Summary

Through a dark ritual, Draco Malfoy is sent back in time, from his seventeenth year to his eleventh. Now he has the chance to use his superior knowledge and skill to change everything and save all his friends and family, but there's a terrible complication: it turns out that not even time travel can cure a case of lycanthropy.

Notes

-This fic is unbetad and un-britpicked, and will be using consistent American spelling.

-Chapters will be short, but I'll be aiming to update once a week.
It had all been decided.

“I have not forgotten the way the Blacks have... disappointed me, in the past,” their Lord had said.
“Nor... forgiven.”

“How fortunate for our cause that I am a Malfoy, my Lord,” Draco’s mother had said, taking his
father’s hand, “and our family, at least, has ever been the most devoted and effective of your
servants.”

His aunt had bristled. His mother had raised her chin. The monster at the end of the table had slit his
red eyes, smiled with his lipless mouth. The creepy old bastard was still a man, somewhere in there,
and he did so enjoy the competition of women for his favor.

“Very well,” he had said. “It shall be you, Narcissa Malfoy.”

It wasn’t like the list had been particularly long: the task required subtlety, which knocked nearly
every male Death Eater out of the running, and sanity, which knocked out just about all the females.
And so: here stands Draco Malfoy, still sick and scabby from the last moon, huddled in Fenrir
Greyback’s shadow, watching as a creature even darker and more twisted than either of them
lowered a golden chain over his mother’s head, as if bestowing a grand favor.

His mother accepts the chain proudly, then bows deeply to the Dark Lord.

“My Lord,” she says. "May I say goodbye to my family, before I go? I might not—” she hesitates.

Draco realizes, with a wrenching shock, that he could very well never be—have been?— born, after
this. If this works. If his mother does as she’s volunteered to do. He could be... erased, like ink
scrubbed from parchment. Unwritten. Reconsidered.

But she loves me, he thinks, and sees in Voldemort’s triumphant smile: she might very well love this
man more. His own mother. Uncertainty twists Draco’s heart.

Narcissa walks across the space, stepping lightly over the blood and chalk and salt drawn across the
blasted clearing. Greyback looms: ghastly, paternal, one huge pawlike hand resting itself on Draco’s
nape. His real father is held off halfway across the clearing by the great brute’s dangerous presence.
Or by disgust. Perhaps that’s where all this has come from, or is going. Perhaps his mother wants to
scrub out this whole chapter. Married an idiot and had an idiot son. One lost his spine and the other
his humanity. Best to start again.
“Draco,” his mother says. His tongue is dead in his mouth. He nods. He’s head and shoulders taller than her now, but all he wants is to throw himself against her knees and cry.

“Mother,” he says. His voice is a rough rasp. Half growl. Shame takes him by the throat and cuts short any further attempt at speech.

“My son,” she says. “This is for the best.” She takes his wrist and pulls him suddenly forward, so sharply he stumbles. He nearly trips, trying to keep his heels and toes clear of the ritual lines, and by the time he’s caught his balance his mother’s got her wand out. Voldemort’s grim slash of a mouth is opening, his own wand swinging into position.

A gold chain loops around Draco’s neck. His mother’s small, pale fist is clutched around the time turner at the end of it. More wands are leveling. All of Draco’s hair is standing on end. One of his feet hit the dead center of the sending circle, and the other comes down not far from it. The lines are still intact. The spell is still ready.

“I love you,” his mother says. “Be good.”

Green light hits her square in the back. He can see the moment her soul is torn from her body: her dark eyes light up like emeralds. Her fist— her dead fist— still holds the time turner. And it— and everything— goes—

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He hits the ground hard. The light blinds him. His arm burns. When he clamps his hand around the pain he finds it hot and wet: blood, he’s bleeding. Squinting through the blaze of gold he sees that Greyback’s bitemark has come open, somehow. And it’s... is it bigger? It’s bigger. The ragged crescent of fang wounds stretches not along his forearm, mirroring his Dark Mark, but instead from wrist to shoulder, each individual toothmark shockingly deep and wide, and he has no idea what went wrong. What his mother did.

No, he knows: she sent him back. She pinned her soul to the diagram and sent him back instead. The time turner itself is gone, burnt up in the sending. This is irreversible.

And, of course, there is no act of magic that can reverse the bite of a werewolf. Even a spell that reverses the victim himself. Even a spell that peeled the Dark Mark from his other arm like it was never there... Greyback’s teeth still burn in his flesh. They draw blood across years.

Merlin, how young is he? He’s losing a tremendous amount of blood. His arms are thin, his hands are soft, he’s wearing a child’s robes. The material’s fine but the cut is loose and simple, and it smells of lavender and cleaning charms, underneath the widening blood stains.

Children don’t have very much blood. He feels nauseous, thirsty, tired. He’s crying so loudly and desperately he can hardly breathe. His eyes have adjusted, at least: he’s at home, at the Manor, lying on the lawn. Bleeding out on the lawn.

“Help,” he says finally. He screams it again between the incoherent cries of a child’s pain and terror: “Help! Someone! Anyone! Mother!”

The Manor’s house elves appear, cracking into place, clean and severe in their crisp white pillowcase smocks. Greyback had hunted them for sport. He had eaten them.
Draco knows what his own servants taste like. He’s had their bones in his mouth. Three of them grab him, bundle him up off the lawn, and for a hysterical moment of terror he thinks they’re taking him off for revenge.

“I want my mum,” he sobs, and then she’s there, he’s somewhere cool and dim and she’s holding him tightly. He clutches at her with his free arm, screaming *mum, mummy*, upset beyond all hope of composure, or coherence. She died, she sent him back and died, and now his arm is a scarlet ruin, and it hurts so badly, and he’s been scared for so long, and he’s going to have to go on being scared forever. He’s been sent back but all the worst of what’s been done to him has come along too.

There’s a potion put to his mouth, a quiet spell. He slips away.

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When he wakes, he’s in his own bed, his own bedroom. It’s much larger than he remembers, and of course brighter, cleaner, fresh. It doesn’t stink of dark magic and wolf piss. It’s just his room.

His mother is sitting in an armchair next to his bed. She’s dozed off, her head against the high back. She looks so young... it’s a shock to even think this. As unhappy as she seems in her uncomfortable doze, there’s so little gray in her dark hair, so few lines on her pale face. How had the war taken so much from her in such a short time?

“How do you feel?” his father wants to know. His gaze is bright and clear. He leans towards Draco, as if he didn’t know, or understand, Draco’s condition.

“Fine,” Draco says automatically, and it comes out as a squeak. His father’s tight frown quirks at the edges.

“I sincerely doubt that,” he says. He reaches out and takes Draco’s hand in his. He and Draco both look at the bandages wrapped from wrist to shoulder.

“It’s werewolf,” Draco says. His voice still squeaks, where it isn’t a dry rasp, but he wants to get this over with. “A werewolf bit me, father. I’m a werewolf now.”

Lucius sits back, pale. Shocked. Furious. He grips the head of his cane more tightly, but he doesn’t let go of Draco’s hand. Draco stares at it and feels his eyes burn with tears. He wonders, a trifle inanely, if he’s going to cry at everything now that he’s a child again.

“We will find who did this,” Lucius says. “I will find who did this. And there won’t be enough left of them to put in a snuff box, much less Azkaban.”

Draco looks up at his face, shocked. Lucius hadn’t been this way when it really happened. His father had been fresh from Azkaban, himself, gray all over and pitifully lost inside his head, and when Greyback and pulled Draco on to his lap and done the whole business Lucius had just stood there,
through all the blood and screaming, and watched with empty eyes. Voldemort had laughed.

His mother hadn’t been there, then, and by the time she was it was all over but the bandaging. She had been furious. His father, now, is furious, and his eyes fairly blaze with it. He finally lets go of Draco, but only to get up and pace about his childhood bedroom, shoulders tight, teeth bared. He looks more wolf than Draco, now.

“I’ll call in the Aurors. I’ll call in the bloody Minister. No one gets a werewolf into my home— past my wards— hurts my son.”

It appears Draco is going to cry about everything now that he’s a child. His arm doesn’t hurt, but it feels heavy, and he’s still tremendously thirsty, and his father still loves him.

The mattress dips as his mother climbs onto it. She sits against the headboard and pulls Draco on to her lap. She strokes his hair, and he cries against her shoulder, not knowing or even caring how old he is, and she and his father plot revenge.

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Greyback is identified through diagnostic spells the privately brought-in mediwizards run on his bite and his blood. The old monster is hunted, found, interrogated to the frustration of all parties involved — of course he can’t tell anyone how he got past the wards, or why he would have wanted to do so, or how managed to leave a wolf-bite under a gibbous moon— and executed. Werewolves, it appears, are dark enough creatures that dementors don’t want their souls. Greyback is destroyed like a beast, not a wizard, with a single unceremonious chop to the neck with an iron axe, and his body is sent to the Department of Mysteries to have some fun with.

Draco has just turned eleven, and the approach of June’s full moon at the end of the month crushes his parents’ desperate hope that he hadn’t contracted the curse, or at least not all of it. Even as cubs, werewolves are strong, immune to most wards and curses, and angry. The rage is a living thing inside Draco as the full moon approaches, beating against the insides of his ribs: a vicious, unreasoning fury at every single sentient being. At his mother for sending him to be here now. At his father for caring. The peacocks, for some reason, he’s fine with.

“He’s said this sort of thing before, when younger and throwing a fit over his lessons. His mother very nearly smiles at him the same way she used to— have some dignity, she’d say. Is this how a Malfoy should behave? Which was rich, considering the way his father would storm about when things hadn’t gone as well as he’d like at the Ministry.

“The peacocks, for some reason, he’s fine with. “I’ll eat them,” he tells his mother, “I’ll pull them apart and I won’t care,” and he draws himself up as tall and serious as he’s able. He’s not sixteen anymore, much less seventeen, but he can remember the feeling: sickness. Desperation. And small bones breaking between his teeth. Narcissa nods, and summons the head elf, and gives the orders.

The full moon tears him inside-out for a fourth time, and what comes out on the other side isn’t just angry: it’s young and frightened and desperately lonely. The werewolf cub throws itself madly against the bars of his cell, down in the deepest levels of the Manor, again and again until its insides pulp and splinter. It is so profoundly alone it can only attempt to destroy itself from the agony.
In the morning Draco is bruised, and exhausted, and human. His parents fetch him back to his room, his real room, and a house elf brings him a bowl of warm, delicately seasoned broth.

“Thank you,” he’s broken enough to tell the elf. He is so tremendously glad not to still be that insane lonely thing that he cries into his soup, and has to wipe his bruised nose with his raw knuckles inbetween spoonfuls.

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His parents don’t understand how well he can hear, now, that he knows they whisper about him, that he can smell their fear, which grows as July grinds onwards.

“Durmstrang is an option,” his father says in low tones. “We have contacts there. Old friends to lean on. The conditions would be favorable for a dark creature.”

“Listen to yourself!” Narcissa hisses. “You know I’ll be damned if I’m getting him mixed up in that absolute bloody disaster of a war when he’s eleven, Lucius, and certainly not as some creature. We didn’t put down Greyback just to send our son off to go be someone else’s— someone else’s tool. Or toy.”

A long pause. “There’s private instructors,” his father finally suggests.

“But I belong at Hogwarts,” Draco says. His parents startle, and Draco leans around the doorframe to the study. “Why can’t I go to Hogwarts? I’ve my acceptance letter.”

“Draco, darling,” his mother starts.

“Don’t they take werewolves?” Draco demands. “Is there a law?” There shouldn’t be: not until after the scandal with Lupin, after his resignation.

“They won’t be kind to you,” Lucius says. “We had to work through too many official channels to locate Greyback. Someone spoke to the public.” The curl to his lip indicates that someone had gone on to regret it. “Draco, everyone knows about this. It’s been the scandal of the summer. All your classmates will know what you are save the mudbloods, and they’ll certainly be informed quickly enough. And they will not regard you favorably.”

Draco feels the hated, familiar burn of tears start up, but he squares his shoulders, and raises his chin.

“I belong at Hogwarts,” he says firmly, wishing his voice didn’t squeak so badly. “I got my letter. You two went there. All the Malfoys went there.”

“Malfoys went to Beauxbatons until the turn of the century, dear,” Narcissa says, looking faintly amused.

“All the Malfoys that matter,” Draco says. This actually wins a full smile from her.

Lucius grips his cane and goes pacing about the study.

“You won’t be treated well,” he repeats. “You’re my son and heir, you deserve respect, you deserve consideration. I won’t stand for you to be jeered at by a mob of filthy mudblood children and all their idiot common friends! Goggled at as if you were a, a sideshow, mocked, derided— ”
“Hounded,” Draco says, and has to pause for a moment to be horrified with himself.

His mother is no longer smiling, is possibly on the verge of her own set of tears, and he thinks *Merlin, if this was Potter’s problem I could have spent the whole summer thinking up nasty jokes and all autumn telling them*— but it isn’t. It isn’t Potter’s problem. He hasn’t even met Potter yet. It’s not even Potter’s *birthday* yet. The heroic little twerp’s still out there somewhere in the barbarian hinterlands of muggledom, thinking he’s about as remarkable as the next wandless savage.

His father has puffed up like one of the grounds’ peacocks, pale and tall and spittingly angry.

“This is *no laughing matter, Draco!*” he snaps.

Draco feels roughly as tall as a house elf before his father’s fury and concern.

“I know, I’m sorry,” he says. He wants to cringe— he wants to bloody well cry, of course—but he can’t back down on this. He curls his soft little hands into tiny, useless fists.

“This is your future, Draco. This is your *life*. You cannot expect us to stand by and let you throw away your every advantage, your opportunities.”

Grand words from a man who joined the Dark Lord *twice*, Draco thinks bitterly.

Aloud, he says: “I know.”

“We want the best for you,” his mother says. “And with... how things are now, for you... just what that might be requires a certain amount of consideration.”

“I want to go to Hogwarts,” Draco repeats, stubbornly. “It’s—” it’s my home, it’s *mine*, “—my right. I got my letter. Werewolves *must* have attended before, and anyway, isn’t father on the Board of Governors? Haven’t we given them enough gold to prove we care about this world as much as anyone, we *belong* here! I belong at Hogwarts! I’m not going to skulk off to bloody bollocking Durmstrang to be creepy old kid-touching Karkaroff’s pet monster!”

“Draco!” his mother snaps.

“What!?” he cries, wild with frustration.

“*Language.*”

“Oh.” He blinks. “Sorry.”

His father is nearly smiling, now. “By Merlin, Draco, where did you hear that about Karkaroff?”

Draco finally drops his gaze. “Well... Around.”

“You’d do well not to repeat such serious accusations,” his father says. “Clearly I’d have done just as well, too. Your sharp ears aren’t an entirely recent development, are they?”

Draco feels as shy as ever in the face of his father’s amusement. “Well,” he goes, again.

His mother sighs. His father pulls Draco into an embrace. He’s so tall when Draco’s this age, and he smells of his familiar old cologne, something warm and sharp. Draco clings to the fine wool of his father’s rich robes and breathes him in, the strength of his arms, the thrum of his magic, the long-lost sense of safety and power it imparts. He sniffs, but very quietly.

“So,” his father murmurs. “Hogwarts. I expect you’ll do us proud. Circumstances not withstanding.”
“I will. You’ll see.”

“We’ll see.”
Chapter 2

But before then: the moon. It builds again as July grinds onwards, the narrow slit of an evil eye coming open night by night. The moon stares down at him, and inside the flimsy cage of his bones, the beast stares back up. Draco feels stifled inside the walls of the manor and lost out on the grounds. He starts once more to struggle with his temper, and he thinks desperately: how did Lupin manage?

How does Lupin manage. The man’s still alive. Out there somewhere, going about his business, being an excellent but completely unemployable teacher, very probably not eating a single house elf.

Should Draco send a letter? Where to? And with what excuse?

Snape comes to visit. His parents talk to him behind closed doors and silencing charms. Draco lurks about, caught between weepy relief and terrified apprehension. When the man comes out of his conference Draco doesn’t know what to say. Doesn’t say much. Remembers, at least, not to meet the legilimens’ eyes.

Snape has been commissioned to brew him the wolfsbane potion. Snape’s well-known position as both Potions Master and Hogwarts Professor will mollify public opinion, so there’s no secret kept of Lucius’ visits to the school, or Snape’s now to the Manor. There are, apparently, petitions to strike Draco from the Hogwarts’ register, and a renewed interest in restrictive Dark Creature legislation. His father has been very busy spending a great deal of money and calling in a significant number of favors, as well as conducting several strategic interviews with the Daily Prophet.

But it’s all, actually, working. Affairs are being set in order. Snape puts one sallow, long-fingered hand on Draco’s shoulder, and murmurs a few terse words of sympathy, and gives him the first of seven foul, smoking bottles.

The taste is incredible: Draco can feel the lining of his throat curdle and die. He imagines he can hear a faint howl of outrage from his guts. He sets the empty bottle down in triumph.

“Delicious,” he says, as airily as he can manage. “I just can’t wait for the next one!”

Snape smiles at him: crooked teeth, black humor. Their eyes meet as he collects the bottle and packs it away, but there’s no brush of minds. No long fingers reach into his head. Snape merely wishes him a good night, talks once more with his parents, and lets himself out through the guest floo.

The pattern repeats itself for a week, and the wolf lies quiet in Draco’s blood, drugged to a feeble stupor. He talks with Snape of the upcoming term, of learning to make the potion on his own.

“The cost is quite prohibitive for normal werewolves, even those with enough of an education to brew it themselves,” Snape tells him, idling one evening over a cup of tea. “You are, in some respects, an extremely fortunate young man.”

Draco thinks of Lupin, out there somewhere in the world, poor and tired and angry and alone. Of all the terrible, terrifying werewolves that threw their lot in with Greyback, and what they might be doing with themselves now, what new monster they might have sniffed out to serve.

“I wonder if my father might set up a trust,” he muses. “Or a charity. It wouldn’t hurt my chances any to make something of myself if there were more, well, more werewolves that had... already made it.”
Snape’s big hooked nose creases with a sneer. “That is... certainly a thought.” He does not sound as if he thinks it’s a good thought.

“Well, and the public always like charities, don’t they?” Draco presses on. “Father says he pis—spent half the fortune on charities, after he came back from, er. All that old business. I don’t see what it could hurt.”

“As you say, Mr Malfoy,” Snape says. Draco knows this tone too: it means go boil your head, you arrogant little snot. His teacher always made an excellent show of his favor in front of the Gryffindors, but it didn’t mean the man was incapable of honest communication.

Draco has learned that discretion is the better part of nasty old men not doing horrible things to you. He drops the subject in favor of Quidditch, and Slytherin House’s chance at the cup.

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And that was another thing: Slytherin. Houses. Quidditch. Potter. Draco can’t stop thinking it over, and over, and over. Is it all to repeat again? He might as well run off to the Forbidden Forest to live off rats and spiders right now, if it turns out that Harry Potter, Supreme Champion Of Absolutely Fucking Everything, met a werewolf and didn’t much like him. Of course, the twerp liked Professor Lupin. Of course, everyone liked Professor Lupin. And of course Harry Potter Supreme Champion Of Etc was raised in some sort of dysfunctional muggle-style troll pit, and consequently went faint with adoration when set anywhere near anything even remotely resembling a father figure.

Draco ponders Houses, and public opinion. Slytherin... might not... be the best place for him. A Dark Creature in a Dark House? Slytherin might not want him. At this point they’d have been trying to distance themselves from the issue of producing Voldemort and then all of his supporters for a decade... Draco dimly remembers the political schisms growing throughout his third and fourth years, the prefects having absolutely vicious fights, and then in fifth everything was quiet, and it all seemed to be decided that they would support the Dark Lord again, as he was certain to actually get things right this time having actually come back from the actual dead in order to do so, and Potter was just a boy, and an extremely obnoxious one, at that. It had been exciting, and the business with Umbridge had been fun, and then sixth year... happened. And it hadn’t been fun at all.

Fuck. He might very well have to apply for Hufflepuff, and hope that this final perversion of character isn’t what finally gets him disowned.

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July’s full moon finds him back in his cell, once more ripped inside-out and bound in fur. But the mad rage doesn’t consume him this time, it’s been drowned. Extinguished. He just sits quietly on the floor, feeling sick and confused, and then goes and curls up in a corner. Without the howling fury there’s only loneliness left, absolute and inescapable. His parents are somewhere far away. Hogwarts is somewhere far away. His friends are an entirely abstract hypothetical, at the moment. He is in the dark and all alone and might very well be so forever.

Werewolf cubs, it appears, cry just as readily as eleven year old boys.
With no physical wounds and only minor mental ones, he recovers quickly from the wolfsbane-dampened transformation. A day to sleep it off, another day of huge meals and light exercise, and then, as they had all decided—as he had been dreading—a trip to the Ministry.

Draco is the fifty second werewolf to join the Werewolf Registry and receive the charmed brass bracelet, stamped with his name and number, that will shrink to fit his wolven foreleg on the moons, just in case he gets loose, goes on a rampage, and is blown to bits. Lupin, Draco notes, is not on the Registry, and good on the clever bastard for dodging it.

Fifty second registered werewolf or not, Draco is the very first werewolf ever to sign the Werewolf Code of Conduct, drawn up back in the seventeenth century. He and his father wear robes more expensive than any of the squeaking, bumbling bureaucrats at the Department for the Regulation And Control Of Magical Creatures could hope to afford with all their salaries put together, and they stand together as a united front of icy pure-blood disapproval in the face of complete governmental incompetence. To whit: no one can actually find the Werewolf Code of Conduct.

It takes nearly an hour for the departments of Beasts and Beings to sort out which of them had inherited the ancient document, and produce it. It’s ripped halfway down the middle along the deep creasemarks, brown with age and grime, and so water-damaged that two of the clauses are illegible.

His father lays the document out on a cheap table with a tottery leg, his lip curling, his every perfectly brushed silver hair radiating indignation. If there was ever an item so shabby in a Malfoy’s archive, it would have been a dust-cloth, used by a significantly smarter house elf to polish up a cabinet, and then probably burnt.

With a flick of his wrist, Lucius draws his wand from his cane, taps it to the parchment, then casts several restorative spells in smooth succession. It isn’t until the document is once more creamy white, brightly lettered, and delicately edged in gilt that Lucius gestures Draco over.

Draco takes the time to read the whole thing, though he’s seen the transcriptions in a few History and Defense textbooks before. Making a show is the entire reason he’s here to do this, and he absolutely relishes making all the stupid men and women who think they’re in charge of his life—of his rights!—wait around a bit. But there’s only so long he can string the whole thing out, and anyway the whole blithering poncy mess boils down to: don’t bite anyone, and if you do, don’t take it personally when you get your head lopped off for it. Also, pay your taxes and may God save whichever King was around back then.

He takes a white quill from his father and a little pot of blood-red ink from a bureaucrat and to We, The Undersigned: he adds, Draco Lucius Malfoy.

Well, so there. It isn’t until he tries to give the quill back to his father and misses that he realizes he’s trembling with nerves. Lucius puts a protective arm across his shoulders and they both glare around at the assembled mob. Poverty-addled petty clerks and desk-flyers, the lot of them. Beneath his dignity. Beneath his house elves’ dignity. He curls his lip at a particularly skeptical looking witch and feels a vicious satisfaction when she takes a step backwards.

They sweep from the musty, pathetic little warren and Draco wonders what it would be like if the Dark Lord had won. Will win. He’s been chewing it over for more than a month and he still doesn’t
know if he’s to complete his mother’s task or prevent it.

If the Dark Lord returned earlier, stronger, without all that fussing about as a ghost or a renegade or whatever, then Greyback was already dead. Draco would be the... main werewolf, the alpha, the chief, whatever it was called. Wouldn’t he? He’d have to be a little older, but. He could be a General.

Would he have to turn other wizards? Would he have to eat children? He couldn’t even kill one doddering old man.

“You seem thoughtful,” Lucius comments, after they’ve stepped from one of the Ministry’s wide, sooty floos to the Malfoy’s scrupulously clean and elegant hearth.

Draco glares at his feet.

“If the Dark Lord won,” he blurts out. “Would I be treated like this?”

His father takes his arm from around Draco’s shoulders, and turns to face him squarely. He touches Draco’s hair very gently. He is tall and healthy and his eyes are full of a bright silver fire, and he looks at Draco like he loves him so much it hurts. He is nothing, nothing like that sad and indifferent ghost who stood and watched a monster take away his child at his Master’s orders.

“My son,” Lucius Malfoy says. “If our Dark Lord were here, everything would be different.”

Draco feels everything slot properly into place. He stands taller. He breathes more easily.

“We will make the best of things,” he announces.

His father smiles. “You will.”
Finally, the trip to Diagon Alley to get his school supplies. His parents had talked of ordering it all by parcel post, and while Draco’s nerves are heartily in favor of this he knows it’d waste an important early opportunity. He needs to be bold, and clever, and assert himself. Make a real change. Make a proper difference.

He needs to see Potter again. This has been the longest, strangest, most terrible summer of his life and he just— somehow, insanely, it feels as if he could only see the stupid sanctimonious little git again, make sure he existed— make sure he was still real, still a familiar counterbalance to everything Draco is and loves and believes in—if he was still there, the Boy Who Lived and went on to face down Voldemort year after after year— something inside Draco that’s still flapping around lost could be securely pinned back down.

Humiliatingly maudlin emotional crises aside, it would also do wonders for his reputation if he somehow actually managed to befriend Potter this time around. Draco keeps worrying at this, as he carefully insists on and then delays the trip to Diagon Alley in order to ensure his parents take him the day after Potter’s birthday, just as they had the first time.

