Folie à Deux

by ItsLeviOsa_NotLevioSA

Summary

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Chapter Summary

"Shit," she muttered as she checked her watch again. "Shit, shit, shit."

She looked behind her, seeking out her parents in the crowd of commuters walking around Kings Cross Station.

"Mum! Dad!"

"And this is why Hugo arrives with the Potters," Rose complained as soon as they had caught up with her.

"Sorry, sweetheart," her mother apologised.

As soon as they made the familiar fall through the barrier, Rose exhaled. "Thank Merlin."

Ron checked his watch. "Hermione, we really should be going."

"No," he pointed out. "If you remember, Harry and I never did come back for our last year."

His wife tutted at him, and pulled Rose into a hug. "Write to us, dear."
"Don't I always?"

"And don't get another one of those...boyfriends," Ron said, shuddering. "We can't keep an eye on you when you're so far away."

"You and mum were technically together during seventh year," Rose reminded him, lifting her owl cage off her suitcase while Ron placed her trunk on the floor.

"Technically," Ron said, pointedly.

"You should go," Rose pressured, taking another look at the clock. "I can manage."

"Are you sure?"

She nodded, sighing deeply. Ron fastened his daughter into a hug. "No boys, Rosie. Promise."

She rolled her eyes and kissed his cheek.

After a final wave, her parents passed through the barrier and were gone.

Rose breathed in deeply, and looking down at her trunk realised perhaps she shouldn't've been so forthcoming in shooing away her parents. She looked quickly at her somewhat agitated tawny owl.

"Hang on there, Horus," she said, softly. "I'll let you out soon."

She sighed again, and braced herself to lift the huge chest to join the others. She'd gotten it to about shoulder height when she realised her efforts were futile, and her arms began to give way.

"Damn it," she cursed loudly as her body sagged under its weight.

Suddenly, the trunk was hoisted up above her head, and carried itself away into the baggage compartment.

Of course.

Her gaze followed it until it was secure, and she turned to thank her saviour.

"Thanks so much for your-Nate!"

Her ex-boyfriend of last year smiled warmly at her, and leaned in for a quick hug. "Still early, huh?"

She reddened, and nodded.

"How've you been, Rose? You look great, by the way."

She swiped some hair away from her face and smiled back. "You too. I've been pretty good, but I'm running late for the train."

Something appeared to have caught his attention. She followed his gaze down to her gleaming badge, emblazoned with the initials HG.

"You got Head Girl?" Nate beamed. "I knew it would be you, Rosie. Uh…Rose."

She blushed. "Thanks, Nate, it was a huge surprise when it arrived."
A lie; she wouldn't have worked her heart out everyday for the past six years, taken extra classes, joined the Slug Club (until it was disbanded upon the Professor's retirement), and taken meticulous notes during every single *excruciating* History of Magic lesson unless she knew that she would reap every bit of what she had sown.

"Don't be ridiculous, Rose," Nate chided her. "You knew you'd get it just as much as everyone else did."

She turned even redder, but shrugged. "Do you know who got Head Boy?"

She felt guilty the moment the words left her, noticing the lack of embellishments on his robes and remembering that Nate had probably been a strong contender for the title.

He, however, seemed unfazed by her faux pax. "I have no idea, sorry."

His gaze wandered to the monumental clock hanging behind Rose's shoulder. "We should probably get going. Which way are you headed?"

To accentuate his point, the whistle sounded, and all loiterers and fellow latecomers hurried to board.

Rose pointed to the back of the train where it had become customary for her, Al, and her best friend Genevieve to meet.

While Nate's face fell, it also betrayed slight relief. "I'm going up front."

She smiled at him. "It's alright. I'll see you at the Welcome Feast."

He nodded, waving. "Bye, Rose."

She watched him disappear, and then, shouldering her satchel and grabbing Horus' cage with the other hand, made her own way towards the back of the train.

She had just reached the door of the compartment when the Hogwarts Express began to chug forward.

"Merlin, Rose, and here you had us thinking you might not make it."

She grimaced at her cousin over the flash of brown hair that had accosted her the moment her foot had trespassed inside.


"It was amazing, Rose," Genevieve gushed, tugging her down onto the seat beside her. "The food, the weather, the boys." She fanned herself theatrically, and bent to feed Horus a treat. "Makes coming back here a bit underwhelming."

"Hey!" Al complained. "No need to be nasty."

Gen grinned widely, and propped her feet up beside him.

Rose, as promised, opened the door to Horus' cage and watched as he flew up to join Archimedes and Navajo on the baggage rack.

"Loving the badge," Gen added casually. "Do you know who got Head Boy?"
She shook her head. Now that Nate was out of the picture, she was really hoping it might be Luke Cresswell, a fellow Gryffindor, though she couldn't shake the uneasy feeling inside her stomach that it she wouldn't be so lucky.

At four o'clock, Rose hastily pushed herself up from her seat. She would make her way down to the Heads compartment while Al and Gen would stop two carriages short to join the other prefects. "We should go."

They left their things for when they would return and headed for compartments A and C, bringing only the wands that were stowed in their jacket pockets.

They didn't see many people as they travelled from the back of the train to the very front; most seemed to be keeping to their own compartments. As the three passed Compartment F, Rose caught sight of Olivia Roux, the prepossessing but tryling seventh year Slytherin making her way back from wherever she was further up. Though Rose returned her shallow smile, her stomach sunk.

"See you later," she said somewhat sullenly to her friends as they reached the prefect's compartment. She waved at the people she recognised from inside.

"Good luck," Gen said, empathetically as the door shut behind her.

Rose pulled a face, and steeled herself.


She passed Compartment B.

*I didn't even have to be Luke. It could be anybody, really. Just as long as it wasn't-*

But there he was: the second thing that drove Rose Weasley into unbounded mania. Reading. Figures.

Her lip curled with distaste at the sight of his feet propped up against the seat opposite him as he casually reclined, his mouth slightly pursed as his eyes skimmed the pages.

Abruptly, Rose realised there was nowhere she'd less rather be. Perhaps she could just go and join Al, Gen and the others in their compartment. *He must be late, she would say, shrugging as she sat down. I'm sure he'll come and find me in here, not to worry.*

Maybe she could just back away before he'd even have time to-

"Well, well. Weasley."

Nevermind.

"I can see the summer didn't really do any good for you, then."

She smiled back wanly in response. "Malfoy, looking as albino as ever."

She opened the glass door, and stepped inside.

"Can't say I'm surprised, really," Scorpius drawled as she sat, avoiding his feet. "I suppose McGonagall had to pay you back somehow for your only friend being Madam Pince."
"Yes," Rose said, adopting a thoughtful expression. "I suppose she must be compensating for you being born a bloodless, lousy git."

"I'm breaking on the inside," Scorpius said, scornfully, and returned to his book.

Silence.

Rose could tell that neither was enjoying their predicament, but she couldn't give him the satisfaction of her leaving. Since this was at least the tenth time Scorpius' eyes had flickered to the door, he evidently felt the same way.

"Did Olivia leave from here?"

He slowly raised his eyes to meet hers. "What's it to you?"

"Nothing," Rose said, shortly. "I was only wondering."

"Well, don't."

She inadvertently got to her feet, much to the Head Boy's surprise.

"I'm...uh, going," Rose said, bluntly, trying to make it seem as if she had consciously decided to leave. "Going to check on the prefects, and whatnot."

"Grand idea."

To her intense displeasure, he stood too, and pushed past her out of the compartment. She huffed and shoved him back, called him an oaf - to which he scoffed at - and followed behind.

"Afternoon," he said, pulling open the door. "Scorpius Malfoy, Head Boy."

"Rose Weasley," Rose interjected as he re-opened his mouth to undoubtedly undermine her. "Head Girl."

She scoped out Al and Gen, and sat in between them.

"Bad luck, sweetie," Gen whispered, subtly patting her on the leg.

Rose only shook her head exasperatedly at her, and turned to address the room.

"Hi, everyone. This is a pretty informal meeting, and you don't have to stay here after this talk if you don't want to, but we just wanted everyone to get acquainted - or reacquainted - before the official start of term."

Scorpius cleared his throat from where he was sitting by Tobias Nott, and leaned back. "We'll be hosting the first official meeting on Tuesday night at eight in the usual Transfiguration classroom where we'll sort out patrols and responsibilities and all that other mandatory stuff."

The two exchanged a cool glance.

"Right, that's it," Rose said, standing. "You can all go back to your compartments now, even if it is nicer in here."

There was a perfunctory round of laughter, though some people remained seated.

Rose gestured for her friends to leave with her, and they headed back to their compartment.
"That's rough, Rose," Al said, as they sat down. "But, I mean, he was the obvious choice, right? You can't say you were surprised."

Rose had neglected to outright mention her distress of Scorpius Malfoy being made Head Boy; she had juveniley tabooed the subject, hoping that if she never voiced her unease aloud, she might avoid it.

Her approach evidently left something to be desired.

"I suppose."

"Cheer up," Gen consoled her. "You'll barely have to see him - so what's a few Heads meetings here and there?"

Her friends had a point. Scorpius Malfoy was not going to ruin her last year at Hogwarts, she would try her damnedest to make that true if it was the last thing she did.

She summoned a smile to her face. "Anyone up for a game of Exploding Snap?"

"Well handled," Tobias congratulated Scorpius as they returned to their compartment.

"What was?"

"You know, your first line of duty with Rose. No bloodshed - that's promising, right?"

Scorpius grunted in response. For the sake of his friend, Toby withheld his snigger. He waited patiently; it only took about thirty seconds before-

"I can't bloody believe that-"

Scorpius's impending rant was cut short as the compartment door was slid open.

"Oh, good," Olivia said, stepping in lightly and leaving the door open behind her. "Your meeting's over."

She planted herself in Scorpius' lap, pushing aside his book, and kissed him deeply. Scorpius stifled a smirk as Tobias mimed slitting his wrist behind her.

"Liv," he said, not unkindly. "What're you doing back here?"

She shrugged, and folded her hands across his chest. "Thought I might say hi. Again. Nice summer, Toby?"

"It was alright, Liv. Yours?"

Instead of addressing him, she turned back to Scorpius, playing with his loosened tie. "It would've been better if I'd've gotten to spend it with my boyfriend."

Both Scorpius and Tobias decided not to remind her that her "boyfriend" had ended the last year in Claudia Bouchard's bed. That aside, Scorpius dreaded to think how many beds Liv had dragged herself out of over the past two months.

She continued to mother him, running her hands through his hair and adjusting his badge. Opposite them, Toby slipped out, muttering something about grabbing some Pastics from the trolley.
"That reminds me," she said absentmindedly, still eyeing his breast pin. "Who got Head Girl?"

"Who do you think."

She sighed, and flopped onto the seat next to him. "Really, Scorpius, if you put as much effort into our relationship as you do hating her, we'd be married with children and a bloody puppy." She rolled her eyes as he glared at her. "It's time to get over this stupid family feud," she continued, adjusting her blouse. "I'm frankly getting sick of all the complaining. You know some people think you two are actually in some sort of torrid affair?"

"It's not a family feud, Liv. You know that's not it." He shuddered. "Do people actually think that?"

She made a face and nodded. "There's only so much you can despise someone for being your biggest competition, you know."

"It's not that, Liv," Scorpius repeated emphatically. "It's….mutually conflicting values."

"Whatever," she waved a hand in disinterest. "Let's talk about something else."

Toby muttered to himself as he left the compartment for the Honeydukes Express. Three Pumpkin Pasties, four packets of Droobles.

As he passed Compartment K, the sound of his friend's name caught his attention. He paused.

"…sounds like a recipe for disaster, if you ask me," came a vaguely familiar voice from inside. "Rose Weasley and Scorpius Malfoy as our two Heads?" She pshed loudly.

"I thought they're both smart though, right?" came a far more subdued voice. "Isn't that the point?"

The first girl - by the name of Jessamine, Toby thought - continued to speak loftily. "You think they're going to get any work done with all that bickering?"

A third voice now joined the others. "Maybe they're over it?"

"You don't get over a six year feud just like that, Sarah. Hell, it probably goes back to their grandparents, too."

Toby rolled his eyes; family had very little to do with it. True, when they had first arrived at Hogwarts six years ago, in their minds, family had everything to do with it. The minute the flames from Scorpius' haywire Incendio spell had latched themselves upon Rose Weasley's person, he had ignited something far worse than her brand new shoes. She had responded with gusto, and with an unprecedented knack for Charms, Scorpius had wound up in the Hospital Wing during his first ever Hogwarts class.

Unfortunately, even after Rose had fully considered the fact that perhaps that First Year Incident might've been an accident, by then something else had taken over, something far stronger: complete and utter incompatibility.

Toby resumed walking and reached the trolley.

He supposed that when two people found new things to fight about almost daily for six years, their initial reason for disliking each other became more or less inconsequential. At least on Scorpius' side, realising that he was not top of the class in every single subject was not something he took to lightly, but try as he might, there was no one with as much of a natural flair for Charms
as Rose Weasley. Worse, Professor Flitwick held the same view.

Tobias gave the friendly witch his order, and paid for his treats.

While she could probably beat out Scorpius Malfoy in a Charms contest blindfolded, Rose Weasley - nor anyone else - couldn't hold a candle to his friend once they entered the Potions lab, a fact that he imagined she never taken well either.

And so the endless game of one-upmanship began, so much so that it quickly escalated out of the classroom.

Toby raked a hand through his hair at the thought of the stress of the new year, and re-entered his compartment. He stifled a groan when he saw that Liv had not yet left.

"Pasty?" he asked, lobbing one to his friend. "What'd I miss?"

"Al."

Albus paused the drumming of his fists to look at his cousin. "What?"

"Stop."

He huffed. "Fine."

Ten seconds later, it began again.

"Honestly," Gen hissed violently, grabbing his arm. "I'll rip it off, Albus."

"I need food. I might faint."

Rose ignored Al's petulant whining and listened attentively as McGonagall introduced Philippa Mountbatten, the new Arithmancy professor. There was scattered applause when she briefly stood.

"I want food, I need food." Al continued his mantra despite Rose's elbow in his ribs.

McGonagall cast her gaze between the Gryffindor and Slytherin tables. "And finally-"

"Yes," Al hissed.

"-I should take a moment to introduce this year's Head Girl and Boy: Rose Weasley from Gryffindor-" Rose was pushed to her feet amidst enthusiastic applause, along with some wolf whistling from Albus and Louis (and one male Gryffindor who bellowed "Whoo! Go Rose!" before being smacked by his girlfriend beside him), "-and Scorpius Malfoy from Slytherin." There was a second round of rather raucous applause as Scorpius surfaced.

McGonagall flicked her wrist, and there seemed to be a collective sigh heaved throughout the entire hall. "With that, let us enjoy this marvelous feast!"

Albus the Locust stood up, plate in hand, and swept down the entire length of the table, grabbing everything at arm's length.

Rose shook her head, and proceeded to pile her own plate.

"Last ever Start-of-Term Feast," Gen said, sadly, as she bit into a forkful of roast potatoes. "Last ever year of free food."
"Glad to know you have your priorities straight," Rose said, dryly. Gen was right, though, she thought rather sentimentally. It was their last ever Welcome Feast.

"What? Never underestimate the pleasure of free food, my friend, I say, ne—you can't expect to finish that, Albus."

"Watch me," the pile of food replied, setting down its plate with a thump. Al let out a dramatic moan as he inhaled his first mouthful. "Better than sex, I swear."

"Speaking of—"

The three friends turned to face Lydia Price - well, Albus attempted to locate the voice over the mountain on his plate - the fellow Gryffindor who had spoken.

"Did you and Nate have a good summer, Rose?"

Rose frowned at the crude transition. "We're not together anymore."

Lydia's eyes bugged out. "You—you two broke up?"

"Yep," Rose affirmed noncommittally, going back to her food.

"So." She sighed as Lydia's equally as taxing friend leaned over conspiratorially. "He's back on the market, then?"

"I suppose so."

Selene peered over at the Slytherin table. "But Scorpius and Liv are still together."

"What's Malfoy got to do with this?" Gen asked in annoyance.

The two girls shared a look.

"Well…" Both looked extremely uncomfortable. "We just um-" Lydia had decided to brave the waters. "We thought that since you and Nate are over, you would be free to be with Scorpius."

Rose shot the both of them a withering look. "And why," she said, waspishly. "Would that be the case?"

At Rose's deadly tone, the two girls remained tight lipped.

"Speak."

Selene pursed her lips. "Well, there's a rumour that you two are shagging in the Room of Requirement."

"Well," Rose said, loftily, going back to her meal. "I suggest you pay a little less attention to hearsay."

That abruptly ended the conversation.

"Ahh," Al said, patting his stomach contentedly. "Who doesn't love a good Welcome Feast, eh?"

"I swear," Al said, panting. "This trek gets longer and longer each year."
Rose and Gen exchanged an amused look.

"Perhaps if you hadn't eaten your entire body weight in Yorkshire puddings, you'd find this easier," Rose said, patting him on the shoulder.

"Really, Al," Gen said, with much less sympathy. "Pride of the Quidditch team, you are. I'll remember this the next time you force your team to run laps at seven in the morning."

"Your boyfriend still not over that?"

"My ex-boyfriend didn't appreciate the six-thirty wake up calls."

"Your ex-boyfriend was a lazy sod."

"He's half right," Rose admitted, pulling a face.

Al snorted in agreement and then shot Gen a dirty look. "And by the way, I am, in fact, pride of the Quidditch team, Genevieve, as you very well know from my-"

"Made it!" Rose announced, as they came face to face with the Fat Lady's portrait. "Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo."

"I still can't believe you overruled with that," Gen said, shaking her head as the door swung open.

"She's wanted to do that since first year," Al said, happily, throwing an arm around his cousin. "Oh, how far we've come."

Rose shook her head, laughing, and led the way inside.

"I do wonder how you're still upright," Scorpius commented as Toby marched purposefully towards the Slytherin Common Room. "Given that you ate nearly three times the amount I did."

"I live to amaze." Toby turned to inspect his friend critically and tutted. "You really ought to get some meat on that bony frame of yours. You look as if you could break into pieces at any moment."

Scorpius chortled at the pathetic jibe.

"Don't be jealous, Toby," Liv scolded, sidling up and pressing a hand to Scorpius' bicep. "I'm sure with enough Quidditch sessions, your muscle mass could overtake your fat easily."

Scorpius barked out a laugh as Tobias muttered rudely under his breath, and, feeling a renewed sense of unity between him and the girl latched onto him, took her hand and interweaved it with his own.

"So you're free tonight, Scorp? No Heads duties or anything?"

He shook his head. "Not yet. We have a meeting with McGonagall tomorrow before dinner. She'll probably debrief us then."

"That'll be a ball," Liv said in a bored voice, before she gave the password and a passageway appeared.

Scorpius scoffed; knowing Weasley, it'd be a bloodbath.
"Late."

Scorpius skidded to a stop and paused to run a hand through his hair. "Some of us have lives to live, Weasley."

"Couldn't drag yourself out of Olivia's bed, huh?"

"Well," Scorpius replied, smirking. "Given where her mouth was, dragging myself away wasn't really an option."

"Thanks for that stirring image," Rose said flatly.

"I thought living vicariously through me might help you survive through your depressingly mundane lifestyle."

"Why, you do care."

Scorpius glanced at his watch. 8:02. Ridiculous. "Why didn't you go up?"

Rose shrugged, keeping her eyes on the gargoyle. "Thought we should present a united front."

"How sweet."

"Sod off."

Apparently roused by Scorpius' arrival, the statue blinked sleepily and moved out of the way to let them pass.

The two proceeded in silence up the steps, both avoiding walking beside each other but each vying to gain the lead.

"Ah," McGonagall said, looking up as they entered. "My apologies for keeping you waiting; I had a rather urgent letter from the Board to attend to."

Scorpius shot an almost infinitesimal smirk in Rose's direction. She ignored him.

"Have a seat."

The two Heads both tried to hide their distaste at the close proximity of the chairs; Scorpius pursed his lips but resisted shuffling away.

"First off, I should offer you my felicitations in person for your appointments as Head Boy and Girl. A surprise, naturally." Her eyes crinkled slightly behind her spectacles.

The two cracked small smiles.

"As previously appointed prefects, I'm sure the both of you realise your crucial responsibilities as Heads; not only do you undertake new and elevated duties, you also serve as the highest role models for the rest of the school to emulate."

Rose coughed.

"Your Head title also puts you in an extremely favourable position as you decide and apply for careers following your graduation from Hogwarts." She studied them carefully. "As top students, I have no doubt you'll be aiming high. Remember, your position as Heads still does not guarantee you the best schools in your further education - you must work much harder this year than in years previous. Very importantly-" Her eyes settled on Rose's sidelong glance at Scorpius' arm resting
dangerously close to hers. "Limit your distractions."

Scorpius shifted his arm; Rose cleared her throat.

"Now, I trust you've both read the précis of your duties this year? Good." She tented her hands, interlacing her fingers. "Your first meeting is tomorrow, yes?"

"Eight o'clock," Rose affirmed.

McGonagall nodded in approval. "That is all I wished to cover. Biscuit?"

Both students politely declined.

"Well, then. Good night, Ms Weasley, Mr Malfoy."

"Goodnight, Professor," they replied in unison.

Scorpius waited for Rose to exit before following her down the stairs.

Given that continuing to walk behind her for the entirety of the corridor seemed awkward and mulish, Scorpius hastened to catch up to the redhead.

"Any plans with dear Nathaniel?" He flicked his eyes towards hers, and noticed that she looked incredibly deep in thought. "Weasley?"

She snapped to. "What?"

He sighed. "You and Braeden."

She glared at him, and didn't answer.

"Is it that scandalous? He the closet kinky type or something?"

She pressed her lips tightly together, and sped up.

"The fuck is up with you?"

She only issued him another scathing glare.

"Oh." Scorpius smacked a hand to his forehead, feigning a revelation. "You're the closet kinky type."

"Go bother Liv, Malfoy," she said acidly before she turned the corner and disappeared.

Scorpius only stared.

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Rose continued to walk up the steps, still mulling over McGonagall's words. She knew her title as Head Girl was as much a responsibility as an imprimatur, but the Headmistress' words seemed to make it that much more concrete.

Her next thought almost stopped her in horror: how was she to live up to McGonagall's expectations of her when her co-head happened to be her - and she knew the word was juvenile, but it was the only one that sprang to mind - arch-nemesis?

She wondered if it was possible to strip one of the Head title, though she'd never heard of it happening before. Perhaps McGonagall would walk in on the two of them having their usual flare
up in the corridor, notice the mortified looks of young students around them, and demote them both there and then.

She clutched her books tighter and promptly turned back the way she came.

Before she could further unhinge herself, she looked up, distracted, at the sound of approaching feet coming from behind her.

"Al!" she said in surprise, as her cousin turned the corner, his broom hefted over his shoulder.

He raised a hand in greeting. "How was the meeting with McGonagall?"

Rose sighed. "Eye opening."

Al chuckled. "Were you heading back to the Common Room?"

Rose shook her head and inclined it in the opposite direction. "I was heading that way, actually."

Al raised an eyebrow. "You're not heading to the library already, are you?"

Rose shrugged. "We have McGonagall's assignment to do. You really should be doing it as well."

"Oh, come on, Rosie. You've already got Head Girl; for the first time in six years, you can relax!"

She looked scandalised by the suggestion. "Head Girl is only the first step, Al. There's the rest of my life, remember?"

He shook his head in defeat. "You do you, Rose. You do you."

She pointed to his Velox 3000. "You're practicing for Quidditch already."

"Yeah." Al looked baffled. "Because Quidditch is fun."

"Well, I think studying can be fun." She winced at her obvious lie, and decided to backtrack by literally backtracking down the corridor. "Well, Al, this is been great, but I've got stuff to do."

Al snickered at his cousin's antics, and continued his walk down to the Quidditch pitch. "See you later, Rosie."

"Bye, Al."

Before Rose entered the library, she had a gratifying thought: perhaps McGonagall would be prudent enough to dispose of only one of her Heads, obviously the more inferior.

Limit your distractions.

Her mind suddenly swung back to the train, and then the dinner a few hours earlier. A slow smile worked its way onto her face.

Olivia Roux made for a fascinating distraction.

Chapter End Notes
Hi guys,

I'm gonna be honest. Reading this chapter (and 2 as well, sometimes) ten chapters on makes me cringe so badly, so I honestly wouldn't be surprised if it makes any of you guys cringe too. Anyways, I swear it gets good around chps. 3/4 :) 

Tyfyt xx
"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 2: I'm Not About To Compromise or, I'll Use You As A Makeshift Gauge

Rating: M mainly for language, and I can't discount any funny business later on

Disclaimer: I work with only what the infallible J.K. Rowling has given me.

Rose was simultaneously surprised and apprehensive about the note she had received from the Headmistress ten minutes after she had retired back to her dorm after a hearty lunch. The note was brief, inexplicit:

Please come and see me after the conclusion of your classes.

M.M.

So after Potions she bid Al and Gen a farewell and headed quickly to the Headmistress' office, playing nervously with the frayed edges of her textbook. As soon as she arrived at the griffin statue, it blinked at her, closed its eyes and moved aside to reveal the staircase behind it.

She climbed up and upon reaching the door, paused before knocking. As she raised her hand, the door swung slowly open.

"Ah, Miss Weasley," McGonagall said, not looking up from her writing. "Please, take a seat."

Rose walked quickly towards the chairs opposite the Headmistress' and sat quietly, quelling the urge to drum her fingers against her bag.

McGonagall continued to scratch at the parchment, but she spared a look towards the redhead silently fidgeting opposite her. She held back a smile. "Oh, please, Miss Weasley, there's no need to be so anxious, I have only a small request to make of you."

Rose furrowed her brow. "A request, Professor?"

"Quite." Having finished writing, she sealed the envelope and motioned for the big, tawny owl to fly down from its perch, and attached the envelope to its leg. "As Head Girl-" Rose felt a flush of pride at her words, "-you have other duties to supplement prefect meetings and patrols."
"Yes, Professor," Rose replied, though she phrased it as more of a question than a statement.

"Therefore, I am assigning you to weekly tutoring sessions with a Ravenclaw second year, by the name of Wilhelm Greengrass."

Rose attempted to stifle a smirk at the name Wilhelm. "Tutoring for which subject?"

Minerva gave her a rare smile. "Charms, of course, a subject at which your Professor finds you quite adept."

Rose only beamed brilliantly in response. "Is um…Wilhelm aware of this arrangement?"

The Headmistress nodded. "He will be waiting for your first session tonight in the library, 7 o'clock sharp. You may alter the times as you see fit succeeding this night."

The girl nodded again, and made to stand up. "Is that all, Professor?"

"That will be all, Miss Weasley."

With that, McGonagall waved an arm, and the door slowly revolved open.

Rose took that as her cue to head back to the Common Room. "Good evening, Professor."

As Rose reached the exit, McGonagall cleared her throat loudly.

"Oh, and Miss Weasley?" Rose turned around expectantly. "You might need to be patient with this one; he really is quite dreadful. A very good evening to you."

"You've gotten stuck with tutoring?" Al's face looked appalled. "Head Girl duties blow, Rose."

"It is part of the job," Rose shrugged, digging into her mashed potatoes. "Anyway, I can manage."

Al stuffed a large piece of chicken breast into his mouth, though it didn't discourage him from continuing his protest. "Well, that sounds awful," he declared. "I'll stick with being a prefect, thanks."

"You know prefects can be asked to tutor too?" Gen chimed in, dropping her bag upon her arrival. "My sister was asked to teach a third year Ancient Runes."

Al's face dropped further.

"You could be asked to help that Wendell boy with Defence Against the Dark Arts," she continued, ignoring his sickened face. "Word has it he accidentally broke a girl's hand trying to cast a Patronus charm."

Rose raised an eyebrow. "How on earth did he manage to do that?"

Gen shrugged. "No idea. You can see why he needs tutoring."

"I seem to have lost my appetite." Al pushed away his half eaten plate in disgust. "I think I'll have to make use of the prefects' bathroom before my privileges get revoked."

"Do you have tutoring tonight, Rose?" Gen asked, pouring herself some pumpkin juice.

Rose nodded. "At seven." She glanced at her watch. "I should get going, actually."
She bid the two farewell ("I'm telling you, Rose, Head duties suck.") and made the familiar trek up to the library, humming to herself nonchalantly as she did so.

She entered and gave Madam Pince a wave. The librarian caught sight of her and gave her a friendly salute back, before glaring at the two fifth year boys entering behind.

She carefully observed the filling room, peering curiously around and wondering how she was supposed to spot the small boy among the hoards of people around him. She supposed she should’ve asked McGonagall what he looked like. She stepped forward, craning her neck to look behind the shelves. Perhaps she could identify a whiff of smoke from where he was practicing.

"Um…Rose?"

She looked up in relief at the young blonde who had gotten up in his chair to wave at her. She walked over, pleased that he had chosen a table a ways off from the rest. Once she arrived, she stuck out a hand in greeting. "Hi, nice to meet you."

He blushed, and shook her hand quickly before sitting. "Nice to meet you. I'm uh…Wilhelm."

Rose felt her mouth pull up slightly at the side. She sat and took out her wand. "So, I've heard you need some help with Charms."

Wilhelm turned an even more violent shade of red. "I'm useless."

Rose couldn't help but smile. "Oh no, I'm sure you're not."

By the looks of the small paper clip and charred feather in front of him, he most definitely was, but Rose refused to approach the sessions with anything less than the highest level of optimism. "Were you practicing?"

"Trying to," he mumbled, hurriedly stuffing the blackened feather back into his satchel.

Rose pursed her lips. "Can you show me what you've been learning in class?"

Wilhelm paused, and then nodded. He held up his wand. "Lumos Maxima," he whispered. The wand did nothing.

He noticed her encouraging expression and blushed deeper. "Lumos Maxima," he repeated forcefully, his brow furrowing with concentration. The wand gave a pathetic burst, like a firework fizzling out.

Rose had to exert a huge amount of control to hold back her laughter. She figured she should stop him before he gave himself an aneurysm.

"Alright, that's okay," she said, placing her hand on his wand to lower it down onto the table. "We have time, we can manage this."

Wilhelm huffed. "I have a test on Friday," he muttered. "I'll never get it right before then."

Rose gathered up her hair into a low ponytail and closed his textbook. "Nonsense," she said, confidently. "Why do you think Professor McGonagall got the best to help you?"

Wilhelm looked a little more optimistic. He mimicked her hold on the wand, shuffling his small hand back to the exact position in which Rose was holding hers. "I'm ready," he said, wiping the small bead of sweat that had gathered at his hairline.
"Can you cast the *Lumos* Charm?" Rose asked.

The young boy turned beet red, and shook his head.

Rose, aware now of the fact that he had not been able to cast a rudimentary first year charm, understood the gravity of the situation. "Ah."

"Please teach me," Wilhelm said in desperation. He cast his head down in disappointment. "I'm the worst Ravenclaw in existence."

"Will," Rose said, unthinkingly. "I mean, Wilhelm." She cleared her throat. "I don't know how your test is going to go on Friday, but I do know that you need to conquer the basic spell before you attempt the harder one, okay?"

He nodded.

"Alright," Rose said, rolling up her sleeves. "Let me show you."

---

Scorpius was in a good mood. Being one of the only two in class who had successfully managed to brew the Wolfsbane Potion in the hour allotted, his homework load was greatly lifted, and he thought he might get a chance to head down to the Quidditch pitch to get a session in before the tryouts the following day. His high spirits were only soured by the memory that the only other student who had managed to complete the concoction was Rose Weasley. Despite this, he was in a good mood.

He entered the Slytherin Common Room, passing the black couches and unlit fireplace, heading directly for his dorm.

His best friend looked up at the unceremonious drop of his bag.

"Yo, Scorp," Tobias said, raising a hand from his place on his bed. "Where've you been?"

He waved a hand dismissively. "McGonagall wanted to see me about a tutoring gig."

"You need tutoring?"

Scorpius paused his rummage through his trunk to throw his friend a dirty look. "No, asshole, I'm tutoring some Slytherin third year."

"Wretch, man."

Scorpius grunted noncommittally. At least it was Potions.

He shook off his robes and shirt, muttering a Cleaning charm before draping them over the frame of his bed.

"I was going to head down to the Quidditch pitch to get in some practice. I could use a Chaser," he commented as he donned his Quidditch gear.

Tobias' face turned slightly mournful. "I would, mate, but I've got Xavier's potion to do."

Scorpius smirked, and mimicked his friend from before. "Wretch, man."

"Fuck you, Malfoy," he griped, grabbing his wand and Potions textbook. "You might want to head out before you lose all daylight."
The blonde looked out the window, saw that it was indeed getting darker, and grabbed his broom.
"Should we go now, then?"

In reply, Toby swung his feet over the bed and grabbed his wand from the desk.

They walked down the staircase in silence, the chattering from the Common Room becoming louder the further they descended. Reaching the stone wall, they made to part ways.

"See you later," Scorpius bid, raising a hand in farewell.

"You coming to dinner?"

He shook his head. "I grabbed something from before. Besides, I'm heading the meeting tonight, so don't be fucking late."

Tobias laughed and clapped a hand on his friend's back as he left the room.

Scorpius turned in the opposite direction and rearranged his broom on his shoulder to a more comfortable position, getting ready to make good use of the next hour.

Forty-five minutes later Rose was closing Wilhelm's textbook in relief. He had successfully managed to cast the *Lumos* Charm, but given that he took almost the full session to do so, she hadn't dared revisit the more advanced one.

"That was really good," she said encouragingly as she hefted her bag onto her shoulder. "We made great progress today."

Wilhelm, though slightly less red than the beginning of the session now that he had achieved some success, still looked slightly beaten down. "But I still can't do the charm I need to have learnt by Friday's test."

Rose paused. "Look, Wilhelm, your Professor knows that you sometimes struggle with the charms in class - why do you think I'm here?"

He seemed to be considering this.

"Does he know you couldn't do the *Lumos* charm before tonight?" she asked gently.

He nodded.

"Well," Rose said, tucking away her wand. "He'll know you've made some progress, then."

"I suppose so," he said in an unconvincing voice.

Rose inhaled, and then let it out. "Do you want to do another session tomorrow? Just this once?"

He looked up to meet her gaze, and slowly nodded.

She smiled at him reassuringly. "Okay. Same time tomorrow, then?"

He nodded again, but this time Rose saw a hint of a smile.

"Remember what I taught you today, okay?"

Wilhelm nodded, his face pursing in seriousness. "*Confidence.*"
"That's right. Are you going back to your Common Room now?" Rose asked, noticing that he had stowed all of his books.

"I'm meeting my friend," he replied, his voice still low.

Rose smiled. "Well, I'm headed back too." She motioned for him to follow her out of the library.

They stopped outside the door. "I'll see you tomorrow. Confidence, okay?" she reminded him. "That's all you need to worry about."

He chewed at his lip. "Thanks, Rose," he said. "I'll um…see you tomorrow."

His tutor smiled at him again, and headed down the long corridor.

"Um…Rose?"

She turned at the sound of his voice. He cleared his throat. "You can, um…you can call me Will if you want."

Rose beamed. "Night, Will."

"Night, Rose."

"Could everyone settle down, please?" The Head Girl's voice barely rang out above the loud chatter filling the empty Transfiguration classroom.

The chattering continued, and Rose opened her mouth to less politely tell everyone to be quiet, until-

"Can everyone shut up so we can get this over with and get on with our lives?"

Rose looked over at annoyance at her co-head as the room fell into silence. Honestly, he could be so abrasive sometimes.

"Alright, welcome to the first prefects' meeting of the year. We have a quite a bit to sort out today so, like Malfoy said, it'll be easier if we just get it done as quickly and painlessly as possible."

There were various murmurs of assent around the room.

"First and foremost, congratulations to our new prefects; you were handpicked by Professor McGonagall so I hope you feel proud of your accomplishments."

Despite the scattered applause, the blonde next to her pettily inclined his head. "Can we wrap up the motivational speech, Weasley? Some of us have places to be."

Rose narrowed her eyes and clenched her jaw. "I'm all ears, Malfoy."

He gave her an antagonistic smirk before turning to address the crowd. "Right, as you all should know already, prefects have the privilege of docking points and assigning detentions as they see fit. You've also earned the right to use the prefects' bathroom on the fifth floor."

There was more excited murmuring at this announcement.

Rose cleared her throat. "However, you also take on the responsibilities of curfew patrols and organising various events throughout the school year. We'll let you know about those as they come up." She held up the mostly blank parchment on the table beside her. "Patrols need to be
done every night in pairs, though not necessarily from your own House nor your own year, so we'll want everyone to fill out their preferred slots on this."

"And because we don't want you to complain about the shitty slot timings or whatever to us after everyone else has gone, we'll be passing the parchment around now - can it, Fletcher - so make sure you're happy with your pick."

"Language, Malfoy," Rose snapped next to him.

He ignored her and continued. "Most of you will sign up for two slots a month, a few of you will have to do three along with me and Weasley." He paused. "Because we're Heads, we get to choose first."

He turned to the redhead beside him and offered her the quill. "Ladies first."

She took it and leaned down, muttering, "Merlin, I suppose they were wrong about chivalry being dead."

"The only reason I'm letting you write first is so I can see which days to avoid," Scorpius bit back just as quietly, and true to form, noticed with relish that she had picked two nights where he had already scheduled Quidditch practice. She finished scribbling, and handed him the quill and parchment. He noted with limited interest the "Albus Potter" written below her name in both instances before stooping to write his name and "Tobias Nott" beneath it. His gaze passed over the one night where the Heads patrolled together and had to make a conscious effort to stop his face from wrinkling.

Rose smiled at her cousin as Al made his way over to her; Gen was talking animatedly with a friend from Runes. "So, Malfoy's still a prick, huh?" he observed with little surprise.

"I can't believe I have to work with him for a whole year," she groaned. They both turned in unison to see Malfoy engaged in conversation with Toby. He caught and dropped Rose's eye in less than a second.

The parchment finally got around to everyone in the room, and although there was some grumbling, no one had any outstanding objections.

"Alright, thanks for making that relatively painless," Malfoy said, folding it up and placing it in his robes.

Rose eyed him with distaste; she would much rather the document stay in responsible hands, but said nothing. "Remember, when we have our next meeting next month, there is opportunity to change since clubs and Quidditch practices will have been properly scheduled by then." She promptly remembered something. "By the way, the password to enter the prefects' bathroom is 'fig leaf'."

"Right." Scorpius leaned backwards, bracing his hands on the table behind him. "I think that just about sums up the meeting. Thanks for being here; take your job seriously, dock some Gryffindor points. You're all excused."

Rose shook her head in annoyance. "Night everyone."

She hung back while the prefects filed out, wondering if she might exchange a quick word with Malfoy as to how the meeting had gone, but he promptly left with Tobias Nott. She blew a strand of hair out of her face.

"You coming, Rose?" Gen asked, hovering by the door.
She sighed, and wordlessly Noxed the overhead lights. "Coming."

"So, are you two watching the Quidditch trials this afternoon?" was Al's opening as he joined Rose and Gen in the Hall for afternoon tea the following day.

"Mm-hmm," Rose answered briefly, still pawing through her Defence textbook.

"Can't, Al, sorry," Gen said apologetically. "I have Xavier's potion to do before tomorrow."

"You finally going to try out this year, Rose?" Al asked, helping himself to the platter of scones in front of him.

She shook her head. "Honestly, Albus, you ask me this every year. It's still no."

Four years of rejection had helped Al to quell his disappointment. "Well, you're missing out on a kick-arse Captain this year."

Rose cracked a grin. "Ha-ha." She checked her watch. "Speaking of, you might want to head out now to set up."

Al grabbed her arm to check the time and swore. "Shit, how'd it get to be ten to five already?"

He jumped up from his seat and grabbed his cousin by her sleeve. "Rose! Vamos!"

She grunted as she reached to grab another scone for the road, mumbling a "bye" around the one currently in her mouth.

"See you later, Gen!" Al's voice echoed from behind the door.

With Al tearing down the hill and Rose following disgruntled behind, they made it to the pitch in under five minutes. For a day in September, it was pleasantly warm, and Rose took her place in the stands as Al retrieved the chest of balls and his broom from the locked shed.

Soon enough, Quidditch team hopefuls had begun to arrive, socialising and stretching before the tryouts officially started. At five oh three, Al cleared his throat loudly and stepped into the middle of the field.

"Alright, shut it, you lot. Let's get these tryouts started."

The Captain's command had the desired effect, and the field grew quiet.

It was custom every year, and had been for as long as anyone could remember, that only roughly half of those who attended tryouts could actually command a broomstick. Likewise, the small group of first years were sent quickly away. A group of blushing girls waved at Al as they left.

The rest of those who had shown up were made to fly around the pitch at varying speeds and altitudes to further seek out those who could properly get through to the position trials.

The next hour passed as expected. Al's face had grown pink with exertion and excitement, and soon enough the three Chasers, Keeper and remaining Beater (as Al was the other) positions had been filled, leaving Seeker as the only role left to assign. As the five hopefuls attempted to catch the Snitch that had been released, Al motioned his cousin down from where she was sat.

"Are you sure you don't want to try out for a reserve position, Rose?" he pleaded. "You know as well as I do you could beat out McGinty in a landslide."
It was true, and McGinty was a prick.

"Even if I do get reserve position, it doesn't mean I'll be playing any games," Rose reminded Al. "You know, hence the term reserve."

Al looked ponderous for a moment. "Yes, but what if someone took an untimely fall the night before the match?"

Rose whacked his arm playfully but seemed to actually be considering. It really was such a nice day for it.

"Come on, Rosie." Al grabbed her hands between his own. "You know how chuffed Uncle Ron'll be if you make the team."

"I'm not exactly dressed for it," Rose flailed, now unsure if she was trying to convince her cousin or herself.

"You know there are extras in the changing room," Al admonished. He sighed in exasperation at the unnoticed golden ball hovering by the base of the left post. "Christ, guys, it's right fucking there!"

"You know it's unfair to expect anyone to be as good as you, right, Al?" Rose laughed. "None of these other guys have the Quidditch legacy that you do."

Al ignored her. "I could get to it faster than you, and I'm not even on a bloody broom!"

It was her last year, it couldn't do any harm right? And as she'd rightly pointed out, she might not even end up playing the game. She had time, didn't she? She was on top of everything, as usual.

"I'll do it,' she said, suddenly.

Al was still yelling at the Seekers. To be fair, they'd all spotted the Snitch, but were finding it difficult to avoid the other four in their quest to capture it.

"What?" he asked, distractedly.

"I'll do it," she sighed. "I'll try out for reserve Chaser."

Al's face lit up in excitement, and he pushed her towards the changing rooms. "Get moving then, Rose! The reserves are about to start."

As Rose re-entered the pitch, Al's team - including the newly assigned Laura Henley as Seeker - had retreated to the stands, and were watching the remainder of the trials. Rose felt her stomach seize up with anxiety.

"Just relax," Al said gently as she took his broom, the same model she had gotten accustomed to using over the holidays. "You'll be great."

And she was. She forgot how nice it was to be flying again, the wind in her hair, the knots in her stomach loosening. In no time, she had been appointed as the first reserve Chaser, and she was so good that no one even thought to accuse Al of nepotism.

"Alright," Al said as he picked their final reserve Beater. "That's the tryouts over. Thanks everyone for showing up, first practice is tomorrow at five. Now go and get some food before it's all cleared away."
Rose, still full from the generous snack she’d given to herself two hours before, stayed to help Al clear up.

As they exited the broom shed, the sound of voices attracted their attention. Rose groaned; the familiar sound of a pompous, self-righteous asshole was quickly drawing closer.

She made to leave the stadium, but Al grabbed her arm on their way out. "Hang on," he muttered. "I want to see who got Captain."

They hung back, waiting as the Slytherins made their way onto the pitch. As Scorpius passed, he hid his surprise through a scoff as he saw Rose donned in her Quidditch gear. She scowled back and folded her arms across her chest.

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me," Al groaned beside her.

"What?"

He pointed at the gleaming badge adorning Malfoy's robes.

As much as she hated him, Rose had to admit that he was the obvious choice. Appointed Keeper in his second year - and with that, setting a record - he had consistently helped the Slytherin team to make it to the finals since his arrival, a feat not even Gryffindor could boast. She supposed Al's frustration was justified.

"Right, everyone, let's get a move on, we all have lives to live. If you're a first year or only here to watch me host these tryouts, I'm flattered, but the exit's that way."

Rose pshed loudly, but couldn't ignore the group of chittering girls - and even a handful adorned in blue and yellow mixed in with the green - as they scarpered out, followed by a handful of younger students.

"Ugh, let's go," Al complained. "I'm starving."

Rose nodded and the two of them left, though Scorpius' voice, enhanced by a Sonorous charm, pursued even after the field had disappeared behind them.

From what she could hear, Malfoy was a good Captain. He was strict but fair, encouraging but realistic, and only bit out his usual snarks when necessary. He was still a complete windbag though, as Al unnecessarily reminded her. She thought that was a generous way of putting it.

It was dark by the time Scorpius returned to his dorm, both he and Tobias sweaty despite the cold.

Scorpius was altogether pleased by his team, though he knew there was the added pressure to win, given that he now held both the Head Boy and Captain positions.

"Good team, Scorp." Toby voiced his thoughts aloud as they changed out of their damp under-gear. "Better than Potter's team, anyway."

Scorpius grunted his agreement as he grabbed a towel and headed for the shared bathroom.

"By the way," his friend continued offhandedly as he disappeared. "Did you know Weasley could play?"

Scorpius blinked. "No," he said. He peeked his head around the door. "But when your cousin's the Captain..." He left the statement open, even though he knew fully well that Albus Potter
would never dream of letting an incapable person onto his precious team.

"I guess," Toby admitted, though his tone suggested he was thinking the same thing Scorpius was. "You guys are as friendly as ever."

Scorpius was reminded of the meeting the previous night. "Yeah, well, she's still the same bitchy know-it-all from first year."

Tobias tossed his shirt onto his trunk. "You've just got to last it out one year, mate," he pointed out.

"No," Scorpius replied as he turned on the hot water. "Weasley's just got to last it out a year."

"Malfoy as Captain is completely ridiculous," Al was complaining to Gen. Rose had tuned him out a good ten minutes before and was now attempting to focus on her Transfiguration homework. She didn't say it out loud, but she had a feeling Al's irritation stemmed from knowing that under Malfoy's captaining, the Slytherin team stood a good chance at taking home the Cup.

"Mm, agreed," Gen said from beside Rose, working on the same essay. Al had yet to notice that this was the fifth time she had repeated this exact phrase within the last two minutes.

While it was common knowledge that Rose Weasley and Scorpius Malfoy detested each other, when it came to the Quidditch pitch, there were no two stronger enemies than the two newly appointed Captains.

"Even worse," Al continued, his voice raising in volume as he sat down with a thump beside them, "poor Rosie has to spend an entire year being his co-Head."

"Perhaps you'd better go and take a shower," Gen suggested soothingly, though Rose had seen her turn up her nose the minute a sweaty Al had stumped into the Common Room. "You'll feel better."

"I think I'd better find Louis. He'll understand," Al grumbled.

"Al." Rose's tone was still laced with disinterest. "Take a shower. You reek."

Al hmphed but headed towards the stairs. As he walked up, the girls heard him mutter, "Shower first, complain to Louis second."

"What possessed McGonagall to choose her as Head Girl is what I'd like to know."

This was Scorpius. He, like Al, had not stopped complaining since he had turned on the shower. Unlike Al, his topic had switched from Quidditch back to old territory. While he was sensible enough to realise that Albus Potter was the reasonable choice for Quidditch Captain, he was not sensible enough to cease his usual spiel about Albus Potter's redheaded cousin.

"Well, I mean, she's smart, she was a prefect, she's McGonagall's favourite by far-"

"My question did not necessitate a response," came the biting reply from the shower.

Toby shook his head in exasperation. "Just hurry up, okay?"

"And to think she's on the fucking Quidditch team now, too, like I don't already see enough of her! Did you see what a stuck-up bitch she was during yesterday's meeting?"
Tobias had not.

"Yeah, Scorp, she's a total bitch."

Toby had to admit, this spiel was overdue. The usual Day One Spiel had not happened since Scorpius had spent the night with Liv. The same went for the following night. Waiting until day three had not happened since—was it third year?

"Did you see how frizzy her hair looked after the tryouts?"

Tobias groaned softly; when Scorpius had had enough of insulting her personality and various skills, he moved on to something much more juvenile: how ugly he personally deemed her to be.

In actual fact, Rose Weasley was very pretty, an opinion he was sure the rest of the Hogwarts population shared.

Well, all except one.

"I swear her front teeth have gotten even bigger since I last saw her." He paused, seeking affirmation. "Wouldn't you say?"

"What? Oh, yes, hideous."

This was the point where Toby would tune his best friend out. After all, Scorpius could listen to himself speak, uninterrupted, for a good hour. He pulled out his Arithmancy textbook and settled down for a bit of reading until he could head into the shower.

"And another thing!"

"Hey, Rose?"

She looked up in surprise at the first word of conversation in over half an hour. "Hmm?"

Gen paused, and then put down her quill. "How do you feel about being co-Heads with Malfoy? Really."

Rose furrowed her brow. "Why do you ask?"

Her best friend shrugged. "I dunno. I mean, you hate the guy, like really loathe him, and you're going to have to spend your last year of school constantly dealing with him. Living with him, even."

Rose remembered with distaste the new Heads dormitory that would open a few weeks before the Christmas holidays. "I suppose when you put it that way it does sound a little bleak."

Gen looked at her sympathetically. "Listen, I only bring it up since I know you can't constructively talk to Al about it - he hates the guy almost as much as you do - so I just wanted to let you know, I'm here if you need to rant."

Rose smiled. "Thanks, Gen, you're the best." She went back to writing.

Gen looked at her friend suspiciously. "What's up with you?"

Rose paused. "What do you mean?"

Gen leaned back against the sofa, crossing her arms. She scrutinised the Head Girl's face,
narrowing her eyes. "You. You're so....zen about the whole Malfoy thing. What happened to the weekly screaming matches and hourly tirades I've had to deal with for the past six years?"

Rose considered, then shrugged. "I dunno. I mean, he hasn't really done anything yet. Maybe he finally grew up over the summer."

Genevieve scoffed. "Yeah, and tomorrow the three of us are going to have a lovely conversation about McGonagall's new boyfriend over bacon and eggs."

"Ho ho." Rose sighed and checked her watch. "Well, I can't write any more of this tonight. You wanna come upstairs?"

Gen nodded, but dipped her quill back into her pot of ink. "You go ahead, I'll be five minutes."

Rose waved her friend goodnight, and trudged upstairs. She really wasn't as unperturbed as she appeared. In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable.

Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record.

She pulled her hair out of her ponytail as she settled under the covers, careful not to wake the two girls sleeping across the room. She shared all of her classes with him tomorrow; they'd see if this impasse could last another day.

Chapter End Notes

A/N:

All comments are greatly appreciated! As always, tyfyt.

~ Rach
"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

Chapter 3: All Dressed Up In A White Straitjacket or, I Can't Compete With All Your Damn Ideas

Rating: M mainly for language, and I can't discount any funny business later on

Disclaimer: I work with only what the infallible J.K. Rowling has given me.

It was not going to be a good day, Scorpius could tell that from the off.

He'd met Liv in the Room of Requirement the night before after sending her a note reading "RoR for a quickie", but instead of the ten minute romp he had been hoping for, she'd decided the summer had been too long for them to be apart and updated him on the agonisingly mundane details of her holiday until past two am.

Because of this, he'd completely forgotten to set his usual alarm and had woken up only ten minutes before Transfiguration was due to start.

Jumping out of bed, he made a beeline for the bathroom, hissing to the sleeping girl beside him, "Liv! Goddammit, get up!" only to have her mumble, "Free period" in response.

He groaned, and focused hard on a clean set of robes appearing at the foot of the bed. He haphazardly flung them on whilst attempting to brush his teeth.

Without saying goodbye, he dashed out of the room, muttering a Summoning charm for his books, quill and homework. Luckily, he made it to McGonagall's classroom and set his essay down on her desk mere seconds before she herself entered.

"Thank you, Mr Malfoy," she commented lightly as she passed him. She looked him up and down but made no remark as to his dishevelled appearance.

He took his seat next to Toby, self-consciously pulling a hand through his bedraggled hair.

"Good morning," McGonagall announced. "Today, we will be applying the theory that I trust you all read and reported for homework." She glanced at the Gryffindor girl in the third row.

"Textbooks closed, Miss Lancaster."

The girl sheepishly stowed it back into her bag.

"Mate, you smell like sex," Toby said, making a face. Scorpius kicked his shin under the table.
The Professor flicked her wand towards the chalkboard, speaking the words as they formed behind her. "Untransfiguration." She focused her sharp eyes around the room. "What is the meaning of 'Untransfiguration'? Yes, Mr. Malfoy."

From the seat across him, Rose lowered her hand in disappointment.

He smirked. "Reverting something that has been previously Transfigured back into its original form."

"Correct. Five points to Slytherin."

Scorpius exchanged a smug grin with Toby.

"Now, can anyone tell me why we only study Untransfiguration at a N.E.W.T. level? Miss Weasley."

"Untransfiguration is considered both Transfiguration and a counter-spell. This simultaneous use of multiple branches of magic means successful spells can only be performed by witches or wizards trained at a sufficiently advanced level."

"Exactly. Ten points, Miss Weasley."

No one in class seemed surprised that their two Heads were the first to offer answers, and most were reluctant to compete.

McGonagall looked around the room, her gaze hardening as she realised perhaps not everyone in her class was quite up to the task. Still, it was only the first week.

She waved her wand, and a copper tin appeared in front of every seventh year. "This tin has already been Transfigured into what you see now. Using the incantation to evoke the traces of magic left from when it had last been Transfigured, can anyone hazard a guess to its previous form?"

She brightened slightly at a third hand that had cautiously raised near the back of the room. "Ah, yes, Mr. Abbott."

"Bronze?" he answered, hopefully.

Less than a second later came the quiet mutters of "Brass" from the two desks second from the front. There was a pause as each glared at the other for the intrusion.

"Brass is correct, Miss Weasley and Mr Malfoy." She turned her attention back to Brian Abbott. "Almost, Mr Abbott, however you overcomplicated the remaining element. The missing element was zinc, not tin and the many others that make up bronze."

"Mr Potter," she said, before she had turned her head to face him.

Next to Rose, Al audibly swallowed.

"Why is knowing the previous form of an object important?"

Scorpius rolled his eyes as Rose looked as if she was physically restraining herself from answering on her cousin's behalf. "Um…so that you can properly evoke the image of which to revert it back to?"

"Correct. Now, if everyone could do precisely that."
There were quiet groans and soft thuds as students cleared their desk spaces and prepared themselves for the long hour ahead.

Scorpius likewise turned his attention to the piece of metal on his desk. On paper, the task didn't seem too difficult, but he could tell it would take more than memorisation of a formula and simple incantation.

"Immutent Ipsa Retro," he muttered, familiarising himself with the spell. At his words, the tin shimmered slightly, but stayed as it was.


He repeated the incantation, more loudly now, accompanying it with the strokes of his wand. The tin shimmered once again to the point where it looked like it had reverted to its brass form, but Scorpius could tell he had merely cloaked it in the image of what it had looked like previously.

"Immutent Ipsa Retro," he said again, taking extra care of the exact angle he was creating with his wand. With a tinkling sound, there was now a bronze tin sitting in front of him.

"Ten points, Mr Malfoy."

Scorpius looked up to see McGonagall surveying him from under her spectacles. He turned his head to his right, ready to cast the perfect smirk, only to see an equally bronzed tin sitting in front of the Head Girl.

His grin faded as McGonagall nodded appreciatively and awarded Gryffindor with ten additional points as well.

It was not much longer until both Toby and Albus had managed to Untransfigure their tins as well, along with a smattering of other students. As the Transfiguration Professor had rightly predicted, it was not a task that everybody could easily perform.

While the rest of the class struggled (or in Al and Toby's case, slept) Rose and Scorpius had been continuously muttering the incantation, their tins flashing as they rapidly changed form. It became immediately obvious that both were trying to outshine the other.

While McGonagall couldn't say that she was neither impressed nor entertained (for she was both) at the two Heads' antics, the high-speed fluorescence was beginning to hurt her wizened eyes.

"Miss Weasley, Mr Malfoy."

They paused mid flourish as they turned to look at their Headmistress. At the sound of their respective desk partner's names, Toby and Albus shot up in their seats.

"It has become clear to me that the both of you have achieved success in today's assignment. You may now cease."

Rather bashfully, the two lowered their wands.

Minerva checked her watch. Ten minutes to go. Thank Merlin.

"Christ, I could murder Westknight," Gen snapped as she sat down.

Rose looked up sympathetically at her friend. This was not the first time Genevieve had expressed
this desire. "Ancient Runes was good, then?" she asked dryly.

Gen shook her head viciously, refusing to elaborate, and set her Potions textbook on the countertop with a loud bang.

"At least we're doing a practical today," Rose consoled. "You can keep your head and hands busy."

Gen grunted and sat with her knuckles pressed against her chin.

"Good morning," Professor Xavier said once the last few people had sat down. "As you all know, today will be a practical lesson. Please open your books to page seventy-two."


"Correct, Miss Weasley." Rose looked up at the sound of her name. "And what, may I ask, is the popular use of this particular brew?"

"It can be used as a cure for the Draught of Living Death," she replied.

"Two out of two."

In her periphery, she caught Scorpius dramatically rolling his eyes. Her smile brightened.

"As Miss Weasley rightly pointed out, the Wiggenweld potion can be used to cure the magically induced sleep, along with a number of other minor maladies. As such, it is a critical potion to learn if one wishes to pursue a career as, say, a Healer."

Rose sat up straighter.

"The ingredients and utensils can be found in the cupboard. You will have until the end of the period. Good luck."

It was a frantic race to the corner of the room.

Rose grabbed the salamander blood, lionfish spines and flobberworm mucus, setting them down on her workplace before heading back for a cauldron and honeywater. Scorpius rudely shoved past her as she was getting her final ingredient.

"Watch it," she spat.

"You watch it," she retorted.

This was routine.

Rose reached her table and set about adding the salamander blood. "Until it turns red," she recited to herself softly. If this was her first test of the year in pursuit of becoming a Healer, she refused to mess this up. She was so focused on the colour of her brew turning exactly the colour as said in the textbook, she didn't notice the blonde Slytherin until he was right in front of her.

"Don't mind if I borrow these, do you, Weasley?" he asked, carelessly, as he swiped a handful of lionfish spines from her countertop. Her entire face visibly tensed, and her eyes narrowed down to slits.

"Malfoy," she hissed. "Give those back."

Scorpius however, was already walking back to his table. "What are you going to do?" he asked,
sparing a glance over to where Professor Xavier was tutting at Ruth Jordan's mould-coloured potion. "Tell on me?"

*Stir until the potion turns orange.*

She cursed under her breath, but kept stirring; she still had several stages left to go before she needed to add the lionfish anyway. She would recollect the ingredient as her potion was simmering.

"What did Malfoy want?" Gen asked, setting her ingredients down.

She hesitated; if she told Gen, she was sure to cause a scene.

"Nothing," she replied. "He was just being annoying, as usual."

She continued adding and stirring the salamander blood, following the instructions exactly.

Ten minutes later, she felt Gen leaning over her cauldron anxiously. "Does my potion look indigo to you?" she asked. "What the hell does 'indigo' mean, anyway? When was the last time you ever used 'indigo' to describe a colour?"

Rose laughed. "It looks fine to me," she answered, peering in. She checked the next instructions. "Hey, Gen, I'm gonna grab some lionfish spines. Watch my cauldron for me?"

Gen nodded, but looked suspicious. After all, when was the last time Rose Weasley hadn't begun her potion completely prepared?

Rose returned with the spines, and continued on with the elixir. She was just adding the Flobberworm mucus when the Potions Master broke the room's silence.

"Twenty minutes left, everyone. Mr Malfoy, if you're finished, may I have a quick word?"

Rose looked up in horror. How could he possibly be done already?

Impulsively, she turned towards his desk, seeing a small portion of the concoction already in a vial, the exact shade of green it was supposed to be. Malfoy caught her eye, and his mouth lifted up into a smirk.

He passed her desk and she began to stir, forcing herself to take her time. She would *not* mess this up.

"The instructions say yellow, Weasley, not *vomit*," the voice of self-righteousness said loftily as it headed back to its desk.

She bit down the retort on her tongue and added in more mucus. Feeling a pair of eyes burning in her periphery, she looked to her left to see Gen studying her intently.

"What?" she asked, raising her eyebrows.


Scorpius' earlier prediction was right: he was not having a good day.

Although he had performed well in both Transfiguration and Potions, he was still sure something was off-piste. Usually when he felt off, he could always count on Weasley's red face and scathing comments as he riled her up to brighten his spirits, but try as he might, she was behaving
exceedingly tolerantly of his unfriendly behaviour. And it really pissed him off that he didn't know why.

"Weasley's acting odd," he remarked to Tobias as they walked down the corridor that led them to their Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom.

"I hadn't noticed," Toby shrugged. "In what way?"

Scorpius raised a hand to rub at his hair. "She's being unprecedentedly tolerant," he said, voicing his previous thoughts.

He was sure snatching her lionfish spines and then insulting her brew during Potions would've prompted the usual curse or vicious insult, but no game. He hadn't had a chance to further explore his disquiet in Charms as they'd had a theory-based lesson, but when he'd ploughed past her before lunch, he'd only gotten a "Fuck you" from Genevieve Chang.

They entered the class to see that Rose was already there, seated up front with her feisty Eurasian friend.

Rather than sitting at the desk across from the pair, as per usual, Scorpius dropped his books onto the table directly behind them.

Tobias noticed this immediately, and by the looks of their stiffened backs, so did the two sitting in front of them. "What're you doing?" he asked, suspiciously.

Scorpius shrugged. "Can't think what you mean by that, mate."

Toby rolled his eyes, but let it slide. At this point, he was quickly using up today's quota of care.

"Afternoon, class," Professor Dolloway announced as he walked through the door. "It's a beautiful day for a practical, eh?"

He set his briefcase on the floor and sat down at his desk. "Right, we'll be practicing the Impediment Jinx non-verbally in pairs today. Since you need little guidance from me, I suggest you get right to it."

"Weasley," Scorpius hissed as the rest of the class began opening *Confronting the Faceless*. "I seem to have forgotten my textbook. Mind if I borrow yours?"

"What do you want, Malfoy."

"Well, you seemed so generous in Potions earlier, I thought I might ask if you wouldn't mind repeating the favour."

Genevieve turned to face him, her jaw tensing; he gave her a winning smile in response.

"There are extra books in the cupboard at the back," Rose said, pulling Genevieve back around.

Scorpius narrowed his eyes. *Something was definitely up.*

"Come on." Rose stood up. "We'd better get to practicing."

Scorpius followed suit. "Ready, mate?"

Toby only shook his head in exasperation, deciding wisely that the best idea would be to work on the opposite end of the room to her. Scorpius, however, had other ideas. "This way," he said, leading them directly to where Rose and Genevieve were setting up their cushions.
Rose's eye began to twitch as she noticed their arrival, but said nothing.

There was a loud clearing of the throat. The class directed their gaze to see their Professor standing up. "I had to rush down here from the seventh floor, and as such didn't get a chance to use the restroom." His eyes flicked around the room. "Carry on practicing, but if anything...out of the ordinary happens, I will know." He strode towards the door, but turned around at the last second. "Anything," he repeated. "I will know."

As soon as the door had closed behind their teacher, Scorpius seized his chance.

"Weasley, has anyone ever told you that your face looks like it caught fire and someone tried to put it out with a fork?"

"Sod off, Malfoy," Genevieve sniped instantly. "Practice your fucking jinx."

Rose, as it was becoming infuriatingly usual, glared at him, but said nothing.

After a quick look at her partner, she raised her wand, but with a rapid Banishing spell, the safety cushion on the floor was flung to the opposite end of the room.

She halted, her mouth opening in intense displeasure as she turned slowly to face its enchanter; he only looked curiously up at the ceiling.

"What the fuck, Malfoy?" Genevieve snarled. It was evident that she had decided to compensate for Rose's apathy by cursing at him at every opportunity.

"Not worth it, Gen," Rose quietly murmured.

As Rose huffed and Accio'd back her cushion, Toby turned on his friend, his arms crossed and his expression one of intense aggravation. "Why are you trying so hard to rile her up?"

It was a good question. *Because it's fun?*

In truth, Scorpius didn't know exactly why he was so intent on getting under her skin. It wasn't because she was a significant part of his life - that wasn't it - but Scorpius didn't like it when the status quo was changed. And Rose Weasley, in all of her infuriating forbearance, had definitely changed it. Worse, Scorpius had no idea why after six years she had even decided to.

"Let's just practice, okay?"

Scorpius, distracted by Rose raising her arm again, failed to respond.

In a flash, the cushion had smacked her straight across the face. When it fell onto the floor, it exposed the vein that was beginning to throb dangerously at her temple.

"Bloody hell, Scorp," Toby was muttering. "For Merlin's sake, leave her alone."

Any minute now.

"*Scorpius."

He knew there was only one thing left before she exploded.

With a smirk, he flicked his wand so the cushion shot up from the floor and straight into Genevieve's face.
He was right.

Rose turned on him, inflamed. "Do you not have anything better to do?" she screeched, hackles rising. "Is it so fucking important to you to rub me up the wrong way?"

"Rose, Dolloway'll be coming back any minute." Genevieve, her role now reversed, began to tug on her best friend's arm. Rose ignored her, her whole body shaking.

"Don't, for a second, think that you are important to me in any way, shape or form," Scorpius spat back. "I was only wondering what happened over the summer to turn you into a soulless, mindless drone."

With a look that clearly said she had no control over what she was doing, Rose Weasley opened her mouth in utter incense. "Stupefy!"

Scorpius, who was expecting - and hoping - for such a reaction, quickly blocked it with a non-verbal Shield spell. The force of her anger, however, projected him a few feet back.

"Finally." Scorpius' face was alight with malice. "This 'holier than thou' bullshit was getting really old."

Rose looked so angry that Scorpius dimly noticed the rest of the class had backed up against the walls of the classroom, some even shielding themselves with cushions.

"Why you insufferable, evil-" Instead of finishing her sentence, she held up her wand to cast another spell.

"Miss Weasley!"

The Weasley in question froze, as if she had finally noticed the gravity of what she was doing.

"Would you care to explain to me why you look as if you are about to curse Mr Malfoy?"

She lowered her wand, attempting to calm herself down through a series of deep breaths.

"He provoked her, Professor," Al interjected, stepping forward.

"I know that, Mr Potter," Dolloway replied. "I could hear the two of them from the other end of the corridor." He turned his attention back to his two seething students. "Verbal provocation, however, does not justify the cursing of another student. Detention this evening for the both of you."

Rose opened her mouth in protest, but closed it in defeat when she caught sight of her Professor's face.

Mercifully, the bell rang then, signalling the end of the school day. The vast majority of the class escaped before their teacher had a chance to dismiss them.

"Seven o'clock," the Defence Professor said, sternly, before he too left.

"See you then," Scorpius said, his expression unreadable. He really hadn't planned this out far enough to realise that this was the only circumstance his undertaking could lead to.

Nevertheless, his exterior remained cool as he preceded Tobias out of the room and back to their dorm.
"Al, you absolute idiot, why didn't you help me?" Gen asked angrily the minute Rose had left for her dorm to write a letter to the Headmistress.

He shrugged. "It was a long time coming. Anyway, I was betting on Rose to win."

Gen savagely sat down on the sofa, crossing her arms. "Fucking prick," she said in a vicious undertone. "Goddamn fucking prick."

Dear Professor McGonagall,

I regret to inform you that due to an unfortunate altercation with Scorpius Malfoy during Defence Against the Dark Arts today, I have been compelled to attend detention at seven o'clock this evening. However, because this coincides with my tutoring session with Wilhelm, I was hoping you could ask Professor Dolloway if I might sit my detention tomorrow night instead.

Best wishes,

Rose Weasley

Miss Weasley,

I have spoken to Professor Dolloway and impressed upon him the importance of your tutoring session with Mr Greengrass tonight, and as such, he has permitted you to sit the detention tomorrow night instead. Mr Malfoy regretfully is otherwise engaged that night, so he will sit the detention tonight as originally planned.

Regards,

Minerva McGonagall

Headmistress

So it was at six forty five on Friday night that Rose exited the Great Hall and made her way up to her third floor Defence classroom to sit her detention. The thought of it still made her fume with anger. Fortunately, she and Malfoy had shared only two classes that day, and not a word was exchanged between them. Perhaps his detention was unspeakably awful and he was ready to atone for his crimes.

It seemed unlikely.

At least the scrubbing - for she was sure that she would spend the next few hours relegated to the Trophy Room - might help her to take her mind off her intolerable co-Head and might even serve as some quasi-cathartic exercise. Her next few hours alone had potential.

Therefore, when she reached the door to her classroom, she stopped in surprise when her eyes fell upon the person already seated there.

"Hey," she said in surprise.

The Ravenclaw sprawled at his desk looked up at the sound of her voice, and hastened to sit up straighter. "Hey yourself."

She walked in and took a seat much more demurely next to him. "So," she asked. "What've they
got you in for? Christian, right?"

He grinned. "Goldstein. I thought Dolloway might not notice if I missed the first Defence class of the semester."

Rose pulled an unsympathetic face. "You're a Ravenclaw, right?" she asked, dryly.

He grinned. "So what's the Head Girl doing in here, then?"

She grimaced. "I uh….got into a rather public fight with Malfoy. Dolloway sentenced us both to an evening's detention."

"I heard," Christian said, a small smile working its way onto his face. "Well, I mean, everyone knows about it by now." He checked his watch. "He's late."

Rose took off her robes, folding them over the back of her chair. "He's not coming. He did his yesterday - I had a thing I couldn't miss."

"A lucky coincidence."

Rose was just about to comment back when the Professor walked into the room.

"Miss Weasley, Mr Goldstein. Mr Filch is on his way to take you down to the Trophy Room where you'll be polishing awards and various candelabra." He grinned at their dismayed expressions. "They've gotten quite dusty over the summer, I'm afraid."

Sudden panting at the door alerted his attention. "Ah, Mr Filch! They're all yours."

Rose and Christian raised themselves out of their seats and prepared to follow the old caretaker down the hall when they were stopped at the door. "Wands, please," Dolloway said, holding out his hands. The look shared between the two offenders clearly displayed that they were hoping they could sneak out of the door before he had noticed. Reluctantly, they surrendered them.

"Thank you."

Filch led them down the corridor towards the Trophy Room, muttering about "criminals" and "delinquents" under his breath. "Here," he said roughly, gesturing towards the door. "I'll be back to check on you at the end of the two hours, so those trophies better shine."

Rose sighed but followed Christian into the room, rolling up her sleeves and preparing for the long night ahead.

"I heard about your fight with Rose Weasley."

Scorpius looked up in surprise - and slight irritation - at the young girl who was standing at his table in the library. He was about to not-so-politely tell her to bugger off, until he noticed the Potions textbooks in her arms.

She lowered them onto the table and stuck out her hand. "Juliette Bexley."

After a moment's hesitation, he shook it and gestured for her to sit down.

"So," he said. "You're having some trouble with Potions?"

"Duh," she replied. "That's why you're here."
Scorpius bit back his retort, remembering that this was a thirteen year old, and rubbed his temple. "What is it exactly that you find difficult about Potions?"

She considered. "Well, apart from the fact that Xavier-" Scorpius resisted the urge to insist she prefaced it with 'Professor', "-says I don't do a great job of writing essays, I have trouble with the timing and ageing when I'm brewing. And apparently I don't have the best stirring skills."

"So…everything."

She glared at him. "No, my weighing is flawless."

Scorpius didn't know whether to smirk or sigh. He went with a combination.

"Right, well, do you have anything I can help you with here? If you want to practice brewing, we'll have to go down to the Potions classroom."

"I have an essay due on Monday on the history, effects and dangers of the Girding Potion."

"Have you started?"

She nodded, and pulled it out of her bag.

Scorpius skimmed it. Xavier was right; her write-up skills needed work.

"Okay," he said, putting it down. "The bad news is, you need help. The good news is, you've got me."

His tutee gave him some semblance of a smile, and pulled out her quill and ink. She poised her hand on top of the parchment.

"No, no," Scorpius said, reaching for it. "Get a fresh one."

She pursed her lips and raised an eyebrow. Scorpius grimaced at her, and nodded solemnly.

She sighed but did as she was told.

"We're not going to be writing just yet," Scorpius said, resting his elbows on the table. "You need to learn how to plan and execute."

She blinked.

He picked up her original draft. "Look here: the introduction to the Girding Potion is fine, but then you mention one effect of it before going straight into describing its history."

He plucked an old scrap from his satchel and grabbed her quill. "Try it like this."

She watched as he scribbled a basic plan on the parchment. "Our Professor didn't say anything about an evaluation," Juliette said, uncertainly.

Scorpius pointedly exhaled. "Well, I'm your makeshift Professor now, and I say you should do an evaluation."

"You're bossy," she decided.

"You're annoying."

She frowned at him.
"Bullet points, smart-ass," Scorpius said, tapping the parchment. "Let's see what you know."

"You and Malfoy really have it in for each other, don't you?"

Rose stopped scrubbing at Gilderoy Lockhart's "Witch Weekly's Most Charming Smile" trophy to look at him. "Yeah," she said. "I suppose we do."

"How'd you two start fighting anyway?"

"We're always fighting," she said, coyly.

"Why? I mean, besides the fact that he's a massive prick."

She grinned, and resumed polishing. "I guess when you're as competitive as we are, always fighting for first place, there's collateral that comes with it."

"Maybe you intimidate him."

"Why would I intimidate him?" Rose asked dubiously, fixing her sleeve as it fell.

Christian shrugged. "You're smart, beautiful, ambitious. You're miles above everyone here."

Rose blushed despite herself. "That's not true," she said, modestly.

Christian shuffled over to where she was sitting and resumed polishing the Quidditch trophies in a closer proximity. "I heard you made Quidditch team too."

Rose was taken aback by his flattery. She wasn't used to someone being so complimentary of her. In all aspects, she dimly registered. "I only tried out for a reserve position."

"Even so. Your cousin's hard to please, so the rumour goes."

"Al? Yeah, I guess he can be pretty tough." She paused. "Do you play?"

He shook his head. "I used to, but I took a pretty bad fall two years ago in the finals against Slytherin. I've never been as good since then."

"Sorry."

He waved it off. "It's fine. I uh…I've found other hobbies." He looked eager to change the subject. "So, what exactly were you two fighting about this time?"

She looked reluctant to answer. "You know, I'm not sure, exactly," she confessed. "He'd been pestering me all day, trying to rile me up. It worked," she admitted.

"Well, he sounds like a bag of dicks."

She laughed. "Yeah, he is. Listen, I'd rather not talk about Malfoy."

He nodded understandingly, and peered over at her trophy. "So, Lockhart. Talk about a total nutcase, huh?"

"Why do you guys fight so much anyway?"

Scorpius paused his perusal of the third year Potions syllabus.
"What?"

"You and Rose. Do you like her or something?"

"Focus on your essay."

"So you do?"

He ran a hand down his face, tiredly. "No, I do not like her. This look like a therapy session to you or something?"

Juliette shrugged. "My mum always told me that when a boy likes a girl, he's deliberately mean to her."

"You shouldn't always listen to your mum," Scorpius griped. "This had better be the best essay I've ever read."

The young girl rolled her eyes. "Anyway, I thought you have a girlfriend."

"She's not exactly my girlfriend," Scorpius replied without thinking. "Ugh, stop talking to me. I swear, I'm going to ask Xavier if I can resign."

"But people see you two going into the Come-and-Go room all the time. How can she not be your girlfriend? Are you doing grown-up things in there?"

Scorpius rested his face in his hands. His voice came out muffled. "She doesn't have to be my girlfriend for us to do...grown-up things. Last warning, kid."

Juliette sighed dramatically and held up her parchment. "Is this better?"

Scorpius raised his head out of his hands and scanned it. He had to admit, her essay was already miles better just from his basic advice. "Yes."

"Good."

He glanced at his watch. "Alright, we only have five minutes left." He took her planning sheet and checked over to make sure she'd covered all the points and-

"Oi."

Juliette looked up mid-word. "What?"

"The first disaster due to an overdose was in '81, not '82."

She read over her words, and then checked in the textbook. "I didn't see you check in here," she said, her brow furrowed.

Scorpius shook his head, carefully editing through the rest.

"You just remembered that?" Juliette asked in surprise.

He nonchalantly nodded.

"Wow," she said in awe. "You must be really good at Potions."

He spared her a glance, smirking. "Duh. Alright, everything else looks good. If you need me to
scan it over quickly after you've written it, just come and find me in the Great Hall, okay?"

"To see you?" she asked, wide-eyed.

"Yeah."

She nodded, slowly. "Um..okay. Sure. Thanks."

He stood up and slung his bag over his back. "So, same time next week?"

She got up too, cradling her books and parchment in her arms. "Yeah. Thanks, Scorpius."

He gave what she thought might've passed for a smile, and then he was gone.

"So, you have other hobbies? Like what?"

Christian appeared to be hiding a blush. "I joined the choir about a term after my Quidditch career ended, and I've been doing it ever since."

"Choir?" Rose asked. "Like, the students who sing at the celebratory feasts and stuff? With the um...toads?"

"Yeah," Christian said, pressing his lips together to hide his smile. "Although we're trying to get rid of the toads. You know, give the choir a more modern feel."

Given that the only songs Rose had ever heard the choir perform appeared to be The Greatest Hits of the Seventeenth Century, she thought perhaps the removal of the toads was inconsequential, but said nothing.

"Do you have any hobbies?"

Rose stood up to put the polished insignia back into its place on the shelf. "I'm not really in any clubs or anything," she confessed. "But I do volunteer at the Hospital Wing."

"Well, I think any treatment from you would be worth the injury," Christian winked.

Rose laughed, but then her expression soured slightly. "Well, you have a fifty-fifty chance between me and Malfoy, so, you might want to think twice before you deliberately break your leg or something."

"It's just you two?"

She shrugged. "Madam Pomfrey would only accept seventh years with Outstandings in Herbology, Potions, Charms, Defence and Transfiguration, along with a letter of recommendation from Professor McGonagall. Mainly since this is the first year volunteering became an option."

Christian nodded sagely. "Ah, well that explains why it's just you and your bestie."

"Well, that and the fact that most people would rather not spend their free time helping out in the Hospital Wing, I suppose."

"Point taken." He wiped his brow. "Merlin, how many trophies does this room have?"

"We're almost done," Rose pointed out. "Only half an hour to go."

Christian brightened. "The company's not so bad, anyway."
Rose smiled. "It definitely makes it a whole lot more bearable."

They carried on working in mostly comfortable silence, with the occasional question-and-answer or casual comment on the absurdity of some of the awards, and soon enough, Filch was standing at the door, holding up a lantern.

"Detention's over," he said, gruffly. "Get out of here."

The two seventh years hurriedly got to their feet and scrambled for the door.

"Goodnight, Mr Filch," Rose said, quietly as she passed.

The flicker in his eyes made Rose sure that he had heard her, but he showed no response.

Their wands had been left on Professor Dolloway's desk; they lit them for the trek up the staircases and back to their respective Common Rooms.

"Despite the circumstances, I had a really nice time with you tonight," Christian said, as they reached the fourth floor landing. "Really."

Rose met his cheery expression, and noted how easy a person he was to engage with. Not like everyone she knew. "I had fun too," she said. "Well, I mean, it wasn't exactly 'fun', but, you know."

He nodded, grinning. "Yeah, I know." He glanced to his right. "Well, this is me."

Rose stuck out her hand, failing to see Christian's slightly disappointed look. "Goodnight, Christian. Maybe we'll have detention together some other time."

He recovered himself, and twinkled at her. "Maybe. Night, Rose."

As he reached the bronze knocker, he looked back at her once more, thrilled to see that she too had turned around. "Rose," he said again, by means of a farewell.

"Christian."

Rose continued up the stairs, in a good mood despite her first detention since she and Malfoy had used Fire Crabs as ammunition during a heated argument in a Care of Magical Creatures class at the end of fifth year.

"Bibbity-Bobbity-Boo," she said to the Fat Lady's portrait as she reached Gryffindor Tower.

Al and Gen were sitting by the fireplace when she arrived, the former casually catching and throwing his ink pot, while the latter complained that the movement in her periphery was making doing her Ancient Runes homework impossible.

"How was detention?" Gen asked, waving to her as she sat down in-between them.

"Good," Rose said. "Better than expected."

"Detention, good?" Al said in disbelief. "The only 'good' detention I had was when Eliza Davies and I were forced to re-shelve the Potions supply room. Suffice it to say, we didn't do much re-shelving." He looked at his cousin in amazement. "Were you doing anything naughty, Rose?"

She waved him off. "Of course not," she sniffed. "Christian and I were just having a nice conversation is all."
"Goldstein?" Gen asked, her eyes widening. "The singing, dreamy one?"

"The very same."

Gen yawned and stood up, stretching. "Well, I'm off to bed. I've had an exhausting day, what with all the Weasley versus Malfoy crap going on."

The two watched her disappear, and then Al got to his feet as well, tucking the ink pot back into his bag. "Are you heading up soon, too?"

She nodded, getting slowly to her feet, and hugged her cousin goodnight. "See you tomorrow."

