet - I barely know you after all - but my daughter and my mother both seem to adore you, and they are two of the best judges of character I know.”
“Thank you.” Draco murmured quietly, smiling slightly as Melissa lifted her head to watch the wall transform. Bill nodded to them and strode through the archway, disappearing into the crowd.

“I liked his hair.” Melissa mumbled. “Can we go and get the stuff we need now?”

Still not quite daring to believe his luck, Draco nodded and walked through the archway.

... 

“There’s so much snow!” Melissa cried, practically leaping from Draco’s arms as he apparated to the living room. She rushed to the window that looked out onto their garden, pressing her face up to it. “Can we go out and make snowmen?”

“Let’s put some of this stuff away first ok? Then we’ll get wrapped up a bit better and head out.” She pouted but nodded and took the pyjamas that they’d picked out for Teddy’s Christmas present off Draco. “Go put them under my bed, please.”

She hurried off and Draco emptied the other bag, which was all groceries with the exception of the tubes of ‘Glitter Removal Gel’ he’d bought from George’s shop. He set the tubes down on the side and packed the rest of the stuff away with a flick of his wand. He turned back to the other bag and removed the blanket that was folded up at the bottom.

He stroked the soft fabric as he placed it on the back of the sofa, smiling. Melissa had gushed over the soft, fluffy blanket when they were in the shop, stroking it against her cheeks and laughing. She’d asked him if they had any blankets at home, so they could snuggle under them and make blanket forts like they did in the orphanage and Draco had bought the blanket almost straight away - she’d thanked him, quite unnecessarily, almost nonstop on the way home.

He’d never had that sort of blanket as a child - one to play with and cuddle under with his parents. He’d had one on his bed in the colder months and had obviously had blankets as a tiny baby, but they’d never been anything other than something to keep warm in - the idea of fooling around with a blanket would have shocked his mother to the core. He was determined to make sure Melissa’s childhood was nothing like his own and if blanket forts were what Melissa liked, then he’d be all too happy to make them.

... 

Harry flooed into Draco’s kitchen and was surprised to be met with silence.

“Draco? Lissy?” There was no reply and Harry walked into the living, which was also empty, save for a new blanket that was slung over the back of the couch.

Where are they? He wondered. Draco had invited him over for dinner last night - surely he couldn’t have forgotten and gone out?

There was a loud shriek, followed by laughter and Harry turned around, watching through the window as Draco, who was crouched down in the snow, threw snowballs at Melissa.

When did it snow? Harry had been cooped up inside all day though and he had flooed straight from the atrium, so he supposed he wouldn’t have noticed.

Grinning, he hurried back into the kitchen and out into the garden to join in.

“Harry! We’re having a snowball fight!” She bent down and packed a small chunk of snow together in her hands. She drew her arm back and threw it upwards, giggling when it hit his shoulder and he
gasped, falling to his knees.

“You’ve wounded me!”

“No I haven’t, silly!” She packed more little snowballs together and began to build a small collection at her feet.

“I think you could kiss it better.” Harry said, still clutching his shoulder dramatically.

She looked at him intently for a few seconds and shook her head. “I’m not a parent! Only parents can kiss things better!” She turned to Draco, smiling brightly. “You can kiss it better!”

Both men blushed, but Draco nodded. “Okay then.” Harry was wary all of a sudden. Draco looked far too innocent.

Draco darted forwards and pressed a brief kiss to Harry’s shoulder - the pressure of which Harry could still feel moments later when Draco shoved a large snowball down the back of his neck.

“Draco!” Harry scrambled to his feet and waved his wand to create a pile of snowballs, sorely wishing that Draco would kiss him properly.
Harry shivered and cast what must have been his 50th drying charm of the day. It had started to snow early that morning, just before Harry had left for work, and it had only gotten heavier as the day wore on, leaving him wet and very cold.

The trio had been delegated the task of dealing with all the snow related incidents that the wizarding public had reported. They ranged from grumpy shopkeepers complaining about teens throwing snowballs at their windows to kneazles stuck in snow. Harry wasn’t sure why aurors were needed to melt a pile of snow to get a cat out from underneath when the owners could do it perfectly well by themselves, but he wasn’t stuck indoors doing paperwork, so he couldn’t complain.

Currently, the trio were on Diagon Alley, handing out another warning to a teen who had hit an unsuspecting passerby with a very large snowball - the woman they’d hit had called the aurors to report an assault. The only thing that was really injured was her pride and her faux fur purse, but they’d had to record the incident and the name of the ‘perpetrator’ - as the woman insisted on calling the teen - down anyway and issue a standard warning.

“The youth these days, honestly Auror Potter! In my day, we stayed in and practiced our charm work and our potion theory, our posture and our manners - we didn’t go around attacking our elders, oh no!” She tutted and glared at the teens, who were shuffling and looking away sheepishly. “Good day, Aurors! Thank you ever so for the help.” She tottered off down the street, without so much as a backwards glance.

“Dear Merlin,” Ron muttered, tucking the completed report sheet into his inner pocket. “She reminds me of my Great Aunt Muriel - all ‘back in my day.’” He turned to the teens again and put on what Harry called his ‘Stern Auror Face’. “Right, I know you were only having a snowball fight with each other and having a bit of fun, but doing it here, on a busy street full of shops just before Christmas isn’t a great idea, is it?”

The teens shook their heads and mumbled out apologies.

Astoria, who had spent a full minute yawning into her hand, suddenly brightened up. “You can be on your way then, take your snowball fights elsewhere and try and avoid hitting old ladies with snow, eh?”

The teens scurried off in a huddle and disappeared off into the throng of people on the street.

“I think we can take a break now.” She asked hopefully, glancing longingly at the Queer Quaffle - a cozy, Quidditch-themed café run by a lesbian couple that served what was quite possibly the best treacle tart in the world.

“Sounds like a good idea.” Ron said, already heading towards the door. “I can practically taste those shortbreads already.” He murmured. His eyes widened suddenly. “My mum’s are the best, of course!”

“Oh of course.” Harry and Astoria replied dutifully. Ron considered eating another person’s baking some sort of treason, which Harry always found amusing.

They entered the café and all three of them stopped for a few moments in the doorway, taking in the familiar, sweet smell of the café. The smell was a mixture of freshly baked goods and flowers and it was one of his favourite scents - remarkably similar to what the amortenia smelt like in 6th year.
The woman behind the counter waved them over as she served another customer. Handing over the change to the man she was serving and telling him to have a nice day, she turned to greet the trio. “I haven’t seen you three for a while! What brings you to my humble establishment?”

“This bloody weather, that’s what.” Ron grumbled, sliding onto one of the barstools next to the breakfast bar.

She nodded understandingly. “So it’s an expresso day, then? With a side of shortbreads, obviously.”

Ron nodded, staring dreamily at the glass case that separated him from the cakes and biscuits. “And a Bakewell tart, please?”

“Coming right up! The usual, you two?”

“Yes please, Ellie.”

She set to work as Harry and Astoria slumped gratefully onto stools next to Ron.

“I swear if we get another call about a stuck kneazle before we finish, I’m going to let the furball freeze.” Astoria muttered, waving her wand over her robes and drying them off.

“Sounds exciting, being an auror. Saving cats from snowdrifts and old granny’s from snowballs. So very glamorous.” Ellie laughed, placing their plates and cups down in front of them.

Harry scowled, but accepted his latte gratefully. “It’s not exactly what we signed up for. I hate snow.” He whined.

Ron guffawed, spraying crumbs over himself and Harry. He swallowed and brushed the crumbs away. “That’s not what you said this morning.” He turned to Ellie, leaning forward excitedly as if he was telling her about a thrilling adventure. “He spent the entire morning going on and on and on about playing in the snow with Malfoy and their kid last night. Snow frogs, snowball fights, how nice Malfoy looked with snow in his hair - every little detail.”

“You have a child?” Ellie asked incredulously, resting her elbows on the counter and leaning forwards. “How did that not make the Prophet and why didn’t you tell me?”

Harry rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly and took a bite of his treacle tart, hoping to delay answering.

“Well,” he began, running his fingers over the rim of his cup. “The documents for the adoption aren’t made public until the house inspections are finished, so only people who we told know.”

“So you adopted a child with Draco. I didn’t even know you two were together!”

