Christmas Wish

by oldenuf2nb

Summary

Draco's life is fairly set. As guardian of Teddy Lupin, he lives a quiet life. Harry left the UK after the war and spent years looking for what he was missing by performing dangerous stunts in the US. 
But when Harry is badly injured and needs a place to recuperate, Draco finds he's not quite content with a quiet life anymore.

Notes

This is a re-post of my 2015 25 Days of Draco and Harry holiday story.

Prompt for this part:
Draco Malfoy sat in the leather wing-backed chair in his study, the well-worn old chair so regularly occupied it conformed to the shape of his body. A fire popped and crackled merrily in the hearth, a book was open in his hands and a steaming cup of tea sat on the table at his side under a stasis charm; he often became so engrossed in his reading that the tea would sit at his elbow for hours before he drank it.

He heard the sound of the door chimes echo through the cavernous house but out of habit he ignored it. Flossy would see who it was, although who could be at the door in the middle of Whiltshire he couldn’t imagine.

Moments later there was a pop to his left, and he looked up, faintly irritated.

“Apologies, Mr. Malfoy,” the little elf murmured. She was immaculately clothed in a spotless tiny maid’s uniform, complete with the ruffled cap perched between bat-like ears. “I know its reading time, but there is being – “

“Not ‘there is being’,” Draco corrected. “Just ‘there is’.”

Flossy dipped her head in a solemn nod. They’d been working on her patterns of speech but Draco doubted they’d ever cure her completely of sounding like an elf, no matter how much she wished it. She had come to him, asking him to ‘fix her talking’ so she sounded like ‘Missus Cissa’. The little thing adored his mother, and he thought her wish to transform was to somehow honor her memory. Draco, who wasn’t much for emotional displays, and been so touched he’d had to dismiss her before he embarrassed himself.

“Yes,” Flossy finally went on. “There is a caller who wishes to be seeing you.”

“Just ‘who wishes to see you,” Draco corrected again. “And who is it?”

“Mrs. Hermione Weezy, sir.”

Draco didn’t bother to correct this mistake. They’d been trying for months to get ‘Weasley’ right, without success and Draco decided it wasn’t worth the headache.

He hadn’t expected Hermione, and she was usually so careful to observe propieties that he was surprised, and faintly alarmed that she was there.

“Show her in, Flossy.”

She nodded and popped out of sight, and Draco closed his book, setting it aside. It was the biography of a fifth century potions master and not terribly gripping, but Draco long ago decided if he was interested enough in the subject matter to buy a book, he’d damn well finish it.

He heard footsteps approaching and rose from his chair, turning toward the door just as Flossy appeared with Hermione Granger-Weasley. The elf stepped aside as Hermione stepped forward, and Draco opened his arms to embrace her.

“Well, this is a pleasant surprise,” Draco said, hugging her. A floral fragrance lifted from her soft hair, no longer frizzy but lying over her shoulders in soft curls.

Of all of his classmates, Draco thought Hermione was the most improved since their Hogwarts
days. On that horrid night when Potter, Weasley and Hermione had been hauled into the mansions great hall, Potter’s face all but unrecognizable, it had struck Draco how beautiful she’d become. Listening to his aunt torture her had been the turning point for Draco; the sound had haunted his dreams for months.

She stepped back with a slight smile, and Draco took in the sleek black slacks and cranberry velvet blazer over a black high necked jumper, and felt a pleasant hum of approval.

“You’re looking lovely today,” he said honestly. “Flossy, tea please.”

Flossy nodded and disappeared, and Hermione gave him a faintly reproving look. He held up his hand, palm out, trying to hide his amusement. “You know I’ve tried to pay her.”

“So she tells me every time I ask,” she muttered, and Draco allowed himself a slight smile as she sat in a chair opposite his in front of the front of the fireplace, and he reclaimed his.

She rubbed her hands together, and then reached out toward the flames. “Gods, it’s cold out there.”

Draco crossed his long legs, glancing at the snowy scene outside of his windows. There had been an uncharacteristically early snow storm just days before and the temperatures hadn’t warmed up enough to melt any of the several inches on the ground. The bare trees were still tipped with frost as well. Draco frowned at her. “Why didn’t you come through the floo?”

She gave him a pointed look. “I would love to, Draco, if you’d ever unlock it.”

“Oh.” He looked toward the opening of the fireplace sheepishly. “Sorry. But ever since the little snot figured out how to levitate the bowl of floo powder down from the mantle,” he said fondly, “I’ve had to lock them all. I forgot to exclude this one.”

She sent him a grin. “I told you he needed more play dates.”

Draco was saved from responding to that distasteful idea when Flossy returned, pushing a tea cart complete with steaming porcelain pot and a platter of elegant little tea cakes.

“Thank you, Flossy,” Hermione said when the little elf presented her a full cup. The elf nodded, glanced at Draco’s cup and saw that it was still full, then Apparated away.

“So,” Draco removed the charm from his cup and picked it up, “to what do I the unexpected pleasure?”

Hermione smiled over the rim of her cup. “Unexpected, at any rate.”

“You know I’m always happy to see you,” he said mildly.

She nodded. “You are,” she said, setting her cup aside. “I hope you still are when I’ve told you why I’ve come.”

Draco set his cup aside as well. “That sounds ominous.”

“I don’t think it is, but given the subject matter…”

“Hermione, honestly, you know there’s only one subject that we might not agree on, and…” He caught sight of her grimace, and exhaled in exasperation. “Oh, for gods sakes.”

“Draco, I know you aren’t going to want to hear this, but we really do need to talk about it.”
“Why? Why do we need to discuss it? I can’t think of a single reason.”

“You can’t?” she said. “Not even one?”

Almost as if they’d been summoned by their conversation, the sound of rapidly approaching, light footsteps sounded in the hall and moments later a small blur of perpetual motion burst in the door.

“Draco, Draco, I cleaned my room.” The little boy with the white blond hair threw himself at Draco’s knees and Draco caught him under the arms. “I even putted away all the toys where they live.”

“Put away,” Draco corrected gently, his exasperation fading as he looked into the wide brown eyes. He lifted the child to his lap. “And did it escape your notice that we have a guest, young man?”

The boy made a happy sound and hopped down, running to Hermione, his hair instantly darkening and curling wildly over his ears. “’Mione, ’Mione, I cleaned my room up real good.”


“I cleaned my room up very good, and I putted away all my toys. You can even see I has a rug, now, cuz Draco said he didn't think it was still under there.” He giggled. “Isn’t he silly?”

Hermione wrapped her arms around the little boy and hugged him, looking at Draco over the top of his head. “Very silly, Teddy,” she murmured, her tone faintly wry.

Inside, Draco sighed. He supposed they were going to have to discuss bloody Potter, whether he wanted to or not.
Teddy had gone to the kitchen with Flossy, who was delighted to feed ‘her master Teddy’ a snack of hot cocoa and cookies. Draco sighed, knowing the child would be high as a kite on sugar for the rest of the day, but it was the only way to bribe him to abandon the company of one of his favorite people. He loved Hermione, and the feeling was mutual. When his chatter faded away outside the door and down the hall, Draco gave Hermione a level look.

“So why, exactly, do we need to discuss the bane of my existence?”

“You know why.”

“No, Hermione, I really don’t. I know the damned fool got himself…” he gestured angrily with his hand, “injured riding some Muggle contraption, but what has that to do with me, or with Teddy? I assume he’ll turn up for his obligatory Christmas Eve twenty minutes, he’ll leave Teddy a passel of dangerous, ridiculous toys that are too sophisticated for a five year old, and then he’ll be gone again, leaving me to deal with the fall out.” He frowned, irritated by the thought of all of the junk Potter would no doubt foist off on Teddy, and by extension him, and crossed his arms. “I doubt a bump on the head while falling off a motor bike will change the usual scenario.”

“You really haven’t seen any of the news reports, have you?” Hermione said. “Not even in the Prophet.”

“I only know he’s been in an accident because of Pansy. And I stopped taking the bloody paper after Andromeda died. They made their feelings about me being named Teddy’s guardian rather than his golden boy godfather very clear.”

Hermione grimaced. “They really were beastly to you, Draco. And Andie made the right choice.”

Draco was startled. He never imagined Hermione choosing him over Potter, even though they had been friends for several years now, putting the war behind them when they both went to work at the Ministry. He was in Identifying Dark Objects, something he was uniquely qualified for, and she in the MLE Prosecutor’s Department. Neither of the other two members of the vaunted golden trio had gone to work for the government; Weasley went into business with the remaining twin at
the expanded joke and magic store, and Potter… well, the idiot had begun riding a Muggle motor bike in some sort of dare devil performing troupe. Even for Potter, to Draco this had been the pinnacle of the moron’s stupidity. Anyone so ridiculous deserved his lumps.

“Well… thank you for saying that,” Draco said, truly touched. Very few in the wizarding world but his closest and dearest agreed with her. “But, I’m still confused as to how…”

Hermione linked her fingers in her lap and chewed her lower lip, and Draco was alarmed when he saw the sheen of sudden tears in her eyes. He leaned forward quickly, reaching out toward her.

“Merlin, Hermione, what’s happened? The dolt didn’t get himself killed, surely.” Draco’s alarm was compounded by how much the idea frightened him. His heart began to pound in his chest.

“No, no.” She shook her head. “He was doing some sort of jump on a motor cycle when something went wrong; I don’t really have any details. But he’s hurt quite badly. Much worse than we first thought.”

“Certainly St. Mungo’s can sort him out?”

She blinked back her tears. They didn’t fall, but they didn’t seem far away, either. “He’s there now. The problem is, because he was in a Muggle show and injured in the United States – “

“He was where?” Draco said, gobsmacked.

“Idaho, actually.”

“That’s an actual place, then,” he said, still trying to find his footing with the whole thing.

She ignored the snide comment. “They sent him to a Muggle hospital. He was… well. He had seventeen broken bones.”

Draco knew he looked as horrified as he felt. “Oh, bloody hell.”

“Including several vertebra, his left clavicle, six ribs, both wrists,” she clenched her fists and held both arms up to her face, “he instinctively tried to protect his face and head like this…”

“Why the hell didn’t he just Apparate?”

“He was surrounded by Muggles, Draco. And he couldn’t have anyway; his wand was here.”

Draco stared at her, stunned. “He was in America, and he left his wand here?” He could scarcely fathom such a thing. He didn’t think he’d been more than an arm’s length from his own wand since he’d been eleven and Olivander had handed it to him. Well, unless one took into account the months Potter had it. “Why in the world would he do such a thing?”

Hermione hesitated, like she didn’t want to answer. Finally, she sighed. “I told you Andie made the right decision because of where Harry’s head was when the war ended. It was like he didn’t expect to live and wasn’t sure he deserved to. Even three years later, when Andie fell sick. He’d gone off to ride that motorcycle with those other lunatics. He said it was the closest he could get to flying without getting on a broom.”

Draco tossed his hands up. “Why the bloody hell didn’t he just get on a broom?”

“I don’t. Know. But he certainly wasn’t in any frame of mind to deal full time with a hyperactive three year old metamorphmagus. And now, he’s fallen head first onto a concrete slab from twenty
five yards in the air.”

Draco felt a little sick, and rubbed his fingers over his mouth.

“If he’d been taken to a magical hospital, it wouldn’t be so serious, but he was unconscious and couldn’t tell anyone... anything. They did surgery right away. And installed several metal supports for the bones.”

Draco stiffened, alarmed. “What kind of metal?”

She looked as ill as he felt. “Stainless steel and titanium.”

“Oh, Gods.” He let his head fall back against the back of the chair, staring up at the ceiling.

One of the things that had come to light within the magical medical community was that the wizard body wasn’t compatible with several types of metal. Ordinarily, metal wouldn’t be used to repair wizard bones, not when they could be set with a spell and regrown with a potion. But the more Muggle-borns who entered into the magical world, the more a modern problem came into focus. The very few times a wizard received Muggle surgery for broken bones and they’d been repaired with metal, it seriously impacted the wizard’s magical core. Draco had read everything he could on the subject and while it hadn’t happened often enough for there to be a comprehensive study, it seemed the longer the metal remained in the wizard’s body, the weaker his magic became. Even a few gold fillings could throw everything off. It hadn’t seemed to impact Hermione, but unwilling to take chances she had her own gold fillings removed. Her father was astonished when she came home with magically regrown teeth where there had been filled cavities before.

But in regards to Potter, with the amount of invasive metal Hermione was describing…

“Can he do any magic at all?” Draco asked roughly.

Tears filled her brown eyes again. “Not right now.”

“And the Healer’s prognosis?”

“He says... he just doesn’t know. They’re going to begin removing all of the metal over the next few days, repair what bones they can and regrow the others, but he just doesn’t know. With anyone else, he’d say that the damage was too extensive to ever repair. But, with Harry…”

“Right.” Draco knew what she was saying. Potter’s magical levels had never been the same as everyone else’s.

Hermione reached across the space between them, grasping Draco’s wrist. “I’m worried about him, Draco. I thought I’d seen all of Harry’s moods but I’ve never seen him like this.” Her fingers tightened. “Even when he was getting ready to walk into the forest that last night. He was resigned, but it was like -- he knew what he had to do and he was willing to do it to save everyone. Now, he’s just,” there was a hitch in her voice, “so lost.”

Draco could understand that. If someone told him there was a possibility his magical core could be compromised and his ability to do magic might disappear, he wouldn’t want to wake up to face another day. He’d felt something like it for two years; his sixth and seventh at Hogwarts. Every day had been a waking nightmare, but he’d still had his magic. If that had been gone, too...

“I’m sorry he’s having a hard time,” Draco said. “Believe it or not, I actually am. But I don’t see what this has to do with me.”
She leaned even further forward and caught Draco’s hand between both of hers. “I have to ask a favor of you, and I need for you to hear me out completely. Please.”

The hair on the back of Draco’s neck twitched, and he had a sudden, strong feeling that whatever she was going to ask, he really wasn’t going to like it. “Hermione…”

“Draco, please.” Her eyes were imploring, and after a long moment he nodded, trying not to be brusque. “Harry asked me to come here and see you. He wants to see Teddy.” Draco stiffened, instinctively pulling against her grip. She tightened her hold. “Please, Draco. It’s the only thing he’s asked for, through all of this. He just wants to see Teddy.” Draco looked away, trying to think how to frame his refusal, but she dug her nails into his palm. He turned his gaze back, irritation flaring. Until he saw the tears that had only threatened before were now slipping down her cheeks. “Please. He wants to see his godson. I think he wants,” she swallowed a sob, "I think he wants to say goodbye.”

Even stunned, with a shaft of unexpected pain shooting through his chest, Draco cursed Potter. He could have refused easily if the manipulative bastard had sent anyone else. But Hermione? A Hermione in tears?

Draco simply didn’t have that in him.
“Is he awake yet?”

The voice came to Harry as if from a great distance. He knew it belonged to someone special to
him, but he was still so tired, so weighed down. He didn’t think he could move even if he had to.

“Not yet.”

That voice he knew as well as his own. Ron. The name floated through his mind. It was Ron. He
wanted to say hello; it had been so long since he’d seen him. Almost a year, he thought. That was
right, wasn’t it?

“Mum, he’s only been out of surgery for a couple of hours.”

“Poor lamb.” Harry felt a gentle hand drift across his forehead, moving his fringe aside. “Ron, see
if there’s another blanket in the cupboard; he’s trembling.”

Was he? He couldn’t feel it. How weird.

A blanket with a warming charm settled over him and Harry drifted further into the soft, painless
mist that swirled around him. It was like settling into a cloud, and he let it take him away.

“Has he opened his eyes yet?”

He’d been asleep, but abruptly Harry was awake. He could hear things, smell things, (he
recognized the smell and at least in his mind, wrinkled his nose. Gods, he hated the smell of St.
Mungo’s, but it was so much better than that Muggle place he’d been at when he was still in
America.) It had been Idaho, hadn’t it? He remembered the show in Reno, then one in a place
called Yakima. He remembered being in the bus with the other guys as they passed over the Idaho
border. Or was it all a dream? And why couldn’t he seem to open his eyes?

“The Healer was in and said he probably won’t before tomorrow. They did the work on his spine
today, removing the titanium and replacing it with a strong stasis charm while the Skelegrow does
its work. The put him under a paralysis spell so he doesn’t move too much and muck up the work they did.”

Okay, so that explained the dull ache between his shoulder blades, he thought. He wanted to tell Ron he was warm enough now, but the paralysis spell was really doing its job; he couldn’t so much as twitch his fingers. Interesting how the inability to move didn’t seem to bother him much. He’d have thought he’d be panicking but he wasn’t at all. In fact he felt oddly peaceful.

Trying to recall what had brought him to where he was, he had a vague recollection of being on the bike, taking off from the ramp. He remembered the exhilaration, how he’d wanted to go higher and higher. As if in answer to his thoughts, the bike accommodated him and soared and the crowd screamed, unable to believe the height as he began to flip in the air. He felt so free, the magic flowing through his veins, making his heart feel too big for his chest. Then to his horror, he realized he was too high, and that it was magic making him soar. The moment he realized it, the moment fear of discovery roared through him, his upward trajectory altered and gravity took over. He remembered the bike feeling like a rock between his thighs, pulling him down, the ground rushing up. He remembered trying to protect his face and head, forgetting there was a helmet there to do the job. After that, he remembered nothing.

He didn’t know how he’d gotten to St. Mungo’s. He could only imagine he’d been hurt badly enough that Roscoe read the letter he’d left, to be opened in the case of his death. The old fart apparently jumped the gun. Harry had seen dead; dead was white and misty and Dumbledore greeted him. This wasn’t quite alive, but he wasn’t dead, either, he knew that. Harry would have paid to see the look on Roscoe’s weathered face when he saw all of the weird stuff in Harry’s trunk. He’d left his wand behind so he wouldn’t be tempted to do magic, but he’d taken his Hogwarts robes and cauldron and spell books, mainly because he didn’t want anything to happen to them.

Roscoe hired him for the dare-devil tour to begin with, and he’d always known there was something off about Harry, something different. Harry heard him pass it off as ‘a crazy, fearless gift’ more than once, but Roscoe knew he wasn’t just a regular guy. He’d been afraid of Harry, which sort of amused him. He wondered what Roscoe thought of the instructions he’d left, to open the little gold ball and slip a note inside. Gods, he’d have loved to see the look on the florid old face when the gold ball sprouted wings and flew out the window!

Dimly, he wondered who came for him. Hermione, probably. Oh, wait. He’d talked to Hermione, hadn’t he? It hadn’t been a long conversation, but he seemed to remember -- something. But he was so tired… he settled back into darkness once more.

“Harry? Harry, can you hear me?”

Hermione, Harry thought, his consciousness fighting to reassert itself. Hermione. It must be her hand he felt squeezing his.

“Harry, I need to you open your eyes. Can you do that?”

“Mrs. Weasley, I believe I told you that there’s no way he’ll be able to respond yet. My paralysis spell is quite complete, I assure you.”

Who was that? Whoever it was, he sounded like he had a beater’s bat up his arse, sideways. Harry disliked him instinctively.

“I know what you said, Healer Whycroft. I just thought, perhaps if he knew he had more company.”
“I doubt the presence of – this person would make much of a difference one way or the other.”

Who could it be that had that guy’s wand in a knot, Harry wondered faintly.

“Healer – “

“It’s all right, Hermione.”

Everything in Harry went still. He knew that voice, but he couldn’t believe it. Whatever potions they’d given him must be causing this, because there was no way…

“Two things, Healer,” the voice went on. “Number one; thank you for referring to me as a person, because there are many whose memories seem to be longer than their pricks and whose capacity to forgive as tiny as their shrunken little balls.” Harry heard an outraged sputter. “And number two; if you think any ‘paralysis spell’ you might cast would be stronger than Harry Potter’s will, you’re out of your fucking mind.”

“How dare you,” the Healer snarled, but Harry wasn’t paying attention to him. He was fighting up through layers of weight and darkness and hurt, pulling himself into consciousness by scrabbling with both hands. It took every ounce of determination he possessed to blink open his eyes. He winced and closed them again against the glare.

“Harry!” Hermione cried.

“Turn down the light over the bed, Hermione.”

There was that voice again, and Harry used the same herculean effort to force his eyelids open. First he saw an older man who was looking down at him as if he was some terrifying creature who’d climbed out of the underworld, but that wasn’t the face he wanted. He rolled his eyes to the other side and there he was, white hair gleaming in the soft light, angular, pointed face no longer as angular or as pointed as it had been when they were in school and so breathtakingly handsome he made Harry’s heart ache.

“Draco,” he whispered, his voice raw and rough from lack of use. “What -- are you doing here?”

Draco Malfoy’s full pink lips pulled to the side in a smirk. He shrugged one square shoulder, his gray eyes shining. “Honestly Potter?” he said, sounding amused. “Hell if I know.”
Draco stared down into Harry Potter’s face, wishing the ruddy idiot had turned ugly or at least looked as if he’d fallen on his head. But he didn’t, the bastard. He looked pale and he had several days growth of beard on his square chin, but that only made him look sexy and swarthy. His hair was shorter than Draco had ever seen it, just his fringe long enough to spill over his forehead. But if you looked close, which Draco did, the lines of pain around his tired green eyes came into focus. He was wearing one of those hideous hospital gowns, this one with candy canes on a black background, no doubt in deference to the approaching holiday, but it didn’t hide the width of his shoulders or the muscular arms. Each of his wrists seemed to be bent at an angle that was all wrong and Draco remembered what Hermione told him about how he’d tried to protect his head. He also noted that Potter had a tattoo on his right forearm; a Gryffin, of course. The image was ferocious, and damn it if it didn’t make the prat even sexier. Draco straightened slightly.

“Well, you look like warmed over shite, Potter,” he said.

“You know that from – personal experience, do you, Malfoy?” Potter retorted, sounding winded. Draco snorted, unable to hide his amusement. “You’re lying there all broken to bits, and you’re still a smart arse.”

The corner of Potter’s lips quirked. “Stick with what you’re good at, that’s what I – always say.”

“Mr. Malfoy, I really must protest.”

Draco turned and looked at the Healer, who’d looked ready to blow ever since Potter opened his eyes.

“Protest what, Healer?” he asked with exaggerated politeness. “We’re merely talking.”

“He cannot move,” the Healer said, his beady little eyes much wider but still beady. “It would be detrimental to his recovery – “

“I thought you put a paralysis spell on him, Healer?” Draco looked at Hermione with feigned
confusion. “Wasn’t that what he said?”

“Draco.” There was a soft warning in Hermione’s tone.


“Harry Potter, vanquisher of dark wizards everywhere and able to break your spell while nearly unconscious?” Draco provided sweetly.

The Healer drew himself up to his full height, his chest puffing out. “I will not take responsibility if this foolishness sets back his recovery.”

“Noted, Healer,” Hermione said, touching his arm. “I’ll make certain he stays still.”

“Yes, well. Do that.” He turned and made as grand an exit as his bruised ego would allow.

“There ya go, Malfoy,” Potter said with a weak grin. “Making friends everywhere you go.”

“It’s a gift.” Draco leaned closer, his elbows on the railing around Potter’s bed. He gestured toward the tattoo. “A Gryffin? Really? Could you be more predictable?”

Potter gave him a small, lazy grin that made butterflies take flight in his chest. And another part of his anatomy twitch in acknowledgment of how rakish it made him look, even lying in a hospital bed. “I thought dragons were passé.”

Draco pretended to be wounded, clutching his chest. “Ouch.” He dropped his hand. “Do you even know what passé means?”

Potter grimaced. “Ask me again when they return my brain.”

“You mean they found one?” Draco pretended surprised. “Who knew?”

Potter smiled, but it was weak effort. “We’ll have to pick this up again later. Witty repartee requires the ability – to follow the conversation.” His eyes drifted closed.

“Oh, no you don’t,” Draco said sternly. Potter blinked as Draco turned to Hermione.

“Will you give us a few moments, Hermione?”

She blinked, startled. “You mean, leave you alone?”

Draco arched a brow. “You don’t actually think I’d do him in while standing in St. Mungo’s?”

She smacked his arm. “No, you idiot. I just don’t want him to try to move or do something… impulsive.”

“Read ‘stupid’,” he said wryly. He looked down at Potter. “Promise her you’ll be good. You and I need to talk.”

Potter searched, finally finding Hermione with his bleary eyes. “I won’t try to break the spell. I promise.”

“But you could, couldn’t you?” she asked, frowning.

Potter sighed wearily. “Not when I’m this tired, Hermione. And not when doing it hurts like a
bitch.”

She looked between the two of them, then agreed reluctantly.

“Five minutes, Draco,” she said sternly. “I’ll go down to the cafeteria and get a coffee.”

“Brave soul,” Draco muttered. She nudged him with her shoulder as she passed.

When she was gone, Draco turned and looked down at Potter. He was watching him calmly, wide green eyes sleepy as they studied him. It was completely unfair how attractive the man managed to be, even bruised and bloodied. Draco had noticed the edges of raw places on the back of his wrists and hands, and wondered why they hadn’t healed those, at least.

He frowned sternly. He had to make sure Potter understood his terms. “Hermione tells me you want to see Teddy.”

It looked as if Potter was going to nod but then stopped himself, biting his lower lip and grimacing. “Yes,” he said roughly instead. “Yes, I want – to see Teddy. I need to see Teddy.”

“Why?”

Potter’s eyes widened from their almost sleepy, half lidded stupor. “What?”

“Why do you need to see him?” Draco braced his hands on the railing leaning forward. “Why do you need to see him right now?”