"Night, Rosie."

As she walked up the staircase and joined Gen in their darkened room, she realised that she had an answer to her speculation two nights before: their impasse had not, in fact, lasted another day.
"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

Chapter 4: I'm The One For A Good Time Call or, What Happened To Just Messing Around?

Rating: M mainly for language, and I can't discount any funny business later on

Disclaimer: I work with only what the infallible J.K. Rowling has given me.

"Guess who has a date for Hogsmeade?"

Rose looked up as Gen dropped her books and homework onto the table with a loud thud. "How radical for you," she commented dryly, though her mouth lifted up into a smile. "Who's the lucky guy?"

Gen shrugged. "Just some Ravenclaw from Runes. The point is: he's gorgeous, and he wants to take me out."

"So I'm stuck with Al, then?"

Gen paused. "Didn't he say he had a date too?"

Rose frowned, shaking her head. "I don't think so. He never mentioned any date."

Gen sat down heavily next to her. "Oh." She perked up. "Hey, why don't you go with Christian?"

Rose pursed her lips. "I don't think we're really friends or anything yet. Besides, a guy like him probably has plans already." She rolled up her finished Charms essay and took out her Potions textbook. "Don't worry about me. Al and I'll have a great time."

Gen nodded thoughtfully, and took out her own books. "Sorry to ditch you."

Rose looked at her friend from the corner of her eye. "Hey, I used to go with Nate, remember? Leave you and Al for the day?"

Gen smiled. "I remember. Come on, this Potions essay isn't going to write itself."

"I realised something."

"That's new."
"No one asked your opinion, Toby," Liv said in a sniffly voice.

"What's up, Liv?" Scorpius asked, tilting his book down to look at her.

She sat down and nestled herself in the crook of his arm; from behind her, Scorpius closed his book in disappointment. "This weekend marks our two year anniversary."

Toby snorted, and then looked accusingly at a third year reading a book when Liv shot him a pugnacious look.

"It does?"

"Well," Liv amended, shifting slightly and burying her hand in Scorpius' cashmere jumper. "We went on our first date during the first Hogsmeade trip of fifth year."

"Oh. Right."

"It's not technically an anniversary." The furious look Liv threw Toby made it clear that his assessment was unwanted. Unfazed, he went on, "Because the Hogsmeade trip this year isn't the exact day it was two years ago."

"Well, then, this is sort of your two year anniversary with Marie Gibbons." At the sound of her name, Toby visibly tensed. "Well, Marie Gibbons' vomit."

"She never told me she was allergic to ginger," Toby mumbled, while Scorpius rolled around with laughter.

Liv raised an eyebrow. "Is that what she told you?"

"Bite me, Liv."

"I'd rather vomit on you."

"Stuff it, both of you," Scorpius said, too tired to mediate. "Let me read in peace."

Liv rolled her eyes, and flounced upstairs. Toby sighed in relief. "Yeah, Happy Anniversary, mate. I'm thrilled for you."

"Don't be sad, Tobias," Scorpius said without looking up. "I'm sure if you ask nicely, Marie will give you another chance."

Toby shot his scrunched up parchment at his friend before going back to his essay. "I've changed my mind. You two are a match made in Heaven."

With his head bent close to the desk in concentration, he missed the strangled look Scorpius threw him as the girls' dormitory door slammed shut with an almighty bang.

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The day of the Hogsmeade trip was crisp and perfect. Rose looked out of the window into the courtyard below, observing with slight dolefulness the couples holding hands as they made their way into the waiting carriages. It would be her first Hogsmeade trip without Nate and his jokes on the ride there in two years, his warm embrace on the journey back.

"Looking for Christian?"

She turned at the sound of Gen's voice, and bit her lip. "Just being nostalgic."
Gen sobered at her friend's mournful look, and gave her a comforting squeeze. "Hey, you did the right thing, Rosie," she said, pushing away an auburn strand of hair. "You're not still cut up about it, right?"

Rose exhaled. "No, it's not that. I just…I just forgot what it's like to be without a Hogsmeade date."

Gen looked wretched. "You know what? I'll call A-the Ravenclaw bloke I'm seeing. He'll understand."

Rose shook her head vigorously. "No, I'm fine. Really. I have Al."

"Doesn't matter. We'll have a good time, the three of us. It'll be far more fun anyway."

"Gen. I want you to go and snog some fit Ravenclaw boy, okay? I'll be far more upset if you don't go with him."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

After searching her resolute expression, Gen sighed. "Fine."

Rose, eager to change the subject, looked her friend up and down. "You look nice."

Gen did a little twirl, adjusting her scarf in her reflection. "You don't think it's too much, do you?" she asked, anxiously.

Rose shook her head. "You look great."

"Thanks." Gen's reflection grimaced, and then turned to properly scrutinise her friend. "Dressing for comfort?"

Rose looked down at her Gryffindor jumper, denim jeans and raised a hand to feel her thick beanie. "I guess. It's just Al, right?"

"Oh. Right." Gen scrunched up her face, and then shook her head. "Set a precedent for the year, Rose! Go put on some real clothes."

Rose huffed, but did as she was told. She re-emerged - sans jumper - in a leather jacket and knee-high boots. "Better?"

Gen flashed her teeth. "Perfect." She checked her watch. "Come on, we don't want to miss the second wave."

"Hurry up."

"I'm going as fast as I can."

Scorpius tapped his foot impatiently. "You know, for someone going stag, you're sure not dressing like it."

Toby threw his friend a look of pity. "You see, you say 'stag', I say, 'freedom'."

"Well, you say 'ginger intolerance' and I say 'gag reflex'. Honestly, Toby, did you have to stick your tongue so far down her windpipe?"
"Laugh all you want, Malfoy," Toby said, securing his belt. "But I'll be sticking my tongue down a whole lot of windpipes today. Have fun with Liv."

"Did someone call me?"

Toby rolled his eyes as the door widened and Liv's reflection joined his. "Morning, Liv."

"Morning, Toby. You're looking dapper."

He grunted, but didn't reply.

Scorpius turned to get a thorough look at his date. With her hair up in a messy ponytail, black jeans tucked into brown boots, and a grey pea coat, she looked like every mother's dream.

"We'll head down first," he told her, shrugging on his own coat. "Give Casanova here a minute alone with his reflection."

"You laugh now," Toby said, oblivious as they slipped away. "But when I come back with two girls on each arm, I'll never let you—OI! Scorpius!"

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Rose turned around in surprise as Gen followed her and Al into the carriage.

"Gen, really, I said I'm fine. Go!"

Gen looked perplexed. "Oh, no, I'm uh…meeting him there."

Rose shut the door behind them, and frowned. "That's odd. Isn't it customary for dates to arrive at Hogsmeade together?"

Gen brushed her off. "Oh, I know, but that's just how they do it in uh…Sweden."

"He's from Sweden?—"

"I've never noticed that tree before. Did you know there was a tree right at the gates? That was a nice place to plant a tree."

Rose looked thoroughly agog at her friend's behaviour. "What did you say his name was, Gen?"

"Oh, look! More trees. And have you ever seen the leaves so orange before? I can't remember the last time I saw such orange leaves."

As Gen continued to rapidly commentate out of the window, the two cousins covertly pressed their heads together.

"If she continues like this, she's going to scare him off," Rose whispered.

"I'm sure the guy — whoever he is — can take it," Al said, seriously. "I wouldn't worry about him."

"It's not him I'm worried about," Rose said, grimacing as Gen stuck her entire torso out of the window.

"Bye!" Rose waved as Gen set off for Honeydukes, the latter of whom had miraculously recovered once they had arrived in the village. She waved back, and disappeared into the crowd.
"Right." Rose looked around, unsuccessfully scoping out any area that seemed only moderately populated. "We could try Zonko's? Or," she threw a regaling look at Al. "Apparently it's Poppy's first day at the Three Broomsticks."

"Poppy?" Al's eyes seemed to glaze over. "Madam Rosmerta's daughter?"

Rose nodded, amused.

Al seemed to suddenly come to. For some reason, he looked rather sheepish. "I'd love to, Rosie, but I, uh...have to be somewhere."

"Wha-where're you going?" Rose asked, thunderstruck.

Al looked apologetic. "I uh...I have a sort of date, actually."

Rose crossed her arms. "With whom?"

He shrugged nonchalantly. "Some sixth year. I thought I told you."

"Ah," Rose said sagely. "Finally got through every girl in our year, huh? And no, you didn't."

"Uh...nearly. Sorry Rosie, it must've slipped my mind."

She softened at the fidgeting hand by his side that seemed to be rolling an invisible Snitch. "You alright?" she asked, laying a hand on his shoulder.

"Yeah, I'm good," he replied, slightly distractedly. "Listen, I'm sorry to ditch you, Rosie."

She waved it off. "I'll be fine. I can probably find Lily or something."

Al grimaced. "Date."

"It's a day for the Potters, huh?"

"Louis is free!" Al grinned. "For the first and last time."

Rose shook her head, pursing her lips to hide her smile. "Go on, then. She'll be waiting for you."

He nodded and jogged off.

Rose stamped her feet and looked around. There were always people in the Three Broomsticks at this time; she was bound to find a friend in there.

After a quick survey of the room, she realised that Louis wasn't there, but recognised her other dorm mates seated in a booth behind the bar. She headed for the barkeeper first, intent on getting her hands on a warm Butterbeer.

Poppy lit up the moment she saw her. "Rose!" she said, waving so excitedly she splashed the countertop with bubbling liquid. "I was hoping to see you!"

"Hi, Poppy," Rose said, resting her elbows on the countertop, relieved to have found a friendly face. "How've you been?"

The young girl looked down at the mess she'd created, and bit her lip. "Well, first day jitters. Mum's been helping me, but uh..." She inclined her head at her predecessor, who was looking more frazzled than Rose had ever seen her. "She's having a little trouble letting go. How're things with you? Louis was here earlier, said something about-"
The two girls turned to see Madam Rosmerta stalking over, shaking her wet washcloth with such vigour that it was spraying everyone as she passed by. "I told you, keep the conversations brief and light! This table has been waiting for-" She drizzled off when she caught sight of the girl who was holding up her daughter. "Well, if it isn't Rose Weasley!"

Rose smiled bashfully, and returned the landlady's embrace. Rosmerta reached behind the bar and came back out with a tankard full of foaming golden liquid; Rose laid two Sickles on the counter in response.

"Where's that hunky boyfriend of yours?" Rosmerta asked, peering around Rose as if she might find Nate hiding behind her.

Rose smiled sadly, wrapping her hands around her drink. "Wouldn't know."

"Oh, poppet," Rosmerta said, comfortingly. She seemed to catch a glimpse of something, and brightened. "Well, I wouldn't be too worried. See you later. Penelope!"

Rose was about to ask her what she meant when she heard footsteps come to a halt behind her. "Rose?"

She turned, narrowly avoiding sloshing her drink, and came face to face with her detention mate from Choir. "Christian!"

He grinned bashfully. "Hi. What're you up to?" He did a quick sweep of the room. "No Al or Gen?"

She shrugged. "They're on dates. What about you?"

He gestured to a blonde boy in intense conversation with a pretty Hufflepuff. "Nick ah...made a friend."

"Third-wheeling, huh?"

He laughed. "Looks like. Who were you off to find?"

She inclined her head towards the group of girls she had spotted earlier. "Oh, uh, just my dorm mates, I guess."

"You-" He paused. "Do you want to maybe find a seat together?"

She smiled. "Sounds great."

"Are we bad people?"

Al looked up from his perusal of the menu and looked at the girl opposite him. "Why? What've we done?"

Gen sighed. "We lied to our best friend."

Al put the menu down, and reached for her hand. "Listen, this whole...thing is really new to me—to us—and there's no point getting Rosie worked up about it if it doesn't even work out anyway. You shouldn't feel bad about it."
Genevieve felt very bad about it. "I suppose." She looked around the room and shuddered. "I hate this place."

Al laughed, noticing with distaste the disgusting abundance of pink surrounding them. "I know. But it was the only place we knew Rose would never come."

"Well, only because you turned down Gladrags Wizardwear."

"Hey, those socks are criminal."

Gen seemed to be relaxing, looking down as Al's thumb traced circles on the back of her hand.

Scorpius was not fond of overly sweet treats. His face, a mask of dignity, critically surveyed the entirety of the shop, passing disinterestedly over the toffees and treacles, until it came to a halt at his preferred mode of confectionary: chocolate.

He made a calm beeline for the structure, his gaze already honing in on the new flavour of double dark. He was mere feet away when a group of third years - or fourth years, or fifth years; they all looked the same to him - toppled in, clambering around his monolith of chocolate, pointing and laughing and breathing all over it.

His eye twitched.

"Scorpius." He felt a hand on his shoulder. "You're scaring the kids."

"My chocolate," he said, pointing at it. "Head Boy coming through," he announced, marching into the throng. He calmly seized three boxes and reappeared. "What did you want?" he asked, dusting off his coat.

Liv shook her head in amusement. "Nothing for me."

"Are you sure? I'm paying, so… ."

She refused again. "I'll just have to steal some of that," she said, coyly, tapping a finger on the top box. Scorpius' eye gave another twitch.

"Really, if you want something, you should buy it now."

"No, no, I'm fine. Let's pay and get out of here."

Scorpius sighed, and headed for the counter.

"So, indulge me," Christian said, pouring more gravy onto his roast pork. 'How did you manage to accidentally cast your first non-verbal spell in third year? Or was that just a rumour I heard?"

Rose coughed over a bubble of laughter. "It was an accident! I was just tapping my wand against my leg while I was reading through a bunch of spells, and the next thing I knew, Gen was hanging by her ankles."

Christian snorted, and swallowed. "You Levicorpus'd your best friend?"

"Not on purpose!"

He chuckled again. "Rose Weasley, you are one of a kind."
She went pink, and busied herself by taking another sip of Butterbeer. "And what about you? Have you ever cursed a friend by accident?"

Christian shook his head. "I guess you wouldn't call me an accidental genius, or anything," he said, laughing. He perked up. "But I did bewitch my mother to breathe bubbles for a week after she took my broom away when I was ten. Like Golliwog does in Golliwog's Great Adventure."

"Golliwog's Great Adventure?"

"Yeah," he said, enthusiastically. "Have you never read that book?"

Rose bit her lip and shook her head.

Christian looked scandalised. "It's a classic!"

Rose shrugged. "My mum raised us with the same books and films she was raised with. You know, Snow White and Sleeping Beauty and the rest."

"Your dad, didn't he grow up with books from...here?"

"My dad, uh...he never had that much as a kid," Rose said, absently. "He only knew of a few classics."

Christian looked exceedingly flustered at this sudden change of topic. "Oh, Rose, I'm really sorry, I never meant to bring anything up like that-"

"It's fine," she said, brushing it off. "It's really okay." She paused. "I'm better for it."

"I'll just have to show you, then."

She smiled at him over her Butterbeer. "That'd be nice."

Christian nodded, and took a audible gulp of his drink. "So, is that your favourite film, then? Snow White?"

Rose's finger traced the rim of her tankard as she pondered. "I was always a Princess and the Frog person myself."

Christian's eyes lit up. "I know that one!" he said, excitedly. "The one where she turns into the frog, right?"

Rose's face must've clued Christian in to her surprise because he chuckled loudly. "My dad grew up with those films, too," he said, shrugging. "I watched it a couple years ago."

They sat in a comfortable silence. Rose couldn't remember the last time she'd spoken to a guy - who wasn't related to her, that was, or Nate - with such ease. Especially given that she'd only met said guy less than a week before. Looking at Christian's small smile, she thought he might be thinking the same thing.

The sudden brightening of the wooden table alerted her attention; she glanced outside, amazed to see that the sun was coming out. She eyed their empty plates.

"Shall we-"

"We should-"
They both laughed, Rose ducking slightly as her face reddened.

"Should we get the bill?" she tried again, reaching behind her for her bag.

Christian did the same, pulling out a Galleon from his pocket.

Rose stiffened slightly when it immediately came to her attention that the amount of money he pulled out was twice the cost of his meal. He met her questioning gaze with a soft smile. "I'll cover it."

"Absolutely not," Rose said, vigorously shaking her head. "We both pay. You paying would make this, um…"

"Me paying for your meal doesn't automatically make this a date, you know."

"For propriety's sake, then," Rose insisted. "We only met a few days ago, after all."

Christian looked slightly uncomfortable, but ceased his protesting as Rose laid some money down on the table.

"Where to?" she asked, hastily changing the subject, and then promptly realised she hadn't even asked him if he wanted to spend the afternoon together. "No — I'm sorry — I didn't even ask if you had any plans!"

Christian laughed at her horrified expression, and shook his head. "I'm completely free," he said, and paused before leaning in towards her. "You have some hair caught in your zipper," he explained, removing it.

Rose flushed, and murmured a thanks.

"Right," he said, smiling. "Where to, then?"

"Um…Honeydukes? I could use a re-stock."

Christian nodded, beaming, and pushed open the door, shrugging into his jacket. "Ladies first."

Scorpius shifted his weight as he glanced once again into the shop window of Gladrags Wizardwear. He tapped his foot. How long did it really take for one to buy a single, silly dress?

He sighed and focused longingly on the interior of the store to his left. The books stacked from floor to ceiling looked incredibly inviting; he paused, and then cracked open the door that Liv had entered fifteen minutes before.

"Liv?" he called, peeking around in case she was in his line of vision. Her muffled voice responded from behind a particularly tall rack of floor length dresses. He heard footsteps, and she scurried out.

"Oh, good, I was just about to send Mr Murray to come and get you. Which one do you think goes better with my skin tone?" She waggled the two identical dresses she was holding up.

"They're exactly the same," Scorpius said dubiously.

"Not the dresses, the belts."

He lowered his gaze to the two bits of leather that cinched both dresses in at the waist. Because that's all belts did, as far as he was concerned.
"Wha—I don’t know, Liv."

"Come on," she said, jiggling the one on her right. "This burgundy one is slightly nicer, isn't it?"

"If you knew which one you wanted to get, why did you bother asking me?" Scorpius said, barely trying to hide his impatience.

Liv pouted childishly, though there was a glint in her eyes that made the blonde by the door feel slightly unnerved. The store clerk patted her gently on the arm. "Don't worry, dear," he said, nodding whilst taking the preferred outfit from her. "My boyfriend doesn't enjoy helping me shop either."

"I'm not her—oh, nevermind," Scorpius said, sticking his hands in his coat pocket. "Listen, you take your time in here, choosing all your belts and whatnot, and then come and find me in Tomes and Scrolls."

He stepped out again, fastening his coat as another vicious gust of wind swept by, and turned in the opposite direction, heading straight towards the bookshop.

A bell tinkled as he entered, and he inhaled the familiar scent of old leather and parchment. Wasting no time, he headed directly for his favourite section, running his fingers along the distressed spines as he browsed.

He had just opened a book when he heard a loud cough from the till, and craned his head around the bookcases. He closed the book, keeping his finger in the pages, and walked towards the origin of the noise.

"Mr Barnett," Scorpius said, politely, inclining his head as soon as he was close enough.

"Scorpius, my dear boy!" the old man said, placing the stack of books on the counter and trotting over to shake his hand. "It's been a while, son. My, you've grown again!"

Scorpius gave him a rare smile and shrugged. "So my mother says, too."

Mr Barnett brightened. "Your mother came in here a few days ago, looking for your Christmas present, I believe!"

"It's September."

"Well, you know your mother - always wanting to be ahead of the times."

"Did she get me anything good?"

The bookstore clerk tapped his nose knowingly. "All in good time, Scorpius."

Scorpius rolled his eyes, though he was still smiling.

"Now, I must get back to my sorting." The wizened man clapped a hand on Scorpius' shoulder, which was no easy feat since that was where his head stood level. "Take care of yourself, Scorpius, and say hello to your father for me."

"I will."

Once the old man was gone, Scorpius retreated back into his small haven, leaning against the bookcases and wishing for once that Liv would take as much time as she desired.
"I always forget how many children there are in there," Rose said, shuddering as they stepped out of Honeydukes, laden with bags.

"Depends how you define 'children'," Christian pointed out. "Agatha!" He adopted a falsetto and nasally squawk. "If you don't take your slimy hands off my Toothflossing Stringmints, I shall be forced to slap you with my walking stick!" He paused, keeping the door propped open while Rose, giggling, stepped to the side to allow two young girls to pass inside.

As they did, Rose caught a glimpse of some foreign language, probably Spanish. To her surprise, Christian let out a quiet chuckle as he released his hold on the door.

"What?" she asked, suspiciously.

Christian looked slightly bashful to have been caught, but shrugged. "They think we make a cute couple."

Rose was far more interested in the fact that he was adept enough to understand their conversation. "You speak Spanish?"

He nodded. "My nan's Spanish," he said. "We spoke it at home a lot." He began to walk. "Do you speak another language?"

Rose shook her head regretfully. "No. I wish I did. I mean, I can read hieroglyphics, if that counts."

Christian halted in his tracks to look at her. "Really? Egyptian?"

Rose nodded. "It's a bit useless, honestly, but after we took a family holiday to Egypt, I couldn't get enough of the culture and history for the next few months." His silence caused her to glance at him.

He exhaled. "Wow."

She blushed - she seemed to be doing that a lot today - and pulled her jacket a little tighter. "I wish I could speak another language, though," she said. "I've always wanted to learn Latin."

"You have a thing for old languages, huh?"

She smiled. "It would make learning spells a lot more interesting."

"You make a good point."

They came to a halt as they considered which shop to enter next.

"Was there anything you needed?" Rose asked, remembering how he had offered to stop by various shops for school things she might need.

He looked around, biting his lip. "Well, I ah—no, it would take a little while. I'm all set."

Rose furrowed her brow as she followed his gaze. "Did you need something from Maestro's?" she asked.

He shrugged. "Flitwick asked if I would have a look around for some more material for our upcoming concerts," he explained. "You know, for the sake of the whole 'modern' thing."

Rose laughed. "It's really no problem, I don't mind at all."
"Are you sure?" he asked. "It'll be awfully boring."

In all honesty, Rose did think it sounded extremely dull, but she thought Christian's company might make up for it. She nonchalantly looked at the shops around them, slightly disheartened to see that she was surrounded by some of her favourites.

She didn't notice Christian's eyes following her face until he cleared his throat.

"You know what?" he said, smiling. "How about I pop in and have a browse inside, and you take a little while for yourself - they've just opened up a new branch of the Owl Emporium, see?" He pointed to the decorative cages in the shop window. "You could buy your owl some treats."

Rose hesitated, but nodded. "Alright, sounds good."

"I'll come and find you when I'm done."

He waited until she had entered inside before heading off towards Dominic Maestro's, whistling contentedly. Rose watched him leave through the large window, oblivious to her beaming reflection.

而 it had started off promisingly enough, the day could have gone better, Al thought.

He sneaked a look over to his companion; she was gazing so enchantedly into each shop window - even the dull and ugly ones - that Al thought she might be avoiding making conversation.

"Is everything alright, Gen?" he asked, as she oohed at the display of quills in a shop window.

"What, of course!" she said, too animatedly. "Everything's great!"

Everything was not great.

She couldn't understand why the day's magic had fizzled out so soon. After all, they had - just the two of them - spent the Hogsmeade trip together before, especially in the last years when Rose was preoccupied with Nate. But today was different. Never before had they planned a…tryst.

Perhaps that was the problem. She remembered with dismay the way their hands had knocked together as they walked, but neither could work up the courage to grasp the other's. Once Rose had been vetoed as a subject of conversation - since her name was accompanied with another bout of guilt from both parties - they seemed to be lost for a common ground. And they couldn't bring up school; they might as well loudly proclaim that they had absolutely nothing to talk about.

She sighed, louder than anticipated, and then swallowed when Al gave her a suspicious look.

"Are you sure everything's okay?" he asked again, and the moroseness in his eyes made her feel wretched.

"I'm fine," she said, again, pretending that yet another indistinctive shop window had arrested her attention. But when she looked closer into the glass, his reflection made her halt in her tracks.

"No, Al, I just uh…" She glimpsed at his raised eyebrows. "I um…" She began to feel panicked. "I…"

And brilliance struck.

"It's my time of the month!"
Al looked terrified. He gaped at her, blinking rapidly.

"Yes, it's my time, and the cramps are just awful, awful today, Al! I'm sorry, I've been suffering with them all day - it's been downright miserable but we were having such a good time so I didn't want to mention it, but it's getting quite bad now, and I uh...well, you understand, don't you?"

She couldn't tell if he looked more traumatised or relieved.

"Oh!" he said, in a strangled voice. He cleared his throat. "Should I take you back? Can you uh... walk?"

Gen held back a grin. "Oh, I should be able to manage, don't worry. I think heading back might be best."

He nodded many times in quick succession.

"But you can stay!" she said, eyes wide. "I couldn't drag you away, Al. Really, you stay and have a good time. I'll just go back to school."

"I'm taking you back, Gen," he said, firmly, and she melted.

Huddled in Al's arms as he escorted her back towards the waiting carriages, she wondered why the rest of the day hadn't come to her nearly as naturally as that one stupid lie.

Rose circled the shop for the fifth time, her purchases already in a bag, but still, with no sign of Christian, she was reluctant to leave. She pursed her lips, wondering if she should look at that rather nice owl cage just one more time, but since the man behind the counter was beginning to look suspicious, she decided against it, and left the emporium.

She stood outside for a short while, her gaze drawn back every so often to the large music shop, but the door remained resolutely closed.

Biting her lip, she considered the bookshop on her right. It looked warm inside, far warmer than where she stood out in the cold.

She shook her head, shaking her hair out of her face. There was no harm in looking for a few minutes.

She stepped in, hearing the familiar chime of the bell above the door and, with her limited timeframe in mind, made a beeline for the nearest bookshelf.

She absentmindedly picked up the book at the top of one of the piles, flicking through it as she walked. Something caught her eye, and she groaned, disappointed; it seemed that every book released in the past two decades settled on the protagonist name of either Harry, Ronald or Neville. *James* if the author was feeling slightly adventurous. Really, if she had to pick up another book like that she might—

She was cut off from her thoughts as she nearly stumbled headway into the figure perusing a book in front of her; she could be so clumsy sometimes-

"I'm so sorry, I'm not sure what's going on with me today—Oh." Upon noticing the person she had collided with, she carried on in a very different tone of voice. "I take that back."

"Really, Weasley, is it too much to ask that you wait more than two short weeks before yet again
ruining my day?"

"You moronic, delusional *prat,*" Rose snapped, all previous thoughts of silently ignoring him vanishing. "Don't you dare blame me for what happened in Defence, it was your own stupid fault for harassing—no, *tormenting* me—"

"Ah, ah, ah," Scorpius tutted, pointing at the sign above their heads. "Quiet, Weasley, a bookshop is a place of serenity and soundlessness. I trust you've been in one before."

"I've just about had enough of you for the rest of my damn life," Rose hissed, her fingers noticeably twitching as they grasped on tightly to the book in her hands.

"How utterly revolutionary for you." Scorpius turned away disinterestedly. "Is that why you look so awful today? Did your little epiphany keep you up all night?"

"Well, I know what kept you up all night."

"I cannot tell you how amusing I find it that you continuously try and use my own sexual prowess to insult me."

"So said the serial rapist."

"Your comments sting, as usual."

Rose shot him one last ugly look, and then proceeded to sidestep him. "Oh, look," she said, picking up a book and shoving it into his chest. "They've written your life story."

Scorpius looked at it quickly, and then smirked before putting *What Not To Do With Your Wand* back on top of the pile. He turned to see Rose's retreating figure.

"Shall I buy it for your dear friend Christian?" he called.

She stiffened, and whirled on him. "If you even so much as *look* at him—"

"It has a nice ring to it, don't you think?" Scorpius carried on. "The Prude and The Christian."

"I'm serious, Malfoy, if you do *anything* to jeopardise my day with him, I swear—"

"Is that Rose Weasley I hear?"

Rose froze as Mr Barnett resurfaced, a wide smile on his face. "Ah, I thought I smelled civility and peace."

"Hi, Mr Barnett," Rose said, her face still stricken with annoyance. She sighed deeply. "You appear to have a pest control problem." The problem scoffed in the background, but said nothing.

He laughed loudly. "I trust Scorpius has been keeping you company."

She grimaced in response. "Not by choice, I assure you." In the background, Scorpius grunted in assent.

"Speaking of company," Mr Barnett said. "Where is yours? That handsome boy you're always with, or the pretty girl?"

"Al and Gen are both on dates," Rose said, ruefully.

"No, no, not your cousin Albus," Mr Barnett said, waving a hand. "The brown haired boy with
"Oh," Rose said, and the hollowness of her voice actually caused the blonde behind her to look up, not that she noticed. "Nate. Uh...we're not together anymore."

"No? Well, I'm sorry, dear. It's no fun being alone."

Rose smiled at him. "I'm not alone," she said. "My friend is just in Maestro's, buying some sheet music."

"I see," Mr Barnett said, peering at her over his spectacles. "And who is this friend?"

"Christian. Christian Goldstein."

Mr Barnett's eyes lit up. "Oh, that reminds me." He gestured for Rose to follow him as he walked towards Scorpius; she reluctantly followed. "That book that the two of you were asking about, by that Christina lady, it's just been delivered!"

"Oh, no, that's alright-"

"Nonsense, you were both asking me about it the last time you came in — it's just here by the window, see?"

The two students followed him, careful to stand on either side of him so as to maximise the distance between them.

"Here, a copy for each of you!"

The two Heads obediently took a book each and proceeded to flip though, filling the silence with the stirring of pages; Mr Barnett seemed to be holding back a laugh at their resolute determination not to speak to one another. He was about to comment on this when the store bell once again tinkled.

"Oh, Rose, there you are!"

Rose looked up as Christian hurried over, two shopping bags in his hands. "Sorry it took so long; they just got a massive delivery of old Stubby Boardman music and I just had to take a peek — I ended up buying them, wouldn't you know."

Rose smiled, relieved. "Did you get everything you needed?"

He nodded, jiggling the bags.

It was then that he tore his gaze away from Rose, and noticed the other two standing beside her. "Scorpius," he acknowledged, pointedly putting an arm around the redhead beside him. "I'm Christian," he said, reaching out to shake the bookshop owner's hand. "Rose's friend."

"Ah, so this is Christian," Mr Barnett said, his eyes twinkling. "Rose was just telling me about you."

Rose coloured. "Just in passing."

From Mr Barnett's other side, Scorpius stifled a moue. "Right," he said, pulling out his wallet. "Not that this hasn't been an absolute ball, but I think I'll get back to Liv now. Next time, Mr Barnett." He handed him three Sickles, and strode out without looking back.

"Wonder what got into him," Christian said, scratching his head.
"Something fatal, hopefully," Rose replied in a clipped voice, before yelping after Mr Barnett smacked her with a rather heavy poetry anthology.

"Trust you to run into Scorpius Malfoy the very minute I leave you alone," Christian said jovially, undeterred by Rose's still sour expression.

"Well, it was more thirty minutes after you left me alone. Technically."

Christian's eyes widened. "Thirty minutes? I had no idea I was gone for so long. Sorry Rose."

She smiled at him, waving off his apology. "It's fine, I usually like a little time to go and see Mr Barnett anyway." She grimaced. "Unfortunately, someone else had the same idea."

Christian laughed at her accusatory tone, as if it was somehow unforgivable that someone else should partake in Mr Barnett's company.

Rose's mouth lifted up into a smile at Christian's infectious positivity and looked around, clicking her teeth as she considered their next destination.

"Oh, no."

She looked at Christian at his sudden change of tone. "What?"

He pointed at the greying sky, tutting. "That's inconvenient." He bit his lip. "Would you laugh if I asked if we could go back to the Three Broomsticks?"

"I think that's a great idea."

Rose led the way back in, waving at Poppy when she saw her wiping down the counter on the other side of the bar; she nodded appreciatively when she noticed that Rose was still with Christian. Although Madam Rosmerta was nowhere in sight, Rose thought she might be trying her luck if she distracted the new bartender twice.

"Two Butterbeers, please," Christian told the man behind the bar. "They have a great new flavour," he said, turning to Rose. "You're not allergic to ginger, are you?" he asked, suddenly.

"No, why?"

"Oh, I just had this date that once — never mind."

Rose squinted slightly in confusion, but led it slide. She looked around the inn, which, past three o'clock, still showed no signs of clearing the lunch crowd. There was a soft melody playing on the radio, warming the pub with its pleasant tunes.

Rose immediately groaned, and realising her faux pax, glanced at her date, only to see that his face was scrunched up in distaste as well.

She pressed her lips together to stop her smile. "Worst song ever, right?"

He rolled his eyes. "My mum is obsessed with the Wicked Nymphs. I've heard this song about a thousand times."

"You're preaching to the choir," Rose said, equally as hollowly. "My grandma and aunt own every album."
"That's not even the worst part," Christian continued, thanking the bartender as the drinks were put on the countertop. "Flitwick's making us perform it at the Halloween Feast."

"It's got round to Flitwick?"

"Hagrid showed him," Christian said, morosely. "If you ask me, the only thing spooky about that song is how it can be everywhere at the same time."

Rose laughed, leading the way to an empty table. Once they were seated, Rose lifted up her drink.
"To really lousy songs."

Christian chortled loudly. "To good company making those lousy songs a little more bearable."

"To good company," Rose repeated, clinking their tankards.

"Really, you should tell Flitwick that he should just stick to good old seventeenth century hits. The older the better."

Rose looked out of the window, the great castle coming into view just as the rain began to subside.

Christian batted her away playfully, opening the door to the carriage and gesturing for Rose to exit first. "You should watch our performance."

Rose grinned impishly. "Don't I have to? You are singing at the Halloween Feast, aren't you?"

Christian's cheeks went slightly pink. "Oh, right. I knew that."

Rose clamped her mouth shut to stop her smile from spreading across her entire face. She absentmindedly picked up a discarded leaf balancing precariously on the fountain's edge and dropped it in, watching as ripples spread over the reflective surface.

"Are you musical?" he asked, eyes lifted in question.

Rose shrugged. "I guess I like to sing."

"Anyone I would know?"

Rose thought for a second. "I'm not sure; I mainly know Muggle songs, on account of my grandma and aunt overplaying Celestina Warbeck."

"The same ones who enjoy the Wicked Nymphs, I presume?"

Rose nodded, grimly. "I like old music. You ever heard of Foreigner?"

"It's only my dad's favourite," Christian spluttered, beaming. "I'm guessing you like AC/DC too?"

Rose blushed, and nodded again.

Christian paused, and then grinned sideways at her. "You….shook me all night long."

Rose raised her eyebrows in surprise, and then gestured for him to continue.

"You really took me when you-"

Rose jumped in, laughing. "Shook me all night long!"
Christian chuckled, seemingly unable to take his eyes off his companion. Rose noticed this, and turned a faint crimson. She was doing this a lot today.

She noted in disappointment that they had reached the fourth floor. By the way Christian had noticeably slowed down their pace, he seemed resistant to end the day. Still, they walked on.

"It seems a little backwards, you dropping me off," Christian said, once they had arrived at the bronze knocker. "Are you sure you don't want me to walk you up? I'd be happy to."

"Don't be silly," Rose dismissed. "Here's fine." Her tone softened. "I had a really nice time with you today. I guess fate works in mysterious ways, huh? What with us both being ditched by our friends, I mean."

Christian smiled, his eyes, as always, twinkling. "I'd say it worked out for the best."

There was a pause as Rose looked down at the stone floor, and Christian still looked at her.

"I guess I'll see you on Monday?" he asked, breaking the silence.

She met his gaze and nodded. "Yeah."

"Bye, Rose."

"Bye, Christian."

She had walked about ten paces before his voice stopped her. "Rose?"

She turned, expectant.

"I uh...I had a really nice time too."

His eyes said it all, even when his face remained forcedly neutral.

She didn't know exactly what made her do it, but then Rose was closing the distance between them, lifting up onto her toes and pressing her lips against his cheek. Christian, looking thoroughly bewildered, blinked, and upon locking his gaze on Rose again, leaned down and pressed his lips softly, but firmly, against hers.
"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

Chapter 5: Why Won't The World Revolve Around Me? or, I Hate To Turn Up Out Of The Blue Uninvited

Rating: M mainly for language, and I can't discount any funny business later on

Disclaimer: I work with only what the infallible J.K. Rowling has given me.

"Trust our Rose to bag a guy like Christian Goldstein," Gen said around the sausage in her mouth as they sat in the Great Hall on Monday morning.

Rose hastily looked around the quickly filling room. "Could you keep your voice down? I don’t need every person at Hogwarts knowing about Christian and me."

Al cleared his throat from beside her. "You might want to let him know that."

Rose raised her eyebrows in confusion and swivelled around to see Christian plonking himself down merrily beside her.

"Morning, Rose!" he said, leaning in to brush his lips against her cheek. "You don't mind if I join you?" He shifted his attention to Al and Gen; they shook their heads as he swung his legs over the bench.

"I heard about you making Captain, Albus," Christian said, helping himself to some toast. "Congratulations."

Al swallowed, and waved his hand noncommittally, but he was sitting up noticeably straighter. "Oh, you know, it's no big deal." He paused. "Rose was telling us about your um….choir."

Christian flushed slightly. "I hope she didn't bore you," he said, smiling bashfully. "I can get a little impassioned about it."

Rose, to whom this was already abundantly clear, almost choked on her scrambled eggs as she tried to hide her snort.

Christian patted her back. "Alright, Rose?"

She nodded, painfully. "Just…uh….wrong pipe."

Christian grinned jovially, humming as he continued to fill his plate. "Did you two enjoy
Hogsmeade?" he asked, focusing on the other two. "Rose said you were on a date?"

Al began to cough loudly as Gen began furiously cutting up her sausage.

"Well, I mean, not that you two were on a date together," Christian amended, looking slightly concerned at the sudden kerfuffle. "That would be the day, huh?"

Gen pulled her lips up into a smile, while Al said nothing.

"It was fine," Gen said, once she realised that the table was still waiting on an answer. "I had a great time with…Ben."

"I thought he was Swedish?" Al said, and then winced.

Gen went back to looking at her eggs. "Oh, yeah, he is. He just has a complicated name, you know, one of those…complicated Swedish names. Ben something or other."

Christian chuckled. "I dated a Polish woman once," he said, thoughtfully. "I think her name might've been Natalia, or something. Though it was a while back," he said to Rose teasingly. "No need to be jealous."

Rose shook her head, smiling.

"Though I've never heard of a Swedish boy named Ben in our year," Christian said, peeking around behind him. "What House is he in?"

Gen, upon noticing the blue prefect's badge sewn onto Christian's robes, stifled a groan. "Uh…Ravenclaw."

"Huh," Christian said. "You'd think I would know him."

Gen gulped down a glass of water. "He's an exchange student, I think," she said. "You know, it was hard to decipher exactly what he was saying around his accent." At the silence around her, Gen grew noticeably pink. "Anyway, the date didn't really work out. Language barrier and all that. Plus, I'm sure he'll be going back to Sweden soon."

Rose nodded, patting her friend's hand consolingly, although now that she thought about it, she was quite sure that when she had asked, Gen had said that his name was Brendan.

"How was your day, Al?" Christian asked, filling his glass with orange juice.

Al shrugged. "It wasn't great," he said. "No chemistry, I guess."

Feeling Gen's furtive gaze, he looked up quickly to meet her eyes, and then focused back on Christian. "No matter though."

Christian, who had intertwined his hand with Rose's, pulled away. "Sorry the two of you didn't have a great time," he said, somewhat sheepishly. "Perhaps the two of you should've just gone together!" He laughed loudly.

Al and Gen cracked strained, painful grins before they went back to their food.

Christian inclined his head towards Rose, smiling at his own joke, and then, still humming, re-took her hand in his under the table.

"I do have to thank you, Toby," Scorpius said, scrutinising himself in the mirror as he adjusted his
"Oh yeah?"

Scorpius, looking amused, turned to face his friend. "If you hadn't had Nicole and Angela in bed with you, Liv would've spent the night. Again."

"She wasn't in the mood for the Room of Requirement?"

Scorpius shrugged. "She wasn't bothered to climb all the way up."

Toby paused, and began to button up his uniform shirt. "So I take it you haven't told her that you found a way around the Transfiguring staircase leading up to the girls' dormitory?"

Scorpius flashed his teeth. "Not exactly."

Toby shook his head, stretching out his arms.

"Sore?" Scorpius asked piously, rolling his eyes as his friend pointedly flexed the arm he was holding over his head.

Toby grinned. "I'm getting too old for this." He jostled the bed as he bounced out of it.

"Maseltov."

"I told you going stag to Hogsmeade would make my day infinitely better than yours. And my night."

"I'm sure you're right."

Toby strayed by his reflection for a moment longer, and then grabbed his bag. "I said I'd come back with a lady on each arm, didn't I?"

Scorpius, unimpressed, reached for his rucksack as well. "I believe you said two on each arm."

Toby scrunched up his nose, balancing against the frame of the door as he held it open with his foot. "Well, it was a little ambitious. I was high on freedom. Ready to go?"

Scorpius nodded and joined him, running a hand through his hair to brush out the knots. He hesitated, looking around the room as the door began to close. His eyes dropped to his desk.

"Oh, hang on," Scorpius said, re-opening the cracked door. "I just need to grab something."

He returned with the patrols schedule from the prefects' meeting, and tucked it into his rucksack.

"What do you need that for?" Toby asked, inclining his head towards it.

Scorpius made for the stairs. "Just a copy for Weasley for the meeting tonight."

"Thoughtful of you."

"Whatever."

The door shut behind them. Scorpius took each step slowly, pacing himself as Toby whistled beside him, making exaggerated thrusting movements as he climbed down.

"Cool it, Romeo." Scorpius cast a dirty look his friend's way. "I know it's been a while since
you've gotten laid, but if you're going to become a spectacle every time you get a girl into your bed, maybe moving into the Heads dorm isn't such a bad idea."

"Oh." Toby paused his exhibitionism and rested a hand on his friend's shoulder. "Hey, man, so I was wondering — can I have your bed once you leave? You know, push it next to mine?"

Scorpius smirked. "Oh, I know you're going to miss me, Tobias, but do you really think that sleeping in my bed is going to help ease your suffering?"

"It'll ease my back in the morning. More space, you know. For…sleeping."

Scorpius scowled. "As much as I'd love for my bed to become your new locale for threesomes—"

"Oh, don't get hung up on the whole threesome thing," Toby said consolingly. "Angela was rubbish."

Scorpius resisted the urge to push his friend down the remaining three steps and directed his gaze instead to Toby's wrinkled appearance. Something caught his eye, and he snorted.

"You realise your pants are on inside out?"

Toby halted, his foot straddling the air as he looked down.

"Let me guess: it must be all that freedom."

"Fuck," Toby swore, pulling Scorpius in front of him as he surreptitiously whipped off his trousers and turned them the right way around. Scorpius' face conveyed his intense displeasure at the sudden turn of events.

"Do you mind?" he asked, marching ahead while Toby fiddled with his belt. "Personal dressing room is not on my to-do list today."

Toby puffed behind him as he caught up. "What day's that again? Shall I pencil you in—OW!"

Scorpius sniggered as Toby rubbed his elbow from where Scorpius' bag had nicked him, then led the way out of the Common Room.

"My day was going so well," Toby lamented as he still theatrically scrubbed at his arm. "Trust you to injure me at the height of my happiness."

Scorpius rolled his eyes. "I'd rather that than start my morning off with a visit to Weasley." Right on cue, they entered the dining hall. His gaze zeroed in on the Gryffindor table, soon after scoping out the red head of hair sitting on the end closest to the door. Scorpius was unsurprised to see Christian there; the new couple had - literally overnight - become the talk of the school. He was positive that Rose was ecstatic at her new celebrity status. The way she was grimacing at everyone who spared them a glance made it more than obvious.

As he approached, Genevieve stiffened from where she was sitting, and quickly tipped her head in his direction. Rose immediately sobered, as if somehow her friend had conveyed exactly who was standing behind her.

"Malfoy," she said, her lips thinning.

"Weasley," he replied, ignoring the boy to her left. And to her right, too, just for good measure.

"What is it?"
He reached into his bag and handed her the parchment. She opened it, curiously, and then relaxed. "Oh, thanks."

He grunted, and then without a word, headed back the way he and Tobias had come.

"So it's true, then," Toby said, darting a glance back. "Rose is dating Goldstein."

"You're becoming quite obsessive, Tobias," Scorpius sniffed, ignoring his friend's chuckles from behind him.

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Rose was always early for night patrols, something Al and Gen frequently complained about when she would pull them out of the door with her ten minutes early for a two-minute walk.

It was a habit of hers; she could walk slow - though she never did - and tonight she might even enjoy the few minutes of solitude in the expansive hallway as she waited for Scorpius to appear.

She had settled comfortably against the cool stone behind her and was about to close her eyes when the unmistakable sound of shoes hitting hard floor sounded from the far end of the corridor.

She turned her head, and had to stop her lips from pursing up. "What are you doing here?"

Scorpius frowned as he stopped in front of her, and then raised his voice, speaking slowly and enunciating each word. "We have patrols tonight, Weasley. You and I. At this time. Thus, here I am, and here, unfortunately, you are, too."

Rose rolled her eyes, drawing her wand.

"So we're back to the silence then? This "I take power in my quietude" shit?"

While his tone suggested he was only slightly irked, Rose had come to know that underlying frustration over the years. She merely shrugged.

"Shouldn't you be with Goldstein? Polishing your promise rings or whatever it is that celibate couples do?"

"I don't know, shouldn't you be with Liv, doing your daily STD check?"

He smirked, but made no reply, though he had the same satisfied look on his face that he'd had in the bookshop the previous weekend; he took no issue in any comment Rose made about his sex life. So long as she knew that he did indeed have a sex life.

Rose sighed. "I won't fight with you, Malfoy. I don't have the energy."

"How many times have I heard that before?"

"I'm serious," Rose said, crossing her arms as they began to walk.

"So am I."

Rose pushed her teeth onto her tongue in frustration, sidestepping slightly to increase the distance between them, as if somehow that would help.

Scorpius, upon noting this, grinned.

"So have you and Goldstein done the nasty yet?"
Rose turned to him, thunderstruck. "I beg your pardon?"

Scorpius only raised his eyebrows back. "You know." And here he clenched one hand into a fist and rapped it against the palm of his other hand twice.

"You're such a pig. I don't know how Liv stands you."

"You should ask her. She might even give you some tips on how to best appease me if you catch her at a good time."

"Do you think about anything other than your past or upcoming sexual encounters?"

"Of course," Scorpius said, seriously. "I think about my present ones. I take pride in my work, you see."

Sardonically, Rose drew further away, noting with disgust that somehow they had drifted closer as they had turned the corner.

"You never answered my question," Scorpius added. "I'll take that as a yes, then?"

"You can take your question and shove it up your-"

Scorpius made a gleeful *umph*, his eyes lighting up, and strode forward. "Finally," he muttered, drawing out his wand and pointing it at the broom cupboard up ahead.

"Honestly, Malfoy, what the hell are you-"

She was cut off as the cupboard door burst open and collided viciously with the wall behind it, exposing the two students huddled in a close embrace in the small area inside.

"Lovely," Scorpius said scathingly, as the two stayed frozen in place, evidently too traumatised to move. "I do have to thank you two, though," he admitted, casting a look behind him. "You just turned my two hours of indubitable dullness into an hour and fifty-eight minutes. Now, go."

Rose, huffing, shouldered past him, attempting to block him from view, but conveniently forgetting that his chin stood above the top of her head.

"No fraternising in broom cupboards," Rose chastised. "Or any other cupboards for that matter."

"Or anywhere else we might see you," Scorpius inputted, grimacing.

Still furiously red, the younger students edged out, avoiding meeting either Head's gaze. Rose held back a laugh as the boy made to intertwine his fingers with his companion as she constantly batted him away.

Scorpius, sighing, re-stowed his wand, and crossed his arms. "Where else do you think we might find unsuspecting cavorts?"

Rose pulled her fingers through her ponytail, feeling her way around the tangles. "You're turning this patrols session into a witch hunt."

"Well, what do you suggest we do instead?"

Frowning, Rose leaned against the corridor wall; Scorpius seemed to acknowledge her resoluteness to stop walking by increasing his own pace.

"Is spending two hours together really so unthinkable to you?" Rose scoffed.
Scorpius considered. "Yes."

And leaving Rose folding her arms crossly against the cold stone, he disappeared around the corner.

Rose scuffed her toe against a chip in the flooring. She hummed a soft melody, drumming against her robes in time. She couldn't decide whether Scorpius leaving had been a positive development; perhaps even bickering with him beat standing alone in silence. She sighed, and pushed herself fully upright, craning her head around the corner to check whether it would be a good place to patrol. She was just setting off when footsteps from behind her caught her attention.

That head of hair looked awfully familiar; she couldn't believe her luck.

"Christian!" she called, jogging over to where he had appeared.

He turned, raising his head out of his score, and beamed upon catching sight of her. "Rose!"

He leaned in to brush his lips against hers, and she could feel his lips widening into a smile. "You haven't finished patrols already?"

Rose's expressed dropped slightly. "No, not yet."

Christian scrunches up his face in confusion. "Weren't you complaining that you have to deal with Malfoy tonight?"

Rose nodded. "He uh…went somewhere."

"You must've scared him off," Christian said, winking as he pushed a loose strand of hair away from Rose's face. "He was too dazzled to stay in your presence. A problem we all share."

Rose, as it had become customary when Christian dolled out his usual compliments, coloured. "Whatever it is, as long as it keeps him gone."

"Your luck appears to have run out."

"What?"

She followed Christian's gaze to see her fellow Head stalking towards them.

"Weasley, where the hell have you been?"

Rose, clenching Christian's hand in hers, unconsciously stuck out her chest. "Don't give me that rubbish. You were the one who walked off."

Scorpius, ignoring this, shifted his gaze slightly upwards. "What is he doing here?"

"You could ask him," Christian replied, icily.

"Last I heard, this was a Heads patrol." Scorpius' expression turned into one of such disgust that it was as if he had smelled something unpleasant. "Couldn't go an hour without your babysitter, Weasley?"

"That's rich coming from the only one of us behaving like a petulant child," Rose said, her eyes going cold.
Scorpius' frame went stiff. Christian bent, lowering his lips towards Rose's ear. "I'm gonna go, alright?" he said. "Don't want to make things worse between the two of you."

"I'm amused you think that that's still possible."

He smiled at her, somewhat pityingly, and pecked her on the cheek.

"Before the hour's up, Goldstein."

With a defiant expression, Christian shot him one last glare and turned on his heel. By the time he had reached the end of the corridor, his head was already back into Stubby Boardman's Greatest Hits: Volume III.

"You're fighting a losing battle, Weasley."

"What now."

"You haven't noticed the way he looks at that thing? I wouldn't be surprised if he unzipped his pants and pulled out his-"

"What is wrong with you?" Rose cut him off, violently. "Do you always have to be so nasty?"

"Only when you're being so disgracefully obtuse."

"I am not being obtuse."

"Why him?"

Rose, caught off guard, recovered, and threw him an ugly look. "How or why I choose my boyfriend is none of your business."

"What, so you'd rather us walk in dead silence for rest of tonight? Especially when I'm craving to know the hidden appeal of Christian Goldstein. Would you really be so cruel?"

Rose weighed her options. She could either answer the question or - as Scorpius had pointed out - prepare to walk in the uncomfortable silence. She went with the lesser of two evils.

"He's nice."

"However have you resisted him until now?"

"He's attractive."

"I'm attractive," Scorpius pointed out.

Rose snorted. "If you say so."

"You have nothing in common."

Rose turned to look at him. "Don't pretend to know anything about Christian, Malfoy. Or anything about me, for that matter."

"Please," he said, rolling his eyes. "I know you better than most." He inclined his head back to where Christian had disappeared. "Better than him, for sure. Or does he not notice that you couldn't be less fucked about his unhealthy obsession with old and dead musicians?"

"Indulge me: did you only bring Christian up so you could swivel the conversation around to
"Insult him?"

Scorpius shrugged noncommittally. "If there was another avenue, I would've taken it."

Rose straightened. "You know, the more you insult Christian, the more insecure you come off."

"What are you, my fucking therapist or something?"

"You're projecting."

"It's not my fault you've chosen to date a gay musician."

Breathing deeply, Rose closed her eyes, though she wondered if her thudding heart might give her away. "You can insult him all you like," she said, slowly. "Even if he was a gay musician, he'd still be leagues better than you."

Scorpius smirked, though when Rose looked back down towards the floor, she could see his hand balled into a fist.

She sighed. "It's your fault, you know."

"A welcome change."

"If you weren't so rude about Christian, we wouldn't be fighting."

"Weasley, we're always fighting."

Rose checked her watch and exhaled. Silently, she pivoted around, tucking her wand back into her robes.

"Where are you going now?"

"It's twelve," she called without turning around. "I'll see you at the prefects' meeting tomorrow night."

It was true, Rose thought as she continued up towards Gryffindor Tower. She'd take bearding over dating Scorpius Malfoy any day.

Any day of the damn week.

"Right," Rose called. "Can everyone shut up, please?"

The room quieted, and Rose sighed in satisfaction. "Good. Now, as you can all see, our Head Boy is apparently otherwise occupied, so I think we'll get a move on without him." Something - or rather, a lack of - caught her attention. "Hang on," she said, looking at the empty spot next to her best friend. "Where's Al?"

Gen shrugged. "I lost him after dinner."

Rose pursed her lips. "Anyway, since everyone's extra curricular timetables should've been finalised by now, we can re-examine the patrols schedule and deal with any switches. Can everyone who strongly feels that they cannot switch put up their hands?"

A few hands were raised. Rose waved her wand, and their names glowed on the parchment before switching back to their normal colour, among them, the new dates for her two rounds with Christian. She waved her wand again, and the rest of the writing disappeared.
"Right, it's a free for all, then. I'll pass it around, see me if there are any problems."

She surveyed the room as the parchment made its way around; she noticed Gen talking animatedly to the boy beside her, and caught a few glimpses of their conversation. He appeared to be asking Gen which nights she was free. Rose frowned and averted her attention to where Tobias Nott was balancing the parchment on his knee as he wrote, his teeth biting down on his lower lip.

Once it had been seen by everyone in the room, the document was given back to her. She perused it, noting with surprise - and slight satisfaction - that Scorpius' name remained on its own for the two nights that they didn't do rounds together. Her brow furrowed as she located Tobias' name under a fellow Slytherin's.

Her stomach twisted as she quickly put two and two together.

"Oh, Merlin."

The door was flung open, and a disgruntled Scorpius entered. "I know I'm late, Weasley, but tell me you managed to sort out this desperately difficult task without my guidance?"

Rose smiled at him sweetly, though her stomach still churned in conflict. "It's all sorted."

"Good," he said. "Let me just check that you haven't moved my night or anything."

She held out the parchment to him, and watched as his eyes scanned it over. Just as she suspected, his gaze froze.

Toby sidled past her, and laid a hand on Scorpius' shoulder. "Listen, Scorp, I ah…"

Scorpius glared at his best friend. "When the fuck are you doing rounds, then?"

Toby shrugged apologetically. "I have to tutor a third year in Arithmancy now. Our timings didn't really work out, and I couldn't hold everyone else up."

Despite the overwhelming pity she was feeling for her cousin, Rose began to snigger.

"I'm Head Boy!" Scorpius squawked indignantly the minute he noticed this, puffing himself up to his full height. "I should get priority!"

Rose tutted. "Not if you show up to your own meeting fifteen minutes late."

"Weasley, I swear to Merlin, if you don't sh-"

It was then that Al burst through the door. "Sorry, Rosie! I swear, this is the first time-" He paused at Scorpius' infuriated face as he glared at the filled up parchment. "What did I miss?"

"It's for ditching you at the Hogsmeade trip, isn't it?"

"Don't be so ridiculous, Al," Rose said, rolling her eyes as everyone filed out. "Christian asked if we wanted to do rounds together. I thought you could pair up with Gen." She sneaked a glance over to where Gen was laughing with the same Gryffindor she had sat next to. "I didn't realise she was wanting to do patrols with Charlie."

"Sorry, Albus," Christian added sincerely. "I didn't mean to inconvenience you like this."

"We can do rounds together when we switch around again," Rose consoled.
"I don't want to do rounds with Malfoy," Al said, sulkily.

"Oh, and I'm over the moon about the turn of events?" came the bitter reply.

Al's jaw tensed he met Scorpius' glare from his position by the door. "It's not like I came late to my own meeting, is it?"

"Well," Scorpius said, his lip curling into that trademark sneer. "As Head Boy I have other appointments and they occasionally overrun." He turned to leave.

"If I was Olivia I'd run too," Rose muttered quietly, though obviously not quietly enough because Scorpius whipped around, his face grim.

"Not all of us have the sexual urges of a tea towel, Weasley."

"You know, I wouldn't be surprised if you were found dead mid-coitus," Rose said, just as loftily. "Like that Australian marsupial. You know, the one that literally sexes itself to death?" She picked up her bag and took Christian's hand, meeting Scorpius' withering gaze. "You remind me of that."

She pulled Christian along with her as she made to leave the room.

"Be careful, Goldstein," Scorpius said, grabbing Rose's arm and pulling her around to face him. "You think she's like this now, but just wait until you-"

"Don't you dare touch me," Rose snarled, shouldering out of his hold and jabbing a finger at his face.

He swiped her hand aside and muscled his way past. "I'm so fucking sick of you," he spat, his face like thunder.

"Watch your fucking language!" Rose screamed shrilly after him as he disappeared, Toby scurrying to keep up.

Someone cleared their throat.

Rose turned around, her pretty face still red with fury. She stilled at Gen's raised eyebrows. Gen cleared her throat again. "I…uh…just invited Charlie to dinner. Mind if he sits with us?"

Rose gave a pronounced exhale and forced a strained smile. "The more the merrier, right?"

"Where the fuck is Liv?" Scorpius fumed, craning his head around the Common Room. "I swear to Merlin, she's never here when I need her."

"Scorpius," Toby said, seriously. "I think you need some fresh air. We'll have a game of Quidditch, okay? Help you blow off some steam."

"I need Liv," Scorpius repeated, leaning over the sofa in case she might be laying down out of his sight.

"She's not here, mate," Toby said, tiredly. "Listen, I'm going to go up to our room, okay?"

"Yeah, go," Scorpius replied, distractedly. "Too late for her to still be at dinner," he muttered to himself, checking his watch. "Goddammit, Liv."

"Are you looking for Olivia Roux?"
Scorpius whirled around, face still screwed up in annoyance when he came face to face with a timid third year.

He hastily recovered his expression, remembering suddenly of his tutee, and then quickly blocked out her image. "Yes, I was — I mean, am."

She nodded, and then pointed at the Common Room's exit. "She said something to her friend about going to take a bath in the prefects' bathroom."

Scorpius flashed his teeth. "Perfect."

Wednesday afternoon meant a working afternoon; mainly due to the fact that McGonagall's Transfiguration homework was a bitch to do, even for a student like Rose Weasley.

She yawned as she entered the library, rubbing her eyes and deciding that perhaps sitting with Christian in front of the fireplace until half past two - while highly enjoyable at the time - only reaped short-term benefits.

She set her work down, glancing at her watch and noting that she had about fifteen minutes until Christian was due to join her. As she opened her textbook, a tinkling laugh caught her attention.

Having recognised the voice instantly, she looked up in slight annoyance to see Liv drawing away from Scorpius' ear, pulling her hair up into a bun as she stretched. Scorpius, chuckling as he shook his head, went back to his writing.

Rose flipped forward until she reached the subchapter they had been assigned to read as homework, studying the introductory paragraph.

One of the most dangerous issues faced by practitioners of Human Transfiguration is the possibility that with the incorrect conjuration, the user risks permanently adopting his or her new transfigured state.

Another high pitched laugh.

Rose looked up to see Liv's hands acquainting themselves with Scorpius' shoulders as she rubbed her knuckles against the base of his neck.

If he was in such discomfort, Rose thought, he should go and work in the Hospital Wing. And take his girlfriend with him, while he was at it.

There are differing levels of Human Transfiguration. For instance, Full-Body Transfigurations, wherein the caster takes on the full appearance of another, require a far greater mastery of the subject than simply altering the caster's hair colour.

Rose was already anticipating the next laugh, but it didn't lessen the annoyance of it; she could feel her eyes straining as she rolled them. Was it so much to ask that the two of them could respect the nature of library work? After all, she was dating too, and she kept her relationship out of the study area. She observed with deep dissatisfaction that no one else seemed to take any notice of the couple's actions.

Looking around, she realised that there were other couples in the library, other couples giggling together or sitting too close. She frowned; she and Christian enjoyed the little things, understated, subtle and quietly-

"Rose! There's my beautiful library partner!"
Christian dropped into the seat next to her, sprawling slightly in his chair as he folded his arms loosely across his chest.

"You're looking awfully chipper," Rose said, her eyes lifted in question as she smiled.

Christian's expression turned into one of such passion that she knew immediately the next topic of conversation-

"During choir practice, Flitwick insisted we learn the song that Stubby sang to his mother on her deathbed to celebrate the anniversary of her passing."

"Stubby's...mother's death?"

"Yeah, it's quite a haunting tune. I could sing it for you, if you'd like."

Like many other girls, Rose was not immune to the attractiveness of a partner who showed a passion for something he enjoyed, but she wondered if it was too much to ask that the thing he enjoyed wasn't so mind-numblingly dull. To be clear, Rose liked music too, but she capped at anything written or performed two hundred years prior.

"Oh, if we were anywhere else but a library."

Christian smiled bashfully. "Right." He exhaled. "I brought my Potions textbook too in case we wanted to work on that after the other stuff; did you get the same homework from Xavier?"

"You're kidding." Scorpius barked out another laugh and shook his head with amusement.

Liv giggled, stretching out an arm in front of her. "I swear, they were talking about it five feet away from me."

"Toby will be crushed." Scorpius rubbed his thumb against his chin.

Liv shrugged. "It could be worse. We could have Marie Gibbons 2.0." She paused. "And 3.0."

Scorpius laughed again, putting down his quill as he gave up working. "So, am I going to be the one to tell Toby he was just a beard?"

Liv spread her hands in front of her. "He's your best friend."

Scorpius considered. "He did mention something about Angela being rather forgettable. Maybe he won't be so cut up."

"He waved at Nicole this morning though."

"Oh?"

"She ignored him."

"Oh."

Liv raised a hand to tighten her ponytail. "But rumour has it, there's a rather attractive Ravenclaw who has her sights set on him."

Scorpius whistled. "I guess Casanova's still got it."
Liv craned over the desk and then glanced behind them. "Maybe she's here." She lifted herself up in her seat. "Huh."

"Do you see her?" Scorpius straightened.

"What? Oh, no, I just saw uh..." She settled back into her chair. "Nevermind."

"Well," Scorpius said, picking up his quill again. "Maybe he can ask her to Hogsmeade next time." He cleared his throat, and then bent again, silently scratching at his parchment.

Liv paused, pressing her lips tightly together.

Scorpius frowned as he wrote, glancing at Liv from the corner of his eye. Her tenseness seemed to radiate out from her, and he looked up to see her expectant gaze.

"Scorpius, I've been meaning to talk to you," she said in a very different voice.

He looked up in surprise. "We have been talking."

"No," she said, folding her hands together, and then separating them. "About us. This."

"Do you really think this is the place, Liv?"

She frowned. "I think now's as good a time as ever, Scorpius."

Sensing that she wasn't going to concede, Scorpius put his quill down, and then picked it up again, fiddling with it.

"Do you remember when we were in Gladrags?"

"You were buying that dress. I mean, that belt."

"Yes, but it's not about that."

"Okay."

She sighed. "You told Mr Murray that you didn't consider yourself to be my boyfriend."

Scorpius searched her unfathomable eyes. "I did." At the sight of her raised eyebrow, he hastened to elaborate. "Liv, I was with Claudia at the end of last year, remember?"

Liv scoffed. "You were hardly with her, Scorpius. On top of her, maybe."

"And you're going to sit here and tell me that you spent the last week of school crocheting in your room?"

She rolled her eyes. "Don't mock me, Scorpius."

"It's unhealthy, Liv. This is unhealthy."

"I know." Suddenly, she brightened. "That's why I think we should give this a proper go."

Scorpius broke into a coughing fit, grabbing the edges of the table as he leant over it. Recovering, he turned back to face Liv's concerned expression. "Haven't we tried that already?"

"Not really."
"Are you sure? I swear beginning of sixth year we tried that-"

"No."

"Last Christmas? We made some sort of-"

"Weekends off."

Scorpius' chest flopped. "Oh."

Liv nodded slowly. "I just mean…we can't say this never worked if we never even really tried, you know?"

Scorpius thought back to five minutes ago when they were laughing at Toby's misfortunes. He summoned Liv's grinning face to mind, flushed as she lifted up her face towards the ceiling.

"So, what do you say?"

Scorpius, jarred back to attention, studied her face, those big baby blue eyes almost glistening in the light. He turned away, focusing on the bookcases near the back of the library.

"I, uh-"

He paused as his gaze fell upon the couple studying together at one of the back tables. His eye twitched as Christian pushed a strand of hair away from Rose's face. She ducked and smiled, blushing as she resumed her work.

He turned back to face Liv, absentmindedly noticing that she smelled exceptionally nice today. "I say that's a grand idea."

The late dinner crowd had just left, leaving the library in a temporary state of quiet, when a shadow appeared over Scorpius' textbook.

"So I guess you don't have a thing for Rose Weasley."

Scorpius' lip twitched as he looked up to meet his tutee's gaze as she sat down opposite him.

"Well," she said, solemnly. "She doesn't have a thing for you."

"Is this going to be a weekly thing?" Scorpius asked, tiredly.

"I would think so. They're weekly tutoring sessions, yes?" Juliette gave him a look that was beginning to feel quite familiar to Scorpius; he often came face to face with it whilst staring into any reflective surface.

"I meant this little foray into my private life," Scorpius elucidated flatly.

Juliette shrugged. "I thought it might spice up our sessions. Make the time between you and I more fun."

"Me and you," Scorpius corrected automatically. "Have you always been this chatty and intrusive?"

"Oh, just since last week."

Scorpius struggled to hide his smirk. "I'm guessing since you called this session two days early
you have something important to hand in?"

Juliette opened the textbook and pointed to the heading. "Consequences of an incorrectly brewed Shrinking Solution."

Scorpius racked his brains; a few outcomes came to mind. "Do you have any ideas?" he asked, leaning forward and resting his elbows on the table.

"Yeah, I guess." She pulled out a quill and parchment. "Well, one idea."

Scorpius pursed his lips. "If we go down to the Potions lab, we can brew the potion with minor issues, and then you can see firsthand."

Juliette nodded and then promptly closed her textbook. "Sounds good."

Scorpius too closed his book, and followed his tutee out of the library.

As they walked, he caught her glancing back at him a couple times. Once he caught her eye, and his gaze narrowed. "What."

Juliette smiled impishly. "So, do you know that Rose is dating Christian Goldstein?"

"You know," Scorpius said, surveying her critically. "For someone who accuses me of being in love with Weasley, you talk about her an awful lot."

Juliette grinned up at him. "I only said you might like her." She skipped ahead of him. "You came up with the love part all by yourself."

Scorpius' eyes widened. "Now, just wait one second-"

Juliette, who seemed utterly unconcerned about her tutor's furious expression, continued to bounce ahead. When she arrived at the door leading into the lab, she stopped, her small hands resting on the frame of the door in surprise.

"Did karma catch up with you or something?" Scorpius asked, haughtily, as he came to a stop behind her. He was about to comment again when he lifted his eyes above his tutee's head and towards where she was staring. His eyes narrowed as he moved his gaze from the jar of beetles to the face of the one holding it. "For Merlin's sake."

Rose huffed, gripping the jar tighter. "I thought my day had been suspiciously positive." She turned around and held up the jar in her hands. "Did you need anything else, Christian?"

Scorpius craned his head further around and groaned. "This only gets better," he muttered, and Juliette inclined her head slightly at his words.

"We could come back?" she offered, far more subdued now.

Her words jolted Scorpius out of his sulkiness. "No," he said, leading the way into the room. "This is a Potions lab, isn't it? For doing potions work?" He passed Rose and Christian. "I can't say the same for what these two are doing."

"Fuck off," Rose muttered, quietly enough that only he could hear.

Scorpius pointedly ignored the way Christian's arms wrapped around his companion as he grabbed the spines from beside her, when really it would've been much faster and far less vomit-inducing if he had just reached in front of her and taken it.
He dropped his gaze to Juliette, perplexed to see that she was already watching him, her eyes lit.

"What?" he asked, sternly.

She shrugged. "Nothing."

Scorpius rolled out his neck, and hiked up his sleeves. "Let's just get on with it."

Scorpius' bad mood seemed to project itself as an invisible force field around him as he stormed back to his dorm.

Juliette had muttered a fairly hasty goodbye before scurrying off towards the Great Hall for a late dinner, and Scorpius noticed she had departed without her usually snarky farewell. People usually gave Scorpius a respectfully wide berth as he walked, but it didn't escape his notice that even were he to stretch out both of his arms, his fingertips would touch empty air.

Was he being so unreasonable to ask that the Potions lab stayed only as its name suggested: a laboratory for making Potions? Was it too much to ask that all handholding and…neck nuzzling could stay the fuck outside?

He bit out the password as he reached the stone wall, slinking inside before the opening had fully widened. He entered the Common Room, his line of vision a mere metre wide as he honed in on the route back to his room. A blonde mass appeared in front of him, and he blinked as he refocused his attention from the ponytailed hair to Li—his girlfriend's face.

He sighed in relief.

Liv's mouth lifted up in a small grin as she noticed his posture relaxing. "Hi."

Scorpius grabbed her hand, murmured a quick "Hello," back, and then led her up to his room. He groaned as he saw Toby sprawled across his bed, his head in his Defence textbook.

"Hey, Scorp, so I was thinking, this whole essay thing, it's—OI!"

"I need the room," was Scorpius' reply as Toby followed his textbook out of the door. Scorpius shut it rather unceremoniously in his friend's face, and he blinked as he started turning around.

"What's up with you?" Liv asked, suspiciously, crossing her arms. "You're not nearly as cheerful as you were before."

Scorpius shrugged. "I just want to spend some time with you. We are dating now, aren't we?"

Liv pulled her mouth up on one side, her eyebrows furrowed. "Well, yes, we are, but-"

"Exactly," Scorpius said, ending the conversation as he grabbed her arm and reeled her in. She smelled as she always did, like vanilla and pomegranate. He buried his face in her neck, running a hand through her soft hair.

"How was tutoring?"

"Brilliant."

Liv frowned again, but Scorpius blocked her expression as he moved to kiss her.

"Something go wrong?"
"You could say that."

She was stiffening. Scorpius could feel that. He wasn't sure exactly what was stirring in him, but it was something that wouldn't stop him from responding so tersely, and instead kept his lips moving for a whole different reason.

"Scorpius, I'm serious. What the hell's up with you?"

He finally looked up to meet her furious gaze. "Can we not do this now?"

Her stare hardened. "I was thinking exactly the same thing."

"Liv—"

She was shaking her head as she re-buttoned her shirt, sparing him no glance as she wrenched the door open. Scorpius heard her footsteps clattering noisily against the stone as she climbed down.

He covered his eyes with his hand, massaging his temple as he leaned against his headboard, before sinking down so he was staring up at his ceiling, counting the cracks he only just noticed were there.
"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

Chapter 6: This Ain't A Scene, It's An Arms Race or, I've Got The Scars From Tomorrow

Rating: M mainly for language, and I can't discount any funny business later on

Disclaimer: I work with only what the infallible J.K. Rowling has given me.

"Al. Calm down."

Al looked up from his plate, his eye twitching. "I am calm."

Rose grimaced as he swallowed his sausage whole, and followed it down with his entire poached egg. "Albus, you're going to choke."

"I'm fine," he mumbled. He looked up and frowned. "Where the hell is Gen? She said she'd meet us at quarter to ten. It's ten past."

Rose shrugged, glancing towards the doors of the Great Hall. "I'm sure she's coming."

She missed Al's darkening face. "She's probably off with her new friend Charlie."

Rose snorted. "You're not in a good mood this morning."

Al threw her a look. "It's Quidditch."

"Exactly." Rose poured orange juice into Al's cup and offered it to him. "Good nervous energy, Al."

"She's throwing off my mojo," Al mumbled into his drink.

"What?"

"Pass the bacon."

"Beautiful day." Toby sighed deeply, sniffing in as if he might inhale the entire oxygen supply around them.

"Not really." Scorpius' mouth was set in a thin line, as it had been for the entire week.

"Mate." Toby punched him lightly on the arm, throwing him a look of pity. "You two need to sort
"We're not fighting," Scorpius said tiredly. "She's just acting quite….distant."

"She's giving you the silent treatment."

"Well, yes, if you want to get all technical about it-"

"Fucking hell, Scorp, what did you do to her?"

Scorpius' eyes glinted, and Toby's own eyes grew almost imperceptibly wider, but he hastened to bury his surprise. "She's just acting like this because it's our first fight as a—well—couple."

There was a loud thud, and Scorpius looked down to see Toby's foot still on the wooden stairs. "Give me Merlin's strength, Scorpius. Tell me you two aren't giving this a go for real?"

"So what if we are?" Scorpius said defensively, pushing past his friend and bagging a space at the front.

"Don't get me wrong, it's your business." Toby shrugged. "But don't pretend like I don't have to deal with your fucking bitching."

"I don't want to talk about this anymore."

Toby laughed, shaking his head as Scorpius presented the same behaviour he had perfected as a mere three year old. His smirk turned into a slight frown as he felt Scorpius straighten up next to him.

Scorpius' attention had been caught by a familiar flash of red, only slightly distinguishable against Gryffindor's maroon robes. His gaze trailed the girl to whom the hair belonged as, instead of following the team into the centre of the pitch, she, along with a few others, retreated to the benches on the side.

"Oi," he sneered to Toby, surveying her from under his lifted chin. "She's just a fucking reserve."

"What?"

He subtly raised a hand to point to the seated redhead.

Toby shot him an amused look. He was met with a scowl. "Mate, you seem to have a bit of an idée fixe."

Scorpius huffed. "Fine. I won't tell fucking tell you anything, then."

Toby only laughed, and pulled his hat down tighter as a vicious breeze stirred the air around them.

Scorpius, bored now, swivelled around, standing on his tiptoes to look over the crowd. "Seriously, where in Merlin's name is Liv?"

"Don't take this the wrong way, mate," Toby said, keeping his eyes fixed on the pitch as the two Captains conversed with Madam Hooch. "I know you're taking this as a rather important fight, but..."
you've never seemed to care *this* much about Liv unless….” He paused. "You know there's no sex allowed on the Quidditch stands, yes?"

Scorpius, ignoring his friend's thinly-veiled insult, only spread his hands out along the wood in front of him. "She should be here by now."

"Hey." The blonde was taken aback by his friend's suddenly consoling tone. "Take the respite, Scorpius. Just enjoy the game."

Raising an eyebrow, Scorpius surveyed the pitch, his gaze honing in on Gryffindor's Captain. Scorpius tilted his head as Albus' gaze constantly flitted towards the Gryffindor stands and back to his team, his fingers in constant flux as he balled and unfurled his fingers.

Briefly meeting Toby's gaze, Scorpius relaxed his stance, crossing his arms and welcoming the chilly breeze as it bit at his cheeks.

Rose knew her cousin better than most.

It was easy for her to tell when something was up, especially when that something was important enough to be affecting his Quidditch playing.

She scrunched her eyebrows together as once again, Al seemed to swing his bat only half-heartedly, and instead of following through, his gaze darted towards the stands, his arm still raised.

"Is Albus okay?" the girl sitting next to Rose asked. "His playing seems a little….tame."

Rose pulled in the side of her mouth. "I'm not sure. He was acting a little strangely this morning too."

The girl nodded thoughtfully, but turned her attention back to the pitch.

Rose followed her gaze, watching as Al whacked a Bludger towards one of the Ravenclaw Chasers, but the speed at which it was wheeling towards her meant she had put a few metres between herself and its course by the time it had reached her.

Rose bit her lip. This was getting ridiculous.

Before she had had time to stop herself, she had pushed herself up from the bench. "Al!" she yelled, startling the rest of the seated team. "Put some force behind it!"

Her cousin looked down at her in surprise, his eyes missing the electric blaze that always appeared during a game.

Rose held out an upturned palm to him, raising her shoulders with a questioning look on her face.

Al shook his head, and flew a distance away. Even from where she sat, Rose could tell that he was looking at the stands again, his brow furrowed.

Rose followed his gaze; a smiling Gen was moving subtly through the crowd to their usual spot, a laughing Charlie in tow.

She frowned.

"I'm bored."
Toby looked up at Scorpius' words. "What?"

Scorpius shrugged. "Nothing's happening. The most action I'm seeing is Weasley yelling at Potter."

It was sort of true: Albus' preoccupation meant his usual blows lacked the usual bite, and instead of bolting around as he usually did, he was mainly static, only moving when necessary. His noncommittal attitude was evidently having an adverse effect on his team.

"I'm getting some tea."

"What, now?" Toby asked archly.

"Now's as good a time as ever, as far as I'm concerned," Scorpius said evenly as he stood. "S'cuse me."

He passed behind the bench where the reserves were sitting, smirking as Rose once again yelled at her cousin ("Hit harder, for Merlin's sake, Albus!") and made his way towards the refreshments tent nearby.

He had just selected his mug and was about to fill it with boiling water when there was a sudden commotion outside. He cocked his head at the tumult of yells.

"Al!"

Scorpius paused, the tea bag hanging from his finger as he recognised the speaker above the racket.

"Madam Hooch! Foul!"

He began to add some sugar, inspecting the spoon critically before he dipped it into his tea to stir it.

"His arm — look at his arm!"

Scorpius swiped his pinky into his drink; the tea was hotter than usual. Perhaps Flitwick had charmed the water to be extra hot today.

"Time out! Players, to the ground!"

Scorpius looked around for the honey. He huffed when he caught sight of it on a table towards the back end of the tent. He moved away, and the voices became indistinct.

He could still hear the crowd from where he stood. He was sure the uproar was coming from the Gryffindor stand; they couldn't be taking kindly to their star player presumably unable to play the rest of the game. He pursed his lips as he put the honey down, and then decided to add one more spoonful.

He wondered if he should wait out the ruckus inside the tent. He was having a bad enough day already, he didn't need any more bother.

Sighing, he put the jar of honey down, and headed for the opening.

"….absolutely not."

He tensed; he'd know that prattish, opinionated voice anywhere.
"Rose, come on. It's your role as a reserve!"

"I'm a Chaser, Albus! Not a Beater! And I'm only a reserve because you pressured me into trying out!" She seemed to be becoming increasingly distressed.

"Correction, you're only a reserve because that's all you agreed to try out for! And I've seen you play Beater, Rose. You can do it."

"What the hell am I even doing here then?"

"Fuck off, McGinty."

"Mr. Potter!"

There was a pause. "Sorry, Madam Hooch."

"Rose, I'm imploring you. As your best friend and cousin. Please."

Scorpius risked a peek. Albus was gripping Rose's hands in one of his, while the other was contorted at a gruesome angle. Scorpius, having previously been at the wrong end of a Beater's bat, winced. Still, he couldn't stop the smirk from blossoming on his face as he passed the small group and noted the protective gloves she was slipping onto her hands. At the sight of him, Rose's face reddened and she quickly turned away.

Scorpius, his eyes still glinting, re-joined his friend.

"Seriously, Scorp, the one time you leave-"

"I miss Albus Potter getting fucked over by a Beater's bat, I know. But," he intertwined his fingers together and stretched them out. "This game's about to get a whole lot more interesting."

"Oh?"

"Weasley's playing Beater for Potter."

"Oh."

Scorpius, offended that his friend didn't immediately share in his excitement, looked over accusingly. "She's a Chaser, Toby," he smirked. "And Chasers don't make good Beaters. Especially reserve ones."

________________________________________________________________________

She should've just done her Potions essay.

Seriously, if Rose had known that six weeks down the road, she'd be in this very position, clutching a Beater's bat and praying to Merlin that Madam Hooch would never blow that stupid whistle, she'd've spent that afternoon of the trials in her room, writing four feet of history on the Volubilis Potion.

She could see Al's eyes fixed on her, ignoring Madam Pomfrey as she pestered him to leave, his jaw tense and his good hand fidgeting like it always did when he was particularly agitated. She smiled at him weakly, sitting up straighter and trying to look alert. Her eyes briefly flickered in recognition as River Jordan announced her substitution.

She glanced up as Spencer Davenport, the other Beater, flew towards her. His face looked painfully conflicted, as if his smile was physically wounding him.
"You alright?" he asked her, tapping his own bat against his palm. "You just need to stay calm, focus on the Bludgers, stay out of the Chasers' way."

"I know."

"Keep your eyes on me."

"Alright."

"And whatever you do," he said, some semblance of a smile coming to his face. "Don't hit me. This face is taking out Harley Gilmore tomorrow."

Rose rolled her eyes. "I'll keep that in mind."

He grinned, and flew some distance away so that he and Rose both flanked the Chasers on either side.

Rose's gaze fell towards the ground, where Madam Hooch had the whistle in her mouth and the Quaffle in her hand. She pressed her lips tightly together as she surveyed the anxious crowd. She wondered if she might try and find Christian. Though, she thought, that might just worsen her nerves.