What sort of qualities appeal to Potter, in terms of friendship? Draco’s already nearly as intelligent and funny as Harry’s favored Mudblood and blood traitor pals put together, and it never seemed to impress. But he had never had much of a problem making friends in Slytherin, and even with a few well-bred Ravenclaws, and he flatters himself that it wasn’t entirely the power of his family name.

Could he fake an affection for muggles, in order to squeak through Potter’s labyrinthian standards of morality? Not for long, certainly. He’s not even sure if he could fake an affection for muggleborns. Perhaps he could just bribe the bloody twerp, Potter’d be eleven by one day and freshly released from his brutish family’s orphan pit of degradation. Maybe Draco could just buy him ice cream until he was spherical and indebted. Who doesn’t like ice cream?

The day dawns. Draco pushes the dried apricots around in his oatmeal at the breakfast table, a jumble of hopeless apprehension.

“There’s still plenty of time to order your supplies, darling,” his mother says. “And you know the owls could do with the exercise, this time of year.”

Draco drowns an apricot. “You know, I’m never going to grow up if you two keep letting me out of it,” he says.

Narcissa smiles faintly. “I could make you clean your room. I hear that works wonders for the Weasley brood.”

Draco gives an expressive shudder. Spurred by visions of exile to a life of drudgery and red-headed shame, he finds the fortitude to eat his breakfast, brush his teeth, and follow his parents into the floo.

Diagon Alley isn’t packed, but it’s unfortunately busy. Draco, feeling extremely small, stays gratefully put between mother and father, letting them bear the brunt of the surging mobs and increasingly nasty looks. He thinks, with a sudden terrible pain, that he will probably never again have Crabbe and Goyle to flank him in this familiar comforting way. The Crabbes have cut ties with the Malfoys and sent Vincent off to Durmstrang, and while the Goyles still stand with their old
partners, Greg hasn’t been over to visit since… everything.

Still. Chin up. Draco sees some dotty old witch point him out to her hideously dressed friend, and glares them both down.

They go to the apothecary for potion ingredients, then next door for devices, scales and glassware, a small pewter cauldron. Their purchases are wrapped neatly and handed off to the family elves, summoned with a snap of Lucius’s fingers and sent off to pack. Less important customers handled by other clerks carry off their own purchases by themselves, shrinking them down or just tucking them into a bag. Draco feels as if Harry Potter might burst into the shop at any moment and shout at him about being too good to handle his own parcels—which he is, but still doesn’t want to be shouted at for.

Draco finds himself peering anxiously about, which only keeps on reminding him of how everyone’s still staring, which only makes him more anxious. It’s as if all the shoppers and clerks expect him to jump on a table and bite the head off a chicken, and can’t wait for him to get started.

It’s absurd. He’s eleven and his wolf form isn’t any less undersized! It wouldn’t be any kind of show, even if he was struck down by the moon this very moment, just a gangly, hateful little puppy with barely enough time to bare its teeth before getting blown to smithereens by a dozen overexcited wizards and witches at once.

They leave the potions equipment shop and make their way along towards the best of the book stores.

“Going to get a leash for that beast of yours, Malfoy?” someone calls out from the crowd. “Pet store’s down the other way.”

Draco stiffens, trying to draw a wand he hasn’t yet regained. His father turns sharply on his heel.

“I’ll gladly buy you a muzzle, Macmillan,” Lucius snaps. “Consider it my good deed for the day.”

Someone goes ooh. Draco is himself rather impressed.

“You wouldn’t know a good deed if it bloody well snuck up behind you and—”

“Oh, give it a rest, Henry,” someone new butts in. “Merlin, but you’re brave with a score of witnesses around in broad daylight, aren’t you? Sod off and go pull the tails off some newts or something, go on, get.”

The elder Macmillan huffs and spits on the cobblestones. Lucius finds his hand grasped and firmly shaken by a tall, somewhat scruffy man, and Draco is shocked to recognize a small, shy, thirteen-year-old Cedric Diggory hovering about.

“Hello,” Diggory the younger says, apparently to his shoes.

“Hello,” Draco says, to Cedric.

“—Control of Magical Creatures, Mr Malfoy, and let me just say when I got back to the office and heard about what a mess you encountered, trying to get young Draco all signed up, heads were rolling! Abominable treatment. Just abominable! I always said the Werewolf departments needed a proper consolidation, and—”

“So, er,” Cedric says gamely. “You’re— you are going to Hogwarts, then?”
“Yes,” Draco says coldly.

“That’s. Erm. That’s good. Good on you.”

“Oh. Thanks,” Draco says, much less coldly.

“— and now everyone and their garden gnome has to put in their two knuts, even that damned Macmillan, if his son turns out half as nasty we’d all better hold on to our bloody hats, hadn’t we, you won’t catch anyone from Hufflepuff treating their fellow wizards like that, will we, Cedric?”

Cedric jumps. “Er! Right!”

“—not that Slytherin hasn’t turned out its share of decent fellows, don’t think I’ve forgotten the way your family’s been working so tirelessly to make amends! Some folks are the sort to never believe —”

Cedric’s dad has not yet let Draco’s father loose from the handshake, and Lucius is starting to look as if he might very well chew his trapped limb off at the wrist. Draco and Cedric exchange a glance of absolutely mutual horror, then turn as one to appeal to their mothers.

“Mum, weren’t we going to go look at the sport brooms before the lunch rush,” Cedric says loudly.

“Mother, I really think we should move on to the bookstore, who knows how many sets of first year texts they still have,” Draco announces.

Cedric’s mother smiles indulgently. “Oh, of course, Cedric, dear—”

“But you four seem to be getting along so well,” Narcissa says. “I’m sure we can spare a little time.”

Slytherins, Draco reflects, completely deserve every bad thing that has ever been said about any of them. His mother lets him stand there and stew in betrayal for a whole ten seconds before laughing, patting his shoulder, and sweeping in to collect her husband. Mrs Diggory gives Draco a wink as she goes to haul hers off.

“T’ll owl you!” Mr Diggory calls to Lucius, and is hauled.

Lucius leans into Narcissa’s side in a manner suspiciously reminiscent of Draco’s after a bad nightmare. “I’m going to scourgify all the skin off this hand,” he announces grimly. “That man was positively communicable.”

“I think it might be a little late to catch Hufflepuff, dear,” Narcissa tells him.

“You don’t know that,” Lucius says, and wipes his hand against his fine dress robes.

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They detour to get him his wand— a much shorter detour than either of his parents had been expecting.

“Hawthorne, ten inches, unicorn hair core,” Ollivander says, before the tarnished old bell has finished its chime. He disappears into the stacks and comes back with a box. It’s covered in dirty
webs and empty egg sacs, and Draco is struck by this, in a way he hadn’t been the first time here. Then, he’d been impatient and a little afraid, after seven failures. Now...

“How long has this been waiting for me?” he asks, snatching eagerly at the filthy cardboard. It might as well be made of gold and sandalwood, as precious as it is, as valuable as the contents.

Ollivander gives a dusty, noiseless little laugh.

“Long enough, young Malfoy,” he says.

Draco draws his wand, then swishes, flicks, and sets every box in the shop floating. It’s nothing compared to the soaring lightness of his heart, and waking thrum of his small body’s fragile, underdeveloped magical core.

Then, to the bookstore, Draco’s elation over the restoration of his wand quickly fading under all the whispering and pointing and staring of what is starting to feel like the entire English wizarding population, and possibly a good chunk of the Americas'.

A set of crisp new first-year textbooks is bought, wrapped, and handed off to the family elves, as well as a few mystery novels for his mother, an astrology text for his father, and— though it made his insides curdle with awkward embarrassment to even touch the books— the three slim books on the history, biology, and global socioeconomic status of werewolves that the shop had in stock.

“Those titles have been popular this month, we’ve had to order in extra,” the shop witch says brightly. “And before June we probably couldn’t have shifted the whole lot for a knut! Funny, innit?”

The withering stare of three Malfoys at once was sufficient to convey that it was not at all funny, and furthermore, probably nothing in the world was ever— or would ever be— funny.

“Right, well, as you like it,” the clerk mumbles, gone scarlet from ear to ear, and wraps the books up hastily enough that she rips the paper a little.

Draco blinks off the shock of sunlight after the dim bookshop just in time to see a familiar huge, hairy figure lumbering into Fortescue’s ice cream parlor. His heart leaps, though his spine prefers to collapse into his stomach.

“Could we get ice cream?” he asks, not too proud to pull on his father’s sleeve beseeching.

“Ask your m—”


“That’s dogs!” Draco protests.

The parlor is packed, but Lucius shoulders his way to the front of the crowd with their orders and is quickly served. Blood still counts for something, even without the Dark Lord around. The half-giant is still standing in line like a great big muddy rock in the middle of a stream, and not looking particularly impressed with Draco’s father.

Well, so much for making a good first impression. Draco wades gamely over.

“Hello,” he says. By Merlin, he doesn’t come up to the man’s hip at this age. He hardly clears his knees!
Hagrid looks down—very far down—and goes, gruffly, “Yeah? Malfoy, is it?”

“I, er, yes. Actually. You’re Hagrid, aren’t you, the groundskeeper at Hogwarts?” Draco had rehearsed this part in his head several times, but still manages to squeak. “And you manage the creatures, too, so, I wanted to... make your acquaintance before term started. Get off on the right foot. Or paw.”

“Oh! So all that Prophet rot’s true, is it?” Hagrid actually kneels down with interest, sending the other wizards and witches in the shop scattering. “Thought it was all made up just’a have a good laugh at yer dad, yeh know.”

“Well, it wasn’t.” Draco’s face is burning. He’s still not used to this, going around everywhere as something everyone hates. He’d been hoping to meet Potter and charm him, somehow, but it’s just as well he’s not here now, actually, to see him here like this. Draco would probably punch him in the mouth for it.

Hagrid’s number is called by the fellow behind the ice cream counter, and he gives Draco a pat on the shoulder—“Hang on a mo’”—that nearly breaks his neck before lumbering off to get two scoops of chocolate and raspberry. He comes back over as Lucius and Narcissa cluster protectively around Draco and jerks his head towards the door.

They take a patio table, and Hagrid lowers himself very carefully into one delicate, wrought-iron chair.

“Mind givin’ these a chillin’ charm, Mrs Malfoy? One’s for a friend,” he says to Narcissa, who obliges. “Cheers. So, Malfoy— the little ‘un, yeah, what’s yer name, again?”


“That’s creative, alright. So. Hadn’t heard anything’ about all this from Dumbledore, dunno why, but he’s a right busy man, yeh know. An’ I suppose it’s different now from how things used ter be, innit, what with the wolfsbane potion. Yeh can jus’ have a kip once a month in one’a the cellars, we won’t need to put yeh through any of what we had ter do with poor little Remus—”

“Remus,” Draco pounces on the name.

“Aw, hell, I shouldn’t’a named—”

“Remus Lupin?” Lucius asks. “He was in the Order, wasn’t he?”

“Aye, and I bet yeh just know all about that, don’t yer?” Hagrid growls, as viciously as a man licking a little pink ice cream cone can growl. “Ran inter him often, did yeh, Malfoy?”

Lucius glares. “We may have met,” he says stiffly.

“Ha! Well I don’t mind sayin’ I hope he gave yeh sommat to remember him by!” Hagrid grins, and finishes his cone in one bite. Lucius half rises from his seat, pale with anger, but Narcissa takes his arm and forces him back.

“I do so hope,” she says delicately, “Mr Hagrid, that you won’t hold any political disagreements you and your friends have had in the past with my husband against our son, this coming term. I understand you have been appointed a position of some authority by Dumbledore.”

Draco regards his mother with deep relief.
Hagrid looks torn between pride and outrage. “Well— yeah, sure, I do all sorts o’ things around the place, but I’m hardly gonna go chuckin’ yer boy inter the Forbidden Forest jus’ because I think yer husband’s a bloody pillock!”

The corners of Narcissa’s mouth twitch. “I’m very glad to hear it, Mr Hagrid.”

Lucius opens his mouth, is kicked in the leg by his wife, and closes his mouth. He instead stabs his ice cream several times with his spoon.

He mutters, “We most sincerely appreciate whatever assistance you might be able to render Draco, with regards to his condition.”

“Right, yeah, sure,” Hagrid says uncomfortably. He regards Draco, who squirms again. “Well, yeh don’t look like too much of a bad sort, do yeh? I expect we’ll get along jus’ fine.”

Draco thinks about the last five or six years of his life. “Yes, I’m certain we shall,” he lies.

Hagrid beams and puts forth a grubby hand the size of a serving tray. Draco lets his arm be engulfed and shaken nearly out of the socket before the half-giant releases him.

“I better go while we’re all bein’ civil,” Hagrid says. “Lots to do, an’ I still haven’t even gotten Harry his birthday present.”

So Harry is here. Draco bites his lip, tries to make himself say Harry, who? or Can I come along? but he just can’t manage. He’s been as pathetic as he can tolerate for just about as long as he can stand, today.

“Until September, then,” he says. He eats his ice cream while Hagrid and Lucius shake hands with deeply reluctant politeness, then Hagrid touches his brow to Narcissa and slopes off, cutting through the crowds like some vast, dirty sailing ship through the waves.

“I want to go home,” Draco says.

“I want to burn my arm off,” Lucius mutters.

“I think we’ll go with Draco’s idea, darling,” Narcissa says, and helps herself to her husband’s ice cream.
Finally: the start of the term. The Hogwarts Express. The Malfoys enter King’s Cross through one of the magical entrances, of course, with none of that uncivilized business of sneaking around in front of Muggles, trying to find the crossover spots, that so many muggleborn and halfbloods have to put up with. Platform 9 3/4 is hideously crowded, a heaving sea of children and parents. Draco has a terrible moment where he wonders why everyone his age is so tall, and then has to remember that he’s only eleven. Sixth and seventh years are at the clear other end of puberty; of course they go lumbering past him like dragons. Somehow the height of full adults hadn’t quite bothered him the same way—it had felt normal, even.

But he hadn’t realized he was such a small boy, the first time.


Clutching his trunk, Draco shivers all over, remembering quite against his will the way her eyes had looked as the life had ripped out of them. His own eyes start to burn, and when she leans down to embrace him, he drops his trunk and clings fiercely to her shoulders.

“Maybe we should forget all this and just get me tutors,” he says.

“Should we?” she asks.

He breathes in the smell of her, thinks again of how the Dark Lord had struck her down, sniffles, lets her go. Scrubs at his eyes.

“No,” he says. “No, I’m going.”

His father inclines his head to Draco, and Draco returns the gesture. Further embraces and carrying on would be a disgrace to both of them. He takes up his trunk again and hurries off to the train before he can think again.

It’s just as crowded inside, with so many students scurrying from compartment to compartment, slinging about their owl cages and improperly shrunken or lightened luggage. Draco no longer quite remembers what it was like to cut through crowds with the proud certainty that anyone in his way had better get out or be sorry. He keeps his head down and tries not to step on anyone’s feet.

He finds an empty compartment somewhere around the middle of the train, stows his trunk, and curls up against the window. He has about three minutes to himself to wallow in self-pity before a tan girl with a puffy stormcloud of hair all around her face leans into the compartment.

“Excuse me, I’m Hermione Granger, are you the werewolf everyone’s talking about?” she asks bluntly. Her front teeth are much too large. She’s bigger than him at this age by a solid margin.

Draco, deeply aggrieved by having to deal with Hermione fucking Granger this early in the year, gives her as rude a gesture as he knows how to make.

“Oh, so boys do that here too,” Granger says, “that’s very nice, I’m sure. It’s only that Neville’s lost his toad and I thought if you were the werewolf you could sniff it out.”

“It doesn’t work like that,” Draco snaps.

Granger gives a pitying sort of look. “I read in What About Werewolves that a werewolf’s sense of
smell is significantly better than a human’s, even in their regular shape. Don’t you know anything?”

“Alright, I meant I don’t work like that. I’m not a bloodhound, Longbottom and his damn toad can get lost and stay lost.”

Granger glares. “They said you were a Dark Creature, not an absolute git, but suit yourself.”

“Fine, I will, then!”

“Fine.”

She flounces off into the corridor. Draco stays put and seethes. The train gives a long whistle and starts to rumble off along the tracks, picking up speed. Granger is probably going off to blunder into Potter and Weasley and exchange heartfelt vows of permanent loyalty, or something, and then talk about how much they all hate Draco and can’t wait to make his life absolutely miserable. Draco just bets that Weasley's brought along a pitchfork from his life back on the farm that they can sharpen up to mob him with.

“Merlin,” he curses, and storms out of the compartment. He catches up to Granger fairly quickly, she’s apparently been looking into every single compartment along the way and talking to anyone she finds.

“Alright, let’s get this over with,” Draco snaps. “And you’d better remember that I helped you, too.”

“We’re both helping Neville.”

“I would honestly rather suck slugs, Granger, this is strictly your favor, and a once in a lifetime event at that. Let’s go to the back of the train and work our way forward.”

“I’ve already been doing that.”

“Yes, but you haven’t had a bloody pet werewolf along, have you?”

An extremely young and chubby version of Longbottom is produced, and Draco sniffs his hand as reluctantly as it's offered. He smells of old lady, old mansion, a lot of dirt, a lot of sweat, and just a hint of toad. When Granger lets go of his wrist Longbottom snatches his hand back to his chest as if he thinks it’ll be bitten off.

“Right,” Draco says grimly, and goes to the back of the train, two of the very worst people in the world trailing along behind him like horrid ducklings. Draco takes even breaths and tries to think about it like Quidditch, just with a small pitch and a squashy snitch.

They find three toads, two frogs, and a fire-bellied salamander that aren’t Trevor before they get to Potter’s compartment, as well as getting wands drawn on them twice by upper classmen who think it’s all great fun to scare children. Draco’s in a foul mood, Longbottom’s near tears, Granger’s slapped a prefect who was halfway through casting some sort of complicated warding spell against Draco, and is consequently missing several important bones in her wrist. She’d nearly had a fit over the prospect of being expelled before even reaching Hogwarts until Longbottom had pointed out that she’d hit the prefect before introducing herself, so no one would know who to punish. Draco had been forced to actually agree with something that had come out of Longbottom’s mouth, and feels unclean on top of being wildly frustrated and more than a bit headachey.

With all the various events and emotional crises, it thus comes as a deep surprise for Draco to wrench open a door, snarl, “Have you seen any toads?” and find himself face to face with a very, very, very small version of Potter.
“Merlin, you’re a baby,” he says, horrified.

Potter glares at him. His eyes are just about ten times too large for his ridiculous excuse of a face and his glasses are scratched and poorly fitted, but the pissy, self-righteous gleam is exactly, absurdly, the same as ever.

“I’m eleven,” Potter squeaks.

“What, in another five years?”

Hermione looks into the compartment over Draco’s shoulder.

“Malfoy, stop antagonizing everyone, I’m not engaging in any more reprehensible acts of violence for you. Oh, you’re Harry Potter!”

“I’m here too,” Weasley says, sounding hurt for some reason.

“Yes, no one cares,” Draco says. “Have you seen Longbottom’s toad?”

“Who?”

“Trevor,” Longbottom says from behind Granger and Draco.

“You’re Trevor?” Potter asks.

“Trevor’s his toad,” Granger says. “We’re looking for it.”

“Well, don’t let us stop you from getting back to work,” Weasley says. “Somewhere else.”

Draco frowns and backs out into the corridor.

“That was anticlimactic,” he says.

“I know,” Granger says. “He was rather small, wasn’t he? And his friend was so rude! Hold on.”

She puts her head back into the compartment. “You’ve got dirt on your nose, you know,” she says. “Just— there.”

Draco looks at Granger with something uncomfortably close to admiration.

They find two more toads, nine frogs all belonging to one very intense and frightening fifth year Ravenclaw, and a lumpy black marine iguana.

“Did you even bring Trevor on to the train?” Draco demands.

“I don’t know,” Longbottom confesses miserably.

“You’re hopeless. This is hopeless. I detest the both of you. I’m going back to my compartment to be alone and feel incredibly sorry for myself for having had to get to know either of you.”

Unfortunately, Trevor is in Draco’s compartment, sitting damply on Draco’s seat.

“Trevor!” Longbottom cries.

“By all that is good in this world why did you follow me!?” Draco cries. But it’s too late. The two loathsome, muggly disgraces are plowing straight into his compartment and setting up shop. Longbottom actually picks up the toad and gives it a cuddle. Granger has brought along her luggage
and stows it right by Draco’s, clumsy with only the one working wrist.

“You can read my copy of What About Werewolves while we’re on the train,” she says. Her tone is brisk and businesslike, but her round, childish face has a distinctly nervous expression. Draco realizes that Hermione Granger, a witch invented by Muggles purely to piss him off for six years in a row, actually wants him to like her right now, and will probably be extremely hurt if he doesn’t.

“Well, alright, give it here,” he says. “And it’s your shout if that snacks lady comes by. I like pumpkin pasties.”

Longbottom looks up from his ecstatic amphibious reunion. “That’s not fair, everyone knows the Malfoys are loaded, and Granger’s just a muggleborn. You can’t expect her to understand money right away!”

“I understand money,” Granger says indignantly.

“No, no, I mean, real money,” Longbottom says. “Wizarding money.”

Granger looks as if she would like to take Trevor and throw him out the window, and Longbottom right afterwards.

She says, very dangerously: “I understand wizarding money too.”

Well, this was completely worth it. Draco finds himself actually grinning as Granger yells at Longbottom about Gringotts, exchange rates, base-ten counting systems, and something called the ‘gold standard’ before the trolley witch shows up.

Hermione only buys him one pumpkin pasty, though, and Longbottom looks quietly disappointed at his small ice mouse.

“Feel free to buy any amount of additional snacks you like!” she snaps. “I just finished explaining your own financial system to you, I’m sure you can manage.”

“You are surprisingly mean,” Draco says. Longbottom nods, then pretends as if he hadn’t when Granger’s baleful glare intensifies to basilisk levels. Draco applies himself to his borrowed book, taking very small bites of his pasty, to make it last.

*

And then at last, there's Hogwarts. Draco climbs off the train, shoulders his way through the crowd of gratuitously enormous adolescents, and in his eagerness to put some distance between himself and his unfortunate new companions, he’s well on his way to the thestral-drawn carriages before Hagrid’s voice brings him back to his senses.

“Malfoy! Get over here, firs’ years over here with me! C’mon! Firs’ years, over here!”

Draco looks longingly at the carriages. If he has to share a boat with Longbottom or Granger, one of them is getting drowned, he is that stressed. Then a fourth year draws her wand on him and he scurries quickly over to Hagrid and grabs on to his elbow. He can work with drowning.
Hagrid gives him a quick once-over.

“Right, is that everyone? All first years? Hey, Harry, there yeh are! Good on yer. Alrigh’, we’re goin’ this way, mind yeh don’t slip, now... Firs’ years, this way!”

Tiny Potter draws up beside Draco and peers at him curiously.

“You’re friends with Hagrid?” he asks.

“Not as such,” Draco says, without relinquishing his grip on Hagrid’s sleeve.

“Course yeh are,” Hagrid rumbles from very far above them. “Yer gonna need as many friends as yeh can get, Malfoy, so yeh c’n count me in as one of ‘em any day.”

“Oh.” Draco isn’t sure whether to feel warmed or chilled by all this, and mostly feels ill.


“Yes,” Draco says frostily. “I am not likely to be popular.”

“Oh. Well, have you considered, not bursting into people’s train compartments and insulting them first thing? You know, if you want to be popular.”

Draco glares. “I’m considering insulting you some more, Potter.”

“Leave him alone, Harry, he’s hopeless,” Weasley says, from Potter’s other side. “I told you before: his whole family’s always been Dark, even before they went and got mixed up with werewolves! It’s no wonder you can’t get three civil words out of him altogether.”

“No fightin’ on the boats,” Hagrid rumbles. They’ve drawn up to the lakeshore, and a fleet of little boats bobs in the black water before them. Hagrid directs everyone in twos and fours into their own separate boats, then peels Draco off his arm.

“I need my own boat, lad,” he says cheerfully. “Yeh can go make yerself some more friends, now.”

Draco finds himself sitting with Goyle and Bullstrode.


“Hello, Greg, Millicent,” he says. He expected to find this awkward, but instead just feels sort of sad. He doesn’t think he can be in Slytherin again, the way he is now, and with all the things he’s going to need to do. It’s starting to really sink in that he’s never going to see the real Greg, his Greg, ever again, or anyone else: the children across from him aren’t the boy and girl he’d counted as his allies for six years, they’re soft and unfinished as biscuit dough.

Who’s going to charm Greg’s quills to put the letters in the right order when he writes? Who’s going to compose the appropriate cruel song when Millicent breaks up with Padma and won’t get out of bed? Hell, who’s even going to be there when Millicent realizes she likes girls in the first place and starts pulling all the chairs in the common room to pieces? Can Draco somehow make Theo do it? Zabini certainly won’t, and when the Weasley twins hex his knees backwards in third year it’s going to serve him fucking right.

Greg and Millicent are staring wide-eyed up at the castle across the lake.

“It’s pretty,” Greg says softly.
“Yeah,” Millicent agrees.

Draco watches the castle loom closer, and every golden window looks like a judgmental eye. It’s a relief to draw close into the cliff, and then pass through the tunnel into the small docking cavern. After that comes the rush and scramble of getting out of the boat—Greg almost falls out, and gives Draco a wonderfully familiar, grateful smile when Draco grabs his elbow— and then off up a passageway, across the lawn, and through the enormous front door.

McGonagall takes over. Trevor goes hopping past Draco’s foot halfway through the introductory speech on houses, and Draco pounces, nearly knocking over a tiny Terry Boot. McGonagall glares down at him and he freezes.