Potter blinked slowly, looking like the action almost pained him. “I don’t – understand.”

“It’s a perfectly simple question, Potter. Why do you want to see him now, and not when you’re recovered?”

“I…” Harry blinked again slowly.

“Hermione is of the opinion that you want to see him to say goodbye.” Draco watched emotions flit across Potter’s defenseless face, stiffened when the green eyes shifted away. “If that’s your plan,” Draco snarled, “you can fucking forget it. I will not bring Teddy here so you can say goodbye to him.”

Potter’s eyes came back, startled. “Malfoy…”

“No. If you’ve decided it would be easier to die now, you go right ahead, Potter. You made it through a war, defeated a monster. If you’ve decided to let a fall off a motor bike take you out, that’s up to you. But you will not leave that lasting memory in the child’s head. He’s five years old, and I won’t have it.” Draco took a deep breath to steady his temper, feeling a bit of a bastard when Potter’s eyes gleamed with tears. He blinked quickly but couldn’t dispel them completely. “Dammit, Potter.” Draco sighed. “You aren’t going to die. You can’t die.”

“Everyone can die, Malfoy.” Potter sounded weak, and sad, and it hurt Draco to hear it.

“Not you,” he responded without thinking. “Not when you’re 23 years old, and your life is just beginning. You should die an old man, surrounded by your children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren.”

Potter made a raw noise, but he smiled wryly. “No children, no grandchildren. Not from me.”

“Fine, don’t pro-create,” Draco hissed. “But you can’t die, either. Teddy has already lost enough
people in his life. He never knew his parents and the grandmother who dotted on him left him, too. He adores you, and you can’t do that to him, Potter. You just can’t.”

Potter was watching him, his eyes still awash in tears of weakness and pain, and some other emotion Draco couldn’t name.

“Why?” Harry rasped. “I haven’t been here for him. I couldn’t keep his parents -- ” He stopped, taking several deep breaths. A single tear slipped from his eye, slid down the side of his face and into his black hair. It took every ounce of self-control Draco had not to reach out and wipe it away with his thumb. “I took off as soon as I could, and I’ve maybe seen him once a year. You’re the one who’s been there, Draco. Why do you think I didn’t fight it, when I heard Andie’s will?” He closed his eyes. “Maybe this is the way it’s supposed to be.”

Draco felt a rush of conflicting emotions. His heart slammed into his ribs in fear at the resigned, helpless sound of Potter’s voice. But he was also angry that he seemed so willing to give up.

“Oh, fuck you, you stupid prat. Fine, you want to die? Die. But understand something, Potter; if you give up and check out now? I’m going to tell Teddy you were a coward. A sniveling fucking coward.”

Harry’s eyes shot open and he glared at Draco. He glared for what felt like a long time, and Draco glared back. But then slowly Potter’s mouth stretched into a wry smile. He chuckled, and it was a deep, raspy sound.

“God, you fucker. You’d do it too, wouldn’t you?” Draco arched a brow at him, and it seemed to be all of the answer Harry needed. He grimaced and closed his eyes. “Asshole.”

“Takes one and all that.”

“Mr. Malfoy, I really must insist you leave, now. Mr. Potter needs to rest.”

Draco looked up at Healer Whycroft, glaring at him from the doorway.

“That’s fine, Healer,” Draco said. “Potter and I said everything we need to.”

“Draco.”

Draco looked back down to find Harry looking at him again.

“When I’m – better, will you bring him to see me? Please?”

Draco just managed to fight down a triumphant grin. He nodded curtly instead and ignored the Healer’s glare as he left Potter’s room.
Harry was sitting up in his hospital bed, staring out of the window. He knew it was a magically modified view, that it wasn’t actually a snowy Diagon Alley, but it gave him something to watch. There was a choice of views; he could look at a snowy countryside, the quidditch pitch in Chudley or the Atrium of the Ministry. The idea of looking into the Ministry was the very last thing he wanted and watching people fly, well – he wasn’t ready for that yet.

The Healer and medi-witches kept telling him he was making good progress, and slowly he was getting parts of his body back. His neck had taken weeks and had to be repaired first but once that was done his clavicle and his wrists had been relatively quick. His ribs still ached, but they told him that could take months to go away.

“Each of the six ribs was broken off of its base and then shattered in several places,” Healer Whycroft told him. “We have to remove and regrow them, and the Muggles made a terrible mess of all of the connecting tissue. It could be six months before you move without pain. You’re just going to have to be patient.”

Anyone who knew Harry knew how well that went over, but for once in his life he wasn’t able to just bluster through something. Even sitting up required the help of a medi-witch and his bed and he had to mentally prepare himself for the pain before he even tried it. Finally today, three weeks after the ribs had been regrown, he could get upright without wanting to scream. Just in time for them to do his legs the next day, he thought with a sigh. The femur of one leg and the shattered tibia of the other had been in stasis casts ever since the Muggle metal supports were removed, and the Healer told him they were an even bigger mess than his ribs. The regrowth process on those could take up to four days, and Harry dreaded it. They’d left enough time between bone regrowth sessions for him to relax and build up some tolerance, but he still would almost rather have his teeth yanked without anesthesia. At least with that, it would hurt like hell but then be over. With the legs, he’d either be in agony or in a drug induced stupor for days.

His attention was caught by a tall wizard in heavy black robes wearing a dark fur hat, holding the hand of a small boy wearing a bright red coat and a striped hat that had a jaunty red pompom on the top. He was skipping, and the man was patiently moderating his long strides to match the boys
happy little hops. Harry smiled faintly; he knew it wasn’t Draco and Teddy, but it looked like
them, and the sight warmed him.

“Well, there’s something I was afraid I’d never see again.”

Harry turned his head and found Hermione leaning against the doorframe, arms crossed over her
chest. She’d been at work and was still wearing her black MLE robes, a dark skirt, jumper and
pumps beneath them. Her hair was pulled back, and he marveled at how beautiful she’d become.

“Hey, Hermione.”

“Hey, yourself. What are you watching that’s put a smile on your face?”

“Oh,” he gestured awkwardly. “Christmas shoppers.”

“Uh-huh.” She sounded as if she didn’t believe him, but she didn’t press either. She walked to the
bed, slipping her hands into the deep pockets in her robe. “I thought I’d drop by and see if you were
free for tea.”

He huffed softly. “Well, gee, let me check my calendar. I have such a busy schedule right now.”

“You are such a smart arse. And you didn’t answer my question. Tea?”

Harry couldn’t think of any reason to refuse, even though he knew he’d be lousy company, but
Hermione didn’t wait for an answer. A medi-witch bustled into the room with a wheelchair, and
Harry gave her a sour look.

“I never really had a choice in this, did I?”

Hermione smiled at him. “It’s just tea, Harry.”

He’d known her too long to fall for that.

The medi-witch removed the protective rail from the side of the bed and levitated Harry expertly
into the chair, then cautiously tucked a lap blanket around his legs.

“I look like a cripple,” Harry groused as Hermione took over and pushed the chair out into the hall.

“Well, not to put too fine a point on it…” she replied.

Harry slouched in the chair. “I love you, but you can be an awful bitch.”

“Thank you.”

She sounded entirely too smug, and Harry curled his lip.

He’d never forgotten what it was like to be out where people could see him in the wizarding world.
When people recognized him from his photos in the Defying Gravity program, at least they were
Muggles. He kind of enjoyed them in their enthusiasm, and they weren’t looking for him to be
anything but a bloke on a bike. It didn’t matter how tall he was or whether he’d shaved that
morning, or who he dated. He was a bloke who could do stupid, dangerous things on a motorcycle
and usually escaped unscathed. Usually.

As they moved through the halls of St. Mungo’s, people didn’t just stare; they stopped and gaped,
and pointed, and whispered behind their hands, and by the time they arrived at the cafeteria Harry
was irritated and wishing they’d never left his room. But when Hermione pushed through the
doors the room was empty, only one table set for tea with a tablecloth and a lovely white ceramic tea set, and a three tiered silver server stacked with small cakes and finger sandwiches. When Hermione parked him next to the table, a woman in a pink uniform with a white apron tied around her waist closed the door behind them and locked it, then gave them a smile before disappearing into the kitchen.

“You set this up,” Harry accused mildly as Hermione picked up a plate and put a selection of bite sized food on it.

“Guilty,” she answered, clearly not guilty at all. She set the plate before him and filled another.

“I can’t believe the hospital went along with this.”

She glanced at him with an arched brow. “You can’t?”

He felt himself color. “Not after all this time, no.”

Hermione poured him a cup of tea and fixed it exactly as he liked it without asking; three teaspoons of sugar and some cream. Ron always said he liked a ‘bit of tea with his shite’. Harry was warmed that Hermione remembered.

“It hasn’t been that long, Harry,” she said, pouring another cup before taking the seat beside him. “And some people, unlike the idiots out in the hall, remember what you did for all of us. And they’re grateful.”

The subject made Harry uncomfortable, just like it always had, and he picked up the cup, glad his hand only trembled a little. The Healer told him the strength in his wrists would return but it would be a while.

“You left work early today,” he said in an effort to redirect the conversation. Hermione gave him a look that told him it hadn’t worked entirely, but she’d go along with it.

“I wanted to see you. When the doctor told me we could finally get you out of bed, I thought tea might be a nice option.”

Harry leaned back in the wheelchair, and the warmth of the cup felt good against his palms. He took a deep breath of the fragrant tea and closed his eyes. A light touch landed on his arm.

“Are you feeling all right?”

Harry looked up at her, smiling weakly. “I’m fine. Just tired.”

“You don’t think you might be… a little depressed?”

Harry sighed softly. “You went into law, Hermione. Not mind healing.”

Her brown gaze didn’t waver. “I’m not allowed to be concerned about you, and your mental health?”

“Of course you’re allowed to be concerned. You wouldn’t be you if you weren’t. And my mental health is fine. I’m just tired of the hospital.”

She brightened. “I’m glad you brought that up.”

“Brought what up?”
“Being tired of the hospital.”

“I’ve been here over a month. I think I’m entitled to be sick of it. And with the fact they still haven’t fixed my legs…”

“I spoke to your Healer about that.”

Harry snorted softly. “That must have been fun.”

Hermione took a dainty bite of a cookie, smirking. “He actually is an enormous arse, isn’t he?”

“There’s the understatement of the decade. There’s a Muggle saying; surgeons have a God complex. This one thinks he’s the second coming of Merlin.”

Hermione giggled lightly. “I’d heard that before, actually. And I have to agree with you about Healer Whycroft. Fortunately, he’s good at what he does. And he told me that after your next two procedures and few days of observation, you might be able to leave as early as the end of next week.”

Harry brightened. “Really?”

She nodded, smiling. “The only thing left to be determined is where you’re going to go.”

Harry looked at her, a bit gobsmacked. Where would he go? He supposed he could go to Grimmauld Place, but he didn’t even know if Kreacher was still alive. And he supposed he could check into the Leaky Cauldron until he was strong enough to go back to the show. But he’d been having weird thoughts about that lately. Like… maybe he didn’t really want to go back.

“I could go to Grimmauld,” Harry said absently. “Or check into the Leaky.” Hermione was shaking her head slowly. “What?”

“You can’t go back to Grimmauld with only Kreacher to keep track of you, not at first,” Hermione said. “And our place is too small; we’ve only the one bedroom and the sofa won’t do. You could go to the Burrow, and Gods knows Molly would love to get her hands on you, but the stairs are a problem.”

Harry looked at her. “Well, maybe someone could come to Grimmauld and keep me company until the doctor releases me.”

Hermione nodded non-committedly. “That’s one idea.” She took a sip of tea before setting her cup aside. “We have another.”

“We?”

“Ron and I. And Molly.” She seemed to take great care in selecting another cookie, studying them, pointedly not looking at Harry. “And Draco.”

Harry frowned, freezing with a cookie stopping just in front of his mouth. “Draco?” he said, his voice a soft growl. “Since when is it ‘Draco’?”
Hermione gave him a quelling look. “You’ve been gone quite a while, Harry. And you knew Draco and I work together. Well, on the same floor, anyway. You had to expect we’d become friends.”

Harry was incredulous. “I should expect that you’d become friends with the prat you punched in the nose during third year? Well, of course; how foolish of me.”

Hermione’s lips were pinched but there was also a wash of pink on her cheekbones. “Some of us grew up in the last five years.”

Harry placed the cookie back on his plate with an irritated sigh. “Yes, I know. You all went to work like responsible adults and I ran around a foreign country jumping over things on a motorcycle. A decision that clearly,” he gestured toward his legs, “got me precisely what I deserved. Did I leave anything out?”

Hermione was wounded, and her large brown eyes filled with tears. “No one thinks you got what you deserved,” she said, her voice raw. “None of us, not even Draco.”

Harry closed his eyes, releasing a sigh. “I’m sorry. You didn’t deserve that.”

“No, I didn’t. And we all feel badly about what happened to you. Do we wish you’d – stay home, and maybe find something to do that wouldn’t get you killed? I’m not going to insult your intelligence. Of course we do.”

“Malfoy doesn’t wish I’d stay home and do something that wouldn’t get me killed,” Harry said sourly.

“Oh! You really just are the most clueless human being, ever.” She dashed angrily at the tears that still clung to her lashes.

In that moment, Harry felt like the most clueless human being, ever. “What? He doesn’t? You aren’t going to convince me that he gives a rodent’s rear end about what happens to me.”
Her glare could have cut glass. “But he does care about Teddy, more than you can imagine. And Teddy adores you. How would you like to be on the other side of this? Trying to tell a five year old that the godfather he adores has a death wish? Oh, wait; you just might actually know what that feels like.”

The old ache that surrounded his memories of Sirius gave a warning throb. “Ouch, Hermione.” He rubbed at the center of his chest.

Immediately he could see her regret. She leaned forward, her hand coming to rest on his arm. “I’m sorry, Harry. That was cruel. But you really don’t know Draco, not the way he is now.”

Harry grimaced. “Still seems like a snarky bastard to me.”

“Well, of course he does. It’s your dynamic, the two of you. But let’s also not forget that it was Draco’s voice that brought you out of a coma. Not mine, not Ron’s; Draco’s.”

Harry didn’t really remember that. He frowned, thoughtful. Or did he? He’d been floating in a warm, gray mist, and then that pointed, posh voice had cut through the haze…

“I couldn’t believe he was there.”

“He came the moment he found out. He’s been as worried about you as the rest of us. And he wouldn’t thank me for saying it, but he’s been here after each of the surgeries, when you’re still unconscious. Checking on you.”

Harry felt heat fill his face. “Because of Ted, probably.”

“Partly, I’m sure.” She leaned back and picked up her tea, looking at him over the rim of the cup.

“So – what did this coalition of great minds decide to do when I get out of the hospital? Or do I have a say in this?”

Hermione picked up another cookie. “Of course you have a say in it, Harry. We won’t be holding you prisoner. But you do need to be thoughtful about it. I just don’t want something, like a fall, to set you back.”

Frankly, Harry didn’t want that, either. He’d had enough of pain. He couldn’t wait for his ribs to stop aching, and the doctor had already given him the list of warnings about what a setback could entail.

He frowned slightly, picking up a small sandwich but not taking a bite of it. “And I can’t go to Grimmauld?”

She shrugged slightly. “Perhaps you should call Kreacher and decide for yourself.”

He’d do just that, Harry decided. “Kreacher,” he said firmly. When the elf didn’t appear, Harry tried again, louder. “Kreacher.”

There was a soft pop and the wizened little creature appeared next to them, but he staggered a few steps and had his back to them, looking around the room quizzically.

“Kreacher?” Harry said. The elf jumped, startled, and turned around.

He looked at Harry in incomprehension, and then squinted, stepping closer. “Master Regulus?”

“Kreacher! It’s me, Harry.”
“Ehh, Master Harry.” He grumbled. He was clearly disappointed, but then he’d never much liked Harry.

“Kreacher, have you been taking care of the house?”

“Of course, Master Harry. As Mistress expects it to be. Kreacher would never disappoint Mistress.”

Harry looked at Hermione, and she shrugged.

“Uhm, you can go ahead and go on home, Kreacher. I’ll – I’ll talk to you soon.”

“Yes, Master.” The ancient elf nodded once and disappeared.

“The house is a disaster, isn’t it?” Harry looked at Hermione, frowning.

“No worse than it ever was, I imagine. I haven’t seen it, but given how confused he is, I can assume. But you mustn’t be cross with him, Harry,” Hermione said. “No one knows precisely how old he is, but Draco remembers him being ancient even when he was a boy.”

Harry let his head drop back against the high back of the wheelchair. “So, now what? One of those… rehab places?” He shuddered. He’d never been to a rehab center, but he’d heard stories. The idea of having to stay in one of those places made his skin crawl, but even he could see why Grimmauld with Kreacher was out of the question. “I mean, I know you can’t do it and the stairs at the Burrow make it impossible…” He tried to think of other possibilities, but there was something about Hermione’s expression that caught his attention. She looked guilty, but faintly excited, and like she was trying to hide both. A wild thought drifted into his head, but that was too outlandish to even be considered. Wasn’t it?

“What?” he demanded, looking at her. “Hermione, tell me.”

“Oh, don’t badger the poor woman.”

Draco Malfoy, nattily dressed in dark slacks, a long dark wool overcoat and a dark hat, strode up to the table. He removed his gloves and hat and pulled out a chair, sitting gracefully. “ Might I trouble you, Hermione?”

Of course.” She gave him a pleased smile and poured into another cup that had appeared in front of her.

Again, the feeling of having awakened in a parallel universe swamped Harry. Who were these people, and what had happened to the old inter-house enmity?

“Now, Potter,” Draco said, stacking his gloves neatly and crossing his long legs. “We have a proposal.” He took the cup from Hermione with a graceful nod.

“A proposal?” Harry said faintly.

Draco took a sip of his tea, the settled the cup back in the saucer. “A proposal. And I’d appreciate it if you listen to the whole of it before your head explodes. Agreed?” He arched one brow and waited, and Harry had the sinking feeling that whatever it was, he really wasn’t going to like it.
Hermione consulted her watch. “We should be able to start any minute now. We’re just waiting for –” There was a loud banging on the door, and Hermione gave Draco a slight smirk before going to open it.

“Sorry we’re late!” Ron rushed through the door, yanking an orange Chudley Cannon’s hat off of his head that clashed horribly with the WWW magenta robes, pausing just long enough to press a kiss to his wife’s cheek. She shuddered.

“Your lips are cold.”

He gave her a cheeky wink. “Ah, but my heart is warm, sweetheart.”

To Harry’s amusement, Hermione blushed dark pink.

“Oh, thank you, dear.”

Molly Weasley came through the doors behind Ron, wearing a bright purple coat with a green and pumpkin scarf and a knitted hat of chartreuse green and baby pink.

“Well, we now know where Weasley’s fashion sense came from,” Draco muttered under his breath and Harry had to bite back a laugh.

Molly was holding a pink box in her hands, and she bustled to Harry, bending to kiss him on the cheek. She smelled of vanilla and tea and the homey scents Harry would always associate with the Burrow, and he smiled when she bent and looked into his face.

“Oh, you look so much better, sweetheart!” She set the box down and pulled off truly hideous, fingerless brown gloves. “I’m so glad. I made something for you!”

She opened the lid of the box and took a cookie from within, setting it on the plate in front of Harry. He took one look at it and his battle with his laughter was lost.
“Aren’t they cute?” Molly preened.

The cookies featured a spreading white puddle, complete with buttons swimming on the melted snow along with a bow tie and flailing little twig arms. The head was a marshmallow, and the whole of it looked like a very happy, rapidly melting snowman.

Draco leaned over and looked at it, one brow arching toward his hairline. “Was it murder or suicide?” he asked wryly, and Ron laughed loudly.

“I asked the same thing.”

“I think they’re adorable,” Hermione said, leaning over and peeping in the box.

“Thank you, dear.” Molly pulled out a chair and sat, crossing her hands in her lap. “And if you find them objectionable, boys, you don’t have to eat them.”

“I didn’t say I objected,” Ron said, grabbing a cookie. “Just that it looked like a winter crime scene.”

There was another soft rap on the door, and Hermione went to open it again.

“What is this?” Harry asked, looking from one friend to another. “Some sort of… what’s it called?”

“An intervention?” Draco offered.

“Yes, that.” He gave Draco a look.

“I suppose you could put it that way.”

“Sounds about right to me.” Ron reached for another cookie, and Molly smacked his hand.

“Those are for Harry, you bottomless pit.”

“But, mum… they’re your sugar cookies!”

She gave him a smile and patted his cheek. “There are more at the house for you.” Ron gave her a brilliant smile.

Harry turned his head and nearly groaned aloud when Healer Whycroft came through the door.

“Oh, brilliant,” Draco grumbled. Harry couldn’t help but agree.

“Just bite your lip and let Hermione handle it, mate,” Ron told him, pulling the marshmallow off of the cookie and popping it into his mouth. “That’s what I do.”

“I have patients waiting so I cannot contribute much,” Whycroft said, stopping by the table. “Other than to re-iterate, Mr. Potter, that it could be disastrous to your convalescence should you take a fall at this stage of your recovery. The bones in your back, neck, shoulder and wrist have been mended, but are still weak. If you will not consider a rehabilitation facility, which Mrs. Weasley assures me you will not, then you must be someplace where there is round the clock care. At least for the first month.”

Harry’s heart sank. A month? Seriously?

“Also, my advice to you, whether or not you should choose to heed to it, would be to find another way to make a living. We saw many healed breaks when we were in doing the surgery; clearly, this
 isn’t the first nasty spill you’ve taken.”

The all looked at Harry expectantly, and he felt his face heat. “No, just the worst.”

“Oh, Harry,” Molly said, frowning. “And you so far from home!”

Harry felt like a heel, even though he knew he hadn’t done anything wrong.

“At any rate, in all good conscience I cannot agree to release you from hospital unless you have somewhere safe to go. I can’t stop you, but I can’t sanction it either.” Whycroft sniffed officiously.

“That having been said, I need to return to the ward.”

He turned and left without another word, and a heavy silence settled in his wake.

“What a bloody rotter,” Ron said finally. “What’s up his arse sideways?”

“Ronald,” Hermione and Molly said in unison.

“Scolding in stereo,” Ron quipped, grabbing another cookie from the three tiered server. “Lucky me.”

“Not that I disagree with your assessment of the good Healer’s finer points,” Draco said drily, “he does provide the lead in for why we’re here.”

“The proposal you mentioned,” Harry said, apprehension filling him.

“Now, Harry, mate,” “It’s like this,” “Harry dear, you really must…” Molly, Hermione and Ron all spoke at once, and Harry grimaced.

Draco held up his hands, waving them. “Stop, stop.” He scowled. “We can’t all speak at once.”

“Draco’s right,” Hermione said primly. She turned to him, one brow arched. “You tell him.”

“Me?” Draco’s look was incredulous. “You did want him to think this was a good idea, didn’t you?”

“I’ll listen,” Harry found himself saying. Draco turned back to him, his expression clearly saying, ‘Oh, really.’ “I can be reasonable,” he said. “I’m not always, but I can be.”

“There’s some interesting introspection.” One corner of Draco’s lips twitched.

Molly smiled at him beatifically. “I do love it when you boys act like grown-ups.”

Ron winked at Harry. “It happens so seldom.”

Hermione huffed. “Draco, go ahead.” She sent her husband a glare. “He’ll be quiet or I’ll cut off his cookies.”

Ron squeaked and grabbed his crotch, and Harry laughed. Draco fought a grin. Molly bit her lip and looked away, but her lips were even quivering.

“I thought you’d already done that,” Draco said mildly.

Hermione sighed. “Honestly. We need to get through this before Harry gets tired.”

“Here, put this in your mouth,” Molly said, shoving another of her sugar cookies into Ron’s hand,
then turned to Draco. “Do go ahead, dear.”

“Thank you, Molly.” Draco replied with a slight smile. Harry thought back to how Lucius Malfoy used to speak of the Weasley’s and saw that more had changed while he’d been gone than even he knew. Draco looked at him, and Harry felt pinned under the light eyes. “All right, Potter, here is the situation as it currently sits. The doctor has told us that you could be released as early as next Wednesday, which will be five days after the next, and hopefully last, procedure.”

“From your lips to Merlin’s ears,” Molly said, smiling at Harry.

“But you heard him; he’s serious about his terms for your release. You can go where you want; you’re an adult, after all. But the Grimmauld Place situation is untenable.”

“He summoned Kreacher earlier,” Hermione said softly. “He saw the problem.”

“Good. Now, Ron and Hermione’s place is too small.”

“We’d love to have you, Harry, you know that. But we’re almost never home and you simply can’t sleep on the couch, not after back surgery.” Hermione really did look regretful.

“And the Burrow,” Draco went on, “has too many stairs from the bedrooms to the bathrooms to the main floor, and it will be a while before you can do stairs comfortably. Molly has offered to levitate you from Ron’s old room to the main sitting room and back, but she has Victoire and Louis three days a week.”

“They’re darlings, they really are.” Molly leaned forward earnestly. “They’re just a bit… high spirited.”

“They’re hellions who prattle in French and terrorize the garden gnomes,” Ron said with a sour smirk.

“At any rate, it would not be a situation conducive to your recovery.” Draco linked his fingers on the table top. “I, on the other hand, have a huge home with main floor bedrooms and facilities that won’t require you to climb stairs, and a full time staff of four house elves who I pay,” he said at Hermione’s pointed sigh, “and my work schedule is at my discretion. That leaves the ideal place for your convalescence to be the Manor – with me.”

