The Standard You Walk Past

by bafflinghaze

Summary

On returning to Hogwarts for their Eighth Year, Headmistress McGonagall decided to room Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter together. She may have hoped for a leading example of house unity; the other students fully expected insults and fights. But nothing happened.

That was, until Harry sleepwalked into Draco’s bed.

Translation links available inside.

Notes

The title comes from the following quote by Lieutenant General David Lindsay Morrison, AO.

The standard you walk past, is the standard you accept.

Sep 2015: now available in Indonesian here, thanks to akira-tm/neko.chuudoku :)

The Standard You Walk Past

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Character: Draco Malfoy, Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, Narcissa Black Malfoy, Pansy Parkinson, Mentions of many characters
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Draco recast the ward over his cauldron and set a timer for ten minutes. The last ingredient—a few drops of Horklump juice—sat in its own warded vial as Draco cleared up his work table. There was a minuscule *ping* as yet another unidentified object attempted to get into his cauldron, and Draco felt a dark satisfaction as that object rebounded back to whomever had thrown it; a few tables to the left in the row ahead of him, there was a loud squawk of surprise and a rush of words from Slughorn as he assisted that unfocused student.

Slughorn rarely approached Draco’s table at the back of the Potions classroom. It suited Draco fine, having suspected that Slughorn was more of a hindrance than a help. Uncle Severus, *he*—

Draco shoved the thought away and focused back on his cauldron. With four more minutes on his timer, the milky colour in the potion was fading. He reduced the heat slightly and made a note in his potions journal.

Potter worked on a desk nearer the front, Weasel (*Weasley*) and Granger flanking him. The Boy Wonder was hunched over, and there was a brief flash of his hand above his cauldron as he tipped something in. Draco inwardly winced as a puff of white smoke rose from Potter’s cauldron.

“Harry, my boy, you’ve almost got it!” Slughorn swept over to Potter, giving Potter a pat on the shoulder. “Shame, shame. Go work with Mr. Weasley for the rest, don’t you worry!”

Potter mumbled something back, but Slughorn shook his head—a great theatrical move from Draco’s position, but probably nauseating up close. “Don’t worry, Harry! Everyone makes mistakes. Now, Mr. Weasley—”

Draco’s timer chimed in his mind, drawing his eyes back to his cauldron. The last traces of milky white dissipated and Draco removed the heat and completed the potion with three drops of the juice and seven slow anticlockwise stirs. A brilliant green colour initially trailed after Draco’s glass stirring rod, before the potion settled on a transparent aquamarine.

By the time Slughorn...*deigned* to visit Draco’s workstation, Draco had bottled his potion and labelled it, table cleared. Draco kept his eyes on Slughorn’s face, which was why he knew Slughorn did not even look at him. The professor glanced at the vial, muttered “Good,” and wandered back to the rest of the class.

Draco discretely cast some shields before walking past the other students to put his vial on the front table. He was not hexed, this time, but that did little to stop the low bitterness at knowing that, once Slughorn saw the curled *Draco Malfoy* on the vial label, the potion would be dumped. Draco would have kept separate vials of the potions he made if it were not for the risk of being found and the likely accusations levelled against him.

He had to walk past Potter and Weasley on his way out. Potter’s eyes were partially blanked over, whilst Weasley’s cheeks were red with frustration. Neither of them glanced at Draco.

* 

Draco sat at his desk in the dorm room, pre-dawn. The room was blessedly empty—Potter had been absent the entire night. Draco was almost worried though; he knew Potter wandered at night, but
Potter always returned just an hour past midnight. Given that Potter was still out...there was a chance Potter would return whilst Draco was still in their shared rooms.

It was Headmistress McGonagall’s idea to put them together in the same eighth year dorm room. A large number of Eighth Years returned so that there simply wasn’t enough room in the House dormitories. As such, McGonagall had converted the East tower into temporary accommodation, and in recognition that the Eighth Year students were adults, they were to room in pairs rather than in large groups. On the face of it, Draco was supposed to represent Slytherin, Potter Gryffindor. Perhaps she hoped for a leading example of house unity; Draco knew the students were waiting with bated breath either for his own demise, or for him to orchestrate Potter’s.

They were all wrong.

The night of the Welcome Feast was the last time Draco had interacted with Potter in any way, when he and Potter had politely shook hands under McGonagall’s sharp eye right after she announced their room allocations. Draco went up to the rooms first, whereas Potter stayed down in the common room with his fans.

And that was it. Three weeks had past since: Draco kept out of the way, and Potter sneaked around Hogwarts late at night doing who-the-fuck-cares and the only time Draco saw Potter was in the Great Hall or in class. He knew Potter never looked back at him, always too busy with Granger and Weasley, or the atrociously large group of simpering fans. Draco reminded himself that he was too busy studying.

Either way, they were not friendly, and they did not fight. They just had nothing to do with the other. It was better than Draco had hoped, honestly. With an even number of boys, Draco had no hope to obtaining a private room. Out of all the other boys, Potter was the least likely to kill him in his sleep; after all, what was the point of killing someone you had saved?

*

There was something, about Hogwarts after dark. In the day time, the world flashed, sound buzzed against Harry’s ears. His face felt sore from smiling, and his eyes felt dry from keeping them open. There was always something to do, someone to talk to. If it wasn’t Hermione and Ron, or maybe Ginny, or Neville, it was some other Eighth year who wanted to talk to him about some work, or duelling club members or Quidditch players asking for his advice, or girls forever trying to dose him on love potions.

The night, however, held no expectations except Harry’s quiet. Strips of pale silvery light lined the corridors, giving the impression of bars: confinement, repressing Harry’s thoughts, keeping him away from the memories that lurked just below his eyes.

It felt like a brief moment when Harry curled up on the window seat of the North Tower, wrapped up in his cloak. The grey of the night landscape made him doze, half awake.

It was the slip into dark-clash-bright dreams that jolted Harry awake. Harry grimaced, sore from his folded up position. The sky was starting to streak yellow pink so he went back to the dorms.

*

It was almost six in the morning when Draco’s wards pinged, and Potter entered the room.

For a brief moment, Draco entertained the idea of ignoring Potter just like Potter had ignored him, but a desire to actually see Potter—to make Potter see him—made him twist in his seat to regard the
Saviour.

Potter had some parchment in one hand and the silky shimmering Invisibility cloak in the other. His eyes were heavy with tiredness but they widened when Draco faced him. Draco had a sudden feeling of something wrong: there was no dislike, hatred, or fire of self-righteousness in Potter’s gaze.

Draco blinked, disoriented. How was he supposed to interact with Potter now? Sneer? Draco remembered Potter’s words and actions at his trial—extending not friendship but an agreement to be civil. Draco had been uncomfortable then, but Mother had prompted him to shake Potter’s hand.

Mother. She would want him to be polite. If it were not for Mr. Potter, we could all be in Azkaban, Draco.

Draco smoothed his face and greeted Potter with a curt nod. Potter responded with a nod of his own, but his eyes remained wide with surprise. Draco had no wish to pursue a silent conversation, so he turned back to his desk.

There was some patting around from Potter, before a whumpf as Potter collapsed onto his bed. When Draco left the room an hour later, Potter was asleep.

*

Harry was paired with Ron for Defence, as usual. Hermione had paired with Ginny. Professor Berriky had taught them two spells—a temporary numbing curse and a concentrated shield spell—and partners were to alternate casting. At the moment, Ron was casting the curse. Ron was casting it weakly though, and boredom struck Harry.

He barely felt anything when his shield shattered. Ron gave a wordless shout, but Harry could muster only the tiniest bit of surprise as he fell.

Harry heard the crack of bone and the crunch of cartilage, and he winced.

Belatedly, as pain flooded into him, Harry realised the bone and cartilage was his. The pain as Harry’s nose crushed against the ground reminded him of Malfoy’s foot. Which made him wonder about Malfoy. What was Malfoy doing? That other morning was the first time Harry saw him since the Welcome Feast.

Sound filtered back into Harry’s ears as Ron turned him over, saying, “Sorry, sorry,” over and over. The entire classroom was noisy as other students and Berriky surrounded him. At the corner of his eye, he saw Hermione, and he had a sudden airy feeling as he was lifted off the ground.

“I’m fine, Ron. Hazards of Defence,” Harry said, watching as Ron’s face slackened with relief.

Berriky was saying something, but Harry focused on Hermione and Ron as they floated him out of the classroom.

Hermione peered at him worriedly. “How are you feeling, Harry?”

“M’fine.” Harry tried a smile, but his nose hurt too much.

Hermione gently shook her head, and Harry sensed doors opening before they entered into the white of the Infirmary. Somewhat dazed, he missed the weightlessness when Hermione lowered him onto a white bed. The sharp scent of blood replenishing potions preceded Madam Pomfrey as she swooped into Harry’s field of vision.
“Afternoon, Madam Pomfrey,” Harry mumbled.

Pomfrey frowned, but it was weakened by her fond tone. “Mr. Potter, it must be impossible for you have a school year without getting hurt.”

“Is it bad?” Hermione asked, leaning forward.

“Mr. Potter will be able to return to his rooms tonight. Just be patient.” Madam Pomfrey cast some quick spells. She left for a moment, returning with potions, which Harry dutifully drank.

“Broken nose and some small fractures. Lie back down, Mr. Potter.” Madam Pomfrey raised her wand. “This will hurt.”

Harry fought the urge to roll his eyes. When had healing not hurt? Ron, to his right, looked a bit pale as Harry’s nose reverse-crunched back into shape, blanching at the snapping sounds as the bone fractures healed.

Madam Pomfrey nodded in satisfaction. “Now, Mr. Potter, you are to remain still. You’ll be able to leave for dinner, but not before.”

“Okay,” Harry replied meekly.

Madam Pomfrey shook her head, giving Hermione and Ron a level look. “Ms. Granger and Mr. Weasley, ensure that Mr. Potter gets his rest.”

“Of course, Madam,” Hermione promptly answered. Madam Pomfrey took her leave as Hermione and Ron settled down on the chairs by the bed.

“Hermione, Ron, I’m fine by myself,” Harry said. It looked like Ron almost believed him, but Hermione definitely did not. “You should attend classes.”

Hermione stiffened, but in the end, they both stayed by his side.

They talked about common things, sometimes just Hermione and Ron while Harry dozed, and sometimes the three of them. It made Harry yearn for those times when it was just them, just the three of them against the world—not that he wanted the War or Voldemort back.

Madam Pomfrey eventually returned and declared him healthy enough to leave. Hermione was still worried, and she stayed by his side during dinner, which consisted of him shifting food around his plate as he accepted the sympathy and hope you’re okay’s and told Ron that he was going to be a great Auror if he could defeat the ‘great Harry Potter’. Ron went red at that, whilst the rest of the table laughed.

*

Back at the common room, Ron and Hermione exchanged glances, and Hermione didn’t tell them to get out their homework. Instead, she placed a warm hand on Harry’s arm.

“Harry, maybe you should go straight to bed tonight,” she said.

Harry blinked and turned to Ron, but Ron was nodding at Hermione’s words.

Guilt slugged through Harry’s veins. He had worried his friends to the point that Ron didn’t even make a joke about Hermione agreeing to not do work.

Ron took a firm grip of his other arm. “C’mon mate, we’re making sure you get rest tonight.”
Harry let them accompany him to his room. However—

“I’ll be fine,” Harry protested, embarrassed as Hermione helped him take off his shoes and outer robes, transfigured the rest of his clothes into pyjamas, and sent a cleaning spell to his teeth.

“*Harry,*” Hermione huffed.

Ron drew back Harry’s bed curtains, lifting the blankets. “In ya go.”

“I’m not a little kid,” Harry muttered, but Ron’s earnest look kept him from rolling his eyes.

“We’re worried about you, mate,” Ron said, frowning. He tugged Harry forwards.

Obediently, Harry climbed into bed and lay still as Hermione and Ron tucked him in. “But I am fine—”

“Go to sleep, Harry.” Hermione smoothed his hair, drawing his eyelids down.

He must have been tired after all because he fell asleep immediately...with the image of Hermione and Ron standing by his bed, as though they were his parents.

*

The *screech* of Draco’s innermost ward ripped Draco awake. The calming blue white of his dream shattered into the darkness of night. His hand grasped the wand under his pillow before his eyes even opened. The moonlight and his own moonstone gave enough light for him to point his wand at the intruder.

The figure hovered by the corner of Draco’s bed, on the window side where Draco kept the curtains opened. A muffled whimper-scream emerged, and Draco scrabbled backwards as the intruder—person—*POTTER!*—collapsed onto the bed.

Conspiracy scenarios and mean pranks filled the hysterical part of Draco’s mind. The other part forced his breathing to even, to *examine*, to *listen*. Draco’s eyes sharpened with a nonverbal spell, allowing him to make out Potter’s face in the shadow of the silver light. Potter’s eyes were closed and his mouth open, glistening saliva pooling at the corner.

Once Draco’s heart stopped drumming in his ears, he could make out Potter’s even, deep breaths. Potter was asleep.

Draco closed his eyes momentarily, but when he opened then again, Potter was still there. *Bloody Merlin.* He flicked his wand, levitating the git off his bed, himself rising from the warm covers. Potter’s curtains were thrown back and his sheets messed up. Irritated, Draco deposited Potter on top of them.

Draco was very much planning to leave Potter like that, but then the Boy-Who-Lived-To-Annoy just *had* to make a little mewling sound, shiver, and curl up. With bad grace, *which Mother will never learn of*, Draco properly tucked Potter into bed and cast a warming charm for good measure.

Potter’s shivers desisted, and any mewling faded.

Barely refraining from childishly flicking Potter in the forehead, Draco turned back to his own bed, still warm. Exhaustion dragged Draco gratefully back to sleep.

*
Much to Draco’s rising irritation, it was just under two hours later when he was forced awake again. It was the sound of screaming that woke him, and for a heart-stopping second, Draco thought it was him. He lifted his hand to his mouth, but it was closed, and the screaming continued.

Draco pulled back his curtains with a flick of his wand. The room was empty, as far as he could see, aside from Potter. It was Potter who was screaming. Draco was torn between the urge to bury his head and wait out the screaming and the other, insane urge to go over and calm Potter. He wondered if the noise could be heard from outside.

He wondered how likely it would be for the others to think it was his fault.

_Fuckity-fuck._

Draco threw back his blankets and moved quickly to the other bed. He waved his wand to re-tuck Potter in, neaten the bed and dry the sweat-soaked sheets. But Potter continued to scream, messing everything up again.

He should just put a silencing charm up and leave Potter to his silent screams.

_But what would Mother do?_

Draco scowled. Given that Draco owed Potter a number of life-debts, she would insist Draco do something to help. To calm Potter, to ease his nightmares, if Draco were in such a position to do so.

Draco placed a hand uncertainly on Potter’s forehead. It was warm, but not feverish. Did he need to talk to sooth Potter? However, the screams wound down to pathetic whimpers.

His hand on Potter’s forehead covered the stupid scar. Without it, without that green gaze, Potter looked ridiculously innocent. Strands of black hair tickled at Draco’s fingers.

Steeling himself, Draco began to stroke Potter’s forehead, Potter’s hair.

The way the black hair parted between his fingers—so pale in contrast—was fascinating. And that it seemed to actually work, the whimpers and tremors easing, felt entirely surreal.

A year ago, Draco didn’t think he’d live. How could he have ever imagined being in this kind of situation? Fighting each other for almost seven years, being on different sides in a fucking war, and now...Death Eater helping Golden Boy.

Draco withdrew his hand the moment he realised that Potter was sleeping peacefully again. A Tempus told him it was less than an hour till his normal wake-up time, and it was with a longing resignation that Draco made an early start to his morning.

*

The sky suddenly turned dark, and Harry understood, at the back of his mind, that this was a dream. But it didn’t stop the sudden welling of remembered fear. Black robes and pearly white masks. Harry ran, he tried to, but his limbs felt sluggish. They caught him—did they in truth?—and then it was Cruciatus all over. Harry tried to drag himself away, and for what felt like a brief moment, the pain stopped, and the sky was lightening—and then it returned as Harry saw Cedric, saw him die over and over and over again—

Somewhere, Harry could feel it, was safety. Maybe just beyond the horizon—and with a snap, he was there—there in the white softness, and thank Merlin he couldn’t see or sense any more Death Eaters—it felt like time stretched and it was forever—
Even in a dream, it was too good to last, and darkness descended and the walls closed in. His cupboard. A sudden panic hit him—he was _too big_ for his cupboard now! He pounded on the door, and it opened, revealing Aunt Petunia.

“Get to work, boy,” she sneered, and Harry stumbled out of the cupboard gratefully. Only to watch in horror as Aunt Petunia morphed into Bellatrix, and she pointed her wand at him and _grinned_—

Harry woke, almost jumping from his bed, wand drawn. His breathing was harsh in his ears, and it took just a brief second for the darkness of the dream to fade, to be replaced with the silver glow from the window and the golden _Lumos_ from Malfoy’s desk. Malfoy’s head snapped towards Harry, wand raised. Harry suddenly felt stupid, and he dropped his wand arm. Malfoy’s face smoothed, and he gave Harry a curt nod and turned away, leaving Harry to feel the emptiness where they usually traded insults.

It was early, the sun barely risen.

*So this is when Malfoy does his work.*

Harry shook his head, limbs tired. His bed was mucked up, and the room felt entirely...blank. He quickly changed into his robes, packed his bag, and headed down early to the common room.

The Eighth Year common room was large and round, with two roaring fireplaces on either side and two sets of stairs directly ahead that led to the dorm rooms. The banners of the four houses adorned the walls, but the room itself was furnished with muted browns and greens. The fires cast warm glows, and with no small relief, Harry curled up on one of the sofas.

Hermione woke him up later, gently shaking him awake. “Harry, breakfast.”

Harry immediately reddened, having been caught. “Sorry, just woke up early, and I—”

Hermione smiled exasperatedly, pulling him to his feet. “C’mon Harry, it’s fine.” Her glance flicked to the boy’s staircase. “Ron will be coming down, raving for breakfast—now.”

On cue, Ron was bounding down the stairs. “Hermione! Harry! Breakfast awaits! We have to get there before all the bacon is gone—” For a moment, he scowled. “Bloody Seamus tricked me yesterday. I’m not going to fall for it again.”

Hermione gave Harry a sly grin and looped her arm with Ron’s. “Let’s go then,” she said, amusement colouring her tone.

Harry found himself smiling as he followed them out.

Chapter End Notes

This was beta'ed by Wifie29 and SqueakyZorro over at PTB.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Apparently, Granger and Weasley had established a routine of putting Potter to bed every night. Sometimes, they quickly left; sometimes, they stayed and talked. If it weren’t for Draco’s well-reasoned paranoia, he would have put up silencing charms. As it was, he gritted his teeth and listened as the Golden Trio chattered about their boring day, filled with schoolwork, Quidditch and war charities.

It seemed, however, putting Potter to bed stopped Potter from his normal midnight wanderings around Hogwarts. And in every one of those nights, Potter’s subconscious had decided to walk into Draco’s bed instead.

Draco dragged himself awake again as Potter sleep-crawled onto his bed. Faintly, he realised that Potter was getting better at that—he got his entire body on, and if Draco left it, Potter would probably figure out to sleep-snuggle under the covers. It felt almost routine to sweep Potter’s blankets back, levitate Potter into his rightful bed, and tuck him in. For as long as it took for Potter to stop screaming, Draco let his hand run through Potter’s hair.

Draco itched to give Potter the modified Dreamless Sleep Draco made for Mother, but when he searched Potter’s bedside table and found empty, old, vials of sleeping draughts, Draco knew he couldn’t, at the risk of Potter getting an addiction; making something weaker wouldn’t help. Though, it explained why Potter hadn’t sleep-walked into Draco’s bed earlier.

And Draco could hardly give Potter his moonstone, or teach him how to use Occlumency to ward away dreams.

Blearily, Draco fell back into own bed.

*

“Malfoy!”

Draco did not turn around and refused to pick up his pace. He did, however, curl his fingers around the wand in his pocket. He could hear the footsteps of maybe a dozen students behind. *Upstart Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws.*

“Think you’re too good for us? You should be in Azkaban!” One of the older boys yelled out. The sound bounced off the walls, leaving behind an echoing *aaazkaban-ban-ban.*

Draco’s mind cooled. *Yes, and it was your Potter who kept me out.* Attending Hogwarts as an Eighth Year had been one of the terms of his probation. He supposed that it was the Wizengamot’s idea of micro-aggression when they had been blocked from throwing Draco into a cell on a rock in the middle of the sea, handing over the law enforcement to school children who, by virtue of being on the ‘Light’ side, couldn’t be at fault—

A spell whistled past his ear, clipping the edge of his shield.

Anger bubbled up. Draco twisted around, whipping his wand out just as the rest of the group decided to cast. He narrowed his eyes, and with a sharp slash, sent the hexes crashing into the castle walls.
Draco barely caught himself, a curse on the tip of his mind. One bloody scratch on any of them and he’d be shunted back to Azkaban, and he bet these kids knew that. With an inward snarl, he clamped the anger down.

The best he could do was cast the strongest shield he could and walk away as though spells weren’t being aimed as his back. He did not give them the pleasure of flinching when a hex barrelled through and struck him in a star burst of pain, shattering his shield. He concentrated on forming another shield. Soon enough, they stopped, as Draco rounded the corner.

He allowed himself a wince, then, and slipped into the nearest empty classroom. Shrugging off his robes, he probed the area around his lower back—thankfully a place he could reach. After healing himself, he found no energy to put on his robes and exit the classroom. But he had too, and he emerged from the classroom when he was sure the corridor was empty.

Draco slipped into the Eighth Year dorm behind Lovegood. The common room was filled with students in the space before dinner; mostly, they ignored Draco, as he ignored them. Potter was on one of the chairs by the fire, apparently holding court with his fellow fans. He looked like the righteous git he was, unlike that strangely innocent person in sleep. Which reminded Draco of his own lack of sleep.

As such, tiredness decided for Draco to skip dinner, and he went straight to bed.

* 

For the first time in a while, Draco had an unbroken sleep. He woke from his green grass-blue skies dream without the sound of alarms in his ears. The room was quiet.

He checked his detection wards. Granger and Weasley hadn’t visited; Potter himself had only been in the room briefly late in the night. Potter had evidently returned to his night time wandering.

Finally.

Draco stretched and got up, feeling his magic becoming more settled and calm already.

* 

Mother’s owl found him in the kitchens early Sunday morning. Draco had long stopped thinking about how the owls managed to get in or how they found him there. The Sunday Quibbler and Daily Prophet were already neatly folded beside his open books.

He retrieved the letter and package from the eagle owl, Teithiwr. She permitted Draco’s absent stroke before flying over to the treats dish the house elves had put down at the table.

The package was opened first: a small box of chocolates, their scent and the box infused with Mother’s magic. He didn’t eat one, though, and closed the box, turning to the letter.

For a moment, Draco traced the Darling Draco at the header of the parchment. It was just over a month before the first Hogsmeade weekend, when Draco could visit Mother. And Father, he supposed.

Darling Draco,
How are you, darling? It would please me greatly if you could find time to write to me more often, else I can only assume that your classes are proceeding well. I am afraid to say I cannot imagine the conduct of the other students and professors; I only hope that you have treated them with courtesy, and they in return.

Oh, how I worry about how you are faring! Can you sleep well? Are the moonstones working?

In regards to your room assignment with Mister Potter, I feel the need to remind you to keep your interactions pleasant and polite. I know you may feel anger, dislike, or discomfort in regards to Mister Potter, but you should see this as a chance. Regardless of whether or not Mister Potter understands the concept of debt, we do. It is best if you can fulfil those debts now, in case in the future, Mister Potter may forcefully call upon them.

Provide Mister Potter assistance, if necessary. It may be beneficial if you become closer than just acquaintances, if not friends. Darling, do not deny that you had, at least once, wished to be his friend. I cannot say I fully know your wishes now, but if that desire still exists, I wish for you to be able to fulfil that desire and gain a measure of contentment out of it.

Enough of that. Your Father and I have completed the renovations of the West Wing and are starting on the East Wing. Your Father’s house arrest, not surprisingly, has not been a hindrance. We send the house elves to retrieve any necessary items. Be careful if you do decide to visit Hogsmeade or any other wizarding areas, Draco. There are many who forget that we have been tried and acquitted.

I have extended my hand to my sister, your Aunt Andromeda. Our meetings are warming; Teddy Lupin is an adorable baby, and you will definitely meet him over the Christmas holidays, if not during your visit next month. Teddy is a Metamorphmagus, a trait from his mother, your late cousin Nymphadora Lupin née Tonks. As yet, he shows no signs of inherited lycanthropy.

Your Father is recovering, and I am sure that he will send you a letter soon. He sincerely wishes to heal the rift between you and himself. If nothing else, do it for me, Draco.

Stay well, Draco. Keep your head up.

Love,

Mother.

Draco slowly folded the letter up and tucked it away. The box of chocolates sat invitingly in front of him, but Pansy and Blaise and Greg (and Vincent) weren’t there for him to share or deny them of the chocolates.

Stop being maudlin, Draco, he berated himself. Teithiwr seemed to hoot in affirmation. Draco gave the bird a wry look and tried not to feel lonely in the smell of the chocolates and his mother’s perfume.

*  

It was moving onto the seventh day that Draco had an unbroken sleep. He woke from a calm-sea
warm-beach dream without the sound of alarms in his ears. The room was quiet.

Draco was uneasy.

He checked his detection wards. Potter had only been in the room briefly during the night.

With no one to hear, Draco let out a frustrated sigh. Potter had to ruin everything. The Boy-Who-Lived ruined Draco’s sleep with his stupid sleepwalking and screaming and now made Draco fucking worried for the git. Draco didn’t put it past Potter’s subconscious to have some nefarious plan to slowly torture him.

Potter had started to wander the night again, and he looked even more shit this time round. From afar, even Draco could see Potter’s glazed eyes, his slouching gait, rumpled clothes, and messier-than-ever hair. It looked like Potter was catching snatches of sleep in uncomfortable places. He did not look as bad as during the War, Draco had to concede, but worse than a wizard on the Light side had the right to be.

*

The next night, when Potter sleep-walked into Draco’s bed, Draco was relieved. Staring at Potter, curled up at the side of Draco’s bed, vulnerable—Merlin, if only Potter knew that he was at the mercy of an Death Eater—Draco lost the resolve to send Potter back to his own bed. Maybe Potter’s subconscious realised the superiority of Draco’s bed, which, after all, boasted Egyptian cotton and silk and offered the comforting view of the night sky.

Maybe the world was offering Draco a way to pay his life debts.

Decided, Draco retrieved and draped Potter’s blanket over him and shuffled to the other side of the bed so that he wouldn’t touch Potter accidently. He altered his wards, making Potter an exception, so that they’d stop alerting Draco. A sense of satisfaction settled over Draco, and he went back to sleep.

*

Draco was puzzled. The landscape—dark, cold, pale blue—was not the image he had in mind when he fell asleep. He turned slowly. The air was frigid, even through the robes—robes?—he wore. The ground was little more than mucked up dirt, and the skeletons of trees broke the horizon.

It looked like the War.

The dream shifted suddenly to pitch darkness, confined space. Draco knew then that it wasn’t his dream and realised he was rather lucid. Crying, wretched sobs and sniffing made his stomach coil, and he saw—despite the darkness—a young boy hunched up on the mattress. Draco knelt down, and then he could see the scar on the boy’s forehead.

The boy was Potter, and he was crying. It was Potter’s dream.

For a moment, panic gripped Draco as he could think of nothing.

Mother—what would she do? The tiny corner of his mind ran through his memories, and the panic faded—six years old, after a nightmare, Mother sang.

Draco closed his eyes. It didn’t do much—darkness and darkness—but it helped him recall the music, the words. He began gently, trying to channel his Mother, and a distant part of him felt and remembered. It was a lullaby his Mother made just for him, and by Black tradition, it was a song about the stars.
In the dream, Draco’s voice worked perfectly.

It was a long song, but it took to the second repeat before little Potter stopped crying, and on the third verse, as Draco settled against the wall of the room more comfortably, that little Potter climbed into his lap, burying his face in Draco’s chest.

As the last chorus faded on the third repeat, so did the dream.

*

Draco woke up, and his eyes blinked lazily. Somehow, during the night, Potter had shifted closer and captured Draco’s hand. The dream was Potter’s, and Draco knew enough of the feeling of dreams to know that it was at least partly true. Potter had dreamt of a room so small Draco could not stand straight in it, a mattress left on the ground, and a little Potter in the darkness.

Draco put Potter back into his own bed before he could wake up and accuse Draco of something ridiculous; Draco cast a warming charm and tucked him in.

Potter’s face turned towards him, relaxed in sleep.

Normal. Friendly even. Not the boy who rejected Draco’s hand in First Year. Not the boy to whom Draco owed life debts. Not the boy who now barely ever looked at Draco.

Draco’s stomach twisted, and he scowled and turned away.

Chapter End Notes

This was beta’ed by Wifie29 and SqueakyZorro over at PTB.
Chapter 3

Harry took a slow breath, forcing his frown away. “Melissa, point your wand at the dummies, not other students.”

It was Friday night and the Great Hall was humid with the used air and body heat of over thirty students of the Duelling Club. Harry knew that Professor Flitwick and Neville were here somewhere, but it bloody felt like Harry was on his own. Melissa, a fourth year Gryffindor, nodded wisely at his words, but Harry had no doubt that she’d forget and Harry would be shielding yet another student from a spell.

“What, Harry? Can you help me with this?”

“Smile, Harry.”

The entire day had felt weird: he had woken feeling distinctly off and much too early—had done so for over a week. He had seen Malfoy again, quietly working at his desk. They just exchanged nods—that’s all! And when Harry thought he should say something, Malfoy just looked at him and made Harry feel stupid without even a smirk. Double Potions had been a disaster, and Harry felt absurdly sleepy during Transfigurations and just managed to scrape by without a detention.

“Sir?”

Harry turned and nodded at the second year Hufflepuff. He cast his ninth protego and watched as the girl struggled through the spell. After her, a cluster of second years wanted another demonstration of the shield spell, and then Harry needed to go see the sixth years girls who appeared to be shooting glances at him and not undertaking much duelling practice, and bloody Zacharias Smith and Geoffrey Hooper were shooting childish transfiguration spells at their dummy—

He spun round, startled as someone tapped him on the shoulder, wand rising.

