The Snitch-Maker

by Omi_Ohmy

Summary

Draco is content with his Snitches, with the *tap tap tap* of his hammer, and the tiny gears and sharp scent of metal in his workshop - until one day Harry Potter appears, asking for help to solve a rash of Snitch-tampering in the Quidditch world.

**Career Choices:** Harry: QUABBLE official (Quidditch representative); Draco: Snitch-maker

Notes

For **Prompt # 28**.

Oh, this fic. It took four rewrites to be happy with it (thank you, eternally, to the ever-so patient mods) but I got there in the end. I wanted to write from Harry’s PoV, but Draco kept pulling me because I think this was more his story to tell. A big thanks to my pre-reader, **birdsofshore**, and beta, **icmezzo** - you’re both the best.

I was inspired by this [video of a scissor-maker](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzO6z0h7d70) when thinking about a Snitch-maker. A real craftsman at work.

A note for non-Brits: you may not be familiar with the term *'mews'* to describe a small street, often quite hidden from a main road and sometimes cobbled, that formerly held stables etc for grander town houses. Or in the case of this story, small workshops.

See the end of the work for more notes.
**The Snitch-Maker**

Draco’s flat was nestled at the top of the building. Unlike his airy workshop, the space was small and cramped. In bed though, he could lie beneath the skylights and watch the stars – the few visible through the glow of the city – wheel across the night sky. Draco woke early every morning along with the rising sun. He found the quiet in his flat soothing, although he missed the birdsong that had often drifted though his childhood window.

Rather than birdsong, or even the soft rumble of Muggle cars, this particular morning Draco woke to a gentle but insistent tapping noise. In his sleep-befuddled state, at first he thought a Snitch had got loose, and half expected to see one swoop past him as he opened his eyes. Instead, upside down from his point of view, the silhouette of an owl was neatly framed by his skylight.

Draco yawned, rubbed his eyes, and swung out of bed. Although he was used to early mornings, the sky was grey and barely light. He padded downstairs to the bathroom to pee, then came back up again to his living room to let the owl in. He opened the window and peered over to the right. The owl was still sitting by his bedroom skylight.

“Over here!”

The owl turned its head then flew the short distance.

“It’s very early, you know,” Draco said. The owl hopped in and hooted quietly. “Or maybe it’s late for you? Or your owner, I suppose.”

The owl deposited a tightly rolled scroll into Draco’s hand and tilted its head at him.

“I expect you’ll be wanting some kind of a treat.” Draco found the tin he kept for such occasion, and gave it an owl treat. He had long ago decided not to think too much what the spells on the treats disguised, and the tin did warn (in giant green loops) not to leave the lozenges out for too long if you didn’t want to find out. Owls, after all, mostly ate mice.

The owl snatched it up and gulped it down in one swift dipping movement, then hooted again.

“Talkative, aren’t you?” Draco smiled, well aware that he was the one doing all the talking. He unrolled the scroll and stared at it, his brain struggling to make sense of the words. The only ones that stood out were the two at the end: Harry Potter.

He read it again. Harry Potter, apparently, wanted to consult with him about Snitches. *I understand that you are the country’s leading expert on Snitches,* it read. Draco snorted. As far as he knew, he was the country’s only expert on Snitches. Either Potter was desperate or well-informed. The note mentioned a “sensitive case”, and Draco assumed that Potter was still slogging away in the Auror department. He’d always imagined Potter rushing about, his robes crookedly buttoned and his hair sticking in all directions, blundering through one case after the other and lovingly tolerated by his fans in the Ministry. His life being everything, in other words, that Draco’s was not.

The sky was begin to brighten. Mornings like this, all colour washed away by mist and cloud, usually left Draco feeling flat. This morning, however, he felt awake – wide awake – and filled with a restless energy, one that seemed to curl and coil beneath his skin. He felt… zingy.

Quickly – before he could change his mind – Draco penned a reply and sent it off with the small spotted owl. Then, zingy or not, Draco followed his usual morning routine. Kettle on to boil, tea
carefully measured out into his diffuser, an apple and a knife ready for his breakfast. While he waited for the kettle to boil, Draco went to get dressed. His mother would shudder at his close-fitting Muggle t-shirt and trousers – “Why, they don’t even have a collar!” – but Draco couldn’t have any loose pieces of fabric on him. He’d only got caught in one of his machines once, but that had been enough to learn a valuable lesson. Old Rambottom had always warned him the dangers of dangling robes, and most people would have been shocked to see the way she dressed while at work.

A warmth tugged at Draco, as it always did when he thought of the old witch who’d trained him the art of Snitch-making. When the kettle began to whistle, the sound of it passed through Draco like sharp slice of a knife, breaking his reverie.

He poured the bubbling water over his tea, and set his timer for four minutes. Then, as normal, he fetched his yoghurt from the cool-charmed shelf, and carved crisp slivers of apple directly onto it. His tea – diffuser removed – was clear and hot. A dash of milk, and all was ready.

In a life of middle-of-the-night terrors, of impossible tasks and mad monsters without noses, Draco had learned the value of routine. Of precision. Why, already his morning routine had lessened the rapid heart-beating brought by Potter’s handwriting, messy and illegible, just as Draco remembered it. He read the letter again. He hadn’t seen Potter since the trials, since an awkward meeting in a dimly lit corridor, in which Draco had tried to thank Potter for speaking up for him, and Potter had tried to… well, Draco wasn’t sure. Reassure him? He had returned Draco’s wand, a gesture that had warmed and confused Draco in equal measure.

The whole encounter had been so strange it had merely confirmed to Draco that he and Potter were polar opposites and as such would do better to keep well away from one another. Of course, there had been no difficulty keeping apart, not as Potter was feted and column after column was written about him, while Draco was reviled, then slowly forgotten.

Being forgotten wasn’t so bad. For one, it was quiet, and a significant improvement from actual hatred. And for another, it had led Draco here, to this flat, this job, and this way of life.

He finished his breakfast, washed up, then set down the stairs to begin work.

* 

*Press metal, cut metal, heat and pour it.*

Draco hammered out the words; he heard them in the hiss of flames and the clanks of the old gear and levers, in the ring of metal on metal.

Most people were unaware of the mechanical, almost Muggle nature of a Snitch. Or rather, that although they were charmed, no magic was used in their construction: each was made with love and care, piece by piece, and all by hand. Perhaps this discovery had been the one that had made Draco want to be a Snitch-maker. He was drawn to this world of purring gears and molten metal, of precious gold stretched thin and worked until it could fly, free and high.

Many of the heavy machines were old, Draco knew. The iron was cool beneath his fingers, oxidation and paint combined to make the familiar rough-smooth surface. Others glistened, greased with dark oil that dripped like blood against the shine of bright steel. Draco wondered who had built them: Muggles, unaware of their ultimate purpose? Muggle-trained wizards? They held an undeniable Muggle solidity, a sense that they had risen from the earth, that they had been moulded by hands. Strange to think that they should exist now to form such a symbol of the magical world.

Draco pressed out the different parts needed for a Snitch: small panels with curved edges, tiny cogs,
and strips of gold. He heated gold until it poured and filled a series of moulds. Finally he laid out the silver sheet destined to form the Snitches’ wings.

His next batch was for small local teams, and school tournaments. Unlike the specialist Snitches that sold for premium prices, to wealthy wizards, or the precision snitches for the British League, these Snitches would only take a few days to put together. He could make in a day those that went into the home Quidditch kits he supplied to the shops on Diagon Alley and in Hogsmeade, although due to volume it could take up to a week to complete an order.

It didn’t matter to Draco whether the Snitch was intended for children to play with in orchards or millionaires to frame in their studies, he always applied the same level of detail and care. Since he’d taken over from Ramsbottom, no Snitch had left his workshop as anything other than perfect. He surveyed the parts he’d made and nodded to himself: this batch would be perfect, too.

* 

Potter’s reply came as Draco was sitting on chair balancing on the cobbles outside. The mist had lifted, and this day had dawned bright and clear. The fading days of summer deserved to be enjoyed before the long stretch of autumn and winter began, and Draco enjoyed watching the world go by.

As he sold his Snitches by owl or appointment only, he mainly used the shop on the ground floor for enchanting and testing Snitches. Along the little road, cafés and restaurants jostled with yoga studios and a bicycle manufacturer. None of the Muggles had ever asked him what the flying golden ball that hung above his door represented, and Draco assumed that most of them thought that he lived there alone. As he did, of course. He used no magic in his workroom, but had laid a series of charms to soundproof the building and ensure the windows obscured the flight of Snitches.

The owl dropped a scroll onto the table, hooted, then flew away. Draco looked around, alarmed at the thought of having been noticed, but no one seemed to be interested and the quiet chatter of the lunch hour continued.

The strange zingy feeling returned as Draco unrolled the scroll, his fingers tingling.

Potter was coming to see him. He didn’t know what to do with the information, so instead returned to work. He’d told Potter to come, and he shouldn’t have been surprised that Potter had taken him up on the offer. After he shut the front door behind him Draco lowered the wards; he remembered Potter’s magical signature easily, his hawthorn wand thrumming slightly as he thought of it. He fancied that it remembered Potter, too.

* 

*Tap tap tap.*

Tinny high notes rang out as Draco beat the silver as thin as parchment, and then thinner still. He spent the afternoon losing himself in his work, as he always did. The familiar weight of his hammer in his hand, more a part of his own body than a tool, grounded Draco in the moment. He worked in the light of the tall window furthest from the door, as even the slightest of breezes could blow the fragile metal from his workbench, and that would not do. Not at all. This sheet of silver would become the Snitch’s wings: light, mobile, a blur of light before the players’ eyes. Only Draco got to see the silver like this: still and whole, a thin layer of potential.

Draco was so focused on his work, so lost in the rhythm and the sounds the sharp scent of metal in the air, that he didn’t hear Potter arrive.
“Hello?” Potter’s voice filled the room. Draco tapped a few more times, chasing an area that needed a little more work.

Potter cleared his throat between taps, and Draco finally turned around. Potter was standing in the doorway, his eyes wide as he stared at Draco.

“Potter.” Draco nodded, once, then turned back to his hammer and started up the tap-tap-tap again.

“Malf—”

“Shh!” Draco didn’t turn around. “I’m nearly finished.”

Draco held his body still and took a few breaths to centre himself again. He needed to concentrate on getting this part of the metal just right. Standing back to see the way the light fell on the silver, he tilted his head this way and that, then tapped it a few more times. This process was repeated twice more, with Draco muttering under his breath as he examined the sheet.

“Almost… not quite… Perfect.”

Finally, satisfied, Malfoy put the hammer down next to the piece of finely-beaten metal, and turned to Potter.

“Thank you for waiting,” he said. As Potter took a breath to respond, Draco pulled the goggles clear from his face. He knew that red lines marked his skin where the goggles had dug in, and he sat back on his tall stool. “I don’t get many visitors. Most people get in the way; I appreciate you standing back and letting me finish.”

“I—” Potter looked as though he was standing on a boat, his feet moving subtly beneath him. He looked around the workshop before returning back to Draco. “I need your help.”

“So you said in your note. But I admit, I am curious: whatever could I help you with?”

Potter lowered the slim file he was carrying, and held it out to Draco. “It’s all in here.”

Wary of disturbing his now-perfect sliver sheet, Draco moved towards Potter. “Let’s go upstairs. I don’t want to mess up anything in here.” He removed his apron, and carefully pulled off his gloves. They stuck slightly, hot and damp with sweat inside. He persevered, inching them off a little at a time, then laying them beside his apron on a clear section of worktop.

He led Potter up the stairs. He normally used the shop below for business meetings, but Potter, although he’d been frowning, had mainly looked perplexed, and Draco thought that maybe a cup of tea was in order. And the kettle was upstairs, so up they went.

He gestured to the small table under the sloping roof, then busied himself with getting the kettle going. When Draco turned back to Potter, he found him sitting bolt upright, the file placed on the table. He looked petrified.

“You do drink tea, don’t you?” Draco asked, suddenly worried. They’d not really drunk tea at school, but Draco was pretty certain Potter must have outgrown pumpkin juice by now.

“Er, yes. I do. Drink, er, tea.” Potter’s face pinked up.

“Still as articulate as ever, I see.”

Potter’s cheeks became, impossibly, pinker. Draco rolled his eyes. “No need to take me so
At this point the kettle decided to interrupt with its piercing whistle, and Potter jumped. “Sorry,” Draco said. “I got the loudest kettle I could find. Sometimes I put it on and run downstairs to check on something, and I’ve been known to forget all about tea.” This time it was Draco’s turn to feel his cheeks heat, thinking about the time he’d nearly burnt the place down. Of course, that had been while Ramsbottom had lived in the flat, and he’d merely been the lowly apprentice. Very lowly, that day.

Draco brought a pot of tea, cups, saucers, a milk jug, and a sugar bowl to the table. Potter picked at the edge of his folder, flicking it with his thumb.

“Are you going to show me what’s in there?” Draco asked.

“Oh. Yes.” Potter opened the file and removed a newspaper clipping from inside. “It’s these matches the Cannons have been winning.”

They were obviously going to skip small talk and pleasantries. Draco felt his shoulders drop momentarily in relief; he’d much rather find out why Potter was here. He kept his voice bland though, as he responded. “Yes?”