“We aren’t! It was an accident! I was on a pain potion and my head was messed up and I woke up in hospital to discover I’d accidentally adopted a child with him.”

“Not that he’s complained, mind.” Astoria chimed in, smirking when Harry glared. “It’s true! We all know you want to shove him up against a wall/the nearest flat surface.” She wrinkled her nose and seemed to reconsider. “Or maybe hold hands and snuggle - I forget you’re a gryffindor sometimes.”

“And You didn’t tell me because....?” Ellie asked, breaking off a small chunk of the crust of his tart, much to his indignation.

“I sort of forgot?” He trailed off sheepishly and ducked his head.
“Don’t worry, El. Me and ‘Mione only found out because we flooed over to his after he left St Mungo’s and made him explain. Then obviously mum and dad asked about his health and he told all of my family.”

“Hm.” El frowned and turned away to serve another customer.

“You can meet Melissa tomorrow at the Orphanage Charity Ball? I think you might have met her already when you took Terence for the decorating day, but I’ll introduce you properly?”

“Ok, but I want you to let Terence stay over for a sleepover after the ball, so me and Iz can have a date night.”

“Ok, I’m sure Melissa will be thrilled, she got on well with Terence last week.” Harry cradled his cup in his hands, still feeling guilty for not telling her.

Astoria lay a comforting hand on his knee under the table. “So how are Iz and Terence?” She asked, steering the conversation away from Harry.

He smiled gratefully and let himself relax as Ellie chatted animatedly about her partner and child.
Chapter 20

I had intended for their first kiss to be in this chapter, but things took a different turn.

If all goes well, I should get two chapters up tomorrow

“You seem tense.” Harry remarked, watching as Draco braided Melissa’s hair.

He was stood in the doorway to Draco’s bedroom and the pair were sat on his bed. Melissa was sat with her feet dangling over the edge of the bed, looking rather forlorn, and Draco sat cross legged behind her. All three were in dress robes, ready to apparate to the charity ball, but Harry was almost certain that no one wanted to go.

Draco ignored him and instead asked Melissa to pass him another hair tie. “All done.” He murmured, patting her head and letting her stand up. “Go and wash that pen off your hands and we’ll go, ok?”

“Ok.” She whispered, exiting the room. Harry’s heart physically hurt to see the normally loud and bubbly girl so subdued.

“Draco?”

He sighed and scrubbed a hand over his face. “I really don’t want to go to this event.”

“So don’t.”

Draco scoffed. “If only it was that simple. We’re expected to be there for the orphanage. The purebloods are more likely to donate if they see that a fellow pureblood is a representative - my mother may have all but disowned me, but my family name still holds some power in the world of pureblood politics. Besides, the kids hate this sort of event as much as I do, it helps them to have familiar faces there.”

“Why do you hate them so much? You grew up like this didn’t you? Surely you’d be a natural at it.”

“Exactly, I grew up like this - watching my parents socialise with bigots and donate to causes they didn’t care a smidge about just to uphold their reputations. This is almost exactly the same and I \textit{hate} it.” He slammed his fist down on the bedcovers in anger. “I hate that there are people with the power to change things, to improve how child abuse is dealt with, who will donate large sums of money - fractions of their paycheques in reality - and everyone else will see that as enough. Sure, a lump of galleons will be enough to pay for counselling sessions for 10 more orphans for a year, but that wouldn’t be necessary if they actually \textit{changed} things. Harsher sentences for abusers, charging people for covering up abuse like they did with Melissa, allowing people to intervene if they suspect abuse is happening, rather than when the child is lying in a hospital bed. I could go on and on. And I can’t even change things myself.” Draco’s voice broke and Harry realised that he was \textit{crying}.

Harry had his arms around him in seconds, letting Draco rest his head on his shoulder. “Every single petition I’ve submitted to the Wizengamot, no matter how many signatures it has, has been vetoed by them, just because of my name. Anything that’s even remotely associated with me has been disregarded by them. I hate having to watch them pledge thousands, millions even, to the orphans
when they won’t even change laws to improve their lives because they don’t like who I was as a child. My father bought out half of them - they had no problems with him even when he openly supported Voldemort - but because of a mark that I had forced on my arm, they won’t have anything to do with me.”

Harry was speechless. There was no point trying to comfort Draco with words, they were meaningless at this point. Instead, he wrapped his arms around Draco’s waist and hoped that his presence would be enough to comfort him.

“Melissa,” Draco murmured eventually, voice muffled by the fabric of Harry’s robes. “Melissa’s upset because she hates these events too. They terrify her. She knows her hearing aid might short circuit and she doesn’t like big crowds and she despises robes and she hates having people come up to her to coo at her and squeeze her cheeks. I wouldn’t bring her with me, but everyone who I’d trust to look after will be there and I don’t want to leave her on her own with some babysitter she’s never met - she doesn’t do too well with new people, although you seem to be the exception to that rule.” He chuckled quietly and wiped furiously at his eyes.

“We should get going,” Draco said, louder this time. “Lissy?” He called, standing up off the bed and avoiding Harry’s eye. He waved his wand over himself, removing the wrinkles from his robes and the tear tracks from his face. Melissa came back into the room and raised her arms to Draco. “Up please.”

Draco complied, holding her close and reaching a hand out to Harry. “I’ll apparate us.”

•••

The night was going surprisingly well.

With the help of Hermione - as she insisted he called her - Draco managed to find a quiet spot in one of the corridors off the main ballroom and some books and pencils for the children to play with, away from the overbearing crowds. Melissa had cheered up considerably and was giggling as she, Terence and Jack, another orphan, coloured in a picture of a rubber duck.

They were being supervised by Zoë, a quiet teen from one of the other orphanages, who Draco knew was more than capable of watching over a small group of children. Despite this, he made frequent trips between the ballroom and their corner, bringing nibbles from the buffet table and welcoming the excuse to leave the company of stuffy purebloods trying to persuade him to invest in their shady side businesses.

He was most definitely not avoiding Harry.

He was embarrassed, of course, about his outburst before they had left, but also grateful that Harry had understood what needed and had just held him.

It was incredibly difficult to keep his feelings for Harry buried when the man kept doing things like that.

•••

“Draco!” Harry waved the blonde man over as he slid back into the room, returning from where ever he kept disappearing off to.

Draco flushed slightly, obviously reluctant to come over and join the small group, but joined them anyway.
“Draco, I’d like you to meet Andromeda Tonks, your aunt and Teddy’s grandmother.” Harry saw the flash of fear in Draco’s eyes, but whether it was because of her striking similarities to Bellatrix or fear that she would treat him in a similar way to his mother, Harry wasn’t sure.

“It’s nice to meet you, Aunt Andromeda. Your grandson is a wonderful boy.”

Andromeda chuckled and opened her arms wrapping Draco in a hug. “I know Teddy is a wonderful boy - he couldn’t be anything else growing up with Harry by his side. He is quite taken with you as well, you know. He’s quite a shy child, he doesn’t warm to people very quickly - yet you seem to be an exception. My grandson is a good judge of character - I believe we will get along well.” She smiled and kissed his cheek. Draco breathed a quiet sigh of relief and returned her smile with his own, slightly shaky one.

Andromeda smirked suddenly and glanced knowingly between him and Draco. “I believe Teddy isn’t the only one who is quite enamoured with you.”

Both men blushed and Harry stammered to reply, but he was interrupted by the arrival of Narcissa Malfoy.

“I heard that my estranged sister was here.” She said, loud enough for the people around them to hear. Heads turned, presumably to see if the sisters would argue, since their history was well known to the wizarding public.

“And you heard correctly.” Andromeda replied coolly. “If it is quite alright with you, I would prefer to stay estranged from you. You still hold the same prejudices mother enforced on us regarding blood and I have no desire to reconcile with a woman who sees my family members as lesser people for things they can’t help or the choices they’ve made.”

Narcissa looked affronted and opened her mouth to speak, but Draco beat her to it.

“This event is about raising money for orphans, not you and your narrow-minded ideals, mother. Please refrain from trying to make a scene and find a group who are more amenable to chatting with you.”

She huffed haughtily. “I have no wish to speak to people who dare talk to me that way. I may see you on Christmas Day, Draco.” Nose in the air, she walked away, leaving the small group in silence.

