Strange Bedfellows

by orphan_account, ravenclawsquill

Summary

When Harry encounters a frail and fidgety Draco Malfoy at the Ministry, he just knows something is wrong and he’s determined to get to the bottom of it.

A story about Deadly Nightshade, crippling insomnia, excellent wine … and finding what you need in the strangest of circumstances.

Notes

Written for HD-Hurtfest 2016.

I’d like to thank lemmom_pie for the magnificent prompt; the wonderful mods, for their patience in the face of my multiple extension requests; and most of all, josephinestone, for the exceptional beta work.

See the end of the work for more notes.
“Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows. I will here shroud till the dregs of the storm be past.”
— The Tempest, Act II, Scene II

Harry dashed through the maze-like corridors of the Ministry, sweating slightly in his scarlet Auror robes.

He pulled a crumpled memo from his pocket and checked his destination yet again: Level 5, Room 53. He scanned the smart wooden doors as he strode past them; he was still miles away. Both the memo and the letter which preceded it had rather unhelpfully failed to provide directions.

The letter had arrived on Harry’s desk over a month ago. Its content was very dry indeed – something about Wizengamot reform and a request to interview Harry about his infamous underage magic disciplinary hearing – but the flamboyant signature of Draco Malfoy at the bottom had captured Harry’s interest.

He’d heard that Malfoy had recently begun working at the Ministry, doing something or other in the Department of Wizengamot Administration Services, but they had yet to run into one another. Harry couldn’t resist such an excellent opportunity to see what Malfoy was up to, so he had agreed to attend an interview with rather more enthusiasm than was strictly necessary.

When the original interview date came around, however, it was cancelled at short notice. The note simply said that Malfoy was unavailable due to “unforeseen circumstances”. Harry had given it the benefit of the doubt, but it had happened again two weeks later.

This was the third attempt, and Harry’s patience was wearing thin. Malfoy’s memo about the rescheduled time had arrived just half an hour before the interview was due to commence. Harry had been tempted to refuse, but his curiosity had marginally outweighed his outrage. Even so, he was seething; it was just like Malfoy to assume that Harry had nothing better to do with his time than be at his beck and call.

Harry was nearing the end of the corridor; Room 49 … 51 … 53. Relieved to have found the room with seconds to spare, Harry knocked loudly and burst through the door.

Given the pompous nature of Malfoy’s demand, Harry had expected something rather more impressive. A panel of interviewers, perhaps, in a grand room with wood-panelled walls. This room was no larger than a broom cupboard and almost as shabby. It contained just a single desk and two cheap-looking chairs, and even this made for a tight fit.

Malfoy was sat at the desk, his blond head bent over a pile of paperwork. He didn’t stand to greet Harry.

“Close the door behind you and take a seat, Auror Potter,” Malfoy said, without looking up. His trademark drawl noticeably absent; he sounded hoarse and exhausted.

Still slightly breathless, Harry sat down in the vacant chair, ignoring the faint crunch it made as its spindly legs struggled to bear his weight. The last thing he needed was for his chair to collapse beneath him in front of Draco bloody Malfoy.

Harry watched as Malfoy leafed through a stack of official-looking papers and was struck by how ill he looked. There were dark shadows under his eyes and his hair looked as if it hadn’t been
washed in several days. He was thinner than Harry had ever seen him; his cheeks were hollow, and although the fabric of his grey suit looked expensive, it hung limply from his frame.

Harry’s assessment was cut short when Malfoy pointedly cleared his throat, ready to begin.

“As I outlined in my letter, I’m preparing a proposal for the reform of Wizengamot Hearing procedures. In order to support my assertion that the current procedures encourage inconsistency, I am compiling a series of witness statements which highlight examples of extreme cases.”

His words sounded rehearsed, as though he had given this speech a hundred times before. Harry supposed that he might have.

“Why?”

Malfoy narrowed his eyes a fraction, but didn’t take the bait. “Because it’s my job.”

Harry watched as he set up a Quick-Quotes Quill and a sheet of parchment.

Once Harry had confirmed his name and given consent for the interview to presented to the Wizengamot, Malfoy began to run through a list of questions.

“As I understand it, you were subjected to a disciplinary hearing before the full Wizengamot on the twelfth of August nineteen-ninety-five. Is that correct?”

“Yes,” said Harry. He had no idea whether the date was right, but it seemed that Malfoy had done his research. The quill marked a firm tick on the page.

“In your own words, please outline the charges which formed the basis for the hearing.”

They ran through the questions in quick succession. They were dull and often highly detailed, and Harry frequently found himself admitting that he didn’t know the answers. The hearing had taken place almost thirteen years ago, after all, and it had all been a bit overwhelming.

As the interview went on, he watched Malfoy closely. There was definitely something off about him. Had they not been on Ministry premises, Harry would have been convinced the man before him was an imposter. Malfoy’s mannerisms were all wrong: he fidgeted relentlessly, tapping his fingers on the desk, carding them through his hair, moving, twitching, constantly.

As Malfoy’s enquiries turned to the details of the hearing itself, Harry noticed a sheen of sweat glistening along his hairline. This was odd: the room wasn’t warm in the slightest. If anything, Harry was quite chilly, despite the scarlet Auror robes layered over his clothes.

“The time and location were changed on the morning of the hearing, I found out from—are you alright, Malfoy?”

“I’m fine, Potter. Please continue.”

Malfoy clearly wasn’t fine; his words came out strained and his pupils were so widely dilated they threatened to swallow his grey irises. As Harry repeated his explanation, a droplet of sweat ran smoothly down Malfoy’s left temple. Malfoy wiped it away with a shaky hand.

“And were you offered any legal representation?”

If Malfoy was surprised by any of Harry’s responses, he didn’t show it. Then again, he clearly had more important matters on his mind.
They ran through the number of Wizengamot members present and the constituency of the Top Table, then moved on to the lines of questioning taken during the Hearing.

A short while later, Malfoy plucked the Quick-Quotes Quill from the air. “That’s all I need. You can leave now.” He made a shooing gesture with his hand.

The whole interview had taken less than half an hour.

Harry got up to leave, but paused in the doorway, staring. Malfoy’s distant professionalism cracked under the weight of his gaze.

“What, Potter?” he snapped, his hands trembling as he attempted to roll up his parchment. His face was an ashy shade of grey.

“Nothing.”

Harry returned to the Auror office, stunned by what he had seen, wild theories racing through his mind.

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Harry stepped out of the Floo and into Ron and Hermione’s living room. He toed off his shoes and shed his Auror robes, letting them land in a crumpled heap on the sofa. Deeming himself sufficiently de-Aurored, Harry followed the sound of clanging pots and pans through to the kitchen.

He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw Ron’s gangly shoulders bent over the stove while Hermione sat at the table, her nose buried in an enormous book. Hermione’s ineptitude in the kitchen never ceased to amaze Harry; she was almost as bad at cooking as she was at Divination.

“Hi, Harry!” she beamed, closing her book and jumping up to give him a hug. She always greeted him like that these days – with a tight embrace, as if she hadn’t seen him for months – though it was rarely more than a few days between his visits. Harry suspected she still felt guilty about moving out of Grimmauld Place.

“Break it up, break it up,” said Ron, grinning. Harry leaned back as three plates floated past and set themselves down on the heavy oak table with a clunk. “Harry, how is it that we do the exact same job, but you always finish two hours after me?”

Because you have someone to come home to? Harry’s mind supplied unhelpfully. “Because you’re a slacker, of course.”

Ron vehemently denied this allegation as they sat down and tucked into their shepherd’s pie.

When the conversation lulled, Harry seized the opportunity. “I saw Malfoy today,” he said, trying to keep his voice light.

“Oh yeah?” asked Ron, sounding utterly uninterested as he reached for the gravy.

Harry pressed on, refusing to be put off by Ron’s lukewarm reaction. “He looked terrible, like he was really ill.” Harry paused. He knew that saying any more would be a mistake, but the words burst out anyway. “I think he’s up to something.”

Ron and Hermione exchanged a look across the table. Harry heard the unspoken words between them: Here we go again.
For a few moments the only sounds were their knives and forks against their plates.

Hermione broke the silence, her voice slightly weary. “He’s probably grieving, Harry. His mother died a couple of months ago.”

Harry’s stomach clenched into a tight knot. A memory flashed through his mind: gentle hands checking his pulse as he lay on a bed of pine needles, the terrified whisper of a mother asking after her only son. “I had no idea,” he said quietly.

“Yes, well. It can’t be easy for him. First his father, then his mother…”

Harry shuddered. Lucius Malfoy’s undignified death in Azkaban had been celebrated extensively in the newspapers earlier that year.

They lapsed into another long silence. Just as it seemed the subject had been closed, Ron spoke up, sounding reluctant. “You’re not going to get all obsessive about him like you did during Sixth Year, are you?”

“Of course not,” Harry snapped. “I was just curious.”

Neither of his friends looked convinced. “I mean it, mate. Nothing good will come of this.”

“I agree,” said Hermione. “Promise us you’ll leave him alone.”

“I promise,” Harry ground out through gritted teeth. He hadn't expected an enthusiastic reaction, but it was mortifying to be treated like a naughty child.

Thankfully, the conversation moved swiftly on. They finished their meal without any further mention of Malfoy, though Harry remained in a bad mood for the rest of the evening.

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Despite his promise, Harry found himself spending a great deal of time thinking about Malfoy. He just knew there was something going on, and he was determined to find out what it was.

It didn’t help that a small voice in the back of Harry’s mind kept reminding him that the last time he’d been suspicious of Malfoy, his instincts had been spot on. Everyone had brushed his concerns aside while Malfoy spent the best part of a year trying to murder Dumbledore and grant the Death Eaters access to Hogwarts, seriously injuring several people in the process.

Harry began to find increasingly ridiculous excuses to wander the halls of the Ministry. He lingered in the Atrium at the start and end of each day and took long walks at lunchtime, always hoping to catch a glimpse of Malfoy. Once, he even slunk down to Level Five, but found the interview room vacant, its battered desk devoid of paperwork.

Harry told himself he was carrying out “surveillance”. It sounded better, more official, than “unfounded stalking”. He didn’t tell anyone about this project, especially Ron or Hermione.

Two weeks passed, and Harry was forced to admit that his attempts at surveillance had been completely unsuccessful. He had spotted Malfoy just once, in the lift, and even that opportunity had been wasted because Ron had been in there with them and had given Harry a warning look.

By the middle of the third week, Harry’s patience had run out. If he wanted to find out more about Malfoy, it wasn’t going to happen from afar. His mind was made up: he was going to send Malfoy
a note.

He looked Malfoy up in the Ministry Directory, and was surprised to see that the Wizengamot Reform Department were based all the way down on Level Ten. Harry couldn't think of a more depressing corner of the Ministry building. Evidently the powers that be weren't terribly keen on reform.

He spent an embarrassingly long time dithering over the opening. “Draco” was out of the question, and he couldn’t remember Malfoy’s job title. He eventually decided to keep it simple.

_Malfoy,_

_I wanted to check that my witness statement was detailed enough. If you need anything else from me, just let me know._

_Harry_

He quickly folded the paper into a misshapen aeroplane before he could change his mind. It shot through the open door like a cork from a bottle, leaving Harry to begin the nail-biting wait for a response.

Fortunately, the wait was a short one; Malfoy’s reply arrived later that afternoon.

Harry opened up the neatly folded lilac paper plane, his fingers clumsy from the spike of adrenaline at having seen the Wizengamot Administration Department stamp on one of its wings.

_Dear Mr Potter,_

_Further to your note, I wish to advise that your Witness Statement is adequate and nothing further is required._

_Regards,_

_D. A. Malfoy_

Despite its disappointingly dull content, Harry stared at the note so many times during the course of the day that by the time he left work that evening, the edges were tatty and it lay flat.

Malfoy’s handwriting was neat but aggressive; the spiky black letters almost came through the page where the sharp nib of his quill had stabbed the dots of his i’s. Harry was convinced the flourish at the end of “Malfoy” looked shaky.

Harry knew it was ridiculous to resort to analysing handwriting, but his curiosity was raging, uncontrollable as Fiendfyre.

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Harry fought his way through the packed pub, his fingers slipping on the cool condensation which had gathered on the two pint glasses he was holding. He’d never seen it so busy at lunch time. Thankfully, the crowd parted easily for him – one of the few perks of being Harry Potter.

He stepped out into the beer garden, squinting in the June sunshine. It was a beautiful day – the hottest day of the year so far, according to the Prophet.

Harry weaved through the throng of people until he reached his colleagues and passed Ron – whose nose was already looking rather pink – the second pint. The conversation hadn’t moved on
since he’d left; they were still discussing the Falcons’ disastrous new Keeper. Harry joined in eagerly, ignoring the sweat trickling down his back.

Harry knew deep down that he didn’t have the time to spend a whole afternoon at the pub, though it seemed half the Ministry workforce was content to do just that. He had a huge case file to read through before Monday morning. The nagging guilt finally won as he drained his fourth pint.

“I’m going to make a move,” Harry said. His colleagues nodded in sympathy, but made no effort to follow him.

Harry dashed back to the Auror Office, shrunk the case file and slipped it into his pocket. The Ministry was so quiet it looked almost post-apocalyptic; even the Atrium was deserted. It seemed that almost everyone had taken advantage of the sunny Friday afternoon.

As he called the lift, Harry had an idea.

He knew it was a bad one and tried to dismiss it, but when the doors opened on Level Eight, opposite the long row of fireplaces, he didn’t get out. Instead, he pressed another button. The lift hissed and took off again, rattling as it descended.

Harry stepped out on Level Nine and made a beeline for the staircase which would take him down to the very depths of the Ministry. It brought him out in the middle of an imposing corridor with bare stone walls, lit only by flaming torches. Harry recognised his surroundings and realised with a jolt that this floor housed the Courtrooms. He strode along the corridor, wondering if it was unpleasant for Malfoy, who had been subjected to a long and unpleasant trial after the War, to walk past them every day.

Harry was relieved when the rough flagstones and torchlight ended and were replaced with office lighting and dull brown carpet. He could be anywhere in the Ministry now, though there was a slight chill to the air which served as a constant reminder that he was deep beneath Muggle London.

This section of hallway was lined with identical black doors, each bearing a polished brass handle and a sign stating the occupant’s name.

Finally, Harry found Malfoy’s office. The small silver plaque on the door read ‘D. A. Malfoy – Senior Administrative Reform Officer’. Harry wondered, not for the first time, what the ‘A’ stood for. Arsehole, perhaps, he mused.

He rapped his knuckles sharply against the gleaming wood and waited. There was no response. He tried again, but still, nothing. Malfoy had obviously left for the day.

Buoyed by the reckless courage of four pints of lager, Harry drew his wand and tapped it gently against the doorknob.

“Alohomora!”

The lock clicked and the door swung open with a muted groan. Harry looked left and right before slipping inside and gently pulling it shut behind him. He paused for a moment, squinting through the peephole at the corridor outside. Two smartly dressed wizards with long silver beards strode past, deep in conversation. Harry stood stock still, the lens of his glasses pushed against the peephole, his open eye stinging from the unfulfilled need to blink. When they disappeared from view, he breathed a quiet sigh of relief and stepped back from the door.

The reality of breaking into Malfoy’s office was quickly sinking in, and it occurred to Harry that he
had no idea what to do next. He looked around the room. It was reasonably large, but lacked a window, meaning it was much darker than the open-plan Auror Office. Heavy legal tomes lined bookshelves on three of the four walls, lending the room a library-like smell and a slightly claustrophobic atmosphere.

Malfoy’s desk stood at the centre of the office. It was clearly his own – it looked nothing like the cheap, standardised Ministry furniture Harry was used to. This desk was huge, probably antique, and constructed from beautifully varnished dark wood. He wondered if it had once stood within Malfoy Manor. Almost every inch of the desk’s surface was piled high with rolls of parchment and yet more leather-bound books, some of which looked extremely old.

Harry crossed the room slowly, stunned by Malfoy’s chaotic workspace; for some reason he’d expected him to be tidier. Even the bin in the corner was overflowing with crumpled purple memos.

As Harry crept around the side of the desk, he jumped violently.

Hidden behind the fortress of books was a familiar head of white-blond hair, slumped against the desk at an awkward angle.

Shock rooted Harry to the spot as waves of adrenaline crashed over him. He forced himself to take a few deep breaths in an attempt to dispel the dizziness. As much as he wanted to turn on the spot and run, he couldn’t do it. There was something unnatural about Malfoy’s pose. Harry was overcome by a sense that something was badly wrong.

“Malfoy?” Harry whispered, his blood roaring in his ears.

He crept closer. Malfoy’s face was hidden in his arms, which were folded loosely across the desk in front of him. Harry reached out and tentatively nudged Malfoy's forearm. Nothing happened.

Harry’s stomach dropped.

Another nudge to Malfoy’s bony shoulder caused his head to loll sideways, revealing eyes which were half-shut. Only the whites were visible, the pupils having rolled back. His mouth was slack and he was deathly pale, though Harry couldn’t be sure whether this was any real change from his usual pallor.

Only then did Harry notice the phial. It was tiny, made from ornate crystal, and it lay unstoppered and empty on the desk, a few inches from Malfoy’s slim fingers. A single drop of liquid had run onto the polished wood, leaving a dark black burn.

“You stupid bastard, what have you taken?” Harry muttered, his mind racing. He shook the blond much harder, digging his fingers into Malfoy’s shoulder hard enough to bruise.

“WAKE UP!” Harry shouted.

Malfoy didn’t stir. Whatever the phial had contained, it was obviously very strong.

Harry pulled Malfoy’s sleeve up a few inches and gripped his wrist, pressing his forefinger firmly against the knot of blue veins which ran beneath Malfoy’s pale skin. He waited, desperately searching for the throb of a pulse. Thirty seconds passed. Sixty. Nothing.

Harry dropped Malfoy’s limp wrist. He was shaking. All of his Auror training hovered just out of reach, at the back of his mind. The situation was sickeningly reminiscent of that afternoon in the Hogwarts bathroom, so many years ago. He was sixteen again, out of his depth, watching his
schoolboy rival die. This time Severus Snape was not around to swoop in and save the day.

It was suddenly too hot. Sweat prickled on Harry’s neck. The walls were closing in, the floor lurching and swaying beneath his feet like a ship in a storm.

He stared around the room, searching frantically, though what for, he had no idea. Finally, his gaze settled on the fireplace. There was only one place he could take Malfoy.

He pocketed the tiny phial, taking care not to let it come into contact with his skin, before lifting Malfoy up in one swift movement. He was surprisingly light, but extraordinarily difficult to hold: he was several inches taller than Harry and his feet dragged on the floor as his body slipped in Harry’s awkward grip.

Harry stumbled to the fireplace and kicked Malfoy’s entire pot of Floo powder into the glowing embers. He knew this particular destination was strictly forbidden, but this surely had to count as an emergency.

“Healer Panacea’s Office, St Mungo’s!” he shouted as he staggered into the flames, his voice straining as he struggled to maintain his hold on Malfoy.

Green flames leapt up around them, sweeping them away from Malfoy’s oppressive office. Grates flew past in quick succession. Harry’s grip on Malfoy began to falter, and he had to fight with all of his strength not to drop him.

Finally, they fell out of the Floo and onto a hard linoleum floor. Harry landed on top of Malfoy’s unconscious form, panting heavily.