Suddenly, a familiar face was in her line of vision. He was already looking at her, smirking, his chin lifted slightly.

Rose's gaze, which she was sure was abjectly brittle, hardened even more, and her eyes narrowed. Perhaps she could imagine that Bludger with a head of platinum blonde hair.

With a screech, the whistle was blown, and there was a mad dive for the Quaffle. It took Rose a few seconds to realise that she was focusing on the wrong ball, and hastily diverted her gaze to seek out either of the two Bludgers. They weren't hard to spot; the jet black balls were already disintegrating Chaser formations.

Rose spun to face the Ravenclaw Beaters, watching as Daniel Lavery sped towards one of the balls. She followed his line of vision, realising with a start that their central Chaser hovered in the perfect spot to be on the receiving end of a nasty hit.

Rose dropped down, flying underneath the players. She waited for Lavery to raise his bat, then rocketed up between them, intercepting the strike with her own bat and sending it back the way it had come.

With a thunderous crack, Lavery was reeling away, winded. Al let out an almighty yell in celebration as Sophie Price caught the Quaffle, zooming off towards the Ravenclaw goalposts, which were, for the moment, completely open.

Rose exhaled in relief, rolling out her shoulder and suppressing a wince from the impact.

She knew from practices that Spencer was more of a defensive player, favouring protecting their players instead of sending the Bludgers to the other team. She thought perhaps she should balance that out.

She watched as one of their Chasers deviated from the other two, consequently deviating away from Spencer as well. Throwing a quick glance to their Seeker - who she saw had sought out a higher vantage point - she turned her broom away and headed towards James Young.
Unfortunately, the other team’s Beater had the same idea.

"James!"

He turned to face her as bat met Bludger.

"DROP!"

He had only a second to react, zooming down as the Bludger brushed the tips of his hair.

Rose, who had noticed a Ravenclaw Chaser heading towards their goals, Quaffle in hand, redirected the ball towards her with all her strength. Layla Choo dropped the Quaffle as she was slammed by fifty kilos of solid iron, straight into the waiting hands of the right-wing Gryffindor Chaser.

Rose exhaled in relief, but her repose was over quickly as she spotted the Bludger cutting through the air towards their unsuspecting Keeper.

She flew higher, streaking above their Chasers, but paused briefly as Spencer Davenport stuck out his hand for a high-five as she sped by.

This was not the game that Scorpius was anticipating.

Toby audibly gasped again when another hit caused the Bludger to barrel towards yet another Ravenclaw player; when the Chaser dropped the Quaffle as the Bludger made contact with his stomach, Rose shot down, thwacking the ball with her Beater's bat towards the goal posts.

"Oi!" Scorpius cried. "She can't fucking do—oh."

He watched as, out of nowhere, a Chaser adorned in red zipped towards the ball, gripped it, and flung it straight through the open goal.

The roaring from the stands sounded oddly hollow to his ears.

"Not bad," Toby admitted. "Golf claps for her," he said, courteously tapping his hands together.

"I already knew she could hit things," Scorpius deadpanned, eyes moving back and forth as he followed her.

Toby chuckled, craning his neck as he looked below them. "Where's she gone now?"

Scorpius masked his disinterest, though he too noticed her disappearance. "Hopefully she's-"

He broke off as she reappeared above them; his mouth slackened with surprise as he realised she must’ve flown beneath the stands, in and out of the frameworks, and resurfaced on the other side.

"We have a missing Ravenclaw Chaser," River Jordan commentated from his place in the stands, his tone blithe with interest. "Nice play from Rose Weasley. Ah! Ethan Rodriguez is back in play. But not in time to stop that goal — point Gryffindor!"

The Gryffindor stands were frenzied with excitement, which only served to vex Scorpius further.

She was going to slip up. It was only a matter of time.

Like a jinx, Toby suddenly gasped beside him. "Uh-oh."
And then Scorpius saw.

Rose was preoccupied by the other Bludger, completely oblivious to the turbulence behind her.

Toby was prancing on his toes. "Hah! She's going to get a nasty hit in the back — oh wait — oh, fuck!"

Scorpius gritted his teeth as the Ravenclaw Chaser careened uncontrollably towards Rose, her only aim avoiding the Bludger as it hurtled towards her. He dimly registered the Captain's yells from where he stood on the ground as he screeched for his cousin to look behind her.

It was too late; as the two girls collided, Rose instinctively swung out with her bat. The force of her hit sent the girl spinning back in the direction she had come, and less than a second later, there came a second collision. As broom and Bludger met, there was a sharp snap as the twigs of the broom shattered. The now useless stick began to freefall, taking its rider along with it.

"No!" Rose cried out, dropping her bat as she stretched out her hand towards the plummeting girl. "Locomotor Evelyn!"

There was a pregnant pause when the girl, instead of falling, began to rise up, though her body convulsed awkwardly, her head lolling backwards as every other limb went completely limp.

"Evelyn Marlowe has fainted, ladies and gentlemen!" announced River Jordan, his voice jarring in the sudden silence. "But she's alive! No thanks to our very own Head Girl!"

And then there was roaring from every corner of the stadium, though why or for whom they were shouting, no one actually knew.

A sharp whistle sounded, and Madam Hooch sprinted into the middle of the pitch. "Time out! Time out! Players, to the ground."

Rose, still fully in command of the Ravenclaw's body, guided her down to the sand, and gently laid her down. She, herself, landed, and hesitated uncomfortably as Madam Pomfrey bustled forward, examining the unconscious girl.

Scorpius and Toby leaned down, straining to listen.

"Nothing appears to be broken," Pomfrey said quietly. "Though I can't say whether or not her body experienced stress from Miss Weasley's spell."

Rose looked up at the sound of her name, her arms still hugging her torso. She met the nurse's eyes, and was beckoned forward.

"You did well, Miss Weasley," Pomfrey said sternly. "You displayed extreme diligence in a dire and stressful situation. Miss Marlowe should have nothing but feelings of gratitude towards you when she wakes."

"Marlowe crashed into her," Toby pointed out, rakishly. "I don't see what Weasley looks so upset about."

Scorpius only grunted in reply, raising an eyebrow as Albus pushed himself into the circle, drawing an arm around his cousin.

"Think she'll be able to play?"

Scorpius shook his head. "Look at her. She's out."
They watched in silence as Evelyn's prone body was levitated out in a stretcher by a seventh year whom Scorpius had seen very occasionally around the Hospital Wing.

"Well," Toby said, sighing deeply as he looked at his friend. "You can't say that was boring, can you?"

Scorpius, in a rare show of diplomacy, didn't argue.

Rose paced anxiously at the doors of the Hospital Wing, wringing her hands together as she tried to pluck up the courage to knock.

She had nothing to be sorry for, she knew that, but still she couldn't help but feel bad.

Just as she had raised her knuckles against the door, it opened, and Evelyn Marlowe stepped out; Rose hastily jumped out of the way. Upon noticing her, Evelyn's eyes widened.

Rose took a step forward. "Uh…hi," she said, lifting her hand into a weak wave. She swallowed. "I uh…wanted to apologise for um…kind of whacking you with a Beater's bat….quite hard. And then your broom breaking….and you falling."

Evelyn's expression had remained inscrutable for the duration of Rose's speech, but when she saw that Rose had stopped talking, her face broke out into a sheepish smile.

"I was about to find you," she said, closing the door behind her. "To thank you."

Rose gaped. "Thank me? For what?"

Evelyn shrugged. "I mean….I crashed into you, right? And then you kinda saved me."

Rose bit her lip. "Well, I suppose, but I did hit you quite hard-"

The Ravenclaw held up a hand. "Really, you don't have to apologise for anything." When she saw that Rose was about to open her mouth again, she hastily asked, "Are you going to the after party?"

Rose nodded in affirmation. "Someone has to keep Al out of trouble. Are you heading there now?"

Evelyn shook her head. "I'm just going to a friend's first. But it's on the way."

They started walking.

"Congrats, by the way," Evelyn said. "I never mentioned."

Rose reddened slightly. "Thanks."


Rose laughed, but it was rather perfunctory. "Christian's not really the competitive type or anything."

"He used to play though, I thought?" Evelyn asked, furrowing her brow.

Rose pulled in her bottom lip, raising a hand to brush through her hair. "He's moved on with impassion."
Scorpius didn't usually do parties.

Well, it was really the collateral of parties that Scorpius didn't do; namely, excess amounts of people (usually inebriated) all crammed into a tight space, excess amounts of noise, and excess amounts of...carnality. Not to say that Scorpius didn't indulge in the latter, but he didn't much enjoy it when anyone else engaged in it.

The only thing that appealed to Scorpius about parties was the promise of alcohol.

He told Tobias so as he helped himself to another bottle of Firewhiskey on the counter, offering four Sickles to the girl giving them out.

When she unnecessarily ran her fingertips along his palm as she scooped them up, Scorpius looked up in surprise, and met what he thought might be a somewhat come hither look.

Toby cleared his throat loudly. Jolted, Scorpius turned to face him. "What?"

"You're supposed to be in a committed relationship now, remember?"

Scorpius threw him a look. "I wasn't going to do anything."

But Toby's comment had brought Scorpius' mind back into a territory he didn't much appreciate. "Still no sign of Liv," he absentmindedly noted, doing another cursory sweep of the room.

Toby shrugged. "Maybe she's busy?" He paused. "Or maybe your fight bummed her out too much to come."

Scorpius pondered. It really wasn't like Liv to let a petty argument stint her appetite for celebrations; perhaps he had missed something.

Perhaps it wasn't so petty after all.

He was about to reply that they would make no more mention of Liv for the time being when a girl stumbled into him, her dress low and high in all the wrong places. She hiccuped and raised her head, her eyes widening as she met Scorpius' unamused glare.

"Very—awfully sorry," she said, giggling. "You're just a little in the way."

This was why Scorpius didn't do parties.

"Shoo," he said emphatically, shifting to face Toby again. He pursed his lips. "Can we find a couch or something?"

Toby rolled his eyes. "So I can spend my night dealing with my sullen best friend while everyone else has fun? Fuck no."

Scorpius pulled in one side of his mouth, looking terribly groused.

Toby nudged him, and lifted his chin up to survey the group a few metres from them. "Come on, let's get a game going."
The noise hit her the minute Rose opened the door to the Room of Requirement.

Her eyebrows raised as she took in the ungainly scene before her, and immediately began searching for Al, Gen or Christian in the crowd. She took a few steps in, quickly identifying the source of the alcohol and wondering if she might find Al nearby. He was always so indulgent at these occasions.

She carefully manoeuvred around the hoards of people, though her plan for discreteness miserably failed. The moment people spotted their impromptu Beater, they ambled over to congratulate her at volumes far too high for her to assume that anyone was still sober at this party.

She thanked them, then after a few moments of hesitation, decided she might pay a visit to the drinks stand herself. She had almost reached the table when someone whooped her name.

She turned to see her cousin making his way over to her, beaming. She took in his messy hair, flushed face and rumpled shirt. "Hey, Al."

"Brilliant game, Rosie," Al said jovially, throwing an arm around her and leading her in the direction she was already headed. "You were fantastic! You wanna try out for Beater?"

She only shook her head, amused. "I see you've healed up."

He waved his hand noncommittally. "Madam Pomfrey fixed it up in a jiffy. Ridiculous, really. I could've been back in time to finish the match." He elbowed her lightly, still grinning. "But they didn't need me, huh? You really saved my arse out there, Rose."

"It was nothing," Rose said, modestly.

"I'll buy you a drink," Al grinned, tossing over a few coins and grabbing two Firewhiskeys. "As a thank you."

"Where's Gen?"

Al's previously cheery expression clouded over. "Probably off snogging Charlie Wanna-Touch-My-Pecs Ainsworth."

Rose laughed, but her cousin's attitude was being to arouse suspicion. "I'm sure she's not. She'll turn up."

Al shrugged. "Whatever." He took another swig from the bottle in his hands. "Come on, we're playing a game."

Rose allowed him to pull her towards the direction of the most noise, though her eyes still searched the room for Christian. She'd find him later.

"Here we are," Al said, releasing her hand and dropping back into his vacated seat. "Sit down, Rosie."

Rose glanced around the small group sitting on the floor.

Oh no. Absolutely not.

"Well, if it isn't the Golden Child herself."

She scowled. "Isn't there a back alley with your name on it? You know, in Poland or something?"
Scorpius took a pronounced swig of his drink. "I don't know, shouldn't Christian's arse have your mouth on it?"

"You lecherous per-

Al laughed. "Oh, come on, Rosie, it'll be fun."

Rose looked down at her cousin, her brow furrowing. "I don't know…"

Scorpius coughed loudly into his fist. "Chicken shit."

Glowering, Rose slowly lowered herself down, crossing her legs tightly. She leaned over to whisper at her cousin. "How much've you had to drink, Albus?"

Al shrugged, lifting his Firewhiskey to his lips again. "I lost count after the fourth one."

"Is that why you're sitting in this little friendship circle with Malfoy, then?"

Al gave her a funny look. "I'm sitting in this circle because I'm not boring, Rosie."

"Oi, stop talking, you two. We're trying to play here."

Rose threw a semi-apologetic look to Maria Trevett and fell silent.

It was only when she looked into the middle of the circle at the empty bottle of Firewhiskey lying on the floor that she understood just what game she had gotten herself into.

"No. I'm putting my foot down."

The entire group looked up at her words.

Al rolled his eyes. "Come on, Rose, it's no big deal. It's just a game."

Rose looked around the circle, meeting everyone's gaze. She halted at the person sitting directly opposite her, his steely grey eyes glitteringly alert; he seemed to be the only other sober person sitting in her immediate area.

"I…uh, have a boyfriend," she faltered.

Scorpius scoffed. "I have a girlfriend, but I just made out with…whoever she is." The girl he pointed to looked exceedingly red in the face, and gave him a weak wave as she smiled widely.

"I didn't know you two had made it official. Maseltov," Rose said, dryly.

Scorpius ignored her. "Well, I couldn't give two shits whether you stay or leave, but let's get this next round going. Make up your mind, Golden Child."

Rose could feel her jaw twitching. She stayed seated, and Scorpius' smirk gleamed. For the sake of having something to do, she took a sip of her drink.

"Who're you vetoing, Rose?" a Hufflepuff named Ruth asked her.

"Al, as always."

Maria edged forward, giggling as she gave the bottle a meagre twist. It circled three times, coming to a halt mere degrees from Rose.
Al grinned. "C'mere, Trevett."

Rose made a face, leaning away and turning away for good measure as her cousin was pushed backwards by Maria's enthusiasm. Maria drew back, drawing her tongue along her bottom lip as she sat down.

As the girl next to Maria took her turn, Rose leaned over to whisper in Al's ear. "Who did Malfoy veto?"

"Nott," Al replied. "Though maybe he'll change his mind now that you're here."

"Dreams do come true."

Rose looked up as Scorpius barked out a laugh. Tobias elbowed him in the stomach as he leaned forward to meet an eager Ruth. Rose held back a grimace as Toby helplessly stayed fixed as Ruth's fingers laced in his hair, keeping him in her grasp.

"Alright," Scorpius said after a good fifteen seconds. "Let the poor man go, Nesgrave."

"You can always change your veto if you want him so bad," she shot back, crooking a finger at him. Scorpius only rolled his eyes at the drunken girl's antics.

At the sight of his hand alighting on the brown glass, Rose's stomach twisted uncomfortably. Her hands gripped the material of the carpet, knuckles whitening. She inhaled sharply, and Scorpius seemed to pause. He looked up quickly and met her eyes before flicking his wrist.

Even before it did, Rose knew it was going to land on her.

"This is what I get for humouring my drunk cousin," she said bitterly to Al beside her. He only shrugged apologetically.

"Let's just get this over with, Weasley," Scorpius said, raising himself onto his knees. "You can finish complaining later."

Maria coughed loudly. "Most people don't."

Scorpius kept his gaze on Rose, but his mouth pulled up into a smirk. "Sure you're up to it?"

It was his smug smile that did it, and she wasn't sure exactly what came over her, but she had grabbed Scorpius' head by his - in her opinion - off-puttingly silky hair and planted her mouth against his. He grunted softly in surprise, but quickly recovered.

If this was the sensation of kissing the infamous Scorpius Malfoy, Rose was exceedingly underwhelmed.

It was merely lips against lips. No softer than Christian or Nate, and a whole lot less mint, and a whole lot more Firewhiskey.

She was grossly aware of the catcalls and the anthem of "Kiss, kiss, kiss," that was still going strong. The ten seconds couldn't be over soon enough.

"Excuse me," Scorpius said, rubbing at his mouth as he pulled away. "I'm just going to dunk my head in a vat of boiling water."

"Inspired idea," Rose said, doing the same. "How about I go with you? You put your face in the water, and I'll count to a thousand."
"Another Firewhiskey, Toby?"

He nodded. "I'll come with."

"This is the last time I play one of those third year games," Scorpius said. "I'll see you all tomorrow. You know, if I live through the night."

He strode off, drawing the back of his hand across his lips again for good measure. It was only seconds before he and Toby were lost in the crowd.

"Drama queen," Rose scoffed, unfolding her legs as she made to stand up.

"Oi — where're you going?" Al asked in confusion.

"I am going," Rose said, squaring her shoulders. "to find my boyfriend."

It wasn't long before she spotted him. He was sitting on the couch with a few other Ravenclaws, sipping cider and socialising.

Christian beamed when he noticed she was making her way over to him, and wiggled out of his space and pulled her into a hug. "You were incredible," he said, passionately, dropping a kiss into her hair. "I'm so proud of you, Rose."

She relaxed into his hold, tightening her grip around him. "Thanks."

He pulled back and entwined their hands together. "I'll see you later, guys," he said to his friends, and led her away. "Shall we find a quiet spot?" he asked her, frowning as he looked around the overflowing room.

"Sounds perfect," Rose said, all too ready to maximise the distance between herself and the party scene.

"There," Christian said, pointing to a corner of wall that was unoccupied.

When they reached it, Rose Summoned two cushions towards them and lay them on the floor, lowering herself onto one.

She waited until Christian had sat down too, and then bit her lip. "Confession time."

Christian raised his eyebrows. "Okay."

Rose sighed. "I kissed Malfoy. During — well, because of — a game."

Instead of the frown she was expecting, Christian laughed loudly, shaking his head. "So that's what all the chanting was for." He pulled a sympathetic face. "Have you recovered?"

She grimaced. "I don't think I ever will."

Christian leaned in, and pecked her softly. "Did that help?"

See? Just as soft.

She brushed a hand through her boyfriend's hair and pulled his face closer to hers. "I'll let you know."
It wasn't long before some fellow seventh year yelled at them to Get a Room, so Rose, laughing, stood up and said, "I'll get us more drinks."

She moved through the crowd, making her way back to the drinks stand. Upon arrival, she noticed that there was suddenly a slew of new beverages, some notably stronger than Firewhiskey. She looked around and realised that due to the late hour, the room was made up of mostly sixth and seventh years.

Still, her lips pursed, but not wanting to spoil the fun, she let it go.

She ordered two drinks - Knotgrass Mead for herself and a Firewhiskey for Christian - and paid, thanking the girl as she left.

She was about to return to Christian using the same route she had arrived with, but due to the new and rowdy game a group of fellow Gryffindors were engaged in, she made a face, and took the long way.

She passed a group of couches and grimaced. How people could complain about her and Christian when there was a sight like this she didn't know: a group of people making such spectacles of themselves, completely uncaring that the close proximity to the other pairs around them made the entire group appear as one heated debauch.

She shook her head, moving her gaze past the couples and unintentionally to one pair a slight distance away from all the others.

But what she saw there almost pushed all that Firewhiskey back up her throat.

Her eyes widened in horror as she took in the feverishly kissing couple furthest away from her. She watched as her cousin's hand slipped in and out of her best friend's hair, watched as Gen's hands ran up and down Al's back.

Her feet were leading her away before she had further time to react, and she was hurrying back to Christian, hoping that the sight of him might calm her racing mind.

She recalled Gen's somber expression when she had asked her how her Hogsmeade date had gone, and wondered if she was compensating. But what about Charlie?

Her mind turned towards her cousin. She hadn't really taken Gen to be Al's type.

She knit her brow; Gen was a girl, she was breathing…

She was Al's type.

Thankfully, she reached Christian then, and hastened to summon a more neutral expression to her face. She wouldn't bring this up with anyone, especially before she had had a chance to talk about it with her two best friends. If they would talk about it at all, Rose thought. She wasn't entirely convinced that Al and Gen would talk about tonight between themselves, nevermind to her.

She shook her head. Maybe it was just the alcohol.

She hadn't even realised she'd offered the Firewhiskey to Christian until he replied with a, "Oh, hey, thanks."

She sat back down and considered the drink in her hands.

"Rose?"
She looked up to meet Christian's concerned expression. "Hey, is everything alright?"

Rose grinned widely, painfully so. "Of course." She popped open her mead and took three long swigs. "Why'd you ask?"

Once Scorpius had downed enough Firewhiskey to get both the taste of her and the smell of her perfume out of his mind, he decided that he would call it a night.

Scorpius moved past the large group of people blocking his view of the door, but stopped when he caught sight of a mass of red hair.

"I suppose we can't really date now that I've beaten you and everything," Rose was saying as she and Christian sat together, cradling their drinks.

*Bullshit you beat him,* Scorpius thought to himself. *The guy wasn't even playing.*

Christian laughed. "I suppose so."

"We probably shouldn't even be sitting together."

*Agreed, you reek of false victory.*

"Probably not." He laughed again, and leaned in to kiss her. Scorpius, still scoffing in disapproval, hastily diverted his attention. He angled away, intending to make good on his decision and leave until he felt a hand at his shoulder.

He turned to see Liv standing with her lips pressed tightly together, a bottle of Firewhiskey in her hands.

He was suddenly flooded with relief, and he reached out a hand towards her, though he didn't know exactly where he intended to make contact.

But she pulled back slightly, her face guarded. "Scorpius."

Scorpius was busy weighing his options in his mind. He could give her a brief "Hi," and then grab two Firewhiskeys for the road and leave this now unbearable gathering, or he could sacrifice his pride and maybe his honesty and fix this fucked up situation before it ruined another perfectly good week.

Another peal of laughter made up his mind in less than a second.

He exhaled. "Liv...about last week. I'm uh-" The word wouldn't come; he couldn't even sound it out. "I shouldn't have taken my bad mood out on you. You didn't deserve that."

Perhaps it was a testament to how long she and Scorpius had known each other, for Liv didn't seem surprised in the least that his apologetic speech came devoid of an actual apology. Her softening eyes even indicated that she wasn't waiting for one.

She nodded, and her lips pulled up into a small smile. "Was it a good game?"

Scorpius had to fight the urge to grimace. "S'okay."

At his one word answer, Liv's face once again hardened slightly.

He stepped closer. "It would've been better if you'd've been there." He paused, and reached up to
brush a lock of hair away from her eye.

And now her face broke out into an actual smile, and Scorpius took that as an invitation to lean in closer, press his lips against hers. When he pulled back, her eyes were lit again, one hand still resting in his hair.

"Hey," he said, his gaze falling to the bottle in her hands. "You wanna get out of here?"
"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

Chapter 7: Where Did The Party Go? or, Things Happened In Half-Time

Rating: M mainly for language, and I can't discount any funny business later on

Disclaimer: I work with only what the infallible J.K. Rowling has given me.

"Upwards—no, downwards swirl," Will muttered quietly to himself as he rested his forearm on the table. "Downwards." He repeated the motion again, his face screwing up in concentration as he consulted his textbook.

Rose smiled, even as her wand arm grew tired from being held upright. She leaned over and folded the book shut. "You know the theory, Will," she said, consolingly. "You just need the confidence to apply it."

He sighed, shaking his hand as if that might somehow help. "Expelliarmus!" he whispered, his eyes fixed on Rose's unmoving wand.

He bit his lip, his eyes moving quickly back to his now closed textbook.

His tutor demonstrated the move, noting with bemusement Will's obvious infuriation at having seen the charm executed so easily. Will glared at his own wand now lying a scant foot away as if it had caused him some great personal injustice.

Rose hesitated, then folded her arms on the table and leant forward. "I think we might need to consider a change in tactic," she said, thoughtfully. "Or maybe just a change in scene. What do you say to finding an empty classroom?"

Will gave her a small smile before his eyebrows furrowed, perplexed. "Um…I think that guy over there is trying to get your attention."

"Huh?" Rose looked up, brushing her hair away from eyes and following Will's gaze.

Her face brightened as Christian came into view, smiling sheepishly as he peeked at her from behind the bookcases.

For all that she could feel her facial muscles pulling up in response to seeing her boyfriend, she couldn't help but notice something else; that feeling of anticipation in her stomach, the slight giddiness that still accompanied the feeling of newness was suddenly offensively absent.
"Congratulations," came the quiet voice from beside her.

Rose blinked and broke the eye contact, shifting uncomfortably in her chair as she looked down at her tutee. "What? Oh, thanks."

Will nodded a few times. "He's really nice. We uh...we do choir together."

Rose pressed her lips together to keep herself from smiling. She wasn't the type to judge others so quickly, but still she couldn't help but be completely unsurprised that Will had managed to find himself a member of the Toad Choir. "Do you?"

"He talks about you sometimes," Will continued, the tips of his ears reddening. "You know, just little things." He paused, tapping his wand lightly against the table. "He thinks the world of you."

Rose bit her lip. "I know."

Will looked up at her, and she quickly regretted her less-than-encouraging tone.

She swept some hair out of her face and cleared her throat. "Are you ready to go?"

Scorpius was very rarely honest with himself. Rather, he pushed any honest inclinations he had so far down that he no longer appeared to have immediate access to them.

Still, for someone who so arrogantly masked his disinterest in just about everything, even he couldn't shake the fact that he was very much dreading the night ahead.

He left for his patrols session ten minutes early, and whilst with Rose Weasley he realised that this simply added to their excruciating time together, he was quite confident that Albus was not the early type. He wondered what he should say, what he should open with.

It was easier with her, he contemplated as he climbed his way to the fifth floor. It was easier with an established repartee, a sort of foundation for what he supposed to say, or perhaps more accurately, what he wasn't supposed to. He didn't know where the line with Albus Potter was drawn, but he wouldn't be sardonically inquiring into his sex life as he did his cousin.

When nine o'clock arrived and Albus had not, Scorpius couldn't decide if he was more satisfied or annoyed.

The skidding of feet from the adjacent corridor alerted him, though he kept his face impassive as Albus appeared around the corner, walking at a deliberately leisurely pace.

Scorpius's face retained its unimpressed expression. "You're-"

Albus held up his watch, tapping it. "Not late. You might say that I'm ten seconds early, actually."

"I actually wouldn't say that," Scorpius replied, scathingly, feeling a hand into his robes for his wand. "Though I can't say I'm surprised that you haven't yet mastered the concept of time."

Albus rolled his eyes, taking out his own wand and striding ahead. "Let's just get this over with."

"So you can get back to whatever terribly important activity it was that you were engaged in before arriving?" Scorpius said from behind him.

Albus threw him a look, but his lack of reply made Scorpius curious as to just what he had pulled his patrols partner away from.
Al hadn't actually planned on being late. Not that he had been late, technically.

But he had, as Scorpius had inadvertently surmised, been engaged in the very important activity that was attempting to make some sense over what had happened between him and his best friend a little less than a week before.

He was rather hoping the two of them could ignore it and take the easy way out, but it appeared Gen wasn't taking that particular route. In fact, her skirting looks and poorly warranted departures were really getting on his nerves. Dashed was his optimism that they could act as two mature adults about the whole thing. (And he had only hidden behind that pillar because she had started it.)

He had only just left his room and was lounging by the fireplace before his patrols when Gen had appeared at the bottom of the staircase, hovering in his periphery. She had gulped upon seeing him, and Al's irritation had flared when he realised that she'd attempted to sneak past him up to her room without so much as a "Hello".

He'd straightened up and lifted a cautious hand in greeting. "Hey."

She seemed to have sighed. "Hey."

"Gen-" he had started, then bitten his lip. "I think we need to talk."

"I thought you might say that," she'd said, smiling ruefully.

"And while we're at it," he'd continued with growing confidence, patting the spot on the sofa next to him. "We should probably talk about Hogsmeade too."

Gen had pushed a strand of hair away from her face and nodded. "Yeah."

"Did you really think that blindfolding me was completely necessary?" Rose asked, laughing as she allowed Christian to lead her down the corridor.

"Well," Christian replied, his voice pleased. "I suppose I could've gone with a slightly less invasive idea, but — watch out for the turn — where would be the fun in that?"

"Where indeed," Rose said, reaching out her free hand to touch at the walls.

"Don't look yet, we're almost there."

"Not looking."

"Hold on, wait, take this last turn — there are two steps down, that's it — and… presto!"

Rose reached up to untie the piece of cloth covering her eyes and, upon seeing the sight before her, held up her hand to her mouth in amazement. "Oh, Christian."

He turned away from the beautifully set table for two and back towards Rose. "Do you like it?"

She tugged on the hand closest to her, pulling him in. "I love it."

He grinned beatifically, leading her towards the table and drawing out a chair for her to sit. "I had to temporarily mask the smell of the food with a charm so it wouldn't spoil the surprise."

Upon looking closer at the table, Rose gasped in astonishment. "Is that Chinese food?"
Christian nodded bashfully. "You told me it was your favourite, so I uh…I got it."

It took Rose almost all of her willpower to resist awwing as she took in the entire scene. As she looked around, she noticed the modest dessert cart slightly off to the side. "That's not…banoffee pie?"

He smiled again, and shrugged. "I have a good memory."

Rose only shook her head in wonder, resting her chin in her palm as she watched Christian ladle out noodle soup. She suddenly felt obscenely guilty that she hadn't even thought to ask Christian his favourite food. Or perhaps she had, but maybe she had forgotten. The idea made her feel even more crestfallen.

"How does your mum know how to cook Chinese food anyway?" Christian asked, shaking her out of her musing. "Duck?"

She nodded gratefully, holding up her plate. "Mum's very um…ambitious when it comes to food. All things, really," she said, chuckling. "But she's not a great cook."

Christian's eyes widened. "She's not? Huh, I'd always imagined she would be, you know, her being a genius and all that."

Rose shook her head, still smiling. "She's awfully stubborn. She must know she's not very good, but she insists." She messed around with her chopsticks for a bit before using them to clamp onto a piece of duck. "Anyway, dad used to take us to get takeout from a store nearby and tell mum it was to save her from doing extra work."

"Smart man," Christian laughed, using his spoon and fork to scoop up some duck as well. "How was tutoring?"

Rose smiled, poking about for some dumplings. "Not bad, he's making progress."

"I recognise him," Christian said, thoughtfully. "I'm not sure how though."

Immediately, Rose's mind began whirring. She could tell him exactly how he knew Will and regret it for the next three hundred years, or she could shrug and say, Huh, No Idea.

She resigned herself to her fate, her voice straining almost imperceptibly as she said hastily, "You do choir together."

Christian clapped his hands together quickly. "Ah! Right, of course."

Then, to her utter surprise, he grinned and said, "You look like an absolute pro with those chopsticks. Teach me?"

Laughing out loud, Rose held up her own chopsticks, and directed them at the pair he had abandoned on the table. "It's all about anchoring your thumb and index finger, see?"

"Do you always walk this slowly?"

Al shot Scorpius a withering look. "Oh, I'm sorry, I thought I signed up for a patrols session, not the London fucking Marathon."

"Well, you'd be equally useless here or there."
"Oh, get off your fucking high horse," Al snapped, acidly, levelling his gaze at Scorpius. "It's your own bloody fault we're stuck together, anyway."

"My fault?" Scorpius pointed his wand accusingly in Albus' face. "I had Head Boy duties to take care of, what's your excuse?"

"If you must know," Al said, indignantly. "I was talking to McGonagall about Quidditch matters."

"Has she finally worked up the nerve to tell you that you fly like a headless chicken?"

Al snorted, unperturbed. "Tell that to my one-seventy win."

Scorpius' lip curled into a sneer. "Please, you only played for about ten shitty minutes as it was."

"Oh, give me a fucking break, Malfoy, I-" Al broke off as he cocked his ear in the direction where they could both hear two animated male voices. "Oh, thank Merlin," he said. "Civilisation."

The two of them broke into a fast walk, each trying to appear the less ridiculous as they sped towards the source of the noise.

"I'm telling you," one of the boys was saying emphatically to his companion, "McFarlan torched that guy with the Chelmondiston Charge, he brought on a whole new dynamic, I swear."

"Nah, mate," the other boy replied, shaking his head with disdain as Al and Scorpius turned the corner. "He punched the Quaffle, see, it's not the Charge, it's called something else, but I forget."

"It's called the Dionysus Dive."

The two young boys turned to look at the two voices who had spoken in unison.

The boy who had spoken first shrugged. "I mean, you two would know, you're the Captains, I guess."

Scorpius crossed his arms. "You guessed right. Now, it was curfew almost an hour ago, get on back to your Common Room."

The two Ravenclaws trudged off, and, before they had disappeared from sight, had already started arguing again.

"Brainless," Scorpius muttered, breaking into a walk.

"Idiots," Al agreed before he had time to think about it.

Scorpius stilled for a moment, but then began walking again, oblivious to the perplexed look on Al's face.

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It must've been a record, Rose thought rather miserably. She thought she might be an optimist, give it maybe twenty minutes.

He hadn't even lasted fifteen.

She struggled to tune back in to what Christian was telling her, lifting her eyebrows and nodding in intrigue as her hopefulness was grounded to pieces inside her.

"...and the trouble is, it's hard to get people to relate to the songs when most of them are sung in Latin, right? So I'm thinking...."
It was almost frustrating, she continued to reflect in annoyance, that Christian was such a good conversationalist when it came to talking about, well, anything other than music, but then plummeted down quicker than she could say "Toad Choir" (which Christian numerous but patiently corrected her was actually called the "Frog Choir") the moment the subject was dredged up.

"Say," she blurted out quickly, causing Christian to drop the dumpling he had trapped between his chopsticks back into his soup - though it was perhaps due to the fact that he had not yet mastered the art of the chopstick - "Do you think you might ever get back into playing Quidditch again?"

Christian's face turned blank in surprise, but he recovered quickly. "Quidditch? I don't think so." He smiled at her. "The hole that was created after my accident has been more than filled, I think. Besides," He reached his free hand forward to take hers. "I wouldn't want to face off against you on the Quidditch pitch, not after watching you during that last match!"

Rose laughed lightly, ladling out some fried rice as Christian continued to look at her, his face colouring slightly.

"You know, uh," he said, sheepishly, and at his change in tone, Rose looked up in interest, "My friends were kinda shocked when they found out we were dating."

"Really? What for?"

Christian shrugged, reddening further. "Oh, you know, it's just they couldn't believe that I managed to get a date with you, and then we were together so soon and everything, when you're so, you know..." He coughed uncomfortably. "You."

Against her will, she too was blushing. "Oh, no, Christian, don't be ridiculous, I'm really not as special as all that-"

"But you are!" Christian said, passionately, putting his fork back down in preparation. "You're top of the class in almost everything, and everyone knows you're going to do such incredible things after we graduate, and you're so, so beautiful-"

"Christian-" Rose tried, feeling almost helpless and scourging around in her brain to try and remember if Nate had ever had an outburst like this-

"And now you're an incredible Quidditch player as well, and..." He cast her a curious look. "Do you really not know this?"

"Of course not!" Rose said, shaking her head. "I never thought about any of it like that. I don't think most of that is true, anyway."

Christian exhaled, pressing his lips together and then quickly digging back into his food.

"Hey," Rose said, softly, lowering her head to catch his gaze. "I think you're pretty great too."

"You do?"

She nodded ardently. "I mean, you're so passionate about your music and your...choir, and it sounds like you could make a great future out of that."

Christian laughed, looking far more at ease. "Well, perhaps if we ever manage to crawl out of the seventeenth century." He brightened. "You know what I was thinking? If we modernise, who's to say that the Start of Term Feast and Halloween should be our only performances? I was going to
try and persuade Flitwick to take on some Christmas tunes, or you know, maybe a little something after exams to celebrate?"

Rose was back to nodding and smiling, though she had the distressing revelation that she was quickly beginning to lose her appetite.

*You’re fighting a losing battle, Weasley.*

She started at the sudden voice in her head, mercifully in conjunction with Christian who, upon seemingly having reached a rather animated point in his monologue, raised a hand towards her, saying "Exactly!" before continuing on.

She had eaten an awful lot of dumplings though; that was surely the culprit for her sudden lack of interest in the food before her.

"Hell, we could completely spice up Quidditch games, you know, like they do in America with their football…"

You haven’t noticed the way he looks at that thing? I wouldn't be surprised if he unzipped his pants and pulled out his-

"Football games?" she asked abruptly, cursing her traitorous brain for having thoughts that under no circumstance it should be having.

"Yes, exactly! I was thinking, actually, that brings me on to my next idea. Now, stay with me on this…*half-time shows!*"

Sometimes perpetuating the image of the decisively uncaring was exhausting.

Usually it came to Scorpius naturally, which could be construed as an unfortunate testament to his character, but sometimes - on what Scorpius deemed to be the very rare occasion - he simply couldn’t be fucked.

At least, this was the excuse he was currently relying on to justify his behaviour. "McFarlan doesn't even know how to execute a Charge without falling off his broom."

"It would've been useful though, since he broke all of his knuckles punching the ball," Albus said, chortling. "Though it was Montoya's fault for bashing the ruddy thing at him so hard."

Scorpius nodded in agreement. "See, this is why Beaters shouldn't handle Quaffles."

"Nah." Albus pointed a finger in his direction. "I give complete props to Rosie for her Quaffle handling during the match."

Scorpius grunted, and to his surprise, Albus only laughed again.

Scorpius wasn't sure if he was going to regret what he said next, but against his better judgement, he said it anyway. "Hey, look, I've been at the wrong end of a Beater's bat too, so I know it's a total bitch."

Albus' eyes widened slightly in recognition. "Oh, yeah, I remember that. Beginning of last year, right? Ravenclaw game?"

Scorpius nodded. "I was out in half an hour." His eyes turned stony. "That completely inept Beater rammed right fucking into me, then had the fucking nerve to hit me."
Albus tried to stifle his laugh, but a small snigger escaped him. "Sorry, man. Not cool."

Scorpius pursed his lips. "I've never seen Bates catch the Snitch so fast though." He shook his head. "At least something good came out of my injury."

"Well, that, and Pomfrey cooks a mean stew, huh?"

"Damn, I'd forgotten about that stew," Scorpius said somewhat longingly, lifting his gaze up. "Hey, remember in fifth year - I think - you had two Bludgers coming after you for like, half the game? What the fuck was up with that?"

Albus gritted his teeth. "My uncles, that's what." He exhaled in annoyance, and Scorpius wondered if he'd made the wise choice of re-opening what seemed to still be a fresh wound. "They run a joke shop, right, and they created these Bludgers - indistinguishable from the normal ones, mind - that you can enchant to lock onto a target."

"And your uncles did it as a practical joke on….you?"

"Oh, never fear," Albus said with a brittle smile. "Oh, we're ever so sorry, Al, we never dreamed they'd ever be used on you." He rubbed his temples. "I mean, they own a fucking open joke shop, right? Obviously some twat's going to buy their stuff and use it."

Scorpius wasn't exactly the empathetic type. "Uh...that's rough, man."

Albus nodded somewhat dazedly, as if he was still re-living the memories. He shook his head and then glanced down. "Huh."

"What?"

He held up his arm. "It's quarter to twelve. Our patrol ended fifteen minutes ago."

Scorpius raised an eyebrow, shaking back his sleeve to expose his own wrist. "Huh."

They looked at each other in silence, and then, in unison, "Huh."

"Well, I guess we can go, then," Scorpius said, uncomfortable with the fact that his tone sounded somewhat uncertain.

"Yeah," Albus replied, in a similar fashion. "I guess I'll see you around."

"Yeah," Scorpius said, furrowing his brow, watching as Albus made his way towards the Grand Staircase. "I guess you will."

Once Rose had managed to steer the conversation away from all things choir and half-time shows, their dinner once again became startlingly more pleasant.

But if anything, that made the doubt clench within her chest even more; if the dinner blew all together, it would be so much easier. On the other hand, she thought, whilst wondering why this was only the second option that came to mind, if the dinner had been wonderful all the way through, that would've been easy too.

It was an unfortunate sort of yo-yo relationship, she knew. But not even the exciting kind. The exciting kind, she was almost ashamed to admit, was the one full of passion, but the one that turned into a sort of reckless abandon, the one that led to screaming matches and-
Rose's brain switched gears completely as soon as she'd thought the word 'screaming matches'. That was not what she wanted.

Here was Christian, who had, from the kindness of his heart, set up this entire dinner; Christian, who had remembered her favourite foods, and here she was, surely unable to do the same even if she'd had a gun held to her head.

She locked back into his gaze, his kind, smiling eyes coming back into focus. And that only made her feel all the more wretched.

She broke their eye contact, glancing down at her watch. "Oh, gosh, it's almost half ten." She swept her napkin across her mouth. "And I still have a Charms essay to finish."

Christian looked up in surprise. "Half ten, already?" He shook his head, smiling. "Time flies when you're having fun, huh?"

"Oh, yes," Rose said. "That's how the saying goes."

Christian beamed at her, and pushed back his chair. "I'll walk you back."

"Are you sure? You'll only have to go up and then back down again."

"I insist," he said, coming around to meet her as she stood. "More time together, right?"

She nodded, smiling, and as they reached the door, turned back to look at the still beautiful set up before Christian magicked it away.

"Thank you," she said, meaning it, as he took her hand. "This was so thoughtful."

Christian coloured, grinning, and shrugged. "You're worth it."

She only smiled at him, and they set off.

"What a good night, huh?" Christian said merrily, swinging their hands together. "And I've gotta say - Chinese food is fantastic. I wonder if they have anything in Hogsmeade."

Rose scrunched up her nose. "Doubt it."

They arrived on the seventh floor, Christian still clasping her hand in his. The warmth was comforting against the cold stone of the dark castle.

They'd walked in silence along the corridor, but as they reached the entrance to the Gryffindor Common Room, Christian turned to her again, his eyes almost shining. "You know, Rose, the more time I spend with you, the more I realise how much I love-" and here something gripped Rose's heart like a vice, "-every minute of it."

She tried to hide her relieved sigh, and instead reached up on her tiptoes to press her lips against his cheek. "Thank you again. I had a wonderful time."

He had a funny look on his face as she lowered herself back down to meet his gaze, and it only took her a second to realise where she'd seen it before: Nate had worn it on their fourth date when he'd taken her out for a picnic by the lake and they'd watched the sunset together. He'd said her name softly, for they'd sat in a peaceful silence for so long that she had almost dozed off, and then he'd said it again, smiling when she caught his eye-"Hey, Rose, I..uh…"
And she realised that she couldn't do it, couldn't let him go through with it.

She broke into a loud cough, bringing a hand to her chest.

His face changed completely, resting a hand onto her shoulder. "Rose, are you alright?"

She waved a hand in front of her. "Oh, no, I'm fine, but I think I'm getting that thing that's going around; pity, I thought I'd missed it this time…"

He nodded understandingly. "Well, I…I think I'd better let you get back then. Sleep up and all that."

She turned her expression into something she hoped conveyed the appropriate amount of disappointment, and nodded as he gave her one last smile and set off, whistling.

"Cheer up, dear," said the Fat Lady's portrait. "Handsome fellow you've got there. And completely taken with you, I see."

"Oh, yes," Rose replied hollowly. "Completely."

It was just past midnight by the time Scorpius returned to the Slytherin dormitories, and by the looks of it, the Common Room was almost completely deserted. There were a few people by the fireplace, one person resting on the sofa, and another huddled at a desk.

Upon recognising the blonde messy bun piled on top of a bent over head, Scorpius made his way over to the table and leant down to press his lips quickly into his girlfriend's hair. "You look busy," he murmured, his eyes roaming the colour palettes monopolising the surface.

Liv looked up to meet his eyes, but her expression quickly morphed into one of suspicion. "What's up with you?"

Scorpius raised his eyebrows, leaning slightly back. "What do you mean?"

"You look kind of…happy."

Scorpius pulled out the chair next to her and lowered himself down, shrugging. "Seems unlikely."

She continued to scrutinise him. "What happened?"

He shrugged a second time. "Nothing."

"Did someone fall down the stairs again?"

"Okay, that was one time, and it was hilarious — you laughed too-"

"I snorted, I wasn't like you who almost collapsed-"

"No one fell down any stairs," Scorpius said, his tone remarkably unconcerned. She had just opened her mouth again when he hastily directed his attention back to the tabletop. "What're you up to?"

She followed his gaze, tapping her fingers on some of the squares. "My aunt and uncle's twenty-fifth anniversary party is coming up and she knows I like this sort of thing, you know, decorating and stuff, so she asked if I'd like to help out. I'm just playing around with some colours, I'm not too sure yet…"
Scorpius pointed to a particular duo of cream and deep plum. "I like this one."

Liv shook her head, strands of hair coming loose from her bun. "Seriously, what is up with you?"

He sighed, accepting that a simple shrug would just lead to further pestering. "Tonight was just a lot easier than I thought it was going to be."

He looked up as one of the girls by the fireplace rose and left for the dormitories. "Has Toby come through yet?"

Liv sniggered, piling some squares on top of each other. "He got cornered by Ruth Nesgrave - you know, the one who almost drained the life force out of him during the party - about half an hour ago. Haven't seen him since."

Scorpius snickered. "If you ask me, he didn't hate it. You know, I wouldn't be surprised if-"

"Don't you two have anything better to do than gossip about me when I'm not around? You're like a pair of old ladies, honestly."

Scorpius chuckled loudly, standing and clapping Toby on the back. "Glad to see you're still in one piece."

Toby looked at his best friend quickly, and then turned his attention to Liv. "What's up with him?"

Liv laughed, throwing Scorpius a smug look as Toby moved to rest against the table's edge.

"For fuck's sake," Scorpius groused, pushing his chair in roughly. "I'm going to bed."

"If you still feel like this in the morning, you might pay Madam Pomfrey a visit, just in case!" Toby called out from behind him, Liv's giggle tinkering in the background.

Scorpius only threw up a one finger salute behind him.

"Alihotsy," Xavier said, writing it onto the chalkboard behind him, "is indicative of which potion?"

The meagre rustle behind him compelled him to speak his next words without turning around. "Mr Malfoy?"

"The Alihotsy Draught," Scorpius replied, the smugness in his tone already the worst part of Rose's day, "whose effects induce the drinker or inhaler with symptoms of hysteria."

"Correct." The Professor turned away from the board and placed the chalk down on his desk. "As you might have guessed, this will be the potion of interest in today's lesson. However, before we begin, I would like to ask if anyone could tell me the chief ingredient of the Alihotsy Draught."

Rose's hand shot up; Scorpius, however, didn't bother. "Powdered root of Asphodel, Professor," she answered.

"And in what amount?"

"Five roots, sir."

"Precisely." Xavier tapped his wand on the hourglass beside him. "You will be allotted an hour's time to complete this brew. Please ensure you cap a test tube amount to be graded."
Rose had just opened her textbook when an all too familiar voice chimed, "Professor, if I may, I disagree with Ms Weasley's contention."

"And by extension, my contention?" Xavier asked, eyebrows raised.

Rose looked to her right to see Scorpius nodding humbly. Well, as humbly as an self-important egotist could.

"After following Professor Snape's revised rendition of the draught, I believe using an extra half-root results in the more potent potion."

Rose huffed. As if Scorpius Malfoy would offer to share his upper hand with anyone. The only reason he spoke up was to enact a personal jibe against her.

"Professor," she said, raising her hand as well. "Perhaps Mr Malfoy has not considered that the increased potency of the potion might have adverse effects on its success, namely, excessive hysteria."

Scorpius inclined his head towards her. "Perhaps Ms Weasley has not fully appreciated the fact that it was a previous Professor who penned these alterations, and that by undermining his constitutions, she may be undermining the constitutions of his successors."

Rose's eyes flashed in outrage as he turned to issue a forcedly neutral look towards their Professor, though she could see the glint in his eyes from where she sat.

By the looks of it, Xavier had not taken offence at Rose's injection; on the contrary, he looked almost entertained.

He nodded a few times, appraising both of his students. "I should not think to disagree with either of you." He almost smiled, before carrying on smoothly, "Therefore, Ms Weasley, you, along with the rest of the class, may brew the potion to adhere to the textbook's instructions. Mr Malfoy, you may brew your concoction as Severus Snape deemed fit."

Rose bit back her inclination to hold her tongue. "Professor, mustn't we consider that the ingredients used only partially predict the outcome of the potion. That is, the skill of the brewer also needs to be taken into account."

"Ms Weasley appears to be backing down, Professor," Scorpius said loftily.

"Not at all, sir," Rose replied, haughtily. When Scorpius turned to throw her a patronising smirk, she mouthed, "Prick."

Confidently out of Xavier's view, he mouthed back, "Bitch."

"Thank you, Ms Weasley, Mr Malfoy." The two students stopped glaring at each other to glare at their teacher. "You've made my next task that much easier. The two of you will be our first pair."

Rose's mouth fell open in horror. "Pairs for what?"

Xavier smiled coolly. "As much as some of you-" and here he stared pointedly back at his previously bickering students, "-would like to think otherwise, paired work is an integral part of learning and improvement, and the ability to rely on another is a skill gained only through experience. This one month project will not only make up fifty percent of this semester's grade, but it will also allow me to further reference you to your Head of House for your impending career advisory sessions. You can see that this particular project is a rather crucial one."
At this stage, waves of heat were rolling off of Rose's Weasley's person.

"Personal relationships must be put aside in place of professionalism." Xavier extended a hand out to his first pair. "Wouldn't you agree? You two will each make up fifty percent of Pair A."

One hundred percent of Pair A vehemently disagreed.

"Professor," Rose tried. "I really can't afford to mess this project up, you know how important it is to-"

"Then you must be exceedingly grateful that I have partnered you with the most capable Potions student at Hogwarts. You may begin."

Rose could feel Scorpius' smirk; from across the room, Gen mouthed, "Bad luck". Rose let her breath out through her teeth and glowered as Scorpius sauntered towards her.

"Professor." She perked up at the sound of her cousin's voice. "Don't you think pairing up the top two students gives them an unfair advantage?"

Al was right; it was a total injustice. Rose turned to face her Professor, barely hiding her glee.

"Well, I wouldn't say top two students," Scorpius muttered darkly, stopping as he passed. "You realise I've been put at a complete disadvantage being paired up with you, Weasley."

"I forgot this year's Head Girl was totally inept at one of Hogwarts' core subjects," Rose sniped back. "However will we manage?"

As the entire class watched their two Heads spar, Professor Xavier turned back to face Al, flipping the hourglass and setting it down. "Mr Potter, does that look like an unfair advantage to you?"

Even Al had no retort.

"How was your date?" was Gen's opening line as she joined Rose and Albus at the dinner table.

Rose chewed her gammon for a few moments before answering. "Fine."

Gen pulled a sympathetic face. "That bad, huh?"

Al's fork froze on the way into his mouth. "She didn't say bad, she said 'fine'. Why does that translate to bad? I don't get it."

The two girls threw him an understanding look, but then refaced each other.

"I don't know!" Rose said, reaching a hand up to brace her head against. "I don't know if it even went badly, you know? Because there were some great parts to it, I mean, he brought me the most amazing food-"

"He brought you food?" Al said, swallowing and then immediately shoving more food in his mouth. "He'f de one."

Rose looked at him with distaste. "No, Al, that's not the point. The food was great, and it was so thoughtful, you know, but he just…he cares about his choir so much. So much."

"So now caring about something is bad too?" Al said, raising his eyebrows in disbelief. "See, this is why I'm slowly making my way through the entirety of the Hogwarts female population."
"No," Gen said, waving her fork at him, ignoring the gravy she was dripping onto the table, "You're making your way through the entirety of the Hogwarts female population because you have the thirst of a camel."

"Actually," Rose pointed out. "Camels can go for weeks with little to no water."

"That wasn't my angle."

"Though when food is scarce, they'll eat or drink anything. Even tents."

"That was my angle."

"Hey!"

"So maybe he gets a little too invested in his music stuff, is that so bad?" Gen asked, sneaking a look to the Ravenclaw table behind her to make sure it was still sans Christian.

"Okay, saying Christian gets 'a little invested' in his music is like saying the Great Depression was a bad day for the stock market."

"Oh, it can't be as bad as all that-"

"I mean, during the day we spent at Hogsmeade together, we talked about a whole bunch of stuff, about languages and movies and books, and he only mentioned choir a little bit..."

"He probably didn't want to overwhelm you so soon after you just met."

"I guess so." She sighed. "Can we talk about something else? This conversation is making my food taste bad."

Gen nodded seriously, and then snickered. "We could talk about how exciting it is that you get to spend four extra hours a week with Malfoy for the next month."

Even as Gen had tried to change the subject, Rose's mind went straight back to her dinner with Christian, and she remembered with reproachfulness that stupid little voice that had glittered in her brain.

Al whistled. "What I wouldn't give to be a fly on the wall in that Potions classroom." His eyes suddenly glinted. "Say, do you think he loves Potions as much as Goldstein loves choir?"

Rose glared at him, putting her fork down with a quiet but severe clank. "You have some gravy on your face."

Three hours later, Rose exited the library after a wholly unsuccessful study session.

Usually it was her safe haven, a place where her thoughts were the most secure and un-muddled, though for the entire two hours she was there, she couldn't seem to calm her racing mind.

And then it hit her.

*It really shouldn't be this hard.*

She knew it wasn't a question of talking to him, or trying to change him; no, that wasn't what she wanted. It even seemed selfish to her that she might change the very quality of his that might make him so much more attractive to a particular someone, even if that someone wasn't her.
She nodded a few times to herself, trying to become more confident as she headed back for her room, planning out what she might say, imagining what he might reply. No, picturing his face was not helpful in the least.

But as she looked up from her fingers as they traced invisible patterns all over her textbook, she saw that for the first time that day, something was coming to her the easy way.

A flicker of doubt seeded up inside her as their eyes locked. He really was very good looking.

But she was too hopeful; that spark, that excitement, was gone.

"Rose!" Christian bounded up and stooped to peck her cheek, wrapping their hands together. "I was just looking for-what's wrong?"

She swallowed and slowly untangled herself. "Christian," she whispered, dread curdling in her stomach. "We need to talk."
"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

Chapter 8: Sleeping For The Wrong Team or, It's Funny How Reflections Change

Rating: M mainly for language, and I can't discount any funny business later on

Disclaimer: I work with only what the infallible J.K. Rowling has given me.

"Malfoy, I swear to God, if you do anything to compromise this project I will personally feed you to the Giant Squid."

Scorpius scowled. "You realise I'm the one being paired with second best and it's my reputation that's in jeopardy here."

Rose set her bag down and took out her textbook, even as she noticed that Scorpius' was already out on the table beside him. "You know if we could only stop arguing, we stand a fair chance at making the best potion in class."

Scorpius scoffed. "You know if you just fucked off and left me to do it, we'd definitely make the best one."

She shook her head, letting out a sharp laugh. "Well, this is the situation we're working with, so, sorry. Which page is it?"

"It's on the board."

"Yes, I know," she said, shortly, and then looked up. "Fifty-two," she murmured, thumbing through the book.

"Veritaserum," Scorpius said before she had found it, and she looked up to meet his gaze.

"Holy crap, really?"

"No, I'm joking."

She eyed him with a unfazed expression and crooked her hand on her waist. "So what's the plan?"

"Perhaps brewing the potion is a good place to start."

Rose gritted her teeth, and set her book down on the table with a loud thump. "Look, I'm really not in the mood. You can continue being an arrogant, self-invested, emotionally stunted dickbag, or you can set aside your stupid superiority complex for one goddamn hour and we can get this
"or you can set aside your stupid superiority complex for one goddamn hour and we can get this thing over and done with."

Scorpius simply studied her, and Rose feared in the silence he would hear her pounding heartbeat, but just as she was about to provoke an answer out of him, his mouth curled into a sneer. "My, my, Weasley, who knew you had such a mouth on you."

"That can't be the most terrible thing I've said to you in all these years."

"Emotionally stunted dickbag…” Scorpius mused. He laughed a little, and shook his head. "Shall we?"

It had taken Rose about twenty minutes to realise that this was the first time the two of them had been alone since she'd been forced into that horrible game and forced to do that…horrible thing. Not that they were often alone together, but still.

She was almost surprised that he hadn't brought it up, and she wondered if his reluctance to do so meant that he had found the experience as awful as she had. The thought didn't actually make her feel better.

"Weasley, I'm not saying so's to offend, but do you always work this slowly?"

She was startled out of her rumination and blinked. She lowered her gaze back to the cauldron and continued adding the Essence of Nightshade one drop at a time. "Slow and steady wins the race."

Scorpius kept her gaze and felt for the bottle of Lethe River Water, uncapped it, and let the liquid seep out so quickly Rose thought it impossible that he could actually be counting the drops, though the liquid unfailingly turned the exact shade of dark blue as said in the textbook. In another second he had recapped it and had lit the cauldron to a simmer. "Does it."

Rose rolled her eyes and glanced at the clock on the wall, beginning her five minutes of stirring.

In truth, Rose's thoughts had been preoccupied for the entire session. She had subtly been studying everything that Scorpius had been doing as they brewed together; she couldn't help it. Although they had shared the same Potions class for over six years, Rose had never really gotten a chance to be up close and personal with the Potions prodigy that was Scorpius Malfoy.

He brewed potions like no one she had ever seen. Instead of checking the heat every few seconds like she did, he seemed to instinctively know when the time was drawing to a close, and looked up at the clock only once, just seconds before it ended.

Rose had seen him speaking quietly to himself as he followed the textbook's directions, and when she asked him what he was saying, he muttered, "Just thinking about some theories," before underlining and annotating several instructions. She thought back to her own Charms textbook that was similarly scribbled upon.

While she had been watching him, a thought had struck her. "How did you know about Snape's book?"

Scorpius blinked, but didn't meet her gaze. "I don't understand the question."

"My uncle hid that book," Rose said, evenly.

"You think your uncle is the only one who can hide things?"

"In any case, most of the contents in that room were destroyed. You should know that; your father
was there when it happened." She tried to keep the bitterness out of her voice.

"Not everything."

Rose could tell that Scorpius would not be sharing anything else, so she pocketed the thought for another time and checked the potion again. "I'm going to add the Lionfish Spines, okay?"

"Fine." He looked quickly at the simmering potion, and grabbed Rose's wrist before she could drop them in. "Wait."

Rose yanked her arm away and looked at him accusingly. "What?"

Scorpius consulted his textbook, and tapped at the scribbles lining the page. "You only need to add four spines, not five."

"The instructions say five."

Scorpius sighed. "I've done this with both reproductions. Four works better, trust me."

Rose's mouth had pursed the moment she'd heard the phrase Trust Me from Scorpius Malfoy, but she was momentarily distracted. "What do you mean you've done this before?"

Scorpius fleetingly caught her gaze but kept stirring. "I brewed this potion in fifth year."

"Why?"

"I was bored."

Rose paused. "You brewed a Professor's level potion in fifth year only because you had nothing else to do?"

Scorpius shrugged.

Rose stayed silent, but opened the lid of the jar beside her.

Scorpius' mouth raised up at the side at the four resounding plops, but whether it was a smirk or a smile, Rose didn't know.

Toby raised a hand in greeting as he turned into the corridor leading to the Slytherin Common Room entrance and spotted Scorpius at the stone wall.

"How was it?" he asked as soon as he had reached him.


They walked through the revealed passage in silence, and it occurred to Toby that Scorpius wasn't in as bad a mood as he was expecting, though he said nothing.

Scorpius quickly spotted Liv reclining on the couch as she often did at this time of night and led the two over. Upon noticing that her legs were curled up beside her, he crossed over and sat. "Hi."

Toby excused himself upstairs ("I just need to prep something for tutoring, be right back") and Liv seemed jarred only when the door closed behind him.

Scorpius stared into the crackling fireplace since that was what she was doing, but stole a glance at her and knit his brow. Despite his callous nature, Scorpius was usually in tune with the emotions
of those around him, even if he didn't always respond to them. Mainly because he couldn't bring himself to care, but this was Liv, and something told him that he needed to.

"Liv?" he asked, his voice coming out harder than he expected - no, wanted - it to, and he cleared his throat before consciously softening it. "You alright?"

She finally turned to face him, and smiled, though it didn't quite reach her eyes. "Hey. Yeah, I'm fine."

She turned back to the fireplace. "How was your Potions session?"

"Fine," Scorpius answered ineloquently, though it was because he was still trying to figure out why his girlfriend was acting so...odd. The last time they had been together, Liv had seemed fine; holding his hand, laughing when he made fun of Toby. The usual. Though - and the thought had been nagging at his brain for a while - Liv had been acting slightly strangely recently, sometimes distant for unfathomable moments, and then seemingly fine the next.

Frankly, Scorpius was slightly baffled. Then again, he'd never been in a proper relationship with Liv before now, and perhaps this was what she was bringing to the table. He considered counselling her that if she was attempting to spice up their relationship, this was not exactly the way to do it.

He looked up to see Liv staring expectantly at him, and he realised that she must've asked him a question. "Sorry, what?"

She gave him a sort of dry smile, and rested her hand on his as she stood. "I just said I think I'm going to head up. The day really took it out of me."

Scorpius nodded and watched her leave before his gaze switched back to the fireplace.

Perhaps she was playing hard to get. But from Scorpius' arguably adequate relationship know-how, that was always something that happened prior to the relationship in order to spark said relationship. Anyway, Liv never seemed interested in playing games like that. Neither was he.

His gaze lifted as he heard footsteps coming down the stairs.

"Hey, where'd Liv go?"

"She was tired."

"Oh."

"But," Scorpius started, and Toby's eyebrows raised in interest, "I think there's something else going on."

Toby prodded at Scorpius to shift over and sat. "Like what?"

Scorpius sighed. "Fuck if I know."

Toby nodded understandingly, and turned his gaze to where his friend was looking. "Loving letter from home?" he asked suddenly.

Scorpius cast his eyes downward to where he had unwittingly left the letter he had received that morning on the coffee table in front of them. His eyes slid over the Malfoy insignia embellishing the fold of the envelope. "You know, mum's usual."
"That could be your answer right there," Toby said, standing up and clapping Scorpius on the back. "Night, mate."

"Night," Scorpius replied absentmindedly, and he stared so long at the crest that had adorned his life for as long as he could remember that when he finally turned his gaze back into the fire, it still burned fiercely in his vision.

Rose Vanished the line she had just written, pursing her lips as she again struggled mid sentence to write down anything that sounded even remotely coherent.

It's too loud in here, she thought with annoyance, looking up with a furrowed brow at the crowded library. Even though she had bagged her favourite table - favourite because of its attempted distance away from the many others - her luck had quickly diminished as soon as three couples had claimed the three tables closest to her, and were, as far as she could tell, doing nothing even remotely in the realm of studying.

She twiddled with her quill, thoroughly tempted to roll up what was probably a terrible piece of writing anyway and just call it a day.

She was so immersed in her thoughts that she almost didn't notice her textbook jolting suddenly in front of her, very nearly pushing her spare quill onto the floor. She straightened, her hand shooting out towards it just as a smaller hand reached for it as well.

"Sorry!" cried an apologetic voice.

"It's no problem," Rose said, looking up to meet the girl who had spoken. The young girl threw her another apologetic look before weaving through more tables; for lack of anything better to do, Rose's gaze trailed her with distrait, one eyebrow raising as the girl reached her destination and sat down next to a bitterly familiar mop of platinum blonde hair.

The girl's face, previously wearing a look of sincere apology, had traded it in favour of an unscrupulous smirk, appallingly similar to the expression she was facing. Rose wondered if this was the student that Scorpius was teaching Potions to - as she had heard - or if he had instead realised that his body was too small a container to fit all of that pompous spitefulness and was attempting to spread it.

"You always make me feel late, you know that?"

Rose smiled at her cousin's arrival, and then furrowed her brows as she took a closer look at him. "You look wet, Al, and not in a showered sort of way."

Al grinned at her wryly before inhaling deeply. "Yeah, you smell that?"

"Sweat?"

"Magic."

She wrinkled her nose in disgust. "Why can't you just shower like a normal, hygienic person?"

Al brushed a hand through his hair, and Rose glared at him as little droplets of water darkened the table. "Watch it!" She narrowed her eyes. "Hang on, we haven't had practice."

"I've been doing extra workouts recently, you know, since I'm Captain now and all that."

"Why don't you Charm yourself to not sweat instead?"
"Did you fail Biology, Rose?"

"Did you take Biology, Al?"

"Anyway, it helps to clear my mind, being out there."

Rose frowned at him. "What does your mind need clearing for?"

Al opened his textbook, seemingly engrossed in the Table of Contents page. "Nuthin'."

Rose stared at him, suspicion etched in her face, but lost her train of thought when she heard a loud snort. Her head snapped up - honestly, was it so hard to respect the sacred nature of library work? - and her eyes widened as she watched the girl who had jostled her things bat Scorpius' hand away as he extracted what looked like a trashy romance novel from her stack of books. Rose's eyebrows raised as he smirked at her, and teasingly read aloud the blurb while she worked; she glared at him, snarking back.

"Hello, Earth to Rose?"

Jolted, she shook out her hair and turned to face her cousin. "Sorry, what?"

Al scrutinised her, raising an eyebrow. He followed her gaze and his face relaxed. "This might sound mental, but our patrols session was surprisingly painless."

"You're joking."

"I'm not."

Rose cast another disbelieving look her cousin's way. "You must be."

"I'm not," Al repeated, laughing.

His cousin continued to appraise both him and his patrols partner. "Well, it looks like your new bestie's headed this way."

Al sniggered. "Looks like."

"Say hi, then, if you two are so chummy. Go on."

But as it turned out, Al didn't have to, since, as Scorpius passed by their table, he raised a subtle hand in greeting and said casually, "Alright, Potter?" before departing. Rose was so stunned that she didn't even realise that his silent treatment to her was, at least for them, unusual.

Al inclined his head cordially back and, as soon as Scorpius had passed their table, shook his head and chuckled.

"H-how?" Rose sputtered, angling her head just enough to watch Scorpius exit the library with his tutee in tow.

Al shrugged. "Turns out we have something in common."

"That's not a good thing, Al."

"Speaking of rounds," Al interrupted, the smile dropping off his face, "What are you going to do about yours with Goldstein?"

"She's going to thank her bloody stars that she has a friend like me."
Both of them turned to see Gen sliding into the seat on Rose's right, pointing the small piece of parchment she had in her hand in Rose's direction. "Charlie knows Christian a little and he was willing to help me out. Anyway," she continued, a faint blush dusting her cheeks, "He was getting a little too interested, and I don't think I can reciprocate."

Al's eyebrows raised at this, but he said nothing.

"So I get to do rounds with this one," Rose said, leaning against her friend and beaming at her. "And you get to do rounds with your best friend too, Al."

"Almost forgot." Gen offered the note in her hand to Rose. "McGonagall wanted me to give this to you. And what's this about Al's best friend?"

Rose studied the folded note for a second, then stuffed it into her pocket. "He'll explain it to you at dinner," Rose elaborated smoothly. "Or do you have a new best friend to eat with as well?"

"Piss off, Rosie."

"Okay, what the fuck is going on?"

Ms Weasley, Mr Malfoy,

I am pleased to share with you that the Heads dormitory is now available for your relocation. As soon as you are ready, you may vacate your current dormitories and settle into your new shared quarters. If you recall, the Heads dormitory is located on the sixth floor, in the most left wing of the castle, with the entrance opposite the portrait of The Hanging Tree. Kindly use "Hog's Head" as the default password until you have decided on a shared one. Please note that your former dormitories are still yours to use if desired.

Enjoy the new liberties granted to you by your achievements.

Regards,

Minerva McGonagall

Headmistress

"Still here?"

Scorpius finished folding his last shirt before he looked up. "And I was so hoping I could sneak out before you got back." He levitated his shirt into his suitcase and locked it. "Your eyes get frighteningly puffy when you cry, did you know? Looks awful."

"As long as you know that your nose runs like Niagara Falls."

The two shared an roguish smile as Toby surveyed the room. "You just finishing up then?"

Scorpius nodded, looking around his glaringly empty section of the room, though he was never one to be heavy on decor; apart from his trunk and table clock, the only other obvious indicator of his residency was the usually full cabinet next to his bed. Scorpius followed Toby's gaze to the glass doors that put its emptiness on display.

"Got everything from the bathroom?"
"Yes."

"And your section of the wardrobe?"

"All of it."

"I would've helped you," Toby said, still peering around the room. "If I hadn't been caught up with tutoring."

It was one of those rather alarming moments where Scorpius could feel a genuine smile forming on his face; it came to his attention that it required far more muscles than his usual smirk. He busied himself straightening out his already straightened sheets. "I'm a big boy, Tobias, and big boys do their own packing."

Toby spread his hands. "I'll be lying here laughing if you've forgotten something and have to climb all the way back down here to fetch it, and then all the way back up again."

"It *would* be useful if there was an *Accio-all-of-my-things* spell," Scorpius said, waving his hand vaguely.

"If there's anyone who could see to it, it would be you," Toby said, sitting down and shaking his head. He paused. "It is a Charms spell, come to think of it, which is more Rose Weasley's department. Good thing you're roomies then, isn't it?"

Scorpius grunted.

"First time in seven years," Toby said, somewhat wistfully.

"First time what in seven years?"

Toby reached out his hand and trailed his fingers along the wooden frame of his bed. "First time in seven years we won't be sharing a room."

"You'll have to find someone else to braid your hair and brush your teeth for you," Scorpius said, adopting his friend's tone. But they each looked up and met the other's rueful smile, and Scorpius thought it was time he should be going.

"Alright, I'm putting this Schmaltz family act to bed," he said, wordlessly commanding his trunk to rise. "But you know my couch has your name on it."

Toby straightened as if to get up. "You want me to walk you?"

Scorpius shook his head, though he still smirked. "You think I want Weasley seeing me getting dropped off like a child at daycare?" He, however, had decided to leave as early as classes and packing had permitted him so he could be there before her, ready to issue her some scathing comment as soon as she walked in-

"Sod what Rose Weasley thinks."

Scorpius rolled his eyes. "You sit tight, Schmaltzy, and I'll see you at Quidditch."

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"*Alarte Ascendare*?"

"No."

"Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them?"
"No."

"Ferula?"

"Honestly, Weasley, if someone does manage to get inside, I'd rather them be at least entertaining in some way."

"Well, don't offer all your ideas at once," Rose said, waspishly, thoroughly tempted to give her wand a swift flick and flatten the boy next to her with a fifty pound trunk.

Scorpius glared at her, and then opened his mouth.

"If it's a Quidditch manoeuvre, you can forget it."

Scorpius sourly closed his mouth.

"Aparecium? It means 'to reveal' so it seems quite fitting."

"Fitting, better known as guessable," Scorpius interjected. "What about a potion?"

"What about a compromise?"

Scorpius paused. "I'm listening."

Rose tapped her finger against her arm, training her eyes on him. "Something that represents both of us. What about 'Leo Anguis'?"

"You speak Latin."

"No. Do you?"

"No."

"It'll do," Scorpius said finally, and Rose took that to be as good a compliment as any as they turned the last corridor and arrived at the portrait opposite The Hanging Tree.

The two of them stared uncomprehendingly at the painting guarding their entrance, their eyes flickering briefly in each other's direction. Rose's mouth opened in bewilderment as she took in what appeared to be a snapshot from the Old West, and she zeroed in on the sudden movement in the forefront of the picture.

The figure stopped plucking his guitar and leisurely turned to face them. "Well, howdy, I was just here told you'd be arrivin', don't mind ma guitar now - I only take it out when I get lonesome."

There were a few pregnant beats of silence, before-

"Good grief," Scorpius said in a horrified voice. "What in Merlin's name are you supposed to be?"

The cowboy jumped up from where he had cushioned himself within a hay bale - his guitar squealing in protest as it clanged onto the dusty ground - and stuck out his hand. "John H. Wyatt reporting for duty." He paused. "But y'all can just call me John."

"It's very nice to meet you, John," Rose said as soon as the side-eye she gave Scorpius indicated that he would not be talking first. "I'm Rose Weasley. And this is Scorpius Malfoy."

"You got somethin' in your throat?" John asked, pointing at his own. "Or maybe you're just the
quiet type? My ma always said when I were a young-un I weren't the talkin' type, but as soon as I got myself hitched, I knew I had'to give as hard as I got, and well, I'm hardly recognisable today."

"Are you well versed in English?" Scorpius asked, with no hint of sarcasm.

John H. Wyatt yawned, picking up his guitar and inspecting it. "I ain't a half-wit, dude," he said, pleasantly. "My ma taught me to speak in seven languages."

"Is one of them English?" Scorpius asked seriously. Rose looked down to see his fingers stiffening along the folds of the robe he had bunched up in his hand.

"You must excuse my dorm mate," Rose said smoothly, though John's relaxed face clearly said that Scorpius was having no effect on him. "He's been terribly afflicted recently."

"Afflicted how?" John asked, raising an eyebrow as he sat down on the worn bench next to the hay bale.

"An incurable skin disease, I'm afraid," Rose said, looking at her companion with sympathy. "Drains the skin of all colour, leaving it sickeningly pale. Horrible, really." As Scorpius opened his mouth furiously, Rose hastily carried on. "Hog's Head, if you please, John. And we would like the new password to be 'Leo Anguis'."

John nodded a few times, though his mouth twitched slightly. "I hope you get yourself fixed, tenderfoot."

Rose waved a hand, sweeping them through the newly revealed hole. "Completely incurable, John!"

Scorpius arched his back away from her hand and twisted to look at her. "You are absolutely-"

"Welcome?" Rose supplied pointedly. "Unless you want to spend the rest of seventh year locked outside your own dormitory?" The thought seemed to occur to her, and dejectedness briefly flitted across her face. "Drat."

"We are going straight back to McGonagall right now," Scorpius hissed, looking back at the closed door.

"Why?" Rose asked, a light snicker escaping her lips as she took in his livid expression.

Scorpius leaned in conspiratorially. "Because, Weasley, I refuse to have our room guarded by a - a hillbilly!"

"I can hear y'all in cahoots, you know?" came the amused voice from outside. "But I'll pay no mind, we're gonna be partners soon, believe you me."

Scorpius huffed heavily. "My father shall be very interested to hear about this John H. Wyatt."

Rose rolled her eyes. "Stop being so ridiculous, he seems very…interesting."

Scorpius dropped his trunk onto the floor with a dull thud. "I forgot the two of you share so much in common. You must not get many opportunities to converse with other such unsophisticated country persons. Please, don't let me stop you."

"He can hear you," Rose hissed, instinctively swivelling around to check the entrance again.

"I don't care," Scorpius hissed back, then repeated it louder.
Rose pulled a hand through her hair, focusing hard on the sensation. She sighed. "Which room do you want?"

"You can choose."

"I like this one," she said, pointing to the one closest to the door.

"And I want the other one," Scorpius replied, already moving towards the back end of the room.

"Is that it?" Rose called, surveying the space around them. "You don't want to figure out how we're going to style this place?"

"What's to style?" Scorpius asked, his gaze moving towards the desk and couch.

"Wall colour, carpet colour, decorations," Rose said, shrugging. "I don't know."

"I have Quidditch," Scorpius said. "And we're finishing late."

"I'm busy tomorrow."

"Sunday night?"


Scorpius smirked. "Then I'll see you Sunday for our…appointment."

Rose charmed her trunk to rise again and had deposited it on her bed when Scorpius said loudly, "Do I need to cast a noise cancellation charm, or will you two behave yourselves?"

"You don't need to worry about that," Rose said shortly, before she walked into her room and shut the door behind her without looking back.

"Good," Scorpius called out, because he didn't know what else to say.

"And once you fly here, I need you two to disperse at ten o'clock and five o'clock, and then, Sydney, you take out the remaining Chaser in the middle. All clear?"

Scorpius, who usually commanded his team through a mixture of fear and respect, lowered his eyes towards his two Chasers and narrowed them as he realised the minuscule movement of their lips meant that they were talking. "Are you two listening?"

Toby, who was hovering next to them, silently shook his head and tsked.

"We're running through plays here!" Scorpius snapped, urging his broom forward and pulling up in front of them. "So shut up."

Noah Bixby raised his hands in surrender. "Ten o'clock, got it."

Jack Harrington, grimacing, flew uncertainly in the vaguely opposite direction. "I'll just…be over here then."

Scorpius glowered at him and thrust out a finger directing him where to fly.

He watched approvingly as, despite their inattentiveness, his Chasers and Beater carried out the play satisfactorily and flew back towards him. "Good, alright, now, when Sydney's dealt with the Chaser in the middle, that still leaves us with—are you fucking kidding me?"
Much closer now, he had heard snatches of conversation. His gaze darkened as 'Rose Weasley', 'break-up' and then 'on the market' was discernible, and he unwittingly compressed the Quaffle in his hands. "Bixby! Harrington! Take a lap!"

The two in question exchanged incredulous looks. "For what?"

"For not shutting the fuck up when I tell you to! And take another one for back talking the Captain."

As the Beaters dismounted, Toby sidled over, tossing the other Quaffle between his fingertips. "You okay, man?"

Scorpius shrugged nonchalantly. "I'm fine. Nothing's up. Why?"

"Did you know about that? You know, Rose and Christian calling it quits?"

"Of course I did," Scorpius said loftily. "And I'm sure Weasley's decision was affected by my penchant for astute judgement."

The Chaser frowned, his gaze honing in on Scorpius' telltale jaw. "Okay, I only ask since you're acting kind of-"

"Back to your post!" Scorpius barked. "Or I'll make you take a lap too!"

---

Rose was prone to taking baths in time of stress. And this, she thought, definitely counted as a time of stress.

She had finally managed to finish her Transfiguration essay - though she had to scrap most of what she had written in that ineffectual library session - and decided to reward her efforts with a nice Saturday afternoon bath.

She had just entered her room, her mind preoccupied with thoughts of the prefects' bathroom - since it was so much nicer than her own - and was just dropping off her bag when she noticed a tawny owl sitting on her windowsill.

At the sight of her, it plucked out the letter from its leg-strap and dropped it onto the table before flying off.

Rose scanned the note, felt her heart flop somewhat, and realised with despondency that she would not be taking a bath today.

"You're awfully sprightly for someone who's headed to the Hospital Wing."

"I happen to have been summoned here," Scorpius replied pompously as soon as their paths had converged. "Madam Pomfrey obviously requires my expertise."

Rose groaned. "She Owled you as well?"

Scorpius skidded to a halt as they reached the doors. "Bloody brilliant, as if we don't spend enough time together as it is. Can't you find something else to do, like make out with your boyfriend? Oh, wait, sorry," he said, not sounding sorry in the least.

Rose's fist twitched; she balled it up, her fingernails digging deep into her palms. "Don't you have a girlfriend to snog, Malfoy?"
"Your comments are trite, as usual."

Rose sighed. "We'll be of no use to Pomfrey if we keep arguing."

"You're already of no use to her."

"See, that's what bitter looks like!"

He attempted to barrel past her but underestimated the force of her pushing back. The two tumbled into the room together, but judging by Pomfrey's reaction, she mistook their headlong arrival to be a sign of their uncurbed enthusiasm.

"Ah, there you are!" The nurse beckoned them over to the three inhabited hospital beds. "We had a very nasty Quidditch mishap. Why they allow this sport to go on, I really don't know."

While she had been speaking, Rose had noticed with surprise that she seemed to be in travelling clothes. "Madam Pomfrey, are you going somewhere?" she asked.

"Urgent matter at home, I'm afraid." She pointed to the boy gingerly drinking out of an opaque cup. "He needs only rest now, but the others require more extensive and time consuming dedication." She turned to properly face both of her students. "I trust the both of you to aptly attend to their injuries."

They nodded, and watched as Pomfrey left the room.

"I'll uh…take this one over here, then," Rose said, edging over to the boy closest to her. "Hi," she said, quietly, as the boy's eyes opened at the sound of her voice. "I'm Rose."

"I know who you are," he laughed lightly, then winced.

Rose grimaced, and grabbed the clipboard at the end of the bed. "Bad fallout with a Beater's bat, huh, Mich-" She choked as her gaze drifted over his full name. "Goldstein." She swallowed. "Christian's brother?"

He nodded. "I'm Michael."

Rose bit her lip. "I suppose you don't like me very much, do you?" she asked, her light tone betrayed by her voice breaking.

Michael laughed again. "I'd probably like you more if you could sort out my broken ribs and shattered knee cap."

Rose exhaled and nodded purposefully, hoping he didn't see as she fumbled with her wand as she drew it from her robes.

This would be his entertainment for the day, Scorpius decided. Watching Rose Weasley squirm was delicious on every level, and since it happened so rarely, it was something that he exceptionally treasured.

"Do you um…sing too?"

Scorpius barely withheld his laughter as Michael answered succinctly, "Not really."

"Oh. Interesting."
"What's so funny?"

Scorpius looked down to see his charge - Austin - frowning up at him. He bent down to reply. "Weasley's patient is her ex-boyfriend's brother."

"That doesn't sound too bad."

"It might not be, if she hadn't broken up with him less than a week ago."

"Ah."

Scorpius grinned, and looked up. "Oi, Weasley, I need to check something with you."

She looked up suspiciously, but walked over. "Like you need help," she scoffed softly.