Harry had known it was coming down to that, but he still stared at Draco, knowing he looked as incredulous as he felt.

“Have you lost your mind?” he asked.

“Probably.” Draco acceded. “But I have something else as well. I have a five year old who is over the moon at the idea of getting to spend so much time with his beloved godfather.”

Draco’s stare was level, and faintly taunting.

“So, what will it be, Potter. The Manor, or a nice rehabilitation facility?”

Harry sighed. What choice did he actually have?
Draco walked from the gates of the Malfoy property up the long drive that led to the Manor, his charmed boots and trousers impervious to the deep snow. They were having a particularly cold, snowy December in Wiltshire; ordinarily if it did snow, it was in January or February. Many years Draco manufactured a snowy landscape for Teddy for Christmas and did massive cloaking charms on the Manor grounds so that no Muggles might wander across a winter wonderland in the middle of a snow-free county. The Manor was pretty isolated, so it wasn’t likely, but Draco didn’t like to take any chances.

He hadn’t used any charms to prevent the cold from brushing his cheeks or the soft wind from tugging at the hem of his heavy coat. He actually liked the cold, crisp winter air, and he found a brisk walk usually helped to clear his head. And after that round table discussion at St. Mungo’s, he definitely needed the walk.

It had been his idea to strong arm Potter into accepting his invitation to recuperate at the Manor. He did have the facilities and the house staff, all on the first floor. He and Teddy occupied the old west wing, the oldest part of the house, and the areas that had been occupied by Voldemort and his death eater cronies, including Batshit Bella’s suite, were in the east wing and he’d closed them off permanently when his father died.

The old master suite and his childhood bedroom were in that part of the house, along with one of two grand ballrooms, a large dining room and several sitting rooms. The moment he took possession of the house he took great pleasure in demolishing the staircases that led up to the suites and down to the dungeons. After that it had been a simple matter to erect walls to hide the damage. Only an architect, looking at the outside of the house, would know that an entire wing had somehow mysteriously become inaccessible. When Teddy was of age he’d tell him what he’d done and allow him to make the decision about the changes and whether they should remain in place or not. He’d decided if there was going to be an innocent child living in the house, one who had lost his parents to the war, no sign of it would touch him, not while he was in his home.

But looking at the expression on Potter's face, Draco was reminded more people than Teddy, or even himself, had been scarred by what had gone on in his childhood home. Potter had reluctantly
agreed, of course, but it wasn’t until Hermione leaned over and touched his arm, telling him softly, ‘you won’t even recognize the place, I promise,’ had it dawned on Draco that forcing him to come back to the Manor might be cruel. He kicked at a bush as his passed, and glittering snow blew up, taken by the breeze to float away.

Damn his father, anyway. It had been Lucius who had dragged Draco into his mess. He’d even hauled Narcissa along with him, too. Mother had been something of a snob, but she hadn’t been a bigoted racist, not like his father. He could remember her sitting on the edge of his bed at night, after Father had been particularly cruel to him, touching his hair gently and telling him that Lucius was a product of his own upbringing, and he shouldn’t take it personally. She’d also told him there were as many good Muggles as there were good wizards, and that he mustn’t take it to heart. He never repeated those words to anyone, instinctively knowing the extremists his father surrounded himself with would never understand and likely find the words subversive. But there were many times over the course of the years of Voldemort’s return that his mother would look into his eyes, and he would know what she was thinking; Muggles were not the enemy. Hatred was.

He blamed Lucius for many, many things, including the loss of his mother not two years after the end of the war. Never particularly strong to begin with, the stress of having her crazy sister and a madman under her roof had taken its toll. Narcissa died when he was just nineteen, Lucius in Azkaban when he was twenty, and six months later Andromeda passed, leaving him Teddy’s guardian. If the war hadn’t forced him to grow up, that certainly would have done it.

He came around the final bend and the house came into view, and Draco stopped. Late afternoon shadows were long, throwing tints of blue and lavender over the snow. He loved the old place, but it was of made up of meandering construction. You could clearly see where each generation of Malfoy had made their own changes and not all of them were compatible. He glared at the wing to the far right, the one his father added, and wondered what it would look like with that section razzed to the ground.

“Draco!!”

The high pitched voice echoed across the grounds, and Draco turned to see Teddy struggling through the foot deep snow, wearing his bright red coat and matching hat, his boots kicking up plumes of snow as he ran. Draco immediately felt his dark mood fade and he smiled, hurrying toward the boy to split the distance. When they met Teddy threw his arms around Draco’s knees, leaning back far enough to smile up into his face.

“Draco, Flossy and I baked cookies!”

“You did?” Draco removed the floppy hat and pushed back Teddy’s hair, watching it shift from soft brown to white blond as he touched it. “And were you a good helper?”

“I was! I didn’t even eated too much of the raw stuff. Just a little, cuz it’s yummy.”

“Didn’t even eat too much,” he corrected patiently, smiling. He bent closer to the little face. “And I think it’s yummy, too.”

“Flossy let me lick the spoon,” Teddy confessed, in what Draco was certain he thought was a whisper. It wasn’t.

“Well, I hope you were good and helped her tidy the kitchen.” Draco bent and slipped his arm beneath Teddy’s knees, lifting him up onto his hip. He began to walk toward the side of the house where Flossy waited, her skinny arms wrapped around her torso. He’d offered her a coat once but she’d cried so hard he’d withdrawn the suggestion at once.
“I did,” Teddy answered brightly, wrapping his arms around Draco’s neck. “I even put away my toys.”

Draco gave him a look of exaggerated shock. “To what do I owe this amazing occurrence?”

“You told me if I was good and if I cleaned my room, we’d get a Christmas tree!!”

Draco frowned thoughtfully. “Are you sure I said that?” He glanced down at the elf as he passed her. “Hello, Flossy.”

“Master Draco.” She smiled up at him.

Draco walked into the kitchen and was immediately engulfed in the smells of Christmas; ginger, cinnamon and nutmeg. He’d remodeled the old servants kitchen, which had been dark and soot stained. He liked to cook on occasion, and it had also been woefully outdated. Now it was bright and modern, with large windows, polished marble countertops and stainless-steel appliances.

There was a plate of gingerbread men with icing eyes and chocolate candy buttons on the marble top of the island, and his smile widened. He set Teddy on the counter next to the plate of cookies and pulled off the wet snow boots.

“Flossy,” he said conversationally, unbuttoning the red coat and slipping it off Teddy’s thin little body, “we’re going to have a house guest beginning tomorrow.”

“Does this guest be needing anything special for eating, Master Draco?”

Draco smirked. “I think he’d probably be happy with anything edible, Flossy. What Teddy and I eat will be fine.” He thought of the number of broken bones Potter had suffered. “Perhaps a little heavier on the protein.”

She nodded. “Pot Roast? Chickens?”

He smiled faintly. “Yes, perfect.”

Teddy tugged on Draco’s coat front and he looked down into the boy’s wide brown eyes. He hadn’t figured out how to change the color of them yet, but Draco knew he would. “Oh, Draco. Is Harry the guest?” he began to bounce in place on his little bum. “Is he? Is he?”

Draco leaned close and rubbed noses with him. “Yes!”

“Yay!!” Teddy threw his arms around Draco’s neck again, squeezing tight, and Draco wrapped his arms around him, hugging him back. “This is going to be the best Christmas, ever!!”

“I hope you’re right, Ted,” Draco said, thinking of how unhappy Potter had looked at the idea of staying with him. “I really do.”
Harry was exhausted. The previous five days, with the regrowing of the femur in his right leg, had been the worst yet. It might have been because of the size of the bone, or perhaps they were cutting back on his pain potions at the same time, but the process had been particularly unpleasant. That morning Hermione and Ron had come to move him to the Manor. It didn’t take much, actually. If Hermione hadn’t gone shopping for him and purchased him a few changes of clothes, he’d have been moving in his boxers and a hospital gown.

Hermione had side along Apparated him to the gates to the property, Ron following immediately. Draco was waiting for them, looking tall and austere in his dark coat, slacks and hat.

“Good morning,” he said, approaching them. “Nice coat, Potter.”

It was a hip length double breasted wool jacket in hunter green, large brass buttons down the front. He was also wearing black jeans and trainers, a black skull cap pulled down over his hair. He was also leaning heavily on a cane, and the pain that was radiating up from his thigh was almost breath stealing. “Thanks,” he managed, trying to smile. He doubted it was much of an effort.

Draco studied his face. “You’re about done in, I see.” He turned to Hermione and Ron. “I can only take him in. I’m afraid you’ll have to walk up.”

“That’s fine.” Hermione gave him a bright smile.

Draco held out his arm to Harry, and much as he hated to, Harry grabbed it and found himself leaning on him. They’d offered him a walker at St. Mungo’s and he’d adamantly refused. Now he thought the old saying, ‘pride goeth before a fall’ might be far more accurate than he liked. “Let’s do this, shall we?” Draco said, and Harry nodded. Just before he Apparated them up to the house, Draco held up his other hand. “Here, take this,” he said, and unsure what he planned, Harry hesitated a moment before shifting his grip to the gloved hand. Once he released his arm, Draco slid it around Harry’s waist and stepped into his body.

Harry would not have thought it possible as much pain as he was in, but the feeling of Draco’s arm around him and the strength against his side was both reassuring and faintly arousing. He
swallowed heavily and just managed to close his eyes before the sensation of being forcibly
hooked behind the navel and dragged into a sickening swirl washed over him. It was so
disconcerting that when his feet settled back beneath him his knees buckled. Thank goodness for
Draco’s firm hold; without it he’d have either been on his face or his arse.

“Easy there, Potter,” Draco said, and his mouth was close enough to his ear that Harry felt the
warm rush of his breath against his cheek. Draco’s arm had tightened around him and he didn’t
ease his hold. “Are you all right?”

“I – one second,” Harry managed, fighting down the debilitating nausea. He took several deep
breaths, tested the steadiness of his leg, then finally nodded. “I’m all right.”

“You’re sure?”

He could feel Draco’s eyes on him and knew he was blushing. “Yeah, I’m okay.”

“There’s a chaise right behind you. One step back and you can sit down.”

Harry’s pride wanted him to straighten and argue that ‘he was just fine, thank you very much’. But
in truth he wasn’t. He let Draco ease him back and then down, and it occurred to him how easily
Draco could have dumped him on his arse if he’d been of a mind to. He didn’t, and Harry found
himself settling onto a comfortable piece of furniture. He straightened his leg and began massaging
the muscle in his thigh even before he opened his eyes.

He found himself in a large bedroom. The chaise he was sitting on was covered in a pretty floral
fabric with large cabbage roses, and there was an oriental carpet that looked like old but not faded
on the floor. To his left was a large fireplace with a fire burning merrily on the hearth, a couple of
leather chairs and a sofa gathered in a loose seating arrangement and floor to ceiling bookshelves,
full of books, on either side of the fireplace. There were also some small tables and a coffee table
with marble tops, and several other pieces that looked to be antiques. Large windows with heavy
draperies pulled back showed a view of the snow outside, and to his right was a massive four
poster bed with pristine white linens. All in all was a large but surprisingly homely room, not
something Harry would have expected to even find in the Manor he remembered. Then an
alarming thought occurred to him.

“Malfoy, this isn’t your room, is it? I won’t put you out of your room.”

Draco chuckled. “No, Potter. This isn’t my room. I actually had it set up for Andie when she was
ill.”

“Oh.” Harry glanced nervously at the bed, and Draco’s laughter grew.

“She died in St. Mungo’s, you idiot. In any case, she had her own bed that went to another room. I
purchased that one when I closed off the part of the house where the old family rooms were.”

Harry looked up at him in surprise. “I certainly wasn’t going to use any of the furniture the mad
bastard had made use of.”

Harry looked up at him wryly. “Which one?”

Draco snorted. “Good point. Any of them.”

There was a portrait hanging over the couch, and it depicted a young man in the military uniform
of an earlier century. He was very handsome, but he didn’t have the Malfoy coloring. When he saw
Harry looking, he sketched a courtly bow, his hand on the scabbard of the sword at his hip.
“A relative of yours?” Harry asked, nodding toward the painting.

Draco looked up at the portrait, smiling faintly. “Of my mother’s actually. And of your godfather’s. That’s his great grandfather, the first Sirius.”

“Really?” Harry wanted to stand in front of it and study the face, but he wondered if that wasn’t what Sirius looked like before Azkaban and the first war.

A polite rap sounded on a door across the room. “Come in,” Draco called. A petite house elf in a pristine apron and ruffled cap opened the door, and Hermione and Ron came through behind her.

“Oh, what a lovely room,” Hermione said, coming to them. “This part of the house is so much nicer, Draco!”

“Well, less like an over-decorated prison, anyway,” Draco replied.

“I like it, mate.” Ron stopped by the bed, taking several small things from his pockets. After placing them on the bed, he waved his wand and restored two suitcases and a large pink box to their previous size.

“Cookies from Mum,” Ron said. “But the way the rest of the house smells, I’m betting there’s more somewhere.” He looked around appreciatively. “Nice digs, Malfoy.”

Harry waited for the cutting comment that didn’t come.

“Thank you, Weasley.”

Hermione pulled something out of her coat pocket and enlarged it, and saw that she was holding a large knitted blanket. It was tan and dark blue, and there was something else worked into the weave. She approached Harry almost apologetically. “Also from Molly.”

She handed it to Harry, and he saw that it wasn’t a pattern but an initial. A capital ‘H’ was repeated every foot across a wide stripe of dark blue along the blanket’s hem. Harry huffed out a soft chuckle.

“Yeah, I tried to tell her nothing says “gee, mate, you’re an old sod with a bum leg” like an afghan with your initial on it.” Draco was clearly trying very hard not to laugh, and Ron dropped a heavy hand onto his shoulder. “Give it up, Malfoy. We all know it’s ridiculous.”

“I’m sure she means well,” Draco said, sounding a bit suffocated.

“Oh, she does,” Ron said agreeably. “She and her knitting needles are still a menace. We tried hiding them every year when we were kids, but she’d just buy new ones.” He sighed. “It’s our burden to bear.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “I’m going to tell her you said that.”

Ron looked horrified. “You wouldn’t do that,” he said. “Not during cookie season.”

“Don’t tempt me,” she warned. “I’m still wearing the damned sweaters she makes every Christmas.” She handed Harry the blanket. “Last year’s was lavender.” She said it with enough venom that Harry had to laugh.

“It looks warm,” Harry said, running his hand fondly over the soft wool. “Which is all that will matter for the next few weeks.”
“True.” She bent over to kiss him on the cheek. “You look tired, so we’re going to go. I’ll come by tomorrow after work.”

“I’ll get here when I can, Harry, but you know…”

“Christmas shoppers. Sure, I understand.”

Ron shocked him by leaning down and hugging him. “I’m glad you’re here, and I’m glad you’re okay. Try not to be too big a pain in the arse.” He lowered his voice to a whisper. “He’s really not that bad.”

Before he could answer, he and Hermione were heading toward the door.

The elf, who had been waiting quietly, turned to Draco. “Can he be coming in now, sir?”

Draco’s lips quirked up in a smile. “Is he driving you spare?”

“He’s been very good,” Flossy said stalwartly. “But he is being anxious to see his Harry.” She gave Harry a warm smile, which he tried to return.

“Tell him he can come.” Draco turned back to Harry when she left. “May I help you with your coat, Potter?”

At one time, Harry wouldn’t have allowed Draco to touch it. And at that point, Draco would have no doubt incinerated it on principal alone. Now even the idea of standing to hang it up was more than Harry was up to. He set the blanket aside and unbuttoned his coat, slipping it down his arms and handing it Draco. He took it and crossed the room to an elegant, dark wood armoire, opening the door and placing the coat on a hanger.

Fast footsteps sounded outside in the hall and a moment later Teddy burst in through the door, running, a huge smile on his face and dimpling his cheeks.

“Harry!”

“Hey, buddy,” Harry said, his heart lifting. As he ran across the room, his hair went from blond to black covered with cowlicks, and Harry braced himself for when the boy collided with his legs.

“Teddy.” Draco’s voice was firm, stopping the boy before he could reach Harry. He skidded to a halt and turned, his little body stiff. “What did I tell you about how you need to approach Harry?”

“Oh.” The little boy glanced at Harry apologetically. “I need to be careful, because he’s hurted.”

“Hurt, not hurted,” Teddy said under his breath. Draco gave him a small smile and a nod. “Yes. And it’s hurt, not hurted.”

Draco gave him a small smile and a nod. “Yes. And it’s hurt, not hurted.”

“Hurt, not hurted,” Teddy said under his breath. He turned back to Harry, still not able to completely curb his natural enthusiasm. But when he arrived at Harry’s side he stopped before he touched him, his dark eyes searching out Harry’s face. “Are you okay, Harry?” he looked so abruptly solemn and worried, and Harry reached out, cupping his face.

“I’m okay, buddy,” he said.

“Can I hug you?”

Heart swelling, Harry opened his arms.

“Remember, careful,” Draco said softly. Teddy nodded before stepping close and wrapping his
arms gently around Harry, his face pressed to Harry’s chest.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” Teddy said, one small hand patting Harry’s back.

“Me, too, Ted,” Harry said. He looked up to find Draco looking at them, face solemn, gray eyes watchful. “Thank you,” he mouthed.

Draco’s lips curved slightly, and he nodded, his eyes gentle. “You’re welcome,” he mouthed back.

Harry lowered his head to press his cheek against Teddy’s and soaked in the feeling of the little boy in his arms, but he could still feel the touch of Draco’s eyes.
Harry slept what felt like a very long time. Teddy reluctantly left when Draco gently told him Harry needed to rest, and he hadn’t even walked to the bed; merely scooted up on the chaise, put a small, soft pillow beneath his head and passed out.

When he opened his eyes, the room was dimly lit by a pair of hurricane lamps on a sideboard and the fire in the fireplace. He could see through the window, and the thick snow was tinted blue with lavender streaks from the setting sun. It looked cold, but he was pleasantly warm beneath the soft throw Molly made for him. He didn’t remember pulling it up and tucking it around his shoulders, but he must have. He stretched cautiously, trying to gage the pain in his leg. The low throbbing that had been there since the regrowing session was still there, and added to it now was tightness, as if he’d lain in one position for too long. He could tell it was time for a pain potion and his stomach reminded him loudly that he hadn’t had anything but a poached egg since seven o’clock that morning. He rolled to his back, wincing when the muscle in his thigh pulled. He definitely needed that potion.

He sat up gingerly, pushing back the blanket and searching for the cane. It was leaning against the side of the chaise, and he grabbed it, leveraging cautiously to his feet. The moment he put weight on his leg he grimaced, taking a deep breath. Bollocks, it hurt. But there were other needs that were pressing, too. There was a door to the left of the bed, and he made his way to it laboriously. Fortunately it was a nicely appointed loo, so he didn’t have to look further. Once he was done and had washed his hands, he exited back into the bedroom, noticing that the luggage that had been by the bed was gone, as was the pink box Molly had sent. Harry had no idea where Hermione had put the potions the Healer had sent, so he limped to the door that led the outer hall.

He didn’t know what he’d been expecting of the wing where Draco lived with Teddy, but it certainly wasn’t the pleasant mix of modern and antique that confronted him as he walked slowly down the hall. There were portraits on the wall that looked as if they were from an earlier time, but none of them even remotely looked like a Malfoy. They smiled in a friendly manner, or curtsied or bowed, but they didn’t really invite conversation. The walls weren’t marble or stone but light, honey toned wood and the floors were covered with plush, beige carpet up to the six inch edge of gray slate that lined the baseboards. There were antique sideboards scattered along the walls,
enormous poinsettias in white ceramic pots, and pine fronds with red velvet bows hung from the wall sconces, filling the air with their fresh, redolent scent. It was beautiful, and Harry felt a deep sense of pleasure as he moved along. This was as unlike the mausoleum Draco’s parents had lived in as it was possible to get. It was also like a glimpse into who Draco was now; understated, elegant.

He moved toward an arch way outline with cedar garland and stopped, peering into the room beyond. It was so homey, but so lovely it took his breath. A large fireplace was surrounded by a beautiful carved white mantle. Across the top was thick garland of pine, and on each end were beautiful silver candlesticks, white tapers gleaming and reflected in the mirror above the mantle, and two large stockings hung there, one with a large T and another with a D. A fire flickered merrily within the fireplace, and next to it was a tall, fat pine tree, hung with red and silver balls and twinkling with fairy lights. Beneath the lower bows was a stack of presents, already wrapped in festive paper. It looked like an ad for Christmas, Harry thought. Perfect, and yet approachable. The most startling thing, at least to Harry, was the large flat screen television hanging on the wall in front of a cozy grouping of a beige sofa and oversized chair.

Harry walked in slowly, taking in all of the details. He didn’t think he’d ever been in a more comfortable room. It was so… he searched for the word, and the only thing he could come up with was ‘perfect’. He approached the tree, studying the unique ornaments on the tree; a little wizard on a broom that flew around the branches, chasing a miniature snitch, a little copy of the hog sentinels who guarded the gates of Hogwarts, a miniature Hogwarts express that belched steam from its stack, wheels turning and a whistle blowing.

There was something else that caught Harry’s eye and he leaned a bit closer, and then laughed in delight. A tiny green and silver stocking hung from one of the branches, and periodically a white ferret would pop its little head out of the top. Harry couldn’t help but wonder if it was a WWW product, and he grinned when the rodent winked at him.

“That one was a gift from your good friend.”

Harry jerked, startled, and turned awkwardly, losing his balance. Draco had been standing in the doorway, but he moved forward quickly, grabbing Harry’s arms and steadying him.

“Easy, there,” he murmured, holding on until Harry could adjust his awkwardly twisted leg.

“I’m sorry,” he said, his hand tightening on the top of his cane.

“For what?” Draco frowned. “I don’t consider looking at the ornaments on the tree prying, Potter. You’re going to be living here for a while; looking at the decorations isn’t being nosy.”

Harry glanced away, his face feeling hot. He still felt unsteady and his leg gave a vicious throb. He couldn’t stop the small gasp and grimace.

“You’re past due for something for pain, aren’t you?” Draco asked.

“I don’t even know what Hermione brought, or where she put it.”

“It’s in the kitchen.”

Harry looked at him and frowned, irritation flaring. “Why? I’m hurt, Malfoy, not an idiot. I can take the potions without supervision.”

Draco held up one hand, palm out. “Not my call, Potter. That was Healer Whycroft’s doing. Apparently the potions are highly addictive.”
Harry exhaled, fighting down the anger. “And they think I’m susceptible to addiction?”

Draco’s expression softened. “They think anyone who has experienced as much pain as you have in the last month might be tempted to make it stop.” He looked away. “I understand that kind of pain and I’d have done anything to make it go away. Now, why don’t you sit here and I’ll go get your potion. You have another two doses of Skelegrow to get through, too.”

Harry settled on the sofa, instinctively rubbing his thigh, grimacing at the thought of the vile bone strengthening medicine.

“I know,” Draco agreed. “It tastes like shite. I’ll make sure I bring something to drink that will take the taste out of your mouth. And Flossy will have dinner ready in a few minutes.”

“Where’s Teddy?”

Draco’s lips quirked in an indulgent grin. “Hopefully picking up his toys. I’ve told him if his room passes inspection, he’ll be allowed to watch a DVD about a reindeer named Rudolph. Feel free to join us. It’s a riveting tale, really, including elves who want to be dentists and talking snowman.”

Harry returned the small smile. “I’d like that.”

“All right. I’ll get your potions.”

Draco backed away, then turned and walked out of the room.

Even with the unpleasant throbbing in his thigh and the prospect of Skelegrow, Harry couldn’t help it when his eyes dropped to Draco’s arse, pleasantly displayed by his snug dark slacks.

Of all of the things he’s seen and appreciated that afternoon, that taut, round arse was certainly one of the best. Even if it was attached to a Malfoy.
"You look so much better!" Hermione said when she walked into the bedroom Harry had already come to think of as his. He put down the book he’d been reading and smiled at her. “And you’re reading! Be still my heart.”

“Hey, Hermione.” He held up the book. “It’s a history of the Black family.” He returned the hug she gave him even as he eyed the shopping bag with Harrod’s across the front. “Tell me you didn’t spend any more money on stuff for me?”

“Oh, don’t worry about that right now. Besides, you’re paying me back for all of it, he who hasn’t touched his vault in five years.” She sat on the chaise near his knees and patted him on his thigh. “Tell me how things are going.”

Her eyes were so bright, she reminded him of the too smart for her own good eleven year old she’d once been. “Things are going…good.” If possible her smile brightened. “And if you tell Ron he was right about Draco, I’ll deny it.”

“What did Ron say about Draco?”

“That he really wasn’t that bad.” Harry looked thoughtfully toward the bedroom windows. “Actually, he’s been pretty great.”

He’d been in the Manor two days, and Draco had been snarky on occasion and sometimes a bit stern with Teddy, but it was when Ted needed it, and the snark? Well, Harry actually sort of enjoyed his dry wit. What surprised him the most, however, was how much he appreciated the changes in Draco. The entitled, stuck up snot he’d met at Hogwarts was gone. He was kind to his house-elves, in stark contrast to the way his father had treated Dobby, and little Flossy all but ran his home like a tiny, high voiced general. The other three elves worked on the grounds and in the house, but there was no mistaking that they reported to her. Draco trusted her completely, and spoke to her with consideration. He even teased her, and watching their exchanges both surprised and impressed him.

