Inevitable

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by Frayach

Summary

There is a very fine line between obsession and love. Harry Potter is the greatest wizard of his age and a troubled poster boy, and Draco’s son is beautiful and gifted. Their relationship is intense from its beginning, and everything else in their lives is collateral damage. They say every hero someday meets his match. Harry has definitely met his.

Notes

Some of you may recognize this story. I wrote it four years ago. That said, I've made many major revisions that desperately needed to be made.

This is not an easy story to read. It is downright disturbing in parts. I've chosen not to give a lot of warnings because most of them would be spoilers. Please use your own discretion - this is definitely a "proceed at your own risk" kind of story.

Thank you to my dear Alexis for the prodding and encouragement. It would've been a shame if this epic had never been properly revised and re-posted.
Harry spat on the ground. No matter how much whisky he’d drunk over the past week, he still couldn’t get the taste of this night out of his mouth. The two other Aurors were silent. He had no idea whether they approved of their mission or not. He didn’t want to know. He’d already had too many fights over the Minister’s order, and he had the scabs on his knuckles to prove it.

The rain was slashing down. There were lamps lit on the first floor of the Manor and in one window on the third floor. That must be where the nursery was.

Draco was never going to believe that Harry fought the arrests tooth and nail. He’d only know that it was Harry who came to the door that rainy night and took him and his wife into custody. Everybody knew that there wasn’t going to be a trial. Both Draco’s and Asteria’s parents had been summarily executed. It now seemed fitting to the Wizengamot that their children should spend the rest of their lives in Azkaban.

Why in God’s name had Draco kept his father’s books and artefacts? It gave the powers that be all the evidence they needed for the arrests, and then there were the accusations: Draco and Asteria (as well as her sister) were accessories to assault, murder, kidnapping and torture. A life sentence merely required proof of association with Voldemort. Under that standard, most of the Pure-blood Slytherins were culpable – even if they’d been teenagers at the time and under extreme duress, it didn’t matter. They were the spawn of Death Eaters, and the wizarding world would not be safe until every one of them was locked away for good, their Gringotts vaults seized, and their estates confiscated and auctioned off.

“What do we do with the children?” he’d asked Kingsley earlier that evening. His boss was standing with his arms crossed, looking out his office window. He’d been staring at the lights of London for at least ten minutes.

“I hate this as much as you do,” he said.

Harry nodded. He knew that Kingsley had done everything he could, including threatening to resign, but the Minister’s mind was already made up. And so was the public’s.

He took a deep breath and straightened his shoulders. He hadn’t bothered with an *Impervius*, and his hair was plastered to his face. The driveway was long and muddy. His boots and the hem of his robe were spattered and dirty by the time he got to the front stairs.

He banged on the door. “Aurors! Open up!” he shouted.
They waited a long time, and he was about to knock again, when the door opened, and he found himself face-to-face with Draco Malfoy. His usually pale complexion was ashen, and his eyes looked haunted. News of the night’s other arrests must’ve reached him already.

“Potter,” he said. “To what do we owe this honour?”

Harry didn’t smile. He was here to do his fucking job.

“Draco and Asteria Malfoy, you are under arrest. Come with us voluntarily, and we will not Stun you.”

Behind Draco, a woman started crying and a baby wailed.

Jesus Christ. What was he now? The Dark Lord in an Auror robe? He was doing to the Malfoys just what Voldemort had done to his family.

“What about our baby,” Malfoy said. It wasn’t a question.

Harry swallowed hard. In many ways, this was the worst news he’d deliver tonight.

“He’ll be placed in a state run foster home.”

Asteria screamed, and her baby cried even harder, no doubt sensing his mother’s anguish.

“I hear you too have an infant son,” Draco said with the same eerie calm with which he’d greeted them.

Harry nodded.

Draco looked at him for a long time, searing his pale grey eyes into Harry’s soul.

“Promise me one thing, Potter,” he said, his voice as cold as a Dementor’s Kiss, “when he’s old enough to understand, tell Scorpius his parents are dead.”

The infant was blond. He had his mother’s golden hair, but his eyes were all Draco. He cried all the way to Bulcher House. Harry had decided not to Apparate because he didn’t want to traumatise him any more than he already had. The Auror who hadn’t taken the Malfoys into custody drove the Muggle car with Harry and the baby in the backseat. The boy’s tiny hand reached out of his blankets, and Harry gave him his pinky finger to hold on to. He felt sick. Kingsley had ordered him to take the next week off. “Go somewhere with your family, Potter,” he’d said.

The nurse who greeted him at the door seemed kind. Harry liked her face; it was ruddy and freckled and laughter lines crinkled at the corners of her eyes. But behind her, he could hear the crying of dozens of children, many of them calling for their parents.

He handed her Draco’s son. She opened the blanket. “He’s our youngest one yet – can’t be older than six months,” she said, smiling down at him. “What’s his name?”

“Scorpius Malfoy,” he said and saw her wince at the last name.

“Are there any special instructions from his parents?”

For the first time that night, he felt himself starting to break down.
“His . . . his mother said he’s still nursing and if there is someone here who could be a wet nurse, she . . . she’d be very grateful.”

He dropped his head into his hand and tried to pull himself together.

“You’re a brave man, Harry Potter,” the nurse said. “You faced the peril for all of us.”

He struggled to regain his voice.

“The only peril I faced was having my heart broken by the ruin my actions have caused tonight.”

The nurse didn’t respond for several moments.

“The children will be well looked after,” she said kindly. “They’ll be raised to know what is right and what is wrong.”

He didn’t answer. He didn’t trust himself.

“He’s . . . he’s only a baby,” he said at last, his voice choking. “He’s done nothing wrong. He’s an innocent. Please promise me that you and all the staff here will treat him that way.”

He paused.

“That’s not a request from the Malfoys,” he continued, his voice steady once again. “It’s from me.”

* * * * * * *

Madam Cockle would always remember the day she entered the nursery and discovered a furious Scorpius Malfoy brandishing a green crayon. The whole room was in disarray: little children were running around shrieking and slapping at the sparks on their bottoms, tables and chairs were overturned, and the young teacher was in tears. Madam Cockle drew her wand.

“Expelliarmus!,” she shouted and the crayon flew into her hand. “Finite!” The sparks snuffed out leaving smoking holes in their wake.

Scorpius stared at his hand as though it didn’t belong to him.

“You will come with me immediately,” said Madam Cockle, seizing his arm. The child was small but strong – and very quick. She knew her grip had to be tight. When they got to her office she ordered him to sit down on one of the wooden chairs. The cushioned chairs were for adults, and if there was one thing that she wanted to instil in her young charges it was respect for their elders.

She handed Scorpius a glass of water and watched him drink it sloppily. Clearly he needed to be taught how to drink neatly, but that could wait for another day. There were more important things to discuss – mainly how on earth had the five year-old child, who’d never received any magical training, known how to channel his innate wild magic through a wand-like object and then use that focussed magic to cast such a sophisticated jinx?

“Scorpius,” she said, folding her hands on the desk before her. “Where did you learn how to do that?”

The boy gazed at her with those unnerving grey eyes of his. She was not unaware of the young Tom Riddle’s history.

“I don’t know, ma’am,” he said.

“What was going through your mind when you picked up the crayon?” she asked.

“I don’t know . . . I was really really angry, ma’am.”
“Why?”

“Because Carlyle made fun of my name, ma’am.”

She sighed. This wasn’t a new problem. Aside from Fenrir Greyback, the Greengrasses and the Carrows, Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy had been the only people executed. It was the fact that Voldemort had operated out of their Manor. Everyone knew this. Even the youngest children at Bulcher House knew about the Malfoys and their wickedness. They’d been given books as soon as they could read that told of the Death Eaters and their fates.

“We’ve talked about this before, Scorpius,” she said firmly.

“I know,” he said. “Just ignore them . . .”

“. . . or tell a teacher.”

Scorpius looked down at his hands in his lap and took a deep breath.

“Harry Potter wouldn’t have ignored them,” he said confidently. “He would’ve fought back.”

Madam Cockle sighed again. Harry Potter. This was also not a new problem.

Ever since Bulcher House had partnered with Chocolate Amphibians, Inc., the children had been receiving Chocolate Frogs (and their accursed cards) every Friday after dinner. Not only were the cards a source of contention and hoarding (both of which were frowned-upon), they also sparked childish imitations and even crushes. Madam Cockle didn’t know which she was facing in Scorpius’s case, but the matter was greatly complicated by the fact that Harry Potter kept sending significant amounts of money every day on the anniversary of Scorpius’s arrival at Bulcher House. In fact, he was the home’s major donor, and it was due to his generosity that every child had a duvet, a comfortable mattress, and two uniforms, not to mention books. Piles and piles of Muggle books. The House relied almost exclusively on donated funds. The government was less than thrilled to spend money on the children and grandchildren of Death Eaters.

The one stipulation was that no one was to know the donations came from Harry Potter – or that a third of them were to be set aside for the health and welfare of Draco Malfoy’s son. This was Madam Cockle’s biggest secret, and it made her life hell with the financial auditors.

Harry Potter, himself, was also a problem. He seemed to be going steadily mad. Everyone knew he was growing more reckless all the time. It was rumoured he had a death wish, and the more the children heard about his adventures (because such things simply could not be kept away from them entirely), the more they emulated him.

Madam Cockle returned her attention to the fair-haired boy with the pale eyes.

“You have to remember that you want to be somebody when you grow up and go to Hogwarts, and fighting won’t help you,” she said sternly. “Who do you want to be when you grow up, Scorpius?”

The boy didn’t even blink. “Why, Harry Potter, of course.”

* * * * * * * *

Harry crouched in the muddy grass with his wand held at the ready. The spells had come out of nowhere. He cast a Protective Shield but knew it couldn’t last long under a well-coordinated attack. His fringe was plastered to his forehead, and rain beaded on the lenses of his glasses. They’d already taken his partner down. A Confringo struck the rock he was hiding behind and sent sharp shards
flying into the air. One slammed into his shoulder, and another grazed his cheek. He gritted his teeth as he pulled the shard free and wiped the blood off his face with the back of his wand hand. There were at least five of them. Not top-ranked generals, but wizards still skilled enough to cause serious damage. The things they did to the victims they took alive were rumoured to rival Voldemort’s most gruesome fantasies.

There was movement in the fog. To anyone but him, it would’ve seemed no more than a breeze, but his finely tuned instincts told him there was a person out there advancing slowly on his hiding place. He cast a Stunning Spell that caught the man completely unaware, but to Harry’s chagrin, he didn’t fall quietly. Suddenly the trees on the edge of the field seemed to surge forward. He knew he could Apparate before they reached him – in fact he probably should Apparate – but he’d be damned before he left his stunned partner to the mercy of sadists. Seizing his partner’s wand, he used one hand to deflect the attacks and the other to cast his own spells. When the fog finally cleared, there were thirteen bodies on the ground. He wiped his bloody hands in the grass and glanced up at the blue sky peeking through the clouds. He hadn’t slept in five days, and he could only, just barely, remember his own name.

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Scorpius Malfoy was no dummy. He knew he’d been called into Madam Cockle’s office that day two years ago because he’d done something that had surprised her – maybe even frightened her – with that green crayon. Ever since he’d been collecting them – along with his Harry Potter Chocolate Frog cards. The two seemed connected in some way, but exactly how, he couldn’t say. He only knew that both the crayons and the cards made him feel invincible, and when he thought of them, he didn’t care so much about people taunting him because of his name.

He also knew that he could make things happen. He could steal things from the kids he didn’t like and either keep them for himself or give them to his friends. He could do all of this just by thinking about it really hard. He could also make things invisible, which was why, when the staff made their weekly inspections, they never discovered his crayons or cards despite his having dozens of both.

And what was the best thing of all? He could sometimes make the bad kids do things he wanted them to do, like cut the queue for dinner and retrieve him a full plate and teacup. Other times, if he was really really really angry, he could make them writhe on the floor and scream. And after he was done, he could make them forget everything that’d happened.

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Even though he hadn’t been back since the night he’d taken Scorpius there, Harry saw that Bulcher House hadn’t changed at all, except for peeling paint and a weedy lawn. He took a deep breath and pushed open the enormous front door. He was nervous, which seemed ridiculous in light of the fact he’d just returned from a mission in Brittany with a scar the length of his body from a wound that’d nearly killed him.

“Ah, Auror Potter,” said Madam Cockle, who looked much the same as well although a bit more harried. “Please come to my office. Can I get you a cup of tea?”

He nodded and looked around. To his great relief, the inside of the House looked spotless, and sunlight flooded the classrooms he passed. The children they encountered seemed healthy and even happy.

When they entered Madam Cockle’s office and she closed the door, he told her how grateful he was to see that his donations had been put to good use. Not having followed up on them, he’d always feared they may’ve ended up in administrators’ pockets.
“And Scorpius Malfoy?” he asked. “He’s been well, I hope.”

Madam Cockle gestured for him to take a seat and handed him a nice hot cup of tea. “He’s healthy and content and is growing just as one would expect of a boy of his age.”

He looked at her quizzically. “Then why have you asked me to come here today?”

Madam Cockle sat down at her desk. “I’ve debated contacting you for a long time,” she said. “After all, you’re neither a relative nor a guardian. But I know of your interest in the boy’s welfare, and, well, to be honest, I didn’t know what else to do.”

He frowned and set aside his teacup. “Continue.”

Madam Cockle took a deep breath. “In a nutshell, we’re concerned that Scorpius is . . . well, is showing some disturbing signs.”

Harry’s frown deepened. “In what way?”

“Well, it seems that he’s discovered his magical abilities . . .”

“That doesn’t seem unusual. I discovered there was something ‘different’ about me long before I went to Hogwarts.”

“It’s not just that,” she continued. “He’s discovered how to channel and use his magic – even nonverbally.”

Harry breathed a sigh of relief. If that was the “problem,” then he could easily handle it.

“I could do wordless spells when I was his age, even though I wasn’t aware I could direct them or control them. I don’t see what’s wrong.”

Madam Cockle took yet another deep breath. “Well, obviously, in your case, there was no chance of you becoming a . . . a Dark Wizard . . .”

The first thought that crossed Harry’s mind was that no one should’ve ever assumed such a thing, but that thought was quickly replaced by what Madam Cockle had actually said.

“What are you saying?” he asked. His voice had lost any levity it might’ve had.

“I’m saying that we might have a dangerous situation on our hands, and if it’s not taken care of, I may have to expel Scorpius from the home.”

“How has the situation become ‘dangerous’?” he asked in the same serious tone. His protective instinct for Draco’s child had been triggered.

“I’ve seen him cast Unforgivables. I’ve seen him with my own eyes, and I’m afraid we may have another Tom Riddle on our hands. His eyes seem dead most of the time – they never change their expression even when he’s hurt someone . . .”

Harry rose from his chair. “That’s a very serious accusation!”

“I know it is.”

He was already at the door before he spoke again. “Where is he?”

Madam Cockle wrung her hands. “Please, Auror Potter,” she said pleadingly. “Hear me out. I asked
you to come today because I thought you could help.”

“What do you envision, exactly?”

“A tutor. He needs someone to talk to him, to mentor him, and I believe you’re the only one who can do that – the only one he’d trust and respect enough to listen to.”

His first instinct was to shake his head. “I don’t want to get closer to him than I already have,” he said. “It’s not fair to him. He needs a father in his life, and I can never play that role for him. I’ve got enough problems fathering my own children and staying alive for their sakes . . .”

“Please,” she said. “I’m afraid it’s got to a point where we’re going to need to expel him, and I hate to think where he’d end up, being a Malfoy and all.”

Harry stood considering her face for several moments. “This is serious.”

“Yes,” she replied. “It is. I wouldn’t have contacted you unless I was absolutely desperate.”

“Where is he?” he asked, remembering Dumbledore’s Pensieve memory of Riddle in his tiny room . . .

“He’s in his room. I can’t trust him to play safely with the other children anymore.”

Harry swallowed hard. How had Scorpius turned into a mini-version of his father and grandfather without even having known them? Was it something in the Malfoy blood?

“Take me to him,” he said firmly.

Having passed rooms with two beds, Harry had assumed Scorpius would have a roommate too, but when they knocked on his door, he realised that wasn’t the case. His heart squeezed into a fist. There were too many similarities . . .

“Scorpius,” Madam Cockle called. “You have a visitor.”

There was no answer. She knocked again.

“Go away!”

Harry gestured for her to leave. “I’ll handle this,” he said. He knocked on the door again.

“Scorpius, I’m Harry Potter, may I come in?”

There was silence on the other side of the door.

“No, you’re not,” the young voice said flatly.

“Well, open your door anyway and see if it’s really true,” said Harry.

There was a creak as the room’s occupant got up from his bed and then a shuffling sound. The door opened a crack and Draco’s eyes peered out.

Harry stepped back with the momentary shock but then quickly regained his composure. The boy’s eyes looked so much like his father’s.
“You see?” he said gently as though he was trying to coax a wild animal out of its hiding place.

But Scorpius didn’t answer. Instead he stood there like a statue with his eyes wide and his mouth hanging open.

“May I come in?” Harry asked.

Scorpius was still in a state of shock as he opened the door and let him enter.

“You really are Harry Potter,” he said with an awed breath.

Harry smiled and nodded. “In the flesh. May I sit down?” he asked, pointing to a small wooden chair next to a wooden desk.

Scorpius said nothing. Harry took a seat anyway.


Harry grinned. “It sounds like a Kneazle’s got you tongue.”

Scorpius continued to stare at him. Harry saw him swallow several times. He gestured for him to take a seat on his bed. The boy did as he was told.

Harry looked around the small but tidy room and was pleased to see that the large window let in plenty of light and there were numerous books on the sill. As he’d hoped, it looked as though Scorpius had become an avid reader. His bed was made and looked comfortable, and three spotless uniforms hung in his closet along with a kite.

“Do you fly that often?” he asked.

Scorpius nodded but then shook his head. “I used to, but I’m not allowed to go outdoors anymore.”

“Do you know why?”

“Because I do . . . things.”

“Like what?

Scorpius was silent.

“It’s okay,” Harry assured him. “I won’t get angry and I won’t tell Madam Cockle. It’ll be our secret.”

Scorpius beamed and looked down at his hands shyly.

“Sometimes I make things fly around,” he said.

“And what happens when you make things fly around?”

“They hit the mean boys.”

Harry nodded, careful to show no reaction to Scorpius’s words.

“Is that all?”

Scorpius looked up and stared him right in the eyes. It was disquieting.
“No.”

“Tell me about the other things, Scorpius, I told you I won’t get angry.”

“Sometimes I make the other children do things they don’t want to do.”

The *Imperius* curse. Harry struggled to maintain a neutral expression.

“Anything else?” he asked softly. He didn’t want to spook the boy.

“I sometimes I make them hurt,” Scorpius whispered. “But only if they’re being really bad to me.”

The *Cruciatus* curse.

“How do you do these things?” Harry asked.

Scorpius shrugged. “I think really hard about it, and sometimes I use this.” He stood up and lifted his mattress. Harry caught sight of several green crayons and Chocolate Frog cards. They all depicted him. Scorpius retrieved one of the crayons and held it out for his inspection.

Harry looked at it carefully although he didn’t need to. Obviously, Scorpius was using it as a wand. He was impressed.

“What happens when you make people do things or make them hurt?” he asked.

“The teachers get angry at me.”

“Do you know why?”

Scorpius shrugged again. “Because it’s bad.”

“Do you think it’s bad?”

Scorpius looked down at his hands. “I don’t know. But I think if it was bad, then I wouldn’t be able to do it.”

Harry nodded. “How do you feel when you do these things?”

Scorpius looked up with a guileless smile on his face. “Like you,” he replied.

There were no lights on when he returned home. It was Ginny’s way of telling him she was angry at him. Again. He sat down on the couch. The conversation with Scorpius had disturbed him. He realised that something *did* need to be done, but he was more than a little reluctant to do what Madam Cockle had suggested. Teaching the boy how to use his magic one evening a week. The commitment might not sound too onerous to anyone else, but it did to him. He was rarely home these days and was risking becoming a stranger to his children. What was more, he was almost always working in the evening. And on the weekends. He just didn’t have the time . . .

But then again, he shuddered to think what might happen if he didn’t intervene somehow. Scorpius was young, obviously gifted and just waiting for someone to tell him what to do. If he fell into the wrong hands . . .

Harry couldn’t let that happen.
That night he dreamed of Draco and Vanishing Cabinets and the chaotic disarray of the Room of Requirement. He also – for the first time in a very long time – dreamed of walking into a dark forest alone, certain that he was about to die without saying important things that needed to be said.

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Scorpius swished the wand. Nothing happened. It was the zillionth one he’d tried, and he was getting tired and hungry, but Mr. Potter showed no sign of giving up.

The wand maker with the strange accent handed him another wand.

“Think hard when you swish,” Mr. Potter told him. “Think about trying to make something float in the air.”

It’d been his first Apparation. Mr. Potter had held out his arm and told Scorpius to hold on tight. When they appeared in Romania, he’d felt sick to his stomach, and Mr. Potter had rubbed his back as he threw up his breakfast. Which was probably why he now felt so hungry.

He’d asked Mr. Potter why they couldn’t just buy a wand in England, and Mr. Potter had told him that it was illegal for children younger than eleven to purchase a wand there. So here they were in Romania, and Scorpius was swishing and flicking for all he was worth.

“How about a wand made from native wood and creatures?” Mr. Potter asked the wand maker. “Let’s try one of those.”

The wand maker reached into a glass case and pulled out a beautiful black wand. “Carpathian walnut with a Longhorn heartstring core,” he said. “We call it . . . well, in English it would translate to ‘an Old World wand.’”

Scorpius reached for it greedily. It was longer than any he’d tried already. He swished it . . .

. . . and the glass case exploded into sparkling dust. Both Mr. Potter and the wand maker backed away with alarmed expressions.

“Hhhhmnn,” said Mr. Potter. His voice sounded unsure. “I don’t know . . .”

“But, sir, it worked!”

“Yes it did, perhaps too well.”

“What do you mean?”

Mr. Potter took a long time to answer.

“I’ve never seen a new wand connect so powerfully with its potential owner,” he said. “I’m worried that it may be too strong for you to handle.”

Scorpius frowned. “But I want it,” he said and then added, “it’s pretty.”

Mr. Potter laughed. “Being pretty is not something one considers when choosing one’s wand. Comfort and recognition are what you look for.”

“What do you mean by ‘recognition’?”

“You need to feel like you already own the wand. Like it was yours in a past life or something.”
Scorpius nodded. He knew what Mr. Potter meant. That was exactly what he’d felt when he’d swished the black wand.

“Can I have it?” he asked. “Please, sir!”

Mr. Potter and the wand maker glanced at each other. Both of them seemed hesitant.

“May I hold it for a moment?” Mr. Potter asked, and Scorpius handed it to him. He watched intently as Mr. Potter inspected it closely and swished it a couple times. Each time he was able to levitate things and make them zoom around the shop, but it didn’t seem like he felt comfortable.

Mr. Potter thought for a very long time. “If I buy this for you,” he said sounding very serious, “you have to promise to use it only when I’m with you.”

Scorpius was ecstatic. Mr. Potter was going to come to see him again, maybe even a lot!

“I promise,” he said fervently. Mr. Potter smiled.

“Ohkay,” he said. “Then say hello to your new lifelong companion.”

Harry hated to do it, but it’d got to the point where he felt he had no other choice.

Scorpius hadn’t been using his wand when they weren’t together as he’d ordered, but he was still “thinking really hard” and “making things happen.”

There’d been the window that closed on a bully’s hand, and the boiling shower, and, far more worrisome, another Cruciatius. Even though it had been weak and unfocused, it was still dangerous – not only for its victim, but for Scorpius as well. The last thing Harry wanted was for him to fall in love with his power to make people hurt.

“But I hate them, sir!” he cried at one of their weekly meetings. “They’re mean and stupid!” His spectral eyes filled with something that approximated fire.

“That may be,” Harry replied calmly. “But that doesn’t give you the right to respond to their cruelty with even greater cruelty.”

Scorpius stamped his foot in frustration. They’d been over this ground already on several occasions, and yet it seemed to make no lasting impression.

“I was Crucioed,” Harry said. “By people who thought I deserved it.”

Scorpius looked alarmed. “But they were wrong, sir!”

“Anyone who uses an Unforgivable is always wrong,” he said, “and that includes me. I Crucioed someone who I thought deserved it. It wasn’t a pleasant experience, and I felt ashamed afterward. I felt like a little piece of me had rotted away.”

Scorpius looked at him with a mixture of curiosity and fear. “Do you think that’ll happen to me, sir?”

Harry had decided when he’d accepted the task of tutoring Scorpius that he was never going to lie or sugar coat things. If Scorpius was old enough to cast an Unforgivable then he was old enough to face the consequences.

“It may,” he said. “But only if you fail to realise how horrible what you’ve done is. Wand at the
Scorpius assumed a duelling stance, and once again Harry marvelled at his capacity to absorb their lessons.

“You’ve been casting rather weak Unforgivables,” he said, his voice as stern as he could make it. “So, I’ll do you the courtesy of making mine weak too.”

He took a deep breath. Just the fact that he didn’t want to do this made his *Cruciatus* almost painless. Almost.

Scorpius dropped his wand and fell on his knees, his limbs contorting into unnatural shapes. Harry said *Finite*, and Scorpius crumpled on the floor. It’d only lasted a couple of seconds and it was as anaemic as Harry could make it, but Scorpius nonetheless wet himself and whimpered in pain. Harry cast a cleaning charm and knelt down beside him.

“That,” he said firmly, “was a *Cruciatus*, and believe me it wasn’t nearly as strong as I could’ve made it. I want you to lie there for a moment and let the sensation sink into your memory. I don’t want you to ever forget this lesson.”

Harry was silent for a long time, listening to the child’s sniffles. Scorpius was immensely talented. He had a natural appreciation of magic’s capacity and an innate sense of his own power. None of Harry’s or his friends’ children had a fraction of Scorpius’s ability. He had the capacity to be a great wizard . . . and a very Dark one. It made Harry think of his grandfather who’d been of equal talent and used it only to benefit himself and torture anyone who stood in his way.

Harry would be damned before Scorpius followed in Lucius’s footsteps.

Scorpius’s sniffles turned into sobs and he clutched Harry’s hand, clinging to it like a lifeline. “I didn’t know,” he cried.

Harry stroked the back of his hand with his thumb.

“I know you didn’t,” he said softly. “That’s why I had to show you.”

“It hurt a lot,” Scorpius said, still sniffling but no longer sobbing.

Harry nodded. He could tell how deeply this had affected him by the way he’d dropped the “sir.” Usually, Scorpius was ridiculously formal.

“That’s why it’s called an Unforgivable,” Harry said, pulling his hand away and using it to push Scorpius’s fringe off his brow. “Not only will your victim never forgive you, but neither will society. And worst of all? You’ll never forgive yourself.”

“I feel so terrible,” Scorpius’s whimpered. “What can I do, sir?”

“First, you should make a solemn promise to yourself that you will *never* again cast an Unforgivable, and then you should apologise to Madam Cockle and to all the classmates you’ve hurt.”

Scorpius’s swallow was audible. “But I’m afraid to, sir. They already hate me as it is.”

“Theyir reaction is not what’s important,” Harry said. “What’s important is that you reach out and try your hardest to make amends. The gesture is as much for you as it is for them. Do you understand me, Scorpius?”
Scorpius pushed himself up off the floor and straightened his shoulders. “Yes, sir,” he said, fixing Harry with his preternatural gaze.

“You’re not just saying that to please me, are you?” Harry asked warily.

Scorpius shook his head. “I don’t want to be like my father, sir,” he said. “He was an evil man.”

Harry shook his head. “You’re father wasn’t evil. He was just misguided. Nobody stepped in to insure that he didn’t use his considerable abilities for evil purposes, but he, himself, in his heart of hearts, wasn’t evil. And what’s more – you don’t need to bear his sins. You’re your own person, Scorpius, and you have people who care about you. You aren’t ‘destined’ to make Draco’s mistakes.”

Harry stood up and offered Scorpius his hand. “I expect never to hear again that you’ve used your talent to do bad things, am I clear?”

“Yes, sir,” Scorpius said, standing up and straightening his uniform. Not for the first time, Harry admired his inherent pride, which, unlike their amorality, was a noble birthright of the Malfoys.

Scorpius’s pride, like Draco’s once had been, was a thing of beauty, and Harry had no intention of breaking it.

* * * * * * *

Scorpius could feel frustration welling in him, and he struggled to master it. He’d tried casting the same spell all evening, but it never worked. Each time, Mr. Potter commanded him in his “wizard voice” (as Scorpius had come to think of it) to shake out his hand and arm and try again.

“But I can’t,” Scorpius whined. “Besides, it’s a stupid spell. . . sir.”

Mr. Potter frowned at him, which made his stormy eyes look even stormier.

“There’s no such thing as a ‘stupid spell,’” he said. “Now assume the stance.”

Scorpius gripped his wand and slashed at the air. He was mad at Mr. Potter and wasn’t even trying now out of revenge. Of course, the spell didn’t work. Again.

As if he’d read his mind, Mr. Potter told him in that irritating wizard voice that he was only hurting himself by being surly.

“You sound like Madam Cockle, sir,” Scorpius said sulkily. “All you adults are the same.”

Mr. Potter laughed at that. “I thought very much the same thing when I was your age, but I can assure you we’re all different from one another in a million different ways. Now let’s try again . . .”

Scorpius dropped his wand and sat down on the floor with his arms crossed.

“Goodness, you’re being quite the brat tonight,” said Mr. Potter, but his voice sounded light and amused. “Get up. We’re going to stay here the whole night until you get it right.”

Scorpius groaned. “Do we have to?” he whined. “I’m tired.”

“I can assure you that after a day of slogging around in a thigh-deep fen, I’m rather tired too, but you don’t see me complaining. Now, wand up.”

Scorpius tried again, and again he failed. He felt tears of frustration spring to his eyes.
“Alright,” said Mr. Potter. “Let’s go about this in a different way.” He walked over to Scorpius and stood behind him. “Raise your arm . . . Ah! There’s one of your problems. You’re holding your wand wrong.”

Mr. Potter reached out his arm and took Scorpius’s hand in is. “This finger should be here,” he said, moving Scorpius’s pinky. “And your thumb should be here. Good! Now, I’m going to do the casting motion, just let your arm go limp. There you go.”

Mr. Potter wrapped his hand around Scorpius’s and swished the wand through the air with the whispered words of the spell. Scorpius’s mouth dropped open. It worked!

“Now you see what you’ve been doing differently?” Mr. Potter asked.

He did see what he’d been doing wrong, but he didn’t want to tell Mr. Potter. He wanted Mr. Potter to stay right where he was.

“Not really, sir,” he said.

“Okay, well then let’s try again.”

Mr. Potter’s body was warm. Scorpius snuggled into his arms. He felt safe and happy and sleepy. He couldn’t remember anyone ever being so close to him before. His eyes drifted shut, and only opened again when he felt, as much as heard, Mr. Potter’s chuckle.

“You really are tired,” he said. “One last time and then we’ll stop. I promise.”

He stepped away and Scorpius felt chilled by his absence, but he held his wand just as Mr. Potter had shown him, and swished it just like Mr. Potter had shown him, and said the words just as Mr. Potter had said them. His brain only just caught up with his actions when he heard Mr. Potter clap and tell him congratulations. Scorpius blushed.

“I doubt you’ll forget how to do that one,” Mr. Potter said. “It’ll become a muscle memory after tonight.”

Scorpius had no idea what a “muscle memory” was, but he knew for sure he’d never forget how he’d felt tucked against Mr. Potter’s chest, Mr. Potter’s hand covering and guiding his own.

* * * * * * *

Through a bloody haze, Harry saw a white ceiling and blinding lamps. All around him were urgent voices and the smell of bandages and several kinds of reeking potions. He didn’t need to ask. He knew he was in St. Mungo’s. Again.

“Water,” he croaked, and everyone looked relieved.

“He’s awake,” said one of the Healers. “Thank Merlin!”

Another Healer helped him to sit up and held a glass of water to his lips. Harry drank it sloppily.

“What was it this time?” he asked. “A curse or a wound?”

“Both,” said the Head Healer. “You’re lucky to be alive . . . again.”

“Is my family here?” Harry asked, already knowing the answer.

“Your wife left a message,” said the Healer awkwardly. “She said she was going to wait to see you
until you were well enough to come home.”

Harry nodded resignedly. He wasn’t surprised by the message. Ginny had stopped visiting him in St. Mungo’s after Lily was born. I don’t want to subject the children to this anymore, she’d said. To the sight of their reckless – stupid – father, who doesn’t love them enough to keep himself alive. She’d been harsh, but part of him knew she was right. What he didn’t tell her – and probably never would – was that he was addicted to the adrenaline. It made him feel awake and alive and young. He doubted he could give it up, even if he wanted to. It was Voldemort’s cruel legacy. He’d never be “normal,” he’d never feel able to rest or relax. The urge to move – and fight – was with him all the time. Dogging his heels and sometimes even making him regret he’d started a family at all. He knew he wasn’t being fair to them. But the guilt could never outweigh the need for the rush of battle. Which in itself made him feel even guiltier. It was like a serpent chasing its tail.

“You also received another message. It’s from a child, judging from the penmanship. He says he misses you.”

He smiled. Scorpius. They’d been meeting for over a year. During that time, he’d increased in skill to the point where he outshone children twice his age. Despite the disruption in his schedule, Harry was very glad he’d taken on the task of tutoring him. Scorpius was learning to disconnect his magic from his negative emotions, which had been absolutely critical. He’d worried Scorpius might be inherently “bad” in someway, but he wasn’t. He was just a child who needed directing and coaching. Much like his own children if only Ginny would allow him to be alone with them for longer than an hour or two.

At their last meeting, Scorpius had completed his first Transfiguration, turning a book into a plate and back again. Although he was unable to replicate his achievement, Harry was very impressed and told him so, making Scorpius beam and those eerie eyes dance with light.

He’d made Scorpius promise not to tell anyone else about their lessons. It would seem too much like favouritism to the other children, which might make them dislike Scorpius more than they already did, and furthermore, Harry didn’t want their relationship anywhere near the papers. They’d have a field day with it. He could imagine the headlines: “The noble Harry Potter, Saviour of the Wizarding World, takes time out of his busy life to mentor the poor child of a Death Eater!”

“How long am I going to be stuck here?” he asked the Head Healer who momentarily bristled at his choice of words.

“For at least another week,” he replied.

Harry frowned. “You make it sound like I’ve already been here a week,” he said.

“Well, you have,” said the Healer and left the room with Harry’s chart.

So, Ginny hadn’t come to see him in all that time, and she hadn’t allowed the children to see him either. He gritted his teeth. He couldn’t deny it any longer: he was beginning to dislike his wife. He knew he was being irresponsible: this was the fourteenth time since he’d joined the Aurors that he’d ended up in St. Mungo’s with a life-threatening curse-sickness or wound or both. But he had a right to see his children all the same! You’re bloody selfish! he heard her shout at him as though she was a ghost in the room. Maybe she was right, but that didn’t change the fact that he loved James and Albus and Lily. He did. Fiercely. Which made him all the more driven to stamp out evil everywhere he saw it: He wanted his children to live in a safer world than he did.

Now that the healers were gone, his room was far too quiet. The thought of having to lie in bed for a week was unbearable. He had work to do, and a little boy to teach . . .
And then it hit him: There wasn’t any reason why he couldn’t teach Scorpius in his hospital room. He’d been meaning to introduce Scorpius to some magical theory, but whenever they were together, all they wanted to do was duel. Harry’s condition would force them both to be still. Plus Scorpius was ready for the more academic side of practising magic – not that Harry was the best teacher for such things. He was too impatient to learn why; he’d always wanted to learn how. Scorpius was different. He wanted to learn both. The boy was a sponge for knowledge, and Harry was sure he could teach him all the theory he knew from years of experience, and Scorpius, the little brat, would get it in a week.

He rang the bell dangling from the ceiling, and a nurse came in.

“Contact this woman,” he said, holding out Madam Cockle’s Floo address. “Tell her to send Scorpius Malfoy to me, and to use her usual discretion. And when he comes, I don’t want to be bothered. Is that understood?”

The nurse gave him a nod and left the room. He was there so often that St. Mungo’s staff was used to giving him what he wanted.

* * * * * * * * *

Scorpius breathed deeply. He’d never smelled the sea before. Or heard the sound of waves and gulls fighting over a newspaper, greasy from the fish and chips it’d once contained.

Beside him, Mr. Potter pulled his long black coat tighter around his shoulders and buttoned another button. It was cold, but Scorpius didn’t care. Until today, he’d always celebrated his birthday at the Home with a cupcake and a tepid chorus of happy birthday at supper. This was a thousand times better.

“You just had to go and be born in late October, didn’t you?” Mr. Potter teased. His cheeks were pink from the wind.

They walked down the crumbling concrete stairs that led to the strand. Scorpius felt the sand give way beneath his feet with every step.

“May I take off my shoes, sir?” he asked.

“Only if you let me cast a warming charm; down where the sand is firmer, you’ll find it very chilly. I don’t want to send you back to Madam Cockle with a cold.”

Scorpius stripped off his shoes and socks and felt a tingle when Mr. Potter wordlessly cast the spell. He ran down to where the waves lapped against the shore.

“Tell me again,” he called back. “What’s on the other side?”

“Canada,” Mr. Potter said, unshrinking the kite he held in his pocket. “But that’s a very long way away.”

“Have you ever been there, sir?”

“Once,” Mr. Potter replied.

“What were you doing there?”

“The same thing I’m always doing when I go places. Fighting bad guys.”
“Guys who use the Unforgivables,” Scorpius added automatically. Mr. Potter had drummed the response into him since their first tutoring session.

“Exactly,” Mr. Potter replied. “Now let’s see if we can fly this kite of yours. I’ve never flown a kite, so you’ll need to show me how to do it.”

Scorpius took the kite from Mr. Potter’s hand and unwound its string. Instantly the wind tugged it skyward. It was perfect kite flying weather, and he felt like he might fly away too with happiness. For two years, Mr. Potter had been teaching him things, and now he’d have the chance to teach him something.

“Come here, sir,” he said. “I’ll show you how it’s done.”

Carefully, Scorpius let the kite’s spool unwind, until the red dragon was sailing far above their heads. It was hard to hold on, so when he went to hand the spool to Mr. Potter, he didn’t let go until he knew Mr. Potter had a good grip.

In doing so, their hands touched, and he felt a tingle in his whole body just as he’d felt when Mr. Potter had cast the warming spell on his feet. It made him shiver with more than happiness. Their hands had touched before, many times, as Mr. Potter had guided him in new spells, but that was different somehow. Those touches had never made him feel such . . . joy.

They flew the kite until they were both frozen and went to find somewhere to eat. It was the first time he’d tasted curry, and at first he didn’t think he liked it – it was so different from the food at Bulcher House. But by the time he’d emptied his plate, he’d changed his mind. The unfamiliar spices reminded him of the unfamiliar sea, and he decided he liked unfamiliar things and that he’d been bored for a long time without even knowing why. After super, Mr. Potter bought him a bowl of strange dough balls soaked in rosewater. The name of the dessert felt as unfamiliar on his tongue as the curry had tasted. *Gulab jamun.*

“Happy birthday,” Mr. Potter said. “How does it feel to be eight?”


* * * * * * *

*Specialis Revelio!*

Scorpius cast the spell at the Quaffle rolling on the floor towards his feet. Immediately, the ball burst into flames.

*Aguamenti!* he shouted, and his wand shot a jet of water that put out the fire with a hiss.

“Bravo!” Harry called from the other end of the room. “Scorpius, I didn’t tell you before you tried it, but *Aguamenti* is a spell you won’t encounter again until your sixth year at Hogwarts!”

Scorpius blushed and smiled with a mixture of modesty and pride.

Harry crossed the room and Banished the smouldering ball. He was amazed. Scorpius wasn’t even able to practise the spells he learned in their lessons, and Harry was sure his success came from having learned it so thoroughly in their last lesson that he didn’t need to practise.

Scorpius never ceased to surprise him. He had the makings of a powerful wizard – perhaps even as strong and powerful as Harry was himself, although Harry didn’t tell him so. Such knowledge had to be discovered, not given, and furthermore, they weren’t far enough removed from the boy who’d
casually cast Unforgivables at his classmates. Scorpius needed to be absolutely sure of himself and who he was before he learned how formidable his innate talent was.

“Are you ready to stop?” Harry asked him. “We’ve been at this for three hours.”

“Just one more,” Scorpius pleaded. “I’m not tired, sir.”

Harry groaned to himself. The nearly nine year-old boy might not be tired, but he was. It had been a long arduous week – even more than usual – and he was exhausted.

“Alright,” he said. He could never say no to Scorpius. “But just one more.”

Scorpius grinned, and Harry returned to the far side of the room. “Let’s try something new,” he shouted. “Something you’ve never tried before. I’m going to roll the Quaffle again, but this time it’ll have a very painful stinging spell cast on it. Believe me, you will not be happy if it hits you. You must protect yourself.”

“Something new, sir? But I thought we’d already done Protective Shields!”

“This isn’t a Protective Shield,” Harry called back. “Now, as the ball rolls near, I want you to think of something or someone you love and the best time you’ve ever had in your life, and then wave your wand in a broad sweep and shout Expecto Patronum. If nothing happens, then you must cast a Protective Shield.”

He set the ball rolling and held his breath. Scorpius called out the spell and . . .

. . . a stag, identical to Harry’s sprang forth, and when it struck the Quaffle, the ball evaporated like stream.

Harry was too stunned to speak.

It was only to be expected, he said to himself as he lay in bed beside a sleeping Ginny. After all, he was the only person Scorpius had in his life to connect with. But a Patronus . . . ? He rolled over. Despite his exhaustion, sleep was going to elude him again. It’s not that he loves me, he assured himself. After all, I am certainly not his father.

But if he wasn’t Scorpius’s father figure, then what was he? A mentor who looked forward to their lesson every week because being around such youth and talent made him feel alive? A teacher whose heart always melted when he made his pupil laugh? There was no way Scorpius couldn’t sense Harry’s own investment in their relationship . . .

Oh God. He hadn’t wanted this. He already had people who loved him, and all he did in exchange was break their hearts time and time again. He didn’t want another heart. He couldn’t bear the guilt of another heart. Especially the fragile heart of a child who was as good as orphaned.

Sometime around two o’clock in the morning, he got out of bed and went into the study. The letter he wrote was simple but (he hoped) kind.

**Dear Scorpius,**

*It has been the greatest pleasure teaching you for the past two years. You are extraordinarily talented and have an exciting magical career ahead of you. It seems to me that, at this juncture, I have nothing more to teach you. I will miss our weekly meetings, but I think it is time I let you...*
discover your capabilities on your own. I will always remain a friend, and if you should ever need me, just Fire call or write, and I will be at your side in an instant.

Take care of yourself and remember everything you’ve learned – not just spells, but values and ideas. You are capable of great and good things. Never forget that.

With eternal fondness,

Harry

He hastily addressed the letter to Madam Cockle with instructions to give it to Scorpius before he could change his mind. He knew it would break Scorpius’s heart, and the knowledge tore him apart. But it was far better to break his heart once than to break it a thousand times.
Scorpius had never received mail before, but that morning he received two letters. One nearly killed him, and the other scared him to death. One he Incendioed, and the other he hid. In less than a quarter of an hour, his whole life had changed into something unrecognisable.

True to his word, Mr. Potter didn’t show up on the day of their weekly lessons, and true to his word, a man calling himself his father showed up at Bulcher House.

He was in his room when Madam Cockle came to find him. Her face was pale, and when she saw him, she pulled him against her ample bosom.

“May God protect you, child,” she said. “I fear that you will need it.”

Her words did nothing to comfort him.

When he entered her office, he was confronted by a spectre with sallow skin and dull eyes through which flitted a glimpse of pain when he saw Scorpius.

“You look like your mother,” he said in a ghost’s voice. “You have her hair.”

Scorpius didn’t know what to say. He had no idea who this corpse-like man was, and he didn’t want to.

“Mister Malfoy, the staff has packed Scorpius’s things . . .”

The man laughed sardonically. “Can’t wait to usher me out the door of your filthy ‘House,’ I see.”

Madam Cockle didn’t contradict him.

“Where will you be taking him?” she asked. “In case he receives any mail.” She looked at Scorpius desperately, and he was sure he reflected that same desperation on his own face.

“That is none of your business,” the strange man said.

“But . . .”

“There are no ‘buts.’” He rose slowly from his chair, leaning heavily on its arms for support. “Come with me, son.”

“We need his address for our records, Mr. Malfoy,” Madam Cockle said pleadingly.
“I don’t care,” this “Mr. Malfoy” said. “He is not your child, he is mine.”

Madam Cockle swallowed. At last she turned to Scorpius. “Good-bye, dear one,” she said.

The man sneered and grabbed Scorpius’s arm. “Good-bye, indeed,” he said. Derision and loathing dripped from his voice.

The place Scorpius found himself in was small and shabby and smelled of rot. It contained only a small couch, an armchair with worn upholstery, and a table with two metal chairs.

“Say hello to our home-sweet-home,” the man said. “You are not allowed to venture outdoors unless I accompany you. This building is in a very unsavoury neighbourhood. We are surrounded by Muggles.”

Scorpius wanted to cry when he saw there were no fireplace and no owl. Even if he wanted to contact Mr. Potter (which he emphatically did not) he wouldn’t be able to.

“I can see you’re not pleased,” said the man. “But I can assure you it’s better than Azkaban.” He laughed as though he’d told a joke.

“Where is my room, sir?” Scorpius asked. He wanted nothing more than to enter it and close the door.

“I am not ‘sir,’” said the man. “I am your father and you will address me as such, as I did my own father.”

“Father, where is my room?” He was going to have to get used to the word just as much as he was going to have to get used to the man.

His “father” pointed down a narrow, low-ceilinged hallway. “Our bedroom is down there,” he said. “Along with the bathroom, such as it is.”

Scorpius’s spirit dimmed even more when he realised there’d be no place where he’d be able to go to be alone. His heart was breaking, and he struggled against his tears. He had no idea how this strange man would react to them. And he had no desire to tell him about love and betrayal and Mr. Potter.

* * * * * * * *

As the new Head Auror, Harry was alerted to all important news a few hours before it hit the papers. This morning’s news was particularly noteworthy. Draco Malfoy had been released from Azkaban. There’d been a plague that had swept through the prison and gutted it of its inmates. More than three-quarters died, including Asteria Malfoy. The remaining prisoners were released out of a kind of institutional mercy, which didn’t take into account how these broken men and women were to live once they’d been set free.

Harry immediately Fire-called Madam Cockle.

Her face when she came to the hearth looked haggard and sad. She’d “lost” several of her charges to “ghosts,” she told him.

“But not Scorpius,” Harry said as though giving her the answer he wished to hear would make it true.
Madam Cockle closed her eyes before she answered.

“He was one of the first to be taken . . . I mean, to go . . . ‘home.’”

Harry swallowed back the acid taste of dread.

“And Draco?” he asked even though he thought he knew the answer already.

“If he’s still human, you wouldn’t know it by looking at him.”

God, what a mess! He and Draco had never become anything more than nodding acquaintances, but that didn’t change the fact that Harry had thought of him often since he’d been taken to Azkaban and prayed that he would find a peaceful death.

And Scorpius? Draco’s radiant and talented son? Harry doubted Draco would encourage him to grow and indulge his insatiable curiosity. He knew that, to the degree he was still capable of emotion, Draco loved his son, but that love would be a strand of Devil’s Snare tightening slowly around Scorpius’s neck till the spark in his eyes went out. Like it had in his father’s.

His partner looked up from a stack of paperwork as Harry strode past his office.

“You look like a man on a mission,” he said.

Harry smiled grimly. “I am.”

“Anything you need me for?”

“No. This can only be me.”

His partner nodded somewhat reluctantly.

“Contact me if you need me,” he said adamantly. “Send your Patronus”

His stag. Harry winced. His letter didn’t seem so kind now. It must’ve felt to Scorpius like utter abandonment.

The building was black with grime, and the steps were greasy with moss. Inside the squalid “foyer,” rats and cockroaches scuttled away from the light Harry had introduced by opening the door. From Malfoy Manor to this. Draco had fallen long and far to have found himself in such a wretched place.

He still didn’t know what he was going to do or say when he confronted Draco. He didn’t even know exactly what he hoped to achieve, but at the very least he needed to let Scorpius know that he was still there for him. That he still cared, and that he’d do anything to keep him safe and well.

The lift was nothing but a bottomless pit, and the railing had long ago rotted off the staircase. There was no one about and no indication of who lived there and in what flat. But something told him that Draco would be on the topmost floor. After years in a windowless cell, his ragged soul must be starved for light.

Should he give a gentle rap or pound on the door? Which was Draco most likely to respond to? He settled for a simple knock and waited.

Someone – or something – opened the door.
Harry gasped and stepped back, nearly falling down the treacherous stairs.

“Potter.”

Draco’s voice was like the scratching of a tree branch against a window.

“Jesus, Draco.”

He could think of nothing else to say.

“Come in, come in,” Draco said, stepping back and opening the door just wide enough for Harry to enter. “Sadly I have no kettle or I would make some tea.”

The commonplace words were more frightening than a hurled insult. Harry didn’t miss the fact that Draco surreptitiously picked up a knife with a dirty blade and hid it in the sleeve of his tattered robe. It was clear that Harry was going to have to Stun him at some point, and the knowledge made his blood run cold. Draco was wandless. It went against every fibre of his honour, but Harry could see he’d have no choice.

“Draco,” he said as soothingly as he could. “Please let me help you. You don’t belong here . . .”

“No, I don’t,” Draco replied with a humourless laugh. “I belong in Azkaban. Isn’t that right, Auror?”

“I’m not here as an Auror. I’m here as someone who wants to help.”

“Really? . . . Oh excuse me, my manners are atrocious, please have a seat.”

A chill ran up and down Harry’s spine as he sat down on a dilapidated couch.

“How do you wish to help, Potter?” Draco asked, taking the other chair and crossing his legs in a macabre imitation of the arrogant young aristocrat Harry used to know. “Perhaps you’d like to raise my wife from the dead or give me back the years I lost with my son?”

Harry couldn’t stop himself. “Where is Scorpius? Is he here?” His voice sounded urgent even to his own ears. “Can I see him?”

Draco let the knife slip from his robe into his hand.

“Why do you want to know, Potter?” His voice was cloyingly sweet despite the rusty blade he didn’t think Harry was aware of.

“Scorpius is an exceptional boy,” Harry said pleadingly. He needed to get out as much as possible before he’d have to act. “He’s got tremendous natural talent and a bright future ahead of him. Please, Draco, don’t drag him down to hell with you!”

“I don’t know what you’ve tried to be for him,” Draco spat and his eyes went from blank to venomous. “But whoever you think you are, you are not his father!”

Draco rose from the chair.

“Please, Draco! Let me help you. If not for you, then please accept it for your son . . .”

Draco advanced on him, but his “attack” was clumsy. Harry felt sick with shame as he cast the stunning spell, and Draco crumpled to the floor.

“Scorpius!” Harry called, flying down the dark hallway and throwing open the first door he saw.
Scorpius was huddled on a narrow bed with a stained blanket. His knees were drawn up and his face was in his hands.

“Go away!” he cried. “I hate you!”

Harry went to him and pulled his hands away from his face. Scorpius’s eyes were red. He looked like he’d been crying for days. Harry sat down and pulled him into his arms as he sobbed and sobbed.

“I know,” he whispered against Scorpius’s lank hair. “You have every right. I was a coward.”

After a minute, Scorpius threw his arms around Harry’s neck.

“Please,” he pleaded. “Don’t leave me here!”

He could feel the wetness of Scorpius tears on his own face. Or maybe those tears were his. He couldn’t tell anymore.

“There, there,” he murmured awkwardly, rocking Scorpius in his arms. “Sshhhhh.”

Scorpius responded to Harry’s efforts to comfort him by holding on even tighter.

“Take me with you,” he whimpered. “Don’t leave me here!”

Harry felt his heart break.

“He’s your father,” he said as gently as he could. “I can’t take you away from him again. I can’t, Scorpius. I’d never be able to live with the guilt . . .”

“But what about me?” Scorpius cried. “I thought you cared about me!”

Harry pulled him closer. “I do care about you,” he said fiercely. “With all my heart. I will do everything I can to help you . . . and your father.” Harry clutched Scorpius’s head and kissed the part in his hair. He could think of nothing else to do, no other form of comfort he could provide.

After a while, he began gently extracting himself from Scorpius’s embrace.

“Have you eaten?” he asked.

Scorpius nodded. “Some,” he said. “But not much.”

“You’re hungry, aren’t you?”

Scorpius nodded again. Harry ran his fingers through Scorpius’s limp hair.

“Is there a bath or shower here?” he asked.

“There’s only a sink,” Scorpius replied. He didn’t seem bitter as much as resigned. Harry tried to swallow the lump in his throat. He stood and reached out his hand.

“Come here,” he said. “We’re going to get you cleaned up and then I’m going to take you to get something to eat.”

Scorpius’s face brightened and he took Harry’s hand, following him down the narrow hallway. The ceiling was so low that Harry had to bow his head.
The bathroom was not as small and disgusting as Harry had feared, but he still cast several housekeeping spells until it shone – at least as much as it was capable of shining. Its paint was still peeling and some of the tiles were still broken, but at least it was clean. It was the least he could do, and moreover what was Draco going to do about it? Soil everything again out of spite?

“Here.” Harry handed Scorpius a towel that he’d Transfiguring from his coat, and Scorpius wrapped it around his neck as Harry instructed. “Now lean over the sink.”

The water that flowed from his wand was cold at first but warmed quickly. “Is there any shampoo . . . or soap even?”

“On top of the toilet,” Scorpius said.

Soap was not ideal for washing hair, but it was the best Harry could do under the circumstances. He held his wand so that water flowed over Scorpius’s head.

“Is it warm enough?” he asked, and Scorpius nodded.

Harry soaped his hands as much as possible and combed the suds into Scorpius’s hair with his fingers.

“Is that okay?” he asked. “Am I pulling your hair?”

Scorpius shook his head. “Feels good.”

Harry massaged his scalp and rinsed and then soaped his hands again and kept running his fingers through Scorpius’s hair. At last, he lifted the towel from around Scorpius’s shoulders and rubbed his head.

Both of them laughed when Scorpius straightened and they saw his reflection in the broken mirror.

“I don’t have a . . .” Scorpius started to say, but then Harry Transfigured the bar of soap.

“. . . a brush perhaps?” he asked, smiling.

Scorpius reached for it, but Harry stopped him. Instead he brushed Scorpius’s hair for him. They were silent, just watching themselves in the mirror. Scorpius’s eyes looked even more disturbing than usual. Harry almost said something but decided not to.

“There,” he said. “You look presentable.”

The gold was back and the softness.

Scorpius’s smile was wan but genuine. “Where are we going to eat?”

“Anywhere you want,” Harry replied and Transfigured the brush back into a bar of soap.

Their light-hearted mood ended when they entered the main room, and Scorpius saw his father on the floor, his eyes staring unseeingly at the ceiling. He stopped and stood over him for a long time while Harry went around the entire flat cleaning and scrubbing and polishing.

“I don’t know this man,” Scorpius said at last in a small voice.

Harry went to his side and put an arm around his shoulders. “He’s Draco Malfoy,” he replied. “He’s a former Death Eater, but he wasn’t a bad man. He was just misguided and not strong enough to think for himself. He and your mother had a beautiful house once and lots of money. That’s all gone
now. Draco has spent years in a place that most people couldn’t survive in for a month. I think he may have lived for you – for the possibility of seeing you again. He loves you, Scorpius, in the only way he can now.”

They were silent for a while as Scorpius began to cry again soundlessly. Harry only knew because he felt his shoulders shake under his hand.

He pulled Scorpius close in a protective hug.

“Don’t forget about me,” he sobbed. “Don’t go away forever.”

Harry knelt down before him and kissed Scorpius’s forehead. “I won’t,” he said simply. “And you can count of that.”

Scorpius stepped back and gave him another weak smile.

“Now let’s go get some lunch,” Harry said as cheerfully as he could. “Have you decided what you want?”

“Fish and chips,” Scorpius replied, wiping his nose with the back of his hand. “And then some Gulab jamun . . . and crisps . . . and . . .”

Harry promised him as much as he could eat and ushered him through the door, but before he left, he went over to Draco and straightened his limbs into a more comfortable position.

“I’ll be back soon and set you free,” he said. “And I’ll bring back your son even though I don’t want to. I’m scared for him. Draco,” he said pleadingly. “Don’t be a proud fool. For his sake if not for yours.”

Harry spent the next two weeks sending owls to Draco three times a day. Every one returned unopened until one came back with almost illegible words scrawled above its unbroken seal.

Go to hell, Potter. I would rather die – and let my son die – than take charity from you.

It was time for a different approach.

* * * * * * *

“I’ve never seen you wearing formal robes during the day before,” said his partner. “You’re starting to scare me. Did that spell the other day scramble your brain?”

Harry gave him a rude gesture on his way out the door.

It took every political connection he had and several unpalatable promises, but at last Harry convinced the Minister to double the pathetic pittance the government paid to the former prisoners of Azkaban should they have minor children they were trying to support. It wasn’t much, but it was something, and it would go a lot farther after Harry found the landlord of the squalid building where Scorpius was now a prisoner and convinced him to lower the rent. Harry would pay for the remainder – and then more if there needed to be repairs.

“Just make sure they get done,” he said. “I want receipts. And don’t tell the Malfoys about me, whatever you do.”

The man cowered and bowed as if Harry was a king. It made him feel dirty.
But there was nothing he wouldn’t do.

As a birthday present for Scorpius, he paid the landlord to get rid of the vermin and put in a working radiator.

As a Christmas present, he paid the landlord to put in a bath.

And on the anniversary of the day when he took Scorpius from his parents, he paid the landlord to tear out the ratty carpet and put in a new one.

The next day he received an Owl.

_If you have anything to do with these so-called ‘improvements,’ Potter, I will send someone to cut your throat._

Harry was tempted to write “You’re welcome,” but instead sent back the Owl with a note that read: _What the hell are you talking about, Malfoy? He was a shitty liar but at least he didn’t hear from Draco again._

* * * * * * *

_Thank God Mr. Potter has my wand._

Scorpius had said the same thing every day since his father had come to take him away from Bulcher House.

He’d kept his magical abilities a secret out of instinct. His father had had his own wand confiscated, and his every move was monitored. He wasn’t to use magic – even to cast harmless household charms, and Scorpius feared his father would use him to do what he couldn’t. Which very likely included some very Dark things indeed.

Not that things were all bad. His father sometimes went with him to the Muggle library, and they’d spend the afternoon in the history and poetry sections (the only sections his father didn’t forbid). Scorpius devoured books and when they ran out of candles and the Galleons to buy them, his father told him stories about the Malfoys and the Blacks that went back as far as the Roman Empire. His face changed when he told them, and it was at those times when Scorpius glimpsed the handsome man he once must’ve been.

When he wasn’t reading or listening to the wireless, he wrote. Parchment was scarce because it was the last thing his father would buy and then only if they had enough money. He got very good at writing in tiny letters and using every millimetre of available space. Sometimes he’d write poems, but most of the time he wrote letters to Mr. Potter.

He’d first seen the green-eyed owl when his father had gone to the shop and left Scorpius behind. It landed on a sill and tapped its beak against the glass. He knew immediately that it was from Mr. Potter. He let it in and scrawled a hasty note.

_Is the owl yours, sir?_

He gave the note to the owl and it flew away, but it didn’t return until his father went out alone again.

_Yes. She lives nearby and knows when your father leaves the building. When he does, she’ll come to you, and if you want to send me a note just give it to her. No need to address it. I hope you’re well._
His father didn’t often go out alone, and so sometimes days would pass before he could send Mr. Potter a letter or the owl could deliver one. In the meantime, he wrote long detailed letters. They were like a diary. He filled them with descriptions of little things he’d seen through the window or on one of their rare excursions. He’d tell Mr. Potter about his dreams (if he could remember them) and ideas for new spells.

And then sometimes he’d tell Mr. Potter how much he missed him. Which was a lot.

Mr. Potter’s letters were much shorter, and sometimes the news they brought was obsolete by the time the owl could find a chance to deliver them.

Dear Scorpius,

I saw a boy with a kite today and thought of you. I don’t suppose you could convince your father to fly yours with you? It would do him good. And yes, your wand is fine. It misses you though. I keep it in a locked drawer in my desk. I found your idea for a spell that tells you exactly when an egg is boiled very interesting. I’ll try it out and let you know how it works. It’s nice to know you have at least a few daffodils around even if you have to walk all the way to the library to see them; speaking of which, I liked the poem you sent me. Well, I must get back to work. Be good to your father and take care of yourself.

Harry

P.S. As always, this letter will incinerate in five minutes so make sure you hold it over the sink!

Dear Mr. Potter,

I got your letter today. The daffodils are gone. There are tulips at the library now. Some are yellow but most of them are red. Father said they remind him of your House Gryffindor and said there should be such a thing as a silver tulip. I’ve read all the books on ancient Egypt and now I’m reading about Greece. Father doesn’t let me read Muggle story books but he says it’s okay to read “The Iliad,” because Homer was a wizard. He also said I can read stuff by a wizard named Socrates but it was boring so I stopped. Father carries a damp cloth everywhere we go so he can wipe Muggle filth off doorknobs and railings and even the books I touch. This morning I made porridge and forgot about it. The flat filled with smoke. I think I’ve thought of another spell like the egg one, but for porridge. I’ve got to work on it some more and then I’ll send it to you. Father is teaching me how to speak French and Italian. He’s also teaching me how to say English words properly. He says I have a filthy Muggle accent. I think his way of talking sounds funny but I don’t tell him that. It might make him angry and he’s been not so angry in the last month. I even catch him smiling at me when he thinks I’m not looking. I have decided once and for all that I don’t like cauliflower! But broccoli is o.k. I also really like keewee fruit. Have you ever had a keewee? They are fuzzy on the outside and green on the inside. Last night I dreamed that you and I were at that place by the ocean we went to that time. Remember? We were practising spells and mine kept hitting seagulls by mistake and turning them all sorts of colours. Next week is my 11th birthday which means I will get my letter from Hogwarts next fall like you said right? Father said he might take me to a museum with rocks and dinosaurs and stuff for my birthday. We went to a museum every year at Bulcher House. It was always the same one and I got bored of it. But I would go there now if I could. It could never be as boring as this place is. I try not to get sad because Father cries and I don’t want him to cry. He talks about my mother sometimes and says I look like her. I’ve never seen her so I don’t know. Did you know my mother? What did she look like? Do I look like her?

Very sincerely yours truly and forever with best wishes,
The plea came directly from Minerva, so Harry couldn’t pretend he hadn’t received the letter. She’d just hired a new DADA professor, but the poor creature was right out of university and didn’t know a thing about the Dark Arts, which seemed like a problem considering the class she was hired to teach was named “Defence against the Dark Arts.” Harry Fire-called her.

“It’s too late to hire someone new, Potter! Classes start in a week!”

“Well, I’m not going to teach DADA, if that’s what you’re asking. I have neither the time nor the inclination.”

“I don’t need you to teach the whole class, only one or two days a week . . .”

“Don’t even bother asking for two, Minerva. I’ve just taken over the Assassination Department. Morale there’s pretty poor, and I’ve got to . . .”

“Yes, yes, I know you’re very busy, but we’re talking about impressionable young minds here! I don’t need to tell you that Defence against the Dark Arts is not just about spells . . .”

“. . . it’s about values. Yes, I know. That was one of the things we changed about how the course is taught at that curriculum review retreat. I still think it’s the right approach . . .”

“And so do I. It’s just that we need someone who can actually teach them. You know the children will listen to you. Please at least think about it.”

It would be the final blow to his marriage if he agreed to do it. He had no doubt about that. At this point it was held together with nothing but spit and glue. James would be starting his second year next week, and Albus would be going next year. The reason for them maintaining the façade was coming to an end. Ginny could go off with what’s-his-name, and Harry could work to one in the morning and then fuck some bloke at the after-hours club without feeling guilty. But the effect on his marriage wasn’t the only question to be answered. There was the question of teaching itself. He wasn’t sure if he’d be good at it. What if he was too impatient? What if the kids didn’t like him . . .

He sent a letter to Scorpius and received an amusing reply.

Dear Mr. Potter,

ARE YOU MAD? YOU’D BE THE GREATEST TEACHER EVER!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Salutations and best wishes,
Scorpius

It was by far the shortest letter Scorpius had sent him during their two-year correspondence.

Harry’s reply was just as brief.

S,

O.k., I’ll do it. But if it doesn’t work out, I’m blaming it all on you.

Yours,
H.
For the first couple weeks, things didn’t go so well. Even the seventh years were too overawed by his presence to answer questions or volunteer to demonstrate spells. At last, Harry decided to do what he’d sworn he wasn’t going to do: He told The Voldemort Story and encouraged the children to ask questions. He knew their curiosity would override their shyness, and he was right. After that, he used real life examples to teach them about all the things he’d learned through hard experience, and sometimes he even brought in guests.

His first guest was his partner of ten years. The lesson he was trying to impart was how to tell your enemies from your friends and vice versa.

He and Briac Gwencalon had met on a muddy field in Brittany. The children all nodded along as Harry told them how brave and accomplished Briac was. One of the most skilled wizards Harry had ever come across. There was only one small problem.

Briac wanted to kill him.

He was part of a radical terrorist organization intent on inciting class warfare in Europe’s magical communities. The organization had been quite candid about being behind the kidnapping and torture of prominent wealthy families. And they were also guilty of grisly murders in the back alleys of cities and towns where the poor were forced to live on black markets, hand-outs and sex trafficking.

After a year of tracking the organization, the Minister had ordered Harry to take a Hit Squad to their headquarters and take the leaders into custody. No one was to be killed, which seemed reasonable until their plans were discovered.

The battle was one of the ugliest in the history of the Aurors. Seven were killed and another four were left for dead. Harry had been among them. He and Briac had duelled for an hour and had wounded each other so seriously that the water in their boot prints was clouded with blood. The last thing Harry remembered before he passed out was being sliced open from his ribs down to his knees and casting his own slicing hex with the last of his strength. They’d fallen so close to each other that they looked like they were caught in an embrace.

So how on God’s green earth had they become partners?

He and Briac told the students about how Harry had visited Briac in Azkaban.

“I couldn’t forget about what an accomplished . . .”

“. . . awe-inspiring wizard I was. And so we talked . . .”

“. . . and I realised we actually weren’t that different in our point of view . . .”

“. . . just in our methods. I had been brought up in a very insular community . . .”

“. . . and he hadn’t been exposed to other ideas . . .”

“. . . or other kinds of people, for that matter, but then along comes Harry . . .”

“. . . and I set him on the right path . . .”

“. . . or so he likes to think . . .”

It was how they always were with each other – finishing one another’s sentences and virtually
reading one another’s minds. Harry told them about how Briac had been in Azkaban for three years when Harry finally convinced the Wizengamot to pardon him. After that, Briac had gone through Auror training despite the fact that he was far older and more experienced than his classmates. He’d graduated at the top of his class and the next day became Harry’s partner. They’d been inseparable ever since.

Their story never failed to amaze their audiences, and from their questions, Harry was sure the kids walked away from the lesson with a less black-or-white view of the world. And the looks on their faces when Harry and Briac showed them the scars they’d left on each other were priceless.


Dear Mr. Potter,
See? I told you you’d be brilliant.

Yours truly at your service,
Scorpius

Dear Mr. Malfoy,

Gloating at one’s elders is a sure sign of delinquency.

Yours,
H.P.

Time dragged. Scorpius and his father played endless games of chess, and Scorpius read Le Petit Prince in French and parts of Dante’s Inferno in Italian (the cool parts, not the boring parts). His father, who was brushing up on his Latin, read him Malleus Maleficarum. It made Scorpius’s blood boil, and for the first time in his life, he thought he might be able to hate Muggles, but when he wrote Mr. Potter about it, he received a stern letter in reply.

Dear Scorpius,

Do NOT let your father lead you down that path. You and I have talked about this. The “Malleus Maleficarum” is a historical document, nothing more. Remember our people have not always stood on the high ground. Think of Vlad the Impaler for instance, or the Vikings burning the Monasteries in Ireland, or Voldemort for that matter. Both sides have blood on their hands. That’s why we have such strict laws limiting our contact with Muggles. Your grandfather poisoned your father’s mind, and look where that got him. Do NOT let Draco do to you what Lucius did to him. Break the cycle NOW.

Yours,
Harry

The best times were when his father took him to concerts at the art museum. He still didn’t like to leave the flat, but Scorpius could tell he was chafing against his own pride, which seemed to be as much of a prison as Azkaban had been. They went to hear a performance of Brahms’s Requiem (because Brahms was a wizard) and later visited an exhibit of Van Gogh’s paintings from his “blue
period.” It went well, and Scorpius was having a great time until a Muggle brushed his father’s sleeve, and they had to leave “immediately!” It was another two months until they ventured out again, but neither of them could bear to miss the Hironimus Bosch exhibit. His father had let Scorpius borrow a book of his paintings from the library, and they’d spent an afternoon laughing at Bosch’s brutal portrayals of Muggles and their vile ways. But no book could be a stand-in for the real thing. A Muggle had even stepped on his father’s foot, but they still stayed. It was only when the guards told them to leave that they tore themselves out of Bosch’s world and went back home to their tiny flat.

The man spat out his come with a momentary expression of revulsion. Harry’s hand itched to slap him. He pulled up his jeans and zipped his fly. It was at moments like these that he wondered if he’d get the same treatment if he went out as “Harry Potter, Saviour of the Wizarding World” instead of a brown-haired, brown-eyed stranger who worked in one of the Ministry’s many accounting offices. It was never worth the risk to find out.

“What’re you doing?” the man asked. “I thought you said you’d let me fuck you?”

“I changed my mind,” Harry replied, turning to leave the squalid little room with its come stained mattress. The man grabbed his arm.

“I don’t think so,” he said. “You were all over me when I said I’d give you a good hard pounding.”

Harry grimaced. It was true. It’d been ages since he’d been fucked, and he was gagging for it. But now that he’d climaxed and his high was disappearing, it no longer seemed so appealing.

“Come on,” the man pleaded. “I’m fucking dying here.”

Harry sighed and undid his belt buckle again. He really hoped he wouldn’t get the “good hard pounding” he’d been promised, and sure enough, he didn’t. The man barely got his cock in before he was grunting his release.

“Ah, that was sweet,” he said. “You’ve got a nice arse. Maybe we should meet again. How ‘bout next Thursday?”

“You fucking wish,” was at the tip of Harry’s tongue, but he knew he wouldn’t say it. He felt sick at himself and sick at his life right now, but come Thursday, he’d be dying to get high and get fucked again. There was no other way to siphon off the adrenaline. And no other way to be touched, if only for few unsatisfying minutes.

“You look too sober for your own good,” Briac said as Harry emerged from the corridor leading to the back rooms.

“I am too sober for my own good,” he replied. “Did you get a leg over?”

Briac’s expression was rueful. “She didn’t show up.”

“Probably because her husband finally figured out she’s not really ‘working late at the office,’” Harry said, accepting the cigarette Briac offered him.

“Who was it tonight? That banker bloke again?” Briac held the tip of his wand to the tip of Harry’s cigarette.

Harry shook his head. “It was a new one tonight,” he replied. “Over there.” He pointed to the blond
“I hope he at least sucked your dick.”

“Yeah. He was a spitter though. It’s bloody rude.”

Briac laughed. “As if you’d want to swallow some random bloke’s spunk. All the witches who blow me spit.”

“That’s why I don’t suck cock,” said Harry, taking one last deep drag before jabbing out his cigarette in his palm. “I’d rather not do it than be rude.”

Briac healed his hand. “You’re a fucking gentleman, Harry,” he said. “Now let’s get out of here. I received a missive from Miranda before we left. They’re ready to strike, and she needs your instructions . . .”

“Fuck instructions,” Harry said. “Let’s go find her and instruct her by example.”

“You’re a maniac,” Briac said, a grin spreading across him face. “It’s one of your few endearing qualities.”

Scorpius leapt out of bed. Today was the day! The day Mr. Potter had told him he’d receive his letter from Hogwarts! He glanced over at his father’s bed to make sure he was still sleeping, but the bed was empty.

He felt his stomach sink like a rock.

They rarely talked about Hogwarts. Scorpius could count the number of times on one hand. His father didn’t even say anything about it when he turned eleven. There was something about this silence that unnerved him . . .

He wrapped his worn-out robe around himself and went into the main room. His father was sitting in his chair with a letter on his lap. Scorpius could see the ornate seal. It was already broken.

“Sit down, Scorpius,” his father said gently, and Scorpius obeyed.

“As I’m sure you’ve already ascertained, this is a letter from Hogwarts accepting you as a first year student in September.”

Scorpius held his breath and nodded.

“I hope you’ll understand when I tell you that I won’t let you go.”

Scorpius stared at him as the words sunk into his heart like arrows.

“But . . . but why?” he stammered.

“Because it’s a joke of a school and a waste of your time. The teachers are idiots and the children even more so . . .”

“But . . . but what about my magic?”

“There is time for that,” his father said. “I am searching for an appropriate tutor for you, someone who will understand your . . . disability . . .”
Scorpius continued to stare at him as the tears filled his eyes. Like Mr. Potter’s letters did, his dreams were turning to ash right before his eyes.

“You can’t just keep me here forever. You have to let me go sometime.”

His father turned away and looked out the window. “You are my son, and you will do as I say.”

“But . . .”

“There is no point to discussing it. I have made up my mind.”

“But I have to go,” Scorpius cried. “I’ll die if I don’t!”

His father turned his face back to him. “Don’t be a histrionic child,” he said. His eyes were hard and unyielding.

“But you don’t understand!”

“Oh, I understand,” his father hissed. “Do you think I’m a fool? I know about Potter’s letters. It’s not enough that he took you away from me once. He’s got to do it again.”

Scorpius swallowed. He’d never seen his father’s face look like this before.

“He didn’t want to take me away,” he said. “He was under orders . . .”

“I don’t give a damn!” his father shouted. “The fact remains that he’s been poisoning you against me! I will not let him win!”

Scorpius felt like a trophy in a wrestling match. “I am my own person,” he said defiantly. “And I think I can tell who and what to believe on my own . . .”

He felt his face burn, and he raised a hand to his nose. When he pulled it away, there was blood on his fingers. He looked up at his father who had risen from his chair. His chest was heaving. He drew back his hand and slapped him again on the other cheek.

“I am your father,” he shouted. “Not Potter.” Scorpius bowed his head. “Look at me when I’m speaking to you!”

Scorpius looked up, and his father struck him again. It was the last straw. Scorpius broke down and sobbed. He dropped to his knees before his father and covered his face with his hands.

“You’re ruining my life!” he cried and fell forward until his face touched the floor.

There was silence. Scorpius was afraid to look up again, but the silence went on for so long, he finally lifted his head, cringing in fear of another slap.

His father had slumped back into his chair. Tears streamed down his cheeks.

“You are my child,” he said, his voice breaking. “I love you. I can’t live without you. You will do what I say, and that is final.”

Scorpius felt the fight drain from his body and bowed his head in defeat.

“What does he write to you about?” his father asked, his voice raspy.

“Stuff,” Scorpius whispered. “Just stuff. He tells me about his class and the places he travels to . . .”
“Ah, yes, perfect Potter and his perfect life.”

Scorpius was silent. He wiped the blood and snot from his nose with the back of his hand.

A warm breeze floated through the open window. It was going to be another hot day. He could hear the sounds of Muggle children playing football and kicking over bins.

Something in him died, and it wasn’t just hope.

* * * * * * *

The Great Hall was full of new, unrumpled robes and shouts of greetings. Students yelled from their Houses’ tables to their friends at other tables, filling them in on their summer adventures (or lack thereof). The flames of the hovering candles wavered in the hubbub. It took three tries for Minerva to get the hall’s full attention. Harry and Hagrid smiled behind their hands; it was unseemly for faculty members to show any emotion other than stern disapproval at the ruckus.

“As you all know, we will be sorting the new students in just a minute,” Minerva said. “I expect you to greet them with the same enthusiasm you received when you were sorted.”

The students pounded on their tables and started singing their Houses’ chants as the first years formed a line next to the stool with the cranky Sorting Hat perched on it.

“Appleton, Alison!”

Harry scanned the first-year class looking for his son. He should be right behind Scorpius. . . . After a moment he spotted black hair and gave a little wave. Albus waved back nervously. Harry then turned his attention to Scorpius . . .

Except he wasn’t there.

Harry sucked in a surprised breath. There must be some mistake. He leaned across the fulltime DADA teacher and tried to get Hagrid’s attention.

“Was Scorpius Malfoy on the train?” he whispered as loudly as he dared.

Hagrid shook his head.

Harry felt his stomach drop. Something was wrong. He’d suspected there was when he hadn’t received any letters from Scorpius for the whole month of August.

Draco. This must have something to do with Draco.

* * * * * * *

The building looked completely different than it had the last time he’d been there. Clearly his Galleons had been put to good use. The crumbling cement stairs had been repaired and the door newly painted. Inside, the elevator still didn’t work, but at least the bottomless pit had been concealed by a table with a vase of artificial flowers on it. The railing had been rebuilt and the wall paper and the carpets in the corridors had been replaced. Harry could tell by the doors he passed that there were now tenants other than the Malfoys living there; something that made him happy although he doubted Draco would let Scorpius have much to do with them. It was a comfort though – hearing other people’s lives around you.

The Malfoys’ flat was the only one on the top floor. Like the other doors he’d passed, it had been
repainted and a brass knocker hung in its centre. He used it to rap loudly. The sound echoed in the empty corridor.

“Go away, Potter.”

Surprised, Harry stepped back and almost fell down the stairs. There was no little window in the door. How the hell did Malfoy know it was him?

“I said go away! I have nothing to say to you, and you have nothing you can say to me that will change my mind.”

“Draco, please,” he said. “At least hear me out.”

There was silence on the other side of the door that Harry decided to treat as acquiescence.

“Scorpius needs to go to school. You can’t keep him here forever.”

Draco laughed humourlessly.

“I don’t see why not.”

“You can’t mean that. You can’t make me believe that you want to make your son a prisoner like you were.”

There was another long silence, and then the door creaked open. Harry stepped through it.

The flat was clean and tidy, and there were books and games on the shelves and plants on the windowsills. Harry breathed a sigh of relief. He’d been picturing Draco and Scorpius in dark dingy rooms like the ones he’d seen last time he was there.

“Where’s Scorpius?” he asked.

“In the bedroom,” Draco replied. “And before you demand to know why I have him locked away, I’ll tell you that it was his wish and not mine. He doesn’t want to see you, Potter.”

Although he wasn’t surprised by Draco’s answer, it still hurt to hear it.

“May I sit down?” he asked.

Draco bowed and gestured to the newly upholstered armchair.

“I can make you tea this time,” he said. “I have a kettle and teacups now.”

“I don’t want tea,” Harry replied.

Draco shrugged and sat down on the couch. “Have it your way,” he said.

“Let’s dispense with the so-called ‘pleasantries,’” Harry said, drawing a long wooden box from his under his Muggle coat. “I want to show you something.” He opened the box, and watched Draco’s eyes widen.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?”

Draco nodded speechlessly.

“I’ve never seen a more beautiful wand,” he said.
“It’s your son’s,” Harry replied.

“How . . . when . . .?”

“I bought it for him. We went to Romania to find it.”

Draco’s expression turned feral. “You . . . you bought him his wand?” he snarled. “It should have been me, Potter! Me!”

Harry nodded. “I don’t disagree,” he said. “But you were in Azkaban, and I had no idea you’d ever get out. Scorpius needed a wand, Draco. His wild magic was too strong and unfocused.”

“Why should I believe you?” Draco asked. “He’s never shown any magical ability as long as we’ve been together . . .”

“That’s because I taught him to control it!”

“And who gave you the right to teach him anything?!”

“How many times do I have to say it, Draco? You were in prison. Scorpius needed guidance that the people at the Home couldn’t provide him with!”

Their voices had risen to the point of shouting. Harry got up and closed the windows.

“You’re going to destroy him,” he said, drawing his own wand when Draco leapt up from the couch. “I know you don’t mean to. I know you love him. But he is a growing child. He needs to be with other children. He needs to play Quidditch. He needs to perfect his magical skills. I don’t think you understand, Draco. You’ve got a son with as much natural talent as I have. He has the innate ability to make him a truly great wizard.”

Draco stared at him. He looked stunned.

“You’re just saying that,” he said, “so that you can convince me to let him go to that joke of a school.”

“It’s not ‘a joke of a school,’ and you know it. It’s one of the most prestigious schools in the world.”

Draco turned his face away. “Scorpius is little more than a Squib, Potter. You can just stop your silly charade. It’s not going to work. I’m not going to send him away to be laughed at.”

Harry was speechless. Utterly speechless.

“Holy shit,” he said. “You really believe what you’re saying, don’t you? I thought you were just . . . . Shit, Draco, I can’t believe I’m hearing this. I’m dumbfounded!”

“Then prove me wrong,” Draco hissed.

Harry grabbed the rope Draco had unwittingly thrown to him and ran with it.

“Fine, I will,” he said. “Scorpius!” But there was no answer.

“See?” Draco said sneeringly. “Now get out, Potter!”

Harry called again. “Scorpius!” Still there was no answer.

“Let me go to him,” Harry pleaded. “I swear to you that if he refuses to come out, I will leave and
never bother you again.”

Draco waved his hand dismissively. “Fine,” he said. “Good luck.”

Harry stormed out of the main room and knocked at the bedroom door.

“May I come in?” he asked.

“No.” The voice was flat and lifeless. Harry almost didn’t recognise it.

“Please,” he pleaded. “I brought your wand with me.”

There was a silence on the other side of the door. At last, Harry heard footsteps, and the door opened. Scorpius turned around and went back to his bed rather than greet him. Harry was surprised by how much he’d grown in the two years since he last saw him.

“I don’t want it,” he said. “Give it to someone else, or better yet, break it.”

Harry crossed his arms.

“Scorpius Malfoy,” he said. “You are being a sulky petulant child.”

Scorpius immediately perked up. “No, I’m not,” he said indignantly. “And I’m not a ‘child’ anymore; I’m going to be twelve in October!”

Harry struggled to hide his smile. “Okay then,” he said. “You are being a sulky petulant young man.”

Scorpius scowled at him. “What do you want, Potter?” he asked.

Harry stepped backwards at the sound of his voice. It was first-year Draco through and through.

“You will not address me in that manner,” he said sternly. “I am ‘Mr. Potter’ or ‘sir’ to you. Is that clear?”

Scorpius smirked at him.

“And as to what I want, I want you and your father to come with me to Dumbledore’s Memorial Park, and I want you to duel with me.”

Scorpius’s smirk wavered.

“And what if I don’t want to . . . ‘sir’?”

“Then fine, you don’t want to. I’ll leave and never bother you again.” Harry thought he saw a flicker of fear in Scorpius’s vacant eyes.

“And what will happen if I do go with you, sir?”

“Then we’ll duel, and if you want to pretend out of some strange kind of self-defeating martyrdom that you can’t match me, then I’ll let you and your father wither away in your attic. But if you come with me and you give me a worthy fight, then we may have a chance to change your father’s mind about Hogwarts.”

Scorpius’s smirk disappeared completely, but the fear remained in his eyes.
“Don’t make me hope, Mr. Potter. I can’t bear having it crushed again.”

Harry reached out and cupped his chin in his palm.

“This has been hard,” he whispered in reply. “I know it has. But tell me: have I ever let you down? Trust me” He leaned forward and placed a kiss in the centre of Scorpius’s forehead. “Trust me.”

Scorpius leaned forward and rested his head on Harry’s shoulder for a moment. “Okay, sir,” he whispered. “But good luck convincing my father to come with us.”

It took three wearying hours, but at last Harry and Scorpius convinced Draco to come with them to the park. Harry’s flagging energy returned, and he couldn’t help smiling as he held his arms out to father and son and Apparated them to the Park.

As soon as they stopping spinning and Scorpius stopped feeling nauseated, Harry opened the box and held his wand out to him. Scorpius reached for it with a hungry look in his eyes. “I’ve missed you,” he whispered to it.

Draco stood silently by. His face was a mask of scepticism.

Scorpius swished his wand a few times, warming up and getting used to the feel of it again after more than two years.

Harry turned and walked away from him. His heart was banging against his ribs, and all he kept saying in his mind was “please, God, please.”

When he’d walked the length of a duelling piste, he turned and assumed the classic stance.

“Wand up, Mr. Malfoy,” he shouted, and to his relief, Scorpius dropped into the stance as though it was one of his and Harry’s lessons.

He started out easy with a few jinxes. Scorpius blocked every one and returned them quickly. Nothing dramatic, but still better than your average first-year could do. Harry picked up the speed.

“Good!” he yelled. “Keep your front knee bent! That’s right! Ready for something a bit more difficult?”

Scorpius nodded. The look of concentration on his face was a beautiful thing to see.

Harry went from jinxes to hexes, and Scorpius blocked every one of them effortlessly. He hadn’t broken a sweat, even in the early September heat.

“Now wordlessly! I don’t want to see your lips move . . .”

Harry hadn’t finished his instruction when the Jelly Legs hit him, and he fell to the ground.

*Finite!* Scorpius said, grinning.

“Think you’re so clever?” Harry asked, grinning. “How about this?” He cast a wordless *Incarcerous*. Scorpius not only blocked it, he used its own force to send it back at Harry who had to duck to avoid it.

“Brilliant!” he yelled. “Very good!” He was having as much fun as he used to when he’d coached Scorpius at Bulcher House. Draco was only a distant thought at the back of his mind, as he and
Scorpius duelled. They’d long ago surpassed anything that was even taught at Hogwarts.

It was time for a Patronus. Harry took a deep breath and cast a stunning spell out loud.

“*Expecto Patronum!*” Scorpius shouted and there it was again. Harry’s stag. Effortlessly, it deflected the Stunner.

Scorpius had finally broken a sweat, and his flushed face shone in the mid-day sun. He was grinning from ear to ear.

“Want to stop?” Harry called to him as he leaned on his knees for a moment, breathing hard. He stood up again.

“You wish, sir!” Scorpius shouted back, assuming his stance even more surely than before.

The spells grew steadily more complex, and Scorpius was hit with a couple Stinging Hexes when he failed to cast a proper *Salvio Hexia* on the first try.

“Try me again!” he yelled, and this time he cast a *Hexia* strong enough to shatter the hexes Harry threw at him like glass.

“Alright,” Harry shouted. “You’re tiring an old man out! One last thing and it’s a new one. Let me show you.”

Harry swept his wand in a diminishing spiral. “*Defodio!*” he said, and a four-foot pit suddenly appeared in the middle of the piste.

“It’s a gouging spell,” he called. “Want me to do it again?”

Scorpius shook his head, and Harry’s heart soared. He assumed the proper stance for the spell and waved his wand and shouted *Defodio!*”

An even deeper pit obliterated Harry’s. It was magnificent. Harry couldn’t help himself. He ran down the piste and pulled Scorpius in to his arms, spinning him in circles until the little brat said he was going to barf on him. Harry felt as happy as he ever had in his life. They were standing waiting for their breathing to return to normal and admiring the destroyed piste when someone bent and put his arms around Scorpius from behind.

Draco placed a kiss on the back of his head. He was crying. Harry walked away to give them privacy. After a long time, he heard Draco call his name.

“Potter!” he yelled. “Come back here!”

Harry walked back slowly, his stomach nervous again. At last he stood before them both. Draco stood with his hands on Scorpius’s shoulders. To Harry’s great relief, Scorpius’s face was full of happiness.

“I expect you to look after him,” Draco said, giving Harry a father’s stern look. “And I expect him to return to me at Christmas in one piece.”

Harry forced himself not to grin, but he knew he couldn’t keep it out of his eyes. “You have my word,” he said.
Scorpius loved almost everything about Hogwarts. He loved the castle and the grounds and the moving staircases. He even kind of liked Peeves. The food was better than anything he’d had at Bulcher House, his classes were challenging, and the professors were approachable and some of them were even kind to him despite his name.

The only thing he didn’t like was the students. Especially his Gryffindor housemates, and among them, particularly the four other boys he roomed with. It was mutual dislike from the first moment they all met. They hated him for his name (both his first, which they said was weird, and his last which . . . well, most everyone disliked him because of his last name). Also, they’d all known each other and been friends before they came to Hogwarts, and he was a detested interloper.

The pranks had been relatively harmless at first – nothing he hadn’t encountered at Bulcher House – but they grew increasingly less harmless as time went on – the destroyed books and essays and broken ink bottles on his sheets. They were constantly hitting him with a vicious form of stinging hex until he thought he’d go mad. He tried talking to them to no avail, and then he tried bargaining and avoidance. Nothing worked. In fact, every effort he made to peacefully resolve the situation seemed to piss them off even more.

Then he hit them a spell he’d invented with his father’s help over the summer. His father was worried – rightly it turned out – that his dorm mates would bully him, and so they’d come up with the Drawn-and-Quartered Curse. It was very simple in its theory: The caster waited until the target was in his bed and then a variation of an Incarcerous would bind his hands and feet to the four bedposts and a variation of Engorgio would cause the bed to grow slowly in four directions until the target’s limbs were stretched beyond endurance. If the caster didn’t cast the counter curse, they were eventually dismembered into four pieces. It was the one spell he’d invented that he hadn’t told Mr. Potter about.

The screams were terrible, and he had to cast a double-strength Muffliato. He sat on his own bed, tapping his wand against his knee and humming. At first they threatened him if he didn’t cast the counter curse, and then they pleaded. By the time their arms and legs had almost pulled free from their sockets, they started to scream and soil their pyjamas. When he decided he finally had their attention, he calmly told them to leave him alone and then he’d ended the Curse and returned their limbs to their sockets. He didn’t heal the pulled ligaments though. He wanted the lasting pain to remind them that he was not to be fucked with.

He didn’t feel even the least bit bad about the whole thing.
Scorpius couldn’t help feeling awed and a little bit afraid when he met Auror Gwencalon for the first time. The man was a living breathing walking mountain!

“So,” he said with a heavy accent. “This is Scorpius Malfoy. Greetings. I’ve heard much about you . . .”

“. . . all good, of course,” Mr. Potter added.

Class was just letting out. Each kid shook Auror Gwencalon’s hand as they left the room. Their eyes were still goggling over the story they’d just heard about how he and Mr. Potter had become partners. Albus gave them both a quick hug before he went scampering after the prats he called friends.

“I hear today’s your birthday,” said Auror Gwencalon. “ Twelve, eh? It seems like something to celebrate.”

The walk to Hogsmeade was chilly but bright. The weather had been beautiful, which had made it hard for the kids to study, although not Scorpius. He’d become used to spending beautiful days indoors reading when he’d lived with his father.

“Do you like your classes?” Auror Gwencalon asked.


“You do know,” said Mr. Potter, “it’s unseemly for a Gryffindor to spend all his time in the library . . .”

“Try telling that to Hermione,” his partner said, laughing.

“I hear you’re not much into Quidditch,” Mr. Potter said.

“I’m pants at flying, sir. Plus, I keep wanting to cast a Protective Shield when that stupid ball comes flying at me. I hope you’re not disappointed in me.”

Mr. Potter looked down at him. “Of course not!” he said. “Why on earth would I be disappointed in you?”

“Well, James is on the team, and Albus has already been promised a spot with Ravenclaw for his second year . . .”

“I’m pretty sure I know how Harry is going to answer this,” said Auror Gwencalon. “Let’s see if I’m right.”

Mr. Potter glared at him. “Last thing I knew you hadn’t yet developed the ability to read my mind,” he said. “Although I know you like to make me think you have.”

His partner roared with laughter. It seemed somewhat out of proportion to the remark, and Scorpius guessed there was something more behind it that they weren’t telling him.

“Scorpius,” said Mr. Potter, his voice serious again. “You do not need to measure yourself by my children. I don’t measure them against each other. You’re all very different in so many ways. It’s like comparing apples to oranges.”

“Good,” said Scorpius. “Because your sons are gits, sir.”

Auror Gwencalon roared with laughter again. “I like this boy,” he said. “Not afraid to speak his
“He gets it from his father,” Mr. Potter said. “Have you even tried to get to know James and Albus?” he asked, turning to Scorpius. “James has a great sense of humour and Albus is a reader like you.”

Scorpius shrugged. “I tried in the beginning, sir,” he said. “But they have a lot of other friends. The whole school likes them. Also, I think they don’t like you giving me so much attention. They say it’s just pity because you took me away from my parents.”

Mr. Potter walked in silence for a while, his head down and his shoulders hunched. “They’re right,” he said, and Scorpius felt a stab of pain. “I did feel guilty, but that’s not why you and I are friends. It’s much more than that. I don’t think you need my pity, Scorpius, or anyone else’s for that matter. If I seem to give you a lot of attention, it’s because I like you. Very much.”

In an instant, the hurt turned to happiness, and Scorpius looked up at the sky with a grin.

The Three Broomsticks was empty except for a group of witches in the corner having a hen party. The three of them took the table as far away from them as possible.

Auror Gwencalon bought three butterbeers and several bags of crisps.

“Oh lord,” said Mr. Potter. “Please tell me they’re not all cheese and onion.”

“I like cheese and onion,” Scorpius said. Mr. Potter rolled his eyes to the heavens as though asking God to intervene.

“It’s all drama all the time with Harry,” Auror Gwencalon said, throwing back the butterbeer in one gulp. “Anyone mind if I get a slash of whisky?” Scorpius shook his head, and Auror Gwencalon turned to look at Mr. Potter.

“Sure, why not?” he said as though his partner had twisted his arm. “Get one for me too.”

Scorpius sat wide-eyed as Auror Gwencalon and Mr. Potter (once again finishing each other’s sentences) told story after story of their adventures together as the three consumed two batches of fish and chips, a plate of bangers and mash and two shepards’ pies as if they were nothing. Each time the two men finished a glass of whisky, the stories got longer and more uncensored. Scorpius watched the reflection of the candle’s flame in the lenses of Mr. Potter’s glasses. His cheeks were flushed, and his expression animated. Scorpius felt proud and excited to be out with these two famous men. When his eyes started to drift shut, he forced them to stay open. He didn’t want the night to end.

“. . . it looks like it’s time for someone to get back to the castle . . .”

It was Mr. Potter’s voice.

Scorpius looked at him blearily. “Not tired, sir” he said yawning.

Mr. Potter laughed. “For some unknown reason, I don’t believe you.”

“Where’s Auror Gwencalon, sir?”

“He had to Apparate back to the office, and I need to join him.”

Scorpius nodded. “Okay,” he said, but then he remembered the long walk. “Can’t we Apparate, sir?” he asked.
“There’s no Apparating to or from the school unless there’s an emergency,” Mr. Potter said. “But here, stand on your chair. There you go. Now climb up on my back and put your arms around my neck.”

Gratefully, Scorpius did as he was told. He’d barely rested his head on Mr. Potter’s shoulder when his eyes started to close again.

The night had gone from chilly to cold, but Scorpius was cosy. Not only had Mr. Potter cast a warming charm but his body itself was warm. Scorpius turned his face into the nook between Mr. Potter’s neck and shoulder. He smelled of whisky and the smoke from the turf fire at the Broomsticks, but there was something underneath that Scorpius couldn’t put his finger on – something good. He snuggled his face in closer as Mr. Potter’s steady gait rocked him to sleep.

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Albus stamped his foot in frustration. “But why?” he whinged. “Why does he have to come with us?”

“First because I said so,” Harry replied, “and second because I said so.”

“But he’s weird.”

“How can you be so certain? Have you ever taken the time to get to know him?”

“He’s a Malfoy,” James chimed in. “He shouldn’t have even been admitted in the first place.”

Harry clenched his jaw. He knew his sons hadn’t always been like this. It was the Weasleys, and most likely Ron. He and Harry had had a spectacular falling out after Ginny had discovered Harry’s “after work activities.” It’d been ugly. Things had been said that couldn’t be unsaid. By mutual agreement, they hadn’t spoken to each other since. It goaded him that Ginny had created a situation where Ron had more influence over his children than he did.

“Aren’t you friends with Gregory Goyle’s son? He and his father were as bad, if not worse, than Lucius and Draco. Why would you treat Archy Goyle differently than you treat Scorpius Malfoy?”

“But Archy isn’t weird,” said Albus. “And he doesn’t have creepy eyes. None of the other kids in our class likes Scorpius, Dad. He always looks like he’s plotting something.”

Harry almost smiled. So had Draco and not just during their sixth year.

“That’s probably why he spends all his time in the library,” said James.

“Have you ever thought that he spends all his time in the library because people treat him badly?”

His sons scowled. “People treat him badly because he spends all his time in the library,” said James.

Harry rolled his eyes. The conversation was going nowhere. And there he’d been thinking that his real impediment to inviting Scorpius to Switzerland would be Draco. Instead, Draco had seemed almost pleased.

“It’s just for a few days,” Harry told his sons. “You’ll have a whole month there with all the friends you want to invite.”

“At least you’ll be there then,” said Albus. “You’d never leave your precious Scorpius alone.”

Harry reeled back, surprised. “What are you talking about?”
“One-on-coaching, lunch at the Broomsticks . . .”

“You get the exact same things,” said Harry.

“Yes, but we’re your children,” said James.

Harry winced. He’d known he was walking a fine line with all the attention he’d been giving Scorpius, but he’d never thought his sons would feel actively threatened by it. He and Briac had talked about exactly the same thing just the week before.

You need to think about why, Harry, Briac had said. Because if it’s out of pity, the boy is going to figure it out one of these days and hate you for it.

But it wasn’t pity. Harry knew that for sure. And it wasn’t because he wanted to play tug-of-war with Draco. Harry didn’t have the remoteness interest in assuming the role of father to Scorpius. He was having enough trouble playing that role with his own children. The only words he could use to describe his relationship with Scorpius were curiosity and affection. Harry was eager to know how the boy would turn out and proud of his role in his life.

“Listen,” said Harry to his sons. “I expect you to be friendly and courteous, and that’s final.”

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Scorpius wasn’t surprised that Mr. Potter’s sons spent all day flying and wolfed down their suppers to catch the fading evening light. In fact, he was glad. The day he’d arrived, they’d been formally polite in their father’s company but icy cold when Mr. Potter wasn’t around. Which was fine with Scorpius. He didn’t want to talk to them either. He gave them one of his father’s sneers when he passed them in the hall. They were obnoxious prats, and he didn’t like flying anyway.

Unless, of course, it was with Mr. Potter.

The one good thing about having James and Albus around was that Mr. Potter felt sorry for him for not being able to join them in their flights through the valleys and under the spray of waterfalls.

“It’s all in your mind really,” said Mr. Potter. “If you believe you can do it, you will.”

Every morning, while Albus and James were still asleep (they slept till noon), Scorpius and Mr. Potter went to an alpine meadow full of edelweiss and lilies. There was always dew and both of them would get their jeans wet to the knees. (Mr. Potter had bought him jeans and t-shirts so he could walk around the Muggle village without being stared at. “Just don’t tell your father,” he’d said.) But soon the sun would rise above the mountain peaks, and the meadow would fill with the humming of bees.

In addition to the jeans and t-shirts, Mr. Potter had also bought him a broom. It wasn’t as fast and fancy as his children’s brooms, but it didn’t need to be. Scorpius was never going to play Quidditch. All he wanted was to be able to fly around the school’s grounds now and then to get away from it all.

“Don’t hold the handle so tightly,” Mr. Potter told him. “It looks like you have a death grip on it.”

Scorpius laughed. “Well, I kind of do, sir.”

“Well, let’s stay close to the ground at first. Unlike your flying instructor, I won’t let you fall without
a cushioning charm. Madam Hooch was the same with us – she thought if she couldn’t get us to fly through encouragement, she’d get us to fly out of terror of falling off. So don’t worry about falling, just concentrate on flying.”

Except that was easier said than done. After the twentieth time he had fallen or flipped over or spiralled out of control, Mr. Potter gave up trying to tell him how to fly and decided to show him instead.

“Sit in front of me, so you can see what I’m doing.”

Scorpius straddled the broom and gripped the handle.

“Lightly,” Mr. Potter laughed. “She doesn’t like to be strangled.”

Scorpius found it hilarious that Mr. Potter had named his broom Bertha. All the same, it was a beautiful broom – handmade for Mr. Potter himself by the world’s most famous broom maker.

Mr. Potter got on behind him and instantly Bertha began floating upward.

“It’s just a whisper of a thought,” Mr. Potter said. “Just a desire to be in the air, nothing more.”

They floated for a while, riding a breeze.

“There’s no need to lean forward like that,” Mr. Potter said. “You’ll confuse the broom. Your thought and your position are at odds with each other. You should only lean forward that far when you want to go fast.”

Scorpius sat up straight. This would’ve been the moment when he’d panic and lose control, but he wasn’t alone this time. Mr. Potter was there holding him around the middle.

“Now, where do you want to go? How about up to that ridge over there to the right us?”

Mr. Potter leaned slightly right, and Scorpius did too.

“Again, just a thought. ‘I want to turn right,’ is all you need to think. Not ‘oh my God, I’m going to die any second.’”

Scorpius laughed. “That’s not what I think, sir,” he said indignantly. He felt as well as heard Mr. Potter’s responding laugh.

They flew along the backbone of the ridge, sometimes skimming the rocks and other times soaring high above them. Scorpius was aware of every little movement in the body behind him. It made him notice the broom between his legs. It felt good.

He thought he could never feel any happier than this. The flowers were jewels nestled in green velvet, and the sun shone warmly on their backs. Mr. Potter’s arms remained around his waist, strong and sure, but not squeezing. Just a light embrace. The wind flew through Scorpius’s hair and whipped tears from the corners of his eyes. He felt like he could shout with joy.

The noon bells always came too soon. They landed on the alpine meadow again, and Scorpius climbed off the broom and found his own. He’d learned more in four days than he’d learned all year in flying class. He’d also learned more about his own body and that there was no place in the world he’d rather be than in Mr. Potter’s arms.

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The blood ran down Harry’s face and blinded him at a critical moment. The *Deprimo* caught him in the shoulder, shattering his collarbone. He gritted his teeth around a cry of pain. Briac swore in French, and cast a *Diffindo*. He dragged Harry to the floor as the Muggle lights burst open in clouds of sparks that rained down on their heads.

“How bad is it?” he asked through clenched teeth.

“Pretty bad,” Briac said. “The bone’s showing where the break is.”

“Fuck! I hate fighting with my left hand!”

“Afraid you’ve got no choice. The best I can do is bind your arm to your side so it doesn’t flop about and make the whole thing worse. There’s no time for anything else.”

He nodded as Briac ripped off a strip of his robe. The bastards had been ready for them. They’d been careful – even more careful than usual because they’d known ahead of time that they had an informant within the ranks of the Aurors. But obviously they hadn’t been careful enough.

At the sound of footsteps on broken glass, Harry Disillusioned himself and went on the offensive. He was sick of waiting for their attacks.

Plus he had plans for the evening, and he hated it when evil fuckers made him late for an appointment.

Scorpius came running down the stairs into the front hall, but stopped dead when he saw Harry.

“What happened to you, sir?” he asked, his voice shaky. He crossed the marble floor slowly.

“I’ll tell you on our way to Hogsmeade,” Harry told him. Students were starting to cluster around, their mouths open as they took in the long gash on Harry’s forehead which bisected his famous scar. Briac had stitched it closed, but it was a messy wound. Harry had a handkerchief in his pocket to dab at the blood that still oozed from it.

“Were you in a fight, Professor Potter?” asked one of his fourth years.

“Did you win, sir?” asked a seventh year.

Harry smiled enigmatically. “I’ll tell you on Wednesday,” he said. “Although you’ll be able to read the ‘official’ account in *The Prophet* tomorrow.”

The students’ faces were full of glee when they realised they’d get to the unofficial version.

“Now, if you’ll please excuse me,” Harry said. “I’ve got a thirteenth birthday to celebrate.

“Are you in much pain, sir?”

Harry shook his head. “Not that much,” he said. “Briac is very good at his healing spells. I had a nasty break . . .” He pulled the collar of his robe open to show Scorpius the bump and gash where his collarbone had broken and pierced the skin. “…but it doesn’t hurt too much. Fortunately, it was a fairly clean break and didn’t require a trip to the hospital. They’re very sick of seeing me at St. Mungo’s.”
The evening was warm for late October. Harry had removed his cloak and shrunk it to fit in his pocket. The adrenaline was still in his veins; he had to force himself to slow down to keep in step with Scorpius – although not as slow as he used to have to walk. Scorpius had grown a couple inches since the trip to Switzerland.

They walked in companionable silence for a while. Harry could tell Scorpius was thinking about something.

“Okay,” he said laughingly. “What is it? I can hear the wheels turning in that brain of yours.”

Scorpius was quiet for a few moments longer.

“Are you ever afraid, sir?” he asked at last.

Harry’s instinct was to respond light-heartedly, but it was a serious question that deserved a serious answer.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I’m not sure I remember what ‘fear’ feels like. The last time I was truly afraid was when I went into the forest to confront Voldemort. I was terrified, but then the worst happened, and things were still . . . okay.”

He felt like he was fumbling for words. There were other things he could say – perhaps even should say – but Scorpius was too young . . .

“Aren’t you worried about losing everything, sir?”

The words were suddenly on Harry’s lips before he had a chance to censor them.

“No,” he said. “It’s been a long time since I felt like I had something to really live for.”

His answer was met with a long silence from Scorpius. Harry felt he should explain himself.

“My children would be safe and happy without me. They have their mother and her huge family; they’ve been best friends with their cousins since they were toddlers and their aunts and uncles are like parents to them. They would miss me; I know that. But I think their mother prepared them for my absence long ago. And as for their mother . . . Well, she and I are basically estranged at this point. In many ways, I think she’d be relieved if I died.”

“But what about Auror Gwencalon, sir?”

Harry laughed. “Yeah, Briac would miss me, but he’d probably join me in short order so we could sit on a cloud and drink whisky and reminisce about our adventures. You have to remember, Scorpius; to be an Auror is to accept that there’s a high likelihood you will die in the line of duty. All of us knew what we were getting into when we signed up. That’s why so many Aurors don’t have children and have several broken marriages and relationships in their wake. To be an Auror, you have to love your job more than anything. Otherwise, you will be afraid. Having something you can’t bear losing is what fear is made of.”

Scorpius didn’t say another word until they’d reached the place where the road broadened as it neared the village. Harry found the silence unnerving.

“What about me?” His voice was so quiet and tentative that Harry almost didn’t hear it.

He had no answer.
“You would be fine without me,” he said at last. “You have your father and you have your new friends from the Astronomy Club – what are their names again?”

“Rowan and Edith,” Scorpius replied. His voice sounded odd. “But with all due respect, sir, you didn’t answer my question.”

Harry took a deep breath.

“That’s because I can’t,” he said quietly. “I don’t know my own heart well enough to answer such a question. You’ll have to be content with that.” His voice conveyed the message that the issue was now closed.

Their meal at the Broomsticks was too sombre for a birthday party, and Harry, to his deep shame, got drunk and told Scorpius things he shouldn’t have. He talked about how it felt to be The Boy Who Lived and then after he killed Voldemort, how it felt to be The Saviour of the Wizarding World. He talked about his falling out with Ron and the resulting estrangement from the Weasleys who’d once been his adoptive family. He talked about how it felt to be an orphan and how miserable he’d been with the Dursleys. He even talked about Ginny and how their marriage had broken down.

Scorpius listened intently but rarely asked a question. His pale eyes were very serious – more serious than Harry had ever seen on a thirteen year-old. It must come from living with a struggling parent who’d no doubt spilled his own heart to his son.

They walked back to the castle in a silence that was no longer comfortable, and Harry felt worried and sad. When they stopped at the gate, he pulled Scorpius into his arms.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “This wasn’t much of a birthday, was it? You’ll have to promise me that you and your friends will do something special.”

After a moment, Scorpius put his arms around Harry’s waist and squeezed. They stood like that for awhile, listening to the wind in the trees and the hooting of owls. When Scorpius finally spoke, his voice was so soft, Harry could hardly hear him.

“I love you,” he said. “Please don’t leave me.”

Scorpius was so busy, it seemed like he barely had time to eat and sleep. In the mornings before breakfast, he helped Hagrid clean up after his menagerie of beasts and over lunch, he helped Professor Longbottom in the greenhouse. He’d grown very fond of Professor Longbottom, and they’d chat over tea and sandwiches after watering and feeding the plants. His days were crammed with classes without a break, and then in the afternoons he had Duelling Club practise and after dinner there was the Astronomy Club. Every other free second, he spent revising or sleeping.

It was all working out just fine until, to his eternal horror, he fell asleep in Mr. Potter’s DADA class.

The Pinching Jinx hit his ear, and he woke with a cry. The class was staring at him – a situation that he always tried to avoid at all costs. Beside him, Edith snickered.

“Thanks for waking me up before Professor Potter caught me,” he grumbled.

Edith shrugged with a grin. “It was far more amusing this way.”
“Perhaps I am boring you, Mr. Malfoy?”

Scorpius straightened in his chair.

“No sir,” he replied. “I’m very sorry. I didn’t mean to.”

“Well then maybe you can tell us about Blasting spells.” Mr. Potter’s eyes glimmered with amusement.

“Good luck, Malfoy,” a boy behind him said sneeringly.

Scorpius rolled his eyes. Bumley was such a git. They were on the Duelling Team together, and Scorpius regularly kicked his arse – a fact that almost certainly led to Bumley’s impotent bullying. Scorpius was used to far worse, and it rolled off his back like rain off an *Impervius* Williams, however, was a different story . . .

Scorpius opened the note Williams had just hit him in the back of the head with.

*Let’s see you get out of this, Malfoy, you pillow-biting poof.*

Scorpius felt his face burst into flame, and he crumpled the note and shoved it in his pocket as fast as he could. Something must’ve shown in his expression, because Mr. Potter’s eyes went from twinkling to concerned in an instant.

“Come up here, Mr. Malfoy.”

“Are you okay?” he whispered as Scorpius brushed past him. He nodded.

“Duelling stance, if you please,” Mr. Potter shouted in his voice that used to make the first years burst into tears. Scorpius bit back a smile and assumed the stance.

“Now, I’m going to hold this crystal ball in my hand,” said Mr. Potter. “Your job is to break it without hitting me. Sadly you seemed to have been sleeping during my lecture, so you probably won’t know how to cast the Blasting Spell I was teaching to the class.”

Scorpius swallowed back the giddy laugh that rose in his chest. Of course he knew the spell. Mr. Potter had taught it to him before he even came to Hogwarts.

Mr. Potter walked to the other side of the room and held up the small crystal ball. Scorpius took a deep breath.

“*Confringo*” he yelled, and the ball exploded into a mist.

The class gasped and there was a spattering of applause.

Mr. Potter feigned a sceptical expression. “Is that all you can do, Mr. Malfoy?” he shouted. “Duelling stance! Don’t ever let me see you get out of it even when your spell has been a success. Your opponent won’t stand and clap; he or she will hit you right back.”

Scorpius assumed a duelling stance again, and Mr. Potter picked up another ball.

“*Confringo* is useful in the heat of battle,” he said. “But what if you want to disarm your attacker before he or she even realises you’re there?” Mr. Potter held up the ball.

“*Reducto!*” Scorpius shouted, and the target shrank to the size of a pea.
Again, the class gasped.