“We—, I—, I think someone’s been cheating. Match-fixing. Er, tampering with the Snitches.”

“My Snitches?” Draco reached for the cutting and not bothering to disguise his interest. His fingers were still soft from being in the gloves all afternoon, and caught on the paper. “It doesn’t say anything about Snitches or cheating here.” He frowned at Potter’s moment of hesitation. “And… ‘We’? ‘I’? Are you here on behalf of the Aurors, or is this something more personal?”

“I, er, I work for QUABBLE now. I’m here for them. That is, I’m here in an official capacity. Sort of.”

Potter was making no sense at all.

“Quabble? What is that, an off-shoot of The Quibbler? You’re not working as a hack now, are you?” Malfoy moved back slightly. He didn’t read any of the papers, not anymore. Not even for the Quidditch scores.

“No; it’s a Quidditch group. Um, but not a team. It’s the Quidditch Union for the Administration and Betterment of the British League and its Endeavours.” Potter sounded as though it had taken a fair bit of practice to actually get all the words in the right order. Draco hid a smile: the words didn’t trip off Potter’s tongue easily enough for him to have worked there for very long. Draco wondered what had precipitated the move away from the Aurors, but it didn’t seem the right moment to ask.

“Fine, Mr Quabble. What makes you think this has anything to do with the Snitches?”

“Well, that’s the thing.” Potter leant forward, closing the space Draco had opened between the two of them. He opened his file again. “At first, we thought it was the brooms. Took them apart, tested them for every charm, jinx, and curse imaginable.”

“But you found nothing.” Draco pulled the photos and lab reports closer, reading through them before looking up again. “So you looked at the Snitches instead?”

“Snitches are far too delicate to strip like we did with the brooms. I never knew there were so many charms in place! And so many parts, too.”
The horror Draco felt at the thought of some Ministry Neanderthal attempting to dismantle a Snitch must have showed, because Potter winced. Salazar, he could imagine the mess of cogs and wheels they must have made. And they probably didn’t have any more of a clue about what they were looking at than before they’d opened the Snitch.

“Tell me you didn’t destroy it.”

“Only that first one.” Potter had the decency to wince again when Draco pulled a face. He hurried to add: “I insisted we left the others untouched after that.”

Draco nodded, approving, at least of this decision. He slid another piece of paper from Potter’s file, this time a photograph of the Cannons and Puddlemere Seekers reaching for the Snitch at the same moment.

“We had several Omniocular recordings and photos of this moment. It’s from Saturday’s match.”

Draco might not read the papers any more, but he still knew his teams. “Yes; it looks like Windle caught the Snitch.”

Potter nodded. “That’s what we found, each recording we examined. But the match went to the Cannons, because the flesh memory of the Snitch recognised Marsh as the first person to touch it.”

Draco frowned, and looked at the photo again. A chill travelled through him. This must be why Potter was here, whatever his tale of Quabbles. They thought it was him, that he was the one who’d done something to the Snitches.

“And we don’t know how that’s possible. I was hoping that maybe you could shed some light.” Potter regarded him earnestly. Merlin, he looked like a little puppy dog hoping to earn a pat on head.

“And by shed light do you mean confess?” Draco asked sharply. He pushed the papers and photos back towards Potter, and folded his arms. “Because I don’t know anything about this.”

Potter bit his lip. “I can’t deny that it did look bad for you,” he said.

“Yes?” Draco remembered again the echoes of the hall on the long walk to his trial; he could almost smell the dank air of Azkaban.

“I’m not here to arrest you.” Potter sat still, keeping his eyes on Draco. Slowly, Draco began to breathe again. He hadn’t realised he’d stopped. “For one thing, I’m not an Auror anymore, remember?” Potter gave him a sad half-smile. “And, for another, two of the Snitches were made in Italy by—”

“Roberto Quinte. He does good work. Flashy, but solid.”

“Yes; that’s the man. There’s no way you could have had any contact with those Snitches.” Potter stared down at the table, then reached for his cup of tea. He cradled it in his hands before taking a sip. “And, er, then I had an argument with my boss.”

“An argument— What, about me?”

“I pointed out that you’re not that stupid. The more I thought about it, the more I realised that it would beyond idiotic of you to risk the reputation you’ve built. And anyway… it’s not your style.”

Draco laughed at this, a short, bitter laugh. Of all the reasons Potter could have given. Style. The last Potter had known, Draco’s style had involved letting a group of murderous Death Eaters into a
school full of children. “What do you know about my style?”

“I know enough to have told my boss to back off. Besides, the evidence doesn’t point at you. And the way I see it, after everything you’ve been through, there’s no way you’d blindly follow anyone else’s orders.”

The breath caught in Draco’s chest. Those had been his parting words to his father when he’d finally plucked up the courage to leave home, but they weren’t anything he’d ever expected to hear someone else say of him. “You’re assuming a lot, there.” He swallowed, and tried to regulate his voice, make it sound less squeezed. “No wonder you had to quit the Aurors if you’re so willing to have such blind faith in others. Still such a Gryffindor.”

Potter, instead of bristling at Draco’s words, smiled. “It’s been a long time since school.”

Draco scowled, then sighed. “You do realise that you are merely confirming everything I’ve just said by being so disgustingly Gryffindor? So ridiculously chivalrous. And, yes, maybe I don’t want to be bossed around by anyone. But why wouldn’t I have had a hand in it, anyway? I could have been acting on my own.”

Potter leant back into his chair, an easy smile on his face and his eyes sparkling. He looked almost as though he was enjoying the exchange. Draco had no idea what to make of him. “Please; you’re comfortably enough off, no debts, no flashy lifestyle to keep up.” Potter straightened up a little before continuing, “And you’ve been through the ignominy of trials and press speculation. There’s no way you’d want to fan those flames again.”

Draco regarded him with a flat stare. “I’m not entirely convinced that this isn’t some kind of…” his hands flapped in a frustrated gesture, “sting to catch me out somehow.”

“Malfoy, look, you’re going to have to trust me on this. I’m only here because I need to consult with you.”

“No; I don’t… I can’t trust you. You’re an idiot if you don’t keep me on your list of suspects.”

“Fine.” Potter shrugged his shoulders. “I’ll treat you with suspicion if it makes you happy. It will certainly make my boss happy.” The flaring of Potter’s nostrils as he mentioned his boss suggested that there was no love lost between them. How interesting: Draco had always assumed that everyone at the Ministry fell at Potter’s feet in sycophantic raptures. “But I still want to ask you whether someone could tamper with the flesh memory of a Snitch.”

Draco blinked as he considered Potter’s words. “That’s… acceptable. The asking, that is.”

Potter held still, but Draco thought he saw his eye twitch. Potter pointed back at the file. “Now we’ve got that agreed, what can you tell me about Snitches?”

At this, Malfoy finally smiled. He was on home territory when it came to Snitches. “Well, that depends on how much you want to know.”

“What do you already know about how that works?”

“I know that Snitches are charmed so that they remember who first touched them. Isn’t that why you were wearing gloves just now?”

“Indeed. I wear gloves throughout. A lot of work goes into crafting a Snitch, and I’m not about to
ruin all that by touching the metal directly. But I told you not to trust me.”

“It’s not you claiming you’ve caught the Snitch and won the match though, is it?”

“No.” Malfoy frowned. “Which means that either the person who says they caught it is behind the cheating, or someone’s found a way to tamper with the Snitch.”

Rather like the tiny cogs laid out on the worn felt lining the workbench, Draco laid out the information he had and tried to make sense of it. Potter, mercifully, kept quiet, while Draco pondered this.

“My charms… but… how? I need to…” Draco muttered to himself as he looked at the match photos again. He prided himself on making perfect Snitches, and took it as a personal affront that anyone would, or could, have tampered with them. Finally he looked back up at Potter again. “I need more time, to think about how this might have been done. And besides, I need to keep to my work schedule,” he looked down at the floor, thinking of the workshop below. “Can I owl you when I’ve got more information?”

Potter rubbed at the back of his head, and Draco realised he’d probably wanted Draco to offer him a simple solution. Potter sighed, then rose. “Let me know when you’ve got something.” He pushed the folder towards Draco. “You keep these, they’re copies.”

Draco was surprised that Potter had trusted him enough to make him copies. He almost said something, but he remained silent and nodded instead. Potter began to move towards the door, and Draco realised that he was leaving.

“Stop!”

Potter stopped immediately.

“You can leave by the Floo if you want. Your, er, robes stand out a bit here.”

Potter looked down at his robes. “It’s only a bit of lunch.”

“Not the stains.” You idiot, Draco’s mind helpfully supplied. “This is a Muggle area.”

“It is? I saw the cobblestones and assumed—”

“They must miss you. The Aurors.”

“I will use your Floo. If you don’t mind,” Potter said, sounding as dignified as a man with egg down his robes possibly could. “Thank you.”

Draco nodded, and moved out of the way so that Potter could get to his fireplace. The tin of Floo powder stuck slightly, but Potter managed to open it without spilling it everywhere. In a whoosh of green flames, he was gone. And Draco’s flat felt quiet… no, empty, in a way it normally did not.

Draco stared at the folder. He wanted to go back downstairs to get all the wings pressed out, but at the same time he knew that if he did there was a good chance that he’d be preoccupied with wanting to read through the file. He sat back down again, and laid out all the clippings, reports, and photos. Better to puzzle for a few minutes than ruin a day’s work by being careless.

The file wasn’t the terrible jumble Draco had been expecting. Everything was clearly dated with a source written on the back. Potter had recorded conversations he’d had with his boss (who, reading behind the lines, Draco thought was probably a bit of a pillock).
Overall, there had been five matches that Potter had identified as suspect, with rumours about three of them circulating in the press. Speculation was rife, with theories ranging from Felix, to hexed brooms, to good old-fashioned cheating by pushing or shoving. The Chudley Cannons, Wimbourne Wasps, and Tutshill Tornadoes had managed the dubious of honour of being both winners and losers of a suspect match.

Potter had made a chart with a list of all the events, and cross-referenced teams, players, referees, and cheating methods. What startled Draco the most, more than the logical thinking or the occasionally insightful notes, was the clear fact that Potter truly didn’t suspect him. He found a reference to himself, on a piece of paper covered in arrows and scribbled notes: his name, next to the words SNITCH? – check and poss help, along with the letter L. An arrow to one side pointed to a small bubble, containing, as far as Draco could make out, DS susp of DM: discount. DS, Draco had already discovered, was Potter’s boss.

Draco pulled out his battered old copy of *Quidditch Through the Ages* to check on some of the terms Potter had used. Scorch marks on the cover had erased some of the letters of the title, leaving rough lines across the covers. Without his gloves on Draco found textures particularly… vivid, to his touch. He ran his fingers once more along the marks: there weren’t many souvenirs of his childhood lying around, and this was a book he’d lost hours to.

Although he now spent his day making Snitches, Draco hadn’t played for years and was a little rusty with the terminology. One in particular had stood out: Snitchip.

Draco flipped through the S’s. Snitchip. There it was: touching the Snitch other than to catch it. Cheating, in other words. Could the explanation be so simple? He went back to Potter’s chart, then found some parchment of his own. Before he sat down he also pulled out a few specialist books. He would have to finish the wings later.

* 

Two days later, Draco knew enough to owl Potter asking him to come back. Draco had also returned to his workshop in the interim, pressing out the wings and smoothing the edges by hand. It was a laborious process: filing away with a jeweller’s needle file, sanding with the finest grade possible, then polishing, taking care to work in one direction only. Before he charmed the wings they were fairly fragile, and in many ways this was the trickiest part of Snitch-making. The silver glinted dully in the sunlight. Sometimes Draco wished that he could remove his gloves and test the wing edges properly, but he didn’t want to risk any contamination.

When Potter arrived, Draco knew that he wouldn’t interrupt, and continued polishing the wings. Gentle strokes, over and again in the same direction, to smooth the metal and ensure the swiftest flight possible.

Carefully, Draco held the wings up to the light, before putting them down and admiring the set. With Snitches of this grade, he worked on six pairs at once. The entirety of the past two days had been taken up with research for Potter and wing-smoothing.

“Thank you, again, for waiting.”

“It’s fine. I enjoyed watching you work: you’re so… focused.”

Draco nodded, noticing that Potter’s eyes seemed drawn to Draco’s gloved hands. The black leather did form a rather stark contrast with the paleness of his skin, he knew. He held his hands up. “This is partly what I want to talk to you about, actually.”
Potter stepped closer.

“I think I need to talk you through how Snitches work, to make this clearer,” Draco said.

“That—” Potter’s voice sounded tight, and he cleared his throat. “That would be helpful. I keep getting to the limit of what I know and… well, that’s why I came to you. Because you know about Snitches.”

“Indeed I do. Let me see… how much do you know already?”

“Er, Snitches fly, they stay above the Quidditch pitch, and they have a flesh memory. Oh and they can open.” He paused, his eyes cast down for a moment as sadness passed across his face. “And they’re charmed to do all that, obviously.”

“Most of that is true, although the opening part is due to how they’re made, not any charms.”

“I see.” Potter frowned.

“Forgive me for saying this, but you don’t look like you do.”

Potter’s mouth tightened. “I had hoped we were beyond name calling.”