"You would be right," he whispered back. "So, how's the patient? Michael, is it? He looks awfully familiar, might I know him?"

Rose elbowed him. "Shove off, Malfoy."

Scorpius looked up to see Michael engrossed by their conversation, and leaned over Austin's bed. "Don't let your brother take it personally, mate," he said with sincerity. "If Weasley hadn't secretly been begging me for a date, she might've stayed with him."

Austin groaned loudly. "Fuck. I owe Georgia fifteen Galleons."

"Which she owes me," Michael whooped. "Hand it over."

"I'll give it to you at dinner," Austin replied, burrowing himself back down into the bed in disappointment.

Scorpius watched in dismay as his attempt at humiliation backfired miserably, though he took certain joy in Rose's face turning the colour of a ripe tomato.

"No, no, Michael, Malfoy and I are absolutely not in any sort of-"

Austin patted her hand consolingly. "I understand that you don't want it to get out. Force of habit, and all of that."

"It's not like that, I don't have any romantic interest in Malfoy. Or any interest whatsoever, come to think of it."

"Don't worry," Austin reassured her again. Rose was beginning to get seriously annoyed by his incessant hand patting. "We believe you." He winked.

"Oh, for-" Rose stopped at the sight of Michael sitting contentedly back in his bed. She glowered at Scorpius, who only looked more amused. "Just forget it."

Liv smelled like cinnamon today.

That's what Scorpius was thinking as they lay on his bed in a comfortable silence on Sunday afternoon, with Liv occasionally humming up towards the ceiling.

"I like this."

Scorpius shifted to face her. "This…silence?"
"No," she laughed lightly. "I like that you have your own room now, and we don't have to worry about Toby or Noah or Shane, or that other guy with those weird posters."

"Theo."

"Or Theo."

They lapsed back into quiet again, and that was nice too. But, as nice as it was, there was something incessantly tugging at Scorpius' brain, and he flicked his eyes back to where his girlfriend lay. "So I guess you're not pissed at me anymore, huh?"

Liv looked at him properly, then rolled onto her side, propping herself up on her elbow. "No, I'm not. We made up at the party, remember?"

"I didn't mean the party; I meant Thursday night when we were in the Common Room, and you sort of just…left."

"I wasn't mad at you."

"I got this letter from home, it was on the table where you were working, I just wondered-""

"It wasn't that," Liv said, quickly, and though she was facing him, she suddenly felt very far away.

"So what was it then?"

"No, I didn't mean—it was nothing."

Scorpius turned to more fully face her, and then they were close enough to kiss if he wanted. "You sure?"

Liv found his hand and clasped it in both of hers. "Can we just forget it? I was just, you know, having an off day." She leant in, pressing her lips softly against his, before drawing back and rolling to face the ceiling again.

If not her words, her body language was enough to indicate that the subject was closed, and some part of Scorpius was relieved, though another facet of his brain still thrummed in dissatisfaction. "How's the wedding prep going?"

"Anniversary."

"Oh, right. Sorry."

"That's okay." She sighed, and Scorpius looked over with a touch of concern but was met only by her peaceful expression. "I sent some boards over to them and they really love all of my ideas — I chose the cream and plum one that you liked, remember that one?"

"Oh, yeah."

"Hey." Liv sat up, resting her hand lightly on his chest, tracing the logo of the shirt he was wearing. "My aunt told me I would be allowed a plus one, and uh…I thought maybe that could be you."

Scorpius blinked, training his eyes on her fingers before settling back on her face. "That would be nice," he said. "I haven't seen your aunt and uncle in a while, actually. You're not inviting Toby as well, are you?"
Liv scrunched up one side of her nose. "I know he usually comes with but, well…I thought it could be a little different this time."

"Different how?" Scorpius asked, and then he became aware of the weight on his chest, the featherlight brushes, and he thought he knew.

Liv’s expression clearly said she thought he should have known too. "You know, you'd be coming over as my boyfriend this time - the last time they saw you we were in fourth year, and we were still only friends."

"Would it make such a difference?"

Liv raised an eyebrow, and seemed to forcibly relax it. "It makes a difference to me."

Scorpius searched her eyes, and if he were a lesser man, he would've gulped. Instead he summoned some form of a smile onto his face, and propped himself up as well. "Let's re-meet your family then."

Liv smiled back, and then her gaze drifted past him and towards his bedside table. "You had something on at eight, right?"

Scorpius made a face, and nodded. "Yeah, why?"

"It's eight."

Scorpius groaned, and then stretched his arms, running a hand through his hair as he swung his legs over the side of the bed and stood. He held out a hand for Liv to stand too, and followed her out of his room.

His mouth pursed as soon as he saw the two figures curled up on the couch, laughing quietly in harmony.

Liv followed his gaze and smirked. She lifted up onto her tiptoes and kissed his cheek. "Have fun."

"Bye," he said, and as soon as she had disappeared he turned his gaze over to the middle of the room. "Okay, Weasley, tour's over. Bye, Chang."

"Bye, Malfy," Genevieve said, barely sparing him a glance.

"We have an appointment," he said, his smirk leaking into his voice as he folded his arms.

"Yeah, I'm sure."

Rose sighed. "He's not lying. We're decorating."

Gen furrowed her brows, laughing in disbelief. "Decorating? That sounds like a disaster waiting to happen."

"Yeah, well, I'm waiting for something else to happen," Scorpius said pointedly, looking between Gen and the door.

Gen looked at Rose, and then hopped to her feet. "See you tomorrow." She got to the door and turned around. "I'll pray for you."

"She'll need it," Scorpius interjected, and Gen shook her head in pity for her friend before she left.
Rose retreated back into her room to fetch her Charms book and returned to see Scorpius doing the same.

"Can we try and get this done without incident?" Rose rubbed at her temple. "I think you've already given me a headache."

Scorpius flipped his book open, and Rose immediately recognised the chapter for Decorative Charms. He looked up and met her gaze. "Shall we make this official, then?"
"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

**Chapter 9: That's A Good Idea, Break A Promise To Your Mother or, The Kids Aren't Alright**

**Rating:** M mainly for language, and I can't discount any funny business later on

**Disclaimer:** I work with only what the infallible J.K. Rowling has given me.

"McGonagall wants to see us, she didn't actually say why — Oh, God, Weasley, what are you doing?"

Rose looked up from where she was stringing twine balls along the mantel above the fireplace. "What? I was just adding a few little things here and there."

"That is hideous, Weasley. If I die tomorrow and that is the last thing I remember, you'd better believe I'd rise from the grave and strangle you with it."

"At this rate you'll be dying a lot quicker than tomorrow, I can assure you," Rose muttered back, ignoring him as she charmed the balls to flicker with a soft orange light.

"Why do we need light over a fireplace?"

"It's not just the light," she said, standing and surveying her handiwork. "I think it makes it look a lot homier." She turned and taxed his unimpressed expression, then sighed and charmed the balls to a tawny brown. "Better?"

Scorpius made a noise that sounded like begrudging acceptance.

"And what's that?" he said, his voice rising as something caught his eye to their left. "What exactly have you done to our window?"

Rose folded her arms across her chest. "Oh, right, I was going to ask you about that. I think the blue casts a nice light in here. Or I could change it so it only tints blue at night?"

"Blue is for the ocean and I don't like the ocean. And since we're still decorating-" He raised his wand and magicked up a mirror positioned above the fireplace. "Looks better here than over there."

Rose glanced at her reflection in it. "Blue isn't just for the ocean. Eyes can be blue." She turned to face him.
"I don't like blue," he said.

Rose shook her head at him. "Then, by all means, change it to something you like." She flounced past him and shut herself in her room.

Scorpius massaged his temple, made a face and headed for the other bedroom. As he turned to take another look at the new room changes, he noticed that there was still only one desk available, and he paused. He could duplicate it, or he could leave it; both would send a message he wasn't quite sure he wanted to send.

He huffed, and left it as it was.

"I trust you find your new dorm to your satisfaction?" McGonagall surveyed them under her glasses as she sealed the envelope she was writing.

"Yes, Professor."

"Good. Now, I'd imagine you'd like to know why I called you two in." Without waiting for a reply, she carried on. "As you're aware, the annual Christmas Ball will be held on the last Friday of the school term. You will also be aware that the event is traditionally organised by choice members of the faculty, however," - and here her eyes seemed to twinkle behind her glasses - "we have decided that it might be more fitting for the arrangers and decorators of the Ball to better represent the student body."

The two Heads shared a quick glance and turned back to face their Headmistress.

"Us, Professor?" Rose asked.

"Certainly. Along with the prefects, of course. However, the two of you will be in charge of acquiring the decorations yourselves."

At their blank looks, McGonagall gave them a wry smile, resting her elbows on the table. "The two of you will travel to Hogsmeade to acquire the decorations you need."

"The two of us," Rose repeated.

"Alone," Scorpius said.

McGonagall raised her eyebrows. "You can't expect me to allow such a large group of students wreaking havoc on the unsuspecting public. No, it is far better for the two of you to go alone."

"Better for who?" Scorpius muttered before he could stop himself, and though Rose appeared to have not heard him, McGonagall seemed to grant him the briefest of looks.

"Although this weekend is not strictly a Hogsmeade weekend, the two of you will take advantage of the relatively empty village and adequately prepare for the festivities. Now, I am aware that Hogsmeade may lack all of the necessities for such a lavish event, and I am therefore opening up the possibility of using the shops in Diagon Alley. You will find that the fireplace you share in your new dormitory will be perfectly sufficient for transport." She paused. "Finally, I am aware that your workload is building, and have informed your professors that three-day extensions may be granted in compensation for your lost time. Do you require an extension for the Trans-Species Transformation essay due the coming Monday?"

"No, thank you," the two Heads replied, both of whom had already completed the assignment.
The corner of McGonagall's mouth twitched, but she only nodded. "Good. Now, Mr Malfoy, you are welcome to leave. Miss Weasley, there is something I wish to discuss with you."

Scorpius stood, inclined his head politely at the Headmistress and left without looking at Rose once. She pshed quietly, and faced her teacher, rubbing her hands up and down her thighs.

"It is nothing to be nervous about, Miss Weasley," McGonagall said, eyeing her student's tapping fingers. "I simply wanted to inquire as to your progress with Mr Greengrass."

"Oh, Will?" Rose asked. "I mean, er—Wilhelm?"

"Yes, Wilhelm."

Rose nodded a few times. "He's definitely improving," she said. "And he works very hard, he just needs a confidence boost, is all."

Professor McGonagall looked down at her desk and ran her fingers along the small piece of parchment there. "He is definitely improving," she affirmed. "I received a note from Professor Flitwick informing me of his progress. You have done very well, Miss Weasley."

Rose glowed. "Thank you, Professor."

McGonagall drew out the jar she usually kept on her desk and held it out to Rose. "Mini tart?"

Rose bit her lip, and took one, grinning.

McGonagall bent down to her desk and after a few moments, looked back up and studied her student with amusement. "Do you think perhaps it would be better to retire back to your dormitory for the night?"

"Oh!" Rose stood abruptly and rather clumsily, shoving the entire tart into her mouth so that McGonagall would know she had eaten it, and then regretted it as soon as she did. She swallowed with some difficulty and then said, "Goodnight, Professor."

"Goodnight, Miss Weasley."

She had just reached the door when she suddenly turned back. "Professor, what's this year's theme?" she asked, realising that the Headmistress had left this information out.

"Why, Miss Weasley," McGonagall said, leaning back in her chair. "That is for you and Mr Malfoy to decide."

"She wants us to pick a theme?" Scorpius demanded.

"Yep," Rose said, falling onto the couch heavily with a sigh.

Scorpius studied her for a second, then lowered himself far more collectedly into the adjacent one. "Isn't "Christmas" theme enough for a Christmas Ball?"

"Apparently not."

"We should brainstorm," he said, pulling his mouth to one side in thought. "If we're heading out together this weekend, Merlin forbid we spend more time there debating what we want to get."

"Fine. Let's hear some ideas then."
He shifted to look over at her. "What, now? Like this?"

Rose nodded, bringing the pillow by her calf to rest under her head. "I can't think of a better time."

"Wha-I can't focus like this!"

"Too bad." Rose deliberately wiggled further into the sofa. "I'm not moving."

Scorpius sighed the sigh of one who felt the entire world on his shoulders. "It should all be white."

"Really? Because I thought fuchsia would-

"Or silver, maybe."

Rose turned to properly look at him. "You want our Ball to be some sort of Winter Wonderland?"

"Our Ball, Weasley?"

"The Ball. This Ball."

"I think so," Scorpius said, musingly. "We could have fake snow, you know, to be atmospheric."

"I thought you said that white was for prisons," Rose said, remembering their previous decorating session the week before.

"For a dorm room, yes. But not with snow."

"We could have ice sculptures," Rose suggested, taking a leap of faith and assuming that Scorpius was being serious. "You know, reindeer and elves and stuff."

Scorpius nodded. "We have a fountain at my house." He cleared his throat. "And over Christmas we freeze it with the water spouting up. That could work as a centrepiece."

Rose had a startling vision of Scorpius dressed in a red velvet Santa Claus suit, prancing around his frozen fountain as fake snow fell from the sky. She choked on her snicker.

"Something funny, Weasley?" he asked, and when Rose looked at him, she thought she saw a seed of indignation budding that could only be explained by ridiculing what someone thought to be a good idea.

"No," she said, hastening to contain her laugh. "I think that's great." When he still looked at her suspiciously, she cleared her throat. "Um...a tree. We could get a tree and snow dust it, and then decorate it."

"And we could put presents under it," Scorpius said. "Fake presents, of course." He checked his watch. "Well, I think that's as good of a start as any. If you think of anything else, tell me."

Rose didn't move from the couch, though she watched as Scorpius got to his feet. "And we can always pick up some stuff if we see it when we go out."

"Brilliant." Scorpius grabbed his bag from the desk and shouldered it. "I'll be going then."

"Bye," Rose said automatically, and Scorpius frowned from behind her.

"Bye," he replied, and as he left the dorm amidst John H. Wyatt praising him for fighting through his ongoing health battle, he wondered if they were going to make a habit of doing that.
Diagon Alley was lit up in preparation for Christmas, and though the company definitely could have been improved upon, Rose emerged from Madam Malkin's grinning, and she turned to face her companion. "Which shop should we go to first?"

Scorpius pursed his lips, and looked around. "There's a shop down there where my mum gets our Christmas decorations. They might have something."

Rose raised an eyebrow, and somehow she found it impossible to imagine Scorpius and his family celebrating Christmas, but she shook herself out of her thoughts and followed Scorpius as he led the way down the chilly street.

"This is it," he said, stopping at a large shop with presents and decorations displayed in the window. He opened the door, and they walked in.

A plump and sprightly looking woman hurried to meet them at the door, and her eyes widened at the sight of the tall blonde boy in her doorway.

"Hello," she said, sidling up to them. "Welcome to my humble abode. I'm Gwyneth. How can I help?" The silent "you" hung in the air as her question was quite obviously directed at Scorpius, and he turned to look at Rose, his expression forcedly blank.

"We're looking for Christmas decorations," Rose put in, and Gwyneth almost reluctantly turned to face her. "Whites, silvers, golds, if possible."

"We have a new stock right over here," she said, beckoning them to follow her as she led them deeper into the shop. "Cutlery, streamers, candles, table decorations, you name it."

Though Rose couldn't decide what exactly to make of the shop owner, she was selling precisely what the two of them needed. She and Scorpius wandered around the display, picking up various items and inspecting them.

"And these can be multiplied?" Scorpius asked, taking care to glance at the woman as briefly as possible.

"Oh, yes," she replied. She watched them deliberate against more items, and cleared her throat. "Was there anything else you two needed? Larger items or…?"

Rose looked up. "We could do with some sculptures, if you have any," she said, "Maybe some-"

"We have this beautiful reindeer sculpture," Gwyneth interrupted. "Come and see!" She dragged Scorpius along with her, and Rose put a hand against her mouth as Scorpius sputtered and protested.

"Scorpius, isn't this exactly what you were looking for?" Rose said, clapping her hands together when she reached them. "It can go right next to your fountain!"

Scorpius turned his gaze on her, and Rose only grinned wider at the murderous look in his eyes.

"It's on its hind legs, see," the woman continued, steering Scorpius around so he could get a better look at it. "As if it's trying to reach up for someone, or-"

"Mating," Rose said, loudly, and pointed at it. "Don't you think it looks like it could be mating? Oh, Scorpius, it's perfect for you!"

"Mating," the woman said, musingly. "Why, yes, it does." She looked Scorpius up and down. "Would you be interested in that?"
"What?!" he yelped, yanking his arm out of her grasp.

"The reindeer, Scorpius," Rose said, *tsking*. "Get your mind out of the gutter. So, what, do you want it?"

"*But we already have so many reindeer sculptures at home,*" he gritted out through his teeth. "*Don't we, Rose?*"

Rose had never heard her name said so venomously, but it only served to entertain her further.

"Now, I'm so sorry, Gwyneth," Rose said, casting a sympathetic look to the shop owner, "but I think we might just stick to the decorations we picked out."

"Very sorry," Scorpius mumbled, and as Rose passed him, he elbowed her in the ribs. He smirked as Rose dipped forward and rubbed at her side before recovering and laying down some of the money that Professor McGonagall had given them.

"Thanks for all your help, Gwyneth!" she said, picking up half of the bags and leading the way out. "Another time!"

As soon as the door tinkled shut behind them, Scorpius grabbed her arm and jabbed a finger at her face. "What the fuck was that all about, Weasley?" he growled. "Or are we on first name terms now, *Rose*?"

"Psh," Rose said, putting the bags down onto the ground. "Lighten up, Malfoy."

"Now you've gone and dirtied the bags," Scorpius said disdainfully, pointing to the ground. "Well done."

Rose rolled her eyes at him and pulled out a small drawstring bag from her coat. She picked up their shopping and lowered the bags one by one into the minuscule opening.

"Undetectable Extension Charm?" Scorpius asked in surprise, momentarily forgetting his anger. His face readjusted to its previous expression. "You can't fit all of our shopping in there. The charm isn't powerful enough."

"Depends on who's casting it," Rose replied loftily. She looked down at her wrist and pushed back her coat sleeve. "It's half twelve," she said. "Now I'm hungry."

It took Scorpius a second to process what she had said.

"Hungry?"

"Are we going in together?"

Scorpius paused, one foot already inside the Leaky Cauldron, and inclined his head towards her. "Well, it'll look exceedingly ridiculous if we sit alone at two different tables when both arriving and leaving together, don't you think?" He caught the attention of one of the waitresses closest to the door and asked for a table for two.

The woman showed them to their seats and handed them some menus before excusing herself; Scorpius cleared his throat, and perused his.

"I haven't been in here a while," Rose said, looking around. "We usually have lunch here when
we're buying school things for the beginning of term, but we didn't this year." She shook her head, laughing incredulously. "If my family could see me right now…"

Scorpius looked at her from over his menu. "What, with me?"

"I don't think your family would be too happy seeing you with me," Rose said, by some way of affirmation.

"I don't think so either."

He noticed her staring around the room, and he put down his menu. "Are you ready to order?"

She nodded, and Scorpius summoned the waitress back to them. As she arrived, she set a small mason jar on the table and plunked in a yellow daffodil. Scorpius raised his eyebrows and regarded the rest of the room; the only other table with a flower was occupied by a young couple who were holding each other's hands as they ate. He coughed.

"And you, sir?"

Scorpius blinked and turned his attention back to where the waitress and Rose were looking at him expectantly. "Oh, the pork, please," he said, folding his menu and handing it to her.

"Any drink for you?"

"Just a Butterbeer, please."

"Two Butterbeers and two pork bellies then." The waitress smiled at them before leaving, and Rose tented her fingers on the table. "You went for the pork too?"

He nodded.

"So," Rose said, and Scorpius tilted his head slightly at her tone. "It would appear that you've managed to land yourself in the good graces of my cousin."

"Or he, mine."

"I suppose you two bonded over all the things you have in common then?"

"Commonality doesn't necessarily precede a friendship," Scropius pointed out, dryly. "If it did, you and I would be friends."

"We have nothing in common," Rose scoffed.

"Not many people can pull off being stupid for show," Scorpius said, evenly. "And you're not one of them."

The waitress brought their drinks to the table, and Rose sipped at hers, though Scorpius could tell that she was avoiding answering him.

"Intellect, Quidditch, Christina Hardwick novels, medicine; we have a lot in common, Weasley. You don't have to like it. I'm not saying I do."

Rose didn't exactly have an answer for that.

"Is it ambition that drives you, or are you just naturally good at everything?"

Scorpius squinted at her, and wove his fingers around his cool drink. "Was that a compliment?"
"How did you get to be so good at Potions?"

Scorpius blinked, and then shrugged. "I suppose I have a natural knack for it, but it's a hobby of mine as well. I like…I like making things, using my hands."

"You told me that you brewed a Professor's level potion two years ago for fun."

"You don't want to know what else I do for fun."

He watched as Rose leaned back into her chair, and pointed her eyes skyward. "Well, there goes that conversation."

"It was a little jibe," he said, and then immediately wondered why he had felt the need to explain himself. "And I bet you practice Charms for fun in your spare time as well."

Rose looked back at him, and uncrossed her arms. "Them's the breaks." She studied him again, and just as Scorpius was beginning to feel uncomfortable, she switched her attention towards the glass in front of her. "If you could improve in only one thing, what would you want to improve in?"

Scorpius thought only for a second. "Potions."

Rose frowned. "But you're already so good at Potions. Wouldn't you be motivated to become talented in something else?"

Scorpius took a sip of his drink, surveying her from behind it. "On the contrary, I find it's when we're actually good at something that the extent of our ambition shines through." He paused. "Why all the questions?"

Rose looked up as a new waitress brought them their food, and she picked up her cutlery. "Just making conversation, I guess."

"You're not one for silence?"

"I'm one for a comfortable silence."

"And this isn't one?"

She swallowed the piece of pork she had put into her mouth and cut into her potato before looking at him. "You know it isn't."

But she said nothing more as she continued to eat her food, and Scorpius was left wondering if this was the first silence between them they'd ever had.

Once they had finished eating, Scorpius called for the cheque; the friendly waitress that Rose had come to know over the years brought it over, and smiled at them before leaving, then pointed to Scorpius with a questioning look on her face from behind him. Rose shrugged subtly back.

Rose ducked down below the table to grab her purse from her sling bag, and when she raised her head back up, she saw Scorpius eyeing the bill. While his face remained as impassive as ever, his gaze was unwavering.

Rose rolled her eyes. "Come on, Malfoy."

Scorpius opened his mouth.
Rose held up a hand. "Spare me." She cracked a grin. "If it'll make you feel better, I'll give you
the money, and then you can give it to Amanda. That way you can feel better inside."

"I feel perfectly fine now."

Rose plopped her coins into the well of the box - Scorpius didn't budge but still looked slightly
uncomfortable - and waited for him to do the same. After beckoning the waitress over before he
had time to change his mind, she grabbed her scarf and wound it around her neck. Scorpius
shrugged back into his coat.

"So," she said, when they were back outside, the wind biting at their cheeks. "Where to next?"

Scorpius seemed to consider. "Well, I think the woman in the other shop-"

"Gwyneth."

"Yes," Scorpius said, shuddering. "Gwyneth gave us almost everything we needed except for the
fake presents and the lights."

"And McGonagall said she can provide the tree, the fountain and the chairs and tables." Rose
looked around them. "I know a shop in Hogsmeade that can provide all of those."

"You sure?"

"Positive."

Scorpius turned around, and then inclined his head down the street. "Back to Madam Malkin's
then?"

Rose nodded, and followed him.

When the shop was in sight, Scorpius dug a hand into his pocket, and stopped. "You brought the
extra Floo powder, right?" he asked, facing her.

Rose's eyes widened. "I thought you were bringing it."

"You were supposed to bring it." Scorpius sighed, rubbing a hand through his hair. "Oh, well.
Apparating it is then."

Rose cleared her throat. "Um…Apparating?"

"Yes, Apparating." When she grew silent, Scorpius raised an eyebrow at her. "Something the
matter?"

Rose bit her lip, trying to phrase her answer as carefully as possible. "I uh…I know we had
lessons, but uh…I mean…I never really-"

Scorpius laughed quickly, his delight unrestrained. "Rose Weasley doesn't know how to
Apparate."

"I can," Rose argued. "I'm just…not very good at it," she finished in a small voice, though she
looked at him indignantly.

"I never thought I'd say this," Scorpius said, shaking his head. "But grab my arm, Weasley."

She hesitated, and then touched a finger to his coat sleeve. Scorpius looked at her in amusement.
"Well, if you'd rather stay here…"

She glared at him, and then grabbed his upper arm roughly, though she flinched when she felt the taut muscle underneath his thick coat.

"Ready?" he asked, unperturbed.

She huffed. "Let's just go."

It was a few hours later that the two of them exited the last Hogsmeade shop, their efforts condensed into one small drawstring bag that Rose had clamped in her hand.

"That bag does make things a lot easier," Scorpius said, begrudgingly commending. "I suppose your company isn't a total loss."

Rose issued a smirk at him, and twirled the purse's strings around her finger. "Did it hurt?"

"Did what hurt?"

"Giving me a compliment."

"Ho ho."

She looked around. "Which shop did McGonagall say we could use for travel again?"

Scorpius pointed ahead of them. "She said this street would work, but everything in this area is closed; most of Hogsmeade closes at eight. I think we finished later than we planned."

Rose deliberated. "Madam Puddifoot's shop is going through renovations at the moment — and thank Merlin for that." She turned to face her companion. "If we're lucky, it'll be open."

Scorpius nodded, and then led the way in silence, their footsteps the only noise in the entire village.

Rose walked closely behind, and cleared her throat. "I'm still waiting."

Scorpius stilled for a moment, but kept walking. "What?"

Rose raised her eyebrows. "Really? No, "I told you so."

Scorpius smirked, angling his face back so she could see his satisfied expression. "Well, I wasn't going to say anything, but now that you mention it…I was right, and you were wrong. Also," he paused, turning around and pointing a finger at her face. "I told you so."

"You're a dick."

"Thank you." He walked backwards, still grinning at her, and she shook her head, quickening her pace to catch up. "Word travels fast, you know, half the school-

"Hey."

"Yeah, okay, you probably don't want to talk about-"

"No, what is that?"

"What's what?"
"That noise."

Scorpius cocked his head. "That, Weasley, is the sound of fun." He turned to get a better look at the lights streaming out of the familiar club a ways off to their left, the music pulsing so strongly it seemed to rumble the ground beneath them. He hesitated, and before he could change his mind, said, "Do you wanna go in?"

Rose frowned. "We're supposed to be buying decorations."

"Oh. No, no, of course, we mustn't go out when we should be buying decorations."

"And we're underage."

"You know, you're almost too right."

Rose narrowed her eyes at his tone. She looked back at the lively club, the glint in Scorpius’ eyes. "If we get caught, our Heads titles could be stripped."

Scorpius scoffed. "If anything, McGonagall will knight me for finally making you do something other than study. Besides, it's not a Hogsmeade weekend, who would even see us?"

"I'll have you know I do a lot more than study." Though he did have a point. "Anyway, isn't it too early to go clubbing?"

"So you wanna wait out here for a reason as stupid as that? Come on."

"I dare you."

Scorpius locked his gaze on Rose's. "I dare you."

Rose snorted. "What are you, five?"

"I'd rather be immature than boring as fuck."

"You know what? Let's go."

Rose snapped up. She stomped ahead of him.

She heard him bark out a laugh from behind her, and then follow her leisurely to the entrance.

Toby sat in the Great Hall, tapping his fingers as he half-heartedly contributed to the talking around him, his gaze roused by any movement by the Great Hall's doors. He scooped some mashed potato up with his fork, and took a bite.

He didn't usually eat without his friends, and on the rare occasion he had to, he didn't much enjoy it.

"Scorpius still not back yet?"

He shook his head at his dorm mate, and after considering, cast his gaze over to the Gryffindor table where he could see Albus and Genevieve sitting together, similarly eyeing the door.

He knit his brow, and just before he was about to turn away, Albus caught his eye and affixed him with an unfathomable expression before turning his eyes away.

Toby checked his watch again. 8:30.

He sighed, and spooned himself another mouth of mash. **How long did it take to buy a couple of silver spoons?**
Once inside, the music was almost ear-splittlingly loud, the lights strobing so much that looking at them gave Scorpius a headache, and he looked over to see Rose's frame stiffen as she took it all in. A wave of confidence swept over him, and though they had arrived hours earlier than he would usually deem acceptable, this was suddenly the very place he needed to be.

They were the only ones standing in the doorway. The bartender caught his eye, glanced over at his companion, and smirked at him approvingly. Scorpius turned away.

"I still can't believe they didn't ID us," Rose said loudly, casting her gaze back to where the bouncer was guarding the door outside.

"One of the rare times my name still comes in use," Scorpius muttered from beside her, and she turned to look at him.

"What?" She strained to hear him over the deafening music.

"Nothing," he said, loud enough for her to hear.

She looked around, her eyebrows furrowing. "Where are the tables? I can only see a bar."

"This isn't *Cabaret*, Weasley," Scorpius said, matter-of-factly. "We're not sitting down to eat. We're here to *dance*.

She frowned, but followed him as he made his way onto the sparsely filled floor; she looked around distastefully at the girls dancing next to them, scooting away as if they might grind on her too.

It was immediately obvious that she had a good sense of rhythm, but Scorpius snickered as she danced as if McGonagall herself were watching them. He shook his head in amusement, beckoned her forward and lowered his head next to hers. "Follow me."

She looked relieved at the chance to get off the dance floor, and did as he bid. He led her to one of the standing bar tables a little distance away from the most populated ones and said, "Wait here."

Scorpius made his way around the one large group in the club, and looked back quickly to check on his companion. She was tapping her fingers against the tabletop, her mouth pursed and her eyes slightly uncertain. He hastened his steps and made his way over to the bartender who had smirked at him as they'd arrived.

The guy grinned upon recognising him, and then frowned, peering behind Scorpius. "Where's your pretty friend?"

Scorpius ignored his comment, and ordered them some drinks, slapping down some money and then making his way back to Rose.

She looked relieved to see him, but instantly knit her brow the minute she saw what was in his hands. "What are those?"

Scorpius made a face, his forehead crinkling as he frowned at her. "Drinks."

"No, I mean, did you buy those?"

"Why?" he asked, raising his eyebrows. "Are you wanting to add 'kleptomaniac' to your list of my most favourable traits?"

"Did you buy me a drink?"
He stared at her. "Yes."

She eyed him, and picked one up, surveying it almost suspiciously. "What's in it?"

"Doesn't matter."

She pursed her lips, but met his almost challenging gaze and downed it.

Scorpius smiled smugly, and took his pick from the drinks in front of him.

"Wha-what are you doing?" Rose spluttered once she had noticed that he had downed three drinks in the time it had taken her to down one.

He shook his head very slightly, squeezing his eyes shut as the cold alcohol swarmed his brain. "I'm drinking."

Rose indicated the littered patch of table in front of him. "Are you trying to pass out?"

Scorpius raised an eyebrow at her. "Weasley, you both vastly underestimate my constitution and show that you have no knowledge of the effects of alcohol. *Three shots is not enough to subdue me.*"

"But you won't be sober."

"Weasley," Scorpius said, his voice irritatingly condescending. "No one comes to these sweaty, rancid, ear-splitting debaucheries sober, alright? At least, not for long. Drink."

She bit her lip, but after casting her gaze back onto the dance floor, she shook her head in defeat, and picked up two glasses.

"I didn't say you should drink two," Scorpius said in almost alarm, reaching out and taking one of the glasses from her. "If you pass out, don't expect me to carry you."

She mimicked his tone. "*Three drinks isn't enough to subdue me.*"

"If you knew what was in it, you might say different," Scorpius muttered, but allowed her to take the drink back. "You ready?"

She nodded, and there was a fierceness in her eyes that wasn't there before, and Scorpius looked back at the now empty tray that occupied the table. He cocked an eyebrow as she left without waiting for him to lead her, but followed closely behind.

She twirled around to face him when they reached the centre of the floor, and though it wasn't nearly as obvious as before, that slight uncertainty was back, and Scorpius thought she needed a little loosening up to give the alcohol time to properly take effect.

"Did you know that I can dance?" he asked, abruptly.

"It doesn't surprise me in the least," she replied, truthfully. "*Well, though?*

Scorpius took one of her hands into his - and he ignored his brain protesting at the foreignness of clasping a hand that wasn't Liv's - and placed his other on her waist. "Why don't I show you?"

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Rose thought that for a magical club, they really could've invested in a better ventilation system.

She fanned herself for the umpteenth time, and though she was feeling hotter by the minute, she
had absolutely no desire to move.

It wasn’t so hot before when they had space to dance, but the night crowd had come surging in, and although it had taken her time to notice the filling club, she was definitely noticing it now. When more people had begun to arrive, she and Scorpius no longer had room to dance as they were dancing before, and she had been doing everything in her power to find some sort of balance between staying close to him, but not close enough that they would be touching in any way. Now, however, because of the sheer amount of bodies surrounding and pressing into them, she had no choice but to allow herself to be pressed into Scorpius too; she tried not to admit it, but surrounded by a mass of unfamiliarity, she was grateful to have an anchor, even if that anchor was him. Her addled mind told her that it was the alcohol talking, but right now she didn't seem to care much for excuses anyway.

She lifted a hand into her hair and tried to sweep back the strands that were sticking to her face. Sweaty and sticky weren't the sensations she usually favoured, but looking up at Scorpius in front of her, equally sweaty and sticky, she thought there were far worse positions to be in.

Scorpius noticed her trying to encourage airflow to her skin, and leaned down. "Do you want to take a break?" he asked, his voice surprisingly gentle despite its forced volume.

Now that she was momentarily jolted from whatever trance she had been in, she realised it really was unbearably hot, and she nodded.

Scorpius seemed to deliberate for a second, and then reached down between them. Rose gulped at his touch; his fingers seemed to burn a trail down the length of her arm - though it was surely just so stifling in here - and he grabbed her wrist, leading her out of the throng, and towards an empty table.

"Here," he said, motioning for her to sit first, and she tucked herself away in the corner, thankful for the space to breathe.

Scorpius lowered himself down and sat back in his chair, looking up through half-lidded eyes. Rose stared at him for a moment, trying to wrap her mind around this Scorpius so at ease, so unassuming that it made her slightly uncomfortable, and she looked around for a source of conversation.

"It's very loud in here," she said, and when he cast his eyes down towards her, she tinged pink with embarrassment.

He leaned in, resting his arm on the table. "What?"

"It's very loud in here," she repeated, and Scorpius nodded, amused.

She wracked her brain for something else to say, and her thoughts seemed clearer when she was sitting down, when she wasn't so warm, and when she wasn't stood flush against the boy sitting opposite her. "So you can dance."

"You said it didn't surprise you."

"It doesn't," she reiterated. "But now I'm interested in what you can't do."

Scorpius looked at her archly and crossed his arms on the table. "You first. Besides Apparating, of course."

Rose appraised him, and though her body had begun to rapidly cool the instant they had arrived at
the table, the heat of his gaze was beginning to make her feel like she was back on that dance floor. And then naturally her brain could only think about the scent of Scorpius' cologne as her nose was pressed to his chest, the beads of sweat that made his skin glisten whenever the red light caught it, and the fact that their close proximity - and that was an understatement - probably meant that Scorpius couldn't see that she had noticed any of it at all.

"Drawing," Rose heard herself saying. "Or anything remotely like that. Drawing, painting, colouring — all of it."

"You know, Weasley," Scorpius said, and Rose would've otherwise despaired at the teasing edge his voice had taken on, "that doesn't surprise me in the least."

"And you?" Rose asked, again, unconsciously leaning forward as Scorpius' closeness had begun to feel habitual. "What can't you do?"

"I can't sing," Scorpius admitted. "Not at all."

Rose threw her head back and laughed, shaking out her hair as it fell in her face, and it occurred to her for the first time that night, this was exactly where she needed to be.

And through it all, Scorpius was desperately trying to focus on the cracks in the table in front of them, the other patrons in the club, even the bartender as he continued to pour out the drinks; anything except locking onto those bright blue eyes in front of him, searing brighter than the blinding lights that surrounded them.

The bathroom was down the hall and to the right, Scorpius had said, and Rose navigated through hordes of people, peering up above them to find a sign of some sort.

There was a crowd of people who had situated themselves about a metre in front of the placard, and Rose could see no other way past but to go through them. She moved forward, and tapped the person on the edge. "Excuse me, sorry to disrupt you, but you're sort of blocking the—Liv?"

At the sound of her name, Liv tore her lips and hands away from the arms she was wrapped in, and looked around frantically for the source of the voice. The minute her gaze landed on Rose, her face turned red with irritation. "Oh, for Heaven's sake, Rose, what are you doing here?"

Rose raised her eyebrows at the Slytherin's tone, and iced over. "Well, I'll be on my way then." She made to move past her fellow seventh year, but Liv grabbed her arm in a panic.

"Wait! Listen, Rose, you can't tell Scorpius, okay? You can't."

"Why would I have any business telling Malfoy?"

"I don't care about your stupid relationship or whatever it is with my boyfriend, okay? Just don't breathe a word of this to him."

"Are you going to?"

Liv crossed her arms. "What do you even care—not fucking now, Horatio, God!" Horatio retracted his arms, grumbling to himself, but sidled away, nursing his Firewhiskey. "I'll tell him when I'm ready."

"I'm not convinced."
"So help me, Rose-

"Are you threatening me?" Rose asked her, darkly.

Liv sighed, fisting her hands in her hair. "No, I'm not. Please. I…I need him."

Rose closed her eyes. To think that five minutes ago she might actually have been enjoying herself. "Fine. But you will."

"I will."

Rose turned on her heel, but hesitated at the last moment. "He deserves better, you know."

"Scorpius deserves better?"

Rose nodded. "Anyone deserves better." She exhaled, shaking her head. "Just don't let him see you."

Liv's eyes widened. "He's here?!" she asked, panic-stricken, grabbing Rose's shoulders and peering every which way about them. The minute her gaze landed on her boyfriend, still lounging with his eyes closed at the table, she swore. "What the fuck are the two of you doing here together?"

"You know, Liv," Rose said, severely, removing Liv's hands off her person, "that's really none of your concern."

"He's my boyfriend," Liv snapped. "It's every concern of mine."

"And what about now?" Rose asked, quietly, before turning around and weaving her way back towards him.

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"We should head back."

Scorpius opened his eyes, puzzled. "What? Why? Weren't you…you know, wanting to stay?"

Rose smiled at him, and it was a sad sort of smile, a mismatch to her still shining eyes, though perhaps it was only the alcohol that kept them radiant. "It's late, and we have a lot of work due in."

Scorpius considered her for a bit longer, then sighed and got to his feet. "After you, then."

Rose nodded, and then glanced back the way she had returned before picking up her bag from the table. "Alright, ready."

She led them through the heated dance floor, and Scorpius thought perhaps the atmosphere might make her change her mind, but she didn't slow. He looked around as he passed through the heavy crowd, and noticed how little breathing room there really was. Looking at it now as a person who didn't quite relish the touch of anybody, he should have wanted to leave hours ago.

His gaze wandered back to the girl in front of him, and he angled his head, watching with almost fascination the way the light seemed to reflect the red in her hair, the pale of her skin.

The moment he stepped outside, the fresh, cold air hit him like a jackhammer, and then he knew his brain was rattled by too much drink, too much music, too much heat. He would snap out of it, snap out of whatever this was, and everything would go back to normal.
Rose turned around with a questioning look on her face, and he realised that he had stopped walking.

"Is everything alright?" she asked, and her cheeks were beginning to redden again with the cold.

"Just…" he said, his voice coming out far quieter than he would have liked. He cleared his throat and started again. "Just getting my bearings."

She waited for him to catch up, and then they kept walking.

Madam Puddifoot's Tea Shop was eerily quiet as they walked in, the walls half white and half pink as the redecorating continued on.

"Are you feeling okay?" Scorpius asked, taking care to keep looking straight ahead. In his peripheral, he saw her look at him for a little while, and then with her eyebrows slightly furrowed, looked away again. "Sober, I mean."

"Yeah, I think so. I don't think I was even that drunk to begin with, really."

Me neither.

They picked their way through towards the fireplace at the back of the room, Scorpius drawing a hand in his robes to retrieve the last remnants of Floo powder.

"You were probably right about me not drinking too much in the beginning," he said suddenly.

"Oh, why's that?"

He shrugged as nonchalantly as he could. "Think I had a bit too much to drink. I don't really, uh…feel like myself tonight."

He still stared straight ahead, and perhaps it was a good thing too, for Rose had a chance to recover her somewhat conflicted expression before he allowed himself to face her. "You know?"

His breath caught slightly at her expression, even as he didn't know quite what to make of it. She was silent for a few moments, and then stuck her hand out for some Floo powder, and it was only after the two of them arrived back in the Heads' dorm that she angled her face towards him. "I'm not sure if I do."

She put down her bag in front of the fireplace and then dropped her hands beside her like dead weights. "Goodnight, Malfoy."

Scorpius should've let her leave, but there was something about her expression that looked more stung than any of his insults or jibes had ever caused her to look. "Weasley."

She stopped, her hand hovering on the doorknob. He sighed, running a hand through his hair. "For what it's worth, I had a good time tonight."

She turned back around, and her eyes had become soft, but they still shone fiercely in the firelight, and a small smile whispered across her face. "Me too." And then she shut the door behind her.

Scorpius exhaled and crossed the sofa towards his bedroom, and still fully clothed, lay spread-eagled across his bed. He stared past his ceiling for what could've been an hour, his ears ringing and his heart pounding.
It was only when the thumping began to slow in his chest and in his head that the sigh he had been waiting to expel came out in one quick breath, and he squeezed his eyes shut.

"Fuck."
"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

Chapter 10: We Were Victims Of The Night or, I Gotta Go, But My Friend Can Stick Around

Rating: M mainly for language, and I can't discount any funny business later on

Disclaimer: I work with only what the infallible J.K. Rowling has given me.

It had always been imperative to Scorpius to keep his feelings in check, under wraps. Of course, he usually preferred denying such feelings even existed and, after seventeen years, he had gotten pretty damn good at it.

He walked to Potions much like he had walked everywhere that day - with an emptiness in his chest, a numbness to his brain, though it felt as if something — no, maybe everything — was trying to get out, make itself known. He only had to stumble for a second, trip up that iron wall he worked so hard to keep up, and it would all come tumbling out.

It was thus crucial to Scorpius that he would not stumble for any second at all.

But it had almost happened once, twice — maybe more times than that. His traitorous brain refused to forget the feeling of the weight of her hands on his shoulders, the scent of her as she lifted onto her toes to whisper into his ear -

With an inhale so quick it sounded horribly like a gasp, he came to and realised he had almost dropped the wrong ingredient into his cauldron. Without thinking, he swept his hand underneath the vial as two drops spilled out, and the nightshade burned in his palm with a hiss. He wrenched his hand away and grabbed his wand, curled his fingers into a cup and whispered, "Sana ignis". He closed his eyes and drew a deep breath as his skin smoked.

"Fucking stupid brain, he thought to himself viciously. Stupid teenage brain.

"Mr Malfoy? Is everything alright?"

Scorpius looked up with the intent of meeting his Professor's curious gaze, but his stupid, treacherous eyes found her instead, if only for a second. Those eyes, those deep blue eyes that could change everything if he didn't get his fucking act together, were wide, the very same ones he had seen all night, shining brightly in the club, and then hours later as sleep refused to claim him. He didn't even like blue eyes.

"Everything's fine, Professor," he muttered. "Just fine."
"I need you to do rounds with Malfoy tomorrow night."

Rose coughed violently as she inadvertently swallowed her entire cup of orange juice, and she blinked as she hastily looked around to see if anyone had noticed the commotion. Upon noticing Al's slightly amused expression, she recovered herself and eyed him. "Why? Have you two had your first friend fight?"

Al motioned for the young boy next to him to scoot along and propped his leg up on the bench. "You know that Charms essay we have due?"

"Mm."

"I haven't done it yet."

Rose shrugged. "Oh, well, me neither."

Al shook his head and crooked an arm around his knee. He pointed his fork at his cousin. "No, you haven't finished it yet, I haven't even thought about it, much less started it."

Rose sighed. "Al."

"Oh, please, Rosie. I swear, I'm not usually like this, it's just I've been a little preoccupied recently-"

Rose interrupted him with a raised spoon. "That's the second time you've talked about being preoccupied or distracted or whatever in the past few weeks. What's up with you?"

Al scratched at his ear. "Nuthin'."

"And that," Rose added lightly, "is the second time you've responded that way."

"Well, the key to truth telling is consistency."

"There is no key to truth telling, Al. That's why it's called the truth."

"Pleeeeeease."

Rose huffed, her mouth curving into a pout. "Do you even know when I have patrols? You don't even know if you'd be-"

"I can be free. Anyway, I thought you and Malfoy are sort of alright, you know, for you two-"

"I didn't even mention Malfoy."

"But you were going to-"

"I don't think I was-"

"So you'll do it?" Al looked hopeful. He peeked over at the Slytherin table, and luckily Rose was facing towards the opposite side of the hall, not that she'd look there anyway. If Potions was any indication, looking at Scorpius didn't result in anything but even more bother.

"I-" She bit her lip.

The bother would've been bad enough on its own, but there was the guilt to contend with too. She
didn't know what Scorpius was so rattled by that he could barely stand to look at her in class. It wasn't as if he knew that she was suddenly privy to the intimates of his life, intimates that she had never wanted to be in any way privy to.

"I'll owe you a favour, I swear."

They had just danced.

And talked.

And talked some more.

And laughed.

"Okay, I don't want to overstep, I can ask someone else-"

"No, I can, I mean, I-"

Maybe he hadn't been weird. She had been weird first, right? He had wanted to stay and she had wanted to go, and maybe he was just responding to her weirdness about the whole Liv thing and he'd just been weird back, or maybe it was just the whole damn thing had gotten too damn weird and too damn warm and these rounds would just make it that much weirder and so the right answer would be No, she wouldn't do it, sorry.

She sighed. "I'll do it."

When Toby remarked suspiciously that Scorpius never liked sitting on the side of the bench that faced the Hufflepuff table, Scorpius responded with a stout, "I do now."

Toby rolled his eyes good-naturedly. "I hope all the good food hasn't gone. I don't know why you insisted on eating so late today."

Scorpius, who had, upon entering the Great Hall, immediately noticed the redhead seated beside a dark head of hair and realised his plan had quite backfired, grumpily muttered, "I haven't felt very hungry today."

"Well, I'm starving," Toby said, beginning to load his plate. He looked around the almost empty hall, his gaze stopping on a spot just behind Scorpius' head. "So I'm guessing something decidedly scandalous went on between you two last weekend, then?"

Scorpius choked on his forkful of roast beef, and reached for his cup of water, sending his fork clattering onto the table next to him. As his hand shot out to save it, his elbow grazed the cup beside him, and Toby lunged to grab it as it teetered on its edge.

He shot Scorpius a funny look as his friend stiffly picked his cutlery back up. "I was only joking, mate." His eyes narrowed, and he folded his arms on the table as he surveyed the damage. "I seem to have struck a chord."

Scorpius met his friend's serious gaze for a moment, and then surreptitiously chanced a look back at the Gryffindor table while running a hand through his hair. "It's nothing."

Toby shook his head, still eyeing his friend. "Must be something. You're never like this."

He was right; Scorpius was never like this. He was usually good at this — whatever this was — but now there was something pesky and incessant that was giving him a constant headache, and
he stared harder into nothing every time his brain thought it had the right to bring up the word 'feelings'.

Today, sneaky little feelings were trying to creep out of their tidy little boxes and badger him with all of their stupid little naggings, stupid little questions, and stupid little problems that Scorpius didn't have any of the answers to.

He had almost fucked up his potion - and he never, ever, fucked up a potion - burned his fucking hand and knocked over a full cup of water, all because he had danced with a pretty girl.  

_Fucking stupid._

"Miss Weasley."

Rose paused on her way out of the Transfiguration classroom the following morning and turned back to face her teacher. "Professor?"

McGonagall lowered herself down to her desk and indicated at its surface. "If I might have just a few minutes of your time."

Rose inclined her head politely and said a quick goodbye to Al before making her way back into the room.

McGonagall gave her a small smile, but broke their eye contact and searched the back of the classroom, her eyebrows raising slightly when she set on a target.

Rose's stomach gave an unfortunate lurch, and she stared harder but more blankly at her teacher, silently willing her with her eyes. _If you have only the tiniest bit of affection for me, she thought desperately, please, please, please don't say-

"Mr Malfoy, if I could see you as well?"

That.

She heard the sound of footsteps pass her, and looked to see Tobias exiting the room, and then another set of footsteps stopped next to her. Well, as next to her as they could be for someone who was obviously trying their very hardest to _not_ be next to her.

McGonagall's eyes went towards the gap between them before surveying her students slightly suspiciously, but said only, "I trust your trip was without incident."

Rose cleared her throat. "$Yes, Professor. It went very well."

"And you managed to find everything you needed?"

Scorpius gave a quick affirmative. "$We still have some money left over, perhaps we could leave it-"

"Miss Weasley returned the remnants of it earlier this morning," their teacher interrupted with a waved hand.

"Oh."

McGonagall nodded at them with satisfaction, but looked at Rose and narrowed her eyes, tilting her head slightly. "$Are you quite well, Miss Weasley?"
Rose started, and she could see Scorpius spare her the briefest of glances. "Fine, Professor, just a little under the weather."

"I hope you haven't caught a chill from your trip out," McGonagall said, with some concern. "The day was quite brisk."

"On the contrary, Professor," Scorpius said, abruptly, and then seemed to think better of it. He continued far more subdued, "It was fine."

"Perfectly fine," Rose added after a pause.

"Well, then," McGonagall said, with an air of finality. "I am very grateful to the two of you for sacrificing your weekend recreations. Though I hope you managed to find some fun of it?"

"As much as we could've," Scorpius said levelly. Rose simply nodded.

"Well, please don't let me keep you any longer."

Rose followed Scorpius out of the room, her hands clasping the strap of her bag so hard she knew that they'd be marked, and suddenly it occurred to her that they were alone.

She kept her eyes on the floor, and her mouth pressed together in a thin line as she considered what to say, or if indeed she should even say anything.

It was only when she thought a simple, "I told Al I would take his rounds session," would at least suffice for a start and tilted her face up to look at him that she noticed Tobias leaning against the wall opposite them and that Scorpius was already making his way over.

Her voice caught in her throat, and she sighed quietly with relief; Al could tell Scorpius himself.

Still, she wondered if they were going to go their own ways without a word - she might still tell him in case Al forgot, or maybe just a look between them that acknowledged each other would do, but by the time she had talked herself into it, he and Toby were already walking down the corridor.

Rose blew the hair out of her face and set off in the opposite direction.

_He didn't even look at me_, she thought to herself. _The least he could've done was look at me._

He only needed a week, at most.

It was perfectly logical that their time together would weigh on his mind; it wasn't everyday that you took your sworn enemy - _at least, we're supposed to be_, he thought dimly - out to a club, extending what he thought was already supposed to be a too long, too unbearable day. But then it occurred to him that if he had been thinking, if he had paused and thought for one fucking second when they were in Hogsmeade, he wouldn't have taken her into a club, wouldn't have bought her those drinks and he absolutely would not have danced with her.

Scorpius wrung his hands together as he walked, his stomach in knots. Fuck. He didn't do nerves, he didn't do awkwardness, he didn't do anxiety. He was fine.

He wouldn't talk to her. Absolutely not. They could split up. _To cover more distance_, he would explain smoothly. He had it all planned out in his head; not too ill-mannered or that would evoke suspicion. He only had to be normal.
He could do that. He could be normal.

But as soon as he turned the corner and she looked up at the sound of his footsteps, their eyes met, and his whole plan crumbled to pieces.

For a second she looked like a deer caught in headlights, but she seemed to steel herself and she pushed off the wall behind her. "Hi."

Scorpius swallowed. "Hey."

Silence.

He shoved his hands into his pockets, lest she should see them clenched and tight. "You uh…you don't look too ill anymore. Uh, if you were ill, that is."

Rose looked at him in confusion but then seemed to understand what he meant and nodded. "Oh, yeah, I'm uh…getting there."

"Oh. Good."

Goddammit, man, Scorpius thought to himself fiercely. Pull yourself together. You're not some blabbering, floundering fifth year anymore. Act like a fucking Head Boy.

"Should we-" he started too loudly, and then exhaled sharply when he saw her taken aback expression. "Should we go, then?"

She looked relieved to walk — at least the sound of their footsteps was better than tense, uncomfortable silence.

Scorpius wondered if he should say something, but then small talk would seem unsatisfactory given that not even the week before, her cheek had been pressed so closely to his chest that he had thought she might've heard the jackhammering beat of his heart, and how it wouldn't've mattered how hard he strained to keep his face impassive, his tone carefree.

"Do you hear that?"

Scorpius turned to look at his companion, and for a second his chest seemed to convulse until he remembered where they were now, what they were doing now. "Hear what?"

Rose held up a finger. "Wait."

Scorpius squinted, and then cocked his head. "Is that…is that singing?"

Rose nodded wearily.

The sound got closer, and for a moment, Scorpius forgot that he was tense, forgot that he was so completely out of his element, and threw her a look. "If that's fucking Goldstein, I swear to Merlin-"

"That's not him," Rose said quickly, and when Scorpius looked at her, he noticed that her mouth had quirked up on one side. "Christian doesn't sound like that."

"Shame. I'm in the mood for docking some Ravenclaw points."

"Oh, stop."

Upon turning into their corridor, the boy stopped abruptly the minute he noticed the two staring at
him, and pressed his mouth shut. At the sight of Scorpius' expression, he scarpered past them without a word, his footsteps not slowing as long as they could hear him.

"I'll bet you wouldn't've been so mean if you hadn't been so jealous."

Scorpius frowned, and then looked towards his left where Rose was smiling sweetly at him.

"Beg pardon?"

"Well, just because you can't sing doesn't mean you should be upset when other people do it."

"It's not technically that I can't sing," Scorpius amended, forcefully quelling whatever it was inside him that had twitched the moment she had brought it up. "It's more that I've never tried."

Rose looked at him in surprise. "You've never tried to sing? That sounds implausible."

Scorpius shrugged.

"Don't you just...catch yourself singing sometimes?"

"No."

Rose folded her arms across her chest. "Well, when I said I couldn't do anything in the realm of drawing, I meant that I had tried and failed."

"So I figured. I do, however, play the piano. Can, I mean."

"So you at least must have some sense of pitch."

"That doesn't seem unfounded."

"You should try it."

"Try what?"

"Singing."

Scorpius made a face at her. "No."

She made a face back and walked ahead of him. As she passed, the scent of her hair lingered in the air for a moment, and Scorpius halted.

She had been so close, so close it seemed ridiculous to believe any of that night had actually happened.

He took a deep breath. He could still do this.

Talking was good, talking and even being near him was, in a way, good. That way she didn't have to rile herself up thinking about all the things he might be doing as she quietly despaired by herself, or maybe even worse, if he too might be affected by what had happened between them that night - not that anything had actually happened, Rose hastily reminded herself once again. Perhaps he did things like this all the time, and she was just another notch on Scorpius Malfoy's belt.

"Have you read the Christina Hardwick novel yet?"
They were leaning against the walls of the corridor, hovering in a particularly popular rendezvous area that the fourth, fifth and sixth years tended to favour, and Scorpius lifted his gaze up from the floor when she spoke.

"I have. What did you think of it?"

Rose braced her leg behind her. "I enjoyed it, though I definitely think some of her other works are better."

"I agree, though I thought the ending was brilliantly unexpected. Out of interest, what is it that you enjoy about her novels? Given that you're the only other person I've met who's read her books."

Rose considered, wondering how she should phrase her answer so as to come across as the intellectual they both thought she was. And then she wondered when she started caring about what Scorpius Malfoy thought of her. "I think it was choosing to portray the main character as so morally ambiguous, since I've found it's more common to have a lead that's morally superior to everyone else."

"I completely agree," Scorpius admitted. "That's what drew me to her books in the first place. So, is that something that interests you? Moral ambiguity?"

Rose met his gaze. "As a matter of fact, it's something that's interesting me more and more."

Scorpius seemed to furrow his brow slightly at her look, and he tapped his wand against his palm. "Maybe we should keep walking."

"Maybe."

They set off again, and they seemed to settle back into a more familiar rhythm, but then it occurred to Rose that this was not in fact familiar at all.

"It seems pretty quiet tonight," Rose said, idly.

"Don't," Scorpius warned. "You don't want to-"

He was cut short as soon as they heard the rattling of the broom cupboard to their right.

"Jinx it," he finished, sighing.

They shared a quick look before Scorpius led them over to the offending area and aimed his wand at the door handle, after which the door was flung open, exposing the young couple inside.

"Dude," the boy said, scornfully, raising his hands. "Privacy, man!"

"Well, in that case," Scorpius said with a brittle smile. He reached out a hand and slammed the door shut again, causing Rose to jump behind him. He muttered a spell quickly and the cupboard glowed.

"What did you-"

Scorpius held up a finger, silencing her, and crossed his arms. "Just wait."

There was shuffling inside, and suddenly the door handle was jiggled, and then jiggled harder.

"What the fuck?" came the voice from inside. "The stupid knob's not working!"

"Oh, yes," Scorpius said loudly, leaning towards the cupboard. "Don't you just hate being
surrounded by stupid knobs?"

Rose pressed a hand against her mouth as she tried to quiet her laughter, but Scorpius turned to issue a quick look at her when a soft giggle escaped nonetheless.

The girl with him began to shriek, and after rolling his eyes, Scorpius cast a Silencing charm, and she went quiet.

"Shall we continue?" he asked, casually. "We have more ground to cover."

Rose shook her head, pressing her lips together. "You are a terrible Head Boy."

Scorpius began to walk, sticking his hands into his pockets. "So fire me."

She caught up to him, and turned her palms upwards, studying them. "So…how did you learn to dance?"

He raised his eyebrows at her, and ran a hand through his hair, messing it up somewhat. Rose unwittingly clenched her own fist. "I'm surprised you remember that, given that you'd just chugged three drinks."

Rose's chest went tight, and she drew in a breath, suddenly feeling shaky with nerves. Her fingers felt tingly and numb and her head heavy and she thought she was beginning to regret dredging up memories of that night. Or maybe it was because they were just...further confirming the whole bloody thing had even happened and that simultaneously thrilled and terrified her.

She continued to study the lines of her palm, and the sudden weight of her head on her shoulders seemed to fade away a little. "Well, I guess I've proved you wrong, then. I'm listening."

They turned into another corridor and Rose looked at Scorpius out of the corner of her eye. He was playing with the knot of his tie, jostling and loosening it.

"When I was younger, my mum and aunt threw a Christmas party every year, and because we held them in the hall and in the ballroom just because it was a room with a lot of space, they quickly turned into dance parties."

"Is that why you were so on the mark for Christmas ball ideas?" Rose asked.

Scorpius shrugged. "It's not a stretch. Anyway, my mum thought it would be odd - especially as I got older - for the host family's son to not be able to dance at, well, a ball, for all intents and purposes. So she made me learn." He smiled a little here, and for a moment his face lost its guarded expression, and Rose could place that smile back to where she had seen it before. "Mum thought it could help me in getting a girlfriend too. You know what they say: to be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love."

"I didn't think Jane Austen was your thing."

"You're right. I didn't think it yours either."

"It's not."

"It's something my mum said to me, and for some reason it just stuck."

Rose felt that same shaky feeling crawling back over her, but before she could stop herself, she heard herself saying, "So do you believe in that? That dancing leads to…that?"
She could feel the weight of Scorpius' eyes on her, and she looked up to meet him, just to show that she could.

His gaze was unwavering.

"That remains to be seen."

Hogsmeade looked much the same as it had the week before, the lights bright and twinkling to combat the early sunset. Rose played with the hem of her coat as she stepped out of the carriage, swiping her hair out of her face as the wind blew around her.

"This," Gen said, "was a fantastic idea."

Rose cast a look at her friend, and burrowed deeper into her thick coat, shivering. "It was?"

"Was, is," Gen continued, using the side of her foot to kick up snow into the air. "I love Hogsmeade. Besides, we haven't been in ages." She paused. "Oh, well, you were here last week, weren't you? Rose?"

Rose hurriedly removed her gaze from Madam Puddifoot's window where she could see that renovations were finishing up, and looked back at her friend. "Oh, yeah, agreed."

Gen squinted at her and linked her arm through Rose's as she steered them in the right direction. "You alright, Rose? You seem a little preoccupied." She pulled in one side of her mouth. "To be honest, you've been pretty out of it all week."

Her friend sighed, and kept her eyes on the snow they stirred up as they walked. "Just, you know, tired."

Gen was quiet for a few moments. "When you're up to it, you can tell me what's really going on."

Rose gave her a sheepish but sad sort of smile, and nodded.

"Oh, hey!" Gen's tone lightened, and she pointed excitedly to her left. "They've completely revamped the place!"

"What place?" Rose said, following her friend's gaze. "Oh."

"Think we could sneak in some time?" Gen said, waggling her eyebrows conspiratorially. "Charlie told me Lux is the best club in town."

Rose considered. "It looks a little warm."

"Magic, my dear, magic."

Rose hmphed. "They probably keep it warm on purpose. Muddle the mind. Dull the senses. Make you do stupid things."

"Oh, Rose, I know you're not one for going out, but you haven't even tried it."

Rose drifted over to the dress shop they were approaching and rubbed her cold arms over her coat. "Yeah."

"Oh, good, I thought I might find you here."
Scorpius paused, his quill hovering above his parchment, and he put it down before fully turning to face the person who had unceremoniously plonked down next to him. "Potter?"

"Yep."

Scorpius craned his neck forward, furrowing his brow. "Are you lost?"

Al laughed quickly and a touch uncomfortably. "Nope, and this is really, really weird, but I uh…I need to talk to you. Well, to someone, and for some reason, I'm here."

Scorpius squinted at him. "Oooooookay. What about your red-headed cousin?"

"I have a lot of those," Al said. "But no, I can't talk to Rosie. Actually, it's really, really important that she doesn't know about this."

Scorpius' eyes widened in somewhat ill-conceived panic. "This isn't anything to with uh…" And here his eyes flicked rapidly down into his lap by way of explanation.

"Oh, no, no, no. It's nothing like that."

Scorpius glanced at his ink pot and twirled the lid in his fingers. "Alright, I'll bite. What is it?"

"It's uh…Gen."

Scorpius gaped at him. "You're here to talk to me about Chang?"

"Uh, yeah, and it's awfully good of you to-"

"Don't you have a herd of cousins to talk to about this?" Scorpius interrupted.

"One of them will tell Rose," Al said, flatly. "None of them can keep their bloody mouths shut. Also, I need an unbiased opinion."

Scorpius raised his eyebrows. "You realise that I would be slightly biased, right?"

"Why?"

Scorpius shook his head. "Nevermind. Just uh…yeah, what about Chang?"

Al leaned back into his chair so that it balanced precariously on its back legs. "I think I might like her."

"That doesn't seem so complicated."

"And she thinks she might like me too."

"Again, not so complicated."

Al shot him a look, and Scorpius spread his hands. "Okay, sorry, go on."

"I mean, we think we must be attracted to each other since we sort of uh…you know, on the night of the Quidditch game. You know, where you made out with Rosie."

"Do you want my help."

Al grinned sheepishly.
"So what's the problem?"

Al sighed. "We tried to go on a date the last time we went to Hogsmeade, but it was just so… awkward. We didn't know what to say, all we could talk about was was school and Rose even though we weren't supposed to, and then we left early since Gen didn't feel so well."

While Al had been talking, Scorpius had been slightly distracted by the heads that were beginning to turn their way. At first it was just one or two people, but when it became apparent that Al was staying longer than a passing, people were really starting to stare. And while Scorpius had become somewhat accustomed to staring, he was not so accustomed to this kind.

"People are looking," he said, flicking his eyes around the room.

"Oh, yeah," Al said. "I saw that. But anyway, the next day when Rose asked how Gen's date was, she said it was "fine", which apparently in girl talk doesn't actually mean "fine"!"

Scorpius' mouth pulled up into a small grimace as he brought his attention back to Al. "And what did you say?"

Al rubbed at his temples. "I said that there wasn't any chemistry, but I didn't mean Gen! I was just trying to throw Rose off, but the way Gen looked at me… I think she probably agreed."

"And you're keeping this from Weasley because the three of you are all besties and it would be weird."

Al pursed his lips, and leant back even further. "Yeah. And we don't even know if anything will become of it, anyhow."

Scorpius frowned. "Is there anything wrong with your relationship as it is now?"

"Well, no, not really—"

"And do you actually need to do anything more than to just let things take their course?"

"I mean, I don't want to overcomplicate it, but it just seems silly to stay in this like... limbo, you know?"

"Trust me," Scorpius said, and for some reason, Al did. "I have a little bit of experience when it comes to forcing a relationship that doesn't necessarily need to evolve." When Al's eyebrows raised and his mouth opened, Scorpius raised a finger. "We're here for your problems."

"So that's your advice?" Al said, after a few seconds. "To do nothing?"

Scorpius shrugged. "Take it or leave it."

Al pursed his lips again, and then nodded once. He seemed to be deliberating some more, and then he nodded again. He suddenly bowed forward, setting his chair noisily back onto its front legs. He drummed his fingers on the table, and studied Scorpius' notes. "Hey, thanks. And sorry for interrupting your work on, uh... do you even take Runes?"

"These aren't Runes," Scorpius said, smirking. "They're hieroglyphics."

"You don't say," Al said, craning his head over in interest. "You know, that's funny cos—er. You know what, nevermind."

Scorpius frowned slightly, but let it slide. "Is that, uh… all you needed?"
Al started, and straightened up. "Oh, yeah, right. Yeah, that was it. I'll let you get back to your...—that. Thanks again." He stood, and raised a hand before heading for the exit. A second later, he paused, and swung around. "Hey, man, now that you know about me and Gen, I mean...I feel weird just—"

"You ought to call me Scorpius."

Al's expression went slack, but then he recovered and nodded a few times. "Yeah."

They paused, and Scorpius bit his tongue against his teeth, deep in thought and yet not really thinking anything at all. "Maybe not today though."

A slow smile worked its way across Al's face. "Yeah."

"You have possibly the worst sense of direction I've ever come across, Toby," Liv said as she reached out a hand to redirect him. "This way."

Toby scrunched up his nose and led the way to the shop door. "I knew that."

He opened it and waited for her to pass him before stepping through himself, looking up as a bell tinkled above them.

When he looked back down, he saw that Liv had already found herself in the middle of three dress racks, and moved to join her. "It's very quiet," he said, looking around. "Are we the only ones in here?"

Without taking away her gaze from the dresses, Liv nodded at the till. "Us and those two."

The two girls at the counter coincidentally chose that moment to turn around.

"Ah," Toby said.

At his tone, Liv looked up at him and then towards where he was looking, and for a brief second, she seemed to freeze, but then her face hardened back to its usual expression.

"Liv," Genevieve said as she and Rose passed them, and she nodded at Toby.

"Rose," Liv said, evenly, after acknowledging her friend.

Rose said nothing, but she too nodded as she passed them, and then they were gone.

Toby let out a low whistle, and turned to face his companion. "That was weird."

Liv continued to nonchalantly ruffle through outfits. "What was?"

"Okay, I know you two aren't the best of friends, but that was downright awkward. What's up with you two?"

Liv shrugged. "Haven't a clue what you mean. What do you think about this one?"

Toby made a face, and Liv put it back.

He sighed. "So, do you know what we're even supposed to wear to this thing?"

"It's a Christmas ball, right? So think Christmas."
Toby nodded seriously. "I'll be right back. I just need to ask the nice shop owner where she keeps her red and green suits."

Liv laughed before she could stop herself, and she did a sweep of the room. "I don't know, light colours maybe?"

Toby nodded, making his way back towards the men's section, and after subtly peeking through a mannequin's crooked elbow to see what Liv was picking out, grabbed a few white suits.

He had put on the suit and shuffled around with it for a minute or two when Liv's voice rang out. "You've been in there for ages, what's taking so long?"

Toby pulled back the curtain and posed weakly. "I look like I'm getting married. Help, please."

Liv laughed again, resting her chin against her hand and laying her dresses down on the seat next to her. "Well, you're the saddest bridegroom I've ever seen, good fucking luck to the poor woman at the alter."

"Ho ho. Help."

"Alright, wait there."

She walked around the shop as Toby watched her from the dressing area, and she circled once before pulling a creamy-gold waistcoat with flowery detailing ("Does it have to be shiny?" Toby asked) off its hanger and offered it to him. "Try that with the stuff you got earlier."

As Toby slid out of the outfit he was wearing and searched for slacks to pair with his waistcoat, he said nonchalantly, "So, are you and Scorp gonna colour coordinate?"

He waited with a furrowed brow as there was only silence. He wondered if perhaps she hadn't heard him. But then there came a somewhat lacklustre laugh, and then a noncommittal sort of noise, but before Toby could read too much into it, she asked, "Are you ready yet?"

He took another look at himself in the mirror before drawing open the curtain. "Almost."

Liv's eyes went to the untied bow tie around his neck, and she shook her head with a little smile before standing on her tiptoes to help him with it.

"So," he said when she was finished, upturning his palms to her. "How do I look?"

Liv surveyed him, and then picked up the dresses from where she had left them. "I think you look very handsome, Toby." She walked past him with her arms full into the dressing room he had just vacated. "Maybe you won't have to go stag after all."

"Hey, I choose to go stag."

Toby lowered himself down into the chair that Liv had been sat in and rested his arm behind him as he waited. "So, I know Scorp couldn't make it, but don't you have another best friend whose opinion you actually care about?"

"Yeah." Toby heard some rustling, and then Liv peeked her head out from the curtain. "You."

She disappeared again briefly, and then stepped out. "What do you think of this one?"

Toby raised a brow. "Nice, but I think we could do better."

Liv pursed her lips, but retreated back inside. Soon after, she reappeared in another silver number.
"This one?"

Toby scrunched up his nose. "There's nothing wrong with it," he said, and when Liv sighed, he held up a hand and rose out of the chair. "Okay, wait—wait there."

He made a beeline for the dress that had caught his eye when they had first entered the shop, and he walked it back over to her. "Maybe try this one." He rubbed at the back of his neck. "I dunno, I saw it, and it sort of reminded me of you a little, and I think gold suits you more than silver does—"

He broke off when she took the dress from him, and after a moment, sat back down.

He listened to the muffled rustling, and after there was a minute of silence, ventured, "How does it look?"

Liv's hand appeared on the fringe of the curtain, and she pulled it back. "You tell me."

Toby was silent for a moment. "Well, if you want to go with one of the others, that's cool, but uh…I like this one. I think it looks pretty."

Liv smiled at him, and then turned back towards the mirror, patting the dress down with her hands. "I like this one too."

As Toby left to go and pay for his suit, Liv lingered at the mirror for a moment longer, drawing her hand across the gold detailing on her shoulder and trying to remember the last time Scorpius had ever told her that she looked pretty.

Scorpius was already collecting ingredients when Rose arrived, and he turned around at the sound of her footsteps.

"You're very efficient," she commented, lifting her sling bag off her body and putting it on the table.

"Proactive," he corrected, measuring out the dragon blood and setting it aside.

She crossed the room to join him at the countertop, peering into the cauldron as she arrived. "Looks good." She turned her gaze towards Scorpius' open textbook and then back to the potion. "Perfect, I'd say."

"I'm just saying, it wouldn't look this good if we'd added the five Lionfish Spines."

"I guess we'll never know."

Scorpius raised his eyebrows as he met her smug smile, but - in a rare show of…. something - said nothing. He reached past her to grab the thermometer from where it lay beside her hand, and as he did so, the scent of his cologne was suddenly discernible above the smell of the brew.

Rose turned back towards the textbook, trying to make out the original instructions hidden underneath much of Scorpius' writing.

"I see you've shortened the brewing time from eighteen minutes to sixteen after the aconite leaves are added."

Scorpius nodded, still doctoring with the potion. "Madam Sprout realised that the leaves are more potent at an earlier stage of development, but that also means that the leaves are slightly smaller, so this is compensating for that."
Rose looked at him in disbelief. "How do you even know stuff like this?"

Scorpius shrugged, still not looking at her. "I voiced my suspicions in Herbology and Sprout confirmed it with me." He finally looked up to meet her stare. "I guess she's singled me out as the only student worthy of the information."

His cologne didn't even smell that nice.

"Yeah, well, try not to make too many alterations, alright? We're supposed to follow the textbook."

Scorpius snorted. "We're being graded on how well this potion does what it's supposed to do, not how loyally we follow the instructions."

Rose didn't have a retort for that.

"Look in here - does this look right to you?"

Rose leaned in, surveying it. "Looks good." She eyed him suspiciously. "You didn't need my help."

Scorpius shook his head. "I thought you'd like to feel included."

"How kind of you," Rose said, flatly. "That thermometer has a slight crack in it, by the way."

"What? Where?"

She pointed to it. "I hope it hasn't affected the potion."

Scorpius narrowed his eyes. "I'll grab us a new one."

He returned in a few seconds, switching the old one out. "I think it still looks fine. You?"

Rose - who had shifted back to allow Scorpius greater mobility - angled her torso towards him. "Looks alright."

While they were both assessing the potion, they had unconsciously moved so close together that she could feel the heat of his arm pressing into hers through the fabric of their clothes. She stepped slightly away, lowering her hands down onto the tabletop to lean on.

"Weasley!"

Scorpius grabbed her arm and pushed it away, eyeing her with trepidation. Rose's mouth fell open in surprise and she glanced down at the spot his fingers had touched her, the imprints of him fading as the skin regained its colour. "What was that for?"

Scorpius looked calm again; he was stirring the potion with aplomb. "Leaves of aconite are incredibly toxic."

Rose glimpsed at him, and then lowered her gaze to the remaining flower on the countertop. "But not to skin, I thought."

Scorpius nodded at her arm. "You have a cut on your thumb, I didn't think it wise to risk it."

Rose was still staring at him like she couldn't process what had happened, but when her silence caused him to briefly scrutinise her, she hastily turned to study the textbook for the next instruction. With her focus so solely on the words in front of her, she couldn't see Scorpius'
distraught expression as he screamed "Idiot" repeatedly in his head.

"You'd be a useless partner from the Hospital Wing," he said, abruptly. "It'd be no good doing this paired project by myself."

"I thought that was what you wanted," Rose said, cryptically.

Scorpius continued stirring and motioned towards the textbook. "Perhaps if you didn't talk so much, you'd work faster."

"You act like I'm the slowest partner you've ever had," Rose grumbled, lowering the heat of the flames. "It could be worse, you know."

Scorpius was silent, and Rose sighed as she wondered if they'd actually made any progress at all.

She moved past him and made her way over to the sink, turning on the faucet and sticking her thumb underneath it. She thought she heard him mumble "Could be", and she hesitated before turning the water back off.

But it was probably just her imagination.

Scorpius was exhausted.

He hadn't slept well for a week now, his robes smelled like burnt aconite leaves, and his mind was still reeling with that stupid voice and that stupid laugh and that stupid face and all he wanted was to go the fuck to sleep.

He trudged up the staircase leading to the fourth floor, remembering with a sudden wistfulness how much easier it was to trudge down stairs than up them, and he wondered if he had the strength or willpower to change out of his clothes instead of flopping down onto his bed as he was.

He was looking at his feet as he walked, listening to them as they rapped against the stone, and he frowned as suddenly his view was obstructed by two more pairs of feet. He raised an eyebrow almost lazily, but there was something familiar about those shoes and that scent when put together-

He blinked and then lifted his gaze to look up directly in front of him.

His eyes settled on his girlfriend, and his girlfriend was not alone. He thought he recognised the boy she was with - or rather, around - and he thought his name might be Horatio and that he was on the Ravenclaw Quidditch team, though he had never seen him play, so perhaps he was only a reserve. That said, he couldn't really see his face from behind Liv's curtain of hair, but he thought it might be him.

And he considered leaving without saying one fucking word.

But then Liv suddenly stilled, and she craned her neck to face him. She caught sight of his expressionless face, and she recoiled from Horatio Reed as if his touch had burned her.

There was silence, until-

"Shit, Olivia!" Horatio was turning a scalding red, and he scrambled to pick up his tie from the floor. "You said he was already in bed two floors up!"

Liv said nothing — she didn't even look at him as he scooted past Scorpius and shot her another
horrified look.

The two listened as the pounding of rubber on stone faded, neither removing their gaze from the other.

Scorpius really, really wasn't going to say anything, but it was that indignant, defensive look on her face that sent the blood coursing through his veins.

"You coward," he said, quietly.

Liv's eyes flared, and she shifted her weight so that she was standing stick straight, and from where Scorpius was standing, she didn't have to look up to meet his gaze. She sneered. "How do you figure that?"

"You knew I was coming this way at this time. The Slytherin dormitories are on the other end of the castle; there's no reason for you to be in this wing." He liked the way that his tone was calm, almost blasé.

"Don't you dare - don't you dare stand there and act like this is unwarranted." Liv took a few steps closer to him, and her eyes were still blazing a frightening blue. She pushed away the hair from where it had fallen in her face, and Scorpius could see a vein throbbing hard at her temple. "Why did you agree to us dating, huh?"

Scorpius, not one to be outdone, found himself moving forward. His expression was unwavering. "Because you wanted me to."

"I didn't want this!"

"Want what."

"You were my friend, Scorpius, you were someone I could count on when I needed you! But I have absolutely no idea what I ever saw in you, not only as my boyfriend but as my fucking friend."

He had never fought with Liv like this - he didn't much care for fighting like this - and what was he fucking doing here, he just wanted to go to bed-

"You could've said something."

Liv laughed humourlessly, bitterly. "Don't fuck with me, Scorpius. I know you. Don't pretend for one second that you would give half a damn about my feelings."

"Well, you never gave me the chance, did you?"

"I gave you plenty of chances! I asked you to come to my aunt and uncle's anniversary, specifically as my boyfriend because I wanted you to know that it meant something to me, and then all you want to know is whether or not Toby's coming, and then you ask if coming as my boyfriend even matters!"

"You're trying to make me feel bad because I cared whether or not our best friend was coming to that stupid wedding-"

"IT'S AN ANNIVERSARY!"

"It doesn't matter!"
"YES IT DOES!"

Liv took a few deep breaths, and rolled out her fingers. "You never want to talk anymore, all you care about is fooling around with me. *I didn't sign up to be your side piece, Scorpius!*" She was red in the face, and in all their years together, Scorpius had never seen her quite like this. "So yes, I kissed someone else, I danced with someone else, I fooled around with *someone else.*"

It was getting increasingly, impossibly difficult for Scorpius to keep his face impassive - he wasn't used to being on the receiving end of comments that wrenched into him like little knives, no matter what he tried to tell himself - but he was doing his very best.

"Does that matter to you, Scorpius?" Liv said, in a very different tone, a tone that was so quiet and indifferent that Scorpius could feel his hands going slick with sweat. "*Does it matter to you now?*"

No.

"You know what, Liv?" They were now almost toe to toe, and Liv had to crane up to meet his gaze. Up this close, her eyes were shining so fiercely they looked as if they were glistening. "I'm going to bed. You can do whatever the fuck you want."

He turned away and walked past her, his hand clasping his wand so hard he wondered if he might break it.

He thought that was the end of it until she spoke just before he turned the corner.

"God," she said, her voice still that deadly calm. "Rose was wrong. You don't deserve anyone."

Her footsteps stormed off in the other direction, and perhaps it was that arguing with Liv had taken all of what little energy Scorpius had left, for her last words didn't sink in until he was lying awake underneath the covers as the clock struck three.
Chapter Summary

"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 11: I Hope He Was A Gentleman or, The Boys Get Lonely After You Leave

Rating: M mainly for language, and I can't discount any funny business later on

Disclaimer: I work with only what the infallible J.K. Rowling has given me.

"Hey, what did you get for question four?"

Rose looked up, the tip of her quill still pressing into her lip. "Four? Oh, um…Cistem Aperio, but if you add Harenis to the end, the spell will work on glass as well."

Gen clicked her tongue. "How do you even know stuff like that? You know what, nevermind."

Rose grinned and turned back to continue her homework, at least until Gen elbowed her in her side. "Ow. What?"

Gen jerked her head to her right.

"Hey, uh, Rose."

Rose looked up and smiled at the boy who had approached their table. "Hey, Dominic. What's up?"

"Uh…" He exhaled and smiled at her again, shaking his head a little. He flicked his eyes back to where his friend was sitting, and looked at Rose again. "I was wondering, would you want to—uh…would you want to—to...lend me a quill?"

Rose raised her eyebrows. "A quill? Uh…yeah, I think I have a spare." She dug around in her satchel and pulled one out. "Here you go."

Dominic took it from her and clenched it in his fist. "Thanks, I'll uh…bring it back." He gave her one more sheepish smile and then walked back to where his friend was hiding his laugh behind his hand.

Rose turned to Gen. "I swear, it's not just me, right? Boys are always forgetting their quills."

Gen shook her head, shooting her friend a reproachful look. "The only way he could've been
more of a flying brick is if he actually sprouted wings and turned into clay."

Rose frowned. "Huh?"

"A flying fucking brick." 

At Rose's unchanged expression, Gen simply shook her head again and went back to work.