“How does he know that?” Williams shouted. “You were only teaching us the Blasting Curse!”

Mr. Potter turned and fixed Williams with an icy stare. The boy’s face went pale as he realised his mistake.

“I mean, Professor Potter, sir . . .” he stammered.

“Mr. Malfoy is an exceptional student. You might be too but I can’t tell from your essays because I never get any,” Mr. Potter said. The class laughed and Williams looked like he might cry. Mr. Potter turned back to Scorpius.

“Last time,” he shouted. “And don’t you dare straighten your knee . . . there you are. Good.” He picked up yet another crystal ball.

And this time, without warning, he flung it as hard as he could right at Scorpius’s head. Several people in the class screamed.

Without thinking, Scorpius pointed his wand, his arm arrow straight and locked at the elbow.

“Evanesco!” he cried, and the ball vanished within mere inches of his face.

Most of the students leapt to their feet, clapping wildly.

Mr. Potter beamed and crossed the room to shake Scorpius’s hand. “Very good, Mr. Malfoy,” he said, his eyes full of undisguised pride. “You may resume your nap now.”

The class laughed and continued clapping until Scorpius took his seat.

“Would you have stopped the ball if I hadn’t been able to react, sir?” Scorpius asked Mr. Potter after class when all the other students had filed out, some of them clapping him on the shoulder as they passed.

“We’ll never know, will we?” Mr. Potter replied with a wink.

Scorpius grinned. “I know you would have, sir. Otherwise you’d have McGonagall to answer to and that would be scary even for the Head Auror.”

Mr. Potter feigned a stern expression. “That’s Head Mistress McGonagall to you, young man.”

“Of course, sir,” Scorpius replied as seriously as he could. “Well, I’d better be off to Arithmancy,” he said and bent to retrieve his books from the floor.

It was then that the crumpled note fell from his pocket.

“Oh God,” Scorpius said and grabbed it. His face was burning with shame.

“Scorpius,” said Mr. Potter. His voice was no longer light. “Something in that note has really upset you. Please show it to me.”

Scorpius shook his head vehemently. “It’s nothing, sir.”

Mr. Potter fixed him with his bright green eyes. “It’s not nothing. I know you too well. You can’t lie
Scorpius swallowed, squeezed his eyes shut, and handed the crumpled sweaty note to Mr. Potter. When he dared to open one eye, he saw that Mr. Potter’s cheeks were a bright pink and his dark brows frowned, making him look as scary as he must look to his enemies. Scorpius stepped back, his eyes wide.

“The bloody fool,” he hissed, and then his expression changed to one of concern. “Why did he call you that?” he asked.

“I . . . I don’t know, sir,” Scorpius stammered. “He just started this since we got back from Christmas hols . . .”

Mr. Potter was quiet for a long time. At last, he looked at the door and closed it with a wordless spell.

“Do you think you might like boys?” he asked gently.

Scorpius’s eyes flooded with tears. “I don’t know, sir,” he said. “I have . . . feelings sometimes, but I never thought they were bad until my dorm mates started teasing me.”

“You get an erection,” Mr. Potter said calmly. Scorpius nodded.

“I can’t help it! It just happens. I try to stay away from the dorm – I don’t even like them! Why would . . . why . . . ?”

“You get an erection,” Mr. Potter said calmly. Scorpius nodded. “Because it’s perfectly normal, that’s why.”

He couldn’t believe what he’d just heard. “With all due respect, sir,” he said. “Please don’t patronise me.”

“I’m not patronising you. I’m telling you the truth. Your feelings are normal, your reactions to seeing other boys’ bodies are natural, and your confusion is natural. Don’t ever feel ashamed.” He voice was serious and urgent.

“I only take showers after my dorm mates are asleep. And I’m trying to stay as busy as I can so that when I sleep I don’t have . . . dreams.”

That was as far as he would go with that subject. Wild Hippogriffs couldn’t drag from him the admission that those dreams were about Mr. Potter, himself – at least the ones that ended with messy sheets.
“You’re running yourself ragged, Scorpius. You can’t keep up the pace you’ve set for yourself.”

He nodded. Mr. Potter was probably right, but he saw no alternative.

“I don’t want to like boys, sir,” he said, his head bowed. “I want to like girls.”

“So did I.”

Scorpius’s head snapped up and he looked at Mr. Potter in amazement.

“You heard me correctly,” said Mr. Potter, his voice even and direct. “When I was your age, I realised I was gay. At the time, it was a horrible feeling. I had the same reactions to seeing other boys naked that you do, and it was humiliating. Fortunately, I was close with my dorm mates, and they pretended not to notice.”

“But . . . but . . . but you were married, sir,” Scorpius stammered.

“Yes. I was, and obviously I was capable of having sex with my wife, otherwise you wouldn’t see my children running around the castle.” He smiled fondly. “Sexual feelings are rarely black and white. We wanted to get married. We wanted a family . . .”

Mr. Potter paused and turned his head to look out the window. Eventually, he continued.

“But I quickly learned that you can’t make yourself desire or not desire someone. I wanted to be with other men, and it took years of agony to admit that to myself and finally do something about it. Don’t make my same mistake, Scorpius. If you’re attracted to boys then find someone who shares the same feelings and who will treat you well. Don’t try to make yourself into someone you’re not.”

They were quiet for a long time. Scorpius felt relieved to have finally been able to confess to someone, but he also felt exhausted. He slumped into a chair. Even his bones were tired.

Mr. Potter sat on the desk and lifted his chin.

“You’re in no shape to go to your classes this afternoon,” he said gently. “I’m going to sign a note for you saying I let you take the rest of the day off. Go get some sleep.”

Scorpius nodded. “Okay,” he said gratefully. “Thank you for listening to me, sir.”

“You know you can always come to me about anything,” said Mr. Potter. “And please tell me if Williams or anyone else is giving you trouble.”

Scorpius nodded again and yawned massively. Mr. Potter mussed his hair and helped him up from his chair. Scorpius gave him a hug.

Mr. Potter hugged him back. “Sleep well,” he said. “Sweet dreams.”

As Scorpius’s eyes slipped closed back in his bed, Mr. Potter’s last words echoed in his ears.

* * * * * * * *

Harry couldn’t help but remember his words to Scorpius as the man’s arms reached around him from behind and undid his buckle.

If you’re attracted to boys then find someone who shares the same feelings and will treat you well.

“You’ve got a beautiful cock,” the man whispered in his ear, running a finger along the length of
Harry’s shaft.

They were standing in an alley that stunk of rotting garbage. He and Briac had been away for almost a month in one of those bloody “stan” countries. Kazakhstan? Kyrgyzstan? Tajikistan? He was too fucking tired and high and horny to remember which one.

“Forget my cock,” Harry hissed against the man’s mouth as they kissed bruisingly. “I asked you to fuck me, not blow me.”

“Happy to oblige,” the man said and opened Harry’s jeans. “Bend over.”

Harry felt cool slick fingers and pushed back with a groan.

“Don’t stretch me out too much,” he said. “I like it tight.”

“. . . and painful, I see,” said the man, and Harry felt the head of his cock breach him. He sucked in a sharp breath. God, it was good.

The man reached for his cock, and Harry batted his hand away.

“Ah,” his partner of the moment said. “You like to come from being fucked. Jesus Christ, you’re hot.” He pulled out, and Harry moaned with disappointment. “Gotta stop for a moment,” the man said. “You’re going to make me come. I’ve never been in such a perfect arse. Are you straight?”

Harry laughed and then cried out as the man slammed into him.

“No,” he replied. “I’m just choosey. Not everyone gets to fuck me.”

The man groaned and pulled out again. “You’re going to kill me,” he said, panting against Harry’s back. “What’s your name?”

Harry laughed again. “I’m not playing that game,” he said. “Just hurry up and fuck me, alright?”

The man pushed back inside him and let himself go. Harry braced himself against the onslaught, crying out on every thrust. He was getting close to a mind-blowing orgasm.

“Fuck. God. You’re beautiful,” the man said as his thrusts lost their rhythm. “I’m going to come in you, baby. I’m going to fill you up.”

“Don’t fucking call me ‘baby,’” Harry said. He was past the point of sanity as he spread his legs wider and braced himself against the wall.

. . . find someone who shares the same feelings and will treat you well.

The man slapped him hard on his arse, and Harry came. The man slapped him again and shouted out his own orgasm.

“Fuck,” he panted. “I think I could fall in love with you.” He knelt down behind Harry and licked him clean. Harry squirmed and felt his cock stiffen again. It’d been a very long time.

“Listen, sugar,” he said in Harry’s ear. “I have a couple friends inside who’d love to worship your arse. Can I go get them?”

What the fuck, Harry thought. Why not? He’d almost died twice on this last mission as Unforgivables whizzed past within an inch of his face.
When the third man entered him, Harry felt his mind start to slip away, and he forgot everything except the cock inside him and how good it felt. Who cared who it belonged to? Harry hadn’t even seen the bloke’s face . . .

“Hey, partner!”

Harry’s head snapped up at the sound of Briac’s voice.

“How many blokes are you going to fuck tonight?”

The man who was fucking him froze mid-thrust.

“Bugger off, mate,” he said. “Get in fucking line.”

Harry and Briac both cracked up laughing.

“Hurry and finish up,” Harry told the man behind him. “It looks like I need to get back to work.”

* * * * * * *

Scorpius closed his eyes and slipped his hand under the waistband of his pyjamas, gasping as he closed his fingers around himself.

He moved as quietly as he could, listening to his father’s breathing. The Christmas moon fell in a long slant across his duvet. It was so bright, Scorpius could see its light through his eyelids.

As usual, the images flashed before his eyes – they seemed to be beyond his control. There was the way the boys looked in their Quidditch gear, and his dorm mates’ pricks, slick with soap. As he got closer to his release, the images became shaper and even harder to control. Mr. Potter’s strong hands resting on his thighs as he leaned against his desk at the front of the class. Mr. Potter’s hair, so black that it sometimes seemed to have blue glints in it. Mr. Potter’s throat when he swallowed, and the way he walked around the classroom as they took an exam, slow and deliberate, his black professorial robes brushing the desks as he passed. And then when he was right on the edge, he’d feel Mr. Potter’s arms around his waist and the broom between his legs as they flew above an alpine meadow . . .

He whimpered as he climaxed, but he was sure it wasn’t loud enough to wake his father. He’d become very adept at pleasuring himself silently behind the curtains of his bed in Gryffindor Tower.

* * * * * * *

Scorpius could see that his father was nervous. Every ten minutes or so, he’d get up from the table where he and Scorpius were playing chess and pace to the window, his face even paler than usual.

“It’s okay, Father,” he said gently. “Everything’s going to be okay, I promise.”

“You are sure his family is Pure-blood?” his father asked again for the thousandth time. Scorpius tried not to roll his eyes. How many times did he have to assure his father that Rowan’s parents and grandparents and great-grandparents, etc. were all witches and wizards.

“I’m surprised he wants to spend New Year’s Eve with . . . people like us,” his father said, gesturing to the tiny flat. “Won’t his family be attending the balls?”

“He’s been to two already, and he’s sick of them.” Rowan had owled him about how dull they’d been.
His father stopped pacing.

“I feel guilty that I haven’t been able to provide you with a social standing. You’re fourteen. You’d be making your first appearance this year.”

Scorpius went to him where he stood by the window. He put his arms around his father’s shoulders and kissed the back of his neck.

“You’ve given me more than a silly social standing,” Scorpius told him. “You’ve given me my father back.”

His father took Scorpius’s hands in his and kissed each one.

There was a knock at the door. His father took a deep breath. “Don’t worry,” Scorpius whispered. “He’s my best friend, and he knows we’re not rich.”

He opened the door, and Rowan stepped inside smelling of the cold. It looked as though he’d put on every piece of winter clothing he owned. Scorpius laughed.

“Are you planning an Artic expedition?” he asked, and Rowan grinned.

“It’s cold out there,” he said, unwinding his scarf and pulling off his gloves. “Good evening, Mr. Malfoy, sir,” he said to Scorpius’s father with a bow. “It is a pleasure to meet you.”

Scorpius wanted to hug his friend. He couldn’t have sounded more sincere and polite. His father smiled and nodded his greeting. For a second, Scorpius thought he could glimpse how elegant and aristocratic he must’ve been once.

“I am pleased to make your acquaintance,” he said. “Scorpius has told me much about you. I am glad you could join us.”

“I am grateful for the invitation, sir,” Rowan replied. “It is immensely kind of you.”

His father nodded again in acceptance of Rowan’s appreciation.

“Would anyone like a cup of tea?” Scorpius asked from the kitchen.

“Why don’t you make a pot,” his father replied. “Mr. Boyne still looks chilly.”

The evening passed pleasantly although formally. They ate a ham with potatoes and green beans that Scorpius had made, followed by a bread and butter pudding. It was expensive, and he knew his father had scrimped and saved for a month to buy the ingredients, but he also knew that his father would die before he let a guest eat their usual fare. His father and Rowan did most of the talking, and Scorpius was content to sit back and listen.

“I understand your family resides in Ulster? Are your parents from there?”

“My father grew up there, as did all his ancestors going back to the time of St. Patrick.”

Scorpius’s father nodded, clearly pleased with the answer.

“Is your mother’s family also from Ulster?”

“No, her family is the MacBain clan in northern Scotland.”

Scorpius’s father’s eyes brightened. “Her name wouldn’t be Morna, would it?”
“It is,” Rowan replied with a smile.

“I knew her cousin Ina well. She and her parents used to spend a week at our Glenaan estate every summer. Please, pass along my . . .”

Scorpius saw his father’s cheeks go pink. No one wanted the greetings of a Malfoy. Scorpius swallowed around the lump in his throat as his father struggled to regain his composure. He was about to change the subject when Rowan came to the rescue.

“I would be proud to,” he said sincerely. “Both my mother and my aunt have reminisced to me about their summers in the Glens of Antrim. I hear your mother’s gardens were beyond compare.”

His father nodded graciously at the kindness. “I am pleased to hear they are well,” he said. “Does your family summer in Britain or are your homes on the continent?”

Scorpius was so engrossed in the almost ritualistic conversation, that the peck on the windowpane startled him. He rose to let the green-eyed owl in and gave it a bit of pudding. He couldn’t suppress the happiness that welled in his chest. He opened the letter with fumbling fingers.

Dear Scorpius,

Happy New Year. I hope you are enjoying yourself and your father’s not quizzing you mercilessly on your Italian. I hope you received my Christmas gift . . .


“Scorpius, your language!” said his father, and Scorpius saw Rowan bite his lip to keep from laughing.

“Sorry, Father, I just realised there’s something I forgot to do.”

Mr. Potter had sent him a brass thimble with instructions to put it on his finger and touch something. The moment he did, the thing he’d touched became incandescent, and when he lifted his finger again, it returned to its normal state.

The oldest magic understood and recognised true beauty, Mr. Potter had written. Everything and everyone has a core that burns bright. All our secrets are diamonds in the dirt.

Scorpius had been so touched by the gift and the letter that he didn’t know what to say in response. A mere “thank you” sounded entirely insufficient, but no response was even worse. He grabbed a piece of parchment out of his school bag.

Dear Mr. Potter,

I did receive your gift, and I am ashamed I haven’t written back sooner. The honest truth is that I didn’t know how to thank you enough – for your gift and for everything you’ve given me over the years. Someday I’ll know how to repay you, but in the meantime I can only give you my love. I hope it’s enough.

Yours Forever,
Scorpius

He’d been so focused on his letter that he hadn’t realised that the room behind him had gone silent. He heard someone suck in a surprised breath. He clutched the letter to his chest and turned.
Rowan was right behind him.

“Where’s my father?” Scorpius squeaked.

“In the bathroom. My God, Scorpius, is that a letter to Harry Potter?”

Scorpius’s cheeks were on fire. “Uhm no, I mean, yeah, kind of,” he stammered.

“I’ve thought for a long time that you might have a crush on him,” Rowan whispered. “But now you’re writing imaginary letters?”

It was humiliating, but Scorpius grabbed the line Rowan had unwittingly thrown to him and ran with it.

“Please don’t tell anyone,” he said. “It would be *really* embarrassing if the other kids knew I was in a make-believe friendship with Mr. Potter . . .”

His father entered the room, and Rowan straightened while Scorpius hid his letter behind his back. “I believe I shall retire for the night,” he said. “You boys can stay up to welcome in the New Year, but this old man is ready for bed.”

Rowan gave him another bow. “Dinner was absolutely lovely,” he said. “I appreciate your generous hospitality.”

Scorpius knew his friend was aware of just how truly generous it was. He’d never hid from Rowan that they were destitute and living off the “largess” of the government.

“Good night,” his father said as he left the room.

The letter still hidden behind his back, Scorpius went to him and kissed his cheek. “Good night, Father,” he said. “I love you.”

His father nodded, but Scorpius could see the tears in the corners of his eyes. He kissed Scorpius’s forehead. “I love you too, my little scorpion,” he said.

As his father disappeared down the hall, Scorpius turned back to Rowan who had found Mr. Potter’s letters. He blushed and set them down when he saw Scorpius watching him.

“It’s *not* your imagination.”

Scorpius shook his head. He knew he should be alarmed that his greatest secret had been discovered, but it was a huge relief in a way. He’d felt like he was always keeping something from his best friend, something that was perhaps the most important thing in his life.

“Tell me *everything*,” Rowan said, his voice full of awe, “you withholding git.”

Scorpius blushed and grinned at the same time. “Please don’t be angry at me,” he said. “And please don’t tell anyone else.”

“You *know* I won’t,” said Rowan as he made himself comfortable on the couch.

Scorpius started at the very beginning. He told Rowan about how Mr. Potter had been forced to take him away from his parents, and how he sent money to Bulcher House and later became his tutor. (He even told Rowan about why Mr. Potter had become his tutor). He told him about their correspondence and Mr. Potter’s summer invitations to Switzerland. He told him about his birthdays and that Mr. Potter bought all his school supplies and uniforms and Muggle clothes. He also told
Rowan that Mr. Potter had given him both his broom and his wand.

“That’s why you’re so bloody good at duelling,” Rowan said, his voice still full of awe. “Does your father know about any of this?”

“Some of it, but definitely not everything. He almost lost his mind when he found out Mr. Potter bought me my wand. My father has never liked Mr. Potter – it’s too long and complicated to get into now. And as for duelling?” he added noting Rowan’s suddenly dark look, “Mr. Potter taught me everything I know, but he doesn’t give me a grade, so you don’t have to worry about that.”

“I wasn’t, I’m just really jealous, that’s all. My God, Scorpius! He’s one of the greatest wizards in all of history!”

Scorpius couldn’t help but beam. “Yeah, I know. I couldn’t believe it when I opened my door at Bulcher House and found him in the hall, looking down at me with those eyes of his. I almost died on the spot.”

“Do you even begin to realise how lucky you are? How many people would kill to be befriended by Harry bloody Potter?!”

Scorpius was silent for a long time before he blurted out the most dangerous admission yet.

“I think it’s more than friendship on my part,” he whispered.

Rowan goggled at him. “What are you talking about? I mean I know you’re gay but . . . Merlin, Scorpius, he’s your father’s age!”

“I know,” Scorpius snapped. “I’m not stupid! It’s just that . . . I think I’m in love with him and have been for a long time although I didn’t know it was love, exactly.”

“Oh my God! What are you going to do?”

“What am I going to do? Are you joking? Absolutely fucking nothing! Do you think I want to bollucks up our friendship? You must think I’m mental!”

Rowan breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank God,” he said. “I was worried for a minute there that I was going to have to talk you out of doing something crazy.”

They looked at each other and burst out laughing as the tension drained away and the bell in the church down the street bonged twelve times.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Scorpius had never known a summer to go by so fast before. Usually, he was with his father in their little flat, venturing out only for groceries and a few concerts and exhibits and visits to the library. He didn’t dislike the time he spent with his father, but he was always restless. He wanted to run and fly and kick around a Quaffle with his friends (it was the only thing the bloody ball was good for). He found himself constantly jiggling his leg or drumming his fingers on the table until his father told him he was driving him mad. With the Aurors, he and Rowan were always running around the fourth floor delivering messages and fetching magical maps while Mr. Potter and Auror Gwencalon drank endless cups of coffee and poured over the intelligence from the night before. Whenever the intelligence wasn’t classified, they let him and Rowan read it and then find the locations on one of the hundreds of maps. Sometimes Mr. Potter asked them for advice, and Scorpius’s heart would soar, and looking in his best friend’s eyes told him he shared the same experience.
The only thing that could’ve been better was the number of days they went out with Mr. Potter and Auror Gwencalon in the field. When he told Mr. Potter they’d love to go out more often, Mr. Potter’s expression turned serious as he shook his head.

“There are things happening that we didn’t expect; or rather we didn’t expect to happen so soon,” he said. “It’s bad timing. I had hoped to take you two out a lot more.”

Scorpius knew it probably sounded stupid, but he asked anyway. “Is there anything we can do to help, sir?”

Harry reached over and squeezed his knee for a moment. “No there isn’t,” he replied. “But thanks for asking.”

They were silent for a while, sitting in Mr. Potter’s office with mugs in their hands. Scorpius was sure he’d picked up a serious coffee addiction in the one and a half months he’d spent with the Aurors. Mr. Potter seemed to exist on it and Mars bars, although he assured Scorpius that when he had a moment’s free time, he went to the pub down the street and got ham, cheese and tomato sandwiches. Scorpius started bringing in oranges because they’d learned about scurvy in Muggle studies.

“One more day, isn’t it?” said Mr. Potter. “Let me see about bringing you out with us one last time.”

Scorpius nodded greedily, and Mr. Potter gave him a smile – a tired smile.

“If you don’t mind me saying, sir, you look knackered.”

Mr. Potter scrubbed his face with his hands, making his fringe stand on end. “That’s because I am,” he said. “I’m exhausted actually. I haven’t had more than three hours of sleep for the past week.” He bowed his head, baring his neck, which was brown from the summer sun.

Scorpius realised he was trembling as he stood and put his mug on Mr. Potter’s desk. Mr. Potter didn’t glance up as he walked to where he sat. He stood before him. He was no longer trembling – he was shaking from head to toe. Slowly, he moved to stand behind Mr. Potter’s chair and reached out his hand until his fingertips grazed Mr. Potter’s skin. Taking a deep breath, he reached out his other hand and began to massage Mr. Potter’s neck and shoulders, first tentatively and then stronger. He remained poised for flight at the first word of rebuke. But it never came. Instead, Mr. Potter hummed with pleasure.

“Feels nice,” he said.

Feeling surer of himself, Scorpius kneaded harder. He could feel the heat of Mr. Potter’s skin beneath his hands and the roll and slide of knotted muscle. Gently, he pushed aside the open collar of Mr. Potter’s Auror robe, and felt his fingers slip into the cups of his collarbones. When Mr. Potter didn’t move or say anything, Scorpius slipped his fingers down further, grazing the top of Mr. Potter’s pectoral muscles. They were firm, but the skin covering them was soft.

He felt himself grow hard and shut his eyes to make his erection go away. He didn’t want to stop what he was doing, but he couldn’t let Mr. Potter see his excitement. He’d die of embarrassment . . .

. . . at that moment, Rowan and Auror Gwencalon came in, laughing and jostling each other. Rowan stopped dead when he caught Scorpius’s eyes. He pleaded with his friend through his gaze just to act normal.

Mr. Potter lifted his head slowly. “What’s so funny?” he asked, his voice slurring with fatigue.
“One of the new recruits has a Pygmy Puff, sir,” said Rowan. “It got away and ran up Auror Gwencalon’s trouser leg.”

Mr. Potter laughed and straightened. Scorpius’s hands slipped off his shoulders, as Mr. Potter buttoned the collar of his Auror robe.

“Poor thing,” Mr. Potter said. “I suppose it’s dead now.”

Auror Gwencalon assumed a forlorn expression. “That’s not very nice, particularly coming from a man who probably hasn’t changed his shorts in a month.”

“That’s not true,” said Mr. Potter. “I changed them last week after you pushed me in the fen, remember?”

The two of them laughed, and Scorpius tried to let the tension (and mortification) drain from his body.

Later, Rowan grabbed his arm in the loo. “Christ, Scorpius,” he said. “What were you thinking?”

Scorpius turned away and went to the sink to splash water on his face. He was sweating as though he’d just run a mile.

“You don’t need to say anything, alright? I already know what you think.”

“I bloody well hope so,” Rowan replied. “Because you’re playing with fire, Malfoy.”

* * * * * * * * *

The dream was not innocent.

Harry woke slick with sweat and breathing hard.

He groaned and rolled over onto his side. He’d been dreaming of the massage Scorpius had given him that afternoon. To his alarm, he’d found Scorpius’s tentative curious touch intensely arousing. But the dream hadn’t stopped where things had stopped in real life.

It was wrong. Very wrong. He knew it was wrong, but he hadn’t felt in years the way he’d felt when Scorpius was touching him. If Briac and Rowan hadn’t come in . . .

He stood and cast a cleaning charm on his sheets. The windows in his bedroom were open, and he stood in front of them, letting the breeze dry the sweat on his body. He watched the headlights of cars crawl over the bridge. A group of people walked by on the street below laughing and talking and obviously pissed. Scorpius was probably asleep in his and Draco’s tiny flat. He, himself, wasn’t going back to bed. Not when there was work he could do. He dressed quickly, yanking on his jeans, not bothering with pants and ignoring the stab of pain from his maltreated balls. His genitals were something to be punished, not coddled. They were betraying him – his sense of what was right and honourable. He stepped into the fireplace and said the Ministry’s address. It was three o’clock. Once again, he’d only slept for three hours.

* * * * * * * * *

“So how is he doing?”

Draco handed him tea in a Slytherin-green cup. Harry accepted it, sat down on the couch and looked around. He hadn’t seen the flat (or Draco for that matter) since Scorpius started at Hogwarts. Much
had changed. Draco seemed more relaxed, and the flat now had a large bookshelf filled almost to the point of collapse, and several framed antique maps hung on the walls. Draco had obviously found some kind of consignment shop where Muggles had unwittingly sold priceless magical artifacts for a few pounds. The air was warm with the summer sun, but not stifling. All the same, Harry cast a cooling charm. Things could get heated as they so often did between him and Draco. Who knew what the prat wanted to discuss?

“As well as I’d expected,” Harry replied. “Which is to say he’s doing great.”

“His friend is a fine young man.”

Harry hid a smile behind a sip of tea. Of course Draco would say that. Rowan was a Pure-blood.

“So,” he said after a moment during which Draco sat gazing out the window with a distracted expression. “Why did you want to see me?”

“For your scintillating company, of course,” Draco replied with a hint of a teasing smile.

Harry laughed. “Bollocks.”

Draco wrinkled his nose at the Muggle profanity but didn’t reprimand him.

“I...” he started and then stopped. Harry arched an eyebrow. “I wanted to tell you that I don’t want you coddling him,” he continued. “He’s not always going to be the great Harry Potter’s charity case, you know.”

Harry tried to keep his irritation limited to drumming his fingers on his knee. “First of all,” he said, “Scorpius is not a charity case, and second he’s perfectly capable of living a life wholly independent of me.”

Draco merely looked at him as though he was a hopeless idiot. Despite his evident derision, Harry noted how much better he looked. There was colour in his cheeks – something Harry hadn’t seen since... well, since forever. At least it felt like forever. They’d both been through so much since they used to bump into each other in Diagon Alley. Back then Draco had nodded in recognition, and until he’d been given the order to arrest him and Asteria, Harry had even imagined the possibility that they might become friends. A slim possibility, yes, but one Harry would’ve welcomed. As far as he’d been concerned, everything his former Slytherin classmates did or didn’t do during the War was water under the proverbial bridge.

“You look well, Draco,” he said.

Draco blushed. “Don’t try to distract me,” he replied. “I’m worried about my son and your... your effect on him. As much as I hate to admit it, he loves you.”

“And I him.”

“Except he’s not the one who’s going to get himself killed, which you, Potter, inevitably will. You’re reckless.”

By way of illustration, Draco nodded at the latest Prophet on the coffee table. Harry watched himself talking to reporters right after he and Briac had successfully rescued twelve hostages. His crimson robe was singed and there was blood on his face.

Harry laughed. “Says the same man who...”
“That was years ago,” Draco interrupted him. “Do you see me trying to practise unauthorized magic? Do you see me trying to leave this . . . this cage I’ve been locked in? No, you don’t. Why? Because of Scorpius. I don’t care what happens to me, but I care what happens to him. He would miss me if I was sent back to Azkaban . . .”

“. . . he’d more than ‘miss’ you. He’d be lost without you.”

“But he wouldn’t be destroyed like he would be if he lost you.”

“I don’t think he loves me more than . . .”

Draco waved his hand as though batting away a swarm of doxies. “Oh, for God’s sake, Potter. Shut it, will you? You know what I’m saying. You don’t seem to care what might happen to the people in your life if you were killed.”

Harry bristled and set his cup down too hard on the coffee table. “That’s not true,” he said.

“Is it? You’ve never been exactly introspective. I’m just asking you to at think about Scorpius and the effect your loss would have on him . . .”

“And what about you?” Harry blurted. “What would my death do to you? What would it ever have done? Did it ever matter? Did I ever matter?”

Draco looked at him as if he’d gone mad. “What on earth are you babbling about?” he asked.

“I’m ‘babbling’ about the War, Draco. You were there. You knew I went to the forest. You knew I’d probably die. Did you feel anything? Anything at all?”

Draco blushed again but this time with anger. “All I felt was relief that the siege would finally end,” he said.

Harry stood and summoned his robe. He’d been careful to take it off as soon as he’d entered the flat. Draco stood as well, looking dismayed.

“You don’t understand,” he said angrily. “You never have.”

“What I understand, Malfoy,” Harry snapped. “Is that you wanted me dead. Well, sorry to have disappointed you.”

Draco grabbed Harry’s arm before he could leave.

“I might have wanted you dead then, but I don’t now. I want you to live, Potter. Let go of your death wish and grow up. Don’t leave Scorpius to mourn you. Don’t . . . don’t break his heart.”

“Like you just broke mine?” Harry replied, but before he could hear Draco’s response, he Apparated straight to his office and the comforting trappings of his ‘reckless’ life.”

“I’m Harry bloody Potter,” he said to the empty room as though his weary words were some kind of reminder to himself. Some sort of unavoidable assignation. Draco had balls lecturing him about recklessness. He’d risked his freedom and that of his family just to hang onto his father’s dusty, old books and a handful of dark objects. If that hadn’t been reckless,” Harry didn’t know what was.

“Pot kettle, Malfoy,” he said with a rueful shake of his head. “Pot fucking kettle.”

* * * * * * *
“Damnit!” Harry yelled. “Did you see where it went?”

He and Briac were out “in the field” with the boys, searching for a peddler of magical powder that made people sneeze until they collapsed from fatigue.

Briac cast a Revealing Spell. “No,” he yelled back. “The thing was too bloody quick. You know it has to have found its way back to the sewers by now.”

So much for sneeze-inducing powders. It was possible that they now had a much bigger concern on their hands – one that Scorpius and Rowan should have no part in.

“Sir,” said Rowan. “Are we going to have to go down there?” He pointed his wand at a sewer drain.

“You won’t,” Harry said, “but Briac and I may have to.”

“What was that thing, sir?” Scorpius asked. “That thing that just ran past us. Was it an animal?”

“Kind of,” Harry replied. “It’s related to a Patronus, except instead of being cast to protect the caster, it’s used to spy or suss out a situation. The animal it forms is usually something small and agile. It may belong to a parolee and be harmless, or it may belong to someone else. We don’t know yet.”

“I think this is a real problem, Harry,” said Briac. “I don’t like the looks of this.”

Harry swore under his breath. This wasn’t how he wanted to end Scorpius’s time with him and Briac. This morning should’ve been about as easy a field task as could reasonably be expected, but something had gone wrong, and he couldn’t tell yet what.

“Do you think it’s Hayward’s bastards? The blokes who’ve been poisoning those dogs?”

“I don’t know,” said Briac, “but I think we’ve got to go down and check it out.”

“Poisoning dogs, sir?” Scorpius asked.

Harry shuddered. He hated cases that involved animals or children, and this one involved both.

“There’s a group of neo-Voldemort supporters. They’ve been moving through Muggle towns poisoning people’s pet dogs. The dog doesn’t die right away; instead it brings the poison back with it to its home. Everyone that it licks dies within twelve hours.”

“That’s horrible!” said Rowan. “Where are they so we can kick their arses?”

Harry laughed. “You’ve been hanging around with Briac too much.”

“I don’t even know these people, but I hate them already,” Scorpius said fiercely. “I agree with Rowan. Let’s go kick their arses.”

“There’s no ‘let’s’ about it,” Harry said. “You two aren’t going anywhere. Am I clear?” He made his expression as stern and forbidding as he could. He needed to impress on them that this wasn’t a joke.

“He’s not being dramatic, lads,” said Briac. “This is serious. People will probably be seriously injured in this fight. If we find them, we will subdue them, and it won’t be pretty.”

“I want both of you to stand over there in that park by the oak tree and wait for us,” Harry said. “Don’t speak to anyone. Do you understand me?”

Scorpius and Rowan nodded resignedly.
“Alright, partner,” said Harry, drawing his wand. “Down we go.”

“Great,” said Briac. “I was hoping we’d spend our morning in a sewer.”

Compared to the bright August morning, the sewer was so dark that Harry was disoriented for a second and staggered against Briac.

“You alright?” Briac whispered. “I didn’t want to say anything in front of the boys, but you’ve been looking like shite lately.”

“Do you think we can discuss this later?” Harry asked. “Now shut up and tell me if you hear anything unusual.”

“Only the fear in your voice,” whispered Briac. “Look, Harry, I can handle this. You know I can. If you’re worried about the boys, Apparate them out of here, and then come back.”

Harry paused to consider his words. They made sense. Maybe he should . . . .

The Disembowling Curse came out of nowhere. Harry ducked with only an inch to spare.

“Holy shit,” said Briac. “These fuckers are playing for keeps!”

Harry grabbed Briac’s robe and pulled him back against the wall. “I can hear footsteps on either side of us. We were fucking stupid to use that drain. They were just waiting for us here.”

A Confringo smashed the bricks beside Harry’s head.

“They’re certainly not holding back,” said Briac, casting his own Blasting Curse into the dark.

“You go that way,” said Harry, “and I’ll go this way. If you get in trouble, you know how to let me know. Okay?”

“When I catch these punks, I’m going to wring their necks,” said Briac before splashing off down the tunnel.

Harry started walking in the other direction. Everything was silent, too silent. His mind was churning; he couldn’t seem to focus on what he was doing. Images kept flashing through his mind. He saw someone with a masked face seize Scorpius from behind and hold a knife to his throat. And then in a blink, he saw someone grab his arm and Apparate him to who-knows-where . . .

Fuck. He couldn’t do this. He had to make sure they were safe. He’d tell them to run as fast as they could. He’d promise he’d find them. He knew he’d be able to. His wand was attuned to five people: James, Albus, Lily, Teddy, Briac . . . and Scorpius. He turned and climbed up the iron rungs as fast as he could.

To his great relief, he saw the boys sitting on a bench, talking and laughing. Harry was just about to call to them when someone grabbed his leg and pulled.

There were at least three of them. Harry noticed they had Dark-Vision Spectacles on, which, in and of themselves, gave them a major advantage. Harry didn’t dare cast a Lumos. He’d do nothing except make himself a glowing target.

“Serpensortia!” he shouted. “Sectumsempra!”

His opponents’ Dark magic pulled on his skin, trying to separate it from the muscle underneath. A Skinning Curse.
“You realise,” he shouted into the darkness, “you’ve just earned yourselves life-sentences in Azkaban.”

There was a laugh and another Confringo!

“Expelliarmus!” Harry shouted, and two wands flew into his hand. “Ready to give yourselves up?” he yelled. “I’ll try to spare you the Kiss if you do!”

Someone laughed, and Harry felt his blood run cold. He knew that laugh from an alley outside an after-hours club. Jesus!

“It’s a shame to have to kill you,” the man called. “You were perfect. If I’d only known you were Harry Potter, I would’ve fucked you twice. Once to get myself off and again to get my revenge.”

Harry gave an ironic snort. “As your friend said so artfully to my partner, ‘get in fucking line, mate.’ If I had a Galleon for everyone who wanted their revenge against me, I’d be an even richer man than I am today. Deletrius!”

It was time to stop fucking around. Harry didn’t like to have to resort to such methods, but this situation was starting to look like it required them. He took a deep breath and concentrated on his attackers to the exclusion of everything else. Within thirty seconds, he began casting wordless spells with his spoken ones. He heard two bodies fall almost immediately.

But then the Disembowelling Curse struck him right in the stomach. Instinctively, Harry wrapped his free arm around his middle, but the Curse had been well aimed. “Expulso!” he yelled before dropping on his knees, struggling to hold everything inside his belly. The spell had been weak it merely bounced off the wall.

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck. What the hell had gone wrong? How could he be kneeling here, thigh deep in filthy water trying to literally hold himself together? The Slashing Curse hit his neck.

Holy fuck! He was going to die here!!

“Harry!!!” He heard the sloshing of footsteps in the distance. But Briac was too far away. Harry took the deepest breath he could and shouted “Expecto Patronum!”

The stag leapt forth and disappeared in the wrong direction. Harry could only stare after it in complete shock. His Patronus had never let him down before.

But then he heard the young voice calling his name and suddenly he understood. His Patronus hadn’t gone to Briac. It had gone to Scorpius!

“Oh God,” Harry sobbed. “Not him! Scorpius, for God’s sake, go back!”

The shock that rocked the tunnel and caused its sides to ripple as though they were made of rubber hit so hard that Harry’s head was thrown back, escaping the Slashing Curse that would’ve cut his throat.

“Jesus Christ!” yelled the man. “What was that?”

But before one of his mates could answer him, the shock hit again. Harry felt himself losing consciousness. Scorpius stood over him with his wand drawn. Harry hadn’t even heard a spell. He doubted there even was one for what Scorpius had just done.

Footsteps sloshed closer, and Briac cast two Sectumsempras, and nothing was left behind but the
horrible gurgle of a dying man.

Harry felt his partner cast a dozen Stitching Charms. Hopefully they’d hold until Briac could get him to St. Mungo’s. Harry’s vision swam as he lost consciousness, and the last thing he heard was a voice like an angel’s whispering in his ear. “Don’t leave me,” the voice pleaded with him. “Don’t you dare leave me!” He reached out in the direction of the words and grabbed the hand that was offered to him, hanging on for dear life.
Chapter 4

The article appeared in *The Prophet* on Valentine’s Day. In a state of shock, Scorpius read and reread it, but its contents refused to sink in as the noise in the Great Hall receded into the background.

“Bloody hell!” said Rowan. Obviously he’d just received his own copy of the paper.

Scorpius felt ill and pushed away his bowl of porridge. The mere thought of eating made him sick.

As usual, Mr. Potter was on the front page. That in itself wasn’t surprising. A week didn’t pass without a story about him or the Auror Department. It was the content of the article that made Scorpius break out in a cold sweat.

*The Saviour’s Secret Life*, the headline flashed. Beneath it was an account by an undercover reporter. Mr. Potter and Auror Gwencalon at an after-hours club, which, the article claimed was “no better than a brothel.” There was a photograph of a brown-haired man kissing a blond who was pressed up against a wall. Mr. Potter’s thigh was between the man’s legs.

“This is bloody stupid,” said Rowan. “That’s not Mr. Potter.”

But it was. Scorpius knew it was. He knew the way Mr. Potter moved. He could’ve picked him out of a crowd, disguise or no disguise.

*It is now clear why Head Auror Potter’s fairytale marriage fell apart. This reporter’s anonymous sources confirm that Ginny Potter discovered her husband’s homosexuality – a secret he had apparently been hiding for years – after she caught him with a man in flagrante delicto. Now, in the wake of his ruined domestic life, it appears that the celebrated Auror is engaging in risky backroom sexual practises, going through partners at a rate of three or four a week. This should be a wake-up call to parents everywhere whose children worship the fallen hero. Greta Greenbough is forming a grass roots campaign to lobby Chocolate Amphibians, Inc. to remove Auror Potter from their cards or face a massive boycott. . .

The Great Hall slowly fell silent as ripples of whispers swept through the student body. Scorpius wanted to jump up on the Gryffindor table and shout that it wasn’t true. How could it be? After all, it was Mr. Potter who’d told him to find someone special who would respect him.

“Now we know why poof-boy always kisses Professor Potter’s arse,” said Williams, elbowing Scorpius between his shoulder blades as he passed. “He wants to do it literally.”

“Fuck off,” said Edith dismissively. She turned back to Rowan and Scorpius. “God, I hate that git.”
Usually Scorpius would heartily agree and spend the rest of breakfast planning a prank with his friends, but not that day.

“I’ve got to go,” he said standing up and gathering his books.

“Scorpius,” said Rowan. “Don’t go. Wait until you’ve calmed down a bit . . .”

Scorpius shrugged off his plea and left the Hall as quickly as he could.

It was Wednesday, the day Mr. Potter taught DADA. Scorpius knew he’d be in his office. He often ate breakfast there with his children and sometimes Scorpius himself if his children had last-minute homework to complete.

He banged on the door.

“Who is it?” Mr. Potter’s voice sounded annoyed. Scorpius almost tip-toed away but took a deep breath instead. He had to know if it was true.

“It’s me. May I please come in, sir?”

There was silence and then a deep sigh. Mr. Potter opened the door.

“Of course,” he said and turned to walk back to his desk. “Just close the door behind you, if you would please.”

Scorpius sat down in his usual chair and accepted the cup of tea Mr. Potter offered him.

“How are classes going?” Mr. Potter asked.

Scorpius gritted his teeth. “Fine, sir.”

“And how are the clubs going. I noticed it was particularly clear last night. You must’ve been able to do a lot of star gazing.”

Scorpius squirmed with irritation. “It was alright, sir.”

“And how is Duelling Club going? You should be having a tournament soon, am I right?”

Scorpius was sure his head was going to explode if they kept up the charade for one more minute.

“Is it true, sir?” he blurted out.

Mr. Potter’s full lips became a thin line. He looked Scorpius straight in the eyes.

“Yes,” he said. “It’s true.”

Scorpius’s eyes immediately filled with tears. “Why?” he asked in a strangled voice.

Mr. Potter took a deep breath and leaned back in his chair. Clearly he’d anticipated this conversation.

“That’s a very hard question to answer,” he said. “I suppose the easy response is that I have needs and no other outlet to satisfy them.”

“But it’s wrong, sir,” Scorpius said. He didn’t even bother with the “with all due respect” shite.
Mr. Potter was quiet as he examined Scorpius’s face.

“Yeah,” he said. “It is wrong. But it’s also necessary. I have no time for a relationship and furthermore, anyone I’d be connected to romantically would become a target. I can’t let that happen. I would die from the guilt.”

“You told me, sir,” Scorpius ground out, “to find someone who cared about me . . .”

“And I stand by that,” said Mr. Potter fiercely. “This is a classic case of do what I say and not what I do. Look, Scorpius, everyone has their weaknesses. I’m just a man, not a god.”

“But you were my god, sir,” said Scorpius.

Mr. Potter gave him an alarmed look. “Please say that isn’t true.”

Scorpius shrugged. “I can’t, sir, because it is.”

Mr. Potter rose suddenly from his chair and went to stand by the window. “How can that be?” he asked his reflection. “After all this time? I thought you knew me, Scorpius. Not some made up vision that doesn’t exist.”

Scorpius was alarmed by his response and the weariness with which it was said. He wished he could retrieve his words. He wasn’t even sure that it’d been true. He felt Mr. Potter starting to slip beyond his grasp. Despite everything he’d learned that morning, he couldn’t let that happen . . .

“Please, sir,” he said in a rush. “There’s more to it than what I said. Yes, you’ve always been my role model and even my hero, but you’ve also become my friend. I do know you. I know you’re lonely, and you wish you were closer to James and Albus and Lily. I know you miss your friends from school. I know you like treacle tart more than anything. I know you cast an Unforgivable once, and I know you love your job and the way it makes you feel. So, yes, I do know you, and what’s more I’m in love with you and have been forever. I want to be with you so much it hurts. I want you to do with me what you do with those men . . .”

Mr. Potter wheeled around, and Scorpius watched with dread as his expression turned from dumbfounded to deeply dismayed. God, why had he just said those crazy secret things? He must’ve gone mad after he saw that article. This is what it must feel like to be hopelessly insane.

“Scorpius,” Mr. Potter said in a barely audible voice. “What are you saying?”

Suddenly the adrenaline that had pumping through his veins drained away, and he was left shaking and very scared and confused.

“I . . . I . . . I don’t know, sir,” he stammered. “Please forget everything I said. I’m so sorry. Please don’t hate me!”

“Of course, I don’t hate you! I’m just very . . . surprised. When were you going to tell me these things?”

“Never, sir,” Scorpius replied miserably.

Mr. Potter seemed at a complete loss as to what to do or say.

“These feelings are completely natural for a fifteen year-old,” he said as if he was reading from a book. “You’ll grow out of them, don’t worry.”
“But I don’t want to grow out of them!” Scorpius cried.

“Scorpius, I’m your teacher and your coach . . .”

“And you’re old enough to be my father,” he continued. “I know all of that already.” He was breathless and lightheaded and his face burned with mortification, but he couldn’t seem to keep his mouth shut.

“I don’t want you to kiss those men, sir!” he cried. “I want you to kiss me! You don’t love them . . .”

“No, I don’t,” said Mr. Potter. “But Scorpius, I don’t love you that way either. I can’t love you that way. You’re a child, for God’s sake!”

At the word “child,” Scorpius began to cry even though he knew it wouldn’t help his argument.

“I’m not a child, sir!”

“Oh, but you are,” said Mr. Potter. “Very much so.” He crossed the room and pulled Scorpius into a hug. “You haven’t been touched with the darkness in life as I’ve been. I’m not always a good man, Scorpius. My life has been too marred by fear and grief and loss to be wholly good.”

“I don’t care!” Scorpius wailed. “I want you to love me the way that I love you!”

Mr. Potter kissed the top of his head. They stood still until the bell rang for classes. Mr. Potter pushed him away gently but kept his hands on Scorpius’s shoulders. His gaze was as intense as Scorpius had ever seen it.

“I do love you,” he said. “I love you as much as I love anyone in my life. All I want is for you to be happy, and I worry very much that this crush you have on me will make you very unhappy.”

Scorpius had stopped crying, but Mr. Potter’s words made him start again. Clearly Mr. Potter didn’t understand anything that he’d been trying to tell him.

Mr. Potter gave him another hug. “Please,” he whispered against Scorpius’s ear. “Don’t cry. We’ll get through this, okay?”

Scorpius nodded against his shoulder just to please him, but he knew this feeling was never going to go away as long as he lived.

** * * * * * * * *

Harry rolled away from the man in his bed. Why had he brought him home? He hated bringing men home. The man stirred in his sleep and reached out, but he didn’t wake when his hand encountered an empty pillow.

Harry stood up. His back hurt, his arse hurt and his head hurt. Everything hurt. He’d drunk too much again. He made his way to the kitchen, kicking aside their pile of discarded clothes. He didn’t remember the fucking and doubted he’d even learned the man’s name before he got on his hands and knees for him. As he often did the mornings after club nights, he felt dirty and smelled of sweat and stale cigarette smoke. He pulled a carton of pumpkin juice out of the refrigerator and drank it without a glass. He would’ve thought he’d slow down after The Prophet’s article, but in fact he’d only got worse. It was as though he was daring the universe to take its revenge. Some days it felt like all he did was fight and fuck.

The breeze blowing through the window was warm and smelled of the roses on his neighbour’s
balcony. It was June. Exams at Hogwarts would be finishing soon, and he wouldn’t be teaching again until September. He usually found the thought rather sad, but not this year.

Things had become awkward between him and Scorpius after Scorpius’s confession. Harry had done everything he could to lessen the tension, but it still remained. Not obviously, but in subtle ways. Harry had used to think nothing about giving Scorpius private duelling lessons or inviting him to his office for breakfast or tea. But everything had changed. Now Harry avoided being alone with him when he could help it. Not that Harry didn’t still see him – it was just that he now made a concerted effort to invite one of Scorpius’s friends to join them, which always involved having to avoid Scorpius’s eyes. He knew what Harry was doing, but was too shell-shocked by their conversation on Valentine’s Day to say anything. The one good side of the situation was that Harry had got to know Rowan and Edith – not just as students but as people. He approved of them heartily and made a point of telling Scorpius so although not much seemed to cheer him up.

In hindsight, Harry realised he should’ve seen this coming, but instead it had taken him by complete surprise. He felt like an irresponsible idiot. He’d known that Scorpius was gay. He’d known that Scorpius cared for him greatly, and of course he knew that Scorpius was fifteen. Harry could remember when he was fifteen. It’d been a confusing and difficult time to say the least. He remember having feelings for his God father that had made him feel very uncomfortable indeed.

And then there were the dreams . . . his dreams. Had he been unconsciously giving permission? Had he been unconsciously wearing his desire on his sleeve for Scorpius to see and – correctly – interpret?

It was going to be hard to explain and even harder for Scorpius to understand, but Harry knew he needed to create distance between them, and summer seemed like the perfect time. There’d be no invitation to Switzerland or interning with the Auror Department. This summer, Scorpius needed to be on his own. Boys’ hearts were famous for being fickle. By the time September came, it would be much easier to recreate their relationship into something more formal.

More acceptable.

Harry had only just barely booted the man out of his flat when his daughter stepped out of his fireplace. He went to her and drew her into his arms. She smelled of the perfume Ginny used to wear when she was Lily’s age. It was not an unpleasant smell.

Lily on the other hand didn’t think the same thing of him.

“Eewww!” she said, pulling away from him. “You smell terrible!”

Harry sniffed under his arms and wrinkled his nose. “Yeah, I do, don’t I?” he agreed. “How ‘bout I go take a shower while you make yourself at home . . .”

“. . . does that mean I can look at your gay porn?”

Harry goggled at her. She’d been saying things like this since the stupid article in The Prophet and the awkward conversation he’d had with his children afterward. James and Albus were almost talking to him again, but never about his being gay. Lily, on the other hand, couldn’t seem to stop mentioning it. Both extremes were disconcerting.

“You won’t find any,” he said, “so don’t bother looking. All you’re likely to discover if you go rooting around are dirty clothes and a few Doxies.”
During the summer, Sunday mornings were Lily mornings, and he’d gamely do whatever she wanted. When she was young that usually meant visiting Hagrid who Harry sometimes felt she loved more than him. Lately, she’d been more interested in having brunch at The Dragon’s Nest Hotel and then going to the park and talking in an endless stream while they fed the ducks.

“I think I’m going to try the avocado frittata this morning,” Lily announced as they stepped out of the Hotel’s ornate public Floo.

Harry gave his name to the concierge, and they were immediately seated at the table overlooking Druid’s Street that Lily liked the most because of the view it afforded of people walking by wearing their Sunday robes.

“I thought you didn’t like avocado,” Harry said, pulling his napkin from the serpentine napkin ring.

“Well, I do,” she said haughtily, shaking back her red hair. “There’re a lot of things you don’t know about me, Father.”

Harry made a face at her. “What’s all this ‘Father’ business? What happened to ‘Dad’? And what do you mean there’re lots of things I don’t know about you?”

Lily tried to look mysterious, but the façade only lasted a few seconds before she burst into her characteristic giggle. She glanced at her hand, inviting Harry’s gaze to follow.

There was a small, but pretty, amethyst ring on her finger.

“Er!” Harry exclaimed eloquently. “What’s? . . . whose ? Please tell me your Mum gave that to you.”

Lily couldn’t contain herself a moment longer. “No, silly,” she said (a title he much preferred to “Father”). “Morley gave it to me just before the End of Year Ball. I’d thought he’d never get it together to give me a ring, but Margaret told me he was just waiting to give it to me at the right moment, and oh my God, it was so perfect, Daddy. You should’ve been there. He put it in the corsage he bought for me, and all my friends were there and got to see how sweet he was, and Mum says he can come with us to Switzerland . . .”

“Hang on, hang on,” said Harry, holding up his hand. “There are far too many things to respond to. Slow down and let’s start with the most important: How old is he?”

Lily blushed. “Now, don’t have a cow . . .”

Harry didn’t like the sound of that at all. “That’ll depend on your answer,” he replied.

“He’s . . . he’s sixteen . . . .”

“HE’S WHAT??!!”

There was a sudden silence around them. Harry didn’t have to look to know that everyone in the dining room was staring at him.

“I knew you’d have a cow,” said Lily, “and it’s not fair. James is sixteen, and he dated that first-year . . .”

“I’m not having a . . . wait a minute, what did you just say? James went out with a first-year?? What is Hogwarts these days? A training ground for paedophiles? . . .”

Instead of “having a cow” in turn, Lily broke down laughing. “I’m going to tell James you called
him a paedophile.”

“Well, I’m sure there are plenty of names he’d like to call me,” Harry replied grimly.

“Come on, Daddy,” she said, clinking her fork against his glass to recall his attention. “She was a first-year, but she wasn’t eleven. She came from Albania and was thirteen. She had to start as a first-year because she hadn’t learned to speak English yet.”

“Oh, I see,” said Harry. “Well, I guess thirteen and sixteen is better than eleven and sixteen . . .” He shuddered. “But not by much. How long did that go on for, and why didn’t I hear of it?”

“It lasted only one term, and you didn’t hear about it because James doesn’t want to talk to you.”

Harry nodded sadly. It was true.

“Well, back to the subject of sixteen year-old Morley. He’s almost out of school and you’ll only be starting your third year . . .”

Lily rolled her eyes and began to tear apart her paper napkin and roll it into little balls which she then dropped into her water glass. “Daddy,” she said. “It’s not like I’m a child.”

What was it with these children insisting they weren’t precisely that?

“Alright, well, we’ll revisit that topic later. Now, what did you say about Switzerland?”

What he really wanted to ask was ‘what the fuck was up with Ginny for inviting this whoever-he-was to Switzerland without talking to him first?’ But he never made such demands on his children. Their parents’ issues should be theirs as little as humanly possible.

“Mum said Morley can come to Switzerland for a few days. She said you wouldn’t care because you’re always off with Scorpius Malfoy . . .”

Harry blanched. Had such things always been so obvious? He’d thought his mornings with Scorpius were of little note, especially since he spent the rest of the day flying with his children while Scorpius read or went out walking on his own . . .

“Well, Scorpius won’t be joining us this year,” Harry said, feeling a twinge on the boy’s behalf. The absence of an invitation was going to feel like a slap in the face, but it had to be done. Harry couldn’t reshape their relationship into something safer and more formal if he invited Scorpius to live under his roof for a week, sleeping in a room just down the hall from his . . .

Lily looked surprised. “He won’t? Why not?”

Harry wanted to ask why she cared one way or another. None of his children seemed to want to have anything to do with Scorpius.

“Because I’m not inviting him.”

“Are you angry with him?”

Harry shook his head. “No, not at all,” he replied. “It’s just that Scorpius has friends and family of his own. He doesn’t need me . . .”

“Well, anyway, what do you think about my ring? Isn’t it beautiful?”

Harry lifted the hand she offered him. The ring was lovely, indeed, and obviously quite old.
“Ah,” he said. “I get it now. He’s from an old Pure-blood family. Hence the silly ‘Father’ business and the interest in avocados . . .”

Lily nodded exaggeratedly. “And he’s the cutest boy at school.”

“So, you’re ‘going out’ or whatever it is you kids say these days?”

“We’ve been together since Valentine’s Day,” she replied. “We love each other.”

Oh dear lord. “You’re thirteen for God’s sake!”

Lily crossed her arms over her chest and glared at him. “And what do you mean by that?” she asked as though challenging him to a duel.

“I just mean that you’re far too young to know what love is . . . .”

Harry stopped when he felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned around to find Hermione with her own daughter. Harry stood up to give her a hug. They rarely saw one another since the falling out he and Ron had had, but they still met for dinner a couple times a month behind Ron’s back.

“Hermione,” he said fondly and gave her a kiss on the cheek. “Hi Rose,” he said, but Rose turned away to talk to Lily.

Hermione gave her a sharp nudge.

“Hi, Mr. Potter,” she said mechanically.

Harry smiled at her. She was her daddy’s girl, and that was okay. He liked to think that Lily would respond the same way to one of his enemies . . . not that he and Ron were “enemies” exactly, just . . .

“Would you like to join us?” Harry asked. “We’ve already eaten, but it’d be nice to have a cup of tea with you . . .”

“Or more likely a Bloody Mary,” said Hermione. “It’s already one of those days and it’s not even noon yet.”

“Mum,” said Rose pleadingly. “Do we . . . ?”

“Lily, sweetie,” said Hermione. “Maybe you and Rose would like to go see the Unicorns. There are a couple of new foals . . .”

Lily brightened, and Harry smiled. She’d looked like a young woman when she’d held out her hand to show him the ring, but now she was his little Lily again.

“Can I, Fath . . . I mean, Dad?” she asked excitedly.

“Oh course,” he said. “As long as you promise not to use your last name to get their owner to give you one! Remember the dreaded Fwooper. . . ?”

“. . . I won’t,” she said, already tugging at Rose’s arm. “Bye Daddy, bye Auntie.”

Hermione took off her spring cloak and sat down.

“Sorry about that,” she said. “Things have got even worse since that very unfortunate article came out. You know I wish so much that that hadn’t happened, Harry. Things were starting to look better now that Ginny’s engaged to Peter . . .”
Harry scrubbed his face with his hands. “I know,” he said. “You don’t have to tell me. That fucking article has made everything in my life even messier than it already was. . . . Speaking of which . . .”

“Oh no,” said Hermione, grimacing. “I really don’t like the sound of that segue.”

Harry shared her grimace. The segue really was rather unfortunate . . .

“Yes?” Hermione prodded, taking a long sip from her Bloody Mary.

“Well, I was just thinking about work and all its messiness,” Harry said, regaining his composure. “And I was wondering if I could ask a favour from you?”

“I’ll consider it when I hear what it is,” Hermione said cagily with a wink over the rim of her glass.

“I have a very promising student who I’ve been mentoring over the years, and I was wondering if he could apprentice with you in the Department of Mysteries this summer. I know your Department doesn’t encourage school-age apprenticeships, but I wouldn’t ask if he wasn’t so talented . . .”

“If he’s as talented as you say he is, then why doesn’t he apprentice with you and Briac?”

Harry took a deep breath. It never paid to lie to Hermione.

“He did last year, and it was a great success, but I can’t extend the offer to him this year. I’ve been rather like a . . . a . . . father figure in his life, I guess, and he’s fifteen and as volatile and confused as all fifteen year-olds are . . .”

“Trust me, I understand,” said Hermione. “I remember Teddy and that girl . . .”

Harry shuddered. “Let’s not talk about that,” he said emphatically, “but, yes, he’s an emotionally immature boy, and I hadn’t thought about . . . I didn’t mean . . .”

“So what you’re so eloquently trying to tell me is that he has a crush on you.”

Harry nodded, relieved that he didn’t have to spell it all out in detail. That was the wonderful thing about Hermione. She just got things.

“I need to establish some very clear boundaries,” he said. “I don’t want this crush going on any longer than it appears that it has. He’s got enough obstacles to overcome without . . .”

“Ah,” said Hermione. “He’s Draco’s son, isn’t he? I’d heard that you’d made him a pet project . . .”

Harry frowned. “I would prefer not to think of Scorpius as some kind of ‘project.’ He’s a child with extraordinary abilities who needs a little guidance and mentoring, nothing more and nothing less.”

“I know you wouldn’t be asking this of me if you didn’t think it was really important,” Hermione said. “I’ll think about it, but I’d like to meet him first. If he’s anything like Draco . . .”

“Not in the ways you’re thinking about,” said Harry.

“Well, then have him meet with me after exams are over.”

Harry felt like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. “Thank you,” he said. “I’m confident that you won’t regret it. He’s very bright; actually he reminds me of you in many ways.”

“Which may be a good or a bad thing,” Hermione said with a wink as her third Bloody Mary popped onto the table in front of her.
Scorpius was still seething when he met Mrs. Weasley at the Sup-a-Cup café near the Ministry building, but he tried his hardest to hide it from her. After all, it wasn’t her fault that he was angry. In fact, if circumstances were different, he’d be over the moon with happiness that she was considering taking him on as her assistant for the summer. He’d never even heard before of a student being offered an apprenticeship with an Unspeakable! But he knew why he was really there on this unusually chilly June afternoon holding a mug of Prince of Wales tea and talking about his classes and exams and such. He wasn’t an idiot.

“You must be top of you class, then?”

Scorpius nodded. “As long as I did well on the Runes exam, ma’am” he replied.

“Ah, Runes,” said Mrs. Weasley. “I remember it well. It was one of my favourite classes. So you’ve covered the Elder Futhark; I imagine you’ll start in the fall on Lepontic. What year did you say you’ll be in?”

“Fifth year, ma’am. But I’ll be sixteen on October 23rd. I started late.”

“Yes, I’ve heard the story,” Mrs. Weasley replied. “Well, fifth year is about the time you start learning the northern Alpine runes, if I remember correctly. Here, have another scone.” She handed him a plate. “So, I understand that Harry has been teaching you duelling for a number of years.”

“That’s correct, ma’am,” Scorpius replied in as cool and disinterested a voice as he could muster. “Mr. Potter has been very kind to me since I was a child.”

Mrs. Weasley nodded. “So, I’ve heard.” Her eyes seemed to take in more than the surface of what she was looking at. Scorpius blushed.

“Harry . . . I mean, Mr. Potter, lives his life very intensely,” she said. “I think few people understand just how intensely. I’ve known him since I was eleven. He seldom realises the effect he has on people. He’s a force of nature, I like to say when people come to me asking about him – which happens a lot as you can imagine. Sometimes I think of him as a tornado, but he never seems to be able to see the wreckage he leaves behind. He’s always surprised when someone makes him stop long enough to look at it. He doesn’t mean to do it, it’s just the effect he has on us mere mortals.”

Scorpius was silent. Her words sounded like an apology for Mr. Potter’s abandonment, but he wasn’t ready to forgive. She gave him a wan smile.

“You come to me very highly recommended. I’ve spoken to all of your teachers, and they all say that you aren’t only brilliant, but you’re diligent as well. Those are precisely the traits you need to have to make a good Unspeakable – along with discretion, of course. If this summer with my Department teaches you nothing else, it will teach you discretion – a characteristic that you’ll find very useful in life.”

Scorpius was still silent. Everything she said to him sounded as though it had a double meaning.

“By all of this, I mean to say that I would like to offer you a position. Do you accept?”

Scorpius bowed his head in recognition of the high honour she’d just paid him. “I gratefully accept, ma’am,” he said.

Mrs. Weasley laughed. “You’re rather serious for a boy of your age. Let’s see if we can give you the substance to justify such gravity. Now, would you like to use the Ministry’s Floo or do you ride the
“We don’t have a Floo, Ma’am,” Scorpius replied.

“Well then,” said Mrs. Weasley, “I’ll walk with you to the nearest stop . . .”

Scorpius looked at her closely, and she paused mid-sentence. “Ma’am, will you please take me to see Mr. Potter?”

Mrs. Weasley’s eyes widened for a moment, but otherwise she showed no reaction to his request.

“He might be busy,”

“Then I’ll just leave.”

“He might not be there.”

“Then I’ll wait for him.”

“He might think it would be a good idea not to see you.”

“Then he’ll just have to tell me to go away.”

Mrs. Weasley’s eyes twinkled for an instant before they returned to indifferent pleasantness.

“Alright,” she said. “Come with me.”

“Ah, Mr. Malfoy,” said Catherine. “It’s nice to see you again.”

Scorpius smiled. “Is Auror Potter in?”

“Yes, I do believe he is. You caught him in-between appointments. Shall I let him know you’re here?”

Scorpius nodded. “Yes, please.”

Mr. Potter had already put on his I’m-an-Auror expression by the time Scorpius entered his office and closed the door. He felt his stomach sink. Maybe this was a very bad idea.

“Scorpius, this is a lovely surprise. Please take a seat.”

Scorpius was more than happy to obey when he realised how much he was shaking.

“Did you have a pleasant lunch with Mrs. Weasley?”

“Yes, thank you for asking, sir.” Two could play at this game.

“Did she offer you a position?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And did you accept?”

“Yes, sir.”
“Well, then that’s grand, isn’t it?”

“When do you leave for Switzerland, sir?” It was bold, but Scorpius didn’t care. As far as he was concerned, Mr. Potter was being a coward.

“In two weeks,” Mr. Potter replied as he shuffled through random papers without looking at him.

“That sounds lovely, sir,” Scorpius replied. “I hear the weather’s . . .”

Mr. Potter stood up suddenly and slammed his hand down on his desk so hard it made his mug of coffee tip over. His face was red.

“God damn it, Scorpius!” he shouted. “Don’t make this any more difficult than it already is. I’ve gone out of my way to make things up to you . . .”

“Oh and there I was thinking that I got the position with the Unspeakables on my own merit,” Scorpius replied, standing up in turn.

“Don’t play games,” Mr. Potter replied, trying to reign in his emotions, but he was still standing with his fists on his desk.

“With all due respect, sir, I don’t believe that it’s me who’s playing games. I’ve been honest with you; I’ve told you how I feel . . .”

“This has got to stop,” Mr. Potter said through gritted teeth. “I don’t want this to take over our relationship.” He came out from behind his desk. His blood-red robe was suddenly the only colour in the room – perhaps even in the whole world.

“Please, Scorpius,” he pleaded. “This makes me feel like a dirty old man! You’re young, but so am I. I’m only forty-one, for God’s sake! I’m too young to feel this way . . .”

As though watching himself from across the room, Scorpius stepped forward to close the distance between them.

“Feel what way, sir?” he asked quietly.

Mr. Potter was breathing fast and shallow through his nose. His hands were shaking. “Don’t make me have to push you away,” he said. “I don’t want to, but you’re going to give me no choice.”


And with that, he stepped forward and pulled Mr. Potter into his arms. They were nearly the same height, so all he had to do was lift his chin . . .

. . . and kiss him on the mouth.

The moment seemed to go on forever. He felt Mr. Potter’s hands grip his shoulders and his lips move in surprise and then protest. He felt himself being pushed away, but he also felt the mouth under his open. Scorpius had never been kissed before, but he instinctively knew one when he felt one and so did his body. He gasped and pressed back into Mr. Potter’s hands as, for one fleeting instant, his desire was accepted and returned ten-fold.

It blew his mind to pieces.

When Mr. Potter finally managed to separate himself from Scorpius’s embrace, he staggered back against his desk and caught himself with his hands. His eyes were round and his face was white from
shock. His voice shook when he spoke.

“Mr. Malfoy,” he said. “You should leave right now.”

Scorpius knew his face was just as white and his eyes just as round. He felt the formality and cold anger in Mr. Potter’s voice and flinched. What on earth had he been thinking?!

“But you kissed me back!”

Mr. Potter was silent, his chest heaving beneath his brilliant robe.

“...Please. Don’t do this,” he pleaded. “You have no idea what you’re playing at.”

Scorpius took a deep breath. “But I do, sir,” he said as confidently as he could even when the last thing he felt was confidence. “I’m not as pure and innocent as you might think. I may not be experienced, but I know how it feels to...”

Mr. Potter covered his ears and shook his head in an exaggerated way that would be comical under any other circumstances.

“Scorpius,” he said after a moment. “Please go. Have a good summer with Hermione, and I will see you in class in September.”

Scorpius heard the finality in his voice and felt his nascent—childish—hope snuff out. He was hard and humiliated and suddenly very very lonely. Without another word, he turned to leave.

* * * * * * * *

The man on top of him grunted and collapsed, pinning Harry, face-down, to the filthy mattress. This was the second time this week he’d been there, and neither time had he been able to come. The same thing had happened the week before and the week before that.

It was starting to drive him crazy.

Before the man could start to snore, Harry heaved him off his back and sat up. He felt empty and restless—a dangerous state of affairs for someone with an addiction to risk-taking.

The fight that left him with his most recent injuries didn’t even involve magic, or genuine magical law enforcement. He’d gone for a walk two nights ago. He’d been unable to work and unable to sleep and he thought he might be cracking up. The two blokes had been on him before his mind could catch up with what was happening. At first he’d thought they were assassins, but then quickly realised they were nothing but Muggle robbers demanding his wallet.

He should’ve stopped once he’d incapacitated them, but the connection between his brain and his fist was tenuous at best. It took a desperate plea for him to stagger back against the wall and look at his hands, cut and bloody.

“You’re a crazy fucking menace,” Briac said the next day. “I don’t know what your latest problem is, but you’d better work it out soon. You’re too old to be behaving like this.”

“Fuck you,” Harry had said, and meant it. “I never asked to be made Mister-high-and-fucking-mighty Head Auror...”

“I’m not talking about your title, you arsehole. I’m talking about your age. Last I knew you were about to be forty-two in a week, and you’re behaving like a first-year recruit with a serious fucking
attitude problem. What if you’d killed those blokes?”

Harry had shrugged and turned to look out the window. He’d already asked himself the same question and come up with no good answers.

The man stood up and began pulling his trousers on. Harry watched him disinterestedly. What had he been thinking? The man wasn’t even his type.

Harry was still pulling up the zip in his jeans when he walked back out into the main lounge. Briac was at the bar and he offered Harry a cigarette without even asking if he wanted one. Harry took it and lit it with a snap of his fingers.

“Ohhh, you’re so very suave,” said Briac. “Is that how you land all those straight blokes?”

Harry laughed and ordered a whisky. “Straight blokes like me because I bottom. It’s really that simple.” He scanned the room aimlessly until he felt Briac kick him in the shin.

“Stop that,” he said. “It’s fucking rude.”

Harry shook his head as if he’d just woke up. “Wha . . . ?”

“You’re always looking around when I’m trying to talk to you these days. It hurts my feelings,”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Maybe I’ve seen enough of your ugly mug lately. That was one long fucking stake-out last week.”

“Methinks you are looking for someone,” said Briac, draining his glass and pushing it toward the bartender for another. “Either that or you’re getting paranoid. Remember you slammed into that witch yesterday in the Ministry’s lobby? Not very observant for an Auror. What – or who – are you constantly looking for, pray tell?”

“Why do you always go all Shakespeare on me when you get drunk?” Harry asked, avoiding the question as artfully as he could.

“Why are you obsessing over a schoolboy?”

Harry froze. Did he really just hear that come out of his partner’s mouth or was he imagining things? He cleared his throat and took a sip of whisky.

“What did you say?” he asked as casually as he could.

“You heard me, Harry.” Suddenly Briac’s voice was serious. Harry felt broadsided.

“I swear to God, I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said.

“That’s probably true, actually. I don’t think you even know what you’re doing or why you’re doing it.”

Harry lit another cigarette. His mind was reeling.

“It’s Scorpius, Harry. If you slowed down enough to think for a second, you’d realise it’s true.”

Harry was still too shocked to respond.

“You’ve seen him a couple times when we’ve been in the Ministry café. I’ve seen you notice him. You’re scanning the crowd over and over again only listening to what I’m saying with half your
brain, and then whoa! you see him, and your gaze locks like a hawk’s. It’s the same look I see when
we’re in the field and you’re searching for something.”

Harry swallowed. Yes, he’d kept an eye out for Scorpius since he’d started his apprenticeship with
Hermione, but it wasn’t out of anything more than curiosity and fondness and the hope that he was
doing okay. Or so he told himself.

“You go on thinking that,” said Briac. “Clearly, you have to for your own sanity.”

“I don’t know what you’re trying to say,” Harry replied. “I told you what I did when he tried to kiss
me. You know that I’ve taken every step possible to put a healthy distance between us. If I wanted to
do . . . to molest him or something, don’t you think I would’ve invited him to Switzerland?”

Briac drained his glass again, and all of a sudden Harry realised that he’d been waiting for a chance
to discuss this.

“I don’t think you want to molest him,” said Briac. “I think you love him . . .”

“Well, that’s no big secret! Of course, I love him! He’s a jewel in a heap of coal as far as I’m
concerned. I want him to be safe and happy . . .”

“And keeping him ‘safe and happy’ is why, despite your own desires, you’re keeping him at a
distance. Because you aren’t safe, are you Harry.”

“I have never . . .”

Briac put a hand on his shoulder. Harry tried to shrug it off, but Briac wouldn’t let him.

“I know you’ve never done anything. And I know you’re trying to do everything in your utmost
power to keep it that way. But, Harry, you need to at least admit it to yourself . . .”

“Admit what?!?” His voice was rising but he couldn’t help it. This wasn’t a conversation he wanted to
have at two in the morning with too many whiskies in his blood and some anonymous bloke’s spunk
up his arse.

“Admit that you feel more for him than you think you do. That’s all I’m going to say; but it’s like
you’ve always told me – a man in denial is a dangerous man, indeed.”

“I would never . . .”

“I know that,” said Briac kindly, pulling Harry close and resting his forehead against Harry’s – it was
the way they often reconnected with themselves and each other after a fight. Two heads. Two hearts.
“And the best way to keep it that way is to know yourself. Stop denying yourself little innocent
things. Go find him. Take him out for tea. Ask him how his summer’s going. You know it’s all you
can think about – even if you can’t admit it to yourself. Avoiding him entirely and then obsessing
about him is a recipe for disaster – for both of you.”

Harry felt himself slump against his partner. He was exhausted and confused . . and afraid.

“Will you go with me?” he asked.

“You know I’d walk into a dragon’s lair with you, Harry Potter. Where are we going?”

Harry reached into the pocket of his jeans and pulled out a folded invitation.

* * * * * * *
Boyne Manor was perched on a cliff on the northernmost coast of County Antrim. Muggles saw it as the remains of Dunluce castle, but in fact it was a vast estate with a sweeping lawn and formal gardens. The day sparkled, and the breeze off the sea was heavy with the smell of salt. One couldn’t have asked for a more perfect day for a birthday party.

He was insane. He should’ve never accepted the invitation. Rowan couldn’t have possibly imagined that he’d actually show up. He should’ve sent his regrets and a tasteful gift. He and Briac should be out in the field. Instead they were here among strangers as Harry walked through the crowd, straining for a glimpse of a blond-haired boy.

“Auror Potter!” cried a wizard in a blue robe who Harry was sure he’d met somewhere. “Lovely to see you. Isn’t it a fine day?”

“It is,” Harry agreed, grabbing his sixth glass of champagne from a passing tray. Dear Merlin, who was this man? Reading his thought, Briac shrugged.

“I saw the article in The Prophet about your efforts to unite . . .”

He knew he was being inexcusably bad-mannered, but Harry couldn’t stop scanning the crowd. Hopefully the little man would think he and Briac were there as Aurors to provide security for the event. They were wearing their robes after all.

“. . . I’m quite sure you will be able to convince the Minister . . .”

There were too many people milling about, and the sun was in his eyes.

“. . . after all, you were able to stop the illegal importation of . . .”

Briac was nodding and smiling with a vacant look on his face, when suddenly Harry caught the familiar spark in his eyes. He followed his gaze. Finally. A glimpse of golden blond hair. Harry reached out his hand.

“Well, it was lovely to see you again,” he said, shaking the wizard’s hand. “Excuse me; I’ve just noticed someone I need to speak to.”

“Quite alright,” said the wizard. “I was an honour to have a chance to speak with you, Auror Potter. . . . Now, Auror Gwencalon . . . .”

Harry felt terribly guilty as he turned away. He’d been rude to someone who obviously had respect for him and now he owed Briac God-only-knew how many favours. God, he should never have come here.

He was nudging his way through the crowd when he encountered Rowan.

“Mr. Potter,” he cried. “I’m so pleased you could make it!”

Harry stopped to shake his hand. “Wouldn’t have missed it. Happy birthday.”

Rowan grinned, but there was something in his eyes that made Harry take note. “You’re very kind, sir,” he said.

Harry reached out and put a hand on his shoulder. “Something’s bothering you.”

Rowan’s grin only faltered a little bit. “No, sir,” he said. “Everything’s fine.”

“Really?” Harry asked, his eyes narrowing. “I don’t think you’re telling me the truth.”
Rowan glanced around quickly and then leaned toward Harry. “It’s Scorpius,” he whispered. “He’s had far too much to drink, and he’s acting rather oddly. He told me to bugger off just now.”

“Where is he?” Harry asked with a frown. “I’ll go talk to him.”

“When I left him, he was over by the fountain talking to some man I’ve never seen before,” Rowan said, but then he smiled as though he was embarrassed of his words. “But then again, I don’t know half of the people here.”

Harry nodded distractedly. “I’ll see you later, Rowan,” he said. “If you see Scorpius before I do, tell him I’m here and that I’m looking for him.”

The fountain seemed to be a gathering place for men of a certain age and persuasion. Harry immediately recognised their signals. Handsome and well-dressed, they were clearly scanning the crowd for prospects.

But Scorpius was nowhere to be found.

Harry walked up to a wizard wearing the latest cut of robes. “Have you seen a boy with blond hair recently?” he asked. “He’s nearly my height with grey eyes.”

The man smiled and winked, and Harry’s blood suddenly ran cold.

“He’s off with McIntyre,” he said.

“When you say ‘off,’” said Harry, “what do you mean exactly?”

The man winked again. Harry curled his hands into fists to stop himself from grabbing the man and shaking him till his teeth rattled in his skull.

“There’re a good number of unused bedrooms in that place,” he said with a nod. “But don’t worry, Mack doesn’t go for pleasantries. He’ll be out again in a few minutes.”

Harry had no intention of waiting for “a few minutes.” He drew his wand and made his way to the Manor’s front door. His heart was pounding unevenly. If what he thought was happening was actually happening, there wasn’t much time . . .

The corridors stretched on forever, but Harry’s wand knew to look for Scorpius’s magical signature, and it led him upstairs and down corridors and through parlours and drawing rooms until he drew to a stop before one particular closed door in a hall with dozens of them.

He dreaded what he’d see when he opened the door, but the longer he waited, the worse it would be. He knocked hard and abruptly, just as he did when he and Briac were visiting the homes of parolees.

“Bugger off,” said a voice. “Go find your own bloody room.”

Harry wasn’t going to play games. “Open the door,” he said, “or I’m going to blast it open.”

“Yeah, whatever. Fuck off, mate. We’re busy,” the voice replied.

Harry didn’t even have to say anything or even point his wand or even think a full conscious thought. The door broke off its hinges in a cloud of splinters.
“Jesus!” the man cried. “What the . . . ?”

But Harry didn’t give a shit about him. All he could see was the beautiful boy on his hands and knees naked in the middle of a bare mattress.

Scorpius.

With what seemed like an audible snap, Harry’s attention turned to the man standing behind Scorpius with his trousers pulled down to his knees and his prick bobbing in front of him. As far as Harry could tell in the split second before he completely lost his mind, there was no condom or lube in sight. The man had been about to take Scorpius unprepared and unprotected.

There was a lot of glass in the room. There were two windows, an enormous mirror and a crystal chandelier. All of them exploded into glittering dust as Harry drew a deep breath. The man dropped to the floor, covering his head and screaming.

“Incarcerous!” Harry shouted. “Expelliarmus!”

The man turned his head to see who it was who’d suddenly disarmed him and wrapped him mummy-like in ropes as thick as his wrist.

“Harry Potter!” he exclaimed. “Oh my God, I’m so sorry. I didn’t know . . . I had no idea . . .”

Harry knew his face was twisted into something feral and ugly, but he couldn’t help it. He’d never been this enraged in his whole life.

“You didn’t know what?” he snarled. “That the boy you were about to rape . . .”

“Rape?!” the man squeaked. “I haven’t raped anyone!”

“He’s fifteen,” Harry yelled, slapping the man so hard with the back of his hand that blood from his nose flew far enough to land on the mattress. “That very fact by itself makes you a rapist and a paedophile! Add to that your use of force to get him . . .”

“But I didn’t use force,” the man whimpered pitifully. “It was him who asked me to fuck . . .”

Harry almost blacked out for a moment at the word “fuck” used in conjunction with Scorpius in any way, shape or form. When he regained control, he was strangling the man with both his hands, fully intent on killing him.

“Stop!” Scorpius cried. “Please stop! He’s telling the truth! I did ask him to . . . to . . . to fuck me!”

“He told me he was seventeen!” the man spluttered as he gasped for breath.

Harry stood up and staggered against a desk. His head was reeling as though he was drunk. The words refused to sink in . . .

“I’m . . . You’re . . .” he stammered. “You’re under arrest. Go with me quietly or I will be forced to Stun you . . .”

The man broke down sobbing. “Auror Potter,” he pleaded. “I have a wife and family. They don’t know . . .”

“Know what?!! That you like to fuck little boys?”

The man sobbed harder. “I swear to God, I didn’t know,” he said. “You have to believe me. If I’d
any idea that he was fifteen! God, what have I done? I had too much to drink. I . . . I . . . He came on to me . . .”

Harry kicked him in the ribs.

“Don’t you dare try to blame this on him, you fucking bastard! He’s a child! And how old are you?”

“Thirty,” the man wailed. “Just last week. Please, Auror Potter, sir! Have mercy!”

Harry drew back his hand again but then he felt someone grab his arm and try to pull him back.

Scorpius’s eyes were bleary and his hair was tangled. He looked like he’d recently been ill or would be in the near future.

“Please, sir,” he begged drunkenly. “Let him go. It’s not his fault.”

Harry yanked his arm away. “Don’t try to apologise for your abuser,” he snapped. “This bloke deserves to be locked away in Azkaban one year for every year he is older than you. What would that make his sentence?” Harry pretended to count on his fingers. “Ah yes, fifteen years! As many years as you’ve been alive on this earth!”

Harry turned back to the nameless man cringing before him. “Azkaban is too good for you,” he said coldly. “I should kill you right now with your sick perverted prick still hanging out.”

The man became incoherent with sobs and pleas for mercy. Harry turned to really look at Scorpius for the first time since he’d entered the room. He was crying and sniffling like the frightened child he was. Harry moaned with grief, as he tore off his robe and wrapped it around Scorpius’s nakedness.

“Please, sir,” he said in a hitching whisper. “Don’t hurt him anymore. You’re scaring me.”

Harry pulled him close and kissed his forehead. “You never have to be afraid of me,” he said softly. “I would never hurt you.”

“I . . . I don’t want to have to go before the Wizengamot and testify . . .” Scorpius whimpered.

Harry glanced at the man. “Actually,” he said. “I wasn’t planning on taking this bastard to trial. I was thinking more along the lines of . . . extracting a confession and guilty plea. Briac and I can be very persuasive . . .”

The man wailed as Harry raised his hand again.

“Please don’t, sir,” Scorpius pleaded. “Please just let him go.”

As soon as he had Scorpius safe in his arms, Harry felt the rage slowly seep from his veins. He looked at the sorry, broken sight before him.

“Finite,” he said with a wave of his hand. The man crawled toward the door. “You’re lucky,” Harry said. “I could’ve killed you without a second thought. Remember that.”

The man nodded as he hauled himself to his feet using the blasted doorjamb as support.

Harry stood up. He was trembling and sick. Slowly, as though he was in a dream, he Banished the blood. He didn’t trust himself to look at Scorpius again until he had crossed to the other side of the room.

“What in God’s name were you thinking?” he ground out. “Did you even know that bloke?”
Scorpius began to cry again

“You were drunk,” Harry said.

Scorpius nodded.

“You flirted with the men out by the fountain.”

Scorpius nodded again.

“And one of them took you up on your offer.”

Scorpius dropped his head into his hands.

“What did he do to you?” Harry asked, his voice sounding low and dangerous even to his own ears.

“Did he kiss you?”

Scorpius nodded without looking up.

Harry wanted to punch something and so he did. The last shard of mirror shattered in its frame. Scorpius cried out and drew himself into the tiniest ball possible.

“Did he take your clothes off or did you?” Harry asked savagely. He had long since ceased wondering if he was trying to hurt Scorpius or himself with this interrogation.

“He . . . did,” Scorpius stammered.

“Did he touch you?”

Scorpius nodded. The plaster wall behind him suddenly cracked into a spider’s web.

“Did he make you suck him?”

The blood was running over Harry’s hand and down his forearm. When he seized Scorpius’s chin and forced him to look in his eyes, he left blood stains on the tear-streaked cheeks.

Scorpius nodded, but then quickly added that it hadn’t worked because he’d thrown up. He pointed to the pool of vomit beside an armchair.

“So when you couldn’t suck him off, he decided to fuck you, and you were going to let him. Jesus, Scorpius! How could you just give yourself to some stranger?”

Scorpius suddenly uncurled from his ball.

“How?” he yelled, his voice slurring. “You’re asking me that question when you do it every night as far as I can tell? I did all of this for you! Because I thought if I wasn’t a virgin anymore that you wouldn’t be so . . . so . . . fucking hung-up about being with me! I thought if I had some experience, you’d . . .”

Harry crossed the room in two strides and to his shame watched Scorpius pull back in fear. He threw his wand aside and dropped to his knees before him.

“Scorpius,” he whispered around his own sob. “God. I . . . I . . . Oh God . . .”

He had no words for what he felt, and all he could do was pull Scorpius down into his arms and hold him close.
“Please,” he cried. “Please. Don’t give yourself away so cheaply. You are so fucking beautiful. The man who deserves to take your virginity should have to crawl a mile over broken glass first.”

Scorpius put his arms around his neck and clung there, burying his face in the notch between Harry’s neck and shoulder. Harry was inarticulate with guilt and grief. All he could do was rock him back and forth like he used to do with his children when they were infants and couldn’t sleep.

“Scorpius,” he murmured. “Please don’t hurt yourself because of me. I can’t bear it.”

“Harry?!”

He could hear the familiar sound of Briac’s running footsteps.

“Here!” he croaked.

“Jesus!” said Briac as he stepped through the shattered door. “Wha . . . ?” He stopped when he saw where Harry was and who he was holding. “Harry?” he whispered. “What happened?”

“I came in to find some bloke raping him. I . . . er . . . kind of lost control.”

Briac nodded as he looked around at the wreckage Harry had made of the stately room.

“Is he okay?” he asked softly, nodding at the sniffing bundle in Harry’s arms.

“Just barely,” Harry said, feeling the hatred rise in his gut again.

“Easy,” Briac said calmly. “You’ve had a lot to drink. Where’s the bloke now?”

“I let him go after I almost killed him.”

“All I can say is he’s very lucky to have made it out of here alive . . .”

“If he’d actually raped him before I came in, I’m quite certain he’d be dead.”

Briac smiled grimly. “And we’d have a bit of explaining to do. You know, of course, that it shouldn’t have been you. You should’ve got me . . .”

“There was no time,” Harry replied. “I ran into Rowan . . .”

Their conversation was suddenly interrupted when Scorpius began trying to struggle out of Harry’s embrace.

“Toilet,” he said and staggered to his feet.

Harry immediately stood and caught Scorpius before he could fall again. As he walked him to the adjoining bathroom his robe slipped off Scorpius’s shoulders. In the bathroom, Scorpius stumbled and gouged his hip on the corner of the counter. Harry grabbed him to keep him from falling again. Scorpius’s head lulled back on his shoulder, exposing the arc of his boyish throat.

“Are you alright?” Harry asked softly to which Scorpius’s only reply was what sounded like “hhmmmm.” Harry felt the sound as well as heard it. It was clear that Scorpius wasn’t going to be able to urinate in the toilet bowl without help.

This is how lines get crossed. Exactly like this.

Harry heard the words somewhere in the back of his mind, but they seemed to be an echo of a no
longer relevant thought. Scorpius was completely naked in his arms. Harry splayed the fingers of one hand on Scorpius’s belly, pressing ever so slightly, and with the other hand, he gently held Scorpius’s penis.

“Let go,” he whispered in Scorpius’s ear, and haltingly Scorpius began to urinate. Harry held his breath. He could imagine the feeling of relief it brought.

Scorpius’s penis was beautiful. Even soft, it was thick and its skin was like velvet. His foreskin didn’t cover his glans all the way, and Harry could see a glimpse of the pink head underneath. From the size of his penis, Harry wouldn’t have been able to tell his age; it was only the near absence of pubic hair that reminded him. He tried to suppress his arousal. He tried to convince himself that all he was doing was helping Scorpius urinate into the toilet bowl.

The flow ended much too soon. Harry hadn’t got enough, of what, he wasn’t sure. But whatever it was, it wasn’t even close to enough.

He couldn’t take it. He couldn’t hold out one moment longer.

He had to have the beautiful body passed-out in his arms. He had to, before someone else did. Gently, he lowered Scorpius to the floor, transfiguring the thin, utilitarian bathmat into a soft, cushy rug. He hadn’t yet figured out how to accomplish his goal, but he nonetheless unbuckled his belt. Lube. He had to find some lube. He opened a cabinet door and fumbled around, knocking things over in his haste, ready to use soap if he had to. He had to make love to Scorpius. Unlike the bastard who’d almost raped him, he’d treat Scorpius right; he’d be careful. He’d prepare him. He’d hold back. He wouldn’t thrust. He wouldn’t even move. He just had to be inside him. He was going to fucking die if he couldn’t be . . .

He heard the knock and froze.

“Harry? Is everything alright?”

In his crazed drunken lust, he’d completely forgotten Briac was there.

“Everything’s fine,” he called, his voice only slurring a little bit.

There was silence on the other side of the door, and Harry held his breath.

“I’m coming in.”

Harry was just about to say no, when his partner opened the door.

Harry watched him notice his obvious erection and unbuckled belt. He hadn’t opened his trousers, but for all intents and purposes, his cock might as well be hanging out.

Harry was shaking. The cabinet was still open and most of its contents were on the floor. Briac looked him straight in the eyes.

Harry started to cry.

“Whatever it is you were about to do, forgive yourself,” Briac said. “Don’t kill yourself over almost.”

Harry took a deep breath and closed his eyes. “I almost murdered the bloke,” he said.

“Come on, Harry. Let me take things from here.”

“I’m not safe,” Harry said, weeping into his hands. “I’m as bad as any of them. He’s not safe with
me. There’s . . . nothing I wouldn’t do to him . . . given half a chance. I want him so much.”

Briac nodded. “It’s about time you finally admitted it. Go home. Take some Dreamless Sleep and go to bed. He’s so drunk, he won’t remember a thing, and even if he does, I’ll erase his memory. It’s still a clean slate. Tomorrow’s a new day. I’ll take care of him. Now go.”

Reluctantly, Harry released Scorpius. He staggered to his feet and buckled his belt.

“Arrest me,” he said, holding out his arms, wrists up. “We both know that if I wasn’t an Auror . . . if I wasn’t Harry Potter . . . that you’d do it.”

“Go home, Harry.”

When Harry didn’t move, Briac shoved past him and Transfigured a towel into a long robe which he wrapped around Scorpius from head to toe.

“Make yourself useful, Potter, and see if you can find his clothes.”

Harry left the bathroom in a state of shock. It took him an inordinate amount of time to find Scorpius’s clothes, which, of course, were draped over the armchair, right in plain sight.

He could’ve helped Scorpius dress the moment the man left the room, but he hadn’t.

He brought the clothes back to the bathroom and offered to help Briac. All he got in response was a glare and a barked order.

“Go the fuck home, Harry. If you think for one second that I’m going to let you go near him, you’ve got some serious sobering up to do – Hell, you have some serious sobering up to do anyway.”

Harry swallowed and then nodded. “Thank you,” he said.

“You’re welcome,” his partner replied.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Yay! Artwork! Thank you, Reira.

“This has got to stop,” Mr. Potter said through gritted teeth. “I don’t want this to take over our relationship.” He came out from behind his desk. His blood-red robe was suddenly the only colour in the room – perhaps even in the whole world.

“Please, Scorpius,” he pleaded. “This makes me feel like a dirty old man! You’re young, but so am I. I’m only forty-one, for God’s sake! I’m too young to feel this way . . .”
Chapter 6

The halls were long and turned without notice or ended suddenly for no apparent reason. Harry was running as fast as he could, skidding on trainers with worn-out soles and slamming against unforgiving stone walls. He was chasing someone, but his wand wasn’t drawn. The person he was chasing was not an enemy . . . but nor was he a friend. Harry didn’t know why. All he knew was that he had to catch the person before it was too late, although too late for what, he didn’t know. He felt as though he’d been sent on a mission but he didn’t know why or by whom. He just needed to find . . . suddenly he caught a glimpse of a black Hogwarts robe and pale hair. He tried to run faster. Something . . . something terrible was going to happen if he didn’t catch the boy fleeing his capture. Something terrible that once done couldn’t be undone . . .

Suddenly he slammed into a door that’d been just that instant closed in his face. He sat bolt upright in bed, his chest heaving and his body soaked with sweat. He’d cried out in his dream and that’s what must’ve woken him. He’d cried in his dream and that’s what must’ve woken him. He’d cried a name. He’d cried a boy’s name, but he couldn’t remember to whom it belonged.

Scorpius . . . or Draco.

***************

On the last day of his apprenticeship with the Department of Mysteries, Mrs. Weasley took Scorpius out to lunch at an upscale restaurant on Wicca Way.

She seemed preoccupied, but Scorpius didn’t make too much of it. The Unspeakables had been busy lately, and she’d been spending long hours at work away from her family.

“Order anything you want,” she said. “It’s the least I can give you after all the help you’ve been to me. I don’t know how I would’ve got through the headless fish incident without you.”

Scorpius blushed and looked at his hands. “You’re too kind, ma’am,” he said.

She smiled ruefully. “That may very well be true,” she said enigmatically. “Here, have some sparkling water.”

They talked of small inconsequential things as they ate, but Scorpius had the feeling Mrs. Weasley was just waiting for dessert and coffee to tell him why she’d really invited him to lunch.
Sure enough, he was right.

“As you know,” she said, pouring milk in her coffee, “I am the International Affairs Coordinator for the Department of Mysteries and as such I travel quite a bit and meet with numerous heads of state and . . . head masters and mistresses of numerous schools. Earlier this summer, I was honoured to make the acquaintance of Head Master Charles Maximus who heads a British school specialising in Healing Magic in Papua New Guinea. I took the great liberty of telling him about you, and he was very much impressed.”

Scorpius swallowed. He had a sense of where this conversation was going.

“Anyway, to make a long story short, he would like to offer you a place at his Academy for your fifth year. Generally, the Academy only accepts foreign students who are sixteen or older, but I told him you’d be sixteen in October, and he stated that he was fine with that.”

There was a long silence. Scorpius’s mind was churning with doubt and excitement and a thousand questions.

“What about my father, ma’am?” he asked.

“Draco, of course, will be fully informed of this opportunity. The position will be fully funded, so you don’t have to worry about expenses. In fact, you’ll be given a generous stipend to spend at your discretion.”

Scorpius was quiet as he thought about how he was going to ask the next question. He finally settled on a direct approach.

“Who will be paying for those expenses?”

Mrs. Weasley winced so slightly that no one would’ve noticed unless they were watching for it.

“The donor’s identity is not what’s at issue here . . .”

“It’s Mr. Potter, isn’t it,” he said.

Mrs. Weasley looked at him for a long moment. Scorpius could practically hear the wheels turning in her brain.

“Yes,” she said at last. “I told him about the opportunity, and he immediately volunteered to help you.” Scorpius opened his mouth, but she refused to let him interrupt. “You should know, Scorpius,” she continued, “Harry thinks very highly of you and wants you to succeed no matter the cost. Besides, it’s no secret that he is a very wealthy man, so you shouldn’t concern yourself about that . . .”

He wants to get rid of me was all Scorpius could think. He wants to put half the globe between us.

“It’s a huge honour, ma’am” he said, “and I am very grateful to both you and Mr. Potter for offering me this opportunity, but I need to think about it.”

“Of course,” Mrs. Weasley said with a warm smile. “But just remember, classes at the Academy will be starting in a week.”

Scorpius felt a lump rise in his throat, and all he could do was nod his understanding.
As soon as he returned to his father’s flat, he picked up a quill, unrolled a piece of parchment and started writing.

Dear Sir,

Why are you sending me away?

Yours in confusion,
Scorpius

The response came just as he was setting the table for tea.

Dear Scorpius,

I’m not “sending you away.” An opportunity has arisen and I want to help you take advantage of it to the fullest.

Yours,
H.P.

As soon as he’d washed the dishes, Scorpius got out his quill again and chewed on it for almost an hour. Finally, he scribbled down his response and sent it off before he could think better of it.

That may be true, but it’s not ALL of the truth. You have feelings for me, and you want me to go away so you won’t act on them.

The little green-eyed owl scratched at his window and woke him up.

It is not appropriate for me to “have feelings” for you. I thought I’ve made that very clear.

Scorpius was half-asleep when he replied.

Whether it’s “appropriate” or not, it’s true.

The response came as dawn slowly crept into the flat.

Scorpius. This is the last letter I’m going to send, so don’t bother replying. I will burn anything you write without reading it. I won’t lie to you. I have feelings for you and they frighten me because, like I said, they are inappropriate in the extreme. But try as hard as I can, I can’t stop thinking about you in ways I shouldn’t. I don’t know how this happened, and I’m deeply ashamed. If I act on these feelings, I will never forgive myself and I’ll have to insure that I NEVER see you again. I don’t want that – I want you to be a part of my life. All I’m asking is for you to give me time and space to work things out in my own mind. This is a once-in-a-lifetime offer. Please accept it. If not for yourself, then for me. If you love me like you say you do, you’ll respect my feelings on this matter. I’ll say no more.

Scorpius fell backwards onto the couch as the letter slipped from his fingers.

He was in shock. Despite his prodding and needling, he’d never expected such a stark admission.

It terrified him.

After a long talk with his father, Scorpius accepted the offer.

* * * * * * * * *

A branch snapped under Briac’s foot.
“Fuck,” he whispered, and that was when the Gubraithian fire began raining down around them like flaming hail stones.

Harry dodged under a thicket of brambles and felt the thorns scratch his face. He pointed his wand at a cloaked figure and whispered *Sectumsempra*. The blood that splattered him was dark and smelled of decay.

*Inferi!*

There were a lot of them, but fortunately they were easy to “kill,” and Harry was more than happy to do the job. He crawled out of his hiding place, and put his wand back in its sheath. This was going to be hand-to-rotting-hand combat.

It felt good to be using his body for something other than sitting in meetings and signing parchments. For a while he forgot who he was and just focused on surviving. His breath fell in sync with his swings, precise and efficient like well-oiled clockwork.

“I hope we weren’t planning on bringing any of them back for questioning,” said Briac as he and Harry stood panting and counted the “dead.” “I hope you realise that you are fucking insane.”

“I also stink,” Harry replied, wrinkling his nose. “Phew! Let’s get out of here. My place or yours?”

“Yours. I’ve got a lady friend staying at mine.”

Harry arched an eyebrow. “Don’t tell me Auror Gwencalon has gone all monogamous on me.”

“Only for a week,” Briac replied with a wink.

Harry stripped off his robe and then the black t-shirt and trousers he always wore underneath. His shower was the one thing he’d upgraded in his otherwise ordinary flat, and the spray drummed on his back in torrents. Standing under it was the best thing that had happened to him in days. He’d been running himself ragged and could feel it in every muscle, but at least when his head touched the pillow, he slept deeply and dreamlessly at night.

Scorpius’s most recent letter had arrived yesterday and was full of more details about the Academy and the neighbouring villages and the numerous trips they took into the rain forests of Huon Peninsula. He talked about the food they ate (fried scorpion!!) and which teachers he liked and which ones he didn’t and how hard it was to learn the local language, Tok Pisin. He said he’d tried fire dancing and met a local shaman and made an *Eccalyptus and Kawako Potion* which is used to treat burns. He sounded like he was in heaven, which made Harry both happy and forlorn at the same time, although he did everything he could to suppress the latter. Scorpius never once mentioned whether he missed Harry or not, even in the letter he wrote on the day of his sixteenth birthday. But he’d sent a Muggle photograph of himself leaning against a palm tree, wearing nothing but a loosely-knotting sarong that rested on his hips far below his navel. He was taller than he was when Harry had last seen him and tan, of course. His hair was lightened by the sun, and he was standing with his face in profile against the backdrop of a brilliant sunset. There was new muscle in his arms and chest and little left of the baby fat in his face. He looked happy and content and comfortable in his own skin in a way he’d never seemed before.

As he’d done a thousand times, Harry forced himself not to touch the erection that swelled between his legs when he thought of the photo. It was the One Rule he would not transgress even though obeying it left him aching with need.
Harry walked into the living room still drying his hair. Briac was on the couch with his feet on the coffee table flipping through one of Harry’s porno magazines.

“He’s rather furry, this one,” he said, holding up that month’s centrefold. “How would a bloke find his penis with all those pubes?”

Harry laughed and collapsed in an armchair. “He’s the reason I bought the fucking thing,” he said.

Briac frowned at the photo, turning it this way and that. “He’s not your type,” he said. “Unless you’ve developed a new fetish you haven’t told me about.”

“I haven’t but I’m trying to,” Harry replied, throwing back the whisky Briac had poured for him.

“Ah, I see. This bloke looks like he’s six-foot-five and weighs about 23 stones. He’d crumple your spine like an accordion with the first thrust.”

Harry shrugged. “He’s got nice blue eyes though.”

“And he’s about the furthest you can get from 11 stones, smooth hairless skin and grey eyes. Have you managed to get it up for Mr. Lumberjack yet or is it a lost cause?”

Harry stood and walked to the kitchen. “It’s a lost cause. Another couple shots?”

“Just bring the bloody bottle out here.”

“Seriously though, I’m not wanking over Scorpius. Don’t make me feel dirtier than I already do.”

Harry walked back into the living room with two glasses in his hands.

Briac gave him a once-over. “I can tell,” he said with a nod at Harry’s still half-hard cock. “You’re going to drive yourself crazy. Thinking about something and doing it are two totally different things.”

“I’m not crossing that line again,” said Harry, collapsing back into the armchair. He set the one-third empty bottle on the coffee table.

“Are we going out after we finish that off?”

Harry scrubbed his face with his palms. He really shouldn’t. His “dates” were getting younger by the day – a fact that he was sure didn’t escape Briac’s notice. He shook his head. “Too tired,” he lied.

They were silent for several minutes, each thinking his own thoughts and comfortable in the other’s presence.

“I miss him,” Harry said after his third glass was empty. “But I’m glad he isn’t here. The best thing that could happen to him is that he falls in love with a classmate and decides to spend his sixth and seventh years in New Guinea.”

“And what’s the best thing for you?”

Harry turned his head to look at his best friend. “That’s the best thing that could happen for me too, although it wouldn’t feel that way.”

Briac was just about to reply when an unfamiliar owl tapped at the window. Harry got up and let it in. The letter was written on the lowest-grade parchment one could buy.
Dear Potter,

I need to speak with you when you have the time.

D.M.

“Who’s it from?” Briac asked.

“Scorpius’s father.”

“Ah, the infamous Draco Malfoy. What does he have to say?”

Harry gave the owl a treat and watched it fly away. “He wants to speak with me.”

“That sounds ominous.”

“It does, doesn’t it?”

“Any idea what it’s about?”

Harry shook his head. “Not a solitary clue.”

* * * * * * *

Draco opened the door on Harry’s first knock.

“Greetings, Potter,” he said about as pleasantly as he’d ever said anything. “Can I get you a cup of tea?”

“Yes, please,” Harry replied as he hung his cloak and scarf on a hook and cast a drying charm on his boots.

“Cold out there?” Draco asked from the kitchen.

“Cold and wet,” Harry replied looking around. The flat was much the same as when he’d last seen it, although Scorpius’s absence was conspicuous in the absence of school books.

“Please have a seat,” Draco said as he handed Harry a cup and saucer with a couple no-brand biscuits on it.

“How can I help you, Draco?” Harry asked. He could think of at least five things Draco might have to say, and he didn’t want to hear any of them. Best to get it out of the way as quickly as possible.

Draco put down his cup and began plucking at a loose thread on his robes. Harry had never seen him so nervous before.

“I know I have no right to ask a favour of you,” he said. “We’ve never been friends, to say the least, and you’ve already given so much to me and my son.”

“I’ve been more than happy to help,” Harry replied, stepping delicately around the landmines of Malfoy pride. “Scorpius deserves every Galleon. I’ve never seen anyone work so hard to succeed.”

“Well, he’s been given many opportunities,” Draco replied. For the life of him, Harry could read neither his expression nor his voice. He frowned.

“Is something wrong?” he asked. “Is Scorpius okay?”
“Yes, very much so. He seems to be enjoying everything to its fullest – as he does with everything.”
Draco smiled fondly to himself, softening his cautious demeanour.

“I’m very glad to hear it,” Harry replied. He felt no need or desire to mention his own letters from Scorpius. “But how can I help you?”

Draco stood and went to the spindly little desk by the window and pulled a piece of parchment from the drawer. He handed it to Harry. It was a letter. Harry unfolded it carefully.

_Dear Father,_

_I hope this letter finds you well. Things are going as well here as ever, except I’ll be happy to eat something other than grubs for a change . . ._

Harry couldn’t keep himself from chuckling.

_Our Potions Master is one of the best in the world. This week we’ve been working with indigenous animals like quolls and Wokan Cannibal Frogs . . ._

“It’s toward the end,” Draco said, and Harry turned over the parchment.

_The only hard thing about being here is that I miss you terribly. It’s almost Christmas time, and I would be heading home from Hogwarts to be with you if I wasn’t halfway around the world. I wish you could be here so I could share with you all the things I’ve seen and learned. I know it’s a lot to ask, but will you please consider asking Mr. Potter for a Portkey?_

Harry looked up from the parchment. Draco’s gaze was locked on a stain on the carpet as though it held the secret of life’s meaning.

“So, you’d like to ask me for a Portkey.” Harry took a deep breath. “It won’t be easy, so I don’t want you to set your heart on it, but I will see what I can do.”

Draco nodded without looking at him. “I would be very grateful,” he said quietly. So quietly that Harry almost couldn’t hear him. “Scorpius is my whole life and the reason I keep on living. I haven’t let him wander far from me until now. I want to hear his voice more than anything in the world.”

Harry stood and reached out, but at the last minute he drew his hand back from Draco’s shoulder. Who knew how long it’d been since anyone other than Scorpius had touched him in friendship, and who knew how he’d respond? Instead, Harry settled on thanking him for the tea and assuring him again that he would do everything he could do.

Draco didn’t offer to see him out, but Harry saw that it wasn’t due to disrespect but rather to the shaking in his limbs.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

_My dearest son,_

_I will be there in three days._

_Your loving father_

Scorpius leapt off his bed with a shout and startled his roommate. His father was coming! In his wildest dreams, he’d never imagined that it could actually happen. His father was confined to a two miles radius from his flat and denied the use of even the simplest spells, but here he was travelling
around the world!

Scorpius sat back down and opened the other letter. It was from Mr. Potter.

Dear Scorpius,

I hope you are well. I was able to procure a Portkey for your father, and he’ll be arriving there at noon (your time) on the 23rd. The only caveat is that he won’t be alone. The only way I could convince the Minister of Magical Transportation to grant me this favour is to promise that I’d accompany him and ensure that he returns. I hope this won’t be a terrible inconvenience. I’ve already made reservations at a hotel in Lae, so you don’t have to worry about finding me accommodations at the school. I’ll also have Lily with me since she’s been pestering me about letting her go to the Academy for her fifth year as well and I wanted her to have the chance to see what it’s like.

I look forward to seeing you.

Yours always,
Harry

Scorpius rolled the parchment and put it in his trunk with all of Mr. Potter’s letters. His unadulterated happiness had suddenly become an uneasy mixture of excitement and apprehension. He hadn’t seen Mr. Potter since that dreadful August day at Boyne Manor. Furthermore, neither of them had mentioned in their letters the feelings they’d confessed to having for each other. He had no idea what seeing Mr. Potter again would feel like. He’d been frightened by the desire he’d read in the lines of that letter Mr. Potter had written him and hadn’t wanted to return to the conversation since. But then again, he’d sent that photograph. If he was being honest with himself as to why, he’d have to admit he’d been flirting – and teasing. But it was as far as he’d dared to go, even though he often imagined Mr. Potter keeping it under his pillow and basing his dreams on it when he fell asleep.

The morning of the day that his father and the two Potters arrived was already sweltering. The Head Master had permitted the use of his office to be the pre-programmed arrival location, and house elves had moved the furnishing against the walls to prevent anything from breaking when the three of them appeared.

“Ow!” Lily cried out as she landed on her bum. She’d been the only one of the three to fall, although Scorpius’s father had to grab Mr. Potter’s arm to keep himself from stumbling. “I hate those stupid things!”

Mr. Potter helped her to her feet, and they stood a respectful distance from Scorpius and his father as they embraced. Scorpius couldn’t stop grinning, and there were tears in his father’s eyes.

“You look so grown up,” his father said, standing back with his hands still on Scorpius’s shoulders. “And you’ve got your mother’s lovely skin tone. You’re the first Malfoy in generations not to be as pale as a grub.”

Scorpius feigned a shudder. “Let’s not talk about grubs,” he said. “I just had some for breakfast.”

“Oh my God, SICK!” Lily shrieked. “Daddy, if I come here, will I have to eat insects?”

Mr. Potter laughed. “You’ll have to ask Scorpius about that.”

“Hello, Mr. Potter,” Scorpius said with only a small blush that he hoped wouldn’t show through his
tan. He was proud at how even his voice sounded.

“Hello, Scorpius,” Mr. Potter replied as he stepped forward and shook Scorpius’s hand. He seemed completely at ease which made Scorpius feel even more self-conscious than he already did.

“Thank you for the Portkey, sir.”

Mr. Potter smiled warmly. “You're more than welcome. Consider it a Christmas present.”

Scorpius stood there for what seemed like an age as he took in the dark hair and green eyes and the two-day-old stubble. He hadn’t forgotten how handsome Mr. Potter was, but seeing him again reminded him of just how handsome. Scorpius blushed again and looked away. In his forties or not, Mr. Potter was nothing short of drop gorgeous.

“First things first,” he said, turning to his father. “I’ll show you your room.”

“Ah yes, and we should go to ours,” Mr. Potter said. “I’m clearly not dressed properly for this climate.” Scorpius let his gaze sweep over him, taking in every detail. “It seems you have the right idea with the sarong. Maybe we’ll buy a couple and meet you back here for supper.”

Was Mr. Potter teasing him just as Scorpius had teased him? He swallowed hard at the mere thought of Mr. Potter in a sarong.

“Okay,” he said shakily. “See you later.”

At first his father seemed overwhelmed and uncomfortable, and Scorpius had to keep reminding himself that his father had been either in Azkaban or their small flat for almost sixteen years. Visiting a familiar place like Hogwarts would’ve been taxing for him, let alone a wholly unfamiliar place like the Academy. Everything was built from wood and rushes and silky mosquito netting, and all the “corridors” between buildings were open-air suspension bridges. Several times Scorpius found himself chattering away only to realise that his father had fallen behind to stare with wonder at some flower or insect or just stand there looking baffled. At last, Scorpius took his arm, and they walked slowly and quietly.

His father’s room was set far away from the main buildings on a low hill that looked out over the sea. Scorpius had bought everything he might need and hung the mosquito netting around the bed. As soon as they entered, his father sat down in a chair. He looked well, but tired, and he was sweating so much, his pale hair was sticking to his neck. Scorpius felt his heart contract with tenderness. He drew his wand and filled a porcelain bowl with cool water and laid a towel beside it.

“How about a little rest, Father,” he said.

His father nodded. “I couldn’t sleep at all last night,” he replied with a smile. “Or the night before. But I don’t want to waste a minute of our time together.”

Tears welled in Scorpius’s eyes. “How about I stay here with you,” he said. “I have revising to do, and I can sit in the hammock while you lie down for a while. I don’t want to wear you out in one afternoon!”

