



glockart09

black coffee on a lonely night

by femmequixotic

I turn and my breath catches. It's him again—he's been in every morning almost since Parliament began sitting after Easter. He looks familiar, but politicians always do to me. I've met too many of them through excruciatingly dull functions Father's forced me into attending over the past few months. Since he can't get me to return to cricket, he's now holding out hope I'll stop embarrassing him with this business and decide to enter politics like a proper Malfoy. Fortunately the House of Lords Act eleven years ago ensured I'll never be forced to take on his seat. God bless Labour for that.

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Written October 2009

Summary: Draco owns a café in the city. Harry's an MP who comes in every morning, newspapers in one hand, BlackBerry in the other, and orders a triple espresso macchiato.

Warnings: non-magical AU, bisexuality, semi-epilogue compliant

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Photo by pj_in_oz

i. November 2006

The day my wife dies, I'm half a world away, having my cock sucked in the filthy loo of a Brisbane pub.

I'd like to say I knew somehow, that in some mystical, primal way I felt the last breath she ever took, but the bald fact of the matter is that, at the precise minute in the middle of a rainy English spring afternoon that Astoria slides across the M25 in a metallic scream of tangled steel and burning rubber, my hands are twisted in Oliver Wood's hair, my prick is wetly fucking a mouth made for cocksucking, my hips are slamming backwards against the metal side of a loo stall as Oliver pressed his tongue against my slit, and the only bloody thing I'm cognizant of is an overwhelming need to spurt spunk down the back of his throat until I'm breathless and shaking.

Does that make me a twat? Some people would say yes. Even among my circle of friends. I don't think Blaise will ever forgive me, but then again, I'm fairly certain he's been in love with Astoria for years, even if he'll shag anything that walks past.

Don't get me wrong. It's not as if Astoria doesn't--*didn't*--know about Oliver. Or Roger. Or any of the others. We had an arrangement, she and I. The test matches and one-day games England played out of country--well, she didn't particularly care whom I pulled, sucked or fucked off British soil as long as I was discreet *and* came back and told her every sordid detail afterwards, buried inside of her as we rolled across our wide bed, tangling the sheets with every eager thrust.

The thought of me with other men made her randy. Her prim mother would have been horrified, and Astoria reveled in anything that would set her society parents on edge. I did as well. Sometimes I think that's why she married me. She taught me to reject the hypocrisy we'd been born into, the outwardly

proper worldview of wealth that hid a multitude of secrets and sins. Behind her elegant composure, she swore like a sailor; she'd try anything sexually at least once if not twice; she said to hell with our social circle's dictates and mores. She voted Conservative *and* Labour. She loved to dance. Loved to laugh. She made me feel alive and I adored her for it, no matter how perturbed my parents were that when I'd met her I slowly jettisoned the aristocratic training that for so many years they'd instilled in me.

Not that Astoria's parents were any more delighted with me, mind.

Lady Greengrass never approved of her daughter being involved with a man in sport. She would have been incensed if she knew I enjoyed a prick up my arse from time to time. And I don't even want to think of what the Baron would have said. He'd nearly burst an artery when the photo of me, Anderson and Cook with naught but our bats hiding our balls and pricks appeared in *Cosmopolitan* in support of a cancer charity. Father had, of course, shared his disgust for entirely the opposite reason. God forbid anyone make light of the sport of gentlemen, after all. What *would* his fellow members at the Marylebone Cricket Club think?

As if any of us gave a damn about the old bastards any longer. And Christ knows the ECB hadn't objected to the publicity.

Astoria, on the other hand, had bloody loved the idea, as well she should since it had been hers. She'd shagged me raw after the photoshoot. We hadn't even made it home; I'd had to pull the Aston Martin into a Tesco's car park so she could crawl into my lap, her damp knickers pulled aside just enough to let her slide onto my prick with a soft moan as she kissed me.

She died in that car.

Jesus.

Krum's waiting in the lobby of the Sofitel Brisbane, his mobile in his hand. It's our sixth week in Australia; we'd just lost the first Ashes test match and nearly the entire team had found a nearby bar in which to commiserate over beer while our security glowered at the locals.

Oliver has one arm draped around my waist and his hand is trying to slide beneath my shirt in a manner most unbecoming a cricket captain. Neither of us is particularly sober, and all I want to do is drag him up to my room with its breathtaking view of the city and shag him senseless.

Instead I stop short at the look on Krum's face, and Oliver pulls away from me slowly.

"What's wrong?" I choke out. All it takes is Krum's broken *Astoria... an accident* before my legs give way beneath me and I'm looking up at him from the floor, blankly whispering *no, no, no, no* as Oliver squats next to me, his hands gentle on my shoulders.

By dawn I'm on a Qantas plane again, numb and exhausted, staring out the window at the river as it disappears beneath the wings.

I've never felt so alone in my life.



Greg's waiting for me outside of Heathrow's Terminal Four, smoking a cigarette. When he sees me, he drops the fag, grinding it out with his heel as he stands. His sauce-stained chef's jacket swings open, white against his grey t-shirt and black trousers. He'd earned his first Michelin star six months ago.

He doesn't say anything. Greg's never had to, not in all the years I've known him. Instead he just drapes his arm around my shoulder, pulling me against his tall, burly body. He smells of cigarettes and garlic from the restaurant. There'd been three of us at first, me and Greg and Vince, thick as thieves as children and even more so once our parents had shipped us off to school together at eleven. We'd been inseparable, and Vince and Greg had done everything I'd told them to up until seventh form.

I'd only found out about the drugs when Greg had come to me, worried about Vince. We hadn't known what to do, hadn't known whom to talk to. Perhaps Snape, our form head, might have helped if we'd gone to him, might have told us how to avert the overdose that took Vince's life at the end of May, but I'd been lost in my own world that year; my parents' divorce had shattered everything, as had the revelation that my father had fucked about on my mother with some stupid girl only a few years older than me. Penelope, her name was. Penelope Clearwater. A researcher in my father's office in Westminster.

"Never become a politician, Draco," Mother had said to me calmly over tea when she came to school to tell me the news. "They only know how to lie and obfuscate."

I'd had to look up *obfuscate* when I'd gone back to my dormitory later. I had to admit it was an accurate description of Father. She needn't have worried about me, however. Not that I wasn't a dab hand at quite a few forms of deception myself. I'm a Malfoy, after all. But I'd no interest in politics. I was cricket-mad from an early age; Father had made certain of that. There are photographs of me at two, holding a tiny cricket bat in a perfect stance, Father squatting beside me in his whites, our blond hair ruffled by the wind.

One's still framed in my study at home, next to a photograph of me in my England whites and my own infant son, sitting in my lap as he chews on the handle of the very same cricket bat.

"Scorpius," I say to Greg as he takes one of my heavy rucksacks from me, hefting it over his wide shoulder with ease. Krum's shipping back the rest of my gear; the last I heard he plans on calling Stuart Broad up from Nottinghamshire to take my place on the team. I don't care now. One blond, right-arm seam bowler's as good as the next, I suppose.

Greg gives me a sideways look. "Your mum's with him."

I nod, swallowing hard as we walked towards the short-term car park. "How is he?" Father had told me Scorpius had been in the car with Astoria, asleep in his infant seat. The emergency team had to cut him out of the twisted metal, his leg fractured in three places, one lung collapsed. They don't know whether he's suffered any kind of brain trauma. Not yet. But he's alive.

The only time I'd heard Father's voice crack over the popping mobile connection had been when he'd told me that.

"Your father's pulled some strings and he's at Great Ormond Street Hospital," Greg says. "They transferred him this morning."

For once I'm grateful for Father's contacts. Great Ormond Street's the best children's hospital in the NHS Trust, but they don't take in every pediatric case.

The car coming around the corner barely misses me. Greg pulls me back onto the kerb with a frown and a "mind yourself, you twit, before your son ends up an orphan."

Only Greg could get away with that at the moment.

"I want to see him." My fingers tighten on the strap of the leather satchel crossing my chest. Grandmother Black had given me that luggage set on my eighteenth birthday and since then it's travelled to nearly every continent. Being a first-class cricketer has its benefits.

Greg tosses his keys. They clank against his palm. "There's spinach quiche and a bottle of Volvic in the car. I'll drive you to hospital if you eat on the way."

There's nothing that Greg thinks can't be solved by a bit of food and drink. I've learned over the years not to fight him. It's not worth the effort and he knows it too, judging by the even look he gives me as we walk up the ramp to the car park.

I shrug. "Fine." I still can't feel anything. I wonder if the cold grip around my heart will ever ease.

Greg squeezes my shoulder but I pull away. I don't want comfort.

Right now, I just want my son.



Mother glances up when I push open the door. She looks wan and tired and her usually impeccable hair is tumbling from its pins, but her fingers are tight around Scorpius's small fist.

"Draco," she says quietly. Scorpius is sleeping, a furrow between his arched eyebrows that I know full well means he could wake at the slightest too-loud sigh. His pink mouth is pursed and half-open and wet with drool, and his thick blond curls are ruffled over a wide white gauze plaster taped to his forehead.

He's tiny in the narrow, bright blue and apple green crib near the window, and the beeping machines surrounding him, their wires taped beneath his hospital gown to his chest, make him look smaller still. Scabby scrapes and black-purple bruises mar his pale skin; a green fiberglass cast weighs down his left leg, vivid against the crisp white sheets bunched around his other leg. He clutches a grey bear under one arm. It's his favourite. Astoria had bought it for him two months ago. She'd named it Shoo-shoo, just like hers had been as a child. My breath catches raggedly in the back of my throat, and I stop in the doorway, Greg behind me. My son's eleven months old. He shouldn't be lying here like this.

Rainbows and cheerfully dancing animals and brightly coloured balloons tumble across the walls. The other two beds are empty. I suspect Father's responsible for that. Again, I feel a curious relief--not an emotion I generally associate with him, I must admit.

Greg touches my shoulder, and I step into the room.

"How is he?" I ask softly. We haven't seen a doctor yet; the press had been waiting just outside the hospital doors for me, shouting questions and snapping photos as Greg hurried me past them. I hadn't even realised the news had spread. Stupid of me. One of the nurses had grabbed us as soon as we pushed into the lobby, and she'd led us directly up to Scorpius's room on the fourth floor.

"He'll be all right," Mother says, and she stands, pulling her hand slowly away from Scorpius'. "They want to keep him until the end of the week though."

I can't take my eyes off Scorpius. "What am I going to do?" I whisper. The tightness in my throat is nearly unbearable. I can feel hot tears pricking at my eyes and I fight them back. Malfoys do not cry; it's the first lesson my father taught me as a boy.

Mother moves towards me then, the Beatrix Ong heels she favours clicking sharply against the floor. She reaches for me, and I let her pull me close, burying my face against her wool suit jacket. She strokes my hair, kisses my temple the way she had when I was little and was despondent over a scraped knee or a lost toy. I cling to her, my fingers tight on her arms as I breathe out, a raw, shuddering gasp as the grief mingled with relief rolls over me for the first time.

"My boy, my boy, my beautiful, beautiful boy" Mother murmurs softly, her hands gentle on my back as the tears stream down my cheek and my shoulders tremble and all I can do is grip her tighter, desperate for her not to ever let me go.



Father sits next to me at the funeral, silent and stiff. He's never approved of Astoria; he'd considered the Greengrasses far too new to society to acceptably merge with the Malfoy name. "They've only been titled for a hundred years," he'd pointed out to me bitterly ten minutes before I was due to walk down the matrimonial aisle. I'd considered reminding him that Great-grandfather Cornelius had restored our dwindling family fortunes by marrying into a wealthy trade family, but Mother's sharp look as she straightened my tie had stopped me.

There are certain family histories best not spoken of, and Great-grandmother Emily's origins are at the top of the list. Her eldest, my Grandfather Abraxas, had made damned certain of that. Sometimes I wonder what Father would say if he knew I enjoyed prick on the side; then again, a bit of shirt-lifting now and then's practically a cliché, almost tradition for proper public school boys. I'd always wondered about Father and Snape, to be honest. The professor took a bit too much of an interest whenever Father visited me at school.

Halfway through the last hymn I break. It's too much, staring at the white roses and lilies and asters heaped upon the gleaming cherry coffin in front of the altar. They're the same flowers that decorated this same Wiltshire church the day of our wedding. My cheeks are wet before I realise. She's gone. In less than an hour she'll be interred beneath the ground, and Scorpius and I will be alone.

Father's hand brushes my knuckles, lightly. I almost think it's a mistake until his fingers curl around mine with the barest squeeze. He stares forward, mouthing the words of *The King of Love My Shepherd Is* as the pallbearers step forward to lift Astoria's coffin from its stand.

That simple touch is enough to carry me down the aisle after my wife's body, shoulders straightened and head held high, despite the stinging in my eyes.

I am a Malfoy. I'll act like one.



The press is waiting for us outside the church, a small huddled mass of mackintoshes and black umbrellas in the grey summer afternoon rain. Father is on one side of me, Greg on the other, both cutting off the shouted questions about Scorpius and I being hurled my way the moment we step through the gate.