He also noticed a change in Teddy. When he’d visited for a couple of days the Christmas two years
before, Teddy had been adorable, but he’d also been spoiled and a bit wild. Andie had only been
gone six months at that point, and even as he’d dropped off gifts he’d known had been too
elaborate and complicated for a three year old, he’d been glad he got to leave again. Andie really
hadn’t been up to taking care of a baby and a high spirited toddler. She was still grieving the loss of
her entire family, and probably because of it was far more permissive with Teddy than she should
have been. Harry knew he would have been a disaster as a full time caregiver; he was too
traumatized by the end of the war. Thoughts of being an Auror had been banished by the horror of
the Battle of Hogwarts and all he’d wanted was to get away where no one knew him, and to find
himself for the first time with no responsibilities. Everyone in the wizarding world had wanted him
to act like a hero, and he’d felt like anything but. He certainly hadn’t felt up to being a father.

And yet, apparently, Draco had. Even with what he’d gone through during the war and with his
own father, he’d stepped up when Teddy needed him. And he was really good at it. Watching him
with Teddy, Harry could see the impact he’d had on the little boy’s life. He still got overly excited,
but Draco knew just how to moderate it without crushing the child’s enthusiasm. And the
gentleness he showed Teddy when he asked questions, or when he just needed a hug; Draco was
generous with displays of affection. And every time he hugged the little boy, Harry’s heart gave a
funny lurch. He saw the way Draco’s face softened, and the absolute trust on Teddy’s, and he
ached with the perfection of it. He wasn’t ready to admit it out loud, but he looked at Draco in a
completely different way than he ever had a man before. He was hot, and Harry wouldn’t mind
getting his hands on that lithe, strong body, but he found even more he wanted to snuggle into
Draco’s embrace, just the way Teddy did. If Draco had given him any encouragement at all, he
might have done precisely that.

Hermione looked like a brown eyed, curly haired Cheshire cat. “So, what has Draco done that’s
been ‘pretty great’?”

Harry knew he was blushing; even the tips of his ears felt hot. “Just… I don’t know. I mean, I’ve
been pretty useless since I got here – “

“You’re recuperating, Harry,” she said. Ever stalwart, his Hermione. “You’re not supposed to be
doing anything.”

“Yeah, but he keeps track of the potions for me and he makes sure I eat…” He shrugged, not liking
the sudden, keen look on her face. “I just expected one of the elves to deal with me, and that –
hasn’t been the way it’s been. That’s all.”

“So, you like him, then?”

“He’s been very gracious,” he deferred.

“Uhm-hmm.”

He raised his left knee and Hermione leaned against it. She was still wearing her DMLE robes, and
he was struck again by how great she looked. She looked… happy. Really happy. Harry realized
he’d only ever seen glimpses of it when they’d been in school. Now she fairly glowed with it. So
did Ron. Even as he couldn’t have been happier for his friends, he had that ‘third wheel’ feeling.
But instead of absentely longing for it, now he wanted to change it, to do something active to find
his own happiness. Jumping a motorcycle certainly wasn’t it. The adrenaline rush hid the
emptiness of his life for a couple of years, but laid up he’d had time to really think about it. He
hadn’t said anything yet, but he’d already decided he couldn’t go back. The roar of the crowd
never meant anything to him; it was that burst of fire in his veins as the bike left the ground. The
only other place he’d felt it was on a broom, but for some reason after the war he hadn’t wanted
anything to do with magic. Funny how now he couldn’t remember why.
“Hey, Hermione,” he said, looking away from her shining face. “You still have my wand, right?”

It took her so long to answer he finally looked back into her face, and was startled by the tears in her eyes.

“Hermione,” he whispered, feeling off center by about a mile.

“No, I’m fine,” she finally said, dashing at the dampness beneath her lashes. “I just wasn’t sure you’d ever want it back. You seemed so… hurt, and so angry. You never really did have a choice with being shoved into the Wizarding world. I thought maybe leaving it behind was healthier for you. But riding that motorcycle the way you do…” She shook her head, pushing the thought of what had nearly killed him away with visible effort. “Of course I still have it! Does this mean you want it back, and you’re coming home to stay?”

He looked down at Molly’s throw covering his legs, fingered the soft weave, slipping his pinky into one of the loops. “I’m thinking about it. But I’d have to find something to do.”

“You don’t have to work, Harry.”

His eyes shot back to hers. “Yeah, I do. Maybe not for the money, but for my own sanity. I’m not good at being inactive.”

“Harry, you have so many choices,” she said, enthusiasm blooming as she warmed to the subject. “You could play professional quidditch.”

He shook his head. “I think I’m burned out on professions that might get me killed.”

“Point.” She worried her lower lip. “So then being an Auror is off the table.”

“I’ve killed my one and only bad guy, Hermione. I can’t do it for a living.”

“Right.” She looked away, and he could almost hear the gears in her head turning. “Oh!” She straightened. “Harry, you could teach.”

He laughed. “Teach what? How to almost die and get away with it? Twice?”

This time when she smacked his leg she wasn’t kidding, and he was grateful for the padding of Molly’s throw.

“That isn’t funny,” she scolded. “And you could teach a lot of things. Harry, really, you could! You could teach flying, or Defense. You would be so brilliant!”

“Whoa, whoa.” He raised his hands, laughing. His smiled remained when the laughter faded, and it was wistful. “As much as the idea of going to Hogwarts feels like – going home, I’m just beginning to explore the idea of staying. And we don’t know if they even need a teacher. So let’s just give it some time, okay?” He could see that she wasn’t done with the topic, but he hoped he could at least re-direct it. “So, you going to show me what’s in the bag or not?”

He wasn’t sure he liked the wicked twinkle that entered her eyes.

“Well, we’d got you pretty much everything you needed, with one glaring exception.” She picked up the bag and set it in his lap. “Cheers, Harry.”

He gave her a skeptical look as he shifted tissue aside, then rolled his eyes when he saw what was in the bag. “Oh, honest to God, Hermione.”
He pulled out the first package and stared at the brightly striped briefs, the picture of a taut male arse wearing the rainbow underwear on the front. He did have a fleeting moment, thinking it resembled Draco’s arse, but that was a dangerous train of thought and he pushed it away.

Hermione began to laugh at the look on his face.

“Well, you can’t tell me you don’t need new underwear. They cut the ones you were wearing off of you when you went into the Muggle hospital, and you can’t keep wearing Ron’s baggy boxers.”

“Granted. But did the ones you got for me need to be quite so…”

“Bright? Happy? Fitting?” she offered.

“Queer?” he cut in flatly. Her laughter rang through the room.

“Are you telling me they aren’t appropriate? If the briefs fit…”

He smacked her lightly on the arm with the package, but he was laughing with her.

Draco stood outside the door in the wide hallway, leaning against the wall. He hadn’t really meant to eavesdrop, but he’d also never been adverse to it. He had matured, but he was still a Slytherin, after all. As he listened to them laugh, and who’d have ever thought the sound of Potter’s laughter would lodge itself quite as close to his heart as it did, a tiny thought began to grow in his mind until it seemed like the best impulse he’d ever had. Pushing away from the wall, he made his way to the Manor Owlery.

He had an owl to send.
Harry sat on the sofa in the sitting room, watching Teddy and Draco. They were on the floor in front of the fireplace, heads bent close as Teddy showed Draco the latest version of the Firebolt on one of the pages in a Quality Quidditch catalog. Teddy’s hair had changed to the exact same shade as Draco’s, and Harry wondered absently if he even knew he did it.

“But… why?” The boy whined when Draco told him he couldn’t have the broom.

Draco pushed up gracefully from the floor. “Because it’s not a child’s broom, Teddy. That broom will go far too high and far too fast for a five year old.”

Teddy’s lower lip stuck out mutinously and he crossed his arms tight over his chest. “But I want it.”

Draco raised one brow and waited, and after a moment Teddy dropped his arms with a sigh. “It isn’t fair.”

“What isn’t? That it’s too much broom for you, or that you can’t have it?”

Teddy’s brow furrowed, and he spent several seconds in serious thought. “That I can’t have it. I want it.”

“I know you do.” Draco sat on the other end of the sofa and gracefully crossed his long legs. “That doesn’t necessarily mean you’re going to get it. You can’t always have a thing just because you want it. Sometimes what you want wouldn’t be safe for you. And whose job is it to keep you safe?”

“You.” He huffed and laid back down on his stomach on the floor. “I sure do like it.”

“You go right on liking it, love,” Draco said gently. “Someday you’ll be just the right size for a broom like that and then I’ll get it for you. But not before.”

“Okay.”
And just like that, the sulks appeared to be over. Teddy went back to his magazine and Draco picked up his book from where he’d left it on the arm of the sofa.

Harry loved the evenings in the sitting room, near the fire and the tree, just spending quiet time with Teddy and yes, with Draco too. As he stared at the growing pile of presents beneath the tree, Harry had a sudden thought.

“Malfoy,” he said softly, “may I have a moment?”

Draco slipped off his reading glasses and turned to Harry, and gods what the sight of those silver framed glasses had done to him the first time Harry saw them perched on his long, thin nose. Draco had donned them casually to read, and Harry hadn’t been able to do anything but stare, finding them almost unbearably sexy.

“Aren’t you a little young to need reading glasses?” he’d asked, his voice sounding suffocated, even to his own ears.

“Oh, I’ve always needed them,” Draco answered. “I’ve was just too vain to wear them. But I don’t like the way the vision correcting spells make my eyes feel.”

Harry agreed; he didn’t like them, either, which was why he still wore the round framed glasses he’d always worn. But Draco looked almost professorial, and Harry thought of the fantasies students would have about any teacher that looked like he did. Harry knew he would have had some, even before he’d acknowledged the truth of his sexuality to himself.

Draco was waiting, and Harry blinked, trying to regain his train of thought. “Oh, uhm…” He gestured his head toward the little boy on the floor and Draco glanced at Teddy, nodding.

“Teddy,” he said, closing his book, using his finger to hold his place. “Could you do something for me?”

Teddy sat up, eyes bright. “Sure, Draco.”

“There’s something I need from my office.”

“What is it?”

There are some folded parchments in the middle of my desk. Could you go and fetch them for me, please.”

“Sure!” Teddy popped up and began to run out of the room.

“Walk, if you please.”

Immediately the little boy slowed to a very quick walk and Harry smiled, then turned to Draco. “I’ve just realized I haven’t got anything for Teddy for Christmas.”

“What, no actual formula one racecar to slip beneath the tree?” Draco was teasing, but Harry grimaced anyway.

“Yeah, about those gifts I’ve sent…”

“Don’t worry about it, Potter. He loved them, and I just needed to be sure to supervise. Now, about this year; if you tell me what you’d like to give him I’ll be happy to pick it up for you.”

Harry shook his head. “No, I’d really like to go shopping.”
Draco looked at his right leg. “Do you feel up to that?”

“More every day,” Harry said. It was true. He’d been at the Manor three days, and his leg felt more stable and there was less pain every morning. “I’ll need to go to Gringott’s and access my vault, but I’d really like to do this myself. I’m just not sure…”

“I understand,” Draco said. “I’ll be happy to accompany you, if you don’t mind waiting until late afternoon. I have to go in to work for a few hours tomorrow.”

“No, that’s fine,” Harry said quickly, already feeling guilty for the time Draco had spent at home.

“Just, bear in mind,” Draco said softly, “even though you’ve been gone from the wizarding world for five years, that doesn’t mean they’ve forgotten about you. There will no doubt be people who feel the need to speak with you.”

Harry hadn’t really thought of that. He chewed his lower lip. “Maybe I can use a glamour spell?”

“I’d advise it.”

Teddy came back into the room, still using the stiff, quick walk, and Draco smiled at him when he delivered the two parchments to his hand.

“Thank you very much,” Draco said. “Now, how about I ask Flossy to make us some cocoa, and we can watch the absolutely captivating adventures of a green… creature named the Grinch who’s adventures are narrated in rhyming syntax. It’s my absolute favorite.” He delivered that with a completely deadpan expression, and Teddy grinned.

“Draco doesn’t like the Grinch.”

“He’s a mean one, Mr. Grinch,” Draco sang in a deep voice, bending to tickle the little boy. He collapsed in a paroxysm of giggles, and Harry found himself laughing with him.

Draco stood up, easily swinging the child over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. He started to walk past him, then stopped to look down at Harry. “Coming, Potter? I understand that you’re a huge fan of Flossy’s snickerdoodles. I warn you; if there aren’t any left, you’ll be making me another batch.”

Harry pushed to his feet, noticing that either the pain that shot down his leg was improving, or he’d got used to it.

“I’m sure there are some left,” he said. “Maybe two, possibly three.” He grinned.

“Oh, well, then,” Draco said, starting from the room, shooting Harry a look over Teddy’s back. “How magnanimous of you.”

“They’d be gone if I had my way,” Harry teased. “But Flossy said you’d throw a right tantrum if I ate them all.”

“She wasn’t wrong. But three, Potter? Really? There were three dozen.”

“They’re good,” Harry retorted, knowing full well he hadn’t eaten three dozen cookies but enjoying the banter too much to say so.

“Keep eating like that, and your arse will be as big as your ego. And that would be a low down, dirty shame.” Draco winked at him over Teddy’s back as he led the way towards the kitchen.
Harry was so gobsmacked it took him a moment to follow, but when he did, he was smiling.
Draco moderated his usual long stride, slowing to match the hitching gate of the man at his side. Diagon Alley was teeming with witches and wizards doing their Christmas shopping, and far more children than had any business being there dodging in and out along the sidewalk. More than once he’d reached out instinctively, his hand hovering near Potter’s elbow, but so far he’d managed to stay on his feet, even though it had been a near thing once or twice.

“Gods, it’s so crowded,” Potter muttered.

“Two weeks ‘til Christmas,” Draco answered, just managing not to say ‘Potter’. It was harder than he’d thought it would be.

“I guess I knew that, but I haven’t been here since the year we didn’t go back to school.” He looked around, his face softening. “I’m glad to see it back to normal.”

Draco studied his expression, thinking he’d done a really good job with the glamour Potter was wearing. Potter hadn’t been particularly amused by it, but it matched his halting gate. And actually, when people saw the older wizard with the long white hair tied back in a bow, wearing the elegant black velvet robes, they seemed to instinctively step out of his way. Draco had merely aged Potter’s face to what he might look like at a hundred or so, but the effect was impressive. And Draco couldn’t help but think that even as an old man, Potter had presence. He thought it might be the result of the amazing amount of magic contained in his compact frame. It had always seemed to emanate from him, even when he’d been young, and it had only become more marked with time. It was seductive, and Draco wasn’t immune.

They’d gone to Gringotts, and the goblins had reacted to Harry Potter returning, disguised as an old man with their usual aplomb; they simply didn’t care. They checked his wand, which Hermione had returned the night before, to certify his identity, then took him to his vault while Draco waited in the lobby. When he returned, they set out down the Alley and were now approaching Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes, which now took up the better part of a block.

Potter paused on the corner, looking across the narrow, cobbled road at the enormous joke store.
“Gods, I thought it was big before the war.”

“They’re extremely good businessmen,” Draco replied. “Even Ron is, surprisingly.”

Potter gave him a wry look. “You like him. You like both of them.”

Draco gave him a grudging nod. “I do. But if you say that to anyone else, including them, I’ll deny it.”

Potter laughed as he headed across the street. “You’re still such a prat.”

“And you’re a bloody git. Some things never change.”

Potter was still grinning when he pushed through the doors into Weasley’s loud, rambunctious party of a shop.

oooOOOooo

It was still so loud, Harry thought, looking around the main level of WWW. There were kids literally everywhere; on the stairs, down the aisles, young girls gathered around the now enormous display of various love potions, and boys laughing when a pint sized doll of Voldemort shrieked and disappeared in a puff of ash. Nothing had ever been sacred with the twins, either, and Harry thought turning Voldemort into something ridiculous was brilliant. Draco didn’t seem to find it particularly funny, however, so Harry kept moving toward the back of the shop, looking for a familiar head of ginger hair.

Finally he heard Ron’s voice, calling out above the subtle explosions and bells and bangs and shrieks of laughter.

“We need to restock the Fizzing Whizbangs, and the Daydream potions were looking low, too. Oh, and check the puzzle aisle, too. I’ve seen a lot of those going out the door today. Oh, and we need to contact Honeydukes; their display is looking a bit done in.”

Harry followed the sound down a crowded aisle until it opened into the area around the cash registers. Lines ten deep were waiting with limited patience to check out, mother’s scolding giggling children and teen agers standing with their head close together, many wearing their school robes. Harry smiled when he saw a very pretty girl in a Slytherin robe flirting with a Gryffindor standing with a group of his friends. He had a prefect badge, Harry saw, and one of his friends, wearing scarf Ravenclaw around his neck, elbowed him with a sly grin. Harry watched them, suddenly swamped in nostalgia. These kids were probably fifteen or sixteen years old, had probably been still dreaming about going to Hogwarts when he’d been a student there. In truth they weren’t that much younger than he was, but in that moment, he felt as old as he looked.

He finally saw Ron talking to a young woman in a magenta WWW robe, her hair as bright a purple as her robes were pink. Harry approached and stood off to one side, waiting until he was finished. The girl saw him and nudged Ron, gesturing with her head. Ron turned and saw him, and smiled.

“Can I help you, sir?” He sounded so solicitous, and so unlike Ron, that Harry couldn’t help but laugh. Ron looked confused until he saw Draco standing at his elbow.

“Oy, Malfoy. This gentleman with you, then?”

“Well, he’s with me. But I’m not sure how much of a gentleman he is.”

Ron looked confused until Harry dipped his head and looked at him above his glass frames,
knowing that even if Ron recognized nothing else, he’d recognize his eyes.

“Merlin. I would have never recognized you, Ha….”

Draco cleared his throat pointedly, and Ron seemed to become aware that his assistant was looking between him and Harry, clearly trying to figure out what she was missing.

“Oh, uhm… Mr. Malfoy, what say we take this conversation over there,” he gestured to a nearby alcove, then turned back to the girl. “Trish, I need those things done. Today would be good.”

“Oh, of course Mr. Weasley. I’m sorry.”

She bustled away, and Ron led the way over to the alcove, which contained shelves of whoopee cushions and bins of Peruvian Instant Darkness Powder.

Draco studied the bright boxes. “Not the most popular items, eh, Weasley?”

Ron looked at the boxes, frowning. “Used to be right money spinners, but not so much now. Kids have got too sophisticated. They want magical video games and packaged practical jokes. They don’t want to have to do the work, you know? I mean, like it’s hard to slip a whoopee cushion under someone for a satisfying fart noise.”

“I feel your pain,” Draco drawled, and Harry stifled a laugh. “They’re lazy sots, the younger generation.”

Ron recognized the sarcasm, and rolled is eyes. “You’re such an arse. The only reason I put up with you is that you and Hermione are friends. Why, I’ll never know.” He turned to Harry. “So, what are you looking for?”

“I need to get something for Ted,” Harry replied. “But…” He looked at Draco. “I want to make sure whatever I get, it’s okay with Draco. He’s the one who has to live with it, after all.”

“Where, there’s a change,” Ron said, slipping his hands into his pockets. “Usually you buy the kid something just this side of legal.”

Harry felt himself color. “Well, I’ve decided that… maybe wasn’t such a great idea, in retrospect. Anyway, what have you got that’s appropriate for a five year old?”

Ron eyed him with amusement. “We’ve got a whole section on the second floor. I’ll show you.”

Ron led Harry down the aisle, keeping pace with him. Neither of them noticed Draco’s speculative expression as he stared at the back of Harry’s head before following along.
Harry was resting from his afternoon outing with Draco when a soft knock sounded on his door. He blinked out of a doze.

“Come in.”

The door opened, and a full head of blond hair attached to a diminutive boy appeared tentatively around the edge.

“Are you awake?” Teddy asked

Harry smiled. “I am. Come on in, Ted.”

Teddy ran to him and climbed up onto the chaise, where Harry had taken to settling for his afternoon naps, settling near his knee. “I have a question to ask you.”

“Okay.” Harry reached out a tucked a blond strand behind the boy’s ear. “What’s up?”

“Draco and I would like to know if you’d care to accompany us on an outing this evening.”

The line was so obviously rehearsed that Harry could only grin. “Well, that would depend on where you’re going,” Harry answered.

“We’re going to see Nutcracker! I’ve never been before, cuz I was too little, but now I’m a big boy and can sit longer without having to pee. But I have to be good or Draco will turn me into the world’s smallest rabbit.”

Harry managed, just, not to laugh. “Why a rabbit?”

“Draco says its cuz they’re twitchy, and it reminds him of me. But will you come? It’ll be so much fun, I promise. Please? Please, please, please??” He held his little hands up, linked in supplication.

“Nutcracker. That’s… dance or something, isn’t it?”
“It’s ballet,” Draco said, coming into the room but lingering near the door. “And do not feel compelled to go if you don’t want to, regardless of the undignified begging that’s been going on in this room.” He gave Teddy a pointed look.

“But I want Harry to go,” Teddy said, sounding as if it were the most important thing in the world. He turned back to Harry. “Please, Harry. Please. I want you to be there.” Harry hesitated.

“Don’t let this little actor sway you, Potter. He won’t actually expire if you don’t attend.”

“I’ve never been to the ballet,” Harry said. “Actually, I’ve never been to the theatre.”

Draco leaned casually against the doorframe, his arms crossed over his chest. “Well, Nutcracker is honestly a pretty good place to start. Pretty little girls with ringlets, giant fighting rats, and pretty men in tights.” Draco smirked. “The music isn’t bad either.”

“Please, Harry. Please!” Teddy actually climbed to his knees, and Harry laughed.

“Oh, all right.”

Teddy cheered and threw his arms around Harry’s neck. He squeezed the little boy, then looked shyly at Malfoy.

“And if you’d be willing to help with the wardrobe…”

Draco grinned. “Leave it to me. I think I have a pair of old dress robes around that put Weasley’s to shame.” Harry knew he looked horrified when Malfoy laughed. “Gods, you’re easy. Do remember, Potter, I have to be seen with you. And I wouldn’t go to a public loo with anyone dressed in those natty old robes.”

Harry laughed. “Don’t tell Ron, but – neither would I.”

Malfoy gave him a saucy grin, and Harry’s heart began to bang happily in anticipation in his chest.

Draco took the Potter’s measurements with a few quickly cast spells, then sent one owl off to his tailor and the other to Hermione, requesting she swing by to pick the suit up. Most wizards still wore robes predominantly or Muggle type suits that were about a century out of date and in hideous color combinations, but Draco had business dealings in Muggle London and Paris that required him to have a professional wardrobe as well. And frankly, he was sort of looking forward to seeing how Potter looked in a well-tailored suit.

Having Hermione pick it up, however, had been something of a misstep. Potter was in the shower and Teddy was having an early dinner in the kitchen with Flossy when she arrived with a rush of cold air, eyes bright and cheeks flushed.

“What is this for?” she asked, holding up the garment bag as she bustled into the room.

“We’re going out this evening,” Draco answered, taking the bag.

“All of you?”

“Yes, all of us,” Draco answered neutrally. He unzipped the bag, taking out the charcoal gray suit jacket, studying it carefully before nodding and hanging it in the armoire.

“Is that for Harry?” she asked avidly.
“As I already have two charcoal gray suits, I’d say it must be.”

“It looks expensive.”

“I have the galleons, Hermione.”

“Oh, I know. I just thought… well, so does he.”

“And as he has no idea what proper clothing costs, no offense,” he said when he remembered Hermione had done some shopping for him, “we aren’t going to inform him now.” He turned and glared at her. “Are we?”

She held her hands up, palm out.

He removed the two dress shirts with ties and pocket squares, studying the emerald green and the dove gray, holding them up to look at the color in the light filtering in the window.

“Where are you going?” she asked, perching on the chaise. Draco turned and shot her a look.

“Noisy, much?”

She shrugged. “Just curious.”

He turned back to his study of the shirts. “We’re going to the ballet.”

Hermione sputtered. “You’re taking Harry, my Harry, to the ballet?”

Something about that proprietary ‘my Harry’ really irritated Draco.

“Yes, I’m taking Potter to the ballet with Teddy and I. We’re going to see Nutcracker.”

She shook her head. “I can’t imagine Harry at the ballet.”

Draco turned, having decided on the pale gray shirt and slightly darker tie. He propped his hands on his hips. “You know, he isn’t a complete dullard.”

“I know that.” She frowned, flustered. “But he is a man who jumps motorcycles for a living, Draco.”

“Jumped,” he said tartly. “Past tense.”

“Just because he said he’s ready to come home doesn’t mean he’ll stop, you know.” She sighed. “I think he might be something of an adrenaline junkie.”

Draco shrugged. “Possibly. There are ways to get an adrenaline fix without splattering ones-self all over the ground, however.”

He didn’t like the penetrating look she gave him. “Draco…”

Fortunately he was saved from Hermione’s amateur psycho analysis by the door to the loo swinging open, a rush of damp, spicy air preceding Potter into the room. He was wearing a white bathrobe knotted at the waist and was toweling his damp hair off with a thick white towel. “Hey, Hermione.” He gave her a brilliant smile when he emerged from under it.

“Hey, yourself.” She got up and went to him, pressing a kiss to his cheek. “You’re not limping as much.”
“The hot water helps,” he said brightly. “What are you doing here?”

“Draco had me fetch your suit. I understand you’re off to Nutcracker tonight.”

A very fetching blush filled his cheeks. “Well, it will be something new for me, won’t it? And Teddy really wanted me to go.”

She looked over her shoulder at Draco. “Oh, Teddy wanted you to go, did he?”

Harry shrugged. “He really did.”

“Hm-hmm. Well, it’s a wonderful ballet; one of my favorites.”