The acrid smell of medical potions invaded his nostrils. The small office into which they had fallen was familiar to Harry; he had spent a great deal of time here since becoming an Auror.

Its owner burst through the door seconds later in an explosion of lime green robes, looking positively mutinous.

“Harry Potter, what have I told you about using my private Floo?” Healer Panacea’s voice filled the room, her vowels rumbling like thunder. She sounded ready for a rant, but stopped short as she took in the sight of the two men on the floor, her brown eyes widening in shock. Ever the professional, she recovered her composure almost instantly and marched over to them.

“What have you done this time?” she asked.

“Please, help him.”

Panacea tried again. “What on earth happened?”

Harry’s voice was hollow and sounded unfamiliar even to him. “I found him like this. I can’t feel a pulse. I don’t think he’s breathing. Please. Do something.”

The silence that followed was unbearable. They were wasting time, and Malfoy clearly had very little time to spare.

“DO SOMETHING!” Harry roared.

Healer Panacea took out her wand and performed a complicated flicking motion. Four Healers appeared in the doorway, as quickly as if they had Apparated.
They levitated Malfoy’s limp body into the air and smoothly directed him from the room. Harry pushed past Panacea and ran after them, tripping over his own feet in the process.

“I found this next to him,” he told the nearest Healer when he caught up, pushing the tiny phial from Malfoy’s office into her gloved hand. She nodded and carefully pocketed it.

Harry followed the Healers down a long corridor and through a set of double doors, into a ward. He watched, powerless, as they gently lowered Malfoy onto a bed and began to perform diagnostic spells.

Healer Panacea entered the ward a moment later, her robes billowing imperiously as she marched straight towards Harry. Her face was set in a grim frown. Harry opened his mouth to speak but before he could do so, she placed a warm, dark brown hand on each of his shoulders and proceeded to march him unceremoniously from the ward.

They came to a stop outside the double doors. Healer Panacea jabbed Harry in the chest with her wand. “Wait in my office,” she said sharply. “We’ll have words about the way you spoke to me, Auror Potter.”

Harry nodded, chastened. Panacea looked at him for a long moment. She pressed a Pepper-Up Potion into Harry’s hand before turning and slamming the doors in his face.

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Harry sat in Healer Panacea’s stuffy little office for an unbearably long time. As night fell outside, the beeping car horns of the rush hour traffic were gradually superseded by raucous laughter, and the unnatural yellow glow of the streetlights spilled in through the window, replacing the evening sun.

Harry had all but memorised the contents of the room in an attempt to think of anything other than Malfoy’s expressionless face and limp, unconscious body. It hadn’t worked, of course. He stared dully at the photograph which stood on the desk; it showed a much younger Panacea, beaming with pride and clutching a diploma.

Harry knew Panacea well. She was the Healer in charge of the Private Ward, a formidable woman known for her exacting standards and no-nonsense manner. She cut an intimidating figure; she could throw a glare that would make Professor McGonagall proud, and at over six feet tall, she would have had to give Harry a few inches to match him – even without the heavy braids which she wore piled on top of her head.

Harry had lost count of the number of evenings he’d spent at St Mungo’s since qualifying as an Auror, many of which had been spent recovering from spell damage whilst drinking Panacea’s monstrously strong tea. He liked to think she had a soft spot for him, though her brisk demeanor made it difficult to tell.

By the time she finally returned, Harry had worried himself sick. She dropped a stack of patient files onto her desk, then folded her arms across her chest, scowling. “Well?”

“Is he going to be okay?” Harry asked, his voice cracking after hours of disuse.

This was not the correct response. Panacea glared at him, her lips pressed together tightly. “The way you shouted at me earlier, I’ve a good mind to ban you from this ward permanently and notify Head Auror Robards!”

“I’m sorry.” Harry felt hot, prickly shame creeping up from his collar, pinkening his ears. “I didn’t
mean to be so rude. I was just really worried.”

She tutted and shook her head, but the crease between her eyebrows had disappeared. Harry knew he was forgiven.

“What’s wrong with him?”

Panacea paused for a long moment before answering, as if weighing up whether to disclose the information. Eventually she sighed. “It’s an overdose.”

“Like a drug overdose?” Harry couldn’t imagine Malfoy as a drug user.

“More of a prescription drug. Dreamless Sleep. Well, a variety of it, anyway,” she murmured with a frown, more to herself than to Harry. “He’s not on the prescription register and it appears to be home-made.”

Panacea’s mention of the prescription register triggered a realisation for Harry. The Ministry’s policy on substance abuse was extremely strict; a Senior Auror had been sacked on the spot the previous summer over recreational use of Bulbadox juice, of all things. Abuse of Dreamless Sleep was far more serious, and would almost certainly cost Malfoy his job if it became public knowledge.

Harry interrupted Panacea’s explanation of the dangers of home-brewing. “I need you to keep everything confidential. The fact that he’s here, what he’s here for … all of it. It’s really important. He won't want anyone to know. And don't put him on the Public Ward. I’ll pay for his room if I have to. Please. For me.”

Harry gave her his best Saviour-of-the-Wizarding-World look, willing her comply. Panacea simply narrowed her eyes.

“You would do well not to tell me how to do my job, Auror Potter. I will treat Mr Malfoy’s admission as a confidential matter because that is the hospital’s policy – not because you requested it.” Her sharp tone faltered under the hopeful gaze of Harry’s green eyes. “He can stay on the Private Ward for the time being, but if we need the bed, I will not hesitate to send him down to Potion and Plant Poisoning.”

Harry beamed. Malfoy would almost certainly kill him when he woke up, but at least Harry couldn’t be blamed for getting him sacked. His relief lasted about thirty seconds, before he realised that Panacea still hadn’t answered his most urgent question.

“Is he going to be okay?”

Healer Panacea sighed. “It’s too early to say. We’re still trying to stabilise him.” Harry’s horror must have shown on his face, because she laid a gentle hand on his shoulder and continued. “It’s a very good job you found him when you did. You may well have saved his life.”

The confirmation that Malfoy had been – and possibly still was – close to death caused Harry’s insides to writhe. He felt more worried than ever.

Panacea checked her watch. “Go home, Harry. Get some sleep. He’s in safe hands.”

Harry allowed her to usher him to the fireplace, but he paused by the grate. His hesitation was the final straw for Healer Panacea’s patience.

“Are you going to trust me or not?” she asked crossly. “I don’t wear these ridiculous robes solely
for the purpose of looking like a fruit salad, you know.”

Harry gave a shaky laugh and reluctantly reached for the Floo powder.

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Harry Flooed home and went straight to the liquor cabinet. The few bottles inside were dusty – he preferred ale over spirits – but the evening’s events had left him in dire need of a stiff drink.

He poured a generous measure of Firewhisky and knocked it back in a single gulp, before getting another. His hands were shaking.

He took his glass through to the front room and collapsed on the sofa. The clock on the wall revealed it to be one o’clock in the morning.

Sleeping was out of the question. It was as if the image of Malfoy slumped over his desk was burned onto Harry’s retinas, resurfacing with a vengeance every time he closed his eyes.

Harry knew he shouldn't care so much – it had been over a decade since he’d had any kind of meaningful contact with Malfoy – yet he felt as sick as if it had been Ron or Hermione in the hospital bed. It was a horrible feeling; a queasy ball of unease which crept from his stomach to his chest, crawling up his oesophagus to the back of his throat.

He had to go back and check if Malfoy was alright.

Harry pulled out a crumpled piece of parchment and scribbled a note to Ginny, explaining that he had a bug and wouldn't be able to watch her play the following morning. He felt guilty for lying, but he couldn't stomach the thought of watching a Quidditch match while Malfoy was in such a bad way.

Once he’d sent the note, he settled down on the sofa with the case file he’d collected before he found Malfoy. It seemed as though weeks had passed, rather than hours.

He opened the file and promptly fell asleep.

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Harry stepped out of Healer Panacea’s Floo at eight o’clock sharp the following morning to find her sat at her desk, reviewing a stack of medical reports.

“Oh, I see how it is. You’re going to ignore all elements of protocol, are you?” she griped, her eyebrows drawn together in disapproval.

Harry ought to have known better and used to Visitors Floo; Panacea was notoriously grumpy at the end of a night shift.

“Sorry. Is he okay?”

She stared at Harry for a long moment through narrowed eyes before giving in. “Your friend’s condition is stable. We’ve had him under a Stasis charm all night. We’ll be lifting it shortly and expect him to be a bit queasy when we do.”

Harry balked at the notion of he and Malfoy being friends, but knew better than to contest it; Panacea wouldn’t let him anywhere near Malfoy if she knew the truth, and Harry wasn’t even sure he could find the words to explain their difficult relationship.
Panacea was looking at Harry with an odd mixture of frustration and pity. “Would seeing him set your mind at ease?”

Harry nodded.

Panacea led the way to a private single-occupancy hospital room near the very end of the corridor and gestured for Harry to enter.

Malfoy lay, unconscious, on the narrow hospital bed. They had changed him out of his work clothes; he was now dressed in a St Mungo’s gown. Paper thin and short-sleeved, the pale green gown made Malfoy look even more deathly pale than usual. Even from across the room, the Dark Mark was immediately visible on his bare forearm, black as coal and raised from his skin, as if it had been burned on. Harry stared. He’d known Malfoy was marked, but the sight of it was still startling.

Harry was jolted from his thoughts by the sound of someone softly clearing their throat. One of the Healers from the previous night had appeared behind them in the doorway. She was holding a tray containing various potion bottles and looking directly at Healer Panacea.

“Ah, Healer Jenkins. Let’s get started,” Panacea said. She turned to address Harry. “You might want to step outside for an hour or so. This won't be pretty.”

“I’m staying,” Harry replied, using the resolute tone he usually reserved for making arrests.

He must have sounded sufficiently authoritative, because Panacea simply nodded. “As you wish.” She sighed. “If you think you’re going to faint, tell us immediately.”

Healer Jenkins stepped fully into the room and closed the door. Harry immediately felt that he was in the way. He shuffled over to the corner and sat down in one of the two uncomfortable plastic chairs, folding his arms across his chest.

Healer Jenkins busied herself arranging the potions, holding several bottles up to the light, presumably to check that their contents hadn’t spoiled. Meanwhile, Panacea made her way over to the bed and took out her wand. On the count of three, she abruptly ended the Stasis charm.

For a heartbeat, nothing happened.

Then Malfoy gasped. He sucked in great lungfuls of stuffy air with the desperation of a drowning man, his deep, ragged breaths reminiscent of the sounds made by Dementors. Harry could hear mucous bubbling in Malfoy’s chest as he spluttered and panted, eyes still squeezed shut.

Harry wished he had taken Healer Panacea’s advice to leave the room. He didn’t want to see this. More importantly, Malfoy wouldn’t want him to witness it. Harry knew that leaving was the right thing to do, but instead he sat, powerless, in the hard visitor’s chair, his stomach churning under the weight of a heavy dose of undiluted fear.

Malfoy’s eyes snapped open, revealing dilated pupils. His hands scrabbled against the sheets, searching for his wand as he processed the scene.

“Where am I? What—for fuck’s sake, what's—” Malfoy spluttered, his words slurred from the residual magic of the Stasis charm. The moment the words had left his lips, he vomited spectacularly over the side of the bed.

Healer Jenkins dashed forward with a bucket. She quickly Vanished the mess on the floor as Malfoy continued to heave violently.
Harry turned away and shut his eyes to give him some privacy, but he couldn’t escape the raw, desperate sounds which tore from Malfoy’s throat, forced up his windpipe as his stomach spasmed.

After several long minutes, the vomiting finally ceased. Harry opened his eyes. Malfoy had collapsed bonelessly against his pillows, and was looking at Harry with an expression of intense dislike. His whole body was shaking. Harry shifted uncomfortably in his chair, feeling every inch the intruder.

“What the fuck is he doing here?”

Healer Panacea ignored Malfoy’s question and stepped up beside the bed, clutching a clipboard. “Do you have any known allergies?” she asked, her voice brisk and businesslike.

Malfoy reluctantly tore his eyes from Harry and shook his head.

“Any magical ailments, curse scars or anything similar that could interfere with medicinal potions?” Her eyes flitted down to his left forearm.

Malfoy cleared his throat roughly. “I have the Dark Mark, as you can see, but it's been dormant since Saint Potter saved the world,” he said, drawing his arm close against his side to conceal it from view. “And also some old scarring on my chest from a Severing curse.”

Panacea made a note of this. “Is the scarring active?”

Malfoy shrugged weakly. “Not particularly. It twinges when I’m feeling under the weather.”

“How old are the scars?”

The ghost of a smirk crossed his face. “Twelve years old, or thereabouts – ancient history. Isn't that right, Potter?” he added softly.

Icy horror trickled through Harry’s veins, rooting him to the spot. He opened and closed his mouth several times, lost for words. As Harry floundered, Malfoy’s eyes widened and he retched again, succumbing to a second episode of vomiting, which was somehow even worse than the first.

The Healers tried three times to force a potion down Malfoy’s throat, but each time it came straight back up before taking effect. Eventually Panacea resorted to using a drip. Malfoy looked appalled when he caught sight of the needle, but was too weak to resist.

It was remarkable to watch as the potion hit his bloodstream. The nausea ceased as suddenly as it had begun, leaving a sheen of sweat in its wake. The shaking continued, though. Malfoy clenched his fists in an unsuccessful attempt to conceal it.

When it was clear that Malfoy’s condition was stable, Healer Panacea gestured for Healer Jenkins to leave. She gave Malfoy a few moments to compose himself, then proceeded to consult her clipboard and clear her throat. “Mr Malfoy, I need you to explain in your own words what happened.”

Malfoy frowned. “I think that’s fairly obvious, don't you?”

Harry was almost relieved to hear Malfoy sounding like his usual, snappy self, but Panacea was less impressed. She pursed her lips and waited for him to continue.

“I took a sleeping potion, but it would appear that it was incorrectly brewed,” he said evasively.
This was not enough to satisfy Healer Panacea. “The level of Deadly Nightshade in your bloodstream is off the charts,” she said sharply. “How long have you been dependent on magical sleep aids?”

Malfoy seemed to realise that he was going to lose this battle. He was quiet for a long moment. When he finally spoke, he looked as though he wanted the ground to swallow him up.

“I’ve used them almost every night since I was sixteen,” he muttered, so quietly Harry had to strain to hear him.

“I need more information than that, Mr Malfoy,” Panacea said briskly as she scribbled a note on her clipboard. Harry was sure that her brown eyes had widened slightly at Malfoy’s admission. If Malfoy was telling the truth, he had been taking the potions for well over a decade.

“I started taking Dreamless Sleep during my sixth year at Hogwarts. I was under certain … pressures … and began to suffer from nightmares. I was concerned about disrupting the sleep of the other students in my dormitory, so I started taking it regularly.” His words trickled out slowly, reluctantly, as if every syllable was a great effort. “After the war, I found I couldn’t sleep properly without it.”

Panacea’s lips were pressed tightly together in a display of disapproval. “You’re not on the Dreamless Sleep prescription register.”

“I brew my own,” he countered.

“Where do you get the ingredients? Deadly Nightshade is on the Restricted Substances List.”

“Does it matter?” Malfoy snapped. He clapped his hands tightly together, but it didn't stop the violent tremors.

Harry sat stock still, barely daring to breathe. Malfoy appeared to have forgotten that he was in the room – surely that was the only explanation for why he hadn’t demanded that Harry leave.

Panacea seemed to decide that Malfoy’s procurement of restricted substances was a matter for another day, and moved on. “Mr Potter has informed me that he found you, unconscious, in your office at work. Can you explain to me why you were taking Dreamless Sleep during the day?”

Malfoy shot Harry a mutinous glare before looking back to Panacea. “I’ve had a difficult few months. I’ve been using it more than usual, to switch off. It had been a stressful day, and I suppose I was craving it,” he said, looking deeply embarrassed. “I’m well aware that it’s a problem.”

Panacea nodded and made another note on her clipboard.

“We can provide you with the tools to help you break the cycle, but it will require a great deal of effort on your part,” she said. “Recovering from a Deadly Nightshade addiction is no walk in the park. You need to want it.”

“I do,” he said firmly.

Seemingly satisfied by his answer, Healer Panacea began to explain the recovery process. “Given the buildup of Deadly Nightshade in your system, the detoxification process will be lengthy. We can offer you a gradually reducing dose to counter the withdrawal symptoms, but it still won't be pleasant.”

“I understand,” Malfoy murmured.
“Even with Nightshade supplements, the early stages of withdrawal can be risky. We’ll need to keep you in here for the first few weeks, while we get you down to a manageable dose.”

Malfoy nodded, his eyes fixed intently on Panacea. “That’s fine, I can take annual leave from work. I doubt they’ll miss me. What can I expect in terms of side-effects?”

She glanced down at her clipboard. “As I’m sure you know, the purpose of Deadly Nightshade in Dreamless Sleep potions is to suppress natural sleep while the other elements create an artificial state of slumber. Given that the detox process begins with a high dose of Deadly Nightshade, you will almost certainly experience severe insomnia. It may be several weeks before you are able to sleep at all—”

“Weeks?” Harry interrupted, forgetting for a moment that he was not even supposed to be in the room.

Panacea fixed him with a stony look, then turned back to Malfoy and continued. “— and you’re unlikely to achieve a full night’s sleep for a number of months.”

Harry gaped. He looked at Malfoy, expecting a similar reaction, but the blond was nodding in a resigned manner, as if this information was nothing new.

Panacea continued to run through the side effects – something about mood swings and tremors – but Harry could barely process her words. His mind was reeling at the concept of spending several weeks without sleep.

When she finished her explanation, Healer Panacea announced that her shift was over, and told Malfoy that Healer Jenkins would check on him hourly in her absence.

“Thank you,” he murmured.

Panacea nodded and bustled from the room, her sensible shoes squeaking against the linoleum, leaving Harry and Malfoy alone.

As the door clicked shut, Malfoy turned his attention back to Harry, fixing him with a deeply distrustful gaze. He looked horribly frail and his hands were still shaking violently, but the pit of Harry’s stomach fizzed with fear.

When it became apparent that Malfoy was waiting for him to speak, Harry dutifully broke the silence. “I’m sorry about the curse scars,” he said quietly.

Malfoy shrugged. “As I said, it’s ancient history. The more pressing matter is what on earth you’re doing here, observing a private medical matter.” He spoke softly, but his tone was dangerous. He continued to eye Harry suspiciously. The whites of his eyes were flecked with red – burst blood vessels from the force of his vomiting. His lips were cracked and bleeding at the corners.

“I was worried,” Harry admitted, his voice barely more than a whisper. “I found you in your office. You weren’t breathing. I thought you were going to die.” An echo of the panic he’d felt coloured his words.

“Well, I didn’t. Aren’t I lucky that the Chosen One was around to save me?”

“Yeah, you are, actually,” Harry replied hotly. He immediately regretted allowing Malfoy to rile him. It wasn’t fair to argue when he was in such a bad way. Harry sighed deeply. “Look, is there anyone you want me to tell?”
Malfoy looked horrified. “Let me make this clear, Potter. You are not, under any circumstances, to tell a soul about any of this.”

“Not even—”

“Not a soul,” Malfoy hissed.

Harry put his hands up in defeat. “Fine. I won’t tell anyone. I’ll leave you alone now.”