“I wasn’t calling you stupid! I merely wanted to suggest that you might want a little more information.”

“Sorry.” Potter rubbed his hand through his hair, standing it all on end. “I’ve had a hard day. To be honest. I saved coming here as a bit of a treat. This place is fascinating.” All of a sudden he looked more as Draco had always imagined him. For some reason the sight of Potter looking lost and hard done by warmed Draco to him a little.

“This isn’t a toy shop, you know.”

“Yes, yes; I know. Go on, what can you tell me about Snitches?”

Draco pointed to the pieces of metal sitting on the felt-lined worktop, all ready for assembly. “A Snitch is made of a series of parts, rather like a clock or a watch. The sole purpose of a Snitch – to a purist, anyway, not like that Quinte – is to imitate the flight of a Snidget.” He turned to Potter. “Have you ever seen a Snidget?”

“No. I thought they were extinct?”

Draco shook his head. “There are a few Snidgets left in the world. Most of them are in a reserve in Somerset.” An image of Potter, hair ruffled by the breeze and small yellow birds darting past him, sprang to Draco’s mind. He wondered if he’d find them as enchanting as Draco did. “I should take you there sometime; it really is amazing.”

“Oh, um. Thanks. Maybe when everything’s”—Potter waved his hands in the air—“quieter, maybe then.”

Why had Draco suggested that? Of course Potter didn’t want to go traipsing around Somerset just to see some birds. He wanted to find out what Draco knew about Snitches, that was all.

“Snitches are crafted so that their wings can move like Snidgets, and so that they are the same weight and size. Their actual flight – movement, speed, direction – along with the flesh memory and not straying from pitches are all added as charms once they’re complete.”
“Doesn’t that mean that you could touch the parts if you wanted to, though?” Potter creased his brow. “That is, if you haven’t charmed them yet?”

“And what if I left a residue of my skin or sweat on the metal? What then when I charmed it?”

Potter nodded, slowly. “I see… so for the charm to be effective, no one should touch it other than the Seeker?”

“Precisely. And if someone else has touched your Snitches before a match, doing so may well have acted to interfere with the flesh memory.” He shuddered at the thought of anyone having the affront to meddle with his handiwork.

“With the other Seeker having the most powerful influence, but not the only ones to be able to mess up things?”

“Yes.” Despite Potter’s occasionally clumsy turn of phrase, he was no dullard, after all. A mess, still – Draco could see what looked like jam on Potter’s t-shirt – but not an idiot.

“Is there a spell you can use to trace who touched the Snitch?” Potter asked, managing to sound both hopeful and resigned to the idea that nothing in life could be that simple.

“No; the magic of the charm is very delicate, and would fall apart at the barest of—” Draco broke off in horror when he saw Potter’s hand about to brush one of the wings. He pushed him aside. “Don’t touch that!”

Perhaps he had been too swift in deciding that Potter wasn’t an idiot, after all.

“I didn’t—” Potter stopped and smiled a little sheepishly. “Actually, I was about to. It’s so delicate. Pretty, almost.”

“Exactly, Potter. Delicate and not to be touched, flesh memories or not.” Privately, Draco was rather pleased to hear that Potter though the wings pretty: he’d always thought so, too. He stood up, and removed his apron. “I want to show you something downstairs, anyway. I think it would be better if we moved you away from any temptation.”

Potter clattered noisily behind Draco, seeming to lean heavily on one foot. “Not one for stealth, are you?” Draco asked, wondering yet again if Potter had left the Aurors due to some kind of incompetence. He wished, for once, that he followed the news a little better; surely this was the kind of information endlessly regurgitated and picked over in the papers.


Ah, well that would probably be the explanation Draco was looking for.

Draco prided himself on keeping a tidy home and workshop, and the showroom was no exception. His mother would be horrified to see him dusting, but the shelves were clear and worth the effort. Draco could almost see why house-elves enjoyed their work so much. Almost.

He crossed the room to the glass case running along the back wall. “I wanted to show you some Snitches.”

“Is that a good idea in a room this small?” Potter asked, looking alarmed.

“It’s not that small.”
“No; I mean—”

“I know what you mean. It’s not a Quidditch pitch but these are my Snitches; I know what I’m doing.”

“Of course.” Potter had the grace to look chagrined.

Potter seemed to hesitate before sat down on the sofa by the window. He huffed slightly as lowered himself, then stretched his leg out in front of him, wincing slightly as he did so. “Cursed on the job. It’s fine, normally, but the stairs are quite steep here.”

How was Draco supposed to have known? He still felt a twinge though, at the thought that Potter had already been up and down them four times. “You can Floo, if want. Next time.” Draco made the mistake of looking up at Potter, who was gazing at him with big, earnest eyes. Draco was put in mind of dog – not a puppy dog, more a large friendly-but-serious guard dog of some kind. He faltered as he continued: “You can come into my… into my flat, as I might be in the middle of spellwork or a sale down here.”

Potter nodded, and Draco almost expected him to loll his tongue out and wag his tail. Hiding a smile, Draco looked down at the Snitch in his hands instead. The metal shone brightly against the dark leather of his gloves.

“You can’t touch this one, I’m afraid.”

“It’s beautiful.”

The Snitch bore extra engraving and the wings were made of gold. One of his high end Snitches, for wealthy collectors. Draco didn’t know why he’d chosen it above the standard Snitches or one of the old Snitches he used for demonstrations. He peeked over at Potter, who was still admiring the Snitch. Potter glasses were on slightly crookedly.

“I want to show you what’s inside.” He pressed the hidden catch on the Snitch’s side, and it clicked open.

Inside, tiny cogs whirred so fast the entire mechanism appeared to quiver.

“Is that magic?”

“A little bit.” Draco blew on it, and wings began to move. “There’s a lot of delicate work that goes into a Snitch. The way the wings move, the balance of it in the hand: all these are achieved through a series of linked mechanisms.”

“What do you use the magic for, then?”

“I don’t really want to give away all the secrets of the Snitch. But in general terms, a series of enchantments strengthen the wings. Most of the magic is focused on getting the Snitch to fly, and keeping within the pitch boundaries. And then of course there are the flesh memory spells.”

“Spells? There’s more than one flesh memory spell?”

Draco nodded. “Several can be used in one Snitch, or only one. It all depends on what you want from your Snitch.”

“At school, all I wanted was for it to fly far and high.” Potter glanced over at Draco. “I didn’t want
beating you to be too easy.”

Draco snorted. “It was never easy and you know it.”

“No. It wasn’t.” Potter sighed. “Do you still play? I bet you have some amazing Snitches to practise with.”

“Not much.” Draco would have loved to, but he’d have needed someone to play against. “How about you?”

Potter shook his head. “Not anymore,” he said, and patted his knee. “It locks up sometimes, and I don’t think it would be safe.”

Draco cleared his throat. “As I see it, it’s a question of how, with your… mystery.”

“Hmm? Oh yes, the mystery of the winning Snitches.”

“The Snitches at school were enchanted to be used countless times, and could be reset after each match. It’s actually quite a complex process, you need spells to clear and then also refresh the memory-forming abilities.” He bobbed his hand in front of Potter. “This Snitch is more like the ones the League uses. It’s only used the once, so I’ve enchanted it to remember the first hand to touch it. After that any number of people can touch it, it doesn’t matter. It still remembers that first person.”

Potter nodded, his fingers curling as though remembering holing a Snitch himself. “Yes. No wonder the collectors like that: it makes it theirs alone.”

“Yes, exactly. And although the school-type Snitches are more complicated, in terms of their spell work, the magic behind these single-use Snitches is actually fairly powerful.”

“So… someone’s tampered with the magic?”

Draco closed the Snitch, and it lay, quivering, on his hand. “I don’t know. But if they did it would have taken a lot of work, and left some kind of a magical mark on the Snitch. What I really need is access to the Snitches.”

“Dunbar – my boss – really isn’t your greatest fan.”

“So you want my help as long as I don’t touch anything?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“I think that it’s probably more like that someone’s found a way to meddle with the memory-forming process. Not the magic, but the moment at which the memory is formed.”

“Isn’t there some way of telling if a Snitch has been used already? Especially for one of these.” Potter nodded down to the golden Snitch in Draco’s hand.

Draco released the Snitch, and it began to fly around the room. “Yes, there’s a small indicator located under one of the wings.” He frowned. “It’s like that part was tampered with to disguise whatever else had been done to the Snitch.” He shook his head. “This is all a serious breach of Quidditch etiquette.”

Potter snorted at the word etiquette, but Draco elected to ignore him. It was patently clear that Potter wouldn’t know what etiquette was if it bit him on his behind.
“That’s only half of the ‘how’, though, isn’t it?” Potter said. “I mean, you’ve described two methods for tricking or changing the flesh memory, but what about opportunity? When could someone have access to a Snitch to do any of this tampering?”

“I believe that’s your job, not mine.”

“Not really.” Potter sighed. “Officially my job is to promote the League. I’m an ambassador for the sport.”

“An ambassador?” This time it was Draco’s turn to snort. “Potter, forgive me for asking, but what exactly does that mean? Quidditch isn’t a country, after all.”

“I know. I open things. You know, Quidditch Stadiums, new team facilities. Schools. I present trophies. And I talk about the benefits of Quidditch. Dunbar – my boss – says that I can help do the team draws for next year’s League.”

“Good grief. How on earth did you end up doing that for a living? And why are you here investigating my Snitches?”

“Um, Kingsley asked me. And, you know, my knee. I’ve always liked Quidditch.” Potter looked away, fixing his eyes on the cabinet in the corner. “As for me investigating, they’re worried about—” He paused. “They want to… to maintain the good reputation of the sport.”

“I still don’t understand why you’re so unwilling to suspect me of any wrongdoing myself.”

At this, Potter turned back to Draco. “What, you’re in cahoots with Quinte? It’s an international Quidditch-makers conspiracy?” He laughed. “That makes sense. And I did look him up. And you. I know about the fight you had in Milan that time.”

Draco and Quinte had merely been discussing the finer points of Snitch design. After a few drinks, things had got messy, and they’d both been done for breaking the Italian version of the Statute.

“Also, I just… I have this feeling. A gut feeling.” Draco felt Potter squirm beside him. “I don’t think you’re quite the person you were at school. And I don’t think you were as awful as you made out, even then.”

Draco very much doubted that Potter’s memories were anything like his own, and he shivered. “Well, charming as this meeting has been, I fear it’s nearing its close. You need to find out who had the chance to touch the Snitch or be alone with it, and any moments before the match when either of those would have been possible. And remember, I’d quite like to have the opportunity to examine the Snitches myself, even though your boss doesn’t quite share the same ‘gut instincts’ that you do.”

Potter’s face reddened at this. Draco had met plenty of people like Harry’s boss before. It was one reason he didn’t go out much.

“I will try to talk him into it, I’ll ask him to do it for me, personally. I really would like it if you could.”

Draco was momentarily taken aback. He hadn’t expected Potter to say that. “Well, do let me know.” He spotted the Snitch resting on the mantelpiece and snatched it up.

“Impressive.” Potter said.

“I do have lots of practice,” Draco said. “Not on a broom, though.”
He put the Snitch away, then moved towards the door, but Potter remained on the sofa. Potter was massaging his knee, and looked unhappy. “I, er, I need a hand up. My leg’s locked. It doesn’t happen often.”

“Oh. Oh, yes, of course.” The sight of Potter like this, a little… vulnerable, was unsettling. Potter was supposed to be saving people, not stranded on a chesterfield. Draco tried to keep his own discomfort from his face, then leant forward, bracing his weight on his back leg. Potter’s grip was warm and solid, and Draco couldn’t imagine that there was any part of him that was weak or damaged. As Draco hauled him up though, he felt the shift as Potter’s knee moved.

“Thank you,” Potter said. “I should learn not sit on those damn things. I never can tell when that might happen.”

After Potter left, Draco returned to his workshop. His hand wavered as he picked up a strip of metal, and stopped, hand and metal mid-air. He stared. Perhaps he should go upstairs and have a cup of tea before returning to work. A strange, unsettled feeling had befallen him, as though he’d been drinking coffee for hours. As Draco put the strip down he shook his head; no one should have to see their heroes fallen.

Only when he was halfway through making his tea did Draco realise that he’d thought of Potter as a hero. And then he remembered seeing Vincent fall, and the roaring flames. He understood then that he’d thought of Potter as hero for years. An ache twisted through him, and he wasn’t sure it was for himself, or Potter. Or maybe for everyone who’d lived through those awful years.

*  

Twist and bend metal.

Each strip of metal needed to be bent or twisted until it was the exact shape to fit into the mechanism hidden within the Snitch. Draco adjusted each to be perfect, tapping with his hammers, squeezing in vices and pulling – always gently – with pliers. His hands, inside his gloves, grew hot. When he took his gloves off at the end of each day his flesh was soft and swollen, pink with heat and moist with sweat. He would blow on them, the cool air like the finest of prickles travelling over his sensitive skin.

Draco worked late, trying to make up for the time he’d missed the past few days. The night made mirrors of his skylights by the time he returned to his flat. He heated some soup, then ate slowly, enjoying the ritual of his meal. Afterwards he lay on his sofa, a book in his hand but his mind elsewhere until his attention was drawn to the sound of the Floo flaring to life. He wasn’t due a call from his mother, and no one else ever called, but then he remembered telling Potter he could Floo. Draco was not entirely surprised, then, to see Potter’s scruffy face looking out at him from the green flames.