One stops me in my tracks, however. It's from a pink-cheeked girl who looks barely out of journo school. "Are you going back to cricket?" she asks, and I look at her blankly. I haven't thought about it.

"Don't be ridiculous," Father snaps at her. "Of course he is. He's England's best bowler--"

She ignores him and looks at me. "Are you going to fight Baron Greengrass's custody petition then?"

I blink. "His what?" I turn back to my father-in-law behind me. "Your what?"

Andrew has the grace to flush. He glares at the reporter. "We thought it best to speak with you *after* the funeral. You'll be travelling around with England; Scorpius will need a stable home. Constance and I thought--"

Something snaps in me. "Scorpius is *my* son." My jaw tightens and I clench my umbrella in one fist. "Don't you fucking *dare* try to take him from me."

"Draco." Andrew glances at the reporters uncomfortably. "We'll discuss this later."

I turn on my heel and walk away.



Pansy hands me another glass of viognier and sits on the sofa, crossing her bare legs as she leans back against the arm. Her black brocade skirt rides up her thigh. "What are you going to do?" she asks over the rim of her wineglass.

There was a time, in my young and stupid years, when I assumed that Pansy and I would marry. Our parents encouraged the match, and we spent a good portion of our teenage years fumbling about with each other's trouser zips and bra clasps. We'd lost our virginity together on my fifteenth birthday. Then, our first year at Cambridge, Pansy had decided she preferred cunt to cock. She hadn't looked back, for the most part, though before my marriage, she'd occasionally stumbled into my bed post-breakup, pissed out of her mind and in need of a quick shag. She'd always rolled out from beneath the sheets the next morning annoyed with herself and criticising my clitoris-stimulating abilities, the bitch.

I suppose I shouldn't complain too much, however. She had, after all, introduced me to the first charming gay boy who'd introduced me to the pleasures of a prick stuffed up one's arse. He'd been a political science post-graduate, determined to change the world and horrify his parents, the latter of which appealed rather a great deal to me. To this day the faintest whiff of clove cigarettes makes me think of long, lazy, toe-curling Sunday mornings in bed with Justin, drinking cheap wine from a bottle and listening to him expound, in his Eton accent, on the glories of socialism between incredibly intense rounds of being shagged senseless.

Father, Tory that he is, would have *loathed* him.

I sigh and pull my socked feet onto the sofa cushion. The wine's mellow and I down half the glass before I answer. "Keep my son."

"And cricket?" Pansy turns her glass between her fingers, studying the pale gold wine. She knows how much the game means to me. How much it's always meant. It's the only thing I've done in my life that's pleased my father. The day I stepped out onto the pitch at Lord's for my first Oxford-Cambridge Varsity Match, ball gripped tight in one fist, had been the first time in my life Father had told me unequivocally he was proud of me. The second had been a few weeks later, as I stood in the middle of Ryder and Amies being fitted for my Full Blue blazer as he had a quarter-century before.

Cricket's all that we have in common. All we've ever had. As I grow older, our conversations have grown more and more stilted and infrequent until one of us brings up flippers and paddle sweeps and whether or not the new batsman Durham's called up is actually a flat-track bully the way MCC gossip has it.

I live for cricket. It makes me happy the way nothing else I've ever done has. I was never a brilliant student, though I was smart and did well enough in my A-levels to enter Cambridge on my own merits, rather than on my family's coattails. I'd read English at Queen's College, and really, after that I'd no choice other than to make cricket my profession. The last thing I wanted was to end up like old Snape, teaching the sons of arrogant toffs like my father. And I was good at cricket. I'd been playing at The Oval for Surrey for two years before Krum had called me up to bowl for England after he took over the team management. I'd split my time for the past five years between the two teams and it'd been the best time of my life.

But now my son's lying upstairs, finally home from hospital, broken and bruised and battered, and each time he wakes up all he says is *Mama, Mama, Mama*.

"You could engage a nanny," Pansy says after a moment. Her pink-polished nail circles the rim of her wineglass.

I take a sip of wine and sigh. "No." The idea of Scorpius being cared for by someone else turns my stomach. Astoria had loathed the practice of foisting children off onto staff--she'd been raised by a series of nannies who were the utter antithesis of Mary Poppins as she put it, twisting her face in disgust. She'd no intention of putting our son through the same experience. My glass slips in my hand, and I tighten my fingers on it. The wine sloshes up the side. Astoria had loved being a mother. Two weeks before Scorpius arrived kicking and screaming into this world Astoria had walked away from her position as a solicitor at Barclay's. She and Pansy'd had a knock-down row about it. Pansy'd almost refused being Scorpius's god-mother, until she held the tiny scrap of my son for the first time and had grudgingly admitted perhaps Astoria hadn't entirely lost her damn mind.

Pansy frowns at me. "Draco--"

"It's not what she wanted." I look up at her. "You know that."

There's a moment's silence, then Pansy sets her glass aside and leans forward. "The question is what *you* want now, darling," she says softly. She lays a hand on my knee. A delicate silver filigree bracelet dangles from her wrist, tiny garnet medallions swinging. It's a gift from her most recent girlfriend, a jewellery designer named Hannah Abbott. I've yet to meet her, and I wonder if I will. Sometimes Pansy whips through women too quickly for me to keep up.

"I want what's best for Scorpius," I say finally, and I drain my wineglass. I stare down at it, rolling the stem between my fingertips. Warm orange-gold light from the mica lamp behind my shoulder pools across my hands. "Whatever that is."

Pansy just leans back and sighs. "Then you're fucked." She picks her glass up again and sloshes the wine about. "Your father's going to be furious."

I reach for the bottle grimly. Might as well get pissed out of my mind, I suppose. "I know."

Pansy *hmmms* and holds her glass out. I pour for us both. "Well, then," she says, pursing her mouth as she tucks her a lock of her dark bob behind one ear, "let's think of the best way to start the vein on his forehead pulsing, shall we?" She raises her glass. "To driving Lucius around the twist!"

I clink my glass against hers. "Hear, hear."

For the first time in days, I smile.



Photo by t-fiz

ii. January 2007

Being a single father is harder than I expect.

Everything reminds me of Astoria, and I find myself falling apart over simple things, such as making breakfast for Scorpius one morning. I've enough presence of mind to ring Greg, and half an hour later, he finds me at the table in tears, Scorpius watching me wide-eyed from his chair, his bottom lip trembling. Apple juice drips from his chin. The stench of scorched eggs and burnt bacon fills the kitchen; I've had to open a window to air it out.

"I can't do this," I say, my face in my hands, and Greg puts on the kettle calmly and pulls more eggs from the refrigerator.

Astoria took care of everything at home. She looked after Scorpius, and she cooked and cleaned--or at least arranged for the cleaning service, who haven't been by in weeks, not since I drunkenly screamed at a maid to leave us be the last time she came. In my defence, I thought she was one of the paparazzi following us about. The *Sun* and the *Daily Mail* were desperate for photographs of the grieving cricketer and his poor motherless son, as they'd liked to dub us in their idiotic articles. Bastards.

I hadn't even been able to bathe Scorpius properly. His cast keeps me from dumping him in the bath or the shower, so I'm reduced to sponging him off. Somehow he's come down with a horrible rash on his bum that keeps him up at night, crying.

He doesn't want me. He screams for Astoria, begs for her, slaps my hands away when I pick him up. His hair is dirty; every time I try to wash it he goes into a screaming fit and I'm terrified he'll hurt himself.

Astoria would have been able to distract him, to coax him into compliance somehow. All I can do is watch as he arches his back stiffly, his face red from screaming, and wonder again what I've done wrong.

Greg melts butter in a clean pan, and I've no idea where he found it. The kitchen is filthy, and dishes from two weeks past are piled in the sink. I'm too tired, too depressed to do them. Scorpius takes most of my time these days, and the few hours a day he sleeps, I collapse. If I'm lucky I fall asleep myself. More often than not, I stare up at the ceiling, watching the shadows dance across the mouldings. Sometimes I talk to my wife. I feel an idiot for admitting that. She's dead, I know, and I've never, whatever the vicar might say, believed in an after-life. We have what we have now, and when we're gone, we're gone.

But I miss her. Desperately. I'm not ready for her to be gone.

"Father's furious with me for quitting cricket." I lean back in my chair and run a hand over my face. "He's decided to cut my funds off."

"Good." Greg's voice is muffled by the refrigerator door. He emerges a moment later with a chunk of wizened cheddar I didn't even know I had. "You're twenty-six. You shouldn't be relying on your father to pay your bills."

I take a dirty fork from Scorpius. He wails and tries to grab it out of my hand. "I *did* get a pay packet for playing cricket, you know."

Greg shrugs. "And now you're not. It's been two months, Draco, and you never go out of the house."

"I'd rather my son not be plastered across the front page of some bloody tabloid every other morning, thanks." I stand up and toss the fork in the sink. It clinks against a pile of bowls and drops into a wine-glass with a splash. Score for Malfoy.

Greg just grunts impassively. He wipes his hands on a dirty dishrag and digs through one of the drawers. "Whatever you need to tell yourself."

I know he's a point. But it's safer here. Protected. Just walking down to the shops for a pint of milk and rash cream for Scorpius's bum turns heads my way. I don't have to hear the whispers to know what they're saying. The tabloids have begun to tire of the tragic widower angle and are now digging up the less savoury elements of my past. Mainly thanks to bloody Marcus Flint. He'd always been furious that England had called me up from Surrey rather than him. And unfortunately, he was aware of some of my proclivities. The last issue of the *Sun* had hinted that I might have been having an affair with a teammate while in Brisbane. I could only hope Oliver had enough damn sense to keep his mouth shut.

"Besides. You need a new place." Greg whisks eggs into the pan, adds a handful of cheese he's grated and some capsicum. "Too many memories here."

I don't say anything. I'm not ready to move on. We'd bought the townhouse in Chelsea two weeks after I'd asked Astoria to marry me. We'd chosen the wall colours together on weekends I didn't have matches. We'd scoured antique shops and worked with the Benthien designers to make certain each room was perfect.

Greg looks at me. "You know I'm right."

"It's Scorpius's home."

"He's just one." Greg folds the egg over itself. It smells delicious, buttery and warm. My stomach growls. I can't remember the last time I've actually eaten more than a mouthful or two. My jeans are loose already. "Scorpius isn't attached to this flat. You are, and the way you're going, it'll either send you to Highgate or Bethlehem Royal, and I'd really rather not be coming by to visit you in that disturbing mausoleum of your family's or a psychiatric ward."

Scorpius reaches for my hand. "Dada, da," he says. His small fingers tug at mine. "Da."

Greg sets a plate in front of me. "Eat. Both of you."

I cut a few small pieces from the enormous omelette in front of me, and once they've cooled, set them in front of my son. He stuffs one in his mouth eagerly. I watch him. Children are disgusting creatures, I've determined. Then again, at the moment, I'm not much better.

Greg sits next to me, two mugs of tea in his hand. He pushes one towards me.

"I'd rather have coffee," I say with a sigh. I'm a horrid Englishman, I know, but I prefer the rich tang of ground coffee beans to the bitter tannin of overbrewed tea. Mother's perplexed by my preferences, and Father refuses to acknowledge them at all. But coffee's one of the few things I can do well in a kitchen. Astoria had always insisted I go down and brew her a pot on Sunday mornings before she'd roll sleepily out of bed to come cook Scorpius and me an enormous breakfast of crepes spread with chocolate and almonds and thick fresh-whipped cream.

"I'm looking for a new flat," Greg says after a moment, utterly ignoring my mournful glance towards the coffeepot.

The milky Darjeeling is sour against my tongue. I stir it with one finger, watching it swirl against the sides of the mug. "Are you?"

"I wouldn't mind some company."

I look up at him. Greg meets my gaze evenly. I know damned well he hasn't had any plans to move out of his flat in Bloomsbury. He'd made a down payment on the place with the savings he'd set aside from his first three years with the restaurant.

Scorpius pounds his fist against the tabletop. "Da!"

I cut off a few more bites for Scorpius, and he grabs them. He nearly knocks his bottle of apple juice over; I catch it before it falls. "You want to share a flat," I say after a moment. I'd never considered it before.

Greg shrugs. "I've been wanting a place closer to the restaurant, and you know how bloody expensive it gets." He looks at me over the rim of his mug. "It would do you good to have someone to help with Scorpius."

I just look at him. "Let me think about it."

"Fair enough." He ruffles Scorpius' hair. My son shoves Greg's hand away, scowling up at him.

I drain my tea, leaning back in my chair thoughtfully.



We compromise at first. Scorpius and I move into Greg's flat while I put the Chelsea house up for sale. Blaise lists it for me; he prefers to work with office properties in the city, but he makes an exception for me. Of course, he doubles his commission fee for the sheer annoyance of having to deal with bored London society wives, he says. I don't care. I just want the house sold.