He was uncomfortable with the idea of leaving Malfoy all on his own. He had an idea, and decided it couldn’t hurt to ask. “Can I come back tomorrow? You know, just to make sure you haven’t died or anything.”

Malfoy frowned, but remained silent. Harry decided that this was as close to consent as he was likely to get. He turned to leave, but as he reached the doorway, Malfoy called his name.

Harry turned. “Yeah?”

“If you’re going to insist on humiliating me further with your visits, can you at least make yourself useful and bring me something with long sleeves to wear?”

Harry’s gaze fell involuntarily to the stark black tattoo on Malfoy’s forearm; Malfoy flinched but made no attempt to conceal it. “No problem.”

***

Harry didn't make it back to St Mungo’s until almost ten o’clock the following night – Sunday lunch at the Burrow had bled into the entire afternoon and evening. He used the Visitors Entrance, as he wasn’t brave enough to face the wrath of Healer Panacea for a third time.

Slung over his shoulder was a duffle bag. He hadn’t known what to bring, so he’d thrown in several shirts, a pyjama top and a pair of jeans. It didn’t really matter, anyway: his clothes would be far too big for Malfoy’s skinny frame.

When Harry reached the hospital room, he was relieved to see that Malfoy looked a bit better; he’d clearly showered and although his hands were shaking, the tremors were far less pronounced than the previous day. Even so, he looked very frail in his hospital gown.

They greeted each other with a nod, and Malfoy muttered an awkward “thanks” when Harry handed him the bag of clothes.

Harry turned away while Malfoy changed into the jeans and a white shirt, trying very hard not to think about the curse scars. After a few seconds he glanced round despite himself and caught a glimpse of Malfoy’s bony back; each ridge of his spine was clearly visible, illuminated by the stark hospital lighting. It looked as if he hadn’t eaten a proper meal in a long time.

“Do you have a belt?” Malfoy asked. Harry’s jeans were short on him and far too big; they hung loosely from his narrow hips, threatening to fall down.

“Erm, yeah. Take this one.” Harry unbuckled his belt and slid it from his own jeans with a hushed whoosh.

Malfoy pulled the belt tight to secure the jeans. It was an improvement on the hospital gown, but the loose fit of Harry’s clothes left him looking vulnerable.
“How are you feeling?” Harry asked awkwardly.

Malfoy’s polite front cracked. He stared at Harry in disbelief and gestured around the room with a quivering hand. “How do you fucking think I’m feeling? I’m bored sick, wide awake and shaking like a shitting Crup!”

Harry fought back a laugh at Malfoy’s outburst. “Okay, point taken. No more small talk.”

An uncomfortable silence settled over them. Fortunately, Harry had a backup plan. He pulled a battered deck of cards from his pocket and held them up.

Malfoy eyed them suspiciously. “You want to play cards?” he asked flatly.

“Yeah, I suppose I do,” Harry nodded.

“Are you seriously trying to tell me that the famous Harry Potter has nothing better to do on a Sunday night than sit in hospital, playing cards with a virtual stranger?”

Harry grinned. Put that way, it sounded ridiculous. “Yes. That’s exactly what I’m trying to tell you.”

Malfoy gave an exaggerated roll of his eyes. “Merlin, and I thought my life was tragic.”

Harry took the cards out of their box and sat down in one of the uncomfortable chairs. “Well just think, you could be a loser like me. Besides, you’re hardly a stranger, Malfoy. We spent six years tripping each other up.”

Malfoy sighed and collapsed weakly into the other chair. Harry passed him the deck of cards.

“Merlin, they’re not even magical playing cards!”

“Well I didn’t want to risk over-exciting the fragile patient,” Harry teased.

Malfoy scowled and for a moment Harry thought he was going to tell him to leave, but then he began to shuffle. “Blackjack. We’ll play Blackjack.”

The next time Harry checked the clock, it was half past one in the morning.

***

On Monday night, they played Rummy; on Tuesday, Whist.

From there, a routine developed. Each evening, Harry would go home and eat dinner, then Floo to St Mungo’s at eleven O’clock. He’d spend a few hours keeping Malfoy company before heading home for half a night’s sleep.

Harry told himself that he felt compelled to visit by a sense of duty, given that nobody else seemed to know Malfoy was in hospital. Deep down, though, he knew that a more honest explanation was that he enjoyed feeling useful and having some company for a change.

The visits didn’t always go smoothly. Malfoy’s mood was wildly unpredictable; some evenings he was subdued, others he was openly hostile. He continued to suffer with tremors and was noticeably irritable and fidgety whenever his cocktail of medical potions began to wear off.

Perhaps because of this, their conversations centered largely around safe topics such as Quidditch, and the inevitable awkward silences were helped along by the crutch of various board games.
By the end of Malfoy’s second week in hospital, they had branched out to Monopoly. Malfoy was surprisingly bad at it – he was too risk-averse to buy most of the properties he landed on – and Harry won the first two games.

As he counted out the paper money ready for a third round, Harry asked the question which had been nagging him for several days. “Had any sleep yet?” he asked, as casually as he could manage.

“No.” Malfoy’s voice was flat. He didn’t offer any further information; just stared blankly at the Monopoly board.

“Shit. How many days is that?”

Malfoy sighed. “Thirteen. Fourteen if you don’t count the Stasis charm.”

“Do you feel tired?” Harry asked. He immediately realised how stupid this question was and braced himself for Malfoy’s inevitable explosion. To his relief, it didn’t come.

Malfoy scooped up a handful of little plastic houses and returned them to the box. “In a way. They’ve got me taking six different potions to counter the worst of the physical effects, but mentally … it’s draining.”

Harry nodded, though he didn’t understand. “I suppose the days must just run into each other.”

“Precisely. There’s no opportunity to switch off. It’s torturous.”

Harry wasn’t sure what to say in response to that, so he handed Malfoy a pile of paper money and rolled the dice.

The third game of Monopoly fell in Malfoy’s favour. He managed to buy up the most expensive quarter of the board in record time, and proceeded to bleed Harry dry. Harry didn’t mind; he was glad to see Malfoy smiling, even if it didn’t quite reach his tired eyes.

Finally, Harry gave a great yawn and got up to leave, tucking the Monopoly box under his arm.

Malfoy was looking at him tentatively. “Potter, are you at the Ministry tomorrow?”

Harry nodded. “Yeah, why?”

“Can you fetch my wand? It should be in my office, in the top left-hand drawer of my desk. I don’t feel right without it.” The fingers of his right hand flexed involuntarily as he spoke.

“Yeah, of course. I’ll bring it to you tomorrow.”

***

Harry slipped away from the Auror Office the following morning under the pretence of attending an important meeting.

He’d carefully timed his departure to coincide with Ron’s weekly catch up with Robards. Harry hadn’t told anyone about his nightly visits to St Mungo’s – after all, Malfoy’s secret wasn’t his to share – but Ron had noticed Harry’s exhaustion at work and was watching him like a hawk.

Harry hurried down to Level Ten, passing the imposing Courtrooms without so much as a second glance, and entered Malfoy’s office.

It was jarring to be back in the oppressive, parchment-scented room. A heavy silence, loud as a
scream, hung in the air and settled on every surface. Harry walked slowly round the desk, desperately trying to suppress the creeping déjá vu which swirled like smoke at his temples. The charred potion burn was immediately visible: a scar on its polished surface.

Everything was exactly as they’d left it, right down to the way Malfoy’s jacket was draped over the back of his chair. Even the Floo powder Harry had knocked over in his rush to get to St Mungo’s was still smeared across the floor in front of the fireplace. Harry quickly Vanished it before beginning his search for Malfoy’s wand.

Malfoy’s wand was right where he’d said it would be: in the top left-hand drawer of the desk. Harry felt a familiar rush of warmth as he picked it up. It was the same wand he’d stolen during the war, the one he’d used in the Final Battle, though it had picked up some new scuffs and scratches since – much like Malfoy himself.

As Harry went to close the drawer, a flash of movement caught his eye. He knew it was wrong to snoop, but he couldn’t resist. The movement had come from a framed photograph. It showed Malfoy dancing with his mother, twirling her around, both of their faces alight with laughter. They looked remarkably alike, with their identical high cheekbones and pointed chins. Harry had never seen Malfoy smile so genuinely in real life. It was a world away from the nasty grin he’d thrown at Harry so often during school.

The silver frame suggested that the picture had previously sat on the desk. Harry wondered if Malfoy had hidden it because he found it too painful to look at, and felt a sudden rush of sympathy for his former rival.

Harry carefully returned the photograph to the drawer and left Malfoy’s office, locking the door behind him. As he dawdled back upstairs, he resolved to make more of an effort to talk to Malfoy that evening.

***

Malfoy was delighted to be reunited with his wand. When Harry handed it to him, he immediately waved it around, slightly awkwardly due to the subtle tremor of his fingers, shooting sparks of all colours into the air.

After a moment, he seemed to remember Harry’s presence and his cool composure fell back into place. He cleared his throat awkwardly. “Sorry. I’ve haven’t been without a wand for so long since I was eleven. Even during the War, my mother lent me hers…” He trailed off, looking uncomfortable.

A change of subject was in order. Harry cast about for something to say. “Seeing your office again reminded me, I’ve been meaning to ask about your work.”

“Oh? What about it?” Malfoy was twirling his wand slowly between his long fingers. It was almost hypnotic.

“Just in general, I suppose. Like, what exactly do you do, and how did you end up doing it?”

Malfoy’s expression soured immediately; his eyes narrowed and a crease appeared between his pale eyebrows. “What, because of my history?”

Harry’s stomach lurched. “God, no!” This wasn’t going at all how he had intended. “I just meant, what sort of training did you have to do? It all looks very technical.”

Malfoy’s stiff shoulders loosened slightly, but his eyes remained careful. “Oh. Well, I studied
Wizarding Law in Geneva with a focus on procedural justice.”

“Impressive.” Harry nodded, hoping a little flattery would soften him up. “Why procedural justice?”

Malfoy shrugged. “It can be a little dry, but I enjoy the process of building the case against something which needs to change. The public speaking element is a nice challenge, too. I suppose my interest in procedural justice stems from my own trial … some of the procedures followed were questionable…” He paused, seemingly lost in thought, staring at his wand as he turned it over and over in his hands. After a moment, his lips curved up into a wry smile. “Besides, I’m well-suited to paper pushing. I’m not exactly the sort to enjoy getting my hands dirty.”

Harry snorted with laughter. “I’m not so sure about that. You never had a problem hexing me at school.”

Malfoy smirked. “You were always the exception, Potter.”

They spent the remainder of Harry’s visit discussing work. Malfoy hadn’t been exaggerating – his job sounded very dry indeed – but he obviously enjoyed it. He was almost animated as he explained that the final stage of his Wizengamot Hearing project involved giving a formal presentation before the entire Wizengamot.

It wasn’t until Harry got home that he realised he and Malfoy had managed to talk for several hours without the aid of a board game. It had been almost like spending time with a friend.

***

Midway through the following week, Harry arrived at St Mungo’s one night to find Malfoy’s room empty. He hurried along to Healer Panacea’s office, wondering where Malfoy had gone. The door was shut, but Harry’s question was answered immediately; it sounded as though Malfoy and Panacea were having a heated argument inside.

“Mr Malfoy, as I’ve already explained, we can’t discharge you with several months’ worth of Deadly Nightshade substitute potions. I don’t doubt your willpower, but as a medical professional there is no way I’m going to risk it. If you don’t have anyone who can dispense the potions to you, you’ll have to attend our Substance Clinic each afternoon to collect your medication.”

There was a moment’s pause, as if Malfoy was taking a deep, calming breath. “And as I have already explained, it’s of great importance to me that my medical circumstances remain private. I hardly see how my attendance at a clinic for addicts will achieve that goal.” He was practically snarling at her. *Big mistake*, thought Harry. Speaking to Panacea in that way was guaranteed to result in things turning very ugly, very quickly.

As expected, Panacea held her ground. “Technically, Mr Malfoy, you *are* an addict,” she said firmly.

Harry took the silence that followed as his cue to burst into the office. The last thing he needed was for Malfoy to hex the Healer responsible for the wellbeing of the Auror Department; he’d never hear the end of it.

“I’ll do it,” Harry said brightly as he closed the door behind him.

Malfoy glared at him. “This is a private meeting, Potter. Why are you here, and what exactly are you offering to do?”
“I’ll look after the Deadly Nightshade potions. You can pick them up from my house each evening,” Harry suggested, a hint of desperation creeping into his voice. It pained him to admit it even to himself, but his evenings with Malfoy had been strangely enjoyable, and prospect of reverting to spending them alone was not a pleasant one.

Healer Panacea watched on as Malfoy weighed the offer up. Apparently his irritation at Harry’s eavesdropping was overshadowed by the inconvenience of attending the St Mungo’s on a daily basis.

“Fine,” he spat.

“Excellent, that’s settled then,” beamed Panacea. She immediately launched into a detailed explanation of the schedule on which Malfoy should take the potions (late at night, as this was when his craving for Deadly Nightshade would be the strongest), and how they should be stored (upright, at room temperature). Harry nodded, trying to take in all of the information as he signed a series of forms to consent to the potion being delivered to his house each week, by owl post.

Panacea moved on to Malfoy next, telling him all about the other potions he’d be given and explaining that he would need to attend weekly checkups at St Mungo’s.

“You’re lucky to have such a good friend as Harry,” she finished, smiling knowingly. Malfoy’s eyes widened and his mouth fell open, but he had the good sense to remain silent.

Healer Jenkins suddenly popped her head round the door and addressed Healer Panacea. “We’re ready to carry out Mr Malfoy’s pre-discharge check up,” she announced.

Malfoy cringed.

“I’ll leave you to it,” Harry said. He grabbed a quill from Panacea’s desk and scribbled his address on a blank prescription form. “You’ll need this to get into my house – it’s under a Fidelius charm.” He passed the form to Malfoy. “I’ll leave the Floo open.”

Malfoy pocketed the form without reading it. “Fine. I suppose I’ll see you tomorrow evening, then,” he said, before reluctantly crossing the room to join Healer Jenkins.

“Yeah,” Harry agreed, fighting back a smile. “See you tomorrow, Malfoy.”

He turned his attention to Healer Panacea. “Thank you for looking after him.”

He stooped at the fireplace to pick up a grainy handful of Floo powder, and quickly stepped into the grate before Panacea could tell him to use the Visitors’ Floo. She tutted furiously as the green flames enveloped him.

***

Malfoy stepped out of the Floo and into the front room of Grimmauld Place at precisely ten o’clock the following evening.

He was wearing his work clothes; a sharply tailored grey suit, complete with waistcoat and tie. Harry couldn’t help but stare. It was disorientating to see him looking so put together after so many nights spent dressed in Harry’s scruffy, ill-fitting shirts. On closer inspection, he looked tired and rather clammy beneath the polished first impression. His body was obviously demanding its nightly potion fix.

Harry wordlessly passed Malfoy the tiny bottle of diluted Deadly Nightshade. He took it,
unstoppered it, and tipped the contents into his mouth. His pink tongue darted out to lick the rim of
the phial, seeking out every last drop. His shoulders sagged with relief as the potion began to work
its magic, soothing his craving and stilling his shaking hands.

It was incredibly strange for Harry to see his childhood rival standing in his front room. He
watched as Malfoy’s eyes flitted around the room, taking in the threadbare carpet and squashy
sofas, then the moving photographs and ludicrous artwork (gifts from Luna, of course) which lined
the walls.

Eventually, Malfoy cleared his throat. “I’ll be off, then.”

“Yeah. See you tomorrow, I suppose. Same time?”

Malfoy nodded, then gestured around the room. “Interesting house, Potter. Not at all what I
expected.”

Harry immediately began to babble as if he’d taken Veritaserum. “It’s the Black house. Well,
technically the ‘Noble and Most Ancient House of Black’. I inherited it from Sirius. Sirius Black, I
mean – he was my godfather. He left it to me when he died. I don’t think it recognises me as the
owner, though. The portraits all hate me and some of the rooms lock me out from time to time...”
Harry trailed off, slightly breathless.

Malfoy was staring at him with an expression of mild surprise. Harry couldn’t blame him; it was
rather a lot of unnecessary information to take in. Even so, Harry kept talking, despite the small
voice inside his mind telling him to shut up. “Actually, there’s something you should see. You’ll
have to come with me, it’s upstairs.”

Malfoy paused for a moment, looking deeply uncertain. Harry was sure he’d refuse, but then he
bent down to remove his shoes.

Harry stepped out into the hallway and signalled for Malfoy to follow him, dimly wondering what
on earth he was thinking. Of course Malfoy didn’t need to see this, and besides, Harry’s house
wasn’t exactly fit for visitors. It was vastly improved from its state during its time as Order
Headquarters, but there was a shabbiness that just couldn’t be fixed. It certainly wasn’t a patch on
Malfoy Manor, and Harry said as much.

“I don’t live at the Manor,” Malfoy said shortly.

“Sorry, I assumed—”

“We sold the Manor to cover the reparations. I have a flat.”

“Oh.” The thought of Malfoy living in a flat was so utterly alien that Harry almost laughed.

He led Malfoy up two flights of stairs and along the narrow landing. The revolting House-elf heads
had long since been removed from the walls, but the wallpaper was stained where they had once
hung. He fought the urge to apologise again for the state of the house.

They reached their destination: the very last room on the floor. Harry pushed the door open,
cringing as it squealed in protest, and pointed to the tapestry of the Black Family Tree, which
dominated the back wall. “You’re on there, see? Bottom right.”

Malfoy walked tentatively over to it, unable to conceal his interest. The heavy wall hanging
hummed with magic as he approached; apparently it could sense his presence.
Harry watched from the doorway as Malfoy ran his fingertips gently over the fabric. His name rippled slightly at his touch. He moved up the tree, tracing the ridges of the silver thread which spelled his father’s name, then his mother’s. His fingers slowed to a halt over the dates beneath it.

Harry’s blood turned to ice in his veins as he realised his mistake. How could he have been so thoughtless as to put Malfoy in front of such a stark reminder of his mother’s death?

“I have to go,” Malfoy said thickly. His cheeks were pink, his sharp jaw jutted out in defiance. Harry recognised that look; it was the expression he himself wore when trying to keep his emotions under control. Malfoy all but ran from the room, pushing roughly past Harry in his rush to get out.

Harry followed, but heard the roar of the Floo before he could catch up. By the time he reached the front room, the flames had died down to a green ember.

“Stupid, stupid, stupid,” Harry muttered, glaring at his reflection in the big mirror above the fireplace.

“Cheer up, dear. You don’t look that stupid,” replied the mirror.

***

Harry worked late the following day, and was in the middle of cooking dinner when he felt the telltale tingle of the wards shifting.

“I’m through here!” he called, as he drained the pasta. Silky strands of spaghetti slithered into the waiting colander, and the ensuing column of steam fogged Harry’s glasses.

Malfoy appeared in the kitchen doorway a moment later, holding the phial Harry had left on the mantelpiece. It was empty; he’d clearly drained it as soon as he stepped out of the Floo.

“Late evening for you, too?” Harry asked, eyeing Malfoy’s smart suit. He suddenly felt underdressed in his own home and wished he’d at least put on a pair of jeans which didn’t have holes in the knees.

Malfoy sighed. “I was off work for almost a month; I have a lot of catching up to do.”