Neville smiled tiredly. “Better start winding down, Harry.”

Harry lowered his wand sheepishly. “Yeah.”

Neville nodded, and the Hall filled with his voice. It took a good ten minutes before the last students cleared though, as many of them wanted last minute advice. Ginny popped her head in as Harry, Neville and Professor Flitwick were setting the benches and tables back into place. Neville quickly hurried over to her, throwing Harry a good-bye.

“Oh, and Harry?” Ginny called. “Don’t forget Quidditch practice tomorrow.”

Harry waved his hand. “Yeah, got it.”

Ginny waved cheerfully at him and Flitwick before dragging Neville away by his arm.

“Good work, Harry,” Flitwick said. The last table settled into place with a sweep of his wand. “I’ll be testing the fourth years next week. Some of them are ready to advance. Do you mind a short duelling demonstration in two weeks’ time?”

Harry shook his head. “Sure. Good night, Professor.”

Flitwick nodded. “Good night.” Briskly, Flitwick headed out of the Great Hall, Harry quickly following behind. The doors creaked closed behind them.

*

Ron and Hermione were in the Eighth Year common room at one of the tables near the left fireplace. Hermione caught his eye almost immediately. Homework, she mouthed across the room. Harry nodded. He went quickly to his dorm room. The door opened at his magical signature, and Harry hurried over to his desk to retrieve his things.

Malfoy’s bed curtains were drawn up already, as always. A glance at Malfoy’s desk found it completely empty. Harry frowned. He had seen Malfoy sitting there, working. More than once. Harry’s own desk was currently a bloody mess. He quickly checked the Marauder’s Map, and yes, Malfoy was indeed in bed.

Harry exhaled. At least he wasn’t hallucinating. He swept up his books and hurried back down to the common room.

Hermione gave him a pleased look as he plopped down next to Ron, who held a quill in one hand and a large cookie in the other. Ron gave him a muffled greeting and quickly ducked his head under Hermione’s look. Harry immediately descended on his Transfigurations essay, due Monday, in three days’ time. He knew Hermione would be satisfied if he completed it before last-minute-Sunday-night.

Almost too soon though, Hermione stood up.

“Let’s end early,” she said, blushing. “It is Friday.”

Harry grinned, giving Ron a pointed look. “If you say so.”

Hermione rolled her eyes as she took Ron’s arm. “Sleep well, okay, Harry?”

“Of course,” Harry replied nonchalantly. “You both go up ahead. I just want to finish this.”

Hermione touched his arm lightly. “Good for you. Just, do sleep, okay?”

He nodded back, lowering his eyes back to his work. A small part of him wished Hermione and Ron still accompanied him to bed.

“Night, mate,” Ron quickly said, and he and Hermione disappeared up the stairs.

Still feeling off, Harry eventually trudged into bed.

*

Draco watched as an obese muggle man slapped little-Harry across the face after failing to produce perfect rashers of bacon. Harry was babbling, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry—”

The man snarled, booting Harry in the back of the knee. “Go to your cupboard, boy! You’re not allowed out until my say-so!”

The dream warped, as the cream-white door of a cupboard under the stairs loomed over them, then shrunk down to its normal size. The man, Vernon—Draco had heard his name spoken in a previous dream—opened the door with a bang and slammed it just as Harry slipped inside.
As Draco was transported into the dark space, too small to stand in, Draco came to the horrible realisation that this was Potter’s room. All around him, the words “freak” and “no one loves you” bounced. Draco’s heart nearly broke, because Mother would never do something like this, not to Draco, and even Father wouldn’t dare, for all the hatred he contributed to, for all the jeopardisation of his own heir.

Draco slumped down in the bed, drawing little-Harry into his lap. He sang the star lullaby again, until little-Harry stopped crying, until little-Harry stopped trembling, and sniffling.

When Draco woke, Potter was curled against his front, somehow crossing the space between them during the night. The dried tear tracks made it all real, and Draco’s stomach sank.

At that moment, Draco sincerely hated himself. For all his supposed intelligence and Slytheriness, he had failed to collect correct information and instead had spouted whatever things matched his anger.

Why hadn’t Potter corrected him? Why had Potter saved him?

Draco carried Potter back to his own bed and cleaned the tears with a wet flannel. Tucking Potter in felt ritualistic; he neatened out the covers, cast the warming charm, and for a brief moment, indulged in brushing his fingers lightly through Potter’s hair.

And sighed.

He was only doing this to cancel his debts to Potter. Nothing more would come of it.

*

Harry woke up Saturday morning, yet again feeling distinctly weird. His blanket was still covering him, which was comforting but strange: it seemed that, this past week, Harry had yet to kick them off like he used to. It was even stranger to feel hungry, and there was a tune was stuck in his head.

Harry rolled over to face the window—and Malfoy’s empty bed. It was past sunrise and the entire room—east facing—was awash with the golden light.

It was odd. A mystery. Malfoy’s desk, empty. Malfoy’s bed, made, curtains pulled back. If it weren’t for the smooth rocks on Malfoy’s bedside table, and the trunk at the foot of the bed, and the clothes Harry supposed hung in Malfoy’s wardrobe, Harry would had thought he was the only student in the room. It felt as though Harry would count his interactions with Malfoy since the war trials on just one hand.

With a sense of déjà vu, he took out the Marauder’s Map and zeroed in on Draco Malfoy.

Fifteen minutes later, Harry burst into the kitchens.

The kitchens were bustling, house elves working tirelessly, air permeated with the heavenly scent of baking bread. Harry’s eyes were immediately drawn to the calm: Malfoy, seated at a table off to the side.

Malfoy was surprised to see him—grey eyes widened almost comically, and his lips were twisting into a—and then his face settled down to coolness. Malfoy gave Harry a curt nod, and he looked back down.

Harry blinked, but Malfoy didn’t say anything.

No insults. Not even a smirk.
Malfoy’s face was blank, just like it was at the war trials when Malfoy had sat passively in front of the Wizengamot, awaiting his judgement. His face had gained some kind of emotion when Harry stepped up to speak; he offered a grudging thanks when Harry returned his wand and had narrowed eyes when Harry extended his hand.

But now, it was emotionless.

A motion drew his eyes away from Malfoy to the house elf in front of him. Winky blinked wide-eyed at Harry and wrung her hands. “Would Master Harry be liking breakfast?”

Harry looked briefly at Malfoy, whose head remained turned away. “Yeah, thanks, Winky.”

Winky nodded and led Harry to the table Malfoy was sitting at. Two other house elves set down some dishes and a cup and jug across the table and slightly to the side of Malfoy. Harry approached it a bit sheepishly—he probably annoyed Malfoy, now that he was closer and noticed the spread of parchment and books. Malfoy didn’t lift his head as he sat down, however, and Harry took that as a reluctant assent to silent company.

As he ate, he listened to the bustle of the house elves, and the steady scratching of Malfoy’s quill. There was a moment when he was suddenly fascinated by Malfoy’s long fingers, articulating a precise, elegant handwriting. Harry winced, thinking about how the professors would have felt looking at his own handwriting. Malfoy’s head shifted as he turned to one of his books, and Harry’s eyes were caught by the pale blond hair that was long enough to partly curtain Malfoy’s eyes. Malfoy’s hair was no longer slicked back, but instead smooth and straight and somewhat curled around his ears.

It was a little surprising when Harry realised he had finished eating. Malfoy was still working, not once meeting Harry’s eyes.

Harry stood up, cringing as the chair squeaked. He looked at Malfoy again. “Um, bye,” he said, then quickly closed his mouth.

Malfoy glanced up, (yes!), nodded (another nod?), and looked down. (Oh.)

It was in the slightest haze of disbelief in which Harry thanked the house elves and wandered back to the Eighth Year common room.

He had sat, with Malfoy, at the same table.

For over fifteen minutes.

Without insulting or hexing each other.

(Not that Malfoy spoke; not that Harry said much at all.)

He almost ran the last stretch to the privacy of the dorm room to examine the Map. He couldn’t help feeling vaguely disappointed in learning that Malfoy was still in the kitchens.

I need some reason to stay longer.

*

The moment Potter left the kitchens, Draco let out a breath he didn’t know he was holding.

Now that Potter was gone, Draco allowed himself, just a little, to panic. Why did Potter come to the
kitchens? Why did Potter sit down at the table? And why did Potter stare at him the entire time?

Draco warily touched his hair, but it was still perfect.

Did Potter find out about the sleepwalking?

Draco stilled. What if he did?

Potter had not confronted him about anything, however, and had said very little. Draco deduced that Potter had not found out, and if Draco could have his way, Potter wouldn’t ever.

But Draco knew his luck, or lack thereof. If he continued letting Potter sleep in his bed, Potter will find out. And Draco wasn’t bloody optimistic enough to believe that Potter would see the “good” side of what Draco was doing.

The only solutions Draco could think of was to return Potter to his own bed; or to set up wards that kept Potter away.

*  

Before bed, Draco placed repelling wards in the space between the foot of his bed to the nearest far-wall; his curtains, to Potter’s side, were charmed tightly shut.

However, Draco was woken when Potter collapsed on the floor just outside his wards. The git just curled up on the floor, and Draco gave in to the urge to rub his eyes. Gritting his teeth, he levitated the git back to not-Draco’s-bed, dumping the sleeping Saviour on the messed up sheets, before resolutely returning to his own bed.

Draco was not surprised when he was prematurely forced awake only a few hours later to find Potter slumped at the base of his bed.

FuckfuckfuckfuckfuckYOU, Potter. You just have to make it hard for me, don’t you?

Draco glared at him, slobbering over the floor. The cold floor. Reluctantly, Draco got up from bed, dispelled the repelling wards, scooped Potter up, and put him down on his bed.

Potter’s breathing settled.

Fucking Potter and fucking world. You better give me good luck for all this, and please don’t kill me. Draco felt like laughing at his own stupid plea.

*

Harry woke, tired, irritated and a bit sore. He was too late to catch Malfoy, with the sun streaming brightly through the windows.

At breakfast, Harry had no appetite for chewing, and the porridge felt like flavourless paste in his mouth. Instead, he nursed a cup of coffee as his eyes shifted to the Slytherin table. It was a sparse house this year, the students sitting in tight clusters of mixed years. But Harry couldn’t see Malfoy.

It was a Sunday, and most students slept in, but he had seen Malfoy up before the sun even rose—

“Hey, Hermione.”

In the back of his mind, Harry winced, belatedly realising that he’d just cut into Hermione’s talk, which he hadn’t been paying attention to. However, Hermione turned to him with questioning eyes,
He blinked sheepishly. “Have you seen Malfoy?”

Ron spluttered on his bacon. “Why’re asking us? Isn’t he your dorm mate?”

Hermione gave a little exasperated shake of her head. “You’re not getting obsessed with him again now, are you?”

Harry frowned. “Course not!” he protested. “I just...realised that I never actually see him in the room. I think only at classes.”

Hermione gave Harry a steady look. “In that case, I probably see him more than you,” she said slowly. “He takes Runes and Arithmancy, as well as Defence and Potions.”

Harry blinked. He couldn’t recall seeing Malfoy in Defence or Potions. Harry shrugged under Hermione’s gaze. “Sorry, you were talking about—?”

Hermione’s eyes brightened and she launched back into her talk.

If Malfoy did his work in the kitchens in the morning, he probably ate breakfast there too. It’s not a bad idea, actually—it would mean Harry could eat in peace, rather than be talked to, talked about, have letters rained upon his head, and asked for yet another autograph (at least he now charged per autograph—Ron thought it would be a good idea to donate it to the War Orphans fund). Harry felt a plan form in his head.

* 

Harry almost jumped up with success when he saw Malfoy at lunch, sitting at the end of the Slytherin table nearest to the professors. Malfoy sat straight backed and had a cool expression on his face. There was an almost visible circle surrounding Malfoy that the other students avoided, skirting around him. The way Malfoy ate was fascinating; neatly, quickly, but with a grace. At times, Malfoy’s eyes idly swept the Hall, and once, Harry accidentally met his gaze. Malfoy kept staring at him, and feeling a bit uncomfortable for having been caught looking, Harry hesitantly tipped his head. Malfoy looked just a bit startled, but he quickly returned the nod and broke eye contact.

After that, Harry made sure to look away when Malfoy’s eyes started to wander near him. But it was after one of those times that, when Harry looked back, Malfoy had already left.

Dinner was an eerie repeat of lunch: Malfoy, end of the table, invisible barrier around him, with Harry trying not to meet his eye. Malfoy left as soon as he finished eating, and Harry itched to chase after him, to follow him to their room.

Harry waited with barely concealed impatience for Hermione and Ron to finish eating. Or maybe, not very concealed at all:

“Harry, what’s gotten in to you?” Hermione asked across the table.

“Err—” Harry spluttered. He looked down at his plate, barely eaten. “Just feeling tired,” he muttered.

Hermione gave a non-committal “Hmm,” and looked to Ron. Harry followed her gaze: Ron was still eating, and after a few seconds, he slowly looked up.

“Whmmmapf?” Ron questioned.
Hermione rolled her eyes at Ron but placed a fond hand on his arm regardless. She turned back to Harry. “Why don’t you go back first then? Straight to bed.”

“Um—okay.” Harry stood up quickly and felt nauseous. “Yeah, bed,” he agreed weakly.

“If it gets bad, we can take you to the Infirmary,” Hermione added, frowning.

Harry tried to smile reassuringly. “I’ll be fine.”

Hermione shot him a smile and Ron mumbled an absent “Good night.”

Harry was almost used to the chorus of “Bye, Harry,” from the Gryffindor table as he left. He waved back, the most he could do while not emptying his stomach on the floor.

The corridors were blessedly empty, and Harry slipped into the common room without any fuss from the guardian portrait. The dorm seemed empty, as he crossed the common room, climbed up the stairs and made his way to his room.

Harry paused with his hand on the door handle. There was light under the door, and Harry fought to keep the nausea and excitement from mixing.

Harry opened the door.

His eyes immediately fixed upon the motion in the room—the bathroom door was simultaneously opening and Malfoy appeared in a white shirt and trousers, contrasting starkly against the darkness of the bathroom behind him.

Malfoy startled, flinching back and eyes widening. His wand appeared in his hand, warily raised, all before thought returned to Harry’s head.

It struck Harry how similar, yet how different, it was from sixth year. He quickly backed a step, facing his palms up. “Fuck, sorry.”

Malfoy’s eyes narrowed. He didn’t tuck his wand away, but his hand lowered. Very slowly, whilst still pinning Harry with his gaze, Malfoy shut the bathroom door.

Harry squirmed a bit and fully stepped into the room, closing the door behind him. “I guess you’re going to bed?” Oh, great, Harry, what the fuck did you just say?

Malfoy didn’t reply. Instead, he tilted his head slightly in acknowledgement and padded across the room—past Harry—to his bed on the far window side. The bed was already partially curtained; Malfoy pulled shut the curtains facing Harry’s bed.

Harry was still rooted at his spot by the door when Malfoy looked back at him. And met his eyes.

There wasn’t a Great Hall between them this time, nothing to let Harry pretend that he hadn’t been watching Malfoy.

Malfoy raised an eyebrow, and Harry’s automatic reaction was to scowl back. He stepped away from the door and away from Malfoy, towards his own bed and trunk. Head turned away, he muttered a “Good night.” The slide of curtain rings ended their non-conversation.

Harry readied for bed quickly, nausea now a solid press against his eyes. Harry dropped his glasses carelessly on the bedside table and muttered his usual silencing charms. He’d deal with Malfoy another day. The headache pulled him into a restless sleep.
Chapter End Notes

hammondgirl and 2Shaes over at PTB were my betas for this chapter C:
Harry had dreamt of the cupboard again. But...he wasn’t alone. There was someone else there, someone with long limbs and a firm chest. Even now, Harry could feel the hum as that chest resonated with sound. He couldn’t remember all the words, just snatches—I’ll place the stars for you—but Harry liked it. It sounded nice.

He had woken after the sun rose, nausea gone. The room had been bathed in golden light and, for a while, Harry felt that it truly reflected his mood: optimistic. His nightmares weren’t as bad, and he had slept the entire night.

Harry smiled to himself.

“Mate, what are you humming?” Ron asked from the next desk over in Potions. Hermione was on his other side, and she gave Ron an exasperated look before returning to scanning her potions text.

Harry looked up, grinning, still humming. “I don’t know. Stuck in my head though.”

“Yeah?” Ron’s potion bubbled and he cursed, quickly focusing back. Harry, however, noticed Malfoy walking up to the front of the class and placing his vial on the table. There was still half an hour left, which was startling. Even Hermione noticed Malfoy’s quick finish, because she was frowning more than ever.

Malfoy noticed him and gave him a nod before slipping out of the classroom without a word. Bewildered, Harry glanced to Slughorn, but the professor hadn’t noticed, despite standing at one of the desks near the door. Slughorn noticed Harry looking at him though, and he swept over, chattering loudly about how good Harry’s progress was. Harry frowned inwardly.

* 

When Harry woke up early enough to catch Malfoy still working at his desk, he virtually jumped out of bed, startling Malfoy, who almost jumped out of his chair.

Giddy with the success of getting another reaction out of Malfoy, Harry couldn’t help grinning when Malfoy gave him that emotionless stare.

“Morning,” he said belatedly, but a quick glance at the windows, “—or, umm, not really morning yet, but—” and fuck yes!, the left corner of Malfoy’s lips quirked up, just a bit. Harry’s grin increased.

Starting to realise how weird it was to be smiling, he ducked his head, as Malfoy rolled his eyes and turned back to his desk.

Feeling mighty pleased with himself, Harry hummed his way through his shower. It looked like sleeping early meant sleeping well, and Harry had the hope that he could now farewell sleepless nights.

* 

Harry emerged from the bathroom to find Malfoy packing his bag.
“Malfoy—” Harry started, before he could think.

Malfoy turned round, brow arched in question.

“Erm, going to the kitchens? Can you wait for me?”

Malfoy regarded him, probably searching for malicious intent, but Harry was quite sure he didn’t have any, not anymore.

Slowly, Malfoy nodded. Harry gave a relieved smile, to which Malfoy quirked the corner of his mouth at.

Harry wanted to hug all the house elves who set the table, seating them across from one another. And when Malfoy finished eating and took out his work, Harry could triumphantly take out his work too.

Malfoy stared. Harry smiled sheepishly, running an absent hand through his hair. Malfoy eventually gave up with a quiet huff, and Harry was able to start earnestly on his homework.

In fact, Harry was doing his work so earnestly that he was shocked when a large owl swooped into the kitchens and landed on the table with a whoosh of wind. Malfoy, Harry immediately noticed, was unfazed. Turned away from Harry, Malfoy actually gave a quiet hum as those long, pale fingers ruffled the owl’s feathers. The bird nipped back and Malfoy ducked his head slightly, quickly removing the items.

With another gust of wind, which had Harry scrambling to keep his parchments down, the owl flew to the other side of the kitchens where the house elves immediately started to fuss over the bird. It was an endearing sight.

He turned back to see Malfoy leafing through a newspaper. Harry scowled. The bloody Daily Prophet. At Harry’s relief, Malfoy quickly tucked it away as he settled into reading the Quibbler instead.

Harry cast a Tempus—and realised that Hermione and Ron would be waiting for him to come to breakfast. Guiltily, he sent off his Patronus and quickly started clearing up his things.

“I err—” Harry started, and he quickly gained that unreadable grey gaze, “err...see you later, Malfoy. Hermione and Ron are waiting for me—” Harry cut himself off. He doubted Malfoy would care why he was leaving.

Malfoy nodded silently and returned to his work, a clear dismissal. His face was blank again, showing none of the liveliness Harry had seen just a few minutes ago. For a moment, Harry wanted to be contrary and sit back down again regardless. More than that though, he had already told Hermione and Ron he’d meet them in the Great Hall. Harry shook his head, and left Malfoy to the company of house elves and a bird.

When Harry woke up early enough, he let himself follow Malfoy to the kitchens for an early breakfast. But he was never able to startle Malfoy by jumping out of bed suddenly. Malfoy didn’t quirk his lips, stopped rolling his eyes, and definitely did not scowl. Those mornings quickly became an agonising wait for the giant owl to come to deliver whatever it delivered: it was the only time Harry saw Malfoy’s face soften from blankness. Once, the bird had even nuzzled Malfoy and
Malfoy had had the barest of smiles.

In contrast to the attention Malfoy bestowed on the owl, and even the house elves, Harry was ignored; he only received tiny nods of acknowledgement at the start of the day, and after the owl arrived and Harry had to rush off to meet his friends.

Harry needed to do something else. Something different. He needed to get Malfoy to speak.

Potter started accompanying Draco to the kitchens for breakfast, for ‘study’. However, he always left a bit early, to go to his actual friends Granger and Weasley, and it left Draco a bitter taste.

Despite his apparent overtures of ‘friendship’, Potter never approached Draco in view of others.

And yet, every night without fail, Potter stumbled, eyes closed and asleep, into Draco’s bed. Unconsciously trusting Draco, curling under the blankets and sleeping as though it was safe. Surely Potter could sleepwalk to Weasley’s bed? Or Granger’s?

*Maybe I’m just the closest source of warmth,* Draco thought sardonically.

He had written to Mother about the dreams. She hadn’t found much about entering others dreams—she mentioned the possibility of hallucinations and legilimency, and she suspected there might be a potion or blood magic that could achieve what Draco had asked her about. She promised to continue searching through their libraries, and had set Father to the task as well. There was a conspicuous lack of her asking why Draco wanted to know this, but if she didn’t ask, Draco will not tell.

In the morning when Teithiwr arrived with Pansy’s and Blaise’s and Greg’s letters, Draco was filled with warmth and relief—tempered only slightly by Potter’s presence, which always disappeared after Teithiwr came. He’d wait til after classes to open and savour them, but the promise of the letters became something that kept him going through the day.

After dinner, in the privacy of his bed, he opened the letters. Pansy and Blaise both attended Beauxbatons, spared from the Wizengamot’s revenge. Draco was pleased they were doing well—assuming that they hadn’t lied in the letters like he might have done. They had sent him some star stones, and Draco placed them together with his moonstone. Greg had forgone education of the academic sort and had gone straight into his Ministry probation hours, working at that dragon reserve in Romania. Draco thought that maybe after the uncontrollable Fiendfyre, dragon fire might appear rather tame. Greg sent him more pictures than words, but Draco appreciated them as much as Pansy’s and Blaise’s. A smile was unfamiliar on his facial muscles, and he tucked away the letters and photos in his bedside table to reply to in the morning.

*“Mr. Malfoy.”* Professor Berriky’s voice, low and thunderous, was an undercurrent in the noisy Defence room as the other students practised their spells. But Harry heard.

He immediately stilled, motioning for Ron to do the same.

*“Mr. Malfoy, why haven’t you a partner again?”* Berriky was saying, folding her arms. *“I’ve never seen you practice. I will not have slackers in my class!”*

Malfoy met her gaze evenly but did not speak.

Berriky had her wand in her hand.
Just fucking talk, Malfoy! Harry wanted to yell.

Malfoy didn’t open his mouth. Instead, he half turned, making a mirror appear near the wall away from the others. With a duellist’s grace, he cast every attack spell they’d learnt and every defence spell as the attack spells came ricocheting back.

Harry’s mouth dropped open.

“What—?” Ron asked, following Harry’s gaze.

“Malfoy,” Harry breathed, “should be in the Duelling club.” They both watched as the final sparks of magic faded away and the mirror vanished.

Berriky was frowning though. “Think you’re so good then? Then leave. You obviously don’t need any help.”

Malfoy nodded, calmly picking up his things. He met Harry’s—and Ron’s—look and arched a brow at them before sweeping out of the room.

“Harry, Ron,” Hermione reprimanded. “Pay attention.”

Harry turned away from the door, but he couldn’t help but shake his head. “But, Malfoy—”

Ginny looked at Harry, then Hermione, puzzled. “What?”

“Malfoy just left class,” Ron answered.

Hermione’s mouth pressed into a thin line, briefly turning to watch Berriky aid another pair of students.

Ginny shrugged. “So what?” Her eyes started to sparkle. “Ohh, don’t tell me Harry’s starting to stalk him again?” she teased.

“No!” Harry protested. He shooed them with his hands. “Get back to work.”

Hermione finally spoke. “Malfoy can’t have a partner. There is an odd number of people in the class.” She turned back to Ginny to recommence practice and Ron shrugged, turning back to Harry and readying his wand.

But Harry couldn’t stop thinking about it. Oh, he pushed it away enough to focus on casting and defending, but Hermione’s words kept repeating.

Malfoy can’t have a partner.

Malfoy never had a partner this entire year. Harry had never seen Malfoy with anyone since the start of the school, and given how limited Harry’s ‘interactions’ with Malfoy were, he wasn’t certain that his company counted.

Malfoy was the only Eighth Year Slytherin to return. Malfoy was alone, aside from the owl, aside from the house elves. Had Parkinson and Zabini and Goyle abandoned him?

And then Harry thought of something he could do.

*

Part one was to stay rather than leave the moment Harry got a glimpse of not-blank Malfoy. He had
already warned Ron and Hermione not to wait for him in the morning. Hermione gave him a strangely knowledgeable look, but Ron was easily convinced with the idea that Harry wanted an early breakfast in the kitchens.

Malfoy narrowed his eyes the moment he realised Harry wasn’t going to jump up and leave. Harry shrugged back, hopefully a picture of nonchalance and returned to completing his homework.

And then, when Malfoy stood up to leave for their first class—Harry stood up too.

“We have Potions first together, so I may as well go with you, right?” Harry said lightly. Malfoy looked at him as though he was barmy.

Harry shifted nervously on his spot. If this plan didn’t work, the next part wouldn’t even start. “Er, you know that awkward thing where you’re both walking to the same place and—”

Malfoy’s eyes flickered away, and he gestured Harry to follow.

Harry grinned.

They were ahead of the rush to classes, so it was mostly industrious Ravenclaws that walked the corridors. Slughorn was not yet present at the Potions classroom and the door was locked. After giving Harry an unreadable look, Malfoy leaned back against the wall in wait. Given the flinch, Malfoy was surprised when Harry went to stand next to him.

“Er, have you prepared for class yet?” Harry eventually said.

Malfoy inclined his head slightly, but said nothing.

“I just don’t get potions sometimes,” Harry muttered. “I bet the bloody subject’s half sentient and out to get me.” He quickly glanced at Malfoy and saw the corner of his mouth twitching.

They stood in silence. When others started arriving, Malfoy darted him a look but did nothing otherwise. Eventually, Slughorn appeared.

“Potions, first thing in the morning,” he said happily. “Early today, eh, Harry?”

Harry quickly realised that Malfoy had already slipped into the room, leaving Harry to face Slughorn alone. “Eh—yeah.”

“Come on in,” Slughorn continued cheerfully.

The other students streamed in, and Hermione snagged his arm.

“How was breakfast?” she quickly asked.

Ron gave him a narrow look, interjecting, “That wasn’t Malfoy we saw, was it?”

“Yes?” Harry replied innocently. “I was just hanging out. He is my dorm mate, just like you said.”

Ron grunted. “Yeah, but—”

“Didn’t Professor McGonagall want inter-House cooperation?” Harry persisted.

“Class, today we will be—” Slughorn’s voice rolled through the room.
Hermione’s eyes widened and she quickly turned to the front, forcing Ron to as well. Harry settled back into his seat in relief.

*

Draco felt the slightest warmth when Potter remained in the kitchens with him for the second time, instead of running off to see Granger and Weasley.

And Potter continued doing so the entire week. Draco was wary of Potter thinking Draco was some charity case but it was hard not to feel vindicated that Potter was finally becoming...something like a friend.

He distinctly felt the eyes of the other students on them when he and Potter walked to class together and, Merlin, he gloated inside. Draco could afford to relax his guard slightly, because even they weren’t naive enough to confront Draco in the presence of their Saviour.

It seemed that even Professor Berriky had caught wind of the non-antagonistic something between him and Potter, because she only gave him a narrowed gaze and left him to silent reading in class whilst the other students paired up.

When Draco decided to muse on this strange new state of his life, he realised that it felt a lot like optimism.

*

Harry woke on Monday with a different song in his head. It was different from the solemn song about stars—this one was light and quested for blue skies and fluffy white clouds in the shape of dragons. Which was good because he had dreamt of Dementors.

Malfoy sat by his desk, and the juxtaposition of golden Lumos and silver moonlight made his hair ethereal, the colours shifting as Harry moved his head. When it was time to go, Malfoy waited patiently as Harry stuffed his books into his bag. The house elves had set their breakfasts next to each other, instead of across the table, and while Harry was uncomfortable about it, Malfoy just quirked his lip and sat down. Harry felt the insane urge to mimic Malfoy’s movements.

Monday meant a Potions practical and a due-in homework assignment, so Harry took out his textbook and his own potions reference text alongside his assignment, which had only been halfway completed—Hermione had not been happy about that.

It was when Harry was glaring at the last question, in between frantically searching his texts, that Malfoy gave a sigh. Shoving Harry’s hands away, Malfoy flicked through the textbook himself. He placed the book in front of Harry and tapped one of the passages. Harry blinked and stared and frowned at Malfoy. “Look, I’ve read that already—”

Malfoy arched an eyebrow and directed his gaze back to the book, as his pale finger slid to a certain sentence and—


Malfoy rolled his eyes and made a shooing motion.

Harry grinned. “Gryffindork,” he supplied for Malfoy.

Malfoy’s eyebrows shot up. Harry carefully kept his open expression. After a moment, Malfoy made a quiet sound and his lips quirked up.
“Hey!” Harry replied, mock indignant. “Oh, and I suppose Potions books are out to foil you, too.” Harry continued, trying to affect Malfoy’s drawl. “Saviour of the Wizarding world, defeated by a mere book.” Harry shook his head in exaggerated disapproval.

Malfoy didn’t laugh, but his eyes brightened.

Their walk to the morning Potions class was finally starting to feel companionable. Slughorn greeted Harry with a brash, “Hello, Harry!” and completely ignored Malfoy.

Malfoy glanced at Slughorn. Giving Harry a tiny smirk, he slipped into the room, leaving Harry to fend for himself again.