“Er— Longbottom’s toad, ma’am,” he squeaks, and hurries to hand the damn thing off, again, to the disaster in question, making it clear with a gesture that he will personally slit Longbottom’s throat should he lose his damn toad one more time.

“If you gentlemen are quite finished,” McGonagall says severely, and Draco realizes he definitely just threatened the life of a future Gryffindor right in front of their Head of House and is probably going to get a hundred points off whatever House he gets sorted into for it. He goes and hides behind Millicent while McGonagall finishes her speech.

The Deputy Headmistress leaves, the ghosts show up and give everyone the usual fright, McGonagall comes back, they all go trotting off again. Draco’s starting to feel like someone might as well tie a lead around his neck and have done with it, all this running about. He must have been much more impressed with all the ceremony and secrecy the first time around.

The Great Hall smells and looks exactly the same, though the faces at the tables are of course different than he was somehow still expecting. It’s so disconcerting for all the upper years to be total strangers, instead of the friends and enemies he’s spent years with. He’s really going to have to get over this.

Watching his peers get sorted into exactly the same houses as before goes from boring to increasingly horrifying as he sees that one classmate or another’s family has packed them off to Beauxbatons or Durmstrang rather than risk bumping elbows with a werewolf. Crabbe, he knew already, and the other houses he can only care about abstractly, but there’s Davis and the Greengrasses and Nott all gone, too. Draco realizes with a terrible pang that this year’s Slytherin sorting might be the smallest on record, with Vincent, Theo, Tracy, and Daphne all pulled out. Merlin! Greg’s going to be the only Slytherin boy of his year for a while, until Blaise gets things sorted out. He can see Snape and Sinistra at the teacher’s table starting to give each other serious looks.

The student population of Hogwarts fell from the classes of ‘90 to ‘98, he remembers, because of the war, due to how the entire wizarding population fell during that time, too, and it hadn’t been particularly robust after the business with Grindelwald through the 1930’s. His class, the class of ‘98, was the smallest in several centuries, and the muggleborn percentage was nearly a quarter, rather than the tenth of ages past— the numbers bounced after The Boy Who Lived went and lived and all, but even by Draco’s sixth year, the class sizes weren’t what anyone would call large. Too many wars, too much infighting, too many taxes and levies and ill-considered reparations leeching the fortunes from the magical world's core purebloods and out to the undisciplined, unfit halfbloods and worse.

And too damn high a percentage of muggleborns let into Hogwarts to further degrade their society. His father had pushed for quotas, when Draco had been a child, but there’d been too many cowards and muggle-lovers among the other Governors and the war had ended too recently, and the proposal had failed.
He nearly jumps out of his skin. It’s his turn.

Greg is sitting at the Slytherin table, looking very small and hopeful, and Draco winces away from meeting his eyes. It’s not as if Draco has ever prided himself on anything as stupid as fidelity, but... well, he has his honor at least, or he did, and now... he goes up to the stool feeling like an absolute worm. But he can’t be in Slytherin, not like this, he just can’t.

The Hall is very quiet, watching him take his seat. He doesn’t have to be any great Legilimens to know that just about everyone is thinking not us, not us. The hat drops over his eyes. “Well! Hello there!” it says in his head.

Draco says, hurriedly: “Listen, I can’t believe there exists a universe where I’d say this, but here we are somehow and I really think you need to put me in Huf—”

“GRYFFINDOR,” the hat cries.

“I am going to set you on fire,” Draco tells the hat, before it’s lifted off his head and he’s nudged— not gently— off the stool. He bites his lip, hesitates, receives another nudge, and trudges off to a uncertain spatter of applause from the Gryffindor table. Granger and Longbottom, at least, are making some noise. The Weasley twins seem to be genuinely delighted, which is alarming, and Draco helps himself to the seat beside Granger that puts her between him and the devious ginger thugs.

“Congratulations,” Granger says.

“Get stuffed,” Draco snaps. “...I mean. Er. Thank you. You too.”

Millicent is sitting shoulder-to-shoulder with Greg, though, and it makes Draco feel somewhat less wretched. Pansy’s sorted and goes to sit on Millicent's other side after a bit, and then Potter comes to join Draco at the Gryffindor table and everyone goes absolutely bonkers over it. Draco doesn’t clap. Potter rolls his eyes at him. It feels weirdly nostalgic.

The rest of the sorting proceeds as before, with the lesser Patil, Thomas, and Weasley junior coming over to cluster around Harry and give Draco dubious looks, and finishes with tiny baby Zabini going to his table to a round of ferocious, defiant Slytherin applause that welcomes their fourth, last firstie home. Draco had forgotten that Blaise used to do his hair like that, all complicated braids and butterfly pins, and wore robes tailored to flounce. Merlin, is he going to have to call him her in class for a few more years? How is that even going to work? Time travel is a tremendous pain in the ass.

And then he feels his arm start to burn: not the arm with the bite scars and the brass cuff, but the arm where his Dark Mark had been charred. Prickling with cold sweat and panic, Draco turns to the staff table, and locks eyes with Quirrel.

Time travel can absolutely get stuffed.
Chapter 5

The Opening Feast seems to drag on forever. Draco doesn’t know whether to catch Snape’s attention or not, and it turns out to be a moot point because the man only glowers at Potter, bickers with Sinistra, and leaves early. Quirrel stays throughout, picking at his food and watching him thoughtfully. Every time Draco glances up at the table, the Defense Professor is just... watching him. Draco remembers that the man had been some kind of a servant of the Dark Lord— not a Death Eater, but something — and had taken a position here to find some key to Voldemort’s resurrection, and been sent packing by Potter, who’d known what to do via some mystical Chosen One powers, or something. It’s been years since Draco's had to think about it, and no one had really been told anything, and a dozen different rumors had been going on all at once at the time. And now, whatever the key was, whatever kind of servant Quirrel is, here the man won’t stop bloody well observing him.

It’d be enough to put him off his food, but all he’s had today was a pumpkin pasty and a few chocolate frogs, and he’s starving. So he chokes his food down without really noticing any of the flavors, while the flesh where his Dark Mark has been erased pulses with a hot, urgent pain. Around him, the first years are starting to introduce themselves to the interested, congratulatory higher years, but Draco couldn’t care less right now. He keeps his head down, shrugs off questions, waits for it to be over.

Finally, the last custard has been cleared away, the last announcements have been made, and everyone gets to go to bed. Draco’s head pounds with exhaustion, and all the other first years look just as knackered. Longbottom’s gone and fallen asleep with his face on a cake pan.

The prefect Weasley goes to lead them off to the Gryffindor tower, and there’s a lot of shuffling and bumping. Draco gets his heel stepped on by Brown, and when he snaps “Watch it!” she squeals and jumps back, trying to hide behind Patil. Everyone glares at him. He feels tired, resentful tears start in his eyes, and glares at his feet as he drops to the back of the little mob and just follows them from a more respectable distance up what feels like every single staircase in the castle. Bloody stairs. Bloody towers. He wishes he were going down to the Slytherin dungeons, but he’s never going to see his dorm room again, or lie down in his own green-sheeted bed, or fall asleep listening to Vince’s treasured wireless play them late night murder mysteries, or Theo complaining for the millionth time about the awful reception under the lake, or anything. It’s all lost forever. It was already lost before he even came back here.

He snuffles as quietly as he can, and scrubs his face before catching up with the rest of the Gryffindor firsties: there’s some kind of disturbance with Peeves, and they all look terrified.

“Ooh, look at the puppy!” Peeves squeals, and goes swooping in mad spirals around Draco, pulling at his robes.

“War made Romulus and Remus
But the two were very squeamish
And the second one went bonkers—

Now the first’s come back to conquer!”

A final pull on his arm sends Draco tumbling. The firsties scatter and the prefect Weasley chases Peeves down the hallway, blustering. To his mortification, it’s Granger who helps him back up.

His closely-tailored sleeve’s had the cuff buttons ripped. Even in the dim light of the corridor, the brass cuff of his identity bracelet gleams and the thick silver spots of his bite scars shine, and Granger sees before Draco can go to hold the fabric together. The open pity on her face turns his stomach. He wants to say something vicious: that she should save her sympathy, that he belongs here and she doesn’t, even like this, that even part animals now he’s still better than her. But his eyes are wet and hot and he knows if he opens his mouth he’ll just squeak, or, worse, hiccup.

“Reparo,” Granger says quietly, and taps her wand to his torn sleeve. The button zips back from somewhere on the floor and the cuff comes neatly back together.

Merlin, is there anything this terrible girl isn’t good at?

He at least isn’t ruined enough to actually thank her. He just wipes miserably at his face and trudges along after the muggleborn to the end of the corridor, then through the portrait-hole.

The Gryffindor common room is overwhelmingly amber, after six years spent among dark stone tunnels and pure silver fires and green glass lamps. It’s a high-ceilinged round room, the air sweet and warm, the floor cluttered with chairs and couches in a dozen shades of red, the dark stone walls covered over with gold-leafed picture frames, the simple fireplace host to a low red and gold fire. It seems comfortable enough, in a crowded, rummage-shop way, but completely alien. Draco scrubs at his eyes again.

At last, though: a final spiraling staircase to climb up after the Gryffindor boys, a final doorway, and six red-curtained beds in a dormitory just as auburn and cozy as the common room. Draco sleepily wonders what Potter and his friends did with the extra bed, before he was here.

Potter and Weasley immediately arrange to have beds right next to each other at one end, and the other three boys are looking at one another uncertainly, not friends yet.

“Thomas, there,” Draco says, pointing next to Weasley, then continues around the semi-circle, “Finnigan, there, Longbottom, you can be my shield there in case anyone gets a case of heroics and wants to do me in.”

“Who made you king, Malfoy?” Finnigan wants to know.

“Well, if you want to blow me up in my sleep, let me know now, so I can skip brushing my teeth,” Draco snaps, marching to his bed, the closest to the bathroom’s door. He’d had his bed in Slytherin in roughly the same location, though the room had been cut out of a tunnel, long and vaulted, not a half-circle cut out of a tower. He’s going to get up in the middle of the night and slam into a wall, he’s certain.

“I’m too tired to have a fight tonight,” Seamus huffs finally. “But you’d better watch out tomorrow.”

“I’ll get my will in order,” Draco sneers. He’s not sniffling anymore, which is excellent. Being mean to people always did cheer him up. He gets his things from his trunk, goes to the bathroom— red towels and copper fixtures, he’s not surprised— and ostentatiously brushes his teeth, then changes,
then comes back into the dorm to find that Finnigan has gone and fallen asleep, the git.
Wrong bed or not, he’s asleep as soon as his head hits the pillow.

*

Draco’s second first day at Hogwarts starts out weird and gets worse.

“Hermione told us you were nice,” Lavender Brown says accusatively, as they clump up in the common room to attempt to get to breakfast together.

Draco laughs, startled. “Merlin, did she really? She was absolutely lying to you. I wouldn’t be nice to anyone if my life depended on it. Nice is for chumps.”

“You helped Longbottom find his toad,” Parvati puts in. “That’s nice.”

“That was politics,” Draco defends himself. “Granger’s the smartest girl in our year and she hits like an insane goat, I wanted her to owe me a favor.”

“She’s smart?” Weasley says dubiously. “But she’s just a muggleborn, she doesn’t know anything.”

Draco gives him a withering look. Potter and Thomas also give him a withering look. It’s actually a very enjoyable moment of fellow-feeling.

“Yet!” Weasley amends. “She doesn’t know anything yet!”

“You would think muggleborns would be terrible at everything,” Draco says, with years of experience, “but actually, they can kick your ass. It’s tremendously unfair.”

“What are we talking about?” Granger wants to know, coming out of the girls’ staircase.

“Do you hit people?” Weasley asks.

“No! Who’s saying that? I would never, fighting’s against the rules!”

“Sure, alright, and how’s your wrist, Granger?” Draco asks loudly. She glares at him viciously and several of the Gryffindor boys take a step back.

“Is anyone here actually nice?” Brown asks.

“I’m nice,” Thomas says.

“I reckon I’m alright,” Weasley says. “So’s Harry.”

“I hit people too,” Patil says. “I’m the bad twin. Maybe we can be friends, Granger.”

Granger looks suspicious.

“And I’m a bastard, so no one ask me to go on anymore toad quests,” Draco says. “That was a once in a lifetime thing.”

Neville stumbles into the common room after Finnigan.
“Hey, got your toad?” Weasley asks, to a few laughs.

Neville flushes. “Oh, erm! I don’t know, do I need him for classes? I put him in one of the baths... it seemed like he might stay put there for awhile...”

“Is this everyone?” the elder prefect Weasley asks, swanning up. “All the first years?”

It is, so they go along after him out the portrait hole and down a few thoroughly unfamiliar corridors. Draco had free reign of even the Gryffindor areas of the school when he was on the Inquisitorial Squad, but that was five years from now, and all the tapestries and sliding doors seem to have been switched around. Or is it, not yet switched around? There isn’t even the suit of armor in front of a rotating wall that you need to give a kick to the personal bits. Presumably it’s hanging around some other rotating wall and getting bored of its relatively trauma-free lifestyle right now.

Even stranger is the way Harry Potter is a completely new phenomenon to everyone. Whispers follow the little knot of Gryffindor first years, and older students point and peer. Potter looks hilariously uncomfortable with the attention. Fame has always run slap bang up against Potter’s enormous wall of muggle-induced traumas and bounced straight off again, it’s an ongoing delight. Even better, it’s fresh. No one’s used to Potter yet, and Potter isn’t used to anyone either.

“He’ll be giving out autographs during breakfast,” Draco says loudly, to a trio of ogling Ravenclaws. “Don’t miss it!”

“Malfoy,” Potter hisses, going plum colored.

“Oh, right, sorry, what was I thinking,” Draco says. He turns around and walks backwards to call, “It’s three sickles a signing! Four to do your thigh!”

“MALFOY!” Draco finds himself hauled sharply sideways by his robes towards an angry Weasley and Potter, and reacts in the regular manner: he pops Potter a good one in the glasses, just to get the first shot in.

Of course, it isn’t the regular manner, yet. Potter’s glasses break, he curses and curls up, a lot of other Gryffindors curse too, and the prefect Weasley’s hand comes down hard on Draco’s shoulder before the younger Weasley can get him in the stomach.

“Malfoy!” he says. “None of that, now, what’s the matter with you!”?

“He just went after Harry out of nowhere, Percy!” younger Weasley says. “Probably his rotten family’s idea of a joke!”

Draco stares blankly at Potter, extremely tiny and bewildered Potter, who’s gingerly touching a scratch on his cheek where his glasses’ nosepad dug in. “Er. I’m— I didn’t mean to.”

“You didn’t mean to deck me?” Potter demands. “Because usually people’s accidents involve knocking things over, not a sucker-punch!”

Draco hangs his head. “I’m sorry,” he grits out. “When you pulled on my robes, I thought, er. I was. Alarmed.”

“Christ,” Potter says, and touches his cheek again. But he looks like he’s actually softening up.

“That’s still no excuse,” says older Weasley. “I’m letting McGonagall know— you’ll have detention tonight, and no arguing. I’d better not catch you treating your housemates like this again!”
Draco just nods, glaring at his feet. His face is, of course, well on the way to crying again. He’s miserably certain he’s going to spend the entire year leaking from the head. He hangs to the back of the group again, staring fixedly away from everyone, and when he gets the chance he peels off and takes a different way down to the Great Hall. Everything’s changed, of course, but outside of the specifically Gryffindor areas, it’s no more than the start of any other term, and once you get the knack of navigating the castle, dead ends and trick staircases aren’t a particular challenge.

He slouches over to the Slytherin table and sits down beside a small and adorably chubby Pansy Parkinson.

“Pansy, I’m sad,” he says. “Nurture me. Bring me a coffee. Lament!”

She gives him a weird look, because she’s eleven, and Draco’s life is terrible in every possible way.

“Like hell I will, Malfoy. Aren’t you supposed to be off with the heroes?”

Draco puts his face down on the tabletop. “Potter scared me while we were walking down here so I punched him in the face. They’re probably going to re-sort me, if they don’t snap my wand.”

Pansy laughs at him.

“Wait, who punched Potter?” Marcus wants to know. “Was it one of us? That’s not going to look good, first day at school and a Slytherin’s gone and decked the Chosen One.”

“No, it was this idiot,” Pansy says. “He used to bite his House Elves, too.”

“Didn’t,” Draco defends himself.

“Did! And you bit me!”

“Well, it wasn’t personal. I bit the House Elves too.”

Pansy picks up a rasher of sizzling-hot bacon and drapes it over Draco’s ear. Draco shrieks and bolts upright, pawing at his face. He’s got grease inside his ear.

“You killed me!” he accuses. “It’s going in my brain, I’m going to get an infection! They won’t have anyone to expel!”


Draco sits back down. Several amusingly baby-faced upper years have scooted over to have a look at the fuss, so the telling of the Hallway Incident gets a bit of necessary embroidering, and a particularly mean imitation of prefect Weasley’s fatherly admonishments.

“You’re alright, Malfoy,” Flint decides. “Pity you wound up with all the white knights.”

Greg nods a shy agreement, from where he’s come to sit familiarly on Draco’s left.

“Yeah, well.” Draco shrugs. “You lot didn’t need a bloody werewolf around. You know how that’d look.”

Flint grimaces. “Right, fair enough. Well, still, feel free to visit, and if anyone gives you a hard time we’ll do some punching. We haven’t all forgotten what the Malfoy name means, and anyway, poor Greg’s all on his own, it’s not right. Merlin! Four firsties, can you believe it? Four!”

The rest of breakfast passes comfortably, in a clatter of griping and gossip, until Draco’s got to dash
back to the Gryffindor table to follow his fellow first years to Herbology.

“Hey, chin up, idiot, we’ve got potions together on Friday,” Draco tells a devastated looking Greg. “You know I won’t let you blow your eyebrows off, you’d look even worse, and that’s probably illegal. Alright, I’m off, don’t pine!”

“Go away already!” Pansy cries.

“That’s the spirit,” Draco says, and dodges another strip of bacon as he goes.
Due to a lot of traveling, my margin for this fic has dropped from 20 pages to about 2, so I'll be skipping at least one Monday update.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

* 

Draco’s vaguely surprised to see Hufflepuffs in Herbology: Slytherin always has it with Ravenclaws. Less likely someone will bury a trowel in someone else’s back, he always figured. But there they are, clustered around Professor Sprout’s skirts and peering interestedly at the Gryffindors.

Sprout takes them through a tour of the less dangerous greenhouses, gives them an overview of the year’s curriculum, and brings them back to the first greenhouse for the day’s lesson. It’s just an introduction to magically neutral plants, the kind that grow even in Muggle territories and form the backbone of most potions. Yarrow, henbane, mint, mugwort, lungwort, pansies, tansies, lemongrass.

“Wolfsbane,” Weasley says, fingering the delicate blossoms and giving Malfoy a dirty look.

“Wolfsbane,” Sprout says. “Also known as aconite or monk’s hood, belonging to the family Ranunculaceae. Five points to Gryffindor for perspicacity, and four points from for unkindness.”

Weasley blushes an ugly red that clashes with his hair.

“Now, for a bonus, can anyone tell me some other ingredients of the Wolfsbane Potion, invented by Damocles Belby in 1979?”

Draco raises his hand and lists off steadily each animal, vegetable, and mineral ingredient, in order of addition. He glares at the uncomfortably fidgeting Weasley the whole time.

“Very well done, Malfoy. Ten points to Gryffindor. Are you working with Professor Snape?”

“No, not yet, but when I’m older, I expect to,” Draco says.

“Well it’s always excellent to be proactive. Now, let’s move on to hellebore— a very scary name for a very pretty flower, and crucial in calming droughts.”

For a practical, they’re set loose on the rose bushes with tiny silver shears and dangerous little bottles of rooting potions, to take cuttings. Finch-Fletchley comes over to have a look at him.

“So is the silver thing not true, then?” he asks curiously.

“Hello to you too,” Draco snaps.

Finch-Fletchley just laughs. “Right, excuse me!” He sticks his hand out to shake. “Justin Finch-
Fletchley, I’m new here. I mean, newer than you wizard-family fellows, I’m... it’s ‘muggleborn’, right? I just think of it as ‘normal’ but I suppose I’m really not anymore.”


“Funny thing. You know, my own family would consider itself very much the same, in our own way! There was a Finch-Fletchley at Agincourt, you know. But I suppose there’s different ways to count a lineage.”


Finch-Fletchley just laughs. “Well, maybe if your ancestors have gone around slaying dragons and riding brooms and everything, a few land wars don’t particularly impress.”

Draco makes a politely noncommittal noise.

“So, is it true then, or not?”

“Is what true or not.”

“The silver thing! Does it burn you, or anything? Everyone’s talking about you being a werewolf and it’s apparently a very big deal, but I have to say, you look just like anyone. Well. A bit pale. But you know what I mean. You don’t look evil.”

“Dark and evil aren’t the same thing,” Draco frowns. “Dark magic takes things apart— Light magic holds things together. You wouldn’t call a knife evil. Or—” he snips his little shears in the air, “silver shears, that I can work just fine, actually. Silver’s only really for closing up werewolf bites, otherwise they just bleed forever. Powdered silver and dittany, you pack it into the wound.”

“Wicked,” Finch-Fletchley says. “So if you bit me right now I’d just go around spurting until someone fixed me up?”

“I could be persuaded to experiment,” Draco says, and snaps his teeth. Finch-Fletchley just laughs and shoves him back.

After that, more Hufflepuffs come over, done with investigating Potter and ready to give Draco a look, now that he’s proved relatively non-lethal to Finch-Fletchley.

“My dad says you’re here to infect everyone,” Ernie Macmillan says. “I mean like, that’s what Dumbledore’s brought you in for, to get rid of all the pureblood kids. But Susan’s aunt thinks your dad’s sent you in to take out the muggleborns.”

“Macmillan, if I’m here to kill muggleborns, your dad’ll be pleased as anything, won’t he?” Draco asks. “And if I’m here to bump you off I’m not going to bloody well tell you to your face. I haven’t been in Gryffindor long enough to be that stupid.”

There’s a gratifying amount of mean-spirited giggling.

“So I’m getting the idea that there’s quite a lot of politics going on, here, about us muggleborn,” Finch-Fletchley says, after a bit of industrious rose-snipping. “Not too keen on us, are some of you?”

Bones says, “Well, yeah, with the war. It hasn’t been over for long enough, I guess. And I don’t really think it settled much, anyway. There’s still a lot of bad blood. I mean, look at Malfoy’s family.”
"My father was coerced under Imperius," Draco snaps.

"Sure, yeah," Bones says flatly. "And he’s been dead progressive ever since."

Draco is forced to resort to glaring.

"But what are the purebloods really against?" Dean Thomas wants to know. He and Granger have all drifted over, and Perks looks interested too. "I mean, it just says in the history books Voldemort—" all the pure and halfbloods wince, "—sorry, You-know-what, rose to power, rallied a lot of pure families together against basically everyone else, and went at it for ten or fifteen years. Then Harry blew him up as a baby and that was that. But what’s so bad about us? Are you lot just racist? Wizard-racist?"

"You don’t belong here," Draco says. "Er. Is the thinking. Muggleborns are freak occurrences, one in about a hundred thousand Muggles, and no one knows how or why it happens, but there’s enough squibs— wizard children born without magic— for some families to think that they’re stealing our magic, somehow, and even if that’s not the case, muggleborns go on to produce squibs themselves at a fairly staggering rate. Something like one in three, even when mated back to purebloods. And even aside from muddying up— er, messing about, the wizarding blood-link with magic, every muggleborn and half-blood’s still a dangerous security risk, and needs constant surveillance to make sure that Muggles don’t find out magic is real and start the witch burnings up again."

Granger snorts at that. "Old superstitions!"

Draco glares. "That still happens, you know, today, it’s a huge problem in the Americas. Perks should count herself damn lucky, and you and Dean too: plenty of Muggles get their child’s owl and go straight off murder the kid, they can’t deal with knowing about us without going mad. It’s just too dangerous, to have witches and wizards with a foot in both worlds. It should be all-in or all-out. And it’s not as if muggleborns even do well, they don’t get proper jobs or anything, unless they marry in to a real wizarding family, and even then it’s not like hardly any of them amount to anything. They just mooch about complaining that everything’s too weird and unfair, and then go right back to the Muggle world. It’s all a waste."

"What would happen to us if we couldn’t go to Hogwarts?" Granger wants to know. "Would we get our own school?"

"What, for the five or ten of you born a year?" Draco sneers. "No. You’d probably just be... left. Left alone. Accidental magic peaks in childhood, when we’re most vulnerable and emotional, then tapers off rapidly in adolescence. You might be a little, I don’t know, a little luckier than the other Muggles, or perceptive, or make some dishes explode when you’re really angry. You might figure out a few little tricks. But mostly you’d just live a normal life among your own kind and no one would have to deal with anything, not you with us or us with you."

Or they’d simply be put down, like any other pest, but Draco declines to mention this to the little wide-eyed gaggle of children. A lot of pure families have been pushing for this solution for ages, though of course, not in the most recent decade. But the argument goes that five dead children a year isn’t much, to safeguard the entirety of wizarding England, and some years it’d only be three. The Carrows pushed for most of a century to get the Hogwarts Rolls opened to the public, so that at least concerned citizens might do as they saw fit, before the first Voldemort war destroyed first the Carrows’ reputation and then their fortune and their heirs.

"But I like it here," Finch-Fletchley says brightly. "Eton’s all very well, but I want this. I can’t just put my wand down and go back home and pretend that I never talked to a real, actual werewolf."

