



the
silent world
within you

by femmequixotic & noeon

Malfoy pulls back and Harry protests, reaching for him. Malfoy bats his hands away, pushing himself to his knees. "Patience, Potter. Honestly. You're such a Gryffindor." He slides his shirt off his shoulders, letting it fall on the ground behind him. Harry's eyes stop on the Dark Mark that mars Malfoy's left arm. His fingers brush the darkly inked skin. Malfoy freezes.

When Malfoy reaches for his shirt again, Harry stops him. "Don't," he says. "It's part of you."

Malfoy's jaw tightens. Harry can see him swallow. "It's not me now," he says quietly.

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Pairing: Harry/Draco

Rating: NC-17

Warnings: Mpreg

Summary: Harry only wanted Malfoy for one night, one birthday. It wasn't meant to be anything more.

Word Count: ~96,000

Disclaimer: All characters belong to J.K. Rowling, Scholastic, Bloomsbury, and Warner Brothers.

Written for: The 2011 [harrydracompreg fest](#), using nursedarry's prompt of *a one-off (or very rare and on/off, in-denial-about-it-relationship at school (AU 7th or EWE 8th year) results in one (or both!) of them pregnant. How do they each find out? How do the teachers find out? Their friends, the other students? I would like this all about how they come to terms with the situation and less about their changing body(ies) and how they'll cope in the future.*

Author's notes: We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Bubba and Gervase for being fantastic betas, willing to tackle this monster, not to mention how thankful we are to the mods for their forbearance and patience as we broke deadline after deadline, realising that we weren't done yet.

Also, halfway through writing this fic, we discovered another Harry/Draco that also began with Draco serving a probation with Hagrid post-war. All similarities are completely unintentional, but we loved oldenuf2nb's fic so much that we'd like to make sure everyone goes and reads it too: you can find *Rising from The Ashes* on [The Hex Files](#) or on [Livejournal](#).

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Photo by H2O Alchemist

summer

A fly buzzes past Draco's nose. He watches as it circles the gleaming conference table, barely missing the frightful white fuzz that Prometheus Bromley-Malett calls hair. Despite the open windows and the dark wood panelling, the room is too warm and stuffy, and Draco shifts in his seat, discreetly tugging at the tight collar of his robe. He stops at his mother's sharp look.

"It's what you would recommend then, Prommy?" Narcissa asks, her voice low.

The barrister nods. He's been in charge of the Malfoy family's legal needs since Draco's father was a child. "There's nothing much I can do for Lucius," he says, taking off his spectacles and rubbing at them with a spotless white handkerchief. "He'll do the remainder of his time in Azkaban from his earlier sentence, and then he'll go before the Wizengamot again. He'll be lucky enough to be eligible for parole in three years. The Ministry's made it clear that it has no interest in going after you, Narcissa. You can thank young Potter's testimony for that. Draco on the other hand..." He slides his glasses back on the tip of his nose and sighs, making perfectly clear his thoughts on Draco's future prospects with one wry arch of a hairy white eyebrow.

Draco scowls at him, then looks away. "I won't do it," he says after a moment. The portraits of past partners in the solicitors' firm eye each other from above him, their grey heads shaking as they murmur amongst themselves. Ancient old sods, so certain they know everything.

His mother touches his hand. "Darling, if Prommy thinks it best, you shall." Her voice is iron sheathed in silk, and he's quite aware he's bugged. Whatever Narcissa Black Malfoy wants, she gets. Even if it humiliates her son in the process.

"The Ministry doesn't want to waste its time with you and your housemates, Draco," Prometheus says calmly. He leans back in his leather chair, his small, rotund frame nearly disappearing behind the haphaz-

ard pile of dusty law tomes piled on the table. With a wave of his hand he sends them somersaulting back to the bookshelves lining the walls. "They'd much rather spend their time and money prosecuting actual Death Eaters, rather than children."

That annoys Draco. He sits up. "I'm not a child--"

Prometheus cuts him off with a snort. "In the eyes of the law you were. While the wizarding code does recognise the age of majority to be seventeen, it also makes adjustments for students who remain at Hogwarts through their NEWTs, providing further legal protection that those who choose to leave no longer have." He shakes his head. "Don't be a fool, boy. The Ministry's willing to consider you a minor under the Schooling Act of 1873, and a year or two of community service versus a decade in Azkaban is not something to be tossed aside in a fit of pique."

"If I admit guilt," Draco says dully. His mother's fingers tighten on his hand. He pulls away, wrapping his arms around himself. He hasn't seen his father in a week. Not since the Aurors marched him away after the battle. He's somewhere in a holding cell deep inside the Ministry. Prommy's not even been able to speak with him yet.

"You *are* guilty, lad." Prometheus is gentle.

Draco touches his left arm. The Mark doesn't ache any longer, but it's still black and ugly against his skin. "I know," he says after a moment.

The room is silent. Draco can hear the soft tick of the clock on the chimneypiece.

"It's a good offer," Narcissa says softly. She looks at Draco, and in the sunlight from the open window, he can see the sharp lines around her eyes and mouth, too pronounced now to be concealed under her favoured rose-scented powder. There are silver streaks in her blonde hair, faint lavender circles beneath her blue eyes. His mother's barely forty-three, and she looks ten years older. "You'll be safe--"

Draco snorts.

"More so than in Azkaban." His mother's mouth tightens, and she leans forward in her chair, pulling her silk robe tighter around her too thin frame. "I won't let them put you there, Draco. Not after what it did to your father. I *won't*."

They look at each other, mother and son, and the pleading in her eyes makes Draco glance away. He deserves Azkaban, he knows. Part of him wants it, thinks it would be an appropriate punishment for him. Vince would be alive now if it wasn't for him. Pansy wouldn't be in hospital with curse burns. He can't even think about the other deaths he'd witnessed. Not right now. He'd barely slept last night after dreaming of Colin Creevey's crumpled dead body lying at the foot of the stairs---

He shudders, and for a moment he can't breathe. He's there again, among the smoke and the fire and the screams.

"Draco." Narcissa's hand clenches his. "Darling."

He blinks slowly, his heart slowing. His mother has that pinched, worried look that's become all too familiar in the past year. She doesn't know what to do for him, Draco knows. Especially now that

Severus's Vow has vanished with his death. There's no one left to protect him. Merlin knows his parents had been utter pants at doing so. He wants to scream this at her. He can't. He won't watch her face crumple. Won't take away the comforting lie she clings to, believing that she had done what she could for him. His father is going to Azkaban. It would kill his mother if he followed.

Draco looks at Prometheus. "Whatever," he says, voice thick. "Whatever is best."

Prometheus nods. "I'll let them know."

The fly lands on Draco's hand, its wings buzzing lightly. He studies it for a moment. It gleams blue and green and purple in the light, and Draco thinks it's almost pretty against his pale skin. His hand barely trembles when he raises it.

The sharp slap of skin against skin rings out in the quiet room. The buzzing ceases.

Draco stares past the billowing white curtain at the window. The street beyond is busy, filled with wizards and witches celebrating the Dark Lord's demise. He flicks the dead fly to the floor. It never had a chance, he thinks mournfully.

None of them ever had.



Harry lies on the bed in the corner room of the Leaky Cauldron, watching a Muggle train rumble past his open window. It's hot for late June, and in desperate need of rain, and his cooling charms do little to dissipate the humidity that causes his t-shirt to stick to his chest.

He's been here for three weeks now, over Molly and Arthur's protests. He knows he could have stayed at the Burrow, even after the row with Ginny, but it seems a bit off, sharing a room with his ex-girlfriend's brother, best mate or not. Andromeda has Teddy at Grimmauld Place--Harry can barely take an hour or two around his godson before his grief at losing Remus and Tonks both becomes too much to bear--and he won't go back to Privet Drive. There's too much there between him and his family, no matter that he's made his peace with Petunia and Dudley at least.

Uncle Vernon he wishes into an early and deep grave.

There's a knock at his door, and Harry sits up with a sigh. It's likely Tom again, with another sandwich and pumpkin juice, worried about how thin Harry's got since he's seen him last. Hiding out in a forest for months with barely any food works a charm as a reduction plan, Harry thinks. He'd recommend it to Dudley, but his improving relationship with his cousin is still on too shaky ground for jokes like that.

"Come in," he calls out, and he flicks his wand at the arched door, unwarding it as he shoves his feet into a worn pair of trainers at the foot of the bed.

"I'd forgotten how dreadful London can be in the summers," a tart Scottish voice says, and Harry looks up in surprise as Professor McGonagall steps into his room. Her robe is a crisply tailored grey seer-sucker, the sleeve cuffs folded over to reveal bony wrists and liverspotted hands. Harry can't remember

if he's ever seen her outside of the somber wool robes she favours during school terms--or a tartan dressing gown. She gives him a small smile. "Hello, Harry."

Harry blinks. "Professor." He runs a hand through his sweaty hair, suddenly aware that he hasn't showered in two days. He just hasn't cared to. He glances around the room. His clothes are scattered across the floor and the sofa, and the books that Hermione had lent him to pass the hours are stacked alongside his open trunk. He also hasn't been outside since Sunday, and that was three days ago. Perhaps four. It's easy to lose track of time here.

Ron was meant to come by last night, but he'd firecalled apologetically at half six to tell him Hermione's parents wanted them for supper and was Harry all right with that, because they'd come by on Thursday night, he promised, it was just Mr and Mrs Granger were still a bit topsy-turvy after coming back from Australia and Hermione thought it best to spend a little more time with them right now. Harry'd told Ron not to worry. There'd been part of him that hadn't wanted to sit through another recitation of how bloody amazing it is to shag Hermione, which is all Ron seems to want to talk about lately, and really sex is the last thing Harry wants to think about right now, all things considered.

"Might I sit?" Professor McGonagall says, and she's already stepping over a pair of discarded jeans. Harry manages to swipe a hoodie and a pair of trainers from the sofa cushions before she settles herself on the worn upholstery. She turns uncomfortably sharp eyes on Harry.

He drops his clothes on the rumpled bed and sits, the mattress dipping beneath him. He doesn't speak. There's not much to say, in his opinion. His hand trembles, and he clenches his fist tightly against the sharp prickle of his unsettled magic.

McGonagall notices. "It still hasn't stabilised?" Her voice is gentle.

Harry shakes his head. The week after the battle he'd had the first of his fits, falling to the floor at the Burrow, his body jerking, his magic exploding nearly an entire shelf of plates. Molly and Ginny had shoved him through the Floo to St Mungo's, and it'd taken an entire two days of being sedated in Spell Damage before the Healers had determined that his fight with Voldemort had affected his magic levels, sending them into intense fluctuations.

"The potions help," Harry says after a moment. He takes two a day now, down from three a week ago, and they suppress the worst of the instability. "Guhathakurta says I should be off them by the start of term."

McGonagall nods. Her greying black hair is pulled back in a tight knot at the nape of her neck. "I spoke with Molly Weasley yesterday," she says. "She's concerned about you."

Harry tenses and grips the edge of the bed. "I'm fine."

"Really?" McGonagall glances around the room, and Harry feels his face warm. "It's the end of June, Harry, and hardly anyone's seen you outside of this room for weeks."

"I go out," Harry says defensively. "I have to eat." He doesn't bother to say that Tom brings most of his food up from the pub below.

McGonagall looks at him over the rims of her square spectacles. "Harry," she says, and he feels like a first-year again, certain that he's in trouble. "You can't hide up here forever."

His throat tightens and he stares down at the worn planks of the floor beneath his trainers. McGonagall's always been able to see through him. He swallows. "I don't care for the stares," he says finally. "Or for everyone coming up to shake my hand and tell me how grateful they are." He looks up at his Head of House. "I went to all the funerals, you know. Every single one of them." His voice breaks. "They were the heroes. Not me."

Neither of them says anything. Another train rumbles by, shaking the glass in the window panes and sending the thin curtains twisting in a breeze.

"The Aurors and reconstruction crews are leaving Hogwarts this week," McGonagall says finally. Harry looks over at her, his brow furrowed in confusion. She takes a deep breath. "You're planning on returning to school to complete your seventh year, Miss Granger tells me."

Harry nods. "If I want to be an Auror, I have to have my NEWTs," he says. "And Ron and I aren't eligible for the rescheduled NEWTs testing in London at Christmas since we didn't attend classes, so Robards won't let us into Auror training this year."

"Well." McGonagall shifts on the sofa and dust rises around her, sparkling in the sunlight from the window. She sneezes. "There's no sense in you holing yourself up in this horror of a pub--honestly, I don't know why Tom doesn't employ proper cleaners if he refuses to use house-elves--so you might as well take up rooms in Hogwarts castle until term."

"Ma'am?" Harry blinks at her.

McGonagall sniffs and pulls a neatly folded white handkerchief from her sleeve. She dabs at her nose before sneezing again. "It would be helpful for me, really. There's another reconstruction crew coming in August to finish the remainder of the castle, but there are wards that need to be reinforced before they do." She looks up at Harry. "Your assistance in that regard would be greatly appreciated."

A warmth spreads though Harry. Home, he thinks. He's always been happiest at Hogwarts. "Really?"

"Would I be here otherwise?" McGonagall says sharply. She tucks her handkerchief back in her sleeve and stands. "I'll expect you by Friday supper then."

"I'll be there." He's already wondering how to get his clothes washed in time. Perhaps he'll just leave them be and let the Hogwarts elves take care of them.

McGonagall stops at the door, her hand on the knob. "And one thing, Mr Potter. At Hogwarts, the war is over. There'll be no recrimination on its grounds for what people may have done during those years, do I make myself clear?"

"No blaming the Slytherins," Harry says quietly. At her nod, he shrugs. "What's the point? We were all just kids."

Her eyes soften. "Yes. You were. All of you. I expect you to remember that."

When the door closes behind her, Harry falls back onto the bed with a sigh. He's going home.

He smiles for the first time in weeks.



“She’ll be foaling soon,” Hagrid says cheerfully as he strides across the clearing to the herd of Thestrals. A twig cracks beneath his enormous booted feet. “First Thestral born in three years.”

Draco nearly has to run to keep up. He’s been at Hogwarts since mid-May, assigned to be assistant to the groundskeeper. It was meant to humiliate him, he knows. A heavy-handed indictment by the Wizengamot of Lucius Malfoy’s soft-handed son, sent into two years of manual labour overseen by a half-giant instead of the menial, mind-numbing Ministry filing work his friends were given.

The first two weeks were hell, he’ll admit. He’d hated being supervised by Hagrid of all people. Everyone knew the man was utterly mad. He’d set that horrible Hippogriff on Draco during third year after all, and the beasts he seemed to adore the most were always the ones the Ministry was warning wizards and witches to be the most cautious around. Draco’d spent his first days on the Hogwarts grounds mucking out the paddocks for the porlocks, who hid everytime Draco came near the damned things.

And then Hagrid had taken him here for the first time, to help with the Thestrals. They’d both been surprised when the Thestrals had come up to Draco, nudging him gently with their beaked muzzles. They’d taken to him quickly, and Draco found he liked the tall horses with their slick short black hair and leathery wings.

They’re his responsibility now, and he’ll be there when Ismene gives birth in a few weeks. He hasn’t bothered to hide his excitement.

Firenze is waiting for them, his broad hands stroking Ismene’s swollen sides. “It won’t be long,” he says, and he steps back as Draco approaches the Thestral, taking his place.

Her hair is soft and smooth beneath Draco’s fingers, and he feels her relax at his touch. She snuffs softly, ruffling his hair with her sharp beak. He laughs. “Wench,” he murmurs, his hands rubbing gently over the swell of her belly. He can feel the press of a hoof against his palm, and Ismene shifts, wincing in pain.

“Rub ‘er like this,” Hagrid says from behind him, and Draco doesn’t pull away when the giant’s thick fingers rest over his, moving Draco’s hand in wider circles. Ismene leans into the touch, resting her head on Draco’s shoulder. “Good lad.”

Hagrid moves his hand and he steps away to check on the rest of the herd. Firenze watches Draco, a smile curving his lips. His blond hair gleams in the sunlight. “He’s pleased with you, you realise.”

Draco shrugs and keeps stroking Ismene’s belly. “I don’t see why. This is the only task he gives me that I don’t bugger up.” He stops long enough to push his sleeve back above his elbow. He’s learned to abandon his robe early on, and it’s a sign of how comfortable he is here in the clearing that it doesn’t matter that the black mar of his Dark Mark is exposed. Neither Hagrid nor Firenze flinches at it.

There’s a reason why Hagrid dresses in trousers and boots around the animals, and Draco’s taken to wearing brown corduroys cinched around his narrow hips with a wide leather belt and a white linen shirt with the sleeves rolled up--when he doesn’t just toss it aside entirely on a warm afternoon. His father--let alone his tailor--would be horrified at his attire, he’s certain, but at the moment Draco doesn’t

give a damn what his father thinks. During Draco's last visit to Azkaban, Lucius had made quite clear his resentment towards his son's Community Order.

"You have your freedom," his father had snapped at him when Draco had complained about the blisters on his hands and the sunburn across his back. "Speak to me about your petty complaints when you've been forced to endure one night in this hellhole."

Draco's mouth had tightened. "If it weren't for your ridiculous toadying to that bastard--"

His mother had touched his arm. "Draco." He'd fallen silent, and looked away, not bothering to point out his father had actually committed the crimes he was being punished for. Common logic had never meant much to Lucius Malfoy.

"It's a rare human who can connect with Thestrals the way you do." Firenze walks to Ismene's flanks, checking her gently. "They frighten most."

"I suppose." Draco pulls a phial of oil from his pocket and pours some on his palm. He begins to rub it into Ismene's rough wings. With the foal, she's too heavy to fly now, Hagrid's told him, so she needs to have her wings cared for to keep them from drying out due to disuse. "I've seen worse."

"You're not afraid of them," Firenze says.

Draco's fingers slide across the leathery membrane--the patagium, Hagrid's told him--between the bones in Ismene's wings. He doesn't say anything for a moment, then he looks up at the centaur. "They're less terrifying than humans," he says finally. "Or at least the ones I know."

Firenze's tail twitches, flicking to one side in a sweep of golden hair. "True."

They fall silent. Draco works the oil into the skin over Ismene's bones. The sun is warm on his shoulders. He's come to love the forest in the past six weeks. It had frightened him desperately as a child, and he's still not certain he'd want to find himself in it at night. But here, during the day, in this small clearing with the breeze stirring the leaves on the trees, making them sigh and rustle as it ruffles his blond hair, he feels peaceful. He doesn't think of the abandoned acromantula colony nearby, or the three-headed dog he's seen running through the trees at times, or the Blood-sucking Bugbears Hagrid's warned him to keep an eye out for. Instead he focuses on the Thestral in front of him and his inexplicable fondness for her.

They'd startled him at first, when he'd come back his seventh year and seen them at last. He'd been afraid of their sharp beaks and hooves and their wide, bat-like wings. He'd been afraid of what they meant. Bad omens. Death. Misfortune.

Somehow, now, after burying Vince, they didn't hold the same fear. "Once you see death," Draco says, though he's not sure why he breaks the comfortable silence, "you change."

Firenze looks up from Ismene's tail. He's been braiding it and wrapping it long strips of white cotton in preparation for the foaling. "Yes."

"Sometimes." Draco moves to Ismene's other wing. "I don't think it affected my father."

“You’re not your father.” Firenze’s fingers knot the cotton over Ismene’s stiffly braided black tail.

Draco snorts. He pours more oil into his palm. “You should tell some people that.” He strokes his slick fingers across Ismene’s wing. The *Prophet* enjoys conflating his crimes with those of Lucius’s. There isn’t a Sunday edition that goes by without some letter or editorial decrying his family and their lack of proper punishment. Mother had stopped her subscription recently when not even a complaint to Cuffe himself had put an end to the completely puerile and factually inaccurate innuendo.

“You’re not.” Firenze pats Ismene’s flank. “No more so than your son will be you.”

That brings Draco up short. He eyes Firenze balefully. “That’s not amusing.”

Firenze quirks an eyebrow at him. “It wasn’t meant to be.”

Draco knows he shouldn’t be this furious. The centaur has no idea Draco’s queer or that he’d decided that, his father’s wishes be damned, he’ll be the last Malfoy. An ineffectual and horribly embarrassing tumble with Pansy sixth year had made him realise that girls had entirely no affect on his cock, whereas one sideways look at Blaise’s splendidly naked arse had him wanking for hours behind his bed hangings, fantasising about being buried deep between those exquisite dark globes. The family line would stop with him, and he thought failing in his duty would be punishment enough. His penance for costing Vince his life. His fingers dig into Ismene’s skin, and she bleats softly. “I won’t have a son. It’s physically impossible.”

“It’s written in the stars, Draco,” Firenze says quietly. “You’ll have an heir.”

Draco steps back, dropping his hands from Ismene’s wings. She shifts and snuffles at him. His mouth thins. “The stars,” he says tightly, “are full of utter shit.”

He ignores Hagrid’s annoyed shout as he walks off and the forest closes up around him.



Supper at Hogwarts is a quiet affair.

Harry sits beside McGonagall, pressing the tines of his fork into his sausage. He’s been at the castle for only an hour—long enough to settle his bags in the room near the staff quarters that the Headmistress has prepared for him. He’d expected Gryffindor Tower, but she’d explained that she thought it best he be near the other summer staff members before term started, particularly with certain parts of the castle still needing repair.

There’s only a handful of them, he’s been told. McGonagall, and Filch, and Hagrid, and Flitwick, and Pince mostly, with Firenze helping with the forest beasts, and Binns drifting about with the other ghosts. Pomfrey’s on call in Cornwall, McGonagall says, in case anyone falls ill or is hurt, but other than that she only pops in once a week to check the infirmary stores and have tea with Pince in the library.

And then, of course, there’s Draco Malfoy.

“Mr Malfoy has been assigned two years of service at Hogwarts under the terms of his Community Order.” McGonagall had looked at Harry, mouth stern and tight, as the former Hogwarts headmasters watched in amusement from their portraits. “I am quite aware of your mutual disregard, and I have made it clear to him as well that I expect extraordinary behaviour from the both of you. Which means no hexes, jinxes, or fisticuffs. Do I make myself perfectly clear?”

Harry'd had no choice but to nod.

Malfoy isn't at supper. Hagrid's murmured something to McGonagall about Firenze setting the lad off. Harry's surprised that Hagrid's defending Malfoy; Hagrid's dislike of the prat wasn't well-hidden during school. McGonagall looks disappointed, but she just nods and reaches for her pumpkin juice.

When she turns away to speak to Professor Sprout about the repairs still needed on the greenhouses, Harry looks at Hagrid and whispers, “Malfoy?”

Hagrid just shrugs. “He's not so bad these days,” he says under his breath. “A bit stropky at times, but the Thestrals like him well enough, and he seems to not mind 'em so much himself.”

Harry scowls. “No one likes Malfoy.”

“I do,” Hagrid says simply. “Mostly. He's changed some. Not much, mind, but enough so yeh don't want to string him up by his toenails.” He stops and ponders. “Well. Not always.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “Then again, you're soft on dangerous creatures.”

“Always have been,” Hagrid says with a chuckle. He sops his bread in his soup. “Be gentle with 'em and they'll turn out well enough. Works a charm with people, too.” He leans forward, his beard trailing in his bowl. “Best keep that in mind. the Headmistress don't want yeh and young Draco brawlin' 'round the castle like yer wont to do.”

Harry sighs. He doesn't think he's the energy to tussle with Malfoy, even if he wants to. It doesn't matter. Nothing much does, these days.

Supper is interminable. The Hall is too empty. Too cold. All Harry can remember as he looks around are the screams from the battle. The smoke from the fires. The flash of curses and hexes as they ricocheted off stone walls. The bodies lying stretched out on the floor in the entrance hall, so damned many of them lined up, waiting for the Healers to collect them.

And Harry himself, standing in the middle of the Great Hall, facing down the man who had already killed him.

He drops his fork against his plate. Its sharp clatter echoes in the quiet hall. He can barely breathe.

McGonagall turns to him. “Harry,” she says, but he's already pushed his chair back.

“I'm sorry.” Harry drops his napkin on the table. “I just need some air.”

No one follows him. He's grateful, though he's certain he sees McGonagall stop Hagrid with a hand on his arm. He runs down the entrance hall, the faint memory of shouts echoing in his ears. It's not the first

time he's been in Hogwarts since the battle. There'd been a memorial held in the Great Hall just two weeks afterwards. He'd been numb then, sedated by the potions stabilising his magic and by the overwhelming grief at all the deaths he'd seen. For the rest of May he'd gone from funeral to funeral, sometimes several in a day, always pale and sober in his best black robes.

He'd had to. No one had asked it of him or expected it even. Ginny had shouted at him, told him that he wasn't responsible for them all, that he was tormenting himself. He'd just pulled on his dress robe and Floo'd to the next funeral. He hadn't even known whose it was.

The air is cool on his cheeks when he pushes the front door open. It's as heavy as he remembers it, and the newly set wards crackle across his palm, stinging slightly. They'll settle into the wood in a week or two, leaving behind a pleasantly warm glow when the students touch the door.

Harry stops on the steps, looking out over the Hogwarts grounds. The lawn slopes down to Hagrid's hut and the paddocks beyond. Malfoy's domain now, although McGonagall had told Harry he had a room in the castle with the staff. Ponce, Harry thinks. He's probably hidden away, like a coward, forcing the house-elves to wait on him hand and foot.

Perhaps he should have realised it would have been harder than he expected to come back. Hermione had tried to warn him last night, but Harry'd waved her off. Hogwarts was home, after all. He just hadn't thought there'd still be ghosts lingering.

The sun barely brushes the tops of the mountains. It's summer, and it won't set until ten, at least, but the light is golden warm and the shadows are long. Harry finds himself at the Quidditch pitch, one of the few places that wasn't harmed in the battle.

Even Death Eaters respect some traditions.

Harry doesn't see him until it's too late. Malfoy's on a broom, circling the pitch lazily, and Harry stops, his hands in his robe pockets. Malfoy stills, his hands tight on his broomstick. Harry's surprised by him-- by his bare chest and his faintly golden skin, by the hint of muscles in broad shoulders and graceful arms, by his hair, once silver-gilt and now nearly bleached white by the sun. There's a streak of dirt on Malfoy's cheek, and his once immaculate hair is sweaty and unkempt.

"Potty Potter," Malfoy says, and the sneer is fainter than it was once, but it's still there. Harry's filled with relief. At least something hasn't changed. "McG told me we'd be cursed with your presence this summer."

Harry shrugs. "Professor *McGonagall*--" He emphasises her full name, and Malfoy snorts. "--needed some help with the wards."

"Is that what she told you?" Malfoy sits up on his broom, and Harry can't tear his eyes away from Malfoy's muscular torso. He can see the pale pink scar lines criss-crossing his skin. *Sectumsempra*, he thinks with a twinge of guilt. Snape's dittany hadn't worked. "I heard everyone was oh-so-worried that you might off yourself because the Weaselette tossed you over."

"Fuck off, Malfoy." Harry glares up at him.

Malfoy's boots are hooked on the broom stirrups. He's wearing corduroys--*corduroys*, for Christ's sake--and Harry hates how well they look on his lithe frame. He wonders what Malfoy would say if he knew

that Harry'd been the one to leave Ginny, once he'd realised that when push came to shove, he really could care less about fucking her. Ginny'd blamed it on the potions, on Harry's depression, on anything but the actual truth. It wasn't that they hadn't tried. God knows he'd come from her hands and her mouth and from rutting against her on the Weasley's sofa one silent afternoon at the Burrow. But the night he'd slipped into her bedroom, the night he'd first touched her bare skin, felt the slickness of her thighs as she'd wrapped them around his hips, her breath catching when his cock had pressed inside her...well. It hadn't been anything like what Ron described with Hermione.

They'd laid beside each other less than five minutes later, staring up at the ceiling, then Ginny had slipped silently out of the bed, reaching for her dressing gown. Harry'd listened to the soft pad of her feet across the creaking floorboards, followed by the click of the bathroom door, before he'd sat up and grabbed his pyjama bottoms from the rug. He was a coward, he knew, but he couldn't be there when she returned.

He hadn't expected Hermione to be in Ron's room, though he should have. He'd known Ron had been sneaking into her parents' house nearly every night. Still, he stood transfixed, his hand on the doorknob as he watched them together, his eyes caught by the sight of Ron's flexing arse, the long sweep of his freckled back, the groan he made as he arched over her writhing body.

Harry supposes he should have known he was queer when he spent months alone with Hermione in the Forest of Dean and hadn't once wanted to crawl into her bed, not even after the night he'd seen her bathing, her breasts full and white in the moonlight. He realised it that night, standing in the doorway, his cock harder than it'd been when Ginny'd touched him.

And now the sight of Malfoy's bare chest was twisting his stomach into knots. It was all he could do not to growl *put on a damn shirt* to the wanker, and wouldn't that give Malfoy something to lord over him for the rest of the year.

Malfoy just watches him, grey eyes cool and calculating. He tucks a lock of pale hair behind one ear. "Strike a nerve, have I?" he asks calmly. "You'd be surprised at what the staff talk about over dinner. The Minister's even concerned now. Wouldn't do to have the War Hero suicidal, would it?" His lip curls. "The rest of us on the other hand..."

"I'll gladly hold the knife for you," Harry says bitterly, and he shocks himself with the statement. He flushes, and opens his mouth to apologise, but Malfoy just laughs. The clear peal of amusement surprises Harry.

"I'm sure you would." Malfoy lets his broom drift lower. "But I'm guessing Old McGonagall forced the same promise of good behaviour out of you that she did me." He eyes Harry for a long moment, then tugs his broomstick up enough to send himself circling around Harry's head. "Come on Potter, there are ten of us here, including the damned cat," he says. "We can't avoid each other entirely this summer, and I'm not idiot enough to exchange Hogwarts for Azkaban just because I can't stand you." The smooth black hilt of a wand sticks out of his leather belt. Harry knows it's not Malfoy's. The Ministry hasn't let anyone on Community Order keep their wand. Instead they've each been issued a Ministry wand, calibrated to allow them to do just enough magic for personal care and to suit the requirements of their jobs. "Feel like flying?"

"What?" Harry blinks.

Malfoy rolls his eyes. "Get a broom from the shed, you imbecile." He pulls a Snitch from his pocket and lets it hover beside him. "I'm bored and irritated--always a deadly combination, my mother claims--and you're here bothering me. We might as well take our misery out on each other in a McGonagall-approved fashion, and the old bat can't object to my kicking your arse in a bit of one-on-one."

Harry has to admit he has a point. "Cheat, and I'll deck you anyway."

Malfoy lifts one shoulder. Harry has no damned idea how he can manage to look completely composed half-naked. "You're too pathetic to cheat against."

The broom shed's still unlocked. It smells of dust and lemon oil broom polish. Harry wishes he had his Firebolt still, but it's been destroyed since the battle over Little Whinging. His throat tightens as he reaches for a battered Nimbus. He still misses Hedwig, finds himself looking for her when he forgets--and then he remembers.

Malfoy's waiting for him over the pitch. Harry drops his robe beside Malfoy's abandoned shirt and flies up to meet him. It's been too long since he's been on a broom. The handle is rough against his palms, and he takes a moment to resettle himself on the cushioning charm. Malfoy watches him, a faint smile on his face. It doesn't reach his eyes.

"Problems?"

"In your dreams." Harry hooks his trainers over the stirrups. A breeze ripples the sleeves of his brown t-shirt. "No charms on the Snitch?"

It hums beside Malfoy. "Only the regulation ones," he says, and he catches it between two fingers. Harry believes him. He wonders if that makes him a fool.

They face off. Malfoy tosses the Snitch in the air, and it darts to the side, shining in the sun. They hesitate, both of them studying each other for a moment, and then with a whoop, Malfoy wheels his broom to the side, dashing after the Snitch.

Harry races behind, the wind in his hair, the sun on his back.

He feels alive.



The weeks pass. Draco avoids Potter as much as he can during the days. It's not difficult to do. Potter spends most of his time wandering through the castle with McGonagall and Flitwick, finding the spots where the wards have weakened--or fallen completely, in some cases. Evenings, however, are filled with flying and Quidditch after dinner. They're nearly silent as they fly now, both of them fixated on the rush of joy as they race each other for the Snitch. Some evenings the other staff come out to watch them. Draco almost thinks McGonagall approves, even on nights one--or both--of them are tight and tense, eager to bruise each other as they try to knock the other's broom out of the way.

Draco wonders if Potter wakes up at night like he does, screaming from a nightmare that he can't seem to shake. Watching him over breakfast some mornings, when Potter's eyes are bloodshot and the circles beneath are dark and purple, Draco's certain of it. At those moments, Draco almost feels sorry for the

bastard. It fades, though, when he thinks of his visits to his father in Azkaban, his mother clenching his hand tightly as they wait to see whether Lucius will have a good day or a bad.

Draco's days are spent outside, walking the grounds with Hagrid and Fang, the enormous boarhound that had terrorised Draco during his school years. Now, however, the ridiculous dog has taken a fancy to him and follows him on his rounds. Draco had thought Hagrid set the beast on him as a guard, but Hagrid had laughed that off over tea one afternoon.

"Fang guard anything?" Hagrid had nearly spilled his whisky-laced tea across the tabletop. He'd wiped his eyes with his filthy sleeve. "Not bloody likely, lad. He's just taken a shine to yeh is all. Best let him follow yeh about; there's no stopping him otherwise. He'll tire of it soon enough." He'd reached down and scratched the ears of the huge dog. Fang had whined and leaned into the touch. "Lazy beast, he is."

It's Fang Hagrid sends out to Draco when he's down in the lower lawn, trying to repair a broken fence. Draco swears when the dog nudges his back and barks. The heavy plank he's been levitating falls to the ground with a crash.

Fang barks again, then whines and tugs on Draco's sleeve. Draco pulls away, annoyed. If that plank's broken in half, he'll hex the damned creature. He doesn't care what Hagrid would say. "What?"

The dog tugs at him again, nearly dragging him five feet down the fence. His boots slip on the grass, and he ends up on his back, looking up at the blue sky and a slobbering canine face. Fang barks.

Draco clammers to his feet. "Fine. I'll go with you, but if this is just you wanting to play fetch again, I'm locking you in that bloody hut."

Fang takes off; Draco follows. It's only when they enter the Forbidden Forest, that Draco realises what must be happening. The Thestral's foaling.

Hagrid's stooped beside Ismene when Draco reaches the clearing. Firenze is behind him. "Careful," Hagrid says when he looks up. "She's in a bit of pain now, so don't yeh come barrelling over like a first-year."

Ismene bellows, her body shaking with a push. Draco can see a small hoof coming from her flanks. She's on her side and her wings are folded tightly against her body. He squats next to her, reaching out to brush his fingertips against her mane. Hagrid starts to say something, but Firenze touches his shoulder.

"Let the boy be," he says.

Draco strokes Ismene's neck. The Thestral calms for a moment, stilling. "You'll be fine, beautiful," he whispers. He can see Ismene's stallion out of the corner of his eye, tossing his head and stomping his hoof against the patchy grass. Draco's not afraid of him. Instead his fingers slide along Ismene's hair, smoothing down over her back, and across her flank. She tenses again for another push, but this one's easier somehow, and another hoof slides from Ismene's body.

"Is she all right?" Draco asks softly. He doesn't stop stroking Ismene's side. The Thestral nudges him with her beak, and he smiles down at her. Sweat glistens off her hair, and it shines more than usual.

"She's nearly there," Firenze says. He moves so that Hagrid can take his place at Ismene's flanks. "Just a few more pushes."

Draco watches as Ismene strains again, and a small beak appears. He's never seen a birth before, not even the time his Kneazle had a litter. The elves hadn't let him near her lest he get bitten or scratched. He's amazed as Hagrid gently takes the tiny head that emerges, guiding it as the shoulders follow.

Ismene rests, her foal half out of her body. She looks up at Draco, nips his trousers lightly. Her white eyes seem to glow. "You're doing well," he murmurs. "Get through this and I'll give your wings the best oiling they've ever had." He can see her bones through her thin skin. "And I'll find a nice fat bird or two for your dinner, how's that?"

"Give us another push, love," Hagrid says. He cradles the tiny Thestral's shoulders in his huge hands. Ismene closes her eyes and snuffs.

"Just one more." Draco smooths back her mane. "You can do it."

Ismene looks up at him. She nudges his hand, and whinnies softly before tensing her body again. A moment later, the foal slides free, its tiny wings unfurling as Hagrid helps settle it on the ground. It hesitates, turning its head and fluttering its wings for a moment before it twists, leaning towards Ismene as it opens its mouth silently. The umbilical cord stretches between them, then breaks.

"Look at that litt'un," Hagrid says proudly. He pulls a handkerchief out of his pocket and wipes his hands on it before dabbing it at his wet eyes. "She's a looker, inn't she, Firenze?"

Firenze beams at the Thestral. It scootches on its knees over to Ismene, and she raises one wing tiredly, drawing her foal to her side. It eyes Draco with bright grey eyes. He reaches out to touch its gunmetal grey coat. The stallion moves forward with a sharp snuff, but Ismene turns her head to him and clacks her beak. He steps back as Ismene nudges Draco's hand to her foal.

Its mane is still slick and sticky, but it turns its head into Draco's touch, and he laughs when it tries to nip his fingertips. "Wretch."

"What will you name her?" Firenze asks, and it takes a moment before Draco looks up.

"Me?"

Firenze laughs. "I'd say you've the right, wouldn't you, Hagrid?"

Hagrid looks up from cleaning off the Thestral. "Fine by me."

Draco studies the small foal. "A girl, right?" At Firenze's nod, he bites his lip. "Druella," he says finally. "That was Grandmother Black's name. She was always kind to me since Mother was her favourite." He looks up. "Not that that was difficult, all things considered."

"Druella then." Hagrid stands up and claps his heavy hand on Draco's shoulder. "Let's leave mum and baby to bond a bit. Merlin knows I could use a pint or two after that." He glances over at Firenze. "Join us at me hut?"

Firenze looks up at the sky. It's clouding over. "I'd best be returning to my herd."

“Suit yerself.” Hagrid still hasn’t moved his hand. “More for Malfoy and me to drink, but send my regards to yer family. Off we go then, lad. There’s a bottle or two of lager in my cupboard with our names on ‘em.”

With a backwards glance at the small foal curled beside her mother, Draco follows Hagrid and Fang through the forest.

“Yer doin’ all right with Harry about?” Hagrid asks finally.

Draco’s crawling over a half-rotted log, holding his breath. He’s rather afraid something’s crawled up inside to die. When he exhales, he looks over at Hagrid. “Well enough, I suppose.” He sniffs. “Don’t worry. I’ve no intention of annoying Professor McGonagall.”

“*Headmistress* McGonagall,” Hagrid corrects. Dried leaves crunch beneath his boots. “And I dinn’t say yeh did. Just asking. Harry’s a good lad, but he’s got a chip on his shoulder when it comes to yeh.” He gives Draco a pointed look. “Reckon yeh’ve got the same for him.”

Draco shrugs. “He’s a prat, but he saved us all from a megalomaniacal madman, so I suppose I’ll behave myself.” He stiffens his shoulders. “I’ve no wish to give you reason to cart me off to Azkaban.”

Hagrid stops and turns, looking back at Draco. “Yeh think I’d do that.”

Draco wraps his arms around himself. The forest is shadowed and cold in this spot. It unnerves him, even with Fang plodding along beside them. He remembers a night years ago, walking along with them and Potter, seeing a bloodstained monster bent over a dead unicorn. He shivers. “Most people would. It seems they find me annoying.” He hesitates. “Among other things.”

“Yeh *are* annoying,” Hagrid says gruffly. “Particularly when yeh get all poncy. But mind me words, Malfoy. I’ve been in Azkaban before, and I got no wish to send anyone, least of all yeh, to that godforsaken place. Do yeh understand?”

Draco looks up at him. “Not really.”

Hagrid snorts. “For all yer a bloody swot, Draco Malfoy, there’s times I doubt yeh’ve a lick of sense in that brain of yers.” He sighs and cuffs Draco on the shoulder, nearly knocking him over. Draco catches himself on a tree. “Yer not going to Azkaban, so just shut it about that, all right?” He stomps off towards the edge of the forest, Fang bounding behind him.

After a moment, Draco follows, lost in his own thoughts.



Harry finds it odd that the best parts of his days are spent chasing a Snitch with Malfoy, of all people. When he reluctantly admits this to Ron in a firecall one night, his best mate just studies him for a moment through the green flames.

“It’s the flying, though, isn’t it?” Ron brushes his hair out of his eyes. It needs cutting, but Hermione likes it longer, so he’ll put off going to the barber again, Harry knows. Sometimes it bothers him how coupled

his closest friends are. Since things went pearshaped with Ginny, he feels awkward around them. They never notice. "I mean, you could be playing against anyone. Malfoy just happens to be around. Bad luck, that."

Harry chews on his thumbnail. Ron has a point, he supposes. It's Quidditch, not Malfoy. A sense of relief washes through him, and he shrugs, changing the subject to Hermione. Ron's face brightens. Harry steels himself for details he'd rather not know.

The warding of the castle is tiring. McGonagall only lets him help in the afternoon for a few hours, sending him off to rest the moment his magic flares, which happens more regularly than either of them would like. Harry's Healer ups the dosage of his potions at the next visit, frowning sternly at him as he tells Harry to keep his interaction with the wards at a minimum.

"Your magic's still too unstable for extended heavy spellwork," Guhathakurta says, scribbling notes in Harry's file. "I expect you to tell the Headmistress to limit your work to no more than an hour a day."

Harry nods dutifully and does no such thing. Assisting with the wards helps him, makes him feel useful, keeps the ghosts of the battle at bay. If he's working with McGonagall and Flitwick to reinforce the charms, he's not thinking about who died in this corridor or how that room stank of sweat and smoke and blood.

He only sees Malfoy at breakfast and supper. McGonagall tells him Hagrid and Malfoy eat lunch in Hagrid's hut, and Harry thinks it's a fitting punishment for Malfoy to endure Hagrid's cooking for at least one meal a day. His Community Order isn't supposed to be cushy, after all.

Harry wonders if Malfoy wakes up at night with the screams of a nightmare still echoing in his ears. Watching him over breakfast some mornings, when Malfoy won't meet anyone's eyes and his mouth is drawn and thin as he clutches a steaming cup of tea tightly in both hands, Harry's certain of it. At those moments, Harry almost feels sorry for the git. It fades, though, when he thinks of Teddy and how he'll never know his parents. Or George, having to soldier on without his twin.

Flying is happiness. In the fading light of the evening, his broom clenched between his thighs, the faint warmth of the lingering sun on his face, Harry feels normal. It's only when he races for the Snitch, barely missing a mid-air collision with a shouting Malfoy that he realises Ron's wrong. It couldn't be anyone else up here on a broom with him. Not really. Malfoy's always got under his skin in a way no one else has been able to. It's not just flying that makes Harry feel alive. It's hearing Malfoy tell him imperiously that he's shit at Quidditch; it's the urge to aim his broom so he buzzes past the bastard, nearly knocking him aside. It's beating him to the Snitch half the time and cursing when Malfoy's fingers close around it before his do.

Tonight, though, Harry's tired. McGonagall's been in London having meetings with the Ministry regarding the start of term, and Harry's taken advantage of her absence to spend most of the day helping Flitwick with the wards. He doesn't care that Malfoy's flying circles around him; all he wants to do is sit on his broom high above the pitch and watch the hawks swoop down over the treetops below.

"Potter," Malfoy snaps, and Harry realises the Snitch has just flitted past him lazily. He turns, too quickly perhaps, and a burst of magic shudders through him, pulling his hands from the broomstick. It bucks beneath him, and he's falling, the air whipping his hair into his eyes. He barely has time to shout, and all he can remember is to bend his knees as he twists around, desperate to land on his feet.

He jerks to a stop inches before the green grass of the pitch. Malfoy's beside him, his face white, his wand drawn. They hover in midair, staring at each other, both breathing hard.

Harry's broom slams into the turf between them.

"What the hell was that?" Malfoy looks ill.

Harry stretches one leg. The toe of his trainer doesn't even brush the grass. He looks at his hands. They're still trembling. He closes his fists slowly, then opens them again. The familiar tingling across his palm fades. "My magic."

Malfoy eyes him. "Right." A flick of his wand and Harry ends up on his arse, wincing. The ground's uncomfortably hard beneath him. Malfoy hops off his broom. It drops next to Harry's. "Explain."

"It's nothing really." Harry stretches out on the grass and looks up at the twilight sky. It glows rosy, and he thinks he can pick out Venus shining brightly behind a thin cloud. He tries to remember what Trelawney told them about the planet in Divination. It controlled sex, he thinks, though Old Sybil had tried to couch it in more discreet terms. Romance, she'd called it. They'd all known what she was talking about. The boys' dormitories had been enthralled with sex since the first of them had a wet dream.

"'Nothing' doesn't send *you* plummeting from a broom," Malfoy says dryly. "I should know." He sits beside Harry, his knees drawn up to his chest. "So."

Harry rolls over onto his side and studies Malfoy. His shoulders have broadened since sixth year. Harry wonders if that's happened recently or over the last year. He realises he's only seen Malfoy a handful of times since that night on the tower. "My magic," he says after a moment, "is a bit cocked up lately." He picks at a blade of grass, rubbing it between his fingertips. "Seems that sort of thing might happen when you lock horns with a Dark Lord." He hesitates. "And die."

"You didn't." Malfoy watches him. His boots are scuffed, the soles covered with dirt. He's rolled the sleeves of his linen shirt up over his elbows and the hairs on his forearms glint gold in the fading sunlight. When he shifts, Harry can see the curves of the Dark Mark, black against Malfoy's skin. Strangely, he doesn't care. He just has a sudden urge to trace the delicate jut of bone at Malfoy's wrist.

"I did." Harry flops onto his back. The soft, green grass tickles the nape of his neck. It smells rich and earthy. "Mostly." He glances over at Malfoy. "The afterlife looks rather like King's Cross."

Malfoy wrinkles his nose. "Remind me to pursue immortality." His palms smooth over his trousers. "Did you really die then?" He hesitates. "Mother says the Dark Lord cast the Killing Curse on you, but it didn't work."

"It did in a way." Harry stares at the clouds drifting across the rose-gold sky. "I just decided to come back." He closes his eyes for a moment and remembers the sense of peace he'd felt after the Curse hit him. "Sometimes I wonder why I didn't stay."

Silence stretches out between them. Harry finally opens his eyes and looks over at Malfoy. Blond hair brushes Malfoy's cheek, obscuring his eyes. "Why didn't you?" Malfoy says at last, his voice quiet.

"There were things left to do."

Malfoy glances at him then. "Killing His Lordship."

Harry shrugs. "Perhaps someone else could have done it at that point. Killing me weakened him." His fingers brush his scar. "But it needed to be me." His voice catches. "It had to be me."

Malfoy doesn't say anything. A fly lands on his hand and he brushes it off, rubbing his thumb across his skin. He sighs. "There's a location charm on me, you know." He flexes his fingers and Harry's surprised at how rough they already are. His nails are ragged and torn, and two knuckles are scraped. The Malfoy he'd known in his six years at school had perfectly groomed hands. "The Ministry wants to know where I am at all times."

"At least you're not in Azkaban--or dead," Harry says, and he doesn't mask the bitterness in his voice. Malfoy doesn't flinch.

"I know."

Harry looks away.

"You don't like me," Malfoy says.

"I don't recall you being overly fond of me either," Harry points out. Malfoy doesn't object.

"Why did you save me?" Malfoy's eyes are shadowed. "In the Room of Hidden Things. You could have left Greg and me there to die." He bites his lip and pulls his knees closer to his chest. "Like Vince."

Harry sits up. The Snitch dips past his shoulder and he catches it without thought. Its wings beat lightly against his palm. "You could have let me fall from my broom just now."

"I didn't."

"And I didn't leave you and Goyle." Harry twists the Snitch in his fingertips, and its wings fold up, slipping into the golden sphere.

Neither of them speak. The Snitch is heavy in Harry's hand. It reminds him of the one he'd carried around last year. *I open at the close*. He can still remember how it felt to stand on the edge of the forest, the Snitch held against his lips as he realised he truly was about to die. He remembers the ache deep inside at thinking that he wouldn't see Ginny again, or Ron, or Hermione, that he'd never be able to say goodbye.

Malfoy takes the Snitch from Harry. He strokes the smooth golden curve of the sphere with his thumb. "Your magic." He looks at Harry from the corner of his eye. "Is it dangerous?"

"No." Harry watches as Malfoy rolls the Snitch across his palm. He realises this is probably the longest conversation he's had with Malfoy. Definitely the longest they've gone without causing some sort of grievous bodily harm to each other. "The Healers just want me not to wear myself out. It's erratic when I'm tired." He shrugs, and a small smile curves his mouth. "Does odd things like knock me off brooms."

"And give me a heart attack in the process." Malfoy's glare is sardonic. "Die on my watch, Potter, and my tattered reputation will be irredeemable. They'd all be certain I'd murdered you."

“I’ll keep that in mind if I ever want to frame you for my death.” Harry says it lightly, but Malfoy turns a sharp look on him.

“Not funny.”

The shadows from the Keeper’s hoops are lengthening across the pitch. “So how long is your term?” Harry asks. It’s nearly time for them to go in; he realises he’s not so eager to disappear into his rooms yet. Talking to Malfoy isn’t as horrible as he’d thought.

Or perhaps he’s just lonely.

“Two years,” Malfoy says. He shifts, resettling on the grass so he’s cross-legged. The first two buttons of his shirt are undone, and Harry catches a glimpse of smooth skin and a sharp collarbone. “Elphias Doge thought it’d be fitting to send me back to the scene of my crime.” He doesn’t meet Harry’s eyes, choosing instead to study the markings on the Snitch in his fingers. “My nightmares are appreciative, I’m certain.” His mouth twists. “Vicious old bastard.”

Harry can’t stop himself. “Maybe he thought it’d do you good to spend time with your ghosts. Your cousin, for one. She’d still be alive if you hadn’t been such a shit.”

Malfoy’s fingers tighten on the Snitch, small crescents paling beneath the tips of his nails. “I never knew Nymphadora,” he says.

“She was amazing,” Harry says. “Funny and smart and a brilliant Auror--” His voice catches in the back of his throat. He’s still angry with Tonks and Remus both, neither of them stopping to think what it would do to their son to grow up without both of them. He wraps his arms around his knees and rocks back and forth for a moment, willing himself back under control. “She has a son, you know.”

“Ted.” Malfoy nods. “I’ve met him.” At Harry’s sceptical look, he shrugs. “Mother has Aunt Andromeda over on Sundays, and she brings him.”

“I thought your mother hated Dromeda,” Harry says.

Malfoy’s sneer is back. “What you think of my family is often wrong, Potter.” He looks away, plucking a few leaves of grass. He lets them drift from his fingertips. “Father was the one who forbade Mother from seeing her sister.”

Harry considers this for a long moment. “Your father’s a shit.”

“Of course he is.”

Harry expected a virulent defence of Lucius Malfoy. He’s taken aback. “That’s not what you said a few years ago.”

“That would be before my father decided to allow a mad bastard to put my life on the line to save his own.” Malfoy’s body is tense. He stares up into the empty stands, the remnants of sun casting a golden glow in his cheeks. “By the end of it all, Father knew I wanted out.” He shudders. “I spent months praying His Lordship wouldn’t turn his wand on me out of boredom.”

This gives Harry pause. He'd known Malfoy was afraid when he saw him in the Manor. That much had been clear. Still, he'd assumed he stood by Lucius. He chooses his words carefully. "I guess your father's not so happy with you then?"

"Oh, don't worry, Potter," Malfoy says bitterly. He reaches for his broom. "I can assure you I've disappointed Lucius Malfoy more than you can appreciate in ways that go far beyond political disagreements." He pushes himself to his feet and looks down at Harry. His cheeks are flushed. "To begin with, it's a bit harder to provide a damned heir when you fancy cock rather than tits."

Harry looks at him in surprise. "You're bent?" His eyes trail down Malfoy's long, lean body; he can't stop himself. Malfoy's face reddens more. A sneer pulls his mouth to one side.

"Bent, yes." Malfoy clenches his broom. He lifts his pointed chin. "Poof, pillow biter, arse bandit, shirt lifter, bonafide cocksucker. Go ahead, Potter. Spread the word to all your little sycophants. I'm sure they'll be delighted to know. I can hear the Weasel now: *Pity he's not in Azkaban. They'd have use for his talents there.*"

"Ron wouldn't say that," Harry says hotly. He stands, wincing slightly. His bones still hurt from his fluctuating magic. He doesn't quite meet Malfoy's eyes; he's not so certain Ron wouldn't. At least about Malfoy.

Malfoy gives him a scathing look. "They all do. They all think it." His mouth tightens; he glances away. A breeze catches his hair, blowing it across his cheek, and he brushes it away. When he speaks again, his voice is low. Raw. "Even the ones who say they give a damn about you."

He stalks off before Harry can stop him, his back stiff. Harry watches him, his gaze sliding down from Malfoy's tight shoulders to the faint swell of his arse beneath his trousers.

Of all people, he thinks. Here he is, only now coming to terms with the fact that he fancies boys, and he's stuck in bloody Scotland with the one idiot he despises--and occasionally wanks over, his wretched mind supplies helpfully--and now Harry can't seem to escape the image of that idiot on his knees in front of him, face pressed against Harry's open flies, mouth wet around his swollen prick, pale gold hair twisted around his fingers.

Harry shivers. His fingertips graze the zip of his jeans. Malfoy. Bent. Oh, *Christ*.

A strangled laugh catches Harry off-guard. It takes a moment before he realises it's his.



Draco doesn't come to breakfast the next morning. Or dinner. He doesn't want to see Potter, doesn't want to face what he's admitted to him.

Standing in the shower after a day spent rounding up Blast-Ended Skrewts who'd escaped their pens, water pouring over his head, down his aching shoulders and across his burnt palms, he curses himself for letting Potter see past his facade. It's not as if he's kept his sexuality a complete secret. It'd been known in Slytherin House last term, and anyone who dared look at him askance had faced the wrath of Pansy Parkinson. Theo had tried it just once. He'd spent three days in the infirmary sicking up, and Snape had ignored his furious complaints, choosing instead to send him to detention with the Carrows.

Theo had never commented on Draco being a poof again.

Draco avoids the Great Hall. He works; he sleeps; he sneaks to the kitchens for food. It's weak of him, he knows, but he can't bear seeing pity in Potter's eyes.

It takes only a few days before Hagrid pulls Draco aside, questioning his noticeable absence at meals. Draco just shrugs and mumbles something about Potter being an arse before he returns his attention to the grass-cutting charm he's casting on the upper lawn.

He ought to have known that wouldn't be the end of it.

Potter finds him in the Thestrals' clearing. Draco's been coming every afternoon to check on Druella, bringing her and Ismene handfuls of sugar cubes he's nicked from Hagrid's hut. He sits beneath the wide branches of a tree, laughing as Druella butts his shoulder with her beak, her tiny wings unfurling as she sneaks another sugar cube from Draco's palm. Her mother looks on indulgently from across the clearing.

"Hagrid told me you might be here," Potter says. He moves from the shadows silently, his hands in his jeans pockets. His hair is mussed and dusty from some castle corridor, Draco presumes.

Draco doesn't answer. His hand smooths across Druella's slick coat. Her hair's darkening now, changing from the dark grey of a newborn foal to an inky charcoal. She prances next to him for a moment before settling down next to him. She eyes Potter in what Draco can only hope is a sour manner. Druella doesn't seem to be fond of anything that takes Draco's attention from her. He scratches lightly behind her ear and she snuffs, leaning in to his touch.

Potter shifts from one foot to the other. He looks ridiculous in a worn black t-shirt that's obscenely too small for him, Draco thinks. He wonders what happened to Potter's penchant for clothes two or three sizes too large. His fingers card through Druella's rough mane.

"Hagrid thinks I've annoyed you." Potter turns his foot, rolling his trainer to one side before straightening up. Honestly, his posture is appalling. "I told him if I breathe it annoys you."

Draco just looks at him. There's no sense in denying the truth.

Potter runs a hand through his hair, pulling away a cobweb. He sighs and glances around the clearing. It seems to unsettle him.

"What?" Draco asks sharply.

"There used to be a colony of acromantula there." Potter points towards the edge of the clearing where an ancient, gnarled oak rests. Its trunk is split open and its dark branches twist up to tangle in the canopy of leaves above.

"Not anymore." Draco wonders at Potter's uncharacteristic unease. "I wouldn't have thought you'd be spooked by that, oh Chosen One and Slayer of Dark Wizards."

With a sigh, Potter wraps his arms around himself as if he's chilled--not an impossibility this deep into the forest. Summer or not, it's still Scotland, and the sunlight that filters through the trees is spotty at

best. Draco's just grateful that the midge-repellent charms he'd helped Hagrid cast his first week of Community Order are still holding. Mostly. He'd slapped one of the beastly creatures away this morning just before it latched its blood-sucking proboscis into his arm.

Potter rubs his hands over his biceps and steps further into the clearing, turning to look around him. "I died here," he says softly.

Draco stills, his hand on Druella's back. He can feel the sharp bumps of her spine beneath his palm. "Here?" he asks after a moment.

Potter nods. He pushes his glasses up his nose. "It's a bit..." He trails off, lost in memory, his lip caught between his teeth.

Ismene steps forward, tossing her mane. She nudges Potter's shoulder with her beak, and he smiles faintly at her, reaching up to smooth his hand across her coat. "I never would have thought you and Thestrals would get on."

Draco pushes himself to his feet. Druella whinnies softly beside him, bumping against his hip. He calms her with a touch on her shoulder. She shifts on her thin legs; even after several weeks she's still unsteady at times. Firenze says its because she's growing so quickly that her centre of gravity shifts just as she's become used to it. "I like them," Draco says. "They're..." He hesitates, looking for a word. "Calming."

Potter snorts. "You and Luna should get together."

"Lovegood?" Draco arches an eyebrow. "Believe me when I say that particular branch of the Malfoys has been chopped quite thoroughly from the family tree. Grandfather Abraxas made certain of that."

"You're related?" Potter looks genuinely shocked.

Sometimes Draco forgets how sheltered Potter is from wizarding society. "Her grandmother was my grandfather's younger sister. She eloped with Alcibiades Lovegood when she was staying at the Dublin townhouse and then scandalised everyone by having Xenophilius six months later."

Potter blinks. "You kept her in your dungeon--"

"His Lordship kept her there," Draco snaps. His voice rises. He's tired of being blamed for everything the sodding Death Eaters did. "My parents made certain she was fed and stayed alive. She might be a complete nutter, but whether or not Grandfather Abraxas would approve, she's family. We're not monsters."

"Just to Muggles," Potter says tightly.

Draco clenches his fists, pressing them to his sides. The last thing he needs is to have an assault of the Savior of the Wizarding World on his record. He doesn't know how he feels about Muggles and the Muggleborn any longer. He doesn't like them, he knows that much, and he doesn't want to be around them. But two years of living in fear have shown him how very mad His Lordship was, and he wants nothing to do with any of his father's old friends. "Whatever you'd like to think," he says at last through gritted teeth.

Potter watches him, an odd expression on his face. "You're not going to deck me?"

"What's the point?" Draco's tired. All he wants is for Potter to go away, to leave him alone in this clearing with his Thestrals. He's only a little longer left with them before Hagrid will expect him back at the hut for yet another assignment. He supposes it's strange that he'd prefer to stay in the forest, given how terrified he was of it as a child. Then again, he's learned there are other things to fear than beasts who would rather disturb you less than you'd like to disturb them. He saves his terror for people now.

Potter just shrugs, then looks back at the Thestrals. Draco thinks perhaps Potter's disappointed, and he doesn't quite understand why.

"Hagrid says you're rather good with them," Potter says, with a nod towards Ismene and her herd. Her stallion eyes them both balefully. Creon, his name is, or at least that's what Firenze calls him. He still doesn't care for Draco.