Scorpius slowly starts sleeping through the night, though the only way he can is to curl up next to me in bed. I like having his tiny, warm body pressed against mine. The day his cast comes off we stop by the Oddono's wagon in Oxford Street for gelato--Scorpius chooses a cornet stuffed with chocolate and I pick a more subdued hazelnut. We take a black cab down Regent Street to Pall Mall to meet Father at the Athenaeum for an early supper before the Lords are called back to a vote. Though Father prefers the privacy of the Manor in Wiltshire, he keeps a room at the club during the weeks Parliament is sitting. Unfortunately for my son and me that requires us to have dinner with him every so often, and I've put Father off for the past three weeks until his assistant whispered in the phone to me this morning that really, Lord Malfoy was most put out and if it was at all possible, might I please have supper with him tonight? Sophie'd sounded so worn down that I couldn't say no.

Father's waiting for us in the Coffee Room. I've barely lifted Scorpius into a chair and taken one of my own before Father starts in.

"What exactly have you been doing with yourself these months?" he asks, pouring a glass of wine for me.

"Raising my son," I answer calmly. It's going to be one of those evenings, I can tell.

Father scowls at me. His knee has begun to act up in the cold; he's carrying his cane again, with the heavy silver snake head. Scorpius is fascinated by it and reaches across the table to poke at it. Father bats his hands away. "And doing a piss-poor job of it, by my determination." He moves the cane to his other side and Scorpius glares at him. I distract my son with a bit of buttered bread.

"I think we're doing quite well."

"That's not what your mother says." Father leans back as the server places a plate of rocket and walnuts in front of him. He snaps his napkin open and drapes it across his lap. "Krum tells me you're still welcome to return to England. MacKay is willing to put you back on the Surrey roster as well."

I sigh. I hate it when he does this to me. "I can't travel with Scorpius."

"You can afford to hire someone to look after him," Father snaps. "Or hand him over to Andrew and Constance for a few years. They're more than willing to allow you holidays and weeks you've no matches."

My mouth tightens. "You've spoken to them, have you?" I reach over and wipe Scorpius's chin. He looks up at me, then hands me the bread he's been chewing. I drop it on the edge of my plate and wipe my fingers.

"Yes." Father sips his wine. "They're as worried about you both as I am."

I poke at my salad angrily. "You can all stop. I'm fine. Scorpius is fine. And I'm not going back to cricket." My chest hurts. I want to go back. I know I do. I'd pick up a cricket bat right now if I thought I could. The game's been everything to me since I was Scorpius's age. But I'm not about to let my son be raised by anyone other than myself. I hated not having my parents around when I was a child. Like Astoria, I'd despised being shoved off on nannies and tutors while Mother attended her society luncheons and Father concerned himself with Important Business of State. Astoria'd wanted our son to have as normal a life as we could give him all things considered, and I'm damn well going to make certain that happens. With me in the picture.

Father glares at me over the rim of his wineglass before he sets it aside. "Draco."

"I said stop." The tines of my fork scrape loudly across the china plate. My hands are shaking. "Please."

Father hesitates, then nods. After a moment, he says, "I understand Gregory is looking for a new location for his restaurant."

I shrug. "He's been thinking of moving."

"Perhaps he should consider Westminster." Father tops off his glass of wine, then offers it to me. I shake my head. It's best I don't drink too much. It dulls my reaction time around Scorpius, which can be dangerous. "I could direct some Parliamentary business his way."

It's a peace offering, and I recognise it as such. "Thank you."

Father nods.



By April Greg's moved the restaurant to a small, elegant storefront two streets over from Westminster Palace. Father's been true to his word, and within weeks *Time Out's* listing it as one of the trendiest spots in the city for politicians and their entourages.

At breakfast one Saturday Greg tells me that the café next door is closing down, much to the consternation of the Government researchers and assistants who fill the offices of Portcullis House and the Norman Shaws.

I'm barely paying attention. I'm struggling with Scorpius to get him to eat his porridge, and, to be honest, he's bloody well annoying the shite out of me. I've grown bored with being a stay-at-home father. There's only so many times you can drag yourself through yet another GMTV after all. I've even started watching *Bargain Hunt* and, really, there's not much lower one can go.

"I'm thinking about buying it," Greg says, stirring milk into his tea. "It might be an interesting diversification--"

"What?" I ask, giving up on coaxing another spoonful of porridge into Scorpius.

Greg rolls his eyes. "You never listen to me any more."

"As we're neither married nor shagging, that complaint doesn't work on me." I spread jam on my toast and bite into it. "What are you thinking about buying?"

"The café next to the restaurant." Greg scoops up porridge with his spoon. I've got rather decent at cooking it in the past few months. "It'd be a good investment, but I'm not certain I've enough cash on hand. Westminster property rentals are pricey."

I stare at him. "A café?"

"Yes." He looks at me as if I've lost my mind. "Why?"

I don't know why it strikes me then. It's mad. I know it's mad. And it will infuriate the living hell out of my father--which, I suppose, in my mind is really more of a pro than a con. I've never had any interest in restauranting, but I know coffee, and how difficult could it be really?

"Let me buy it," I say.

Greg just stares at me.

I lean forward, my elbows on the table. I nudge the jam pot aside. "I've got to have something to do before I go out my mind with boredom. Why not a café?"

"Your father for one," Greg says, setting his spoon down.

"Bollocks on my father."

Scorpius nods. "Bollocks!" I don't bother to chide him.

"This is not going to go well," Greg says with a frown. "You're too lazy for this sort of work. It's *hard*, Draco. Not like playing cricket."

I just grin. "It can't be that awful or you wouldn't be interested."

Greg rolls his eyes. "You're sixty-eighth in line for the throne."

I ponder, tapping my spoon against the side of the bowl. "How hard do you think it would be to kill sixty-seven people in one go?"

"Draco!"

"I'm joking." Or at least I think I am, but let's not tell the Queen's Guard or MI5, shall we?

Greg just sighs and rests his beefy arms on the table. "My point is that your sort don't work In Trade. You're an Hon, for Christ's sake."

I shrug. "The peerage is Father's, not mine. At least until he dies."

"Forget your father for a moment." Greg frowns at me. "What would your mother say?"

My mother has become quite the social butterfly since the divorce. British society didn't even blink when the sordid story of Father's affair came out after Penelope--the slag--sold her story to the *Daily Mail*. Mother was one of them after all, her Black antecedents traceable back to before Henry's nasty little argument with the Pope. Her father was the Earl of Ravensworth. Penelope was just some common, albeit educated, tart from Ipswich who'd managed to make a fool out of a Lord yet again. It's a typical story in the aristocracy, after all, and Father had survived the humiliation.

"Mother," I say after a moment's thought, "will just be glad I haven't turned out like Cousin Nymphadora." Aunt Andromeda's only child had stunned society when she'd run off with some drummer during her punk phase. Which had come shortly after her stint as a P.C. for the Met. Everyone had written that one off as being influenced by her solicitor father, but if Uncle Ted had been rather chuffed at the time, he wasn't best pleased with his daughter at the moment.

Greg pauses, then nods. "Have you heard from her lately?"

I wipe Scorpius's mouth. He pulls away, frowning as he tries to see the telly again. He's disturbingly fond of the Teletubbies. "A card last Christmas. She and Lupin are still in Canada. Vancouver, I think, in some free love commune or something. She sent a photo of Teddy. He's eleven now, and she's let him dye his hair turquoise. Mother was horrified." I don't bother to add that she'd also murmured that Nymphadora was a perfect example why Aunt Andromeda should never have married beneath herself.

Greg looks appalled. "Oh, then you've nothing to worry about."

"My thoughts exactly."



Photo by paulkehrer

iii. May 2009

"You need to order more Kona beans," Millicent says as she passes me, two mugs filled with steaming coffee in her hands. Her black curls are twisted up and held in place with a pencil. She's a postgraduate student at the University of London's Warburg Institute. I've never quite understood exactly what she's researching, but she goes about spouting off Latin every now and then--especially when she's annoyed--so I've decided it's better not to ask for clarification.

I cut the quiches that I've just pulled from the oven. Greg made them the night before; I've merely had to warm them up for the breakfast rush. I get a share of his restaurant kitchen next door. It's an arrangement that's benefited us both over the past two years, and I'm fairly certain I owe a great deal of my business to the small batches of pastries, desserts, breads, soups and quiches he and his bakers leave in the refrigerator each night for us before they close up.

I'll be the first to admit that owning a café in Westminster a five-minute walk from the Parliamentary office buildings seems a million years away from playing first-class cricket. And there are more days than I can count when I miss stepping out on the pitch, the sun in my eyes and the breeze ruffling my hair. I can't even watch the matches on telly any more. It's too difficult to see my former teammates on the field.

Krum rings me up every few months, asking if I've changed my mind. There's still a spot on the England roster for me if I want it, he says. Oliver stopped coming by late at night last year. I don't have time for him, or for any of the others, to be honest. I haven't officially gone out since last October with a man or a woman and it's been longer since I've shagged anyone. Between the shop and nights spent struggling to get Scorpius in bed at a proper hour--and keep him there, for Christ's sake--I'm too bloody tired to think

of sex or dating or anything but falling into my own bed in the flat I bought above the shop last summer and share with Greg. If I'm lucky, I manage to sleep for a few hours before I have to roll out of bed and stumble bleary-eyed downstairs to open up for the first rush of Government staffers that fill the pavements of Parliament Square and Whitehall before dawn breaks.

Coffee has become essential to the running of the country, and despite the despicable presence of a Cafe Nero in Portcullis House, a great number of researchers and assistants and MPs themselves, whether Labour or Tory or Lib Dem, prefer to walk a few streets over to Leg Before Wicket for a double shot of espresso and a currant scone, buttered or with just a dollop of clotted cream. Sometimes I wonder how many of them come out of the sheer curiosity of seeing the Viscount Avebury's aproned son behind a counter. To be honest, I don't give a damn as long as they pay.

Surprisingly, I like the work. I don't really need the money. I've enough tucked away from my cricket days, not to mention the trust fund Grandfather Abraxas set up for me the week after I was born. But running the café's kept me busy and tired, and one morning not so very long ago I woke up and realised that it had been two weeks since I'd dreamed about Astoria. Millicent says that's what her therapist calls closure; Greg tells her that's utter bollocks and psychiatrists are quacks who'd do best not to be mucking about in regular people's heads, thanks ever so much, since God only knows what they'll balls up in the process. I'm wondering how much longer it will take before the two of them end up in bed. My money's been on a year, and that's coming up rather too soon for my liking. I'm not that keen to lose two hundred quid to Pansy--she's far too bloody smug about the matter. I'm beginning to consider taking Greg aside and offering him fifty pounds to just go ahead and shag Millicent for Christ's sake. Everyone knows they're both gagging for it.

The rush slows at half-eight, at least for a little while. Parliament's a week from Whitsun recess and it's a Wednesday which means in an hour we'll have the MPs trailing in for a quick burst of caffeine before they're forced to endure the Prime Minister's Questions. Though frankly, in my opinion, listening to Gordon ramble on has to be better than facing down the phalanx of journos wandering about Westminster lately, now that the *Telegraph's* broken the Parliamentary expense scandal. Really, you'd think the people responsible for running the bloody Government would have more sense than to expense houses they weren't bloody living in. Then again, Mandelson was idiot enough to make the taxpayers pay for work on his house six months after he stood down from the Commons, and Gordon still made him a peer, so, really, what can you expect?

For the moment Father's managed to keep himself out of the mess. I don't expect that to last much longer. I've already had to throw one bottom-feeder from the *Daily Mail* out of the café this morning—I became all too familiar with Alfie's concept of journalistic integrity after Astoria's death.

I've just wiped the counter with a damp cloth when a cough makes me turn. Millicent's in the kitchen, washing up before she has to spend the remainder of the morning buried in Latin texts. I turn and my breath catches. It's him again--he's been in every morning almost since Parliament began sitting after Easter. He looks familiar, but politicians always do to me. I've met too many of them through excruciatingly dull functions Father's forced me into attending over the past few months. Since he can't get me to return to cricket, he's now holding out hope I'll stop embarrassing him with this business and decide to enter politics like a proper Malfoy. Fortunately the House of Lords Act eleven years ago ensured I'll never be forced to take on his seat. God bless Labour for that.

"Triple espresso macchiato to go with a dab of foam, you wretched Philistine," I say, and he smiles at me and nods. His messy black hair tumbles across his forehead, over the wireframes of his glasses. It looks as

if it hasn't seen a comb in days. I should not find that oddly appealing.

"Blame the New York baristas for that aberration." His voice is soft and low. It sends a shiver down my spine. "Entirely the Americans' fault for corrupting me."

"Bloody Starbucks." I drop my rag on the counter. "You lived in New York?"

"For two years." He tucks his BlackBerry into his pocket. "Did a bit of post-graduate in international affairs at Columbia. Oh, and heavy on the espresso. Gordon's up this morning."

I snort and grab a paper cup. "Good luck keeping your eyes open even with that." I hate having to turn my back on him, and that annoys me. It's stupid of me to think him attractive. He's *not*. He's tall and scrawny and looks as if he was underfed as a child. Not to mention he reads the *Guardian*, the *Telegraph* and the *Independent*. I can't tell whether he's Labour or Conservative--knowing my luck he's Lib Dem and everyone knows they're a bunch of ruddy nutters.