“Insufferable woman.” Andromeda muttered. “I reached out to her several times over the years, you know - my wedding, Dora’s birth, when you were born, Draco - and she never once replied or acknowledged me. I cannot believe she has dared to attempt to speak to me when she herself has shunned me so many times.” She sniffed quietly and dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief. “If you’ll excuse me, gentlemen. I hope I will see you on Christmas Eve - I know your little Melissa’s birthday is then, Teddy insisted I buy her a present.”

She weaved through the crowd to wards the doors Draco had come through, leaving the pair alone.

“I want to thank you, you know, for before.” Draco said quietly. “I’m sorry for crying all over you, too.”

Harry grinned at him, relieved Draco wasn’t going to pretend like it had never happened. “It’s fine, honestly. We all get emotional and upset.”

Draco nodded, seemingly relieved. “The kids are out in the corridor, if you want to join them and get away from this crowd.”
Harry nodded, eager to get away from the prying eyes of the people around them, and followed Draco out.

•••

“Thank you, ladies and gentlemen of the Wizarding World, for being here tonight.” Kingsley Shacklebolt said, his voice amplified by a Sonorus charm.

He was stood on a stage in front of the crowd at the far end of the ballroom. He was about to announce how much had been donated over the course of the night, after his standard speech about unity and equality that Draco had heard about a million times. He was holding Melissa, who was dropping off on his shoulder, and Harry was stood next to him in a similar position, with Teddy asleep in his arms, blue head curled under his neck. Draco himself was tired and he hoped that the minister would hurry up so they could go home and sleep.

Then he heard it - a sickening crackling noise and a popping sound.

Melissa froze, her entire body ridged, and let out a heartbreaking squeak.

He’d heard the same sound only a handful of times before, but he knew straight away it meant her hearing aid had short circuited.

She gripped the front of his robes tightly, eyes wide and fearful as she leaned back and looked at him.

Draco turned around and pushed his way through the crowd, closely followed by Harry and Teddy. Melissa was clinging to him and sobbing quietly. There was no point putting a new hearing aid in while in the same area that the other one had short circuited in - they’d only be left with two broken ones.

Harry’s presence parted the crowd with ease and Draco was able to exit the ballroom.

The doors closed behind them and left them in silence, which was only broken by Melissa’s crying. He knelt down on the floor and set Melissa down in front of him.

He pointed at his chest and tapped just his fingertips against his temple, hand flat - signing ‘I know’ when she reached for him again and pointed at her ear. He dug in his pockets one-handedly, the other holding onto Melissa’s hand, trying to comfort her at the same time.

“I’ll get it, you hold her.” Harry said, pulling Draco’s fumbling hand out of the pocket. Draco took Melissa back into his arms, stroking her hair as Harry searched for the box with the new hearing aid in. He pulled back moments later and opened the box for Draco. Teddy was still asleep in Harry’s other arm, oblivious.

Draco tilted her head and gently pulled the part that looped behind the back of her ear forwards, up and over the ear, then twisted it slowly and removed it from her ear. He dropped it on the floor and brushed a thumb over the small burn the hearing aid had left behind when it sparked, casting a wandless healing charm over it.

He took the new one and put it into her ear carefully after turning it on. He adjusted it and tucked the outer part behind her ear.

“Can you hear now?” He murmured, waiting with bated breath. She nodded against his neck and Draco sagged in relief. She lifted her head up, rubbing her eyes and sniffing. “Tank you.” She whispered.
“Oh sweetheart,” he wiped her tears away and kissed her forehead. “You don’t need to thank me - you need to be able to hear.”

“Okay.” She said, barely audible. “Can we go home now please?”

“As soon as possible, I just need to tell Mrs Wittle that I need to go and we need to tell Terence’s mums that he can’t stay over tonight.”

She shook her head frantically. “Don’t wanna go back in there!” Her eyes glistened with tears again and he hugged her again.

“You don’t need to, sweetheart. You can stay with Harry, okay? And I’ll go by myself so we don’t wake Teddy up.”

She nodded slowly and held her arms out to Harry. Harry lowered himself until he was sat with his back against the wall of the corridor so that he could hold both children. She scrambled onto his lap and curled up in a similar position to Teddy.

Cheering and applause were dying down as he entered the ballroom again, the minister having just revealed the total amount they’d raised. Their friends and family were stood at the back of the crowd, near the door and Draco hurried over.

“Is Lissy ok?” Terence asked as soon as Draco came over, clutching Ellie’s hand.

“She is now, her hearing aid stopped working, but you can’t stay over I’m afraid - she’s still very upset and she needs to rest.”

The boy and his mums nodded. “It’s okay,” Ellie and Iz reassured him. “You don’t need another little one under your feet while Lissy’s so upset, we’ll organise a sleepover another time, alright Terence?” The boy nodded.

“Can we come over tomorrow and see her, Draco?” Molly Weasley asked, wringing her hands. “She looked awfully upset and Mrs Wittle told me how frightening it is for her.”

“I’m sure she’ll love to see you.” Draco replied, “But I really need to go, so I’ll see you tomorrow.” He glanced over the group. “Andromeda’s gone home hasn’t she?”

Molly nodded. “We’ll take Teddy if you like?” Draco shook his head.

“He’s already fast asleep, we don’t want to disturb him. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

They wished him good night and he returned to Harry and the kids. Melissa had fallen into a fitful sleep, twitching with every movement Harry made, so Draco took Teddy instead, to ensure she didn’t wake up completely.

••••

The four of them stumbled into Draco’s bedroom yawning.

“We’ll need to share the bed.” Draco said, transfiguring Teddy’s robes into pyjamas. “She’ll wake up if you put her down and I don’t want to sleep in the guest room away from her.”

Harry nodded, pushing aside the part of him that leapt with joy at the idea of sharing a bed with Draco and sat down on the bed, careful not to jostle the sleeping child in his arms. “That’s fine.”

With a few more waves of Draco’s wand, their dress robes had been transfigured into comfortable
pyjamas and Draco climbed into bed too, settling Teddy in between them.

The settled down, Melissa asleep on Harry’s chest and Teddy snoozing between the two adults, Draco’s arm lying over the blue haired boy’s chest and his hand reaching to undo her braids.

“She’s deaf in both ears, so why doesn’t she wear two hearing aids?” Harry asked quietly, mindful of their sleeping charges.

“It’s too dangerous. When one short circuits like that, it sends out shockwaves of magic, like an explosion or a ripple in water. If she had another one in her other ear, when the shock waves hit it, there would be a very high chance of it exploding. Muggle items short circuit because of a build up of magical energy - if too much is added all at once, it will blow up.” Draco stopped for a moment and seemed to think. “It’s like adding muggle petrol to a small fire. The magical energy in the device is like a small fire. Little bits of timber are added and it grows - like the amount of magical energy in the device. When a shockwave hits it though, it’s like adding petrol, because the flames are suddenly huge and uncontrollable. The device can’t handle this sized ‘fire’, so it will explode.”

“I didn’t know that.” Harry murmured.

“Please just go to sleep Harry.” Draco replied, eyes already drifting shut. He was asleep moments later and Harry followed soon after, lulled to sleep by Draco’s steady breathing and his hand resting against Harry’s side.
Draco awoke slowly, stretching his legs out straight underneath the bed covers and wondering why his bed was so warm.

He opened his eyes, allowing them to adjust to the darkness of the room. Teddy was curled up next to him, facing away from him. He had one fist tucked under his chin and his other arm stretched out towards where Melissa’s head was lying. Melissa was spread out on the bed, half lying on Harry’s chest with her arms and legs stretched out like a starfish and mumbling inaudibly in her sleep.

Harry’s head was tilted towards him, mouth ajar and tousled dark hair splayed across the pillow. He made a quiet noise and shifted slightly, the corners of his mouth curling into a soft smile as he slept.

Draco groaned quietly and hid his face in the crook of his arm, just above Teddy’s head. It seemed like yesterday had been a day for embarrassing himself - first he’d cried all over Harry then he’d practically demanded that he share a bed with him.

I have Harry Potter in my bed he thought, snorting quietly as he imagined what his 16 year old self - closeted and dealing with the realisation that he found Harry bloody Potter of all people attractive - would have thought.

He lifted his head from his arms and took the opportunity to look properly at Harry - something he hadn’t done since they were in Hogwarts, when both of them spent almost every meal staring not-so-subtly at each other.