"That’s all very well, but I want this. I can’t just put my wand down and go back home and pretend that I never talked to a real, actual werewolf.”
Granger nods seriously. “And the spells,” she says. “I can fix all sorts of things just with one simple first year spell! We’re going to be taught to do so much more. How can you expect us to say ‘Ever so sorry to bother you, we’ll just go home and be dentists!’ when there’s magic?”

“When you open your closet and find Narnia inside, you don’t close the door on it,” Thomas says gravely. “You answer the call.”

Draco shrugs uncomfortably. “I suppose that’s what the wars are about. If no one told you, you wouldn’t know what you were missing, and we wouldn’t have to deal with you all coming in and being— different, and difficult, and a terrible security breach, and everything. So why tell you?”

Thomas and Perks and Granger and Finch-Fletchley all look at each other.

“I think we’d know we were missing something,” Thomas says. “I think we all knew there was something more out there for us. When the owl found me, I just thought, ‘finally.’ Hogwarts is our home now too.”

Draco shrugs again. “Just don’t expect it to be easy,” he warns.

Thomas grins at him, teeth very bright against his dark skin. “I never did.”

*

History of Magic with the Ravenclaws, another surprise. They all clearly want to give him a more thorough investigation than the Hufflepuffs, but of course Binns just launches right into an impenetrable monologue, and the whole lot of earnest little faces turn to their notes. Draco is unhappily unsurprised to find he has retained absolutely nothing of Binns’ first year curriculum, which may or may not have happened in a pocket dimension where everything was excruciatingly pointless.

“Aren’t you going to take notes?” Granger whispers.

“No,” Draco says. “I have an eidetic memory. It’s a werewolf thing.”

“It is not.”

“As too.”

“Well I’m not sharing my notes with you if you regret this later, so don’t even ask.”

“Here’s an idea, go sit somewhere else so I won’t even be tempted to.”

Granger looks really hurt.

“I could show you how to take notes if you don’t know how,” she says in a crushed little voice.

It’s very difficult to be continuously cruel to Granger when she’s eleven and he might need her to do things for him later. “No, I do— I just—” Draco rubs his eyes wearily. “Alright, you win, stop making that face, you’re already unpleasant enough to have to look at.”

He lets Granger show him how to take notes. She uses a reasonably efficient system, for a first year, even if she’s also determined to draw a little star instead of a dot for all her i’s and j’s.
Dinner goes alright. Greg comes shyly over to try and say hello, but goes dead white when some of the older Gryffindors glare him down.

“Oh, look, a baby Slytherin, absolutely terrifying,” Draco says loudly. “Lock the doors and hoard the dinner rolls, he might sit near you.”

After that only Draco gets glared at and when he imperiously pats the bench near him, Greg quickly scurries over and sits. He peers curiously at Longbottom, who had previously affixed himself to Draco’s other side.

“You’re Longbottom?” Greg says gruffly.

*Don’t talk in front of the Gryffindors*, Draco nearly admonishes him, but of course, it’s not really his job to manage Greg anymore, as much as he wants to. It’s only Greg’s business if he says something stupid, or awful, or both, and gets clobbered alone, on his own, without Draco.

“Yes,” says Longbottom, clearly wishing he could say no.

“And you know Draco?”

“...Yes?”

“You like Draco?”

Now Longbottom looks at Draco, as if asking permission, before he says, “Yes.”

Greg nods, looking satisfied. “My gramps always said you Longbottom lot were, um, a rotten bunch of bloodthirsty weasels, and it was a right shame, which side you’d come down on. So that’s good.”

Longbottom looks completely lost. “...It is?” he says faintly.

Draco regards Greg with a weird, delighted horror.

“Greg! Are you trying to make sure I have protection?”

Greg looks shy all over again. “Well, you’re small,” he says.

“We’re all small! Neville’s small! We’re eleven!”

“I’m going to be twelve on the twentieth,” says Granger, from across the table. “And you are small, Draco, I think you’re the shortest after Harry.”

Greg gestures as if to say, see?

“You’re not part of this conversation,” Draco says as cuttingly as possible to her.

“Well, I was just saying! You are!”

“I’m Greg,” says Greg, to Granger.

“Hermione,” she says.
“My gramps always said mud—”

“**That’s** alright, Greg!” Draco cuts in, acutely aware of being surrounded by Gryffindors. “We don’t need to know what your gramps said about *that* right now.”

“Oh.” Greg looks uncertain. “...Alright.”

“Actually, I’d quite like to know,” Granger says, incorrectly. “What about mud?”

“Do they have roast potatoes like this at the Slytherin table?” Draco asks loudly. “I didn’t see. Here, Greg, you have to try the way they are here. Delicious.” He pulls over a platter and loads up Greg’s plate, then the jam, because Greg is disgusting and puts jam on anything that’ll hold still. After that Greg’s too busy eating to repeat what the Goyle patriarch had to say about mudbloods.

Draco turns the conversation towards Herbology, a topic on which Longbottom and Granger both have plenty to say.

Chapter End Notes

quick canon note: draco's information on muggles and muggleborns is supposition and extrapolation rather than drawn directly from any part of the canon text, and may not be entirely accurate. plus, it's biased as hell.

rowling has said that a quarter of hogwarts students are muggleborn, which is contradicted by canon and by simple math. england's muggle population rose while its wizard population fell during the 20th century.

less than a quarter of the extremely small class of '97 was muggleborn: those marked down on rowling's original list as muggleborn, such as hannah abbot, were later stated in canon to be half or pureblood. even dean thomas turns out to be a halfblood, with a wizarding father that left his muggle mother before either of them knew— making dean the same as harry, muggleborn by culture but not blood.

if muggleborn numbers increased and decreased so as to always be the same fraction of wizardborn numbers, rather than simply being a very rare occurrence tied to the muggle population, the implications would be incredibly significant.

since that's not mentioned at all by any light characters, we can conclude that somewhere between 3 and 10 muggleborn come to hogwarts per year, every year, with an average of 5, giving us a minority percentage of 5-10%.

as a final note: this work also disregards much of pottermore and most anything rowling has said outside the books about the wider wizarding world, assuming a much more diverse and realistic number of magical communities, schools, and traditions. sally-anne perks was born in the united states south and would have attended laveau's school of secrets, in lousiana, had her mom not moved the family to england for business.

it's actually entirely possible that the perks family went back to america and that's why we never hear of sally-anne again after the first book.
Before Draco can leave with the other first years after dinner, Percy Weasley gets him.

“No you don’t, Malfoy, you’ve detention.” Putting a heavy, freckled hand on Draco’s shoulder he turns Draco around and walks him to the staff table. Quirrel is still there, talking animatedly with Flitwick about dueling, but as Draco tries to slink past Quirrel’s attention is once more fixed on him, clinical and unwavering. Draco curls his arms close against his chest as the one gives a hot throb. Weasley just gives him a little shake, as if he might be trying to escape rather than cringing.

“Here is is, ma’am,” Weasley says officiously to McGonagall. “The culprit of the incident I was telling you about earlier, with the first years.” McGonagall has broken off her conversation with Sinistra to watch Quirrel watch Draco. She, at least, seems a bit concerned. Flitwick just seems amused. At least now that they’re here the prefect’s let go of him, and Draco can edge around the other side of McGonagall for protection. He’d rather whatever she wants to do to him get done than whatever the Defense Against The Dark Arts teacher has in mind.

“Thank you, Weasley, I’ll take him from here. Aurora, my apologies, but we’ll just have to finish up later.”

McGonagall is tall for a woman and just settling into her late sixties, the middle age of a well-born witch: her face may be creased but her spine is straight and her shoulders unbowed. When she rises smoothly from her chair and puts an arm around Draco he feels at first terrified and then immensely relieved. She places herself deliberately between Draco and Quirrel and ushers him quickly from the Great Hall— Draco wonders if she might carry him off by the scruff if he tries to drag his heels.

“Thank you,” he ventures, when they’re out of the hall and turning towards the first flight of stairs. The Gryffindor Head of House looks down at him sternly.

“I can’t imagine what you have to thank me for, Mr Malfoy,” she says, but there’s just a bit of a quirk to her stern mouth. Then her brows furrows, and she catches his arm. Draco’s heart shoots right up into his mouth when she pushes back the sleeve where his Dark Mark had been, and frowns at the bare skin.

“You were rubbing your arm, just now, and earlier...” she says. Her brow is furrowed. “Severus has been just the same, I thought perhaps...” she cuts herself off and turns to climb the stairs.

“What? Perhaps the Malfoys got branded young?” Draco snaps, chasing after her, fear giving way to a hot stinging anger. “I would have been less than a year old, to have taken the Mark before Potter managed to do him in, how **precocious** do you think I could have been?”

Precocious— ha! He was **young** and **stupid**, not mature, he was childish enough to think it meant anything **good**, to let a Dark Lord sink that kind of magic into his flesh. To be proud. To feel as if it marked him as a man, rather than... than whatever Voldemort had seen his followers as. Tools. Toys.

“I will thank you not to take such a tone with me, young man,” McGonagall says quellingly. “But I take your point. You must realize, however, that ten years is not such a long span of time for some of us— we who fought your parents’ Lord still remain vigilant.”

That’s interesting. “You don’t think that he’s really dead? Potter just... banished him for a bit?”

McGonagall is quiet for a time, a flight of stairs. “We all have hope,” she says finally. “But in my experience, Mr Malfoy, it is best to take a practical stance on these matters.”
“I think Quirrel does too,” Draco mutters. “I think I’m going to be one of his practicals. He looks like he’s going to bloody well dissect me over a desk first chance.”

“Language, Mr Malfoy! I assure you, no professors at Hogwarts are allowed to cut students into bits, no matter how much any of us might desire to. Professor Quirrel won’t give you any trouble, I’m sure, just as I’m equally certain you won’t be giving him any. Are we clear?”

Draco nods meekly.

*  

Cleaning out the bins and cages of McGonagall’s many sets of living transfiguration subjects is an arduous and smelly task, a punishment completely disproportionate to the crime of hitting Potter only once in his stupid little face. Hedgehogs are fast, nippy bastards and Draco absolutely can’t wait to get to third year again, when he can turn them into pincushions and see how they enjoy having extra holes.

McGonagall sits at her desk, revising her lesson plans and giving him the occasional instruction on tarantulas or tadpoles.

Draco finally gives up and cuffs the sleeves of his robes back to clean out the slug tub and put down more lettuce, and when he’s done he catches McGonagall staring at his brass cuff, her lips pursed into a thin line. A thought occurs to him suddenly, several dots all connecting.

“You must have known Remus Lupin,” he blurs out. “At school, I mean. When he was a student. You’d have been his head of house, too.”

The professor’s gaze goes cool and dangerous. “How did you come to hear of Mr Lupin?” she asks slowly.

“Er. Hagrid. Ma’am.”

McGonagall sighs heavily and pinches the bridge of her sharp nose. “Of course,” she murmurs. Louder, she adds, “I’m sure you are aware, Mr Malfoy, that Mr Lupin is not a member of the Werewolf Registry.”

Draco nods, interested in where this is going.

“And that it would be illegal for any witch or wizard afflicted with the condition of lycanthropy not to register themselves once they came of age.”

Draco nods again.

“And so, as it would be a very grave accusation to say that Mr Lupin might have committed such a crime, I do not feel it appropriate, as a Hogwarts professor, to make such a serious claim. I hope you can understand my position.”

Draco nods a third time. “Well, yes, that’s all very clever, but you’re appealing to my better nature, here, and I’m a Malfoy, so I haven’t got one. Now if I wanted to turn Lupin in for any sort of reward, I can drag you in too as an accessory.”
He immediately regrets saying this—he’s definitely left most of his frontal lobes back in the future—but McGonagall only throws back her head and laughs.

“Oh, you’re a Malfoy, alright! I should give you another detention for trying to threaten your Head of House first day of term. If I were Professor Snape I suppose I’d give you two, for doing so poorly: Dumbledore can have you out on your ear any time he likes, young man, and he might very well like to if he hears you’re getting up to mischief. Finish up those slugs now, if you please.”

Draco does, both his ears burning hotly with mortification.

After the slugs are as clean and happy as it is possible for slugs to get, and Draco’s trying to deal with a few sleepy hamsters, he takes a deep fortifying breath and says, very fast, “I actually just wanted to ask you what he was like. Professor Lupin. I mean, Professor McGonagall, about Mr Lupin, when he was—when he was at school. How he did.”

McGonagall sighs. “He did well,” she says, and she sounds very sad. “He was studious and fairly sensible, a good influence on his friends. Got high marks in quite a wide variety of classes. He had a great deal of potential.”

“He didn’t realize that potential, did he?” Draco says bitterly.

There’s another silence. “I don’t believe he has gotten the chance to, yet.”

Draco squeezes a hamster and it makes an indignant whenk! noise. He drops it hastily before it can bite, and finishes with the bedding and water bottle in a rush of only slightly tearful anger and despair. His whole life. He’s got the whole rest of his bloody life like this. Voldemort could drop stone dead tomorrow and Draco’s just got to keep on being this way. He remembers how patched Professor Lupin’s robes always were. How tired he always seemed.

“Mr Malfoy,” McGonagall says. “I can’t tell you that anything in your life will be easy. But I can assure you that no battle is truly lost until you stop fighting.”

Draco can only nod once more, feeling overwhelmed with resentment and gratitude and nausea. He scrubs his face as furtively as he can manage, and closes the lid on the hamster bin.

“You may be excused,” his head of house says gently. “But don’t hit any more students or threaten any more professors, if you could be so kind.”

“Ma’am,” Draco manages, and flees.

*  

His second first day at Hogwarts is finally over. He collapses into his red-sheeted bed with a long, heartfelt moan.

“Goodnight, Draco,” Neville says from the next bed over.

“Grmnnvm,” goes Draco.

He has a horrible screaming nightmare full of long fangs and rough hands and comes awake only
after having smacked right into the curved tower wall. He’d tried to run in his sleep. He sits on the floor, bewildered and in quite a lot of pain, and Neville and Potter come over and goggle at him. The three other boys stay in bed and make complaining noises.


“That’s really bleeding quite a lot,” Longbottom says. “Oh, no. Oh.” He dashes off to the washroom to sick up.

Potter, very practically, pulls a corner of Draco’s bedsheet over and holds it to his fountaining nose.

“Tilt your head back and swallow,” he says.

“You know how to treat injuries this young?” Draco says, somewhat nasally. “Merlin’s saggy tits, Potter, were you off slaying monsters in the muggle world too?”

“It’s a bloody nose, Malfoy, not an injury,” Potter says. “Don’t be a girl.”

“What do girls have to do with my nose?”

“I— it’s just an expression.”

“Were you a girl in the muggle world?”

“What? No!”

Draco is relieved. One case of Blaise is quite enough for any year.

“My cousin hits me sometimes, is all,” Potter says. “You remind me of him. Can’t think why.”

“I said I was sorry!” Draco says.

“Not to me.”

“Oh. Well. I’m sorry.”

Potter’s actually surprised. “Er. Alright then.”

They sit there quietly, feeling incredibly awkward. Draco snuffles a few times. His nose is still going.

“You can go back to sleep,” Draco says. “I’m alright— neither injured nor a girl.”

“Right,” Potter says uncertainly. “I— you’re— do you have a lot of nightmares like that? It sounded pretty rough.”

“I don’t know yet,” Draco says. “It’s a bit new.” He’s had pretty bad nightmares for more than a year but the screaming and running thing is a recent development.

“Oh. Because of your—”

“Yes.” He’s got his bitten arm tucked up close to his chest.

“Can I see it?”

“See what.”
“Your scar. I’ll show you mine.”

“I’ve already seen your stupid scar. Everyone’s seen your stupid scar. I bet you gave fifty autographs out to people who wanted to have a look at your bloody stupid scar.”

“Christ, alright! You could have just said it was private or something! Ron’s right, you’re really awful, you know that?”

“Oh, sit down. Here, look. Feast your stupid eyes.”

Potter gives him a good long glare with his stupid eyes, but then looks at Draco’s arm. In the soft light spilling out of the washroom it’s just bright enough to see every glimmering fang mark.


Whenever it’d be sufficiently dramatic for you to swoon about portentously, Draco refrains from saying. Instead he goes, “Not really. It just looks bad.”

Potter pokes his brass cuff. “What’s this?”

“Identity bracelet. If I go marauding around as a wolf, and some hero comes and blows me to bits, they’ll be able to tell it was me. On account of the bits won’t turn human again.”

“That’s... really sad,” Potter says.

Draco gives a little shrug that he hopes comes off as noble and stoic. It feels a lot better to have a tragic future in front of a sympathetic audience.

Potter grins suddenly. “Hey, is it going to stay the same size as long as you’re human? Will it cut off your circulation when you grow up? Is your hand going to dry up and fall off eventually?”

“It will grow with me, because it is magical, and we are wizards,” Draco says very slowly and clearly. “Now go to bed, you’re awful too.”

A bit later, Draco realizes as he drifts off, that that was probably the longest civil conversation he’s ever had with Potter.

I’m growing up, he thinks, and giggles crazily into his pillow.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*

Breakfast with Gryffindors, then an incredibly boring lesson on plant biology, then a rosehip dissection practical, then a brief, giggly, and incredibly stupid knife-fight between Thomas and Patil that ends with some sealing charms and a good scolding from Professor Sprout when Patil gets her thumb slashed up.

Draco would never have expected it, but it appears the Gryffindors always stayed on best behavior in Potions: in Herbology, if something could be picked up and whacked against a friend, it would be. The same went for objects that might be thrown, dropped down a robe collar, or licked under social pressure, and once one or two Hufflepuffs get caught in the crossfire, it’s war. Even Granger, who had wanted very badly to seem far too mature for such childish nonsense, can’t resist the opportunity to sneak up on Draco and stick a cold, wet slice of rosehip to the back of his neck, making him squeal at an impressively humiliating register.

“Why did you let us have knives?” he demands of Professor Sprout at one point. Weasley’s managed to slit the back of Draco’s robes from collar to pants, and is laughing his stupid ginger head off, for all that he actually lost his house twenty points with his deranged stunt.

“Reparo ,” goes Sprout, unperturbed. Then she pats him on the head. “It’s all fun and games until someone loses an eye, lad. Then it’s educational. Now! Class, who’s managed to keep hold of a hypantheum?”

In Charms with the Ravenclaws, Draco is dismayed to discover his magical core is an even smaller, wispier thing than he’d thought. He’s held off on actually using his wand, afraid to confirm anything, all the way until now, when Flitwick finishes his lecture on the six cardinal wand movements: swish, flick, slash, tap, wave, flourish, he could recite them backwards while standing on his head. He could probably demonstrate them while standing on his head, although Flitwick merely asks for them to practice the movements until they can deliberately cast sparks from each.

“We’ll be at softening charm by the end of the week, and I’m a hippogriff’s backside,” Draco mutters. Still, he goes through the movements: the extensive scarring on his wand arm takes enough adjusting to that he merely comes off as well-bred and privately tutored, not preternaturally skillful. Padma Patil casts sparks first, followed by her Gryffindor twin, then Roper and MacDougal. Hermione casts sparks once and then can’t again for ten increasingly frantic minutes. Finnegan goes off with— as Draco alone expected— a colossal BANG! that sets Goldstein on fire, and then he bursts into delighted laughter. After that it’s half an hour of Flitwick patiently keeping everyone from igniting one another for too long.

Draco concentrates on getting each form just so, past the tightness in his elbow that drags too many motions too far to the right, past the stiffness in his ring and little fingers that make his gestures too sharp. He should have done this the very night he’d gotten his wand, but he hadn’t. He’d been scared. Well, he’s got no excuses, now.

The room fills over the course of an hour with the bright, sharp, living smell of magic, as sparks of all
colors are cast with increasing confidence and regularity. Granger’s have scaled from a dim red up to blue-white and she glows with fierce pride. Finnegan continues to explode erratically, laughing and whooping each time. Thomas is starting to ease into his calm, businesslike style of casting. Brown, serious and giggly by turns, her smile yet to pick up that calculating edge, the Patil twins not yet split into house allegiances. Longbottom is as always far more worried than his natural capability warrants. Weasley gets his old castoff wand to work for him out of sheer vicious force of will, and Potter is...

Potter isn’t anything like how he will be, one day. Not at eleven, not with Voldemort just an old bad story to him, not a mere month free from his sad muggle life. He is full of joy and wonder, clumsy as a crup let loose from its pen for the first time, all wobble and wag.

It’s... ghastly, Draco thinks, to see the Gryffindors like this. Gruesome: all the years peeled back and this vulnerable, innocent core of all his enemies exposed to him unknowing. Thomas at sixteen, just as likely to deck you as hex, Finnegan with a vicious jinx always just behind his scowl, Longbottom grown every bit as big as Greg and a lot more ready to bite. Brown and Patil, two edges of the same viciously pretty sword, butterfly pins enchanted to sting. Weasley and Potter and Granger, Draco’s sworn enemies, brilliantly violent, and that long exciting fifth year they’d all played soldiers. Dumbledore’s Army, and the next year all the lines that had been drawn were patrolled, defended, real curses quick to everyone’s lips, wands out in the hallways, real fear settling into everyone’s hearts, there to stay. There to stain.

And how far did Draco go, in those years? The wand he holds in his soft little child’s hand has cast *imperio*. It’s *crucio*. It hasn’t cast the killing curse but only because he couldn’t, because he was a coward, because he was a child still, even at sixteen, and he had hoped all the adults would say, *it’s alright, Draco, we’ll take care of it* and finish the war up among themselves. He had hated Potter for six years then and still somehow thought that the war did not eat children.

The classroom is very warm and bright. Draco has both palms against the table and is breathing fast and shallow. When young Granger touches his shoulder he flinches away.

“I’m alright,” he says sickly. “It just takes a bit out of you, doesn’t it?”

She frowns. “I suppose,” she says doubtfully. She casts a string of bluebell flames that hang in the air for seconds at a time, a dancing bouquet, and laughs delightedly. “Oh! Draco, look!”

“Up Ravenclaw!” shouts Padma, and is swatted by her sister. Hermione concentrates fiercely, and produces crimson bells the next cast, to a round of applause from Parvati.

“Show off,” mutters Weasley from behind them.

“At least some of us have something to show!” Draco snaps back. “Whinesly.”

Granger gives him a great big smile, and Draco is warmed entirely despite himself.

Then Weasley deliberately sets his sleeve on fire and Granger whirls around and sets alight his hair. The rest of the class proceeds apace.

* 

Without detention, Draco has a few hours to kill in the Gryffindor common room before bedtime. It’s
intimidating, being surrounded by so many Gryffindors, sprawled all over the couches and tables in
their red ribbons and gold charms, shoving and squabbling. There’s at least a dozen free-roaming
cats, and a cluster of tall, handsome sixth years are playing a game with someone’s owl that involve
it landing on everyone’s head in turn. As Draco watches, it messes all down the back of a pale girl’s
robes, and the scoring system of the game is made apparent in a flurry of shrieking and laughter.

Draco clutches *What About Werewolves* tightly to his chest and goes to sit in a window seat. A big
fat calico sniffs him with interest, then oozes into his lap and purrs imperiously until he scratches her
ears.

By fourth year, Slytherins are fairly well self-controlled: Draco has to admit that he loves an
audience, and has never been particularly restrained in his self expression, but still, it wasn’t like he
carried on all hours of the day and night. The Slytherin common room was—is?— for quiet
conversation, debate, tutoring. The unrestrained noise of games and fighting are— were?— private
matters for the dorms.

Draco wonders who’s playing games with Greg, in his dorm this time around without Vince’s radio,
or Theo’s exceptionally violent chess set. Perhaps they’ll transfer Blaise over sooner, if Draco can
figure out who to ask.

The stars are coming out: the Gryffindor tower has a truly gorgeous view of the grounds and the
night sky, each window in the round Common Room with a different vantage point. Now that Draco
really looks, though, he’s almost certain the tower windows have been charmed to show the view
from a different direction than they actually point.

Longbottom clears his throat, and Draco nearly jumps out of his skin. The cat on his lap makes a
sharp scolding noise, and digs her claws in.

“Sorry!” Longbottom says. “Sorry, I didn’t mean! I just wanted to, erm. Sorry.”

Draco clutches his robes over his heart and gives Longbottom a look of deep reproach, and
Longbottom wilts gratifyingly.

“I’ll go,” he mumbles.

“No, you can come sit with me, if that’s what you wanted to ask,” Draco says. “Take this cat, please,
she’s crushing my legs.”

Longbottom sits and attempts to take the cat. Unfortunately, she’s huge, and Longbottom is three
years away from any significant upper body strength. The cat stays put.

“Sorry,” Longbottom goes.

“It’s alright, I’ll just sit here until you learn severing charms,” Draco says graciously. “Then you can
cut loose my top half and drag me off.”

Longbottom laughs. He’s got a funny laugh, surprisingly deep, and very abrupt: he’s not at all a boy
who expects to laugh at anything.

“You’ll be here awhile,” Longbottom says. “I’m hopeless, I think.”

“Sure. You didn’t even make any sparks at all during charms. Not a one. You’re a total washout,
Longbottom, a disgrace.”

Longbottom looks shyly pleased. “Well. I guess I did do a little.”
“Maybe we could set this cat on fire? Though if she still doesn’t get off me, I’ll be in serious trouble.”

Longbottom prods the cat. The cat purrs louder.

“What are you two doing?” Granger says loudly. “Are you reading? What are you reading? I’m reading *Wizard Bird*, it’s a wizard novel, by a wizard. Lavender gave it to me and said I had to read it even though it’s fiction, because everyone else has, have you two?”