*

On Wednesday morning, Harry was only a little bit startled with the owl flew into the kitchens. Malfoy lifted his head, and suddenly Harry was stuck staring at the slightest smile as Malfoy retrieved the letters and packages. Malfoy opened the largest package—a box made of dark wood. After glancing to Harry, Malfoy made a show of opening it. The smell of rich chocolate immediately flooded Harry’s senses, and he realised that this was one of many packages Malfoy’s mum sent him. Malfoy nudged him out of his stupor with a raised eyebrow and made an offering motion to the box.

“Me, have one?—Obviously, Potter,” Harry answered himself. Harry opened his palm. “You first, Malfoy.” Harry arched his brow in imitation of Malfoy. “Why, Potter, you do have manners.”

Malfoy rewarded him with smirk, and he picked a dragon shaped chocolate and shifted the box towards Harry. Harry looked inside and was surprised. The box had what Harry assumed were layers of trays. Chocolates nestled in shaped indents, and there were lions! He immediately picked that one.

Harry grinned, making him unable to arch his eyebrow, but nonetheless— “Why, how Gryffindor of you, Potter—You wouldn’t have eaten the lion anyway! Snakes eat lions for breakfast, don’t you know?”

Given Malfoy’s upturned lips, he approved of Harry’s responses.

They settled back to work, and well, Harry felt for the first time that they really were friends.

Chapter End Notes

hammondgirl and 2Shaes over at PTB were my betas for this chapter C:
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The note that accompanied the box had said,

To be shared. Love, Mother.

And the moment Draco saw the lion-shaped chocolates in the box that Mother sent him, he knew that he should talk to her properly about his relation with Potter.

He knew that she knew something. He hadn’t written to her about his emerging...friendship with Potter, but he had read about it in the Prophet. There had to be student spies at the school, ones obsessed with Potter and everything he did. That Draco being seen around with Potter made the news was hardly surprising, and sometimes Draco wondered why there weren’t articles like “Harry Potter, attending Potions class!”, or “Harry Potter eats pancakes for breakfast!”, or other such rot.

Draco placed the letters and other packages to the side, and presented the box to Potter. Potter did his amusing talking thing, and Draco picked out a dragon, and Potter his lion (Gryffindor). They shared minutes of pleasant silence as they consumed their chocolates. Draco found himself unwillingly smiling a little at Potter’s wide grin.

“Thank your mum for me, Malfoy,” Potter said easily, licking off his fingers. “Alright.”

Draco allowed himself to roll his eyes, somewhat at Potter’s answer for him, but also because he will thank his mother.

Potter stretched luxuriously, and after flicking Draco another grin, settled back to his work. Draco blinked at the sudden warmth that filled him. He shook his head clear his mind, and tried not to smirk when Potter dripped ink all over his parchment on accident and cursed to himself.

*

That night, Draco set the letters and packages around in a circle on his bed. He picked up Mother’s letter’s first, the scent of flowers clinging to the paper. Mother’s letter did not include any explicit reference to Potter. Instead, she reminded him to visit the Manor during the upcoming Hogsmeade weekend and to write to Father. Even Father had written to Draco but the lightness of the entire letter—a bland and thorough rendition of the renovation works at the Manor—left Draco no doubt that Mother had been looking over Father’s shoulder as he wrote it.

Draco swallowed as he unravelled the package that Father had sent. Perhaps Father isn’t as inattentive of me as I thought. A small silver pendant was revealed, nestled in dark blue velvet. The chain was white silver, made of tiny delicate links, and when Draco touched the pendent with a tentative finger, a shiver of magic curled up his arm.

Draco closed his eyes. There was a newer spell he could sense. Father’s magic. It did not have the same safe feeling of Mother’s, but there was a sense of stoicism and that...Father cared. Draco was
able to undo some of his own personal defence spells, and he sighed the strain of maintaining spells decreased.

Pansy’s and Blaise’s joint package was a much lighter tone; they had given him some French hair potions. Pansy assured him that they were at least as good as Sleakeezy’s, darling. Think how utterly amazing French fashion is, Draco! Pansy’s and Blaise’s banter across the letter—different sections in different handwriting and the occasional blot as they fought over the quill—had Draco nostalgic. He decided then to write to Mother to see if Pansy, Blaise, and Greg would be able to come over to the Manor during the Hogsmeade weekend as well.

* 

Harry saw a mirror, unlike the mirror Malfoy had cast during Defence. This was the Mirror of Erised, and Harry saw his reflection: a small, short boy, messy hair, too-big clothes.

As Quirell clutched his arm, he felt himself freeze, and burn, and scream. Voldemort’s voice curled around him like poisonous gas. He couldn’t shake off the grip and the Stone knocked back forth in his pocket as he tried to get away. His scar burned as Quirell burned.

Warmth blossomed across his back, and he feared that it was Fiendfyre. He twisted his head and just caught the glimpse of blond hair before black robes swathed him, drawing him away. Harry turned back to Quirell and Voldemort, and his eyes widened as he watched a copy of himself stand there as the memory played out and Quirell crumbled. The person kept him warm, and slowly, Harry could hear the words the stranger was quietly singing—“For you, I’ll give you the moon”—and Harry finally relaxed in the embrace.

* 

The bitterness towards Dumbledore for letting him suffer that contrasted sharply with the song still in his head. He was a fucking child when he had seen death; the stone, the basilisk—fuck, even Sirius. How could Dumbledore have thought Harry could do it, when it would defeat Aurors more accomplished?

Harry put on his glasses, drew back the curtains quickly and saw the familiar image of Malfoy doing his work. Malfoy tilted his head, which Harry returned with a smile.

His anger at Dumbledore dissipated the moment Malfoy’s lips curved up. Feeling much calmer, Harry prepared for breakfast with Malfoy.

* 

When Harry returned to the common room during his free period, Luna was at the largest window seat. It was still morning; the sun shone through, lightening her hair. It brought flashes of Harry’s dreams to the surface, and Harry blinked. Had he been dreaming about Luna? The whimsicalness of the songs stuck in his head felt like it could be her.

She raised her head as he approached and gave him a dreamy greeting. “Harry, your wrackspurts are clearing.”

“Um, okay.” Harry glanced at the sketchbook in her hands, filled with images and neat writing of creatures that looked familiar and of ones that didn’t. “I was just—I think I’ve been seeing you in my dreams,” Harry said.

Luna smiled serenely at him. “I don’t remember being there though.”
Harry took a moment to understand. “Um, oh.”

“Are they good dreams?” Luna gazed at him with clear eyes. Her voice was light and did not match the timbre Harry remembered.

Harry felt a smile rise unbidden to his face. “Not bad.”

Luna placed a hand on his arm. “Then everything will be fine.” She smiled, her eyes going dreamy again. “You’ll find what you’re looking for.”

Harry gave her an uncertain smile and looked through the window with her. The person in his dreams couldn’t have been her—whoever it was, they were flat chested, and Luna certainly wasn’t. Harry flushed when he caught himself looking at Luna’s chest and quickly turned away.

* 

Draco’s eyes narrowed. He was just walking to lunch, a little late due to a trip to the Library, when he heard shouting.

“Bloody Slytherins! How dare you return to Hogwarts!”

He drew his wand and began to slowly swirl it, pointing to the floor. Lines of magic coalesced around him as the pendant’s magic stirred in response. He took a moment to compose his face and posture.

Then, he walked forwards and rounded the corner.

He looked leisurely. As expected, the corridor was empty besides two Slytherins—first or second years, given their height—and three Hufflepuffs. And to think that Hufflepuffs were stereotypically nice and fluffy.

They saw him immediately, and their attention shifted, wands raised and pointed directly at Draco. Draco flicked his eyes nonchalantly to the Slytherins. The two girls met his gaze with determination, but both were intelligent enough to quickly slip away from the Hufflepuff boys and past Draco.

“Well, it’s Draco Malfoy, the baby Death Eater,” the brawniest boy said. He flicked back dark brown hair as he advanced. “We’ve seen you chumming up with Harry.”

Draco kept a blank face as he took a step forward. In his mind, he was chanting shields in preparation to counter almost anything they could throw at him.

“Well, stop it,” the boy snarled. “Harry doesn’t like you. He’s just really noble sometimes. Don’t mistake it for real friendship!”

Draco stiffened. He knew that, he knew that already. Potter was the Golden Boy, idiotically noble, forgiving, and good. Draco—he couldn’t even be just Draco, he was Draco Malfoy. The image of Potter smiling suddenly flashed in his mind. How much of that was fake?

“Stupefy!”

Draco twisted and the spell sliced the bottom edge of his robes. The other boys immediately cast again, faces twisted in anger. Draco advanced, mind focused. Protego! Protego! Sparks flew as hex and shield met, and the sharp sound of impact echoed through the corridors.

Draco took a solid step forwards. The Hufflepuffs took a wary step backwards.
“Stay away from us, Death Eater! We’ll tell Professor Sprout!” one yelled. Another threw a curse, but Draco was not distracted by their oft-repeated words.

After all, he had thought that about himself. They could not hurt him more than he had already been hurt, by his own stupidity.

The curse skidded around the pendant’s shields in a full circle and shot straight back at the caster. With a yelp, the boy ducked and knocked into the other two with a grunt of pain. Draco continued forward mercilessly.

The Hufflepuffs were finally catching on and they shuffled backward, wands trained warily at Draco’s face. After all, they were the ones who said Draco was a Death Eater. And one couldn’t be Death Eater without knowing something Dark.

The self-imposed leader of the three cracked first. “You—Malfoy...you stay away from us! Don’t even think of attacking us!” They stepped back until they pressed up against the wall, leaving Draco a clear path down the corridor.

Draco took the path given to him, and he wasn’t surprised when they cast at his back. The pendant’s magic coalesced and most of the curses dissipated with a flash of light that made Draco’s shadow stretch dark across the floor. He forced himself not to flinch when a sharp pain trickled across his back and instead thought of the possible counter-curse candidates and healing spells he required.

The post-war world seemed to be one where Slytherins had more honour than Hufflepuffs.

*

Harry stretched back on the sofa, idling away in the Eighth Year common room. The room was pleasantly quiet, with any chatter in hushed tones and away from Harry.

The person in Harry’s dreams was Malfoy; he was sure of it. Harry had spent lunches and dinners observing all the students—no one had blond hair quite as light as Malfoy, solid chest, firm muscle and male.

The Malfoy that Harry saw in his dreams was warm, comforting, gentle and open. It made Harry obsess, just a bit, about whether the real Malfoy could be like that. And Harry had the feeling that he could be. The little smirks and smiles that appeared suddenly, though Harry hadn’t figured out the pattern yet; the exasperated huff and rolled eyes when Harry was stuck in his homework that preceded Malfoy helping him. They all hinted things about Malfoy (Draco) that, at the moment, was just beyond Harry’s knowledge.

Draco was never in the common room, and Harry wondered if that should be on his list of things to make Draco do, right after making him talk. Harry felt a little disappointed at that; he thought that if he started talking ‘for’ Draco, Draco would eventually give in and start talking to him. Even if only because Harry’s responses were shite.

“We never see you at breakfast anymore,” Ron said morosely, flopping down on the sofa next to Harry.

Harry grinned and shrugged. “I like eating in the kitchens. It’s quiet.”

Hermione looked at him pointedly. “And not due to a certain Slytherin you were obsessed with during sixth year?”

“I was right, then,” Harry grumbled, avoiding the question. “You can’t stop me from going to the
kitchens,” he said mock-petulantly.

Hermione laughed. “No, we can’t. Do your little thing with Malfoy, then.”

Ron spluttered. “Harry’s not doing anything with Malfoy!”

Harry flushed. “Err, we both eat breakfast in the kitchens. You can come if you want…” Harry added, whilst thinking please don’t come.

“No bloody way,” Ron shook his head vehemently. “I have the strength to go the Great Hall for my breakfast.”

Harry grinned and laughed at Ron’s so serious expression.

*

Every morning since the chocolates arrived, Draco had taken one chocolate and let Harry pick one chocolate for himself. There were all sorts of dragons, lions, peacocks and flowers, all delicately and deliciously rendered in a range of chocolates: milk, white, dark, mint...more than Harry could name.

“What is the world coming to—a Malfoy picking a lion?” Harry said, pointing in mock horror at the piece of chocolate Draco had just taken from the box.

Draco gave him a wicked grin and bit off the head. He pushed the box closer to Harry, and Harry peered inside.

Harry’s mouth dropped. “There are only dragons and peacocks left!” Gingerly, he picked up a Chinese Horned dragon. He caught Draco’s eyes, which sparkled with mirth. He straightened his back and put on a posh accent. “Why Potter, it was my dastardly plan all along.” Harry put on a pout. “Well, I suppose dragons are cool.”

Draco looked away as he closed the box, but Harry could make out the smile on his lips. It filled Harry with warmth as they settled back to their work without a word. He still hadn’t made Draco talk; the singing in his dreams didn’t count. He guessed that if Draco did talk, they’d be trading a lot more insults. But since Harry was insulting himself, he couldn’t be much hurt about it, not when Draco’s eyes glinted his agreement.

*

Maybe Harry was getting a teensy bit more than a little obsessed with Draco, though he could proudly say he wasn’t as obsessed as he was in sixth year.

In his double free, he studied his Map, searching for the familiar name. He might followed Draco from his Transfigurations class to Arithmancy. He might have sat at the back of the class in his invisibility cloak watching Draco write out long elegant equations he couldn’t make sense of. He might have trailed behind Draco as he left, last out of the class, on the way to the Library. He might have admired Draco’s almost gliding walk, which reminded him a lot of Narcissa Malfoy’s.

But he definitely saw a group of four Hufflepuffs, two Ravenclaws and one Gryffindor facing off with a pair of Slytherins. Draco’s back straightened and he continued forward, much to Harry’s internal panic.

The group attempted to surround Draco, the two Slytherins forgotten. Harry stuffed his Invisibility cloak in his pocket, drew his wand and ran forward. He had to dodge hexes and curses that came
whistling back—to his satisfaction, some of the group got hit by their own spells, falling over, legs tangled, or babbling in pain.

By the time Harry was there, Draco had already turned the corner.

*No matter.*

One of them—a small, blond haired girl—had spotted him and was frantically alerting the rest of her mates. Harry was then able to see all the faces of the attackers.

“Harry!” one of them said. They tried to smile at him.

He glared back.

“Don’t think I’m stupid,” he grounded out. “Seven on one? That’s hardly fair.” He glanced at the Gryffindor, making the boy flinch. It was disappointing that all seven of them attended the Duelling Club. Harry hoped it wasn’t because they wanted to learn how to attack people they didn’t like.

“Malfoy is perfectly in his right to challenge any of you to duel, do you realise? And if I see any of you indulging in this behaviour, I will report you, and I will kick you out of the duelling club.” Harry narrowed his eyes when they just looked at him with gaping mouths. “Understand?”

Their mouths snapped shut, heads nodding frantically. A few mumbled, “Yes, Harry.”

“Now go.”

The students acted immediately, streaming past Harry, in the opposite direction from which Draco went. Once the last of them disappeared from Harry’s sight, he tucked away his wand.

The distance that Draco had in dealing with them matched perfectly with the blank façade Harry had seen of Draco. But it jarred with the softness Harry saw in the mornings and clashed with the Draco in his dreams. What Draco did was positively Gryffindor...maybe Draco could care as much as Harry suspected.

* * *

Harry watched Draco discretely the next morning, but he wasn’t acting any different. The bare skin Harry could see—hands, neck, face—were unmarked, and there wasn’t any unusual stiffness in Draco’s posture that could suggest injury. Draco ate in his usual neat manner, and he wrote straight lines of readable words across his parchment.

When Draco turned to him, eyebrow arched, Harry quickly leant over and squinted at Draco’s work. “Are you sure that’s the answer?”

Draco swatted Harry’s hand away.

“Of course, Scarhead.” Harry pouted. “If you say so. My, you’re very intelligent, Potter.”

Draco snorted and punched him in the arm.

“Hey!” Harry rubbed his arm gingerly. “Fine, fine. Draco Malfoy is the most intelligent wizard ever,” Harry intoned.

Draco smirked, and Harry pretended to grouse some more, just to see Draco’s eyes dance with humour.
Chapter End Notes

StoryPainter and Thir13enth over at PTB were my betas for this chapter C: {As you might have noticed, the betas keep changing. If you're interested in beta'ing the rest...drop me a comment?}
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The noise of the kitchens was muted as it filtered through the muffling ward around them. Draco tilted his head slightly and examined Potter through his hair. Potter was engrossed in his work, plate of pancakes forgotten on the table.

Potter’s dreams were horrible; Draco, at least, had been able to experience them lucid. He knew very well what dreaming a dream felt like: no control, and where all actions were ultimately futile. He saw it in every tense line of Potter’s body in the dreams—and worse, Potter had lived through those events. It was a wonder how Potter—awake Potter—had not turned bitter, snide, and sarcastic.

Potter had almost stopped his midnight wanderings. He was resigned to Potter sleeping in his bed, but that meant he had reason to be a tiny bit proud about seeing Potter alert and refreshed.

Draco was still uncertain about Potter being his friend though. He had accepted Potter’s company in the early mornings, but...what would Mother do next? Draco already knew what Father would want him to do, in the post-war world. He would immediately accept Harry Potter’s overtures of friendship and then use that friendship to boost the Malfoy reputation.

Draco supposed Mother would accept that friendship too. Draco smiled inwardly. Mother would never do something so overt as using a friendship to boost reputation. She would make Potter a close friend, such that a boost in reputation looked like some side effect.

But maybe, Draco should be friends with Harry Potter merely because Draco enjoyed his company, no matter how stupid that might be.

He watched Potter fumble through the textbooks, writing in his chicken scratch across the parchment. After enduring a minute of Potter’s frustrated sighs, Draco took pity and turned to help.

* * *

Draco didn’t think Slytherins would ambush him, but they did, early Thursday morning when Draco was making his way from the kitchens to the library. They rounded on him in one of the dusty, normally empty corridors he frequented—which meant they’d been watching, and Draco had to extend the range of his detection spells. Or maybe he had become complacent with Potter’s company.

It was a group of mainly middle-years—third, fourth, and fifth. Their spokesperson was a seventh year, though. She was as tall as Draco, skin just as pale but hair dark as night.

“Draco Malfoy.” The way she curled her lip at his name amused him. It was something he’d used to do. “Is there something you wish of us? Is your aid to gain our favour?”

Draco met her gaze blankly.

A few seconds stretched to a minute. When Draco blinked, the seventh year tilted her eyes up and away.

“L-look.” She stopped, probably mortified that she had stammered. She took just a second to compose herself, but her eyes fixed on a space just above Draco’s eyes. “Understand this, Draco
Malfoy, that we do not require your assistance. Any rendered to us will be considered without tie or bind of debt.”

Draco turned his gaze to the Slytherins behind her. They stood almost like Gryffindors and met his gaze, if only briefly. Draco entertained the notion of speaking to them, or using a group-Legilimency. Draco’s eyes narrowed slightly. The curse still buzzed just slightly under his throat, courtesy of a wizard from the ‘Light’ side. The comforting press of the pendant’s magic, of generations of Malfoys and of Father’s magic, gave him courage. He settled on Legilimency.

At that, Draco took a step back, so that he could capture all their gazes. He cleared his thoughts for a moment and curled his fingers about his wand. As he raised his wand and formed a slow swirl in the air, all eyes were drawn to his wand, even as they fumbled for their own wands.

Legilimens inverto.

The buzz of the Slytherins’ thoughts appeared like lines of fuzzy dots against a dark backdrop. Draco ignored them—he had no interest in knowing what they were thinking. Not that he could know, given the nature of the modified spell.

I have not and will not help you, Draco projected.

Their eyes widened. The smartest of them flinched away, breaking eye contact. But Draco had refined this spell over the summer, and this form of thought sending did not need eye contact once the spell was established. He stepped forwards slightly. Their leader stepped back. She hadn’t broken eye contact, and Draco felt her suddenly throw up Occlumency shields.

Draco gripped the links in his mind. Why would I help those who will not think for themselves? Slytherins who do not act like Slytherins?

Surprise and anger coloured their faces. Maybe now they’d be smart and learn not to roam around alone or only in pairs. Or realised that they, at least, had the option to speak to McGonagall and try to make her believe them.

It is not my fault they appear on my path. I merely walk through, Draco ended, with a feeling of nonchalance. He cut the connection, no longer feeling like talking.

When he stepped forwards, the Slytherins parted like water, giving him way.

It made Draco realise that he did not include himself in ‘Slytherin’ any longer.

*  

Harry checked the Map as often as he could, but he never saw any large group approach the lone Draco Malfoy.

Regardless, when Friday night Duelling Club came round, Harry made them all wait while he got onto the stage. He was easily able to pick out those students from the audience—the ones that were looking away from him, instead of looking at him with curiosity. He’d already told Professor Flitwick and Neville that he wanted to talk to the students, though not what of, so they were looking at him curiously as well.

“Is everyone here?”

The students glanced at each other, and a few nodded back at Harry.
Harry nodded slowly. “It has come to my attention that some of you have not listened to Headmistress McGonagall's words at the Welcome Feast. Remember? Inter-house unity? Reconciliation?”

The students shuffled. Some of them looked away guiltily. A few made aborted attempts to cross their arms. Harry wondered if they had gone around hexing Slytherins as well.

“If it wasn’t clear enough, that means no attacking other students. Just because someone is Slytherin doesn’t mean they’re bad! Hell, Peter Pettigrew was a Gryffindor, and I’m sure you’ve all heard the stories about him.”

Harry shook his head, trying to get rid of his anger, but it built up instead. He paced about the stage, before going to the edge, glaring down at some particular students.

“The War is over. Leave people alone. I don't care how cliche this sounds—befriend people from other houses. And Draco Malfoy”—some of the students perked up—“was a Death Eater. I know. He was a Death Eater. He’s not any more. I testified for him at his trial. He has every right to be here. So if you think otherwise, you’d better come talk to me about it.” Harry breathed deeply, but it had never calmed him before, and it didn’t calm him now. “Understand?”

“Can we trust Slytherins at all? Can you name one good Slytherin?” Zacharias Smith called out.

“Many Slytherins fought for us in the Battle of Hogwarts. I can’t say the same for you!” Harry said harshly.

Smith sneered. “You’re avoiding my question, Harry.”

“Severus Snape risked his life to spy for our side. Narcissa Malfoy lied to Voldemort and saved my life.”

“Pfft.” Smith rolled his eyes. “A tiny act doesn’t make them good. They were clearly trying to save themselves.”

“Merlin!” Harry spat out. “Bloody Merlin was a Slytherin. Is that good enough for you?”

Zacharias fucking Smith shrugged. “No need to get so angry. I’m just saying what everybody else is thinking.” Geoffrey Hooper beside him made a noise of agreement.

Harry glared. “Fine. Whatever. If you have a problem with Slytherins, talk to your head of House, talk to me. I will not tolerate attacks on them, in any circumstance. Got it?”

The students he glared at quickly nodded, and the head-bobbing spread like a wave.

Harry ran a frustrated hand through his hair. “Good. Let’s start,” he said abruptly. He jumped down from the stage. His heart was thumping, and he felt like punching someone. Probably Smith.

Neville touched his shoulder briefly. “What was that about?”

Harry shook his head sharply. “Kinda caught it happening.”

Neville looked concerned. “Shouldn’t you tell McGonagall then?”

Harry sighed, deflating. “I know—I just don’t think the Slytherins would appreciate it, you know?” And neither would Draco. “Look, the next time I see it happening, I’ll do the whole thing.”

Neville nodded, jaw set determinedly. “I’ll keep a look out too.”
“Thanks, mate.”

*

Harry watched the other students closely. The Duelling Club was remarkably well behaved and muted, and the students looked sufficiently contrite. He noticed that they preferred to ask Neville or Flitwick for help. Have they all done something? Harry immediately kicked himself mentally. He had ignored the Slytherins, never noticing what was happening, and for some of the students, that may have looked as good as his consent.

Harry rubbed his face. Why can’t people just get along? That the statement could be turned on him was not lost on him. It reminded him of wanting Draco in the Duelling Club. That’ll never happen, Harry thought tiredly.

At the end of the club meeting, Professor Flitwick approached him. “Has there been an incident, Mr. Potter?”

“Professor?”

“Your speech. If you saw anything, you must report it,” Flitwick insisted. “I will be speaking to my House about this.”

Harry sighed. “No one got hurt, aside from the attackers who hurt themselves. I’m not going to say who were involved—if they hadn’t come forward, there must be a reason.”

Flitwick frowned. “Mr. Potter, I understand students’ dislike of so-called ‘dobbing in’, but attacking other students is unacceptable behaviour!”

“Me and Malfoy for six years?” Harry queried.

Flitwick folded his arms. “I believe you have misplaced your sense of justice.”

“But Headmistress McGonagall’s speech didn’t work, did it?” Harry said dejectedly. “Can I return to the dorms now?”

“This issue is not resolved,” Flitwick warned, “but you may return.”

“Good night, Professor.”

“Good night, Mr. Potter.”

*

On Friday night, Draco learnt that Padfoot was Sirius Black. His cousin, someone he never knew. He watched, feeling like an intruder, as dream-Harry laughed with Black. He shuddered as the dream darkened.

He never wanted to see Bellatrix ever again, but he saw her often in Harry’s dreams. Her face, twisted in dark glee, always managed to stir a deep fear in Draco, and when Black fell into the veil, a cry sundered the dream space.

“No! No! Sirius!”

Harry dropped to his knees with a great heaving sob and everything melted and disappeared until there was only Harry alone in the darkness, facing a deceptively beautiful Veil.
Tears ran down Harry’s face, unchecked. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, it was all my fault, my fault. If it wasn’t for me—”

Draco made to approach Harry, but everything tilted, and Draco barely maintained his balance. They were suddenly at the astronomy tower. Draco sickened, looking down on his own face. He watched Dumbledore fall, a drop that seemed forever and an impact that shook the ground. It did not stop. And every time Draco tried to approach Harry, he was pushed back by the dream itself. Harry remained beyond his reach, and a low chant permeated the dream.

“I’m sorry, it was my fault, I’m sorry, it was my fault, I’m sorry—”

It hurt Draco, because he knew it wasn’t Harry’s fault. It was Draco’s. Snape and Dumbledore—that was Draco’s fault. Death Eaters at Hogwarts—that was Draco’s fault. The people locked in the Manor’s dungeons, the Golden Trio before his eyes—and he could do nothing but watch those trapped get tortured. And torture them himself.

And...Draco had taken a long time to fully understand this, but it was the Dark Lord’s fault.

Draco wanted to embrace dream-Harry. He wanted to say—it’s not your fault, it’s mine. I’m sorry—but he couldn’t. Or at least to say—it’s not your fault, the fault lies solely on the Dark Lord—but the words stuck in his throat. Draco could only sing, and this time he sung of night and darkness, an angry song because Draco was too weak to stand the fear.

He wanted Harry (when did he start calling him Harry?) to stop feeling guilty. He wanted him to be angry. Angry at the Dark Lord, angry at Draco, but not guilt, not guilt that was never supposed to his. Draco wanted to take it, that guilt. Draco deserved the shame. The hate.

Not Harry.

*

Harry was still asleep Saturday morning when Draco started for the kitchens, so Draco went alone. After last night, Draco did not begrudge him. But he could not stop the smile when Harry arrived an hour later.

“Morning,” Harry said, as he dropped heavily onto his seat next to Draco. “Morning? You’ve already wasted half of it!”

Draco smirked. He found Harry trying to speak for him amusing. It had shocked him, at first. Harry didn’t speak what Draco was thinking, but the times it came close was...comforting, in a way. To know Harry knew him well enough. Draco swallowed. After the incident with the other Slytherins, Draco had tried to talk again in vague hope that the curse had faded, but as he expected, it had not. There was nothing he could do, though, until the visit to the Manor during Hallowe’en.

House elves came to set Harry’s breakfast and things settled down into their comfortable routine.

After an hour of work, Draco leaned back, stretching. His fingers were stained with ink where they brushed against the parchment. Annoyed, he drew his wand and cast a cleaning spell. Sometimes the ink just simply didn’t dry fast enough.

Harry lifted his head, meeting Draco’s eyes with a smile. “Malfoy. Fancy a leisurely fly?”

Draco stilled. He hadn’t flown with other people since the Fiendfyre. Harry kept his smile, though.

“Afraid I’ll beat you? You can’t beat someone at flying leisurely, Scarhead. Aha—so you’re scared.”
Harry tried to curl his lip into a sneer, but it failed, looking like a grin instead. “In your dreams, Potter. I’ll beat you at leisurely flying!”

Draco rolled his eyes. He wasn’t daft enough to say something like that. Harry’s smile, uncertain around the edges, did it for him, though. Draco stood up in a huff. Harry leapt out of his seat, grinning.

“Yes!” Harry continued when Draco glared, “You won’t be smug when I beat you!”

They cleaned up their things and headed quickly back to their dorm room. It was still pre-breakfast and they saw no one on their way to the dorms, nor out to the Quidditch pitch. Draco was just relieved that he had his broom and flying gear with him. The idea of an early morning fly was good—without the stress of trying to catch a snitch.

* 

Harry was surprised at his own words when he asked Draco out for a fly. He was even more surprised when Draco accepted. Regardless, Harry didn’t regret it.

Draco looked good in his flying gear—lighter and more form-fitting than standard Quidditch gear. Harry ripped his eyes away, trying to ignore that prickling of unease of staring at a boy. Another part of his mind pointed out unhelpfully, Draco’s more a man than a boy. Harry shook his head, which just made Draco look at him curiously.

“Just thinking. I never would have thought,” Harry quipped back.

Draco rolled his eyes.

The Quidditch pitch was just ahead. Harry put in a sprint to get there first. Throwing a challenging look back, Harry mounted and kicked off. Even though he expected it, he startled at the sudden rush of wind as Draco shot past him. Harry really did mean a leisurely fly, but Draco raced, body streamlined, around the pitch.

But most of all, Draco was fast, and it showed best when Draco skimmed just over the stands. The quick-blur of Draco as he flew made Harry dizzy. Draco pulled ahead of him, circled, and came back behind him. Harry half twisted to see, but Draco whizzed past, and the tornado that seemed to follow him buffeted Harry away from the perfect circle he had been making around the pitch.

