



# once upon a time yesterday

by femmequixotic

*"Do you think we could ever be friends?" I ask. I sidestep an elderly wizard laden with shopping bags. Curls of shiny gold ribbon trail behind him across the cobblestones.*

*Draco looks at me as if I've lost my mind. Perhaps I have. "No." He's muffled by a thick scarf wrapped twice around his neck and mouth. The temperature keeps dropping. I hate that about winter.*

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## **Written December 2008**

**Summary:** "You've always been obsessed with Malfoy, Harry. That should probably tell you something."

**Warnings:** Epilogue compliant, past relationship, older Harry and Draco

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# one

I wake up cold and with a fuck of a headache.

Somewhere in the cringing corners of my pounding brain, I've a lingering dream of someone shouting *this way, Harry, give us a smile, won't you?* before a flash of light blinds me.

I roll over and groan. A thick-knit afghan slides off my shoulders and onto the floor. Death warmed over would feel better than I do at the moment, there's no doubt about that. My mouth is dry and cottony; one entire side of my face throbs. I've only the vaguest recollection of last night--I have a distinct, unsettling feeling that cards and half-dressed witches might have been involved--but, given that my face is currently pressed into what appear to be sofa cushions, I don't seem to have made it into bed.

"Fuck," I mumble. My hair's caught in the button of a pillow. I can feel a panting breath on my neck, then a tongue drags across my cheek. Something reeks of kibble. I don't have a dog. At least I don't think I have a dog. And if I've brought home a bloke who smells like one...well, it wouldn't be the first time, actually.

I open one eye, certain I'm about to sick up. I am never drinking again. I am forty-five years old and frankly, too damn old for this. A yellow Labrador barks cheerfully at me, sending pain rippling through my skull. I wince. "Shut it."

The dog just licks my cheek again.

Joscey. Jamie had named her after Joscelind Wadcock, Puddlemere United's best Chaser. She'd been his Christmas present when he was eight.

Which means this isn't my flat. I sit up slowly, hand at my temple, willing my head to stop pounding. Not that the decor a la Early Bachelor wouldn't have marked it as James and Teddy's. A tower of Boddingtons cans nearly fills one entire window, and the telly is nearly as big as the hearth.

Scrabbling about for my glasses on what passes for a side table in James and Teddy's minds, I knock over a delicately balanced house of Chinese takeaway boxes, sending them skittering across the sitting room, bits of kung pao chicken and fried rice falling into the cracks between the floorboards. Joscey races after them, gleefully. I catch my wand just before it rolls off. Another blind slide of my hand over the tabletop and my glasses follow the takeaway.

"Bugger!"

I stop the fuckers with a flick of my wand, then lean over the arm of the sofa to grab them, along with today's *Prophet*, lying on the edge of the hearth, streaked with soot. I need a strong cup of tea, but the likelihood of finding the kettle in the pigsty my son calls a kitchen is next to impossible. Ah well. Next best thing, I suppose. I dig in the pockets of my jeans. My fingers brush plastic discs and I pull them out, puzzled. Two poker chips. Christ. If I was playing against Ron last night, I'm bugged. I toss them aside and pull out my cigarettes--there are only two left in the pack, alas--and a Muggle lighter. I light one up and fall back against the sofa with a sigh.

I unfold the *Prophet*, take a drag off my cigarette, and promptly begin to choke.

Fuck, bugger, *shit*.

The problem with being the Savior of the Wizarding World is that getting pissed in public generally ends up in a very unattractive photo splashed across the front page of the *Prophet*, above the fold, with a headline in three-inch boldface questioning one's emotional stability.

I don't know who'll be annoyed more, Kingsley or Ginny. She's already half-certain I'm an alcoholic as it is.

Not that I object to being shit-faced, mind. I spent the last ten years of my marriage pickling my liver in Glenfiddich and Ogden's--with good reason even Gin admits, and when your ex-wife agrees that dosing yourself with alcohol on a regular basis was the healthier way to get through your marriage, you know you're a bit fucked in the head. Still, seeing myself draped between Teddy and Ron--neither of them sober in the least, either--the three of us leering cheerfully at the camera, snow frosting our hair...Christ.

Fuck Barnabas Cuffe, the slimy little bastard. If Gin hadn't been away from work the past week, he'd never have had the balls to run it. I throw the *Prophet* across the room. The pages drift across Teddy's three guitars (one unstrung), Jamie's Quidditch equipment (reeking socks and unwashed jockstraps included), and a listing Christmas tree, a few scattered fairies sleeping off their drunk on the boughs. I roll my cigarette between my fingers, exhaling a stream of smoke.

Last night was the stag party. I'd downed at least a bottle of whisky on my own, so I suppose I should be grateful they caught us on the way out of the club and not in it as I seem to recall someone's face

(Teddy, I think) smashed against some girl's tits--I sit up, my train of thought derailing as realisation dawns.