“Where did you come from?” Draco asks, although he already knows: from muggle hell.

“Lavender. She wanted to play chess with Weasley, though I can’t imagine why, he’s quite the rudest boy in our year, and considering we’ve got you, that’s really saying something, isn’t it. Can I pet your cat?”

“She’s not my cat.”

“Whose is she?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care. Please get her off, I can’t feel my legs.”

Granger picks up the cat quite easily, and seems completely delighted to do so.

“What an excellent cat,” she says. “You are, aren’t you? Aren’t you? Yes. Yes, you are. You’re an excellent cat. I wish I could have a cat, but my mum’s allergic. I might be able to once I know the spells to fix that, but I haven’t found them yet, and anyway, I don’t think it’s really on, casting spells on your own parents, I mean, unless you’re certain not to blow their noses off or anything. Have either of you done it?”

Longbottom and Draco look at one another.

“I’m still at sparks,” Draco says.

“I don’t really, um, my parents aren’t really around,” Longbottom says quietly. Granger looks shocked and upset, and sits down between them on the window seat.

“I’m sorry, Neville, I didn’t mean to bring anything up. Are they, er, like Harry’s?”

“No, they’re fine, Hermione, I mean, they’re in St. Mungo’s. The hospital. They were hurt in the war, though, and so they’re all funny in the head. They’re fine otherwise. But they can’t take care of me, my gran does it for them. They give me presents, sometimes, when they think it’s my birthday, though.”

Granger looks really sad. “I’m so sorry.”

Neville shrugs. “It’s alright.”

“It was Bellatrix, wasn’t it,” Draco says. He hadn’t even meant to say anything, but he finds he’s sick again, thinking of his own parents, how they couldn’t take care of him either because of the war, thinking of Bellatrix. Of how he’s mocked Neville for this exact thing, for the holes in his family that Draco’s family had torn.

“What— how’d you know?”

“She’s my aunt, Bellatrix, she’s my mother’s sister. She’s sick and evil and I hate her. She’s actually in love with the Dark Lord, actually— thinks they could be married, or something, *in love*. With this
monster, this inhuman—she— brought him people to torture— as gifts— these little performances—“

“Draco, it’s alright,” Neville says, and puts his hand on Draco’s shoulder. He’s broken down crying, completely, a little boy scared of monsters.

Granger puts the cat back in Draco’s lap and touches his other shoulder, and Draco chokes and snuffles and tries to pull himself back together.

“It’s not even my parents,” he gets out. “They’re fine— now—they’re happy...”

By the time he’s cried out, Granger is hugging him, and Neville’s come up with a grubby handkerchief from somewhere. Draco wipes his face.

“That was embarrassing,” he says.


“Well, everyone cries,” Granger says, in her brisk, lecturing sort of way. “It’s perfectly natural, you know, it’s not as if boys are born without tear ducts, everyone feels strong emotions from time to time, and anyway, haven’t you been through trauma just recently? You’re bound to have a lot of feelings to work through, and I shouldn’t think those feelings are ‘hooray!’ We don’t think anything less of you.”

Neville nods seriously.

Draco feels entirely off balance. “You’ve known me two days, you could hardly think more of me,” he points out. “And I’m not a nice person, even outside of the crying.”

“Yes, you fish for compliments far too often,” Granger agrees.

“No, I mean—” Draco realizes her mouth is twitching at the corners. “You’re making fun of me! Granger! How could you, I have trauma! ”

She just laughs at him, then leans back against the window and opens her book.

“I have the other Graveworthy books,” Neville says. “Shop Gods and all, I meant to say. My dad had the whole collection, I used to read him Animagus Winter when I visited him in hospital, because gran said he hadn’t managed to finish it, um, before the end of the war. So if you like the first one, I can ask gran to send the rest over.”

“That’s very kind of you,” Granger says.

“Wren dies,” says Draco, very specifically unkindly.

“What?” says Granger.

“Wren d—” and then Neville punches him in the shoulder to shut him up. “Longbottom! How could you, I have trauma.”

“You’ll have more, too, if you go telling her things like that,” Neville threatens.

“My hero,” says Granger, grinning, and Neville smiles shyly back.
*I include Ellis Graveworthy and his novels with all due respect to the incredible, inimitable, and inspiring Copperbadge, who with any luck will never notice.
The next morning, Draco gets the first hateful howler, dropped in front of his egg and sausage by a barn owl who doesn’t even bother to land before winging hastily away. Draco is completely puzzled, and thinks for a long moment that he must have been delivered someone else’s mail instead. Then the red envelope opens itself up:

“—NG MORE THAN A DISGUSTING ABOMINATION SET IN AMONG INNOCENT CHILDREN TO FEAST ON THEIR BLOOD, I DEMAND—”

Draco blanches, grabs the howler, rolls it up, and stuffs it into a jug of pumpkin juice. He crams the stopper into the jug and sits back, feeling faint with the shock. The bottle rattles and warbles on the table, but it’s now blessedly indistinct.

“How’d you do that?” one of the twin Weasleys says.

“Do what?” Draco asks.

“You just grabbed it, mate!” says the other twin.

“Picked it up like nothing!”

“Howlers eat right through chilling charms—”

“— not to mention silencers. You can’t just—”

“—pick one up—”

“—and pickle it!”

The jug of pumpkin juice goes off with a BANG, shooting the flaming cork straight into the enchanted ceiling. It doesn’t come back down. Dark orange smoke pours from the bottle.

“—DROWN YOU IN A SACK LIKE ANY OTHER UNWANTED MONGREL PUP!”

That seems to be the end of it, though, and shortly thereafter the bottle disappears with the subtle pop of House Elf magic. One of the older Gryffindors applauds, and then there’s some additional scattered clapping.

Draco wants to curl up and die. Unfortunately, a Weasley has hold of his hand. Draco really wants Weasleys to stop grabbing him, if he’d known how often it would happen in Gryffindor then he would have just walked over to Hufflepuff, hat or no hat.

“George, look at this,” says one. “No burns.”

The other one gives an impressed whistle. “Does it hurt?”
Draco sneers. “What, being held captive by insane gingers? Only my dignity.”

They both laugh. “No, your fingers,” they say together.

“...Stings a bit. Let me go!”

He’s finally released.

“Young Malfoy, you just stuck your hand straight through very strong—”

“—very serious incendiary spellwork.”

Draco scowls. “Well, I suppose being a disgusting abomination comes with perks.”

“That’s brilliant.”

“And useful.”

His hand is grabbed again, and before he can pull it back, a Weasley’s tapped his wand to his palm and cast a Jelly-Fingers Jinx.

“Hey!”

“Did it work?” asks the other twin.

Draco’s hand is pressed against the table. When it doesn’t stick or squish, the twins whistle again. Draco, fed up with all this, draws his own wand.

“Leave me alone,” he says fiercely.

“Hey, no need for that, young Malfoy,” says one, holding his hands up innocently.

“It’s all in good fun,” says the other, releasing him. They retreat down the table with exaggerated deference, then start up a whispered conversation with their black friend that has the three of them excitedly peering at him every ten seconds. Draco gives them a two-fingered salute, finishes his eggs, and runs off to Herbology for another exciting day of being gawked, pawed, and yelled at by a bunch of rambunctiously terrible lion cubs.

He gets a handful of ripe compost down the back of Ron’s robe, though, and it makes him feel a little better.

* 

On Thursday, Draco gets half a dozen Howlers, and is hugely entertained to find he can crumple them up into little balls and lob them at the twin Weasleys, as if they were live coals and he were the only man in the world with dragonhide gloves. The twins retaliate by bat ting the screeching wads of red paper around with serving trays, sending nearly every other Gryffindor in range scrambling for the far ends of the tables. The fun is eventually halted by the Prefect Weasley, Ron standing behind him in perfect scowling miniature, and a threat of detention for the three of them if they don’t cut it out.

“How else do you propose I handle my hate mail?” Draco asks. “I can’t let them just go off, you
know, they’ve got some pretty strong language and there are *children here.*” He makes his eyes very large. Prefect Weasley looks unamused. Ron looks actively murderous.

“I’ll talk to McGonagall,” the older boy says. “We might be able to get the letters diverted. But for now would you *stop flinging them about,* you could hurt someone.”

“I’m already hurt,” Draco tries. “I have a trauma. You should be more sensitive about that, Prefect Weasley.”


“The poor wee lad has emotional problems,” the other twin says.

“I have a tragic past,” Draco says. “It’s extremely sad. Now I use humor to cope with my deep inner pain.”

“I’ll show you pain,” Ron cuts in, “You nasty, black-hearted, spoiled little—”

“Merlin’s pants would you all *be quiet!*” Prefect Weasley shouts at a fairly respectable volume. “*Sit down and finish your breakfast without sending anyone to the bloody infirmary, is that SO MUCH to ask of you lot!*”

“Wow, hello, mum,” says a twin.

“Lovely to see you this morning,” says the other. “Where’s Percy?”

“SIT DOWN AND SHUT IT.”

Draco sits down. “I’m going to cry,” he announces, though his eyes are perfectly dry. Being a prick has put him in too good a mood for even fake tears.

He sighs. The twins sigh. The indistinctly screaming Howler balls burn themselves one by one to ash.

“This is getting added on to my tragic backstory,” he mutters. “Ordered about by a fucking Weasley.”

“Language, young Malfoy.”

“There are children here.”

“Sod off!”

After the fun dies down, though, there’s nothing to distract him from the fact that Defense Against The Dark Arts is today, this morning, soon, and getting sooner. Quirrel’s already left the Teacher’s Table to go prepare for it. Draco’s classmates are finishing their plates, pocketing breakfast rolls, shuffling their bags together. Draco stabs his scrambled eggs into a million fluffy crumbs and wonders if he can just sit here until lunch.

“Draco,” Granger says.

“I’m eating,” Draco says, and puts a yellow crumb in his mouth. “Mm. Nutritious. I’ll see you at lunch.”

“You can’t *skip class,*” Granger says, incorrectly. “Draco!”
“Stop saying my name like that!” Draco exclaims. “Hermione. See! How do you like it!”

“I like it just fine. Draco, are you quite alright?”

Draco sighs deeply. “No, I think Quirrel is going to hex me inside-out the minute I stick my stupid werewolf snout into his classroom and everyone will go ‘goodness gracious, Professor, that was very educational!’ and my mother will be tremendously sad I went and got myself offed because I thought getting an education inside a cursed old pile like this dump was a good idea. A private tutor wouldn’t hex me inside out. A private tutor wouldn’t hex me even a little.”

“Draco, no one’s going to hex you.”

“Hermione, I appreciate that you are very clever for a muggleborn even at eleven, but you are also very wrong.”

Hermione looks stung. “Well, fine, then, see if I care when anyone hexes you! You don’t have to be so— so— so bloody nasty, it’s a terrible defense mechanism and isn’t going to endear you to anyone, even people like me who want to give everyone a second chance.”

She flounces off. Her book bag’s about twice the size of anyone else's, but she really does manage a respectable flounce.

Draco eats all the rest of his eggs stubbornly, until he’s nearly the last person there. Even Neville has abandoned him, gone off with Seamus to talk about their charms homework, and be generally faithless sods who also don’t care if Draco gets hexed inside-out.

“GO TO CLASS, MALFOY!” Prefect Weasley barks at him. Draco jumps three feet in startled terror, grabs his book bag, and legs it out of the Great Hall at top speed. He spends the rest of the trip to the Defense classroom thinking of all the cutting remarks he could have made instead.

*

Quirrel ignores him the whole class, which is a disjointed stammering mess of lecture, term overview, motivational speech, and convoluted asides. Draco’s arm doesn’t bother him, though the smell in the room does: garlic, imperfectly mummified specimens, mouldering books, cursed junk, and something very, very, very Dark. Quirrel smells like Voldemort. He’s got the monster’s scent all over him, it’s inescapable in a closed classroom. It smells like getting the wrong end of a snake dragged over the inside of your sinuses. But all anyone else notices is the garlic.

“That wasn’t so bad, now, was it,” Hermione says condescendingly, as they’re packing up to go. Quirrel looks up at them from the front of the classroom. He looks at Draco. Draco freezes like a mouse in the shadow of a hawk, a rabbit in front of a wolf. A rat eye to eye with a hooded cobra. He freezes like anyone with a working brain freezes when stuck in a small and smelly classroom with the Dark Lord.

“Draco Malfoy,” says whatever the fresh fucking hell Quirrel is.

“I’VE GOT TO GO SORRY,” Draco squeaks, bundles all of his things and Hermione’s things up into his arms, and zips out of the room so fast he may have actually apparated. Hermione catches up to him down a hallway and around a corner, where Draco has scrunched himself behind the legs of a suit of armor.
“He really scares you,” she says slowly.

“Ten points to Gryffindor,” Draco snaps.

“He didn’t look at you all class.”

“But then he looked at me.” Draco’s shivering all over. How did he ever think he could actually defeat the Dark Lord? At eleven? An extremely explodable eleven? Draco is not going to defeat the Dark Lord, not at eleven, not at sixteen, not at a hundred and fucking twelve. Draco is going to hide behind this suit of armor forever.

Neville has come and found them by now, apparently done being absolute best chums forever with Finnegan. “Is he alright? Is he having another— thing?”

“He’s scared of Professor Quirrel.”

Neville goes and sits down by Draco. “Well, I suppose that makes sense.”

“See!” Draco cries.

Neville pats Draco’s head tentatively, as if Draco were an actual canine at this very moment, which, if he actually was, he’d be trying to take Neville’s hand off at the wrist. Sadly enough, it actually makes Draco feel better. If Neville were Greg-sized already it would probably feel even more reassuring, but he can’t have everything. Or even very much.

“Let’s go and get lunch, I’m starving,” Hermione says impatiently. “You can have another nervous breakdown where there’s food, and I expect everything will feel a good deal more manageable after you’ve eaten.”

Draco sulks out from behind the armor. Just to spite her he doesn’t have a nervous breakdown during lunch even a little.

He does get greasy fingerprints all over the last chapter of *What About Werewolves* and makes good and fucking sure she sees him at it. She just rolls her eyes and casts a remarkably disciplined *scourgify* on the book right afterwards, but it’s the thought that counts.

*

It’s a glorious fine sunny afternoon and they’ve the rest of the day off. Draco heads outside after lunch with most of the rest of the first years, Granger trailing along after him clutching her homework things and Longbottom trailing a bit further behind, having gone and fetched his bloody toad, and they all go and sit by the lake in the crisp september sunshine.

Draco eventually wears out every avenue of fretful contemplation, and pushes Neville into the lake. Then he keeps pushing him over every time he tries to flounder up out of the muddy shore. It’s tremendous fun until Neville gives a little sniffle, whereupon Hermione realizes that Injustice has been Perpetrated, puffs up like a kneazle, and pushes *Draco* into the lake with a shrill cry of “See how you like it, you bully!”

“I’ve done nothing to deserve this!” Draco wails, slipping around in the mud. “Unhand me!”
“Apologize to Neville!”

“Never!”

Hermione puts mud in his hair. Neville helps. Draco screams and kicks and bites Neville’s arm, whereupon they all freeze up at once.

Draco very carefully lets Neville go. Hermione, her face gone greyish-pale beneath the tan, pulls the boy’s soggy sleeve up. Because of the loose, wet wool of Neville’s robe, Draco’s teeth hadn’t so much as reddened the skin beneath. The three of them let out the exact same breath of relief.

“I’m sorry, Neville,” Draco says shakily.

“No harm done,” Neville says, just as unsteadily. Then he picks Trevor up and puts him on Draco’s head. The bloody thing immediately pisses all over his face. Draco screams again and tackles Neville, pummeling indiscriminately, Hermione yells “Boys!” and hits them with a stick, and things proceed disgracefully from there.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Friday morning arrives as a misty drizzle, shrouding the grounds beneath Gryffindor Tower. Draco spends a while before the breakfast trip to the Great Hall peering out of every window in the common room in turn.

The Slytherin common room has a large painting of Hogwarts from across the lake, but it’s been stuck at noon since 1832, and only reflects the weather accurately for that particular hour each day. By the time any particular student has learned enough chronomancy to attempt a fix on the painting, they’re old enough to be sentimental about it, and so generation after generation of Slytherin has resorted to sending a random firstie up the stairs to the closest window on the ground floor to see if they need to ready their rain gear.

Just peering outside from the common room lacks a certain panache, Draco feels, but it makes up for it in convenience and some genuinely splendid views. The many towers and turrets of Hogwarts rise from the heavy mist like solemn grey islands from a silver sea. Draco was right to come back here. He belongs here, this school his family has attended for so long — the Blacks as well as the formerly-Beauxbaton Malfoys — supported for so long, funded and governed and grown up in. It belongs to him.

“Wow,” says tiny Potter, leaning out the window beside Malfoy. “Cool.”

“Don’t lean so far out or I’ll have to push you,” Draco says, catching Potter’s robe scruff. “It will look just like a tragic accident. Boy hero, defeated by gravity, very embarrassing, wizarding world forced to pretend they never thought Potter was all that special anyway.”

“God, you’re so horrible!” Potter exclaims, sounding angry. “What’s wrong with you?” He swats Draco’s hand off his robe and storming away.


* *

He doesn’t receive any more howlers at breakfast. Apparently Prefect Weasley is good for something, and that something is ruining his fun. But he does get his mother’s owl, who lands in front of him with a dish-rattling thump to deliver a lavender-scented letter and a package of expensive sweets.

“Wow, he’s huge,” Hermione marvels.

“Boudica is an eagle owl,” Draco explains, smug at knowing more facts than her. “She’s half a stone and has a two meter wingspan and knows a dozen different commands. Boudica, bow.”

Boudica gives a cursory nod, then picks up Draco’s bacon and attempts to feed it to him.

“Bou— no! I can feed myself, shoo!”
She hops back, displaying a good measure of her two meter wingspan, and steps in Neville’s muesli. With an affronted screech, she flaps a few times and takes off.

“She’s gorgeous,” Hermione says wistfully. “I want an owl. I don’t think mum’s allergic to owls...”

“My gran is,” Neville volunteers. “She always gets my great uncle to handle the post. She says it’s because they’re filthy.”

“They’re not!” Draco says, irrationally insulted.

“Well, I didn’t say it,” Neville protests.

“Birds spend hours every day preening themselves,” Hermione says, transparently anxious to be the one who knows most about owls now. “I read that owls—”

Another owl diffidently taps Draco’s elbow, making him jump. It’s a tired, somewhat raggy looking little thing, obviously a rental from the big antitheft leg band. It gives him a letter in a flimsy white muggle envelope, sealed shut with some sort of paste rather than wax, then fluffs its feathers, ingratiates its way onto a delighted Hermione’s shoulder, and dozes off.

The letter inside is on the same sort of paper as the envelope, thin and slick-grained and white as eggshell, unpleasantly *machined*. But more unpleasant than *that* is the smell of another werewolf that rises from the folded page and sends all the hair on his arms and neck prickling to attention. The werewolf’s older than Draco. Younger than Greyback. And very ill.

To the young Mssr Malfoy, it reads, in the same neat hand that graded his classwork all third year.

*I would like to offer my sympathies for your condition, my admiration for your conduct, and my congratulations for your sorting of House. You have been set on a long and difficult road, but I write this letter in hopes of assuring you that it is not, necessarily, a lonely one. I offer freely whatever support I can provide as a fellow traveler, and sign myself*

*Your friend, (should you care to accept one)*

*Mssr Moony.*

Draco reads the letter over again, and then a third and fourth time, and then hands it to Hermione, who’s bent over his shoulder so closely he’s starting to breathe her frizzy hair.


Draco takes the letter back and reads it again, then lets Neville have a look. Lupin had always taken his students very seriously, which had felt wonderful at the time; judging by the painstakingly meticulous wording of the letter, Draco thinks now that perhaps that’s less a reflection of how mature Draco must have been at thirteen, and more about how Lupin didn’t actually know how to talk to children.
And it is, obviously, Lupin. What other werewolf in England has a wizarding education and a reluctance to out themselves? And hardly a knut to his name, judging by the muggle stationery supplies and the cut-rate rental owl. And yet the man would still want to try and reach out and help Draco, a rich, powerful, protected— dark, evil, Deatheater— Malfoy. His family destroyed Lupin’s, too.

It’s pathetic. It’s sad. Draco’s not even surprised to be caught on the edge of tears, just angry. The war, the war, the fucking war. Snape and Quirrel at the teacher’s table tucking into roast ham and Lupin’s off starving in a ditch somewhere and it’s not fair, and Draco never had to really care about all this before, and he’s certainly not fucking well equipped to do so now.

The muggle envelope contains another, empty envelope inside it, besides the letter. It’s addressed to Mssr Moony’s Reserved Shelf, Athena’s Owls, Haste Alley, and Draco suppose that makes sense, with how ditches for starving in are probably difficult for owls to locate.

He pushes his breakfast aside, fishes out his pen and some parchment from his satchel, and gets stuck. What the hell is he going to write? Hello Professor Lupin, I’m from the future, and shouldn’t even be a werewolf at all, and don’t really know anything about how to stop what’s going to happen, which is that your life gets even more terrible I think, p.s Dumbledore hired Voldemort for some reason, what the fuck. Your chum Draco.

“Are you writing back? What are you going to say? I suppose you must have a lot to talk about. Or do you? He’s a stranger. Is that creepy?” Hermione frowns. “My dad always warned me about strange men that show up around playgrounds, trying to be little girls’ friends, and not to fall for it, but I don’t see any reason why little boys couldn’t also be kidnapped and chopped up and sold to China. Did you know, a human kidney sells for a hundred thousand pounds or more?”

Draco stares at Hermione in shocked horror. Neville’s gone all greenish.

“Merlin, is that a regular problem for muggles?” Draco asks. “I mean, you lot go around chopping each other up and selling off bits like newts for the apothecary?”

“What does China use the kidneys for?” Neville asks. “Do they—are they—eaten?”

“No!” Hermione looks, of all things, insulted. “It’s for surgeries. If one of your organs dies you can get a surgeon to snip it out and sew a new one in. But the new one’s got to come from somewhere, so sometimes people are abducted—not often, I don’t think.”


“Of course not. Wait, wizards can? Like—lungs, and legs, and things?”

Neville, apparently at the limit of his meager store of medical knowledge, looks to Draco.

“Not necessarily,” Draco says. “If it’s a physical injury, like splinching, or a cauldron explosion or a transfiguration accident or something, then yes, the missing part can be regrown. If it’s spell damage, like a curse or potion, then it’s more difficult, because the new part might come in all twisted and poisoned. That’s why you see Aurors go around looking like old rag dolls, they can’t heal right from all the curses.”

Hermione frowns. “Why don’t wizards go and work at regular Hospitals, then? Everyone there would have nonmagical damage, a wizard could heal everything.”

“A wizard can’t heal much of anything on a Muggle,” Draco protests. “They don’t have magical
cores, they’re just mundane animals—"

“Excuse me!?”

“— like animals, alright, keep your hair on, Granger, I mean you can’t give them potions or anything, it’d be like feeding them the individual ingredients. No resonance. And if you transfigured them a new leg it would only be spellwork, not part of them, and it’d drop off or dissolve or something. Mud— Muggleborns always come into our world and then pitch fits that we’re not spending all our lives fixing every last little problem all their unfortunate friends and relatives could ever have, but we can’t. ”

Hermione scowls at her toast. “That can’t be right, I think you’re just being— being racist. I’m going to go look it up.”

“Well, fine.”

“Fine!”

“Guys, we should get to Potions,” Neville cuts in, keen to stop the unexpected unpleasantness. “We could get there early, and, and get the good seats...?”

“Oh, hell, but I’ve still got—” Draco waves his quill unhappily. “I need to send Lu— Mooney, something, while the owl’s here.” He casts around, trying to think of what he can possibly say.

To Mssr Mooney: thank you for your letter, I hope you are well. Being a Gryffindor is awful, ditto the Werewolf Situation. I hope you had a better time of it than I am so far. Yours respectfully, Draco Lucius Malfoy.

It’s a short, pathetic scrap of parchment that barely fills out the envelope, and his handwriting could certainly be better. In a fit of inspiration, Draco grabs up the package of fine candies his mother’s sent along with Boudica, and offers it with the letter to the sleepy owl he has to pry from Hermione’s shoulder.

“Here, deliver this too,” he orders.

The owl looks at the package, then looks at Draco incredulously. It goes “Pweep,” which is apparently small scrubby rental owl for “No bloody way, mate.” Compared side by side, the candy box is fairly sizable.

“Alright, alright,” Draco sighs, and draws his wand. “Wingardium Leviosa!”

The package loses perhaps a gram of weight. Draco casts again and the package loses possibly another gram or two.

“Damn. Hermione! Lighten this for me, would you?”

“I haven’t done any lightening charms before,” Hermione says. “Also I’m not your maid.”

“No, you’re my dearest bosom friend who’s got a non-infantile magical core, and who’s going to lighten this for me and my adorable small pathetic baby owl who desperately needs a heroic Gryffindor’s heroly help.”

“Oh my god, alright,” Hermione says, but she’s laughing and drawing her wand, so that’s good. “How do you say it?”
Draco walks her through the spell, which she gets after only two tries, and then Neville wants to learn it too, then Lavender and Parvati, and in fairly short order several spoons, a slice of toast, the sweets package, and an ominously smoking parchment roll are scudding about over the tabletop like little clouds. Lavender tries to hit Parvati with the smoldering part of the parchment, and Parvati tries to hit Lavender with the buttered side of the toast. *Gryffindors!* Draco does his best to ignore them both.

“There,” he says to the owl, “I don’t know how long this’ll last, so you’d better go quick.” He ties one end of the floating package’s decorative ribbon to the owl’s leg, so it looks like a small fuzzy child with a rectangular balloon.