“If you call that leisurely, then I’ve won!” Harry shouted sullenly as he righted himself. Draco tilted his head back, and Harry’s heart was already lifting when Draco’s lips quirked into a smile.

And then Draco laughed, and Merlin, Harry’s breath caught in his throat. It was entirely unexpected and unfamiliar. The morning light lit Draco’s hair like a golden halo around his head, and the uncharacteristically open expression—one Harry would have vehemently denied possible on Malfoy’s face—made Draco look beautiful, almost Veela in flight.

And Merlin and Godric, Harry knew what a catch in his breath and a skip in his heart meant. It meant that he—that Harry was—

Harry forcefully looked away from Draco. He couldn’t even think it, only feel it, know it, and dread it. It’s fine, Harry, just...ignore it. Draco’s a friend. Your crush will go away. The other crushes went away, didn’t they? You...felt that about Cho, and about Ginny, but you don’t anymore, do you? It’ll go away. It will.

This ‘crush’ was just a product of being around Draco more frequently. The rush of making a new
friend. That's all.

Draco shot past him again, smirking.

Harry swallowed, trying to recall their usual banter. “I really just wanted a relaxing fly!” Harry shouted after Draco. Draco just grinned back. And stuck his tongue out.

Harry’s mouth dropped open. “Oh, it’s like that, is it?” And he leaned over his broom and forced up his speed, chasing Draco’s laughter around the pitch.

Chapter End Notes

Beta'ed by StoryPainter and Thir13enth over at PTB, and by shlybkwrm :D
With Hallowe’en approaching at the end of the week, Hogwarts became lively, and the Great Hall
was sickeningly decorated. Draco, however, only appreciated the pre-Hallowe’en treats the house
elves slipped him when he was in the kitchens alone.

In contrast, Harry’s dreams were worsening. Sometimes, all Draco could see was darkness, and the
dreams’ very emotions—guilt, hurt, despair—seeped into him. He knew Harry was there,
somewhere, but Draco couldn’t find him, and no song seemed to reach.

And the times that Draco could reach out, could draw Harry into his embrace, Harry stopped crying,
but he remained quiet, tense.

Draco learnt that Prongs was James Potter, Moony was Professor Lupin; Draco learnt about Tonks
—yet another cousin he never knew—and about the death of Fred Weasley.


He always woke up with Harry’s head tucked under his chin and Harry’s face streaked with tears.
Sometimes, Harry was sleep-whispering, I’m sorry.

It’s not your fault, Draco thought fiercely. It’s not.

* 

The moment the first decorations for Hallowe’en came up, Harry’s uncomfortable thoughts about
Draco rapidly disappeared. He started wandering again and never woke up early enough to
accompany Draco to the kitchens.

The Hallowe’en Feast gave Harry a headache. Everyone’s smiling faces, cheerful chattering made
Harry sullen and angry. He escaped, feeling Hermione’s worried look against his back, but he
couldn’t stand all the fucking happiness—didn’t they know that his parents had died on this day,
seventeen years ago?

He growled, as he dodged yet another clump of students illegally drinking alcohol. The students and
ghosts filled the corridors of Hogwarts with too much noise, leaving Harry no place to roam. He
stomped through the eighth-year common room and up the stairs. Though, he quietened his footsteps
as he entered the dorm room because Malfoy’s curtains were drawn up. Even on Hallowe’en, Malfy
follows his schedule. Harry slumped back on his bed.

He couldn’t remember much of his mum—he feared that he had false memories, conjured up from
his dreams and the pictures of her he’d seen. But he was certain that one memory was true. He was
safe, warm in his mum’s arms, her scent enfolding him. Her voice was a lullaby, and Harry felt
himself sleep in a dream—

And then it was chaos. There was Voldemort, and he could hear Mum’s scream, and he could see
the Killing curse fly towards him, sickly green, and “No-no-no!”

His eyes opened, he became aware of a warm embrace, and he thought maybe—maybe it was his mum hugging him—and the War and Voldemort was just a dream—

But it wasn’t a dream. His mum had died.

Wetness welled in his eyes. The arms around him tightened. Harry saw the brief flicker of white-blond hair, and he felt the hurt easing, burrowing his head into the hand that stroked him, his face into the chest curled next to him. The person smelt of tea and paper, and a kind of male muskiness. *It’s Draco*, he began thinking, but the rest of the thoughts drifted away when he felt and heard the gentle hum of the song of the stars.

*

Harry’s dream chilled Draco. Harry remembered his mother dying. Harry remembered the strike of the killing curse.

Draco loathed himself. He’d let Harry sleep in bed, had hugged Harry in his sleep without consent. Draco was a *fucking Death Eater*, one of the followers of the very person that *killed* Harry’s parents. The Dark Lord was the direct cause of the very deaths that tore Harry up inside, and Draco had followed that man; had bowed to that man, had his mark permanently burned into his arm.

He turned the water in the shower as hot as he could, but no amount of scrubbing removed the disgust.

Harry was sleeping fitfully when Draco left for the kitchens.

*

When Harry woke up, stretching in his own bed, sunlight streaming in and rather late in the morning, waking up in Draco’s arms felt like an oddly good dream. A flush of shame filled his stomach. He wasn’t...no. He *couldn’t* start dreaming about those kinds of things.

The hurt in his chest felt physical, but it was alright; he was not supposed to be happy on the day he was going to visit his parents’ graves.

*

As soon as he could, Draco slipped out of Hogwarts. The moment he left the anti-Apparition wards, he apparated to the private receiving room of the Manor. Draco had barely started relaxing when he was quickly swamped by an enthusiastic Pansy.

“Draco! We’ve missed you *so* much. Are you sure you won’t transfer?”

Pansy drew back enough so that Draco could see Blaise. Draco had missed them *so much*, but where was...

Pansy followed his gaze. “Greg’s still at the reserve.” She scowled at Blaise. “*Blaise*, don’t just stand there! Merlin, you should just see him at Beauxbaton—”

Blaise rolled his eyes, as Pansy dragged Draco over to him.

“Let the man breathe, Pans,” Blaise drawled.

Draco felt his tension draining away. He was safe here. Draco opened his mouth to speak, but his
throat immediately constricted and he choked.

Pansy was immediately concerned; even Blaise was frowning. “Did the curse return?” Pansy questioned. She made to examine his jaw, and Draco let her.

“Is it?” Pansy repeated.

Draco closed his eyes and nodded.

Pansy frowned and tucked a lock of Draco’s hair behind his ear. “When did it happen? Why didn’t you tell us?”

He raised his wand, and at their nods, cast a modified Legimens.

*When I returned to Hogwarts. I did not want to worry you—nothing could be done while I was at Hogwarts.*

Pansy sighed. “If you say so. Aunt Cissa is waiting for us in the North Orangery for morning tea.”

“She’s there too, Draco,” Blaise warned.

*I’ll be fine.*

Pansy gave Draco a wane smile and hooked her arms around both Draco and Blaise.

The North Orangery was beautifully sunlit, and gentle atmospheric charms kept the room from overheating. Draco could feel Mother’s magic hum about them. Father and Mother both sat at the table. Draco nodded to both of them.

“Draco,” Mother said. She rose from her chair and embraced him. “How are you, darling?”

Draco breathed her scent in, and for a moment, the sharp contrast between here and *Hogwarts* made his eyes prickle. When he didn’t reply, Mother placed a hand on his cheek.

“Draco?”


“Draco!” Mother pressed her hands against Draco’s cheeks, checking his mouth, and his throat. “Is it the same?”

“I think so,” Pansy replied for Draco. “Do we still have all the—?”

Mother nodded, determined. “Yes.” She guided Draco to a chair. “Sit, Draco. Have some tea.”

Draco had barely nodded before Mother gave him an absent kiss and started walking swiftly away, commanding Pansy to follow. They swept out of the room, and he knew they would return soon, with books and potions. Even Father busied himself, calling house elves and flipping quickly through a heavy tome.

Draco, once, tried to help, but Pansy very insistently pushed him down.

"Be patient, Draco," she chided teasingly.

After that, Draco sat (im)patiently and drank his tea, and Blaise sat next to him, demolishing the pastries the house elves brought.
Father made a triumphant sound and paced quickly over to Draco. He arched an eyebrow at Draco, in way of permission, before he cast a spell on Draco. The spell tingled, and Father nodded. “It’s the same curse,” he called out.

"Understood," Mother said, across the room.

Father nodded at Draco once again and closed his book. He placed a hand on Draco's shoulder. Draco did not know what to say—neither did Father, it seemed. In the end, Mother called Father. Father squeezed, just slightly, and he turned and walked over to Mother.

Draco swallowed, and set down his tea cup, overwhelmed with feeling. After being surround by students but alone at Hogwarts, to finally be in the presence of people who did not ignore him, did not attack him—Father, Mother, Pansy, even Blaise. Letters weren’t enough to convince Draco that they still cared for him. But this did.

*

After breakfast, Hermione and Ron accompanied Harry to Godric’s Hollow. Harry dearly wished for rain, but the sky remained patchy and the ground dry.

They freshened the protective charms around the graves, and Harry laid down an array of white flowers—roses, chrysanthemums and lilies. Silently, Hermione and Ron stepped away, giving Harry some privacy.

The dream had repeated in Harry’s mind since he woke up. His mother’s warmth, her scent, her voice. The Killing Curse.

Draco.

It felt so wrong to dream of Draco. It felt like...desecrating the only memory he had of his mother, and he felt sick for enjoying the dream of Draco’s embrace.

Why couldn’t the nightmares stop after the War ended? After all he had done, had sacrificed, couldn’t he just be normal? Go to school, complain about classes, and worry about a girlfriend?

Instead, he kept having nightmares, and Draco appeared in the nightmares, and he was becoming friends with Draco, but Draco never talked to him, and Slytherins were being attacked—

Eventually, Hermione placed a hand on his arm. “You said you were going to have lunch at Mrs. Tonk’s place?” she said quietly.

Harry nodded shortly, not ready to trust his voice.

Hermione patted his arm sympathetically. “Ron and I will head to the Burrow first. We’ll meet back at Hogsmeade at four, okay?”

“Yeah.” Harry forced his lips into a smile.

Hermione looked unconvinced, but let go of his arm. “Alright, Harry.” She walked back to where Ron was, and after they both waved, the pair apparated from the graveyard.

*

It was after a long while before Harry felt ready to apparate to Andromeda’s place.

He landed just beyond the front door, and he was surprised to hear a number of voices from inside.
When he knocked, the door immediately opened, revealing Andromeda.

She smiled at him, stepping aside to let him in. “Hello, Harry. Just in time for lunch.”

“Hi, Andromeda.” Harry cautiously stepped in. “Who are...?”

Andromeda smiled. “They’re all in the dining room. You can hang your coat here—”

Harry followed her directions distractedly. The voices sounded vaguely familiar.

“Narcissa is here with her son, Draco, and some of his friends.” Andromeda looked at Harry. “I hope you don’t mind. I read in the papers that you and Draco have put behind your rivalries.”

Draco?! Draco was here?

Andromeda seemed oblivious to Harry’s mental crisis as she led Harry to the dining room.

Teddy, Mrs. Malfoy, Parkinson, Zabini.

But the moment he saw Draco, it felt impossible to tear his gaze away. Unlike Harry, Draco did not look surprised to see him.

“Harry’s here!” Andromeda announced cheerfully. “Take a seat, Harry, and I’ll bring lunch.”

Harry blinked and looked at her uncertainly. She gave him an encouraging look.

Zabini rose. He looked at Harry only briefly before addressing Andromeda. “Allow me to help.”

Andromeda nodded, and the two headed to the kitchen.

Parkinson, whom had been cradling Teddy, approached Harry first. “Potter. Long time.”

Harry nodded, not knowing what to say. He accepted Teddy, and he was relieved when Teddy babbled at him, grabbing his clothes eagerly. Harry let Teddy’s tiny fist grab onto his finger. “Hullo, Teddy,” he said quietly.

“Why don’t you sit down, Mr. Potter?” Mrs. Malfoy said, indicating the chair across from Draco’s.

“Er, yeah, thanks.” Harry felt himself flush under their gazes. He busied himself with occupying Teddy’s attention, while trying desperately not to listen to Parkinson’s conversation with the two Malfoys.

“Hogwarts is entirely old-fashioned and completely behind the times,” Parkinson was complaining. “They should let you off campus every week.”

There was an odd pause before Parkinson continued, sighing dramatically. “Hogsmeade isn’t Paris, but it’s better than seeing the same bloody walls all the time. I thought I’d go mad!”

“Language, Pansy,” Mrs. Malfoy said, amusement colouring her tone. “Children pick up the oddest things, no matter how young they are.”

There was that odd silence again. Parkinson snorted. “Draco, we are going spend the entire Christmas hols out and I’m not taking no for an answer—hey!”

Harry looked up in time to see Draco poke Parkinson on the shoulder. She rolled her eyes back at him. Her eyes immediately met to Harry.
She narrowed her eyes, just slightly, at him. “Potter. How is Hogwarts?”

Harry blinked, momentarily mind-blanked. “Fine, I guess. No one out to kill me this year, so yeah.”

Parkinson cast Draco a look. Draco must have sent Parkinson some kind of message, because she straightened, and faced Harry again. “I—just want to apologise for what I did during the war. For trying to offer you to the Dark Lord.”

“No—that’s fine. I understand,” Harry said hastily. His gaze quickly drifted to Draco, who still hadn’t said a word.

Mrs. Malfoy raised an eyebrow. “Do you wish to speak to Draco privately, Mr. Potter?”

Harry’s eyes widened, as Draco rolled his eyes at his mother.

“No, that’s fine. Call me Harry.” Harry fiddled with the hem of his jumper. “Mr. Potter sounds a bit weird.” He met Parkinson’s eyes, then Draco. “Harry,” he repeated.

Mrs. Malfoy nodded. “Harry, then. Then please, call me Narcissa.”

Parkinson gave a huge sigh. “Fine. Since you’re Draco’s friend. But if I’m calling you Harry, you may as well call me Pansy.”

Draco smiled, and patted Parkinson—Pansy—on the shoulder. Pansy frowned at Draco, and then leaned across the table to address Harry.

“Tell me, Harry, how did Draco convince you to cast on you?”

“What?” Harry looked wide-eyed at Draco.

Draco gave Harry an apologetic look, and stiffly turned his head away from Pansy.

Pansy poked Draco, looking annoyed. “What?”

“D-Draco didn’t cast anything on me.”

Pansy looked back and forth between Harry and Draco suspiciously. “Then how did you talk? He didn’t write everything down, did he?”

A choked sound came from Draco. Muffled laughter, Harry realised.

“What is it? Tell me.” Pansy poked Draco some more, but Draco shook his head at the table. Suddenly, Pansy huffed. “Fine, don’t tell me.”

Draco touched Pansy’s arm. With a sigh, she turned to Harry again. “Draco wants to cast a Legilimency spell.” Her eyes flickered to Draco then back to Harry. “Not that you have to. Seriously, though, it’s weird being your mouth, Draco,” Pansy added with a whine. “It’s not like you can’t talk now.”

“No—that’s fine,” Harry cut in. “You can cast it,” he quickly added, before realising that he didn’t want Draco to read his thoughts. His head was whirring, though. Did he hear Pansy correctly? Was Draco unable to talk before?

Draco raised his wand with a small smile that stopped Harry’s thoughts. Harry’s eyes and forehead tingled for a moment, but dimly, Harry realised that it was nothing like Snape’s Legilimency.
Don’t worry, I can’t read your thoughts.

Harry startled. “Wow, that was.” He frowned. “Weird.”

Pansy waved her hand dismissively. “You’ll get used to it. Now here comes the food!”

Teddy twisted in Harry’s arms at the exclamation so Harry shifted him almost upright to watch Andromeda and Zabini—Blaise, Harry supposed—enter the room with plates and bowls of food.

“Help yourself,” Andromeda said warmly. “I just need to pop back and get Teddy’s lunch.”

“Potter,” Blaise said, as he put down the salad near Harry.

“It’s all given names now,” Pansy drawled. “So he’s Harry and you’re Blaise.”

Blaise raised his eyebrows in mock surprise. “Blaise, hm? I was wondering what my name was.”

It was the oddest thing to feel Draco’s amusement-laughter in his mind. Blaise, cut the pie.

“Yeah, Blaise. I want some salad too,” Pansy added, smirking.

Blaise rolled his eyes, but good naturedly did as they asked. “I’ve been demoted to waitstaff,” he said woefully. “Aunt Cissa?”

Narcissa nodded. “Thank you, Blaise,” she said, accepting the laden plate.

“And you, Harry?” Blaise asked.

Harry nodded meekly.

Once Andromeda returned though, the bulk of the conversation centred on her and Narcissa. Harry made himself busy by eating and fussing over Teddy. He couldn’t help darting looks at Draco though, who seemed to be returning slightly guilty looks back.

When lunch concluded, Andromeda lifted Teddy out of Harry’s arms. “It’s time for Teddy’s nap now,” she said. “Why don’t you go speak privately with Draco?”

“Yes, Mother,” was Draco’s voice in Harry’s head. Come on Harry, we better do as they say.

“We’ll be in the lounge, Draco,” Pansy said. She and Blaise were already up.

“I guess so...” Harry said. Draco nodded.

In the study, Draco leaned against the table, and Harry against the closed door.

Mother and Aunt Andromeda want us to talk, so I suppose you should talk, Draco said, breaking the silence.

Harry frowned though. “But that’s the thing—why don’t you talk? What was Parkin—Pansy talking
Harry stepped away from the door, moving towards Draco. “But it’s not because you’ve been sick for the last month, is it?”

No. I—

“Yeah?” Harry prompted.

Draco grimaced. *It was a curse. Every time I tried to speak, my throat would close up.*

“What?” Harry had crossed the room now, standing just a few steps from Draco. “That’s—terrible. Who would do that? And how could you spell?”

Draco shrugged. *Nonverbals. It’s fine, the curse is broken now. My throat is just a bit rough.*

Harry though was *not* done with it. “I feel like a fucking idiot. I should have known you wouldn’t not talk if you could—”

Fuck off!

“—yeah, yeah—and all those times I pretended to be you—” Harry flushed. “I must have sounded really stupid.”

*Loath as I am to say this, you are not an idiot. There was no reason you should have known, and I never told you.* There was an odd light in Draco’s eyes as he crossed the last distance between them. He reached out, touching Harry lightly. *And I—I greatly appreciate what you did. Thank you.*

Harry stared into Draco’s eyes, closer than they’d ever been, grey and silver glints. He was aware, suddenly, of Draco’s height—just taller than him, making Harry tilt his head back to meet Draco’s eyes.

“Okay,” Harry finally whispered.

Draco stepped away, and Harry tried not to follow his warmth. Harry scrambled for something to say. “About the curse...”

*Do you really want to know about the curse?*

“Yes,” Harry said strongly.

Draco gave him a suspicious look. *Do I have your silence? To not run off and do something ridiculously heroic afterwards?*

*

Draco could see Harry struggle to say yes. There were reasons why Draco hadn’t told Harry about it, and one of them was to avoid being Harry Potter’s pity project.

“Fine.” Harry said. He tugged at the bird nest on his head. “I won’t tell anyone. And I won’t run off. Unless you let me,” he added.

Draco scowled. *I mean it. I’ll bloody book you a personal dinner with the Giant Squid if I have to.*
Harry looked back at him defiantly. “I mean it too.”

*Of course you do.* Draco turned and sat down on the sofa. It was too squishy for Draco’s liking, and he struggled to relax. After a moment, Harry joined him.

*It was after the trials. Within the hour you returned my wand.* Draco kept his gaze fixed at the far wall. *Not everyone wanted me freed.*

Harry shifted beside him. “I—”

Draco shook his head. *You, Potter, don’t count. Most people do not have a hero-complex.* Draco could remember it clearly. He was still dazed from being told that he wasn’t headed for Azkaban and from the familiar warmth of his wand—a wand that still recognised him despite its brief stint in Potter’s hand. Potter had left quickly, just after Draco had forced out a thanks at his mother’s request.

There had been a lot of shouting, and a lot of screaming. Guards had surrounded him and his parents, to accompany them out of the courtroom and to the nearest Floo. But the guards weren’t vigilant enough. Or perhaps it was one of *them* whom cast it.

*After you left, someone cast a spell. It hit me. They might having been aiming for my father, but—it hit me on the arm. It was only a brief sting, and in the chaos, I did not notice anything more.* Draco breathed. *The guards pushed us through the Floo, and Mother called out the destination. And then, when I tried to speak...I just started to choke.*

Draco turned to Harry and was surprised that Harry’s gaze was fixed so firmly on him. Draco tried to relax, to break the tension. *It was all quite shocking and scary, I assure you. I had to write things down, or have Legimency cast on me whenever I wanted to say something. I, of course, eventually found this modified-reverse-legimency, and became stunningly fantastic at non-verbal magic.* Draco looked at Harry pointedly. *You may clap, minion.*

Harry cracked a grin and clapping obligingly. “Amazing,” he added.

Draco nodded imperiously, and continued when Harry stopped clapping. *Then we—Father, Mother and I—found the curse and determined the cure. So I could speak by the time I returned to Hogwarts, September.*

“You said ‘Potter’ to me at the Welcome Feast,” Harry said slowly.

*Yes.*

Harry’s eyes darkened. “Then someone cast the curse at you again. Maybe the same person—or group of people.”

Draco reluctantly nodded. It was on his way to the first breakfast at Hogwarts. A cluster of seventh years came up from behind and—the rest was the past. Draco rolled his shoulders and stood up. *Now you know the story. I think that’s enough talking.*

“But—you can’t just leave it—” Harry protested, quickly following Draco. “If you weren’t so amazing at non-verbals, you’d be almost be—be without magic.”

*Undoubtedly their intentions.* Draco turned sharply. *Look, it’s over. I can spell, I can talk and their plan failed miserably. There’s nothing more I can ask for. And you gave your word, Harry.*

Harry startled, green eyes widening. “But—”
You gave your word.

Harry visibly deflated. “Is there anything I can do?” His shoulders slouched, and his head bowed minutely enough that he peered at Draco through his lashes.

Draco was struck with the image of Harry in his dreams. Defeated. Meek. It was a far cry from the person standing in front of him, but it was a reminder of Harry’s horrid childhood and Draco lost the resolve to snap back.

Look, Harry, I just want to get through the school year. Draco huffed. But if it makes you feel better, I am not adverse to having the Saviour-of-the-Wizarding-world as my personal guard. You’ll have to follow me around, always half a step behind me to the left and watching out for miscreants. And at night, you’ll have to stand outside the door and watch out for more miscreants, and at meal times, you’ll have to taste my meals in case of poison and—

Harry laughed. “Okay, got it, your Highness.”

Draco smirked. I like that. You may continue calling me your Highness. Or perhaps your Majesty. Or Draco Malfoy, the greatest wizard on Earth.

"Maye," Harry said dubiously, but he was grinning again.

* 

After that, they returned to the lounge room, where Andromeda was already setting up some wizarding board game. Harry had a surprisingly good time, even if everyone was thoroughly thrashed by Andromeda. Once Teddy woke up, Andromeda and Narcissa retired whilst Harry and the Slytherins (or, ex-Slytherins) entertained Teddy. Winners were determined by what hair colour Teddy had, but it was hard to tell, since Harry, Blaise and Pansy all had black hair.

Harry was reluctant to leave first. After all, who knew what those three would be plotting the moment Harry was gone? But eventually, time cut close and Harry had to go.

“You’ll come over during Christmas won’t you, Harry?” Andromeda asked, leading Harry to the door.

Harry smiled. “Yeah.”

Andromeda smiled back. “It was good seeing you today. Now, look after yourself.”

“I will,” Harry promised, and turned on the spot, apparating to Hogsmeade.

* 

“Harry, you’re almost late!” Hermione was the first person Harry saw.

“But he isn’t late,” Ron interjected, rolling his eyes.

Hermione ignored Ron. “Did you have fun at Mrs. Tonks’?”

“Yeah.” At Hermione’s and Ron’s expectant faces, Harry elaborated. “Narcissa Malfoy was there too, along with Dra...” Could he call them by their given names? Yes, he thought firmly. “Draco, Pansy and Blaise.”

Ron reddened. “Really? First name basis now?”
“They’re not so bad when they’re not out to hurt you. Or with a Teddy in their midst,” Harry said
defensively.

Hermione gave him an unreadable look, then smiled. “I’m glad you had a good time. Everyone else
is already at the Hogs Head.”

Harry nodded and was content to follow their lead.
Harry hadn’t forgotten Draco’s words from Saturday afternoon. There were people in the school who had attacked Draco, and Harry had witnessed an attack himself. Granted, that group of students were poised to attack two younger Slytherins, but they had turned on Draco fast.

*I—I caught it! I won, Potter!* Draco’s gleeful thought filled Harry’s mind, forcing him back into the present. Draco lifted the fluttering practice Snitch, and it glinted in the morning light, just like his hair.

Harry flew over to Draco, grinning back. “You’ll have to beat me for every time I beat you.” He held up his hand and pretended to count earnestly. “Now, there was that time during second year, and second year again, and—”

Draco narrowed his eyes. *You did not let me win on purpose, did you?*

“Merlin, no!” Harry retorted. He lunged, grabbing Draco’s fist and prising the Snitch away. “I’m going to win so often so that you’ll never catch up with me in your entire lifetime!”

*Oh, you’re on, Potter!* Draco bumped his broom against Harry’s. *Release the Snitch.*

Harry obliged, uncurling his fist. The Snitch immediately zoomed away from them. “Ready—”

*Go!* Draco cut him off. He shot past Harry, leaving Harry behind in his turbulent wake.

*They played four games in total: two wins to Draco, two to Harry, and they collapsed on the pitch in utter exhaustion. Draco had the Snitch once again, smiling infectiously at Harry.*

Harry grinned. *“None of your losses have been made up. We better play again next week, don’t you think?”*

Draco rolled his eyes, but he continued smiling nonetheless. He held his arm up, pointing the Snitch to the sky and looking at it contemplatively. Harry, however, was looking at Draco, flushed and dishevelled.

*A sudden clapping ruined the moment.*

Draco’s eyes went wide and he sat up abruptly, hand already reaching for his wand. Harry scrambled up less gracefully. *Surprise shot through him.*

*Madam Hooch was approaching them, smiling. Behind her, on the stands, were a smattering of students. When had they come? What had they seen? Had any of them tried to hex Draco while they were still in the air?*
“Very good games, boys!” Hooch enthused. “Beautiful flying, Mr. Malfoy, and top form as always, Mr. Potter.”

Harry looked back at her, taken aback by the compliments. At the corner of his eye, he could see that Draco was surprised and uncertain.

“Thanks, Madam Hooch,” Harry said awkwardly. “I hope we didn’t go into some team’s practice time, did we?”

Madam Hooch smiled affably. “Not at all. I’m surprised that Mr. Malfoy is not coaching the Slytherin team.”

_Tell her I don’t have time._

Harry blinked. “Err, Draco doesn’t have time. He...um, he wants to focus on his NEWTs.”

Madam Hooch looked between Harry and Draco with surprise. “I understand,” she said sympathetically. She headed off the pitch and Harry and Draco followed her, brooms in hand.

“If you do plan to have longer Seeker games though, you’re welcome to book the pitch,” Madam Hooch said, looking back at them.

Harry nodded.

“Why don’t you return to the castle? You boys must be hungry after all that—and I believe breakfast is still running.”

Harry shot Draco a look. “Yep, thanks, Madam Hooch.”

Madam Hooch smiled and waved them off.

“Come on, Draco,” Harry said quickly.

_You don’t expect me to go the Great Hall like this, do you?_ Draco grimaced, picking at his sweat soaked clothes.

Harry shook his head, chuckling at Draco’s disgusted expression. “Almost, but no. I’ll let you have the bathroom first.”

Draco sighed dramatically. _Oh, good._

As they returned to the castle, Harry glanced back at the Quidditch Pitch, where he could still see the vague forms of students on the stands.

*  

Draco emerged from the bathroom feeling wonderfully clean. Harry, who had been lazing in his bed, sat up and gave Draco a strange look.

Draco looked back at Harry pointedly. _What is it? Bathroom’s yours._

Harry looked away momentarily. “I was wondering if you’d come to the Library with me.” He suddenly flushed and quickly added, “With Hermione and Ron too. I mean...you’re usually in the Library on Sundays, right?”

Draco slowly nodded in answer to the last question, but he was fully ready to reject Harry’s offer.
Harry might not mind his presence, but it was highly likely Granger and Weasley would. And then there were Harry’s fans. Given the faces Draco saw on the stands, he hadn’t become more well-liked by hanging with Harry. It looked like some of them hated him even more now.

“Then, just sit with me—us! Hermione and Ron won’t mind.” Harry did not meet Draco’s eyes as he said those last words.

* I’d prefer not to disrupt my study. *

Harry deflated. “Oh. Will you come to the Great Hall—”

* No! Draco was startled at how vehemently he sounded. *No. The kitchens is where the finest food in Hogwarts is found, after all. Why would I settle for a cold, late breakfast? *

Harry straightened. He had a strangely determined look in his eye. “Okay. I’ll go with you to the kitchens then.”

* And your friends? Draco stressed. *

“They can look after themselves.”

Draco was affronted. *And I can’t? Potter, if you—* "Merlin, no!” Harry slapped a hand over his own mouth, inexplicably flushing again. “Just wait for me, Malfoy.” He mock-glared at Draco.

Draco flopped back on his bed with a whoosh. *Fine, git. *

* “Prat,” Harry muttered. But he peeked through the bathroom door just before closing, just to make sure Draco was still there. *

When Harry emerged again, Draco was still in the room, though no longer lying in bed. Instead, he sat cross-legged on top of the covers, with those weird rocks scattered in front of him.

Draco actually looked surprised at Harry’s presence, even if for a brief moment.

Harry stared at the rocks. They glinted and sparkled and flickered with light. “I—if you don’t mind me asking—”

*I do mind.*

Harry rolled his eyes but continued determinedly, “What are those rocks for?”

* It is none of your business, and they are stones, not common rocks. Scarhead. * Draco sniffed in a parody of hurt. Harry watched curiously as Draco lined them up along the windowsill.

Draco turned back to look at him, eyebrow raised. *Forgotten your proclamation to accompany me down to the kitchens? Slow minions are dead minions, and all.*

Harry grinned back. He grabbed his already packed bag from his desk and stepped quickly to the door, opening it. “After you, my lord.”