"I suppose." Draco's not certain what that says about him. Druella nudges his hip again, and he runs his fingertips behind her ears. She snuffs happily and prances beside him. Potter laughs. It's a surprisingly pleasant sound that unsettles Draco. "Why are you here?" he asks. "Felt like reliving the scene of your demise?"

"Not particularly." Potter's face clouds, and Draco feels a momentary pang of guilt. "I didn't realise..." He stops and sighs again. "Well, I did, I suppose. Maybe that's why Hagrid..." Another sigh, and he pushes his hands into his pockets. "He was here too, you know."

Draco hadn't. His mother doesn't talk much about that night. All he knows is that somehow she kept Potter alive, and that was why neither she nor he were sitting in Azkaban alongside his father. "Hagrid," he says finally, and Potter nods.

"They had him tied to that tree," Potter says faintly, gesturing across the clearing to another, smaller oak. "All of them gathered here. They made him watch while I stood here..." He walks to a dip in the clearing. Ismene follows him, staying close. Potter stares off into the distance.

Draco feels a frisson of fear. He doesn't like the look on Potter's face. Doesn't like the fact that he's out here alone with him. "Potter," he says, and his voice is sharp and high.

Potter doesn't turn around. His shoulders jerk, and Draco steps forward, alarmed, visions of Potter's fall still in his mind. He'd thought his heart had stopped when he saw Potter lose his grip on the broomstick, tumbling towards the ground below. It'd been a repeat of the Quidditch match in which he and Vince and Greg had dressed as Dementors, in the hopes that Potter's infamous focus would be thrown off. If he closes his eyes he can still hear the bonecrunching thud of Potter's body striking the pitch. He'd spent that afternoon sicking up, coward that he was.

Working with the Thestrals has taught Draco to be cautious. The stallions are the most high-strung. It'd only taken one painful strike of Creon's hoof on his shoulder for him to learn not to spook him. He moves slowly towards Potter, warily. "Potter," he says again, and his fingers barely brush Potter's arm.

He ends up with a wand tip at his jaw. Potter's eyes are bright and unfocused. Haunted. Draco stays still, but he sees Potter's gaze drop to the flutter of a pulse in his throat. Potter blinks.

"I'd really rather you not hex me," Draco says. His voice only trembles slightly, a feat of which he's proud. The wand is still pressed against his skin. Draco recognises it. Hawthorn with a unicorn hair core. Ten inches. He'd used it for nearly seven years before Potter took it from him that night in the Manor. Part of him aches for it back, desperate to feel its familiar thrum against his palm. The Ministry would never allow it, though. He was lucky to have even a crippled wand of his own. McGonagall had made certain the Ministry had allowed him a few minor self-defence charms, claiming he'd need them in the Forbidden Forest. None of them would work against Harry Potter.

The wand drops a fraction of an inch. Enough to allow Draco to pull away. "Sorry," Potter says. He shakes his head, and runs a hand through his ridiculously messy hair. They look at each other for a long moment. Draco manages to keep his tongue. There's no damned sense in provoking Potter at the moment. Not here.

"Do you have nightmares?" Potter asks finally.

Draco nods. "Nearly every night," he whispers. He swallows, but he doesn't look away.

"Sometimes I think I hear you screaming," Potter says. "Late at night."

Their rooms are down the hall from each other. Draco reminds himself to put up a Silencing Charm. He keeps quiet, though, to Potter's obvious discomfort.

Potter steps back, sliding his wand into his pocket. "I should go. I just wanted to say you shouldn't avoid supper because of me. McGonagall's a bit narked at me because of that."

Draco waits until he's at the edge of the clearing before he speaks. "Charity Burbage," he says, and his throat's thick. Potter stops and looks back at him. "Last night I dreamt about Charity Burbage."

"The Muggle Studies professor who resigned." Potter moves closer again.

"She didn't resign." Draco's fingernails dig into his palms. He can barely feel them. "He killed her. There in the Manor, in front of us all, as she floated above the dinner table. She begged--" His voice catches and he shudders, closing his eyes. "She begged Snape to save her. They were friends, she said--" He doesn't know how his godfather had managed to turn away. He does know that Severus had never forgiven himself for her death.

"Christ," Potter breathes.

Draco looks at him then. "His Lordship killed her, then fed her body to Nagini." He licks his bottom lip. "That's not something that you ever escape, Potter. I see her in so damned many dreams. Looking at me. Begging me to help her. And I can't." The ache in his throat builds. "I couldn't even save myself," he murmurs.

"None of us could," Potter says. For a moment Draco thinks Potter's going to reach for him, and a burble of panic twists through him. Instead Potter rocks back on his heels and rakes both hands through his hair. "War's hell, Malfoy," he says finally.

Draco can't disagree. He watches Potter walk away, hands in his pockets, and he wonders why he can say things to the bastard that he can't even tell himself.

Later that night, long after dinner is finished, Draco finds a small, half-empty phial of potion beside his door. It's cool against Draco's fingers when he picks it up, and the familiar purple liquid sparkles in the light from the sconce above his shoulders. The note beside it is unsigned, but he knows, somehow, that it must be from Potter's personal store. The Ministry requires his access to potions be restricted and monitored. Mustn't have the terrible misfortune of a Community Order offender offing himself, now must we? The parchment crinkles beneath his fingers as he unfolds it.

Drink me, you git.

He smiles.

For the first time in weeks Draco sleeps without dreams.



Blaise slides a dusty bottle of whisky out of his robe and sets it on the table, casting a furtive glance towards the bar--and Rosemerta. "You do *not* want to know who I had to kill to get my hands on this," he murmurs.

Draco rolls his eyes and opens the bottle, pouring a splash of whisky into their just emptied glasses. The wax from the seal crumbles across the scarred wood of the tabletop. Closing his eyes, he takes a sip and sighs happily. It's worth enduring a glass of Ogden's Best for this. He relaxes back in his chair, his body aching. Still, he's out away from the castle, and in proper clothes finally, having traded in his scuffed boots and corduroys for woolen trousers and gleaming brogues. He flexes his silk-stockinged toes in relief.

"And also for you," Blaise says, and a soft thunk against the wood makes Draco open his eyes. Blaise pushes two packs of rice rolling papers and a small-but-hefty pouch of tobacco across the table. *Leavitt & Peirce* is stamped across the weathered leather, and Draco can feel the preservative charms warming his fingertips as he picks it up. "Finest Virginian. Mother was in Boston last week."

Draco opens the pouch. The earthy scent of tobacco drifts out. He hasn't had a smoke since he'd found himself back at Hogwarts. He won't touch the cack Hagrid puts in his pipe, and this is his first venture out to Hogsmeade. If Blaise hadn't brought him some, he'd have dragged him into the smoke shop down the street. "If I weren't utterly bent, I'd kiss your mother on the mouth."

Blaise makes a face. "I'd rather you not. Her latest is only a few years older than us, have I told you that?" He lifts his glass to his mouth. "And American. I'm not certain which is worse."

"Difficult call, that," Draco agrees. He tucks the pouch and rolling papers in his robe pocket and reaches for his whisky again. "How's the Ministry?"

"Well enough, I suppose." Blaise raises a shoulder expressively. He's had to report in to the MLE in order to cross the border into Scotland, despite the fact the terms of their Community Order grant them free travel throughout Britain. The Aurors say they're fine-tuning the program. Draco thinks they're just enormous cocksuckers. "Nothing more delightful than filling paperwork for the Ghoulish Task Force for a pittance that barely covers my part of the rent." He grimaces. Draco knows he's sharing a tiny Knockturn Alley flat with Greg and Theo. It's all they can afford on the few Galleons a month the Ministry provides. "Still, as Theo points out, better ghouls than the tea cart in the Atrium."

Draco drains his glass. "Poor Pansy." She'd been incandescent when she'd received her assignment after St Mungo's had finally released her, insisting it was ridiculously sexist to have her serving up tea and cake while the boys had actual jobs. She was forever dropping mugs of tea by the end of the day, and enduring the abuse spouted at her by the so-called heroes of the wizarding war. Sometimes Draco suspects the humiliation she endures on a near daily basis was part of what the Wizengamot had intended for her. They'd known the extent of her injuries; her Healers had testified on her behalf. "How's her appeal to the Wizengamot going?"

"As expected. They've oh-so-conveniently rescheduled her request for another hearing yet again." Blaise pours them both another few fingers of whisky. "She's right, you know. They'd never have put any of the rest of us in that position." Draco knows. Even Millie was assigned to Broom Regulatory Control.

"She really shouldn't have annoyed them," Draco says and he knows he's being more than unfair. Still, Pansy has a wretched habit of saying the wrong thing to the wrong people at the exact wrong time, and she ought to have known that, pride be damned, just after they'd lost the war wasn't the time to publicly--and in extraordinarily explicit terms--accuse one of the senior Wizengamot members of offering her a Mayfair flat and a monthly allotment in exchange for her willingness to suck his cock.

Even if he had.

Blaise gives him a long, tense look over the rim of his glass. "Yes, well, she sends her love."

Draco ignores the twinge of guilt. He knows how Blaise feels about that particular incident. One of these days he'll wake up and realise he's head over arse for Pansy. They all know it, no matter who Blaise is fucking at a particular moment. "Is she still living with Daphne or have they strangled each other yet?"

"Be afraid," Blaise says dryly. "They get on terrifyingly well now." He leans back in his chair, a faint smile curving his mouth. The candles floating above their heads cast a warm glow on his dark skin. "As a matter of fact, last night they were just bemoaning their inability to properly get into your trousers, either one of them. Pansy had some interesting stories."

Draco turns his whisky between his fingertips, studying the curve of the glass. Pansy'd told him more than once how disappointed she was that of all the Slytherins he was the one that had to be honestly, truly homosexual. He'd always felt guilty over that; he did love Pansy in his own conflicted way, and they'd occasionally talked about marriage late at night, curled up on the sofa in the common room. *An heir, darling*, she'd said, her hand on his chest and her head on his shoulder. *A potion or two, one quick shag, and nine months later we're both free to live our own lives as we see fit. No more lectures from your father about your familial duty, and no more pressure from my mother to marry up the social ladder.*

He'd considered it briefly. Until last year. Watching his father kowtowing to a madman had stripped Draco of all his familial pride. It didn't matter now if he was the last of his line. In fact, he was rather relieved. His father would be furious, of course. Draco's found that he doesn't really give a fuck.

"How pissed was she?" he asks finally. He takes a sip of whisky. It's sharp and smooth against his tongue. Peaty, almost.

"Two bottles of wine worth." Blaise raises an eyebrow. "Did she really offer to shag you with a dildo?"

Draco sighs. "Yes, and I turned her down, thank you very much." Pansy'd been one of the few he'd said no to last term, and everyone knew it. He suspects that's why it irritates her so much. He hadn't cared, though. None of them had. There'd been little more to drag them through the year, and Severus had turned a blind eye to their debauchery, only pulling Draco and Pansy aside once to inform them as Head Boy and Girl it was their responsibility to make certain none of their classmates were complete and total imbeciles. He'd given them the password to the cabinet in the infirmary that held contraceptive potions. Pomfrey had said nothing to them when her stores were depleted; she'd merely replaced the potions on a regular basis.

For the most part, he'd taken only the sixth and seventh year Slytherins boys to his bed, supplemented by a Ravenclaw or Hufflepuff every so often. Blaise had been there quite frequently, though he'd never let Draco fuck him properly. Instead he'd twisted long fingers through Draco's hair as Draco took his cock in his mouth, sucking him until Blaise cried out, his hips bucking as his spunk spurted over Draco's lips.

"How long has it been?" Blaise asks. He's always been able to read Draco's thoughts. Draco'd almost suspect him of Legilimency, if he didn't think Blaise was far too lazy to learn it. Instead he's certain Blaise has just inherited his mother's innate ability to read emotions and physical cues. Like the way Draco's been staring at Blaise's mouth.

Draco lifts his glass again. "Long enough." He hasn't cared these past two months, but it's been the longest he's gone without someone in bed with him since last September. "Not many options around here at the moment."

"Wait until September," Blaise says. "You always did enjoy Andrew Fronsac's arse."

"No fraternization with the students." Draco's mouth twists to one side. "McGonagall's already made that perfectly clear. And I'd rather not think about shagging Flitwick or Hagrid, thanks ever so."

Blaise flinches. "Right." He flicks his wand at the bottle of whisky as Rosmerta passes, and it Disillusions. She eyes them suspiciously but doesn't stop. "Isn't Potter there this summer?"

It's said a little too lightly, a smidge too casually. Draco's eyes narrow. "Why?"

"He's not a student at the moment." Blaise's smile is slow and careless. "And you always did seem a little obsessed."

"Fuck off," Draco says, his irritation rising. He's not about to tell Blaise that Potter's begun to feature more prominently in his nightly wanks. That he imagines what it would be like to spread Potter across his bed, to push him up against the cold tile of his shower, to look down and see Potter on his knees, Draco's cock in his mouth. "Besides, he's McGonagall's golden boy. She'd pass me back over to the Aurors in a heartbeat."

Blaise looks unconvinced. He *hmm*s into his whisky before setting his glass aside. He leans forward and his fingertips brush the back of Draco's hand. "You're terribly tense, you know."

Draco just looks at him. Blaise's dark eyes are fixed on his. "Aren't you shagging Daphne's little sister?"

"Astoria?" Blaise smiles. "Sometimes." His thumb sweeps across Draco's wrist. "Your mouth's much lovelier."

It's tempting. Draco's always loved sucking cock. Particularly Blaise's, and the bastard knows it. He takes another sip of whisky. "What's in it for me?" he asks. It'll never be Blaise's arse, of course.

"A hand other than your own."

Draco's prick swells. He hasn't been touched in weeks. And perhaps the memory of Blaise's fingers twisting around him will drive the away the thoughts of Potter's hand. Mouth. Arse, for fuck's sake. "And the whisky," he says.

Blaise stands. "Our alley awaits, milord," he murmurs, and a shiver runs down Draco's spine as he pushes his chair back.

He'll regret this in the morning. He always does. But for now all he wants is to feel the familiar rough cobblestones beneath his knees and taste Blaise's bitter spunk as he swallows him down. It's all he deserves after all, a quick knee-trembler behind the Three Broomsticks with an old friend who'd toss him aside the moment anyone thinks he might actually enjoy the idea of another man's prick.

The bottle of whisky is warm in his hand. He slides it into his robe. He'll drink the rest of it when he goes back to his rooms, alone again.

Draco brushes past Blaise, not waiting to see if he'll follow.

He knows he will.



Later, when everything changes, Harry will tell people that the turning point of his life wasn't his death. Or his battle against Voldemort. It was the night of his eighteenth birthday, when Hagrid decided to bring several bottles of perfectly brewed plum brandy to supper.

What he'll know, though, is that it's not Hagrid's fault his life up-ends. It's his own.

Harry supposes he's made the choice already, even before this afternoon when, laid low by another bout of fluctuating magic--a longer one this time, that sends him to the floor, shaking and makes McGonagall Floo Pomfrey to come examine him and order him to his room to rest--he finds himself flipping through one of the books Hermione had left with him. One that he keeps tucked away in his trunk, hidden beneath an old school jumper and his Quidditch kit.

Only Hermione knows he's queer. After his row with Ginny, she'd cornered him at the Leaky, insisting he tell her what was going on. He hadn't wanted to, but she knew enough of the story from Ginny's side to figure out that he wasn't exactly straight, insisting to him that no seventeen-year-old heterosexual male would be unaffected by their girlfriend's tits to begin with.

She'd had a point.

And she'd been back the next day with a book from the Waterstone's on Trafalgar Square detailing the intricacies of gay sex. He'd mumbled a redfaced thank you at the time, but in the weeks since he's read it so many times the paperback spine's nearly bent.

He knows what he wants. He's studied the line drawings of men bent over each other, cocks in arses, limbs tangled. He's wanked himself nearly raw over them, closing his eyes to imagine his thighs spread, legs draped over another man's arse. His fingers, slick with oil, slide inside his body as Harry pretends they belong to whatever anonymous man he's fantasising about now.

Except if he's honest with himself he knows that man with his blond hair that brushes his pointed chin with each sharp, imaginary thrust of his hips against Harry's arse.

And so he sits on the edge of his bed, the warm July sun pouring through the diamond-paned window behind him, still-wrapped presents from Hermione and Ron and Molly and Arthur piled on the chair beside the nightstand, and the decision's made, even if he doesn't think about it. About what it means.

He closes the book and sets it aside. His hands barely shake. He's ready. He knows he is.

Supper's a boisterous affair. Hagrid cheerfully uncorks his bottles of plum brandy, and the house-elves bring out an enormous vanilla sponge slathered with chocolate and hazelnuts. McGonagall toasts to Harry's health, but Harry has eyes only for Malfoy, who sits silently across the table, sipping the wickedly strong brandy, his face impassive.

It's after nine when the professors begin to stagger away, Flitwick clapping Harry on the back and wishing him a happy birthday, Pomfrey kissing his temple boozily. Even Filch seems to be, if not happy, then not quite as nasty as usual. Hagrid's hunched over the end of the table, his head on one arm as he snores softly, and McGonagall casts a concerned glance his way as she rises.

"I'll make sure he gets back to his hut," Malfoy says, setting aside his nearly empty glass of brandy. He's had several, Harry knows, but neither of them have come close to the rather impressive quantity their professors have imbibed. Still his head swims just enough.

McGonagall touches Malfoy's shoulder gently, and Harry's surprised he doesn't pull away. "Thank you, Draco."

And then they're alone, the two of them and Hagrid and a few house-elves who sweep away the abandoned glasses and plates with sharp clicks of their long fingers.

"You can go to bed, Potter," Malfoy says, and Harry thinks it's the first thing he's said to him all evening. He hadn't been on the pitch for the past two nights either. He'd been in Hogsmeade the first night, according to McGonagall. Merlin only knew where he'd been yesterday. Harry tells himself he doesn't care enough to ask.

At Malfoy's hand on his arm, Hagrid wakes with a snort, blinking and wiping at his eyes. "Wha'," he says, and he yawns, stretching his huge hands towards the ceiling. The enchanted sky's growing darker, the last rosy fingers of twilight fading into a charcoal-blue.

"I'll walk you out," Malfoy says. There's a faint tinge of affection in his voice, Harry thinks, but he's more taken aback at Hagrid's pat of his hand over Malfoy's.

"Good lad," Hagrid says as he pushes his chair back with a screech of wood against stone.

Harry barely has time to scramble up himself. He grabs the edge of the table to steady himself. "I'll go with you."

Narrowed grey eyes turn on him. "No need," Malfoy says coolly, but Hagrid's already draping a heavy arm around Harry's shoulder.

"'arry," Hagrid slurs. "'arry, 'arry, 'arry, me boy. Saw him die, you know." He wraps his other arm around Draco. He leans down and whispers, "Broke me heart."

"I'm certain it did." Malfoy's oddly skillful at manoeuvring Hagrid around the tables and out into the hall. Harry can't help but wonder how many times he's done this before.

Halfway down the lawn, Hagrid pulls away from them, stumbling forward as he bursts into song. "As I were goin' over the far famed Kerry mountains," he roars, and Harry and Malfoy exchange an exasperated glance. He'll have half the creatures awake now. "I met with Capt'n Farrell, and his money he were counting..."

"Circe," Malfoy says under his breath, and he hurries to catch up with Hagrid, Harry at his heels. "If he falls, Potter, he'd damned well better land on you."

Harry just rolls his eyes. "I'll make certain a limb or two knocks you down."

Hagrid staggers up to his hut, reaching down to scratch behind Fang's enormous ears. "There's whisky in the jar," he bellows, and Fang joins in, his howl echoing across the grounds. Hagrid leans against the doorframe, a watery smile breaking through his coarse beard. "Good lads, 'arry and Malfoy. Yeh hear that, Fang? Good lads." He snuffles, and Harry winces.

"For God's sake, don't let him cry," he murmurs, and Malfoy steps forward, pushing Hagrid into the hut.

"Bed, and then coffee in the morning," Malfoy says firmly. Hagrid pulls him up to his side, still snuffling, and it takes a moment for Malfoy to extricate himself. When he does, his hair is mussed and his cheeks are red. "Go to bed," he snaps.

When Hagrid finally stumbles into the hut, closing the door behind him, Malfoy relaxes. He runs his hand over his hair, smoothing it, before he turns back to Harry.

They stand silently, looking at each other, then Malfoy shifts and Harry catches a glimpse of a faint bruise on his pale throat as Malfoy's shirt pulls to one side.

"Are you hurt?" Harry steps closer, and his fingers brush the edge of Malfoy's collar.

Malfoy jerks back, clapping his palm over the mark. "No." He pulls his shirt back up to his neck, but not before Harry sees the bruise again.

It's a love bite, Harry realises, and his cheeks warm. "Oh." His fists clench at his sides. He doesn't know why it bothers him that Malfoy has a mark on his skin that wasn't there a few days ago--and wasn't caused by him, for fuck's sake--but it does. He looks away. "Hogsmeade must have been enjoyable."

"Well enough," Malfoy says. He's studying Harry, a curious expression on his face. "Blaise has his uses."

A flare of jealousy spikes through Harry. "Does he." His voice is flat. Expressionless. Or so he thinks.

Malfoy's eyebrow quirks. He moves away from Harry, walking towards the porlock paddocks. "He does," he says over his shoulder. "But I wouldn't think you'd be interested."

"You'd be surprised." Harry follows him. He slides his hand into one pocket. The small phial of oil's still there. He can't take his eyes off Malfoy, his blond hair shining in the twilight.

"Would I?" Malfoy leans against the paddock, turning slightly to glance back at Harry. He looks amused. "I doubt there's anything about you that would surprise me, Potter. You're terrifyingly normal--"

Harry cuts him off with a kiss, pressing him back against the slats of the paddock fence. It's awkward at first, and his glasses bite into his cheek, the lenses fogging up. But Malfoy's mouth is soft and warm, and this is nothing like kissing Ginny, Harry realises, as his cock swells immediately.

And then Malfoy stiffens, his hands flat against Harry's chest as he shoves Harry away, sending him falling onto his arse in the dirt. "What the hell are you doing?" He wipes the back of his hand against his mouth.

"Kissing you," Harry says calmly. He clammers to his feet.

"You're straight." Malfoy's staring at him. His fingertips are still pressed against his lips.

Harry steps closer, carefully, slowly. "Not so much, really." He doesn't take his eyes off Malfoy's face.

"The Weaselette--"

"Ginny," Harry says, "isn't my girlfriend any longer."

Malfoy looks away. "Oh."

Harry licks his bottom lip. "I'm gay," he says finally. "Ginny and I tried, but..." He shrugs. "It's not that I didn't like it. I just..." He trails off, realising how mad it is that he's talking about sex with Malfoy of all people. He takes a deep breath and exhales. "Kissing you just now was better."

Malfoy's face is pale as he glances back at Harry. "This isn't funny."

"It's not meant to be." Harry's next to him now, their hips nearly brushing. Malfoy hasn't shoved him away yet. He thinks this might be a good sign. "Is Zabini your boyfriend?"

Malfoy laughs, a sharp, bitter bark. "Blaise likes to have me suck his cock," he says after a moment. "If he's in a good mood, I might get a wank in return. Maybe a good rutting, but God forbid he let anyone think he might enjoy a cock up his arse. So no, Potter. I wouldn't consider him my boyfriend."

Relief rushes through Harry. "Right." He hesitates, shifting from foot to foot. His stomach flutters. "I might enjoy that. The cock bit."

A porlock nudges Malfoy's shoulder. He knocks it away, still looking at Harry. "Oh."

"It's my birthday," Harry says quietly.

Malfoy snorts. "Am I supposed to care?"

"Maybe." Harry pulls the phial of oil from his pocket and drops it into Malfoy's cool hand. Malfoy just gives it a curious look, turning the small glass bottle between his fingers.

"What is this?" he asks. They've lowered their voices, the both of them, as the shadows have lengthened and darkened across the lawn.

Harry meets his gaze. "You know."

Malfoy laughs, and Harry isn't certain if it's mocking or not. "You can't just nick cooking oil from the elves, Potter."

"Don't be a twat." Harry's hand closes over Malfoy's, curling his fingers over the phial. "I bought it in Knockturn before I came North. I'd read that I needed it if I wanted to..." He trails off, his cheeks hot. "You know."

"Fuck?" Malfoy asks. He hasn't pulled away yet. Harry thinks that might be a good sign.

He shrugs, pulling together his shreds of courage. For fuck's sake, he'd thought talking about sex would be easier. He'd never had any problem with Ron, not even when his best mate had started in on how far away from a wall he could be to spatter it with spunk when he wanked. "And to put my fingers, er..." He stumbles over the words again, and he waits for Malfoy's derision.

"Up your bum." A small smile curves Malfoy's mouth. Harry blinks. There's nothing scornful about it. "Such a kinky sod, Potter," Malfoy says lightly, and he doesn't move. His gaze doesn't leave Harry's face.

"It's my birthday," Harry says again. He's mesmerised by Malfoy's grey eyes. By the pale flush rising on his cheeks.

"So you've said."

Harry's thumb traces tiny circles on Malfoy's wrist. He can feel the irregular beat of Malfoy's pulse against his skin. He moves closer, pressing against Malfoy, pushing him into the fence behind them. They're nearly of a height: Malfoy's only an inch or so taller than Harry's five-eleven, a far cry from the small children they'd been that day in Madam Malkin's shop. He leans in and brushes his mouth across Malfoy's, just barely.

Malfoy's breath catches. "Potter." His pale gold eyelashes flick down, then back up again. "You reek of brandy."

The words are soft, warm puffs against Harry's lips. "I'm not pissed, if that's what you're implying," he says. He dips a finger in the waist of Malfoy's trousers, pulling him closer. He bites back a groan at the press of Malfoy's swelling cock against his.

"Then you're Confunded," Malfoy says. His hand settles on Harry's hip; his fingers twist in the soft cotton of Harry's t-shirt. When Harry leans in to kiss him again, Malfoy doesn't shove him away. Instead he breathes out, opening his mouth to Harry's, letting Harry's tongue flick against his.

"I already know where I want you to fuck me," Harry murmurs against Malfoy's lips. His chest is tight. He's terrified Malfoy's going to push him aside, taunting him for his weakness.

Malfoy pulls back from the kiss and studies Harry's face silently. His hips are still pressed to Harry's; his hand still clutches Harry's shirt. "You're actually serious," he says after a moment. At Harry's nod, he disentangles himself, stepping away from the paddock.

Harry turns after him, his heart thudding against his chest. "Malfoy."

"Why me?" Malfoy's arms are crossed over his chest, his back's to Harry. He still has the phial gripped tightly in one hand. "Just so you can mock me to Granger and the Weasel?"

"No." Harry catches Malfoy's elbow, pulling Malfoy around to face him. The twilight's nearly gone now. Above them stars shine in the darkening sky. "I didn't intend to tell them anything if you'd rather me not." He takes a shaky breath. "I just want...."

"What?" Malfoy's face is pinched, his voice sharp. "What do you want--"

Harry cuts him off with another kiss, this one harder, rougher. His hands tangle in Malfoy's hair, pulling his head back without care as he drags his mouth down Malfoy's jaw, stopping to nip at the mark on his skin. "I want to fuck," Harry says into the curve of Malfoy's throat, and he can feel Malfoy tremble against his lips.

"Not here," Malfoy says after a moment. One hand cards through Harry's hair, then Malfoy twists aside, away from Harry's touch. "Not where anyone could see us."

"No," Harry agrees. He reaches for Malfoy's hand. "The Forest."

Malfoy doesn't object. Harry pulls him into the protective curve of the trees, into the shadows and darkness. They stop every so often to kiss, one of them pressed against a wide tree trunk, shoulders catching on the bark as he arches against the other.

Harry knows where he's going. He's come this way before on a night much like this one. He wonders if that first journey would have been more bearable without the ghosts of his parents and godfathers and with Draco Malfoy pulling him into the shelter of a willow tree as he is now, rutting against him, his arms draped around Harry's shoulders as he kisses him senseless.

The clearing is almost empty. The Thestral herd runs through the night; only Ismene and her foal are left. Malfoy barely notices them as he pulls Harry to the ground beside him. They kiss in the moonlight, hands sliding over each other's bodies, legs tangling together. Malfoy tastes sweet, Harry thinks, and slightly sour. His tongue slides against Malfoy's, and Malfoy moans, his hips pressing up against Harry's. The phial of oil drops from his hand, landing with a soft thud on the trampled grass.

Harry pulls at Malfoy's shirt, tugging at the buttons. One flies off; Malfoy doesn't notice. He just gasps when Harry pulls aside the wrinkled linen and presses his mouth to one hard, pink nipple. When Harry's teeth scrape across his skin, Malfoy swears softly, twisting his hands through Harry's rumpled hair.

It's nearly too much. Harry raises over Malfoy, aligning their hips as he settles between Malfoy's thighs. He leans up to kiss Malfoy, all teeth and tongue. They rut together, their bodies pressing and arching

against each other, their kisses growing deeper, more frantic, their hands grasping, clutching through denim and corduroy.

They come nearly in unison, Malfoy's legs wrapped around Harry's hips, his face pressed against Harry's neck, before they slump together on the ground, Harry breathing hard into Malfoy's shoulder. Another tremor of pleasure ripples through him, and he laughs softly as he rolls to his side.

"That," he says, looking up at the sky above them, "was better than full-on sex with Ginny."

Malfoy sniffs. "I sincerely hope so." His hand smooths over Harry's stomach, sliding up beneath his t-shirt. Harry breathes in sharply, turning to look at him. Malfoy's eyes are heavy-lidded, his mouth swollen. "Although I intend to put that phial to use in a moment." His thumb flicks across Harry's nipple, and Harry groans. Malfoy smiles thinly and rolls Harry's nipple between his fingertips, pinching and squeezing. "You do realise I top, Potter, don't you?"

"Yeah?" Harry just wants him to keep doing what he's doing. Ginny'd always wanted him to play with her tits, but he'd never realised until now exactly why.

Malfoy pulls back and Harry protests, reaching for him. Malfoy bats his hands away, pushing himself to his knees. "Patience, Potter. *Honestly*. You're such a Gryffindor." He slides his shirt off his shoulders, letting it fall on the ground behind him. Harry's eyes stop on the Dark Mark that mars Malfoy's left arm. His fingers brush the darkly inked skin. Malfoy freezes.

When Malfoy reaches for his shirt again, Harry stops him. "Don't," he says. "It's part of you."

Malfoy's jaw tightens. Harry can see him swallow. "It's not me now," he says quietly.

"I know."

Malfoy's breath catches as Harry leans in and brushes his lips across Malfoy's marked skin. When Harry pulls back, Malfoy touches Harry's mouth gently. "You're an idiot, Potter."

Harry grins. "Yeah."

"As long as we're on the same page." Malfoy's pale gold skin gleams in the moonlight as he pulls off his boots, then stands. His hands work at his belt buckle, and the leather rasps softly as he tugs it free from the clasp. He stops, looking down at Harry sprawled beneath him. "Take off your shirt."

Harry doesn't hesitate. He tugs his t-shirt over his head, knocking his glasses askew. He pulls them off and folds them on top of his shirt. Even with fuzzy vision, he can't take his eyes off Malfoy's shoulders, broader now from manual labour, the muscles firm and rounded. He rolls to his knees, and Malfoy inhales sharply when Harry's hands slide across his stomach, his fingers trailing along the puckered pink scars that twist across his chest.

"There was so much blood," Harry murmurs.

Malfoy doesn't answer. Harry can see the press of his cock against his corduroys again, and he's grateful they're both eighteen, with eager and ready pricks. Malfoy's breath is quick and shallow as Harry's fingertip traces a scar that crosses his nipple. He grabs Harry's shoulder to keep his balance.

“The dittany--”

“It was too late,” Malfoy says sharply. “Snape kept me from dying at least.”

Harry turns his face against Malfoy’s hip. “I’m sorry.” His lips move across Malfoy’s hot skin, and Malfoy shivers, his fingers pressing into Harry’s shoulders. He sways slightly. “I’m so sorry.”

“Potter,” Malfoy murmurs. He touches Harry’s cheek. Harry looks up at him. Malfoy’s eyes are dark and bright. “Why here? Why this clearing?”

“You know.” Harry’s throat is tight. He presses his lips against the jut of Malfoy’s hipbone again, mouthing it softly over the waistband of his trousers.

Malfoy’s fingertips brush across his temple. “Say it.”

The buttons on Malfoy’s corduroys are smooth brass. Harry slips them from their buttonholes, letting his palm cup the swell of Malfoy’s prick against the spunk-soaked fabric. Malfoy breathes out, and his fingers slide from Harry’s cheek to tangle in the soft hair at the nape of his neck as Harry pulls aside Malfoy’s flies to reveal a small triangle of wet white cotton. Harry looks up.

“I have nightmares,” he whispers. Malfoy watches him, his face dispassionate. “About this clearing. About *him*--”

“Voldemort,” Malfoy says uneasily, the name stumbling on his tongue.

Harry nods. “Voldemort. And me. Standing here...” His fingers tighten on Malfoy’s trousers, and they slip slightly down Malfoy’s hips. Harry draws in a deep breath. “Did you know it doesn’t hurt when the Killing Curse hits you? There’s just a flash of green light, and then you’re falling into blackness. Nothingness.”

The clearing is silent, save for the soft whinny of the Thestral foal and the whisper of wind in the tree leaves.

Malfoy’s fingertips trace the back of Harry’s neck. “Or King’s Cross Station.”

Harry’s laugh is muffled against Malfoy’s hip. “Or King’s Cross Station,” he says. He turns his head to look back up at Malfoy. His pale hair gleams in the moonlight, brushes the sharp angles of Malfoy’s jaw. “I need another reason to dream about this clearing,” Harry says after a long moment.

“And I’m the only poof you know.” Malfoy’s voice is quiet. Sad.

Harry doesn’t say anything.

Malfoy’s fingers twist through Harry’s hair, tugging his head back. He looks down at Harry, studying his face, his expression shuttered. “You kept my mother out of Azkaban.”

“She saved my life.”

“For me.” Malfoy’s thumb strokes along Harry’s stubbled jaw. Harry turns his head and kisses his palm. Malfoy’s long, elegant hands are rough now, and calluses are beginning to form on his formerly soft skin. It makes Harry’s cock ache.

“Yes,” he says. He’s not a fool. Narcissa Malfoy only defied the Master she feared for a chance to find her son in the battle-ravaged castle. He doesn’t blame her. A mother’s love had kept him alive. Twice.

Malfoy’s silent. Harry’s heart thuds in his chest. He tells himself he won’t care if Malfoy rejects him. It won’t mean anything. It’ll most likely be for the best, and besides, he can stave the nightmares off with the memory of Malfoy’s body rutting up against his, of Malfoy’s eager kisses, of Malfoy’s hands moving across his skin.

And then Malfoy catches Harry’s chin in his fingers, tightly, his eyes fluttering closed. Harry doesn’t move. “One night,” Malfoy says at last. “One night and then all our debts to each other are done.”

Harry flinches. “I’m not asking you to whore yourself--”

Malfoy presses his hips forward, letting the swell in his y-fronts brush Harry’s mouth. “Oh, I want this, Potter.” His voice is quiet and intense. He licks his bottom lip. “But I want it clear that this...” He trails off, and his thumb smooths across Harry’s mouth. His breath catches when Harry nips at the tip, sucking it lightly. Harry can see the flutter of the pulse in Malfoy’s throat. “My family doesn’t owe you anything.”

“You never did,” Harry says. He presses his mouth against the damp cotton stretched across the head of Malfoy’s cock, the way he’d seen sketched in his books. The taste of spunk on his tongue is exhilarating. Malfoy’s hiss makes him smile, and he pushes Malfoy’s trousers down his narrow hips. They puddle at Malfoy’s feet before he kicks them aside. Harry stares at Malfoy’s pants, at the curve of Malfoy’s cock, leaning to the right, dark against the white cotton.

“Potter,” Malfoy says, almost gently, and Harry hooks his fingers in the elastic of Malfoy’s pants, tugging them down over his erection.

It’s not the first cock Harry’s seen. There’ve been years of boarding school showers and Quidditch changing rooms, after all. It’s not even the first hard one he’s noticed. But this is Malfoy’s prick, heavy and thick, the tip mushrooming red and wet over his stretched foreskin. It bobs away from his stomach, over gilt-furred balls that Harry can’t stop himself from leaning in and licking.

Malfoy groans.

With another lick, Harry buries his face against musky hair and skin that smells of sun and sweat. Malfoy’s hands are in his hair, stroking, twisting, and the noises he’s making go straight to Harry’s cock. Harry shifts, spreading his knees as he kneels on the soft grass and dried leaves, and when he turns his head, dragging his tongue along the side of Malfoy’s prick before sucking at the tip, Malfoy cries out, nearly bending over Harry, his hands tight on Harry’s head.

Harry sucks again, tasting Malfoy. He’s salty and bitter, and after another exploratory circle of Harry’s tongue against slick skin, Harry decides he rather likes the taste, despite how different it is from his own.

Malfoy pushes him away, reluctantly. “Potter,” he says, his voice raw, “I can’t--” He bites his lip and catches Harry before he can lean in again. He’s shaking, and his thighs are tight. “Really, if you want me to fuck you...”

It takes a moment before Harry realises he's whimpered. He falls back on his arse, his hands already tugging at the zip of his still sticky jeans. He has them halfway down his thighs, his damp pants tangled in them, when Malfoy drops down beside him. When Malfoy's mouth slides down over Harry's hard prick, almost down to his balls, Harry's shoulders hit the ground and his hips buck up.

"Oh, *Christ*," he says breathlessly. It's not his first blow job; Ginny had been brilliant at giving them, and they'd spent most of the summer before Bill's wedding out behind Arthur's shed, her head bent over his prick as he rubbed her through her wet knickers. But this. Nothing had been like this, with Malfoy's tongue curling just perfectly around his cock, with the brush of his jaw against Harry's thighs, the faint stubble reminding Harry that this was a man sucking him, pressing his foreskin back, flicking his tongue against the tiny wet slit in the head of his prick.

Malfoy pulls back. "Accio phial," he chokes out, and the small glass bottle flies into his hand. He uncorks it with shaking hands and pours the clear oil over his fingers. "You've done this before?" he asks. "Put your finger inside your arse?"

Harry nods, spreading his thighs. A twig pokes his hip and he knocks it away. "Three of them once." He feels his face heat. "I came rather hard."

"I can imagine." Malfoy leans over him. His slick fingertips brush against the cleft of Harry's arse, over his puckered hole. Harry shivers. Malfoy's cheeks are pink, his eyes bright. His tongue darts out, wetting his lip. He massages the soft skin between Harry's balls and his arse, stroking, then pressing down lightly with his fingertips. "I'd like to have seen that."

His finger pushes into Harry. The angle is different from the times Harry's done this to himself. Harry lifts his hips, only to have Malfoy press him back down against the ground, his finger twisting deeper into Harry. The oil is warm on Harry's skin, the herbs in it working to relax his muscles.

They lie there a moment, breathing hard, looking at each other. Malfoy hesitates, and then he kisses Harry slowly, lingeringly, pressing another finger into Harry's arse.

Harry tightens himself around Malfoy's fingers, his heart pounding. He catches Malfoy's mouth again with his, a thrill shooting through him when Malfoy opens his mouth to Harry's tongue. He could kiss Malfoy forever, Harry thinks, and his cock smacks wetly against his stomach. "You're good at this," he whispers against Malfoy's lips.

"Practice." Malfoy's mouth trails along Harry's jaw. When he twists another finger into Harry, Harry groans and his head falls back against the ground. The earthy scent of crushed grass and loamy dirt is almost overwhelming. Harry's fairly certain he'll never walk past the greenhouses again without getting hard. Malfoy sucks Harry's tongue, then nips his bottom lip. "Nearly there," he murmurs with another gentle press of his fingers.

Harry's arse aches. He's glad he's tried this on himself multiple times so he knows how the pain of being stretched eases into slow waves of pleasure. He hadn't taken into account though, the arousal that each of Malfoy's slow, kisses builds in him. His hand slips over Malfoy's shoulder, down his arm, and he can feel the flex of Malfoy's muscles with each thrust.

He arches his neck and Malfoy's teeth brush his skin, nipping lightly. "How many blokes have you fucked?" he asks. He turns his head to look at Malfoy.

“Enough.” Malfoy presses deeper, twisting just so, and Harry cries out, his body tensing. “Prostate,” he says with a small smile.

“Nice.” Harry’s breathing hard. He wants Malfoy to do that again. He’s read about that, but he’s never been able to do it on himself.

Malfoy’s mouth brushes his. “Again?” He doesn’t wait for Harry’s answer before his fingers dip in again, brushing up against that spot. Harry arches up, pleasure shooting through him. His cock leaks stickily against his stomach; his balls tighten.

“I--” Harry’s thighs are shaking. “Malfoy--”

Malfoy’s fingers slide out of his arse. His breath is coming in ragged rasps. He kisses Harry roughly as he moves over him. “I need--” He groans as his prick slips through Harry’s cleft. Harry can feel Malfoy’s body jerk against him.

“Yes.” Harry cants his hips wider. He’s desperate to have Malfoy back inside of him. A stone presses into his back. He doesn’t give a damn. “Please--”

Malfoy grabs Harry’s thigh, pulling it higher. Harry’s foot slides against his shoulder. “It’s going to hurt,” he says. He almost sounds sorry.

He presses into Harry slowly.

Malfoy’s not lying. Harry bites his lip, his eyes screwed shut against the pain. This is nothing like Malfoy’s fingers inside of him. It takes everything Harry has not to shove Malfoy off him; he keeps telling himself it will fade, the coming pleasure is worth it. His fingers dig into Malfoy’s arms. To his credit Malfoy doesn’t complain.

And then he’s still. The pain eases slightly, and Harry feels full. Spread. His eyes flutter open.

Malfoy’s leaning over him, one hand on either side of Harry’s waist. His mouth is pink and swollen and open slightly. His eyes are bright and unfocused. He looks amazing, Harry thinks, with his flushed skin and his hair hanging down over his face, sticking to his damp cheeks.

When Harry reaches up to touch Malfoy’s jaw, Malfoy turns his head and presses his mouth to Harry’s fingertips.

This, Harry realises, this is what it feels like to have someone inside of you. To be inside of someone else. He suddenly understands what Ron’s been on about, what makes this moment so bloody amazing.

He trails his fingers down Malfoy’s throat. Presses them to Malfoy’s pulse. He can feel the throb of blood beneath his fingertips. He feels alive. Finally. His foot slides down, hits the ground. Malfoy moans softly, and he shifts, his cock pressing deeper into Harry.

Harry gasps. “Please,” he says. He pulls Malfoy down into a kiss, their mouths moving against each other. Harry’s hands slip down Malfoy’s shoulders, over his back. “Please.”

Malfoy moves then, his cock nearly slipping out of Harry before he presses back in. The pain shifts, grows more intense before it's enveloped by an intense pleasure that Harry's never felt before.

He wraps a leg around Malfoy's hips, urging him on. Malfoy's thrusts grow faster, rougher, lifting Harry's arse up off the ground, pressing his back into the ground beneath him. Harry barely notices. His body tingles. He can feel his magic moving inside of him, roiling through his limbs, across his torso. He grabs Malfoy's shoulders, pulling him closer to him, their bodies tangled together, Malfoy's stomach rubbing against Harry's cock.

"Harry," he hears Malfoy gasp against his ear. "Harry. Oh, God." Harry turns his head, catches Malfoy's mouth with his.

"More," he says, and his fingertips are hot against Malfoy's skin, burning with the magic that trembles through his body, overwhelms him. He doesn't care where he is. Doesn't care what's around him. All that matters is Malfoy's body pressed up against his, his prick deep inside Harry.

Malfoy fucks him, caught up in the shimmering swirl that twists over their skin in thick silver curls. They can't look away from each other; their hands smooth over heated skin. Harry's body presses against Malfoy's, tightens around his cock, and Malfoy cries out, shuddering as his hips rock against Harry's arse. He arches back, his hair whipping around his face as a blindingly bright rush of magic slams into Harry, sending him shattering over the edge with a shout and a spatter of hot spunk between their bodies.

The light fades. They collapse on the ground, still wrapped around each other, gasping for breath. Harry can't stop trembling. His hands clutch at Malfoy, holding him tight. Malfoy buries his face against Harry's throat. His body is limp, heavy.

Neither of them speaks. Harry's not even certain he still has a voice.

Malfoy moves finally, rolling off Harry. He stares up at the sky. He clears his throat after a moment. "What exactly happened?" he rasps.

Harry shakes his head. "It's not always like that?"

That earns him a long look. "No."

"Probably my magic." Harry gives him an apologetic look. "Pomfrey warned me it might be erratic today."

Malfoy looks back up at the stars. A small smile plays across his tired face. "For once, Potter, I'm not complaining."

The stone beneath Harry presses into his hip. He shifts, reaching beneath him to pull it out. It's a ring, not a rock, and Harry recognises it almost immediately.

He holds the shattered ring up. The moonlight catches it, gleaming off the dark stone in the gold setting. He turns it just slightly, and he can see the faint white lines sketching out a circle in a triangle bisected by a straight line. The Resurrection Stone.

Malfoy's watching him. "What's that?" he asks.

“Something I thought I’d lost.” Harry slides the ring on his finger. It’s cold against his skin, but he can still feel the thrum of magic. He should throw it into the underbrush, he knows. He’d promised Dumbledore’s portrait that he wouldn’t go looking for it. Still. He can almost hear the whispers of his parents again, Sirius’s laughter, and Remus’s gentle admonishments.

He touches the stone. It hums softly.

“Potter,” Malfoy says, and when Harry glances over at him, he’s sitting up, his knees pulled up to his chest. The Thestral foal has bounded up beside him, and he’s stroking her mane lightly. He doesn’t look at Harry. “Do you want to go back to the castle?”

“It’s not dawn yet.” Harry shifts closer to him, knocking the foal away. She nudges his shoulder.

“No.” Malfoy raises an eyebrow. “Are you suggesting..”

Harry rolls over onto him, pressing him into the ground. He kisses Malfoy lightly, smoothing the furrow away with his thumb. “I’d like to try that again if you like.”

The foal nuzzles Harry’s hair, and Malfoy laughs. “Druella.” He snaps his fingers and the foal dashes off, back to her mother. “You realise we’ve probably just scarred her for life.”

“She’s a Thestral,” Harry says dryly. “I think she’ll live.” He smooths his hand over Malfoy’s forehead. The ring is heavy and dark against his pale hair. Harry thinks for a moment he can see a spark deep within the stone, but it fades.

He leans down and kisses Malfoy. If he only has one night, he intends to make the most of it.



Draco wakes up when the early morning light begins to filter through the trees above. He’s cold, but only slightly, most likely because Potter’s draped himself over Draco and is snoring softly.

“Idiot,” he murmurs, but it’s not bitter. His anger at Potter has dissipated, and that realisation draws him up short. He doesn’t know what it’s like not to hate Potter, not to channel all his rage at the world towards him. Pansy had always told him that his nearly irrational hatred of Potter was essentially his hatred of everyone who had betrayed him, most of all his father. He’d finally told her to shut it. If he wanted his mind healed, he’d go to St Mungo’s, for fuck’s sake.

Still. He suspects she wasn’t entirely wrong.

Draco strokes a finger across Potter’s cheek, his stomach twisting. He doesn’t know what to do with this. Doesn’t know how he feels. He tells himself this was just sex, the way it was with Theo and Vince and Entwhistle and all the others. Even Blaise. Potter isn’t any different.

He knows he’s lying to himself.

Potter’s eyelashes flutter. Draco stills, his hand still on Potter’s cheek. Potter looks up at him.

“Hi,” he says after a moment. Shyly, almost. He smiles.

Draco doesn't move. “Hi,” he says. He keeps his voice even.

They're still naked, still wrapped around each other. He knows Potter can feel his erection. He can definitely feel Potter's.

He wants to kiss him. Wants to lean in and brush his mouth across Potter's, to roll him onto his back and rut up against him again.

Instead, he says quietly, “I have to go.”

Potter looks disappointed, but he nods. They disentangle themselves and reach for their clothes, dressing in silence. Draco's not worried about being late; it's a Saturday morning and Hagrid will be sleeping in. Draco'll have time to feed the creatures before he wakes, and then he intends to disappear for the rest of the day, possibly flying up to the mountain peak. He needs to be alone.

He stops at the edge of the Forest, his hand on Potter's arm. “Don't expect anything from me,” he says, not looking at him. “This doesn't change anything.”

“I know.” Potter catches his wrist. “But it could.”

Draco looks at him then. He has to end this now. He knows he does. Potter's a sentimental fool, and practically a virgin. And Draco doesn't like what he feels, standing here beside him, Potter's skin hot on his. Potter could make Draco hope again, and that's far too dangerous.

He pulls away, grasping his haughtiness to him like a cloak. “You're a moron, Potter, albeit one with a decent enough cock and a lovely tight arse.” The Hogwarts lawns are spread out in front of them, green and lush as they sweep down to the lake. Draco dreads the next round of mowing charms. He tugs at his sleeves, pulling the cuffs over his wrists. “You're a good fuck, but I've been there now, and I don't particularly care to visit again.”

Potter's hand is on his elbow, turning him towards him. “What the hell is wrong with you?”

“Nothing.” Draco lets his mouth slip into his usual sneer. He curls a lip. “I could ask the same of *you*.”

Potter looks confused. “You seemed to enjoy last night.”

“I did.” Draco doesn't think that admission could be problematic. Besides, there's only so much one can lie, and having spent half the night with his cock up Potter's arse as he kissed him madly, Draco doesn't think he can pull that particular half-truth off.

“Right.” Potter crosses his arms over his chest, his fingers tugging at the sleeves of his t-shirt. There are still fragments of leaves in his hair. Draco resists the urge to brush them away. “So that's all, then? Thanks for the fuck; I'll ring you later, but really I won't?”

“I won't even bother to ring,” Draco says, honestly. He meets Potter's angry gaze. He tries to keep his

expression blasé and faintly amused. Potter wants to fuck him again, he realises. He wants to fuck Potter again. Repeatedly. With vigour. This is absolutely impossible. "Did you expect me to?"

"I thought..." Potter frowns. "I thought we could do it again."

Draco tenses. "No," he says flatly. Potter doesn't understand casual sex, he's certain of that. It's not even that he's far too Gryffindor. God knows everyone in school had shagged Lavender Brown. Potter's far too emotionally fragile. Far too loyal. Far too likely to fall in love--or to believe he had, at least. Draco isn't certain he believes in love now. Potter's the type who does.

Potter's shoulders stiffen. "So glad to have been your fucktoy, Malfoy," he says, his bitterness evident.

Draco's anger flares. "You're the one who asked for it." He gives Potter a scathing look. "I don't know what else you expected. Surely you don't think what just happened was anything but sex?" At Potter's flush, Draco laughs incredulously, hiding his surprise and the way it twists his heart. This, he thinks. This is why he has to keep Harry bloody Potter at a distance. "Oh, you *are* an idiot."

"Fuck off," Potter snaps, and Draco knows he's hit a nerve. He presses harder.

"Did you think I'd fall for you?" Draco steps closer, lowers his voice. "Did you think that one brilliant shag with the Saviour of the Wizarding World, and I'd be a changed man? Dropping to my knees at a snap of your fingers to suck your cock?"

Potter clenches his fists at his sides. "I thought you'd be less of a complete bastard," he says tightly.

Draco turns away. "You thought wrong," he murmurs. "I'll always be a bastard, Potter." He glances back at him. Potter looks hurt; Draco steels himself. "I'm not your project, and I'm not someone you can fuck into civility. I don't like you. I never will. The sooner you realise that, the better."

He leaves Potter standing beneath the trees, watching him as he strides off, his shoulders tight.

He doesn't look back.



Photo by [widdowquinn](#)

autumn

August passes slowly.

Harry waits on the pitch for Malfoy every evening. He never comes. Harry barely sees Malfoy as it is. The few times they pass in the hall Malfoy doesn't even look at him. Harry's certain Malfoy's going out of his way to avoid him. Meals are silent affairs when Malfoy shows up--a rare enough occurrence. McGonagall just gives Harry a disappointed look the nights Malfoy's seat remains empty. Hagrid pulls him aside and asks him if he and Malfoy have had a falling out. Harry just shrugs and mumbles something about Malfoy being moody. He knows they blame him. He supposes in a way they're right.

Still, even if he could go back and change that night, he wouldn't.

He tries to talk to Malfoy. Tries to find him at work, but somehow he never can. He suspects Malfoy's using a Disillusionment charm.

And so Harry gives up. Malfoy's made it clear he doesn't want anything to do with Harry. Fine then. Harry throws himself into the warding of the castle until he exhausts himself again and ends up in the infirmary once more.

"Honestly, Harry," a frowning Pomfrey says, rubbing at her sunburnt nose, "I don't know why your magic's still so fragile. The potions should have stabilised you more." She gives him a worried look. "Are you sleeping at all?"

Harry nods. He's been tired nearly every night, dropping off into a deep sleep the moment his head touches the pillow.

Pomfrey sighs. “Well, I’m sending you back to St Mungo’s for the weekend. If Healer Guhathakurta has no objections, I’m recommending an intravenous potion and a strong lecture on pushing yourself too far.”

Guhathakurta agrees. Forcefully. “One hour, Harry,” he says, and Harry’s rather certain they can hear him down a level in Potion Poisoning. “One hour a day of intensive magical work is all you were allowed.” He throws up his hands, sending parchment fluttering around them both. A mediwitch quietly flicks her wand at the multicoloured scraps and they fly back into Harry’s file.

“Headstrong idiot!” Guhathakurta grabs the file and pulls out a piece of blue parchment. He waves it in Harry’s face. “This. This is your most recent scan. Magic everywhere! Patterns that are absolutely not normal in any way for a healthy wizard.” He slams the paper back into the file. “Two months ago you were stronger. More stable. Now look at you. Pale and shaking and--”

The mediwitch barely makes it over with a bedpan before Harry sickens up. Guhathakurta’s hands are on his back, steadying him.

“Fluids,” he tells the mediwitch, and she nods, Vanishing the bedpan and Summoning another bag of potion to add to the one floating above Harry’s bed. A thin silver tube runs from it, disappearing beneath Harry’s skin. With a touch of her wand, it splits into two tubes, and she attaches one to the new potion. This one’s a virulent lavender, but it’s cool as it runs into Harry’s arm, and he leans back against his pillow, his nausea subsiding, the roil of magic across his torso subsiding.

“Sorry,” Harry picks at the rumpled white sheet over his hips. He hates being tired like this. Hates collapsing because his magic’s overextended again.

With a sigh Guhathakurta runs his hand through his dark hair. His light green robe swings open slightly. He’s wearing jeans and an Oxford shirt beneath it. He must be Muggleborn—or a halfblood at least. He sits on the edge of Harry’s bed. “We’re going to run some more tests,” he says. “And take some blood.” At Harry’s groan he holds up his hand. “If you’d done what I’d told you to in June we wouldn’t be here trying once again to make certain your magic’s stable for classes in a week and a half.”

“You’re trying to guilt me,” Harry says weakly.

Guhathakurta smiles. “Is it working this time?”

“Maybe.” Harry looks up at him. The bed is hard beneath his hips and he shifts uncomfortably. “I’ll do whatever you need me to.”

“You’d damned well better.” Guhathakurta smacks Harry’s chart lightly against his leg as he stands. “I’m getting tired of seeing your face.”

It’s Tuesday before Harry’s sent back to Hogwarts, with a bag of potion phials and strict orders to rest. McGonagall’s barely been settled in his room before there’s a knock on his door.

“Come in,” she says, with a frown at Harry when he tries to get up off the bed.

The last person Harry expects to see when the door creaks open is Malfoy.

He stands in the doorway, hesitantly, his hands in his pockets. Neither of them says anything for a long moment. McGonagall looks between them, her sharp eyes taking in everything.

“I’ll leave you both then.” She squeezes Harry’s shoulder. “Send for a house-elf if you need anything, Mr Potter.” She hesitates next to Malfoy. “Keep the door open,” she says tartly, and she sweeps out of the room in a rustle of black linen.

Malfoy looks at Harry. “St Mungo’s,” he says finally.

Harry shrugs. “Overexertion.”

“Right.” Malfoy’s eyes find the potion phials on the windowsill. “My grandmother takes fewer potions than that.”

“I didn’t know you had a grandmother.” Harry sits up in the bed.

Malfoy glances back at him. He looks horribly uncomfortable. “Everyone has grandmothers, Potter. Even you, I suppose.”

“I didn’t know either of mine.” Harry reaches for the glass of water McGonagall’s placed next to his bed. “And you know what I meant.”

“Grandmother Enfys,” Malfoy says finally. “My father’s mother. She’s the only one left. I don’t see her often. She prefers the Dublin house to London or Wiltshire.” He leans against the doorframe. “Nasty old woman.”

Harry feels a flash of bitterness. “At least you’ve met her.”

“Trust me,” Malfoy says. His mouth twists to one side. “I’d rather not have. She has a disturbing habit of whacking my bum in passing as an expression of affection.”

Harry can’t help a laugh, and Malfoy turns a baleful look on him. “You have to admit it’s a funny image.”

“Child brutality.” Malfoy smiles though. He pauses, studying Harry. “Are you all right?”

“I wouldn’t think you’d give a damn.” Harry pulls his knees to his chest. His feet are bare; he flexes them against the coverlet.

“I don’t,” Malfoy says, a little too coolly. “But Hagrid wouldn’t shut up about you.”

Harry gives him a long, level look. Malfoy glances away. “I’m fine,” Harry says at last. “You can tell him not to worry.”

Malfoy nods. “I’ll let him know.” He turns to leave, reaching for the doorknob. He stops at Harry’s voice.

“Malfoy.”

He looks back at Harry. “What?”

Harry licks his lip. His fingers smooth across his jeans. "I guess..." He trails off, then forges on at Malfoy's impatient scowl. "Next week. Things will change, what with you being staff..."

"I suppose."

Harry rubs his thumb across his bare ankle. "After everything..." He bites his lip. "Look, this is ridiculous, you and me. I don't care if it was a one-off or not, all right? You don't want to talk about it ever, we won't. But we can't just go around acting like it didn't happen."

Malfoy's silent. Harry's stomach twists, and then Malfoy sighs. "Yes we can, Potter," he says quietly, "and it's better for you if we do."

"Malfoy—"

He closes the door behind him.

With a *fuck*, Harry falls back against the pillows. He doesn't think he'll ever understand Slytherins.

He reaches for his zip. At least he's something proper to wank to now. His fingers slide past denim and cotton, curling around his already hardening prick. He closes his eyes and thinks of elegant hands and blond hair and a mouth made for sucking cock.

His groan covers the sharp sound of a ragged breath just behind the door.

Harry doesn't notice.



The Hogwarts Express arrives late on September first.

Draco sits at the Head Table, Professor Sinistra at his side, staring out at the empty tables. The students will arrive shortly; McGonagall's just come in with news that the Thestral-drawn carriages have turned up the drive.

It's odd, being at this table for the Feast. He barely remembers last September. He'd been terrified and shell-shocked, and all he can recall is Severus sitting in the Headmaster's chair, flanked by the Carrows. He'd looked down at Draco, his gaze steady, and Draco'd known then that Severus would do anything he could to keep his nest of serpents safe.

The doors fly open, and Draco tenses, twisting his napkin between his fingers. The students pour in, all save the first years, robes fluttering behind them, ties askew as they find their tables, laughing and chattering. Draco's struck by the normality of it all. Except for the sombre glances some of the older ones cast around the Great Hall, it might have been any other start of term.

Draco sees him then. Potter. He's exchanged his t-shirt and jeans for grey flannel trousers and a Gryffindor jumper beneath his black robe, the scarlet lining of his hood catching Draco's eye as he turns to say something to Weasley.

He's surrounded by Gryffindors, all of whom form a wedge around him, keeping the other students at bay. Draco hears the whispers though, sees the eyes that turn towards Potter. Potter does too. His cheeks flush, and he ducks his head. Granger puts her hand on his arm and guides him to their table.