The stag party. Last night. After the rehearsal dinner. And I'd stayed over with James since we all had to be at the church this morning. Which meant today was--

Oh, fucking *shit*.

A door bangs against the wall.

"Bugger, bugger, bugger, *bugger!*" James comes tearing out of his bedroom and pounds on the door across the hall. It goes straight through my head.

"Jamie," I snap, pressing the ball of my palm against my forehead. Ash drifts off the end of my cigarette. My stomach lurches again.

My eldest ignores me and pounds harder. "Ted, mate! Get up!"

The door flies open. I can hear Teddy mumble from the darkened bedroom, "All right, Jesus, stop shouting." He leans against the doorjamb in nothing but his y-fronts. "What?"

"Put some damn clothes on," James sputters. "My dad's here; he doesn't need to be seeing your twig, *Christ*." Teddy slams the door on him without answering.

"Arse." James skids into the sitting room, his eyes wide, jerking his white shirt over his shoulders. His black hair stands on end. Braces dangle from his striped trousers. "Dad--oh Christ, thank God you're awake." His mouth purses, and his eyebrows draw together. "You were supposed to set the alarm."

I blink. "I what?"

"Alarm!" James waves towards a clock perched precariously on the post-covered coffee table. "You said--and I quote--'leave the alarm with me, son, I'll be certain to set it--'"

"Oh bollocks, Jamie." I shove myself off the couch, stubbing my cigarette out in an empty shot glass. The world sways slightly before righting itself. No, really. I'm *never* drinking again. Ever. And this time I actually mean it. "You finally decide to listen to me when I'm pissed? I'm late to *everything*."

"Stupid me." A cabinet shuts behind me--too loudly, thanks--and James presses a bottle of homebrewed hangover potion into my hand. "Best down this quickly."

It tastes vile--James has always been bollocks at making his potions taste like anything but sewer water--but it's effective. Within seconds my head eases and my stomach calms. I grab my bag and suit from the coat tree next to the door. I *hate* dress clothes. With a bloody passion.

Teddy wanders out of his bedroom scratching his bare stomach. He stretches, pyjama bottoms sliding down on his hips, and yawns. He's been wearing his short, spiky hair green lately. In honour of the season, he says. He looks remarkably like his mum. "Hey, Uncle Harry--" He blinks when James throws a grey waistcoat at him. "What the hell--"

"Dress!" James brushes past him, heading for the bath. "Or Gran's going to serve our balls on silver platters at the reception. We're late."

"Your Gran doesn't have silver platters." Teddy sits on the arm of a chair. It creaks, and I make note to avoid that one. I'm a good stone and a half heavier than my godson.

James stops at the bathroom door. The look he turns on Teddy is baleful. "Dress," he says again in a tone that's dangerously close to channeling Ginny at her most annoyed. I pull my jumper off and unbutton my jeans. I'm not arguing with him at this point. Teddy, on the other hand...

"I need to shower," Teddy protests. He rubs at his eyes.

"Later!" James slams the door behind him. A framed poster of the 2018 lineup for the United falls off the wall. Al had bought it for James's thirteenth birthday.

"Jamie!" Teddy turns to me, the waistcoat still dangling from his fingers. "I can't show up at church smelling like I fell into a vat of Ogden's, now, can I?"

I shrug and pull my black trousers on. "I recommend Pepperup for the headache and Scourgify for the stench." My godson makes a face before stomping into the kitchen to set the kettle on. I've no sympathy for him. I rummage in my bag, looking for my braces. I find them in the bottom and set them aside before I Scourgify my armpits, wincing at the sharp tingle. I hesitate, pulling at the open waistband of my trousers. Oh, what the hell. Better than not showering at all. I hiss as the spell zips across my balls. The scent of lemongrass drifts up from my trousers. Sometimes being a wizard has its benefits. I slide into my shirt, buttoning it.

Weddings are not my favourite events. I didn't even enjoy my own. To be honest, as much as I loved Gin, it didn't take me long to discover I really wasn't the marrying type. It took me another ten years to admit it to her. I snap my braces up over my shoulder. They're too tight. I tug at them and sigh.

The clock strikes two. James throws open the bathroom door, toothbrush in hand. We stare at each other in horror. The wedding's in half an hour. We're to be at the church *now*.

The kettle whistles loudly.

"Right," Jamie says, trying to keep his voice calm and failing profoundly. He sprays toothpaste out of his mouth. "If we're out of here in twenty minutes, we can Apparate to Queen's Gate Mews, sneak into the church from the back and Mum will never know we weren't already there waiting."

It sounds like a brilliant plan, save for one small glitch.