"You know the number one reason for cheating is lack of attention and intimacy?"

Scorpius looked up from his book, and for a few moments there was nothing except the sound of the crackling fire again. "Oh yeah, how'd you figure that?"

Toby pointed lazily to the open magazine on the table. "It says so in that magazine over there."

Scorpius - for lack of anything else to do - wandered over and picked it up. "Huh. Who knew Weasley read trash like this."

Toby suddenly swung his legs over the back of the couch, and looked at Scorpius upside down. "There's a comprehensive guide to the best London medical universities in there. I figure she was looking at that."

Scorpius paused. "Medical universities in London?"

Toby still hung over the edge of the couch, and he cracked a grin at Scorpius' expression. "As far as I can tell."

Scorpius was silent, and he leaned over and closed the magazine with a soft thump. Toby, upon noting this, smirked. Scorpius, upon noting that, set his mouth in a thin line and quirked a brow. "Don't think I don't know what you're doing."

"Well, what can I say, Scorp, I'm a romantic at-"

"Not that," Scorpius said, and then after a moment, glared at his friend. "I mean, no-that doesn't even make sense. I meant you hiding out in here."

Toby held up a hand, finally returning to his upright position. "You were the one who said this couch had my name on it." He ran his hand along its back. "It's getting cold without me."

"Somehow you make that sound disgusting. And you are hiding out in here."

Toby made a face, grabbing the magazine from the table and flipping to a random page. "That's ridiculous."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah."

"What're you doing here then?"

Toby sucked in his cheeks, pursing his lips. "I'm...reading this magazine."

Scorpius fell back onto the other couch, grabbing the cushion on the floor and propping it up behind him. "I didn't realise there was something wrong with your old one."

"Come again?"
Scorpius nodded at the page Toby had turned to. "How To Find The Perfect Doctor For Your Lady Parts."

Toby immediately recoiled away, and the two of them watched the book as it sailed onto the floor and fell onto its side.

"Like I said," Scorpius added pointedly. "Hiding."

"I told you," Toby said, kicking off his shoes and stretching out properly on the sofa. "I refuse to take any part in this." At Scorpius' expression, he spread his hands. "I'm not saying she wasn't wrong, because she was, but I'm not getting in the middle of my two friends."

"You're my friend, Toby, not hers."

"Don't be childish."

"You're being childish."

They were silent for a few moments, and Toby reached down and grabbed the magazine, setting it back on the table.

Scorpius tapped his foot against his other leg. "You know, I heard that she and Horatio couldn't keep their hands off each other when they went out together on Saturday night."

Toby raised his eyebrows (though at his friend's tone, he tried not to). "May I remind you what you were doing last Saturday night?"

Scorpius set his jaw, and looked accusingly at Toby out of the corner of his eye. "I should never have told you about that," he huffed.

"Then why did you?"

They lapsed into silence once more - Scorpius didn't have an answer to give him, and Toby had expected as much - until Toby groaned and stood up. "I'd love to stay and not chat, but there's a girl waiting for me in the library."

Scorpius raised his eyebrows. "Now who's withholding information?"

Toby chuckled. "I have tutoring." He paused suddenly, and shook his head. "Huh. Déjà vu. See you later."

"Bye," Scorpius said, rather absently.

Déjà vu.

It was like déjà vu in some ways, Scorpius thought. But then in some ways not like déjà vu at all. He and Liv had fought before; their fights usually resulted in the "off" part of their on-off relationship, but this was different. Usually, Liv would get pissed that Scorpius would forget about their anniversary - which somehow changed every year - or complain that they hadn't done anything special or couple-y in too long, or Why Do You Never Refer To Me As Your Girlfriend, Scorpius, or Why Does Toby Have To Come Along To Everything, Scorpius?

This, however, was somewhat uncharted territory. Scorpius had never been cheated on before. He supposed that was what made the "off" part of their relationship so successful, but then all the one night stands in the world somehow couldn't stop them from finding their way back to each other. Liv was the only real girlfriend he'd ever had.
And then she'd gone ahead and cheated on him anyway.

His gaze travelled towards the desk at the back of the living room. On it lay the silvery-blue waistcoat that Scorpius' mother had sent him at his request, and he stood up to put it away.

Dateless.

His first ball dateless.

He shook his head, the force of it shaking the waistcoat in his hands, the silky material rustling and lapping like water.

He didn't need Liv. He could find someone else. He could have anyone he wanted.

"I could have the fucking pick of the bunch," he said aloud, and the fire crackled on, and Scorpius realised how quiet the place was, how alone he was.

His gaze briefly flickered to Rose's closed door, but if memory served, she would be at Quidditch training.

Good thing too, he thought, opening the door to his room. That was the last thing he needed.

_____________________________

She had to have told him.

That had to be the reason why Rose hadn't seen Liv and Scorpius together for almost two weeks now. And it wasn't like she looked at Scorpius often, obviously, but even the most unobservant person couldn't have missed the tension between them.

At least, that's what she had said to Gen on the morning of the Christmas Ball when her friend had asked her why she was suddenly so interested in Scorpius' love affairs.

"I mean, did you see him at breakfast? Do you think he looked mad at breakfast?"

Gen laughed a little disbelievingly. "No, Rose, I wasn't looking at him at breakfast, and so what if he was? They break up all the time - let them sort their shit out. You couldn't get me near their problems with a ten foot pole—door, Rose!"

Rose started and her gaze shifted to where Gen's hand was clenching her forearm. She looked at her other arm, her shoulder just grazing the doors to the Great Hall. "Sorry," she muttered, stepping fully away and walking through.

She could feel Gen's eyes burning a hole in the back of her head, so she quickly scoped out the room, anxious for a distraction. "There's Al," she said, relieved, pointing at her cousin and leading them over to him. "I asked him to bring down the room plan, I just want to double check something on it…"

Gen wasn't being subtle, and Rose was being even less so. But Gen didn't need to be worrying about what Rose knew she was worrying about, because - and Rose knew this was terrible - the thought that was thrumming through her mind and causing her to collide with doors wasn't how Scorpius was coping with their break up, but whether or not he knew that Rose had known about Liv and Horatio. Well, the other thing had flickered through Rose's head too, but she wasn't supposed to be thinking about things like that.

Al waved as he saw them coming over, and finished draping lights over the twig tree beside him.
"How's it looking?"

Rose nodded approvingly. "It's coming along."

"Hey, Scorpius was looking for you." Al pointed to the far side of the room. "He was over there the last time I saw him. Said something about wanting to do the charm on the ceiling for the snow."

Rose could see Gen looking at her out of the corner of her eye. "Alright, I'd better go. I'll catch up with you guys later."

She made it about two steps before something stopped her short, and she turned around with her hands cocked on her hips. "You called him 'Scorpius'."

Al rolled his eyes. "You don't miss a thing."

"Except doors, apparently," Gen muttered.

"Go," Al said emphatically. "You've got actual things to worry about."

Rose huffed and turned away again, heading for the direction that Al had pointed at. She reached the end of the room and furrowed her brow as she peered around the prefects.

As one of them walked by her, she raised a hand to catch his attention. "Hey, um…have you seen Malfoy anywhere?"

"Scorpius? Oh yeah, he's over by the fountain."

"Okay, thanks," Rose said with a smile. "This area looks great, by the way."

She walked past him, tapping her wand in her palm as she remembered that this would be the first proper conversation between them since, well, since she began having her suspicions.

"Hey, wait, Rose-"

She felt a light touch on her shoulder, and she blinked as the boy she had just spoken to arrived in front of her. Conrad, she was sure his name was.

"Yes?"

"I was uh…” He smiled at her, and pulled a hand through his hair, ruffling it. "Do you have a date? For tonight, I mean. I know I've left it pretty late so you've probably got one already..."

Rose raised her eyebrows in surprise. "Oh, right! I completely forgot."

Conrad's smile widened. "Does that mean 'no'?"

"No. I mean, yes. I mean…I don't have a date."

He smiled a little, and he lifted his hand down from his hair and entwined it with his other one. "If that's a no, don't worry about it-"

"No," Rose said hastily. "That wasn't a no."

She didn't know Conrad very well, which sort of made her wonder whether or not he knew her. He was a prefect though, so he would've attended the meetings she headed, but she didn't think they'd had a single conversation before this one.
"Is that a yes?" She could hear the hopefulness creeping into his calm voice.

She hadn't actually considered going with a date. She hadn't exactly considered going without one either. It had been easier last year, she thought to herself in a moment of despondency. And the year before, when she'd had Nate to go with.

And now, well...now Conrad was asking her, and he was waiting.


"What about her?"

Scorpius sighed the sigh of one most heavily burdened. "For the last time, I am not interested in going with anyone."

At his words, the girl a few feet away from them stiffened before she resumed setting out the silver goblets with a derisive pout on her face.

"It's almost selfish of you," Toby said, reproachfully. "All these girls throwing themselves at you so readily, and you're not going to take a single one." He flapped out a napkin so that the corner of it grazed Scorpius' jaw, the latter of whom smacked him away and scowled. "Do you know how many guys are going to be relegated to sloppy seconds because of you?"

"Your sympathy is a boon in this troubled time," Scorpius replied flatly.

"Oh, come on, mate." Toby flicked his wand and one of the ice reindeer sculptures began to paw at the ground. "You're not thinking of going alone, are you?"

That was precisely what Scorpius was planning on doing.

Liv would know if he took just anyone - and even he had to face the fact that the most eligible girls would already be committed - he'd only be doing it for the sake of not showing up alone. He needed someone breathtaking, someone so arresting she would awe the room with her presence, someone to make him look good — no, he would already look good. Someone to make him look better.

And yet, there was no one who could do that. No one, he thought even more firmly when his brain twitched as he cast his gaze away from the girl adding the finishing touches to the snow-charmed ceiling.

So he'd do it. He'd show up alone, and he'd get all of the girls anyway. A small voice in his head piped up whether winning without trying was worth the win at all, but then he remembered his girlfriend wrapped up in the arms of another man, and he didn't care.

His gaze snapped towards where two fifth year prefects were setting the arch of twig trees by the entrance, watching as one of them cast the whole thing to light a dark blue.

"No, for Merlin's sake, light blue! Doesn't anyone have vision?"

Toby snorted beside him.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Rose straighten, apparently roused by his unexpected outburst, and she trailed over, her eyebrows raised. "I didn't know you cared so much."

Scorpius spared her a glance, suddenly annoyed when his brain did that stupid twitch thing again,
and looked back at the entrance, satisfied to see that it was now glowing the colour he wanted. "I
don't half-ass anything."

The two prefects moved away, so now he was looking at an empty entrance. He turned back to
look at his fellow Head, and his gaze drifted to where she was cradling three sisal glowing
presents. "You have a wand, you know."

She shrugged. "A little manual labour never hurt anybody." She glanced at her watch. "It's almost
five. We really should be wrapping up."

"We are." Scorpius nodded at the room. "We just need to finish the table settings and animate the
rest of the sculptures."

"Sculptures are done," Toby called out, pointing behind him.

"Looks good," Rose said in approval, reaching out and straightening the silver fork next to her.
"Very good."

"It almost makes the trip to Gwyneth's worth it," Scorpius said unthinkingly, and Rose snickered.
"You loved the attention, don't lie."

"What, you didn't notice as I swiped her address and office hours before we left?"

She shook her head, grinning, and Scorpius nodded behind her as Genevieve appeared.

"We're all done in our section," she said, looking at Scorpius curiously for a split second. His
eyebrow raised the most diminutive of a fraction. "You ready to go?"

Rose glanced back at her friend before turning back to face Scorpius. "Yeah, I think we're all
done here. Are you leaving too?"

Scorpius shook his head, lifting his chin as the girl moved on to her last table. "I'd better make sure
everything is finalised properly."

Rose looked conflicted. "I can stay too," she offered. "It wouldn't be an issue."

Scorpius waved her off. "Go. We'd lose all of the prefects' respect if they thought we were both
needed to oversee the menial task of table setting."

Rose nodded slowly, and pocketed her wand in her back pocket. "Alright. Thanks. I'll um...see
you later, then."

"Bye."

She turned away, her friend at her side, and as they left, he heard Genevieve say, "So, who're you
bringing as your date?"

Rose didn't usually consider herself to be the most girliest of girls. Yes, she enjoyed making
herself look presentable for dates and things, but there was something she loved about twirling
around in a pretty dress, and playing with her hair and make-up and the way it just made her feel
like such a...girl.

"Up or down?"

Rose turned away from the mirror and looked at her friend. She squinted. "Down."
Gen nodded in agreement and continued to charm her hair into curls, placing them carefully around her head. "I do love that colour on you."

Rose smiled, skimming her fingers along the fabric of her dress. "I didn't want white, but…silver works."

Gen cleared her throat, and stood up, nudging Rose away with her hip so she could sit down in front of the dresser. "I know what it's about, you know."

Rose lowered her arm from where she was about to twirl up her hair in a bun and paused. "Know what what's about?"

Gen eyed her in the mirror's reflection, and though she was fiddling with mascara, her gaze couldn't have been more direct. "There is a palpable difference in the way that you two are interacting. Come on - give me some credit as your best friend, alright?"

"Difference? There's no difference."

"Please. You spent half the day together, and the times you weren't spending together, you were looking for each other. Also, he asked your opinion on something. I've never heard anything akin to that out of that boy's mouth."

Rose made a show of rolling her eyes. "We were just setting a good example. You know, "Even enemies can put aside their issues and work together"." Even as she said it, the word 'enemies' tasted wrong on her tongue.

"Nice try, Rose."

Gen was resolute, and Rose could only sigh. "I suppose there might be a possibility that we're acting somewhat differently."

Gen's eyes glinted. "It was Saturday, wasn't it? That day you two went out in Hogsmeade?"

Rose nodded. "Day. Night. Morning, I don't know — no!" she said hastily when Gen's eyebrows flew up. "No, no. Not that." She pressed her lips together, words swirling and dissipating in her head as she tried to make enough sense of that night to tell it. But this was Gen, and for God's sake, if she didn't tell someone it was going to eat her alive.

She sighed so harshly that all of her breath left her. "Alright, but you have to promise not to be judgemental."

"You know what? I would fuck me."

Scorpius readjusted his bow tie, glancing at his friend behind him. "Well, that's what's important, I guess."

"No, really. I would."

Scorpius bent to pick up his jacket from where he had slung it over the back of the couch, and inspected it for creases. He heard footsteps behind him, and straightened. "Let me guess, you still don't know how to tie a bow tie."

He turned around to see Toby sheepishly holding out the scrap of fabric in his hand, and crinkled his nose before obliging him.
"Look at us," Toby sighed. "Two bachelors on the first ball of our final year. Can you believe it?"

Scorpius finished doing up the knot and pulled out the parts of Toby's collar that had folded back over themselves. "One of us, yes."

"Thanks."

Toby struck out a foot in front of the mirror, twisting his leg as he inspected the cut of his slacks. "I mean…you'd fuck me, wouldn't you?"

"You're absolutely irresistible, Toby."

Scorpius shook out his jacket a little and pulled his arms into it, joining his friend and surveying himself in front of the mirror. He looked good. Of course, Scorpius always looked good, and he made a point of it. Toby looked good too — too good in fact, there was almost no way that he had picked out that outfit himself-

"Gold was an interesting choice," Scorpius said.

"Oh, it wasn't mine," Toby confessed, airily, waving a hand. "It was Li-"

He broke off so quickly that it would've been far less noticeable if he had just taken that last half second to finish saying her name; not that it mattered, how could Scorpius not be thinking it anyway.

Toby looked genuinely guilty, and Scorpius clapped a hand on his shoulder. "Come on. Let's go do what bachelors do."

Toby swiped his jacket from where he had piled it onto the chair next to them, and swung it over his shoulder. "Ready?"

Scorpius nodded, and led the way to the door. Almost instinctively, he paused, and tilted his face towards the door next to him. It was ajar, and the room was quiet.

Toby's eyes widened, and he pointed a finger at Scorpius' face. "You were going to!"

Scorpius shook his head defensively. "I wasn't."

"You were!"

"I—no, I wasn't."

"Okay, you weren't."

Scorpius glared. "Ignoring you." He passed Toby and left the room.

"You can't ignore me," Toby protested, his footsteps clambering to catch up. "I climbed seven floors to make sure you didn't show up looking like a prat."

"I'm sure that was the main motivator behind your visit."

"I mean, sure you have a nice, big bathroom, and Shane's hair gel does smell sorta funky, what the fuck is in that stuff anyway…"

Toby prattled on as they descended towards the Great Hall, but it was about nothing in particular, and Scorpius knew he was only doing it to keep Scorpius' mind occupied after his faux pas, but he appreciated the gesture all the same.
Professor McGonagall sought them out as soon as they arrived at the entrance, and she placed a hand on his shoulder, her eyes crinkling as she smiled. "Mr. Malfoy, I must congratulate you on your work; the Hall looks absolutely splendid. Have you seen Miss Weasley, by chance? I must offer her my congratulations as well. Ah — there she is!"

Scorpius followed her gaze and stared.

It wasn't as if he had never seen her in a dress before, but there was something about the way she was wearing this one that made his throat tighten and his head light, and he wondered why they insisted on fighting so much, why they couldn't simply get along and spare themselves all of the aggravation.

Then he frowned, suddenly aware that there was a boy next to her, a boy whose arm she had intertwined with her own. He self-consciously relaxed the tightness in his forehead.

Professor McGonagall was pointing towards the towering Christmas tree by the edge of the room, and as Rose moved her gaze to settle on it, their eyes met.

He cleared his throat, and turned away, startled by the subsequent rising of heat underneath his collar. He turned back to look at Toby, but found that he too was staring at the Great Hall's entrance. He furrowed his brow, and looking around his immediate area, it became obvious to Scorpius that he was not the only one roused by Rose's appearance, and his jaw set as soon as he realised all of the other boys were looking at her too.

"Let's get something to drink."

Toby blinked, and then turned back to face Scorpius. "Huh?"

"A drink, Toby. Let's go get a drink."

As soon as he turned away from her he wished he hadn't, and then he wished he hadn't thought about that either. Toby whistled low and soft, lingering for a second before following Scorpius away.

Scorpius sighed, feeling a headache coming on, and he shouldered past two guys who were staring, transfixed, at the entrance and consequently failed to move out of his way as he came past. His head twitched, but he kept his gaze forward, even as he heard his Headmistress compliment her on her dress. Maybe he was holding onto a lingering shred of sanity, he thought, relieved. Even McGonagall had something to say.

Therefore, objectively, she must look very nice tonight.

"You look absolutely stunning," Conrad said. "If I hadn't mentioned."

"You've mentioned it," Rose said, smiling. "But thank you."

She readjusted her hold around his neck and looked around them. "The Hall looks beautiful," she breathed. It had looked good during the day, but now that there was only darkness outside, the lights illuminating the Hall gleamed all around them in splendour. Rose thought it all looked incredibly romantic.

"It's your vision," Conrad praised. "Of course it looks amazing."

Rose flushed, and she became acutely aware of the weight of Conrad's hands on her waist. "Can I
ask you something?"

Conrad's eyebrows raised in curiosity. "Ask away."

Rose felt a small smile tugging at her lips. "Why did you ask me here tonight? I mean - and don't take this the wrong way - but we don't know each other very well." Her blush deepened. "I don't think we've ever really talked before today."

Conrad shrugged, and his gaze was briefly caught by a friend who waved at him as he danced by. "I mean, I...I sort of feel like I know you. You know, everyone knows you — you're Rose Weasley."

Rose felt her smile slipping.

"But of course, you're right, we don't really know each other at all, but you know, I'd be lying if I said I hadn't noticed you or anything." He grinned at her. "Everyone starts off as strangers, right?"

Rose summoned the smile back to her face, and nodded. "That's what they say."

They danced in silence for a minute or two, and with so much to look at in the room it was acceptable, but even with all that to look at, it still wasn't enough to stop Rose from glancing back at the tall blonde boy in the silvery-blue waistcoat at the concession stand. She had seen that waistcoat on the desk in their shared living room, and it had looked good there, but it looked even better on.

A little voice was crooning in her brain, and she struggled to ignore the whispers of Where's his date? as they continued to prod at her. After all, trying to wrap her mind around Scorpius showing up to a Ball alone was like trying to force a square block to fit into a circular hole. It just wasn't done.

Every other time he'd broken up with Liv it was like he'd brought another girl into the bed while the sheets were still warm, each girl prettier than the last. That girl would cling to Scorpius' arm, enthralled that he had chosen her, but by the time the night had come to its close, her moment would be over, and often by the next day, Liv would have her boyfriend back.

She had inadvertently still been staring at him as her mind had swum, and he caught her gaze now. It wasn't unkind, and it really was nothing like the glare he used to return, but still it was unreadable, and she coughed, and turned back to her date.

"It's Malfoy's," she said abruptly. "Not mine."

Conrad frowned, cocking his head. "What?"

"The Hall," Rose elaborated, reddening. "It's Malfoy's vision."

Almost as if she now had an excuse, she tilted her head to survey him again, and Conrad followed her gaze. He was still at the concession stand with Toby, talking to another seventh year and seemingly occupied, but there was something about the way he was angled that made her — no. It was nothing.

As if sensing their gazes on him, Scorpius flicked his eyes back to Rose, and then to her hands around Conrad's neck. She interlaced her fingers tightly, ignoring them as they became cold and clammy.

"Huh," Conrad said. "I thought it was only me who had noticed."
"Noticed what?" Rose said, though she knew exactly what he was about to say.

"You two, you know, looking at each other." His eyes widened. "Of course, you two are both Heads, and you set this whole thing up, it makes sense, right-

"I'm confused," Rose interrupted, slowly, squinting. "What are you saying?"

Conrad shrugged. "I think he must be planning on asking you to dance."

Scorpius, in fact, was not planning on asking her to dance. Yes, she looked nice - objectively, of course - and even if he was having trouble removing her from his line of vision, the hand he raised was to signal to Toby to grab him the punch he wanted at the other end of the table. The misconception was not thoroughly bemusing, however; as much as he had tried to avoid it, he had caught Conrad's eye once or twice as he kept a watchful gaze on the Hufflepuff's dance partner.

Conrad parked himself in front of Scorpius, clasping Rose's hand in his. She was clinging onto his arm, and from the way her body was twisting away, Scorpius could tell that this visit was not her idea.

"Alright, Scorpius?" Conrad said, offering him a smile. "I was just telling Rose I'm really not the territorial type; if you two want to dance I'm completely fine with that."

"I'm sorry," Rose said, immediately affirming Scorpius' previous thoughts. "He dragged me over, we don't have to do this-"

"Sure." The words sounded hollow to Scorpius' ears, as if someone else had spoken them. He met Rose's gaze, wide-eyed and unblinking. "If you don't mind."

"Me?" Rose said in a voice that sounded much higher than usual. She quickly recovered her disbelief, and her gaze turned towards the outstretched hand that Scorpius hadn't quite registered he had been holding out.

For a moment, Scorpius seemed to falter in his head, staring at Rose's hand as her fingers twitched. Oh, God, he thought to himself. You've fucked up. You absolute id-

And then she placed her warm hand into his, and those thoughts fell away.

He led them across the dance floor to an empty spot, his eyes focused ahead of them as he fought against the urge to look at her hand in his. She wasn't clasping his hand; no, just resting lightly in it, apparently as unsure as he was about their predicament.

But then he had to turn around and meet her gaze again, and he did. He chanced a look around them, and just as he had expected, the couples dancing around them looked like actual couples - the girls with their arms entwined around their partners' necks, the guys with their arms wrapped around their partners' waists. Like the way she had danced with Conrad.

When he looked back at her, she was a second too late looking back.

Her hand was still in his, so he manoeuvred them around so he was raising their hands together at shoulder height, and he applied a little pressure, just enough to be firm. He wound his hand around her waist, pressing lightly into the small of her back. Tentatively, she rested her hand on his shoulder, and he didn't miss how she had to take a half-step forward to reach.

"Snob," she whispered, though the corner of her mouth twitched.
"Amateur," he whispered back, and then they began to dance.

"Am I dragging you away from anyone?" she asked, lightly, and he paused before twirling her, and when she returned back into his arms, she looked like she'd gotten the hint. "You're good," she commented, nodding approvingly. "I didn't get to see these fancy moves that night."

"A packed club isn't really the place for ballroom dance," he replied, relieved she'd moved on. She was the last person he needed to confess anything to.

"So, indulge me," she continued, her eyebrows arched. "Don't tell me you got this good for some family Christmas ball?"

Scorpius pursed his lips. "Is that so hard to believe?"

"Don't get me wrong," she said, and then inhaled sharply when he overbalanced her for a brief second before grabbing her again. "Show off," she muttered. "I mean, I get that you're an overachiever, but…dancing?"

He shrugged. "I had my reasons."

"Had?"

"Tell you what, Weasley," he proposed, and her eyes seemed to light up in anticipation, but maybe it was just that they had moved underneath the chandelier again, "if you can tell me the name of the position I'm holding you in, I'll allow you a little insight."

She smiled, a satisfied little smile that Scorpius had come to know. "You know when you wanted to be good at something, and you did everything you could to learn about it in the hopes that maybe everything was learnable if you could just follow a book?"

"That explains a lot."

She smirked at him, and reached behind her, nudging his hand down so that it moved from her shoulder blade to the small of her back. "Closed position."

"You don't disappoint."

His hand felt oddly cold from where she had released it, and oddly empty. He shook himself out of his thoughts and met her gaze. "As much as it may surprise you, I didn't pop out of the womb this painfully handsome and accomplished."

"I thought this would feel more rewarding," Rose mused.

"Truth be told, I didn't really come into anything extraordinary until I was about seven."

"And let me guess, dancing was your first calling?"

"Miss Viola said I was the best student she'd ever had."

Rose cracked a grin. "Miss Viola?"

"My seven year old self found her quite lovely. Though between you and me, I have the sneaking suspicion that she may have since become an underground stripper."

Rose laughed, and shook her head. "You never really answered my question though," she noted. "Sure I did," he countered. "You asked me why I started dancing, and I told you that I was good
"So, what, you don't do it because you love it?"

"That, Weasley," Scorpius said, with an air of crushing condescension, "is completely beside the point."

She pressed her lips together, nodding. "Well, you're good."

"I know."

She narrowed her eyes. "Humility isn't a crime, you know."

"Modesty is a waste of time," Scorpius said, dismissively.

Rose pressed her lips together as if fighting a smile, and they were silent again. Her hair seemed to catch the light and sparkle, and Scorpius was about to chastise himself for being an idiot until they moved out from underneath the chandelier and he could see that she had tiny crystal hairpins in her hair, and that her hair was, in fact, sparkling.

"You must be into Voltaire."

Scorpius blinked. "Scarcely heard of him. It is a him, right?" Her hand brushed against his shoulder as she adjusted her grip, and he hastily pushed down each new wave of whatever it was that washed over him every time she unwittingly reminded him of her touch. "Why?"

"Let us read, and let us dance; these two amusements will never do any harm to the world," she recited.

"He's obviously never seen Cabaret."

"So you don't know Voltaire, but you don't seem to have a problem with pop-culture references." Scorpius thought it almost sounded like an accusation.

"Is there a question in there?"

"Is there an answer in there?"

Scorpius considered, and something in him wanted to surprise her, to show her that she didn't know anything there was to him, not anything at all.

"I mean, I only know Cabaret because my Muggle grandparents are musical buffs. What's your excuse?"

He scoffed a little, and led them into another open space. The beams of light that managed to evade the twigs shone onto her face, one blue eye engulfed in shadow, the other flecked with gold. He swooped them to safer territory.

"I have an appreciation of history."

"But not of truth telling, it would seem."

Scorpius felt the side of his mouth tugging upwards. "I like the music."

"But you don't sing?"

"Don't I?"
Her eyes widened, and a line appeared on her brow. "Then you're a liar."

"Am I?"

She clenched her hand in his, and then suddenly seemed to realise that he could feel it too. She lessened her grip. "Why do you do that? Be so completely obtuse and cryptic about everything?"

"Frankly, Weasley, if you knew enough about me you'd fall in love with me instantly," Scorpius said seriously. "Stronger women than you have caved."

She let out a disbelieving laugh. "How do you get that ego past the door?"

"Well, I mean, it has to be a double entrance or-"

"You're being evasive again."

"I don't owe you any answers, Weasley," Scorpius said, levelling his gaze at her, though he knew he didn't look serious at all.

"Please," Rose said, not one to be outdone, "I don't think you acted on that philosophy when you insisted on butting into my relationship with Christian. And Nate, come to think of it."

"What you saw in either of them was baffling, Weasley." The boy next to them dipped his partner clumsily, and Scorpius was sorely tempted to show him how it was really done, but of course that would only lead to more problems. "Anyway, you should be thanking me: you got rid of Goldstein well enough, didn't you?"

Her eyes flashed, and the grip that was beginning to feel comforting suddenly clenched against his shoulder, and he wondered why he continued to make her angry, though that feeling was par for the course these days. "I didn't get rid of Christian. I just…realised we had conflicting interests."

"Your only conflict was whether you were interested in him at all."

"Do you insist on drowning every girl you talk to in your sage relationship advice, or is it just me?" Rose asked, dryly.

He supposed it was ironic, given his current predicament. Something in the back of his mind flared, and he wondered if this was what karma felt like. "Only the ones who really need it."

For one of the startlingly first moments of the night, he moved his gaze away from Rose and settled it on the concession stand. Conrad was there, he noted, and he'd lost track of the amount of songs they'd danced to, but when Conrad smiled at him, it didn't quite reach his eyes.

If only Scorpius was one to care about things like that.

And Scorpius wound his fingers around Rose's as he twirled her again, and he found himself caring even less.

It was only mere minutes later, when the song finished, that Rose's date appeared.

"Mind if I cut in?" Conrad asked pleasantly, but his eyes were a touch frantic, and he was taking Rose's hand before it had fully left Scorpius'.

"Not at all," Scorpius said, and without a further glance, walked over to the empty punch table and began to ladle himself a drink. He sipped it, surveying the room, and then halted.
There she was, in Horatio's arms again. And she looked absolutely miserable. Good.

"Hey, stranger." Toby grabbed the ladle out of Scorpius' hand and began to refill his empty goblet.

"What is it, Toby?"

His friend shrugged, turning around and leaning against the table behind him as he too took in the room. "You two seem awfully friendly. And I do mean that in an awful sort of way. What gives?"

Scorpius tossed him an idle look, and ditched his punch before reaching out for the mead next to them. "Did you know that Magizoologists have found that if you put two rats in an enclosed space they'll eventually stop trying to kill each other and start sharing their food?"

"Funnily enough, I-"

"Scorpius!"

The two turned to see a fellow Slytherin approaching, the train of her dress so long that she had half of it draped across her arm.

Scorpius gave her some semblance of a smile. "Lucy. What can I do for you?"

She shrugged, and placed a hand lightly on his shoulder. "You're not uh…here with anyone, are you?"

Toby surreptitiously raised a hand.

"Oh, hello, Toby. So you're not, then?"

"Not," Scorpius affirmed, and his gaze was drawn down towards the flash of skin at her thigh when her dress flared at its slit. "Care for a dance?"

She flashed her teeth. "I thought you'd never ask."

Scorpius crooked his arm out for her to take, and then threw his friend a smug smile. "See you later, mate."

They had made it a few steps before the sound of Toby's voice stopped them. "So are you just two rats beginning to share your food, then?"

Scorpius turned around and raised his eyebrows. "Don't be daft, Tobias. We're people, not rats. Finish my drink, will you."

As he walked arm in arm with Lucy, she pointed up at the ceiling above them. "You know, I can't imagine how anyone could do that charm. It seems terribly difficult."


"Well, I wouldn't even know where to begin."

Something began to brew in Scorpius then, something that felt a little like annoyance, and then he wondered when he had become so snobby about dates. Granted, he would never accept a date with a girl who looked more air than brain, but he didn't know when or why this philosophy applied to a simple dance, especially when the point of a dance was one night when things really were about the way that everyone looked. And Lucy looked good.
They reached the dance floor and Scorpius raised their hands up, placing his other hand on her waist.

"Ooh, that's an fancy way to dance," Lucy said, her eyes widening. "What do you call that?"

Scorpius sighed, wondering whether or not he was going to trip on the train of her dress. "Closed position."

When he twirled her, her dress flared out like a flower blooming, and that slit seemed to creep even higher, not that Scorpius noticed.

Rose looked at herself sternly in the bathroom mirror.

*Calm down. You are a composed, elegant Head Girl. You do not come into bathrooms to freak out.*

She braced her hands on either side of the sink, feeling the cold marble pressing into her palms. She sighed, and turned away from the mirror, unwilling to leave. She halfheartedly opened her bag and dug around in it a little, finding only a tube of lipgloss inside, though with the excess of lights around the room, she feared if she applied anymore shine to her lips she might blind anyone who stood too close. She recapped it and put it back.

She scrutinised herself, liking the way a few more strands of hair had escaped her bun; it made her look more relaxed, more approachable. A few other girls greeted her as they passed by, all of them fiddling with their powder and blotting pads. Rose bit her lip, now feeling stupid just standing there gazing past her reflection.

Still, she fluffed out her hair a little, and drew a finger under her eye, pretending to fuss with her makeup. Her eyes hardened as she silently willed the girl in the mirror to focus, to go and find her date, and to stop thinking about things like closed position and *Cabaret.*

She stepped back outside, her eyes still searching the ballroom even after they had settled on Conrad.

She suddenly inhaled sharply, blinking furiously as her cousin suddenly guided the girl he was dancing with towards the outskirts of the fray. She recognised her best friend instantly, and it wasn't as if Gen and Al hadn't danced together before, but she didn't think Al's hand had rested so low before. At least, she hoped that it hadn't.

She shook her head. *Focus.*

She would find Conrad, she would dance with him, she would smile at him, and absolutely nothing would distract her from-

"You look like you've seen a ghost."

She jumped, and made a tiny surprised noise at his words, though of course it was him. She took in his raised eyebrows before lowering her gaze to the goblet of punch he was holding out to her.

He followed her gaze and coughed. "I uh…got this for Toby but he went to the bathroom, and you know, no one likes warm punch and obviously it would look stupid if I just poured it back in, not to mention unsanitary."

She took it, a half-smile on her face, and cupped it within her hands. "No ghost," she said, laughing a little uncomfortably. "I just saw…um…" She trailed off and instinctively looked back
towards her friends.

"They had it coming, Weasley."

She frowned at him a little, but perhaps she was just frowning to herself. She coughed. "Where's that girl you were dancing with?"

Scorpius shrugged. "I'm sure she's doing just fine without me."

A flash of gold attracted Rose's attention, and she bit her lip as Liv twirled by, though she remained a safe few feet away from Scorpius' back. Rose took a breath.

If he knew, he wasn't showing it. If he knew, he would've been mad at her right? Then again, he was always mad at her, and she was always mad at him.

Except today — today they didn't seem to be quite so mad at each other.

"So."

Rose snapped back up to look at Scorpius, who was looking across the room. He tilted his head at where Conrad was queuing in the punch line. "A Hufflepuff, huh? What, did you just grab a guy as you walked in?"

She rolled her eyes. "Go ahead. I happen to think Conrad is lovely."

"You don't actually like him?"

She shrugged. "He's nice, nothing to write home about, I suppose. He seems to really appreciate this 'open date' thing, whatever that says about him."

"So you like him because he gives you an excuse to get away from him?"

"Your wit is boundless."

He smirked at her, and the silence between them was made all the more obvious when the song in the background faded out as well. Rose reached up, curling her hand loosely around her bun before letting it go again. A soft violin chorus began to play, and Scorpius' mouth suddenly and inexplicably parted, his eyes softening before they dropped to the floor.

"Something wrong?" Rose asked, craning her neck to look at him.

He blinked, raising a hand to pull through his hair. "What? No, nothing."

Rose raised a brow. "Your lack of faith in my observational skills is kind of insulting."

He seemed to hesitate. "I was just…reminded of something."

"What kind of something?"

He raised an arm, pointing vaguely at the direction of the orchestra on stage. "My mum taught me to waltz to this song. And I haven't heard it in a while."

Rose straightened, staring at him as he stared at the orchestra, and she had no idea of what she could say apart from, "I haven't a clue how to waltz."

Scorpius focused his eyes on her again for a moment before looking into the sea of people on the dance floor. "It's really not as difficult as people think, you just sort of-"
He raised his hands in a pose much like he had held her in an hour or two before, and then lowered them, and instead crossed his arms before turning back to face her. "Well, obviously, it's hard to show by myself, but you know, the most important thing is the one-two-three rhythm, and then the footwork sort of comes with that..."

He had that look on his face again; the look that he had whenever he talked about something he cared about, but the more he cared about it, the more he refused to show it.

Rose took another deep, steeling breath, and before she could change her mind, she held out her hand. "Why don't you show me?"

"So."

Rose shook her head, smiling as Gen bumped their arms together. "I knew it was only a matter of time."

"Two dances, Rose."

"It's just dancing," Rose pointed out. "You were doing it with Al. Three times, I noticed."

"Yes, but Albus is our friend, Rose. Malfoy's your...well, I don't know what he is anymore."

"That makes two of us," Rose muttered, unconsciously raising her gaze to seek him out. He was standing at the edge of the room, chatting with Toby.

Gen furrowed her brow. "Where's Conrad?"

Rose pointed into the mass of people still dancing. "He's just dancing with a friend. It's good; I needed a breather."

Gen scrutinised her friend. "You've never expressed interest in him before. I don't think I've heard you even say his name before. Are you sure it's Conrad?"

Rose flicked her hand away. "Yes, his name is Conrad." She shrugged. "I didn't want to be rude. Anyway, he's very sweet and nice."

Gen sighed, and then nodded. "Alright, interrogation over."

"Want some punch?"

"Actually," Gen said, hugging her arms around herself. "I've drank so much I'm bursting. I'm gonna run to the bathroom, be back in a few."

Rose watched her friend leave, and after she had disappeared, her gaze idled back towards the outskirts of the room, as much as she wished it wouldn't.

Some of her Professors were conversing nearby, and suddenly she remembered something about a toast, something McGonagall had said, and she cast her gaze up to the ornamental clock above the doors. Almost eleven. It would probably be anytime now.

She looked back at Scorpius. He'd know. But he was talking to a friend, and she didn't know if the two of them dancing together meant that it would now be considered normal for her to impinge.

She sighed, and shook her head. Head Girl, Rose, she said firmly to herself. You are a composed
"I see Lucy was only afforded the privilege of a single dance?"

"She has the personality of a plank."

Toby nodded in apparent thoughtfulness. "Not, you know, like someone you might dance with twice. They…they would have to-"

"Not have the personality of a foot of timber, yes."

"Well, I mean, two dances tonight. Who knows what the cumulative number is now."

Scorpius met his friend's innocent gaze, and his eyes narrowed. "You know, if you didn't have enough product in your hair to poison the entire student body, I would stick your head in the punch."

"Fine," Toby said, raising his hands in surrender, "I'll just ask you straight out then. What's up with you two? And don't fucking mention any rats this time."

"Honestly, Toby, don't make something out of nothing."

"Is that your answer?"

Scorpius sighed. "There's nothing up with us."

"So you don't like her?"

"Of course I don't fucking like her, Toby, what an idea."

He looked down at his half-full goblet of mead, aching to down the stupid thing, and aching even harder to push his meddler of a best friend face-first into the nearest Christmas tree.

"So why'd you go to a club with her?" Toby pressed.

"Oh, I don't fucking know, Toby. We were already there, for fuck's sake. I just wanted to see if she wasn't as boring as I thought, that's it."

"But you don't mind spending time with her anymore?"

Scorpius pursed his lips. "I have to spend time with her, whether I mind it or not. We live together, if you recall. Well, whatever, it's just easier to get along with her than to not."

"She looks nice tonight."

Scorpius paused for a breath. "What?"

Toby shrugged. "She looks nice."

"She looks…better than usual."

Toby crooked a brow at him. "That's a pretty substantial compliment, given the circumstances."

Scorpius set his drink down on the table behind him with a loud thump. "Jesus, Toby, you look
better than usual." He pushed back his sleeve, studying the watch on his wrist. "How much longer do we have to stay at this thing, anyway?"

"What time is it?"

"Almost eleven."

Scorpius' gaze flickered back to his drink on the table, and he lifted it up to scrutinise the pattern on its rim, if only to give his eyes something to do. A few seconds in he gave up, draining his cup dry before setting it back down again. "The second that clock strikes midnight, I'm fucking outta here."

Scorpius' remaining hour seemed to inch to a close, but underneath that boredom was a touch of agitation; he was not an exchanging farewells sort of person, but unfortunately it seemed that whatever sort of person he thought he was, any ideas of that were promptly thrown out of the window when it came to her.

He supposed if he left now he would show Toby exactly what he was advocating: that Rose Weasley did not — could not — affect him, that she meant nothing to him. And he wouldn't say goodbye to someone who meant nothing to him.

People were starting to leave the Hall, flushed from the dancing and the excitement, and the floor had begun to grow sparse. He had seen Liv slip out an hour before, Horatio Reed in tow, and she had not returned, not that it made any difference to him.

Suddenly, the back of his neck began to prickle, and Scorpius wasn't sure exactly what it was, but something in him made him turn around, lift his eyes from his drink and onto the middle of the dance floor.

And then he stopped.

The orchestra's music, now merely a jumble of noise, receded under the hood of his mind, and Scorpius thought that maybe time itself was bending, crawling to a halt as Rose kissed Conrad. Conrad who was nothing to write home about, Conrad who had surely been absent from her side for at least half of the night, Conrad who wouldn't know closed position if it hit him in the fucking face.

Scorpius seemed to come back into himself, and then the lights were too bright, the music was too loud, the people were too close and when the fuck did it get so goddamn hot in here?

He pulled at his collar, dragging it away from his neck and letting the air cool his skin.

She was still kissing him.

He needed fresh air, needed to escape the stuffiness of the room, the headache of the noise. He filled his champagne flute to the brim, his sights set on the blackness he could see from the Great Hall's open doors. He paused.

He could keep going straight and head for the gardens. He wouldn't be able to hear the music from outside, he probably wouldn't even be able to hear the party. It would be as if it weren't even happening.

His gaze flicked towards the staircase. Or he could go that way, climbing up and up until the noise might disappear, take off every layer of his suit and crawl into bed, and the party wouldn't be happening from there either.
He wanted to leave with purpose, with the air of finality that said that he didn't care for this Ball anymore, but he had the sinking feeling that no one would even notice his disappearance. Toby was dancing with some Slytherin girl, and he didn't know why but he chanced a look at Albus, who he saw was dancing with Genevieve Chang. And her. She wouldn't notice he was gone either.

He set his jaw. She was perfectly at liberty to kiss whomever she wanted, he couldn't care less.

The clock in the Hall began to chime, signalling that midnight had arrived, and Scorpius, true to his word, lifted his glass to his lips, emptied it, and went to bed.

Chapter End Notes

A/N:

Hey guys, thanks so much for taking the time to read this fic, I can't say how much I appreciate it <3 I usually like to add little notes at the end of each chapter, but since I've been uploading this fic onto ff.net for the past year and just decided to give AO3 a go, I've all but kept the Notes section blank. After this chapter though, I'll be back to posting little things at the end of each chapter.

~ Rach
"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 12: On A Steel Horse I Ride or, Don't You Put Me On The Backburner

Rating: M mainly for language, and I can't discount any funny business later on

Disclaimer: I work with only what the infallible J.K. Rowling has given me.

Hogwarts awoke to find itself victim to a typical January morning: crisp, snowing, and too fucking cold.

Scorpius stamped his feet as he and Toby entered the Entrance Hall, watching as his breath puffed up in a little cloud in front of him. The sound of voices to his right caught his attention, and he angled his head towards the Great Hall, watching as the few students who had remained at Hogwarts over the Christmas holidays talked over their lunch.

"Think I'll head down before the surge," Toby said, clapping his hand on Scorpius' shoulder. "I'll come up in a bit."

Scorpius nodded and set off for the stairs, and from behind him he could hear more students as they departed their carriages. He walked up the six floors in record time, anxious to get to his room.

As he turned into the corridor leading to his dormitory, he heard the familiar twanging of an old guitar, the murmurings of a song. He was startled when he realised he had missed the sound, but still he kept his face impassive as he came face to face with the portrait that stood in front of his room's entrance.

"Howdy, tenderfoot."

Scorpius inclined his head, his lips lifting up into not quite a smile, but not quite not a smile either. "Happy New Year, Mr. Wyatt."

"John, if you'd be so kind. Good Christmas?"

Scorpius nodded. "The usual. Glad to be back."

John scrutinised Scorpius closely, scratching the back of his head. "Your hair looks a mite
"I had it cut."

"Ah." John sat back on his bench, resting his guitar on his knee. "I suppose you'll be wantin' to go in then?"

"That would be my preference. Leo Anguis," Scorpius said, and then, as if by afterthought, asked, "Is my roommate back yet?"

The cowboy grinned at him. "Sure. She got back just a few minutes 'fore you did, brought a right pretty girl back with her."

_Not Conrad, then_, Scorpius thought immediately, and then stifled a groan. That stupid Hufflepuff hadn't even been on his radar until a few weeks ago.

The door swung open, and Scorpius walked in. Rose's door was slightly ajar, as it usually was when she wasn't in, but he could hear her voice from inside, and Genevieve was with her. He paused. He could knock, maybe, open the door just a tad, say "Hello" and perhaps "Good Christmas?" like John had asked him, and like a roommate might do, but his hand wouldn't leave his side. Anyway, she wasn't alone in there, so maybe it wasn't a good idea.

He felt like a class idiot as he hovered outside her door, and he heard her friend's laughing voice as she joked, "So, have you seen him yet? Has he recovered from your charms?"

There was a dull thud as a book made contact with a person, and Gen yelped.

"Oh, leave it."

Scorpius stiffened, and suddenly the memory of Rose's hands cupping Conrad's face as she kissed him replayed in his mind, and despite the fact that the image felt as if it had been burned into his brain, it looked slightly different - though no less nauseating - each time he remembered it, until he couldn't be sure what it had looked like at all.

Knocking was definitely not a good idea.

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Scorpius was unsurprised when, shortly after dinner, Artemis appeared at his window, a letter sealed with the Hogwarts crest held firmly in her beak. He read McGonagall's letter as his owl poked about his person, her beak in the pockets of his robes.

His eyes strayed on the parchment for minutes after he had finished reading it, vacant in thought. He hadn't seen her since he'd left the Ball almost the month before. His jaw tensed the longer his mind ran, flashes of anger giving way to unsettling moments of quiet. His indecisiveness bothered him — it bothered him more than the odd feeling he had in the pit of his stomach when he thought about seeing her again, the odd feeling he had when he thought about not seeing her.

He thought about the heat that had welled up in his body as he had watched her in the middle of the dance floor, and a sudden revelation overtook him. He let out a long, heavy breath.

He didn't want to be mad at her.

He would be mature and rational and reasonable, even though the thought of Conrad Wells made his wand hand twitch, and he finally put the parchment down.

Her door was ajar again, which probably meant she was either eating late or at the library. He
could meet her at McGonagall's office.

The castle was unseasonably quiet for a first day back, and inconveniently so. Scorpius was hoping the sound of other voices or perhaps the sight of other people might serve as a distraction, but he didn't see nor hear another soul the entire four floors down.

Did a month change anything? Granted, thirty days wasn't very long, but wars had been fought and won in less time. Theirs had been going on for seven years as it was.

He sighed. He was overthinking it.

He would arrive, and then she would arrive (or maybe she was already there), and he would say "Hello" then, and they could get back to what they were before the holidays.

Not that Scorpius had any idea what they were. They weren't friends, though, that much was obvious, but then what were they? Reluctant co-Heads who went to clubs together and danced together at balls? Roommates who ate out together and stuck their noses into places they didn't belong?

He sighed once more, checking his watch as he entered the corridor leading to the Headmaster's Tower. Five minutes early.

He waited in silence, digging his hands into his pockets and resting against the wall behind him. He checked his watch a few times more, his mouth pursing when its face read five twenty-nine. One minute.

He cocked his head as he looked down the hallway, his brow furrowing as he pricked his ears, listening. He counted a silent fifteen seconds in his head, and then he heard it. Footsteps. His hand twitched in the cavern of his right pocket, and he fought the urge to lift a hand into his hair and smooth it.

He wasn't sure what reaction he was expecting from himself when she turned the corner, or if he was even going to react at all; maybe it was the stress of her lateness, or the coldness of the stone behind his back, but a sudden chill went through him, and his throat felt tight with a lump he couldn't quite swallow down.

Maybe it was because of how normal she looked. Her hair was in a bun instead of its usual ponytail, but it was neat and professional, not like the updo she had worn when he had last seen her. And it wasn't sparkling this time.

Despite what he'd told himself earlier, that same spark of irritation welled up again, that same image in his brain flickering to life. *He's nice, nothing to write home about, I suppose.*

He cast his eyes down to the ground, suddenly aware of his clenched teeth.

He'd show her. He'd show her just how goddamn mature he could be. "Close call, Wea-"

"If we hurry we won't be late."

He blinked, an eyebrow crooking up, and he paused for a second or two before he nodded. "Right."

She nodded too and began to walk up the stairs. From behind her, Scorpius frowned.

They reached the doors leading to McGonagall's office, which swung open before them, and Scorpius inclined his head towards her. "Just in time," he murmured as they walked in, and
though the recognition in her eyes made it obvious that she had heard him, she said nothing.

His frown deepened.

She wished he would stop staring.

The near constant weight of his gaze was really beginning to get to her, and she felt her cheeks go warm with…well, Rose wanted to call it annoyance. Given that it was Scorpius Malfoy, it probably was.

It would've been better if he had been full-on staring, instead of this incessant out-of-the-corner-of-his-eye stare. Because then she could've looked at him with a reasonable amount of haughtiness, enough for him to see the real annoyance in her eyes, an annoyance that said Rose Weasley Meant Business, and then he would've glared back at her, and she could've gotten on with her life.

But no. Instead she had to keep her eyes fixed on McGonagall's face, self-consciously nodding every few seconds to show that there was only one thing that was holding her attention, whilst feeling herself grow progressively hotter and more uncomfortable every time those steely eyes flickered back in her direction and that voice spoke from beside her. She shifted a little, adjusting her collar and smoothing her hair.

"…an absolute triumph," their Headmistress continued. "Professor Sinistra never comes to these occasions, you know, since her nights are spent rather occupied by star-gazing, but she said the minute she saw how beautiful it looked, she couldn't stay away."

"The highest of compliments," Scorpius said, almost wryly.

"Quite." McGonagall adjusted the glasses on her nose, looking down at the parchment in front of her. "Now. To business. I trust your prefects' meetings are running smoothly?"

The two seventh years nodded.

"And your patrols?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary," Rose said.

"Good." McGonagall peered at them from over her spectacles, an almost indiscernible smile playing on her lips. "In that case, I don't have much else to say to you. However, will you please inform Mr Blanchett that docking house points from his ex-girlfriend's new boyfriend for — what was it?" She consulted the parchment again. "Oh, yes, 'existing', will not suffice as a reasonable offence."

"Yes, Professor," Rose said, hiding her laugh while Scorpius openly snorted next to her. She felt his eyes on her again, for longer than she was expecting, and the smirk that had turned his mouth upwards faded, and he looked as unsatisfied as ever.

"Do you have any questions?"

They shook their heads.

"Well, then." Their Professor surveyed them again, and Minerva couldn't help but notice something in the room felt…off. "Before you go, I wanted to take the time to thank you both again for your excellent work so far this year. I must say I am quite impressed with the way you two have come together."
Rose coughed and Scorpius blinked.

"Thank you, Professor," he said, finally.

"Yes, thank you," Rose mumbled, staring at her hands as she folded and unfolded them.

"I shan't keep you any longer," McGonagall said. "I shall see the two of you in Transfiguration tomorrow. A very good evening to you both."

They pushed back their chairs, the scraping sounds heavy and uncomfortable as they made their way to the door in silence. Scorpius reached it first and held it open, and it took Rose a second to realise that he was waiting for her to pass through, and she moved under his arm, careful not to touch him in any way.

She took the stairs two at a time, trying not to cringe at the tapping that filled the otherwise silent stairwell. They barely ever walked in silence. And the silence never felt like this.

Regardless, it didn't last long.

"Hungry?" Scorpius asked.

Rose started, and made a little noise of affirmation, cursing that this was the only floor in the entire school that didn't have a bathroom on this corridor.

She didn't know why she didn't just tell him to leave her alone. Well, she sort of did. The imminent question of "What's up with you?" (though because it was Scorpius, it was more likely to be along the lines of "The fuck's up with you, Weasley?") was something she was not willing to go into. It wasn't as if she could tell him that she was mad at him for talking about her behind her back. She couldn't let him think she cared about stuff like that. She didn't care about stuff like that, she hastily corrected herself.

Scorpius' legs were longer than hers, so it didn't take long until they were walking side by side. "Good Christmas?"

That wasn't the only reason, of course. That damn Hogsmeade trip, those damn patrols and that stupid, stupid Ball that Professor Sinistra shouldn't've bothered showing up to complicated things. He had made her smile — laugh, even - made her feel like a girl should feel when a boy was dancing with her, made her feel like she should feel when he wasn't, given her punch and told her that his mum had taught him how to waltz.

And in the end it hadn't meant a damn thing.

She made another noise of vague assent, and this time she spared him the briefest of glances when her curiosity got the better of her. He still wore the same mildly confused expression that had become more and more apparent the longer they had sat in McGonagall's office, and it looked all wrong on his face.

She saw him raise his arm slightly so he could adjust the sleeves of his jumper, and she felt her eyes lose the slightest bit of focus as she remembered that jumper in the dim lights of the dance floor, the blue light making the hunter green look navy, the red light making it look burgundy.

And suddenly it was her turn to avert her stare.

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He had at least expected her to say something to him.
He wasn't asking for a monologue; a simple "Hi" would've sufficed. Or a wave. Or something. Anything.

He tried not to fixate on it, but he thought she'd cut him off a bit hastily when he had tried to make conversation as she had arrived — no, not even conversation. He'd just wanted to say "Hello". Then again, they were practically running late, and the conversation wouldn't have come to much anyway since the walk up to McGonagall's office wasn't exactly a long one, and they weren't ones for small talk, they had never been—

But then in McGonagall's office too... It wasn't as if he'd attempted direct conversation with her, but he still had the nagging feeling that she was being strangely... unreceptive.

She hadn't even looked at him. She hadn't had that problem a month ago. Or ever really; she couldn't glare at him if she wasn't looking at him.

Maybe she was just having a bad day. Everyone had bad days.

He cleared his throat, the question he'd wanted to ask her earlier that day echoing in his head. He steeled himself, flattening down the discomfort in his stomach (Nerves? Was it nerves? No, that was ridiculous; Scorpius never got nervous). "Good Christmas?"

She blinked twice, and he could see the line of her jaw working as she studied the floor. She made a small, noncommittal noise, which Scorpius took to mean 'Yes', and then they were back to silence.

Scorpius was beginning to feel intensely uncomfortable. He ran his tongue over his teeth as his brain turned to white noise, and he reached a hand to fiddle with his shirt sleeve. His pride was on its last hinges, and given that he didn't have much left to hold on to, he'd be damned if he was letting that go too.

They only had three floors to cover until they were back on the ground floor, and Scorpius was about to turn and take the last flight of stairs down until the small plaque reading "Males" on the other side of the corridor caught his attention. McGonagall had released them earlier than he had anticipated — it was only just past six, and he and Toby didn't usually eat until at least quarter-past. It was a shit exit, but it was an exit nonetheless.

"Hey-"

"I'm gonna-"

They both froze at the sound of the other's voice, and then the silence surged back in as they each clamped their mouth shut in surprise.

Rose's eyes were wide and she had the vague look of a caged animal. She pointed at the small plaque reading "Females" on the opposite side of the corridor. "I need to use the bathroom."

She tapped her wand in her hand a few times before she suddenly clutched it, and in a short, panicked second, the bathroom door had swung shut behind her with a bang.

Scorpius blinked, his brow knit. Now that was a shit exit.

Rose wasn't often in her old dormitory. The only reason she ever went back up was to fetch Gen for classes or dinner, and that had only happened a few times since she'd left. She and Gen preferred to be in the Heads dorm now, where they could talk in peace, where they wouldn't have to listen to Elizabeth Lawson gossip about her latest hookup and pretend to be even the slightest
bit interested (not that a lack of interest ever seem to deter her).

However, here she was, back in her old dorm, sitting on her old bed. It was silly, she thought, that they still kept her empty bed, the sheets pulled halfway down and the pillow bare, but she supposed it was some sort of protocol. It was nice to be back, to be sitting with her old dorm mates as they caught each other up on Christmas stories. She almost wondered why she wasn't here more often.

"So, Rose," Elizabeth said, her voice lowering to a dramatic whisper and her eyebrows waggling. "We all saw you with Conrad Wells at the Christmas Ball. You know, with him."

And now she remembered why.

Gen opened her mouth, but closed it when Rose shot her a look. "Yes, and?"

Her other dormmate, Leanne, let out a giggle. "Get lost under a sprig of mistletoe, did we, Rose?"

She rolled her eyes. "Honestly, Leanne."

"So, is that a thing now?" Elizabeth pressed.

Rose laughed a bit uncomfortably, and brought her knees up to her chin. "No, no, I just, um…I'm not sure what came over me, really. Had too much punch I suppose," she joked. *Too much punch would've been preferable.*

Rose wasn't the spiteful type, and well, really, Conrad had asked her - all she'd done was let him. So why was she feeling so damn guilt-ridden?

"He's pretty cute, Rose," Leanne said, smirking. "You could do a lot worse."

"She could do a lot better," Gen intoned firmly. "Butt out, the both of you."

"You two are no fun," Leanne mumbled, unfolding herself off the bed and jerking her head at the door for Elizabeth to follow. The two of them left, Elizabeth soothing Leanne with a, "You want interesting? I haven't even started on what happened to me over the holidays, remember that guy Ted I told you about…"

"Ignore them," Gen said, sagely. "The longer they're here, the more of their slaggyness gets transferred to us in the air particles."

Rose cracked a weak grin.

"Anyways, they've got it all wrong. Imagine if they found out the real gossip, huh? They'd lose their shit if they knew about you and Malfoy."

"There is no me and Malfoy," Rose said sharply.

Gen's eyebrows raised at her friend's tone. "Whoa, did I miss something? What happened?"

"We came to our senses," Rose said shortly.

"Nuh-uh, Weasley," Gen said, pointing an accusatory finger at her friend. "I've only just been debriefed. Don't make me play catch-up again."

"If I tell you, you might kill him. There's no telling what you'll do with that temper of yours."

Gen crooked an arm on her waist. "And that's now a bad idea to you?"
"I didn't say that."

"Rose."

"We should really get started on our Charms assignment."

"It's not due for two weeks," Gen said, narrowing her eyes, but Rose was already opening her bag and drawing out some parchment, so Gen reluctantly picked up her textbook as well. "Will you tell me after we've done this stupid assignment?" she prodded. "It's the least you can do since you're making me finish this thing two weeks early."

"Two weeks can turn into two days alarmingly quickly," was all Rose had to say on the matter.

"The Wailing Woman," Dolloway announced, tapping his wand on the projector so that an illustration from the textbook materialised on the board, "is a Dark creature native to Ireland and Scotland, sharing what key characteristic with the Mandrake?"

Rose's hand shot up a fraction of a second quicker than Scorpius', and he turned his head in her direction as she answered. "Both are equipped with cries that are fatal to anybody who hears them."

"Precisely. The Wailing Woman, also known as a Banshee, will be the subject of today's lesson. Your task is to split into pairs and produce a concise but comprehensive means of combating it, taking into account the various advantages and disadvantages of each potential method, and ultimately deciding on the most appropriate."

"What the hell is a Banshee?" the boy behind Scorpius mumbled to his desk partner.

"Dunno," the other boy replied.

Their Defence teacher sighed loudly, and pursed his lips. "The blind leading the blind, it would seem." He shook his head. "We can't have that now, can we? I can see only one solution: random assignment."

There were various groans heard around the room then, and Dolloway raised a hand to silence them, smiling blithely. "We shall do it the old fashioned way, and in my opinion, the best way." He waved his wand and an old and greyed wizard's hat materialised, hanging in the air. "It is very simple. I shall pass around this hat, and you are each to pick your partner's name from it."

He flicked his wand again and the hat obediently floated towards the far end of the front desks, two rows ahead of Scorpius. Scorpius watched with limited interest as each student read aloud their partner's name, though his attention grew with every second that he remained partnerless.

His curbed attention still informed him that her name had not yet been called either, and whilst the thought of having to work with her made his stomach churn, he realised it was an ideal scenario with which to further interrogate her. If anything, it was better to grasp onto that instead of sitting in his seat, his heart thrumming in the cavity of his chest.

The hat came to rest in front of the Head Girl, and she too had the look of a skittish animal, but the hand she stuck out was steady, and she withdrew the scrap of parchment. She scanned the name once, blinked twice, and that was enough.

"Scorpius Malfoy," she said, clearly but emptily, and the hat moved on.
He could feel the brief weight of Toby's gaze as he side-eyed his friend, and he set about gathering his things and grabbing his satchel off the floor. He set his jaw, and strode over, seating himself beside her.

He thought about saying "Hello", but at the moment, he wasn't entirely convinced she was going to say it back. He settled instead on something he knew that she would have to reply to.

"So," Scorpius said, noticing that while Rose's eyes flickered at the sound of his voice, she still kept her gaze stubbornly on the table surface in front of them. "I'm pretty positive that a Laughing Potion is our best bet."

Rose raised an eyebrow, and she folded one of her arms over the other, cupping a hand around one of her elbows. "Well, if you're convinced you'll permanently have one on your person…"

"The question isn't whether or not we'll be equipped with the potion," Scorpius pointed out, cocking his head slightly when Rose still stared unwaveringly ahead. "It only asks which is the best method of combatting a Banshee. You alright, Weasley?"

She finally lifted her gaze and met his eyes. "If you'd rather be complacent about it, you can stick with the potion you probably wouldn't have on you, and I'll choose something else-"

"That doesn't seem to be very cooperative," Scorpius interrupted, entirely aware that she had neglected to answer his question.

"Not your strong suit, is it?"

"I'm very open to suggestions, one which you have yet to offer, may I point out-"

"Well, if you're so set on your potion I can't see what difference it would make-"

"I insist-"

"You'll only resent me for it, I can already tell-"

"Weasley," Scorpius managed through gritted teeth. "If there's something you want to say, spit it out."

"Oh, are we all for sharing now? Tell me, what prompted this spontaneous character change-"

"Professor," Scorpius said loudly, not taking his eyes off his partner. "Miss Weasley isn't feeling very well. With your permission, I'd like to escort her to the Hospital Wing."

And scarcely without waiting for an answer, he grabbed her by the arm, gripped her schoolbag in his other hand, and pulled her out of the room. The minute the door closed behind them, her mouth shot open in protest, but Scorpius, spying the bathroom doors to their right, immediately dragged her into the men's room with him.

"What the fuck is up with you, Weasley?" he demanded, letting go of her. "You've been acting like an absolute pain since we've been back and the least you could do is explain why."

"I cannot believe you kidnapped me," Rose snapped instead. "I'm going back to class, you can stay here and wallow by yourself-"

"Not fucking likely," Scorpius snarled, catching her by the arm he had just released; she immediately tore it away. "Come on, then, just tell me why you've been behaving like a stubborn brat, and I'll be happy to be rid of you."
"You'd love that, wouldn't you?"

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Scorpius could feel an angry heat spreading throughout his body, and he clenched his fists, wondering when he had switched his efforts from fighting with Rose Weasley to trying his damndest to maintain some sort of peace with her.

Her eyes narrowed. "Let's play the Scorpius Malfoy philosophy game: I don't owe you anything, remember?"

He hadn't meant it. Not really. It was just a jibe; something that had come off his tongue as they danced, and he remembered their dance now. The memory of it made him inexplicably angrier.

His tongue pushed against his teeth, and he bit down on it. Maturity was vastly overrated. "Damn you, Weasley! My care is waning. Tell me what's wrong, or shut the hell up!"

"Wrack that famous brain of yours, Malfoy!" Rose seethed, her face flushed with anger. "Wrack it until your head bloody bleeds!"

"Fuck you, Weasley," he growled, and he could feel his composure unravelling rapidly, though that didn't seem to matter now.

"Go fuck yourself, Malfoy," she spat. "Go and fuck yourself silly."

"Maybe I will!"

"I'm counting on it!"

With one last venomous look, she spun around and stalked towards the bathroom door.

"Where the fuck do you think you're going now?!"

She angled her head around to face him, and wrenched her bag back onto her shoulder. "The Hospital Wing. I'm not feeling well, remember?"

The door slammed behind her.

---

Rose did find herself in the Hospital Wing in the end.

She was still tense and furious from being dragged out of class into the men's bathroom, and her plan to avoid Scorpius at all costs had failed tremendously. Her head throbbed and she felt warm all over, but lying in a hospital bed did little for any of that. Pomfrey had offered her a Calming Draught to relieve her headache, but she didn't think she had the sort of ailment that any kind of medicine could cure.

Reluctant to go back to class, she stayed in the sanctuary of the Wing, staring outside as the last rays of afternoon light filtered in from the window. It wouldn't last long. She picked up her schoolbag and fumbled around in it for a book.

As soon as the bell rang, signalling the school day had ended, she thanked the nurse and headed down to the birch tree by the lake, Accio'ing her coat, hat and gloves out of her open window as she did so. It was a bitterly cold day, and though she was almost entirely covered from head to toe, she shivered and rubbed her hands over her coat sleeves. The only upside of such cold weather was that it would deter people from being outside.

In theory, anyway.
A few of the younger students were taking advantage of the snow and were building a snowman, whilst several others were engaged in a rather rowdy snowball fight. Rose sighed and picked her way past them - and her favourite spot by the frozen lake - and instead wandered down to the Quidditch pitch, hoping the fresh air and silence would do her some good.

She had left the Hospital Wing at half three, and now the sun had all but disappeared. She sighed again, wisps of condensation swirling in front of her. She had walked all the way down to the pitch, and now what? Realising she didn't want to turn back, she continued to walk until she had reached the higher section of the stands, and she sat, surrounded by darkness. She supposed she could cast the Lumos charm, but she didn't much fancy reading by wand light. She stowed her book.

It was quiet enough, and she was completely alone. She held up her watch a few inches away from her face, squinting as she struggled to read the watch hands. At the end of last term, she and Scorpius had arranged a prefects' meeting before dinner, so she still had almost two hours to kill before she had to leave.

She had been sitting in silence for fifteen minutes, stretched out on the benches when she heard it. Something heavy was being dragged across the grass, thumping and groaning as it caught the ground and then bounced back onto it. Rose sat up straight, narrowing her eyes as she craned forward. It was the Quidditch chest that housed the balls, and someone was heaving it down to the pitch. Rose wondered why the person didn't simply levitate the thing.

She heard a grunt, and she couldn't see much from the stands, but in a few more moments, the figure had taken to the air, and stopped, hovering in front of the goalposts furthest away from her. She watched as blue flames exited the caster's wand, wrapping themselves around the centre post until the entire hoop shone blue. Soon after, the other two were lit as well.

Rose knew by the first hoop; she would recognise that blonde head of hair anywhere.

Her chest seized in panic, an iron hand clenching like a vice, and she knew she needed to get out of there before he could spot her. But she couldn't. She had no way of knowing which way he'd fly next, and she'd rather spend two hours cowering beneath the stands than to be seen by him.

Scorpius lobbed the Quaffle through the goalposts before zooming over to the other side to catch it as it fell, and he repeated this, over and over, flying so quickly Rose wondered if he might accidentally propel himself straight into the posts. He looked like a falcon, she thought. A sleek and deadly falcon plummeting through the sky.

She watched as he flew back down to the ground, and a shred of hope seeded up inside her at the thought that he might be leaving, but it was shot down immediately when she heard the soft but giveaway rattle of the chains that held the Bludgers. Besides, he wouldn't leave the blue flames on the goalposts. That just didn't seem like something he would do.

Suddenly, the Bludger was bathed in a similar blue light, and off it went, spinning and rolling in the air. In the next moment the other one had joined it, the two of them crackling and bowling as they soared around the pitch.

Brilliant.

Rose hid her face in her hands, the gravity of the situation finally weighing down on her. Escape was damn near impossible now; those stupid things were cutting a trail whizzing about in the air, and she had no idea which way they could be flying. If they got close, it would be enough to illuminate her face, and he would know. And then she'd look like an absolute prat.
Or worse, Rose thought in another moment of sheer panic, what if the Bludgers could somehow sense another human presence, and they turned their attention on her? What in Merlin's good name would she do then? She supposed she could just blow them up, but she didn't know how she would explain that to McGonagall when the time came. I'm ever so sorry, Professor, it's just that I was sitting in the stands minding my own business when Scorpius Malfoy arrived, flying around the pitch like a raving lunatic, and he let loose the Bludgers, and one of them was aiming to bash my face in, you see, so I sort of blew it up. But don't worry, I'll buy you another one.

He was a lunatic, Rose thought bitterly. A reckless, deranged lunatic. It would serve him right if he crashed face first into the ground.

As much as she drummed that mantra into her head, her heart raced every time he rocketed down, expelling a sigh when, at the last possible moment, he pulled out of the dive and shot back into the air.

She heard a loud crack as bat met Bludger again, and Scorpius had hit it so hard that she could hear it whistling as it spun away, before it recovered and careened back over to him. For what seemed an eternity that was all she could hear; the severe smack of the bat as it struck both Bludgers in an endless cycle, stirring the evening air and rallying the owls.

Scorpius had no idea how long he'd been on the Quidditch pitch for.

His arm felt like it was on fire, but somehow it only served to fuel his anger more, and he became so accustomed to the pain that he almost forgot what it was like to play without it.

He had put away one of the Bludgers when he had felt himself really tiring; he didn't need a full-blown injury on top of everything that was going on. But the other ball was still going strong — again and again he attacked it, and he wondered which one of them might give up first.

He would've stayed there all night, taking out his anger on that stupid, stubborn ball of iron - because sometimes you really just needed to hit something - but once when he raised his wrist to meet the ball, the blue flames flickered across the face of his watch, and some small part of him dutifully counted down the minutes until he would be forced to leave his safe haven and head back into the castle to marshall the prefects' meeting.

His reluctance to leave meant that by the time he had wrestled the Bludger back into its case, he had ten minutes until the meeting was due to begin. He wouldn't have time to shower. He levitated the chest beside him, raising his wand and muttering a Cleaning spell over his body, feeling rather than seeing soapy suds rise and then sink back into his skin. That would have to do.

He put the chest away inside the Quidditch shed, quickening his pace as he made his way through the empty grounds and back into the castle, feeling oddly calm despite the predictably excruciating half-hour ahead.

Well, at least until he arrived back into the Entrance Hall.

Any and all amounts of anger that had become dormant during his time on the Quidditch pitch came back in full force as he passed the open doors to the Great Hall - stupid doors they should've closed for dinner - seeping back into him so strongly it felt like his blood was on fire.

Did she have a fucking clue? Where was that fucking brain everyone was always going on about? Did she not realise that things had, at least in his eyes, changed between them? Was the girl blind? They had danced together not once, which could've been considered an accident, not twice, but three fucking times.
She had no fucking clue.

He rolled out his shoulder as he walked, and the pain had lost its satisfying edge — it was now just another thing for Scorpius to be really fucking annoyed about. Two hours later and all he had to show for it was a fucking twinging arm.

Fuck Quidditch. Fuck Bludgers. Fuck her.

He caught sight of himself in the windows of the classrooms as he passed by. His hair was windswept and haphazard, his face flushed and his eyes unnervingly bright, alert. He looked like an absolute mental case. It was a good thing he was so damn good looking.

He turned into the Transfiguration classroom with two minutes to spare, noticing Albus and Genevieve straight away, not because he wanted to - it was just because they were seated conveniently in his eyeline - and he pressed his lips together in a strained line. Fucking coward.

Al met his eyes and raised a hand in greeting, and yeah, that was something, but it only made him even more certain that he hadn't done anything wrong and it only reminded him that she was mad at him for no reason, and she was stubborn and infuriating and petty and childish and she drove him up the fucking wall, and if she didn't walk into the room in the next ten seconds he would call it a night and bloody well leave this stupid meeting too.

Toby waved at him from his spot near the back, his eyes narrowed as he took in his best friend’s appearance, but at Scorpius’ minute twitch of his head, he dropped his gaze and resumed talking to the girl next to him. Scorpius turned around to face the blackboard behind him, raking in a series of deep, furious breaths before abandoning that completely and instead glaring at the offending clock at the front of the room that blared for all to see that their Head Girl was now late.

And if that wasn't just the cherry on the fucking rotten cake.

Scorpius' tangible anger at least had one perk: the second the clock struck five thirty, the room went so silent he could hear the clock hands ticking. He revelled in the silence for a moment before he exhaled.

"Right," he said, his voice cool and just a touch above his usual volume, "I think we should make a start."

A number of the students shifted uncomfortably, casting quick glances at each other. Scorpius sighed. Now he had to go ahead and clean up all of her stupid messes too, and she didn't deserve an ounce of that-

The door was flung open and Rose raced in, her slightly laboured breathing the only noise in the entire room.

For one second, for one fraction of the teeniest second Scorpius caved, because she looked as exhausted and spent as he did, but then she turned her eyes on him, and they were stonier than ever.

If she wanted to go back to how they were before, she could be his fucking guest.

"Ah," he sneered, his voice grating in the silence. "Our Head Girl has been kind enough to join us." The sound of his voice, barbed as needles, had lost all of the subtle teasing edge that had far too quickly become habit for him when he spoke to her now, and the familiarity of it somehow seemed to lighten the weight in his stomach. It was as if he was running on autopilot again, the words coming out of him like a muscle memory, and that was good. His brain had done enough
Rose’s eyes narrowed even further as he spoke, but she said nothing as she took her place at the front of the room, the space between them awkward and heavy. It was only then that Scorpius noticed that she was as flushed and windswept as he was, if not more so. She looked like she’d run a mile. His eyebrow crooked suspiciously as she hastily ran a hand through her hair, patting it down and brushing out the tangles.

He couldn’t remember the last time she had looked so disarranged. Okay, no, that was a lie. The startling image of her dancing in the club, her hair messy, but nonetheless attractive - maybe it was the most attractive he’d ever seen her - and her cheeks glowing pink replayed in his mind, her laughing face the worst part of the entire thing.

God fucking dammit.

He heard a small voice whispering amongst the stillness, and his voice rang out loud and sharp as he addressed the speaker. "Oi, Wells, shut your bloody trap."

He didn’t care how Conrad responded to that, but Rose made a small disgruntled noise beside him, and he angled himself away until she had disappeared from his line of vision. He rubbed a hand through his hair, his aching arm protesting as he did so. "Right. Let's get this over with."

Rose felt like her life was slipping back into normalcy by the next day. It was almost relieving now that he was mad at her too, because then she didn’t have to worry about him trying to talk to her, or look at her with that annoyingly confused expression that didn’t belong on his face and how it made her feel wretched and even angrier all at once.

She waved at Will as he walked in through the library doors; he raised a cautious arm back, and she self-consciously tried to remember what it usually felt like to smile — was she smiling normally?

Will plopped his bag on the floor as he sat down. "Sorry I'm late."

This smile came easier. "You're two minutes early, Will."

"Oh."

"So how was your Christmas?"

Will bent down to extract his textbook and parchment from his bag. "It was nice. Just, normal family stuff, you know?" He shrugged. "Nothing special. How was yours?" he added politely.

Rose cracked a grin. "You know, normal family stuff. Though one of my cousins finally started showing signs of magic." She laughed. "Ten years of nothing, and then on Christmas Day she blows up the entire turkey when my grandma refused to change the colour of the sweater she knitted for her."

Will smiled somewhat sheepishly. "I took ages too…my mum thought I might've been a Squib.” He cleared his throat. "How was the um…dance? I saw the Great Hall on the morning. You did a really nice job."

Rose tried not to sour at the memory. "Eventful," she said. "And eye-opening."

"I heard you went with Conrad Wells."
"I did." Rose didn't know why she felt she needed to explain herself to a twelve-year-old, but she did it anyway. "It was just a one-time thing, though. I'm not, um...you know, with him or anything."

"Oh, I know."

Rose raised her eyebrows in surprise. "You do?"

Will nodded as if the answer was obvious. "You're much too interesting for him."

She had to smile at that. "So, how's Charms going?"

"We had a reviewing class," Will said, his eyes lighting up. "Where we had to perform a Severing charm, and I did it! My very first try!"

"I knew you could," Rose said, beaming. She raised her hand for a high-five, and, after staring at her hand for a moment, Will lifted his own and tapped it very lightly against hers.

"What are you doing now?"


Rose gave him a reassuring smile. "That's what I'm here for. How did your last assignment go?"

Will bent again and pulled it out of his bag, slightly crinkled. "Professor Flitwick said I was just off an O."

"That's great, Will!" Rose studied his assignment, checking over Flitwick's annotations. "So he wants a stronger conclusion, huh? More real-life application-Will?"

Her tutee jumped, moving his gaze away from the doorway, and back to Rose. "Oh! Sorry!"

Almost as if he couldn't help it, he lifted his gaze beyond them again.

Rose shifted slightly in her chair, following his stare. Her lips curved into a small smile when she saw a young Slytherin girl at the library's entrance, a small little blonde thing with big, doe-like eyes.

Will was slowly but steadily turning the colour of a ripe tomato, and Rose had to choke down her laughter. He lowered his head, suddenly engrossed in reviewing his homework.

"She's lucky," Rose told him. "I don't remember the last time any guy reacted to seeing me that way. Or if any of them ever did."

"Of course they did," Will said, matter-of-factly. "You're Rose Weasley."

"You say that like it should mean something," Rose said hollowly. The last she heard, her companionship was worth nothing more than the avoided stress of having to fight with her. Then again, who gave a damn about what Scorpius Malfoy thought of her? She certainly didn't.

"If you don't know," Will said with an unfathomable expression, and Rose had noticed that his face had calmed to a soft pink, "then I'll let you find out on your own."

Rose blinked at the young boy sitting next to her before reaching over to pull his new assignment towards her to read. She scanned through it for a minute, though her tutee's face was still in her peripheral. "So," she said, when she realised that Will's determined expression had nothing to do with the homework at hand, but rather to do with forcing himself to avoid looking back up to
where the little blonde girl had sat down in plain view of them. "Who is she?"

"Who's who?" Will mumbled, the tips of his ears going pink.

Rose laughed quietly. "It's alright, Will. I won't ask if it'll make you uncomfortable."

She continued to read in silence, and just as she was about to open the second year Charms textbook, Will spoke from beside her. "She's in my Charms and Herbology classes."

Rose glanced at him, a hint of a smile playing on her lips. "Do you two talk a lot?"

Will flushed. "I don't think she wants to talk to me."

"Why not?" Rose asked in surprise, her brow lined.

Will seemed to hunker down in his chair, his eyes downcast. "She's really cool. And I'm, well… she just wouldn't ever talk to me."

"You'll never know if you don't try," Rose said in a comforting voice. "What do you have to lose?"

"It's easy for you to say," Will mumbled. "You've never had that problem."

"Will," Rose said emphatically as she thumbed through the textbook. "I don't know what idea you have in your head about the kind of person I am, but I'm fairly sure it's inaccurate." She considered. "Or outdated, at least." Fifth year, or even sixth year Rose Weasley had been sensible, she thought to herself. She didn't waste her time and energy with unfeeling, unrepentant and arrogant Head Boys, getting roped into clubbing trips during work weekends, and then allowing herself to get further roped into dancing with those same unfeeling, unrepentant and arrogant Head Boys at Christmas Balls.

Fifth year Rose Weasley would be rolling in her grave.

As she raised her head from the book, she caught a glimpse of the young girl again, who, to her surprise, was sneaking a glance in Rose's direction. Well, a few inches left of Rose, to be precise. She caught the Head Girl watching her with veiled interest, and blinked before snapping her head down and furiously scribbling on her parchment. Rose side-eyed Will; he was looking at his hands, tapping his wand in his fingers. She hid her smile.

"Will," she said, firmly. "I think you should talk to her."

"Can't we just get on with my homework?" Will pleaded. "The more time I spend thinking about her, the more time I end up wasting."

"Will!" Rose scolded. "No one should be as cynical as you are at your age. You have years and years to lose your faith in love."

"Have you?" her tutee asked quietly.

"Perhaps we should get on with your homework."

"What should I say?"

"What?" Rose asked, momentarily confused.

"To Emmeline."
Rose pulled in one side of her mouth in thought. "Well, you should be nice to her, for starters. I don't know where that whole be-mean-to-girls-you-like thing began, but it's very confusing and wholly ineffective."

"But I thought that's what girls know," Will said, furrowing his brow. "That if a boy is mean to her, he probably likes her."

"Or maybe he's just mean," Rose said flatly. "Take it from me. You're much better off just being truthful from the start. You wouldn't want to, oh, I don't know, lure her into a false sense of security and wait until she's, oh, maybe changing her mind about you and thinking, Huh, maybe he's not such a pigheaded arsehole anymore, and maybe he'll even dance with you, but then he turns around and he's not only what you thought he was before, he's actually worse, which you didn't know was even possible," she finished with a huff.

There were a few moments of silence.

"Rose?"