In the pale, early morning sunlight that was peeking through the curtains, Draco admired Harry’s sleeping face - admired the long, dark lashes that dusted his cheeks, resting on the small smattering of dark freckles that spread across the bridge of his nose. Admired his sharp jawline, the dark skin covered with small amount of stubble. Admired the way his ink-black hair - hair Draco had insulted on many occasions, but secretly wondered what it would be like to run his hands through it - spread haphazardly across the white pillows.

He was handsome, in a rather rugged sort of way, emphasised by his well-fitting auror robes on most days. Draco imagined he could be perceived as a rather intimidating man, but his rather menacing auror persona was softened by his bright smiles and the small child he was currently hugging close to him.

Harry turned his head and made a quite noise at the back of his throat as he slept, his mouth twitching into another smile. Draco suddenly realised just how long he had been staring and looked away.
Cheeks flaming, Draco pulled himself into a sitting position, careful not to wake Teddy. He found his wand on his nightstand and cast a tempus charm as he slipped out of the bed, discovering that it was just past 8 o’clock.

He switched his pyjama top for a much warmer jumper and pulled the bed covers back over Teddy before heading out the room.

He wondered, as he walked downstairs to the kitchen, what it would be like to wake up like that with Harry every day - like a family.

He had been glad to have a makeshift, ever changing, family in the form of the orphanage and its inhabitants and had been overjoyed when he had been able to officially make Melissa his child, but he’d never truly considered what it would be like with a partner by his side too.

He’d never had proper relationships in the past - he’d dated Pansy briefly before he came out and he’d had flings over the years - and after the war he’d resigned him to the fact that it was very unlikely that he’d find anyone willing to date him. After all, no wanted to date a death eater. And even if he found someone who didn’t care about the mark on his arm, the press would be enough to deter them.

He hadn’t read the Prophet for years - he had no desire to read articles accusing him of all sorts of criminal activity - but he’d seen headlines in passing speculating about his friends and acquaintances just because he’d been pictured with them. He could hardly imagine what it would be like if they got wind that he was dating someone - love potion and imperious accusations would only be the start of it.

He’d seen it happen with Theo and Pansy - both his old friends had had partners who had left them because they couldn’t handle the negative press and he didn’t want that to happen to him.

But Harry...

Harry was used to the media attention, even if he hated it more than anything in the world, and was used to their ever changing opinions - he could do no wrong in their eyes on one day, yet be the next Grindlewald two days later. He knew Harry had a similar attitude towards the press as he did - if he didn’t read it, it wasn’t published. Denial probably wasn’t the best way to deal with it, but it worked.

He flicked the kettle on and set about making coffee, still thinking deeply.

Draco was relatively confident that Harry had some sort ‘feeling’ for him - if his actions and friends were anything to go by - but Draco doubted they would strong enough for Harry to want to start any sort of relationship him. It was very unlikely that Harry wanted to be settling down with children with his steadily advancing career - especially not with him, what with his family problems and the general hatred he received from the public.

He supposed he could do something, act upon his own feelings and see how things turned out, but it was quite a bit of a risk and Draco wasn’t a risk taker.

He could count on one hand the number of risks he’d taken since Hogwarts.

He’d come out to his mother - his father thankfully already dead by then - and that had left him almost alone, his mother hated him after that and if it wasn’t for her fierce family loyalty, she wouldn’t haven’t spoken to him again.

He’d applied for an official position in the orphanage - which was one of the best things he’d ever done - further distancing himself from his mother and resulting in several weeks of speculative
articles about his motives in the Prophet.

He’d adopted Melissa - most definitely the best thing he’d ever done - and been subjected to several very invasive house searches by aurors and more disapproval from his mother.

If he acted on his feelings, he risked losing the friendship he’d built with Harry over the past few weeks - Harry could very well decide he no longer wanted anything to do with them, which would crush Melissa, who’d grown very attached to Harry.

As much as he’d love for Harry to be something more to him than a friend, he didn’t want to risk the relationship he had with him now, especially with Melissa involved.

Draco was pulled out of his thoughts by the sound of small feet on the stairs. He turned to find Teddy making his way towards the kitchen, rubbing his eyes, blue hair sticking up at every angle.

“Morning Teddy.” He said, flicking his wand and putting two slices of bread under a toasting charm on a plate.

Teddy gave a tired wave in reply and made a beeline for Butch, who snoozing on one of chairs tucked under the kitchen table.

“Sleepy kitty.” He pet her head careful, grinning when she pushed her head into his hand, purring.

“Toast, Teddy?”

The boy nodded and looked up at Draco. He stood up suddenly and put his arms up to Draco. “Up please?”

Draco obliged and was surprised when the boy threw his arms around his neck, hugging him tightly.

“You looked sad.” Teddy murmured into Draco’s neck. “Hugs always make me happy.”

Draco returned the hug, leaning his head against the side of Teddy’s and smiling. “Hugs make me happy too.”

…

“Some-ting beginnin’ with...” Teddy paused and scanned the living room. “C!”

They were playing a muggle game called ‘I Spy’, one Teddy said that he played all the time with his grandma. Teddy was sat up on Draco’s lap, blanket bunched up around his waist and slowly sliding off the couch.

Draco had brought Teddy and his toast over to the couch and pulled the new blanket over them in an attempt to get Teddy to fall back asleep, but so far, his plan had failed. Teddy insisted he wasn’t tired at all - though the dark circles under his eyes said otherwise - and had persuaded him to play the game.

“Cup?”

“Nope!” Teddy pulled the blanket further up his front so it reached his shoulders and held it there, giggling.

“Coffee?”

He shook his head.
Teddy giggled again, leaning forward and nearly toppling off Draco’s legs. “No!”

He looked over the room again, confused. They’d already done cushion and couch and Draco couldn’t think of anything else. “I give up, what is it?”

Teddy wriggled for a second, fighting with the blanket to pull his arm out, and pointed at the window. “Cat!”

The section of curtain that just covered the area where the window sill met the wall shifted and bulged for a moment, before a furry grey ear poked around the side. It was followed by two paws and a quiet meow.

“She hid there before! I think she wants breaky-fast too!” He picked the last slice of toast up from the plate. “Can she eat toast?”

Draco laughed. ‘Toast isn’t for kittys, but we can fill her bowl up with cat food and then go check on Harry and Melissa, see if they’re awake, okay?’

Teddy nodded eagerly and slid off the couch, pulling the blanket with him and leaving Draco shivering at the sudden lack of warmth. He waddled across the living room, stumbling over the blanket that was trailing under his feet.

“Careful Teddy.” He murmured, following the toddler and using his wand to lift the blanket a few centimetres off the ground. “Do you want to fill the bowl?”

“Please!”

Teddy held the top of the bag and shook it gently, sending the little pellets into the bowl, Draco supporting the bottom of the bag so he didn’t drop it. The sound of the dry food clinking against the bowl soon drew Butch out of her hiding place and within seconds of Teddy stepping away from the bowl, she was munching away like she was half-starved.

“Greedy kitty!” Teddy giggled, patting her back with a gentle but slightly clumsy hand.

“Very greedy kitty.” Draco said, nodding in agreement as he refilled the water bowl with a flick of his wand. “Shall we-“

He was interrupted by the floo flaring to life, closely followed by the arrival of Molly Weasley and a rather large wicker basket.

“Draco, Teddy!” She said, beaming as she set the basket down on the table and bustled over to envelop them in a warm, motherly hug. “Good morning, gentlemen! Where are Harry and little Lissy, eh?”

“Sleepy!” Teddy answered, bouncing on the balls of his sock-covered feet and holding his arms out for more hugs.

“Oh, they’re still asleep, are they young man?” She bent down and tilted his chin up, eyes crinkling as she shared a secretive grin with him. “Well, I’ll let you into a little secret.” She stage whispered, a fond smile settling onto her face as Teddy’s eyes widened. “I have homemade pancakes and waffles in my basket for breakfast. I don’t think they’ll want to miss them, do you?”

Teddy shook his head fiercely and eyed the bag with longing. He turned to Draco. “Can we wake
them up? Please? Please?"

He nodded and gently poked him back towards the living room. “Put the blanket on the couch first, can’t have you falling on the stairs now, can we?” Teddy hurried off, blanket still trailing behind him.