"Yes, well, not quite," I say apologetically, setting aside my empty bag. My coat and socks and tie are spread across the sofa. "You see, it appears I forgot my shoes."

James closes his eyes and thuds his head against the doorjamb. "Jesus, Dad."

I share his sentiments exactly.



The doors to the nave are already closed when we Apparate into St John of Rila. Evergreen boughs and cream roses adorn the arch.

"Shit, fuck," James says under his breath, then looks a bit shamefaced as a statue of the saint frowns down at him. "Right, sorry about that."

I straighten my tie and rub my cheek. A last-minute shaving charm cast just before we left the flat didn't quite clear all of my stubble. At least I managed to brush my teeth, I suppose.

"Dad!" Lily hurries across the foyer towards us, her black taffeta skirt hiked up to her knees, exposing a swirl of white petticoats. She's seventeen now, in her last year at Hogwarts, and she looks just as pretty as her mother did at her age. A bit more frothy at the moment, though. "You're late. Again."

She eyes the three of us, dropping her skirt to cross her arms over her chest. Cream roses and a black ribbon have been woven through her red hair, and her neckline is a hell of a lot lower than I would have ever agreed to if I'd seen the dress which is probably exactly why neither she nor her mother let me in the same room with it before now. I narrow my eyes at Teddy, who's staring a bit too appreciatively at her chest. He gives me a sheepish grin and looks away.

I kiss my daughter's cheek and drape my arm over her shoulder. "Overslept a bit, love. Sorry about that. My fault."

She frowns down at my shoes. "You're wearing trainers."

"Right, yes." I stick a foot out. They're my favourite black high-tops that I'd worn the night before. I'm fairly sure I got all of the vomit and whisky off them. "Had a little footwear issue."

"Well, you look nice otherwise." Lily smooths my jacket over my shoulders. "Just don't let Mum see, oh God. She's already made them change my hair twice." She tugs on one of her ringlets and wrinkles her nose. For the past two years she's charmed her curly hair straight. I can only imagine the row that happened over today's hairstyle. "She's driving me mad."

Gin had been the same way on our wedding day. She has a tendency to sublimate her sheer terror into really bloody annoying last-minute decisions like changing the floral arrangements at the altar a half-hour before the ceremony or concluding mid-labour that she'd really rather have the baby at home. Her Healer'd been furious with her for that one. We'd had to find an entirely new one when I got her up the duff with Al.

I ruffle Lily's hair. "She'll be fine once it's over and done with."

"I suppose." Lily leans against me. "Al's been avoiding her since yesterday. Louis and Rose Floo'd Aunt Hermione last night and told her they thought Al was seriously considering putting belladonna in Mum's tea. He'd even pulled out the mortar and pestle. Aunt Hermione had to go over to the flat to calm him down. Louis still isn't certain he won't try."

"Wouldn't be his best idea." I try not to laugh. My middle child has the brilliance of a Ravenclaw and the patience of a Slytherin. Fortunately for his sake, he Sorted the former. I'm not entirely certain how the Weasley clan would have taken the latter.

"Mum and Viktor are just about to come down." She glances over at her brother. "You'd best get your arse in there. Al's about to have a fit thinking he'll have to do this on his own." She lowers her voice. "He's panicking about losing the rings."

James rolls his eyes. "Christ. He's fucking left Hogwarts and he still acts like he's twelve--"

"Go," I say, cutting him off, and James sighs, heading for the nave, Teddy at his heels, in search of Victoire, I'm certain. The door creaks loudly when they open it; I can see glimpses of faces peering back towards us. I look back at my daughter. "Your Mum's not seen the *Prophet*, has she?"

"No, and you and Uncle Ron both owe me for that." Lily pokes my chest. "I tossed it in the hearth before breakfast so Gran didn't even find it. Uncle Charlie on the other hand..."

"Lily!" Molly bustles down the staircase on the far side of the foyer. "We're nearly ready, dear." She stops when she sees me. Molly's never entirely forgiven me for leaving her daughter. I can't say I blame her for that. When someone breaks Lily's heart in another thirty or forty or fifty years, I fully intend to hate them. "Oh. Harry. You're late."

"Hullo, Molly." I kiss her cheek. Her face softens. "How is she?"

Molly pats my arm. "You know Ginny. She'll be fine once it's all over. Viktor, on the other hand, is looking a bit shell-shocked."

I laugh. "He'll adjust." Viktor's better husband material than I ever was. "Give him until the honeymoon. If he doesn't relax then..."

"Dad." Lily wrinkles her nose. The thought of either of her parents having sex tends to revolt her. "That's just disgusting."

I kiss her hair. "I'd best be getting in there." I look at Molly. "Give Gin my love, will you?"

She nods and hurries my daughter off.

I slip into the nave.