Harry grimaced in sympathy. The stack of paperwork which greeted him after even one week off was bad enough – he could only imagine how much parchment Malfoy had returned to.

He stirred the pan of sauce which was bubbling on the hob, and flicked the gas off. “Do you want some spag bol?” he asked. “There’s plenty. I always end up cooking far too much for one.”

Malfoy hesitated. He craned his neck, trying to catch a glimpse of the contents of the pan. Harry fought the urge to cross the room and punch him lightly on the shoulder for being so rude. “I’m not going to poison you, you arsehole. I just thought it’d do you good to get some food in you – you look as if a gust of wind would blow you over.”

Malfoy looked thoroughly unimpressed. “You are aware that it’s not intentional? That loss of appetite and nausea are side-effects of the Dreamless Sleep?”

“I don’t give a toss whether it’s intentional. I can see your spine through your jacket, you scrawny git.”

“Well, seeing as you’ve invited me so nicely…” Malfoy said dryly as he slipped out of his jacket and removed his tie.
“Great.” Harry grinned. He meant it; he hated eating alone.

Five minutes later, they were sat at the kitchen table, tucking into plates of spaghetti and sipping from glasses of slightly warm white wine. Harry couldn’t help but marvel at the madness that was Draco Malfoy eating dinner in his kitchen.

Malfoy made an appreciative sound as he took another mouthful. “This is really good, Potter. I wouldn’t have pegged you as a cook.”

Harry shrugged. “I’ve always cooked, since I was a kid. When I lived with my Aunt and Uncle, I did pretty much all of the cooking.”

Malfoy spun his fork on the plate to pick up some more spaghetti. When he didn’t speak, Harry continued, more to fill the silence than anything else, “Do you cook?”

Malfoy scoffed. “Obviously, I cook. I’d starve to death if I didn’t. I’m terrible, though. Utterly hopeless.”

“Really?” Harry asked. “Even though you were good at Potions?”

Malfoy nodded. “Potions is closer to baking – it’s all about precision. I make an excellent Victoria sponge. Cooking, however … I must lack the instinct for it. Everything I make tastes bland, and I have a real knack for burning through the bottom of pans.”

“I’ll teach you, if you like,” Harry offered. The words surprised even him as they tumbled from his mouth. Malfoy simply stared, pale eyebrows raised. “If you want, of course,” Harry added, his courage failing him.

“Okay, but only if you let me educate you about wine,” Malfoy said, as he took a sip from his glass and cringed. “I hate to tell you, Potter, but this is quite possibly the worst wine I’ve ever had the misfortune to drink.”

“I don’t really drink much of it,” Harry said sheepishly. “I prefer beer, but I figured you’d be more of a wine drinker.”

“You were right, but I’m not entirely sure this even counts as wine. It tastes more like vinegar.” He held his glass up to the light and wrinkled his nose. “I’ll bring something better along tomorrow.”

Harry smiled at Malfoy’s casual acknowledgement that this was going to happen again. “Alright, you’re on.”

When they finished their meal, Harry levitated the dishes over to the sink. He wouldn’t usually have used magic to do this, but he was convinced Malfoy would mock him if he started stacking the plates by hand.

Harry had been trying all evening to find the right moment to apologise for the tapestry incident and decided this was as good an opportunity as he was going to get. “I’m sorry about yesterday. I didn’t think.”

Malfoy nodded stiffly. “It’s fine. It’s not for you to wrap me in cotton wool.” He fell silent for so long that Harry thought the subject was closed, but then he spoke again, his voice rough with suppressed emotion. “It’s just … it was just us. And now it’s just me.”

Harry’s chest tightened. This situation called for words of wisdom, but he had no idea what to say or do. In the end, he settled for placing his hand lightly on Malfoy’s shoulder. “I know the feeling,”
Harry said quietly. “It’s shit not having a family. It gets better, though. Not easier, exactly, but … better.”

It wasn’t particularly eloquent, but Malfoy nodded, stunned. He made no effort to move away from Harry’s touch. “Thanks, Harry. For dinner, and…” he trailed off, looking serious. Harry couldn’t remember Malfoy ever using his first name before.

“And any time, Draco.” The word felt foreign on Harry’s lips, but he found that he liked it.

***

Harry followed through with his offer of cookery lessons. Unless he was out with his friends, he waited for Draco to arrive each evening before making a start on dinner, and they prepared the ingredients together whilst discussing recipes and techniques. Draco’s potions expertise came in handy: he was far more skilled with a knife than Harry could ever hope to be.

Meanwhile, Draco introduced Harry to the world of wine. He taught Harry about different varieties of grape, and showed him how to hold his glass up to the light to check colour, to smell before tasting, and to take tasting notes. Some nights he brought several wines along and encouraged Harry to compare them.

Their evenings didn’t end with dinner. Draco usually brought a bundle of documents with him and worked for a few hours after they finished eating, often lingering in Harry’s kitchen until the early hours of the morning.

He never asked to stay; it just happened.

Harry went along with it and started using the time to catch up on his case files. He needed to; all the late nights with Draco meant that his daytime productivity had reached an all-time low.

Without ever discussing it, they slipped into a routine of spending almost every evening together. The cosy domesticity of the arrangement wasn’t lost on Harry, but he found it strangely comforting. For the first time since Ron and Hermione had moved out, Harry looked forward to getting home each night.

***

Between a flood of new cases landing at work and spending his evenings with Draco, Harry suddenly found himself with very little spare time. For the first time ever, he turned down several of Ron and Hermione’s dinner invitations in a row.

He shouldn’t have been surprised, therefore, when Hermione turned up one night to stage an intervention.

When the wards shifted, Harry initially thought that Draco had arrived early. He dashed through to the front room, ready for a round of the verbal sparring which had come to mark the start of Draco’s visits. He was almost disappointed by the sight of Hermione brushing ash out of her bushy brown hair.

“Hermione! What brings you here?” he asked, hoping he didn’t look too surprised to see her. He was desperately glad that he hadn’t entered the room with his planned greeting of “How’s my favourite tosser?”

Hermione’s lips were set in a thin line. “I’ve come to make sure you’re okay.”
She marched past Harry and headed for the kitchen, signalling for him to follow. Once there, she folded her arms across her chest and adopted the stance which Harry had come to think of as her lecturing pose. Sure enough, she immediately launched into a long, impassioned speech.

Harry was touched by Hermione’s concern, but he was bored out of his mind within minutes. He nodded at her, glassy-eyed, hoping that she didn’t have too much more to say. She noticed, of course.

“—Harry, are you even listening to me? We’re really worried about you. Ron told me that you fell asleep at work the other day! Are you having nightmares again?”

“What? No, Hermione. I’m fine.”

“It’s only because we care, Harry. Oh, Ron and I should never have moved out...” With that, she launched into a second lecture, this time explaining the importance and benefits of social interaction.

Harry tried desperately to school his features into a look of interest, but his eyes kept flitting over Hermione’s shoulder to look at the kitchen clock. How could he get rid of her? Draco would arrive any minute.

Sure enough, the Floo roared in the front room at precisely ten o’clock. Hermione stopped talking abruptly, clearly wondering who on earth was visiting Harry so late on a Tuesday.

Harry froze, mind reeling as he tried to plan his next move. As it happened, he didn't have a chance to do anything at all.

“What’s for dinner?” Draco’s distinctive voice rang out, clear as a bell, from the hallway. “You are going to love tonight’s wine, it's a really fruity South African—”

Draco fell silent abruptly as he entered the kitchen and caught sight of Hermione. For a split second, his lips formed a perfect, comical ‘o’, before he caught himself and the cool Malfoy mask fell into place.

“Evening, Granger,” he said, in the haughty drawl Harry remembered from school.

Hermione looked back and forth from Harry to Draco so quickly that a lock of bushy hair fell into her eyes. “What on earth is he doing in your house, Harry?”

Harry’s cheeks were burning; he felt as though he had been caught doing something very wrong. Before he could speak, however, Draco cut in.

“Potter is providing me with a witness statement for my Wizengamot Reform Proposal,” he lied. “Unfortunately, our Saviour is so terribly busy that this ludicrous hour was the only time he could fit me in.” Draco’s voice was positively dripping with disdain.

Harry nodded fiercely, ignoring Hermione’s raised eyebrows. “I felt like a bit of a prick for the awkward timing, so I agreed to feed the skinny git while we run through his questions.” He threw a scowl at Malfoy for added effect.

“And I brought a bottle of wine along because I can't fathom how unbearable Potter’s company would be without it,” Draco finished, curling his upper lip in a show of disgust.

Hermione looked utterly unconvinced. “Right,” she said warily. “I suppose I’d better leave you to it, then.” She walked slowly from the kitchen, pausing in the doorway to give Harry a long,
bewildered look.

They stood with bated breath until they were sure she’d gone.

“Do you think she fell for it?” Draco asked.

Harry stared at him in disbelief. “Of course she didn't fall for it, you prat. What do you take her for?”

Draco shrugged, unconcerned. “You need to work on your acting skills, then. I was perfectly convincing.”

“Oh yeah,” Harry said, rolling his eyes. “Because ‘oooh, you're going to loooove tonight’s wine!’ just screams ‘enemies’.”

Draco frowned at Harry’s dreadful impression. “I don't sound like that.”

“Yeah, you do. She’s going to think we’re a bloody couple or something after that!” Harry teased, shoving Draco lightly on the shoulder.

“Don’t be ridiculous. Anyone with half a brain could see that I’m out of your league.” Draco smirked as he opened the fridge, though his face quickly fell into a frown when he found it empty. “In all seriousness, what is for tea? I worked through lunch today. I could eat a Hippogriff.”

Harry shook his head. “Good to know you view me as your personal soup kitchen. Hermione’s been here for ages – I haven't had chance to plan anything. Shall we just get a takeaway?”

Draco wanted Chinese food and Harry fancied pizza, so they compromised and ordered a curry. It was too hot for Draco and too mild for Harry, so neither of them were happy, but they took great pleasure in blaming each other for the unsatisfying meal.

Harry knew that Hermione was bound to give him an awkward grilling after the scene in the kitchen, but while he was sat bickering with Draco over a sub-standard takeaway, he couldn’t quite bring himself to care.

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To Harry’s surprise, Hermione didn't owl him the following morning to demand an explanation. She didn't turn up at Harry’s house that evening, either, and when Harry went round for lunch the following weekend, she didn't even mention Draco.

Far from feeling relieved, Harry was convinced this was a very bad sign. Hermione only stopped pressing for answers when she found them, which meant that she had probably already drawn a conclusion from what she’d seen. Harry didn’t even want to think about what that conclusion might be.

***

On Saturday night, Draco turned up looking very pleased with himself. He downed his potion as usual, then set an oddly-shaped bottle on the kitchen counter with a flourish.

“What’s that?” Harry asked.

“Goblin-made wine,” Draco announced grandly. He sighed at Harry’s perplexed look. “It’s a nightmare to get hold of – and let’s be honest, it’s wasted on your unrefined palate – but I managed
to wrangle this from Pansy and thought we may as well ensure that your education is thorough.”

Draco decanted the wine into an ornate glass jug, but insisted that they wait until after dinner to drink it, muttering something about aeration and tannins. It was a startling shade of violet, and Harry caught Draco gazing almost lovingly at it several times as they cooked.

When the dishes were finally in the sink, Draco Summoned a pair of Harry’s nicest wine glasses and poured them each a generous measure. His cheeks were flushed with excitement, which made for a pleasant change from his usual pale complexion. Harry couldn’t help but notice that his face no longer looked as gaunt as it had when their odd little dinner arrangement had first begun; it seemed that the home-cooked meals were serving their purpose. A broad grin spread across Harry’s face at the sight of Draco looking so much healthier.

“What?” asked Draco, instantly suspicious.

“Nothing.”

Harry gently swirled his wine, watching it ripple around the sides of the glass, then put his nose to the rim and inhaled steadily. It had a heady, almost smoky scent – a world away from the fruitiness Harry had been expecting. His surprise must have shown on his face, because Draco was smirking at him. He grinned and touched the edge of his glass gently against Draco’s.

“Cheers!”

Harry took a small sip and let the wine spread across his tongue, concentrating on the layers of flavour and savouring the way its dry finish tickled the back of his throat. It was unlike anything he had ever tasted; spicy and sharp, and packed with notes he couldn’t even begin to describe.

“It’s nice,” he said eventually.

Draco’s eyebrows shot up towards his hairline. “Nice,” he said flatly. “I give you a thirty-year-old bottle of the very finest Goblin-made wine after almost six weeks of wine-tasting lessons … and you describe it as nice?”

Harry laughed. “Yeah. It’s nice.”

“My god. I don’t know why I bother.” Draco set down his glass and buried his head in his hands. He continued, his voice muffled by his fingers. “I suppose you’re right, though. It is nice.”

For once, Draco hadn’t brought any work with him, so they brought the rest of the wine through to the front room and collapsed onto the squashy sofa. Harry initially felt slightly awkward at the departure from their usual routine of working in the kitchen, but the alcohol soon smoothed away his concerns.

In addition to being nice, the wine turned out to be rather stronger than either of them had anticipated.

Harry felt fine until he stood up to go to the loo, but then the room dissolved into a haze and the floor swayed beneath his feet. He could only imagine how drunk Draco was; his slight build wasn’t exactly conducive to handling high volumes of alcohol.

When Harry returned, Draco had topped up their glasses with the very last drops from the bottle and was staring, glassy-eyed, at the fireplace.

“My mother loved Goblin-made wine,” he mused as Harry resumed his position on the sofa. “She
used to order it at Christmas when I was a child, and I’d always beg her for a sip. I was enamoured by the colour of it.” He held the glass up so close to his eye that his pale lashes brushed against it and his iris momentarily glowed lilac. “Given the ludicrously high alcohol content, I suddenly understand why she never let me.”

Harry’s lips twitched with amusement at the way Draco used words like ‘enamoured’ and ‘ludicrously’ even when heavily intoxicated, but he forced his smile back. Draco hadn’t spoken about his mother since his second evening visit, and Harry was too curious to let this opportunity pass him by.

“Can I ask what happened?” he asked quietly.

Draco was silent for a long time. When he finally spoke, his voice was so soft Harry had to lean closer to hear him. “According to the medical report, it was acute magical atrophy. It’s common enough among families like mine … triggered by centuries of inbreeding, and the like. It stripped her of her magic first, then the physical symptoms began.” He paused, suddenly looking far younger than his twenty-eight years. “It was horrific to watch.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry said.

Draco’s brow creased into a deep frown. “Why should you be sorry? It’s not your fault and besides, I was horrible about your mother at school.”

“You were horrible in general at school.” Harry shrugged.

Draco nodded, completely serious. “I was a prick.”

“You’re not any more, though. Just a prat, now,” Harry teased.

Draco rolled his eyes and took another sip of wine. He didn’t quite manage a smile, and Harry realised that he had more to say.

“It sounds like you were really close,” Harry pressed.

Draco let his head fall back against the sofa, his eyes sliding shut. “I suppose we were. We needed to be, especially after my father’s life sentence appeal failed. It wasn’t much fun being a Malfoy during the first few years after the War.” Harry’s stomach twisted guiltily: he knew Draco would never have shared this much personal information whilst sober.

Draco drew his wand and performed a smooth swishing motion. “Orchideous!” A bunch of daffodils shot from the end of his wand. They were the lightest shade of yellow Harry had ever seen, so pale they were almost translucent. Given Draco’s intoxicated state, Harry was surprised he could cast anything at all.

“Their scientific name is ‘narcissus’,,” he murmured. “Ever since she passed away, they’re the only flower I can produce.”

Harry silently mirrored the wand movement and produced a bunch of bright orange firecracker lilies. “I can make others if I really focus, but the default is always lilies. My mother’s name was Lily,” he added, in case Draco didn’t know.

Harry gathered all of the flowers and transfigured his empty wine glass into horribly ugly, misshapen vase. He tilted it towards Draco, who cast a poorly aimed Aguamenti, over half of which missed the mark entirely. Finally, Harry stuffed the flowers roughly into it. The result was utterly ridiculous: mismatched flowers sticking out at all angles, threatening to spill right out of the
hideous vase.

They looked from each other to the vase and back again, then burst out laughing. It was a welcome relief from the tense conversation which had preceded it.

“I’m not sure floristry is our calling,” Draco slurred.

“Of course it is.” Harry grinned. “They’re just … abstract.” He stumbled over to the window and set the vase down heavily on the the sill. The change of location didn’t improve its appearance in the slightest.

They stared at the flowers for a moment long, until Draco broke the silence by clearing his throat. “I’ll be off, then,” he said. He swayed alarmingly as he stood up; Harry had to step forward and grab his shoulders to steady him.

“Are you taking the piss? You can’t possibly Floo – look at the state of you! Fuck knows where you’ll end up.”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “What do you suggest? If you tell me to take a taxi, I’ll hex you. Trust me, I know some really nasty ones.” He attempted to scowl, but could only manage an odd, crooked squint.

Harry sighed. “I’m sure you do. Look, I have a huge house full of empty rooms. Pick one. Try to sleep. Entertain yourself if you can’t.”

They staggered up the stairs together, bouncing off the walls and banisters. Harry left Draco on the landing to choose a room and collapsed into bed fully clothed. He quickly fell into a deep sleep.

When Harry got up during the night for a glass of water, he saw light pouring out from under the door of Regulus Black’s old room. He smiled to himself; it seemed fitting that Draco would have chosen the room of a fellow redeemed Death Eater. A part of him wanted to knock and see if Draco was okay, but he resisted. He had learned that when it came to Draco, less was more.

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From that night on, Draco began to stay overnight at Grimmauld Place several times a week. He always stayed in Regulus’s room, though as far as Harry could tell, he wasn’t getting much sleep. Harry often heard Draco’s voice from across the hall; usually a quiet mutter, but occasionally he spoke loudly and clearly, apparently rehearsing a speech. Draco was always gone by the time Harry woke up, and he always left the room immaculate.

Despite Draco’s tidiness, a surprising number of his possessions gradually found their way into Grimmauld Place: strong filter coffee, which he insisted on drinking instead of Harry’s cheap, freeze-dried stuff; a pair of ornate crystal wine glasses which Harry was too afraid of breaking to wash; various items of clothing; and what felt like an entire library’s worth of books.

Draco continued to take a Deadly Nightshade potion every night, but the dose was reducing rapidly and this was mirrored by his withdrawal symptoms. As August sailed by, the only signs that Draco was due to take a potion were a subtle tremor of his fingers and an irritable mood – though given his spiky personality, this particular symptom often went unnoticed.

Harry, meanwhile, couldn’t believe how comfortable it was to live alongside his schoolboy rival. His own sleep had improved hugely since Draco began to stay over; apparently his subconscious was pleased to have another person in the creepy old house.
It seemed almost too good to be true.

***

Harry was in the middle of a very pleasant dream, in which he’d just been offered the England Quidditch captaincy, when a loud blast tore him abruptly from his slumber.

His Auror instincts kicked in immediately; he was up in an instant, wand in hand, listening intently. When no further sounds came, he dashed across the hall and burst into Draco’s room.

The source of the noise was immediately obvious when Harry flicked on the light: every single drawer of the armoire on the back wall had been blown open and the contents strewn haphazardly around the room. It was as if it had been packed with dynamite.

Miraculously, Draco had slept through the explosion. He was tossing and turning, his face screwed up as though he was in physical pain.

