Hope Springs Eternal (But Love Springs in the Forest, Unannounced)

by lettered

Summary

Draco falls into a love spring. Harry saves him! And now they're bonded for life. Draco is horrified. Harry thinks it's kind of neat.

Notes

This was my fic for reversathon. I went with this prompt: the crack-concept of secret, unintentional soul-bonding [handled] with some seriousness (just because you love someone doesn’t mean you don’t also hate them).

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The magical life bond between Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy lasted five days. During that time, they had five arguments. The first one happened right after Draco Malfoy almost drowned.

Most of Harry’s experience with people being saved from drowning had to do with Ron. There was that time during the Triwizard Tournament when Harry had had to retrieve that which had been taken from him, and then that time in the Forest of Dean when Ron had saved him from a freezing lake. This time it was nothing like those times and everything like them, because it was Draco Malfoy.

Harry didn’t even hesitate. He dove in as soon as he saw those long, pale arms disappear beneath the
The water was cool and clean. It splashed in his mouth when he came up for air, and it tasted sweet. When Harry opened his eyes to look for Draco, the water seemed as clear as air, and yet tinted with silver, almost sparkling at the edges of his vision. Draco sparkled too.

He was going to love that.

When Harry reached him at last (at last) he slid an arm under Draco’s, across Draco’s chest, and hauled, pulling him toward the bright, sun-dappled surface. When they broke through the water at last (at last), Draco wasn’t breathing.

Harry didn’t even know how he got him up to shore; he just knew that he did, and Draco lay there, still, unmoving. Pressing his hands together, Harry covered Draco’s heart, and pushed. His mouth covered Draco’s, and Draco would have called him a fool. Fumbling for his wand, Harry finally got it. ”Aspirate!” he yelled.

Draco coughed, spitting water.

“Christ,” said Harry, because sometimes he still said things like that, when he wasn’t thinking.

“Christ Jesus Merlin.”

“Ugh,” said Malfoy.

“Christ,” Harry said again. “What the fuck were you thinking?”

“That I’d go for a dip.” Draco’s tone would have been dry, if it weren’t so wet, watery and weak between coughs.


“Um,” said Draco. “Harry?”

“What?”

“You’re kissing me.”

“So?” said Harry, his lips murmuring on Draco’s jaw. God.

“Stop.” Weakly, Draco tried to push him off.

“God,” said Harry. “You almost drowned.”

“I did not almost drown; I am a perfectly accomplished swimmer, and you’re still kissing me.”

“Why shouldn’t I kiss you?” Harry asked, moving his lips up from Draco’s jaw to cross his strong cheekbones, then down to his mouth.

Draco pushed up on him, more forcefully this time. “Maybe because I almost drowned?”

At last, Harry pulled away, looking down at Draco. He looked just like a kneazle caught out in the rain, and Harry thought he’d never seen a sight quite so lovely. His heart was at last slowing from its thundering, frantic pace, but seeing Draco looking so mussed and just—vulnerable, lying there—was pushing the beating up to his throat. “Why shouldn’t I kiss you?” Harry demanded. “What would I have done had you died?”
“Oh, God.” Closing his eyes, Draco put a dramatic hand on his brow.

“What?” Harry said, brushing his fingertips over the wet white shirt on Draco’s chest. “I can’t be relieved you’re alive?”

“Oh, God.” Draco made a moaning sound. “Harry, this is a love spring.”

“A what?”

“Merlin’s tits, and you still know nothing of wizard history.”

“Accio glasses. I’m not a complete ignoramus,” Harry said, as his glasses came flying into his hands. He put them all. “I thought love springs had all disappeared.”

“Apparently, they haven’t.”

Tilting his head, Harry looked Draco over. He looked perfectly miserable, and now was beginning to shiver, but when Harry reached down, he was forcefully pushed away. “Okay,” Harry said slowly. “Maybe I’m a little bit of an ignoramus.”

“This isn’t happening to me. This isn’t happening.”

“Draco,” said Harry. “It is happening.”

Draco sat up suddenly; he had this way of suddenly filling with purpose, as though he could be instantaneously infused with some unseen strength—sort of like when he had had too much caffeine. Sometimes, Harry found it terrifying. Other times—depending on circumstances—he quite liked it. Sometimes he quite liked it indeed. “But why is it happening? Someone did this to us.”

“Um,” said Harry.

“Think about it.” Draco leapt to his feet and began pacing. “I was lured here. The Apparition coordinates—Harry.” Turning suddenly on him, Draco said, “Why are you here?”

“Well, I thought I was saving your life, but now I’m thinking maybe I’m listening to you rant?” Sighing, Harry stood up, picking a bit of pond scum off of his shoulder.

“No,” said Draco, “why did you come?”

“The clock?”

“Oh.” Draco slumped.

Harry waited while Draco paced, hoping for some kind of explanation, but none was forthcoming. Draco could get a little intense when he was like this—especially whenever whatever little theory he’d been nursing was proven to be a total conspiracy theory. “You mentioned Apparition coordinates?” Harry prompted.

“Lovegood.” Draco was going pink—and not embarrassment-pink; this was fury-pink, two spots of colour high up on his cheekbones, and Harry hadn’t heard him say Luna’s name like that in a long time. In fact, Harry wasn’t sure he’d ever heard Draco say her name like that; Draco had a soft spot for Luna.

“One of her tips?” Harry tried to make his tone consoling instead of amused.

“Maybe it wasn’t. Don’t bother me, Potter.” Draco angled his face away. “I’m thinking.”
Swallowing a sigh, Harry finally stood. Waving his wand at Draco, then himself to dry them, he considered the situation. Luna was often leaving Draco little “tips” about where he could find rare potions ingredients. Frequently the ingredients were so rare that her tips proved invaluable, but she was often also cryptic, and sometimes—Harry hated to admit—even dangerous. As often as she forgot to sign her name, she also forgot to mention the rare cache of metal she’d found was also in a dragon’s den.

That had been a fun day. Draco had been convinced someone was trying to kill him then, too. Harry had been high up on his lists of suspects, despite the fact that Harry had been the Auror who saved him all those years ago.

“So you think it was a set-up,” Harry said finally, because Draco just got so touchy when his pet theories were immediately shot down. “Someone lured you to Apparate into the middle of the lake, knowing I would rush in to save you. I’d swallow the water; you would be drowning, swallowing the water, and then we fall madly, hopelessly in love.”

“But why?” Draco rubbed the back of his neck. He did that when he got really caught up in something. It used to drive Harry absolutely mad. Still did, now that he thought about it. “Who would do such a thing?”

“Someone who never reads The Daily Prophet? Or any wizarding media? And never talks to anyone? At all?”

Draco stopped rubbing his neck, frowning. “What do you mean?”

“In case you missed the biggest new media event in the past—oh, decade or so, we already were madly in love.”

“Irrelevant.” Draco flapped a hand.

“And hopelessly in love.”

“Maybe you’re hopelessly in love.”

“And married,” said Harry.

“Civil partnership.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Great, you’re telling me we’re not married now. That’s just great.”

“Of course we’re married,” Draco snapped. “You think I wave this around for kicks?” He waved his hand at Harry, possibly for kicks. It still had a ring on it, though.

“Fucking hell,” said Harry. “Not this again. You don’t have to wear it if you don’t fucking—”

“This,” said Draco. “This is what I’m talking about.”

“What,” said Harry, and it wasn’t really question. “The fact that you don’t want to wear my wedding ring? Or maybe you just mean now you can’t run if you—you . . .” He couldn’t finish, because the bottom was dropping out, because maybe that was what Draco meant—”

“Listen to yourself,” said Draco, in his worst possible voice. Harry hated that voice. It was very low and quiet and quite forceful. He said the worst possible things in that voice.

("Sometimes, I just can’t stand to be near you.”)
“Some things were better before we ever got together.”

“I don’t think I could live without you, Harry. I think that without you, I would just . . . end. Cease to be.”