She brusquely moved away the hair that had fallen over her eye mid-spiel. "Yes?"

"Can we start my homework now?"

It was her turn to go pink, and she nodded before shaking her head slightly. "Right. Um…page sixty-five, was it?"

As she turned to find the page, Will tossed the white feather on the table into the air, and raised his wand, muttering, "Arresto Momentum Duo." The feather hovered in the air for a moment, before continuing its fall onto the table. Will sighed, and picked it up again.

"Hey, Will?"

"Yes, Rose?"

"I think you're super cool."

The young boy said nothing, but when he muttered the spell again, the feather stayed where it was, obstinate in its refusal to fall.

"For fuck's sake, what are you doing here, Weasley?"

Rose returned his glare in kind as they met in the middle of the corridor. "Grow up, Malfoy. We both signed on for this knowing fully well we'd have to put up with each other."

Scorpius crossed his arms. "True, but I wasn't expecting Pomfrey to have kept you on for so long. I was sure she'd've found a way to be rid of you by the first week-"

"Oh, give me a break."

"Ever heard the phrase 'three's a crowd'?"

Rose began to walk down the corridor, her head angling slightly when she heard him follow behind. "You're more than welcome to go away if you're worried about overcrowding; Pomfrey and I can handle this ourselves."

"I need to make sure you don't kill anyone." He paused, deliberating. "Not that I really care if you
do. I just want to witness your fall from grace."

Rose turned on him, her eyes cold. "You deserve every bit of what you get, don't you, Malfoy?"

Something about the way she said it unnerved Scorpius, like there was something especially important there; it was on the tip of his tongue. Where had he heard that before?

"If you mean top grades, Quidditch Captainship, devilishly handsome good looks, not to mention my Head Boy title, then, yes. I would say I deserve what I get."

They continued to bicker as they made their way down the corridor, and Rose got in one more "Fuck you, Malfoy," before they each pushed open one half of the double doors and fell silent.

Pomfrey looked up as they arrived. "Ah, Miss Weasley, Mr Malfoy."

Rose and Scorpius blinked at the seemingly healthy boy sitting on the foot of one of the hospital beds, partially concealing the girl behind him. "This absolute buffoon has admitted to pouring a love potion into this girl's drink — a dare from his friends, he says. Such games are absolutely deplorable if you ask me, not to mention what I would qualify as grounds for expulsion ("Oh, lighten up, Madam Pomfrey!"). She is, as you might have expected, absolutely infatuated with him."

"I love you, Asher," the girl crooned, as if to top off Pomfrey's speech, the bed rustling as she fidgeted.

"If you don't mind my asking," Rose said, uncertainly. "How come we're not just waiting for the effects to wear off?"

Asher muttered something under his breath, and when Pomfrey shot him another death glare he cowered.

"That is an excellent question, Miss Weasley," she said, puffing herself up to her full height. "It seems Mr. Cromwell has managed to-"

"Profit from the brains behind Weasley's Wizard Wheezes?" Scorpius finished dryly. He inclined his head as Pomfrey turned around to sternly berate the still crooning girl behind her. The girl who, he happened to notice, had both of her hands handcuffed to the frame of the hospital bed. "Ironic, isn't it, Weasley?" he whispered, smugly. "Cleaning up daddy's mess?"

"I hate you," Rose hissed back.

The nurse turned back around to face them, and the two Heads quickly rearranged their expressions into more neutral ones.

"As Mr Malfoy has correctly surmised, Mr. Cromwell attained his love potion from the Weasley joke shop and I'm afraid there's no time limit on its effects."

"Yikes," Rose murmured softly.

Scorpius frowned. "There is, however, an antidote," he said, though it sounded like a question.

Pomfrey's face took on a somewhat ugly hue and she turned to face Asher again, her hands crooked on her hips. "Would you like to explain to Mr Malfoy why we cannot use the antidote to cure Miss Bennett?"

Asher raised a hand to scratch at his hair. "I uh…misplaced it," he said, sheepishly. From behind
him, the girl continued to pull against her restraints, her face scrunched up in anguish.

"So I'm guessing we need to brew a new antidote?" Rose finally asked.

Pomfrey nodded. "The only one I am aware of is a stronger version of the antidote for the Amortentia potion, but it is extremely difficult to make. I was hoping the two of you could be of assistance."

Scorpius cleared his throat. "At least it won't take too long."

Pomfrey clicked her tongue. "Mercifully. It should only take an hour or so."

Scorpius was tempted to ask her why she didn't simply brew the potion herself, but it occurred to him that he was most likely a better potions brewer than she was, and he thought she might know that. He didn't want to admit it, but the girl beside him was probably better than her as well. They made, unfortunately, a rather perfect pair.

"I'd imagine you have sufficient experience with love potion antidotes," Rose said in an undertone.

"Oh, I don't need potions," Scorpius replied, undeterred. He nodded downwards, smirking. "Magic's all right here."

"You are so unworthy of your badge!" Rose hissed as Pomfrey moved away to fetch the trolley filled with ingredients.

"Why?" Scorpius bit back, just as spitefully. "Because they only give them out to prudes like you?"

Rose opened her mouth to retort but Pomfrey's return distracted her. Her eyes ran over the ingredients on the trolley. Scorpius studied her, wondering if she had brewed the potion before. He had - not that he had actually ever needed a love potion antidote - and his fingers itched as he realised that the ball was in his court now; he was going to send it back over to her with so much force her head would spin.

The session wasn't as painful as Rose was expecting.

Pomfrey was still in the room with them (though she was attending to other students a ways away) so they couldn't exactly dissolve into a shouting match, especially with sick students around. Also - and Rose had noticed this over the years - Scorpius always seemed far more reluctant to fight with her during Potions, as if she was a distraction he didn't much want.

Rose was good at Potions; she was Head Girl, she was good at everything. But still. Brewing potions with Scorpius was nerve-wracking, especially when it wasn't one she'd ever brewed before, or ever even seen made. She didn't know if he'd made it already, but with Scorpius that didn't really matter; first or hundredth time, the damn thing would be perfect.

As she turned around to grab the castor oil behind her, she caught sight of Asher as he descended closer towards Jade's face, and she barked his name. "Don't you dare."

He angled his face to look at her, his eyebrows raised in innocence. "She wants me to."

Scorpius made an unsatisfied noise. "I'm not even going to dignify that nor you with an answer."

Rose's eyes flicked in his direction, but he was still scrutinising the textbook as he stirred.
They worked in silence (with the exception of Jade's incessant cooing) for a few minutes before Rose heard footsteps behind her, and she tensed as she could discern the near silent smell of breathing behind her.

"This looks complicated."

"It is," she replied shortly. "And it's all your fault, by the way."

Asher ignored that and wandered a few steps over to where Scorpius was standing over the cauldron, and he pointed into it. "What are those?"

"You are to stand at least five feet away from this cauldron," Scorpius said sternly, not bothering to look up. "You have a distinctively clumsy air about you, not to mention stupid."

"What?"

"I don't want you getting 'stupid' in my potion."

"Our potion," Rose interjected sharply.

"If you say so."

Rose rolled her eyes, and leaned over to look inside the cauldron, and, noticing it was now the colour specified in the textbook, poured in the castor oil.

"What is he still doing here?" Scorpius muttered, jerking his head towards Asher, his dissatisfaction evident.

Rose scoffed. "I'm pretty sure the minute Jade loses sight of him she'll scream her bloody head off."

"I tried," Asher said.

"Don't lEEEEEEave!" Jade warbled from the bed. "Don't lEEEEEEave me."

"Go tell her a story or something," Rose said, pinching her temple. "Try and get her to shut up, will you?"

As Asher drifted away, Scorpius added in the Gurdyroot. "We only have two minutes to add the Wiggentree twigs after this dissolves," he said, tapping the textbook. "I think it best if I do it."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Rose bristled, glaring at him.

"I mean, if we want this added in two minutes, it's best if I do it."

"You're stirring, I'll do it."

"I don't want to risk this potion on your word-"

Scorpius reached over for the twigs at the same time Rose did, and their hands collided, and one of them - or maybe both - knocked over the jar of Camphi, and the colourless gas seeped out, filling the air with the smell of rusty sandalwood.

"Contain it!" Scorpius snapped, hurrying to screw the lid back onto the jar.

Rose flicked her wand and the air shimmered as the gas was sucked into it, and then it and the smell disappeared.
She let out a deep breath and braced her hands on the trolley.

"You almost fucked us up there," Scorpius said after a few moments.

For all of two seconds Rose thought he might've decided not to be a spiteful git, but of course, he hastened to correct her. "It was your fault," she said, harshly. "If you'd only let me do the twigs, that wouldn't have happened."

"I said I was going to do it, but of course you didn't listen, as usual."

"It was your hand that knocked it, not mine."

"Why must you ruin everything, Weasley?" he suddenly seethed. He seemed to regret it and hastily looked over to where they had last seen Pomfrey, but she had retreated back into her office. "Me?" Rose said incredulously. "You're the one who ruins things! I thought we were getting along for a little while and then you had to go ahead and..." She cut off immediately, clamping her mouth shut.

"What?" Scorpius demanded, seemingly abandoning the potion as he dropped the thermometer he was using to stir and faced her full on. "What, Weasley? What fucking changed, huh? Why'd you suddenly go all bipolar on me?"

"You're just going to stand there all innocent and pretend you don't know."

They were cut off as Jade gave an earsplitting wail when Asher bent down to retrieve the chocolate frog she had thrown at him, temporarily disappearing from her line of vision. Her screams attracted the nurse's attention, and Pomfrey reappeared. From beside her, Scorpius took the opportunity to add in the twigs. Rose's head snapped back and she opened her mouth in displeasure when she noticed that the Gurdyroot had fully dissolved. She closed her mouth again and set it into a thin line, watching him work in silence.

"Madam Pomfrey," Scorpius called once the two minutes had ended. "It's ready."

The nurse hurried over, lifting her glasses down to her nose and inspecting it. "Excellent work," she praised. "It looks perfect. I am exceedingly grateful to the both of you. I shall be sure to let Professor McGonagall know of your work here. I can manage now."

They walked out in silence, the Hospital Doors shutting with a prominent thud, and then they were alone.

It only took a moment for Scorpius to tsk at her. "It's a good thing I was there to do that, huh?"

"Will you just let it go?" Rose cried, and the volume that she spoke caught Scorpius off guard. "God, I can't believe for a second I — I...ugh." She made a strangled sort of noise as she pressed her hands to the sides of her head.

"You what?" Scorpius challenged, his voice too echoing throughout the corridor as he matched hers.

"Nothing," Rose snapped.

"Coward."

Rose's hands were by her side in an instant, and she turned on him, inflamed. "Merlin, you never
fucking learn, do you? You just keep going around acting like an entitled, self-absorbed little boy, and you never learn. You deserve every bit of—" Her expression soured even further, but she pressed her mouth tightly shut. She shook her head violently at him, her face almost contorted with frustration. "Just…just fucking leave me the hell alone, alright? I'm so done."

Scorpius' eyes had widened as she spoke, and now they narrowed so far they were tapered to near slits. "Oh, you're pissed? You have no fucking right, Weasley." Scorpius stepped closer, close enough that Rose had to incline her head to meet his vicious gaze. "How long did you know, huh?"

Rose was quickly losing her patience. "Know what?"

"That my girlfriend — ex-girlfriend — was cheating on me."

She froze. "What?"

"You heard me." It was hard to see past the anger, but she thought he looked inappropriately smug with his choice of leverage. "You knew, didn't you?"

"Wha-how did you-?"

"I deserve better, do I?"

The words that Rose had spoken in a sort of mercy were violently flung back at her. Memories of their night at Hogsmeade temporarily clouded her mind so that the dancing boy who held her with his warm, callused hands was standing before her. She savagely expelled them.

She braced her hands on his chest, and roughly pushed him back. "Well, what did you expect? We're not fucking friends or anything! I suppose it's just easier to get along with me than to not, right?"

Scorpius looked stunned.

"Sound familiar?"

A shadow seemed to pass over Scorpius' face.

"Fuck, that's why you're pissed?" he growled, furious. "You're acting like a little brat because your feelings are hurt? Oh, well, I'm sorry to break it to you, Weasley, but you and I were never friends. Never."

"Then what were we?!

Scorpius levelled his gaze at her, and while his cold expression gave nothing away, if she had listened closely, she would've heard the skittering beat of his heart as it began to free fall. "We weren't anything."

"Bullshit!" Rose couldn't remember a time when she had felt so angry, so fucking hurt. And it was worse than whatever she'd felt before, because she didn't want to be hurt, she didn't want any of this. She didn't want anything to do with him.

"Bullshit how?" He was looking at her as if she was a child he was humouring, and she wanted to punch that pretty face of his in.

"Don't try and pretend like you didn't care, because you did—"
"Sweet fucking Merlin, Weasley, you think I care about you now? Are you absolutely delusional?"

"Damn it, Malfoy." Her breath came out through gritted teeth, her voice a near whisper, and a twisted smile had worked its way across her face. She felt manic; she had no idea if it showed. "Don't you care about anything?"

She realised that she couldn't care less no matter what he ended up saying, and she turned away from him then, crossed the length of the corridor in mere seconds, and was already halfway down the next before she took her next breath.

Scorpius stood in that empty corridor as he watched her go, a sudden numbness making his shaking hands go cold.

_I try not to_, he thought colourlessly to himself as the sound of her footsteps faded away. Because as soon as you care, you're fucked.

Chapter End Notes

A/N:

Ah, I've missed writing these two this way. As always, thank you to everyone for taking the time out to read and review this fic - I know I don't reply to reviews, but I read every single one and squeal out loud every time I get a notification that a new one has been posted :P Sorry it took me a while to get this chapter out — I'll try and get back on track with quicker updates. This chapter is even longer than the last one, no idea how that happened :P Chapter titles come from Bon Jovi's Dead or Alive and The Killers' All These Things That I've Done, and I have to say, this chapter gave me so much grief when it came to choosing the first title. Other strong contenders were: "Welcome to Your Life" from Tears For Fears' Everybody Wants to Rule the World, "I Try Twice As Hard and I'm Half as Liked" from Fun's Some Nights, and "Let's See How Far We've Come" from Matchbox Twenty's How Far We've Come.

~ Rach

P.S. If you're kind enough to leave a comment, will you please not leave comments on the Cookie chapters because I delete those and then re-upload the next chapters in a new doc, so your comment will be lost :(
Hey, Doctor, I'm Certifiable

Chapter Summary

"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 13: Hey, Doctor, I'm Certifiable or, Imperfect Boys With Their Perfect Lives

Rating: M mainly for language, and I can't discount any funny business later on

Disclaimer: I work with only what the infallible J.K. Rowling has given me.

For what seemed like the first time in weeks, Scorpius could feel a win coming on.

He studied his team with barely concealed satisfaction as they dutifully carried out his latest play, and when Jack Harrington hurled the Quaffle in his direction, he did it with such force that Scorpius almost fumbled with it before gaining a firmer hold.

Yes, Scorpius could feel a win coming on.

"Alright," he called, holding a hand up. "Gather round. Remember, we need to be one hundred points in the lead if we're going to guarantee our position in the final. Bates, I don't want to see you breathe in the direction of the Snitch until I give you the all clear."

His Seeker nodded, and Scorpius tossed the Quaffle to Toby. "I want to run the Chaser play again." His mouth quirked as he shook his head. "I can't believe I'm saying this, but it's all on you, Bixby."

Noah grinned, and bucked on his broomstick, once again making Scorpius question his decision to give him responsibility for anything. "Bixby, quit humping your broom and get into position."

"Aye aye, Captain."

Scorpius flicked his wand, and the Bludger that had been immobilised suddenly shook itself off the air before taking flight, heading straight for Toby. The rest of the team were in their pre-discussed places, and when Toby lobbed the Quaffle almost halfway across the pitch towards Bixby, the Bludger immediately changed its course.

"Steady!" Scorpius called when Bixby began to fidget on his broom. "Wait. Wait. Now!"

Moments before the Bludger would have slammed into him, Bixby zoomed out of the way, and the Bludger, momentarily confused and thrown off course, continued its path, then zigzagged in
the sky before identifying another target. By the time it had, Scorpius had narrowly stopped another goal.

He pointed his wand in the direction of the ball and muttered a spell, and the Bludger hovered in the air, motionless. "Good."

His team gathered again, and Scorpius let out a satisfied exhale. "Don't let the pressure get to you, alright? This play is completely reliant on timing."

"What about the crowd?" Toby asked suddenly. "You know, crowd safety and all that."

Scorpius glanced at his best friend before turning back to face Bixby. "As long as you're in front of the Gryffindor stand, I don't fucking care."

His team laughed, and Harrington whooped. "Best to take out a few of them before we face them in the final."

The final. Against Gryffindor. Against her.

Granted, she was only a reserve - Merlin knew why - but karma seemed to be fucking Scorpius in the ass these days, so he wouldn't be surprised if that dumbfuck McGinty took a spill and Rose had to step in once again. He supposed they were sort of back to where they started, but - Scorpius couldn't put his finger on exactly what it was - there was something different between them now. It was as if the air that surrounded them was alive, like they were in an electric field that was thrumming and unrelenting, and it was that feeling - that exact feeling - that meant there was suddenly a daring little voice in his head that made itself known right before Scorpius was about to utter some insult towards her, a little voice that planted a seed of doubt in his mind, that told him maybe he didn't mean what he was going to say.

That voice needed to go.

He was suddenly aware of the silence that surrounded him, and he blinked a few times, fixing his gaze back on his curious and expectant team. He cleared his throat, swallowing. "Let's run it with two Bludgers this time. I want it perfect, Bixby."

"You will need to achieve Outstanding N.E.W.Ts in Charms, Herbology and Potions, with at least Exceeds Expectations in both Arithmancy and Defence Against the Dark Arts."

Rose nodded. It wasn't new information.

"It is a lot to ask, Miss Weasley." McGonagall granted Rose a glance before turning back to the sheet in front of her. "Though by the looks of your grades, it shouldn't be a problem." The Headmistress shook her head. "Perhaps it's a good thing that only the top students are applying to study medicine at a further level."

Rose waited, wondering if McGonagall would elaborate, but she didn't.

"So you are not interested in following your mother and father into a ministerial position?" McGonagall crooked an eyebrow at her student, her head slightly tilted as she appraised Rose from behind her spectacles.

"To tell you the truth, Professor, I think there's enough of my family in that profession already."

McGonagall chuckled and scribbled an extra note on the parchment in front of her. "Indeed. Of course, I was only curious; you would make an excellent addition to any medical field. Madam
Pomfrey has been keeping me updated on your work in the Hospital Wing and she has been exceedingly generous in her praises." McGonagall's lip twitched in some semblance of a smile. "The most recent of which involved concocting a strengthened version of the Amortentia potion, am I right? A potion a number of seasoned professionals find suitably challenging, I should say."

Rose's stomach twisted, and she swallowed. "I can't take all the credit, Professor," she muttered. "I can't say how the potion would've turned out if Mal—I mean, if Scorpius hadn't been there."

"Yes," McGonagall said, somewhat musingly as she tented her fingers on the table. "Mr Malfoy is quite uniquely excellent when it comes to Potions. Not to say anything against your talents, Miss Weasley, of course."

Rose cracked a strained smile, so strained she could feel the tension in her cheeks, and she prayed McGonagall would change the subject sooner rather than later.

"So it is the London Institute of Health that you are applying to, correct?"

"Yes, Professor."

"May I ask you something, Miss Weasley?"

Rose's eyebrows furrowed. "Of course, Professor."

"Might you be interested in studying abroad? Expand your horizons, as it were."

The question made Rose slightly uncomfortable. It was the discomfort that came when she felt as if she wasn't living up to expectations, even if those expectations were as silly as studying abroad. "Maybe sometime in the future, but um…right now I think I'd like to stay here in Britain."

"Of course, if you are fond of London, that is sufficient reason to study there."

A sheepish smile broke out before Rose had time to stop it. "I don't particularly like London, Professor," she admitted. "I don't much like it at all, if I'm honest. I find it very…stressful."

McGonagall blinked at her. "Why not then choose another place in which to further your studies? Perhaps another institution?"

Rose shook her head. "The best one is in London, Professor. That's the one I'd like to go to."

McGonagall continued to inspect her with interest, though the last thing she looked was surprised. "Very well. Now, you already know how difficult it is to achieve acceptance into the LIH. Admission rates are around sixteen percent."

"Sixteen?"

McGonagall nodded. "It is not as low as you were expecting, though that is because application rates are similarly low. Many students believe they wouldn't stand a chance at gaining entry - and many of them are correct. This seems to be the case this year as well."

Rose wanted to do something else besides nod.

McGonagall's quill made one final flourish across the parchment before she scanned it and held it out for Rose to take. "That should be all the information you need for now."

"Thank you, Professor."

McGonagall was still looking at Rose as if she wasn't quite yet satisfied. "Tell me, Miss Weasley,
Scorpius was silent for a few moments as he digested his Head of House's question. "I...I think medicine appeals to me because I know I can rely on what I see in front of me. It's not about making pointless - forgive me, Professor - rules and decrees, or about personal agendas or one-upmanships. It's about people just trying their best to help other people."

Professor Xavier appraised him for a few moments. "Mr Malfoy, have you ever considered a profession in teaching?"

Scorpius's eyebrows lifted, and he wet his lips. "Honestly, no, Professor. I never..." Liked children. "...much thought it was for me."

Xavier seemed to catch onto his unspoken words, and his lips quirked up. It was one of the closest times Scorpius had seen what might've passed for a smile on the man's face. "Scorpius, I should be very honest with you." He leaned back against his chair, folding his arms. "You have incredible talent, so much so I think that the word 'talent' is undermining to you. I would be surprised to see another student succeed in Potions as you have for the rest of my teaching years."

Scorpius suddenly became conscious of the small crease in the fold of his collar, and he subtly straightened it. "I was hoping I could use some of that talent to save someone's life, Professor." He paused, and then felt his face take on the slightest fracture of a smirk. "I could write a textbook if you like."

Xavier chuckled briefly - a sound Scorpius had never heard before and thus one that vaguely alarmed him - before he resumed scrutinising Scorpius with as serious a face as Scorpius had ever seen him wear. "You want to make a difference, my boy, don't you?"

The question had never been phrased at Scorpius so bluntly before, but now that he thought about it that way, yes, he did. He wanted it more than he had ever wanted anything. "Doesn't everyone, Professor?"

"Don't let anyone ever tell you that wanting something is the most important thing," Xavier said instead. "Means. Most people don't have the means to achieve change, no matter how much they want it. You do." Xavier reached for the pile of papers at his desk and tapped them against the table to set them straight. "Perhaps you'll make a medical discovery."

Scorpius shrugged. "Perhaps."

Xavier cleared his throat, and his expression became hard once more. "Now, anyone applying to this university will hear the same thing; it is exceedingly difficult to get into. Admission rates are low, competition is high."

"And yet you support my decision?"

Xavier didn't hesitate. "Unquestionably."

Scorpius paused. "Professor, how many students applied this year?"

"Two."

Scorpius didn't ask who the other student was; he didn't have to.

Scorpius weighed up his options before he hesitatingly asked, "Is it likely the two of us will be accepted?"
Xavier rested his arms on the table and leant forward. "Are you asking whether or not it is likely that two students from the same school will gain acceptance into this university, or are you asking about this particular scenario?"

Scorpius could feel a sudden warmth creeping up his neck. "Does it matter?"

"Certainly."

Scorpius met his Professor's gaze, but he was looking past those black eyes. "I guess I have my answer then."

"Cheryl, can you stay still, please?"

The girl in question twitched her shoulder agitatedly as she struggled to do as Rose had asked. "I'm trying."

Rose backed a step away as she rolled out more bandage, tensing as she bumped into a hard body behind her. Without turning around she noted the body as it moved backwards, hardly. "Isn't there another patient you can deal with? I've got this and frankly, you're in the way."

Scorpius instead leaned forward, close enough that his familiar scent hung unnervingly in the air between them. "Yes, you look like you're doing just fine manhandling her by yourself."

Cheryl, who had been listening to this for the past half-hour, continued to inspect her nails.

Rose angled her head back just enough for Scorpius to see her scathing smile. "Isn't it time for your milk and arsenic?"

"Only if you promise to join me."

"Unfortunately, unlike you, I have a patient to attend to."

Rose looped the last bandage around Cheryl's arm and pulled it tight, waving her wand to seal it. "Done."

The patient raised her arm to inspect it and turned towards Rose. "Thanks, Rose." She then turned towards the boy standing next to her. "Thanks, Scorpius." Her eyes twinkled and Rose stifled a disgusted groan in anticipation. "You're so talented, and you were so quick to identify what bit me, makes me wonder what you can't do, if anything-"

"You announced it as soon as you walked in," Rose said flatly, ignoring Scorpius' amused expression.

Cheryl wasn't done. "Now, are you sure my bandages are tight enough? It probably wouldn't hurt to check."

Rose immediately flicked her in the arm. Cheryl yelped.

"Did you feel that? Then they're tight enough." Rose walked over to the basin and washed the stickiness off her hands. When she turned around, Cheryl, dimly satisfied, had moved onto examining Scorpius' shirt, which was entirely white except two small words by his pocket that said "Hospital Wing". Rose sighed. "Cheryl, we offer medical services here; you might want to go someplace else if you're looking for more after hours sort of services."

Scorpius, who had been humouring Cheryl, raised an unreadable eyebrow at Rose and put a hand
on Cheryl's unbandaged shoulder. "You'd better go and get your medication slip from Madam Pomfrey before Fräulein Weasley bites you herself."

Cheryl threw Rose a rather brittle smile before hopping off the bed and disappearing into the nurse's office. Scorpius wandered over to the basin to wash his own hands.

"Jealousy is an ugly colour on you, Weasley." He paused. "Though I've yet to see one that isn't."

"I'm not sure I trust your taste, if I'm honest," Rose said thoughtfully. "Or did you not know that that white shirt makes you look positively drained of blood. I mean, more so than usual."

Scorpius snorted, and Rose waited for his next insult, but then the main doors opened, and a young girl that Rose recognised (though she couldn't remember from where) marched in, furiously scratching at her forearms and muttering curses like a trucker.

She looked around in a frenzy before her gaze settled on Scorpius, and she made a beeline for him, waving her red-lined arm.

"Juliette?" Scorpius blinked, partly to himself, and Rose watched as the girl she now recognised as Scorpius' tutee stopped in front of them.

"What're you doing here?" Scorpius asked in surprise.

"Stupid Brian and his stupid friends," Juliette said viciously, still scratching at her skin. "They saw us holding hands and they thought we'd appreciate the sensation of falling into a poison ivy bush."

"Brian too?"

"Yeah," she said, and then crossed her arms before unfolding them in discomfort. "Though he played it off as funny. He hasn't even come to the Hospital Wing yet."

Scorpius grabbed a clipboard from the bottom of the bed and began to write her information down. "You'd better sit."

Juliette sat, but scooted forward so that she was still close to where Scorpius was standing at the foot of the bed. "Can you fix it?"

Scorpius smirked. "That's kind of what we do here."

Scorpius felt a tap at his back, though it felt like he had just been prodded with the tip of a quill. A manicured hand slinked around his bicep, and he withheld a sigh. "I'm sure Weasley can help you out, Cheryl."

He felt eyes on him, and they weren't Cheryl's, but he ignored them and continued to write. The manicured hand retracted itself.

The sound of scratching drew his attention again, and he looked at Juliette properly. She had rough, red streaks on her bared forearms, and faded fingernail marks on her cheeks. As he watched, she scratched at her jumper-covered upper arms, but when it wasn't as satisfying, resumed scrubbing at the soon-to-be horror scene that was her lower arms.

"You're staring."

"I'm not."
"You're the worst nurse ever."

"I am not your nurse." Scorpius reached out a hand to stop her. "Try and hold off on that, alright?"

"It hurts."

"Well, why else would you be here?" Scorpius sighed upon seeing her face. "Don't think about it, alright? Focus on something else."

She looked briefly around the empty room and huffed. "There's nothing to focus on." She pursed her lips, weighing her options, and then seemed to make up her mind. "Do a thumb war with me."

"I don't know what that is," Scorpius said with a blank face.

Juliette grabbed his hand and interweaved it with hers, ignoring Scorpius' horrified expression at their contact. "There, now, you try and squeeze my thumb under yours and keep it there for ten seconds without me escaping."

"No."

She raised her eyebrows as he wiggled out of her grasp, stiffly resuming his hold on the clipboard.

She paused, and then tapped pointedly on the wood. "Do you see what it says on the bottom in big black writing?"

Grumbling, he diverted his attention to where her finger was.

"See? It says that you must attend to the patient's every ne-"

"A thumb war is not a need."

"Yes it is."

He didn't fight her as she reached for his hand again, and attempted very weakly to remove his thumb from underneath hers as she pressed down on it. "Oh no," he deadpanned. "You got me."

"You let me win," she accused him, her eyes narrowing.

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"You're not supposed to let me win."

"I don't want to play this game anymore."

Juliette glared at him and crossed her arms.

Scorpius shot her a look in kind and gingerly lifted up her arm to properly scrutinise it. "So, apart from today, things are all good with Brian, huh? Last week you sounded like you were warming up to him."

"For now," Juliette replied darkly.

The sound of footsteps attracted his attention, and he shifted his eyes to watch Rose as she reached up to put the bandage coil back into the cabinet. When she turned around, she caught him staring and issued him a glare before disappearing into Pomfrey's office.
He turned back and was met with Juliette's curious expression.

She beckoned him closer, and he grimaced, then shook his head. She grabbed his arm - with a surprising amount of force - and pulled until his head was close to hers. "Something happened."

Scorpius drew back. "If you stopped talking, I could go and get the medicine you need."

Juliette squinted at him. "You're not angry with her," she decided.

"I am," Scorpius said indignantly.

"You're not," his tutee said, shaking her head. "You're..." Her attention was suddenly caught by something, and Scorpius followed her gaze as Rose passed by the bed and put her folded white shirt into their usual drawer a few feet away from them. She turned around and picked up her bag, seemingly deliberating before she spoke.

"You seem to have got that under control, so uh…I'm gonna go."

"What do I care if you leave?" Scorpius said automatically, and turned back to Juliette.

Rose made a disgruntled, exasperated noise from behind him and stomped out, yanking the door closed behind her with more force than necessary.

There was silence, until-

"That was mean," Juliette said.

"That was your fault," Scorpius muttered.

Rose awoke early on the morning of the Quidditch match. So early, that in the late days of January, the sun had not yet risen, and she set about getting ready in the dim lighting of her bedside lamp.

She had no idea whether or not Al or Gen would be awake yet, but the grumbling in her stomach could not be ignored, so she grabbed a book from her nightstand, and that would have to suffice.

Her door was slightly ajar, so she pushed it open and walked out of her room. The living area was empty - as Rose had expected this early in the morning - and she was about to exhale in satisfaction when suddenly a platinum mop of hair surfaced from its position on the couch. Scorpius was muttering quietly as he moved pieces around a board, his hands seeking hold in his hair whenever he paused to study his play.

Rose's immediate apprehension annoyed her — it annoyed her so much that she resumed walking with special fervour, though Scorpius was so immersed in his plays that he showed no recognition of sensing her.

Her hand travelled to her back pocket as she walked, out of habit, reaching to hold her wand—

The sudden clacking of wood on wood startled her, and in a quick, confused moment, she fumbled with her wand and watched it as it hit the carpet and rolled beneath the desk.

Rose gaped at her luck, her head turning back to Scorpius as he ducked to pick up his fallen piece.

She cringed, scrunching up her nose before she stealthily (yet very fervently!) knelt down and peered under the desk. Her wand had rolled so far it rested against the wall; she lowered herself
down until she was lying on the floor and shoved her entire arm underneath, sighing in relief when her fingers closed around it.

She had just straightened herself back onto all fours when she suddenly heard footsteps, and she barely had time to register what was happening before the footsteps stopped and a familiar voice drawled, "Are you fucking kidding me with this shit?"

Rose was on her feet in an instant, her traitorous wand in her hand, and she met Scorpius' expression with the determination of a drowning man. "I was looking for something."

"Your dignity?" Scorpius scoffed. "Hate to break it you, Golden Child, but in order for you to misplace something, it has to be present in the first place."

"I dropped my wand, you oaf," she snapped, jamming it back into her pocket.

"You're such a child, Weasley." He shook his head as he walked back into his room, paying no heed to Rose as she continued to fume.

Rose wasn't going to watch the Quidditch game.

She knew it was stupid, she knew it was petty, she even knew it was borderline cowardly, but a stronger part of her simply didn't care. She didn't want to see him, and that was that. She didn't need to watch him play - and play well - and listen as the crowd screamed his name, listen to the girls as they fawned (they always did). Better yet, Conrad, whom, after their brief kiss at the Ball, Rose had not spoken to since she had gently told him that she didn't see their relationship developing past that night, would - according to the Hogwarts gossip mill - be making his debut as co-commentator. She definitely didn't need that either.

She sat cross-legged in her bed as she continued to read, too aware of the deafening silence that surrounded her. She had cast a Silencing spell around her bed when she realised the sounds of the cheers could be heard from her bedroom (honestly, if she had wanted to listen to three hundred people chanting "Scorpius" at the top of their lungs, she would've just gone to the bloody match). When she brushed aside a strand of hair that had fallen past her ear and tucked it away before turning her attention back to her book, she realised she had absolutely no idea what she was reading. Flicking back six pages made her realise she hadn't taken in a single thing for the past twenty minutes, which was, incidentally, exactly how long she had been reading for.

She let out a frustrated sigh, shutting the book, and instead began to burn holes into the wall in front of her.

Her gaze flicked from the window to her closed door, and back to the abandoned book on the bed. After a minute of struggling, she waved her wand and undid the spell she had cast, and suddenly her room was alive with muffled noise. It filled her with instant loneliness, the thought of her friends cheering in the stands without her — maybe they were lonely without her there too. She remembered Al's face when she told him she wouldn't be watching (he had arrived halfway through her breakfast), and how when he asked her why, she fumbled her way through some stupid excuse, because nothing could be more stupid than the truth.

She let out a stressed, half-strangled noise, and, after a moment, grabbed her Charms textbook off her nightstand. She had told Al something or other about practicing Charms; she might as well make good on her promise. Conjuration of living things? Is that what they were doing next?

As one hand flipped the book to find the correct page, the other drifted towards her wand on her bedside table, and as she grabbed it, her eyes stopped on it and her mouth set.
You're such a child, Weasley.

Oh Merlin. Oh Merlin.

She was sulking.

Rose Weasley was holed up in her room, attempting to prepare for a Charms lesson that she could pass in her sleep with two hands tied behind her back, missing a perfectly entertaining Quidditch game, all because she was sulking. Even worse, she had let him be right, she had let him win by not going. He probably had expected her not to be there.

She slammed her Charms textbook shut and jumped out of bed, throwing on a hat, scarf and coat as she stepped into her boots. She deliberated, and then stuffed her wand in her back pocket too before striding out of the Heads dorm.

Scorpius saw her arrive.

Among the chaos as Toby had lobbed the Quaffle through one of the Hufflepuff goalposts, Rose had inconspicuously made her way up into the Gryffindor stands, edging past spectators as she found Albus and Genevieve. If she had been looking at the pitch - why hadn't she been looking at the pitch? - she would've seen how Scorpius' eyes had slid over to her direction, and how they didn't slide away.

He remembered back to a few months ago, how it had been her up there, playing Beater when she shouldn't have been playing at all. It had been him that had been faceless in the crowd, and her who had been cast into the spotlight, and they had never danced, hardly talked even; she had just been a self-righteous, obnoxious know-it-all who was dating a Ravenclaw who got off to the idea of dead composers. Her face now stood out in stark contrast to the nameless around her, and Scorpius wondered if it would always be like this now, if Rose Weasley would continue to affect him in ways he didn't understand.

The game was still going on, and Scorpius quickly drew himself out of his thoughts and cast his gaze away from the stands. Luckily, all of the action was still constrained to the far end of the pitch, and if this play worked like it had in their practices, they were seconds away from a goal.

He watched as Jack Harrington feigned a fumble, and the Quaffle fell from his hands, and in that tiny moment of confusion, Hanes came up from below him and whacked it away.

Scorpius's hand unwittingly slid along the length of his broom when he leaned forward, and he entertained the briefest flicker of fear when his centre of gravity shifted.

Bixby swerved at the last moment and intercepted the Quaffle mere seconds before Angela Hale's fingers would've closed around it. Almost in response, from halfway down the pitch, the Hufflepuff Beater brought up his bat and thwacked the incoming Bludger with all his strength, sending it thrumming and spinning back towards Scorpius' triumphant Chaser.

Bixby noticed this almost straight away, and Scorpius could see the gears whirring in his head as he realised the Bludger's path towards him couldn't be more direct; if he moved now, it would simply follow.

He caught Scorpius' eye and there was a sudden clarity between them, and Bixby smirked, readying himself for the scenario he had practiced almost to perfection.

It took Scorpius all of two seconds to realise that something was wrong.
Bixby was too close to the stands. Scorpius could see his position far better when he flew further out from the goals, and when he moved out even further he caught a flash of familiar red, red that he had tried to put out of his brain for the entirety of the game, and when he instinctively craned out even further to get a better look, his eyes widened in horror, and panic seized his chest so tight he thought he might choke.

"MOVE TOWARDS IT!" Scorpius screeched unthinkingly, but Bixby only looked at him in incomprehension, and of course he did when Scorpius was now telling him to do exactly the opposite of what had been drilled into him for the past three weeks.

Scorpius could feel the blood roaring through his brain, and now he really was panicking, and that idiot bastard who never fucking listened during practices was hovering there, doing exactly what Scorpius had told him to do then and was not fucking listening to what Scorpius was fucking saying right fucking now-

"HANES!"

One of his Beaters turned in recognition, but he was now too far away; the other, Sydney Locke, was preoccupied at the other end of the pitch, exactly where Scorpius had told her to be. Everything was set up exactly as Scorpius had meant it to be.

There was only one thing that he had left unaccounted for.

"WEASLEY, GET OUT OF THE WAY!"

She wasn't looking; her gaze was fixed on the other goalposts, as far away from him as it had been for the entirety of the game.

But it was still coming, and Bixby was still blocking her from it and it from her, and maybe it wouldn't hit her, maybe it would find someone else in the crowd, but frankly, Scorpius wasn't prepared to take that chance-

"ROSE!"

He should let it hit her, it would serve her right for all the things she had said to him, the ridiculous way she was acting. If he moved now, he would leave his own goals completely open — he was already forsaking his concentration as it was-

"Christ—WEASLEY, THAT BLUDGER IS GOING TO HIT YOU!"

Scorpius' screams were beginning to cause a stir, and Rose finally looked up in alarm, her eyes widening and her hands reached up to instinctively shield her face-

And without further hesitation, Scorpius shot out like a bullet, straight into its path.

They collided in a sickening blow, and Noah Bixby turned white as a sheet as he watched his captain hit the Bludger harder than it hit him, and time seemed to slow down as Scorpius' features went slack, and then he began to fall.

"No!" Rose gasped, clutching her wand and pointing it at Scorpius, but in the ensuing madness, a wayward body slammed into her side, and her spell went shooting off towards the teachers' stands, sending the tarp crashing down upon them.

Her mind was everywhere at once, but she staggered towards the front of the stands, her wand raised again and the words on the tip of her tongue, but then the entire crowd seemed to cry out as
one, and Rose lunged for the wooden bannister in front of her, her desperation almost overbalancing her, and she knew her unspoken spell was already too late.

Her heart seemed to simultaneously fall through her stomach and up through her throat as her gaze landed on an unconscious Scorpius, his legs splayed out at horrific angles and a steady stream of blood turning his pretty blonde hair red.

"STAY IN YOUR SEATS!"

McGonagall's voice, amplified by a Sonorous charm, filled the stadium, and the crowd, although still shrieking, stayed where they were. Rose became dimly aware of Al and Gen's arms as they held her back, and it was then that she realised she was still squirming to get to him. McGonagall was rushing down the stands, weaving in and out of Rose's vision as all of the staff followed her, and Madam Pomfrey was running across the pitch, and all Rose could do was watch from where she stood, Scorpius' screams still ringing in her head.

"You're an idiot."

Scorpius opened his eyes, blinking blearily. "You've got an odd way of expressing gratitude."

"You should be more careful."

Scorpius scoffed quietly, closing his eyes again. "You should be more observant." He cracked an eye open. "You know that Bludger was coming for you, right?"

"Sorry."

"I wasn't blaming you."

"Even so."

She stayed still, resolute. Scorpius coughed and set his elbows against the bed, attempting and then immediately failing to push himself up. He begrudgingly lay back down. "So, why are you still here, then? You've apologised."

"But you haven't."

"You ever hear the phrase, "You shouldn't kick a man when he's down"?"

"You ever hear the phrase, "Turnabout is fair play"?"

"Are we going to keep playing The Phrase Game, or are you going to tell me the real reason you're here?" When Rose opened her mouth to retort, Scorpius held up a hand. "I'm not going to apologise, Weasley, and you know it. So don't tell me that's why you dragged your arse all the way here."

She pursed her lips, her jaw clenching and unclenching. Scorpius could feel the small vibrations of her leg feverishly tapping against the bed frame. "I-uh, I came to say—I mean, I wanted to say—"

"Before the medication sets in, yeah?"

She glowered at him and spilled out her next words so quickly they were almost indecipherable. "I came to say thank you."

"No need; that smile said it all."
"No, I'm serious," she said, crossing her arms and fully straightening. "I would've never asked anyone to take a Bludger for me, nevermind you."

Scorpius shrugged noncommittally. "Truth be told, I never would've expected myself to have taken a Bludger for anyone either." He raised his eyebrows, his gaze flickering over his entire upper body covered in bandages. "I guess there's a white knight in me after all."

"It's news to me as well."

"Pomfrey said I had a visitor earlier."

Rose paused, and then crossed her arms, shrugging. "You were still concussed." She stepped closer, inspecting the medicine bottles on Scorpius' nightstand. "How're you feeling?"

"Like a million Galleons, Weasley."

She glared at him. "Be serious."

"Like I took a Bludger to the stomach, and then hit the ground from about three stories high. That serious enough for you?"

"You're not making this easy."

"Well, then I'm doing something right."

She sighed in frustration, her entire torso moving as she did so. "Look, a lot of things have happened recently, things that sort of put us back a few months, but after today I…I'm willing to move past it."

Scorpius raised his eyebrows.

"Besides," Rose continued, smirking slightly, "Dolloway wants us to complete our Banshee assignment out of class, and apparently we need to pass his class to make it to the universities we want to get into."

"University. Singular."

Rose hesitated. She frowned. "What?"

"The university we want to get into. The London Institute of Health. Isn't that right?"

Rose's fingers twitched. "Yeah, that's right."

Scorpius nodded slowly. "I guess we can't get rid of each other that easily, huh?"

Rose was silent, and she was spared answering when the nurse chose that as her moment to re-enter the room. "I'm afraid you'll need to leave Mr Malfoy to rest, Miss Weasley."

"Oh, no, of course." Rose abruptly straightened, and shifted the weight of the coat in her arms. "I'll just get going."

Pomfrey nodded, and then retreated back to her office.

"Uh…I should go."

Scorpius inclined his head. "Doctor's orders."
She smiled quickly as she looked at the ground, but sobered as she took in the heavily bandaged boy in front of her. "Bye, Malfoy."

"Bye, Weasley."

She turned to leave, but then seemed to consider, and then shifted to look back at him again. "I hope your chest feels better."

"And my arms."

"And your arms."

"And my legs."

"...those too."

She had just reached the door when he called out, "And my head!"

She shook her head, and without turning around, said, "Good-bye, Malfoy," before closing the door behind her.

Toby was already laughing by the time Scorpius had fully opened his eyes.

"You've really outdone yourself this time, mate," he said, reaching out a hand to pat Scorpius' forearm, incidentally the only area of Scorpius' upper body not covered in bandages.

"Oh, fuck off," Scorpius groused, rubbing at his eyes. "What time is it?"

Toby checked his watch. "Little after eight. I heard Weasley telling her cousin about how you were at dinner."

"Which makes her a right sight better than you, I must say," Scorpius interjected.

"I was here earlier," Toby defended. "You were just concussed was all." He leant back and patted his stomach. "Besides, man's gotta eat."

"I'm glad you've got your priorities straight."

Toby grinned, and then surreptitiously peeked around the room before drawing a hand into his robes. "I brought you dessert." He opened his palm and set about straightening the creases in the tin foil covering the food.

Scorpius sniffed. "Did you... is that a chocolate lava cake?"

Toby set the cake atop his palm and presented it to his friend. "Ta-da! Am I the greatest friend ever, or what?"

"You are now if you weren't before."

Scorpius grabbed the dessert, Scourgified the spoon he had used for his soup and began to eat.

"I'm guessing you won't be attending classes for a while," Toby ventured, settling back in his chair and wiping his hands clean of any cake residue.

Scorpius shook his head, talking around the food in his mouth. "Pomfrey said I'll be in here for three days at least."
"What, she can't be rid of you sooner?"

Scorpius shook his head again. "She thinks the healing process will be too hard on my body if it's all done at once. Plus, the amount of medication I'd have to take would be excessive, so she wants to do it in stages."

"Fair point," Toby said, and, upon noticing the empty cup of water beside him, refilled it.

"Do me a favour," Scorpius said, "and hand in my essays for Monday, will you?"

"Sure." Toby appraised his friend. "Though with the amount of projects and university prep we have coming up..." He shook his head. "Doesn't really give you enough wiggle room to be a bloody hero."

"You don't need to tell me how senseless I was," Scorpius said, squarely. "The fifty feet of plaster suffocating my circulation is plenty reminder."

"I'll say-"

Toby faded off and they both looked up at the sound of approaching footsteps, and Toby straightened as Madam Pomfrey bustled into view.

"It's time for Mr Malfoy's medication." She squinted as she stopped by Scorpius' bedside. "Is that —is that a dessert in your hands?"

Her eyes whipped to Toby, and he curled into himself on the chair, eyes widening. "Surely you can make an exception for a most dedicated student?"

"Favouritism has absolutely no place in the medical facility," Pomfrey preached sternly.

"I thought it was the very place for it," Scorpius said nonchalantly.

"If there were any justice," Pomfrey said, drawing herself up to her full height but grabbing Scorpius an extra pillow and comforter besides, "it would've been your mouth that needed fixing."

Toby snorted, and made little effort to hide his snicker behind his hand.

"Goodnight, Mr Nott," Pomfrey said, shooing him out of his chair. "Mr Malfoy needs plenty of rest."

"And cake," Scorpius added hopefully, peeking at Toby from behind her. "More cake would be good."

Pomfrey shook her head and waggled her fingers at the boys before she retreated back into her office.

Toby sighed and got to his feet. "Well, that's my cue, then. Let me know if you need anything."

Scorpius nodded. "See you later. Thanks, mate."

Toby grinned at him, and then turned to go. Scorpius turned away to reach for a glass of water.

"Hey, uh..."

He looked up slightly suspiciously at Toby's turn of voice. "What is it?"
Toby looked somewhat conflicted. "Liv, uh…asked me how you were and to uh…give you her best."

Scorpius’ expression remained unchanged. "Well, you can tell her you've done it."

Toby paused. "Right. Okay, I'll see you tomorrow."

He crooked his hand and left Scorpius sitting in silence again.

Rose was packing up her bag at the end of the school day when, upon flitting her eyes over the Charms assignment she was putting into it, something occurred to her, and, after a moment's contemplation, she approached Professor Flitwick's desk.

"Miss Weasley," Flitwick squeaked upon seeing her. "What can I do for you? Surely you don't have a question regarding the assignment?"

Rose shook her head. "No, Professor. Actually, I was wondering if I might take an extra sheet for Scorpius Malfoy. He's still in the Hospital Wing and it's probably not a good idea for him to fall behind."

"I see," Flitwick piped up, rummaging around on his messy desk. "A very good attitude, Miss Weasley. Splendid. Now, where did I put that—ah!" He extracted the piece from under a sea of papers - how he'd managed to swallow them in the two minutes since he had handed them out Rose had no idea - and scanned it before handing it to her. "I trust you will let Mr Malfoy know I am here to help if he so requires it."

Rose nodded, and tucked the sheet away into her satchel. "Thank you, Professor."

As she made her way out of the classroom, she saw Al leaning against the doorframe, Gen's sleeve brushing his right arm.

"What was that about?" he asked, eyes lifted.

Rose shrugged, trying to appear casual. "I just grabbed an extra assignment off Flitwick."

"Because you love Charms that much?" Gen asked in amusement.

"No," Rose said, waving her off. "I just grabbed one for Malfoy, that's all." As she attempted to brush past them, Gen stuck out a hand and held her fast.

"You what?"

Rose shrugged once more. "I figure, you know, it's the least I can do. He is sort of there because of me." She began to backtrack away, holding onto the strap of her bag. "I'll see you guys later."

"Where are you going now?" Gen called, sharing a quick look with Al.

"I have to give it to him, don't I?" Rose called back.

It suddenly occurred to her that she and Scorpius had shared all of their classes that day, so Rose hurriedly pulled the other three assignments out of her bag and duplicated them. She skimmed through them, familiarising herself with the material again in case, well, in case Scorpius would need any help. Maybe she was just giving her hands something to do.

She turned into the corridor of the Wing, and she remembered their fight now, remembered the
darkness that had overtaken Scorpius' expression, the resentment fuelling every word he said.

And now he was lying in a hospital bed because he had flown out in front of a Bludger, all for the girl who, as he had vehemently told her only two weeks ago, meant nothing to him.

Rose held out her hand to open the door when suddenly it burst open, and she jumped back in surprise as the nurse bustled through.

"Miss Weasley!" She held a hand to her chest, and let out a slow and strained exhale before recovering herself. "What brings you here? I don't remember Owling you."

Rose held up the sheaf of papers in her hand. "I just thought I should bring Mal—Scorpius his assignments."

The nurse looked grave. "That's very kind of you, Miss Weasley. He is still in a very bad way." She shook her head, tsking. "Bludger to the chest. I can't imagine what he was thinking."

"Not very much, I'd wager," Rose mumbled.

"What was that? Anyway, I must nip out. He's in the line of beds on the left side of the room."

"Thanks, Madam Pomfrey."

Rose waited until the nurse had squeezed past, and then she entered, pulling the door closed behind her.

Scorpius was sitting up, his head slightly cocked and his gaze fixed on the Hospital Wing's entrance. That slight feeling of discomfort made itself known again in the pit of Rose's stomach, and she swallowed.

Scorpius stared at her for a few moments before he found his voice. "What're you doing here?"

Rose suddenly looked quite flustered and brandished the stack of papers in her hand at him. "I, uh…I brought you your assignments."

Something in the cavity of Scorpius' chest twisted, and he blinked. "Oh. Thanks. You didn't have to; I would've asked Toby to get them for me."

"Well, it was just because we share all the same classes today that I thought it would be easier for me to just grab all of them. So…here." She put the papers down on his nightstand and edged back again. "Besides, it's the least I can do. I really do owe you."

"Thanks," Scorpius said again, not knowing what else to say. He shuffled through the papers, stopping when he studied the title of their Charms assignment. "This is new."

Rose leaned forward, tilting her head as he turned the sheet towards her. "Oh yeah, um…Flitwick said it's some of the most challenging Charms we'll learn at school. Most people didn't really understand how to do it when he was explaining it in class."

"So, we're learning the two-part version of it?"

"Yeah," Rose affirmed. She pulled her textbook out of her bag and flipped it open to the right page. "The first step, that's the *Piertotum Locomotor* bit of it, animates the objects, and allows them to obey basic instructions, but then the second part, this spell here, is what allows them to gain superior sentence."
"Which is—" Scorpius squinted. "Singula Animo."

"Right. It's quite difficult, honestly, and it requires some complex wand work, and Flitwick said it could be disastrous if done wrong—"

"I can see why—"

"He also said he could help you, if you needed."

Scorpius nodded, frowning a bit. "Okay. Thanks." He rubbed a hand against his temple. "Does Flitwick want us to learn both parts before next lesson, or…?" He turned away from Rose, fumbling at his nightstand. "Balls," he muttered a moment later as he pawed through his Herbology and Defence textbooks.

"Oh, here," Rose said, turning her textbook towards him and leaning forward for him to take it. He met her eyes for a moment before reading the introductory passage. "Flitwick wants us to attempt the second part, but since the first part's hard enough, he's not expecting us all to manage before Thursday."

Scorpius lifted his eyes from the book. "So how long did it take you to learn it?"

Rose flushed. "I uh…learnt it before the lesson."

"Seems like a nice way to spend lunch—"

"—two years ago."

Scorpius' mouth twitched, and he bent to study the textbook again. "This wand stroke is new," he said, suddenly, tapping at it.

Rose instinctively crossed towards his bed as Scorpius angled the page in her direction. As he shifted his eyes to look up at her, she reddened. "That's um…mine."

Scorpius smirked. "There're more notes on this page than there are words from the book."

"No more than your Potions textbook," she answered, slightly defensively.

"You misunderstand me," was all he replied, that smirk still present. Scorpius continued to read. "That does make things easier," he admitted.

"I like Charms," Rose said, a small smile on her face. "You have room to be creative. Not like other subjects."

"Like when I told you to add four spines instead of five?" Scorpius asked wryly.

"I wouldn't call that being creative."

"True," Scorpius said ponderously. "That was just me being right."

He looked up and met her gaze, letting out an amused breath in place of a laugh and went back to reading. His brow furrowed as he took in the instructions, and a significant part of him wished he had read over this before.

In his periphery, he saw Rose hesitate before biting her lip. A moment later, she withdrew her teeth. "Do you…want me to show you?"

Scorpius looked up in surprise, and his gaze fell towards the chair that sat beside his bed. He
looked back at Rose. "Sure."

Rose nudged the door open and stepped into the Hospital Wing, keeping her footsteps as light as possible until she realised that apart from Scorpius - whose blonde hair she could see from the door - the room was empty.

She shifted the weight of the books in her arms as she reached him. "He-

She broke off and pulled back with surprise. Hugging her books tight to her chest, she looked down at the sleeping boy in front of her.

He was breathing steadily, heavily, in and out in an almost calming pattern, lying perfectly still. The sun was low in the sky, and afternoon light filtered in through the blinds, casting soft slats of sunlight across his face. Of course it was the upper part of his face where the light shone, and Rose blinked as Scorpius' hair almost looked a white halo about him, and the shadows around his aristocratic nose only made it look all the more straighter.

Rose's foot hovered in the direction of the door. She could leave - could, though she knew that wasn't exactly synonymous with able to - and she probably should leave, but what if he woke and she wasn't here and he thought maybe she had forgotten about him.

She squared her shoulders and stood resolutely. What kind of a Head Girl was she if she couldn't pull herself together and calmly and non-dramatically wait for him to wake up?

Or maybe she could just keep her books in her hands, a chair at the ready, and hover, and the minute his eyes would begin to open she would lower herself down and say, Oh, good, I only just arrived and I was going to wake you, that's just good timing, I guess—

She shook her head, chastising herself for her stupidity and meekness, and set her books quietly onto the floor. There now, she had no choice but to stay. She directed her attention to the chair that had remained by Scorpius' side from their session the day before and charmed it to hover, drawing it a safe distance away from him before demurely lowering herself into it and pulling out her textbook. It wouldn't hurt to practice the movements for a few minutes before he woke up, she could use the affirmation-

She took her time finding the page, and her gaze drifted up towards the top of the paragraph, but then it drifted up further, and her brain took a few moments to catch up with her mind because by the time her brain had graciously decided to start thinking again, her mind was in a tailspin.

_I guess there's a white knight in me after all._

She had caught a glimpse of Scorpius as he had screamed at her to move, his Quidditch cloak flapping wildly in the breeze behind him, and it was that image that stuck in her brain now, and though he was lying motionless in a bland white hospital bed dressed in nothing but a bland white hospital shirt and slacks, she thought he looked every bit the white knight he had the day of the match.

Suddenly, he drew in a sharper breath, and his eyelashes fluttered a few times before his gaze settled on the white ceiling above him. Rose's mouth opened in surprise, and she rapidly thought of the best position he should find her in before ducking back down and writing some gibberish on her parchment.

He cleared his throat, and she looked up. "Is it...is it four already?" he asked, his voice hoarse with sleep.
She let out a breath, and rummaged through the stack of books on her lap, extracting a fresh piece of parchment, quill and Scorpius’ Transfiguration textbook. "It's four fifteen."

"Oh, shit, sorry," Scorpius said, sitting up and nonchalantly rubbing the heel of his palm at his eyes. "Pomfrey upped the dosage of medication today since it's my last day in here. You could’ve woken me up."

Rose waved a hand, and though Scorpius was still slightly groggy, a hardness had re-entered his eyes, and a part of her wished he had slept on for just a little bit longer. "It's alright, you looked uh…" Peaceful. "...Tired."

Scorpius looked around for the water jug beside his bed, and poured himself a cup. Rose coughed, and pulled her chair closer towards him. "So, uh, we started a new chapter today: Conjuration of living things. If you're feeling up to it, we could do some practical stuff."

Scorpius swallowed, and then put away the cup, picking up his wand instead. "Yeah, that sounds good."

Rose nodded and flipped open her textbook. "We learnt the Avis spell today."

Scorpius tapped his wand against the bedding on top of his thigh. "How many people managed to conjure up anything?"

Rose kept her eyes on the textbook, but her mouth quirked up into a smirk. "One." She paused. "Two if you count Al's bird-rabbit hybrid thing."

"We should brighten up McGonagall's day, then."

"Are you sure you don't want to warm up?" Rose asked, then spread her hands when she caught sight of Scorpius’ expression. "I mean, I don't know — the medication can you make you all kinds of groggy, and you just woke up, so-"

"I'm good."

He cleared his throat, and clasped his wand in his hand. "Avis," he muttered, noncommittally, as if trying it out.

Rose stuck her fingers in the bind of the book and flipped it over to show him. "You have to create a sort of 'M' shape, you know like when you were younger and you drew birds that were supposed to be far away."

Scorpius studied the illustration. "I thought you said you couldn't draw."

He felt the heavy weight of her gaze on him, and finally looked up to meet her.

She smiled at him, but her eyes were slightly narrowed. "I can't."

Scorpius dropped her gaze and practiced the wand movements. "Does that look right to you?"

Rose watched him and nodded. "Yeah. Also, the traditional method means when the bird is conjured up, it makes a sort of gunfire sound. I've found that if you add an extra forty-five degree rotation at the end, you can conjure them soundlessly."

Scorpius raised an eyebrow at her, then furrowed them, looking deep in thought as he added in the extra move. "Like that?"
"Yeah." Rose shrugged. "I could show you, if you'd like."

"Be my guest."

Rose rolled up her sleeves, and - though she had managed to perfect the spell wordlessly that afternoon - muttered "Avis" as she demonstrated the move. To her slight relief, a red robin soared up towards the ceiling, chirping. She watched it for a few moments, and then lowered her wand. "Do you want to have a go?"

Scorpius pointed behind Rose, the corner of his mouth twitching. She turned, and her mouth slid open as her gaze settled on the identical red robin now perched on the bedpost of the empty bed closest to them.

She turned to re-face Scorpius but did so before recovering her awed expression, and Scorpius leaned back, interlacing his fingers and resting his head against his palms. "It's just that damned medication."

Rose said nothing but watched as her bird flew over to join Scorpius' and bumped their heads together, cooing softly as they enjoyed each other's warmth.

It was a few hours later when Scorpius was just finishing up another chapter of his book that he heard the handle of the Hospital Wing door turn. He closed his book and straightened, assuming that it was Madam Pomfrey back from dinner and ready to release him.

His eyebrows raised when instead Rose stepped into view, her brow lined as she wet her lips. Her gaze settled on him with an unfathomable expression, and she seemed to hesitate before she walked to stand at the foot of his bed.

"You're still here," she said, blinking and looking, well, the only word that came to mind was disappointed.

Scorpius looked around the Wing with a theatrically curious expression on his face. "It would appear so. That is why you're here, isn't it?" He paused. "Unless you're visiting some other remarkably selfless individual who flew into the firing line of a Bludger and broke most of the bones in his body for you?"

She narrowed her eyes at him, but shuffled around with the plates of food she had in her arms - which Scorpius had found odd but had decided not to comment on - as she spoke. "I uh…brought you some food-"

"Oh, jeez, Weasley, don't miss your dinner for me."

She waved him off. "Gen's finishing up work in the library, and um…Al's still in his room engrossed in this new play so I was just going to eat in my room as well, but then I thought why should the both of us eat alone when um…I mean, I thought you'd be gone," she finished quietly.

Scorpius decided to ignore that incredibly un-Rose Weasley logic and simply stared at her. "Thanks."

Rose looked at the chair that seemed to permanently reside next to Scorpius' bed and made her way towards it. "So, when are you getting released?"

Scorpius shrugged. "Pomfrey said tonight. It could be any moment now. Or," he said, something stirring inside him as he caught Rose's expression, "it could be in a few hours."
She nodded in apparent satisfaction and scrutinised the food on the two plates she was holding. "I'm not quite sure what you like, but it was a roast, so you can't really go wrong with-"

"It looks good," Scorpius interrupted her. She met his gaze, smiled a bit, and handed one of the plates over.

As he began to dig into his food, Scorpius cleared his throat. "So, tell me more about this new play, I'm quite intrigued."

"Nice try, Malfoy."

He smirked at her, cutting himself a slice of lamb. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her spear a slice of gammon on her fork and hesitate with it.

"I had no idea you were as good at Transfiguration as you are at Potions."

Scorpius raised a brow. "I'm not."

She looked at him. "I mean, it would take a pretty powerful wizard to master a Conjuring spell wordlessly on his first go."

"No arguments there."

She frowned, as if she couldn't apply logic to what Scorpius had said, and he cracked a grin. "Alright, fine. McGonagall took the liberty of sending me an outline of the classes I would miss. I had a go at the Avis spell this morning."

The tension left her forehead then, though she pushed around the food on her plate, still not eating, and Scorpius wondered if something else was bothering her.

He was about to change the subject, but then—

"I'm sorry," she said, suddenly.

"For?"

She cast her eyes down to the table, still toying with her food. "I should've listened to you. I uh…" She bit her lip. "I heard you yelling my name but I was so mad at you I just…refused to listen. It's my fault you're in here."

Scorpius nodded. "That's true. But that Bludger was going for the crowd whether you were there or not."

Rose looked up and met his gaze. "Would you have intercepted it either way?"

"No," Scorpius said, without missing a beat.

Her eyes seemed to soften at that, and Scorpius was careful that his face wouldn't give anything away - not that there was anything to give away, of course - but then her eyes trailed back down onto her plate, and she resumed eating.

"Oh." Rose put her fork down suddenly, cradling her plate on her lap as she reached for her satchel on the floor and dug around in it a little. She extracted a slip of parchment and held it out for him to take. Crooking an eyebrow at her, he smoothed it in his hands and scanned it.

He recognised Xavier's handwriting straight away, and his gaze was drawn to the bold "O" in the corner.
A perfect Veritaserum potion, Miss Weasley and Mr Malfoy. I would like to offer my personal congratulations for your achievements and have taken the liberty of adding your concoction to the Hogwarts' potions storage. As an aside, please do observe the outcomes of professionalism and cooperation.

He could feel Rose's eyes on him as he considered the information.

"Professionalism and cooperation, huh?" Scorpius asked dryly.

Rose shrugged. "Was he wrong?"

Scorpius put his empty plate on the bedside table next to him, and leant back, folding his arms across his chest. "I'd like to see you professionally cooperate with Nigel McDougall and get the same grade."

Rose rolled her eyes and plucked the paper out of his hands so she could inspect it again. "I suppose it might have something to do with this particular partnership."

"Oh, I didn't say anything about any partnership. I was referring to myself." He smirked. "And perhaps the addition of four Lionfish Spines?"

She pursed her lips before pressing them together and shaking her head at him. "You're never going to let that go, are you?"

Scorpius shook his head, smirking, and then the main doors swung open, and they turned their heads towards the entrance.

"Miss Weasley," the nurse said in surprise, as Rose hastily shot to her feet. "How nice of you to be here for Mr Malfoy's release."

"Oh, I didn't-" Rose started, but when Scorpius looked at her, she faltered. "It's um...no problem."

Pomfrey smiled at her, and picked up the clipboard at the base of Scorpius' bed, checking a few boxes and scribbling some notes as she peered at the empty bottles on Scorpius' nightstand.

"Any lingering pain, Mr Malfoy?" she asked, still scribbling.

"None at all," Scorpius assured her, rolling his shoulders for good measure.

"No headache?"

"Only since she arrived."

At Rose's affronted expression, Scorpius' laugh turned into a hasty cough, and he shook his head. "No, ma'am."

"Good."

Pomfrey unclipped the sheet of paper from her clipboard and put the clipboard back into its holder by the bed. "Well, then, I am officially discharging you, Mr Malfoy. Enjoy your evening. Goodnight, Miss Weasley."

She nodded at the both of them and headed for her office. "Oh, and Mr Malfoy?" She paused and then turned back. "Don't do that again."

Scorpius could feel Rose's eyes on him, and as he glanced at her she flushed, casting her eyes to
"No promises," he murmured, throwing his legs over the bed and standing for the first time in three days. He wobbled a bit, his legs still weak, and he let out a long breath.

"Everything okay?"

He met her concerned expression. "Fine. Just, you know, getting my sea legs."

"Do you need me to carry anything?" she offered, moving forward as Scorpius piled his textbooks into his hands.

Scorpius blinked in surprise. "Uh…yeah, sure. Thanks." He removed the top textbook from the significant pile in his hands and reached out for her to take it. At her unimpressed look, he took off another.

She rolled her eyes. "Don't forget anything."

He cast his gaze around his bed before turning back to her. "Right. So…shall we?"

It wasn't long before they had reached the corridor of the Heads dormitory, and they both blinked in surprise at the sight of Albus and Gen who were engaged in fervent conversation with John Wyatt. Rather, John Wyatt was engaged in fervent conversation with them.

"Now, you don't wanna twang the string too hard now, I could tell y'all stories about all the times I-"

Upon seeing them, John took off his hat and waved it vigorously.

"Tenderfoot! You look good as new." He scratched his head, still grinning. "Though that there outfit is a little…er…"

"White?" Rose supplied.

"Yeah, white as I ever seen."

Scorpius pursed his lips. "Nice to see you, John." He turned to Rose. "I can take those books back now, Weasley."

John fixed his hat back onto his head, and he sat back down on his bench, picking his guitar back up and plucking some notes. "That was mighty brave of you, tenderfoot," he said. "Flyin' out in front of a big ol' ball of steel-"

"Iron," Scorpius and Al interjected quickly.

"Whatever it was," John said airily. "Would've taken serious-"

"Balls of steel?" Scorpius asked archly, smirking. From next to him, Al snorted.

John shot him an amused look and went back to plucking. "You've got a committed partner there, don't ya, Miss Weasley — Miss Weasley?"

Scorpius turned his head to look at Rose; her attention was caught completely by something at waist height, and when Scorpius followed her gaze, it landed on Al and Gen's entwined hands. He blinked.
"Rose?" Gen asked, biting her lip.

Rose started, and cast her eyes around the group, frantic. "Sorry, what?"

Scorpius' brow furrowed, and he didn't miss how Rose's gaze kept darting back towards her friends' hands, like she couldn't help it. He cleared his throat.

"How're you feeling, mate?" Al asked. "Still feel banged up?"

Scorpius shook his head. "Nothing Pomfrey couldn't fix." He grinned conspiratorially. "You better bring your A-game."

Al rolled his eyes good-naturedly before silence fell upon the group.

Rose still looked like she was having trouble believing what she was seeing, Genevieve was steadily tearing a hole in her bottom lip, and Albus was clicking his teeth, and Scorpius thought maybe it was time for him to be leaving.

"I should probably get to sleep," he said, finally. "You know, rest up or whatever."

Al nodded thoughtfully, whilst Gen still stared at Rose, her eyes beseeching an empty audience as Rose continued to stare at the ground. "Yeah, good idea. See you in Transfiguration."

Scorpius raised a hand in farewell and flicked his eyes towards the redhead beside him. His "Goodnight" caught in his throat when he saw she was still staring firmly at the ground, and he instead turned towards John. "Leo Anguis."

The portrait swung open, and Scorpius climbed through.

Before the door had fully closed behind him, he heard Al take a deep breath before saying, "Rosie, there's something we need to tell you."

Chapter End Notes

A/N:

Hey guys! Thanks for reading and hope you enjoyed the chapter! Just a note - please, please don't leave comments on any and all chapters titled "Cookie" as I delete these and re-upload the full chapters later. This means your lovely comments will be deleted too :(
"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

Chapter 14: Double Vision From The Blood We've Shed or, Looks Like I Strayed To The Arms That Were Open

Rating: M mainly for language, and I can't discount any funny business later on

Disclaimer: I work with only what the infallible J.K. Rowling has given me.

There was a buzz in the air. The same buzz that was in the air every year on this very day.

Rose walked down the last flight of stairs before she reached the ground floor, her eyes slightly unfocused as they trailed her path. The halls were loud, too loud for this early in the morning, and so she failed to hear the cherub until it was nearly upon her.

It whooshed past her with its beating wings, humming loudly as it strummed on its lyre, and Rose raised herself up from where she had instinctively bent, lowering her hands away from her head.

What would you do if I wrote you a Valentine's Day poem, huh?

Nate had grinned as he had slung his arm around her shoulders, the grin that had broken her heart and mended it all at once. She had met his gaze with an arching smile, entwining her fingers around his.

How about you don't, she had informed him, only half-meaning it. He had pressed his lips into her hair, and she had felt his smile.

What if I do it anyway?

Another cherub zoomed past her as she was lost in that thought, immediately drawing her out of it, and she entered the Great Hall. Her eyes fell on the spot that she, Al and Gen usually sat at for breakfast, but instead of her friends, she was met with an empty bench. She suddenly felt herself grow cold.

God, she hated Valentine's Day.

Resignedly, she continued on towards the table, sitting down and pouring herself a cup of orange juice as a way to force herself to stay, at least for a little while. When she looked back up, there
was a cherub hovering in front of her face, expectant. Rose looked around her, frowning a bit when the thing wouldn't go away.

"Uh…hi," she said cautiously. "Did you…uh—"

The cherub (whose heart-shaped name-tag read "Nigel") loudly cleared his throat and unfurled the parchment he had been holding in his hands, and began to sing.

*Roses are red,*

*Violets are violet,*

*Valentine's Day sucks,*

*But you're a riot.*

*Cherubs aren't even romantic-y*

*Valentine's Day sucks,*

*But you don't,*

*Our very best friend, Rosie*

By the time he had finished, Rose was laughing uncontrollably, her face warm as she doubled over, wheezing. The cherub, looking more or less affronted, clicked his fingers to Vanish the parchment, and then zoomed away.

As Rose wiped her eyes on her sleeve, she looked up and saw Al and Gen making their way towards her, Al crossing the front of the table before he plonked himself down next to her; Gen took the space opposite them.

"So did you like it?" Gen asked, grinning wolfishly as she waggled her eyebrows.

Al nudged his cousin in the side. "It was Nigel, right? I deliberately requested Nigel." He sighed. "He's got the loveliest voice. He makes even the crudest of songs sound like bloody lullabies—"

"We don't need re-enactments of the preludes to your previous sexual congresses, as lovely as they sound," Gen interrupted dryly. "I'm sure we can use our imaginations."

Al winked at her before he began to load his plate with food.

Rose still had a little smile on her face as she took cue from Al and reached for the heart-shaped pancakes. "It was brilliant. You guys are the best, really."

"It would've turned out better if Al had let me do most of the writing," Gen said, rolling her eyes. "He said one stanza each. Obviously I did the first, unless you think that I would rhyme 'romantic-y' with 'Rosie'."

"It only added to its charm," Rose assured her cousin, locating the sugar and pulling it towards her. "So what have you guys got planned for today?"

Al and Gen shared a quick glance before Gen shrugged at Rose, too casually. "Oh, nothing much. We were just thinking of heading to Hogsmeade for a quick lunch, it's nothing big, you could even—"

"Gen!" Rose laughed. "I'm not a charity case. You guys go and have a good time." She looked
around at the breakfast scene behind her. "It's just like any other day. Albeit, with...you know, singing cherubs."

"Who write almost unbelievably incredible songs," Al put in. "Oh wait, no. That was me."

"Okay, Wordsworth, settle down." Gen leaned over the jug of maple syrup and, upon realising it was empty, hollered at the group of third years a ways up the bench to hand her theirs. "If you're sure, Rose."

Rose waved a hand at her. "I wanted to start work on my Transfiguration essay anyway. The library might finally be empty and I might actually be able to concentrate for a change. Besides, I won't have time to work on it tonight with the party and everything."

Even as she said it she didn't really want to stay inside; she could go and work underneath the birch tree on the grounds and take advantage of the emptiness. What did she care about Hogsmeade — she didn't even want to go now that she thought about it.

"You're actually coming?" Al asked, impressed. "I thought you don't party on weekdays."

Rose shrugged. "People can surprise you."

Gen stretched, rolling out her shoulder. "Well, I for one think it's a great idea. No matter how the day ends up going, everyone can at least finish Valentine's Day with a party."

"It's a terrible idea," Al corrected her, laughing. "Do you have any idea how shit-faced people are gonna get tonight? It's Valentine's Day. What some people might consider to be the worst day of the year."

"Oh, is it?" Gen asked, raising her eyebrows. "Is it the worst day of the year?"

"For some people," Al emphasised. "But some people aren't taking their incredibly witty and beautiful girlfriend out to lunch." He cringed. "Sorry, Rose."

Rose rolled her eyes. "It's fine. I'm perfectly happy not to go."

No, she thought as she stared at her heart-shaped pancakes, dimly hearing Al and Gen moving on to talk about the upcoming party. She didn't want to go to Hogsmeade at all.

"Why the fuck would you do this to yourself, Weasley?"

Rose's head snapped up as she took in the blonde boy who was resting his arms on the empty chair across from her, his eyes lifted in dry amusement.

She immediately went on the defensive. "What, Valentine's Day should only be celebrated by couples?"

Scorpius crooked an eyebrow at her. "That is the function of it, so I've heard."

Rose drew her fingers away from the menu in front of her, curling her fingers around her elbows. "Valentine's Day actually started out as a Christian holiday that honoured saints."

"Saint Valentine?"

Rose smirked. "Valentinus." Her gaze suddenly furrowed. "You do not have this free."

Scorpius shrugged, and raised himself off the chair before sliding his hand under its cross rail and
pulling it out so he could ease himself onto it. "She gave you two menus," he observed blithely. "Did you tell her you were expecting company?"

"The opposite, actually," Rose said shortly. "You have class."

"And now I've gone and painted you a liar," Scorpius mused. "You can't be happy with me."

As she watched, a small grin threatened the corner of his mouth.

"I went to class, but almost no one turned up. Coulter let us go."

He turned to peruse the menu, the stark red Valentine's Day promotion in the top corner immediately catching his eye the way it had caught hers. "You're welcome," he said.

"For what?"

He leaned over and tapped the identical symbol on her menu. "I've just made you eligible for twenty percent off."

Rose's lips thinned, and she suddenly wondered if this was some horrible plan, some evil, ghastly idea he had come up with just to spite her, to make this day even worse than it already was. But then she remembered the past few weeks; Scorpius sleeping in a hospital bed, red robins circling the white ceiling, not quite uncomfortable evenings spent working by the fireplace while the castle surrendered to the cold.

"Have you both decided on your orders yet?"

She was startled out of her reverie by the waitress who had shown her to her table, her pointed face smug as she refilled Rose's water before reaching over to plunk down a second glass in front of Scorpius.

"Um…" She looked up at Scorpius, half-expecting him to leap out of his chair whilst announcing that the waitress had made a grievous mistake and of course they weren't here together, he was just about to leave—

But he only stared at her and said, "I've chosen."

Blinking furiously, Rose turned her attention back to the menu and sought out the mains list, her mind at a complete blank. "The um…chicken breast, please."

She focused on the starters, even as she had no interest in ordering one, dimly hearing Scorpius relay his order as well.

"Any drinks for you?"

"Just some water, please," Rose said.

Scorpius cocked his head at her. "Come on, Weasley, it's a holiday." He inclined his head towards the waitress. "Any specials?"

"I could recommend the spiced mead," she said, indicating it on Scorpius' menu. "It seems to be a favourite on Valentine's Day."

"Perfect." Scorpius shot her a brilliant smile. "Two then, please."

Rose opened her mouth to argue; it was the middle of the day, and they had afternoon classes. It wouldn't do for someone to see the Head Boy and Girl drinking together at half-twelve—it wouldn't
do for anyone to see them together as it was, on Valentine's Day of all days—

"I'll buy, Weasley. My treat."

She met his gaze, and then she was handing her menu back to the waitress, and suddenly they were left alone again.

"That's twice now you've bought me alcohol," she commented, breaking the silence as she rearranged her fork and knife.

Scorpius raised a brow. "Coincidence," he granted, just as lightly.

A sudden squeal drew both of their attentions, and they looked over to see a young girl inhaling a bouquet of roses before tucking them under her arm as she began to eat.

Scorpius made a dissatisfied noise, and reached for his glass. "Like I said: why would you do this to yourself?"

Rose felt a brief flicker of irritation seed up inside of her, though if it was at Scorpius or at the simpering girl, she wasn't sure. "Tell me, in this situation, which of us is the pot, and which is the kettle?"

Scorpius swallowed, and set his cup back down. "Are we talking in terms of shape, or function, or-"

"You're here too, aren't you? You're doing this to yourself just as much as I'm doing it to me."

Scorpius appraised her, long and hard, before saying, "I asked first."

Rose sighed. "I'm not going to stay in the castle on a perfectly nice day, especially when we've been given permission out, and I think it sends a stupid message, and I didn't realise you needed a boyfriend to enter a restaurant-"

"So you're proving a point? For the everyday man?"

"No. I'm just eating."

Scorpius laughed, a quick, sharp noise. "Do you know how long it's been since I've spent Valentine's Day alone?"

His tone was hard to place. It wasn't bitter, but it wasn't happy either. It just…was.

"I imagine you came out of the womb with a girl attached to your-"

"I was thirteen."

"Me too," Rose said, and that seemed to surprise him.

The waitress came back, two steaming goblets in her hand, and she set them on the table. Rose bent to sniff hers. "It smells nice."

"And it's free, so drink up," Scorpius reminded her.

She blew on hers before cupping the warm chalice, the heat immediately releasing some of the tension in her frame. "So if it's so easy for you to get a date, why don't you just get one?"

Scorpius pulled his drink closer towards him as well. "Did you know that girls want to talk to you
first?" He grimaced. "They insist on it, actually. Apparently, Valentine's Day isn't an excuse to 
grab whichever girl you fancy and take her into bed with you. They’d prefer it if you buy them 
lunch before all that."

Rose rolled her eyes. "How revolutionary. And what's wrong with that?"

Scorpius shrugged. "Talking's all fine and good. I just don't feel like doing it."

"We're doing it now," Rose said before she could think about it.

Scorpius met her gaze. "Yes, Weasley, talking to you doesn't make me want to rip off my ears and 
your tongue. Happy?"

She didn't answer, she only continued to watch him with guarded eyes, trying to puzzle together 
just why he was here, why he was here today, why he didn't see her here, turn around, walk out 
and find some other pretty girl to buy spiced mead for and regale with a twenty percent off 
discount. What concerned her more though, was the slight shiver of pleasure that seemed to be 
creeping up her body every time he looked at her, every time he opened that mouth of his and 
reminded her that he was here, that he was here today, that the mead in front of her was bought by 
him, that she was no longer alone because of him.

Her silence seemed to amuse him. "Look on the bright side," he continued. "You could've been 
here with Wells or Goldstein—"

"And instead I'm here with you."

His expression didn't change, and he stared at her unwaveringly before finally saying, "And 
instead you're here with me."

Rose saw her plate lowered down in front of her, and she picked up her fork and knife, ignoring 
with every fibre of her being the red rose in the mason jar that this new waitress had put between 
the salt and pepper, just like every other couple in the room.

"So, why did you want to become a Healer?"

His question seemed to catch her off guard, and she sipped at her drink a little before her eyes 
began to trace the scratches on the wooden table.

"My Uncle Fred died in the war, and uh…" She cleared her throat. "My dad's never gotten over it. 
My Uncle George too — especially my Uncle George." She paused. "No one has, really."

Scorpius was silent.

"I remember the most horrible thing about it was that no one could've done anything to stop it." 
When she met his gaze then, it was hard, so hard that it almost flattened him. "I can't be helpless. 
Whatever happened, I would need to know that I'd done everything I could."

Scorpius thought he had gotten far more than he'd bargained for, and he didn't quite know what to 
make of this new information. Part of him was intrigued, as if he had somehow nicked a crack in 
his unbreakable exterior, and this was his reward. Another wondered if the tense, uncomfortable 
feeling in the pit of his stomach meant that this whole situation, this whole intimacy in the air, was 
so, so wrong.

Her eyes suddenly brightened a little, and she relaxed back into her chair. "That's how I first 
bonded with Nate, actually." At Scorpius' arched brow, she nodded and cupped her chin in her
"He wanted to go into medicine as well, until he realised that he was more interested in wand lore and artistry."

"Braithwaite wants to fashion wands?"

Rose nodded again. "He's really good at it. He apprenticed with Ollivander the summer before last. Apparently he's a natural."