Harry edged his way through the clutter until he was stood by the bed, then grabbed Draco’s shoulder and shook him gently until he began to stir. “Wake up. It’s a dream. It’s just a dream,” Harry said, keeping his voice low and even, just as Ron used to do for him.

After a few more gentle nudges, Draco’s eyes flew open and he sat up abruptly, his chest heaving with deep, ragged breaths. He was drenched in sweat; his hair was wet through and his white t-shirt clung to him, translucent. It took him a few moments to return to reality, but when he did, he looked around the room in horror.

“Fuck. I’m so sorry. Let me sort it…” He started searching for his wand, fumbling around with shaky hands.

Harry reached out and gripped Draco’s shoulders firmly. “Stop. Don’t be ridiculous. We’ll sort it tomorrow.” He paused. It was odd to be the person doing the comforting; he felt a powerful but extremely inappropriate urge to give Draco a hug. “Go and have a shower, and I’ll find you something to change into. I’ll get us a drink, too. That usually helps me.”

Draco nodded. He climbed gingerly out of bed and stumbled shakily from the room.

Harry left a bundle of clothing outside the bathroom door and padded down to the kitchen. He poured two measures of whiskey and, after a moment’s deliberation, brought them back up to his bedroom.

He sat back against the headboard of his bed and waited for Draco. He could imagine the relief of the shower; he was all too familiar with the blissful feeling of warm water washing the dregs of darkness down the plughole.

There was something comforting about the sound of the water running. It had been almost a year since Ron and Hermione moved out, but Harry had never got used to the silence they’d left behind.

Draco put his head around Harry’s door ten minutes later. His damp hair appeared gold in the dim light as opposed to its usual platinum, and he looked far better than when Harry had woken him, aside from his mutinous expression.

“Is this your idea of a joke, Potter?”

“What do you mean?” Harry asked innocently, desperately trying to conceal a grin.
Draco glared for a long moment before stepping fully into the room.

The clothes Harry had chosen fitted Draco terribly. The golden snitch pyjama bottoms rode scandalously low on his narrow hips, presumably because they were several inches too short. His main objection, however, seemed to relate to the t-shirt. It was a very old one – one which Harry didn’t have a hope of fitting into – from the back of Harry’s wardrobe. It wasn’t overly tight on Draco, but the hem barely skimmed his navel. The Gryffindor lion roared proudly on his chest, set against a faded red background.

The combination left several inches of Draco’s pale stomach on show, punctuated by the shallow dip of his navel and the ridges of his hip bones. Harry had meant it as a joke, but staring at that strip of creamy skin, he had to admit that Draco didn’t look funny at all. An unexpected stab of arousal took Harry completely by surprise.

“It suits you!” Harry teased, though his voice was shaky. The room suddenly felt rather warm. He shook his head in an unsuccessful attempt to clear it and gestured for Draco to sit on the bed. Draco sighed in exasperation, then stalked across the room and perched gingerly on the edge. The act of doing so caused the Gryffindor t-shirt to ride up another few inches at the back, revealing the dimples at the base of his spine.

Harry passed Draco his drink and tried desperately to remember what he’d planned to do next. It took him a moment to remember that Draco had even had a nightmare.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Harry asked.

When his question was met with stony silence, he pressed on. “I used to drive the other Gryffindors mad with my nightmares,” he said conversationally. “During Fifth Year, I had one almost every night. I’d wake up sweating and screaming. Seamus used to cast *Silencio* around the curtains of my bed.”

Draco smiled weakly down at his whiskey. “I almost destroyed the Slytherin dormitory with a burst of uncontrolled magic during Sixth Year,” he murmured. “I had the same nightmare every night for a month, and one night I woke up to find that I’d cracked the window which looked out into the lake – can you imagine how catastrophic it could have been?” He shuddered. “I had to pretend I’d done it on purpose, in a rage.”

Harry exhaled slowly. “Shit.”

“Shit, indeed,” Draco agreed. “I started taking Dreamless Sleep after that because I’d read that it’s not possible to cast spells whilst under its influence. The lack of dreams was just a bonus.”

“Have you had any magical outbursts since you stopped taking it?” Harry asked. “Other than tonight, I mean.”

“A couple of minor ones. I blew all the lightbulbs in my flat a couple of weeks ago, and broke my bedroom window not long before that.” His cheeks were flushed with embarrassment and he carefully avoided Harry’s eye. “I’d appreciate it if you kept that to yourself.”

“Of course.” Harry nodded. He could understand Draco’s request: magical outbursts were embarrassing enough for children, let alone fully trained adult wizards.

“I mean it, Harry.” Draco’s voice was sharp. Harry nodded again, as earnestly as he could.

Apparently satisfied, Draco shifted up the bed to lean against the headboard beside Harry. He took
a sip of whiskey and gave a sigh of appreciation, though his features quickly settled back into a
frown. “Living in a flat presents an added complication, of course,” he said. “That’s partly why
I’ve been stopping over so much. There are Muggles above and below me. If something more
serious were to happen … well, with my record, I doubt anyone would believe it was accidental.”

Harry had to admit Draco had a point. “You can stay here whenever you want, you know,” he
offered. “Every night, if you need to. It’s actually been helping with my own nightmares.”

“And here I was thinking you were doing me a good deed, when in fact you’re just as selfish as the
rest of us.” Draco smirked. Harry recognised the shift of tone as his subtle way of closing the
subject.

“Well, I’m knackered,” Harry said with a yawn. He downed the rest of his whiskey in a single
gulp. “You might as well stay in here tonight. None of the other beds are made up.”

Draco’s shoulders stiffened. “I hardly think it would go down too well if I were to blow up Harry
Potter in my sleep.”

Harry snorted. “I know you don’t think particularly highly of me, but I’m a qualified Auror and, as
you so often remind me, the Chosen One. I’m sure I can handle a bit of loose magic.”

Draco hesitated, then, “Do you mind if I read?”

“No, go ahead. Leave the bedside light on if you want, I’m a heavy sleeper.”

Draco reached over and picked up Harry’s wand from the bedside table. “Accio ‘A History of
Transfigurative Theory’!” A huge leather-bound book sailed through the open door and landed in
Draco’s lap with a thump. Harry eyed it with disgust.

“You’re the most boring person I’ve ever met, you know.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “I’m actively trying to bore myself to sleep. Besides, I found it on your
bookshelf.”

Harry shook his head in exasperation. “How many times do I have to tell you? If it looks as if it
belongs in this house, it’s probably not mine. That book isn’t mine, just as the Troll-leg umbrella
stand isn’t mine, just as the tapestry of a Dementor in the downstairs loo is not mine!”

“Mmm, of course,” Draco said mildly. “And I suppose the stuffed Unicorn I found down the back
of the sofa isn’t yours, either?”

Harry gaped. “That was a gift—a joke gift, I mean, from … um…” He trailed off as Draco nodded
slowly, smirking. “Oh, sod off, Malfoy. Get under the covers and read your boring book. I’m going
to sleep.”

Harry took off his glasses and relaxed back into the pillows. The bed shifted as Draco climbed in
and made himself comfortable. The presence of another warm body was reassuring, and the quiet
rustling as Draco leafed through the book soothed Harry to sleep in no time at all.

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Harry woke up alone the following morning, but when he padded into the kitchen for breakfast he
was surprised to find Draco sat at the table, nursing an incredibly strong-smelling cup of black
coffee. He had clearly been home and returned; he was dressed in a particularly severe pinstriped
suit. Harry decided that he much preferred the Gryffindor pyjamas.
“Morning,” Harry greeted him uncertainly.

It was immediately obvious that Draco was on edge: he was incredibly fidgety, his eyes moving restlessly around the room, looking everywhere except at Harry. When he spoke, his sentences came out as sharp fragments. “What happened last night – it was a bad idea. It shouldn’t happen again.”

“Why? Did I steal the duvet or something?” Harry teased in a futile attempt to lighten the mood.

“Will you just listen for a minute?” Draco snapped. “There’s something you need to know.” He was practically squirming in his seat, turning his cup round and round in his hands.

Concern curled in the pit of Harry’s stomach, and he looked closely at Draco, checking for any signs of intoxicating potion use. “What’s wrong?”

Draco took a deep breath. “I’m gay.” He let the words hang in the air for a moment, then continued in a rush. “I wouldn’t have told you – well, it’s none of your business, after all – but given what happened last night, I thought you ought to know. In case it makes you uncomfortable. In case you don’t want to share a bed with someone like me.”

Harry almost laughed with relief, but managed to catch himself. He knew that his response was important. “Draco, calm down. It’s fine.”

Draco looked at him askance. “What?”

“I said, it’s fine. It’s not a problem. You scared me, you prat. You should see yourself – you’re like a coiled spring! I thought something awful had happened!”

Draco blinked. “It’s not a problem? Do you make a habit of inviting homosexual men into your bed?” he asked archly.

“Well, no. I don’t really invite anyone into my bed—but that’s not the point!” Harry stuttered, feeling his cheeks flush. “Look, it’s not an issue. We’re just sleeping – or, trying to sleep in your case, I suppose. It’s not like we’re, you know…” He couldn’t bring himself to say it.

“Fucking?” Draco supplied. His anxiety appeared to have melted away; wry amusement danced behind his eyes. He was obviously taking great pleasure in Harry’s discomfort.

“Um, yeah, that. Anyway. You need sleep, and you’re more likely to get it if I’m there to catch any unrestrained magic.” He paused. “And if I’m honest, I sleep far better when there’s someone else in the room,” he finished quietly.

Draco nodded slowly. “Well. That’s that, then.”

“I’ll kick you out if you snore, though,” Harry said, letting his lips curve up into a tentative smile.

Draco tutted. “A Malfoy would never engage in such crass behaviour as snoring.” He drained his cup and got to his feet. “I need to get going. Have a good day rescuing Kneazles from trees, or whatever it is that you Aurors do,” he teased as he stalked towards the kitchen door.

The magnitude of their conversation hit Harry hard as he watched Draco leave, and he was suddenly struck by an urge to acknowledge it.

“Draco?”
Draco turned in the doorway and looked at him expectantly, blond eyebrows raised.

“Thanks for trusting me enough to tell me.”

Draco’s expression softened for a split second before rolled his eyes and swept from the room, muttering something that sounded suspiciously like “Bloody sentimental Gryffindors.”

Alone in the kitchen, Harry’s mind began to race. He’d meant what he said: he really didn’t care that Draco was gay. It did shed new light on Harry’s memory of him in that Gryffindor t-shirt, though. It somehow made the unexpected surge of interest feel more real.

In search of a distraction, he headed upstairs after breakfast to clear up the mess in Regulus’s room. When he got there, however, he found that the drawers had been repaired and refilled, and the bed was neatly made. There was even a crystal vase of pale yellow daffodils on the windowsill. Harry grinned. He wasn’t sure why he’d expected anything less from Draco.

He still had plenty of time before he needed to leave for work, so he climbed the next flight of stairs, lost in his thoughts about Draco’s confession. He wandered from room to room, and eventually found himself stood before the Black Family Tree.

Draco’s name glimmered, alone, in the bottom right-hand corner of the tapestry. Harry ran his fingers gently over the fabric, just as Draco had done on his first visit to Grimmauld Place. The magic didn’t ripple in recognition for Harry, though, and eventually he stepped back to look at the whole family tree.

As he stared at the interconnecting lines of silver thread, Harry had an idea.

***

Dinner that night was an awkward affair. Both Harry and Draco went to great lengths to avoid any mention of that morning’s discussion, and as a result the conversation was stilted and unusually polite. Long silences stretched out between them, and Draco couldn’t quite manage to look Harry in the eye.

After such an uncomfortable evening, Harry was stunned when he returned from brushing his teeth to find Draco lounging on his bed in a set of grey cotton pyjamas. He didn’t acknowledge Harry; he simply continued to flick through the same enormous book he’d been reading the night before.

Harry ignored the twinge of disappointment that Draco wasn’t wearing the too-short Gryffindor pyjamas and fought the urge to start asking questions. He strolled across the room and climbed under the duvet, keeping his expression as neutral as possible.

“Night,” he said, as he removed his glasses and set them carefully down on the bedside table.

Draco still didn’t look up from his book, but Harry felt the tension leave him. “Night, Potter.”

And that was that.

From that point on, the right-hand side of Harry’s bed belonged to Draco. Every night they stumbled up the stairs together and settled down, side by side, beneath Harry’s worn burgundy duvet. They never expressly discussed the arrangement – to do so would have forced them to address its significance – preferring instead to act as if it was perfectly normal.

Draco struggled to get more than a couple of hours’ sleep, so Harry often woke in the night to find him reading. On the rare occasion that Harry caught Draco sleeping, he was struck by how relaxed
he looked; even the tiny crease between Draco’s pale eyebrows disappeared.

Draco only had one more magical outburst: a minor surge which knocked his glass of water off the bedside table and onto the floor. It was so insignificant that Harry didn’t even bother to wake him. He simply cleared it up with a flick of his wand before drifting back off to sleep.

***

“For the last time, where are we going?” Draco grumbled.

“For the last time, I’m not telling you until we get there!” Harry kept his tone light, but his stomach was churning. There was no way Draco would have agreed to come if Harry had disclosed their destination.

They were walking down a long suburban road lined with impossibly tall trees. Dappled sunlight filtered through the canopy of leaves, which provided a welcome respite from the late August sunshine. Smart Edwardian houses stood along each side of the street, set back behind long front gardens; the vast array of exotic flowers gave the area away as a Magical one.

Harry had decided that approaching their host’s front door was the safest option – appearing inside a stranger’s house seemed like a surefire way to set Draco on edge – but he hadn’t factored in just how persistent Draco could be.

The constant wheedling for information was driving Harry mad, but it did at least fill the gaps in their conversation, which was unusually sparse. Despite the fact that Draco had all but moved into Grimmauld Place, it was the first time they’d spent time together during the day, and they were both feeling cautious.

They finally arrived at the polished front door of a particularly smart house with grand bay windows. Draco looked more confused than ever when Harry raised the silver knocker and rapped three times against the gleaming wood.

A moment later the door swung open to reveal a small, skinny boy with freckles and fluorescent blue hair.

“Harry!” Teddy looked delighted to see Harry, but didn’t come forward for a hug; at ten years old, he was just starting to become self-conscious. Harry settled for ruffling Teddy’s garish hair, then glanced at Draco, who suddenly looked very uncomfortable.

“Draco, this is Teddy Lupin. Teddy, this is—”

But Teddy cut Harry off, staring at Draco with wide eyes. “I know who you are,” he said, frowning up at Draco’s white-blond hair. “You’re Draco Malfoy.”

“That’s right,” Draco agreed quietly.

Teddy nodded triumphantly. “Grandma told me you were coming.”

Draco’s head whipped round to look at Harry, but before he could finish putting two and two together, Andromeda appeared behind Teddy in the doorway. Draco visibly flinched. Harry tried to put himself in Draco’s shoes; with her long, dark hair and heavy-lidded eyes, Andromeda’s resemblance to her sister Bellatrix was jarring.

Andromeda and Draco looked at one another for a long moment. Neither made any move to shake hands or hug.
“So,” she mused, “I finally get to meet my little sister’s son.” She didn’t smile, but her tone was polite.

“Pleased to meet you.” Draco nodded, though he didn't look pleased. He looked as if he was considering running very quickly in the opposite direction.

“Come in.” She stepped back and ushered them inside. Harry entered first, with Draco following warily behind. Teddy ran ahead and disappeared up the stairs, chattering loudly about his new Quidditch gloves.

Andromeda led them through the house to a ruthlessly tidy sitting room, tastefully decorated in neutral browns and creams. Harry had been visiting once a week for almost a decade, and had never seen so much as a cushion out of place. He couldn’t understand how she managed to keep the house so immaculate whilst raising Teddy the Human Whirlwind.

At the center of the room were two cream sofas, standing face to face on either side of a beautifully carved coffee table. Andromeda took a seat on one, and gestured for Harry and Draco to make themselves comfortable on the other. As they sat down, a tiny, surprisingly youthful House-elf appeared with a Pop!, bearing a tray of tea and cakes.

“Thank you, Binkey,” Andromeda said, dismissing her with a wave. “One step ahead, as always.”

Harry quickly took a slice of carrot cake – Binkey’s baking was always exceptional – but Draco stuck to a cup of tea and remained perched on the edge of the settee. Harry took this as a sign of his discomfort and began to wonder if this had been such a good idea, after all.

Andromeda watched Draco carefully. “You look very like your mother,” she said eventually.

“Thank you,” Draco replied stiffly, his expression guarded.

Harry almost choked on the urge to laugh. It was bizarre to see two people whom he knew so well – people he had seen relax, laugh and joke – sit there, stiff-backed, in a baffling display of pure-blood propriety. It was like watching a game of chess between two evenly-matched players.

The silence was excruciatingly uncomfortable, broken only by the faint sound of classical music drifting in from the kitchen. Draco cocked his head, listening. A slight frown of concentration appeared on his face.

“Beethoven’s Ninth?” he asked.

Andromeda nodded approvingly. “Yes. A little cliché, perhaps, but it’s one of my favourites. There’s just something about the—”

“—strings?” Draco finished.

A wry smile crept across Andromeda’s lips. “Exactly. The strings; it’s as though the bow is being pulled across my very nerves.”

The ice had been broken. Harry felt his shoulders sag with relief. He was woefully out of his depth on the topic of classical music, so he took this as his cue to leave. “Well, I promised Teddy I’d take him out flying, so I’ll be back in a bit,” he said as he got to his feet.

He turned and half-ran from the room, abandoning his untouched cup of tea and ignoring the identical looks of horror on his companions’ faces.
When Harry returned to the sitting room an hour later, slightly sore and picking leaves out of his windswept hair, it was to the sound of lively chatter.

He feigned caution as he poked his head around the door, peering gingerly at Andromeda and Draco in turn. “Well, I can't see any obvious signs of spell damage…”

“Oh, shut up, Potter.” Draco smirked as Andromeda arched a dark eyebrow. Harry realised he’d united the two wiliest Slytherins he knew, and immediately wondered what he’d done.

“I was going to head off, but you should stay if you’re not finished,” he told Draco.

“No, I’ll come with you. I have some work to do this afternoon,” Draco sighed. He took a final sip of tea and got to his feet.

The rigid formality returned the moment he and Andromeda stood up; it was as if a spell had been broken.

“Thank you for having me,” he said, stiffly.

“It was a pleasure,” Andromeda nodded. She snapped her fingers to call Binkey, who set to work clearing the tea trays, and ushered Harry and Draco back to the front door.

Harry and Draco could have Apparated and gone their separate ways, but Draco followed without complaint when Harry began to stroll along the pavement.

“That looked like a success to me,” Harry said after a few minutes.

Draco raised an eyebrow in an attempt to look nonchalant, but Harry could see he was trying to hide how pleased he was. “We’re going to try and get tickets for a piano concerto next week,” he said casually.

Harry beamed. “I knew it was a brilliant idea to introduce you!”

Draco tried to shoot Harry a withering look, but the lightness in his eyes betrayed him. “Smugness doesn't suit you, Potter. You don’t have the bone structure for it.”

Harry sighed and shoved him lightly. “Such an arsehole,” he muttered loudly, even as his heart leapt at Draco’s grin.