The sound of peeping frogs woke Scorpius from a dream in which he’d been straddling Mr. Potter’s lap and rubbing their erections together. As he resurfaced to consciousness, he kept his eyes closed
and reached down to stroke himself to the orgasm he’d been so close to. It only took a minute, but he nonetheless came hard and had to bite his lip to keep himself from crying out.

Fortunately, his father was still asleep. Scorpius rose and went to him.

“It’s time for supper,” he whispered. “Do you feel like eating something?”

His father yawned and sat up. “I do,” he replied. “In fact, I’m famished.”

“Just remember,” said Scorpius, “most of the foods involve insects or worms.”

His father laughed. “Don’t you remember me telling you about your mother’s family estate on Madagascar? It wasn’t a meal unless it included locusts. I think the only person you’ll see turning green tonight is Potter’s daughter.”

And sure enough he was right. But despite spitting up in her napkin a couple times, Lily forged ahead and ate a bowl of rice and grubs.

“That wasn’t that bad now was it?” Mr. Potter asked putting his arm around her shoulders and giving her a kiss on the ear.

“How can you be so casual about it?” Lily asked. “Since when have you been dining on insects?”

“Since I was sent to Ghana for a month when you were four. When you’re being held hostage in a jungle, everything begins to look tasty.”

“Ugh,” Lily said, reaching for her napkin. “Say no more, please.”

To Scorpius’s great relief, Mr. Potter had not shown up wearing a sarong and nothing else, not that jeans and a white linen shirt were much better, but at least Scorpius wouldn’t have to spend the night wondering whether or not Mr. Potter was wearing pants. Sadly, he’d shaven since Scorpius last saw him, but it was made up for by the three open buttons and the glimpse of chest.

The four of them spent the evening attending a tribal coming-of-age ceremony at which Lily was given a crown made out of reeds. Scorpius had met most of the tribe’s members and two of them were on the Academy’s faculty, so they had no compunction about daring him to do a fire walk again. Actually, he didn’t need that much to persuade him; the rush it gave him was more intoxicating than any liquor he’d ever tried, and he returned to the others with a pounding heart and heaving chest.

He’d have to be blind not to see the look of naked hunger that crossed Mr. Potter’s face. It thrilled him but it also disquieted him. Mr. Potter, more than ever, looked and seemed his age. He was a man in the very prime of his life, confident to the point of being bold and unwilling to hide his passions. He could so easily sweep Scorpius up like a straw in a tornado if he let himself do it, and Scorpius found himself wondering just how close he was to doing exactly that.

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“We’re beginning to learn why Lae is called ‘pothole city,’” said Harry as he and Lily got out of their leased Muggle car. “It’s time to learn the native magical transportation.”

Poor Lily was already nauseous and it wasn’t even breakfast yet, but in true Potter style, she did her best to deal with it (relatively) quietly.

“Dad! You drive like a crazy person on an illegal potion!”
Harry saw Draco smile and duck his head to hide it. “Kind of like the way he flies,” he said.

Harry grinned at him. “I wasn’t the only one who flew like a maniac, Malfoy.”

At that moment, Scorpius stepped through the door of the Academy’s equivalent of the Great Hall. Thank God, he was dressed in shorts and t-shirt. The sarong-thing was going to make Harry die of frustration if they spent the day walking around the rainforest with Scorpius wearing something so easy to take off . . .

There was an “Open Portkey” to the Academy’s warded rain forest reserve, which permitted 24-hour access to the two Portkey hubs. Lily landed on her feet for a change, but Scorpius staggered for a moment. Instinctively, Harry reached for his hand to steady him, and their fingers remained twined for a couple seconds longer than necessary. Even that little bit of contact made Harry’s heart quicken. He avoided Scorpius’s gaze.

The transition between the Portkey hub and the rainforest trail was striking. They all kept bumping into each other until their eyes got used to the dim light. Trees towered over their heads, blocking out most of the sun except a few brilliant rays that broke through the canopy here and there.

Even though Harry tried his utmost best, he couldn’t keep his eyes off Scorpius entirely. Just as he’d been in the photo he’d sent, Scorpius’s skin was tan and his blond hair even more blond than usual. He moved with confidence and grace over rocks and roots in nothing but bare feet. He seemed completely at home in the strange environment as if he’d been attending the Academy since his first year. He knelt now and then to point out the plants they used to make healing salves and potions.

They hadn’t gone far when Draco said he needed to rest for a while. They stopped under a particularly tall tree and Draco sat down, fanning himself with a giant leaf Scorpius had found for him. Harry was struck by all the ways Scorpius cared for his father, as though their roles were temporarily reversed. It made Scorpius seem far older than his sixteen years.

As they waited for Draco to catch his breath, Scorpius took Harry and Lily to hunt for scorpions.

“The kind that lives here are actually kinda ugly,” he said. “They’re flat and black and have enormous pinchers. My roommate put one in my bed once . . .”

Harry frowned. He’d hoped this wasn’t another place where Scorpius was bullied and ostracized. Scorpius must have noticed his disquiet because he added quickly that it’d been just a fond harmless prank.

“Their stings aren’t that bad, but you wouldn’t want one to pinch you. When I poked it with the tip of a quill it pinched it off like a pair of scissors. So, if we find one, we shouldn’t try to pick it up with our fingers.”

“You don’t say,” said Lily. “Darn, and there I was hoping to make one a pet and have my pygmy puffs keep it company.”

“From what Scorpius is telling us, I think it’d turn your puffs into bits of fur in five seconds,” Harry replied. “It would be a scene of pink and purple carnage.”

As they poked around in rock crevices and under rotting bark, Harry watched Scorpius move. He longed to trace his spine with his fingers from his neck to his tailbone, which Harry got a glimpse of now and then under Scorpius’s waistband. The shorts he wore caught midway down his hips and left his lower back bare every time he bent over. Harry couldn’t help but notice there was no tan line which led inexorably to the image of Scorpius lying naked on the beach.
At last they found a scorpion, and Scorpius eased it onto his palm. It only raised its pinchers a little bit.

“It knows I won’t hurt it,” he said. “It trusts me. Do you want to hold it?” he asked Lily. She reached her hand out tentatively, and Scorpius held his hand against hers so it could crawl on to her palm.

“Your brothers are going to be impressed when they hear about this,” Harry said. “It’s too bad we don’t have a camera to prove to them you actually did it.”

“I’ve got one,” Scorpius said pulling off his rucksack. He knelt in front of Lily to take the photo, and Harry felt a surge of joy. This is how it’ll be. Scorpius and his children getting along and enjoying one another’s company . . .

“Do you want to hold it too, Daddy?”

Harry nodded and held his hand against his daughter’s as Scorpius prodded the scorpion gently with his finger. It was lighter than Harry had expected it to be considering its size.

“It looks like it belongs in the ocean,” he said. “I wonder if it evolved from some kind of crustacean. A hard shell on the outside to protect a vulnerable inside.” He glanced at Scorpius when he said it, and Scorpius blushed. He clearly hadn’t missed the comparison Harry had made with himself.

After looking at the scorpion for a few more minutes, Scorpius took it back and returned it to the forest floor. When he looked up, his eyes went straight to Harry’s. His glance was full of helpless longing. It took Harry’s breath away.

* * * * * * * * * * *

The week passed too quickly. Scorpius spent nearly every minute of it with his father, who, after just a few days, was looking happier and healthier than Scorpius had ever seen him. His skin pinked slightly and hints of silvery-blond appeared in his white hair. His strength also began to return, and soon Scorpius could walk three miles with him without having to stop every half a mile and wait for his father to regroup. Whereas Mr. Potter and his daughter clearly favoured the ocean, Scorpius’s father fell in love with the rainforest and spent hours sketching plants and animals while Scorpius sat contentedly nearby and read. He wished he could have his father with him for the rest of the year and watch him become the man he was before the government had finally been able to break him, but he was thankful for the glimpse he got.

It didn’t escape his notice, however, that Mr. Potter was never without Lily, even when she complained about feeling like she was on a leash. Scorpius knew Mr. Potter was trying not to be alone with him, and, while at first he was grateful, Scorpius began to get increasingly frustrated. How long could things go on without them talking about the pink spotted elephant in the living room? It was one hundred percent clear to him that Mr. Potter wanted him. The way he watched Scorpius move was like a cat watching a bird, and to make things worse, Scorpius exploited the situation for all it was worth. He’d started out the week wearing a t-shirt and shorts and sandals and ended it wearing nothing but a sarong. It made him feel alive when he felt Mr. Potter’s gaze on him like hands sliding up his thighs and pushing the thin cloth up past his waist . . .

It wasn’t till New Year’s Eve that they suddenly found themselves completely alone. Scorpius’s father had been exhausted and went to bed before midnight, and Lily had drunk too much and fallen asleep in a hammock near the dining hall. Scorpius was wandering aimlessly enjoying the sound of revelry in the village and the frogs in the trees. He hadn’t even been looking for Mr. Potter until he saw him sitting on the beach looking out over the sea.
Scorpius’s heart pounded as he made his way across the sand until he stood within a couple yards of him.

“May I join you, sir?”

Mr. Potter turned around and looked at him for a moment before nodding. Scorpius sat down beside him, leaving a good couple of feet of cooling sand between them.

“I’m glad you came, sir,” he said. “It’s been fun having a chance to show you everything your generosity has made possible.”

Mr. Potter took a deep breath and then let it out before answering. “It makes me happier than I can express that this has been a good experience for you.”

They sat silently looking out at the moonlight on the waves.

“I . . . I still . . . feel like I did . . .” Scorpius stammered. He’d been unable to take the pleasantries for another second.

“Sshhhhh,” Mr. Potter said. “Let’s not talk about it.”

“But I need to talk about it.”

“We probably have nothing new to say to each other,” Mr. Potter replied. “I know I don’t, and from the way you’ve been making love to me with your eyes, I don’t think you do either.”

“But what are we . . .”

“. . . going to do about it?”

Scorpius nodded.

“Nothing. Except this.”

And with those words, Mr. Potter reached out and put a hand on Scorpius’s cheek. The touch was so gentle that Scorpius almost couldn’t feel it. Mr. Potter leaned forward until his breath caressed Scorpius’s lips.

“You’re torturing me,” he murmured.

Scorpius tried to close the distance between their mouths, but Mr. Potter wouldn’t let him.

“I know you don’t know what you’re doing,” he whispered, “so I won’t hold it against you.”

“But I do know what I’m . . .”

“How could you?” Mr. Potter replied. “You can’t even imagine a man’s needs and what lengths he’ll go to. You’re testing my strength beyond endurance.”

And with that, he pulled away.

They sat in silence again until Scorpius couldn’t stand it. He reached over and took Mr. Potter’s hand. He didn’t yank it away as Scorpius thought he might and after a minute or two, Mr. Potter wove their fingers together. A breeze ruffled his hair, and his ears were pink with sunburn. Scorpius watched his profile until he heard the sound of fireworks and saw their many colours reflected on the lenses of his glasses.
“Happy new year,” he whispered.

Mr. Potter squeezed his hand and raised it to his lips.

“I’ll see you in June,” he said and kissed each of Scorpius’s knuckles. His mouth lingered for a long moment before he got up and walked away.

* * * * * * *

“Did you give in?” Briac asked as he handcuffed a suspect to a lamppost.

Harry punched his suspect in the mouth despite him having surrendered willing. Harry spat on his face. As far as he was concerned a trial was too good for these blokes. Trafficking young children made him crazed with rage.

“Do I look like a man who’s just made love to the one person he desires more than life itself?” he snarled.

“Er, now that you mention it, no.”

“Then you’d be right.”

“Harry, let me take care of this lot. I’ll meet you back at the office”

Harry shook out his hand and healed his knuckles. He felt unhinged, and it worried him. He wasn’t a first-year recruit anymore; he had an image to maintain and a ministry department to run.

“There’s a letter for you,” Catherine said as he stormed past her desk. “I put it in your in-box.”

Harry snatched it up, slammed the door to his office and broke the letter’s wax seal.

Dear Potter,

I haven’t thanked you properly for enabling me to see my son. It was worth more to me than all the repairs and upgrades you’ve been extorting from my landlord (yes, I know it’s you, you incurable prat). I wish I could repay your kindness, but it looks like I’ll remain in your debt for the rest of my life as much as it may goad me. If there’s anything I can do for you – anything at all – just let me know and I’ll do it gladly.

Yours in Gratitude,
Draco

Harry folded the parchment and put it in his drawer for personal correspondence. He’d never seen Draco so happy in his whole life as he was in New Guinea, and it made Harry feel good. Draco thought he was in debt to him, but Harry would always consider it the other way around. He’d taken Scorpius from him that rainy night sixteen years ago and damned him to a lifetime in Azkaban. Nothing he could ever do could make up for that. He pulled out his quill.

Dear Draco,

Will you just get over it and call me Harry? If you call me “Potter” again I’m going to tell your landlord to put cockroaches under your bed.

Yours,
Harry gritted his teeth as the man shoved his cock inside him and began to thrust mercilessly. He was going to come within a minute, and sooner if he touched himself. It was the fourth time this week he’d been fucked, and he still craved more.

“Ah, fuck!” the man cried out as he felt Harry’s contractions, and when he pulled out his spent cock, Harry almost came again.

“Jesus Christ,” the man groaned. “You are easily the hottest fuck I’ve ever had. Give me about fifteen minutes and I’ll gladly fuck you again.”

Harry turned over before he lay down. His cock was too sensitive to touch anything, including the mattress.

“I don’t have fifteen minutes,” he said, “but I do have five for you to put on your clothes and leave.”

The man chuckled. “Is the wife about to come home?”

For the sake of expediency, Harry nodded. The man stood up, and gazed down at Harry for a minute. “Has anyone ever told you how fucking beautiful you are?” he asked. Harry covered his eyes with his arm. This was the first time he’d ever let someone fuck him without his disguise. But then again, the man was a Muggle so it didn’t matter.

“Please go,” he said. “You remember the address. You can have me one more time tomorrow, but that’s it, okay?”

“I’ll be here with bells on.”

“Great,” Harry replied and felt his cock twitch again. “See you then.”

“I’m not going to be able to do it.”

He and Briac were sitting on Briac’s balcony watching the boats on the Thames and drinking gin and tonic.

“What? Hold out when you see him arrive at the Portkey hub? That’s a public place, Harry, I think someone from the Department would be forced to arrest you for indecent behaviour.”

“Not to say rape.”

Briac lit a cigarette and offered one to Harry. “When did you say the boys are going to arrive?”

Harry looked at his watch. “Shit!” he said. “Actually, any minute now.”

It was the end of the semester at Hogwarts, and Ginny had gone to pick them up at Kings Cross. She’d promised she’d Floo them to Briac’s as soon as they got home.

It would be the first chance in forever he’d had to talk with his sons. They’d avoided his invitations to Wednesday morning breakfasts since Christmas. The situation had gone beyond ridiculous and had crossed the border into alarming. Harry had invited them to Briac’s with the hope that his presence would act as a mitigating influence. They loved Briac – possibly even more than they loved
him. It made his heart ache with loss.

He stubbed out his cigarette when he heard a commotion in the living room.

“We’re out here!” he yelled.

After what seemed like an hour, James and Albus pushed open the glass door.

“Hey boys,” said Briac, standing up and giving them both hugs which they returned. Harry stood up and did the same, but both of them swiftly pulled away.

James had just turned seventeen, and Briac made a watered down gin and tonic for him. Albus, however, had to make due with just tonic water.

“I’m old enough to have some liquor,” he whinged. “I’m sixteen after all.”

Harry flinched and turned his gaze back to the river.

“Well, that means you only have a year to go,” said Briac. “So stop your whinging.”

Albus sunk down in his chair with a scowl. There was a long silence.

“So, Dad,” said James, “how was New Guinea?”

Ah, so that’s what it was. The boys were pissed off because he’d taken Lily and not them.

“It was very nice,” he said, “and if that’s what’s got your pants all in a bunch, I’ll remind you of all the times we went fun places and left your sister behind.”

“Oh no,” said James, his voice was saccharine sweet. “We’re not upset because you took Lily; we’re upset that you were snogging Scorpius Malfoy on the beach.”

Harry choked on an ice cube to the point where Briac had to slap him on the back.

“Who told you that?” he croaked, his eyes watering.

“Who do you think?” said Albus. “Lils, of course.”

Harry frantically reached back in his memory. Lily had had too much Champagne (much to his anger) and had fallen asleep.

She must’ve woke and come to find him. But why hadn’t she said anything to him? He hadn’t noticed any strangeness between them, not like there was between him and his sons.

“Look lads,” said Briac, his voice serious, “this is not a matter for flippant remarks.”

“I can’t help but notice that Dad’s not denying it,” said James.

Harry was too stunned to respond. This situation seemed to have stepped right out of his worst nightmare. He had no idea what to do.

“Dad, Scorpius is as old as I am,” said Albus with a quaver in his voice.

“And he’s a year and a half younger than I am,” added James.

Harry turned to Briac who looked at him helplessly. Harry hadn’t even told him about New Year’s Eve.
Harry took a deep breath.

“Lily told you the truth,” he said, trying desperately to keep his voice from shaking. “I kissed Scorpius on the hand.”

“You lie!” said James. “Lils said you were snogging him.”

Briac dropped his head into his hand.

“I was not snogging him,” Harry replied. “I almost kissed him on the mouth, but I stopped myself.”

Albus began to cry quietly.

“Can I have a cigarette, Briac?” asked James. “I think I need one.”

“Since when did you start smoking?” asked Briac, but he handed one to James all the same.

“Look,” said Harry. “I’m not going to lie to you. You are my kids, and I love you . . .”

“Just not as much as you do him,” interrupted Albus.

Briac lit a cigarette and then stood up and walked to the other side of the balcony.

“That’s not true,” said Harry, “and if I haven’t made that clear to you, then it is my fault. If you’re old enough to drink and smoke and bandy around accusations, then you’re old enough to hear the brutal honest truth. I’m not denying that I love Scorpius, and I’m not denying that I’m attracted to him. Believe me, I’m not proud of that fact, but it is a fact that we’re all going to have to deal with. All of us, but me most of all.”

They were silent for a very long time.

“I hate him,” said James flatly. “He’s lucky I graduated this year.”

Harry slammed his glass down on the table, and James jumped. “If you want to hate someone, then hate me,” he said. “Scorpius has been innocent in all of this.”

“I hate you both,” said Albus, “and I haven’t graduated yet.”

“Is that a threat?” Harry asked.

“No, it’s just the truth, Dad.”

Harry was at a complete loss. In a single conversation, he’d lost his sons’ love and endangered Scorpius. When had his life got so bollocksed up? Did it all start when he and Ginny separated? Was that the fatal turning point, or did it happen even before that? When he was seventeen and was put on an altar to be sacrificed?

Tears of helplessness stung his eyes and ran down his cheeks before he could stop them.

“I’ve never pretended that I’m a saint,” he said. “You two have seen my many flaws. You saw me escape into my work because it scared me so much that I was a father; you saw me shout at your Mum; you saw me countless times in St. Mungo’s when I should’ve been taking care of myself for you and Lily; you saw my name in headlines that I’m sure made you the target of your classmates’ taunting; and now you see me falling in love with a boy your age.”

“Are you asking for our forgiveness?” James asked coldly.
Harry put his face in his hands. He was wrung out and afraid and desperately overwhelmed.

“Dad!” Albus cried, and Harry felt his arms encircle him and hold him tight. “Please don’t cry. We’re sorry.”

“You’re sorry,” James said with a quavering voice. “I’m not.”

Harry let himself collapse in Albus’s arms, but he couldn’t stop crying. It felt like floodgates had been opened in his heart.

“I love you, Dad,” Albus said. “I love you no matter what.”

James threw his glass at the wall. “I’ll leave you two to your little love fest,” he snarled.

“James,” Harry said, looking up. “Please don’t go.”

“Your ability to force me to obey you ended the second the clock struck twelve on my seventeenth birthday, so fuck you.” James stormed through the door and headed for the Floo. Briac turned and caught Harry’s eye, and Harry didn’t even have to say anything. Briac followed James and grabbed him before he could step into the fireplace.

“Let me go!” James yelled, and then he too began to cry. “I hate you all!”

“Come on, James,” said Briac. “You can’t leave like this.”

“I don’t want to stay,” he sobbed. “Everyone’s betrayed me: Dad’s betrayed me, Lily’s betrayed me, and now you and Albus have too.”

“All Lils said to you was that she still loves Dad and trusts him,” Albus cried. “How is that betraying you?”

“You don’t understand!” said James. “You don’t understand how angry I am, and you lot just roll over like a bunch of pussies!”

“I’m not rolling . . .!”

“Lads,” interrupted Briac, “I can’t think of a less productive conversation. Albus, you stay here with your Dad, and James, you come with me so if you want to punch someone, I’ll be handy.”

Harry heard the door click shut. He closed his eyes and held his remaining son as tightly as he could as though Albus was all he had left in the world.

* * * * * * * * * * *

The man who met him at the Portkey hub was not Mr. Potter. He had Mr. Potter’s face and he wore an Auror’s robe, but he was not Mr. Potter.

“Good afternoon, Scorpius,” he said pleasantly. “I trust you had a safe journey.”


As they made their way to the Apparation Point, Mr. Potter stayed a good yard away from him and didn’t glance at him even once.

“Are angry with me, sir?” he asked.
Mr. Potter turned to him with a bland expression. “No, of course not,” he said. “It’s lovely to have you back in England again. I’m sure your father will be very happy to see you.”

“And you’re not, sir?”

Mr. Potter still didn’t look at him. “Why would you say that?” he asked. “I’m very happy to see you. It’ll be nice to have my star pupil again.”

They were silent as they waited in line.

“Take it that means that I won’t see you over the summer, sir,” Scorpius said. It was bold, but it appeared that boldness would be necessary.

“I’m afraid not,” Mr. Potter replied. “Briac and I have some work to do in Turkey, and then I’ll be with my children in Switzerland.”

Their turn arrived, and Scorpius took Mr. Potter’s arm for a Side-along. Mr. Potter still didn’t look at him.

They landed as they always did in a deserted car park near his father’s flat. Scorpius waited for his stomach to stop churning, and when it did, he realised Mr. Potter was already at the gate.

“What’s going on?” he cried after him. “Why won’t you even look at me?”

Mr. Potter froze but didn’t turn around.

“I believe you don’t need me to escort you to your flat,” he said.

Scorpius suddenly saw red, and it wasn’t just Mr. Potter’s robe. “Look at me, you coward!” he shouted.

Still Mr. Potter remained where he was with his back turned.

“That would be ‘look at me, you coward, sir’,” he said coldly.

“What did I do . . . sir? At least do me the courtesy of telling me!”

Mr. Potter suddenly whirled around and came marching back toward him. Scorpius put every ounce of effort into keeping himself from crying. Instead he held his ground in the face of the hurricane that was Harry Potter.

Mr. Potter stopped when they were within feet of each other, and he looked Scorpius full in the face.

“You have done nothing wrong,” he snarled. “But that will change if you keep speaking to me in that demanding tone.”

Scorpius reeled back a step. “But . . .” he said.

“But nothing,” Mr. Potter replied. “Now please, go home and enjoy the summer with your father. I’ll see you in class in the fall.”

Scorpius’s throat was so tight, he couldn’t speak. After a long silence during which he fought to maintain his composure, Scorpius said “Thank you, sir,” and turned and walked away.

* * * * * * * * *
Briac must’ve known that something was wrong when Harry didn’t show up at the club, which was why Harry almost hit him with a vase when he suddenly stepped out of his fireplace.

“Christ, Potter!” he yelled. “You almost bloody killed me!”

“Well, then don’t show up uninvited!” Harry yelled back. He drew his wand and pointed it at the refrigerator.

“Well, this at least should be entertaining,” Briac said as he lit a cigarette.

“Don’t smoke in my fucking flat!” Harry yelled as the refrigerator and everything in it exploded like a bomb.

“I take it you saw Scorpius today?”

Harry wheeled around but because he was drunk, he staggered and only just barely caught himself with the counter.

“I don’t want to hear that name again,” he said, his voice low and even.

“Oh Jesus, Mary and divine Saint Joseph,” Briac replied. “Are we really going to play this idiotic game? How old are you?”

“Too old,” Harry replied. “Too old to be arse over fucking tea kettle for a teenage boy!”

“We really are going to play this game,” said Briac. “It's a good thing I brought a book to read.”

Harry slashed the couch to shreds.

“Now where am I suppose to sit?” Briac said forlornly. “Harry, stop this. It’s childish and pointless and it’s making me not like you very much.”

Harry leaned against a wall and slid slowly to the floor. “You should’ve seen his face,” he said. “It was like I’d punched him in the stomach.”

“I’m sure it felt that way to him. How was he to know you’d turned into a fucking dick while he was away?”

“I haven’t turned into a ‘fucking dick,’ I’m just trying to exert some control over my life.”

“Yeah, by being a fucking dick.”

Harry grabbed his hair with both fists and pulled.

“Let’s get out of here,” said Briac, offering his hand.

The whisky slid down his throat like liquid fire, and he was just about to take another swig when Briac yanked the bottle away, only handing it back when Harry gave up and agreed he’d leave it alone for a while.

“You’re acting like an arsehole,” Briac said.

Harry laughed sardonically. “Haven’t we already established that I am an arsehole, and a selfish arsehole at that?”
Briac nodded. “Yes, I do believe we settled that question back at your flat.”

Harry leaned against the wall of a Muggle office building, the bottle of Jamison’s hanging from his hand. He and Briac never went on benders in wizarding areas. The papers would have a fucking field day.

“You should’ve seen him . . .” Harry said, slurring his words. “Jesus, Briac. You should’ve seen him in New Guinea.”

“We also settled the fact the boy is unconscionably beautiful,” Briac said. “We decided that even before we decided that you’re an arsehole.”

Harry slumped to the sidewalk and put his head on his knees.

“Make it stop. Please, God, make it stop!”

“You need to get your arse kicked in a fight,” Briac replied. “That would take your mind off things for a while.”

Something clicked in Harry’s brain. “Exactly,” he said standing up.

“Shit,” said Briac. “Please say we’re not going to go looking for a drunken brawl . . .”

Harry shook his head. “Why would I subject you to my own masochism?” he said. “Let’s find a tattoo parlour.”

“It sounds like a stupid but a relatively harmless idea,” Briac replied, letting Harry settle an arm around his shoulders.

But by the time they found a parlour and Harry told the bloke what he wanted, Briac seemed to reassess his earlier position.

“Now that,” he said under his breath. “Is most certainly not a harmless idea.”

“Perhaps,” Harry replied. “But he’ll never see it; he’ll never know.” He turned to the artist. “I’ll pay you extra if you make it fucking hurt,” Harry told him handing him five hundred Muggle pounds. “A lot.”

Briac sat down in a leather chair and lit a cigarette as Harry stripped off his shirt and tugged his trousers and pants down to the middle of his thighs.

The pain hit him like a Bludger. He gritted his teeth and grunted.

“You said you wanted it painful, mate,” said the artist warningly.

“I’m only complaining,” said Harry, “because you’re not making it painful enough.”

The bloke went back to work, and Harry’s eyes watered. It bloody fucking hurt, and he had to concentrate on not tensing up. For five hours, his mind was free from the desire that dogged his heels like a rabid wolf, slavering to be sated.

“She better be worth it,” the artist said, pausing to wipe the sweat from his brow. Harry was drunk on pain and guilt and desire and too much whisky.

“Yeah, he’s worth it,” he said.
Briac lit his last cigarette as he massaged a woman’s latex-covered breast. It turned out that two hundred extra pounds bought more than just a complimentary joint.

“If you’re going to fuck her, use a condom,” the artist said off-handedly.

“Fuck you, Jack,” she said, grabbing Briac’s hand and sliding it up under her tight dress.

Harry watched through tear blurred eyes. “Go get a leg over for me too,” he ground out through clenched teeth. Briac laughed and took the woman’s hand, leading her into a darkened corner. “Back in a moment,” he said.

Harry’s laugh sounded like a bark. “That says nothing good about your skills as a lover.”

Briac gave him the two-finger salute before slipping into the shadows.

Harry closed his eyes. He was soaked with sweat and he stank from the whisky and adrenaline, and the mere thought of Scorpius in that bloody sarong had made him as hard as a rock.

“Harder,” he growled.

“It’s alright, mate,” said the artist. “You won’t be the first one to get off. Just don’t hump the bench; you’ll ruin your tat.”

Harry groaned. The whole point of the pain was to take his mind off his need, not turn him on even more.

From the far corner, he could hear flesh slapping against flesh, and Briac’s snarled obscenities. The woman was moaning and urging him to go harder, faster, deeper.

“Come for your daddy,” Briac commanded, and she screamed with her orgasm.

Harry sobbed in pain and frustration.

Briac came back, wiping off his half-hard dick with a handful of toilet paper before stuffing it back in his jeans. The woman followed him, straightening her dress.

“How’s it going?” Briac asked the artist and sucked in his breath when he saw Harry’s back.

“Holy shit, Harry.”

“I hope that’s ‘holy shit’ in a good way.”

“It’s ‘holy shit!’ in a ‘holy shit!’ way.”

The last part of the tattoo required the artist to have to spread his arse cheeks. He asked Briac’s lady friend for assistance.

“Jesus Christ,” she said. “That’s amazing!”

“His arsehole or his tat?” Briac asked yawning.

“His tat, you arsehole,” she replied.

“You’re confusing me!”

“Alright,” said the artist. “All done. Take your time sitting up,” he told Harry. “I don’t want you
fainting and falling off the table and suing me.”

Harry slowly pushed himself up. He was definitely sober. He took the glass of water the artist held out to him.

“That was impressive, mate,” he said. “I never thought you’d make it through.”

“That’s because you don’t know Harry,” Briac told him. “He’s one tough fucking bastard.”

Harry gave him the widest grin he could muster.

“I want to see it,” he said. “Where’s a mirror.”

“Over there,” the artist replied. “It’s full length.”

Harry could feel blood trickling down his back as he crossed the room. He was crazy; there was no point in trying to deny it. When he reached the mirror, he turned around and glanced back over his shoulder.

The black scorpion ran the entire length of his back. Its pinchers were spread to cover his shoulder blades, and its body extended all the way down until the stinger rested on his tailbone. It glistened with blood and sweat.

He was silent for a long time, shocked at what he’d done.

“It’s beautiful,” he breathed.

The artist pulled off his bloody t-shirt and gloves. “Good,” he said. “Because you’re stuck with it.”
The days all blurred together. He did nothing but lie on the couch and read. His father no longer forbade him from reading Muggle novels, and he was going through them at a rate of three or four a week. He also revisited his French and Italian and made his poor father quiz him endlessly on his vocabulary. He rarely went outdoors, and his tan slowly faded. He even resorted to learning Muggle geometry and covered the parchments he would’ve used to write to Mr. Potter with angles and shapes and lines of equations.

No letters came except from his friends and the one from Hogwarts offering to make him a prefect. He sent out an acceptance within minutes of receiving it. A stipend came with the position. For the first time in his life he’d be free of Mr. Potter’s largesse.

Despite his desire not to, Scorpius kept revisiting the scene in the car park as though if he thought about it long enough, he might be able to make it make sense. All he could imagine was that Mr. Potter’s feelings for him had changed, and now he was embarrassed to even be in Scorpius’s presence.

It was the day before he was to leave for the prefects’ orientation that he received the answer to all his questions.

_Malfoy,_

_Don’t think that I’m not on to you. I KNOW you’re a whore for fame just like your father was. Do not even THINK about coming near my dad again. If you do, you’ll have to answer to me, and I can assure you that you’re not the only one my dad taught how to duel._

_A. Potter_

Scorpius hid the letter in his school trunk. The last thing in the world he wanted was for his father to find it. Everything was suddenly crystal clear. Somehow Mr. Potter’s children had found about their . . . their what? It wasn’t an affair, but it wasn’t just a friendship any longer either. But whatever one called it, Albus and James and probably Lily had found out about it and confronted Mr. Potter who was then faced with the necessity of choosing, and – not surprisingly – he’d chosen his family.

But why couldn’t he have said as much? Did Mr. Potter really think so little of him that he’d decided he’d not deserved an explanation? Scorpius ripped a piece of parchment in half and furiously jabbed his quill into a jar of their cheap ink.

_Dear Mr. Potter,_
I know why you want to cut your ties with me, and I understand. But what I don’t understand is why you had to be so cruel about it. I think I deserve a proper good-bye after everything we’ve been for each other for all these years. I will be at Hogwarts on August 29th. There will only be seven students in the castle, and all of them are prefects for other Houses. My co-prefect can’t be there until the evening of the 30th. I will look for you in the Gryffindor common room at 8 p.m. on the 29th.

Scorpius

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Harry read the letter in his office. It was early evening, and most everyone had already left. He’d always loved this time of day. It reminded him of the deceptive peace of a hurricane’s eye.

He was not in control. That was the only thing he was certain of. Every day that he hadn’t seen Scorpius had been as uncomfortable as a too-tight jumper. He’d been restless and bad-tempered, which had only made him snap at his kids and Stun suspects who could’ve been incapacitated with a simple Incarcerous. He’d tried to pretend it was the heat, but when he lay in bed at night, unable to sleep and trying desperately not to touch himself, he knew it was Scorpius – or more precisely his absence – that was making him utterly crazy.

The letter had confirmed what he already knew – that he’d hurt Scorpius deeply. And for what? To earn his children’s affection again when he’d already committed the offense they were angry about in the first place? What on earth had he been thinking? He’d treated Scorpius like a sacrifice on an altar and did nothing but make them both profoundly miserable.

He would meet Scorpius tomorrow night. That fact hadn’t even been up for debate once he’d received the letter. He couldn’t not meet him. He would sell his soul at this point for one kiss, and he knew that was what Scorpius was asking for. A conversation didn’t need to take place at night in an empty dormitory, but more than a conversation did.

He wouldn’t be able to resist. This obsession had sunk its claws too deep. It was no longer an “if” situation, no longer speculation and fantasy. He knew he was going to cross the line again tomorrow night; the only question was by how much.

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Scorpius sat on the couch in Gryffindor’s common room trying not to chew his fingernails off. He was sweating in the stuffy air despite having opened every window. He’d spent the day barely hearing the instructions he and the other prefects had been given about their new jobs. There was a lot about how to break up fights, but for the life of him, he couldn’t recall the lesson. His every thought – conscious and unconscious – was on Mr. Potter and whether he’d show up.

He looked at his watch for the thousandth time. It was nearly eight. The sky was darkening, and the owls in their tower were calling mournfully. He’d given the Fat Lady’s password to Mr. Potter, and he was sure the Head Mistress would let him enter the school . . .

God, he wanted to scream and run around kicking things. It was the only way he’d be able to burn off the energy that’d been torturing him for days and keeping him awake at night. He went to one of the windows and leaned out of it as far as he dared. The mountains were painted plum-coloured by the sunset. Everything seemed on the verge of becoming something else. It made his head spin. The evening breeze cooled his face and dried the sweat in his hair. He was just about to pull himself up to sit on the sill when he heard the door click open. He wheeled around and watched as Mr. Potter, dressed more casually in jeans and a t-shirt than Scorpius had ever seen him before, stepped over the
“Scorpius,” he said. His voice was scratchy.

“Mr. Potter,” Scorpius replied in the steadiest voice he could muster. He felt like a mongoose hypnotised by a cobra’s eyes as he watched the distance between them close.

They stood looking at each other until Scorpius couldn’t stand it any longer. “Is this the first time you’ve been back to Gryffindor Tower, sir?” he asked.

Mr. Potter nodded as he looked around. “It is. Seeing it again brings back a lot of memories. See that shelf over there? Ron and I rigged it once so that when Hermione put her books on it, the whole thing screamed like a banshee and collapsed. She nearly fainted.” He chuckled to himself. “That was a long time ago, before she became a cool-headed Unspeakable.”

Scorpius remained where he was as Mr. Potter walked around the whole room, pointing things out and telling him snippets of stories. He seemed relaxed, but Scorpius suspected it was only a façade. At last, he stopped and went to the window where Scorpius was standing. He swallowed hard, and Scorpius watched his Adam’s apple bob.

“I have treated you shamefully,” he said at last. “I have no excuse, and I don’t ask for your forgiveness. I . . . I just feel so . . . overwhelmed by my feelings. My inability to deal with them is making me do all kinds of things I regret. I thought I could push you away and by doing so regain the love of my children. But it was the stupidest bloody idea I think I’ve ever had. It doesn’t matter if you leave to go halfway around the world again and we never write to each other, my children will still be angry, and all I would have done is hurt you and myself. Summer was hell without you.”

Scorpius looked closely into his eyes, trying to read in plain words what he was trying to say.

Mr. Potter smiled guiltily. “I’m not digging myself out of my ditch, am I?”

Scorpius shook his head.

“The ditch is pretty deep, sir,” he said. “You broke my heart.”

Mr. Potter’s face went through several expressions before it settled on a look of helpless regret.

“Scorpius,” he said brokenly and held out his hand. “Come here.”

After a moment during which he considered whether he was willing to relent so easily, Scorpius reached out and accepted Mr. Potter’s hand.

Their embrace was familiar and totally unfamiliar at the same time. Mr. Potter’s arms were around his shoulders, and his arms were around Mr. Potter’s waist, and Mr. Potter kissed the centre of his forehead like he so often did, but there was something more. Something he couldn’t put his finger on. A kind of restlessness.

They stood like that for a long time – to the point where Scorpius wondered if Mr. Potter had misinterpreted his letter. He thought he’d made himself quite plain. This evening wasn’t supposed to be another poor-little-Scorpius-let-me-comfort-you moment.

But then Mr. Potter drew back and took his hand and kissed his palm, closing his eyes momentarily as he did so. Scorpius teetered on the edge of frustration. When would Mr. Potter stop treating him like a child? But then Mr. Potter moved his hand to his chest and pressed it against his heart.
“Can you feel that?” he asked.

Scorpius nodded. He could feel wild stumbling beats.

“Those are for you.”

Scorpius didn’t know how to respond. Suddenly everything was so intense. Not like he’d heard about snogging after balls behind the greenhouse . . .

“I’ve been miserable without you.” Mr. Potter said.

He pressed Scorpius’s hand even closer to his chest.

“Forgive me. I seem to do everything wrong when it comes to you.”

Scorpius took a deep but nervous breath. “Do . . . do you want to go upstairs and visit your old dorm, sir?” he asked.

It was all he could think to say – and it was all he’d been thinking about all day. He held his breath waiting for Mr. Potter’s answer.

“You don’t need to call me ‘sir.’ My name is Harry, you know.”

Scorpius would’ve never imagined that mere words could have such an effect on him, but these did.

“Harry,” he said, and to his astonishment, Harry’s breath caught, and he closed his eyes.

“You say my name in the same way you touch me – so hesitant and sweet,” he said. “It turns me on.”

Scorpius actually gulped and then felt very stupid, but Harry smiled.

“And to answer your question – yes, I would.”

Scorpius had to rewind his memory to remember his question, but when he did, his knees went weak. He pulled away and took Harry by the hand.

The dorm room was stuffy. Scorpius went around opening all of the windows letting the sounds of the night fill the heavy quiet and the fresh mountain air dilute the room’s summer-long slumber. He heard Harry chuckle.

“What’s so funny, sir . . . er, I mean, Harry, sir?” He blushed at his linguistic incompetence. Leaving the “sir” off his sentences was going to be difficult.

“I assume the one made bed is yours?” Harry asked.

Scorpius nodded.

“Well, it was mine once too.”

They looked at each other for a moment until they both started laughing.

“I’m not very original, am I?” Scorpius said.

Harry sat down on the mattress and pushed on it with his hands to test the springs. “It’s definitely a
new mattress,” he said. “Mine felt like it’d been stuffed with rocks.”

“I’m definitely glad it’s not the same mattress,” Scorpius replied. “That would make it a million years . . . er, . . .”

“A million years old?” Harry asked. “Well, not quite. I’m forty-two, so at most that would make the mattress twenty-five years-old, which, last time I checked, was short of a million. Scorpius,” he said, his voice turning serious, “if we’re about to cross this line even by an inch, you need to know that I’m older than you by two and a half-decades. I’m the same age as your father. I’m not a young man; I am a middle-aged man, with a man’s life and a man’s history, and a man’s secrets and a man’s desires. You need to understand these things.”

Scorpius nodded. “I know all of this already,” he said boldly, squaring his shoulders to back-up his words.

“No, you don’t,” Harry said gently. “Not yet at least. I’ve never, in my whole life, wanted anyone as much as I want you. I could eat you whole in one bite, lick my fingers clean and still be hungry. I’m not entirely safe. My will is the only thing left standing between me and the desire to take you, and it’s become a very thin barrier.”

Scorpius blinked and then responded in the only way he could think of. He reached down to pull off his t-shirt, exposing his belly as he did. Harry looked away.

“Keep your clothes on,” he said. “I’m not going to make love to you.”

Scorpius blinked. “Then why are we up here?”

“Because I want to lie down on something soft.”

Harry’s eyes glinted with mischief. He toed off his shoes and lay back with his head on Scorpius’s pillow. How many times had Scorpius dreamed of just this very sight and now it was real. It was really happening.

“Are you going to join me?” Harry asked.

Suddenly realising that he was just standing there with his mouth hanging open, Scorpius nodded vigorously and kicked his trainers off without untying the laces. As soon as he was lying down facing Harry, he lunged forward for a kiss.

Harry laughed breathlessly. “No kissing,” he said, and Scorpius opened his mouth to protest, but Harry touched his finger to his lips. “Let’s just lie together. Come here.”

Harry opened his arms and Scorpius moved into them. Their bodies were so close that he could still feel Harry’s heartbeats, but this time against his own chest instead of under his hand. Their cheeks touched as they breathed each other’s breath.

Scorpius had never felt anything like it. Ever. He put his arms around Harry’s shoulders and pulled him even closer.

“You’re so beautiful,” Harry murmured against his ear. “I want you so much.”

“I want you too,” Scorpius said, feeling like an idiot. How was he supposed to respond to the sheer hunger in Harry’s voice? It overwhelmed him.

“Mmmmm, let’s see how much, shall we?”
Harry gently pushed him away and looked at his body, his eyes lingering on the bulge in his jeans.

No one had ever looked at him that way.

Harry nodded as though pleased. “You do want me,” he said, pulling Scorpius back into an embrace. “You’re hard.”

For the second time that evening, Scorpius heard himself gulp. His cheeks turned hot.

“Don’t feel embarrassed. I’m hard too.” Harry pulled back just far enough for Scorpius to look down and see not only a bulge in his jeans, but a wet spot near the waistband.

“Why can’t we have sex?” Scorpius whispered. “I want to.”

‘Because you’re sixteen,” Harry replied. “Because you’re wearing a Hogwarts t-shirt with a giant pig’s arse on it, and because I promised myself I wouldn’t. That’s why.”

Scorpius was deeply offended. He pulled away.

“In other words, I’m too young.”

“You, you are.”

“Then why are you even here?”

“Because I’m in love with you, and I want to be next to you more than anything in the world.”

Scorpius drew a startled breath.

“Come back here,” said Harry, and Scorpius moved back into his embrace.

They lay in each other’s arms as the light slowly faded into shadow. Scorpius closed his eyes and focused on the sensation of having someone in his arms – the warmth, the scent, the vague discomfort of not being able to stretch out. Harry’s breath was soft and moist against his neck. His strong fingers were combed into Scorpius’s hair.

It was a dream come true. The only problem was that he wanted more. He wanted Harry to be on top of him. He wanted to wrap his legs around Harry’s waist. He wanted skin and sweat… but more than anything, he wanted to move. His whole body cried out for it.

“Stop,” Harry said gently when Scorpius started to rub against him. He reached down and rested his hand on Scorpius’s hip, splaying his fingers, stilling them.

“But I want…”

Harry placed a finger on his lips.

“I know,” he said, as though that was some kind of answer that made sense. “You have to understand,” he continued after a moment. “I can’t come. It’s not a line in the sand – it’s a line carved in my heart.”

Scorpius inhaled sharply. Harry’s eyes were almost black, their pupils leaving room for nothing but a thin rim of brilliant green. He’d set his glasses on the bedside table. Suddenly, Scorpius realized he’d never seen him before without them on. He looked vulnerable and very human. Scorpius found himself wanting him more than ever. He hadn’t thought such a thing was possible.
After a while, Harry took Scorpius’s wrist and placed his hand on his chest again. He didn’t say anything or try to stop him when Scorpius let his fingertips graze his nipples. He merely closed his eyes with a deep sigh. Scorpius held his breath as he felt them harden beneath the thin fabric of Harry’s t-shirt.

“Do . . . do you like that?” he stammered, feeling silly and inexperienced.

Harry opened his eyes slowly. They were hazy with hunger.

“Yeah,” he replied simply.

Scorpius was amazed by his own courage and audacity when he bent his neck to take one of Harry’s nipples in his mouth, sucking gently. Harry’s back arched like a bow just before its arrow flies. A small gasp escaped his lips.

“How’s it going?” he moaned, reaching down to adjust his erection, rubbing it for just a moment.

Scorpius took the opportunity to wrap his arms around Harry’s waist and roll them both over so that Harry was on top of him and Harry’s hips were between his thighs.

Harry groaned and buried his face in the crook between Scorpius’s neck and shoulder. His whole body trembled in Scorpius’s arms.

They stayed like that until the sun sank behind the mountains’ slopes and disappeared.

“I have to go,” Harry whispered.

Scorpius merely nodded as he stroked Harry’s dark hair.

They both sat up feeling slightly stunned. They’d crossed a line, and they knew it. Harry reached out and brushed the backs of his fingers against Scorpius’s cheek.

“You’re so beautiful,” he said. “I feel like I’ve been waiting for this moment for my entire life. All of it – you, this place, the moon . . . God forgive me.”

“God isn’t here,” Scorpius replied, echoing the words his father had so often told him. “It’s just us. You and me.”

Harry chuckled and ran his fingers through his hair. He looked slightly lost.

“It’s going to feel strange,” he said.

Scorpius frowned. “What’s going to feel strange?”


“Things don’t have to change . . . that much,” Scorpius said, trying to soothe Harry’s obvious disquiet.

“Ah, but they will,” Harry said, leaning forward to kiss his forehead. “You’re no longer a student of mine, Scorpius. You’re no longer even a friend. You’re my lover, and things are going to change. I can’t look at you like I used to anymore. We’ve lain in bed together. We’ve touched. You’ve felt this . . .” He took Scorpius’s wrist and guided his hand between his legs. Scorpius gasped, and Harry laughed knowingly. “There are no secrets now. Nothing more that can be denied. We have . . . we have to be careful. Not only with each other, but with everyone else. We have to be careful, Scorpius.”
He sounded like he was trying to convince himself more than Scorpius.

They were still for a moment more until Harry pulled away and stood up. He straightened his t-shirt, which, Scorpius noticed, was nothing but black cloth – no Quidditch logo or vintage adverts for U-No-Poo. His own silly t-shirt was definitely going to find its way to the bottom of the bin.

“Stay with me,” he said, breaking the quiet.

Harry came around to his side of the bed and took him in his arms.

“I can’t,” he said. “And you know it.”

Scorpius nodded resignedly. “You . . . you won’t feel differently in the morning, will you?” he asked.

Harry pulled him into a hug and kissed his nose.

“Not a chance,” he said. “Not a chance.”

Harry stumbled out of his fireplace. The glass of scotch with Minerva had turned into three.

He sat down on his couch and put his head in his hands. The adrenaline had worn off; now all he faced was the sheer insanity of what he’d just done. He’d crossed a line he’d once sworn he’d never cross under any circumstance. But there was no going back now. The genie was not only out of the bottle, he’d caught the bus to Blackpool.

He needed to get control of himself. He was the adult in all of this. If he didn’t have control, then no one did.

He felt tears of frustration sting his eyes. He was exhausted from having to rein-in his needs, his feelings. Being back in Gryffindor Tower had made him feel like a teenager again and God knew, being intimate with Scorpius made him feel decades younger. He’d have thought he’d lost that enormous capacity for excitement, both physical and emotional. Life had jaded him, scarred him, twisted him into shapes he sometimes didn’t recognise. How many times had he sobered up only to find himself on some filthy mattress somewhere getting fucked by strangers? How many times had he gone “a little bit too far” in a fight? His scarlet robes and famous scar gave him permission to do all kinds of things that he shouldn’t . . .

He stood and went to the kitchen. There were empty take-away cartons and dirty dishes everywhere. No wonder he was attracted to a sixteen year-old! He still lived like one himself.

This had to change. It simply had to.

Scorpius was truly his now. As close as they’d been before, this was something entirely different. He was Harry’s to do with as he pleased . . .

But he was also Scorpius’s. And that perhaps was the most momentous change this night had brought.

He Banished the cartons and cast a few housekeeping spells before he started laughing and slumped against the refrigerator and slid to the floor. He was an arse. A complete fucking arse. If he thought that merely cleaning his flat would make a substantive difference in his life, he’d just be fooling himself like he’d done for years, and complete honesty is what he needed right now. No excuses. He
needed to start making the right decisions.

First of all, he had to start being a parent to his children again. He hadn’t been for years and it showed. As counterintuitive as it seemed, he knew that his children should come before all else – including his relationship with Scorpius. After all, if he’d learned anything over the past year, it was that if his children were unhappy, so was he. Plain and simple. And it’d been that unhappiness that’d caused him to be so cruel to Scorpius in June.

In other words, Harry needed to be happy himself to insure that Scorpius was happy and that meant reconciling himself with his children, regardless of how excruciatingly uncomfortable (and unsuccessful) the effort might prove.

Second of all, he needed to be a hell of a lot more careful with Scorpius. Since he was a child, Scorpius had loved him and needed him as much as his own children had. It was a huge responsibility, and Harry had tried to live up to it – and often failed spectacularly. Failure was no longer an option. Tonight he had added the role of “lover” to the already long list of roles he played in Scorpius’s life. There was no going back to the way things had been before.

He yawned and gave up on both the housecleaning and the heavy thoughts. Tonight wasn’t the time to turn over the necessary New Leaf. Instead he poured himself another glass of whisky and flopped down on his couch. For the first time in a very long time, he felt like Harry. Just Harry.

It felt good.

************

They were in the middle of their weekend run together when Harry asked Briac whether he’d ever had a sexually transmitted disease.

Briac stopped as though he’d hit a wall. “A what?” he asked. “Isn’t that a Muggle thing?”

“Well only as long as the protective spells hold up,” Harry replied. “Or if you remember to cast them in the first place.”

Briac looked at him with a raised eyebrow. “Is this a come-on or a subtle hint that if we run any longer, your dick’s going to fall off?”

“I can assure you it’s not a come-on,” Harry replied. “I was just curious, that’s all.”

“Bollocks. You’re never ‘just curious.’ There’s always some potion or another bubbling in that skull of yours.”

“Well, I’ve been thinking lately that I’ve fucked a lot – and I do mean a lot – of men.”

“I know. We’ve discussed this already. Right before you punched me in the face, if I remember correctly.”

Harry smiled sheepishly. “That wasn’t very nice, was it? Er, sorry about that. I just hate it when people breathe down my neck about sex – even if that somebody is you.”

“You’re a fucking bastard when you’re in denial,” Briac said matter-of-factly.

“Well, I’m trying my best to pull my head out of my arse now, okay? It won’t happen overnight. I’ve
spent long years perfecting my arsehole-ness.”

“So, what’re you saying? You’re going to go back to having only seven partners per week?”

“Ha ha. No, I’m actually thinking of having no partners . . . for a while.”

Briac assumed an expression of concern. “Perhaps you should sit down,” he said, clutching Harry’s arm solicitously.

“Oh piss off,” Harry said, swatting him away. “I’m serious. I’m getting too old for that shite. Plus, it’s . . . well, kind of nasty.”

“Maybe the chastity faerie has visited you, but she hasn’t come knocking at my door yet, so let’s not bandy about words like ‘nasty,’ and even worse ‘old.’” Briac shuddered.

Harry ignored him. “I’m getting myself checked out at St. Mungo’s.”

“Uhm, may I ask . . .?”

“No.”

“Okay.”

They ran in silence for a while, dodging pedestrians and cars and overturned bins. Above them, the sky was low and grey. September 1st. Summer certainly knew when her time was up.

“You know,” said Briac after several minutes, “you don’t have to do something so . . . public. There’s a witch on Circe Circle who can do all the necessary tests with complete discretion and privacy.”

“Oh yeah, I saw her name just the other day,” said Harry, leaping over a disgruntled cat. “Maybe I’ll give her a fire call.”

Briac was very quiet until they returned to his flat and stood on the balcony stretching out.


“She also tests for Blood Curses.”

“Wha . . . ? Oh, the witch you were talking about.” Harry struggled to keep his voice bland and neutral. Briac was a fucking arsehole.

“ . . . you know the kind I mean, like latent impotence spells and . . .”

“Well, I’m not worried about anything like that,” Harry replied, giving his partner a wink. The bastard was too observant for his own good.

“Maybe you should be. How about the curse that stays inactive until you make love to your soul mate for the first time? Or how about the curse that turns your balls to . . .”

“Yes,” said Harry gruffly. “I’ve heard of all those. I am an Auror, you know. I doubt any of them have been cast on me.”

Briac looked out over the river and the rest of the misty city. “It’s better to be safe than really really fucking sorry,” he said without turning to look at him. “I’m just saying.”
“We haven’t had sex, if that’s what you’re trying to ask so subtly.”

“Of course you haven’t. The boy is still sixteen. I have at least that much faith in your ability to keep your prick in your pants. But he’s going to be seventeen in less than two months.”

Harry went back inside. Hiding something from Briac – especially something as important as this – was no easy task.

Briac followed him. The bastard was persistent.

“Don’t do it.”

Harry went to the refrigerator and pulled out a bottle of orange squash.

“He’s too young – not in a legal sense, but in a maturity sense. The whole thing will blow his mind. He won’t know how to deal with it. We’re talking about a teenager. Their brains aren’t fully developed yet, even though their bodies are.”

Harry wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and threw the empty bottle in the bin under the sink. He knew Briac’s flat as well as he did his own.

“And I shouldn’t have to be the one to tell you this. You’re the father of three teenagers, not me. What would you do if Albus slept with a forty-two year-old man?”

“Kick the old bastard’s teeth in.” Harry had now moved on to last week’s take-away curry.

“Uhm. Yeah. Well, so you can see my point, I hope.”

Harry sniffed the carton. He made a face and threw it in the bin.

“Yes, I see your point. I’d have to be a complete moron not to.”

“But nothing I said is going to change anything, is it? You’ve got your heart – and your cock – set on it. Jesus, Harry, can’t you hold out until he’s at least twenty? It will seem less unsavoury to people.”

“And less perverted, too.”

“Well, I wasn’t going to put it like that, but now that you have, well, then yeah, less perverted.”

Harry stuck his head under the tap and took a long drink, swished the water around his mouth, and spat it out.

“I’m mingin’,” he said, sniffing his armpits.

“Harry.”

“Briac.”

Harry gave up and sat down on one of the barstools by the counter.

“Look. I don’t disagree with anything you’re saying, and I haven’t even told you if we really are going to have sex or not. But for the sake of argument, let’s say that sex is exactly what I have in mind on the stroke of midnight on Scorpius’s seventeenth birthday. The fact is I can’t stop myself . . .”
Briac threw up his hands and started down the hall to the bathroom, but Harry called him back.

“I can’t believe I just heard that,” Briac said. “If that’s not the stupidest most selfish thing I’ve ever heard than I don’t know what is.”

“You wanted an answer. I gave you an answer. If you don’t like it, that’s your problem. Look, I know he’s little older than a child and younger than one of my own sons, but I have feelings for him I can’t control. I’ve tried and it’s left me a wreck. You know what I’m talking about. How much help was I in Angola this summer? If we lived in ancient Greece . . .”

“But we don’t live in ancient Greece; we live in England in the twenty-first century.”

“Have you ever considered that if my . . . needs were unnatural, then I wouldn’t have them?”

“That’s what all paedophiles must say at some point or another . . .”

Harry was off the stool and across the room before Briac could finish his sentence.

“That’s a serious accusation . . .”

Briac held up his hands in surrender.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “That was entirely out-of-line. Harry, I’m just trying to help you see sense. I firmly believe you shouldn’t have sex with Scorpius. I think you’re courting a dangerous situation. You’re volatile, and you’re a man with a voracious sexual appetite. He’s volatile, and is little older than a child and has no experience to help him handle the repercussions – or that appetite of yours. You’re going to overwhelm him. Just by being you, you’re going to push him to a ledge he won’t be able to back away from if he wants to. Do you actually believe he could tell you ‘no’ if he got scared? You’re not only the mentor he’s looked up to all his life, you’re Harry fucking Potter! I’m saying this not because I give a shit what the public will think, I’m saying this for Scorpius. And for you. I know you don’t want to hurt him.”

Harry felt embattled and confused and still crazy with desire. He couldn’t take this conversation one more minute. Grabbing his t-shirt, he walked to the door.

“You’re going to do it, aren’t you.” Briac’s voice was without judgment. Harry knew that he’d realised he was going to lose this fight.

Harry rested his head against the door. “I don’t know,” he said. “But I think so. I’m going to do everything I can to keep him safe in every way possible. You can’t begin to imagine how arse over tits I am. It’s killing me.”

Briac sat down on the couch with a resigned sigh. “What do I need to do?”

Harry opened the door.

“Just support me. Don’t leave me now. I need you, Briac. Scorpius will need you too, and so will my children.”

“Are you going to tell them?”

“Yes.”

There was a long uncomfortable silence.

“You know I’ll support you.” Briac said finally without looking up from the upside-down Quidditch
magazine he was pretending to read. “You’re the closest thing to a brother I’ve ever had. There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for you, no matter how stupid it seems.”

Harry’s throat was too tight to respond with words; instead he walked to the couch and put a hand on Briac’s shoulder and squeezed it brusingly hard.


* * * * * * * *

Perhaps it was his imagination, but it seemed to Scorpius that this year’s crop of first-years were spawns of Beelzebub. Just on the first night alone, they managed to break the couch in the common room, one of the beds in their dorm room, and, by some mysterious means, the toilet in their bathroom. Plus one poor little fellow was terribly homesick.

“Hi there, papa,” Rowan said when Scorpius dropped on the (newly mended) couch beside him. “Are all your little nestlings finally asleep?”

“I don’t know about asleep, but at least their candles are out. Thank Merlin. Even though the boys in my year are complete arseholes, at least they weren’t a screaming bunch of yobs.”

“My year was pretty bad. It wasn’t until November that we could finally get to sleep before dawn.”

Scorpius laid his head against the back of the couch and closed his eyes. He was exhausted. Hopefully tonight’s events weren’t harbingers of the year to come. He’d taken on a full course load and agreed to mentor struggling first-years from all the different houses for all their courses. If he had a chance to breathe, it would be a miracle.

It’d been surreal sitting at his table in the Great Hall wearing his school uniform and glancing every now and then at the faculty table, and more specifically, at Harry in his black, professor’s robe.

*Harry*

It still blew his mind that he was calling Mr. Potter “Harry” now. In many ways, that’d been the most momentous change that’d occurred three days ago. Harry had been “Mr. Potter” for so long, and then everything had changed in an instant. Scorpius was still wondering if he’d grown gills and could breathe water now as well as air.

He’d caught Harry’s eye a couple times, and the looks they’d shared between them, as brief as they were, were taut with meaning. Several times, Scorpius would be listening to a younger student’s stream of questions and suddenly be overwhelmed by the memory of Harry’s heart beating so hard and fast against his own. And when he lay down in his bed and pulled his curtains closed . . . oh God, he recalled the sensation of having Harry in his arms.

Someone nudged him in the ribs. He opened his eyes and realised he’d been dozing.

“Sorry to wake you, mate,” Rowan said, “but you’ve got a Fire Call.”

Scorpius yawned and stretched. “Who from?” he asked. It was probably his Head of House again checking in on the little devil spawn.

“Professor Potter,” Rowan whispered with a wink.

Scorpius was suddenly wide awake. “Make sure nobody comes near the hearth . . .”
“Hhmm, this sounds serious,” Rowan said with another wink. Scorpius glared at him.

“It’s about class,” he lied. “Bugger off.”

He went to the fireplace and knelt on the singed carpet.

“Harry?” he called softly. “Are you there?”

“Scorpius . . .”

The word was slightly slurred.

“Are you drunk?” Scorpius asked anxiously, dreading the answer.

Harry laughed. “Only just a little bit.”

“Is Auror Gwencalon there?”

“Who?” Harry laughed again. “Scorpius, you don’t have to call him that anymore.”

“I miss you,” Scorpius said, unable to keep the longing out of his voice even though Rowan wasn’t all that far away.

“God, I miss you too,” Harry replied.

Scorpius could hear music and talking and laughter in the background, and his heart dropped into his stomach.

“Where are you?” he asked.

“At a club. I’m using the bartender’s fireplace. It’s alright. We go back a long time, and he has no idea who I’m calling.”

Scorpius took a deep breath and released it shakily.

“You’re . . . you’re not there to . . . ?”

“No.” Harry’s voice sounded suddenly sober. “The answer is no, Scorpius. I swear to you. Briac wanted to go, and I came with him. That’s all. Yes, I’ve had a bit to drink, but I swear to you that no one has touched me, and I’ve touched no one either. How could I when all I can think about is you?”

“I’m sorry,” Scorpius stammered. “It wasn’t my place to . . . .”

“Of course, it’s your place to ask. I’m yours. You have a right to know what I’m up to. Oh bugger! Briac, you great oaf! You stepped on my fingers!”

Scorpius laughed. “I take it you’re not the only one who’s had a couple pints.”

“Oi there, Scorpius,” said Briac whose voice was even more slurred than Harry’s. “How’re you? How’s the prefecting going?”

“Okay. Tiring though. The first-years need a lot of watching. I can’t imagine ever being that young . . .”

“Well, you were. Trust me. It was only yesterday.”

There was a very awkward silence. Finally Harry told Briac to piss off.
“Sorry ’bout that,” he said. “He really is arsed.”

Scorpius nodded. He didn’t know what to say. Drunken adults were a relatively new phenomenon in his life.

“God, I shouldn’t have called you . . .”

“No, I’m glad you did,” Scorpius replied. “I miss you.” He lowered his voice to a whisper. “I wish you could be here and we could go to bed together.”

Harry closed his ember eyes for a moment and then opened them again. “Me, too,” he said. “And what would you do if I was there?”

Scorpius blushed again, and Harry laughed.

“Kiss you. I want more than anything on earth to kiss you.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “Kiss me? That’s all? I’m sure that can be arranged; just hurry up and turn seventeen and you can do more to me than just kiss me.”

Scorpius’s breath caught in his chest. “Like what?” he asked boldly.

“More than I can tell you over a Fire Call when neither of us is truly alone,” Harry replied.

“Speaking of which,” Scorpius whispered. “There’s a big group of people coming back from the library . . .”

Harry sighed. “I suppose I’d better let you go then. Remember though, when I’m looking all stern and serious up at the front of that classroom on Wednesday, don’t forget that I’m really only thinking about being with you. Good night, Scorpius. Sleep well and dream of me.”

“Good night,” Scorpius whispered, and Harry disappeared just at the same instant a group of students from his year threw themselves in the chairs around the fire. Scorpius winced. He wanted to deal with them like he wanted doxies in his pyjamas. He stood up and tried to leave inconspicuously.

“Oh, come on, Malfoy,” Pinkerton, who was in Rowan’s seventh-year class, yelled after his back as Scorpius walked away. “You’re no fucking fun!”

As soon as he got upstairs, he brushed his teeth and took a shower as fast as he could. His conversation with Harry had aroused him, but he studiously kept his hand away from his cock. He was just getting into his pyjamas when Williams and Pinkerton entered the room and locked the door.

“I don’t know what you’re planning,” Scorpius said evenly, “but whatever it is, it’s a very bad idea. Just leave me alone.

“The prefect just gave us an order, Miles. We’d better get out of here until he glares holes through us . . .”

“That’s a good point,” said Williams. “Malfoy, why do you have those fucked-up looking eyes? No
wonder no one asks you to the Balls.”

Not only was the conversation juvenile, it was boring. How old were they? Scorpius finished putting on his pyjamas and was about to climb into bed when suddenly his blankets and pillow were Banished. He rolled his eyes.

“I just finished dealing with shite like this with the first-years,” he said. “Grow up, you arseholes.”

The next spell was less benign. Scorpius found himself suddenly blinded. He grabbed on to one of his bedposts with a sudden bolt of fear and tried to take a deep calming breath. It didn’t take much to reopen old wounds. He felt the little box open where Harry had taught him to lock his hate away. This was not a good situation. Where was his wand? He groped for it on his nightstand.

Williams laughed nastily as though he’d read Scorpius’s mind. “It’s somewhere you won’t be able to summon it from.”

Scorpius doubted that was true, but he decided to play along anyway. “What do you want?” he asked. There was still a sliver of time in which to divert the almost inevitable.

But then Pinkerton shoved him against the wall and grabbed his jaw. “A little fucking respect, you Death Eater scum.” He punched Scorpius in the stomach, and he doubled over in pain.

“And to show it, you can suck our pricks,” added Williams. “You sure got pretty while you were away. You’ve got a mouth just made for sucking cock. On your knees like a good Malfoy . . .”

Scorpius heard two flies unzip. What had they done to his eyes?

“I’m only going to warn you once,” he said, his voice quavering only a little bit, but with fury not with fear. “Don’t come near me.”

“Ooohh, such a scary little pillow-biter,” said Pinkerton feigning fright. Someone punched Scorpius in the stomach again and tried to force him to his knees. Through the burst of pain, Scorpius imagined them on the floor in pools of their own blood and suddenly his wand was in his hand.

The screaming started as the thought sunk its claws into Scorpius’s heart.

“Jesus!”

“Oh my God!”

There was a gargling sound. Scorpius could smell the stink of terror. It was not the first time he’d smelled such a smell, and it went to his head like wine.

“Malfoy! Please! Jesus! Make it stop!”

“I warned you,” he replied evenly. “End the blinding spell, and I’ll stop slicing you into ribbons.”

There was another scream.

“We can’t,” Williams wailed. “We don’t know how! Jesus, Malfoy!”

“Well, at least give me back my fucking blankets.”

If anything scared him, it was the satisfying calm that’d descended on him. Their pleas were music to his ears . . .
Don’t take pleasure in hurting people, Scorpius. That’s the first step on the path to damnation.

Harry’s voice echoed back from long ago. It’s never worth it.

“Finite!” he shouted. Harry was right: The maggots weren’t worth expulsion and a stint in Azkaban. Especially not now.

Williams and Pinkerton moaned and cried. In addition to blood and fear, there was the smell of piss in the air. This wasn’t how he’d wanted the day to end. He cast several healing spells. Unlike the Sectumsempra Harry had taught him, Slicing Hexes could be healed relatively quickly and didn’t leave scars. Also, the blood loss was minimal. The wounds stung horribly, but they seemed worse than they actually were.

“God, Malfoy! You are a fucking animal!” shouted Pinkerton.

“Shut up, you daft cunt!” yelled Williams. “He nearly killed us. He’s insane!”

“I’m going to the Head Mistress,” Pinkerton said, and Scorpius heard footsteps running to the door which he kicked and beat like a prisoner. The stupid idiot had forgotten they’d sealed it shut.

Scorpius walked slowly and deliberately in the direction of their voices.

“I don’t think you’re going to the Head Mistress,” he said, his voice low. “After all, there’s no sign that I’ve hurt you, but there are definitely signs that you hurt me. You cast a dangerous spell for which you didn’t know the counter spell. Last time I checked, that was illegal. Tell her, and I’ll make you beg for a Slicing Hex because it’ll feel like having your back scratched compared to what I’ll do to you. Alohomora.”

He heard the sound of footsteps descending the stairs. They wouldn’t go to the Head Mistress. The boys he hurt never did. He felt his eyes with his hands and began to panic. What if the bastards had blinded him permanently? He went downstairs slowly, gripping the railing and called for Rowan to help him to the hospital wing.

* * * * * * *

On the day of his first class of the year, Harry arrived at Hogwarts exactly as the bell for breakfast began to toll. He felt ridiculous. His hands shook as he unfastened the clasps of his red Auror robe and pulled on his black professorial one. He hadn’t felt this nervous about anything in years, maybe even decades. He took a deep breath and reminded himself for the one-millionth time that he was the wizard on the Chocolate Frog card – Harry Potter, Vanquisher of Voldemort, and not Harry Potter, the insane crazy man who’s gone mad with lust.

There was a knock at his door.

Harry took a deep breath and let it out slowly. This was it: the moment when the rest of his life began.

“Come in,” he said and felt a lump rise in his throat as Lily and Albus walked tentatively into his office.

“Hi,” he said simply. He remained standing and made his posture as welcoming as he could. Lily saw the invitation, even if Albus didn’t – or more likely didn’t want to acknowledge he did. She crossed the room and gave him a hug. Harry wrapped his arms around her and gave her a kiss on the pale part in her flame-coloured hair.
“How does it feel to be a fourth year?” he asked.

“How does it feel to be a third year except the boys in my class are getting taller and cuter.”

Harry hid his sigh of relief behind a cough. Clearly, there’d be no more Swiss summers with Morley, which was almost too bad. The only thing that he and Ginny had agreed upon for the entire month of July was that he wasn’t that horrible.

“And how about you, Albus? How does it feel to be a sixth year and finally have one foot out the door?”

Albus shrugged and gave no sign of wanting to get any closer. Harry reminded himself that he shouldn’t be disappointed. It was amazing Albus was here at all. He hadn’t accepted any of Harry’s breakfast invitations for almost a year, so this was progress.

“Sit down,” he said, gesturing at the three armchairs he’d put around the fireplace. On his desk were the juice, fruit and pastries the house elves had brought him.

“Tea? Or perhaps coffee?”

“Tea, please Dad,” said Lily, tugging up her uniform socks.

“Albus?”

“No thanks.”

“No thanks to tea? Or no thanks to coffee?”

“No thanks to either.”

Harry glanced at his son as he handed Lily her teacup. They’d spent almost no time together in Switzerland, which was mainly his fault. He and Briac had been sent to Angola. He’d only had a few days to go flying with Lily and Albus. Ginny had made a point of telling him that James had left an hour before he’d arrived and would return an hour after he left.

“What’s your first class this morning?” He threw out the question for the same reason Lily threw bread crusts at ducks: to see if there’d be a response.

Lily glanced at Albus, clearly willing to cede to him the right to answer first, but he kept his head down and picked at his croissant.

“Charms,” she said at last after the silence had grown uncomfortable. “And I even did my summer reading, so I’m all prepared.”

Harry gave her a genuine smile. “I’m glad to hear that. And when do you have class with me?”

“The fourth years are your second-to-last class,” she replied. “We’re right before . . .”

“The sixth years,” said Albus. “We’re your last class.”

Harry sensed the hostility behind the remark but chose to overlook it.

“Well, that’s good. It’s always nice to have the best class last . . .”

“Why? Because having us last makes it easier for you to bring Malfoy back here?”
Harry had been ready for this. There would be no scenes.

“I would be glad to discuss your feelings about Mr. Malfoy, but not now. Let’s have a pleasant breakfast and start our busy days on a positive note.” He kept his voice as level and reasonable as he could. “I’ve told you both that you can ask me anything you want, and I will answer truthfully, but I’d prefer that those conversations occur individually and at a mutually convenient time.”

Albus glared at him but didn’t respond.

Harry tried again. “How does Hufflepuff’s team look?” he asked, turning to Lily.

She shrugged and reached for another lemon tart. “Okay, I suppose. We lost Peters, of course, so that’s a bit of a blow, but there’s a girl in my class who says she’s been practising all summer, so who knows? We have try-outs on Saturday.”

“And how about Ravenclaw?”

“I frankly don’t give a toss,” Albus said, throwing his pastry in the bin. “I gotta go or I’ll be late to class.”

Harry looked at his watch with a sigh that he was careful to keep to himself.

“You git, we still have forty minutes,” said Lily. “Can you pour me some more tea, Daddy?”

Albus grabbed his book bag. “You know,” he said to Lily. “James is right. The way you say ‘daddy’ makes me think of what Malfoy probably says when he’s got . . . .”

Harry stood up as casually as he could. “Albus, I’m glad you could make it this morning. Perhaps, I’ll see you again at the Broomsticks this evening?”

“Yay!” squealed Lily. “Can I bring Clarice?”

“Sure, why not? Albus, would you like to invite someone?”

“Oh, so now we’re inviting people, huh? Are you going to invite Malfoy? Or should I?”

“I’m not inviting Scorpius,” Harry replied evenly. “And neither are you, but you are allowed to invite someone you actually like.”

Albus looked at him for the first time that morning. “Do you mean it?” he asked.

“Do I mean what?”

“That I don’t have to like him?”

Harry’s heart squeezed at all the implications behind that remark. He reminded himself that this was only the very beginning, and a lot would, with necessity and time, change, but he couldn’t help picturing a life of having to choose at every juncture . . .

“No, you don’t,” said Harry. “You may like or dislike anyone you want to; all I ask is that you be civil to Scorpius. I think that, because you should be civil to everybody, that shouldn’t be too much to ask.”

“Depends on what the definition of ‘civil’ is,” Albus mumbled. “I hope you’re not asking me to be
‘civil’ to him the way you are.”

Harry turned to Lily whose smile had completely vanished.

“Lils, why don’t you go up to the Great Hall, and let me talk with your brother alone for a couple minutes, alright?”

Lily nodded and stood up, brushing crumbs off her skirt. “I’ll see you later, Dad,” she whispered in his ear as though she needed to be embarrassed of her affection.

“Okay,” he said. “Be good.”

As soon as she closed the door behind her, Albus turned on Harry. “I don’t want to talk to you!” he yelled.

“I don’t particularly want to talk to you either when you’re in this mood, but I think we need to discuss something very important.”

Albus folded his arms across his chest and stared into the fire.

“Many people’s safety and happiness depend on you and your brother and sister behaving reasonably,” Harry said. “And I’m not just talking about the obvious people, but people like Scorpius’s father and the people that Bríac and I spend our days trying to protect. I need to be able to remain the Head Auror. Just trust me when I say that because obviously I’m not at liberty to tell you why. I think you think you want to tear the lid off some terrible secret and expose it to the world. I’m not saying you’re wrong to feel that way, I’m just saying you don’t know all the details and something that might make you feel good in the short term, might break your heart in a thousand different ways for the rest of your life. What I’ve done and will do is scandalous. If you – or one of your classmates – go to The Prophet telling reporters that the Head Auror is romantically involved with an underage student, they will swarm over all of our lives like killer ants. I’ve done my very best to protect you and James and Lily from the press’s insatiable hunger for gossip. I would ask you to consider doing the same for me.”

“What if I don’t feel like protecting you and your little fuck-toy?”

Harry took another deep breath and released it slowly. He was going to be exhausted and he hadn’t even taught his first class yet. This was uglier than he’d imagined.

“I see you’ve been spending a lot of time with James,” he said. “That’s his anger I hear coming out of your mouth. I’d be willing to bet those are his words, too.”

Albus blushed and sunk deeper in his chair.

“I thought so,” Harry said. “James and I will have our own conversations, but I want to talk to you now, not him. Scorpius is not a toy of any kind; he is as young and vulnerable as you are. I don’t want bad things to happen to any of you. I love you all, with all my heart . . .”

“Is that what he is to you? A third son with benefits?”

“No, Scorpius plays a different role in my life than you and your siblings do. Not a more important role, just a different one. He always has.”

“He’s sixteen!”

“Yes, he is. I’m aware of that fact.”
“He’s younger than James!”

“I’m also aware of that fact, yes.”

“I don’t want you to love him!”

Harry sighed. This was the heart of the matter. “I know,” he said, “and I don’t know what to say. I love him. There’s nothing you can do to change my mind, so please stop trying – for both our sakes.”

“Well, maybe I can’t change your mind, but maybe I can change his.”

Harry thought about this remark for a while, weighing all the possible answers. “If I find out that you or any of your classmates have threatened Scorpius, there will be serious consequences,” he said evenly.

“Of course not,” said Albus. “Who’d want to hurt your precious ickle . . .”

“I’m not sure you’ve considered every angle,” Harry replied. “Scorpius is not a victim – nor is he incapable of . . . doing things he shouldn’t. I wouldn’t want to have his wand pointed at me in anger. . . . But aside from that, please Albus, it would break my heart if you tried to hurt him, just as it would break my heart if someone tried to hurt you.”

Albus walked slowly to the door. “I’m not going with you and Lily to the Broomsticks,” he said. “Breakfast is one thing, but dinner is different.”

“Okay,” Harry replied. “We’ll miss you, but I respect your feelings.”

Albus snorted sarcastically and stomped to the door.

But as soon as he’d opened it, he ran smack into Scorpius, who seemed disoriented and grabbed Albus’s arm for support.

“Fuck off,” Albus said and pushed past him. Harry was just about to yell after him, but Scorpius shook his head.

“Please don’t,” he said and groped for a chair. Alarmed, Harry went to help him.

“What’s wrong?” he asked. “You’re acting as though you can’t see.”

“That’s because I can’t,” Scorpius replied. “I was hit by some kind of blinding spell last night, and the school’s healer couldn’t help. Have you had experience with spells like this?”

Scorpius’s voice was steady, but Harry knew him well enough to hear the fear underneath. Harry knelt on the floor and looked in Scorpius’s eyes, holding his chin and turning his head this way and that. The normal aloofness of his gaze just seemed vacant.

The rage Harry felt was definitely dangerous.

“Who did this to you?”

“It’s not important; I just want my sight back.”

Harry cupped his cheek. “Of course you do. I’ll fire call Briac right now. Of the two of us, he’s the expert in healing spells – as you can imagine.”
When Scorpius didn’t smile, Harry took his hand and placed it on his lips so he could feel Harry’s.

“I know this is scary, Scorpius, but it’ll be okay.”

Scorpius nodded.

“I’ll be right back,” Harry said as he stood up and went quickly to the door, “and I’ll have Briac with me. Stay here.”

Neville’s office had the nearest fireplace with a fireplace connected to the Floo network. He was heading out the door for his first class but was more than happy to let Harry make a Fire Call.

“I need you.”

Harry saw Briac get up from his desk and walk over to his hearth.

“Are you alright?” he asked. His voice sounded concerned as it always did when Harry told him he needed him.

“I’m fine, but some soon-to-be-dead bastard blinded Scorpius with some kind of spell.”

Briac disappeared and was in Neville’s office before Harry even had the chance to stand up.

“Not Albus, I take it?”

Harry bristled. “Of course not! Scorpius won’t say who, but knowing his relationship with his dorm mates I wouldn’t be surprised if it was one of them. Whoever it was cast the spell without knowing the counter spell.”

“Where is he?”

“In my office just down the hall.”

Scorpius turned his head when Harry opened the door.

“Hi there,” Briac said and knelt down in front of Scorpius’s chair to take a look at his eyes.

“Where the hell did whoever-this-was learn this spell?”

“They’,” Scorpius corrected him.

“It was a ‘they’?” Harry said. “Tell me who and I’ll go find them while Briac helps you . . .”

“No, Harry! Please don’t! Please!”

Briac looked up at Harry with a kind of I-told-you-so look. Harry scowled at him.

It took nearly a half an hour, but at last Briac concocted a counter spell, and Scorpius blinked as his vision was restored. He threw his arms around Briac and hugged him.

“Thank you,” he said. “I was starting to get afraid that I’d have to stay that way forever. He looked up at Harry. “I’m okay,” he said. Harry gave him a sceptical look. “I mean it,” Scorpius said. “I’m alright, Harry.”

“You’re not going to tell me who they are, are you?”

Scorpius shook his head. Harry took a deep breath and ran his fingers through his hair.
“Why do you want to protect them?”

Scorpius pleaded with his eyes to let it go. But Harry was too angry. The thought of someone hurting Scorpius made him wild. He opened his mouth to ask for their names again when Briac shook his head and mouthed “no.”

Harry relented with a sigh. “Alright,” he said. “For now.”

Scorpius took his hand and squeezed it. “I’ve got to go to my first class,” he said. “I’ll see you soon. Thank you again, Briac.”

“What is on your mind?” Harry asked as soon as Scorpius closed the door behind him.

Briac sat down and indicated with a nod that Harry should too.

“He cast a strong enough slicing hex to put him Azkaban for a decade, Harry. If he was anyone else, we’d have to arrest him . . .”

“You cast an Prior Incantato, didn’t you. You son of a . . .”

“Yes, and I’m glad I did! You would’ve eventually worn him down to give you the names. You would’ve gone all vigilante on them, which I imagine isn’t the kind of behaviour that’s expected of a teacher, or you would’ve gone to the Head Mistress. Clearly, Scorpius has already done something to insure they won’t talk. He doesn’t want you messing things up.”

Harry sat down in the chair next to Briac’s in a state of shock.

“He just jeopardised everything in his life . . . and for what? I thought I taught him how to control his anger.”

“Clearly, the lesson didn’t sink in. Harry, I thought you were playing with fire before; now I know you are. He’s too much like you but without a Voldemort to focus on and control his taste for violence. This looks like a prime case of nature over nurture. He’s his father’s son. If you make him your lover, you’re going to throw an unknown variable into the equation. Add to that your children and how they’ll react. I don’t like it.”

He knew Briac wanted him to focus on Scorpius, but all he could feel was anger at his friend.

“That was a serious invasion of his privacy,” he snarled.

Briac held up his hands in surrender. He’d been making that gesture a lot lately.

“Fine. You refuse to hear what I’m trying to say because it scares you too much. Get control, Harry, that’s all I’m trying to tell you. Now excuse me, I’ve got work to do.”

He walked past, and Harry grabbed his arm. “And what I’m trying to tell you is that if you do anything like that again, you’ll have a duel on your hands.”

Briac tore his arm free from Harry’s grasp and left.
The morning of Scorpius’s seventeenth birthday was like every other October 23rd he’d ever known. The sun rose at eight o’clock. He had toast, porridge and tea for breakfast in the Great Hall sitting between Rowan and Edith. He still wore the same uniform he’d worn when he was sixteen; he still had the same courses, the same books, quills and parchment. He was still a prefect, tutor and member of two clubs. He even still had his too-long hair that kept falling in his eyes.

But there was one thing that was different from all his other birthdays. There was a letter in his pocket from Harry Potter inviting him to dinner at The Dragon’s Nest.

It also included a note to Professor Longbottom excusing him from his first class tomorrow morning.

He was finally going to lose his virginity, and Harry was going to be the one to take it.

He felt so full of secrets that he wanted to jump up on the table and shout to the world that he and Harry were lovers, but of course he didn’t. He even faked a yawn and put his head on the table as if he was going to fall asleep at any moment.

Edith nudged him in the ribs. “Wake up, Malfoy.”

Scorpius sat up and rubbed his eyes. “Stayed up late writing an essay,” he said and yawned again.

“Well, at least stay awake for Herbology. We’re starting the section on plants that digest anything that touches their flowers. Including fingers.”

Edith had been right: Herbology was engrossing, and he managed to distract himself until he handed Professor Longbottom the note Harry had given him.

“I have no problem with you missing class tomorrow,” Professor Longbottom said. “I’ll make sure I give Edith the assignment.” His professor sounded casual about it all, and Scorpius almost giggled with the adrenaline rush he’d been riding since he woke up. Little did Professor Longbottom know that he wouldn’t be in class because he’d still be making love with Harry when the bell for morning classes rang.

The day was interminable, and the first-years had even more issues than usual, but at last, he found himself in a scalding hot shower, scrubbing every inch of his body as if it was a shoe he was shining. Once he was out of the shower, he pulled out every uniform shirt and sniffed it. To his chagrin, none of them smelled completely clean, and he was forced to choose the least offensive one. Glancing around to make sure there was no one in the room, he pinched Howard’s cologne and doused himself with it. That should blot out the smell, but then there was another problem. The shirt was
wrinkled, and he couldn’t remember the ironing charm. There was no time to find Rowan and ask him; Harry was going to be there to fetch him in fifteen minutes!

At last he had his tie on and the least too-small jumper he could find and ran down the stairs like an inmate sprung from his prison cell.

* * * * * * * *

Harry was sweating and replying distractedly to all the students who stopped and said hello to him. It was supper time, and there was a line forming in front of the doors to the Great Hall. All around him, the younger children were giggling and shrieking, while the older students slumped against walls and pillars trying to look cool.

He was feeling a little sick. He hadn’t eaten anything all day, and the noise was starting to give him a headache. At last he saw Scorpius running down the stairs, his face looking like it’d been scrubbed within an inch of being sloughed off altogether.

“How are we going to get there, Har . . . er, sir?” Scorpius asked as they walked to the front doors.

“We’re going to fly into Hogsmeade and then Apparate,” Harry replied as they walked far enough away from the castle not to be noticed. He Accioed his broom and put Scorpius in front of him.

Merciful Merlin, what was that smell? Harry couldn’t help sneezing repeatedly as Scorpius’s hair blew back in his face. He hadn’t known what a whole bottle of cheap cologne smelled like, and he wished he’d never found out.

They landed just outside of Hogsmeade, and Harry shrunk his broom and put it in his pocket. He was wearing what he usually wore to the office when he wasn’t in his robe – black shirt and black trousers. He’d wanted to wear something nicer, but he hadn’t had time to return to his flat. He still even had his knife strapped to his thigh. Very romantic. Scorpius took his arm and he Apparated into The Dragon’s Nest’s foyer.

They were seated (at Harry’s request) at a table as far away as possible from the one where he always sat with Lily. After a few minutes of fussing around with napkins and asking the waiter for water, Harry finally looked at Scorpius for the first time.

He’d been half-hard all day. All he’d been able to think about was Scorpius naked beneath him. His whole body yearned for it. He’d make love to Scorpius all night, doing to him everything he’d been imagining for endless, torturous months. He wanted to make Scorpius moan and beg and plead for more . . . .

The only problem was that Scorpius was dressed in a rumpled school uniform and ripping off pieces of bread, rolling them between his palms, and throwing them in his water glass just as Lily did with her napkins.

“Is that a Hors d’oeuvre?” Harry asked.

Scorpius looked at what he’d done and blushed to the roots of his hair. He probably hadn’t even realised he’d been doing it.

“Uhm, no,” he said, fishing the bread balls out of his water with a knife, which only made the whole situation worse by getting water all over the table cloth. “Oh God, how embarrassing,” he said.

“It would probably be easier if you used a spoon.”
Scorpius nodded and switched tactics.

Harry suddenly needed a drink . . . or five. He felt like a parent out with his teenage son, trying to teach him table manners. He waved for the waiter and ordered a bottle of wine and a shot of whisky.

“So happy birthday,” he said, pouring Scorpius a generous glass of wine before throwing back his shot and waving the waiter over again. “Why don’t you just set up the table for automatic refills?” he said. “Otherwise I’ll be bothering you the whole evening.”

The waiter nodded. “Of course, Mr. Potter,” he said.

“Thanks,” Scorpius replied taking a huge sip of his wine. “Of course, it’s even better now. How was your day at the office?”

“Nothing special. Coached the new recruits, met with the Minister, that kind of thing.”

There was an awkward silence that he’d never experienced with Scorpius before, but it was mercifully interrupted by the waiter asking if they wanted to order any Hors d’oeuvres. Harry had been there so many times, he didn’t have to look at the menu.

“What do you want?” he asked Scorpius.

Scorpius turned red. “I don’t know. Whatever you want.”

“I’m fine with anything. Order whatever you want.”

Scorpius wiped the sweat off his brow with his napkin. He was clearly very uncomfortable.

“We’ll have the vegetable samosa,” Harry told the waiter. “Enough for two please.”

Scorpius gulped down his glass of water. Harry decided to address the obvious.

“You look uncomfortable. Why don’t you take off your jumper?”

Scorpius looked surprised as though the option hadn’t occurred to him.

The jumper was too small, and Scorpius had to struggle to get out of it. When he finally did, his fine hair was standing on end with the static. He looked like he’d just had the fright of his life.

Harry threw back another whisky and another glass immediately appeared in its place. Scorpius took another gulp of wine; he appeared to be mimicking Harry’s every move.

The Hors d’oeuvres took far longer than they should have, and by the time they arrived, Scorpius was clearly a little tipsy. He reached across the table to jab a samosa with his fork as if he was having supper at Hogwarts and needed to be aggressive in order to get what he wanted.

Harry threw back another whisky when Scorpius managed to spill chutney on his Gryffindor tie. The poor boy was obviously a wreck. He reached across the table and put his hand on Scorpius’s.

“It’s just me,” he said. “There’s no need to feel so nervous.”

Scorpius blushed and bit his lip. “I’m not nervous, sir . . . er, Harry, sir.”

The dinner was more of the same, except Scorpius got tipsier and tipsier. Finally, when he got up to use the loo, Harry Banished three quarters of his glass and the entire bottle of wine. When he came back, it was clear Scorpius had splashed his face with water.
This was *not* going to work.

Harry ordered them both the same thing for dessert, and watched as Scorpius poked at it and shoved it around his plate with his fork before going to the loo again.

This was *definitely* not going to work.

Harry swallowed back a mouthful of disappointment.

“Uhm,” said Scorpius when he returned to their table. “I’m not feeling so well.”

Harry nodded and handed him the key to their room. “I’ll pay the bill and come up in a few minutes,” he said, and Scorpius practically sprinted out of the dining room.

Fuck Briac for being right. Again. Harry threw back his last glass of whisky. At this point the best thing that could happen was for him to get drunk and not be able to get it up. But that possibility seemed unlikely. He still had the same almost-erection he’d had all day. Clearly his cock wasn’t able to see what his brain did.

He took his time paying the bill and then went for a walk around the duck pond that Lily liked so much. The park was full of couples in nice clothes either going to, or coming back from, the theatre or concert hall. They looked elegant and comfortable, not only with each other, but with themselves. He sighed. What on earth had he been thinking? Teenagers were not meant to be having sex with middle-aged men . . .

_God_, he was so frustrated though. He’d done nothing but think about this night since their evening in Gryffindor Tower. Scorpius hadn’t seemed so nervous then. It wasn’t that he was acting like a seventeen year-old tonight (which was difficult enough as it was), he was acting like a thirteen year-old! If Harry made love to him tonight as he’d being planning to do forever, he really would be a dirty old man.

He sighed and headed back to the hotel. Scorpius obviously had a nervous stomach, and he’d wanted to give him enough time to deal with it. An hour had passed; that should be enough.

When he knocked on the door, a pale-faced boy with damp hair and wearing a frightening amount of cologne opened the door. He looked like he’d been crying.

“Hi,” Harry said. “You’re not feeling so well, are you?”

Scorpius shook his head. Harry entered the room and closed the door. Scorpius followed him and started trying to take off his tie with fumbling fingers. Harry gently pulled his hands away and undid the knot himself. Scorpius pulled his shirt tails free of his waistband and undid his buckle. Harry gently seized his hands. Using a wordless spell, he Transfigured a couple towels into pyjamas.

Scorpius’s eyes widened and he stared at him. Harry leaned forward and kissed his forehead.

“Go take a nice long bath and put those on,” he said. “I’ll wait for you here.”

Harry sat down and pulled off his boots and unbuckled the knife around his thigh. God, he looked like a fucking assassin! Moving as quickly as he could, he unzipped his fly and pushed his trousers down. It took a long time, but eventually he came. He stripped off his clothes and dressed as quickly as he could into a t-shirt and pyjama bottoms. When Scorpius came out of the bathroom, he was lying on the bed watching the Muggle telly. He patted the space beside him, and Scorpius joined him.
I love “The Thin Blue Line,” he said. “It reminds me of the Auror Department.”

Scorpius leaned back against the pillows uncomfortably, but after a little while he started laughing at the jokes.

After “The Thin Blue Line,” they watched two episodes of “Coronation Street.” Scorpius had never seen it before so Harry had to fill him in on the plots and characters. When they started an episode of “Eastenders” though, Scorpius reached for the remote and turned off the telly.

“I don’t think we came here to watch Muggle stories,” he said.

Harry took a deep resigned breath. “No, you’re right.”

Scorpius turned over onto his side to look at him. “I want to have sex with you,” he said fervently. “I’m just a little nervous, but I’ll get over it.”

Harry lay down so that they were facing each other. He reached out and tucked Scorpius’s fair hair behind his ear. “I know you do,” he said. “But I just can’t.”

“You ‘can’t’ or you ‘won’t’?”

“Well, if you’re going to pin me down like that then, it’s I ‘won’t’. Not tonight. You’re the same boy you were yesterday, it’s just that today you’re of legal age. But you’re still the same boy, Scorpius.”

Scorpius frowned. “I wasn’t too young one and a half months ago, was I? What’s changed?”

“Nothing. That’s precisely my point.”

“But you said . . . .”

“I know I said. Scorpius, can’t you tell you’re not even a little bit hard. The whole prospect of making love is terrifying to you, no matter how much you may want to do it. One’s body doesn’t lie.”

“If you start having sex with me, I’m sure I will . . .”

“Scorpius, we’re not having sex,” Harry said gently.

To his great chagrin, Scorpius’s eyes filled with tears.

“But I thought you wanted me! You told me so yourself.”

“I do want you,” Harry replied. Just not tonight.”

Scorpius was quiet for quite a while as he struggled to get a hold on his emotions. “Will you at least kiss me?”

Harry thought for a moment. There didn’t seem to be a reason to say no, as long as clothes didn’t come off. He rolled on to his back and pulled Scorpius with him.

“How about you kiss me?”

Scorpius gave him a surprised look. “But I don’t know how to kiss,” he said. “I thought you were going to teach me.”

Harry smiled. “I’d rather you teach me how you want to be kissed rather than I teach you how
everybody kisses generically. I want to learn about you.”

The nervousness returned to Scorpius’s eyes. “What if I’m pants at kissing?”

“I can promise you that whatever you do, you won’t disappoint me, so kiss me already. Don’t think too much about it, just do it.”

Harry watched as Scorpius closed his eyes, and then he felt the soft press of lips against his own. Their mouths were still closed and the “kiss” only lasted a second, but Harry nonetheless felt his heart quicken.

“How was that?” Scorpius whispered, his breath caressing Harry’s cheek.

“It was perfect.”

“You’re just saying that.”

“Well, kiss me again and see if I don’t mean it.”

Scorpius pressed their mouths together again, and this time stayed where he was for several seconds. When they parted, Harry hummed his appreciation. Scorpius flushed with what looked like pride. When he leaned forward again, he licked Harry’s lips. His touch was so curious and innocent; Harry felt his heart squeeze with tenderness.

After several minutes of soft chaste kisses and a tentative tongue, Scorpius opened his mouth, and Harry immediately turned his head to seal their mouths together. After a few seconds, Scorpius tore away from the kiss and panted.

“Can’t . . . breathe . . .”

Harry laughed. “You have to breathe through your nose, otherwise you’re going to turn blue, which is not the most attractive colour for one’s face.”

Scorpius took a deep breath as though he was about to dive into a lake and sealed their mouths again. It took a couple tries but he finally got the whole breathing through his nose thing down.

It was then he introduced his tongue, and Harry had to pull back panting, but not because he was losing his breath.

“My God,” he murmured. “You could make me come with your tongue alone.” He lifted his head for another kiss, and Scorpius slipped his tongue in his mouth again. Harry groaned and did the same with his tongue, clutching Scorpius against him.

The kiss went on forever. Every time one of them pulled back, the other moved to start it again. Their bodies got closer together, and Harry could feel Scorpius’s erection against his own. When he felt Scorpius start to rub against him, he pulled back.

“Do you want to touch me?”

Scorpius nodded emphatically. Harry rolled them back onto their sides . . .

And Scorpius went straight for his cock.

He yelped with surprise and pulled out of reach. Scorpius frowned at him.

“I thought you asked if I wanted to touch you.”
“I did. It’s just that there are many parts to my body other than my cock. For instance . . .”

Harry took Scorpius’s hand and cupped it against his cheek. Scorpius brushed it gently with his thumb, pausing now and then to graze his palm over the stubble on Harry’s jaw. It tickled, and Harry smiled. Scorpius traced his lips with his fingers and placed a lingering kiss on his chin.

“When you look at me your face seems so much different from all those photographs in The Prophet. You don’t look at all stern and distant.”

“That’s because I trust you. I try to have a certain look about me when I’m in public, especially when there are reporters around. I’ve been burned too many times. It’s all business now. I don’t let them see cracks in the mask – at least if I can help it. The public is not always kind and it cares nothing about the person behind the image – unless it’s to try to knock me off the pedestal they put me on.”

Scorpius kissed his mouth softly as though apologising for years of things he’d never had anything to do with. Harry brushed his cheeks with his thumbs as Scorpius took off Harry’s glasses, folded them, and placed them on a nightstand. He tenderly kissed Harry’s eyelids.

“You have such thick lashes,” he said. They make you look kind of shy.”

“Sometimes I am shy,” Harry replied. “Or at least I used to be when I was much younger.”

“They’re beautiful,” Scorpius murmured. “I love them almost as much as I love your eyes. Your eyes are my favourite thing about you.”

He pushed aside Harry’s fringe and traced the scar with his finger over and over again.

“Does it ever hurt anymore?”

“No, not anymore. It stopped hurting when I killed Voldemort.”

Scorpius kissed the corners of his eyes.

“You have creases. You worry too much.”

Harry smiled. “There’s a lot of weight on my shoulders,” he said. “There always has been.”

Scorpius leaned forward for a long deep kiss. There was nothing tentative about his kisses any longer. Harry arched his neck as Scorpius kissed his throat and nuzzled his cheek against the stubble on Harry’s chin. Turning his head, Scorpius kissed his neck beneath his ears.

Harry reached down between them and adjusted his cock which had become trapped in an uncomfortable way as it swelled, and as he did so, he brushed Scorpius’s erection, and they both gasped. Harry quickly pulled his hand away and took Scorpius’s, moving it to his shoulder.

Scorpius’s touch was more arousing than any other he’d ever experienced. Scorpius explored his body as though he was blind and trying to learn everything through his hands, every bone and every muscle. When he slid his hand from Harry’s shoulder to his thigh, it felt as though he was removing a shroud that had been there for as long as he could remember.

“You’re so . . . here.” Scorpius’s voice sounded awed. “How did that happen?”

Harry took his hand and placed it on his waist. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, you’re here, and I’m touching you.”
Harry leaned in to kiss him. “Does it feel strange?”

“In some ways but not in others. Part of me feels like I was born to touch you, and the other part is just amazed it’s actually happening . . . after dreaming about it for so long.”

Harry watched his face as Scorpius propped himself on his elbow and stroked Harry’s thigh through his pyjamas. His face was full of concentration as though nothing existed in the universe except for him and his body. He was the Scorpius Harry recognised. The calm serious young man and not the frightened child he’d been at dinner . . .

He could always change his mind . . .

Scorpius pulled him close and tried to stifle a yawn against his shoulder. Harry was relieved.

“Let’s get under the sheets,” he said. “You may not have had sex with me, but you will have slept with me.”

Scorpius yawned and stretched. “You’re not going to leave, are you?” he asked.

Harry shook his head. “Of course not. I’m going to lie here in your arms all night.”

They burrowed underneath the duvet, laughing and kissing as they made themselves fit together. Harry had done everything under the sun with other men, but he’d never slept with one of them. In fact, he hadn’t slept in a bed with another person since he’d been with Ginny. He felt a surge of gratitude for the possibility to have this again – something so simple but yet so very necessary.

“You’re so warm,” Scorpius said softly, putting his leg over Harry’s and snuggling close to his chest.

“And you feel so good. I have a feeling I’m going to sleep better than I have in months. Jab me if I snore.”

Scorpius laughed. “Who would ever have thought that Harry Potter snores?”

Harry pulled him close and kissed his mouth.

“Happy birthday,” he murmured. “I love you.”

“Even though I was stupid and silly at dinner?”

“Yes, of course. I love you no matter what,” Harry said, “although it would be nice when he dine together again if you didn’t roll your bread into little balls.”

He felt Scorpius cringe. “I can’t believe I did that,” he said.

“You were nervous,” Harry whispered into his hair. “We made tonight into too much of a big milestone.”

“When will we be able to be like this again?”

“I don’t know,” Harry said gently. “Let’s play things by ear. We tried to take everything too fast.”

Scorpius was quiet for a long time.

“I guess I’m a huge disappointment,” he said.

Harry pulled back so he could look in those eerily beautiful eyes of his.
“You are not a disappointment. You are more perfect than I’d even imagined, which is saying something. I just have to make sure the time is right. That’s all. Now go to sleep, Scorpius. I’m not going to let you go.”

* * * * * * *

Classes were surreal to say the least.

“Where were you this morning?” Edith asked at lunch. “You missed the Acidic Anemone. It stunk and burped. You would’ve loved it.”

“Uhm, I uh slept late,” Scorpius replied, grabbing a slice of buttered toast from the platter as it floated by. He felt very odd – as though he’d just come home from a long journey in foreign lands. He’d woke in Harry’s arms and they’d held each other until the last possible second. Harry had taken his breath away when he opened his sleep-puffy eyes and smiled, and for the first time, Scorpius had appreciated just how momentous waking up together was – how wonderful and intimate.

But God, the night before had been a wonky broom ride! He’d felt so ill with nerves and too much wine, and then he’d come out of the bathroom and known right away that they weren’t going to have sex. He wasn’t stupid. Of course he knew why. Harry was already skittish about his age, and there he’d been acting like one of his first-years! What the fuck had he been thinking?

But then there’d been the talking and the laughter and the kissing and the touching. All of it had made his head feel light with giddy joy. Harry had been so carefully urgent. He could feel it in his kisses and the way his body had moved in Scorpius’s arms. He had no doubt at all that if he hadn’t bollocksed things up, they would’ve had sex.

But to his amazement, he found that he rather preferred the night they’d actually had. He had begun to start admitting to himself just how nervous the prospect of real penetrative sex made him. He wouldn’t be surprised to learn that his regressive behaviour at dinner was a subconscious way to avoid it.

Classes the next day were even more surreal.

It was Wednesday, the day Harry taught DADA. It was also the day he usually had breakfast with Lily in his office, but today he was sitting at the faculty table with all the other teachers. Scorpius looked around for Lily but didn’t find her. He felt his stomach drop; was she now mad at Harry too?

But then he remembered hearing that she’d had to miss the match with Slytherin yesterday because she had a cold.

“So, here’s what I think,” Edith said conspiratorially, leaning against his shoulder and whispering in his ear. “I think Professor Beaver-Face has teeth like that because he goes to the forest every night and gnaws trees. Don’t you think that would explain a lot of things? I mean why doesn’t he live in the castle? I know why . . . he leaves in a beaver dam. Bet you anything . . . Scorpius? Hello! Earth to Scorpius!”

Scorpius shook his head. He was miles and miles away from the Great Hall and his day-to-day life as a Sixth Year. He couldn’t be less interested in Professor Weaver and his supposed beaver dam even though before he’d spent the night with Harry, he and Edith conjectured endlessly about the strange-looking professor’s odd ways. Trying to look casual, even bored, he turned his head to look at Harry
through his fringe. Harry was talking with McGonagall. He looked just like he always did. Slightly rumpled robes and glasses. Was he thinking of Scorpius and the night they’d spent together? If so, it didn’t show on the outside.

That afternoon, Scorpius felt so weird about things that he considered skiving off DADA, but that would be even weirder. Instead, he settled on going into the room last, but his watch must’ve been wrong because he came in after Harry had already started lecturing. And then if things didn’t already suck enough, the only free desk was next to Albus.

“How nice of you to join us, Mr. Malfoy,” Harry said as he always did when students came in late. He went back to his lecture without even the tiniest hesitancy. Scorpius meanwhile was blushing like an apple. He got out his book, parchment, ink bottle and quill as quickly and as quietly as he could. What was wrong with him these days? He seemed incapable of not looking like a complete arse in front of Harry.

Albus shoved a note at him.

*I loathe you, Malfoy. Don’t ever go near my dad again!*

Scorpius put it under his parchment without turning to look at him, and, of course, Harry saw him.

“Mr. Potter and Mr. Malfoy, stop passing notes unless you want them read in front of the class.”

Scorpius noticed that Albus looked even more mortified than he did, which was gratifying in a pathetic kind of way.

After class, Harry didn’t look at either of them as they left the room.

* * * * * * *

“You were right.”

Briac glanced up from the whisky it looked like he’d been drowning his sorrows in.

“Of course, but which thing was I right about today?”

“Having sex with Scorpius is a bad idea.”

Despite the bags under his eyes, Briac immediately perked up.

“You mean you didn’t do it? Despite having spent the night with him?”

Harry glared at him. “How’d you know about that?”

Briac looked at him with an expression that said “as if you can keep something like that from me.”

“I’m more relieved than I can begin to tell you. Sit down and drink a couple shots with me.”

“I think I’m going to stay with beer tonight,” Harry replied. “The whisky thing is getting out of control.”

“Whoa! Aren’t we full of the obvious tonight! First you admit that sleeping with a boy who can’t even grow a beard yet might be a bad idea, and then you admit you have a drinking problem! Does that mean you’re finally going to confess to the women’s bras and knickers you keep in your closet?”

Harry glared at him again. “I’m glad I could cheer you up,” he said. “What was wrong with you
before I came in?”

Briac sighed in a very I’m-not-joking kind of way.

“She left me,” he said. “For good this time.”

Harry sat on the barstool next to him, and they drank in silence for a while.

“It’s this fucking job of ours. She couldn’t take it. Harry, I’m sick of fucking a different woman every night. I’m tired of sleeping alone.”

“I understand,” Harry said. And meant it. Waking up with Scorpius had been like waking up to a wonderful dream. Scorpius was beautiful in every light, but none seemed to suit him as well as the soft light of dawn. Harry hadn’t been able to let him go.

“I’d do anything to get her back. I think I’m in love with her.”

Harry finished his pint and ordered another. “Here’s to not having what we want most in the world,” he said, clinking his glass against Briac’s. “Cheers.”

Harry was about to catch him.

Scorpius lay forward on his broomstick and flew so close to the side of the valley that the tall grass swept his feet.

“Jesus, Scorpius! Careful!”

He rolled his eyes. He was not one of Harry’s children. Turning sharply to the right, he flew out over the loch this time skimming the water with his trainers, not caring if they got wet. Harry pulled alongside him effortlessly. The bastard.

“You’re flying like your father,” he said breathlessly. “Has he been giving you tips?”

Scorpius grinned. “Maybe. He told me about the . . .”

Suddenly he found himself upside down in freezing water. Luckily, he’d learned to swim in New Guinea. He watched as Harry stopped as though he’d hit a wall which almost caused him to topple off as well.

“Scorpius!” he cried, and Scorpius slipped beneath the surface. Harry called out his name again, and then Scorpius heard a splash and felt Harry grab him around his chest.

Harry was going to kill him.

Scorpius turned and kissed him and then kicked his way back to the surface.

Harry was flushed and panting and furious.

“Bloody hell, Scorpius! I thought you were drowning!”

“No, just taking a swim. Glad you could join me.”

Harry was not amused. “You’re an annoying little prat, and I’m freezing. I guess we’d better head for shore now.” He grabbed his broom and mounted it.
Good luck Scorpius thought. Harry’s soaked wool cloak must weigh a . . .

But suddenly Harry was rising up and speeding away as though the water was wind propelling him forward. It was truly amazing. Harry flew toward shore and then turned and swept back to Scorpius who was floundering pathetically.

“Too bad you don’t know how to get back up in the air,” Harry said. “I guess it means more sandwiches for me.”

Scorpius glared at him. “You’re such a poser.”

Harry grinned. “And you’re such a cocky little shit. Here, give me your hand and hold tight to your broom with the other. Once you’re out of the water, get on it. You’ll have to fly fast though with all the weight you’re carrying.” He winked and was off like a jinx.

The warming charm they cast together felt like a blast from the Sahara.

“Whoa!” Harry cried. “I think either one of us could cast a charm that won’t roast us like chickens. I forget sometimes how powerful your magic is.”

Scorpius suppressed a grin at Harry’s compliment and reached for the rucksack. It was a perfect day in every way. Even though it was wintry cold, the sky was a cloudless rich blue and the sides of the valley were awash in more colours than even a painter could imagine.

And Harry was laughing. It seemed like forever since Scorpius had seen him laugh. It made his heart soar. This was the first time in more than a month that they’d spent a whole day together. Harry had been unusually serious, and when they’d had lunch together every Wednesday, he’d seemed preoccupied. He told Scorpius that it was work, and Scorpius tried to believe him. But he knew the real reason: Harry was trying to back away from him again. Scorpius had seen the signs before – the careful physical distance, the excruciatingly bland conversation, and only a chaste fleeting kiss when they parted. Scorpius had almost been at wits’ end until he’d read the story in the The Prophet on Thursday.

After weeks of raids, Harry Potter and his hand-picked group of Aurors were finally able to find and capture Corpus Manley, the mastermind behind the trafficking of cursed wands that have killed seven people since October. It was Auror Potter himself, and his partner Auror Gwencalon, who made the arrest after one of the Department’s most seasoned Aurors, Bridget Murray, was seriously wounded. Eyewitnesses report that Aurors Potter and Gwencalon threw off their Glamours and entered through the front door of Manley’s country estate “as though they were guests arriving for a dinner party.” While this reporter, like the rest of our readers, questions Auror Potter’s brazen methods, his skill and sheer bravery remain unquestioned – and unmatched. Asked after Manley was secured whether he worried that some of his minions were at large and dangerous, Auror Potter said that “Manley’s cohorts in crime will be hunted down and brought to justice. No one nearly murders an Auror and gets away with it on my watch”.

Scorpius had felt like an idiot – and a self-centred one at that. Not everything in Harry’s life revolved around him. But it troubled him that Harry had felt he needed to hide his worries and concerns from him. He couldn’t help but think it was yet another manifestation of Harry’s coddling him because of his age.

His thoughts were interrupted when Harry grabbed him around the waist, pushed him back into the grass and kissed him as though the world was on the verge of coming to an end. Scorpius gasped
with surprise at the sudden desire that rushed over him, and he kissed Harry back with equal passion.

“God,” Harry murmured against his lips. “I’ve wanted to do this for weeks. I can’t tell you how hard it’s been to hold back.” He lowered his head for another kiss, caressing Scorpius’s tongue with his own, and making Scorpius’s head spin.

They kissed for a long time, making love to each other’s mouths, until Scorpius pulled away and sat up. Harry propped himself on his elbow and looked up at him with questioning eyes.

“You don’t have to shelter me,” Scorpius said. “I’m not a piece of china. I won’t break if you talk to me about what’s bothering you.”

Harry sat up and pulled a stem of grass from his hair. “I know you won’t break,” he said. “You’re not the breaking kind. I’ve known that about you forever.”

“Then why didn’t you tell me about the raids? Or at least say there were things at work that were troubling you. I don’t want you treating me like a child emotionally as well as physically.”

Harry took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I could tell you were getting upset. You can’t hide things from me. I know you too well. It’s just that I’m not used to talking about my work with anyone except Briac. When we were married, I could never talk to Ginny. She didn’t want to hear it – it scared her, and the last thing I want to do is scare people. I spend my life trying to protect people from reality. It’s a big part of my job. If the public knew what I know, they’d lock themselves in their houses and never come out.”

Scorpius reached out and pulled Harry close. “I’m not the public,” he said, and then, after mustering every ounce of courage, he added, “I’m your lover, and I want to know about everything in your life – no matter how frightening it might be.”

Harry turned and kissed him passionately before pulling back and resting his forehead against Scorpius’s. “You probably didn’t know it, but you’ve been a confidant for years. It’s only since we’ve got closer that I’ve pulled away. I want to protect you, Scorpius. I love you too much to drag you down into my sordid dangerous world.”