"Have to," he says with a laugh. "I'm asking a question."

I froth the milk in the stainless steel pitcher, watching as the foam rises. "A good one, I hope."

"Maybe." When I turn, he's leaning against the counter watching me. He scratches his chin. It's slightly stubbled as if he hasn't shaved this morning, and that thought nearly makes me drop the pitcher. "I want to know why the Government's insisting on this Internet surveillance legislation the Tories have cooked up."

I draw three shots of espresso into the cup. "Ah. You're Labour."

"Lib Dem." He gives me a rueful smile and I wrinkle my nose. Damn. "I know what you're thinking," he says as he pulls a tenner from his pocket and hands it to me. He drops the change I give him in the Oxfam jar next to the till. I don't bother to tell him they've stopped coming by to collect. "We're not all mad, you realise."

"All politicians are mad, party affiliation be damned," I say. I hand over his macchiato. "Trust me."

He grins. "Speaking from experience?" Behind his glasses, his eyes are a deep green, flecked with brown and gold. There's a faint zig-zag scar over one of his eyebrows, pale against his lightly tanned skin. I have the distinct urge to drag my tongue along it.

I look away, a little flustered. "Somewhat." I can feel my cheeks warm, and I reach for the cloth again, folding it in quarters.

"Too bad." He hesitates, his smile fading slightly, then turns to go.

"What's your name?" I can't stop myself. I drop the cloth on the counter and tuck my hair behind one ear. It's past my jaw now; Pansy's been after me to cut it for weeks.

He turns back to look at me, eyebrow raised. "Harry." His mouth quirks into a crooked smile. "Harry Potter."

"Draco Malfoy." I hold out my hand; Potter takes it without hesitation or the usual flare of pitying recognition I get from most people, but then, it's been nearly a year since the *Daily Mail's* mentioned me or the accident, thank God, and Potter doesn't look the type to read that rubbish. His fingers are warm and strong. I wonder what they'd feel like on my hips. The thought rattles me for a moment until I drop his hand, pulling back. "MP for?"

Potter sips his coffee. "Guildford."

"Surrey, then. That explains rather a lot." I walk around the till, straightening the coffee stirrers. He's next to me, and I allow myself a quick sideways glance. He's of a height with me, and his black bespoke suit and charcoal tie screams Henry Poole. Ridiculous hair or not, he looks far more Mayfair than terrace housing, and he smells bloody amazing, like warm sunshine and the fresh-cut grass of a pitch. I lick my bottom lip.

Potter reaches across me and takes a stirrer from my hand. "I suppose it does," he says with a soft laugh, and he looks directly at me then, a long, slow and obvious appraisal as he chews on the end of the thin wood stirrer. I take a step back; the counter presses against my hips and I'm suddenly grateful for the long apron I'm wearing to protect my jeans and black t-shirt. It's been quite a while since my body's been this interested in another person. I'm half tempted to drag him to the back storeroom and blow him right now, Question be damned.

"The first record we have of cricket being played is from Guildford," I say. I can't look away from him, and I'm quite aware I'm babbling on like a fool.

Potter smiles and the corners of his eyes crinkle. "I think I'd read that when I was a lad. Bit cricket-mad, I was."

I shift the sugar shaker a few centimetres to the right, suddenly uncomfortable with his sharp gaze. "Weren't we all?"

"Thanks for the coffee, Draco Malfoy," he murmurs, and I close my eyes until the bell on the door clanks behind him, willing my prick to wilt.

It doesn't work.



Pansy lights a Silk Cut and hands it to me. "Every morning, darling?"

"Before nine." I take a drag of the fag and pass it back. "I *think* he's flirting with me."

She pulls her crimson tweed jacket tighter, clutching the vee neck with one hand as she lifts the cigarette to her mouth. It's still chilly for a May evening, and the wind's picked up since we came out of the Covent Garden Tube station. Blaise is late, as usual. I check my watch. It's just after eight and the curtain goes up for *Chicago* at half-past. Bloody fucker. And I'm paying Millicent overtime to sit with Scorpius too.

"Perhaps he just really likes your macchiato." Pansy taps ash from the end of her cigarette. She's never quite understood why I enjoy working at the café. It's beneath me, she thinks. Perhaps she's right. Blaise thinks I've lost my mind too. Greg's the only one who doesn't think I'm mad, who knows that it's the hard work that I need.

I shrug. "Perhaps."

Pansy doesn't say anything for a moment; she just eyes me curiously. "You're attracted to him."

My cheeks heat up and I curse the pale skin I inherited from the Black side of the family. "So?"

"How long has it been since you've been properly shagged?" The breeze blows her hair into her eyes and she brushes it back impatiently.

I sigh and cross my arms. "Since Mother's New Year's party."

Pansy exhales a stream of smoke. "I thought you skipped that."

"I did. I mean her party in the year before last." The twenty-year-old son of one Mother's dearest friends had chatted me up just before midnight. We'd rung in the New Year together on the rooftop terrace of Mother's Eaton Square house, his prick up my arse as Big Ben chimed midnight on the BBC. The next morning he'd left for Oxford and his proper, parental-approved fiancée, and I've been in a sexual drought since. "Quentin Whitestone. I shagged him on New Year's and he married Elise in June."

Pansy grimaces. "Quentin always was an enormous twit."

I can't disagree with her.

"You should ask him out," Pansy says.

"Quentin?" I give her a horrified look.

She rolls her eyes and smacks the back of my head. It hurts. "No, you idiot. This MP of yours."

I blink at her. "But he's an MP."

"And?" Pansy waves her cigarette about. Ash scatters everywhere. A chunk of it lands on her breast and she brushes it off. "I've shagged MPs before."

"Married ones," I point out.

She takes a drag of her cigarette and blows the smoke in my face. "When it comes to MPs, darling, there's no difference between married and single. They're all deliciously immoral, and frankly that's the best sort of shag one can have. You'd be a fool not to at least test the waters."

"I don't even know if he's gay." I take the cigarette back from her and lift it to my mouth. "Or bisexual."

"Who's gay or bisexual?" Blaise drapes one arm over my shoulder, the other over Pansy's. He kisses her cheek. "Sorry I'm late, lovelies. Had to do an office showing to the incredibly well-endowed ex-wife of a cabinet Minister's brother."

I push his arm off. "In other words, you had to show yourself off."

"Twice," Blaise says. He takes the cigarette from me. "Are we talking about your love life, nancy boy?"

Pansy twists around to look up at him. "Do you know anything about Harry Potter? The new MP from Guildford?"

"I make it my business to know all the MPs." Blaise's brow furrows. "By-election, yes? Took Anne Milton's old seat just before Easter?"

I nod. I don't like the fact that I'm actually curious about what Blaise might know. He's the font of all London-related gossip, particularly within corridors of power and wealth, whether political or corporate. He hasn't made a few million pounds since Cambridge by sitting on his admittedly lovely arse.

Blaise takes a drag on the cigarette before he hands it back to Pansy. "Nothing much. I sent my assistant after him to find out if he was interested in a flat, but he's settled down in some hovel in Kennington, of all places. Your old stomping grounds, near the Oval." Blaise wrinkles his nose. His thoughts on the usual London habitat of MPs and their staff are grim at best. Blaise has always been more of a Mayfair and Belgravia aficionado, and he shares my father's opinion of the crassness of merchandising the Oval to Brit Insurance. Commercial sponsorship of the game is anathema to them both. I hadn't given a damn what they called the cricket grounds I played on as long as Surrey had dropped my pay packets into Barclay's on a regular basis. "He's sharing the flat with an old school mate, from what I understand. Or rather the old school mate's letting him kip on the sofa when Parliament's in session."

"I hope he's not claiming it on his expenses," I say.

"Far too much of a jobsworth for that, I've been told." Blaise snorts and brushes a bit of nonexistent lint off his olive green Ozwald Boateng jacket, then straightens his brown silk tie. "He's a bit of money from some inheritance or other, but nothing of significance. Oxford boy. Read political science and economics with post-grad in international affairs from Columbia in the States before coming on as a researcher for Chris Huhne for the past few years."

Pansy makes a face. "Lib Dem? Oh, Draco, really, couldn't you find a nice Labour bloke to shag? Chris Bryant, maybe? Or what about Alan Duncan? He's a Tory. Your father would love him even if he is bent."

"Alan Duncan is twenty-three years older than me," I snap. "He might as well be my father."

"Yes, but he has such lovely hair." Pansy drops her cigarette to the pavement and grinds it out with one stilettoed heel. "All salt-and-pepper."

I glare at her. "Grey."

"Silver," Blaise counters with a sly smirk. I flip two fingers at him. Bastard. He should be on my side.

"Very sexy." Pansy slides an arm around my waist and kisses my cheek. "Think about it."

With a sigh, I drag them both towards the theatre. There are moments I wonder why I even bother having friends.



Potter comes in again the next morning at five before nine, his papers tucked under one arm as he scrolls through the messages on his BlackBerry, frowning. His suit today's the dark, burnished brown of fresh roasted coffee beans with faint chocolate pinstripes, tailored perfectly to his slightly sloped shoulders and narrow hips.

I want to eat him.

"Fuck off, Alfie," I say to the short, balding *Daily Mail* writer who's standing at the till. "Or I'll ring up the Met again."

"I just want a latte, Draco." He waves a tenner at me.

I glare at him. "Out." I haven't forgiven him for those horrific widowed cricketer articles, half of which implied Astoria had been at fault for the accident, rather than the lorry driver who'd been on his mobile when he'd swerved into her. I'd gone to the Press Complaints Commission over his half-veiled suggestions that a toxicology report might indicate she'd been under the influence of drugs.

As if Astoria would have. She'd been breastfeeding, for Christ's sake. I wasn't even allowed to smoke cannabis in the house once she'd got preggers. She'd refused an epidural during labour, and she wouldn't even take paracetamol as long as she was nursing. The thought of Astoria on drugs is utterly ludicrous.

Alfie rolls his eyes and turns to go, brushing past Potter in the process. Potter mumbles a *sorry* beneath his breath, but doesn't look up from his phone.

"Mr. Potter," Alfie says, stopping next to him. Potter blinks at him. "Alfie Hart, *Daily Mail*. Wondered if you'd like to say anything about the expenses—"

"I said *out*, Alfie." I raise my voice, and Potter glances over at me with a small smile. "Don't harass my customers. Jesus."

Alfie shoots me a nasty scowl. "Might be I'll harass your Da instead."

"Please do." I shrug. I could care less what the tabloids have to say about Father as long as they leave Mother and Scorpius out of it. "He'll probably enjoy it."

The bell clanks as Alfie slams the door behind him. Secretly I hope he's on his way up to Father's office, though I know as well as he does he won't get within ten metres of it. I look at Potter. He's gone back to frowning at his BlackBerry. I can't decide whether I should be relieved or annoyed.

Millicent eyes me in amusement as I hand her the cups for Alistair Darling's assistant's order. "Oh, shut up," I say under my breath, brushing past her to grab a frothing pitcher.

"And here I thought you liked the Chancellor of the Exchequer," Millicent says, pouring a shot of espresso into milk. "Tossing him over for the next Nick Clegg, are we?"

I flip two fingers at her. "More like I appreciate the arse of the Chancellor's assistant, and frankly, I think the honourable gentleman from Guildford might have a better one."

Millicent laughs, her lightly freckled nose wrinkling. "It's a bit charming that you fancy him."

"Please." I pour the frothed milk into an extra tall paper cup for Potter. "I just need sex."

"Don't we all," she mutters.

Potter looks up again from his phone as I set the cup in front of him. "Triple espresso macchiato," I say with the enticing smile I spent ten minutes practicing in the bathroom mirror this morning. My lips feel stretched tight and awkward and I'm rather certain by the faint curve of Potter's mouth that I look a right twat. I frown. "Two quid."

"Ta." He glances down at the cup, an eyebrow raised. "Isn't that larger than usual?" He looks back up at me. "And cheaper?"

I have an urge to slap the side of his head. "Maybe." I'm aware of Millicent chortling behind me and I resolve to dock her paycheque this week. The Chancellor's assistant--the lovely Angelina Johnson, who has legs up to Heaven and tits nearly as glorious--hides a smile as she leans against the pastry case.

"Oh." Potter blinks again, his lashes fluttering behind his glasses. He looks bloody gorgeous standing there, even if he is thick as board. "Oh. Well." He grins at me, a wide flash of bright teeth that nearly makes my knees buckle. "Thanks."

I wipe my hands on my apron and nod, cursing myself silently. I used to be rather good at pulling, if I do say so myself. I don't know what the hell it is about Potter that makes me so damned nervous.

His phone rings and, with a ruefully apologetic smile, he answers, turning away. Angelina leans over and whispers, "Ask him out."

I give her an incredulous look. "Have you lost your mind? I don't even know if he swings that way—"

"Oh, he does," she says, cutting me off. "Emma Grieg from Osborne's office made it very clear she'd like to, shall we say, get better acquainted with our new MP, and he *turned her down*." She gives me a pointed look, one perfectly waxed eyebrow arching.