Horrible things.)

“You’re already talking about me leaving you,” Draco said, “and it’s been—” he made a mad gesture with his arm, a mad Draco gesture—“ten minutes. Make that eight.”

“Maybe because you said you’re not hopelessly in love.”

“I’m not.”

Harry flinched. Sometimes Draco said these things. He just said them, like he couldn’t help the awful things that came out of his mouth, and Harry had learned to deal with them.

(“I want you to hurt me when you fuck me.”

“I don’t deserve any better.”)

Sometimes the things he said still hurt, though. Harry couldn’t help but flinch, and even Draco should have been able to admit that this was a little worse than most things he said.

“Harry.” Draco’s voice was still low.

“Maybe it’s the love spring,” Harry said dully. “I just don’t . . . really feel up to having this conversation right now. Maybe tonight, yeah?”

“Harry.”

Harry turned away. “In an hour or three I’ll feel better about the fact that you almost died.”

“I didn’t almost die.”

“I know. You’re a very accomplished swimmer.” Harry closed his eyes, but of course he didn’t Apparate. Of course he didn’t, because Draco was there, grabbing his arm, in his face, as Harry knew he would be.

“Why do you make me do this?” said Draco. “Why do you make me say these things?”

Draco hated it when Harry played the victim. He really hated it, but it just wasn’t something Harry could turn off and on like a switch. When someone hurt him, it showed, just as when someone hurt Draco, it was usually invisible.

“You don’t have to say anything,” said Harry, his voice gentling a little, because he could see all of Draco’s invisible places, all of them. “I know that you care for me. I know that you love me. Sometimes I just don’t understand . . . how.”

Draco took off Harry’s glasses, the way he sometimes did—as though he couldn’t stand to be looked at. He folded them up, slipped them in his pocket, then leaned in until their foreheads touched. “You make me say the most asinine things,” he murmured.

“I’m not making you,” Harry said.

“You make me,” said Draco. “You make me crazy.”
“I could give you Veritaserum,” said Harry. “That would be making you. Imperius, that would be making you. I’m just standing here,” he said, and his lips ghosted over Draco’s, “seducing you.”

“You make me,” Draco said, and kissed him.

His mouth was warm, and tasted clean and sweet, just like the water. His lips were tender against Harry’s own, yet possessive; Harry loved the way Draco kissed, like he wanted to savour every moment. Beneath the warm ache of it he could feel a little—something like a little tug, and suddenly, warmth was pooling low in his belly, feeding on itself. He wanted Draco closer, and the tenderness crashed in waves of warm desire, and pleasure, need, frustration—

“What the hell is this?” Harry asked, pulling away. “Was that—”

“It’s the love spring,” Draco said, panting.

Harry nipped him on the jaw. “Let’s get one installed in our backyard.”

Draco breathed a husky laugh. “Don’t.”

“Was I feeling what you were feeling?” Harry asked, and nipped him again on the jaw, higher. “Just then?”

“Don’t,” said Draco, pushing him a little.

Harry kissed until his mouth was under Draco’s ear, that perfect, magic little spot where his jaw jutted out, that place that made Draco writhe.

“Oh God,” Draco said, and Harry could feel it, the things that he was doing to him, the hot wash of need, the sudden rush of blood, but under that and deeper—

“Stop,” Draco said, tone ragged, and pulled Harry in again.

Harry could feel it inside that kiss—God—all the way down—there was the place where Draco felt for him, the place for all the real things, so inadequately expressed by things like words.

“Make me stop,” Draco begged.

You could call it love, but that hardly did it justice—God, it was intense, strong and yet so desperately fragile in a way; and Harry could feel the fierce way in which Draco longed to protect—

“Helicopter,” Draco said, sounding desperate.

Harry stopped. Something wild flashed through him—the sudden terror that he wouldn’t let him go—and then he could. He did, and stepped back. Rubbed his scar. “Jesus,” he said. “Sorry. Are you okay?”

“I don’t love you hopelessly,” Draco said, all in a rush.

“Yeah.” Harry rubbed his scar again. “Okay.”

“I don’t,” Draco insisted.

Harry tried to clear the fog in his brain. “Okay,” he said again, trying to understand.

“What I feel for you,” said Draco, “it—it’s the most hopeful thing I know.”
Harry stopped rubbing his scar. “Is that the asinine thing I was supposed to make you say?”

“It sounds so stupid,” said Draco, “but loving you, it makes me feel—like I’m in control. Like I can do anything, because of what—what I feel for you.”

“Okay,” Harry said again. “That’s—that’s good. I—I’m sorry. Why aren’t we still making out?”

“Because I used my safe word.”

“I know. I mean, I wouldn’t—just. Why?”

“Because that wasn’t you. This isn’t us.”

“Um.” Harry looked at him, and it was definitely Draco, because it wasn’t like he was sweet or sparkling, like the water. He was just as pale and pointy as he’d ever been, and even if Harry had grown to love all his angles, his stark, finely featured face, he could see that Draco wasn’t perfect. Both outside and in, there were sharp parts, long parts, ridiculous parts, vulnerable hollows full of yearning and fear. Harry loved them all, and then he thought of kissing him again that way and feeling them all, all the way down. “It sort of seems like you?” Harry said at last, because he quite honestly didn’t know what Draco meant.

“We chose,” said Draco. “We chose each other. Do you know what it means to me that I . . . that I got to choose, and choosing, I chose you?”

The problem was that Draco was trying to tell him something important. Really important, if his use of his safe word was any indication, if the tone of his voice was any indication. It was really important, and pretty much the only thing Harry could think of—the only thought he could hold onto for more than five seconds right now—was that he wanted to fuck his husband’s brains out. He really wanted to.

Like he really really really wanted to. Right here, right now.

Gritting his teeth, Harry put his hands in his pockets.

“Do you?” Draco said.

“I guess not,” Harry said.

“It means everything to me,” said Draco.

“Okay,” said Harry.

“Now do you understand?” said Draco.

“No.”

Draco frowned at him. “The love spring takes your choice away.”

“Draco . . .” Harry rubbed his scar again. He was trying to understand this. He honestly was. “We already chose.”

“It’s not a choice you make once, Harry.”

“But . . . we got married.”

“Do you think it’s easy?”
“I . . .” Harry tried to think about it. He tried to think about waking next to Draco in the morning—Draco in the sunlight, bathed in gold, ten times less prickly than any other time of day; sleepy andpliant against him, warm; saying all the things he never said when he was fully awake and fit to be acerbic. Harry thought of Draco sailing into the house at the end of work, confident and bright and happy, because he’d won a contract; he thought of Draco moody and bitchy and glaring daggers, because he’d lost another one to Smith. He thought of Draco looking wicked and mischievous in the bedroom; he thought of Draco vulnerable and defensive at any mention of his parents. He thought of Draco every day and every moment and he loved them, all of them, and said, “It’s the easiest thing I’ve ever done.”

“Not for me,” said Draco.

“Okay,” Harry said again, and put his hands back into his pockets.

“What about when we fight?” Draco said.

“We make up.”

“What about when I bitch at you?”

“You apologize.”

“What about when you’re unfair to me?”

“I apologize.”

Draco was beginning to look annoyed. “What about when I refold your clothes?”

“I put them in the drawer?” said Harry.

“And when I make you wash the dishes with my spell instead of the one Molly taught you?”

“I get annoyed?” said Harry. “Really, Draco, this is what makes it hard?”

“These are decisions, Harry. Every single one of them. It’s a decision we make, to stay together.” His eyes were desperate and grey and exactly the colour they were when he tried to apologize. Those were the times he seemed to think that there was the highest possibility of Harry leaving him, when there wasn’t. There just wasn’t. “Every time we make that decision—every day—we’re stronger. What we have is stronger.”

“So, you’re saying . . .” Harry scratched his chest. His clothes were stiff from the drying spells. “We can’t make the choice to leave each other if we wanted to. Because of the bond from the spring. And you think this is a problem.”