“Oh, he’s just precious! I remember when mine were that little! You’re a lucky man, with those two little ones. And Harry, of course.” She chuckled and waved her wand over the basket. Plates flew out from inside and began arranging themselves on the table, swiftly followed by mountains of breakfast food.

“You didn’t have to do this, Mrs Weasley.” He said quietly, half hoping she wouldn’t hear him - she could be a formidable woman when enraged and Draco didn’t want to get on her bad side by insulting her.

She placed her hands on her hips, frowning at him. “I hope you realise that I do consider Lissy to be my grandchild now - the girl needs a proper one - and I do believe I am well within my grandmotherly rights to spoil her after a traumatic experience. Why don’t you go and wake them up and tell them I’ve got breakfast ready, hmm?”

Draco flushed, suitably chastised - yet unbelievably touched by the woman’s continued selflessness and acceptance - and took Teddy’s hand as he came back into the kitchen.

They were halfway out of the door when Mrs Weasley spoke again. “I do believe I asked you to call me Molly, young man!”

Draco smiled to himself, following closely behind Teddy as he hurtled up the stairs on all fours.

They arrived outside the door - Teddy minus his left sock - but it opened before they could knock.

Melissa flung herself at Draco’s legs, squeezing them tightly and burying her face in them.

Harry appeared at the doorway just seconds later, looking rather adorably sleep rumpled. “I told you he hadn’t left, Lissy.” He murmured, covering a yawn with the back of his hand.

“Thought you left.” She muttered, her voice quiet and muffled by the fabric of his pyjama pants.

“Oh, sweetheart.” He murmured, feeling incredibly guilty all over again - for leaving her in bed, for taking her last night - and scooped her up in his arms, allowing her to cling tightly onto his neck. “I’m not going to leave you.” He rested his hand on the back of her neck - which was shaking as she breathed unsteadily, clearly still panicked - and rubbed his thumb over her skin and what he sincerely hoped was a comforting manner.

“Grandy-ma Molly has pancakes.” Teddy said, poking Melissa’s leg to get her attention.

“Will they help, Lissy?” Draco asked, relaxing when she gave him a weak smile and nodded slowly.

“Sit on your knee?” She whispered, tightening her arms around his neck, uncertainty flashing across her face.

“Of course you can.” He wiped away a stray tear and kissed her nose, drawing another, wider smile from her.

“Pancakes!” Teddy cried, setting off at speed down the stairs.
“Don’t run!” Harry and Draco shouted after him in unison. They shared a glance, and Harry chuckled, a familiar dimple appearing as he did so. Harry looked away first, a blush spreading across his dark cheeks.

“Are sure you’re okay, sweetheart?”

She frowned ever so slightly but nodded. “Pancakes fix everything!”
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

I picked away at and fiddled with this chapter all week and I don’t think it’s my best work, but I’m happy with it. It’s 6k words long, so quite a bit longer than average, but I’ve reached a word count of 50k, which I never in a million years would happen with this story.

Happy reading and if you are interested in reading more of my writing, please take a look at the notes at the end of this chapter.

*This chapter hasn’t been edited completely, so some italics are missing and there may be grammatical errors

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next morning, a much more cheerful - albeit much more exhausted - trio sat around the breakfast table, picking at the remains of the veritable feast Molly had brought over yesterday.

Molly had spent over an hour pottering around Draco's home under the guise of 'helping out' and making sure they ate enough, but Harry recognised her none too subtle snooping as plain nosiness, wrapped in a healthy dose of motherly concern - she had wore the same quietly guilty expression as she had on her first visit to Grimmauld Place after Harry officially moved in, where she had spent the best part of the afternoon poking around the house, which Arthur assured him was simply her way of ensuring that her child was living in a safe and suitable home, as well as a desire to inspect the wallpaper patterns. Given that Molly had left without making a comment, Harry was quite certain that she approved of both condition of Draco's home and his interior design choices.

Harry was delighted that Molly had decided to show just how much she cared for Melissa and Draco - a full homemade breakfast and motherly nagging said more about how Molly felt towards them than any words ever could - but he was equally glad that it was just the three of them this morning, because the peaceful, domestic scene in front of him felt very private and rather intimate, and Harry was reluctant to even think of sharing it with someone else, as well as honoured that Draco felt comfortable enough with his presence to let him witness it.

Draco was sat across the table from him, Melissa curled up in his lap, both of them rumpled and bleary-eyed with sleep. Her head was resting in the centre of his chest, a chunk of Draco’s croissant held loosely in her hand, which she lifted to her mouth occasionally to nibble on it in her sleepy daze, letting flaky pastry crumbs fall and cling to the soft material of Draco's jumper. Draco was in a similar state of dishevelment, stroking her back absentmindedly with one hand, the other hugging her against him. She yawned quietly, letting out a tired whine and snuggling deeper into his chest, her eyelids drifting shut. Harry resisted the urge to aww, knowing he’d probably wake her up again, which she definitely didn't need after her 4 am start.

Harry hid what was most likely a very soppy - lovesick his inner Ron supplied helpfully - smile behind his mug, before covering a yawn of his own and ignoring the part of him that wanted to be able to wake up to this every morning. Instead he decided to cherish the peaceful moment - something that was in short supply in his life - and the remains of Molly's homemade pancakes.
The pleasant silence was broken several minutes later - in which time Melissa had fallen back asleep on Draco's lap - by the tapping of several owls on the kitchen window, each carrying a letter. Melissa made a noise of discontent, but was quickly soothed by Draco, who stood from his chair with her in his arms, looking worried.

"I'm going to put her back in bed, could you let the owls inside, please?"

Harry nodded and waved his wand at the window. The latch opened and the owls streamed in, in a blur of feathers and parchment. His eyes widened as he realised that there was at least 10 birds gathered on the kitchen table, helping themselves to the last bits of breakfast - including the remaining portion of his pancake he noted with a scowl. Two more owls arrived, both carrying angry red Howlers that had Harry's stomach sinking.

Draco returned to the kitchen as Harry closed the window - wearing a new jumper that didn't have half of Melissa's breakfast clinging to it - and drew his wand from his pocket, waving it over the kitchen door frame.

"One-way silencing charm, I don't want her waking up again until she's ready to." He explained as the charm shimmered, settling into place over the door. He grimaced as he turned to the huddle of noisy owls sat on his dining table, eyeing the Howlers that had started to smoke, "Let's open them first, get it over with." He looked weary and tired and Harry just wanted to make the letters disappear and send him back up to bed.

Draco sat down with a worn-out sigh and untied the Howlers from the owls' legs, opening them both in quick succession and casting 2 inaudible charms. Both men flinched as two vicious voices rose from the letters, shouting over each other and filling the kitchen. The voices mixed with each other and their words jumbled, but the threatening, homophobic message behind both letters was quite clear and Draco cut them short after several tense moments, leaving a small pile of ash on the table.

Harry felt like he'd been punched in the stomach. The words of the Howlers ran on a loop inside his head, slowly dragging up insecurities he thought he'd gotten over years ago and memories of his cousin's cruel taunting. He swallowed, taking his eyes off the destroyed letters as he tried to calm his thoughts.

"Can you summon three vials please?" Draco asked quietly, staring at the table and snapping Harry out of daze. He sounded rather calm, but the angry red spots on his pale cheeks and the way he gripped his wand so tight that his knuckles went white told Harry that he was anything but. Guilt swelled in his chest as he silently berated himself for not considering how bad Draco must be feeling too. Guilt swelled in his chest as he silently berated himself for not considering how bad Draco must be feeling too. He complied and a few seconds later, three vials were floating next to Draco's head, out of reach of inquisitive owls. Harry watched curiously as he tapped his wand against the rim of the first vial, letting a thick, translucent substance pour out of his wand. It was tinged green and reminded Harry of a raw egg yolk. Draco repeated the process with the next vial, then swept the ashes into the third.

"What is that stuff?" Harry asked, curiosity getting the better of him despite the rather heavy atmosphere in the room.

Draco looked up at him in surprise, but floated the first two vials over to give him a closer look. Up close, Harry could see that the gelatinous mixture seemed to be writhing angrily in its glass container, pushing against the cork as if it was trying to escape.