“Oh, that’s right,” Harry said. “You took ballet, didn’t you?”

“When I was very young, yes.”

“Really,” Draco said, giving her a teasing look. “Will you perhaps favor us with a solo?”

Hermione narrowed her eyes. “I’ll favor you with a bat-bogey hex that will make Ginny’s look tame, is what I’ll do.” She turned back to Harry. “Have a good time.”

“I’m sure we will.”

Hermione gave Draco a wry look. “I’m sure you will, too. All right then, I need to get home. I’ll talk to you tomorrow, Harry.” She walked to the door, then stopped and glanced back. “Good thing I bought you new underwear, isn’t it, Harry? You couldn’t wear Ron’s old boxers under that gorgeous suit.”

Potter turned bright red. “Gods, Hermione.”

She laughed and waved as she went out the door. Draco looked at Potter with an arched brow. “New underwear, is it?”

Harry shook his head. “We are not discussing those rainbow striped pants.”

Draco laughed. “Rainbow striped pants? Do tell?”

Harry groaned. “I’m never going to live this down, am I?”

“Not as long as I have a memory, no.”

“Brilliant.”

Draco wasn’t sure which he was enjoying more; Potter’s blush, or the idea of him in nothing but a pair of tight, rainbow striped briefs.
Ghosts of Christmas Past

Chapter Notes

Prompt for this part:

It had been years since Harry had been to London at Christmas time. He’d come with the Weasley’s when he was still school age, but they took the floo. (Fortunately he got better at that with age and never ended up in Knockturn Alley again.)

His only actual memory of seeing the large tree lit up next to Big Ben was the one time the Dursley’s took him along when they went into town. Petunia and Vernon took Dudley to London to shop for Christmas gifts, and since nothing was too good for Dudley, it had to be the large glitzy department store with the famous name. Harry had been perhaps five or six at the time, and the giant clock and the massive, lighted tree had looked very grand to his young eyes. Of course, when the Dursley’s parked their sedan they locked him in the car and disappeared for four hours. He’d been cold and had desperately needed to go to the toilet by the time they returned, curled up in a corner of the back seat, using his aunt’s sweater as a blanket. She’d responded by boxing his ears and telling him had ‘no right to touch her things with his filthy fingers’.

As he and Draco walked by the giant clock tower with Teddy between them, Harry paused and looked at the stately tower, and the massive tree. They looked so much like they had before, save the looming London Eye behind them. Harry couldn’t help but remember how he’d felt, seeing the grand buildings, eyes avid before they locked him away in the dark parking garage. Usually the memories didn’t bother him much, but standing there in the expensive suit, Teddy next to him wearing a bright red jumper, shirt and tie, and Draco looking so elegant it made Harry’s heart race, he couldn’t help but think of the grubby six year old in ugly black clothes four sizes too big for him. Gods, all he’d wanted, for as long as he could remember, was for someone to love him, to show him small kindnesses. Instead, through no fault of his own, they’d hated him. He tried to force the memories away, but for a moment they swamped him. He’d been running away from Privet Drive, and from the year spent wandering in a tent, and from that last, cataclysmic battle for five years. He’d gone as far and as fast and as high as he could, using the adrenaline rush to push everything away, but it hadn’t worked. He’d almost killed himself running from it, and it hadn’t worked.

“Harry?”
He startled, looking down to see Teddy looking up at him. “Yeah, Buddy. What is it?”

“Are you okay?” The wide brown eyes searched his face. “You look sad.”

Harry could feel cool gray eyes on him, too, and he pushed the dark thoughts away.

He forced a weak smile. “I’m fine, Ted. I’m good.” He squeezed the little boy’s hand. “Let’s go see the Rat King.”

Teddy was very excited about a giant rat fighting a prince, and he grinned. They started off down the sidewalk again, and every few steps, Draco glanced over at him, eyes searching, but Harry tried to ignore it.

The Malfoy’s had always kept a box at the Royal Opera House. Draco thought the first time he’d attended an opera with his parents he’d been three or four. His father detested Muggles, but even he had to admit that as far as Ballet and Opera were concerned, they did a far better job than anything the wizarding world managed. And many of the bigger names in the arts were actually wizards, going where their work could be presented in the best venue, by the most talented musicians and dancers in Britain.

The excitement and wonder on Teddy’s face warmed Draco’s heart. They’d had several conversations about how one acted in public, and the difference between wizards and Muggles. To Draco’s delight he was perfectly behaved, his eyes wide and his smile so broad dimples popped out on either side of his mobile mouth. When he walked into the box he went to the edge, looking down on the seating below and the stage just to their left one level down, but he never gave Draco a moment’s worry. He took his seat, leaning forward with his arms on the ledge, his eyes avid. Draco remembered doing the same and the sharp smack his father had delivered to the back of his head. Those memories were never good ones and he tried to push them away, taking his seat and returning the delighted grin Teddy sent his way. He couldn’t imagine touching the child in anger, and once again the gap between himself and his father, even with the man dead for two years, had never seemed wider.

His eyes moved to Potter, taking in the pensive expression on his handsome face. Something was bothering him, something that had begun as they passed Big Ben and the London Eye. Draco had wondered if his leg was bothering him, but Teddy was right; he looked sad. He also looked spectacular.

The suit fit him like a tailored glove, and the charcoal color made his tawny skin glow a soft golden brown and his hair look so black there were blue highlights in the soft strands. It was short in the back and above his ears, but the top was slightly longer, thick and wavy and Draco had a sudden desire to sink his fingers in it. Potter’s broad shoulders filled out the jacket perfectly, and the cut of the trousers accentuated his narrow hips and flat stomach. The soft gray of the shirt and tie had the faintest green tint, and it brought out his spectacular green eyes, but subtly, making you notice the eyes, not just the color. Right now, they were eyes that looked so melancholy it made Draco’s heart ache. There wasn’t time to try to decipher what was bothering him, however, because the house lights were going down and the light, happy notes that opened Tchaikovsky’s ballet were starting.

Watching Teddy’s face as the toy soldiers and the prince battled the rat king was a new delight, only deepened as his awe at the magically growing Christmas tree made his eyes almost impossibly wide. And Potter sent him an arched brow when the first male dancer appeared in extremely revealing tights, making Draco swallow a laugh. Then the swelling melody as the Snow
Queen danced with her Cavalier, the graceful snowflakes swirling around them, made Draco catch his breath as it always had. When the lights came up at intermission, Teddy looked up at him in disappointment.

“It isn’t over,” he asked, lower lip thrust out.

“No, it’s just intermission. That means it starts again in fifteen minutes.”

“Oh, good,” the boy said in relief, collapsing back into his seat. “I don’t want it to be over.”

“Well, it will eventually. Just not yet.”

There was a discreet knock on the box door, and an usher came in with a tray on which there were two glasses and a bottle of champagne in an ice bucket, along with a chocolate milk shake.

“You thought of everything,” Harry said with a wry grin, accepting his glass, but Draco could see that whatever was bothering him earlier hadn’t gone completely. There were shadows in his eyes, shadows Draco had a surprising desire to see chased away.

“I did,” he said, giving Potter a smirk. “And you’ll love act two.” He wiggled his brows. “Lots more tights.”

Potter huffed, but there was a grin lingering at the edges of his mouth as he sipped his champagne.

Draco just wished it went all of the way to his eyes.
“Oh, good Lord,” Draco said, looking at the cup of cappuccino Flossy levitated into place in front of Potter. “A heart?”

He wasn’t sure he’d ever seen a house-elf blush before, but Flossy’s cheeks turned dark pink and she suddenly became very busy at the stove.

“Be nice,” Potter said as he took the stool next to Draco’s at the high, bistro style table. “Thank you, Flossy. It’s looks delicious.”

“You is most welcome, Master Harry,” she said, gracefully floating a plate of bangers and mash into place in front of Potter. She gave Draco an arch look. “And if Master Draco was being nicer, he’d be getting a heart on his hot drink, too.”

Draco gave her an affronted look. “When wasn’t I nice?”

“When you told Flossy that your poached eggs were being runny.”

“They were!”

“They weren’t,” she countered. “You’re just being cranky this morning. Maybe Master Draco stayed out too late, or drank too much of the fizzy drink and needs to be getting more sleep.” She turned away from the table with her nose in the air. “I’ll be getting Master Teddy dressed, now.” With a small pop she disappeared.

Draco looked at the place where she’d been, then he looked at Potter, who seemed to be concentrating on his breakfast rather more than seem warranted. “Oh, go ahead and laugh,” Draco groused. “It’s not every day I get told off by the hired help.”

Harry shot him a faintly amused look. “Have you been cranky?”

Draco rolled his eyes and went back to his paper. “Apparently.”
Potter ate for a few minutes in silence. When he spoke again, his voice was soft. “If you didn’t sleep well, you weren’t the only one.”

Draco looked at him over the top of his reading glasses. “You didn’t?”

Potter shook his head. Now that Draco was looking, he noticed Potter actually did look tired. There were lines around his eyes and there were dark circles beneath them.

“So, what kept you awake?” he asked, folding up the newspaper. “Not pain, I hope?”

Potter shook his head. “Just some unresolved things from when I was a kid.” He wiped his mouth with a napkin. “As a matter of fact, I thought I might make a short trip today.”

Draco cocked his head to one side, waiting. Finally, Potter sighed softly. “I want to go to Little Whinging. It’s in Surrey.”

“…why?”

Potter looked away. “I grew up there. I thought….” He exhaled and shrugged. “I want to see if my aunt is still there.”

Draco studied him for several moments. He didn’t know the specifics of Potter’s childhood. Hermione had told him it was miserable, but that’s all. Draco made a quick decision.

“You aren’t a prisoner here, Potter. If you’re feeling up to a trip to Surrey, you should go.”

He nodded.

“I don’t think you should go alone, however,” Draco went on before Potter could protest, “and I doubt Hermione or Weasley could manage to arrange for time off on this short notice. Do you have a problem with me accompanying you?”

Potter stared at him for several seconds, but finally shook his head. “No, that would be okay.”

“Good. Just let me talk to Flossy, and then we can set out.”

The corner of Potter’s mouth twitched. “I don’t think you should go alone. Do you want me to accompany you?”

Draco gave him a baleful look. “You’re hysterical, Potter.” But as he pushed back to make his way to Teddy’s room, he wondered if perhaps he shouldn’t have accepted Potter’s offer. Flossy was a very efficient house-elf, but she could hold a grudge, too.

Harry wasn’t really comfortable with the idea of Malfoy going with him, but he knew he wasn’t steady enough on his leg yet to go alone. He wasn’t sure where the impulse had come from, to see if his aunt and uncle had returned to their old home, it just suddenly seemed like something he should do. He’d wondered about Dudley and Aunt Petunia. He wouldn’t even pretend to care about Vernon, but right at the end there, when they were leaving, Dudley had come back, told him he wasn’t useless. He couldn’t count the number of times he’d clung to that in the years since.

Once Teddy was told they were going out, and promised an extra half hour of telly if Flossy reported he behaved himself, he and Malfoy bundled up and he led Harry into the courtyard outside of the kitchen door.
“So, where are we headed, Potter?” Malfoy asked, cheeks pink with the cold, pulling on a pair of soft looking off white gloves. He was wearing a sky blue jumper under a dark blue pea coat, a hat that matched his gloves pulled down over his white blond hair.

“Number Four Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey,” Harry replied. “You might want to aim for Number Five; it’s across the street. If my relatives actually have moved back, my uncle won’t thank us for landing in the bushes.”

Malfoy gave him a quizzical look, but held out his arm.

“Shall we?” he asked.

Harry hesitated for just a moment before stepping into Draco’s side, slipping his arm around the slender waist.
Harry had never got over his early dislike of Apparating, and as he and Draco landed with an unsettling jerk, he was reminded just why. His feet settled onto the ground and promptly went out from under him on ice, and if it hadn’t been for Draco holding him he’d have landed on his arse. As it was they slid a few inches before Draco was able to stabilize the both of them, his arms hard and deceptively strong around Harry’s body.

Harry found his feet unsteadily, trying to find purchase on the ground with his cane. When he finally straightened, he realized he was inches from Draco’s face, so close he could see the flecks of darker gray in his quicksilver eyes. He could also see that Malfoy’s lashes were pale, and thick, and his skin was perfect, smooth without a freckle or blemish. His bone structure had matured, the faintly pointed chin and nose still in evidence but now his cheekbones were high and strong and his lips were full. Harry found his eyes dropping to them, studying them, wondering what they would taste like…

“Are you all right?” Draco asked, his hands spreading and his fingers gripping on either side of Harry’s spine. He straightened, suddenly realizing he was staring at Draco’s mouth.

“Uhm, yeah… I’m fine.” He stepped back carefully, and noticed that Draco’s hands were slow to slide away.

“For Merlin’s sakes, what are you boys thinking?”

Harry turned at the sound of the querulous voice, gripping Draco’s arm as his feet slid an unsettling inch. When he saw who it was, his eyes widened.

“Mrs. Figg?”

He was shocked the little woman was still alive, but there she was, headed toward them in orthopedic shoes, wearing an ugly bright purple house dress, a hair net over a head full of curlers,
and an orange jumper.

She squinted. “Do I know… Oh, my lands!” One of her liver spotted hands went to her throat. “Harry Potter. I never thought I’d see you again!”

“How are you, Mrs. Figg?”

She reached out and pulled him into a hug and he returned it one armed, his other hand still gripping Draco’s.

“Oh, you know me.” She straightened, her hands lifting to wipe at tears on her cheeks. Harry was humbled by the show of emotion. “Healthy as a horse, just like my father until he dropped dead at a hundred and sixty two.” He gave her a slight smile.

“You look wonderful,” he said, meaning it. She didn’t look any different. She was exactly the same as she’d been when he was a kid, feeding him cookies when the Dursley’s left him behind and she babysat.

“And you are so handsome!” She said proudly. “You look so much like your Dad.” She looked at Draco, her eyes narrowing. “And I dare say you look like your father too, don’t you, young man?”

“Oh, sorry.” Harry dropped Draco’s hand, gesturing, but he’d felt the way he’d stiffened at the question. “This is Draco Malfoy. And he’s nothing like his father.”

Draco didn’t say anything but he didn’t offer his hand, either. Neither did Mrs. Figg. She looked Draco up and down, her lips tight.

“I didn’t like your father, boy,” she said finally.

“Neither did I,” Draco replied, his expression wry. She looked momentarily surprised, then grudgingly smiled.

“Well, if Harry thinks you’re all right, then you must be.” She crossed her arms over her chest. “But you boys shouldn’t be Apparating out here in the open like that! Anyone might have seen you.”

Harry felt his face heat. “You’re right, of course. I didn’t think of that.”

She shook her head. “Fortunately, no one is around. School’s still in, and the post isn’t due for another hour. But when you leave, step into the alley.”

“We will, thanks.”

Harry turned and looked across the street and could tell immediately that Number Four was empty. The driveway and walk were unplowed, the drapes that had hung at the windows gone. There was a for sale sign in the middle of the front yard.

“They never came back, then,” he said, feeling his heart sink.

“Oh, they did.”

He turned back to Mrs. Figg. “But, it’s empty…”

“Your uncle passed, Harry, about six months ago. Heart attack. When he did, Petunia went to live with Dudley and his wife in Kent.”
“He got married?” Harry asked weakly. She nodded.

“Nice girl, but she’s got her hands full with that one and now his mother, too.”

Harry spared a moment of sympathy for the cousin-in-law he’d never meet. He looked back at the house, sighing softly. He felt her hand tap his arm, and he looked back down at her.

She gestured across the street with her head. “Go on, then. No one’s as much as looked at it and that agent won’t know. A quick _Alohamora_ and you’re in the door.” She gave him a small smile. “I won’t whisper a word.”

He looked at Draco, who shrugged. “You know I don’t care. Breaking and entering are part of my regular Death Eater routine.” He gave Mrs. Figg a pointed look and she startled both of them by laughing aloud.

“Oh, you’re a cheeky one, aren’t you Draco Malfoy? Well, if Harry isn’t holding your past against you, I certainly won’t. Go on, now. Quick, before anyone comes along.”

“She’s right,” Draco said, looking up and down the street. “If we’re going to do this, we should be about it before the street’s full of kids.”

Harry knew he was right but he paused, pulling the little woman into another hug.

“Thank you, Mrs. Figg,” he said. “For everything.”

“Oh, child, you’re more than welcome.” She pulled him down until her mouth was near his ear. “And he’s very handsome, in spite of who his father was,” she whispered. “You make a nice couple.”

“Oh, we aren’t…”

She shushed him. “The way he looks at you? I think you’re mistaken.” She patted him on the back then straightened away. “Go on with you, now.”

Harry was startled by what she’d said but when Draco took his arm, he allowed him to help him across the street. When they were directly in front of Number Four, they paused.

“You grew up here?” Draco asked, studying the house.

“Dumbledore brought me here after my parents were killed.” Harry pushed his hands into his pockets. The house looked exactly like the one next door, and the one next door to that. It was narrow, and dark, and unappealing.

“Well, if we’re going to do this, let’s.” Draco led the way across the undisturbed snow on the tiny front lawn, pulling his wand from his sleeve when he reached the door. He pointed it at the lock and murmured, and the door popped silently open. “After you,” he said, pushing it wide. Harry swallowed, then stepped over the threshold.

Instantly he was assaulted by memories. The carpet was the same on the stairs where Dudley had stopped to jump, raining dust down onto him as he sat in his cupboard. He took a few steps and saw that the large mirror was still hanging above the fireplace, and he could see through to the kitchen and that dining room addition Vernon had been so proud of. He flicked the switch on the living room wall, and the ugly brass chandelier in the addition sprang to light.

“Well, this is…” Draco began.
Harry thought of Draco’s beautiful, elegant, comfortable home, and laughed. “Ugly.”

“I wasn’t going to say it.”

“Why not?” Harry looked over at him. “It’s true.”

Draco shrugged. “It’s most assuredly not your fault your relatives had abysmal taste.”

“No, it really isn’t.”

Harry walked through, into the kitchen where he’d made breakfast so many times. It was so much smaller than he remembered. And stark, cold.

Suddenly he could see the Christmas dinner he’d helped Aunt Petunia make the year before he went to Hogwarts. There had been turkey and potatoes, and individual fruit salads. Vernon’s sister was there, and Harry had been dodging her for two days, hiding in the kitchen. He done whatever Petunia told him, trying so very hard to please her, hoping against hope that they’d let him eat, maybe just what was left on the plates, but something. He was so hungry his stomach ached. As he’d got older, Petunia took to weighing the food, just to be sure he didn’t eat anything but what she gave him. He’d hoped she’d been too busy that night, what with Aunt Marge there, but she was never too busy to make sure he was miserable. Right after dinner, she’d locked him in under the stairs without allowing him to eat, just as she always did when Vernon’s sister was there. Just to show she wasn’t ‘going easy on the brat’.

He’d learned to get around the lock on cupboard by then, using a bit of wire and a ruler. When the house settled, Harry opened the lock and snuck out of his cupboard. The house still smelled of the elaborate dinner and the Christmas tree glowed in a corner of the sitting room, presents piled all around. He ignored them; none of them were for him, after all. Moving as quietly as he could, he made his way through the dining room and to the door that led to backyard. He’d wrapped his arms around his middle in the bitter cold and gone through the back gate to the alley where Vernon kept the bins. Taking the lid off of the one nearest the gate, he found what he knew he would; the bag containing the carcass of the turkey. Huddling between the bin and the gate out of the wind, he sat shivering in the dark and picked the carcass clean. When he was done he put it back in the plastic bag exactly as it had been, careful to return the lid. Then he snuck back in, relocked the door of his cupboard, and smiled to himself. He’d gone to sleep with a full belly that night, in spite of his family.

“Potter? Harry?”

Harry blinked and turned quickly to Draco.

“Are you all right?” Draco was frowning and Harry felt his hand on his lower back. Abruptly, Harry turned away, wiping his cheeks with unsteady hands.

He hadn’t realized he was crying.
By the time they returned to the Manor, Draco was both exhausted and heartsick.

Like everyone else in the wizarding world, Draco’s family had assumed that ‘the boy who lived’ was someplace safe from the lingering Death Eaters, but also where he was spoiled and pampered as befitted his station. He was a legend, after all, the only being alive the Dark Lord hadn’t been able to kill. So just seeing the humble, ugly little house where he’d been living with Muggles was bad enough to shake what he’d always thought. Hermione told him Potter’s childhood hadn’t been happy, but he’d assumed it was no worse than anyone else’s.

Draco had turned away, wanting to give Potter at least the pretense of privacy while he wiped his eyes.

“I’m sorry your Uncle died,” Draco said, imagining that was the reason for his emotion. Potter laughed, and it was a ragged sound.

“I’m not,” he said. “He was a horrible person.”

“Uhm, okay.”

When Potter walked through the sitting room and back to the entryway, Draco assumed they were leaving. He didn’t know what to think when Potter opened the door to a cupboard under the stairs.

He leaned in, pulling a string attached to a lightbulb in the ceiling. When light flooded the cramped space, Potter made a soft, ragged sound that might have been a laugh or a sob. Draco moved up behind him and watched as he ducked in through the door.

Potter had crouched down, and he was pressing his hand to the wall. He grimaced and closed his eyes.

“Potter, I don’t have any problem being here but is there a reason you’re sitting in a musty
Potter glanced back at him and his eyes were so stark Draco felt like he’d actually struck him.

“Careful there, Malfoy. You’re insulting my bedroom.”

Draco frowned, studying the cupboard carefully for the first time. What he’d assumed were just smudges and scratches on the wall were in fact childish writing. All around the edges just above the baseboards someone had drawn rough pictures of cats with giant eyes and pointed ears with the name Fluffy written above its comical little head. There were at least four drawings of cats, each a bit more sophisticated than the one before. And then finally, at the far back corner, Draco saw written, “Harry Potter was here. And nobody cared.”

Draco stared at the crooked letters for several seconds before he could tear his eyes away.

“Fluffy?” he finally managed. Potter looked a bit sheepish, which was better than the stark, frighteningly desolate expression he’d been wearing before. He also blushed.

“It was the closest I could get to actually having a pet. Other than the spiders.” Potter rubbed a hand over his face. “Jesus, let’s go. I don’t know what I thought I’d find here.”

Draco stared at the pictures of the comical little cat, then had to reach out and help Potter to his feet. He was even more unsteady than he had been before, and he leaned on Draco as they ducked out of the cupboard. Potter headed immediately for the back of the house and Draco didn’t attempt to hold him back. He didn’t say another word as Potter opened the back door and they stepped into a small back yard. Draco glanced over at him, but the closed expression on his face made it abundantly clear he wasn’t in the mood to talk.

“Back to the Manor?” Draco asked softly. Potter closed his eyes and nodded, and gripped Draco’s jacket in hard, almost desperate hands.

When they arrived back in the yard outside of the kitchen entrance, Potter limped away from him, pushing through the door. He paused long enough to press a kiss to the top of Teddy’s head, but then he went toward his room, leaning heavily on the cane, his shoulders hunched.

“Is Harry okay?” Teddy asked, staring after him.

“He’s all right,” Draco answered, but he was fairly certain he wasn’t, and he didn’t know what to do about it.

He sat with Teddy while he finished his dinner, then settled him in to watch his one program of the evening. Potter hadn’t reappeared, and when Draco went to check on him he found him sound asleep on the chaise. Even in sleep, there were deep lines between his eyes and on his forehead. Draco stared at him, feeling as if he was missing something important. Finally, he went to his room, lighting the logs on his hearth and tossing a handful of floo powder into the flames. He knelt on the thick rug.

“Hermione Granger-Weasley,” he announced, and waited until a homey kitchen appeared.

“Granger,” he called when she didn’t immediately appear. “Where in hell are you?”

“Hold your boxers, Ferret.” Ron Weasley’s head appeared, his ginger hair mussed. “What do you want?”

“Your wife,” Draco replied dryly.
“‘I’m not done with her yet,’ Weasley said, and Draco grimaced.

“I didn’t mean… Oh, just tell her it’s important, would you please?”

Ron’s wry smirk faded. “Is Harry okay?”

“Physically?” Draco thought about it. “I think he may have overdone a bit today, but that isn’t the problem. Just get – “

Hermione appeared. Her hair was mussed as well, and Draco didn’t want to even contemplate what had caused it to be that way.

“What’s wrong,” she said, never one for pointless chit chat.

“Can you come through? We need to talk.”

She looked at Draco for another moment, reading the seriousness on his face.

“Give me five minutes.”

Draco stood up and crossed the room, pacing restlessly until the flames flared and she came through, her hair secured at the nape of her neck, wearing jeans and a dark blue jumper.

“What’s wrong?” she demanded. “Tell me right now.”

Draco propped his hands on his hips. “No, you tell me.”

She seemed to take in the fact that he was dressed for outdoors and that he still had on his hat and gloves.

“I don’t understand. Tell you what?”

“Potter wanted to make a little trip down memory lane today.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means I need an explanation, Hermione,” he said, allowing some of his concern to enter his voice. “Let’s start with Number Four Privet Drive.”

All of the colour fled from her cheeks. “Oh, no.”

“Oh, yes. So, start talking.”

She more collapsed than sat in one of the chairs facing the fireplace, taking the band holding her hair out and releasing a cascade of curls. She ran her hands through them, and Draco pulled off his hat and gloves, opening the front of his coat before sitting opposite her in a matching chair. Finally, she yanked her hair back into the band and looked at him, her brown eyes wide and solemn.

“How about we start with when I met Harry for the first time?”