"That *slag*." My voice rises, and Potter glances over, his BlackBerry still pressed to his ear. I flush and turn back to Angelina. "Anyway, all that means is that he just has the common sense not to shag everyone's favourite Tory tart." I curl my lip. "Particularly one who's crawled into bed with half of Parliament."

Angelina pokes through the crumbled sample biscuits in a basket on the pastry case. "Including your father."

I slap her hand away from the samples and pull a fresh chocolate biscuit from the warming tray behind me. "I really didn't need to know that," I say as I break the biscuit, handing one half to her. I bite into the other half. It's warm and soft and decadently rich. Millicent bakes them every few hours. I refuse to let her tell me how many bars of Green and Black she nicks from the storeroom to make each batch. She informs me we're both better off that way.

"Sorry, darling," Angelina says, entirely unapologetic. "Your father's a bit of an arsewipe." She munches on the biscuit, catching crumbs in her palm. "I haven't slept with him, if it makes you feel better."

I poke the enormous, bordering on tacky diamond on her left hand. "I rather doubt your Weasley fellow would stand for that."

Angelina glances down at her engagement ring. "I daresay he wouldn't." She smiles at Millicent as she takes the tray filled with four lattes and then nods her head in my direction. "Tell him to grow a pair."

Millicent snorts. "I've been telling him that for the past week."

"I really do hate you both." I glare at them as Potter shoves his phone into his pocket and steps back to the till.

"Sorry about that." He pulls his wallet from his pocket. "Two quid, right? I've a fiver..."

I hand over three pounds from the till, but Potter catches my hand, closing my fingers back over the heavy coins. I'm almost certain his thumb strokes across the ball of my palm, but I could be hallucinating because I'm entirely unable to pull my gaze from those bloody green eyes of his.

"Keep them," he says quietly, with a small smile, and then his hand slides away from mine and I can breathe again. He looks over at Angelina and winks at her. "Angelina."

"Harry." She grins at him, ignoring my glare. The bitch forgot to mention they were on first name basis. "Nice suit."

Potter laughs. "Hermione made me go get fitted. Evidently it's not proper to show up for Question Time in jeans and trainers."

A burst of jealousy flares up in me. "Hermione?" I ask, keeping my voice light. "Your wife?"

"Best mate," Potter says with a smile. He picks up his coffee. "She's married to the brother of Angelina's fiancé, actually. Ron. Who happens to be my other best mate."

I narrow my eyes, and Angelina does her best to look innocent. It fails when she laughs. "We all went to Oxford together." She tilts her head towards me. "Cambridge boy."

"Really?" Potter looks back at me. "What'd you read?"

"English. At Queen's." I shrug. "Second class Honours." I look at him. "You were probably First."

Potter shakes his head. His hair tumbles into his eyes. "Second as well. Two-one, but only because Hermione tutored me, whether or not I wanted her to."

Angelina picks up her lattes. "You know," she says, tossing a faint smirk my way, "Harry's coming over for dinner tomorrow night. It's nothing much, just a few friends. Why don't you bring a bottle of wine and join us?"

"Because I've better things to do with my Wednesday evenings than chin wag with a bunch of poncy politicians." I wince when Millicent pinches me. She frowns at me and glances over at Potter.

Potter looks amused. "Don't think much of us, do you?"

"He's just bitter that he's not as interesting as we are." Angelina pulls a few paper serviettes from the dispenser and tucks them between the cups. "What excitement do you have planned tomorrow anyway? Wanking to the Doctor Who you DVRed?"

"I should never have told you I fancy Matt Smith." I'm aware of the way Potter's eyes flick towards me for just an instant before he looks away, lifting his cup to his mouth. I'm beginning to regret the poncy remark.

Angelina nods. "You probably shouldn't have done." She tosses a few sugar packets on the serviettes. "Half-seven. We're at 213B Ossington in Notting Hill. Ring the bell and make sure you've a decent bottle with you or we'll all judge you terribly behind your back when you leave." She grabs Potter's arm. "Walk me back to Westminster."

"I'm going to Portcullis," he protests.

"Westminster first," Angelina says cheerfully and she hands him the tray of coffee. Potter gives me a desperate look.

I just wave at them.

"Traitor." Potter says bitterly, but the effect's ruined by his wide grin. I snort.

"Half-seven, Draco," Angelina calls back before the door clanks shut behind them. "You'd better be there."

I look at Millicent. "Why do I have a feeling everyone I know is conspiring against me?"

"Because we are?" Millicent smirks at me and pulls another tray of biscuits from the Agfa. "I'll sit Scorpius for you. It's easier to read my books in your flat anyway. Quieter."

I glare at her. "You're just hoping Greg finishes early at the restaurant and pops upstairs."

She pokes me in the chest with a spatula. "Do you want me to invite your Mum to stop by the shop next time she rings for you?"

"You are a bitch, Millicent." I groan.

"Of course I am." Millicent flips the biscuits onto a display tray. Melted chocolate oozes from the sides. "And you've a dinner party on Wednesday with the bloke you've been making cow eyes at for weeks now. You'll thank us later."

Somehow I sincerely doubt that.



Wednesday, quarter to eight, and I've been standing outside Angelina's stone townhouse for ten minutes, working up the nerve to ring the bell. I'm rather disgusted with myself to be honest. I'm almost twenty-nine years old for Christ's sake, and a decade ago—hell, three years ago, even—I'd never been flustered

by any of the trappings of the mating dance. I'd been a brilliant flirt, a charming conversationalist, a bloody amazing first-class Casanova if I do say so myself.

Astoria always had.

Of course, three years ago I also hadn't discovered whilst climbing out of a cab that the once pristine white cuff of my shirt now had bright red wax from a melted crayon staining the edge. I curse my damned son under my breath and rub at it again. All I manage is to make it more pronounced. With a sigh I tug the sleeve of my black jumper down over it and straighten my tie.

The door flies open, and Potter's standing there in a fitted *Children's Trust* t-shirt beneath a brown corduroy jacket, wine glass in hand. A pair of well-worn jeans nearly hang off his hips, held up only by a braided leather belt. "Oh," he says, attempting to look startled. "Angelina just sent me to check--"

I flush. "They've one of those security cameras, don't they?"

A small smile curves Potter's mouth and makes him look utterly fuckable. "It's in the kitchen," he says. "Only Angelina saw." He takes a sip of wine, holding the door open. "And me."

"Brilliant." I step into the house, doing my best to hide my embarrassment. I shrug out of my jacket and hand it to Potter. He hangs it on the coat rack and leads me into the sitting room, elegantly furnished in a mix of antiques and reproductions, heavy on the latter though they're obviously expensive and well-made.

"I didn't realise Alistair paid this well," I murmur and Potter laughs.

"George's business is taking off." He twists the stem of his wineglass between his fingertips. "Lucky for me; I was their first investor."

Five faces turn to look at us as we enter--or rather *me*. Potter's hand rests on the small of my back. I do my best to suppress the shiver that runs through me at the warmth of his touch, but I'm fairly certain he can feel it nonetheless. He doesn't move his hand.

"Hermione Granger," he says, waving his glass at a bushy-haired woman who smiles and raises her own wineglass towards me. "Ron Weasley, her husband. George Weasley, his brother. Luna Lovegood and her bloke, Rolf Scamander. Everyone, this is Draco Malfoy."

It suddenly strikes me that everyone else is part of a couple. My hands tighten on the bottle of wine and I take a step back just as the door into the dining room swings open. This is a date. Or a set-up. Which is nearly the same.

Angelina swoops down on me and kisses my cheek. "You made it," she says loudly, then whispers into my ear, "If you'd stepped off that stoop I would have sent Harry after you."

I shove the bottle of wine at her. "Here." It's a Penfolds Grange Hermitage, '96 vintage.

"Lovely." Angelina eyes the bottle appreciatively as she damn well should. The bastard set me back 700 pounds—or would have if I hadn't nicked a case of it from the Manor cellar five years ago. Greg had just

raised an eyebrow when I'd taken it from the kitchen wine pantry and muttered something under his breath about impressing MPs. Like I'd care what he thinks of the matter. Honestly. I just didn't have time to make it to Oddbins.

"George, darling," Angelina says, "will you let this breathe?"

George takes the bottle from her. "Nice, but then your sort always are good at choosing wine, aren't you?"

Angelina slaps his arm. "George!"

Her fiancé winces and glares at her. "What the hell--" He looks back over at me and Potter, and his eyes widen. "Oh, no, I didn't meant bent. That's ridiculous. Harry's shite at picking a decent bottle, and he's as homosexual as they come, unless you count that one fling with Ginny. I meant what with you being a toff and all. You know wine."

I bite my lip, trying not to laugh at the horror on Potter's face. "Yes," I say after a moment. "I do know wine."

"Oh, for Christ's sake," Angelina says, and she pushes her husband back towards the kitchen.

Hermione stands and offers me her hand. "Lovely to meet you, Draco." Her eyes flick towards Potter. "I've heard wonderful things about you."

I glance over at Potter. His cheeks are pink. "I need another glass," he says without looking at me. "Would you like one?"

"Yes, please."

Hermione draws me towards the sofa and I sit, completely aware of the scrutiny I'm receiving. I have the distinct feeling I'm going to need a whole bottle by the end of the night.



I've been at worse dinner parties. My father's mind-numbingly dull fundraising monstrosities come to mind.

This one's intimate, however, and I can't help but feel slightly left out, though Potter and Hermione and Angelina do their best to keep me in the conversation. Luna, odd creature that she is, studies me across the table, not bothering to hide her curiosity as she snaps another breadstick in half.

She and her husband are naturalists, I've discovered, who met during last summer's Climate Camp outside Kingsnorth power station in Kent. Evidently Luna requested Rolf's help in touching up her body paint, and it was love at first sight. Worse yet, they're vegetarians, which has entirely bollocksd dinner tonight in my opinion. Not that I've anything against vegetarians; Blaise has been one for years, albeit more out of a fanatical--paranoid, Pansy says--keenness to keep from dropping dead at thirty like his father had than any particular philosophical belief. Still, I'd prefer a good roast or salmon steak tonight.

"I know who you are," Luna says to me, setting her breadsticks down on her plate. My stomach tightens. I've managed to avoid the subject of my father so far; Angelina's had the common sense not to bring him up.

I drag the tines of my fork across the tofu Kiev on my plate. Angelina is a brilliant cook, but not even she can make soybean curd entirely palatable. The wild rice, on the other hand, is brilliant. "Do you?"

Luna nods. "It took me a while," she says in her light voice. "I'm terrible with faces you see, and names too sometimes, unless they're a specific class or phylum or other taxonomic rank. But my father likes cricket and I watched it quite a lot with him and I remember you. You played for England and Surrey."

I don't know whether to be relieved or perturbed. I settle for satisfied that Father's not been mentioned, nor has the expense scandal. For Potter's sake, I suppose, or Angelina's. The Chancellor of the Exchequer hasn't exactly been ignored in the media's maelstrom.

The others glance over at me, curious. Angelina takes a long drink of her wine. Potter just looks at me, a small smile curving his lips. It's then I realise he's known all along.

I can feel my cheeks warm. "I stopped playing nearly three years ago," I say after a moment. "My wife died, and I have a son to raise. Bit hard to be touring when you're a single dad."

There's a silence, then Ron leans forward, his brow furrowed. He looks me up and down, then snaps his fingers. "I'm more of a football lad myself--up Tottenham and all--but I like a bit of cricket on the side. You bowled the Ashes, but they replaced you."

"Ron," Potter says, with a disapproving frown. He looks at me, almost hesitant. "06-07 series, wasn't it?"

I nod. "One Test, which we lost." I fold the linen napkin between my fingers. "I was called back when Astoria..." I break off and look away.

Potter touches my thigh beneath the table, a quick, light press of fingers that's oddly comforting.

"Well, at least we brought the Ashes home this year," Ron says. "That Stuart Broad's a bit of something, don't you think?"

I reach for my wine glass, trying to cover my flare of jealousy. "He could be." I tell myself I don't miss cricket. I know I'm lying. And I really bloody loathe the easy success my replacement seems to have had.

"Brilliant bowler, really. Harry and I saw him at the Oval for the Fifth Test, didn't we? Man of the Match indeed--Harry couldn't stop ogling his arse." Ron jumps as Hermione pinches him. "What?" He blinks at her.

Hermione rolls her eyes. "Really, Ron."

"I think your wife's encouraging you to shut it," Potter says dryly. "I'd have to second her on that."

Ron flips two fingers at him with a grin. "That's not what you were saying every time he bent over."

"Ron!" Hermione glares at him as Potter chokes on his wine, dropping his napkin in the process. I reach down and grab it, hesitating for a moment when I realise my eyes are on level with his crotch. I can see the bulge in his jeans, and when I look up, Potter's watching me, his eyes shadowed. I sit up slowly, not looking away as I hand him the napkin.

"Thanks," Potter says, his voice low and almost gruff. He licks his bottom lip.

"Anytime." I give him a faint smile as Angelina turns the subject from cricket to the eternal question of whether or not Gordon will ever step down as PM.

Potter's knuckles lightly brush the back of my hand. I don't pull away.