The church is Bulgarian Orthodox; Viktor doesn't practice, but his parents do, and in Ginny's opinion, her last marriage in the C of E hadn't gone so swimmingly. Throw in a bit of incense and some prayers in a different language, and maybe this one would stick. I'd had to agree with her. It was worth a try.

People are packed into the small space, standing in a half-circle around the gilded icon screen. There are no seats. I hope the ceremony's short.

Ron waves me over to where he, Hermione and the kids are standing at the front. I squeeze past a large elderly wizard who grumbles at having to step back.

"You're late," Hermione murmurs, leaning over Ron.

"Sorry." I push my glasses up the bridge of my nose. "Bit of a fuck up all morning." My sons are at the



front of the nave, heads bent together, whispering furiously. Al doesn't look best pleased. I'm not surprised. Out of all my kids, he's the one who resented the divorce the most. Even after all these years, he's still half-expected Ginny and I'd get back together. "How's your head?"

Ron snorts. "Two phials of Pepperup, and it still feels like shite. I don't know how Viktor's going to make it down the aisle."

"He's Bulgarian. He holds his liquor better." I reach into my jacket and pull out the poker chips. I hand them to Ron. Hermione frowns at us both. "How much did I lose?" I'm wretched at cards, and every damned one of my friends takes advantage of me when I'm pissed. Bastards.

Ron pockets the chips. "A hundred to Neville. Fifty to Seamus. Two hundred to me." He grins. "The kids say thanks for the extra Christmas presents."

"Wanker."

Hermione hisses through her teeth. On her other side Rose stifles a laugh.

The doors slam open; music begins to play, a slow, sweet waltz that I recognise as one of Ginny's favourite pieces. Lily comes down the aisle first, and I'm struck by how adult she looks. I don't want her to grow up. To me she'll always be a little girl with chubby arms and a bright smile, begging me to take her flying.

And then Ginny floats past on Viktor's arm, her cream dress trailing behind them, her shoulders bare and milky white. She looks incredible. Ethereal. She's not bothered with a veil--she'd had that at ours--and her dark red hair is piled on top of her head in soft curls. She turns her head; our eyes meet.

*You're beautiful*, I mouth at her, and she smiles, her eyes crinkling at the corner.

She takes my breath away. I suppose, in some manner, she always will.

Viktor closes his hand on her arm, and she looks back up at him, her face glowing with happiness.

I'm glad for her. I really am.

I think.



"I need whisky," I say as we walk into the ballroom at Dorkins Hall. The moment Ginny and Viktor announced their engagement, Ragmar offered up his house in the country for the reception. Bastard damn well ought to have, Ron had pointed out when Ginny had dithered about accepting. Viktor'd brought the Cannons five league pennants since he'd come on as Seeker.

The room is hung with garland and fairy lights and an enormous Christmas tree fills one corner, stretching to the ceiling. Snow glitters off the huge glass globes weighing down the boughs.

Much to Hugo's dismay, Ron steers his son towards the tables on the edge of the dance floor and away from the open bar. "Get me a stout, will you?" he asks.

"Whisky for me," Hugo says, hopefully.

"Don't even think it," Ron retorts. "Your mother's here."

Hugo sighs, and I take pity on him. "Cider?" He shrugs and pulls a book out of his pocket.

The bar is crowded. When I finally press through the crowd (mostly men from what I can tell, all with a gleam of desperate boredom in their eyes), Tom from the Leaky Cauldron's behind the counter. He raises an eyebrow at me. "Ex-wife's wedding, Potter?"

I grin at him. "Why do you think I'm in need of alcohol? Whisky, double and neat, a cider and a Guinness." I pause. "Actually, make that two whiskies. Don't want to have to fight the crowd again."

"Wise lad." With a grunt, Tom pours the whisky and drafts the Guinness and cider from barrels that float behind him. He pushes them all towards me. "Don't get too pissed." He gives me a toothless smirk. "Wouldn't want to see you in the *Prophet* again."

"Oh, sod off, you old bastard," I say with a smile. I balance the glasses together with a charm and pick all four up. It's a delicate procedure, but I've practice.

Tom cackles. "Off with you. I've a queue backing up."

I've just managed to get past the thick of the throng when I slam into someone's side, spilling half a whisky onto a black wool dress robe.

"Shit," I say, "sorry--" I break off when the man turns around. One of the glasses slides out of my hands and crashes on the floor. I barely catch the other three. "Draco."

I haven't seen him in years. Christ. Only once since Gin and I got married, and that was on the platform at King's Cross Al's first year. I hadn't even known he'd settled down and had a kid until then.

"Harry," he says, and his mouth twists. I don't think it's meant to be pleasant. I don't care. I can't stop looking at him. An elf hurries up, dustpan and wand in hand, to clear the shards of glass at our feet. Draco wipes his robe with a damask napkin the elf hands him. "Ever graceful, I see."