Draco knows Potter finished moving his trunks from his summer room to Gryffindor Tower this afternoon with the help of the house-elves, none of whom seemed to want to let him pick up anything heavier than his satchel, Draco'd made damned certain of that. They haven't really spoken in a week, although Draco's been more regular at meals. He doesn't trust himself to say anything to Potter, so he's contented himself with just watching him covertly.

Potter doesn't look well. Draco doubts most people would notice, but then they haven't spent seven years studying the prat--obsessing over him, Pansy would say. Still, Draco can tell that behind Potter's easy smile and crinkled eyes he's exhausted. The circles under his eyes are a shade darker. When he looks away, his mouth pulls down in the corners. He's barely eaten all week at meals.

Draco doesn't want to think about what it might mean that this concerns him. It's bad enough that he's spent his nights wanking to the memory of overheard groans and soft breaths, to the thought of Potter beneath him again, his legs wrapped around Draco's hips.

He's glad he's pushed Potter away. He's a temptation Draco can't give into, as much as he'd like to spend another night buried inside of him. It's a horrible idea. At best, Draco'd be nothing but Potter's toyboy. At worst, whoever found out--and they would, Draco is certain--would claim he'd seduced the Boy Who Lived for his own gain.

They might not be wrong.

A flash of bright red hair catches his eye at the Gryffindor table. He ignores whatever Sinistra has said to him. Ginevra Weasley pushes her way through the throng around Potter's bench, and Draco tenses. She touches Potter's shoulder. He turns.

The two of them look at each other for a long moment, and then Ginevra's fingertips brush Potter's cheek. Draco's jaw clenches. He wants to look away. He can't. They speak quietly, heads bent together. The Weasel watches from across the table, his arm draped around Granger. Draco wants to punch the smug look off his stupid weasel face.

When Potter stands up and pulls his ex-girlfriend to him, burying his face in her hair, Draco pushes his chair back and stands.

Sinistra grabs his arm. "You can't leave yet."

Draco looks back at Potter and the Weasley girl. He doesn't care that Sinistra follows his gaze. "I want to check on Ismene."

"After the Sorting." Sinistra draws him back down into his seat. "It can wait."

The doors are thrown open again, and Hagrid's there, surrounded by first years following him between the tables. They look so small and innocent.

When he looks back at Potter, Ginevra's gone. Potter meets his gaze. *Were we that young?* he mouths.

Draco shakes his head, a faint smile curving his lips. Potter's mouth quirks at one corner. Draco sees the Weasel frown at them both, then lean over to say something to Potter. He shrugs and looks back at Draco.

McGonagall stands, the Sorting Hat in her hands. She peers at the first years over the rims of her spectacles. "Welcome to Hogwarts," she says and a shout goes through the Hall.

Another term has begun.



Harry shifts his satchel from one shoulder to the other as he heads from the Defence classroom down to the Great Hall for lunch. They're a month into classes now, and it's finally got to the point that he's not bombarded the moment he steps foot in public.

Three fifth year boys come hurtling out of the classroom behind him, nearly knocking him aside. "Sorry, Harry," Stewart Ackerley shouts over his shoulder, and Harry hears a snort behind him. He turns.

Opal Adoyo, the new professor of Defence, closes the classroom door. "Ravenclaws," she says. Her teeth flash white against her dark skin. "I find them the most difficult."

"They can make you want to hex their toes inside out," Harry says with a smile in return. He likes Professor Adoyo, with her tightly curled hair and the long string of polished hematite she wears draped around her graceful neck and her sharp words when the class buggers up. She reminds him in some ways of Snape, and he finds that oddly comforting. McGonagall'd assigned him to work with her for the year: the Ministry had insisted if Harry, Ron and Hermione were to return for their final year that they assist professors as well as take their NEWTs classes. Hermione had been thrilled to be placed in Vector's Arithmancy classes, and Ron was pleased to find he'd be assisting Hagrid. Until, that is, he also discovered that meant dealing with Malfoy as well.

Adoyo stops at the top of the stairs, her hand on the banister. "You've been a great help with the younger years. I was wondering..." She hesitates, then purses her mouth. Harry waits, curious. "Well. I've heard about your tutoring the other students in your year in Defence. A club, Minerva says. Dumbledore's Army?"

Harry nods. He twists his satchel strap around his fingers. It feels strange to be back at Hogwarts still. He hasn't quite got used to his robes again. Or the fact that he shares classes with Ginny. "We met in the evenings." There's more to it than that, but Harry doesn't quite know what McGonagall's told her. He's hesitant to ask.

"I'd like you to help me start something similar." Adoyo gives him a sober look. "After what the students went through in May..."

"It'd help them."

"They're frightened still," Adoyo says, and for the first time her voice is gentle. "Battle shock. It's not uncommon, and Merlin knows you must have some of it as well."

Harry shrugs. The nightmares have settled some, but he still wakes up frequently, his heart pounding and drenched in sweat. "I'm all right."

She eyes him. "Well, then, you'll help? I'd thought to start it up Saturday next, right after lunch. In the Defence classroom, of course."

A rush of second years passes between them. One of the boys gives Harry a shy look, but he doesn't stop.

"Yeah," Harry says after a moment. "I'll be there."

"Brilliant. I'll see you then." Adoyo gives him that brilliant smile again. She's nearly halfway down the stairs when she glances back up at him. "Oh, Draco Malfoy will be joining us as well. I thought he might be a good resource for Dark hexes."

A group of sixth-year girls pass by, their laughter drowning out Harry's curses.



"You can't be serious," Ron says. He pokes at his Yorkshire pudding, eyeing it suspiciously. "She wants Malfoy to help?"

"She does." Harry shoves another bite of sausage in his mouth. He doesn't bother to swallow before he says, "Are you going to eat that?"

Ron pushes his plate across the table. "Keep eating like that, mate, and you won't be fit to be Seeker."

"Don't listen to him, Harry." Hermione lowers her Ancient Runes text and frowns at Ron. "You know he barely got enough nutrition when he was a child, Ronald. There's nothing wrong with Harry putting on a bit of weight."

"There is if it's going to affect his catching the bloody Snitch." Ron pushes his hair out of his eyes. "You've got to think about broom dynamics--"

"Anyway, it doesn't matter if Professor Adoyo asks Malfoy to help," Hermione says, cutting Ron off. She tucks her book in her satchel. "The wand the Ministry gave him can't cast hexes. Everyone knows that. It's part of the Community Order requirements the Auror Office insisted on."

Blond hair catches Harry's eye and he turns to watch Malfoy coming into the Hall. There's a gaggle of first-year girls following him--at least one or two from every House judging by their robes. Their adoration is obvious as they whisper and giggle; Malfoy merely looks bitterly resigned.

Ron snorts. "Look at them. Honestly, I don't know what's wrong with the world when Malfoy of all people becomes their little idol. Gryffindors, even! It's enough to put me off my food."

"I'll take your tartlet," Harry says absently. He can understand what they see in Malfoy. Tall, tanned, his hair bleached nearly white from the sun and his shoulders wider than they'd been in the summer, Malfoy was bloody gorgeous. Shaggable even, and that thought makes Harry's cock twitch.

“The hell you will.” Ron puts his hand over his lemon tartlet. “I suppose we should be glad whatever was making you sick up after every meal is over.” He wrinkles his nose. “Really awful, that.”

Hermione watches Malfoy cross over to the staff table. “I have to admit, he doesn’t favour the Slytherin girls. I’m surprised.”

Harry’s not. The Slytherin boys, on the other hand... His eyes narrow as one of them approaches Malfoy, and Malfoy smiles down at him. Bastard.

Ron tears a roll in half and shoves it into his mouth. “You should see him in class,” he says. “I think Hagrid calls him in to help with the first years just to torment him. They’re all over him. Draco this and Draco that, and can you please help us with our flobberworms, Draco?” He makes a face. “And this is the arsehole who tried to have Hagrid sacked.”

“I think Hagrid’s got over that,” Harry says. He turns back around and stabs his fork into the Yorkshire pudding. “You know how he is. Likes dangerous creatures and all.”

“Broken ones, too,” Hermione says quietly. Harry doesn’t like the way she’s looking at him.

“I suppose,” he says shortly. He jumps when Ginny drops down next to him on the bench. She grins.

“So I hear I’m being knocked back to Chaser on the team.”

Harry gives her an apologetic look. “Sorry?”

Ginny laughs and bumps his shoulder. “I’m fine with it, Harry. You’re a better Seeker than I am, Sloper’s right about that.” She throws a roll over at her brother; Ron catches it with ease. “Ready for practise tonight?”

“Been keen all day.” Ron hands the roll to Harry. “Now can you jolly this one up? He’s been in a funk for days.”

Harry frowns at him as he butters the roll. “I have not.” He stops when all three of them just look at him. “What?”

“You’ve been a beast, darling,” Ginny says as she stands up. Harry looks at Hermione, and she nods hesitantly.

“You have, Harry.”

He sighs. “Fine. I’m cranky.” He doesn’t know why. He supposes because he’s tired and can’t seem to get enough sleep. Or food.

“And we still love you.” Ginny ruffles the back of his hair. Harry can almost feel the poisoned glare he’s certain Malfoy’s sending his way. He leans back into her touch. “Must needs run,” she says. “I promised Dean a letter before the end of the week, and this is the only free time I have to write it.”

Harry glances up at the staff table. Malfoy’s pointedly avoiding looking at him.

“Are you all right with the Dean thing?” Ron asks after his sister walks off. “I told her she should tell you before we came back--”

Harry cuts him off. “I’m fine with it, Ron.” And he is. He’s glad Ginny’s found someone else. She and Dean are good for each other--they always were--and he hopes it lasts. He can’t stop his quick glance back at Malfoy. One of the first years--the one with long dark blonde curls, Perdita, Harry thinks her name is--has wandered up to speak to him. She looks thrilled when he bends down to speak to her.

“What an asshole, eh, Harry?” Ron asks with another snort.

“Yeah,” Harry says. He tries to sound annoyed, but he doesn’t think he manages. “A complete asshole.”

When Harry turns back to his friends, Hermione’s watching him thoughtfully, her brow furrowed.

He reaches for his pumpkin juice and looks away.



Draco sits in the Quidditch stands, alone. Well, not entirely, he supposes. He’s awash in a sea of blue and bronze, surrounded by Ravenclaws cheering on their team against the Gryffindors in the first match of the season.

Still, he’s given wide berth by all but the first year girls, who sit two benches below him, occasionally turning to look at him and giggle. He’s fairly certain he sees Perdita scrawling hearts and *Perdita loves Draco* in a lurid green ink across the cover of her bright pink parchment case. He’s not certain if that or the fact that the case is trimmed in faux Hippogriff skin with a gaudy rhinestone clasp is more humiliating. He’s still bemused by their adoration, although, if he’s forced to honesty, he’s rather taken with Perdita herself. She reminds him of Pansy their first year.

Draco wraps his dark green scarf tighter around his neck. It’s barely mid-October, but the wind is chilly at this height.

A roar goes up from the Gryffindor side as Potter swoops after the Snitch, his scarlet robe whipping behind him, his focus on nothing but the fluttering gold ball. A Bludger barely misses his shoulder, and he jerks his broom to the right. The Snitch disappears. Draco smirks at the grim look on Potter’s face as he circles back up above the fray. He misses playing against Potter, Seeker against Seeker. They’d been well-matched, really, or so he likes to think. If nothing else, he’d made certain Potter had to work for the Snitch, unlike Pemberton. Circe. If the idiot manages to stay on his broom, Ravenclaw’ll be lucky.

Draco watches Potter. It’s familiar to him; he’s been doing it nearly half his life now. He wonders what it will be like, after this year, when Potter will be away, training to be an buffoonish Auror, most likely falling back in with the Weasley girl if staffroom gossip is to be trusted. Even last year, though Potter’d not been at school, his presence had been felt everywhere. Death Eaters had whispered his name in corners where His Lordship couldn’t overhear. Gryffindors had chanted it loudly during Quidditch matches, to the point that the Carrows had demanded Severus suspend the remainder of the season. He’d refused.

Sometimes Potter reminds Draco of Severus. He’s sure neither one of them would be pleased by their similarities. Still, there are moments when Potter’s willingness to ignore Ministerial expectations seems remarkably like his Head of House’s quiet defiance of the Dark Lord.

Draco's wand, for example. He'd never expected Potter to return it. To be honest, he hadn't even assumed Potter still had it. If he'd been in Potter's shoes, he would have snapped it the moment he'd purchased a new one of his own.

Instead, Potter had watched him struggle through the first of Adoyo's Defence Club meetings with a wand borrowed from one of the students that had barely managed to cast a Jelly-Legs Jinx. The next Saturday he'd caught Draco after lunch, motioning for him to follow. Draco had, of course. It wasn't every day Potter abandoned his friends in favour of Draco.

He'd been shocked to see Potter pull a familiar wand out of the waistband of his jeans. Ten inches of polished hawthorn with a smooth ebony hilt that Potter was now turning towards him. Draco'd just looked at him, oddly confused.

"Take it," Potter had said. "It's yours."

Draco had hesitated. "It won't work for me any longer. You won it. You're its master."

Potter'd just given him a half-smile. "Try it."

The wand had felt heavy and warm in his palm. When his fingers curled around the hilt, it sparked just a bit, then settled against his skin comfortably. Draco's breath caught. For that moment he'd been eleven again, standing in the middle of Ollivander's with his parents, his new wand in his hand and the realisation that, after years of anticipation, he'd truly be going to Hogwarts finally hitting him.

"Figured it might want to have you back," Potter said. "It's just been rolling around in my trunk since I got my new one." He'd leant against the wall, watching Draco as he flicked the wand, sending a rolling ball of sparks down the hall. "It likes you."

"It shouldn't." Draco had stroked the hilt lightly. "Wandlore says—"

"Wandlore probably doesn't take into account the fact that nine weeks ago you were inside of me," Potter said bluntly.

Draco stilled, just looking at him. It'd been the first time they'd mentioned what had happened that night. They're both silent. Potter doesn't look away. "I suppose," Draco said at last.

"Right." Potter had pushed himself off the wall. "And now I'm giving it back to you. Relinquishing mastery, so to speak."

"The Ministry won't let me keep it," Draco said. "If they find out—"

Potter turned to look at him. "I'll make sure they don't." At Draco's raised eyebrow, he'd shrugged. "You need your wand. Keep it hidden outside of Defence Club and you'll be fine."

Draco hadn't been able to say thank you before he'd walked away. He's still not entirely certain if he would have.

Now he studies Potter as he soars above the stands, the wind ruffling his dark hair. Ginevra--even now Draco refuses to use that ridiculous nickname for her--flies up beside him, leaning in to say something to

him. Draco's eyes narrow. He'd never given a damn about the girl before; she was an irritant, but less annoying than her brothers. And yet, he's beginning to find her loathsome, always hanging about Potter, laughing at what he says, putting a hand on his arm, watching him across the table at meals, a furrow in her brow. She's his ex-girlfriend, for fuck's sake. She's supposed to despise him, at least for half a year, and go out of her way to make his life utterly miserable before she's back at his side, laughing, or so his experience with Pansy has taught him.

Every time he sees Ginevra hanging over Potter as she does, he wants to shout, *I've had him too*, but he's managed to restrain himself--so far at least. He wonders what she'd think if she knew her precious Potter had wrapped his thighs so tightly around Draco's hips that he'd left a bruise Draco hadn't healed for days.

The first years below him giggle as they huddle over a parchment in Perdita's hand. When the breeze blows Perdita's curls out of the way, Draco catches a glimpse of the roughly drawn picture of what obviously is himself striding across the Hogwarts lawns, Fang trailing behind him. He flinches.

This is what he's become. An assistant groundskeeper. A first-year idol. A laughingstock.

Draco tugs his woollen robe tighter around him. It barely fits across his shoulders now. The seams pull slightly as he stands up, what little pleasure he's had in the match dissipating. With one last glance at Potter flying above him, he starts down the stairs. The first-years move to follow, and Draco turns his fiercest glare on them. All but Perdita shrink back. She eyes him curiously, but she settles back onto her perch on the bench with a nod.

That one, Draco thinks, will be dangerous one day.

His boots thunk as he stomps down the stairs, and he ignores the frowns the Ravenclaws cast his way. He slips his hand in his robe pocket. His wand is still there, warm and tingling against his fingertips. He strokes his thumb against the smooth hilt.

He owes Potter, he knows, and he hates that feeling.

The roar of the Gryffindors echoes behind him as he escapes to the forest.



"I'm telling you, Harry, I think he's up to something," Ron whispers. Slughorn's broad back is turned to them as he scrawls a potion recipe across the chalkboard at the front of the room.

Harry balances his silver knife on the point, twisting it lightly into the scarred desktop. Today's been a good day so far. No flares of magic, no sudden rush of nausea, and his nightmares have been easing now that he's back in a dormitory with Ron. There's something comforting about his best mate's snores. Pomfrey had been pleased when he'd gone to see her this morning for his weekly checkup, and she'd packed him off quickly, bustling to the Floo to send her report to Guhathakurta at St Mungo's.

His cauldron sits patiently to one side, surrounded by the ingredients Slughorn has passed out. Dove entrails glisten wetly in the dim light from the hanging lamps that flicker above every desk. For once they don't make him want to sick up. He looks over at Ron. "You're mental."

Ron pokes him. "Even Hermione thinks Malfoy's acting weird. All he does is stare at you. You should have seen him at the Quidditch match, she says. All alone with the Raveclaws and she swears he never took his eyes off your broom."

"So?" Harry shrugs, trying to look calm. Inside, however, his heart thuds against his chest. He's tried to ignore Malfoy in the Great Hall, but he's always aware of him. Always. Ron and Hermione had been surprised when Harry had put off going down to Hagrid's hut for a visit, but Harry's terrified of running into Malfoy there. "He's probably just plotting how to irritate me next."

Ron doesn't look convinced. "He's plotting something, that's for certain." He scowls at his sister when she throws the bud of a *gomphocarpus physocarpus* at the back of his head and hisses *shut it*. Hermione glares back at him from beside Ginny.

Pay attention, she mouths. Ron just rolls his eyes and turns back to Harry.

"Anyway," he says, folding his arms on the desk and leaning over the parchment he's been doodling on, "I'm watching the bastard, just so you know. Thinking about setting the first-year boys on him during Care of Magical Creatures." His brow furrows. "They think it's ridiculous the way the girls are mooning all over him. Bet they'd be up to a prank or two or three."

Harry can't help but feel a swell of fondness. They may have had their spats, but when push comes to shove, Ron's always been there for him in the end. "Thanks, mate," he murmurs. He feels a bit sorry for Malfoy. God only knows what Ron'll come up with. He'd spent years deflecting the twins' pranks, after all. A lump catches in Harry's throat as he thinks of Fred, buried beneath the biggest headstone Arthur had been able to afford. George still hasn't recovered; Ron's told him they're worried about how much George has been drinking lately.

Slughorn turns and claps his hands, sending up a small plume of chalk dust. "Now," he says with a cheerful smile. "Page forty-eight in your textbooks, please. Libatius Borage has provided you with a basic outline for brewing a poison antidote. Using it and the preliminary recipe I have just written on the board, you will craft your own customised antidote based on Golpalott's Third Law: *The antidote for a blended poison will be equal to more than the sum of the antidotes for each of the separate components*. I have placed upon each of your desks a small phial of poison; you will identify it and use it to begin your research. A final antidote and a report of your brewing process will be due on my desk by the second of November, at which point we will conduct a test of the poison and the effectiveness of your antidote on each one of you." He ignores Hermione's waved hand. "You may begin."

Harry and Ron give each other a dismayed look. Two weeks to come up with their own antidote? They're utterly buggered.

"Just think of the Aurors," Ron mutters and he reaches for the dove entrails. "I'll chop, you dice?"

"Fair enough" For a moment Harry misses the Forest of Dean and their cramped, tiny tent. Damn the Ministry and their requirements. He's jealous of his former classmates who are just having to study for their NEWTs instead of suffering through classes again.

He reaches for the *gomphocarpus physocarpus* with a sigh.



It's late on Halloween morning when Draco's awakened by a house-elf gently shaking his shoulder. "Master Draco," Winky whispers in that ridiculously high-pitched elf voice of hers, "you is being needed, sir."

Draco sits up, shaking off the remnants of a lovely dream that involved a soft mouth and messy dark hair. "What?" he asks sleepily. He rubs at his eyes.

"The Thestrals," Winky says. "Master Centaur Firenze, sir, he is sending for you. The Thestrals is being very, very sick and he is saying Master Draco is being needed. Right away."

Draco's already out of bed, reaching for the trousers Winky's pulled from his wardrobe. "Go to Professor Adoyo," he says sharply. "Tell her I might be tardy to Defence Club this afternoon." He's relieved in a way. Sparring against Potter nearly every Saturday afternoon for the past three weeks has set his teeth on edge. He's considered bowing out, but he suspects Potter would see that as a sign of weakness, and Draco will be damned if he'll break first.

Winky nods and disappears with a loud crack. Draco pulls his shirt on, still buttoning it as he slams his door behind him.

Firenze's in the clearing when Draco pushes past the undergrowth, with Hagrid beside him. They crouch over a Thestral collapsed on the ground, shaking.

Draco's heart quickens. "What's wrong?" He runs across the clearing, stopping only when Hagrid catches his arm, his beefy fingers digging into Draco's skin.

"Swamp fever," Hagrid says gruffly as Draco stares down at Ismene's stallion. Creon tosses his head against the ground, his eyelids fluttering over white eyes. It's only then Draco realises the clearing's silent. The herd's gone, save for Ismene, who stands over her mate's twitching body. The foal's nowhere to be seen.

"Where are the others?" Draco drops down beside Creon, reaching out to stroke his mane. Creon snaps weakly at his fingers, but he lies still as Draco's fingers smooth across his heated skin. Blood seeps from the corner of his mouth. When Creon coughs, it splatters across the cuff of Draco's sleeve.

Firenze leans down to touch the sharp protrusion of ribs along Creon's torso. The stallion's muscles are wasted away; he looks like a skeleton with skin draped over his frail body. "My herd moved them deeper into the forest when we discovered Creon's condition. Swamp fever's highly contagious; it drains their magical energy first, then feeds off their bodies."

Creon huffs softly. Draco can feel a shudder go through the stallion. "Is he going to be all right?" he asks, but he already knows the answer.

"We'll have to put him down," Hagrid says. He wipes at the corner of his eyes with a huge scrap of greying linen. "Don't seem right, but it's best for the herd."

Draco's stomach twists. "Isn't there a spell to cure--"

"No." Firenze shakes his head. "Euthanasia is the only course of action." His eyes drift to Ismene. "For both of them."

Draco freezes. He looks up at Firenze. "Both of them," he repeats dully.

Hagrid blows his nose on his handkerchief. "Can't be helped," he says. "She's got the symptoms too."

"No." Draco stands up and steps towards Ismene. "Not her." He places a hand on her thin back. She's burning hot and he can feel every bone beneath her skin. He looks at Hagrid, his face crumpling. "You can't--"

"There's no other choice," Firenze says, and his voice is gentle. "They'll both die as it is, and it will be a painful death, Draco. You see how Creon suffers already."

Draco looks down at the once prideful stallion. He blinks back warm wetness.

"In another day, she'll be the same." Firenze's hand settles on Draco's shoulder. "It's kinder this way."

"And Druella?" Draco asks. The words are barely audible.

Firenze pulls him closer. "She'll be cared for. She's not ill, nor does she show any signs of the fever. Another couple will take her as their own. She's already begun the weaning process as it is. It won't be overly difficult for her to readjust."

Draco turns on him. "She's losing her parents. I damned well think that will be hard."

They look at each other. Hagrid stands up. "Draco. She'll be fine. Yeh and me, we'll make sure of that, all right?"

There's a long silence, then Draco nods slowly. It feels as if there's a vise on his chest. He draws in a ragged, painful breath. "How will you..." His voice catches in the back of his throat and he coughs. "How will you put them down?"

Hagrid and Firenze exchange a glance. "Normally we'd break their necks," Firenze says quietly. "But the Killing Curse would be more humane."

Draco looks up at them. "Neither of you have a wand."

"No." Firenze meets his gaze directly. "But yours has been returned. I've seen you here in the clearing."

He'd slipped away more than once over the past few weeks to practise here, to get used to the feel and heft of his wand in his hand. It's heavier than the Ministry wand. Far more powerful. Draco looks at Ismene and shudders. "I can't."

Firenze looks disappointed, but he nods. "Very well." He moves closer to Creon, bending down to take his neck in his wide, strong hands. Draco looks away just before the sharp whinny followed by a stomach-churning snap. His hands shake. He shoves them in his pockets; his knuckles brush both his wands.

Hagrid dabs at his eyes with his handkerchief. "Poor thing."

When Firenze moves towards Ismene, Draco stops him. "Don't." Firenze looks at him; Draco's stomach clenches. He doesn't want to do this. He can't bear it. But he knows he has to. For Ismene. He doesn't want her to hurt. Doesn't want her to feel any pain.

He presses his face against her flank. He can hear the rattling of breath deep in her chest. He strokes her hair, her mane. "I'm sorry," he whispers, and she nudges his shoulder gently. She understands what's happening. He knows she does. He looks up at her, and she ruffles his hair with her beak and whinnies.

Draco touches her face. "I'll look after her," he promises, and Ismene jerks her head in a nod. Her wings stretch for a moment, the skin between the bones horribly transparent, then she folds them back against her body and she snuffles against his ear.

She watches calmly as he pulls out his wand. The look she gives him is kind, he thinks, as if she's absolving him of guilt. But it doesn't. Guilt doesn't work that way, he's found. You remember always. Every night. Every one of your sins replaying over and over again in your mind until finally you go mad.

Draco wonders if he's well on his way to that.

"I'm so sorry," he chokes out, and then it's over in a flash of green light and a whispered incantation that Draco barely realises comes from his own lips.

Ismene lies sprawled on the ground, one eye staring up sightlessly at the nearly bare branches above.

Draco falls to his knees, retching, his body wracked with sobs for the first time in months. He's barely aware of Hagrid and Firenze beside him, lifting the corpses, carrying them deeper into the forest. He lies on his side, curled up into himself, tears seeping across his face. For Ismene. For Creon. For Vince. For Pansy. For his parents.

For himself.

Small hooves appear, then a tiny body settles on the leaves beside him, delicate wings folding against cool skin. Draco pulls Druella closer. He doesn't know how she's found him; he suspects Hagrid's sent her his way. He's a sentimental fool, Draco's found.

He buries his face against her mane and closes his eyes.



Harry is in a foul mood when he comes into the Defence Club. For some inexplicable reason his back's been hurting for days, he's barely slept the night before, and it's Halloween. He'd gone out to Godric's Hollow earlier in the morning, Ron and Hermione alongside him, with the intention of visiting his parents' graves. They'd barely made it down High Street before the reporters were there, the photographer's flash nearly blinding Harry.

Ron and Hermione had each grabbed Harry's arms, Apparating them out with a sharp crack. They'd landed just outside Hogwarts gates, falling onto the soft grass. Harry just lay there, staring up at the clear Autumn sky, his chest tight and his eyes burning.

"All right, mate?" Ron had asked carefully, and it had taken Harry a long moment before he'd nodded and pushed himself to his feet.

Hermione had tried to talk him out of going to the club, telling him he could come sit by the lake with her and Ron, but one look at Ron's face, and Harry knew Ron--though he tried gamely to hide it--was disappointed by that particular option. So he'd shrugged her away, brushed the grass off his robe and stalked up the hill to the castle, Hermione's scolding of Ron drifting behind him.

Professor Adoyo looks up from Levitating the mats across the classroom when Harry throws the door open. Her robe is a bright apple green that reminds him of Rita Skeeter's acid quill, and he scowls at her. "Mr Potter." Her eyebrow raises. "Is something wrong?"

Harry hangs his robe on one of the hooks lining the south wall. He tugs his jumper down; it's a bit snugger than usual, and he thinks the house-elves might have shrunk it. "Sorry, Professor." He pulls his wand from his pocket and sighs. "Just a bad day."

"Halloween," she says with a nod. She tosses a stack of thick torso shaped pads his way, and he catches them. "I'm sorry."

"It's fine." Harry sets the pads down beside the matted piste. "Where's Malfoy?" The bastard's usually here before him, helping Adoyo set up.

"There's been an issue with one of the Thestrals." Adoyo opens one of the leaded-glass windows, letting the cool air drift in. The room tends to get too warm once the students begin practicing. "He sent word that he'd be here as soon as possible."

Harry feels a tendril of worry. Malfoy adores the animals. If there's something seriously wrong with one of them, he'll be upset.

The students' arrival distracts him. Adoyo lines them up on the piste and with a flick of her wand sends the pads hovering in front of each of them. Harry goes down the line with her, correcting form and assisting with pronunciation. The youngest student is a third year--the first and seconds being deemed too small for the club--the oldest a sixth year who wanted more practice time for her NEWTs. She gives Harry a sideways glance, smiling at him as he touches her wrist, lifting it higher into the proper stance.

"Are you going to Hogsmeade next weekend?" she whispers. Harry can't quite remember her name. Anne or Anna or Annabelle, he thinks. Or perhaps Amelia. He's not certain.

He shrugs and watches her cast Relashio again. "Maybe." The spell explodes against the shoulder of her pad. "Still a bit off--don't let your wrist go so limp when you aim."

"I'll be in the Three Broomsticks, if you like," Anne-Anna-Annabelle-Amelia says. She brushes her dark curls back from her face. Her eyes are a bright blue. "Might even be persuaded to buy you a drink, if you're good."

Harry gives her a blank look.

"I don't particularly think you're Potter's type, Arabella," a familiar voice drawls from behind Harry. *Arabella*. Right. Harry turns, and Malfoy's there, looking ruffled and exhausted. His hair falls over one eye, and there's dirt on one sleeve and what Harry thinks might be blood on the cuff. He looks wild. Unsettled.

Arabella huffs and wrinkles her nose at Malfoy. "As if anyone would listen to you," she sneers. "Fancied yourself so highly, didn't you, Malfoy? All that carrying on with the Carrows last year didn't do you one whit of good. Look at you now, mucking out porlock shit."

Malfoy's face pales beneath his tan, then his cheeks flush and his eyes narrow dangerously. Harry puts a hand on his arm. "Leave her," he says just loudly enough for Arabella to hear. "It's not worth it. She's just a child."

Adoyo's voice rings across the room. "Mr Potter and Mr Malfoy." They look her way. "If we clear the piste, I should like the two of you to show the students proper duelling technique."

A cheer rises up from the door, and Harry glances over. A rather large group of first and second year students have crowded around to watch as they often do on Saturday afternoons. Harry sees a few of the girls that trail after Malfoy in the throng.

He stops Malfoy with a hand on his arm as the rest of the club clears off the piste. "Are you all right?"

Malfoy starts to shrug, then he hesitates. "No," he says after a moment. "The Thestrals..." His voice catches. "Swamp fever. We had to euthanise two of them."

"Oh." Harry drops his hand. No wonder Malfoy looks so shattered. "Which ones?"

Malfoy catches his lip between his teeth. "Ismene and her stallion." He looks away. "I killed her." His mouth twists. "First time I've actually used *Avada Kedavra*."

Harry doesn't say anything for a moment. "I'm sorry," he says finally, knowing what that must have cost Malfoy, and Malfoy meets his gaze. He nods.

"Thanks."

"The foal?" Harry asks. He doesn't want to; he's afraid of the answer.

Malfoy turns his wand between his fingers, staring down at it. "She's fine."

"Good."

They stand awkwardly beneath the open window. Sunlight streams into the room, shining on dust motes and making Malfoy's hair gleam gold. Harry resists the urge to reach out and touch his cheek, to pull Malfoy into a rough embrace.

Adoyo calls his name, and Harry looks away at last, the moment broken. They step up onto the piste, their wands out, the other students looking on in fascination. At Adoyo's command, they duel, flicking hexes and jinxes at each other, sidestepping and blocking.

Malfoy's an excellent opponent, quick on his feet and with his wand, and Harry's soon sweating, his fingers slipping on his hilt. He ducks Malfoy's Blasting Curse easily, and fires back the Bat-Bogey Hex Ginny had made him an expert at. Malfoy knocks it aside with a nonverbal *Protego*. Harry can't help but grin. It's like a dance, their duelling is, and they're both in perfect rhythm with each other.

Harry whirls, bending to the left as an Anteoculatia zings over his shoulder. Malfoy snorts.

“Almost, Potter,” he taunts him, and Harry flicks a Steleus at him that lands squarely in Malfoy’s chest. He bursts into a series of sneezes, but still manages to deflect Harry’s horn-tongue hex.

Malfoy’s eyes flash at him; his hair is cloud of silver-gilt whipping around his face. His cheeks are flushed, his mouth pursed, and he’s absolutely breathtaking in his fury.

“Impedimenta,” he cries out as Harry stumbles over a lace of his trainers. Harry’s caught by surprise, distracted. The spell slams into Harry’s chest and knocks him backwards. Magic explodes across Harry’s skin, sending a burst of bright light throughout the room, enough to cause the others to shield their eyes before it fades. His wand falls from his limp grasp.

The last thing Harry sees before his head snaps back painfully is the horrified expression on Malfoy’s face and then he falls to the matted piste.

His body vibrates with the impact and darkness overtakes him.



“Do you mind telling me what happened?” Granger asks. “Did you use something unusual or did you feel strange when you cast it? Did you make any strange motions?”

The waiting room is tucked away in an alcove along the main hall of the Spell Damage ward. Healers and mediwitches hurry past, faces sober and tense, thick file jackets packed with paperwork and parchment fluttering along behind them. Draco’s been here for three hours now, sent to wait with no news. It had all happened so quickly: the trauma Healers had rushed to take Harry from him the moment he’d tumbled through the Floo from the Hogwarts infirmary. Pomfrey had been right behind him, her voice clipped and sharp as she’d informed the intake Healer of what had happened. She’d left him after twenty minutes, promising to return as soon as she could. Instead, Granger and Weasley had arrived an hour ago, their faces pinched with worry and, in Weasley’s case, suspicion.

Granger’s eyes are bright, unnaturally so in her pale face. Her bushy brown hair is drawn back in a loose chignon and it makes her look much older. Draco hates to disappoint, but he isn’t going to go there. He had felt off, angry and drawn to Potter at the same time. It was as if his thoughts had gone in one direction and his magic in another, but he isn’t going to tell Granger this, especially not with Weasley glowering at him from the hideous avocado green chair opposite him.

“I don’t know what happened,” Draco says finally. He twists his shirt sleeve around his fingers and glances back at mediwitches’ station. They don’t look their way. “Harry had just given me this wand back and I wasn’t sure I had control of it. It was a simple jinx, really. I just said it by the book and he...” Draco is still shocked when he thinks about Harry falling to the ground without a word in front of him. “...he just collapsed.”

Weasley snorts. “Sure, Malfoy. I’m certain everyone will believe you. Why would they have any questions for a traitorous bastard like you?”

“Ronald!” Granger looks genuinely shocked and Draco tries not to smirk. It pleases him to see Weasley get a bit of trouble with the girlfriend; he’s eager for any distraction that will keep him from thinking about Potter and whether he’s okay, whether he hurt him too badly with whatever the hell it was that came out of his wand.

Draco just looks away as Granger upbraids Weasley, unleashing her worry on her truculent oaf of a boyfriend. He wishes he had something to do other than wait, wait, wait. A mediwitch leaves the station and walk towards them. He sits up from his slouch, his stomach twisting. As bored as he is, he’s not sure he can bear the news if something truly bad has befallen Potter. He refuses to think about it.

She stops beside them. “Would you like some tea, loves?” She glances back at the ward doors they’d taken Harry through. According to the hospital pass clipped to her pale blue robe, her name’s Primula Woodshaw. “There’s a tea shop up on the fifth floor, and it might be a while yet. Don’t worry, he’s not in critical condition. They’re just running a few more tests.”

Something infinitely tight in Draco’s chest lets go all of the sudden, like a breath he’d been holding for hours. Relief floods him and he can’t speak for gratitude for a moment. He realises he thought he might have actually killed Potter and as much as he’s wished it in the past, the thought horrifies him now. And his own horror at it horrifies him on another level. Has he truly begun to give a damn what happens to the specy git?

Granger looks over at him. “Would you like to go up, Draco? We did miss dinner and it would be nice to have a cup of tea.”

He shrugs.

“I’m staying here,” the Weasel declares. He folds his arms over his chest.

Granger sniffs primly. “No one asked you.” She stands up. “Draco?”

He’ll be damned if he’s going to be left here with Weasley. “Fine.” He pushes himself out of his chair and follows Granger to the lift.

The Weasel calls something after them about bringing a sandwich back but Granger pretends not to hear. She punches the fifth floor button with vigour and when the lift doors close behind them, she turns a frown on Draco.

“So,” Granger says with a purse of her mouth. “You and Harry?”

Draco scowls at her. “What?”

“What’s going on between the two of you?” She fixes him with a determined stare, as though he’s a recalcitrant teacup that won’t transform.

“I’m sure I don’t know what you mean...” he says.

“You know exactly what I mean.” She eyes him. “I see the looks he gives you when he thinks no one is watching. And I can tell that you are paying attention to him, particularly when you pretend otherwise. You’re not invisible, you know.”

The lift doors open with a shudder and a clang and Draco takes the welcome avenue of escape. Granger's words have thrown him into confusion - he'd no idea he'd been that transparent and the revelation is distinctly uncomfortable.

"Harry has no idea, of course." She continues smoothly, walking down the dingy yellow hallway to the double doors marked *Tearoom*. "He gets all sulky because he thinks you're ignoring him." Granger lays a hand on Draco's arm and he turns to face her involuntarily. She lets it fall. "So, what I want to know is, why?"

Draco doesn't have words. At all. He just looks at her, unable to put voice to everything that's tumbling through his mind.

Granger's face softens. "Draco. It's okay."

"No," he says stiffly. "It's damn well not okay. Potter was a fool, and I never should have--" He breaks off sharply, his teeth digging into his lower lip.

"Never should have what?" Her voice is gentle. "Look, I don't care if you and Harry have feelings for each other."

"Shut up," Draco says and he turns on her, his jaw tight. "You don't know what the hell you're on about--"

"Then what?" The look Granger gives him is pure steel.

Draco's fists clench. "We fucked, Granger."

She brings her hand to cover her mouth but he gives her credit for dropping it a moment later. "Oh," she says in a very small voice. "That would explain a lot."

"Explain what?"

Granger tucks a stray lock of hair behind her ear. She doesn't quite look at him. "Harry had a lot of questions about his identity over the summer."

"He didn't seem to have any questions while lying on his back," Draco says, not caring how harsh it sounds. "But I suppose he thought it meant more than it did."

"Perhaps it did." Granger's eyes narrow. "It's a very intimate act for some, you know."

Draco doesn't answer.

Granger pushes the gouged yellow door open. "Do you want tea or not?" She doesn't wait for him to answer, but strides in, without looking back to see if Draco is following.

He catches the door before it closes. "As if I know what I want," he murmurs under his breath.

The door swings shut behind him.



Harry wakes up to the familiar beep of a monitoring spell over his head. He groans softly, his entire body aching. Infirmary again, he thinks, and he tries to remember what exactly's landed him here this time. Pomfrey's going to be furious with him, he thinks. His head hurts and he hopes he doesn't have a concussion - the potion for that tastes awful. He remembers falling and white blond hair--Malfoy. Did Malfoy push him?

His eyes flutter open, then blink quickly at the bright light above him. The infirmary smells odd, a bit more antiseptic than usual. And as he comes to fuller consciousness, he realises the spell array around him is far more complicated than usual: there seems to be a glittering tissue of monitoring spells interlaced with spells he doesn't recognise, all wrapped around him like a cocoon.

"You're awake," Ron says next to him, and Harry turns his head to see the blur of his best friend perched on a too small chair next to his bed.

"Yeah." Harry swallows, his throat dry. "Hey." He tries to sit up, and a broad hand pushes him gently back against the pillows.

"No moving," Ron says. "Hospital rules."

"Hospital." Harry blinks again, and this time the world around him shifts into focus as Ron slips his glasses back on his face. He recognises a near empty St Mungo's ward, a privacy curtain drawn halfway around his bed. He licks his lip. "That bad?"

Ron gives him a lopsided smile. "Don't know yet. The Healer's haven't said." He shifts in his chair, his hands laced between his knees. "Hermione's here too. She's up in the tearoom with Malfoy."

"Malfoy?" Harry's tired. He must have misheard. Malfoy wouldn't be here in the hospital waiting for him.

"Yeah," Ron says with a sigh. "I told him he could leave anytime, mate. I really did. Bastard wouldn't. I think he just wanted to be here to torment you when you woke up."

Harry sinks back into his stack of pillows. His head hurts a lot. "What happened?"

"Impediment Jinx gone awry." Ron's brow furrows. "You don't remember? Hermione's trying to figure out if Malfoy did anything funny. Wouldn't want to be him right now. You know how she can be when she wants to know something."

"Fuck," Harry says. He can't help a wave of sympathy for Malfoy.

Ron grins. "Yeah. The Ferret deserves it though. He's been acting funny all evening."

Before Harry can ask him how, Guhathakurta enters the ward, a sheaf of papers in his hand. "Mr Potter." He stands at the end of Harry's bed. "Not precisely the way I'd have liked to see you again." He frowns at Harry. "Not to mention I was called in from my grandmother's birthday celebration."

Harry feels an irrational prick of guilt. "Sorry."

Guhathakurta snorts. "I probably owe you for that. Terribly boring dinner party with the whole extended family." He glances at Ron. "You know how that goes."

"Do I ever," Ron mutters.

Harry doesn't, but he just nods.

"How are you feeling?" Guhathakurta flicks his wand at Harry, and a trickle of warm magic slides through the cocoon of monitoring spells to settle against Harry's sternum.

"Okay." Harry clears his throat. "A bit nauseous, I guess. And my head hurts."

Guhathakurta grunts softly and dips his wand lower. The magic slips down to Harry's abdomen. It tingles softly. "Nothing else?"

Harry considers. "Not really."

"Right." Guhathakurta slips his wand back into his robe and scribbles something across one of his papers with a forceful sweep of his peacock quill. "I have some surprising news for you." He hesitates. "You might want to hear it privately."

Ron lifts his chin. "I'm not going anywhere."

"Anything you want to tell me can be said in front of him," Harry says, almost at the same time.

Guhathakurta eyes them both. "Very well." He shuffles through the papers and coughs delicately. "It seems that in your last set of scans we may have overlooked something. A second magical field in the process of forming. Quite difficult to demarcate, actually. It's no wonder the results were conflicting."

Harry sits up, suddenly nervous. His head swims. "A second magical field?" All he can think of are Horcruxes. Perhaps Dumbledore had been wrong. Perhaps he hadn't actually got rid of the bastard--

"You're pregnant, Harry," Guhathakurta says bluntly. He looks him in the eye. "Between thirteen to fifteen weeks, we estimate, although it's difficult to ascertain in the absence of a menstrual cycle."

Harry stills, staring at him. "I'm what?"

Ron swears softly. "You're joking."

"I'm afraid not, son." Guhathakurta turns to him, taking in the hand he'd laid on Harry's coverlet. "I'm afraid you're going to be a father."

"Me?" Ron's voice squeaks. "I'm not. Harry. What--No, mate, you've got his all wrong. I'm not--" He turns to Harry, utterly speechless.

"It's not him," Harry says quietly. His hand settles on his stomach, smoothing the soft cotton over it. "This..." He bites his lip. "Men can't get pregnant."

Ron and Guhathakurta both look at him. "Not normally, no," Guhathakurta says. "The frequency rate is roughly one every fifty, sixty years. I've read about it in the literature though, and my mentor assisted with a male pregnancy during his residency."

"Shit," Ron says. He pulls his hand away from Harry's and rubs his face. "Pregnant."

Guhathakurta sits on the edge of Harry's bed. "All right. I have to ask a few questions." He flips to another sheet of paper, this one pale green. "Have you taken any substances that would cause unnatural fertility?"

Harry shakes his head wordlessly.

Guhathakurta *hms* and scrawls across the paper. "Has any being pronounced a fertility curse against you that you know of?"

Harry shakes his head again.

"Right." Guhathakurta taps his quill lightly against the file jacket. "Have you had sexual intercourse with a man or a woman Polyjuiced or Metamorphed into the form of a man?"

"No to the latter," Harry says. His throat is tight. He can barely get the words out. He can't look at Ron. "I did, um, have sex with someone. On my birthday."

"What?" Ron's eyebrows shoot to the ceiling. "Who?" He gives Harry a horrified look.

Guhathakurta frowns and looks through his papers. "July the thirty-first? That fits with the diagnostics." He looks up. "You may want to inform this person of your situation, and we'd certainly like to test him too."

"Why?" Harry can't help asking. "You don't think he--"

"To get the fullest medical description possible," Guhathakurta says. "These cases are extremely rare and it's important to chronicle everything we can. We still don't understand all of the mechanisms, although they tend to be associated with unusual magical phenomena and extreme magical field fluctuations; however, we lack proper modern scientific descriptions. There's also the question of genetic risk and whether the pregnancy is viable."

"Viable," Harry repeats weakly.

Guhathakurta nods. "Capable of producing live birth." He takes in the look on Harry's face. "By Caesarean of course. As for genetic risks, with the combination of two male gametes, the chromosomal results can be highly unstable."

With a detached part of his brain, Harry notices Guhathakurta's mounting excitement about the situation, like Hagrid with a new rare and dangerous magical creature. The rest of his mind is simply shut down and he has no idea what to say or so. He can't possibly be pregnant. This must be a concussion and he's delusional. Perhaps he's even still unconscious and having a shockingly vivid dream. He pinches his arm surreptitiously. It hurts.

“You think his magic being unstable had something to do with this,” Ron says.

“Most likely.” Guhathakurta’s voice takes on a tinge of glee. “It’s highly unusual, of course, and there may have been other external factors that we need to run to ground, but it would provide a perfect environment for something like this to occur in.”

Other factors. Harry thinks of the shattered ring lying on his chest of drawers and swallows. It couldn’t have... He can see the clearing in his mind’s eye, can remember the swell of light and silvery magic that enveloped his and Malfoy’s bodies. *Fuck.*

Ron’s looking at him oddly. “Harry.”

Guhathakurta clears his throat. “Can you tell me if the father’s human?”

Harry nods. “He’s a wizard.”

“He.” Ron’s pale beneath his freckles. His mouth is twisted in a determined line. “Who?”

Harry closes his eyes for a moment and takes a deep breath. When he opens them, he turns to face his best friend of the past seven years, having no idea what effect his words will have on them, but knowing somehow everything’s changed. “Malfoy. It was Draco Malfoy.”

The ward’s silent. Guhathakurta takes a step back. “The Death Eater.”

“He’s not a Death Eater any more,” Harry says hotly. “He was pardoned and he’s serving a Community Order.”

Ron’s staring at him, his fists tight. “Malfoy.” The name is barely audible gritted out between clenched teeth.

“Yes.” Harry raises his chin. “That’s who it was.”

The door to the ward pushes open and Hermione slips in. “Harry,” she says, running to his bedside. A few moments later Malfoy comes shuffling through with wrapped sandwiches and a steaming mug of tea in his hands.

Harry’s heart leaps into his throat at the sight of Malfoy. There’s a strange twist in his belly at the thought of some part of Malfoy still being inside of him.

Ron’s head snaps up. He bares his teeth, and too late Harry realises what he’s about to do. “Ron,” he says urgently, but it’s too late.

With a full cry, Ron launches himself at Malfoy, toppling him to the ground. Tea splashes across the tiled floor; the cup shatters. Sandwiches bounce off the baseboards as Ron’s fist crashes into Malfoy’s face with a sickening crunch of bone and cartilage. Blood sprays in an arc.

Harry shouts and tries to leap up, but Guhathakurta holds him down and shouts over his shoulder for assistance. Mediwitches come running, as Hermione looks in shock between Harry thrashing on the

bed and Ron and Malfoy rolling across the floor, their fists slamming against skin and bone. Belatedly she tries to pull Ron off of Malfoy, but stops short as a fist nearly connects with her jaw.

“Stop,” Harry yells. “Stop it, Ron. *Stop.*” He jerks against Guhathakurta’s hands, desperate to be free. One of the monitoring spells explodes in a shatter of blue sparks as the others blare shrilly in warning. He can feel his magic building, roiling through his nervous system. He screams wildly and digs his fingers into Guhathakurta’s arm.

“Don’t make me sedate you,” Guhathakurta growls in his ear. “I’d rather not, but it’s dangerous for you to be this upset.”

Malfoy’s flipped Ron over and is straddling him. He raises his fist and Hermione gasps as the mediwitches whisper about calling security. Harry breaks free of Guhathakurta’s grasp and flies off the bed, his body trembling with magic and adrenaline. He doesn’t even care that his arse is hanging out of his hospital gown.

Guhathakurta’s voice echos across the room. “Stop, Harry. You need to settle down right now or you’ll hurt yourself and the baby.”

Malfoy’s fist drops, and he gapes slack-jawed at the admonishing Healer. Ron takes the opportunity to twist his hips, throwing Malfoy off as he slams his fist one last time against Malfoy’s gut. He staggers to his feet, rubbing his jaw. “Fuck you,” he spits out.

“Ron,” Hermione says, and then she stops, looking back at Harry. “The baby?”

Ron wipes blood off his split lip. “That *bastard*,” he says bitterly, gesturing towards Malfoy still sprawled across the floor, “has somehow managed to get Harry up the duff.”

“That’s impossible,” Hermione and Malfoy say in chorus. Malfoy’s face is dripping blood and his eyes are leaking with tears. His nose is cocked at an unnatural angle.

“No,” Guhathakurta interjects. “It’s merely improbable. But it does happen, and Mr Potter is most definitely pregnant.”

Harry can’t take his eyes off Malfoy. “It’s yours,” he says quietly.

Malfoy just stares at him. “You can’t be serious.”

“My birthday,” Harry says. “You remember. You were there after all.”

Malfoy slumps slightly, and the mediwitches edge closer, eyeing his broken nose. “Circe. My parents will kill me.”

“I don’t understand,” Hermione murmurs. “Harry doesn’t have the proper reproductive system...”

“His body will adapt,” Guhathakurta says. He’s beginning to sound cheerful again. “The extreme magical field variation allows conception to occur without the normal mechanisms of human reproduction and the body evolves magically to create a proto-womb, though his normal sex organs remain intact.”

Harry can't help the flush that rises on his cheeks. He's not exactly comfortable having his sexual life examined out loud, not to mention his internal organs.

Ron turns to him. "If you weren't preggers, I'd deck you too," he snaps. "Fuck, Harry. All that time with my sister, and now you're gay? What in buggery were you thinking?"

"Buggery, actually," Malfoy intones dryly.

Ron raises a fist threateningly, and Malfoy bares bloody teeth at him.

Hermione wrinkles her nose. "Someone heal him please?"

The mediwitches swoop in to pull Malfoy aside, and Ron turns back to Harry. "Did you fuck him when you were with Ginny?"

"Don't be an idiot," Harry says with a frustrated sigh. "You know I broke up with Ginny before I came to Hogwarts. I barely even knew I was gay myself. Ask Hermione."

Ron's face tightens. "You knew?" He wheels on Hermione.

Hermione raises her hands in protest. "I only knew he was exploring the possibility."

"He seems to have been exploring more than that," Ron says, gesturing towards Harry's belly. "Now look where it's got him. If only you'd told me, we could have stopped him before he became a freak."

The room falls into uneasy silence. Harry tenses. "Get out," he says quietly. "I don't care how angry at me you are. That's going too far."

Ron shoots Harry a wounded look and storms out.

"Harry," Hermione says, but he cuts her off.

"Just go after him," he says. "He needs you."

Hermione brushes his cheek with a quick kiss. "I'll be back. Be careful and rest."

Harry nods as she flies out the door. He looks back at Guhathakurta, ignoring Malfoy who's had his face cleaned and Episkeyed by the mediwitches. "What's next?"

Guhathakurta gathers up his files. "I'm going to prescribe a mild sleeping potion. Nothing too dangerous, of course. But you need to recover after all of this. I'll send an owl to Hogwarts for the both of you. I'd like to run some more genetic tests in the morning, and I'd like to bring in an obstetric Healer for consultation." He hesitates. "It'll be necessary in any eventuality to have qualified help."

"Fine. Whatever." Harry climbs back into the bed, suddenly exhausted, his mind racing. "As long as it's not tonight."

He barely notices as the mediwitches file out of the ward. Malfoy hesitates, then edges closer to Harry's bed.

“Potter.”

Harry turns his head on the pillows, looking at him. He feels a strange electric field surrounding their bodies as Malfoy leans over his bed. “What?”

Malfoy licks his lips. “I’m sorry I hit you with that spell.”

“It’s not your fault.” Harry’s eyelids are suddenly too heavy and he closes them.

Malfoy snorts. “If you say so. The Healer seems to think otherwise. Did you know?”

Harry’s eyes fly open. “No. Merlin. No. I had no idea until just now.”

Guhathakurta coughs softly from the edge of the privacy curtain. “Mr Malfoy. We’re arranging a bed for you in the Derwent Ward.”

“Very well. Thank you.” Malfoy steps away from the bed. He’s nearly at the door when Harry stops him.

“I’m sorry about Ismene,” he says softly. His eyes meet Malfoy’s for a long moment.

Malfoy’s lip trembles. He clenches his fist. “As am I.” He turns and the doors swing behind his retreating form.

The lights in the ward dim, and Harry’s left alone. A mediwitch appears with the potion and he’s scarcely drunk it before he closes his eyes and drifts into sleep.



“Mr Malfoy, if you would, please focus again on the tip of my wand.”

With a sigh, Draco looks back at Guhathakurta’s wand. It glows a soft pale blue. The Healer’s performing a mildly hypnotic spell for diagnosis, Draco knows, and he’s explained that Draco has to remain conscious to get the proper reading. Draco’s well on his way to a cranky boredom: they’ve been at this all morning and it wouldn’t be an understatement to say he didn’t rest well last night. A large part of him refuses to believe this pregnancy nonsense can possibly be real. When he’d woken up to the rattle of the breakfast trolley --after only a few hours of sleep and nightmares involving the Killing Curse and Potter with a swollen stomach that exploded as a Thestral foal fought its way out of his body--he’d been certain he was the victim of a horrible Weasleycentric prank until Guhathakurta had bounded in to Draco’s corner of the ward at half seven to prove otherwise. He’d been running tests on Draco with the occasional interruption to dash across the hall to Harry’s ward to check the results ever since.

The wand dips ever so slightly. “I’m sorry to ask again, but please focus. We’re almost done with this set.” Guhathakurta is almost impossibly cheerful for number of hours they’ve been at it. According to the large clock on the wall, it’s nearly noon.

Draco scowls at him, but turns his gaze back to the faintly pulsating light. It makes his head hurt.

Guhathakurta finishes his reading and jots the results onto the topmost parchment of a large stack that perches precariously on the bedstand and threatens to knock over the mostly uneaten remains of Draco's breakfast. "Well, that's that then. You're in fine health and you don't seem to be under any unusual magical influences." His glance falls on the Dark Mark on Draco's forearm, and Draco has a sudden urge to cover it. He doesn't, but he presses his arm against his side. His cheeks warm. Guhathakurta coughs and shuffles his papers, looking away. "It'll most likely take a bit more time for the remainder of your and Mr Potter's results to come down from the labs, but I'd say you needn't worry about your own condition."

Draco picks at the sheet draped over his hips. He's not really concerned about his own health, but the entire situation is worrisome. He wishes he were anywhere but here. Being in hospital makes it all too too shatteringly real. "May I leave, Healer?"

Guhathakurta flips through his parchments. "I'd like to have you close by for at least the afternoon, if anything develops. We're finished with the primary diagnostics, but it's hard to say what else we'll need to run after the first round of the laboratory tests comes back." He scrawls something across a form and hands it to the mediwitch who's just walked up. She murmurs something to him and he nods before turning back to the papers. His dark hair falls over one eye and he brushes it back impatiently with a flick of his peacock quill.

"I don't really have anything to do here," Draco says. His mouth twists to one side. "And I don't particularly fancy reading year-old issues of *Witch's Weekly* or the romance novels from the lounge."

After a few moments, Guhathakurta looks up. He blinks. "Sorry. I was just tabulating something. What would you like? I might be able to find something else in the staff lounge, newspapers and the like."

"I'd like to be back at Hogwarts doing my duties." Draco's surprised to find that he means it. He misses the rhythm of his day. God only knows what Hagrid might get up to, preparing for tomorrow morning's Care of Magical Creatures class. He'll have the third year Gryffindor and Slytherins, and Weasley will be no help at all with that lot. He sighs in annoyance. "But as that seems to be impossible, I don't know. It seems ridiculous for me to lie about." Pansy would laugh at him, he knows. *You've always been a horribly lazy sod, Draco*, she'd say. *When did the thought of a day in bed become anathema to you?* Still, the idea of being confined to a hospital bed makes Draco's chest hurt. He supposes he's more anxious than he's willing to admit.

Guhathakurta frowns and taps his chin absentmindedly with his quill. "They always need help in the children's ward. There are a lot of patients whose parents are gone during the day who could use someone to play with them or read to them."

Draco snorts. "With all due respect, sir, I'm far better with animals than people." He glances down at his arm. "And, frankly, no parent wants their child near a friendly helper with the Dark Mark."

"Perhaps." Guhathakurta sets his quill aside. "Do you enjoy working at Hogwarts?"

Draco is caught off guard. No one ever asks him what he thinks of his Community Order. "Mostly. Although there are moments..." He trails off, thinking of Ismene. He chews on his lip. He can't believe it hasn't even been a full twenty-four hours since he'd turned his wand on her.

“What moments?” Guhathakurta is directing his full attention to Draco now and it’s a bit disconcerting.

“I had to... there was a Thestral who was sick, and we had to...” Draco swallows around the lump that has appeared in his throat. He won’t see her again. The thought makes him want to curl into himself. “I had to euthanise her.”

Guhathakurta sits on the edge of the bed. “What was wrong with her?”

“She had swamp fever.” Draco says. He doesn’t look at Guhathakurta. “She’d just foaled three months ago and I helped during the process.”

A wave of terror grips Draco and he can’t speak for a moment. Somehow all of his dread is focused on one point. He doesn’t want to fall apart in front of the Healer, but he has to say something. He can’t pretend to be disinterested any longer. He licks his lip and stares down at the sheet accordion folded between his fingers. The crisp white cotton is striped with tiny pale blue lines. “She seemed healthy, and then she was about to die,” he says softly. He looks up at Guhathakurta. “Are you sure that Potter’s not in danger?”

Guhathakurta meets his gaze evenly. “I can’t say at the moment. I don’t see immediate signs of danger, and he has good care, but the situation is quite rare.”

“I’m afraid he’s going to die,” Draco murmurs. He drops the sheet and smooths it across his thighs. It’s strange to admit this to a complete stranger. No one who knows either him or Potter would believe him, though. “I don’t want to kill him.”

“I see.” Guhathakurta regards him for a long moment. A mediwizard comes into the ward, stopping by one of the other beds with a steaming potion phial. Guhathakurta watches him, rolling his wand between his fingertips. Draco’s grateful for the Muffliato the Healer had cast earlier. “Even if something happened to him, it wouldn’t be your fault. You didn’t cause this, you know. No one knows what causes this.” Guhathakurta looks back at Draco. “Mr Potter’s unruly magic perhaps. Or the fact that he died and came back.”

“You know about that.”

Guhathakurta’s smile is wry. “I *am* his Healer, Mr Malfoy. I know a great many things about Harry’s recent experiences. The fact remains that magic is at times more of an art than a science and any numbers of factors could contribute to an unusual situation such as this.”

“But I’m the other...” Draco can’t say it. The word hangs between them, unspoken. He draws in a deep breath. “This happened because I had sex with him. And it’s dangerous precisely because no one knows how it works.” Draco’s face is hot and he’s raising his voice without thinking about it.