"It's essentially a Howler in memory form. When you pour it onto parchment that has been treated with Pensieve liquid it will rewrite the message inside the Howler and record the magical signature of the sender."
Harry nodded in understanding. He was no longer surprised by finding new things in the Wizarding World - he'd accepted a long time ago that he'd probably never learn every little tradition or popular charm the magical world had to offer - but he was still fascinated by this new piece of magic.

"I want to report these two letters to the aurors." Draco continued. His voice sounded strange and it took Harry a moment to realise that he sounded like he was asking for permission.

"So this Howler-memory gloop stuff can be used as evidence against abusive Howlers like that? Then why haven't I seen this stuff before?"

"I don't know." Draco said simply as he leaned across the table over the birds - who'd huddled together at the centre of the table in fright at the sound of the Howlers - to retrieve the vials. "I can't understand why you wouldn't be told about this in training, but it isn't taught at Hogwarts though, so maybe people just never learnt any new spells outside of school."

"Knowing some of our classmates," Harry replied with a grin, "That's probably true."

This drew a smile from Draco and Harry gave himself a mental pat on the back for managing to lighten the mood. The sick, achy and uneasy feeling that the letters had caused was still there, but it wasn't quite as strong as it had been and the pair set about opening the remaining letters and letting the restless owls leave.

***

They had spent a good half an hour sorting through the letters - they had a rather large pile of letters containing quite violent threats and cutout of a Daily Prophet article that neither of them had quite gathered the courage to read - and complaining when more owls replaced the ones that had just left before Draco stumbled across a rather intimidating looking envelope with his mother's handwriting on. It had been attached to a rather unremarkable post owl, instead of the usual regal and flashy Malfoy owls that his mother used for corresponding with family and important acquaintances. It was her subtle and slytherin way of telling him what she thought about him and, despite his poor relationship with his mother, the snub still hurt.

"This one's from the ministry, you should open that one." Harry slid the letter across the - finally bird free - table and looked up when Draco didn't reply. Something in his expression must have worried Harry because concern immediately coloured his face and his eyes darted to the unopened letter in Draco's hand.

"Who's that from?"

"My mother."

Harry winced and Draco couldn't blame him - his mother was not what anyone could call a likeable person.

"I don't think I'm going to open it." Draco sighed, looking at the letter apprehensively then lifting his head up to meet Harry's eyes again. There was a nagging sense of lingering pureblood loyalty that was pushing him to open the letter and reply, but his desire to protect Melissa was overwhelming and he was struggling to come up with a reason to continue interacting with his mother.

"So don't." Harry shrugged, "She's only criticised your choices and Melissa since you adopted her, you don't need to keep trying to please her just because she's your mother."

Draco should have known Harry wasn't going to beat around the bush and gave him a wry smile. "You have a point. But I did hope you were going to try and convince me otherwise." With great
reluctance, he pushed the letter aside - it was too early to contemplate the breakdown of his relationship with his mother.

He picked up the Ministry letter, ripping open the envelope and scanning through the letter, relieved to find it was just informing him of the date of the next home visit for Melissa. "It's just a letter about a home visit today, after what happened the other day."

"Today?"

Draco nodded, handing over the letter. "I know you need to get to work, so don't worry about it - it should only be a check up, so you don't have to be here." He desperately wanted to ask Harry to take a day off work, to stay longer, but he already felt guilty about Harry staying during his day off yesterday.

"Don't be ridiculous, of course I want stay for it!" Harry blurted out, looking indignant and slightly hurt. "You know, because putting on a united front should mean less check ups and stuff." He trailed off, looking at Draco hopefully.

"You really don’t have to use one of your holiday days just for this." Draco protested, but it sounded rather feeble to his own ears and Harry was a very stubborn Gryffindor.

"That’s not a problem, I’d take off all the holiday time in the world to spend more time with Lissy.” Harry shrugged, standing up from his chair. “I’ll go back home and get changed, then tell Robards that I’m taking the day off. I won’t be long, hopefully I’ll be back before she wakes up.”

Before Draco could protest further, he flooed out of the kitchen. Draco chuckled quietly - Harry’s excitement at the prospect of the visit and spending more time with Melissa, as well as his casual declaration of love for her was adorable. His statement caused hope to flare in his chest and reassured him that Harry probably wasn’t going anywhere any time soon.

Smile splitting his face in two, he headed out the kitchen to check on his sleepy child.

•••

Harry stumbled out of the Ministry floo with his characteristic lack of grace wearing last year’s Weasley Jumper and a clean pair of jeans.

*I have got to ask Draco how he stays standing upright in the floo* Harry thought as he wound his way through the rush hour crowd of workers and headed for the Head Auror’s office, practically skipping with excitement as he stepped into the lift. Harry had been trying to think of an excuse to stay with Draco and Melissa longer all morning before the perfect opportunity fell straight into his lap and he was over the moon. The way he had comfortably slotted into their lives over the past few days felt so right to him and he couldn’t bring himself to end it, even if he did feel a little bit selfish for taking advantage of Draco’s hospitality.

Harry exited the lift behind a witch he recognised from the forensic team as he continued his journey to Robards' office, chuckling quietly to himself - earning him one or two odd looks from people around him - as he recalled the glimpse of his boss' festive cheer at the beginning of the month. Harry had a feeling that his office could rival the Weasley living room on Christmas morning. He knocked on the door and entered the office at the sound of a muffled 'come in'.

Harry's prediction was very accurate - the office looked like Rudolph the red nosed reindeer had thrown up on it.

Tinsel adorned the walls, stuck along the border of the room with what must have been very strong
sticking charms, switching between red and green every few seconds. An extravagant garland was draped across the roaring fireplace, adorned with twinkly little bells and a hefty amount of glitter that had his inner-parent cringing. Above hung a string of fairy lights with Christmas cards attached with silver pegs, which ranged from traditional, classy cards and cards that Harry recognised as Weasley products. The centre piece of the room was the tree - every branch held an ornament, every inch sparkled with lights and glitter and Harry was certain a sneeze would be enough to topple it.

His boss sat behind his desk, covered in a mix of Molly Weasley mince pies, semi finished paper work and more greetings card, munching away on quite happily on a pie. He reached up to swipe crumbs from his well kept moustache and waved at Harry cheerily.

"Mornin' lad!" Robards greeted him merrily, popping the remains of the pie in his mouth, "What can I do for you?"

Harry had a strong suspicion that these were a batch of Molly's special alcoholic, strictly Not For Children mince pies.

"Good morning, sir. I wanted to take a holiday day today, if you don't mind?" Standing in front of his boss - merry he may be - suddenly brought back memories of standing in McGonagall's office when he was a teen. He felt small and nervous, even though there was no reason for Robards to reject his request.

He was not expecting Robards to choke on the last of the mince pie, coughing and spluttering, sending crumbs all over his desk and thumping a fist on his own chest to dislodge it from his throat.

"Good Merlin, boy!" He exclaimed, vanishing the crumbs from the desk, "Give a man some warning!"

Robards conjured himself a glass of water and cleared his throat noisily, leaving Harry wondering what on earth he had done.

"You've never voluntarily taken a holiday from work since you started, lad! I had to force you to take a week off for Christmas!" Robards looked flabbergasted and Harry had never seen his usually cool, calm and collected boss in such a state. Although, Harry thought, I suppose this is a bit out of character for me too.

"What's brought this on?" Robards suddenly looked concerned and lent forward towards Harry, "The job isn't getting to much for you is it? You know your mental health is more important to me than paperwork being handed in on time."

"No! No, of course not! I'm doing great actually." He reassured him, relieved when Robards sat back in his chair. "Besides, we know Hermione would be up here in an instant if she saw the slightest indication that any of us were being worked too hard."

At that Robards smiled, but the worry didn't leave his face. "So, what is it then? Not that I mean to pry, of course."

"I adopted a child at the beginning of the month," Harry said, continuing to speak over his boss' spluttering, "And we have a home visit today."

Robards gaped at him, speechless.

"Sir?"

Robards cleared his throat, still looking very shocked. With a put on sigh, he pulled a sheet of
parchment from under a pile on his desk and wrote on it, shaking his head. "You never fail to
surprise me Auror Potter." He said with a disbelieving laugh, holding up the parchment - a signed
document with lots of boxes he assumed meant he'd got his request - for him to see. "You've got the
day off, good luck."