Draco nodded.

“Okay,” Harry said again. He pushed his glasses up. “So, do you think you’re going to leave me, or is it that I’m going to leave you?”

Draco’s shoulders slumped.

“Neither,” Harry guessed. “Okay. Draco, I’m just trying to understand.”

“You don’t understand why our decision to be together is more important than some magical obligation.”
“I would if there was any possibility of us separating, but I just—I don’t see it. I can’t see it. I know that sometimes you doubt that I—”

“No.” Draco shook his head adamant, teeth grit. “This isn’t about that, Harry. Not right now. I know how you feel. I know that you . . .”

“I know you know,” said Harry softly. “But you don’t always believe it.”

“I believe you love me, Harry.” Draco’s voice was far less vehement, now. He never got vehement about this, because after all this time, he still said things like that with just a little bit of wonder—and just a little bit of disbelief, even when his words said quite the opposite.

Harry just looked at him for a while. Then he sighed, and did what Draco had best taught him: he tried to understand. “Maybe I do need a refresher on history,” he said. “Tell me what the love spring does.”

“It binds people together for life,” said Draco.

“Sure,” said Harry. “So, you feel . . . what? A connection with someone? Like you don’t want to be apart from them.”

“Yes.”

“And does it make you fall in love?”

“Not exactly.”

Harry waited. He’d found that silence sometimes worked best with Draco. It had not been the easiest lesson, but he’d found over a long period of time that patience could be useful. It was useful with his friends; it was useful with criminals; it was useful for getting what he wanted, and it was useful with Draco.

Draco huffed in annoyance. “It’s makes you desire—and require—someone’s presence in order to be . . . fulfilled, but it doesn’t change what you feel toward that person. It could bind you to someone you hate, and you would still hate that person, but you would also feel the need to be with them, and you wouldn’t feel whole if you weren’t.”

“So ‘love spring’ is a misnomer.”

Draco hitched a shoulder, his elegant—at times insolent—equivalent of a shrug.

“Do you need to be constantly near the other person? Will we . . . fall ill and die if I go to the Ministry and you go to your lab?”

Draco shook his head. “People linked by this bond can always feel the absence of the other person, but it doesn’t hurt them unless there’s a prolonged absence. Most historians think they existed in order to create family units. Or, you know. Centaurs and mermaids.”

“And what about . . .” Harry waved a hand. “What happened when I touched you?”

“Some love springs were rumoured to bestow the ability to . . . feel what one’s partner was feeling at times of . . . intense emotion.”

“Because that would be so useful for those couples who hated each other.” Harry pushed up his glasses. “That first horse and man marriage must’ve been really something.”
“I guess it . . . helps to know if you hate each other?”

“But what we felt,” Harry said, “when we kissed—that was just what we felt. Not something the love spring did.”

“Harry—”

“No,” Harry said, and stepped closer. “I listened, just like you asked. Now you listen to me. What did you feel, when I touched you?”

Going a little pink, Draco dropped his gaze.

He used to do that all the time, but for the last five years or so, he hadn’t. Harry hadn’t realized quite how much he’d missed it, the way it used to send that thrum of desire straight down from heart to groin because God help him, Draco looked shy. He looked so uncertain and—and—God, here Harry was fetishising, but he looked virginal, because there was a part of Draco that was secret and vulnerable and quite strongly convinced that no one could ever want him, and he never showed anyone that.

He never showed anyone except Harry, who got to see all that fear and desperation for acceptance and—and approval, because here was something else Draco didn’t show: he liked to be praised. He liked to be petted and soothed and told that he was good, that he was loved, and Harry had been so glad when that shy, uncertain look finally stopped appearing in Draco’s eyes. It meant that Draco finally believed what Harry had been trying to tell him for years: that he loved him. Draco finally understood that someone could love him, completely and unconditionally, just for who he was, and so these days he hardly ever blushed, and always met Harry’s eyes.

Harry came closer. When he spoke, his voice was low. “What did you feel, Draco?”

“I felt . . .” Draco finally lifted his gaze. His eyes looked like wet pavement. “I felt essential. Rare.”

“That isn’t a feeling I got from some spring,” Harry said.

Draco turned away. Sometimes even the slant of his shoulders could look spiky. “I don’t know what you’re saying,” he said, which Harry found ironic. “Are you saying you don’t want to undo this?”

“Isn’t undoing it impossible? I thought these things were permanent.”

“Nothing is impossible,” said Draco. “By all accounts, this love spring shouldn't be possible. They all faded with time.”

“I don’t understand what you want,” said Harry.

Draco finally turned around, still looking miserable. “I want to find out how to get the bond off.”

Harry looked over at the pool, which was still sparkling in the sunlight. It was just the sort of pond that in the movies and his life held shining swords. He thought of Ron. “You know,” Harry said at last, “as far as fate goes . . . I just don’t see how this is all that bad. It’s pretty much just affirming something we already have. Something we want.”

“We want the choice. Harry, I’m talking about free will.”

“Yeah, well. I’m talking about killing the Dark Lord.”

Draco didn’t say anything, because of course he couldn’t say anything to that. Harry supposed it was
a pretty cheap thing to say, but he hadn’t said it because he was trying to win an argument. He’d said it because it was true.

Sighing, Harry scrubbed a hand over his face. “I have to go back to work.”

“Harry,” Draco said.

“What?”

“Your glasses.” Draco started to hand them back, and then he didn’t.

“Draco.” Harry’s voice was tired.

“Just . . .” Draco gave the glasses back. “Just say you’ll look into it,” he said. “Just tell me that you’ll try.”

“Yeah.” Harry put his glasses on. “Okay. I’ll try.”

*

The second argument happened that night. It happened because of sex.

Draco was late getting home. He’d sent his Patronus—“working late; don’t wait up”—so Harry waited up. “I told you not to,” Draco said, when he got home.

“I just wanted to see you,” Harry said. “How was your day?”

“Do you think it’s the love spring?” Draco had taken off his cloak; now he was starting on his robe. Harry tried hard not to be annoyed. “I always want to see you.”

Spelling the robes into the bedroom down the hall, Draco wandered toward the kitchen. “Surely not always.”

Not bothering to correct him, Harry followed him. “There are noodles if you want them.”

“I already ate.” Draco spelled open a cabinet and down a glass; he never could just get a glass of water like a normal person (“you mean a normal Muggle,” Draco would have said). “Thank you for earlier today, by the way. For saving me from drowning.”

“I don’t think anyone was trying to curse us,” Harry said, sitting down at the kitchen table.

“No, I don’t suppose so.” The long line of Draco’s throat undulated as he took a long sip of water.

“I wasn’t able to find anything about how to counteract the bond.”

Draco put the glass down very carefully on the counter. “I wasn’t able to, either.”

“Is that why you’re so late?”

“I think I’ll go to bed.” Draco turned away.

“Draco,” Harry stood up, going after him.

Turning back, not quite looking at him, Draco said, “Yes, Harry. That’s what I was doing. It’s not because I don’t—it’s not because I secretly want to leave you.”
“I don’t think you secretly want to leave me,” Harry said.

Draco still didn’t quite meet his eyes. “I’m very tired.”

Harry was careful not to touch him. He never touched him, when Draco got like this. “We’ll fix it,” Harry said.

“You’re all . . .” Draco put his hand out, hesitated, then touched Harry’s shirt. “Rumpled,” he said finally.

“Yeah. Sleeping on the couch. See?” Harry teased, just a little. “I didn’t wait up after all.”

Still not looking up at him, Draco started playing with one of the buttons on Harry’s shirt. “I don’t see why you put up with me,” he said.

“Bad habit?”

“I really am tired.” Draco just kept playing with that button.

Harry smiled. “Then go to bed.”

“Maybe I will.”

“I notice you’re not moving.”