“Well, it’s not an issue of ‘want, it’s an issue of ‘have to.’ You don’t need to protect me – at least not from yourself.”

He pushed Harry onto his back and kissed him until their warming charm cooled.

“Let’s cast another one,” he said breathlessly. “I want you to make love to me – right here. Right now.”

Harry pulled away and sat up. “It’s getting dark,” he said as if that was some kind of answer.

“I don’t care.”

“You must be hungry.”

“I ate a sandwich less than two hours ago.”

“The grass is too scratchy.”

“We’ll put our cloaks down.”

“It might rain.”
“Bollocks, the sky is as clear as it has been since this morning.”

Harry was quiet for a long time.

“I can’t . . . .”

Scorpius felt a stab of anger and stood up.

“Please, Scorpius . . .”

“I’m beginning to think you don’t want to.”

Harry stood up and tried to pull him into his arms, but Scorpius stepped away.

“I do want to – it’s just that . . .”

“. . . if you look south you can see the castle, and I’m wearing my school uniform.”

Harry winced but nodded nonetheless. “Yeah,” he said. “You’ve pretty much guessed it all.”

Scorpius closed the clasp on his cloak. “Well, we better get back then so that I can eat dinner with all the other little children and then climb into bed with my stuffed Hypogryff . . .”

“Merlin, Scorpius! Don’t be like that!”

“Well, it’s true, isn’t it?”

“We’ll make love. I promise. I just need . . .”

“. . . to be able to pretend I’m not a teenager.”

Harry was silent.

“I don’t want to part like this,” he said after a moment. “Please don’t send me back into my fucked up world angry at me. I’m trying to do what’s right, Scorpius.”

“And what’s right is leaving me confused and aching for you?”

Harry was silent again as he looked out at the horizon.

“I love you,” he said at last. “I don’t want to completely fuck this up. You wanted to know about my work? Well, tonight Briac and I are going to burn a house down to force out its occupants – more of Manley’s people and hopefully the last – and subdue them. No one knows about it except me and Briac, and now you. It could lose me my job. People will be injured and some might die. I can’t take your virginity and never return. I can’t, Scorpius. You’re just going to have to accept that.”

Scorpius took a deep breath. “I’m sorry,” he said at last.

Harry took him in his arms. “Don’t be sorry. And don’t let me leave without a smile so I can carry it like an amulet into hell with me tonight.”

* * * * * * * * *

There were many ways to die, and Harry had witnessed pretty much all of them. There was death by suffocation, death by exsanguination, death by fire, death by blunt force trauma, death by Unforgivable, etc. etc. etc. But there was one way of dying that’d never occurred to him, and that
was death by sexual frustration.

If he didn’t make love to Scorpius soon, he was going to explode. It was as simple (and messy) as that. But despite the urgency of the situation, fate kept getting in the way.

Take last Wednesday for instance: Scorpius had come to Harry’s office just as Harry was about to Floo to his office at the Ministry. He’d been in the process of changing from his black robe into his red one when there was a knock on the door. When he’d opened it to find Scorpius in the hallway, his arms full of books, looking far too innocent not to be up to something devilish, Harry had realized that his reasons for not making love to Scorpius on school grounds were rapidly becoming obstacles too easily overcome.

Harry had stepped aside to let him enter, not unaware of the fact that Scorpius was not wearing his uniform.

“Tea, Mr. Malfoy?” he’d asked teasingly.

“Yes, please, sir,” Scorpius had replied primly. “May I sit down, sir?”

Harry had to bite his tongue to keep from laughing.

“Of course,” he’d replied. “How can I be of assistance this evening? You seem to have been doing a lot of reading.”

“I have, sir,” Scorpius had said. “And I have a list of questions I’d like to ask you if you have the time.”

Whereupon Scorpius had drawn a scroll of parchment from his bag and let it unwind. It was at least two yards long.

Harry had laughed. “Well, Mr. Malfoy,” he’d said. “It looks like we’ll be here all night.”

Scorpius had blushed and bit back a smile. The sight had made Harry’s heart turn over with love . . . and his blood surge with desire. He’d sat down on armchair across from Scorpius and crossed his legs.

“So,” he’d said. “Where shall we begin?”

It’d turned out that the little imp actually did have questions – some of which were quite complex and went far toward quelling Harry’s desire.

“So,” Scorpius had said, frowning at the diagram Harry had drawn illustrating the safest way to protect a building surrounded by a sieging force of Inferi, “casting Fianto Duri or even Repello Inimicum isn’t sufficient?”

Harry had shaken his head and pointed with the tip of his quill at the diagram’s three 45-degree angles. “Good guess,” he’d said, but Fianto Duri works only when you’re being approached from a 90-degree angle, and Repello Inimicum doesn’t work on Inferi. Their molecular structure is too porous, which is a polite way of saying that they’re nothing but pieces of rotten meat on legs.”

Scorpius had looked frustrated. “So what’s the point of . . . Okay, then how about Protego Maxima?”

“Same problem,” Harry had replied. “You see, when it comes to Inferi, the problem with many explosive protective spells is that the Inferi lack the necessary solidity. It’s one of the reasons Inferi
can be dealt with only through direct combat. Fortunately, they’re easy to kill, although rather stinky.”

Scorpius had laughed, and Harry had taken the break in interrogation to pull him to his feet and kiss him.

The kiss had quickly become heated, and their hands had wandered over each other’s body. Scorpius had pushed Harry’s unbuttoned robe off his shoulders and kissed his neck and throat while Harry had tugged Scorpius’s shirt free of his trousers.

“God,” Harry had moaned inarticulately as Scorpius let nervous hands slide down to his hips and then clutch his arse, sinking his fingertips into the muscle hard enough that – if Harry wasn’t wearing trousers – there would have been marks.

They hadn’t even gotten their clothes off when they found themselves on the floor, with Scorpius’s back pressed against the Oriental rug and Harry on top of him, his hips between Scorpius’s long legs. Harry hadn’t been able to stop himself from moving, and Scorpius’s frantic squirming hadn’t helped matters. Harry had buried his face in Scorpius’s hair as Scorpius cried out softly every time Harry pushed downward. If it wasn’t for the layers of fabric between them, he would’ve been in Scorpius’s body, stroking him from the inside until they both shuddered with release. But then again, the presence of fabric hadn’t mattered all that much – a minute or two longer and Harry was going to come fully clothed. He’d never felt so . . .

But then there’d been a knock on the door.

“Daddy?” a small tear-soaked voice had said. “Are you there? I really need to talk to you. I . . . I failed an exam and Sven broke-up with me and . . . and. Oh, daddy, please be there.”

Harry had groaned raggedly as he pushed himself up onto his hands and knees. His body ached for relief, but his daughter came first. He wasn’t going to pretend he wasn’t there just so he and Scorpius could make love.

“Just a minute, sweetheart,” he’d called.

He’d reached out his hand and helped Scorpius to his feet. They’d quickly cast charms to straighten their clothes and untangle their hair although both of them were still flushed and breathing hard.

“What should I do?” Scorpius had whispered. “Should I Disillusion myself?”

Harry had shaken his head. “I’m not going to hide from my children like that. Just sit on the couch and open your book so it looks like we were talking about today’s class. Meanwhile, I’ll brew some more tea.”

He’d given Scorpius a quick kiss and then opened the door. As soon as he did, Lily threw herself into his arms, making Harry very glad he’d cast a charm to subdue his erection.

She’d started babbling away, every now and then stifling a sob, but then she’d seen Scorpius and stopped in the middle of a sentence.

Scorpius had cleared his throat, but he hadn’t been able to get rid of the huskiness from his voice. Harry had hoped Lily was too distraught to notice.

“Hi, Lily,” he’d said.

She’d just stared at him, obviously at a complete loss as to what to say or do.
“Hold on, sweetheart,” Harry had soothingly. “You’re upset about too many things. I can’t keep track. How about a cup of tea and some biscuits?”

Lily hadn’t moved, and her eyes hadn’t left Scorpius’s face. After a very awkward moment, Scorpius had closed his book, rewound his scroll and put them in his bag.

“Thank you for your help,” he’d said to Harry with a casual voice as he stood and headed for the door.

“You’re welcome,” Harry had said, matching his blasé demeanour.

Lily had stepped aside when Scorpius passed, but she didn’t say anything. Harry had decided to treat that as a good thing.

* * * * * * *

“I’m not an idiot, you know.”

Scorpius shook his head exasperatedly. How long would this conversation go on? He had homework to do.

“I’m not calling you an idiot, you idiot. I’m just denying your ridiculous accusation.”

Rowan sighed. “How long are we going to play this game?”

“Forever, or at least until you stop being a nosy git.”

“You’re my best friend. I want to help, that’s all.”

“For the last time, Harry and I are not having an affair!”

“You just called him ‘Harry.’”

Scorpius had realised his mistake as soon as Harry’s name had left his mouth. He stood up and gathered his books. There were other tables in the library.

“Please!” Rowan called after him. “You don’t have to admit it. You don’t even have to say anything, I’ll ask ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions and you can just nod or shake your head. You’ve been miserable since your birthday.”

Scorpius sighed and sat down again. He had to admit that he was dying to talk to someone. The whole virginity thing was driving him mad. At this rate, he began to think he’d never lose it. There was always something that was “not just right” – something that reminded Harry of his age . . .

“Are you having an affair?”

Scorpius sighed and after a couple minutes, nodded his head.

“Are you having an affair with Professor Potter?”

This time Scorpius took even longer to reply. Finally, he nodded. It felt like jumping off a cliff. He watched as Rowan struggled not to react. Clearly part of him had doubted his own suspicion.

“Is it going to last?”

Scorpius frowned and thought about the question. He hoped so. At last he nodded.
“But you’re still unhappy?”

Scorpius shrugged and shook his hand to imply “yes, a little bit.”

“Does he treat you like a kid?”

Scorpius nodded emphatically.

“Have you had sex with him?”

Scorpius shook his head.

“Do you want to?”

Scorpius gave him another emphatic nod.

“But he won’t?”

Scorpius nodded.

“Because of the age thing?”

Scorpius nodded again.

“You need to get out of England.”

Scorpius frowned. Not only was the statement not amendable to a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer, it wasn’t even a question at all.

Scorpius gave him a suspicious look.

“Just hear me out, okay? I’ve been thinking about this for a long time . . .”

Scorpius gave him an incredulous look. The thought of his best friend “thinking about” his deified virginity and Harry’s refusal to take it was just bizarre.

“. . . my family is very close with an old aristocratic family in Morocco. One of the sons owns a part-magical, part-Muggle hotel. It’s in Fes el Bali, one of the oldest and biggest walled cities in the world. I’ve been there. It’s more beautiful than you can imagine with baths and gardens in its courtyards. One of the rooms I stayed in even had a living tangerine tree! Make sure you ask for that one . . .”

Scorpius couldn’t stay silent for another second. “Ask for the room with the tangerine tree? What are you even talking about?”

“I’m talking about you getting Harry away from England. You need the right setting to seduce him . . .”

Scorpius looked incredulous. “Me seduce him?”

Rowan shrugged. “Well, someone has got to do the seducing, and clearly Harry is holding back. Listen, Scorpius, this place is incredible and sensual beyond belief . . .”

Scorpius couldn’t believe he’d just heard the word ‘sensual’ come out of his Quidditch playing, loud belching, prank playing friend.
“I’ll set it all up for you. Like I said, the owner’s family has been close friends with my family for centuries. When he hears that you’re my best friend, he’ll do anything and everything for you . . .”

“Even if I was . . . inclined to this idea, there’s no way I could pay for it . . .”

“Kareem would rather slit his own throat than bill you. It’s an issue of honour between old Pure-blood families.”

Scorpius was silent for a long time.

“Okay,” he said hesitantly. “I’ll think about it . . .”

He could tell from his friend’s gleeful expression that he’d all but said ‘yes’ already.

* * * * * * *

Harry was exhausted. He’d given three separate interviews to three separate newspapers and another for the wireless. His jaw felt tired from all the talking. The last of the Manley people were in custody. He felt like he could actually take a breath for the first time in weeks. He knew he should go home and get some sleep, but all he could do was think about Scorpius and the contentment and comfort he felt in his arms. But it was Thursday night. Scorpius would almost certainly be in the library writing about some rune or star pattern or some other damn thing.

He was putting on his jacket and getting ready to leave his office when a Hogwarts owl pecked on his windowpane. There was only one person – unless it was Minerva, Hagird or Neville – that the letter the owl carried could be from. He fed the owl a treat and sent it back to the castle.

The piece of parchment was small; it contained only one paragraph.

Dear Harry,

Enclosed is a Portkey. It will take you to me tomorrow evening. We’ll be in a temperate climate for the weekend, so pack accordingly. Wait for me at the restaurant on the terrace. The waiters will show you to the right table. I will meet you there.

Love,

Scorpius

Harry read it again. And then again. What in the world was the little minx talking about? They’d had plans to meet in Hogsmeade for dinner on Saturday . . . He held the Portkey in his hand to see if it held any clues as to what Scorpius might be up to, but it was nothing but a silver button. He called Catherine.

“I don’t know what I have on my calendar for the next three days,” he said. “But whatever it is, cancel it.”

* * * * * * *

Edith was having fun. Perhaps too much fun.

“Oh come on,” she said. “At least try it on.”

“Edith,” said Rowan. “It’s pink. Bright pink. Bright pink definitely doesn’t go with blond hair. Besides, Scorpius already said he doesn’t want to look like a pygmy puff.”

“But there’s a tie that matches it perfectly!”
The three of them were in Harrods and had been for what seemed like hours. Scorpius had never got dressed and undressed so often in his whole life. And in-between the outfits Edith was choosing for him, he was sitting on the bench in the changing room speed-reading *The Joy of Gay Sex* as though he was cramming for an exam. He’d just started the section about exercises to relax the sphincter muscles in preparation for anal sex when Edith broke his concentration. Again.

“How about lavender?” she yelled into the men’s changing room.

“Again, pygmy puff,” said Rowan. “I’m beginning to think you’re colour blind.”

“Some gay boys like pygmy puff shades. Scorpius, does your whoever-he-is like pygmy puffs?”

Scorpius heard Rowan sputter in an effort to contain his laughter.

“Uhm, I don’t think so,” said Scorpius, turning his book sideways and upside down trying to understand the dynamics of one particularly athletic looking position.

“Yellow? There are no yellow pygmy puffs . . .”

“Have you ever seen yellow on a blond?” asked Rowan. “It’s not a pretty sight. Besides, he’ll look like a canary, and if you match it with black trousers, he’ll look like a giant walking bumblebee. Oi, Scorpius, have you got to the part discussing the virtues of water versus oil-based lubricants yet?”

“Oh, I give up,” said Edith. “I’m going to find you some accessories instead.”

Scorpius looked at his watch. “I don’t have a lot of time,” he yelled after her.

“Don’t worry,” she said. “I know what colour shoes look good with any outfit.”

As soon as she was gone, Rowan came into the dressing room with one single shirt. Scorpius put it on, and they looked at each other.

“Perfect,” they said at the same time and laughed.

As Edith had promised, the shoes and belt were much easier to agree on. Scorpius kept asking for the prices, but Rowan kept jabbing him in the ribs with his elbow.

“When you become Minister of Magic, you can use your influence to get me a prestigious but work-free job.”

They were just about to leave the store, when Edith grabbed his elbow. “Scorpius,” she said, her voice serious. “You can’t leave yet. You’re missing a crucial element of your presentation . . .”

“He’s not a ham,” said Rowan.

“Yes, but he is beautiful, and beautiful boys deserve beautiful make-overs. Come on, you two. Stop behaving like men.”

“My God,” said the woman at the cosmetics counter, “you have the loveliest hair I think I’ve ever seen.”

Edith blushed proudly. “And I cut it for him. Now sit down, Scorpius. Stop being such a baby. You’re not going to end up looking like an old whore, I promise.”

Scorpius closed his eyes. His heart was pounding and had been since he’d written the letter to Harry. Everything was going to be perfect. He’d been on the Floo with Kareem all morning. Whenever
he’d overlooked a detail, Rowan had caught it and filled it in.

He couldn’t help but grin as he felt the tiniest pressure on his eyelids and heard a gasp of appreciation from both Edith and Rowan.

*********

“Mr. Potter! How lovely it is to meet you! Welcome to Fes el Bali!”

To his surprise, Harry was drawn close and kissed on both cheeks by a tall handsome man in tasteful Muggle clothes.

“Er, . . .”

“My name is Kareem. I am the owner of this hotel and am at your service.”

Harry smiled nervously. Should he return the kisses? He had no idea. He settled for the bland but safe “please call me ‘Harry’” line and looked around. The foyer of the hotel (hotel!) had a domed stone ceiling and there were thousands of colourful tile pieces in elaborate patterns on the floor. From somewhere close by, he heard the sound of a fountain. The air smelled of foreign spices, incense and heat.

“I was instructed to take you to your table in the garden. Please follow me.”

They walked under tall onion-shaped arches and along open-air passages. It seemed that every corner they turned revealed a different enchanted place. There were pools full of lilies and gardens full of miniature fruit trees, and clear baths open to the sky with floors covered with what looked like bits of glass in every shade of blue imaginable. Every space had different smells and different sounds. His senses felt almost overwhelmed.

At last they exited the hotel and stepped out on to a vast stone terrace. The tables were low and the chairs were not chairs at all – they were white couches with many cushions. The view was of the lights of Fes stretching on for miles. From a nearby mosque came the sound of the call to prayer.

Kareem led him to a table set away from the rest and bade him to sit. It took a little while to make himself comfortable on the couch, but when he finally did, he felt like he was in heaven. Kareem must’ve been able to tell because he smiled broadly and gave Harry a slight bow.

“If you need anything during your stay,” he said, “you can reach me through the Floo in your room.”

Harry tipped his head back and looked up at the dark blue evening sky. What had Scorpius done and what did he have in mind? This certainly wasn’t the Dragon’s Nest. A waiter came so quietly to his table that he seemed to walk on air.

“The chef suggests this wine for your meal,” he said, holding the bottle so Harry could read the label, which of course he couldn’t. The waiter let him taste it before he filled Harry’s glass. It smelled of exotic flowers. His closed eyes and his lazy smile must’ve conveyed his pleasure to the waiter because he poured him a generous amount and left the bottle on the table.

Harry reached down between his legs and touched himself. He’d been aroused all day, but now, drowned in sensual pleasures, he was half hard. He would have to be completely stupid not to be able to guess why Scorpius had brought him here. In anticipation of the weekend, Harry had bought a new cranberry red shirt (the sales lady said the colour suited his complexion, whatever that meant) and new black trousers. He even had new shorts and socks, although he suspected he’d not be wearing either for very long. He Transfigured his spoon into a handheld mirror. He’d got his hair cut,
instructing the barber to get rid of as much grey as possible, but there was still some on his temples. He looked his age. There was no pretending otherwise. He’d considered a Glamour but he knew Scorpius would see through it in a second and be (rightly) offended. He was forty-three. There was no way of getting around that fact. He turned his head to look over the city where thousands of people lived their thousands of different lives. In all that humanity and among all those choices, there must be room for him and Scorpius.

He was lost in his thoughts when he heard a familiar voice say something to a waiter in French, and Harry turned to see a tall young man cross the terrace. He was wearing a dark blue shirt and black trousers and his blond hair was cut to his chin with his fringe falling over his right eye. He was the very essence of grace as he moved around the tables. Harry stood up when Scorpius reached him and when he did, he saw the shimmering eye shadow that brought out the subtle blue in his grey eyes. Harry sucked in a breath.

“My God, you look beautiful,” he breathed.

“So do you,” Scorpius replied and kissed him lingeringly. “I can’t believe you’re here.”

Harry laughed. “Me neither. You’ve been indulging your erotic imagination, I see.”

Scorpius blushed, but only faintly, as he sat down on the couch beside Harry and kissed him again. Harry was just about to say “fuck dinner,” when the waiter approached with their first dish of the evening. It was a kind of salad made of garlic-scented roasted peppers, beets and grated carrots sprinkled with orange blossom water and cinnamon.

Harry poured Scorpius a glass of wine. “This is a long way from the strand in late October and curried chips,” he said.

Scorpius laughed. “But it’s in the same vein. Except it’s me this time treating you to something new. Although I will confess that all of this is as foreign to me as it is to you, which means we get to explore it together.”

He took a sip of wine, and Harry kissed him, drinking the remaining drops off Scorpius’s tongue.

The salad was amazing as was the second course – an exquisite blend of shredded chicken, cinnamon, saffron, and herbs encased in a filo-like dough.

“It’s called bestila,” Scorpius told him, “and the main course is called a tangine. It’s made with cubes of lamb simmered in a prune and honey sauce.”

“Where did you learn all of this?”

Scorpius laughed. “I don’t want to give away all my secrets, Harry. You’ll just have to content yourself with not knowing.”

Harry couldn’t help but notice that their conversation didn’t contain any references to Hogwarts. Scorpius talked about his memories of New Guinea and the history of the city they were in. However he’d discovered this place, he’d clearly done some research. Harry was content to say almost nothing as he leaned back against the cushions and listened to Scorpius’s voice. It seemed no longer the voice of a schoolboy.

By the time dessert came with its perfumed wine and fresh fruit and pastries made of honey and almond paste, Harry was practically in Scorpius lap. Scorpius kept putting half a slice of fruit between his teeth and encouraging Harry to bite it too until the whole thing turned into a sweet juicy mess between their lips and tongues. It was driving him mad.
“We have a room, don’t we?” he said breathlessly. “I’m done eating – at least food, I mean.”

Scorpius pulled a key out of his pocket and dangled it before Harry’s eyes. “Not only do we have a room, but it’s the most beautiful room in the whole hotel. I’ve seen it already. It has the largest bed in the world.”

Harry groaned. He was alarmingly close to coming right there. Just the thought of Scorpius spread out naked before him . . .

“Room. Now. Please,” he said.

The bed really was enormous, as were the French doors that opened on to a balcony with a view of the walled city with its towering mosques. Gauzy white curtains blew in with a soft breeze. The sheets were a warm cream colour and covered with pink rose petals. There was a tree growing out of the very floor. It was clearly magical; its orange fruit seem to glow softly like fairy lights.

Scorpius was just about to open a bottle of champagne, when Harry grabbed him by the arm and pulled him into a starved kiss.

“I’m going to do to you everything I’ve been dreaming about. Scorpius, you are about to lose your virginity in a thousand ways. This is your last chance to say no. I won’t be able to stop once we start.”

“I don’t want you to stop,” Scorpius said. “That’s the whole point of us being here.”

“I’m going to make this last – every minute of it. I want to touch every inch of you, inside and out.”

He felt Scorpius shiver with anticipation and knew it was time. “Everything I’m going to do to you is going to bring you pleasure. Trust me. Give yourself to me. I’ll take care of you.”

Scorpius went limp in his arms in a gesture that spoke to Harry of acceptance and submission.

“Come with me,” he said, holding out his hand. Scorpius took it, and Harry led him over to an armchair near the billowing curtains.

“Sit down,” he said gently but firmly. “And spread your legs.”

Scorpius obeyed. Harry knelt on the floor before him and buried his face between his thighs. He could feel the heat of Scorpius’s erection and smell his arousal even through two layers of fabric. He breathed in deeply and looked up. Scorpius watched him intently over his heaving chest as Harry placed his hands on his knees and spread his legs even wider. The sight before him thrilled and aroused him more than any hardcore porn could. Nothing more than Scorpius’s crotch. The seam of his trousers bisected his balls causing his testicles to bulge on either side. Then above them was the solid ridge of hard cock pointing up and to the right. By spreading his legs wider and wider, Harry had tightened the crotch of Scorpius’s trousers until he could actually see the rim of his glans. He drank in the sight before looking back up at Scorpius’s face.

His expression was somewhere between awe and confusion. Harry smiled and reached up to cup his cheek.

“I’m going to make you come just like this,” he said. “If I do anything that hurts or makes you uncomfortable, let me know immediately, okay?”
Scorpius nodded breathlessly, and Harry lowered his gaze again. Sliding his hands from Scorpius’s knees to the insides of his thighs, Harry brought them together so he could use his thumbs to gently press and massage his balls. The gasp Scorpius made this time was anything but tentative. When he was ready, he moved his thumbs to Scorpius’s erection and ran them up and down the underside of his shaft, stopping at the tip to rub his whole palm over the bulge. He started slow at first but steadily sped up. He could hear Scorpius’s fast shallow breaths. He sat back on his heels again and looked up at his face. Scorpius’s cheeks were pink and his bottom lip looked bitten. He was holding something back.

“Don’t deny yourself anything,” Harry said. “If you want to move, then move. If you want to make noise, then please do. It’s not a sign of weakness to be embarrassed of; it’s a sign of your appreciation and the closeness of your orgasm.”

At his words, Scorpius’s body loosened up, and he began to rock against the seam of his trousers. Harry sucked in a surprised breath.

“You’re close, aren’t you?”

Scorpius nodded mutely.

“Don’t hold back. Keep moving just like that.”

Harry returned his thumbs to their gently probing. Rolling Scorpius’s testicles gently and massaging the length of his erection as the speed of Scorpius’s rocking sped up and lost its rhythm.

“Oh!” he gasped. “I’m . . .”

And then he was throbbing beneath Harry’s thumbs, and he rocked against his seam in hard sharp thrusts. “I’m coming,” he said. His voice sounded strangled. Harry knew it was because he’d never said those words before, and it made him dizzy to realise he’d done it – he’d made Scorpius come. The fabric over the head of his cock grew wet and shiny, and Harry could smell the intoxicating smell of sweat and semen combined with Scorpius own distinct scent. Moving swiftly, Harry undid Scorpius’s buckle and reached under his waistband until he found the wetness and covered his fingers with it. Making sure he had Scorpius’s attention, Harry raised his hand to his lips and licked them clean. The taste was as intoxicating as the smell. He looked up, his fingers still in his mouth, and watched Scorpius’s face go through several expressions. Harry laughed when he stopped cleaning his fingers and wiped his salvia on his trouser leg. He pulled Scorpius’s limp body off the chair and into his arms.

“You’re exquisite,” he said. “You have no idea how beautiful you are.” Scorpius burrowed closer to him and rested his head on Harry’s shoulder. He was still having aftershocks from his orgasm. Harry brushed aside his damp fringe and kissed his brow.

“How did that feel?”

Scorpius seemed stunned, and for a little while, Harry didn’t think he’d get an answer to his question.

“Dangerous. It felt scary.”

Harry raised his eyebrows, surprised by Scorpius’s answer.

“What you do mean? Did I hurt you?”

Scorpius shook his head emphatically. “So . . . so . . . almost too . . . much,” he said haltingly. “I’ve come before, of course. But never . . . never like that.” He pulled back to look in Harry’s eyes. “I want to do that to you,” he said. “I want to make you feel exactly what I felt.”
Harry was about to say something light-hearted, but then he saw Scorpius’s serious expression.

“What did you feel?”

Scorpius frowned. He looked like his was searching for the right words – for any word.

“Open,” he said at last. “Open and bare. Like you could see my heart.”

Harry placed his hand on Scorpius’s chest. “I may not be able to see your heart, but I can feel it. I’m not going to break it, Scorpius. I swear to you; I’m not going to break it. Be with me. Don’t hold back. I want all of you. Every inch, every breath.”

Scorpius’s eyes were wide and his breath hitched.

Harry brushed his hair back from his face. This degree of seriousness was not what he’d expected. “Go visit the bathroom and clean up,” he said softly.

Scorpius opened his mouth – no doubt to tell Harry that he could just cast a cleaning charm, but Harry didn’t relent. Finally, Scorpius left the room.

It was time for him to be vulnerable. Moving as swiftly as possible without tearing his new shirt, Harry stripped off his clothes and lay down on his front on the bed in a sprawled position as if he was asleep. When he heard the bathroom door open, he turned his head so that Scorpius couldn’t see his expression.

He heard footsteps that stopped suddenly and an astonished gasp.

“Oh, my God, Harry,” Scorpius said. There was pure awe in his voice. “When . . . Oh, my God. Can I touch it?”

“Oh, my God, Harry,” Scorpius said. There was pure awe in his voice. “When . . . Oh, my God. Can I touch it?”

“Of course,” Harry replied. He felt the tentative brush of fingers stroke down the length of his back and then up again.

“You really do love me, don’t you?” Scorpius murmured as though to himself. He still sounded stunned and awed. “It’s huge. Did it hurt?”

“Yes, but that was the point. I got it the same day I treated you so cruelly when you returned from New Guinea.”

“That long ago . . . ?”

Harry felt a kiss on each of the scorpion’s pinchers and then, to his surprise, a kiss at the base of his tailbone where the stinger disappeared. He spread his legs, encouraging Scorpius’s wandering fingers.

“It’s beautiful.”

“I’m glad you like it. It’s for you, of course. . . . As is this.” He rolled over and presented his chest and belly and urgent erection. Scorpius gasped again and got off the bed. Harry watched as he quickly unbuttoned his shirt and unfastened his buckle and stripped off his trousers in one fluid movement.

To Harry’s great relief, his body looked completely different than it had on that horrible day last summer. There was no baby fat anymore; Scorpius’s body was taut with young muscle that moved under Harry’s hands. Every line looked newly carved, from his hip bones to his collarbones. If he
could, Harry would have drank him like water or eaten him like fruit. His body was at it newest and most pristine . . .

Scorpius climbed onto the bed and knelt between Harry’s spread legs. He seemed unable to decide where he wanted to touch Harry the most. He ran his fingers through his pubic hair and then reached up to trace a nipple, teasing it until it was hard and peaked. His expression was one of rapt attention – like a child who’d just opened a present. Harry had never felt so wanted, so desired. Scorpius stroked his cock and traced his ribs with his fingers. And then, probably out of nothing but sheer instinct, he straddled Harry’s hips and summoned a bottle of almond oil from the drawer of the bedside table.

It was Harry’s turn to gasp.

Scorpius opened the bottle and poured oil on his hand, but Harry grabbed his wrist.

“Too soon,” he said breathlessly. “Too soon. Turn around and put your knees on either side of my neck.” Scorpius paused, looking very unsure, but then did as Harry asked and in doing so presented himself, open and exposed. Harry felt actual tears in his eyes when he saw the sweet rosy pucker.

He’d planned on going slow – of doing each act “in order,” starting with handjobs and ending with intercourse – but Scorpius had caused him to throw out all his plans when he’d straddled his hips. Harry had never rimmed anyone before, but it was exactly what he wanted to do now. He wet his lips and kissed Scorpius’s anus as though it was his mouth. He was tight, but as Harry continued, he pulsed open until Harry could penetrate him with most of his tongue. He pulled back to look at what he’d done: Scorpius’s anus was slightly open and very pink. It made Harry’s mouth water and he went back to licking and kissing, fucking him now as deeply as he could with his tongue.

He’d never, in his whole life, done anything so intimate with another person.

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Scorpius leaned forward and placed his palms on Harry’s bent knees not only to brace himself, but to open himself up even more. Perhaps it was the wine or the setting or the devouring of *The Joy of Gay Sex* – or combination of all three, but he wanted to be open – desperately. The wet desperate moans Harry was making drove him wild, and he felt his body respond by relaxing and opening up to the point where Harry must’ve felt he was ready to insert a finger into him.

For months, he’d been wondering (often fearfully) what he’d do when he was finally in this place – the place where Harry finally penetrated his body. But he realised he needn’t have been worried. His body knew how to respond. He felt the tightness of the ring muscle at his opening loosen and welcome the invasion. He cried out, not from pain but because one finger simply didn’t feel like enough. He felt Harry probe his insides until he touched something that made his whole body convulse. He cried out again and spread his legs wider, pushing himself into Harry’s caress and fucking his fingers. He knew it was fucking. This feeling. This feeling of wanting to be spread wide and entered. Somewhere in the back of his mind he heard something glass shatter.

Harry’s hips were thrusting upward against nothing but air. Scorpius could see he wasn’t even going to need friction to come. Just the simulating of the sex act was going to be enough. Harry touched the place inside of him again, and Scorpius arched his back, canting his arse higher and making it possible for Harry to lick his rim as he continued to thrust in and out with his finger.

He couldn’t take it one more moment. He was ready – as ready as he’d ever be. He moved swiftly to straddle Harry’s hips again, ignoring Harry’s words of “not yet,” and before Harry had time to react, he held his cock steady and sat down on it.
Harry writhed beneath him as though he’d just been *Crucio*ed. Even the cries he made sounded as though he was in pain. He seized Scorpius’s hips and thrust up into him at the same time that Scorpius pressed down.

It hurt. *A lot.*

“Scorpius!” Harry cried. Tears welled in his eyes and rolled down his temples. He seemed completely helpless – all the control and power and pride were stripped away leaving raw sensation in their wake. Scorpius squeezed his thighs even tighter and rode Harry as hard as he could despite the pain. Somewhere in the room, something else shattered as he gritted his teeth and fucked himself with Harry’s cock.

This was not making love. This was not just losing his virginity. This was something elemental and frightening. Something not entirely in their control.

He could tell that Harry was going to come when he threw back his head and began breathing through his nose at such a rate that he seemed like he might faint. His grip on Scorpius’s hips turned fierce and his upward thrusts lost even the tiny bit of rhythm they’d had. When Scorpius finally felt the contractions, he instinctively sat down on Harry as hard as he could, pushing Harry’s entire length into his body and opening himself up in the process. The sound Harry made was like none Scorpius had ever heard or even imagined as he pumped upward, still instinctively thrusting in an urge to come as far up inside Scorpius’s body as possible. As the contractions stopped and Harry’s whole body shuddered repeatedly, he started to dismount, but Harry wouldn’t let him.

“I could come again,” he gasped. “Don’t go yet. Don’t go, Scorpius.” He began thrusting fast and hard, and even with a softening cock, he came again with a sob.

Scorpius stayed where he was, until Harry whimpered. “Too sensitive,” he panted. He pushed Scorpius up as his cock slipped from his body. Scorpius felt come gush out of him.

“Let me suck you.” Harry’s voice was raw sounding. “Please.”

Scorpius was surprised by the plea, but he nonetheless lay back against the pillows and spread his legs. He looked at his own cock twitching on his belly, leaving pools of wetness.

“Please,” Harry begged, looking up at his face, and Scorpius suddenly realised that Harry was actually asking for his consent. He nodded, and in one single motion, Harry swallowed his whole cock to the root.

The sensation hit him like a Bludger to the gut. He grabbed Harry’s head to hold him still as he began thrusting his way to orgasm. He was so close . . . The harder and faster he thrust the firmer Harry’s grip on his hips became as Harry urged him to go as deep as he needed to.

Scorpius’s climax hit him unexpectedly. He didn’t have time to warn Harry (as the *The Joy of Gay Sex* had said you should) or even pull back. Suddenly, he felt his cock pulse and the orgasm rip from his balls and cock and aching rectum. Harry swallowed and swallowed and then reached between Scorpius’s legs to squeeze his balls and wring every last drop of come from his body. He seemed like he wanted it to never end – as though the sole reason he existed was to suck Scorpius’s cock. It made Scorpius feel faint with a rush of power. It was not unlike the rush he felt when he cast a Dark spell . . .
Harry staggered to his feet, his head reeling. His jaw ached and his throat hurt. They were both slick with sweat despite the breeze blowing through the curtains.

He was dizzy almost to the point of nausea. He summoned his clothes. Scorpius’s body looked sated, and his eyes were heavy-lidded.

“I need to . . . I’m . . . I need to go for a short walk,” Harry stammered.

Scorpius frowned. “It’s late.”

“I won’t be gone long,” Harry replied, pulling on his socks.

“Is there something wrong?” Harry could hear the alarm in Scorpius’s voice. He shook his head.

“I won’t be gone long,” Harry said again and walked quickly to the door. He knew he shouldn’t be leaving Scorpius after what they’d just done, but he needed to be alone.

The truth was he felt that, between them, he was the one who needed comforting, not Scorpius.

The streets were so narrow that if he lifted his arms, he’d be able to touch the buildings on both sides. The houses were dark, but the call to prayer broke the quiet. He was in a very foreign place feeling very foreign to himself.

He’d finally made love to Scorpius. Finally! So why was he feeling so completely undone?

And afraid.

It’d felt like an Imperius. The longing. The need to please. He’d expected to be swept up in pleasure – both his and the pleasure he’d give Scorpius. He’d imagined slow steps as he initiated Scorpius to more and more advanced sex acts . . .

But the moment Scorpius had seized his cock and sank down on it, taking his own virginity, Harry had quite literally lost his mind.

He leaned his back against a wall and looked up at the starry sky. He realised he was shaking.

How had the tables suddenly turned? How was he the one who felt overwhelmed and virginal?

He’d been away for an hour when he closed the door and walked as quietly as he could to the bathroom. Scorpius was asleep. He looked content and completely at rest. In the bathroom, Harry leaned on the counter and looked at himself closely in the mirror, trying to read in his face the nature of the foreign spell Scorpius must’ve cast on him.
It was the same dream. They were always the same. He was standing in a corridor with stone walls. There were no paintings or suits of armour, but he knew he was at Hogwarts. He was searching for someone, but the person kept eluding him, and all he’d see as he rushed forward was the back of a school robe and blond hair as the boy turned another corner. Harry had to catch him – before it was too late. But he couldn’t keep up. As so often happened in his dreams, he felt like he was running through syrup and struggling for every step. The boy was so much faster than he was . . .

“Draco!”

Harry’s eyes flew open. He had no idea where he was. There were foreign sounds and foreign smells and the foreign feel of a body in his arms. Scorpius frowned and changed positions, but he didn’t wake. Harry rested his forehead against his. His heart was still pounding, and he felt inexplicably lonely. He nuzzled Scorpius’s neck and kissed his collarbone, trying to shake off the sense of strangeness. Scorpius murmured and turned onto his back. Grateful for the distraction, Harry tugged the sheet off him so he could admire the beauty of Scorpius’s body – its clean long lines. Against the sheets, he looked like a pencil sketch of a masterpiece. Harry shivered with rekindled need. Making love to Scorpius wasn’t enough. He wanted to eat Scorpius. Devour him.

Harry got on his knees and crawled between Scorpius’s legs. His sleeping cock was pink against his pale thigh. Carefully, Harry took it in his mouth and sucked until it started to swell. Harry pulled back and watched Scorpius’s erection twitch against his belly, wet and shiny in the moonlight.


Harry went back to his gentle sucking. This was the way he should’ve done it before. Scorpius’s first introduction to the pleasures of oral sex should’ve been like this, not the frantic mouth-fucking that he got.

When Scorpius was fully hard, Harry began licking his glans and fondling his balls, letting his fingers slide down to massage his perineum. Scorpius bent his knees and then let his legs fall open. There was no guile in the way he responded to Harry’s touch, no move or sound calculated to achieve a particular response. His body was pure and welcoming.

Harry began to rub himself off on the mattress. There was no way he was going to stop what he was doing to wank. Besides, he didn’t need to; he was going to come. Scorpius was making urgent little humming noises that told Harry he was close too, and Harry swallowed him as deep as he could. Scorpius sought out his hand and squeezed it tight as his whole body succumbed to his orgasm.

In-between shudders, Harry licked him clean, and then crawled back up to the pillows so he could
kiss Scorpius and murmur loving nothings against his neck. They lay together quietly for so long that Harry thought Scorpius must’ve fallen back asleep until he spoke. His voice was clear and awake-sounding.

“You called my father’s name.”

Harry raised himself on his elbow and looked down into Draco’s eyes in Scorpius’s face.

“It was odd. I dreamed we were back at Hogwarts, and I was chasing after him through a maze of corridors, calling his name. But he wouldn’t stop. I don’t know why I was trying to catch him. It just seemed really important – as though something bad was going to happen and I . . . I needed to protect him. At least I think that’s what I was feeling.”

Scorpius traced his jaw, pausing to rub the pad of his thumb on Harry’s whiskered chin.

“Do you dream of my father a lot?”

Harry thought for a moment before answering. “No, not anymore, or not often at least. I used to all the time when I was at Hogwarts and then again after that horrible night I took you away. But it’s been months.”

“I was just curious because sometimes my father dreams about you, too – or at least I think he does. He calls out your name in his sleep. But, of course, I never ask him what he dreams about. My father keeps some things deeply hidden, and anything having to do with Hogwarts is definitely hidden.”

Harry traced a finger from Scorpius’s bottom lip to his navel, pausing to circle his nipples on the way down.

He didn’t tell Scorpius he often dreamed of Draco when he was feeling deeply unsettled.

“Go back to sleep,” he whispered in Scorpius’s ear and pulled the sheet over them both.

* * * * * * * * *

Scorpius opened his eyes. He didn’t need to turn over to know that Harry wasn’t there. His back was chilled, and there was no dip of the mattress on Harry’s side of the bed.

He tried to stem the panic as he’d done the night before when he’d waited and waited for Harry to return from his “walk.” He’d pretended to be asleep when Harry opened the door because something told him he might not want to hear what Harry had to say at that moment.

Scorpius stared up at the ceiling. What was he doing wrong? How could Harry feel the farthest away he’d ever felt just when they’d finally got so close? Was he just so ridiculously virginal that everything he did and said reminded Harry that he was seventeen?

He’d try harder. He’d make Harry want him so much that he’d forget his age.

With that aim in mind, Scorpius sat up with the intention of taking a shower when he saw them. The rose petals arranged in words: “Coffee Back Soon.” The weight suddenly lifted from his heart, Scorpius flopped back against his pillows and grinned. His body felt awake and alive to every sensation, and he stretched every muscle from his toes to his ears. His bum felt sore, but it was a good kind of sore. Besides, it’d been his own fault. He hadn’t been able to wait another second for Harry to take him. He’d wanted so desperately to feel Harry inside him. He’d thought he’d go mad if they waited one second longer . . .
Scorpius heard the door click and watched Harry push it open with his shoulder. He was carrying a tray with a coffee pot, two cups and a plate with fruit and pastries on it.

“You’re awake,” he said. “And I like whatever it was you were thinking about before I came in.” He nodded at Scorpius’s erection under the sheet.

“Can breakfast wait for a little bit longer?” he asked.

Harry put the tray on the table and cast a warming charm. “Funny, I was thinking the exact same thing.”

Scorpius watched intently as Harry untied the belt of his robe. He was naked underneath, and Scorpius inhaled sharply. The room had been dim the night before. He’d seen Harry, of course, but not like this. Not in full sunlight. Every line of his body was carved muscle – solid and powerful and there. It took Scorpius’s breath away.

“Can I see it again?” he asked.

Harry gave him a seductive little smile and turned around as he let the robe fall to the floor. The scorpion was dark against Harry’s fair skin, and its legs merged with his ribs, just as its tail merged with his spine. It was truly unbelievable in every sense of the word, and Scorpius felt dizzy at the knowledge of what it meant. A desire to be marked for life. Because of him.

“C’mere,” he said. “I want to do to you what you did to me last night . . .”

Harry smiled mischievously. “What? We did several things. I think you’re going to have to be more specific.”

Scorpius made a face at him but answered anyway. “I want to . . . suck you. I mean your cock. I want to suck your cock.”

Harry moaned and tilted his head back. He was already hard. Scorpius didn’t know much about such things, but he was willing to bet that Harry wasn’t going to last very long – even with Scorpius’s amateur performance.

“I would be an utter fool to say no.”

Harry lay down against the pillows, and Scorpius moved between his legs just as Harry had done with him on both previous occasions, but then he was confronted with the question of “what next?” Harry’s cock was leaking precome in strings that stuck to his belly but then broke when his cock twitched. Everything smelled of sex. It was all a little overwhelming.

Harry chuckled and propped himself up on his elbows. “Just do what you think would feel good on you. Don’t worry. I can promise you that anything you do to me is going to feel bloody amazing.”

Scorpius gave him a nervous smile before licking the length of Harry’s cock. It twitched so hard it bopped him on the chin, and they both laughed. It went a long way toward helping Scorpius to relax. Harry lay back and spread his legs.

He tasted just the way he smelled. Scorpius could feel his pulse in the vein that ran the length of his shaft. It was the most intimate thing he’d ever felt in his life – he was overwhelmed by a mixture of tenderness and arousal. He traced Harry’s cock with his tongue again and got yet another bop on his chin.

“If you want to put it in your mouth, don’t worry. I promise I won’t thrust up and gag you,” Harry
Unfortunately, Harry’s words reminded Scorpius of that horrible day at Rowan’s family’s house when he’d thrown up trying to give that nameless bloke a blowjob. It was not a good memory, and he couldn’t even imagine the mortification he’d feel if he did the same thing with Harry.

Instead of braving actually putting Harry’s cock in his mouth, Scorpius reached between his thighs to stroke his balls. The sensation made Harry groan and spread his legs even wider, and Scorpius redoubled his efforts with more confidence. But after a couple minutes, Harry lifted his chin and guided his mouth to the head of his cock.

“Just a little bit,” he said huskily. “I’ll pull out before I come, but I’d give anything to feel your mouth on me – even just for a second.”

Scorpius did as he asked and put as much of Harry’s cock in his mouth as he could. It was hard to breathe, and he kept having to pull back, but Harry didn’t seem to mind. He was crying out Scorpius’s name and knotting his hands in the sheets.

“I’m going to come,” he gasped. “Pull off or you’re going to get a mouthful.”

But Scorpius didn’t. All he did was pull back until only the head of Harry’s cock was in his mouth, and when Harry came, he swallowed every drop.

“Oh God,” Harry moaned. “Scorpius.” His chest was flushed and his bottom lip looked raw. He was the most beautiful sight Scorpius had ever seen.

“I like making you come,” he said.

Harry laughed and fell back against the pillows. “Well, that’s a good thing considering how often I’ll be coming. You were perfect.”

Scorpius grinned happily and crawled back up the bed to kiss Harry on the mouth, letting him taste himself on Scorpius’s tongue. It was so naughty that it gave him shivers. Delicious shivers.

Breakfast was a lazy affair. They sat out on the balcony in nothing but the soft robes the hotel had provided them with, eating pastries and exotic fruits. The coffee was like none he’d ever tasted before, and Scorpius was sure he’d never be able to go back to the bland bitter stuff they drank in England.

There were a lot of things he’d never be able to go back to.

It was hard to imagine waking up on Monday morning in a dorm room full of snoring students and eating porridge and writing essays and sitting in class and . . . and . . . And how were he and Harry going to go back to pretending they weren’t lovers? He’d seen Harry naked. He’d seen Harry completely undone by an orgasm, by Scorpius straddling his hips, while Harry thrust inside him.

“A piece of pomegranate for your thoughts,” said Harry, holding out the fruit for Scorpius to eat from his fingers.

“Really?”

Harry raised an eyebrow. “Really.”
Scorpius took a deep, nervous breath. “Okay,” he said. “I was thinking that I don’t know how I’ll be able to go back to being a sixth-year Hogwarts student after this.” He gestured to include the two of them as well as the city stretched out before them.

Harry refilled both their cups. “Well, we’ll need to figure how to make it work because not going back is not an option.”

Scorpius pouted. “You sound like my father,” he said. “And that’s definitely not a good thing.”

Harry laughed. “Draco would not be pleased to hear you say I sound like him. In school, he always teased me for my ‘Muggle’ accent.”

The coffee was rich and spiced with something that tasted like cinnamon but wasn’t. Scorpius took another sip and closed his eyes. He’d never be able to thank Rowan properly. He’d be spending the rest of his life indebted to him. He opened his eyes and turned to look at Harry. There was an expression on his face that couldn’t be described as peaceful – or at least not the kind of peace Scorpius was feeling.

“A piece of plum for your thoughts,” he said feeling brave. He’d never asked Harry what he was thinking before. It’d never seemed his place, but now it did. It seemed precisely his place. Reaching across the table, he fed a quarter of a plum to Harry and then lapped the juice off his chin, making Harry inhale sharply.

“I’m thinking I want to bring you back to bed with me so that I can make love to you again.”

But Scorpius refused to be distracted. “No, you weren’t,” he said. “Or if you were, it didn’t seem like something you were looking forward to.”

Harry turned his face to gaze out over the city, leaving Scorpius with his profile against the cloudless sky. It seemed suddenly like they were flying.

“Perhaps, like you, I’m wondering where we go from here.” He turned back to Scorpius and reached for his hand.

“I love you. I want to be with you. But like I said before, you must go back to school . . .”

“I could get a private tutor . . .”

“A tutor wouldn’t have the resources Hogwarts does. How would you learn Potions and Herbology? I can’t have scurvy grass and sneezewort growing in my kitchen sink . . .”

They both realised what Harry had just said at exactly the same instant. Scorpius was sure that his eyes were as wide as Harry’s.

“You mean . . . ?”

Harry stood up and leaned against the railing with his back to Scorpius.

“I don’t know what I mean,” he replied. “I’m so afraid that we’re moving too fast, but the thought of not having you with me every night . . . I need you, Scorpius. It’s gone well beyond want.”

Scorpius sat up straight in his chair. He couldn’t believe what he was hearing!

“Then why don’t I stay with you and . . .”

Harry shook his head without turning to look at him. “I don’t know if that’s a good idea – I don’t
even know whether Minerva would allow you to remain a student at Hogwarts without living there.

Scorpius went to him and linked their arms together. “Just talk to her before you say no,” he said eagerly. “She respects you . . .”

Harry turned to him and kissed him deeply, effectively ending their conversation.

For the time being.

* * * * * * *

God, he wished he could shake this mood! They’d done nothing but make love and nap all day, emerging from their room once to stroll through the market and again to swim in a deep cool bath in one of the hotel’s many courtyards and then lie about naked on the sun-soaked tiles. Harry had never come so hard and so often and still be left aching for more.

It was an unnerving feeling – although not an unpleasant one. It was the other mood – the one lying just beneath the contentment and pleasure. Something restless and alert. It wasn’t just his Auror’s instincts. He knew those well enough that he could turn them on or off at will. It was more like the feeling he got just before a thunderstorm. It made him want to pull Scorpius close and never never let him go.

“I wish we could stay here forever.”

Scorpius rested his ankles on Harry’s shoulders and arched his back when Harry entered him. He was so tight. No matter how long and thoroughly Harry prepared him, he was always tight when Harry first breached him and his first thrust was always met with a grimace.

“Me too,” Harry groaned as he found a rhythm that was going to let him last longer than a few minutes.

When they made love, Scorpius eyes were locked on his. Harry had never had sex with someone who watched him so intently. Every trace of Draco’s coolness and reserve was gone, and for the first time, Scorpius seemed wholly there – wholly present. As Harry moved inside him, he found himself remembering Draco’s eyes and how, like his son’s, Harry had been the only one to make them really see the world in the present tense and not some ethereal unnavigable distance.

“Relax,” Harry said. “You’re trying too hard to make yourself come. Let me do the work. Just lie back and loosen up.”

It took a minute or two, but at last Scorpius was comfortable enough to rest the full weight of his legs on Harry’s shoulders and roll his hips in counterpoint to Harry’s rhythm, allowing Harry to rub his prostate on each inward thrust.

Scorpius melted beneath him, and his intense gaze turned dreamy and heavy-lidded.

“There you go,” Harry breathed. “That feels good, doesn’t it?”

Scorpius nodded, his breath hitching with the jolts of pleasure Harry was giving him. That place where Scorpius was right now was why Harry bottomed – there was no feeling like it in the world.

“When you start feeling your orgasm, try not to tense up. The harder you try to hold on to it, the quicker it will pass.”

From his guttural moan, Harry could tell this climax was going to be the last Scorpius could bear – at least until after dinner.

“Touch yourself just how you want to be touched.”

Scorpius reached between his legs and stroked himself in long slow motions. His grip was so tight, as his hand neared the head of his cock, the pressure turned his glands a dark purple. It was agonizingly erotic, and Harry started thrusting harder and deeper, pushing Scorpius over the edge as he did so.

The sound Scorpius made could barely be called human – it was so rooted in the body’s animal need for pleasure and release. Only when his cock stopped throbbing did he say Harry’s name. Before then, it was as though he’d forgotten his capacity for language. Harry groaned and lunged forward, throwing all of his weight behind the achievement of his orgasm.

“Scorpius!” he cried, slamming into his pliant body and spurting as far up inside him as he could. When he collapsed trembling in Scorpius arms, Scorpius kissed him again and again. Everywhere. From the scar on his forehead to his flushed throat.

“I love you,” he said over and over. “God, I love you.”

It was the same thing as the night before: Harry showered and dressed before Scorpius and went down to their table on the terrace where he sat nursing a glass of wine until he saw a gorgeous young man moved gracefully through the crowd to join him. He seemed so untouchable – so beyond Harry’s grasp, that he had to pinch himself to remember how this beautiful creature had just come completely apart in his arms.

Tonight’s shirt was a soft pale green that brought out the gold in his hair. And silvery-green eyeshadow. It was that little detail, even more than the cufflinks and expensive watch, that made Harry want to chain Scorpius to his wrist so that they’d never have to be apart and no one could look at him covetously like Harry did. Scorpius was his. No one else could do to him what he could. No one had the right. He’d held Scorpius in his arms when he was only months old – no one else could ever claim to have done that.

As Scorpius sat down, Harry realised he’d been clutching his wine glass and as soon as the realisation hit him, the stem shattered and cut his hand. Scorpius leapt up, but Harry waved him back down. It wasn’t horrible – at least not as horrible as it looked with blood and wine all over the stark white of the table cloth.

Two waiters rushed to their table, and Harry blushed. He wasn’t used to people making such a fuss over such a little wound.

“It’s okay,” he assured them. “I’ll just go to our room for a moment and clean it up.”

Harry stood and looked down into Scorpius’s worried expression and before he could stop himself, he seized Scorpius chin and kissed his mouth hard and fast. When he pulled away there were bloody finger prints on the boy’s smooth chin.

* * * * * * * * *
The moon rose behind the spires of a hundred mosques. It looked like a cushion stuck with pins. Scorpius turned from the balcony to look at Harry spread out on his back with his arm thrown over his eyes. Scorpius had just made him come with his mouth.

This man killed one of the Darkest wizards in history, he thought for the thousandth time. And he’s in my bed waiting for me. Marked for me. In love with me.

Scorpius lay down beside him. The night was hot and smelled of dust and incense. Harry was covered in a light sheen of sweat. Scorpius tucked his hair behind his ear, and Harry lifted his arm to smile at him. He looked tired but content.

“Can I see it again?”

Harry gave him a questioning look. “See what again?”

“The scorpion.”

Harry smiled and rolled over. He seemed lazy and calm, but Scorpius couldn’t help noticing that his body still shuddered every now and again with aftershocks from his orgasm.

It must’ve been very intense and the knowledge made Scorpius’s heart swell with pride.

Harry’s back was slick, and the black scorpion was covered with crushed pink rose petals. Scorpius peeled them off one by one. Every detail was perfect.

“Did you draw it or did the artist?”

“The artist,” Harry replied sleepily. “He had several photographs, and I chose the one I liked the most.”

Scorpius traced the scorpion again with his finger. “It’s got narrow pinchers,” he said. “That means it’s the most venomous kind. Scorpions with large pinchers have weaker venom because their pinchers can do most of the work of killing its prey. This one, however, relies on its stinger.” He trailed his finger down the scorpion’s tail and into the crack of Harry’s arse. His heart was in his mouth from his own audacity.

Harry spread his legs, but Scorpius stopped. He wasn’t ready – assuming he ever would be – to do to Harry what he’d done to Scorpius the night before. He had no idea what to do or how to touch him on the inside.

Bums were very very private parts. He still couldn’t believe that Harry had licked his!

Harry must’ve realised that Scorpius wasn’t going to proceed any farther, because he turned over and gave a nod to Scorpius’s urgent erection.

“You look like you need to come,” he said. “How do you want your orgasm?”

Scorpius suppressed a giggle. Harry sounded like a chef asking how he liked his eggs cooked. He blushed.

“You choose,” he said.

Harry’s eyes widened. “Anything?”

Scorpius paused for a second before nodding. How many choices could there be? Handjobs, blowjobs, and intercourse. Surely intercourse was out of the question for the moment. Harry wasn’t
hard enough.

“Anything?” Harry asked again.

Scorpius took a deep breath and nodded, watching as Harry summoned the oil from the bedside table.

“This is going to be messy,” he said. “But it’ll be more than worth it.” He poured oil on his belly and smoothed it over his entire groin. He handed Scorpius the bottle and indicated he should do the same. “Now lie back and spread your legs.”

Scorpius was more than happy to comply, and when Harry settled his hips between his thighs, Scorpius immediately began thrusting upward, rubbing their cocks together with every press, seeking friction. But the oil was too slick. He reached down and clutched Harry’s arse with his hands.

Just as it had before, instinct took over, and he began to move in a rhythm that was going to make him come. He tightened his thighs and heard Harry groan. He was hard again.

“My God, Scorpius!” His voice sounded choked. “I need to be inside you.”

But Scorpius had decided he liked the rubbing. Even though he was on his back beneath Harry, he still felt in control. He did nothing to accommodate Harry’s desperate search for his opening, and when he felt him get close, he squeezed his arse as tightly as he could. Harry’s thwarted need was evident in the way his body moved. It wasn’t just his hips, it was his back and chest as well. Scorpius held him as tightly as he could.

“Don’t toy with me,” Harry gasped. “I need this.”

But Scorpius was too close to his orgasm to change what he was doing. He rocked and rubbed against Harry as the tightness in his belly grew. Harry was whimpering with his every thrust, and the sound drove Scorpius mad.

“Please!” Harry said. Please, Scorpius!”

Scorpius tried to slow his trusting. He wasn’t ready for these feelings to end – this surge of pleasure and power. But it was too late. He was too close, and he came with a cry, his body arching into Harry’s embrace. As he relaxed, he let his knees fall to either side, opening himself up, and suddenly Harry breached him painfully. He thrust wildly, grunting with each inward stroke.

“God, I’m going to come again . . . . You have no idea what you do to me . . . .”

Harry shook violently, and Scorpius squeezed his cock as tight as he could until Harry sobbed.

“Enough,” he said brokenly. “I’m too sensitive.”

Scorpius loosened his grip and felt Harry pull out. The absence felt unbearable.

“How am I going to be able to let you go tomorrow?”

Scorpius propped himself up on his elbow and looked down into Harry’s flushed face. “That’s easy to answer,” he said. “Don’t let me go.”

Harry closed his eyes for a moment. Even his lashes were clumped together with sweat.

“I wish it was that easy.”
“Well, why can’t it be?”

Harry reached for him and pulled him down into his arms.

“Ssshhh,” he murmured. “Let’s get some sleep. You’ve worn an old man out.”

Scorpius scrunched up his face. “You’re not old,” he said. “My father’s old, but you’re not.”

Harry chuckled. “I dare you to tell him that to his face. He’s only two months older than me, Scorpius. Draco and I are peers.”

He didn’t want to think about it. Scorpius wrapped his arms around Harry and placed his head on his chest. His heart was still beating fast.

“You father only seems older because he’s suffered so much. Suffering ages you. Heartbreak ages you.”

“Well,” Scorpius replied, kissing the tip of his nose. “I guess I’ll never age then.”

Harry wrapped his arms around him and squeezed tight.

* * * * * * * * * *

Scorpius woke to another slow-building climax as Harry sucked him, massaging the spot inside of him and milking his orgasm from him with gentle swallows. When Scorpius came with a cry and his body went limp, still shaking with aftershocks, Harry pulled him into his arms.

“Do you want breakfast?”

Scorpius looked at Harry’s face and then at his rigid cock.

“What if I want you for breakfast?” he asked, his voice sounding sultry even to his own ears.

To Scorpius’s surprise, Harry winced and blushed. “I think I’ve only got one more orgasm in me,” he said. “You wore me out last night. So, let’s eat, and then make love one last time before we have to leave.”

Just the thought of leaving made tears spring to Scorpius’s eyes. He turned his head so Harry couldn’t see them. Suddenly, he wasn’t hungry. The thought that tonight he’d be eating dinner in Hogwarts’ Great Hall took away his appetite.

Harry stood and put on his robe. Even through the feeling of sudden loss, Scorpius smiled. His hair looked even messier than usual. He got up from the bed and ran his hand through it. He was still amazed that he had the right now to reach out and touch Harry anytime he wanted to.

Breakfast was the same as yesterday’s – coffee, pastries and fruit, but instead of eating quietly as they had last time, Scorpius, to his horror, chattered away without taking a breath. First it was about the market they’d walked through yesterday and then it was about the magic of Portkeys, and then it was about Hogwarts. Essays, exams, stupid roommates, Peeves, etc. etc. etc.

Harry grabbed his hand and squeezed hard.

“Shush!” he said harshly. “Not yet.”

Scorpius actually clapped a hand over his mouth. What the hell? It was as though a clock had struck and he’d reverted back to a schoolboy.
Their love making was hard and fierce and dirty. Harry buried his face in the crack of Scorpius’s bum licking and moaning wetly before inserting a finger and rubbing that spot inside him until Scorpius was begging for him.

“Ride me again,” Harry growled. He lay on his back and held his cock steady as Scorpius sank down on it just as he had the night he lost his virginity. It hurt, but this time Scorpius knew how to keep himself from clenching up.

“Are you ready?” Harry didn’t even wait for a response as he bucked upward. Scorpius cried out in a mixture of pleasure and pain as Harry began to thrust at a punishing pace. His eyes were fiery – he looked as though he’d forgotten everything in the world except Scorpius. It was an empowering feeling.

“Make yourself come,” Harry said fiercely. “I want you to come all over me. I want you to fuck me. . . . claim me.” He was breathing so hard that Scorpius could barely hear him, but he’d got the essentials. Usually he liked it slow, but not now. He stroked himself as fast as he could. Harry watched him so intently that it was only seconds before he felt his orgasm pool in his belly. He cried out and watched his come paint Harry’s stomach and chest. He’d never watched himself ejaculate before and was amazed how far his come could spurt.

Harry writhed as he had their first night before grabbing Scorpius’s hips and stabbing upward. “You . . .” was all he seemed capable of saying before he fell over his edge and shouted out his orgasm.

There was only five minutes before their Portkeys took them their separate ways. They were both still shaking and breathing hard. Harry hadn’t cleaned himself up and Scorpius could feel Harry’s come soaking his thighs.

They were completely mad to think things could stay the same.

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Harry landed and stumbled to his knees in cold wet grass. His shirt stuck to his back in the rain. He felt more dizzy than usual after a Portkey. He never fell anymore. He staggered to his feet, breathing hard.

He had to get back to his flat.

The crowd in Diagon Alley was worse than usual. People kept getting in his way only to step back babbling their apologies when they realised whose path they were in. Harry just kept walking, his mind blank except for Scorpius’s face, flushed with arousal.

The key to his building simply would not turn. On his third try Harry gave up and drew his wand. He’d fix the bloody lock later. Too impatient to wait for the lift, Harry ran up the stairs, taking two and three at a time. She would be there. She had to be there . . . .

Harry lit a fire with nothing more than a thought and dropped to his knees.

“Minerva!” He called. “Minerva, I need to speak with you!”

He saw laced boots and tartan robes and almost fainted with relief. He wouldn’t have been able to wait for her. He probably would have Flooed into Neville’s chambers he felt so desperate.

“My goodness, Potter!” she cried. “Is anything the matter?”

Harry had to catch his breath and lower his voice to a more sensible tone.
“Sorry,” he said. “Didn’t mean to alarm you. It’s just that I ran upstairs to get out of the rain.”

Minerva gave him a pinch-lipped smile. “What’s wrong, Potter?” she asked shrewdly.

Harry opened his mouth, but nothing came out. He was an idiot. Why hadn’t he taken some time to think about what he was going to say?

Minerva frowned. “I’ve seen you like this before,” she said. “But that was a long time ago.”

Harry took a deep breath. “I don’t know how to say this, Minerva, so I’ll just have to say it plainly. I’m having an affair with one of your students.”

He watched her expression harden as the import of his words sunk in.

“Stop right there,” she said, but Harry pushed on.

“I need to be with him . . .”

“Potter!”

“I want him here with me. I want to come home to him. I want to wake up beside him . . . I want to . . .”

“I can’t believe we’re having this conversation.”

Well, at least there was one thing they could agree on. “Me, neither,” Harry said. He took off his glasses and scrubbed his face with his hands. “I’ve lost my mind when it comes to him.”

“Whoever he is,” Minerva replied unsympathetically, “he needs to finish his education. My first responsibility is to him, not to your obsessions.”

Outside, the rain started coming down harder. It hammered the windows and forced Harry to lean closer to the embers.

“I know,” he said. “You don’t need to convince me of that fact. I don’t want to take him away from his studies, just the rest of it. You can’t tell me that no one in the history of Hogwarts has been a part-time student . . .”

“I can’t believe we’re having this conversation. I’ve never been so angry at you in my life, Potter. How in Merlin’s name could you have let this happen?”

Harry closed his eyes. He didn’t have a good answer, and so he said nothing.

“I fell in love,” he said at last. “Minerva,” he pleaded. “I’ve been over the why’s and how’s a million times. This has been years in the brewing. I hate to get sappy, but it’s as though we were meant to be together – regardless of our ages and all the other barriers that stand in our way.”

Harry heard a deep resigned sigh. “I never thought I’d ever hear you say any of the things you just said. Who is the boy?”

“Scorpius Malfoy,” Harry said flatly as though he’d just thrown his last card on the table. Minerva was quiet as the information sank in, and then she began to laugh humourlessly.

“I’m opening my Floo,” she said. “I’m out of whisky so bring one of your bottles.”

Harry stood up and walked swiftly to the kitchen where he knelt on the floor and began searching
through half-empty bottles before he found a new one. He had a feeling he wasn’t going to like what she had to say.

“Sit down,” she said as soon as Harry stepped out of her fireplace. She waved her wand and two cut crystal glasses filled with ice and placed themselves on the tea table between their chairs. Harry opened the bottle and poured four fingers each. Contrary to the speed with which he’d been urged to get there, they sat in silence for several minutes as they drank and watched the rain on the windows. Harry poured them another four fingers. That was one of the things he’d always admired in Minerva: She could drink him under the table.

“Scorpius Malfoy,” she said at last. “Twenty-three years too late.”

He frowned at her. What was she talking about?

“I always knew you were in love with each other. It was obvious to everyone except the two of you . . .”

“Scorpius is seventeen,” he said.

“So were you,” she said. She was beginning to sound like Dumbledore and it set Harry’s teeth on edge.

“When I defeated Voldemort? What does he have to do with Scorpius and me?”

She shook her head with a rueful expression. “Nothing,” she said. “Nothing at all.” And then out of the blue, she asked: “What does his father think about this?”

Harry winced. “We haven’t told him yet. Scorpius is of age. He’s free to make his own decisions . . .”

“Free you say? How can a boy who can’t even grow a beard yet make his own decisions when it comes to you, Harry Potter?”

He bit the inside of his cheek to keep his voice as calm and as even as possible. “You don’t know Scorpius like I do. He is not a delicate flower in a hail storm. He’s always been more than capable of standing up to me.”

She sighed and took a deep sip of her Whisky. “He must get that from his father.”

Harry was starting to feel annoyed. “I’m talking about Scorpius, not Draco.”

“Are you?”

He slammed his glass down and stood up. He was tired of being toyed with. “Yes, I am,” he said. “And the only reason I’ve even told you about Scorpius and me is because I want to see if we can work out a way for Scorpius to live with me but still attend classes.”

“Sit down,” she replied. “You’re not thinking clearly . . .”

He collapsed back into his chair. She was right of course. He took off his glasses and rubbed his face with both hands.

“He makes me crazy. Or rather what I feel for him makes me crazy. He’s all I think about these days. My mind is only half on my work. It’s not only crazy, it’s dangerous. Please let me have him, Minerva. I’ve always taken care of him. I won’t stop now that we’re lovers . . .”
She grimaced. “Well, this isn’t the first time a teacher has had an affair with a student, and the . . . situation has always been dealt with decisively. But this of course is different. None of those teachers were Harry Potter.”

“Will you please stop talking about me as though I’m some kind of third party entity. I’m me. Just me.”

“Yes, of course,” she said gently. “But you’re more than that too. In the minds of the public you are everything brave and good and noble . . .”

“Even after the revelations of my sexual escapades? I’d always thought that had been the only good thing to come out of the whole thing. This ‘Harry Potter’ you speak of needed to be taken down a notch of two.”

Minerva poured herself another glass. She refused to look at him.

“I deserve a bit of happiness,” he said. “After all these years. I’m lonely. I’m getting older every day. He’s everything to me.”

“And what about your children then?”

Harry bristled. “My children and how I deal with them is nobody’s business but my own. Minerva, the only thing I need from you is your permission to keep Scorpius as a student, but let him live with me. That’s the only thing I’m asking. I don’t want to take him away from his studies. That’s the last thing in the world that I want. But I need him. I can’t wait another year and a half. I’ve already waited long enough.”

She was silent for a long time. He could tell she was grappling with her conscience and her love for him. He knew that.

“I will think about it seriously,” she said. “Of course I need to speak to Dumbledore’s portrait and go through the annals . . .”

Harry reached for her hand and gave it a squeeze. “Thank you,” he said. Thank you.”

She gave him one of her classic McGonagall looks.

“Scorpius Malfoy,” she said, shaking her head. “I should’ve known. Damnit all, I should’ve seen it coming a mile away. And so should’ve you, Potter, but then again, introspection has never been one of your many formidable abilities.”

Harry opened his mouth. He was about to ask her what the hell she meant, but then he closed it again.

He sensed he might not like the answer.

* * * * * * * * *

“Piss off, you berk!”

Scorpius opened his eyes and then rolled them.

“Fuck you, that’s my bloody shampoo.”

Where was he? Had he died and gone to hell?
“Shut it, you two. Some people are still trying to sleep.”

He’d had such a wonderful dream.

“Socrates’ scrotum! You are all a bunch of arseholes.”

He and Harry had been making love in a bed covered with rose petals.

“If the eggs are runny this morning, I’m going wring some house elf neck.”

Scorpius stretched. Every muscle felt tired and his bum ached.

“Get up, Howard, you lazy sod.”

It hadn’t been a dream!

“Which one of you prats left your hair in the fucking sink?”

He and Harry had been in Morocco.

“Is it curly or straight?”

He’d lost his virginity.

“Eeeewww!”

He and Harry had talked about living together!

“I’m just asking, you stupid git, because it might be Hotchkiss’s. He’s got curly hair.”

Scorpius sat up, only wincing a little bit.

“Suck me!”

Were they ever going to leave?

“You wish, you bloody poofter.”

God, he hated his dorm mates!

“You looking for a boot up the arse?”

Why oh why couldn’t he have woken up before them and avoided their morning banter?

“Shut it, I’m famished.”

Go. Away.

“Alright, alright! Keep your knickers on!”

At last they filed out and Scorpius was left with sweet, lovely silence. Two mornings in a row, he’d woke with Harry’s head between his legs. The contrast was jarring to say the least.

He couldn’t believe he still had to put up with this shite. He was Harry Potter’s lover after all.
Rowan grinned. They hadn’t seen each other the night before because he’d had Quidditch practise, and Scorpius had gone straight to the dorm, got into bed, and pulled the curtains. It wasn’t the first time, he written essays by Lumos.

“I take it the hacked off expression is because you’re back in this hell hole and not because you had a bad time in Morocco.”

Scorpius returned his friend’s grin. He couldn’t help it. “You’d be right,” he said, pouring himself a glass of pumpkin juice.

“Well?”

Scorpius bit his cheek and refused to look at him. “Well what?” he asked innocently.

“Did you lose it?”

“No, I’m still quite sane.”

“Shut it, you git. You know what I’m talking about.”

“Yes, several times over.”

Rowan slapped him on the back. “See, I told you all it would take was to get him out of England.”

Edith slid in between them, effectively ending their conversation.

“If Miranda steals my knickers again, I’m going to throw a fit,” she said, reaching for the pot of tea. “Oh hiya, Scorpius. How was your weekend?” She gave him a perk little wink.

“It was very nice, thank you,” he replied, still biting his cheek.

“I bet it was,” she said. “You’re glowing, you know.”

“How can I be glowing and have a hacked off expression?” Scorpius asked.

“Well,” she replied. “You’re glowing because you’re madly in love with whoever-he-is, and you’re hacked off because you’re back in the arsehole of Scotland.”

Scorpius gave up trying to hide his grin and instead turned away to keep himself from telling his friends every last glorious detail. But the grin faltered when he glanced up at the faculty table and saw the Head Mistress staring at him with an unreadable expression.

He quickly returned his attention to his breakfast.

Wednesday came both too soon and too slowly. Scorpius spent so much time in front of the mirror that he almost missed breakfast.

“My goodness!” said Edith giving him the once-over. “Aren’t you prettied up today!”

Scorpius blushed and sat down between his two friends. Rowan nudged him in the ribs.

“You idiot,” he hissed. “How much more obvious could you be?”

“I can’t help it,” Scorpius whispered. “He’s going to see me in my uniform again. I don’t want to
look like I’ve thrown myself together like one of my arsehole dorm mates. I’m not the same as I was . . .”

“I don’t know if I’m terrified of DADA this afternoon, or looking forward to watching you squirm,” Rowan said with a grin.

“Thank you very much,” said Scorpius. “Remind me not to sit next to you.”

Harry wasn’t in the classroom like he usually was when they began filing in. Scorpius heart was pounding and he felt faint.

“Breathe,” said Rowan. “It’s one of those things you need to do to stay alive.”

Scorpius slid into his usual seat. He was so nervous, he couldn’t even come up with a pithy reply.

At last, Harry came in, and to Scorpius’s shock and surprise, Harry immediately sought him out, his green eyes even more intense than usual as their gaze took in all of Scorpius in a single glance.

“Sweet Circe,” breathed Rowan. “This is going to be a very interesting hour.”

But to Scorpius’s great relief, it didn’t turn out interesting at all. In fact, it was the most boring class they’d ever had with Harry. He lectured the whole time and didn’t have them practise their spells from the week before.

“Great,” said Rowan as they gathered their books. “Thanks a lot, mate.”

But Scorpius didn’t pay any attention to him. He was too busy holding Harry’s gaze. He could feel his eyes widen more and more as Harry continued to stare at him with those eyes of his.

“Mr. Malfoy,” Harry said. “Please see me in my office.” And with that he was off with a swirl of black robes.

“I can’t believe he just said that,” Rowan breathed. “Did I just hear him ask you to his office? So much for keeping your affair a secret.”

“What’s all that about?” asked Edith. “What’d you do this time?”

But Scorpius didn’t answer her. He was already out of his seat.

Harry opened the door on his first knock. Scorpius glanced around to make sure no one could see him, and entered Harry’s office as quickly as he could.

Before he could say anything, Harry slammed the door shut and pulled him into his arms, kissing him frantically. It was desperate and needy and completely took Scorpius’s breath away.

They hadn’t even said anything to each other when Harry shrugged off his robe and pulled Scorpius’s Gryffindor sweater up and then, when Scorpius raised his arms, yanked it off over his head. His shirt didn’t receive any kinder treatment. Harry didn’t bother with buttons and instead grabbed the collar in both hands and ripped it open, biting and kissing Scorpius’s neck, most certainly leaving marks. Scorpius cried out when Harry combed his fingers into his hair and clenched his hands into fists.

“God,” Harry said brokenly. “I want you . . . I need you so much. Scorpius . . . this . . . we . . . us.”
Harry’s capacity to speak seemed to have left him. He grabbed Scorpius’s wrist and pressed his palm against his straining erection.

“I was hard all through class,” Harry groaned. “Were you? Tell me you were.”

Scorpius could only nod before Harry started kissing him again, which was a good thing because he would’ve had to lie. In fact, he hadn’t been hard during class. He’d been too overwhelmed by Harry’s gaze – too afraid that everything he felt for Harry was written plainly on his face for all the cruel, unforgiving world to see.

“I have to have you,” Harry growled against his mouth. He reached down and unbuckled Scorpius’s belt, jerking it free of its loops, and then using it like a whip on his desktop with a resounding smack that echoed off the room’s stone walls. Scorpius found himself wanting to ask what was wrong . . . because as much as he wanted Harry, Harry was frightening him. He was a hurricane of sexual energy, his magic crackling around them like embers thrown off a bonfire.

“Malfoy,” Harry practically snarled as he opened his own trousers and, as he stripped Scorpius to the skin, Scorpius had the horrifying thought that it wasn’t him Harry was thinking of . . .

. . . but then the thought fled when Harry murmured Scorpius’s name, soft and low, into his hair.

Their love-making was as frantic as their kissing had been. It was also different – very different. During their time in Morocco, they’d always made love face-to-face, but not today. Today, Harry positioned Scorpius on the couch on his knees, his arms braced against the back of the couch. There was little preparation before Harry lined up the head of his cock and plunged inside Scorpius’s body, pumping deep and fast and hard.

“God,” Harry panted, his hands gripping Scorpius’s hips like a vice, holding them still so that each of his thrusts went as far as possible. “Please . . . God, Scorpius, what have you done to me? I’ve lost my mind . . .”

Scorpius had no idea what he was talking about and would’ve asked if Harry hadn’t reached around his waist and wrapped his fingers around his cock.

“Come, baby,” Harry said, the unexpected endearment hot and moist against the back of Scorpius’s neck. “I want to feel you come while I’m inside you.”

It didn’t take long before Scorpius found himself bucking with the force of his orgasm. He grabbed ahold of the couch’s soft leather and thrust his hips back, impaling himself on Harry’s cock, making Harry cry out as though he’d been struck by the Killing Curse.

Apparently the analogy was not lost on Harry because he ground out strange, nonsensical words . . . words that sounded torn from his chest.

“You can’t . . . no one can imagine . . . what it’s like . . . to just stand there waiting to die.”

Was it because he’d been lecturing about the Unforgivables for an hour or was it something else? All that Scorpius knew was that he wanted to comfort Harry, to take away the helplessness he heard in his voice, but then Harry was coming with a deep, guttural sound, which was quickly followed by a broken sob. When he pulled out, he collapsed beside Scorpius on the couch and opened his arms, summoning Scorpius’s into an embrace. Scorpius held him tight as he shook and sobbed.

After a minute, Harry combed his fingers in Scorpius’s hair and yanked his head back so he could look in Scorpius’s eyes. For a moment he seemed confused, his brows furrowing, but then he fixed Scorpius with the most intense gaze Scorpius had seen yet.
“Marry me,” Harry said, his voice almost a growl. “Marry me, Scorpius Malfoy. I’ve lived too long without you. I can’t take it one day more.”
Rings would be too obvious.

The second the papers got a whiff of their relationship – which was bound to happen sooner or later – rings would belie any denials they made. As much as he wanted Scorpius to feel their engagement was something to celebrate, not something to hide, he knew what the press was like. “Rabid dogs” was too civil a term. Just as he did with his children, Harry wanted to do everything he could to protect Scorpius from the spotlight he dragged around with him like a ball and chain. On the relatively innocent end of the spectrum, there’d be unquenchable curiosity. On the other end, there could be threats and violence. Neither option was acceptable. Not when it concerned Scorpius and Draco.

They’d get rings when they were actually married.

Harry entered the silversmith’s shop through a low door. He had to stoop to get in, but when he did, the room he found himself in was magically expanded. Everywhere he looked were singing, writhing, swimming – and in the case of a small likeness of a sheep – bleating creatures made of silver.

His red robe wasn’t subtle. As soon as he noticed him, the artist immediately came out from behind the counter, wiping polish his hands with a stained cloth.


Harry grimaced inwardly but smiled on the outside. “Please call me ‘Harry,’” he said. He glanced around at the handful of other shoppers, all of whom had stopped their browsing and were gawking at him. “Is there a place where we could talk privately?” he asked in a low voice.

“Of course! My workshop is out in the back garden. Brinn, will you take care of the other customers, please? And tell anyone who may be looking for me that I’m not available.”

The artist took Harry’s arm and led him through the back of the shop. Ever since he’d defeated Voldemort, people touched him wherever he went without invitation. It’d driven him mad at first especially when Hermione had explained to him that it was due to their sense of ownership. In many ways he was public property, a familiar fixture of people’s lives. People felt like they knew him and he them. But he’d got used to it. Like everything else. And sometimes, like that afternoon, he even welcomed it. It made him feel less alone with the secret of his love for Scorpius.
They walked through a pleasant little kitchen with pale blue walls and a polite tea kettle and then through a room with a large table covered with sketches.

“May I ask you your name?” Harry said.

“Why, certainly,” the artist replied. “Please pardon my manners. My name is Humphrey Boland. I’m from Froghollow. Born and raised there.”

Harry smiled, hoping to relieve the man of his obvious nervousness. “I’ve been there,” he said. “It’s a lovely village.”

“Well, it’s seen better days, I’m sorry to say, which is probably why you had occasion to visit.” He nodded at Harry’s Auror badge. “May I get you a cup of tea? Biscuits?”

“Tea would be fine,” Harry replied, looking around. There was a glowing furnace and magical tools flying about. He ducked when a hammer seemed to fly straight towards his head.

“Don’t worry; they won’t hit you. I’ve been using them since I started my shop, and they haven’t hit me yet. Please, take a seat.”

Harry sat down on a wooden bench and accepted the cup Humphrey handed him.

“Now, how can I help you, Auror Potter, sir.”

Harry’s smile was a tad thinner this time. “‘Harry,’ my name is ‘Harry,’” he said. “I’m looking for something in particular. Two pendants – one a scorpion and the other a stag. I’d like them to be animate like your other creations with their level of animation dependent on the mood of the wearer of the other pendant. But most importantly, the chains must be unbreakable and the pendants must be impossible to remove. No matter what.”

Humphrey’s eyes widened. “That is strong magic,” he said. “I’m not sure if I’m capable of it.”

Harry nodded. He’d expected that response. He reached into the pocket of his robe and pulled out a tiny vial. “It’s a potion that was used to extract some of my innate magic. Don’t ask its name. It’s illegal, and I want to shield you from liability. It should be enough, but if it isn’t, let me know.”

Humphrey took the vial from Harry’s extended hand with a look of awe on his face. “I didn’t know such a thing was possible,” he breathed.

“We’ll speak no more of the potion,” Harry said. “The less you know about it, the better.”

The artist nodded his understanding and put the vial in a locked box, which he then stored in a locked trunk. Harry was pleased when he felt the quality of the wards. He’d clearly come to the right man.

“I have no artistic talent. I leave the designs to you.” He stood up. “Thank you for the tea – and the discretion.”

Humphrey reached out his hand and shook Harry’s enthusiastically with both of his. “When do you want them?” he asked.

“As soon as possible,” Harry replied. “I’ll pay you extra to put any other project you may have aside.”

As Harry knew he would, Humphrey waved away any suggestion of payment. Like the touching,
this happened all the time, and like the touching, it’d been very awkward at first. But now Harry sent payments by owl or through a courier. It was much easier for people to accept his money when they weren’t looking in his famous eyes.

Out on the street, people parted and made way for him as they always did, and Harry found himself wondering if someday they’d do the same for Scorpius – not because he was Harry’s husband, but because he, himself, was famous for his accomplishments. He could picture it and ducked his head with a smile. He’d always been curious to see what Scorpius would become, and now he had a front row seat.

He’d received a letter from Minerva’s far sooner than he’d thought he would. Her answer had been terse. Harry could tell she wasn’t happy when she wrote it. In order for Scorpius to attend Hogwarts and live somewhere else, he had to stay with family. So, I suppose that means you’re going to get married, she’d written. I hope to God for Scorpius’s sake you know what you’re doing.

Their engagement wouldn’t be long. Harry couldn’t wait for months as most couples usually did. They hadn’t set a date yet, but both of them imagined a summer wedding. Nothing special – close friends and family only. Hopefully, there’d be family. Harry sighed. He hadn’t had that conversation yet. The time just hadn’t seemed right. James was busy with his Auror training, and Lily was beginning to prepare for the O.W.L.s. And Albus. Well, he was in Scorpius’s class, and Harry had no idea how he’d react. Lily would come around before the spring. James would come around in a couple years, but Albus . . . Harry just didn’t know.

He and Scorpius had spent every weekend together since their return from Morocco. Harry had decided to move out of his flat before they were married. They needed to start out on as equal a plain as possible, so during the days, they walked every magical street in London looking for the perfect place to begin their life together, and during the nights they made love. The sex was varied between raw and tender, depending on their moods, but it was always earth-moving. Harry had gotten used to coming multiple times in one night. He’d never felt so alive. It was though he’d wakened from a years-long sleep with Scorpius’s beautiful body in his arms. Harry couldn’t get enough of him, and every Wednesday after class, they’d christen a new piece of furniture in his office.

But he’d have to start telling people. It was February. He couldn’t put it off much longer. Everyone would have to know at least six months in advance, longer if possible. And Harry knew the first person he was going to tell. He needed Briac’s support now more than ever.

* * * * * * *

“God, I hate balls,” Edith said as she slipped into the chair next to Scorpius. She’d just returned from the fourth year girls’ dorm. Apparently wands had been drawn over a boy on Slytherin’s Quidditch team.

“I’m not a big fan either,” said Rowan. “The music is always crap.”

“Well, at least you’re not a prefect like Scorpius and me,” Edith said. “We’re going to have to spend the whole evening splitting up fights and randy couples, right Scorp?”

Scorpius looked up from his Runes book. “What?”

Edith rolled her eyes. “You’ve been so out of it lately. I mean even more than usual.”

Scorpius gave her a rude gesture, but his other hand remained at his throat. Harry had given him the stag pendant on Sunday morning as they’d lain in bed waiting for the sweat to dry and their breathing to return to normal. Scorpius couldn’t keep himself from touching it. Every move it made
told him something about Harry at that exact moment.

“Did whoever-he-is give you that?” Edith asked. “Can I see it?”

Scorpius held it up. Its diamond eyes caught the lantern light and cast bright colours on every surface around them, and it pawed the air with one of its hoofs. Scorpius had determined that when it did that, Harry was being stern and serious about something.

“Merlin, it’s beautiful,” she breathed. “Take it off. I want to look at more closely.”

Scorpius laughed. “I can’t,” he said. “It’s spelled never to come off. I couldn’t remove it even if I wanted to. Which I don’t.”

Edith looked surprised. “My God,” she said. “You can’t be serious! Scorpius, you’re seventeen! How on earth can you think you’re going to stay with one person the rest of your life? I can’t believe it!”

Scorpius shrugged. “Well, start believing then,” he said. “I guess some of us find our soul mates sooner than others.” Like when they’re six months old, Scorpius thought with a shiver.

“I can’t decide whether I’m jealous or relieved that I haven’t found my true love yet,” Edith said. “But I think relief wins out. So when do we get to meet this bloke.”

Scorpius bit his cheek. Thinking of Harry as a ‘bloke’ struck him as hilarious for some reason. He wished he could tell her that she already had met him and sees him every week in fact. He tucked his pendant back under his collar.

Last Wednesday, he’d caught a glimpse of Harry’s pendant. He’d unclasped the collar of his robe in the classroom’s stuffy heat, and suddenly the sunlight spilling through the window had caught the scorpion’s eyes and cast sparks of colour like a firework. Scorpius had sucked in a breath, feeling dizzy with the sheer impossibility of it all. Harry was his.

Edith had turned to him. “Professor Potter has a pendant that looks just like yours.”

Rowan had elbowed her in the ribs. “It’s your turn to answer the question,” he’d whispered, and Edith stood up as though she’d been sitting on a shrieking urchin.

Scorpius had winked at his friend. “Good one,” he said. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome,” Rowan had whispered. “Just remember that when I’m having it off with Ava behind the greenhouses after the ball . . . Ow!!”

Rowan had grabbed his ear at the same moment Scorpius felt his own sting sharply.

“Mr. Boyne, Mr. Malfoy,” Harry had said, fixing them with a professorial frown. “Perhaps you’d like to share your no doubt scintillating thoughts with the rest of the class?”

Rowan had sunk down in his chair. “No, sir,” he said. “I’m sorry, sir.”

“Mr. Malfoy?”

God, Scorpius was going to crack up laughing if he wasn’t careful.

“No, sir,” he’d said as evenly as he could. “I apologise.”

“Talk while I’m lecturing again,” Harry had said. “And you’ll be doing detention with me after
class.” He’d turned around quickly and began writing on the board. Scorpius had wondered if he was the only one who’d noticed his shoulders shake with laughter.

“Hello, earth to Scorpius?”

He frowned at Edith. That “earth to” saying was one of many he didn’t understand. He suspected they were Muggle due to her upbringing.

“What?”

“You look like you died and went to heaven,” said Edith. “Are you ever going to finish that chapter so we can go over our Arithmancy homework?”

“Oh, yeah, right,” said Scorpius returning his attention to his book.

Next year he’d be doing the same thing except he’d be at a desk in his and Harry’s house rather than the Hogwarts library. Scorpius will have arrived home by special Floo after his last class and made them dinner by the time Harry came home. They’d make love first and eat later. And then he’d do his homework just like he was doing now.

This time he couldn’t hold back his grin.

* * * * * * * *

“I can’t believe we’re having this conversation.”

Harry poured them both another glass of whisky.

“Trust me, I can’t either.”

“Obviously, I’d sussed out that you were going to have sex with him. Your question about sexually transmitted diseases was hardly subtle, but this?? If you’re even considering this seriously, I’m not sure what to say except that you’re no longer amusingly crazy, you’re just crazy.”

Harry watched Briac as he emptied his third glass. He’d bought them each a bottle. As soon as he’d told him to come to his office, warded the door, and pulled out the two glasses from his drawer, Briac must’ve known something he wasn’t going to like was afoot. Harry was pretty certain that this was the first time in a very long time that he’d told his partner something that he’d never imagined hearing in a thousand years.

“You’re not going to do it.”

Harry was quiet. He was going to wait before he replied because Briac was going to have to get it all out of his system before they could have any kind of useful conversation.

“You’re simply not going to do it. It’s not an option.”

Briac’s voice was alarmingly calm. Harry leaned back in his chair and reached into the collar of his robe to stroke the scorpion on his chest with his thumb. He’d caught himself doing that quite often these days. It wriggled contentedly.

“You’ll lose your job.”

Harry nodded. “Maybe.”

“You may even be removed from the Department.”
“I hope not, but I think that’s a possibility.”

“You’ll ruin your whole legacy.”

Harry frowned. “I don’t see how. The press and the public are going to have a feeding frenzy for the next couple years, but then it’ll die down when Scorpius leaves school.”

“Well, then why the fuck can’t you wait till then?!”

Ah. There was the hardest question of all.

“Because I don’t want to.” God, now he was starting to sound like Scorpius. They were too much alike. All of this was probably going to end in a fireball of disaster, but that thought thrilled him more than frightened him.

“You’re fucking selfish. You’re fucking irresponsible, and on top of all that, you’re a fucking arsehole, and I am really seriously angry at you right now.”

“It’s not like we’d be getting married tomorrow.”

“How long do you think an engagement can be kept a secret? Especially with you obsessing like you are? You’re in over your head, Harry. You’re not thinking clearly.”

I think that’s what being in love is all about, Harry wanted to say, but he had a feeling that wouldn’t go over well. Instead, he stayed quiet and reached for his bottle. Even in the midst of this unpleasant conversation, all he could think about was Scorpius. His face was always in Harry’s mind; his voice was always in Harry’s ears. It was a special kind of torture watching him in class with his school uniform and too-long fringe falling in his eyes when he glanced up to read the writing on the blackboard. He was good at pretending nothing had changed – too good. His disinterested gaze made Harry’s heart hurt pointlessly, and he’d reach for his pendant. It was only then that he saw a flicker of emotion in Scorpius’s eyes. It never failed to leave Harry short of breath.

“You’re children will never forgive you.”

“In time, they will. Once I’ve proved to them that being married to Scorpius has no effect on their place in my life – and my heart.”

“You only say that because you want to believe it; not because you think it’s actually true.”

Harry set his glass on the stack of maps and parchment on his desk and put his head in his hands.

“It’s ridiculous,” he said through his fingers. “None of these things would be an issue if Scorpius was older. All of these . . . impediments are due to his age, nothing more.”

Briac laughed humourless. “That’s like saying that Voldemort was an upstanding citizen except he wasn’t . . .”

Harry looked up. “I resent the comparison, even in jest.”

Briac shrugged. “I really don’t care what you resent,” he said. “You have a son who’s older than this . . . this child.” Harry bristled again, but Briac held up his hand. “He is a child, Harry. Open your eyes and think with your head for a moment and not just your dick. He’s a boy whose whole life has centred on you in one way or another. It’s creepy, and it’s wrong. I only just barely held my tongue when I suspected you were going to fuck him . . .”
Harry straightened in his chair and leaned forward. He could feel his face flush with emotion. “Scorpius is not some kind of ‘victim’ in all of this. He is – and has always been – very much his own person. I’ve never forced him to do anything. It’s been him who’s moved our relationship forward . . .”

“Oh, so he seduced you. I see. Isn’t that what all the dirty old men say about the gorgeous young things they slaver over?”

Harry discovered he was shaking. “You don’t mean that,” he said. “I know you don’t.”

“Ah, but I do mean it, Harry. It’s time we called a spade a spade. You’re a middle-aged man mourning the loss of his youth and trying to recover it between the legs of an adolescent. You’re ‘in love’ because otherwise you’d just be a pervert!”

Harry stood up and so did Briac. Both realised at the same moment that this could come to blows.

“Those are very serious accusations,” Harry said, struggling unsuccessfulously to keep his voice steady. “I could throw them back at you if I wanted to point out the likely ages of the girls you fuck at the clubs.”

They were both breathing hard.

“Do you mean to tell me,” Harry continued, “that you wouldn’t snap up the chance to have one of them in your bed instead of up against a billiards table? You’re a fucking hypocrite, Briac. You know damn well that if faced with the opportunity to live your life beside such youth and beauty and potential, you’d grab it in a second. You’re just as fucking lonely as I am! Like me, you’d rather die than grow old. You don’t get a lot of chances in life to be happy. Believe me. The thought of marrying Scorpius makes me happy, and if that makes me a quote-unquote ‘dirty old pervert,’ then so fucking be it!”

They stared at each other, both of them shaking and both with tears in his eyes.

“We’re parting company over this, aren’t we?” said Briac.

“Yeah,” Harry replied. “Yeah, we are.”

Briac nodded resignedly. “I won’t do anything to stop you,” he said. “And I won’t speak to the press. You know that, don’t you?”

Harry had to take a moment to get control of himself before he answered. “I do know that,” he said. “Thank you. I’ll assign you a new partner – anyone you want.”

Briac turned away. “You know I don’t want anyone else but you, Harry. You may be everything in Scorpius’s life, but you’ve been everything in mine as well. I’d still be rotting in prison, my brain decaying with hate, except for you. You’ve saved my life a thousand times. I love you more than any other fucking person in this world, but I am not going down this path with you. It’s going to end badly, and I don’t want to be there when it does.”

“I’ll take that chance,” Harry replied stonily at the same time the tears began to well in his eyes. “Good-bye.”

Briac walked out without another word and closed the door softly behind him. Harry threw his glass at the wall and then sat back down in his chair and wept.

* * * * * * *
Harry rested his forehead on the mattress between his forearms and pushed back. Scorpius hadn’t a clue, but he was rubbing Harry’s prostate with each thrust, and Harry was about to lose his mind. He’d already come once since Scorpius had arrived in his flat just before supper, so it was going to take a bit longer this time. Both times, it’d been Scorpius fucking him. Harry couldn’t get enough of the sensation – Scorpius was a natural top. It made his whole body open up and his mind drift on pulses of pure pleasure. When Scorpius made love to him, he couldn’t even remember his own name. There was nothing and nobody but the two of them and the mattress beneath their hands and knees. And the scorpion. Harry couldn’t forget the scorpion; it swung from his neck, catching the city lights with its eyes.

“Are you still with me?” Scorpius asked. His voice sounded unaccountably nervous as his thrusts began to grow faster and more erratic.

Harry responded in the only way he could, with a groan of ecstasy.

“I’m going to come in you again,” Scorpius cried out helplessly. “Oh, Harry . . . !”

Just the sound of his name spoken in that clear young voice pushed Harry into his climax. Scorpius was clearly right on the edge. He was struggling to go even deeper, but he was already so far up inside Harry that their balls rubbed together.

“Come on. Come for me,” Harry said breathlessly, knowing that as soon as Scorpius did, it was going to trigger another orgasm for him too.

Scorpius made that exquisite yelp of his and pulsed hard. Harry dropped his head again and watched as more come spurted from his already bruised-looking cock. The sheet was soaked with sweat and semen.

“Bath,” he croaked. “Now.”

Supper was simple – just spaghetti bolognas and red table wine.

“It’s nothing like Morocco, but it’ll do.”

Harry sat down gingerly, and Scorpius – the prat – laughed. “I could cast one of the healing charms I learned in New Guinea,” he said. “But I’d rather you stayed like that and remember me every time you sit down.”

“Every time I move for that matter.” Harry refilled his glass.

They talked about nothing consequential. Harry asked how Draco was doing, and Scorpius told him about another new spell he’d invented and about how he and Edith had flown to the island in the lake and back again. Harry was impressed. That was no small feat for a boy who’d never been a confident flier despite all his many other talents.

It was only after supper was over and they were on their last glasses of wine, that he told Scorpius about Briac. He couldn’t get through the whole story without crying again despite having had admonished himself not to. Scorpius’s own eyes filled with tears, and he came around the table to hug Harry and kiss his neck.

“I’m so sorry,” he said. “I hadn’t imagined something like this could happen.”

Harry took a deep breath. “I had. I know the stakes better than you do. That’s why I’ve been as cautious as I can. I’m going to shake my relationships to their foundations. But I never thought Briac would . . .”
His throat was too tight to finish the sentence. “Don’t be sorry. This is my problem, not yours.” He took Scorpius’s hands in his and kissed them. “Your father, though . . . both of us are going to need to work with him together, and it won’t be easy. You need to prepare yourself for any outcome and decide whether getting married right now is worth it.”

Scorpius returned to his seat looking very solemn and far older than his seventeen years. “It’s worth it,” he said, looking steadily into Harry’s eyes. “No matter what my father does.”

“He’s going to think I’m taking you away from him again. You do realise that.”

Scorpius nodded. “I’ve thought of that possibility.”

“He may even disown you, just as Briac did me.”

Scorpius swallowed visibly as the tears sprang to his eyes again. Harry wished he could shield him from this pain – necessary or not.

“I’m prepared for that,” he whispered. The tears began to fall. Harry reached for his hand. His own throat felt tight. It was no use pretending otherwise. The news would rip Draco apart. Again.

“He’ll get over it,” Harry said, but he scarcely believed his own words. “And when he does, you’ll buy him a townhouse next door to ours. With every luxury . . . albeit Muggle luxury, but he’s been living like a Muggle for years now. He’ll get used to it. Just think, he’ll never need to worry about money again because you’re going to be able to take care of him.”

Scorpius wiped his eyes with the back of his hand and gave him a weak smile. “I’d like that,” he said. “I only wish it could be true.”

“It will be,” Harry said fiercely. More than anything, he hated to see Scorpius cry. When they were married, he’d make sure he never cried again. “I love you. I will stop at nothing to make you happy.” He took Scorpius’s hand. Soon there would be a ring on his finger. A reminder of the promise Harry will make. To have and to hold . . .

“When are you going to talk to your kids?”

“As soon as I’m ready, and as soon as I think they’re ready. That’s going to be another very difficult conversation. I have to confess, I’m not looking forward to it at all.”

“Is there anything I can do?”

Harry came around the table and knelt on the floor before Scorpius’s chair. He took Scorpius’s hands and kissed them. Scorpius urged him to lay his head in his lap, and they were quiet as Scorpius stroked his head and ran his fingers through his hair. Harry’s silence in the face of Scorpius’s question spoke more clearly than words ever could, and Harry knew from the gentle way he touched him that Scorpius knew the answer.

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Scorpius felt the wand tip press into his neck as soon as he left the Muggle Studies classroom. He froze, and it took several seconds for Rowan to notice he was talking to nothing but air. He turned to look back, and Scorpius saw his face go pale. Reluctantly, his friend reached for his wand.

“It’s okay,” Scorpius told him evenly. “This isn’t your fight. Go on to lunch. I’ll be there in a few minutes.”
“Who says this is only going to take a few minutes, Malfoy?” The voice in his ear quavered on the edge of tears.

“Because I’m not going to talk with you if you pull your wand on me,” Scorpius replied. He’d been waiting for this for days, and now that it was happening, he felt an emotionless calm descend on him. Unlike Albus Potter, he wasn’t shaking.

“You will not dictate the terms,” Albus snarled. “I owe you nothing.”

“No, I agree,” said Scorpius. “But it isn’t a good idea for us to be alone. We should each of us have another person with us while we talk or . . . do whatever it is we have to do. This could get very out-of-hand very quickly.”

“Is that a threat?”

“No, it’s just the reality. Neither of us wants to hurt the other.”

“That’s a major assumption on your part,” Albus hissed in his ear. “I wouldn’t rely on it, if I were you.”

Scorpius went completely still for an instant, and then in a single motion, disarmed Albus and pushed him up against the wall. Tears were streaming down Albus’s cheeks. He’d obviously been crying for hours. Harry must’ve told him this morning.

“I don’t want to do this,” Scorpius said. “I don’t want to fight with you.”

“That’s because you’re a fucking coward! First you mooch off my father for years and then you seduce him, and now . . . now . . . Don’t you already have enough of him? Can’t you leave a little bit of him for us?”

Scorpius’s first thought was that Harry wasn’t a piece of carrion to be torn apart by vultures, but then Albus flinched. It must’ve been the look in his eyes that’d unnerved him. A crowd had started to gather around. Scorpius took a deep breath.

“I know you don’t want to have this conversation here and now,” he said. “How about Saturday night before the ball, in the corridor outside the old classrooms? Bring at least one person with you.”

He released Albus and turned away. He expected yelled taunts as he walked towards the Great Hall for lunch, but instead all he heard was sobs. He wished that he felt as sorry about everything as he probably should, but when it came down to it, he didn’t.

“What the hell was that all about?” Rowan whispered as Scorpius sat down next to him.

“I can’t discuss it now,” Scorpius said, looking around. Some students were still staring at him as was the Head Mistress. He glanced at Harry where he sat at the faculty table between the full-time DADA professor and Professor Longbottom. He seemed to be having a bland pleasant conversation, but Scorpius noticed he wasn’t eating, and he looked pale and tried. He squeezed his hands into fists. This was going to be terribly hard for Harry; it almost made Scorpius regret their predicament. The sooner he and Albus came to some kind of truce, the better.

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Of course, he didn’t tell Harry. Even though he felt guilty for keeping something of this magnitude a secret, he couldn’t tell him. There was simply no way. Harry’s heart clearly had already been broken. If he found out about his and Albus’s little tête-à-tête, especially after what had happened with Briac
He knew Harry was strong, but even Harry Potter had a breaking point.

They’d met after class on Wednesday. The same day Harry had told Lily and Albus, and he and Albus and arranged their . . . whatever it was going to be for Saturday. They’d made love on the carpet in front of the fireplace, and Scorpius had made it as slow and gentle as he could. But in the end, as his orgasm tightened the muscles in his thighs and belly, he’d begun thrusting harder than he’d meant to until he came with Harry’s name on his lips. Unlike every other time, Harry hadn’t come. Scorpius had urged him to lie down on his back and spread his legs. It took awhile, but finally he’d made Harry climax. The pure physical force of his orgasm had clearly broken down some barrier of reserve, because Harry had thrown his arm over his eyes as he began to cry soundlessly.

For the first time, Scorpius could see how he might come to hate Albus Potter’s guts.

Of course, he hadn’t told Harry that. Not even torture would get it out of him. If he had to, he’d take that one secret to the grave.

* * * * * * *

For the first time since they’d become friends, Rowan got really angry with him.

“You are not fighting him!”

Scorpius put his head in his hands and shook it. “I’ve told you a thousand times,” he said. “I don’t want to fight him; I just want to talk with him. Clearly, he needs to yell at me. I’m prepared to take whatever he has to say. Obviously, I don’t want to hurt Harry’s son.”

“Then why do you need a second?”

Scorpius took a deep breath. “Because,” he said. “If it does get out of hand, there should be people there to separate us. You have to understand, Rowan. I don’t want to hurt him. It would break Harry’s heart even more than it already is.”

“Can’t you ask someone else?”

Scorpius glared at him. “You know I can’t,” he said. “You’re not only my best friend; you’re my only friend.”

“What about Edith?”

“Edith has no idea what this is all about. I can’t ask her to do something like this and learn at the same time about Harry and me. It would be a disaster, and you know it.”

Rowan stood up from the desk he was sitting on. Appropriately (or not) they were in the DADA classroom.

“Why can’t you two wait?” Rowan walked over to a window and leaned against the wall so his back was to Scorpius. “That’s what I don’t understand. If you’re going to spend the rest of your lives together, why can’t you get married a year and a half from now? It’s not because you’re putting off sex until you tie the knot. I mean from the look of things, you’re fucking like crups . . .”

Scorpius was off his desk in an instance and his wand leapt into his hand.

“Don’t go there, Rowan. I’m warning you; do not go there.”

Rowan didn’t look at him. “Put away your wand, Malfoy, and don’t ever draw it on me again if you
want to still call me a friend.”

Seeing instantly what was at stake, Scorpius put his wand back in his pocket. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I shouldn’t have done that, but Rowan, do not ever again say anything disrespectful of Harry. I love you, but I love him even more. I love him more than my own life. Don’t try to get in-between us. So far no other relationship seems to have survived. Harry and Briac are no longer friends and we’ve driven a wedge between him and his children. Even my father will hate me. If you think I won’t cast our friendship aside in a second for Harry’s sake, think again. I’m sorry to put it so bluntly, but it’s true.”

Rowan laughed. The sound was not pleasant. “How many other people will be collateral damage before this is through?”

“As many as need to be,” Scorpius replied coldly. “Are you with me or not, Rowan Boyne?”

“Oh, I’m with you, you fucking selfish bastard, but I’m not happy about it. You better not hurt Albus. You’ve both been taught by his father, but you know you’re stronger than him. Much stronger. I wouldn’t even be a fair fight. So, keep that temper of yours under control, or you could find yourself collateral damage.”

* * * * * * *

He wouldn’t see Harry again. Not until Sunday. Not until after his meeting with Albus. He had no choice. His duties as a prefect required him to help supervise the stupid Valentine’s Day ball. All he wanted was to have Harry in his arms. Since Wednesday, they’d only exchanged letters once. It was the longest they’d been apart since Morocco, and it made Scorpius not only crazy but anxious. Had Harry changed his mind about them? Had he decided that losing his children and best friend was too much? The mere thought that Harry might break up with him left him shaking and soaked in a cold sweat.

God, he wished it was Sunday and he and Harry were lying in bed together, assuring each other that it would all be okay in the end. He wished this thing with Albus was over and done with.

He couldn’t sleep at all Friday night. He’d even had to get up to be ill, but because he hadn’t eaten in two days, nothing came up and he was left retching bile. He’d so wanted to get some sleep. He wasn’t as in control as he usually was when he was tired and hungry. He’d have to force something down his throat for each meal, in case he threw up again.

When he couldn’t take it a moment longer, he crept down to the common room and threw some contraband power Harry had given him on the still-glowing embers.

“Harry,” he said in the loudest whisper he dared. “Are you awake?”

I took an alarming short time before Harry knelt down on the floor. He must not have been able to sleep either.

“Hi,” he said. His voice sounded rough and slurred. “Is everything alright?”

“Uhm, yeah. Sure,” Scorpius said. The last thing he wanted to do was make Harry worried. He just wanted to hear his voice. More than anything. “I just couldn’t sleep. This is the first Friday night we haven’t spent together. I can’t sleep without you beside me.”

He heard Harry take a deep breath. “God, I love you,” he said. “Briac asked why we couldn’t wait. I tried to explain to him what a wreck I am without you . . .”
“Ssshhh,” Scorpius said gently. From the sound of Harry’s voice, he could tell he’d been crying. “Harry.”

“And Draco,” Harry’s voice broke. “Draco’s done nothing but suffer for most of his life . . .”

“But he won’t,” Scorpius said urgently. “It’ll be like you said. We’re going to take care of him!”

Harry was silent for a while.

“Minerva thinks I used to be in love with him,” he said at last with what sounded like a cross between a sob and a rueful snort.

Scorpius felt his heart squeeze unbearably tight. “With whom?” he asked.

Harry laughed again. It was definitely rueful. “With your father,” he replied. “With Draco.”

It was Scorpius’s turn to be silent. Finally he asked in a small voice, “were you?”

Harry rubbed his face with his hands. “I don’t know,” he said. “I don’t think so, but I don’t know what to think anymore.”

They were both silent for a long time. “You should go to bed, love,” Harry said at last. “I’m arsed and exhausted. You don’t need to listen to me ramble.”

Scorpius would’ve liked to say that he liked listening to Harry ramble, but the truth was he didn’t. Not that night. “I love you,” he said. “More than anything and anyone.”

Harry smiled a weary but genuine smile. “You’re my whole world, Scorpius,” he said. “Go to sleep. I’ll see you the day after tomorrow. First thing. I promise.”

* * * * * * * * *

As the time for his meeting with Albus neared, Scorpius grew more and more anxious. If this turned into a duel – which he suspected it probably would – he’d have to use only defensive spells. He couldn’t hurt Harry’s son. He couldn’t bear the thought of breaking Harry’s heart more than it already was. Attacking Albus would do just that, and he was determined not to. He’d cast protective shields and maybe use his Patronus if he had to. It was going to be difficult though. His instinct was to fight back. But he couldn’t let himself. It simply wasn’t an option.

Five minutes before eight o’clock, Rowan met him in the common room where he’d been standing, watching the snow settling in drifts over the courtyard. He was silent and grim, and he refused to catch Scorpius’s eyes. The walk to the old part of the castle seemed endless. Neither of them spoke. Scorpius was on high alert for any sound of an ambush. Who knew what Albus would do? As they descended the stairs and wound their way through the labyrinth of halls, Scorpius listened to Rowan’s leaden footsteps and thought again about the best way to handle the situation. He’d stay calm. He’d let Albus rant and not get his pants in a twist. He’d make concessions (although what those might be, he couldn’t imagine). But he wouldn’t say he was sorry, because he wasn’t. Not one little bit. His drew his wand as they neared the meeting place. There were still no other sounds but their own footsteps. When at last they arrived at the agreed-upon spot there was no one there. Scorpius stopped abruptly causing Rowan to run into him. Perhaps Albus had decided this was a terrible idea after all. Maybe he was downstairs in the Great Hall dancing with his girlfriend. Maybe . . . but then he saw the newspaper on the floor. It was a copy of The Evening Prophet and on the front page was his father being led out of their building with manacles on his hands and wands at his
Harry had just come back to the office from getting take-away, when Briac knocked, entered without a word, and threw a paper on his desk. Harry watched him go with a pain in his chest, but then he looked down.

* Former Death Eater and convicted felon, Draco Malfoy, was taken into custody this evening after a complaint from an unknown but credible source informed Aurors that Mr. Malfoy had used a prohibited spell on him earlier in the day. As everybody knows, the prisoners released after the Azkaban plague are forbidden to practise magic of any kind, and one violation of this term will automatically terminate their parole . . .

Harry stared at the picture of Draco for a second before his body caught up with his brain, and the instant that happened, he ran to his office door and threw it open with a loud crash.

“Who did this?!” he yelled. “I don’t remember giving anyone the order to arrest Draco Malfoy!”

“No, but the Minister did,” said one of his top Aurors. “He thought the order shouldn’t go through you – that you were not impartial enough to make the decision.”