“Sorry to disturb you at home like this – and so late – but you did say—”

“I did.” Draco sat up and yawned. “Well, hurry up then. What is it?”

“I was wondering… are you free tomorrow? I want to trace the journey a Snitch makes from your workshop to the moment it’s released for a game, and I could do with a few pointers to get me started. Plus I’d appreciate an extra pair of eyes.”

Draco opened and closed his mouth. “You want me to help you?” he asked in the end.

“If you’re free.”
The Snitches needed another couple of days’ work, but Draco didn’t hesitate when he answered. “Yes. We—” He swallowed, the word strange on his tongue. “We can meet here in the morning if you like; we can begin where the Snitch starts its journey.”

Potter’s face broke into a smile, and, despite himself, Draco smiled back.

* * *

“I’ve got some questions, actually,” Potter asked as they walked along the mews. A few people were sat outside the café with the fairy lights, drinking coffees and reading newspapers. “First of which is why you don’t have your own owl for deliveries.” Potter had arrived at a not-too early hour that morning and they were on their way to the owl service Draco used.

Draco shrugged. “I’ve got no space to keep an owl. And I only use an owl once every week or so.” He didn’t want to talk about his limited personal correspondence. “Your little owl is—”

“That’s not my owl,” Potter said quickly. “I don’t have one of my own. Not since school.”

Draco dimly remembered Potter with a snowy white owl. Who knew what had happened to it. Potter did seem the type to become attached to an owl, then never manage to replace it. Whether out of laziness or sentimentality, Draco wasn’t sure. Maybe a little of both.

“Are all your questions going to be this trivial?”

“It’s relevant! How do you know that someone within the owl service isn’t tampering with your parcels?”

“I hire an owl, but I give it the parcel and send it off myself. I am aware of the value of my goods.”

“Why not Floo them over? It’s a lot more direct.”

“I can’t. Can’t have any magic interfering with the charms on the Snitches.”

They walked down some residential streets, until the came to a squat brick building at the edge of a park. The trees were still in full leaf, their tips showing beyond the building. It wouldn’t be long though, before they began to curl and brown. Draco stopped at the door bearing the sign: Staff only beyond this point. He knocked three times. A small bearded man answered.

“Oh, it’s you,” he said, but then he saw Potter. “Oh, and you!” He peered back at Draco in surprise, but didn’t say anything. After a quick explanation of what they needed, he led them to the owls. He kept glancing over at Potter, whilst mostly ignoring Draco. Which did grate slightly after several years of weekly chats about the owls.

“I expect Bernard’ll ask for your autograph before we’re done,” Draco muttered to Potter as they followed the short wizard down a corridor.

Potter didn’t say anything until they reached the owl room. “Isn’t this a Muggle area?” Potter asked. “How do they get away with owls flying around?”

“Petting zoo,” Bernard answered, before Draco could say anything. “We’ve got goats and rabbits, too. And chickens.”

“How do you pet a chicken?” Potter asked.

“You don’t.” Bernard’s fascination with Potter seemed to have worn off, and he stood with his arms
folded and his more normal grumpy expression on his face. “Do you need me for anything else? I need to clean out the rabbit hutch.”

They watched him leave.

“Do you think it could be him?” Draco didn’t want to imagine that grumpy Bernard could have been the one tampering with the Snitches all along.

“He might have trained the owls to stop elsewhere.”

“True.” Draco frowned. “I guess you never really know someone, do you?”

“No.” Potter gave him a strange look. “You don’t.”

* 

The air outside the owlery was considerably fresher than inside.

“So where do you send the owls? To the teams?”

“No.” They walked past the chickens and goats, none of which looked particularly in the mood for petting. “I mainly send the Snitches to Quidditch gaming suppliers. They put together complete kits then sell those on.”

“Are there specialist Bludger and Quaffle makers, too, then?”

“Of course, but there are more of them. And they make both type of balls.” And with nothing of the skill that Draco put into his own work, naturally. He’d always been drawn to the Snitch: fast, light, almost a mind of its own. Not one of those horrible bashing balls, or the boring old Quaffle.

“So the suppliers put together the kits that are sold in Quality Quidditch Supplies?”

“Some of them. I sell directly to the shop, too. Ogilvy and Taylor supply a few teams, Wright’s Balls supply about half a dozen, and the rest are Henley Flying Sports.”

Potter’s eyes were wide and bright when he asked his next question. “I wonder… who supplies which team?”

“There’s a café in the park. Maybe we could sit down and go through the file—”

“We could cast a Muffliato so no one can hear us—”

They hurried to the café, which stood largely empty apart from a squawking toddler and his weary-looking mother.

“I provide the Quidditch equipment suppliers with Snitches of different grades.” Draco looked at the names on Potter’s list. “Let’s see. The Cannons use Wrights… so do the Tornadoes. The Wasps use Henley’s, and both the Magpies and the Arrows use Ogilvy. Sorry, Potter. I can’t see a link.”

Potter winced. “Do you think you could call me Harry? I keep expecting Flitwick to take five points when I hear you call me Potter.”

Draco hesitated. “I suppose so. Harry.”

“Great.” Potter smiled. Whatever Draco had agreed to, he didn’t see that it had to include calling him Harry in his thoughts. Potter was always going to be Potter in his mind, as far as Draco was
concerned. “So next we should visit each of the suppliers.”

“Do you— That is, if you still have need of me, I can accompany you.”

“Do you always talk like that?” Potter asked.

“Like what?”

“Like you have a stick up your bum?”

“I do not!”

“Oh come off it, Draco.” Potter’s eyes were twinkling. He looked like he was enjoying himself again. “You do. Gigantic, pureblood stick” He grinned. “I would say you always have, but I think you’ve got worse. You’ve added politeness now.” Potter gave a mock-shudder.

“Do you want my help or not?”

“I do.”

“Then maybe you can stop calling me names.”

“I don’t see why I should.” Potter gave Draco a sly smile. “Isn’t it what we’ve always done?”

“You are impossible. No wonder I spent most of my adolescence trying to work out how to throttle you.”

Potter touched his nose. “I suppose you did at the end.” The jovial atmosphere dissipated.

Draco sighed. “Sorr—”

“Don’t,” Potter said. “It was a long time ago. Things change.”

Neither spoke on the walk to the small copse of trees at the far side of the park. Draco was, he realised, on the verge of shaking. He never reacted like that, not to anything. Not anymore. Being with Potter was unsettling – one moment he was being called Draco, the next he was reminded that he’d once stamped on Potter’s face, breaking his nose. He glanced over at Potter, who seemed lost in thought. Did he feel it, too? This churning sense of confusion, all mixed up with familiarity? Draco sighed, lost.

* *

The offices of Ogilvy and Taylors were housed in a street not too dissimilar to Draco’s: an industrial mews. It was, however, in a wizarding part of Gloucester. Draco instinctively walked with his head down, wishing he had his robes on so that he could better blend in. Potter, interestingly enough, adopted a similar stance.

“I hate these places,” Potter gritted out under his breath.

“Me too. Too much—”

“Attention.”

Perhaps it was the presence of the other – a Death Eater cancelling out a Chosen One – but no one approached them as they made their way to the Ogilvy’s. Rather than go into the busy shop, Draco rang the doorbell on the door at the side.
“Sorry; more stairs,” he whispered, before a young wizard with slicked-back hair answered the door. Draco felt, rather than saw, Potter’s amused glance in his direction. If the wizard’s hair were fair rather than dark, he would be the spitting image of Draco at school.

Despite the stairs, Potter’s shoulders lifted and he held his head higher once they were inside. The Draco look-alike led them to a large room where several wizards and witches were assembling kits – ball sets, but Quidditch leathers and brooms, too.

“Why, Harry Potter, what a pleasure to have you in our humble offices,” a thin wizard said, crossing the room to shake Potter’s hand. “Nick Ogilvy, at your service.” He gave Draco a sniffy glance, a small almost-nod of the head, and then turned back to Potter.

“Draco here is giving me the most fascinating introduction to the world of Snitches,” Potter said, smiling broadly enough to show his teeth. Draco stared at him. “I’ve already had a glimpse of his workshop, but he spoke in such high terms of the work you do here at Ogilvy and Taylors, I knew I had to see it for myself.”

Potter was, in Draco’s opinion, laying it on a bit thick, but Ogilvy plumped himself up like a Fwooper and even let some of his smile wander over in Draco’s direction.

“Let me show you what we do! Of course, we deal with more than just Snitches…”

Potter let himself be taken on a tour – really only a walk around the room – while Draco trailed behind. The wizards might be snooty at Ogilvy’s, but there were, Draco noticed, all wearing gloves when they handled the balls.

*  

In contrast to Ogilvy’s, Henley’s was based in a series of small rooms in an old warehouse in West London. It was also staffed by a mix of men and women, and there Draco was greeted just as warmly as Potter.

At Wright’s, all the sporting goods were stored and packaged up in an old factory, with a short witch overseeing all the work from an observation booth at the top of the building. In all three places, the workers wore gloves.

“But at Henley’s it would be possible to take them off,” Potter pointed out. “Anything could happen in those rooms.”

“Did you see how busy they were? I can’t imagine that they’d have the time.”

“It wouldn’t take long.”

Draco liked Maria, who ran Henley’s. She always treated him well, and she’d even offered them both a cup a tea. “I just—”

“I know. She was nice, Maria, wasn’t she? But it could be anyone there. I’ll get Ron to have a look at their employees for me.”

“Weasley’s still an Auror, then?”

“For now. It’s a dangerous job and—” Potter lowered his voice. “Between you, me, and this lamppost, I think Hermione might be pregnant. Ron’s had a bit of a… scared look about him, recently. Well, scared and happy, in a dreamy kind of way.”
Draco had no experience of such things, and they walked on for a while. He noticed that Potter was walking with a slight limp, and hadn’t been that morning. “If I were you, I’d see what Weasley can find out, then visit the teams on your list. There are plenty of people with access to a Snitch before a match.”

“Come with me, again,” Potter stopped in the street, reaching out to touch Draco’s arm. His cheeks reddened up as he asked. “It helps having you along. And you… you’re better company than half the people I work with. I… I quite like having you around.”

“You do?” Draco spoke so rarely to other people that he doubted it, somehow. Remembering how smoothly Potter had handled Ogilvy, it was more likely that Potter knew what to say to keep Draco around as an unpaid consultant.

“Tomorrow, then?” Potter gazed at Draco with his earnest puppy expression. “I can meet you in Wimbourne, if you want. Dorset should be nice, this time of year.”

“I—” Draco didn’t know what to say. He thought of his workshop, of the work left to do to finish his current batch of Snitches. “Maybe… tomorrow afternoon? I do need to get some work done.”

Potter’s face lit up. “Tomorrow afternoon. Two? I’ll owl you the details.”

Draco nodded, then watched Potter limp off to the end of the street before he turned to walk the rest of the way home himself.

* 

*Smooth out the sharp edges, sparks flying.*

Like the pieces of a puzzle, each part of the Snitch lay complete and yet incomplete. Draco began to pump the pedal of the grinder with his foot, until the band was running smoothly, its surface a whirring black blur. He lowered his safety mask down to his eyes and the world closed into the box of vision directly in front of him. He picked up the first piece, one of the casing panels, and began to smooth the rough edges. Sparks flew up, an arc of light and metal accompanied by the keening of the metal. Draco kept moving his foot, the steady rhythm matching his heartbeat.

* 

Draco stared out at the drizzle misting up the street outside his workshop. Despite the weather, Draco felt buoyant as prepared to leave for Wimbourne.

He Apparated into a heavy deluge of rain, thick drops hammering down and the world a dark grey. Draco was forced to seek shelter under a Muggle bus stop.

“I didn’t take you for a bus person,” Potter said, by way of greeting. He held an oversized Muggle umbrella in his hands, and was grinning. “I bet you don’t even take the Knight Bus, do you?”

Draco didn’t, but that was more due to the fact that you have to go out to need a bus, and Draco generally stayed at home, only really Flooing or Apparating if he needed to see one of his suppliers.

“If I’ve got a stick up my bum, you’ve got an irrepressible desire to insult those around you,” Draco said, scowling. “Although insult is too severe a word for what you do. Mildly irritate, perhaps.”

“Would you like to be mildly irritated under this umbrella, while we make our way to the stadium? The brolly’s big enough for both of us, and there’s a hidden Umbrella Charm so you should stay dry.” Potter gave a little half-bow, raindrops plopping down from the lowered side of the umbrella.
Draco shook his head at Potter’s levity, but stepped under the umbrella, anyway. He could feel the heat from Potter’s side as they stood close while Draco checked that he was covered by the charm. Potter’s clothes, Draco noticed, were clean. Perhaps Potter made more of an effort when visiting a professional Quidditch team.

“I don’t normally deal with the teams directly,” Draco said, suddenly nervous. “I’m not sure what reception I’ll get.”

Potter stopped walking, jostling Draco with his umbrella-holding hand. Someone swore behind them, then walked around still muttering to themselves about idiots on the pavement. Potter did seem sometimes to find it difficult to walk and talk. “You’re very highly respected, you know.”