"What are you doing here?" I blurt out. Christ. Subtle there, Potter. Still. Not every day you stumble on an ex at another ex's wedding.

Draco raises an eyebrow, obviously amused. "Krum invited me." He takes a wineglass from a tray that floats past. His mouth turns down. "And I thought it'd be great fun to see the final dissolution of your marriage, all things considered." His voice is tight; his shoulders are tense. "How are you, Harry? Still making the *Prophet*, I see."

Jesus. All these years and the first thing I want to do is strangle him. Or fuck him. I'm not sure which. I don't think it really matters. "Seriously, Draco. Why are you here?"

"I told you." Draco looks at me over the rim of his wineglass. "Your ex-wife's new husband invited me." He lowers the glass. His bottom lip is wet with wine. I want to taste it. Bad thought, that. Horrible. Very, very bad idea. Draco watches me. "Amusing, isn't it?" He takes another sip of wine, then looks pointedly down at my feet. "Nice shoes."

He doesn't wait for me to answer before he turns and walks away. Bastard. Fucking asshole *bastard*.

I head back to the bar for more whisky. I'm going to need a fucking bottle now.



Ron looks at me when I drop into the chair next to him. Hermione's across the room, talking to Neville and Hannah. Hugo has his nose in a book. I hand Ron his Guinness and Levitate the cider in front of Hugo. "You look like you swallowed a lemon," Ron says.

"How does Viktor know Draco?" I glare at him as I open the bottle of Ogden's. Steam rolls off the top.

Ron freezes, his stout at his mouth. "Shit." He lowers the glass and leans forward, elbows on the damask tablecloth. "He didn't. I told him not to--"

"Just answer the fucking question." I pour a glass of firewhisky. A few stray drops splash over my hand. They sting for a moment before I lick them away.

"Malfoy makes his brooms." Ron twists his Guinness between his fingers. He damn well knows why I'm annoyed. "He's bloody famous on the Continent, evidently. Viktor's been ordering from him for years now."

"And you didn't tell me this?" I glance over at Hugo. He's oblivious. I lower my voice anyway. "I can't believe you."

Ron gives me an incredulous look, then turns to his son. "Hugo."

Hugo lowers his book and blinks up at him. He reaches for his cider and takes a long swallow.

"Go find your sister," Ron says. "She's probably off with Lily, flirting with some boy. Rescue him."

"Do I *have* to?" Hugo sets his book down. It's a biography of Paracelsus from the Hogwarts library. "They always make fun of me when you send me after them."

Ron claps his son's shoulder. "Yes, you have to. Get lost."

Hugo pushes himself out of his chair with a sigh. Ron waits until he's halfway across the room before he looks back at me. He lifts his glass again and takes a drink, wiping the head off his mouth with the back of his hand.

"You and I, we don't talk about Malfoy," he says finally. He doesn't look at me. "We haven't for twenty years. You don't bring him up, and I sure as hell won't. Fuck, Harry. You cheated on my sister with him--"

My mouth tightens at that. "I did *not* cheat." I frown into my whisky. "We'd broken up, and she was dating Seamus at the time for God's sake."

"Yeah, well, at least he wasn't Malfoy." Ron leans back in his chair. "Look, I've kept your secret this long. Hermione doesn't even know. Even when you came out as a poof to my baby sister, did I tell her you'd shagged the fuck out of Malfoy's arse before you proposed? No." He shudders. "Although if you'd told me before you'd married her, I'd have kicked your arse to Dover cliffs."

"I'm not a poof."

Ron rolls his eyes. "Whatever. Bisexual. So what? You left Gin because, face it, you'd rather fuck a bloke, and hey, mate, whatever works for you, right? I'm past wanting to deck you for hurting her." He takes another sip of Guinness. "Mostly."

I run my hand over my face and sigh. I stare out over the ballroom. I see Draco in the corner, a flash of pale gold hair and black wool robe. He's talking to Donaghan Tremlett from the Weird Sisters. Kestrels fan, he was. Is, rather. Ginny'd met Donaghan when she'd started working for the *Prophet* as senior Quidditch editor. I dated him for a year after the divorce; Ginny'd introduced us after she'd profiled him for a Sunday feature about his support of Kenmare. Decent enough fellow. Good taste in music. Brilliant to watch Quidditch with. Bloody boring in bed.

Draco tucks his hair behind one ear and takes a sip of wine. I'd forgotten how good he looked. Even if his hairline's fading. He's all sharp angles and long limbs. Christ, I can still feel them wrapped around me.