The owl goes “*Pweep,*” again, which might actually just mean “*Sod off,*” takes Draco’s letter in its beak, and flaps off with the package bobbing along behind it.

Draco heaves a great big sigh of relief and nausea. His feelings about Lupin— about just about everyone and everything right now actually— are still a painful, confusing mess. But he feels a little better about having done something to make up for... well, everyone and everything.

“Right, Potions,” he says. “Let’s go to Potions. Let’s go to Potions and blow ourselves up. Today might as well be horrible from start to finish.”

* 

The Gryffindors don’t blow themselves up. They *do* get mercilessly picked on by a grown man, which is significantly less funny than it seemed when Draco was eleven for the first time and a Slytherin. It’s also less funny now that he knows that if it came right down to it, Snape would probably actually murder them. Why not? He killed Dumbledore, when it came down to it. Draco was a stupid adolescent who didn’t know what he was doing and couldn’t go through with it in any case, and Snape was a grown man who used the killing curse against his staunchest patron when the gobstones were laid and the Dark Lord was calling.

“I will not explain myself to a child!” Snape had growled at him, later, as they’d hidden at the disgusting hovel of Spinner’s End. “There are many aspects to this war you’ve neither the right to know not the wisdom to comprehend.”

It had seemed— and still seems— perfectly straightforward to Draco: spend a few years as a double- or triple-agent to see whether or not the Dark Lord could actually win this time, drop back down to being a single-agent and kill the idiot Light Lord who believed in goodness and hope and redemption and that they applied to you, then leg it for the new base of operations and stand as the Dark Lord’s right hand, thereby ensuring the Dark Lord would win this time, because he was a sick crazy fuck who couldn’t plot his way out of a paper bag so long as the paper bag had a mudblood to torture at the bottom of it.

Right now, with six years to go before his chance to prove his loyalties, Snape seems content merely to take all his latent murderous Death Eater tendencies on tiny baby Potter, who’s got none of his usual smartass fire and is instead distressingly... *distressed* about it. Draco wonders how Dumbledore watched Snape freely exercise this *blatantly obvious* grudge against the Boy Who Offed Snape’s Lord And Master, plus all the rest of the children of the original Order Of Dumbledore’s Friends (And/Or Pawns), and thought it would all actually work out just fine.
Maybe Dumbledore was actually a Slytherin. Maybe he thought it was funny like Draco had.

Draco doesn’t know. It doesn’t make sense. He’s painfully aware of how much of the war he must have missed, while he was busy being fourteen and fifteen and trading schoolboy hexes with Potter and thinking that made him a real tough piece of work.

There’s so much for Draco to think about and so little that Draco can actually do. It’s miserable.

“It’s as if the Professor wants us to hate our Slytherin classmates!” he proclaims to Hermione, during the practical. “I don’t know what he’s trying to pull, there’s only four of them. Surely it wouldn’t be at all fair for us Gryffindors to gang up on them?” This is said in careful proximity to Finnegan, who’s always been the most likely lion—after Potter—to turn his case of moral outrage into someone else’s infirmary stay.

“Well, I suppose not,” Hermione says, doubtfully. “They did laugh a bit at Potter, though. I don’t think that was very nice.”

“I laugh at Potter all the time,” Draco protests. “I am the undefeated champion at laughing at Potter.”

“You’re not very nice.”

“I keep telling you!” Draco turns to Neville. “Don’t I keep telling her?”

Neville grins a little. “You did warn us,” he mumbles.

Pansy, summoned by the opportunity to give Draco a hard time, sits down and steals Hermione’s slugs.

“Draco is a snotty little twerp,” she says, starting to mince. “It’s worth being a full quarter of my year in order to stay a full castle’s length away from him for so much of the time. Did you know, the last time he came over to my estate, he threw rocks at our prize krupps?”

“I never!” Draco says. “That’s slander!” He honestly doesn’t remember this, though it sounds like something he’d probably have done at ten.

“You did. You’d say ‘catch the ball!’ and they’d try, then get biffed in the face. It was the saddest thing ever.”

“You were laughing, though,” Draco accuses. It’s not even a guess.

“Sod off,” Pansy grins, which means yes, of course.

Children are horrible little gremlins. Draco can’t fucking believe he threw rocks at krupps, it’s a wonder he wasn’t mauled to death as a baby. Or drowned in a bucket.

“That’s horrible,” Hermione cries. “That’s animal abuse!”

“Parkinson krupps are sturdy,” Pansy shrugs. “And anyway we both got thrashed for it.”

“That’s child abuse!”

“Parkinsons are sturdy,” Draco says, and Pansy makes as if to stab him, which means thanks.

No one blows themselves up in Potions, not even Neville, which is a shame, but no one turns being picked on by Snape into picking on his Slytherins, which is surprisingly excellent.
Finnegan even sits next to Blaise.

Chapter End Notes

big thanks to mercurialMalcontent for being my sounding board and ideas guy whenever I'm stuck! Most of this would not have gotten done without them.
The weekend passes. Draco spends a lot of time in the library with Greg, who has to be dragged in, and Hermione, who has to be dragged out. He does his best to keep them from offending one another and focused on their homework, because Greg doesn’t have him in any other classes besides Potions right now, and he’s basically a brick when it comes to understanding how anything in the world actually works, even besides his problems reading and writing. From Greg’s perspective things just sort of seem to happen, one after the other, in no significant or preventable way, and it’s not like Draco can appoint Pansy as his governor. Governess. She’d let him fall off the side of a staircase and giggle at the splat. She’d probably let her own mother fall off the side of a staircase. It makes her great fun to be friends with, but less enjoyable to delegate important business to.

Draco misses Vincent fiercely, wretchedly, continuously. Losing Theo and Tracy and Daphne is different, it’s just sad. But missing Vince feels like someone cut one of Draco’s fingers off and he remembers every time he fumbles for something: Vincent isn’t there, he doesn’t have Vincent anymore, Vincent is never coming back. Neither the friend he left back in a future that’s already erased nor the little boy sent off to Durmstrang to serve some other, better family.

If Greg flunks all his classes because he’s alone, and has to go have tutors at home, and grows up apart from Draco like Vince is doing, Draco will probably wade right into the lake and let the giant squid eat him. Luckily, Hermione is as persistent as she is unreasonably intelligent, and seems entirely prepared to walk Greg through the intricacies of photosynthesis as many times as it takes.

She also gets legere regis down in no time at all, and charms all of her own quills after she does Greg’s, delighted at the way the modified quills pull her hand along to spell a word correctly whether she knows it or not.

“Just because I’m smart doesn’t mean I know how all these spells are spelled!” she says. “Also I think this is making my handwriting neater. It’s terribly sloppy, normally, I always mean to do better...”

Hermione’s handwriting is already scrupulously even, though uncultured; with a charmed quill the letters come out as if stamped, with crisp little points on the asinine stars she insists on dotting her i’s and j’s with. Still, Greg’s beyond pleased that someone like Hermione would use a corrective spell that someone like him needs, so Draco’s happy, too.

Draco writes a letter to his mother and father, prompted by Boudica swooping in on him every hour or so, somehow, and trying to feed him mice and owl treats. He tells his parents that his house sorting was a terrible shock, but that he’s still good friends with Parkinson and Goyle, and he’s sure he’ll get along well with Bullstrode and Zabini too, and that several of his Gryffindor housemates are from very nearly respectable families, like Longbottom and Brown and Patil, and that it’s tremendously
unfair first years can’t have their own brooms, because it’s been beautiful weather for flying and he won’t get to until flying lessons next Thursday, and even then it’ll be a stupid old school broom.

He doesn’t tell his parents anything about Hermione, or his new owlpal ‘Moony’. He folds the letter up, seals it, and gives it to Boudica, who makes a last attempt to put half a rodent in his mouth before finally buggering off.

Draco really wishes his mother hadn’t thought Boudica’s maternal tendencies were quite so funny.

*

On Sunday, he’s called to the Headmaster’s office. His Gryffindor Head of House escorts him, and he finds himself sitting in a comfortable and possibly carnivorous squishy armchair, facing down Albus Percival Wulfric Bastard Dumbledore, Supreme High Champion Of Cocking Everything Up Spectacularly.

“How has your week been?” Dumbledore asks. “I trust you’re settling in?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Making friends?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Your professors report no trouble from you in class.”

“No, sir.”

Dumbledore regards him over the expanse of desk, twinkling offensively. Some silver and delicate looking item beside his clasped hands goes ‘vworp’ and turns inside-out.

“How is it, Mr Malfoy, that you have such certainty of what He Who Must Not Be Named... smells like?”

Draco freezes. “Shit. “My father,” he improvises, “has a number of artefacts from... from the last war.”
“And after the incident this summer, I suppose you went and sniffed them?”

Draco has no choice but to nod, feeling his face heat with anger and embarrassment. “Yes, alright? And Quirrel’s just the same as him— them, whatever! He’s, he’s possessed or carrying him around or something! You have to get him out of here, he’s got access to Harry Potter, of all people! Plus something like thirty other children, including me, which I’m not very happy about!”

“Mr Malfoy, please calm yourself.” Dumbledore raises his hands, still smiling. “Professor Quirrel has been studying Dark artefacts and creatures as a vocation— it was his job even before I hired him. It would be strange for an accomplished Dark Arts researcher not to smell of the items and practices that he has been researching. Perhaps this is why he chooses to perfume himself with garlic.”

“He smells like the Dark Lord, not some trivial little hand of glory or strangling amulet! You have to believe me!”

Dumbledore shakes his head, looking grave now. “I will talk to him, Mr Malfoy. If he has indeed encountered some relic of You-Know-Who in his travels, some significant object, it would be best to contain such a thing and give it over to the relevant authorities.”

Draco seethes.

“This is going to blow up in your face,” he says, shaking his finger at the stupid old wizard. “Something terrible is going to happen! He’s going after Potter and if he gets him I’ll have told you so!”

“MANNERS,” Dumbledore snaps out, suddenly very tall and very forbidding. “If you DON’T MIND, Mr Malfoy.”

Draco hunkers down. “Yes, sir,” he squeaks.

Dumbledore becomes, by degrees, a friendly old man once more.

“Will that be all, Mr Malfoy?”

“I— well, if—”

“Very good. Now, it’s a beautiful day outside, and I shan’t keep you from enjoying it.”

Draco is still angry, and scared, and in no way prepared to enjoy anything, ever.

“May I have another lemon drop, Headmaster?” he growls.

“Of course!” Dumbledore beams at him.

Draco picks up the entire dish. “I’ll eat it later,” he says, and strides out of the office in a completely justifiable huff.

*  

Back in Gryffindor Tower, he storms around the common room until he finds the double Weasleys, who are together with their black friend, doing something genuinely horrific with a box of cockroach clusters and a knotted sock.
“I’ll give you a galleon if you let me borrow one of your brooms,” Draco says.

“Hello to you too, midget Malfoy,” says one Weasley.

“Midgefoy,” says the other, and snickers. “Midgefly.”

“A galleon,” Draco repeats, with strained patience. “It’s a form of currency you might not be familiar with. I have several. I’ll give you one if you let me have a broom.”

“Why?” they chorus.

“Because I feel like sweeping up a bit, why the hell do you think I want a broom, it’s a beautiful day and I’m in a shit mood and I want to fly! Also I don’t know anyone else who has a broom and will let a first year do something as stupid as jumping out of the tower window.”

“That does sound pretty stupid,” says the other Weasley, thoughtfully.

“Are those lemon drops?” asks the first Weasley.

“Yes, I stole them from Dumbledore. He’s why I’m in a terrible mood, I don’t want to talk about it. Are you going to give me a broom or not?”

The Weasleys look at each other.

“We want a galleon each,” they say.

“Sod off! I’m not going to be riding both your brooms at once!”

“One galleon for a broom—”

“—and the other galleon for hush money,” they say.

“And Dumbledore’s lemon drops,” says their friend, grinning.

“These are for me!” protests Draco.

“Well, then, enjoy your day spent indoors,” says the friend.

“Merlin!” Draco growls. “Alright! Alright, here. I’m going to get the money, one of you get me the broom.” He grabs a handful of the lemon drops, stuffs them in his mouth, thrusts the dish with the remainder at the Weasley friend.

Then he goes “Gnggh,” as the effect of a fistful of lemon drops hits him all at once. He staggers, shudders, manfully swallows a huge gulp of burningly sour juice and does not cry, then straightens his spine and marches off.

He comes back with two galleons from his pitifully small allowance and hands them over for a pathetic old Cleansweep Five that looks as if it might have been produced in the 60’s. The 1860’s. The three third years trail him over to nearest unoccupied tower window.

“You know the windows don’t look out over where they actually are, right?” the Weasley friend asks. “It’s an advanced misdirection spell.”

“Cuts down on students trying to get back into their dorms from the outside,” says one Weasley.

“Or doing what you’re about to do.”
“Tell us where you wind up,” says the other. “I mean, if you actually make it back.”

“Cover for me and I might,” says Draco, and throws a leg over the Cleansweep.

It’s incredibly awkward: Cleansweeps have dramatically recurved central shafts, because the Cleansweep line was enchanted with what was, at the time, an innovative charm that spread weightlessness out from the core of the broom rather than suspending its surface or mass. Over successive models the manufacturers came to the obvious conclusion that a longer shaft meant more core to enchant and a curved shaft kept the total length inside regulation. And of course, because the core of a solely core-lifted broom rotates freely, the Cleansweeps require full-spread tail bristles—rather than gathered or even finned—to keep the rider from rolling over on turns, which absolutely massacres fine control and responsiveness.

This is all very well for the offensively tall and leggy Weasleys, who can afford to lean meter or two of torso into every turn and execute all the sloth roll grips they like. Unfortunately for Draco, he’s roughly the size of a house elf right now, and used to the much straighter shaft and more sensible threefold core-mass-surface loft enchantments of the Nimbus line. He’s going to be jumping out of a tower on an ancient pig of a broom that he’s much too short to effectively steer.

The ground suddenly looks very, very far down.

“Hold on,” says the Weasley friend. “Can you even fly, Malfoy? George, I think we should have asked if the boy’s ever been on a broom before.”

“Lee, I think we are about to find out if werewolves bounce.”

Draco gives them a rude salute, steels himself, and launches.

There’s a moment of lurching disorientation as the tower around him becomes an entirely different tower behind him, and then a much longer and more horrifying lurch as Draco falls like a stone. He remembers once more that he left most of his capacity for rational forward planning back in the future and roundly curses every possible version of himself for it, as well as his mother, as well as his imminent corpse.

Fortunately, the ground is very far away, and the broom shudders, kicks, and finally sputters to life as Draco frantically pulls up on the nose. The damn thing doesn’t have the independent lift of a child’s broom or the pressure-response of a sensibly enchanted broom, so instead of actually stabilizing out into truly powered flight, the best Draco can manage is a sort of crippled, spiraling glide away from the pointy and rough-shingled battlements of the Astronomy wing and off towards the lake.

“Work, damn you!” he shouts at the broom, digging his heels in as hard as he can. It—of course!—rolls over on him. He glides for a few moments upside down before wrestling his way back upright, then, at the absolute end of his rope, he reaches back and grabs a handful of bristles. It sends a nasty tingle up his arm, sparks whirling around his brass cuff, but the broom slews reluctantly sideways and breaks out of its spiral. It isn’t just like riding an ancient pig, he realizes, it’s like riding an ancient pig, on ice, that wants to kill him.

Some magical items mature into dignified and helpful personalities. Weasley brooms, it appears, go belligerently senile.

Well, if it really wants to do him in, it can get in line. Bristles in hand, Draco forces the jumped-up fencepost into a proper glide, slow and shallow, and makes a bloody well respectable tumbling land in the long grass by the lake. He sits up, panting, and then has to pounce on the broom as it tries to fly away on its own.
“I will mulch you,” he hisses, and it starts trying to kick him.

“Hey, are you alright, little b— oh, it’s you,” says someone, and Draco looks up from his chokehold to see a dismayed young Cedric and some other third year Hufflepuffs peering down at him.

“We saw you fall out of the Astronomy tower,” says a girl with nearly as many braids as Blaise. “Are you alright?”

“I didn’t fall, I jumped out of Gryffindor tower,” says Draco.

“No, it had to be the Astronomy tower, Gryffindor’s over there,” another boy says, pointing.

“The Gryffindor windows look out on different places than where they are,” Draco says.

“That’s neat!” says the boy.

“Can you get in Gryffindor tower from the Astronomy wing, then?” wonders the girl. “I mean, does it go the other way?”

“I think he’d have to climb in from the outside, if he wanted to get back inside, I mean. If he went through from the inside to the outside he’d just be falling out of the Gryffindor tower, right?”

“What,” says the girl. “Hold on, we need to draw this.”

The Hufflepuffs sit down and pull some paper out.

Draco looks at Cedric. “Want to help me break into my common room?”

“No!” he says. “Just go back up the regular way you Gryffindors do, up the stairs, and all. We can walk you back there if you’re lost.”

“But Cedric!” says the boy. “It’s for science!”

“And for breaking into Gryffindor tower,” says the girl.

“That’s not nice,” says Cedric.

“I don’t care,” Draco says. “Break in all you like.”

“Guys...” Cedric says sadly, but too late. Draco marches off towards the Astronomy wing, broom clamped under his arm.

The boy hurries after him and sticks his hand out at Draco. “My name’s—”

“Don’t care,” says Draco.

“It’s Rupert,” he says.

“And that would be very sad except for how I still don’t care.”

“I’m Amanda,” says the girl.

“I care even less.”

“You’re right little shit, aren’t you?” the boy says.

“Absolutely,” Draco agrees. “Just ask Cedric. I’m the worst.”
“You know Cedric’s name?”

“Everyone knows Cedric.”

Cedric looks alarmed. “What, really?”

“Well, no, not yet, I suppose,” Draco allows. “But if you keep on helping poor little first years get back home safe and sound, probably. Can you fly me up to the windows up there? This demented piece of junk genuinely wants to kill me.”

Cedric sighs, runs his hands through his floppy hair, and takes the broom from Draco. He’s tall and solid, even for a third year, and it doesn’t look nearly so outsized and homicidal in his hands. “Front or back?” he asks.

“Back, I suppose. You’ll need all the nose control you can get with that thing, it flies nothing like a Nimbus.”

“You’ve flown one of those before?”

“Why does everyone keep asking that! Yes, of course I have, I’ve been flying since I was six, my father got me training brooms and everything. He and mother used to fly for Slytherin, though I think in different years.”

“Lucius Malfoy played Quidditch,” Cedric repeats, clearly amused at this.

“Wait, that’s a Malfoy?” the girl asks.

“The Werewolf Malfoy?” the boy asks, and jumps back sharply, drawing his wand.

“Keep your sodding pants on, I don’t bite,” Draco says crossly. “And yes, Cedric, my father played Quidditch, he wasn’t born full-formed on the floor of the Wizengamot. He was a keeper. My mother played seeker like me. I mean, like how I prefer. To play. When I’m allowed.”

“Well, maybe you’ll be allowed to play for Gryffindor, their seeker’s rubbish,” Cedric says.

Draco opens his mouth to say What are you talking about, Potter’s infuriatingly good, and then realizes.

None of that’s happened yet. Potter’s still got four days before he even so much as touches a broom for the first time in his tragic little life. Potter doesn’t even know how to play Quidditch yet.

Draco could elbow him out of the way and take his position and win all of his games instead and all the Gryffindors would cheer for him. And no one would know.

He’s very quiet as he climbs on behind Cedric and wraps his stupid short little arms around the older boy’s waist.

“Alright, there?” Cedric asks.

“Yeah, right,” he says distractedly. Cedric kicks off—the broom lurches and the third year makes a frustrated little grunt as he wrestles for control.

“It’s core lifted,” Draco says, clinging tightly.

“It’s a piece of junk!” Diggory says. He bumps the nose into the stone wall in front of them. “My dad’s stodgy old Bluebottle handles better.”
“It’s a Weasley’s, they fly on garbage,” Draco tells him.

“Hm. No wonder we’ve been trouncing Gryffindor for so long, they’re practically half the team. Our coach reckons it isn’t really fair, you know, how all the players have to field their own brooms, it *incentivizes* coaches to pick players from rich families, rather than flyers with real talent. It would make for much better games if the school would just invest in a set of sports brooms for all four teams... which window did you say it was?”

“I don’t know. One of the top ones, I suppose. And I don’t think there’s anything wrong with having players bring their own brooms! Being a good flyer is as much about the broom as it is about the rider. You can’t do good work on rubbish.” The broom underneath them shudders and knocks into the wall again. “Case in point.”

“Well, that’s *my* case! Poorer players can’t do good work, even if they’re brilliant flyers. The Weasleys must be giving it their all just to take off from the pitch. If they were on the same brooms as everyone else—”

“Then everyone else would be denied *their* advantages. You can’t just go around expecting people not to use everything they’ve got just because some other people have less. It’s not *their* fault. You’re taller than me, should I cut you off at the knees?”

Cedric snorts. “I’m just saying, money isn’t a skill.”

“Shows what *you* know,” Draco snorts back at him.

Cedric just laughs, instead of getting angry.

“Hey, speak of Weasleys,” he says. “I think I see them. That’s insane.” He draws the broom up level with one of the windows midway up the Astronomy tower. Instead of looking in on the spiral staircase or one of the equipment rooms, it looks in on the Gryffindor common room. The two Weasleys and their friend are still clustered in the window seat. One’s gone and gotten omnioculars.

“Hello, Fred!” Cedric says.

“It’s George,” says the one with the omnioculars.

“I was talking to *him*,” Cedric says, nodding at the Weasley friend. The other Weasley twin just laughs.

“So where’s this look out on?” says Fred, the Weasley friend.

“About midway up the Astronomy Tower,” Cedric says. “North... north by northeast, I should think.”

“Wicked,” says a Weasley.

“And difficult to reach,” says the other, frowning.

“Not so hard,” Cedric points out. “Though— can I give you this broom back later? I don’t know how I’m getting down, otherwise.”

“It’ll cost you a galleon,” a Weasley says immediately. “That’s the going rate for rental rides.”

“Mate, I don’t think you could *sell* this for a Galleon. I don’t think you could sell it for two knuts and a warm hug.”
“Market forces,” says the other Weasley, tapping his long nose sagely.

“Just fly the damn thing in,” Draco commands. “I want to get down from this garbage scow before it disintegrates, please, not after.”

“Alright, alright, here, I’ll back you in....” with an impressive minimum of bonking against the windowframe, Cedric gets the broom turned around and maneuvers it, bristles first, past the window seat. Fred the Weasley friend grabs Draco by the robes and helps him inside.

Halfway down from the window seat, Professor Mcgonagall clears her throat loudly, and everyone freezes.

“And just what do we have here?” she asks, her green eyes flashing.

“Cedric did it!” Draco blurts out, and bolts for his dorm.

Chapter End Notes

the cleansweep five was produced, probably, in 88 or 89, and two were bought for the weasley twins when they made the quidditch team in third or fourth year. considering the high turn-over in top-model sports brooms, it would have been a reasonable purchase to get a secondhand but still fairly recent model for a young student's sports broom.

by 91 the weasley's brooms would only have been about four years old, but seemed closer to ten years old to a draco from 96, and would absolutely have handled abominably underneath a very small, light, weak, and young rider.

then, of course, there's whatever experimental modifications fred and george themselves have been layering on their rides...
To Draco Lucius Malfoy,

I am doing quite well, thank you kindly for asking, and you have my further thanks for your kind gift. A little chocolate can go quite a long way in a tricky situation. Did you know that the substance is especially effective at warding off the effects of mood-altering Dark Magics and Creatures, such as depressive jinxes and dementors? Not that I intend to tangle with either of them, but of course it always pays to be prepared. You’ll learn that as a Gryffindor, I’m sure: when I was at school, my friends and I found ourselves in any number of difficult and improbable adventures. Chocolate didn’t always help, but it didn’t hurt, either, especially when those situations involved finding our way back to the castle through five very dark and soggy miles of Forbidden Forest.

Your (intrepid) friend

Mssr Mooney.

*

On Monday, they start to learn about soil, and Draco is forced to roll his sleeves up as they are made to examine at close range various forms of various substances decomposing. Macmillan has the unmitigated gall to lean in, peer at Draco’s identification cuff, and criticize the font. Draco hits him square in the mouth with a handful of cow’s dung. Fellow Hufflepuff Lilly Moon, apparently keen to disprove rumors that she’s in any way affiliated with him, jumps at the chance to whack Draco over the head with a trowel and gets detention for it. The remaining Hufflepuffs all glare at him, along with Weasley and Potter, who had nothing to do with the scuffle for once but nonetheless look self-righteous about it.

“Honestly, Draco,” Granger scolds. “You need to keep ahold of your temper!”

“Get bent,” Draco snaps.

“A point from Gryffindor for uncharitable language!” Professor Sprout says cheerfully, and finishes charming the blood and dirt out of his hair.

“Gryffindor can get bent!”

“Draco!”

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

sorry this took so long to work out! i was stalled for awhile but hopefully the next few chapters will take a bit less time than three months.
He knows that he didn’t have emotional problems like this the first time he was eleven. He’s always been a bit too impetuous, and it’s always gotten him into most of his trouble. But he thinks he was rather more prone to sulking and brooding, originally, when someone had slighted him, and he hadn’t been quite so aware as a child how trying it is to be a child. Now he exists in a state of nigh-continuous aggravation, and Gryffindors do actually have one thing figured out, which is that constantly blowing up over petty nonsense feels pretty alright.