Draco took his hand away. “I missed you too. All day. I could feel it, like a physical ache.”

“No worse than usual.”

“We’re almost forty, Harry. We’ve been married fifteen years.”

“Yeah, I can barely stand the sight of you.”

“We were just at work,” Draco said, “and we saw each other at lunch time.”

“You’re saying it’s the love spring?”

“Well, I did almost drown.”

“I thought you were going to bed?”

“I am.” At last, Draco lifted his eyes. “Good night, Harry,” he said, leaning in to kiss him. It felt like it was supposed to be a little peck, but he must have felt Harry’s response to it, because then he was kissing him again, not nearly so quickly, open mouth dragging down to Harry’s own. “Mmm. What did you put in my water?”

“I didn’t,” Harry said, and kissed him back. “It’s the spring.”

“Oh, God. That’s—”

“Yeah,” Harry said, and maybe sort of kind of pulled on Draco’s lower lip with his teeth.

Draco pulled away, then came in again, licking the underside of Harry’s upper lip. Harry could feel the hot pull of desire, the sudden surging want. “God, it’s,” Draco tried to say. He took off Harry’s glasses.

“Intense,” Harry said, then put his tongue in Draco’s mouth.
They were kissing then, Draco clutching at him as desperately as he had those first few times together, when he’d believed so completely he’d never get a chance again. “God,” Draco said, “have you been wanting this—” he stopped to kiss him again—“all night?”

“You have no idea,” said Harry, and pulled him close, fitting Draco’s hips against his.

“Oh God.” Draco had this dirty, dirty way of swivelling his hips, grinding his covered cock against Harry’s own in an utterly obscene motion that Harry loved right down to the tips of his toes—this time compounded by Draco’s own feelings, which felt a lot like: need claim have take filthy mine. “Do not make me use my safe word again,” Draco muttered.

“Tell me,” Harry said, and had to stop because he’d slid his hands inside Draco’s shirt, and there was the feeling of his hands on Draco’s bare skin, but also Draco’s feelings. Harry could feel what it felt like for Draco, and it was hot more grateful touch me don’t stop need I want to live inside of this; I want to have this, forever. Harry took a breath. “Did you need to use your safe word because you couldn’t stop yourself from doing this?”

“I knew you’d stop for me, if I used it.” Draco was kissing down along the side of his neck and as good as it was, practically eleven times better was Draco’s need to cover him, to claim him, that desire to possess, and Harry could feel it all the way down to his bones. “Fuck,” Draco said, and then he did that thing with his hips—that thing that he did that was like this little twist, and always fit them together so perfectly; it drove Harry crazy.

It drove him crazy.

“Fuck,” Draco said again, and Draco saying words like that, his voice so raw, made Harry crazy, too. “You really need it,” Draco said.

“Yes,” Harry said. “God yes.”

“No, but I mean . . .” Draco’s voice was murmuring into Harry’s neck as his hand slid inside his shirt, teased at the waist of his trousers. “I mean you need it.”

“You did almost die,” Harry said, unbuttoning Draco’s trousers now.

“But, I mean—” Draco pulled his mouth away and took a desperate breath—“you’re practically stupid for it. Weak.”

“Yeah, well.” Harry kissed him again. “I feel the way you feel—” The desire, but also the surprise, the gratitude. Harry didn’t want Draco to be surprised that he wanted him like this, not after all this time. He wanted Draco to just know.

“But it’s like—” Draco pulled away from him again—“it’s like you’re desperate for it. Like you can’t get enough of—”

“I can’t,” said Harry. “I never can.” Then his hand slid in Draco’s trousers, wrapping around his hard cock, tugging. “I’ve told you that a thousand times.”

“But you feel like—” Draco’s hand clamped around his wrist—“you feel like you’d do anything; like you’ll do anything just to—to get inside of me, or—or me inside of you—”

“You inside of me,” said Harry, his lips by Draco’s ear, his hand still pulling on his cock.

“Harry,” Draco said, “do you always—”
“Always,” Harry said, and kissed him again. Into that kiss, he tried to put all the things he felt—all the need and aching desire, the emptiness inside him that only Draco could fill, that aching longing to be filled, taken and stretched and compelled into completion, but there were things much deeper than that, this longing to be with him always, this longing for his life to be filled by him, this connection between them.

“Oh God,” said Draco, when they at last broke apart for air. “Oh God.”

“Yes,” said Harry, and pulled him to the table.

They usually didn’t do it this way. Harry liked to use his hands and mouth and things like oil—enhanced oil, because on that point Draco was adamant, but had it been up to Draco they might have just as well spelled all their clothes off and dispensed with preparation by any means but magical. It was Harry who insisted on doing it manually, on touching every time and place he could.

Harry didn’t insist now, though, because Draco was spelling off his clothes and Harry’s too in his haste; he was doing it on their kitchen table, conjuring lube with his wand and pushing it into Harry with a murmured spell, and he kept saying things like, “So needy Harry; do you always want me this much?”

“Always,” Harry said, trying to pull him closer. “I always do.”

“Oh God,” Draco said again, as Harry’s hand wrapped again around his cock. “you worship it.”

“I do,” said Harry, against his jaw.

Parting Harry’s thighs, Draco positioned himself between them, standing while Harry braced himself on the table top. “Have you always—”

“Yes, I’ve always,” said Harry, because he simply wanted Draco to fuck him now; it was the only thing he wanted; the only thing he could want, because the wonder and the awe and the raw ache that Draco felt were rocking him like waves. “I always have. I’ve told you that a thousand times.”

“But I can feel you—you—” Draco couldn’t seem to speak, cock hard against Harry’s thigh, body leaning over Harry’s and trembling, just slightly.

He must be feeling all the things that Harry was—the way Draco’s desire spiked Harry’s own, but also the way his actual surprise that Harry wanted him so much only made him want Draco more. He had to feel this wealth of tenderness, this desire to protect, this of course I want you so badly I can barely think; I always have. It had to feel like love.

"Tell me,” Harry said. “Tell me what it feels like for you.”

“Harry.” Draco sounded desperate.

Harry pulled Draco down until he could put his lips right by Draco’s ear. “Put your cock inside me. Then tell me how it feels.”

Draco’s breath caught, and then he fumbled a little in a way he hadn’t fumbled in a good long while, hand wrapping around Harry’s on his cock and finally, finally guiding himself in. He swallowed hard and then let go and he was there; Harry could feel the tight burn of him inside, stretching, pushing deeper so that Harry arched, sucked in a breath. “Tell me,” he whispered, pulling Draco down again to bite his mouth.

“It’s—” Draco was flushed, hair bright against pink face. “It’s, you want me—”
“I know,” said Harry. “Tell me more.”

“You’re tight.”

“God, I know,” Harry said, because he could feel it—not clench around his own cock, the way his arse was around Draco’s, but he could feel Draco’s response to it, the overwhelming clench of need, the pressure of desire. He could feel the way his own body was driving Draco crazy, and Harry was out of his mind with the pleasure of it. “I know I am,” he said. “I always am for you.”

“You want to open up,” said Draco, and pushed deeper. “You want me all the way inside; you want to give me everything—”

“Everything,” said Harry, and sought out Draco’s hand with his own. He knew that Draco hated that, but he wanted him to feel—

“Merlin.” Draco thrust, his hand tangled up in Harry’s. “Merlin—” and he thrust again.

Obviously Draco felt it, the way Harry felt connected, with Draco’s hand in his, just as Harry also felt a little more trapped, a little more tethered without his hand free to roam Harry’s body. “Tell me what I want right now,” Harry said, holding tight.

“God, you want—” Draco slammed in deeper. “You want—”

“You know what I want,” Harry said, spreading his legs yet wider, arching his hips. “Tell me.”

Draco held his hand so hard it hurt. “You want me to come inside of you. You want me to fill you with it, fill you up; you need it—I can feel how—how open you are for it—oh, God, Harry—”

“Say it,” Harry said, and arched his hips again.