“Yes, that’s true.” Guhathakurta says in steady tones. “And it’s very important to keep him under proper medical supervisions, whatever decision is made about the pregnancy.”

Draco blinks and falls back against his pillows. Of course. Harry could have an abortion. It might be risky, too, but surely it would be far less risky than carrying a child your body wasn’t meant to hold. “Are you advising termination, then?” It goes against everything his father believed about the bloody sanctity of

wizarding life—pureblood wizarding, at least—but Mother had been far more pragmatic. She'd made certain, back before it was clear that his proclivities leant the opposite direction, that he knew about contraceptive charms and how to discreetly obtain abortifacient potions, should his partner require one.

He wonders what she'll think about this particular situation. Oh, Merlin.

“We don't advise such things unless there is a direct threat to the life of the person carrying or something drastically wrong with the foetus.” Guthakurta's face is impassive. “It's up to the parents and their choices. In this case, there's no endangerment indicated.”

“But that could change, couldn't it?” Draco raises his voice again, tensing at the thought of his mother's reaction to him getting Potter of all people up the duff. “It's a risky situation and no one knows what could happen as you've said.”

“Well, of course. All pregnancy is risky,” Guhathakurta says. “For that matter, being alive is a fairly risky endeavour. But in Mr Potter's case, he's young and strong, albeit with unusual magical fluctuations, and there is no direct threat at the moment.” He pauses. “I'm sorry but I really shouldn't discuss further particulars without his consent. I've likely said more than enough as it is, but as one of the fathers this concerns you as well. You really should talk to Harry yourself about the situation if you're worried about the outcome.”

Draco refuses to be mollified. “If you were in my situation, what would you do?”

Guhathakurta smiles and stands. “I'd be concerned, as you are, and also completely surprised. And I'd want to discuss it with the other person directly involved. That is all I can advise: talk to him.”

Draco rubs his hands over his face with a groan. Talking isn't exactly something he and Potter have ever been good at. Fighting, yes. Mocking, yes. Fucking, even, as surprising as that had been to discover. Talking, however....

His stomach growls. Loudly.

“I'm sure lunch will be served soon.” Guhathakurta drops the Muffliato as the meal trolley rolls through the ward doors. “Ah. Just in time.” He picks up his stack of parchments. “If you were interested in helping on the children's ward, I'm sure I could find you a robe with long sleeves. No one looks beyond the volunteer's robe.”

“Thank you.” Draco realises how very kind Guhathakurta is trying to be. Still his heart pounds fiercely with anxiety. He needs something, anything, to distract him from his dread.

A young orderly barely older than Draco himself, his face still spotty, removes a tray from the trolley. Draco accepts it gratefully, suddenly ravenous at the sight of piping hot chicken and vegetable pie and mixed berry crumble covered with custard sauce. He realises that this is the first proper meal he's had in at least a day, if not longer. After a brisk nod and a promise to check back in, Guhathakurta walks down the long ward at an impressive clip. Draco lets himself be seduced from his nebulous worries by the solidity of the food in front of him. He thinks only about eating and how one might go about obtaining a second tray.



“Mr Potter, Mr Malfoy, would you please explain how we have arrived at this terrible state of affairs?” The Headmistress’s face is livid and her lips so compressed as to be almost invisible. The trilling quality of her words and her crisp diction instills fear in Harry.

It’s never good when she’s rolling her words this violently, he thinks. He sneaks a glance at Malfoy, sitting tensely in the other chair on this side of McGonagall’s desk.

Malfoy grips the arms of the chair, his knuckles white. Still his voice barely quavers when he raises his chin and says, “I believe, Headmistress, it began when I fuck--”

Harry cuts him off. “It happened on my birthday.” He can feel the heat in his face rise. He shifts in his chair uncomfortably. The last thing he wants to do is discuss his sex life with his Headmistress, especially after three days of observation and painstakingly thorough examination at St Mungo’s.

McGonagall lays a hand on her breastbone for a moment. “Oh, thank God.” At Harry’s puzzled look, she explains. “The situation would be beyond saving if it had happened during term.”

“I’m staff, Potter,” Malfoy says in a bored tone. He stares up at the stony-faced portrait of Snape that glares down his hooked nose at the proceedings with a disapproving frown. “You’re a student, even if you are the Saviour of the Wizarding World.”

“This is highly irregular, Minerva,” Snape’s portrait says. The other Headmasters nod along with him, all save Dumbledore, who snoozes away in his chair.

She waves a hand at him. “Hush, Severus. I’ll thank you kindly to let me deal with this matter.” Harry’s amused to see even Snape flinch at the sharp glance McGonagall turns on him, until that look is focused back on him. “Mr Malfoy is correct,” McGonagall says. “And, that, Mr Potter, makes your condition very...” She hesitates. “Challenging.”

Snape snorts. “I rather think that would be the least challenging aspect, all things considered.” The look he gives Harry is scathing. “He’s *with child*, Minerva. It’s unprecedented in the history of Hogwarts.”

“I hadn’t failed to notice, Severus.” McGonagall keeps her steely glare fixed on Harry. “But thank you for reminding me yet again why we’ve all gathered here. At least we’ve determined that the contact occurred before Harry was enrolled as a student. Is that correct, Mr Potter?”

Harry thinks of Malfoy’s hands on his heated skin. He swallows. “It was just my birthday,” he says again. “We didn’t...” He trails off, not entirely certain how to continue.

“It was only the one night,” Malfoy says. He sits up straighter in his chair. “We haven’t been alone together since July.”

“Would you be willing to take Veritaserum to confirm that?” Snape snaps.

Malfoy turns towards his former Head of House. "I shouldn't hesitate, Professor." They exchange a long look before Snape leans back in his chair with a grunt.

"We won't ask that of you." McGonagall straightens the paperweights on her desk, setting them in precise distances from one another. "Your word and Mr Potter's are good enough." She looks at Harry expectantly. He nods.

Malfoy laughs, sharply. "You mean Potter's is." His mouth twists to one side, his expression shifting from wary to almost cruel. He's hiding, Harry can tell. Malfoy's foot bounces ever so slightly against the worn rug.

McGonagall gives him an even look. "No. I meant what I said. It's important that you both corroborate this story. The Ministry will have questions."

"Of course." Malfoy glances away, but for a moment Harry can see the flash of fear in his eyes. His skin pales beneath his tan. "Is this where you tell me I'm going to Azkaban?"

"Whyever for, dear boy?"

Harry looks up at Dumbledore's voice. The portrait of the former Headmaster stretches in his chair, scratching his beard as he yawns.

Malfoy shrugs. "The Ministry isn't known for their judiciousness. And I *have* got Harry Potter up the duff."

At Malfoy's uncharacteristic slip into vulgarity, the portrait of Phineas Black bolts upright. "What?" Evidently the gist of the conversation hadn't been entirely clear to him before. The other portraits shush him loudly, ignoring his protests.

Dumbledore merely beams down from his perch on the wall. "Quite exciting, really." His blue eyes find Harry's. "Miraculous, one might say."

Harry looks away. The ring's in his pocket now; he'd picked it up the moment he'd returned back to Hogwarts. The warmth of the tarnished gold is comforting in a strange way.

"Still, Minerva," Snape says, leaning against his frame, "there *must* be consequences for Potter's actions."

"I wasn't the only one," Harry mutters under his breath, and Malfoy's nostrils flare.

McGonagall sighs. "You needn't worry, Severus. Given that this pregnancy is viable according to the Healers, we do need to know whether or not Mr Potter intends to carry to term."

All eyes turn towards Harry. He rubs the palms of his hands along the seams of his jeans. "I..." He coughs softly as Malfoy sits forward, his hair falling into his face. "I don't know."

"You can't be serious," Malfoy says. His eyes are dark. "It's too dangerous."

“And you’re only *eighteen*,” Snape says tightly. “There’s no sense in Mr Malfoy being forced to throw his life away for your sentimental Gryffindor fantasies, Potter.”

Harry scowls. “I’m not forcing Malfoy into anything. If I keep the--if I keep *it*, he doesn’t have to have anything to do with either of us.”

Malfoy’s silent, looking at him.

“I have other people who’ll help me,” Harry says. “Andromeda for one.”

“No one’s asking you to make the decision this evening, Harry,” McGonagall says, her voice gentling. “You’ve had a long stay in hospital.” Her gaze flicks towards Snape’s portrait. “But I will need to know your intentions at some point in the near future as it will affect your schooling.”

“You’re not throwing me out.” Harry’s aghast. He hadn’t thought of that possibility.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Malfoy snaps. He sits up in his chair, uncrossing his legs. “They wouldn’t be that idiotic.” Harry’s surprised. He would have assumed Malfoy of all people would be the first to applaud his expulsion.

McGonagall purses her mouth. “Thank you for that rousing defence, Mr Malfoy.” She folds her hands, resting them on her desk blotter. “Although, you are correct. While in most cases such as this--” At Snape’s snort, she frowns. “Well, with other instances of student pregnancies, it has been the policy of the school to allow parents to remove their children with minimal disruption, your particular circumstances are a bit more...” She hesitates, searching for the proper word.

“Utterly witless,” Snape says dryly. “Or perhaps heedlessly cretinous.”

“Extraordinary.” McGonagall glares at him over the rims of her spectacles. “Honestly, Severus, if you can’t keep a civil tongue I’ll have your portrait hung in Horace’s office.”

“Cow,” Snape mutters beneath his breath, and Malfoy doesn’t bother to hide his smirk.

McGonagall turns back to Harry. She looks highly uncomfortable. “Arrangements will have to be made if you choose to remain pregnant. Gryffindor Tower is out of the question, of course.”

Harry’s temper flares, and his fingers dig into the arms of his chair. “Why the hell not? It’s not like it’s contagious.”

Snape opens his mouth, leaning forward in his frame, and Dumbledore says in that particularly calm tone of his, “Severus.” Snape sits back with a scowl and a flick of his robes, his sulking obvious.

“Thank you, Albus.” McGonagall sighs. She stands and walks over to her sideboard, her black robe swishing around her ankles. A ruffle of ivory lace at her throat is pinned with a heavy silver brooch in the shape of a thistle. She reaches for a crystal decanter and unstoppers it, pouring a golden liquid into a small glass. Her back is ramrod straight. “We simply can’t, Mr Potter. You’ll need a private room.”

“Talk about favouritism,” Malfoy says bitterly. “Everyone else gets sent down, and Potter gets a private room.”

McGonagall turns, her glass in her hand. She takes a sip. "You shouldn't complain, Mr Malfoy. If he requires it, you'll be sharing with him."

"What?" Harry says. "You can't--"

Malfoy's already out of his seat, his hands clenched into fists. "I am not--"

McGonagall eyes them both over her whisky. "I can assure you that I can and you will." She sits back down at her desk. "There will either be an abortion or there will not. If there is not, you will both live together as a couple while you are at Hogwarts." The look she gives them is sharp and cold. "You are a staff member, Mr Malfoy, and Harry is a student. By all rights, I should sack you this moment, and do believe me when I say there are school governors who would insist upon it. But as you and Mr Potter are the same age, and Mr Potter has returned to Hogwarts under special circumstances, an exception can be made. Married staff have lived at the castle on occasion--"

"I am *not* marrying him," Malfoy says hotly. "Have you lost your mind? We're both wizards. It isn't even legal--"

"Do sit down." McGonagall's tone brokes no argument, and Malfoy sinks back into his chair. His hands tremble and there's a sheen of sweat on his upper lip.

Harry hesitates. "You're not asking us to do that, ma'am. Are you?" He hadn't even wanted to marry Ginny. There's no way he'd let himself get shackled to Draco bloody Malfoy.

"No." McGonagall sets her whisky down. "As there's no legal option for legitimacy, you'll merely have to live together for the remainder of the term." She sighs again. "Really, Harry, you've put me in a terrible bind. Should you continue the pregnancy, I'll be forced to go before the board of governors. The only way I can keep Mr Malfoy's position is if I persuade them that you are indeed a couple with no legal recourse to marriage."

Malfoy turns to Snape. "Professor--"

Snape's already shaking his head. "You know as well as I do, Draco, that they'd send you to Azkaban otherwise." He looks at Harry, his expression grim. "Surely this is a more humane form of prison."

"And if I terminate?" Harry asks quietly.

"St Mungo's would provide you the proper potions," McGonagall says. "Your Healer has already advised me of that. When you returned, you and Mr Malfoy would each be allowed to stay in your separate capacity at Hogwarts, but there could be no sexual contact between the two of you for the duration of your time as a student."

Malfoy relaxes into his chair. "See, that would work. There's already nothing sexual between us."

"I rather think that's closing the gate after the horse is out of the barn," Phineas Black pipes up from across the room. The other portraits chuckle. Snape rolls his eyes.

Harry stands. "How long do I have to make a decision?"

“As soon as possible.” McGonagall looks up at him. “There’s only so long the potions will work and we must avert the appearance of scandal.” She glances around the room. “Needless to say, this will remain within the walls of this office for the time being.

Harry nods and runs a hand through his hair. “Right. Can I go back to my room now? It’s just I’m tired--”

McGonagall pushes her chair back and steps around the corner of her desk. “I’ll send a house-elf with you.”

“I can make it.” Harry can’t bear the idea of being herded back to his dormitory as if he’s some sort of invalid. “Thanks.”

Malfoy starts to stand; McGonagall’s hand on his shoulder pushes him back down. “I’ll want a word with you alone, Mr Malfoy.” She doesn’t sound happy.

Harry thinks perhaps he should protest or at the very least defend Malfoy, but he’s exhausted and confused and more than a little upset. He supposes it’s not entirely fair to blame Malfoy for all this, given his own complicity in the matter, but there’s a part of him that does.

The office is quiet as he leaves. He casts a quick look back at Malfoy, slouched down in his chair, his thumb pressed against his mouth as he stares blankly at the floor. A lock of pale blond hair falls across his forehead, brushing his cheek.

Harry hurries down the curving staircase.

When he closes the Headmistress’s door behind him, Hermione’s in the chilly hall, waiting. She jumps off the windowsill she’s perched on, and she pulls her school robe tighter around her. Sconces flicker above them, casting long shadows down the corridor.

“Hi,” she says. “How’d it go?”

“She’s not sending me down.” Harry leans against the wall. The stones are cool against the back of his neck. “Malfoy’s probably getting a good bollocking right now.”

Hermione wraps her arms around herself. “He should have known better. He was staff.”

“I don’t think either of us were thinking of that at the time.” Harry lets his head loll to one side, looking at her. He sighs. “If I make the decision, all this could go away.”

“Yes.” Hermione steps closer, a worried frown drawing her brows together. “That’s what you’re planning, isn’t it?”

Harry shrugs. “I suppose.”

They stand there for a long moment. Harry looks away. Hermione bites her lip. “Harry.”

“What?” He just wants to go lie down. It’s all been too much and he wants to stop being asked questions he has no answers to.

"I know you're scared," Hermione says softly. "I understand that more than you'll know." When he looks at her she flushes. "Ron and I...this summer." She draws in a shallow breath. "Well, there was a week when I thought--we hadn't been careful once, you see, and it could have happened. I was late and it seemed as if..."

"Oh." Harry doesn't wonder why they haven't told him. There's been a widening gulf between him and his two best friends since June. He's kept his secrets. They've kept theirs. He doesn't blame them. Much. And as much as he wants to shout at her, that this is natural for someone in her situation, that this happens when boys and girls sleep together, he doesn't because now he knows how it feels. He can't help but wonder what he and Ginny would have done if this had been her, if she'd been the one carrying. If everything had been *normal*.

Hermione brushes her hair back from her shoulders, twisting it in her hands before letting it fall loose again. "I'd decided to have an abortion," she says at last. "We're both too young and I want to finish school and take on an apprenticeship somewhere. It wouldn't have been the right time for me." She drops her hands to her sides. "Or Ron. He's eighteen, and I love him dearly, but he's not ready to be a dad yet." She hesitates. "Maybe you're not either."

"No," Harry says. "I suppose not." He knows she's right. Knows he'll have to make a decision soon. He might as well be pragmatic about it all. "It's what Malfoy wants. If there's anyone not ready to be a dad, it's him. Not that I'd ask him to be, mind, no matter what."

Hermione relaxes. Her fingers catch an opal pendant hanging from a thin silver chain around her throat. Ron had given it to her this summer. Harry'd helped him pick it out. "Thank God. I was afraid--" She breaks off. "Well, familial duty's important to purebloods."

"Not to Malfoy."

Hermione doesn't say anything about the sudden bitterness of his tone, but her sideways glance is wary. She twists her necklace around her fingertip. "Harry, if you're not sure--"

He knows she's just trying to help. He shakes his head. "No. Everyone's right. I'm not even out of school..." He trails off with a soft huff. He suddenly wants to press his palm against his stomach. He resists.

"And this is dangerous magic." Hermione steps closer, her worry evident. "I've been reading up on it while you were in hospital, and the magic has to rearrange your internal organs to build a sort of proto-uterus. It's rather like an ectopic pregnancy in a woman where the fertilised egg implants itself in the abdomen. Even for Muggles those can occasionally--and very rarely--result in a viable birth. Your body's going through something similar. But it's not guaranteed that either you or the baby will survive." Her eyes are bright and wet and she blinks rapidly. "Magic helps, but anything could happen. You could actually die, and there'd be no coming back this time."

Harry pulls her up against him. She lays her head against his chest, and he can feel her tremble. "I know." He strokes his fingers through her hair. "I'm not going to die."

"If you do," Hermione says against his robe, her voice muffled, "I'm going to be furious with you."

Harry laughs quietly. He's silent for a moment, and then he sighs. "It seems smarter to take the termination potions." Guhathakurta had already gone over the procedure with him before discharging him that afternoon. Two potions twenty-four hours apart, then a procedure to remove the uterine sac and make certain his organs went back to their original positions. He'd be in hospital for another two to three days, then all of this would be over and he could go back to the normal life of a Hogwarts student.

Something deep inside of him aches at the thought.

Hermione pulls back. She wipes her thumb beneath her eyes. "I'll go with you to St Mungo's if you like." She hesitates. "I know this isn't easy for you."

"It's not." Harry takes her hand. "But thanks." Hermione gives him a watery smile and she leans in to kiss his cheek.

"Ron's sorry," she says. "About calling you a freak. He didn't mean--"

Harry doesn't want to think about it. Ron's right, really. He is a freak. He shrugs. "It's fine."

Hermione doesn't look convinced. Her fingers squeeze his. "We love you, you know."

Sometimes Harry wishes he could still believe that. He knows they do, but everything's changed now. It's supposed to, he thinks. They're growing up, and Harry hates that. He's not ready for any of this. He doesn't know if he ever will be.

"I'm tired," he says finally, and Hermione nods.

"They'll be wondering where you are," she says. "The whole House has been worried about you."

He tenses. "Do they know?"

Hermione shakes her head. "McGonagall made it clear that we weren't to mention any of this. They just think it's your magic acting up again."

Relief washes over Harry. He doesn't want to face the questions he'd get otherwise. Another reason to just go to St Mungo's and take the damn potions, he thinks. Then he wouldn't have to deal with Gryffindor's horror at his spawning a Malfoy.

Harry lets Hermione lead him down the hall, back to the tower. He casts one last, lingering glance towards the Headmistress's office, but Malfoy doesn't come out. He tries to square his shoulders, but fails.

For the first time in months, Harry's utterly terrified.



"You're a complete fool, you realise."

Draco wheels around at the sharp voice. He's not in the mood to deal with Severus, not after what he's just endured in McGonagall's office. His face burns with humiliation. "Yes. I believe you made that abundantly clear in there, Professor." He gestures in the direction he's just come.

Severus shoves a knight out of his portrait frame and clammers over a painted stone rampart, breathing hard. He pushes his lank hair out of his face and glares out at Draco. "What else do you want me to say, Draco? Should I be pleased that you've managed to impregnate the Saviour of the Wizarding World? Do you have any idea what your father's reaction to this is going to be?"

"As a matter of fact," Draco says coldly, "I rather think I know better than you. He may have been your friend, but he's my father, and I can assure you I'm quite well acquainted with the lash of his fury. I've never managed to make him proud of me, and this bloody well makes certain that I never will. Is there anything else obvious you'd like to point out?"

The look his godfather gives him is vicious. "I may be reduced to oil paints and brushstrokes, Mr Malfoy, but I am still very capable of making your life hell if I so choose."

Draco slumps against the wall. He's only a corridor away from the staff quarters. He'd hoped to be in his rooms before Severus had caught up with him. It wasn't enough that the man had outshouted McGonagall. Of course not. Draco'd known he'd fully intended to catch him alone and eviscerate him further. Severus had always been like that when you'd disappointed him in some way. He'd flog a dead Hippogriff until there's no Hippogriff left to flog.

"Go ahead then," he says. He's too tired to fight. Even after three days he still hasn't come to terms with the fact that Potter's pregnant. By him. "Tell me again what an idiot I am. Tell me again how foolish I was, that I ought to have known better than to fuck Potter of all people, particularly at a time when I knew his magic was unstable, and particularly when I'm on a Community Order and could be sent to Azkaban at any moment. Tell me again I'm morally reprehensible for fucking a student, even if we are the same age--" His voice cracks.

That had been the worst of it all, the righteous anger they'd all turned on him, even the portraits, after Potter had left, berating him for improper fraternisation. The only one who hadn't eviscerated his moral character had been Dumbledore, sitting silently in his chair as he sucked on a lemon drop until he'd finally leant forward and told them to stop.

Draco runs a hand over his face, pushing his hair back off his forehead. He wants to slide down the wall, bury his face against his knees and cry. If he was eleven, he would. Instead he leans his head against the wall and stares up into the shadows of the arched ceiling. He's grateful it's late enough that the other staff are in their rooms already, preparing for bed.

After a moment, Severus sighs. "You're a stupid boy ruled by his cock." He sits on the edge of the rampart. A non-existent wind ruffles the sleeves of his robe. He looks older than thirty-eight. Far more tired. There are deep lines etched in the corners of his eyes, between his brows. "Whether or not Potter chooses to abort the foetus, this will have implications on your life. The Board of Governors has an unfortunately long and irritating memory."

"I know." Draco pushes himself off the wall and walks to a window. Arms crossed over his chest, he looks out the leaded panes onto the grounds below. He can just see the edge of Hagrid's hut from this angle. Light flickers from a side window, only to be blocked for a moment by the half-giant's shadow. "They'll have to report it to the Aurors as well." His mouth twists. "Must keep the Death Eater's record current."

He can still feel the soft press of Potter's lips against his Mark. His fingers press lightly against it, and he shivers. How idiotic is he that he still wants Potter, even after all of this?

Draco turns back to Severus. "It won't be an issue. They'll talk him out of being sentimental. Not even his friends would tolerate him being stupid enough to carry my child."

"We can only hope," Severus says, his voice grim. "In my experience, Potter does whatever the hell he wishes with no thought to anyone else's concerns--or advice." He stands up and leans against the portrait frame. "I don't wish you hurt," he admits finally. "You've been through enough as it is."

He sounds regretful. He meets Draco's gaze slowly.

"Professor," Draco says, but Severus shakes his head.

"I did what I could to protect you," Severus says. "I would have done more if it hadn't been for that damned snake." His fingertips brush his high collar. Draco wonders if there's a scar there now. He remembers what Severus's body had looked like that night when the Aurors had allowed him and his parents to go with them to collect it from the Shrieking Shack. He'd been buried in Highgate a week later. Draco had gone with his mother, both of them standing at the side of the crowd, heads held high. There'd been a photograph in the Prophet the next morning. The caption had labeled them as Death Eaters and intimates of His Lordship.

Draco had incinerated it on the spot, leaving a lasting scorch mark on the dining room rug.

Severus had always protected him. This much is true. Even when he'd been angry at his Head of House, accusing him of trying to steal his glory. Draco knows now what that had cost Severus. He steps closer to the portrait frame, lets his fingers brush Severus's sleeve.

"Mother made you Vow."

"Narcissa never forced me into anything," Severus says. He doesn't look away from Draco. "I did what I could for you, Draco. I made the Vow for you. You were my godson. How could I do any less?" He looks wistful. "There were times I envied Lucius you."

A lump aches in Draco's throat. "I wish you were here. I mean--"

Severus smiles faintly. "I would prefer not to be a mouldering corpse myself." He lays his hand near Draco's fingertips. "Whatever Potter decides, you'll need someone fully on your side. Gregory is utterly loyal to you, but useless for the most part, and while Mr Zabini may be of benefit, he will always place his own person above yours." Severus frowns at Draco. "And don't sleep with him again, Draco. For God's sake, have a bit more respect for yourself. Blaise will never publicly be anything but heterosexual."

Draco scowls, but he knows Severus's right.

"Which leaves Miss Parkinson." Severus taps a finger against his thin lips. "Cunning, bright, and an absolute bitch, bless her. You should speak with her soon. Explain the situation." He cuts off Draco's protest. "Potter has his friends and allies, Draco. You need yours as well, and Pansy, despite losing you to the temptations of the same sex, is viciously loyal to you. Arrange for tea or drinks or whatever it is you idiots indulge in. You need someone by your side at the moment."

"But what if she..." Draco chews on his lip. "I mean, it's Potter. Everyone thinks I hate him--"

Severus's snort echoes in the hallway. "No one will be entirely surprised. Trust me." Draco's face flames, and Severus arches one dark eyebrow. His mouth twitches. "You've always been somewhat of an open book, Mr Malfoy. Particularly when it comes to Harry Potter."

Draco doesn't bother to argue. "Not as if you haven't either. *Sir.*"

"True." Severus's surprisingly calm. "For different reasons."

Draco turns away. "I'll talk with Pansy."

"She's a sensible head on her shoulders," Severus says, from behind him. "Listen to her."

"Good night, Professor." Draco's boots thud softly against the stone floor as he walks away.



The next day, Harry stays in his dormitory for most of the day. He goes down for breakfast and a morning Potions lesson, but he enjoys the quiet of the Tower after lunch. With three days in hospital and the eager and concerned welcome in the Gryffindor Common Room last night, he is ready for a bit of peace. And he needs time to think.

He sits on his bed, reading Quidditch magazines and staring into space. He looks through his chocolate frog card collection, the ones he'd brought with him, and resolves to buy more frogs in Hogsmeade. He's only got two or three from the Second Wizarding War Collection, and perhaps it's time to add his friends and himself to the stack.

As the pale November sun slants low over the grounds, he can't sit still any longer. The common room's nearly empty when he strides through; only Ginny and Tabitha Braithwaite sit beneath the tall windows, books spread on the table between them.

"All right, Harry?" Ginny asks. She rolls her quill between her fingertips. Her red hair is plaited into a loose braid that hangs over one shoulder. Harry feels a twinge of sadness. He wonders what might have happened between them if things had been different. Maybe he'd have spent last night lying on the sofa next to her, his head in her lap as they whispered, the way they had his sixth year. Perhaps he wouldn't feel so alone.

"Fine, thanks." He stops. Part of him wants to tell Ginny about this, wants to ask her advice. He can't, though. Not now. Not after everything.

She looks up at him, and the sunlight warms her pale skin. Faint freckles dot her cheeks, and Harry remembers how he'd loved to trace them with his fingertip.

"Have you seen Ron?" he asks instead. Hermione's in Arithmancy this afternoon, and he hasn't seen Ron since he'd rolled out of bed and stumbled to the shower.

Ginny looks disappointed.

"Lake, I think," Tabitha says with a sideways glance at Ginny.

“Thanks.” Harry nods to her. “Later, Gin?” She nods and watches him as he clammers out of the portrait hole, her lip caught between her teeth.

Wrapping himself well in his robes and scarf against the chill, he sets forth at a good clip toward the greenhouses. He takes the right branch of the path before he reaches them, following the winding track down the back lawn to the lake. This late in the year, the landscape is devoid of colour. The lawns are already bleached yellow pale and dun and the trees are bare in the fading light.

A surprising patch of red catches Harry’s eye. The last rays of sun glint in Ron’s hair, setting it aflame. He’s sitting on the dock near the main road, the one they’d first encountered as first-years coming in by boat.

“Hey,” Harry says quietly.

Ron turns, looking up at him. “Didn’t think you wanted to see me.”

Harry settles next to him, grunting softly as his arse hits the worn planks. “I didn’t think you wanted to see me either, but I thought I’d make sure.”

“Right.” Ron pulls his knees up to his chest. His frayed black robe hangs over the edge of the dock, almost grazing the surface of the water. “Sometimes you’re an annoying git.”

“Thought I was a freak.” Harry watches a hawk soar over the far bank of the lake.

Ron sighs. “I told Hermione to tell you--”

“She did.” Harry looks over at him. “You weren’t wrong. I am a freak.” He gestures to his stomach. “I mean, this is all really weird for me too.”

“I can imagine.” Ron tosses a twig into the water and watches it bob away. “I’m glad I’m not in your shoes.” He hesitates. “I could’ve been. Well. In the Ferret’s shoes, I guess.”

“Yeah. Hermione said. I’d no idea.” Harry’s still a little hurt and tries not to show it, although he knows the summer was difficult for all of them.

Ron looks at him out of the corner of his eye. “I thought she might. I should have told you.”

Harry sighs. “Not like I said anything about Malfoy.”

“Yeah.” Ron’s silent for a moment. “That was a surprise. Sorry for decking him.”

“That’s all right. I’m sure you were just gagging for the chance, really.” Harry grins. “Opportunist.”

Ron laughs and relaxes. They’ve never been that great with staying angry with each other, not once they started to talk again. “Always thought I’d be decking you when you got Gin up the duff.”

“You wish you had such problems now, eh?” Harry raises his eyebrows.

Ron’s smile fades. “You need to talk to her, you know. Whatever you decide.”

Harry twists the fringe of his scarf in his fingers, then smoothes it out. "I know."

They look out at the lake. The afterglow of the sunset gleams across the choppy waves, and one of the Great Squid's tentacles breaks the surface, sending drops of water arcing into the air.

"What are you going to do?" Ron asks finally. His gaze drops to Harry's abdomen.

"I've no idea. Literally none. I try to think about it and it's like my mind goes blank." Harry scowls. "I know everyone says it's my choice but I have no idea what to say. I wish it weren't, in a way."

"You don't mean that, mate. You know how bad you are at doing what other people tell you." Ron hesitates. "Don't you?"

Harry sighs and stares at his shoes. "I don't know. Sometimes I wish I had someone to tell me what to do. Like Dumbledore. Or my parents. Or Sirius. But I don't think they could help me with this, even if they were here." He squints into the distance, to the barely distinguishable copse of trees that cloaks Dumbledore's tomb.

"Pity you don't have that stone you told me about," Ron says lightly. "You could bring them all back."

Harry reaches into his pocket. He pulls his hand out and opens it to display the battered ring containing the Resurrection Stone lying on his palm. "This one?"

Ron stares down at it. "I thought you lost it."

"I did too." Harry looks at him. "I found it again. After Draco and I--" He breaks off. "I was lying on it when we...well."

"Stop right there." Ron waves a hand. "Have you told Hermione about this?"

Harry gives him a look. "Is she in the library researching yet?"

"Good point." Ron thinks for a moment. "Listen, don't tell her for a day. I haven't seen her much alone since you went into hospital. Or at least warn me." He picks the ring up and eyes it suspiciously. "You think this did that to you?"

Harry shrugs. "I think it was a lot of things. My magic, the clearing, the Stone, who knows what else. Maybe there's something wrong with sex on your eighteenth birthday and no one told me."

"I think there's something wrong with sex with Malfoy on your eighteenth birthday. Or any time really." Ron grins, visibly trying to lighten the tone. Harry realises he must be scowling again.

Harry gives a short laugh. "It was nice, actually. He has a great cock--"

"No," Ron says, his hands over his ears. "Not listening, mate. La-la-la-la-la."

They smile at each other. Ron drops his hands and leans in, touching Harry's stomach. Harry tenses, and Ron pulls away.

“It is kind of amazing,” he says, “No matter how it got there. And, well, even if it is the Ferret’s.” He looks up at Harry. “I mean, let’s face it, unless it takes after you, it stands a good chance of being a pointy faced git. Still, aren’t babies supposed to be good things?”

“Not right now,” Harry says. “Not if you’re still at Hogwarts. And definitely not if you’re not married. Although... yeah. I guess I’m fucked all round.”

Ron shrugs. “Don’t think being married has much to do with it. Look, when I thought there could be a chance of having a kid with Hermione, it scared the shit out of me. I didn’t know what to do, or to say. It was her decision, yeah? And I knew that if she decided she wanted it, then I would have to want it to, no matter how I actually felt.”

Harry just looks at him. “How did you feel?”

“Completely unprepared,” Ron says calmly. “Almost mental at the thought of telling my mother. Scared witless at the thought of telling Hermione’s dad. Have you seen those tools he uses in people’s mouths?” Ron shudders. “Absolutely sadistic that is.”

“He’s a dentist, Ron.” Harry tries and fails to suppress a laugh at his best friend’s horror.

“Like that’s something normal.” Ron shoots back. He flips two fingers at Harry. “Anyway. At least he’s not a Malfoy. Can you imagine telling Malfoy’s father that you’re preggers with his heir?”

Harry blanches. He had thought of it, actually, and the very idea makes him sick. “Sadly, yes. I can. And I’d rather tell a dentist. Put that in the column for taking the potions.”

“But still, Malfoy’s not his father. He’s, well, he’s Malfoy but he’s different. And this is me saying that.” Ron looks almost shocked at his own words. “He’s good with animals. Hagrid says he is. Maybe he wouldn’t be awful with a kid.”

“You can’t be serious.” Harry eyes Ron suspiciously. He reaches out to feel Ron’s forehead. “Who are you and what have you done with my best mate?”

Ron smacks his hand away. “You can’t blame the kid for coming where it comes from. It didn’t have a choice.”

Harry sits back and rubs his eyes. His head suddenly hurts. “True. Is it even fair to think about bringing a kid into the world like this? It wouldn’t have a chance for an ordinary life.”

“Neither did you,” Ron says quietly.

“That’s what I mean.” Harry drops his hand to his stomach. The waist of his trousers is tight. He wonders how he’d managed to convince himself it was just the result of too much Hogwarts food, even though the rest of his body is thinner than it was earlier in the summer and he’d spent weeks sicking up.

A serious look crosses Ron’s face. “I don’t think any kid of yours would have an ordinary life, Harry. No matter how it got here. This one is just a little more special.”

Harry swallows past the lump in his throat. "I just want to be normal," he murmurs. He wishes he didn't feel like crying. Fucking hormones.

Ron's arm slips around his shoulders, pulling him close. "That ship has sailed, mate. Long ago. Embrace the freakdom. How many people can say they've been walking around with a Dark Lord in their head since they were almost two?"

"You're an arse," Harry says, but he laughs. "I wish I could explain this as a side effect of Horcruxes. Or something. It's so embarrassing."

"You don't know that it isn't really," Ron says. "I mean, it's obviously also a side effect of something we are *not* going to talk about, but you don't know it doesn't also have to do with that."

Harry glances up at him. "That is not making me feel more confident about this situation, Weasley."

Ron drops his arm and shifts, turning to face Harry. "I know. But it could be. How's your scar?"

"Fine." Harry touches his forehead. "Scar-like."

"No weird dreams?"

Harry gives him a look. "Between the nightmares about the battle and the nightmares about dying, no not really."

"Good. That's normal then." Ron's matter-of-factness oddly makes Harry feel better. "For a freak, I mean."

Harry bumps his shoulder against Ron's. "Shut it or I'll make you godfather."

Ron grins in delight. "I'd like to see the Ferret's face. Someone has to be a good influence." He gives Harry a sober look. "But I'll support you, you know. Whatever you decide. Just make sure it's yours, right? Don't let anyone else push you into it."

Harry nods and warmth spreads through his chest. "Thanks."

They watch the twilight fade into night and the faint glow of the Merpeople under the waters, the soft lap of the waves the only sound around them.



"I hate this place," Draco says, glaring at the besotted children in the tables surrounding them. He doesn't know why Pansy insisted on meeting here, and on a Hogsmeade weekend at that.

"Don't be cruel, darling." Pansy grins, her red lips gleaming. There's a new green streak in her dark, artfully shaped bob. Draco rather likes it on her. "I have fond memories of Madam Puddifoot's."

Draco slips his robe off and drapes it over the back of his chair. "It's sweltering in here."

“Madam likes it warm.” Pansy waves to the stout witch armed with two teapots and a plate of Battenburg cake, her shiny black hair twisted into a tight bun at the nape of her thick neck. “Smile, Draco. Don’t remind her we fought on the wrong side in the battle.”

A gold cherub zips over Draco’s head, settling in the sheer pink netting draped over one paned window. “I’m trying,” he says through gritted teeth as he bats another cherub away. It shoots a golden arrow at his cheek, stinging against his skin, and Draco swears. “But I’m afraid I fell into one of Lockhart’s nightmares. And really, it’s unlikely she’ll forget.”

“It is rather more pink than I remembered.” Pansy beams up at Madam Puddifoot as she sets one of the teapots in front of them. “Oh, how lovely. Darling, look. What a charming teapot.”

The teapot is in the form of two elephants kissing, their trunks arched to form a heart. Draco eyes it with distaste. “Absolutely.” He winces as Pansy kicks him beneath the table. He despises those pointy-toed heels of hers.

Madam Puddifoot just nods and moves on to the next table, leaving behind the plate of marzipan-covered cake slices.

“You are a bitch,” Draco murmurs.

Pansy beams at him and shakes one of the frilly lace napkins out before draping it across her lap. He can still see the shiny pink scars from the curse burns on her hands. “Don’t you remember the first time you took me here? We had our first kiss in that corner.”

Draco follows her nod. A sixth-year couple sits nearly twined together at a table beneath an overgrown spray of ivy hung with silver hearts that creeps ominously along the wall. The boy’s hand slides down to cup the girl’s breast. Draco frowns. “I should stop that.”

Pansy puts a hand on his arm. Her fingernails dig into his skin. “Or you could leave them be. They’re teenagers. We’re supposed to be randy all the time, or have you forgotten?”

“Some of us are too tired to think about it.”

“Oh, Draco, don’t be boring.” Pansy pours tea for them both, filling Draco’s cup mostly with milk and sugar. “Are you sure Hagrid’s not slipping saltpetre into your food?” She slides the cup across the table to him. The butterflies painted on the china flutter their rosy wings.

“Between feeding the Thestrals and mucking out the Porlock paddock, I hardly have the time.” Draco frowns. “Not to mention there’s almost no one out here whom I can shag with impunity.”

At the turn of a student’s head, Draco waves his wand irritably under the table and a Muffliato descends around their table.

“There’s always Blaise,” Pansy points out. “Didn’t he come to visit recently?”

“Before term,” Draco says, “and I’ve been warned off him.” At her raised eyebrow, he sighs. “Snape.”

"I'm assuming you mean his portrait." Pansy stirs her tea. "I sincerely hope he's not back from the dead. Don't you two still have an arrangement?" She waves her hand. "You and Blaise, of course, not Snape." She pauses to consider, her head tilted slightly. "Can portraits even have sex?"

Draco sips his tea. It's hot and milky and far too sweet. Just the way he prefers. "I'd rather not know. As for Blaise, we did." He hesitates. He wonders if Pansy has any idea how head over arse Blaise is for her. "I think Snape's right though. Best to end it, all things considered." He eyes her, taking in her new hair and the perfectly tailored new robe she's wearing. It's an emerald green wool, cut to fit the curve of her hips and to enhance the swell of her tits. "You're shagging someone new, aren't you?"

"I've no idea what you mean," Pansy says primly, but her eyes sparkle.

"You're looking terribly smart." Draco sets his teacup down. "And you're interested in my sex life. Which always means you've got your eye on someone, if you haven't already dragged the poor sod off to your bed."

Pansy's mouth curves into a small smile that she hides behind her teacup. "Just looking at the moment, and no, I'm not telling you who yet. You'll tell Blaise and then he'll spoil it all."

She's learned over the past two years, Draco notes.

"So." Pansy blows lightly on her tea. "What was so urgent that you needed to have me come all the way up from London for? Do you know how irritating it is to deal with the Aurors? They had me fill out two forms just to tell them I was crossing the border into Hogsmeade." She frowns. "And then I had to flash a bit of tit at Purkiss just to get him to sign it."

Draco runs his fingertip over the rim of his teacup. He waits until Pansy sets her cup back down in the saucer. She picks up her spoon to stir it again. "I got Potter up the duff."

The silver spoon clatters against the saucer. Pansy stares at him. She blinks. "I'm sorry," she says after a moment. "I'm terribly afraid I misheard you."

"You didn't." Draco shifts in his chair, resting his arms on the tabletop. He flicks a glance towards the students beside them. They're ignoring them, the Muffliato still in place. "Potter's pregnant. With my child."

"Harry Potter." Pansy blinks again. "You've somehow managed to...impregnate Harry Potter."

Draco nods. He picks up a slice of cake and bites into it.

Pansy sits back in her chair, gobsmacked. She puts a hand to her mouth. "Oh Draco."

"How's this going to look on my Community Order?" Draco asks. He puts down the slice of cake, suddenly nauseous. "Yes, well, he got Saviour of the Wizarding World pregnant..."

"But... *How?*" Pansy's mouth is open in a small o and her hand hovers near her lips. There's a ruby red smear on it that she doesn't even notice.

“And that,” Draco says grimly, “is the great mystery. I mean, other than the obvious part of my cock up his arse, of course. Still, it shouldn’t have happened.”

Pansy drops her hand to her chest. “Well, darling, this *is* Harry Potter we’re talking about, yes? Isn’t he known for accommodating impossibilities terribly well?”

“Yes, I’ll attempt to remember that the next time I fuck--” Draco breaks off, frowning at Pansy. “No, there’s not going to be another time, so don’t ask.”

Pansy wrinkles her nose at him. “I wasn’t.” At Draco’s baleful look, she shrugs. “It’s not as if it’s an outrageous question, if he’s already pregnant.” She strokes the edge of her robe’s collar with one finger thoughtfully. “I can’t decide if Lucius will be furious or ecstatic. On the one hand, it’s Potter, but on the other, he has a biological heir without forcing you on some pathetic girl who can’t stand up to her daddy dearest.” Pansy’s tone makes it quite clear what she thinks of some of their former Housemates. She leans forward. “You must have enjoyed it though. Potter’s terribly fit.”

“Scrawny, awkward and a virgin,” Draco says. “What do you think?”

“Delicious?” Pansy asks, quirking an eyebrow.

“Rather,” Draco admits. He thinks of Potter beneath him, his thighs spread, his hands slipping across Draco’s damp skin, all the whilst begging Draco to fuck him. He looks away, a flush warming his cheeks.

Pansy presses a knuckle to her mouth. “Oh, dear.”

“Shut it.” Draco reaches for his teacup. He wishes the tea was liberally laced with brandy. He could use a good bottle or two right about now, even if it was what had landed him in this mess to begin with.

“But how?” Pansy asks again. “I mean, it’s not every day you of all people end up with Harry Potter in your bed. I mean, we all suspected it would happen one day. You can’t manage to keep up that amount of loathing without there being *something* fueling it, and you really were so terribly obsessed with him, darling. Blaise and I hardly knew what to do with you sometimes.”

Draco runs his hands over his face. His head hurts already. He loves Pansy, truly, but there are moments he’d like to hex her lips together. “It wasn’t a bed; it was a clearing in the Forest. And there were liberal quantities of brandy consumed. Plum brandy. Brewed by Hagrid.”

“There was your first mistake.” Pansy frowns at him. “Inferior alcohol always leads to horrible decisions. Not to mention hangovers. For all you know, it was brewed with unicorn dung.”

That’s not exactly something Draco can disagree with, so he scowls at her. Honestly, he thinks, Severus’s portrait must have been dropped down a flight or two of stairs if he thought Pansy would be helpful.

“I’m afraid this is worse than a hangover,” he says. “I thought McGonagall was going to send me straight to Azkaban.”

Pansy studies her teacup. “What does Potter say about all this? I’m assuming he has some sort of opinion, given that the...thing is in his body.”

Draco picks up his teacup. "He's not saying much." He looks at her. "Firenze predicted this."

"The centaur? In the Forest?" Pansy peers at him. "Sometimes I forget you're related to Lovegood."

Draco takes offence at that. He hates that Pansy knows that connection. She always chooses to remind him at the most annoying times. "It's a different line!"

"Barely, darling." Pansy watches as the sixth-year couple disentangles themselves and stands. "What did your centaur say?"

He glares at her.

"Oh, just tell me." Pansy rolls her eyes.

"I'd have an heir." A rose droops from the bud vase on their table, one wilted petal fluttering to land on the lace cloth. Draco picks it up and crushes it between his finger and thumb. A sickly sweet smell wafts across the table. "I thought he was mad."

The look Pansy gives him is gentle. She covers his hand with hers; she's known what it means to him not to be able to provide his family with a son. "Draco."

He pulls his hand away. "I resigned myself to the fact that I wasn't going to fulfill that particular duty, and now that it's possible, I scarcely know what to think. But it's too dangerous and it's Potter. And I'll be damned if I'm going to tell Lucius Malfoy that Harry Potter is bearing his grandchild."

"I for one would quite like to hear that particular conversation," Pansy says. "Especially if I could see his face from a safe distance." The mutual disdain between Pansy and his father is legendary in Slytherin House history.

"Besides, it's a moot point. Surely Old Scarhead is going to terminate and I'll go back to being a normal, red-blooded nancy boy."

"Blue-blooded, surely, darling." Pansy shakes her head. "And he's a Gryffindor. He'll keep it." At Draco's protest, she holds her hand up. "If he does, this could be to your political advantage. The other father of Harry Potter's child? Draco, love, no one will touch you. Potter's the type who would never cause grief to his child by hiding you from him. And the rest of the wizarding world will follow his example." She grabs his arm. "This baby could save your family."

"How appropriate for the child of the Saviour of the Wizarding World." Draco pulls away. "You're living in a dream world, Pansy. And I don't particularly care if Father rots in Azkaban or not at the moment."

Pansy sighs. "One day you will. You're angry now, but that won't last. He's your father, Draco, and nothing is going to change that."

"Potter doesn't know how lucky he is, not knowing his parents." Draco swirls the dregs of his milky tea irritably. "He doesn't have to answer to anyone with this or worry about his standing in Wizarding society."

“Neither do you, darling.” Pansy looks evenly at him. “That’s the joy in falling so low. There’s no place further to sink. Who cares what they think of you? You’re already a queer, and you’re serving a Community Order for kissing the arse of a madman in order to save your life.”

“Is this supposed to make me feel better? Because I feel like opening a vein now.” Draco sets his teacup down with a rattle and leans back in the musty, overstuffed armchair.

Pansy’s mouth purses and she reaches across the table to smack his arm. “Yes, you arse. Don’t be melodramatic. Even with all of this, you’re happier than you’ve been in years. And you look fabulous, even if you do need a haircut.”

He gives her a small smile. “You’re a harridan.” The doorbell clangs as a group of third-year Hufflepuffs wander in. “Have I told you about my fan club?”

She trills a long laugh. “No. Pour me another cup and tell me everything.”

Draco reaches for the teapot.

Perhaps, he thinks, Severus was right after all.



It’s late at night and Harry can’t sleep. He stares at the hangings of his bed, listening to the rhythm of the other boys breathing, the snores and snuffles and grunts. He tries to count sheep, count dragons, count pygmy puffs, all to no avail.

It’s Tuesday. It’s been a week since he was discharged from hospital. He knows he’s supposed to make a decision soon. Too long and the potions won’t work. Professor McGonagall has also been looking at him more anxiously at meals since Sunday, although she hasn’t pressured him for a reply.

After tossing and turning for another time, he gets up and pulls his robes over his pyjamas. His favourite red slippers are next to the bed and he steps into them. Almost as an afterthought, he takes the invisibility cloak out from its hiding place among his mussed bedlinens.

He shuffles down the Tower stairs and into the Common Room. The fire is mere embers at this hour, waiting to be renewed in the morning. The usual rubbish is strewn about: shreds of paper from games of Exploding Snap, Wheezes labels, broken quills and parchment scraps. He sits for a moment on a large sofa of indeterminate colour, but he can’t come to rest here. It’s not as familiar as he’d hoped.

The Fat Lady is snoring in her portrait frame as Harry gently opens the door and closes it behind him, taking care not to disturb her. His slippers make a soft clacking noise as he walks down the hallway. After years of sneaking out for late night hijinks, he’s strangely nervous about walking alone tonight. He doesn’t mind the quiet but he knows he deserves to get caught for all of the times he’s done this with impunity. Still, he has too much on his mind to care overmuch. He merely notices that he’s anxious as he traverses the long corridors, wandering in an aimless fashion through the early morning stillness when one day is over and another has yet to begin. It could be any time or no time at all. He doesn’t put the invisibility cloak on; he just carries it like a talisman. He finds the slick fabric comforting against his skin.

Eventually Harry comes to a familiar corridor on the seventh floor. He studies the scene of troll ballet for a whilst, even though all of the principals are sleeping, smaller and larger lumps against the painted landscape. He pulls his robes more tightly around himself and makes the decision. He begins walking back and forth and concentrating on his need. He's no idea if it will still work; he hasn't tried it since he's been back. He thought he wanted to leave this room in the past, but it's called to him tonight and he has to see if it's still there.

As Harry paces, three, four times, he thinks it's been too long. It can't possibly have taken that long. *I have a need but it's not here anymore.* He turns on his heel and takes a few steps towards the staircase. On a whim, he looks over his shoulder. A door has appeared in the stone of the wall. He heard nothing, but the fabric of the universe shifted and there it is now, the door in the wall.

Harry hurries over as if the entrance was an illusion that could disappear at any moment. When he turns the handle, the scene that meets his eye on the other side is an utter disaster. There are black charred marks and burnt piles of rubbish and plaster everywhere. It doesn't smell of smoke, but the very air screams fire.

Harry remembers that Malfoy nearly died in this room. He remembers pulling him to safety on his broom, climbing, climbing into the night, carrying him away from the raging fire that Crabbe had begun. He remembers heat at his back and his eyes watering and Malfoy clinging tightly to his waist. It's only been a few months, but it feels like an eternity. He's fallen down the wrong rabbit hole and come out here, in this blackened wasteland, where nothing is the same. Still, the room continues.

When his eyes accustom to the gloom, Harry realises there's a glint at the far wall. He says, "Lumos" and walks to find the source of the reflecting moonlight. And then he suddenly wonders if he must be dreaming because he's standing in front of a mirror he hasn't seen for a very long time.

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There is a chair against the wall, at right angles to the mirror. Harry sits in it for a moment. He's not sure that he wants to look into the smooth, silvery surface, but the room must have assessed his need and presented him with the item in the castle most likely to help.

"Astounding, isn't it?" Harry starts at the sound of Dumbledore's voice. "I was asleep on a beach in the Seychelles somewhere near the Divination classroom and now suddenly I'm here. You must have very great need indeed, Mr Potter."

Dumbledore's portrait is hanging on the wall opposite the mirror. "I suppose I do," Harry says slowly. "I'm sorry, Professor. I was wandering without really thinking about it and then I thought I'd see if the room was still here."

"Why shouldn't it be? It's part of the castle and the castle is still here." Dumbledore tilts his head to get a better look at Harry. "You shouldn't be out of your dormitory, you know. At least you put on your slippers. It's terribly nippy in November."

"I couldn't sleep." Harry shifts in the chair, which he wishes were more comfortable. The room doesn't appear to want him to settle or get complacent. "I wanted to walk and clear my thoughts. I've been looking for answers and I don't know where to find them."

“And so you came here,” Dumbledore says. “Where you and Mr Malfoy escaped death by a hair. And where so many lost things were lost forever.” A sad look flits over his face.

Harry crosses, then uncrosses his legs, trying to find the most tolerable position in which to sit without success. This is a dedicatedly uncomfortable chair. “Yeah. I guess.”

“Shouldn’t you look in the mirror?” Dumbledore pours himself a cup of tea from the pot at his side. He settles back in his wide armchair. “You might see socks or perhaps even a jumper.”

Harry stands and rubs his hands together. “I don’t know if I can look. I’m afraid of what I want.” He hesitates, then barrels on. “I suppose I’m afraid of making a choice.”

“Ah, Harry. Everyone’s afraid of what they want at some point Or whom.” Dumbledore taps the side of his long nose. “But you already made a choice didn’t you? You chose to go looking for the Resurrection Stone after all.”

“I didn’t know it was there until... I didn’t know.” Harry purses his lips mulishly.

Dumbledore sips at his tea carefully, blowing on the surface and releasing brushstroke-puffs of steam. “But you chose that clearing. And on your birthday as well. May I see it?”

Without thinking, Harry reaches to the pocket of his pyjamas. Dumbledore examines his face keenly. “So you are carrying it with you. And you think you haven’t made a choice.”

Harry pulls the cracked stone out of his pocket and walks to Dumbledore’s portrait. He holds it up for examination. Dumbledore twists and turns his head, examining the golden ring from several angles.

“Have you used it?” Dumbledore asks with a steely glint in his blue eyes.

Harry shakes his head. “No. I keep it around because it seems to calm the... the baby.”

Dumbledore nods. “You worked greater magic than you perhaps even knew, greater than has been recorded for this object. This isn’t a Resurrection, though, Harry. You haven’t brought the souls of the dead back. You’ve just created a link to the past through your body. Nothing more miraculous than a regular baby after all.”

Harry’s shoulders sink and he takes a few deep breaths. Even after all of the tests at St Mungos, he’d carried with him the fear that somehow the foetus was tainted by the dead or perhaps even one of the dead itself. He knew it was a bizarre and unreal fear, but he couldn’t shake it until now. “So it is just a regular baby then, Professor?”

When he receives no answer, Harry raises his voice. “Professor?”

Dumbledore snorts and shakes himself out of sleep. “What? Oh, sorry. What was the question again?”

“Is the baby a normal baby?” Harry tries not to raise his voice too much. He speaks clearly and distinctly.

“Oh that, well, the means of its conception are quite unusual. Not that Gellert and I hadn’t discussed the possibility before the unpleasantness. But...”

“Professor, please.” Harry thinks he’ll die before Dumbledore gets to the point.

The professor’s voice takes on a kindly tone. “Yes, Harry. It’s as normal and as extraordinary as any other baby. You do not have to worry about bearing a monster. At least not until the little terror starts teething.”

Harry almost cries with relief. He stands there as the tension pours out of his body and into the room and the odd, post-inferno landscape. There is enough emptiness here for him to leave what he doesn’t need. He doesn’t need to carry the fear with him any longer.

With Dumbledore’s snores behind him, Harry squares his shoulders and turns to face the mirror.



Pale lemony light spills across the unmade bed as Draco hurries to finish getting dressed. According to the Tempus charm, he has five minutes before he should be down at the staff table and he only has one boot. He crouches down on his knees, hunting under the fallen edge of the coverlet and reaching, reaching, until he touches leather under the bed. With a cry of triumph, he pulls the fugitive piece of footwear out from its hiding place.

A knock at the door interrupts the final steps of preparation for the day’s labours. With a distracted huff, Draco reaches for the door handle and opens it. And stops, boot in hand. Potter’s standing in the doorway, looking oddly luminous for seven in the morning. His skin almost glows and the dark circles beneath his eyes are virtually gone, not to mention the worry lines on his forehead. His eyes are incredibly green and clear.

Draco drops the boot and it falls to the floor with a soft thud. “Potter. Good morning.”

“May I come in?” Potter waits for a moment, then motions with his hand. Draco belatedly twigs and steps aside to let him enter, closing the door behind them. He wonders if he can get in trouble for having a student in his quarters, but it’s Potter and they’ve already committed improprieties, flagrant and breathtaking improprieties that still keep him warm at night. Besides if this conversation is what he thinks it is, they need privacy. Draco decides he can plead early morning stupour if anyone questions his actions, anyone being Minerva McGonagall and the gaggle of old biddies in the Headmasters’ portrait collection.

Potter stands, looking around Draco’s cramped quarters for a moment. “It’s not as neat as I expected,” he says finally.

“I like to live a little,” Draco says. “And it infuriates the elves.”

Potter nods. “I’ve made a decision.”

Draco sits down abruptly on the bed, his legs having turned to jelly without warning. He *thinks* Potter hasn’t hexed him, but he’s not sure. “Oh.” He stretches a leg to test it.

When Potter doesn’t say anything but continues looking around like a mooncalf, Draco prompts him. “Do I have to guess? Is it a riddle?”

“No,” Potter says slowly. He scratches his arm. “This is a nice room.” He turns to face Draco. “I’m sorry,” he says.

Draco tries to look possibly sympathetic but his brain is screaming out for clarity like oxygen. He wants to know why, how, and yet, he will know all too soon and isn’t sure he’s ready for the consequences. Surely Potter will do the sensible thing, as any wizard would. Draco sits up. “I can’t forgive you without knowing why.” He’s half-joking and he’s not sure which half.

“I’m sorry, Draco. I’m keeping the baby.” As Draco’s brain spins, some distant part of it registers that Potter has actually used his given name for the first time.

Potter waits in the middle of the room for a moment, looking in Draco’s direction, perhaps awaiting an answer. He traces a half-circle on the floor with a scuffed trainer. When Draco says nothing but continues to stare blankly, feeling as though he’s been petrified, Potter blinks at him. Eventually he turns and walks to the door. As he’s leaving, he casts a backwards glance over his shoulder at Draco, who still cannot move. There is a swish of black robes and then the door closes.

Draco’s whole world explodes.



Ron Levitates Harry’s trunk into the centre of his new bedroom and looks around. “Almost bigger than the dormitory.” He sits on the edge of the bed, bouncing slightly on the mattress. “And at least you don’t have to share with the Ferret.”

Harry makes a face. “Eventually you’re going to have to stop calling him that.”

“I don’t know.” Ron drapes his lanky frame across the end of the frame. “Doesn’t every kid want a Dad and a Ferret?”

“Not funny.” Harry settles on the wide, overly cushioned windowseat. He eyes the octagonal room. Tucked away in one of the smaller turrets overlooking the lake, it’s bigger than anything he’s slept in before. Alone at least. The air smells of lemon and furniture polish: the suite had clearly been given a good going over before Harry and Draco’s arrival. The old, dark wood of the furniture gleams and there’s nary a cobweb or a speck of dust in the whole place. Heavy blue velvet curtains hang from the bed, and there’s a massive wardrobe hulking in the corner, opposite a worn leather sofa long enough for Harry to stretch out on. A fire crackles in the hearth. McGonagall’s already told him it’s connected directly to the infirmary and her office via the internal Floo network.

Ron pokes around a bit in the shared rooms and comes back. “What, no en-suite bath?”

“Bath’s down the hall, git. We have a sink for washing.” When Ron walks out of the door, Harry yells after him. “The loo’s the other way.” That’s going to become problematic soon enough, Harry thinks. He already has to piss like mad. Guhathakurta tells him it’s only going to get worse.

Harry’s already explored the few rooms. Malfoy’s bedroom is smaller than his, a fact which pleases Harry to no end, and there’s a long, sunlight-filled sitting room that stretches between the rooms. Arched windows line one wall, and the other is filled with bookcases. Harry’d just caught Hermione studying the rows of books longingly.

She appears in the doorway, a thick, dusty book in her hand. "Are you all right?"

Harry toes off his trainers and stretches his feet out. "I guess." He gives her a half-smile. "Still narked at me for this?"

"Don't be ridiculous." Hermione sets the book down on the sofa and perches on the arm. "It's not what I'd do, but..." She trails off.

"But you're more likely to have kids the, well, the usual way, aren't you?" Harry says. His hand rests on his stomach. It's become almost natural in the past couple of days. At Hermione's frown, he shakes his head. "I want this. I know it's mad, and I know it's stupid, but I really do."