Still. Over the next few days he tries to tone it down for Granger and Longbottom. They’re abjectly pathetic, he does need minions, and no one else in Gryffindor is at all suitable. Seamus thinks he’s a loony, if fairly entertaining, and Dean has decided he’s a racist, even though he doesn’t care at all what color a wizard might be, since it’s their blood that actually matters. Lavender and Parvati only talk to him to learn new spells, and Potter remains transfigured at the hip to Weasley. And Draco can’t very well import Greg, though the boy does at least do as he’s told and come to sit with them for one meal a day, to go over coursework with Draco and Hermione. That he also talks about action comics with Neville is less acceptable but, it turns out, entirely unavoidable, no matter how stern Draco gets with them.

“Martin Miggs, The Mad Muggle, is all that stands between myself and minion mutiny,” he laments, drooping tragically over his dinner.

“Were you such a nutter before you got bit, or did it come on afterwards?” Seamus wants to know. “Like, did your mind collapse under the horror?”

“I think it’s genetic,” Hermione says, and Seamus and Dean both laugh.

“I’m not a genetic!” Draco protests. “You take that back.”

“Genetic,” Hermione says slowly, the way she does when she wants him to learn a particularly stupid muggle word. “Having to do with your genes, which are the biological code that describes who you are.”

“I don’t have one of those,” Draco says. “It sounds idiotic. Probably Seamus does, because he’s idiotic.”

“Up yours, mate,” contributes Seamus, and punches him in the arm. Draco makes a wild *See? See!?* gesture.

Hermione sighs. “It’s in your blood. Everything that’s alive has one.”

“Even plants?” Neville asks.

“Yes.”

“Plants don’t have blood,” Draco points out. “Checkmate, Granger.”

“Some plants do,” Neville says. “Like Mandrakes, or Henslington’s Suppurating Flesh Trap.”

“You’re not allowed to talk anymore,” says Draco.

“It’s in plants’… sap,” Hermione says, but she sounds less certain.

“I think genes are in all parts of you, though,” Seamus says. “Like on crime shows when they read the DNA off a strand of some bloke’s hair from the crime scene.”

“Oh, that makes sense,” says Hermione, even though it absolutely doesn’t.
“Some plants have hair, too,” Neville says. “Such as—”

“No,” Draco says. “No, you’re still not allowed to talk.”

“Coconuts,” Greg grunts, looking up from his stack of Neville’s comics. “They got hair.”

“They do!” Neville says, unreasonably delighted by this.

“That doesn’t count,” Hermione says.

“Yeah, no one’s going to find coconut hair at a crime scene,” says Dean, and just laughs when Hermione makes a huge show of ignoring him. He says, "That'd be bananas,” and Hermione, enraged, hits him with a slice of toast.

“I wasn’t mad before I got bit, or even afterwards,” Draco tells Seamus. “It was having to hang around with you lot that’s done it.”

“Cheers,” says Seamus, and punches him in the arm again.

*

To the Intrepid Mssr Mooney:

Are you a professor somewhere? You seem like one. Illicit jaunts to the Forbidden Forest notwithstanding. Please let me know if you need any more chocolate, or perhaps a book of maps. I shouldn’t like you getting lost somewhere right when I need advice.

Gryffindor is still terrible, though I’ve made an assortment of connections. I don’t think my parents are likely to approve of any of them. I don’t think any of them approve of my parents. Things would have been so much simpler in Slytherin, though probably just as terrible. I hope you’re having a better time of things.

Yours sincerely,

Draco Lucius Malfoy

*

Thursday morning, Hermione and Neville are too busy fretting over that afternoon’s first Flying Class to give half an owl treat for Draco’s abject dread for the upcoming Dark Lord Lecture Time With Bonus Werewolf Evisceration Class. He finally gives a halfhearted excuse about forgetting his textbook, then goes and hides in the haunted third floor girl’s bathroom.

Moaning Myrtle is older than him, now— not that she hadn’t been older than him by about forty years even when he had been sixteen, but now he’s eleven and she’s twelve and unbelievably condescending about it. He has a grand shouting match with her that ends, abruptly, when he remembers that the girl was killed by the monster in the Chamber of Secrets and that the monster is still in there because Potter won’t kill it for another year, if ever, and this entire bloody school is a death trap of dark magic and evil professors.
He has another pathetic breakdown.

The really sad thing is that he’s just about starting to get the hang of them: he crouches in a corner of the bathroom, small enough to fit neatly underneath the furthest sink, forehead pressed to his knobbly little child knees and his hands up over his head, over the back of his neck, as if that would do any good.

At least in this particular bathroom he doesn’t have to worry about the noise. He can cry as loudly as he likes, and does, howling out all the misery and hopeless frustration of being too small and too young and too damaged to handle any of what’s happened to him, let alone prepare to deal with any of what’s going to happen. He can’t be a hero. He can’t save the day. He couldn’t even kill one dotty old man. He couldn’t escape a single werewolf. He’s trapped somewhere that should have been safe, should have been his home, trapped with the Dark Lord all over again and he still doesn’t know what to do about it.

His mother died for him to get this chance. Merlin, she’d died. Her eyes had lit up curse-green and she died. And he doesn’t know what to do.

Draco cries himself into an absolutely wretched headache, then dozes off in his corner. He wakes up to Granger sitting next to him, quietly reading an enormous Herbology textbook. He’s got her satchel under his head now. It’s surprisingly comfortable for an object composed primarily of library.

“Gnnr,” he says, feebly. He knows should be angry or curious or something but he just feels numb and sort of despairing.

“It’s only just lunchtime,” Hermione says. “You haven’t missed any more class.”

“Mmn.”

“I took notes for you.”

“Nmbf.”

“You know, this isn’t a workable solution for your issues. You’ll fail the class.”

Draco laughs. It comes out disgustingly phlegmy from all the crying. “I’ll survive the class,” he croaks.

“Honestly, Draco! Don’t you know you have to face your fears? They just get bigger if you turn your back on them, you know. It’s vitally important to confront your insecurities head-on and take control of them, or you’ll never get anything done.”

Draco snorts at her. “As if you’re scared of anything more than a bad grade, Granger.”

She whaps him with her textbook. It actually hurts.

“You’re the sort who’s so keen to keep us muggleborn out, Malfoy! If I have to prove that I belong here just as much as any of you— you— inbred snobs, then I will! I’m going to get perfect grades, every year, and pass all the tests there are, and no one will ever be able to say I don’t deserve to be a witch.”

Draco has to close his eyes, which have started to burn again.

“People will say that anyway,” he says.
She huffs. “Well, I’ll know that they’re wrong, then. And so will anyone else who’s paying attention.”

Draco says, bleakly, “People will always hate you for who you are, no matter what you do.”

“Yes, and you too, werewolf boy, so don’t go skipping your classes!” Hermione hits him with her textbook again.

“Ow! Alright— point— Hermione! — point taken!”

She stops bludgeoning him. “Anyway we’ve got flying after lunch. You definitely shouldn’t miss that class, I heard all about your tower adventure.”

Draco had somehow managed to forget about their first flying class, after obsessing about it for several nights running. What’s going to happen? Will Potter show off again? Make the Quidditch team again? Should Draco outfly him and steal his position? But should he really fly for Gryffindor? Against Slytherin?

“I’m going to stay in here until I die,” he decides. Hermione raises her book threateningly.

“You can’t,” she says. “One disgracefully weepy ghost per girls’ bathroom is quite enough, thank you.”

Draco opens his mouth to protest, considers her raised book, and closes his mouth. She lowers her book, eyes narrowed.

“You really shouldn’t be a witch,” he says abruptly. “With conflict resolution skills like that, you should be a mountain troll.”

Hermione raises her book with a bristling, outraged huff; Draco lets her shoo him out of the bathroom with a lot of shouting and hitting, laughing despite himself, despite everything.

*

To Draco Lucius Malfoy,

I’m no professor, though I think I would like to be, were circumstances otherwise. A schedule such as ours rather precludes steady employment, or working with children. I promise I am currently and for the likely future at your sole disposal.

As for your house, your friends, and your parents: give them time. In my experience, things go wrong all at once, but they take considerably longer to put to rights. Don’t feel as if you have to fix everything, immediately, all by yourself. Time will bring you what you need, whether that’s people or simply perspective.

Your (un)professional friend,

Mooney
The thing is, he doesn’t really remember what happened, specifically, that very first Thursday when Potter made the Gryffindor Quidditch team. Draco remembers that he’d been outraged; he’d been involved, he’d provoked Potter to some sort of stunt, but it’s been years, and he knows that in telling and retelling the story of what had happened—and arguing with the Gryffindors over whose fault what bits had been—he’s very likely lost touch with any of the actual particulars of the situation.

He walks down the stairs from the Great Hall and across the grounds, as he’s done hundreds of times before, this time with Hermione at his side, and keeps wondering which time is this? What was supposed to happen? Is this the time Pansy threw a rock at Patil and broke her nose on accident, or Granger and Longbottom crashed into each other and fell ten feet into the mud, or Peeves managed to chase the entire population of the owlry through the quidditch pitch?

Draco joins the Gryffindors out on the field and gives a friendly nod to the four Slytherins, who are huddled defensively together.

“Are we all getting along?” he asks.

“Patil is a stuffy priss,” Pansy reports.

“Parkinson is no better than she should be!” Parvati fires back.

“Well, I think you’re both generally terrible, so that’s alright,” Draco says, and Parvati picks up her broom to try and hit him with it.

“Drop it, young lady,” Madam Hooch says, somehow managing to sneak up on them across a flat field on a bright sunny day, and Parvati squeaks and drops the broom. Pansy snickers meanly, but is quelled by a sharp look from the flying instructor. Class gets started.

“What’s wrong with you?” Draco asks Neville, sidling up to him. “You look absolutely wretched.”

Neville is clammy and pale, and wrings the hem of one sleeve in his hands. “I think I’m going to be sick and Parkinson stole Trevor,” he says. “She was trying to get the other girls to kiss him...”

“She what?” Draco is shocked. “You brought Trevor down here?”

Neville nods miserably. “You and Hermione weren’t at lunch and I was so nervous and I wanted a friend around so I took him with me in my pocket but you know how he always gets out—”

“You need to learn sticking spells,” Draco growls. “Or how to sew a button.”

Neville continues to look abjectly pitiful, and Draco sighs heavily and shuffles over to Pansy.

“Is Longbottom’s toad still alive?” he asks.

“What’s it to you?” she asks. “Oh, that’s right, you missed lunch, didn’t you?”

“You’ve got my number,” Draco says. “Give me the toad and I’ll eat it live in front of everyone. On my honor as a horrific affront to man and magic.”

“You’re disgusting,” Pansy says approvingly, and gives him the toad.

“What’s this?” Madam Hooch demands. “Playing around, eh? Too good to pay attention to broom...”
“Pansy rescued this poor pet toad that got lost,” Draco says loudly. Pansy stiffens and then tries to stomp on his foot. “Because she is such a good person who cares about small animals, ma’am!”

“Yeah, Parkinson’s famous for how much she loves animals,” Patil puts in, and Draco has to admire her venom. Pansy stomps his foot.

“No hippogriff play,” Madam Hooch says absently, and collects the toad. “I’ll hold on to this until the end of the lesson.”

“It’s—he’s mine, ma’am,” Neville squeaks.

“Be that as it may,” Madam Hooch says, and pockets the hapless little bastard. Pansy stomps Draco’s foot for a third, vindictive time, and Madam Hooch eyes her reprovingly.

“To your brooms, children,” she says. “Before I start taking points, if you please.” Pansy tries to stomp Draco’s foot a final time and he kicks her in the shin, then scurries to put Greg and Hermione between them.

Everything goes fairly well until it’s time to get off the ground: Neville is so nervous he misses his mark and kicks off much too hard, so he goes shooting straight up into the air like a firework, screaming.

“Merlin’s absolute tits,” Draco says, and kicks off after the disastrous twerp. The school brooms are all old and sensible Merryweather 59’s, but they’re still responsive to a good hard kicking. He levels off with Neville and crosses grips with the idiot, steadying the boy’s broom underneath his own and getting his arm over Neville’s shoulders—or at least one and a bit of Neville’s shoulders, because of the completely unfair size difference.

“If you vomit on me, I’ll vomit on you right back, but twice as angrily, so don’t,” Draco snaps.

“Ohh, we’re so high,” Neville quavers.

“Nonsense. You wouldn’t break a thing if you fell off from this height,” Draco says. He eyes the ground speculatively. “Well, you might, you’re an absolute disaster, Longbottom, honestly.”

“Don’t let go.”

“I’m not letting go.” Draco grips the back of Neville’s robes and starts bringing them back down.

“You know what, you’re not even a disaster. You’re an embarrassment to disasters. Disasters see you coming and find they’ve got a pressing engagement to go cock everything up somewhere else. Did you know that? It’s shameful. You are just absolutely the worst.”

They’re back on the ground now, though they’ve drifted some distance away from the class. Neville gives a little moan when his feet touch the grass and breaks away from Draco to hunker down on the lawn rather like a toad himself, all grey-green and quivering.

“Disgraceful,” Draco pronounces, and pats his head. “You stay there and keep the lawn from running off. The rest of us have a lesson to get back to.”

Neville nods tightly. Draco takes both their brooms under one arm and strides back to Madam Hooch.

“Alright, he’s very sorry and it won’t happen again if we don’t make him do it again, probably,”
Draco says.

“He can have a bit of a rest,” Hooch says. “Everyone else, form up, let’s do it properly this time!”

After she’s got the rest of Draco’s year wobbling in a slow, low loop around the lawn, the flying instructor comes back to pace Draco, who of course isn’t wobbling at all, even on a school broom, and is starting to have persistent thoughts of challenging the similarly unwobbly Potter to a race.

“So, that was a nice piece of flying, earlier, lad,” Hooch says. “Textbook frontal cruciform stabilization. Where’d you learn that kind of maneuvering?”

“My parents flew for Slytherin,” Draco says, falling back on the best excuse. “That’s how you steady a jinxed broom or a concussed player, isn’t it? And any broom with Longbottom on it is at least halfway to cursed.”

Hooch makes the particular facial expression adults tend to make when they’re trying not to laugh at something mean.

“You’re the young Malfoy, aren’t you?” she says instead. “Your dad would have been somewhat before my time here but I remember your mum, if she’s the same Black I’m thinking of. Nasty bit of work. Absolute banshee on the field. Hid her wand in her broom bristles once, you know, so she could confound the other seeker in the air. Had to ground her a whole season for that and I’m sure she would have hexed my head off if I wasn’t holding her wand while I did it. Tried to hit me with her boom. A right devil of a girl.”

“That is the best thing anyone has ever told me about my mother,” Draco says, awed. “Thank you.”

Hooch gives him a friendly nod. “If you fly for Gryffindor I should hope to see a cleaner game from you, boy.”

“I don’t know if I can,” Draco blurts out. “Fly, I mean. I know it’s a bit stupid, but I always— my whole family is Slytherin, all my friends— I mean to fly for Slytherin, I don’t think it’d feel right, flying against them. They’re my— they should have been— my teammates...”

“Ah. Well, you’re not the first pureblood in that pickle,” Hooch says. “All I can say, lad, is you should play the game in front of you, as best you possibly can, and everything else will work itself out.”

Yes, that’s certainly what happened when I found myself taking a bloody Dark Mark, Draco manages not to say. It’s a bit of a close thing.

“I want to fly,” he finally says. “I just really want to fly. It’s... it feels like the only thing that’s still good.”

Hooch nods decisively. “Well, there you go, then, lad. It doesn’t need to get any more complicated than that.”

She claps him on the back and sails away to go help some other students. Draco flies along meditatively for a time, then leans forward and catches up with Potter and Weasley.

”What do you want, Malfoy?” Potter demands, wheeling on him, perfectly poised and confident even on an old school training broom. He really is a natural.

Draco reaches out and gently plucks Potter’s glasses off.
“Oi!” Yells Weasley.

Potter just dives forward and tries to take a swing at him, though Draco swings easily out of the way. He waves the glasses at Potter so they catch the light, and sees the old—new—familiar—way the thin little boy orients on the glitter, like a deranged falcon.

“Catch me if you can,” Draco grins, and flies.
“So you’re both Gryffindor’s Seeker?” Marcus Flint asks.

“Yes,” Draco says. He appropriates Greg’s toast, then has to scrape half the jam off. “It works out rather well, actually, since the rules against first years playing generally come down to how delicate and unreliable we are, and at this age Potter’s about as delicate and unreliable as an every-flavor bean.”

Flint snorts. “As opposed to you yourself, Malfoy, the half-pint of werewolf.”

“I’m at least two thirds of a pint, thank you,” Draco says through a mouthful of toast.

“Is he any good?”

“Potter’s disgustingly talented and has enormous amounts of drive,” Draco says. “It’ll more than make up for his lack of experience. Absolutely don’t underestimate him for a minute.”

“And you?”

Draco finishes his toast. “Well, you can underestimate me all you like, because I won’t be playing against Slytherin. We worked it out. He’ll fly against Slytherin, I’ll fly against Ravenclaw, and we’ll flip a coin for Hufflepuff. Excepting injury, illness, and whatever the bloody hell the moon is doing at any given game.”

“Huh. I think you got the short end of the broomstick,” Marcus says.

Draco shrugs. “I want to fly, not kill myself or get disinherited. If I won a game for Gryffindor against Slytherin I expect my parents would pack me off to Durmstrang the next morning. As potion ingredients.”

“I’d dress and quarter you for them,” Marcus agrees. Draco nods solemnly. He’s always appreciated his old captain’s sense of honor.

“Anyway, Ravenclaw’s got a good team this year and you’re fielding a fat lot of aerial thugs,” Draco says. “They’re going to give me an actual challenge.”

“The day Gryffindor beats Ravenclaw at anything more challenging than a handstand is the day I eat my cauldron and die,” cuts in Angus Bulstrode.

“I’ll go press my funeral robes!” Draco sniffs.

“So how’s that new captain Wood?” Marcus asks, before Draco can properly get into it with the sixth year. They spend the rest of breakfast hashing over Gryffindor and Slytherin’s respective line-ups and strategies, and setting down a few bets.

As he peels off for Herbology, Oliver Wood falls into step with him.

“Are you selling our secrets to your Slytherin friends?” he asks.

“If I was I wouldn’t admit to it, you’d kick me off the team,” Draco points out.

“I’ll kick you off the team whether or not you admit to it, if you were.”
“Well I’m not!”

“Good!”

“I am, thank you!”

“...so how’s that captain Flint?”

Draco grins. He loves Quidditch so much.

* 

A smoking, foul-smelling goblet appears with his breakfast one morning, and Draco recoils, along with most nearby Gryffindors. Draco turns to look at the Staff table, betrayed, and finds Snape just staring at him, his dark eyes a little narrowed, his mouth a little twisted. It’s seven days before the full moon and Draco had really thought he’d get to do this in private, go to his godfather’s office and maybe get some sympathy, have a talk about that Wolfsbane charity or trust or scholarship or whatever Draco’s been thinking about.

Some part of Draco, a large part, still expects Snape to favor him, and look out for him. Even though Draco’s a werewolf, and a Gryffindor, and Snape is a petty, mercenary bastard with an ironclad grudge against both of those things and who’s been drawing away from him in extremely pointed stages ever since he came back.

“What is that?” Hermione asks, already leaning back in to investigate.

“It’s my Wolfsbane,” Draco says shortly, and takes the goblet. He swallows the potion, even though it burns, leaving his mouth stinging and his stomach even worse off. With a convulsive shudder, he claps the goblet down against the table and turns again to glare straight into Snape’s nasty, narrow little smirk. He salutes his godfather with two very specific fingers.

“Draco,” Hermione hisses, wrenching his arm down.

“Yes, yes, ten points from Gryffindor, I’m sure,” Draco says. “You drink this stuff tomorrow and see how nice you feel.”

When he’d taken the potion back at the Manor, he’d been able to lie down and take it easy for the rest of the day. At Hogwarts he has no such luxury, and the groggy nausea plagues him for the entire morning, all through Herbology. The next day it’s worse and lasts longer, and he sleeps through the entirety of History class without so much as a sharp prod from Hermione. He gets no such break in Transfiguration: McGonagall raps his desk sharply with her wand whenever she passes by, and at the end demands to see his notes.

“Granger took them for me,” Draco protests.

“Then they’re not your notes, Mr Malfoy. I expect to see a copy of them in your own hand by next week. You must take your education seriously.”

Draco stares at her, fists clenched by his sides, and feels the prickle of angry tears. His Head of House stares him down with sharp, unmerciful green eyes.
“Yes, ma’am,” he grits out. “I’m trying.”

“Dismissed,” she says.

*

He ditches breakfast entirely the morning before his next DADA class, warned by the violent gleam in Granger’s eyes, and takes as many secret passages as he can up to the owlry. Boudica wings in as he’s settling into an open window seat, and hoots in surprise to find him there. She perches on the seat beside him, graceful even flat-footed, to give him his mother’s letter and a package of warm, charm-fresh macaroons. They’re all iced like Quidditch balls and orbit his head as soon as he unwraps the paper, and it brightens his mood considerably. He catches and releases the inaccurately sized snitch, done up in edible gold foil, and a squashy bludger knocks gently into his forehead. He eats that one first.

The letter is from both his parents, congratulating him on making the Quidditch team in his very first year. He’s apparently the youngest seeker in forty years—being about two months older than Potter disqualifies him from being the oh-so-astounding youngest in a century. It’s not his fault Potter is offensively young as well as being offensively everything else, he thinks darkly. The letter goes on to hint that he might be getting a significant delivery in the near future, which cheers him right up. He’ll have his own broom to match Potter’s, at least, and to outstrip nearly anyone else on the field, too.

He’s busy nibbling off the golden foil of the snitch macaroon and plotting out his inevitable crushing victory over Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff and how impressed Potter and Wood and Flint will be when someone else comes into the owlry and very nearly scares him right out the window. Boudica has to snag his sleeve and flap like mad before he’s balanced again, and then he’s got to contend with half a stone of mother hen planting a sickle-clawed foot on each of his shoulders and preening his hair worriedly.

“Yes, hello, what?” he snaps at the newcomer, who turns out to be a very amused Hagrid.

“Hallo there, Malfoy,” he says peaceably. “That one yers?”

“At this point I suspect I’m hers,” Draco growls, and bodily shoves Boudica out the window, tearing up the shoulders of his robe to do so. She screeches angrily as she takes wing, circling around tightly and coming right back to sit on him again, her talons easily wrapping all the way around one of his twiggy little legs. This time the preening is a great deal more stern.

“She’s a right beauty,” Hagrid observes.

“Well you would think that, wouldn’t you, she’s huge and sharp and liable to smother me, I’m sure she’ll make the top ten on Hagrid’s Horrible Hugables!” Draco says, into a mad owl’s chest feathers.

“What’s the list, then?” the half-giant asks. He moves further into the owlry with a big
sack and a canteen the size of a wine barrel, topping up the meat-mixture owl chow—*chowl*?—and water dishes.


“I do like manticores,” Hagrid says thoughtfully. “They’re Persian, yeh know.”

Draco did not know, and furthermore does not care.

“I reckon werewolves’d make that list,” Hagrid says. Draco has to rebury his face in Boudica’s feathers because he’s having an emotion. Hagrid lumbers over to Draco, more of a force of nature than any sort of human being, hairy all over and huge.

“D’yeh wanna see the room I rigged up fer yer yer transformation? Dumbledore said it had t’be in the dungeons, even if yeh’d be fine ‘cuz of the wolfsbane, so yeh can’t just spend the night over’n my place. Damn shame. There’s a nice pillow fer Fang by the fire’n everything, I know he'd share and it’d be right cozy. But the Slytherins manage the dungeons just fine, y’know, and I fixed up a room to have toys’n bones an’ such…” He twists his big hands together, each of them probably larger than Draco’s whole body. What little of Hagrid’s face he can see past the beard is warm and concerned and Draco has never done anything in his life to deserve it.

“Sure,” he says. "D'you want a macaroon?"

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Hermione refuses to talk to him for the entire day. Draco’s too busy feeling sorry for himself about the damn werewolf situation to care about her during lunch, and then too busy being happy about his Quidditch situation during dinner, and ravenous from practice. He busies himself with stuffing down a nearly Greg-sized meal and bickering cheerfully with Dean about how absolutely imbecilic Muggle sports are and how intensely stupid Muggles must be to be entertained by such simplistic pastimes. When Dean actually watches his first Quidditch game, he’ll see, Draco assures him. Dean assures Draco that he’s a stuffy git who deserves more than a few black eyes for impugning the honor of his inferior Muggle sportsmen, and the matter is laid companionably to rest over dessert, which is strawberry tarts they can both agree are pretty alright. Dean is not actually such a bad sort when he’s not from another house or trying to hex you rotten.

Hermione sniffs and glowers and stays silent on all matters sports-related or otherwise, snubs him in the walk back up to the tower, and flounces angrily off to bed without so much as a goodnight, whereupon Draco starts to realize that she’s actually quite angry with him and he should probably do something about it.

Also, he remembers with a sudden and wrenching burst of horror, it’s her birthday. She’d told him earlier in the month, when they were talking about getting their letters, her eleventh birthday was in late September and that was why she had to spend a final term in some dreary Muggle school, impatiently memorizing all her Hogwarts textbooks and getting a completely unfair leg up on the rest of them. She was twelve today.

Draco feels, again, the panicky horror that they’re all so *young*, so terribly and miserably *young*, all his friends and enemies are *little children*. 
And he's an irresponsible, easily distractible little twerp with all the attention span of a newt, who made a mental note to get his new ally a birthday present in order to cement her loyalty, and then completely forgot because of sports and werewolves and dark lords and self-defeating self-pity. He has had just about enough of himself, honestly.