Draco nodded. “That’ll work.”

By the time Hermione was done, it was ten o’clock, Teddy had come in for a good night kiss and
Flossy had put him to bed, and Draco had a headache behind his eyes that made every heartbeat an agonizing beat of pain. He saw her off in the floo with a kiss on the cheek, then went to his study and collapsed in the chair behind his desk.

He leaned forward, his elbows on the blotter and his fingers pressing into his temples. Now that he knew about Potter’s background, he almost wished he didn’t. Gods, how did a child, an infant, even survive the sort of neglect and abuse he had? Draco knew that his own childhood had been skewed by his father’s beliefs, but he’d never doubted for a moment that he was loved. His mother had told him every day. He’d been coddled, spoiled, fed and clothed. The war years had been a nightmare, but when he was a baby and a toddler? He wanted for nothing. While Potter…

“Fuck,” he muttered. As Hermione was telling him about the nightmarish relatives who raised Potter, he’d had a sudden and almost overwhelming desire to hex the living shite out of them. It was good he hadn’t known before they went to the house; he might have burned it to the ground.

One of the last things Hermione said rang in Draco’s ears, even after she’d been gone an hour.

“That isn’t his home, Draco,” she said softly, her eyes welling. “It never was; not really. His only real home has always been Hogwarts.”

Hogwarts, he thought, where everything had started.

A sharp rap sounded on the window behind him and Draco jumped, startled. He turned and saw a large barn owl hovering outside the window, looking at him reproachfully.

He jumped up from the chair and opened the window, stepping aside as the bird flew past him. It landed on the desk, holding out a leg imperiously.

“Sorry, didn’t see you out there,” Draco said, then shook his head. Why the hell was he apologizing to a bloody bird? He did offer the dish of owl treats and the bird stared at them suspiciously before taking one delicately in its beak. Draco untied the parchment, pausing when he saw the wax seal on the back.

He popped it open anxiously, reading the salutation and the first few words. Slowly, he started to smile.
Harry felt weary clear to his bones.

He’d been awake, lying in the warmth with his eyes closed, since the first gray light of dawn had touched the curtains at the windows. His leg ached and he was well past time for his pain potion, but he couldn’t bring himself to care. On the one hand, the potions made him tired and he didn’t want to do anything but sleep. On the other hand, he wasn’t sure why he bothered to stay awake. He was enjoying Teddy’s company, and he truly did want to be a better Godfather than he had been. But the budding magic in the boy was palpable, and just being round him, watching his hair turn color from black to blond and back again, just being able to see how good a wizard he’d become, made Harry’s chest ache. He wore his wand in its holster almost every day, but he knew what magic felt like surging through his system, and he hadn’t felt a flicker of it since the bike he was on crashed into the pavement. The Healer told him what might be the result of what the Muggle surgeons had done, putting all of the metal in his body. Gods, how he’d hoped he was wrong. The longer he went feeling nothing, however –

He wasn’t sure what he’d expected to find in Little Whinging. It was the place he’d first felt that wonderful spark of magic, so maybe he’d hoped to find that? He hadn’t. All he’d found on Privet Drive were memories so painful he’d blocked them for years. When they’d threatened in the past, he’d jumped on the bike Sirius left him and ride as fast as he could make the machine go. When the old bike hadn’t been enough of a thrill, he’d bought bigger bikes, or faster bikes. He’d escaped to the Muggle world where no one knew him, and he’d been so completely reckless and fearless while racing on the amateur circuit that he’d caught the attention of one of Roscoe’s agents. It was how he’d ended up jumping the bike with six other daredevils. He made a ton of money he had nothing to buy with, and a fierce, desperate ache that forced him to jump higher, go faster. No matter what he’d done, he couldn’t get away from what still lived inside of him. Then his magic had done what it hadn’t done since he was a kid; it had gone rogue, and he’d ended up in Malfoy’s guest room, little better than a squib. He was so fucking scared he could hardly breathe.

“Harry?”

The almost timid little voice cut through the haze of despondency that had begun to swamp him,
and he forced his eyes open. Teddy was standing next to the bed, eyes wide, twisting his small hands in front of him.

“Hey, buddy,” Harry said, trying to smile. He hoped it wasn’t as pitiful as if felt.

“Are you okay?” The boy asked. “It’s way past breakfast. Aren’t you hungry? You didn’t eat any dinner, either.”

Harry rolled to his side and curled his arm beneath him, pushing up. Pain shot down his leg. “Dammit,” he gasped, falling back down, trying to catch his breath.

Teddy ran to the bedroom door, calling “Draco!” at the top of his lungs. Harry wanted to call him back, but another pain shot down his leg and up to his hip, and he gripped his thigh.

Moments later Draco was there, leaning over him, his gray eyes filled with concern.

“How bad?” he asked.

“Bad,” Harry managed. It didn’t even occur to him to lie.

“Flossy?” Draco didn’t even raise his voice, and yet the elf popped into place beside his elbow.

“Yes, Master Draco?”

“Potter has gone too long without his pain potion. Could you bring me a dose, please?”

She nodded and disappeared again.

“Do you want to sit up?” Draco asked, his voice soft. Harry looked up at him, then at the little boy hovering just behind him. “I’ll help, if you’ll allow me to.”

Harry swallowed, then nodded. “Please,” he managed, realizing he simply didn’t have any pride left.

Draco gently rolled him to his back, then slid his arm under his shoulders. Harry could smell the subtle scent of his cologne, and feel the strength in his arm. He gripped Draco’s other hand, and between the two of them they were able to get him into a seated position with a minimum amount of pain. It had receded to a deep throbbing, and he pushed at the solid muscle in his thigh.

“Here, wait,” Draco said, touching his arm. “Is it the muscle or the bone that hurts?”

“I’m not really certain,” Harry answered. The pain is here,” he pushed down on his thigh. “That’s where they regrew the bone, right?”

Draco nodded and pulled his wand from the holster under the sleeve of his sweater. “If I may?”

Harry looked at the wand in his hand, then up into his eyes. All he saw was a legitimate desire to help. Finally, he nodded. Draco’s full lips pulled into a slight smile.

“You’ve become a trusting soul,” he said. Harry shook his head.

“No, it just hurts and if you can help…”

Draco nodded. “Temporarily, at least.” He pointed his wand at Harry’s leg. “Torpeo Morsus,” he murmured, and immediately the burning throb began to fade. Harry let his head fall to the side onto Draco’s shoulder as for the first time in weeks, nothing hurt.
“Oh my God, thank you,” Harry breathed, every muscle in his body going lax. He hadn’t realized how tense he was holding himself in just the anticipation of pain.

“It will only last a few minutes,” Draco said. “It was designed to ease wounded before a Healer could get to them. I’m afraid it’s just a stop-gap measure.”


“Can I get up?” he asked Draco, pointing to the bed. Draco looked at Harry and shrugged.

“It’s not my bed.”

“Is it okay, Harry?”

Harry opened his arms and Teddy scrambled up, using Draco’s leg as he did so.

“You’re welcome,” he said dryly, but Teddy was too busy climbing into Harry’s lap to care. He threw his arms around Harry’s waist.

“I’m glad Draco made it better,” he said into Harry’s t-shirt. “You scare-ded me.”

“Just scared, Teddy,” Draco said gently, smoothing a long pale hand over the boy’s hair. “Not scare-ded.”

“Scared,” the boy repeated. “I was scared.”

Harry caught his breath, remembering what he was thinking when the child came into the room, never in his life wanting Teddy to feel the way he had. “I’m sorry, buddy,” he murmured, encircling the boy with his arms.

“Don’t make that face again, okay? That hurted face?”

He looked over at Draco, who was watching the two of them with an odd expression on his face. He waited for the correction that didn’t come.

Flossy reappeared, carrying a tray with two steaming cups of cider on it. There was orange peel spiked with anise seeds floating in the drink along with cinnamon sticks, and what Harry knew were some of her frosted spice cookies around the clear glass mugs. The fragrance was heady, and she set the tray on the table next to Harry’s bed and removed a stoppered vial from her pocket.

“Your potion, Master Harry,” she said, presenting it to him.

“Cider for the grown-ups,” she gave Draco a pointed look, “and Master Teddy, it’s being time for your lunch.”

“Can’t I eat in here with Harry?”

He sent imploring eyes to Draco and waited. Draco looked at the boy, then back at Harry.

“You should probably eat something. It’s been about twenty hours since you last did.”

Harry wasn’t really hungry, but he nodded anyway.

“Come, Master Teddy. You can help Flossy bringing lunch in.”
Teddy hopped down off the bed and held the elf’s hand as she led him from the room.

Draco reached behind Harry and propped up pillows, fluffing them. His face and upper body were near Harry’s, and he felt himself wanting to lean forward and wrap his arms around Draco’s long neck. The impulse was so strong his arms actually trembled with it. He pulled the blankets in his lap up higher instead.

“While they’re busy elsewhere, there’s something I’d like to ask you,” Draco said, finally straightening away. He slipped his wand, which he’d laid on the bed next to Harry’s hip, back into his sleeve and handed Harry one of the mugs of cider. He held the mug under his nose and inhaled the spicy scent. “I’ve arranged an outing for Teddy this weekend,” he went on, picking up the second mug. “And I’d like for you to go with us.”

“An outing?” Harry repeated.

“It’s one of his Christmas presents, actually.” Draco dropped his free hand into his pocket. “I’d like to keep it a surprise, if I could.”

“From me, too?” Harry leaned back against the pillows, giving him a wry look.

“Yes. I supposed it’s foolish to ask you to trust me?”

Harry met Draco’s steady gaze, finding, to his utter astonishment, that he actually did.

“No, I trust you,” he said softly.

Draco’s brows lifted in surprise, but he looked pleased. “I promise you won’t be sorry.”

They were still looking into one another’s eyes when Teddy bounced back into the room, carrying a bag of crisps.
They rose just after dawn, Draco dressing a sleepy Teddy in heavy corduroy trousers, a long sleeved white jumper with a red and white patterned cable knit over the top of that, and his heavy black coat. He hadn’t told Potter they’d be gone over-night, and hoped he wouldn’t mind once they got to their destination. He asked Flossy to pack a bag for him, and took care of small over-night bags for himself and Teddy while the little boy dozed on the sofa in the sitting room. Moments after Flossy Apparated with their luggage, Potter appeared from his room. He was dressed in dark slacks, a dark jumper and the hunter green coat, his black hair waving over his forehead, and Draco didn’t think he’d ever seen a more handsome man in his life. He was pale and he looked tired, but he was moving better and his eyes weren’t shadowed by pain.

“Good morning,” Draco said. “Are you ready?”

“All ready.” He smiled as he looked at the couch. “Someone else doesn’t appear to be, however.”

Draco smiled, too. Teddy was lying on his side, his knees pulled up to his chest and his mouth open, sound asleep. Draco went to him and scooped him up in his arms, and Teddy mumbled before pressing his face into Draco’s collar and lying his head on his shoulder.

“Could you get the door for me, please? We’re going out through the kitchen.”

“Sure.”

Harry moved ahead of him and when he opened the door, he whistled softly. “Nice ride, Malfoy.”

Draco stepped out onto the driveway, closing the door behind them. “Father wasn’t a huge fan of Muggle vehicles, but when he did buy one, he bought with ridiculous excess.”

Draco had chosen the Silver Cloud Rolls because it was comfortable, and yes, if he was being completely honest, he’d hoped to impress Potter, too. The chauffer opened the rear door of the sleek black and silver car, giving Draco a deferential nod.
“Good Morning, David,” he said.

Potter chuckled. “What, his name isn’t James?”

Draco shot him a wry look over his shoulder. “No, and we’ve no need to spare the horses, either. Smart arse.” Potter grinned. Draco was relieved to see that some of the shadows that had lingered in his eyes the evening before were gone.

The sun was barely up, and the sky was a crisp, clear blue. It was cold, and as they left the manor the snow glistened pale, frosty blue and soft orange. The drive into town, particularly at the early hour, took about ninety minutes. When the chauffeur pulled into the passenger set down area of King’s Cross Station, Potter gave him a quick, disconcerted look.

“Platform nine and three quarters?” he asked with a twist of his lips, but Draco didn’t think he was teasing.

“Platform eleven and three quarters, actually,” Draco answered, then leaned over Teddy. “Time to wake up, little man,” he said softly. Teddy moaned.

“I’m sleepy,” he whined.

“Too sleepy to go on a train ride?” David said lightly. “Oh, I guess I’ll have to have David drive us back home.”

Teddy sat straight up, his eyes as wide as if Draco had poked him with a pin. “A train?” he said, his voice high with excitement. “We’re going on a train?”

Draco unbuckled his seatbelt. “We are, indeed, going on a train.”

The little boy squealed and threw his arms around Draco’s neck. “Oh, thank you, Draco! Trains are the best things, ever. Harry, did you hear? We’re going on a train!”

Harry smiled. “I heard. You like trains, huh?”

“Oh, they’re the best things ever, ever, ever!”

Potter’s brow furrowed. “Something tells me I should have known that,” he said with a healthy dose of self-disdain. Draco just gave him a level look, trying hard not to look accusing.

They got out of the car, the little boy bouncing on his toes between them, gripping their hands, and they moved off through the heavy morning crowd. Teddy’s smile was as wide as it would go and his eyes were shining.

“Well done, Malfoy,” Potter said softly. “Beats the hell out of a remote controlled car.”

“Doing something with him, rather than just sending something, usually does.”

Potter grimaced. “That was a direct hit.”

“I wasn’t aiming at you, truly,” Draco said. “But, he does miss you.”

Harry looked down at the happily skipping little boy. “I plan to rectify that.” He snorted softly. “Now I just need to find something to do with myself.”

Conversation had become too difficult over the announcements and the chatter of the crowd. Draco
led the way down to the platforms and surprised Harry by walking through a set of ornate double doors between platforms eleven and twelve.

“They’re disillusioned?” Potter asked as they entered an elaborate, luxurious lounge. There was plush black leather furniture, thick white carpeting, and fresh lilies in large milky white vases.

“Only to Muggles,” Draco answered.

A pretty young woman with blonde hair, wearing a sharp black suit and white blouse, sat behind a tall reception desk. She rose when she saw them, gracing them with a sunny smile.

“Mr. Malfoy.” She glanced at Harry, but if she recognized him she was very cool and professional. “I believe they’re waiting for you. Right this way.”

She opened another set of double doors and they exited onto a quiet, mostly deserted platform. On the tracks sat a sleek, modern engine in black and gun metal gray, attached to a passenger car. Draco noticed for the first time that the private train matched the Rolls, and he thought how very predictable his father had been. He wondered what the train would look like painted fire engine red.

Teddy’s bouncing accelerated and he gripped their hands hard. “Look, Harry, look! It’s a train. A real train!”

“I see that, sweetheart,” Potter answered, and the young woman smiled at them as she led the way to a porter dressed in a dark green jacket and black slacks.

“Good morning, Mr. Malfoy,” he said with another, equally sunny smile.


“Still not James?” Potter asked, one dark brown arching.

“Har har,” Draco said with a smirk. “You’re hilarious.” He turned back to the porter. “Are we all set?”

“Yes, sir.” Thomas gestured to a set of stairs. “We were just waiting for you.”

“Excellent.” Draco bent, looking Teddy in the eyes. “Are you ready to go?”

“Yes, yes!!!” He jumped up and down, and Thomas grinned.

“Someone is certainly exited,” he said.

“This is his first ride on a train,” Draco explained.

Thomas gestured widely with his arm toward a set of stairs leading up from the platform. “Well, welcome aboard, sir.” He slipped capable hands under Ted’s arms and lifted him onto the stairs.

Potter followed, trying to maneuver between the hand rails and his cane.

“Here, let me hold that,” Draco said, taking it from him. Potter gave him a slight smile.

“Thanks.”

He managed to pull himself up, and Draco thought how completely ridiculous it was that a simple smile could take his breath. And how being on eye level with Potter’s really rather spectacular arse
wasn’t improving his ability to breathe.

The private car wasn’t as elaborate as some he’d seen. Father had used it primarily for travel between London and another family holding near Calais. Draco’s mother had detested Apparating and traveling by Portkey made her violently ill, and he’d purchased it so they could travel privately, without having to associate with Muggles. Narcissa hadn’t cared nearly as much as Lucius had, and Draco didn’t care at all. But owning the train had its benefits, like being able to arrange this trip for Teddy. And for Potter, although he didn’t know it yet.

Potter paused just inside the door, looking around at the teak wood paneling and the plush off white furniture. There were two long couches facing each other in addition to four swiveling armchairs, and behind them was a dining room table with six elegant chairs. Each of the windows had a fabric covered valance and thick pull down shades, and brass sconces with dangling crystal teardrops hung on the walls at regular intervals.

“Jesus, Malfoy,” Potter said, hands propped on his narrow hips. “This is yours?”

Draco handed him back the cane, shrugging uncomfortably. “I suppose so, yes. I inherited it, at any rate.”

Teddy was jumping from one couch to the other and whooping, and before he had an opportunity to say anything to him, Potter did.

“Ted,” he said firmly, just loud enough the little boy could hear. Teddy let his feet go out from under him and bounced on the couch, his eyes avid.

“Yes, Harry?”

He looked so cute, his eyes bright and his cheeks flushed, that Draco doubted Potter would actually be able to scold him. He was sure he could. But Potter looked at him, unsmiling, shaking his head.

“Does Draco let you jump on the furniture at home?”

Some of the happy glow in his eyes faded. “No,” he admitted softly.

“Then do you think he’s going to let you jump on the furniture here, just because it’s on a train?”

Teddy twisted his hands in his lap.

“So let’s save Draco the trouble of scolding you, and stop jumping on the couches.”

“Okay,” Teddy said. “Can I sit by the window?”

“Yes,” Draco said, “You may sit by the window.”

Not long after the train pulled slowly from the station it began to pick up speed. Breakfast was served, scrambled eggs and bangers and mash, coffee and fruit. Teddy had hot chocolate and, a victim of his early morning, he was dozing over his plate before he’d finish eating. Draco wiped his lax lips and his hands, and then laid him down on the couch under a chenille throw, his head on a pillow. He and Potter finished their breakfast with quiet conversation, until Draco looked over at his guest with a slight smile.

“Want to see something cool?” he asked, almost daring him.
“Sure,” Potter said.

Draco stood up. “Come on.”

He led the way toward a door in the rear of the car, and they walked through a galley kitchen and passed a sleeping area with berths on each side. Then they were in the back of the car, and Draco hit a button next to a stainless steel door. It whoosed open and Draco stepped out onto a narrow deck that hung from the rear of the car over the train tracks. He turned and looked back at Harry, who was lingering inside the open door.

“Come on,” he called. “Come out.”

Potter was holding the top of his cane in a white knuckled grip, but after just another moments hesitation, he stepped through the door, his free hand going to the railing and gripping it hard. After a moment he seemed to relax a bit and started to look around.

It was cold, but it was worth it.

The train had just sped over a small bridge and there was a couple of inches of snow on the railings. Snow cloaked the trees, covered everything but the tracks where the train had just sped through it. And even with the train’s engine, it was surprisingly quiet.

“Oh, look!” Draco pointed just as a herd of deer rain down the hill and jumped over the tracks on their way into a nearby valley. They were so beautiful they took his breath. “Aren’t they gorgeous?” he said. “I’ll never understand how someone could shoot one of them.”

“Me, neither,” Potter said, watching them until they disappeared.

“They aren’t bothering anyone, and yet people come out here and shoot them. It makes me furious. They can’t hunt on Malfoy grounds. Not only is it illegal, but any hunter who takes a shot at a deer on our land has their gun blow up.”

Potter shot him a lopsided smile. “Is that yours, or your dad’s doing?”

Draco gave him a baleful look. “Can you see father giving a rip about the deer?”

Potter laughed. “Not really, no. I like it, though, the exploding gun. As long as no one loses any fingers.”

“Just the gun blows up, not their hands. They go home believing it was a miracle they were saved from injury.”

“Not a miracle,” Potter said, giving him an almost fond look, “just you.”

It was getting colder so they went back inside and took seats next to one another on the couch facing Teddy, who was still sound asleep. When Potter lowered himself into the couch, he gave a quiet sigh of relief.

“Time for a potion?” Draco asked softly.

He shook his head. “I’m okay. Just feeling a little sleepy.”

“Then take a nap.” Draco put his head back, got comfortable and closed his eyes. “No better place to nap than a moving train.”

“You’re still not going to tell me where we’re going?”
Draco’s lips curled. “Nope. It’s a surprise.”

“I can tell we’re going north, you know.”

“Lot’s of things north of London, Potter.” He opened his eyes and shot him an indulgent look. “Close your eyes, turn off your head, and let it be a surprise.”

Potter huffed, but he did scoot down on the couch and close his eyes.

Draco actually did doze for a few moments, the motion of the train lulling him to sleep. But then he felt something come to rest on his shoulder and he stiffened. Slowly opening his eyes, he looked to the side and his chin brushed against black hair much softer than it looked. Potter’s head was on his shoulder, and something caught hard in the middle of Draco’s chest. Potter’s features were lax, his lips slightly parted, and suddenly looking at him, Draco had never wanted to kiss anyone more in his life.
Potter sat with his legs splayed, his body relaxed, strong hands loose on his thighs. All in all, he was so delectable that there were a good many things Draco wanted to do besides just kiss him, but at the moment it was his mouth that was pulling Draco in like a homing beacon. Slowly, Draco lowered and angled his head, and then black lashes lifted and eyes as green as the stone in his Slytherin ring were right there, staring into his.

Draco stilled, unsure what he should do. Should he go ahead and kiss him, or should he pull back, pretend he’d been about to do something else. Which was patently stupid, he told himself, since he’d obviously either been going to kiss him or lick his face. And he wasn’t a dog. Even knowing that, he couldn’t seem to move either forward or back, just sat there in the glow of that green tractor beam.

He saw confusion and then realization dawn across Potter’s features. He licked his lips, and Draco felt a rush of arousal go straight to his groin. “Malfoy?” he said, his deep voice soft.

Draco still couldn’t respond, but his eyes dropped again to Potter’s lips.

In his peripheral vision he saw Potter’s hand rise, and he had a flickering moment of alarm, wondering if he might be going to hit him, or push him away. Instead, his hand curled around Draco’s nape, his pinky finger teasing the shell of Draco’s ear.

A slight smile touched the corner of Potter’s lips. “Do you plan to just hang there, or are you going to kiss me?” he whispered. Draco exhaled a breath he hadn’t known he was holding.

Instead of answering, he covered the small distance between them and covered Harry’s mouth with his.

It was the sweetest, most stirring first kiss he’d ever experienced. For several heartbeats their lips just pressed together, soft, breath mingling. The taste of Potter was sublime; the honeyed oranges from breakfast and the subtle, rich tang of his tea. Then Potter made a noise in the back of his throat and tightened his hand on the back of Draco’s neck, and his tongue touched Draco’s lips. It was Draco’s turn to grunt in the back of his throat and without even consciously aware he was
doing it he slipped his arm around Potter’s broad shoulders.

Potter slipped his tongue sleekly into Draco’s mouth, his fingers climbing up into Draco’s hair, caressing his from crown to nape. Their heads shifted, angling in the opposite direction, and Draco slid his tongue along the one in his mouth, curling around it. Wanting more, to feel more, to taste more, Draco separated from him just long enough to press Potter down onto the couch on his back. Potter grinned up at him.

“This is okay?” Draco said, hovering over him.

“If it wasn’t I’d have already said so,” Potter answered, lifting his arms around Draco’s body. “Am I that obvious?”

“What?” Draco didn’t get it.

“Did I give myself away or…”

“Oh, no,” Draco said quickly. It was, well – “

“Hermione,” they said together, and shared a wry smile. Then their lips were pressed together once again, only now so were their bodies and the sweetness seeped away, turning into something needier, darker. Draco pressed down with his hips then remembered Potter’s leg and eased back.

“No,” Potter said against his mouth. “It’s okay, just…” his hand slid down to Draco’s arse and gripped, and Draco moaned.

“Oh, that’s…” Draco gasped.

“Yeah, I know,” Potter answered, and then open mouths were pressed together again, searching, needy. Draco’s hands smoothed up Potter’s muscled sides and then down to his hips and it was perfection. And then Potter pulled back and Draco was afraid he’d somehow hurt him, until his ears detected a sound, even above the low click of the wheels on the track and subtle hum of the engine. Giggling.

Draco jerked his head back and glanced to the side only to find Teddy looking at them from above the chenille throw. His wide brown eyes were dancing.

“You was kissing Harry,” he said, breaking into another peal of giggles.

Draco sat up quickly, but wasn’t such a lout that he didn’t help Harry back up into a sitting position. It was damned uncomfortable, and from the grimace that passed over Harry’s face he guessed he was in a similar predicament.

“Thanks,” Harry said, grinning in spite of the bright blush staining his cheeks. Draco knew his were the same; he could feel the heat to the tips of his ears.

Teddy sat up, too. “So, you don’t think he’s a completed arse anymore, then?”

Draco wouldn’t look at Potter, even though he saw him turn his head and arch a brow in his peripheral vision. “That’s conceited arse,” he corrected archly. “And… not so much, no.”

Potter leaned closer to his side. “I’ve re-evaluated thinking you’re an enormous prick, too.”

Draco turned to look at him, about to remind him about little ears, but the laughter dancing in Potter’s eyes undid him, and they began to laugh together. It was the first time, to his recollection,
that had ever happened. They rested their foreheads together as the laughter ran its course, and Draco caught Harry’s hand, squeezing it.

“What’s a prick?”