"It makes all the sense in the world, Harry." Hermione doesn't meet Harry's eyes. She traces the faded gilt ornaments on the leather book cover. "You've lost your family--"

Harry sighs. "It's not just that." He knows they all want to think he's just trying to replace what he didn't have. Maybe they're not entirely wrong, but he's tired of the assumption. He's not a complete idiot. He's fully aware this baby isn't going to replace his mum or his dad or his godfather or Remus or Tonks or any of the people he loved who are mouldering away beneath solid granite monuments now. His fingers trace small circles across his robe.

A cloud drifts across the sun, its shadow greying the room. Hermione picks at the sleeve of her robe. "I do wish you could have arranged things with Ginny, but I suppose there was good reason for that too." She looks up at him, exasperated. "Do you always have to do things the hard way?"

"Hermione, listen." Harry leans forward and spreads his hands out, looking at them for a moment before continuing. "It's like, if you've ever been close to death, and I know you have, then life just seems bloody amazing. And I know it's not fully alive yet, maybe, or it doesn't have to be, but in the end I couldn't imagine making the choice any other way."

"Sentimental twaddle." Snape's portrait glares from the pastoral landscape that spring lambs cavort across. The shepherdess hides in the low branches of a tree, her crook shaking the bright green leaves as she peers out at Snape. Harry snorts. Even the portraits are terrified of the bastard.

"Professor," Hermione says, disapprovingly. "You're scaring the horses."

Snape glances back over his shoulder at the foals in the distance. "Who paints this tripe?" he asks, his nostrils flaring.

"I like it," Harry says.

Dark eyes skewer him. "You would?"

"It's calming when you're not in it." Harry pushes himself off the windowseat. "You're not planning on taking up residence here, are you?"

"Not bloody likely." Snape snorts. "I'm looking for Draco."

"His room has the painting of gryphons," Harry offers.

Snape rolls his eyes. "Minerva's attempt at a joke, I'm certain." He lifts the hem of his robe from a puddle with a scowl. "I do loathe nature. It smells."

Harry watches him sweep from the frame. "That's never not going to be weird," he says thoughtfully. There's a noise at the door. "Fall in the bog, mate?" he asks, not bothering to turn around. Hermione's eyes widen.

"Potter, there's no reason for you to be vulgar," Malfoy says.

He's leaning against the door, his arms crossed over his chest, obviously just come in from the grounds. His hair is mussed and his cheeks are rosy. Mud cakes the toes of his boots; stray pieces of hay are caught on his dark grey jumper. Harry wonders if Malfoy knows how good manual labour looks on him.

"Best be used to it if we're living together," Harry says lightly. He still finds it odd that he'll be sharing these rooms with Malfoy of all people. He's half-certain they'll end up killing each other before Christmas hols. If Snape doesn't heckle them to death first.

They look at each other. For a moment Harry forgets they're not alone, until Hermione coughs softly. The sofa creaks as she stands up. "I should go up to the library," she murmurs, picking up the book. "May I borrow this?"

"Sure," Harry says. "Just bring it back when you're finished with it."

She kisses Harry's cheek. "See you at supper." He nods. She brushes past Malfoy; he doesn't move.

Harry rubs his hand along one arm. "Your trunks are moved in already."

"Before breakfast," Malfoy says. He's looking at Harry oddly. "I didn't think I'd want to move everything at the end of the day." He glances around the room, his eyes falling on the few photographs Harry's already set on the chimneypiece. He walks over and picks one up. "These are your parents."

"Yeah." Harry looks over his shoulder. It's his parents in their garden at Godric's Hollow. His father stands behind his mother, his arms wrapped around her swollen stomach, his hand smoothing across her robe. Sirius had given it to him the summer he spent at Grimmauld Place before fifth year. "She was pregnant with me."

Malfoy rolls his eyes as he sets the photograph back down. "I assumed." He studies it still. "She was rather pretty."

"Everyone says I have her eyes," Harry murmurs. *Whose eyes would their baby have*, he wonders. He doesn't dare to voice the thought aloud.

"My mother wouldn't let herself be photographed in that condition," Malfoy says evenly. "The first photo I've seen is from my christening. After that there are albums and albums full."

A pang goes through Harry. "I never had any photos of my family. Not until I came to Hogwarts. Hagrid gave me some, and then Sirius and Remus added a few more. I barely have an album."

“God, Potter. That’s tragic.” Malfoy tilts his head and gives Harry a contemplative look. “Although it does spare you the time you spit carrots up on Great Aunt Griselda that no one will ever fail to find funny no matter how old you are.”

Harry laughs softly. “I take it there’s a story there?”

“I still hate carrots,” Malfoy says. “That’s all that’s worth knowing.”

They smile at each other, their eyes meeting, and then they look away. A flush rises on Malfoy’s cheeks.

“Harry.”

Ron’s in the doorway, Ginny behind him. Harry steps away from Malfoy, suddenly flustered.

“I need a shower,” Malfoy says. He doesn’t speak to either of the Weasleys as he pushes past them, his mouth tight.

Ron watches him, a furrow between his brow. “What a shit.”

Harry doesn’t defend Malfoy. He’s looking at Ginny, nervous. “Hey,” he says.

“Hey.” She doesn’t smile at him.

“I should go find Hermione.” Ron gives Harry a pointed look. “You two need to talk.”

Subtle as always, Harry thinks and his mouth quirks to one side.

Ginny stands in the doorway after her brother leaves, fingers twisting in the sleeves of her jumper. Her hair’s loose around her shoulders, and Harry remembers how he’d twist it around his fingers as he kissed her.

The light is fading now as blue spreads across the sky. Far off the pale glow still touches the lake and turns it to silver.

“So,” she says finally. “Malfoy.”

“Gin.” Harry reaches out a hand for a moment, then lets it drop before it touches her. “I don’t really know what to say except I’m sorry you found out like this.”

“Don’t get me wrong,” Ginny says. “I’m glad you have to pay for it.” Her eyes drift down to Harry’s stomach. “And I’m really glad it’s not me.”

Harry sits on the sofa. It creaks beneath him. “Everyone knows then.”

“Not everyone.” Ginny sits beside him. “But you’re not going to keep it secret for long. The first-years are already poking about, trying to figure out why *you* get to move in with their hero.”

Harry laughs. He pulls at a thread on the cuff of his sleeve. “Should I watch my back with that lot?”

"I would. Too many glitter quills and too little sense." Ginny leans back, crossing one denim-clad leg over the other. "Maybe I'll help them out."

He looks at her then. "I really am sorry."

Ginny nods. Her hair falls over her cheek, obscuring her eyes. "I know."

"Hey." He brushes her dark red hair back, tucking it behind one ear, and she looks up at him. "I didn't mean to--"

"Harry, I know." Her voice is thick, and she swallows and looks away. "You're bent, or at least bent enough that you and I..." She trails off and sighs. "Look, I want to be happy, and I'm happier with Dean than we were at the end."

"Yeah." Harry bites his lip. He wants her to be happy. He just wishes that he could have given her that. "I tried to be normal--"

Ginny touches his cheek. "You won't be, love. You're Harry Potter, and any possibility for a normal life for you went out the window when you were barely a year old." She leans her forehead against his; he can smell the faintest hint of the cinnamon sweets she loves on her breath. "Don't fight who you are. You'll only make it worse for yourself. And hurt others."

He nods, a knot of misery clenching in his chest. "I know."

She pulls away and looks at him. "What's it like?" she asks. "Being...you know." She waves a hand in the general direction of his midriff.

"Weird." Harry considers. "No. Very weird. The hormones are...strange." He shifts uncomfortably. His trousers need to be let out a bit more, he thinks. His waist has been thickening more every day.

Ginny nods. "I will never forget my contraceptive potion," she says fervently, and Harry can't help the laugh that escapes.

"Weasley fertility?"

"More or less." She frowns at him before a smile curves her lips. "Are you happy about this?"

"I am," Harry says. "Yeah." He looks down at his hands, clasped tightly between his thighs. "Hermione thinks I've lost my mind, wanting to be a single dad at eighteen."

"Malfoy's around too."

Harry tugs his sleeve down over one bony wrist. "I'm not expecting anything of him. It's not fair."

Ginny doesn't say anything for a moment, and when Harry looks up at her, she's studying him. "You're sharing rooms with him."

"Because McGonagall's making us," Harry says. "To keep the board of governors from expelling us both."

“As if they’d think of sending you down,” Ginny scoffs. She wrinkles her nose. “You’ve a pass for life now.”

Harry snorts. “I wish.” He watches the flames in the hearth glow against the lengthening shadows. Night falls early in the Highlands at this time of year. “She’s meeting with them tomorrow.”

“Don’t worry too much about it. McGonagall is formidable when she thinks justice is being served.” Ginny stands up. “I’ve got to get ready for supper.”

“Gin.” Harry calls when she’s at the door and she turns in a lovely arc to face him, her hair swinging. He takes a deep breath. “I still love you, you know.”

Her brows knit together. “I know, Harry. But you’re not in love with me. And that makes all the difference.”

He nods as she brushes past Malfoy who has emerged into the sitting room with his hair wet, wearing a fresh pair of corduroy trousers that hang low on his slim hips and pulling a jumper down over a smooth, taut abdomen.

When the door is safely closed, Malfoy makes kissing noises until Harry glares at him. “Shut it, Malfoy, before I hex your face like that.”

Malfoy drops into one of the overstuffed armchairs and crosses one long leg over the other. “Pathetic of you, still in love with your ex-girlfriend when you’re up the duff with another man’s sprog.” His mouth twists, but for a fleeting moment, Harry thinks he sees hurt on his face. “How horribly tawdry, Potter. Shame we’re not in a witches’ romance.”

“You’d know of that, wouldn’t you?” Harry’s irritable. He hadn’t meant for Malfoy to hear any of that. “Being the expert in love that you are.”

“I’m expert enough to leave it alone.” Malfoy drums his fingers against the arm of the chair. “So should you. Besides, the Weaselette’s missing something you rather enjoy. Vocally, as I recall.”

Harry remembers the press of Malfoy’s cock deep inside of him, the way he’d arched against that long, pale body, digging his nails into Malfoy’s shoulders and spreading his thighs wantonly, begging for more. His face warms. “Fuck off.”

Malfoy’s eyes glitter. “As you wish.” He stands up and ambles to the door. “I’ll see you in the Great Hall.”

When the door shuts, Harry barely makes it to his bedroom before he has his flies open, his fingers on his prick. It’s a matter of moments, a few quick, rough strokes, before he’s shaking, his body arching. The pressure builds in his groin and he tenses with need. His hand grasps roughly and then he’s shuddering in waves as his spunk spatters the floor.

It takes him a moment to realise the name he’s groaned is Malfoy’s.

He falls across his bed face-first, his curses muffled by the coverlet.



The staff room falls silent as Draco walks in. It's worse than it'd been last night at dinner when he'd entered the Great Hall. At least the students had merely hushed and whispered, then resumed their normal volume. And the staff couldn't show displeasure in front of their pupils without invoking McGonagall's ire. Here, though, where his sins were open and not merely purportedly unfounded rumours, their eyes follow him with obvious distaste and the muttered remarks are audible enough.

He's never wished the Headmistress were present more than he does now. But McGonagall's in London this afternoon, standing in front of the Board of Governors and presenting him and Potter as a love match, as if anyone would ever believe that possibility.

Opal Adoyo hands him a teacup as he stops by the tea station. "Chin up," she says, and she goes to take her usual seat in the corner beside Flitwick and his pile of newspapers nearly as tall as himself. The tiny Charms professor nods to him and pats the empty sofa cushion to his left.

"Mr Malfoy," he says, but before Draco can make his way across the room, Vector grabs his elbow, her nails scratching his skin through the thin wool of his jumper. He spills half his tea across the worn wooden floorboards and splashes the leg of his trousers.

The Arithmancy professor smirks at him. "How terribly clumsy of me." Her voice drips with malice.

Draco pulls away. "You didn't mean to, I'm certain," he says through gritted teeth. A house-elf is already wiping up the spilt milky tea, but there's little to be done about his trousers. He doesn't have time to go back to the rooms to change.

"Unlike you and the other mess you've created here," Vector says, and Sinistra gives him a disapproving look over the rims of her spectacles.

"Poor Harry," she murmurs. "After all he's been through." Several heads nod in unison. Opal snorts and Flitwick shakes out a newspaper loudly.

Draco wants to scream. After all Potter's been through? Honestly? Who's the one who lived with His Lordship for months? Who's the one whose father's in Azkaban? Who's the one who has a year and a half left to serve on his Community Order?

"It was his choice," he says, his throat tight, but they'll never listen. To them, Potter's their Golden Boy, capable of doing no wrong. Somehow in their heads, they've worked it out that he's the one responsible for this pregnancy. The fact that Potter begged him to fuck him senseless would never register with any of them.

Idiots.

"We didn't used to ask about choice in such matters," Slughorn intones. "Contact between a student and staff led to automatic dismissal." He shakes his head. "I always warned Albus his permissiveness would foster corruption and insolence. Hogwarts has come down indeed."

"I'd like to hear the old windbag say that to McGonagall's face," Opal mutters behind Draco.

Vector opens her pursed, thin lips to lay into Draco and he steels himself, hoping he won't lose his temper, not knowing how long he can last. He notices idly that she has lipstick on her teeth and it's not for

nothing that she has so many frown wrinkles on her face. The rest of the staff circle round like vultures. "Permissiveness is one thing, preying on students, especially when one is as bent as a--"

"Well," Hagrid says loudly, and he pushes his girth from the oversized armchair in the corner where he's been knitting some sort of too large tea cosy. "Reckon I think that's enough of that sort of balderdash." He gathers his ball of yarn and stuffs it in one of his pockets, along with the enormous needles, as he looks around the room. "Ashamed of the lot of yeh, I am, running yer yaps about things what yeh don' know about. What would Pr'fesser Dumbledore have to say about that? And I don' think he'd take too kindly to yeh tying those two thoughts together like that, Septima. Never did try t' hide his perclivities, now did he? Besides, as I see it, Draco here and 'arry, well, both of 'em are the same age. Nothin' to be bellyachin' over."

"But he corrupted the Saviour of the Wizarding World!" Vector's hand is clutched melodramatically to her chest but her gaze is steely.

"I don't believe one fuck can do that," Draco says mildly, "no matter how much one enjoys it. You might try it sometime."

Vector's eyes widen. She sits back down into her chair with a soft thud. "Well, I never--"

"I'm sure," Flitwick says from behind his newspapers and Draco hastily suppresses a snort of astonishment. He'd no idea the diminutive Charms teach was paying attention.

"Eh, shut it, the both of you." Hagrid's hand comes down firmly on Draco's shoulder. "And yeh too, Draco. Never was one t' know when's best t' keep yer mouth closed. Now the Thestrals need seein' to, so if yeh'll excuse us."

Hagrid steers Draco to the panelled door and all but pushes him through. Draco looks back and sees Opal smiling at him. She raises her cup to him and then Hagrid frogmarches him down the corridor.

They're both silent as they make their way outside. Hagrid doesn't even stop to let him grab his cloak, so by the time they're halfway down the lawn, Draco's shivering in the November chill.

"Best cast a warming charm," Hagrid says, not looking down at him.

Draco flicks his wand and heat ripples across his fingertips and circles his torso. He sighs in relief. "Vector's a bitch."

"Most people know that right off." Hagrid rubs the back of his neck. His knitting needles bounce against his hip. "Yeh should hear what Hermione has to say about her."

"I'd rather not." Draco can barely keep up with Hagrid's long strides. His boots slide on a patch of slick mud.

Hagrid just grunts and turns towards the forest. "Yeh need t' learn when not to poke 'er. Better for yeh to just let 'er growl at yeh and get tired of it. Some creatures are just that way. She only attacks if yeh fight back."

"I'm not about to let her say those sort of things about me." Draco doesn't add *or Harry* but the look Hagrid gives him over his bushy beard makes it clear that the words hang unspoken between them.

"Yeh and 'arry are two peas in a pod," Hagrid says. "'E never let that cow Umbridge say anything to him without fightin' back. Look what she did to him."

"What?" Despite himself, Draco is intensely curious. Although they'd been to school together, he knows so little about Potter's past when it comes down to details, other than their mutual animosity and infrequent encounters.

Hagrid's voice rises an octave in outrage. "Why she tortured him. Made him write hundreds of lines with a Blood Quill. He still has the scars on his hand." His eyebrows draw together. "*I will not tell lies.* That's what it says."

"Oh." Draco thinks back. He's seen a pale, jagged scar on the back of Potter's right hand. He hadn't realised it formed words.

"Anyway." A half-rotted log snaps beneath Hagrid's boot. "Point being that neither one of yeh know how to stay out of trouble."

Draco doesn't entirely like being lumped with Potter in this regard. "I managed to stay alive with the Dark Lord living in my house."

Hagrid gives him a long look. "So yeh did, Draco Malfoy. So yeh did."

They've reached the edge of the clearing and the Thestrals lift their heads from the hunks of meat spread across the dead grass. Druella whinnies sharply, then breaks away from the herd, galloping towards Draco, her mane streaming out behind her. He can't stop a wide smile from crossing his face. A few feet away she unfurls her small, leathery wings and takes off, her hooves leaving the ground as she flies towards him, barely missing his shoulder.

Draco ducks just in time. "She's flying!"

"Caught her just yesterday." Hagrid beams at the tiny Thestral, reaching out to steady her as she drops back to the ground. "She'll learn how to control it soon."

Druella prances in front of Draco, nudging his hip with her beak. She nips through one of his belt loops.

"Yeh might as well be her mother now," Hagrid says.

Draco gives him a baleful look. He strokes his fingers through Druella's mane, pulling loose twigs and leaves from it. "I think Harry being a mother is enough."

"Yer both protective of those yeh love." Hagrid takes a large hunk of meat and tears it apart, tossing it to the herd. "Shame yeh don't realise that about each other yet."

Draco freezes, his hand on Druella's bony withers. "I don't know what you mean."

Hagrid wipes his hands on his rough brown trousers. "I've watched enough animals matin' to know."

Seein' yeh two circle each other and skitter away...well. Might be two Hippogriffs choosin' each other." He eyes Draco. "They mate for life, yeh know. Usually after they've ripped a good chunk or two out 'a each other."

Druella nudges Draco's hand, annoyed that he's stopped petting her. He resumes, and she huffs in pleasure. He doesn't look at Hagrid. "I'm not mating with Potter. I think I'd have better chances with a Hippogriff." He shudders a bit, thinking about the fierce orange eyes and the terrifyingly sharp beaks. Even though he's become accustomed to the herd at Hogwarts and they to him, he still remembers the terror of his first encounter.

Hagrid chuckles. "Yeh might not be wrong. 'Arry's a lot more skittish and proud than he likes to think. Give him some time." He lowers his voice. "Olympe says hormones make yeh foul-tempered."

"In that case, Potter's been pregnant since he was eleven." Draco can't believe he's having this conversation. It defies the imagination that he's actually having a serious discussion involving the mating habits of Hippogriffs, Gryffindors, and giants.

Hagrid turns appraising eyes on him. "Yeh're nervous."

"Who wouldn't be?" Draco watches Druella as she rips a piece of meat off a hewn-off carcass and gobbles it down. "This isn't exactly normal."

"Isn't exactly not normal either." Hagrid settles his bulk on a wide stump, his elbows on his knees. He takes out his knitting needles and begins to work on the garish burnt orange hairy rag he's crafting. "Creatures of all sorts breed. Don' see why yeh and 'arry are any different."

Draco gives him an incredulous look. "He doesn't have a uterus, to begin with."

Hagrid wraps the yarn around one beefy finger. "That's what magic's for. Any breeder'll tell yeh that about magical creatures. Sometimes they need a bit of an extra push, so to speak."

The bare tree branches above Draco's head creak in a faint breeze. He looks around, wrapping his arms around himself. It'd been here, although the trees were full of leaves then and the grass was green and long. They'd fucked here. Or a few feet away, really. He remembers Potter's breath hot against his throat as he'd groaned with each frantic snap of Draco's hips against his arse.

Draco shivers. He's forgotten to recast his warming charm and his arms are cold.

Hagrid watches him, his eyes knowing. "Yeh need a hobby," he says. "Somethin' to take yer mind off things so yeh don't pick fights in the staff room. Or up in yer rooms with 'arry."

"What?" Draco looks over at him, confused.

"Knittin' always calms me nerves," Hagrid says, holding up his thick needles. "Warm, too, in the winter."

Draco realises he's not joking. He blinks. "But why?"

"It's soothin'. Yeh do the same thing over and over and yer mind goes to rest." Hagrid's enormous needles clack together softly. "And if there's anybody I've met whose mind needs to rest a spell, it's yers."

Draco bursts into laughter. The knot in his chest loosens just a bit.

He sits beside Hagrid's feet, pulling his knees to his chest as he casts another warming charm. "Show me then, you mad giant."

Hagrid smiles down at him, and the Thestrals whinny.

For this moment, it's enough.



Harry sits down at the Gryffindor table, grabs a roll and bites into it angrily. Ron and Hermione eye him from across the huge dish of cottage pie one of the house-elves has just placed in front of Harry.

"All right there, mate?" Ron asks hesitantly. All he gets in return is a furious glare. "Right." He looks over at Hermione. "Your turn."

Hermione sighs. "Harry--"

"Don't." Harry stuffs the rest of his roll in his mouth. "I'm not in the mood."

Wet crumbs spatter across the table as he speaks, and Hermione flinches. "Did Draco upset you?"

Harry swallows and wipes his napkin across his mouth. He supposes it's a rational question, although really, he and Malfoy have only seen each other in passing over the past few days. They've both kept to their rooms: Harry falling asleep over his Potions and Defence essays due by supper on Friday and Malfoy...well. Harry's not entirely certain what Malfoy's been doing in his room. At one point he'd have suspected him of plotting the destruction of the world as Harry knew it. That was before he'd discovered Malfoy had an entire collection of *The Adventures of Martin Miggs, the Mad Muggle*. It's harder to accuse someone of being capable of abject evil when you know the comic antics of a gangly, clueless fourteen-year-old send him into fits of sniggers.

Malfoy's an odd duck, Harry thinks, and he shakes his head.

"Pomfrey," he says, and at Hermione's frown, he drops his napkin next to his plate and scowls. "She called me up to the infirmary to go over my..." He glances around and his voice drops. "My Healing plan with Guhathakurta. Evidently I'll have to see him monthly, but she'll be keeping an eye on me weekly."

"That doesn't sound so terrible," Hermione says cautiously.

Harry leans his elbows on the table. His frown deepens. "She says I have to switch from helping Professor Adoyo with Defence to helping Flitwick with Charms." The absolute unfairness of this still stings. "I'm *awful* at Charms."

Ron reaches for the basket of rolls and Hermione gives him a look. He stuffs one in his mouth and takes a second, then wipes the back of his hand across his face. "It's not like you can blame her. You shouldn't be handling Defence classes anyway in your condition." At Hermione's huff of annoyance, he shrugs. "He shouldn't. Might hurt the baby."

Hermione and Harry both shush him. Ron rolls his eyes. "It's not as if you're going to be able to hide it in a few weeks," he says through a mouthful of cottage pie. "And this is Hogwarts. You snog someone one night in the broom closet and the whole school knows about it by breakfast." He gives Hermione a guilty glance. "Not that I'd know, of course."

"I do hope Lavender's well," Hermione says primly. She looks back over at Harry. "But he's right, you realise. Defence is too dangerous for you and the..." She hesitates. Natalie MacDonald is watching them, obviously listening. "You know."

"But Charms? Why Charms?" Harry puts his head melodramatically in his hands. "It's like glowing bubbles and Christmas tree ornaments."

Hermione sniffs, her mouth pursed. "Would you prefer History of Magic?"

"Cor." Ron looks appalled. "That would be the worst. Can you imagine having to stay awake and help Binns?"

Suddenly Charms doesn't seem too terrible to Harry. "But how am I going to help in a subject I'm pants at?"

"You could always ask Draco," Hermione answers. "He was excellent at Charms as I remember."

Ron and Harry both look at her, horrified. "No," they say in unison.

"Besides," Ron says, "he's already got Harry up the duff--"

"I really don't see how that affects his ability to help with Harry's Charms work," Hermione says tartly, just as Natalie gasps, her hand flying to her mouth, her eyes wide.

Ron turns to her, reaching out to grab her arm, but she's already gone before he can stop her. "Well, that's gone and done it," he mutters. "The whole of the fifth-year will be talking."

Harry just blinks and then sighs. He's almost been waiting for this moment. Ron's not famous for his discretion, but if it wasn't him, it would be something else.

"Ronald!" Hermione bites her lips into a fierce frown of disapproval.

Harry puts a hand on hers. "Don't, Hermione. I mean, don't worry."

She just sighs and shakes her head.

By evening, the rumours have apparently spread through the fifth years and into the sixth and seventh. Fierce whispering conversations can be heard in Gryffindor common room that either Voldemort, Malfoy or perhaps even Snape has somehow got Harry Potter pregnant and that Ron and Hermione aren't speaking to each other. Harry walks in on one such conversation as he comes to check on Ron.

"Do you know what Jimmy Peaks and Euan Abercrombie were just talking about?" Harry pushes the bed hangings further to the side to sit down.

“Ignore them, mate,” Ron says as Harry sends a pair of Keeper knee pads skittering to the floor.

Harry looks at them mournfully. He misses Quidditch, even though he tries not to think about it. McGonagall had categorically forbidden him to get on a broom from the moment he'd come back from hospital. Ginny's taken over his position as Seeker. “Romilda offered to make me an anti-nausea potion.”

Ron sets his Astronomy textbook aside. “Tell me you told her no.”

“Do I look mad?” Harry stretches out across the end of Ron's bed, his feet dangling over the edge of the mattress. “I miss being up here.”

“It's quiet without your snoring.” Ron glances over at the empty bed Harry'd slept in. The other three are piled high with rumpled bedsheets and dirty laundry. The seventh-years are even less tidy than Dean and Seamus had been.

Harry flicks two fingers at him, then lets his hand settle on his abdomen. His robe hangs open, bunching at his sides, and the small swell of his stomach is more noticeable against the tight waistband of his trousers. His fingers make small circles against the wool. “Did I do the right thing?”

Ron moves a stack of parchments and flexes his feet in his garish purple and gold socks with lumpy red Quaffles embroidered on them. A pile of chocolate frog wrappers sifts from behind the bed. “About the baby?” At Harry's nod he leans back against his mound of pillows, studying him. “I don't know. Bit late now, isn't it?”

“I guess.” Harry stares up at the constellation chart Ron's spelled onto the ceiling of his bed to help him study. Sirius shines down on him. Harry wonders how furious his godfather would be with him. Or maybe he would be fiercely defensive and get in the way of his living with Draco. Harry can see both reactions. He does this sometimes, imagines what Sirius or his Mum or Dad would say. Even if he thinks they wouldn't agree, it calms him to pretend they're there, talking with him.

Ron watches him. “Do you want to sleep up here tonight?”

Harry pauses. “McGonagall--”

“Won't know,” Ron says gruffly. “Or if she does, it'll be too late.”

“I don't have pyjamas.” Harry eyes his old bed.

“Like you haven't borrowed mine before.” Ron flicks his wand at his wardrobe, and a pair of orange plaid flannel pyjama bottoms flies out, slapping Harry in the face.

He laughs and wads them in his hand. “You're mad.”

Ron grins. “Shut it and put them on. And if you snore, I'm sending you back down to Malfoy.”

Harry shudders in mock horror. “Bastard.”

His heart feels oddly lighter.



Draco throws a teacup at Potter when he walks into their rooms the next morning. He doesn't think about it, he just draws his arm back and hurls it. The cup shatters against the wall just beside the bastard's ear, shards of china falling to the floor and scattering across the carpet at the end of a trail of milky tea. Potter should be grateful he was mostly done, Draco thinks.

Potter freezes and stares at him like a gape-mouthed imbecile, that rats' nest he calls hair falling into his eyes and his ruffled robe hanging off one shoulder. His jumper is clutched in one hand, the sleeve trailing on the floor. "What the hell, Malfoy? What the bloody hell?"

Calmly, Draco flicks his wand at the broken china, Vanishing it. He's too angry to worry about the carpet right now. "If I'd meant to hit you, Potter, I would have." His mouth is tight, and he's exhausted. It'd been nearly half-three when he'd finally given up listening for the creak of Potter's door. He doesn't know why he's so furious at the fucking shit for not coming back, but he is, and Draco's never been one to hide his displeasure, especially not with Potter.

He reaches for his heavy black wool cloak. The first snow of the year is threatening outside, and whilst Draco doesn't think it will actually fall, he's not a complete fool.

Potter walks warily into the sitting room. "You're angry."

"Oh, well done." Draco claps loudly, draping his cloak over his arm. "Ten points to Gryffindor."

"You do realise those will actually take, given that you're staff?" Potter attempts to smooth his hair down. It's a lost cause.

Draco shrugs. He hadn't and he's furious that he'd forgotten, but he doesn't want the git to see. "One makes sacrifices for the sake of sarcasm." He heads for the door.

"Is this about me not coming back last night?" Potter asks.

Surprised that Potter's had even an inkling of insight, Draco turns and looks back at him, his hand on the doorknob. "Oh, I'm sure you ended up in someone's care." The amount of venom in his voice shocks even him.

Potter's eyebrows rise. "I didn't realise *you* cared."

Neither did Draco. It makes him uneasy, this flare of jealousy. He wonders whose bed Potter slept in. The Weasel's? The Weaselette's? That's far more likely, all things considered. His mouth twists to one side. "I'm certain she was sympathetic. Poor ickle Potty, preggers by that horrible Death Eater. Did she spread her legs for you this time?" His brain tells his mouth to shut up, but as usual it doesn't listen. "Or did you just rut up against her like a common strumpet?"

"Strumpet?" Potter laughs, his face screwing up into amusement. "Does anyone talk like that? What have you been reading?"

Draco has developed a taste for historical novels, but he's not about to admit it. He rather enjoys their plots after a long day outside, thank you very much. It annoys him even more that Potter's been keeping an eye on his reading materials lately. He sniffs. "Arcane seventeenth century Wizarding history, if you must know, although I'm certain you've no idea about the period."

Potter shrugs. "Don't really want to."

"You're a Philistine, Potter." Draco's gaze flicks towards the copy of *Quidditch Weekly* lying on the sofa. His parents had never allowed him to read anything amusing or adventurous. He's found he's a great deal of literature to catch up on. He's even thinking about going into the Muggle section in the library. Severus had recommended a book called *Vanity Fair*, saying Draco might recognise himself in one of the characters. Not knowing whom else to ask about it, Draco had surreptitiously questioned Hermione when she was last in the suite. The oddest look had come over her face and he still wasn't sure they'd understood each other.

"I wasn't with Ginny." Potter drops into an armchair. He looks up at Draco. "But if I had been, why would you care?"

"I don't," Draco says shortly. They both know that's a stupendous lie now, but he refuses to back down.

Potter's scepticism is evident. "Yeah. You don't care so much that you threw a teacup at my head."

"And deliberately missed." Draco scowls at him. "But only because you're carrying a Malfoy."

The words shock him a little as they come out of his mouth. He still hasn't quite got used to that idea, and judging from the look on Potter's face, neither has he. Potter's hand drops down to lie against his abdomen.

"Yeah."

They just look at each other. Draco's rage drains. He's tired and uneasy, and he is fucking scared witless by all of this, not that he'd ever tell Potter that. He doesn't want to look the fool, after all.

"I'm going to breakfast," he says after a moment. "You should eat too."

Potter nods. "I'm going to come in a few minutes."

Draco is nearly out of the door when Potter calls after him. He doesn't hear what he says, and turns back. "What?"

"I'm sorry." Potter's looking at his scuffed trainers and Draco wonders for a moment if he can Vanish them in an idle moment when he's not paying attention. "I probably should have told you where I was."

Draco shrugs. "It's fine."

He can feel Potter's eyes watching him as he pulls the door shut behind him. He doesn't know what to say.

The Great Hall is full when Draco reaches it. He usually breakfasts earlier than most of the students, in an attempt to avoid the unwanted attentions of what seems to be a growing clique of first-year girls. Thanks to Potter skulking in at quarter past seven, though, the moment he steps foot past the arched double doors, he's beset by a clump of Ravenclaws and Slytherins--with one or two Gryffindors thrown in--who've obviously been lying in wait.

"Is it true?" one of them asks, her eyes wide. She's the second-in-command, Draco thinks. Perdita's best friend, Agnes. Her dark hair curls wildly around a plump, pale face.

"I have no idea what you're on about," Draco says coolly, attempting to side-step them. The entire group steps with him, blocking him.

Agnes's blue eyes narrow at him dangerously. It's frightening how they can go from sickly sweet to feral in a heartbeat. "You know exactly what I mean. Why won't you tell us?"

"Yeah, do you want the baby to grow up a--" The girl speaking lowers her voice dramatically and hisses, "Bastard?"

It looks for a moment like they are going to swoon collectively but it's hard to swoon properly on a stone floor. Draco should know. Instead, the scrum of girls merely clutches at each other for support and lurches a bit to the side, the girls at the edge of the group being pressed up against the wall by the weight of others.

Draco is alarmed even though he thinks them horrendously melodramatic. "Calm down. Really. It's okay."

They eye him mistrustfully in their shared state of being overcome by the tragedy of the situation. "Why should we believe you?" The girl who has spoken from the centre of the group is a Ravenclaw as well, Liana something or other.

"Because he's the baby's other father," says Violet Wilton, a third-year Gryffindor, leaning against the wall from few paces away and watching the affair from solid ground. Draco thinks her parents' sadistic sense of humour must have toughened her up a bit.

The group of girls oscillates like an overexcited jellyfish and its constituent parts squeal as one, reaching out their hands. "How *romannntic*."

Whilst they're momentarily distracted by Violet's dry pronouncement, Draco turns tail and all but runs into the Great Hall. He doesn't stop until he's made it safely to his place at the end next to Hagrid. A few eyebrows rise at his haste, especially when the mass of girls moving at an alarming speed is spotted at the far end of the hall, but most of the staff is focused on their eggs or marmalade.

McGonagall steps out in front of the tables, turning a stern eye on the first-years. They stop as one in the center aisle between the tables, and Draco's fairly certain they're sizing up the possibility of swarming over the Headmistress, at least until she says something to them that he can't quite make out. Her meaning's clear though, as the mass dissipates, each girl skulking off sullenly to her House table.

Draco slumps in relief. A house-elf pours him a cup of tea, which he takes gratefully.

When Potter walks in--or strides, rather, Draco thinks, with his head held high and his shoulders squared--the whispers begin again. They don't seem to bother Potter; he just turns a cold stare on the gawkers until they look away, their faces flushing. Draco supposes Potter's used to this; there hadn't been a year that had gone by--until last year, at least--that a Potter rumour or twenty hadn't flown by. He'd been responsible for more than one himself.

Potter grins at the Weasel, who tosses a piece of buttered toast his way. For a moment, Draco hates both of them again, loathes the easy way they have with each other. He's always been jealous of that. It's not that Blaise and Pansy aren't good friends, but Draco's never really considered his friendship with either of them to be *easy*. Slytherins never are, unless you're counting being willing to tumble into bed at a moment's notice--and even then there are rules.

Draco looks down at his bacon and eggs. He scrapes the tines of his fork across the shivering surface of the eggs, breaking through the whites. A stream of yellow yolk runs across his plate, soaking into a triangle of toast. When he looks back up again, Potter's watching him from Gryffindor table, chewing slowly. His hair's still damp from his shower, and his tie's askew. Draco's heart thuds oddly against his chest.

He's distracted by McGonagall's soft cough and the louder clank of her spoon against the rim of her glass. The whispers die down as the students turn on the benches to look her way.

She stands and clears her throat again. "Quiet, please. I have an announcement." The sideways glance she casts Potter's way makes Draco's stomach twist. *She wouldn't, Draco thinks. Would she?*

"As you know," the Headmistress says primly, "Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter were both seventh-year students at Hogwarts last year. Draco Malfoy is working among us as a junior assistant to Professor Rubeus Hagrid and Harry Potter is taking advanced NEWTs classwork and will now be assisting in Charms, rather than his previous Defence assignment."

Draco sees Potter grimace and look away, a flush rising on the back of his neck. He hadn't realised Potter had been removed from Defence. He bites his lip. Yet another sacrifice from St Potter. The students look between him and Potter, their curiosity evident. The first-years lean forward in excitement.

"The persistence of certain rumours has unfortunately made it necessary to clarify the current situation between them." McGonagall looks horribly uncomfortable; Draco hasn't an ounce of sympathy. He twists his napkin angrily between his fingers--she ought to have warned them she was going to do this. The glare he sends the Headmistress's way is vehement. It doesn't stop her from continuing. "Mr Potter," she says, her reluctance obvious, "is, as the rumours suggest, expecting Mr Malfoy's child."

There's a moment of utter silence. Even the ghosts hang frozen in the air. And then the entire hall erupts in a cacophony of response: chatter, shouts, outrage and uproar. McGonagall stands resigned as it echoes off the walls, and it's only when both Slytherin and Gryffindor begin to climb onto their tables to hurl insults at each other that she pulls out her wand.

Bright orange fireworks explode into the air. The students fall silent, and McGonagall tucks her wand back into her robe. "Thank you," she says tartly, "and I'll ask Slytherin and Gryffindor Houses to take their seats again, if you please." She waits as the students slide back onto the benches, still casting scowls across the hall. "And twenty points to Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff for having the good sense to remain in their places."

Draco wants to slide beneath the head table and crawl out of the room. Half the hall is staring at him, the other half at Potter. It takes all he has to school his face into a frozen expression of a calm he doesn't feel. Thank God for Sunday dinners with Voldemort.

Hagrid reaches over and pats his hand awkwardly. "Chin up, lad," he mutters. "Yeh'll make it through this, and then yeh can spend the rest of the day out in the forest, if yeh want."

Draco nods, not trusting himself to speak.

"You will all, of course," McGonagall says, "respect their privacy. But as I am quite aware how little that means when it comes to youthful gossip, your professors and I have worked this morning to establish a variant of the Fidelius Charm on the castle. The information will *not* leave Hogwarts grounds." At this she casts a fiery look around the hall. The entirety of the head table with the exception of Draco stands up, their wands drawn, and the students shrink back. Draco knows everyone but the first-years are thinking of last term, of the Carrows with their wands at the ready to punish any student who crossed their path.

McGonagall's face softens. "The spell has been designed so that no mention of this matter may be made outside of Hogwarts. Not to your families. Not to the press. Not even to each other on your holidays. And any student caught tampering with the charm will be sent down immediately. Do I make myself clear?"

As one, the whole hall nods. Potter doesn't look up from his plate. He sits stiffly on the Gryffindor bench, his shoulders tight. Draco forces himself to sit still in his chair, despite his entire body screaming to go to Potter, even when he's not certain why. Potter has an effect on him that Draco can't explain; the bastard has a vulnerability that few people see. Now that Draco has seen it, he can't ignore it. The urge to protect Potter unsettles him.

McGonagall nods towards the staff, and they lift their wands.

"Go on with yeh," Hagrid whispers out of the corner of his mouth, and Draco pushes himself up just as they cast the Fidelius incantation. Magic streaks whitely across the stone walls and floor, causing the whole hall to shiver.

He looks back at the door, his gaze meeting Potter's. The spell crackles around them, and for a moment Draco's back in the forest, Potter's body wrapped around his. Potter looks down, and Draco feels oddly adrift.

The magic sinks into the stones, disappearing with a soft whoosh. The hall is silent.

Draco slips away.



Harry comes in from the library, tired, his satchel slung over his shoulder. He's in a foul mood, and the looks he's been getting from his fellow students the past few days haven't helped.

They're courteous enough, he supposes. No one's going to dare to be hateful to the Boy Who Lived Again. At least not to his face. But he can hear the whispers when he passes. *Freak. Poof. Pillow-biter.*

And then there's the first year girls. They follow him around, offering to carry his books for him, asking him what Malfoy's like. Ron thinks this is hysterical, or at least he did until he told them all that Malfoy was a prick. Now they've taken to tripping him in the halls--or in the Gryffindors' case, in the common room--which infuriates Ron to no end.

"It's Malfoy," he says angrily to Harry after one particularly nasty spill. He rubs his shin. "What the hell do the little cows see in him?"

Harry'd just shrugged and shifted his satchel from one side to the other as they climb a moving staircase to the third floor, breathing a bit heavily. "Your fault, mate. Everyone knows the whole lot of them are mad."

His friends are watching him with sharp eyes, asking him constantly if he feels all right. He'd been rubbing at his scar just now in the library, and Hermione had looked at him, her brows drawn together in worry, and asked him if it hurt.

He'd slammed his book closed. "No. It doesn't. My entire bloody head hurts, though, and my feet are swollen, and I've something growing next to my intestines, thanks ever so much, but I'm *fine*. Will you stop asking me?"

She'd drawn back as if he'd slapped her, and Ron had given him the look he always gets when he's done something to upset Hermione. The look that says "I might not have sex for weeks if you don't mend this."

"Harry," he'd said, and Harry'd just pushed his chair back, stuffing his books and parchment scrolls into his satchel.

"I'm going upstairs."

They hadn't tried to stop him, which had only made Harry more furious.

Malfoy looks up from two wooden sticks and a lapful of what Harry's rather certain is some sort of yarn when he slams his satchel onto the floor and drops into the chair opposite him. A fire crackles in the hearth, and there's a glass of wine hovering next to Malfoy's elbow. Harry wants to grab it and drain it, but years of Muggle cautions about excessive drinking during pregnancy have had their effect.

"What are you doing?" he asks.

It's a moment before Malfoy answers. "Knitting," he says, and he stabs the yarn with one of the wooden sticks. He scowls. "Hagrid says it's calming."

"You don't look calm."

Malfoy glances up at him again. "Neither do you."

Harry just grunts and slumps back in his chair. "I hate everyone."

"Have you somehow switched bodies with Snape?" Malfoy asks suspiciously. He drops the knitting into a bag at his feet and kicks it across the rug. It hits the stone hearth, tipping to one side. A ball of yarn slips out and bounces against the floor.

“Unfortunately no.” Harry rubs his hand over his stomach. He unfastens his trousers and sighs in relief. The waistband’s started to dig into his skin. “I think being a painting would be more comfortable.”

Malfoy just looks at him. “Why aren’t you using proper tailoring charms?” he asks suddenly. “You have to have outgrown your trousers by now.”

Harry shrugs. “I don’t know any.”

This draws an exasperated sigh from Malfoy. “Oh for goodness’ sake.” He pulls his wand out. “Stand up.”

Harry hesitates, but at Malfoy’s glare, he pushes himself out of the chair. “What?”

Malfoy eyes him for a moment. “Take your robe off and turn around.”

Feeling like a fool, Harry does. He tosses the robe down onto his chair and glances back over his shoulder, catching Malfoy studying his arse. “See anything you like?”

A pink flush spreads over Malfoy’s cheeks. “Shut it.” He waves at Harry to turn again. “Honestly, I don’t know how those trousers aren’t cutting you in two.” His nostrils flare. “And that shirt is a horrific fit in the shoulders.”

He flicks his wand at Harry, and suddenly his trousers hang looser. Another flick and Harry’s shirt shifts on his shoulders. Malfoy purses his mouth, his head tilted, then he flicks his wand again. Harry blinks as his trousers pull more snugly against his balls.

“Better,” Malfoy says. He sighs again. “Not perfect by any means. I’m neither Twilfit nor Tatting, but at least Mother made certain I knew those charms before my second year at Hogwarts.” He sniffs. “There’s no sense in being utterly tacky, Potter.”

“Thanks,” Harry says, and he realises he means it. He gives Malfoy a small smile as he settles back in his chair. “Will you teach me then?”

Malfoy reaches for his glass of wine. “I suppose I’ll have to. No sense in my child’s father looking like a ruffian.”

They look at each other for a long moment, the words hanging between them.

“It’s never going to be not-weird, is it?” Harry asks quietly.

Malfoy turns his glass in his hands, staring down at it. “How could it be? But you can learn to live with weird.” He gives Harry a sideways glance. “I suppose it’s stranger for you, though. All things considered.”

“Well, this wasn’t exactly a position I ever saw myself in,” Harry admits. “I mean, I thought I wanted kids one day. Before I figured out..well, you know. The poof thing.” He runs a hand over his face, pushing his glasses up. “But this isn’t how I thought it would go.”

“No.” Malfoy sips his wine. He rests the foot of his glass on his thigh. “It’s been a long time since I thought I might have...” He trails off. Harry waits, watching him. Malfoy shakes himself, then draws in a deep breath. “Anything like this, really. I suppose I’m surprised to be alive right now. Or outside of Azkaban.”

Harry rubs his thumb across the arm of his chair. "Yeah," he says. He looks up at Malfoy. "It seems more real now that everyone knows."

Malfoy nods. "We couldn't have kept it hidden much longer."

"I know." Harry's hand settles on his stomach again. It seems more natural there for some reason. "Still."

"Yeah," Malfoy says. He drains his wine glass and stands up. "I'm going to bed."

"Night." Harry watches Draco disappear into his bedroom.

He sits out by the fire until only the embers glow.



Photo by Jon JA Marshall

winter

It's the second week of December when the inevitable happens.

Draco supposes he should have expected it. They're both eighteen, for Merlin's sake, and male to boot. Wanking's been a fact of life for years.

Witnessing it, however, is an entirely different matter.

He comes back to their rooms early one afternoon. He's made plans to meet Blaise in Hogsmeade for dinner, mostly at Pansy's insistence.

"You have to tell him about the baby at some time, darling," she'd said over a flickering Floo call late one night. "If you wait until the brat's born, he'll never forgive you." She'd paused and eyed him. "That goes for your mother as well."

He'd just shushed her as Potter had walked through the sitting room on his way to the loo, but he'd known she was right. And so now he's racing through the halls to get back to his room in time for a quick shower and a change of clothes. And that's when it happens.

It's not as if Draco doesn't register that Potter's bedroom door was open, but he doesn't think anything of it as he grabs his shower bucket and clean clothes and heads for the bath. He barely dunks himself and lathers up before rinsing off and hopping out to towel himself dry. Fresh clothes, and then he's running back to the rooms to drop off his dirty ones and cast a drying charm on his hair.

"Malfoy."

He hears it the moment he walks back in. Potter's voice, quiet but tight, and his heart catches for a moment because it sounds as if Potter's in pain.

Of course he goes to the door. He's not a monster, and Potter's carrying his child. If something was wrong....

But it isn't.

Instead, Potter's sprawled across his rumpled bed, his glasses askew and fogged, his shirt open and hanging off his shoulders, his trousers and pants crumpled on the floor beside those horrible trainers.

The first thing Draco registers is that this means Potter's naked. The second is that the swell of Potter's stomach is noticeable now. It's rounded above his hips, a definite bump that both horrifies and intrigues Draco. He wants to run his hands over it.

The third thing that Draco registers is that Potter's hand is on his cock, pulling it hard as he arches his shoulders against the bed. Potter's skin is taut and flushed, and his brown nipples are hard.

"Malfoy," he says again, this time with a groan that Draco knows isn't from pain, and Draco makes a soft sound, his fingernails digging into his palm.

Potter's eyes fly open. "Oh," he says, and he looks at Draco, but his body's shaking already, and he digs his foot into the mattress, his hand twisting over the dark head of his swollen cock.

Draco presses his knuckles to his mouth, unable to take his eyes off Potter. "I..." he chokes out, but he can't form the words to tell Potter to finish.

He doesn't need to. Potter's hips jerk, lifting from the twisted blue sheets, and his fingers tighten on his slick prick. Draco breathes in sharply. He's seen plenty of boys masturbate. He'd lived in Slytherin, after all. But this....God. He's never seen anything that made his cock ache as much as Harry Potter, five months pregnant with his child, wanking about him. He bites his fist, willing himself not to rip open his flies and join Potter on the bed.

"Oh," Potter says again, his thighs tensing as he pushes himself up off the bed, and then he cries out, spunk spattering over his tight fist, dripping onto his swollen belly.

Draco, like a fool, runs.



"You're an idiot," Blaise says, rather remarkably blasé for what he's just heard, Draco thinks, and he orders Draco a firewhisky.

They're at the Hogs Head this time, and Aberforth Dumbledore scowls at Draco as he pushes the half-full glass across the bar to him. Draco picks it up and carries it over to a more secluded table. He can feel Aberforth's glare between his shoulder blades, although he doesn't blame him in a way. He had tried to kill his brother, after all. And, well, everyone else as well, he supposes.

He sits down. Blaise takes the seat across from him, and Draco heaves a small sigh. He sips the steaming firewhisky. Snow falls outside the window, thick fluffy white flakes that glitter in the lamplight. Draco can see his reflection in the dark panes. His face is an elongated pale smudge on the glass; he hadn't even taken the time to comb his hair, and it takes all he has not to reach up and attempt to smooth it down.

Blaise watches him over the rim of his whisky. *He* looks perfectly put together, of course. As always. His green wool robe may not be current season, but it's neatly pressed. His fingernails are clipped and manicured, and his black curls are close cropped, a perfect frame for his high cheekbones and imperiously long nose.

"So," Blaise says finally, setting his glass down. "Are you going to explain how you managed to get into Gryffindor Tower to see this charming--" His mouth twists mockingly. "--display of Potter's lust for you?"

It's only then Draco remembers that Blaise doesn't know anything about any of this. Well. Not that he'd forgotten that fact. It'd just slipped his mind when he'd walked into the pub, his mind swimming with the image of Potter stretched out, nearly naked, his hand wrapped tight around his prick. Blaise had said *Hello, you look a bit unsettled*, and all he could choke out was *I just saw Potter wanking whilst saying my name*.

Draco lifts his firewhisky to his mouth and downs half of it in one quick gulp. It burns his throat, but he doesn't care. Warmth seeps through his numb body, filling him with a modicum of courage, false though it might be. When he sets the glass back down, Blaise quirks an eyebrow.

"Impressive."

Draco closes his eyes for a moment and takes a deep breath. "He wasn't in Gryffindor Tower. McGonagall moved us into a shared suite of rooms almost six weeks ago."

When he opens his eyes, Blaise is staring at him, his glass halfway to his mouth. "McGonagall," Blaise says. At Draco's nod, Blaise's glass thumps against the battered tabletop. A splash of firewhisky lands on the wood, sizzling softly until it sinks into the scarred grain. "Why on *earth* would she do that? Does she think you need special supervision by the Gryffingit?"

"Because," Draco says, and he's relieved that his voice doesn't shake. He twists his glass between his hands, then glances around. There's no one around them, but he lowers his voice anyway. "Potter's pregnant." He looks up at Blaise. "With my child."

For the first time in eight years, Draco sees Blaise utterly speechless.

Blaise sits back in his chair, a stunned expression on his face. It lasts for several moments. "You're not serious," he says finally, peering over Draco's shoulder. "Where's Pansy? Come on out, darling. You've had your joke."

"It's not a joke." Draco casts a quick Muffliato, and Blaise's eyes narrow.

"That's your wand." He leans forward and grabs Draco's wrist. "Your actual wand, not the Ministry--"

Draco pulls away and slides his wand back into his robe. "Potter gave it back to me."

"Before or after you supposedly got him up the duff?" Blaise's mouth is one tight line, and his dark eyes regard Draco coolly.

“After.” Draco rests his elbows on the table. It bows slightly beneath his weight. “But before we knew.” He hesitates. “About the baby.” The words still sound odd to him.

Blaise swears and runs a hand over his face. “You’re not joking. Circe, Draco, what have you got yourself into now?”

Draco shakes his head. He doesn’t think Blaise will take this as well as Pansy did.

“It’s not possible.” Blaise drops his hands and reaches for his firewhisky. “Men can’t bear children,” he says after downing the rest in one long swallow. “It’s a law of nature. We haven’t the proper bits.”

“Evidently it’s possible with Potter,” Draco says. There’s a bitter tinge to his voice he can’t help. “Of course.”

“He’s having you on. It has to be.”

Draco finishes his firewhisky and sets the glass back down. “Then he’s having his friends, McGonagall, Pomfrey, and half of St Mungo’s on as well.” He glances up at Blaise. “You know as well as I do that Potter’s not that sort. He’s pregnant, and the baby’s mine.”

They’re silent, looking at each other, until the bells on the pub door jingle as a couple walks in, arm-in-arm.

“I need a good deal more alcohol for this conversation,” Blaise says, and he pushes his chair back. Draco watches him walk to the bar, absently noting that his arse is still too perfect for a straight boy’s. Draco turns back to stare out the window. The cobblestone streets of Hogsmeade are nearly covered with snow now. A wizard stands beneath one of the iron lampposts, charming an evergreen garland to twist up it. Christmas hols are only a week and a half away, Draco realises with surprise. Potter’d been spending quite a bit of time in the library lately, but it hadn’t quite occurred to Draco that the end of the term was that close on them. It’s been an odd year, he thinks.

Blaise sets a bottle of Blishen’s on the table and sits back down. He pours them both two fingers of the glowing amber whisky, pushing one across the table to Draco and draining his own before refilling it again. He looks over at Draco. “I’ll admit to a great sense of relief that I never allowed your cock anywhere near inside of me, if this is what happens.”

Draco rolls his eyes and takes a sip of his firewhisky. “The rate you go through girls it surprises me you haven’t ended up with a mistake or two.”

“If I had, I’d have had the good sense to make certain the problem was dealt with before it became an issue,” Blaise says with a pointed scowl. “Literally and figuratively. By-blows complicate inheritance laws.”

“And sometimes they solve them.” Draco rubs his thumb over the cuff of his sleeve. “I have an heir now.”

Blaise shrugs. “If it’s a boy. Unless your ancestors were so progressive as to adopt aînesse intégrale.” His expression clearly conveys his doubt at this possibility.

Draco gives him a baleful glare. "There *are* provisions in place for a female heir." He lifts his glass to his mouth. "If she retains the Malfoy name." He doesn't tell Blaise this step had been taken by his Grandfather upon his mother's first pregnancy. His older sister had been miscarried in the seventh month.

"Do your parents know?" Blaise asks after a moment. "About Potter's... delicate condition."

"No." Draco shakes his head. "And I've no intention of telling them until I've safely left the country."

Blaise snorts. "Good luck with that." He turns his glass in his hand. Whisky sloshes up the sides. "Pansy knows."

"Yes."

"She's been hinting I should talk to you." Blaise drains his glass and pours more. "She's fucking Tony Goldstein, you know." His mouth twists. "Not that she's admitted it, but gossip gets around the Ministry. Theo's seen them snogging in the corridors."

Draco takes that in. Even he knows that Anthony Goldstein was taken on as a junior clerk in the office of the Chief Warlock. If the Wizengamot thought one of their subordinates was associating with an accused Death Eater sympathiser, Community Order or not... "It's dangerous for both of them."

Blaise lifts one shoulder. "Her funeral, not mine." Draco can hear the wounded pride in his voice. "We're all keeping our secrets, aren't we? Pansy and Goldstein. You and Potter. Me and..." He trails off, staring down into his glass. "Well. At least I'll never be playing happy little fucked up families." He lifts his glass to his mouth again.

"Blaise." Draco lays his hand over Blaise's. His skin is warm and soft, and when Blaise turns his hand beneath Draco's, threading their fingers together, Draco doesn't pull away.

"Are you still hard?" Blaise murmurs. "Still thinking about Potter?" His fingertips brush Draco's palm lightly, and Draco shivers. Blaise lowers his voice. "Take me back to your rooms, and I'll suck you off whilst you tell me how you fucked him. When was it?"

Draco's throat is dry. "This summer." Blaise has always been able to do this to him, to make him want him badly enough to go against all his common sense.

Blaise's thumb sweeps across Draco's wrist. Draco knows he can feel the unsteady pulse of blood beneath his hot skin. "Just imagine him lying there hearing us..."

The spell's broken. Draco pulls his hand back. "I can't," he whispers, and he knows it's true. He doesn't want to. He doesn't want Blaise's hands on him. He doesn't want Blaise's mouth. The realisation of whom he wants instead floods through him and takes his breath away.

Blaise purses his mouth, his face shuttered. "I see."

Draco knows this has to be difficult for him. First Pansy. Now him. "Blaise," he says, and he wants to reach back out to him, but he doesn't trust himself.

"You're in love with Potter," Blaise says flatly. The words slam into Draco, and he shakes his head violently.

"I'm not." The very thought's ridiculous. Potter's pregnant, and Draco's sense of familial duty's rearing its ugly head again. That's all this is.

Blaise gives him a pitying look. "You've never known your own self, Draco, and yet the rest of us can see you so clearly." He stands up. "I've got to go."

Draco catches his arm. "There's a Fidelius on the castle," he says, and when Blaise's face closes, Draco knows he's said the wrong thing. He was supposed to stop Blaise from leaving. Instead it's about Potter. Again. They still, the both of them, a frozen tableau of fractured friendship. Draco can't drop his hand. He's too afraid to let Blaise go. "On the students, really. To keep them from talking. McGonagall says Potter and I are exempt since it's our secret."

"I'll keep it to myself," Blaise says after a moment. He looks tired and worn, his facade of disdainful distance slipping. "You've been my friend since we were eleven. You should know I'd never tell." A bitter smile twists his mouth to one side. "Didn't Snape drum into us that there's honour even among ser-pents?"

"Thank you," Draco whispers. He doesn't know why he's so protective of Potter and the baby, but he is. He chews on his lip. "Not even Greg or Theo."

Blaise nods, then pulls away. "Good night, Draco," he says quietly. With a heavy heart, Draco watches him walk away.

The bell on the door clangs softly behind him.

Draco reaches for the bottle of Blishen's.



When Draco stumbles back into their rooms, Potter's sitting in the dark, waiting for him like the bloody stubborn Gryffindor he is.

Draco leans against the doorway. His head swims, and he lifts the nearly empty bottle of firewhisky to his mouth, taking one last swig. "You're awake," he says, and his voice slurs slightly.

"And you're pissed. Did you walk through the corridors like that?" Potter pushes himself out of the chair. His feet are bare, and his shirt is untucked. Draco stares at the small swell beneath it.

"What does it feel like?" he asks. "The baby?"

Potter smooths his hand over his shirt. "Strange." He makes a face. "A bit like bad gas."

Draco doesn't even chastise him for his vulgarity. He sets the bottle on a side table. It falls off, crashing against the floor. Glass goes everywhere, bringing Draco to his senses--or what little of them were cog-nisant at the moment. "Don't move," he says to Potter, and he bends down to sweep his wand across the broken shards.

"Lumos," Potter says, and the sconces on the wall flame.

The flare of light startles Draco. He loses his balance and pitches forward. A shard of glass slices across his outstretched palm, and he swears as blood wells over his skin.

"Idiot," Potter says, but Draco doesn't think it sounds as harsh as Potter's invectives usually do. Potter Vanishes the broken glass, then kneels next to Draco and reaches for his hand. "Let me see."

Draco sits on the floor, his back against an armchair. His palm stings and aches. Potter frowns down at it before he clambers up.

"Wait here," he says. Draco thinks it's ridiculous of Potter to say that. His blood's pooling on the floor; where the hell is he going?

He stares up at the sconces on the wall. The golden light warms the bookshelves that are set between them and flickers across the gilt-trimmed spines of the books themselves. There's a space in one shelf, between *Elementa Chymia* and *Diaries of a Mad Witch*. Draco frowns.

"You've been reading," he says loudly.

Potter comes back into the room with a flannel and a bowl of water and a tub of salve. "I do know how to, you realise."

"One wonders at times." Draco's head feels enormous. He turns it and winces as Potter kneels down next to him. "You're not known for your intellectual capabilities."

Warm water drips onto his palm. Draco flinches as Potter dabs the flannel at the cut. He studies Potter's face, the smooth skin of his cheek, the darkly stubbled angle of his jaw, the brush of his impossibly long eyelashes as he frowns down at Draco's hand.

Draco barely notices when Potter rubs the salve into his skin. It's only when the cut tightens as the wound heals over that he glances down. There's a dark pink line against his palm and then it's gone. He can smell the familiar scent of dittany. "Thank you," he says.

"You reek of whisky," Potter says.

"Blaise insisted on buying a bottle." Draco waves his hand at the place where the shards had been.

Potter *hms*.