“Why the hell does he think that?!” Harry shouted. “Everyone knows I’m no great friend of Malfoy!”

His heart was pounding, and a million questions flew through his head but the most pressing were too terrible to bear: Had someone discovered his relationship with Scorpius, and if so, had it been Briac who told them?

“Gwencalon!!” he yelled. “My office, NOW!”

Briac was calm as he walked in and closed the door. He didn’t even draw his wand when Harry did.

“I promised you,” he said, “that I would never tell anyone. Do you really think so little of me that you think that I would?”

“Then who the hell else knows, if not you?!” Harry roared. “And what the hell does Draco have to do with anything? He doesn’t even know about me and Scorpius! Is this some kind of sick revenge, Briac? Because if it is . . .”

Briac didn’t blink when Harry pointed his wand at him. “Actually, I do think it’s some kind of revenge,” he said. “But it wasn’t me.”

“Then who else could it have been? Who else knows about me and . . .”

Harry swallowed and dropped his wand so he could grab the edge of his desk in an effort to remain standing.

Briac made a move towards him, the concern evident on his face, but then he stopped.

“Oh God,” Harry said in a strangled voice. “Oh God. It was one of my children . . .”

Briac nodded. “It was James,” he said softly. “And he’s not lying. We gave him Veritaserum. Draco did attack him.”

Harry staggered to his couch and sat down. His mind was completely blank.
“Where is he now?” he asked weakly. “Is he alright?”

Briac went to his drawer and pulled out a glass and a bottle of whisky.

“James is with Ginny. She met him at St. Mungo’s. Apparently, Draco’s magic hadn’t been used for so long that the spell didn’t do much damage, especially since it was wandless. But you know what this means, Harry. Draco’s going back to Azkaban. There’s nothing you can do.”

Harry accepted the glass Briac handed him as though he was in a dream. This couldn’t be happening. “Where are Albus and Lily?” he asked, his voice cracking. “Are they okay?”

“They’re fine. Ginny saw no reason to remove them from Hogwarts. They’re perfectly safe there.”

Harry suddenly sat up straight as a horrible thought occurred to him. “But they aren’t,” he said. He pushed himself up from the couch and handed his glass to Briac. “They’re not safe there . . .”

Briac frowned as Harry grabbed his robe off a hook. “But Draco’s in custody . . .”

“I’m not talking about Draco,” Harry said as he threw open his door. “I’m talking about Scorpius!”

* * * * * * *

Somewhere far and deep something cracked in Scorpius’s head. He could both feel and hear it. Somewhere in the back of his mind where words and other civilised things still existed he thought this is what it feels like to go crazy.

“Jesus!” Rowan cried and dropped the paper as though it was on fire. “What the fuck?”

Scorpius could barely get the words out. “Albus . . . Potter.” He stood for a moment, his breath coming so fast, it made him feel faint.

“Jesus,” said Rowan again. “Scorpius . . .”

Scorpius wheeled around. “Don’t even try to tell me to calm down!” he yelled. “I’m warning you!” He still had his wand in his hand, and he pointed it straight at Rowan’s throat. His friend stepped back with a cry. “Do not come after me. I will hex you if you do!”

Scorpius tore off his school robe and ran as fast as he could to the Great Hall. The ball had begun already. The lights were low, and a string quartet played up on the platform where the faculty table usually was. Couples in fancy robes were waltzing around the room in a blur of colour.

Scorpius cast a Sonorus and Petrified the musicians. The dancers came to a sudden stop as the entire quartet and their instruments fell with a terrible crash of broken notes and cracking heads.

“ALBUS POTTER!” he yelled at the top of his lungs. A hundred startled faces turned to look at him, and several members of the faculty came running out of the corner where they’d probably been sharing a necessary bottle of port.

“Scorpius Malfoy!” shouted McGonagall. “In my office . . .”

“Petrificus Totalus!” he shouted, and to everyone’s shock, the Head Mistress froze and toppled over just as the musicians had done.

The Stunner that came at him from Professor Longbottom was so tepid, it was clear he didn’t want to cast it. Scorpius laughed out loud.
“ALBUS, YOU FUCKING COWARD! OUTSIDE NOW!”

His heart pounding to the point where he thought it might burst, Scorpius ran out of the castle’s front door and into the blizzard. He stumbled in a drift but caught himself before he fell.

“Right here, Malfoy,” Albus said from somewhere in the darkness. He’d obviously anticipated all of this.

Scorpius shielded his eyes from the light spilling through the doors. “Come out where I can see you!” he yelled. A laugh was all the warning he received before the Slashing Curse struck him in the shoulder. The pain was intense. He glanced down. Blood dripped from his fingers onto the snow.

“You planned this, didn’t you?!” he shouted. “You and James! You were too fucking cowardly to face me, so you had to go after my father . . . .” His voice broke.

Albus laughed again. He sounded as unhinged as Scorpius felt.

“So sorry to have taken your father away. Sure sucks, doesn’t it?”

“You are fucking crazy” Scorpius yelled. His eyes were slowly adjusting to the light, but the snow was still blowing into his face and stinging his cheeks.

“Are you going to fight or what?!” Albus yelled, casting another Slashing Curse. Scorpius blocked it this time. Protective spells part of his mind chanted, but it was quickly drowned out by the rage surging through his veins.

Albus cast a third Slashing Curse, but it went wide. He was flailing around like a first year.

Students were gathering around them and teachers were screaming at them, trying to get them all inside.

“Everyone knows about your father, Malfoy, and how he sucked Voldemort’s prick, but does anyone else but us know that you’re fucking mine, you shameless fame-drunk whore!”

The Shredding Hex struck Albus right in the chest. Scorpius felt it take shape in his mind as a thought before it travelled to his wounded shoulder and then down his wand arm. He raised his wand again as Albus screamed in pain and fear. His hands scrabbled at his robes. His face was white against the black night.

Harry had taught him well. Better, it seemed, than his own children.

“Confringo!, he shouted, aiming purposely at Albus’s feet and throwing snow ten feet high, blinding not only Albus, but his friends who were running to his side.

Sectumsempra!” Scorpius shouted, and Albus screamed in agony. All he could think was that Albus was lucky he’d cast only a weak one. But his next spell wouldn’t be. All he could see was his father, goaded to the point where he lost control and damned himself back to hell. His poor father who’d tried to . . . Well, if his father was going to Azkaban, then so the fuck would he . . . .

Scorpius raised his arm and pointed his wand at the bloody heap in the snow. “Crucio,” he shouted. But the torture curse had only just barely left his lips when several things happened all at once: there was a crack of Apparition, and suddenly Harry and Briac appeared and then there was a terrifying scream. A girl’s scream. As if in slow motion, Scorpius watched Lily Potter throw herself on her brother and take the Cruciatus straight to the back of her neck.
Stunned, Scorpius staggered backward and dropped his wand as he watched Lily writhe and scream and scream and scream. Then as though a million years had passed, he heard a familiar voice yell *FINITE!*, and Harry ran stumbling through the snow to grab Lily and Albus in his arms. He was sobbing and crying for help.

Scorpius fell to his knees. He couldn’t breathe. He tore at his tie, trying to loosen it, but his hand was bloody and couldn’t find purchase on the silk. He had to get up. He had to do *something*. Lily wasn’t moving, and Harry – his Harry – sounded like he had lost his mind with grief. He *had* to do something. He couldn’t just stay there – he couldn’t bear it. What had he done? *What had he done?* He had to be alone. He had to think about what he should do . . . He couldn’t bear the sound of Harry’s cries. He couldn’t bear the thought of Harry’s eyes on him – the hatred he knew would be there – that *should* be there. In one night, he’d lost everything. His father, the love of his life, his whole world. Before he could even talk himself out of it, Scorpius ran.

He had no conscious idea where he was going. He had some vague notion of trying to reach the Forbidden Forest, but he kept stumbling in the flying snow. He couldn’t see more than a few feet in front of him, and he couldn’t cast a *Lumos*. He’d dropped his wand as soon as he cast the Unforgivable. He couldn’t breathe. He had only the primal instinct to keep running toward . . .

Suddenly, with no warning, he slipped on his bum as if he’d run onto a frozen . . . Lake.

At the same moment he realised where he was, he heard a deep groan and then a crack like thunder. He rolled over and struggled to his knees, and then, before his survival instinct could kick in, he staggered to his feet and started running toward the sound. Everything was suddenly crystal clear. He knew what he was going to do.

He stumbled again when the slab of ice he was on began to tip. He heard the whoosh of water right behind him and felt a spider web crack grow out from beneath his knees. He had no idea how far he was from the shore; it was obscured by the snow. He couldn’t even see the lights of the castle.

The worst part was not the black water engulfing him or the sound of the ice closing over his head. It was the knowledge that he hadn’t said good-bye. Not to his father, not to his friends – and not to Harry.

Harry. The image of blowing gauze and black hair against a white pillow came to him like sleep. Harry’s eyes when they opened were soft and gentle. He reached up to touch Scorpius’s face and pull him down into a kiss murmuring all the time *my Scorpius, my love*. He closed his eyes as Harry curled around him. Sleeping beside Harry was more wonderful than he ever could’ve imagined. He was sweetly tired, and Harry was still murmuring in his ear. He thought he heard the sound of the call to prayer somewhere in the distance. He was in Harry’s arms – the only place he’d ever wanted to be. His whole life. The only thing he’d ever really wanted. *Scorpius*, Harry murmured . . . .

And suddenly he was being hauled up by his tie and torn from his beautiful dream. He choked and gagged.

“You stupid stupid stupid child!”

Someone was yelling at him and shaking him and slapping him on the back. He was so cold and so sleepy. He felt his head roll back on his neck as though his body was made of wet rags.

“If you die, I’m going to fucking kill you,” said the voice. Scorpius was sure that he’d heard it before sometime a long long time ago. He felt his eyes slip closed again.
“Do you honestly fucking believe that by killing yourself, you’d be somehow helping Harry?”

Briac.

“Yes,” Scorpius choked when he could catch his breath. “I did – and still do – honestly fucking believe that. Now, let me go!” He struggled as hard as he could.

“Don’t bother,” said Briac. “I’m three times your weight. Now drink this. Open your jaws or I’ll pry them open!” Scorpius reluctantly obeyed and felt hot chocolate fill his mouth.

“I don’t want to live,” he sputtered. “I don’t deserve to live. Did you see what I did? Lily has never done anything to hurt me, ever. I didn’t know she’d do it . . . I didn’t know . . .”

The tears came. Scorpius couldn’t even say Harry’s name out of shame and grief. Briac pulled off his cloak and wrapped it around him.

“You’re coming with me, you idiot boy,” he said, and if you keep struggling I’m going to Stun you. Is that clear?”

Scorpius was too wrung out to complain, even when Briac hoisted him up onto his back and Apparated without warning.
Harry sat on a chair between Albus’s and Lily’s beds while James stood by the window, staring out at the fake moonlit forest.

“Dad?” murmured Albus. “Is that you?”

Harry reached over and smoothed the fringe back from his forehead. “I’m right here,” he said softly.

“Where am I?”

Harry reached for his hand and kissed his knuckles. “Saint Mungo’s,” he replied. “I’m here, your Mum’s here, your grandparents are here, James is here . . .”

“But what about Lily?” Albus asked, struggling to sit up. “Where is she?”

Harry gently pressed him back down against his pillow. “She’s right here,” he said calmly, “in the bed on the other side of me.”

“Is she going to be okay?”

Harry nodded. “You both are. You just need to rest.”

James turned from the window and came over to sit on the edge of Albus’s bed. He looked to Harry as if he’d aged seven years in a week – a year for every day his brother and sister had been in comas.

“I’m sorry,” James said.

Albus shook his head. “Don’t be. I went into it with my eyes open, it was just Lily who . . .” But his voice broke.

“Sshhh,” his brother said. “You heard Dad; she’s going to be fine.”

Harry stood up and took James’s place by the window. He hadn’t slept in days, and he was struggling to keep intact the thin veneer of calm that was holding them all together at this point. He hadn’t even fought with Ginny and instead let her yell at him until she was hoarse.

“Dad?” said James. He hadn’t called Harry “Dad” since he was a little boy and still thought Harry was worthy of the title. Unlike his siblings, he’d soon found out the truth.

“Yeah?” Harry asked, turning away from the window.
“Aren’t you hungry or something?”

Harry smiled and shook his head. “Not really.”

“You look tired.”

“That’s because I am.”

“Where’s Briac?” Albus asked.

“Briac and I have . . . parted ways,” Harry said. He closed his eyes.

“Over . . . ?”

Harry held up his hand, and Albus immediately fell silent.

They were all quiet for a long time and watched as the nurse came in and helped Lily turn over. Tears filled James’s eyes.

“You know, she never said a bad word about you, Dad. Even when Al and I were trying to browbeat her.”

Harry swallowed and turned back to the window. His little Lily. How had he let this happen?

“Will I be able to go back to school?” asked Albus.

“I don’t see why not,” Harry replied.

“What about . . . ?”

Harry dropped his head into his hand, and Albus fell quiet.

“Your friends have brought your books and homework assignments for you,” James said.

Albus snorted. “Oh goody. Dad, can you get the nurse? I’m hungry.”

Harry left the room and walked to the cafeteria. A nurse needn’t be bothered for something so trivial. They’d been going out of their way to do everything they could for Harry and his children. He’d heard nothing but “Head Auror Potter,” and “Mr. Potter, sir” for days.

He was just about to pay the grouchy witch for a pitiful little cheese sandwich and a paper cup of tea when he felt someone put a hand on his shoulder. He turned and saw Briac. For some reason he didn’t even blink.

“I heard Albus was awake,” Briac said. “I thought he might want to play some chess.”

Harry smiled wearily.

“Regardless, the kids will be glad to see you,” he said.

“And you? Are you glad to see me?”

Harry nodded. “Yeah. I am.”

They walked together back to the room, and James and Albus both cheered when Briac walked through the door.
“Yay!” Albus cried. “Dad said you’d ‘parted ways.’” He put finger quotes around the words.

“Well, your father says lots of silly things, doesn’t he? How’re you doing?”

“I feel okay,” Albus replied. “Just a bit sore.”

“The Healer said you’re lucky to be alive,” said James. “Lily too.”

Harry had resumed his place by the window. He was grateful that Briac was there. He was starting to lose it. But he had to know a couple things. At least the things he could bear.

“What is the status of Draco’s prosecution?”

He saw James flinch in the window’s reflection.

“It’s been staid for the moment,” Briac replied. “He’s in a holding cell at the Ministry, not in Azkaban.”

“Who’s in charge of the Department?”

Briac laughed. “Believe it or not, me.”

“Good,” said Harry.

“We need our real leader back though,” said Briac. “When the time is right, of course. I’m crap at interviews.”

“I used to be too,” said Harry. “But I got used to it.”

“Go home, Harry.” Briac’s voice was kind. “I’ll stay here with the kids. You need to sleep and get something to eat.”

Harry leaned forward until his forehead rested against the cold glass.

“I don’t want to go home,” he said. “Can I go to your flat?”


Harry nodded, and Briac left the room.

“Dad?”

Harry turned around to look at Albus. “Yes?” he asked.

“Are you very sad?”

“Ssshhhh,” James whispered. “Not now.”

“I’m only asking if he’s sad. That’s all.”

“Well isn’t it obvious that he is? Why do you need to ask him?”

“I’ll be less sad when Lily wakes up,” Harry said, gathering his robe.

“But you’ll still be sad.”
Harry rubbed his eyes. “I’m the Head Auror,” he said. “I have a lot of responsibilities. There’s another problem up in York that I have to see to.”

“Can’t you get someone else to take care of it? Why not Briac?”

Harry smiled grimly. To be honest, he wished he was up in York as they spoke. His wand hand had been itching all week.

“Because I’m Harry Potter,” he replied as though that answered every question there was left to ask.

* * * * * * * *

Draco glared at him. He was dressed in thin prison garb despite the cold in his cell, and there were manacles around his wrists and ankles that had chafed his skin, leaving raw ugly sores.

“Is it true?”

Harry sat down on the floor on the other side of the bars.

“Is what true?”

“All of it.”

“You’ll have to be more specific,” Harry replied, and Draco laughed.

“Ha ha, amusing as ever,” he said. “Fuck you, Potter. Is it true my son’s going to Azkaban?”

Harry rubbed his face with his palms.

“No,” he said. “It isn’t true. He’ll have to surrender his wand, but he’s not going to Azkaban.”

Draco was silent. “I don’t know which is worse,” he said. “Azkaban or a life without magic.”

Harry drew up his knees and wrapped his arms around them.

“Don’t be an arsehole, Malfoy. It was the best I could do, and you know damn well that he’s better off out of Azkaban.”

They sat in silence for several minutes. At last, Draco spoke. “Please, Potter, help me get out of here. Not for me, but for Scorpius. I just want to take him home where I can keep him safe. He’s not the evil Dark-wizard-in-the-making that everyone’s saying he is. He’s just a child, and what’s more, he’s my child. I don’t want him wandering alone in a friendless world.”

Harry buried his face in his arms.

“T’ll do everything I can for you,” he said without looking up. “The fact that my son was the instigator makes it easier for me to be quote-unquote ‘merciful.’”

“Yet another magnanimous Potter gesture,” Draco said, but there was no malice in his voice. “Do you ever get tired of playing the Saviour?”

Harry looked up and tilted his head back against the wall. “Yeah,” he said. “I was tired of it a long long time ago.”

He pushed himself off the floor. “You’ll hear something by the end of the day, tomorrow morning at the latest,” he said.
Draco gazed up at him with those eyes Harry had never been able to read and still couldn’t. “You look like shit,” he said.

“Probably because I feel like shit.”

“You had no right, you know.”

Harry wasn’t sure what Draco was talking about, but he nodded his head anyway.

“I saw you after Voldemort. From a distance, of course, but I saw you. You got too good at what you do. You made yourself dangerous.”

Harry leaned back against the wall. “What do you mean I got too good at what I do?”

“You got too good at hunting. Everything – and everyone – started to look like prey.”

Harry was silent.

“Why did you do it, Potter? Why my son?”

“After I took him from you . . . I’ll never forget your face that night . . . I only wanted him to be happy. Everything I did was for him. You weren’t there, Draco. He had to bear that name of yours alone.”

It was Draco’s turn to draw his knees up and rest his forehead against them.

“It’s as though we’re both his parents.” Amazingly, Draco’s laugh wasn’t bitter. “We raised him together. That’s why I could never get too angry with you. I thought you were good for him. I wish to God I hadn’t been wrong.”

Harry felt a tear roll slowly down his cheek.

“I’ve always loved him,” he said.

“Yes, I know. And that’s the problem. He didn’t have a chance, poor boy. Did you think he was capable of reining you in? Of making you ‘normal’? He’s got the capacity, certainly, but not the experience. I don’t know everything. Your son merely told me that you were quote unquote ‘fucking Scorpius.’ I lost my mind.”

“He didn’t tell you the whole story then; Scorpius and I were . . .”

Draco’s head snapped up, and he shot Harry a look that froze his tongue.

“Don’t talk to me of ‘marriage.’ It only makes me angrier, and I’m already trying my hardest not to hate you. I don’t want to hate you. I’m tired of hating you. If we really want Scorpius to be happy, then you and I have to be on the same side. You can’t ask him to face the consequence of losing one of us if he chooses the other. He’s a boy. I’ve needed him too much, and you’ve wanted him too much. You and I are not unequal, Potter. We never have been. If we hate each other, we’ll twist Scorpius into a rope as we pull on both ends of his heart. You want to protect him? Then protect him from yourself!”

Harry wiped his eyes. “I have to get back upstairs,” he said. “You’ll be under house arrest for a short time. I don’t know how the fucking bastards expect you to eat, but clearly they don’t care. When I show up at your door with groceries, don’t you dare turn me away out of your fucking Malfoy pride. I owe you more than you owe me. A thousand times over. If you’ve really stopped hating me, then
don’t prevent me from doing the only thing that will let me sleep at night. Please, Draco.”

Draco didn’t reply in words, but he nodded his head. Harry waited for him to say something, but he didn’t.

It seemed like a step in the right direction.

Harry walked to the door and then turned around. Draco didn’t look at him.

“I’ll see you . . .”

“Later, Harry.”


* * * * * * *

The room slowly darkened again. Another evening. Scorpius turned away from the window. He hadn’t moved from the bed except to go to the bathroom. Every now and then, Briac came in to give him some tea and a plate of food. Scorpius rarely ate.

He hadn’t spoken either. In fact, he was determined never to speak again. It’d been his tongue that cast the _Cruciatus_ that had almost killed Harry’s children.

“Are you going to stay silent forever?” Briac asked one late afternoon as Scorpius lay on his side watching rain pummel the new daffodils into submission. “Because you’re a bloody boring houseguest.”

Scorpius merely turned and stared at him incredulously. Briac had a fucked-up sense of humour.

He tried not to think and to sleep as much as possible, although his dreams were often worse because he was with Harry in most of them, and they were laughing and talking and making love. Waking up was like dying again and again.

In an effort to distract himself, he wrote letters to his father, to Rowan and Edith, to Head Mistress McGonagall (with profoundest apologies), to Lily and even to Albus. He wrote some to Harry too, but those he never sent. He couldn’t bear the thought of having them returned unopened.

He waited every day for an owl that would bear the letter ending their engagement.

But the owl didn’t come. His father wrote him back and then wrote every day after that. He told Scorpius about how he wasn’t going to Azkaban and that he was back in their little flat, and he was making it ready for when Scorpius returned. And Rowan wrote him, although the tone was stilted and he talked mostly about classes. The Head Mistress wrote a terse note accepting his apologies and wishing him luck, and Lily wrote him.

Her parchment was lavender and she wrote with purple ink and her owl was the fiercest thing Scorpius had ever seen. She didn’t say much in her first letter, only that she was okay and able to walk again. In her second letter, she said that Albus had been released from St. Mungo’s and was going back to school, and in her third letter she told him that she didn’t believe all the things that people were saying about him. Scorpius had folded the third letter and put it under his pillow.

Albus’s letter came so long after his own letter that Scorpius had almost forgotten that he’d written to him.
Malfy,

Yes, Lily is okay. She’s back at school and playing Quidditch again. And I’m fine too. Classes are the same as ever, meaning they’re bloody boring. The only major difference is Dad doesn’t teach anymore. James is training to be an Auror. I heard about the Wizengamot stripping you of your right to practise magic. I can’t say that I’m sorry, but just so you know, Lily is. She thinks everything is all my and James’s faults, but I remind her I wasn’t the one casting Unforgivables. You dug your own grave, Malfy. I told you to stay away from our Dad. But whatever. I’m sick of fighting, and I’m sick of even having to think about you at all. Go live your life, and I’ll live mine.

Peace,
A.Potter

When Briac came in to give him his breakfast, Scorpius scribbled his first communication in all the time he’d been there.

Does Mr. Potter know I’m here?

“No,” said Briac. “But I think he suspects you are. Nobody knows where you are, not even Harry.” He handed the parchment back to Scorpius.

Do you see him?

“Everyday. We’ve been very busy.”

Is he alright?

Briac took a few moments before answering.

“No, he’s not.”

Scorpius began to cry as silently as he could. He reached for the parchment.

When can I go home to my father?

“Once I’m sure of which way the wind’s blowing. And sure you won’t try to kill yourself again.”

That is annoyingly cryptic.

Briac stood up and Accioed a box of tissues from the bathroom. He handed them to Scorpius.

“He still loves you,” he said softly. “He’s just trying to decide what to do. I’ve known Harry since you were in nappies. He’s using the field to work things through, but once he does, his mind will be made up.”

Scorpius blew his nose and reached for the parchment.

I love him too. He’s better off without me. I want him to be happy. I have never been anything but a burden to him. He should’ve seen that I was bad news when he first met me at Bulcher House. It would’ve saved us all a lot of heartache – him especially.

Briac read it and rolled his eyes. “Bloody teenagers,” he said. “You’re all so melodramatic.”

* * * * * * * * *

The flat was just as it’d always been except that his father had bought some flowers and put them on
As soon as Scorpius walked through the door, he ran to his father and held on tight.

“You must be Auror Gwencalon,” his father said over Scorpius’s shoulder. “Thank you for taking care of my son. I wish I could repay you somehow.”

Scorpius pulled back and turned to look at Briac, who stood in the doorway looking like a giant in a doll’s house.

“It was no trouble,” he replied.

“And . . . and thank Potter for me.”


When the door closed behind Briac, his father went to the kitchen to put on the kettle. Scorpius followed him. There was something he needed to know, and now that he was home he could let himself speak again.

“Father,” he said softly. “What was it that James said to you that day that made you so upset?”

His father took a deep breath. “We don’t need to talk about this,” he said. “It’s water under the bridge.”

“But I need to know. Please tell me, and then I’ll never mention any of this again.”

“He told me that you and Potter were going to be married and he showed me a memory of a conversation he’d had with Potter just the day before . . .”

Scorpius covered his ears. He’d heard enough. It was what he’d thought all along.

“You’re right,” he said. “We don’t need to talk about it. Everything’s changed now. I haven’t heard from Harry since . . . since that night.”

“But he’d asked you to marry him . . . How long . . . ?”

“Had we been together? Not that long actually. Basically, since just before my seventeenth birthday, so four months. If you want to know the whole truth, it was me who seduced him. Not the other way around.”

“But why . . . ?”

Scorpius took the cup of tea his father held out to him and sat down at their little table. “Because I love him,” he said. “Because I want him.”

His father nodded. Scorpius had expected him to rage, but he didn’t.

“You’ve talked to Harry, haven’t you?”

His father nodded again. “He came to me when I was in jail, and he came here every other day while I was under house arrest.”

Scorpius mouth dropped open in sheer shock. “Why . . . why didn’t you tell me? We’ve been writing to each other all this time!”
“Because he didn’t stay long, and there was nothing to say about his visits. I was under house arrest, and he brought me groceries. That’s all. We had a cup of tea and talked about his job. Believe it or not, your name didn’t come up.”

Scorpius winced as though his father had struck him, but then his father reached for his hand. “The important thing is that Potter and I don’t hate each other. That’s the important thing. Especially for you. If Harry and I agree on anything, it’s that we want you to be happy. Whatever that may mean.”

His mind was empty except for the plan they’d put together. Briac knelt on the floor while Harry stood watch over him. It was a jinxed explosive device that could sense the aura of Dark magic on a person’s skin. Harry hoped the necessary deaths it caused would be as quick and painless as possible.

It never ceased to amaze him how many witches and wizards became curious about the Dark Arts and then were ensnared by them. They were nothing but grass bending in the wind when it came to the ancient powers, and it was only a matter of time before they became nothing but conduits and menaces to society. It’d been why he’d taught DADA. To try to stem the continuous flow of souls rotting in a stew of obsession and hate.

It wasn’t that he didn’t understand. He did. He always had. It was just that for some reason he’d never wholly succumbed. It took strength – and constant vigilance.

Which might be why he’d lost his mind when it came to Scorpius. He’d been seduced into thinking – if only for a moment – that he, Harry, was harmless. But just like Draco said, he wasn’t.

It was an odd feeling to know that Draco was the only person besides Briac who understood that.

The spell slashed his thigh, bathing his mind in an antiseptic rush of pain. It cleansed him to the bone. There was nowhere else he should be but here – in this place, this moment. When he fought the stakes were clear. You lived or died, and if you lived, it was only to eat and fuck and drink and then fight some more. Roll up your sleeves, step into the waves and try not to drown.

At first he’d walked a lot. He’d start with his father in the mornings, and they’d walk the two square miles to which his father had been confined. They’d then go home for their increasingly meagre lunch, and afterward Scorpius had gone out again. Unlike his father, he had no restrictions on his mobility, and he’d walk and walk and walk till he was exhausted. Sometimes he’d trace his and Harry’s footsteps when they’d gone hunting for a place to start their life together in. And other times, he’d pass by Harry’s building – but only after dusk. The lights in his flat were never on.

Scorpius refused to imagine why.

But as time went on, he stopped walking. On Harry’s birthday, he stopped altogether. Walking felt too much like hoping.

The stag pendant was constantly moving, pawing the ground and shaking its antlers. He had no idea what that meant. When they’d been together, the stag had sometimes been still, but not now. It often woke him at night, in the pale hours just before dawn.

He tried hard to not think about his future. It became easier all the time as the money for groceries dwindled. There was something pleasant about being hungry for food. It dulled the other hungers.
The scorpion seemed to sleep a lot. Even when Harry prodded it with his finger, it barely moved. He’d been doing that a lot lately, but the thing seemed sick so he tried to leave it alone as much as possible.

“What do you keep poking at, Daddy?”

He and Lily were having brunch at their usual table in the Dragon’s Nest. Her appetite had fully returned, and he watched her start in on another piece of tomato quiche. Even more importantly, she could feed herself. Most of the shaking had gone away. The rehabilitation therapists had worked miracles.

Harry unbuttoned his collar. “This little fellow,” he said, pulling out the ailing scorpion.

“Can I hold it?” she asked.

Harry held it out on its chain.

“It doesn’t look very well,” she said, putting it in the palm of her hand. “It tried to pinch me, but it could barely lift its claw-thingy. Did Scorpius give it to you?”

She was the only person in his life who ever mentioned Scorpius’s name in his presence.

“Sort of” Harry replied and tried to clear the roughness from his voice with a cough. It was all he could say.

Lily nodded, her eyes serious behind her hideous rhinestone glasses.

“Do you still love him? I mean . . . like that?”

Harry wasn’t exactly sure what she meant, but regardless, the answer would remain the same.

“Yeah.” He reached for his glass of water to clear his throat of the lump that’d formed there.

“You’re not happy,” Lily said matter-of-factly.

There was something about her – there always had been – that made him want to reveal his heart to her.

“I’m very happy that you’re getting better and that Albus is fine,” he said. “But no, in every other part of my life, I’m not happy.”

“You’ve never been happy, Daddy.”

He frowned. “Now why would you say that? I was very happy when you children were born.”

“Then why’d you go away so often and try to get yourself killed . . . ?”

“That’s your mother talking,” Harry replied. “I wasn’t trying to ‘get myself killed,’ I was just doing my job – what I’d been trained to do.”

“What are you going to do after we grow up and have our own families?”

“Well, hopefully I’ll still be working,” Harry replied, “and hopefully you’ll invite me to visit once in a while.”
“But who will keep you warm at night? I think about that a lot. I think you cry when you think nobody’s looking.” She prodded the scorpion with the paper umbrella she’d got with her pineapple swizzle, or whatever it was.

Harry smiled and squeezed her hand. “Daughters shouldn’t worry about their fathers,” he said. “And besides, that’s what being an adult is all about – crying when nobody’s looking.”

She returned the scorpion to his chest and laid her hand over it for a moment.

“I’ll go with you,” she said.

Harry had just finished his bloody Mary and was trying to get the waitress’s attention for another one. “Go with me where?” he asked.

“To see Scorpius, of course,” she said.

Harry stared at her. “What?”

“I said, I’ll go with you to see Scorpius.”

“But . . . why . . . I’m not . . .”

“Oh, come on, Dad. Are you actually trying to tell me you don’t want to see him?”

Harry didn’t bother denying it. She knew him too well.

“Even if I did go,” he said. “Why on earth would you want to go with me?”

Lily twirled her little umbrella between her palms. “Because he needs to see that I’m okay,” she said. “He says he’ll never forgive himself for what he did to me. He said that’s why some curses are ‘unforgivable’ – you’ll never forgive yourself for having cast them.”

Harry heard his own words speaking across a decade.

“Wait a minute,” he said. “What do you mean ‘he says this’ and ‘he says that’?”

“We’ve been exchanging letters since the end of March.”

Harry was stunned. “You have?”

Lily nodded and stuck the umbrella behind her ear.

Harry didn’t know what to say, until suddenly everything spilled out.

“Is . . . is he alright?” he asked. “Are he and his father healthy and comfortable? Do they have enough money to heat their flat? It’s been a cold summer. Do they get out at all? Draco’s not allowed to go more than a couple square miles, which is a complete outrage. Do they need clothes? I have no idea how they’ve been getting clothes. Do they still go to the library? The museum? Does Scorpius have boots? How about a jacket? Are they safe? Are they getting enough to eat? Do they need anything? They have hardly any money at all, the government is so stingy. Are they going for walks? Scorpius needs sunlight. He gets so pale when he’s with his father. Are all of their utilities paid for? Do they have electricity? Running water? How about gas? Are their blankets warm enough? Cool enough? Is Scorpius still reading as much as he always did? How about his Italian? His French? Do they have enough parchment and ink? Do they need an owl? There’s an extra department owl. Does Scorpius have enough money for a haircut or does Draco cut his hair for him, God forbid. Do they have enough biscuits? Is their bedroom window draughty? Does Scorpius still
communicate with Rowan? It must be hard for him not having any friends his own age. Do he and Draco get enough fresh fruit and vegetables? Once he’d been released from house arrest, Draco’s turned away my visits. Fruits and vegetables can be very expensive, even this time of the year. Are they warm and dry? Are they okay? Are they happy?”

Lily goggled at him. “I have no idea how to answer three-quarters of those questions,” she said. “But the last one I can definitely answer. No, Scorpius’s not. I don’t know about his father.”

Harry brushed the tears from his eyes, hoping Lily didn’t see them, but he suspected she probably did. If Scorpius was unhappy, there was no way Draco was happy either.

“I only ever wanted him to be happy,” he said, choking on the words. “From the moment I took him in my arms as a tiny baby, I’ve only ever wanted him to be happy.” He pulled off his glasses and cleaned the lens with his shirt. “How’d I ever lose sight of that simple fact?”

He was having a very hard time holding himself together. Lily got up from her chair and went around the table to stand behind him and hold him in her arms. “Daddy,” she said softly. “Please. Let’s go to him. I love you so much. I don’t want to see you in so much pain.” She rested her chin on the top of his head like she used to do when she was younger. He took her hands in his.

“What did I ever do to deserve you?” he said, kissing her knuckles. “What did I ever do to deserve all of you?”

* * * * * * * * * * * * *

Scorpius was in bed. The day was dreary and wet. Again. He was tired and cold, and his father was out for a walk. If he was there, he’d make Scorpius get up. His father hated it when he lay in bed all day.

The knock was so soft, he almost didn’t hear it but then it came again, a little bit louder this time. It was probably the tenant downstairs. He was always needing to borrow something.

Scorpius got up and reached for his “robe.” His father had got it for him and tried to pretend he’d bought it at Madam Malkins’s, but Scorpius knew it was nothing but a fake silk kimono he’d found at a second-hand shop. But he played along anyway. It seemed to make his father less unhappy.

“What is it now?” he said as he opened the door and then nearly fell over when he saw who it was.

“Lily?” he said. “Wha . . .?”

Before he could get the question out of his mouth, she came in and handed him an envelope.

“What does a girl have to do to get some tea in this joint?” she asked in her feigned American accent.

Scorpius was still in shock, but he went into the kitchen anyway and put on the kettle. When he came back again, Lily had made herself comfortable on the couch. She looked beautiful. Her red hair was cut in a bob that suited her face, and she was wearing the most fabulous pair of glasses he’d ever seen. Her cheeks were full of colour and her fingernails were painted pink and her brown eyes were lively and full of mischief.

He looked down at himself in his pyjamas and kimono and ratty slippers. It was three o’ clock in the afternoon, and he looked like he’d just got up – which actually wasn’t all that far from the truth.

“Uhm,” he said lamely. “I wasn’t expecting company.”
Lily laughed and accepted the cup of tea he handed her. “I don’t usually look this fancy,” she said. “It’s just because Daddy and I were eating brunch at the Dragon’s Nest.”

She said “daddy” so causally, as if Scorpius didn’t know who her “daddy” was.

“Are you going to join me?” she asked.

Scorpius sat down in the armchair. “Sorry it’s not very nice here,” he said.

Lily looked around. “I don’t know why you say that,” she said. “Everything’s tidy and clean and cosy.”

They were quiet for a while as they sipped their tea.

“It’s very nice to see you,” said Scorpius at last. “But why are you here?”

“But I wanted to say hello in person and see if you were okay,” she said. “You haven’t opened your present.”

Scorpius had put the envelope in the pocket of his kimono. He drew it out and examined it.

“I wish I’d known you were coming,” he said. “I would’ve got something for you too.”

Lily had just taken a bite of biscuit. “It’s not from me,” she said spraying crumbs on the front of her red and pink dress.

Scorpius swallowed. He didn’t want to think too much about who it might be from. After all, it could be from Albus as some kind of sick joke. He took a deep breath and tore it open.

“It’s a Muggle photograph of my Dad,” Lily said unnecessarily.

Scorpius hand trembled as he held it up. He recognised the background immediately. City lights and the spires of mosques. Harry was looking at the camera with an uncharacteristically shy expression and a glass of wine in his hand. His smile was carefree and happy. One of the waiters must have taken it.

“This is from your father?” he asked, his voice only a whisper.

Lily nodded, her mouth full of another biscuit. “And so is the note on the back,” she said, spraying more crumbs.

Scorpius turned over the photo. It bore two words.

*Be happy.*

Scorpius swallowed. He couldn’t look at Lily for several moments; he was trying too hard to keep himself from crying.

“Where is he?” he finally asked.

Lily got up and took his hand and led him to the window. All he could see was a dark-haired man in a black shirt looking in a shop window on the other side of the street. He didn’t turn, but he didn’t need to. Of course, Scorpius knew the man was Harry.

“He told me that’s as close as he can come for now,” Lily said. “But I think that, maybe someday, he’ll be able to get closer.”
Scorpius nodded as the tears rolled down his face.

“Tell him I’m okay,” he said. “That he shouldn’t worry about me.”

Lily laughed. “I don’t lie to my dad,” she said. “He knows me too well.”

Scorpius put his face in his hand and started to cry for earnest.

“I almost took you away from him,” he sobbed. “How could he ever forgive me?”

Lily hugged him and kissed his cheek very lightly before standing up and walking to the door.

“Good-bye, Scorpius Malfoy,” she said and was gone before he could respond in kind.

* * * * * * *

Harry woke from another dream in which he’d been making love with Scorpius. Without opening his eyes, he reached down and stroked himself to orgasm. The scorpion around his neck skittered up his throat to his ear as if it wanted to tell him something. It did the same thing every time he made himself come to thoughts of Scorpius.

He could hear noises coming from the kitchen. Lily was trying to make eggs without using magic and, by the smell, failing yet again. He could hear Albus trying to coach her and James talking with his girlfriend through the Floo.

They were living with him this summer. It’d taken hours and hours of arguing with Ginny and a hundred promises to Molly, but at last they’d agreed. It’d started out disagreeably, and poor Lily had had to assume the role of go-between for a few days, but slowly his sons had relaxed even to the point where they both gave him awkward hugs when he left for the Ministry in the mornings.

As he’d been doing since the weather had turned hot, he walked into the main room with his t-shirt slung over his shoulder. The first time he’d done it, there’d been a collective gasp, and then a very long heavy silence until Lily asked why he’d never shown her his tattoo before. Albus and James had been very uncomfortable and left shortly after breakfast, but they hadn’t said anything. When they returned later that evening in good moods, Harry assumed their silence had been about as good a reaction as he could reasonably hope for. By now, his boys were no longer staring at his two scorpions, and James had even asked a couple days ago whether getting the tattoo had hurt.

Harry and Briac had been in the field every day since Harry had returned to his job. The thought of being still to do paperwork and conduct meetings made him crazy. He spent every minute either working or being with his children. At night, after they’d gone to bed, he’d go over reports and plans, often falling asleep at his desk. He and Scorpius had slept together enough times in his bed that he tried to be there as little as possible.

There was a never-ending list of things that needed doing. Plus he had a Herculean task he was trying to accomplish. It took hours every week and a million memos and lunches with various members of the Wizengamot and Hogwarts faculty, but he wouldn’t stop until Scorpius’s wand was returned to its rightful owner.

Which wasn’t to say he didn’t have doubts about how or when to approach Scorpius again. At first he hadn’t wanted to. The screams of his children were too fresh in his mind. But then, over numerous bottles of whisky, Briac had finally made him see that he, himself, had played the central role. But for his impetuousness and selfishness, none of this would’ve happened. He had a long way to go before he could pay off his debt to his children – and to Scorpius.
It felt like an eternity since he’d last seen him. They’d never, since Harry started coaching Scorpius at Bulcher House, gone this long without seeing each other or exchanging letters, and Harry felt the absence like a smoldering hole in his heart. But then he’d remember that snowy night and knew he wasn’t ready yet.

It wasn’t until the week before school started again, that Harry trusted himself enough to go to Draco’s flat. Lily offered to go with him, but he’d refused. Returning Scorpius’s wand was something he had to do himself.

The day was sweltering, and the back of Harry’s shirt was soaked by the time he walked from the abandoned car park to the door of their building. He stood in the cool foyer for several minutes trying to calm himself. Above all else, he had to remain calm.

Draco opened the door on his first knock, and Harry got the feeling he was waiting for someone anxiously.

“Harry, it’s nice to see you.” he said. “Please come in.”

Slightly unnerved by his civility, Harry followed him into the kitchen. He couldn’t help but notice the way Draco leaned on a chair when he went by.

“I have tea but no biscuits,” he said without turning around. His robe was threadbare, and Harry could see his shoulder blades through it. He looked around. There was nothing on the counters.

“I’m just going to grab a bit of milk,” he said, and he and Draco lunged for the refrigerator at the same time.

Harry got there first.

There was nothing on the shelves except some brown sauce, eggs, butter and a half-empty milk bottle.

Draco sat down at the table and put his head in his hands as Harry went around throwing open every cabinet door. All he found was four cans of mushy peas, three packets of Coleman’s beef casserole mix, two jars of jam and a loaf of bread.

Harry leaned on the countertop. He could barely control his emotions.

“Is this all the food you have?” he asked, his voice shaking.

Draco didn’t answer for a long time.

“Scorpius has gone for groceries . . .”

“You’ve been starving.” It wasn’t a question. When he turned to look at Draco, he noticed for the first time that his hair was falling out and his neck was skeletal. And he stunk. If they couldn’t buy basic necessities, then he was sure they weren’t buying soap.

“How long?” Harry asked, his voice hoarse. After all they’d agreed upon, how could Draco do this to himself and Scorpius?

“The Galleons I’d saved ran out two months ago . . .”

Harry took a second to turn the months into weeks.

“It was a cold spring,” Draco said as if that explained everything.
Harry walked to the couch and sat down. He felt like he was in a dream. This couldn’t be happening.


“The government didn’t want to ‘support’ us anymore after . . . after what happened.”

Harry felt faint. “Then where . . . how? Where does the money come from to buy the little food that you have?”

Draco hadn’t looked up from his hands. He didn’t answer Harry’s question.

“Draco, answer my question or God help me, I will shake it out of you. Don’t make me do that.”

“I don’t know,” Draco said in an almost inaudible voice. “He won’t tell me no matter how much I beg him to.”

Harry needed air. It was too hot. He couldn’t breathe. He thought he might vomit. He staggered to the door.

“I . . . I need to go outside for a minute,” he stammered. “I’ll . . . I’ll be back.”

“Potter.”

“I . . . can’t talk. I . . . I . . . can’t talk right now.”

Harry stumbled down the stairs, gripping the railing tightly to keep himself from falling. It was his fault! He should’ve known! He should’ve done something!

He faltered on the outdoor steps and landed on his knees on the sidewalk. He was going to kill someone. Maybe even more. If . . . If Scorpius was earning money by whoring himself, he was going to lose his mind and end up in a padded cell in Azkaban. He dragged his hands through his hair. Bits of cement and broken glass had cut his palms. They left bloody prints on his jeans as he staggered to his feet and looked around wildly. He couldn’t even begin to imagine where Scorpius might be. He took off his glasses and wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. He was trapped in a nightmare.

“Mr. Potter?”

At the sound of Scorpius’s voice, he wheeled around and had to catch himself against the side of the building. He couldn’t answer. He didn’t trust himself. Scorpius was barely recognisable. His hair was lank and hung in his face, and his complexion was sallow and almost grey looking. He was wearing the Muggle clothes Harry had bought for him, but his jeans were frayed and his t-shirt was paper thin. Both hung off him.

Harry couldn’t take it. He sat down on the steps and put his face in his hands. After a couple minutes, he felt a light touch on his shoulder. He grabbed Scorpius’s hand and clutched it.

“Has . . . has anyone . . . has anyone hurt you? Tell me who and I will kill them with my bare hands. . . oh, God, I’m so sorry.” He kissed Scorpius’s hand over and over.

Scorpius sat down beside him and tentatively leaned his head on Harry’s shoulder. “Nobody’s hurt me,” he said. “In fact, people have been very kind.”

Harry wasn’t sure if that answer was better or worse. If they were so ‘kind’ then why were they exploiting a half-starved boy?
Harry kissed Scorpius’s hand again. His heart was breaking.

Scorpius smiled and pulled his hand away. He brushed Harry’s lips as though wiping something off. Harry frowned in confusion both at Scorpius gesture and his smile.

“You have blue on your nose, sir,” he said. “And orange on your upper lip.” He opened his palms and for the first time, Harry realised they were covered with chalk.

“You’re drawing pictures and selling them, aren’t you?” he whispered. “You’re not . . . not . . . sleeping with men for money.”

Scorpius made a disgusted face. “Of course not! I’d rather beg than be a whore! Plus, he wouldn’t let me.” He reached under his collar and pulled out the pendant Harry had given him.

The adrenaline drained from his veins, and Harry started to cry. Scorpius put his arms around him. “Don’t cry,” he whispered. “This is no worse than I deserve. I just wish my father didn’t have to suffer along with me. He says he’s not hungry and makes me eat most of the food. I’m worried he’s going to collapse. I try my best, but there are only so many drawings of imaginary landscapes you can sell a day. But it’s always the view from our window in Morocco that sells first.”

Harry cried even harder at his words. “I’m so sorry,” he said over and over again. He tucked his head against Scorpius’s shoulder while Scorpius tried to soothe him. Somewhere in the back of his mind, Harry knew it should be the other way around, but it felt so good to be in Scorpius’s arms again.

“Don’t cry, sir,” Scorpius said in his ear.

“I’m not ‘sir,’” Harry sobbed. “I’m Harry.”

“Harry,” Scorpius whispered as though the word was a charm.

“How could I have let this happen? How could I have been so stupid? If I’d thought about it for even one second, I would have known . . . God, Scorpius, you’ve been exchanging letters with my daughter for months! Why didn’t you tell her?”

Scorpius brushed Harry’s damp fringe off his forehead. “I haven’t forgotten for a second that I almost killed her. In comparison, being a little bit hungry seems like nothing.”

“You’re not ‘a little bit hungry,’ you’re starving! And so is your father. It’s almost September! How were you going to make it through the winter? You can’t draw on the sidewalk in January!”

Scorpius didn’t respond.

Harry took both of his hands and held them tight. “I’m going to make this up to you. I swear I will . . .”

Scorpius pulled his hands away and stood up. “I don’t want your charity,” he said. “You’ve already given us far more than we deserve. We’re criminals, Harry. By rights, we should be in Azkaban right now.”

Harry stood up and tried to pull him into a hug, but Scorpius backed away. Harry wiped his eyes.

“Okay,” he said. “I respect that.”

Scorpius took a deep breath and let it go. “Thank you,” he whispered.
“But there’s a reason I came here today,” Harry continued, “and I don’t want you to see it as charity. Please, Scorpius.” He took Scorpius’s hand. “Let’s go upstairs to your father; he should hear this too.”

It was clear when they walked in the door, that Draco had been crying as well. Scorpius went to him and held him close, whispering things in his ear that Harry couldn’t hear. He sat down on the couch, pulled the wand from its sheath under his sleeve and placed it across his lap.

Both Scorpius and Draco saw it at the same time when they turned around.

There was a long silence that seemed to go on forever. Finally, Harry realised that it was going to have to be him who broke it.

“This isn’t charity,” he said. “This is what I, as head law enforcement officer, thought was right. When I was seventeen, I cast a Cruciatus Curse. I should have been punished but I wasn’t because I’m Harry Potter. I should have been expelled from Hogwarts, Draco, when I scarred you for life, but I wasn’t. In the eyes of most of the world, I was still a child who makes mistakes – even if they have horrendous consequences.” He turned to Scorpius. “I hate to say it, but you’re a child – a child who was in way over his head. I shouldn’t have done what I did. I shouldn’t have told you I was in love with you; I shouldn’t have made love to you, and I shouldn’t have entertained – even for a second – the thought of marrying you.”

Draco looked down at his hands, but Scorpius sank into the armchair and began to cry. Harry wanted more than anything to go to him, but it was important that he stand his ground. Even though everything he’d just said broke his heart as much as it did Scorpius’s.

“I love you,” he said. “That’s never going to change, but you’re too young for me to be ‘in love’ with you.”

Draco went to the kitchen and began putting away the few groceries Scorpius had brought home with him.

“So what you’re trying to say is you . . . you love me like a friend . . . like one of your children . . .”

“Which is saying a lot,” Harry added.

“But . . . you’re not in love with me anymore.”

“Not until you’re older and I’m less of a selfish prick.”

Scorpius nodded, trying to stop crying.

“It hurts,” he whispered. “I feel like you’ve ripped my heart out.”

Harry felt tears fill his eyes again, but he brushed them away. This wasn’t about him.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I know that doesn’t help in any way, but I want you to know I’m sorrier than I’ve ever been that all of this happened. That’s why I did this . . .” He held out Scorpius’s wand to him as well as a letter with an elaborate seal. “You’ve been invited back to Hogwarts for your final year, and all restrictions on your use of magic have been lifted.”

Scorpius didn’t seem to know what to say, but Draco came back into the room and reached for Harry’s hand.

“I’m not too proud to accept your generosity yet again for the sake of my son,” he said. “Thank you,
Harry stood up and shook Draco’s hand with both of his, but then he heard the door shut with a soft click and the sound of running footsteps on the stairs.

“Scorpius!” Harry called and started to go after him, but Draco didn’t release his hand.

“Let him go,” he said. “He worries about me more than he should. He won’t go far or stay away for long. But he’ll be someplace watching the front door and waiting for you to leave.”

Harry swallowed and nodded. He didn’t trust himself to speak.

“Thank you,” Draco said. “Of all the gifts you’ve given me, your letting him go is the most precious.”

“I can’t just stop loving him,” Harry choked. “I’m not that strong. I still want him . . . so much. Instead of warding my doors against intruders I ward them against myself. To keep myself from getting out.”

“Whoever said you needed to stop loving him?” Draco said. “Certainly not me. Don’t forget. We’re partners in his happiness. Your love makes him happy. God knows, I wish it was platonic, but it’s not. Just wait, Harry. Don’t . . . make love to him, and for God’s sake, don’t ask him to marry you again. At least not until you can think clearly enough not to hurt him.”

Harry nodded. He didn’t trust his voice. It was getting dark. Somewhere out there, Scorpius was waiting for him to go away, and back at his flat, his children were waiting for him to come home. In hundreds of homes, hundreds of people were sitting down to tables and discussing their days with their families. Because of him. Because he kept them safe. How had he let himself forget? How had he let himself want something for himself so much and so selfishly. He was a father. He was an Auror. He was Harry Potter.

“Harry . . .”

Draco must have seen something in his face because he squeezed his hand. Harry squeezed his back, feeling a little less lonely.

“I’m sending Briac here tomorrow with books and clothes for Scorpius and groceries for you,” Harry said. “He’s crushed men’s skulls with his bare hands. Do not even think about turning him away.”

Draco, the prat, rolled his eyes.

The first couple weeks were hell. As would be expected, he’d been stripped of his prefect status, and even more students than usual wouldn’t talk to him. Even Rowan and Edith were distant, but at least they sat with him at meals and talked with him about classes and other inconsequential things. Most of the faculty wouldn’t acknowledge his presence – the one exception being Professor Longbottom. He’d quit both the duelling and the astronomy clubs and spent all his free time either in the library or running around the old Quidditch pitch – the one Harry had played on when he was a student. The running felt good after having been cooped up either in Briac’s or his father’s flats for more than six months.

He was lonely. Terribly lonely. The only person who sought him out to speak with him was Lily. She sometimes asked him to sit at her table in the library. They didn’t talk much, but he felt comfortable in her presence anyway. Students walked by and goggled at them. Albus on the other
hand refused to acknowledge him most of the time and when he did, it was to give him a nasty look or a rude gesture. Scorpius did everything he could to avoid him though, and sometimes they went for days without encountering one another. McGonagall had gone out of her way to make sure they shared no classes together.

It wasn’t until his eighteenth birthday that he saw Harry again. He came to the castle without Scorpius knowing about it, and when the Head Mistress said she wanted to see him in her office, his heart dropped into his shoes. But when he opened the door, he found Harry drinking tea with her. At her invitation, he sat down as well and accepted the cup she offered him.

“I was just talking with the Head Mistress about the possibility of taking you with me to Inverness for dinner,” Harry said. “She says it’s fine with her. Would you like to go? I understand if you don’t.”

Scorpius blushed. “I’d like that,” he replied through his shock.

“Well then, that’s settled,” the Head Mistress said curtly. “Have a pleasant evening.”

“I should change,” Scorpius stammered as they walked down the stairs to the main Floo. He was wearing black trousers and his school jumper. He felt stupid and childish. Again.

“You look fine,” Harry replied, but Scorpius noted with chagrin that he was wearing a jacket and tie.

“Please,” he said. “I’ll feel like a schoolboy out with his father.”

Harry smiled, but his expression remained distant. It made Scorpius want to change his clothes even more.

“Alright,” Harry replied. “I’ll meet you down here.”

Scorpius ran up to Gryffindor Tower, taking two steps at a time. In the common room, he ran into Rowan.

“Can I please ask you a favour?” he said breathlessly.

“No,” said Rowan. “I saw Mr. Potter in the front hall, and I want nothing to do with whatever it is.”

Scorpius bit his lip on a vicious retort and merely nodded instead. Now that he couldn’t borrow anything from Rowan, all he had was a white shirt and black trousers. He looked in the mirror. White didn’t suit him when he didn’t have a tan. He looked like shit, but it would have to do.

He walked down the stairs slower than he climbed them and bumped into Lily on her way to supper with her entourage of friends. They all grew silent when they saw him except for Lily who smiled brightly and said hello. He smiled wanly in response.

“Go along,” she said to her friends. “I’ll be down in a moment.”

One of the girls paused. “Are you sure you want to be left alone with . . . him?” Contempt and disgust dripped from her every word, but Lily ignored it.

“Don’t be silly,” she said before turning to Scorpius. “My dad’s here, and it’s your birthday. I put one and one together and concluded he’s going to take you out to dinner.”

Scorpius blushed and nodded.

“The only problem,” said Lily, “is that you look like shit.”
Scorpius had to laugh out loud at her frankness. “It’s true,” he said. “But this is the best I’ve got.”

“Bollocks,” she said. “Come with me.”

She took his arm before he could protest and led him toward Hufflepuff’s tower.

“Wait here,” she said when they reached an alcove in the circular staircase. “I’ll be right back.”

When she returned, she was bearing a pale lavender shirt and a plum-purple tie. “As you’ve probably guessed, they’re my favourite colours,” she said. “I bought all of this when my friends and I dressed up as boys for last year’s end of the year ball. Here, put them on.”

Feeling extremely shy, Scorpius unbuttoned his white shirt and accepted the lavender one.

“It looks fabulous on you!” Lily said and handed him the tie. “True you look very very gay, but then again, you are very very gay, so who cares? Now close your eyes for a second.”

Scorpius did as she said and felt her draw her wand tip across his eyelids. She handed him her pocket mirror. “If you’re going to wear lavender and plum clothes, you’re going to have to wear lavender and plum eye shadows. Here, look at me! Close your eyes again. There you go. Perfect!”

And she was right. He did look perfect.

He grinned and she gave him a hug. “Happy birthday,” she said. “Go have a nice time with my dad. He misses you terribly.”

And with that she was gone in a swirl of red hair and rhinestone glasses and flowery perfume.

* * * * * * * * * *

Harry blinked and stared. Was that Scorpius?

He looked as beautiful as he’d been in Morocco.

“You look incredible,” he said, and Scorpius blushed.

“It was all Lily’s doing,” he said.

Harry shook his head and laughed. “She’s been even more impish than usual lately,” he said. “Shall we?” he gestured that Scorpius should step into the Floo ahead of him.

The restaurant Harry had chosen for them was called “Nessie’s.”

“They even have sea monster on the menu,” he said. “I’m not joking. But I read on WitchRestaurant.com that it’s unpleasantly chewy.”

It took a while, but eventually their conversation began to flow more smoothly. Scorpius told him about his classes (which seemed to be the only safe school-oriented topic), and Harry talked about the Aurors’ upcoming mission on an island off the northern coast of Norway.

“It’s far north,” he said. “For obvious reasons, I can’t tell you exactly where, but I can assure you it’s going to be very cold. Briac is already predicting that his balls will fall off.”

He almost kicked himself at the mention of genitalia, but Scorpius didn’t seem to notice. Harry watched him examine the dessert menu. He’d returned to a healthy weight since returning to Hogwarts, but he no longer looked like the boy Harry had brought to his bed. His unnerving eyes
looked even more like Draco’s than they used to. Harry was glad for the make-up’s softening effect. He seemed less impetuous too and mulled over his answers to Harry’s questions for a second or two before responding.

But he was still beautiful. Actually even more so than before. A touch of gravity suited him. Harry swallowed a mouthful of pure desire.

At last he settled on apple butterscotch pie and tea, and Harry told the waitress to bring two spoons.

“So you’re eighteen,” Harry said. “And this is your last year at Hogwarts. Any thoughts yet as to what you’re going to do next year?”

“I enjoyed studying Healing. I’d like to apprentice with Healer Maureen McVey at St. Mungo’s . . . if she’ll have me, of course . . .”

Scorpius’s voice dissolved into weariness.

“You’re having difficulties finding a healer who’s willing to work with you,” said Harry matter-of-factly.

Scorpius sighed. “Yeah, at least in Britain. I could go back to New Guinea; they’d be glad to have me.”

Harry’s heart dropped. He didn’t want to lose Scorpius to the other side of the globe again.

“But you want to stay in the U.K., right?”

Scorpius blew on his tea. “I want to stay with my father,” he said. “I don’t want to go away again.”

Harry nodded and made a note to himself to talk discreetly to Maureen the first chance that he got.

“I think you’d make an excellent healer.”

“I hope so. It’s a long course of study. I wouldn’t be able to actually practise on my own until I’m twenty-three.”

“You can do it,” Harry said with every ounce of confidence he possessed.

Scorpius nodded. He hadn’t finished even a quarter of his share of the dessert. Harry reached across the table and took his hand. Scorpius looked up with a startled expression.

“I’m proud of you,” he said.

Scorpius’s eyes filled with tears, and Harry called for the bill.

The night was cool. Harry removed his jacket and draped it over Scorpius’s shoulders. They walked in silence for a while along a path that followed the river.

“I want to kiss you,” Harry said. “If that’s alright with you.”

Scorpius looked at him with another startled expression and nodded mutely.

Harry stopped and took Scorpius in his arms. They stood like that for a while getting used to each other’s bodies again, and then Harry tilted his head and kissed Scorpius’s mouth. It wasn’t a chaste kiss, but it wasn’t a demanding one either. Scorpius followed his lead. Their tongues touched gently, tasting each other. Harry could feel Scorpius tremble in his arms, and he opened his mouth to kiss
him just a little bit deeper.

It was all there again as though no time had passed at all. The desire, the sheer need. Harry hadn’t been touched in all the time they’d been apart, and his body cried out for more. Thank God, he’d cast a spell to keep himself from getting an erection or he’d be undoing his buckle and guiding Scorpius’s hand to his bare flesh. Their kiss deepened further. It had become the kind of kiss that was only appropriate in complete privacy, which they didn’t have. He could cast a Disillusionment Spell . . .

He felt the unmistakable feel of Scorpius’s erection and, with a great effort, he pulled away.

“I think you should get back to Hogwarts,” he said.

Scorpius nodded. His breath was fast and shallow. Harry fought back the urge to resume their kiss. He wanted nothing more than to make Scorpius come. But he couldn’t. He’d promised himself. He wasn’t going to fuck everything up this time. This time he was going to do things right.

They walked back to the restaurant. Harry kissed him softly one last time in front of the public Floo.

“I’ll visit you when I get back from Norway,” he said. “We’ll go to Edinburgh and see the Christmas lights and have dinner at The Ornery Yak.”

Scorpius laughed. “What a name!”

“It’s the oldest wizard-owned pub in Scotland, which, by definition, makes it older than the Picts. You’ll like it, I promise.”

“Anywhere you are is a place I’ll like,” said Scorpius, and Harry’s heart turned over. “I love you.” And then like one of Harry’s dreams, he was gone.

* * * * * * * * * * *

On Halloween morning, Scorpius woke to the sound of Peeves screeching at the top of his lungs, or whatever it was poltergeists had for lungs.

“Oh God, shut up!” said Howards pulling his pillow over his head.

For once Scorpius agreed with him.

When he got to Gryffindor’s table in the Great Hall, Edith and Rowan moved apart to give him space between them. As was always the case on Halloween morning, breakfast was made entirely of pumpkin. There was pumpkin porridge and pumpkin pudding and pumpkin pancakes.

“If pumpkins procreated we’d also have pumpkin eggs.” said Rowan.

Scorpius had fallen asleep the night before without finishing his Runes essay, so he was writing it while he ate and only listening with one ear, but he smiled anyway. The thought of pumpkins laying eggs was pretty amusing.

“I wonder if they’d be orange,” he said. “I’ll bet . . .”

But his words were cut off by a sudden and very noisy kafuffle at the faculty table as a whisper spread like a ripple on either side of Head Mistress McGonagall. The students watched in surprise as she stood up and cast a *Sonorus*.

“NoBODY MOVE!” she shouted and at the same time Hagrid and Professor Longbottom leaped out of their chairs. Hagrid ran to the Hufflepuff table and Professor Longbottom ran to the
Ravenclaw table. Scorpius watched in shock as they led Lily and Albus swiftly from the Great Hall.

It was then that the owls arrived.

There were hundreds of them dropping stacks and stacks of copies of The Prophet. Rowan grabbed one.

“Oh Jesus,” he said. “Oh my God!”

Scorpius was trying to grab one, but someone else kept getting to it first. He felt Rowan grab his arm. “Come on, Scorpius,” he said.


Edith started tugging him too. And then he saw it.

**HARRY POTTER AND TWELVE AURORS KILLED IN AMBUSH!!**

The Hall grew very silent all of a sudden or else he’d suddenly lost his capacity to hear anything but the pounding of his own heart. He was aware of his two friends grabbing him by the arms and pulling him to the doors.

“The Aurors are here for the Potter children,” he heard a voice say.

“Someone get their things!”

Scorpius staggered, but Edith and Rowan held him up.

“We’re going to take you someplace quiet where you can sit down,” said Edith. “Hang in there.”

Someone in a red robe ran past them, knocking Scorpius’s elbow. All of a sudden there seemed to be red robes everywhere. He stumbled out into the courtyard. The sun reflected off the frost on the castle’s stone walls. He needed to sit down. He couldn’t breathe.

And then he heard Lily screaming for her dad and swearing at the Aurors who tried to restrain her.

“We'll take you to St. Mungo’s as soon as his body arrives,” said someone trying to soothe her but it only made her cry harder.

“The papers lie,” said another Auror. “He’s not dead yet. The Healers say they give him an hour at the most.”

Lily crumbled to the ground, and Scorpius watched as two Aurors on either side Apparated her away.

An hour. At most. He had to get to St. Mungo’s.

He pulled himself away from his friends and ran to the nearest Auror.

“I must see Harry,” he begged. “Please!”

The Auror looked at him angrily. “I don’t have the time or the patience to deal with you, whoever-you-are,” he said. “We’ve got a serious emergency on our hands! Now let go of me!”

But Scorpius wouldn’t be shaken off. “You don’t understand,” he said. “Harry needs me!”
The Auror shoved him hard. “We’re here for his children,” he shouted. “We haven’t been ordered to get anyone else.”

“Where’s Briac?” Scorpius shouted after him. “He knows who I am!”

But nobody listened to him. They were focused on Albus, trying to get him to calm down enough for a safe Apparition.

Somehow in the midst of it all, their eyes met.

“Fuck!” Albus yelled. “Go get him too.” He pointed at Scorpius. “He’s my dad’s fiancé, or whatever the fuck he calls himself. He needs to see my dad,” he sobbed. “Bring him with us!”

Scorpius stared at him as two Aurors grabbed his arms and Apparated.

Saint Mungo’s was even more chaotic than Hogwarts had been. Reporters were everywhere, and healers’ assistants were running around barking orders at their assistants who in turn barked orders to their assistants.

Scorpius held on tight to the Auror who was escorting him out of the front lobby. As they ran down the corridor, they passed healers with bloody gloves and bloody aprons. There seemed to be blood everywhere; he and the Auror kept slipping in it.

“Wait here,” the man growled, shoving Scorpius into a room with uncomfortable looking chairs. He looked around him and saw men and women and children crying or gazing at the walls in shock.

“Scorpius!”

He heard Lily’s voice and ran toward it. As soon as he found her, she fell into his arms sobbing.

Scorpius caught sight of both Albus and James. They were both crying. James came over and tried to get Lily to stand up straight. Scorpius helped him.

“Malfoy,” James said by way of acknowledgement.

Scorpius tried to take a breath to respond and that was when he realised he was sobbing as hard as Lily. He couldn’t speak.

James reached out and grabbed Albus’s hand and pulled him over to join them. He put an arm around both Scorpius’s and Albus’s shoulders.

“We’re all in this together,” he said fiercely. “So no shite from either of you.”

Albus and Scorpius looked at each other and nodded and reached out for each other’s shoulders so they could form a tight circle around Lily and hold her up. She clung to them all.

When the Head Healer came into the room to get them, he ushered Lily and James and Albus out of the room, and Albus grabbed Scorpius’s hand, glaring at a healers’ assistant who tried to pull him away.

The lights were so bright, Scorpius felt blinded for a moment. He stumbled, but James caught him. There were voices everywhere and screaming. Horrible screaming – the kind of screaming only people who are about to die do. They were led to the far side of the room where there was a little less blood and a little less noise.
Briac stood up from a chair beside a bed. He was covered from head to toe in blood and mud. His face was grey and he shook as though he was coming apart at the seams. At the sight of them, he opened his arms, and Lily and Albus ran to him.

“I did everything I could,” he choked. “You know I did. I tore apart the man who cursed him with my bare hands. I didn’t see it coming . . .”

Scorpius found that he and James were holding each other up.

“Briac, you arse,” said a weak voice from the bed. “I’m not dead yet.”

But Harry’s words only made Briac cry harder. “I fucking hate you, Potter,” he said. “You’re going to leave me with all your little ones aren’t you, you fucking bastard. When I join you, I’m going to fucking kill you.”

Harry made a sound that could be a laugh. “You can’t kill me, you big git. I’ll already be dead.”

“Shut the fuck up, Potter, and kiss your babies.”

Lily was the first to run to him, but when she got close enough to the bed to see him, she started to wail and wring her hands.


“Daddy, don’t leave us!”

“Where are your brothers?” Harry’s voice was little more than a whisper.

“We’re here, Dad,” said James, taking his hand. “We’re right here. We’re not going anywhere.”

Scorpius hung back. He had no idea what to do. The room was spinning, and he felt faint.

“Go over there,” said Briac, grabbing his arm. “He was calling for you earlier. He needs to see that you’re here before he goes.”

As though he was in a dream, Scorpius walked slowly to the bed, and watched as Harry’s children parted to make way for him.

He didn’t know what he’d see. He didn’t know whether he’d even recognise Harry. But it was worse than that. Harry looked almost fine. There was no blood, only a deathly pallor that made his eyes greener than they’d ever been.

“Harry,” he whispered.

Harry reached out his hand, and Scorpius took it.

“Scropius”

Scorpius pressed his hand to his lips. It was cold.

“I would’ve married you. You know that, right?”

Scorpius nodded. He couldn’t speak.

“I’ve never not loved you.”
Scorpius kissed his hand again and then reached up to brush his fringe away from his famous scar.

“I don’t know how to live without you,” he said matter-of-factly.

Harry closed his eyes and didn’t open them again. Scorpius pressed Harry’s palm against his cheek as Harry’s children gathered around.

“Take care of each other,” Harry murmured. “Be good to each other. I love you all so much.”

“We love you too,” Albus said softly.

Harry nodded and smiled faintly. “If I don’t wake,” he murmured, “don’t cry too much. I’ll see you... and haunt you... like Peeves if you do.”

James broke down. Scorpius reached for his hand with the one that wasn’t holding Harry’s and squeezed it. James squeezed back.

“But if I do... wake. Be... ready for the biggest... wedding party you... can imagine. Kiss me, Scorpius.”

Scorpius leaned down and kissed him. After a minute, he pulled away and kissed the scorpion pendant on Harry’s chest.

“I’m going to leave you with your children now,” he said softly. “Wherever you go, just remember that I love you. More than anything. You’ve been my whole life.”

He kissed Harry’s hand before he got up and walked away and kept on walking until he found himself five hours later on the front steps of his father’s building as night fell and the streetlamps came on.

“Is it true?”

Scorpius closed the door behind him with a soft click. His father was sitting at the table staring down at the Prophet’s front page with its image of Briac running down a hall in St. Mungo’s, surrounded by Aurors and carrying Harry over his shoulder like a sack of flour. His face was streaked with blood, and his expression was wild with rage and fear. Scorpius’s father didn’t look up when Scorpius pulled out the chair beside him and sat down.

“Yeah,” he said softly. “Yeah, it’s true. It was peaceful though...”

His father held up his hand in a silencing gesture.

“I don’t want to hear about it,” he said harshly.

Scorpius swallowed and turned his head to hide his tears.

“You can stop hating him now,” he said. There was a hint of bitterness in his voice.

His father stood and walked over to the stove to put the kettle on. He didn’t reply for a long time.

“I don’t hate him,” he said after a moment. “I never did.”

Scorpius turned to look at him through puffy eyes.

“That’s not what you...”
“I thought I hated him. There’s a big difference between thinking and knowing.”

Neither of them spoke as the water heated from a boiling rattle to a screech. His father pulled two cups from the cabinet.

“Is it cold outside?” he asked.

Scorpius nodded. They drank their tea in silence. Scorpius’s mind was blank. His body felt drained of some vital, life-sustaining force. He felt the pendent against his chest. It was cold and still.

“Potter . . .” his father began.

“. . . Harry” Scorpius corrected him.

“Harry lived just as he wanted to.”

Scorpius set his cup on its saucer and stared unseeingly into his tea. In it flecks of tealeaves floated aimlessly. They spoke of nothing. There was no longer anything they could foretell that Scorpius could bear to hear.

“Do you really believe that?” he asked. “Do you really believe he had any real choices in his life?”

“We all have choices,” his father said. “Even Harry. It’s just that Harry and I . . . well, we never made the right ones. If we had, neither of us would have ended up like we did.”

Scorpius didn’t reply because he wasn’t sure that his father wasn’t right. Harry had made the choice to love him. Had that been just one wrong choice in a whole, long list of bad choices? His father seemed to read his mind.

“You never make a mistake when you choose to love,” he said. “The only chance of mistake is what you choose to do with that love. Harry fucked up . . .”

Scorpius covered his face with his hands as he started to cry the tears he’d known would start falling eventually. Between his sobs, he almost didn’t hear his father finish his sentence.

“And so did I. Don’t cry, son. Don’t cry for the past. If you’re going to cry, cry for the future. Cry because something . . . beautiful has left the world. Something that slipped through both of our fingers.”

Scorpius knelt before his father and laid his head in his father’s lap just like he used to when he was a child. His father petted his head, but he didn’t say another word. There was nothing more to say.

They didn’t speak of Harry again for a long, long time.
Chapter 12

There was a sound and a smell.

The sound was a voice. The smell was coffee.

The smell of coffee made him nauseous, but the voice was nice.

The voice – a man’s voice – was saying something about a Missus Tattleweed’s garden. Apparently it was full of award-winning fire-breathing snap dragons.

He tried to speak. He tried to see.

He could do neither.

He couldn’t even move.

Panic surged in. Where was he? What was wrong with him?

The rhythm of his breathing must have changed because the voice abruptly ceased.

“What are you doing when you do that, Potter?” asked the voice. “Are you dreaming? If so, what do you dream about?”

He knew that voice.

Draco Malfoy.

Draco, he tried to say, but no words came out. His lips didn’t even move. Draco.

Draco went back to reading about Missus Tattleweed’s garden. Harry heard a page turn. Draco must be reading a newspaper aloud.

“Last week, dozens of people turned out to watch a caber toss held every year in Braemar in memory of Malcolm McManus McGregor McDonald. Merlin, what a silly name! Why do people do that to their children? We’re coming to the last page, Potter. I refuse to read the personals to you like I did yesterday. I’m still trying to get some of those images out of my head. Even if I could cast an Obliviate, the effort would be futile.”

So Draco had been there before. Why? Where was everyone else? Where were his children? Briac? Scorpius?

A spell. No one knew what to do. He’d been given only an hour. His children had come to him. Scorpius was there.

Where were they all now? And why was Draco here instead of his son?

“Well, Potter, some of us have lives.” Draco said and laughed humourlessly. “I will see you tomorrow, same time, same place.”

Harry felt someone (Draco?) adjust his hands, and then he heard retreating footsteps. He tried to call out, but he couldn’t.

* * * * * * * * *

He could see light through his eyelids. Before it had been nothing but darkness. Sometimes people who came to see him leaned over and kissed his cheek. He could see their shadows and feel their lips.

Lily smelt of perfume. When – and if – he woke fully, he’d tell her that wasn’t the best idea for an Auror. But for now it was heaven.

“Hi, Daddy. I’m sorry I was away for so long. I sent a letter to Draco to read to you. Did he? It was all about that horrible affair in Larne. We captured them all with stunners. I disarmed three of them. You would’ve been proud of me. Did I tell you they gave me your robe? I must’ve told you. That was weeks ago. Although it was too long. I had to shorten it. I hope you don’t mind. James and Brianna and the baby are all well. Albus’s team won their first qualifying match for the World Cup. Scorpius is finishing up his apprenticeship. I haven’t written to him yet about the potion he sent. He’s been working on it for so long, and here you are. Nothing’s changed. It’ll break his heart when he hears. Draco will probably be the one to break the news to him. But all the same, Scorpius is doing well. We all are, Daddy, but we miss you. So much.”

His brain was like a water-logged sponge. It couldn’t absorb everything he learned. He’d felt the baby curl his fingers around his thumb. They’d named him Harry. Lily was an Auror. When he’d been “alive,” she was still in her fifth year at Hogwarts. Albus was playing with the Falmouth Falcons. Andromeda was a great-grandmother. Briac had married a witch named Elizabeth.

He’d been unconscious for years.

“I think Albus is thinking about asking Portia to marry him. The stupid git. I’ve told him that marriage means babies and babies mean no more Quidditch, but he says he’s in love, and what can you say to people who think they’re in love? Speaking of babies, Harry is doing great. He sat up last week! And Brianna’s going back to work, so it’ll just be me and your grandson hanging out all day. I talk to Lily about her work – she’s out in the field at least a couple days a week. At first I was jealous and wondered if I’d made a mistake by leaving, but now that Harry’s here, I’m glad I’m not an Auror any longer. I don’t want to miss him growing up. Not like you did with us. That’s one of the many lessons I learned from you, Dad.”

Days passed. Weeks passed. He knew because everyone came more or less once every seven days. Plus Draco read the date of the newspaper he read to Harry every day. Harry wondered why. He wondered if part of Draco sensed he was listening.
They all came. Some more frequently than others. They all came except for Scorpius.

“Did I tell you that my team played New Guinea? I spent a couple days with Scorpius. He’s doing really well. We did a lot of walking in the jungle. He’s practically a native now! You should hear his array of bird calls. Anyway, he wanted me to say hello to you. As for me, things are much better. The injury wasn’t as serious as the team’s healers thought it was, and I was flying again within a week. Mum’s doing fine. She and Peter just came back from Spain. I’ve seen their house there. It’s pretty nice. Not as nice as our old place in Switzerland, of course. Nothing will ever be able to replace it, but it’s nice to be near the ocean. You’d love it. The flying’s brilliant. I miss you, Dad. It’s getting better, but I doubt it will ever go away. I can go a day without thinking of you now. But two is still impossible. I’m starting to think it always will be.”

They were trying to forget him. He forgave them. There was no reason for them to think he was anything but a husk. Lives should be lived in the present and not in the past.

“Well, you’re not going to believe this. We never thought it would happen, but here we are. Elizabeth’s pregnant. I’m scared shitless, Harry. More scared than any of our missions ever made me. God, I wish you were here. We could get arsed out of our heads and make a list of all the reasons I’ll be utter crap at being a father. We’ve talked about me quitting the Aurors, but as Head Auror, I can spend all my time and then some doing paperwork and press conferences. Seeing how much of that shit there is, I’m surprised you even took the job in the first place. I have a hard time picturing you doing the things I do every day. You were a warrior, Harry. I don’t think I ever saw you wear cufflinks, not even at the fucking banquets. Jesus, Harry. Elizabeth says I should forgive myself. That you’d want me to forgive myself. But I carry the weight of that memory with me every day. Your eyes when that curse hit you. You looked at me with this plea of ‘Not yet.’ I used to wish more than anything that it was me, not you. But I can’t wish that anymore, Harry. I’m about to be a father. I’ve got to stop living like I want to die.”

He woke to a feeling on his chest. The scorpion was wriggling all over the place. Somewhere far away, Scorpius was very very happy.

Hermione came every Sunday evening. Of all his visitors, she was the most quiet. She’d say a few words about her family. Rose had joined Lily in the DMLE, and Hugo was working with his father and uncle at the joke shop. Neither of them seemed inclined toward an intellectual profession, she’d said resignedly. Sometimes she also talked about her job and bits of news about their Hogwarts classmates, but most of the time, she just held his hand and hummed softly. It was as though they were hunting together for the Horcruxes again. Giving each other quiet company and tiny scraps of hope. When she left, she brushed his hair back and kissed his forehead. Sometimes he felt tears on her face when she pressed her cheek against his.

Draco groused a lot. He groused about his neighbours. He groused about the landlord. He groused about the weather. He groused about the Minister’s government. He groused about the price of bread. Every day it was the same. There seemed no end to the things that made Draco grouch. Harry found it oddly comforting.

He began to remember his dreams. At first they were hard to distinguish from his waking “life.” People visited him – sometimes from the grave. Dumbledore, Remus, Sirius, Snape, Hedwig even. Other living people who never visited him when he was awake came to see him in his dreams late at night: Ron, Dean, Seamus, Luna, Scorpius.

He “woke” everyday praying that would be the day. Scorpius would run to his bedside and take his hand and press it to his lips. He’d say Harry’s name over and over. He’d say “I love you.” “I miss you.” “I can’t live without you.” He’d kiss Harry’s lips and forehead and even the tip of his nose.
Harry ached for him. For his voice, for his touch, for the familiar scent of his skin. He was sure if Scorpius came to him, that he’d be able to shatter the last of the spell that was holding him hostage in his own body.

But Scorpius didn’t come, and even though they mentioned him frequently, none of his visitors ever told him why.

“You shit. How could you have let this happen? Wake up or die, but don’t just cling to life like this. You’re breaking everyone’s heart. Including mine. Just like you always did. It’s the only thing you’ve ever been really good at.”

He wanted to reach out his hand and take Ginny’s. She used to love him once. She used to hold him while he slept.

He knew it was his birthday only because Draco told him so.

“You’re forty-nine today, you old goat. I beat you to it, and I can tell you it’s no different from forty-eight. Of course, both of us look like shit: you’re pale and your limbs are emaciated, and I’m looking like I spent twenty years in Azkaban instead of nine. I’m glad Scorpius finally left. It wasn’t good for him to watch us age before his eyes. He’s young. He’s got his whole life ahead of him. Don’t be angry at him. Don’t resent him his happiness.”

Harry heard the rustle of parchment.

“This arrived this morning. He said I should read it to you:

Dear Harry, Happy birthday. We held a tribal dance for you last night. I wish you could have seen it. The whole village was there. I did a fire walk for you. Everything is okay here. It’s winter, which means there’s been a lot of rain, which is good for the forests. My friends and I spend a lot of time trying to thwart the Muggles and their logging operations. We’ve had some success, but it’s a constant battle. I know you know what that feels like.

I don’t know if my father told you, but I sent a potion that I and a friend of mine brewed. We worked on it for almost four years. I had high hopes for it, but my father tells me that things haven’t changed. I don’t know what to say. I’ve tried my best, and everything I’ve tried has failed.

Harry, I’ll be home at Christmas. It’s been a year since I last saw you. I need to see you. It’s been too long . . .


Harry wanted to yell that it was interesting to him. Anything that Scorpius had to say was interesting to him.

“So, what’s in the The Daily Puppet today. Ah yes. Our lovely Minister and your friend Briac. It seems the Aurors completed another flawless mission, for which the Minister is taking full credit. Bastard. You’d hate him. He’s reorganising the DMLE, claiming his ‘service’ gave him the necessary experience to do so. ‘Service,’ my arse. He sat at a desk in the procurement division and only used his wand to sign paperwork. Briac has been on a rampage about the reorganisation for weeks. Last time he and Elizabeth had me over for dinner, he went on about how it did your legacy a disservice and trampled on all the work you’d done. It got boring, and thankfully his wife finally told him to shut up and eat. She’s a tough little witch. I like her. I think you’d like her too. Well, don’t eat all the cake, Potter, you pig.”
Christmas. Scorpius would be home at Christmas. He had nearly five months. He was starting to be able to move his fingers. When Lily had noticed, she went crazy, yelling for the Healers, but he was unable to do more, and soon things returned to the way they were. A residual muscle memory, the Healers said. Don’t get your hopes up.

But by Halloween, he could move everything, although he was too weak to lift his arms and legs. The visits increased, and now people were running into each other. Lily came while Hermione was there. Albus and Briac bumped into each other. And once James arrived just as Draco was leaving. Even with his eyes closed, Harry could tell it was an awkward moment, but then they’d said each other’s names cordially. It made Harry’s heart swell with happiness. Everyone was coming together. The wedding would include everyone now. Everyone that he loved more than anything in the world.

Scorpius folded the letter his father had sent him and put it in the drawer in his bedside table.

The potion was working after all. It’d taken forever, but it was finally working. Harry still couldn’t open his eyes or speak, but he could hear and move. His father said the physical therapists were working with him every day, twice a day, and he was able to lift small weights on his own. He wasn’t able to walk yet, but he would someday, the Healers said.

Everyone agreed it was a miracle.

Scorpius took a deep shaky breath. Five years. Five years during which everything had changed. He’d finished school and got an apprenticeship at St. Mungo’s, but after they’d treated him badly, he’d gone back to New Guinea. He’d been there for three years. He spoke the language. He had his own villa. He’d just started practising Healing on his own.

But Harry was awake. He’d been able to tell even before the letters had started pouring in. The stag around his neck shook its head. It’d been the middle of the night when he’d felt it, and he’d laid awake till dawn, his heart pounding.

He’d done it. He’d pulled Harry back from the grave.

He closed the drawer and managed to knock a book onto the floor with a bang.

Khorve turned over and opened his eyes.

“Mmmm, you’re awake. What time is it?”

“It’s still early,” Scorpius said. “Go back to sleep.”

His lover stretched and reached for him. “Lie down with me,” he said. “You look tired and you’ve only just woken up. That can’t be a good thing.”

Scorpius looked at him – at his brown skin and tousled hair and sleepy brown eyes. He leaned down and kissed his lips.

“Harry’s awake,” he said.

Khorve eyes flew open. “What?” he said sitting up.

Scorpius swallowed. “He’s awake and can communicate by squeezing people’s hands.”

They were silent for a long time. From all around them came the sound of frogs and birds, and in the
village, someone laughed and a dog barked, happy to see its master coming down the road.

“Are you still going home for Christmas?”

Scorpius nodded. He couldn’t speak. He didn’t know what to say. Khorve took his hand and kissed it.

“You’ll miss the fireworks.”

Scorpius squeezed his eyes shut as tears rolled down his cheeks. They were silent again.

“Are you coming back?” Khorve’s voice quavered, but his arms were sure and steady when he pulled Scorpius against him.

“I don’t know.”

Just as Scorpius knew he would, Khorve didn’t push him away or yell. Instead he drew Scorpius closer, and Scorpius put his head on his shoulder.

“Do you want me to come with you?”

Scorpius laughed a little broken laugh. “It’s winter in England. You’d hate it.”

Khorve stroked Scorpius’s back. “Anywhere you are I’ll like.”

Scorpius put his arms around him. He smelled of the forest – fresh and rain-washed and clean. Pure. Innocent.

“I’ll . . . I’ll be in touch,” he said lamely. “Whatever I decide, you’ll be the first to know.”

* * * * * * * * *

As Christmas neared, Draco visited more often – sometimes even three times a day. In the mornings he’d read the paper and drink coffee, and in the afternoons, he’d grudgingly help the physical therapists. But at night, he just sat quietly, reading a book. The only way Harry knew he was there was the sound of turning pages and an occasionally creak as he shifted in his chair.

If he could speak, Harry would have asked him what was wrong. Because clearly something was, and all he could think was that it was about Scorpius. Was he hurt? Was he unhappy? The scorpion around his neck no longer skittered around. Something was wrong with Scorpius, and Harry’s heart was breaking. Never before had he so resented being trapped in bed like he was.

“Bloody carollers,” Draco said, sitting down on the edge of Harry’s bed instead of the chair he usually pulled up. “If they come in here, I’m going to chase them away, the little brats. Whoever thought it was a good idea to have cute bright-eyed little kids sing to dying people is either insane, cruel or very very stupid. Plus I haven’t had my coffee yet and their pitch is off.”

He was silent for a long time. Eventually he cleared his throat, and Harry felt him stand up and heard him walk to the window.

“Harry,” he said. “I don’t know what it’ll be like when Scorpius comes home. He’s been away for a long time in a completely foreign place. He’ll have a tan and probably smell like frog mucus or whatever that stuff is that keeps the little bastards gooey. He sent a photo on my birthday. I almost didn’t recognise him. His shoulders look like he’s been swinging from trees, and his hair is even longer than usual. He looks good, Harry. He looks happy.”
Harry swallowed. Well, one of his questions was answered. Scorpius was okay – better than okay. It sounded like he was thriving. Why this should make Draco sound so sober, he couldn’t tell. Isn’t this what they had wanted? For Scorpius to be happy?

It was only a matter of time now before he’d be able to see and speak again. He was sure of it. He could open his eyes just wide enough to see through his lashes. Lily had told him they looked like “little green threads.” He could see things, even though they were blurry because no one had thought to put on his glasses. Scorpius would, though.

“He’s going to stay with me – obviously,” Draco continued. He should be arriving later today. Briac’s going to meet him at the Portkey hub. I . . . I don’t know if he’ll be ready to see you right away, so if a day or two pass, don’t panic, okay? Don’t get your Potter knickers all in a twist. He’ll probably have difficulties with the difference in time and season.”

Well, of course, Harry wanted to say. Why would he get upset over a couple days when they had the rest of their lives to be together?

Draco returned to Harry’s bed with slow steps. He sat down on the side of Harry’s mattress again, and to Harry’s shock, took his hand in both of his. He was quiet for a very long time.

“I don’t know,” he said. “Which choice will hurt more.”

Briac looked even bigger than usual. Clearly, married life agreed with him.

“Scorpius,” he exclaimed. “You look like you could beat me at arm-wrestling!”

Scorpius grinned. “I doubt that,” he said. “But I’ve been helping to steal a lot of logs off lorries, and it’s not the easiest of work even with a wand.”

Briac clapped him on the back. “Regardless,” he said. “You look good. Harry will be so happy to see you. Did your father tell you he can open his eyes a tiny bit?”

His father had told him, but Scorpius didn’t feel like talking about it.

“How are you and Elizabeth?”

It was Briac’s turn to grin. “Her belly’s the same size as the Minister’s, although she loathes the comparison. I know because I found it out the hard way. God, Scorpius,” he said. “You look great. I wish I could be there when Harry gets a look at you, but we’ve all agreed you two should be alone. Would you like to stop at the Leaky for lunch?”

“Not now,” he said. “Maybe later. I just want to see my father.”

“Fair enough,” Briac replied. “Well, then take my arm. It’s been a long time since you’ve Apparated in England. I don’t want you starting your visit with a messy Splinching.”

His father was waiting for him on the front stoop. He stood up when he saw Scorpius walking down the street. As soon as they were within a reasonable distance they ran to one another and gave each other a huge hug.

After a minute, his father pulled away, and Scorpius had the chance to look at him. He’d been dreading this moment, but he was pleasantly surprised. His father looked well. He was a normal
weight, and his hair was cut, and miraculously he was wearing trousers and a shirt instead of a ratty fussy robe.

“You look great,” he said, and his father rolled his eyes.

“I’ve been going out in public more,” he said, although he didn’t say where, and Scorpius didn’t ask.

Upstairs, the flat looked different. The mismatched couch and chair had been replaced by a matching set, and the dining room chairs were wood rather than metal.

“It looks like your job at Slug & Jiggers has been going well,” Scorpius said looking around.

“It buys the odd thing now and then. Tea?”

Scorpius nodded. Despite his father’s modesty, everywhere Scorpius rested his eyes things were better than the things they’d replaced. It made his heart glow with happiness. He’d been so worried. His father had a habit of not including bad things in his letters.

“So,” his father said as he set a pot of tea and a plate of biscuits on the table. “You’re home. I imagine it feels strange after all this time.”

Scorpius nodded. “A little bit. How is everyone? I know you see Lily every now and then.”

“She’s doing very well. She’s already moved up two ranks in the Aurors. She loves it. You’ll have to visit her while you’re here. I’m sure she’d hex off your balls if you didn’t.”

Scorpius laughed. He could picture it actually.

“She’s got her father’s natural ability,” his father said after a moment.

Scorpius knew they were broaching the subject. Well, it was going to happen sooner or later.

“How is Harry?”

His father was quiet as he swirled his teacup on the table.

“He’s doing as well as could be imagined. The Healers think he’ll be able to open his eyes all the way by the end of January. He’s slowly getting his strength back and there’s a chance he’ll be walking again by spring. Your potion worked miracles, Scorpius. I can’t find words to tell you how proud I am of you. Harry owes you his life.”

Scorpius stared at the tabletop. He didn’t want to see his father’s face.

“What are you going to do?” his father asked after an awkward silence. “You need to make up your mind before you leave . . . or not.”

Scorpius nodded. He didn’t trust himself to speak.

“I know,” he said finally in a small voice. “I will.”

* * * * *

“Harry?”

The voice was soft but familiar. Very familiar.
Scorpius.

He opened his eyes as wide as he could. All he could see was a white shirt, tan skin and golden hair.

Scorpius walked to the cabinet on the other side of the room and began opening drawers and rummaging around. Harry couldn’t see what he was doing, but when he returned to Harry’s bedside he was carrying Harry’s glasses.

When he put them on, Harry could suddenly see clearly. Scorpius had known. Of course, he did. Harry tried to smile. He must have succeeded because Scorpius returned his little smile with one of his own. He brushed back Harry’s fringe and lightly kissed his forehead. Harry felt the touch of his lips in his whole body.

His Scorpius.

Harry felt like he could really breathe for the first time since he’d wakened. Draco had been right – Scorpius did look different. His face had filled out, and his eyes showed a confidence that hadn’t been there before.

He was more beautiful than ever. Harry’s heart beat fast in his chest as he reached out to take Scorpius’s hand.

Scorpius’s eyes filled with tears. “Harry,” he said over and over again. “I can’t believe you’re back. I thought it would never happen. I’d given up hope, but I shouldn’t have. You’re the strongest bravest person in the world. I shouldn’t have doubted you.”

Harry let go of Scorpius’s hand and reached up to brush the tears away. He wished more than anything that he could speak. He’d tell Scorpius that, but for his persistence, he’d never have come back. He’d tell Scorpius that he loved him, that as soon as he could, he’d marry him. He was sure no one would begrudge them their happiness. Not after all they’d been through. But he couldn’t speak; all he could do was make a circle with his fingers and slip them around one of Scorpius’s like a ring.

He was sure his eyes said it all. Scorpius was looking into them as though he was reading Harry’s heart.

“I’m sorry it took me so long to come here,” Scorpius said. “I needed to be ready for this. For seeing you again. I know you won’t believe me, but you look well. There’s colour in your cheeks and your eyes are clear and focused.” He reached for Harry’s wrist to check his pulse, and Harry smiled again. “Your pulse is strong.”

But not steady, Harry would’ve added if he could. How could it be? For the first time in a very long time, he felt like everything was going to be alright.

* * * * * * *

Those eyes.

The look in them was so intense. So full of desire. They took his breath away. Even lying in a bed, mute and, for the most part, unable to move, Harry was beautiful. It’d only taken a second, and he was right back there – right back in the whirlwind of need and lust and obsession.

He could have that all again. He knew he could. He could make Harry whole again. He had both the training and unrelenting will. He’d spent four years designing and brewing the potion that had woken Harry up, and every stir he made he’d put in every ounce of his love.
Until it had run out.

He stood up and went to the window. Mercifully, it wasn’t one of those fake sceneries that had always given him the creeps. Rain fell on the streets and the leafless trees. He’d forgotten the feel of winter. The way it seeped into your bones.

He’d waited until the last possible day. Everyone had started to get cross with him, especially his father. Which was not surprising. His father was the only one who knew about Khorve.

He’d finally found the courage to bring up the subject in the letter he wrote to Harry on his birthday, but when he talked to his father about it, his father told him he’d hadn’t read that part to Harry. He’s confined to that bed, fighting for every tiny movement, he’d said. I’m still angry that you gave me the task. You were being a coward. Scorpius tried to tell him that it wasn’t out of cowardice. He hadn’t said anything in the letter about ending things with Harry should he wake. He’d just wanted to be honest. He’d never kept secrets from Harry, and he wasn’t going to start now when things became uncomfortable. Harry would know he was hiding something. He’d see it in his eyes and know.

Scorpius rested his forehead on the cold glass. Just that morning, he’d been asked to leave a shop in Diagon Alley when someone had whispered to the clerk that “that man is a Malfoy.” In New Guinea, he was respected and loved. Here he was nothing but a criminal. Harry Potter’s charity case.

He knew he’d been standing with his back to Harry for too long. He could feel the stag paw at his chest. It was unsettled unlike it’d been when he’d first entered the room. Then it had been more active than it’d been in five years. He swallowed. Whoever had developed language hadn’t developed words for what he had to say.

He turned and went back to the bed and sat down. Harry’s eyes were full of questions and concern. Scorpius took a deep breath.

“I’m leaving tomorrow,” he said gently and reached for Harry’s hand with both of his and held it tight. “I’m not coming back. And I don’t want you to come with me. Harry, I don’t want to do this anymore. Our love wrung my heart out and made me do terrible things that left me wanting to kill myself with shame. I touched darkness when we made love. I would have done anything. I would have thrown away everything.”

He watched as his words sank in. First Harry’s eyes were stunned and panicked, and he gripped Scorpius’s hand as hard as he could, but as Scorpius continued talking, they dulled until the spark in them sputtered and went out.

He’d thought he’d known what it was to feel heartbroken. God knows, his heart had been broken several times when they’d been together. But he’d never felt his heart break like this.

“Harry,” he whispered and kissed the now-limp hand in his over and over again. “I’m so sorry. I will always love you. Always. You were the great love of my life, but I was never happy when we were together. Happiness is being content and at peace. I have both of those things now, and I can’t . . . no, won’t let them go.”

The tears started to fall. Harry’s eyes swam with them, and they soaked his pillow. Scorpius clutched his hand and squeezed until it must’ve hurt. Their love had been like a vampire, sucking the blood from their veins, and he knew he needed to drive the stake in its heart.

“I’m in love with someone,” he said gently. “We started out as friends. He’s a native of New Guinea. We share the same interests, and we’re the same age. Well, almost. I’m a year older than he is. His family is huge, and they’ve practically adopted me. They’re a very old and powerful clan, and they
think it’ll be possible to get my father down there. If the Minister refuses to let him go, he’ll have a fight on his hands. I’m not sure he’d think a Malfoy was worth all the trouble.”

Harry closed his eyes, but the tears still kept falling. Scorpius knew his body so well, that he could feel the spirit in it die. The surge of emotion he felt was too much to bear, and he grabbed a vase full of flowers and flung it at the wall. He felt shredded, gutted, savaged by grief.

This, *this*, was why it had to end.

Harry hadn’t opened his eyes at the sound. Shaking, Scorpius returned to the bed and sat down. He regretted it already. He wanted to strip naked and crawl under the sheet and hold Harry against him. But he stood his ground. He wasn’t a schoolboy any longer.

“You’ll be alright,” he said fiercely. “You’ll be alright, Harry. You’re surrounded by people who love you. You have Briac and Elizabeth. You have your children and your grandson and Hermione and a whole nation that worships you, that has held candlelight vigils every year on your birthday. Hundreds of people, Harry, ready and willing to take you into their hearts.”

He couldn’t start crying. If he did, he’d never stop. The pendant around his neck felt deader and more inert than it had even when Harry was unconscious. Clearly, far far away in whatever place it was where he’d been, Harry had been fighting.

That fight was gone now.

It looked like it took a great deal of effort and pain, but Harry rolled over and lay on his side with his back to Scorpius. Through the thin sheet, Scorpius could see the tattoo. Harry had loved him. In his broken, fucked-up way, he had loved him. Scorpius clenched his hands into fists until the nails broke the skin of his palms.

Harry had said good-bye in the only way he could.

The sun had set and the streetlamps had come on when Scorpius finally stood up. He felt like he’d walked a thousand miles over broken rocks. He kissed Harry’s bare shoulder and stood up.

“I pray to God you find happiness, Harry. That you’ll finally find the peace that I’ve found. It’s out there. If I found it, so can you.”

He stood for a long time looking down at the man he’d once thought he’d spend the rest of his life with and then, before he could change his mind, he Apparated away.
Chapter 13

To Harry’s surprise, Draco didn’t stop visiting him in St. Mungo’s after Scorpius left. In fact, it was as though nothing had happened – Draco still came by every morning, groused about the coffee and the weather, and then read Harry the newspaper, front to back (with editorializing comments, of course). He never mentioned Scorpius, but then again, he never had before either.

Nor did he stop visiting after Harry got his full eyesight back and could sit up and read the paper himself. Instead Draco brought a chess board, and they played for hours while Draco groused about how hopelessly bad Harry was.

It wasn’t until Harry got his voice back that Draco stopped coming. As soon as Harry could croak a few words, Draco vanished from his life. It happened suddenly with no warning or explanation and crushed Harry’s heart in a way and to an extent he never could’ve imagined.

Time passed. Harry slowly grew stronger. As soon as he could walk again, he’d walk for hours until he was exhausted enough to sleep. By the time he was released, he knew every sterile inch of every corridor in St. Mungo’s.

* * * * * * *

The owl from Draco arrived in the early morning hours just before dawn. Clearly, Harry wasn’t the only one who couldn’t sleep. He gave the bird a treat and watched it fly away over the steep eaves of Diagon Alley. When it disappeared from sight, he unrolled the piece of parchment it’d brought him.

Dear Harry,

Welcome home. I’m sure it feels good to get out of that hellhole of a “hospital” although I’m equally sure you miss the food, the coffee and the dying screams in the middle of the night. Alas, we can’t have everything we might wish for. Believe me, I know.

The reason I’m writing is to let you know that I will be joining Scorpius in New Guinea this week. His partner’s family somehow persuaded (hopefully by painful means) the Minister to let me go – that is, of course, as long as I swear I’ll never return, which, I’ll tell you, was not a promise that was hard to extract. I’ve grown to hate England, and with Scorpius gone, there’s no reason for me to stay.

So, I suppose this is good-bye. I will admit that I’m not without some sadness at our parting. I’d grown to tolerate you, but now that you’re well again, I see no reason for our continued friendship. Do not write to me and, more importantly, do not write to Scorpius. That is my wish; I’m asking you to please respect it.
I wish you well, Harry. I hope you find happiness, whatever that means for you. Enjoy your family – ultimately your family is the only thing that really matters in this world. It’s always been true for me, which is why my life turned out the way it did. Not having parents, you never truly understood that. I forgive you though . . as I hope, after all this time, you’ve forgiven me.

Yours Fondly,
Draco

Harry rerolled the parchment, threw it in the fireplace and Incendioed it with a flick his wand. Then he poured himself a glass of whisky, sat down on his couch and watched it burn.

* * * * * * * * *

To Scorpius’s delight and deepest gratitude, Khorve’s family was able to procure a teaching position at the Academy for his father. He was teaching Defence Against the Dark Arts, a topic he was well suited for given his experiences. At first his father had been offended; he would’ve preferred Potions and suspected his assignment was due to his association with Voldemort, but after he’d been teaching the class for a couple months, he was glad for it. The students truly listened to him in a way Scorpius doubted they would’ve listened to someone who’d merely gotten a degree in DADA and never witnessed the actual use – or rather abuse – of ancient magic.

Scorpius meanwhile threw himself into his healing practise. There was a malady afflicting the native islanders’ magical capabilities – something he suspected was unwittingly caused by Muggles and their burning of the rain forests to make room for grazing lands. The witches and wizards of the island had a timeless connection with their forests and obviously felt diminished by their destruction. It broke Scorpius’s heart and caused him to redouble his efforts, not only to find a cure, but to help save the forests. He and Khorve spent long days casting protective spells and jinxing the Muggle’s lorries and tractors.

His life was full. When he wasn’t working, he was spending as much time as he could with his father. It was a good thing. When he wasn’t constantly busy, his mind drifted into memories of Harry and what they’d had together, as dysfunctional as things had often been. Harry had loved him, and he had loved Harry. He knew he’d never love or be loved like that again. Part of him grieved the loss, but another part was grateful he’d escaped the fate of spending the rest of his life with Harry. Would they ever have found peace and contentment together? Or would it have always been intense and feverish . . and wrong?

* * * * * * * * *

Harry licked the wetness on his hand, and the metallic taste bloomed like a lotus on his tongue. Just as he’d suspected. Blood. The blade had been thinner than a razor. He hadn’t even felt it as it filleted his arm from shoulder to palm, but he sure as hell felt it when the bastard kicked him in the stomach. He coughed and retched and curled around the pain.

“Where’s your partner, Potter?” his attacker asked. “Oh right. I’d forgotten. The great Harry Potter doesn’t have a partner. He likes to fight his battles alone. It’s a fucking stupid idea as your current situation amply illustrates.”

Harry rolled onto his back and grinned up at the face hovering above him in the dark. It’d be funny except the man was one of his former students. Another one lost. Another promising young wizard he’d have to send to Azkaban.

All of his arrestees went to Azkaban. He didn’t kill anymore. Killing was too easy.
“I’m giving you one last chance, Williams,” he said evenly. “Take it. Believe me, you’ll wish you did. I’ve seen what a month in Azkaban can do to a man, let alone ten years.”

Williams kicked him again. Clearly, that was his response to Harry’s mercy.

The hand that reached down and grabbed Harry’s bleeding arm melted like wax. The screaming was horrific, and it was easy to subdue him. And then heal him. The men Harry brought to the DMLE’s holding cell always looked untouched. It was only the feral look of terror in their eyes that suggested that his methods were . . . unorthodox.

When he arrived back in the office, no one was there. It must’ve been after midnight. He looked at his arm under the loo’s humming fluorescent light bulb. Blood flowed down the drain, staining the white porcelain pink. He felt faint, but it wasn’t bad enough to go to St. Mungo’s. He fumbled through the drawers in the first aid cabinet until he found the Wound-B-Gone thread. He went back to his office and flopped down on the couch. He’d clean it up later. That’s why it was leather. He was constantly bleeding all over it.

Since losing Briac to his cosy domestic life, Harry had learned how to stitch up his own wounds. His wand arm was difficult though. He had to use his teeth, and the result was always messy and gruesome. Sometimes he’d flash his latest masterpiece at Briac when his former partner came in wearing his suit and formal robe. He couldn’t tell if the look in Briac’s eyes was envy or horror. Knowing Briac, it was probably a little bit of both.

The whisky helped with the pain. They all thought he drank to get drunk, but that wasn’t the case. He drank so he could sleep. He’d come to learn that being hung-over was better than being haunted and exhausted. After all, that was why Pepper-Up was invented.

His glasses were all dirty, so he drank out of the bottle. Fucking Williams. He’d been the fourth of his former students that Harry had had to arrest. He’d start to feel jaded except he already was. His job had been to teach. If the little brats hadn’t listened, that was their problem, not his.

But still. If he let them, things like this might break what little piece of his heart he still possessed.

*B * * * * * *

Briac slammed his door closed, and Harry opened his eyes.

“You’ve drooled all over the maps. Again.”

Harry pushed himself up. Sure enough, there was bloody saliva all over Wales. He must’ve lost a tooth and not noticed before he’d passed out.

“Sit up, you daft prick, and open your mouth . . . Jesus when was the last time you brushed your teeth? Your breath smells like you rimmed the arsehole of a Blast-Ended Skrewt.”

Harry laughed. Briac may be a father of two, but he still had the filthy mouth of a field Auror.

“I hope you don’t talk like that at home.”

“Shut up and bite down. How does that feel? Honestly, Harry, do you even have any of your original teeth left?”

Harry shrugged and stood up. “Dunno.”

“I noticed there’s another fish in the net downstairs. You’re going to bloody well kill yourself if you
keep up this pace. Promise me you’ll go home tonight.”

Harry nodded. It was his grandson’s birthday, and the Potter side of the family was having their party that evening. He’d have to go back to his flat and clean up before he went, and cleaning up these days was no quick feat.

“Paperwork today, leave the interrogation to somebody else.”

“Oh come on,” Harry groaned. “I have a headache, don’t do that to me.”

Briac rolled his eyes and walked to the door, but he stopped with his hand on the latch.

“This has to stop, Harry. You know it does. Please. You’re scaring us all to death.”

Harry walked to the window and looked out at the grey horizon. “I’m good at what I do,” he said.

“Nobody has ever said that you’re not. In fact, you may be too good.”

“Get out of here, Gwencalon,” Harry replied. “Don’t you have a press briefing? And, by the way, you can take your bloody paperwork and shove it up your arse.”

His amused voice belied the seriousness of his words, and Briac shook his head with a laugh.

“Of all my rogue Aurors, Potter,” he said. “You are the worst.”

Harry decided to take that as a compliment.

* * * * * * * * *

His grandson had his mother’s eyes. Round and blue and curious. Harry held him on his knee while he cooed and drooled. Lily was chatting with Albus’s girlfriend, and James was in the kitchen making sure dinner didn’t burn to a crisp. And Brianna was talking to him.

“How are you?” she asked.

“I’m alright,” he said blandly. “Keeping busy.”

She watched her son for a minute. He seemed adamant about eating his stuffed dragon.

“You have another wound.”

Shit! Harry tried to be careful with his injuries. He didn’t wear them like badges or pleas for attention. They were just part of his job. Some people came home with grease or potion ingredients on his hands. He came home with blood – most often his own.

“It’s nothing,” he said, taking a moment to roll down his shirtsleeves and button the cuffs. “It’s not as bad as it looks.”

Brianna gave him a smile that suggested she didn’t believe a word he said. No wonder James fell in love with her.

“We’re worried about you,” she said. “Lily Flooed into your flat and said the refrigerator has nothing but mouldy take-away in it.”

Harry kissed the top of his grandson’s head. He smelled of that delicious smell all babies had. Harry couldn’t believe he was two already! Where had the time gone?
“I eat at work most evenings,” Harry replied truthfully. “Don’t worry; I’m not going hungry.”

Brianna took little Harry away when he started to cry. “He’s getting fussy,” she said. “I’ll take him if you want.”

Harry shook his head and held out his arms. “I hunt down Dark witches and wizards for a living, I think I can handle a cranky toddler.”

He held his grandson in his arms and closed his eyes. All around him were lives being lived. James and Brianna, who were pregnant again. Albus and his girlfriend. Lily and her entourage of school friends. Briac and Elizabeth and Neven and Tristan. It was a symphony of happiness and contentment.

He must have nodded off for a moment because Lily was shaking his shoulder.

“Wake up, Daddy,” she said. “It’s time for cake.”

Harry opened his eyes and smiled at her, but she ducked her head to hide the sudden tears that sprang to her eyes.

“It’s what I’d always feared,” she whispered into his hair. “You’re alone.”

Harry surrendered the baby to Brianna and kissed Lily’s hand. “I’m not alone,” he said. “I have all of you.”

“But who do you go home to? Tell me that, Daddy.”

Harry didn’t know how to respond. If she meant how does he satisfy his need for sex, he’d tell her about the club. But he was pretty sure that wasn’t what she meant. She meant who loves him? Who holds him while he falls asleep at night?

“I’m very tired when I get home, flower,” he said. “Most nights, I don’t even make it to bed at all. The couch is very comfortable.”

“That’s not what I mean,” she said. “And you know it.”

She came around and knelt on the floor in front of him. “You’re lonely,” she said. “There must be someone out there for you!”

“Lily,” he said, his voice serious. “We’ve been over this already. Many times. Don’t worry about me. I’m old enough to be a grandfather. I can take care of myself. There is one love out there for everyone. I made the mistake of messing mine up. It’s my burden to live with, not yours, sweetheart.”

He kissed her forehead and stood up. Everyone was about to blow out the two charmed candles on the lavender cake Lily had made.

* * * * * * * *

The dream was so vivid it made the rest of his life feel like a shadow until he’d had his first cup of coffee.

Harry lying in a bed. Pink rose petals clinging to the sweat on his skin. His dark hair against the pillow looking even darker than ever, and his eyes... well, what could one say about Harry Potter’s eyes that could do them justice? Harry’s lips glistened in the moonlight, and his mouth tasted like
spiced wine. No matter how much of Harry’s body Scorpius kissed or touched, it was never enough. The hunger could not be sated by sex alone. Let me have it, he whispered in Harry’s ear. Let me have your soul. He wanted to tear Harry apart and eat him piece by piece, blood and muscle. Flesh and bone.

He was always on his back when he awoke and it took several moments before he knew where he was. The sounds around him were not calls to prayer; they were a thousand forest creatures going about their little lives. Beside him, Khorve breathed soft and slow. In the villa next door, his father slept soundly – safe from persecution and hardship.

Both he and his father had told Harry not to come, and he hadn’t. Scorpius was not mistaken. He knew in his heart it wasn’t out of a lack of desire, but rather a Herculean restraint. He could feel it in the pendant on his chest. A fearsome resolve that only Harry Potter was capable of.

Scorpius had written letters, but they’d all been returned unopened. The only news that got to them about Harry was from Briac and Lily, and they seemed to be tiptoeing around landmines. He and his father heard that Harry worked non-stop to get back in shape and rejoined the Aurors by Christmas – exactly a year from the time Scorpius had last seen him. They knew that he was working alone in the field, but why this was the case, no one told them. Every now and then, Lily or Briac would send a photograph from The Prophet. Harry was virtually unrecognisable. He looked grim and forbidding behind Briac as Briac took the reporters’ questions. He was frequently unshaven and haggard looking. Scorpius’s father always Incendioed them.

He used to dream of Harry every night and wake hard and trembling or with tears in his eyes. Khorve always seemed to sense a “Harry dream” (as they’d come to call them) and either pulled Scorpius close and kissed his forehead or moved between his legs to suck him off. Before they’d become lovers, Scorpius had talked to him about Harry, so nothing surprised him or made him jealous. Harry was a part of Scorpius in the same way the freckles on his shoulders were a part of him.