Draco smirked, eyes crinkling at the corners with mirth. *You know your place indeed, minion.*
They made their way down the kitchens, tracing their well-used path. With the greatest luck, Harry did not encounter anyone he was obligated to talk to, and the trip felt just like the early mornings: just them.

Draco was almost insufferable when the house elves procured them a proper morning tea instead of breakfast fare.

*Good grief, Harry, you might have a sweeter tooth than me!* Draco, seated directly across a suspiciously smaller table than usual, eyed Harry’s plate as he picked up his cup of tea.

Harry only shrugged. He had long conceded defeat in ever eating as elegantly as Draco, and he was hungry after Quidditch.

Draco inclined his head, looking past Harry. His face smoothed, and he said casually, *Your friends, I assume.*

Harry quickly looked over his shoulder, but it was only Hermione’s otter Patronus.

“Harry, you said that you’d meet us at the Library at ten-thirty. Please send a message if something’s up.”

*Well, run along,* Draco said dismissively.

“Come to the Library too, Draco,” Harry insisted.

Draco sipped his tea nonchalantly. *I already said no once, Potter.*

Harry scowled, standing up with a loud squeak from his chair. “What’s gotten into you?”

Draco arched a brow and shot back, *And what’s gotten into you now?*

*I fancy you!* shouted a little corner of Harry’s brain. Harry felt a flush rise unbidden, and he just knew that Draco noticed it.

“Fine, then. Be by yourself then,” Harry snapped back in attempt to cover his embarrassment.

Draco’s eyes cast down. *Your friends are waiting, Potter.*

“Yes. Yes, they are.” Harry flung his bag over his shoulder violently. “I’ll see you at lunch.”

*Perhaps.*

Harry didn’t feel like replying, opting to stomp out of the kitchens instead.

The cool air hit him like a blast. He stopped, leaning against the wall. His mind, and his heart, was a bleeding mess. It was going so well, he and Draco, and the flying. And that meant it was going shite. He wasn’t supposed to crush on Draco harder. But he needed to protect Draco—but Draco would hate that, despite his joking at Andromeda’s. How was he supposed to spend more time with Draco whilst not spending more time?

Harry balled a fist, seriously thinking of punching the wall. He couldn’t though, because Hermione would see his hurt hand, and she would ask and worry. He wasn’t supposed to worry her. He realised that loitering outside the kitchens might make Hermione worry too. Making his next goal *going to the Library with Draco,* Harry finally headed to the Library.

*
"Harry," Hermione said.

Harry’s head whipped up, caught in the act. He tried to blink innocently. “Yes?”

She leaned forward, peering at the work laid out in front of Harry. “It must be at least the fourth time this hour that you’ve opened up the Map and checked it.”

“I—no.” Harry crossed his arms defensively. The Map shifted about his lap. “I’ve been writing my Transfigurations essay, just like you wanted.”

Ron groaned. “Nah, mate. It feels like bloody sixth year again, you and that Map.” Ron turned widened eyes at Harry. “It isn’t...Malfoy again?” he whispered.

“No!” Harry immediately protested. He quickly rolled up the map and tucked it into his robes.

Ron looked at him sceptically. “I’m not so sure, mate.”

Hermione persisted. “It’s Malfoy, isn’t it? I heard you had a Seeker’s game with him this morning.”

“Really?” Ron exclaimed. Hushing sounds immediately surrounded him, and he placed a hand over his mouth guiltily.

“The morning was nice. And I haven’t had a game in ages,” Harry said defensively.

Ron nodded absently. “So, you beat him, right?”

“Er, a bit? The whole thing was a draw.”

Ron’s mouth dropped comically. “A draw?! How the hell did Malfoy get the snitch before you?”

“He’s not a bad Seeker,” Harry mumbled.

Hermione poked Ron before he could reply. “Enough Quidditch. Library. Work,” she said. Ron meeped and picked up his quill again.

“Got it,” Harry said hastily. He pulled the books closer and made a show of flicking through them.

Hermione nodded primly.

Five minutes later, Harry excused himself to go the loo to surreptitiously check the Map again.

* 

Draco wasn’t at the Great Hall for lunch, but that was okay—Harry checked and Draco was in the kitchens. After lunch, Harry, Hermione and Ron moved to the common room. Harry had quickly checked the Map in the toilets and found that Draco had moved to the Library.

“Bloody hell, Harry!” Ron said, somehow making it through Harry’s distracted staring at the common room exit.

“Sorry, what?”

Ron waved his hands over the chess board. “Your turn. Look, if you don’t want to play, just tell me. You’ve been bloody distracted all day.”

Harry rubbed his eyes. “Sorry.” He made an absent move, at which Ron snorted.
“Checkmate!” Ron stood up abruptly and with a familiar swish of his wand, packed up the chess game.

“Err, Ron?”

“We are going to Hermione. And you are going to tell us what’s up.”

Harry laughed weakly, trying to diffuse the tense atmosphere. “Did Hermione put you up to it?”

Ron shook his head vigorously. “Mate, even I can see something’s up.” Ron lowered his voice. “Look, I’m sorry, that I wasn’t a good friend, in the past.”

“No—I understand why. It's okay,” Harry protested.

“Doesn’t make what I did any better,” Ron said lowly. “But, we’re friends, right? Tell us what’s worrying you and we’ll see what we can do.”

“Are you sure you want to know, though?” Harry said dryly. Somehow, despite Ron’s words, he couldn’t see the topic going down well.

“Okay, we’re going up to your room.” Ron said firmly. He sent a Patronus to Hermione and led the way up the stairs.

Harry trailed after him and resignedly opened the door.

Ron whistled. “Your room’s neat.”

Harry tried to look around the room with new eyes. The window curtains were fully open, and the room was bathed in the reflected light from the sky. Draco’s stones lined the windowsill, spaced out evenly. Draco’s side of the room was immaculate. A stack of books sat on top of Draco’s table. On top of Draco’s trunk was his bag of flying gear, and his broom was still leaning against the wall by the desk. Harry’s bed was surprisingly neat—Draco must have spelled it before they’d left for morning tea. A few novels and odd bits of coloured rocks and quills littered Harry’s bedside table. His trunk and wardrobe were closed, hiding away their mess inside. Harry’s own desk had scattered parchments and quills—it looked a little bit neater than Ron’s desk.

“I guess so,” Harry said dubiously.

“It is,” Ron insisted. His head turned towards the door, just as Hermione pushed it open.

“I got your message,” Hermione said breathlessly. “What’s wrong?”

Harry levelled Ron a look. “Nothing so urgent that you had to run, Hermione.”

Ron, however, was triumphant. “So there is something!”

Hermione smiled, closing the door behind her. “Harry? Are you ready to tell us?”

Harry flopped down on his bed. He kind of wanted to tell them, about everything, about Draco and the Slytherins (not about him, he did not want to tell anyone about himself). But he doubted that was what they wanted to hear. He turned to them, giving them his most reassuring smile. “It's fine, really.”

The mattress depressed slightly as Hermione sat down. “Harry? We’ll always be your friends, regardless,” Hermione said.
Harry crossed his arms. “Why do you think I’m hiding something?”

Ron rolled his eyes. “Mate, sometimes I think you’re always hiding something. I know you don’t mean it,” he added hastily, “but checking out Malfoy that often isn’t exactly subtle.”

“I’m not checking him out!” Harry denied hotly. His heart thudded.

Hermione’s eyes suddenly brightened. Harry felt anticipation curl in his stomach.

“You’ve been a lot happier lately,” Hermione said, “and you’ve stopped sneaking out at night.”

Harry’s mouth opened, but he couldn’t say anything at first. “You knew.” It came out too much like a question for his liking.

Hermione gave him an exasperated look. “Yes, we knew. But the point is, soon after you stopped, you started taking breakfast in the kitchens.”

“With Malfoy,” Ron added helpfully.

“And? He’s my roommate. McGonagall told us ‘house unity’ and all,” Harry said stubbornly. He wasn’t lying. “I don’t see where you’re going with this.”

Ron stood up abruptly. Hermione started to rise, arm lifting up as though to block him, but Ron was already talking. “You know about Seamus and Dean, don’t you? That they’re currently seeing each other? That’s why they roomed together. And you met Charlie’s boyfriend last time at the Burrow.”

What?

Seamus and Dean? Charlie?

“I think the Dursleys are the kind of people who are homophobic and they probably told you blatantly wrong information,” Hermione said fiercely. “It’s okay if you’re gay, or bisexual, Harry. We’ll still love you. We’ll still be friends.”

Harry’s stomach dropped and he was suddenly dizzy with disgust and relief. “I’m not...” The denial died in his throat. “I...maybe I am.” Harry finally whispered. His throat choked up and stupid tears started to form in his eyes. He needed to say that he was sorry, that he couldn’t be straight like them, like what even he wanted to be. He was utterly unprepared for Hermione tackling him and hugging him.

“I’m so proud of you, Harry.”

The image of Hermione being his mum rose sharply in his mind and he felt embarrassed. But mostly, he felt relief that Hermione knew and could still stand to touch him.

“Anyway,” Ron said, as he came over and placed a warm hand on Harry’s shoulder. “If the Dursleys didn’t like gay people, that’s all the more reason to be okay with it. It’s like a figurative punch in their face.”

Harry smiled weakly, and he wiped away the water in his eyes. Their friendship settled like warmth around him.

Eventually, Hermione pulled back. Ron moved the desk chair closer to the bed and sat down.

“Good. Now we can talk about Malfoy,” Ron said bluntly. “You fancy him, obviously.”
“What?” Harry spluttered.

Suddenly, it felt like everything was moving too fast. He’d just come out to them and they wanted to talk about his crush? At the back of his mind, he could wryly note that he wasn’t surprised that they somehow knew about this too.

Ron continued, ignoring Harry’s very serious plight. “So, we need to figure out whether he fancies you back.”

Harry made a face but his heart traitorously fluttered at the thought of being with Draco. “You want me to—with Draco?”

It was Ron’s turn to make a face. “I don’t know why you like him, but he’s not so bad any more, right? It looks like he’s changed.”

“And you’re on first-name basis,” Hermione said shrewdly. “And you told us that you spent some time with Parkinson and Zabini, so you’re also on good terms with his friends.”

“But he’s not on good terms with you,” Harry countered.

Ron shrugged. “He’s not on bad terms either. And apparently only talks to you.”

Harry bit his lip, the reason why Draco didn’t talk at the tip of his tongue, all ready to be blurted out. He had to reluctantly agree that on the outside, it did look like that. When he felt he wouldn’t betray Draco’s trust, he muttered, “I still don’t understand why you want this.”

“He apparently makes you happy,” Hermione said easily. “And you’ll probably fight, but Ron and I fight sometimes too.”

“We hated each other,” Harry said, raising his eyebrows.

“If this happened before, I would’ve told you to stay away from Malfoy,” Hermione admitted. “And if you weren’t friends already, I couldn’t imagine it happening.” She grinned mischievously. “You’d make a good couple. Some of the girls think so, regardless.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “That’s just a bit creepy. Look, I don’t want to do anything right now, alright?” Never, if he had his way.

Ron grinned with relief. “That’s fine, mate. How about a game of Exploding Snap?”

Hermione frowned. “You, Ronald, have not finished your Potions homework, have you?”

Harry chuckled at Ron’s sudden caught-out expression.

“Er...” Ron said weakly.

In the end, Hermione roped both of them into joining her interrupted study session, and when Harry impulsively checked the Map, Hermione only smiled indulgently at him, and Ron rolled his eyes.

* 

Harry caught up with Draco just before dinner, outside the hall. Draco merely looked at him.

"About this morning, what I said—"

Draco gave no response, which made Harry flounder a bit. 
Harry took a breath. "You're my friend," he said firmly. He felt relief when Draco raised an eyebrow.

_I suppose I am your friend regardless of my opinions on this matter_, he said dryly.

Harry grinned. "Yeah. Draco Malfoy, you're my friend whether you like it or not." He stuck his hand out. "Now shake my hand."

Draco's lip curled up with amusement. He nodded and solemnly shook Harry's hand.

Harry made a sweeping motion towards the open door of the Great Hall. "After you."

_Prat._ But Draco's voice was fond, and he strode into the hall first.

Harry gave Draco another smile before heading to the Gryffindor table.

* 

Harry’s dreams felt nice that night. They skipped and wandered over the last few days, and Draco.

“—yeah, yeah—and all those times I pretended to be you—” Harry was saying. “I must have sounded really stupid.”

_Loath as I am to say this, you are not an idiot. There was no reason you should have known, and I never told you_, Draco replied. He reached out, touching Harry lightly. _And I—I greatly appreciate what you did. Thank you._

Harry stared into Draco’s eyes. In dreams, he felt like he had no control, and Harry tilted his head up a fraction more, feet tip-toeing slightly, as Draco leaned in, placing a hand on the small of Harry’s back, and the other on Harry’s cheek.

They kissed. It didn’t feel like anything definable, but Harry felt _good_. He felt _happy_.

They parted. Draco smiled, just like he had on the pitch, and he leant in to kiss Harry again.

The dream continued, jumping about events throughout the day. But when Harry woke, it was the kisses that he remembered.

He turned his head, to watch Draco work, and he remembered his conversation with Hermione and Ron the day before. It felt like hope in his stomach, like the world was opening up for him, much like when he first learnt that he was wizard.

He was _allowed_ to like Draco, in the crush-or-maybe-more way. Hermione and Ron had given him the closest thing to a blessing to date Draco.

Harry must have made a noise, because Draco turned around. Harry hadn’t put his glasses on yet, but he could _feel_ Draco’s smile, feel it at the edge of his mind where the Legilimency spell connected him and Draco. And Harry had the sudden flare of realisation that Draco might like him back too.

He carried on his day as normal, but it didn't stop him from smiling widely whenever Draco looked at him.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Another chapter beta'ed by shllybkwrn :D

The *Daily Prophet’s* and the *Quibbler’s* front page told the same story, but had starkly different headlines. The *Daily Prophet* screamed:

**LIGHT WIZARD DUMBLEDORE, FAGGOT?!**

Draco eyed the reporter’s name—*Rita Skeeter*—and it made all the sense in the world. He felt himself rolling his eyes as he read it.

*...how it couldn’t be true—how could one of the most prominent light wizards, Albus Dumbledore, defeater of Grindelwald—be a homosexual? For the greater part of fifty years, Dumbledore has been the symbol of Light, one of the greatest wizard of all time. We and our children have looked up to this wizard as a role model. I shudder at what this has inadvertently caused.*

*If only we had known that he was a pooper! For why else did he let Death Eater Severus Snape into the school? And allowed Death Eater spawn Draco Malfoy to walk the same halls as our children?*

*To his credit, his life contains very little traces of a homosexual lifestyle; no, instead, he seems to advocate a life without marriage altogether. Is he so perverted that his duties provided him with that sort of fulfilment? To find out, be sure to keep a look out for my upcoming book—*

Utter drivel, of course. Dumbledore’s—whatever—that made Harry suffer had nothing to do with his supposed torrid romance with Grindelwald.

Irritated at Skeeter’s words, Draco flicked to page five and found the standard *A Day in the Life of Harry Potter* section that had appeared after the War. However, one of the students had somehow taken a grainy photo of Harry and himself flying, and what followed underneath was almost a play-by-play of their match. Draco frowned as sliver of unease settled into his stomach. He folded up the *Prophet* with the front page facing in.

The *Quibbler*, which Draco knew was firmly run by Lovegood’s father, and not without Lovegood’s own input, said rather reasonably—

**WE HEARD THAT ALBUS DUMBLEDORE WAS GAY**

Draco scanned over it—it confirmed the *Prophet’s* tripe about Dumbledore being gay, and someone had obviously leaked the *Prophet’s* article, because the *Quibbler’s* was addressing it directly.

*So you think you could have defeated Grindelwald? Why, if Dumbledore, a gay wizard could have done it, I’m sure all you heterosexual wizards and witches out there could have defeated Voldemort in your sleep. Alas, all the heterosexuals must have been missing from Britain these last fifty years.*
Draco skimmed through the paper, but it held little interest and he folded it up again.

Harry peered at them upside down across the table and frowned. “What do they say?”

*Apparently Dumbledore was gay,* Draco replied, pushing the papers towards Harry. *You can read them if you want.*

Harry’s frown deepened and he regarded Draco with a strange look in his eye. “Do you care?”

Draco’s breath caught in his throat as the dream from the previous week caught up with him again. Was he considering something with Draco, and was that the dream was reflecting some kind of reality like the previous ones? Draco had disregarded it as just a *dream,* where things happened but not as one wanted—Harry had not done anything different, so he had thought it was useless to even *think* about that kind of situation occurring.

Harry’s eyes flickered down to the papers. “That Dumbledore was—”

*Not because he was gay, but because he was Dumbledore and kept favouring Gryffindors,* Draco allowed cautiously.

Harry smiled sadly at him, but Draco didn’t think it was because of him. Harry caught his eye, and shook his head as though to clear something out. Memories, Draco realised.

“How’s your throat?”

Draco blinked at the topic change and lifted a hand to his neck. He hummed experimentally and it felt fine. Draco swallowed, and licked his lips before speaking. “Hello, Potter.” His voice was a bit dry, but aside from that, it sounded like him.

Harry suddenly smiled; it was utterly dazzling. “Hullo, Malfoy.”

“I suppose I can remove the *Legilimens* now,” Draco said carefully.

Harry nodded. “I suppose so.”

Draco waved his wand, and it was done—and regretted it immediately as he felt the loss of that connection. To cover it up, Draco decided that it was his turn to change the topic.

In the most pompous tone he could gather, Draco started, “Now, if you want me to look at your Potions homework...”

*

The revelation about Dumbledore being gay came too close to his own revelation for Harry’s liking. Hermione and Ron were *fine* with it, and Draco seemed fine about it too, but the *Daily Prophet* was *not* fine with it. Harry couldn’t understand it: Ron and Draco were both pureblood—that would mean that liking other boys was fine in wizarding Britain, didn’t it?

But the *Daily Prophet,* the bane of his life now that Voldemort was gone and Draco was no longer his arch-rival, was a mass publication and would share the view of the majority of its readership.

And they didn’t like it. They thought it was wrong. The Dursleys had thought it wrong too: to be gay was something even *worse* than a freak. Harry had a sinking feeling that he wasn’t okay, that Hermione was lying and that being gay wasn’t something normal after all.

And just like his fears about Voldemort became true, so did these.
The school buzzed with the news and it seemed to be the only topic anyone talked about. The upper years, those who could remember Dumbledore, seemed to exalt in their position, sending tales, true or otherwise, into the ears of the lower years.

“Dumbledore’s gay!”

“Can you believe it—he was a shirt-lifter!”

“Fuck, I always knew there was something weird about him.”

Harry sat miserably at the Gryffindor table, trying and failing to cut out the noise. Across the Hall, Draco looked as unfazed at everything as ever, and Harry wanted to sit in that calm that surround him. He wanted Draco’s Legilimency spell, so that Draco could talk to him. He wanted even more to go to the kitchens for lunch.

“Hey, Harry,” some sixth-year Gryffindor said, catching Harry’s attention across the table.

Harry forced his gaze away from Draco. “Yeah?”

“You hung ‘round Dumbledore a lot. Does that mean you knew he was gay?” The boy gave Harry a rather piercing stare.

Harry’s eyes widened. “What—no—”

Hermione glared at the boy. “Why does it matter?” she snapped. “Discriminating on orientation is as bad as discriminating on blood.”

The boy looked sour, but he turned away from them.

“Ignore them,” Hermione whispered into Harry’s ear. She gripped his arm and it felt like an anchor. “It’s always the voice of the dissenters that sound loudest, even if they aren’t the majority.”

Harry nodded and smiled, and Hermione released her grip. For a little while, Harry believed her.

* 

He couldn’t stop his ears picking up comments on their own, just before a Professor came into class, or during that time when Harry was in the thick of students rushing to the next class, or during dinner when relief of the day’s end made students chatter even louder.

“Fuck, can you believe we had a poof for a headmaster?”

Harry quelled the urge to rant and defend Dumbledore. Yes, he did things Harry didn’t like, but in the end, Voldemort died.

“Didya think Dumbledore turned Harry Potter gay?!”

Wait—what if he did?

Ron heard that comment too though, and he scoffed at it.

“Imagine Charlie was here,” he whispered to Harry. “He’d terrify them so much that they’d piss in their pants. Someone thought Charlie had ‘turned gay’ because he worked in a dragon reserve surround mostly by guys. I don’t know what Charlie did, but that idiot was jumpy for weeks.” Ron shook his head. “Learned the hard way that you can’t turn someone gay. You know, maybe we could call Charlie now...”
Harry laughed weakly. “That would be funny.”

“Hey, think about this! So, Dumbledore was gay, and he defeated Grindelwald. Harry Potter defeated Voldemort—you think Potter’s gay too?”

Harry panicked when he heard that, and Hermione and Ron hadn’t heard it, so they couldn’t say anything.

“It’s not natural for Harry Potter to not have a girlfriend. He can have any girl he wants, after all.”

A few students approached him directly, alone and without Ron or Hermione.

"Are you gay?" they asked, bluntly, and with a snide look on their face.

Harry forced himself to meet their gazes and chuckle. "Oh, of course not," he said, faking, denying, lying.

They gave him such a look of relief. "Thank Merlin you're not weird too! It's so disgusting, right?"

Harry felt himself slipping, and he could do nothing to stop it.

*I*

“I think I’ll go to bed early,” he told Hermione and Ron weakly. They had sat down for less than an hour in the common room to work, but even here there was talk. Maybe not about him, because most of the Eighth Years knew him ‘well enough’, but about Dumbledore. It was better, because Ron was right about Dean and Seamus, who flipped off anyone who thought being gay was bad. But Harry didn’t feel well enough to continue acting normal.

Hermione nodded, sighing. “That’s probably for the best. Do you want us to come up with you?”

Harry shook his head. “I’m not that badly off,” he said as lightly as he could.

Ron rose from his seat to clap Harry reassuringly on the shoulder. “Don’t worry, mate.”

Hermione smiled. “Sweet dreams, Harry.”

Harry nodded, and refrained from dashing up the stairs. He got ready for bed quickly and flung himself on the bed so hard that his head felt dizzy.

He knew what was rational and what wasn’t. Hermione and Ron didn’t care about what Harry's preferences were, assuming they weren't lying to him. The Weasleys wouldn’t care. Seamus and Dean wouldn’t care. Draco wouldn’t care. And the wizarding world, the media and the fucking Daily Prophet had spat crap about him before, they'd care, but they weren’t his friends or adopted family. Rationally, he knew that they didn’t matter, not much at all, compared to those close to him. But no matter how rational about it he wanted to be, there was nothing he could do to stop the feeling of disgust and despair inside of him.

He liked Draco so much. Liked spending time with him, talking to him, making him laugh. And that was wrong.

In the end, the Dursleys were right, weren't they? I’m a freak. I’m disgusting. I just want to be normal, but I never will be. Harry curled into a ball and tried to sleep.

*I*
It started off as usual. He was in the Forbidden Forest. It was cold and he didn’t know how his feet kept moving and he was prepared to die. The snitch was in his hand—the Resurrection Stone. His heart ached, as he watched his parents, Sirius, and Remus emerge. It was a dream, he knew, but he wanted to say something different, to tell them something different, but all he could ask was if it hurt.

Guilt clogged his throat as the dream warped.

They were telling him it was all his fault, because he was a bloody sissy. Harry tried to protest, but the dream wouldn’t let him.

“Walk to your death, Harry,” they said in one voice. “That’s the only way you can atone for your mistakes.”

They disappeared, the Resurrection Stone burning in his hand. His feet kept walking, already knowing the way. But this time, the Dementors approached, and everything became colder, icy, frozen. The Death Eaters saw him, Voldemort was there—

In his dreams, Draco always approached from behind, and when warmth enveloped him, Harry knew it was him. Draco was humming, but Harry’s eyes were on Voldemort. Voldemort, who raised his wand, where the silvery forms of James, Lily, Sirius and Remus emerged, and they said in one voice,

“You were too weak, Harry. Walk to your death.”

Harry tried to step forward. It was his destiny to die, but Draco obviously didn’t know that, because the arms just gripped tighter. Harry thrashed, his voice suddenly freed. “Let me go, Draco! I need to die! I have to!”

Draco just hugged him tighter—hugged him! And when Draco’s fingers stroked Harry’s hair, his whole body felt warm—it felt so good, so good that Harry had to fight back a sob.

“I’m not—not—let me go, Draco!” Harry threw himself forward, and forced—forced his eyes to open, to wake up—

Night-time.

Everything glowed a faint silver. His face was pressed against heat, arms encircled him. Harry was warm and safe. It had just been a dream.

He looked up, and the blond hair, the face.

It’s not a dream!

Disgust at himself came over him in a rush and he hated Draco, hated that he would feel safe like this. Harry raised his arms and pushed, violently untangling his legs from Draco’s, scrambled away from the comforting (why? Why is it—?) circle of Draco’s arms. In his haste, he stumbled as his feet hit the cool floor, and he almost fell.

The light from the stones on Draco’s bedside table caught the silver in Draco’s eyes as they opened, blinking slowly. Harry’s heart thumped, and his whole body tensed, ready to run or fight.

“Harry?”

*
Draco rose rather languidly from sleep. For a moment, he thought he was still dreaming, and he called out softly to Harry, with the intent of soothing him back to sleep.

Harry spluttered. “What the fuck, Draco?”

Blood rushed and Draco’s head spun as he sat up. Harry stood before him, partially lit by Draco’s moonstones and star stones. Harry stood there awake.

Fuck fuck fuck. This was it. The end.

Harry took a step back. “Why was I in your bed, Draco?” he snarled.

Draco closed his eyes, trying to breathe evenly.

“Is this some prank, to make me feel—” Harry’s voice came to a strangled stop.

Harry was staring intently at him when Draco’s eyes opened again, the green of his eyes shiny in the gloom—hurt, fear, confusion. Draco had decided long ago that he’d tell Harry the truth, if Harry found out.

Now Draco decided to actually do so. He clung to the hope that Harry really did like him. Because Draco suddenly realised he liked Harry more-than-a-friend.

Draco swallowed. He would have to speak out loud.

“It was never my intention to hurt you,” Draco started lowly. He licked his lips, mouth feeling too dry.

Harry’s eyes rolled minutely, a bit of fire coming back.

Draco smiled wryly. “Well, not anymore. Not since you saved me from Azkaban.” Draco wanted to add, as much as I hate to admit, but he did not think that would make Harry laugh.

Harry nodded. His eyes flickered away from Draco, so he waited patiently until Harry’s eyes fixed on him again.

“You started sleepwalking following your fall in Defence, more than a month ago. You were having nightmares, and stumbling asleep into my bed. I took you back to your own bed at first,” Draco added. “But eventually I decided it wasn’t worth the bother, and just let you stay.”

“You should have woken me up,” Harry retorted. He took a few steps around the space, his back closer to the far wall. “You should have.”

“As if I’m an idiot,” Draco shot back. “You would have hexed first—I’ve seen you jump out of bed as though you were under attack.”

Harry closed his eyes. “Why, though?” he said with a strained voice. “We weren’t friends, then.”

“It helped you sleep,” Draco replied simply. “It wasn’t selflessness that made me do it. After all, I owe you at least two life debts, and I hoped that this would repay one of them.”

Harry scowled abruptly and turned his head away in a sharp motion. “Is that it,” he said flatly.

Draco flinched. “No.” Harry turned his head back sharply and Draco hurried to continue. “No, it’s not like that now.”
Harry stepped forward. His magic swirled around him, prickling against Draco’s skin. “Yeah? Then what? You care for me?”

“Yes, you git!” Draco snapped back. He swept back his covers and stood up, meeting Harry face to face. “You bloody grew on me, and it was fucking annoying at first because you were so bloody you, but then you started pretending to talk for me and flying with me! So, Merlin help me, but if letting you sleep in my bed helped you, I’ll do it again!”

Draco breathed heavily with all his emotions broken free. He gave Harry the most intense look he could, instead of screaming and shouting and stomping like part of him wanted to.

Harry’s eyes widened, and his magic drew back, just a bit. But he did not speak.

Draco growled with frustration. “I somehow entered your dreams, you know. I don’t know if you remember them.” Draco pitched his voice quieter, but it still drew out a stronger reaction from Harry.

Harry punched him in the gut. “Fuck! It was you after all!”

Draco gasped and kicked him back in the leg. “It’s not like I knew why!”

“Because I’m Harry-fucking-Potter,” Harry minced out. “What did you see? What do you want from me?”

“You and your Muggles.” Draco gritted his teeth. “Fucking saw them lock you in your fucking cupboard.”

Harry recoiled. “You—”

“And I wanted to hurt them. Why the fuck don't you hate all Muggles?”

* * *

Harry felt exposed and naked under Draco’s glare. Draco had seen him. His childhood with the Dursleys wasn’t supposed to matter anymore. They were supposed to be insignificant in the face of Voldemort and the memories of the last seven years.

Harry narrowed his eyes. “You pitied me. You fucking thought I was weak and pitiful and then you had to do something, right?”

Draco’s lips pulled into a snarl. “And you didn’t pity me? The lonely Death Eater with no friends? Only fit to be ignored or cursed?”

“No!” But Harry knew that Draco was right, and so did Draco.

“It was like that at first,” Draco said nastily. “But then we became friends and it wasn’t, right?”

“It’s not the same thing,” Harry cut in. He slashed at the air, frustrated. “You were awake. You could have pushed me away if wanted. I—I couldn’t.”

Draco’s eyes widened and he deflated abruptly. “You’re right.” Draco's eyes averted. “I should have woken you. I should have told you. I’m a coward. I can never do anything right, can I? Everything eventually goes to shit. I was a fucking idiot to think this would somehow go differently.” Draco laughed bitterly. “You have every right to be angry.” He made a choking sound, but forced out, “I’m sorry.”

Harry had to blink, for in a whirl of sound, sense and scent, all the songs that Draco had sung to him
Their early mornings, chocolates and flying. Unwilling, Harry’s heart clenched, as his eyes roamed over Draco’s defeated posture.

“What do you want?” Harry whispered.

Draco shook his head. “Something I don’t deserve. There are better people for you out there. You deserve it, after everything.”