"I told him about you." Draco's fingers brush the front of Harry's shirt. "About us."

"I see." Potter's mouth tightens. "And what did he say?"

Draco touches Potter's cuff. It's frayed slightly. He resolves to teach him mending charms soon--or insist the house-elves do. "I think he disapproves."

"Of us?" Potter's voice is quiet.

"Of everything." Draco wants to touch the swell of Potter's belly. His fingers hover over it. "Can I?"

The question seems to take Potter by surprise. He nods, slowly, and his hand catches Draco's, pulling it closer until Draco's fingers rest against the cloth of his shirt. His fingers spread out and curve slightly across the rounded surface. It's warm; he's surprised how warm. Potter's breath stutters, and his hand settles over Draco's, heavy and soft.

Draco looks up at him. His eyes are closed, his head is tilted back, his mouth open slightly.

"It just moved," Potter says. He presses Draco's hand a bit more firmly into his stomach and Draco can feel a slight hardness shifting beneath the skin. He's at a loss for words.

Potter's eyes flutter open. He looks at Draco. "It's been happening a lot this week."

Draco can't breathe. He feels simultaneously completely sober and as drunk as he's ever been. "Unbelievable," he manages to say.

"Yeah." Potter's lips quirk in a small smile.

It happens before Draco can stop himself. A dangerously slow movement, his eyes fixed on Potter's mouth, and then his lips are brushing against Potter's, almost hesitant.

The hand on top of Draco's drops. Coming to his senses briefly, Draco pulls back and scans Potter's face. His eyes are shining and then his fingers are tangling in the long hair at the nape of Draco's neck and he's pulling Draco back for another, longer, more desperate and gasping kiss.

"Did you kiss Zabini?" Potter asks, his lips on Draco's.

"No." Draco tries to kiss Potter but he leans back slightly.

"Did you fuck him?" Potter's eyes are dark, dark green. Draco's never seen anything quite that colour.

"He asked me to. He offered to come back with me and suck me off." Draco can't keep himself from tracing Potter's jaw with his fingertips. "I said no."

Potter turns his head and his lips brush Draco's knuckles. "Why?"

"I'm almost a father, aren't I?" The smile Draco gives Potter is lazy and languid. Whisky makes it so much easier to talk. "Doesn't seem right to be a complete whore."

Potter's breath catches. "I don't know. Being a complete whore sounds pretty good to me right now."

"With someone else, I mean." Draco fingers the buttons on Potter's shirt. He slips one through its buttonhole and traces the exposed patch of skin with his thumb. He pauses. "What were you thinking?"

Potter watches him through half-lowered lashes. "That I'm randy as fuck." He smiles. "Hormones."

"Me too," Draco whispers. "Whisky." He leans closer, and his lips brush Potter's again. "And maybe hormones too."

Draco fumbles another button loose and then another. Potter's breath speeds up and his shirt drapes open. Draco catches a glimpse of pale skin. He brushes his thumb across Potter's exposed nipple and Potter moans, arching into his touch. Draco is immediately rock hard.

"Holy fuck. Please." Potter's eyes are screwed shut and he's biting his lip.

Draco lowers his mouth to suck, and Potter keens wildly, his fingers grasping at Draco's jumper, twisting in the wool, pulling Draco closer. Draco keeps sucking, his tongue licking wet circles across Potter's chest.

Potter's hands slide up Draco's arms, down his back, tugging at Draco's jumper until he can touch bare skin. He jerks against Draco, his breath ragged, the side of his rounded belly pressing against Draco's hips. "Fuck," he says. "That feels--" He breaks off into a groan and another muffled *fuck* into Draco's hair.

They tumble sideways to lie on the floor. Draco tries to find a way to get his hips into contact with Potter's properly but gives up after a few awkward and ineffectual thrusts. The position is too difficult: he's never had to work around a bump before. Potter's lying spread out and wanton beneath him, moaning. Draco settles back on his knees and rips Potter's trousers open.

Potter groans and his hips buck up. "Please. Yes, oh fuck, please."

It only takes a moment for Draco to get Potter's cock free. The moment his mouth closes around the tip, Potter positively howls, his hands grasping at Draco's hair.

For a moment, Draco's vision blurs and he's afraid he's going to come in his own trousers. Instead, his fingers clutch Potter's hips, holding him still as he sinks his mouth further down Potter's prick.

Potter tastes bitter and salty and a bit muskier than Draco remembers. He presses his tongue against the length of him, and Potter jerks, his fingers tugging Draco's hair painfully. He swears again.

Draco opens his mouth to complain and, as Potter thrusts down his throat again, his mouth is flooded with metallic spunk. He swallows reflexively around Potter's cock, almost choking, and Potter's hands slip away from his hair as his arms drop to the floor. His breath comes in short, sharp gasps.

"Fuck," Potter murmurs. His face is flushed, his glasses tilted to one side.

Draco wipes the back of his hand across his mouth and rolls to sit up. A hand grabs his arm.

"Wait," Potter says, and Draco does. He lets Potter push him back down to the floor, and Potter shifts next him, rolling over onto his side. His fingers fumble with the buttons on Draco's trousers, and Draco helps him, pulling the thick wool aside as Potter shoves his hand between his flies, under the silk of Draco's pants. He grasps Draco's cock firmly.

"God," Draco chokes out, and then Potter's stroking him hard and fast, smearing slickness from the head of his prick down his shaft.

Draco's eyes roll back in his head, and he groans, pressing his hips up into Potter's tight fist. Why have they waited to do this again, he wonders, when it feels so bloody *fantastic*?

“Harder,” he says, his lip caught between his teeth, and Potter complies, squeezing Draco’s cock as he pulls the length of it. Draco can see the wet red head sliding between Potter’s fingers, through his gaping trousers, and nothing he has ever done has looked that hot.

Draco grabs Potter’s shoulder, arching towards him. He pulls him into a rough kiss; his tongue slips against Potter’s. He’s close, so close, and Potter’s hand feels so good on him.

“Fuck Zabini,” Harry says against Draco’s mouth, gripping Draco’s cock tightly.

Draco’s entire body writhes. His feet slide against the floor. “Potter,” he pleads, and Potter’s hand moves even faster across his heated skin.

It’s more than Draco can take. With a sharp cry, he arches his back, banging his head against the floor in the process. “Fuck,” he groans, and then he’s coming, spunk splattering through Potter’s fingers and across Draco’s jumper.

He collapses, tremors still wracking his body. His fingers are tense, and he realises he’s clenched them somehow in the sleeve of Potter’s shirt.

Potter leans in to kiss his jaw, and Draco shivers.

“We might need another flannel,” Potter says, surveying the mess on their clothes and on the floor.

Draco nods. “Yeah.” His body feels boneless. Limp and floating. “Can you...”

“I can manage.” Potter rolls up, wincing slightly. “At least for now.” He looks down at Draco. “Another month or so though...”

Draco settles back against the floor and closes his eyes. The world doesn’t spin too much. “Better make yourself useful then.” He smiles.

The sound of Potter’s laughter echoes from the other room.



The next morning, Harry is about to leave for breakfast when he glances over to the far side of the sitting room and is surprised to see that Malfoy’s door is still ajar. He thinks for a moment. Perhaps Malfoy merely forgot to close his door this morning. With a sigh, he sets his satchel down and walks over to check.

When Harry peeks into the room, Malfoy is lying on his back with his hand over his eyes, breathing deeply. Harry watches him for a moment, enjoying the rare chance to observe Malfoy without artifice. Malfoy’s lovely pink mouth is open and Harry thinks he sees a crust near his mouth that indicates drooling whilst sleeping. Malfoy would be horrified, but Harry finds it charming. Harry thinks about what that mouth was doing late last night and closes his eyes. He sighs. The sight of Malfoy’s lean body tangled in his rumpled white sheets is making Harry uncomfortably hard and he really needs to get to breakfast.

“Er, Malfoy.” Harry leans over and gently shakes Malfoy by the shoulder. “Malfoy!”

Malfoy's arm swings in an arc and connects with Harry's eye in the process. Pain radiates across Harry's face and he grunts.

"What the hell--" Malfoy starts up in bed, clutching the sheets around him. "Oh Merlin, my head." He slumps down against his pillows, one hand pressed to his forehead, his eyes squeezed shut.

Harry covers his eye with his hand. "That really hurt!"

"Potter, what are you doing here? And why are you shouting?" Malfoy squints in Harry's direction.

"It's already half-seven and you just hit me in the eye." After he rubs it for a moment, it stops stinging as much.

Malfoy pinches the bridge of his nose. "I'm sure you deserved it." Early morning sunshine streams through the window, glinting on Malfoy's ruffled hair.

Harry looks around. The room's smaller than his, but it's cosy and comfortable. Malfoy's clothes are strewn across the floor, and one low chest is covered with photographs of Malfoy's family and friends. Harry finds it oddly disconcerting to see Lucius Malfoy glowering out at him from a simple but clearly antique silver frame.

"You need to get up," Harry says, glancing back at Malfoy. "You're going to be late."

Malfoy groans, and then he rolls out of bed.

Completely starkers.

Harry gapes, taking in the long legs, flat stomach, and wiry muscles of Malfoy's arms and shoulders. He's utterly gorgeous, if completely hung over. He's also sporting an impressive morning erection.

Malfoy turns at Harry's soft stutter. "What?" he asks, distracted. "Do you have any pain potion, or will Pomfrey not let you take it?"

"I..." Harry wraps his school robe around him. He's grateful for its spacious folds. "Yeah, sorry. She keeps me away from it." This isn't entirely true. Guhathakurta has a special variant he can take. He just never does.

Malfoy stretches. Harry wants to reach out towards him, to touch his smooth skin and jutting hipbones, to lick the hollow of his long throat. Instead he clenches his fists at his side.

"Maybe you should put on some clothes," Harry says sharply, and Malfoy blinks in surprise.

"Oh. Sorry." Malfoy pulls the sheet from the bed and wraps it around his hips. A faint blush stains his cheeks.

"That's okay." Harry says. His chest is tight and he's uncomfortable with the entire situation. He has to say something to Malfoy now, but he's not sure where to begin. Part of his brain is focusing on how hot Malfoy looks and part of it is urging him to flee. "I mean, last night was brilliant and everything. It's just--"

“Weird,” Malfoy says, rubbing his brow and shading his eyes from the sunlight.

Harry nods. “Yeah. I think we should just, you know...”

“Pretend it didn’t happen,” Malfoy suggests.

“Yeah.” Harry can’t tell if he’s disappointed or relieved. Or a combination of the two. He can’t take his eyes from Malfoy’s broad chest and the still-pink scars criss-crossing his skin, so much paler than it had been in summer. “I think that’s best.”

“Whatever you like.” Malfoy turns away, throwing open his wardrobe. He pulls a pair of pants from a drawer and drops his sheet. It puddles on the floor at his feet. “Are we done?”

Harry stands at the door for a moment, not sure he’s done the right thing, or indeed if there is any right thing to be done.

“I *will* need some privacy for dressing,” Malfoy calls without looking back.

“Oh, right. Sorry.” Harry reluctantly casts another look at the soft curve of Malfoy’s arse. It’s high and perfect and firm, and as much as Harry wants to drop to his knees and run his tongue along the crease just above Malfoy’s muscular thigh, he knows he can’t. He has to leave now or he won’t leave at all.

He closes the door behind him and leans against the wall for a moment, listening to the rustle of fabric on the other side. He draws in a shaky breath, and his hand settles on his stomach.

“It’s better this way,” he murmurs, his fingers stroking across the swell. For a moment, he wonders if the baby understands, then he shakes himself. “Don’t be an idiot, Potter.”

He walks across the room, picks up his satchel, and leaves.



A week later, Draco’s buttering his toast and trying to ignore the gaggle of first year girls who’ve managed to get seats at the head of Slytherin table even though he can see two Ravenclaws and a Gryffindor in their midst. It’s only three days until the end of term and the excitement at the impending hols is palpable. Students are talking animatedly as a light snow falls outside, augmenting the air of holiday excitement.

Draco recognises his mother’s eagle owl immediately as it swoops down from the rafters. He sets his toast down and unties the rolled message from Heloise’s foot. He unrolls it and reads it as she pecks at his toast.

He reads it twice and then rolls the parchment tightly, tucking it into his stable jacket. When he looks up, Hagrid is feeding Heloise an enormous bit of kipper. She swallows it with enjoyment, making clicking noises and letting Hagrid smooth her neck feathers.

“All right there?” Hagrid eyes him.

Draco stands up and pushes his chair back. "I'm going to go down to the Porlocks now. I want to check on their bedding again."

Hagrid nods, stroking Heloise under her beak. "I'll meet yeh down there soon enough. Maybe we should look in on the Thestrals today."

Draco strides out of the hall and walks at a quick clip towards the courtyard.

"Malfoy." An all too familiar voice stops him and he turns around.

"What, Potter?" Draco's voice is weary. He's not in the mood to see anyone right now. Not after that letter.

Potter walks towards him, the hem of his robe sweeping across the stone floor. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine."

"Right." Potter doesn't look convinced. "It's just you seemed a bit upset when the post arrived."

Draco's lips compress. Of course he wouldn't be able to get out of this, would he? Not with Potter. He pulls the roll of parchment from his pocket and shoves it at Potter. "It's from my mother. It's our appointment to visit my father in Azkaban for Christmas."

"Oh." Potter doesn't take the letter. Draco lets his arm drop. He looks away. "I'm sorry," Potter says after a moment. "That must be terrible."

Rage flares up in Draco. "No, you're not." His stomach knots. "You hate my father, so don't even try to pretend you give a damn if he's in Azkaban."

"I don't," Potter says quietly. "He deserves to be in there."

Draco grows very still. He has the urge to strike Potter, but knows he can't. "He's my father, Potter. And the grandfather of our child. You know. That monstrous Malfoy everyone's horrified you're carrying."

Potter doesn't flinch. "It's you I give a damn about." He hesitates. "And your mother."

"No," Draco says thickly. "You don't." He starts to turn away. Potter catches his arm.

"Hey." Potter turns Draco towards him. "I know you don't want to go." His hands curl around Draco's wrists, pulling him closer. "And I know you don't want to forgive him."

Draco can't look at Potter. "I'm not going to let my mother go to that hellhole alone."

"I know." Potter reaches up carefully and touches Draco's cheek. Draco doesn't know why he lets him, but he finds it almost soothing. "It's a pretty shit Christmas."

"Yeah." Draco leans against Potter. His fingers clutch at Potter's robe. "I'm worried about her," he whispers. "Whether she's going to be okay." He licks his lip and turns his face against Potter's shoulder.

“After. You should have seen her when Father first went in.” He shudders, remembering how shattered she’d been after their visits that summer, how she’d said nothing afterwards but had gone into her darkened bedroom with a gin and tonic and stayed there the rest of the evening. He hadn’t been much better. Just an hour among the Dementors had left his heart cold and aching.

“I’m sorry.” Potter strokes Draco’s hair. “When do you have to go?”

Draco sighs. “Solstice.” He fingers the clasp of Potter’s robe. “Father prefers it to Christmas. Mother’s always hated Yule.” There’d been arguments throughout his childhood and the occasional thrown vase, but Father’d always accompanied them to midnight mass on Christmas Eve, even if he’d mocked the vicar throughout the service.

“You’ll be staying after?” Potter sounds almost wistful.

“Probably.” Draco closes his eyes and breathes in. His heart skips a beat. He can smell Potter, soapy fresh and musky all mixed together. He’s afraid Blaise might have been dangerously close to the truth of him and Potter. Or him, at least. “What are you doing for hols?” he mumbles. They live together, and he doesn’t even know the smallest things about Potter’s life.

“I’m going to be alone here, I think,” Potter says. “Or at least with Flitwick and Binns and the other ghosts.” His fingers still smooth over Draco’s hair, tucking it back behind his ear. “You’re welcome to stop by for pudding. The elves always make too much food.”

Draco pulls back. “I would have thought the Weasels would have invited you home.”

Potter shrugs. “They did. I decided not to go.” At Draco’s frown, he sighs. “Ginny. It’d be too awkward.”

“You could consider it a chance to rekindle your romance.” Draco doesn’t know why he says it.

Potter’s laugh surprises him. “She’d have to be very tolerant to take back a boyfriend who’s five months pregnant with another man’s child.”

Draco’s hand settles on Potter’s waist. His fingers stroke the side of his swollen belly. “Or desperate.”

“Jealous?” Potter asks lightly, but his eyes are fixed on Draco’s.

“Terribly,” Draco says, and, in a moment of weakness, his lips brush Potter’s jaw. Potter shivers, and he turns his head.

“Don’t be.” His breath is a warm huff against Draco’s lips. His hand rests on Draco’s shoulder, his thumb tracing small circles on Draco’s collarbone.

Draco wonders what McGonagall would say if she came out to find him shagging Harry Potter in the Entrance Hall. He inhales slowly. “Potter..”

Potter’s mouth is gentle against his. It surprises Draco, after Potter’s protestations the week before, but he doesn’t pull away. He can’t. Instead, he leans in, letting his body settle against Potter’s.

Draco doesn't think he'll ever get used to this, to the shocking burn of Potter's lips, to the flare of desire that spirals through his whole body, to the wave of possessiveness that threatens to overwhelm him every time he touches Potter. Their lips meet again, and Draco's hand slips to Potter's, twining their fingers together.

It's a soft kiss, broken by the sound of contented sighs from the far end of the corridor. Potter pulls back. "I think we have an audience," he murmurs.

Draco peers over Potter's shoulder. He catches a glimpse of Perdita and Agnes ducking behind a suit of armour.

"You're going to tell me not to hex them, aren't you?" he asks grimly.

Potter's laugh is muffled against Draco's hair. He presses his lips just beneath Draco's earlobe, and Draco's knees go weak. "You cannot hex the first years, Malfoy," he whispers into Draco's ear. "At least not yet."

Draco doesn't bother to argue. He pulls away reluctantly. "They'll be coming out soon," he says, nodding towards the Great Hall. "And I've Porlocks to check on."

Potter steps back, his fingers slowly slipping from Draco's. "Yeah."

There's a cough from the wall behind Draco. He turns. "Mr Malfoy," Severus says, his voice frosty. "Minerva McGonagall is about to step through that door." He studies his fingernails. "Not that you seem to care."

Potter grins up at Severus's portrait. "Thanks."

Severus harrumphs. "You don't have to listen to her *after* she's upbraided you."

Draco touches the portrait frame. "Thank you, sir," he says to his godfather. He receives a snort in return.

The last thing he sees as he walks through the door into bright sunlight is Potter in the hallway, talking to Severus's portrait. He smiles.

It's curiously comforting.



Narcissa empties one snifter of brandy and motions for another before speaking. Draco pours it for her, then tops off his own. She leans back on the chaise in her sitting room, looking out of the tall paned windows onto the gardens below. Grey clouds hang low over the row of ancient oaks that edge the centre avenue, and the beds, bursting with colour in the summers, are piled high with a dark mulch that Draco knows from recent experience with the Hogwarts grounds took hours to fill in.

"That wasn't too awful, I suppose," Narcissa says finally, but her lips are quivering, and her fingers are white against the curve of her glass. "Your father looks better than last time."

Draco perches on the edge of a spindly-legged chair his great-great-grandmother had ordered from Paris. It's as uncomfortable as it's been since he was five and he'd sat in it, legs swinging above the floor, while he watched his mother dress for dinner. He sips his brandy. "I suppose."

Narcissa glances sharply at him. "Draco."

His mother needs to believe this, Draco knows. It doesn't matter that in actuality his father looked gaunt and wild-eyed, his prisoner code tattooed in ugly grey ink across the back of one shaking hand. It doesn't matter that his long hair hung filthy against his face, that his beard was matted, that his striped shirt hung off his bony shoulders, that spittle had flown across the table as he'd shouted at them to get him out, to get him out *now*.

"Lucius," his mother had said, her voice breaking, and his father had turned to him instead.

Draco'd sat there silently. When his father reached towards him, Draco'd pulled back. "Don't."

Their eyes had met for a long moment, and then his father had leaned across the table and slapped him, the crack of flesh striking flesh echoing in the silent room, a rush of pain flooding Draco's cheek as his father's jagged, filthy nails raked across his skin. The guards had grabbed his father, pulling him out of his chair as he'd struggled in desperation, kicking out at them.

He touches his cheek now. It still stings, despite the salve his mother had put on it the moment they returned home. The words his father had screamed at him as they dragged him out of the room still ring in his ears. Coward. Failure.

When he looks up, his mother is watching him. She turns away, back to the sober grey gardens. Her hand trembles as she lifts the brandy sifter to her lips again. "He's not himself, Draco," she whispers.

"I know."

And he does. The man he'd seen today was nothing like his father had been. This man was broken. Tormented. Barely sane.

Draco knows he might have shared the same fate, if it wasn't for the Acting Minister's leniency. Shackbolt wasn't a monster. He turns his glass between his fingers, then sips the brandy. Rumour had it the man was even angling to have the Dementors removed from Azkaban again, though he was facing stiff opposition from the Wizengamot.

Bastards.

He sets his glass aside. "Are you all right?" he asks his mother.

She doesn't answer for a moment, then she sighs. "As well as possible."

"I don't like your being in this house alone," Draco says. It doesn't matter that Narcissa has abandoned the Manor's ostentatious common rooms, the ones that still hold memories from those awful months, and confined herself to the smaller, cosier rooms of the east wing his grandfather had once used for guests.

Narcissa sets her brandy snifter on the floor and reaches out for him, clasping his hand. Her long fingers are cool and soft; the ring his father gave her all those years past on their betrothal has turned to the inside and the diamond scrapes across his palm. "I have the elves," she says, "and Andromeda brings little Teddy by frequently."

She's been making her peace with her sister now. They're the only two Blacks left, and they've both lost so much in the war.

"Still," Draco says, but his mother squeezes his fingers. She gives him a small smile and pulls her hand back. She smooths the skirt of her grey silk robe. It's embroidered with a thickly leaved vine that curls along the hem and up the front along the long line of tiny jet buttons. It's the robe his father had always liked on her. Draco can remember him coming up behind her in happier days, wrapping his arms around her waist and kissing the side of her neck as he told her how beautiful she looked. A lump forms in his throat. He misses that Lucius.

Badly.

His mother touches his face. "I'm fine, darling. And I've you for the holidays now." She picks up her brandy and leans back against the sofa arm.

Draco blurts, even without realising what he's about to say, "I'd like to have someone join us for Christmas." He bites his lip. He supposes he's been considering it for the past three days. It's foolish of him, he knows, but this time of year makes him stupidly sentimental.

Narcissa regards him for a moment, her snifter delicately suspended in the air. "Really."

"Yes," Draco says, suddenly afraid. He's seen that curiously calculating look on his mother's face before.

"May I ask whom?" Narcissa takes a small sip. "Is Mrs Zabini perhaps otherwise occupied this year?"

"No." Draco swallows, and it's the hardest thing he has ever said. "Harry Potter actually."

Narcissa almost drops the glass but, to her credit, manages to save it at the last minute. A single splash of brandy falls to the floor, staining the pale blue Savonnerie. She looks at her son, her beautifully arched eyebrows close to her hairline. "Isn't it a bit late to be making these arrangements, Draco? I know that it's important to be politically advantageous, but really."

"He's alone over Christmas," Draco says, his stomach fluttering. "And he's pregnant with my child."

Narcissa freezes, her shallow breaths the only movement for several long moments. Draco clenches inwardly, waiting for her reaction with something approaching abject terror. The clock on the chimneypiece ticks loudly and their silence hangs heavy in the air. Draco wishes that he could have left the country, hidden himself away, anything instead of confessing this to her. And yet, he knows he must. No matter what his father thinks of him, he can't be a coward now.

"You are perfectly certain of this fact?" Her voice is absolutely steely, almost without colour. He notices she doesn't ask if it's possible, doesn't claim he must be lying.

Draco nods, his throat tight. "Yes. It was confirmed by a specialist at St Mungo's. Several, actually."

“I see.” His mother’s blue eyes don’t even widen.

“You’re not surprised,” Draco says.

His mother sets her glass on the floor and sits up, swinging her legs off the sofa. She stands and walks to another set of floor-length windows, pushing aside the brocade draperies as she looks out. “Oh, I am,” she says finally. “On several different levels. But if you’re referring to the concept of a male bearing a child, no. It’s highly unusual, but not unheard of in certain pureblood families.” The navy fringe of the draperies brushes against her pale hair. “Particularly when wizards are of a certain...” She hesitates. “Persuasion.”

“I haven’t tried to hide who I am.” Draco watches her, studying the set of her shoulders and the straight line of her spine.

“No.” Narcissa looks back over her shoulder at him. “Your father and I have long suspected.” She turns. “We assumed at some point you would recognise your familial duty.” Her fingers are twined together, a sure sign she’s upset. “We hadn’t anticipated it would be in this manner, however.”

Draco drains his brandy.

Narcissa walks back to the sofa and sits on the edge. “You’re eighteen.”

“Everyone seems to feel it necessary to point this out,” Draco says dryly. “Yes. We are. And a hundred years ago that wouldn’t have been surprising.”

“It’s not the nineteenth century any longer, Draco.” Narcissa frowns. “You’re too young--”

“Don’t, Mother.” Draco’s tired of this argument. “It doesn’t matter. Potter’s up the duff, and it’s my fault. He’s chosen not to terminate the pregnancy, so there’s nothing to be done for it.”

Narcissa regards Draco levelly. “And how long have you known?”

“A few weeks,” Draco says. He hopes she can’t tell from his face that it’s been close to eight, but she does have a mother’s sixth sense.

His mother’s eyes narrow. “Well.” She’s silent for a moment. A ghost of a smile flits across her face. “It’s been some time since I’ve worried about you finding yourself in this predicament.”

Draco’s mouth quirks slightly. “Was I that obvious?”

That earns him a long look. “Darling.”

A flush warms Draco’s face. “It’s not something one wants to discuss with one’s parents.”

“Severus suspected first.” Narcissa leans back and crosses one leg over the other. Her black buckled heels peek out from beneath her robe. “Your father was furious when he came to us. I believe Severus left with a rather nasty hex burn.” She sighs. “He eventually came to terms with it.”

Draco doesn't say anything. He twists the sleeve of his robe around his fingertips. He hadn't realised his father knew. He'd never said anything to Draco, other than his usual assumptions that Pansy would be marrying into the family at some point.

"But, Potter?" His mother rubs at her temples. "Really, dear, you don't make things simple, do you? Although I suppose it's not shocking. Lucius was a bit concerned about your obsession with the boy."

"I wasn't obsessed," Draco snaps. Honestly. He doesn't know how anyone could take the burning hatred he'd felt for Potter for *years* and twist it into that. He hadn't even cared that Potter was fit until recently. Well, maybe sixth year. But that still wasn't an obsession. *Merlin*.

Narcissa's eyebrow arches elegantly. "Of course not, darling."

Draco scowls at her.

"Oh, don't." His mother's amusement is obvious. "You'll end up with wrinkles."

"I'm *eighteen*," Draco says through clenched teeth, but his brow relaxes. One doesn't want to tempt fate, after all.

Narcissa reaches up to tug the tasseled rope that hangs from the high ceiling. "As for your young man—"

Draco grits his teeth. "Mother. Potter's *not* my young man."

"Well, I don't know what else you'd call him, Draco." His mother gives him an even look. "He's bearing your child."

Draco looks away. His stomach flutters slightly at the thought of Potter being his somehow. He doesn't know what to think about that.

Narcissa stands and walks to Draco. Her hand settles on his shoulder. "In any case, I insist that he be invited for Christmas."

Gratitude washes over Draco, coupled with awe at his mother's resolve in the face of anything life can throw at her. "Thank you, Mother."

A house-elf enters, bobbing her head. Her ears flop forward. "Miss Cissy is being ringing?"

"Yes, Essie." Narcissa's voice is gentle. Even the elves have been scarred by His Lordship's occupation of the Manor. "Will you bring my formal stationery? And my seal? I've an invitation to write."

With a nod and a snap of her long fingers, the elf disappears. His mother looks back at him.

"Draco, have you considered Mr Potter might not wish to come?" Narcissa purses her mouth. "After all, he has less reason than we do to have pleasant associations with the Manor. And it's been difficult enough for us."

"I know." Draco chews his lip. He remembers all too well the night Potter stumbled into the Manor, his face swollen and puffy. Draco had lied for him, lied because he'd known even then that only Potter

could end the nightmare the Dark Lord was dragging them all into. He looks up at his mother. "But I don't want him to be alone on Christmas."

Narcissa nods and holds out her hand. He takes it. "Then we'll make certain he isn't." She smiles. "I've been waiting for a grandchild," she says. "Andromeda will be thrilled. She's been wishing Teddy could find a playmate."

At that moment, Draco realises his entire life has shifted, and something entirely new is going to take the place of the old.

He's terribly afraid he likes it.



The nearly empty Great Hall looks impossibly cheerful, Harry thinks, looking around him.

After the students had left, Flitwick had decided that Harry should be learning more ornamental charms, it being Christmas and all, so he pulled out extra resources from the library and they'd been casting for days. Harry's entire body aches from the effort, but other than a few fiery explosions when his magic had gone a bit wonky, it'd gone rather well. He's discovering he likes charms, which surprises him given how average he'd been at it through the years.

"It comes that way sometimes," Flitwick had said, happily casting a charm that had sent a thick garland of evergreen boughs cascading along the front of the staff table. He'd eyed with approval the shimmering glass globes Harry'd tucked between the leaves. "Charms work is quite frequently more of an art than a science, and I do believe you've quite an artist's touch there, my boy. Lovely work. Lovely."

And now a miniature Father Christmas with a sleigh and reindeer circles over Harry's head and weaves through the antique silver-topped candles, a charm Flitwick had taught Harry to cast from a crumbling German book. Delicate crystalline stars gleam in the tall windows, lending a soft glow to the empty tables, and swags of greenery hang from the rafters, dotted with fairy lights in the shapes of tiny silver flowers and large globes in which snow is falling on tiny magical scenes.

Fairies dance in the air, following the sleigh and sometimes riding the reindeer. A Quidditch team wearing Santa hats circles the enormous and heavily laden tree, interweaving with a chain of brightly coloured Hippogriffs. A warm fire blazes in the hearth, and the Yule log burns white and gold with flames that form gleaming lions, snakes, badgers, and ravens and sparks in the shape of *Hs*.

Harry and Hermione sit at the empty Gryffindor table, wrapping presents, while Ron reads a copy of *Quidditch Weekly*, a look of complete absorption on his face. They'd finished dinner over an hour ago but they like spreading their tasks out on the table, lingering alone amidst the quiet and light of the Great Hall before going back to Harry's sitting room.

Also, and more importantly, Harry thinks, they'd all eaten so much chocolate and cloudberry trifle, they don't feel like moving.

"Harry, can you hand me the scarlet ribbon?" Hermione finishes wrapping a book for George and looks at the package critically. "Should I add holly or a spray of golden bells to this one?"

Harry tilts his head. "I don't know. Bells, maybe."

With a wave of Hermione's wand, the ribbon wraps around the package. A second spell attaches the miniature golden bells to the bottom of the scarlet bow. They jingle softly.

"Lovely." Hermione puts it on the large pile next to her, which groans as it shifts.

"I can't believe Krum is going to be *leaving* Bulgaria." Ron says, his voice muffled by the paper in front of his face. "How much do you think the Águilas de Madrid paid for him?"

"Loads," Harry said. He reaches for a sheet of wrapping paper. It sticks to his fingers, and he frowns as he shakes it free. "Wasn't there some talk of his playing in the States?"

"Yeah." Ron turns a page in the paper. The Pudd United players on the front page tumble across each other, their brooms falling to the edge of the photograph. "And the Wimbourne Wasps wanted him, but Madrid outbid everyone."

Harry whistles. "That must be a good contract then."

Hermione finished affixing a tiny white flower spray to a small dark blue box. Harry knows it's a bracelet for Ginny and he feels bad that he hasn't bought her anything. He's sending along presents for the family, and he'll give Ron and Hermione their gifts before they leave on Christmas Eve, but it's strange to send nothing for Ginny. He wishes he could make it all right. Maybe next year.

"Are you sure you won't come?" Hermione asks in a casual tone, setting the present atop the tilting pile. "You know everyone wants to see you."

Ron looks up from his paper. "Yeah, mate. I know it's strange, but, well, frankly, it's been a strange year and all."

Harry nods and looks down at the length of ribbon remaining in his hands. He coils it carefully. "I'm sure."

Hermione starts to speak, then stops.

Ron gives her a look. He folds his paper and sets it aside. "We'll be back before New Year's. And you can always come after Christmas if that's easier. But we'll be back soon."

"Thanks," Harry says. "I'm really okay. I don't mind the time by myself right now." In truth, he almost welcomes a week or so on his own. Or as much so as he can be in a castle filled with elves and the handful of staff and students who are staying over the holidays. He doesn't particularly want to be alone on Christmas, but it would be far worse to cause trouble. If he has the choice, solitude looks a lot better. Besides, he's used to holidays at Hogwarts. He likes the quiet of the castle when the students are away. He ignores the niggle deep inside that wishes Malfoy could be here with him.

Hermione frowns. "Harry--"

Harry shakes his head. "Make sure Molly and Arthur know that I want to see them. And I'll come to visit soon."

Ron looks down at Harry's swelling belly. It's pressed firmly against the edge of the table. The baby likes the pressure, Harry thinks. Or something. All he knows is that it stops moving so much when he sits like this, which is a welcome respite for him.

"Maybe it's better this way," Ron says, finally.

Harry nods. He sets the coiled ribbon down. "Yeah, I think so right now. Don't want too many surprises for the holidays." He tries to laugh, but it won't quite come out right.

"What's that owl doing up there?" Hermione looks up at the bird resting on the rafters, looking perplexed as an amassed group of fairies dances around the candles and the sleigh circles the far end of the room.

"I don't know." Harry waves his wand, and a gentle wind disperses the group of fairies. The long silver-topped candles flicker and the huge eagle owl sights him and swoops down to the table.

Harry takes the heavy parchment roll tied with a blue ribbon and sealed with an *M* in thick black wax. "Do we have anything for the owl, Hermione?"

"No," she says. "I'll ask the elves if they have owl treats."

Harry cracks the heavy seal with a butter knife and unrolls the parchment. It's thicker and softer than anything he's ever received.

"Who is it from?" Ron asks.

Harry looks up and he's sure his eyes are wide. His stomach's just dropped about a mile. He can only choke one word out. "Malfoy."

"Really," Hermione says, returning with the treats and feeding one to the owl perched on the back of the chair next to her. "But he just left."

Harry swallows and shakes his head. "No. *Narcissa* Malfoy."

Ron and Hermione both gape at him. Hermione curses as the owl pecks at her finger, then she sets the treats down on the table. The owl greedily settles on the table and begins snuffling among them.

"What does she want?" Ron asks.

"She wants me to come for Christmas." Harry smooths the parchment out on the table and stares down at the neatly written lines. There's not a single stray drop of ink. "To Malfoy Manor."

"But, that's--She can't think--" Hermione puts a hand over her mouth. "Oh, Harry!"

Harry's mouth is dry. "She's invited me for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day."

Ron gives a low whistle. "Draco must've told her."

“He’s the only one who could’ve,” Harry says. He looks back down at the parchment. Narcissa’s signature curls across the bottom. “Everyone else is barred by Fidelius.”

“That’s actually very brave of her.” Hermione drops a few more of the treats in front of the owl.

“Brave?” Harry and Ron ask the question simultaneously.

“She must know you’ll refuse.” Hermione glances up at them. The owl steals a treat from her palm, nipping her as she does. Hermione jerks her hand away. “She’s asked you anyway. I think that’s brave.”

“That’s mental, is what that is.” Ron shakes his head. His red hair falls into his eyes and he brushes it back again. “Mental. Why would you go back there?”

Harry shrugs. He drops his hands to his belly and rubs lightly. The baby shifts at his touch. Guhathakurta’d warned him in his check-up two days ago that it’d start pummeling him soon. Malfoy had just laughed and said that would come from his side of the family. Harry can still feel the warmth of Malfoy’s gaze. “I suppose because that’s where they’re spending Christmas.”

“But you’re going to say no, aren’t you?” Ron asks, worried. He leans across the table. “I mean, it’s better to be alone than to be there. Right?”

Harry hesitates. But Malfoy’s at the Manor, he thinks, and then he’s horrified that the thought’s even crossed his mind. It’d only been this past Easter that he’d been dragged into the Manor by Greyback’s Snatchers. Hermione looks away, and Harry knows she’s thinking of it too, remembering Bellatrix Les-trange holding her down, torturing her with the Cruciatu s Curse.

He shudders at the memory of her screams echoing through the Malfoy dungeon. “I think Mrs Malfoy was trying to be kind,” he says finally. “But I can’t go and I don’t know what to say.”

Hermione gives him a firm look. “We’ll owl her back and send your thanks. Then we’ll tell her that you’ve made other arrangements. Should we write this in the sitting room?”

The owl swoops back to the chair back and starts grooming its feathers.

“Here,” Harry says. He wants to get this over with as soon as possible.

Ron pushes a parchment pad and a self-inking quill across the table. “Use this.”

Harry rips the first sheet off and wads it up. He tosses it across the room and the owl dives after it. Malfoy’s going to kill him for this, he knows. But he can’t.

He picks up the quill and sighs.



Draco walks up the winding path to the castle from Hogsmeade, his boots crunching through the thin crust of snow on the hard ground. He supposes he could’ve Floo’d directly into the staffroom, but he’d wanted some time to think. His heavy charcoal wool cloak swirls around his legs as he walks. He

remembers this path being interminably long when he was younger, but now it seems he's scarcely through the gates and then he's arriving at the side door in the courtyard.

He doesn't want to go through the front door right now.

"Go to him," Narcissa had said to Draco an hour ago as he fidgeted over breakfast, barely eating. He'd bought presents for Potter, and he kept looking at them lying under the little tree in the converted sitting room. "If you're this concerned, then go to him. Perhaps it will be easier for both of you to say things in person."

Draco knows his mother is right, but still, he doesn't know why he's come. It's probably useless. Potter'd sent his refusal back almost immediately, polite enough that Draco was certain Granger must have drafted it. His mother had read the ink-smudged parchment carefully, not even giving a sign past a small nostril flare at how middle class she found the phrasing. She'd merely announced that Mr Potter wouldn't be joining them after all, then asked Draco if he would like to see the letter.

Stung by Potter's assumed diffidence, he'd refused. Narcissa had frowned, but she'd folded the parchment neatly and left it on the side table. She'd known perfectly well that he'd pick it up the moment she left the room.

He had.

Now, as he pushes the heavy oak and metal door open and his steps ring through the empty stone hallway, Draco knows how difficult it was for Potter to be invited. Even Draco, with his happier memories of the Manor in his childhood, finds it hard to walk through the long corridors, remembering how terrified he was that Yaxley would turn the corner, or Greyback, or--the greatest fear of all--that he'd hear the soft sweep of scales against stone that would warn him that His Lordship was passing, Nagini at his side.

Still. Potter shouldn't be alone for Christmas. Maybe he will come if Draco asks him personally, tells him it's all right. Maybe it will matter when he sees how much Draco wants him to be there.

Maybe.

Draco gapes when he enters the empty Great Hall. Although there are no candles and the grey light outside of the windows is faint, the room glows with all manner of decoration and ornaments. It looks like a charms book exploded, and Draco can't help but smile. He can see Potter's handiwork across the room. He's certainly improving, Draco thinks. These charms are far more sophisticated than what he'd been doing two weeks ago.

A sleigh circles above his head, and he swears softly as he walks into a chair while looking up at it. Snow drifts down to the tables, disappearing the moment each flake strikes the worn wood. A handful of fairies flit behind him--a few brave ones even risk playing with his hair. He shoos them away gently and smoothes it back into place as he leaves the Great Hall and ducks down a narrow hall towards the staircase to their rooms.

When Draco reaches the small familiar corridor and sees the arched door, even though he's just left a few days ago, his heart jumps into his throat. He must be mad. He considers turning back. Potter will mock him. And not just Potter - he hears Granger's voice and then Weasley's muffled through the thick wood of the door.

“Draco.”

He turns at the voice. Albus Dumbledore regards him from a portrait frame across the hall. The old friar who usually snoozes in the painted armchair is gone, and Dumbledore’s feet are propped up on his overstuffed ottoman. His garish orange and yellow striped socks nearly blind Draco.

“Sir.” Draco keeps his voice even. He doesn’t like Dumbledore. He never has. But Potter respects the man--God only knows why--and Draco’d rather avoid that particular argument if he can.

“Happy Christmas,” Dumbledore says and he settles his hands on his stomach, over his long beard. The gesture reminds Draco of Potter, and something deep inside him twinges.

He nods. “And yourself.” He puts his hand on the door handle.

“I’ve been keeping an eye on him.”

At that, Draco turns. Dumbledore’s watching him carefully. “Have you?”

“Magic exists, Draco, that you’ve not yet encountered,” Dumbledore says cryptically.

Draco scowls at him. He’s always hated it when the old bastard goes off on some idiotically barmy and generally useless tangent. Even in oils the Headmaster is irritating. “I’m not terribly surprised.”

Dumbledore yawns and scratches at his arm. “There’ll be a day when you are. I certainly hope you’re prepared for it.”

“That makes entirely no sense,” Draco protests, but the Headmaster’s nodded off, or at least is pretending that he has.

With a huff of annoyance, Draco turns back to the door. “Potter stinks,” he says--he’d been the one to win this month’s Knut toss over the password, much to Potter’s dismay--and the handle shifts beneath his fingers.

The scene that meets him on the other side is so comical, he would laugh if he weren’t so nervous. Instead he just stands in the doorway and looks at Harry, who’s wearing a dark blue dressing gown over a truly hideous jumper of gold and scarlet, a pair of blue striped pyjama pants, and--dear God--fuzzy slippers in the shape of Norwegian Ridgebacks. His mouth is open in a small o, and his glasses are threatening to slide off the end of his nose. Draco glances instinctively down and wonders that Potter’s bump is really that big already.

“Draco,” Granger says, setting down the lumpy bag she’s carrying on the small table next to the sofa. “You’re back.”

He nods. Weasley eyes him from the ottoman, where he has his wand pointed at the biggest pile of chocolate frogs spread across the floor that Draco’s ever seen.

“Hungry?” Draco asks, trying to be amusing. No one laughs.

“They’re getting ready to go to the Burrow,” Potter explains, drawing his dressing gown more tightly around him. He twists the end of the belt around his fingers, then looks at Draco with impassive green eyes. “We’re just finishing packing everything.”

A flush rises on Draco’s face. “Can I- Can we talk alone for a moment?”

Potter shrugs, and he glances over at his friends.

Weasley frowns. “Harry,” he says, but Potter holds up a hand. He looks back at Draco.

“About what?”

Draco shifts, clenching the cuffs of his robe in his fingers. “What do you think?” he asks acerbically. Honestly, Potter’s not that stupid.

Potter eyes him for a moment. “All right,” he says, and he walks into his bedroom. Draco follows. He doesn’t bother to close the door; he knows Granger and Weasley will be listening.

“It’s not about you,” Potter says, turning towards him. The bed behind him is unmade, and clothes are strewn across the floor.

Draco steps over a pair of jeans. “I know.” He shoves his hands into his pockets. “It’s about the Manor.”

“Yeah.” Potter’s hair sticks up wildly. Draco’s fairly certain he hasn’t even combed it today. “It’s...” He trails off and sits down on the edge of the bed. The swell of his belly is obvious beneath the knot of his dressing gown belt. Draco can’t take his eyes off it.

He walks over to Potter, stopping in front of him. He touches Potter’s cheek, and his fingers drift over Potter’s stubbled jaw. “I want you for Christmas,” he says quietly, and then his face heats when he realises what he’s said. He doesn’t correct himself though. It’s true.

Potter looks up at him. “Malfoy.”

“It scares me too,” Draco admits. His heart thuds against his chest at the look in Potter’s eyes. He squats in front of him, his palms on Potter’s thighs. “I woke up last night screaming--”

Potter’s hands catch Draco’s face. His fingers are wide and thick, and when his thumb sweeps across Draco’s bottom lip, Draco can’t stop his soft sigh.

“I’m sorry,” Potter says.

Draco can barely breathe as Potter’s hand cups his jaw. “Unless you’ve a nasty snake as a familiar, Potter, it’s not your fault.” Potter’s dressing gown scrunches beneath his fingers. “I want you at the Manor for Christmas. You shouldn’t be alone.” His whole body aches for Potter to kiss him.

Potter does.

His lips are rough and dry, and when Draco’s tongue flicks against them, they open just enough. Draco lurches forward, his body sliding between Potter’s thighs, his hands gripping Potter’s hips. The kiss is slow and lingering, and Draco finally pulls away, he’s flushed and trembling.

“Come home with me,” he whispers.

When Potter nods, Draco slumps against him in relief, his cheek resting against Potter’s bump. Potter’s hand settles on Draco’s head, stroking softly. Neither of them speak.

“Harry,” Weasley says from the doorway, and Draco starts to pull away. Potter holds him still. Weasley hesitates for the briefest moment before he continues. “Hermione and I are off to the Burrow. Are you okay?”

“Yeah.” Potter’s voice is raw and rough. His fingers trace the curve of Draco’s ear. “I’m going to the Manor for Christmas.”

Weasley’s silent.

“I’ll be okay, Ron,” Potter says.

“We’ll Floo you then.” Weasley’s voice is tight. Potter just nods. His fingers keep moving across Draco’s hair. Draco closes his eyes.

After what seems like an eternity, the door snicks shut.

“Happy Christmas,” Potter murmurs.

Draco thinks perhaps it might be.



The Manor is dark and cold.

Harry steps out of the Floo, slightly breathless. To Guhathakurta’s delight, his magic has stabilised over the past few months, enough so that the rush of Floo travel doesn’t leave him disoriented and gasping, but it’s uncomfortable enough.

Malfoy steadies him, his fingers gripping Harry’s elbow. “You’re all right?”

“Yeah.” Harry’s hand settles on his bump. The baby expresses its displeasure with a foot in his bladder, and Harry winces. *Brat*, he thinks affectionately. *Take after your father, do you?*

He looks around as Malfoy picks up the small bag he’s packed and hefts it over his shoulder. Harry recognises the hall. Scabior and Greyback had dragged them through the front door, into this long, stone corridor lined with Malfoy portraits. His fingers brush his jaw, remembering how swollen it’d been, how his skin had stung so fiercely, stretched pink and shiny across his face.

And Narcissa Malfoy had stood in front of him, studying his distorted face, her blue eyes blank and icy before she’d led him in to a brightly lit room, all purple and gilt.

They say they’ve got Potter...

Harry closes his eyes. He can see it all, feel it all. His heart pounding, the tang of fear in the back of his throat. Lucius touching him, his finger hovering over his distended scar. Malfoy's terrified face as he looked away, refusing to confirm Harry's identity. The sharp shriek of Bellatrix Lestrange's laughter, the echo of her slap on Ron's face as he begged her to take him instead of Hermione. The dankness of the dungeons. The touch of Luna's hand on his arm as she cut through the ropes on his and Ron's wrists. How his scar had burned, hot and fierce. Hermione's screams as each Crucio wracked her body. Ron's desperation to get to her. The tightness of Wormtail's silver hand, crushing the breath from him. The glitter of Bellatrix's knife against Hermione's throat. The brush of Harry's fingers against Malfoy's as he jerks the three wands from his grasp.

Dobby's limp body in his arms afterwards, blood staining Harry's shirt as he held the tiny elf to him and sobbed.

Harry trembles. Why is he here? Why had he agreed to come back--

"Potter," Malfoy says softly. He turns Harry to face him. "Look at me."

Harry can't.

Malfoy's hands rest on Harry's hips. "Potter." His forehead presses against Harry's; Harry can feel the warmth of Malfoy's breath and the soft stroke of his thumbs against the wool of Harry's robe.

Harry takes a deep breath and opens his eyes. He sees Malfoy. Just Malfoy. Not the Manor. Not the corridor. Not the portraits. He huffs a bit self-consciously, but he doesn't pull away. The roundness of his bump presses against Malfoy's flat stomach. Somehow it makes him feel...not better, but not as unsettled as a moment before. "Sorry."

Malfoy snorts, but he gives Harry a faint smile. "We can go back to Hogwarts if you'd like."

Harry can see the worry in his eyes. He shakes his head. He'd made it through the memories of Hogwarts this summer. He can do it here. Maybe.

Still, he doesn't object when Malfoy takes his hand. They look at each other for a long moment, and Harry knows Malfoy's also thinking of their last encounter here eight months ago. "It's weird," Harry says, "how much can change so quickly."

Malfoy just nods as he leads Harry down the cold corridor. "This isn't what I would have expected a year ago." The murmurs from the portraits echo their surprise. Malfoy frowns at them and steps closer to Harry.

"I don't think anyone would have, really," Harry says wryly. He eyes the portrait of a scowling old woman, her entire body dwarfed by the enormous feathered turban perched on her silver curls. He's afraid if she moves her head it'll go sailing off. Judging by her stiff posture, he thinks she is as well. "We should be the poster boys for St Mungo's next safe sex campaign."

"Don't give Guhathkurta the idea." Malfoy starts up the enormous curved marble staircase.

Harry follows him. "It's cold in here."

“We’re only using one wing,” Malfoy says over his shoulder. “Neither Mother nor I care to be in these rooms.” He sounds grim. “Too many memories.”

Harry thinks he hears a scurrying noise in the shadows. It unsettles him.

Two more darkened hallways, their chests and chairs and tables draped with heavy white canvas, then another, thankfully shorter flight of stairs, and Malfoy pushes open a tall black door, ornately carved and gleaming. The corridor beyond is lit by enormous wall sconces that cast a bright glow over the polished wood floor. More portraits line the walls, but these look friendlier, Harry thinks, or perhaps that’s just misplaced optimism.

Malfoy points a few out as they pass: Great-great-aunt Leda who’d had twins she’d named Castor and Pollux (“That branch of the family was always so *predictable*,” Malfoy says with a curl of his lip); Great-great-great-grandfather Hector (“Who was as frightfully dull as his name sounds--don’t get into a conversation with him unless you’re dying to discuss sheep breeding in the early nineteenth century.”); Cousin (“God only knows how many times removed, though I’m sure Father could tell you”) Reuben, a charming rake whom Malfoy had been forbidden to talk to as a child (“Of course I did--he told the best stories about Dashwood’s Hellfire Club, though I was twelve before I realised what exactly the Monks of Medmenham were up to. To be honest, for the longest time, I thought it was a pub frequented by rather a lot of clergy.”)

Reuben winks at Harry and raises a small crystal goblet filled with a dark red wine. “He wasn’t far off,” he calls out as they pass.

They stop in front of a tall, broad shouldered man with piercing grey eyes and a short shock of blond hair that falls across his forehead. He’s barely older than the two of them, Harry thinks, and while his jaw isn’t as pointed or his body as wiry thin, he’s obviously a direct relative to the boy standing next to Harry.

“Grandfather Abraxas,” Malfoy says quietly, and the portrait scowls down from his perch on the pale green brocade wall.

“I see you’re back.” Abraxas Malfoy’s voice is higher than Harry expected. He clutches the lapels of his robe with both hands, and the look on his face makes clear his opinion of this.

Malfoy shrugs. “I’m sure you’re pleased.” Grandfather and grandson eye each other with disdain until Abraxas drops down into his painted chair. He crosses one booted leg over his knee.

“Go on then,” Abraxas says. “Your mother’s been in a tizzy all morning. Ordering the elves about. Honestly, that woman. Never did understand what Lucius saw in her. Flighty chit. No appreciation of family values, letting that Muggle-loving sister of hers visit with that wolf’s boy. Wouldn’t have allowed it in my day, and that cow damned well knows it. Now her sister Bellatrix, on the other hand...there was a fine gel.” He nods approvingly. “Spirit and propriety, that’s the ticket.”

Malfoy turns his back on his grandfather. “Potter,” he says, but Harry just looks at Abraxas, appalled.

“You’re an arse,” he says after a moment.

Abraxas's eyes narrow. He leans forward in his chair. "And if I'm not mistaken..." His eyes drop down to the swell of Harry's belly under his robe. "You're the aberration what's ruined my grandson's reputation." His gaze flicks over to Malfoy, and his thin lip curls in distaste. "Not that he had much of one to begin with, given his proclivities."

"Leave him alone." Reuben sticks his head into Abraxas's portrait. "You need a good shag yourself, Abbie. Do you a world of good."

Before Abraxas can reply, a door opens.

"Draco."

Narcissa Malfoy steps into the corridor. She's thinner than Harry remembers--too thin, he thinks--but her Alice blue robe is perfectly tailored to her tall frame and her pale hair is twisted into a neat chignon at the nape of her neck.

Malfoy crosses to her and kisses her cheek. "I've brought him," he whispers, and a small smile curves Narcissa's pink lips.

"I see." She turns a cool gaze on Harry.

For a moment, fear spikes in Harry. Perhaps this is a mistake. Perhaps they've brought him here to punish him, to lock him in the dungeon like they had with Ollivander and Dean and Luna, for Christ's sake--she was their family, what would stop them from doing that to him?

And then Narcissa steps towards him. "Mr Potter," she says warmly, and Harry finds his hands caught between hers, her skin surprisingly soft. "I'm so glad you could join us. I've tea waiting."

"Thank you." Harry says. He'd like to say he's glad to be here but he's still not entirely sure. Malfoy is watching them nervously, his gaze flickering between his face and his mother's.

Narcissa regards Harry with sharp eyes. "Draco, darling," she says. "Take Mr Potter's bag to your room, please. I've had the elves prepare it."

Malfoy blinks. "My room. Not the blue room?" He hesitates. "Have you moved me into there?"

"No." His mother doesn't look away from Harry. "It seemed appropriate that you both share."

Harry feels a flush creep up his neck. "It's not necessary," he protests. "I'm sure the blue room is fine."

"Nonsense." Narcissa glances back at Malfoy, one eyebrow arching. "Darling, if you please? I'd like a moment with Mr Potter."

Malfoy gives Potter a look both surprised and concerned. "Is that all right with you?"

It's not, but Harry's not about to admit that under the circumstances. "Sure."

Narcissa purses her lips and observes. She's obviously not used to being questioned. Malfoy glances between them again, then hefts Harry's bag back over his shoulder. He starts down the hall.

“Come in, please,” Narcissa says, stepping back through the door. Harry follows her slowly, trying not to be caught out looking for unexpected hazards.

The room is small, at least compared to the rooms downstairs. A fire crackles in the hearth, and a gilt-framed mirror hangs above the chimneypiece. Harry catches a glimpse of his own pale face and floor-rumpled hair. He tries to smooth it down, but it’s been nearly impossible to keep it neat the past month or two. His unruly magic makes it spring right back up again, especially since the baby’s been growing. He lays a hand on his chest for a moment, touching the Resurrection Stone through the cloth of his shirt. He’s been wearing it on a chain almost constantly since late November, only taking it off at night. Not even Ron or Hermione knows. He’s certain they’d be horrified, but the gentle thrum of magic is soothing.

“Please sit,” Narcissa says politely, gesturing to a pale wood and brocade armchair. She settles on the sofa and reaches for the teapot. “Draco tells me you prefer your tea black and sweet.”

Harry nods. He sits in the armchair, surprised that Malfoy’s remembered something like that. He’s no idea how Malfoy takes his. He rubs his hand over his bump absently, until he realizes the flutter in his stomach isn’t coming from the baby but rather from his own nerves. He looks up to find Narcissa watching him, a curious expression on her face.

“When is the baby due?” she asks.

“Early April.” Harry takes the cup of tea she hands him. “My Healer’s scheduled a Cæsarean during Easter hols.”

“A spring baby.” Narcissa smiles. “You’re fortunate. Draco was born in early June, and the last two weeks I carried him were unseasonably warm. I swore if he was late I’d...” She laughs softly. “Well, pregnancy can be frustrating at times, as I’m afraid poor Lucius discovered.”

Poor Lucius indeed, Harry thinks. He hides his frown behind the rim of his teacup, but a cool awkwardness falls between them.

Narcissa looks down at her tea. “I realise there are...difficulties between you and our family.”

“Like your husband spending the past few years trying to kill me,” Harry says flatly. If she’s going to bring it up, he’s not going to ignore it.

“Yes,” she says. “That would be one source of contention certainly.”

“And your son breaking my nose, working for Voldemort--” He doesn’t care that she flinches. “--and in general going out of his way to make my life miserable.”

Narcissa lifts her teacup to her mouth and takes a delicate sip. “And yet, you let him close enough for this to happen now. So perhaps things are changing.”

Harry has to admit she has a point.

“I protected you,” she says after a moment.

“To get to Draco.”

Narcissa inclines her head. “Yes.” With a tap of her wand against the saucer, her teacup hovers beside her. “And yet I’ll continue to protect you.” She picks up a small glass paperweight from the table next to the sofa. “Whether or not you like it, Mr Potter, you’re a Malfoy.” She smiles faintly. “It’s a disconcerting realisation, I’m aware.”

Harry looks away. He hadn’t considered that. “But we’re not married. I don’t really think--”

The paperweight hurtles through the air, dispatched from Narcissa’s hand. Before Harry can duck, it hits something invisible a foot away from him and falls to the floor, shattering into several large pieces. Harry stares at the jagged chunks of glass on the rug. They disappear, sinking into the thick wool pile.

When he looks up again, Narcissa’s on the floor, slumped beside the sofa. He leaps out of his chair and kneels beside her. “What the hell--”

Narcissa’s breath is ragged, and a lock of her hair has slipped free from the chignon to brush against her clammy cheek. Still, she smiles up at him. “You can’t be harmed here, Harry. Not while you’re carrying a Malfoy heir. My parents insisted on that particular protective spell when I married Lucius. It’s bound into the wards.” She winces as Harry helps her back to the sofa. “You’ve met Abraxas.”

“He’s charming,” Harry says dryly. He sits down next to her. “You’re hurt.”

“The spell ricochets back on the person wishing to cause harm.” Narcissa tucks her hair back behind her ear and leans into the corner of the sofa. “It incapacitates them and is proportionate to the level of harm intended.”

“Why did you do that if you knew it would hurt you?” Harry asks. He wonders if he’ll ever understand Narcissa Malfoy.

She lifts a hand to touch his cheek. “I wanted you to know you are safe. And I didn’t know how else to show you.”

Harry just looks at her, at this woman who’d saved his life once already, if only for her family’s sake. “This baby means that much to you.”

“My son means that much to me,” Narcissa says quietly. Her hand drops to Harry’s bump, and the baby moves. Not much, but enough for Harry to feel it. “And this baby means something to him.”

“He wanted me to abort it, you know,” Harry says. He’s unsettled. A year ago, he never would have let Narcissa Malfoy touch him. Then again, a year ago, he never would have thought his knees would go weak from the faintest brush of Malfoy’s lips against his.

Narcissa regards him levelly. She moves her hand and reaches for her teacup, taking a sip before she answers. “He must have been very confused at first, as I’m sure you were. He must have also feared for your safety. I don’t think there can be any doubt now whether he wants the child.”

“I suppose not.” Harry remembers how agonising that time of decision was and how simple the choice seems now that it’s been made. “I’m sure he’d rather he wasn’t stuck with me, of course.”

"I wouldn't be too sure," Narcissa says calmly, settling her teacup back into its saucer with a barely audible clink.

"Sure of what?" Malfoy walks back into the room from the hall and stops a few paces from the sofa, hand on his lean hips and inquisitive look in his eye.

The baby kicks at the sound of his voice. Harry sits up. "Whose side the kid'll take after," he says quickly.

Narcissa gives her son a bland smile. "Was everything set up appropriately? I know it's been a bit difficult for the elves to adjust to using this wing again."

"I think my bed's bigger." Malfoy drops into the chair Harry's vacated. He eyes his mother with suspicion, and Harry ducks his head, hiding a grin as Narcissa shrugs with almost Gallic aplomb.