Her eyes were forlorn, but the small smile on her face was real, and before Scorpius could think about it, he heard himself asking, "So why didn't it work out?"

She was noticeably taken aback by his question, and as she considered, he waited, expectant.

"You know," she said instead, "it's a bit of a double standard, you always asking me questions about my relationships, and yet you never offer me anything about yours."

Scorpius could feel the muscles in his face visibly shifting as the openness of his expression closed off. "You don't seem to need me to tell you about my relationships," he said. "If memory serves, you managed to find out all on your own."

Colour immediately flooded to her cheeks and her eyes widened when she realised what she had inadvertently brought up, and Scorpius thought maybe he had just ruined their lunch.

"I shouldn't have said anything," she said, and despite everything, her voice was steady. "It's none of my business what—"

Scorpius inspected his drink, checking for any remnants. "Makes no nevermind to me." There were a few drops left, not enough to bother. "You may not believe me, Weasley, but I honestly couldn't care less. Ask me whatever you want."

She shook her head. "You don't want to talk about your relationship with Liv with me. It's really none of my business."

"I'm asking you now. That makes it your business."

Rose bit her lip, and she took a deep breath. "That night we went clubbing, I saw Liv and Horatio. You know, together."

Something caved inside of him, the smallest of somethings, but he kept his face impassive.

She took another breath. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you, and I wanted to, I swear, but…I knew it had to come from her."

A memory trickled through Scorpius' mind, a fragment of recollection, and he blinked. "Is that why you wanted to leave all of a sudden? Because of Liv?"

Her lips were slightly pursed, a symptom of the tightness of her face, and she relented. "We were having a good time," she said quietly. "I told Liv I would tell you if she didn't, but then the two of you broke up, and then we weren't talking, and I sort of figured—"

"You were right. It needed to come from her."

Rose nodded slowly. "So I guess she told you, then?"

Scorpius' mouth twitched. "Effectively."

She was back to staring at the table, her fingers curved protectively over her elbows, hugging
She was back to staring at the table, her fingers curved protectively over her elbows, hugging them tightly to her chest. "Weasley, you look like I've just broken up with you over a Valentine's Day lunch," he chided. "If you're not careful, someone will come and take away our twenty percent off."

She smiled a little, maybe, and right on cue, the waitress reappeared. "All done?" She balanced their plates on her right arm as she whipped out a smaller menu from her apron. "Would you like to see the dessert menu?"

Rose said yes, though Scorpius suspected it was out of politeness, and he peered over his menu to watch her as she skimmed hers. "Anything you fancy?"

She bit her lip again, and Scorpius was sure their previous conversation was still weighing on her mind. He realised that, as always, Rose Weasley had been right: he didn't want to talk about his relationship with Liv with her. There were far better things to talk about.

"I'm not really hungry enough for a full dessert, but the last time I was here, Poppy said that the spiced apple pie is a must."

Scorpius smirked. "Is everything spiced on Valentine's Day?" He searched down his menu until he found it. "It does look pretty good, and it's only available for a limited time."

"I can't manage the whole thing," Rose said regrettfully.

"Can you manage half?"

He wasn't sure who looked more surprised at his words, but he figured the worst thing he could do was look like he had confounded himself, so he simply waited for her answer.

She recovered quickly. "I'll order it. You paid for the drinks after all."

"So one order of the apple pie then?"

Scorpius had forgotten about the still-hovering waitress, and he coughed. "Yes, thank you."

He reached for the jug on the table to refill his water and unwittingly blanched when pain seared from his right elbow, a forgotten injury. "Are you alright?" He thought there might be concern in those blue eyes.

"Oh yeah," he said, reaching for the jug again with his other arm. "Just a small incident a couple weeks ago. I was attacked by a rogue Bludger, wouldn't you know. Water?"

Her eyes, previously widened in worry, now lidded guiltily. "I thought you had recovered from that."

He chuckled, leaning over to tip the contents of the jug into her glass. "Training mishap." He rubbed at it gingerly when it continued to twinge. "It looks a little bruised."

Rose reached out a finger, and then abruptly seemed to realise exactly what she was doing and clumsily pulled back, returning her arms to the safety of her torso. After a few seconds, she wound them back around her empty goblet, tapping her fingers against the metal.
"I spy dessert," Scorpius said unnecessarily.  

Rose removed her hands again as the waitress slid aside the salt and pepper shakers, and then the mason jar with the rose to the sides of the table before placing the dish down in the centre.  

"Enjoy," she said as she left.  

Rose eyed the pie in front of them, and then the two forks.  

"Ladies first," Scorpius said, inclining his head towards her. "I insist."  

She pulled in her bottom lip, but grabbed a fork, offering the other to Scorpius.  

"Poppy was right," she said with a smile after she had taken a bite, pushing the plate over a little. He could feel her eyes on him as he cut himself a piece, and he forced himself not to look up.  

"So you're like old-school charming, huh?" she said with a light laugh that sounded more like a light snicker.  

"Huh?"  

"Ladies first and everything."  

He shrugged. "Self-preservation. You never know what they put in food these days. Were we in olden times, you might consider yourself to be my food tester."  

"Do you get all the girls this way?"  

"Evidently."  

"I'm intrigued," Rose went on in a very different voice. She sounded as if they were about to play a game. "Do you use those sort of lines on other girls?"  

"What sort of lines?"  

She rubbed at her collarbone; Scorpius' eyes were drawn to the movement. "You know, stupid lines like that. Pick-up lines."  

"That wasn't a pick-up line."  

"I know that wasn't."  

"I don't use pick-up lines."  

"So what's your secret then?"  

Scorpius wondered if she would be annoyed if he didn't answer. Depending on what he said next, she might be annoyed if he did.  

He considered. "I ask them once, I tell them not to bother playing coy because I won't chase them, and finally I say that I'd prefer to have them out of my bed by eleven the next morning."  

"Oh, yeah?" Rose said, resting her elbow on the table and lowering her chin onto her hand. "And that usually works for you?"  

Scorpius indicated to his face with a circled finger. "This usually works for me."
He got a laugh out of her then, but her eyes were slightly narrowed. *They wouldn't be narrowed if it weren't true*, Scorpius couldn't help but think.

Rose leaned down below the table and when she came up she had her wand in her hand.

Scorpius, who didn't think his comment had pissed her off so much to warrant being cursed, was about to raise up his hands in surrender when she wordlessly pointed her wand towards the flower between them, and it promptly arched upwards until its stalk stood perfectly upright.

He looked at her curiously, and she shrugged.

"It was drooping," she said.

Scorpius fought to keep his expression neutral, and he dropped his gaze back to the pie.

They were just two people eating in a restaurant, talking together as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world, tucked neatly into a table for two, on this sunny Valentine's Day.

Gen's hand shyly wound its way around Albus' as they walked past shops and restaurants, and it felt as if it could be their first time, or their hundredth.

Al showed none of her hesitation, immediately bringing his other hand towards them and rubbing her palm between his own. "Your hands are freezing."

"That's because it is freezing," Gen pointed out, looking down as she watched their shoes carve two pairs of footprints in the snow.

Al laughed, but he faded off as the sight of the shop they were passing by caught his eye.

Gen followed his gaze to the dull looking window display, and frowned. "What is it?"

Al smiled a little sadly as he brought his gaze back to her. "You didn't actually feel ill that day, did you?"

It took Gen a little while to realise what he meant, and when she did, her cheeks heated despite the cold.

That was enough. Al looked down at their entwined hands, considering them. "I actually thought we wouldn't work out, you know." When he caught her stare, he nodded. "I wanted us to, obviously, but…I dunno, I thought just maybe we were better suited as friends."

Gen didn't know exactly what it was, but something in his expression - maybe it was his eyes, a little unsure, but brimming with something that might've been hope - made her go warm, and suddenly nothing before today mattered.

"We are friends," she elbowed him teasingly.

Al grinned back, and, after a moment, leaned down to press a light kiss to her temple. He looked around at the shops lining their left and right sides. "So, where do you wanna go?" He smirked. "I heard Madam Pudifoot's brought out a new selection of desserts."

"I'd rather starve," Gen said bluntly. "That place is where sane people go to die."

"It has" gone through renovations," Al said diplomatically. "Maybe it's not so bad anymore."
Gen scoffed. "Why entire renovations were needed to change the wall colour to a slightly less offensive shade of pink, I don't know."

"Three Broomsticks, then?" Al mock conceded, leading them in the direction of the pub.

Gen would've liked to have stood back and enjoyed the day out, but something was nagging at her. She drew her finger along the velvety stalk of the flower in her hand. "Do you... do you think Rose is okay?"

Al gave her a weird look. "You worry about Rose way too much."

"I feel bad, it's her first Valentine's Day alone since Nate and, well, the host of other guys who tried their luck with her before him. Maybe we should have taken her out with us, it's not like — oof!"

She grunted as she crashed into Al's still form, and rubbed at her arm. "Oi, what was that about?"

Al was staring straight ahead, unblinking. "I don't think you need to worry about Rose."

Gen followed his gaze through the window of the Three Broomsticks, landing on the redheaded girl and blonde-haired boy sharing a pie in the back-end of the restaurant.

They stood there in the window and for a long moment, neither of them said a word.

Then next to her, Al's shoulders began to shake, and she looked towards him, her eyebrows furrowed in concern, but suddenly he barked out a laugh. "Happy Valentine's Day, Rose," he said, still chuckling.

Then he took Gen's hand into his and led them down the street.

When Rose exited her room, Toby was sitting on the couch, jiggling his leg impatiently.

He looked up at the sound of the door opening, and hesitated before offering her a little smile. "Hi."

"Hi," Rose replied, pulling the door shut behind her. "Are you um... going to the party?"

Toby nodded. "Yeah. If we ever end up leaving, that is."

Rustling noises were suddenly discernible from the room near the back of the dormitory, and Toby angled his head around. "Oi, Scorp! Hurry up!"

Two seconds later, Scorpius' door was flung open and he stalked out, one hand scrubbing a towel vigorously at his damp head, the other holding up the towel wrapped around his waist. "Jesus, Toby, why do you insist on getting there so ear—"

He abruptly broke off at the sight of Rose, and she saw him clench his hand more tightly around the towel at his waist. Her face immediately heated.

"Weasley," he greeted her stiffly.

"Oh... um..." Still burning, Rose averted her eyes and focused on the ground so hard her vision began to blur. "Um... I'm um... ready so I'm just gonna um... okay, bye."

She couldn't actually feel her feet hitting the carpet as she scarpered out, though she somehow made her way through the portrait hole unscathed - ungraceful as her departure was - and collided
headfirst into Gen.

"Woah!" Her friend steadied her. She squinted. "You look jumpy. What's up with you?"

Rose drew a hand over her cheek and was relieved to find that it felt a normal temperature again. She self-consciously relaxed her face. "Just...excited."

Gen scoffed. "Please. Anyways, we're early, I thought we were just meeting inside first."

Rose immediately grabbed her friend's arm and entwined it around her own. "No no. You know how I hate to be late." She tugged them away from the dormitory entrance and down the corridor. "I could really use a drink, and I don't want the mead to run out before we get there."

Gen continued to study her suspiciously. "Okay. But you're being weird," she informed her.

Rose laughed, a little too loudly, but soon they were walking up the staircase where a scant few other students were making their way towards the Room of Requirement.

As soon as they entered, Gen pulled Rose over to the drinks table where a handful of seventh years were still unloading bottles from wine boxes.

"Did you guys empty the entire village of its alcohol?" Rose asked, bewildered.

The two guys shared a quick glance.

"You're not gonna like...report us, are you?" one of them asked bravely.

"I'm off-duty tonight," Rose assured them. "Can we?" She handed over some coins and grabbed a mead for herself and gin for Gen.

"I thought you said that evil never sleeps," Gen teased as they located an empty sofa, no large feat with so little people in the room.

"Evil's a bit of a stretch, don't you think?" Rose smirked. "Hooliganism, maybe. Speaking of, I can't believe you convinced Al to join us so early."

Gen shrugged. "It's my right as his girlfriend — ah, speak of the devil. Oi, Al!"

Al raised a hand in greeting and picked his way over to them, snagging a drink from the table when the two seventh years had their backs turned. "I see the party's in full swing," he snickered. "What have I missed?"

"They finished putting out the drinks a minute ago," Rose offered. "It was very exciting. You missed a rager of a set up."

"So witty, even on Valentine's Day, dear cousin," Al remarked, unfazed. "How's your day been?"

Rose felt her composure slip for a fraction of a second, but she smoothly rearranged her features. "Not much. Just, you know, lunch."

"Oh?" Al asked, and, with the twinkling look in his eye, Rose missed the swift motion as Gen's elbow made contact with his gut. "Where?"

"Three Broomsticks."

"Us too," Al said immediately.
Rose felt her stomach bottom out, and her fingers went white around the bottle in her hands. "You…you guys were there?" She turned towards her best friend. "Gen, you never—"

Gen shouldered out of Al's hold and stepped in front of him. "We were going to, but we decided—"

"It was too packed," Al interrupted, poking out from behind her. "You know, full of couples and…other people."

"Yeah," Rose said hastily. "It was pretty busy. Anyways…I'm really thirsty, shall we start drinking? Let's start drinking."

As she walked off without waiting for an answer, she missed the vigorous but silent burst of laughter from her friends as they shook their heads and followed her to the couches.

Two hours later, the party was in full swing.

Rose, having just allowed Gen to drag her into some drinking game or another, had decided to claim a moment alone; she located the nearest couch and fell rather unceremoniously onto it, nearly spilling the whiskey that was sloshing around in her cup.

She closed her eyes for a moment, wondering if the alcohol was going to hit her, and if it was, if it could preferably do so sooner rather than later.

"Mind if I sit?"

Rose looked up from where she had bent to study her drink, and blinked. "Nate?"

Her ex-boyfriend grinned and still, Rose felt the tiniest of tugs deep in her stomach. He lowered himself down onto the couch next to her, and Rose could immediately tell that he was wearing the cologne she had bought him the year before.

"Good time for a party," he said, chuckling at the game of Mugs that was very quickly turning in favour of one team. "I guess the career stuff really stressed people out."

"Real life is stressful," Rose admitted, the thought that this was the first time they had sat down together since the break up suddenly occurring to her. "So, are you still wanting to pursue wand fashioning?"

Nate nodded, grinning. "I did another summer with Ollivander, and he thinks I have a future, Rosie—uh…Rose."

She smiled gently at him. "You don't have to call me Rose, Nate."

He returned her smile before he knocked the side of her leg teasingly. "So, I've heard you're into musicians now."

Rose rolled her eyes good-naturedly, her reply ready, when the double door opened and Scorpius walked in. He was in clothes this time, but that same heat, that same feeling Rose couldn't place snuck up on her again, and their eyes met.

His gaze slid over to the boy next to her for a fraction of a second before it returned, and for some reason, that gave Rose the ounce of confidence she needed. She raised her fingers and waved them.

Looking throughly amused, Scorpius smirked back, nodding at her before he turned back to Toby.
and pointed them in the direction of the drinks table.

Rose turned back to see a puzzled Nate.

"What?" she asked.

He shook his head, shrugging. "I guess I've seen stranger. Are you guys—ah, you know, not my place to ask."

Rose hastily took a sip of her drink. "Nothing to ask," she said. "Nothing to tell."

Nate looked like - despite what he had said - he wanted to ask more, but suddenly there were hands wrestling on his arms, and the scent of Firewhiskey was a heady thing in the air. "Come on, Nate, we're up next!"

Nate looked back at Rose and shrugged helplessly, allowing his friends to pull him towards the game. "Nice talking to you, Rosie!" he called.

She raised her bottle towards him and sighed deeply.

She had been alone for a minute before she sensed someone behind her.

"Not into Mugs, I'd wager?"

Scorpius had brought a drink with him, and when he sat, he didn't smell like cologne; he smelt like soap and shampoo and everything clean, and Rose thought maybe she liked that a little bit more.

"You're first to come to a party and still the last to be drunk."

Rose frowned at him. "You're not drunk either."

"I only just arrived," he pointed out.

"Toby made it sound like you were heading straight out."

"Toby missed dinner and wanted to head to the kitchens first."

"Where is Toby?" she asked, doing a cursory sweep of the room.

Scorpius shrugged. "Trouncing your ex in Mugs."

Rose followed his gaze towards the large group in the middle of the room, and watched Nate down the glass in his hand, coughing and laughing as Toby did a victory lap around the table. She raised a brow. "I see."

"Was he as stimulating as you remember?"

Rose pulled a face. "Excuse me?"

Scorpius chuckled, raising the bottle for a swig. "Braithwaite. You looked bored."

"I wasn't," Rose said shortly. "But thanks for your concern."

"How'd you meet the guy, anyway?"

Rose felt a small smile tugging at the corner of her mouth. "Detention."
"Detention?" Scorpius repeated, incredulous. "I can count the amount of detentions you've ever had on one hand."

"And they were all your fault," Rose informed him dryly. "It was after my first one, when I met Nate. I was uh…preoccupied with the whole thing and walked straight into him — dropped my books and everything — and we got to talking."

"The Herbology Incident?" Scorpius asked.

"The Herbology Incident," Rose confirmed.

"I still can't believe you did that," Scorpius said, shaking his head.

"I didn't do it on purpose!" Rose immediately insisted. "I told you I tripped."

"And poured Invigoration Draught all over my already mental plant?"

"Yes," Rose said stubbornly. "And you did the same to mine before I even had the chance to explain!"

Scorpius laughed at the memory of their two screeching, cannibalistic plants, devouring their brethren around them while the rest of the class erupted into a terrified frenzy. "I guess a part of me knew you'd never do something like that deliberately, but…" He shrugged unapologetically. "I guess I didn't care back then."

"Oh, and you would now?"

Scorpius shrugged again. "Possibly."

Something he said suddenly occurred to Rose, and she bristled. "What do you mean I'd never do anything like that?"

Scorpius caught her expression and snorted. "Come on, Weasley, what's the worst thing you've ever done in your life?"

The silent challenge in his eyes sent Rose's mind whirring.

Scorpius watched her struggle and gave a short, satisfied laugh. "I knew it."

Rose grimaced. "One time I threw Fire Crabs at a classmate during a Care of Magical Creatures class."

Scorpius pressed his lips together, his eyes glinting. "Did you? What did the poor sod do to warrant that?"

Rose crossed her arms. "He was a prick."

Scorpius met her eyes, and they shared a small, rueful grin.

"Come on, then," Rose said. "What's the worst thing you've ever done?"

Scorpius studied her for a few moments and then cracked a grin, raising his hands. "Fine, someone tell McGonagall she's chosen the most boring, rule-abiding Heads in Hogwarts' long history." He paused, and then in the same dry voice, said, "He's staring at you again."

Rose followed his gaze, and blinked when Nate sheepishly ducked his head to break their eye contact and immediately engaged his friend in conversation.
"It's nothing."

"It's Valentine's Day." When Rose furrowed her brow at him dubiously he shrugged. "People get awfully sentimental on holidays like this."

Rose considered that, remembering the amount of times today she had inadvertently caught herself reaching for some fleeting memories of her past relationship. It had been two years of her life after all.

"Here we go."

"Here what?" Rose fretted.

Scorpius lifted his chin straight ahead of him, and Rose turned to see Nate making his way towards them.

"You should say no."

Rose frowned. "You don't know what he wants."

"I do," Scorpius promised.

Nate brought with him the scent of Firewhiskey, and as he approached, he offered out a hand to her. "Rosie, we never got to finish our talk earlier." He hadn't drunk enough for his words to be slurred, but there was a brightness to his eyes and an ease to his gait that hadn't been there before.

"Nate—"

"One dance, Rose? Come on, you love this song."

Unbidden, Rose found herself looking to Scorpius, who, after returning her gaze, got to his feet.

"Later, Weasley," he said, and without a second glance he was carving his way through the crowd, leaving Rose wondering why he even seemed to care.

He craned his head around, looking for Toby, who had disappeared under the guise of getting a drink, though that was a while ago. Scorpius heaved a sigh.

"Scorpius?"

A lot of girls had said Scorpius' name tonight, but this one, even through his drunken haze, immediately sent his stomach twisting into an uncomfortable knot. It had been so long since he'd heard her say his name.

He lowered the bottle of Firewhiskey in his hand, and turned around to face his ex-girlfriend.
She looked half-surprised that he'd actually turned around, but when Scorpius looked at her properly, under her cautiousness was that unfailing obstinacy held in the tightness of her expression.

"Enjoying the party?" he asked, indicating the cup she was cradling in her hands.

She followed his gaze and shook her head, abruptly discarding it on the table next to her. "Um… I'm not really drinking tonight."

"No?" Scorpius questioned, taking another sip and realising with dejection that the bottle was now empty. "S'not like you."

"Scorpius," she said again, and Scorpius thought maybe it wasn't the best idea to do this right here, right now, when Oscar Bates was chugging an entire bottle of mead as his friends hollered him on, and the music blasting throughout the room was reaching its climax (what was the name of the song? Why couldn't he figure out what the song was called?)

He raised his eyebrows at her.

"Can we talk?" she asked.

"Isn't that what we're doing?" he replied, and when she was about to retort, he continued blithely, "Did you think I wouldn't talk to you if I was sober?"

"No," Liv said immediately. "But I wouldn't have come over if you were."

Scorpius smiled wryly at her, cocking his head. "Are you going to ruin my party, Liv?"

Her face fell, but she stubbornly shook her head. "I'm trying to make up for the last night of yours I ruined." She looked down at the drink beside her, and Scorpius knew she was wishing its contents were in her stomach. "You um…you look better. All healed up."

"I am," Scorpius said. "But that's not what you wanted to tell me."

"No," Liv admitted. She took a deep breath. "I'm sorry."

Scorpius blinked. And then he blinked again.

"Scorpius, I'm so sorry. I don't even know where to start. I know that I—what I did was wrong, I know it was, and I should've talked to you, I should've told you how I felt instead of doing what I did, and it's not an excuse, but I…I wanted you to hurt like I was hurting, and I know that was wrong of me too—"

Scorpius' eyes moved to her hair. It was mussed, like it always was in the morning, and he wondered why, if anyone had mussed it. She didn't usually have it as messy as that, especially at a party.

"—not like I'm expecting us to go back to how we were before, but I miss you, okay? I miss my best friend, I miss you and me, and you and me and Toby, and I know how badly I fucked up — I fucked up so bad, and I know I can't ask you to trust me, but at least let me try and make it up to you—"

Liv's eyes were shining, he thought they might even be glistening, and suddenly memories of that night in November dredged themselves back up again. She had been cruel that night, and he felt as vacant now as he did then. It felt like a lifetime ago. He wasn't mad at her anymore, he knew that much. Maybe it was the alcohol. Maybe.
His eyes travelled back to the curve of her lips as she spoke, particularly liking the way that her mouth pursed every time she told him how sorry she was, and those lips were so familiar, so invitingly like home that he found himself stepping towards her. How long had it been since he had kissed someone? Three months? Had it ever been so long before?

He angled his head away from her confused eyes, and he studied the room. Two Hufflepuff girls in the corner, one of whom had already attempted conversation with him tonight; he would have no problem there. A pretty Ravenclaw sitting near the entrance, sipping her drink as she watched the party around her. Inexplicably, his gaze turned back to the girl in front of him, and he was looking at her soft hair and remembering how it used to feel in his fingers, and he fleetingly wondered if she would still smell like cinnamon, and that odd thought began to nag at his brain.

He had been drinking bad decisions by the bottle, and Liv was just the cherry on top of the fucking cake. The rational part of him knew you shouldn't re-open closed wounds, especially when the wound in question cheats on you with a reserve whose name you can hardly remember (Horatio Horatio Horatio), but there on the dance floor, not twenty feet away from him, was Rose Weasley and Nathaniel Braithwaite, and Rose Weasley never did anything wrong and if she could do it, Scorpius would be damned if he couldn't do it either.

Liv's hair was as soft as he remembered it, and he felt the empty bottle of Firewhiskey slip from his fingers as he moved his other hand to join the first there.

He knew in the morning this would come to bite him in the ass, but morning was hours away. Morning could wait.

"Nothing like a slab of bacon to cure a hangover," Al said merrily, depositing three on Gen's plate as they sat in the Great Hall on Wednesday morning.

Gen raised her head from where it had been resting on the table long enough to wrinkle her nose. "I think the smell is making it worse." She turned to face the table again, her voice coming out muffled. "You have it."

"Suit yourself." Al pulled her plate toward him, and considered before picking up an additional two rashers. He looked at his cousin, who had said almost nothing since they had been sitting at the table. "You're quiet, Rose."

She blinked, coming to. "What? Oh, yeah, sorry, just um…thinking."

"About?" Al pressed.

Gen groaned, and then straightened up, rubbing at her temple. "Three guesses who. Wait, two guesses. One for each of the guys you spoke to last night."

"She spoke to me," Al said.

"This isn't a list you want to find yourself on," Gen said, patting him on the shoulder. "So, who is it? Nate?"

"You spoke to Nate?" Al asked, his eyebrows raising as his fork hung in the air.

"Amongst other things," Gen muttered, keeping her eyes down. "Are you guys okay?"

Rose shrugged. "I'm sure we are."
The three of them were quiet for a while, broken only the sound of Al's fork and knife working away at his food.

"I haven't seen Malfoy get so pissed in a while," Gen said nonchalantly, finally grabbing the jug of orange juice and pouring herself a cup. "Was he drunk when you were talking to him, Rose?"

"No, he wasn't." She frowned. "Wait, how drunk was he? He was totally sober when I was with him—"

"You were otherwise preoccupied for a while, Rose," Gen pointed out gently. "Besides, alcohol tends to warp your sense of time."

"He doesn't usually drink too much at parties."

"He broke the habit then," Al snorted. "And my back."

"Your back?" Rose echoed. "You had to carry him back to our dorm? He was with Liv the last time I saw him."

"Yeah, she was there too," Al confirmed. "I helped her bring him back to his room."

"Did any of you see her?" Rose found herself asking. "After she brought him back?"

Gen pursed her lips thoughtfully. "No, I don't think I did."

Rose didn't think she had seen her either. After everything that had happened with Horatio, she didn't think there was any possibility that Liv and Scorpius could get back together. Even yesterday at lunch, he had said he didn't care, she was welcome to ask him anything she wanted. That didn't seem the sort of comment that preceded a relationship.

Rose felt Gen's eyes on her briefly before she looked back at Al. "So, are they back together then? They've been broken up for so long I just assumed it was for good this time."

"I don't think he was conscious enough to make any decisions like that." Al shrugged, unconcerned. "It was probably just a stupid, drunk decision. Lots of people do stupid shit like that when they're drunk."

"Stupid's a little harsh," Gen said quickly. "Hooking up with an ex isn't the worst thing in the world. I mean—"

"Are we forgetting that I didn't actually kiss Nate?" Rose asked, amused.

"You kissed Nate?" Al choked on his eggs and hastily gulped down the glass of juice Gen offered him to relieve his coughing.

"I didn't kiss Nate," Rose hissed, looking around to make sure no one had heard him. "And shush."

"How did I miss all this?" Al whined.

"How are you not hungover?" Gen retorted. "You drank more than I did."

"Yeah, but I threw it all up last night," Al said sagely. "Best way to prevent a hangover."

"You're an example to us all," Rose said, pursing her lips in distaste.

"I guess now's not a good time to tell you that your shirt's on inside out?" Al said dryly.
Rose's head snapped down, and she suppressed a groan. "How long were you waiting for that?"

Al tsked, grinning. "Our Head Girl's slipping."

"It's okay, Rose," Gen consoled her. "That guy over there has vomit on his front. And Liza McCarthy is wearing a Ravenclaw jumper."

Rose laughed into her cup. "I saw her and Ephraim getting together last night."

"What?" Al gaped. "Liza and Eph—I missed that too?"

"I wish that was my biggest problem," Gen groused. "I don't know how I'm gonna get through Runes without throwing up. Though it would serve Westknight right if I did throw up on him—"

Rose's attention was suddenly on the Great Hall's entrance. Toby Nott walked in, hands in his pockets, and sat down next to a group of seventh years near the door, not one of them blonde. He frowned a little as if sensing eyes on him and looked up, meeting Rose's gaze with a searching expression.

She hastily turned back to her food, toying with a piece of toast and realising that she had inexplicably lost her appetite.

From across the hall, Toby stared at her curiously a moment longer before returning to his breakfast.

Scorpius was hungover.

He knew it before he even opened his eyes, and when he did he was accosted by the sunlight beating down from his window. He abruptly turned onto his side, and saw Liv still sleeping beside him. Something in his stomach churned, and he staggered to the bathroom, upheaving last night's dinner into the toilet. He fumbled half blindly in the cupboard above the sink, his fingers closing on the small vial of potion he kept stashed there, and he downed its contents.

He splashed water onto his face, rinsing out his mouth before abandoning that and grabbing his toothbrush.

Liv was sitting up when he returned, her gaze expectant.

At his expression, she gave him an appraising look. "You always did have a terrible memory after a night of drinking."

Dread washed over his body, cold and disorientating, and though the potion was already working to settle his stomach, he felt like there was a good chance he could go for another round. "What happened last night, Liv?"

She made an incredulous face and crossed her arms. "You're not serious. You think I want to get back together?"

Scorpius leaned heavily against the doorway, and she sighed.

"The only reason I came back here with you was to make sure that you ended up in your own bed and no one else's."

Scorpius wanted to stay standing a safe distance away, but with his throbbing headache and nausea, that wasn't really a feasible option. He walked measuredly back to his side of the bed and
lowered himself back down onto it.

"What actually happened, Liv?" he asked again, because all he could really remember was—

"You kissed me."

That.

"Okay," he said lamely. "What happened after that?"

"You asked me if I wanted to leave the party. You weren't really in the best way, so I agreed, and I brought you back here."

"And then?" His hands were freezing. He rubbed them together.

Some of the seriousness evaporated from Liv's expression and she rolled her eyes. "You wouldn't stop bloody talking. I was going to make sure you were okay and then leave, but you were in a bit of a talking mood, so I figured I'd stay with you for a little while until you'd had enough, but you went on and on about the most random things, and I was getting so sleepy and I must've fallen asleep."

"Like what sort of things?" Scorpius asked.

Liv shrugged nonchalantly. "Hell if I remember."

"And you stayed?" Scorpius murmured, his brow furrowing.

"And I stayed," she replied.

They sat in silence for a little while, Scorpius digesting her words. A thought suddenly occurred to him and he turned to face her. "How did you get in?"

Liv leaned back against the bedpost, mirroring Scorpius' pose. "I was half-way towards Rose when Toby bumped into us, and he told me the password."

"I see. So, ever the gentleman, he didn't offer his help?" Scorpius asked, raising a brow.

"Toby wasn't in a fit state to help anyone," she scoffed, and then her tone shifted. "Albus Potter, however, was more than happy to offer his assistance."

Scorpius was quiet. "Thanks, Liv."

He waited a few seconds before looking at her, and when he did, she was already looking at him. A small smile tugged at her lips. "You're welcome."

"You don't look too good."

Scorpius raised his head from where he had been bent over his Ancient Runes textbook. "Cheers, Weasley."

Rose smirked and lowered herself down onto the chair next to him, piling her own textbooks on the table. "I'm surprised you don't know how to make a hangover cure," she commented.

"I can," Scorpius objected. "But I'm hoping this hangover will convince me to never drink that much again."
"You'd take a day of throwing up over acceptance at being a teenager?"

"I'm not *that* desperate to be convinced," Scorpius admitted. "I took something to settle my stomach this morning. Anyway, it's the headache that's the killer."

"With how much you drank, I'm not surprised."

Scorpius gave her a look, flipping to the next page of his book. "Don't start, Weasley. I saw you."

"Given that we had an entire conversation together, that doesn't particularly surprise me."

"Dancing."

Rose frowned. "With Nate?"

Scorpius grunted.

"Not that it's any of your business, but Nate asked me to dance for old times' sake."

"Did you kiss him for old times' sake as well?"

"Did you?" Rose countered, and that shut him up.

They sat in a stalemate silence before Scorpius picked up his quill again. "You're making my headache worse."

"Just think about how much you're being convinced."

He didn't reply, so Rose opened her Arithmancy textbook to start on the week's assignment. As she took out her quill from her bag, a fellow seventh year passed them, studying them with open interest. Rose raised a brow in defiance, and the girl scuttled off.

"You guys looked like you were having a good time."

Rose angled her head to look in Scorpius' direction, and saw that he hadn't looked up from his work.

"We were."

"So why didn't it work out?"

Rose dropped her gaze back to her paper, positioning her quill in her hand, though she had no idea what she was planning on writing. "You asked me that yesterday."

"You didn't answer me yesterday."

"Why are you interested?" she asked, feigning nonchalance.

He saw through it immediately. "That's how this works out, doesn't it? Give and take. I tell you something, you tell me something. But if you don't feel like telling me why you dumped Braithwaite, I won't force it out of you."

Rose raised her eyebrows, suddenly appraising him as she straightened up. "Why do you assume I was the one who ended it?"

Scorpius blinked, then seemed to be carefully crafting his next words before he spoke them. "You
don't seem particularly the sort of girl that gets, uh..." He trailed off, and Rose couldn't help but think that if only he were braver, he would've gone through with it. Still, she only nodded.

"With Nate, uh," she said, suddenly realising that she had never had to voice aloud the reason why she had ended things after those two and a bit years. "He — he was nice, really nice, but..." She looked up to see Scorpius furrowing his brow as he watched her. "We never fought."

Nice. That was the only word she could think of to describe their entire relationship. Nice.

Scorpius taxed her conflicted expression and frowned further. "And that was...bad?"

She nodded. "I never fought with Christian either."

Scorpius rolled his eyes. "I don't think that was your problem with Stubby Goldstein."

"Yes, you've made your opinion of Christian rather clear," Rose said stoutly, crossing her arms. Scorpius shot her a challenging look back, as if daring her to tell him he was wrong.

She sighed upon seeing his expression. "But yes, the music thing played a substantial role in the break-up."

"You don't like fighting," Scorpius intoned suddenly. "You like the challenge."

She kept her gaze on her parchment for a few protracted seconds. "How'd you figure that?"

He shrugged. "You wouldn't have bothered with me for all these years if you didn't."

Rose wasn't quite sure what to make of that.

"I didn't actually kiss him," she heard herself saying instead. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Scorpius blink before casting her the briefest of glances.

"No?"

She shook her head. "No."

She directed her attention to the words in front of her, though she immediately realised she was on the wrong chapter for the assignment. She pulled in her bottom lip, wondering if it would be obvious if she pawed through half the book before resuming work.

Scorpius ruffled a hand through his hair, messing it up for a short second before it fell back into place. The same scent she remembered from last night suddenly drifted over to her, and she wondered how he could be so hungover and yet smell so clean.

He stretched, rubbing a little at the back of his neck as he straightened. His brow furrowed as he turned his head to survey the library.

"The library's not crowded," he said.

Rose squinted at him. "No..."

"So why're you sitting here, then?" he asked.

Rose blinked at him, and then shrugged before she decided she would flip to the right page, her pride be damned. "Because I wanted to."
The Slytherin Common Room was colder than Scorpius had remembered.

Maybe it was because he was now used to a smaller space, closer to the warm fire. Maybe he had just grown accustomed to something new.

"So, tell me again, Toby, what possessed you to hook up with Ruth Nesgrave of all people?"

Toby sighed dramatically. "I told you, I was smashed. I didn't even realise it was happening till too late."

"Hear that, Scorp?" Liv said dryly, turning a concerned eye on Scorpius. "Our Toby's been the victim of a predation."

"You looked like you were really having a rough time of it, Toby," Scorpius agreed, adopting a similar tone. "Now, tell us, where did the bad lady touch you?"

"You two are right ones to talk," Toby informed them stoutly, which effectively shut them both up.

"As your friend, Toby, I feel inclined to warn you that Ruth has been telling all of her friends that it's only a matter of time before you ask her out."

"She what?" Toby choked out in a strangled, horrified voice.

Liv let out a small laugh, glancing at Scorpius with twinkling eyes. From the couch opposite her, Scorpius felt the corners of his mouth turn up in reply.

"How do you know? You guys aren't even friends."

Liv shrugged casually. "I may have…overheard something."

"You were eavesdropping," Toby corrected her, smirking.

"They were talking about it in the bathroom," Liv defended smoothly. "You can't eavesdrop in a public place. Really, Toby, did you have to choose someone with such a loud, annoying voice?"

"I was drunk!" Toby crossed his arms. "You guys are gonna put me in a bad mood."

That wasn't true, Scorpius knew. Toby was in happier spirits than Scorpius had seen him in months. Looking at the fond expression she was directing at their friend, Scorpius had an odd suspicion Liv was thinking the same thing.

"Sorry, Toby," Liv said, smiling.

Toby met her gaze and grinned. "Have you told Scorp about your summer internship?"

Scorpius raised his eyebrows in surprise. "No, she hasn't."

A faint blush rose to Liv's cheeks, and she shook her head nonchalantly. "It's nothing, really. I sent the final designs for my aunt and uncle's party to them, and she forwarded them to a design company, and they um…offered me an internship."

"It's great, Liv," Toby interrupted her.

"It is great, Liv," Scorpius concurred, inclining his head at her.
That was another thing Scorpius had noticed. While Liv had been updating him on her life since Christmas, she hadn't done the same for Toby, though nothing she said seemed to surprise him.

Horatio Reed had never come up.

Toby yawned, stretching as he rose from the couch. "Bed time, I think."

He clapped Scorpius on the back as he left, and truthfully Scorpius was half-tempted to leave too. Slight discomfort set in the moment the sound of Toby's footsteps faded away, but before he had the chance to think of something harmless to say, Liv cleared her throat.

"Hey, can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"On the topic of the anniversary party, I was wondering….I mean, I know we're good again, but I know we're not really ready for a family situation together, so I was thinking…would you mind if I brought Toby?"

"You don't need my permission to bring Toby, Liv," Scorpius said, somewhat amused.

Liv rolled her eyes. "It's not for your benefit. Toby won't agree to come if he thinks you're not okay with it." She gave him a hopeful look. "I thought maybe if you told him you were fine with it, he wouldn't feel weird."

Scorpius shrugged. "I suppose I could say a little something to him."

Liv smiled before she glanced down at the watch on her wrist. "It is pretty late. I think I might head upstairs as well." She unwound her legs and rose from the sofa, hugging a cushion to her chest for a second before putting it down. "Night, Scorp."

"Night," he replied, watching her as she gave him a little wave before disappearing up the staircase.

Scorpius stared into the emerald fire for a minute longer, wondering when he had forgotten what it looked like. He turned away from the flames and got to his feet, realising how tired he was as well, and made for the entrance hole. As he neared it, he heard footsteps coming down the girls' staircase, and curiously he angled his head back around.

Liv was playing with her hands, looking half-surprised to see him still there.

He waited for her to speak, keeping his face as impassive as he could.

"I never asked," she finally said, meeting his gaze, and Scorpius somehow knew exactly what she was going to ask him. "Why did you kiss me?"

Scorpius considered for a while before he told her.

She still looked deep in thought as Scorpius left.

Scorpius' mind, on the other hand, was empty as he walked back to the Heads' dorm, and it was peaceful. It had been a long time since he'd done this walk, and the immediate familiarity of it was calming. Force of habit, he'd said.

"Another late night, tenderfoot?" John greeted him, chortling, canting his hat in his direction.

It was a lot warmer in here, that's what he had thought. Scorpius peeked over the couch, the image of Rose studying on the floor by the fire already playing in his mind. But the space was empty, and her door was closed.

Scorpius hesitated by the fireplace, its warmth something he was loathe to leave. On the table was his half-finished Transfiguration assignment, and, a little ways away, a blank sheet with the title of their assignment written in Rose's - now familiar, he realised with start - script.

He raised his wand, *Nox*ing the lights and leaving the room in almost total darkness. He continued to his bedroom, shutting the door behind him, and the red fire blazed on.

Chapter End Notes

A/N:

Hey guys! I know it's been a while since the last chapter - quick updates are not my speciality (nor is productivity). Hope you enjoyed reading the chapter; I do love bringing back some old faces ) Just as a note, this fic is still planned to go to 22 chapters, which makes us almost two-thirds of the way there! Also, word of advice to any aspiring fic writers: make sure you know your fic better than I know mine. I completely forgot that Scorp had already figured out that Rose knew about Liv and Horatio, and confronted her about it at the end of chapter 12, and wrote a totally conflicting scene to that during their Valentine's Day lunch and had to completely rewrite that section. *face palms*. Anyways! Uni's started up again so updates will probably stay few and far between, but I'll do my best! Chapter titles come from Shinedown's State of My Head and Hozier's Angel of Small Death & the Codeine Scene.

~ Rach
"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 15: You Look Pretty Sinking or, She Walks Away Like A Lady

Rating: M mainly for language, and I can't discount any funny business later on

Disclaimer: I work with only what the infallible J.K. Rowling has given me.

It wasn’t exactly common knowledge that Rose had a soft spot for magical creatures — any animals, really, but magical creatures were a special sort of soft spot for her.

Al, knowing this, had informed her that Hagrid had told him - unintentionally, of course - that there was a griffin recuperating from a broken leg in one of the paddocks behind his hut, far enough away that no one would find it accidentally.

So it was with barely concealed excitement that Rose made herself scarce after lunch and slipped away past the stone pillars and trees as she found herself alone on the empty grounds. She didn’t really expect to see anyone there — most of the students were still inside eating, and being a Saturday, there weren’t any classes taking place.

It was a cold day in March, but the sun was beating down, and Rose kept out of the shadows as she walked, enjoying the way the pumpkin patch looked as it was illuminated by the sun. As she passed the windows of Hagrid's hut, she frowned and paused before leaning back to scrutinise past her reflection.

Her reflection's forehead creased as she took another look at what she had previously disregarded as a figment of some deranged brain, and turned, crooking an eyebrow in amusement despite the sudden tightness in her throat. "First Hogsmeade, now here? Are you following me?"

Scorpius rolled his eyes as he continued down the hill, and Rose crossed her arms as she waited for him to get within normal speaking distance.

"I thought you were heading down to the pitch, and I was going to let you be, but then I saw you heading the other way, and..." He shrugged. "I was curious."

"I'm sure that's what all stalkers say."

Scorpius adjusted his scarf and nodded understandingly before his expression became perplexed.
"Are you stealing pumpkins?"

"Close."

"Humour me. Where are you going?"

Rose shrugged before smirking. "Nowhere."

Scorpius cocked his head before saluting her. "Alright, well, if I never see you again, I'll be sure to inform McGonagall that this was the last sighting of you. Do you have the time?"

Rose *tsk*ed. "So much for curiosity." She walked on, keeping him in her eyeline, and after a moment, she raised her eyebrows at him quizzically. "Well? Are you coming?"

Scorpius studied her for a moment longer before he gave a dramatic sigh and followed her path. "Someone needs to make sure you don't die."

"I didn't realise that was a priority of yours."

"Don't be so fucking morbid, Weasley."

He held up a low hanging branch above their heads, waiting for Rose to pass before he ducked underneath. "Don't tell me you've roped me into some secret detention you've got?" He spared her a brief glance. "Nah, you're far too happy to have detention." He did a double take as they passed a clearing in the woods. "Is that the Thestral paddock?"

Rose nodded, and she didn't know why, but she heard herself asking, "Can you see them?"

Scorpius hesitated before shaking his head. "No, I can't. Can you?"

Rose shook her head too. "No. I'd like to— not, like that, obviously!" She went pink and broke their eye contact before clearing her throat and pointing ahead of them. "Look, we're almost there."

"You mean there's more forest in this forest?"

"It's not the forest we're interested in."

It was only when they reached the edge of the glade that they could see the corner of the paddock's gate. As they drew closer, Rose could hear scratching and what sounded like the ruffling of feathers. She grinned, increasing her pace until the entire enclosure came into view. Reaching the latch on the gate, she turned back to issue Scorpius a smug look. To her surprise, she saw him at a standstill a few paces back, a guarded expression on his face as he affixed the animal in front of them.

She frowned. "What's wrong?"

He didn't appear to hear her, and it was only when she said his name that he jolted, and blinked a few times. "What? No, nothing."

She beckoned him forward. "Don't you want to get a better look?"

She could've sworn the mumble out of his mouth sounded a lot like "Not really", but, he reluctantly joined her at the fence. Her gaze slid down towards the non-existent space between her coat sleeve and his, and then back up.

"It's magnificent, isn't it?" she said.
Although the griffin had initially taken an interest in the two strangers as they approached, it had considered them for only a few moments before it had resumed grooming itself.

"I wish we could get closer."

Scorpius scoffed. "I'm perfectly fine here, thanks very much."

Rose felt a tiny smile creeping across her face, and she braced an elbow on the fence as she turned to look at him. "Call me crazy, but you're acting a little—"

"Vigilant?"

"Twitchy."

Scorpius made a face, fastening his coat more tightly around him. "I'm behaving as I always do."

Rose squinted, and then nodded at him, no longer hiding her smile. "Stick your hand in then. Not far, just, hold your hand over the gate."

Scorpius's fingers immediately curled into fists and he pulled them back. "Safety hazard." He pointed vaguely at the nearest segment of fence. "There are probably signs everywhere prohibiting exactly that."

"Prohibiting what?" Rose asked in amusement. "This?" She stuck her hand out in front of them, waved it around a little, and returned it back to the safety of her torso.

"Now you've done it, Weasley, what did I tell you, look at THAT — oh."

Having fluffed out its feathers, the griffin laid its head back down onto its front legs.

"An easy mistake to-ah — SEE!"

Scorpius yelped and pulled them both away from the paddock's entrance. The griffin yawned again, unmoved by Scorpius' outburst, and tucked its head away out of sight.

Rose could still feel the heat and pressure from where his fingers had clasped around her shoulders, and she flexed her fingers, glancing sideways at him. "It's okay. I don't think it's paying attention to us anymore." A thought occurred to her, and she issued Scorpius a curious look. "I've heard Malfoy Manor's full of swans."

"Unfounded rumour," Scorpius dismissed, still staring at the griffin with intense suspicion. "Why in Merlin's name would we want our home to be populated with those vicious, hissing beasts?"

Rose shrugged. "They look pretty."

"So do I."

Rose rolled her eyes and looked back into the paddock, but she made no move to get closer to it. "I never thought I'd get to see one."

Scorpius was silent for a while before he inclined his head. "It's got a splint," he noted.

Rose nodded. "That's why it's here. Hagrid's helping it recover before he sends it back on its way."

"Why didn't you do this, then?" Scorpius asked suddenly. "Instead of people, I mean."
She pondered. "I don't know."

A breeze wafted through the forest, stirring up the smell of leaves and moss, and the griffin curled tighter into itself against the cold. Rose too burrowed tighter into her coat.

"We'd best not disturb it anymore," she said quietly. "I just wanted to get a look."

Even with the wind picking up, the sun still danced through the trees, bathing the glade in a dusty glow, and the griffin's fur looked as if it were dappled with molten gold. Feeling the warmth on her face, she turned to comment on this to Scorpius but met eyes that were inexplicably already looking at her. His own face was cloaked in shadow.

"Yeah."

They had just stepped out from under the thick cover of trees when Rose immediately felt the soft splattering of wetness on her skin. Scorpius looked up too, into the sun-speckled, spring rain, and held up a hand to shield his eyes.

"Good timing, I guess," he offered. "Should be enough time for us to get back."

Rose shook her head. "Now you've done it."

He frowned at her wry expression. "What do you mean? Done what?"

Rose sighed and picked her way past him. "Never tempt fate, Malfoy. It's what makes the gods laugh."

"Weasley, I never took you for a superstitious and illogical—"

Rose silently held up a finger, and then with a clap of thunder, it promptly began to tank down around them. Scorpius, dumbstruck, turned to meet her smug expression, and without a word, they took off running back up the hill.

Rose pointed to an old weeping birch tree a little ways to their left and called, "We can wait under there until it lets up!"

The castle was still at least a few minutes away, even at a run - and with the amount of mud and sopping grass they couldn't really keep up their pace - and Scorpius conceded as he followed her and ducked underneath the drooping branches.

Once inside, he immediately shook out his hair, and Rose was taken aback by how human and well, un-Scorpius, the act was, and she much more covertly began to squeeze out the excess from her ponytail as well.

She scoped out a relatively dry area of ground and sat down, cross-legged, as she waited for Scorpius to do the same.

"What were you saying?" she asked innocently as she looked up at him. "Superstitious and—?"

"Illogical," Scorpius grumbled as he sat. "Or something."

While Rose had settled herself with her back resting against the trunk of the tree, Scorpius had chosen a spot opposite her, and he looked around at the leaves above them; while they warded off most of the incoming drops, a few still managed to evade the branches. He lowered his gaze back down, and something seemed to catch his eye. His brow furrowed, and he leaned forward, his
eyes on the trunk behind Rose.

Her breath immediately stilled, and she cast her eyes downwards, already knowing what had caught his attention.

"RW and NB," he read out loud, raising his eyebrows. His expression took on a scornful edge. "No heart?"

"Nate did that," Rose said, her cheeks warm despite the cold. "We were fifteen."

Scorpius met her eyes again but said nothing, and he had no right to judge her, he had no right to judge anything Rose had done or felt, not when she was out here carving her initials into trees, and he was inside doing God knew what with—

"So is it weird?" he asked instead.

"Is what weird?"

He shrugged. "Being out here with me instead of him."

Rose shook her head, and, feeling the pooling of water on her shoulder, reached up into her hair and undid her ponytail, letting the wet strands loosen and dry in the air. "I've been coming here for years by myself to, you know, read and think. Nate's never been back here." Even with her back to the trunk, she still knew exactly what it looked like. "I showed him this place anyhow, I figure I've got dibs on it."

Scorpius nodded slowly, his eyes still hovering behind her, and then with one last look, he turned his gaze on her instead. "I don't know how this keeps happening," he admitted, a thin smile flickering across his face.

Something alighted in Rose's chest, and she cleared her throat. "What?"

He hitched his shoulders up. "How we keep getting into situations like this. Hogsmeade a few weeks ago, Hogsmeade a few months ago even, and now this—"

"Hogsmeade was a Heads-sanctioned event," Rose pointed out. "We couldn't exactly not go."

"The club wasn't though," Scorpius considered evenly. "We did that all by ourselves."

Rose didn't know why he was saying these things, things that under their best judgment, they should let pass, because they were things that made them stop and think that maybe they shouldn't be here at all, and maybe that would be enough for them to leave. The thought twisted into her stomach like a knife.

"It's only a bit of rain," she said quietly. "We could-"

"It's like Noah's fucking Ark out there, Weasley," Scorpius interjected. "It would be stupid to leave."

Rose pulled in the side of her mouth, and then she nodded, interlacing her fingers. "Al and Gen will be wondering where I am."

"Did you not tell them where you were going?"

Rose shook her head. "No, I did. Al was the one who told me about the griffin in the first place."

"How'd he find out?"
"Shouldn't you know?" Rose said, a dry smile playing on her lips. "You know, since you guys are so close now and everything?"

Scorpius rolled his eyes. "What with boys and nails, we don't really have time to talk about anything else." He cracked a smirk - which Rose thought could've passed for a smile - but then his expression grew more serious, and he shrugged. "I think sometimes he needs some male company. You know, someone to go to with girl problems, for relationship advice."

Rose's eyes grew comically wide. "And he comes to you for relationship advice? Why, was Warren Beatty unavailable?"

"Albus cares more about being a good partner than I ever have," Scorpius admitted after allowing another smirk at her pass. "He worries over nothing."

Rose smiled. "They're a good match."

Scorpius nodded, and then he frowned a little before picking up a broken off twig from the ground and trailing it in the dirt. "Why do you think it worked out for them?"

Rose cocked her head at him. "...Because they're a good match?"

"No, I mean…" He paused and dug the stick in even more. "Why do you think it's so easy for some people to just...decide they want to be together, and they just do it."

He was still looking at the ground, and Rose blinked a few times, unsure of the answer he wanted. "I'm uh...I'm probably not the best person to ask," she said with an uneasy laugh. "I guess I don't have much experience with that kind of thing." She hesitated, hedging her bets, but then she realised she didn't have that much to lose. "Didn't you...you know, want to be with Liv?"

At the sound of her name, Scorpius finally looked up at her, and his eyes were as startling as ever. "I never wanted much of anything when it came to Liv," he said slowly, as if maybe he were just figuring that out himself. "It just made sense. We were already friends, and we were doing all that other stuff too, it complicated things more if we weren't together, in a weird sort of way."

A droplet that had collected on a strand of his hair gave way, and Rose's eyes couldn't help but follow it as it trailed down his collarbone, and she stared at that taut skin, beaded with water, and she suddenly wondered whether the rain would be warmer on his skin than it was in the sky.

She coughed abruptly, ignoring her ridiculous brain, hoping he hadn't noticed her wandering eyes. "It's funny how complicated the simple things get."

"Did you know?"

Rose's eyebrows raised. "About Al and Gen?"

"Yeah." He paused. "Only you looked a little taken aback that day when we got back from the Hospital Wing, and they were, you know…"

Her forehead creased and she drew her legs in, hugging her arms around them. "I guess I always had a sneaking suspicion when it came to Al. He's never been good at hiding his feelings. Gen was trickier."

"You mean better?"

Rose shook her head, her mouth puckered in thought. "I think Gen held back for my benefit, but I
don't think she felt the same way until last year at the earliest.” Her expression turned wry. "You've never been this interested in my friends before."

Scorpius held her gaze for a few moments before he shrugged, tossing the stick back onto the ground. "We've never been stranded out during a rainstorm before."

Rose blinked; she had forgotten that that was why they were here, that they weren't simply out here because they wanted to be. The silence in the air suddenly hung heavy.

"It's stopped raining," Scorpius said, and maybe that was why.

Rose scrambled to her feet and stepped back out into the open air. "There's a rainbow," she said, letting out a breath and pointing ahead of them. "And a blue sky."

Scorpius followed her out and stood next to her, sunlight glinting off every droplet in his hair. "We should probably head back then," he said. "You know, now that the rain has stopped."

"Yeah," Rose said after a moment. "We probably should."

He nodded and tightened the scarf around his neck before adjusting the collar of his coat. The movement caused the fabric to billow out slightly, and something caught Rose's attention.

"What?" he asked when he saw her staring.

She pointed to the pocket sewn into the inside of his coat. "You — you had your wand."

He followed her gaze and blinked. "Oh, right, I didn't even realise what with the rain and, you know, the tree and everything." He cleared his throat, turning his attention back to the sky. "Think we're tempting fate again by just standing here?"

Rose bit her lip to keep herself from smiling. "Probably."

As they walked back to the castle together, this time she couldn't keep the smile away as the rainbow arced in the sunlight above them and her fingers brushed over the wand sitting inconspicuously in the back pocket of her jeans.

Scorpius had had a good weekend. An uneventful Sunday, but… a more eventful than had been expected Saturday. He walked into Potions on Monday morning, his good mood persisting, and he swept a cursory gaze over the classroom, not looking for anyone in particular, just…looking.

She was the only redhead in the room, so it was only natural that he immediately noticed her at the front, and he pulled out a piece of parchment from his bag as he walked over to where she was sitting. Al saw him first and lifted a hand in greeting.

"Good weekend?" he asked.

His cousin had turned at Al's words, and she looked at him then, her expression unfathomable but still somehow expectant.

His lips twitched. "I'd say so."

She looked down, a tiny smile turning her lips up, and Scorpius suddenly thought that saying it had been a good weekend seemed like the understatement of the century.

He held out the parchment to her. "I've got one of the pages of your Defence assignment; it
probably got mixed up with my stuff when we were studying on Saturday.”

“Oh, I didn't even notice,” she said, taking it and putting it back into her bag. "Thanks."

From next to her, Genevieve raised a brow but said nothing. Al suddenly launched into an excited spiel about how the Holyhead Harpies' Quidditch Captain was under investigation for tampering with Bludgers before a match, with Rose chipping in about how the papers had gotten the details wrong. Genevieve’s eyes were narrowed as she watched Scorpius talk to her boyfriend and best friend, and it didn't bother him as such, but it wasn't exactly encouraging his good mood.

A throat cleared pointedly at the front of the room, and Scorpius looked up to see Professor Xavier staring at him with open interest, and he abruptly hurried to where Toby had just arrived and was setting up his things further back.

"Good morning, all," their Professor said as soon as Scorpius had sat down. "I trust you've had an enjoyable weekend. Like I said at the end of last class, we will be brewing the Amortentia potion today. As I also made a point of saying, Amortentia is an extremely dangerous potion, and any student seen storing any of it will receive immediate disciplinary action."

He flicked his wand at the board behind him, and letters began to carve themselves into the chalk. "You will have until eleven to finish. Instructions can be found on page forty-six of your textbooks."

Toby grinned archly, waggling his eyebrows. "Ready to fall in love with me?"

"I thought I already had," Scorpius answered dryly.

Xavier's voice cut through their conversation. "Sit down, Mr Rosenthal — and put those away. I have yet to assign partners and somehow you have managed to collect almost every ingredient besides the ones you actually require in the five seconds that have passed."

He flicked his wand again, and two columns of names started to form. Scorpius sought his out immediately, and then promptly said goodbye to his good mood.

She didn't look too pleased either, even when her friend gave her a consoling smile before rising up and taking her place next to a Ravenclaw near the back of the room.

Scorpius sighed, turning to Toby and dramatically declaring, "Promise you'll wait for me," before he went to sit in Rose Weasley's now unoccupied seat. His new partner kept her gaze on her textbook as he arrived, and he promptly remembered that the last real contact he'd had with Genevieve Chang was when he had catapulted a cushion straight into her face. He wondered if that would be a good ice breaker.

Before he had a chance to think on it further, she pushed out her chair and said, "Ingredients. I'll work my way down, you work your way up."

Scorpius knit his brow, not used to being ordered about in the Potions classroom and immediately deciding that he was not a fan of such a situation — but she had already set off, so he knit his brow some more and did the same.

When he reached the store cupboard, Rose was piling Ashwinder eggs into her arms while her partner headed back to their table with his hands full of peppermint.

"Careful, I hear Walker's almost as clumsy as he is stupid," Scorpius said in an undertone. "I wouldn't let him near any of the glass stuff if I were you."
Rose raised her eyebrows. "You know, that's almost like something a friend would say."

"Almost, Weasley," he replied before carrying the ingredients back to their work station. Gen was already looking at him as he walked over, and her eyes seemed to be perpetually narrowed, her mouth getting tighter by the second.

He sighed internally, and decided today he wasn't in the mood for an argument. "Listen, I know the two of us don't exactly like each other, but we don't have to in order to make a good potion. We just need to get along well enough to work properly and avoid mistakes. So how about it?"

She appraised him for a few seconds before she nodded slowly, closing her textbook. She angled her head towards Scorpius', and, after a moment, he pushed it over so that she could see it as well.

She wasn't a bad partner, he grudgingly admitted, especially when the frown on her face started to disappear when she realised that they were at least three stages in front of all the groups around them.

Then Steven Walker stumbled past him with a glass beaker and he automatically turned to issue a significant look at Rose, who pressed her lips together and shook her head at him, and when he turned back, that frown was back in full force.

"Something the matter?" he asked lightly after a few seconds, crushing moonstone into powder with a pestle.

"What do you want with her, Malfoy."

"What do I want with her?"

Gen kept cutting up the rose thorns, her eyes fixed on the movement of her knife. "You spend the best part of six years despising each other - taking any and all opportunities to show that - and then suddenly you're going out clubbing together and dancing during Christmas Balls, then you save her from a Bludger, and somehow you end up at the same table on Valentine's Day."

"You've simply stated a course of events. I don't know what you want me to do with that information."

"I want you to explain why those course of events are a course of events."

"This seems like a friend conversation. Why don't you have it with yours?"

The knife sliced down with a violent *crack* on her cutting board. "Because I trust Rose, and I wouldn't trust you further than I could throw you."

"I don't think you could throw me anywhere."

"Is it a game or something?" she asked waspishly, finally turning those steely eyes on him. "Do you have a bet on how long it takes before she sleeps with you? Is that it?"

"Jesus, Chang, it's not even ten o'clock."

"Or is it worse than that, huh? Do you actually like her?"

He paused here, for the slightest fraction of a second, before he weighed the crushed powder on a scale, even though he already knew it was the right amount. "If we hadn't been paired up in this class, when were you planning on asking me this?"
"I don't want to, but I'm taking that as a 'yes'."

"Then you don't know any more than you did before I came here."

She put her knife down, and frankly Scorpius' immediate thought was to grab it before she decided to abandon their civility and stab him with it. She checked the temperature of their cauldron and after consulting the textbook, poured in half of the prepped thorns. "I know you and Al are...friends now, or something, okay, I know he sees something in you that he doesn't hate."

She rotated the thermometer around so that she could see the numbered side. "I want to know if you're giving Rose reason to see the same thing."

"So what you really want to know is if I'm being nice to her. Sure Chang, we share notes and sing kum-bah-ya together, it's a fuckin' ball."

"You don't intimidate me, you know," she informed him. "Not in the slightest. Not with your permanent glares or the way you flaunt your knowledge about, or the way you speak like you know better."

"Come to think of it, what good did nice guys do for her anyway? Braithwaite, Wells — don't even get me started on Goldstein."

"Why do you care who Rose dated-"

"What do you want, Chang?" He turned on her, and unlike most, she didn't flinch. He didn't know if that impressed or annoyed him more. "You want things to go back to how they were before this year? Humour me, do you think it's possible that the peace between us might actually be doing the pair of us some good?"

"Is it a peace or a ceasefire?"

The cauldron bubbled next to them, and Scorpius immediately lifted it off the flames, cursing that if there was one conversation and one person that was going to make him fuck up his potion, it was this conversation and Genevieve Chang.

As the liquid simmered down and Scorpius saw that their concoction was unaffected, he put the pot back onto its stand.

"Are you and Albus going to stay together forever?" he finally asked.

She was visibly taken aback, her tone immediately defensive. "What?"


"I don't know," she admitted, and it was obvious that she didn't like that she was divulging this to him.

"Well then, I don't know either. But maybe you're hoping you will."

She said nothing, only continued to stare at him, and for once Scorpius thought she wasn't going to argue back. He dropped his gaze back to his textbook for a second and then added the rest of the rose thorns. Soon after, he felt the weight of her gaze leave him.

"It's ready," he said after a minute of stirring.

Gen leaned in and sniffed the potion. Her brow immediately furrowed a little as she drew back, her gaze dropping back to the cutting board on the table, and then she stepped back fully, nodding
at him.

Scorpius had brewed Amortentia before in order to test the effects of an antidote he had helped to curate, so he already knew what he would smell, but he bent down anyway. He froze, blinking furiously as his eyes glazed over and his blood iced in his veins. He recognised the scent instantly.

"Do my eyes deceive me?" came the voice that he recognised instantly.

Scorpius jerked up, his eyes settling on the test tube that the hand in front of him was holding.

"Am I handing in a potion before the Prodigal Son himself?"

Rose was grinning, but that grin faded when Scorpius failed to reply. "Malfoy?"

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see that Gen was looking at him suspiciously as well, but, unlike Rose, there was no element of concern on her face.

The panic that had gripped his heart loosened its hold, and he could breathe again. "Just making sure the potion's ready," he said, bringing out his wand and magicking a sample into their own test tube.

Rose scrutinised him for a second more before her gaze passed towards her friend and she gave her a smile before continuing towards Xavier's desk.

"You know, if it had been last year, she would've been the one lying in the Hospital Wing with broken bones," he said, his eyes never leaving the girl at the front of the room.

Gen was staring ahead too, but at his words she turned her head just enough to look at him. "There are worse things than broken bones," she said, her voice hard, and with that, she plucked the test tube out of his hand and walked it up to where her friend was standing.

Scorpius looked back down at the cauldron, his curiosity almost overwhelming him, but he didn't dare lean closer; and before he could change his mind, he waved his wand, and it disappeared.

Rose thought her day could've gone better.

Her second period Potions class had left her with an uncomfortable feeling simmering in the pit of her stomach, and nothing she had done since then had done anything to quell it. Even attempting to focus on her Defence assignment had done little to distract her; glancing at her poorly written and subsequently abandoned assignment on the floor, really, her attempt had backfired.

So Rose had turned instead to the package that her mother had sent to her a few weeks before, and now the table that she had been working on was littered with jigsaw pieces. It didn't stop her mind from running, but at least her future wasn't riding on how quickly she could put the jigsaw together.

Her head twitched when suddenly she heard John H. Wyatt's friendly voice from the other side of the portrait hole, and she inadvertently let out a slow exhale, twiddling with the pieces she was no longer looking at.

"We've been relieved," Scorpius announced as he walked in, his rucksack still on his shoulder.

Rose looked up and blinked. "Relieved how?"

Scorpius opened his bedroom door enough to drop his bag inside and closed it again.
"McGonagall caught me as I was leaving the library and said that she's giving our rounds to Ainsworth and Prescott as punishment for uh...abusing theirs."

Rose made a face. "How is giving them further opportunity to do that helpful?"

Scorpius shrugged. "The woman's got years of experience. Anyway, it means that we don't have to patrol in the freezing cold until midnight." He got a closer look at what she was doing and frowned. "I'm sure there's some spell that might allow you to reassemble that without all of this work."

Rose rolled her eyes and spied a piece in the box that she had been looking for. "This isn't a chore, Malfoy, it's a game. And you're more than welcome to help."

He pursed his lips but wandered over to where she was sitting, lowering himself down until he was seated opposite her.

"Um..." Rose bit her lip. "You might want to sit on this side. You know, so you're not looking at it upside down."

"Oh."

She scooted a little off to the side as he repositioned himself next to her, studying the table with his brow lined in thought. The table they were working on was small, so with both of their legs crossed, there was less than an inch separating them. Because of the lack of space.

"These pieces all look the same."

Rose followed his gaze to the cluster of grass pieces she had picked out earlier and stifled her grin. "Well, try them out, there's only one that'll fit." To illustrate her point, she fitted together two of the pieces and added a third to the board. "See?"

Scorpius stared at the pieces she had moved before he glanced at her. "Where did you even get one of these? I've never seen one in my life."

"Jigsaw?" Scorpius repeated, picking up the cover to inspect it properly. "Ages twelve and up?" he scoffed. "Hardly."

Rose chuckled. "It's more of a guideline."

"I'll say."

"Yes," Rose said, musingly. "My ten year old cousin Lucy very much enjoys doing them."

Scorpius looked up sharply, but upon seeing Rose's lips pressed together to hide her smile, he softened, and bent down to study the pieces again.

Rose caught him staring at her out of the corner of his eye as she handpicked pieces out of the box and fit them into their respective places. She bit her lip to stop herself from laughing, and kept working. A moment later, he reached for the box and shuffled around in it for a little while, picking out anything that looked vaguely blue.

"What're you doing?" she asked, unable to stop herself.

He met her gaze, and if she didn't know better, she'd say he looked slightly sheepish. "I thought
I'd pick out the blue ones, you know, to do the sky."

Rose reached out and tapped one of the pieces in his palm, ignoring the rush of heat down her fingertips and into her stomach as she brushed the skin at his wrist. "This piece is a part of the blue barn over there, and this one belongs to the puddles on the ground."

"Oh." He put them back into the box.

"But, um…” She tapped the remaining piece. "I've been looking for this one for ages."

Scorpius looked at the hole in the corner of the sky and after considering, slotted the piece in. "So how do you balance it? You know, your parents coming from two different backgrounds?"

Rose blinked, taken aback by the question. "My um…my dad didn't have much growing up; except company. He had a lot of siblings so they sort of relied on each other for entertainment. My mum was an only child so this sort of stuff is mainly from her."

Scorpius nodded slowly, not meeting her eyes as he continued to shuffle about in the box. "Did you go to Muggle school?"

"Well, I just called it 'school'," Rose said, smiling wryly. "But yes, I did."

"Me too."

She looked up in surprise, and Scorpius' lips twitched at her expression. "It's not the Pureblood way, I know, but my parents thought there were things I needed to learn that wouldn't be taught at Hogwarts."

"What age did you stop?"

Scorpius smirked. "There were incidents. My parents had to go in and wipe some memories. My father knew we were taking a risk by letting me go there but my mother insisted we try. I got a tutor when I was five."

Rose looked at the piece in her hand, one half of the bird that was sitting in Scorpius' palm. She indicated at it and hesitantly took it from his hand, joining it with hers. His eyes were glued to the board when she looked back at him.

She cleared her throat. "So is that where you learnt all those pop-culture references you know?"

"Haven't I already answered this?" he asked, raising an amused brow.

"Badly," she replied smartly.

Scorpius seemed to consider for a while before he wet his lips. "My parents didn't want me growing up closed minded. My father has always believed that ignorance played a big part in… everything that happened."

Rose tried to imagine Scorpius as a young boy, in a home with a television that played Muggle movies, in a home that had turned that young boy into who she saw now.

Almost like he had read her mind, Scorpius toyed with the piece he was holding and said, "But my parents weren't the ones who showed me musicals. Liv did."

Rose wondered how their conversations always managed to come back to her; somehow she had allowed herself to forget that Liv had been a significant part of Scorpius' life for far longer than
she had ever been. The forgotten discomfort in her stomach made itself known again.

"I never pegged Liv as the musical type," she confessed instead.

"She isn't really," Scorpius admitted, reaching over to place a piece by her elbow. "Her parents showed them to her, and once she showed them to me and Toby, Toby got completely stuck on them and ordered Liv to take us through her entire collection." He laughed, shaking his head, and Rose suddenly thought that he was the only real puzzle worth solving in this room.

"How do her parents — I mean, isn't she—"

"Muggle-born," Scorpius finished for her.

Rose's mouth fell open before she could stop herself, and she blinked several times in incomprehension.

"You didn't know?"

He didn't look judgemental, just surprised, and Rose bit her lip. "I um…I just assumed," she said truthfully.

Silence washed over them as Rose wracked her brain for something to follow it up, but her struggle was forgotten when she glanced at the clock on the wall. "Oh, god, I didn't realise how late it had gotten," she breathed.

Scorpius followed her gaze. "It's not that late," he said. "How early do you go to bed?"

She waved him off. "No, I um…I was working on our Defence essay earlier but uh…I wasn't getting anywhere with it so I put it down to give myself a break and now I—" She faltered and sighed. "I suppose it'll have to be a late night."

Scorpius studied her for a few long moments before he shrugged. "I've got Charms to do, I haven't started that one."

"That one's not due for another week," Rose said, frowning a little. "Right?"

"Right." Scorpius shrugged again. "But there's no time like the present."

When Rose failed to reply (or do much of anything), he got up and headed for his room, soon after re-emerging with his bag and Charms textbook.

Rose pointed at the table. "How're we—I mean, the table's sort of in use."

Scorpius laughed in disbelief, shaking his head at her. "Are you a witch or not?"

He murmured under his breath, and the puzzle and all of its pieces began to hover, Scorpius guiding them onto the desk at the other, colder end of the room. He murmured again, and the dying fire came back to life.

Scorpius was a solitary person by nature, so it was no surprise that his favourite time of day was past curfew, when the castle was quiet and dark, when he could loosen his tie ever so slightly and roll up his sleeves until they tucked about his elbows. He checked his watch; it was just past eleven. He didn't usually wander the castle so late, but tonight wasn't strictly a curriculum-approved kind of night, and he needed to minimise his chances of a run-in.
So when the sound of his footsteps were coupled with an intruding set coming from the adjacent corridor, he stiffened, his right hand immediately grasping the fabric of his tie as he made to right it.

The sight of her didn't surprise him. Scorpius, as established, was a solitary person by nature and her arrival had quite frankly ruined that for him, but when his gaze landed on her curious eyes, the tugging of a smile at her lips, he thought there was the smallest chance that solitude was overrated.

"Hey," she said, and with that little word something in his throat jumped, and made the calculated effort of clearing it before he replied. That didn't much surprise him either.

"Hey."

"What're you doing out here so late?" Rose asked once she had reached him.

Scorpius inclined his head at her. "Why, do you want to corroborate excuses? I'm going to take a gander that mine is better than yours."

"The bar is set pretty low." She waggled her Transfiguration textbook at him. "Go on, impress me."

Scorpius shrugged. "Just something a little off the radar."

Rose raised her eyebrows, crossing her arms. "Oh? And what, might I ask, is the Head Boy doing that is "a little off the radar"?"

Scorpius considered, and before he could change his mind, he took a step backwards. "Care to take a walk on the wild side?"

Rose rolled her eyes, but a shiver of thrill snaked down Scorpius' spine when she took a step forward to land where Scorpius had stood previously. "Didn't we recently establish that neither of us qualifies as being particularly wild?"

Scorpius continued to increase the distance between them, cocking his head at her as she pursed her lips.

"I would consider our little excursion on Saturday to be on the more exciting side of things."

"I know you would. I suppose if someone sees us we could say we're on Heads business."

"For all you know, we could be."

He waited for her to catch up before pivoting around and leading her down the corridor.

"So how'd you manage to evade Pince? Doesn't the woman skulk around the entire library during closing time?"

A twinkle entered Rose's eyes. "Evidently, my prowess around a library far exceeds your own. She has a blind spot."

"Might I ask where?"

"You might, but I won't tell you where it is."

Scorpius shrugged. "You wouldn't find me in any secluded corner of the library. You do realise you're probably studying on relatively unholy ground?" When she frowned at him, he nodded smugly.
She pulled a face. "Must you do that?"

He spread his hands. "Just giving you a health and safety warning. I'm sure it's a very… educational area."

Suddenly he felt an elbow in his side, and he blinked. Rose, having realised what she'd done, hugged her arms around her torso and slipped a hair away.

"Um…" Rose said they walked past the Transfiguration corridor and out towards the back end of the castle, "is this the part where you lure me outside and kill me?"

"You weren't very difficult to lure," Scorpius pointed out. "And no. Unfortunately, I don't have an alibi."

"Okay, where are we going?"

He looked back at her and smirked. "Scared, Weasley? I thought I was bringing along a Gryffindor."

"You're bringing along the Head Girl, and the Head Girl wants to know where we're going."

"Hush, you're ruining the surprise."

The greenhouses were almost pitch black from the outside, save for the little baubles of light dotted around the greenhouse closest to them that housed the nocturnal plants.

Rose snorted. "Don't tell me you dragged me along to watch you do last minute homework?"

Scorpius scoffed. "As if. Professor Longbottom asked me to help him with something."

They continued walking past the cluster of five greenhouses, and then Scorpius stopped at the door of the one positioned a ways away from the others, feeling around in his pocket for the key.

"I don't think I've ever been in Greenhouse Six before," Rose said as he slotted it into the keyhole.

He flashed his teeth. "Something a little off the radar."

He pushed open the door and moved aside the curtain that hung in the entrance, putting the key back into his pocket whilst dimly hearing her move past him into the glasshouse.

"Ooh." Rose bent to peer at the plant on the table. "It's so pretty, what's it-ahh!"

Scorpius, acting purely on instinct, had grabbed her around the waist from behind and tugged her towards him, holding her flush against his chest, and he figured it must've been the shock that stilled her thought processes, because she didn't push him away.

They stood there in silence, the twin intakes and exhales of air the only noise in the room before Scorpius let out a long breath. "Don't touch that, Weasley. It may look pretty but it'll swallow you whole."

Rose nodded slowly, the movement causing her ponytail to brush at Scorpius' collarbone. "No touching, got it."

Her words hung in the air between them, and Scorpius' arms snapped to his sides at the exact moment Rose propelled herself hastily forward. She drew a hand through her ponytail before gesturing vaguely at the rest of the greenhouse. "I'll uh...I'll stick behind you."
Scorpius mutely nodded and twisted sideways to edge past her, heading towards the end of the room, seemingly empty besides a black screen that stood from floor to ceiling. He spared a glance at Rose out of the corner of his eye as he rolled the partition out of the way, revealing a modestly-sized tank draped in a black fabric.

Rose frowned at it, and shot him a questioning look.

"It disturbs the other plants," Scorpius explained.

"What disturbs…them-"

Scorpius had reached out and pulled off the fabric, and Rose wordlessly moved forward towards the glowing tank and lowered herself down until she was eye-level with it. Her eyes were wide, and Scorpius knew why. He leaned over the tank, bringing his wand out of his pocket and moving it in a figure-of-eight above it, and as the water agitated, the faint light grew until it was positively beaming. Rose's mouth parted in wonder, her face bathed in a soft, blue, sparkling light, and suddenly Scorpius didn't know where to look.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"The Muggles call it bioluminescence," Scorpius replied, and he coughed when his voice came out softer than he'd expected. Rose didn't seem to notice; she'd brought up a finger to rest against the tank, as if hoping somehow she could touch it through the glass.

"What are they?"

Scorpius rubbed his hand against his upper arm, feeling suddenly strange standing behind her. He lowered himself down until they were level, gauging her reaction as he answered, "The proper term for them is dinoflagellates, but most people recognise them as-"

"Plankton," Rose said.

"You remember your Herbology," Scorpius said, impressed.

"It's incredible," she breathed. "This…this is real magic."

Scorpius felt the corner of his lips twitch. "You haven't seen anything yet."

He waved his wand again, and passed it in an arc above them, and suddenly the entire greenhouse was flooded in that bright, dazzling blue. Rose let out a delighted laugh as she watched each little plankton encased in a bubble of water create their own ball of light in every space of the room, and God, Scorpius could've bottled the sound. She blew very softly on one, and smiled as it lightly bumped into the one next to it before re-settling.

Scorpius had never seen her so relaxed in his presence, and he wracked his brain for any other way he could ensure that that smile returned.

Her face suddenly came into focus, and her questioning look made him realise she had asked him something.

His brow creased. "Sorry, what?"

Rose cracked a grin. "I guess you never get used to it, huh?"

The laugh he forced out sounded natural enough, and Rose tilted her head at the other side of the
room. "Anyways, I thought you said they disturb the other plants."

Her question jolted Scorpius back into reality, and he realised he didn't quite want to be back there. "They can survive an hour or so, don't worry."

Rose was still playing with the plankton, curling and twisting her fingers so that the little bubbles drifted against her skin. "What exactly does Professor Longbottom want you to do with these?"

"Uh...research, basically," Scorpius said, scratching his head, and he raised his hand to find himself copying her movements. "Bioluminescence occurs due to a chemical reaction produced by these organisms. Professor Longbottom wants to find out exactly what that chemical is, and how we can recreate it."

"For?"

"Among other things, it can produce neurotoxins that can be used as a relaxant for some of the more...over-zealous plants."

"Like the ones that tried to eat us?" Rose asked wryly.

"Like those ones," Scorpius confirmed.

He watched as a little bubble bumped into Rose's index finger, and she gasped and pulled her hand back as she watched it right itself.

"You can touch it," Scorpius assured her.

She met his eyes, and then looked up at the plankton again, but her hand was still curled into a fist, hesitant at her side.

Without quite realising he was doing it, Scorpius reached out and cupped one of the bubbles, closing the few steps between them and placing it into her hand. The warmth of her palm grazed his, and then his mind began to whir. What the fuck are you doing? he thought frantically. The first time was an accident, but this is...definitely not that.

He stepped away hastily, crossing his arms and praying that they would just fucking stay there, and it occurred to him that it was happening again, this thing between them was happening again. And then it occurred to him that maybe these things were happening to them because they allowed them to, because in some ways, they were actively seeking them out.

"Hey, Malfoy?"

The sound of his name on her lips reminded him that despite what was running through his mind, they weren't friends; he had no idea what they were. But even so, there was something about it that sounded different, something that sent insufferable wings of hope beating unrepentantly against his chest.

"Yeah?"

"Thanks for luring me outside."

Scorpius realised that he might not know where he stood with Rose Weasley — hell, he might never know — but right now, in the middle of the night in Greenhouse Six watching as the world swam lazily around them, he didn't care.

"You're welcome."
It was Friday, and Scorpius had forgotten about the fireworks.

"It's tonight?" he had asked that morning at breakfast. "Are you sure?"

"It's my favourite day of the year." Toby had been distraught. "It happens every year. Today. My favourite day. Which is today."

It was ironic, then, that Scorpius sat in the Slytherin Common Room seven minutes before the fireworks were due to start, tapping his leg impatiently when Toby still hadn't appeared. The living area had rapidly emptied out ten minutes before as people scrambled to get a good view to watch the display.

"For fuck's sake, Toby," he muttered, checking his watch again.

Just as he wondered if Toby had forgotten that they were supposed to meet - which wouldn't be entirely uncharacteristic of him - and considered getting up to go and find him, he heard footsteps descending down the girls' staircase.

Liv was holding a piece of parchment, still scanning it as she came down, so she didn't see Scorpius until she approached the sofa he was sitting on.

"Hey," she said, obviously surprised, lowering her arm so the paper hung at waist-height. "What are you still doing here?"

"Waiting for Toby," he replied after he'd raised a hand in greeting. "Though I'm not completely convinced he's going to show."

"Fireworks Night is his favourite night," Liv smirked. "He'll show."

Scorpius allowed a good-natured eye-roll and inclined his head at the parchment. "Posting a letter?"

Liv looked down at it before she nodded. "Yeah. I'm um... sending it to my aunt." She rolled it up, tucking it into her robes. She paused. "I'm asking her if I can stay at hers over the summer. You know, if everything goes well."

She wore the same closed off expression she always wore when she talked about her family - when she had to, she didn't do it often - so, as usual, Scorpius didn't ask her to elaborate.