“Harry—”

Harry gripped Draco’s hips, yanked him in closer, hard—Draco completely filling him and Harry squeezed, then let him go, anticipating the next thrust. “What’s it feel like,” he panted, “say it.”

One hand still tangled in Harry’s, the other braced against the ground, Draco jerked his hips in, pushing deep inside Harry’s body. “You love me,” he said, and gasped. “Oh, God. You love me.” Then he started shuddering, the way he always did, the way he got loose and crazy and sort of out of control, thrusting erratically. “Harry, you, God, you, love—”

“Always,” Harry said, and followed suit, thrusting against Draco’s stomach until his come was on both their stomachs, their chests, and Draco was inside of him, filling him, saying things like:

“I didn’t know; I never knew—”

_Told you so_, Harry wanted to say, and didn’t.

Then Draco shuddered and went still against him, limp and sort of weak on top, Harry half on the table. Draco always got so boneless in the aftermath, so much so that Harry just wanted to hold him and forever give him shape, to be his armour and his spine. After a minute, though, Draco always straightened up. He hated being sticky and rather disliked being wet as well—although during he often seemed quite pleased with it. He always went to wash almost immediately.

This time was no different. After a moment, he stood up, and walked out of the kitchen.

For several minutes, Harry just lay there on the table, until the awkward angle of his legs started to
catch up with him. He pushed himself up, standing, went over to the wash room. The door was open—Draco often did that, when he showered after sex, his concession to the fact that Harry would have preferred to spend the aftermath together.

For another minute or two, Harry just watched him, his husband’s long, lithe body under the hot spray of the shower, and wondered whether the spring did more than just bind them together and allow them to feel each other’s feelings. Harry was pushing forty, and he’d just come harder than he’d come in quite some time, but after watching Draco bathing in the water for a minute or three, he was nearly ready for another go.

Knowing Draco, he was doing it on purpose. He had to know what all that water sluicing over his pale arse was doing to Harry’s cock. Then at last Draco spelled the shower off, stepped out, and spelled a towel around him. He walked into the bedroom, Harry following. Letting the towel drop, Draco spelled his pyjamas over to him.

Standing there, still nude, Harry watched the rest of his view get covered up, Draco didn’t turn around. “You’re still upset about the spring,” said Harry.

“Of course I’m still upset about it.”

“Why?” Harry asked.

“I think we’ve been over that.”

“So, the mind-blowing sex didn’t help at all?”

“Harry . . .”

Draco paused in the midst of putting on the vest he usually wore to bed, and Harry waited for Draco’s explanation. At last, Draco’s arms moved, pulling down the shirt the rest of the way, and then Draco turned around.

“Sex doesn’t really have anything to do with it.”

Harry just looked at him. “I can feel your come inside of me. I can feel it leaking out and drying on me.”

Draco dropped his gaze, looking desperately unhappy. “Then please wash up.”

Sighing, Harry sat up. “You really don’t like it.”

Draco pressed his lips together. “You know that I like . . . like—” he grimaced—“making love to you,” and his lips twisted around the words, because Draco didn’t say things like that very easily. “And feeling what you felt was—” here he swallowed hard—“nice.”

“Nice.”

“Harry—”

“You never even knew I wanted you like that, did you?”

Draco swallowed again. “You’ve told me that you want me like that.”

“Did you believe it?”

“Yes.”
“But it’s not the same as knowing,” Harry pointed out.

“I don’t want to know. I don’t need to know.” Draco’s voice sounded thick. “It’s believing you that’s important. It’s that I trust you, even about—about things like that. That’s what’s important.”

“And for you, trusting me is hard.”

Draco’s shoulders slumped, and all Harry wanted to do was hold him, but he didn’t reach out. He already knew that Draco didn’t want to be held.

“Draco,” Harry said instead, quietly. “If I had a problem with that, we’d have broken up long ago.” He waited, but Draco still just stood there, looking slumped and dejected. “It seems to me that the spring just makes it easier for you to believe me.”

“It’s not who I am.”

“It’s just helping you,” Harry said. “Like—like a medicine.”

Draco flinched, the way he sometimes did at Harry’s words, when Harry couldn’t see that he’d done anything wrong. “If you would understand what you sound like,” Draco said in a low tone.

Harry waited, but Draco didn’t finish. “What do I sound like?”

Draco didn’t meet his eyes. “I already know that you don’t want to change me, Harry. You’ve told me you don’t want to fix me, and I’ve always believed you.”

Harry’s breath caught. “No, of course not, I—”

“Then you need to trust me now,” Draco said. “The fact that it’s hard for me to trust you, and that you make me do it anyway—that’s why we work. Or rather—maybe it’s not the way you work for me, but it’s the way I work for you. It’s what makes me—makes me able to lie down next to you and—and wake up beside you in the morning. It’s the reason that I love you in all the ways that I do, Harry. Don’t take it away. Please,” he added, still not looking at him, and if the rest hadn’t broken Harry, that single word—please—would have done.

“You know that I’ll do anything,” Harry said. “I’ll do anything you ask.”

“Then let’s find out how to break the bond,” Draco said, “and break it.”

*

The third argument happened the next evening in Draco’s laboratory.

The laboratory was behind the shop where Draco’s potions were sold. Rose Weasley was manning the till for the summer between her sixth and seventh year at Hogwarts, but she had gone home for the evening. Draco had sent another Patronus, saying, “Late again. Don’t wait up,” and then another two minutes later, “I actually mean it this time. I don’t care about whatever you can do with your tongue.”

“That’s not what you said last time my tongue was in your arse,” Harry sent his stag to say. His Patronus hadn’t ever changed.

Draco’s changed all the time, and Harry had given up trying to figure out what it meant. Just now it looked like some kind of horrible bottom-dwelling crab, and yet it was still sexy when it said in Draco’s uppity tones, “We’re not having Patronus sex right now. I don’t care what you say about
my arse."

“I love fucking you with my tongue,” Harry sent his stag to say. “I could eat you out for hours.”

“And anyway, how do you know what I said last time your tongue was in my arse,” said the crab. “I believe I was incoherent at the time.”

“Why aren’t we having Patronus sex again?” Harry’s stag demanded.

“Because I’m busy,” said the crab. Another minute later it appeared again and added, “Besides, it takes forever.”

“I should have known you’d take that as an invitation,” Draco said when Harry appeared in the lab. He didn’t even turn from his careful dicing of some bits of lichen.

“I dunno,” said Harry, lounging up against one of the lab benches. “I still kind of want to have Patronus sex. It’s been a while.”

“It was a love spring,” Draco said. “Not a lust well.”

“Where can we get a lust well?” Harry wanted to know. “We could put that in our backyard instead.”

“You don’t need one.” Draco’s voice was rather snide, and he remained fixed on the lichen.

“Yeah,” Harry said. “Just think about what it would feel like for you to feel like what it feels like for me to put my tongue in your arse.”

The knife thunked down on the cutting board, but Draco didn’t turn around. Then he resumed chopping.

“You know how you never believe that I like it,” Harry went on. Draco picked up the sliced lichen and dumped it in a cauldron, then started pouring some sort of sparkly clear liquid into vials.

“You’d be able to feel how wet I want to get you,” Harry said. “How deep I want to put my tongue in you, how I want to fuck you with it, all wet and messy inside your tight little hole, how I love to get my face in your arse and try to scrape my teeth up inside you until I can feel you squirm for it like a little slut in heat.”

Finished pouring the clear stuff, Draco put the tubes in a magic centrifuge and spun them with his wand, his pale hand only shaking a little.

Harry sighed. “Or you can make your potion.”

“The timing is delicate,” was all Draco said. His voice was hoarse, and Harry felt a little badly. Not very much, but a little.