Draco snorted. “There’s a reason I don’t go out, much. People don’t just forget.”

“You made the Snitch that was caught to win the last world cup. I spent the morning talking to the manager at the Wasps, and he sounded excited to get to meet you.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

The rain had abated slightly by the time Harry and Draco had walked past the last of the houses. The fields probably looked bright in the summer, but most were now brown and bare. They crossed a river, swollen and fast-moving in the rain, and didn’t stop until they reached a gap in the hedgerow, which covered a rusty manhole cover. Draco felt each thud of Potter’s feet on the ground, felt the vibration of it through his side; Potter’s limp was starting up again.

“Here we are,” Potter said. He sounded far too cheerful for such a dreary day. He touched his wand to the manhole cover, and a stadium unfolded before their eyes, spectator stands and Quaffle hoops springing up to the sky. Mike Rumsey, the team manager, was at the door to welcome them. He shook Potter’s hand, but then turned to Draco and shook his just as warmly.

“Such a pleasure to meet you, Mr Malfoy. I’ve admired your work for years.”

The stairs leading to the below ground-level floor didn’t have a railing, and Draco glanced over at Potter. He made his decision without thinking: he stepped towards Potter, offering him a discreet corner of his arm to hold onto. Making their way down behind Mike, Potter hesitated for the briefest of moments then grabbed Draco’s elbow. His fingers gripped Draco’s arm firmly as they made their way down half a dozen steps. At the bottom Potter let go wordlessly, and stepped forwards to join Mike. If Draco’s arm hadn’t still felt the twinge of Potter’s hand, Draco might have doubted that it had ever been there.

Draco followed Mike and Potter through a warren of corridors until they reached an equipment storage room.

“We have an Owl room at the side of the stadium, upstairs. Clare and Johnny here are responsible for sorting through the mail, while Harris, Liz, and Barnaby are the Equipment Team. I’ve set aside a room for interviews, but I thought you might like to see how we store our balls first.”

“No one else would get this treatment,” Draco whispered.

“Shush. And of course they would.”

“Aurors, maybe. I bet your boss knows just what he’s doing, sending you out to investigate this.”
“Draco, no one wants to lose their right to play in the league. It’s really not just me.”

“If you say so, O mighty one.”

The balls were kept in a series of long shallow lockers, and only Equipment Team had the keys. There were practice balls – for which the Snitch was charmed slightly differently, being effectively resettable. Draco examined these Snitches, but although he winced at a bent wing (and offered to repair it) he didn’t see anything amiss.

“Are you here about that match people say we didn’t really win?” Barnaby asked. “Because we won that match, fair and square. And if you think it’s anything to do with the balls, the League matches use balls approved by the Ministry of Sport and Games.”

“Approved? And yes, we are looking into the matches. I’m only gathering information though; I’ve not yet come to any conclusions about whether or not anyone has been cheating.” Potter’s earnestness seemed to be channelled into a sincerity that warmed even Draco, who wasn’t even the person it was directed towards. “But I do have some questions.” Potter pulled a folded piece of parchment from his pocket, covered in his scrawling writing. Draco peeked over Potter’s shoulder; it appeared to be a shopping list. “Is it possible that someone could swap one out with a practice ball?”

Barnaby shook his head. “Not really. We keep a running inventory of all the balls used.”

“And there are always two of us who get the balls out together, and we keep track of how often they’re used,” Liz added.

“How about on the way to the game itself? How are they approved? What happens?”

“The balls are kept locked up, and then we bring them out before the match to make sure they are in full working order—”

“How do you check?” Draco asked.

“We look them over, then let them out for a minute or two.”

Draco and Potter exchanged looks. “And who is present for these checks?” Potter asked.

“At least two of the team – I mean us, the equipment team – and Mike. And then someone from the other team, to make sure it’s all above board. Oh, and sometimes the person from the League.”

“Only sometimes?” Potter asked, his voice sharp.

“The official was there for the match you’re talking about,” Barnaby said. His voice was getting louder.

Potter smiled. “That’s interesting.” He made a note on his parchment. “You’re being very helpful, thank you.”

Barnaby looked slightly mollified. “After that we lock them up again. The next time we open the box is at the beginning of the match.”

“What happens if you do find a defective ball?” Draco asked. “Not that any of my Snitches are defective, of course.”

Liz started. “I’d forgotten that it’s you who make the Snitches. They are very good.” She looked down at the Snitch with the broken wing and blushed. “Sorry about that one.”
“No matter,” Draco said, although it did, to him.

Harris, an older wizard with a long white beard spoke up next. “The League official has spare balls, just in case someone does find a defective ball, or if the other team objects to the set provided.”

“And were the balls replaced for that match – on July 5th?” Potter’s voice was very calm, but Draco caught the tremor in his leg.

Harris frowned, then gestured to Liz who fetched a thick book from a cupboard in a corner.

“They were,” she said. “You don’t think that—”

“We’re keeping all options open at the moment,” Potter said. “But thank you, that’s all very useful information.”

* 

Back outside and once again in the stinging rain, Draco sheltered under Potter’s umbrella once more. “Well, that was interesting.”

“Wasn’t it?” Potter frowned. “I know all the regulations on ball size and weight, but I hadn’t thought too clearly about where the balls came from, or how they were looked after. I am very interested in this ball swap: did it happen in the other matches?” He swayed, his body leaning into Draco’s.

“Do you need to sit down? Your le—”

“I’m fine,” Potter said. “Really, I am.”

“Cup of tea and something to eat, then? I’m hungry.” Draco wasn’t actually that hungry, but the tremor he’d seen in Potter’s leg may have been to do with more than excitement, because it hadn’t gone away since they’d left the Wasps’ stadium.

“I—Yes, that would be good.”

They found a cafe in town, with pastel bunting and fairy lights around the door. Draco normally avoided such places because the people who ran them tended to be overly friendly, but Potter was drawn in by a cake display. He always did have a sweet tooth, if Draco remembered correctly.

“This—” Potter chewed and swallowed. “This is good. Do you want some?” He pushed his plate of chocolate cake towards Draco who shook his head. Potter pulled his plate back and devoured the rest of the cake, leaving a wake of crumbs on his clothes and a smear of chocolate on his chin.

“I don’t remember you being such a messy eater.”

“S’rry.” Potter dabbed at his chin. “Hermione’s always telling me off, although I don’t see how she can, seeing as she’s married to Ron and he eats like a pig.”

For possibly the first time in his life, Draco found himself agreeing with Potter’s frizzy-haired friend. Glancing down, Draco saw that Potter’s scrap of parchment lay on the table between them. Maybe that’s why Potter’s clothes had been clean. He’d run out of food.

“I assume that you plan on checking whether the other teams also had a ball replacement before play?”

“It’s one possibility, isn’t it? I also want to know exactly who had access to the balls in each place.”
“Getting your friend Weasley to help out again, are you?”

Potter flushed. “Maybe.”

“If those are the kind of resources needed to investigate this, I don’t understand why it isn’t someone from the Ministry in charge.”

Potter paused, before leaning forward. “Don’t you remember what the younger wizard said? All the League balls come from the Ministry. What if—?”

“Ah! A bit of corruption. It’s been a while since we’ve had some of that.” Since Potter and his friends had set about transforming the Ministry, tales of injustices had died down considerably.

“Corruption, cheating, revenge: this could be due to any one of a number of reasons.” Potter sighed and stared morosely at his cup of tea. “Five Stadiums. All the ground staff. And that’s not even the players or officials! This is going to take ages to sort, isn’t it?”

“Can we narrow down who we talk to?” A thrill of the impossible went through Draco at his mention of we. He still couldn’t quite believe that he was sitting drinking tea with Harry Potter, or that he was helping him.

“Yes and no. I don’t want to miss anything.”

As they were getting ready to leave, Draco noticed that Potter’s face seemed looser around the eyes, as though he’d been tense before. Tense, or in pain.

*  

Potter Firecalled that night. “I’ve arranged to visit the Appleby Arrows and the Montrose Magpies tomorrow. I want to find out if the balls were replaced.”

“I need to do some work,” Draco said.

“We are working.”

“My work, you idiot.” Draco held his breath as he realised he’d said that last bit out loud. Potter didn’t seem to mind, though, so he continued. “The kind that pays. Or rather, that pays me.”

“Oh.” Potter’s face fell. “I had hoped you could come with me when I visited the other teams.”

“I’ll come with you if I can, but I can’t spend every day out with you.”

“I can ask about getting you paid as a consultant, if that’s—”

“It’s not about the money.” That was only a small lie: Draco did need to get paid, but mainly he always felt… incomplete until his latest order of Snitches was finished. “I’ve got to maintain my professional reputation: I don’t want to be late with this order.”

Potter’s ghostly green face nodded silently.

“Look, I’ll try to keep my afternoons free. You can owl or Floo if you need me. How does that sound?”

“Yeah, fine. I’ll visit the Arrows without you, but maybe I can pick your brains about it afterwards.”

“If you really want my help, I suggest you get me access to those Snitches.”
“I’ll keep trying.” Potter’s face twisted. “Dunbar’s being an arse about it, though.”

As the fire died down Draco turned away in frustration. Damn Potter, coming and disturbing his peace and routine. Because now Draco had something else that felt incomplete. And there was nothing he could do about it, he needed to finish his own work before worrying about Potter’s.

* 

_Hold it up to the light._

Draco squinted, focused entirely on the Snitch casing and the join where it closed shut. The alignment, he could see, was not quite right, and he returned the Snitch to his felt-covered work top, and gave it two deft taps with the hammer before holding it aloft again. This time, as he turned it, the join was so tight it was almost invisible. Satisfaction spread like warmth through him, and he put it down and turned to the next Snitch. None would leave his workshop until he was satisfied that they were perfect.

A knock at the door disturbed Draco. Rather than being startled though, he looked up knowing it would be Potter. He wasn’t disappointed to see the usual scruffy hair and messy clothes. It appeared that Potter had managed to restock his egg supply since he’d last visited.

“I hope you don’t mind me interrupting, I know that you’re busy. But I thought that rather than Flooing I could pop by, fill you in on what happened this morning.”

Draco put his hammer down. “I’ve got a bit more to do here.” He nodded down at the Snitch-casings. “If you don’t mind waiting for me to finish up here, I can come out for the afternoon—”

“Brilliant!” Potter beamed. “I was hoping you’d say that. I don’t have to be at Montrose for an hour or two, and I’d like it if you could be there, too. Do you mind if I watch? It’s fascinating, watching you work.”

“No at all.”

Draco took a centring breath, then returned to the casings. The trick, he found, was to ensure that they closed without any gaps at all. A snitch should snap shut so tightly that unless one knew what to look for, the fact that they could open at all would remain a secret.

As Draco worked he was aware of Potter in the room, first standing, then finding a stool to his left and sitting down. Draco’s focus on his work remained tight, yet Potter was always there, like a shadow at the edge of his line of sight. No, not a shadow – a pair of eyes, watching him. The back of Draco’s neck grew tight under Potter’s scrutiny, and a fine layer of sweat built on his brow as he tapped away.

He lined the Snitch casings up in a neat row, then covered them with a piece of cloth. Draco draped them slowly, taking the time to take a few deep breaths again. When he turned back to Potter, it was to find him still staring intently.

“You should bring your gloves with you,” Potter said. “You know, in case you have to examine a Snitch.”

Draco rubbed his hands together, and the leather creaked. Potter’s eyes flew to the gloves. What was it with the gloves? Maybe Potter was reminded of the creak of Quidditch leathers, or maybe it was all in Draco’s mind. He started to tug his gloves off.
Potter tore his eyes away from Draco’s gloves. “C’mon. Let me buy you a sandwich while I fill you in on this morning.”

*

The trees swayed in a light breeze as they walked through the park, and Draco hugged his coat a little closer. Draco’s hands were sensitive to cold weather, probably due to the amount of time they spent getting hot and sweaty while he worked, but still he regretted that it wasn’t a little cooler. It would have been… interesting to check Potter’s reactions to his other pairs of gloves.

“So what happened at the Arrows this morning?”

“Well, they’re a much smaller business than the Wasps. But it was fairly similar. And the balls were switched before the match.”

“Did you find out who the official was?”

“Oh yes. David Inkledrum, who also—”

“Signed off the ball switch for the Wasps?”

Potter nodded. “Let’s see what the Magpies can tell us.”

The set-up at the Montrose Magpies’ stadium varied in a few details from that at the Wasps, the greatest being that the team coach was waiting for them in the equipment room.

“Harry!”

Potter grinned. “Seamus! It’s good to see you! What are you doing here?”

“I’m the coach here.” Finnigan, as Draco remembered him from school, caught sight of Draco behind Potter, and his face darkened.

“Draco’s helping me out,” Potter said. Finnigan’s eyes widened at the use of Draco’s first name, but he kept his questions to himself. “I’m interested in what happened in the lead up to your match against the Wigtown Wanderers.”

Finnigan groaned. “Not you as well! I had a reporter sniffing around here earlier this week.”

“All the better reason to get this cleared up as soon as possible, wouldn’t you say?”

“We won fair and square.”

“I wondered about the balls. Did you use yours, or were they switched for League balls before the match?”

“I’d have to check.” Finnigan’s smile faded, and he frowned. “I can’t keep track of what happens at each match.”