***

It quickly became apparent that Draco and Andromeda got on like a house on fire. They began to meet up once a week for what Draco referred to as an ‘injection of culture’. “A commoner such as yourself wouldn’t understand, Potter,” he’d teased. Harry had feigned outrage, but Draco was right: he had no interest in visiting art galleries or listening to classical music, and was more than happy to leave them to it.

Even so, he always made sure he was at home when Draco arrived at Grimmauld Place after spending an afternoon with Andromeda; the unsuppressable smile which lingered on Draco’s face was one of Harry’s favourite things to see. The knowledge that he had helped to connect Draco with the last remaining arm of his family made Harry’s chest feel tight with happiness.

In fact, spending time with Draco always left Harry buzzing with happiness – so much so that it was becoming a problem.
Ever since Draco had confided in Harry about his sexuality, it had dominated Harry’s thoughts. Although on the surface nothing had changed, Harry couldn’t help but feel as if everything had changed.

He found himself noticing Draco in an entirely different way. His gaze lingered on Draco’s clever fingers as he chopped the vegetables for dinner; his stomach squirmed when Draco laughed at his own snarky quips, pale pink lips slipping back to reveal pointed white teeth; his cock stirred at the thought of Draco’s slim hips and narrow shoulders, his long legs and firm arse … Harry simply couldn’t stop watching.

“You’re being ridiculous, he told himself. Draco’s gay, you’re not. You’re just curious. Stop jumping on the bandwagon.”

As Harry grappled with his feelings, his fantasies shifted significantly. More often than not, he found himself wanking to the thought of slim, masculine bodies and bright blond hair.

His inappropriate attraction to Draco spiralled even further out of control when a late summer heat wave swept in at the start of September.

Grimmauld Place was stubbornly resistant to temperature regulation charms, resulting in a series of uncomfortably hot nights. Even Draco was forced to concede defeat after spending two hours trying and failing to cool the bedroom down.

The heat quickly got the better of Harry, and he took to wandering around topless and sleeping in just his pyjama bottoms. He thought he caught Draco staring a few times with an odd, slightly dazed look in his eyes, but he decided he had to be imagining it: Draco had made it perfectly clear that he wasn't interested in Harry.

Draco was more stubborn and initially refused to so much as roll up his sleeves, but his resolve crumbled one evening when the temperature in the kitchen crept past thirty degrees. He pushed his sleeves up past his elbows and undid the top three buttons of his shirt, then turned his attention back to his case file, ignoring the sweat prickling along his hairline.

Harry stared across the kitchen table at the hint of red scar tissue which peeked from the wide ‘V’ of Draco’s lapels, ending just below the hollow where the ridges of his collarbones met. He had to grip the edge of his seat to prevent himself from reaching out to stroke it.

From that point on, things got even worse. Draco began to show more skin; he started wearing t-shirts – which looked bizarre on him, given that Harry was so used to seeing him in smart shirts – and, on one particularly hot evening, he even put on a pair of Harry’s shorts. They were a couple of sizes too big for Draco despite the weight he’d gained, and they rode so low on his hips that Harry temporarily lost the ability to speak.

All the while, Harry watched, becoming ever more confused. He’d looked at blokes with a sense of curiosity in the past, but this was the first time he’d ever developed such a strong crush on a man.

Harry’s interest in Draco meant that their bed-sharing arrangement quickly became something of a challenge, as waking up hard became the norm. It didn’t help that despite his initial complaints, Draco had taken to wearing the too-short Gryffindor t-shirt to bed at least once a week.

If Harry hadn’t known better, he would have sworn that Draco was flirting with him.

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Given Draco’s tendency to get up early, the first time Harry woke up before him came as a
surprise. He was greeted by the sight of Draco’s blurry form, face up in bed beside him. He groped blindly at the bedside table for his glasses; the room swam into focus as he put them on.

Harry’s pulse quickened as he realised that Draco was shirtless, his ivory skin warmed by the dusky yellow light which filtered through the curtains. The covers were pushed down around their feet; it had been another uncomfortably warm night. Harry glanced at the alarm clock, which confirmed that Draco had overslept.

“Draco,” Harry whispered. He received a sleepy “mmhm” in response.

Then Draco stretched – really stretched – and Harry’s mouth went dry.

Harry was used to the sight of Draco’s slim frame, all long limbs and sharp edges, but there was something breathtaking about the way he extended every inch of his body into the stretch. He reached up and gripped the headboard, raising his arms above his head to reveal the intimate hollows of his armpits; creamy skin lightly dusted with fine gold hair.

Harry’s cock stirred. He was immensely grateful that Draco’s eyes were closed – it left him free to stare – and with the way Draco was moving, Harry couldn’t have torn his eyes away if he’d wanted to.

An easy smile bloomed on Draco’s face. The expression was so unlike his usual measured frown that he almost looked like a different person. He threw his head back into the pillow, exposing his graceful neck, his Adam’s apple bobbing slightly as he swallowed.

Arousal thrummed in Harry’s veins as he allowed his eyes to wander down Draco’s body, taking in the faint blush of his nipples, almost imperceptible, unlike the mauve scars which streaked his chest.

Harry paused at the jut of Draco’s hip bones, which were cut off cruelly by the waistband of his pyjama bottoms. He was struck by a powerful urge to grab them, to sink his fingers into the tender skin, to pull Draco’s narrow hips against his own and rut against them until he came all over Draco’s pale stomach.

And the noises he was making! Harry didn’t dare to breathe, so desperate was he not to miss a single sigh or delicious, sleepy moan. Every sound shot straight to Harry’s groin.

Harry’s cock was begging for attention, straining against the fabric of his pyjamas. He pushed the heel of his palm against his hard length, biting back a sigh of relief at the pressure. Only the threat of getting caught stopped him from going further.

Just as Harry thought he couldn’t bear any more of it, Draco rolled onto his stomach. He turned lazily, every muscle pulled taut as he strained into the stretch. He arched his back, catlike, and Harry’s eyes traced his spine from the nape of his neck all the way down to the delicious dimples above the curve of his arse.

Harry was still staring, entranced, when Draco’s eyes finally fluttered open.

A bolt of fear shot through Harry’s bloodstream, and he turned face-down, quick as a flash, pulling his hand away from his cock as if he’d been burned. He tried desperately to steady his breathing, though he felt as if he’d run a race.

Draco sat up abruptly, his grey eyes instantly alert. “Fuck, what time is it?”

“Half eight.”
With a deep groan, Draco hauled himself out of bed. His back made a cracking sound as he stood.

“Body failing you in your old age?” Harry teased, his voice weak.

“I’m less than two months older than you, you idiot.” Draco smirked. “And I’ll have you know, I’m well on my way to being in excellent shape.”

I’ll say, Harry thought as Draco stalked from the room. He stayed in bed and listened to Draco rushing around, waiting for him to leave. It seemed to take forever.

When he finally heard the roar of the Floo, Harry had his fingers wrapped around his cock within seconds, and he proceeded to have one of the fastest, most desperate wanks of his life. He came with his face buried in Draco’s pillow, inhaling his heady scent in shallow gasps. His release smeared the sheets where Draco had lay only minutes earlier.

As the rush of his orgasm faded, reality hit Harry like a well-aimed bludger: there was no way this could end well.

***

As Draco reached the weakest phase of Deadly Nightshade potions, his sleeping improved considerably. It still took him several hours to doze off, but he slept deeply and Harry began to wake up first increasingly often. He always woke Draco in time for work during the week, but left him to sleep in at the weekends.

One Saturday, Draco was still snoozing when the kitchen clock chimed ten o’clock. Harry knew he’d moan about wasting the day if Harry left him much longer, so he brewed a pot of Draco’s fancy coffee to ensure a smooth wake up. He was getting ready to pour a cup when the kitchen door burst open.

“Boo!”

Harry jumped so violently he dropped the cafetière. It fell to the floor with a clatter, sending a wave of scalding black coffee across the polished tiles.

“Christ, Ginny, you scared me to death!”

She was bent double in a fit of silent laughter, bracing herself against the doorframe, her flame-red hair dancing around her shoulders. “You should see your face!” she gasped.

Harry took several deep breaths, not yet trusting himself to move or speak. Every nerve ending in his body tingled from the rush of adrenaline that had accompanied the shock.

Ginny managed to compose herself first. “I’ve come to check that you’re still alive, and more importantly, still a Harpies fan. It’s been so long since you’ve come to a match that I’m starting to suspect you’ve defected…” she trailed off, schooling her features into an expression of mock suspicion. “You’ve not become a Cannons supporter, have you?”

Harry grinned weakly. “Of course not.”

When it became evident that he wasn't going to clean up the coffee, Ginny took out her wand and did it for him.

“Since when do you drink filter coffee, anyway?” she asked. Harry shrugged noncommittally and shoved his hands into his pockets. This only raised Ginny’s suspicions even further. “Are you
“Alright, Harry?” she frowned. “You seem a bit jumpy.”

“I’m fine, Gin. You just caught me off-guard. I didn’t even feel the wards go off.”

He leaned against the kitchen table in an effort to look relaxed as she did a slightly alarming impression of Mad-Eye: “Constant vigilance!” she barked.

“Erm, yeah, right…”

Ginny shook her head and muttered something about Harry being a tough crowd. She scanned the room, taking in the gleaming counters and neatly stacked shelves. “Right, what’s going on? I’ve never seen your kitchen so clean.”

Her eyes came to a rest at the sink. A sly grin spilled across her face; in that moment, she looked uncannily like George. Harry followed her gaze and winced. Draco’s crystal wine glasses stood in the basin, traitorously close to one another.

“Ooh! Been entertaining, have you?”

“It’s not like that,” Harry said quickly.

It was too late, though. Ginny was on a roll. “Oh, I think it is.” She picked up one of the glasses. “Very fancy … How come you never get these out when I come round for dinner?”

Harry scowled and pressed his lips tightly together. Silence seemed like the safest tactic.

Things only got worse when Ginny spotted the wine bottle on the kitchen table; her eyes widened when she saw that the label was written in French. “Merlin. Imported wine? You’re pulling out all the stops! She is a lucky girl.”

Harry maintained his frown, but he could feel a blush creeping all the way from his neck to the tips of his ears. How could he possibly explain that not only was the ‘lucky girl’ Draco bloody Malfoy, he was currently tucked up in Harry’s bed wearing a Gryffindor t-shirt?

As if on cue, a door creaked upstairs.

Ginny’s jaw dropped.

Harry finally sprung into action. “Right, that’s enough. Gin, you need to leave.”

He took her by the shoulders and frog-marched her along the hallway and into the front room. Ginny craned her neck as they passed the staircase, desperately straining to catch a glimpse of Harry’s mystery date.

Harry kept a firm hold on her all the way to the Floo – he knew he didn’t have a hope of catching her if she tried to make a run for the stairs – and poured a measure of Floo powder into her hand.

“Fine, I get the message.” She sighed, disappointed.

Harry grinned. “About time!”

She punched him lightly on the arm with her free hand. “I’m only joking, you know. I’m happy for you. Can’t wait to meet her.” With a wink, Ginny disappeared into the green flames.

Harry immediately collapsed onto the sofa and buried his face in his hands, heart hammering in his chest. He was still recovering when quiet footsteps entered the room a few minutes later.
“How much of that did you hear?” Harry groaned, turning to face Draco.

“Enough to know that I’m a very lucky girl,” Draco replied dryly.

***

Harry received no fewer than seven messages from Ginny over the course of the following few days: four owls came to the house and three memos turned up on his desk at work. Every single one sought further information about Harry’s so-called ‘Mystery Girlfriend’.

The final straw came when an eighth owl burst right through the Floo on Thursday night, while Harry and Draco were working. It scattered ash all over Harry’s front room and bore a note that read:

I assume from your lack of replies that you’re having the time of your life with your Mystery Girlfriend. Enjoy!

G x

P.s. Blonde, brunette or redhead?
P.p.s. Don’t forget the foreplay!

Harry hastily tried to hide the message, but Draco was far too quick for him. He grabbed the charred scrap of paper and read it aloud in a slow, exaggerated drawl that made Harry’s insides squirm with a strange mixture of arousal and embarrassment.

When Draco finished reading, he frowned and tapped his temple as if he was thinking very hard. “I’m not entirely sure what would constitute foreplay, given that the main event is me writing my presentation speech,” he mused. “Perhaps you should stick a quill up my arse?”

Harry gaped. “I have no idea what you expect me to say to that,” he spluttered, cheeks burning. “I’m going to bed.”

Draco nodded. “I’ll be up in a bit; I just need to finish this section,” he said, his eyes fixed once more on his sheet of parchment. “You should just let her turn up,” he added, with a wicked grin. “Imagine the look on her face if she came through the Floo to find me sat here wearing your pyjamas.”

Harry made it very clear that he had no desire to make Ginny’s head explode and warded the Floo as securely as he possibly could. He headed up to bed alone, trying desperately not to think about foreplay.

When he woke a few hours later, it was to the masculine scent of Draco’s aftershave. It was the middle of the night and so dark that it made almost no difference when he opened his eyes.

They were lay flush against one another on their sides, slotted together like spoons in a drawer. Draco was breathing deeply, the warm flesh of his bare back pressing firmly into Harry’s chest each time he inhaled. Harry’s arm was draped loosely over Draco’s waist, his forehead resting against the soft nape of his neck.

Harry’s stomach twisted into a tight knot as he registered the intimacy of their position. They had woken to find themselves a little too close for comfort on a number of occasions, but had always sprung apart and never spoke of it. Harry couldn’t remember them ever being quite so neatly entwined as this, though.
Half-asleep, Draco shifted against Harry. He muttered something indistinguishable and rolled his hips slightly. The sudden pressure had Harry hard in an instant. His cock was wedged firmly against Draco’s arse, and he knew Draco had felt it: his slow, steady breathing had stopped abruptly.

Harry’s mouth was dry. It was now or never: any second, Draco would move away and the moment would be shattered. Harry couldn’t let that happen. Adrenaline shot through his veins as he allowed himself one long, gentle thrust against Draco’s arse. He exhaled in a rush as the friction dragged his foreskin down, exposing the sensitive head of his cock to the fabric of his pyjamas.

“What are you doing?” Draco murmured, his voice thick with sleep.

Harry’s heart was pounding in his chest, blood roaring in his ears. He had no idea what to say; no idea what he was doing, but Draco didn’t give him too long to think about it. He turned around to face Harry in the dark, his soft breath tickling Harry’s cheek. Harry bit back a moan of frustration at the loss of contact, but then Draco’s warm hands were on his skin, and Harry was on fire.

Draco pushed Harry onto his back and climbed smoothly on top of him. “Is this what you wanted?” he asked quietly as he lowered his hips against Harry’s. Harry forgot to breathe as he felt Draco’s hard cock through the layers of fabric.

“Yes,” he choked out.

Draco buried his face in the warm hollow of Harry’s neck and began to grind against him, moving his hips in slow, rhythmic circles. Waves of pleasure ebbed and flowed. This was nothing like the feeling when Harry wanked; it was bone-deep and built gradually, seeming to radiate outwards from his groin to the very tips of his toes.

Their breathing quickly became ragged, their bare chests slick with sweat as they writhed against each other.

Draco slipped his fingers under the waistband of Harry’s pyjamas and coaxed them down past Harry’s knees, then got up to slip out of his own.

Harry’s eyes fluttered shut at the feel of Draco’s bare thighs when he settled back into position. “Please,” he panted, arching up in desperation, seeking Draco’s touch.

When Draco wrapped his hand around Harry’s hard cock, Harry thought for a moment that he might faint. Draco squeezed gently, coaxing a quiet moan from Harry’s lips. He ran his thumb across the head, gliding smoothly over Harry’s slit, smearing a bead of pre-come around in a slow circle.

“Please, Draco,” Harry repeated, desperate.

Draco shifted and spat audibly into his palm before reaching down and taking both of their cocks in his hand. Nothing could have prepared Harry for the feeling of another man’s prick against his own, hot and hard and silky smooth. He gasped and bucked into Draco’s firm grip.

Draco moved his hand teasingly slowly, wanking their cocks leisurely. The lack of light made it hard to tell for sure, but Harry was convinced that Draco was smirking. He nipped and sucked at the sensitive skin of Harry’s neck before sinking his teeth in hard enough to make Harry gasp.

“Faster,” Harry grunted, thrusting up into Draco’s fist.

Harry felt his balls tighten as Draco picked up the pace. His orgasm came with barely a moment’s
warning, his cock throbbing against Draco’s as his come streaked their stomachs.

Before he could even catch his breath, Draco pulled away and retreated to his own side of the bed. Harry was still dazed, and it took him a few moments to recognise the sounds Draco was making. When he placed them, a fresh rush of heat pooled in his groin.

It was too dark to see, so Harry lay still and listened as Draco finished himself off. Draco’s breath caught in his throat and the sheets whispered against his skin as he fist ed his hard prick. Every delicious sound went straight to Harry’s cock, and it took every shred of his self-control not to turn on the light so he could watch.

It wasn't long before Draco’s movements stuttered, and he came with a low, muffled groan, as though he’d pulled a pillow over his face to mask it.

They lay in the dark, panting. The sheets were damp with sweat and the smell of sex saturated the air. Harry didn't dare speak, terrified of shattering the fragile moment, so he reached over and ran his fingers lightly along Draco’s arm.

Draco froze at Harry’s touch. “That was a huge mistake,” he whispered hoarsely.

The moment the words had left his lips, Draco was up like a shot. He flicked the light on; it was too bright, stinging Harry’s eyes as he hurried to put on his glasses. Harry felt as though he had been plunged into a pool of icy water.

Draco was still half hard, his flat stomach smeared with the combined mess of their release. He wiped it roughly on the corner of the duvet. His cheeks and chest were flushed pink, though Harry couldn’t tell whether this was due to exertion or shame.

Harry’s mind was reeling. “I’m so sorry. I thought—”

But Draco wasn’t listening. He was pulling on his clothes, running his fingers through his tousled hair. “I have to go,” he said shortly.

“Draco, it’s the middle of the night,” Harry pleaded.

Draco’s mind was made up, though. He shook his head, an unreadable look in his eyes. Harry watched as Draco finished buttoning up his shirt and rushed from the room. He heard the familiar whoosh of the Floo a minute later and knew there was no point in trying to follow.

***

That night, Draco didn’t turn up at the usual time. Harry cooked dinner and left it under a warming charm, then poured himself a double measure of whiskey and settled down for an excruciating wait by the Floo.

He gripped Draco’s potion in one hand, and used the other to worry the flushed mark on his neck, pressing gently against the tender skin where Draco’s sharp teeth had made him gasp.

The clock ticked traitorously and Harry refilled his glass once, twice, three times, but Draco didn’t appear in the flames.

Eventually, Harry placed the tiny phial on the mantelpiece and trudged up to bed feeling utterly defeated. It was two o’clock in the morning.

He tossed and turned before eventually succumbing to a fitful sleep. The bed felt too big without
Draco beside him.

When Harry checked the following morning, the potion was still there.

***

The following two evenings followed the same pattern; the mantelpiece was beginning to resemble an apothecary.

Harry was sick with worry. Even Ron noticed something was wrong: he assumed Harry was ill and suggested that he go home, offering to cover for him if Robards came by. Harry told him not to be silly and resumed the arduous task of moping at his desk.

He had initially hoped that Draco was picking up his potions from St Mungo’s, but a fire call to Healer Panacea confirmed that this was not the case.