Sometimes as he walked alone in the forest or sat on the beach watching the sun set, he tried to talk to Harry through their pendants. He begged Harry to be happy. To stop grieving. To move on. Once he’d thought that he was the weaker one – the more vulnerable one – in their relationship, but as time went on, he began to believe it was the other way around. He’d been a safe haven in the hurricane that was Harry’s life. Without him, Harry was unmoored. Adrift. Nothing but a rudderless boat at sea.

* * * * * * *

Except for the dreams of Harry that sometimes haunted him, life on the island was relatively uneventful, and Scorpius liked it that way. His Healing practice was going well; his father was enjoying teaching and had begun writing a book about the properties of native potions, and he and Khorve were starting to plan a spring wedding. Everything was peaceful and everyone was content, which was why he was so pissed off when Connor (aka “Lazurus”) Wallace came along and f**ked everything up.

A visiting sixth year from Hogwarts and one of his father’s students, Connor was handsome, charismatic, bright . . . and a dangerous Dark Wizard in the making. Every time Scorpius had the misfortune of encountering him when he visited his father’s office at the Academy, he wanted to hex the little shit. He dressed in black robes not unlike those Severus Snape wore in his portraits and moved in ways calculated to intimidate. Unfortunately, it worked. The other students were in awe of him.

Khorve’s younger brother was in Connor’s class and told Scorpius and Khorve about Connor’s...
views, as well as his eagerness to spread them.

“He worships Voldemort,” Khrove’s brother told them. “He’s always in the library’s Forbidden Section. I think he’s reading banned books.”

“Isn’t the Forbidden Section warded?” Scorpius had asked because if it wasn’t, he was going to make sure his father knew about it. He had been among the faculty members who’d both helped to procure the section’s books and draft the strict rules regarding their access.

“It is,” Khorve’s brother had assured them, “but Connor has special privileges. He totally kisses up to the head librarian, and she turns a blind eye. Officially, he’s just tidying up the shelves, but we all know what he’s really up to.”

Scorpius’s blood had run cold with a dreadful realization. Hadn’t the same situation been the case with the young Tom Riddle?

“Kids listen to him,” Khorve’s brother continued. “He’s even started a secret society of some kind.”

“Great,” Khorve had said. “This is why I’ve always said the Academy shouldn’t accept students from Hogwarts.”

Scorpius had laughed, grateful for the change in topic. “You forget I was once a visiting student from Hogwarts,” he’d said.

“Case closed,” Khorve had replied.

But it wasn’t – at least not as far as this bloody Connor was concerned. A few days after the conversation with Khorve’s brother, Scorpius and Khorve were on their way to bed for their daily afternoon love-making, when Khorve raised the subject again.

“Why don’t you sit down with him?” he said. “Just for a couple of hours. Try to talk some sense into him. Tell him about your experience with Unforgivables.”

“The reason I won’t ‘sit down with him,’” Scorpius replied, “is because I don’t want to talk about that night. I don’t even want to think about it. The dreams are bad enough as it is without stirring up old memories.”

Khorve nodded. “I don’t blame you, but your father . . .”

“My father has enough experience with the Dark Arts. He can handle this situation.”

“I’m not saying he can’t. It’s just that you’re closer to Connor’s age. Maybe he’ll listen to you more than he’ll listen to an adult.”

Scorpius laughed. “I am an adult.” He wrapped his arms around Khorve’s waist and walked him backward until his legs hit the edge of the bed.

“So I can tell,” Khorve said, reaching down to cup Scorpius’s growing erection. Scorpius pushed him onto the mattress and lay down on top of him, kissing his neck.

Truth be told, he wanted to end their conversation even more than he wanted to have sex. His father and Khorve had been hounding him for weeks to talk to Connor.

“You cast an Unforgivable once,” Scorpius had reminded his father during a heated argument one night. “Why don’t you talk to him?”
His father had winced.

“Harry told you about that?”

Scorpius had nodded.

“Did he also tell you he cast a spell whose effects he didn’t know and almost killed me?”

Scorpius had nodded again. “There were no secrets between me and Harry,” he’d said.

His father had dropped the subject of Connor – at least for a few days.

Scorpius entered Khorve carefully, relishing his sigh of gratitude. Why was he thinking about all of this – especially Harry – when he was making love with the man he planned on marrying? It was that blasted Connor. He stirred up memories Scorpius had long been able to suppress. Not just about his time with Harry, but the things he had done . . . the things that should’ve earned him a life sentence in Azkaban. The things for which he’d never be able to forgive himself.

He never dabbled with the Dark Arts anymore. He was a Healer. The only aspect of the Dark Arts that even came close to “healing” was necromancy, but raising the dead isn’t healing. That’s how Inferi were made.

“Just think about it some more,” Khorve said, as they lay, catching their breath and letting the sweat dry. The breeze was off the ocean. Scorpius could smell the salt in its caress. He inhaled deeply and released it in a sigh of exasperation.

“Okay,” he said, but he’d only said it to get Khorve to move onto another subject. He was as likely to give Connor a lecture as he was to fly to the moon. Those days were behind him, and besides, dousing his students’ fascination with the Dark Arts was his father’s job.

But relief from the subject of Connor and his nefarious ambitions only lasted until they went to Scorpius’s father’s villa for supper and found his father in lying in his hammock, his brow furrowed, clearly absorbed in the parchment he was reading. Scorpius cleared his throat, and his father started.

“Scorpius,” he said. “Khrove. I didn’t hear you enter.”

“Clearly,” Scorpius said fondly and crossed the room to give his father a kiss on the forehead. It was then that he saw what his father was reading.

“Scorpius,” he said. “Khrove. I didn’t hear you enter.”

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“Christ,” he said. “This kid is insane.”

His father took off his reading glasses and sat up with a sigh, putting his feet on the floor.

“Go ahead,” he said. “Read the whole thing and then tell me he’s not worth worrying about.”

“What is it?” Khrove asked, looking over Scorpius’s shoulder at the parchment he was holding.


Scorpius crossed the room without looking up and sat down on the edge of a chair, his face hot with mounting anger.

“He wrote about Harry,” he said.
“That’s not the exceptional thing about this particular essay,” his father replied. “Students write about Harry all the time.”

“But they don’t argue that Harry was on the wrong side of the War,” Khorve said.

“Keep reading,” was Scorpius’s father’s only reply.

. . . far from being innocent “victims,” the Potters were part of a subversive plot to undermine Voldemort’s far-seeing reforms. Their deaths were not only necessary; they were morally imperative. Of course, as we know, the Dark Lord’s noble endeavour created his worst enemy. Harry Potter was only an infant at the time, but he was an infant who became the instigator of one of the worse mass murders Britain’s magical population had ever endured . . .

Khorve stopped reading. He must’ve been able to sense Scorpius’s outrage.

“It gets better,” Scorpius’s father said.

“This . . . this little monster,” Scorpius hissed. All he could see was the scar on Harry’s forehead – the ragged, purple scar marring Harry’s otherwise beautiful face.

“And you know what’s even worse?” his father said. “I get a starring role for letting the Death Eaters into Hogwarts. It’s rather ironic that I’m going to have to fail him for such an obvious error.”

“This isn’t funny, father,” Scorpius said angrily, throwing the parchment on the floor. “You said this kid is bright . . .”

“. . . very,” his father said. “In fact he’s the brightest student I’ve ever had.”

“. . . he might be convincing others,” Scorpius continued. “This might go far beyond just this one irresponsible brat!”

“Kids that age are easily led,” Khorve said.

Scorpius’s father snorted ruefully. “Now there’s understatement if I’ve ever heard one.”

“I’ll do it,” Scorpius said. “I’ll meet with him. I’ll set him straight. This is bollocks. I never imagined in a million years a student would have the stupidity to write something like that.”

“You don’t have to worry about talking to him any longer,” his father said. Scorpius started to protest, but he held up his hand. “I fear this has passed beyond our ability to contain it, and why resort to hearsay,” he continued, “when you can hear the truth from the horse’s mouth?”

Scorpius and Khorve stared at him.

“Harry?” Scorpius breathed. “You’ve been in touch with Harry?”

“Not only have I been in touch with him,” his father replied. “I’ve asked him to come here and talk to Mr. Wallace himself.”

Scorpius and Khorve continued staring at him, open-mouthed. Suddenly vivid memories of Harry flitted through Scorpius’s mind – Harry holding his wand arm steady as he taught him his first disarming spell; Harry’s arms around him as they soared over green valleys; Harry beneath him as Scorpius straddled his hips, his throat and chest flushed with arousal, his green eyes wide and helpless with desire.

“What did he say?” he asked in a little voice. He wasn’t at all sure he could bear seeing Harry again.
His father walked to the doors leading out to the garden where he grew the plants for his potions. For a while, the only sound was the splash of the fountain. He didn’t answer right away, but when he did, his voice was steady and resolute.

“He said yes,” he replied. “In fact, he said he’ll be here tomorrow.”

Harry was anxious which meant he cut himself.

“Damnit!”

Lily came running to the bathroom, her eyes full of concern.

“What is it?” she said. “Are you alright?”

Harry laughed and showed her the shallow nick his razor had left behind. She healed it with an eye-roll and the barest touch of her wand.

“You scared me,” she said, her hands on her hips.

Harry went back to shaving but watched her in the mirror as she leaned against the door jamb, tugging at a loose thread in her jumper. She seemed even more anxious than he was which was saying something.

“It’ll be alright,” he told her. “I know what to expect. I’ll see Scorpius, and I’ll probably even meet his . . . whatever-he-is . . . boyfriend, fiancé, whatever. It’ll be okay, Lils.”

“I wish I could come with you.”

“That’s only because you miss the taste of grubs.”

She wrinkled her nose.

“I just hope he’s good to you, that’s all,” she said.

“He’s never not been ‘good’ to me,” Harry replied, lifting his chin and admiring his handiwork in the mirror.

“Except for the fact he left you while you were incapacitated in a hospital bed.”

“He didn’t leave me. He’d already left. He was just informing me after the fact.”

Lily crossed her arms. “And what about Draco? What about the way he just simply abandoned you out of the blue like he did?”

Harry dried his face with a towel and started brushing his teeth.

“The Malfoys don’t owe me anything,” he said around his toothbrush. When he spat in the sink, there was a hint of pink. One of his teeth must’ve been knocked loose by his latest arrestee. He made a mental note to petition the Wizengamot for an extra year in Azkaban for disfiguring an Auror.

“No, they don’t owe you anything – they owe you everything. They wouldn’t even be in New Guinea if you hadn’t made it possible for Scorpius to spend a year there when he was a Hogwarts student. Everything they have is because of you.”
Harry sighed. Maybe he should bring Lily with him if all she was going to do was worry while he was away. He leaned down and drank from the faucet, swished the water around in his mouth and spat it out . . . along with his loosened tooth.

“Damnit!”

Lily drew her wand again.

“Open up,” she said as though she was Hermione channelling her parents. “There. Honestly, dad, do you have any of your original teeth left?”

He laughed. “Briac asked me the same thing the other day.”

“I didn’t mean it as a joke.”

He tousled her flame-red hair.

“I’ll fire call when I get there,” he told her. “And then I’ll fire call as soon as I get back. I don’t see myself staying for longer than a couple of days. This kid Draco wants me to talk to can’t be so far down the Voldemort path that I can’t straighten him out pretty quickly.”

“Just don’t hex him,” Lily said. “Your unorthodox teaching methods might be illegal in New Guinea.”

“Well, if they’re not, they should be,” Harry replied.

He went to his bedroom and started going through his closet, trying to find something to wear and at the same time trying not to think about wanting to make a good impression. He and Scorpius were over. It was a good thing. Scorpius was happy. Harry could tell from the pendant wriggling on his chest.

“You look . . .” Lily said when he walked into the living room.

Harry arched an eyebrow. “Yes?”

“Great,” Lily said. “You look great, dad.”

He grimaced. Was it that obvious?

“It’s just a pair of jeans and a clean shirt. Lils, are your standards for me so low that all I need to do is some laundry to look halfway presentable?”

“You look better than ‘halfway presentable,’” she said. “Turn around.”

“Oh, for heaven’s . . .”

“Just do it.”

He turned in a circle, feeling ridiculous . . . and pleased.

She came over and straightened the collar of his shirt.

“You do realize, of course, that as soon as I arrive, I’ll need to change,” he said. “It’s summer there.”

“Yes, but first impressions are important,” she replied. “Speaking of which, let me see your feet. You’re going to be wearing sandals. You don’t want your toenails looking like talons.”
He rolled his eyes and leaned down to take off his socks.

“Not bad,” she said appraisingly. “But you are a wee bit pale.” She flicked her wand and suddenly his skin was a shade darker than usual.

“What?” he said. “You don’t want me looking like I live in England?”

She laughed and linked her arm through his as they walked to the fireplace. “Need I even answer that question?” she asked. But just as he was about to step into the floo and give the Portkey hub’s address, she stood on her tiptoes and kissed his cheek. When she stepped back, there were tears in her eyes.

“I’m angry at Draco for even thinking about asking this of you,” she said. “Doesn’t he care what seeing Scorpius will do to you?”

Harry wiped away her tears and kissed her forehead.

“I don’t think he’d ask me to talk to this student of his if it wasn’t genuinely important,” he said. “Draco has no reason to try to hurt me.”

Lily arched an eyebrow.

“It’s true,” he continued. “Plus, if he and Scorpius are happy, why should I be unhappy?”

She arched her other eyebrow, but instead of arguing with her any longer, Harry stepped into the fireplace.

“I’ll be home soon,” he said.

The last thing he saw was her sad and worried expression.

* * * * * * * * *

He and his father had debated at length who should meet Harry at the Portkey hub, but they’d finally both agreed it should be Scorpius.

The day was hot and humid, and the people milling around the hub were fanning themselves with large fronds enchanted with a cooling charm. Scorpius kicked himself for forgetting his. By the time Harry arrived, he’d look like a melting ice cube.

To say he was feeling nervous was an understatement. He hadn’t been able to eat anything at breakfast despite his father’s and Khorve’s concerned, watchful gazes. There were too many questions. How would Harry look? Would he look like he’d just stepped out of one of The Prophet’s front page photos – grim and old beyond his years? Scorpius was terrified that he would. The guilt he’d feel would be crushing.

But when he actually saw Harry, he realized he needn’t have worried.

“Scorpius!” Harry called fondly as soon as he spotted him, and the next thing Scorpius knew, he was running toward Harry’s outstretched arms as though he was a little kid again.

They hugged each other close, and Harry even kissed him on the forehead, but there was nothing but affection in the gesture. Nothing even awkward.

Harry was . . . Scorpius stepped back so he could get a good look at him . . . Well, there was only one word for it. Harry was gorgeous. For a moment, he couldn’t breathe. It was as though Harry had
stepped out of one of his dreams, dark-haired and smiling. So very different from the last time Scorpius had seen him in a bed in St. Mungo’s.

“You look surprised,” Harry said. “Were you expecting amputated limbs?”

Scorpius shook his head wordlessly. What could he say? How could he tell Harry he’d expected a worn, wasted man, aged beyond his years, crooked, angry . . . and broken?

“It’s . . . no, it’s just good to see you, that’s all,” he replied.

“And you as well,” Harry lightly replied. “So, what does a man need to do to get a good lunch of grubs around here?”

Scorpius laughed and hugged him again. It was okay. Harry looked good – even happy. Everything was going to be okay.

When they arrived at his father’s villa, Harry shook Khorve’s hand in both of his.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” he said.

Khorve blinked at him for a moment. Scorpius couldn’t tell if it was because he was finally meeting Scorpius’s former lover . . . or because he was meeting Harry Potter. The Harry Potter.

“You, too, sir,” Khorve replied after a moment, blushing uncomfortably.

Harry spared him any further chagrin by glancing around at Scorpius’s father’s airy, light-filled living room. It smelled of newly cut flowers and was decorated with elegant dark wood furniture and native artefacts. It couldn’t be more different from Draco’s former flat in London.

“So,” Harry said. “Where is Malfoy?”

“Here, Potter,” Scorpius’s father said, entering the room. “And that’s Professor Malfoy to you.”

Harry bit back a smile and shook Scorpius’s father’s hand warmly.

“It’s good to see you again, Draco,” he said.

Scorpius sat down and watched the two of them stroll around while his father pointed out his collections of this and that. They both seemed relaxed, which was interesting because Scorpius’s father had been everything but relaxed that morning. Whereas Scorpius had sat still at the table praying his food would stay down, his father had paced back and forth, back and forth, his whole body practically vibrating with tension.

“Don’t worry,” he’d told his father. “I’m not going to run off with him.”

“I bloody well hope not,” his father had snapped, running his fingers through his hair as he paced.

“Then what’s wrong?” Scorpius had tried to ask, but his father hadn’t answered. He hadn’t even said anything before he’d abruptly left the room.

Scorpius and Khrove had watched him go and then looked at each other with twin baffled expressions. Up until that morning, Scorpius’s father had been remarkable blasé about the whole affair.
“Did you ever ask him how he’d left things with Harry before he came here?” Khorve had asked. “Maybe that’s why he’s so stressed out. Maybe it has nothing to do with you . . . or with us.”

Scorpius had shaken his head because the answer was no, he hadn’t asked his father about Harry when he’d moved to New Guinea. The subject was too sensitive – too fraught with landmines. Any time Scorpius had tried to talk to him about his doubts about leaving Harry, his father would blow up at him, demanding how Scorpius could even think that he’d be better off in England with Harry than he was in New Guinea with Khorve. The mere hint that Scorpius might be wavering in his conviction sent his father into a tailspin. Other than talking about Harry as Harry Potter, they barely mentioned Harry at all.

“So,” Harry said, disrupting Scorpius’s train of thought. “We have a baby Voldemort on our hands.”

Scorpius’s father indicated that Harry should take a seat and then summoned a house elf for some tea and sandwiches. Harry did as he was told and watched them like the Auror he was as Scorpius’s father sat in the chair next to his. He crossed his legs and leaned back, but Scorpius could tell that something had been awakened in him by his father’s sudden seriousness.

“I’m afraid so,” his father said. He was sitting with his arms on the armrests of his chair, staring into the cold fireplace. He chewed his lip for a moment before continuing. “I wouldn’t have asked you to come here if I . . . if I believed I could handle the situation on my own. Believe me, Potter, I’m not happy that I’ve had to resort to this . . .”

Harry snorted ruefully. “You don’t need to convince me,” he said. “In fact, I’m pretty sure I’m the last person in the world you want sitting in your living room right now.”

The corner of Scorpius’s father’s mouth twitched in the hint of a smile. “You wouldn’t be wrong,” he replied.

Harry turned his head to look at a wooden statue of a three-headed dog sitting on the mantel piece. Scorpius stared at his profile, watching the sudden flush in his cheeks slowly fade. The ensuing silence was awkward to say the least. Finally, Scorpius’s father cleared his throat.

“The child – my student – is very bright,” he said. “And very curious, which are traits I’d normally encourage except in this case, curiosity has become an obsession.”

Harry turned to look at him. “That can’t be too unusual,” he said. “I had plenty of students who were, in my opinion, overly curious about the Dark Arts. In many ways, I think it’s natural. It’s almost a kind of rite of passage for some kids.”

“But this has passed curiosity,” Scorpius’s father continued. “Like I said, it’s become an obsession. He’s come to me asking questions that . . . well, that remind me of the kinds of questions Tom Riddle asked Professor Slughorn . . .”

“. . . Horcruxes?”

“Among other things, yes. But it’s not only that – it’s not just obsession, it’s ambition. It’s ideology. He’s not simply asking how something works in the abstract, but how it can be used in concrete ways.”

Harry tipped his head back against his chair, and Scorpius saw for the first time that maybe Harry was under more strain than he’d first appeared. He closed his eyes and scrubbed his face with his hands, making his fringe stand up. Scorpius felt his heart squeeze with the familiarity of it all – with the adoration he’d never stopped feeling.
“I guess the more things change, the more things stay the same,” Harry said.

Scorpius’s father stood and began to pace, his bare feet leaving behind ghost prints of humidity on the cool tile floor.

“I think you have the power to stop this in its tracks, Harry,” he said. “I don’t want it on my conscience if this kid becomes a criminal . . . or worse. I don’t want to be another Professor Slughorn. I want to crush this. Now.”

“So what do you propose?” Harry asked. “Invite him over for tea? Lecture him about what a bad bloke Voldemort was?”

Scorpius’s father stopped pacing and turned to glare at him.

“I don’t see how you can make light of this situation,” he snapped.

Harry sighed. “I spend my days dealing with professors’ students who have gone wrong,” he said. “Including my own. Scorpius, did you know I had to arrest your old dorm mate a couple of months ago? Williams? Remember him?”

Scorpius grimaced. “How could I forget?”

“Your point?” Scorpius’s father asked.

“My point is that there are some people who will play with fire no matter what people like you and I tell them.”

“And that’s a reason not to try to do something about it? Tell me, Potter, is that how you see yourself? Nothing more than a rubbish collector in a red robe cleaning up the streets, because if you do, that’s not the Harry Potter I remember.”

“God, I hate it when people say that!” Harry said.

“What? Call Aurors rubbish collectors?”

“No, call me ‘Harry Potter.’ Jesus, Draco, when will I ever be just Harry to you? Because that’s all I am – all I’ve ever been. Harry. Just plain old Harry.”

Scorpius would’ve gone to him and taken him in his arms if Khorve and his father weren’t there. Contrary to the way he looked, Harry sounded weary and under strain. He wanted to yell at his father to stop. This damn Connor kid wasn’t worth picking the old scabs off of all of their hearts. He was just about to say something, when he realized his father had suddenly stopped pacing.

“That’s it,” he said.

“I need this,” he said. “We need to make the abstract real. I’d asked you to come here because you’re Harry Potter, but what I need is for you to be Harry.”

He went to the doors leading out to his garden, and stood with his back turned to the room for a moment before turning around to look at Harry again.

“I need this,” he said. “You know how much I hate asking people for favours – especially you after all you’ve done for me and Scorpius over the years – but I have sins to pay for, Harry. Sometimes I dream of Dumbledore’s face just before he fell. I hear the screams of my fellow students as Greyback
tore them to pieces. I feel Vince’s hand slip from mine as you and I flew away and left him to die. All of those things were my fault . . .”

“Blame is hard to assign during a war,” Harry said. “We all did things we regret.”

Scorpius’s father just looked at him for a long moment, clearly trying to read something in Harry’s eyes.

“You’re overly kind,” he said harshly.

Harry laughed. “Now those are words I never expected to hear from Draco Malfoy’s mouth.” He grew solemn again when Scorpius’s father didn’t smile.

“He Who Cannot . . . I mean Voldemort . . . see I can’t even say his damn name after all these years! . . . destroyed everything and everyone I loved. But worst of all, Harry, he destroyed my faith in myself – my faith that I could see the right things and believe them and the wrong things and reject them. You don’t know what it’s like to not be able to trust yourself.”

There was a very long, very awkward silence. Scorpius knew they were all thinking the same thing. When it came to him, Harry hadn’t been trustworthy. He hadn’t been in control.

Harry cleared his throat. “You give me undue credit,” he said. “You were conditioned to follow your father, which meant you were conditioned to follow Voldemort. I was conditioned by loneliness and a lack of direction to follow Dumbledore. It all started when we were just children, Draco. Just kids. I wasn’t born some kind of hero, and you certainly weren’t born some kind of villain.”

“Maybe,” Scorpius’s father replied. “But now here we have another child looking to be led, and I can’t do it. Or rather I can’t trust myself to do it right.”

“And I can?” Harry asked.

“You did with me,” Scorpius blurted before he could stop himself.

They all turned to look at him, no doubt wondering what on God’s green earth he was about to say. Scorpius turned his head to look up at his father.

“There are things you don’t know,” he said. “Things I’ve never told you.” He turned to Harry whose face had gone white. Scorpius would’ve laughed – did Harry think he was going to talk about how he had introduced him to several arcane sexual practices?

“Do I want to hear this?” Scorpius father asked.

“Probably not,” Scorpius continued. “But you need to hear it. Father, I was not so unlike this Connor kid. That’s how Harry and I met. It wasn’t out of generosity. It was out of necessity. I would’ve turned into another Tom Riddle without him.”

“Scorpius,” Harry said. “You were five. You were no Tom Riddle.”

“Maybe not,” Scorpius continued, “but the potential was there – it just hadn’t been harnessed to ambition yet. Had I been given time . . .”

“Stop!” Scorpius’s father said, covering ears.

They all turned to stare at him.

“I don’t want to know any more,” he said. “Please. I was in Azkaban when I should’ve been with
you – guiding you, teaching you. That was my job, not Potter’s. That had been my chance to redeem myself. My chance to make things right with my conscience, but no . . .”

“I had to arrest you, Draco,” Harry said. There was anguish in his voice. “I didn’t have a choice.”

Scorpius’s father turned to look at him.

“That’s not what I mean,” he said. “What I mean is that I was a fool to have tried to keep the Manor and everything that went with it. The library of banned books. The Dark artefacts. What was I thinking? What was I ever thinking about anything?”

He looked like he might break down. Scorpius stood and went to him. His father tried to pull away, unwilling to be comforted, but Scorpius didn’t let him.

“It’s alright,” he said. “Everything is alright. You’re here now. I’m here . . .”

“You’re mother’s not.”

“My mother was an adult. She knew what you were doing.”

His father pulled away and wiped his eyes. “Damnit,” he said angrily. “Just what I wanted to do. Cry in front of Potter of all people.”

Harry laughed. “You watched me relearning how to feed myself,” he said. “I think when it comes to humiliating ourselves in front of each other, we’re pretty much equal at this point.”

Scorpius’s father smiled weakly, and Scorpius turned to look at Harry. There was nothing he wanted more in the world at that moment than to take Harry in his arms and kiss him.

“I love you,” he mouthed. “I love you, Harry.”

Fortunately, at that very moment, a house elf appeared, so nobody saw him – not his father, not Khorve – not even Harry, himself.

* * * * * * * *

As soon as Harry returned to his hotel room, he threw floo powder on the embers in the fireplace and called Lily. She was overjoyed to hear from him and brimming with curiosity.

“What’s the weather like?” she asked.

“I feel like I’m lodged in Briac’s armpit,” he replied and laughed when she grimaced.

“So hot and humid then . . .”

“. . . and stinky. At least where I’m staying in the city. It’s much better at the Academy with the forests and the sea nearby.”

“And you’ve chosen to stay in the city because . . .”

“. . . for all the reasons you might be thinking.”

She sighed. “I hope they at least put up a fight.”

“They did. I had my life and limbs threatened, but I didn’t want to stay there.”
“Is it . . .”

“It’s not easy.”

“Is Scorpius’s fiancé . . . ?”

“Yes.”

“And Draco?”

“He’s well, although clearly upset about this student of his.”

“He must be. I mean you wouldn’t be there if he wasn’t.”

“He wants me to tell the kid what it was like to be caught up in the War at the age of seventeen. He said he’s tried lecturing him on the dangers of the Dark Arts, but the kid is deaf to his words. Draco doesn’t think he’s even making a dent.”

“And he thinks you can.”

“That’s why I’m here. It’s certainly not because either of them actually want me here. Clearly, Draco feels his back is against the wall. He doesn’t want to play Professor Slughorn to this kid’s Tom Riddle.”

“What do you mean by they don’t want you there? Has anyone said anything?”

Harry snorted. “There’s no need for them to say anything. It’s obvious. And God knows I shouldn’t be here either.”

“Daddy . . .”

“It’s easy to pretend I don’t miss them when I haven’t seen either of them in more than a year.”

“But you do miss them.”

“I do.”

She sighed sadly. “Maybe . . . maybe if you talk to Scorpius . . .”

“I am not going to talk to Scorpius. In fact, I’m going to go well out of my way not to be alone with him for even a second. Hence the hot, stinky city as opposed to a nice beachside cottage.”

She sighed again. “I wish I was there to keep you company.”

“Well, you can’t be, Auror Potter. You have paperwork to do at the office.”

She made a face. “I hate paperwork.”

“It’s a Potter family trait.”

“So, have you decided what you’re going to say to this student of Draco’s?”

“Nope. Haven’t even thought about it yet.”

“I wonder what he’s like.”

“I’m sure he’s like every precocious pure-blood brat I’ve ever encountered. Cocky and dense.”
“Takes one to know one.”

He rolled his eyes. “Don’t worry. I’ll think of something to say tonight before I meet with him tomorrow. I want to get this over with as soon as possible and get home. If worse comes to worst, I’ll contact Minerva and have her revoke her decision about letting him study abroad.”

“So you’ll be home the day after tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow, actually. That is if I have my way.”

She nodded. “I’m sorry you have to go through this. I wish Draco could’ve just figured out how to handle it on his own.”

“Don’t be hard on Draco. He’s a haunted man.”

“Again. It takes one to know one.”

He smiled wanly. He supposed it was true after all.

“I’ll call you when I get home tomorrow,” he said. “Love you, flower.”

“Love you, too, daddy,” she replied.

The flames turned back into embers. Harry rose from the hearth and ran his fingers through his hair. God, the day had been hell. First the queue at the Portkey hub in London had been horrendous – so horrendous, in fact, that Harry had almost resorted to the I’m-Harry-Potter-get-out-of-my-way line. Then when he’d arrived in New Guinea, the heat and humidity had hit him like a runaway lorry, nearly knocking him off his feet. And, of course, Scorpius had looked absolutely stunning – happy, healthy, smiling shyly. He’d felt so good in Harry’s arms, and Harry had wondered how he seemed to Scorpius. Old, surely. Maybe even somewhat pathetic.

Fuck.

Why was he here? Draco could handle this on his own. He just didn’t have enough faith in himself, but he could do it. . . . and what was more, it’d been almost as hard to see Draco looking happy and healthy as it was to see Scorpius. Everyone was apparently doing just fine and dandy in the land of palm tree and papayas. Good for them. Meanwhile, he himself was stuck in a never ending nightmare of Dark spells and criminal trials, his days glued together with little more than whisky and anonymous sex.

And then there was Khorve, Scorpius’s fiancé or whatever he was. Harry had liked him immediately. Young, smart, handsome – and obviously madly in love. To the extent he might’ve imagined just one night in Scorpius’s arms, meeting Khorve had snuffed-out that dream. The worst thing Harry could ever do to Scorpius would be to ruin his relationship.

Fuck.

He had to do what he came there to do and get the fuck home again as soon as possible. But what was he going to do? What could he possibly say to a kid Draco seemed to think was the next incarnation of Voldemort over a light lunch of tea and cucumber sandwiches? God dammit. He needed the sutures ripped out of his heart like he needed an Avada Kedavra straight to the head . . .

. . . Suddenly, he stopped pacing. Avada Kedavra. That was it! The Killing Curse! If anything can get a kid to wake the fuck up, it’s a good, old Avada Kedavra.
He went to the fireplace and got down on his knees on the hearthstones.

“Draco Malfoy!” he called. “I need a vial and a Pensieve.”

Scorpius couldn’t stop himself from glaring at Connor when he walked into his father’s office. All this fuss for nothing more than a precocious brat. All this heartache. All this unearthing of the past from its shallow grave.

The little shit smirked at him. Despite the heat, he was dressed in a long, black robe. He’d even painted his pointed nails with black polish. Scorpius rolled his eyes.

“Ah, this must be Mr. Wallace,” Harry said, standing up from the armchair by the fireplace.

“How’d you guess?” Scorpius mumbled under his breath. Harry must’ve heard him because for a moment he had a hard time containing a smile. His green eyes danced with mirth. Scorpius’s heart turned over.

“Indeed it is,” Scorpius’s father said. “Welcome, Mr. Wallace. I’m pleased you could meet with us today.”

Connor clearly hadn’t heard him. He was staring drop-jawed at Harry.

“Potter,” he said.

Scorpius’s hands itched to rip the kid’s head off. “Potter”? Was the kid insane as well as stupid?

“That’s ‘mister Potter,’ to you,” Scorpius’s father said coldly.

“Yes, Professor,” Connor said with a syrupy voice. “Hello, mister Potter.”

“Hello,” Harry replied. If he was annoyed, he didn’t show it. Instead, he scrutinized the boy’s face with an Auror’s keen gaze. His expression conveyed nothing of what he may be thinking.

“Please have a seat, Mr. Wallace,” Scorpius’s father said. “Would you like a cup of tea?”

Connor seemed not to have heard him. He was still staring at Harry.

“Can I see your scar?” he asked.

“Can I see your scar, sir,” Scorpius’s father snapped.

Scorpius bit his tongue to keep from smiling. In a vacuum, the whole situation was rather hilarious. Harry didn’t blink. He merely moved his fringe aside to show Connor the jagged lightning-bolt.

“It really is you,” Connor said. “The wizard who encountered the Dark Lord . . .”

“The wizard who vanquished the Dark . . . I mean Voldemort,” Scorpius’s father said and then walked to the window where he stood with his back to the room, his arms wrapped around himself as though it was winter and he was chilled to the bones. Scorpius wanted to go to him. He wanted to tell his father that it was okay that he still had trouble saying Voldemort’s name – that after all he’d been through, it was only natural.

“In the flesh,” Harry said nonchalantly. “Speaking of the ‘Dark Lord,”’ he continued, using air
quotes (which nearly caused Scorpius to lose it – he’d forgotten how funny Harry could be), “I hear you have quite an obsession with old snake face as I like to refer to him.”

Connor flushed angrily, and his fingers twitched as though he was considering going for his wand. Scorpius knew that Harry noticed it too because he raised an eyebrow.

“Expelleramus” Harry said and caught Connor’s wand with a Seeker’s precision and speed. To Scorpius’s chagrin, the power and poise behind Harry’s move caused a savage desire to coil spring-like in his belly.

“It’s as easy as that, my friend,” Harry said. This time he wasn’t laughing.

Connor’s flushed face went deathly pale.

“I don’t have a lot of time to waste on you,” Harry said, his gaze burning a hole through Connor in his stupid black robe. “I’m a very busy man as is your professor. Your high esteem of Voldemort is misplaced . . .”

“Voldemort was a great wizard!” Connor said angrily.

Scorpius’s father wheeled around, but Harry held up his hand before he said anything.

“It’s true that he was a very powerful wizard,” Harry said. “No one but a fool would deny it. But Voldemort was not a great wizard. Great wizards don’t kill innocents. Listen, Mr. Wallace, Voldemort was a coward. He’s no worthy of your respect than a clot of dirt under your shoe.”

Connor’s face flushed again with umbrage at Harry’s words.

“You were his enemy,” he said.

“I was a boy,” Harry replied. “Just like you. I was nothing but a boy.”

Scorpius looked at his feet. Harry had been seventeen when he’d confronted Voldemort, and he, himself, had been seventeen when he and Harry had first made love . . .

“I want you to see something,” Harry continued.

He walked to the stand on which rested Scorpius’s father’s Pensieve and drew a small vial from his pocket. The three of them watched as he filled the shallow basin with water from his wand. The Pensieve was carved from native rock and as big as a wagon wheel. When Harry emptied his memories into it, a shimmering vapour hovered over the surface of the water like iridescent fog on a lake.

Scorpius looked at his father. He looked like he might be ill at any moment.

What was about to happen? What did Harry want Connor to see?

“You don’t need to come with us,” Harry told Scorpius’s father, but his father shook his head.

“I told you already I’m going with you,” he said, but there was a waver in his voice.

“I’ll come, too,” Scorpius said. He didn’t want his father to be alone. He didn’t know what Harry planned to show them, but if it was a memory of the War, Scorpius knew instinctively that he should be there when his father saw it.

Harry looked at him for a long moment, clearly unsure how he felt about Scorpius’s presence.
“Please,” he said. “Please, Harry.”

Harry merely nodded and turned away.

“This is a Pensieve,” he said to Connor. “Inside it are my memories of the night Voldemort cast the Killing Curse at me. When we put our faces in the water, it will feel like we’re there. We’ll also be able to see through the Invisibility Cloak I was wearing.”

Connor looked greedy with excitement. Scorpius wanted to strangle him.

“All right, then,” Harry said. “Let’s go.”

He took a deep breath and placed his face in the Pensieve’s water. Connor joined him a moment later. Scorpius turned to look at his father.

“You don’t have to do this,” he said. “Neither of us do.”

But his father shook his head. Scorpius took his hand and squeezed it.

“This was all a very long time ago,” he said. “Just remember that. Whatever Harry shows us is in the past.”

They approached the Pensieve and took deep breaths.

“When we get there, don’t go,” his father said. “Don’t leave me.”

Scorpius felt his eyes fill with tears. He knew – of course he knew – that his father had been scarred by the War, but he hadn’t known how much it still haunted him.

He knew now.

Despite appearing to boil, the water was cool when Scorpius lowered his face into the basin. For a moment he saw nothing but its stone bottom, then slowly a vision bloomed around him – a vision of rubble and destruction. He looked about until he saw his father beside him. Nearby, Harry stood next to Connor, pointing out something with his wand. Scorpius followed his gaze, and that’s when they saw him . . .

. . . a boy, tall and dark-haired, walking zombie-like down Hogwarts’ main staircase, the round lens of his glasses reflecting the flames from a near-by blaze.

Harry. They were looking at Harry.

Scorpius heard his father inhale sharply.

As boy-Harry came nearer, Scorpius saw that he was clutching his wand in a death grip. Wailing cries punctured the air, making him flinch, but still he kept walking, picking his way through shattered masonry and charred timbers. Every now and then, he staggered and fell to his knees. It wasn’t clear if he had tripped or whether his legs had simply given out from under him.

After he passed, the four of them followed him. Scorpius couldn’t help noting how thin and gangly boy-Harry was. The hunt for the Horcruxes had obviously taken a toll. His hair was long; he kept having to brush it out of his face with the back of his hand.

Scorpius had imagined this scene a thousand times. In fact, he’d started imagining it before he’d even met Harry. But his imagination was nothing like reality. He’d always thought that Harry strode through the gates, wand held at the ready, power radiating off of him like rays from the sun. But the
truth was that Harry didn’t stride, he bumbled and even crawled, his face moon-white with fear.

Scorpius had the overwhelming urge to run to him. To pull him into his arms and protect him. Harry had been sent out to die, and he knew it. He had known he’d never be back. When he finally stumbled out into the courtyard and looked back at the castle, he started to cry soundlessly, but then just as quickly as he’d started, he stopped, took a deep breath and squared his narrow shoulders.

Scorpius looked at Harry – the real Harry – but he couldn’t read his expression. His eyes were fixed on his boyish self. Meanwhile, Connor merely looked confused. Scorpius wanted to slap him. Hard.

“This is how it was,” Scorpius’s father said. “There was no glamour to any of it. There were no grand duels. It was nothing but children being slaughtered. This – this – is what your hero wanted to accomplish. He wasn’t a great man. He was a cowardly butcher!”

With enormous satisfaction, Scorpius watched Connor flinch at his father’s words.

By then boy-Harry was approaching the Forbidden Forest. The close-knit trees rose before him; their needled spires seemed to poke at the stars. Dementors slithered between the mossy trunks, their rasping breath merging with a rising wind. Just before he passed into the darkness, boy-Harry leaned on his knees and retched violently. There was nothing but bile. Either he hadn’t had anything to eat in days or he’d already been ill so many times that there was nothing left in his stomach.

Beside him, Scorpius’s father covered his face. Scorpius tried to comfort him, but his father shrugged off his arm. There was nothing Scorpius could do to make this easier for him. There was nothing his father wanted him to do.

The walk through the forest seemed to take forever. Every few feet, boy-Harry stopped and tried to pull himself together. Now and then, they could hear a hic-cupping sob. Terror shivered through his body, and he clutched at branches to keep himself from falling to his knees.

Suddenly, he stopped in his tracks while his fingers fumbled at a pouch hanging on a leather string around his neck. From it, he drew a golden Snitch and pressed it to his lips like a talisman. In the quiet that followed, they heard him whisper.

“I am about to die,” he said.

The Snitch broke open and something fell to the ground. He drew his wand with a murmured Lumos. The light flickered on a jagged, triangular stone.


Real-Harry merely nodded. There were tears in his eyes. Scorpius couldn’t take it a moment longer. He ran to Harry and wrapped his arms around him.

“Why?” he sobbed. “Why did this have to happen to you?”

Harry pulled away and kissed his forehead.

“It had to be,” was all he said.

Meanwhile, boy-Harry closed his eyes and turned the stone in his hand. After a moment, as though addressing someone they couldn’t see, he spoke into the darkness.

“Does it hurt?” he asked.
Scorpius’s attention was suddenly distracted when his father vanished. He must’ve lifted his face from the Pensieve.

“Father!” Scorpius cried. “You can’t just . . .”

Harry grabbed his arm and turned him around to face him.

“Let him go,” he said gently. “I wasn’t the only one who suffered.”

“Who were you talking to?” Connor interrupted. “You were looking into the trees. Who were you talking to?”

But Harry shook his head without answering.

“That’s something I will never tell anyone, not even my children,” he said. “Not even you,” he added, looking at Scorpius.

Scorpius nodded and the three of them turned their attention back to boy-Harry as he continued his walk deeper and deeper into the forest. He seemed more determined now than he was before. He was still trembling with fear, but his eyes were clear and his gaze was resolute. Suddenly they heard a voice.

“Someone there,” came a rough whisper close at hand. “He’s got an Invisibility Cloak. Could it be – ?

Two figures emerged from behind a nearby tree, and boy-Harry froze. The men’s wands flared. Scorpius recognized them from his school textbooks. Yaxley and Dolohov.

“Definitely heard something,” said Yaxley in a heavy Scottish accent. “Animal, d’you reckon?”

“That head case Hagrid kept a whole bunch of stuff in here,” said Dolohov, glancing over his shoulder with apprehension in his eyes.

Yaxley looked down at his watch.

“Time’s nearly up,” he said. “Potter’s had his hour. He’s not coming.”

“And he was sure he’d come! He won’t be happy.”

“Better go back,” said Yaxley. “Find out what the plan is now.”

He and Dolohov turned and walked deeper into the forest. Boy-Harry followed them. Soon, Scorpius saw a light in a clearing.

“Now you’ll have a chance to see your hero, Connor,” Harry said.

Scorpius looked at Connor. He didn’t seem particularly pleased by the prospect.

There were numerous people standing around a fire. Scorpius felt sick when he realized his grandparents were among them. Fortunately, unlike many of the others, they weren’t hooded and masked like cowards. They did not look happy though. His grandfather’s skin was waxy and his grandmother looked like she’d been crying for hours. Scorpius had never seen two more miserable-looking people in his life.

Connor elbowed him.
“Is that Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy?” he asked.

Scorpius gave him the look of death. “Shut up and watch,” he hissed.

After a moment, Scorpius realized that one of the figures silhouetted by the fire’s light was Voldemort himself. He recoiled and stumbled against Harry who placed a comforting hand on his shoulder. Voldemort was repulsive! His face was pinched, and his skin was a sickish purple-blue hue, like a bruise. He looked more like a snake that a human. His eyes gleamed as red as blood. Scorpius wanted to vomit. The air was drenched with a mist of rot and bodily decay.

“This is the man . . . the thing . . . you worship?” he said to Connor. “This hideous monster?”

Connor didn’t reply. He was shaking too hard to find his voice. He looked confused and frightened.

Scorpius would’ve laughed at him, but there was nothing about the situation that was remotely funny. He turned his attention back to the boy walking to his doom.

When Dolohov and Yaxley entered the ring of firelight, Voldemort turned his molten gaze on them, causing both of them to cringe.

“No sign of him, my Lord,” said Dolohov.

Voldemort didn’t reply. He merely fondled the wand in his hand, stroking the dark wood with his grotesque, spidery fingers.

“My Lord —”

Scorpius flinched when he realized the obsequious voice belonged to his great-aunt. She looked insane. Her eyes were as wild as her hair. There was blood and soot on her face. She licked her lips vulgarly.

Voldemort raised his hand to silence her, and she did not speak another word.

“I thought he would come,” Voldemort said in a voice that sounded creepily child-like. He gazed into the fire. “I expected him to come.”

Nobody spoke.

Scorpius knew what was about to happen, but he still couldn’t watch it. He covered his face and turned away as boy-Harry took a deep, shuddering breath.

“I was it seems . . . mistaken,” Voldemort said, although he didn’t seem terribly upset by the prospect. Perhaps, Scorpius thought, he was relishing the idea of sacking the castle and killing everyone inside.

“You weren’t.”

Scorpius inhaled sharply. Boy-Harry must’ve removed his Invisibility Cloak.

He did not sound afraid. Scorpius felt himself fill with pride.

There was suddenly a lot of noise and movement, and Scorpius heard Hagrid’s booming voice cry “HARRY! NO! NO! NO! HARRY! WHAT’RE YEH – ?”

“QUIET!” someone shouted.
Hagrid suddenly stopped yelling.

The hub-bub was followed by a seemingly endless silence. At last Voldemort spoke.

“Harry Potter,” he said very softly. “The boy who lived.”

Scorpius could hear his great-aunt pant with excitement like a dog. There was another long silence and then a shrill voice screamed into the creeping fog . . .

“AVADA KEDAVRA!”
Harry’s memory disappeared, leaving behind nothing but darkness so vast it felt like they’d been swallowed by a sunless cave.

*Death, Scorpius thought. This is what it feels like to be dead.*

Green lightning flashed behind his eyelids when he blinked, while in his ears, Voldemort’s voice echoed like a vulture’s shriek. He could still see his grandparents’ haunted eyes and his great-aunt’s feral expression as she licked her lips, hungry for Harry’s execution.

*AVADA KEDAVRA!*

Harry turned to look at them.

“That’s enough,” he said. “I think Mr. Wallace gets the point.” His expression was unreadable – he seemed far away, lost to Scorpius’s voice and beyond his reach, beyond his ability to comfort. Beyond his ability to touch.

All Scorpius wanted was to go to Harry and take him in his arms, but there was still Connor to deal with. He turned to look at the little fool. Connor looked stunned as though it’d been him who’d been hit by the Killing Curse. His face was a sickly shade of puce.

Scorpius felt a surge of glee at his predicament. He’d been the cause of this whole situation – he’d been the reason Harry was reliving the past – his noble but painful past.

At Harry’s bidding, they lifted their faces from the Pensieve’s water. For a moment, the world seemed to drift, as insubstantial as pipe smoke. When Scorpius’s sight finally readjusted to the light, he looked around, feeling dazed. Where was he? The room was familiar, but . . .

. . . oh, right. His father’s office.

But where was his father? Scorpius looked around, but he wasn’t there.

He only realized he was dizzy when he fell against the desk, knocking a stack of parchments to the floor. Harry had to grab his arm and lead him to the armchair by the fireplace. Scorpius looked at his face. Harry – his Harry – looked tired and drawn.

Scorpius was going to *kill* Connor. Tearing him limb from limb was too benign a death. Scorpius was going to . . .

. . . but then he and Harry heard someone crying and realized Connor was curled foetus-like on the
couch, his arms covering his head as though expecting a blow, his whole body heaving with sobs.

Harry went to the liquor cabinet and poured three glasses of whisky. He told Connor to sit up and handed him one. Connor gulped it down like a parched man in a desert and then promptly threw it up all over Scorpions’s father’s beloved Oriental rug. Harry flicked his wand at the mess and cast a Vanishing charm.

“So, mister Wallace,” he said, taking a seat and casually crossing his legs, twirling his wand between his fingers like a baton. “Let’s talk about this little obsession of yours.”

“I . . . I didn’t know,” Connor stammered, wiping his nose with the back of his hand. “He . . . Voldemort . . . he was . . .”


“You . . . you were so brave,” Connor said, his voice cracking. “How did you do it?”

Harry sheathed his wand and tipped his head back to stare up at the ceiling. For a long moment, he didn’t speak. Connor’s sniffled loudly in the silence.

“I did it because I had to,” Harry finally said. “I didn’t have a choice. I was the Chosen One. Chosen to be sacrificed like a sheep on an altar. Chosen by fate when I was nothing but an embryo in my mother’s womb. It was inevitable. Few things in life are inevitable . . . but that was.”

“He . . . he was hideous,” Connor said.

“If you want a black-robed, morally-ambiguous wizard to worship, choose Severus Snape,” Harry said. “He’s infinitely more complex and infinitely more honourable than Voldemort who was nothing but a fascist. And a coward. Killing an unarmed boy. Very noble.”

“I’m sorry, sir,” Connor said in a tiny, hic-cupping voice. “I didn’t know.”

“Go on,” Harry said kindly. “You’re alright. Go have a swim or play with some frogs or whatever you kids do here.”


Connor stood up, looking wobbly as though his legs were made of boiled noodles.

“May I shake your hand, sir?” he asked timidly.

Harry looked at him with narrowed eyes.

“Please tell me you’re not going to worship me now. Connor, you don’t need to worship anyone. Be curious about them, admire them, but don’t worship them. God knows, I don’t deserve to be worshipped. I’m just a man, and I’ve made a man’s mistakes . . . more than my fair share, in fact.”

“Thank you, sir,” Connor said. “Before I go, would you mind signing my Defence Against the . . .”

“Oh for heaven’s sake,” Harry said, rolling his eyes. “No, I will not sign your textbook. I don’t sign anything for anyone.”

Scorpius had a sudden memory of the scorpion on Harry’s back. His mind reeled. This great man had done that for him. For love of him! How had he let himself forget?
Connor bowed twice as he walked backward out the door and closed it behind him.

“Christ almighty,” Harry said, getting up to pour them both another glass of whisky before returning to the chair by the fireplace. He sat down, looking weary and exasperated.

“You’re amazing,” Scorpius gushed, unable to contain himself. “Then and now. You’re a brave, courageous, amazing man, Harry.”

Harry took a sip of whisky and watched the bird of paradise pecking at its seed bowl. From outside came the sounds of students walking by in the hot afternoon, chatting about essays and exams, but in the room where they sat, it was cool and quiet, an oasis. The sun filtered through the slatted blinds leaving behind ladders of light on the floor. Scorpius closed his eyes for a moment, imagining the same shadows adorning Harry’s naked body, his chest slick with sweat, his beautiful cock hard and twitching against his belly. He could have that again . . . he had to have it again.

Suddenly Khorve seemed like a distant, inconsequently memory. His whole life was nothing but a wisp of a dream. The only thing he could see was Harry’s face. Harry’s beautiful face with its famous lightning bolt scar.

“I don’t know how you did it,” he said. “No one else could’ve found what it took to sacrifice themselves like that. God, Harry . . .”

Harry shook his head. “I didn’t feel brave at the time,” he said. “I felt used and manipulated. All I wanted was to get it over and be done with it. All of it.”

Scorpius watched, his heart breaking, as Harry angrily brushed aside tears and stood up.

“I’m going back to my hotel to get my things,” he said, running his fingers through his hair, making his fringe stand up and reminding Scorpius of the courageous boy in the Pensieve. “I didn’t bring much, but of course, I’ve managed to strew it everywhere.”

“And then you’re going to have supper with us,” Scorpius said, but Harry just smiled and shook his head.

“And then I’m going home,” he said.

Scorpius blinked at him. Harry couldn’t just leave!

Harry started looking in Scorpius’s father’s various boxes and bottles, searching for the Floo powder and swearing each time he encountered nothing but ground fugglewort or withered toad toes.

“I’m glad I came . . . dammit, where does Draco keep his powder . . .” he said distractedly, “. . . but it’s time to go. I’ve got to lead some new recruits through a drill simulating an outbreak at Azkaban. Tomorrow’s going to be a long . . .”

Scorpius didn’t wait to hear the rest of the sentence. Harry was not leaving. It simply wasn’t an option. He stood and grabbed Harry’s shoulders, giving him a shake as though Harry was in some kind of trance and causing him to drop a jar of locust wings.

“Fuck your new recruits,” he snarled. “You’re not leaving, Harry. I won’t let you.”

Before Harry could respond, Scorpius started kissing him – his mouth, his neck, his throat – while his hands tugged Harry’s shirt free of his jeans, his fingers clawing at bare skin, leaving behind bloody, swelling welts.
“You’re not leaving,” he hissed in Harry’s ear, making him shiver.

“Scorpius,” Harry said as soon as he caught his breath. “Don’t . . . this . . . you don’t want this.”

“I’m not a child anymore,” Scorpius replied, nipping at Harry’s mouth as he slid his hands down Harry’s back and into his jeans. “I know what I want, and I want you. I always have.”

Harry tipped his head back with a groan. Scorpius couldn’t tell if the sound was an admission of desire or defeat. It didn’t matter. As long as he had Harry in his arms, nothing else mattered – nothing else would ever matter again. He leaned down to bite one of Harry’s nipples through his shirt, making Harry’s thrust instinctively, rubbing their cocks together.

It took a moment or two, but at last Harry came alive. He combed his fingers into Scorpius’s hair and held his head still as he ravaged his mouth.

“God,” he gasped into their kiss. “Scorpius . . . please . . .”

At the sound of his name spoken in that famous voice, Scorpius’s knees went weak, his body nothing more substantial than a reed in the wind. One hand fumbled with the buttons of Harry’s shirt while the other cupped Harry’s swelling cock. He had to have Harry inside him, between his legs, thrusting hard, breaking him open, cracking his ribs apart, revealing his heart to be devoured. His head lulled back, baring his throat, as Harry sucked bruises to the surface of his skin. It was as though no time had passed. It was as though no Unforgivables had been cast. There’d never been promises broken. It’d always been them . . . it would always be them. They were timeless. They were forever . . . they were inevitable.

* * * * * * *

It was one of the hardest, most difficult things he’d ever done, but he had to do it – he’d never forgive himself if he didn’t. Making love to Scorpius would ruin Scorpius’s life. Hell, it would ruin both of their lives.

Harry took a deep breath, placed his hands on Scorpius’s shoulders . . . and gently pushed him away.

“I can’t,” he said. “I won’t. And what’s more, you don’t really want me to.”

Scorpius protested and reached for him, but Harry held his wrists. Scorpius had grown strong, but Harry was still stronger. His whole body ached to be touched, but he held his ground.

“Harry,” Scorpius said pleadingly, his voice lust-soaked and greedy. “I do want you. You have no idea how much.”

Harry laughed ruefully. “I don’t doubt it,” he said. “After what you’ve just seen. But if we made love, you’d been making love to a Chocolate Frog card – not to me. Not a fifty-something man with scars to prove every mistake he’s ever made. I’m not seventeen any longer, Scorpius. It’s been a very long time since I walked into that forest.”

“I know that,” Scorpius replied tearfully. “Harry, I’ve always known that.”

He let go of Scorpius’s wrists and pulled him into a hug, combing his fingers into Scorpius’s silky hair.

“If you’d always known that, we’d still be together,” he said.

When Scorpius began to cry, Harry pulled him closer.
“I’m sorry,” Scorpius sniffled. “I was cruel. I never should have left you like that. I never should have left you at all.”

“Leaving me was the smartest thing you’ve ever done,” Harry said gently, and as he was saying the words, he knew it was true. “Scorpius, you have a full life and a beautiful partner. You were happy until twenty-four hours ago. You followed your heart, but even more important, you followed your brain. You said our love was a vampire, draining our veins. You weren’t wrong.”

The adrenaline seemed to have retreated, and Scorpius sagged against his chest, his body heavy in Harry’s arms.

“One last time,” he said. “Please, Harry. I want you inside me.”

Harry’s body responded to Scorpius’s plea with a primal jolt of need. God, it would be so easy – so easy to strip each other naked, to consume each other again. Harry ached to be on his back with Scorpius straddling his hips again, impaling himself with a hungry sigh and then riding him hard. Harry could hear himself grunt with each upward thrust, all his strength and pent-up desire focused on giving and receiving pleasure, on the slick slide of penetration, on Scorpius’s thighs gripping his hips, holding on, fucking himself on Harry’s cock, his eyes fixed on Harry’s... those eyes. Those grey eyes. Draco’s eyes.

He groaned and pulled away. It couldn’t be. He couldn’t let it happen. He’d regret it for the rest of his life. Scorpius grabbed his collar, trying to tug him into another kiss, but Harry resisted even as the friction of his cock against his jeans brought him close to an orgasm.

“I want to make you come, Harry,” Scorpius begged. “I want to watch you come again.”

He had to go. He had to leave. He had to get out of there. All he could do was shake his head and redouble his search for the Floo powder. When at last he found it, he turned to look at Scorpius one last time.

“I love you,” he said. “I always have and I always will, but it ends here. It ends now,” and with that he stepped into the fireplace and called out the address of his hotel.

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When his father walked in, Scorpius was standing in the middle of the room, breathing hard, still trying to process what’d happened and get a grip on his emotions.

“Where’s Harry?” his father asked, looking around, frowning at the chaos Harry had created in his search for the Floo powder.

Scorpius collapsed on the couch and covered his face with his hands. He was shaking and fighting back tears.

“Scorpius?” his father said warily. “Are you alright? What happened?”

Scorpius dropped his hands and tipped his head back to stare at the ceiling. He couldn’t look at his father – not when he was still hard and the taste of Harry’s kiss was still so vivid in his mind. God, what a mess. He’d wanted Harry so badly.

“Don’t tell me...”

Scorpius could hear the burgeoning anger in his father’s voice.
“No, we didn’t,” he said.

His father sighed with relief.

“He wouldn’t,” Scorpius added dully.

Neither of the spoke again for several minutes. Scorpius merely watched while his father drained his Pensieve and cleaned out the basin. Even in his distracted state, Scorpius was aware of how unnecessarily thorough he was being.

“Is he leaving?” his father asked, casting a second Scourgify.

Scorpius merely nodded.

“You asked him to stay for supper?”

“Of course, I did,” Scorpius snapped and then immediately apologized. This situation was his doing, not his father’s.

But his father hadn’t even seemed to notice Scorpius’s tone. He started hunting around for something in his cabinets and drawers, swearing under his breath.

“Damn you, Harry,” he muttered.

“It wasn’t his fault,” Scorpius said. “It was mine. He didn’t do anything. It was me who wanted . . .”

His father waved his hand at him, and Scorpius fell silent.

“Dammit,” he muttered, still searching for whatever it was he was searching for.

Scorpius watched him. As unlikely as it might be, he felt both numb and gutted at the same time. Numb with loss and gutted by rejection. If this had been Harry’s revenge . . .

. . . but even as it crossed his mind, Scorpius knew it wasn’t true. Harry hadn’t made love to him because he didn’t want to overturn Scorpius’s life, not because he still harboured residual resentment. Throughout his visit, Harry had been consistently kind but distant. He’d clearly had no intention of trying to convince Scorpius they should resume their relationship. He’d even gone out of his way to talk to Khorve and make him feel comfortable and included. No, Harry’s rejection was not revenge. It was simply one among many acts of kindness – and, knowing Harry – repentance.

“I need your help.”

Scorpius was pulled from his thoughts by his father’s request. He turned to look at his father. He was holding his wand in one hand and a memory vial in the other.

Scorpius blinked at him. What was he doing?

“I need you to hold the vial for me,” his father said.

“What’re you doing?” Scorpius asked, standing up and walking over to where his father stood beside his desk.

“There’s something Harry needs to see,” he replied, but when Scorpius asked what it was, his father shook his head.
“It’s between me and Harry,” he said. “It doesn’t involve you at all.”

Despite their gentleness, his father’s words felt like a poison dart. Scorpius swallowed back tears. The thought of his father wanting to tell Harry something that didn’t include him was distressing, but his father didn’t notice his consternation. He handed Scorpius the vial and touched the tip of his wand to his head while at the same time whispering a memory extraction spell. Scorpius watched the tiny, shimmering wisp curl around the tip of the wand like a strand of candy floss.

God, he wished he knew what it was!

As soon as the wisp was safely stored inside the vial, his father tucked it in the pocket of his linen shirt and went to the fireplace, but just before he stepped in and said the Portkey hub’s address, Scorpius grabbed his arm.

“Tell him I’m sorry,” he pleaded.

His father cupped his cheek and gently kissed his forehead.

“Don’t worry,” he said. “I’m sure he knows.”

And then just like Harry, his father was gone.

* * * * * * * * *

The Port Moresby Portkey hub was packed. Harry felt trapped in a crush of people, moving far too slowly in far too many directions. God, all he wanted to do was get out of there and get home! The humidity was so thick it fogged his glasses. He’d cast a cooling charm on his clothes, but they were sticking to his skin anyway. Beads of sweat rolled down his temples . . . and the smell! The smell was terrible. Rubbish and dead fish from the docks. He tried to breathe through his mouth as much as he could, but it was impossible to escape the smell altogether.

He was focused so intently on the unpleasantness of his situation that it took several moments to realize that someone was calling his name. He stopped and looked around. The voice was familiar, but to his relief, it wasn’t Scorpius’s. It was Draco’s.

Finally Harry spotted him and waved. Draco pushed his way through the crowd and as soon as he was close enough, he grabbed Harry’s hand and pressed something small and cool against his palm. Harry was just about to apologize for having left without saying good-bye, when Draco turned and was quickly swallowed by a surge of people, his blond hair disappearing as though a cloud had engulfed the sun

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The sand was starting to cool beneath his feet when Scorpius finally stopped walking and sat down beneath a palm tree to watch the sun sink into the ocean. Out in the distance, a fishing vessel chugged its way back to shore followed by a flock of hungry gulls, while behind him, the forest chirped and buzzed with night creatures. He closed his eyes, breathing in the salty evening.

His longing for Harry had not abated despite having walked for hours in an effort to exhaust himself and clear his mind. The image of the brave boy walking into the Forbidden Forest remained seared into his memory as did the image of the man, flushed-cheeked and breathing hard, his cock pressing against Scorpius’s own . . .

. . . but even though the images refused to fade, others began to regain their solidity: a grateful patient, clutching his hand in hers; his father puttering around in his garden, grousing about the
insects; the exhilaration of a successful fire walk; Khorve . . . Khorve swimming in their favourite pool beneath the waterfall, his long hair swept back, his arms out, coaxing Scorpius into the clear, spring-fed water.

He belonged here. He’d been welcomed and accepted and loved. Harry was many things – he was danger and passion. Raw, jagged emotion; dark hair and green eyes; famous, reckless and beautiful. But he was also England. Scorpius didn’t want to go back to England. In fact, he was pretty sure he’d die if he went back to England.

His place was no longer at Harry’s side. Perhaps it never had been.

The tears were threatening to start when suddenly he heard a familiar voice call his name. He turned his head to see Khorve walking toward him, a blue sarong tied around his waist. He was wearing the necklace of shells Scorpius had made for him. It shimmered against the brown skin of his bare chest. Scorpius smiled at him.

“May I sit down?” Khorve asked when he was close enough, and Scorpius patted the sand beside him.

“You father told me Harry left.”

Scorpius turned his head to look out at the ocean again and nodded. The sun’s golden path stretched to the edge of the horizon. The waves were no more than gentle evening swells.

“I thought you might want some company.”

Scorpius smiled as his heart filled with fondness. Khorve took his hand and entwined their sandy fingers.

“I know it was hard,” he said.

Scorpius nodded again. The knot in his throat wouldn’t let him speak. It was threatening to stop his breath altogether. He squeezed his eyes tight and swallowed.

“You don’t have to talk about it,” Khorve said. “I just want you to know that I love you. All of you.”

Scorpius squeezed his hand as the tears slid down his cheeks.

“This is where I belong,” he said after a moment. “Here on this island with you – this is where I want to be, but it’s hard. Harry was everything to me. Everything. My father, my teacher, my lover. He was my world. It’s . . . it was hard to watch him go this afternoon.”

Khorve raised his Scorpius’s hand to his lips and kissed it softly.

“You don’t have to pretend to me that it was easy,” he said, but then added after a moment, “but you might need to pretend to your father that it was. Having Harry here seems to have upset him.”

Scorpius turned to look at Khorve with a frown.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean just that he seems, I don’t know . . . agitated, unhappy.”

“He and Harry have a lot of complicated history between them.”

“That’s exactly what he said when I came by his villa looking for you this afternoon. He said that
there are things he’s never told Harry, but that it was time Harry knew about them.”

Suddenly, Scorpius remembered the scene in his father’s office and how his father had extracted a memory and bottled it. Was there something he wanted Harry to see? And if so what was it?

But even as the questions crowded his mind, Scorpius realized he could never ask, and if he did, he knew his father would never answer.

“I wonder if he regrets having asked Harry to come here,” he mused, and Khorve snorted.

“My guess is, yes,” he said. “Although I have to say . . .” His words trailed away into silence.

“You have to say what?” Scorpius asked.

“I have to say that I think perhaps Connor was an excuse. I mean, after seeing the kid, I’m sure your father had the situation well under control. It was as though he used Connor’s obsession with Voldemort as a reason to see Harry again.”

Scorpius’s frowned deepened. It seemed unlikely. Harry had long been a forbidden subject between them. Moreover, his father must’ve known there’d be a risk that Harry and Scorpius would rekindle their relationship. Scorpius couldn’t think of a reason sufficiently important to make the chance worth it.

“I’m going to say something completely insane,” Khorve said after a moment during which they’d watched a crab scuttle from the forest back to the water’s edge, a snail clutched in one of its claws. “Promise me ahead of time that you won’t get angry.”

Scorpius arched an eyebrow; Khorve had sparked his curiosity.

“I promise,” he said.

Khorve took a deep breath. “Okay,” he said. “And remember you promised . . .”

Scorpius nodded. “Go on.”

“. . . I think your father has feelings for Harry.”

Scorpius almost fell over.

“What?”

“You promised you wouldn’t get angry.”

“I’m not angry, I’m just . . . what on earth makes you think that? They were enemies in school. Harry arrested him and put me in an orphanage, and then he . . . well, you know . . . I mean, if my father feels anything toward Harry it would be anger or even hatred.”

Khorve shrugged. “Sometimes it takes an outsider’s perspective on a situation to see things the people involved can’t.”

“Like what things?” Scorpius pressed.

“Like the way your father watches Harry when Harry’s not looking. Like the way he seems to stumble over his words when Harry’s around. Admit it. Your father never stumbles over his words any other time.”
Scorpius thought back. Yes, his father had gotten animated when they’d discussed Connor, but had he stumbled over his words? Scorpius couldn’t remember . . . but then again, all his attention had been on Harry. He barely remembered anything his father had said at all.

“It just doesn’t make sense,” he said. He was not at all sure how he felt about Khorve’s observations. His father having feelings for Harry? It simply wasn’t possible.

“Anyway,” Khorve said quickly, obviously sensing he was making a difficult situation even more difficult, “I just wanted to forewarn you that your father is not in the best of moods. Maybe we shouldn’t have supper at his place tonight.”

“If he’s upset, that’s all the more reason to go,” Scorpius replied. The thought of his father upset about anything upset him as well.

Khrove smiled, wrapping his arms loosely around Scorpius’s shoulders, and kissed Scorpius’s forehead when Scorpius laid his head against his chest.

“I love that you want to take care of your father,” he said. “It’s one of the many things I love about you.”

“Well, he took care of me,” Scorpius replied. “There were many times he went without basic things so that I could have them.”

“You’ve been his life,” Khorve said.

Suddenly, unbidden, a thought flashed across Scorpius’s mind. Khorve was right. He really had been his father’s whole life ever since he was released from Azkaban . . . which meant . . . which meant he’d spent long months completely alone while Scorpius was at school or living in New Guinea. His father must’ve been terribly lonely! Why had that never occurred to him before?

As though Khorve had read his mind, he asked, “do you think your father has ever had a girlfriend. I mean since your mother?”

Scorpius shook his head. He would’ve known about it.

“He didn’t get out much,” he said. “The only places he ever went were the library and art gallery. He wasn’t allowed to venture any further. I know he visited Harry at St. Mungo’s now and then, but otherwise . . . well, and then there’s the job he got at Slug & Jigger’s . . . But, no. I feel sure I would know if he’d ever been in some kind of relationship. Hell, my poor father didn’t even have friends in England, let alone someone who was more than a friend.”

Khrove shuddered. He came from a huge, close-knit family. The thought of being alone must horrify him.

Scorpius stood and offered Khrove his hand. Thinking about his father’s long months of solitude was breaking his heart almost as much as Harry’s departure had.

“Let’s head back,” he said.

Khrove stood and brushed the sand off his sarong.

“No need to argue with me,” he said. “I’m famished.”

Scorpius laughed and settled his arm on Khrove’s shoulders. The sun had set, and the forest was alive with every sound imaginable. The stars’ reflections lay scattered on the ocean’s surface as
though someone had cast a handful of diamonds on its dark surface. Scorpius felt a stab of sadness. It would’ve been nice to share this time of day with Harry . . . but then again, he knew they wouldn’t be walking arm-in-arm like he and Khorve were. They’d probably be making love in the waves, oblivious to the living beauty around them. Oblivious to any and everything except each other.

*That’s not what I want, Scorpius reminded himself. I wanted it once, but it’s not what I want anymore.*

The night sky was obscured by a clammy fog when Harry arrived in London. He was exhausted, but at the same time, he knew he’d never sleep. Why go back to his flat when all he’d probably do was get drunk and pass out – anything to erase the recollection of the past few hours . . .

. . . but then he remembered the memory vial in his pocket and curiosity overrode the desire for escape. He Apparated straight from the Port Key hub to the Ministry building. It was well after midnight. His footsteps echoed in the morgue-like stillness. He smiled. He liked the Ministry building best when he was the only one there.

The DMLE’s floor was equally quiet and dark, although he noticed a few offices with lights on and people hunched over parchments, scribbling away with their department-issue quills. He passed silently. He didn’t want to talk to anyone, even Lily if she was there . . . perhaps even especially Lily. He wasn’t ready to discuss his trip to New Guinea – assuming, that is, he ever would be.

When he reached the Memory Retrieval Room, he unlocked the door and pointed his wand at the lamp until the air hummed with harsh fluorescent light. Unlike Draco’s enormous, ornamental Pensieve, the department’s was made of utilitarian, white porcelain reminiscent of a sink or – even worse – a toilet bowl. To Harry’s disgust, someone had left behind greenish water that’d caused a scummy ring to encircle the rim. He made a mental note to tell Briac to send out a memo about the proper use and care of the Pensieve. Harry could see it already:

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Everyone  
FROM: Head Auror Gwencalon  
RE: Care and cleaning of the department Pensieve

No one likes to stick their face in the cold residue of your revolting memories. Clean the bloody Pensieve after you use it, you arseholes, or you’ll be scrubbing the holding cell Muggle-style.

*Have a good day.*

Harry had to cast *Scourgify* twice before the Pensieve was clean enough that Draco’s memories wouldn’t mix with the previous user’s – a prospect that made Harry shudder. Sometimes the Aurors used the Pensieve to watch the previous night’s visit to the brothel, and there were things about his colleagues that Harry could live happily never knowing.

When the Pensieve was sufficiently clean, Harry filled it with water and pulled Draco’s memory vial from his pocket. He held it up to the light as though the wisps inside could show him a prelude of what he was about to see. After a minute he pulled out the cork and poured the bottle’s contents in the water, watching their iridescent rainbows spread like petrol in a puddle.

He had no idea what to expect, and given the emotionally tumultuous afternoon, he wasn’t sure he could cope rationally if Draco’s memories upset him. This probably was the wrong time to do this, but his curiosity exceeded his caution. He took off his glasses, drew a deep breath and plunged his
face beneath the surface.

As was always the case, it took a minute or two before he realized where he was, but when he did, he understood immediately that Draco’s memory was a response to his own. He was standing in Hogwarts’ courtyard in a crowd of students and teachers. Draco was among them. He was wearing his school uniform, and there were splatters of blood on his singed shirt. His nose was puffy and bleeding from Ron’s punch. Behind the crowd, small fires burned amidst the rubble, casting dancing shadows on the blackened grass, while overhead, Dementors swirled like ragged sheets caught in a wind, their bony hands glinting white in moonlight soon to be extinguished by a gathering storm.

Harry walked closer. The crowd was silent. All eyes were fixed on the edge of the forest. They were waiting for something, and in a flash, Harry knew instinctively that they were waiting for some news of his whereabouts. The hour Voldemort had given them had tolled. Something was about to happen, and everyone looked terrified, even the Slytherins. No one’s face revealed wishful satisfaction. There was nothing but soot and tears and sickly pallor.

Harry walked even closer until he was standing at Draco’s side.

“He ran away, didn’t he?” Pansy whispered.

“Shut up,” Blase whispered back.

Pansy ignored him and turned to Draco.

“What will happen if he ran away?”

Draco didn’t answer. His eyes were fixed on the forest’s edge. Harry watched him swallow several times in quick succession.

“The Dark Lord’s not going to kill us,” Pansy said, but she sounded less than confident.

“Shut up, Blase hissed.

Draco covered his face with both his hands and then slid his fingers through his hair, streaking the blond with soot. His eyes were red-rimmed and glassy with tears.

Harry knew what was about to happen. Of course, he did. He was there. He knew that soon they’d all see Hagrid bearing his seemingly lifeless body. There’d be an explosion of screams and commotion.

Sure enough. Suddenly, Harry heard Hermione cry his name, and then she was joined by a chorus.

“NO!” Minerva screamed, running forward, her expression wild with grief and fear. Ginny covered her eyes and fell into her mother’s arms. Ron looked frozen, his face contorted in a mask of rage.

Harry turned back to the Slytherins, bracing himself for their celebratory cheers.

They didn’t come. Instead, the Slytherins seemed stunned as though despite all their faith in Voldemort, they’d never actually believed Harry would be killed. Even Pansy turned away, trying to bury her face against Draco’s shoulder . . .

. . . but Draco stepped aside so quickly that she nearly toppled over.

Harry looked at him. Obviously, it was this moment that Draco wanted him to see. His face was drained of colour and his lips were parted as though he’d been in the midst of saying something, but
the sight of Harry’s corpse had struck him dumb. He stood still for a moment . . .

. . . and then he turned and started pushing his way back to the castle, shoving people aside and swearing at them when they didn’t move fast enough. Harry followed him. Once he was alone, Draco looked around wildly, his hands clenched in fists. He looked as crazy as Minerva had.

*Coward, Harry found himself thinking. Of course, Draco ran away . . .

But then he watched as Draco fell against a wall, his cheek pressed against the blackened stone and his eyes squeezed shut around tears. He slid slowly to his knees, shaking all over, clawing at the crumbling masonry.

“Harry,” he whispered, choking on the word.

He banged his head against the wall until a blossom of blood seeped through his pale hair and then he started to sob into his bleeding hands.

“Fuck you,” he moaned, banging his head again. “Oh, God . . . fuck you, Harry.”

Suddenly, there came a frantic voice – a woman’s voice crying Draco’s name.

For a long time, Draco just sat there frozen, but then he took a shallow breath.

“Over here,” he called weakly, staggering to his feet. “I’m over here, mother.”
Minerva lifted her head from the Pensieve and summoned a towel to dry her face. Harry watched her closely from the tartan couch by the fire. She’d just viewed Draco’s memory, and he wanted to see if her face would give him a clue as to what she would say about it.

He’d been waiting for what felt like forever for her to emerge. To him, it’d seemed like the memory had only lasted a few minutes, but she was gone much longer than that – long enough, in fact, that Harry had the time for a leisurely glass of whisky and a rather dull conversation with Armando Dippet’s portrait.

“Well,” she said as she patted her face, her expression even more pinched than usual. “That was quite something.”

When she sat down, he poured her a glass of whisky and handed it to her. She sipped it distractedly as she gazed into the fire. He wanted to yell at her to hurry up and tell him what she thought, but he knew she needed to process what she’d just seen. It couldn’t have been easy for her – after all, she, too, had been there that night. Like everyone else, she’d thought he was dead and Hogwarts was finished. Like everyone else, she’d thought Voldemort had won.

He looked around her office while he waited for her to collect herself. Severus was absent, but Albus was there. He seemed to have guessed what Minerva had seen; he looked weary and sad.

At last Minerva broke the silence – and when she did, she was looking at Albus too.

“Did you know about that as well?” she asked, her voice a mixture of resentment and resignation. “You seemed to have known everything else. Poor, poor Draco.”

Albus sighed.

“Would it have made a difference if I did?” he asked.

Minerva pressed her lips in a bloodless line.

“Not to you,” she said evenly.

Harry wanted to clear his throat and remind her that he was in the room. Being talked about in riddles was a familiar – and unwelcome – occurrence when he visited Hogwarts, although usually it was the portraits arguing in whispers with each other, not with one of the living.

“Harry lived,” Albus said. “Draco had his chance . . .”

She leaned back with a sigh and a shake of her head.

“You can’t convince me that you can’t figure it out on your own,” she said. “Even you aren’t that dense, Potter.”

He scowled, but when he realised she was fighting back a laugh, he rolled his eyes. Some things would never change. He dropped his gaze to his glass, watching the fire light play in the amber liquid.

“I always knew that Draco . . . in colloquial terms . . . fancied you,” she said.

Harry’s head snapped up.

“Fancied me?”

She chuckled. “And I always knew that you fancied him as well.”

Harry opened his mouth, but she held up her hand.

“Save your breath,” she said. “All of your protestations will fall on deaf ears. You were a boy, Harry. A confused, over-burdened boy tugged in a hundred different directions. You couldn’t see what the rest of us saw.”

“The ‘rest of you’?” he said, disbelievingly.

“Except for Hagrid, of course,” she said fondly. “But then again, there are a lot of things that escape Hagrid’s attention.”

“So,” Harry said, pouring himself a much-needed second glass of whisky. “Draco and I fancied each other — and moreover, it was obvious. It certainly wasn’t obvious to me. Even the fact I was gay wasn’t obvious to me back then. Minerva, Draco wanted me to lose the Triwizard Tournament. He cast an Unforgivable at me. He stomped on my face, for heaven’s sake!”

“My point precisely,” she said.

Harry just shook his head.

“And me? I just wanted to avoid him.”

“Again, my point exactly. You may have wanted to avoid him, but Harry, you had eyes for no one else.”

“But Ginny. . .”

“Were you ever attracted to Ginny?” she asked.

“She’s beautiful.”

“You’re gay.”

“Draco was a prat.”

“So were you.”
Harry laughed.

They sat for a while in companionable silence while Harry turned her words over in his mind. Outside, the wind whistled through the castle’s turrets, carrying the calls of owls and the distant howling of the wolves in the forest. The sounds gave him a delicious shiver. Yes, Scorpius loved the sound of his frogs and insects, but Harry loved the sound of the wind in the moors and the cold scent of the deep mountain lakes.

After a few minutes, Minerva broke the silence.

“He clearly wanted you to know he wasn’t unaffected by your seeming death,” she said. “Showing him your memory of walking into the forest must’ve triggered all those emotions again. He must’ve been thrust backward – back to that night.”

“So now what?” Harry asked.

“So ‘now what,’ indeed,” was her irritating reply.

Harry stood and started pacing, glass in hand.

“I mean, what should I do?” he said. “Do I send him a letter? Do I say nothing? What do I do, Minerva? I honestly have no idea.”

“What do you want to do?” she asked. “That’s the only question you need to answer.”

“I don’t know what I want to do,” he said honestly. “I haven’t a bloody clue.”

“Do you love him?”

Harry stopped pacing and collapsed back onto the couch.

“My feelings for Draco are . . . complicated,” he replied, and she laughed – as did Albus. Harry wanted to glare at him but decided to ignore him instead.

“I’ve been in love with his son for years,” he said. “How can they not be complicated? Are you saying I was never really in love with Scorpius – that all this time, it’s really been Draco I’ve been in love with?”

Minerva shook her head. “No,” she replied. “No one but a fool would think that, but you have feelings for Draco independent of Scorpius. You know you do. You two have spent a considerable amount of time together. I’m sure I wasn’t the only one who noted that Draco visited you every day in St. Mungo’s for more than five years. Were you indifferent to his presence?”

Harry shook his head. He remembered how devastating Draco’s sudden disappearance and subsequent departure had been.

“Scorpius and Draco may look alike, but they’re very much two different people,” she said.

Harry drained the rest of his glass. It was late, and he still had to return to his office before he went home. There was going to be a raid tomorrow – importers of illegal potions – and he needed to review the final plan. It would be quite routine, but there’d be new recruits with him. Whenever new recruits were involved in a raid, anything could go wrong.

“I could always do nothing,” he said.

Minerva nodded. “That is always an option, and I daresay it may be the one Draco would prefer. Just
because he chose to show you his memory doesn’t mean he wants to discuss it.”

Harry set his glass on the table and stood with a yawn and a stretch. He still had no idea what he wanted to do, but it’d been good to talk to someone. Minerva walked him to the door, her hand on his shoulder.

“Think about it carefully,” she said. “But do it when you’re sober.”

He laughed. She knew him too well.

They embraced, but just before he left, Minerva stopped him.

“I think you should at least write a letter,” she said. “He’s obviously a haunted man,” then she paused before adding, “You both are.”

* * * * * * * * *

It was cold. If he wasn’t running as fast as he could, he knew he’d probably freeze. It must be winter beyond the maze of stone corridors. There was no wind, but the torches’ flames wavered in the air stirred by his passing. Ahead of him, the blond boy turned another corner. Harry was gaining on him. He ran even harder, his breath tearing at his lungs. He had to catch the boy – if he didn’t, it would be too late and all would be lost. His heart lunged against his ribs like an animal trying to escape its cage. He was getting closer and closer . . . he stretched out his arm as far as he could and closed his fist on the wool of the boy’s black robe and pulled with all his might. The boy fell backwards, right into his arms.

It was Draco. He turned in Harry’s arms. His sneering face was flushed and damp with sweat.

“It’s about time, Potter,” he said. He was about to say something more when Harry leaned forward and kissed him.

“Shut up,” he said against Draco’s mouth. “I could say the exact same thing to you.”

Harry woke with a start, his heart pounding. Just as he’d been in his dream, he was panting for breath and soaked with sweat.

There he had it. Finally. After all these years he had an answer. The boy in his dream was Draco. For all these years, he’d been dreaming of Draco.

He lay still for a long time, staring up at the ceiling. He felt queasy even though he’d gone to bed sober. On his chest, the scorpion pendant wriggled happily. Harry covered his face with his hands before turning his head to look at the clock on his bedside table. It was not even midnight yet. He’d never get back to sleep.

He sat up and put his feet on the floor. He was in his bedroom, but everything seemed strange, as though he’d stepped through the frame of a Van Gogh painting. The floor felt uneven. The windows looked crooked. The pile of laundry in the corner seemed to breathe.

He scrubbed his face. Maybe it wasn’t the dream; maybe he merely needed a drink. He hadn’t had one for more than a day. Who knew how dependent on whisky his sanity had grown? He got up and pulled on a t-shirt and a pair of jeans. The air was chilly but he didn’t put on socks. He felt unsteady, and the coolness of the floorboards grounded him – at least enough that he didn’t need to lean against the wall as he walked down the shadowy hallway to his living room.

There was an unopened bottle of whisky in his liquor cabinet. He poured himself a glass and drained
it in a single swallow and then poured himself another. The alcohol’s warmth soothed his stomach, but it did nothing at all to untangle his thoughts. Draco. For all these years, it’d been Draco . . . but then again, he’d re-watched Draco’s memory before he left the office that evening. Wasn’t it possible that dream and memory had merged? He’d been thinking about Draco nonstop for three days . . . didn’t it make sense that he’d dream about him, too?

Harry drained his second glass and poured himself a third. Getting drunk wasn’t the worst thing he could do – hell, under the circumstances, it seemed like the only thing to do. Long gone were the days he could fire call Briac, and Minerva had clearly already said everything she was going to say on the subject of Draco and his memory . . .

At least write a letter . . .

Harry shook his head and laughed out loud. Write Draco a letter? First of all, Draco was an infinitely better writer than he was and would probably find his mumblings nothing but contemptible. Second, Draco had given him no indication he would even want to receive a letter, and finally, what the hell would he say?

But then again, maybe that was the whole point of writing a letter instead of making a fire call – you didn’t have to know what you were going to say ahead of time. You could just start writing and see what came out, and if what came out was gibberish, you didn’t have to send the letter.

What the hell, right? What was there to lose? Just because he wrote the letter didn’t mean he’d have to send it. At the very least, it would kill the time until he was drunk enough to pass out. He found a piece of parchment and a quill and sat down at his dining room table with another glass of whisky and the half-empty bottle close at hand.

It was a long time before he dipped the quill in ink and even longer before he started writing, but at last he did . . . and once he started, he couldn’t stop.

Draco,

It’s not even midnight, and I’m drunk off my arse. I’m sure that doesn’t surprise you considering how much of your liquor I consumed in the single night I was there in New Guinea. My daughter thinks I have a “drinking problem.” She’s not wrong. I do. I also have several other problems too many and too boring to go into – I’m just saying all of this so you’ll know I’m not in some state of denial. I am who I am, and after what you saw the other day, I think you know why.

I can’t say I understand entirely why you showed me your memory, but I’m nonetheless grateful. I have often imagined how you reacted and have always assumed you were glad I was dead (or seemingly dead). Thinking that you were glad made me not want to like you after the War was over. How could I like someone I assumed wished I had died and Voldemort had won? Why would I seek out your friendship? All I wanted was to forget I’d ever met you. But it wasn’t easy. I thought about you a lot. Mostly angry thoughts, but sometimes I was just curious about what you were doing and what kind of person you were becoming.

I showed your memory to Minerva (I hope that’s alright), and she told me that you and I always fancied each other. She even said that practically all the faculty thought so too. I don’t know what to make of her explanation as to why you showed me your memory. I like to think it was because seeing mine connected us in some way, but I don’t know what that connection is exactly or what I want to do about it. Are you in love with me, Draco? If so, you need to tell me. Remember how dense I can be. I’ve never been good at reading people’s minds, especially when it comes to things like this.
I don’t know if I love you, but I do know I want you in my life in some way. I don’t feel the same way about Scorpius anymore. He needs to live without me and me without him. He’s happy. I don’t want to ruin that. But are you happy? Am I happy? Am I merely asking drunken rhetorical questions by this point?

The one thing that I do know is that I’m lonely and that you make me feel less lonely when we spend time together. Does that mean I love you? I don’t know. If I do, it all feels very different from my love for Scorpius.

I’ve already decided that there is no way in hell that I’m actually going to send this letter, so I can ask you what happened after the end of your memory? What happened when you went home with your parents? Were you still thinking of me even though you knew by then that I was alive? And if you did, what was it that you thought? I wish I knew the answers to these questions because I think they’d help me make up my mind and figure out what I want to do.

I won’t deny it. I have feelings for you, but they’re complicated and I’m afraid. I’m afraid that if we talk that you’ll tell me I’m mad for thinking any of this. I couldn’t bear that. I’m tired, Draco. So so tired. I think at this point I might be living for no other reason than my children. There, how’s that for a confession. It’s something I can’t imagine telling anyone else, but I think you get it. I think that the faint hope you might see Scorpius again is what kept you alive in Azkaban. Most people simply give up and waste away, but you didn’t.

Well, now I’m officially drunk. It’s time for me to either throw up or pass out. I prefer the latter. Part of me wishes I could send this letter, but a bigger part is glad that I won’t. I feel many things for you, but trust isn’t necessarily among them. I wouldn’t be surprised if the feeling is mutual.

Sincerely Yours,
Harry

***************

A gentle hand brushed the hair off his brow making room for an even gentler kiss. Harry blinked. His eyes were gummy and he didn’t have his glasses, but he could still see his daughter’s shining hair. He tried to sit up, but the room tipped, and his stomach rolled over. He squinted at the table with its empty whisky bottle and collapsed back onto the couch, covering his face with his hands.

“I’m sorry, Lils,” he groaned. “I forgot we’d planned to have brunch this morning.”

She sighed. “It’s okay. The Dragon’s Nest will survive a Sunday without us.”

“Sweetheart . . .”

“No, really,” she said. “It’s okay, but . . .”

He struggled to sit again, but his stomach couldn’t take it. He got up and staggered to the bathroom with only a moment to spare and no time to cast a silencing charm so his daughter wouldn’t have to listen to him being sick.

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck fuck.

Christ, he was a mess. How horrible for Lily to come in and find her father passed out like a drunkard under a bridge.

He spat in the sink and washed his mouth out before splashing his face with cold water. What an arsehole he was!
When he stumbled back to the living room, he found her standing at the window, her arms wrapped around herself. He went to her and pulled her into a hug. As always, she smelled like lilacs. At his demand, she never wore perfume in the field anymore, but that didn’t mean she’d given it up all together. The springtime scent of lilac was as much a part of her as her purple, rhinestone glasses and her unicorn-horn wand.

“I’m so sorry, flower,” he whispered into her hair.

She gently pushed him away.

“You smell terrible,” she said. She sounded old and tired well beyond her years.

He sniffed under his arms and winced.

“Briac used to find that endearing,” he said.

She smiled weakly.

“You miss him, don’t you?”

He shrugged and went to the kitchen. The subject of Briac was almost as painful as the subject of Scorpius and Draco. He knew his friend still loved him like a brother, but Briac had turned into the very epitome of a family man. He was devoted to Elizabeth and the children, and nothing got in the way of spending time with them. Yes, he and Harry still drank coffee in Harry’s office every morning as they went over that days plans, and yes, they still met for a drink every Wednesday evening, but that was it. For all intents and purposes, Briac was no longer a part of his life. Harry saw him more often in the pages of The Prophet than he did anywhere else.

“I wish people would stop breaking your heart,” Lily said angrily.

“You haven’t broken my heart,” he replied, winking at her, trying to soften her mood. “Tea?”

“But I’m your daughter,” she said. “You need a friend.”

“Daughters can’t be friends?”

She sighed. “I’m serious, daddy,” she said. “You need someone – what will happen when I go to Latvia . . . ?”

She clapped a hand over her mouth, her brown eyes wide with chagrin. Harry stared at her.

“What?” he said. “Latvia? What are you talking about?”

She bit her lip as tears filled her eyes. “I’m so sorry,” she said. “I didn’t mean to say that . . . I mean, I wanted to tell you properly.”

“Tell me what?” Harry said, dread taking the place of queasiness.

“I’ve been offered the position of assistant head of their department of magical law enforcement,” she said wretchedly. “Daddy, I won’t go if you don’t want me to. Please just tell me . . . I can’t bear the thought of you all alone.”

Harry’s mind reeled. His groggy brain was having trouble processing her words. Latvia? Assistant head of their law enforcement department? Lily? His Lily? He shook his head, trying to unclog his thoughts. The last thing on earth he wanted was for her to think he wasn’t anything but excited and happy for her.
“Lils!” he said, sweeping her up in his arms and spinning her around like he used to do when she was a little girl. “That’s brilliant news! How long have you known? I can’t believe you kept it a secret from me!”

She tried to pretend she wasn’t as pleased at his response as she clearly was, but she couldn’t hold back a grin.

“So, it’s okay if I go?” she asked.

“Okay?” Harry replied. “The only thing that wouldn’t be ‘okay’ is if you don’t go! But first you have to tell me something . . .”

She raised both eyebrows, obviously wondering what the caveat was.

“. . . you’ll have to tell me where the hell Latvia is.”

She laughed and rolled her eyes playfully. “It’s between Estonia and Lithuania – Russia is to the east.”

Harry frowned. “That’s a lawless area of the world. The Muggles have things figured out fairly well, but the wizarding communities . . .”

“. . . which is why it’s all the more exciting,” she said.

“Spoken like a true Potter.”

“And a true Weasley,” she reminded him.

“So your mother’s okay with the idea?”

“I haven’t told her yet. I wanted you to be the first to know, but I think she’ll be excited for me. My brothers, however. They’re going to put up a fight.”

“That’s just because they’re protective of you.”

“*Overly* protective.”

He returned to the kitchen, filled the kettle and set it on the stove. Now that his back was turned, he could let his face settle into an expression of doubt – and fear. Albus and James weren’t the only ones who felt perhaps overly protective of Lily. But then again, he reminded himself, she was an experienced Auror, and being an assistant to the head of law enforcement might mean more paperwork and less field work. He could only hope.

When the water started boiling he poured it into the lavender tea pot she had given him when she was ten. She giggled when he brought it to the table.

“You still have that old thing?” she said.

“Of course, I do,” Harry replied. “I’ve never thrown away anything you children have given me.”

“Except for that Pygmy Puff.”

Harry sighed. The poor thing had only lasted a few days in his keeping.

“You’d forgot I can’t even take care of house plants,” he said.
She came over to the table and sat down next to him. They were quiet for a while as they drank their tea, but then Lily rested her hand on top of his.

“The only reason I don’t want to go,” she said, “is you. I’ll worry all the time.”

“You worry all the time now,” Harry replied lightly. “You’ll just worry from a thousand miles away.”

Her eyes filled with tears. He squeezed her hand.

“I was joking,” he said.

“Maybe you were,” she replied. “But it’s true.”

“There are such things as Port Keys,” he replied. “And if worse came to worst, there are always Muggle planes.”

“But it won’t be the same,” she said as the tears started to fall. “I see you every day now. How often will I see you when I’m in Riga?”

“As often as you can stand to put up with me,” he said. Her tears were threatening to trigger his own. He would never tell her in a million years, but he couldn’t begin to picture his life without her. The mere thought crushed his heart.

They were both saved from their tears by an sudden urgent fire call from Briac.

“Harry!” he shouted.

Harry went to his fireplace and got down on his knees.

“Christ, no need to yell,” he said.

Briac laughed even though it was clear he was under stress.

“Yes, I do,” he said. “You’re usually passed out on your couch around this time.”

Harry scowled at him. “That is simply not true,” he replied. “Lily and I are usually having brunch this time on Sundays.”

He swallowed as soon as the words left his mouth. Sunday brunch with his daughter was soon going to become nothing but a fond memory.

“Hurry up and tell me what’s got your knickers in a twist,” he said. “I’m a busy man.”

Usually Briac would say something like “yeah, busy getting drunk and trying to get laid,” but he didn’t. Obviously something serious was troubling him.

“It’s the Craven gang,” Briac said. “They’re planning an attack at a Muggle wedding. Apparently Henry Craven, himself, had been seeing this woman – as unlikely as that is, I know, and wants to take revenge by killing her, the groom and all of their families.”

“By what means?” Harry asked, glad for the distraction. Craven was a real piece of work. Harry had been following his “career” for years, waiting to catch him doing something illegal. So far the man had been far too cautious and wily. He’d been driving Harry round the bend.

“Poisonous gas,” Briac said.
Harry grinned. He liked revenge attacks. They were always spur-of-the-moment and poorly planned. The human heart was not a patient organ – it was almost as impatient as the cock.

“Time and place?” he asked.

“Two o’clock. Bassenthwaite chapel – Saint Bega, not Saint John.”

“Cumbria, right?”

“Across the lake from Setmurthy.”

“Got it,” Harry said, he was just about to end the call when Briac stopped him.

“It’s gas, Harry. Don’t go alone.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “I’ve handled more gas attacks than I can count,” he said. “I’ll be fine.”

Briac sighed. “I hate that you do this,” he said. “I hate your death wish. And sometimes I even hate you, too.”

“Join the club,” Harry replied. “The dues are ten quid per month, but since you’re a long-time friend, I’ll give you a discount and make it seven.”

Briac didn’t even bother replying before he disappeared.

“I agree with Briac,” Lily said, coming up behind him.

Harry started. He’d momentarily forgot she was there.

“What about hating me?” he asked.

“No, of course not,” she replied. “About hating your death wish.”

“It’s not a death wish. It’s a preference. No one is as good as I am in the field. Why risk another Auror’s life when I’m more than capable of handling things on my own?”

“I’m certain that if you had a boyfriend, you’d stop being so reckless.”

Harry sighed. This was a familiar topic of discussion that frankly he’d not miss terribly much.

“Depends on the boyfriend,” he said. “Some men are attracted to risk-takers.”

“You’re more than a risk-taker,” she replied.

Harry stood and brushed off his jeans. Christ, he needed to sweep his hearth!

“I want to hear more about Latvia,” he said, changing the subject. “Are you free tonight for dinner?”

She pretended to think about his question for a moment.

“Of course, I am,” she replied. “I’m always free for you.”

She stood up on her tip-toes and gave him a hug.

“Be careful,” she said, her cheek resting against his chest. “Every time I say good-bye to you before you go out in the field, I worry it’ll be our last.”
He closed his eyes and kissed the top of her head. As much as it was going to break his heart when she left, he was relieved that she’d no longer know every time he had an assignment. Maybe she could pretend he was at the office every day.

“I’ll see you tonight,” Harry said. “We’ll go anywhere you want – even that horrible Muggle diner with the American-style bun burgers.”

She laughed. It was the last thing he heard before he Apparated to the Ministry building.

* * * * * * * *

The morning sun was drying last night’s rain, and Scorpius and Khorve were just about to sit down for breakfast when the courier owl from the Port Moresby owlery scratched at the screen.

“It’s from Lily,” Scorpius said before he even retrieved the envelope.

Khorve cocked his head. “How do you know? You haven’t even opened it yet.”

Scorpius came over and handed it to him before sitting down on one of the raw-silk cushions circling their table.

“It smells like her,” he replied. “She’s worn the same perfume since we were in school together.”

“I wish I could meet her someday,” Khorve said, inhaling deeply. “She sounds like the sister you never had.”

Scorpius thought about his words for a moment and realized it was true. She’d always looked out for him – even after that terrible, snowy night so many years ago.

“She’s lovely,” he said. “Inside and out. She looks out for Harry more than anyone else.”

“Not an easy job, I’m sure,” Khorve said, returning the letter to Scorpius and digging into his bowl of honeyed rice.

“That’s the understatement of the year,” Scorpius replied. He leaned back against his cushion and opened Lily’s letter. There were two pieces of parchment inside. One was lavender; the other was standard off-white.

Scorpius unfolded Lily’s letter first and started reading it out loud.

Dearest Scorpius,

I hope this letter finds you happy and well. I remember fondly my time in New Guinea and am sure you’re enjoying the beautiful forests (btw, I’ve heard you’ve managed to convince the Muggle government to make the northern half of the forest a National Park – congratulations!)

I’m writing because I wanted you to know that I’m moving soon. I was given the job of assistant head of the department of magical law enforcement in Latvia. I start in two weeks. As you can imagine, I am dreadfully worried about my dad. He’ll never admit it, but I know my leaving will be hard for him. He loves me very much, and with Briac and James involved with their families and Albus away with his team most of the time, my dad is going to be very lonely.

I’m not telling you this to try to make you feel guilty. My dad would never forgive me if you suddenly showed up in London. He knows you’re happy where you are, and he doesn’t want that to change. As you probably can imagine, I don’t understand how you could’ve left him like you did, but he does and that’s what matters in the end.
I’ve enclosed something with my letter that I want you to read and give to your father. It’s addressed to him from my dad. I found it the other day when he left me alone in his flat to go into the field on an assignment. I’m taking a terrible risk by sending it to you, and I beg you to treat the situation with discretion and gentleness. I know it will be strange – how can it not be strange to hear that my dad might have had feelings for your father once. I know that it might even hurt you, but I needed to do this. If your father feels anything for my dad, then, like me, he’ll be worried that my dad might not be safe after I’m gone. He drinks too much and goes out alone in the field. I know this probably isn’t a revelation, but I think it might get even worse.

I don’t know what I want your father to do. Maybe he could start a correspondence with my dad or maybe fire call once and a while. I’m not expecting more than that.

Please help me, Scorpius, and even more importantly, please help my dad. Remember that you loved him once upon a time.

Yours Always and Forever,
Lily

Scorpius’s hands were shaking when he refolded Lily’s letter. So she was leaving England. Harry was going to be devastated. How could it be otherwise? Lily was his darling – his “little flower” as he used to call her and maybe still did.

“She loves her father a great deal,” Khorve said. “Just as you love yours.”

Scorpius nodded. “She’s one of the few things that have kept him alive over the years,” he said.

His hands were still shaking when he opened the letter Harry had written but clearly intended not to send. Like he’d done with Lily’s letter, he read it aloud to Khorve. When he was finished, they just sat there, staring at each other, stunned.

“Are you okay?” Khorve asked anxiously.

Scorpius merely sat there, open-mouthed. “Okay” was not even a word in his vocabulary anymore. It’d given way to “shocked” and “gutted” – maybe even “appalled.” Of all the things he might’ve expected, admissions of romantic feelings had not been among them.

“What am I going to do?” he said. “Khorve, what am I going to do?”

Khorve reached across the table and took his hand. Scorpius closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Sunlight danced behind his lids as a breeze caused the leaves outside to sway, casting fleeting shadows and revealing vein-filled light.

“You face two outcomes,” Khorve said. “If you don’t give the letter to your father, you’ll hurt Lily, but if you do give it to your father, you’ll . . .”

His words trailed off.

Scorpius opened his eyes. “Exactly,” he said. “What on earth would my father say?”

Khorve was quiet for a long time. From outside came the sound of cockatoos squawking at each other, battling over a gumnuts.

“Again, there are two outcomes,” he said. “Either your father will be touched and want to try to help – or he’ll . . .”
“Have a fit?”

“Oh worse.”

Scorpius scrubbed his face with his hands. How could this be happening? It was surreal.

“Do you think it’s true?” he asked. “Do you think my father might have feelings for Harry and . . . and vice versa? God, if only I knew what was in that memory my father gave to him. Obviously, it had a pretty profound effect.”

“My guess?” Khorve said. “My guess is that it was a memory about the War. Remember you told me your father stopped watching Harry’s memory at a certain point?”

Scorpius frowned, trying to recall the exact moment his father disappeared. “He did,” he said after a moment. “Right about the time Harry whispered to the Snitch that he was about to die.”

“Do you think it’s possible he simply got overwhelmed?” Khorve asked. “I mean, that’s pretty upsetting . . . I’d be moved by it and I wasn’t even born yet when the War started. Your father was part of it all.”

Scorpius thought about Khorve’s question for a while. His father had certainly been anxious about seeing Harry’s memory, but when Harry had given him the chance to change his mind, his father had refused. Obviously, he’d made up his mind that Harry’s memory was something he should see. It wasn’t mere curiosity – it was necessity.

“I read somewhere – my school textbook, I think – that Harry pretended to be dead and Professor Hagrid carried him back to the school,” Khorve said. “I wonder if your father saw that and thought Harry had died? Maybe that affected him in a way he hadn’t expected it might.”

Scorpius didn’t reply because he didn’t know. His father had always flatly refused to discuss the War or his role in it, even to the point of getting angry when Scorpius had tried to gently press him.

“I don’t know,” he replied. “I guess maybe, but hadn’t the Slytherins been lead out of the Great Hall to their dorm? Were they even out in the courtyard when Voldemort arrived? I have no idea.”

“My guess is that your father’s memory answered that question, and it was that answer was what caused Harry to write this letter,” Khorve said.

Scorpius nodded. That was exactly his interpretation as well. But it still didn’t answer the question. Even if his father had had feelings for Harry all those years ago, did he still have those feelings now? It was very hard to imagine given everything that’d happened since then. Harry had testified at his grandparents’ trials (albeit in an attempt to mitigate their culpability); he’d arrested his father and put him in Azkaban; he’d overseen Scorpius’s placement in an orphanage and then add on top of all of that, Harry had fallen in love with Scorpius – to the point of asking Scorpius to marry him! How could any feelings, no matter how deep, survive such events?

“Are you going to give the letter to your father?” Khorve asked, interrupting Scorpius’s thoughts.

He shook his head. He still had no idea . . . but then Lily’s words returned to him. She was leaving London. Harry would be crushed by the loss and even lonelier than he must already be. The question was – did his conflicted feelings about Harry’s letter justify not taking the chance that his father might be able to help Harry in some way? With whom did his loyalty lie? With himself – or with Harry?

When he framed it that way, the answer was obviously. After everything Harry had done for him,
after all they’d been through, after Scorpius’s rejection, his loyalty unquestionably lay with Harry, and if his father could help Harry – even if the desire to help might arise from romantic feelings – then he was going to give the letter to his father. To hell with his own feelings.

“Yes,” he said after a moment. “Yes, I’m going to give Harry’s letter to my father.”

* * * * * * * * * * *

It took days before he could work up the nerve. There was always an excuse. One day, his father had a headache. The next he was in a bad mood because one of his potions had failed. After that, a class hadn’t gone well. And so on and so on, but finally a day came along when his father felt healthy, happy and generally positive about life (despite his requisite grousing about the insects).

His and his father’s villas weren’t far apart, but Scorpius took as long as possible to walk between them, the letter from Harry deep in his shirt pocket. He wanted to give himself time to change his mind. Despite having discussed the situation pretty much non-stop with Khorve, he still wasn’t convinced he was doing the right thing. But then he’d read in the international edition of The Prophet that Lily had left England for Latvia and realized the time to make up his mind had come.

He knocked on his father’s door, alternatively praying he was home and praying he wasn’t. When his father called to him to come in, Scorpius’s heart started pounding. He felt sick from the flood of adrenaline.

“I’m in here!” his father called.

Scorpius walked even slower from the door to his father’s study than he’d walked between their villas. He walked so slow, in fact, that his father called to him again, thinking Scorpius hadn’t heard him.

“There you are,” his father said when Scorpius finally entered the room. “I thought you’d stopped in the kitchen to raid my cabinets. You and Khorve should do your shopping more regularly . . .”

His father stopped mid-sentence. He must’ve seen something ominous on Scorpius’s face.

“What is it?” he said, frowning. “You don’t look well. Is something wrong?”

Scorpius swallowed the bile that had risen in his throat and shuffled his way to the chair by the window. He wasn’t sure that he wasn’t going to fall down. His father rose with alarm and came over to him, kneeling beside his chair and taking his hand, his face full of concern.

“Scorpius,” he pleaded. “What’s wrong?”

By this point, Scorpius was on the edge of fainting. He was breathing too shallowly. He had to do something before his father’s alarm increased to the point where he’d try to fire call Khorve. He reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out Harry’s letter.

“Lily Potter sent this,” he said in a hoarse whisper.

His father took it from him, his frown deepening.

“Is she alright?” he asked, the concern evident in his voice.

“She’s fine,” Scorpius replied. “In fact, she’s great. She just moved to Latvia to be the new assistant head of law enforcement there.”
“Potter must be pleased,” his father said.

“‘Harry,’” Scorpius said. “Please call him ‘Harry,’ father.”

His father’s expression suddenly froze.

“The letter is about Harry,” he said. His voice betrayed nothing about how he felt about the fact.

“Actually, it’s from Harry,” Scorpius replied. “Well, sort of. You’ll see when you read it that Harry obviously didn’t intend to send it.”

His father stood suddenly. He looked furious.

“You are not going to him!” he shouted.

Scorpius stood as well, holding out a placating hand.

“No, I’m not,” he said urgently. “I promise, father. The letter isn’t to me.”

“Then who is it to?” his father snapped. “Is it to Khorve? Does Harry want to make Khorve feel guilty for something – for taking you away, or some bollocks like that?”

Scorpius stepped back, wide-eyed. His father rarely swore, especially not in such a coarse, Muggle manner.

“No, no!” he said quickly. “It’s okay. The letter’s not addressed to either of Khorve or me – it’s addressed to you.”

His father’s whole body suddenly went rigid.

“It’s what?” he said, incredulously.

“It’s addressed to you,” Scorpius said again, unable to stop himself from wincing.

“Have you read it?” his father asked.

Scorpius merely nodded.

“What does it say?”

Scorpius swallowed.

“I’d rather not tell you,” he said. “I’d rather you read it for yourself.”

He held out the letter. His father paused for a moment before grabbing it roughly from his hand.

“Leave me,” he barked.

Scorpius almost collapsed back into his chair. He couldn’t believe his father had talked to him like that!

“I said leave me,” his father said again, although this time kindly.

Scorpius took a deep breath and exhaled Shakily.

“Will you be okay?” he asked.
His father smiled and reached out to cup his cheek.

“I’ll be fine,” he said. “There’s nothing Potter can say that can hurt me.”

**But you can hurt him,** Scorpius thought.

“I’ll be home if you need me,” he said, reluctant to go.

His father smiled wanly. “I’ll be fine,” he said again. “In fact, I’ll be so fine that I’ll make you and Khorve supper tonight.”

Scorpius wasn’t at all sure that would actually happen, but he thanked his father anyway. He was just about to leave the room when he turned around.

“Be kind to him,” he said. “He’s done so much for us.”

His father merely looked at him blankly. Clearly he wasn’t going to say another word.

Scorpius turned again and left without another word.

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Harry gave the brown, non-descript courier owl a treat and watched it fly away before looking at the return address of the letter it’d just delivered. When he saw what it was, he gasped out loud.

Draco. Draco had written him a letter.

Harry wanted to tear it open, but he forced himself to take the time to pour himself a drink and carry the letter to the living room.

What on earth had Draco written to him about? It wasn’t in response to a letter from Harry. Yes, he’d written that insane, drunken letter, but he’d burned it before he passed-out. Or at least, he was pretty sure he did. Regardless, wherever it ended up, it certainly didn’t end up in New Guinea.

He swallowed his glass of whisky and poured himself another. He’d been drinking even more than usual lately, which was saying something. Lily had left three days ago and had already written and fire called twice, but it didn’t change the fact that he felt bereft without her. They used to see each other every day, and Harry hadn’t realized how much his happiness relied on her constant presence in his life. To say he missed her didn’t begin to convey the sense of loss and loneliness he felt, and he tried hard not to hope she’d hate her new job and want to return. Every time the thought came anywhere near his consciousness, he chastised himself for being so selfish. It reminded him of how he’d felt when Scorpius and Draco had moved to New Guinea. It was not a pleasant feeling.

He turned his attention back to Draco’s letter and tried to imagine the worst news it might contain. It couldn’t possibly be that there was something wrong with Scorpius. Harry felt certain that, no matter Draco’s feelings on the subject of his relationship with Scorpius, Draco would fire call him. No, it couldn’t be bad news about Scorpius. It could, however, be good news. Maybe Scorpius and Khorve were getting married?

Just as he did with his selfish thoughts about Lily, he swallowed the grief and envy the idea caused him. After all, he and Scorpius were long over. It’d been years since their relationship ended – years during which the scorpion pendant on Harry’s chest either wriggled happily or rested at ease. They were over. They’d been over for a very long time. If Harry was still lonely, it was because . . . well, it was because he was alone.
Unable to suppress his curiosity any longer, Harry cracked the wax seal on Draco’s letter. The parchment felt strange – softer than the parchment in England and fragrant with the smell of leaves and sea. Harry closed his eyes and breathed in deeply and then, finally, took a sip of whisky and started to read.

_Potter,_

_I have little to say in response to your “letter” (if that is what such rambling nonsense can be called) and it can be summed up with a single question: who the fuck do you think you are? Contrary to your belief, the world does not revolve around you and your drunken existential angst. Certainly mine doesn’t. And by the way, it never did. Do I love you? Are you mad?_

_You seem to think that the fact I gave you my memory means I have feelings for you. You’re wrong. The reason I gave you that memory is to inform your Highness that you weren’t the only one who suffered during the War._

_I cannot convey to you how unwelcome your “correspondence” (inadvertent or not) is to me. Do not write to me – or more importantly, my son – again._

_Draco Malfoy_

_P.S. The fact you showed my memory to McGonagall is . . . honestly, I have no words._

The glass he’d been holding slipped from Harry’s hand and shattered on the floor. Later, when the shards cut his feet as he struggled to stand, bloody footprints left behind a trail from the couch to the fireplace.

The _Incendio_ he cast shattered the marble and melted the iron grate. Some thing in him – one of the few that’d kept him alive – had just died.
Harry hated Scottish forests, which was why he hated Henry Craven even more than he ordinarily would. In every other setting, Harry was utterly without fear, but in an evergreen forest, blanketed with dead leaves and thick with bushes and brambles . . . well, that was a different story. No matter how much he chastised himself, he always recalled that slow, dark march to his death, which now also made him think of Draco. Harry was sick and tired of thinking about Draco. By this point, thinking about Voldemort was a welcome change of topic.