He turns, and our eyes meet. I can't look away, not even when Draco deliberately steps closer to Donaghan, brushing his fingertips lightly, quickly across Donaghan's chest. Donaghan just looks down at him in surprise before tilting his head towards Draco, a smile curving his mouth, and I know then that they'll end up in bed tonight. Donaghan was never that difficult to read.

"When did Malfoy start making brooms?" I ask tightly. I can remember lying sprawled naked across a bed in a villa in Nice with Draco, talking about what we wanted to do with our lives. Or his life, rather. The Malfoy fortune was dwindling. The Ministry had taken part for reparations; the rest was going to repairing the Manor. No one had wanted to hire him--the Dark Mark, Draco'd told me bitterly, was an instant *thank you, sir, but you don't quite fit the position as we envision it*. If I'd had balls twenty years ago, if I'd not been terrified of being called bent, queer, a poof, I'd have gone public with our affair. No one, at least not at that time, would have treated Harry Potter's lover like shit. Not publicly.

Things change.

"Fifteen years ago or so, I think." Ron's voice is quiet. "He's set up shop in Diagon now, Viktor says."

I look over at him. "Since when?"

"A month or so." Ron brushes his hair back out of his face, watching me. "His son's getting married or something, I guess."

"Right." My eyes drift back to Draco. He's laughing at something Donaghan's said; he's nearly pressed against his side. It infuriates me.

Ron follows my gaze. "You told me yourself that Malfoy's not any good for you."

"He's not." My hand tightens on my glass as Draco smiles, looking directly at me. He raises his wineglass, then turns back to Donaghan, whispering something to him. Donaghan looks over at me, then laughs.

Fucking bastard.

"Don't go there again, Harry," Ron says. Worry furrows his brow.

I drain my whisky and pour another glass. Smoke swirls around my hand. "I'm not."

Ron doesn't look convinced. I don't think I am either.

The bell rings for dinner.



It's getting late.

I'm still at the table, though Ron and Hermione and Hugo have left an hour ago. The dinner dishes have been cleared; empty glasses and bottles clutter the table's surface. Lily's curled on a chair next to me, bare feet tucked beneath her, her head on my chest. I've draped my suit jacket over her to keep her warm. She's sleeping lightly. I'll have to wake her soon, I know. She's coming home with me for the rest of the hols, save for a few days she'll be spending in Brighton with Seamus and Dean's daughter Emily.

People are still dancing and drinking, though the crowd's thinned noticeably. Ginny and Viktor are in each other's arms, swaying slowly to Celestine Warbeck's warble. They're in their own world, entirely oblivious to anyone else. I reach for the whisky and pour another glass, emptying the bottle. I've lost track of how many I've had. Hair of the dog and all that shite.

James sits down on my other side. "Hey." He has a bottle of beer in one hand.

I raise an eyebrow. "Where've you been?"

"Here and there." He kicks off his shoes and puts his feet on a chair. He takes a swig of beer. "Rose dragged Al and some friends to a club off Knockturn."

"So I heard." I smooth my palm over Lily's hair. She shifts and mumbles something unintelligible against my shirt. "Rumour had it that Gemma Fawcett was going?"

James laughs. Al's obsession with the lovely Gemma is an open secret. "That's what Rose told me."

We fall silent. James runs a hand over his face. "You all right, Dad?" he asks. "I mean, I know you're okay with Viktor, but still..."

"I'm fine." I smile at him and James relaxes. He worries about me, I know. And he's probably the only one of my children who understands why I left Gin. It's not that I didn't love her. I still do. But it wasn't fair to her, our marriage. She'd been so angry at first; I hadn't blamed her. Nothing could be worse than your husband coming to you, telling you that he loved you, of course. He always would, but the fact of the matter, you see, is that he thought maybe he liked cock more.

I watch James as he looks out over the dance floor. I know exactly when he catches sight of Teddy dancing with Victoire. His face falls slightly; a wistful expression softens his eyes.

For a year now I've known James was in love with Teddy. I'd hoped I was wrong at first. Teddy's been wrapped up in Victoire since they were in Hogwarts. The only reason that's kept them from marrying is Victoire's job with Gringotts. She takes after her father, that one. Brilliant at cursebreaking. Unfortunately it means she travels. A lot. She's not been ready to give that up yet.

My son's in for heartbreak, I'm quite aware, and there's not a damn thing I can do to stop it.

"I've a tryout," he says after a moment. "Tomorrow with Caerphilly."

James has been attempting for two years now to land a spot on one of the Quidditch teams. He's a good Chaser, but there's not been many positions open in recent seasons. Not enough older players rolling off the rosters and too many sharp younger ones coming out of Hogwarts.

"You want your mum or me to put in a good word?" I already know the answer. Jamie's stubborn about pulling strings. He wants to do this himself. No help. I understand, and I'm proud, but it worries me. I wonder how long he'll keep going until he gives up. "Viktor maybe?"