Finally, furious with Draco for being so stupid as to jeopardise his recovery, Harry stormed down to his office at lunch time.

He burst through the door and found Draco buried behind yet another stack of paperwork.

“It’s customary to knock, you know,” Draco muttered irritably.

Harry could immediately see the telltale signs of Nightshade withdrawal; the end of Draco’s quill was vibrating from the subtle tremor of his right hand. Draco followed Harry’s gaze and quickly put it down.

“I was worried.”

“I’m fine,” Draco replied dismissively.

Harry snorted. “No, you're not. I can see your hands shaking, you prat.”

Draco immediately put his hands beneath the desk, hiding them from view, and stared up at Harry expectantly.

Harry took a deep breath. “I’m really sorry about what happened, but please don’t let it affect your recovery. You’re only a couple of weeks away from the end of the program.” He set a small phial down on the desk. “It contains a half-dose. I asked Healer Panacea and she said it’ll help to ease the symptoms until tonight’s dose.”

Draco slowly reached out and pocketed the tiny bottle.

“I’ll leave tonight’s potion on the mantelpiece as usual,” Harry continued. “I’m cooking a pork stir fry, if you want any. If not, that’s fine. You don’t even need to see me if you don't want to.”

Draco fixed Harry with a hard stare. “Why are you doing this?”

“Because I care. And I miss you.” Harry’s cheeks grew hot as he spoke.

For once, Draco seemed to be lost for words. He turned away, looking pained.

When he finally spoke, his voice was very quiet. “If you’re coming to some kind of realisation that you’re attracted to men, good for you. But I will not be your experiment, Harry. I’ve got quite enough going on, in case you hadn’t noticed.”
Harry’s temper flared, hot and raw in his chest. “I’m not interested in experimenting, you idiot; I’m interested in you!” he snarled at the back of Draco’s head. “And the other night, you seemed pretty interested in me, too.”

Draco remained silent, sitting perfectly still with his back to Harry. As much as Harry wanted to reach out and throttle him, he knew he didn’t stand a chance of winning this battle.

Harry sighed. “I’ll leave the potion on the mantelpiece. As far as dinner goes, have some, don’t have some, I don’t care. But don’t put yourself in medical danger due to your own bloody stubbornness.”

Harry stormed from the room, his jaw clenched tight, hands balled into fists in his pockets.

***

That night, Harry’s heart skipped a beat when he felt the familiar prickle of the wards shifting. He desperately wanted to run through to the front room and greet Draco, but he forced himself to stay put by the cooker and continue stirring the pan of noodles.

Draco swept into the kitchen a moment later, cool as a cucumber, and placed a bottle of chilled white wine in the fridge. “Chilean Pinot Grigio,” he said lightly. He pretended not to notice Harry’s stare as he took a bundle of paperwork from his pocket, restored it to its original size, and immersed himself in the notes.

Harry couldn’t quite believe it.

“Erm, how was work?” he asked cautiously. Relief washed over him when Draco launched into a very detailed rant about his suspicion that members of the Wizengamot were deliberately removing old statute books from the Ministry library.

Harry nodded along, humming his agreement in all the right places. By the time dinner was on the table, it felt just like any other night.

Draco made no mention of their argument, or the fateful night in bed, and Harry was more than happy to go along with that.

When they went up to bed, Harry was simultaneously delighted and terrified when he returned from the bathroom to find Draco tucked up in his bed, reading. He’d assumed that Draco would revert to sleeping in Regulus’s room, and he was almost embarrassed by how pleased he was that this element of their strange relationship had survived.

Even so, Harry took special care not to touch Draco as he climbed into bed beside him, convinced that even the barest hint of contact would send him fleeing again. He said goodnight as casually as he could, then turned onto his side, facing away from Draco. He lay still for what felt like several hours, hyper-aware of Draco’s warm body beside him. When Harry finally fell asleep, he dreamed that Draco was on him again, fucking him through their clothes, whispering “is this what you want?” over and over again.

On the face of it, things were back to normal. They picked up their routines, cooking, working and bickering as if nothing had happened. Beneath the surface, though, their relationship had shifted irrevocably. Although they never discussed it, the night in bed coloured every interaction, hanging in the air of Grimmauld Place like a mist. Every moment Harry spent with Draco was a sweet torture; frustrating beyond belief, yet he craved it like a drug.

Increasingly, Harry woke during the night to find himself draped over Draco. It took an almost
superhuman effort, but he always rolled away as gently as he could, petrified of making Draco bolt again. All he really wanted to do was straddle Draco’s hips and make him moan.

Several weeks passed, but the frisson of electricity that Harry felt whenever Draco was around didn't ease in the slightest. Still, he kept his feelings firmly to himself: what they had wasn’t enough, but it was better than nothing.

Draco took his final Nightshade potion on a blustery Tuesday evening in early October. They toasted the occasion with a bottle of champagne, but Harry spent the entire night unable to shake a deep feeling of sadness. Draco’s potions had been the entire foundation of their relationship. Harry wasn't sure what would happen, but he didn't dare to ask.

Harry needn't have worried; Draco turned up as usual the following evening with a ten-year-old South African Shiraz and a new draft of his Wizengamot speech, which he read aloud as Harry cooked dinner. Harry let Draco’s smooth voice wash over him, his chest tight with happiness and his muscles loose with relief.

Neither of them needed to say it out loud, but the message was clear: nothing was going to change.

***

The week before Draco’s Wizengamot presentation, he burst through the Floo looking furious.

“Potter!” he shouted.

Harry grimaced. It was never a good sign when Draco reverted to using his surname. He trudged through to the front room, racking his brain for any idea as to what he might have done.

Draco was scowling at himself in the mirror above the fireplace. When he caught sight of Harry, he strode over and jabbed him in the chest with a sharp finger. “Your home-cooked dinners have made me fat!”

Harry choked on a laugh. “What are you on about?”

“I’m trying to sort out my clothes for the presentation and nothing bloody fits me!”

Harry pointed looked Draco up and down. “Right. Firstly, you can hardly blame me for making you fat – it’s not as if I’m force feeding you. Secondly, you’re about ten stone soaking wet, so forgive me if I can’t take you seriously.” He shook his head as Draco pointed in horror at the almost imperceptible straining of his shirt buttons across the chest. “And thirdly, you can always borrow my Gryffindor t-shirt if you want. I know how much you like it.”

Draco’s outrage gave way to a grin. “I do, but I doubt that the Wizengamot will be quite so fond of it.”

This outburst turned out to be the first of many. Draco insisted he wasn't nervous about his presentation, but as it loomed closer he became snappier than Harry had ever known him to be – even more so than he’d been during the early stages of Deadly Nightshade withdrawal.

Draco’s mood swings should have driven Harry crazy, but he found them strangely endearing. There was just something about Draco’s petulant scowl that made Harry’s stomach twist with want and his fingers itch to smooth it away.

***
Harry arrived at Courtroom Ten early on the morning of Draco’s presentation, determined to get a front row seat in the Public Gallery. He was surprised to find Hermione there, clutching a huge notebook and a biro.

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

“Well after I bumped into Malfoy at your house, I got curious and did some digging. Did you know that there hasn’t been a change to Wizengamot proceedings since 1742?”

Harry could see where this was going: if he let Hermione find her stride, she could easily spend the next twenty minutes boring him beyond belief. It was vital to cut her off, and quickly.

“Hermione, you’d probably be better talking to Draco about this. He’ll actually know what you’re talking about.” Even as he suggested it, Harry decided he’d make himself scarce if such a conversation ever took place: Draco and Hermione were the nerdiest people he’d ever met – they could almost certainly talk for hours, if not days.

Hermione sighed and turned her attention to the elderly members of the Wizengamot who had begun to shuffle slowly into the room. Every now and then she muttered a name under her breath, sounding almost star-struck. Harry nodded along, though he only recognised a handful of the esteemed witches and wizards, and his own surprise was that they were still living: he’d been convinced that they were long since dead.

The trickle of people built up to a steady stream, and the Courtroom filled quickly. Before Harry knew it, all fifty members of the Wizengamot had filed in taken their seats, creating a sea of plum-coloured robes.

The waves of whispered chatter gave way to silence when Draco strode purposefully in, straight-backed and serious, his pointed chin held high. His footsteps echoed around the Courtroom; the sound was wonderfully familiar and Harry knew without looking that Draco was wearing his favourite brown leather brogues. He leaned forward against the worn oak barrier to get a better view.

For some reason, Harry had expected Draco to turn up in his usual smart grey suit. Instead, he was clad in a striking set of tailored cornflower-blue robes, which suited him perfectly: the cut flattered his slim frame and the bold colour brought his pale skin to life. Harry involuntarily bit down on his bottom lip. Draco looked good enough to eat.

Draco turned to face the Top Table and sank down into a respectful bow which caused the fabric of his robes to pull taut across his shoulders. Harry’s heart flipped over in his chest. He was so busy admiring the view he barely registered that Draco had started to speak.

“Chief Warlock Bones, Minister Shacklebolt, esteemed Members of the Wizengamot … good morning.” He straightened up, standing tall, as he continued. “My name is Draco Malfoy, and I am here today to guide you through the proposed advances which will secure the reputation of Wizarding Britain as a world leader in the field of procedural justice.”

He paused for exactly three seconds to ensure he’d captured the attention of every witch and wizard in the room, before launching into his carefully constructed presentation.

Harry had expected Draco to be a good public speaker, but he quickly realised he’d been wrong: Draco was excellent. He had foregone a Sonorus charm, but projected his voice around the huge Courtroom in such a way that everyone present could hear every word he said. He exuded power and authority, and addressed the Wizengamot as confidently as if he were hosting a dinner party in
his own home. The painstakingly rehearsed words flowed smoothly and easily from his lips – at one point he even drew a laugh from the room. His gestures were wide and relaxed as he stalked back and forth, his hands perfectly steady.

Harry initially supposed it was Draco’s pureblood upbringing shining through, then stopped himself. He thought of the countless evenings where he’d heard Draco’s voice, smooth as syrup, pouring out from beneath the door to Regulus’s old room; remembered the way Draco often muttered under his breath while they cooked, when they played cards, and when Harry lay down to sleep. Harry’s chest swelled with pride as he realised that Draco’s skills had nothing to do with his upbringing and everything to do with good, honest practice.

The presentation lasted over an hour, and Harry sat, transfixed, throughout it as he tried and failed to reconcile this Draco with the broken man who had interviewed him six months ago. He knew he was staring, openly gaping, but he couldn’t bring himself to care. It was incredibly sexy to see Draco in his element.

Finally, Draco gave his closing statement, pulling the threads of his argument together so neatly that it was crystal clear even to Harry.

“...thank you very much for your time.” Draco bowed once more to Chief Warlock Bones, then turned on his heel and stalked off to a smattering of polite applause. Harry clapped along, feeling slightly dizzy.

Hermione tugged at his sleeve. “Look, Harry! They’re all nodding! That’s a really good sign … and I’m not at all surprised, he put forward an exceptional case.”

Harry nodded mutely, staring at the spot where Draco had stood. He jumped when Hermione shook him gently.

“Harry, are you okay? You look a bit dazed.”

After reassuring Hermione that he was fine, Harry stood up abruptly and began to push his way out of the Public Gallery.

He weaved through the throng of people gathered outside the Courtroom door, and ran the short distance along the dingy hallway to Draco’s office.

He burst through the polished door to find Draco stood behind his desk, looking every inch as powerful as he had in the Courtroom.

“Harry? What are you—?”

“You were brilliant.” Harry’s voice came out breathless, and not just from running. He couldn’t conceal his grin. He knew he was practically glowing with pride.

Draco raised an eyebrow. “It has been known to happen.” His composure slipped as he spoke, his upturned lips undermining his dry tone.

Harry crossed the room in three short strides, coming to a stop right in front of Draco. Adrenaline hummed in his veins, making his skin prickle and his pulse quicken.

They were so close. Their lips were inches apart. Draco stood perfectly still as Harry took a shaky breath and leaned forward, licking his bottom lip as he did so. To his embarrassment, Draco turned his face away at the last moment and Harry’s lips grazed sharp cheekbone rather than warm lips.
Draco stepped back with a heavy sigh, looking almost pained. He reached up and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Harry…”

“What?” Harry frowned, his stomach twisting as the heavy weight of humiliation set in.

Draco shook his head. “You don’t understand. This is a bad idea.”

Shame abruptly ignited into burning rage. It seared through the discomfort in the pit of Harry’s stomach and swept upwards, scorching his throat so his words came out sounding harsh and raw.

“No, you’re right,” he spat, “I don’t understand. How could I? I’m not a Legilimens, Draco.”

Draco laid his hands gently on Harry’s shoulders and fixed him with a probing look. “Harry,” he said again in that quiet, weary tone that made Harry want to punch him, “if we were to do this, it could potentially ruin everything. Are you really willing to risk that?”

“Yeah, I am!” Harry all but shouted. “Because what comes next could be even better!”

Draco was shaking his head. “You might want it now, but in the long term it would never work. I’m terrible at romantic relationships. I’m difficult and demanding, and I always say the wrong thing.” He moved the tips of his thumbs in tiny, featherlight circles over the very ends of Harry’s collarbones as he spoke, the desperately intimate gesture a stark contrast from his words.

The mixed message was the final straw for Harry. He pulled sharply away from Draco’s grip, shaking with rage.

“Have you not noticed that we’re practically in bloody relationship already?” Harry hissed. His magic surged along with his temper and the loose paperwork on Draco’s desk fluttered alarmingly. “We spend every evening together, we cook dinner together, you wear my clothes … we share a fucking bed, Draco. Which part of that doesn’t sound like a relationship to you?”

Draco’s cheeks were pink. He kept his lips pressed firmly together, jaw clenched so tight Harry could see a blue vein pulsing against the backdrop of his pale neck.

“Exactly. The only thing missing is sex, and quite frankly, that’s only because you’re such a prick tease.” Harry paused, feeling vindicated when Draco dropped his gaze to the floor. “Well, I’m done. I’m sick of existing on morning wanks, wondering if you’ll ever stop being such a fucking coward, when that’s clearly never going to happen.”

“Morning wanks?” Draco whispered, looking dazed. The powerful wizard from the Courtroom was nowhere to be seen, and Draco suddenly looked eerily like his sixteen-year-old self: small, lost and a little bit frightened.

“Forget it,” Harry growled. He turned on his heel and stormed from the room. He wished he’d been wearing his Auror robes; the sweeping fabric would have made for a far more dramatic exit.

He spent the rest of the day thundering around the Auror Office in a foul mood, throwing case files around and intimidating the secretaries.

***

Harry stepped through the Floo and threw off his Auror robes. It wasn’t until he’d collapsed onto the sofa with his head in his hands that he realised he could smell food.

He groaned. As much as he loved his friends, all he wanted after the day’s events was to curl up,
alone, with a bottle of Draco’s expensive white wine.

He stumbled through to the kitchen and stopped in the doorway as if Stunned.

Ron and Hermione were nowhere to be seen. Instead, Harry was greeted by the sight of a familiar shock of white blond hair. Draco was bent over the hob, stirring the contents of a saucepan.

He’d changed out of his formal robes into a dark green jumper and a pair of fitted grey trousers. One of Harry’s tea towels hung from the back pocket.

“I figured it was my turn to cook.” His tone was light, but his eyes were careful.

“About time,” Harry replied hoarsely. His heart was pounding in his chest, and it took every shred of willpower he had not to cross the room and snog Draco senseless.

A glass of white wine floated smoothly across the room and into Harry’s hand. He swirled it and inhaled slowly, deeply, as the cool beads of condensation on the glass soaked his fingers.

“Lemon and … grapefruit?” he guessed.

Draco shook his head. “Gooseberry. You’re along the right lines, though – it’s a sharp one. Bit of an acquired taste.”

*Like you*, Harry thought as he nodded and took a sip. The wine was dry and tangy; it almost fizzed on Harry’s tongue. “I needed that.” He sighed. “I had a nightmare of a day.”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “How so?”

“I made a twat of myself in front of someone important,” Harry said, looking pointedly into Draco’s grey eyes.

Draco smirked. “Sounds like you.”

Harry shook his head in disbelief. “You are *such* an arsehole. I honestly don’t know why I let you into my house.”

Draco appeared to be biting back a laugh. “Because I have world-class taste in wine?” He paused. “Or perhaps because you find me terribly attractive and excellent company to boot?” he added cockily.

“Definitely the wine,” Harry said stubbornly. “What are you cooking, anyway?”

He padded across the room to peer into the saucepan, but Draco stepped in the way, effectively blocking his path.

“Wait and see – though if you can’t tell from the smell of it, you’re not the chef you held yourself out to be.” Draco put his hands on Harry’s shoulders again – that same, light touch he’d used in his office – and turned him gently around to face the door. “Go and make yourself look presentable,” he said, his breath ghosting across the back of Harry’s neck. “Dinner will be ready in ten minutes.”

Harry stumbled off to get changed, barely registering where his feet were taking him. His stomach was a bundle of nerves and excitement, and he began to wonder if he was out of his depth.

When Harry returned to the kitchen, feeling rather more put together in his nicest pair of jeans and the black shirt Ginny always said made him look “buff”, he found Draco sat in his usual spot at the table.
Draco’s eyes widened when he caught sight of Harry. He’d opened his mouth to speak, but it took a moment before any words came out. “You took your time,” he said eventually. “I was starting to wonder if I should cast a warming charm.” He gestured to the two steaming bowls before them.

“Sorry,” said Harry sheepishly as he slipped into his seat. He leaned down and inhaled the rich, sweet aroma of tomato and basil. “Spaghetti bolognaise.”

Draco nodded. “Of course. It was the—”

“—first thing we ate together,” Harry interrupted. “I remember. I cooked it, after all.”

They ate in silence for a while, focusing their full attention on twisting the thick ribbons of pasta around their forks. The sauce was rich and glossy; Draco had clearly followed Harry’s tip of adding a cup of starchy water from the pasta and boiling it down to the right consistency. The flavours were well-balanced, too, if a little more subtle than Harry was used to.

All the while, Draco watched Harry closely, eagerly anticipating his verdict. Harry decided, somewhat cruelly, to make him wait. He ate slowly, pointedly avoiding Draco’s expectant gaze. Of course, Draco was far too stubborn to simply ask Harry what he thought of it. Only when Harry had finished his final mouthful and set his cutlery against edge of the bowl did he put Draco out of his misery.

“That was pretty good,” he said, licking his lips. “Very good, actually.”

“I’ve been having cookery lessons. A night school, of sorts,” Draco said with a wry smile.

“Oh, really?” Harry grinned, playing along.

“Yes. I’ve not been the best student, though. I keep getting distracted by the teacher. He has the most fantastic arse, you see…” Draco put down his knife and fork, looking intently at Harry.

Harry’s pulse stuttered, then picked up at speed, bringing with it a wave of dizziness. “Is that so?” he asked weakly.

“Oh yes,” Draco said seriously. “And naturally, he’s a teasing bastard and insists on walking around half-naked at every opportunity.”

Harry desperately tried to think of something to say, but his brain failed him. He sat, gaping like a Freshwater Plimpy, as Draco got to his feet and cleared the table with a flick of his wand. After a few moments, Harry picked up his wine and took a sip, mainly to hide his slack-jawed expression. The last thing he needed was for Draco to start teasing him.