Yet all things considered, Harry was still inclined to be reasonable, perhaps even lenient . . . that is until Craven cleared his throat and spat in his face.

Harry took off his glasses and casually used his Auror robe to wipe them clean.

“That wasn’t terribly wise,” he told Craven. “I’m surprised. Given how many times you’ve given me the slip, I’d had a rather higher estimation of you.”

“Go ahead,” Craven said with a sneer. “Lock me up. Azkaban will only make me stronger.”

Harry put his glasses back on and shook his head sadly as though Craven was a child who’d disappointed him one too many times.

“What fairy tale books have you been reading?” he asked.

“Sirius Black’s biography,” Craven shot back.

It was a response even stupider than the spitting had been. Nothing enraged Harry like casual references to his Godfather’s unjust imprisonment.

“It’s interesting you would mention biographies,” he said. “You, yourself, have quite a lengthy file back in my office. I know the whole thing front to back. I practically have it memorised. It contains all kinds of interesting titbits of information.”

“Yeah, like what?” Craven asked, sounding remarkably cocky for someone who’d been disarmed and was tied to a standing stone with unbreakable rope in the middle of a clearing in the largest forest in Scotland miles away from his gang’s no-longer-so-secret headquarters.

Harry frowned and scratched his head, pretending to think for a moment. “Uhm, well, let’s see,” he said. “For starters, I understand you’re not terribly fond of snakes. Unfortunately for you, I am. And see this lovely knee-high grass we’re standing in? It’s a perfect hunting ground for adders. I can hear them whispering to each other as we speak.”
Upon hearing Harry’s words, Craven turned a sickly shade of pale.

“Come meet a new friend of mine,” Harry said in Parseltongue and watched with immense satisfaction as several adders slithered out from under the blackthorn bushes, their bodies as thick as a man’s arm.

Craven looked like he was about to be ill.

“Snakes are very inquisitive creatures,” Harry said casually as though he was instructing one of his classes of new recruits. “I think they’ll find your story quite interesting.”

“Give up, Potter,” Craven said, his voice wavering slightly. “You’re not going to make me confess.”

Harry bit his lip to keep from laughing when he heard the snakes’ slithery giggles.

“Hear that, lads, he said.

“We do, the snakes replied. Shall we bite him? We want to bite him. Let us bite him. We want to bite him.

Harry paused to think for a moment.

“First, let’s wait and see if he talks on his own, he said.

No! No! No! the snakes chanted. Bite him! Bite him! Bite him!

“Wha . . . what’re they saying?” Craven asked.

Harry turned to look at him.

“They’re saying they want to bite you, but I’m going to give you the opportunity to talk first. I’ll ask you again: where did you dispose of the children’s bodies? Their parents need to know.”

Craven’s sneer was a little less arrogant than it had been before.

“I told you,” he said. “You’ll find where I put them over my own dead body.”

The snakes giggled again, making Harry laugh. He must’ve sounded maniacal because, for the first time since Harry had bound him, Craven started to struggle.

“The snakes and I have all day,” Harry said. “They like to bask in the sun, and you’re the only criminal on my list – unless, of course, I have time to catch your fat henchman. Tell me, Craven. Why is it that henchmen always seem to be either fat or dumb? Or fat and dumb? What’s up with that?”

Harry shook his head wonderingly. It was hot. He took off his robe and sat down on a rock to examine his broken arm with a detached kind of interest, as though the jagged bone puncturing the skin belonged to someone else. He disliked bone shattering spells much more than slicing spells. The wounds were messier and harder to heal. He was soaked with sweat and it wasn’t even midday yet. Of course, the sweat could be due to his many injuries, but he couldn’t know for sure. He’d drunk enough painkilling potion to knock out a Hippogriff.

“He smells like death! We don’t like him! We don’t like him!” the snakes hissed.

“You’re not alone,” Harry replied. “I’m not a big fan either.”
Craven struggled until his sweat was pink with blood from the ropes chafing his skin. Harry watched him with a strange feeling of déjà vu. Hadn’t he been here before? Hadn’t all of this happened a thousand times already? Everything was so familiar. The heat. The dulled pain. The sweat. The blood. The broken bones and seared flesh. The skin sliced to ribbons . . .

. . . and this tiredness. This crushing fatigue. This sense of pointlessness and the taste of violence in his mouth. Spit and steel and splintered wood. So on and so on . . .

He stood and pointed his wand straight at Craven’s face.

“It’s people like you,” he said. “It’s people like you who have made me what I am.”

Craven laughed.

“Bollocks,” he said. “You’ve done it to yourself . . . and you keep right on doing it. Over and over. You’re nothing but a hired killing machine, and when you can’t kill anymore, you’ll be nothing but a lonely old wreck of a man.”

Harry shook his head. He was having a hard time seeing straight.

“Can we bite him now? the snakes hissed.

Harry cast a cooling charm, but it turned into a desert-hot blast. Everything was becoming its opposite.

“You’ll be a lonely, old wreck of a man . . .”

Harry gasped and stepped back. The man before him was no longer bound . . . and he was no longer Henry Craven . . .

He was Draco.

BITE HIM! Harry yelled, and the snakes surged forward while in the same instant, he woke with a start in a bed in St. Mungo’s, his chest heaving and a scream stuck in the back of his throat.

* * * * * * *

Scorpius collapsed on the couch by the fireplace. He felt ill, so ill, in fact, that he sent his Patronus to find Khorve. He needed his fiancé’s calm perspective because all he wanted to do right then was strangle his father with his bare hands. He felt angry, but worst of all, he felt betrayed.

It’d been Lily’s letter that’d made him do it. She’d been so furious that she’d written her words in black ink.

How could you have let this happen? she’d said. You know how fragile my dad is right now with me gone. How could you not know that your father would be so awful? I don’t understand, Scorpius. You’ve hurt me terribly.

The moment he’d finished reading her letter, he’d gone to his father’s villa, fully intending to confront him. But his father hadn’t been there. If he had been . . . if he had been there, maybe Scorpius wouldn’t have done what he did, and maybe he would never have read his father’s cruel words.

The spell was complex. It’d taken several attempts before it was successful, and Scorpius had grown worried that his father had created some kind of anti-revealing protective shield. But at last it had
worked, and Scorpius had watched with growing horror as his father’s quill (in his father’s handwriting, nonetheless) re-wrote the letter he’d written to Harry just days before.

Khorve came running through the door, his wand drawn, but as soon as he saw Scorpius, he sheathed it again.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, going over to the couch and sitting down beside him.

Scorpius couldn’t answer for a moment. He merely sat there, staring at nothing, too shocked and appalled to reply.

“Was it the article?” Khorve asked, taking his hand. “Is that what has you so upset?”

Scorpius turned and looked at him with a frown.

“What article?” he asked.

“The article about Harry . . .” Khorve stood and walked over to the fireplace. “Here’s a piece of it,” he said, holding up the charred remains of the morning’s newspaper. Obviously, Scorpius’s father had intended to incinerate it but failed – for whatever reason – to complete the job.

Scorpius took the charred Prophet from Khorve’s hand with a growing sense of dread, but then he froze. After what he’d just seen, he didn’t know if he could bear to read more bad news – especially if it involved Harry.

“I can’t read it,” he said. “Read it to me.”

Khorve took the paper from him and sat down beside him again.

“It’s mostly burned,” he said, “so I can’t read the whole thing, but it’s about Harry.”

Scorpius swallowed. He’d known it would be, although why his father cared enough to burn it was another question entirely. It was clear to Scorpius after reading his father’s letter, that his father didn’t care about Harry enough to bother casting an Incendio.

“. . . Potter’s latest arrest was perhaps one of his greatest. Henry Craven had been on Britain’s most-wanted list for years . . . snake bites . . . it’s believed Potter was also bitten . . . St. Mungo’s . . . awake but in serious condition . . . An expert on the use of snake magic is quoted to have said that adders are unpredictable and hard to manage even by an experienced handler like Potter . . . out of control . . . some say Potter is . . . danger. Head Auror Briac Gwencalon . . . unsuccessful . . . remove Potter from the field. This reporter believes . . . Potter was scarred . . . Voldemort . . . orphaned . . . death wish . . .”

Khorve turned the paper this way and that, but was unable to read anymore of the article. It didn’t matter. Scorpius had heard all he needed to know that Harry was behaving even more recklessly than usual. Snakes? Scorpius remembered clearly Harry telling him that he never used Parseltongue anymore – that it was too dangerous and even irresponsible.

Scorpius covered his face with his hands. He didn’t know at whom he was more angry – his father for sending that letter or Harry for being so incautious.

Khorve placed a comforting hand on his shoulder.

“If it wasn’t the article that upset you,” he asked, “what was it?”
Scorpius pointed to the table where his father’s transcribed letter sat, the ink still wet on the parchment.

“I cast a Revealing spell,” he said. “His quill re-wrote the letter he’d sent to Harry. Go ahead. Read it . . . but not out loud. I don’t want to hear it again.”

Khorve was quiet as he read before crumpling the letter, throwing it in the fireplace beside *The Prophet* and turning both to ashes.

“I suppose that explains the angry letter from Lily,” he said.

Scorpius nodded.

“Now what?” Khorve asked.

Scorpius sighed. He felt tired and sad.

“Now what? Now we do nothing,” he replied.

Khorve nodded.

“That was what I was going to suggest,” he said. “I mean what *can* we do?”

Scorpius sighed. What a mess. Lily was angry at him, he was angry at Lily, and both of them were angry at his father. He stood and started pacing. What he couldn’t understand was why his father would be so cruel. It was clear from Harry’s “letter” that he’d never intended to send it and even if he had . . . his father’s words were so full of bitterness. Why? Scorpius and Harry were no longer together; in fact, Harry, himself, had ensured it would stay that way. So why was his father so angry?

He could feel Khorve’s concerned gaze and stopped pacing. The air was cool and heavy with the scent of moss and wet earth. It’d been raining for days. He walked to the screen door leading out to his father’s garden. The plants and shrubs were at their lushest, their leaves large and blindingly green, which meant it took a moment before he glimpsed his father through the branches of a gardenia bush. He was sitting on the wooden bench by the koi pond, his shoulders slumped and his head in his hands. Scorpius stood watching him for a long time, but he didn’t move despite the fact his clothes were drenched and he must be cold.

Khorve joined Scorpius and put his arm around him.

“You should go to him,” he said, but Scorpius turned and walked back to the fireplace where the ashes of his father’s letter still smouldered.

“I have nothing to say,” he replied. “At least not anything that would make a difference. My father is who he is.”

Khorve looked at him with a questioning frown. “And do you know exactly what that ‘is’ is?” he asked.

“The larger question is whether it’s any of my business.”

“And you don’t think it is?”

“If it ever was, it’s not anymore.”

Scorpius walked back to the door and looked out. His father was still there. He took a deep breath and called through the screen.
“Father, Khorve’s here. I’m going to make tea.”

His father lifted his head. For a moment, he looked confused, as though he’d forgotten where he was, but then he smiled, and in an instant, Scorpius forgave him.

“It’s cold,” he said. “I’ll light a fire.”

His father stood and walked down the path to the door, carrying one of the gardenia’s bone-white blossoms, rain drops still clinging to its petals while Scorpius pointed his wand at the fireplace and turned the ashes of the morning into a brilliant flame.

* * * * * * *

The nurse shook her head when she walked through the door and saw he was awake. She looked almost as exasperated as Ginny used to look when he wound-up in St. Mungo’s. In fact, they could be twins if the nurse had ginger hair instead of brown.

“Back again, I see,” she said.

Harry smiled apologetically.

“I can promise you it’s not by choice,” he said.

She gave him a deadpan look.

“Are you sure?” she asked. “Because no one else is.”

His smile turned into a glare.

“Anyway,” she said briskly, “you’ll be happy to know that your stay will be much shorter this time.”

“That’s a low bar,” he said.

She ignored him.

“I daresay it’ll also be more boring,” she added.

“Nothing,” he said. “Nothing can possibly be more boring than five years in a coma and another year and a half spent learning to walk and feed myself again.”

“Perhaps,” she said. “But this time you won’t have your companion.”

Harry frowned. His companion?

“Draco Malfoy,” she said. “I’ve heard he’s left the country and isn’t allowed back in.”

Ah, Harry thought. Draco. Of course. How could he have forgotten?

“I don’t know if you fully understand,” she said.

Harry’s frown deepened. Understand? What he understood was that one day Draco was there and the next day he wasn’t.

“He was here every day for more than five years,” she said. “Every day. And not only that, he helped care for you as well.”

Harry stared at her.
“What? he said. He was not at all sure he liked the idea. “Isn’t that a violation of patient privacy or something?”

“Helping me with your physical therapy is scarcely a violation of privacy,” she said. “It was much-appreciated assistance.”

Harry was still staring at her.

“So, Draco’s seen me naked?” he said.

She burst out laughing.

“Is that what you’re worried about?” she said. “He saw much more than that, I can assure you.”

“Now that has got to be a breach of privacy,” he snapped.

She merely shrugged.

“He was here. Sometimes I needed help. End of story. Sue me.”

Harry was so angry he couldn’t speak. Her revelation cast Draco’s letter in a whole new horrifying light. How the hell do you not care about someone whose urine bag you emptied? It couldn’t have been a mere effort to pass the time. And Draco had visited him every day. Yes, he must’ve felt pent-up and lonely in his flat, but every day?

“I very well might,” he said.

She shrugged.

“Fine. Now give me your arm.”

He stuck his arm out from under the sheet. It was covered with a bandage stained with something that wasn’t blood.

“Ugh,” he said, wrinkling his nose.

“That’s right,” she said. “Pus. Did you assume snake bites are attractive because I can assure you they’re not. You’re covered with boils filled with venom. Ugh, indeed.”

Harry felt slightly faint. Compound fractures were one thing – boils were quite another.

“I look like I have the plague,” he said, wincing when she started scrubbing an open sore with some kind of stinky, stinging cleanser.

“Well, you could be dead like your suspect,” she said.

Harry closed his eyes. Fuck. He hadn’t meant to kill the bastard. He was the only one who knew where the children were. Now they’d never find them. God, he was out of control.

“You’re out of control,” the nurse said.

Harry glared at her again.

Maybe he would sue.

* * * * * * * * *
It was early summer in New Guinea, which meant it was winter in England. Scorpius tried to keep that in mind when he noticed how restless his stag pendant was. Harry wasn’t a fan of winter. He disliked being cold, which was one of the many reasons Scorpius had taken him to Morocco. Harry had blossomed in the desert sun – his cheeks had turned pink and his eyes a lighter shade of green, his bare skin against the sheets, petals clinging to the sheen of sweat . . .

Scorpius shook his head. Memories of their time together would never fade – and it’s not like he wanted them to – it was just that they were jarring, much like he’d probably feel if he believed in reincarnation and caught glimpses of a past life more full of passion and glamour than his current one.

But there was no doubt about it – he still loved Harry, and the obvious unhappiness he sensed broke his heart.

Sometimes he considered writing to Harry and apologizing for his role in the whole affair with his father, but then he’d talk himself out of it. Why open wounds that might be healing? After all, he couldn’t know for sure how deeply Harry had been affected. Lily had merely assumed he’d been hurt. What if, in fact, he didn’t care? Why stick his nose where it didn’t belong. Besides, if he should be worried about anyone, maybe it should be his father, whose mood was unpredictable lately.

Several times, Scorpius had tried to talk to him – not about Harry, but about life in general. But his father seemed to be curling into himself. He spent long hours in his garden and snapped at anyone who disturbed him.

“You seem . . . unlike yourself,” he’d said to his father just the night before.

They’d been sitting in the shadows, just beyond the reach of a circle of firelight, watching Khorve’s tribe perform a dance for the wedding of one of his many cousins. The air was alive with the sound of drums and a song of welcome to the new bride.

His remark had been met with a cryptic reply.

“I’ve been unlike myself since the day I was born,” his father had said.

Scorpius had turned away, pretending to be interested in the dance when in reality he wanted to hide the shine of tears in his eyes.

“You can’t really mean that,” he’d said.

“Can’t I?” his father had replied, his tone more musing than accusative. He’d been silent for a long time – so long, in fact, that Scorpius was surprised when he said, “I don’t know. I don’t think I ever will. Not now, at least. I have only one bridge I haven’t burned.”

He’d smiled at Scorpius and brushed his cheek with his knuckles, smudging the bright red clay Khorve had used to paint his face.

“Stop worrying about an old man,” he said and nodded at Khorve who was beckoning Scorpius to join in him.

Scorpius looked at his father and for an instant he saw a young man – younger than himself – with haughty eyes and hair more blond than silver-grey, but then he blinked and his father was himself again – aged beyond his years from the kind of hardships most people couldn’t survive.

“I love you,” he said fiercely.
His father merely smiled and nodded at Khorve again.

The next thing Scorpius knew he was swept away in a river of leaping firelight and beating drums. Everyone was bare-chested, wearing skirts of palm leaves, witches and wizards alike, their heads adorned with crowns of brilliant feathers and their shell necklaces shining, reflecting the light in their ancient whorls.

*This*, he thought. *This is what it is to be young.*

If only Harry and his father had had the same chance.

* * * * * * * *

Riga had one of the oldest, most prestigious and most beautiful wizarding districts in Europe. Harry was entranced the moment he stepped from the Port Key hub, so much so, in fact, that he literally turned in a circle like a little kid, staring up at the tall wooden houses with their steep eaves and smoking chimneys. It was like seeing Diagon Alley for the first time again, but instead of brick and marble, there were bright colours and intricate carvings of flowers and magical beasts.

A small purple Yeti appeared at his side.

“You look like I did when I first got here,” it said in a familiar voice.

Harry laughed and pulled his daughter into a hug.

“I hear your voice, so I’m assuming you’re somewhere inside this fur coat,” he said.

She laughed and pulled away so she could look up at his face.

“It’s the only way to stay warm,” she replied. “Don’t worry. We’ll get you one. In a more subtle colour, of course, although green would be nice. It would complement your eyes.”

“Thanks, but I think I’ll stick to natural Yeti colours – whatever those are,” he said.

She laughed again and linked her arm through his.

“I’m so excited you’re here,” she said. “I can’t wait to show you around, but first we have to go back to my flat so you can meet Sir Barnaby Bumpleton.

Harry arched an eyebrow.

“Does that mean you’re going to be called Lady Bumpleton someday?”

She punched his arm and he pretended it hurt, making her laugh again. It’d been his intention; there was no sound in the world he loved more than Lily’s laugh.

“No,” she said. “Sir Bumpleton is my Kneazle.”

“Your Kneazle?” he said. “What about your Pygmy Puffs?”

“Oh, they’re fine,” she assured him. “I keep them at the office.”

He laughed. “The Assistant Head of Law Enforcement keeps Pygmy Puffs in her office?”

“Of course,” she said, as though every Assistant Head of Law Enforcement in the world kept Pygmy Puffs in their offices.
“Lils, I’m so happy to be here,” he said, pulling her into another hug. “Four months without you is far too long.”

“Wow,” she said. “Has it really been four months already? It feels like mere weeks.”

“Busy, I take it?” he asked.

“Busier than you can imagine. But thankfully it’s not all paperwork.”

He smiled at her, but his heart sank. He’d been happy imagining her stuck behind a desk with mountains of maps and files to go through every day.

“So, you’ve been out in the field already,” he said.

“Of course,” she replied. “Do you honestly think a Potter could stay away from where the action is?”

His smile grew even more strained. “Well, I guess I was hoping . . . Lils, you’ve only just started this job. You’re not familiar with this place yet. Surely, there’s a lot more for you to learn.”

“And what better way to learn it than being in the field,” she replied. “Come on, daddy. Don’t fret. I have a great team, and, besides, things aren’t much more dangerous here than they are in England.”

He sighed. Her remark was less than comforting.

“Why couldn’t you have taken a job on a nice, peaceful little island somewhere,” he asked. “Preferably in a warmer climate.”

She rolled her eyes at him in a way that said he was exasperating her. Reluctantly, he dropped the subject – although he couldn’t promise it wouldn’t come up again.

Despite the cold, he enjoyed the walk to her building. It took them down several roads, each narrower than the first and all paved with slippery cobble stones. They kept bumping into each other and laughing. It was only two o’clock, but it was nearly dark. As they made their way, the lanterns lining the sidewalks grew brighter and brighter, casting shining shadows on the ground. Harry had never thought winter could be so beautiful.

“Oh, let’s buy a cake,” Lily said excitedly, reminding him of the little girl she used to be. “There’s a lovely little English bakery on the corner. Their lemon sponge is amazing.”

As though he’d disagree. He’d buy her a hundred cakes if she wanted.

Unsurprisingly, Sir Barnaby Bumpleton turned out to be fat and bad-tempered, but the building Lily lived in was beautiful. Painted salmon pink, there were snow drops spilling from the window boxes and magical creatures peering down from the beneath the eaves. No place could be more perfect. Even the narrow, winding stairs that led up to her flat seemed plucked straight from a fairy tale.

“So what do you think?” she asked, standing in the middle of her living room with her arms spread.

“I think you must’ve felt like you’d died and gone to heaven when you first saw it,” he replied. “But how on earth did you get all your things up those stairs?”


Harry bit his lip. What he really wanted was alcohol. He hadn’t had a drink in more than a day, and his hands were beginning to shake, but hell would have to freeze over before he begged his daughter
for a glass of whisky.

“Whatever it is, Chai sounds lovely,” he replied.

She gave him a big smile, making the discomfort of withdrawal feel more than worth it.

He lit a fire in the little fireplace while she was in the kitchen. Outside, it had started to snow, but inside it was warm enough to take off his boots. He wandered around, looking at things, the floorboards creaking under his feet, startling Sir Bumpleton and causing him to snarl. What was it with Kneazles? Harry wondered. He’d yet to meet one that could stand him.

They drank their tea in a bright kitchen filled with every imaginable Muggle appliance. Harry smiled. Despite his age, Lily’s grandfather’s fascination was obviously still going strong. Of all the Weasleys, Harry missed Arthur the most. After he and Ginny had married, he and Arthur used to spend hours in the shed drinking homemade stout and charming toasters.

“So,” Harry said, “do I get to meet your boss while I’m here?”

Lily rolled her eyes. “You sound like mum when I got a new teacher every year,” she said. “But, yes, you’ll get to meet him. He’s threatened to fire me if I let you go home without having dinner with him and his family.”

“Good,” he said. “I want to hear every detail of every case you two have on your docket.”

She did not look amused – which was fine because Harry wasn’t trying to be funny.

“I love you, dad,” she said.

“I hear a ‘but’ coming,” he replied.

“But I have my own life. I don’t need you trying to interfere . . .”

She clamped a hand over her mouth.

“Oh, dammit,” she said, her eyes filling with tears.

He took her hand and weaved their fingers together. “You only did it because you love me and are worried about me,” he said. “I told you I’m not angry.”

“But you were that night,” she said.

Harry turned his head. He couldn’t bear to think of that night and look at her at the same time. He regretted many things in his life but none so much as that drunken fire call he’d made the night he’d received Draco’s letter.

It’d had taken him a while to figure out exactly what had happened. Obviously, someone had sent his rambling, incoherent brain-dump of a “letter” to Draco, but who? When it became clear that it was Lily, he’d felt more betrayed than he’d ever felt in his life, which was saying something . . .

. . . he’d been so angry . . .

How could you have done that to me? he’d railed. What were you thinking, Lily? That letter I wrote was private! No one was supposed to see it – not you, not Scorpius and especially not Draco! You’ve hurt me more than you can begin to imagine!

She’d cried. Of course, she had. But he hadn’t relented. The next day, after waking from a drunken
stupor, was the closest he’d ever come to killing himself.

“How can you ever forgive me?” she asked, the tears spilling from her eyes. “You must hate me.”

“I don’t hate you, flower,” he said, squeezing her hand. “I could never hate you. There is nothing you could ever do that would cause me to hate you.”

She wiped away her tears with her free hand.

“Do you hate Draco?” she asked.

Harry thought about her question for several moments. After all, it was a good one. Finally, he replied.

“No, I don’t hate him,” he said. “Draco has many good reasons not to like me.”

“But you’ve been so good to him and Scorpius.”

“Maybe good to them, but perhaps not so good for them. Lils, If Draco’s feelings are . . . complicated, it’s in a large part due to the fact I was his son’s lover – his teenage son’s lover. Think about that for a moment. Can you imagine what I would’ve done if some forty-something bloke had set his sights on you?”

She winced. “You’d tear him limb from limb?”

“Probably not. That would actually be too kind a death. I think I would’ve torn out his heart and eaten it raw with a little salt and vinegar.”

She stared at him.

“No wonder you think Draco’s feelings are complicated,” she said.

“Exactly.”

“But you were so hurt,” she said, the tears welling in her eyes again.

He pulled her close and kissed her forehead. “Sshh,” he said. “It’s all in the past. None of this matters anymore.”

“I only want you to be happy,” she wept. “I don’t care who it is – I don’t care if he’s seventeen or seventy. I just want you to have someone to love you and take care of you because I can’t do it. I can’t be that person, dad. I have been for so long and I’m so tired.”

He swallowed back tears of his own. Of course, nothing she’d said was untrue or unreasonable, but still . . . he couldn’t fool himself into believing it didn’t hurt. Just as he hadn’t been able to fool himself into believing Draco hadn’t broken his heart.

She gently pushed him away and stood to carry the teapot back to the kitchen.

“More cake?” she asked with forced cheerfulness.

Harry couldn’t speak, so he coughed as though he had something stuck in his throat. He had to get a grip on himself.

“I’ll be right back,” he croaked and went to the bathroom where he closed the door and leaned on the sink.
“You bastard,” he said to the man in the mirror with a day-old beard and red-rimmed eyes. “You selfish fucking bastard.”

Draco was right. He did think the universe revolved around him.

“Daddy?” Lily’s voice was tiny and filled with tears. “Daddy, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it. You’ll always have me. I’ll never leave you . . . I’ll come home if you want . . . I’ll do anything. Just please don’t be sad.”

Harry closed his eyes as the tears rolled down his cheeks.

“I’m fine,” he said. “I’m just feeling a little light-headed. I’ll feel better in a moment.”

“God, I hate him,” Lily said angrily. “I hate both of them right now.”

Harry sighed.

“Draco is not the person you’re looking for,” he said.

He filled the sink with cold water and splashed his face then took a deep breath and opened the door.

“Let’s go buy a Yeti for me,” he said, trying to give her a bright, uncomplicated smile.

After a moment, she smiled back.

“And then how about you show me around a bit.”

Her smile turned into a grin. He could tell she was already in love with her new home. It made his heart brim with happiness and ache with loss at the same time.

******************************************************************

It was late, but Scorpius couldn’t sleep. He’d lost a patient that afternoon. It was a rare occurrence, but whenever it happened, it took him a long time to recover. Khorve had made his favourite meal for supper and given him a backrub right before bed – which had helped – but it hadn’t been enough to get him to fall asleep. When two a.m. rolled around, he gave up and decided to go for a walk on the beach.

The rainy season had been living up to its name – it had been wet and cold for weeks, reminding him of London, which, of course, reminded him of Harry and the latest flood of news articles. Apparently, several of the late Henry Craven’s comrades had survived the raid of their headquarters, and the Aurors were looking everywhere for them. There’d been a shake-up in the department recently when it was discovered one of the Aurors had been passing along intelligence. Every day brought new photographs of Briac’s endless news briefings, and every day it was clear from his gestures and expressions that he was growing more and more impatient. There were no photos of Harry, but Scorpius was sure that was because he was out in the field too busy and engrossed to bother with the press. Of course, there could be other reasons there were no photos of Harry, but Scorpius refused to go down that path. If he started worrying about Harry, he’d never stop.

“He’s a selfish arsehole,” Scorpius’s father had said just that morning. “He doesn’t stop to consider how his actions affect others.”

They’d been taking advantage of a brief respite from the rain to check on the mushroom farm.

“He’s in law enforcement,” Scorpius had replied. “One could say the same about all the Aurors.”
His father had simply given him a deadpan look.

They’d made their way slowly, trying not to step on frogs, their trousers damp from brushing against the wet ferns on either side of the path.

“That remark doesn’t deserve a reply,” his father had said, “but I’ll humour you nonetheless. Harry is not simply an Auror, he’s a soldier – a soldier past his prime. Pardon the pun, but he should he pottering around in a garden somewhere like me.”

Scorpius had laughed. The image of Harry on his knees in wet turf, carefully transplanting mushrooms was simply ludicrous.

“Go ahead and laugh,” his father had said. “But tell me this: what will happen when Harry can’t fight any more? What happens when even he realizes he’s more hindrance than help? Other than drinking, he doesn’t appear to have a single hobby. I teach and garden and write . . .”

“. . . and cook,” Scorpius had added. “You’re a great cook, even if some of your meals are a wee bit too spicey.”

“My point exactly,” his father had said. “Harry either can’t or doesn’t want to do any of those things.”

“That’s not true,” Scorpius had replied. “He enjoys teaching and he’s good at it, too.”

“And what classes does he teach?”

“He teaches field operations to new recruits . . . okay, right. I see your point.”

By then they’d reached the mushroom farm and his father was momentarily distracted by the hoard of pale green slugs that were devouring his Boletus Castanopsidis.

“Little bastards,” he’d muttered, pointing his wand at them. “Evanesco, Triboniophorus Graeffei.”

“So, what do you propose?” Scorpius had said.

“About the slugs?” his father had asked, wiping slug slime off his beloved shitakes with a cloth transfigured from a leaf.

Scorpius had laughed. “No, about Harry.”

“What do I propose?” his father had said. “I propose he get a life. And soon. He’s not getting any younger.”

“He has his children.”

“Yes, and I know he’s devoted to them, Lily in particular, but you can’t live for your children alone. It places too much pressure on them. Don’t you remember when I tried to keep you from going to Hogwarts because I couldn’t bear the thought of living without you? Imagine what would’ve happened if I hadn’t changed my mind. Where would you be now? Where would we both be?”

Scorpius had nodded. “True,” he’d said. “I understand that, but Harry’s not holding his children back – I mean look at Albus, he’s on the road with his team practically all year, and now Lily’s in Latvia.”

“Lily,” his father said distractedly as he turned his wand on another batch of slugs. “Now there’s a chip off the old block if I ever saw one.”
Scorpius had laughed. “Lily? Are we talking about the same Lily with her lilac perfume and pink Pygmy Puffs?”

“Yes, Lily. She’s a Potter through and through.”

“She’s a Hufflepuff.”

“Hufflepuffs are the same as Gryffindors – only more civilized and pleasant to be around.”

“Well, I don’t think Harry needs to worry that Lily won’t have friends and hobbies.”

“No, but he should worry that she’ll get herself killed. The only difference between them is experience, and Harry brings new meaning to the concept. Battling trolls at the age of eleven? Winning the Triwizard tournament at fifteen? Evading the Dark . . . evading Voldemort and hunting down Horcruxes at seventeen? Sometimes I think that Dumbledore put him up to all those things on purpose – to make a fighter of him.”

“So does Harry,” Scorpius had said. “He thinks the same thing.”

His father had shaken his head ruefully. “Then I guess my father and Dumbledore have something in common,” he’d said. “They were both raising their boys to play roles in Voldemort’s world, except Harry was raised to fight . . . and I was raised to fawn and acquiesce.”

Scorpius had been picking snails off a bush of impatiens but froze when he heard his father’s words. “You really believe that?” he’d said incredulously. “That you were raised to be a servant?”

“Yes, I believe that,” his father had replied. “Absolutely, I believe it.”

Scorpius had dropped his handful of snails and gone to his father, startling him when he threw his arms around him and causing him to blow up a particularly large slug, splattering them both with slug guts . . .

. . . which turned out to have been a good thing. Scorpius wasn’t sure he wanted to hear and more than he’d heard. It made his father’s imprisonment all the more horrifying, and Scorpius could barely think of what his father must’ve endured without breaking down.

The sun was starting to rise above the trees when Scorpius turned to go back home. He’d gone farther along the beach than he’d planned – the sand was easier to walk on when it was wet – and he was finally tired, hopefully tired enough to fall asleep. He’d cancelled his appointments for the day, and it was unlikely Khorve would take a diving group out. The waves were still too choppy from yesterday’s storm. They’d have time for a much-needed leisurely day. Yes, his patient had died, but she was elderly and had been ill for some time. It was always upsetting when people died, but it was also a comfort knowing they’d lived a long and happy life as Scorpius knew his patient had. She was surrounded by her multi-generational family when she passed, her daughter holding her hand. There’d been time for good-byes, and that was the important thing.

Good-bye. After having watched people go – some alone and some not – Scorpius had one wish in life . . . that he’d have the chance to say good-bye, especially to his father.

And especially to Harry.

***********

The week came to an end far too soon. They’d visited every museum – both Muggle and magical –
and walked every broad street and narrow alleyway. He was sure he’d gained weight after all the pubs and restaurants they’d eaten at. By the time he had to leave, Harry was as much in love with Riga as his daughter was, and he and Sir Bumbleton had even reached a negotiated peace.

To his great relief, they hadn’t discussed Draco again. As far as Harry was concerned, the topic was finished and closed. He had nothing more to say on the subject – and if Lily did, she didn’t mention it.

“I have to go to the office as soon as I get home,” he told her at the Port Key hub. “But I’ll call you as soon as I get back to my flat.”

She merely nodded. He could tell she was fighting back tears.

“Hey,” he said, lifting her chin so he could look in her eyes. “It’s alright. I’ll visit again soon, and you’ll be home for your mum’s birthday.”

She turned her face away.

“It’s not that,” she said. “It’s just . . .”

“It’s just what?” he asked.

“It’s just that you’re so alone and I’m so worried about you.”

“Lils,” he said. After the first day, his supposed loneliness and alleged recklessness also hadn’t been a subject of discussion, and he wanted to keep it that way.

“Don’t ‘Lils’ me,” she said angrily. “Daddy, I’m begging you. Please stop. It was bad when I was in London, but it’s even worse now. Every time I open the paper . . .”

He wrapped her in his arms and rested his chin on the top of his head.

*I’m ready, he thought. I’m ready to promise.*

He pulled away and looked deep into her soft brown eyes.

“I have one last assignment,” he said, taking a deep deep breath. “And then I’ll stop. I’ll leave the field. I’ll be an instructor or something. Hell, maybe I’ll even retire altogether. God knows I’ve earned it, but whatever I do, I promise you, flower, I will stop fighting. You have a life now – one that you love – it’s high time I stop making it difficult.”

She stared at him, her mouth open.

“You what?” she whispered in awe.

He laughed. “You heard me,” he said.

“Say it again.”

“I promise . . .”

“You promise what?”

“I promise that after this final assignment that I’ll never go back out into the field again.”

She threw her arms around his neck.
“You have never said anything that makes me happier,” she said.

He pulled back and grinned at her.

“Even when I told you that you could have that unicorn foal when you were eight.”

“Even that,” she replied. “Especially seeing as you knew mum would say no, so it was a moot point anyway.”

He laughed. “Caught,” he said, holding up his hands. “Good work, Assistant Head Auror Potter.”

She rolled her eyes fondly and he gave her a kiss on the cheek. Her purple coat and fond smile were the last things he ever saw of her again.

* * * * * * * * *

For the rest of his life, Scorpius would always remember exactly where he was and what he was doing the moment the letter arrived.

The day was so flawless that anything you could say about it would be a cliché. The sky was a cloudless blue, and the sun was warm and bright. He was lying in his hammock, listening to the birds sing. The wind was from the ocean, carrying with it the scent of saltwater and the laughter of children playing in the waves. He and Khorve had just made love, and his body felt languid and sated. Everything in the world was going well – his patients were healthy; the Muggles had ceased their logging operations; his father’s potions were working and Khorve’s diving classes were full for the first time that year. Even Harry was happy – Scorpius could sense it through his stag pendant. Life was good. Life was full. Life was kind . . .

. . . until it wasn’t.

The owl scratched at the screen, waking Scorpius from a light doze. He sat up and yawned. It was a Sunday, and he had no patients which meant that whatever the owl was carrying was probably not work-related.

He took the letter from the owl’s beak and gave it a bigger treat than usual. He looked at the return address . . .

. . . and that’s when his heart started skipping beats.

It was from London.

And it was from Harry.

It contained nothing but a news article.

Lily Potter had been killed on assignment.

Apparently, a gang of arsonists had had simultaneous fires throughout Riga, destroying whole neighbourhoods, both Muggle and magical. Lily had gone alone to the location where it was believed the arsonists based their operations and was killed. The article didn’t say how, citing ongoing investigations, but later Scorpius learned from the papers that it’d been Avada Kedavra. The same spell that’d taken her father’s life. The same spell he’d survived but she’d succumbed to.

Scorpius’s stomach turned over, and he dropped the letter as though it was on fire.

Lily.
Harry’s Lily.

He ran out the door, stumbling on the threshold. The path to his father’s villa was short, but it seemed endless. When he finally arrived, he burst in, shouting for his father who came out of his study, looking alarmed.

“Christ,” he said. “Scorpius, what the hell is going on?”

“Lily . . .” Scorpius gasped, leaning on his knees. He was having an impossible time catching his breath.

His father’s face went white. It seemed as though he’d already guessed what’d happened.

“Lily’s dead,” Scorpius said, choking on his words. “She was killed . . . God! Harry! What is he going to do? What are we going to do?”

“Well, that’s just about the stupidest question I’ve ever heard,” his father said. “And I’ve heard some pretty stupid questions in my day. What are we going to do? We’re going to England, of course.”
Harry fell to his knees and started clawing at the dirt, the years peeling away like cheap paint. He was seventeen. He was fifty. He was a boy. He was a man.

He was a father.

He dug and dug and dug, smearing his face with mud when he tried to brush his hair out of his eyes. It was here. It had to be here. He’d know this clearing anywhere. He’d been visiting it in his nightmares for more than thirty years. He’d died here. He would die here again. He’d lie down and die here if he couldn’t find it – if he couldn’t find the Resurrection Stone.

The rain was without mercy. It fell, cold and steady, soaking the earth, soaking his clothes, soaking him to the marrow of his bones. His fingernails were torn and bleeding. His shirt ripped by brambles. His knees cut and bruised. The wind thrashed the trees – a living thing, furious at the world, furious at God.

Lily. His Lily. His beautiful Lily. His beautiful daughter. His beautiful little girl.

The smell of dead leaves mixed with the smell of foreshadowed snow. His hands were claws. His heart a violent storm. His mind a steel trap. The Stone was here. He could feel it. A tug of dangerous hope, a careless disregard of Death and its demands.

“Harry.”

He heard his name. At least, he thought it was his name. It could’ve been the wind.

“Harry, stop”

Strong hands seized his wrists and held them tight.

“You did the right thing,” the voice said. “You let it go. Now let it go again.”

There was a body behind him. A warm body. Who knew that Death was so warm?

“You did the right thing,” the voice said again. “You were brave, Harry. You need to be brave again. You need to let her go.”

“But I can’t,” he wailed.

“You must,” the voice said.
In what seemed like a mere hint of a moment, the rain turned to snow. The wind quieted. The forest went dark and still. Harry fell against the body behind him, feeling something like life in his veins, in his bones, in the chambers of his heart. Nothing had ever caused him more pain.

“She doesn’t want this,” the voice said. “And you know it.”

“But I can’t . . .”

The rim of a flask touched his lips.

“Shhh,” the voice said. “Drink this.”

Suddenly, the warmth of a memory filled his body. A gentle rain. Trees taller than mountains. The scent of earth and sea. Lily laughing, a little scorpion on her palm.

“Draco,” he murmured.

“Shhh,” the voice said again.

Harry’s head lulled onto Draco’s shoulder. His eyes rolled back.

“You drugged me,” he said.

He felt Draco chuckle.

“Yes, I did,” he said. “Bloody right, I did. Scorpius, help me.”

Scorpius joined Draco and draped Harry’s arm over his shoulder, hauling him up off the ground.

“I . . . can . . . walk,” Harry said, his voice slurring the words, smudging their edges and blunting their plea.

“No, you can’t,” Scorpius said. “You’re freezing to death.”

They half-carried, half-dragged him through the midnight labyrinth of trees. Snowflakes melted on his glasses. He couldn’t see. He’d ask where they were going, but he didn’t care enough to make the effort. All he knew was that he was being conveyed away from the one place he wanted to be – that clearing in the forest where he’d felt the violence of the Killing Curse explode inside him, tearing his mind apart. A brilliant flash of green and then a glimpse of a terrifying silence so complete that it was a black hole swallowing everything – every thought, every memory, every desire, every dream. The ultimate Dementors’ Kiss.

“Lily,” he cried. The knowledge that his daughter had died like that crushing his will to live.

They stopped and Draco forced him to drink another mouthful of his damned potion. It fought a warm trail down his gagging throat to his empty stomach.

“I hate . . . you,” he told both men, and he meant it with every bone and sinew in his body.

His words were met with nothing but breaths of exertion as they dragged him onward, back to places where he’d have to exist again. Where he’d have to walk and talk and sleep and eat.

He didn’t want to do any of those things knowing that Lily was gone. Knowing that the cold, greedy ground would soon swallow her whole – her smile, her laugh, her playful kiss on his cheek.

“I’ll . . . never forgive you,” he said, although whether he meant God or death or merely Draco and
Scorpius, he wasn’t sure. It didn’t matter. To him it was all the same. He was equally angry at all of them.

Either the snow had grown heavier or they’d reached the edge of the forest. Harry felt the light from Hagrid hut’s before he saw it – a beloved destination now a turncoat enemy. He struggled feebly. He could feel the Stone tugging like a magnet on the weakness of his human heart.

He understood now . . . he understood the second brother. He never really had before, but he did now. Now he knew the root of his one wish. It hadn’t been power. It’d been loss – gut-wrenching, intolerable loss.

Draco and Scorpius stopped just before they dragged him into the reach of the windows’ light.

“Harry,” Draco said, slapping his cheeks.

Harry tried to open his eyes, but he couldn’t.

“Harry, I’m going to give you a choice,” Draco said. “There are a lot of people in Hagrid’s hut. There’s going to be a lot of noise and chaos when they see you. Do you want to stay conscious or do you want more potion? If I were in your place, I’d choose the latter option.”

Tears welled in Harry’s eyes, thawing the ice in his eyelashes.

“Don’t make me do this,” he choked.

“I’m sorry, Harry,” Draco said, sounding like he meant it. Harry grabbed the reins of a chance.

“If it was Scorpius . . .” he said. “You’d be where I am.”

“If I knew where the Stone was?” Draco replied. “Bloody right I would, and you, Harry, would be where I am. It’s a Deathly Hallow. It’s an abomination. Now drink this.”

Harry didn’t even try to struggle this time. He merely opened his mouth and swallowed. Slowly, the world lost its contours and sounds lost their shapes. The cold vanished and the ground rose and fell beneath his feet like waves against a beach. He heard the calls of sea birds and the excited cry of a little girl in a purple dress with flame-red hair.

“Daddy! Look what I found!” she said, running toward him, clutching something in her hand.

“What is it?” he asked her. If it was a shell, he’d have to tell her his pockets were already too full to hold another.

She held up her hand. He watched her fingers open like the petals of a blossoming flower . . . and there it was . . . the pitiless glitter of the Resurrection Stone.

“It’s for you,” she said, smiling up at him, her eyes full of love. “It’s for you, daddy.”

* * * * * * * * *

The figure was hunched over, scrabbling at the frozen ground like an animal.

“Har . . . !” Scorpius called, but his father held up his hand.

“Sshhh,” he said. “We need to catch him unaware. He’ll bolt if he senses us, and once he does, we’ll never catch him. He’ll die out here.”
Scorpius nodded. They’d been searching for hours and were about to give up hope and head back to Hagrid’s hut when they’d heard the most wretched sobs Scorpius had ever heard, which was saying something. As a Healer, he often had to soothe unbearable pain.

“I’ll go to him,” his father said, although why he would think it was his role and not Scorpius’s was unclear. If finding and comforting Harry was anyone’s role, it was Hermione’s. After all, she’d been the one who’d guessed where Harry was. Briac had been sure he was in Latvia, hunting down Lily’s killers. Ginny was convinced he was passed out in some hotel somewhere. Scorpius had thought he was out flying in the moors, and his father had been convinced he could be anywhere doing everything he could to evade them. It was Hermione who’d suggested the Resurrection Stone, and the moment she had, they’d all known she was right.

The problem was that no one had any idea where the Stone was. They knew it was in the Forbidden forest, but the forest was vast beyond even the most skilled map-maker’s ability to chart. It magically expanded and contracted based on whims of its own, whims known to none except perhaps the Centaurs. But the Centaurs couldn’t be counted on. They’d let Harry die once. They’d let him die again.

They’d split into pairs and entered the forest, leaving behind them trails so they could find their way back. The rain had been on the edge of freezing. Scorpius had dressed as warmly as he could in clothes charmed to trap his body heat as much as possible, but he was still cold. He could only imagine what Harry was feeling. They’d gone to his flat and found no evidence that he’d ever been there. He’d been in the forest for more than a day, wearing nothing but whatever it was he’d been wearing when he heard the news of Lily’s death, fighting to survive solely for one purpose.

“Stop for a moment,” Scorpius’s father said, panting for breath. “I need to rest.”

Upon hearing his words, Harry started to struggle, but Scorpius wrapped him in an embrace, pinning his arms against his sides.

“Sshh, Harry,” he whispered against Harry’s ear. “It’s going to be alright. You’re going to be alright.”

“But I don’t want to be alright,” Harry croaked. His eyes were only half-open, his words barely intelligible.


Thankfully, Harry had lost consciousness by the time they reached Hagrid’s hut. Hermione ran out to meet them.

“Did he find it?” she asked.

“No, thank God,” Scorpius’s father said, surrendering his place to Briac who picked Harry up and carried him inside, laying him down gently on the floor in front of the fireplace.

Scorpius immediately set about healing Harry’s numerous cuts and bruises. His hands were the worst. Even Briac turned away when he saw them. His fingers were black with frostbite, and most of his nails were gone.

“Jesus Christ,” Briac said. Elizabeth went to him and put her arms around him.

“Just imagine if it was one of our boys,” she said. “You’d be in the same state.”
Briac pulled her close.

“Lily was his life,” he said through his tears.

Scorpius turned his face away, his cheeks burning with shame. He didn’t want to know if anyone was looking at him. Once he’d been as big a part of Harry’s life as Lily had been. Once Harry had fought to live for him – for the dream of marrying him. Scorpius hadn’t just snuffed out that dream like a candle; he’d crushed it to make sure it was dead. Maybe if he hadn’t – maybe if he and Harry were still together – Harry wouldn’t be quite so devastated.

His father must’ve sensed his thoughts because he took his hand and squeezed it.

“You did the right thing,” he whispered. “Look at the life you have now. You have a future. You never had one with Harry. He never had a future to offer you – he still doesn’t.”

Scorpius’s throat was too tight to respond.

“So, the Stone is still lost,” Hermione said, kneeling beside Harry and brushing the wet hair off his forehead, revealing the famous scar. “Poor, Harry.”

“What would’ve happened if he’d found it?” Albus asked. “Would Lily be here now?”

“We don’t know what would’ve happened,” Hermione replied. “The legend tells us only that the second brother was able to recall his fiancée from the grave. We don’t know what that means. No one knows how she appeared to him and whether she’d appeared to anyone else. And thankfully no one ever will.”

Albus was quiet for a long time. Scorpius could sense what he was thinking. He was thinking that maybe finding the Stone wouldn’t be such a bad thing – not if he could see Lily again.

“It’s a terrible temptation,” Hermione said. “The worst of the three Hallows – at least in my opinion. Only some people lust for power and some people for the ability to become invisible, but everyone at one point or another wants to bring back to life someone they’d loved and lost.”

When at last Harry was healed enough to be moved safely, Briac picked him up again and Apparated back to London, but before he left, he reminded Scorpius’s father of the danger he faced if he stayed in Britain much longer.

“It’s not a question of whether you’ll be recognised,” he’d said. “It’s a question of when.”

“He’s right,” Scorpius said after he was gone.

His father scowled at him.

“Of course, he’s right,” he said. “That doesn’t mean I’m going to listen to him.”

“So we’re going to stay.”

“At least until we know if Harry will be alright.”

“I can stay. You don’t need to.”

His father walked to the fireplace and stirred the dying embers into a flame. Shadows leapt up the walls, snapping like dogs at the wooden rafters.

“Actually,” he said, “I do,” and then, of course, refused to elaborate.
The funeral was unbearable. Scorpius spent most of it staring at his feet. He couldn’t look at Ginny, who was weeping into her black shawl. He couldn’t look at Albus or James or Brianna with her son on her knee. He couldn’t look at Harry, whose face was as bone-white as a skull, his eyes nothing but hollow pits.

The service seemed to go on for hours. Through it all, Harry sat in his formal Auror robe, his leg jiggling with tension, his wand in his lap. Scorpius could tell from the faraway look in his eyes that he was living solely for the chance to confront Lily’s killers face-to-face.

Scorpius shuddered. Harry was going to slaughter them. He prayed that at that very moment, the Latvian authorities were arresting the bastards and putting them in protective custody – not to protect them . . . Scorpius didn’t give a shit about them . . . but to protect Harry from himself. Only God could guess what he might do, but whatever it was, it would earn him the Kiss. Scorpius was as sure of that fact as he was sure that the earth would continue circling the sun. Public sympathy be damned. Whatever it was that he’d do to those men would earn him a place in infamy beside Voldemort. Torture was not out of the question – neither were slow, hideous deaths. Lily’s murderers would beg for death’s mercy before the end.

Scorpius shuddered again. His father took his hand and squeezed it.

“It’s alright,” he whispered, even though they both knew it wasn’t.

With Briac’s expert assistance, his father was wearing a Glamour so elaborate that someone would have to cast a spell to see through it. He’d protested at first, insisting Harry needed to see him, but Briac had been very persuasive when he’d said that without a Glamour Scorpius’s father wouldn’t get two steps out the door of their hotel without being recognised and reported.

*The last thing Harry needs right now is for you to get arrested,* Briac had said, settling the issue.

After the funeral, almost everyone went to the Weasleys’ for a reception. After saying good-bye (and admonishing Scorpius’s father again to go home), Briac and Elizabeth went to another reception for Lily’s Auror colleagues. Meanwhile, Harry went nowhere. He simply remained sitting in his chair, staring at Lily’s casket. No one tried to approach him. It broke Scorpius’s heart.

“Do you think we should go to him?” he whispered to his father.

“Since when did you acquire a death wish?” his father replied.

Neither of them spoke in the taxi on their way back to their Muggle hotel. The neon lights collected in the raindrops on the windscreen. Scorpius was pretty sure they were both thinking the same thing: how long was it before Harry went to Latvia?

“I’m sure someone’s watching him,” Scorpius said over their room-service supper. “We can’t be the only ones who think he’s going to track down Lily’s killers.”

“No, I’m sure we’re not,” his father replied. He’d removed his Glamour and was himself again, although paler and more tired-looking than usual. Scorpius was sure he looked the same. They’d only caught a couple of hours’ sleep between leaving Hagrid’s and going to the funeral, and the sleep they did get was barely restful. The moment Scorpius closed his eyes he was in the Forbidden Forest again, dragging Harry through the mud, branches scratching their faces and wolves howling in the distance.

They ate in silence, both so pre-occupied that they didn’t even complain about the food, which was
typical English fare—mushy vegetables and tough, chewy beef. The evening seemed endless. Neither of them could read and (per his father’s orders), the telly wasn’t an option. Scorpius drew some half-hearted sketches, while his father sat in the chair by the window, nursing a glass of whisky and looking out at London’s skyline. After a while, they both went to bed and were awakened by the Muggle telephone sometime during the early morning hours.

“They got them,” Briac said. “The Latvian officials arrested Lily’s killers, and they’re in protective custody.”

Scorpius collapsed back against his pillows with a huge sigh of relief.

“How protective is ‘protective’?” he asked. “Harry isn’t your average vigilante.”

“It’s as secure as humanly possible,” Briac replied. “They’re in an indestructible, impermeable holding cell, and the entire department of law enforcement is either guarding them or patrolling for sympathizers who might try to help them escape. They’re safe.”

“Which means Harry is, too,” Scorpius said. “Do you know where he is?”

It was Briac’s turn to sigh, but it wasn’t a sigh of relief.

“As soon as the news got around about Lily’s killers, he went back to his flat and went straight to bed. He seems to have completely lost the will to live. I think the thought of being able to revenge Lily’s death was the last thing keeping him alive.”

Scorpius got up and gestured to his father to get their coats. “We’ll be there as soon as possible,” he said.

“The hell you will,” Briac replied. “You’re going back to New Guinea—both of you. Your father’s not safe.”

“Neither is Harry,” Scorpius protested.

“Which is why Elizabeth and I are here with him. Hermione and Rose are going to take our place after we leave. Don’t worry, Scorpius. No one has any intention of leaving Harry alone for even a second.”

“But I want to be here for him, too.”

“I know you do, but you need to think of your father now. You know he won’t go home unless you do.”

“But . . .”

“There’s no ‘but’ about it. Look, I’m going to go. Elizabeth made toast . . .”

“Briac,” Scorpius said, interrupting him. “I’m not leaving. I left Harry once, and I’m not going to do it again.”

There was a long silence on the other end of the phone. Finally Scorpius heard Briac’s resigned sigh.

“Alright,” he said. “But I’m not changing my mind about your father—he needs to leave, the sooner the better.”

Scorpius’s father must’ve overheard the conversation, because suddenly he Accioed the phone out of Scorpius’s hand, dragging the whole contraption to the floor with a crash.
“I’m not going, Gwencalon,” Scorpius father said, his voice low and calm. “At least not until Harry knows that I stayed for the funeral.”

There were several minutes of raised voices and back and forth; finally Scorpius’s father hung-up.

“Well?” Scorpius asked. “Did you convince him?”

His father’s only reply was to summon his coat.

“Owl Khorve,” he said, pulling on his boots. “Tell him we’re staying until further notice.”

* * * * * * * * *

Harry stayed in bed for days.

The people who sat with him talked of Lily. They brought photographs and placed them on his bedside table where he stared at them for hours. Albus even brought her Pygmy Puffs for a visit.

“She shouldn’t be a forbidden subject,” the Mind Healer had told him. “He needs to know she’s still part of his life, that he can still think and talk about her.”

It wasn’t easy though. Despite their own heartbreak, people wanted to make their visits light-hearted and free of tears. No one wanted to break down in front of him as they had at the funeral, but it was hard for them to keep their emotions in check.

When it was their turn to watch him, Scorpius sat at his bedside while his father sat in the armchair by the fire and read aloud endless books about ferns. Harry turned his back when they walked in the room and lay facing away from them until they left. Scorpius didn’t know if they were the only ones who received such treatment. He hoped not.

Time ticked by. People grew increasingly concerned and tried to get Harry to talk. They did not succeed. It seemed as though he’d been struck deaf and mute.

Meanwhile, Scorpius started thinking he might lose his mind. When they weren’t with Harry, they stayed in their hotel, walking the corridors for exercise and reading stacks of books. It reminded Scorpius of all the years he and his father had been virtual prisoners in his father’s flat.

It must’ve reminded his father of that time as well. He was growing increasingly restless and impatient. One day, he simply cracked.

“I can’t stand being stuck here another second,” he said, throwing down his latest treatise on flowering shrubs and kicking it across the room like a petulant schoolboy tired of revising for a Runes exam.

Scropius looked up from his sketch of Westminster.

“Are you saying you want to go home?” he asked.

“No, of course not,” his father replied. “I’m saying let’s go for a bloody walk.”

Scorpius frowned. He did not like his father’s suggestion at all, but he also knew that talking his father out of his idea would be about as easy as coaxing a koala down from a tree.

“Alright,” he said warily. “But only if you use a Glamour.”

“We’ll stay in Muggle areas. I’m sick and tired of creeping about,” his father said. “I want to go out
as myself. I’ll even wear Muggle clothes. It’s not like I’ll be walking around in a black robe looking like Severus Snape.”

Scorpius bristled. Using a Glamour seemed like a reasonable request, and staying in Muggle areas didn’t completely foreclose the possibility that they might be seen by a witch or wizard.

“Look,” his father said, placing his hands on Scorpius’s shoulders. “You have to understand that this is a matter of pride for me. We won’t go far, I promise.”

Scorpius was not happy about the idea – he’d visited Diagon Alley the week before and had been spat on and called the son of a Death Eater. He had no doubt that his father would be reported the second a witch or wizard laid eyes on him . . .

. . . but at the same time, he understood his father’s desire. His father had been living for years in a place where he was not only tolerated, he was respected and adored, and now here he was, back in a place where people hated him for his father’s crimes and the fading Mark on his arm. It was a matter of self-esteem and revenge – two very powerful motivators.

“Okay,” he said reluctantly. “But we won’t go far and we won’t stay out for long.”

“Agreed,” his father replied. He’d been already wrapping his scarf around his neck and putting on his coat. Clearly, Scorpius’s permission had not been required, just his approbation.

They took the stairs to the lobby and slipped out the revolving door into a light, freezing drizzle.

“This is good,” his father said, looking up at the grey sky. “The worse the weather, the fewer people there’ll be.”

They walked for an hour, their chins tucked in their collars and gloved hands shoved in their pockets. The people they passed didn’t look twice at them. Cars splashed by and business men with umbrellas elbowed their way down the sidewalk. Scorpius couldn’t help but compare the whole scene to the landscape of New Guinea – and the comparison wasn’t favourable to London. Cold raindrops dampened his hair, chilling him to the bone. But still his father walked on, a grim, determined expression on his face.

Finally, they returned to the hotel, and took off their wet coats, casting drying charms at the dripping wool.

Scorpius hadn’t been happy about the walk, but he couldn’t help but notice that his father’s face was pink and he looked refreshed.

“Aw,” his father said, sitting down on his bed to pull off his boots. “That was worth it, wouldn’t you say?”

Scorpius didn’t reply. He wasn’t entirely sure, but then again, seeing his father happy seemed worth the risk.

“Tomorrow let’s walk by the river,” his father said. “We’ll go early in the morning before the bloody joggers come out. I’ll even wear a hat if you insist.”

Again, Scorpius didn’t reply. He didn’t know what to say. His father was tempting fate, and when Malfoys tempted fate, things always seemed to turn out badly.
It was mid-afternoon on a cloudy day, and they were just about to Apparate to Harry’s flat when there was a sharp knock on the door.

“It’s the maid,” Scorpius’s father said, straightening his shirt collar in the mirror. “How many times do we have to tell the management we don’t need our room cleaned? It’s infuriating!”

Scorpius stood up and went to the door. “Thank you, but we don’t need room service,” he said.

“It’s not room service,” a familiar voice replied. “It’s me.”

Briac! What a pleasant, unexpected surprise! Scorpius unlocked the door . . .

. . . and that’s when he saw them. Two Aurors in their scarlet robes, wands drawn.

Scorpius stepped back, shocked into silence.

“May we come in?” Briac asked. His voice wasn’t unkind, but it was formal-sounding – the voice of a law enforcement officer, not a friend.

“Certainly,” Scorpius’s father said calmly, turning away from the mirror. “Good evening, gentlemen, please make yourselves comfortable. May I get you a glass of whisky? If you prefer gin, we have that as well.”

For just an instant, a flicker of pain crossed Briac’s face, but it quickly melted back into professional indifference.

“Thank you, but no,” Briac replied. “We’re not here for an informal visit. Draco Malfoy, you are under arrest.”

“What? Briac!” Scorpius said, but his father held up his hand.

“You heard the Head Auror,” he said.

He went to his closet and retrieved his cloak and robe; clearly he no longer felt he needed to pretend he was anything but the proud, aristocratic wizard that he was.

Briac and the two Aurors entered the room and closed the door, locking and warding it behind them. Briac bound Scorpius’s father’s wrists with a flick of his wand.

“Listen,” he said. “You were spotted and reported, Draco, by three separate sources. I have no choice but to arrest you.”

“What about them?” Scorpius asked, nodding in the direction of the two Aurors. “Why are they here?”

“They’re providing much-needed legitimacy,” Briac replied. “They’re friends of Harry going back a long way. Emerson here used to be Harry’s partner before me. They don’t want to see you go to Azkaban any more than I do.”

For the first time since Briac and the Aurors entered the room, Scorpius saw his father’s face turn deathly pale.

“Is that where I’m going to be held pending trial?” he asked. “Azkaban?”

Briac shook his head. “No, you’ll be in a holding cell in the Ministry building. I will do everything I can to make you comfortable.”
Scorpius’s father snorted. “How kind of you,” he said.

Briac flinched.

“Does Harry know about this?” Scorpius asked. “He would never allow it.”

“No, Harry doesn’t know,” Briac replied. “And he won’t until the last moment.”

“What are you talking about?” Scorpius asked angrily. Clearly there was something afoot, and he and his father were being kept in the dark

“Shhh,” Briac said, drawing the five of them in a close circle and leaning forward so they could hear his almost undiscernible whisper. “Here’s the plan. Scorpius, your father is not going to be convicted.”

Scorpius’s father frowned. “How can you be so sure?” he asked. “The prosecution has a water-tight case. I’ve violated the law simply by being here. All they need to prove is that I would face a criminal penalty if I returned and that I have, in fact, returned. My mere presence will prove their case.”

Suddenly, Scorpius realized his father was trembling.

“I can’t go back to Azkaban,” his father said, his voice hoarse. “I will kill myself first.” There was fear in his eyes.

Scorpius sensed his father’s legs weren’t going to support him much longer; obviously the situation hadn’t fully sunk-in until that moment. He led his father to the couch so he could sit down with dignity.

Briac sat down beside him.

“It won’t come to that. I promise,” he said. “Here’s the plan. There is tremendous, overwhelming public sympathy for Harry right now. When he goes to the press and says you were only here to support him in his grief – a statement that has the benefit of being true – the people will demand your release. They might even demand you be permitted to stay. The Minister is already very unpopular. There’s no way he could hold-out even if he may want to, which he might, but his word means little these days, especially when Harry is concerned.”

“That’s brilliant!” Scorpius said. “Did you hear that, father? It’s a water-tight plan.”

But his father didn’t smile. He didn’t even look relieved.

“Your plan relies on an uncertain premise,” he said.

Everyone looked at him questioningly.

“And what premise is that?” Briac asked.

“That Harry will go to the press,” Scorpius’s father replied. “You know how he is about the press.”

Briac shook his head. “Don’t worry,” he said. “When he realizes what’s at stake, he’ll go to the press in a heartbeat.”

Scorpius nodded along with the two Aurors. “Of course, he will,” he said. “How could he not?”

His father turned away, his face just as pale as it had been before Briac had told him the plan.
“Let’s just say he has his reasons,” he replied. “And leave it at that.”

* * * * * * *

It was Hermione’s turn to watch him when Harry decided he’d finally had enough. He couldn’t stay in bed a moment longer.

He rolled over and looked at her. She didn’t even blink.

“I’m going to get up,” he croaked. He hadn’t used his voice in days.

Hermione nodded. “Yes,” she said. “I think it’s time. Do you want me to stay?”

He pushed himself up so he could lean against the headboard.

“No,” he said. “That’s why I waited until it was you who was with me. I knew you were the only one who’d give me a choice.”

She stood up.

“You deserve to choose,” she said.

Harry reached for her, and she took his hand.

“You know,” he said, smiling. “If I wasn’t gay, I would’ve married you.”

She smiled enigmatically. There was a reason she was an Unspeakable.

“Good-bye,” she said and leaned down to kiss his forehead.

“Good-bye,” he replied and watched as she walked through the door and closed it behind her.

Slowly, he pushed away the bedcovers and put his feet on the floor. Everything looked strange as though he’d stepped into a Van Gogh painting. Objects seemed warped and two-dimensional. The chair by the fireplace seemed to be breathing. He ran his fingers through his greasy hair. He’d bathed right before the funeral but not since. He sniffed under his arms. He stunk.

But he didn’t care. Not even a little bit.

Someone must’ve put his wand somewhere out of reach. It took several tries to summon it to his hand. Bastards. He’d felt infantilised, patronised, condescended to.

He pointed his wand at the pictures of Lily on his bedside table and whispered *Evanesco*.

Fools. He was sure they’d contacted a Mind Healer or some such other kind of quack. As if some arsehole with a paper certificate could “cure” him. What no one had stopped to think for one fucking second was that maybe he didn’t want to be cured. To be “cured” was to be normal, manageable, tamed. To be “cured” was to be the person he’d been before Lily died, but that person was as dead as she was.

Well, he was none of those things and no endless babble was going to change that. Lily. They’d all talked about Lily. Lily, Lily, Lily on and on and on. Blah blah blah. Fools. He hadn’t wanted them there at all, but if they *had* to be there, couldn’t they have been like Hermione and shut the fuck up?

He tried to stand, but fell before he could grab the bedpost. Hours went by while he lay on the floor staring up at the ceiling. They’d thought he was going to kill himself. He wasn’t. The thought hadn’t
even crossed his mind. If he killed himself, who would be angry . . . who would be furious? Who would remain un"cured." Who would still be filled with violence and rage? No one, that’s who. It was his job, and his alone. He would keep it burning until the day he died – an eternal flame of hatred.

After who knew how long, he used the bedpost to pull himself up. He had to eat something. He had to be strong. He staggered down the hallway to the kitchen, his hand against the wall. He was weak after spending days unmoving. That had to change.

To get to the kitchen, he had to pass through the living room. He paused and looked around. There was a lot of furniture – most of it comfortable. Chairs, couches, cushions. Things people had to put them at ease – to lounge in and watch the telly.

He pointed his wand and whispered one word.

*Expulso.*

In an instant, everything in the room was blow-apart with a blast so strong it knocked him backwards, and he fell again. Flames licked the ceiling and blackened the latticework. Chucks of charred wood and smouldering cloth lay scattered about. Several large splinters had punctured the plaster walls and remained there, stuck, still burning.

Harry stared at the wreckage, feeling a mixture of horror and satisfaction.

After a while, he staggered to his feet again and continued his trek to the kitchen. People had left behind food in the fridge – salads and easy-to- warm casseroles. Harry’s wand hand itched to blow them up, too, but that would be needlessly self-destructive. He was hungry, and he needed to eat. Hunger was distracting.

He found something made of pasta and cheese and sat down in the middle of the floor, eating it cold with his fingers and contemplating his next move. There was no doubt he was going to Riga. That was a given. But what would he do when he got there? That was the question. The fuckers were in protective custody. It was going to take all his cunning and expertise to get to them.

He finished eating and wiped his hands on his pyjama bottoms. Pyjama bottoms? Who the fuck had changed his clothes? He must’ve been awake, but he had no memory of it. Arseholes. He’d been fully dressed when he got in bed. Who gave them permission to touch him in such intimate ways? Who had the fucking gall? There was no one – *no one* – in his life he wanted to be naked in front of. In fact he was never going to be naked in front of anyone again – not a lover, not a prostitute. No one was ever going to touch him again. He was done with sex. Unlike eating and drinking, it was superfluous. He’d been touched once – he had a vague memory of someone kissing him, his mouth, his body . . . but that had been a very long time ago. It had not happened since. And it would not happen again. Nothing like love would ever happen again. Nothing like tenderness.

Suddenly a wave of grief crashed over him, choking him and pressing him down until his forehead hit the floor. He made a sound – a horrible sound, something between a gag and a sob. He was consumed by longing and despair . . . two emotions that would break him like a twig if he let them.

He wouldn’t let them.

He sat up and raised his wand again, but there was nothing more to explode. He was starting to feel stronger again, though, and he stood without needing to grab the counter. He stumbled back to the bedroom. He needed to change. He needed to go out in public and he needed to change. He needed to go out in public to the Pork Key hub. He needed to get to Riga.
He struggled out of his t-shirt and stripped to the skin. He really should shower, but there wasn’t
time. Every minute that passed was another minute Lily’s killers remained alive. The knowledge was
unendurable.

He was just pulling on his jeans when he heard a whoosh, and someone stepped out of the fireplace.
He swore out loud. He should’ve remembered that someone would come to take Hermione’s place.
. . . whoever it might be was going to get an eyeful.

“Jesus Christ!” Briac yelled. “What the bloody hell?”

Harry laughed as he walked down the hallway, bare-chested and twirling his wand.

“Why, hello there, Briac,” he said when he walked into what was left of the living room. “As you
can see, I’m up and about again. I thought I’d do a little tidying up. What do you think of the new
lay-out? I’ve been harmonizing my environment to fit my mood. Very feng shui, don’t you think?”

He pointed his wand at what remained of the coffee table, shattering the glass into glittering shards.

“Jesus, Harry,” Briac said, drawing his wand.

“Expelliarmus!” Harry shouted, catching Briac off guard.

Briac’s wand flew into his hand. Harry laughed again.

“Not on our toes are we?” he said.

Briac held his hands out in a placating gesture.

“It’s alright,” he said calmly. “Just sit down, Harry. Everything is going to be alright.”

“Don’t you dare patronise me,” Harry said. “Now get out of my flat.”

Briac didn’t drop his hands, but he did take a careful step forward as though Harry was a rabid dog
that needed to be captured.

“I’ll go,” he said. “I promise I’ll go and not bother you again, but we have a situation on our hands,
Harry, and we need your help.”

Harry cocked his head, feeling mildly curious. A situation? How intriguing.

Obviously, Briac had decided to cut to the chase. “Draco was spotted and reported,” he said. “I had
to arrest him. He’s in a holding cell at the Ministry. The trial is tomorrow afternoon. The public will
sympathise and demand his release when you go to the press and tell them that Draco was only in the
country to help you.”

Harry stared at him. “What?” he said.

“I said Draco is in a holding cell . . .”

Harry waved his hand dismissively. “No, not that part. The part about me going to the press.”

It was Briac’s turn to stare. “I don’t think you . . . Harry, what the hell are you saying?”

“I’m saying,” Harry said very slowly as though he was talking to a foreigner who did not speak
English, “that I will not go to the press.”
Briac looked beside himself, his mouth opening and closing like a guppy.

“I don’t understand,” he said. “If you don’t go to the press, the public won’t demand Draco’s release.”

Harry twirled both his and Briac’s wands between the fingers of both hands as though he was just bored and killing time.

“Whoever said I want Draco’s release?” he asked.

"Expelliarmus!" Briac shouted, but Harry held on tight.

“Nice try, Gwencalon,” he said, “but hardly subtle.”

Briac’s face was red with anger and indignation.

“I cannot believe we are having this conversation!” he shouted. “What the fuck is wrong with you? If Draco is convicted he’ll be sent to Azkaban!”

“And who the fuck says I care?” Harry shouted back. “Draco has made it abundantly clear that he wants nothing to do with me – in fact, he’s made it quite clear that he thinks I’m a selfish moron. Tell me, Briac, why should I help someone who metaphorically spat in my face when I tried to tell him I might have feelings for him? Answer me that!”

Briac stared at him. “There are so many levels of fucked-up-ness in that tirade that I don’t even know where to start,” he said.

“Well start with this,” Harry said, his voice steady and cold. “I will not whore my grief to the press. I will not blubber about my daughter’s death so the masses can mop their eyes with their handkerchiefs and say, ‘Oh, poor dear Harry. What a terrible life he’s had.’ I don’t want public sympathy. I don’t need public sympathy – what I need is for you to get the fuck out of my flat!”

He threw Briac’s wand at him so suddenly that Briac barely had time to catch it before it hit the wall.

“Harry . . .” he said desperately. “It will kill Draco to have to go back to Azkaban, and you know it.”

“I said get out of my flat!” Harry yelled.


“Like he thought of me?” Harry said, his voice full of disdain. “I gave him everything, Briac! My heart, my soul, and he threw them back in my face!”

A look of grim resignation settled on Briac’s face.

“You’re not going to back-down, are you?” he said.

Harry shook his head.

“You’ve asked the unthinkable of me,” he replied. “Your request makes me sick. Now, how many times do I have to tell you – GET OUT OF MY FLAT!”

Briac sheathed his wand and prepared to Apparate, but then he stopped.

“Go to hell, Harry,” he said evenly. “Because that’s where you belong.”
OMG. There are no words for how hard it has been to get the ending to this story right. Many apologies for the long silence. This is part one of a two part finale.

They didn’t Apparate. Scorpius’s father was too shaken. Instead, Briac and the two Aurors walked them down the stairs and out the back door of the hotel. It was drizzling. A Muggle car was waiting in the alley. It was black with tinted windows. The mere sight of it caused Scorpius’s father to stumble. Briac caught his arm before he fell.

“It’s alright,” Scorpius whispered in his father’s ear. “Don’t forget we have a plan.”

His father didn’t reply. Scorpius wasn’t sure he could. He was clearly trying to hold himself together with nothing but a thin cement of pride and sheer will. He walked slowly, his chin held high in a poor approximation of indifference, but in the car, he refused to let Scorpius take his hand. He was beyond comfort. Helplessness had settled in. Dread owned him now.

Azkaban. His father never spoke about the years he’d been imprisoned there. Even when he was a child, Scorpius had known his father didn’t have the words to describe his experience. Maybe there weren’t such words. Words like “horror” and “degradation” were meaningless in the face of starvation, rape and years of solitary confinement. No language existed that could portray what it was like to live for days eating nothing but rats and cockroaches. No language existed that could convey the experience of knowing that you’d never be permitted to die no matter how many sexual favours you “granted.” No matter how much you begged.

There was traffic, so the drive took longer than it should. No one spoke. Briac looked grimly ahead while Scorpius’s father stared out the window. Scorpius watched his father’s reflection in the glass. His eyes looked haunted. They did not look like the eyes of a man with an endurable future.

Eventually, the car pulled into an alleyway off a narrow lane not far from the Ministry building. The entrance to the prison block was under a skip behind a pub. Newspapers sticky with the grease of fish and chips clung to their boots. There was a strong smell of rotten cabbage in the air. Scorpius heard his father gag.

He placed a comforting hand on his father’s shoulder.
“Think of the rain forest,” he said. “Think of your garden.”

His father merely nodded, too distracted by fear to reply.

The uneven stone steps were winding and poorly lit. They seemed to descend forever. When they finally reached the bottom, Scorpius and his father were led into a blindingly bright room with fluorescent lights and rows of uncomfortable orange plastic chairs. On the white concrete walls hung posters informing visitors that they were not permitted to enter the cell block unless they surrendered their wand and wore appropriate clothing. No low-cut blouses or skirts above the knee! At the far end of the room was a sliding steel door. Briac stopped before they went through it.

“I’ll need to take your wands,” he said apologetically, unbinding Scorpius’s father’s wrists for a moment.

Scorpius saw his father’s hand shake as he reached into the pocket of his robe. No doubt he was remembering all the years he’d been forced to live like a Muggle.

“It’s alright,” Briac assured him. “It’s just a formality.”

Scorpius’s father nodded and after a moment’s hesitation, placed his wand in Briac’s outstretched hand.

“Remember,” Briac said, his voice low, “no one but the five of us know about our plan. While I trust most of my Aurors, there are some I don’t and some whose loyalty I haven’t tested yet. Only talk to me when we’re in the holding cell with the door closed and locked. Understood?”

Scorpius and his father nodded.

They began their walk down a long corridor lined with doors on both sides. Some of the doors were open, their cells empty, but most were closed. People passed them. Most were Aurors, but some looked like prison guards. Scorpius’s father stopped short when he saw them.

“I can’t,” he said. “I can’t do this again.”

Scorpius’s heart broke. He wondered if his father was remembering the abuse he must’ve suffered in Azkaban. He’d been nothing but a toy to amuse his captors. A plaything they could use for any depraved purpose.

Scorpius was sure Briac would’ve comforted them, but by necessity, he’d slipped into his formal role as Head Auror.

“Come along, Mister Malfoy,” he said curtly and pointed. “Your cell is at the end down there.”

Scorpius was impressed and relieved by the professionalism of the witches and wizards around them and was sure it brought some small amount of comfort to his father – to the extent that was possible. No one even glanced at them, let only glared. The atmosphere couldn’t be more different from Diagon Alley where they would’ve been treated like escaped convicts – or worse.

When at last they reached the cell and closed the door behind them, Scorpius’s father collapsed on the steel bench and tipped his head back against the wall. Despite the distinct chill, sweat had dampened the hair at his temples, darkening it to blond.

“We don’t have much time,” Briac said. “It’s five o’clock, and The Prophet goes to print at midnight. The trial is scheduled for tomorrow. Obviously, Harry’s story has to make the deadline.”
Scorpius’s father swallowed but remained silent. Scorpius wished he knew what his father was thinking. He wished he knew if he had any hope their plan would succeed.

“I’m going to Harry now,” Briac said. He placed his hand on Scorpius’s father’s shoulder. “It’s going to be alright.”

Scorpius’s father merely nodded. He did not look convinced in the slightest. After Briac left, he lay down on the bench and pulled his knees to his chest. Scorpius covered him with his cloak. His heart was breaking, but then he reminded himself that this was Harry they were talking about. Harry was a Gryffindor. Gryffindors always fought for those they love, and Harry loved them. Maybe not in the same way, but just as intensely. It hadn’t been hard to read between the lines of Harry’s “letter.” If he wasn’t “in love” with Scorpius’s father than he was at least deeply fond of him. Harry would not let his father go to Azkaban. It was simply unthinkable that he would, no matter how hurt he’d been by his father’s letter. In the end, it didn’t matter. What mattered was that Harry was Harry, and if Scorpius’s father wasn’t the love of his life, then he was at least a cherished friend – a friend he’d protect to the death.

***********

Lily. His Lily. His darling daughter.

For a long time, Harry stared at his empty fireplace. The soot stains looked like a Rorschach test. Patterns emerged. Birds. Bats. Butterflies. Familiar faces twisted in absurd expressions. He blinked and then blinked again, barely aware that he’d clenched his fists in his hair, pulling at the roots till it hurt. The air smelled of melted plastic. Somewhere behind him, something still smouldered. He could hear the hiss and snap of living embers.

Briac was gone. Harry had told him to leave, and he had. He was probably already back at the Ministry building delivering the bad news.

What had he done?

Had he really just condemned Draco to a life in Azkaban? Azkaban where nightmares crouched in every corner and people emerged – if they emerged at all – their minds plundered by a violent silence – a silence broken only by the screams of the mad and the groans of the dying. It was amazing Draco had survived the first time. He would not survive a second.

Harry stumbled backward, crying out when he sliced his bare feet on the glass shards of his coffee table. The pain was like a sobering slap in the face. He was a monster. Grief had made him a monster. He looked around at the wreckage he’d wrought. The smouldering couch where he and Lily used to sit watching football matches on the telly, a bowl of salt and vinegar crisps between them. The blackened mirror she used to check her hair in before she went out. The blasted armchair where she used to sit, her legs tucked under her, reading her latest Muggle crime novel. The singed rug where she used to play with her Pygmy Puffs. The shattered coffee table where they used to play poker, throwing popcorn at each other when they cheated.

He’d destroyed memory after memory, and there’d he’d been talking about whoring his grief? He already had, except instead of whoring it to The Prophet, he’d whored it to his rage.

“What would Lily think if she could see him now, bloody feet, soot smearing his bare chest, casserole all over his hands? It would break her heart. And what would she think if she knew he’d doomed Draco to a short, dismal life in prison? Could she still love him after that?
The answer seemed obvious.

Of course not.

* * * * * * * * * *

Scorpius was sitting on the bench, his father’s head in his lap, when they heard slow, heavy footsteps coming down the corridor.

“That’s Briac,” Scorpius’s father said, sitting up and combing his fingers through his hair. “Harry’s not going to do it.”

“You don’t know that,” Scorpius said fiercely, but as soon as Briac opened the door and they saw his expression, he knew his father was right.

“I did everything I could,” Briac said. “I’m sorry.”

Scorpius leapt to his feet. Briac was “sorry”? Sorry was what you said when you stepped on someone’s toes. Sorry was what you said when you showed up late at a party. Sorry was not what you said when you’d just given someone the news they’ll be spending the rest of their life in prison.

“This isn’t happening!” he said. “This can’t be happening! Briac, what did Harry say? Did he give a reason?”

Briac ran his fingers through his hair. His face looked haggard. He took off his red robe and flung it in the corner.

“He said he wasn’t going to ‘whore his grief’ to the press,” he replied. “He was furious that I’d even asked him.”

Scorpius’s father had turned a greyish shade of pale, but nonetheless, he smiled ruefully.

“I called that one, didn’t I,” he said.

“I don’t understand how this can be happening?” Scorpius said, his mind reeling for purchase on the icy slope of their new reality. He turned to Briac. “I’ll go to him. I’ll talk to him. He’ll listen to me. I know he will. He still loves me. I know he does.”

Briac winced. “I’m not so sure he’ll listen to you,” he said. “Harry isn’t himself. He’s raging. You should see what he’s done to his flat. Grief has twisted his mind. It’s like all the losses he’s ever suffered have finally broken him – and you’re one of those losses, Scorpius. Seeing you will only remind him of that fact.”

“My father is not going to Azkaban!” Scorpius said. “I don’t care that Harry’s not himself. I don’t care how much he’s grieving . . .”

His father held up his hand.

“Scorpius,” he said. “Enough.” He turned to Briac. “What are my options?”

“Your options?” Briac replied. “There aren’t many, but at the risk of sounding like I’m banging my head against a brick wall, I don’t think we should give up on Harry.”

“But you said I shouldn’t go,” Scorpius said. “You said that it wouldn’t make a difference.”

“I’m not talking about you,” Briac replied. “I’m talking about your father.” He turned to Scorpius’s
father. “I can release you for an hour. There’s a provision in the law that permits a suspect to visit anyone he wants before his trial. Your meeting will have to be supervised and take place in public, but my Aurors will be discreet. You won’t even notice they’re there. I won’t go. Harry doesn’t want to see me again . . . but you – you need to make this real for him. You need to look in his eyes and show him what’s at stake. He can’t possibly say no.”

Scorpius’s father shook his head.

“He can and he might,” he said.

Scorpius latched onto his father’s words with the tenacity of a barnacle.

“He might?” he said. “Isn’t that enough to make it worth a try?”

His father looked at him, his pride and fear grappling for control of his expression.

“I can’t believe we’re even debating this,” Scorpius said. “Father, if you won’t go to him, then I will. You’re not going to Azkaban. It’s not an option.”

His father turned to Briac.

“Are you sure Scorpius wouldn’t be a better choice?” he said. “I mean, after all they were . . .”

His voice petered out before he reached the end of the sentence.

“I hurt him,” Scorpius said.

“So did I,” his father replied. “Remember Harry’s so-called letter that Lily gave you to give to me? I lied when I said I didn’t reply.”

Scorpius took a deep breath, the momentous admission balanced on the tip of his tongue.

“I know,” he said in a rush, wanting to get it all out at once. “Lily wrote to me, saying Harry was upset, and I cast a revealing spell. I’m sorry. I know it was an unforgivable violation . . .”

His father waved his hand in angry dismissal of his words.

“It doesn’t matter,” he said. “That’s water well under the bridge. What does matter is that you know what I wrote – you know what I said to him.”

“I do know, and I don’t understand,” Scorpius replied. “I didn’t then, and I still don’t now.”

Briac cleared his throat and then turned away when Scorpius and his father looked in his direction.

“There’s nothing to understand,” Scorpius father said. “The only thing to understand is that Harry may just as well say no to me as he did to Briac.”

“You’re not even going to try?” Scorpius said, tears pricking at the corners of his eyes. “If you won’t do it for yourself, then do it for me. Do you really believe I could live knowing you’re suffering in Azkaban? I couldn’t. It would kill me.”

Scorpius’s father went to him and pulled him into an embrace. Scorpius clung to his shirt like a child.

“Please,” he begged.

After several tense moments, his father finally relented. “Alright,” he said, stroking Scorpius’s hair.
“I’ll go to him. But don’t expect too much.”

“Thank God,” Briac muttered under his breath before turning to Scorpius’s father. “I need to fill out the necessary paperwork,” he said. “I’ll be back in five minutes and then we’ll go. Don’t forget we don’t have much time – and you, Draco, only have an hour. You should start thinking now about what you plan to say and how you plan to say it. The nature of your approach is crucial. Think of an offer that Harry can’t refuse.”

Leaving them with that final admonishment, Briac left, closing the cell door behind him. Scorpius waited for the sound of his footsteps to fade before collapsing on the bench. Whatever emotional scaffolding that had been holding him up had come crashing down.

“Don’t let your pride get in the way,” he pleaded to his father. “You know that Harry cares about you.”

His father turned his back and walked to the far corner where he stood with his head bowed and his arms wrapped around himself like a straitjacket.

“And you know you care about him, too,” Scorpius added softly. “You know you have feelings . . .”

“I am not in love with your former lover,” his father said angrily.

Scorpius inhaled sharply. Was this what it was all about? His prior relationship with Harry? Is that why his father had been so proud and so cruel in his letter? Was that why he was being so obstinate now?

“Harry and I broke up nearly ten years ago,” Scorpius said, trying to keep the incredulity out of his voice. “You know I’ve moved on.”

“Yes, but has he?” Scorpius’s father asked. “I’ve never been convinced he has. Like Briac said, your loss is still fresh in his mind.”

“I’m not saying he’s forgotten me,” Scorpius said, reaching into his shirt and holding up his stag pendant. “He’ll never forget me, but father, you and I are different. The feelings he has for you are different from the feelings he had for me.”

His words clearly didn’t seem to comfort his father. He curled in on himself, his shoulders slumped as though a great weight was pressing down on him.

Scorpius went to him and put his arms around him.

“Harry and I are not lovers,” he said gently and then, taking a deep breath, he added, “if you want him, then he’s yours.”

“I don’t ‘want’ him,” his father snapped. “I never have.”

_Bollocks_, Scorpius wanted to say. He’d shared a bedroom with his father for years. It hadn’t been uncommon to be jolted from his sleep by Harry’s name. If his father didn’t “want” Harry, he at the very least dreamed of him.

“Don’t be too proud to tell him you’re sorry,” Scorpius said. “You know you are. I’m not blind. I know you’ve been hurting ever since you sent that letter.”

His father’s failure to reply right away was revealing – his silence spoke louder than words.
“I won’t tell him I’m sorry,” his father eventually said. “But I will tell him . . .”

His voice faded. Scorpius prompted him to continue.

“Tell him what?” he asked.

“That I wish he hadn’t been hurt,” his father replied.

Under different circumstances, Scorpius would’ve laughed.

“That sounds like an apology to me,” he said.

“Well, it’s not,” his father replied. “I’d merely be saying that I wish he didn’t care for me so much that I could hurt him.”

Scorpius sighed with frustration, but perhaps that would be good enough. After all, Scorpius had often wished the same thing about himself. For a long time – especially since he’d met Khorve – he had wished that Harry would stop mourning their separation and move on . . .

. . . the main difference between him and his father, though, was that Scorpius was telling the truth. His father, on the other hand, was – as the old proverb goes – lying through his teeth.

* * * * * * *

Harry stripped and stepped into the shower, tipping his head back so the drops could splash on his face. The water was almost hot enough to scald. It had to be. He had to rinse away the shame clinging to his skin as rank and tenacious as week-old sweat. All thoughts of revenge had seeped from his bones, leaving behind nothing but a marrow of grief and regret. He scoured every inch of his body, scrubbing off the veneer of rage until his skin was raw. He’d never before felt so naked. So exposed. He supposed it was a foreshadowing of what was to come.

He was going to The Prophet. He hadn’t needed the DMLE’s owl scratching at his window with a note from Draco telling him to meet him at the Hooded Crow. He’d already decided. In fact, as soon as his hour with Draco was over, he was going to Floo straight to the editor’s office. Rita Skeeter was expecting him, her green quick-quotes quill in hand, ready to sop up his wretchedness like an eager bespectacled sponge.

He turned off the water and stepped out of the shower. The mirror was covered with steam. He could still see the ghost of words Lily had written just days before she left for Riga. Good morning! with a heart at the end. He wrapped a towel around his waist and walked to his bedroom. He’d healed the wounds on his feet. There was no need for additional self-flagellation. He opened his closet doors and stared unseeingly, his mind unable to grapple with simple concepts like clothes. After much consideration, he finally chose the outfit he knew Lily would’ve chosen for him – black trousers and a dark green shirt she’d given him for his birthday. It compliments your eyes, dad, she would’ve said as she fixed his collar. He bit back tears. He was going to plead for Draco’s freedom, but he was not going to cry. If he did, the news would make the cover. It might even be the headline.

Draco.

Harry took a deep breath before stepping into his fireplace and saying the Hooded Crow’s address. What was Draco going to say? He must be furious that Harry had refused to go to the press – and he’d have a right to be. He was probably going to chew Harry a new arsehole . . . but then again, Draco was a Slytherin. Harry was sure that if Draco wanted something badly enough, he could be quite charming indeed. If Slytherins excelled at anything, it was emotional manipulation. Harry was just going to have to play it by ear – and most importantly, take everything Draco said with a huge
pinch of salt, no matter how much Harry might want to believe him.

Briac must’ve suggested the Crow – it’d been his and Harry’s favourite pub when they’d been partners. It was dank and cave-like – not somewhere you went if you were on a date or looking for a night out with the lads. It was a place where you went to exchange confidential information with informants or make threats to life, limb and property. It was a place where no one would care if the former Head Auror was tucked away in a corner booth with a former Death Eater.

The first people Harry noticed when he stepped out of the enormous stone fireplace were his former partner, Emerson, and Lily’s former partner, Cassandra. He nodded at them, and they nodded back. Somewhere in the dark recesses, Briac must be lurking with a pint, alert for any signs of trouble. Harry winced. Briac was almost certainly angry at him. He approached Emerson and whispered in his ear.

“Tell your boss we’ll have a drink later after I’ve talked to Skeeter.”

Emerson smiled and clapped Harry on the back.

“Be warned,” he said. “He’ll probably claim you owe him a pint.”

“Or three,” Harry replied. He looked around. “Where’s Malfoy?”

Emerson nodded to a booth in the back where a man sat, the hood of his cloak obscuring his face.

“How hacked off is he?” Harry asked, trying to sound no more than casually curious.

“Not at all as far as I can tell,” Emerson replied.

Harry arched an eyebrow. Well, that answered that question. He was going to be talking to a Slytherin. Whatever it was Draco truly felt would be buried under a mask of congeniality. Deals would be offered. Lies would be told. Few things of consequence would be discussed.

Harry sighed.

As always, the light was low. Torches flickered in their iron holders, blackening the stone walls behind them. No one looked at him when he passed their tables. No one gave a shit. They were too engrossed in their own nefarious conversations to care what the Chosen One was up to.

Draco barely looked up when Harry joined him. There were two glasses and an unopened bottle of expensive Scottish whisky on the table in front of him. The golden liquid trapped the light as though each flicker was a fly in amber. Draco pushed back his hood.

“Potter,” he said with a wan smile.

“Malfoy,” Harry replied with a smile no less wan.

There was a long silence while Harry opened the bottle of whisky and filled both their glasses. He threw back his and poured himself another. The alcohol warmed a path to his grateful stomach. He hadn’t had a drink in over a week. Finally, Draco cleared his throat.

“I’ll just say it outright,” he said. “I need your help, Harry. I can’t go back to Azkaban. I know you know why. I know you’ve been there. I know you know what it’s like.”

Harry nodded. He did, indeed. He’d been there numerous times escorting recent convicts. Despite the many humanitarian advances that’d been made since Voldemort’s defeat, Azkaban remained
almost unchanged. Most of the Dementors were gone, but some remained, gorging themselves on the inmates’ despair. Harry hated it with every fibre of his being, but public opinion could not be budged. If anything, attitudes toward crime and punishment had only hardened over time. No one wanted another Voldemort.

“I’m pleading with you,” Draco said. “You know that’s not easy for me, but I’m desperate.”

Harry downed his second glass and poured himself a third.

“I know how hard it is for you to talk to the press,” Draco continued.

Harry bristled.

“Actually, you don’t know,” he said. “There is nothing in this world I despise more than the press. The thought of talking to Rita Skeeter about Lily . . .”

He swallowed and looked away. Lily’s face filled his mind – her smile, her brown eyes, her hair the colour of flame. She’d been the most beautiful sight in the world to him, his one oasis.

After a moment, Draco reached out and placed a hand on his.

“I wouldn’t ask you to do this if I wasn’t at the end of my options,” he said.

Harry nodded. He was still too choked-up to speak.

Obviously unnerved by Harry’s silence, Draco continued, his voice dropping even lower than it already was. “I’ll do whatever you want,” he said. “What do you want, Harry? What is there that I can give you? Name it, whatever it is, and if it’s in my power, you’ll have it. I’m not without resources. I have money, influence, the talent and skill to make a potion to cure any ailment you can imagine.”

Harry shook his head. He didn’t want anything – at least not any of the things Draco had offered. He didn’t need money, and he certainly didn’t need influence. What he wanted . . . what he wanted was some kind of affirmation, some kind of proof that Draco hadn’t meant what he’d said in his letter. What he wanted was a sign that Draco cared about him, although what that sign might be, he didn’t know. All he knew was that he wanted it to be something he could believe in, something unambiguous. Something as real and direct as Draco’s plea had been. Something . . .

. . . Harry looked at Draco’s face – his mouth, his nose, the pale depths of his eyes. He looked at Draco’s hand where it lay on top of his. Suddenly, he felt a strange, unexpected surge of emotion . . . and desire. He blushed and yanked his hand back.

Draco eyes widened. Against all hope, Harry had given him something to latch onto, and latch onto it, he did.

“If that’s what you want,” he said, his voice sounding almost sultry, “you can have it.”

Harry almost leapt up from his bench. Shock must’ve been written all over his face. All of a sudden, he felt . . . he felt so dirty, so used. For the flash of a second he considered telling Draco to go to hell, but then he remembered that going to the press was as much for him – for the assuagement of his guilt – as it was for Draco.

“Don’t you dare play with me,” he snarled.

don’t expect you to give me anything for free.”

Harry thought he might be ill. This is why he’d always disliked Slytherins. It was why, when he was Head Auror, he’d only hired three of them – and out of those three, he’d eventually sacked two.

“Who says I’d be doing anything for you?” Harry said. “Who says I wouldn’t be doing it for me? And who says I even want what you’re offering?”

“I do,” Draco replied. “I’m saying all of the above – and I’m telling you that you can have it if you only ask.”

Harry wanted to kill someone – preferably Draco – when he felt blood rush to his loins. He threw back a fourth glass of whisky. There was an inn above the pub. He could take what Draco was offering. He hadn’t been touched in so long – not since he’d rebuffed Scorpius’s advance all those months ago. He longed for sexual arousal – for the forgetfulness it offered, the eventual release . . .

. . . and he longed for Draco.

The realisation hit him like a Bludger.

He scrubbed his face, willing his body to reject the longing in his veins.

“We don’t have much time,” Draco said. He reached under the table and laid his hand on Harry’s knee. “I know how to give you what you want.”

Harry couldn’t take it a moment longer. He leapt up and grabbed his coat. Draco stared up at him, his eyes full of desperation.

“I’m going to the press,” Harry said, furious and appalled almost beyond words. “I was going to go before we even met. You don’t have to whore yourself to get me to whore myself!”

Draco leapt up as well. His face was flushed, his hair almost golden in the firelight.

“You . . . you’re going to the press?” he said. “You’d always intended to? You let me proposition you for no reason?”

Harry turned away and, without another word or even a glance, shoved his way through the crowd to the door. He was hard and humiliated, aching with need and burning with shame.

For the breath of a moment, he decided he wouldn’t go to his meeting with Skeeter . . . but in the end, he did.

*************

Scorpius woke from a fitful dream to the sound of footsteps. He sat up when Briac unlocked the door. There was a copy of The Prophet in his hand. Scorpius’s father groaned when he saw it. He’d spent all night sitting in the far corner of the cell, his head on his knees and his hands covering his face. Scorpius hadn’t dared ask him how his meeting with Harry had gone. It was obvious from his father’s silence that it’d been a disaster.

“Did he do it?” Scorpius asked Briac, his voice begging for a small glimmer of hope.

Briac merely threw the paper on the bench, too breathless to reply. He must’ve run all the way down the stairs.

The first thing Scorpius saw was a photograph of Harry turning away from the camera to brush a tear
from his eye. Scorpius gasped. He’d never imagined in a million years that Harry would permit himself to cry in front of anyone, let alone Rita Skeeter. Talking about Lily must’ve been too much for him to bear.

**HARRY POTTER PLEADS FOR DEATH EATER’S FREEDOM** the headline (literally) screamed. Scorpius snatched up the paper and began reading aloud.

“Yesterday, the famous (some might even say ‘infamous’) Harry Potter opened up about his grief, his late daughter and the apparent friendship he shares with his one-time nemesis, Death Eater and former convict, Draco Malfoy.”

“As all of you know, Potter recently lost his promising young daughter to a mob of evil-doers. ‘She died doing what she thought was right,’ Potter said. ‘She took her life into her hands, fighting for the lives of others.’ This reporter found Potter’s words most touching, but I was left with an unanswered question that I’m sure I share with many readers: is Potter aware that he’d brought up Lily to be a needless risk taker? This reporter did not ask but expect to learn more in my upcoming article, ‘Lily Potter: Righteous . . . Or Reckless.’”

Scorpius shook the paper as though it was Rita Skeeter herself.

“That’s sickening,” he said indignantly. “Poor Harry.”

“Sickening and entirely predictable,” Briac said. “Keep reading.”

Scorpius returned his attention to the paper in his hands.

“Potter movingly recounted memories of times he spent with his daughter, including taking Lily to buy her first broom. ‘We tried out every broom in the shop,’ Potter said, gazing wistfully into the distance. ‘It took all day. It was like she used to be with a new Pygmy Puff – she always had a hard time choosing which one she wanted.’”

Scorpius’s father covered his ears.

“Please stop,” he said. “Skip to the part about me.”

Scorpius scanned the long article until he found his father’s name.

“As moving as his words about his daughter were, this reporter was most struck by Potter’s emotional plea for the release of the son of Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy, who, readers will recall, received the Kiss shortly after Voldemort’s defeat. Former Death Eater, Draco Malfoy, appears to have insinuated himself into our hero’s heart. ‘Yes, he’s in the country illegally,’ Potter said. ‘But the only reason Draco is here was to comfort me after Lily died. His presence is one of the reasons I’m even here today. If he didn’t help save my life, then he at least helped to save my sanity.’ Potter addressed the Minister of Magic himself, pleading with him to pardon Malfoy and allow him to return to his adopted home of New Guinea. ‘Let him go,’ Potter said, a fire blazing in his passionate green eyes. ‘He’s caused no harm. I’m asking you directly – let him go.’”

Scorpius looked up, his eyes wide. He glanced at his father who looked much the same. When he turned to Briac, Scorpius saw he was grinning ear to ear.

“I knew Harry would come through,” he said. “Flip to the opinion page. There’s a column by Jude Judson.”

Scorpius found the column and started reading.
“Long gone into the deepest shadows should be the dark days in which we punished the children of Death Eaters, no matter how notorious or bloodthirsty. Long gone should be that living hell we call a prison. Regardless of the critical role Draco Malfoy played in comforting our beloved Harry Potter in his time of grief, he should be pardoned on nothing but guiding principle alone. The nation should raise up our fists and say – as did our saviour – ‘Let him go!’ His release would signal that the night is finally over, and the light of a new dawn washes over the land in splendid rays of purple and gold.”

“God, what terrible writing,” Scorpius’s father grumbled.

Scorpius was about to chastise him for complaining when he realised his father was trying to hide a grin just as wide as Briac’s.

“You’re safe, father,” Scorpius said. “There’s no way the Minister won’t pardon you now.”

“Not if he wants to keep his job,” said Briac, “which believe me, he does. You’ve never met a more politically-minded man in your life. It’s sickening, but in this situation, it plays into our hands.”

Scorpius went to his father and helped him stand, catching him when his legs gave out from exhaustion and relief.

“You two must’ve had a good conversation,” he said. “Harry really went all out for you.”

His father’s smile faded.

Scorpius frowned at him. Something was wrong.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” his father snapped.

“Alright,” Scorpius replied, both surprised and miffed at his father’s tone.

“You don’t need to talk about it,” Briac said, placing his hand on Scorpius’s father’s shoulder. “What took place between you and Harry should stay that way – just between you and Harry.”

Scorpius’s frown deepened when he realised his father and Briac were conversing with their eyes. Briac must know something. Harry must’ve told him something, but what? Whatever it was, it did not look like a good thing.

“Where is he?” Scorpius’s father asked.

Briac smiled ruefully. “Somewhere sleeping off a hang-over is my guess.”

“So, he won’t be there when the Minister actually pardons my father?” Scorpius asked, feeling hurt on his father’s behalf.

“Harry’s presence would be overkill,” his father replied, brushing off his robe. “It’s a good thing he won’t be there.” He turned to Scorpius. “While we’re waiting for the trial to start, why don’t you go back to the hotel and pack our things. We’ll want to leave straight away.”

Scorpius blinked at him. Go pack their things?

“But if you’re pardoned, you don’t have to leave right away,” he said. “Don’t you think we should stay at least another day? We need to say good-bye to everyone, especially Harry.”

Scorpius’s father made a big to-do about putting on his cloak.
“I don’t think we should push my luck,” he said tersely. “Besides, it’s time to go home. My garden will be . . .”

Scorpius grabbed his father’s shoulders and forced his father to look him in the face.

“What did you say?” he asked, feeling the urge to shake the words out of his father like coins from piggybank. “What did you say to Harry?”

“It’s none of your business,” his father replied in a tone that made it clear he had nothing more to say.

Scorpius dropped his hands. He was too tired and still too worried to argue. Regardless of what happened, they had a long day ahead of them. He looked at Briac, who merely shook his head and turned away.

* * * * * * * * *

There was too much sunlight. Harry groaned and rolled over, trying to escape the glare. His head throbbed and his stomach was queasy. His saliva was thick with the aftertaste of vomit. He opened his eyes and groped for his glasses.

Where the hell was he? He struggled to sit up and look around. Stale cigarette smoke curdled in the air while dozens of liquor bottles caught the sun’s glance, casting rainbows on the floor.

Ah. Right. The cot behind the bar. He hadn’t woken up to find himself there in a long time.

He must’ve got so drunk he’d passed out.

He scrubbed his face and slapped his cheeks, trying to revive himself. He needed to get up and go home. He was far too old for this shit. Why the hell had he drunk so much?

Ah. Right. Rita Skeeter. The interview. He groaned again as the memory of the previous night chipped its way through his stubborn hangover. But that wasn’t all. Draco. He remembered meeting with Draco – and he remembered fucking the nearest blond prostitute he could find.

Jesus Christ. No wonder he’d drunk himself into oblivion.

Suddenly, someone threw a glassful of icy water in his face. Harry shook his head, droplets flying everywhere. The room rocked from side-to-side with a sickening sway.

“Briac!” he yelled. “What the hell . . . ?”

“We don’t have time for that,” Briac replied. He threw Harry’s Auror robe at him.

Suddenly Harry was sober – very sober.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, taking a swig from the bottle of Pepper-Up Briac handed him.

“The answer to that question is what isn’t wrong,” Briac replied.

Harry stood and struggled with his robe until he found the sleeves.

“You’re going to have to be more specific,” he replied.

“It’s Draco,” Briac said.

“What about Draco?” Harry asked, sitting again to pull on his boots. “I thought we’d talked that
topic to death last night. I have nothing more to say to him or about him.”

Briac waved his hand as though Harry’s words were annoying gnats buzzing around his head.

“This has nothing to do with you and Draco,” he replied. “It has to do with the trial.”

Harry was strapping on his knife when he froze.

“What about the trial,” he asked.

“The Minister refused to do it,” Briac replied. “He refused to issue a pardon. Harry, Draco’s trial is going forward.”

Harry stared at him.

“Say that again,” he said, disbelieving his ears. He couldn’t have heard what he thought he’d heard. He hadn’t gone to Rita Skeeter for nothing. He hadn’t bared his soul for a cheap headline for nothing.

“The prosecutor is presenting his case as we speak,” Briac said.

Harry summoned his wand.

“It’s certainly infuriating,” he said, “but must we panic? It’s not like the Wizengamot will actually convict him.”

Briac grabbed him by the shoulders.

“Of course, they’re going to convict him,” he said. “They’ll have no choice. The case is cut and dried. The result is a foregone conclusion. Draco broke the law when he entered the country. That’s all the prosecution has to prove, and obviously they can. Harry, the Wizengamot is a court of judgement – whether its members like it or not they’re bound by the law, and the law is crystal clear in Draco’s case.”

Harry felt the truth of Briac’s words sink in. Briac was right. Draco would be convicted. He would go to Azkaban. Harry couldn’t let that happen. No matter what had transpired between them, Harry couldn’t let Draco go to Azkaban again.

“How much time do we have?” he asked.

“Not much,” Briac replied. “But the good news is there’s a sympathetic audience. They’re riled up already and the verdict hasn’t even come down yet.”

Harry shook his head. He didn’t understand why the Minister would squander what little public support he had . . . but then he remembered. Lucius Malfoy had killed his brother. This wasn’t political – it was personal.

Harry sheathed his wand. His scorpion pendant had started stinging him. Scorpius must be there watching the proceedings. He was panicking. Harry felt the deep flood of a familiar protective urge. He ran to the fireplace.

“What’re you going to do?” Briac asked as he ran after him.

“I don’t know,” Harry replied. “But don’t worry – I’ll think of something. I always do.”

Briac laughed.
“I have a feeling I’m going to enjoy this,” he said. “Are we talking a coup d’état?”

Harry didn’t have time to reply, but if he did he might’ve said, “Why the hell not? It’s not like I have anything better to do than be a military dictator.”

The moment they stepped into the lobby of the Ministry building, Harry knew something was wrong. There were too many people milling around. The chamber must’ve emptied. Everyone looked shocked or angry or some combination of both.

The trial must’ve ended.

Harry grabbed the arm of the nearest passer-by. He didn’t even need to ask his question before he got the information he was seeking – and dreading.

“He was convicted,” the man said. He looked dazed.

“Harry Potter” cried a distraught little woman with a large floral bag. “Save him! You must save him!”

“The Minister didn’t pardon him,” the man whose arm Harry had grabbed said. “The bastard went right ahead with the whole thing.”

“Election day can’t come soon enough,” said another passer-by.

Harry turned to look at Briac who looked as stunned as Harry felt. They’d both been sure the Minister would bend under public pressure. They’d both been sure that he’d heed Harry’s plea – that their plan would work.

They’d both been wrong.

Scorpius. They had to find Scorpius.

Harry set out at a run, shoving aside the people who got in his way, his heart in his throat. Scorpius might not survive this. Left alone, there was no knowing what he’d do. Harry had visions of him stepping in front of a lorry – they were too vivid and real to reject as impossible. Scorpius loved his father as much as Harry had loved Lily, and heaven knows Harry had thought of a hundred ways to kill himself after she was taken from him.

* Hang on, Harry thought. Hang on, love. *

The gallery was packed. Scorpius took a deep breath before he entered the chamber, preparing himself for a barrage of insults, but they didn’t come. Instead people nodded and made room for him, stepping aside and offering to give up their seats. Some people even placed a comforting hand on his shoulder.

“Don’t you worry, sweetheart,” said a witch with pink hair, reaching up to pat his cheek as though she was his grandmother. “The Minister will pardon your father.”

“He’d better,” said her husband, “or he’ll have a vote of no confidence on his hands.”

Scorpius smiled at them. It was rather unnerving to be treated kindly by people who just yesterday might’ve spat in his face.

He ended up with a seat in the first row between a tall wizard dressed all in green and a little witch
wearing a button with Harry’s face on it and clutching a large floral bag with a kneazle in it. It was the first time Scorpius had ever been in the judgement chamber. He looked around. Most conspicuous, of course, was the accused’s chair with its leather straps and shiny steel buckles. Also conspicuous was the place where the Minister sat in the midst of the witches and wizards of the Wizengamot, most of whom were already there whispering to each other or scribbling notes with self-inking quills. Several of them smiled at him, and he tried to smile back. He knew that everything was going to be alright, but he was still anxious all the same. He wouldn’t stop feeling anxious until he and his father stepped out of the Portkey hub in Port Moresby.

The gallery was so full that the Aurors guarding the doors had to start turning people away. The crowd started getting restless. There seemed to be a general consensus that something should’ve happened by now. Some of the younger, rowdier wizards even started chanting the Minister’s name accompanied by an unflattering epithet.

Finally the man, himself, entered through an elaborately carved door behind the accused’s chair. Everyone fell quiet as the members of the Wizengamot stood, their formal satin robes, gleaming in the flickering torch light.

The Minister, a stout man with a greying mutton chop beard, went to his seat followed closely by his administrative assistant. Scorpius couldn’t help but notice that he wasn’t smiling and shaking hands. He wasn’t sure what that meant. Hopefully, it merely indicated that the Minister recognised the seriousness of the situation and concluded it was not the time for crass politicking.

The Minister remained standing after the members of the Wizengamot took their seats again.

“Bring out the accused!” he thundered.

Low murmurs erupted when Scorpius’s father entered through the same elaborately carved door the Minister had. Briac was at his side, his wand sheathed but conspicuous, his large hand on Scorpius’s father’s shoulder. Even from a distance, Scorpius could tell the touch was more comforting than confining.

Scorpius looked at his father and felt his heart break. His father was dressed in prison garb as though he’d already been convicted. His face was pale as he searched the crowd until he spotted Scorpius.

“It’s alright,” Scorpius mouthed and was relieved when he saw a twitch of a smile on his father’s face although it soon vanished when Briac strapped him into the accused’s chair.

The prosecutor entered the room briskly, ignoring a smattering of boos from the crowd, and looked up at the Minister.

“Is the government ready to commence?” the Minister asked, taking his seat.

The prosecutor blinked at him.

“Excuse me, your Honour?” he said.

“I said is the government ready to commence,” the Minister replied.

There was a loud, unified gasp from the gallery. Several people leapt to their feet.

“Pardon him! Pardon him! Pardon him!”

The chant started as a whisper but slowly grew to a roar.
The Minister held up his hand.

“The Aurors are ordered to remove from this chamber anyone who again speaks out of turn,” he said. “Mister Prosecutor, we are waiting.”

The poor prosecutor opened and closed his mouth several times like a bewigged guppy before finally clearing his throat.

“Minister,” he said. “Honourable members of the Wizengamot, the government has charged Draco Malfoy with the crime of entering the country following exile and an express order to never again return.”

“BOO!” several people shouted. “PARDON HIM!”

Scorpius turned to look at the Aurors who were guarding the doors. They were whispering to each other, clearly unsure as to what to do. They’d been given a directive by the Minister, but it was obvious they didn’t want to abide by it.

“Head Auror Gwencalon!” the Minister bellowed. “Order your men to escort the provocateurs from this chamber!”

Briac nodded at the Aurors, who reluctantly complied.

Scorpius watched the whole scene unfold with growing alarm. This was not how things were supposed to go. Even the prosecutor had expected (and obviously hoped for) a pardon. Scorpius looked at his father. His eyes were fixed unseeingly on the floor. His hands gripped the arms of the accused’s chair so tightly that his knuckles were white.

Scorpius started to rise from his seat, but the witch with the kneazle placed her hand on his arm.

“Not yet, dear,” she said. “Have faith. Harry Potter will never let your father go to Azkaban.”

Scorpius bit his lip. She was right, of course, but did Harry even know what was happening? He looked at Briac, willing him to read his mind.

Send someone to get Harry, he thought. Come on, Briac!

Briac’s face was stony. Scorpius only knew what he must be thinking because he knew Briac – if he didn’t, he’d think Briac felt nothing about the situation one way or another . . .