“When we visited the Magpies, they kept a record of which balls were used for every match. Do you do the same?”

“Yes; exactly. I’ll get Mona to have a look and owl you the details if you want.”

“That would be great.”
“So, Harry, how are you? Still playing Quidditch? We should arrange a friendly some time.”

Draco expected Potter to say something, to interrupt or point to his knee. But Potter merely nodded, a rigid smile fixed on his face.

Seamus kept on, oblivious. “Bet you could show our Seeker a thing or—”

“We probably need to be going, don’t we, Harry?” Draco forced himself to use Potter’s first name, and was rewarded with a shocked glance. Finnigan, too, stared at Draco as though he’d just danced a can can. “It was delightful seeing you again, Finnigan, but come on, Harry. We need to get to the… the Snidget reserve, before it gets dark.”

Potter closed his mouth – which was dangling open – and nodded. “Yes. Yes, the reserve. You did say the Snidgets are a sight to behold. I’d be honoured to see them.”

*I*

“I would like to see the Snidgets, you know,” Potter said when they left.

They’d only ended up staying inside for five or so minutes but Draco had formed the distinct impression that their presence wasn’t exactly welcome. Or maybe it was his that wasn’t; Finnigan had been chatty with Potter.

Draco thought of Potter surrounded by a wheeling flock of Snidgets. It seemed as though it would be right, somehow. Potter was as wild as they were, in his own way. It was unlikely that Potter would take him up on the offer, but if there was a chance... “I’d love to see you with them. Er, I mean, I’d love you to see them.”

Draco decided to hold out his hand to Side-Along before he started babbling about the wind in Potter’s hair. The world spun and went dark as they Apparated back to Draco’s flat, and Potter stumbled as they arrived. Draco steadied him, then busied himself with making tea rather than see the expression on Potter’s face. “I only said that about the Snidget reserve to shut him up. But we can go. I’d like to. With you. I need to visit it this week, anyway.” Merlin, but something about Potter made him a mess.

“Seamus isn’t that bad. Just a bit eager.”

Draco thought that rich, coming from Potter who really should have an eager puppy as a Patronus. He ignored a flutter of irritation at Potter turning the conversation away from the Snidget reserve. “You haven’t told him, have you, about your knee?”

Potter sighed. “I don’t see Seamus much anymore. Mostly I see Ron and Hermione. And Luna, of course.”

Draco didn’t understand why there was anything of course about Potter seeing the Lovegood girl, but he did have a vague recollection that she’d been one of Potter’s little gang at school. He saw her at the Snidget reserve sometimes, and knew she was some kind of naturalist now. He remembered, with considerable unease, how she’d been, lost and alone in the cellar at the manor. An apology seemed hollow, but the one time they’d spoken since she’d accepted it then skipped off to look at the birds.

The kettle whistled, interrupting Draco’s train of thought. He used the hot water to warm a teapot, then set the tea to steep.
When he returned to the table with the teapot, Potter had opened the file and was making some notes. Draco hesitated, but decided to ask the question foremost in his mind, anyway. “How many people know about your injury?”

“Oh.” Potter looked away, his voice growing quiet and the quill stilling in his hand. “The people I used to work with. The medical staff who treated me. My friends – that is, Ron, Hermione, the Weasleys, and Luna. And, er, now you.”

“I don’t mean to intrude.”

Potter looked back at him and gave a crooked little smile. “I don’t mind. I did tell you, after all. It’s not that I’m ashamed of my knee, or anything like that.” He picked up his empty tea cup and turned it around in his hands. “It’s more… I don’t know. I’ve lived so much of my life under the public eye. Well, since I’ve been in the wizarding world.” The cup bobbed in the air. “I definitely wasn’t very… visible before that. And when I got injured it was… well, it was like a chance to take a bit of a back seat.”

“You didn’t have to live up to anyone’s expectations anymore.”

“Something like that.” Potter looked embarrassed. “I’d had so much of my life pored over, I just felt… I didn’t see why I should share this, too.” He sighed. “It isn’t easy.”

Draco wasn’t clear if it was living with the injury that wasn’t easy, or hiding away, or keeping it all secret. He looked at Potter’s frown, at the way he was twisting the cup, and decided not to push it any further.

“So. Inkledrum then. What do you think?”

Potter put the cup back on the table, his mouth loosening into an almost-smile at the change of topic. It softened his whole face when he smiled, and Draco always felt his own mood lift a little, too. “I think he’s definitely a suspect. But I also think I need some more information. I’m still waiting to hear back from Ron, and I wonder if he’ll turn up anything useful. But…”

“Yes?”

“I do think that we need to go to the Ministry.”

Draco’s stomach sank. “The Ministry?”

Potter nodded. “I don’t know how you feel about going there, but I want to interview David Inkledrum.”

Draco thought of dark corridors and formidable chambers. He remembered gaggles of journalists and the agony of being put on trial. “What about your information from Weasley?” he asked, trying to think of a way out of having to go back.

Potter shrugged. “I want to keep the momentum going. His information will come when it comes. Look, you don’t have to come if you don’t want to.”

Draco was torn. He was curious about this Inkledrum character, but he really had no love lost for the Ministry, reforms or no.

“I would like it if you could come,” Potter said. “I find having you there keeps me… well, it’s not just about me, then, is it? I feel that it’s easier to get on with my job. Plus I’d be interested to hear what you think of him.”
“I…” Every part of Draco was saying that he should say no, that he should leave Potter to this adventure on his own. But then he remembered the grimace Potter had worn while Finnigan was talking to him. What would it take for Potter to return to the Ministry where presumably some people did know about his injury? He imagined that, although Potter hadn’t said it, the pity of others was the hardest to bear. “I’ll come. But only if you’ll come with me to the Snidget reserve once we’ve finished this tea.”

A broad smile lit Potter’s face. “Is that the best bargaining tool you’ve got? I’d love to see the Snidgets!”

An answering grin lifted Draco’s face; despite his reservations about returning to the Ministry, he was excited to show Potter the Snidgets.

“They are the most magical little creatures. You’ll never look at a Snitch, or Quidditch, the same again, you know.” Draco paused, suddenly worried that Potter might expect a full tour of the reserve. “I do need to make some sketches but I think the birds are interesting enough that you can have a wander around without needing me as a guide.”

* 

The Snidget reserve – disguised as an old quarry to Muggles – was buried deep in the Somerset countryside. Draco and Potter Apparated to the edge of the reserve, but when Draco produced a couple of brooms to take them further, Potter paled and shook his head. In the end they had to walk to get in. After a few minutes, Draco was aware of Potter beginning to limp beside him, but as Potter had refused to fly and didn’t mention anything about his knee, Draco said nothing.

Once they’d walked clear of the reserve boundaries, a small flock of wheeling, whirring Snidgets came to investigate their visitors. Magical wards kept them safe from most predators, and they’d become curious in their safety. Potter laughed as they flew around his head.

Draco smiled. The Snidgets were exhilarating to be around. Rather like eager little puppy dogs.

“Tell me about Snidgets,” Potter said, his eyes alight as he followed them through the air.

“Quidditch – or rather, the game that preceded it – was first played with Quaffles, then with Bludgers, too. Snitches were the last ball to be added.” Draco glanced over at Potter. “How much of this do you know already?”

“I’ve read Quidditch Through the Ages,” Potter said, ducking as a bird flew near enough to see the red gleam of its eyes. “But I can’t remember all the details.”

Potter looked bigger, somehow, in the bright, wide outdoors. His face was less pale than normal. Draco found himself staring at his mouth, at the way it quirked when he was being self-deprecating. He always seemed to look so surprised and pleased, all at once. It was… endearing.

Draco realised that he was staring, and hastily launched into an answer. “It all started in about the thirteenth century, when someone threw a Snidget into a Quidditch match. He said he’d award 150 Galleons to the person who caught it.”

Potter whistled. “That must have been a fortune back then! It still is, now.” The birds, who’d begun to lose interest, came back at Potter’s whistle. They moved in all directions: up, down, diagonal and horizontal slices through the air that defied prediction.

“It was carnage, apparently. Modesty Rbnott – who this reserve is named for – managed to save that Snidget, although she got fined for her troubles. Anyway, after that Snidgets became part of the
game. I can almost understand; I’ve had that thrill from chasing the hint of gold, from flying high and low in search of the Snitch. Except that Snidgets are a lot more fragile than Snitches.”

“Catching them…”

“Killed them. By the mid-fourteenth century they were endangered. But luckily Bowman Wright invented the Snitch.”

“So it’s a direct replacement?”

“Yes. Hence me wanting to observe them every chance I get. The enchantments used to mimic their flight patterns are tricky, to say the least. During my apprenticeship with Edith Ramsbottom, the old Master Snitch-Maker, I sat through many a lecture on the delicate movements, speed, and energetic turns of the Snidget. My true appreciation of the marvel of these small birds though, didn’t come until I saw them for myself.”

Draco found a small hillock, and made himself comfortable. He opened his notebook, then tried to focus on the movements of the small golden birds flying around him, their wings ablur. Potter seemed to understand his need for quiet, and wandered off.

Although Draco was supposed to have cleared his mind to avoid distractions, he was always aware of Potter’s figure in the distance. When he’d been younger, straining to beat Potter to the Snitch, Draco had never truly considered what he was chasing. Other than glory, that was, or revenge, or whatever other stories he had told himself in those days. But maybe what he’d been chasing had been something else entirely.

A Snidget twisted in midair in front of him, and as it darted off he made a few notes and amended the sketch he had been making. He sighed. It had taken years until he was trusted enough to be given the pass that allowed him onto the reserve. He’d never brought a guest before, though. Even now when he came he often felt overwhelmed by how little he knew and how much he still had to learn.

Draco put his pencil down again, and hugged his knees as he watched a golden fluffball flying in circles around one of its young. Ramsbottom had seemed besotted with the Snidgets, but then Draco saw that for what it was: professional admiration. He missed her, sometimes, but she’d long since retired to warmer climes and left the business in his hands.

“These owls. Such large and clumsy birds,” she would say in her rare letters. “But needs must.”

Matching the flight patterns of the Snitch to the Snidget as accurately as possible was one of the secrets to his trade, and refreshing his memory of their movements was an important part of his craft.

Did Potter find these birds as fascinating? He glanced over. Potter was down by a boggy bit of land, picking his way across the firmer tufts with care. He seemed lost in thoughts, but his shoulders looked relaxed rather than slightly hunched as they had been earlier. The wind had picked up and Potter’s hair looked rather like something a bird would nest in.

Draco smiled as he finished his sketches, then packed up his belongings. He may not have known the beauty of Snidgets when young, but perhaps he had always appreciated the freedom of flying through the air. And that was something he’d shared with Potter, all those years ago.

Potter was standing under a tree, peering up through the branches at a small nest.

“It’s empty now,” Draco said. “Wrong time of year.”

Potter turned and smiled, and Draco smiled back. “They really are amazing, aren’t they?” Potter’s
eye were bright. “I’ve never seen anything quite like them before.” He laughed. “Apart from Snitches, of course.”

“When I first came here I found myself wanting to reach out and catch them,” Draco admitted, a little ruefully.

Potter thrust his hands into his pockets and looked guilty. “Oh, that’s a relief! I thought it was a bit of a monster, wanting to do just that.”

“There’s nothing monstrous about you. You’re far too puppy-like for that.”

“Puppy-like? What do you—”

“Oh goodness, it is getting late, isn’t it?” Draco said before Potter could question him any further about puppies.

Potter cast a sceptical eye at the horizon. “Sun’s not setting yet.”

“No, and we don’t want to disturb the Snitches when they roost. Besides,” Draco added a little more convincingly, “I’m getting tired.”

Draco had noticed that Potter’s limp was more pronounced, although out here, amongst the birds, Potter seemed more… free, than normal.

With a sigh Potter nodded, and they headed back to the edge of the reserve.

When they’d almost reached the point at which they could Apparate away, Potter stopped to get his breath back and rest his leg. He sat on a fallen tree and rubbed at his knee. He looked pale even with the slight touch of colour the walking had given him.

“Sorry,” he said. “Did I mention that it seizing up sometimes?”

“It’s fine—” Draco stopped, sure he’d heard a voice calling out. He turned to see a figure in the distance, waving.

“Harrryyyy!”

The figure came nearer, and Draco saw that it was Luna Lovegood, running towards them.

“Harry! Draco! Fancy seeing you here.” She huffed and clutched her side. “Have you been to see the Snidgets? Aren’t they wonderful? Harry, you didn’t tell me that you were interested in them.”

“Er, hi, Luna,” Potter said. “I didn’t know that you were coming here today.”

“Nor did I! But it felt right. Are you going home now?”

Potter nodded.

“Brilliant! Is your knee acting up? We can go together if you want.”

Potter looked over at Draco. “I… I suppose.”

“It was nice seeing you, too, Draco. You’re looking less pale than the last time I saw you, and your Nargles have disappeared.”

Draco wasn’t sure what to say. “Thank you?”
“C’mon.” Luna held her hand out to Potter and pulled him up. “It’s your turn to cook tonight.”

They left gently bickering about whose turn it actually was to cook. Just before they Disapparated, Potter turned and waved at Draco, a look of what Draco decided was apology on his face. They disappeared with a pop, and Draco was left standing next to the fallen tree with only the far-off glints of gold from the Snidgets as company.