Ron beams at us both.



Everyone clears their own plates, carrying them into the kitchen and scraping them into the compost bin as Angelina runs a sink of bubbles. I'm not used to that; proper dinner parties in my estimation should have hired help to clean the dishes. I manage to keep my tongue to myself, however. It's been a pleasant enough evening.

Somehow I find myself in the dining room alone with Hermione, tucking the napkin rings into the side hutch as the others laugh in the kitchen. I can hear Angelina shriek at her Weasley, insisting he not splash her again.

"Sorry about Ron earlier," she says, not looking at me. She tucks her hair behind her ear. "Sometimes he doesn't realise--"

"It's fine." I close the hutch drawer, turning to lean against it. I study her. She's pretty enough, in a normal way. Astoria was much lovelier, though I must admit Hermione's teeth are better. Her parents were dentists, she'd said, which accounts for that. But I'd been fond of the small gap between Astoria's front teeth. It'd given her charm. "It's just been a while since I've been recognised."

She nods and glances over at me then. "You said you had a wife."

"Are you asking if I'm gay?" There's no need to beat about the bush. I've seen that look before. At her nod, I shake my head. "I'm not gay; I'm bisexual. I like men and women, I'm not confused on the matter and merely can't make a choice one way or the other, and no, it's not just a phase no matter what my mother might prefer to believe. Is that a problem?"

Hermione raises an eyebrow. She's a barrister; I suddenly feel like a hostile witness in the docks. "I take it this is a discussion you've had before."

"More than once," I say with a frown. I despise discussing my sexuality with people I don't know. It's none of their damned business to be bluntly honest. I am what I am, and I'm finally comfortable with it. "It's been my experience that people don't believe there's such a thing as bisexuality."

"Men generally choose one sex or the other." Her mouth purses. "I've read plenty of material that suggests female sexuality is far more fluid than male--"

I roll my eyes. "Speaking as a male, I, for one, fancy a thick cock as much as I do a wet fanny."

Her nostrils flare. "You needn't be crass."

"And it's not crass of you to be prodding about in my personal affairs?" I give her an incredulous look. "You know, really, sometimes heterosexuals are appallingly rude. You don't see me asking what you get up to in bed with your Ronald, now do you?" I'm annoyed now. "What the hell difference does it make to you whom I take to my bed anyway?"

Hermione's cheeks redden. "I wasn't...I didn't mean...oh, *bollocks*." I smirk at her, amused again by the self-conscious backpedaling a certain shade of liberal does whenever their biases are pointed out. She crosses her arms over her chest and looks me up and down, her lips pressed primly together. "Look, I don't care whom or what you want to sleep with, to be honest. I just don't want Harry hurt."

Oh, so it's this sort of conversation then.

"I barely know him," I say, attempting to keep from bristling. I fail, of course. It's a mistake. Hermione looks triumphant, the cow.

"But you like him."

Really, is she thick? I can't even hide it any longer from myself. I want in Potter's trousers. Badly. It's nearly an embarrassment. "He's fit enough, I suppose."

We eye each other, neither one of us willing to give ground. Hermione sighs finally and drops her arms. Her shoulders slump slightly. "He's been hurt before. I don't want it to happen again."

"I think he can make his own decisions," I say finally. "He seems an adult. Of sorts."

A small smile quirks her lips. "Of sorts."

I pick up her wineglass and hand it to her. "Politicians often keep the more annoying traits of toddlers, I've found. Utter self-centeredness or unrealistic idealism." I glance back towards the kitchen door then reach for the last of the nearly empty wine bottles still sitting on the table. I top off her glass, then mine. "My mother once told me never to find myself attached to one." I purse my mouth. "Sadly, I've never listened to my mother."

"Be careful or you'll make me like you, Draco Malfoy," Hermione says over the rim of her glass, and I sniff.

"We'll see."



Potter comes up behind me as I'm shrugging on my jacket. He helps slide it over my shoulders, and I look back at him. The others have left: Ron and Hermione an hour past, in order to get their son and

daughter's sitter home, and Luna and Rolf only a few minutes ago after too much wine sent Rolf into a diatribe over global warming and the Yanks' stubborn stupidity over the Kyoto Protocol. *Special relationship, my arse*, he'd snarled bitterly, splashing wine about with each wave of his arm. *Fuck them all and Tony Blair too, and yes, darling, I realise you're tugging on my arm, but this needs to be said and Harry's in Government now and he can Do Things—oh, dreadfully sorry, Angie sweets, was that a terribly good vase?* Luna'd wrangled him out of the door, pink-cheeked and promising him they'd open another bottle when they reached home.

"Your friends are odd," I say, and Potter laughs.

"And here they were on their best behaviour tonight." His hand rests on my hip, heavy and warm. For a moment, I'm almost certain he's going to lean in and kiss me in the foyer, but the sharp click of Angelina's heels on the black and white tile floor pulls him back. I'm disappointed. It's appalling how desperate I am to feel his mouth against mine.

Angelina leans against the banister and smiles at us. She toys with a gold chain around her long neck. It glints prettily against her dark skin. "Shall I ring for a cab, Draco?"

"No need," Potter says before I can answer. He still hasn't moved his hand. "I'll make sure he gets home safe."

"I'm quite certain you will," Angelina says with a pointed look at me.

I ignore it and kiss her cheek. "Lovely dinner." Potter ushers me through the door, calling back a cheerful *Give George a good shag* before Angelina slams it on him, laughing.

Potter shoves his hands in his jeans pockets as he jogs down the steps. "So," he says, and he licks his bottom lip nervously. It's oddly charming.

"So." I fold my arms over my chest. "You might have mentioned you knew who I was."

"I might have done, yes." Potter looks sheepish. "But I didn't want you to think I was some strange cricket-obsessed stalker."

I raise an eyebrow. "Are you?"

"Do you want me to be?" He grins at me, a wide, white flash of teeth.

I can't resist the charm. "We'll see."

Potter runs a hand through his hair. It doesn't help tame it. "I follow Surrey, you know. England too, but always Surrey. I saw you pitch at the Oval."

"That was a lifetime ago," I say quietly. I can't look at him. I don't like thinking of those days.

"I know."

We stand silently for a moment. I twist a button on my jacket, and sigh. "Right then." I glance down the street. "You've a car?"

He coughs and shifts from foot to foot. "Yes, well, it's in Kennington." He gives me an apologetic half-smile. "It's easier to take the Tube when I'm in town."

I run my hand over my face. "Perhaps Angelina ought to have rung a cab." I look at him and wrinkle my nose. "I loathe the Tube. It's nasty, filthy, horrifically fragrant, and far too crowded for my tastes."

Potter reaches for my hand. "And sometimes," he says with a laugh, "it's a perfect excuse to press up against someone special." His thumb traces a circle on the back of my wrist.

I flush at his warm look. "Yes, well." I try to hide a smile and fail as he pulls me towards Notting Hill Gate. "I suppose it does have its benefits."



Potter spends most of the twenty-minute Tube ride deliberately bumping against me, pressing me back into the train doors with his hips as he holds on to a chrome pole, nattering on about his devotion to Surrey. It's enough to drive me mad, and despite the crowded car, I'm considering kissing him just to shut him up. When I tell him this, he laughs and watches me through half-lidded eyes as I grab his arm to steady myself when the train lurches into Westminster station.

"You're incorrigible," I tell him, stepping through the doors as they hiss open behind me, a carefully modulated woman's voice warning me politely to mind the gap.

Potter just smirks and follows me up the escalator.

The streets are lined with lamps that throw a soft, warm gold-orange glow across the pavement and up the stone facades of the Government buildings, and a brisk wind rustles the fresh leaves in the trees along the pavement. We walk in silence around the perimeter of Parliament Square towards Broad Sanctuary and Victoria Street. Neither of us wants to hurry.

"You grew up here, didn't you?" Potter says finally, glancing over at me. "I mean, with your father being in Government and all."

I stop at the corner of Little George Street and look at him. I don't say anything. The breeze blows my hair across my cheek and Potter reaches up, tucks it back behind my ear.

"Malfoy's not a common name," he says gently. "And I've been in and about Parliament for a while." He smiles. "I did mention the stalker bit, too, didn't I? Angelina answered a few questions for me after I noticed you."

"You noticed me."

Potter eyes me. "It wasn't obvious?"

"Maybe." I pull my jacket tighter. "Sorry. I'm just not on the best of terms with my father."

A couple walks past us, giving us a curious look. Potter draws me back into the shadows next to the building beside us as they pass. "Too much of a Tory for you?" he asks lightly.

"I've voted Conservative every election," I reply with a sniff. "I was practically raised to say my prayers to Maggie Thatcher every night."

"That's a truly terrifying thought," Potter says and I can't help but laugh.

"Better her than Tony."

We start to walk again. "I was always fond of Paddy Ashdown." Potter grins at me. "Then again, I was raised by an Oxford prof who preferred philosophising about Kafka and Kierkegaard over cannabis and tinkering with his motorbike to actually teaching his classes."

"The perfect breeding ground for a Lib Dem." I wish I had a clip to keep my hair from blowing into my face. I push it back again. "Your parents must be pleased."

Potter folds his arms across his chest. His t-shirt bunches beneath his corduroy jacket. "They died when I was a baby. Car crash." He touches the scar on his forehead. "I ended up with this."

"Oh." I shiver in the breeze. "You were in the car then."

He nods. "I don't remember it, obviously. My aunt and uncle took me in for a few years until my godfather came back to the country. Quite a shock going from the terrace house dullness of Little Whinging to Sirius's idea of a proper education."

"I can only imagine." I twist my fingers in the hem of my jacket sleeve. The spires of Westminster Abbey tower over us. "Astoria died in a car accident. Our son was in the back seat." I look up at him. "I was in Brisbane having my cock sucked off by one of my teammates so I could come back and tell her about it. I don't think I'll ever forgive myself for that."

"You couldn't have stopped the accident," Potter says, too gently for my comfort.

I press my lips together and watch a black cab roll past. "Maybe. Maybe not. It still doesn't make it any easier."

"Is that why you've given up cricket?" Potter crosses over to Tothill Street, me at his heels. "Because you should have been there and you weren't?"

"No." A car blares its horn at me as I jog across the zebra crossing. Potter waits on the kerb. "I have a son--"

Potter just looks at me. "You could take him with you. Hire a nanny. Any number of things if you still wanted to play."

"It's not that easy," I snap.

"Nothing ever is." Potter stops in front of the café. The windows are dark, as are those of Greg's restaurant next door. I hadn't realised it was so late. Potter catches my hand again. His fingers curl around mine. They're warm and soft and strong. "You named this shop after a way to dismiss a batsman. It doesn't take a degree in psychology to see through that."

"I miss it," I say softly. It's the first time I've said that out loud in years. My throat closes on me, tight and painful. "I miss her."

"I know," Potter whispers, and then he's kissing me, his mouth moving against mine. His lips are chapped and rough, and it's nothing like kissing Astoria or Oliver or Roger or Quentin or any of the handful of men and women I've taken to my bed for one night here and there since Astoria's funeral.

Potter presses me against the door of the café, and I can hear the bell clank quietly through the thick glass. His hands cup my face, his teeth nip at my lip, and I can't stop myself from grabbing his shoulders. I'm taller than him, but not by much.

"Harry," I say against his mouth, breathless, and I taste him again, sour-sweet from the wine.

He laughs, a soft, warm huff across my lips. "I think that's the first time you've said my name," he murmurs, his hands settling on my hips. His thumbs push at the waistband of my trousers, rubbing across the jut of my hipbones through my white cotton shirt.

"Harry," I say again, with a laugh of my own as I tangle my hands in his hair and pull him into another kiss.

It's slow and deep, and it makes my cock ache. I moan softly, pushing my hips forward into his. Harry gasps and pulls me against him, rocking into me. I can feel him hard and hot against my leg, through his jeans, and it makes me smile into our kiss.

I pull away. "Come inside."

Harry nods. His mouth is already swollen and wet. I want to kiss him again, want to drag my teeth across his full bottom lip, want to hear his breath catch as I rub against him.

With shaking hands I pull my keys from my pocket—a difficult task with a raging erection, I might add—and I fumble with the lock, cursing as I nearly drop the damned key ring twice. At last the door swings open and we stumble in, shutting it behind us with a slam. I slide the lock closed again and turn back to Harry.

His eyes are bright behind his glasses and his hair is rumpled. The buttons on his jeans are straining against the swell of his cock, and I drop to my knees, pushing him back against the nearest table.

My hands are already pulling at his belt when I look up at him. "I need—" I choke out, and Harry groans, his fingers tight around the edge of the tabletop.

"Yes," he says, but I've got his jeans open and my mouth is pressed against the soft white cotton of his y-fronts. "Oh God," Harry whispers, staring down at me.

It's been too long since I've done this. Too long since I've felt the soft, smooth skin of another man's prick beneath my lips. I love sucking cock. I've loved it since the first time I did it in uni, late at night, bent over Justin's cock as he told me how to lick him. I love the taste of spunk, the smell of it, the feel of it flooding my mouth as the body beneath me shudders.