Draco stopped the centrifuge and took out the vials, pouring off the clear liquid from the top, then shaking out the glitter at the bottom. This he worked through some kind of cheesecloth—drying it out, Harry guessed. Then Draco added the glitter to the cauldron, and the air above the brew made a little poof. Draco didn’t seemed disturbed by it, so Harry guessed it was okay.

Draco was testing the properties of the love spring water. Harry knew that. He knew that Draco was looking for a cure.
It was okay. Harry had told him he’d tried to help, and he had been. He’d been researching love springs and tracking down leads as much as he could at work, but he hadn’t been coming up with much. He was trying really hard—for Draco—but it was difficult when his heart wasn’t really in it.

“You know,” Harry said, sitting down on one of the stools, “I always thought the wizarding world would have some kind of magic bond thing.”

“It does?” Draco said, and cracked a turtle egg over a bowl.

“I mean like some sort of spell.”

“Why?” Draco used his wand to separate the yolk from the white, then very carefully began to clean the pieces of the shell. It was a delicate process, and Harry would have been pants at it. “They had love springs.”

“I mean, I would have thought they’d develop them after the love springs started drying up.”

“You’ve lost me,” Draco said.

Harry shrugged. “You know, for binding couples. At weddings and so on.”

Draco bent to watch the effect as he dipped the egg shell into a yellow-looking oil. “Maybe they realized how barbaric that would be?”

“I looked for one,” Harry said.

“Hm?”

“I looked for one when I married you,” Harry said.

Draco froze, then resumed his dipping. “You what?” he said, very politely, which was a very bad sign.

“I thought there must be one, so I looked for one.”

“I see,” Draco said, straightening.

“Do you?”

Draco dropped the shell into the simmering cauldron, then added the yellow oil to the egg yolk.

“I wanted to bind us together,” Harry said. “Forever, with a spell.”

“No.” Draco wasn’t facing him anyway, but he turned very deliberately away so that Harry couldn’t even see the hint of his profile. “I don’t suppose I do see.”

“To me, it was just a way to seal the deal,” Harry said.

“I didn’t know indentured servitude turned you on,” Draco said in his horrible voice. His hands were moving very steadily among the beakers.

“It doesn’t,” Harry said. “I never wanted you to serve me. I wanted—well, I guess I wanted to serve you, but only in the way an equal does.”

Draco just kept going, adding crushed water lily petals to the egg white now, and mixing them.
“I just . . .” Harry wished there was a way to make him understand. “You have your family, you know? Blood ties, they’re like magic—they hold you to a person. I just wanted us to be like that.”

Draco crushed more flower petals, added them to the egg, crushed petals, added them to the egg, crushed, added, crushed, added. He did it ten times, then poured the mixture into the cauldron.

“I guess I’ll see you at home,” Harry said, once Draco took out a little bowl of dirt and started sifting it through a different cheesecloth.

“You are my family.” Draco was using that same terrible voice.

“I know. I just—”

“Blood isn’t magic, Harry. It’s just blood.”

Harry—who had never thought he’d hear Draco Malfoy utter a sentence anything like It’s just blood ever, even after all they’d been through—stopped cold.

“I’m bound to my family because I choose to be,” Draco went on, his tone still wintery. “I choose out of history, obligation, love, gratitude, a thousand things—so many things that it doesn’t feel like choice at all, but I do choose it. The force that holds me to them isn’t science and it isn’t magic. It’s who I am.”

“I know it’s who you are,” Harry said, his voice low.

“Then don’t you know—” Draco stirred the silt into the yolk—“How can you possibly not realize that you’re a part of who I am as well?”

Harry swallowed. “I do realize that, Draco. It was a long time ago.”

“But you still want this bond.”

“I didn’t say I wanted it,” Harry said, his voice gentle. “I just meant that I don’t mind it.”

Draco poured the yolk and silt into the cauldron, then opened a jar of slugs, pulled out three, and started slicing them. He was working faster now; Harry guessed it was the potion. “I thank the world every day for Ronald Weasley and Hermione,” he said eventually.

Draco had said something like that once before, almost sixteen years ago now. I suppose I’ve got to be thankful for your friends, he’d said. Even Ronald. When Harry had asked him why, he’d said, Because you deserve to have people who you know will never, ever leave you. At the time he hadn’t been able to say that he was one of those people, but Harry had known it anyway.

“No one abandoned me,” Harry pointed out. “They all just . . . died.”

“Go home, Harry,” Draco said, still slicing slugs.

Harry swallowed a sigh.

“Wait up for me,” Draco said. “Twenty minutes. Then you can put your tongue wherever you want.”

“Oh. Well then.” Harry perked up considerably. “I’ll take one arse, covered in honey.”

“Don’t be disgusting.”
“You know you love it.”

“Go home,” Draco said again, putting in the slugs, “or I’ll change my mind.”

As far as arguments went, it hadn’t been a very loud one, but Harry knew that Draco had been furious with him—with the idea that Harry had looked for a spell to bind them at their wedding. The only reason it hadn’t gotten uglier was that Draco had this idea that Harry had this abandonment complex. Harry didn’t think he did, but then again he didn’t really like to think about those things very much—Mum and Dad and Sirius and Dumbledore and Lupin and all of that. Just, when Draco got all protective and mother hen-ish about it, Harry tried to do whatever he said and usually they ended up pretty happy, particularly when there was arse-licking and honey involved.

*

The fourth argument happened on the third day, and it also happened because of sex.

They sort of hadn’t been able to stop having it.

There had been that first night and then the next morning, and then the night after that. Draco often got a little crazy after Harry rimmed him, but that time had been about twenty times as intense—Draco feeling what Harry was feeling, and Harry feeling Draco feeling it, echoed back and forth until Draco was sort of this wet, quivering mass of incoherent flesh.

Harry could have kept at it forever, making out with Draco’s hole and feeling the waves of comfort wet loose shock open relax allowed stretch fill anything anything anything; there was a point at which Draco would have taken anything, would have let him do anything, would have done anything just because Harry asked, and Harry knew that about Draco but to feel him be that open and permissive and utterly without barriers was something new.

Harry had fucked him after that, and the next morning Draco seemed to want to make up for it by sucking him off and fucking him against the wall. Then of course Draco had had to have his shower, and Harry couldn’t help himself because—because—shower sex. He wanted Draco to know how he felt, making out with him all slippery and wet; he wanted to feel how Draco felt, making helpless noises and licking all the come off of Harry’s body before the water could wash it all away.

Harry had come to the lab again after work, a little more intent on sucking Draco’s brains out through his cock than on anything to do with what you were supposed to do in labs. Draco didn’t look at him, though. Handing him a list, he said, “If you’re going to hover, at least make yourself useful.”

It was a recipe for a very simple indicator solution, because Draco was still working on finding the cure for the life bond.

Harry kept getting distracted.

“Are you working on it?” Draco said, spelling a jar of insects down from a shelf.

“Sure.” Harry nibbled the spot under Draco’s ear. “Needs more lemongrass.”

“Just stop for a minute,” Draco said, then turned and caught the corner of Harry’s mouth with his own.

Harry slid his thumbnail along Draco’s collarbone, just like he knew Draco liked. “Stop what?”

“Merlin’s tits, stop this.” Draco pushed at him, then moaned, as somehow the motion had managed
to bring their hips closer together.

“Stop tending your potion?” said Harry, tugging Draco’s slender hips against his own. “But I thought you wanted me to.”

“Salazar,” Draco panted, and pushed him again. “The spring, are you working on the spring.”

“But I thought you wanted me to.”

“The spring?” Harry said, and reached for him. “The love spring,” said Draco, and stayed out of reach. He looked like he was practically clinging to the lab bench in order to do it.

“It’s brilliant,” Harry said, and ran a finger along Draco’s neck.

“Cut it out,” Draco snapped, but he leaned in, and it was Harry who stepped back. “Fine,” he said. Turning away, he picked up the knife in order to slice the lemongrass. “I’ll work on the potion.”