"No. I just wanted you to know." James nudges me and smiles. "You want me to help you get her home?"

I look down at Lily. Her hair's fallen over her face; my shirt buttons have left marks on her cheek. "I think I can manage her."

James leans back in his chair and tilts his bottle up. His waistcoat is open; his tie is undone.

For the hundredth (or more) time, I glance at Draco across the room, sitting at a table with Donaghan, an open bottle of wine between them. Strange that I know right where he is. I've known all evening.

He shifts in his chair, turning slightly, and our eyes meet again.

I'm not certain I like it.



"You're an idiot." Luna sticks her head out of my bathroom. Her hair's wet, falling in short ringlets around her face. I really have to Floo someone in to look at her shower. I'm getting tired of finding bras hanging on my towel rack and the tiny scraps of silk that Luna calls knickers in my hamper.

I'm sprawled across my bed, still dressed in my trousers and shirt. Lily's asleep in the spare room across the hall. I run a hand over my face, pushing my glasses up on my forehead. They slide back down. "What was I supposed to do?"

"Talk to him?" Her voice echoes off the tile. "You've always been obsessed with Malfoy, Harry. That should probably tell you something."

I stare up at the ceiling. "I have not. I haven't thought of him in twenty-three years."

"Bollocks." Luna comes out of the bathroom, stark naked.

"Luna!" I slap my hand over my eyes. "Jesus Christ!"

She sighs. "You're gay, Harry. It doesn't matter if I walk around the flat dressed or not."

"I'm *bi*! I don't object to tits, or have you not noticed the three kids that stop by every so often when they want money or to nick tins of food?"

She's silent for a moment, and I curse myself. Luna'd had three miscarriages; the last one had ended her marriage. The subject of children--even mine--is a slightly sore one. "Sorry," I murmur.

"Don't be." Luna peels my fingers away from my eyes. I squeeze them shut. "And you haven't slept with a woman since you left Ginny twelve years ago. I think that makes you rather gay, darling."

This is an argument we've been having for five years now. Luna had come to stay with me for a few days when she moved out of the house she shared with Rolf. She's never left. I don't mind; the company's pleasant, if odd at times and I can tolerate putting up with bits and bobs of various magical animals that she's brought home from work and left lying about the sitting room. Although the time I did stumble into the kitchen half-awake to find a stuffed basilisk skin coiled on the table did give me a start. To say the least. Fortunately it was moved to the wizarding wing of the British Museum the next day, but not before it ended up stabbed by a butter knife.

"Clothes, Luna."

She drops my hand. "Fine, but I'm borrowing yours." I can hear her rummaging around in my wardrobe. "Anyway," she says, "every time you get pissed and morose after you break up with some bloke, you talk about Malfoy."

"Do not."

"You so do, love." She shuts the wardrobe door. "All right. You can open your eyes."

I roll over onto my side. She's wearing one of my old t-shirts--an Echo and the Bunnymen concert shirt from 1985 that I'd found in an Oxfam shop in Islington--and a pair of my boxers. They hang down to her knees. "I cannot begin to tell you how wrong it is that you lounge about in my pants."

Luna drops on the bed next to me. She pulls her knees up to her tits and studies me. Her hair's a halo of curls in the light from the lamp next to my bed. "Maybe it's just that he's the first boy you kissed." She smiles dreamily, her arms wrapped around her legs. "That's why I'll always be fond of Neville."

"I'm not fond of Draco." I frown at her. "He's an arse is what he is. A manipulative, arrogant bastard--"

"Who's been under your skin since your first year." Luna stretches out next to me, her hair wetting my pillows. She tilts my head towards her. "Maybe you should talk to him, Harry."

I sigh. "I think that'd be a bad idea."

"Probably." Luna's silvery eyes are steady. "But he's going to be in your head until you do."

She has a point.

Fuck.





Photo by bowbrick

## two

It takes me two days to wrangle the name of Draco's shop from Ron. Finally he tells me just to stop me from Flooing him.

"You'll regret it, Harry," he says bitterly.

He's probably right.

I've walked past the front of Nicaea Broom Company (London-Paris) three times. It's snowing lightly, and I've worn a path in the dusting of white over the cobblestones. Christ, this is hard.

I stop in front of the window again, pretending to look at the display model once more. It's a good broom, well-crafted and well-designed. The bristles are trimmed in a streamlined, tapered oval to catch the wind at its most effective; the handle is polished to a smooth ebony gleam. The model name is etched in silver on the side. The *Severus*. A small smile twists my mouth.

The shop door clangs open, bells jangling. Fairies scatter from the wreath that swings on the front.