Harry beamed. "Thanks, sir. I'll make sure to tell Molly you enjoyed her mince pies!" He headed
towards the door with a spring in his step, but paused when Robards spoke again as he opened the
door.

"I want to meet this child of yours, I'll see at the Burrow on Christmas day I presume?"

"Of course, sir."

•••

They were reclined against the couch, Melissa sat back against Draco's chest, wrapped up snugly in
a blanket, as he tried to encourage her to finish the slice of toast he held in his hand. Butch was sat at
their feet, staring intently at the food, despite having been fed just 20 minutes ago, when Melissa had
wandered back downstairs.

"Where's Harry gone?" She asked, sitting up and looking around in surprise, only just noticing he
wasn't there.

"He's gone back home for a little bit."

"Why?" Melissa interrupted anxiously, a worried little frown on her face.

"It's ok, sweetheart." He murmured, hugging her close to him as he realised he'd inadvertently upset
her. "He's coming back, don't you worry. He's only gone to get some clean clothing and then he'll be
spending the rest of the day with us."

Melissa brightened up, reaching out to stroke Butch as she climbed between them and the couch to
settle down on her lap. "Can we go to the park?"

Through the window, Draco could see that the garden had been covered in a fresh layer of pure
white snow over night and he shuddered internally. It would be another very wet and cold day
outside.

"Maybe in the afternoon." He acquiesced, unable to contain the soft smile that spread across his face
at the sight of Melissa's pure joy. "But first, that man who visited us a while ago, Bernie, you
remember him? He'll be visiting us again today to ask us a few more questions."

"Kay." Melissa rubbed two fingers between Butch's ears, giggling as the cat purred in response.
"Will he come to the park with us too?"

Draco laughed, reaching between them to run his hand over the cat's back. "I don't think so,
sweetheart."

They fell silent, smothering a very smug Butch with attention as Lissy finally ate the rest of the toast,
until the distinctive sound of the floo came from the kitchen. Melissa was out of his lap in seconds,
blanket tangling around her legs as she launched herself off the couch and towards the kitchen with a
cry of "Harry!". Harry caught her under the armpits as she tripped over in the doorway, swinging her
up onto his hip. She wrapped her arms around his neck, squeezing him tightly as he folded the
blanket back around her.
"Did it go okay?" Draco asked, smiling at the picture the pair made and wishing he had a camera to capture the moment.

Harry nodded, coming to sit down next to him with Melissa still curled up in his arms. "It did, Robards was a bit shocked that I was asking for a day off out of the blue, but he signed the paperwork and he wants to be properly introduced to Melissa at the Burrow on Christmas day. If you are coming on Christmas day, that is." Harry hastened to say, "I didn't actually invite you, but I sort of just assumed you would." Harry looked rather sheepish and slightly guilty, while Melissa looked like she was going to burst if she didn't ask him if they could go - her eyes wide and pleading, which would have swayed his judgement if he had any intention of saying no.

"We will be visiting the orphanage on Christmas morning, but I don't see why we can't come over in the afternoon for dinner." Surprisingly, braving the Burrow again for Christmas didn't seem quite so daunting - in fact, he was rather looking forward to it.

"Will Teddy and Vicky and Neville's toads be there?" Melissa asked enthusiastically, bouncing on Harry's knee in excitement.

"I don't know about the toads, but I know that Ted and Victoire will be there, and some other kids." Harry replied, grinning when she cheered, almost toppling off his knee in the process.

"Why don't you go and get dressed before Bernie arrives, sweetheart?" Draco suggested, unravelling the blanket from around her when she nodded and scrambled off Harry's lap. "Your clothes are on the bed." He called after her as she ran out of the room. He sat up, reaching over to the coffee table where his wand lay. With a quick wave of his wand and a muttered charm, the blanket neatly folded itself up in midair and sailed over Harry's head to land on the back of the couch. He waved his wand again to summon the newspaper article from the kitchen, which came flying through the air and landed between them on the couch.

"I send off the Howler memories to the aurors and I read the article Skeeter wrote." He said eventually, when both of them just stared at the paper like it was going to bite.

"And?"

Draco shrugged inelegantly, pushing the paper towards Harry. "I think she's written worse about me, so it doesn't bother me as much as some of her other pieces. She was a lot harsher in her narrative on you."

The article had mostly consisted of references to his father and suggestions that he was set to turn Melissa - who hadn't been named, much to his relief - into a death eater, which he had expected. What he hadn't anticipated was the harsh criticism of Harry's choice to adopt. Skeeter had ranted and raved about the end of the Potter line and denying a lucky witch the honour carrying his children through three extensive paragraphs before rounding off the article with a little paragraph encouraging her female readers - 'Potential Mrs Potters' she called them - to double their efforts to woo Harry and save him from 'the death eater and his adopted spawn.'

Harry picked the article up and read through it, his relaxed expression becoming angrier with each word he read. "How is she allowed to publish this? You aren't a death eater!"

"But I used to be, even if it was because my mother's life was threatened, so I can't do anything about it. What about the rest of the article?"

Harry opened his mouth again, presumably to start an angry tirade that wouldn't be suitable for little ears, when Melissa came hurrying back into the room.
"I can't find my socks!" She whined, hopping from foot to foot on the cold wooden floor.

Draco stood, ignoring Harry's huff of annoyance, and picked Lissy up when she raised her arms. Later he mouthed over his shoulder as they exited the living room.

***

Socks retrieved, kitchen cleared of feathers, Prophet article burned and house made presentable, they finally sat down in the living room with lunch. Lunch, on Melissa's insistence, was a picnic-style meal that they'd thrown together from what Draco had left in the fridge and gathered together on plates. It was an odd mix of sandwiches, cheese and crackers and toast that they'd assembled, but Melissa stared at the food laid out on the blanket like it was the best she'd ever seen.

"Is it still a picy-nic if it's inside?" Melissa asked, settling down on the blanket next and arranging her frogs in a circle around her. She had begged Draco to let them go to the park for a picnic instead of going after the home visit, but had been still been pleased when Harry suggested that she have an indoor picnic with her frogs in the living room instead.

"Of course it is, sweetheart. Do your frogs need plates too?"

She nodded, giving Draco a look that quite clearly told him that she thought it was very obvious that they needed plates, giggling with glee when he levitated them over to her. She set them out in front of the frogs with great care and dished out a cracker to each one, chatting away to them as she did so.

"She hasn't left space for us to sit down." Harry said, sounding both crestfallen and amused.

"Adults aren't allowed at teddy tea-parties, or teddy picnics." Draco chuckled, "That's her first rule of playtime."

He sat down on the couch and summoned a sandwich from the plate in the centre of the blanket, drawing his legs up underneath him as Harry sat down next to him.

"I want to do something about that article." Harry murmured, low enough that Melissa couldn't overhear him, leaning in close in a way that almost made him shiver. "I know you don't think what she wrote about you is that bad, but she wrote about adoption like it was a bad thing and she has so many readers who take her word as gospel. I'm worried that could be a bad thing for your orphanage and the rest of them, but I don't really know what I could do."

"You're friends with the Minister of Magic, for Merlin's sake, what couldn't you do?" Draco teased gently, privately pleased that Harry was asking him for advice. "But if you really want to do something, you should ask Hermione. She bribed Skeeter once, I'm sure she could do it again and get her to write a formal apology."

"I can't imagine Skeeter apologising."

"Maybe not, but if anyone can get her to, it's Hermione."

"Was that a compliment?" Harry gaped incredulously, "Did you, Draco Malfoy, just compliment Hermione Granger?"

"I like 'Mione." Melissa piped up, looking at Draco curiously as he felt his cheeks heat up. "Will we see her at the Burrow on Christmas?"

Harry nodded, smirking at Draco when she turned back to the teddy picnic.
"Shut up." Draco whined, smacking him on the arm when Harry only laughed. "Have a sandwich and leave me alone."

Harry complied, still wearing an amused expression, and changed the subject. The conversation drifted to safer waters and they talked quietly while watching Melissa pretend to feed her frogs. The atmosphere was relaxed and comfortable and Draco didn't want to move - Harry's shoulder was resting against his own, making his heartbeat faster each time Harry shifted, pressing ever so slightly closer and leaving Draco wanting to do nothing more than pull him closer and curl up with him.