When every pot, plate and pan was stacked neatly by the sink, Draco came and stood by Harry’s chair. Harry automatically stood up and turned to face him, causing the chair legs to scrape harshly against the floor. An awkward laugh escaped Harry’s lips, but Draco’s face remained perfectly serious.

Draco gently took Harry’s glass from his hand and set it down on the table, without taking his eyes off Harry. Time seemed to stand still. Harry’s heart was beating so hard he was almost convinced Draco could hear it.

Draco reached up and slowly ran his fingertips along the line of Harry’s jaw, ending at his chin and coaxing him forward, and Harry suddenly had no doubt where this would lead.

All those weeks of agonising frustration, the awkward moments and casual flirting, it had all been
Harry realised he was holding his breath but didn’t dare release it. The moment felt fragile as spun glass. They were standing so close that the tips of their noses were touching. Harry could smell the sharp tang of the wine on Draco’s breath.

“I’ve wanted to do this for months,” Draco whispered. “I’ve never been this patient about anything, before.” His eyes flitted down to Harry’s lips, granting Harry a fleeting view of his pale lashes before he closed the miniscule distance between them.

It took Harry a moment to catch up, to register that Draco was finally kissing him. His lips were soft but he kissed firmly, insistently, mapping every inch of Harry’s mouth with his tongue. It was even better than Harry had imagined, and he wanted more.

Without breaking the kiss, Draco nudged Harry backwards until he was pressed against the counter, cornered in his own kitchen. Once there, the kisses became desperate. Harry tangled his fingers in Draco’s hair as Draco bit his lower lip, hard enough to sting.

After several long minutes, Draco broke the kiss and pulled back to look at Harry, breathing heavily. When Harry opened his mouth to ask why he’d stopped, Draco dropped to his knees in a single fluid motion.

He mouthed Harry’s cock through his jeans, letting his warm breath filter through the denim. It was too much and not enough all at once. Harry reached down and clumsily unfastened them, his fingers slipping over the button before he tugged sharply at the zip.

Draco looked up at him with one eyebrow raised, then hooked his slim fingers under the waistband and pulled both Harry’s jeans and boxers down to his knees. Harry’s cock sprung free, flushed pink and fully hard.

Almost without thinking, Harry moved his hips forward an inch, touching the tip against Draco’s lips. Draco smirked, accepting the challenge. He slid his lips over the head of Harry’s prick, pushing his foreskin all the way back. Then he sucked, and Harry saw stars.

“Oh, fuck.” Harry’s hands scrabbled desperately against the counter for something to grip onto, but it was too flat, too smooth. The cupboard doors were digging into the small of his back, but he barely felt it.

He reached down and threaded his fingers through Draco’s blond hair, tugging sharply at it as Draco ran his tongue over Harry’s slit in light, fluttering motions. Draco clearly knew what he was doing – the wet heat of his mouth was intoxicating.

Harry began to worry that his knees might give way. He’d thought about this so many times, wanted it for so many months … it seemed wrong for it to finally happen in the kitchen, pushed awkwardly against the cupboards.

With a great effort, Harry forced himself to nudge Draco away. The head of his cock slipped from Draco’s lips with a wet pop. A crease appeared between Draco’s pale brows as his face settled into a familiar frown. This time Harry didn’t have to resist sweeping his thumb across it.

“Bedroom?”

“Good idea,” Draco agreed as he climbed to his feet, his voice low with need.

Harry Apparated them up to his room, miraculously managing to do so without any signs of
sphinching. He turned on the light with a wandless spell, then, uncomfortable in its bright glare, turned it down to a soft glow.

Draco looked around, surprised, but he quickly came to his senses. The look on his face was almost predatory. “Take off your clothes – all of them – and sit on the edge of the bed,” he whispered against Harry’s neck.

Harry fought back a shiver and did as he was told. He stepped clumsily out of his jeans, then hastily unbuttoned his shirt and shrugged it off his shoulders. The cuffs caught around his wrists – it took him a moment to struggle free. Once he was completely naked, he sat down as Draco had instructed, feeling very exposed.

Draco nodded approvingly. When he was satisfied that Harry was in position, he pulled his jumper smoothly over his head, revealing his pale, scar-streaked torso. It was nothing Harry hadn’t seen before, of course, but the context made all the difference. For all of his complaints about getting fat, Draco’s body was a sight to behold. He looked lean and strong, all straight edges without a curve in sight.

Draco slipped out of his trousers and socks, managing to make the awkward motion look far more graceful than Harry had, and came to stand directly in front of Harry, wearing only his tight black boxers.

He bent over Harry and kissed him, hard. “Lie back.”

Harry let himself fall back against the soft duvet, his legs still hanging over the edge of the bed. He would never have admitted it out loud, but he loved that Draco was taking charge – it reminded him of Draco’s confidence in the Courtroom.

Draco sank to his knees between Harry’s thighs and slowly ran his tongue over the soft skin of Harry’s balls. Harry shuddered at the tingling pleasure as Draco gently took one into his mouth and laved it with his tongue before letting it drop, full and heavy.

Draco took Harry’s cock into his mouth again, far deeper this time, until his nose was buried in the dark curls of Harry’s pubic hair. The quiet moan he made as he did so sent goosebumps rippling across Harry’s skin.

He sucked firmly as he moved back up to the head of Harry’s cock, swirling his tongue in slow circles. His fingers caressed Harry’s balls just firmly enough not to tickle, then moved further back, grazing the sensitive skin behind them. Harry froze as he felt the pad of Draco’s fingertip caress his entrance.

“Relax,” murmured Draco, reassuring and insistent all at once. “I’ll stop if you don’t like it, but I’m certain you will.”

Harry nodded slowly, his heart pounding in his chest as he watched Draco bring his hand to his mouth and suck his index finger, his grey eyes focused intently on Harry’s face.

Harry swallowed hard, but his nerves deserted him as Draco ran the flat of his tongue slowly up the length of Harry’s cock. His finger was back against the crinkled skin of Harry’s hole, cool and wet with saliva. He gently massaged the tight ring of muscle, running his fingertip in smooth circles around Harry’s rim. Spurred on by Harry’s pleasured sigh, Draco flicked his tongue lightly over the head of Harry’s cock as he pushed the very tip of his finger inside.

Harry’s thighs tightened instinctively, but he forced himself to relax, focusing on keeping his
breath steady. He had never done this before and it felt odd to be breached in this way; foreign, neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

Draco paused for a moment, his eyes flitting up to meet Harry’s, before he pushed his finger in further, all the way in, and Harry gasped. Tingling pleasure began to tease nerve endings he hadn’t known he possessed. It intensified sharply as Draco began to slowly slide his finger in and out of Harry’s arse, and he let out a needy whimper.

Draco grinned around the head of Harry’s cock and crooked his finger, stroking, searching ... when he found what he was looking for, a white-hot jolt of pleasure lifted Harry’s hips clean off the bed. Harry thrust senselessly into Draco’s mouth, craving more, more, more, but Draco’s free hand came up to rest on his hip, pinning him against the mattress.

“Uhhhhhh.” Harry was dimly aware of the noises he was making. In any other circumstances, he would have been mortified, but he couldn't bring himself to care. He fought against Draco’s grip, rolling his hips to force Draco’s fingertip over that spot again and again.

It was too much. “So close,” Harry gasped, squeezing his eyes tightly shut.

The moment the words left his lips, Draco smoothly pulled away from Harry’s cock and withdrew his finger. Harry winced at the odd sensation.

“Why are you—?”

Draco climbed onto the bed beside Harry and kissed him fiercely. “I can’t let you come just yet,” he murmured, his warm breath tickling Harry’s neck. “I want you to fuck me.”

Harry swallowed hard. Oh.

Draco looked debauched. Harry’s fingers had ruffled his usually immaculate hair into a tousled mess and his lips were swollen and red from sucking Harry’s cock. “Have you ever fucked a man before?” he asked, his voice rough with need.

“No,” Harry admitted. Heat pooled in his belly at hearing Draco say the word “fuck”.

“I’ll talk you through it,” Draco murmured.

Harry nodded. He wasn’t nervous; he trusted Draco.

“Accio lube!” Draco’s trousers shifted on the floor as a small bottle fought its way from the pocket. It came sailing through the air and into Draco’s waiting hand. He passed it to Harry, whose mouth had fallen open at the realisation that Draco had planned every bit of this.

“Alright, you can start by copying exactly what I just did to you,” he whispered, pausing to nibble Harry’s earlobe. “You were paying attention, weren’t you, Harry?” he asked with a smirk, drawing out each word, making them sound utterly indecent.

Draco stripped out of his boxers to reveal his cock, standing proud from a bed of gold curls. He stayed still for a moment, letting Harry look, then sprawled out on his back, arms outstretched, knees bent, feet flat against the mattress: the position exposed the perfectly pink pucker of his hole. Harry crawled into position between Draco’s legs and took a moment to stare. The sight of Draco putting himself on display like this made the hairs on the back of Harry’s neck stand up on end.

It took Draco clearing his throat to bring Harry back to himself. He swallowed thickly and slicked two fingers with lube, still staring at the remarkable sight before him. “Ready?” he asked. The
word came out as a rough growl. Draco nodded, his lips parted slightly.

Harry swallowed and began to trace light circles around Draco’s furled hole, biting down hard on his bottom lip when he felt the muscles begin to relax beneath his fingers.

Draco hummed his approval. “Yes, that’s it, perfect.”

A fresh wave of arousal rushed over Harry at Draco’s praise and, emboldened by it, he slid his finger smoothly into Draco’s arse. “Oh god,” he breathed. Draco was smooth as silk, and so very warm. Harry pulled his finger almost all the way out and groaned at the way Draco’s muscles gripped him, trying to prevent him from slipping away. He pushed in again, more firmly this time. Draco’s breath left him in a rush.

Harry set a slow rhythm and watched, transfixed, as Draco began to push back against his finger, breathing heavily.

“Another … and then scissor them … like this,” Draco said, demonstrating with his own hand in the air. The low tone of arousal somehow made his voice sound even posher than usual. “You need to stretch me, get me ready for your cock.”

Harry’s mouth fell open. For a long moment, he simply gazed, slack-jawed, at Draco, immobilised by his words.

When he recovered, Harry did as he was told and slid a second slick finger inside Draco. He was amazed by how easily it slipped in, and his breath caught in his throat at the thought of how Draco’s arse would feel around his cock.

He twisted his fingers inside Draco, separating them gently and moving back and forth until he felt the tight ring of muscle begin to loosen around his fingers. Draco was clearly enjoying it: he was making the same soft moans as he had on that morning, so long ago, when Harry had watched him stretch.

Remembering what Draco had done to him, Harry curved his fingers upwards and stroked Draco’s soft inner walls. Draco suddenly hissed with pleasure and bucked up against Harry’s hand.

It was Harry’s turn to smirk. “Told you I was paying attention.” He pressed firmly against Draco’s prostate, steadily massaging the tight bundle of nerves.

Draco’s cheeks were pink, his eyes unfocused. He writhed shamelessly, fucking himself on Harry’s fingers as a steady flow of pre-come spilled from his cock.

“You need to stop … stop before I … Ohhhh,” his words dissolved into a long moan.

Harry knew Draco’s warning was serious, but he couldn’t bring himself to stop. Watching Draco come apart was intoxicating.

“Please … I’m ready … so ready … need your cock inside me,” he gasped.

That was enough to convince Harry. He withdrew his fingers quickly, whispering his apology when Draco flinched.

Harry slicked his cock with a generous amount of lube; he was so turned on that even his own rough touch was bliss, though he knew it was nothing compared to what he was about to experience.
Draco hooked one leg over Harry’s shoulder and wrapped the other around his waist.

“Oh god.” Harry whispered. He was dizzy with need, weak all over. He pressed the blunt tip of his prick gently against Draco’s hole and was awestruck at the way it began to stretch around him, willingly accepting the intrusion.

“Go slowly,” Draco said quietly. He stared intently at Harry, his grey irises almost completely swallowed by black pupils blown wide with arousal.

Harry gritted his teeth tightly but it did no good; a guttural moan escaped his lips as Draco’s body began to yield to him in the most delicious way.

He slid forward, inch by inch, into the slick heat of Draco’s tight channel. He was gripping Draco’s hips so tightly it was sure to bruise – he whimpered at the thought of leaving his mark on Draco’s fair skin.

“Stop,” Draco said suddenly, sinking his fingers sharply into Harry’s forearms. “Don’t move a muscle.” He was breathing very slowly and deeply. His eyes were tightly shut, his cheeks flushed a deep pink.

“Are you okay?” Harry ground out. His cock was almost completely buried in Draco’s arse, and he wanted, more than he’d ever wanted anything in his life, to simply thrust forward and force the last inch inside.

“Yes, just … it takes a moment to accustom…”

Still breathing steadily, Draco released one of Harry’s forearms from his death grip and reached down between them to stroke his own cock, apparently attempting to distract himself from the burning discomfort as Harry’s prick stretched him wide open.

Shaking with the effort of it, Harry held himself perfectly still and watched. Draco’s cock was flushed and leaked pre-come onto his pale stomach as his hand moved slowly over it, pulling his foreskin back and letting it slip forward.

Several agonising minutes later, Draco finally began to relax. Harry felt rather than saw it; Draco’s arse was still incredibly hot and tight, but the muscles gradually loosened until they were holding Harry’s cock rather than squeezing it.

Harry’s forehead was prickling with sweat. He desperately needed to move; to bury himself in the tight heat of Draco’s arse. Before he knew it, he was begging. “Please, Draco, I need to move … please, let me …”

After what felt like an eternity, Draco finally nodded. “Okay. Move,” he growled, his voice lower than Harry had ever heard it.

Harry pulled back slowly, until only the head of his cock was inside Draco. He paused for the length of a heartbeat, checking Draco’s face for any sign of pain – his mouth went dry when he saw an expression of desperate hunger there instead. He slid smoothly back in, all the way in this time, so deep his balls hit Draco’s arse cheeks. Harry’s toes curled as Draco’s arse spasmed around his cock, struggling to take him.

“Uhhhh … so full,” Draco gasped.

Harry’s restraint crumbled; he couldn’t wait a moment longer. He leaned forward and started to fuck Draco properly, using long, slow thrusts that stole their breath and made Harry’s balls draw
close to his body, almost painfully tight with the need to come.

Draco shifted his hips awkwardly, and Harry realised what he was trying to do. He reached across the bed for a pillow and pushed it under Draco’s arse, adjusting the angle just so…

On the next thrust, Draco’s eyes rolled back. “Yessssss,” he hissed, arching his back. “Feels so good, your cock inside me.” He grabbed desperately at the duvet, twisting handfuls of soft cotton between his fingers.

Harry’s steady pace deteriorated into frantic, shallow thrusts, but Draco didn’t seem to mind at all. Broken words tumbled from his lips as Harry fucked him, and Harry kissed him feverishly, determined to catch every last one. The kisses were wet and messy, punctuated with gasps and groans, and they only added to the air of frantic need which filled the room. Harry forced his tongue into Draco’s mouth, needing to fill him completely.

Draco suddenly put his arms around Harry, digging his nails into Harry’s back. “Fuck … Harry!” His cock pulsed between them; sticky spurts of warm come joined the sweat which already slicked their skin.

Draco’s inner muscles rippled around Harry’s prick as he came, squeezing him tight. It was too much; Harry thrust into Draco hard – once, twice, then came to a shuddering stop as his own orgasm crashed over him, filling Draco’s arse with his release.

He collapsed bonelessly on top of Draco, still riding out the last of the aftershocks. It was a long while before he felt able to speak, and when he did, he was at a loss for words. “That was … wow.”

“Eloquent as ever, Harry,” Draco murmured, even as he used two fingers to lightly draw small circles at the base of Harry’s spine.

Harry realised there was a real risk of him falling asleep and crushing Draco. He gently shifted his hips until his spent cock slipped from Draco’s arse, drawing a soft sigh from Draco. He pressed a final kiss to Draco’s mouth and moved off him, settling on his own side of the bed.

“Ready to sleep?” Harry asked.

Draco didn’t reply; his eyes were already shut, his breathing slow and steady. Harry grinned as he removed his glasses. He covered Draco with the duvet and snuggled up beside him to soak up his body heat.

“Nox.”

***

The following morning dawned gradually. Weak November sunshine crept in through the crack in the curtains, pooling on the floor at the foot of the bed and spreading up the walls, painting the room with a faint yellow tinge. Its occupants were sound asleep, their bodies entangled so closely that an onlooker would have been hard pressed to tell where one ended and the other began.

Harry woke slowly. He drifted, half-asleep, dimly aware of Draco’s warm, naked body against him. When he finally opened his eyes, he was greeted by a blurry view of the back of Draco’s neck. He desperately wished he had his glasses so that he could see properly, but he was far too comfortable to move.

He pressed a wet, open-mouthed kiss to Draco’s nape and was rewarded with a sleepy groan. He
gently nipped at the soft skin, teasing more delicious sounds from Draco’s lips until the blond finally turned over to face him, grey eyes slightly glazed from a mixture of sleep and arousal.

“How did you sleep?” Harry asked, as he ran his tongue along the sharp line of Draco’s jaw.

Draco blinked, stunned. “Really well, actually. In fact, I think I might have slept right through.”

“Really?”

Draco propped himself up onto his elbows and stared at the bedside clock in mute disbelief: ten o’clock in the morning. He’d slept for over twelve hours.

Harry almost laughed out loud. “Are you seriously telling me that after almost six months of insomnia, all you needed was a good fucking?”

Draco smirked. “Apparently so!” He rolled onto his back and stretched, throwing his head back and letting his eyes flutter shut. A long groan escaped him when he arched his back up off the mattress, sending a sharp stab of arousal to Harry’s cock.

“I fucking love it when you do that.” Harry hadn’t meant to say it out loud; the words just slipped out.

“I know you do.” Draco grinned, his voice straining slightly as he twisted his hips from left to right. “You always stare at me as if you’ve been Stupefied whenever I so much as stretch my shoulders … when you’re not trying to get away with wanking right next to me, that is.”

Harry’s stomach dropped sharply. His cheeks immediately burned hot with shame. “What? I wasn’t —” he choked, but his words fell away as Draco started to laugh.

“You definitely were. For what it’s worth, it did wonders for my ego, but was murder on my self-restraint,” he drawled, stretching his words lazily, just like his body.

Harry laughed along, but his insides were still squirming; he was mortified. “So what do you want to do today?” Harry asked, desperate to change the subject.

Draco abruptly finished his stretch and frowned, deep in thought. “Well … as I see it, we have about six months’ worth of sex to make up for.”

Harry nodded seriously. “I see. We’d better get started then, hadn’t we?”

Draco pulled him in for a slow, filthy kiss, all wet tongue and sharp teeth. Before long, he straddled Harry’s hips, trapping their hard cocks between them, and moved slowly, firmly, until they were both crying out.

Harry knew that a relationship with Draco wasn’t going to be easy. There would be countless obstacles ahead – not least the terrifying matter of telling everyone about it – but, in that moment, he had a lap full of Draco and a heart so full it felt as though he might burst.

It had been a strange six months, but Harry couldn't have been happier that Draco had chosen to weather the storm with him.

End Notes
Thanks for reading!

Comments and kudos are always incredibly inspiring - I'd love to know what you thought of the fic! <3

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