Harry's prick is gorgeous. Thick and short and heavy in my hand as I lift it out. His balls are dark and full, their light fur scratchy against my tongue. Harry gasps as I suck one into my mouth, my fingers digging into his hips. He's fucking gorgeous, and I haven't wanted anyone more in a hell of a long time.

I lick up the underside of his prick, pushing his foreskin back with my tongue as I take the swollen head into my mouth. Harry's glasses have slipped to the edge of his nose; light glints off the lenses as he watches me, breathless, his mouth half-open. "Draco," he says and his fingers clench the table, his knuckles white.

I suck him slowly, sliding down his cock until it hits the back of my throat. I nearly gag--it's been too long since I've done this--then I catch myself, drawing back and breathing out as I swallow around his prick. Harry's hips jerk, nearly knocking me off balance and I grab them and hold him still. His breath is ragged and raw in the silence of the café, and I can smell tomorrow's coffee beans, roasted just before I'd left for the day. I inhale again, pressing my nose against the dark curls covering Harry's groin and trailing up his belly. Harry's thick, musky scent fills my nostrils.

My cock's hard and aching and I shift on my knees, moving one hand to tug my fly open as I drag my mouth back up Harry's shaft.

"Christ, yes," Harry chokes out. "Touch yourself."

It's all I can do not to jerk myself raw right then. Instead I pull back, letting his cock pop out of my mouth wetly. I stroke my fingers over the swell in my pants, rubbing the silk over the head of my prick. I lean back on one hand, looking up at Harry as I stretch the silk tight, the wetness on my prick spreading quickly through it. "See what you've done?" I say, and Harry laughs softly.

He stops when I slide my cock out of my pants, lifting it free of the silk, and curl my fingers around the base. I smooth a thumb over the vein, trying to hide the tremble in my hand. The *want* on Harry's face twists my stomach and I draw in a shaky breath.

"Harry," I say, and then he's pulling me up, tugging me towards him as he kisses me roughly. Our cocks press against each other; we stumble backwards, and I wrap my arms around his neck as my shoulders hit the pastry case. A metal jar falls, and the cutlery it contains scatters across the floor. A spoon cracks beneath Harry's foot, and he tugs at my jacket, pushing it off my shoulders. I let it fall, and I help him jerk my jumper over my head. The glass of the case behind me presses against my back, cool through the thin cotton of my shirt. I gasp.

"Like that, do you?" Harry grins at me and rolls his hips forward, his prick slipping over mine. My breath catches.

"Make me come," I whisper, and I'm kissing him again, my fingers carding through his thick short hair.

Harry's hand curls around our cocks, and he groans as his palm slides down our shafts, pressing them together as he rocks forward on the balls of his feet. I bite his jaw. My teeth scrape over soft, warm skin.

I'm shaking. I push against him, my hands sidling down his back, slipping beneath his jacket and t-shirt. I ruche the corduroy and cotton up, spreading my fingers across his back. My fingers drag over the knobs of his spine; my breath's harsh against his throat.

"Christ," Harry says. His head falls onto my shoulder as his fingers twist over slick foreskin. I can't stop moving, can't stop rutting against him, my prick slipping over his palm, rubbing against his cock. It's been too fucking long--I can't hold off any longer.

And then Harry's prick slides away and his hand tightens around my cock, hot and heavy and moving faster, harder as he lifts his head and watches me. He pushes my shirt up over my stomach, and his thumb strokes small circles around my navel.

I catch my bottom lip between my teeth. My fingers dig into Harry's back. "I--" My voice rises, elongating that one letter until it's a wavering gasp as my back arches, taut and tense. My hands scrabble, twisting in heavy fabric of his jacket. "Oh, God--"

With a cry, I come in thick sticky strands that spurt over Harry's fingers, smearing onto his t-shirt. I slump against him, barely able to hold myself up on my trembling legs. Harry presses me back against the case. "Draco," he whispers against my jaw, "come on. I just need..." He groans and his cock slides over my stomach, hot and slick.

I turn my head and kiss him, slowly, languorously. My fingers slip over his damp skin, pushing past the waistband of his jeans to smooth over the flat planes of his arse. "Harry," I murmur, and I rock my hips forward, twisting them just enough to roll his cock against my stomach. He shudders against me and I laugh. I love how much he wants me. I'd forgotten what an utter rush that power can be.

I slip one hand between us, curling my fingers around his cock. He shivers, and I kiss him again, rough and hard and quick, before I slide down to my knees. "I want to swallow you," I say, and he looks down at me with dark eyes. I take him in my mouth. His wet cock tastes bitter and tart, and when I suck lightly at the head, Harry hisses and slaps his sticky hands against the pastry case behind me.

"Draco." His breath comes in ragged gasps, and it hitches when I suck him deeper into my mouth, pressing his prick against my upper palate as I slide my tongue along the underside. His hips rock forward. The back of my head hits the pastry case. I don't care. Harry's trembling, his fingers flexing against the glass above me. "Jesus--"

I tighten my mouth around his prick, twisting so his cock fucks my cheek with each shallow thrust of his hips.

Harry comes hard, filling my mouth with sour spunk that I swallow eagerly. His hands slip over the glass case and he lurches forward and I catch his hips.

I lick the last bits of come from his cock before I pull away. My knees creak as I stand up slowly, the remnants of my cricket career.

Harry slumps next to the till.

"Fuck," he says fervently. He takes my hand and tugs me closer, leaning in to kiss me. His tongue slides against mine, and I know he can taste himself on me still. I shiver, then pull away.

"Come upstairs." I can hardly believe I'm saying the words. It's entirely unlike me. Perhaps the orgasm affected my mind.

Harry touches my cheek. "Are you sure?" His thumb drags over my mouth. I kiss the tip.

"Yes." I am. Strangely. It's mad; I'm quite aware of this fact. I barely know him. I don't care. I can't stand the idea that he'll leave. It's a disturbing realisation--I've always been quite fond of the freedom one-night stands and anonymous sex in lavatory stalls provide. The last time I wanted someone to stay with me had been the first night I'd spent with Astoria.

I don't want to think about that.

Instead I pull myself together, tucking my prick away and stooping to pick up my jacket and jumper. I drape them over my arm. "Spend tonight with me, Harry," I say, not looking at him. My heart thuds against my chest. For the first time in years I'm terrified of being rejected.

Harry's fingers curl around mine.

"All right," he says.

I breathe out. I'm not entirely certain it's in relief.



I'm still holding Harry's hand as I push open the door to the flat.

Millicent and Greg are lying on the sofa together in the flickering light of the telly. Millicent pulls back when I say *oh for God's sake, it's about time*, her cheeks flushed and her shirt half-open. I get a glimpse of far more of her tits than I'd ever care to see. She tugs the gaping fabric together, lifting her chin as she glares at me.

"I really hope my son's asleep," I say, tossing my jumper and jacket on an ottoman, and Greg snorts and flips two fingers at me as he sits up, bare-chested. Fortunately I'm rather used to his tits. Harry, on the other hand, coughs and looks away.

Greg eyes Harry's half-open jeans and come-splattered t-shirt, then glances back at me, taking in my rumpled hair and my untucked shirt. I'm fairly certain I can see a lovebite developing just below his jaw. "Good dinner then?" he asks mildly, and Millicent snorts behind him.

"Well enough. Despite the tofu," I say, and Greg frowns. I never bring anyone home with me. Ever. Not men. Not women. I've Scorpius to think of, after all. Greg glances back at Harry, and I can see the wheels churning in his brain as his eyebrows wedge together.

"I'd say," Millicent murmurs. "Must have been quite..." She lets her gaze drift down to my undone belt. "Explosive?"

"Oh, fuck off." I glare at her. She just smirks. "We'll leave you alone, shall we?" I pull Harry towards the hall leading to my bedroom before Greg can question me further.

Harry snorts. "Rather smooth, that."

I hush him with a kiss. It's long and slow, and Harry slips his fingers through my hair, pushing it back from my face. His thumb strokes my temple.

"Draco, I want—" We stumble and slam into a wall, knocking a framed portrait of Scorpius and Astoria askew. Harry's hands move from my face to my hips, gripping hard as he pulls me against him. He bites my throat, sucking at it, then licking the sharp sting away. "I want to come inside you this time." His fingers flex against my arse.

I trail my mouth along his jaw. He needs a shave; his stubble is rough against my lips. "I think that can be arranged."

He groans and ruts up against me. "Christ, you drive me mad..."

"Good." I trail my knuckles over the half-buttoned fly of his jeans and press lightly against his swelling prick. This gesture elicits a sharp, soft breath against my jaw. "Quiet." I pull away, unbuttoning my shirt. He watches my fingers intently. "Or you'll wake Scorpius." I slide the shirt off my shoulders and step backwards into my bedroom.

Harry pushes himself off the wall, his eyes dark and bright.

"Mustn't do that, eh?" His hands catch my hips again, and I smile as he nudges the bedroom door shut behind us.



The clock on the bedside table gleams redly at me in the darkness. I blink, trying to clear my head of sleep. Two-eighteen. Far too early for the alarm. I'm dimly aware of an arm draped over me, a hand resting heavy on my hip. Harry. I smile. I can't have been asleep more than an hour. My arse is still sore and stretched, I'm fairly certain my shoulders have the imprint of my headboard branded on them now, and I desperately need a shower.

I wonder how long I have to wait before I wake Harry up for another go.

Daddy I hear whispered from the doorway, and I still, grateful for the sheet that's pulled up around my and Harry's waists.

Tiny, pyjamaed feet pad across the wood floor. "Daddy," Scorpius whispers again, next to me. He pats my arm. "Daddy."

I raise myself up on one elbow. "You're supposed to be in bed."

Scorpius looks at me through unruly blond curls. "I canted sleep." He chews on the satin ribbon edge of his favourite blue blanket that Mother had given him when he was born. Shoo-shoo, his teddy bear, dangles from his other hand.

"Can't sleep." I sigh and sit up.

Scorpius nods. "I sleep in here with you?" His pink bow mouth trembles slightly. "'Cause there monsters in my bed."

I can feel Harry stir behind me. "Turn around," I say to Scorpius and when he does, I scramble for my pants, leaning over Harry to grab them.

"What is it?" Harry mumbles sleepily, catching me long enough to kiss me lightly on the mouth.

"Scorpius." I slide back, pulling my pants on beneath the sheet. "Sorry...evidently monsters have sent him running."

"Don't they always?" Harry sits up. Scorpius has turned around now and is watching him curiously. "Hi," Harry says and Scorpius dips his head, suddenly shy. He pokes a finger at one of the cars printed onto his footed flannel pyjamas, and sucks at the corner of his blanket.

I slide out of bed and pick him up. Shoo-shoo slaps against my bare back, his shiny black button eyes scraping my skin.

"Who's that?" Scorpius whispers, too loud, and Harry laughs. He's already pulling his pants on; the twist of his hips under the sheet sends a shiver down my spine.

"I'm Harry." He rolls out of bed and immediately strips off the sheet, then the fitted one beneath it.

"Where do you keep—" He looks at me and raises the come-soaked sheets he's wadded in one hand. He tosses them next to the door.

"Closet in the hall," I say and Harry nods.

Scorpius watches him leave. "He scared of monsters too?" he asks, and my mouth twitches.

"Something like that."

Harry comes back with clean sheets. He yawns as he stretches them out on the bed, tucking them beneath the mattress corners.

"You don't mind, do you?" I ask as I drop Scorpius onto the bed. He bounces, his arse in the air as he snuggles up against my pillow. Harry watches him, smiling, and Scorpius rolls over onto his back, his blanket between his teeth as he laughs up at Harry. "I could put him back in his bed, but he'd just be in here again in another fifteen minutes."

Harry plops down next to Scorpius, pulling the sheet back over both of them. "Of course not." He nudges Scorpius's shoulder. "Monsters should always be avoided."

Scorpius nods. "Bad monsters." He roars at Harry, baring his teeth. "'Cause they eats people when they sleeps."

"Very detrimental to the health," Harry says solemnly, and Scorpius pats his face as I slide beneath the sheet next to him.

"Daddy keep them away." Scorpius wriggles up against me, pressing his feet painfully against my thigh. He wraps his arms around Shoo-shoo and lays his head on Harry's pillow. "Okay?"

"Okay." Harry looks at me and smiles. My heart flips when he touches Scorpius's cheek lightly, then drapes his arm over both of us. *Sleep*, he mouths at me before closing his eyes.

I'm starting to think perhaps I'm fucked.



Harry leaves at six, kissing me as he slides from under the sheet and Scorpius's feet, which have somehow ended up on his chest at some point in the past three hours. My son's head is pressed against my hip, and drool's smeared from the corner of his mouth across his chin.

"I'll ring you?" Harry asks, a hopeful look on his face. He settles his glasses on the bridge of his nose and pulls his t-shirt over his head.

"After the things I let you do last night, I damned well expect it." I carefully extract myself from beneath Scorpius and slowly stand. Scorpius curls in on himself with a whimper and a sigh, pulling his blanket over his shoulder. He stays asleep, thank God.