“You can. You can have what you want,” Harry said before he could think.

Draco lifted his head and looked at Harry sardonically. “You don’t understand what you’re saying.”

Harry shook his head, and he took a step closer to Draco. A sense of déjà vu ran up his spine, as the proximity forced him to tilt his head up slightly to meet Draco’s eyes. “I do. I don’t care about the public.”

I shouldn’t care about the public, he amended silently. He was going to try harder, so that one day, he really wouldn’t be fazed by the sensationalist words of a newspaper with a bad record.

He placed a firm hand on Draco’s arm, acting braver than he felt. “Hermione and Ron already know, so you don’t have to worry about them. And you’ve been in my dreams. You know what I want.”

Draco’s free arm lifted hesitantly and his hand came to rest at the back of Harry’s head. Harry shivered at the tingle of contact. “If this happens, it cannot be undone.”

Harry quirked an eyebrow. “What, scared, Draco?”

Draco’s growl was the only warning before his other arm snaked around Harry’s waist and drew him flush against him. Harry gasped just as Draco brought their mouths together.

It wasn’t the gentle kisses Harry had dreamed about at all. Their teeth knocked together in a flare of pain that made Harry open his mouth wider, and Draco nibbled on Harry’s bottom lip. Harry felt like swaying as Draco’s tongue smoothed over his lip and slowly, slowly, entered his mouth. His tongue was rough as it caressed Harry’s and the utter bliss pushed down the urge to choke. And when Harry tightened his grip on Draco’s arms, it was all heat.

The heat on his back where Draco’s hand pressed and roamed, the heat on the back of his neck and scalp where Draco’s fingers were tangled with his hair. The burning of their thighs, torsos and fucking cocks pressed together even through the layers of clothing. The hot and wet of their mouths as Draco’s tongue touched and caressed and thrust. Harry moaned and gave in. His heart thumped, the lack of oxygen made him dazed. He wanted to melt, and he wasn’t entirely sure he wouldn’t.

A warmth welled in Harry's chest as Draco withdrew gently, stroking his tongue one last time, and pressing a closed-lip kiss.

“Fuck,” Harry said, running a hand up Draco’s arm just to make sure everything was still solid. He could feel a sense of shame, lurking somewhere deep, but he forced himself to focus on Draco instead.

Draco’s mouth curved into a smirk. “It’s a bit too early for that.”

“Oh, fuck off. Is all you think about is sex?” Harry gave Draco a slight push away.
Draco’s arms fell away from Harry and he took a half step back until the back of his legs pressed up against the bed.

“I was thinking about going to sleep,” Draco said cautiously. “On my bed—but only if you want to.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Merlin, you don’t have to treat me like glass.”

Draco narrowed his eyes and stood straighter. He ran an agitated hand through his hair and half turned away. “Fuck being nice to you then.” He climbed back onto his bed and under the covers.

Harry stood at the end of the bed hesitantly; Draco’s eyes were closed and he wasn’t saying anything. *I’ll probably just sleepwalk into Draco’s bed though.*

Draco groaned, and pulled the covers back. “Hurry up, Potter. Quit bloody looming and get in.”

Harry grinned and jumped in, making Draco’s eyes open with surprise as the bed suddenly dipped.

Draco glared at him, but quickly sighed defeat. Harry fumbled a bit to get under the covers. He lay down close enough to touch Draco, but far enough that they weren’t touching.

For a moment, Harry looked up at the bed’s canopy, silver grey in the moonlight. The *view* was odd, but when he closed his eyes, the *feeling* was familiar.

His eyes snapped open when he heard something coming from Draco. He turned his head, but Draco was looking away. And then Harry recognised the hum and the soft words.

*“I’ll do anything for you, my darling. I’ll place the stars for you.”*

Harry closed his eyes and slid gently into sleep.
When Harry woke up, it just dawn and the sky was a beautiful array of colours. For once, he didn’t have that feeling that something was off, because he was there, in Draco’s bed; and somehow during the night, he and Draco had closed the distance.

Draco was already awake, head angled to a book floating above the bed and absently running his hand through Harry’s hair. A shiver of warmth went through him.

Draco turned, a smile, free, on his face. “Good morning, Harry.”

Harry smiled back. “You’re not grouchy in the morning.”

Draco arched an eyebrow and smirked. “If grouchy turns you on, I can certainly be grouchy to you all the time.”

Memories of the kiss—the snog—flooded back and Harry flushed. “I guess I really am gay then,” he said quietly.

“And Cho Chang and Ginevra Weasley?” Draco scoffed. “You certainly looked smitten then.”

“You and Pansy Parkinson?” Harry countered.

“My best friend,” Draco scowled.

Harry rolled his eyes. “You’re the one who started it.”

Draco poked Harry in the arm. “What I’m trying to hint, Potter, is that there’s no need to box yourself in with Muggle words. Merlin, we even go shagging other species.”

Harry wriggled in the bed. “I didn’t think of that.” He turned his head to Draco. “Thinking? That must be a first for you, Potty.”

Draco opened his mouth, ready to protest, but Harry cut in again.

“For Merlin’s sake, is that the best you can come up with? Something original, perhaps?”

“Better,” Draco muttered. He drew his wand, flicked the curtains back and rose smoothly from the bed. “If you’ve stopped bickering with yourself, it’s time for breakfast.”

“Alright.” Harry made no move to get up though, content watching Draco enter the bathroom first.

* 

When Harry caught sight of the newspapers that were delivered to Draco, he felt his heart skip a beat. The *Daily Prophet* was still writing about Dumbledore.
“I don’t understand,” Harry mumbled under his breath, just trying to get the feelings out.

“The Prophet?” Draco looked up from the *Quibbler*. “What’s there to understand?”

Harry gestured at the paper. “You don’t mind that…and Ron and Hermione don’t. Then why does the Prophet?”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “Skeeter, of course. Judging on her history, she no doubt lives on scandals, both figuratively and literally.”

“Yeah, but—why is it a scandal?”

Draco shrugged. “You expect me to understand the thoughts and feelings of the wizarding public?”

Harry scowled. Draco seemed to be willfully obtuse.

Draco looked back impassively, but he lowered his newspaper. “You do not want to be seen with me in public,” he said flatly.

“No, I—not in a close way.” Harry ruffled his hair, agitated when Draco continued looking at him blankly. “I want to wait until all this dies down first.”

“You are willing to be in a…a secret relationship.”

Harry smiled weakly. “Is that what we have? A relationship?”

Draco’s lips pressed into a thin line. “I assumed you understood what I meant last night.”

“Yes,” Harry hissed. “Merlin, why are we fighting already? Just, let me talk.”

Draco inclined his head slightly.

“I just want to keep us”—Harry felt a smile forming at the thought, but Draco didn’t twitch—“quiet, for now. Maybe, just a few people. People I—we know. Hermione and Ron already know that I sort of fancy you, so I want to tell them. And the Weasleys, eventually.”

“My mother, and Pansy,” Draco said softly.

Harry blinked. “If they promise not to tell anyone else—”

“They can keep secrets.”

“Okay.”

“We will have a mostly secretly relationship then.” Draco finally gave Harry something of a smile, but Harry detected a defeated edge to it.

Harry’s heart pounded as he thought of what he was going to do next. Draco was looking away again—Harry reached over and gripped Draco’s arm, pulling him closer, turning him round to face Harry again. He brought his other hand up to Draco’s cheek. He saw the brief grey of Draco’s widened eyes before his own eyes fluttered closed and he placed a kiss on Draco’s mouth.

Harry’s mind blanked momentarily at the gentleness of it all. Drawing away, Harry had to marvel about how they had gone from enemies to this.

“That’s two,” Harry realised.
Draco gave Harry a weird look. “Two what?”

“Two kisses. Dream kisses don’t count.”

Draco straightened. “And as the Saviour of our illustrious world, I suspect you demand more of them?”

Harry shook his head. “You’re the Malfoy. I thought you would demand more. Maybe a million. Or a billion. Some ridiculously large number that’s better than anyone else.”

Draco’s mouth slowly curved into a smirk. “Are you willing to be my personal kiss-dispenser?”

“Ugh, that sounds gross.” Harry's forehead wrinkled, but his lips grinned against his will.

Draco laughed.

*

“I’m sorry, Harry.”

Harry looked at Hermione quizzically. “About what?”

Hermione glanced around the common room furtively, before leaning in and whispering, “I tried to convince Rita Skeeter to retract her statements. But she’s apparently registered as an animagus already.” Hermione’s mouth twisted into a grimace. “I checked, she really has.”

Harry tried to give Hermione a reassuring smile. “I’m fine.”

“Did Malfoy say something about this?”

Harry flushed, and he could tell Hermione noticed because her eyes widened. “He...he fancies me back.”

“Oh.”

“It’s supposed to be private, for now,” Harry added. But he was already having second thoughts about that.

Hermione gave Harry a thoughtful look. “Are you going to tell Ron?”

Harry nodded. “Yeah.”

Hermione nodded to herself, eyes already flicking away in thought. “I’ll probably need to give you the talk, then. I’ll find you some books—it’s different between two men—”

“Hermione!”

“And of course, we’ll have to meet Malfoy properly.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “He might not want to meet you, though.”

Hermione narrowed her eyes. “Did he want to keep it a secret?” She asked sharply.

Harry winced. “No.” Now, he regretted that decision. “I wanted to.”

Hermione frowned. “Harry, why?”
“I’m an adult now, Hermione.” Harry replied stubbornly. “I’ll ask Draco about meeting you tomorrow morning, alright?”

Hermione nodded, and dropped the subject, but she still looked mildly reprimanding. Like an overprotective big sister, Harry mused.

*

“Malfoy.”

Draco’s hand immediately went to his wand, but it was Granger. He set the book in his other hand back on the table and turned to face her. Professor Vector, at the front of the classroom, gave them a curious glance but otherwise left them alone.

“Granger,” he replied. It was only out the sense of dire courteousness that he spoke—he had had a faint hope of not speaking in public for the rest of the school year and thus avoid having that particular curse cast on him the third time.

Granger already had her book bag slung over one shoulder. “Can I speak with you, just outside the classroom?”

*Harry must have told her something.* Draco nodded slightly. “Yes.” He slipped the last book into his bag and followed Granger out of the classroom.

Granger turned to him with an apologetic look. “Actually, I need to talk to you in private.”

“Silencing spell,” Draco replied monotonically. He was already starting to feel irritated.

Granger quickly cast it. After nodding to herself, she finally spoke. “It’s about Harry.” Granger looked at him expectantly, but Draco did not offer anything. “Has he talked to you about joining us for Saturday study?”

“He has.”

Granger started to become flustered. “Will you, then? Harry already told us about your relationship.”

“I know. I will.” He will go, because he wanted the slightest chance that this would actually work out, instead of twisting and becoming shit like everything else. Harry wanted secrecy and closed doors, but that he had named Granger as one of the few he wanted to tell and actually told her gave Draco a glimmer of hope that Harry did mean to follow through.

“Good,” Granger smiled. “We’ll meet in the common room after breakfast first and proceed to the library from there.”

He nodded.

Granger became stern. “Look, Malfoy, if you want to be Harry’s boyfriend, you’ll be in our company often. For Harry’s sake, we’re going to try to be friends, but friendship only works both ways, so if we’re going to make an effort, you should too.” Her magic flared out, just a bit, and Draco idly wondered if it was some Gryffindor thing. “If you wanted a fling with Harry, then you drop it now.”

*How unbelievable idiotic would it be to involve myself in a fling with Britain’s Golden Boy?*

Draco said lowly, “I fully understand the requirement of your friendship.” He met her eyes firmly,
rolling the words in his mind before he spoke. “I apologise for my past behaviour, and I apologise for my actions, or lack thereof, during the war.”

Granger blinked, as though she was surprised to hear it. “That’s fine. Apology accepted.”

Draco tried for a little smile: it seemed like something Harry always did. “After all, you have proved yourself to be the brightest student in our year.”

To his success, Granger softened. “Thanks. Call me Hermione.”

“Draco.”

Granger nodded. “I’ll see you later, then, Draco.” She cancelled the silencing ward.

“Yes.”

Granger left briskly, while Draco made a more cautious scan of the surrounding students. One of them caught his eye, a familiar student. The boy looked at him and then disappeared into the throng of other students exiting classrooms after the school day.

Draco had been seen speaking.

*

When Draco fell into Harry’s dreams, he realised Harry must have either crawled into bed with him, or had sleepwalked in.

Harry’s dreams were jagged snippets. Draco was detached, float-walking behind Harry as the dreams traced through Harry’s days. He felt a brief surge of joy when Harry dreamt of their early morning kisses.

Then, the kitchens faded into the bustling Great Hall, and the swell of noise all seemed to speak together in a chanting of voices.

“Dumbledore’s gay!”

“Can you believe it—he was a shirt-lifter!”

“Fuck, I always knew there was something weird about him.”

Draco felt like sneering at the voices, things Draco had heard all day long and was rather sick of, but Harry in the centre just looked with widening eyes. Draco approached him, tried to comfort him; but Harry made a noise of distress, pushing Draco away, but then reached out to pull him closer again.

“I’m fine, I’m fine,” Harry was saying under his breath.

The image shifted—just a blur of colours now, the press of bodies. What Draco heard next was new.

“Do you think Dumbledore turned Harry Potter into a poof?”

“Explains why Harry Potter isn’t dating any girls—he could have anyone!”

Harry shrunk before Draco’s eyes, and Harry was a little boy again. His uncle and cousin loomed, larger than life.

“Don’t be a sissy, boy,” the older Muggle sneered.
“What, was Cedric your boyfriend? Always knew you were a freak,” the younger one said.

“Harry,” Draco said.

Little-Harry tilted his head up to regard Draco briefly, before his head dipped down again. “It’s fine, I’m fine. Dwaco, I’m not a freak, am I?” he said quietly, muffled by the folds of Draco’s robes.

Draco petted Harry’s head. This was a conversation that Draco needed to have with Harry again when he was awake, not when only Draco was fully cognisant.

“No, you’re not,” Draco replied gently.

“I hope so,” Little-Harry mumbled. He burrowed further into Draco’s robes.

The dream changed, and Draco returned to singing.

*

Draco rolled over and woke fully. Harry was curled up along his side, and Draco’s fingers automatically went to Harry’s hair.

Harry was source of contradictions and an overwhelming sense of helplessness. He made Draco feel —anger, and affection, and lust. Draco didn’t want to. He wanted to remain amongst his family and childhood friends. He didn’t want to let in someone new—Harry Potter, no less. The more people he interacted with, the more dangerous it would be for him, the more likely his guard would drop.

Draco felt helpless. When Harry Potter did not want to be his friend, Draco was not his friend; when Harry Potter wanted to be his friend, Draco became his friend; when Harry Potter wanted Draco to be his boyfriend, Draco became his boyfriend. Everything was done according to Harry’s will.

He felt a little guilty. He had thought Harry wanted to keep it a secret because it was Draco, the only true Death Eater allowed to roam free. It seemed impossible that Harry could still think that liking other guys could be wrong. But then, it seemed impossible that Harry could have had a shit childhood. And the Daily Prophet—Draco felt like sneering, and in another time, he’d have gotten his father to sue them. Harry was supposed to be inhuman, the perfect hero. And he is strong, Draco reminded himself. He hadn’t become bitter. He had killed the Dark Lord, and saved the world—which, at times, hated him.

Harry stirred. Draco stilled his hand, and Harry nuzzled upwards against it.

“Draco?” Harry mumbled, eyes still closed.

“Go back to sleep,” Draco whispered.

Harry murmured incomprehensibly. Draco resumed stroking Harry’s hair and watched as Harry drifted back to sleep.

And he trusts me. That was the crux of it, was it not?—that somehow, Harry believed him deserving of trust.

And for that, Draco would try to hold onto this gift that he did not truly deserve.

*

Granger and Weasley were waiting for them in the common room, after he and Harry returned from the kitchens.
Granger greeted them with a smile. “Harry. Draco.”

“Hi, Hermione.” Harry replied cheerfully.

Draco inclined his head. “Hermione.”

Weasley stepped forward. He looked between Harry and Granger, before putting his hand forward to Draco. “Ron.”

Harry gave Draco an encouraging nudge. “Draco,” Draco said, as he shook Weasley’s hand. Weasley didn’t hide—or failed to hide—the look of relief when Draco let go.

“Good,” Granger nodded. “Let’s go to the Library.”

They formed pairs when they left the tower and, to Draco’s surprise, Granger placed herself next to him.

“It’s good that you’re here, Draco. I’ll finally have someone to talk to about Arithmancy and Ancient Runes.” She shot the two in front of him an exasperated look. “They simply don’t understand knowledge for the sake of it.”

And I’ll have someone to talk to at all, a tiny part of Draco thought snidely.

“What have you started the Charms mid-semester project yet?”

“I have,” Draco allowed.

“See!” Granger said loudly. Draco frowned, but realised she wasn’t talking to him. Granger hurried forward slightly and touched Harry and Weasley in the back. “Draco’s started the project too!” Harry and Weasley parted to let Granger through the middle, and thus they became the Golden Trio.

Draco felt the distance between him and them increase.

“It’s not due until way after the Christmas hols, Hermione,” Weasley whined. “We’ll do it during the hols, not now.”

“Ronald Weasley, you know perfectly well that you never do homework during the holidays!” Granger said sternly.

“Then we’ll do it after. I don’t think Flitwick even expects us to have started it—we haven’t even learnt everything we need yet!” Weasley protested.

Granger folded her arms. “He’s taught you enough for you to start it. The whole point is for it to be a progressive sort of project that you build upon, not pull together during the last week.” She turned to Harry. “How about you, Harry?”

Harry took a step away. “I—I’ll start it before Christmas?” he said hesitantly. “And I’ll have you and Draco to help me.” He turned his head and shot Draco a smile.

Draco raised an eyebrow back and was shocked when Harry grabbed his hand, drawing him into the now row of four eighth years—taking up the majority of the corridor. Harry quickly dropped his hand and Draco missed the warmth immediately.

He debated silently about whose wrath he could more easily take, and replied, “It’s supposed to be your work, not mine or—Hermione’s,” remembering at the last second to use Granger’s given name.
Granger nodded vigorously. “Precisely! I won’t always be there to help you, or be able to help you.”

Oh, Merlin, Draco realised that he might end up being forced to be friends with Granger by bonding over school work.

They arrived at the Library earlier than Draco was used to. Granger immediately took the lead, heading towards one of the larger square tables further back. Draco found himself manoeuvred to sit next to Granger, with Harry directly opposite him.

Weasley looked plaintively at Granger. “It’ll be hard for you to help us if you sit over there.”

Granger grinned back. “Hmm, that’s the idea.”

Draco ignored their bickering, taking out his work. He was mildly surprised to find that the Golden Trio could work quietly, for when he stood up to search for a book half an hour later, the three were all industriously working away—even Weasley. Granger gave him a quick nod, which he returned before heading towards the shelves.

The low hum of talking deeper in the Library put Draco on alert. He withdrew his wand and proceeded towards the sound.

“We were using that!”

“Well, maybe I want to use it instead—”

“But that’s a first year book. You’re not in first year!”

Draco could make the two little Slytherins through the gaps in the shelves. An older Ravenclaw was holding up one of the textbooks, too high for them to reach—most likely with a grip too strong for a summoning charm to work.

He forced back a sigh and walked towards the shelves closest to them. Charms books—at least he could form a truthful-sounding excuse for being in the area. He did not look at them, at first, but they immediately stopped talking and turned to look at him.

He looked over at them lazily, letting his eyes fall on the book the Ravenclaw was holding up. He raised an eyebrow. “Goshawk, Grade 1? I’m surprised that a Ravenclaw would fail First Year Charms,” he drawled.

The Ravenclaw tensed, sneering back. The kid slapped the book back down on the table and took a step towards Draco, wand drawn. “I’m surprised they let you back into Hogwarts at all.”

Draco took a step towards the further shelves, away from the Slytherins. “As am I,” he lied. “I must ask Harry Potter about that. After all, he was the one who testified for me.”

As he expected, the Ravenclaw startled at the name, eyes narrowing dangerously. By then, Draco had already half turned away and was looking at the books. With a quiet exhale, he shifted towards the next bookshelf, as though he could not find what he was looking for.

The Ravenclaw followed. Draco slipped into yet another aisle, heading back towards the Golden Trio—relative safety, he realised.

“Did you find what you were looking for?” Granger asked.

Draco shook his head. At the corner of his eye, he saw the Ravenclaw hesitate, scowl, and turn
Granger frowned. “What did you want?”

“Books detailing the interplay between Charms and Ancient Runes—I recalled seeing something of that form before, but was unable to find anything.”

Granger’s frowned deepened. “No, there is—I’ve read them. Wait here, I’ll go find them.”

Draco nodded, grateful in more ways than one. If Granger could want to befriend him, she would not stand for the mistreatment of Slytherins.

Harry looked at him suspiciously. “Is there something wrong?”

Draco smirked. “Potter, there is nothing wrong with my work, but perhaps you should check yours again.”

Harry rolled his eyes and pushed his work towards Draco. “Correct it for me, then.”

“And if I want something in return?”

Weasley suddenly choked and his face reddened.

Both Draco and Harry turned to face him.

“Are you alright, Ron?”

Ron looked around furtively, before whispering. “I don’t mind you guys together but please don’t flirt in front of me.”

Harry flushed as red as Weasley and looked back towards Draco nervously. “That was flirting?”

“No, Potter, I was merely hinting at monetary compensation. Ten Galleons a page, depending on the legibility of your hand writing,” Draco said seriously.

Harry quickly lost his flush and nudged Weasley. “I didn’t think so.”

Weasley rolled his eyes. “Mate, it was flirting, and that sounded like a joke.”

Draco leaned across the table. “Oh, you haven’t seen flirting yet, Ronald Weasley.”

Weasley squeaked. “You know I’m with Hermione, right?” he said quickly.

Draco smirked. “Are you sure she wouldn’t mind watching? Or perhaps a foursome...” Weasley was quickly turning as red as his hair.

“Hermione!” Weasley said loudly, jumping out of his chair. He hurried towards Granger who had just emerged.

She looked at him bemusedly. “I missed you, too,” she said, smiling.

Harry gave a surprised laugh, and after a moment, Draco grinned back.
See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Someone slipped him a note during dinner. It had to be one of the Slytherins—no one else came near him, and it was unfamiliar enough that he knew it wasn’t Granger, Weasley, or Harry. When he stood up to leave the Great Hall, four Slytherins followed him out.

“Mr. Malfoy,” the smallest of them started.

Draco suppressed his instinct to glare condescendingly. “Yes?”

“I know Felicity said differently”—ah, that seventh year—“but we want to say thank you.”

Draco gave them an impassive look. “You shouldn’t. You understand that a large portion of this is my fault to begin with?” he said lowly.

The Slytherins shifted, but their spokesperson met Draco’s eyes. “Yes, still, we—can you please teach us how to defend ourselves? We’ve seen you—and it’s not as though we can attend Harry Potter’s duelling club.”

Draco blinked in surprise. Teaching them. He doubted Harry would mind Slytherins joining the club, but the other students wouldn’t make them welcome. No, it wasn’t a bad idea.

“And if you say it was largely your fault...doesn’t that mean you have some form of debt to us, then?” the girl added slyly.

Draco raised an eyebrow, and feeling very Harry, he said, “If you are willing, then I’ll do it.”

All four sets of eyes widened simultaneously—it was quite comical. “Really?”

“In the kitchens, most likely. A suitable time needs to picked.”

“B—but we don’t know where the kitchens are! No one’s shown us!”

At this, Draco frowned inwardly. The older years should have told them—there was a shortcut near the Slytherin dungeons.

“Is your presence required anywhere now?”

The four of them looked amongst themselves and shook their heads.

Draco tilted his head. “Then come.”

He led them towards the dungeons. Behind one of the tapestries was Slytherin’s insignia and he instructed one of them to place their wand tip at the corner, causing an entrance to open behind the tapestry. It would only stay open for as long as it took for the wand’s owner to pass through. The first years did so in a quiet, orderly fashion, and it was minute later that Draco was ushering them up.
a narrow flight of stairs. The faintest smell of food lingered, and it became stronger as the light brightened.

“Merlin,” one of them breathed.

A house elf quickly came up to them. “How would Simp be able to help Mr. Malfoy and friends?”

“A space sufficient for us to move around freely and cast spells, if possible,” Draco said after a moment of deliberation. The kitchens were not the most suitable place for this, but the Room of Hidden Things was too far from the dungeons, and using an abandoned classroom was too dangerous—anyone could find them. And Draco was not welcome in the Slytherin dungeons.

Simp nodded and led them towards an area away from the cooking. “If Mr. Malfoy be putting up wards.”

“I will. Thank you.”

The house elf gave Draco an anguished look, whilst the Slytherins gave him one of surprise.

“Is Mr. Malfoy being sure he doesn’t want food? Drink?”

Draco turned to the Slytherins. “Well?”

Their spokesperson shook her head hurriedly. “No—no thank you,” she added.

Simp gave them a sad look before bowing and heading back to the hubbub of other elves.

As he promised, Draco walked in a circle to cast up the shield wards. They were weak, but if given warning and time, he would be able to lay down stronger wards.

He raised a hand. “This space is sufficient. If it is suitable, we meet Friday nights when Potter’s duelling club is running.”

“Yes—wait!”

Draco raised a bemused eyebrow.

“Can’t you teach us something now?”

Draco smirked. “Do you know Harry Potter’s signature spell?”

One of the boys stuck his hand up.

“Yes...?”

“Damien. It's the Disarming spell!” he said excitedly.

“Correct. The Disarming charm is taught in second year defence, but as you are all Slytherins,” Draco swept his gaze across the children, “I expect you all to learn quickly. Understood?”

They all nodded silently.

Draco twirled his wand and the word *Expelliarmus* appeared in the air. “Look at it. Commit it to memory. *Expelliarmus*—Repeat, one at a time.”

They didn't leave until all of them could cast it. But before they left, Draco warned them: “It's not
enough to be able to cast successfully. You must never cast it *wrong.*”

Amelia, and her closest friend Lela, led the chorus of nods. “We’ll practice. Thank you.”

Draco felt something warm bloom in his chest, and it was a struggle to keep a calm face. “Don’t make me regret teaching you.”

The little Slytherins all puffed out their chests. “We won’t, Mr. Malfoy.”

Draco pulled down the wards. “Then I expect to see you all here next Friday at 7 p.m. sharp.”

*  

Harry wriggled in the circle of Draco’s arms. He shifted back a bit to see Draco’s face. “Draco?”

Draco made an absent hum. “Go to sleep, Potter,” he mumbled.

“I saw you in the kitchens, with—”

Draco turned to Harry sharply. “Spying on me?”

Harry met Draco’s glare calmly. “I was worried.”

“And I can handle things myself,” Draco snapped back. There must have been something on Harry’s face, because he immediately softened and sighed. “Some of the first year Slytherins wanted to talk to me—and that’s all I’m going to say. Hurry up and close your eyes and go to sleep. We have to be up early if you want to go for a fly.”

It took Harry a moment to process Draco’s words. “That’s...good, then?” he said hesitantly. “That they’re talking to you?”

“If you want to think so, Potter. Clearly, it helps that I can talk back and—go to sleep already and stop irritating me.”

“I...umm...” Somewhere in Harry’s mind, he thought to ask Draco about coming out, but Draco’s hand was stroking his hair and the lullaby floated around his ears...and he fell asleep.

*  

Harry woke up wrapped around Draco and something hard pressing against his stomach. His flush was immediate. He attempted to extricate himself, but he accidentally did something that make Draco moan in his sleep and pull Harry in tighter.

“Draco...”

Draco’s eyes opened wide and he immediately let go of Harry. “Fuck.”

Harry watched Draco shift away with a heavy stomach. “Don’t you want to do *it* with me?”

Draco gave him an intense look. “You still think it’s wrong for you to be with a man.”

Harry folded his arms. “No, I don’t.”

“I still enter your dreams, Potter. I’m not an idiot.”

“I...” Harry swallowed. “What have I been dreaming about?”
Draco looked just as uncomfortable. “There have been some dreams about Dumbledore, but also about your supposed Golden Boy requirement of having a girlfriend. And your Muggle relatives feature frequently.”

Harry ran a frustrated hand through his hair. “They’re not supposed to matter any more. I know it’s okay—I’ve even practiced putting my finger up my—can’t we just—you’re not...hard any more, are you?”

“No.” Draco turned away from Harry. “Don’t try to force it, Potter. It’ll make you feel worse.”

“But what if I—”

“What do you want?”

“To tell people that I—you and me. About you and me,” Harry repeated, more firmly.

“The papers are still talking about Dumbledore,” Draco said lowly.

Harry frowned and sat up. “I thought you wanted it to be public.”

“Clearly, I am simply arguing with you for argument’s sake,” Draco muttered.

“Well,” Harry said, leaning over Draco and forcing him to meet Harry’s eyes, “I’m asking you how you want to go about it.”

Draco closed his eyes. “After I inform my parents and friends.”

“You haven’t yet?”

“No.”

“Why not? I told Hermione and Ron already.”

“Because I was uncertain,” Draco said quietly.

It was best not to think about it, Harry thought, as he straddled Draco and forced their mouths to meet in one smooth move.

He did his best, nibbling at Draco’s bottom lip, slipping his tongue into Draco’s mouth. He let his tongue trace Draco’s lips, his teeth. He felt Draco reluctantly respond.

“Do I—” Harry panted, once he withdrew from Draco, “—have to do this every single time you’re unsure about something? Tell me,” Harry added, when Draco remained silent. “Tell me what you’re thinking, tell me what you’re uncertain about. I’m the fucking Gryffindor, remember? The Saviour? I’m not going to try blackmail you, or sell your words or—” Harry gave a sigh. “I thought we went through this already.”

The silence stretched, and Harry thought he might have to grind down on Draco’s groin to get some kind of reaction.

“It’ll be your first time, wouldn’t it. You never looked as though you’d shagged the sh—the youngest Weasley.”

“Y-yeah,” Harry admitted.

Draco smirked weakly. “It’ll be my first time too. Not all the rumours about me are true.” Draco’s
hand raised and it caressed Harry’s cheek. Harry fought the urge to shiver at the touch.

Harry shook his head, but that didn’t stop the flush creeping up his neck. “Hermione gave me some books. To build up to it.”