He circulates the common room until he’s located the Weasley twins and Fred the Weasley Friend, and stands in front of them assertively.

“I need you to go to Hogsmeade and buy me a self-heating teapot,” he says. “It’s Thursday, Madam Puddifoot’s is still open, and if you could pick up a couple satchets of tea as well that’d be excellent.”

“What’s in it for us?” asks a ginger.

Draco rolls his eyes. “Money, you twerps. I’m not sure if you’re familiar with the stuff, but it’s this funny little invention wizards came up with to regulate the exchange of goods and services.”

“Oi,” says another ginger. “Are you going to pay us to insult us too?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Draco says. “I’m insulting you for free.”

One of the gingers tries to stand up, rather menacingly for a thirteen year old, and Fred the Weasley Friend tugs him back down by his jumper hem.

“How do you expect us to get to Hogsmeade on a Thursday evening?” Fred asks. “It’s not as if they let anyone just stroll right out the front gates any time they like.”

Draco looks at him flatly, then at the gingers. “Figure it out. Nothing has ever stopped any of you from perpetrating your ridiculous shenanigans before and I doubt anything will now. I’ll give you five galleons plus the money for the teapot if you bring me back the bill of sale.”

“Each?” Fred asks hopefully.

“To split,” Draco says.

“That’s hardly anything,” a twin says.

“It’s also not exactly divisible by three,” the other twin says.

“It’s twenty eight sickles and ten knuts per each of you,” Draco says, after a brief pause to calculate. “Or two of you get two galleons apiece and the least important member of your trio gets one.”

“George,” says Fred.

“George,” agrees one of the gingers.

“Lee,” says the other ginger.

“Get bent,” says Fred.

“You can discuss it on the way,” Draco says. “I need that teapot by tomorrow morning or you won’t see a speck of copper.”

“You’re a very mercenary little boy,” Fred says thoughtfully.

Draco frowns at him. “Technically, you’re my mercenaries,” he says. “Do we have a deal?”
“Yes,” says possibly George. Or the other one. Draco absolutely does not care.

“Yeah, sure,” agrees the other one, and Fred nods too. Draco leaves them planning the excursion and goes to bed, feeling equal parts glad and worried and exasperated all at once, as well as completely and utterly exhausted.

It’s absurdly hard work, being a child. He thinks someone ought to have warned him.
In the morning there is very probably the most expensive self-heating teapot in all of Hogsmeade at the foot of Draco’s mattress. It’s a lovely, shimmering blue, and is accompanied by a fragrant tea-tin and a tawny screech owl that resembles nothing more than a ferocious muffin. Draco sits up and peers at the arrangement of owl and porcelain, then ventures a hand towards the pot. The owl clacks its beak and expands alarmingly, thrusting out a scroll. Madam Puddifoot is apparently an extremely practical business witch and would like Draco to know that the Malfoy family is always welcome in her shop and he can call upon her by owl order anytime he—or his family—would like, so would he be so kind as to complete the bill of sale himself and send Felicity back with the appropriate sum?

Felicity, all by herself, manages to convey that should Draco not care to do so, he will be very, very sorry.

“I don’t deserve to be menaced by confectionary this early in the morning,” Draco says crossly, and climbs out of bed to dig through his trunk for the gold. The muffin regards him beadily until he shows her the right amount, drops it ostentatiously into a spare change purse, signs the bill of sale with an elaborate flourish, and thrusts both items at her. Then he has the cruel satisfaction of watching a creature with a brain the size of a bean try to figure out whether she should take two items in each foot, or one item in her beak, and if so, which item. After extended internal debate, she finally flaps into the air, grabs the gold and the parchment in each foot, and wings out the tower window.

Draco triumphantly digs out a spare roll of parchment, attempts to transfigure it into wrapping paper, less triumphantly attempts to transfigure it into any other color but cream, curses at length, and finally succeeds at manifesting a gold star pattern as well as a slight reduction in parchment thickness. He wads the teapot up in it, tucks it under his arm, leaves the tea-tin for future gifting opportunities, and marches down to the common room covered in glory.

“I’m not talking to you,” is what Hermione says when he finds her. She buries her nose further into her book.

“You just did, and also, I got you a birthday present,” Draco says. He thrusts the big, somewhat glittery lump at her. Surprised, she takes it.

“What?” she asks. “...Really?”

“Absolutely,” Draco says, and puts his hands on his hips. “Did anyone else get you a birthday present? I bet not. I bet I’m your best friend.”

“Neville’s my best friend, because he doesn’t skip out on DADA like a coward,” Hermione says, but she sounds extremely uncertain.

“But did he remember your birthday?”

“...No,” she admits. Then she rallies a bit. “You didn’t either, you know! This is late.”

“Not by much,” Draco protests. “And it was expensive!”

“You can’t buy your way out of trouble,” Hermione says.
“I can buy my way out of you being upset because no one remembered your birthday,” Draco points out, very cleverly, and finally wins a smile from her. “Also I can buy my way into being your best friend. Because I am. You can’t go have any other best friends now, like Potter or Weasley, they’re all completely inferior.”

“Potter and Weasley are rude and unpleasant boys,” Hermione says.

“Yes,” Draco says, triumphantly. “Yes, absolutely, they are. Open my present now.”

She does. She is underwhelmed. “...A teapot?” she asks, doubtfully.

“Every girl’s dormitory has to have a teapot,” Draco tells her. “Daphne—I knew a girl who was very firm on that. It’s very important to be a girl with a self-heating teapot. It gets cold in the dorms in winter at night, and also other girls have to suck up to you if they want tea.”

Hermione blinks. “I don’t want Brown and Patil to suck up to me,” she says.

“That’s ridiculous,” Draco says. “You’re ridiculous. Establishing social capital with your peers is extremely important, aren’t you always lecturing me about my academic prospects?”

“That’s studying!” Hermione exclaims. “That’s tests, and marks, and things, honest work! Not, not manipulating people!”

Draco is not sure how this is all going wrong and he doesn’t like it at all. He tries to think like a Gryffindor before she throws the teapot against the wall in the name of truth or justice or whatever.

“Making friends is important,” he says tentatively. “Can we agree on that?”

Hermione looks extremely suspicious. “Yes,” she allows.

“And sharing with people is also important,” he goes on.

“...Right.”

“So it is important to have things you can share with the people who make friends with you,” Draco concludes. He gives her a hopeful look. He was practically channelling Godric’s pompous spirit itself, he wants a medal.

“IT’s still manipulative,” Granger says.

Draco throws up his hands. ‘Well then put it on your bedside and don’t let anyone touch it! Merlin! Happy birthday, Granger, here’s a fifty-galleon enchanted paperweight! You’re welcome!”

Parvati and Lavender themselves take that moment to enter the common room, as well as the conversation.

“Is that a teapot?” Lavender asks. “Why do you have a teapot?”

“Oh, um!” Granger flushes, holding the item in her lap as if it were suddenly spiny and poisonous. Draco gives her a significant look. She glares at him.

“It was her birthday yesterday,” Draco says.

“Oh no!” Parvati says. “Granger, I’m sorry, you should have said something.”

“Yes, happy birthday,” Lavender says. “Did Draco get you that?”
“I did!” Draco says. “It’s self-heating, too.”

“My birthday’s in May,” Lavender says. “Remember that.”

Parvati laughs in a scandalized way, and swats her arm. Draco makes an exaggerated production out of pretending to write a note on his palm. He *likes* people who come right out and tell you what they want.

“Well, anyway, we’re sure to get you something next year,” Lavender says to Hermione. “And we’ll be extra nice to you today. Meanwhile, if we bring tea, do you think we can share? It’d be lovely to have something warm to drink while we’re studying.”

Hermione looks supremely uncomfortable. “Er…”

Lavender frowns. “Well, you don’t have to if you don’t want to,” she says, sounding hurt.

“No! I mean—” Hermione gives a big sigh, “—I’m sorry, I’d love to share. We can all use it.”

“Cheers! You’re the best,” Lavender says, and takes the teapot out of Hermione’s hands to give it a good examination.

“I’m not… I’m not being manipulative, am I?” Hermione asks them anxiously. Draco throws his hands up again from sheer uncontrollable exasperation.

Lavender looks puzzled. “What? No. You just said we could use this. Are there conditions or anything?”

“Er. No. You can use it for free all you like. I just don’t want you to think I’m bribing you to like me.”

“There’s nothing *wrong* with bribing people to like you!” Draco shouts.

Lavender blinks at them both. “If someone like Malfoy was bribing me to like him, I’d go for it in a shot,” she says to Hermione. To Draco, she adds, “I mean, you’re a bit of a prat but you don’t really mind anyone saying so and *everyone* knows your family’s still loaded, even with the scandals, and all.”

“Lavender!” Parvati says, swatting at her again.

“*Thank you,*” Draco says, fervently.

“It’s just not very Gryffindor,” Hermione mumbles, her tan skin flushed even darker with self-consciousness.

“I suppose,” Lavender says, in a tone that indicates she does not at all suppose, and moves around to Draco’s other side so as to avoid any additional swats from Parvati, who’s turned a fairly hilarious chestnut color from scandalization.

Draco takes it upon himself to herd the girls downstairs to breakfast, the better to learn which favors and bribes Brown and Patil might be amenable to. They can’t hold a candle to Slytherin’s witches, of course, but they’re all he has to work with, for the moment.

And really, they’re better than nothing.
Draco’s mood sours quickly and profoundly from breakfast to Potions, however. He introduces Lavender to Blaise with, “Mrs Zabini patronizes a number of fashion houses in Milan, you two could talk about robes and things,” and, pleased at dodging the whole pronoun issue entirely, pushes Padma off on Millicent with “You both have far too many cousins. Complain about that.”

He gives Hermione an approving nod when he sees her partner up with Greg—Morgana only knows he needs the help in potions, his literacy problems are particularly disastrous in this setting—and plops himself down with a melancholy sigh by Pansy.

“I miss Tracy and Daphne,” he says.

“Who?” Pansy asks.

Draco grimaces. “My imaginary friends,” he says. “You haven’t seen them around, by any chance?”

She raises an eyebrow. “You’re mad.”


“Well, if you go any more bonkers, be told that I have quite a lot of knives and things right here and I’m absolutely itching to use them.”

“I have the same amount of knives. It’s potions.”

Pansy promptly raises her hand. “Professor, Malfoy’s threatening me with knives.”

Snape looks up from across the classroom. “Five points from Gryffindor,” he says.

“What!” Draco exclaims.

“What!” exclaims Hermione, from the next table over. “Draco!”

“Keep your voice down in class, Ms Granger.” Snape fixes Hermione with a dark, anticipatory air. Hermione clamps her mouth shut and bends hurriedly over her mashed mugwort.

Snape and Pansy used to be a lot funnier, Draco reflects, when they were on his side. Or, he supposes, when he was on theirs. He gives his partner his best possible glare—she only smiles at him sweetly—then takes all the beetles for himself to chop up. She can deal with deboning the batwings. Serves her right.

Snape keeps a close eye on him for the rest of the practical: weirdly, unnervingly close. Draco keeps being reminded that they’re not on the same side anymore, haven’t really been in ages, perhaps... they never were? He keeps thinking about how Snape killed Dumbledore when Draco couldn’t, how he’d accepted Voldemort’s praise for it with this terrible little smile on his sallow face, protecting Draco with this twisted act of self-aggrandizement that he rode all the way to the top of Voldemort’s heap of treacherous monsters.

How he never really told Draco much of anything, beforehand, or if he had Draco was too young and stupid to listen. This isn’t a game, Draco, he’d said, once, pale with anger, clutching the livid Dark Mark on his sallow wrist. This is your life. This is for all of your life.
But he hadn’t said a thing, when Draco had stepped up to take his mark. Hadn’t said a thing when Greyback had given Draco his second mark. Snape hadn’t said a single word to Draco that whole time, as everything fell apart for the Malfoys: one more casual betrayal of his patrons and protectors. Fawned and flattered in peacetime, left to burn in war.

The Malfoys stood by the Goyles, the Crabbes, the Knotts—even the Blacks!—for good or ill, an interdependent web of alliances and responsibility, bound in blood. Draco supposes it figures that a houseless halfblood would see no value whatsoever in blood loyalty, and serve only whatever master offered the best opportunity at any given moment.

But Draco had never stopped feeling personally, childishly betrayed about it all. Snape was his godfather and Draco had loved him and it had meant nothing, in the end. And now Draco is a child and Snape is betraying him all over again.

“Professor, Malfoy keeps hoarding the ingredients,” Pansy says cheerfully. “Tell him to share!”

“Mr Malfoy,” Snape drawls, looming over him. “Do mind your manners.”

“Yes, sir,” Draco sneers back. “Thank you for the reminder, sir. I wouldn’t want to bite anyone’s head off, sir!”

When he bares his teeth at Snape the man’s eyes widen, just a little, and he shifts his weight back on his heels before taking five more points from Gryffindor for insolence.

Draco smiles grimly at Pansy, knowing she saw it too. Snape hates werewolves. But he hates them because he’s stark, stupid terrified of them, and that is a small but very important consolation.

Pansy’s eyes narrow thoughtfully as Snape strides off. She’ll be called a pug for her nose and a bitch for her attitude all her time at Hogwarts, but she’s as sharp as any of the pedigreed Parkinson hunting dogs. She knows fear, when she sees it, can zero right in on weakness. Pansy could track a whiff of discomfort across ten miles of wasteland, and Draco still admires her immensely, even while she’s still a cute, chubby little girl in pigtails. Even when they can’t be friends.

“Isn’t it nice when Gryffindors and Slytherins get along together!” Draco says brightly.

“I do enjoy interspecies cooperation,” Pansy says, thoughtfully, carefully, and lets him keep peeling all the snails.

* 

The weekend speeds past Draco in a series of awful, anxious lurches, until Hagrid comes to find him in the library. He looks absurd, easing carefully through bookstacks only slightly taller than himself, but Draco doesn’t feel much like laughing.

“Ready, young Malfoy?” Hagrid asks.

Hermione and Neville give him matched sympathetic looks. It makes it much easier for Draco to raise his chin in a noble and stoic gesture of determination, and say “Yes, of course,” instead of screaming like a banshee and jumping out the nearest window.

He hands all his books and things over to Hermione, brushes his robes down only somewhat
unnecessarily, and walks with manly composure over to Hagrid’s side. Then the giant groundskeeper completely ruins the effect by taking Draco’s hand and towing him away with a too-cheery “Right, off we go then!” as if he were a niffler pull-along toy.

The cell is much the same as the last time Draco saw it: a fairly large, empty room at the end of a long-unused corridor of the Hogwarts dungeons. Most of the room is behind thick, narrowly set wrought-iron bars, freshly installed, leaving an observation space a few paces across between the bars and the room’s sturdy oak door. Hagrid halts in this space, and fumbles for his keys to open the iron gate set into the bars.

“Where ye go,” the half-giant says, with forced heartiness. “Jus’ get yerself settled in, that’s a brave lad.”

Draco does not feel brave. He feels tired, and scared, and sad, and he wants his mother very badly. He’s not sure if this is his sixth or seventh transformation, and can’t quite concentrate enough to have a proper count, and doesn’t really want to anyway. But he’s come this far, and anyway there isn’t anything else to do. He walks into the cell, and starts unbuttoning his robe.

Then he pauses, because while the cell has the same scattering of chew-bones, old pillows, and Fang’s enormous manky dog bed as Draco remembers Hagrid pointing out to him before, it also has a cat. The cat is a large, sleek tabby, with pale spectacle markings around very familiar stern green eyes. It is sitting on Fang’s dog bed—or, rather, half-submerged in the thing.

“Er,” Draco squeaks, and clutches his half-unbuttoned robes up to his chest. “Hagrid!”

“Yes?”

“There’s—er! There’s a cat!”

The cat blinks slowly at him.

“Is there now,” Hagrid says, with a really terrible affectation of nonchalance. “Musta come in through the bars. Yeh know how it is with cats.”

“Er!” Draco agrees. “But—but, er. Is she—do you think she’s—likely to stay?”

“Well... she probably jus’ wants ter keep an eye on ye. As... yeh know, as cats... do. I could try ter shoo her away or summat....” Hagrid sounds uncertain about this. Draco contemplates either of them trying to shoo this particular cat, and shivers.

“I’m sure she can come or go as she pleases,” he says thinly, and Hagrid looks immensely relieved.

“Right, yeah,” he says, and locks up the door set into the bars. “I’ll, eh, leave yeh to it all... good luck, Malfoy.”

Draco waves goodbye, then feels incredibly stupid for having done so. He peers furtively at the cat, who has curled up and closed its eyes. It slits one green eye open, though, and the very tip of its tail twitches. Draco hastily retreats to the corner of the cell and waits until both the cat’s eyes are closed to finish disrobing.

He gets his clothes folded and pushed outside the bars just in time: the moon rises, somewhere far away, and drags the wolf inside of him out.

The ravenous, vengeful anger that is a werewolf’s fundamental nature has been thoroughly suppressed by the potions Draco’s been taking, but the wolf is still a wild young thing. It goes
sniffing all over its new enclosure, so delighted with all its exquisitely chewable new possessions that it doesn’t even have time to get lonely before it discovers the cat.

The cat is no longer curled up. It is instead sitting up very tall on its back haunches, and when the wolf cub comes rushing excitedly forward, the cat gives it a stern warning swat on the snout.

The wolf is immediately apologetic: this is the first creature beside itself it has seen in months, and it wants nothing more than to make friends. It rolls over, whining, and wags so hard its thin tail whaps thunderously against the stone floor.

The cat graciously deigns to let the werewolf insinuate itself onto the dog bed, then lick beseechingingly under the cat’s chin. This respectful tribute delivered, the cat pins the wolf cub down by the scruff and sets to the fairly hopeless task of licking its tufty, immature pelt into order. For a long while, there are no sounds in the room but the rapid beating of the ecstatic cub’s tail and the soft, half-swallowed purring of the grooming cat.

Both cat and wolf look up sharply when the outer door of the room creaks. The cat’s whiskers go forward, interrogatively, and the cub’s ears tuck back. Both tail and purr stutter to a halt.

A man creeps into the room, furtive and hooded. He smells of garlic, and of deathly dark magic. Draco knows who this is, and so the wolf cub knows who this is: it gives a long, anguished cry and bolts for the furthest corner of the cage, where it claws frantically at the walls and floor, trying to dig its way out through stone.

The hooded figure draws closer to the cage, then reaches out to trail a wand across the iron bars, one by one. The iron thrums under the press of magic, thick bars twisting in place like snakes. The wolf gives up scratching and begins to bodily throw itself at the wall, then dashes to the next corner, claws at it, dashes back again in a panic. It is crying a pathetic shrill puppy cry, one of its paws already worn raw and bleeding, but it tries again to dig through stone as the hooded figure reaches the gate set into the bars.

“Mrrr,” goes the cat, and stands very deliberately in front of door. It fixes a stern glare up at the man, green eyes as cold and sharp as diamonds, whiskers quivering in the faint wandlight. Its tail lashes, just once, in warning.

The hooded figure pauses, then gives the cat a low bow.

“G-g-good evening, P-professor,” Quirrel stammers meekly. “I j-just came by t-t-to check the cage w-was, was, er, s-s-secure. W-w-wouldn’t w-w-want any accidents! Is everything al-al-alright?”

The werewolf cries desperately in the corner, still trying to dig.

The cat lashes its tail once more, then nods, very pointedly. It sits down, as if it has all the time in the world just to stare at Quirrel.

“Good, good,” says Quirrel. “I’ll j-just, ah, I’ll be... w-well, I’ll be on my w-way, then. T-take c-c-care!”

“Ffst,” the cat remarks, scathingly. Once the intruder is gone from the room, the cat stretches elaborately, yawns, and goes to collect the cub from its desperate scratching. The werewolf is at least three times the tabby’s size, but allows itself to be bullied—still trembling and whimpering—back onto the dog bed, and then sat on. The cub lies on the big, worn cushion and pants and shivers, tail tucked tightly, eyes wide, paws leaving bloody smudges on the fabric, and the tabby cat holds the cub down and sternly grooms it all over again, from bristling hackles to raw red paws. It takes a very
long time, but cats are very patient when they’re taking care of things. Especially when those things are frightened young children, of any species.

* 

Draco wakes up in the hospital wing, snuggled under stiff, heavy blankets that smell only of cleaning spells. His hands are numb, although the rest of him feels achy and exhausted in a way that’s become depressingly familiar. Not such a bad change, then, not really, except. Except this is Hogwarts, school of witchcraft and wizardry and fucking Dark Lords, curses and monsters and traps and murders, it’s not safe, why did he come here? He takes a shaky, shallow little breath in through his nose, feeling it start to sting, his eyes start to burn. Nowhere’s safe, not even a cell designed to hold back a werewolf. The Dark Lord almost got to him there, too.

“Draco,” his mother says, and he sits bolt upright. His mother is sitting in a visitor’s chair to one side of the head of his cot, and he scrambles without further thought to embrace her. She smells of flowery perfume and of the manor and underneath that exactly like herself, his mother, who is here, her arms around him, her face pressed to his forehead. He sniffles childishly and can hardly care.

“Mum,” he manages, and squeezes her tightly. “You’re here.”

“Of course, darling,” his mother said. “Though you could have stood to wake a little sooner, Draco, really. It’s nearly one in the afternoon.”

“Yes, lunch is almost over,” Hermione chimes in, and Draco would jump out of his skin if it weren’t for his mother holding him so firmly.

“Merlin!” he gasps, and Narcissa huffs a warm, quiet laugh against his hair. Draco peers over his shoulder in rising mortification, at Granger and Longbottom perched in visitor’s chairs on the other side of his bed, looking smaller and younger than ever.

“Er,” he says. “...been here long?”

“Most of lunch,” Hermione says. “We brought food up though, in my bag! Nutrition is important! Madame Pomfrey agreed with me. And your mum.”

Draco peers up at his mother. “So... you’ve.... met?”

“I introduced myself,” Hermione says. “It was that or sit here staring at you being unconscious all hour, which was terribly boring. She helped me with my transfiguration homework. Your mum is very intelligent.”

“I’ve noticed that myself,” Draco says numbly, which at least earns him an approving squeeze from Narcissa. He contemplates whether or not he should get off her lap and try to be an adult about all this, but can’t think of any good reasons why, and presses his face more firmly against his mother’s shoulder. If he’s going to have all the stupid crying jags and irrational fits that come with being a very traumatized little boy, he might as well enjoy being small enough to get the really good hugs from his mother, before he outgrows them.

“You’ve made some very charming acquaintances here, Draco,” Narcissa says, her voice rich with amusement. “I wish you’d written to let me know earlier, I was worried.”

“Well, er, as you can see, you don’t have to be, I’m perfectly alright,” Draco says. “I’m absolutely set on minions, henchmen, and assorted hangers on. Practically king of Gryffindor, you know.”
“He isn’t, actually,” Hermione says. “He just says things like that when he’s stressed.”

“I’m not a minion,” Neville says, apparently finding a bit of spine under his seat cushion.

“Yes you are,” Draco says sternly. “Greg appointed you.”

“Draco, no one has to be your minion if they don’t want to be,” Narcissa says. “We’ve had this talk before.”

“Have you,” Hermione says.

“Longbottom does too want to be my minion!” Draco says. “Why wouldn’t he! I keep track of his toad for him and everything! No one else around here’s going to do that for their minions.”

“I thought you were joking about the minion thing!” Neville protests.

“I’m always completely serious about everything!” Draco exclaims. “Except when I’m being sarcastic and I don’t see why that should count against me here!”

“We’ve had this talk too,” Narcissa tells Hermione, who looks unfairly delighted.

“Mother,” Draco wails. “Stop embarrassing me in front of my—my—people!”

“Friends,” Hermione says. “Best friends, I think it was. You bought me a whole teakettle and everything.”

“And you stop embarrassing me in front of my mother!” Draco orders her. It doesn’t help. She and Narcissa just share a terrible look that portends all sorts of future horrors. Merlin’s tits, he never thought he’d have to worry about his mother getting along with Hermione Granger, of all the bloody fucking witches in the whole entire stupid world.

“Visiting hours are over,” Madame Pomfrey says, sweeping in.

“You’re my new favorite,” Draco says fervently. “Please save me.”

“You’ll have to let go of your mum first, dear,” Pomfrey says, and Draco realizes with a guilty flush that he’s still clinging to Narcissa’s front like a particularly sad lethifold. He unpeels, and settles stiffly back into bed, wincing manfully here and there as various aches make themselves known.

“I’ll see you soon, darling, at your first Quidditch game,” Narcissa says. “Your father and I are looking forward to it tremendously. In the meantime, do try to pick up a quill now and then. You know how Boudica frets.”

Draco takes this threat as read, and nods solemnly.

“Would you two chivalrous Gryffindors care to escort me out, Ms Granger? Mr Longbottom?” Narcissa asks them politely, and they scramble up out of their chairs, looking startled and pleased to be asked.

“Yes, of course,” Neville says, giving an almost-not-terrible bow appropriate to his station and Narcissa’s, which Hermione inappropriately copies. She’s so young, so horribly, earnestly oblivious of her place in the world: it makes something strange in Draco’s chest twinge, which he honestly doesn’t need, considering how much of the rest of him already feels terrible.

“Draco, we took Herbology notes for you, they’re on the side table!” Hermione says, walking backwards out of the ward in order to wave at him. “Rest up, we’ll see you at dinner!”
Draco waves at them weakly, then rolls over and drags a pillow over his face. He would reconsider every life decision that brought him here, except for how he already has and he regrets all of them.

*Chivalrous Gryffindors,* indeed!

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