"One never knows what sort of nonsense they'll take into their heads, darling. They're elves, after all." She pours Malfoy a cup of tea, and, taking it, he sighs.

Harry knows exactly how he feels.



Drowsy with wine and pleasantly full, Draco watches his mother and Potter laughing at the other side of the table and is shocked by how normal it seems. They're all three making an effort to make this work out, and it hasn't been easy entirely - earlier in the evening, Potter had looked surprised that they attended midnight mass at Saint Ætheldreda's, but he'd dressed in the dark red dress robe Draco had made him pack and gone with them without complaint.

The sitting room is now adorned with enough greenery for a room twice its size. When Potter'd cast the small stars on the windows just after they'd returned from church, Draco had seen tears in his mother's eyes.

"Where did you learn that charm, Mr Potter?" she'd asked softly.

"From Professor Flitwick," Harry said, finishing the fixing process with another swish of his wand.

He hadn't turned around to see Narcissa crying. Draco'd touched his mother's arm, but she'd waved him away and gently wiped the dampness from her eyes. "I haven't seen those since I was a little girl," she'd said. "My grandmother used to put them up every Christmas."

Potter'd looked over his shoulder then and smiled. "I'm glad you like them. They came from an old German collection of charms that Professor Flitwick brought out for the holidays."

"Can you do the winter candles perhaps?" his mother had asked almost casually, but her fingertips had brushed the hollow of her throat, catching the string of pearls she's had since she was sixteen and threading them through her fingers. "The Yule ones? Grandmother wouldn't serve dinner on Christmas Day without them." She smiles faintly. "There was quite a row the year she fell ill. None of the rest of us knew the charm."

With another flick of Potter's wand a string of silver-topped candles hovered above the dinner table. Narcissa had looked up, eyes wide, and for a moment, Draco caught a glimpse of the young girl she'd once been. At dinner, she'd told stories about her grandparents he'd never heard. It was magic, but of an inexplicable sort.

Now the fruit and the cheese and the wine from the midnight meal are still on the table, and they've mostly stopped nibbling, full from the delicacies of the past courses. Potter finishes a clementine. Draco watches the last succulent segment leave his strong, solid hand. Juice drips down one finger, and Potter licks it away. His breath catching, Draco stares down at the remnants of Stilton smeared with pear preserves on his plate. When he glances up, Potter catches him looking and smiles shyly. His cheeks are flushed and his eyes bright behind his round glasses.

They don't look away.

Narcissa coughs delicately, and Draco turns to his mother, almost grateful for the distraction. "Are you all right?" he asks.

"I'm fine, darling." She hides a small smile behind her napkin as she glances over at the delicate porcelain clock perched on the chimneypiece. One of his many-greats had commissioned it from John Arnold himself in 1774. "It's almost two. Perhaps we should retire." She summons the elves to clean everything and kisses Draco on the cheek, then grasps Potter's hand for a moment. He looks surprised, but he doesn't pull away. "You both go ahead. I want to make sure everything on the tree is settled for the night."

"I can help," Potter volunteers, missing the cues that are obvious to Draco. There's a reason his mother put them in the same room. He's quite aware of that. He narrows his eyes at her; she ignores him utterly.

"No need," Narcissa says to Potter, "but thank you." She turns to her son. "I think we should sleep in. I'll tell the elves not to have breakfast ready before half ten."

Draco nods, a faint blush tingeing his face as he contemplates sleeping in a bed with Potter. They haven't ever done that, unless one counts a pile of moss and leaves to be a suitable mattress, which Draco most certainly does *not*. His mother smiles indulgently, her sharp eyes missing nothing.

"Good night," Potter says as Draco takes his hand and leads him out of the room. Narcissa waves them on as she cautions one of the elves to be careful with the crystal.

"Was it me or was your mother trying to get us to go to bed?" Harry asks after they've walked a few paces down the hall.

"Don't be crass, Potter," Draco says, "but yes, of course."

Potter only laughs. They walk down the long hallway to the large corner room with the massive four-poster bed--nearly twice as large as it'd been the night before when Draco slept in it alone--and the view of the lawns and the Italian fountain, now dry for the winter. It's cold, but the fire in the grate cuts the chill once they step nearer and the elves will have warmed the bed, Draco knows.

Draco waits while Potter washes up first. His belly is bigger, Draco thinks when Potter reemerges from the bath. He's changed into an old pair of pyjamas and a faded black Weird Sisters t-shirt, the one they'd been selling two years ago in Diagon Alley, the one with Kirley Duke's profile in grey. Seeing it stretched tightly across Potter's stomach confirms Draco's suspicion. Potter's getting larger by the day now, and he appears to be walking a little more slowly.

"All yours," Potter says, and he sits on the edge of the bed, looking around the room. Narcissa had moved up some of Draco's things from his old room: books, clothing, his Firebolt, his photographs of Slytherin House, of Greg and Vince, Pansy and Blaise, of his parents standing beside him. Potter picks one up and peers down at it before he turns it to show Draco, his eyebrows rising. "Snape?"

Draco's two or three in the photograph, all plump legs and wind-ruffled blond hair, and he's hanging over the arm of a bench in the garden, pestering Severus whose attention is firmly caught by the *British Journal of Potionbrewing* he's reading--or seemingly is until Severus scoops Draco up and sets him on the bench beside him, one hand on Draco's shoulder, holding him still.

Draco takes the photograph. Severus looks so young in it, and Draco realises he could only have been a few years older than he is right now.

"He was my godfather," Draco says finally, and he sets the frame back down among the others.

"Oh." Potter looks uncomfortable. "I didn't know."

"Most people didn't." Severus had insisted upon that before Draco came to Hogwarts. In private he was Severus his godfather. In public he was Professor Snape. Always.

Draco goes into the bath and changes into his own heavy cotton pyjamas and cleans his teeth. He looks at himself in the mirror reflexively and realises he cares how he appears to Potter. Which is silly given the situation and the fact that he's already had his mouth on Potter's cock twice now, but still.

They've been shy around each other all evening, particularly in the presence of his mother. During the service, Potter had laid a hand on Draco's thigh and Draco had covered it with his own for a few moments. That was the most physical contact they'd had, although their eyes had seemed to keep searching the other's out.

"That was the first time I've ever been in a church," Potter says as Draco is turning down the coverlet on his side of the bed. Potter is sitting cross-legged, propped up against a stack of pillows. "It was interesting. Nicer than I thought."

Draco pauses, his hand on the heavy ivory brocade. "Really?" he looks at Potter's face. "Never?"

"Never," Potter confirms. "The Dursleys--my aunt and uncle--they didn't attend church. And they probably wouldn't have brought me if they had."

Draco frowns. This is the first time Potter has told him anything about his family. "We mostly go at Christmas and Easter. Mother insists. The Blacks always were strictly C of E. My father--" There's a lump in his throat suddenly. "My father didn't like church."

"Why?" Harry shifts, turning to look at Draco.

“He thought it all poppycock.” Draco crawls onto the bed. “He wasn’t exactly fond of being told what to do.”

“Ironic,” Potter murmurs.

Draco sighs. “Well. Unless he thought it would advance him.” He leans back against his pillow--only one, as Potter’s stolen the others. He thinks about complaining, but from the way Potter’s sitting Draco suspects his back is hurting.

The sheets are warm and crisp, and Draco pulls them up to his chin. They smell faintly like the cedar and lavender his mother insists the elves keep in the linen closets year-round.

He’s nearly drifted to sleep when the mattress shifts on Potter’s side. Draco rolls over. Potter’s squatting next to the bed, digging into his bag. “Are you okay?”

Potter’s glasses have slipped to the end of his nose. When he looks up, Draco notices they’re smudged on one lens. “I’m fine,” he says, and he holds the edge of the mattress as he stands up. There’s a wrapped present in his hand.

“I was going to give this when you woke up,” he says, “but...”

Draco sits up and he’s sure his face displays his eagerness. He’s always loved presents. “It’s Christmas.”

A small smile curves Harry’s mouth. “It is.” He slides back onto the bed, setting the present in Draco’s lap. “Go on then.”

It’s a book. And it’s terribly heavy. That much surprises Draco. “Granger helped you?”

Potter’s smile widens. “Your godfather.”

Draco raises an eyebrow as he pulls the remainder of the paper from the book. He stares down at it.

Historia thestralium by Konradt Geissner.

His fingers trace the worn gilt lettering on the cover. It’s in surprisingly good condition. “Oh.”

“Snape said you were interested in studying them,” Potter says quickly. His brow furrows. “And you spend so much time with Druella...”

Draco swallows. He hadn’t even realised that Severus had paid that much attention to his ramblings about the Thestrals in their conversations over the past few months. Usually he’d cut Draco off halfway through. And Potter almost always fell asleep if he brought the subject up in the evenings. “It’s wonderful.”

Potter looks relieved. “I sent off for it,” he says. “Supposedly it’s the best book on them. It’s Latin, but there’s a translation charm--”

“I won’t need it.” Draco keeps stroking the cover, stunned. The book’s impossible to find. Or impossible if you’re not Harry Potter. Not to mention what it must have cost. Draco’s read Geissner’s abridged

version, *Thestralbuch*, stumbling through the German translation charms, and he despises the accompanying English condensation by Overby, *Historie of thestrales* which excised most of Geissner's more fascinating observations of the creatures. He's been wanting to get his hands the original since he'd discovered its existence two months ago, just to compare it to *Thestralbuch*. "Snape tutored me in Latin."

"Of course he did." Potter rolls his eyes, but he leans forward, touching the back of Draco's hand. "It's okay then?"

Draco nods and catches Potter's hand, squeezing it before letting it go. "More than. We don't even have it in the Hogwarts Library. Pince was going to track down a copy for me."

"Now she doesn't have to."

Draco looks up at him. "Thanks."

They smile at each other. Draco glances back at the book. He's itching to delve into it now. Instead, he sets it aside, carefully, trying not to bend the corners, and slides off the bed. He walks over to his wardrobe and opens a drawer, pulling out a small bag.

"I wasn't going to give you these," he says as he turns around. "I've better things under the tree. But..."

He hands the bag to Potter as he crawls back onto the bed, and he watches in trepidation as Potter pulls out the scraps of grey and red wool.

"Hagrid helped me," Draco says. Potter turns them over in his hands. "They're--"

"Gloves." Potter slides them on. The fingers are too small and the palms too large, and Draco sighs. He knew it was a ridiculously, stupidly, inanely sentimental idea that was destined for failure. Potter, on the other hand, beams at him. "They're great."

"You're an idiot." Draco tugs at one of the glove's knitted cuff. It's an inch higher than the other one. "I'm pants at this."

Potter falls back against his pillows, his hands stretched out in front of him. "No one except Molly's ever made me anything."

"Great." Draco makes a face. "I'm on the level of a Weasley."

Potter rolls to his side, his gloved hand settling on Draco's cheek. The wool is soft against Draco's skin. "You're on your own level, Malfoy." His eyes are dark behind his glasses, and Draco reaches out to brush Potter's fringe back. Potter turns his head and presses his mouth against Draco's wrist.

Draco stills. "Are you tired?"

"Not really." Potter reaches out and laces his fingers between Draco's, pulling him closer. "You?"

"Some," Draco says. He's lying. His entire body is awake, lying here next to Potter, their bodies touching. He pulls the gloves off Potter's hands slowly, one finger at a time. Potter just watches him.

Draco sets them aside, then settles next to Potter, his head on Potter's chest. He can hear the steady thud of Potter's heart. He lays his hand over Potter's t-shirt, then frowns.

"What's this?" Draco tugs at a chain around Potter's neck. There's a ring attached to it, and Draco has a flare of jealousy. "The Weaslette's?"

Potter shakes his head. "It's..." He hesitates. "An old family heirloom, I guess."

Draco turns the ring between his fingers. The gold setting's battered and scarred, but the grey-black stone still gleams. If he twists it one way he can catch a glimpse of something etched deep inside. A triangle and a circle and a straight line, all of which look oddly familiar. He frowns.

"The baby likes it." Potter takes the ring from Draco, pulling the chain over his messy hair. He sets the whole thing aside.

Draco eyes him. "The baby?"

Potter shrugs. "It calms her. Or him." He rubs his stomach. "Wee ickle beastie."

"I'll thank you not to call our child a beast." Draco's hand settles over Potter's. "It sets a bad precedent."

"Does it?" Potter leans in and drags the tip of his tongue across Draco's upper lip.

"And how can that *thing* calm him?"

"Don't know." Potter's tongue flicks at the corner of Draco's mouth. "It just does." His hand settles on Draco's hip, his fingertips slipping beneath the waist of Draco's pyjama bottoms.

With a sharp breath, Draco murmurs, "You're trying to distract me."

"Is it working?" Potter looks Draco in the eye. Draco holds his gaze. He strokes Potter's soft mouth with his thumb, and Potter bites it delicately.

His skin prickles with desire as his lips meet Potter's. "Perhaps." He puts an arm around Potter's shoulder and pulls him closer, swallowing the gasp from Potter's lips as his hand strokes down Potter's spine. Potter rocks his hips forward, pressing his belly against Draco's as he buries his mouth against the curve of Potter's throat, sucking hard enough to leave bruises.

"Fuck," Potter says as he arches his neck.

Draco is torn between protectiveness and consuming desire. He pulls his mouth away from a lurid pink mark on Potter's neck. "Did that hurt?" He strokes it with his thumb. Potter's eyelids are lowered.

"Not nearly enough."

"You idiot," Draco says affectionately, "I can't fill your neck with love bites. My mother will notice. And besides..." His hand drifts down to the growing bump between them.

Potter looks up at him then, his glasses tilted just slightly on his nose. "Oh, for fuck's sake," he says in irritation. "I'm pregnant, not made of glass. And you can heal them." He slides a leg between Draco's thighs, and, fingers tangling in Draco's hair, draws Draco's head back down to his throat. "Besides, it feels good."

"Bloody vampire," Draco says with a laugh against Potter's warm skin. He plucks Potter's glasses from his nose and leans over him to set them on the side table, beneath the lamp.

"I think I'm just a fetishist." Potter's hands slide over Draco's back, beneath his pyjama top. Draco can't stop the shiver that ripples through him, and Potter smiles against Draco's jaw.

"Shut it, Potter," Draco growls, and he rolls Potter onto his back, leaning in to kiss him as he presses him into the mattress.

Potter's teeth nip at Draco's lip. "Make me?"

Draco can't suppress another laugh. "Wretch."

When his mouth trails down Potter's jaw, sucking and biting, Potter squirms against him, breathing hard. He licks Potter's collarbones and shivers when Potter moans. Loudly.

Draco pauses to cast a Muffliato on the bed, although he suspects his mother has already done the same so she can sleep without concern.

Potter looks up at him through thick, dark lashes. He smiles in that slow, easy way that makes Draco's toes curl. "Think I'll get too loud?"

"I'm rather counting on it," Draco says, and he pushes Potter's t-shirt up. Kirley Duke wrinkles up over Potter's swollen belly, and Potter sits forward, helping Draco to pull the t-shirt over his head. Draco pushes him back onto the pillows and leans over him. He licks one of Potter's nipples, looking up at him.

"Draco," Potter breathes, and his head falls back against the headboard.

This appears to be a good sign, Draco thinks. He sucks Potter's nipple into his mouth, flicking his tongue against the hard nub as his cheek presses against Potter's skin. He can feel the groan deep within Potter's chest when it comes, and Draco's fingers fumble with the buttons of his pyjama top until it hangs open.

He pulls away to slide it off his shoulders, and Potter's watching him, biting his lip in an effort to keep quiet.

"I think I was an idiot." Potter says finally, and Draco leans in and kisses him hard, his hand resting on the swell of Potter's stomach.

"You're always an idiot."

Potter pushes him back so he can look him in the eyes. "I mean it." Potter's hands slip down Draco's chest, his fingers light on Draco's skin. "That day I told you we should pretend we never..." He licks his swollen bottom lip, leaving it wet and pink. "I've wanted you to fuck me every day since."

A sharp tingle of desire twists through Draco's body. Looking at his hand, he traces circles on Potter's abdomen, his fingers slipping beneath the stretchy waist of Potter's pyjamas. His skin heats when he realises Potter's not wearing pants. "Really."

"Yeah." Potter's hand settles over his. "Really." He leans in and kisses him, nipping at his lip. "Do you want to...." He trails off, looking at Draco.

Draco blinks. "My mother is down the hall..." Potter just looks at him, and Draco knows that's not an excuse. Narcissa had practically thrown them together all evening. She didn't seem too flustered by the idea that her son might be shagging the father of his child senseless tonight. Arousal flares through Draco again at the thought. Still he hesitates. "Aren't you a little far along for that to be safe? I mean, the baby--"

"No." Potter says calmly. "Guhathakurta suggested I couldn't have that sort of sex past seven and a half months, but right now is still fine."

"Oh." Draco says. He's a little taken aback. It's been six months since they did this last--he doesn't count sucking Potter off a few weeks ago, though he knows Pansy would mock him--and he wasn't expecting it tonight. "You talked about this with him?"

Potter looks embarrassed. "Not so much talked as was told. He assumes...." Potter's cheeks pink. "Well."

"Of course he does." Draco sighs. He's heard the rumours that are floating around Hogwarts. Just because they're sharing rooms, everyone thinks he and Potter must be shagging every night. He scowls. Perverts.

"So." Potter's fingertips brush Draco's nipple. "Do you want to fuck me?"

Draco thinks he might come just from that. His breath taken away, all he can do is nod.

They're silent for a moment, a sudden shy awkwardness falling between them. This is the first time he's contemplated this without the assistance of alcohol, Draco realises. He has a moment's panic that he might not actually be able to go through with it without a bottle or two of Dutch courage.

"Do you have lube?" Potter asks finally. "I didn't have any left."

"Yeah." Draco gets off the bed, his legs shaking, and goes to the chest of drawers. He opens a heavy warded box and pulls out a phial of lube.

"If I'm good, will you show me what's in that box?" Potter scoots to the edge of the bed, watching Draco curiously.

Draco glances down at the phials of lube, the beads and the anal plugs, and the collection of dildos he's used to fuck himself since he was fifteen. "Perhaps." He hopes the look he gives Potter is wickedly seductive and not completely pathetic. "But only if you're very, very good."

"Something to work up to then," Potter says with a sideways quirk of his mouth.

“One must have one’s goals.” Draco crawls back onto the bed, phial clenched in one hand, and reaches for Potter with the other. His fingers trace the swell of Potter’s bump. “How do we do this?”

Potter flushes. “Guhathakurta says I have to be on top or on my hands and knees.”

“You actually had this conversation with him.” Draco rolls onto his back and covers his face. “Oh, my God.”

“Look, at least it wasn’t Pomfrey,” Potter says. He pulls Draco’s hands away from his face and peers down at him indignantly. “And you weren’t the one who had to suffer through it.”

Draco glares up at him. “My sex life is now a matter of record at St Mungo’s.”

Potter kisses him. Roughly. When he pulls back, Draco’s breathless. “Our sex life,” Potter points out. “Our up until now non-existent sex life.”

“Is it going to come into existence then?” Draco’s thumb strokes the corner of Potter’s mouth.

“Rather.” Potter’s eyes are dark as he leans in to brush his lips against Draco’s. “If you think you’d like to fuck my arse again, that is.”

Draco wonders if it’s possible for a cock to rip through cotton pyjama trousers. His hand settles on Potter’s full belly, stroking lightly. He wants to be inside of him. Now. “Which do you prefer then?” he asks, his mouth dry. “Riding me or hands and knees?”

Potter smiles and turns over, wriggling his hips as he slips out of his pyjamas. He kicks them off onto the floor, then lifts his arse in the air.

“Fuck,” Draco whispers.

“I think that’s the point.” Potter looks back, balancing on his elbows. Draco can’t tear his eyes away from Potter’s perfect arse, pale and flat and begging to be pounded. Hard.

With a groan Draco pulls down his pyjama trousers, fisting his cock as he uncaps the phial of lube. It’s wet and cool against his skin, but when he slips a finger inside of Potter, it grows warm and slick.

Potter gasps. “Christ. That feels--” He shifts against Draco’s hand. “It’s too good almost.”

He’s open and relaxed, and Draco has two fingers inside of him easily. Potter looks amazing like this, his cock and belly hanging between his legs, his back arched, his arse open and ready. Everything about his pliant posture begs to be fucked.

Draco’s more than ready to do so. He presses another finger into Potter, his other hand grasping his cock tightly. Potter groans as Draco fucks him slowly, his fingers twisting with each careful thrust. A flush rises across Potter’s arse, and Draco presses his mouth to the small dip in Potter’s back.

“That’s enough.” Potter’s voice is rough and strained. His arse tightens around Draco’s fingers, and Draco can feel the tremble that goes through him.

Draco stills. "Are you okay?"

"Yes." Potter says, panting hard. His fingers grip the coverlet. He rocks forward, and Draco can see the swollen head of Potter's cock between Potter's thighs as it rubs against the brocade. "I'm just afraid I'll come, and I want you to fuck me properly."

Draco groans and slowly pulls his fingers out. Potter is rutting slowly against the bed, almost as if he's unaware of what he's doing, and Draco doesn't know how long he'll last either. "All right. You have to let me know you're okay though. I'm still worried about hurting you." His hands settle on Potter's hips.

Potter nods, breathing hard.

With another dip of his fingers in the phial, Draco slicks his cock, which is hard and already dripping, and positions himself on the bed between Potter's thighs. He can't believe he's about to do this. Again. His breath comes in sharp, ragged gasps as he guides himself to Potter's arsehole and gently presses the head of his cock against it. It slips against Potter's crease, once, twice, and Potter moans and pushes his hips back. His arse opens easily to Draco, and when Draco's cock slides inside of him, Potter arches his back and groans.

"Fuck. Malfoy." His voice is raw. "I want you so much."

Draco's fingers dig into Potter's skin, and he moves as slowly as he can make himself, further and further into the wet heat. Potter is moaning and so open, it's surprising to Draco. And then Draco is inside of him all of the way, his balls flush against Potter's arse.

"Is--" Draco closes his eyes for a second, his body shaking with the need for release. He takes a deep breath. "Is that okay?"

"More than," Potter says with a soft gasp. "It's amazing." He takes Draco's hand from his hip and puts it on his swollen abdomen.

His hand cupping Potter's belly, Draco moves, balancing on his knees as his hips pump into Potter in small strokes and the rounded swell of skin and strange hardness moves beneath his hands. "You have to let me know if anything hurts," he says breathlessly, but he's not really thinking at this point.

"It's all right, Malfoy. Just move." Potter shifts, pushing his hands up to brace himself against the headboard and spreading his knees to let Draco go deeper.

"Oh, Merlin," Draco chokes out, and he leans over Potter's back. When he grabs one of Potter's nipples, Potter keens softly and Draco's hips undulate against Potter's arse.

It's difficult to keep his balance, though, and Draco is at an alarming risk of pitching forward. "Maybe we should try this with you on top?" he suggests, leaning back for balance.

"Okay." Potter's breath is ragged.

They pull away from each other. Potter's face is stained with a red flush, and the look he gives Draco is completely wanton. It makes Draco's prick ache.

Draco lies on his back and holds Potter steady as he kneels over Draco, facing away from him. He licks his lip, his eyes fixed on Potter's arsehole, slick and open. "Why don't you take it at your own pace?"

"It can't go fast enough, from my end." Potter positions himself carefully, one hand reaching behind him to grasp Draco's cock as sinks down onto it.

Draco bites back a moan as his fingers grip Potter's hips tightly.

"Wow," Potter says. His breath hitches and he slides down further, his thighs spreading wider. His arse clenches around Draco's cock and it takes everything Draco has not to slam up into him. Potter's groan is soft. "Yeah. You feel fantastic."

Draco tries to stay still to let Potter get his balance, and then he thrusts shallowly to meet Potter as they establish a rhythm. It doesn't take long. Potter's knees dig into the mattress; Draco's hips buck up harder against Potter's arse. Their gasps and groans echo around them: Potter begs Draco to fuck him harder, and Draco responds by telling Potter how fucking good his arse feels on his prick. The bed bounces beneath them. The headboard slams loudly against the wall. Draco doesn't care. The whole fucking Manor could hear them at this point and he wouldn't give a damn.

With a moan, Potter twists his nipples between his fingers as he fucks himself roughly on Draco's cock. The sight is bloody amazing and Draco could come just from watching Potter get himself off, but he wants to touch him, wants to make Potter cry out his name as his spunk spurts across Draco's bed.

Draco leaves a hand on Potter's hip and slips another around to pull at Potter's prick. Draco sits up a little, and Potter leans forward, his arse slapping hard against Draco hips and his cock thrusting into Draco's hand. "More," Potter demands, his voice thick.

Sweat curls the ends of Potter's hair, makes Potter's flushed back gleam in the lamplight. Draco can't resist pressing his open mouth against Potter's slick skin, his tongue tracing along the salty knobs of Potter's spine. His fingers tighten on Potter's cock.

Potter groans. He grabs Draco's hand again, moving it from his hip to his belly. Draco's fingers splay across the rounded swell, and Draco doesn't think he's ever felt anything as erotic as Potter's body beneath his hand as Potter rides his prick. They rock back and forth, Potter's belly swinging with them, adding to the motion of their bodies and the bed.

And then Potter shudders against Draco. "Oh, God, Malfoy," he chokes out. "Now."

Draco clenches his fist around Potter's cock, and he pulls Potter back against him, his hand tight on Potter's stomach. Potter's knees slide wider on the bed, and he shouts as he comes, his arse clenching around Draco's cock.

Spunk spatters across them both.

In one fluid motion, Draco shifts, pushing Potter forward onto his hands and knees as he thrusts into him, his hand splayed across Potter's bump as he thinks that all of this, them, is not just two of them, but three. He strokes Potter's sides and then lower, pumping his hips wildly, breath coming in gasps. His body contracts, tight, taut, tense--oh, *God*--and then explodes. He comes hard inside Potter, arched over Potter's back, his hand cradling the rounded curve of their child and his cock buried deep in Potter's arse.

They collapse sideways together, breathing hard.

“Draco,” Potter says finally and it’s muffled against the coverlet.

It takes a moment for Draco to realise he’s speaking to him. He makes a sound--he’s not certain what--and Potter shifts beneath him with a grunt.

“Baby.” Still muffled.

Draco blinks slowly. His body feels limp. Loose. He’s not certain he’s ever come that hard before in his life. “Mmm?”

“No,” Potter says and he shifts again. “The baby--”

It sinks in then, and Draco moves, sliding out of Potter’s body. “Did I hurt--”

Potter laughs and rolls over onto his back, and Draco’s breath catches at the sight of him sprawled naked across his bed. He’s been wanking to this for weeks now and he can’t believe he actually has Harry in front of him. “The baby kicked.”

“What?” Draco suspects he must have lost brain function in that orgasm. He feels as thick as a Hufflepuff.

“It kicked. Hard.” Potter grabs Draco’s hand and presses it to his belly. “I’m not sure if it liked that or not.”

Draco looks at him. They lie still for a moment, waiting, and then he feels it. The smallest push of a tiny foot against his palm. “Oh my God,” Draco whispers.

Potter grins. “It’s been doing that for days now. Moving mostly, and sometimes I thought it kicked. Never that hard though.”

“Oh my God.” Draco stares down at his hand. “It’s real.”

“Yeah.” Potter’s hand settles over Draco’s. “Scares the shit out of you, doesn’t it?”

Draco nods. “In a manner of speaking.” He doesn’t move his hand. “Do you think it knows what we’re doing?”

“I’m fairly certain it doesn’t have any idea what sex is.” Potter kisses him. “I, on the other hand...”

Draco nips Potter’s bottom lip. “Are you going to be insatiable now?”

“Perhaps,” Potter says with a sparkle in his eye. He reaches for Draco. “Would you care?”

Whatever mad protest Draco might possibly have made is cut off by another kiss, long and slow and lingering.

Draco finds he doesn’t quite mind.



Harry owls Ron and Hermione on Boxing Day to tell them he's spending New Year's with Draco and not to worry, but they'd rather not have company. Hermione owls back and insists on a Floo call to confirm--*honestly, Harry, they could have Imperiused you over Christmas dinner for all we know, she writes--*and despite Malfoy's grumbings about idiot Gryffindors and their prejudices, Harry dutifully calls the Burrow from Malfoy's fireplace, kneeling before the grate in the soft bottle-green wool robe Malfoy had given him to replace his own ragged bathrobe.

"You're certain you're fine?" Hermione asks, her brow furrowed with worry. The green flames flicker and dance around her messy curls. Harry can hear the others behind her, and Hermione turns and whispers, "Shush, Ron," rather crossly.

"I'm fine." Harry smiles at her. "I promise. No Imperius, no potions--"

"Other than lube," Malfoy murmurs from the bed. He turns another page in *Historia thestralium*, and Harry gives him a reproving look.

He turns back to Hermione. "You don't have to come check on me. We're going back to Hogwarts tomorrow, and I'll Floo you again--"

"Maybe we should come through." Hermione chews her lip. "Just to make sure."

"You don't want to do that," Harry says calmly.

"Why not?" Ron's face appears in the flames beside Hermione's.

Harry sighs. "Because right now, Ron, I'm absolutely starkers beneath my robe, and I'm about ready to shuck it off and crawl back into bed with Malfoy, so I rather think your popping over would be quite inconvenient."

If it's possible to turn greener in Floo fire, Ron manages it. "Yeah," he says. "Didn't need to know that--in fact, I think none of us needed to know that--"

"Right in one," Bill shouts from the background, and Harry can hear Ginny's peeling laughter.

Charlie's face pops over Ron's shoulder. "I wouldn't mind knowing more," he says, giving Harry a good-natured leer that makes Malfoy shut his book with a thump, and tell Harry sharply that he's wanted now, thank you very much.

"Oh, for goodness--" Hermione pushes them all away, flustered. "We'll Floo your rooms tomorrow then, Harry. If you don't answer, I'm coming through." She lifts her chin. "Whatever I might find."

The Floo clangs shut, and Malfoy snorts.

"Gryffindors," he says, as Harry slips out of his robe and slips beneath the coverlet, and Harry hushes him with a kiss.

When they arrive back at Hogwarts, there's a basket sitting in front of their door. They eye it suspiciously, and Malfoy nudges it with his boot. It doesn't explode, at least, although Harry's not entirely certain that's a comfort.

"Were you expecting a present?" Malfoy asks.

Harry shakes his head, and Malfoy bends down to pick the basket up. He hands it to Harry; it's surprisingly light. He opens it as Malfoy unwards the door.

"Oh," Harry says, and he pulls out a giant stuffed squid. It's an atrocious shade of lavender and its tentacles wriggle and curl around Harry's wrist.

Malfoy looks back at him. "That can't be safe."

"No." Harry steps into their suite. "There's more." He sets the basket on the sofa and digs deeper into it.

"Should I be afraid?" Malfoy asks lightly.

Harry pulls out an enormous glittery pink hand mirror. "Probably."

Malfoy wrinkles his nose. "As if our child won't be bent as it is."

"Don't stereotype," Harry says absently, as he lifts out a giant mobile that's been obviously made by hand. Charmed bits of coloured wood hang off the bright teal arms: merpeople and fish and sea monsters and eels.

"I think there's a theme." Malfoy touches a merman, who waves a tiny golden trident at him. Harry's doesn't really think it's meant to be a friendly gesture.

"There's also a note," Harry says, and he unfolds a piece of pink parchment. He hands it to Malfoy. "First years."

Malfoy skims the note. "We've really got to do something about their taste," he murmurs. "No one should use a Glitter Quill past the age of seven."

With a laugh, Harry grabs Malfoy's hand and pulls him towards his bedroom.



They spend the next few days exploring each other's bodies, wrapped in a world of skin and warmth and discovery. Malfoy moves into Harry's room--"It's bigger, you twat," he says with a smile, and Harry just pulls him down onto the bed to kiss him senseless--and Harry pretends not to notice when Malfoy sets the photo of his toddler self and his godfather on the chimneypiece beside the photo of Harry and his parents, but he does catch Snape's eyes drifting towards Lily Potter as she spins Harry around, laughing all the while.

In bed with Malfoy, Harry learns technique and skill and tempo and that pleasure is wanting as well as having, and when Malfoy slips from beneath the covers their first night and pads naked over to the bag he's brought from the Manor, Harry sits up, curious. Malfoy pulls a familiar warded box from his bag and opens it.

"Here's something I've always wanted to try on someone," Malfoy says, turning around with a short string of beads looped over his fingertips. A half-hour later, Harry flops on the bed, panting and flushed across their widened bed, looking up at Malfoy with wide eyes and spunk spattered across the underside of his belly.

Malfoy leans in and trails his fingers through the mess. "I'd say that's a successful experiment," he murmurs, and he slides down to suck the sticky head of Harry's cock.

Harry would have to agree.

They convince the elves to bring food to their quarters, so they don't have to dress for the Great Hall, and they sprawl naked together, feeding each other between bouts of sleep and sex and showers together. Two days before New Year's, Draco finally rolls out of bed to help Hagrid with the Porlocks, but returns twenty minutes later, stripping off his jumper and reporting that he'd been told he should "spend time with 'arry while he can."

Neither of them complain.

And Malfoy calls him "Harry" now, too, and Harry calls him "Draco." It seems silly to continue with the custom of last names when they are twined around each other for hours on end.

New Year's Eve is spent in bed. The round turret room is filled with ivory candles of every shape and size--a present Harry sets up for Draco while he's off in the loo. The look on Draco's face when he walks back in to find Harry waiting for him, his skin warmed by the flickering light of a hundred candles, makes Harry's struggle with the charm worth it. They lie for hours in the candlelight and talk about their futures and their pasts, in between bouts of furious shagging.

Harry doesn't remember if he's ever felt so alive and so weightless before.

Their friends reassert their presence as term gets under way again, and though Harry's glad that Hermione and Ron come to his rooms as if nothing has happened to talk about assignments and NEWT revisions, he misses the time alone he had with Draco.

And then something strange happens: Ron challenges Draco to a chess game that doesn't end in hexes and bloodshed and then Hermione asks Draco for his advice on potions ingredients related to magical creatures. But Harry's most surprised when Draco comes in one night after supper and doesn't sit in his armchair, immersing himself immediately in *Historia thestralium* but rather takes a seat on the sofa next to Harry, their hands touching, and listens to his conversation with Ron and Hermione without rolling his eyes or snorting--well, only once--and, in fact, offering his opinion on the Cannons' chances against the Harpies in their next match.

Harry's particularly shocked when Ron agrees. He and Hermione exchange a long glance, then Hermione shrugs. *Stranger things*, she mouths.

He supposes she's right.

The next week Hermione shows up with a battered copy of *Encyclopaedia equorum alitium* she's ordered from Flourish and Blotts' secondhand room, and Draco accepts it gracefully. More than, actually, as Harry can't even persuade him to go to bed with him after Ron and Hermione leave. Instead Draco stays up until early in the morning, turning fragile pages in the book.

And that's how they come to this, a late January blustery Saturday when rain lashes the windows and inside is snug and warm with a roaring fire. An improvised rack is hung thick with cloaks: Blaise's pale grey with black piping, Pansy's green with a giant jet brooch, Luna's uneven, ethereal handspun that is lined with some odd animal fiber and would look at home as a tent in a high mountain climate.

Draco sits on the sofa, knitting once again, and Harry's stretched out beside him, his head on Draco's thigh, the soft yarn brushing against his forehead.

"Should I put more water on?" Hermione asks from the back of the room, standing at the table next to the sink where the kettle and tea are arranged haphazardly, a tin of Wizard's Best Keemun open and a spoon next to it lying in a scatter of loose black leaves.

"Not yet, I don't think." Draco says, eyeing everyone's cups, then turning his attention back to his knitting. A blue and white blob is emerging under the steady click of his needles. "And I have it on a replenish charm, so we should be all right for a bit."

Ron's sitting on the floor, his back against the sofa. He holds up the *Quibbler* so Harry can read it. "Erumpents on the loose in London, Luna?"

Luna looks up from the pages of the *Historia thestralium*, which she has perched on her knees. She's sitting against the wall; her knee-length stockings are luridly pink and green and white with radishes embroidered on them. "Rollicking in St Paul's no less."

"This is lovely," Parkinson says in a brittle voice, perched on the edge of a chair and clearly ill at ease. She and Zabini had shown up unexpectedly, at least to Harry: Draco had greeted them calmly, without flying into a tizzy about there not being enough cups or raspberry jam for the scones. Slytherins.

Zabini pours another cup of tea from the pot that steams on the floating tray beside him. He adds a splash of whisky to it and hands it over to Parkinson. "You look like you need it."

"How's Astoria?" Draco asks him, as he frowns down at his needles, untangling the yarn. "Fuck it." Harry looks up at him and he sighs. "Dropped a sodding stitch." He taps his wand against the needle.

"She's Astoria," Zabini says, watching him. "Dim as Greg's Lumos and a hellcat in bed. Honestly, Draco, this whole knitting thing is ridiculous. You're not a bored housewife."

That earns him a glare from both Parkinson and Hermione. "Don't be such a sexist pig, Blaise," Parkinson says over the rim of her teacup. "If Draco wants to knit, then it's...charming." She doesn't sound entirely convinced.

"It's calming," Draco says, turning his knitting needles. "Which I need around Harry, to be honest."

“Pass the scones, would you Hermione?” Ron asks, his nose buried in an article about zombie vegetation at Hadrian’s wall and Roman burial practices. “So how exactly can a plant be a zombie?”

“Oh, I’ll get them.” Harry waves his wand to summon the plate and a scone on the wall explodes. He feels the giddy rush of magic, followed by a hollow feeling in his stomach. “Oops.”

Zabini and Parkinson spring out of their seats, spilling tea as they try to hold their cups and draw their wands at the same time. Harry resists the urge to laugh. He knows they must be frightened, but they look so comical with their elegantly cut clothing and casual disdain when they lose their composure and start acting like five-year-olds with a boggart. He’s particularly pleased to see Zabini with jam on his trousers. Wanker.

“See what I mean?” Draco says calmly. “Knitting.” He holds the blob of yarn up.

“It’s rather a question of what can’t be a zombie, Ronald.” Luna sets the book aside. “But it’s hard to explain. I’d leave it up to my father if you really want to understand the theory. Basically the turnips over the Roman graves were uprooting themselves and moving about, eating other, smaller plants. We think it has something to do with Atlantis.”

Hermione sits on the arm of the sofa next to Draco. “What are you making?” she asks.

“Baby blanket.” Draco sounds obscenely proud of himself. “Although it might be more of a parallelogram than a rectangle.”

“The baby’d better grow sideways to match,” Ron says, mouth full of scone and jam. Wet crumbs spray everywhere. Parkinson looks disgusted. Harry can’t entirely blame her. He smacks the back of Ron’s head, and Ron yelps, sending more crumbs flying across the room. Zabini brushes them off his robe with a scowl. Harry doesn’t bother to hide his grin. His dislike of Zabini’s personal now that he knows Draco fucked him. Or blew him at least. He glares at him. Whatever. The carpet beneath Zabini’s Italian boot begins to smoke, and Harry hastily looks away before Draco catches him.

“Are you working on the zombie Atlantean root vegetables still, Luna?” Hermione asks politely while Parkinson’s eyes grow as large as saucers.

“Oh no,” Luna says. “Although I may go visit Germany because I hear they’re having similar trouble with pumpkins. Right now I’m working on the plague of flying worricows that is afflicting Scotland and the Ministry efforts to pretend they’re migrating geese.”

Pansy coughs loudly and sips quickly at her tea.

“The scones are rather dry,” Draco drawls. “Do you care for more tea?”

The baby kicks, hard, and Harry grunts, his hand flying to his stomach.

“Harry?” Hermione asks worriedly, and he waves her off.

He lifts up his jumper, and the baby kicks again, its foot pressing Harry’s skin out. “Just the brat being a perfect little Malfoy.”

Zabini stares in horror. "I think that's the strangest thing I've seen so far. And today, that's saying a lot." Parkinson elbows him and he shoots her a vicious look.

Draco leans a bit and his hand settles on Harry's stomach, rubbing lightly over the spot where the baby kicked. His fingers are warm and soft, and at his touch, the baby settles back down, although it sends one final kick into Harry's kidney. He winces.

"So, speaking of Erumpents, have you seen the Erumpent in the Ministry yet, Pansy? I've heard it's running wild," Luna says. "I certainly hope no one ends up like Wilfred Elphick."

"Not yet," Parkinson answers, and Harry's surprised at how pleasant she sounds. "Although some of the Ministry officials have pretty poor manners and I wouldn't mind if they found a sticky end."

"Our Pans, the marauding heroine of the teacart," Zabini deadpans.

"Like you're doing so much better, Ghoul Boy," Draco retorts. Zabini flicks two fingers his way.

Hermione gives Parkinson a thoughtful look. "You could always run over their toes."

"Believe me, it takes all the restraint I have not to sometimes." Parkinson grins and gives Hermione a conspiratorial look.

"Wicked!" Ron exclaims, and they all turn towards him. "The Keeper for the Welsh national team's a werewolf?"

"Oh, Ron," Hermione says with a sigh. "You can't believe everything you read."

Luna looks up. "But that's what books are for, Hermione."

"She has a point," Ron says, and Hermione rolls her eyes. Parkinson laughs, a surprisingly melodic sound.

"Speaking of, has anyone seen my needle?" Draco asks. "I think I've managed to drop it."

As everyone looks under the sofa and tables, Harry realises he might be forming a strange sort of family already. He touches the suddenly warm Resurrection Stone, well-hidden on its chain beneath his jumper. It's a curious mix, he thinks, but, in its own bizarre way, oddly perfect.

The baby kicks again, and Harry smiles.



By mid-February, Draco is half-certain he's about to smother Harry in his sleep, except he's hard to catch because he's always getting up to piss now. Draco hasn't slept through the night for two weeks; Harry's constantly rolling out of bed with a groan, shifting the weight of the mattress, and Draco has to wait for him to come back to know he's all right. And he's not even going to consider how many times he's woken to an elbow in his side and Harry leaning over him, informing him he's famished and can Draco please go down to the kitchens and bring him a sandwich--or ten--and Draco's found himself

more than once blearily surrounded by elves who insist upon packing up an entire basket for “Mr Harry Potter, sir, and the baby.” Judging by the amount of food Harry’s consuming, Draco’s starting to wonder if the baby’s secretly some sort of Vanishing Charm.

Worst of all--and much to Draco’s dismay--their nascent sex life has gradually been tapering off as well. Harry’s still randy, but he’s complaining more and more about tenderness and not being able to move or get comfortable. And when the baby starts to pummel Harry’s lower intestines every time they get anywhere close to fucking each other senseless, making Harry wince and reluctantly push Draco away, Draco starts to wonder if the wretched little bastard has an evil plan for its other father: death by blue balls. Harry just laughs and assures Draco that their child hasn’t any murderous intentions--which Draco is highly sceptical of--as he pulls Draco into another kiss and slips his hand into Draco’s pants. A rushed hand job before Harry falls asleep isn’t exactly Draco’s idea of a highly eroticised night in bed, but, then again, he’s not stupid enough to look a gift orgasm in the mouth.

The snow is heavy and thick on the frozen ground, and on Guhathakurta’s orders, Harry’s confined to the castle, a fact which thrills the first-years who now dog *his* steps, insisting on carrying his books or fussing over his lack of a proper scarf or bringing him food and pumpkin juice nicked from the kitchens. Draco’s decided not to fight against the adoring hydra and instead has enlisted the entire lot of them to keep an eye on Harry during the hours Draco’s forced to make his rounds outdoors with Hagrid.

Perdita and Agnes in particular have taken to their new roles with great delight, waiting on the steps every evening before dinner, wrapped in their cloaks, woollen hats pulled down over their foreheads and thick scarves nearly covering their noses, just to give him their daily report on Harry’s comings and goings. Agnes somehow has managed to obtain a tattered, terribly out-of-date copy of *What Every Witch Should Know About Childbirth*, and she quotes from it constantly. Draco puts his foot down, however, when she informs him brightly that sexual intercourse can trigger premature labour, and has he considered that fact?

Draco grabs the book from her gloved fingers and closes it with a sharp snap. “Enough, Agnes.”

She frowns up at him and the tip of her nose is pink with cold. “But it says--”

“And there are some things that even a Ravenclaw shouldn’t know at your age.” Draco tucks the book in his jacket pocket as he stomps up the steps. When he opens the door, the heat of the hallway is a welcome relief. His warming charms have improved over the winter, but by late afternoon he’s so cold that they barely linger more than a few minutes before he has to recast them. Just today he’d spent fifteen minutes longer than necessary checking on the Thestrals because Druella’s mane had warmed his frozen fingers.

“I’m twelve,” Agnes says, pursing her mouth, and Draco thinks it’s sad that they’ve all been in such a hurry to grow up. He remembers thinking it would take an eternity until he could leave Hogwarts. Now he’d give anything to go back to the comfortable ignorance of his first year. “And everyone *knows* you do things like that with Harry. Orla Quirke said that Khalid Saleh said that Simon Moll said he went up to the Owlery last month to post a letter home to his mum in Sheffield and he saw you and Harry snogging and Harry was making certain noises, except she wouldn’t tell us what kind because she said we’d find out when we were old enough, and really I’m awfully tired of people telling me I’m too little--”

Draco covers her mouth with his gloved fingers and pulls her up against his side. Her screech is muffled against the wool. “Orla Quirke’s a horrible liar,” he says, even though he knows exactly what Simon Moll

must have seen--and he's incredibly grateful that the dark folds of Harry's student robe cover a multitude of sins.

"She's not!" Agnes protests when Draco drops his hand. "She wants to be a journalist someday. Like Rita Skeeter!"

"And I rest my case." Draco wonders sometimes why he puts up with the first year girls. They're exhausting.

Perdita just pokes Agnes. "I told you not to ask him." She eyes Draco as she flips her golden curls back over one shoulder, and Draco feels suddenly disconcerted. "Besides, it's all *different* with Harry." She lowers her voice. "He's got boy bits."

"Indeed he does," Draco says dryly, "and I'll thank you to keep your wicked little noses out of that particular subject."

"What subject?" The Weasel's behind them all of a sudden, his robe half hanging off his shoulder.

"Fuck off, Weasel," Draco says, but somehow in the past few weeks the insult's turned into a greeting between the two.

"You too, Ferret." The Weasel catches up, drawing even to Draco's gait. "So, again I ask, what subject?"

Draco snorts. "You don't want to know. Trust me." He brushes the last traces of snow from his shoulders as they turn towards the Great Hall.

"Draco having sex with Harry," Agnes pipes up, and the Weasel eyes her sideways. Draco gives him a look that clearly says see? "Even though he's *with child*."

"Right. Different subject." With a shudder, the Weasel shifts his satchel to his other shoulder and frowns. He glances at Draco. "We're still on for chess tonight?"

"If you really want me to wipe the floor with you again." Draco peers down the hall past him, ignoring the avid looks Perdita and Agnes are giving them both. NEWT Charms has just let out. "Where's Harry?"

"Supper already," the Weasel says. "Flitwick let him leave early. He said the baby wants brussel sprouts tonight."

All four of them grimace. Draco sighs. "He'll be up all night with gas." Perdita and Agnes ewww in unison.

The Weasel holds up his hands. "Your problem, not mine." He hesitates. "On second thought, maybe that chess rematch can wait another day or two."

"Coward," Draco says spitefully, and the Weasel just grins.

When they enter the Great Hall, Draco sends Perdita and Agnes to the Ravenclaw table, threatening to take enough points from them to make their House standing sink dramatically if they keep following him. They skulk away reluctantly, casting sullen glances back his way.

The Weasel gives him an amused look. "You enjoyed that entirely too much."

Draco just quirks an eyebrow at him. "Not as much as I enjoyed taking them from you and Harry as a Prefect."

"Valid point," the Weasel concedes.

Harry sits at the Gryffindor table, a plateful of food in front of him. He looks up when Draco sits next to him, his back against the edge of the table. Not all of the students have wandered in yet; Draco likes having this moment with Harry before he has to take his seat at the head table.

"Hi," Draco says with a smile, and he leans in to kiss Harry's cheek. Harry's breath smells like butter and brussel sprouts. "Cruciferous vegetables again? The baby's going to turn into a cabbage."

It's the wrong thing to say.

Harry turns on him, a fierce glint in his eye. "And it's inside of *me*, thanks ever so much, so frankly, I'll eat what I damn well please." He raises his fork. "And the first comment you make again about me being fat--"

"I didn't mean it," Draco protests. He knew he shouldn't have said that this morning as he helped with Harry's tailoring charms. Harry hadn't taken it well.

"Oh, Draco, you didn't." Hermione looks appalled.

Draco sighs in exasperation. "I was *joking*--"

"You compared me to a Hippogryff," Harry says hotly.

A hush falls over the table. Even the Weaselette gives him a disappointed glare. Harry pops a brussel sprout into his mouth and chews.

"Arsehole," he mutters.

Draco runs a hand over his face.

"Anyway," the Weasel says, "at least the Ferret didn't imply you were an Erumpent." He pauses and considers Harry thoughtfully. "Yet."

Harry throws a brussel sprout across the table at him and scowls. "You are way too obsessed with Erumpents, mate."

"Oi." The Weasel ducks and grins. "Do you know what they do with those horns during mating season?"

Somebody titters and the normal noise of the Great Hall at mealtime starts up again. As Harry turns back to his plate, Draco realises that he'd better do something and fast: Harry's going a bit round the bend with being trapped in the castle. Draco frowns.

An owl to his mother is definitely necessary.



Three days later, Draco walks into the suite with a smile on his face. "I have a surprise."

Harry looks up from the Charms textbook he's practicing with. The glass vase he's been conjuring falls from mid-air as his focus breaks. It disappears into a whiff of smoke just before it hits the floor. "I don't want any more chocolate. The last bar you gave me had me up all night with heartburn."

"Not that sort of surprise, you prat." Draco rolls his eyes. He'd been up as well with him, spending hours rubbing Harry's belly as he groaned. Harry never seems to remember that. "Come with me."

Harry looks perplexed as Draco offers him his arm and helps him stand up. "And bring your cloak," Draco adds.

They Floo from Minerva's office to the Manor. His mother meets them in the hall. She greets them both with a kiss.

"Should we--" Draco starts, but he's cut off by a whoosh of the Floo and a burst of green flames as his cousin steps out of the hearth. She's breathless and her blonde curls bounce around her pink cheeks.

"So terribly sorry I'm late," Luna says. "Father just needed my help with a story for the next issue and I lost track of time." She slips out of her cloak, draping it over her arm, and Draco's surprised to see her wearing two summer dresses in floral patterns that seem as if they'd never match but somehow don't look completely terrible. Her tights are a bright grassy green and he's fairly certain the tiny fairies that dangle from her earlobes are carved out of rhubarb.

But Draco's entirely flabbergasted when his mother takes Luna's arm and smiles at her. "Welcome back to the Manor, my dear. I hope this visit is much more pleasant than your last."

Luna smiles shyly back at her. "I'm quite certain it will be, Aunt Narcissa." Her voice is light and sweet. "Far fewer wrackspurts floating around and fuzzifying things up."

"Quite," Narcissa says. Her hand covers Luna's. "We should have you and your father over for dinner one night, don't you think?" She looks at Draco and he nods, helplessly. He can only imagine what *his* father would say. He'd made his opinion on his Lovegood cousins completely clear in the past.

"I didn't realise Luna would be joining us," he manages to get out.

His mother gives him an even look. "I thought Harry might like to have a friend," she says. "And given the garden is for Malfoys only--"

Harry interrupts before Draco can discreetly complain. "Does this surprise involve food?" he asks. "Because I'm a bit hungry."

"You're always--" Draco yelps when Harry steps on his foot. Hard. He gives Harry a sour look.

Narcissa shakes her head at them both and hands Luna a large iron key. "It's better if it's opened by a witch of the family," she says.

Luna nods dreamily and traces the scrollwork on the key. "It's very old. No wonder it disturbs the wrackspurts. They hate iron."

His mother just nods and points them to the staircase.

They take a shortcut, but they still have to go through the darker, more haunted parts of the Manor. Each of the three of them has their own ghosts here, Draco knows. Harry clenches Draco's hand and Luna stays very close to them both. Draco swallows and focuses on protecting his lover and his cousin, driving his own fear away with responsibility. Perhaps this is how his father did it, he wonders, but he knows his father had been crippled by fear at the end and useless against anything.

They find the small door in the wall, just where Draco remembers it, smaller than a normal door and tucked away in the curve under a stairwell. Draco had panicked for a moment, worried he wouldn't find it, worried they would get lost, but there it is, the simple smooth wood appearing out of the shadows.

Luna steps forward and sets the key to the lock. "Unbind the door and open true," she intones in a sing-song cadence.

The door swings forward, and it's almost like stepping into another time. The small courtyard is shielded against the elements and crocuses are blooming in carpets, wild and colorful. White anemones drift across the yellowed grass. A few purple hyacinths are even starting to open, their fragrance rich and spicy in the mild air.

Harry is wide-eyed with wonder.

"This will be the baby's garden," Luna says, leaning down to look into a crocus throat. "Aunt Narcissa said so." When she looks up, she has bright orange pollen on her nose. Draco resists the urge to laugh, motioning instead to her nose. She smiles and wipes it off.

Harry looks over to Draco. "There's a garden just for the baby?"

Draco nods. "I grew up here. It was supposed to go to my sister, and my mother had it closed until my birth."

"But this seems too nice to be a Malfoy tradition," Harry blurts out. Draco and Luna laugh.

"There are many strange things in every line," Luna says. "For example, Uncle Lucius's mother was a mermaid."

"Really?" Harry gapes, imagining the baby with fused legs and gills. "I would think your grandfather would have been better tempered then."

Draco rolls his eyes. "No she wasn't."

"But she could swim awfully well." Luna says. Draco crosses his arms and purses his lips.

"Is that a picnic?" Harry asks, staring at the checked blue cloth, a hopeful expression on his face.

"Yes," Draco says. He tries to hide his smile and fails utterly. "Mother had the elves prepare something nice for us."

Luna's already kneeling beside it, unpacking dishes of warm chicken and bottles of cold ginger beer and plates of shortbread and tiny strawberries for afters. Even Draco feels his stomach rumble as they sit down on the cloth. He transfigures a small rock into a huge, firm cushion for Harry to rest against as he balances a china plate on one knee.

The sun is warm, and it doesn't take long after they eat for Draco and Harry to shed their robes and jumpers, sprawling on the grass in their trousers and shirts, their feet bare. Draco doesn't even worry about grass stains as he lies on his stomach beside Harry, his cousin sitting cross-legged on Harry's other side, a pile of flowers in her lap that she's stringing together with a spell. A pink butterfly dances around Luna's shoulders before it settles in her hair.

Harry laughs. "It suits you." He tugs at the chain around his neck, twisting it between his fingers. The ring on the chain slides from beneath his collar and swings free.

"What's that?" Luna asks curiously, and Harry freezes. Draco frowns down at him, puzzled by his reaction. The butterfly takes off from Luna's hair, flying over the hyacinths.

"A Potter family heirloom." Draco keeps his voice dry. "Or so he tells me. It's awfully battered."

Luna catches the ring between her long fingers and turns it. "Oh."

"It's nothing," Harry says, but he's watching her intently.

Luna traces a fingertip against the stone. "The Deathly Hallows," she says. "Father has a necklace with this symbol." She lets the ring drop back against Harry's chest, giving him a long look. "I didn't realise you were a Peverell, Harry."

Draco laughs, trying to diffuse the strange discomfort that's risen just beneath the surface. "The fairytale brothers? I always preferred *The Wizard and the Hopping Pot*." He frowns. "Father once shouted at Mother for reading me *The Fountain of Fair Fortune*, though. He never cared for Sir Luckless."

"Babbitty Rabbitty was my favourite," Luna says. She's still looking at Harry. "But the three brothers always fascinated me. Terrible thing, really, trying to be more clever than Death. It never goes well, does it? He just keeps searching."

They're all silent for a moment, then a Great Tit dips past in a flash of yellow and black. With a laugh, Luna claps her hands, and a throng of butterflies rise up from the flowers, circling around them before they disappear into the sky.

Harry looks up in delight, and Draco wants to remember the expression on his face forever.

With a flick of her wand and a small smile, Luna drapes the chain of flowers around Harry's belly. "The baby's happy."

"Yeah." Harry's fingers brush his swollen bump. His white shirt is untucked, and Draco's surprised at how attractive he finds Harry like this, disheveled and heavily pregnant with his baby. His hand covers Harry's, and when Harry turns his wide smile on Draco, Draco's stomach flips and shivers.

Looking away, Draco sits up. He picks up a piece of shortbread from the plate beside him and hands it to Harry, then takes a strawberry for himself. When he bites into it, he nearly closes his eyes at the succulent sweet-sourness of it.

“Happy?” Harry asks with a laugh, and Draco nods, finishing off the strawberry. He drops the stem into the bowl.

“Mother adores strawberries,” Draco confides. “She took lessons for a few months with a weather-mancer just to learn how to extend her growing season into February.”

“Maybe she learned how to manipulate time,” Luna says. “She could have made a portal and stolen then from June.”

Draco doesn't even seem to want to argue. He smiles and leans back on his elbows, watching Harry eat his shortbread. Harry catches Draco looking and beams at him, only a few crumbs falling onto his shirt. He dusts them off.

Luna jumps up. “Oooh. Pictures. I brought the portable photo apparatus.”

Harry groans. “I hate pictures. Not like this.”

“Yes like this,” Luna says. “They're for the baby album I'm making.”

Both Draco and Harry stare. “The what?”

“The baby album.” Luna speaks to them as if they're thick. “Every baby needs an album of pictures that they can look back on when they're adults. How else are you supposed to remember the first things you see?”

“I don't really think the baby can see anything right now, Luna.” Harry struggles to sit up. Draco helps him, pulling Harry up against his side. His hand settles on the swell of Harry's belly.

Luna lifts her camera and peers through it. It clicks when she pushes the button, and a second later a nearly blinding flash goes off. Luna wrinkles her nose. “Wrong setting, sorry. I forgot I was photographing worricows last time.” She twists a few knobs and dials. “And, really, Harry, the baby can see a great deal more than you think.” She looks up at him. “Not everything we see is with our eyes, you know.”

Harry huffs and looks at Draco.

Draco shrugs. “You might as well let her.” He pops a strawberry into Harry's mouth to stop his protest, then leans in and kisses the red juice away.

“Manipulative Slytherin,” Harry murmurs, but he takes another bite of strawberry.

Draco laughs and kisses him again. A butterfly flutters over them.

Luna snaps away.



“Where’s Potter?” Pansy settles into the huge armchair in the corner that Harry usually favours. She kicks off her shoes and rubs her feet. A teacup hovers beside her, steam twisting in elaborate curliques around her hair.

“Off with the other good Gryffindors. Revising.” Draco sips his tea. He stretches his stockinged feet out towards the fire. He’d been caught in a torrential downpour on his way back from feeding the Thestrals. “They do have NEWTs coming soon.”

“At least he’s getting a chance to take his tests.” Pansy’s mouth twists. Her fingers work across the arch of her foot, and she winces. “I need a desk job.”

Draco sighs and sets his cup down. The NEWTs issue is problematic. It’s something he doesn’t discuss with Harry; he’s not entirely certain Harry even knows he hasn’t earned his NEWTs yet. “At least we’re not forced to be Hogwarts students any longer. Think of it that way.”

“Doesn’t it bother you?” Pansy sits up and lets her feet drop to the floor. She flexes her bare toes. “Everyone else had a chance to take their NEWTs at Christmas, but we’re stuck with the Ministry’s alternate certification route.” She laughs bitterly. “Community Order as certification. What a joke.”

“No, actually,” Draco says. It’s something he’s been thinking about a lot, watching Harry revise. “I know what I want to do, and I don’t care how I have to do it.”

Pansy eyes him curiously. “Since when? Last I heard your life goal was to--how did you put it? Live hard and die young?”

Draco grins. “I’m still hard and young.” He easily ducks the cushion she tosses his way. “And I’ve decided to do magizooology.”