So that was why Luna Lovegood was Potter’s friend. His ‘of course’. Draco couldn’t account for the way his feet felt heavy, or the way his insides empty all of a sudden, as he made his way home.

* 

Grand obsidian stairs rose in front of them and curved around to the right. The room where Draco had been tried was out of sight, swallowed into darkness at their top. Draco and Harry stood at the base, side by side. Without a word, Harry reached for Draco’s arm and together they made their way up. About halfway to the top, Harry stumbled and Draco put his arm around him and held onto his hand instead.

Harry felt warm and solid. He was so close that Draco could smell him, could inhale the woody heat of him.

Draco woke up, blinking in confusion. The dream had felt so real: the stairs, Potter, the stumble. Draco sighed and rubbed his eyes. The room was still dark; rain pattered down softly. His anxiety about returning to the Ministry was giving him nightmares, it seemed.

Draco tried to go back to sleep, reflecting that it hadn’t felt quite like a nightmare to have Harry in his arms. Harry, not Potter.

* 

Join and engrave and polish.

The many parts of the Snitches were laid out in front of him: the casing, the perfectly-cut inner gears and balances, and the delicate, frond-like wings. This part of the process was one of his favourites, when the hours he had spent came together to become what was recognisably a Snitch. Using slender tweezers Draco placed the parts together, his hands remaining steady throughout. Who would have thought that this was the lasting gift of his hellish youth, that he could control his body in this fashion, betray no movement he didn’t intend? It had been as though fear, faced so utterly, had left him with a physical calm that nothing could shake.

Once all the intricate pieces were joined, Draco gave the Snitch an experimental blow, the touch of his breath causing the wings to shiver and lift even without the enchantments that would enable it to fly. He ran a finger over the metal, and through the leather of his gloves felt the faintest of bumps; one that shouldn’t be there. Holding the Snitch at an angle so the he could see the crooked point of the join, Draco selected his smallest hammer, one that came to a fine but dull point, and gently tapped the bubble of gold at the base of the wing. He held it up to the light and repeated the process once, twice more.

The body of the Snitch bore a series of lines, like a smile of horizontal teeth below the sweeping eyelashes of the wings. Other raised lines marked out what Draco thought of eyebrows, moustaches or mouths, depending on his mood. Each Snitch felt as though it were its own person: some lay cheeky in his palm, others sat with dignity. And yet Draco prided himself on the unvarying standard of his work, on the fact that everything he produced was dependable and of the highest quality. With care, Draco set his foot to pump once more, this time to power the small engraving tool with which
he added the final details before the Snitch was ready for enchanting.

* 

Unlike in Draco’s dream, in actual fact there were no stairs to climb in the Ministry. Potter looked perfectly at ease in the lift. His robes were immaculate. Draco found himself wondering how Potter and Luna had got together.

The Department for Magical Games and Sport and the League shared office space on Level 7.

“Why isn’t Quabble based here, too?”

“We’re supposed to be impartial.”

“You mean you’re amateurs?”

“Don’t even get me started on the strange distinctions between all of these groups. I’m still trying to work them all out.”

They found David Inkledrum in a cubicle, filling out some forms.

“Oh.” He stared at them. “Sorry,” he added. “I wasn’t really expecting a visit from Harry Potter. Or…” it took him a few seconds to work out who Draco was. “Oh, goodness, or Draco Malfoy, too. Please do sit down.” He hastily fetched a couple of chairs from an empty cubicle nearby. “What can I do to help you two gentlemen?”

“We’re investigating the Snitches from a couple of recent Quidditch matches,” Potter said, giving the dates. “As I understand it, you were the League official in charge of checking the balls.”

“Yes! Well, that is to say, I did look at them.” He frowned. “There was something wrong with each of them.”

“Can I ask what?” Draco asked.

“Um, let me see. There was a dented Bludger, and a Snitch with a slightly crooked wing, and the stitching looked loose on—”

“A Snitch you say?” Draco immediately thought to the broken Snitch he’d brought home from the Wasps.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a tall, solidly built man walk through the door, see them, then turn and run. Beside him, Draco heard Potter rise.

“Dunbar!” Potter shouted. Everyone in the office turned to stare.

Inkledrum was looking up at Potter. “Dunbar Scunthorpe? From Quabble?” What’s he doing here?”

“That’s what I’d like to find out. Excuse me.” Potter rushed off with no sign of a limp.

“I saw him,” Inkledrum said. “At some Quidditch matches recently.”

“Which ones?”

“I—I can’t remember.” Inkledrum craned his neck to try and see where Potter had gone.

“I’d better go after him. You’ve been very helpful though, thank you.”
Draco found Potter in the corridor outside, no boss in evidence, but a rather tired looking Weasley at his side instead.

“He got away,” Potter said. “But I bumped into Ron. Draco, I think you’d better hear this.”

Potter had the tightness around his eyes that Draco associated with him having knee-difficulties, so he insisted that they sat down before finding out anything more. Weasley directed them to an empty office. Potter reached for Draco’s arm before he could offer it, and together they made their way to the second floor.

Once the door was shut, Weasley threw a file onto the table with a grim expression on his face.

“I wasn’t really expecting to find anything when Harry asked me to look into this.” He looked over at Potter. “Sorry for doubting you, mate.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Potter said. “Tell him what you found.”

“Harry asked me to look into the background of the people who worked at the main Quidditch supplies companies, and at a number of Quidditch teams. Most of what I found was pretty innocuous. Except for this.”

Weasley leant down, and pulled a photo out of the file. It showed a wedding party, and Draco looked up at him in confusion.

“So they’re connected? I don’t think it’s a crime to have friends.”

“Liz Bagman married Glenn Taylor, of Ogilvy and Taylor. They’ve both been borrowing substantial amounts from the Goblins—”

“How do you know that? Goblins never talk!”

“The ones at Gringotts don’t. There are others out there… freelancers.” Weasley shuddered. “You wouldn’t want to get messed up with them.”

“So this couple is getting into debt. Are you saying that they cheated to win some bets?”

“I considered that as a possibility. But then I noticed that Dunbar Scunthorpe was getting some rather large payments – or rather I noticed he’d suddenly come into a lot of Galleons. The Taylors are still in debt, as far as the word on the street goes. They could still be mixed up in this all somehow though.”

“You mean it was *Harry’s boss* who was cheating?”

“No wonder he wouldn’t let you near those Snitches, Draco.”
“And Inkledrum?”

“Clean, as far as I could tell—” Weasley’s wand vibrated. “We’ve got him!” He held out his hand. “Quick, you can come with me. They must have caught Scunthorpe.”

Where ever Draco was expecting to Apparate to, it wasn’t the other end of the corridor. They all arrived with a bump outside Ludo Bagman’s office.

* 

A scuffle could clearly be heard from inside, and Weasley burst through the door in full Auror-heroic mode. Draco and Potter followed a few steps behind: just in time to dodge a streak of red that flew past their heads and hit the wall with a bang.

Ludo Bagman stood behind his desk, his face a magnificent shade of magenta, his robes so magic-filled they floated around his body. He looked like a giant purple cloud of fury. Potter threw a shield up between Bagman and the rest of them, but not before one of Bagman’s stunners had hit him.

A cry of surprise escaped Potter’s lips and he fell backwards, straight into Draco’s arms. Together, they sank to the floor, while spells pinged through the air above them. The barrier sizzled and wavered as Potter’s eyes began to lose focus.

“Pot— Harry!” Draco didn’t know what to do. It had been years since he’d duelled or been caught up in a fight. Harry’s eyes fluttered shut, and the magical barrier faded. “Ennervate.”

“Don’t be so dramatic,” Harry said with a cough as Draco’s spell took effect. “It was only a stunner.”

The spells suddenly stopped, and instead of the crackle of magic, blasts, and shouting, a stream of swearing filled the air. Draco looked up to see Weasley stood over a now tied-up Bagman, looking very smug while Bagman protested loudly.

Two more Aurors stood in the corner, one holding Scunthorpe by the arm. Draco hadn’t even noticed him in the room when they’d first come in, but then so much had been happening. After a terse whispered conversation with Weasley, the Aurors led Scunthorpe and Bagman away.

“The paperwork on this is going to be a killer,” Weasley said with a groan. A thin trickle of blood ran down the side of his face.

“So maybe the fact that they were friends was an important detail,” Draco said.

Weasley snorted. “You think?” He touched his hand to his head and winced. “I can’t believe I was just attacked by the head of Games and Sports.” He turned his attention to Bagman’s desk, starting to look through the papers sitting there.

On the floor, Harry and Draco still sat entangled. After Harry blinked and groaned, shaking his head as though to clear it, Draco felt the tremulous sigh that went through him.

“Are you okay?”

“It was only a stunner. A vicious one, but harmless in the long run.” Potter patted his right leg, stretched out in front of him. “I’ve had worse, believe me. Although I could do with a rest.”

“I’ll help you get home to Luna.”
Harry laughed weakly. “Luna? I'm not sure if she'll be there... Once she disappeared for two months. Turned out she was exploring the Amazon basin.”

“But aren’t you two—”

Behind them, Weasley began to laugh: a soft, rolling laugh that cut through every bit of tension in the room. “Don’t tell me you thought those two were together? Oh my.” He laughed some more, then wiped tears from his eyes. “Wait ‘til I tell Hermione! Harry and Luna...” He started laughing again.

“What’s so funny?”

“Only there’s more chance of you and Harry getting tog—” Weasley’s eyes went comically wide as he took in Harry leaning into Draco, and then he closed them tight. He grunted as he stood up again. “I better go find someone to fix me up. You two... I think you two have some unfinished business.”

He did look pale, and seemed a little wobbly on his feet, but Weasley shook his head at the suggestion of any help. He left Harry and Draco alone in the silent room.

“What did he mean, unfinished business?” Draco asked.

“I... I don’t know.”

Harry – how could he be ‘Potter’ now? – was in his arms, as warm and solid and Draco had ever imagined him. Draco could smell a hint of rosemary and sandalwood that must be Harry’s shampoo or soap; Harry’s mess of hair was brushing his chin.

“Harry,” Draco said, surprised.

“Yes?”

“I’m thinking of you as Harry.” Draco couldn’t quite believe what he was saying.

Harry laughed, then groaned and shifted in discomfort. He burrowed deeper into Draco’s arms then sighed. “I could tell that you were still ‘Pottering’ me in your head. You do this little sneer when you say it.”

“I do? What about when I call you Harry?”

Slowly, Harry turned so they were facing one another properly. His eyes were filled with all their puppy-dog earnestness, his glasses skewed and his once-neat robes were in disarray. “Go on,” he said, his voice soft yet ragged, “I want to see: say my name.”

Draco was aware of just how close they were sat, of Harry’s weight and warmth still pressed against him. He took a breath then said the first sentence to come to mind. “Your glasses are on crooked, Harry.”

A smile spread over Harry’s face, soft and sweet, and a corresponding bloom of warmth filled Draco. He leaned closer, and the quiet huff of their breathing filled the room. He wanted to—

He remembered where they were. Surely once the excitement of catching Bagman had passed, this moment would fade away, too. “I—” Draco sat back and took a deep, long breath. “It’s been such a busy day.”

“You’ve only been here for half an hour.”
Draco exhaled, a little shakily. “You know what I mean.”

“Yeah,” Harry said, “I do.” He regarded Draco, for a moment, a questioning look in his eyes. With a sigh he turned and leant back into Draco. For a few minutes more they said nothing. Draco was excruciatingly aware of Harry’s body against his own. Still without speaking, Draco felt Harry’s fingers brush his own.

He knew that he should pull away, that this was the moment to walk away. And yet when Harry did it again, his fingers curling around Draco’s, seemingly of their own volition Draco squeezed back.

Weasley reappeared, his head no longer bleeding. He stopped short when he saw the two of them on the floor. “Obviously I wasn’t gone for long enough.”

“You should have hit your head harder,” Draco said. His heart was racing.

Weasley gave him a hard look. “We found Liz Bagman. When she heard her dad was in custody—”

“Yes?” Harry asked.

“I’m not having this conversation with two grown men sprawled on the floor.”

Draco’s bottom was growing a little numb, but Harry was warm and he didn’t want to let go. He wanted to know what happened next, but feared that if they moved everything would unravel, and he’d be left alone again.

Weasley had no such issues stepped forward to haul Harry to his feet, with Draco following quickly after. He missed the weight of Harry, leaning into him, and he trembled as hadn’t done for years at the loss of it. But then he felt the tentative touch of Harry’s fingers again, and threaded his own through them. He didn’t want to let go. Weasley’s eyes flicked down to their joined hands but his only reaction was a slight flaring of the nostrils. Draco felt a reluctant gratitude to him for not making a fuss.

“Turns out she and her husband were the ones behind the tampering. That is, they were the ones doing it – making a potion using players’ sweaty kits, and soaking the gloves in it before they wore them to handle the balls.”

Draco found it hard to focus on Weasley’s words, but Harry managed a response. “I thought the balls were switched?”

“That’s the thing. Dear old daddy was pushing that through, too. His daughter worked on the gloves, her husband on the replacement balls. It seems though that it was Ludo, not his daughter, driving this whole thing.”

“And Dunbar?”