Draco’s eyebrows lifted. “Merlin, she did that?”

“It was embarrassing as heck,” Harry replied petulantly. “She gave me both Muggle and Wizarding books. And then she talked to me about cleaning and protection and using lube and—”

Draco laughed, looking gleeful. “She gave you the talk! What else did she say?”

“You can ask her if you want to know so badly!”

Draco looked mock-sorrowful. “I would have loved to have seen the look on your face when Granger talked to you. Oh Merlin, your friends are priceless.”

Harry crawled off Draco and pulled him up. “Write those letters now, Draco. You can give them to Teithiwr when she arrives.”

Draco caught Harry’s chin. “You...”

Harry went for a gentle smile. “Yes?” He could see the questions, the insecurity lurking in Draco’s eyes and expression, and he felt a little thrill that Draco was even showing these emotions to him.

Draco straightened. “I will write to them, then.”

A bubbling filled Harry’s stomach about what was going to happen.

* *

Draco eyed the watchers apprehensively. Only a few were there when he and Harry arrived at the Quidditch pitch; one of them ran off and the stands subsequently filled. And whilst some of the faces were not familiar and some were non-aggressive, he recognised some of them. And they knew that he had seen them.

“Ignore them,” Harry had said, after a scowling glance at the spectators. “We could change the day and time, next time.”

Draco had nodded back, and his misgivings had flown away soon after the Snitch was released and they were enmeshed in a race to catch it.

But once they’d landed and finished, Draco became acutely aware of them again. He felt a light touch on his arm and he turned his gaze back to Harry.

“Do you think the letters reached them yet?”

“My parents have most likely received theirs. However, Pansy, Blaise and Greg are on the Continent, if you recall. An owl cannot fly that fast.”

“Oh.” Harry toyed with the edges of the Quidditch robe. “Let’s go back in, then.” Harry looked up again. “How long will it take?”

“A day, perhaps two,” Draco mused. He glanced at their watchers again and started heading back towards the castle. Harry followed him tamely.
“Muggle phone calls would be faster,” Harry said, once they were safely inside their room.

Draco took off the flying guards. “Useless for those who don’t have those...Muggle things.” When he met Harry’s gaze again, he was taken aback—even more so when Harry pounced on him. Draco grunted with surprise as he fell back onto the bed. He thought Harry would kiss him, but instead, Harry’s fingers were a furious blur over his clothes, undoing buttons and pulling layers off.

“You,” Harry pulled off Draco’s flying robes successfully, “looked so”—shirt unbuttoned—“fucking amazing.” Harry seemed to give up on trying to take off everything and just slipped his hands under the remaining layer, teasing Draco’s side. Draco shivered, for Harry’s hands were cold, and his touch left paths of tingling in its wake.

Harry looked at him with a heated gaze, face flushed, hair even more disheveled than usual. He looked utterly debauched already, and a wave of lust went through Draco. He was allowed to want this, to want Harry. He was allowed to touch Harry, to hope for a future where someone would like him, and not see the Death Eater first.

“Draco—don’t just look at me like that—”

Draco flipped Harry over with a growl and it became his turn to pull off Harry’s clothes. Unlike Harry, he succeeded in rendering Harry half-naked. Harry’s skin wasn’t smooth—dry at places, rough with coarse hair, old wounds and faded scars—but that made him so much more interesting.

Draco pulled out Harry’s cock, and without hesitation, Harry reached out to Draco and took him in hand as well.

Harry froze. Draco almost worried immediately, if it weren’t for the look of embarrassment on Harry’s face. “Protection spells, Hermione said. Always.”

Draco nodded shortly and withdrew his wand from his discarded robe. With two swishes, the spells lay down on their skin, tingling a slight bit before seeping in. Harry let out a sigh, relaxing into the bed.

Harry gave a little tug on Draco’s cock. “How, um, do we do this?”

“Let go.”

Harry gave him an uncertain look, but removed his hand.

“Good.” Draco propped himself up with one arm by Harry’s head and carefully lowered his hips until he could grasp both their cocks with one hand.

Harry’s pupils dilated. “Feels good.”

Draco nodded mutely. His grip was awkward and it took some concentration for him to stroke them both properly.

“Draco—” Harry’s eyes slipped shut, and Draco moved his hand faster. The first rush of pleasure made Draco shiver.

Harry rocked beneath him, arching up. His lips parted in a moan and the sound made Draco’s heart flutter. He lowered his head and gave Harry a sloppy kiss. Harry’s hands buried themselves in Draco’s hair and manoeuvred his head so that they were kissing.

Draco moaned as Harry tugged at his hair. He bit down on Harry’s bottom lip, and Harry whimpered, setting Draco’s lips abuzz. Harry’s breath was warm and intoxicating, hot and wet and
hinting of syrup, and it made Draco feel so close to him.

Draco felt his muscles tensing as the heat rose and rose. He broke the kiss with a groan, eyes opening. “Is it—” Draco panted.

Harry tossed his head to the side. “Yeah—just—” His eyes scrunched up. With a quiet gasp, Harry came, with the sweetest expression on his face.

Mesmerised, Draco sped up, came with a shudder, and collapsed onto Harry in a boneless heap.

Harry recovered first, sneaking a hand under Draco to retrieve Draco’s wand. At the sharpness of cleaning spells, Draco rolled off him.

Harry burrowed his head into Draco’s side. “Sleepy.”

With that, Draco gave up on his plan to have a shower and closed his eyes.

* 

After Sunday lunch, Harry went off to coach the Gryffindor team. It meant Draco could deal discreetly with the Hufflepuffs that came his way, and the subsequent group of Slytherins that came up to him—ten this time, instead of four.

Amelia Nguyen—their spokesperson—led the way. “Mr. Malfoy, we cannot wait until Friday,” she said without preamble. “We—we practised the spell you taught us, we do know it. But there will be classes tomorrow, and you simply can’t cast it then.”

Draco suppressed a sigh. “Then we go to the kitchens. But understand this is Felicity Shafiq’s responsibility as head—she is, I presume?”

“She believes we should try ourselves and learn from books like Ravenclaws. It’s so—absolutely unfair!” The Slytherins all nodded.

Draco kept silent, ushering them towards a different, closer entrance to the kitchens.

“They ‘prank’ us during class, using Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes stuff. How are we supposed to obtain those things? We’re too young to be allowed to Hogsmeade, and Felicity won’t budge.” Amelia made a motion of despair. She turned to him, defiant. “We told Professor Slughorn, but he said that pranks are a harmless part of school life. Harmless!”

Draco curled his lip. Slughorn was a man of easy things, and a little bit too able to see only the things he wished to. They reached the portrait in front of the kitchens and Draco went up to tickle the pear. He could see their brains working as the portrait swung open—what other portraits hid entrances to hidden rooms?

“We got caught when we tried to prank them back,” Amelia told him without a blush on her face. “So you have to teach us how to.”

“First focus on protecting yourself and your things before going on the offensive,” Draco said mildly. “It won’t do to attack and find that you’ve been ambushed from behind.”

Draco was a little taken aback when one of them took out some Muggle items and started writing. Amelia, however, looked unperturbed as she herded them into the ring that marked the boundary of the wards Draco had raised the previous night. She turned to him, entirely business.
“Now, sir, we only have time for one or two spells,” she said resolutely. “So, please teach us the next two most important spells.”

Draco groaned inwardly, already regretting his decision to actively help them. He had thought that it would raise his standing and, reduce his load if they could defend themselves. He also thought it would be...pleasant to have some sort of following.

It was because he did not want to lose face that he did not back down. Though, as Draco surveyed the faces of the younger students, he had to admit to himself that their looks of admiration also provided incentive.

Draco nodded slowly, withdrawing his wand to call up the wards.

“A deflection charm. If you are smart enough,”—Draco watched bemusedly as some of them stood straighter—“then we can proceed to a shield charm.”

Amelia looked amongst her peers and nodded decisively. “Good.”

Chapter End Notes

And that's the only reason why this fic has a mature rating ; )
Harry watched Teithiwr swoop in and land in front of Draco. Draco took the letters from Teithiwr’s claws and gave her an affectionate smile. She cooed back before leaving their company for the house elves.

“Well?” Harry asked.

“My mother’s and father’s letters,” Draco replied distractedly.

Harry could only keep quiet only for a moment. “And?” When Draco didn’t reply, he shuffled in and leant into Draco’s space. Draco nudged him back.

Harry tried to be patient, but... “Well?”

Draco turned to him, with a grave expression on his face. “Harry, you must understand...”

Harry felt his stomach drop.

“My parents, to my relief, accept our relationship,” Draco continued, in the same, serious tone.

Harry blinked. Then, he blinked again. Draco looked back at him.

“You—” Harry lunged at Draco, catching him about his waist. “Bloody almost gave me a heart attack.”

Draco spluttered as he collapsed partially onto the table, but almost immediately, Harry felt Draco’s chest rumble as he started to laugh.

“Merlin, you should have seen your face!” Draco said, between fits of laughter.

Harry squeezed tighter, fully intent on squashing Draco’s torso. “Wasn’t funny,” he scowled.

Draco gave him a pointed look. “No, it was quite funny.” He shook his head in disbelief. “You knew Mother liked you, didn’t you? At Aunt Andromeda’s house.” Draco wriggled in Harry’s arms, forcing him to weaken his grip. Not that Harry could maintain it, face almost squashed into Draco’s side as it was.

“I can’t tell what your mum’s thinking,” Harry muttered back.

“Hmm.” Draco patted him on the head. “Take my word for it then, Potter. She likes you. And if she likes you, there is no need to worry about Father. Well, a very tiny bit of worry is required.”

Harry frowned, only now remembering Lucius Malfoy. “Well, if you say so,” Harry said slowly.

Draco hummed, and he was the one to break the silence. “You’re a cuddler, aren’t you?” he said, in an entirely too-curiously innocent voice.
Harry grunted, but made no move to extricate himself from Draco. In the silence that had preceded Draco’s words, Harry had been thinking how nice it felt to do this—being close together without the need for words.

Draco patted his head again. “Harry Potter is very adorable,” he said lightly. “I believe that your animagus form will be something very small and cuddly.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “And yours would be a very annoying, very loud, squawking peacock.”

Draco actually shuddered. “Merlin, no. You do not understand how much they like to hurt you, and they’re absolutely territorial. I couldn’t go into some of the gardens without Father, because they’d attack anyone else.”

It was Harry’s turn to pat Draco on the head. “Aww, poor Dwaco,” Harry crooned. “Did the big bad peacock make you hurt?”

And it was Harry’s turn to laugh at the abject expression of Draco’s face.

*

“Draco,” Harry said, not letting go of Draco’s sleeve. He wasn’t going to allow Draco make him face Slughorn alone. The way Draco was jerked back into Harry’s arms was pretty funny and Harry sneaked Draco a hug.

Draco straightened immediately and looked to the ceiling. “Yes, Harry?” he said, with the most aggrieved voice.

“Don’t leave me,” Harry whispered. He glanced down the corridor and, on cue, Slughorn appeared, rounding the corner.

“Potions out to get you again?” Draco asked.

Harry nodded with utmost solemnity. “Yes, potions and Slughorn. Your presence and your help are necessary for my safety. As the Saviour of the Wizarding World, I require your personal assistance.”

Draco made an inelegant snort, but he didn’t leave Harry’s side. However, he did flick Harry on the forehead. “Got it, Scarhead.”

“I don’t know, is it just me or do we always have Double Potions on Monday mornings?” Harry muttered.

Any reply Draco might have given was cut short as Slughorn approached Harry in big strides and clapped Harry on the shoulder.

“Harry, great work on your last assignment,” Slughorn said, smiling widely.

Harry peered up at Slughorn. “Thank you, Professor.” He turned to Draco, whose face had smoothed to disinterest. “Thank you for helping me, Draco.”

Draco’s eyes told Harry as clearly as if he spoke—What the fuck are you doing? Harry looked back innocently.

Draco made the tiniest eye roll back, but played along with Harry. “You’re welcome, Harry.”

Harry turned back at Slughorn, who was looking uncomfortably at Draco.
“I suppose I—good work on your assignment too, Mr. Malfoy,” Slughorn said, flustered.

Draco dipped his head slightly. “Thank you, sir.”

Slughorn cast Harry a strange look that clashed with the smile on his face. “Well. Let us go in.”

Harry nodded back pleasantly, waiting for Slughorn to open the door and enter first. He caught Draco’s sleeve again before he could slip away.

“Potter,” Draco hissed.

“Can’t you help me brew as well? I’ll join you in the back row.”

Draco gave a little shake of his head and glanced at Slughorn inside the room. “Why would you need to?” he whispered. “This just is not done—”

“Indulge me,” Harry said, as low and deep as he could. He grinned inwardly at Draco’s catch of breath and dilating pupils.

“I—fine. Fine.” Draco turned his head from Harry with a tiny huff.

Harry rolled his eyes but complacently followed Draco to the back row. He put his bag down on the table and sat down.

“Come on, Harry, you need to wash your hands before brewing,” Draco said.

“Really?” Harry replied.

“Contaminants, Harry.” Draco looked prepared to drag him over to the sink.

Harry frowned, and he looked at his hands thoughtfully. There was dirt stuck under his fingernails, and one of his fingers felt sticky with jam residue. “Alright.”

Draco sighed. “I see that you truly do need my help.”

“Yep,” Harry grinned brightly back.

* 

The other students didn’t notice him and Harry at first, when they came into the room. After all, Draco was normally by himself at the back—what more was there to see? Slughorn kept darting glances at them, though Harry seemed oblivious. Draco wasn’t, but he pretended to be, inspecting Harry’s hands critically to make sure they were clean. Draco cast a cleaning charm regardless.

When Weasley and Granger arrived, the pair gave them a curious look, and Granger made her way to the back, followed by a less-eager Weasley.

The class started whispering then, the move drawing their eyes to the back. Draco felt like shaking his head. His friendship with Harry was mentioned in the Daily Prophet every single day for a number of weeks already and with the Golden Trio for days now. It was unusual for them to look at him with envious eyes, though.

“Harry, Draco,” Granger greeted warmly.

“Hi, Hermione,” Harry replied. He was still smiling brightly.
Granger looked at them curiously. “Any particular reason?”

“Draco offered to help me today.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “Please do not take Harry’s word. I have been pressed-ganged into service.”

He was really surprised when Weasley burst out laughing. “Malfoy, you’re not too bad,” he said.

Draco gave a disdainful sniff.

Harry patted him sympathetically on the arm. “Aww, you’ve hurt poor Dwaco’s feelings.”

Weasley laughed even harder, and Granger cracked a grin.

Draco glared at all them, especially Harry. “Class is about to begin, so sit down and look to the front,” he said, mustering every ounce of calmness he had.

He had utterly brilliant timing, because at that moment, Slughorn loudly cleared his throat and started to greet the class. As expected, Granger immediately turned her attention to the front, and by example, Harry and Weasley followed.

Draco smirked inwardly, smug that he had the last word.

* 

After a brief introductory, Slughorn set them working on a potion used to aid patients with hypothermia.

“Atago, aren’t we supposed to get ingredients now?” Harry asked, a little worried. Ron and Hermione were already lining up at the ingredients cupboard.

Draco finished jotting down something in his journal first. “I prefer to choose ingredients unhurriedly,” he said evenly. “You’re welcome to go first.”

Harry shook his head. “I guess.” *Draco avoids the crowd.*

Draco stood up. “Set up your cauldron. For this sort of potion, pure water is beneficial. Start boiling water and distilling it.”

“An aguamenti isn’t enough?”

“We want to remove as much trace of our own magic as possible. The distillation process does this,” Draco replied, rolling his eyes. “You’re conjuring water out of nothing after all—”

“Contaminants, right?” Harry felt pleased.

Draco nodded. “Learning well, my pupil.”

“What, should I call you ‘Master Draco’ now?”

Draco lifted his chin. “Well, of course.”

Harry chuckled, and he followed Draco’s movements. Draco appeared to be ignoring it, but Harry saw Slughorn nervously approaching them from the corner of his eye.

“Harry, doing alright back here?” Slughorn asked. “You haven’t retrieved the necessary ingredients.”
His hands fluttered a bit by his side.

Harry put on a smile, which Slughorn returned. “Yes. Draco was just telling me it's best to purify the water first.”

Slughorn's gaze flickered towards Draco. “Ah, yes, very good.”

Once Slughorn walked away, Draco snorted.

“You're Slughorn's little Gryffindor,” Draco mocked.

“Always awkward as fuck,” Harry said, sighing mightily. “Anyway, you're my master now,” Harry said cheekily. “So I'm your little Gryffindor.”

“I should have you spanked for that,” Draco murmured, licking his lips.

Harry grinned. “You should be focusing on your potion, Master Draco.”

Draco smirked. “A Harry Potter elixir isn't a bad idea.”

“Hey, I think Slughorn's looking at us again. How long do you think before he'll come over here again?”

Draco frowned. “Never, I'd hope.”

“Maybe that's why my potions are so bad,” Harry said contemplatively.

Draco shook his head. “I'm sorry to tell you, Mr. Potter, but Potions is a sentient being out to get you.”

“But now I have the amazing Master Draco to guide me through the dense thicket!”

“Focus, little Gryffindork. Reduce your flame.” Despite the reprimand, Draco's eyes were alight with amusement.

Harry made a good potion that lesson; but even better, Draco wasn't alone at the back of the room.

* *

Draco headed to the Library after Arithmancy, intent on finding a specific book before dinner. Granger had gone in the opposite direction to the Eighth Year Dorms. Potions that morning had gone well, and Draco might have revelled, just a bit, in Slughorn’s expressions when he was forced to acknowledge Draco in front of the beloved Golden Trio. At times, Slughorn had this wonderfully twisted expression, caught between forlornly looking at Harry and grimacing at Draco.

The four of them had entered the Great Hall for lunch together, though Draco parted ways with them when he headed to the Slytherin table. There, Amelia and her band settled themselves around him in a blatant display of support and affiliation. It was the first time Draco did not leave lunch early.

Draco felt good. People talked to him, wanted to be around him and listened to him. And it was that sense of fulfilment, Draco thought, was the reason why he did not notice them until it was too late. He was too immersed in recalling the day’s events that by the time he noticed his detection wards pinging, his path was blocked by a gang of Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws, and Gryffindors. And when he realised that, he also realised that they had blocked the way behind him as well.

A Gryffindor boy stepped out from the line. Hooper, Draco thought, feeling anger in his throat.
Hooper raised his wand and pointed it directly at Draco’s face. “What are you doing to Harry Potter?”

Draco slipped his wand into his hand. Hooper was one of the people who had cursed Draco that second time.

“Imperius? Potion?”

“Neither,” Draco said coolly.

Hooper sneered. “I see you have gained your voice back. Such a shame, really. If you understand what's good for you, you'll step away from Harry Potter.”

Draco made his expression colder. “Perhaps it's you who doesn’t understand.”

“Understand what? You honestly believe that Harry Potter would willingly befriend a Death Eater? When he was the one who fought and killed Voldemort?” Hooper glanced at the other students, who were nodding along with him. It made the fucking Gryffindor stand straighter and glare at Draco with a renewed self-righteousness even more sickening than Harry’s, back when Draco had really loathed him.

Draco counted. There were too many students. Standing in an almost-circle around him made them targets for each other’s spells if they missed Draco, but it also meant Draco’s back would only be protected by the pendant—and the pendant could only hold a certain amount of power and spells.

Draco narrowed his eyes. “And if I tell Harry about your actions, Geoffrey Leonard Hooper?”

Hooper laughed lowly. “If that's so, why haven’t you told Harry Potter already?” He looked amongst his group again and turned back to Draco with a cocky grin. And then he cast the first purple-red hex.

Draco slipped easily into nonverbal counters. He sidestepped the first hex, deflected the second, deflected the third. His heart rate picked up, and he could feel the beginnings of sweat beading on his forehead. He gripped his wand tighter and chanced an *Expelliarmus* in-between a deflection charm and a shield charm. It almost succeeded, tugging away one wand, but Draco couldn’t bloody maintain the disarming spell for just the moment longer it needed.

The air became thick with red stunners, and it made Draco’s stomach roll and the heart pump harder. He couldn’t brazen it out, couldn’t advance towards them, couldn’t scare them off and walk away with his back turned. He felt his face put on a thunderous expression, no matter how calm and cool he wanted to appear. A tremor of fear went through him when he missed a spell and it careened into his pedant’s defence. *Keep it together!* he snarled to himself. *Remember the Dark Lord? Remember Bellatrix? This should be child’s play.*

Draco pushed out an intense deflection spell, out and out until it pushed back against fucking Hooper. Hooper stumbled, and for a brief moment, the onslaught eased. Then the spell shattered and Draco had to cast yet another shield.

It was just a lapse, just one fucking pause in his spell casting when he thought it might be a tiny bit easier to cast aloud then force the spells nonverbally, that was enough for a stunner to hit him. It meshed angrily with the pendant’s magic and his shields and made him freeze instead of knocking him unconscious. A small mercy, that, because it meant he was conscious as the hexes hit him. He didn’t flinch at the pain—he *couldn’t*. Instead, he forced himself to concentrate on breaking the stunner; he could still feel his wand, and he swirled the words of counter spells around his mind and
pushed magic through and outwards.

“The only place that deserves you is Azkaban!” Hooper sneered. “This, this is for every hurt and pain you and your fucking Death Eaters did to us!”

Draco ignored him and a burst of triumph accompanied the breaking of the spell. He had barely time to non-verbally cast a shield before a blast of lightning knocked him down and burnt his wand arm. He choked down a scream.

Hooper stepped forward. “You could never feel the pain we have, short of a fucking agonising death. *Because that’s what happened to my sister.*”

Hooper was close enough that the others had stopped firing spells, and as his foot came closer to Draco’s face, Draco gripped his wand tighter and rolled and rose in a movement that made pain flare anew in his arm.

“Do you feel fucking remorse, Malfoy?”

Draco curled his lip. *Of course* he did, but it’d be fucking useless telling *them.*

Hooper raised his wand and cast a spell at Draco point blank. Draco forced magic into a shield charm, raising his arm in an instinctive block.

The movement was too sharp, and his arm burned with pain and his fingers jerked around his wand. The spell hit him and the feeling of ice spread from his chest, so *cold* it hurt. His heart missed a beat as he was frozen into place.

Hooper curled his lip back. “Are you feeling pain yet? Is guilt choking you yet?”

“Hey!”

Draco couldn’t even move his *eyes* to see where the voice came from.

“Go! Away! *Expelliarmus!*”

There was a shout of anger and another chorus of Expelliarmus. *Amelia and her Slytherins,* Draco realised.

“Oh, you’ve done it *now!*” yelled a voice too low to be one of the Slytherins.

Hooper cast the ice spell at Draco again before he stepped past to look behind. “Well, if it isn’t the little baby snakes,” he muttered.

Draco imagined himself glaring at Hooper: even baby snakes were venomous. What he heard though, were shield charms and disarming spells against hexes. The Slytherins wouldn't last. They wouldn’t be able to free him.

Hooper made a snorting sound and turned back to Draco. “Now, what to do with you?”

Draco’s heart thumped in his chest and his stomach dropped. In a flurry of mental activity, he attempted nonverbal wandless counterspells.

Hooper seemed to sense Draco’s struggle; he smirked and raised his wand.
Harry saw a crowding of students around the label of footprints of *Draco Malfoy* on the Marauders’ Map. Horror and anger stirred simultaneously. He jumped out of the sofa, ignored Hermione’s startled question, and dashed out of the Eighth Year common room.

He saw them from behind, and as his feet thudded closer, he made out the flash of white-blond hair.

“*Draco!*”

He flung out his hand and fired an indiscriminate disarming spell.

The students turned to him, their faces angry before sharply turning into a mixture of shock, fear and embarrassment.

“It’s Harry Potter!” The words rippled through the crowd of students and faces turned to him as they edged back towards the corridor walls.

Harry snarled at them as he stalked forward. “Fuck you all! The War’s fucking *over!*” He wanted to wipe the sickening looks of embarrassment off their face: they should be chastised and feel *fucking sick* of their *fucking stupid* actions. Harry pointed his wand and the students had a *fucking inch* of intelligence to let him through.

Harry stalked forward. Draco was blocked from his view by some Gryffindor and that was *shit*. “You! Drop your wand.”

The Gryffindor turned and Harry’s fist clenched when he recognised Geoffrey bloody Hooper.

Geoffrey gave him a devious smile. “Hello, Harry.”

Harry aimed his wand. “What did you do to Draco?”

Geoffrey’s smile dropped. “Look, Harry, it’s nothing—it’s not permanent, like my *sister’s death*.”

“And you don’t think people I’ve loved have died?” Harry stepped right into Geoffrey’s space. “You were *there* when McGonagall talked to us at the start of the year, and you were fucking *there* when *I* talked to entire duelling club!”

“So? You’re *Harry Potter*. It’s not the same!” Geoffrey swung his head to Draco and back to Harry. “You don’t *understand* what it’s like to see his face every single day and to be reminded of the War and those fucking Death Eaters! Maybe *you* forgive him, but you’re not the only person in the world, *Harry Potter*!”

Harry wanted to shout and scream and punch Geoffrey in the face *so fucking badly*. “*And you* don’t understand! What would you do if *your* family was held at wand point? Would you let your family die just so *you* could be on the good side?”
Geoffrey bared his teeth. “As though I’m stupid enough to get into a situation like that!”

“That’s the fucking point! It’s not Draco’s fault that his father was a Death Eater!”

“So. What? Malfoy’s a Death Eater too. He chose to bow down to You-Know-Who!” Geoffrey snapped.

“More to the fucking point, the War is over! I don’t see Draco attacking others. I see you attacking!” Harry snapped.

“You little—” a voice growled.

Harry’s head whipped to the side. He saw a first year Slytherin tussling with an older student.

“Let go!” the first year cried.

“Expelliarmus!” The wand flew into Harry’s left palm, and he dropped it to the ground. Harry heaved a breath and turned back to Geoffrey with narrowed eyes. “Now, what did you do to Draco?”

Geoffrey crossed his arms across his chest and turned his head away. “The spell should be wearing off now anyway. I’m not low like some Death Eaters.”

Harry shoved Geoffrey out of the way, turning immediately to Draco and placing a hand on his chest. The shifting of muscles rippled under his hand. Draco blinked. Harry’s other hand raised tentatively to Draco’s cheek.

“Are you okay?” he whispered. He ignored Geoffrey's indignant spluttering.

Draco turned his head away and coughed.

“Draco?”

Draco nuzzled his hand even as he said, “The Slytherins—”

“They’re better off than you.” Harry gingerly ran his fingers across Draco’s arms and chest, and he caught Draco flinching.

“What has happened here?”

Harry quailed, just a bit, at McGonagall’s voice. Mostly though, he felt relief. She can deal with this.

“We were just—” Geoffrey started.

“—Attacking Mr. Malfoy!”

Harry was shocked that it wasn’t him to who spoke—it was the group of little Slytherins.

McGonagall stiffened and gave them a hard look. “Mr. Potter? Can you confirm this?”

Harry looked hopelessly at her, because didn’t telling her still meant breaking his promise to Draco?

“It’s true! Why won’t you believe us?” a voice called out.

McGonagall turned her head slightly. “Ms. Nguyen, I—”

“They’ve been doing this since the start of the year!” The smallest of the Slytherins shook herself
free. “It’s not fair! It’s not fair! What kind of Headmistress are you?!”

McGonagall looked a teensy bit taken aback, in Harry’s judgment. Harry’s respect for the Slytherin spiked. “Ms. Nguyen, if you’d allow me to speak, I want all of you to see me in my office. I will speak with the Slytherins first, and I will expect to see you, Mr. Hooper, and your friends, an hour later.”

Geoffrey visibly swallowed. “Yes, Headmistress. Erm...Headmistress?”

“Yes, Mr. Hooper?”

“What about dinner?”

McGonagall nodded shortly. “After dinner then. Mr. Potter and Mr. Malfoy, I’ll see you both tomorrow morning before breakfast.”

Harry nodded and took Draco’s hand.

McGonagall led the Slytherins away and the other students quickly dispersed, but not before Geoffrey gave them both a narrowed-eyed look.

* 

It was after few minutes that Draco broke the silence between them. Harry knew that Draco’s apparent acquiescence would not last.

“Where are you taking me,” he said flatly.

Harry shook his head. His fingers probed over Draco’s arm, and on cue, Draco winced. “You’re hurt.”

“Nothing compared to the Dark Lord,” Draco replied in a false, flippant tone.

“We’re going to Madam Pomfrey’s,” Harry said, ignoring Draco. He took his hand and made towards the first floor.

Draco tugged his hand free. “No.”

Harry turned and growled at him. “You’re hurt, you stubborn prick!”

“I can heal myself,” Draco retorted.

“What, are you a qualified Healer?”

“They weren’t throwing Dark curses, Potter. I have sufficient knowledge to heal myself.”

Harry grabbed him by both hands. “No.” He bit his lip. “Look, I don’t get your mistrust of Pomfrey —”

“Incorrect.”

“But if you don’t want to see her, then at least let me help you.” Harry looked as earnestly as he could at Draco, and he was relieved when Draco’s mouth softened. Harry kissed Draco lightly on his cheek. “Thanks. I was worried, you know.”

Draco’s eyes flickered away before settling on Harry again. “I should thank you. If you hadn’t
Then you would have gotten really badly hurt, Harry silently filled in. He shook his head. “Don’t thank me, I just did what was right.”

Draco smirked weakly. “I see. Ever the Saviour.”

Harry changed directions and took them back to the eighth year dorms.

Hermione rose immediately from her seat when they entered. “What happened?”

Harry shook his head. “Later, please.” He was aware of Draco's stiff posture and blank face, and he was aware of the curious glances some of the other students were giving them both. He was relieved when Hermione gave a slight nod and sat down again.

In their dorm room, Draco turned his back to Harry and started taking off his robes. Harry placed a light hand on Draco's hip.

“Let me help, please.”

“I never agreed.” But Draco let Harry slip his arms out the sleeves.

Harry tossed the robes over Draco's chair. “I know you hurt your arm,” he said, as he undid the buttons on Draco's shirt, “but did you get hit anywhere else?”

Draco winced as the shirt was pulled away, but Harry could only give him an apologetic look. “My chest. I may have bruised my shoulder,” Draco admitted.