. . . but then he saw it – a slight clenching of Briac’s wand hand.

In the blink of an eye, one of the Aurors guarding the main door vanished.

He’s going to find Harry, Scorpius thought. He’s going to find Harry.

He looked at his father. His face was ghastly pale. He’d looked up, searching again for Scorpius’s face.

“It’s alright,” Scorpius mouthed, hoping he conveyed the hope he was no longer blindly counting on. “Just hold on.”

“The prosecution will resume its case,” the Minister said, glaring at the gallery.

The prosecutor cleared his throat. He was young and obviously uncomfortable. Scorpius actually felt sorry for him.
"The prosecution will now offer the first exhibit," the poor man said. He held up a piece of parchment with an official-looking seal. "Mister Malfoy, do you recognise this document?"

"I do," Scorpius’s father replied. Despite his pallor, his voice was proud and clear.

"Can you tell this court what it is?"

"It is a formal agreement granting me permission to leave the country."

"Can you tell me to whom the two signatures at the bottom belong?"

"They belong to me and the Minister."

"Please read to this court the body of the agreement."

Briac handed Scorpius’s father his glasses while the prosecutor handed him the parchment.

"It says, ‘The signatories agree that Draco Malfoy, son of Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy, be permitted to leave Britain to reside permanently on the island of New Guinea.’"

"What else does it say?" the prosecutor prompted.

Scorpius’s father took a shaky breath, but when he spoke, his voice remained steady.

"It says, ‘the signatories further agree that, should Draco Malfoy return, he shall be imprisoned in Azkaban for the remainder of his life sentence.’"

The crowd bellowed with indignation. The confusion was so great that Scorpius almost didn’t notice an Auror approach Briac and whisper in his ear. Briac turned to the prosecutor and said something Scorpius couldn’t hear.

When at last the crowd was quieted, the prosecutor cleared his throat and addressed the Minister directly.

"It appears a law enforcement emergency has arisen that requires the presence of Head Auror Gwencalon," he said. "The prosecution asks this court to permit him to choose another Auror to take his place."

The Minister waved his hand distractedly.

"Very well," he said. "Now please continue with your case against the accused."

Scorpius had to bite his tongue to keep himself from bursting out into inappropriate, hysterical laughter. “Law enforcement emergency,” indeed. Obviously, the Auror who’d left the chamber earlier had located Harry.

Emerson took Briac’s place at Scorpius’s father’s side.

"Mister Malfoy," the prosecutor said. "Please tell these honourable ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot whether or not you understood the terms of the agreement you admit to having signed."

"I did," Scorpius’s father replied.

"Did you sign the agreement knowingly and voluntarily?"

"I did."
“And did you, in fact, depart the country?”

“I did.”

“Have you been residing in New Guinea for the past several years?”

“I have.”

“And did you return to this country?”


There was a smattering of giggles and guffaws from the gallery.

“And the reason you returned was to comfort Harry Potter after the death of his daughter?” the prosecutor asked.

“That’s irrelevant,” the Minister interrupted before Scorpius’s father could answer. “It may be a reason, but it’s not an excuse.”

“BOO!” the audience yelled. “BOO!”

Scorpius couldn’t help but notice that the members of the Wizengamot were looking increasingly alarmed and uncomfortable. They glanced at each other anxiously and passed each other notes like students during a boring class.

“It seems to me you’ve proved your case,” the Minster told the prosecutor. “You may make your closing argument.”

The prosecutor looked like he’d much prefer that the earth crack open and swallow him whole, wig and all. Nonetheless, he cleared his throat.

“Minister, Honourable Witches and Wizards of the Wizengamot,” he said. “The prosecution concludes its case against Draco Malfoy.”

“That was not a closing argument,” the Minister said angrily.

The prosecutor looked increasingly panicked. He glanced fearfully at the restless audience. He cleared his throat yet again.

“The evidence is clear,” he said. “There was an agreement. The agreement was broken. Thank you.”

The Minister shook his head furiously when he realised that was all he was going to get out of the government’s representative. He stood from his chair.

“Very well,” he said. “If the prosecutor can’t do his job, then I’ll do it for him. Witches and Wizards of the Wizengamot, esteemed colleagues. You have taken an oath to uphold the law of this great land. Now is the time to fulfil that oath. Before you sits a man whose parents not only supported Voldemort, but gave him their home from which to base his wartime operations. Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy were among the highest ranked Death Eaters as was their son, who also bears the Mark. Draco Malfoy should have never been released from Azkaban. Only a misguided act of generosity allowed him to slither through the cracks. Now here he is again, having abused my good will. It was at great political risk that I agreed to permit him to leave Britain. My only stipulation was that he never return, but yet here he is before you. Draco Malfoy is a brazen criminal who must no longer be permitted to breathe the fresh air of the righteous.”
“I think I’m going to puke,” someone whispered, and laughter rippled through the chamber.

The Minister looked like his head was about to explode. His eyes bugged out and a vein throbbed in his temple.

“This chamber must vote to convict!” he yelled. “Draco Malfoy cannot be permitted to make a fool of us again!”

He sat down in a huff of velvet robes. He looked like he was on the verge of having a heart attack, but Scorpius’s attention was no longer on him – it was on the members of the Wizengamot who were whispering and gesticulating. His father’s fate was now in their hands – a fact which none of them looked at all happy about.

Scorpius’s heart sank. He knew what their distress meant. He stared at them, willing them to take a chance – to say “to hell with the law” – but they were no longer glancing at him. There were no more little smiles of assurance.

Finally, the Chief Warlock stood. The room, which had been abuzz with speculation, fell silent.

“Has this honourable body finished deliberating?” he asked. When it was clear that no one had anything to say, she continued. “All those voting to convict, raise your hand and say ‘aye.’”

Slowly, wearily, one member after another reluctantly raised their hands. Scorpius’s heart rolled over in one sick heave of dread.

“All those voting not to convict, raise your hand and say ‘nay.’”

No one raised their hand.

Scorpius looked at his father. He’d tipped his head back and was staring up at the gold stars on the domed ceiling. Scorpius couldn’t tell if he was shocked or resigned – maybe a bit of both. He turned his head to look at the Minister. He looked ecstatic.

“That settles that,” he said gloatingly. “Now, Mister Malfoy, do you have anything to say for yourself? Do you repent your crime?”

Scorpius’s father looked at him, his gaze level and serene.

“No,” he replied. “I do not.”

The gallery went mad as Emerson and one of his colleagues released Scorpius’s father from the chair and bound his wrists behind his back.

“Pardon him!” the little witch beside Scorpius cried, tears in her eyes. “Pardon him!”

Scorpius stood, his mind reeling. The wizard in green grabbed his arm when he tried to run to his father.

“They’ll imprison you, too,” he said.

“I don’t care!” Scorpius shouted at him. “Father!”

For the first time, his father looked panicked. He shook his head and mouthed “no.”

“Anyone seeking to approach the convict will be charged with aiding and abetting his escape,” the Minister said, his words clearly directed at Scorpius.
Scorpius didn’t care. He struggled against the green wizard’s grasp as his father was taken from the chamber, his face ashen. He glanced one last time at Scorpius.

“I love you,” he said.

And then he was gone.

When Harry finally arrived, wand drawn and expression wild, it was too late.

Harry tried to pay the fisherman, but the man refused to take his Galleons despite the fact he was about to break the law.

“We’re not slaves of Voldemort because of you,” he said in his heavy Orkney accent. “Taking you to Azkaban is the least I can do to show my gratitude. You’re a hero, Harry Potter. We all owe you our lives.”

Harry grimaced. It was times like these when he wished he wasn’t the Chosen One. Would the man have agreed to take him and Briac on the treacherous journey if he wasn’t?

Sensing Harry’s compunction, Briac took his arm and led him toward the lurching boat.

“C’mon,” he shouted into the gale, his words nearly blown out to sea. “There’s no other way.”

Harry nodded. They had no other choice but to go by boat. They’d debated the question, but finally agreed that flying to Azkaban wasn’t an option. The Dementors would surround them in a second and with Lily dead, Draco imprisoned and Scorpius in on the verge of suicide, Harry doubted he could summon his Patronus. His imagination was too withered and frail.

Harry Disillusioned the small fishing boat before they clambered aboard and watched as the Out Skerries islands were devoured by the fog. Azkaban was only a few miles east, but the trip took nearly all day. The wind was against them. It threw waves over the bow and lashed their faces with icy rain. Despite the seasickness potion they’d drunk before they left, both Harry and Briac were ill, the endless motion of the North Sea turning their guts inside out. Everything smelled of fish and brine and petrol fumes.

There was no elaborate plan – there was merely the violence of injustice surging in Harry’s veins. Hopefully there would be no need for fighting. He knew most of the guards would simply surrender, but there’d surely be a few hold-outs. Prisoners weren’t the only ones whose minds were warped by torture. There were guards who, like human Dementors, thrived off helplessness and gorged themselves on despair. There were people who got off on inflicting pain and humiliation. Azkaban was a playground for such men.

Night had fallen before they finally heard the boom of waves striking rock. They barely had time to draw their wands before the Dementors swarmed around them. Harry and Briac stood back to back. Briac’s Patronus needed to protect both of them. The captain, too, shouted “Expecto Patronum,” unleashing a shark to join Briac’s lion.

Harry squeezed his eyes shut and tried to concentrate on a memory that would free his stag, but every one of them slipped off the bleak, oily surface of his mind. Memories of Lily turned into visions of her body lying in some cold place, a green mist escaping her mouth like a final sighed endearment. Memories of making love to Scorpius turned into an empty bed and long nights spent staring at the wall. And then there were memories of Draco – Draco reading the newspaper every day, Draco beating him at chess, Draco giving him a tour of his garden. All of them gave way to a
letter blazing in Harry’s fireplace, fire-rimmed cinders floating up the chimney. Words too painful to read twice.

He felt the Kiss before he saw the Dementor swoop towards him. It pulled on his soul as though his life force was nothing but a hooked fish, thrashing against its fate. He drew his wand, but the spell died on his tongue.

“Hold on,” Briac said through gritted teeth. “Your whole life isn’t devoid of love. Think of your sons. Think of your grandson – think of me, for fuck sake.”

Harry squeezed his eyes shut even tighter and felt the swelling power of hope. Not all was lost.

“Expecto Patronum!” he shouted and felt the damp, moldy brush of a Dementor’s robe against his cheek before its owner screamed away into the darkness.

Briac laughed triumphantly as Harry’s stag bounded around them, shaking its antlers.

“You’re stronger than you think, Potter!” he shouted. “Don’t forget that!”

Just then the boat struck a rock, throwing all three of them to the deck. The frame shuddered with the force of the impact. It wouldn’t survive another hit.

“We’ll swim from here,” Harry said. “Wait here. We’ll be back soon.”

The fisherman looked at him as though he’d gone insane in front of his very eyes, but Briac was already sheathing his wand and preparing to dive.

“There are stairs,” Harry shouted into the wind, sheathing his own wand. “Head for them!”

“Assuming I can see them in the first place!” Briac shouted back.

Harry took a deep breath and dove, his mouth full of Gilly Weed. The waves swallowed him whole before spitting him out against jagged, barnacle-covered rocks. He felt the salt water sting his torn skin, but at least the barnacles helped him get a handhold. He crawled onto a small stony beach and lay for a moment, catching his breath and looking up at the cliffs looming against a starless sky.

Soon, Briac joined him. There was seaweed tangled in his hair, and his cheek was gashed. Harry drew his wand and cast a healing spell. It was haphazard, but at least it stopped the flow of blood.

“Your hands are a mess,” Briac said, drawing his own wand.

“No time,” Harry replied. “We have to find the stairs.”

It felt as though they’d almost come full circle before they finally stumbled over the first step of a steep narrow path. The wind had been strong before, but it seemed to grow even stronger as they climbed, threatening to shove them sideways. Harry held on with his mangled fingers and reminded himself of what was at stake. Draco had been imprisoned for six days – six endless days, stripped of any hope of freedom. He could hear Briac breathing hard behind him. He’d been Head Auror for so long that he’d lost some of his endurance.

“We’re almost there!” Harry shouted, praying it was true.

“Bollocks, you lying wanker!” Briac shouted back.

Harry laughed. It was like old times again. Just the two of them, their wands and a shared death wish.
When they reached the top step, it was just as Harry had expected. The guards threw down their wands the second they saw Harry stagger toward them, his legs shaking after the climb.

“Harry Potter!” one of them cried and got down on his knees, his hands in the air. The other two quickly did the same.

Harry looked at them and thought no amount of Galleons could compensate them for the work they did. They were barely older than boys, their cloaks drenched and their faces gleaming pale in the endless rain. They spent their days there, their pity slowly eroding until at last it was gone.

Harry knew they were harmless, but he bound them nonetheless. He couldn’t afford to take any chances.

“Poor buggers,” Briac said, shaking his head.

“We’ll get them out of here soon enough,” Harry replied.

“But first you need to find Draco.”

Harry didn’t answer one way or another. Briac’s tone was too pointed.

The rusted iron gates were closed but unlocked. Harry pushed them open with a sound like a dying groan.

Suddenly, a curse struck the ground right beneath their feet, spraying shattered stones and clumps of dirt. Harry crouched, signalling for Briac to find cover. He felt his mind sharpen to a razor’s edge. This is what he lived for. This is why he existed. He pointed his wand and shouted a blasting spell twice as strong as the spell his hidden enemy had cast. Rock exploded like hail stones. He heard a cry and then silence.

“Don’t try to fight me!” he yelled into the wind. “I will win, and you will die.”

His words were met with another blasting spell.

“What are you fighting for?” Harry shouted. “The ability to rape and maim?”

“The ability to protect society!” a voice replied. “I would’ve thought an Auror would understand that!”

Harry ducked behind a stone statue of a wizard holding an unbalanced scale just as an *Avada Kedavra* grazed his shadow – far too close for comfort.

“*Imperio!*” he shouted at the flash of movement he saw through the murk.

Taking the hint, Briac cast the same spell at his own attacker.

Slowly, two men stepped from their hiding places, their eyes hazy with submission. Harry swallowed back a mouthful of revulsion. Of all the Unforgiveables, he hated the Imperious Curse the most – the way it stripped people of their wills leaving them naked to any suggestion. But desperate plights required desperate tactics.

“Take us to Draco Malfoy,” Harry told them.

They nodded and headed toward the door, their expressions blank and sickeningly serene.

Harry and Briac followed them, their wands held at the ready.
“Bloody hell,” Briac breathed when they walked into the foyer with its chandeliers made of human bones. “Did we make a wrong turn somewhere and end up in the Middle Ages?” Unlike Harry, he’d never been there before. He covered his nose. The air was thick with the putrid smell of misery.

Harry covered his nose as well and began walking down the flagstone corridor, following their beguiled guides. Cold water dripped from the arched ceiling. Every now and then, they passed stairs leading up into the shadows.

“How many levels does this place have?” Briac whispered.

“Too many to count,” Harry replied. “But they house new prisoners on the ground level because . . .”

Suddenly Briac held up his hand.

“Shhhh,” he said. “Do you hear that?”

Harry stopped to listen – and that’s when he heard it. The sounds of flesh slapping against flesh and the grunt of a man nearing orgasm.

“Stop!” Harry hissed at the two men leading them into the dark, his hand tightening around his wand when he realized that someone was going to die. If that was Draco, if Draco was being raped, blood would be spilled.

Quietly, he and Briac ran toward the obscene sound like twin shadows, their trained feet noiseless against the mossy stone floor.

“Don’t attack without provocation,” Briac whispered.

Harry bristled, but didn’t reply.

Soon they slipped around a corner, and Harry saw a blur of blond hair and pale skin. There was a man in hog-tie with another man kneeling behind him, the trousers of his guard’s uniform pushed down to mid-thigh . . .

. . . Harry lost his mind. Fuck provocation. The man’s very existence was provocation enough.

“Crucio!” he shouted.

The guard screamed and fell backward, writhed on the floor, clawing at the air, his jutting prick purple and shiny in the torches’ flickering light.

“Draco!” Harry yelled and ran to the man hunched on the cold stone floor. He flicked his wand, and the binding ropes vanished. Harry fell to his knees and helped the man roll onto his side.

He wasn’t Draco.

Harry almost wept with relief. But then his stomach churned when he realised the man was a recent convict – a man Harry, himself, had arrested. The man had robbed and killed a Muggle, but he didn’t deserve this. No one deserved this. It’d always been too easy for Harry to forget where it was his suspects ended up.

Briac joined him.

“It’s not your fault,” he said, reading Harry’s mind. “It’s society’s.”
Harry merely shook his head. Briac may be right, but Harry was the one who did the dirty work.

Briac cast *Finite* at the squealing guard.

“I’ll deal with him,” he said. “Go find Draco.”

Harry nodded and ran back to the two Imperioed guards waiting for him, their eyes cheerful and vacant. They turned like two synchronized dancers and began walking again. Harry followed them, trying to ignore the scabbed hands reaching through the bars, begging for his assistance. He wasn’t there for them.

When at last they reached Draco’s cell, Harry told the guards to unlock the door before ordering them to return to Briac. The sound of the sliding bolt for a moment – but only for a moment – drowned out the desperate pleas and anguished cries of the other prisoners.

Harry knew he needed to be cautious. Azkaban reduced its inmates to animal instincts. He entered the cell slowly and quietly, but loudly enough that Draco would hear him. He didn’t want to startle him. He wasn’t sure what Draco would do.

The cell was small but dark. It took Harry several blinks before he saw Draco huddled in a corner, his clothes stained and hair matted with the straw that covered the floor to soak up the prisoners’ urine. The air smelled of sweat, sickness and fear. It looked as though he wanted to become one with the masonry – nothing more than another stone in his cell.

Harry placed a careful hand on his shoulder.

“Draco,” he whispered, expecting Draco to turn around, but he didn’t. Instead he tried even harder to wedge himself into the corner. His fingers clawed at his neck, leaving welts.

“Draco,” Harry said again. “It’s me. Harry. I’m here to get you out.”

Draco shook his head.

“Go away,” he rasped. “Please.”

Harry frowned, but then the realisation hit him. Draco thought he was nothing more than a hallucination – a mirage of hope. How many times had Draco been “rescued” only to realise it’d been nothing more than a fever dream? How many times had freedom turned into horror?

Harry knelt on the cold, damp floor and pulled Draco into his arms, pressing his cheek against Draco’s, gently rocking him as though he was a child just wakened from a nightmare.

“What will make me real to you?” he asked.

Draco turned his head to look at him. His pale eyes were rimmed with red. There was a messy wound on his forehead.

“Kiss me,” he whispered.

Harry didn’t hesitate. He shifted so they were face-to-face and leaned in until their mouths touched – softly, briefly – but that’s all it took. Draco unwound himself and put his arms around Harry’s neck, burying his head against Harry’s shoulder.

“It really is you,” he said over and over again, clutching Harry’s shirt. “It really is you.”

Harry tightened his embrace.
“Yeah,” he said hoarsely. “It’s me.”

Draco made a sound – a mixture of gratitude and relief and something else Harry couldn’t name but knew he didn’t need to.

He leaned back so he could kiss Draco again as something in his chest that was hard as a rock and tight as a coil loosened and then melted like lead over a flame. When Briac found them, he quickly and quietly turned away.

** **********

Unsurprisingly, Draco was ill during the trip to Mousa despite having nothing in his stomach but porridge and bile. Harry held his hair back as he leaned over the side of the boat. When they finally reached the island, Harry inquired after a place they could rent – somewhere as far from the village as possible but still within reasonable walking distance. The air smelled of salty mist and peat smoke.

The climb up the hill to the little cottage was wearying. Harry didn’t dare Apparate with Draco – he was too weak for even a side-along. He and Briac had to half-carry him one step at a time. Draco was barely conscious when Harry led him up a narrow staircase to a bedroom with two beds with rusty iron headboards and furrows in the middle of their worn mattresses. He helped Draco out of his clothes and was about to tuck him in and go downstairs when Draco grabbed his hand with surprising strength.

“Do go,” he said.

Harry hesitated for only a second before getting undressed and joining him.

Draco slept for all that night and all through the next day, only getting up when Harry said Scorpius would be arriving shortly. Harry was with him the whole time, waking him out of nightmares with murmured reassurances.

It made Harry feel good to be useful – to know that his presence wasn’t an intrusion. He wondered if that’s how Draco had felt all those days he’d sat beside him in the hospital. He wondered if he’d just stumbled over a new kind of love.

** **********

As was always the case with Harry’s missives, the Owl was brief and the handwriting all but illegible.

** Scorpius,**

*Your father is safe and well. We’re on the island of Mousa. Its village is Unplottable, so you’ll need a broom. Take a Portkey to Lerwick and then fly south for fifteen miles. There’s a lighthouse and a harbour. Your father will meet you on the dock.*

*Yours,*

*Harry*

Scorpius clutched the parchment to his chest and let out a whoop of joy, scaring the delivery owl, which squawked and flew away. When Elizabeth came running to his room to find out what all the noise was about, he grabbed her hands and twirled her around until they both were dizzy and she was begging him to stop.

“Harry,” he gasped. “Briac . . . they rescued my father!”
Elizabeth gave her own shout of joy, her face flushed with the same excitement – and relief – he was feeling.

“See? I told you everything would be alright,” she said, cupping his face between her hands. “Now will you sit down and eat something? You haven’t eaten in days, and it shows.”

But he was already throwing his clothes in a bag.

“I’ll eat when I get there,” he said, pulling his jumper over his head and searching for his cloak. “Don’t worry; I’ll be fine.”

“Well, when you fall off your broom, don’t claim it was because I didn’t try to feed you,” she scolded.

He laughed giddily. “I won’t. I promise.”

“I’d go with you,” she said, “if I wasn’t eight months pregnant, of course.” She rubbed her belly. “Speaking of which – tell that husband of mine to bring me home some salted herring. I’ve been craving them – that and ice cream, too, of course.”

After everything was packed and shrunk, he turned to look at her with a solemn expression.

“Thank you,” he said. “For everything. I don’t know what I would’ve done without your company – I don’t even want to think about it.”

“Then don’t,” she replied. “Now hurry up. You don’t want to be flying after dark if you can help it.”

He hugged her as close as he could without crushing the twins.

“I’ll see you again soon,” he said.

“You’ll see me when it’s time,” she replied. “Don’t forget – your father has been through a terrible ordeal. He’ll need some peace and quiet to find his feet again.”

He kissed her cheek and accepted the broom she offered him. It’d obviously seen better days, but it was sturdy and streamlined.

“It’s Briac’s sentimental favourite,” she said in a parting (and only half-teasing) admonishment. “So don’t you dare crash it, young man.”

It was dusk when Scorpius finally landed on a dilapidated dock in a mist-shrouded village. He glanced around, searching for his father. He was just about to head to the nearest pub to warm up and maybe get something to eat, when he saw a tall man wearing Harry’s cloak and boots walking toward him. Scorpius dropped his broom and ran to him.

“Father!” he cried, throwing himself into his father’s waiting arms.

His father cupped the back of his head and kissed his cheek. They stood like that for a long time, the wind parting around them like a river’s current. Scorpius knew the fishermen in the harbour were probably staring at them, but he didn’t care. He’d just lived through the most gruelling week of his life – if “living” was even the right word to describe the state of terror and grief he’d barely survived.

“Shh,” his father said. “It’s alright. I’m alright.”
His words were meant to comfort, but they only made Scorpius cry harder. He’d doubted if he’d ever hear his father’s voice again. It hadn’t seemed possible.

“Where is Harry?” he asked. “Is he alright?”

“Harry’s fine,” his father replied, stroking his hair, which was still damp from his journey. “He’s back at the cottage.”

Scorpius stepped back and wiped his eyes. His father had a healing wound on his forehead, but otherwise he looked fine. His eyes were clear and awake. He was even smiling. Scorpius wanted to beg his father to tell him everything, but he knew his father wouldn’t. Maybe it was better that way.

The little, thatched-roof cottage was a short walk from the village. The road was narrow with hedges on either side as it climbed steeply to the top of a cliff overlooking the sea. When they arrived, they found Briac and Harry sitting in front of a hearth in a room whose ceiling was so low that Scorpius needed to stoop to keep from hitting his head. It was empty save for a plain table, two armchairs and a worn, but comfortable-looking leather couch. Harry and Briac had their legs stretched out and glasses of whisky in their hands. Harry stood and pulled Scorpius into his arms, holding him close.

“Thank you,” Scorpius whispered against his ear. “I don’t have words . . .”

“You don’t need words,” Harry replied. “You never have.”

Scorpius laughed a tearful little laugh and kissed Harry’s cheek. Harry’s skin was warm from the fire and scratchy from not having shaved. He smelled good – like wind and whisky and that scent that was Harry himself.

Scorpius and his father pulled off their cloaks and hung them up to dry. The room leapt with shadows and smelled of beef stew. Scorpius’s stomach growled.

“Sounds like someone’s hungry,” Harry said. “Sit down. I’ll bring you a hot toddy and some stew whose quality I can’t vouch for seeing that Briac made it.”

“Hey!” Briac exclaimed indignantly.

Scorpius laughed. He still felt woozy with happiness and relief. He sat down beside Briac and watched Harry walk to the kitchen.

“I’ll give you a hand,” Scorpius father said and followed him.

They were gone a long time.

“How are you?” Briac asked, pouring himself a glass of whisky.

“Better than when you last saw me,” Scorpius said. “Although I daresay that’s a rather low bar.”

Briac reached out and squeezed his arm.

“You were strong,” he said. “It’s not easy having to wait like you did.”

“I had faith in you and Harry,” Scorpius replied, smiling at him. “I knew you’d find him. And I had faith in my father.”

“So, what’s happening in London,” Briac asked. “We haven’t seen a paper.”

“It’s more like what isn’t happening,” Scorpius replied. “The Wizengamot had a vote of no
confidence. The Minister resigned. There is going to be an election in a few days, and people want Harry to run.”

Briac burst into a roar of laughter.

“Hear that, Harry!” he said. “You’re going to be the next Minister of Magic!”

There was no answer. Scorpius frowned and started to rise from his chair. Briac placed his hand on his shoulder and shook his head.

“We’ll mock him when he comes back,” he said.

Scorpius looked at him.

“What’s going on?” he asked. “And don’t try to convince me it’s nothing.”

Briac merely shook his head again.

A couple minutes later, Harry and Scorpius’s father returned. Scorpius tried to catch his father’s eyes, but his father wouldn’t let him. His cheeks were flushed. Suddenly, it dawned on Scorpius . . .

. . . his father and Harry had slept together. Sometime between his father’s escape and Scorpius’s arrival, they must’ve slept together. He could tell. He knew how Harry looked after sex. He recognised the languid movements, the sheen of pleasure on his skin.

Scorpius felt a surge of jealousy – but of whom he wasn’t sure. Was he jealous of his father for having Harry, or jealous of Harry? Scorpius had been the sole focus of his father’s time and affection for more than twenty years . . .

He looked at Briac. Briac shook his head again.

“Let it be,” he mouthed.

Harry handed Scorpius his bowl of stew and took his seat again. Scorpius looked at him closely and felt a surge of desire almost equal to the surge of jealousy. He wore Harry’s pendant. Harry had a scorpion tattoo covering his back. Harry was his . . .

. . . but was he Harry’s?

Scorpius closed his eyes and imagined New Guinea – the rain forests, the lagoons, the waterfalls, Khorve.

Harry may be his, but he hadn’t been Harry’s for a long time – a very long time.

Scorpius shook off his thoughts when he realised his father was looking at him, his brow furrowed with a frown. Scorpius nodded in the direction of the kitchen and stood up. His father followed him. When they were alone, Scorpius turned to him.

“You slept with Harry,” he said flatly.

His father looked genuinely startled before his expression settled into feigned indifference and unfeigned irritation.

“That’s none of your business,” he said curtly. “But even if it was, the answer is no. I slept with Harry, but that was all. Scorpius, you have to understand – Harry found me in a very vulnerable state.”
“But you didn’t . . . you didn’t have sex?” Scorpius said, feeling both relieved and oddly sad.

“No, we didn’t have sex,” his father replied. “The moment Harry and Briac brought me here, I went to bed. I was exhausted. Harry joined me. I was in no state to have sex even if I wanted to.”

“Did you want to?” Scorpius asked.

His father merely turned away and filled the kettle in the sink.

“Harry was your lover,” he said as though that was an answer to Scorpius’s question. “I am not going to have sex with your former lover. You’re my *son*, Scorpius. You and Harry know each other in ways I’ll never know either of you. That’s just the way things are.”

Scorpius rested his hand on his father’s back, right between his shoulder blades. His father was tense, but he slowly relaxed under Scorpius’s reassuring touch.

“You . . . you can have him,” Scorpius said. “If you want him, I mean.”

His father sighed.

“I’ve already told you. You can’t simply give Harry away – he may be yours to keep, but he isn’t yours to give away. He never was, and he never will be.”

“But I want you to be happy,” Scorpius said. He felt so confused, so torn.

His father turned and pulled him close.

“My little scorpion,” he said. “I *am* happy. Ever since you came back into my life I’ve been happy. I’ll be even happier when we’re home again.”

“Even if that means leaving Harry?” Scorpius asked.

“Even if that means leaving Harry,” his father replied.

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Scorpius woke to find himself alone. He sat up and looked at his father’s bed. Not only was it empty, but it looked at as though his father had never been in it. He rubbed his eyes and stretched. It must be nearly midnight – the stars peeping through the lace curtains were diamond bright in the black sky.

Where was his father? He’d been taking a lot of long walks over the past several days – was it possible he was out there now, following the path leading through the heather to the cliffs? It was the first clear night since Scorpius had arrived. Maybe his father was taking advantage of the full moon .

. .

. . but then he heard voices coming from downstairs. They were soft, but unmistakable. Harry and his father were in the parlour.

Scorpius rose quietly and tip-toed across the noisy floorboards. It was cold. He wrapped his cloak around him and opened the door, heading for the stairs. When he reached the bottom step, he sat down and peered around the corner. Harry and his father were sitting in the armchairs in front of the fire.

“You can do it,” Scorpius father said. “Don’t run away because you’re scared.”

Harry scrubbed his face, making his fringe stand up in dark spikes. Obliviously they’d been
discussing something contentious for hours.

“I’m not scared and I’m not ‘running away,’” he said. “I’m simply saying I’d be complete bollocks at running the country. Jesus, Draco, I can’t believe we’re even having this conversation. Imagine if we were teenagers again. You’d be arguing that I can’t keep my laces tied let alone be Minister of Magic.”

Scorpius’s father laughed. He looked at ease, his legs stretched out in front of him, his feet bare. He certainly didn’t look like a man who’d been imprisoned in Azkaban just days ago. Scorpius smiled. He’d always known his father was strong, but recent events had confirmed it.

“What are you going to do?” Scorpius’s father asked. “Go back to being an Auror after having unabashedly broken the law?”

“Why would being a criminal make me less suited to be an Auror than a Minister?” Harry replied. “Criminality is a bar to being a Minister? I would think it’s actually a requirement.”

Harry chuckled and sipped his glass of whisky.

“I’ll think about it.”

“Don’t ‘think about it. Do it.”

“Are you sure you’re not being a Slytherin about this?” Harry said teasingly. “If I’m Minister, I can pardon you.”

Scorpius’s father shrugged. “Making up my mind about something is always easier if I have something at stake,” he said. “But this really isn’t about me. It’s about you growing up.”

“Ouch.”

“Well, it’s true. You’re not the idealistic new recruit you once were. For you, risk is an addiction, not just a by-product of your job.”

Harry stared into the fire. “I only feel fully alive when I’m about to die,” he said.

“Exactly,” Scorpius’s father replied. “But isn’t that rather selfish? Harry, why can’t you find the will to live in a desire to make a difference? Think of this as an opportunity to serve rather than ‘rule.’”

They were quiet for a while, each watching the other as they finished their glasses. After a couple minutes, Harry broke the silence.

“I’ll get us another bottle,” he said and stood with a stretch, baring his belly with its trail of dark hair. Scorpius couldn’t help noticing that his father swallowed and looked away. When Harry left the room, he tilted his head back with a frustrated groan.

After a while, Harry returned, but instead of sitting in the armchair where he’d been before, he sat down on the couch.

“What would I do as Minister? Besides close down Azkaban,” he said as though there’d been no break in their conversation.

“I’m sure you’ll think of something,” Scorpius father said, getting up to stir the cooling embers in the fireplace. “And if you can’t, just consult Hermione. I’m sure she can think of something.”
“I’m sure she can,” Harry replied. “Unspeakables are privy to some pretty horrible stuff.”

“And you could veto stupid proposals – never forget the things that you could prevent as well as accomplish.”

Harry nodded. He was actually starting to look convinced. Scorpius and Briac had been hounding him for days to accept the nomination, and Harry had come up with countless reasons why he shouldn’t. It was interesting that Scorpius’s father seemed to have more influence than Scorpius and Briac had combined.

“Will you be a consultant?” Harry asked, sounding only half-teasing.

“As long as I can do it through the mail.”

“Draco, there is such a thing as a telephone.”

Scorpius almost laughed when his father frowned. His father didn’t understand how telephones worked, which meant he was opposed to their use.

Harry laughed, but then his expression changed.

“C’mere,” he said, nodding at the place beside him.

Scorpius’s father hesitated for a moment – but only for a moment. He put aside the poker and joined Harry on the couch. Harry poured him a glass of whisky and handed it to him.

“To the new Minister,” Harry said, almost-but-not-quite mockingly. He held up his glass and then threw back the whisky in a single swallow.

“To the new Minister,” Scorpius’s father said with complete seriousness. He held up his glass just as Harry had done, but instead of draining it, he took a sip and set it aside.

It happened without preamble. Neither of them reached for the other. Neither even said a word. They merely melted together, their mouths meeting halfway. The kiss was slow and deep, their fingers sliding into each other’s hair. After a couple minutes, Harry pulled away and took off his glasses before leaning forward again into another kiss. Their cheeks were flushed in the warmth of the firelight. Scorpius heard his father sigh.

“I want you,” Harry murmured, his voice rough in a way that was all too familiar. “You want me, too. You know you do.”

“God knows I wish I didn’t,” Scorpius’s father replied. He traced Harry’s mouth with the tip of his finger. “Harry Potter,” he said as though he was saying the words for the very first time.

“Stop thinking,” Harry whispered.

In a wordless response, Scorpius’s father leaned forward, easing Harry onto his back and settling between Harry’s spread legs. Even from a distance, Scorpius could see that he was shaking. He kissed Harry’s lips, his jaw, his throat, but then suddenly he froze . . .

. . . he’d just unbuttoned the top few buttons of Harry’s shirt, baring Harry’s chest.

The scorpion, Scorpius thought. His father had seen the pendant and remembered . . .

Harry looked at him – for a moment he seemed confused, but then it sunk in.
“Draco,” he said, reaching out for Scorpius’ father’s hand, but his father stood up.

“It’s late,” he said with a clipped voice.

Harry sat up. His cheeks and throat were flushed, his eyes dark. It was a look Scorpius well recognised.

“I am not going to . . . to fuck my son’s lover,” Scorpius’s father said.

Harry flinched, but he didn’t look away.

“Is this why you wrote that letter?” he asked.

Scorpius’s father stared at him for a moment. He looked trapped.

“Yes,” he replied. “But even if I have feelings for you, I will never act on them.”

Harry looked at him pleadingly.

“It was a long time . . .”

“I don’t care,” Scorpius’s father said. “Ten lifetimes couldn’t be long enough.”

“But I care for you,” Harry said. “I want you. Draco, you’re not Scorpius and he isn’t you. You’re two different people.”

“Think with your head and not your dick,” Scorpius’s father replied. This time Harry did look away. “Imagine for a second that Lily had had an older lover. Would you . . . no could you sleep with that man?”

Harry didn’t reply.

“Exactly,” Scorpius’s father said in the same way he said “checkmate” when he was playing chess.

“You’re . . . this is it?” Harry said, turning again to look in Scorpius’s father’s eyes. “This is your last word? Can you at least tell me how you feel about me? You won’t sleep with me. I get that, but, Draco, do you love me . . . because I love you, and I need to know.”

Scorpius’s father stared at Harry wide-eyed. He didn’t look any less trapped than he had before.

“Yes,” he said after a moment, his voice raw. “I’ve always loved you, Potter.”

Harry covered his face and groaned with frustration.

“Don’t do this,” he begged. “You’ll regret it. I’ll regret it. We’re not getting any younger, Draco.”

“I haven’t acted on my feelings for decades,” Scorpius’s father replied. “Don’t think that I can’t hold out forever.”

With those final words, he headed for the stairs. Scorpius only barely escaped being discovered. He ran to his and his father’s room and dove into bed, pulling the bedclothes over his head just as his father walked through the door.

* * * * * * * * * *

Harry leaned forward and closed the distance between them, searching for Draco’s kiss – longing for
He slipped his fingers into Draco’s hair, warm from the fire, and opened his mouth, giving permission to Draco’s tentative hunger. Draco hadn’t kissed anyone in decades, but his fumbling attempts were more arousing than the most skilled of prostitutes. Harry murmured his appreciation, his encouragement.

He said something – he couldn’t remember what. Words didn’t matter. The only thing that mattered was Draco’s hand on his chest, pushing him backwards against the arm of the couch, Draco settling between his legs, spread wide in an unmistakable invitation. Harry moaned and arched his back. He was hard – throbbing and hard with the kind of arousal he hadn’t felt in years.

Draco kissed his temples, his mouth, his cheeks, his jaw, his throat, while his fingers fumbled with the buttons of Harry’s shirt. Harry closed his eyes and tilted his head back, giving Draco as much access to his body as he could. He knew Draco could feel him – his cock, the needy, little thrusts of his hips.

But then suddenly Draco froze, his expression changing from eager to icy in the space of an instant.

Words were said. Confessions made and proclamations proclaimed. Questions answered and possibilities thwarted. When Draco turned to leave, Harry could only watch him, mouth open, stunned, hurt, angry and aching.

He sat up and threw back the remainder of Draco’s whisky. Part of him still believed Draco would return, but then he heard footsteps in the bedroom over his head and the creak of tired bedsprings. He stood and went to the door, grabbing his cloak on the way. He needed to get out of there. He needed to feel the brisk island air on his face.

The moon was full, turning the white sand path that led to the cliffs silver. Harry followed it until the glowing windows of the cottage were extinguished like snuffed candles.

So that was that. Draco had made himself abundantly clear. There’d be the thin outline of a friendship between them but nothing more. Harry wanted to scream. Draco wanted him. Harry knew he did. If they could only make love, Harry would show him . . .

“Harry!”

He turned to the voice, unsure for a moment to whom it belonged – Draco or his son, Scorpius or his father.

It wasn’t until the approaching figure threw back his hood that Harry realised it was Scorpius who had followed him. He couldn’t tell if he was disappointed or relieved – relieved or disappointed.

“It’s late,” Scorpius said awkwardly, leaving Harry to wonder if he knew what’d just transpired between him and his father.

“But early, depending on how you look at it,” Harry replied.

“Can I walk with you?” Scorpius asked, ignoring Harry’s barbed retorted.

Harry paused for a moment. He’d wanted to be alone, but then he nodded. Scorpius took his hand, weaving their fingers together. They walked in silence for a long time. The wind had picked up. Their black cloaks billowed behind them.

“Well?” Scorpius asked after a while.

“Do what?” Harry replied, genuinely perplexed.
“Except the nomination for Minister of Magic,” Scorpius said.

Harry snorted. “I’m beginning to ask why not. Is that reason enough to do it?”

Scorpius laughed. The sound was as clear and bright as the stars.

“It’s as good a reason as any,” he replied. “I agree with my father. You should do it.”

Harry stopped to look at him. How much had he seen? How much did he know?

Scorpius dropped his hand and ran ahead, a sprite in the moonlight, pale hair and dark wool. Harry felt a surge of desire and despair. The Malfoys would be the death of him. Both loved him, yet he could have neither of them. They were both beyond his reach – both had good reasons to leave him for the other side of the world.

Not for the first time, he felt like he was looking through time at a lonely old age and a solitary death. When Scorpius ran back to him, Harry caught his arm and held on tight.

“Is it truly over between us?” he said. “Is there really no way I can win you back?”

Scorpius looked at him with those pale eyes – Draco’s eyes.

“No,” he replied gently. “No, I’m afraid there’s not.”

Harry dropped his hand and gazed out over the sea. He’d known the answer, of course, but it hurt nonetheless.

“But that doesn’t mean you can’t have me tonight,” Scorpius said.

Harry’s breath caught in his chest. To prove his point, Scorpius undid the button of his cloak and let it fall to the ground.

Later, Harry would be appalled at himself – the way he lunged for Scorpius and kissed him breathless – but at the time, all he felt was need and desire. He cast a warming charm and tore open Scorpius’s robe, ripping the clasps, devouring his pale throat, nipping his collar bones as Scorpius tipped back his head with a deep, primal groan.

They didn’t “make love” – “making love” implies savouring the moment, exploring each other’s bodies, murmuring endearments. Instead they rutted like animals. Harry found Scorpius’s opening with the head of his cock and pushed inside him while Scorpius clawed at his back, arching off the ground, ravenous for Harry’s deep, tongue-filled kisses.

It felt like it used to. It felt like it’d been. Desperate and all-consuming. It felt amazing and perfect – and utterly wrong.

Harry was delirious, his orgasm building forever, his thrusts erratic. When Scorpius cried out and came underneath him, Harry rammed into him, freezing, spurting, convulsing.

He was still hard when Scorpius wriggled out from under him and rolled him onto his back, straddling his hips and impaling himself. Harry’s back arched off the ground as Scorpius rode him . . .

. . . all at once, the crashing waves became calls to prayer, the heather became a bed sprinkled with rose petals, Scorpius was no longer twenty-six but seventeen. His young body taking each one of Harry’s brutal upward thrusts, his gaze innocent and adoring.
Harry squeezed his eyes shut, clutching the mirage, as another orgasm ripped a cry from his throat. After Scorpius came a second time, they collapsed side-by-side, breathing hard.

“Oh, God,” Harry groaned, throwing his arm over his eyes.

Scorpius kissed him softly – first his mouth, then his chest and finally the slippery head of his cock.

Harry groaned again. He wasn’t entirely sure why. His body hummed with pleasure, satisfied, no longer aching, but his mind was a tornado of emotions – love, longing, lust . . . and deep, deep regret.

Scorpius lay on his side and propped himself up on his elbow. Harry groped for his hand and squeezed it. To the extent he’d royally fucked-up, it hadn’t been Scorpius’s fault.

“This is our secret,” Scorpius whispered.

Harry nodded. He was still too breathless to speak.

“It doesn’t mean I don’t love Khorve,” Scorpius continued. “And it doesn’t mean you don’t love my father.”

Harry’s eyes flew open. So, there was the answer to that question. Scorpius had heard him and Draco.

“He loves you, too,” Scorpius said, but Harry shook his head over and over from side to side.

“I can’t talk about this now,” he said. “For heaven’s sake, Scorpius. We just made love. My come is inside you. You’re going to go back to your and your father’s room with my come still inside you. That – that – is precisely the reason your father won’t be with me. Metaphorically speaking, my come has been inside you for years.”

“Ugh,” Scorpius said, wrinkling his nose and reminding Harry that, in many ways, he was still a boy. He smiled and kissed Scorpius’s nose, trying hard not to wish they were still together.

Jesus Christ. What a fucking mess.

Maybe it was time . . . maybe it was time to let them both go. But before he did, he was going to have Scorpius as many times as his body permitted. He might never have the chance to make love like that again. When life hands you a brief reprieve, grab it by the throat and hold on tight.

* * * * * * * * * *

Scorpius woke to someone gently shaking his shoulder.

“Scorpius,” his father whispered. “Wake up.”

Scorpius rolled over and blinked up at his father. It was still dark. The only light came from the tip of his father’s wand. Fog had swallowed the moon. It no longer shone through the curtains as it had just hours before.

“What’s going on?” he asked, sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

“We’re leaving,” his father replied.

Suddenly, Scorpius was wide awake.
“We’re what?”

“We’re leaving,” his father said. “The first ferry to the mainland leaves at five. I want us to be on it.”

Scorpius panicked for a moment. Did his father know what had happened between him and Harry just hours earlier? Was that why he was whisking Scorpius away?

“How?” Scorpius asked. “Aren’t we even going to say good-bye?”

His father turned and went back to his bed. An open suitcase already held his few items of clothes. Scorpius threw aside his bedclothes and got up, wincing slightly and hoping his father hadn’t noticed. He and Harry had made love until they were both too exhausted to do anything more than get dressed and go back to the cottage.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” his father replied. “Harry and I... Harry and I had words last night. I’d like to avoid going through another scene if I can help it.”

Scorpius was tempted to say that he knew what’d happened, but then he’d have to admit to spying – and perhaps more.

“Harry might not understand,” he said, retrieving his things from the little dresser in the corner and stuffing them in his bag.

“No, he will,” his father replied. “Trust me. Don’t worry. I’ll write to him when we get back to New Guinea. I haven’t forgotten that I owe him my life.”

Scorpius merely nodded. His mind was grappling with at least a dozen different emotions, chief among them guilt for leaving without a word of farewell. Harry may understand why Scorpius’s father was leaving, but would he understand the same about Scorpius? He would’ve liked to tell Harry he didn’t regret what happened between them, that it was beautiful... that maybe he wanted it to happen again.

Scorpius and his father finished packing and quietly left their room. Next door, Briac was snoring like a Yeti. The sound drowned out the creaking of their footsteps as they descended the stairs. When they reached the parlour, they found Harry was asleep on the couch, his hands curled under his chin in that way that’d always made Scorpius’s heart ache with love. Both father and son froze.

“Shhh,” his father whispered. “Don’t wake him.”

Scorpius wanted to disobey – he wanted to cough or stumble over something. Harry was a light sleeper; he’d be awake in an instant.

And then what?

It was only the sheer dread of the possible ensuing scenarios that got Scorpius past Harry and out the door.

They trotted down the hill, disturbing the black birds in the hedges. The fog was so thick that they didn’t see the village until they were nearly in it. A man in a horse cart delivering milk passed them with a nod and the tip of his cap. Scorpius smiled at him. The island, as bleak as it was, would always be dear to him. It was like Morocco in many ways.

They purchased their tickets and boarded the ferry. It wasn’t till they were making their way out of the harbour that Scorpius’s father spoke to him again.
“You have to understand,” he said. “I can’t be Harry’s lover when you were his lover before me. No matter what I feel for him, I just can’t.”

Scorpius felt a wave of unexpected relief. After making love with Harry, he felt a sense of ownership again. Harry was his.

God, what a mess.

Scorpius and his father stood side-by-side, watching the shore of the island slowly recede, when suddenly they saw a figure dressed in Auror red came running onto the dock.

“Fuck,” Scorpius’s father said, startling Scorpius. His father was adamantly opposed to the use of “coarse Muggle phrases.” He turned away and pulled the hood of his cloak over his head. Scorpius didn’t do the same. Instead, without stopping to think of the implications, he threw Harry a kiss and waved good-bye.

Harry stood on the dock watching the ferry leave the harbour, his mouth open in shock. Yes, he hadn’t been eager to face Draco and Scorpius in the glaring, sober light of morning, but he had wanted to talk to them – both of them, although separately, of course.

He’d wanted to tell Draco to think about things and not simply cast them aside as impossible, and he’d wanted to tell Scorpius . . .

. . . hell, he had no idea what he’d wanted to tell Scorpius. A hug would’ve said more than a thousand words.

But Draco and Scorpius had foreclosed any possibility of talking or hugging. They’d even foreclosed the possibility of a chance to say, “I hope to see you again.” Instead, they’d left Harry wondering if either of them cared for him at all.

He turned on his heel and walked back to the road. Hopefully, they’d seen him through the fog; it’s why he’d worn his Auror robe. He wanted them to know they were running away from him. Not that knowing would make any difference.

He walked straight past the cottage and back up to the cliff where he and Scorpius had been the night before. The fog was so thick that he couldn’t see the waves crashing on the rocks below. He could only hear them. His cheeks were hot from having walked uphill so quickly. The dampness of the fog mingled with the dampness of his sweat.

God. Making love to Scorpius had felt so good even though Harry had known it was wrong. Just as he used to, Scorpius had thrown himself into the sex – wild and passionate. It’d turned Harry on beyond belief when he’d thought about the fact that it’d been he who’d taken Scorpius’s virginity; that it’d been he who’d taught him to let go like that, to come so beautifully.

And then there was Draco – those fumbling ravenous kisses . . .

Suddenly, Harry felt a presence behind him. Instinctively, he drew his wand and turned to find Briac holding up his hands in mock surrender.

“Arsehole,” Harry said, sheathing his wand again.

“I just thought you might like some coffee,” Briac said, handing Harry a mug, “seeing as you were up most of the night.”
Harry looked at him. What was Briac implying? Did he know something or was he merely speculating because Harry had never gone to bed?

“You’re in quite the mess, aren’t you, Potter,” he said.

Harry sighed. There was the answer to that question.

“Which mess are you referring to?” he asked. “Because I’m over my head on two fronts.”

Briac raised an eyebrow. “I was referring to the mess with Draco,” he said. “What’s the other one?”

Harry turned to look out at the fog again and took a deep breath.

“Scorpius and I were together last night,” he replied.

“By ‘together’ I’m assuming you mean in the carnal sense of the word.”

Harry merely nodded.

“Jesus, Harry.”

Harry scrubbed his face with the hand that wasn’t holding his mug of coffee.

“I know, I know,” he groaned. “You don’t need to give me a lecture. I already know I fucked up.”

“Well, you certainly confirmed Draco’s concerns, that’s for sure.”

Harry tipped back his head. It’d started to drizzle. The water felt good on his face.

“I don’t know what I’m doing,” he said.

“Well, that’s abundantly clear.”

“I love them both. I want them both. And before you say it’s because I see them as the same person, I can assure you that’s not the case. They’re as separate in my mind as they can be. Scorpius I want to possess and Draco I want to simply be with. I want to grow old with him. Scorpius makes me feel young and alive and desired. Draco makes me feel interesting and useful and real. Scorpius is passion. Draco is comfort and contentment – or at least the possibility of those things. I’ve never had that in my life, Briac. I’ve never been either comfortable or content.”

Briac placed his hand on Harry’s shoulder.

“I know,” he said gently. “I’ve always known that, which is why I’ve never believed Scorpius was a good match for you – or you for him. Draco, on the other hand . . . like you said, I can see the two of you growing old together. I can’t picture that with Scorpius. And, Harry, you’re not good for him either. His young lover is who Scorpius needs, not a jaded, old man.”

“Hey!” Harry exclaimed but didn’t elaborate. After all Briac was right.

“So, with all of that in mind, what do I do?” he said.

“Fuck if I know,” Briac helpfully replied. “Let the chips fall where they may, I suppose.”

“That’s not exactly helpful,” Harry grumbled.

“Don’t worry,” Briac said. “Considering you slept with one of them and almost slept with the other, I
think you’ll be hearing from both sooner rather than later. You’re a hard man to forget.”

Harry snorted. “Can I assume that was a pun?”

Briac winked at him and finished the last of his coffee.

“C’mon,” he said. “We have more than your love life to think about. There’s an election that needs winning and a country that needs running.”

“I’m still not sure I want to do this,” Harry said.

“Bollocks,” Briac replied. “Let’s get back to the cottage and pack. Just remember, the nation’s in crisis. All nations in crisis make bad electoral decisions. You’ll be part of a long tradition. Remember when America elected Donald Trump?”

“Hey!” Harry exclaimed for a second time. “I deeply resent that comparison.”

Briac threw a beefy arm over his shoulder as they followed the path downhill.

“You’re not going to be in this alone,” he said with complete seriousness. “I’ll be working with you. Hermione will be working with you. The whole DMLE will support your proposals. You can do this, Harry. I know you can.”

Harry nodded. He wasn’t so sure, but then again he needed something to throw himself into – something that wouldn’t get him killed. It’d been Draco’s plea the night before – the one clear, unambiguous indication that Draco loved him. Maybe answering that plea would be as unequivocal a declaration.

Back at the cottage, Briac made breakfast while Harry sat at the table, trying to compose an Owl expressing his gratitude for having been nominated. It wasn’t going very well. When Briac brought him a plate of eggs and sausage, Harry nearly balled-up the parchment and lobbed it at his head.

“I thought of something,” Briac said.

“I hope it involves me withdrawing from public life and becoming a hermit,” Harry replied, throwing down his quill.

Briac waved his hand dismissively.

“No, not about the election. About your troubles with Draco.”

Harry arched his eyebrows. Unlike his ideas, Briac’s were usually good ones with at least a small chance of success.

“You need to get rid of the pendant,” Briac said as though that was the easiest thing in the world.

“I can’t,” Harry replied. “You know that. The chain is charmed never to break or be removed. It was made with the strongest magic available, including some of my own.”

“In this whole, big, wide world, there has to be someone who can do it. There has to be. Albus Dumbledore would’ve been able to do it.”

“Albus is dead,” Harry said.

“I know that,” Briac replied. “But he wasn’t the first and last wizard with that kind of power.”
“Assuming you’re right, how would I go about finding such a person? I can’t exactly put an ad in the ‘help wanted’ section of *The Prophet.*”

“Knowing your aversion to anything resembling scholarship and research, I would suggest talking to Hermione.”

Harry paused to consider Briac’s words. They weren’t unreasonable . . . the question, though, was whether he actually wanted to remove the pendant. He’d worn it for a decade. He’d feel almost naked without it. And what was more, it would sever yet another bond with Scorpius. Just thinking about removing the pendant made Harry feel queasy. How would he ever get Scorpius back should he want to?

“At least think about it,” Briac said. “And maybe talk to Scorpius. See how he feels. Who knows? Maybe he’d like his pendant removed as well.”

Harry turned away. After having made love to Scorpius again . . . some of the old desire had returned. In some way Scorpius was still his as long as they wore each other’s pendants. Remove them, and they could drift apart forever.

“Think about it,” Briac said again. “There’s no way you can be with Draco while that pendant is still hanging around your neck. You need to decide which of the Malfoys you want more.”

Harry scrubbed his face. “You make it all sound so . . . unsavoury.”

“Because it *is* unsavoury. I’m not even going to ask what you were thinking when you had sex with Scorpius because it’s pretty clear you weren’t thinking at all.”

Harry didn’t even try to defend himself.

“What about the tattoo?” he asked. “Isn’t it as much of a problem as the pendant is?”

“A Muggle tattoo isn’t hard to remove, but that’s not the point, is it? You’re hung-up on the question of *if* you should remove it, not *how.*”

Harry nodded. As usual, Briac had been able to distil the whole mess into a simple point – or at least it was simple to understand. Enacting it was a whole different story.

They finished their breakfasts and then went around the cottage tidying up. It was time to get back to London. Harry had the upcoming election, and Briac had the imminent birth of his twins.

Before they left, Harry took one last solitary walk along the edge of the cliff. Perhaps it was a good thing that Draco and Scorpius had left. If they’d stayed, Harry wouldn’t be returning to London, and if he didn’t return to London soon, there’d be no way he could win a contested election. The people were making their choice in a week. Yes, Harry had name recognition on his side, but he also needed a platform. Just being Harry Potter wasn’t reason enough to elect him. He needed ideas. He needed plans.

Probably not for the last time, Harry wished he had Draco beside him. Draco would know what to say and how to say it.

“Damn you, Malfoy,” he told the indifferent horizon. The wind pushed his hood back. He stood for another minute before drawing his wand, closing his eyes and Apparating back home.

* * * * * * * * * *
Scorpius closed his eyes and thought about Harry as though Harry was a place he wanted to Apparate to – a beautiful place, a place of white sheets and rose petals.

“God!” Khorve gasped. “You’re on fire tonight.”

Scorpius gritted his teeth. He was close to coming. He didn’t want Khorve interrupting his fantasy. Harry was kissing him as he thrust – Harry with his dark hair, damp with mist and sweat. Harry with his green eyes and covetous hands, his mouth bee-stung from Scorpius’s hungry little nips.

That night on the cliff – it’d been years since Scorpius had been that turned on.

He came hard, only stopping himself from crying Harry’s name at the last instant.

Khorve came soon afterward. They collapsed onto the bed, side-by-side, their breathing fast and shallow.

“Wow,” Khorve said. “Not only does absence make the heart grow fonder, it makes the cock grow harder.”

Scorpius smiled weakly. Now that he’d come, the guilt was rushing in like a tide. They lay for a while, listening to the sounds of the forest and the gentle waves on the beach.

“I’m glad you’re back,” Khorve said. “I was so worried about you and your father.”

Scorpius took his hand and squeezed it. Khorve was so sweet and kind, so calming. So here. So unlike Harry, but yet . . .

Scorpius wanted to tell Khorve everything, but telling Khorve everything would mean telling his father everything. There’d be no way he and Khorve could keep a secret like that from him. The three of them were all too close. It was interesting, Scorpius thought, that having his father find out he’d cheated on Khorve with Harry was scarier than telling Khorve himself.

He and his father had been home for a little over a week, and everything was as busy and topsy-turvy as they get in New Guinea. Scorpius had a backlog of patients to see, and his father’s garden had been overrun with slugs and poisonous frogs. There’d been little time to think of Harry, but even so, Harry was always in the back of Scorpius’s mind. He often found himself clutching his stag pendant as though he could touch Harry through it. If only he and Harry had talked before they parted . . .

To say he was torn was to boil his complicated desires and fears into a tired cliché. He was worse than torn – he was ripped to shreds. On the journey back to New Guinea, he’d been certain he wanted to be with Harry. He’d had to grab onto the side of the ferry to stop himself from diving into the harbour and swimming back to the dock. After all, Harry was the love of his life. He’d been in love with Harry since he was five for heaven’s sake!

But as soon as he smelled the rain forests and felt the beach’s warm sand under his feet . . . memories of Britain started fading like an old photograph. Had he really walked along the Thames in the cold rain? Had he really dragged Harry out of the Forbidden Forest as snow began to fall? Had he really spent a night in a jail cell? Had he really watched his father be convicted and taken to Azkaban? Had he really made love with Harry on a cliff, the wind full of the waves’ salty spray?

He was so confused. He burned for Harry, but he adored Khorve. He dreamt of Harry at night, but he ate quiet breakfasts with his father in the mornings. He made himself come to thoughts of Harry, but thoughts of his patients made him feel happy and useful.
“Hey,” Khorve said, giving Scorpius a playful nudge. “Come back. You’re a million miles away.”

“At least not literally anymore,” Scorpius replied, rolling onto his side and looking into Khorve’s sleepy eyes.

Khorve tucked a strand of hair behind Scorpius’s ear.

“I love you,” he said.

“I love you, too,” Scorpius replied . . . and he did. He loved Khorve and he loved Harry, just differently. Very very differently.

“I’ve been thinking,” Khorve continued. “I hope you . . . I mean, I hope you want us to be together . . .”


“Well . . .” Khorve bit his lip. He obviously wasn’t sure he wanted to say what he was about to say. Scorpius’s stomach dropped.

“Just tell me,” he said.

“It’s just that . . . well, you call for Harry in your sleep – I mean, you always have, and that’s okay, but it seems more frequent lately.”

Scorpius reached out and brushed Khorve’s cheek with his knuckles.

“I’ve just come back from Britain,” he said. “I saw Harry a lot. Some . . . some of the old feelings came back, that’s all.”

Khorve took a deep breath.

“Will any of those feelings stop you from marrying me?” he asked.

Scorpius sat bolt upright.

“I mean, if you don’t want to, I’ll understand,” Khorve stammered. “It’s just that I’ve been thinking about asking you for a long time, even before you went away, and I just want to be sure that . . . shit, this is coming out all wrong.” He grabbed Scorpius’s hand and kissed it. “I guess what I’m saying is . . . is will you marry me?”

Scorpius’s mouth had gone dry, so when he tried to speak, it came out sounding strange and not like him at all.

“I . . . Oh, Khorve . . . thank you,” he said. “I . . . will you understand if I say I have to think about it?”

He winced when tears welled in Khorve’s eyes.

Christ, he was an arsehole! How had he let himself make love to Harry? How had he let himself complicate what’d been straight-forward feelings of comfort and contentment?

He kissed the tears off Khorve’s cheeks.

“I’ll let you know soon,” he said. “I promise.”
Khorve smiled softly. Scorpius felt his heart brim over with affection.

“Okay,” he said. “I’m sorry – I shouldn’t have just sprung it on you like that.”

“No, it’s alright,” Scorpius said. “I just wish I had an answer right now.”

He kissed Khorve’s lips and then his lids when Khorve closed his eyes.

As soon as he was asleep, Scorpius got out of bed to write Harry a letter.

* * * * * * * * * * *

The shabby, brown owl looked harried. It was no wonder. It came from the London Owl Office and probably had dozens of flights to make every day. Harry gave it an extra treat. Fortunately the previous Minister of Magic had left behind a stash in his desk drawer – a desk he’d quickly vacated after Draco had been taken to Azkaban and the Wizengamot had handed down a vote of no confidence.

Harry closed the window and looked at the Owl. He’d only been Minister for a week, but he’d already learned to recognise formal correspondence and set it aside for his assistant (a clever witch recommended by Hermione for her discretion) to take care of.

But the Owl wasn’t formal – in fact, it was the most personal he’d received in a long time.

Scorpius.

Harry returned to his desk and cracked the seal with shaking hands. He had no idea what he’d find and even less of an idea of what he wanted to find.

Since that night on the cliff, Harry hadn’t had a sound night’s sleep. Dreams of Scorpius’s young body arching beneath him, his little cries swallowed by the wind . . . every night, Harry woke needing to come and then, after he did, feeling monumentally guilty.

It was the same with Draco . . . except not exactly. His dreams of Draco were longer and more complex, rambling stories full of twists and turns. Sometimes he and Draco made love, but most of the time they simply had adventures of one kind or another – explorers of the Amazon or sheep farmers (of all things) in Yorkshire.

The dreams of Draco and Scorpius were so different, but he woke from both feeling empty, lonely and sad.

Taking a deep breath, Harry unfolded the letter and started reading.

Dearest Harry,

I’m writing because I need your thoughts before I make a huge, life-changing decision. Khorve has asked me to marry him. On the one hand, I want to say yes. Khorve and I have been friends for years and years. We share many of the same interests and love each other very much. What’s more, my father loves Khorve as well. If Khorve and I were to break up, he’d be devastated. But the love I have for both Khorve and my father can never compare with my love for you. I’m being utterly frank when I say that if you wanted me, I’d run away with you to the ends of the earth. You are the great love of my life. Our night together reminded me of that. No one makes me feel as alive as you do.

So, I guess what I’m asking is for you to tell me honestly for once and for all whether you want me. I already know that you love me. I can see it in your eyes. But do you want me? Do you want to spend
the rest of your life with me? If the answer is yes, then I am yours. If the answer is no, I will marry Khorve.

Please don’t mention this letter to my father. He wouldn’t understand. Being with you might mean leaving him, but Harry, I’m willing to risk the chance then spend my life wondering what might have been.

Please write soon.

Love,
Scorpius

Harry had to read the letter a half a dozen times before it fully made sense to him. The meaning was stark. He could either have Scorpius or lose him forever.

He stood and walked to the window. It was drizzly, but he could still see the London Eye with its candy-coloured lights. He’d taken Lily on a ride the day after it opened. She’d clutched his arm more from excitement than fear. The memory made him smile. God, he missed her! If she were there, she’d know exactly what he should do.

A knock on the door startled him out of his thoughts.

“Come in,” he said.

His assistant opened the door. “Sir, Ms. Granger is here to see you. Should I send her in?” she asked.

“Of course,” he replied. “You never need to ask when it’s Hermione – Briac, yes, but never Hermione.

He smiled, but she merely nodded. He had to remember that she would take anything he said seriously, even when it was anything but.

He turned from the window when Hermione walked through the door and quietly closed it behind her. He went to her and pulled her close. She smelled of the roses her daughter was named after.

“How have you been?” she asked.

“Terrified,” Harry replied.

She laughed. “Good. That means you’re probably doing a good job. I’d be worried if you told me that running the government was a piece of cake.”

He let her go and walked back to his desk.

“Have a seat,” he said. “Are you here on official business or personal?”

“Personal.”

She sat down and crossed her legs. There was rain in her untamed hair.

Harry bit his lip. He wasn’t sure he’d like what he was about to hear. Scorpius’s letter had already rocked his world enough for one night. Nonetheless, he told her to continue. As usual, she dispensed with chit-chat.

“Briac told me that you might be considering removing your pendant and asked me whether I knew of a witch of wizard powerful enough to break the charm.”
Harry wasn’t at all sure he wasn’t angry at Briac for disclosing their conversation, but he supposed he’d deal with that later.

“And?” he asked.

“As it turns out, I know several. One of them, you’ll be interested to know, is actually a tribesman in New Guinea.”

For a moment, Harry felt faint, but he quickly caught his breath.

“I see,” he said, not knowing what else to say.

“I’m not here to advise you,” she said. “I’m sure Briac will do that. I’m just giving you information. It’s up to you to decide what to do with it.”

He nodded.

“Thank you,” he said, his voice rough. He cleared his throat. “Have you told Briac yet?”

“No. I thought you deserved to hear directly from me.”

He watched her rise from her chair and straighten her robe. She was giving him time to tell her something, but he had no idea yet what he wanted to say.

“I have policy proposals I want to discuss with you,” she said. “But I’ll wait until tomorrow. Go home and get some sleep, Harry. You look exhausted.”

“I am exhausted,” he replied.

She came around his desk to give him a kiss on the cheek.

“Good luck,” she said, and then she was gone, leaving Harry with his unthinkable thoughts.

Over the course of the next several days, Harry wrote three letters, but sent only one of them.

The first begged Scorpius not to marry Khorve and to come back to England. The second said goodbye and gave Scorpius his blessing, and the third – the one that he ultimately sent – told Scorpius that he would be there in four days.
Harry and Scorpius stood face-to-face holding each other’s hands and looking into each other’s eyes. The setting sun had painted the cooling sand coral pink. The wind that’d been blowing all day had quieted. The forest and the little bay were still in the gathering twilight. They were both dressed in white sarongs, their feet bare. Nearby, wearing garlands of exotic flowers, was everyone they love. A special space had been reserved for Lily. Harry could feel her there – her happiness, her blessing.

They were all waiting for the ceremony to begin.

Scorpius squeezed Harry’s hands. There were tears in his eyes. Harry smiled at him. Everything had finally come full circle. Everything finally felt right. The sun’s last rays caught on their silver pendants. Scorpius wore a white gardenia behind one ear. He had never looked more beautiful. Harry felt his own eyes fill with tears.

The sun was almost gone when the old man walked out of the trees and onto the beach, his great grandsons on either side lending their support. They were dressed in traditional garb – palm-leaf skirts and elaborate shell necklaces – their brown faces and bare chests were covered with symbols painted in dyed clay.

When the old man reached them, they turned to him and bowed, their fingers still entwined. Harry didn’t think he could let go of Scorpius’s hand even if he wanted to. The breeze tugged at their white sarongs, the cloth lapping at their ankles like waves.

There was a prayer of some kind that Harry doesn’t understand, but it didn’t matter. The prayer was followed by a chant. Harry could feel the magic gathering in the air – powerful and ancient. The old man reached out and laid his palms on their chests, right on top of their pendants – the scorpion and the stag. His touch was so light, Harry could barely feel it. He heard Scorpius’s breath hitch, or maybe it was his own. The old man closed his fingers around the pendants, tightening his hands into
fists and with one, sure, quick yank, he broke their chains.

When he opened his hands again, both pendants were gone.

Now the *real* ceremony could begin.

Still holding Scorpius’s hand, Harry led him to the edge of the circle of their family and friends.

“Take care of him,” he said, his voice rough with emotion.

Khorve nodded solemnly.

“I will,” he replied. “I promise.”

Harry loosened his grasp on Scorpius’s hand. For a moment, Scorpius still clung to him, but when Khorve reached out to him, he let go.

Harry stepped back as the two lovers embraced.

He’d let go. He’d finally let go.

He turned to look at Draco and smiled at him. Tears filled his eyes again when Draco smiled back.

“Good-bye,” Harry mouthed, and before anyone could stop him, he slipped into the shadows.

He was going home. He’d done what he came there to do. He was going home now.

* * * * * * * * * * *

It wasn’t hard to decide who would be the Heads of the DMLE and Unspeakables departments, but there were numerous other Ministry positions to be filled – many of them Harry hadn’t even known existed. It took weeks for him to choose and then nominate all of the potential candidates. Fortunately, the Wizengamot was putty in his hands, and all his nominees were confirmed quickly and more or less painlessly.

The first four months of his tenure were a proverbial whirlwind. He oversaw the building of a new prison and closed Azkaban. He undid all of the prior Minister’s changes to the DMLE. He approved proposals to further protect magical creatures and provide government-funded tuition grants to poor Hogwarts graduates who wanted to go on to pursue additional certificates. He even overhauled the Ministry of Magical Rubbish and Recycling, which for years had been riddled with corruption and incompetence.

He worked almost nonstop, often sleeping on the couch in his office instead of returning to the Minister’s residence. Every morning he met with Hermione and Briac – his two complete confidants – about his plans for the day. He could tell they wanted to say something to him about his relentless schedule, but fortunately they didn’t. As had always been the case, work was his solace. You can’t be lonely if you don’t have time to be alone.

Nonetheless, it didn’t escape his attention that Draco hadn’t written to him. He’d heard from Scorpius since the wedding, but nothing from his father even though Scorpius assured him that everything was fine. Harry tried not to let it upset him, but on the rare occasion that he went home at a reasonable hour, he drank too much whisky and wrote Draco long, rambling letters that he never sent. He doubted he’d ever see Draco again – Scorpius maybe, but not Draco. His silence was all the evidence Harry needed to know that Draco wanted nothing to do with him.
Then along came his first diplomatic visit.

Harry had insisted on going to Romania alone even though Briac thought he should have company. But Harry didn’t want company – at least not Briac’s. Briac had turned into a mother hen since Scorpius’s wedding. He’d keep tabs on how much Harry drank and when he went to bed at night. Harry didn’t want a chaperone. But as so often happened, the universe ignored his wish. When he checked in at Hotel Bucharest, he was told by the clerk behind the desk that there was a man waiting for him in the bar.

Goddamn you, Briac, Harry thought as he rode the lift to his floor. He’d known something must be up when Briac had merely shrugged when Harry had told him to stay in London. Obviously, he’d already determined he’d go to Bucharest whether Harry liked it or not and decided to forego an argument in favour of surprise.

In his room, Harry showered and dressed for the night’s dinner with the Romanian president. He’d decided to wear a suit instead of a robe – he felt awkward in any robe that wasn’t an Auror’s. Plus, with a suit he could wear black without looking like a version of Severus Snape in glasses. Despite being in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, he didn’t want to look like a vampire. His pallor already made him suspect.

Thinking of Lily as he always did when he was unsure about what to wear, he chose a green shirt and a dark green tie she’d bought for him. She’d always loved dressing him, especially in green. When she’d been a child, she’d been so angry she hadn’t inherited his eyes – that is until Harry had told her that, to him, her brown eyes were the most beautiful colour in the world. He sighed when he looked in the mirror for one last attempt at taming his hair. Sometimes he still couldn’t believe she was gone. What wouldn’t he give if it was she who was accompanying him tonight, not his burly babysitter?

The bar was located across the lobby from the check-in desk. Walking into it felt like walking into the nineteenth century. It was full of dark mahogany panelling and gold fixtures with the only colour being a wine-red carpet. Harry blinked several times in its low light, looking for Briac, but the only man he saw was light-framed and pale-haired . . .

Harry stopped as his heart skipped three beats.

“Ah, Potter,” Draco said. “At last. I never would’ve thought you’d be someone who spends hours primping in front of the mirror, but it looks like I was mistaken.”

Harry stared at him.

“Well,” Draco continued. “Are you going to join me? Seeing as we’re in the Balkans, I’m drinking Palincă instead of whisky, but the bartender assures me there’s whisky if you’re looking for the hair of the dog that bit you – assuming, of course, that you’ve recently been bitten. Considering your alcohol addiction, I don’t doubt that you have been.”

Harry was still staring at him, but he was also walking over to the bar and taking a seat on a stool beside Draco.

“Malfoy,” he said. “What are you doing here?”

“And ‘hello’ to you, too,” Draco replied. “I can leave if you’d like me to.”

Harry actually reached out to grab his arm.

“No, don’t go,” he said. “It’s just . . . you surprised me. I was expecting Briac.”
“Briac and I agreed that it would be I who’d keep an eye on you this weekend,” Draco replied.

Harry frowned. There were two disconcerting aspects to Draco’s remark – the first being that Draco was there to “keep an eye on” him, and the second being that Draco and Briac had discussed it.

“Before you get your knickers in a twist,” Draco said when Harry opened his mouth to complain, “I’ll assure you that I’m not actually going to keep an eye on you, and Briac and I have not been discussing you behind your back for months. I hadn’t heard from either of you until I found out about your trip here in the newspapers.”

Harry bristled.

“You say ‘either’ as though I’m at fault for us losing touch. Draco, you could’ve written – why did I have to make contact first when it was you who would barely speak to me when I came to New Guinea for Scorpius’s wedding.”

He felt a small surge of triumph when Draco looked away. It served him right. Draco had gone well out of his way to insure he was never alone with Harry for the entire two days Harry had been in New Guinea. It’d been as painful for Harry as losing Scorpius had been. Except for the moment when he was preparing to Apparate, Draco hadn’t even looked at him.

“I didn’t have anything to say,” Draco replied sharply.

Harry sighed. “But I suppose you do now,” he said. “Make it quick. I’ve got to be at the presidential residence in an hour.”

“I’m here,” Draco said after taking a deep breath, “because there’s still something I’d like to ask of you – one last thing.”

Harry arched an eyebrow. “Which is?”

“Which is . . . Harry, I can’t get out of my head the fact that you still have that tattoo on your back.”

“So, I suppose you’re here to skin me?”

Draco flinched – but whether it was because of Harry’s tone or the mental image, Harry didn’t know.

“No, of course not,” Draco replied. “Don’t be ridiculous. I’m a potions master, not a butcher.”

“So let me guess: you’ve brewed a potion that will remove my tattoo. Fine. Just let me eat my dinner first before you make me drink it. I want to try to enjoy myself as much as possible tonight.”

Draco blushed.

“You don’t drink it,” he said. “It needs to be applied topically.”

Harry was relieved. The idea of having to drink a potion disturbed him. He hated consuming something whose ingredients he wasn’t sure of.

“Good,” he said briskly. “I’ll do it when I get back to the hotel tonight. Give it to me.”

Draco was still blushing when he rolled his eyes to the heavens.

“You’re a moron, Potter,” he said. “How on earth did you ever get elected Minister? You can’t apply the potion yourself. It has to be massaged into your skin. You can’t massage your own back.”
“Fine,” Harry replied. “I’m sure the hotel employs a masseuse – I’ll get him or her to do it.”

Draco’s pink blush turned red.

“I would prefer . . . I would be happier if I could do it,” he said. When Harry opened his mouth, he added, “not because I want to. I just want to make sure it works.”

“In other words you don’t trust me to actually do it,” Harry said, his voice colourless.

Draco merely looked at him.

“I know how hard it was for you to get rid of the pendants,” he said. “I can’t imagine it’ll be easy for you to get rid of the tattoo either.”

He was right, of course, but Harry would be damned before he got into a conversation about why he’d gotten the tattoo and what it means to him – and what it will mean to get rid of it. He’d be completely naked. Completely unmarked. Completely alone. All evidence of his relationship with Scorpius will have been wiped away like footsteps in the sand when the tide rushes in.

But he wasn’t going to fight Draco over it. He hadn’t with the pendants and he wouldn’t with the tattoo either.

“Fine,” he said. “When I get back tonight, we’ll do it.”

He felt angry and cornered, and Draco’s reply didn’t make him feel any less so.

“I would prefer . . . I’d prefer to do it before you go to your dinner tonight,” he said.

Harry threw back the glass of Palincă Draco had bought him and let the bartender pour him another.

“Why are you in such a rush?” he asked. “Are you worried I’ll change my mind and run away or something?”

Draco shrugged. “Pretty much,” he replied.

Harry swallowed his second glass and stood up. He wanted to have this done with. If they were going to do it, they might as well do it now. Draco finished his drink and followed him out into the lobby with its gleaming marble floor and huge mirrors with gilded, ornate frames.

“It reminds me of the Manor,” Draco said so unexpectedly that Harry actually stopped to look at him.

“You never saw it before the Dark . . . before Voldemort lived there. It was full of light and flowers. My mother was famous for her gardens.”

Harry didn’t know what to say.

“I guess that’s where you get your green thumb,” he said, feeling like it was a rather lame observation in the face of Draco’s remarkably intimate disclosure.

“I like to think so,” Draco replied.

They got into the lift, and the door closed on a long, uncomfortable silence. Harry was sweating. He’d have to change his shirt before he went out. When they reached his room, he took off his jacket and went straight for the liquor cabinet.

“More Palincă?” he asked. His voice had an edge in it.
Draco shook his head.

“I don’t want to drink while I do this,” he said. “It’s irresponsible to use a potion under the influence of anything mind-altering.”

Harry snorted. Whatever.

“Well, I hope you won’t mind if I partake,” he said. He poured himself a glass of whisky and drank it before taking off his shirt and tie and throwing them on a nearby chair.

Draco’s face turned pink again. Harry smirked, opened his buckle and stripped off his trousers and shorts. His nakedness was a weapon. He could tell that Draco wanted to look away, but he couldn’t.

“You can keep your trousers on,” Draco snapped.

Harry turned around to make it abundantly clear where the stinger of the scorpion lay.

“‘Fraid not,” he replied.

He walked to the bed, stripped back the duvet and lay down on the white sheets not bothering to cover himself up.

Draco sighed with what sounded like resignation.

“Roll over,” he said.

Harry did as he was told, turning his head to watch Draco retrieve a bottle of potion from a bag that looked like the kind of bag a Muggle doctor would carry. The bottle’s glass was a deep indigo blue.

Draco went to the bathroom and returned with a damp face cloth.

“I’m going to need . . . I’m going to need to sit on you,” he said.

“Sit away,” Harry replied, relishing Draco’s discomfort.

Slowly, carefully, Draco moved so he was sitting on Harry’s arse, his legs straddling Harry’s hips. Harry shifted slightly to make himself more comfortable and heard Draco’s breath catch.

He hadn’t known how Draco would touch him – it could’ve been rough and careless, but it wasn’t. Instead Draco kneaded his back, pressing the tips of his fingers against Harry’s muscles. It felt good.

It felt really good.

Harry closed his eyes and tried not to imagine the tattoo fading from his skin. Every now and then, Draco wiped his back with the damp cloth, wiping away the ink the potion had caused to seep out through his pores.

When he reached the stinger, Draco shifted so that he was straddling Harry’s thighs. Harry heard him take a deep breath before sliding his fingers into the crack of Harry’s arse. Harry buried his face in his pillow to muffle a groan of arousal.

Suddenly, by accident – or at least it seemed by accident – one of Draco’s fingers pushed inside him ever so slightly.
He froze and then yanked his hand back.

“I’m sorry,” he mumbled. “I didn’t mean to do that.”

Harry couldn’t tell if he was serious or not, but all the same he arched his back and spread his legs a little wider, willing Draco to penetrate him again.

But he didn’t. Instead, he wiped the crack of Harry’s arse clean of ink and dismounted.

Harry didn’t roll over to look at him. He was hard, and he would be damned if Draco found out. He’d be damned before he let his body betray how much he wanted to be taken.

“There,” Draco said, his voice full of satisfaction. The cloth he was holding was black. “Go take a shower. Thank you, Harry. I can’t begin to tell you how grateful I am.”

Harry sighed. He felt just as naked and vulnerable without the scorpion as he knew he would. Meanwhile, Draco was behaving as though he’d just performed a surgery and was pleased with the outcome. He returned the bottle of potion to his bag and snapped it shut.

“Kiss me,” Harry pleaded. If Draco was going to simply leave him like that, then he wanted something in exchange for his concession.

Draco merely stood at the edge of the bed looking down at him.

“I told you,” he said. “I’m not going to fuck my son’s lover. Why do you keep insisting?”

Harry rolled over onto his back, but this time he covered himself with the duvet. Whereas he’d been proud of his nakedness before, now he was ashamed of it and its reaction to being touched so . . . well, so “lovingly” was the only word to describe it.

Draco must’ve seen something in his eyes because his expression softened and he brushed aside Harry’s fringe so he could kiss him on the forehead.

“Thank you,” he said again. “Thank you for letting him go.”

But Harry was done with their conversation and finished with concessions. He rolled over onto his side and didn’t move again even when Draco said good-bye.

* * * * * * * * * * *

His father seemed depressed.

It was really the only word Scorpius could use to describe his snappishness and dreary mood. Ever since he’d returned from his trip, he’d been spending more time sleeping than usual. He’d even been neglecting his garden.

“Do you even know where he went?” Khorve asked one morning over yet another breakfast that was just the two of them.

“All he told me was that he went to visit an old friend although who that could be I cannot imagine,” Scorpius replied. “Last I knew my father didn’t have a lot of ‘chums.’”

Khorve smiled guiltily. “The thought actually makes me laugh.”

“I know. Me, too. You’d think he could’ve come up with a better explanation.”
“You don’t suppose he might’ve . . . I mean maybe he and Harry met up in Romania or something. Harry went there recently for a meeting with the Romanian president.”

“I’ve actually wondered that myself, but why? He hasn’t even written to Harry no matter how much I’ve pestered him to do it.”

“But remember,” Khorve said, reaching for the bowl of fruit, “the last time he was like this was after he’d written the infamous letter.”

Scorpius nodded – it did seem like his father’s low moods were related to Harry in some way. He’d been low for weeks after the wedding.

“I still think it’s strange how cold your father was to Harry while Harry was here for the wedding,” Khorve said.

Scorpius nodded again. It had been strange – even after Harry had made it clear he wanted Scorpius to marry Khorve, Scorpius’s father had kept his distance.

There was really only one explanation: his father didn’t want to act on his attraction.

Just then they heard their screen door open. Scorpius and Khorve stood up to hug Scorpius’s father when he walked into the kitchen.

“So,” he said, taking a seat and filling his bowl with rice. “What is Britain’s Minister of Magic up to now?”

That was how he referred to Harry – if he referred to him at all. “Britain’s Minister of Magic.”

Scorpius opened the newspaper.

“Well, it looks like he’s asked the Wizengamot to consider changing the penalties regarding the illegal capture and sale of endangered creatures.”

“Strengthen them or weaken them?” Khorve asked.

“Strengthen them,” Scorpius replied. He smiled. He was sure Harry had been thinking of Lily and her love of animals when he made his proposal.

Scorpius’s father harrumphed, but that was all.

“Anything more interesting?” he asked.

Scorpius had flipped to the international section and started reading about Harry’s policy on Muggle Climate Abuse when suddenly he stopped mid-sentence.

“What is it?” his father said.

“Harry’s going to Latvia,” Scorpius replied. “There’s an international meeting on Muggle Climate Abuse taking place there next week.”

“Where exactly?” Scorpius’s father asked, betraying his alarm.

Scorpius groaned.

“Riga,” he replied.
The three of them were silent for a long time.

“Poor Harry,” Scorpius said. “It’s going to be hard for him to be back there.”

“‘Hard for him?’” his father said. “It’ll kill him. Jesus. He’ll drink himself into a stupor and fall in the Daugava.”

Scorpius and Khorve blinked at him. Scorpius’s father blushed and looked away.

“I’m just saying he’ll have a difficult time,” he muttered. “That’s all.”

“Maybe we could go with him,” Scorpius said. “The three of us, I mean. We could keep him sober.”

“Unlikely,” his father said. He sounded both angry and frustrated at the same time.

“We could at least try,” Scorpius said. “Isn’t this sufficiently serious for us to at least try?”

“Why all of a sudden is it our job to keep Harry out of trouble,” his father snapped. “He has plenty of other people who can do the job better than we could.”

He snatched the paper out of Scorpius’s hand and turned to the gardening section, burying himself in an article about bamboo. Scorpius looked at Khorve, who shrugged to say “we tried.”

When the date of the international conference grew near, Scorpius’s father announced he was going on a trip to Australia to attend a weeklong course on native shrubs. Scorpius opened his mouth to say “bollocks,” but Khorve shook his head and mouthed “no.”

They both knew Scorpius’s father was going to Riga.

“I wish he could be honest with us,” Scorpius said later.

“He’s being a Slitherthing about it,” Khorve said.

Scorpius laughed. “Slytherin,” he said. It didn’t matter how many times he corrected Khorve, Khorve always forgot.

“What am I being ‘Slitherthing about?’” Scorpius’s father asked, coming up behind them where they were sitting on the beach watching the sun set.

“About going to Riga,” Scorpius said boldly. “Father, we know that’s where you’re going. You don’t need to lie to us.”

His father sighed resignedly.

“It’s alright to care for him,” Scorpius said gently – and cautiously. “I don’t know why you’re so cagey about it.”

“Harry was your lover,” his father replied. “How many times do we have to go over that?”

Scorpius wanted to pull his hair out in frustration.

“That doesn’t mean you have to shun him,” he said.

“I’m not ‘shunning him.’”
“Then why haven’t you written or visited him? Father, Harry saved your life.”

His father looked out over the bay. For a moment it seemed as though he wouldn’t reply.

“I know that,” he said. “I just . . . it’s not easy to be ‘friends’ with Harry. It never has been.”

Scorpius nodded and decided not to press any further. That was probably as honest and straightforward an answer as he could hope to get. He felt sad though – for both his father and for Harry. As Harry had said that night on Mousa when he and Scorpius’s father had kissed – they weren’t getting any younger. Time was slipping through both their fingers.

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Riga.

Harry closed his eyes, clenching his hands into fists so tight his fingernails bit into the skin of his palms. He couldn’t start crying. He couldn’t break down. If he did, he’d never be able to glue himself back together. Why’d he come here? What was he thinking he’d find?

“Sir?” said the driver of his Muggle car. “Is everything alright?” He was earnest and young – barely over twenty with spots and a sketchy hint of a moustache. He reminded Harry of Neville. He reminded Harry of himself before he got married. Before he had children. Before he knew what it was like to bury one of them.

Harry nodded and then cleared his throat.

“Everything’s fine,” he replied. “It was a bumpy flight is all.”

He let the driver take his luggage and got into the backseat of the car. He was traveling by Muggle conveyances because it was safer. Any potential assassin would be stalking the Portkey hub, not Riga’s international airport. Obviously, it would not be a good thing if Britain’s Minister of Magic was killed on an official visit, but part of Harry wished he could flaunt his vulnerability. Part of him wanted a good, old-fashioned fight – the kind of fight that wiped away everything but the here and now, the sweet metallic immediacy of present danger.

They drove through countryside that grew increasingly populated as they neared the outskirts of the city. It was winter – in fact, it was almost a year to the day he’d arrived in Riga to visit Lily. The pastures were buried under snow, and horses stood, ears back and necks bent as the snowflakes caught in their long eyelashes. In the city, people in fur hats hurried down the sidewalks, their breath smoking in the cold and their chins buried in their collars.

The city was just as vibrant as Harry remembered it. The houses in Vecrīga – Riga’s old town – were like elaborate, multi-coloured wedding cakes, bright and cheerful in the shadow of Doma Laukums, the enormous cathedral on the north side of the cobbledstone square. The marketplaces were full of amber jewellery, fruits and vegetables and the smoky smell of lamb kabobs. By the time they reached the hotel, the sun was setting and the streetlamps were coming on, their flames protected by thick glass panels. Harry remembered Lily grabbing his hand and pulling him through the maze of alleyways to her favourite bakery and then on to the building where she’d lived . . .

He bit the inside of his cheek until it bled. Why had he decided to come to this conference? He could’ve sent any number of Ministry officials in his stead. Maybe he’d call Briac and tell him to join him. Maybe he should have company after all. Maybe he shouldn’t let himself be alone.

To a Muggle, the Vermanes Park Hotel looked small and, from the outside, unremarkable. Being magical, though, it was actually enormous, taking up a full block, and looking like one of St.
Petersburg’s Tsarist palaces. The driver pulled up to the front door and gave Harry’s luggage to the waiting valet. Harry tipped him liberally. He still wasn’t used to being waited on hand and foot. He doubted he ever would be. He’d done everything he could to avoid such treatment when he’d been no more than the Chosen One, but being Minister of Magic was different. He had an image to uphold, no matter how awkward it felt. He smiled when he thought of how Lily would’ve teased him.

*Watch your step, your Majesty,* she would’ve said, taking his arm and leading him to the door of the hotel. *Don’t trip on your royal robes.*

He checked-in and rode the lift to his room on the top floor – the Presidential Suite, of course. His assistant wouldn’t dream of lodging him anywhere else. He dropped his suitcase on the bed and went straight to one of the windows overlooking the river. He remembered Lily writing about the Daugava, how she’d walk its banks, crossing its bridges that stitched the city together like steel and concrete threads. He remembered her writing of the ancient trees that lined the promenade. Now here it was beneath him, the slow dark water, its surface pricked by stars. He stood for a long time just watching it, wondering how deep it was, wondering how cold it was . . .

“Don’t even think about it, Potter.”

The voice came from one of the armchairs by the fireplace. Harry drew his wand and wheeled around.

Draco stood with a mocking smile and put his hands up.

“Malfoy!” Harry exclaimed, his heart pounding in his throat. He was rarely caught so off-guard, so unaware of his surroundings.

“I would say ‘the one and only,’” Draco said. “But I’m not. There’s another Malfoy. Scorpius told me to say hello.”

Harry sheathed his wand.

“You scared the hell out of me,” he said. “What are you doing here? How’d you get into my room?”

“I can be very . . . persuasive,” Draco said in a way that clearly indicated he didn’t intend to elaborate.

Harry walked to the fireplace and sat in the armchair next to Draco’s. Draco poured them both glasses of whisky and returned to his own chair. He handed Harry one of the glasses and watched Harry throw it back like it was water.

“I don’t have anything left to give you,” Harry said. “I’ve given you everything I had – or at least tried to.”

Draco bit his lip and turned his head to look into the fire’s glowing core. Harry couldn’t help but follow his gaze. All of a sudden, an image of Lily filled his mind – she was running, wand drawn, down a street hemmed in by burning buildings. Her face was fever-bright with anger. Whoever was burning down her beloved city was going to die . . . .

The glass slipped from Harry’s hand and shattered on the floor. He covered his face with a groan.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Draco said.

Harry didn’t bother asking how Draco knew what he was thinking – of course he knew. He, too,
had a beloved child.

“But it is,” Harry said. “Didn’t you read that article Skeeter wrote? She’s right. I did teach Lily to be reckless. She looked up to me for everything.”

“Hey,” Draco said sharply, interrupting him. “Lily deserves to be given the benefit of the doubt – she deserves to be thought of as an independent person with an independent will and independent thoughts. She’s not a younger version of you . . . just as Scorpius is not a younger version of me.”

Harry looked at him. It was Draco’s turn to cover his face with a groan.

“Is that what you came here to tell me?” Harry asked. “That you’ve finally figured out that you and Scorpius aren’t the same person?”

Draco dropped his hands and went back to staring into the fire. For a long time, he didn’t reply, but when he did, he cut Harry to the bone.

“You have to understand, Harry. Scorpius was supposed to be the Malfoy who got away – the Malfoy whose life was not defined by Voldemort or Grindelwald or some other power-hungry tyrant. Scorpius was supposed to be free to live a normal life. But then you came along, and he became another Malfoy enthralled by lust for what another had to offer. And you simply took him – in every way imaginable. How can I not hate you for that? How can I not resent you and your interference?”

Harry looked away and didn’t look back even when Draco got up to pour him another glass of whisky. He simply let Draco put it in his hand. The fire snapped and hissed in the silence.

“But he did get away,” Harry said. “What would you have me do? Obliviate him? Obliviate myself?”

“The only one I want you to Obliviate is me” Draco replied. “I wish you could simply wave your almighty Potter wand and make me forget because . . .”

“Because what?” Harry said, his voice hollow and incurious.

“Because I want you,” Draco replied. “I want you so badly I can barely live with it. Not a minute goes by when I’m not thinking about you, when I’m not wanting you or worrying about you.”

Harry turned to look at him. For the first time, he realised how haggard and unhappy Draco looked.

He wondered if he looked the same to Draco.

“I’ve told you I feel the same way,” he said. “I’ve told you I want you. I’ve told you I love you. Do you need for me to tell you I need you, too? Because if you do, then I’ll say it.”

Draco shook his head wearily.

“And I’ve told you that we will never be together. I’ve told you that I’m not going to fuck my son’s lover.”

“Then don’t!” Harry said. “Don’t fuck me. Don’t want me. Don’t think about me. Don’t worry about me. Just don’t. Just leave me alone. You were doing an excellent job at it. Why stop now?”

Draco reached for Harry’s hand where it lay clenched on the arm of his chair, but Harry yanked it back.
“But I can’t stop,” Draco said softly, despairingly. “That’s what I came here to tell you.”

Harry threw back his glass of whisky and stood up, grabbing his coat off the bed where he’d thrown it when he first came in. Draco leapt to his feet.

“Where are you going?” he said.

“I don’t know,” Harry replied. “Somewhere. Anywhere. I’ll find a place. Feel free to stay here. Dinner’s on me. Enjoy the whisky. Enjoy the bed. Enjoy the rest of your fucking life.”

Suddenly, Draco looked truly panicked.

“You can’t simply go,” he said.

When Harry didn’t respond, he grabbed Harry’s arm as he was about to walk out the door.

“Don’t go,” he pleaded.

But it was too late. Harry was already heading for the lift. He was done with their conversation. He was done with Draco. He was done with Scorpius. He was just done. Done with everything.

Out on the street, the air was razor-edged with frost. For a while it felt good on Harry’s burning face, but then it just felt cold. He was shivering despite the warming charm he’d cast on his coat. He walked and walked with nowhere to go, stopping now and then at a bar for a glass or two of whisky. He wasn’t at all surprised when, at midnight, he found himself standing on one of the Daugava’s many bridges.

Instinctively, he reached for his pendant, but it wasn’t there. It hadn’t been for months. For months, he’d been unremembered. He leaned over the railing and watched chunks of ice float under the bridge and out the other side. All he’d have to do is simply shift his weight just a little bit. It would be so easy. The railing was waist high. Lean forward.

Suddenly, he felt a tug on his coat. He looked down and saw a little girl with flame-red hair and brown eyes.


She took his hand and started leading him, first off the bridge and then through a maze of streets and alleyways. The ground was icy. He kept slipping, but the little girl didn’t stop. When he realised she was leading him back to the Vermanes Park Hotel, he froze in his tracks.

“I can’t go back,” he told her when she looked up at him. Her eyes were familiar, but strange.

She didn’t say anything. She just started walking again, dragging him after her with the tidal strength of a ghost’s eternal, elemental love.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

His father said nothing of Australia’s native shrubs when he returned to New Guinea after being away for a week. Nor did he say anything about Riga or Harry. He did stop neglecting his garden though and started joining Scorpius and Khorve for meals again.

In other words, he seemed happy. Even content. Whatever had transpired had eased his mind. Scorpius was dying to know the details, but his father refused to reveal them.

Then the absences began. Every now and then, his father would disappear for a couple of days.
Unsurprisingly, the absences always occurred when Harry was traveling.

“So, I guess you’ll be going to Tibet this week,” Scorpius said one morning. He’d just read in the newspaper that Harry was going to be meeting with the Dali Lama. “Make sure you bring warm clothes.”

His father didn’t look up from his Journal of Meat-Eating Flowers.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” he said unconvincingly.

Scorpius laughed.

“Oh for heaven’s sake,” he said. “We know you’re staying with Harry when he goes abroad. Why can’t you just say it?”

“Did you know that some plants have actual teeth?” his father said. “They’re apparently quite sharp. I’ve got to get one. I wonder where I can find a bulb.”

“Father,” Scorpius said.

His father finally set aside his journal.

“What Harry and I do is our own business,” he said. He didn’t sound angry, just matter-of-fact.

Scorpius put up his hands in a gesture of innocent resignation.

“Alright, alright,” he said. He didn’t want to press his father too hard. “I’m just glad you’re happy, is all.”

His father bit his lip, fighting back a smile.

“Yes, I’m happy,” he said. “Happy that my nosey son’s curiosity has been satisfied.”

Except it wasn’t.

“Do you think they’re sleeping together?” Khorve asked that night as they were getting ready for bed.

Scorpius paused with a frown of contemplation.

“I honestly don’t know,” he said. “It’s hard to imagine given how adamant my father has been for so long.”

“If they were, would you be . . .”

Khorve’s voice tapered into silence.

“Would I be what?” Scorpius prodded.

“Would you be alright with it,” Khorve replied. “Would you feel jealous?”

Scorpius sat down on the bed and thought for a while – long enough that he could sense Khorve growing anxious. At last he replied.

“Yes,” he said honestly. “I wish I can say I wouldn’t be, but I’d be lying. Harry was . . . well, Harry was so passionate. When we made love, he was so, I don’t know how to describe it . . . ‘present’ I
guess – if that makes sense. He made me feel like I was the only one in the world that mattered to
him. It’s hard to picture him being like that with someone else. And the fact that that someone else
might be my father is... uhm... kind of disturbing.”

Khorve sat down beside him and took his hand. Once again, Scorpius was reminded how lucky he
was to be married to a man who was so understanding – not resigned, just caring. Scorpius raised
Khorve’s hand to his lips and kissed it.

“I may be jealous,” he said. “But I don’t wish I could go back.”

Khorve smiled at him and then pushed him backwards against the pillows, settling himself between
Scorpius’s legs and biting playfully at his neck.

“That’s good enough for me,” he said. “More than good enough.”

* * * * * * * * * * * *

They weren’t making love, but that was... that was alright. Not easy, but alright.

Harry rolled over and looked at the bed where Draco laid, still asleep, one arm thrown over his eyes
to block out the glare of the morning sun. Harry smiled. Soon, Draco would wake, and they’d ring
for room service. They were in Istanbul, and Harry was eager to try the famous Turkish coffee.

It was nice not to wake up to a hang-over. Not that he’d stopped drinking entirely, just not as much
and not with the intention to pickle his heart. Contentment had shaved the rough edges off his
dreams.

Draco lowered his arm.

“Stop staring at me, Potter,” he grumbled. “Where’s my breakfast?”

Among the many things Harry was learning about his travel companion was the fact that he was
definitely not a morning person.

Harry laughed and threw back the bedclothes. He’d always slept naked, and that hadn’t changed. He
felt Draco admiring his body as he walked to the bathroom.

Someday, Harry thought. Someday, but not now.

There were no meetings planned, no conferences, no diplomatic blah-blah, just a day to explore the
city together. Harry turned on the shower, but before he got in, he turned around to look at his back
in the mirror like he always did. It was a ritual, a reminder of the scorpion that’d been there – a
reminder of loves lost and loves gained. His skin was now bare. A canvass for a new painting... or
none at all.

And that was alright.

That was alright.

The End!... .but never fear, there is an epilogue.
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Two and a half years later . . .

Chapter Notes

Still open-ended. This story refused to end neatly.

I wouldn’t call Harry’s kiss “tentative.” There’s nothing “tentative” about Harry, nothing subtle. “Curious” would be a better word. Curious and inquisitive. This is an adventure for him, not a conquest. A journey, not a destination.

I kiss him back. This has been a long time coming. No revelations, no invitations, just a fire, a comfortable couch and a couple glasses of whisky for lubrication. When Harry had shifted and leaned toward me, I’d met him halfway.

We’re in Reykjavik. A month ago it was Lisbon and before that Legos and before that Mexico and Quebec Cities. I’m still in New Guinea most of the time – my garden requires too much care to be away for long – but I’ve seen the world. I’ve tasted exotic foods and done exciting things. I know the nooks and crannies of places most people have never heard of. Harry and I are tireless in our explorations. No garden has gone unvisited. No museum overlooked. No street left untrodden. It pleases me to know I’m enjoying dozens of presidential suites at the Ministry’s expense. I have nothing but loathing for Britain and its government – not even Harry being Minister changes that. My memories of my native land are rain-soaked and dark, gnawed on by nightmares.

But I don’t need to be thinking of such things when Harry’s kiss is so surprisingly soft and searching. I’d expected a mashing of mouths, aggressive and assertive. But I was mistaken.

Is this how he kissed my son?

But I won’t think about that either. I won’t feel guilty. I won’t feel disgusted. All I’ll feel is this moment – this well-earned moment.
“How did we get here?” you might ask. Surely, you must wonder. I wonder myself. I’d been so adamant that this wouldn’t happen. This kiss and everything that might follow. How could I not be? When my son was no older than seventeen, Harry took his virginity. He kissed my little boy just as he’s kissing me now. How does one get past that?

The answer is that one grows old. One looks mortality in the face. One decides not to die alone.

Without Harry, I’d be alone. Even surrounded by others I love, I’d still be alone. Since I, myself, was a teenager, I have wanted Harry, and since I became a man, I’ve grown to love him. Reluctantly, perhaps, but without a question. Without a doubt.

You see, we’re much alike, Harry and I. We’re both survivors. No matter how bad things got – how many times we’ve thought about ending it all – we’ve let life take us by the hand and pull us back from the edge.

Harry’s cock is hard. I don’t need to feel it to know. I can smell his arousal in his sweat and taste it on my tongue. My cock is hard too. Can he sense it? Or does he think that I’m as frigid as I’ve made myself seem for over two years now. That’s how long it’s been since that night in Riga when he came back to me.

I hadn’t expected him to, not after what I’d said to him. Not after I’d told him I hated him for stealing Scorpius from me. But he had come back. He’d said it was Lily who’d made him. Maybe it was. If so, then I’m forever grateful because “hate” wasn’t the right word. The right word was “grief.” That’s what I’d felt. Grief. Grief for Scorpius mostly – it couldn’t end well. I knew that and time proved me right. But I’d also grieved for myself . . . for the hideous suspicion that if only I’d told Harry that I loved him back before the War, everyone could’ve been spared a great deal of pain.

But then again, if I’d told Harry I loved him, there’d have been no Asteria and no Ginerva. There’d have been no children, and I can’t imagine that. The thought is unbearable. Scorpius is my heart’s greatest joy – just as Lily had been Harry’s. That’s another way in which we’re alike. We talk about them both – and Albus and James as well. It was hard at first given the fact that Harry had been my son’s lover and poor, sweet Lily is dead, but that hadn’t stopped us from sharing memories. Long nights have been spent all over the world in front of fireplaces just like this one talking about our children.

Harry’s hair is so black that in some kinds of light it looks blue. Especially here in Iceland, in a December world of perpetual twilight. It’s warm now from the fire, slipping through my fingers – as warm as his mouth and his hands pushing up my shirt, searching for skin. The sound I make is embarrassing. I hadn’t wanted him to know how much I want this. It makes all my prior refusals seem like teasing. They weren’t. I wasn’t teasing him. I was waiting. Waiting for the right moment. For this moment.

There’ve been so many times when it had just felt wrong. That night in Riga especially. It would’ve been so easy to tell him I was sorry by getting into bed with him, but it would’ve been wrong. It would’ve nipped in the bud what we later came to be – companions, friends, explorers of strange lands and each other’s’ hearts. I wouldn’t change a day of our chaste years together. I needed that time – we both did. It’d been a long, long time since I was consentingly sexually intimate with another human being. Harry grew to realise that. He grew willing to honour my hesitation. And by doing so he allowed me to grow comfortable with the knowledge that he wants me – that I arouse him.

The kiss is more demanding now, but I can feel him poised on the possibility that I’ll want to stop. Maybe I will when our clothes come off. I’ve seen Harry naked – he sleeps with nothing on and isn’t shy about it – but I haven’t seen him hard. I’m not sure how I’ll feel when I do . . .
... after all, my son has seen him like that. *My son!*

As always, Harry reads my thoughts.

“It’s not the same,” he says, frank in his assertion.

I take him up on his remark.

“In what ways?” I ask.

“In every way,” he replies. “I don’t want to possess you. I want to enjoy you.”

He’s said the right thing even though his admission that he desired my son to the extent he did is disturbing – although not surprising. Thank God, Scorpius and Khorve found each other! Scorpius has an unfettered soul – Harry would’ve chained him. He may not have wanted to, but he wouldn’t have been able to help himself. He’d been in over his head. They both had.

He places my hand between his legs and doesn’t get offended when I recoil. He knows I’m not rejecting him, just the memory of being forced to touch when I didn’t want to.

“Sshhh,” he says against my ear, trying to soothe me.

“I’m not sure I’m ready,” I say, disappointing myself.

His breath catches, but he says it’s alright. His assurance makes it clear. He loves me.

“Tell me,” he says.

“Tell you what?” I ask him.

“What you want to do tomorrow.”

I consider his question.

“Take a bath,” I say.

He laughs. “That’s an easy request to accommodate considering there’s a bathroom adjoining our room.”

I roll my eyes. The git.

“One of the outdoor geothermal baths.”

“Ah,” he says. “And then what?”

“A horseback tour of the countryside.”

He arches an eyebrow.

“To see the tundra,” I elaborate. “There are winter-blooming plants here.”

He laughs again and kisses me quickly, chastely. My heart turns over. Suddenly, I want him more than ever. I slide my hand between his legs, and again he catches his breath – but this time for a different reason. He’s still wearing his suit trousers. The dark wool is warm against my palm. I unbuckle his belt. The clink of metal sounds loud in the quiet room.

“We don’t have to,” he says as my mouth finds his.
“I know,” I reply.

He leans back against the arm of the couch and lifts his hips as I tug his trousers down. He has a beautiful cock – it’s even more beautiful when it’s hard. I touch it wonderingly, brushing the hot skin with the tips of my fingers, watching it lurch. I look at his face. He’s biting his lip. Suddenly, I see him when he was seventeen, his expression intense and old for his age as he lifted his wand, pointing it at Voldemort . . .

. . . no wonder he wanted to relive his youth. If only he hadn’t tried to relive it with my son . . .

I lean down and place a soft, lingering kiss on his forehead. He interprets the gesture correctly and lifts his hips again as he pulls up his trousers. I cautiously search his face for anger or resentment and find neither. He closes his eyes and takes a deep, shaky breath.

“Okay,” he says.

“I’m not saying never,” I say, scrambling to make everything alright.

He smiles – it’s a tad weak, but a smile nonetheless.

This is the farthest we’ve ever gone.

I move away so he can sit up and zip his trousers. The fire is growing cold. I stand and stoke its embers. My shirt is untucked. I feel dishevelled. He stands and puts his arms around me from behind, resting his chin on my shoulder.

“I love you,” he says. It’s nothing more or less than a candid remark.

“I love you, too,” I say with the same matter-of-factness.

He kisses the back of my neck and steps away. I know he’s going to make himself come in the shower. The thought doesn’t unnerve me like it always has before.

Maybe I’ll make myself come, too. It’s been a very long time.

We eat supper in our room and talk comfortably about inconsequential things. Later, when he gets into his bed, I pause before getting into mine. We haven’t shared a bed together, but tonight we do. Nothing happens, but when I wake in the morning, I realise he’s taken my hand at some point during the night.

I lie on my back, listening to the sounds of people starting their days. Safe and happy – those are the two words that come to mind. If someone were to ask me how I feel these days, that would be my answer. Safe and happy.

“A penny for your thoughts,” Harry says, his voice rough with sleep.

I roll over onto my side and look at him.

“I was just wondering what it would feel like to be inside you,” I say, surprising myself with the certainty of my desire.

He smiles and reaches out to tuck my hair behind my ear. I would wonder who he sees – me or my son – except I can tell from his expression that it’s me. There’s a kind of deference in his eyes – a willingness to be led . . .

. . . even though I have no idea where we’re going.
There’s no need to point out that I’ve never made love to a man before. I married a woman – a woman I loved but was not in love with. Desire has never made me rough and anxious, both of which I am now as I undress and move to get on top of him. His body is warm and languid with the remnants of sleep. His eyes are still heavy-lidded, the green all but obscured by his lashes. Usually, when I see him like this, I’m in my own bed looking at him across an unbridgeable distance. Usually, by this time, we’d already be showered and headed out the door to find a coffee shop. This morning everything is different. I’m still trying to decide how I feel about that when he spreads his legs and lets my hips settle between them.

He strokes my back, willing me to stay, willing me to relax as I close my eyes and rest my forehead against his. It reminds me of the night in Riga – how he came through the door and slammed it behind him, his coat covered in what looked like little stars that turned out to be snowflakes. I stood my ground as he approached, unsure what his mood was, unsure of his intentions, but then he’d merely stopped and rested his forehead against mine. His skin was cold from being outside for so long. Later he’d told me about the bridge, about Lily, but that night all he’d said was *Let’s start over.*

“Can I touch you?” Harry whispers.

I nod but then jump when he does. He moves his hand back to my shoulder. He’s trembling slightly.

“This won’t change anything,” he says. It’s a question as much as a statement.

I nod again. It seems that I’ve forgotten how to speak, but it’s true. This won’t change anything. Even if this never happens again, there’s a history between us. A recent history. A history that is capable of accommodating anything life might throw at us.

There’s a moment of awkward hilarity when he teaches me a spell that will make him ready for me. I have to say it a couple of times before it works, which gets us both laughing and makes it easy for me just to push inside him with no fanfare and no warning. He squeezes his eyes shut for a moment in what can only be pain. I rest my forehead against his again before I start to move, hoping that I’m doing it right. Hoping that after he gets used to it that it will feel good.

I’m sure it will. I mean, I know that he’s had more than a lot of experience – I know because I asked him several months ago in a Muggle pub in Sydney with grimy tables and exceptionally good chips. He told me about the clubs, the alleyways, the backrooms, the strange beds in strange flats. He was matter-of-fact about it and the reasons behind it. Loneliness, boredom, pent-up frustration and aggression – all the things you might expect. He didn’t apologise, although he *did* promise that he’d stopped when he and my son were together. I know why he told me, and I was glad he did, but after that, I couldn’t look at him for the rest of the trip . . .

Damnit.

I freeze. The mere thought of Harry and my son being lovers repulses me. A thousand nights with strangers is nothing, but one night with Scorpius . . .

He opens his eyes and searches my face for the reason I’ve stopped.

“I love you,” he says when he finds it. “*You,* Draco.”

It feels so good to be inside him – so good that it’s almost enough to prevent me from pulling out. Almost.

He squeezes his eyes shut again but for a different reason this time – a different kind of pain.
Still, it’s farther than we’ve ever gone – farther by a long stretch.

“Will you ever forgive me?” he asks. The catch of tears in his voice breaks my heart.

“It’s not about ‘forgiving,’” I say. “I forgave you a long time ago. It’s about forgetting.”

He nods. I lean down and kiss him.

“Do you think you ever can?” he asks.

“I don’t know,” I reply.

He looks up into my eyes. I wait. As is so often the case, everything hinges on his response.

“I’m not punishing you,” I say. And it’s true. I’m not.

He reaches up and gently brushes my cheek with his knuckles. It’s his answer. It’s enough.

“Are you hungry?” he asks after a moment.

I feel a surge of affection. Harry. My Harry.

“Yeah,” I say. “I’m starving actually.”

“For anything in particular?” he asks.

“Anything except fish,” I reply.

“We’re in Iceland,” he says. “Good luck with that.”

I laugh and move carefully so I won’t squash him. We lie on our backs side-by-side, our shoulders touching. After a while, his hand finds mine.

“Thank you for being here,” he says.

It’s what he always says.

I squeeze his hand.

It’s always my answer.

It always will be.

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