Despite his interest in the strange fluttering feeling in his chest, and the heat of Harry’s hand in his own, Draco was interested to hear Weasley’s explanation.

“Bagman senior was paying him off to obfuscate the investigation.” Weasley stopped when he saw Draco’s expression. “What? I know long words. I couldn’t have a conversation with my wife otherwise. Speaking of which,” Weasley added, looking at Harry, “she wants you to come over to dinner tomorrow.” He paused, then sighed. “You can bring a guest if you want to.”

Draco realised that Weasley meant him. That he was being invited to dinner at a Weasley’s house. Dinner with the golden trio. Unbelievable.
Weasley moved towards the desk. “I need to get back – I only came in here to get a letter I noticed earlier. You two better get out of here.”

“I could help—” Harry began.

Weasley shook his head. “Go home, Harry.”

This time, Weasley took them to the Floo banks himself.

* * *

Draco found himself, still hand-in-hand with Harry, in a bright flat filled with paintings of animals. And birds. And sea creatures. Colours clashed, feathers and fronds and hooves all seemed to move in a riot of distraction. Whatever Draco had been about to say or do, he forgot. He let go of Harry’s hand and stared around in horror.

Harry gave him an apologetic smile. “Er, I’m staying with Luna for a bit.”

A bright pink seahorse regarded Draco from the nearest painting. It was, as far as Draco could see, a nonmagical painting, and yet as he walked across the room it seemed to follow him with his eyes. He turned his back to it.

“I suppose I should be glad that none of this is yours. How do you stand it?”

Harry shrugged. “You get used to it. But maybe… maybe it’s why I like your workshop so much. Everything’s so… focused.”

“It has to be.”

“No, it’s not that,” Harry said. “It’s you; you’re the one who’s focused. I— I like it.” The warm glint was in Harry’s eyes again, the one that made Draco want to step closer. So he did. The waving mass of creatures around them seemed to still.

“I—”

“Draco—”

Harry grasped Draco’s hand again, and then he was close enough that Draco could see the brilliant green of his eyes.

A loud clatter sounded behind them, and Draco’s heart rate shot up. He broke away from Harry as Luna landed through the Floo.

“Hello, boys,” she said, brushing herself down. She nodded at Draco. “Nice to see you again. She looked puzzled as she looked at Harry. “I thought you were working today, Harry?”

“I got hit by a Stunner.”

“Ooh, just like the bad old days? Were you in a fight?” She removed her coat and hung it on a stand painted like a giraffe.

“Sort of.”

“It’s a... lovely place you have here,” Draco said. He cast about for something to say. “Very vibrant.”
Luna beamed. “I’ve been collecting the artwork for a few years now. Actually, I did a few myself.”

Draco wasn’t at all surprised to hear this. “Are you staying for dinner?” Luna asked.

Draco glanced over at Harry, who smiled softly at him. “Yes,” he said. “I believe I am.”

As Luna lived in a one-bedroom flat, there was nowhere for Draco and Harry to retreat to, so instead they sat, side by side, on her purple-velvet sofa. She popped in and out of her kitchen, filling them in on her latest hunt for a rumoured breed of miniature Aethonon while she did so.

“Of course, it’s not a hunt exactly,” she said. “I’m not intending to harm them. I want to find them and see what I can find out.” A loud squawking came from the kitchen, and Draco wondered exactly what she was cooking. Luna laughed when she saw his face. “Oh don’t worry, that’s just my alarm! I’ll be back in a second. You do eat potato, don’t you?”

Potato sounded harmless, and Draco smiled in relief. “Yes.”

“Fantastic!”

As soon as the kitchen door was shut again, Draco turned to Harry. “I don’t know if I should be here.”

“I want you here.”

“But this isn’t you and me in my workshop. This is your friends… your life.”

Harry grasped Draco’s hand, sending a thrill all the way up his arm. He was staring at Draco, his eyes bright. They didn’t look earnest anymore… it was more than that. “I want to kiss you.”

Draco skin tingled all over; his breath seemed stuck in his chest. “I—”

The kitchen door swung open again. “How about broccoli?”

Draco stared over at her wildly. “Yes, broccoli’s fine.”

Luna grinned and ducked back into the kitchen.

This time, Draco didn’t say anything. Instead he leant forward, bringing his hand up to cup Harry’s face. Harry’s lips tasted of tea and heat. He kissed gently, as though worried that Draco might disappear. Draco wrapped an arm around Harry and pulled him in closer, never breaking the kiss.

They’d got to the point of running hands under t-shirts, and Harry had his hand a little lower when they were interrupted by a soft cough from the doorway. “Dinner is ready.”

Draco continued kissing Harry, but Harry pulled away with a sigh. Draco tore his eyes away from Harry’s pink and shiny lips to see Luna standing by the kitchen, a procession of dishes floating behind her. He reluctantly sat back, grabbing a cushion with a winking flamingo on it and placing it on his lap.

“Er,” Harry said.

“You’ll have plenty of time for that later, I’m sure,” Luna said. “But I don’t want the food to get cold.”

They sat around her table – painted lime green – as the dishes gentle plopped down between them.
“I made all your favourites, Harry,” Luna said. “Dribbling eggs, exploding mash, broccoli bombs, luck-dip lentils. And cheese.”

The lentils burbled menacingly, and a hoot of steam shot out from the mound of mash potatoes. As blob of potato sailed through the air and onto his plate, the state of Harry’s clothes suddenly made sense.

*

When Draco woke later that night, a hundred colours and pairs of eyes were staring at him. Harry slept on, warm in his arms. They were both squashed onto the purple sofa, the embroidered animal cushions scattered all over the floor. Draco shivered in the cold of the night, and pulled a rainbow-striped blanket over them both. The movement, though was enough to wake Harry.

Harry muttered something beneath his breath before opening his eyes. “I’m far too sleepy to move, but am I really on Luna’s sofa with you, Draco? This isn’t another dream?”

“I’m really here. Me, the creepy starfish, and the rest of the menagerie.”

Harry chuckled softly, tickling Draco’s neck. “The first few weeks I slept here, I would wake and be so confused I’d fall off the sofa. Once I accidentally blew up one of her pictures.”

“Accidentally?”

“I shot a spell at it. I was still half asleep, but a singing Manticore is a little much at 3 a.m.”

Draco wiggled his feet to pull the blanket over their legs properly. “How long have you lived here?”

“Oh. About… eight months now, I think.”

“Why so long?”

“I’ve got a house. But it’s full of ghosts… and memories. After the Aurors… I wanted to be around someone, and Luna needed someone help with her Pygmy Puffs. They kept breeding until she had a couple of hundred rolling around the place.” Harry shrugged against Draco’s chest. “It seemed a good idea at the time.”

“I never thought you’d end up alone,” Draco said. “You always had so many fans.”

“I don’t want fans.” Harry yawned. “I want people who like me for who I am.”

“Is that why you came to me?”

“I never thought you’d like me. But… you did at least treat me like a person. And I was intrigued.”

“You were willing to see past my past.” Draco’s voice quavered. “Even though you knew all about it.”

“I’ve learned you can only really know a person by being with them.” Harry picked up Draco’s hand and began to rub it with his thumb. “The rest is conjecture… assumption. So soft,” he said with a sigh.

“It’s the gloves—”

“Oh, yes; the gloves! Very nice.” Harry hummed with approval. “If you knew what the sight of them does to me.” His hands moved along Draco’s arm, making the hairs rise up and his skin shiver. “The
things you could do with them.”

“I’ll bear that in mind.” Draco turned, the sofa creaking, and met Harry in a kiss.

When they drifted back to sleep some time later, Draco felt wrapped in a cocoon of warmth. He was, he realised, happy.

* 

Layers of enchantment

The early morning sun lit Draco’s showroom, forming stripes on the far wall as it came through the shutters. He liked to do his Snitch enchanting at this hour, when the street outside was quiet and the world felt still and full of possibility.

Six Snitches sat the table in front of him, each resting on the specially indented box he would package them in, ready to send on to Quidditch Quality Supplies. Draco pulled on his gloves, then opened the book in which the Snitch enchantments had been recorded over the centuries. The lines came from Wright’s own notes, and then were scribbled on by generations of Snitch-makers. Ramsbottom’s heavy, angular writing filled some of the pages, and Draco’s own flowing script formed amendments, too.

The spells were applied in layers. There were those to strengthen the wings and joins, and those to keep the gears running smoothly. Others gave the Snitch its power, and yet others – the most complex – governed the way it flew, aiming to imitate a Snidget as much as possible.

At first, the Snitches stayed where they were, beginning to shine ever brighter until they were glowing with a clear golden light. As the layers of enchantment grew, so the room filled with the crackle and sharp scent of magic. Draco’s wand grew warm, even through his gloves, and he held the box firmly. The Snitches began to shake and quiver in their restraints, but Draco couldn’t free them, not until he’d finished.

Once all the flight enchantments were done, Draco was sweating. He ignored a droplet that threatened to go up his nose with every in-breath, instead focusing on the final few spells. One to keep them in the field of play, and then one to make them take on a small part of the identity of the first person to touch it. DNA, the Muggles called it. When flesh touched the Snitch, a record would be stored within the metal itself, changing its nature forever.

Draco flicked open the catches holding the Snitches in the box, and watched as they sprang to life. Wings unfurled, they darted around the room. Like small golden birds, they filled the air.

* 

“I brought you a present.” The weather had turned colder, and Draco’s words turned into white clouds in the air. He and Harry were sheltering from the wind under a low-spreading oak tree, its leaves caught somewhere between green and brown.

Harry stepped nearer, and Draco handed him the carved box he’d been carrying all day. He opened it, and nestled in the deep red velvet was a golden Snitch – its wings, too, made from gold.

“It’s beautiful,” Harry whispered. “And it’s for me?”

“Yes; I made it for you,” Draco said. “You can touch it, if you want. I’ve already– I’ve enchanted it so it can only recognise two people. I thought that… I thought we could play together.”
“Play…” Harry’s brow creased in confusion. “Play Quidditch?”

“Seeker’s games.” Draco stared out onto the moor. “I realised that I’ve been spending all these years making Snitches, watching Snidgets, but I don’t even watch Quidditch anymore, let alone play.” Draco turned back to Harry, bringing out the broomsticks he’d shrunk and put in his pocket. He returned them to their full size, and held one out.

“Is this why you brought me here?” Panic rose in Harry’s voice and he took a step back.

“Wait, Harry. Trust me,” Draco said.

“I can’t.” Harry touched his leg above his knee. “You know I can’t.”

“You can, though. Look.” Draco held the broom up again. “I’ve modified the foot harness. You can move it forward, keep it flexible, or lock it into place. Whatever works best.”

Harry looked at the broom, then back up at Draco again. “It… it might work,” he said, each word dragged out. He reached out and wiggled the footrest half-heartedly, but made no move to take the broom.

“It’s adjustable for length as well,” Draco added, although all standard Quidditch ones were. He hated seeing Harry like this.

“But what if I fall?” Harry said. “I don’t want to injure anything else.”

“You won’t,” Draco said, but Harry still looked fearful. “I won’t let you.”

Harry rubbed his leg again. “I– I can’t. It’s locked now.” He grimaced, and leant back against the tree. A brown leaf fluttered down. “You go for a fly if you want to. I’ll watch.”

Draco stepped closer to Harry. “This isn’t you.”

“Don’t tell me who I am or am not! You’ve known me for all of five minutes. I’m not the same as I was at school, or in the war.” Harry’s voice rose but he stared down, his eyes fixed on his knee.

“I know.” Draco sighed. “You were brave back then. You faced… I can’t imagine. But I think you’re still brave now.” He moved nearer to Harry, until he was close enough to see the tremor in the white huffs of Harry’s breath. “I think you can do anything you want to do.”

At this, Harry looked up. “I want to believe that you’re right,” he said, softly enough to be almost a whisper. “I try, sometimes, and then I start limping, or—”

Draco kissed him. Harry stopped talking, and held onto Draco. He kissed with a passion that reminded Draco of how he’d flown at school. He kissed as though he was free. They were both breathless when they broke apart.

“You can do this, you know. You’re a flyer, Harry. You’re not mean to be stuck on the ground.” Draco Summoned the broom and held it out again. This time, Harry took it.

Draco and Harry chased the Snitch, urging their brooms ever higher and laughing into the wind. Draco’s skin tingled with cold, and his fingers ached on the broom. But none of that mattered. He scanned the sky, looking for the tell-tale hint of gold. And then he saw it, and with a cry of triumph, Draco dove down only to find Harry crashing towards him at the same time. Their fingers touched as they both grasped the Snitch; then they began to tumble down to earth. Harry, not Draco, righted their brooms, and they swept back down in a wide arc, landing gently on the ground.
“That,” Harry said, breathlessly, “was wonderful.” He opened his hand to show Draco his golden Snitch. “I hope I didn’t damage it, we grabbed hold of it so hard!”

Draco gave it a cursory glance. “They are designed for that, you know.” He stepped forwards, the fluttering golden ball between them. Smiling, he pulled Harry into a kiss.

Harry’s hand relaxed, letting the Snitch loose.

It darted in zigzags about their heads, wings whirring, like a Snidget flying free.

Fin

End Notes

Thanks for reading! All comments are extremely welcome either here or on Livejournal.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!