Instead, he gave her what he hoped looked like a reassuring expression. "See you outside, then?"

She smiled, but it didn't quite reach her eyes. "Can't miss the fireworks."

She waved at him and slipped away, leaving Scorpius staring at the portrait hole long after she had disappeared from sight.

"Okay, how does this sound?" Gen cleared her throat. "You probably know Al - I put Albus Potter in brackets, you know, in case they forgot - and we've been friends for ages, but he's my boyfriend now." She pursed her lips, poising her quill. "Okay, wait, maybe —" She stepped towards the wall next to them, bracing her parchment against it. "We're — together — now. That's less official-sounding."

"You put 'Albus Potter' in brackets?" Rose repeated, laughing.
Gen made a face. "That's all you took from that? Come on, Rose, this is important. I need your literary skills."

"You're writing to your parents, not the Minister. Calm down."

"No, it's just—" Gen sighed. "I've been telling them for years that I'd never date Al and I never saw him in that way, and now out of the blue I have to tell them that we're together."

"And you put 'Albus Potter' in brackets?"

"You are no help."

Rose rolled her eyes, still snorting. "Okay, fine, how about, 'I'm dating Al. We'll see how it goes'."

"Um, no, Rose, I want my parents to think I'm happy about this." She paused, still braced against the wall, angling her head just enough to see Rose. "Are you happy?"

Her sudden shift in tone made Rose blink.

"About you and Al? Of course I am."

"No." Gen shifted to look at her friend properly. "As in, are you happy right now?"

"Right now right now?"

"Be serious."

Rose thought back to the past week, of griffins and greenhouses and sun-speckled rain and felt her lips turn up as warmth spread across her cheeks. "Yeah, I am. She blinked and then suddenly knit her brow. "Why do you ask?"

Gen scrutinised her for a long few moments before her gaze lightened and she shrugged, tucking her finished letter back into her robes. "Just doing my best friend-ly duties. Come on, we don't wanna miss the start."

"Does this have anything to do with a certain Potions class we had this week?"

Gen halted in her tracks for a second before she continued walking. "You said it, not me."

"So it is?" Rose caught up to her, touching a hand to her shoulder. "Why, what happened?"

"Nothing."

"Gen."

Her best friend took out her wand from her robes and twiddled it in her hands. Rose eyed the movement suspiciously. After a moment, Gen pressed her lips together and suddenly looked a little sheepish. "Okay, don't be mad."

"No promises."

They reached the spiral staircase leading up to the Owlery and began to climb.

"This thing with Malfoy, Rose—"

"What thing?"
"Well, that's what I tried to get out of him."

Rose crossed her arms, but her eyes were brimming with eagerness, and something else that Gen didn't want to place.

"I asked him what he wanted with you, why he took that Bludger for you, why the two of you were at Hogsmeade together."

"You know that was for Heads business."

Gen looked her straight in the eyes. "I didn't mean that time."

Rose's eyes widened guiltily as Gen's words sunk in, and the arms she had crossed suddenly wound protectively around her torso. "Gen-"

"I'm not mad, Rose, I promise." The familiar smell hit them as soon as they entered the Owlery and Gen took out the envelope and parchment she had stashed in her robes. "I'm just worried about you."

As Gen whistled for Navajo, Rose folded the parchment and placed it into the envelope. "Why didn't you just ask me?"

"Because I knew you'd tell me everything I wanted to know."

"And that's why you didn't ask me?"

Navajo nipped at Gen's fingers before he took off into the black expanse of sky, one that would soon be filled with bright, explosive lights, but Rose was in no hurry.

"Not telling is just as useful," Gen said.

There was movement behind them, and a few seconds later another owl took off. The two of them watched it as it departed as Navajo had before Gen cleared her throat. "Listen, I didn't ask you because I don't need you to tell me what's going on. But I need to know that you know what you're getting yourself into."

As they turned away from the glassless windows, the dim jumble of noise just discernible in the background began to turn into coherent speakers as people began to assemble below them.

Rose said nothing until they reached the base of the stairs. When she spoke, her voice was tentative. "Did you smell the potion?"

Gen blinked. "Of course I did. Didn't you?"

After a moment, Rose shook her head. "No."

It was apparent after a few seconds of protracted silence that Gen wasn't going to ask her why, and Rose suddenly understood what Gen had meant about the usefulness of unshared information. She felt the heavy weight of something akin to guilt, and she sighed. "I was going to tell you, you know. I just…I don't know, I guess I don't know what I was waiting for." Something occurred to her and she looked up at her friend. "Al knows too?"

Gen made an apologetic face and nodded. "He was there. Although I wouldn't be surprised if Malfoy's already told Al. You know how they've been—" Gen shuddered. "Hanging out."

Rose finally cracked a grin at her friend's expression and leant into her side. "He's not bad, you
"What made you change your mind? The whole risking-his-life-for-you thing?"

Rose elbowed her lightly. "It wasn't just that. We...we talk about things. Important things." When Gen raised her eyebrows at her she shrugged. "I think I might be getting to know him."

"He actually tells you stuff? Like, personal stuff?"

Rose nodded. "I mean, he's told me about his family and...and all that stuff about Liv, the things that happened between them."

"And you? Is he getting to know you?"

She remembered back to before Christmas, when she had been with Christian and what Scorpius had said about him then. It felt different now. "It's only fair that I reciprocate a little, don't you think? He—" She stopped here, hesitant to say it out loud, maybe because she didn't want to know what Gen thought about it, maybe because saying it out loud felt a little like making it true. "I think there's a part of him that genuinely wants to know why I was with Nate and Christian and...you know, Conrad."

There was a part of her that wanted to know the same thing.

"Listen, Rose, if that party a few weeks ago is anything to go by, you're still friends with Nate. And you know your break up with Christian was completely harmless." Her expression turned grave. "Malfoy isn't like that. He's even told you about him and Liv. He's not a relationship kind of guy."

"There's something else you should know."

Rose frowned. "What?"

"Al was pretty hammered the night of the party, but he told me that when he was helping to put Malfoy to bed, Malfoy waited until Liv had gone to the bathroom and told him about how he thought he saw you kiss Nate, and that he didn't want to see you back with him." Gen's voice was measured, careful, and Rose's heart pounding as she waited for her to continue. "He said people do stupid things when they're drunk, but if you had kissed Nate, you would've been way stupider than him." She bit her lip. "I didn't know if I should tell you. You know, drunk speak and all that."

"And all that," Rose repeated softly, her eyes vacant.
"I mean, I doubt you were stupider than him that night given that he hooked up with Liv. I mean, of all people, why would you choose the ex that cheated on you—"

The sound of footsteps suddenly exploded from the adjacent corridor, and Liv stormed into view, her face flushed with anger and her fingers gripping the parchment in her fingers so tightly she was practically ripping into it.

Rose felt her heart drop through her stomach, and Gen stiffened next to her, and she opened her mouth to speak, though she had no idea what she was about to say—

"Don't fucking try it, Rose," Liv snarled. "What right — what fucking right do the two of you think you have talking about me and Scorpius? Do you think I went around talking shit about you and Braithwaite when you guys dated, or whatever the fuck you and Potter think the two of you are doing?" She barrelled on without waiting for an answer. "No, I kept my damn nose out of your business! What, you think just because you and Scorpius hang out sometimes means that you suddenly have any right to anything — anything — that went on between me and him? You understand absolutely NOTHING about us."

Liv's eyes were dark, her frame taut with rage, but even then, Rose could see that in her eyes, simmering behind all of that anger and radiating off her in tidal waves, was raw, searing hurt. And Rose knew then that the apathy that Scorpius had described to her about their relationship did not extend to Liv. The girl that was stood in front of her was what was left of the mess that Scorpius had made, and she fleetingly wondered if one day someone would say the same thing about her.

"Liv, I—"

"And you know what? I was rooting for the two of you to be friends, fuck, to just get along!" Liv shook her head, a sardonic smile twisting across her face. "And you couldn't even extend the same courtesy to me."

"I kept your secret, Liv," Rose said quietly. She felt Gen's head twitch in her direction.

"And that makes you so fucking wonderful, does it?"

Rose could see the whites of Liv's knuckles as she continued to crush the parchment in her hands. "I bet you couldn't wait to tell Scorpius about me and Horatio, couldn't you? Because Rose Weasley is so perfect that she would never cheat on her perfect boyfriend."

"You're right, I would never-"

"With her perfect grades and her perfect family and her perfect Head Girl title-"

Gen's words came out through gritted teeth. "Liv, you're taking out your anger on everyone so you don't have to shoulder the blame yourself. You got yourself into this situation, and it's no one's fault but your-"

"Fuck you, Chang," Liv whirled on her, eyes flashing dangerously. "Your own best friend didn't trust you enough to tell you about her precious Valentine's Day date until today, what the fuck do you think you know about any of this?"

Gen furiously opened her mouth to retort but Rose held out a hand to stop her.

"Is that why you're mad?" she asked disbelievingly, stepping forward. "Because Malfoy and I ate lunch together? You're going to run over here screaming at me because you think I'm moving in on your ex-boyfriend?"
"Don't you fucking talk down to me, Rose. I couldn't give two shits if you actually moved in with Scorpius. But if you don't have the decency to admit that it was you who started this with your bitching and butting into me and Scorpius' business acting like you have any right at all—" She broke off suddenly, and when she spoke again, her voice was quiet and far more menacing than it had been before. "Did you ever consider that you only ever got Scorpius' account of things? Did you even think for one second that you might not be getting the full story and God forbid I'm not the only one in the wrong here?"

"What you did-

"What I did is none of your business! Whatever that was, whatever decisions I made, however they affected him they didn't fucking affect you, Rose! You think that my relationship with Scorpius is some assignment that you can stick your stupid brain into and come out with an O, well, it isn't!"

"I wasn't aware the two of you had business anymore," Rose snapped before she could think about it.

Liv halted, and some realisation seemed to hit her. She tilted her head at Rose, her eyes slowly narrowing as the gears clicked into place. "You're trying to use your relationship with Scorpius as leverage. He's gotten under your fucking skin, Weasley, hasn't he?" She suddenly cackled, and her previously darkened eyes were now alight with triumph. "And guess what?! He still chose me! His fucking cheating girlfriend!"

She stepped closer, breathless. "Who chose you, Rose? Who fucking chose you."

Rose thought of a thousand slights, but for some reason, all of them included Scorpius Malfoy, each and every single one, and she couldn't say any of them, not when Liv was here saying...saying things that, by all accounts, were-

Instead, she let the expression drop from her face. "Why don't you go and find Horatio? You're good at that."

She turned away, the lump still knotted so tight in her throat that she didn't dare breathe, and walked down the corridor away from the Owlery, her and Gen's footsteps the only noise in the now quiet hallway.

She could still hear the fireworks from the Astronomy Tower.

She had expected it anyway, but it didn't make things any easier when she was up here alone, and they were all down there, laughing and shouting as the fireworks lit up the night. She had told Gen to go on, she didn't feel like being around people, and anyway, she didn't want to bring down the mood, not when Al had been looking forward to this all week.

She wondered if Liv was down there too, wondered if she was with Toby and…well, she made a point of not thinking his name.

He's gotten under your fucking skin, Weasley, Liv's voice echoed, scornful and victorious. Rose pushed it deep down, away for another time - or maybe never - and she made her way towards the outer edge of the tower, where there were always blankets set up for the Astronomy students.

Rose knew that being alone with only thoughts like these for company wasn't doing her any good, but she'd rather this than be with anyone else, because then she'd have to tell them what was wrong, and at the moment, she didn't think she wanted to know that.
The sky suddenly shattered into a waterfall of deep blue and red, and there were more cheers from downstairs. She thought back to the fireworks last year, when she had stood with Al and Gen and Nate, and all that had mattered then was Nate and how warm his hand felt in hers.

Nate. Nate had chosen her.

Suddenly, the door handle began to turn, and Rose's panicked brain immediately thought that it was him, that somehow Liv had told him about what had happened and he had for some reason left the fireworks and come to find her, that he'd see her here and say that Liv was wrong, she was wrong about everything—

The door swung open, and Rose thought then that the gods had a sick sense of humour—

Christian stared at her, confusion etched into his face as she sat wrapped in a blanket with her chin on her knees, eyes dry but empty and all alone.

"Rose?"

She raised an arm, summoning a smile to her face. "Hey, Christian."

"What are you doing here? Do you not like fireworks?"

She tried for a laugh, but it was shakier than she expected, and that just made it all worse. "I guess I wasn't really feeling it tonight." She forced more conviction into her voice when she spoke again. "What are you doing here?"

Still perplexed, Christian pointed to the telescope right next to her - God, she was probably nestled in the blanket he had meant to use - and shrugged semi-apologetically. "Mapping the stars for an assignment. I have to mark their positions every three hours."

"Oh. That sounds fun."

He studied her properly, his gaze softening. After a few seconds of hesitation, he started closing the distance between them.

"No, Christian—" Rose tried to wave him away. "Don't worry, I'm totally fine, I'm just really tired, you know, you go, enjoy the fireworks—"

But he sat down anyway, close enough that they were shoulder to shoulder, but far enough that they didn't touch.

"You…you look like you could use a friend."

They sat there in silence, even though Rose remembered that Christian never could stay quiet for long, watching as luminescent shards of light sliced through the canvas of stars.

*Christian chose me,* she thought dimly. *He's choosing me.*
A/N:

I'm sorry that this chapter took so fucking long to post. I am inexcusable, and I don't deserve your patience ❤️. That being said, I'm down to my last few weeks of uni, so I'm hoping I can churn out some chapters relatively quickly over the summer. To compensate for this terrible wait, I thought I'd add some extra trivia: Liv's a really difficult character to write, but if you want a little look inside her head, listen to Lea Michele and Ashley Tisdale's cover of Dancing On My Own. Chapter titles come from Fall Out Boy's This Ain't A Scene, It's An Arms Race and Third Eye Blind's Faster.

Omg also, something a little random: someone sent me this question and I thought it was quite hilarious and worth sharing with you guys (plus, as always, it gives you some more facets to Rose and Scorpius' characterisations in my mind):

Q: What would Rose and Scorpius do if they saw a discarded piece of trash on the ground? So random lol

A: Haha yes, random BUT you can gauge many a character trait from one's propensity to deal with trash, so hats off to you for sheer creativity! With Rose, it would be more of a tiny sigh but automatic reach down to pick it up and walk it over to the nearest bin, or walk with it until a bin appeared. She wouldn't make a big deal out of it; she wouldn't even pause the conversation. And then you have Scor. Scor would definitely call attention to it, and make a big fuss over littering and the general lack of cleanliness and which shithead thinks he's too good to just fucking throw his own garbage away, but he'd definitely pick it up and make a scene out of stomping around to find a bin and disposing of it.

On the subject, I've been sent some questions along similar lines (i.e. character-related questions), and they're always super fun to answer, so if you have any, feel free to leave them as reviews/messages, and - as long as they're not spoiler-y - maybe I can add some to the end notes of my chapters!
"In truth, if the last six years had been any indication, sharing the Head position with Malfoy was going to be awful; living with him insufferable. Then again, although he was as caustic as ever, nothing outrageous had happened between the two yet. True, it was only Wednesday, but for them, it was almost a record." My best attempts to write a believable high school fic. Enjoy!

Scorpius rubbed tiredly at his eyes as they adjusted to the soft rays of light pouring in from his window.

He couldn't quite put his finger on it, but he had the distinct feeling that he'd woken up halfway through a dream. He blinked slowly, automatically tightening his hold around the duvet engulfing him, its warmth spreading around his body like his blood had been heated. And yet, it was as if the warmth was within him; he felt warm and good and...well, confused. Confused about a dream he was sure he'd had that he could feel but not remember — it was on the tip of his tongue, like a flint that continued to spark but refused to catch flame.

He didn't often wake before his alarm, and he turned in his bed to check the time, his eyes still having trouble focusing—

At least until they fell upon the numbers blinking red on his clock's interface.

In seconds, Scorpius had leapt out of bed, that warm, fuzzy, unexplainable feeling smoked out and replaced by a sheer panic that had wormed its way past his grogginess with impressive speed and force.

He had never slept through an alarm in his life.

He scrambled out of his pyjamas and into his uniform, hopping ungracefully into his bathroom as he tore a brush through his hair and then over his teeth, splashing his face with cold water for good measure. After towelling off any damp skin, he packed up his books and wand from where they were set on the table and reached urgently for his socks and shoes, darting a quick look in the mirror before he grabbed his now packed bag and left his room.

Once in the living area, he stopped short in surprise.
"What the fuck are you doing here?"

Toby raised a finger without looking up and continued to scribble on his parchment. "Hang on, just finishing this up now, one sec — aaaand, done!" He brandished his completed assignment at Scorpius before rolling it up and standing. "You didn't come down to breakfast, so I came up to look for you and brought you some food," he explained. "Your lights were still off so I figured I'd wait and see if you'd come out, I was just about to come and wake you actually, we do have to go rather soon, oh oops, make that rather now—"

Scorpius' brain ached, and he shut his eyes, wondering whether if he willed it hard enough he could be back in that bed feeling warm and good and left alone to figure out just why he was feeling that way—

His stomach growled, another reminder that that lovely wish of his was merely a wish, and he took the muffin and banana Toby was offering to him, biting into the muffin instantly.

"Thanks," he said, voice muffled. "We'd better head down."

Toby continued to speak at him as they descended towards the ground floor, Scorpius occasionally grunting in order to convey a sense of engagement, though in reality the sudden lack of urgency he was feeling meant that his brain had instinctively wandered back to what it was doing earlier. He didn't know why he couldn't help but grapple with this, but there was something about it that felt important, important enough that his body had reacted to it - was still reacting to it if the incessant tugging at his stomach was any indication.

They turned the corner into the Transfiguration classroom, and McGonagall briefly looked up from her writing to nod at them by way of a greeting as they passed by, and then Toby gasped in disgusted anger before he hissed, "Those two fuckers have stolen our seats, hang on, I'll make them move—"

"Miss Weasley, may I see you for a moment?"

The girl in question's head angled up from her desk, raising directly into the thin line of Scorpius' awareness, and she caught his eye for a brief second before she answered, "Yes, Professor."

And suddenly, that voice incinerated that heavy, warping cloak of disorientation, violently dissipating his scrambled haze of amnesia, and Scorpius' brain grasped at a memory, latched onto it, and pulled.

"Fuck."

"I am hoping that it has not escaped your attention that we are approaching the end of the school term, wherein your two weeks of Easter break will be your last opportunity to revise for your upcoming N.E.W.T.s unimpeded by class attendance."

McGonagall's eyes swept over the quiet classroom, which, after a particularly gruelling session, looked impressively alert. "I feel I don't need to impress upon you all how important it is at this stage to remain on top of your learning so as to avoid a mad scramble at the last minute." She paused, her tone shifting. "That being said, an opportunity to give yourselves a leg up has arisen. Yesterday evening, Professor Flitwick alerted myself and the rest of the staff to the behaviour of an adolescent Murtlap that had been left unattended in the 2B Charms classroom overnight. We believe it has been bewitched from a harmless, genial animal into a violent and aggressive menace. Unfortunately, none of the usual spells have worked." Her eyes flicked towards where Rose and Al were seated in the front row. "It may instead have ingested something that is causing its erratic
behaviour. Perhaps the work of the Weasley shop recently opened in Hogsmeade."

Rose and Al shared a glance, the latter shrugging at his cousin and then at their professor.

McGonagall looked a touch amused. "Unfortunate. Regardless," she continued, "because nobody has admitted to bewitching it, the first person to revert its temperament back to normal will be granted a grade raise on the essay you have just handed in yesterday, or if that is unnecessary, a grade raise on their lowest assignment."

While she had been speaking, a low hum had begun to fill the classroom; McGonagall was an infamously strict teacher, and top grades were hard to come by. Rose's fingers began to drum on the desktop in anticipation.

Al gave a quiet groan from beside her. "Well, it's alright for some," he whispered gruffly. "I'll probably end up wasting the time on this extra credit that I could've used on my other assignments."

"Don't do it then," Rose whispered back absentmindedly, her sights already set on the Charms book that was housed by the library's Restricted Section. It was times like these when her friendship with the ill-humoured librarian came into good use.

"Nah, McGonagall gave me a P on my History of Human Transfiguration essay."

"You thought it was *Humane* Transfiguration until, like, thirty minutes before the class," Rose pointed out dryly. "I think you got off lightly."

Al grunted. "Evidently, I need all the help I can get."

McGonagall cleared her throat, and silence fell over the classroom again. "The Charms classroom will stay open one extra hour in the evening so that you all may maximise your chances of finding a solution. You may alert me if and when you have been successful. Class dismissed."

Rose entered the library, slightly breathless from her speed walk up from the Great Hall. She had scarfed down her lunch and decided to take advantage of the emptiness of the library at meal times in order to grab the book she wanted from the Restricted Section; Madam Pince's mood more than often correlated directly and inversely with the amount of people in the library, though more than that, Rose wanted to catch her before her quota of patience for the day had been expended.

When she didn't immediately find the librarian policing at the front as she usually did, Rose went on a little hunt around the aisles and bookshelves, pricking her ears for that low voice usually spoken as an irritated hiss, but she heard nothing of the sort.

With little else to do but wait, she made her way over to the Restricted Section, figuring she might as well stand by the rope until she could identify where the librarian was. But as she turned the corner, she immediately saw the back of a very familiar, very platinum head of hair already standing in her intended spot, leaning over the red oak checkout desk.

By nature of the thin aisle before the library widened out again, it was hard not to look at him as she approached, and she couldn't help but notice that not everyone could pull off the school's slacks, but when someone could, they *really* could—

She shook her head firmly, appalled by his efforts to thwart her — or, er, her own efforts to thwart herself - or, a team effort to - whatever, it was unimportant. If anything, it only fuelled her more.

"What are you-" she began saying, far more aggressively than she had anticipated, but as she got
crown, her line of vision changed, and the librarian's grey nest of hair surfaced from Scorpius' right shoulder. "Madam Pince!" she exclaimed, surprised. "What—what are you-"

Scorpius' head had pricked up at the sound of her voice, and he took his time turning to face her, flashing his teeth.

"Ah, Weasley, what kept you? We were wondering where you'd been."

"We?" Rose echoed in a near strangled voice.

"Certainly," the librarian chimed in, coming fully into view now, but something was off about her face, something extremely disconcerting. "Mr Malfoy expressed that he expected you sooner."

It took Rose a second to realise that the 'something' that was off about her face was that she appeared to be…smiling.

"Madam Pince," Rose whispered, horrified. "I—I-" As she got closer, her eyes zeroed in on the book resting on the checkout table, half its title hidden under Scorpius' hand, but Rose knew exactly what it said anyway: *Devious Charms and their Many Devious Uses*.

"Planning on checking out a book?" Scorpius asked, his eyes glinting. "Any of them catch your eye?"

"Yes, in fact," she said distractedly, still staring at it, "there was one in particular—"

"I'm afraid, Miss Weasley, that we only stock the one copy," Madam Pince said, and although she looked genuinely remorseful by her standards, her betrayal was far too fresh for it to matter. "However, I give you full permission to use it once Mr Malfoy has finished with it."

Rose felt her mouth form a forced smile. "Thank you. Well, if you'll excuse me, I need to go to the Charms section."

She turned on her heel and made her way back through the library until she had reached the shelves housing the Charms textbooks, and she pulled one out at random before she sat herself down at her usual table.

No sooner than she had stooped down to extract a quill and parchment from her bag, a thick black book thumped down in front of her, filling her field of vision. Already grimacing, she raised her head up to see its owner grinning down at her.

"Couldn't find the book you wanted?"

Rose swiped the book aside, grounding her elbows on the table and leaning up towards him. "Since when are you and Madam Pince friends?" she demanded. "She only has the tolerance level for one student friend, and that spot has already been taken."

"That seems a rather harsh way to talk about one's friend, Weasley," Scorpius tutted. "I think you would have found - had you known her better - that Irma can be extremely tolerant."

"You were flirting with her."

"Don't be ridiculous," Scorpius scoffed, lifting the strap of his satchel from around his body and dropping the bag onto the table. "I think it's fair to say that her eyes are looking particularly blue today."

"You don't even like blue."
"Well, yes, clearly I only mentioned that once I had hoodwinked the book from her. Besides, that's somewhat decisive, wouldn't you say?"

Rose raised an eyebrow as she said flatly, "I thought I gave a pretty verbatim account."

Scorpius paused, and he allowed a little smirk before he slipped a hand under the cross rail of the chair next to Rose, pulled it out, and swiftly lowered himself down. "Not to question your proficiency at Charms, Weasley, I mean, we all know how far you've got Flitwick up your ass, but I am curious to know how a Charms book for marine and cold-blooded creatures is going to help with this very land-based, very warm-blooded one in the Charms classroom."

Rose darted a look at the title of the book she had carelessly picked out. "Creatively."

"Mm-hmm." Scorpius crooked an amused brow at her before he opened up his book to the contents page. He ran his finger down until he found the page he needed and immediately flipped to it. Rose kept her eyes occupied by studying her own book.

She counted a silent thirty seconds in her head before, without taking his eyes off the page, her desk partner drawled, "Weasley, if you're going to return that, perhaps you'd better do so sooner rather than later."

Flicking her eyes briefly in his direction, Rose deliberated for a long moment before she closed her book and then pushed her chair back, purposefully leaving the book on the table. "You just reminded me, actually. There's a…companion volume that I forgot to get. Better go before someone grabs it."

As she walked away, she chanced a look back to where she could see Scorpius, still reading his book, his grin visible underneath the hand cupping his chin. What little breath she had left her, and she hastily turned back around.

She picked out a few books she thought she could at least get some information from; she wasn't entirely hopeful, but she couldn't go back empty-handed.

Scorpius regarded the books she had dropped onto the table before turning back to his own. "Merlin, how many books did this guy write?"

Rose paused. "Several."

He shook his head a little, letting out an amused exhale, and paused to write something on the parchment he had evidently gotten out of his bag while she had been gone.

Rose turned the page she was reading on induced temperament alteration, but when her gaze travelled upwards, a word from Scorpius' book caught her eye - damn, she needed that section on Feral Charms - and she unwittingly finished the sentence before automatically moving onto the next one.

Suddenly, the angle at which she was reading changed, and she looked up in surprise as Scorpius wordlessly continued to move the book so that it rested in-between them.

"Malfoy-"

"You know, Weasley," he interrupted her, that half-grin still on his face. "All you had to do was ask." He nodded down at the book. "Knock yourself out."

Rose hesitated, pressing her lips together.
"Come on, Weasley, you know you want to."

"It's a race," she said slowly. "That prize only goes to one person."

"It wouldn't be a very good one if I won on a technicality," Scorpius scoffed. "Come on, you gotta give me more satisfaction than that."

When she still looked uncertain, Scorpius lowered his head until he stared her straight in the eyes. "I dare you."

Rose immediately pulled back a little, furrowing her brow, wondering why that sounded so familiar.

Isn't it too early to go clubbing?

So you wanna wait out here for a reason as stupid as that? Come on. I dare you.

Startled, she swallowed, his eyes coming back into focus as she blinked the memory away. "Alright." She paused. "Um…thanks."

As she bent to study the book, movement at the library's entrance caught her eye, stopping her — apparently, lunch was over. Two girls from their Transfiguration class walked in, and, upon noticing her and Scorpius poring over a book together, exchanged a look, and then promptly left.

She lowered her gaze, fighting a tiny, self-satisfied smile, and then her brow suddenly lined in thought. "Hey, who do you think did it?"

"Huh?"

Rose shrugged. "I mean, if we can narrow down who was most likely to do it and we can gauge their ability level, it might help us to figure out what charm they used. That is, if they used a charm."

Scorpius considered. "Well, who had Charms last yesterday?"

"Um…” Rose racked her brains. "Sixth years, I think. Wonder what they're studying now."

Scorpius raised his head and looked around at the library, which had been steadily filling in the few minutes since lunch had ended. He leaned over towards the two girls at the table closest to them. "Hey, are you two sixth years?"

The two girls exchanged a look, two identical, nervous smiles flitting across their faces. One of them - the braver one, Rose thought - said, "Yeah", pink tinging her cheeks.

"Did you have Charms last period yesterday?" After they both nodded, he continued, "What's Flitwick been teaching you?"

The same girl who had spoken before pursed her lips a little in thought. "Um…we just finished learning the Harmonia Nectere Passus Charm, and we're just about to start Calming Charms."

"Right, thanks," Scorpius said, turning back to face Rose. From behind him, both girls pouted in disappointment at the brevity of their conversation.

Rose sighed. "Well, Harmonia Nectere Passus only works on inanimate objects, so that's out."

"Doesn't seem like the Calming Charm did the trick either."
"Maybe it wasn't them." Rose pulled in the side of her mouth, tapping her finger on the table. "It could easily have been someone who sneaked in past hours. I mean, it doesn't matter anyway, no Calming Charm I know could do that."

"Which Calming Charm?" Scorpius asked suddenly. "There's a few, I should've asked them to be more specific."

"Oh my God," Rose said, her mouth dropping open. "That's it. In fifth year, when Hagrid taught us the spell to calm the Grindylows down, he told us we could only use it on marine animals since."

"It targets their respiration, and marine animals respire differently than land animals," Scorpius finished, sitting up straight in his seat.

Rose raised her eyebrows. "If someone messed with your breathing and used a spell that wasn't designed for you on you..."

"You're bound to get a little pissed."

They were both slightly breathless, overwhelmed by their sudden, shared epiphany. After a few moments of protracted silence, Scorpius cocked his head. "So what spell was used exactly? Care of Magical Creatures was so long ago, I can't remember..."

A wry smile traced its way across Rose's lips, and she held out Charms for the Cold-Blooded and Marine to him. "Knock yourself out."

It had felt so real.

_of course it had, Scorpius' brain conceded logically. _Everything feels real in a dream, that's why most people find it so difficult to become lucid._ Looking back at it now, though, there was a lot about it - a lot about her - that should've served as a red alert to Scorpius' dream self that none of what he was seeing existed outside the cavity of his mind. Take her clothes, for instance — Scorpius had never seen her wear anything like what she had been wearing. And her hair — it had been worn down in a soft, shiny curtain of red so that she took up his entire field of vision, and suddenly there had been no one else in the world but the two of them. Except Rose never wore her hair down, so that was stupid. And they had been talking about going to Greece, but she had never even expressed an interest in going to Greece, and certainly not with him, so why would they be talking about it? Granted, the dream hadn't consisted of that much talking—

And when was the last time he had ever recalled a voice from a dream? Of course it would've sounded like hers at the time, just like the way his mind had constructed everything else about her, but when Scorpius really thought about it, he could never remember the way anyone had sounded in a dream. It followed then that, objectively, that voice might not have been hers at all. "Then why did hearing it feel like a battering ram to the chest?" piped up a bold and entirely unwelcome little voice of dissent.

Scorpius ignored it. He ignored it so well and commanded his brain to only think logical, smart thoughts, ones that twisted her image into little abstract, unfamiliar pieces, until by the end of Transfiguration, the girl in Scorpius' dream could've been any girl with red hair and blue eyes.

But it had gotten harder when they had been working together in the library. The more he was around her, the more he heard her voice, the more he began to remember. Well, harder but not
impossible since his brain had been preoccupied with the assignment at hand, but once the
brainwork there was done too, that couldn't serve as a distraction anymore either.

And that voice—

It echoed in his brain whether she was speaking or not, the voice he had become so damned
accustomed to, day in and day out, and suddenly her dream self and her real self were speaking to
him in tandem, one and the same, logical thoughts be damned.

His entire body had slumped in defeat. That voice was unmistakeable.

As they had left the library, she had reached up to redo the bun she wore her hair in (see? She
never wore her hair down), probably to ensure that she looked presentable before they went to see
McGonagall, and a whiff of her shampoo had almost stopped him short. He didn't know that
much about how smells worked in dreams, but goddammit, even his dream self had gotten her
shampoo right. Scorpius had never really noticed before, but now that he thought about it, she
always smelled like that, like sweet and fruity and flowery all in one.

Clearly, his brain was intent on fucking him over.

Like it was doing now, as he struggled to pay attention to what Rose was reciting to McGonagall
about what they had discovered from their library session over the turbulence in his head. He
hastily zoned back in.

"…remembered what he had told us about the differences between marine and terrestrial
respiration, and we guessed that whoever bewitched the Murtlap must have used the Calming
Charm intended only for marine animals, which would explain why the Murtlap is behaving so
erratically."

Scorpius consciously forced his expression into one of concentration, and he nodded in
affirmation when McGonagall's eyes passed over him.

"Well," she said after a moment, finally putting down her quill and straightening up. "I must say, I
was optimistic, but I didn't expect anyone to come to me with a solution this quickly." Her mouth
quirked. "The pair of you managed to figure it out even faster than I did. Of course, I didn't think
to ask Filius what he had been teaching his students," she mused. "Very resourceful."

"You knew?" Rose asked, her brow furrowed in surprise.

McGonagall surveyed her from underneath her spectacles. "I am the Headmistress, Miss
Weasley," she said dryly. "I regarded it as an opportunity to work a little outside the curriculum."

Rose glanced at Scorpius meaningfully, her mouth slightly parted in disbelief, and it was the first
time she had properly looked at him since they had entered the Transfiguration classroom. As
soon as their eyes met, the part of his brain that he had commanded to become dormant flickered
back to life, and it thought about something that, at the present time, was most definitely not
what it should have been thinking about.

Word had travelled fast about the explosive argument between Rose Weasley and Liv Roux near
the Owlery on Fireworks Night. Of course, the Hogwarts Gossip Mill was seldom without some
sort of tale circulating, but this wasn't what people would consider to be idle gossip, given those
involved and especially the subject matter.

Between what he'd heard about that night and now his dream, Scorpius' brain wasn't exactly
operating at peak function. It suddenly occurred to him — while standing in that Transfiguration
classroom for the second time that morning — that maybe it was because of what he'd heard about
that stupid fight, what people had been whispering and what Toby had eventually told him, that he'd had that stupid (stupid, warm, good, wonderful) dream in the first place.

He'd heard silly little wisps of information and now his brain had plucked them out of context and told him that they meant something, and that same brain, traitorous as it was, had decided to listen, and had spat back out a stupidly warped fantasy that fucked with his head and filled him with an ache he had never felt before.

"Well." McGonagall's voice cut through his inner monologue and he blinked, roused. "To be honest, I wasn't planning on awarding the prize to two students-

"She can have it."

"He can have it."

Their heads automatically snapped towards each other.

After briefly meeting his eyes, Rose quickly shook her head. "It was his idea to question which Calming Charm had actually been used, without that I would never-"

"And if she hadn't thought to ask what Professor Flitwick was teaching his students, I would never have figured it out either," Scorpius interrupted.

McGonagall continued to regard them in silent amusement. "You didn't let me finish," she said in a way that Scorpius could only describe as wry. "However, this has clearly been a team effort, and since I can't very well give the prize to neither of you, you'll have to share it. If you can live with that."

Rose bit her lip and smiled a tiny smile at him, and God, that ache almost nauseated him.

"Splendid. Well, if my memory serves me, you've each received one Exceeds Expectations grade at some point this year, so I shall raise them both to Outstandings. Ah, that reminds me." She rummaged through the stack of parchments on her desk and extracted two, holding them out to each student. "Congratulations."

Right then as they looked down at their two identical O's, Scorpius came to a conclusion: the best thing - the smart thing - would be to forget it. No matter how good it had felt, no matter how real it had felt, it hadn't been real.

It had never been real at all.

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The rest of Scorpius' week passed surprisingly without incident. It had been three days since his dream, and somewhere in that time, his brain had decided that they played for the same team, and had kept his thoughts firmly revolved around those of the awake variety.

It was a bright Saturday morning, the kind of morning that was still rare for late March, so Scorpius decided that he wouldn't waste what little remained of it working in the library, instead opting to grab the book from his bedside table and read it out on the grounds.

"Lovely morning," John remarked to him when he arrived back at the portrait hole. Rays of sunlight filtered in from the window, shining in diagonal slats across the oil surface of the painting, illuminating all of the ridged imperfections and dust particles that had settled over the years.

" Haven't seen much of it yet," Scorpius replied, holding up his textbook. "I'll be right back out. Leo Anguis."
"I'll be here."

However, as soon as the portrait door swung open, Scorpius realised that he would not, in fact, be right back out. Standing with her back to him, Rose's left hand was clenched in her hair, and from where he stood, he could see the whites of her knuckles standing out against the red. She angled her head down and then stomped her foot, groaning audibly.

"Heavens, what a sight."

She whirled around, her other hand clutched tightly around her wand, and she blew out the hair that had fallen into her face. Her expression wasn't exactly welcoming, but Scorpius made the educated guess that this was the occasional situation of which her annoyance was not directed at him, so he took a step forward. "What exactly are you doing?"

She was partially concealed behind the couch, but Scorpius saw her hand as it moved beside her. He heard a soft thump. "Nothing."

A smirk pricked at the corner of his lips. "You can read that book a thousand times over. It won't help."

Rose exhaled sharply, folding her arms. "It has to," she said stubbornly.

This was precisely the kind of situation that Scorpius should have avoided. His book was sitting on his bedside table; all he had to do was walk ten steps, grab it, and be on his way. But even as the sun beat down through the window pane, he knew that book was staying where it was.

He strode over, passing the couch so that he was standing in front of her. "Get out of your comfort zone, Weasley." He reached out a hand to pick up the book from the table, and she made to grab it, but he swept it past her fingers, putting it on the table on his other side.

"That's mine," she sighed.

He crooked a brow at her, and she deflated.

"What are you even doing up here?" he asked suddenly. "Everyone else is downstairs."

"The sixth years are downstairs," Rose said shortly. "Most of the seventh years have already passed."

"No more than twenty, I assure you."

She seemed to take a little comfort in that. She bit her lip. "My cousin — well, not my cousin — but... Teddy Lupin told me that they Disarm the entire castle during Apparition training, so I thought...well..."

"You didn't think Hogwarts could bear seeing its Golden Child not head and shoulders above the rest as per usual?"

She met his gaze, and crossed her arms again. "I can't concentrate in there."

When Scorpius didn't reply, they lapsed into silence, Rose tapping the wand against her palm, a nervous tick that he had seen her build up over the years.

"Show me," he said.

"No," Rose said, resolute.
"Why not?"

"I don't want to."

"Don't be a brat."

"I don't want to do it at all."

That made Scorpius stop. "You're not even going to try?"

Rose's eyes seemed to search the couch, and her gaze lingered on it before she sat wearily down. "I just…I'm not used to things not…"

"Coming easy?"

She raised her eyes to meet him, and Scorpius took that as an affirmation.

"I'll tell you one thing, Weasley. You're not going to get any better sitting there trying to extract any further meaning from that book. You have to put it down and be completely hands on with it."

"What if…" she faltered. "I don't want to end up, well, splinching myself — the school would have field day if word got round that the Head Girl managed to splinch herself and is sitting in the Hospital Wing legless and potentially approaching death."

"You'd think you'd be more concerned with the actual fact of death," Scorpius observed. "Besides, I think you'd be far more approachable without a leg."

"I'm not approachable?"


She appraised him for a few long moments, and then, her eyes darting back towards the book that was now in arm's length, slowly got to her feet.

"There, that's the hardest part over with."

"Really?"

"No."

A laugh slipped out then, and it seemed to surprise Rose as much as it did Scorpius. She cleared her throat. "Destination, Determination and Deliberation." She muttered it again, as if she were trying to burn the words into her mind.

"Absolute rubbish," Scorpius said sternly.

"What?"

Scorpius shook his head. "It's absolute rubbish, that's what." He rolled his eyes. "One must be completely determined to reach their destination. Not with haste, but with deliberation. It's all a bunch of bollocks."

"It's Ministry-approved guidelines," Rose sputtered. "The school endorses it, you would think—"
"Out of the two of us, I'm the only one who's passed — or even attempted — their Apparition Exam," Scorpius interrupted. "Ergo, it will be my approved guidelines that we'll be following."

She narrowed her eyes at him, and Scorpius realised that what he was asking was no small feat for her. Still, the gaze he returned was unshakeable.

"Fine," she said with a sigh. "I suppose you can't make me any worse."

"I'll do my best, to be sure."

The side of her mouth lifted up; an almost smile for an almost joke.

"Close your eyes," Scorpius instructed.

She blinked at him, and slowly closed them, though they fluttered almost infinitesimally.

"Close your eyes," Scorpius repeated, amused. She half-opened one, and then shut them both.

Scorpius moved closer, ignoring Rose's tense shoulders as she sensed his movement. "I want you to think of a place," he said calmly. He waited a few moments before asking, "Do you have one?"

She nodded.

"Describe it to me."

"It's um…it's a meadow a little ways off from my house. I go there sometimes to think, to be alone. The grass is tall, almost knee high, most of it's green, some of it's brown. Whichever way you look there are white and purple flowers."

"That's not enough." He thought back to his first successful Apparition. "What can you smell? How cold is it? What can you hear? Feel it. You need to believe you're there."

She furrowed her brow. "Meadowsweet," she said. "It's heady, but not strong enough that you can't smell the wildflowers. It's damp, with early morning mist that the sun hasn't burned away. It smells like rain, like moss."

Scorpius listened to her speak, watched as the tenseness of her shoulders seemed to give way, and the lines in her brow disappeared. He could see it too. He could see her there, eyes closed just like they were now, half concealed in the grass, the sunrise setting her hair alight in a flaming halo around her.

He blinked several times, startling himself, and he swallowed. "Open your eyes."

She did, and she didn't seem surprised in the least to see him at least three feet closer to her than he had been before. "How did that feel?"

She exhaled, her gaze dropping to the carpeted floor. "Like I was there. Like I could…be there."

"Good." Scorpius nodded. "That's how it needs to feel. And when you feel like that, that's when your confidence comes in. Knowing exactly where it is you need to go is half the battle."

"And the other half?"

"You need to want to be there. You need to fill yourself with it, every particle in your body needs to want it. You need to picture yourself there — see yourself disappearing from here, and appearing there. You can't doubt it for a second."
"That doesn't seem like that's all there is to it," Rose said dubiously.

"The rest of it," Scorpius said, amusedly, "you've already mastered from that bloody book. The technicality of it, the physical movement." He clicked his teeth. "You're going to try it."

Rose looked horrified. "What, now?"

Scorpius shrugged. "I mean, we could always go for a spot of tea, maybe mulch around in the Entrance Hall for a little, say a little hello to the Giant Squid, maybe pop into Hogsmeade while we're at it-"

"Alright."

He folded his arms against his chest in satisfaction. "Close your eyes again." This time she did straight away. "You're going to Apparate within this room. Pick a spot, any spot you like, and see it the way you saw the meadow."

She opened her mouth.

"You don't need to describe it to me," he said, his voice coming out much softer than he had intended it to. He backed away, his footsteps dull on the carpet.

He saw her take three deep, steeling breaths, and then she pivoted and was gone in a loud crack. Before Scorpius had time to think about it, his hair was blown out of his face, and Rose reappeared, and suddenly they were almost nose to nose.

Though his heart began to pound, and his brain swirled as it frantically screamed, Too close, far too close, he didn't flinch, and he inclined his head at her. "Well done."

He could count the number of eyelashes that framed her eyes. Much too close. He averted his gaze. "Good grief, you've got both your legs."

She looked stunned. "I did it."

"You did," he confirmed.

"I..." She looked at him in incomprehension. "You- I...thank you."

He held her gaze. One, two, three, four... "You're welcome."

In the silence that followed, they both suddenly became aware of what little distance existed between them, and Scorpius immediately side-stepped back towards the couch.

"Right, so...um...that's definitely an improvement."

Rose bobbed her head in a somewhat over-enthusiastic nod. "Yeah, I uh...I guess I should just practice that a few more times before we uh—" She distractedly lifted up her watch to inspect it. "—before the session finishes downstairs."

Scorpius nodded. After a second, he asked, "Feeling confident?"

She pursed her lips, fidgeting. "More than I was before. Not as much as I need to be."

Scorpius' fingers wound around his wrist, shuffling his own watch. "Something that worked for me in the beginning was using something as a grounding tool, something that I could use to block out anything around me that might be distracting and concentrate on where I wanted to go."
"Something like a watch?" she asked, staring at the movement of his fingers.

He followed her gaze, letting out a sheepish laugh. "Uh…yeah, exactly." He hitched up his shoulders. "It helped me in the exam, it might do the same for you."

She hadn't even asked for his help and here he was, helping her like he really cared whether or not she passed her Apparition Exam, missing the hour of sunlight that he could see was steadily disappearing from beyond the window, and sacrificing any peace of mind he had gained by standing far closer to her than he had ever dared.

While he had been mulling this over in his head, she had taken off her watch and was clasping it in her fingers, closing her eyes and murmuring to herself.

"...Is it helping?" Scorpius finally asked they after had stood in silence for a while.

She nodded, her eyes still closed. "I think so."

"Uh…good." He immediately cringed at his one-word response. When she re-opened her eyes, he cleared his throat. "Do you wanna try again? You know, before they put the Charm back on?"

She pressed her lips together, and nodded in determination. "Yeah. Okay." She clenched her hand into a fist again and let her eyes shut, her brow furrowing in concentration. She took a breath - only one this time - and spun.

She reappeared on the other side of the room, next to Scorpius' bedroom door, and he willed away the tiny surge of disappointment that seeded up within him so quickly that it was as if he had never felt it. She looked triumphant, but her eyes were soft, and a smile pricked the corner of her lips.

Almost as if.

"You're a pro," he said.

She let out a relieved breath. "I wouldn't go that far, but uh-"

"You'll take the test next Saturday?"

She smiled. "Yeah." She paused, and then fastened her watch back around her wrist, making her way back towards the couch. "Hey, thanks. Really, I mean it. You've kind of been a godsend, actually."

Scorpius shrugged. "Happy to help."

Rose's eyes suddenly brightened and her lips pulled up into a grin. "If I pass, you won't have to do Side-Along with me on any more Hogsmeade trips," she joked. "You'll be happy you helped then."

Scorpius hoped the laugh he let out hadn't sounded half as unnatural to her as it did to him.

The school day had just finished on Thursday afternoon when Rose saw Christian with two of his friends across from her in the corridor.

"Christian!"

He turned, and when he saw who had called him, smiled. Rose saw him murmur something to his friends before navigating the busy halls alone towards her.
"Hey, Rose, what're you up to?"

She shrugged. "Same old. Anyways," she smiled a little sheepishly. "I realised I never thanked you properly for the other week. I'm sorry again that I made you miss the fireworks."

Christian opened his mouth to reply, but upon seeing students spilling out from the two classrooms nearest to them, tugged on her arm a little so they moved well away from the crowds milling through the corridor. "You know, the good thing about fireworks being in the sky is that you can see them from anywhere."

"Right," Rose laughed, rolling her eyes good-naturedly. "But, really, thank you."

"Don't mention it," Christian said, a soft smile on his face.

She had missed him, a little, in a weird way. She had forgotten how easy he was to talk to.

As they stood there, a girl passed them - a sixth year, Rose thought - and she tapped Christian on the shoulder, giving him a little wave when he wheeled around. Christian waved back, and when he turned to face Rose again, the tiniest tints of pink had appeared on his cheeks.

Rose felt her lips pulling up into a smile. "Who's that?" she asked.

Now he really was blushing. "Oh, er... just a friend from choir. She's a sixth year."

"Just a friend?" Rose pressed, her eyes twinkling.

Christian bit his lip, and then smiled at her bashfully. "I'm not sure."

"Well, I hope it all works out." She really did. Just because she found Stubby Boardman about as interesting as paint drying, she thought he might be barking up the right tree with this sixth year from choir.

"Thanks, Rose. Any fun weekend plans?" he added politely.

She made a face. "Unless you count the Apparition Test, no. Are you taking it?"

Christian grinned sheepishly. "I already passed it, actually."

"Oh, that's lucky! You have no idea how much I envy you," Rose said, shaking her head. She fleetingly wondered how Scorpius would feel about that.

"You'll be fine," Christian reassured her. "I have total faith in you." He cleared his throat. "I should probably get going, though. I have choir practice."

"Oh, sure," Rose said, unsurprised. "It was really nice talking to you."

"You too, Rose. See you around."

"See you."

She had just turned away when Christian suddenly called her name. She turned around expectantly as he jogged those few steps back to her.

"You wouldn't happen to be missing a cloak, would you?"

Her eyes widened. "Oh my god, yes I am."
"I think you might've left it in the Astronomy Tower after that night. It's been there for a while but no one's claimed it and then I remembered that the day I had first seen it there was after Friday night, so uh…well, go take a look."

Rose thanked him, and made a mental note to grab it when she had time on the weekend. She watched him vanish back into the crowd with one last wave, hoping once again that the sixth year girl whose name she didn't even know had a thing for nineteen eighties rock bands.

The Apparition Test took place in the Great Hall on Saturday morning, with Rose among the hoard of students gathered in the Entrance Hall waiting to be called inside.

Al was muttering to himself from beside her, his fingers rolling an invisible Snitch as they always did when he was nervous or agitated. She wanted to be of help, but with the mounting feeling of nausea roiling in her stomach, she didn't think she could be much of a comfort. Her eyes flicked towards the double doors where Gen had disappeared inside moments before; she was so much better at the whole comforting thing than Rose was.

She had no idea why she was even so nervous about this. It wasn't a big exam by any means, and most people here had failed once already and were on their second - or even third - go, including Al. It wasn't as if any of this would contribute to her grades or anything. And yet. God, she was so nervous.

She wrung her hands together; they were freezing cold from nerves. She stuck them into her pockets in an attempt to warm them, and then a few moments later lifted up her wrist to check the time.

Except that her watch wasn't on her wrist.

Panic blooming rapidly in her chest, she dug her hands back into her pockets - even though surely she would have felt her watch when they were inside there seconds before - and felt nothing except the wooly insides of her jumper. And then she remembered: she had taken it off before her shower and in her nervousness, had forgotten to put it back on.

"Oh, fuck," she whispered. "Oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck."

Al turned to face her, his brow creased in concern. "Rose? What's wrong?"

"I forgot my watch," she breathed in horror.

Al immediately looked relieved and patted a hand on her shoulder. "Oh, Rose, you won't even be in there for ten minutes, and besides, they have a mammoth clock in there, I swear, you can't miss it-"

"It's not that," Rose said miserably, pulling a hand through her ponytail in agitation, and then wincing when she pulled too hard through the strands she had forgotten to brush. "It's - oh, God, I can't pass without it, what the hell am I going to do, all of it gone down the-"

"Rose." Al took her firmly by the shoulders. "You don't need a watch to pass. Seriously, I have no idea why it's upset you so much, but you can't do anything about it now, alright? And you know, even if you fail, who cares-"

"I care!" Rose cried. "I've never failed a test in my life, Al."

"Well, yeah, but this one doesn't even really count, does it, and anyway-"
"We will now be calling in all students with surnames beginning with J up until P," McGonagall's voice rang from the doorway, cutting Al off mid-sentence.

After a moment of silence, Al swallowed and turned to face her again. "I gotta tell you, you getting all freaked out actually made me forget about how freaked out I am. Wish me luck."

"Good luck," Rose wished him, mustering up all of the comfort she could (which, as established, wasn't very much), and then she was alone.

She took a deep breath, wondering how much longer the contents of her breakfast would stay in her stomach, and then let it out slowly, like people always said to do in order to calm nerves, but then the lack of air in her lungs made her feel lightheaded and somehow worse, so she stopped doing that. Her gaze flicked towards the Grand Staircase where the crowd of students who had finished were leaving, looking equal parts relieved and equal parts disappointed.

She had a sudden, hysteria-induced thought: she could go with them. There was nothing stopping her, really, and then she wouldn't have to be nervous anymore; there was another test next month, she could do the test then and she would make absolutely sure that she wouldn't forget her watch that time.

Most of the crowd had now disappeared around the corner, with only a few trailing at the back, and soon they too would be out of sight. Rose let out a defeated sigh.

She couldn't leave. Giving up would be worse than failing.

Just as she was about to turn away, a flash of blonde suddenly stopped her short, and when Rose's eyes focused, she saw Scorpius Malfoy skidding to a stop at the top of the stairs, his chest rising and falling hard enough that she thought he might have sprinted down from their dorm on the sixth floor. His eyes searched around the crowd, and she was about to raise a hand to signal to him that he had just missed Toby, who had gone in with Al—

But his eyes found hers before her hand had moved from her side, and as he held up his arm, she saw her watch dangling from his fingers.

She only vaguely comprehended him through her furiously blinking eyes as he jogged down the stairs and carved a path through the crowd towards her, but she suddenly felt as if someone had thrown her a buoy out at sea.

Her stomach now rolling for a completely different reason, she watched her lifeline as it approached her.

"Don't tell me you were thinking of bailing on me, Weasley," Scorpius said, one eyebrow raised in amusement.

His voice jolted her - he was here, God, he really was here - and then her mind finally caught up with her eyes, and she felt a slow smile working its way across her face. "Not a chance."

"Good." He held out his hand. "I thought you might need this."

It was then that Rose realised exactly why she couldn't fail this exam, why she felt more nervous for this one stupid test then she could remember feeling for anything before.

"Weasley?"

She snapped her head back up. "Sorry, what?"
He looked at her curiously. "You just got this…weird look in your eyes. Like you found a whole new thing to freak out about." He laughed a little, but Rose was willing to bet he wouldn't find the situation quite so funny if he knew exactly what it was that she had found to freak out about.

"It's nothing," she waved him off hastily, attempting a weak laugh as well, before her gaze instinctively drew back towards the doors. She had already lost track of the time since Al had gone in; how much longer would it be until they re-opened?

She could sense him watching her carefully, and she turned away from the doors, self-consciously skimming her fingers over the smooth glass of the watch face. She was about to say something to him - what, she had no idea - when Conrad Wells suddenly beamed from where he had moved to stand beside her (clearly, he wasn't one to hold grudges).

"Good luck, Rose!" he said cheerfully. "You look a little worried. Need any last minute tips?"

Scorpius immediately snorted. "Wells, you've failed this test at least three times already. Weasley's going to need a whole lot more than luck if she listens to a single word out of your mouth."

Rose automatically backhanded his upper arm in admonishment. "Ignore him," she said to Conrad. "He's only smug because he's already passed."

Conrad, who had been good-naturedly unfazed by Scorpius' remark, then frowned. "Why're you here then?" he asked in confusion.

Rose quickly spoke before Scorpius had the chance to. "I forgot something and Malfoy was nice enough to bring it to me."

"Like your wand?" Conrad joked.

"No, like her watch," Scorpius said, rather shortly. "But it's all sorted out now, don't worry."

Conrad smiled at her again, still looking mildly confused. "Oh, well, that's good. Well, see you in there!"

"You too." Rose returned his easy smile before he turned away and began speaking to the boy next to him. Once again without a distraction, her stomach twisted back into its coil.

"What are you having for dinner?"

Scorpius' voice cut through the dull panic that had shrouded Rose's senses and she blinked.

"Dinner? Oh, um…I'm not sure, what's it-"

"It's a roast tonight, I think. You partial to chicken? You look like you're a chicken sort of girl."

A laugh bubbled out, even though it sounded a little shaky. "I look like a chicken sort of girl?" Rose echoed. "That's a first."

"Well, clearly, that's not what I meant, I-"

"You're right, though. What about you?"

Scorpius shrugged. "I prefer lamb myself, it's easier to eat without having to worry about all the bones and stuff."

"That's true."
In the silence that followed, her gaze once again darted back towards the double doors; surely they would open any minute now. She bit her lip as her chest tightened, her heart creeping back up into her throat.

Scorpius hesitated, and then she felt his hand alight on her shoulder. "Weasley. Your track record for exams is pretty good. You'll be fine."

"What if I'm not?" she asked before she could stop herself.

He paused, and then shrugged. "Like I said, you'd be far more approachable without a leg."

She managed another feeble laugh, before something occurred to her, and she lifted her gaze to meet his. "You know, even if I don't pass, which I'm not saying I won't, I think you should know that it's got nothing to do with you, you've been-"

"Breathe, Weasley," Scorpius ordered softly.

His hand was still on her shoulder.

There was a slight kerfuffle at the door's entrance when the frontmost people were forced to back up as the doors opened out towards them. The crooked tip of McGonagall's hat came into view, and Rose gulped.

"All remaining students may now enter."

The batch of students who had gone in before them exited en masse, Al somewhere among them, but they were shepherded away before Rose could get a proper look. Toby Nott, however, was on the outskirts of the throng, and, upon seeing his best friend, grinned widely, pumping his hand in a fist. Scorpius flashed his teeth, reaching out to clap his friend on the back before Toby was swept away.

The hand he had used was the one that had been resting on Rose's shoulder, and the absence of its weight felt instantly foreign.

"Ready, Weasley?" he asked, his grin still lingering as he turned to face her.

"As I'll ever be," she replied hoarsely.

"Tell you what," Scorpius said, nudging her forward as students began making their way towards the doors. "If you fail, I'll buy you a drink."

"Buy me two," she half-joked weakly.

He nodded with a smirk that wasn't quite a smirk, and finally she turned away from him, meeting McGonagall's eyes for a moment - and feeling the Headmistress' silent encouragement - before the doors closed behind her.

"Weasley, Rose!" a small man piped up from her left, a clipboard in his hands.

She raised a hand and stepped towards him. "That's me."

"Right. Miss Weasley, this is your first time attempting this test, is it not?"

"Yes, it is."

"Well, then, as you can see, there are two hoops on the ground." He gestured to the one right in front of her. "As you will have been told, you will begin the test by standing within this hoop, and
then I would like you to Apparate into that red hoop over there." Rose's eyes followed to where
his finger was pointing. "I will then come over and check to see whether or not your Apparition
has been successful. All clear?"

She nodded mutely, her wand clenched tightly in her hand, and her watch clenched even more
tightly in the hand that he couldn't see. Now that she was inside, she had to stop herself from
looking back at the doors. She wondered if he was still behind them.

She stared at the hoop in front of her, inches away from the tips of her flats. Then she lifted her
gaze towards the hoop sitting five feet away.

*I want you to think of a place.*

Her fingers clutched harder.

"Are you ready, Miss Weasley?"

*Do you have one?*

"Yes."

*Describe it to me.*

"Well, if you would please step inside the hoop then."

*Feel it. You need to believe you're there.*

"And remember, Miss Weasley: Destination, Determination, and Deliberation."

Rose smiled, releasing her fingers from around her watch, and then she spun.

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Scorpius walked back from dinner by himself.

It had been an especially loud, boisterous affair (and was, in fact, a roast). Granted, dinners
following Apparition Exams usually were, but an uncommonly large amount of students had
passed today, so there was more celebrating to be done than usual. The excitement, however, at
this stage, largely stemmed from the student body's knowledge that each House would be
throwing mini-parties in their Common Rooms for those who had passed, as was tradition for the
three weekends a year on which the Apparition Exams were held.

Scorpius checked his watch as he passed the fifth floor; it had just gone eight, and since the party
wouldn't start until ten — after the first, second, third and fourth years had finally retreated to their
dorms (often reluctantly since they knew exactly what would happen directly upon their
departure) — he decided he had at least an hour to take a long, hot shower and freshen up before
Toby would come urging him back to his old Common Room.

He arrived at the portrait hole, and although he had seen - noticed, that was - Rose, Albus and
Genevieve disappearing after dinner had finished while Toby continued to preach at him the
benefits of having a friend who was a chef, he cleared his throat and asked casually, "Weasley
isn't in, is she?"

John smiled winsomely at him, propping his foot against the bench as he strummed. "Sorry,
tenderfoot, but I ain't seen her since before dinnertime."

Although that was the answer he was expecting, dull disappointment weighed down in his
"Right, thanks, John." He recited the password and stepped inside, and as soon as his eyes settled on their living room, it suddenly occurred to him that if the purpose of throwing these parties was to celebrate with those who had just gained their licenses, he was sort of defeating it by not doing it with the one person whose license he'd actually had a hand in awarding.

He wondered, fleetingly, if maybe she would be thinking about that too.

Just as quickly, he shook his head, shaking that stupid, childish thought away, and he entered his room, immediately stepping out of his shoes and depositing his bag onto his bed. He began to shuck off the rest of his clothes, folding them into a pile at the bottom of his bed, but as he reached to undo his belt, a sudden tapping at his window drew his attention.

He undid the lock and pushed it open, and Artemis swooped onto the sill, a letter grasped firmly in her beak. After pausing to stroke the fur on her head, he took it, absentmindedly grabbing some treats from his desk drawer with his attention on the Malfoy insignia that held the envelope closed.

He thought about leaving it on his desk and reading it after the party, but his curiosity got the better of him, so he sat down on the edge of his bed and prised it open.

With all the celebrating that she, Al and Gen had been doing, Rose had nearly forgotten about her cloak.

She wasn't all that bothered to go all the way to the Astronomy Tower and find it, but she figured there wouldn't be a time when the idea would actually seem appealing to her, so she went anyway.

It wasn't so bad, she thought as she climbed the spiral staircase leading up to the tower. Today had been a good day for examinees, and the Gryffindor Common Room had been teeming with rowdy students all celebrating their newly acquired licenses. Having decided not to partake in tonight's drinking, Rose hadn't been quite so rowdy as the rest and was thankful for a breather.

She reached the tower's door, lifted up the wooden bolt, and then pushed it open, feeling a surge of fresh night air as it blew about her face, and when she raised her gaze, she saw Scorpius Malfoy lounging gracefully on the far side of the tower, nursing a dark brown bottle in his hands.

He looked up slowly at the sound of the door opening, and, after meeting her gaze, looked back down at his bottle in disinterest. "Of all the gin joints in all the world."

She was taken aback by the tone of his voice. The way he sat cloak-less, apparently unfazed by the chill. But mostly, she realised, by the way that he barely acknowledged her.

She spied her missing cloak on the floor a few feet away from him and hurriedly swooped it up into her arms. "I just…I forgot this."

He nodded slowly, digesting the information, still not looking at her. "You've got it now."

She bit her lip, her stomach sinking in confusion and disappointment. "Is…is Toby around, maybe I could-"

"I don't need Toby." He glanced up at her. "Or anyone else. Just this." He held up the bottle in his hands to illustrate his point and took another swig.

"That doesn't look like Firewhiskey," Rose said uncertainly, reluctant to go and now trying to
hold a conversation, hoping it would serve as a better alternative.

Scorpius licked his lips clean of the drink and pointed it at her. "This is much better stuff. Much — much stronger. Better." He inclined his head. "Good for celebrating."

"Is that what this is?"

He smiled wryly at her, shaking his head. "If you're about to lecture me, Weasley-" He stopped, sighing, like he had changed his mind about what he was going to say. "Don't."

Rose thought that maybe this was some terrible, horrible dream — no, it was worse than that; like everything in the last few months had been that dream and this was real, and that meant that now they were back to…back to-

"I promised I would buy you a drink, didn't I?"

The terrible thought skittered away. No, these last few months had been real.

"Only if I failed."

Scorpius waved a careless hand. "Technicality."

This wasn't the sort of place that Rose wanted to be; a freezing cold tower with nothing thicker than the not-so-thick shirt she was wearing and a drunk Scorpius Malfoy who reminded her too much of the boy she had spent the last six years of her life fighting with. But in spite of all that, Rose felt her knees lowering onto the cold ground, so cold she could feel its sting over the cotton of her tights, and her numbing fingers pried open her cloak and gathered it around her shoulders.

If Scorpius noticed, he didn't show it. He was staring at the white label of the bottle, but his eyes were vacant, a thousand miles away. Rose's gaze was drawn to the same label, and when she caught sight of the information it was offering, her eyes widened.

"Maybe you should take a little breather from that," she suggested carefully. "I don't think the extent of it has hit you quite yet."

"Oh, I hope not."

She pressed her lips together, deciding that maybe he would thank her for this tomorrow, and she reached for the bottle cap on the floor, but his fingers beat her to it and, without a sound, it had arced cleanly in the air and disappeared into the darkness. Pursing her lips flatly, Rose aimed her wand at the side of the tower the cap had disappeared over and raised her other hand to catch it when it soared back.

Scorpius blinked, staring at it in her palm, and then at her. "That, Weasley, is a very clever trick. You are very clever, you know." He shrugged. "I should know, I'm very clever as well."

He brought the bottle up to his lips again, and Rose instinctively reached out a finger to push it away; Scorpius frowned as he realised his mouth was hanging over empty air.

"I really don't think you should drink anymore."

Scorpius looked up to meet her gaze. "Why? Don't you like me more like this? I'm being nice."

"You're being drunk," Rose said firmly. She put her hands on her thighs, weighing her options. "Though if you told me why you're sitting up here getting drunk all by yourself, I might be a little more empathetic."
"I won't tell you," Scorpius said stoutly, and a little petulantly, "because it's none of your business."

Rose exhaled in frustration. "Fine. Well, if it's none of my business, I'll be going then."

"Be my guest."

Rose straightened, and she looked to the door, and then back to the grousing boy in front of her, and, fuck, she couldn't. She slowly lowered herself back down. Scorpius' expression didn't change.

He held out the bottle to her. "Have a drink."

"No thanks."

He held it out further and tapped the lip of it on her knee. "Have a drink."

She pushed it away. "Persuasion doesn't work that way."

She thought she caught a glimpse of a smirk, but if she had, it was already long gone. He inspected the bottle, turning it round in his fingers. "This is expensive stuff, Weasley. You oughtn't be rude."

"I didn't know Hogsmeade sold expensive alcohol."

"Ah," Scorpius said, lifting a finger and pointing it at her face. "It doesn't. No, this is specially brought from my parents' cellar." He took another swig. "Which makes you especially rude for refusing it." A strange, focused look entered his eyes, as if he had just now realised that she was sitting beside him, and he immediately furrowed his brow. "Weasley. Don't you have celebrations to be attending?"

"Do you want me to leave?"

He shrugged dispassionately. "Misery loves company."

She latched onto his words. "So you are upset about something."

"Not with my happy face on."

Rose was about to press him further, but another gust of wind blew, whipping her hair about her cheeks, and she clamped her mouth shut and burrowed tighter into her cloak.

"You're cold."

"It's cold out here," she pointed out dryly, trying to stop her voice from shaking.

Scorpius put his bottle down, his fingers going to the hem of his jumper. In one fluid motion he had pulled it over his head and was holding it out to her.

She stared at it. "Won't you be cold?"

He shook his head, waggling it at her insistently. "Beer jacket. Put it on."

She hesitated another second, but after meeting his unyielding gaze, took it from him; it was soft, and when she unfastened her cloak and pulled it over her head, she was suddenly enveloped in his scent — his real, non-whiskey-drenched scent, the one she caught a whiff of every time he ran a
hand through his hair in thought as they studied next to each other by the fireplace, the one she remembered pressing her nose into in that sweaty, humid club in Hogsmeade all those months ago.

Once her arms were in and she straightened it out she could see that it fell almost to the floor, and the sleeves were so long that she had to fold them back several times over until her hands appeared.

Scorpius had remained quiet throughout this, but when he looked her up and down clad in the jumper he had been wearing, something seemed to flicker in his eyes. "Better?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yeah, thanks."

She could still feel the weight of his gaze as she fastened her cloak back on, and when she looked back up, his eyebrows were furrowed again, his expression thoughtful.

"I'm glad you passed your Apparition Test, Weasley."

She blinked in surprise, and when she hugged her arms around her torso, the soft fabric of his jumper pressed against her palms. "I couldn't have done it without you, you know. And you coming all the way down to give me back my watch when-" She couldn't finish the sentence; she just exhaled and shook her head.

Scorpius stared at her. "You're welcome."

It was fleeting, but when she lifted her gaze to meet his, she thought she recognised someone in them, someone who had, just that morning (or was it yesterday morning now?), untwisted the knot in her stomach and eased the air back into her lungs.

She sighed. "I wish you would tell me what's wrong."

"We all wish a lot of things, Weasley."

She had no reply to that, and in the silence he seemed to consider, and then he twisted away from her, retrieving something from behind him. It was a letter, and he slid it over the stone floor towards her. She gingerly picked it up, her eyes darting back up towards him as she smoothed it out.

She read it twice, her heart in her throat, and then she folded it up for fear she couldn't help but read it again.

"I'm so sorry," she whispered, offering the letter back to him.

He plucked it out of her hand and tossed it behind him. "Why'd you look so sad, Weasley? It's not like you knew her."

"She's your grandmother, I understand what-"

"Listen, Weasley, I didn't tell you what happened because I don't want to talk about it, okay?"

She stayed still, worrying her lip as she wondered why he had even decided to show her the letter in the first place, but given that she didn't exactly have an arsenal of experience when it came to consoling an ex-arch nemesis, she hitched her shoulders helplessly. "What can I do?"

His eyes flicked down towards the bottle on the floor, and then back up to meet hers. Underneath all of that blankness, they were silently, mournfully, pleading, and against her better judgement,
she reached for it and took a sip. She immediately coughed, pushing the bottle back to him and wiping the back of her hand against her lips. "Oh God, you're drinking this straight?"

His lip twitched. "It tastes nice. Though I should've asked if you're partial to whiskey, cos if you don't like whiskey, you're not gonna like this much."

"It's not the taste," she said, still coughing a little. "I think it's burnt a hole in my throat."

"That's how you know it's working."

His hands wandered towards the collar of his button down - the same one she remembered from the exam - and he gripped the topmost button in his fingertips and twisted it out of its hole, doing the same with the one below it, and Rose's gaze was drawn to the taut skin it exposed as the material drew apart. She hastily averted her eyes, his fingers rolling up his sleeves in her peripheral.

They sat in silence, and Rose could already feel the warmth of the alcohol spreading around her body, its heat still pressing against the back of her throat. It was only after a minute or two that Scorpius' fingers moved from beside him, searching blindly across the floor until he blinked and remembered that he had thrown the letter behind him. He dropped his gaze, and then suddenly—

"She was good," he said. "I know what people might say, but she was always good to me. Even if no one knows it, she was always-"

"She saved my Uncle's life." The words came out before her brain had had the chance to stop her.

There was another moment of protracted silence before Scorpius asked, his voice thick, "What?"

Rose swallowed. "After, um…Voldemort used the Killing Curse on Harry in the Forbidden Forest, instead of making sure he was dead himself, he asked your grandma to check for him. She…she reached underneath his shirt and felt his heart still beating, and then she lied. Straight to Voldemort's face."

She couldn't look him in the eyes as she said it, but once she had finished, she chanced a glance. His eyes were faraway, dry as a bone, conveying nothing. But when she looked down, his hand was trembling.

"No one told you what she did? She ended a war."

"My father doesn't like to talk about the war," Scorpius finally said, his voice level. "I guess it's fair enough, he's not proud of it - he probably would've told me if I'd asked." He heaved a sigh, his shoulders slumping ever so slightly. "He and my mum had a long, long week away before they got married, where they talked everything over, and now he doesn't have anything else to say. So we don't talk about it."

It was always strange for Rose to listen to Scorpius talk about his family when she knew him only as he existed here, with her. It sounded stupid to say it, but the only part of his life she knew was the part that had her in it.

"It's hard, you know," he went on, surprising her, "to listen to the world talk about your family when your own family won't even talk about it to you." A wry grin twisted across his face, and when his eyes met hers, they seemed to be the only part of his face not cloaked in shadow. "But you wouldn't know anything about that, would you, Golden Child?"

"Why do you say that?"
Scorpius smiled. "How could you? You arrived at this school with a golden crown on your head. You couldn't have any idea what it would be like to come to a school where Malfoy's the first name anyone thinks of when you say the word 'Death Eater'."

Her throat tightened, and she wouldn't have been able to reply even if she had known what to say.

"Did your parents sit you down when you were eleven years old and warn you that people you didn't even know might hate you for things you never did, that people would expect you to be made a Slytherin because all Malfoys are Slytherins, but that there's nothing wrong with it - you're there because you're ambitious and resourceful, because you're a born leader."

His hand had stopped trembling.

"I didn't realise you cared about things like that."

"I was a child," Scorpius replied. "All children care about things like that."

He paused, his gaze suddenly hardening before it dropped to the floor."You know that story you told me on Valentine's Day? That you wanted to become a Healer so you could do your best to make sure people wouldn't suffer?"

Something in the pit of Rose's stomach tightened; she thought he'd have forgotten. She nodded.

A bitter sneer overtook his expression. "I did it because I never wanted to be helpless, so I wouldn't have to hate myself if something went wrong and I couldn't do anything about it." His eyes took on a sheen of vacancy, and now Rose could see the moon reflected in them. Then suddenly, it was her own face that stared back at her. "So I've done everything I could. I get top grades, I spend my weekends in the Hospital Wing, I'm Head fucking Boy. What's the point of any of that if you can't save the person you care about?"

Rose began to think he was getting more sober; he seemed to think so too since he put the bottle to his mouth and took another, extra long swig, hesitating for a long moment before he swallowed it down. Rose watched the movement in his jaw, his throat, and she crooked a finger, silently asking him to pass the bottle over.

As she drank, even through half-lidded eyes, she could see him watching her, and when she ran her tongue over her lips to clean them of the drink, he watched her still.

"You know, you got the entire school buzzing."

She paused, the lip of the bottle still pressed against hers, and she lowered it. "What with?"

He looked at her meaningfully. "Your little heart-to-heart with Olivia."

She blinked before handing the bottle back. "People know about that?" You know about that? "No one's said anything about it to me," she added, a little defensively.

"You know how you think I scare people?"

"Yeah."

"I'm not the only one."

He pulled a hand through his hair, scruffing it up a little before it fell immaculately back into place, like always. "It was partly my fault, I guess." At her surprised look, he shrugged. "I had no right to talk about Liv with you. It was her business, hers and mine, and it wasn't my place to be
spreading it. I guess you were collateral."

Rose's eyes widened ever so slightly. Maybe that was all he had heard, if he thought the part she played in it was so little. It was a tiny hope, but it was hope nevertheless—

"Is that all people are saying?"

He paused. "No."

"So you—I mean, people know what else we talked — fought — about, then."

"Yes."

He didn't say anything else, but he knew. Oh God, she could tell just by the way he was looking at her, he knew everything.

She could deny it. She could deny it and say that you can never believe the things you hear, things get blown out of proportion and taken out of context all the time. But then she realised that maybe she didn't want to say that, that maybe Liv was right, in her own twisted way — what else could explain the tingling that Rose had felt from the second she had come up and seen him sitting here, tingling that had nothing to do with the exam when she had spotted him at the top of the Entrance Hall's stairs, and even earlier when they had worked together in the library, and in their dorm, and — Merlin, she couldn't remember the last time she hadn't felt like this—

"You know, I'm a fun drunk."

The swirl of thoughts dissipated, and she blinked. "Okay."

"No, really, you'd normally like me drunk."

"I like you well enough sober."

His mouth pricked up at the side, maybe, and he cocked his head a little, appraising her. "You look nice in my jumper, Weasley."

She looked down, the grey material swamping her all the way to her knees, the green and silver band lining the hem the only thing that differentiated his jumper from hers. Despite herself, she felt a blush creeping its way up her neck.

"Don't all of our jumpers basically look the same? You know, just…grey."

He said nothing, but as his gaze travelled to the very band that she had been looking at only seconds before, she knew this time she hadn't imagined the smirk at all.

"Why did you help me? With the Apparating, I mean." The question had been prodding at her since that session in their dorm, and she didn't think she would ever get a better chance than this.

Scorpius tapped a finger against the bottle's side, making a sharp plinking noise that echoed in the night air. "So I wouldn't have to do Side-Along with you, remember? You said so yourself."

_That's a good enough answer_, she thought forcefully to herself when her brain twitched. _Just be satisfied with that, just let it go—_

"It's not just that." She bit her lip, and she saw his eyes slide down quickly at the movement. "Why…why did you share that Charms book with me when you knew it could've cost you McGonagall's prize? It's — we're always battling for top spot, you and I…it's just…" She
frowned. "It's how we are." She paused before adding quietly, "Isn't it?"

He raked a hand through his hair again, and he suddenly looked very tired, his eyes far away. "I have no idea of anything when it comes to you, Weasley. No fucking clue at all."

Her heart turned over, and, God, that feeling welled up inside her again, that tingling feeling that licked its way up her spine and made her shiver all the way down to her fingertips, and she wondered how he could possibly do this to her, how he could possibly affect her this much—

"Why don't you ever wear your hair down?" he asked bluntly.

His voice cut through her concentration, and she immediately flushed, all too conscious of the thoughts he had unknowingly interrupted—

She reached instinctively to touch the bun she wore her hair in. "What?"

"It looks nice when you have it down."

"I…I'm not sure, why do you—" she began to ask, but her voice died when he leaned over and slid out the pin that was holding her hair up, and when it cascaded down around them in waves, for a moment all she could smell was her shampoo in the air.

Her breath caught in her throat as she stared at him, and he blinked at her — she couldn't describe it, but something seemed to pass in his eyes, some flicker of recognition—

"See?" he murmured, even though she couldn't.

He was so close. She thought back to their Apparating session, when he had been even closer than this, but if it was like it had been then, it would only be a second before he moved away—

But he didn't.

"Have you ever been to Greece, Weasley?" he continued in that same, soft voice.

"Once," she said, her voice barely above a whisper, then she consciously raised its volume and said slightly louder, "With my family two years ago. Why do you—"

"You know, Weasley, I'm not that drunk."

"Aren't you?" she breathed.

"No," he said slowly. "I don't think."

"People do stupid things when they're drunk."

"Do you think we're going to do something stupid, Weasley?"

His eyes flickered to her lips again. Then he tilted his head a little bit, contemplatively. "I can see the moon in your eyes."

"You're probably too close, then," Rose whispered, the sound barely audible. A last-ditch effort; she made to grab for the bottle resting in between his knees. "I don't think you should drink anymore of that."

Before she could pry it away, his hand landed on hers. It was warmer than she had expected, though it was probably just the cold air in contrast.
"Weasley."

She blinked and shook her head. "Malfoy, give it to me."

"You have freckles on your nose."

"The bottle, Malfoy."

"Your eyes have some green in them."

"Please."

His eyes stopped searching hers and finally settled on them.

And just like that, she lost all of her resolve.

The almost empty bottle cracked painfully as it made contact with the stone floor, and suddenly Rose could feel wetness beginning to seep along her calf, slithering underneath the minuscule holes in her tights, but she couldn't bring herself to care, not when Scorpius' lips were soft and pressed against her own.

Her heart was pounding, the blood in her head screaming so loudly she couldn't focus on anything else, anything at all, and yet—

She could feel his hands - God, they were so warm - drifting up, skimming the side of her jaw, her cheek, before one of them cupped the back of her neck, the other tangling itself in her hair. Her skin prickled where he was touching her, and she needed to breathe, God she couldn't breathe at all, not when he was here, kissing her, not when his warm, callused hands were brushing the hair at the nape of her neck, the back of her ear—

She could tell he had moved closer because suddenly she could feel the warmth of his leg pressing against hers, and the thought of it — the thought of him — electrified every nerve in her body. She gasped desperately when his finger grazed against her earlobe, and he pulled away, his eyes searching hers again as if to ask, Is this okay? but his hands were still in her hair, hair that she never wore down but that he said looked nice when she did, and his knee was still pressed against hers, her skin searing from where he had touched her—

He had tasted like whiskey, one that had burned in her throat and was far sweeter than she cared for, but right then, as she stared into his blazing eyes, the two of them alone in the Astronomy Tower while parties raged on deep inside the castle, she thought he tasted like the best drink she had ever had.

And Rose leaned forward to kiss him again.

Chapter End Notes

A/N:

OMG THEY KISSED. I'm sorry that I said I was gonna try and get these chapters up quicker since it was summer and all, and yet it's been a hot minute since the last one. Let me tell you, writing fanfiction is never more attractive than when it's used as a procrastination tool and now that I have virtually nothing to procrastinate, fanfic writing is taking a backseat in favour of doing absolutely nothing. That aside, hope
this chapter (and that moment) satisfied you all — this chapter wound up being waaaaaaay longer than I anticipated, but it might be my favourite yet. Fun fact! I always planned to have some sort of Scorpius-dreams-about-Rose storyline but I hadn't yet decided where to put it, so my first pass of this chapter existed without the dream at all. This is probably obvious, but it was far more boring and didn't actually lead up to the end scene as much as it should have, so I'm super glad that my brain helped me out when it decided to have a spontaneous perusal of the huge document that I dump any ideas I have onto. Chapter titles come from Ella Fitzgerald's Dream A Little Dream Of Me and Fun's At Least I'm Not As Sad (As I Used To Be).

Oh! And some answers below:

Q: Haha okay so like I dont know if you read the Percy Jackson books but what if you gave Rose, Scorpius, Gen, Albus, Toby and Liv their god parents? haha sorry if you don't read the books!

A: *cracks knuckles while sighing in deep contentment* I have been waiting my entire life for this question. Okay, I'm gonna assume you're talking about the 12 Olympians? I'm just gonna do these quick fire: Rose = Athena, Scorpius = Athena, Gen = Zeus, Al = Hermes, Toby = Hephaestus, Liv = Aphrodite. Also, yikes, Rose and Scorp having the same godly parent. Maybe one of them could be in Apollo Imao except Scorpius would actually refuse to acknowledge himself as the son of (Rick Riordan's canon portrayal of) Apollo and his horrific haikus.

Q: How tall do you see Rose and Scorpius?

A: I see Scorpius as being around 6'1, maybe a tiny bit over. Rose is very average height, so I'd probably plonk her at around 5'4/5'5, erring more on the 5'5 side.

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