Draco was pulled out of his pleasant musings by a knocking on the door and the small bundle of dread that had rested in his stomach since he read the letter suddenly intensified. He stood, ignoring the nausea, and went to answer the door.

The sight that greeted him was not a welcome one.

Bernie - who had been so bouncy and bubbly last time - wore a grim expression that had Draco's heart in his throat and merely nodded in greeting as he stepped inside out of the snow, holding a stack of papers against his chest. He made his way down the hallway ahead of Draco, following the sound of Melissa's voice and Harry's deep laugh.

Bernie’s face lightened when he laid eyes on Melissa, bending to offer a hand for her to shake. She shook it very solemnly, which Draco would have found very amusing if a sense of impending doom wasn’t clouding his senses and threatening to bring his lunch back up.

“Afternoon Gentlemen.” Bernie greeted them, sitting on the other couch as Draco settled back next to Harry. If he was sat far closer, Harry said nothing.

Bernie frowned at them and, much to their surprise, laughed. “Don’t look so worried, I can assure you I am not bringing you bad news, but I have done a little bit of research into your case.”

Draco relaxed by a marginal amount, but he, like Harry next to him, was still tense. “And?”

"I do believe your case was mishandled.” He replied, an unexpected scowl forming on his face, “I took a look at some of the files from when you applied to adopt Melissa - Lissy, sorry - and noticed that six separate Auror searches were conducted as part of the background check.”

"I was told they were all mandatory.” Harry had gone rigid besides him and Draco slid a hand onto his thigh in a silent attempt to placate him.

"Auror house searches are never mandatory, Background checks only involve interviewing friends and family and checking the person’s criminal history. Aurors are only involved if we are short staffed and we need to send a trained Auror representative out to conduct an interview or if there is reason to believe that the person is attempting to adopt for negative reasons “

"Even if I have that criminal record?”

"I went through that as well - there is nothing in there that would raise concerns that you intended to harm Melissa. The very fact that your community service involved you working in an environment where you were surrounded by children and you going on to work with those very children should have been a very adequate indicator that you do not pose a danger to children.” Bernie looked incredibly angry and Draco was glad that the angry was on his behalf and not directed at him.

"There is also something else that I discovered while reading through your case.” He continued, giving them a calculated stare. “You, Harry, are not mentioned anywhere in these documents.”
Draco paled and his hands felt clammy - how did he not realise that someone would notice that eventually?

"I actually wasn’t meant to adopt Melissa.” Harry croaked out after several tense moments of silence. “It was an accident.”

Bernie raised a quietly disbelieving eyebrow.

"We are together.” Harry was hasty to confirm.” -but we only started dating towards the end of the adoption process, after all the interviews. I went along when the adoption was finalised for moral support and I accidentally touched the paper with a hand that had an open wound on, so my name also went on the document.”

Bernie nodded in understanding, as if he had expected the answer. “I suspected something like that had happened, so I conducted a few little interviews of my own with your friends and family to add to the document. It is not entirely legal, but once these documents are put in the ministry, the press will be all over them and I don’t want them to raise questions that could take Melissa away from a stable home. You may not have been part of the legal process from the start, but I have no doubts that you are a suitable guardian. “

"Won’t the person who originally conducted the interviews be able to tell the press that those interviews never took place?” Harry asked, very obviously sidestepping the legality of the situation.

"The employee who conducts the interview is sworn to secrecy - they cannot discuss the interviews to protect those who are interviewed.” He shuffled his papers and handed them a sheet of parchment. “As you can see, the name of the interviewee isn’t given, in case they give the aurors a negative statement and someone wants revenge.”

"So these papers will just seem like standard documents once you’ve added the statements?” Draco asked, hardly daring to believe he had gone out of his way to ensure Melissa stayed with them, holding back an almost overwhelming urge to hug Bernie and sob with relief into his shoulder.

"Yes. I have added in the odd note here and there to ensure it looks like you have been part of the process from the start and filled in a document for your ‘background check’, so the press shouldn’t be able to find anything that could harm your little family.” With a grin, Bernie handed over a pile of documents and told them to sign them. "Well, I have a few more questions to ask you before we finish up and I can leave you in peace, so let's get started. shall we?"

"Thank you for doing this for us." Harry said quietly, gratitude clear on his face.

"Oh don't worry about it," Bernie insisted, cheeks tinged pink in embarrassment, "I would do it for anyone else in this situation - if anyone else did get into a similar situation. We see far too many people return children they have adopted, usually because they have a biological child and no longer want an adopted one, which makes it even more difficult for the children. I see no reason for you three to be spilt because of a few documents. It is especially important now, after that article that dreadful Skeeter woman published where she implied that adoption is a bad thing.”

The rest of the visit continued much like last time, with Bernie asking them about long term plans - such as whether Melissa would be attending Hogwarts - and inquiring about the recent incident at the charity ball, then having a long and detailed discussion with Melissa. They talked about everything from the visit to the Burrow right down to her favourite stuffed frog, with Harry and Draco chipping into the conversation at odd intervals, still sat on the couch together in a way that Draco could only describe as snuggling.
"Well, gentlemen," Bernie began, hauling himself off the floor next to Melissa with a grunt of discomfort. "I believe that this concludes our little meeting." He collected the documents he had handed to them back with a quick swish of his wand, the papers arranging themselves into a neat and orderly pile on the coffee table. He picked up a rather large piece of parchment off the top of the stack and withdrew a very formal looking grey quill from his robe pocket.

"After looking into your case very thoroughly and from the information I have gathered through these visits, I am certain that no more home visits are necessary." He bent over the parchment and signed along the bottom, stepping back as the ink glowed silver before the document vanished with a pop. "You are now both officially Melissa's legal guardians. That document has gone to..."

Bernie continued speaking, probably giving them very important information, but Draco wasn't paying him any attention because Harry had kissed him.

Harry's lips were warm and gentle against his own, the cool metal of his glasses pressing into Draco's heated cheeks. Harry's fingers tangled with his own as he pulled him closer, Draco's eyes sliding closed as he recovered from the initial shock and relaxed into the kiss, ignoring the instinctive urge to push Harry away. Slowly, he responded to the kiss, his hand finding its way to the back of Harry's neck, fingers playing with the soft hair on the back of his neck. Vaguely, he registered the sound of shuffling paper and the click of the front door, but Draco could barely focus on anything but the soft slide of lips against his own and the warmth that flooded through him as Harry squeezed his fingers tighter. Draco never wanted to move away.

A heavy, child-shaped weight landed between them and they pulled apart, Harry's calm expression shifting to one of horror as he realised what they'd done. Melissa sat between them, her back to Draco as she faced Harry, little hands on her hips.

"You kissed Draco." She said inquisitively, her protective stance making her look like a cuddly, avenging angel. "Does that mean you like Draco like 'Mione and Ron do?"

Harry was silent and refused to meet Draco's eyes over her head, staring at his hands. But Draco knew from experience that one could only ignore the questioning gaze of a small child for so long, so he wasn't surprised when Harry raised his head hesitantly after several agonisingly long moments and nodded, fear and uncertainty in his eyes as he meet Draco's.

"Okay!" Melissa said brightly, hopping off the couch, oblivious to the tension between her two guardians.

Draco squashed the urge to shout with glee at the knowledge that Harry returned his feelings and instead smiled at Harry, reaching across the gap between them to take his hand as the fear slid from Harry's face, replaced with a mixture of joy and hope as Draco pulled him closer.

They would need to talk properly, when they didn't have a small child to interrupt them, but for now, Draco was more than content to curl up against Harry's side and let himself forget about Rita Skeeter and the rest of the Wizarding World for a little while.

Chapter End Notes
Those last scenes were a pain to write, but I finished them and I’m pretty pleased with the result! We’ll have some Draco and Hermione interaction in the next chapter and some quality time between Harry and Melissa too.

If you are interested in reading more of my writing once I’ve finished off this story, I am hoping to write another story of a similar length to this one before the year is out. It will be drarry, obviously, and it will be based in a muggle school with Harry and Draco as teachers there, but it won’t be a non-magical AU. Before I start planning and writing it, I want to know how much my readers know about the English/British education system so I can cater the amount of information I provide about the school system. Please let me know in the comments! ❤

End Notes

How was it? Please leave a comment!
[You can find me on Tumblr HERE as MotherBookerao3]

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!