That drew Harry's attention to Draco's chest. Goosebumps were spreading across Draco's skin, and he could make out a star-burst of muted red-blue. Harry's heart beat a little faster when he saw the faded slashes across Draco's chest. He traced the ridge of one scar as it went from Draco's hip right through one of his nipples.

“Does...does it hurt anymore?”

“No,” Draco replied, equally quiet. “The scars, they don't have any feeling.”

Harry's eyes flickered uncertainly to Draco's. “I never apologised to you about this.”

Draco's eyes were hooded. “I thought that it was justified, given all that I did before then—and after.”

Harry couldn't help his hands, touching and probing Draco's skin. “No, it was just—just something thoughtless and reckless. I wanted something that I knew you couldn't stop, but I didn't even know what it was.” Harry looked up at Draco properly. “I was so scared that I'd killed you. If Snape hadn't arrived...”

“And I suppose you'd rather face my Crucio than kill me?”

“I can survive that,” Harry said blithely. “The fact is, I'm sorry.” Harry grasped Draco's hips and pressed the lightest kiss over the centre of Draco's chest. Draco trembled under his hands.

“Harry—”

“Hush, just let me heal you now.”
“All the things—I regret—” Draco stopped talking when Harry placed his wand on Draco's chest.

Harry murmured some healing charms and watched critically as the colour faded.

Draco huffed. “There's a lot of things we need to talk about.”

“We have a lot of time ahead of us,” Harry replied casually. He studied the burn on Draco's arm with an academic ferocity.

A kiss dropped on Harry's head. “We do.”

The unspoken promise spread a warm feeling through Harry.

* *

“When will you tell us what’s up, Harry?” Hermione pestered as they walked towards the Great Hall for dinner, and as they sat down at the Gryffindor table, and after she caught him looking at Draco across the Hall.

Harry cursed inwardly. He knew he'd forgotten to talk to Draco about something—about how much Draco would let him say. “I'm not supposed to tell you yet. But I think everything'll become clear soon.”

Hermione gave him an unamused look. “It has something to do with Draco, doesn’t it?”

“Maybe,” Harry admitted.

“Hmm...” Hermione did not look placated, but at least she stopped questioning Harry in-between bites.

Harry looked down the Gryffindor table. Geoffrey and his friends were seated far away from them, and he caught Harry’s look with a narrowed gaze. He turned to his friends to whisper something, and those friends in turn gave Harry surreptitious glances. They in turn whispered to their neighbours and Harry got to watch the Hogwarts gossip mill at work.

And of course this new rumour was about him, as he started receiving more and more of those odd looks. But the oddest thing was that they were looking at Draco as well.

* *

Draco rolled his eyes inwardly. If he wanted to look at someone, he would either look intently or discreetly, not that nauseating back-forth-back-forth looks some of the students were giving him across the Hall.

Amelia’s second in command, Lela, whispered something to her, and they both turned to Draco with wide-eyed looks.

“Is it true that you’re...friends with Harry Potter?” Amelia asked.

Draco turned his gaze to the person in question. “That rumour isn’t entirely untrue,” Draco replied. Harry met his eyes across the Hall, and when Draco nodded, Harry gave a little wave back.

Amelia, however, still looked suspicious. “Well, we just heard that you and Harry Potter...are...”

“Yes?” Draco prompted with a suppressed sigh.
Amelia quickly raised her hands. “I’m just the bearer of the news, yeah? That you and Harry Potter are together. Like, in a like-like way.” Amelia’s face twisted into distaste at the ‘like-like’.

Draco’s eyes widened, and he quickly looked back to Harry. Harry looked lively and unconcerned as he chattered with Weasley and Granger.

“What?” Draco asked quietly.

“I heard from Lela, who heard from Malcolm, who—” Amelia cut herself off at Draco’s look.

“It’s fine. It’s true after all,” Draco said nonchalantly. He picked up his cup to take a sip. Draco kept his smirk to himself when Amelia’s and Lela’s eyes widened, shock written clearly on their faces.

“Wow—” Amelia breathed, before hastily adding, “and eww. Adult stuff.”

Lela looked at Draco hesitantly. “Do you do...kissing things?”

“Yes.” Draco stood up.

Lela whispered furiously to Amelia, and then turned to Malcolm and whispered furiously to him and...Draco could imagine the information spreading back up the chain. Pansy would have reveled in this.

Draco made his way over to the Gryffindor table. Granger gave him a searching look, but obligingly made space for him next to Harry.

Harry swallowed. “Draco!”

Draco looked down the Gryffindor table pointedly, “I think someone’s been busy talking.”

“About me?” Harry replied drily.

“About this.” Draco drew Harry towards him possessively and kissed him.

Harry emerged from it red cheeked and blinking. “What?” Across the table, Weasley was making choking sounds and Longbottom was literally choking.

Harry whispered, “But what about Parkinson and—”

“They would have received my letters by now,” Draco said softly into Harry’s ear. Obviously it would take twice as long for them to reply back. He felt the eyes of the students on them, and Hooper was staring at him rather murderously. “I’ll see you later.” Draco stood up in one smooth movement and walked back calmly to the Slytherin table.

* *

Harry watched Draco walk away, half dazed. Did Draco just...? Did he...? But it...?

“That was both unexpectedly, yet expectedly, showy of him,” Hermione murmured.

“Harry,” Neville finally choked out, “how long have you been seeing Malfoy?”

Harry run a hand through his hair. “Not that long, actually.”

“Err, well, you don’t need me to warn you, but the Prophet’s gonna go mad over this,” Neville said.
Harry winced. Fuck, that was kind of why Harry wanted to keep it a secret.

“We’ll just ignore them then, won’t we, Harry?” Hermione said sternly.

Harry straightened and nodded. “Right. Yeah.”

“Harry Potter?” A student touched him on the shoulder.

“One Galleon per autograph,” Ron said quickly.

The Ravenclaw boy shook his head and looked ready to back away.

“Yes...?” Harry prompted.

“Hal.” Hal gave Harry a wild look. “I just wanted to say...you’re-my-role-model-and...I’m-gay-and-it-means-a-lot-to-me-that-you’re-out...!”

Harry blinked. One part of him recoiled from the idea of being anyone’s role model; but another felt the need to rise up. It was like Hermione said, if the Daily Prophet thought being gay—or bisexual, Harry reminded himself—was bad, then all the more reason to punch the Prophet in the face by being out.

Hermione nudged him under the table.

“Er, no problem,” Harry said. “Er...good luck with your school work?”

Hal beamed. “Thank you, Mr. Potter!” The Ravenclaw hurried back to his own table, looking bright.

Hermione had a beaming smile. “Good job, Harry.”

*

Draco shifted as Harry climbed into bed.

“What will you say tomorrow when you meet with McGonagall?” Harry asked, without preamble.

Draco suddenly felt very weary. “Harry—”

Harry placed a hand over his mouth. “Do you think I’m weak?” he asked, gazing earnestly at Draco.

“No,” Draco said into Harry’s palm. Harry was one of the strongest people he knew; also one of the most annoying, though.

Harry gave him a skeptical look. “So you don’t think I’m weak, even though I have all those nightmares? Even though I—” a blush appeared on his cheeks, but he continued, “—need you to hold me at night and sing a lullaby so I don’t get nightmares?”

Draco shifted Harry’s hand away. “It’s not the same. Amelia and her Slytherins will tell McGonagall what she should know.”

Harry’s hand twisted and he clamped down on Draco’s hand. “No, what Hooper and the others were doing to you was different. Don’t you want justice?”

“Some would say justice corresponds to sending my entire family to Azkaban for life,” Draco said bluntly.
Harry scowled. “Stop trying to change the subject. If it was before everything that happened, you would have thought I was weak and pathetic, wouldn’t you?” Harry put his hand back over Draco’s mouth. “Don’t talk. Think about it.”

Draco closed his eyes. He would have thought it was weak and pathetic, more so because it was Potter.

Even if he ignored it, his subconscious had told him that those were attacks. Despite his want to keep calm and not let it affect him, it did: he changed his sleeping schedule, ate breakfast in the kitchens and was unable to communicate—unable to speak—with others in any meaningful way.

“It’s weak to need help, isn’t it?” Harry asked quietly.

Draco’s eyes snapped open, but his protest died in his throat. He met Harry’s eyes blankly. He didn’t want to be powerless—he had promised that to himself when Harry testified for him at the trials. He didn’t want to need help, not when he had wanted it so much, in some indescribable way, during the war—yet when it came too late, or at a cost almost as terrible...

But Harry...

Harry lifted his hand from Draco’s mouth and rolled away to the edge of the bed. “I’ll keep your promise,” he said. “But that doesn’t mean I like it. Or...” Harry turned back and faced Draco, with a determined look in his eye. “How about I remove your kissing privileges? And sex, of course.”

“You wouldn’t—”

“I would,” Harry said firmly, and fucking Merlin, Draco believed him.

“That is completely unrelated to the subject,” Draco protested.

“So? You don’t like it? Well, I don’t like what’s happening.”

Draco found it hard to believe that Harry would coerce him in this way; it undermined the whole...Gryffindoriness and sincerity that was supposed to underlie confessions.

“I mean it,” Harry warned. “You’ve got to tell her. You don’t fucking understand, the need is...”

Draco sank back into the bed. “My confession would hardly alter McGonagall’s response.”

Harry sat up and prodded Draco in the chest. “If you’re not going to do it for yourself, or for justice, or for sex, can’t you do it for me? You’re the one who kissed me in front of the whole bloody school.”

Draco folded his arms. “This isn’t about you.”

“Malfoy! Stop being so fucking stubborn!” Harry growled. “What are you so fucking scared of? Because that’s what it is—you’re just fucking scared of telling McGonagall the truth. Oh, you’re not scared of being gay and kissing me in front of everyone, but the moment some kids younger than you start ganging up on you, you hide away!”

“I’m not bloody scared, Potter!” Draco snapped. “You don’t understand—”

“Fuck I understand! You were a bloody pain in my side for six bleeding years!” Harry’s hand slammed into Draco’s chest.

Draco bucked and pushed Harry off. “You were my arch-rival, and that’s worlds different from
what’s happening here,” Draco hissed, pressing Harry into the mattress.

Harry glared at him. With a scowl, he turned his head away. “And you’ve been in my dreams, whether I like it or not,” he said bitterly. “You, out of anyone else, should know how shite my…”

Draco swallowed. “Your childhood,” he filled in, equally quiet. It was hard to remember that Harry had been attacked frequently in his childhood; Draco still struggled to see how Harry Potter could have been that kind of person, the kind of person that was bullied.

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“Do you understand anything I’m trying to tell you?” Harry ground out, when Draco stayed silent. He mustered some force to half slide Draco off him.

Draco didn’t meet his gaze. “No, I admittedly don’t…But I’ll tell her.”

Harry gave Draco the most skeptical look he could make. “Really?”

“But I may need you to remind me tomorrow morning,” Draco added. “Anything to make you stop complaining.” Draco started stroking Harry’s hair, and against his will, his eyes began to droop.

“You’d better.” Harry sighed and tilted his head towards Draco, moving his head more firmly onto Draco’s hand. “And I think it’s about time we figure out how you’ve been entering my dreams.”

“Mother has suspicions about Legilimency—”

Harry quirked a smile. “Could be because I used your wand.”

Draco mussed Harry’s hair. “Indeed. Are you quite sure it’s not past your bedtime?”

Harry shook his head, though admittedly his eyes had closed, and he was definitely not bothered to open them again. “Legilimency, shared wand, and the fact that you keep your wand under your pillow,” Harry counted off.

Draco extricated Harry’s glasses before he spoke. “Sounds surprisingly plausible.”

Harry hummed. “I am quite smart, aren’t I?” he said lightly, laughing when Draco’s fingers attacked his sides.

Finally, when had Harry gave Draco as good as he got and both of them were all laughed out, Draco swished his wand, tucking them both into bed.

“Put your wand on the bedside table,” Harry directed.

Draco did as Harry told, but he gave Harry a dubious look.

“You're here. I don't need you in my dreams as well.”

“Assuming that the wand is the crucial link.” Draco's fingers crept into Harry's hair.

“I'm right, I'm sure of it,” Harry said, even as he snuggled up closer to Draco.

“Golden Boy gut feeling?”

Harry closed his eyes. “You’d better get used to it.”
Draco said nothing more, but Harry could feel Draco rolling his eyes. Instead, Draco dutifully sung Harry a lullaby about blue skies and fluffy white clouds.
When Harry woke up, Draco's hand was once again tangled in his hair. Draco's eyes were open, and he had a contemplative expression.

“I dreamt of you,” Harry said, stretching his arms.

Draco turned to him and smirked. “Did you? I'm flattered. After all, I didn't dream of you.”

“So it was your wand.” Harry grinned. “I was right! I told you so!” He jabbed Draco in the stomach, and quickly rolled off the bed before Draco could retaliate.

Draco rolled his eyes. He waved a lazy hand at Harry. “I had to let you be right sometimes. If I was right all the time, I'd be too perfect to live with.”

Harry groaned.

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“Mr. Potter and Mr. Malfoy, take a seat.”

Harry touched Draco briefly before they sat on the two adjacent chairs. The portraits were awake and watching them curiously...and there was Dumbledore, with the twinkle in his eye, and Snape was half-turned away from them. Harry swallowed, his memories threatening to overwhelm him.

“I have spoken with the others students,” McGonagall started, much to Harry’s relief. “You may want to know that they were either unharmed or had minor injuries that were healed. Madame Pomfrey did not keep anyone overnight.” She gave them a piercing look. “I neglected to see if either of you had injuries.”

“I was injured,” Draco said quietly. “Harry healed me, so it’s fine.”

“I wasn’t hurt,” Harry added.

McGonagall pursed her lips. “I see. Then, Mr. Malfoy, what occurred before the fight?”

“Nothing. I was only walking towards the Library when they surrounded me.”

“Can you confirm this, Mr. Potter?”

“I did not see the start of this attack, but I trust Draco.” Harry turned to Draco and gave him a quick smile. Draco nodded back.

“I had suspected that there was more,” McGonagall sighed sadly. “Mr. Malfoy, I'll understand if you do not wish to tell me about what has been happening between the other students and yourself, and I will be taking measures regardless, but at the moment, you may be the best person to reveal the extent of these attacks. If nothing else, I would like to hear your side.”

“I was planning to,” Draco said, giving Harry a weak smile. Harry gave him an encouraging smile back.
Professor McGonagall nodded solemnly. “Then, inform me.”

Draco told her of the attacks against the innocent Slytherins, the pranks against them, though he left Slughorn’s inaction out—if McGonagall decided talked to Slughorn, then Draco was content to let him dig his own hole and fall in; it was possible that Amelia had already spoken about Slughorn’s uselessness. He forced down his own pride and put his emotions away and told her about the attacks towards him, and the time he spent mute because of the curse.

“Did they say anything to you?” McGonagall asked, with a mixture of curiosity and self-righteous fury of the Gryffindor kind.

Draco’s eyes flickered to the watching portraits of Dumbledore, who’d watched the proceedings with damned-twinkling eyes, and to Severus, who had turned to face Draco when he had started speaking. He was looking at Severus when he said flatly, “I’m a Death Eater. I don’t deserve to be here.”

Severus’ eyes flashed.

Beside him, Harry made a coughing sound. “Ex-Death Eater. And I think you deserve to be here.”


The Headmistress stood up. “Thank you, Mr. Malfoy, Mr. Potter. Rest assured that those students will be severely punished.”

Draco rose to his feet, inclining his head.

McGonagall gave Draco a determined look. "I have failed in this, and I expect no forgiveness. But I can assure you that the Board of Governors will not remove Slytherin House from Hogwarts, not while I remain Headmistress."

Draco looked up at her in shock. The Board wanted to what?

“Thanks,” Harry said. He half-herded Draco out of the room.

“See, that wasn’t so bad, was it?” Harry said lightly once the door had closed behind them.

Draco gave him a blank look. “I am not going to answer that question. We are returning to the kitchens.” He turned sharply and picked up his pace.

“I suppose. But I think...” Harry trailed off behind him, replaced by the sound of half-running footsteps as Harry caught up with him.

Amelia and her Slytherins were in the next corridor, and Amelia, at least, looked faintly annoyed.

“Mr. Malfoy, all she said she'll do was take points off and give them detention!”

Draco glanced at Harry before addressing Amelia. “What else could McGonagall do?”

“Public humiliation,” was Amelia’s sharp answer. “I don’t think it’s even 'til they're all poked fun at.”

“No,” Harry said, sounding horrified.
Amelia’s face immediately fell.

Harry waved his hands and quickly said, “No, I mean, no, it’ll make hate—them—make them hate you more.”

Draco shook his head. “Amelia,” he said, drawing her attention away from the poor, inarticulate wizard. “Public humiliation wouldn’t work. The public will not side with Slytherin House.” And he did not even want to imagine the outrage from the school Board.

“You shouldn’t do it because that’s bullying, too,” Harry cut in.

“Regardless of reason, public airing won’t work,” Draco said. “However, can you imagine those other students being able to keep quiet on how they suddenly have detentions and why their house points have coincidentally gone down sharply?”

Amelia puffed up a cheek. “I think I get it. Headmistress McGonagall is a Gryffindor, so they’d like her.”

Harry poked Draco. “We have to go the Great Hall now. I want to see those house points, or lack thereof.”

Draco frowned. “There’s no need for us to see them now.”

“Aren’t you coming down for breakfast?” Amelia asked.

“We’ve already eaten. Go ahead.” Draco made a small ushering notion.

“Kay.” Amelia and her Slytherins scampered off in a messy clump.

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“Why don’t you want to go see the hourglasses?” Harry asked in a mournful voice.

“I’ll see them at lunch,” Draco replied dismissively. He made towards the kitchens, but Harry blocked his way.

“Why not?” Harry pressed. “You never go to breakfast in the Great Hall.”

Draco gave him a dark look, and Harry matched it. He knew full well why Draco didn’t breakfast in the Great Hall—the same reasons why Draco used to sit alone at one end of the table and left early during the meals he did attend. Because Harry knew the feeling of having no-one, the dichotomy between being attacked or entirely ignored. But that didn’t mean he’d liked it.

“What are you afraid of?” Harry tried, shrugging his shoulders in attempted nonchalance. “You are the great Draco Malfoy, after all.”

“Sod off,” Draco muttered, but Harry could see the tiniest upwards twitch at the corner of his mouth.

“Are you sure you’re not scared?” he goaded.

Draco crossed his arms. “I’m not,” he denied.

Harry felt he was drowning in Draco’s eyes as they stared at each other. His eyelid was just starting
to twitch when Draco broke the silence with the huff.

“Git,” he muttered fondly. "Then lead on, Mr. Saviour."

Harry smirked in victory. He laced his fingers with Draco's and proceeded to drag him off to see the hourglasses.

They made quick time, with Harry blatantly ignoring any of Draco's protests. As they approached the Entrance Hall, the noise rose sharply. Students milled around the four hourglasses, staring at them and speaking furtively amongst themselves.

Harry looked at the hourglasses, filled with a large dose of respect for McGonagall. She had taken off a lot of points from Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, and Hufflepuff. He frowned as he focused on the chatter; Slytherin and snakes came up with a decidedly hateful undertone.

“All staff and students are to congregate in the Great Hall.” McGonagall's voice rose above the noise.

Harry grabbed Draco's arm, pulling him close before he could escape.

“She said we should go in,” Harry said.

“You were never one to follow rules,” Draco said lightly, but he was betrayed by how tense his arm was in Harry's grip.

"We're already here. You're not going to back out the last minute, are you?"

Draco straightened his robes. “Of course not.”

They entered the Hall, Harry's hand firmly laced in Draco's. Harry ignored the other students' reactions, instead waiting until Draco realised that Harry wasn't going to let go.

Draco leaned in Harry, speaking breathily into his ear, “Hm, do you wish to sit on my lap this breakfast?”

Harry shivered despite himself, and his cheeks heated up. “Can't I sit next to my boyfriend?” Harry protested.

Draco gave him a quick, sweet smile. “Boyfriends, are we?”

Harry nodded firmly and finally looked away from Draco. He caught Amelia at the Slytherin table making gagging faces. She immediately winced, but Harry grinned back. He and Draco made their way over to her, and she shuffled her Slytherins down to make space for them.

“Still hungering for their public humiliation?” Draco murmured as he sat down. He shot Harry an exasperated look when Harry refused to let go. Harry just did an awkward shuffle over the bench and sat down with a heavy plonk next to Amelia.

Amelia and Lela gave them both large grins.

“Did you see the points?” Amelia said excitedly.

“Or rather, not see the points?” Lela followed quickly, before bursting into laughter.

Harry nodded, grinning. “When McGonagall does something, she does it right.”
Amelia shook her head. "It's so weird. Like, I can't believe she did."

"Makes me hungry," Lela said.

"It's breakfast," Amelia said dryly. "Mr. Potter, can you pass the honey?"

"Only if you call me Harry," Harry joked.

Their eyes widened, and they said together, "Wow."

Harry chuckled and reached over for the pot of honey.

*

Draco left Harry to amusing the Slytherins. The Hall was quickly filling as the students that had dawdled outside came in. The staff were already all there, aside from McGonagall; they looked calm enough eating their breakfast that Draco suspected they knew what was going to happen, which meant McGonagall had planned this before she even spoke to him and Harry.

Slytherin House had all sat down. Felicity sat further down, and Draco caught her glancing at them. She pressed her lips together and, surprisingly, nodded at Draco. Draco returned her acknowledgment. The older years were more apprehensive, whispering furtively and looking uneasy. They were whispering about Draco's relationship with Harry, and their little conspiracy theories about how it connected with the missing House points.

Some of the students from the other tables were blatantly staring at Harry. Hooper had an especially murderous look on his face, and the students around him didn't look particularly happy either.

Draco's ears pricked at the sound of wing-beats. Teithiwr descended like an avenging angel, with sweeping gusts and a dark silhouette against the bright Hall ceiling. Draco twitched his wand to push the food dishes away from him just before the eagle owl landed.

"Teithiwr," Draco greeted. "Apologies, you'll have to go to the kitchens for your raw meat."

Teithiwr gave Draco a patronising look, but let Draco take the newspapers and letters. The owl nipped Draco's fingers just as he finished and swooped up into the air. Draco watched, amused, as she flew, showing off to impressionable young Slytherins.

Draco ignored the papers (DEATH EATER DRACO MALFOY IN HOMOSEXUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BOY WHO LIVED!) and used his wand to open Pansy and Blaise's letter.

Dear Draco,

I have to declare that I, Pansy, knew it! He was looking at you all Hallowe'en. You'll invite him to the Manor for Christmas, won't you? Ohh, it's going to be fun! We should be expecting your face on the papers soon then. I hope it'll stop my heart from missing you just a bit. And yes, Blaise is being so stupid again as if. Hi Draco. I see you got your guy. Harry's quite cute, isn't he? I wonder if you will talk about Harry Potter more or less, now? See, Blaise can't even wait his turn. As I was saying, Blaise was skipping out on class to laze in the sun because he thought it'll lure in the students and of course he had to get in trouble and...

Draco smiled and folded the letter up. He approached Greg's letter with a bit more apprehension, unsure of the distance between them now. Greg's standard photos tipped out, mostly of empty fields
of sheep and the occasional dragon eating a sheep; there was a photo of Greg waving in front of a barn, with a pitchfork in his hand. A slip of paper came out.

*Hi Draco,*

*Whatever makes you happy. It's your life. I'll see you at Christmas.*

*Greg.*

*P.S. Send me a photo of how you've been. (Please.)*

Draco felt a swell of loyalty from Greg's letter. He'd have to ask Harry later if he knew anyone with a camera.

"Good news?" Harry said, right into his ear.

Draco squeezed Harry's hand. "Yes."

"Is that the—"

Draco pushed the newspapers away from Harry. "Ignore them," he said, a bit too sharply.

Harry frowned and attempted to grab them. "What?"

Draco turned his head and kissed Harry's cheek. "Do you trust the Daily Prophet or me?"

Harry blushed, but that might have been because Draco had discreetly licked his ear.

"You, I suppose," Harry said slowly.

"Students, to your seats, please," McGonagall swept in, bringing quiet with her. She turned and gave the Slytherin table a nod. By the time she ascended to the podium, the Hall was silent, aside from the clinking of utensils.

"Good morning, staff and students. No doubt some of you have wondered where the House points have gone." She paused to gaze across the Hall. "Well, it is *not* a mistake. A number of students from Gryffindor, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw have committed what can be called *crimes* upon the Slytherin body. Points have been taken in light of that, and those students will be serving detention until the Christmas break."

Whispers swelled; McGonagall called for silence immediately.

"*Never,* never in Hogwarts' history do we allow bullying between students, not least attacks on Slytherin students! I want everyone who has done so, and any student who *knew* of these attacks but did nothing, to be ashamed of themselves." McGonagall grabbed the edges of the podium, eyes shining with emotion. "We've made it through the War. We're *alive.* What caused the war was disunity between us. So now, we have to unite. I'm not asking you to forgive those who have hurt and maimed and killed during the war. What I'm asking you is to not condemn Slytherins who've done nothing of the sort! What I'm asking you is to see people as they are now, and not clouded with your preconceptions." The Headmistress dropped her grip from the podium. "The different Houses are meant to inspire healthy rivalry, not hatred. Don't repeat the mistakes of the past—"

* * *

Harry leaned on Draco's shoulder as he listened to McGonagall talk. He could see that her words didn't reach all the students; he could see outright rejection on some of their faces. What kept him
optimistic was that some students were listening carefully, and some were nodding to her words; he saw that there were some guilty looks at the Slytherin table mixed with the dark looks.

He met Ron's gaze across the Hall, and Ron nodded firmly. Of course, Ron and Hermione would be committed to the reconciliation. Harry realised that he could count on Neville's support, and Ginny's and Luna's and...likely everyone from the old D.A., excluding Smith.

There was more to do. Some of the hatred in the school reflecting the wider dislike in society, as Harry could clearly see in the top-half front page of the Daily Prophet, even though Draco had tried to hide it from him. But he wasn't alone in this battle.

Harry smiled up at Draco, who was watching McGonagall. Draco tilted his head down and pressed an absent-minded kiss on Harry's forehead.

Harry squeezed Draco's hand. They'd both come a long way since the start of the school year; and with a bit of luck and hell-load of stubbornness, they'd have a long time yet together.

A few years later...

“Everyone! Get in!” Harry yelled.

Draco trailed after Harry, watching amusedly as Harry hustled Greg Goyle and Charlie Weasley towards the group clustered in front of the Manor's Christmas tree. Xenophilius Lovegood, acting as the Quibbler's photographer, was tinkering with his camera atop a floating platform, with a Dean Thomas looking over his shoulder.

“Draco, what are you doing?” Harry had such a harried expression.

“Potter, there's no rush to get this done,” Draco drawled.

Harry frowned. “I thought you really really wanted to open your presents.”

Draco smirked. “Watching you is infinitely more fascinating.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Come on, just get your parents in. I want them to stand next to Molly and Arthur and Andromeda.”

Draco tugged Harry in and kissed his forehead. His heart warmed as Harry once again squeezed his hand.

“Now, off to do Harry's biding,” Harry drawled.

“And you think that'll make me listen?” Draco replied drily, exaggerating his own drawl.

Harry pushed Draco away. “You bet,” he said, grinning. He rushed off to round up some more stray Gryffindors.

For his own sanity and his own wish to hurry things along, Draco did do Harry's bidding. Mother was chatting with Aunt Andromeda, and Father was attached at Mother's side. Draco touched Mother's arm lightly to get her attention.
Mother smiled. “Oh, what is it?”

“Harry wants us to get ready for the photo.”

“Alright,” Aunt Andromeda said. She linked arms with Mother, and the pair moved towards the larger group; Father passively followed them.

The Weasleys and Harry’s Gryffindor friends had largely congregated together. Draco was rather unsurprised to see Luna Lovegood conversing with Blaise and Theo—it was Lovegood, after all—but he was surprised to see Pansy talking to Ginevra Weasley. He wondered if his grandfather was rolling around his grave—and whether Father was as blank about it all as he looked: in the last few days leading up to Christmas, Malfoy Manor had been swarming with Weasleys and Gryffindors, and the occasional Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff.

And yet, it was the happiest Draco had ever seen his home to be.

Harry’s arm slipped around his waist. “I’m so happy,” he murmured.

Draco raised an eyebrow, giving the loud group a pointed look. “About that?”

Harry just gave him a little smile. “Kind of. Let’s go, we’re going to stand near the presents. That way, you get to open your presents first, right after the photo.”

“Are you implying that I have such little self control?”

Harry grinned. “I know you’re just a little kid inside.”

Draco breathed into Harry’s ear. “Malfoy, there are children about. Come on.”

Mr. Lovegood called for attention, and the chatter died down. “Fantastic, everyone!”

“Dad, don’t forget that you’re going to be in the photo!” Luna called.

Mr. Lovegood laughed, and jumped down from the platform to join her. “When we all say ‘cheese’, the camera will take a picture.”

Draco shook his head. “Cheese?” he whispered to Harry.

“Oh, it’s a Muggle thing,” Harry replied, too distracted for Draco’s liking. Harry bodily moved them both a bit more to the side.

“Okay, three—”

Draco curled his hand into Harry’s black mess of hair.

“—two—”

Draco drew Harry closer.

“—one—”

Harry’s eyes focused on him; intense, dark.
“Cheese!”

They kissed.

Amelia and Lela were spreading the words, “they’re kissing again,” Hermione was laughing, Teddy and Victoire were saying “cheese” over and over very loudly and very quickly, and Draco even recognised Father's voice saying cheese.

Harry’s lips curved into a smile against Draco’s, and Draco’s lips smiled back.

The rest of Christmas Day passes in a haze of colour, noise and food, and if Draco Malfoy carries Harry Potter to bed, much to the raucous uproar of all those gathered, that is neither here nor there.

On Boxing Day, the front page article in the Quibbler will feature a photo of them all—the smiles and laughter—and a wish for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Chapter End Notes

The End.

And this final chapter was also beta’d by the lovely shlybkwrm, who took time from her schedule to help me :)

So, a big thanks to all my betas, and everyone who commented, and everyone who kudos'ed, and really, everyone who has been on this little story-journey with me. Thank you!

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