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They’d had a rather frank, ‘gents only’ conversation about what a prick was, (“I thought it was a penis”, Teddy asked in confusion,) and by then the train was slowing. When they disembarked, once again bundled up for the weather, Harry looked around the deserted simple platform in bewilderment.

Draco led both Teddy and him toward the platform steps, and that was when Harry saw sleigh.

It was burgundy, and a matching pair of black horses were hitched to it. A driver stood, holding open the door.

“Oh, horsies!!” Teddy said, dropping their hands to clap. “And it’s like Santa’s sleigh! Are we at the north pole?”

Draco smiled, and it was an expression Harry was growing pretty fond of.

He’d been startled when he’d opened his eyes to find Draco’s face so close to his, but not really. Even with the emotional impact the trip to Little Whinging had on him, he’d felt something change between them. If he were being honest, in retrospect he’d felt the shift even before that. During the earliest days, when he’d still been in so much pain and Draco kept track of his potions, and made sure he had something to eat, and that he was comfortable in his home. There’d been something, even then.

He followed Teddy into the sleigh, still with no idea where they were going. The woods were thick around them, the heady scent of pine in the air, and Draco tucked a fur blanket over their laps as the driver climbed up onto his seat and flicked the reigns. The horses pulled, and the sleigh jerked into motion. Harry put his arm around Teddy to hold him in place, because he was literally bouncing in excitement, and Draco caught his other hand beneath the blanket, linking their fingers. Harry sent him a slight smile, leaning back to enjoy the ride, where ever it might be taking them.

They moved along at a steady pace, the sound of the horses hooves muffled by the snow but the jingle of the bells on the harnesses ringing on the clear air. It was a beautiful day, the sky a beautiful clear blue, and even though it was early afternoon the shadows of the trees along the road were already long shadows. When there was a break in the trees and Harry first saw the lake spread out from the ice along the shore, he stiffened slightly, looking quickly at Draco. He was watching him, a soft expression in his eyes.

“Oh, look!!” Teddy shouted. “A castle!!”

And there it was, on the top of a ridge above them, emerging from behind the trees. The winter sun lit its turrets and warmed the stone façade, and Harry felt his throat grow tight and his eyes begin to burn. He stared, his heart so full he thought it might burst.

Home. He was home.

“Teddy,” Draco said, loud enough to be heard over the bells. “This is someplace very special. Do you know where you are?”

Teddy shook his head, his eyes very wide. “Where?”
“You’re at Hogwarts,” Draco answered, squeezing Harry’s hand.

Potter had gone very quiet when the castle came into view, his eyes tear filled, but he hadn’t said anything and Draco began to grow worried. The longer he went without saying anything, the more nervous he became. When the massive gates automatically creaked wide to welcome the sleigh, Teddy gasped, taking in the winged hogs perched on the top of the gates matching stone towers.

Draco had always thought the castle at its most magical in winter, the sun shining on the snow and the skies a vivid blue or the sky overcast as the snow floated gently down. It hadn’t mattered; Hogwarts in winter was something very special. He’d hoped Harry would agree, and be glad to be back, but looking at his pale face now he wasn’t sure. His anxiety began to grow.

When they pulled into the courtyard and stopped at the base of the steps that led to the castle’s main doors, they swung open and a tall figure appeared wearing black and red robes, a wide smile on his face. Draco climbed down, and Potter followed him, but before Draco had Teddy on his feet Potter was halfway up the stairs, meeting the figure that was coming down.

“Nev,” he heard Harry say, his voice raw.

“Hey, Harry,” Neville Longbottom said.

Draco looked up in time to see them meet on the steps, and then they were embracing. Harry held him tight, his eyes squeezed shut.

Draco and Teddy waited, allowing the old friends a private moment. Finally, Neville pulled back and Harry lifted his hands, bracketing his face.

“God, you look great,” Harry said. “Teaching clearly agrees with you.”

And Longbottom did look good, Draco had to concede. The five years since he’d seen him last had been good to him. He carried himself differently; taller, more secure. “Minerva sends her apologies for not meeting you herself, but she’s still herding the kids who had to stay for the holidays. They’ll be heading into the Great Hall shortly, and she said to meet her there.”

Draco and Teddy went up the stairs when Longbottom smiled down at them. He offered his hand when Draco was close enough.

“Malfoy,” he said with genuine pleasure. “Good to see you.” He turned to look down at Teddy. “And this must be Mister Lupin.”

Teddy looked up at Draco in surprise. “How does he know who I am?” he whispered loudly, and Neville laughed.

“I had an owl, telling me to expect Remus Lupin’s son, and I’d know you anywhere.”

“Did you know my daddy?” Teddy asked, clearly delighted.

“I did. And your mum.”

“Are you a wizard, too?”

“He is,” Draco said. “And a very good one, I might add.”

Neville laughed again. “Oh, that must have just killed you,” he said to Draco, and Draco felt the
“After the final battle,” he said, meeting Neville’s gaze. “Not so much.”

Neville patted him on the back and gestured toward the castle’s door. “Let’s get in out of the cold, shall we?”

Teddy, ever gregarious, grabbed Neville’s hand, and Neville seemed delighted to lead him up to the school. Draco came even with Harry and caught his arm.

He turned to look at him, and Draco saw the soft pleasure in his eyes. “Is this – this is okay?”

Harry caught Draco’s hand, squeezing. “This is so much better than okay.”

It was the first deep breath Draco had taken since they’d come through the castle gates.

It was warm inside, the giant fireplaces in the entrance hall ablaze. The fragrances of meat and vegetables filled the space and in the distance they could hear the low murmur of voices. Draco didn’t remember there ever being a tree in the entrance hall before, but there was now. A towering pine stood against the far wall, enormous presents all around the base. It was beautiful, fairy lights aglow, but Draco turned to Neville with a wry grimace.

“Gryffindor colors in the main entrance? Really?”

Neville laughed again. “It changes with the colors of the house that won the last Quidditch match. I’m afraid we beat you, Malfoy, or it would have been silver and green.”

Harry looked at him with a teasing grin. Draco thought it might have been worth the loss on the pitch if it put that glow in Harry’s eyes.
“Who are all the presents for?” Teddy asked Neville. The tall man knelt gracefully so that he was at eye level with the boy.

“Can you keep a secret?” Teddy nodded, his eyes wide. “They’re empty. The elves put them there for decoration.”

Teddy looked scandalized. “There’s nothing in them?”

Neville shook his head, a smile hinted at in the corners of his mouth. “Not a thing.”

“The ones under our tree has presents in them.” A horrible thought seemed to occur to the boy, and he looked up at Draco. “They do, right?”

Draco chuckled. “Yes, Teddy. The ones under our tree have actual presents in them.”

“Okay,” he said, obviously relieved.

“I’m sure you’ve been very good,” Neville said, patting him on the back.


“Well, you should at least get points for honesty.” He stood and turned to Harry, glancing meaningfully at the cane. “So, I understand you finally took a header on one of those bikes.”

Harry nodded. “Spectacularly, apparently. I don’t really remember.”

A house-elf in a spotless toga appeared, holding a tray on which were four pewter tankards of something so hot it was steaming and a gingerbread man with a wide, red icing smile. Teddy grinned widely when she handed him the cookie with slight bow, then she moved to stand in the midst of the three men. They each took a mug, and Draco inhaled the steam. He recognized the
scent of the mulled wine and took a grateful sip. He felt the heat all of the way to his stomach, radiating out to the tips of his fingers.

“This is spectacular,” he said, taking another sip.

“I know my grandmother would be gratified by the compliment, Mr. Malfoy.”

Minerva McGonagall came down the stairs, as spritely as she’d ever been in her dark green robes and large, pointed hat. She took the last mug and the elf disappeared with a soft pop. She held up the drink, looking at Harry.

“To your health, Mr. Potter.”

“Thank you, Professor. I apparently could use the good wishes.”

She took a sip of her wine. “I do hope that this incident has finally brought you to your senses, and you won’t continue to take unnecessary risks with your health.”

He nodded. “I’ve decided I’m retired from trying to jump over things on a motorcycle for a living.”

“Excellent. I’m glad to hear it,” she said. “Now that the students who are remaining for the holidays have tucked into their supper, would you gentlemen care to join us for ours?”

“Thank you, Professor,” Draco said. “And thank you for the invitation.”

“You’re more than welcome, Mr. Malfoy.” She gave him a slight nod, and a pointed look, one of her eyebrows arched as she looked at him over the top of her spectacles. He remembered seeing a similar look more than once when he’d been a student, but then he’d usually been doing something he wasn’t supposed to. This time there was a sparkle in her pale eyes, and he smiled. She looked down at Teddy, a gentle curve on her lips.

“And this must be Mr. Lupin. Young man, it’s a pleasure.” She held out her hand, and Teddy looked at it, unsure.

“Shake her hand,” Harry whispered, nudging his shoulder.

“Oh!” Teddy shoved the rest of the cookie into his mouth, then gently took the tip of her fingers between his thumb and index finger and wiggled them once before tucking his hands into his pockets. It was the first time Draco could ever remember seeing the stern woman smile.

“This way, gentlemen.” She gestured down a hallway on the other side of the towering Christmas tree, and Draco watched as Teddy once again clung to Neville’s hand. Draco sent Neville a questioning look but he just smiled, shaking his head slightly. He and Teddy kept up a lively conversation as he and Harry walked with the Headmistress.

Harry was limping a bit more than he had been, and Draco reached into the pocket of his overcoat, slipping a vial from it and into his palm. He subtly slipped it into Harry’s palm and he startled slightly, looking down at what he now held. He gave Draco a grateful look and a nod then slipped it into his pocket.

It was wonderful walking the old castle’s halls again. It was almost as if the battle that scarred its walls had never happened. Occasionally there would be a section of wall that was a slightly lighter color, but it was as if the castle had assimilated the repairs, masking that it had ever been damaged. Draco had always believed the castle was so filled with magic from the centuries of housing wizards that it was almost sentient, and he could feel an age old intelligence in its walls. When
he’d been a student, only the Slytherin common room and dorms had felt truly welcoming, but now warmth seemed to infuse even the entrance hall, and he took a deep breath. It had never felt like home to him; he’d had the Manor of his youth, and his parents. But if this was what it felt like to Harry? He could understand how the little boy who’d scribbled on the walls in the cupboard in Little Whinging could find a home here. He also now understood why Harry had chosen Weasley over him the fateful day he’d refused to shake his hand. Startling how an eleven year old managed to be such a good judge of character.

McGonagall led them into a short hallway behind a tapestry, and then through a hidden set of double doors. What was revealed inside was a large, formally set dining room. The walls were covered in red watermarked silk, there were Christmas trees with white lights in each of the corners, and a tapestry on the far wall featured the Greek muses. They were lovely and graceful, and nodded at them as they passed, smiling at Teddy. For his part, his eyes were as wide as saucers as he looked at the table, formally set for a holiday dinner. There were probably thirty place settings, and Draco wondered who else would be joining them. Down the center of the table was a long arrangement of flowers and evergreen bows, and on each plate was a tiny Father Christmas with a tiny sack in which there was one perfectly wrapped gift.

“Harry, you and Mr. Malfoy will sit here,” McGonagall said, pointing to the end of the table. “And Mr. Lupin, you here between Mr. Malfoy and Professor Longbottom. And everyone else should be here – “ she looked toward the doors, “ – ah, good. Here they are.”

Draco turned, and through the doors came the Hogwarts staff. Professors Flitwick and Slughorn, who came to Harry, shaking his hand. Professor’s Sinistra and Trelawney came in together, followed by Professor Sprout, who patted Neville on the shoulder as she passed. Madam Hooch stopped to chat with Harry, her strange hawk-like eyes alight. And Professor Vector, Draco’s old Arithmancy teacher, even hugged him when she saw him, clearly delighted he was there. There were new faces, too. Witches and wizards who had replaced Hagrid when he retired, and Charity Burbage. And Severus. Draco felt an old sadness tinge the happy evening.

“I miss him, too,” McGonagall said near Draco’s ear, and he turned. “How it delighted him to attend these holiday get-together’s, sneer in place.”

Draco could imagine him doing just that, and smiled faintly. She studied him for a long moment.

“He’d be proud of the man you’ve become, you know.”

Draco felt his throat thicken and his eyes sting. “I hope so.”

She patted his arm and moved to take her place. She cleared her throat, not particularly loudly, but the room immediately quieted and people turned to her. “Shall we take our places?”

The chatter resumed as everyone pulled out their chairs and sat. Neville did the honors of pulling out Teddy’s seat for him, a red padded booster already in place on the seat. He lifted Teddy into place and pushed him in, and the little boy looked at the Father Christmas on his plate in delight.

“Hello,” the little Santa said with a jolly ‘ho ho ho’. “You’re Teddy, aren’t you?”

Teddy gasped. “He knows my name, Draco!”

“I see that.” Draco pulled out Harry’s chair, taking the cane so that he could lower himself onto the seat.

“Thank you,” Harry murmured.
“You’re more than welcome.” Draco smiled at him, taking the seat beside him.

The little Santa on Draco’s plate looked up at him with a cheery smile. “Hello, Mr. Malfoy,” he said.

“Hello,” Draco replied.

“And what do you want for Christmas?” The little decoration asked. Draco glanced at Harry instinctively, and Santa gave a very jolly laugh. “Well, I can’t put that under your tree, but I think you’ll like your gift.” Santa reached into his sack, then held out a little, elegantly wrapped box.

He heard Teddy squeal and he looked over to see the little boy holding a small ornament out. “Look Draco,” he called. “It’s Harry!”

And it was, a tiny Harry Potter as he’d been in school, wearing his red and black robes, his wand in his hand. There was a loop and a hook on his head.

“It’s an ornament,” Draco said, delighted by the craftsmanship. “We can put it on the tree when we get home.” He looked down at the Santa on his plate, who was still holding out his gift and smiling at him. “You can’t give him to me,” he said softly, “but you can give him to Teddy?”

“That’s different,” Santa said with a secret smile. “He’s always had a piece of his godfather’s heart. You’re going to have to go after that yourself. But you’ve made a good start.”

“There’s a note, Draco.” Teddy leaned toward him, holding it out.

Draco took it, looking down at the simple print.

I cannot put your heart’s desire inside this box,
It’s not like candy or woolen socks.
But he’s come home this time to stay,
And now he’ll never go away.”

Draco had to blink when the print began to swim before his eyes, and his heart felt full to bursting. He closed his eyes, then felt a hand on his knee. He turned to find Harry watching him, a frown between his brows.

“Are you all right?” Harry asked.

Draco nodded, swallowing. “I’m fine.” He turned back to Teddy, handing him the note. “I’ll read it to you before bedtime, all right?”

Teddy nodded, so engrossed in the tiny ornament he didn’t even look up.

Draco took the box from his Santa, finding it surprisingly heavy for such a small box. He was removing the bow from his box when he heard Harry make a startled noise at his side. Draco turned to him and found him looking at something in his hand with a gobsmacked expression.

“Harry? What is it?”

Harry turned his head, his eyes very wide. After what felt like the longest moment of Draco’s life, he held up his hand.

Dangling from his fingers was an ornate, antique brass key.
“What do you suppose it’s to?” Draco asked, admiring the workmanship. There were etched swirls around the base, forming several interlocking hearts. He found it whimsical, and surprisingly sentimental.

“I have no idea.”

“Is there a note?”

“Yeah, but I haven’t read it yet.”

Whatever Draco had been going to say was lost in a murmur of pleasure as dinner appeared on the table. Roasted turkey and side of beef with Yorkshire pudding, potatoes, carrots and parsnips in a buttery glaze, stuffing balls and bacon and Brussels with onions, to name not even half the side dishes. It was more food than Draco could remember seeing on one table since he’d left Hogwarts five years before, and the table all but groaned under the weight of it. He turned to help Teddy, loading his plate with the things he would eat (he wasn’t exactly picky, but he wouldn’t go for the parsnips or the Brussels, either), cutting the turkey and potatoes into bite sized pieces.

He turned to loading his own plate, and felt eyes watching him. He looked to the side, right into Harry’s steady gaze.

“So, did you always want to be a dad?”

The question startled Draco, and he paused as he reached for some turkey. “I suppose I always knew I would be, at some point. Being a Malfoy, it was part of my father’s expectations.”

“Would he have forced the issue?” Harry asked.

“He’d have tried,” Draco responded dryly. “Of course, that was before the whole ‘girlie bits make me nauseous’ realization.” Harry sputtered with laughter as he took a slice of medium rare beef. “What about you?”
“I always wanted kids,” he answered after a moment. “And girlie bits didn’t make me nauseous. I just knew I didn’t like them enough for children to result, either. I like kids.” His eyes took on a far-away look. “I was just afraid I’d be a lousy dad.”

Draco shook his head. “You’re mistaken.”

“How do you know that?”

“I’ve watched you with Teddy.” Draco took several of the root vegetables. “The primary necessity is patience, which you seem to have in abundance. You’d do fine.”

A small smile graced Harry’s lips. “Thanks.”

Draco had a sudden thought, and as he ate his dinner, absently reminding Teddy to stop fidgeting and to use his napkin, it wouldn’t go away. Harry had placed the key on the tabletop between them, and he found his eyes going to it again and again. He glanced toward the head of the table only to find McGonagall watching him, and she smiled faintly, saluting him with her glass of wine, nodding. He couldn’t seem to bring himself to nod back.

After dessert was served, and it was another celebration of excess with trifles and custards and plum pudding, the staff began to say their goodbyes and wander away. Draco watched McGonagall as she bid her staff goodbye, listening with half an ear as Teddy chattered with a thoroughly charmed Longbottom. Several of the teachers stopped to chat with Harry, and Draco’s eyes kept going to the key, lying with deceptive innocence on the brocade tablecloth.

Draco had no doubt it was a key to a door in the castle. And he thought he knew what it meant. When he’d sent the owl to Longbottom, he’d hoped they would extend an invitation to Harry, to come and visit. It hadn’t occurred to him…

“Draco. Draco!”

The voice finally cut through his musing, and Draco jerked his head around. Harry was staring at him, holding a note in his hand. It was trembling.

“What is it?” Draco asked. But he knew. He already knew.

Harry pushed the note toward him and Draco took it, turning it to read what was written.

It’s been five years since you saved these walls,
Walked these floors, wandered these halls.
You felt the need, the urge to roam,
But Hogwarts will always be here to welcome you home.
And under that was written;
I’m looking for a new DADA teacher, beginning next September. The job is yours if you want it.
Minerva McGonagall

The blood drained from his face, but Draco forced a smile. “Harry, this is… wonderful.”

But Harry didn’t look as if he thought it was wonderful. “How can I teach – anything? I can’t do magic.”

“That may very well have straightened itself out by September, mightn’t it?”

Harry turned to McGonagall, who had come and was standing behind him. “I have no way of knowing that, Professor,” he said, sounding disappointed, and Draco wanted to kick himself. He
knew Harry had been wondering what he could do with himself, and here was the answer, presented on a silver platter. How could he be selfish, wanting to keep Harry to himself, when he might be able to teach something in which he was arguably the most notable expert in their world?

“You have no way of knowing it won’t sort itself out, either,” Draco said, gripping his arm. “That’s nine months from now. You’re healing rapidly; your magic might very well be as strong as it ever was.”

Harry looked at him, anguished. “What if it isn’t?”

Draco lifted his hand, gripping his shoulder. “If it isn’t, there will be something else for you to do. Either way, it isn’t going to matter, not to me.”

Harry looked as if he didn’t believe him. “You aren’t going to care if I’m a Squib?”

Draco shook his head slowly. “You’ll still be…you. And that’s all I care about.”

Harry started to take a step toward him, his heart in his eyes, when Teddy’s voice stopped him.

“What’s that?”

They looked at him to find the boy pointing above their heads, causing them to look up in unison.

“That,” Neville answered, a laugh quavering in his voice, “is mistletoe.”

A large ball was floating above their heads and as Draco watched, white berries began to pop out amongst the mossy green leaves and red ribbon wound through the ball, tying itself into a red bow on the top.

“What’s if for?” Teddy wrinkled his nose.

“Well, usually when people find themselves standing beneath mistletoe, they’re supposed to kiss,” Neville answered, his eyes sparkling with poorly suppressed mirth.

Teddy looked at Draco and Harry, his brow furrowed? “Oh! Is that why you and Harry was kissing on the train? Cuz of mistletoes? I don’t remember seeing any there.”

Neville lost his battle for composure and made a sound that was a cross between a snort and choking, and Draco saw Harry’s face begin to turn the same shade of red he felt climbing his own cheeks.

McGonagall looked at them mildly, crossing her arms over her chest, her mobile brow arched. “Well, I do believe this will teach you to remember when children are around, you almost always have an audience. Something to remember if you’re with us at start of term, Mr. Potter.”

Harry gave her a weak smile, and Draco covered his eyes with his hand.
McGonagall turned to Neville with a wry smirk. “Professor Longbottom, perhaps you’d like to show our guests to their room?”

Harry looked at her, startled. “We’re staying over?”

“As long as that’s all right with you,” Draco said quickly. “If you’d rather not, the train…”

“No,” Harry said quickly, feeling his smile grow. “I’d love to spend the night. Teddy,” he said to the little boy, “would you like to spend the night here?”

“We’re going to sleep in a castle!” Teddy cheered, jumping up and down.

“Teddy,” Draco said, holding out his hand. “Come here, please.”

Teddy stopped bouncing, going to Draco, his shoulders slightly hunched. Draco took his hand, giving the boy a soft smile. “You aren’t in trouble. I know you’re excited, but you need to calm down a little bit, okay?”

“Aren’t you excited to sleep in a castle?” The little boy asked him, his eyes wide. “It’s a castle, Draco.”

“I know, love.” He ruffled the boy’s blond hair. It had been dark brown, just like Neville’s, moments before. “And yes, I’m excited to sleep in the castle. I’ve always loved being in Hogwarts. But you need to remember it’s a school, too. And we can’t yell.”

“Oh, okay.” Teddy leaned against Draco’s hip, gripping his hand between both of his.

“So, gents,” Neville said, grinning as he gave them a deep bow, “shall we?” He gestured with a sweep of his long arm, and they started to move toward the door.

“Ho, ho, ho, young man,” Draco heard behind him. Unlike the others, his Santa still sat where Draco had put him, above where his plate had been. “You didn’t take your gift.”
Draco had put the small silver wrapped package on the table and forgot about it. He didn’t believe he’d get what he wanted for Christmas, not with Hogwarts being offered to Harry. He’d seen the lost man in the cupboard in Little Whinging, going back to a place where he’d known nothing but abuse because he was so desperate for a home. And Hermione’s words echoed in his ears. “Hogwarts was his home.” He picked up the little package and quietly thanked the miniature Santa Claus, but he’d given up on getting what he truly wanted for Christmas.

They moved through the halls, passing a few students. Draco saw the moment many of them recognized Harry, and the flash of excitement on their young faces, but they were also very polite and didn’t approach him. Draco wondered if McGonagall had perhaps told them they were coming, and asked them to respect Harry’s privacy. They walked past the suits of armour that fought in the battle of Hogwarts, and many of them had dings in the surface but to Draco it seemed as if they stood taller, their heads angled proudly. He also noticed they nodded to Harry as he moved by them, but he wasn’t sure Harry was aware of it at all.

After Draco became aware of the armour, he started watching the paintings, noticing they responded in deference to him, too. Bowing, curtsying, doffing hats. It was as if the castle and its inhabitants were all paying their respects, and Draco smiled as Harry walked past it all, chatting with Neville, completely unaware. It was so like him, he realized. At one time he’d thought him a conceited prat, but he was the complete opposite, a man without the massive ego some, including him, had accused him of. Gods, they’d misjudged him, he’d misjudged him.

When they arrived at the old Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom, Neville led them through the door. Teddy’s eyes were as wide as saucers, taking in the skeleton of the flying beast that hung from the ceiling. He yanked on Draco’s hand.

“What is that?” He pointed up.

“That’s the skeleton of a pterosaur,” Draco answered. “They lived a long, long time ago.”

“Not anymore?” Teddy asked fearfully, his grip on Draco’s fingers tighter.

“No, love,” Draco said, pausing to swing the boy up into his arms. “Not anymore.” Teddy wrapped his arms around Draco’s neck, turning his face into his throat, and he was reminded just how young the boy was. He patted him on his small back. “It’s okay.”

Neville led them to the staircase along the back wall, and Draco remembered seeing Lockhart come down those stairs, and Moody, and for the last, hellish year, Severus. Now he followed Harry up them, more certain than he’d ever been of anything that Harry would come down those stairs to his students, starting sooner than he hoped. Harry gripped the banister and had a bit of difficulty climbing them, but that wouldn’t last. His days at Draco’s home were numbered.

Draco had never been in these quarters. He was very familiar with Severus’s rooms in the dungeon, but by the time he’d finally got the DADA classes he’d so longed to teach he’d severed all ties with Draco. He realized now that Severus had been protecting him, but it had stung at the time. He looked around the room with curiosity.

There was a sitting room just inside the door, furnished in with a dark velvet sofa and a matching arm chair. There was a large fireplace, with a fire already burning on the hearth, and a fully decorated Christmas tree sparkled in a far corner. Draco noticed it was decked with all of the house colors, and he smiled wryly. At least the place wasn’t a salute to Gryffindor. He put Teddy on his feet so he could go look at the tree.

Behind the sitting room was a small kitchen and dining area, which surprised him as he’d thought
professors took their meals in the Great Hall. Off of the dinette was a large bedroom with an ensuite, but there was also a short hallway that led to another room. This one had a twin bed and a wall mural featuring each of the Hogwarts mascots. Teddy ran in past him, looking at the wall avidly.