Harry just laughs and buttons his jeans. "Tonight, then. Parliament's only sitting until six."

I kiss Harry good-bye at the door--twice--then shower before leaving Greg a note on where to find Scorpius when he wakes up. Greg feeds him breakfast and drops him at the Little Elves Montessori nursery school in Marylebone. I'll pick him up at half-four, once I've closed up the shop.

The early rush passes in a blur. Millicent slips in twenty minutes late, but I'm in a decent mood and only snap at her once for her tardiness which earns me a raised eyebrow from her. "You should get shagged more often," she says, passing a mug of double espresso with skim milk across the counter to Kitty Ussher who's looking worn and tired. I suppose being hounded by the *Telegraph* for asking the taxpayers to pay twenty thousand pounds for your house renovations might keep you up at night.

"You should be talking." I brush past Millicent and take a croissant from the pastry case, sliding it onto a plate for Hazel Blears' assistant. My cheeks warm when I realise there's still a handprint on the glass.

Millicent snorts. "I went home." At my incredulous look, she shrugs. "We're moving slowly."

I just roll my eyes.

It's quarter to eleven nearly when Pansy comes in. I'm sitting at one of the tables, going over my stock list so I can place an order this afternoon with the wholesalers. Rain pours down the window next to me, greying the street, save for the occasional red blur of a bus or the bright yellow of an umbrella. Pansy drops into the seat across from me, and I glance up from tapping my pencil against the tabletop.

"Darling." Pansy looks grim. I sit up straight, suddenly worried. Pansy never scowls like that now if she can help it. She's terrified of wrinkles.

"What's wrong?"

She drops a copy of the *Daily Mail* on my papers. "You haven't seen this?"

I shake my head. No one comes in with the *Mail* or the *Sun*. Of course they all read it, but none of them would be caught dead carrying it about. I glance over the headlines. A giant photograph of Sir Peter Viggers's ducks fills most of the page, along with a smaller photograph of the man himself attempting to defend spending nearly two thousand pounds on a floating duck house.

Pansy taps a polished red fingernail at the upper right corner and my throat closes. There's a picture of Harry and me against the pastry case, kissing. *MP sex scandal* is printed across it in bold white type.

I flip through the paper, my heart thudding erratically. The story's on page four--the expense scandal's buried it somewhat, even in the *Daily Mail*--but the photograph is larger and clearer. Alfie's byline is on the article. It's blessedly short, although full of speculation, and it mentions Father and his indiscretions twice.

"Shit," I say, closing my eyes. *Fuck, fuck, fuck.*

Pansy puts her hand over mine. "It's only the *Mail*. Maybe no one who matters will read--"

"Don't even." I look at her then. "It'll be all over Westminster by tea and you know it as well as I do."

"I know." Pansy chews on her cherry-glossed lip. "What are you going to do?"

I sigh and stare out the window. "I have no damn idea."

But the next time I see Alfie Hart I'm rather certain I'm going to knock his bloody teeth down his throat.

I don't even know what Harry's going to say.



The call from Father's assistant comes an hour later. Sophie sounds harried and exhausted; Father's one of the few Lords who bothers staffing an office even part-time. The few hours Sophie works a week during Parliamentary sessions are spent at Father's desk while he's in committee--most of them attempting to settle his diary for the week and help him kiss arse with the Tory leadership.

"He wants to see you now," she says over the crackle of her mobile, and I can hear the sharp click of her heels echoing in some Westminster Palace hall. "He'll be out of committee in half an hour."

I don't want to go. I also don't have a choice. Mother's already rung me up, appalled, after Aunt Andromeda emailed her the link to the story on the *Daily Mail*'s website. I wasn't even aware Mother knew how to operate a computer. I suspect I've Uncle Ted to blame for that. I'm not sure what horrified Mother the most--the fact that I'd been caught *in flagrante delicto* with a politician, or the fact that said politician was Lib Dem. I think she would have preferred I choose a nice, proper Conservative to rub dicks with.

So at half noon I'm waiting in the Central Lobby for Father, sitting on one of the black leather sofas next to Gladstone's statue and staring blankly at the annunciators above the reception desk which inform me

the House began sitting at 10.30 today and what is on the agenda for discussion. My umbrella drips onto the tiled floor and one of the guards glares at me, but I don't care.

"Draco." Father's clipped tones bring me to my feet. He walks towards me, impeccable as always in his black suit, his hair tied neatly back. Father's the only Tory I know who can get by with hair that brushes his shoulder blades. He crooks his finger at me, and I follow. He waits until we're well into the East Corridor before he speaks. "The *Daily Mail*," he says, looking straight ahead, mouth tight. I'd never wanted to officially come out to my father at all, much less in this manner. Having a modicum of plausible deniability between us was much more comfortable. Still he seems relatively calm. For now.

I stop beneath the painting of Latimer preaching before Edward VI. "The *Daily Mail* doesn't affect you." I try to keep my voice even.

Father snorts. "Don't be ridiculous." He purses his lips. "Do you know what sort of position this puts me in with the leadership? The last thing I need at the moment is photographs of my bisexual--" he says the word with hateful hiss and a distasteful twist of his lips and I know then that he's already spoken with Mother "--son in an intimate embrace with a Lib Dem on the cover of the bloody *Mail*!"

I glare at him. "So if Harry were a Tory it'd be acceptable?"

Father's nostrils flare. He's beyond put out with me. "Don't be a fool."

"Why not? It's what you think I am." I look away. Baroness Boothroyd passes us with a cheery *Good afternoon, Lucius, darling* to Father and a curious glance my way. Father nods to her, letting his face soften into what passes for civility for him. She's crossbench, after all, and therefore must be cultivated.

"I didn't do this to embarrass you," I say quietly as the Baroness walks off towards one of the committee rooms. "I didn't know Alfie was lurking about at half-eleven. Parliament doesn't even sit that late on Wednesdays."

Father sighs and drums his fingertips against his crossed arms. He ignores the assistants and the members of the public wandering past us on their way to and from the Central Lobby. Few of them glance our way; whispered tête-à-têtes between Lords and MPs and their underlings are not uncommon in the corridors of Westminster Palace. "You'll stop this nonsense immediately, Draco. I'll not stand for our family to be used by the Government as a distraction from the current scandal."

I tense. "Is that what they're planning?" I don't particularly give a damn about Father's reputation. Harry on the other hand doesn't need to be dragged through the tabloids' muck.

"Wouldn't you?" Father scowls. "The Commons is desperate for anything that will turn the public's attention from their complete lack of sense. Honestly, the idiots act as if the Green Book were a suggestion manual rather than policy."

"And when will they catch you out on your housing claims?" I ask through gritted teeth. "You can't tell me you're not claiming London expenses, Athenaeum be damned."

Father arches an eyebrow. "I would think you'd have a higher opinion of me than that, Draco." He straightens his French cuffs, toying with a silver serpent cufflink that had once been his grandfather's.

I snort. The Malfoy family's always been quite adept with creative accounting when it comes to our Barclay's accounts, and Father's been even more talented than most of my ancestors when it comes to investments and playing a discreet shell game with Inland Revenue.

When Father looks away, I have my answer. That's why he's so upset. It has nothing to do with wanting to protect me or the family name. I've humiliated him. No Conservative politician wants to be publicly confronted with a queer son who's shagging a Lib Dem, but this is the bloody twenty-first century. Being openly homosexual isn't the political death sentence it once was. But this... Father's just terrified he'll be caught out like all the others and between the worries of his financial misdeeds coming to light and my perverse indiscretions being flaunted on the tabloid pages, Cameron will stop being so bloody cosy with him. It's always been about power for Father. He's been angling for a Shadow Cabinet position for years now with the hope that it'll turn into an actual spot on the Privy Council once the Government rolls back around to the Conservatives.

It's enough to make me ill.

"Draco."

I half-turn at Harry's voice. Father stiffens next to me as Harry jogs up to us, his laptop satchel slapping against his hip. His hair's needs combing, but his dark brown Gieves & Hawkes mohair suit is neatly pressed. He nods curtly to Father. "Lord Malfoy."

"Potter." Father's lip curls.

Harry looks slightly taken aback, but he glances at me. "Are you all right?" he says softly, and he touches my arm.

Father slaps his hand away. "Do you mind? I rather think you've done enough to blemish the Malfoy name."

Harry steps back, blinking. "Look," he says hotly, "this doesn't have anything to do with you—"

"I rather think it does." Father moves closer, his eyes narrowing. I know that look all too well; I've seen it on the snakes Father keeps at the Manor just before they devour the tiny mouse dropped into their cages for dinner. "I'd watch yourself, Mr Potter. The British public doesn't care for your sort running its business."

"Bollocks." Harry's jaw tightens. I can see the flutter of tension in his cheek. "My *sort*, as you put it, has been running the country for quite some time."

"Stop it," I say, my voice rising. They both look at me. "I'm not doing this right now. Or right here." I place my hand on Harry's arm, ignoring Father's narrowed lips. "I'm sorry."

Harry catches my hand. "Draco."

I pull away. I don't care that I'm getting glances from passersby. "I can't, Harry," I say and I'm not sure what I mean. My throat is tight and painful, my shoulders tense. I just need to leave. I'm tired of being Father's pawn and I don't want to be responsible for the collapse of Harry's career.

"I'm sorry," I say again, and I leave them standing in the corridor, looking after me.



Rain falls steady, puddling on the pavement of the Albert Embankment and disappearing into the choppy waves of the Thames. Fog rolls over the river, grey and thick. I can barely see the spires of Parliament across the water; the lights from the buildings and the light of the lamps along the Embankment and bridge are softly diffused by the mist.

I don't know how long I've been standing here, leaning against the embankment wall, staring out at the Thames. My mobile's rung five times. After the last I turned it off. I don't want to hear from anyone--not Father, not Mother, and definitely not Pansy or Blaise. Even the shop can fuck off for all I care. I grip my umbrella, huddling beneath it as I pull tighter the purple Alexander McQueen jacket Blaise bought me for my birthday last, with a sharp criticism of my lack of appropriately modern style. The bastard's full of shite in my opinion.

I don't know what to do. I do know what I want. Harry. I want to feel him touch me again, want to kiss him, want to spend another night with him in my bed. However, I'm quite aware of what the media could do to him over this. What they *will* do if it continues.

If I have the slightest bit of altruism in my bones, I'll walk away from him. Mother had said as much this morning. *It's best for him and for you, Draco. You know that.*

The problem is that I do. I just don't bloody care.

A hand brushes mine, thick, solid fingers that have become achingly familiar over the past few weeks.

I look over at Harry. The idiot's come out in the rain without an umbrella. His suit is soaked—most likely ruined—and the peach collar of his shirt sticks to his wet skin. His hair is plastered against his forehead.

"You're hopeless," I say.

"Maybe." Harry reaches for my hip, pulling me closer. "I don't give a damn about the *Mail*, you know."

I splay my hand across his chest. His skin is warm beneath the wet fabric. "You should."

Harry's fingers settle over mine. "I've been out of the closet for a very long time," he says with a small smile. "Cowley Street's entirely aware. In fact, Clegg called me up to congratulate me this morning. Seems they think my having a Tory boyfriend might bring a few gay Conservatives our way."

"Are you using me for your own political gain, Potter?"

"Maybe," Harry says again. He brushes his knuckles over my cheek. My umbrella falls back, loose in my hand as my breath catches at the look on his face.

I swallow. Raindrops hit my skin, cold and bracing and I shiver. "How'd you find me?" I ask after a moment.

"Millie," Harry says. I wonder if she's ever been called that before. "She said you like to walk along the Embankment towards the Oval when you're upset."

"I should sack her." I catch Harry's hand and move closer. He watches me through rain-splattered glasses. "But it's hard to find someone who brews decent espresso in this town."

Harry smiles faintly. "It'd be a shame to lose her."

I nod. My thumb slides over Harry's wrist. I can feel the steady thrum of his pulse. "This could go badly, you know. You and me. I'm shit at relationships and I've never managed to be faithful to anyone."

"Me either." Harry leans against me. He's solid and strong, and I want him. Desperately.

"I want to play cricket again." I look at him, a furrow between my brow. I'm not entirely certain where that came from, but I know it's true. "Not until next season, but...."

Harry presses his forehead against mine. "You should ring Surrey." He twines his fingers through mine. "See what you need to do."

"I will." I lick my bottom lip. Rain dampens my hair. "Harry," I whisper, and he's kissing me, slow and soft and careful.

I don't care what people think. I don't care what they say. All I care about is Harry, his hands on my waist, his mouth moving against mine.

For the first time in years I'm happy, I realise. And I'll wake up happy tomorrow. And the next day. And the day after that.

And after that, well. We'll see.

My umbrella drops to the ground. The breeze blows it across the Embankment. I've no idea where it goes. Instead I wrap my arms around Harry's neck, still kissing him.

"Fuck the *Mail*. Let's go home and shag each other senseless," Harry says against my mouth and I laugh. It's a brilliant idea in my opinion.

The fog breaks as we wander up the Embankment, arm in arm, and a scrap of bright blue sky shows through the clouds.

Somewhere, I think, Astoria is pleased