“Harry, please, can we just have a rational discussion like—”

“Sure.” Putting down the knife, Harry turned around. “We can have a rational discussion like normal adults. Let’s have a rational discussion about how you’re killing yourself every night to brew this ‘cure’, when you could be at home with me.”

“All right,” Draco said, very steadily. “Let’s have a discussion about that.”

“It’s just,” Harry said, and tried to think of what he really wanted to say. “You’re throwing yourself into this like it’s some kind of emergency, and from where I’m standing it’s just . . . not. It’s really not.”

Draco inclined his head at angle. When he did that, his face slanted to the side and his hair and features caught the light in extraordinary ways. Harry thought Draco must know what he looked like—statuesque, untouchable—but he never really knew, with Draco. “It’s not an emergency,” Draco said finally. “It’s only extremely distasteful to me.”

“Great.” Harry turned back to the bench and looked at the lemongrass. “Now I’m distasteful.”

“You know that’s not what I said.” Draco’s voice wasn’t snide, but it held that remarkable poise that could be just as irksome.

“I know.” Harry made himself turn back around, made himself look at his husband, take a breath, and calm down. “It’s just . . . do you realize how that sounds to me? That being bound to me is distasteful?”

“I also didn’t say being married to you is distasteful.”

Harry could tell that Draco was being extremely careful with his tone of voice, so that Harry wouldn’t read into it but sometimes it is tacked on the end. Harry took another breath. “I know,” he said. “I know.”

Draco slanted his face down then, and it didn’t do anything to stop the way the light was always beautiful around him. “But you still think I’ve said something awful.”

Harry rubbed his scar. “No. Yes. Draco, I know you’re not trying to be awful. I mean—”
“Thanks for that,” Draco said in that careful way; it meant that he knew he could sound sarcastic—perhaps that he even wanted to sound sarcastic, but it wasn’t because he wasn’t being sincere. “I know you’re trying to understand what my problem with this is,” he said quietly. “Help me to understand why it’s so difficult for you. Please,” he added, because he must have known the words could have been construed as condescending. “Please, I’m trying to understand, Harry.”

“You just . . .” Harry could feel his shoulders slumping, and he didn’t mean to do it; they just did. “You’re acting like it’s so unpleasant. Like it’s so hard. I understand if the principle of the thing bothers you—free will, okay; I get it; it’s important—I just. The reality of it isn’t that bad, right? I mean, sure, we’ll get the cure as soon as can possibly be, but in the meantime—can’t we just enjoy it a little?”

“You mean the sex.”

“Well,” and Harry realized that maybe that was what it boiled down to. “Yes? I mean, you’re not telling me you find that distasteful.”

Draco didn’t say anything.

Harry waited, then said, “Oh, come on.”

“Of course I don’t find it distasteful, Harry.”

“Stop talking that way.”

Draco lifted his eyes and they were blazing. “What way?”

“Like I’m volatile and you’ll hurt me, like you can’t say what you really think or else my ickle feelings will get hurt. I’m not the one who has trouble believing—” Harry stopped himself, but not before Draco flinched. Closing his eyes, Harry rubbed his scar again. “Look, can’t we just . . .”

After a long moment, Draco spoke, his voice strained. “I like to feel what you’re feeling. I admit that it’s . . . a rush.”

“A rush,” Harry repeated dully.

Draco looked at him a little while. “You do realize that our positions are reversed,” he said at last.

Harry went back to slicing the lemongrass.

“Usually it’s I who argue for magical augmentation,” Draco explained, “and you who demand authenticity.”

“It’s not unauthentic.” Harry was chopping the lemongrass sort of hard.

“It’s not,” Draco conceded. “If it were just . . . every once in a while, I wouldn’t—it’d be brilliant. But it’s not. And Harry, I want the times when sex isn’t perfect, when I can’t feel what you feel, and I can only do my best to show you . . .”

“Maybe that’s the difference,” said Harry, and put the lemongrass into the cauldron.

“Maybe what’s the difference?”

“It’s more important to me.” Harry started measuring the fish eggs, now. “What you feel is more important to me, when we’re making love, than what I feel.”
“And what’s important to me is only what I feel.”

Harry measured another spoon of fish eggs, and then he realized what he’d said. “Draco,” he began, and turned around.

Draco’s face was white. “I’ve always been the only thing I care about,” he said, in this perfectly ghastly voice. “Malfoys always look out for themselves.”

“Draco,” Harry said again, put down the spoon, reached out.

“Don’t touch me,” Draco said, and flinched away.

“I didn’t,” Harry began, and reached out

“Don’t,” Draco said, and Harry didn’t, because Draco used that voice.

“Please,” Harry said. “You know I didn’t mean—”

“I know,” Draco said, his voice quick and heart-breaking. “I just need—I’m going out. Fresh air. Don’t wait up,” and he Disapparated.

Harry looked at the solution he’d been brewing. He supposed it didn’t need stirring now.

*

Draco didn’t come home that night, nor the entire next day.

Harry didn’t worry about where he was, because he knew that in fits of temper, Draco went straight to his mother. It had only happened a handful of times before in their fifteen years of marriage, but those few times had been significant enough that Harry remembered each of them.

One of those times in particular still filled Harry with horror. That had been the time that Draco had said, Sometimes, I can’t stand to be near you, and Harry had said, Fine. Leave, and don’t come back.

Six hours later, Harry had been beside himself. He was already so sorry; he couldn’t even remember what they had been fighting about other than it involved Lucius. Draco had been stubborn and Harry had insulted his father, and then Draco had said some filthy words and Harry had yelled at him. Draco had been the one to dredge up their past, but it had been petty; it was Harry who had brought up Death Eaters, Voldemort, the Room of Requirement, all of it.

He desperately wanted to apologize, to put it all behind them, but he already knew by then—through a year and a half of living together—that Draco needed time after arguments. He didn’t like to be rushed and he certainly despised begging, though Harry would have begged him in a heartbeat. He would have done anything.

After twenty-four hours, he sent an owl with just this message:

I’m sorry for everything, and I love you.

Two days after that Harry opened the door, and Draco was standing there, looking rather the worse for wear. He held out a piece of paper and Harry took it; it was his owl. At first, Harry thought it meant that Draco was rejecting his apology, until he realized what it really meant.

That was the first time Draco said, I love you.
“I thought it was over,” Harry croaked.

Draco merely inclined his head. “It’s never going to be over.”

Three months later, Harry teased him about that, and Draco merely looked away again. “If you require proof,” he said, in a steady voice, “I’ll swear to it in front of witnesses.”

“I—what?” Harry stopped laughing and nudging him then.

Draco just gritted his teeth. “I’ll swear it in front of witnesses. I’ll sign a legal document.”

“I,” Harry said again. “You’re asking me to marry you.”

Draco’s gaze remained fixed on something outside the window. “I’ll wear your ring. I’ll force Mother to attend. I draw the line at carrying flowers.”

“You’ll wear my ring?” Harry asked, incredulous, because it was an old ring that had belonged to Sirius that Harry had found and started wearing after Hogwarts, and that Draco had professed to hate.

Draco looked at him then. “I’ll do anything,” was all he said.

“You usually only say that when I’ve got my tongue inside you.”

“I mean it, though,” Draco said. “I mean it every time.”

“Let me,” Harry breathed. “Let me put it on—I . . . I want to see it on you.”

Draco held out his hand, looked away as Harry slid the ring on his finger. It was a simple silver thing that hinted rather abstractly at a snake and lion intertwining; Harry had always supposed Sirius had it because so much of the Black family was traditionally Slytherin whereas he had been chosen for Gryffindor. Considering Sirius’s feelings for his family, it wasn’t any wonder that he had never worn it when Harry had known him; Harry only started wearing it because of Snape, and to put the war behind him.

Seeing it on Draco’s finger did absolutely crazy things to his insides.

Draco took his hand away, still not looking, and Harry couldn’t resist asking. “Aren’t you—I mean, you’re happy, right?”