“We did a little redecorating,” Neville said as Harry and Draco watched Teddy look around the room. Harry turned to him.

“What do you mean?”

“We knew if you decided to take the job that you’d have friends and family who would want to see you. We knew you’d particularly want to have Teddy spend time with you.”

“Who’s doing the job now? There rooms must belong to someone.”

“Slughorn and Flitwick are splitting the lessons for DADA, but it isn’t really a good fit for either of them. And they already have rooms elsewhere in the castle and don’t want to move.” Neville patted Harry on the shoulder. “If you decide you like them and you’re willing to teach here, this would be your space.”

Harry leaned his cane against the wall and looked around. There was a small office space just inside the main door, and he walked to it, looking at the desk and the empty shelves behind it.

Draco began to feel awkward, loitering in Harry’s rooms. He turned to Neville.

“I was wondering where I would be,” he asked.

Harry turned, his brow furrowed. “Aren’t you going to stay here, with us?”

“There’s only one master bedroom, Harry,” he said softly. Harry approached him, until he was standing close.

“You don’t want to stay with me?”

Draco’s face felt hot. “I didn’t want to assume…”

“You aren’t assuming anything.”

“All right, well, I’m going to go now,” Neville said, apparently feeling awkward a bit of a third wheel. “But I’d love to come and take you down to breakfast in the morning.”

“That would be great,” Harry said. “Thanks, Nev. It’s so great good to see you.”

“And you, too.” He smiled. “And you, Draco. You look good, happy.”

“Thank you,” Draco answered sincerely, because he never doubted Neville meant it what he said.

After Neville left, Draco felt uneasy. Where was he supposed to sleep? The sofa was certainly big enough. Teddy seemed very interested in opening all of the drawers and cupboards, and he cheered in delight when he found a flat screen telly inside the armoire in the corner of the living room. He remembered hearing that someone had finally managed to make the Castle’s magic compatible with certain technology. There was rumoured to even be a beginning computer lab near the library, primarily for research purposes. Draco set up the telly for Ted, finding several DVD’s for children on top of the player, and wondered who it was who’d been so thorough.

Teddy settled in happily, lying on his stomach on the aged woven carpet on the floor, and Draco
forced a smiled when he looked back at him, even though he’d never felt less like smiling in his life. He could hear Harry moving around in the dinette, then heard his slightly uneven footsteps as he approached. When his arms slipped around Draco’s waist he stiffened slightly. He was already so far gone; how could he protect his heart now that he knew Harry didn’t really need him anymore?

“What’s wrong?” Harry asked against his ear. The warm breath caused an involuntary shudder to move down his spine

“Nothing,” he answered, holding himself still.

“Try again.”

“I’m fine,” Draco said, growling, growing irritated. “Just because I don’t automatically want to be manhandled doesn’t mean I’m not perfectly all right.”

“Whoa.” Harry grabbed his shoulders and turned him, looking into Draco’s face. He stared for a long moment, then grabbed his hand and started out of the room.

“Potter,” Draco complained.

“Wait,” Harry said, and his tone of voice brooked no argument. He walked into the bedroom and closed the door behind them, then turned, his arms crossed over his chest. Unconsciously Draco mirrored his pose.

“Now, talk.”

Draco glared at him. “Talk? What, Like I’m a Labrador?”

Harry’s lips quirked. “More like an Afghan hound. Aren’t they the ones that are all thin and long haired and elegant?”

Draco wasn’t remotely mollified by being compared to any sort of dog. “You are not charming.”

Harry shrugged. “Didn’t know I was going for charming. I just want you to tell me what’s wrong.”


Harry shook his head slowly. “Try again.”

Draco turned away. “Gods, you’re insufferable.” He started to walk to the door, but Harry grabbed his arm in a hard grip and turned him back around. Draco batted at it. “Stop manhandling me.”

“Then stop trying to walk away from me,” Harry said, refusing to release Draco even when his hand connected with the hard arm. “What happened? You were fine, and then…” Recognition moved through the green eyes. “Is this about them offering me the DADA professor’s job?”

Draco looked away, knowing he was not a good liar. He never had been, regardless of the number of times he’d tried. “Why should I care? You said yourself, you need to find something to do.”

“There’s a pretty big contingency here, Draco,” he said, his tone dry. “I have to be able to do magic, first.”

Was it bad, Draco wondered, that he found himself hoping Harry’s magic didn’t come back? Yes, he realized, it probably was. “Your magic is going to come back,” he said softly. “I’m sure of it.”
“Why does that idea make you sad? You told me yourself that it didn’t matter to you whether it ever came back or not, that…” Harry stopped again, and Draco saw that he’d finally hit on the truth. Draco closed his eyes, not wanting Harry to be able to read anything else there. He’d apparently seen quite enough.

“Draco,” he murmured, and he’d stepped closer. It sounded like his lips were near Draco’s. His hands slid up Draco’s upper arms, then curled around his biceps. “Draco,” he repeated. “Look at me.” Draco shook his head. “Draco,” Harry repeated. “Please.”

Draco waited for a second, then opened his eyes. Harry’s were so close, staring into his. “Why would my working at Hogwarts be a problem?”

Draco sighed. “You’d be back here, and doing something you love. And there would be the opportunity for you to meet other people here in the wizarding world, to date. And…” He stopped and shrugged, feeling awkward.

“Draco, I’ve dated. Quite a bit, and I imagine you have, too.” Draco felt his cheeks heat. Yes, before Teddy, he’d dated rather a lot. “What if I don’t want to date, any more. What if what I want,” he paused, as if to make sure Draco was paying attention, “is a family?”

The words hit Draco right in his heart. He’d always wanted a family like his friends had, not a father who cared more about how things looked than how they were and a mother who tried, but who was over ridden by her spouse over and over.

“What if, when I look at you and Teddy, I see what I’ve always wanted?” Harry went on.

“But, you’ll be here, and – “

“Only if my magic comes back.”

“You’re Your magic is coming back,” Draco said emphatically. “There is now no scenario under which Harry Potter does not have his magic. Don’t you understand that? You’re a force of nature; the rules that apply to everyone else have never applied to you.”

Harry inhaled sharply, then wrapped his arms around Draco, pulling him in. Draco finally gave up and dropped his arms around Harry’s waist.

“Do you know how much you scare me?” Harry whispered. Draco leaned back enough to look into his eyes.

"I scare you”? Draco said.

Harry nodded. “I could love you so easily, it terrifies me.” Harry took a step closer, until they were pressed together from knees to chest. “In fact, it may already be too late.”

Draco felt his heart hitch, then begin to beat hard and fast, right at the base of his throat. “For me, too,” he whispered.

Harry smiled slowly. “Then whether I’m here, or with you in Wiltshire, or I buy a garage and repair lawn mowers – “ Draco wrinkled his nose and Harry laughed, “ – we can make it work.”

“You believe that,” Draco said, looking into his eyes. Harry nodded.

“Yeah, I do.”
Draco sighed. “You always have been a fool.”

Harry laughed. “Yeah, but I’m your fool.” Harry lifted one brow. “Yeah?”

“God help me,” Draco said. “I think you are.”

Harry was still smiling when he kissed him.

The arms around him tightened, pulling him the rest of the way in, and Dracoc Draco allowed his spine to soften, his body to conform to the solid line of Harry’s. He opened his mouth when Harry’s tongue touched the seam of his lips, and welcomed it into his mouth with a soft sound. Harry deepened the kiss, his tongue curling around Draco’s, and one of his hands slid into Draco’s hair, fingers spearing through the soft strands. He pulled Draco’s head back, and his lips slid down Draco’s throat. He Draco dropped his head to the side, arousal growing as Harry’s teeth gently nipped.

They heard giggling, and Harry groaned, dropping his forehead onto Draco’s shoulder. Draco turned his head and found Teddy in the doorway. He pointed above their head, and before he looked up, Draco knew what he would find. A very, very LARGE ball of mistletoe, white berries gleaming in the soft light.

oooOOOooo

Soft morning sunlight was coming in through the windows when Draco stepped into the shower, sighing as the hot water sluiced down over his body. He was sore in places he hadn’t been sore in years, but he also felt loose limbed and well-shagged. And he had been; spectacularly well shagged.

They got Teddy into bed the night before, with a bit of tussle. The boy was still so excited to be going to bed in a castle, and he and Harry had stayed in the sitting room, not willing to retire to the bedroom until they knew for a fact the child was asleep. There had been several requests for glasses of water, and at least two trips to the lookloo, before several minutes went by without the patter of little feet on the stone floor in the hall. They’d looked at each other, shut off the telly, and gone to look cautiously through the door to find Teddy sound asleep on his back, his mouth open and soft snores sounding. Harry looked at Draco with a smile, his eyes heating, and he took his hand, leading him to the bedroom.

Draco had had a lot of sex in his late teens and early twenties. Some of it cringe worth, (Pansy) some of it forgettable, (Marcus Flint) and some of it fairly spectacular, (Blaise Zabini). But he didn’t think he’d ever been made love to before in his life. Harry Potter didn’t just have sex; he made love, and there was a huge difference between the two.

They’d divested each other of their clothes, kissing the entire time. Harry’s lips took Draco places he knew he’d never been before; the feel of his bare skin against Draco’s made him long to somehow be able to crawl beneath it and live there. His mouth on Draco’s cock had brought him to the edge of release so quickly it was almost humiliating, but he knew how to back him away from orgasm, too. They also learned that the castle truly could furnish everything when they found lube and condoms in the bedside table. It was easier to imagine that than that McGonagall had done it.

When Harry finally slid cautiously into Draco’s body, his eyes catching and holding Draco’s, the burn and stretch held a deeper significance than the act ever had before. He caught Draco’s hand, linking their fingers as he began to move, and Draco arched his back and gasped. Every thrust brought Harry’s cock across the place that made his nerve endings flare, and he lifted his legs, gripping Harry’s hips with his thighs. Just before he came apart, he cried out.
“Harry!”

“Right here, love,” Harry said, his rhythm staying steadfast. “Right here.”

“Come with me!”

He had, and it had been spectacular. All three times.

Now Draco found himself humming in the shower, and he couldn’t remember the last time that had happened. He turned off the shower and toweled off, running a comb through his hair so it didn’t dry like a rat’s nest and slipping into a long, white terri-cloth bathrobe. He exited back into the bedroom where he’d left Harry sleeping, only now the bed was empty. He looked around, and found Harry standing at one of the large bedroom windows, looking out over the snow, wearing long plaid sleep pants and nothing else. Draco started toward him then realized he held his wand in his hand. He Harry was trembling, and there was sweat beading along his hairline, but he was obviously doing something. Something with magic.

He walked up behind him, not attempting to be quiet, and laid a hand gently on his back. He noticed scratch marks on his skin, but wasn’t regretful of leaving them there.

“What are you doing?” he whispered.

“I’m just… finishing,” Harry said, his wand arm dropping as if it was fatigued. Harry’s face lit up, and he caught Draco’s hand, pulling him in front of the window, and he pointed.

Out on a pristine bank of snow were etched interlocking hearts.

Draco felt a thrill of excitement. “You did that with magic,” he breathed.

“I did that with magic.” Harry beamed at him, as proud as a first year managing his first Windgardium Leviosa.

“Oh, I’m so glad,” Draco said, pulling Harry into a hug. “So glad.”

“Me, too,” Harry said. “I feel like I got a part of myself back.”

“That’s because you did.”

Harry leaned back, looking into his eyes. “I couldn’t have done it without you,” he said, lifting one of Draco’s hands to his lips. “Thank you. So much.”

“You’re so welcome,” Draco said, pulling him back into an embrace. He doubted anything he’d done had much to do with Harry getting his magic back, but he didn’t mind taking some of the credit.

He was still a Slytherin, after all.
Draco levitated the giant silver punch bowl carefully down the flight of stairs at the back of the room, letting it come to rest in the center of a long table that was draped in a silver lame cloth. On one side of it crystal goblets were lined up in neat rows, and a stack of hunter green plates and cutlery were placed on the other. Beyond it were more tables, all in the same silver and green décor with large arrangements of white flowers. They would be groaning under the weight of the food that was planned. Harry let Draco have his way with the décor, but he’d planned the menu.

When Draco first became reacquainted with Harry he hadn’t realized the man was such a food connoisseur, but he supposed it made sense given he’d been little more than an indentured cook for the first eleven years of his life. (Draco still had moments where he wanted to hex Harry’s relatives, even though he had no idea where they were. It was probably a good thing he didn’t.) But for the party they were planning that evening, Draco was in charge of transforming the Defence classroom into the tribute to Slytherin it had become, and Harry met with the castle house-elves to plan the food. Draco had no idea what they’d be serving, but his usual compulsive need to be in charge of everything didn’t include anything that had to do with food; Harry excelled at it, it was as simple as that.

“Fluffy!”

Draco heard the distinctive ‘ping ping ping’ of a glass ornament rolling down stairs and he looked over in time to see Teddy come tearing down after it and the gamboling ball of white and black and brown fur that was chasing it. The calico kitten caught the ornament at the bottom of the stairs as it rolled toward one of four towering, elegantly decorated Christmas trees. The little wretch caught the top of the red ornament between its teeth, rolled to his back and began to bat at it with his back feet.

Teddy scooped up the kitten, pulling the glass bauble from its claws. “Bad cat,” Teddy said, his little face fierce, his mouth firm. “Bad, bad cat!”
“He’s undecorating the tree again, is he?” Draco asked, approaching the little boy. He looked up at Draco and shook his head with a sigh.

“He’s not very well behaved,” he said, sighing as if he had the weight of the world on his narrow shoulders.

“The curse of his breed, I’m afraid.” The kitten stopped abusing the ornament and rolled in Teddy’s arms, his bright green eyes avid as he looked around the room. Draco smiled at the bright, animated expression. “He is a charmer though, isn’t he?” He scratched beneath the cat’s little pointed chin, and Fluffy closed his eyes, purring loudly enough that Draco could hear him.

“He’s a stinker.” Teddy tucked the kitten beneath his arm. “I’m going to go put him in my room, so he can’t undo all of the work we did yesterday.”

“What about your tree?” Draco asked, eyes wide. The little boy looked so distressed that Draco chuckled, slipping his arm around his shoulders. “I’m teasing, Ted. I put up charms in your room. Your tree is safe.”

“That wasn’t very nice,” Teddy groused, but he was clearly relieved.

“Go put the ‘stinker’ away,” Draco said, petting the little cat’s head one last time. “And maybe watch the telly for a bit. I’ll let you know when it’s time to change into your dress robes.”

Teddy smiled up at him, pulling Draco down to kiss his cheek before turning and going back up the stairs, scolding Fluffy with each step.

Draco watched him go, thinking how much he’d grown in just the last twelve months. He’d gone from just past toddler to little boy, and part of Draco mourned the loss. The other part of him enjoyed the bright, infectious six year old who loved to climb trees and was already a terror on a training broom. He and Harry both enjoyed the time they spent flying with Teddy on the pitch when it was unoccupied, and Draco couldn’t think of a better place for him to practice. As long as he did it supervised; they’d already had that conversation at least twice that he was aware of, and he had a sneaking suspicion Harry and Ted hadn’t told him everything.

When they’d come for dinner at Hogwarts just before Christmas the year before, all Draco had been hoping for was something to put the spark back in Harry’s vivid eyes, something to bring him pleasure. Then he’d been afraid he’d accomplished his mission far better than intended, and his fledgling relationship with Harry was about to be derailed completely. Given his experience with all things Potter in the past, he should’ve known better. The man, and everything associated with him, never did run the way it did for other, average wizards.

Longbottom was as good as his word and showed up to escort them to breakfast. The night he’d spent in Harry’s arms had him feeling a little more secure, but the boyish thrill of excitement on Harry’s handsome face made Draco wonder if he would be taking over from Slughorn and Flitwick sooner rather than later. About halfway through the meal, delighting Teddy and startling Draco, the Santa from the meal the night before appeared above his plate, his hands propped on his pudgy little hips.

“Young man,” he said in a voice that brought gravitas to his ‘ho ho ho’, “you didn’t open your gift, did you?”

Draco blinked. He hadn’t even thought about it since the evening before. Even though he’d changed his jumper and shoes from the ones he’d worn the day before, he was still wearing the same slacks. Surprised he hadn’t noticed the box in the pocket and afraid he’d dropped it
somewhere, Draco felt for the little box. While he was patting down his pockets the small silver box appeared next to his plate.

Santa was not pleased.

“That was certainly careless for something so thoughtfully designed just for you,” Santa said, crossing his arms.

“My apologies,” Draco said, then felt ridiculous. He was apologizing to a doll, for Gods sakes.

“Well?” Santa gestured at the box was that was only slightly smaller than he was. Suddenly just the sight of it made Draco’s hands feel unsteady.

“Open your present, Draco,” Teddy cried. “Maybe it’s a Hegwid to go with my Harry!”

“Hedwig, Buddy,” Harry said softly, watching Draco.

Apparently everyone was watching Draco. He lifted his head to find all of the eyes around the table on him. And once again, McGonagall lifted her drink, this time in a coffee cup, to salute him.

Gingerly, Draco opened the little box. Lying on a bed of cotton was a key the exact duplicate of Harry’s, right down to the curlicues and the hearts. It struck him in that moment that the handle of the key looked exactly like the hearts Harry had drawn that morning, outside of their window in the snow.

“It’s just like Harry’s,” Teddy said, staring at it. “I wonder why?”

Neville just smiled benevolently, taking a sip of his coffee.

Draco looked at McGonagall, frowning slightly, confused.

“Mr. Malfoy,” she said, a faint smile on her lips. It was such an unfamiliar expression that she was almost unrecognizable for a moment. “Had you opened your gift last night, you’d have seen that I was offering a position not only to Mr. Potter, but to you, as well.”

“You’re offering me...” Draco took the key into his hand, feeling the weight of it.

“The teachers here at Hogwarts are all given a key that looks exactly like that one. It adapts to the locks on their quarters as soon as the professor agrees to accept the position.”

Draco knew his eyes were as wide as they could go. “I’m sorry, but...”

“As I’ve already said, had you opened your gift last night, you would know that Professor Slughorn intends to retire at the end of the next term, and there will also be an opening for a potions master.”

“I don’t have my certification.” He’d been within four months of his finals when Andromeda passed and Teddy came into his life.

McGonagall’s face softened. “I know where you are in your studies, young man. I also know you can have the certification necessary in time to join Mr. Potter when he comes in the fall.”

“Draco.” Harry’s eyes were wide, full of excitement and delight. “We could both teach. Here. In Hogwarts.”

The thought made Draco’s breath catch. To teach at Hogwarts had been his dream, but... he’d
never imagined having the opportunity. The war was over, but memories were long.

“But, the parents, Headmistress,” he murmured.

The small smile remained in place. “Well, Mr. Malfoy, there may well be parents who wish to take issue with you teaching within these walls. But if they do, they’ll need to take it up with the new Headmaster.”

“Professor?” Harry turned his head, startled. “You’re leaving?”

“It’s time, Harry,” she replied, unruffled. “I’m ready to go home, spend time with my sisters, get to know their families. I’ll be just a Floo call away, but yes, I’m retiring.”

Draco looked at the faces around the table. “Who…”

McGonagall gestured to her side. “There will be a formal announcement next term, but Professor Longbottom is taking over the Headmaster’s duties.”

“Nev!” Harry said, a delighted smile on his face.

“It’s time for your generation to take over,” McGonagall said, her eyes remaining on Draco’s. “I have every confidence you’ll be brilliant.”

The smile Harry gave him made up Draco’s mind for him.

Between Harry, him, and Flossy, Draco was able to return to university and not feel like he was abandoning Teddy completely. When Draco took his exams for his Potion’s certification, he got the second highest final grade in the history of the institution; the only one higher was given to one Severus Snape. Just before the new term began in September, he moved in with the new Defence Against the Dark Arts Professor, with full approval of the new Headmaster. If there were parental complaints, they never advanced beyond Neville’s desk.

There were several new professors who began when Harry and Draco did. The new Muggle Studies professor was Ms. Granger-Weasley, teaching part time in conjunction with her job at the DMLE. Her delighted husband transferred to the WWW store in Hogsmeade, and they all had dinner together at least once a week. Divination was now being taught by Padma Patil, even though Trelawney still lived up the ladder in the apartment. Fortunately, the potions professor’s rooms in the basement were vacant, and Trelawney now ordered her sherry in, rarely attempting to come down. An art course was added, Dean Thomas was teaching it, and Ginevra Weasley was the new flying instructor. The only teachers from the old guard who remained were Flitwick, who everyone was glad to see stay, and Binns, who still had no idea he was dead.

Draco heard the sound of someone coming down the stairs and turned to tell Teddy it was time to change only to have his voice lodge in his throat like a rock.

Every time he saw Harry in his teacher’s robes, Draco was convinced he’d never seen anyone more handsome in the whole of his life. Even with the disreputable hair, there was something about Harry dressed in a shirt, waistcoat and tie with his dark slacks under the black and red robes. Every day, Draco saw his partner in his usual uniform, and his heart would lift. Seeing him now, Draco could only stare.

There had been fittings for the new formal robes, of course. He’d seen them pinned in place, had even approved the design. But now they were finished, and perfect, and Harry was transformed. The black wool clung to his broad shoulders and the faint green tint in the dark fabric picked up the light in his eyes. The long outer robe brushed the floor, revealing the dark green lining, and the
slacks and patterned waistcoat under it fit him like a glove. The high collar and the black and green striped ascot hugged his throat and accentuated his square jaw, and for once his hair looked artfully mussed instead of styled by Cornish Pixies. Draco thought if he managed not to tear it all off of him right there in front of all of their guests, it would be a miracle.

Harry paused at the foot of the stairs, pausing to look around the room. He propped his hands on his hips, which swept back the sides of the long robe, and Draco had to swallow in order to keep breathing.

“You put me in this get-up so I’d matched the décor, didn’t you?” Harry asked, more humor than annoyance in his eyes. “It’s a bloody salute to all things Slytherin, and I’m the biggest damned party favor in the room.”

Draco advanced on him, his throat tight and his trousers tighter. “MY party favor,” he growled. For once, Teddy’s interruption was timely, or they might have greeted their guests stark naked in the middle of the Defence classroom floor.

It was ten minutes to midnight when McGonagall, startling everyone, came down the stairs from their private apartment. There were many happy greetings, which she accepted with a slight smile as she made her way to stand near the front of the room, behind where the Professors desk usually sat. She nodded to Harry, withdrawing a small book from her sleeve. He looked for Draco, his eyes wide and his tentative smile slightly nervous. Draco, now dressed in robes very similar to Harry’s only black with a gunmetal gray lining, caught Teddy’s hand and they made their way to Harry. He took Teddy’s hand, keeping the very excited little boy between them. The three of them walked to McGonagall, stood in front of her, and waited.

They hadn’t made an announcement in the press. The Prophet still dogged Harry’s steps and reporters made an absolute nuisance of themselves for the first month he’d been at Hogwarts. When word they were co-habitating got out, there had been howlers for weeks. Neville knew what was coming, of course, because they’d had to acquire his permission, which he’d been only too pleased to grant. But he and McGonagall were the only ones in the room who knew that this was anything more than a New Year’s Eve party.

McGonagall cleared her throat, holding her wand just beneath her chin and saying ‘Sonorous’.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” she then went on, her voice amplified but only slightly, “if you would gather, please.” She waited while they did, confused murmurs and speculation stirring through their ranks. She waited until silence had been restored before turning back to Harry and Draco. “Dearly beloved…”

There was a rush of noise. Hermione gasped, cried out “Oh, Harry!” Ron laughed out loud and leaned forward to pat Draco on the back. Teddy turned and looked over his shoulder at Neville.

“I’m the best man,” he announced, and delighted laughter flowed through the room. Ginny and Luna pushed forward, babbling their delight, but McGonagall raised her hand, palm out and silence fell again. “Decorum, ladies and gentleman, if you please.” She straightened and looked at Harry and Draco. “Dearly beloved,” she said again, “we are gathered here to celebrate the marriage of Harry James Potter and Draco Abraxas Malfoy…”

Draco didn’t hear much after that. He knew Teddy answered his cue perfectly, reaching into the pocket of his brand new dress robes to withdraw the matching platinum bands. He felt Harry take his hand, his fingers steady and warm as he slipped the ring on Draco’s finger. Draco nearly dropped the band when his turn came, but fortunately he managed not to. He even was able to repeat his vows without making an utter cake of himself, holding onto his composure with both hands. He’d been certain for weeks, the entire time this plan had been in the working stages, that he
was going to cry and make a fool of himself. When McGonagall was saying 'by the power vested in me by the laws of the wizarding world, I now pronounce you bonded together for now until forever', he thought he’d made it. She gave them permission to kiss, a smile of benevolence on her face. Their friends were waiting, breathless, ready to launch into their congratulations and somewhere deep in the castle a clock began to strike midnight.

Harry lifted his hands and cupped Draco’s face between his palms, and when he met Draco’s gaze there were tears welling in his beautiful eyes. “I love you,” Draco read on Harry’s lips.

“I love you, too,” Draco mouthed back.

Then they were kissing, and the tears Draco feared were there, mingling on their cheeks when Harry pulled him into a fierce embrace, and whispered “forever” in his ear.

In that moment, Draco found he didn’t care who saw him crying in his new husband’s arms at all. If ever there was cause for happy tears, this was it.

Chapter End Notes

I dedicate this story arc to Sassy_cissa. She knows why

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