“Oh, dear God.” Pansy stares at him. “The giant’s got to you, hasn’t he?” She reaches out and feels Draco’s forehead. “Is it contagious?”

Draco knocks her hand away. “Not terribly. And neither is Goldstein’s cock, I assume. I’ve no idea if the Ministry will give you a certificate in *that*, but they should.”

Pansy picks up her teacup primly. “I really wouldn’t know what you’re on about.”

Draco pours another cup from the serviceable porcelain pot--he eyes the fuschia cosy Mother Weasel had given Harry for Christmas balefully and determines to find something significantly less *pink* to use--and he doses the tea liberally with brandy. “Pans. I think everyone outside of Idgie and Peter knows you’re shagging him rotten.” Pansy flushes at the mention of her parents. She hasn’t spoken to them in almost a year. Not since they’d slipped away to the Continent the day after the battle, leaving their only daughter behind. “And Goldstein’s broken off his engagement.”

It’d been the talk of society in January. Even Narcissa had mentioned it in one of her owls. The Goldsteins had been appalled. Mostly due to the amount they’d had to pay the MacDougals in betrothal fees. Frankly, Draco thought that was their own damned fault. They ought to have gone for a modern con-

tract, not one of those ancient Scottish bindings that call for the monetary equivalent of a homestead, two acres of land and fifty sheep as a bride-price.

His nostrils flare. It was practically medieval. If Harry's carrying a girl, he decides, there'll be none of that for her.

"Please." Pansy holds her cup out and Draco pours a dash of brandy in it for her. "Morag MacDougal's a complete whore. She wears python boots, for Christ's sake. Completely outré, and really, he's better off without her." She sips her tea. "Not to mention she didn't like sucking cock, can you believe that?"

"No," Draco says truthfully. The idea's entirely foreign to him. "Goldstein must think he's died and gone to heaven."

Pansy beams. "I am rather good with my tongue."

"Saucy minx." Draco settles back against the sofa. His eyes drift towards the clock and he wonders how late Harry will stay at the library tonight. Draco finds himself missing the prat. "Does he give as good as he gets?"

"Darling, the last time I mentioned my vagina in a conversation with you, you nearly had a fit of vapours." Pansy blows across her tea, her scarlet mouth pursed.

"And now I deal with pregnancy on a daily basis." Draco ponders how strange his life has become. "How do you feel about being pregnant, by the by?"

Pansy pales. "I think God created contraceptive charms for a reason."

Draco arches an eyebrow and finishes off his tea, setting the cup aside. "I don't know how much God had to do with them. I missed that part of Genesis."

"In the beginning there was cock, darling." Pansy crosses her legs and takes a sip of tea. "It's an ancient translation."

Draco laughs. "Then we're both fervently religious." He's missed these conversations with Pans. He wishes he could see her more often, but with his schedule and Harry only six weeks from the Caesarean, it's impossible. That thought makes him pick up his knitting, whether to distract himself from the thought or out of sheer panic of finishing the blanket on time, he's not certain, but he'll be damned if he asks Hagrid to help him. He's seen the hideous afghan on the man's bed. "So, when did you fall in love with Tony?"

Pansy nearly drops her teacup. "What?"

"You know you are, Pans. Don't be coy." Draco studies her for a moment before realisation hits. "Oh, shit. You *didn't* know. How interesting."

Pansy stands up and walks over to the window, staring out at the grounds. "I'm not."

Draco watches her. The snow outside's beginning to melt. Slowly. At this rate it'll be June before the grass is visible again. "I know. 'Parkinsons don't fall in love.' Well, and men don't end up preggers, do they?"

“No.” Pansy wraps her arms around herself. She doesn’t look back.

“So it’s happened, then. But the question is, what will you do now?” Draco knows he’s being a bit hard on her, but better it come from him than someone else. He wonders what Blaise will think when he finds out. It’ll crush him, Draco expects, but he doubts Blaise will admit to that. Or do anything other than brush it off and bury his woes, and other bits, between Astoria Greengrass’s legs.

He sincerely hopes the bastard’s using proper charms.

Pansy doesn’t say anything, she just turns and leans against the window, looking at him.

“Pans, you know if I could do anything, I would. I’d force him to make you an honest slag. Do you think he feels the same about you?” Draco examines his knitting, finds the dropped stitch, picks up back up, and continues.

“He certainly doesn’t look at me the way Potter looks at you,” she retorts waspishly.

Draco stops knitting and sets the blue and white blanket down on the sofa. “I’m sure I don’t know what you mean. Besides, Harry’s eight months pregnant and more than a little out of his gourd now on the best of days.”

“Draco. Darling. If any man looked at me the way Potter looks at you, I’d...” Pansy rubs at the large opal on her finger. Her grandmother had given it to her on her sixteenth birthday. It’s a Parkinson family heirloom, which means it’s only two centuries old. New money, after all. She glances over at him. “Well, I’d tell him how I felt.”

Draco swallows and looks down at the blanket beside him. He fingers the edge. It’s soft and warm. “I would if I knew, Pans. But I don’t. It’s all so confused.”

She doesn’t say anything for a long moment. When she speaks, her voice is gentle. “Have you thought about what you’re going to do when the baby comes?”

“A little.” A flutter of anxiety rises in Draco’s stomach. They haven’t talked about what’s coming next. At all. He has no idea what’ll happen once Harry leaves Hogwarts in June, taking their baby with him. Draco bites his lip. “I think I’ll do my best to be there for Potter and for the baby. I want to be a part of their lives.” If Harry lets him, that is.

Pansy just studies him. “Potter’s keeping the baby then. You’re not...taking it.”

“No!” Draco has a visceral reaction to the words. He knows his father would insist on a Malfoy heir being raised at the Manor, but Harry would never allow it and Draco has no desire to make a claim on custody. Not after watching Harry these past five months. Not after seeing him talk to the swell in his belly, not after seeing him sing to it off-key. Not after watching Harry’s eyes light up every time the baby kicks, even when he’s swearing at it. He shakes his head. “I can’t imagine...It doesn’t seem right at all.”

Pansy’s quiet for a very long time, then she sighs. “Oh, darling.” She sits on the sofa next to Draco and reaches for his hand. “You’re entirely arse over tit for him, aren’t you?” She hesitates, then squeezes his fingers. “Take it from one in the same condition.”

Draco leans his head on her shoulder and she strokes his forehead out of his eyes. "We're fucked, aren't we Pans? The world doesn't want us to live happily ever after."

"Maybe old Trelawney was right. Maybe we were born under cursed stars." Pansy nudges him with her shoulder. "Unlucky in love and life."

"We make our own stars. Didn't we decide that sixth year?" He nudges back. A dark night on the Astronomy Tower with a bottle of wine nicked from Severus's office. He remembers it well.

Pansy looks away. She reaches for the brandy and drinks straight from the bottle. "I don't think I can make my own anything any longer, ducks."

Draco watches her. She looks devastated. "I don't believe you. You're just afraid." He takes the bottle from her--there's only a few fingers left--and downs a good swallow of it. It burns his throat going down.

"I'm a good shag and a laugh or two, Draco." Pansy gives him an earnest look and motions for the bottle. "My father was Marked. I'm not the sort for Tony."

Draco understands. He knows how that feels. "Harry has to look at my Mark every day." He looks down at his forearm, at the long sleeved shirt he wears to hide the black stain on his skin. It doesn't seem to bother Harry, and Draco's not certain why. Harry'd once told him the Mark doesn't make the man, but Draco doesn't believe him.

He knows better.

"I can't imagine explaining to a child what it means," Draco says slowly. "Its father. Grandfather..." He trails off.

"It means we were incredibly stupid. And naive. And we believed everything our parents said because they were our parents and we loved them." Pansy says bitterly. "Sometimes I think people forget that."

"Yes." Draco says quietly. He looks at her, his throat tight. "We lied and we did everything to please them while the world fell apart." He'd never ask that of his child. Ever.

"Fuck them," Pansy says succinctly. She takes another drink from the bottle. "They ran to Greece and left me here." Her mouth twists to one side. Draco wonders if she's given up on hearing from her parents, or if she even cares. He's afraid to ask.

He sighs.

"And now we have our own lives to fuck up." Draco thinks about the baby. He wonders what it'll think of him in eighteen years. If it'll hate him as much as he hates his own father. If he'll even know his child then. An ache blossoms deep inside of him. "It's much harder, isn't it?"

"Infinitely." Pansy passes him the bottle and he finishes it.



“You’re pissed.”

As the voice floats into his consciousness, Draco squints up at the portrait looming over the sofa. There’s a blanket draped over him and his head aches. He can vaguely recall opening another bottle of brandy with Pansy as they both commiserated over their pathetic lives.

“And you look horrible against that shade of brocade,” he says to Severus as he sits up. “Where’s Pansy?”

“Asleep in the bedroom you no longer occupy,” Severus says dryly. He leans against the side of the portrait frame, his arms crossed over his chest. He truly does look terrible against the yellow brocade drapery of the background. Draco wonders where he dispatched the charming Sir Perkin. “And Potter is in the other.” He eyes Draco. “Only you could end up with two lovers sleeping in the same suite.”

Draco leans against the arm of the sofa, pulling his knees to his chest. That explains the blanket then. It’s much more Harry’s style. He rubs at his eyes. “Pansy’s not my lover and you know it.”

Severus sniffs. “Not for want of trying on her part your fifth year.”

“True.” Draco pushes his hair back from his face. He feels filthy, and judging from the faint grey light filtering through the row of windows across from him, he suspects it’s not long before he’ll have to roll out of bed anyway.

The fire cracks as a log settles in the hearth. The elves must have stoked it, Draco thinks, and he’s glad for the warmth in the early morning chill. He wraps his blanket tighter around himself. “Why are you lurking?” he asks, and the words are jumbled by a wide yawn.

It doesn’t matter; Severus understands enough of it. He scowls. “Attempting to have a word with you without Potter or one of that bizarre entourage you’ve collected lately hanging about.” His mouth thins. “It’s rather difficult.”

“You might have tried the loo.” Draco yawns again.

Severus is not amused. “Gryffindor vulgarity does not suit you, Draco.”

Draco doesn’t bother to point out that he’d heard worse in Slytherin common room. “So now you have me all to your self, you wicked professor. Should I faint or shout?”

That earns him a glare. “Your imagination always was a bit overactive.” Severus settles in Sir Perkin’s uncomfortably carved wooden chair. “You’ve seen the ring Potter wears around his neck.”

“The family heirloom?” Draco reaches to tuck the blanket over his cold toes. “What of it?”

Severus sighs. “It’s not an heirloom.” He hesitates. “Per se.”

Draco wonders if he can just drop back off to sleep for a few minutes. He’s horribly tired. He leans his head against the back of the sofa. “Severus, please...”

“It’s a Resurrection Stone.”

Silence stretches out between them, then Draco laughs. "Like the fairy tale. Have you been talking to Luna, Severus? Really I'd thought better of you--"

"It's dangerous, Draco." Severus's voice is low. Sober.

Draco looks at him sharply. "Dark?" His head swims.

"Not in and of itself," Severus admits. "But His Lordship once owned it, and Potter used it when he first faced him down."

Uncertainty slithers through Draco's mind. "How did Harry get it?"

"Albus."

They look at each other. Draco doesn't know what to think. "Harry's not Dark," he says slowly.

Severus sighs again. "No."

"And the ring's not Dark."

"No."

Draco sits silently, his thoughts tumbling together. "Why are you telling me this, Severus?"

"Because someone needs to keep an eye on the foolish brat," Severus snaps. "I wasted enough of my life attempting to, and frankly, I'm tired. He's your responsibility now, Draco. I've paid my debt."

"What do you want me to do?" Draco asks after a moment. "Take it away from him?"

"No." Severus runs a hand over his face, pushing his hair back out of his eyes. Draco wonders if it's as thick and lank in paint as it had been in reality. "Albus says it's connected to the baby."

Draco's brow furrows. "What?"

A faint flush rises on Severus's sallow cheeks. "Somehow Potter used it in the brat's conception. Or it played some sort of role." His nostrils flare. "I didn't care to ask for details."

"Oh." Draco settles into the corner of the sofa. He blinks. "Harry did this on purpose?" His fingers pick at the blanket. "The baby?"

Severus snorts. "It's far more likely that he is a complete idiot, utterly unaware of his own power." He looks away. "Albus thinks there may be leftover...business." Severus sighs. "From Potter's not-quite-death." He scowls again. He still holds a modicum of bitterness at being dead while Harry's alive, Draco knows.

"Of course." Draco doesn't quite understand, but he's not going to press Severus, not with that particular expression on his face, and not on any matter that involves Dumbledore. That subject's still sore for them, even nearly two years after the fact. He doesn't think Severus will ever entirely forgive him for putting him in the position to murder his mentor. "So I...what? Watch?"

“Are you a Slytherin?” Severus asks.

Well. It was a stupid question, Draco supposes. He bites his lip. “Is it going to hurt him?” *Or the baby*, he thinks, but he can’t seem to voice that thought.

Severus gives him a long look. “Probably not.”

“Probably?” Draco’s voice rises. “What does that mean?”

“It means you may have to make a choice one day,” Severus says quietly. “And I hope you know how.”

Draco stares at him, horribly unsettled, until there’s a noise from his bedroom, followed by Pansy’s muffled curse.

When he looks back at the portrait frame, Severus is gone.

He doesn’t know what to think.



Photo by byrony2

spring

Harry leans over to check his Potions notes again and curses. His belly's so big now that he has to turn sideways to reach the table, and it's beginning to hurt his back. He has to get this material read; his last practical with Slughorn was a complete disaster and it's only two weeks to Easter hols. He glances at the small grey and white jasperware clock with cupids Narcissa had sent them for Valentine's Day. Draco'd been very quiet when Harry opened the wrapping to reveal it, then said it'd been his mother's favourite since he could remember and he can't believe she sent it. Harry views it as a good luck token, but right now, he's ready to throw it across the room in frustration. He only has forty-five minutes before he's supposed meet Hermione and Ron and review the material he's just now reading. His brain is sluggish and refusing to take in the specifics and he has to keep going back to understand what he's just looked at. It's altogether infuriating.

And, of course, the baby seems to have woken up again and is now dancing on his bladder.

He gets up and shuffles into the hall, his bottle-green dressing gown open over his t-shirt and school trousers. He's surprised he hasn't worn a path in the stone with how often he treads this path daily to the loo. After a quick slash, he refastens his trousers and heads back for the room. He's brought up short as he sees Minerva McGonagall standing in front of the door, her mouth set in an utter rictus of Scottish disapproval, fury radiating from every detail of her posture.

"Harry, I'd like a word with you. And Mr Malfoy when he arrives. I've sent for him."

Harry blinks. "I have to meet Ron and Hermione for Potions revising, but--"

"I can assure you this is more important." She stares back at him. Her eyes flick down at his attire. "Put on your school robes. I'll wait outside until you tell me to come in."

Harry throws his robes on, terrified at what has happened now and utterly at a loss as to why the Headmistress should be beyond furious at him or anyone else. He hasn't broken a rule in weeks, if not months. Surely shagging the man the Headmistress made you live with isn't against the rules. Living with him was her idea in the first place.

He fingers the Resurrection Stone and tucks it under his shirt. The baby kicks him fiercely and he bends over, gasping. Breathing heavily, he opens the door. "Please come in."

McGonagall sweeps into the room and wrinkles her nose at the stacks of books and papers spread out on the table Draco'd enlarged with a charm so Harry could study. It takes up nearly half the room now.

"Would you like tea, Headmistress?" Harry asks, walking slowly to the corner.

"Yes, thank you." Her voice is brittle and resonant with fury.

Harry takes his time, considering how to best defend himself from a completely unknown charge. He sends a teacup over to Minerva with a flick of his wand and then picks up the pot, pouring her tea. Draco's changed the cosy again, he notices. This one's black with snitches knit around the edges. He pours a cup for himself and sits down. The Headmistress doesn't take a seat, but instead prowls the room, looking out onto the lawns and then back to the door, waiting.

Harry sits on the sofa, leaning back on a cushion to take the weight off of his back. When Draco opens the door and Harry sees his familiar white blond head and broad shoulders, he breathes a sigh of relief.

Draco's brow is furrowed with concern, which lightens the moment he sees Harry sitting comfortably, or what passes for comfortably these days. "Oh thank goodness. You're all right." He sits down next to Harry and takes his hand, stroking it with his thumb. Harry's nerves settle further.

"I'm sorry to have worried you, Mr Malfoy." McGonagall doesn't sound sorry at all, Harry thinks. "I assumed I made clear that it was urgent but that it didn't involve the baby."

Draco nods slowly, clearly sizing up McGonagall's mood. "Yes, Headmistress. But I wasn't sure it wasn't Harry."

"I see." She takes a sip from her cup and sets it down on a side table, then walks over and unfurls a tabloid. She holds it in front of them and Harry notes that it's the *Quibbler*. "Would you please explain the meaning of this?"

Draco takes the issue from her hand, holding it so he and Harry can look together. On the front page, an enormous headline in bold black type reads *Malfoy and Potter Spring Fever*. Draco frowns and pages to the middle, where half a page is taken up by a large photo of Harry leaning against Draco.

"Oh my God..." Draco says, blanching.

"What--" Harry looks horrified. He grabs the *Quibbler* from Draco's hand. He watches as the Harry in the photo takes a bite of the strawberry Draco's teasing him with, and then he turns his head and kisses him, ending with red juice on both of their chins.

Harry's pregnancy is very clear in the photo, and the accompanying text talks about the aphrodisiac qualities of strawberries and the comparatively rare condition of male pregnancy.

"Fuck." Harry says. McGonagall glares at him. "Sorry, Headmistress."

She clutches at her scrawny bosom. "What I do not understand is how you could bring such ignominy and disrepute upon this school by appearing flagrantly in a publication. And after we've gone to such great lengths to protect you and to protect Hogwarts."

Draco inhales sharply. "Do you really think we would advertise this, Professor McGonagall? We've more to lose than the reputation of the school." He looks at Harry. "At least I do."

They stare at each other, gazes locked.

The Floo flares green. It's some sort of Firecall, but the wards are not allowing it through. McGonagall takes one look and unlocks the wards. "What is it, Miss Lovegood?"

"May I come through?" Luna's head is wavery in the green flames. Harry thinks she's crying but he's not sure.

A moment later, she steps through, her face red with tears. "I'm so sorry, Harry. Draco. My father found the photo among the ones for my Scottish worricow piece and thought it was human interest. I took all the rest out for the baby album, but I missed the one. He didn't mean to hurt anyone, but he doesn't really understand how most people think. He just thought it was interesting."

McGonagall's mouth tightens. "Oh, for the love of--" She breaks off, pressing a hand to her temple. "You absolutely *foolish* girl. This has done a great deal of damage, you realise."

"I know." Luna looks like she's about to burst into crying again. She dabs at her nose with a purple floral handkerchief. "I don't know how I can help but I'm willing to do anything."

"Can you pull the issue?" Draco asks, eyebrows raised thoughtfully.

Luna shakes her head. She snuffles again. "It sold out immediately, and Father had more printed. I did talk him out of a third run, but I'm afraid not much can be done to stop the rest of the circulation now. The *Prophet's* already firecalling Father. Barnabas Cuffe's furious we scooped him."

McGonagall sighs heavily. "The school is already being barraged with owls and I have to answer to the Board of Governors tonight," she says. "You'll come with me, Miss Lovegood, to explain the situation."

Luna's face is pale and nervous, but nods. "I'll bring my father if you like."

"Heavens, no." McGonagall's eyes widen. "I can't imagine what he'll say, and the Governors are very tetchy at the moment. The last thing I want is Xeno riling them up further. I promised them there'd be no publicity of this sort." She looks miserable. "We worked so hard..."

"Very well, Headmistress." Luna twists the fabric of her flowered skirt in her fingers. "Tell me where to be and when. Harry, Draco, I'm so very sorry."

Harry nods and bites his lip. He loves Luna but at the moment, he wants to throttle her. From the look on Draco's face, he can see he's not the only one.

"It was an honest mistake," he says finally, his voice dull. "And I suppose the news would have come out eventually."

None of them say anything. Harry looks back down at the photograph of him and Draco. He's struck by how peaceful they look. He traces a finger across the newsprint, following the angle of Draco's jaw.

They ought to have known they couldn't stay in this bubble. He looks up at Draco, their eyes meeting.

"It was too good to last," Draco murmurs.

Harry can't help but agree.



Despite McGonagall's best efforts, and overnight work on the other staff members' parts, some Howlers do succeed in getting through the next morning. Draco is sitting at his usual place, tired and irritable. He didn't sleep much last night, and Harry'd been too uncomfortable for much more than a hand job and an awkward cuddle. They'd been miserable and short with each other this morning, both barely able to speak.

The owls swoop down on him with red envelopes, their contents opening as they drop to the table before Draco's plate of hash and eggs. As the hateful, vile words shower over him and the smoke and ashes explode, something inside him grows cold, colder even than the March rain lashing the windows. Opal aims her wand and incinerates the next bunch as it arrives, shouting to Hagrid to have the Owlery closed.

The first-years are exchanging horrified whispers. As Draco stalks from the room, he hears Perdita bitterly protesting the audacity of anyone who would say negative things about Draco, Harry, and their precious baby.

Harry comes after him; Draco's almost at the door when he shouts, "Draco, wait." Draco pauses for a moment, then turns the handle and stalks out into the rain. He'll be damned if he can talk to anyone right now. Not even Harry.

He doesn't look back. He can't.

Late that afternoon, cold, wet, and still furious, Draco returns to their rooms to wash up before dinner. Harry is sitting in an armchair, reading an Advanced Charms book that's hovering in the air. Three goggle-eyed hobgoblin heads bubble up from his wand and explode with wet, sucking noises in the air. He's already turned the fire violet and Draco knows this is a bad sign, or at least the small part of him that still cares about the outside world knows this.

"Hullo," Harry says in an awkwardly indifferent voice.

Draco nods. "Hi."

“Are you better now?” Harry’s green eyes are large behind his glasses. He’s been combing his hand through his hair so much, it’s standing almost straight up.

“Your hair looks ridiculous,” Draco says. He hangs his soaking jacket on the hook. He supposes he should have bothered with an Impervius, but he just hadn’t given a damn.

“So that’s a no.”

“Maybe,” Draco says, grabbing a towel to get dry his sodden hair a little. His boots are dripping muck onto the carpet. He could care less.

Harry sets down the book he’s not reading. “Are you going to be a drama queen about this all night?”

Draco’s chest clenches. “A what?”

Harry’s chin juts out. “You’re acting like this only affects you, Draco. And you’re being a beast.”

“I’m being dramatic about this.” Draco says in a flat tone. “Me. I think not, Harry.” He throws the towel to the corner of the room, not caring where it lands.

“You walked away from me.” Harry raises his voice.

“I just needed some time. It’s all so horrifyingly public now.” Draco catches a glimpse of the ring hanging from the chain around Harry’s throat, and he tenses. He wishes he could forget everything Severus had told him about it.

Harry struggles out of the chair. “I knew it. I knew you were ashamed of the baby. And of me.”

Draco glares at him. “It’s all very well for you to be odd. You are the fucking Saviour of all Wizarding Arses everywhere. You could wear your pants on your head and everyone else would start doing it. Some of us have to care about our reputations, Harry.”

“And you think I don’t care?” Harry is shouting now. “Merlin, Draco. You’re such a shallow git.”

“I may be shallow but at least I don’t lie and ruin other people’s lives with my lies.”

This stops Harry cold. “What do you mean?”

Draco walks over and jerks the chain out from beneath Harry’s shirt. The ring dangles between them, glinting in the lamplight. “Severus told me about the Resurrection Stone. That it’s not just a family heirloom.” He drops the chain and the ring thuds lightly against Harry’s chest. A wave of recklessness crests through Draco. “No wonder the baby likes it, Harry. It was fucking conceived with it.”

Harry’s hands grip his swollen belly. His breath is shallow, but he doesn’t look away from Draco. “What exactly are you saying, Malfoy?” he asks coldly.

It’s almost as if the words come from outside of Draco. “You did this on purpose.”

Harry is ashen with fury. “I--you think I fucking chose this?”

Draco's detached inside, in that way he'd been the entirety of last year. It's better this way, he thinks, and he's almost relieved at the comforting familiarity of not-feeling. He's cold, even, and it's spreading from his heart throughout his body. Everything suddenly seems so clear. How could he have been such a fool? "Yes," he says harshly, and the stunned look on Harry's face pushes him on. Rage wells up inside of him; he can still hear the screams of the Howlers echoing in his ears. "Yes I do. I think you knew what would happen and you chose it. You did all of this on purpose to embarrass me and get revenge on my family."

"Get. Out." The papers on Harry's desk start to flutter, a few of them rising off the worn wood. Harry's eyes are a deep, dark green that almost frightens Draco. "Just *get out*." The fire flares in the hearth, singeing the chimneypiece and casting black soot smears across the carpet.

"Fine, Potter. I will." Draco knows the switch in names will hurt Harry. He wants to. He pauses at the door. "I should have stopped this insanity long ago."

He barely makes it into the corridor before, with a flick of his wand, Harry slams the door in response.

Draco slumps against the wall, shaking, as his anger slowly drains. He stares at the door beside him. He reaches towards the thick wood, only to jerk his hand back when sharp sparks sting it.

Bastard.

He refuses to look back as he storms off down the hall.



Harry rubs his eyes. The fire in the Gryffindor common room is burning low and the lower years have gone to bed. He, Hermione, and Ron have been working all night. It's so late even Hermione has nodded off. Harry suspects she hasn't slept for two days, although the notes she brought them tonight were absolutely brilliant, so he doesn't really care how she did it.

"Are you and Malfoy still fighting?" Ron asks. He looks away from Harry and over at Hermione. His face softens and he leans over to gently pull the brown and orange afghan over her sleeping form.

Harry looks up from the parchment he's copying. "Yeah. We haven't spoken in a week." His heart clenches. He's barely seen Draco. The only indication he's even there any longer is the small bag next to his favourite chair filled with balls of blue and white yarn and an increasingly bigger baby blanket. He's still furious with him, of course, but he's beginning to have regrets about losing his temper.

They've gone back to separate bedrooms. Draco leaves before Harry's awake and goes to bed before Harry comes back in from revising. On the nights Harry comes back at all, that is. He's been sleeping mostly here in his old room.

"Have you, um, done anything else?" Ron shifts, looking a little embarrassed.

"No, Ron. We haven't fucked either," Harry snaps. Ron flinches at the sharpness of his tone and Hermione mumbles in her sleep, putting a hand over her eyes.

“Keep it down, Harry. I’ve been trying to get her to sleep for hours.” Ron frowns and looks from his girlfriend to his best friend. “Have you tried to mend things with him? At all?”

“I don’t know what’s to mend,” Harry says mulishly. He misses Draco, but he doesn’t want to be the one to give in. And he doesn’t know how they can go back on what’s been said. “He started it and he’s the one who decided to go back to his own damn room.”

“Oh come on, Harry, Malfoy’s mad about you.” At Harry’s words of protest, Ron holds up a hand. “Honestly. He hasn’t been able to keep his hands off of you and the baby for weeks. Even in public. Every time you’re in the room, his eyes follow you. He must be really upset by this to fight with you.”

“And I’m not upset as well?” Harry slams his book shut, and Hermione’s soft snores cease for a moment before starting up again. “He didn’t have to make it worse by yelling at me and acting as though his reputation is the only thing at stake here.” *Or blaming me*, Harry thinks privately, even though he’s wondered himself whether Draco’s right.

Ron sighs. “Harry, you’re really thick sometimes. Malfoy’s reputation is in tatters. His dad’s in Azkaban, his mum’s being shunned by everyone they know, their Gringotts accounts have been mostly put under investigation, and he’s been sentenced to manual labour for two years. He’s just trying to protect whatever he can, but his life has really been destroyed. Except for the part with you and the sprog and all, but now that’s being dragged through the mud by people who don’t know a damn thing about either of you. So perhaps he’s a little sensitive.”

“Well at least he’s not pregnant,” Harry says petulantly. He shifts and hopes he can hold off pissing for another ten minutes. He doesn’t want to get up now even though he wants the conversation to end. “And preparing for NEWTs.”

“Yeah, well, the Howlers aren’t coming for you, are they?” Ron shakes his head. “You know, I’m not one to defend the Ferret, but I think you should at least try to understand his position. I know you’re angry, but you’re about to have a baby and fighting with its father’s not going to help.”

Harry knows Ron’s right. He even feels a bit guilty about what he’s saying. It’s true. Draco is lashing out because he’s angry and afraid. He also feels guilty that he blocks the Malfoy family’s situation out of his mind most of the time in order to focus on the present. He doesn’t want to connect himself to Lucius or even to what they all did during those years. For Christ’s sake, Lucius tried to kill him--not to mention Ginny--and Draco spent all of sixth year working up the nerve to murder Dumbledore. Even Narcissa only saved his life because it was convenient for her. And this was the family his baby would be a part of? Sometimes Harry doesn’t know what he’s done to deserve this situation. Sure, everyone has issues with their in-laws, but really, Harry thinks this is beyond the pale.

And he’s not telling Ron about the Resurrection Stone, no matter what. The last thing he needs is for Hermione to tell him what a complete idiot he’s been. It’s not as if Harry doesn’t know that.

He sighs. “Look, there’s not much I can do about it. You know Draco. He has to wear himself out.”

Ron sighs. “Suit yourself. I need to get Hermione to go to bed.”

Harry nods. “Yeah. I need to sleep too.”

“C’mon then,” Ron gives Harry an arm to help him get up. “Let’s go upstairs. I’ve got your bed ready.”

As he climbs the stairs back up to his old dormitory, Harry wonders if Draco’s thinking about him. His hand rests on his enormous stomach.

The baby kicks him.

Harry thinks maybe he’s earned it.



Draco watches Harry at breakfast. The idiot barely eats, dragging his fork across his plate listlessly. Not even the Weasel or Granger seem to be able to talk him into more than a forkful or two of eggs, and Harry doesn’t bother to look up when the Weaselette leans across the table.

“Yeh two still fightin’?” Hagrid asks, wiping his hands on his napkin and dropping it next to his plate.

Draco shrugs. “I suppose.”

Hagrid gives him a long look. “Yer worse than two Blast-Ended Skrewts set tail to tail,” he says with a sigh. “Just with a baby between yeh.”

“It’s not here yet,” Draco says. He looks down at his own plate. He’s managed to choke down half of it. Another Howler had slipped through the wards this morning, this one informing him that he was going to burn in Hell with the Dark Lord. Hagrid had just stabbed it with his fork, cutting it off with a calm *Never did care much for that sort of religion*. The scarlet remnants of the parchment are shredded across the tabletop.

“Soon enough tho’.” Hagrid pushes his chair back and stands. “Might want to be thinkin’ about that.”

Draco stays at the table. He can’t stop looking at Harry, even though he knows the first-years are watching him. An elf sets a bun in front of him, warm and melting with thick white icing. Just the kind Harry loves. Draco turns; Winky is clearing Hagrid’s plate.

“This,” he starts, but Winky cuts him off.

“Is being for Mr Harry Potter, sir.” Large black eyes fix on him. Even Winky’s mouth is set in disapproval. She looks towards Gryffindor table expectantly, her meaning clear.

Draco sighs and picks up the bun. “He won’t eat it if I give it to him,” he says.

“Mr Draco Malfoy ought to be seeing.” Winky frowns, and Draco finds himself stepping down from the staff table, curious eyes on him as he walks towards the Gryffindors. Things must be dire indeed if he’s getting relationship help from a house-elf.

“Draco,” Perdita whispers urgently as he passes her, but he doesn’t look over. The first years have been glaring at him all week, their ranks closing around Harry and the baby every time Draco passes. Only Perdita and Agnes have been even the least bit sympathetic, and Draco realises how absolutely pathetic

it is that he even cares what they think of him, for Circe's sake. House-elves. First years. His life is out of control.

The Weasel sits back as Draco approaches. Draco doesn't think he looks entirely unfriendly, but it's hard to tell with all that awful red hair distracting him. Granger, on the other hand, is shooting daggers his way.

"Hey," Draco says softly.

Harry looks up at him. He doesn't say anything.

Draco sets the bun next to Harry's elbow. "You should eat something." He eyes the bun. "Maybe it's not the most nutritious thing, but you always like them."

This earns him a small nod. Harry's face is pale and Draco can see the dark circles under his eyes. He stands there for a moment, uncertain of what to say and disconcerted by the direct stares he's getting and the animated whispers all around him. He's never been one to dodge attention--what Malfoy is?--but this is different. Draco doesn't like it, doesn't like them all knowing what's going on between him and Harry, doesn't like them gossiping about something so private. He shifts from one foot to the other, then sighs, shoving his hands in his pockets. "I should go check on the Thestrals."

He's a foot away when Harry says, "Malfoy."

Draco looks back. The entire room swivels their heads to watch.

Harry picks up the bun. "Thanks." He takes a small bite, and Draco smiles.

He turns and walks away.



Harry comes back to the room that night.

Draco stays in his own bed, listening intently to the noises in the common room. When Harry comes to the door of Draco's room, his wand tip bright with a Lumos, Draco sits up and his coverlet bunches around his waist. "Gryffindor Tower too crowded?" he asks, trying to keep his voice light. He holds his breath.

"Something like that," Harry says and then he yawns. He slips out of his robe and drapes it over one arm. His jumper is stretched taut across his huge bump. He brushes his fingers over it, and Draco's heart aches. He misses touching Harry, misses feeling the baby move beneath his palm. "I'm going to lie down." Harry hesitates. "By myself."

Draco nods. "Okay." When Harry turns to leave, Draco calls his name. He looks back. "I'm glad you're here tonight," Draco says quietly.

"Thanks," Harry says, and then he's gone. Draco can hear him move about his room, getting undressed, then the familiar squeak of the mattress as he settles onto his side of the bed. A lump forms in Draco's

throat. Harry'd crawled into the side he'd always taken when Draco was with him. Draco's side never squeaked. They used to joke about it.

Draco rolls over and stares at the wall that separates them. He wonders if Harry's doing the same.

"Night, Draco," he hears Harry call out, and he smiles faintly.

"Good night," he says, closing his eyes.

For the first time in days, Draco sleeps.



It all happens so quickly in the middle of a normal day. From one moment to the next, his world changes.

It's almost lunchtime and Harry's in the first-floor corridor. Students are streaming past him and a knot of fourth years is forming near the far end. Harry sees someone pull a wand, and he reacts without thinking. He shouts for them to stop and pulls his own wand, coming closer. There's a blue flash, something hits the wall and then a numbness spreads across his side, followed by wrenching, twisting pain. He falls to the floor as white hot agony seizes his body. He can hear voices and shouts through the haze. The baby's shifting.

Ron's saying something to him, but Harry can't make it out, and then he's gone and Hermione's leaning over him, her long hair brushing his cheek.

Harry cries out as another wave of pain shoots through him. Pomona Sprout pushes through the throng of students gathering around him and kneels down, resting a cool hand on his brow. It breaks through the wave of pain.

"It's going to be okay, Harry," she says, her dark eyes meeting his and for a moment Harry almost believes her. At least until McGonagall comes running down the hallway, shouting at everyone to get out of her way.

They transport him to the Infirmary, levitating his body but not putting any other spells on him for fear of harming the baby. Harry feels like he's being ripped open by a hot knife and his face is streaming with tears and clenched with pain. Every moment lasts a lifetime, followed by shaking breaths and fear that the pain will start again. Hermione's beside him, her hand tight around Harry's, and he knows from the look on her face that it hurts when he clutches her fingers, but she doesn't stop him.

"Ron," he says.

"I'm here, mate." Ron's on his other side, and he smooths back Harry's hair gently.

And then they're gone, and Madam Pomfrey's leaning over him, her hand on Harry's belly. Harry can see the bright white light of the Infirmary lamps behind her, and he squints his eyes.

“He’s in labour, Poppy. He was hit by a spell,” Professor Sprout says. Harry turns his head, but he can’t see her.

“Do we know what it was? Could you tell?” McGonagall’s voice is clipped and audibly concerned.

“No,” Professor Sprout says. “The fourth-year Hufflepuffs swear they were only casting Jelly-Legs Jinxes and the like, but it’s hard to tell what happened. They do think it went through a mirror.”

McGonagall swears loudly, and if Harry weren’t in so much pain, he’d be laughing. It’s a first in his experience.

“That’s bad,” Pomfrey confirms. “It could be anything. We have to keep him as comfortable as possible. I have an urgent Floo into his specialist at St Mungo’s. He should be getting back to us any minute, but he was out of surgery on a break.”

Draco, Harry thinks. He opens his mouth, but all that comes out is a groan.

Still, McGonagall pauses. Her face appears over him. “We need to tell Mr Malfoy. Pomona, would you send the Patronus? I’ll step out and ask Miss Granger and Mr Weasley to retrieve Mr Potter’s things. Poppy, how else can I help?”

The aged mediwitch sighs. “I’ve put a monitoring spell on Mr Potter and one on the baby. So far, they’re both fine, but we need Healer Guhathakurta soon.”

A cool cloth soothes his brow and Pomfrey gives him ice chips to suck on in between the shocking bouts of agony. Harry’s world turns to sobbing and exhaustion and searing pain. He prays that he’ll make it, that he’s not dying, that the baby will be okay. He’s terrified but he can’t maintain terror as another spasm grips him.

“Poppy,” Professor Sprout shouts.

Harry sinks into darkness.



Draco’s working at a stone in the hoof of a Thestral when the Patronus arrives. It’s a wispy silver beaver that moves straight to him and announces, “Mr Malfoy, come to the Infirmary at once. Mr Potter’s in labour.”

Draco startles up, dropping the hoofpick. He stares for a moment, his mouth open and his brain refusing to form thoughts. It’s too early. Harry’s not scheduled for another week.

The Thestral snuffles and nudges at his arm with his nose.

Hagrid rouses him from his stupor. His face is worried. “Go now, Draco. Druella’ll carry yeh back to the castle. Yeh can land on the Astronomy Tower.”

In complete and utter shock, Draco mounts Druella when Hagrid brings her over.

“Careful,” Hagrid says, and a slap of his heavy hand against Druella’s flank sends her galloping across the clearing.

Draco ducks his head as they barely make it above the trees in the clearing. His fingers are twisted tight in Druella’s mane, and his legs slip against her smooth sides.

“Sorry, girl,” he murmurs, and she tosses her head and snuffles softly as the wind ruffles his hair.

She flies over the roof of Hagrid’s cabin, her shadow following the path below. In almost no time, they’re rising to the flat plane of the tower and circling to land on the stone. Draco pats Druella’s side and thanks her, then runs down the stairs as fast as he dares, trailing a hand on the wall for balance.

At the bottom of the stairs, he’s met by a familiar voice, raised in alarm. “You idiot. Where have you been?” Severus is standing in the midst of a painted farmyard, the hem of his robe dragging in the mud.

Draco doesn’t need this. He ignores him and races down the hall. Severus jumps from frame to frame following him, pushing aside drowsy wizards and angry monks, bored looking cattle and Morris dancers. “Go to your room first, boy. Get the Resurrection Stone.”

Draco stops and wheels on him. “Why?”

“Because it will help.” Severus says. His face is grim, and it frightens Draco. “Because the brat needs it.”

Draco doesn’t stop to ask which brat. He runs through the corridors, dodging armour and flying around corners, taking staircases in bounds. He bursts into their rooms, the door opened ahead of time by Severus who skipped the run and came straight down. He dashes into Potter’s room, praying that he can find it, and there it is on the side table.

The ring is warm in his hand, almost thrumming with magic, as he turns around and runs for the Infirmary. The first-year girls are clustered outside and they part instantly, forming a path for him.

“Good luck, Draco,” Agnes says, and she’s clutching her tattered copy of *What Every Witch Should Know About Childbirth*.

Perdita looks like she’s about to burst into tears. “Good luck,” she chokes out, and the rest of them take up the chorus.

He thanks them inwardly for their kind words, which is a sign of how utterly out of his mind with terror he is.

When he bursts into the room, Healer Guhathakurta is pulling on his green robes, his face half-covered by a white mask.

“Where’s Harry?” Draco shouts. No one scolds him.

He hears a groan and sees a white cotton sheet. Running over, he sees that Harry’s hair is damp with sweat and his face is pale and twisted in anguish. Draco drops to his knees, holding Harry’s hand.

"I brought you the ring," he whispers. "I have it here." Carefully, he puts it around Harry's neck and Harry relaxes a little. Draco squeezes Harry's fingers, then presses them to his mouth. "It was a stupid fight."

"Not entirely," Harry says. And then he convulses, crying out in pain, his whole body rippling with spasms. His hand nearly crushes Draco's. He gasps and falls back against the pillows. "You were right. Just not about me doing this on purpose." He's breathing hard and his face is drenched in sweat. He grasps the ring between his fingers and breathes out. "That's better."

"I need to remove the baby now," Guhathakurta says curtly. He steps up to Harry's bedside. "Mr Malfoy, if you're going to stay, you need to be disinfected."

Pomfrey flicks her wand at Draco, and a shiver of magic tingles across his skin, sinking into his clothes. She hands him a white robe. "Put this on, dear."

Draco slips the robe over his work clothes and stands by Harry's side. "I'm here."

Harry looks up, his green eyes unfocused without glasses. His body tenses again and he bites back a groan of pain. "Fuck." He pants, his fingers digging into the mattress beneath him. "I swear to God, Draco, if I live through this, I'm going to kill you for doing this to me." His shoulders press into the pillows behind him and he shudders, his eyes screwing shut. "Rip your fucking balls off."

Draco can't stop the smile that breaks across his face. He wants to kiss Harry, but he's fairly certain Guhathakurta would throw him out of the room. Instead he strokes a fingertip across Harry's mouth.

Harry swears again, arching forward with a sharp cry, and Pomfrey has to push him back against the bed. It's all Draco can do not to shove her away as Harry struggles against her.

"Mr Malfoy," Pomfrey says sharply. "A little help, if you please?"

The next minutes are tense and horrifying. Even though he's under a localised pain block spell, Harry goes into shock as Guhathakurta's spell slices through the muscle walls of his abdomen. Draco holds him and prays, mostly that he won't faint because Harry would never forgive him--or stop reminding him what he went through was so much worse.

There are several tense moments and utter silence while Guhathakurta works. Magic is bouncing around the room in waves, from Harry, from Guhathakurta, from the ring. Draco is dimly aware that McGonagall and Pomfrey are working to contain it, but he can feel the wash of it across his skin as it surges from Harry's magical field.

A scone shatters behind him, and he grips Harry tighter, leaning in to murmur encouragement in his ear.

And then there is a wet sound and squalling, another spell. And Guhathakurta says, "It's a boy."

Harry slumps almost lifeless on the bed, his face drained of colour. Tenderly Pomfrey wipes his brow and administers a pain draught. He sinks against the pillow, and Draco kisses his cheek, wiping away the wetness he finds there and then realising it's his own tears.

After what seems like an eternity later, Guhathakurta returns with a neatly swaddled bundle. "Would you like to hold your son?" he asks Harry.

Harry hesitates, his exhaustion evident. "Draco first," he says in a raw voice. "I've spent nine months holding him. Draco should have a chance."

Draco carefully takes the impossibly light and strangely formed bundle from Guhathakurta's large hands and then he and Harry are looking into the scrunched up, red, and bawling face of this strange new being they've somehow managed to help into the world.

Pomfrey moves them into a room in the Infirmary--the one generally used for Quidditch injuries--and wheels in a bassinet. Draco picks Scorpius up, for that's what they'd agreed to call a boy even if Harry had wanted to call him Jack at first. Such a strange name, Draco thinks, outlandish, really.

Harry watches him. "He's so little."

"Yeah." Draco touches Scorpius's tiny nose. There's a light fuzz of dark hair on his head, but Guhathakurta's told them that'll probably fall out at some point. Draco secretly wishes it comes back in blond, but he's not holding out hope for that. He'll be happy enough if Scorpius inherits the Malfoy eyes.

"I'll need to rent a house in Hogsmeade," Harry says.

Draco's counting Scorpius's toes and fingers again, just to make certain the proper number are there. He looks up sharply. "What?" He worries for a moment that Harry's delirious.

Harry holds out his arms, and Draco reluctantly hands Scorpius over. Harry stares down at their son, brushing his cheek with a knuckle. "You've another year here on your Community Order, and Scorpius and I are going to need a place to stay."

Draco stills. "Harry."

"I'm sure McGonagall would let you spend weekends," Harry continues softly. "You're a dad now--"

"Harry," Draco says again. He can barely breathe. "Aren't you supposed to stop having mad sex all weekend when you've a kid?"

"I mean it," Harry says. He looks up at Draco. "I want to try this."

"This?" Draco's voice comes out in a small squeak. He clears his throat.

Harry gives him a half-smile. "Whatever we have here." He looks back down at Scorpius. "I mean, we should see how it goes. For him, right?"

Draco nods. "Yeah." He's suddenly afraid, but he reaches out and takes Harry's hand. "So does that make you my boyfriend or the poor innocent lamb I've seduced into a life of perfidy?" he asks casually. He rubs a thumb over Harry's knuckles. "Just asking in case another Howler lands on my plate."

Harry's bright grin dazzles Draco. "I think I like perfidy." He considers. "But only if it involves a great deal of cocksucking."

“Oh it does.” Draco sits on the bed next to Harry. “Budge up.”

“Prick.”

“Arse.”

They smile at each other.

Draco touches Scorpius’s tiny fist and his son stretches, his fingers flexing, then curling around Draco’s fingertip. Draco’s breath catches and he looks up at Harry.

“Beautiful, isn’t he?” Harry murmurs. Draco just nods.

A quiver of joy shoots through him. He thinks he could get used to it.



Late that night, while Harry’s sleeping, his even breathing rising and falling in the silent room, Draco holds Scorpius against his chest, strangely comfortable with this odd new person in his life whom he feels like he’s known all along.

He must have dozed off because when he opens his eyes, a hooded figure is bending over him, like a Dementor in a dark robe with a bony finger and glowing eyes. “I want what’s mine, Mr Malfoy.”

Slowly, Death reaches for the baby.

“No.” Draco is almost frozen in shock. He holds Scorpius tighter.

Death’s hood tilts. “I’ve been cheated once.” His voice rattles and wheezes. “Young Mr Potter--”

“Chose not to follow you,” Draco says. “He came back--”

“And cheated me.” That bony finger touches the edge of Scorpius’s blanket, leaving behind a small black mark. “I’m merely claiming what’s mine back.” Death turns to look at Harry, lying pale in the bed. “Of course if you’d rather I took him instead...”

A chill settles across Draco’s chest. “It’s not my choice.”

Death turns back to him. “I think it is.” Draco almost thinks he can see a hint of a ghoulish smile in the shadows of the hood. “Your son or your lover, Mr Malfoy? Which will it be? One brought back to life by my Hallows, and one created with it. I can assure you I’m not leaving empty-handed.”

Silence stretches out between them. Draco clutches Scorpius to his chest.

“Very well,” Death says. He turns back towards the bed, his hand stretching out to Harry.

“No.” Draco holds onto Scorpius with one hand. He grabs Death’s sleeve, his fingers burning with an icy heat the moment they brush the heavy wool. He hisses, dropping his burned hand.

Death stills, cocks his head. “You’re either very brave or very foolish, Mr Malfoy.”

“Most likely foolish.” Draco sees the glint of the chain around Harry’s throat. He pushes past Death, his heart pounding wildly. He grabs the chain, pulling it’s length over Harry’s head as he clutches Scorpius tightly against him, keeping him as far from Death as he can. The ring falls into his blistered hand, the Resurrection Stone glowing brightly against his skin.

“This belongs to you, I believe,” he says. “Will you take this?”

Scorpius is surprisingly quiet, his eyes wide as the hooded figure studies them. “This baby should not have come into being, Mr Malfoy. He is an anomaly.”

“Yes, but he belongs to me now.” Draco lifts his chin. “And so does Harry. So take the stone, that belongs to you.”

Death ponders for a moment and then loops a skeletal finger through the chain and lifts the ring from Draco’s grasp. It swings between them, glowing brighter and brighter until the depth of the stone is nothing but pure light, and Scorpius whimpers softly.

“Well played, Mr Malfoy,” Death says finally. “I agree to your trade. Not every man can bargain with me. Then again, there are very few Resurrection Stones.”

When Draco wakes up, sunlight is streaming through the windows and Harry is feeding Scorpius from a bottle, the colour returned to his face.

Draco nearly throws himself on the bed, holding them both. “I had the worst dream.”

His gaze falls on Scorpius’s blanket. There’s a small black mark on the edge. Draco freezes, his breath harsh in the silence.

“Draco,” Harry says.

A heavy chill seeps through Draco’s body. He turns his hands over. They’re blistered. His whole body trembles.

“Harry,” he say softly, “the Stone.”

Harry’s fingers brush his bare throat, the bottle still in his hand. Scorpius fusses softly. “I know.”

Albus Dumbledore steps into a portrait across the room. He stands silently, looking at Draco. Their eyes meet. A curious look crosses Dumbledore’s face, and he tilts his head towards Draco in a gesture Draco’s seen many times over the years. But never directed towards him.

Well done.

Severus moves behind Dumbledore. He touches the older man's arm, leading him out of the frame. When he looks back at Draco, he nods. A rare smile curves his thin lips, and then they're gone.

"It's all right, love," Harry says softly. He touches Draco's cheek. "It's all right now."

And Draco knows it is.



Photo by emmanez

fifteen years later

Draco stops under a large plane tree on the path to Hogwarts from the village and takes off his wool jumper. He's surprised at how warm it is for May. Canberra'd been frigid at night and cool during the day and he hadn't adjusted his travelling outfit for the summer of his destination. He rolls back the checked cuffs of his broadcloth shirt.

Presents and parting gifts from Rolf and Luna threaten to spill out of his satchel as he stuffs the rolled navy wool in amongst the clothes he'd packed at the research station this morning. His other things, his research, will be arriving by international Wizarding delivery later in the week. He hopes they don't rifle through his samples again and ruin his sorting methods. He doesn't want to have to restructure three months worth of work.

He shoulders his bag and sets off again with long, determined strides. After twenty minutes, he reaches his destination. He sets the heavy leather satchel on the worn stone stoop and pounds loudly on the wooden door. Fang II barks and Hagrid's bushy face appears. His hair's gone mostly white now, although his beard retains several streaks of brown, and he's going deaf in one ear. His face splits into a grin when he recognises his caller.

"Draco, lad. Back so soon, are yeh?" Hagrid motions him inside. "I've made some rock cakes, and there's a kettle already on." He rustles around in the shelves by the sink and returns with two mismatched stoneware mugs. "Now how're young Rolf and Luna getting on?"

"The twins are seven now, and complete terrors." Draco hoists his long, lanky frame onto his favourite stool. His feet barely hit the bottom rung. "And the station is thriving. Luna's working on some Aussie creatures that are half fungus and half mouse. I was never quite sure when she pointed them out in the forests what to look for, but she seems thrilled. And Rolf's work on the classification of Graphorns and the hornless Australasian types is finally gaining international recognition."

“And th’ breeding program?” Hagrid presses. “Tell me about th’ ‘orses.”

Draco blows on the surface of his scalding tea and takes a sip. “We went to Ulan Bator and the countryside this time. We’re trying to gather rare lines from all over Asia and I think we may even be able to repopulate some areas with herds in partnership with the local Wizarding authorities. I also talked to a visiting team from Slovakia working specifically with endangered Abraxan horses, and we may have work to do there, too. They said there are several local breeds that haven’t been properly classified.”

“Might check with Olympe.” Hagrid looks pleased. “Last I heard she has records of all the Abraxan bloodlines. European, at least. See if there’s some overlap. Did yeh see the Moon Thestrals?”

Draco nods, remembering the small group of four and the pale moonlight making their forms visible. “It was in Khankh, near Lake Khovsgol. We were only ten feet away when the moon shone on them. They almost looked like Patronuses, but they were too solid and too bright. And their eyes were jet black.”

Hagrid leans forward, spilling some of his tea onto the sleeping Fang, who leaps up and barks. “There, there,” Hagrid says, patting him distractedly while looking at Draco. “How long did yeh see them?”

“Only for a few minutes. The moon slipped behind a cloud and then they were gone.” Draco pauses. “It was astonishing really.” He points to his bag. “I have some of their mane hairs in there. And I got a hoof impression.”

While Hagrid is chuckling and pouring more tea, Draco reaches into the pocket of his trousers and fishes out a small tin. “Here,” he says, handing it to Hagrid. “Put this in the fire and then pour water on it once a day for ten days.”

Hagrid shakes it gently. “What is it?”

“Nothing too dangerous, unfortunately,” Draco smiles. “Although I’ll knit you a pair of gloves out of their hair when they moult. It’ll help you work with the Fire Crabs. Real Woolly Salamanders are hard to come by.”

Hagrid beams at him. “Yeh didn’t have to bring me anything.”

“I wanted to bring you some lovely exploding Crater Crabs from Indonesia, but I was afraid I’d be caught at customs.” Draco waits for a moment, watching the succession of looks on the half-giant’s face and his attempt not to look crushed. He laughs. “They should be arriving in a separate case next week. Rolf worked out how to pack them in rock with enough food for the journey.”

Draco lets Hagrid hug him, and then he pushes him gently back into his seat. “But tell me about the herd. How’ve they been getting on this summer? Are the new foals from Druella’s line still larger than the others?”

When he leaves the hut half an hour later, Draco is up-to-date on the progress of the Thestrals and the notable events from the past twelve weeks, at least as Hagrid sees them, which is a bit different from the standard perspective. Draco’d learned almost nothing about the students or teachers, but he knew more than he cared to about a large spider nest that Hagrid’d found in the Forest.

As Draco rounds the paths next to the greenhouse, he sees a familiar robed, dark-haired figure leaning against the fence around the vegetable patch and his heart leaps in his chest. He throws his satchel down in the ankle-high grass and runs. Harry just waits for Draco to reach him, a crooked smile on his face. Draco's hands thread past the stems of Harry's glasses, through the unruly curls and he pulls him in. Their lips meet, softly at first.

Draco nips Harry's lower lip.

Harry shifts and sighs and kisses him back harder. "I've missed you, love."

"How's my favourite Charms professor?" Draco murmurs. His fingers tug lightly at Harry's hair. Harry's held the position since Flitwick retired eleven years ago. Draco thinks if he told his eleven-year-old self that he'd be married one day to the Head of Gryffindor House, he'd have laughed himself into a nervous breakdown.

Harry smiles against Draco's mouth. "Complaining terribly about his husband being halfway across the world for three months."

"I'd hate to endure that," Draco says. "Must have been horribly annoying at staff meetings."

"According to Snape." Harry pulls back and grins at him. "He marched into our bedroom one night to tell me just to wank and get over myself."

Draco raises an eyebrow. "And?"

Harry's mouth quirks. "Imagine his complete consternation when he found me already putting his advice to use. At least the first half."

With a laugh, Draco kisses him until they are both red-faced and gasping, on the edge of all possible restraint. Harry's hand is twisted in the cloth of his shirt and he has both hands cupping Harry's arse.

"I'd drag you off into a greenhouse if I could," Draco murmurs, and Harry's lashes lower.

As if on cue, the new professor of potions emerges from the greenhouse nearest them, her basket full of cuttings. "Not in Nev's greenhouses, you wouldn't. They've just been cleaned." Her face softens, "You two never stop, do you?"

Draco reluctantly steps away from Harry, but keeps his fingers twined through Harry's. Sunlight glints off the matching engraved platinum bands on their left hands. "Perdita, how are you?"

She smiles. "Well, thank you. And glad you're back. The Deputy Headmaster's been moping without you."

"I have not," Harry says. "I haven't the time to mope."

"That's not what I heard." Draco smiles, ignoring Harry's mock indignation. "Will Agnes be coming up from London this summer?"

Perdita shakes her head. "No. I'm going to have to travel down more. She's just been appointed to a new obstetrics ward at St Mungo's, and she barely stops working to eat."

Harry and Draco exchange glances. "She did always seem unnaturally interested in childbirth," Draco whispers. "Especially for an eleven-year-old."

"Twelve," Perdita retorts with an amused gleam in her eye.

A shout comes from the direction of the castle as two girls burst out of the door. Peony Goldstein leads, her long legs propelling her in a dash. She's just finished her first year and has her eyes set on the Ravenclaw seeker position. Rose Weasley-Granger chases behind her, her bushy red hair streaming. And behind them, Scorpius James walks at a more leisurely pace, not wanting to be caught running by his fathers as though he were eager. He stands back as the other two greet Draco, then walks forward slowly. Draco smiles and ruffles his son's blond hair, noticing with a pang that he's almost as tall as Harry.

"I didn't expect such a reception," Draco says dryly. His hand settles on Scorpius's shoulder.

Scorpius ducks his head and grins, his hair falling across his cheek. "They're just hoping you have presents."

Peony eyes her godfather expectantly. "Of course he does. He always does."

"In the satchel." Draco gestures back behind him, and the two girls take off, robes flapping behind them. He looks back at his son. Scorpius's Slytherin tie is slightly askew. Draco straightens it. "And you're not running after them?"

Scorpius grins. "I'll make them do all the work."

"Wise boy." Draco smiles as Harry slips both arms around his waist, resting his chin on Draco's shoulder. "Where's Teddy?"

"Off with Victoire again," Scorpius huffs in annoyance, and Harry and Draco exchange a pointed look. They've had their suspicions about their son's friendship with his cousin.

"Ah." Draco leans back against Harry's chest, enjoying the solidness of him.

Scorpius rolls his eyes as Harry nuzzles Draco's neck. "Dad," he says with a huff and the pained belief of a teenager that his parents only had sex once--to conceive him. "People--"

"Will not be surprised in the slightest that I can't keep my hands off your father." Harry says, and Perdita laughs.

"Too true. You should have seen them when they were younger." She slips an arm through Scorpius's elbow. "I've a new potion brewing if you'd like to see it. Professor Snape's hovering over it right now, and I'm certain he'd be more than happy to tell us both how I cocked it up."

Scorpius's eyes light up, and he looks back at his father. "May I--"

Draco smiles indulgently at him. Severus had been thrilled to discover there was a potions prodigy in the family. "Go on. I'll come find you after I unpack."

Scorpius whoops and takes off towards the castle, Perdita right behind him. Her blue dragonskin heeled boots kick up dust in their wake.

“Don’t get too engrossed,” Harry calls after them. “Your grandmother’s expecting us for dinner this evening.” He gives Draco an apologetic look. “She rescheduled Lucius’s birthday party last week so you could be there.”

Draco groans. His father’s mellowed somewhat in the past decade and a half, just not enough to make a family dinner with Harry palatable. “I wonder what he’ll accuse you of this time.”

“I’m rather looking forward to finding out.” Harry grins wickedly, and Draco sighs. Harry deliberately enjoys provoking his father, Draco’s certain of that, and after fifteen years, he’s starting to strongly suspect his father enjoys it as well.

“Put the wine near me then,” Draco says. His mother can fend for herself.

“Always.” Harry pulls Draco closer, leaning in to kiss him. “In the meantime, we’ve three hours to spare and a distracted teenager.” His mouth brushes Draco’s ear. “And I’ve been wanking myself raw for days thinking of having you inside me.”

“Not too raw, I hope.” Draco hooks two fingertips in the waist of Harry’s trousers. He breathes in the scent of Harry--spicy, warm, musky. God. He’s missed him.

Dreadfully.

Harry’s eyes sparkle. “Race you,” he murmurs, and then he pulls away, his fingers slipping from Draco’s hand.

“Cheat,” Draco shouts, taking off after him, and Harry just laughs over his shoulder as he dashes towards the castle.

Draco can hear Rose and Peony behind him, dragging the satchel between them and cheering him on.

In the bright blue sky above, a Thestral circles, her foal at her side. Her whinny echos bright and loud across the grounds, and Draco laughs, his hair whipping around his face as he runs after the man he loves.

This, he knows without the slightest doubt, is perfect happiness.

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