“Yes.”

“Can you—will you at least look at me?”

Draco had changed so much since Hogwarts, since that day Harry had found him crying in the bathroom. Draco had learned, among so many other things, how to keep a fairly taut fist around his emotions when he so chose, but when he turned to Harry, there were tears in his eyes.

Harry only saw him cry one other time after that, when Lucius died.

“I’m sorry,” Draco had said, sounding utterly gutted.

“About what?” Harry began, and then realized Draco meant the silent tears, which were not even falling from his eyes.

“I don’t mean to be maudlin,” Draco went on. “I’ve firmly assigned that task to you, and I would
prefer that you keep it.”

“I’ll keep it,” Harry said. He slid his fingers through Draco’s own, feeling the ring. “I’ll keep it always.”

“Oh, God.” Draco looked away again. Then, after a pause, “Say it again.”


“You lack sound judgement,” Draco murmured.

“And just think,” Harry said gleefully. “You’re stuck with me for life.”

“What was I thinking?” Smiling, Draco looked out the window, and gripped Harry’s hand so tightly that it hurt.

That was always what Harry remembered when they fought—that particular fight, that particular reconciliation. When he thought about it this time, he realized how spectacular it was, that Draco was always guided back by choice, by an inability to stay away that had nothing to do with magic, and everything to do with everything that he needed from Harry.

So, twenty-four hours after their fourth fight in as many days, Harry sent an owl with just this message:

_You were right. I was wrong._

_I’m sorry for everything, and I love you._

*

On the fifth day of their life bond, Harry opened the door. Draco stood there at the stoop, and handed him the slip of paper.

“You forgot to cross the first part out,” Harry pointed out.

“No, I didn’t.” When Harry frowned at him, Draco rolled his eyes. “Are you going to let me in?”

Harry moved out of the door way. “Cure’s on the counter,” he said, as Draco moved past him.

“What?” Draco stopped.

“Mm-hm,” Harry said.

“But . . .” A series of things passed through Draco’s eyes; his jaw ticked, his fist clenched, and then he let it go. “Hermione?”

“If helps your pride any, she used your research to work it out,” Harry said. “She said you would have got it in the end.”

Draco went into the kitchen, picked up the little vial on the counter. “This is it?”

“That’s it,” Harry said.

Draco inspected it, turning the vial this way and that. “Is she sure?”
“Let’s check,” Harry said, then he moved closer and kissed him.

Surprised at first, Draco barely moved, and then he was tipping his head, kissing Harry back. Then Harry was pulling away and Draco’s hands were in his hair pulling him closer again, practically sinking into his mouth, licking Harry’s tongue, the inside of his cheek, the undersides of his lips and then his tongue again. Then Draco was making these little moaning sounds he usually only made when Harry was fingering him, paired with jerky little motions of his hips.

“Wow,” Harry said. “I guess you still feel it.”

“What did you—” Draco’s hands, still tangled in Harry’s hair, pulled him closer for another kiss. “What did you do?”

“ Took the cure.” Harry’s hands settled on Draco’s hips. “I can’t feel what you feel any more.”

“Why,” Draco said, barely even a question. He kissed him again, then wandered down and bit Harry’s chin, did that thing with his hips. That thing. “Why would you do that?”

“Mm,” Harry said, pulling him closer. “Didn’t you want me to?”

“No,” a sentiment that Draco tried to make pretty clear with his hips.

“But I thought you—”


“Oh,” Harry said. “Why?”

“Because you—oh God. You want me. You want me so goddamn much.”

“Well, yes and no,” Harry said.

“You do.” Draco’s hands were in his shirt, hot and dragging on bare skin, which made it hard to concentrate with the lips and hips and all of Draco right there, so hot and ready for it. “God, you want me to fuck you, don’t you.”

“That would . . . hm.” Harry tried to pull away. “No, seriously, Draco, can we talk for a moment?”


“Wow, you’re right.” Harry stepped away. “This really isn’t who we are.”

“It is, though.” Draco looked slightly dazed. “I mean, not just sex. You missed me. I can tell. You ached for me the whole time. The way I—I—I just don’t understand why you’d go and take the cure without me.”

“It was the right thing to do,” Harry said.

“I know,” Draco said, brightening considerably. He grabbed Harry’s arm. “Let’s go back to the spring. We can—”

“Draco,” Harry said, peeling himself away.

“You don’t get it, Harry.” Draco looked disgruntled again. “You were right. I was being—I don’t know. Pedantic. Stupid. You know how I get. I’m never going to leave you. You’re never going to
leave me, and I can’t live without you, so why don’t we just—"

“Draco,” Harry said again, more quietly.

Swallowing again, Draco shut up.

Those times when Draco went away like that, Harry preoccupied himself so dreadfully with the idea that Draco might not come back that he’d never considered very closely the things that Draco might be feeling. He knew that Draco was upset and that he needed time, and beyond that Harry could only work himself up with terrible thoughts of being left alone. Abandonment issues indeed.

Even knowing how hard it could be for Draco to believe that Harry truly loved him, it had never once occurred to Harry that Draco could be afraid he wouldn’t take him back.

“We don’t need the spring,” Harry said in that same quiet voice.

“I’m saying that I don’t mind it,” Draco said, in his most earnest voice.

“And I’m saying that I do.”

Draco frowned. “You were certainly firmly in its corner when I left,” he pointed out.

“I was wrong,” Harry said. “I’m sorry.”

The frown deepened. “What changed your mind?”

“The thought that when you came back, it might be just because of the bond. I want you to come back because you want to.”

“That’s ludicrous.”

“I know,” said Harry, “but it is what it is.”

“You think I came back because of the bond?”

“No.” Harry came a little closer, touched Draco on the arm. “But I don’t ever want to have to doubt.”

Draco angled his face away. “You’d never have to.”

“I know that,” Harry said. “Just as I wish you knew that I would never, never need a spring to accept you back with open arms.”

“I do know.”

“Then why did you want to go back to the spring?”

“I . . .” Draco lifted his eyes. “Sometimes I’m—I’m afraid of the awful things that I would do for you. Terrible things.”

“They’re not terrible,” Harry said, coming closer, touching his other arm.

“You don’t understand.” Draco shook his head, stepping away. “If you—if you ever stopped wanting to be with me I would—I would . . .”

Harry shook his own head, stepping forward again. “Never. I would never—”
“You don’t understand,” Draco said again, stepping away. “I would slip water from that love spring in your drink. I would take you prisoner; I would put you under a spell, if it meant—if it meant you were . . . you were always mine.”

“Then I guess it’s good I’m always yours anyway,” Harry said, and kissed him.

He kissed him and kissed him until Draco was pushing him away, panting. “God, you feel so—so —” Draco tried to say, and Harry finished for him:

“Horny?”

“Sentimental,” Draco said, and tried to sound disgusted, but instead just managed to sound enraptured, then pulled Harry in for another kiss. “Are you sure,” he kissed him, “curing this,” his teeth along Harry’s neck, “is the best,” nip to his collarbone, “idea?”

“Yes.” Harry gripped Draco’s hips, arched against them.

“Yeah, but,” Draco panted, then moaned, his own hips arching back. “Do you remember what it feels like—to feel what I’m feeling? Do you remember all that . . .”

“Lust?”

“I was going to say joy,” Draco said.

“I remember,” Harry said. “Maybe you can make a potion.”

“What?” Draco pulled away, and Harry shrugged.

“Something to simulate the effect,” Harry said. “Then we can just do it every once in a while, without, you know, the life bonding stuff. You already separated out all properties, and Hermione said she thought it—” Harry shrugged again. “Maybe it’s not possible.”

“I’ll make it possible,” Draco said, and kissed him again. “But just in case it’s not, I’m not drinking that cure until we fuck each other senseless.”

“Well, if you insist,” Harry said.

As far as arguments went, it wasn’t a very long one.

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