"What the hell are you doing?" Draco glares at me from the doorway. His sleeves are rolled up; he's shed his outer robe. His wrists are still narrow and bony. I used to suck them, I remember, with him beneath me, gasping as I kissed my way down his arm. I can still recall the way the Dark Mark was raised against my tongue.

I step back from the window. "Just looking."

"Well, stop." The wind ruffles his hair. It's loose, falling to his chin. I like that he hasn't bothered to hide his receding hairline. There's something sexy about it. He's not as thin as he was twenty-three years ago, though he's nowhere near gone to fat. His face is still pointed and sharp; he's still straight and tall, his shoulders perfectly set. "You're scaring off the clientele."

I roll my eyes. "I hardly think."

"Truer words have never been said." Draco brushes a lock of hair out of his face, then folds his arms over his chest. He shivers. "Now go away."

"I want to talk." I lean against the storefront. A witch hurries past us, shopping bags on her arm, the hood of her cloak pulled up over her face. It's bitterly cold.

Draco's mouth thins. "Twenty-three years without a word from you, and you pick now to decide to clear the air. Lovely." He shakes his head. "No. I'm not doing it. I'm not giving you the pleasure of tormenting me--"

"Me?" I stare at him. "Look, you're the one who came to my ex-wife's wedding. I never would have known you were back--"

"You would have eventually." Draco steps out of the way as two boys, no more than fifth years, I'm certain, stop next to us. Both are wrapped in thick-knit scarves of Slytherin colours. "Mr Nott, Mr Harper."

Nott grins at him. It makes his snub nose wrinkle. "Mum sends her best." He pulls a bag of Galleons from his pocket. "And I've the money for my broom."

Draco smiles at him, a warm, wide curve of his mouth. He used to smile at me that way. Occasionally. "Go on in. Luc has it waiting for you. Tell him I said to throw in a polish kit."

The boys duck beneath his arm. I look at Draco quizzically. He sighs. "Pansy's boy and one of his friends."

Right. "I'd heard she married Theo Nott," I say. "I think."

"Owen's my godson." Draco lets the door close. He leans against the doorjamb. "You're not going anywhere, are you?"

"Not until we talk."

Draco's shoulders slump. "Circe's tits." He sounds tired, weary. "Why?"

"Because it's Christmas?" I raise an eyebrow.

Draco snorts. "You don't like Christmas."

"That's not true." Or it's not now, at least. I hadn't cared one way or another before. Now... "The kids changed my mind."

"They do that sometimes." The shop sign creaks above us in the wind. Snow swirls in the air, tiny flakes of white against the grey stone buildings of Upper Diagon.

He's weakening, I can tell. "I'll buy you a beer at the Leaky Cauldron." I'm not above bribery. "You can tell me about your son."

"Scorpius." Draco hesitates. He wraps his arms around his chest again, rubbing his palms over his elbows. "I don't like beer. You know that."

"Mulled wine then." My cloak whips around my knees. I'm fucking frozen; I know he has to be. "Hot. Piping. Nice alcohol buzz."

Draco shakes his head. "You're a shit, you know."

"For offering to buy you a drink."

"For a lot of things." He opens the door. "Wait here. I need my cloak."

I stand alone in the snow, not entirely certain that I'm not making an awful mistake.



I order a pint of lager for me, a mug of mulled wine for Draco, and a plate of chips to share, not that Draco will, but I'm fucking starving. Tom hands them to me with a quirked eyebrow and a curious glance Draco's way. He's taken a table in the back corner, away from the bustle of the bar. He's leaning against the wall, tracing a finger over the scarred wooden tabletop.

"Not a word," I say, balancing one in each hand, the plate bobbing along beside me, and Tom shrugs.

He wipes the bar off with a rag that's seen better days. "Weren't about to."

I head back to the table and set the mug of wine in front of Draco.

He glances up, his finger stalling. "Thanks," he says stiffly. He eyes the chips, nostrils flared. I'd never been able to get him to eat one. Nasty, mushy, greasy shit, he called them. This from the man who thought goose liver was brilliant spread across a water biscuit.

"I'm hungry." I sit down, tucking my cloak beneath me. "Lunch meeting today with Kingsley. Didn't get to eat."

Draco glances over at the Auror insignia on my shoulder. "With great power comes shorter lunch breaks, they say." He cups his wine in both hands. His cheeks are still pink from the cold.

I laugh, surprised at his attempt at a joke. I shouldn't be. He'd had a dry wit when we were dating. Or fucking, rather. We never actually went anywhere. I'd been too nervous about being seen with him.

We sit awkwardly for a moment. Draco looks away, sips his wine. I douse the chips with vinegar, then set the bottle aside.

"So," I say. "Your wife. She's back in London with you?"

Draco looks at me sharply. "No."

I chew a chip. "Oh."

He sighs. "Astoria died when Scorpius was thirteen." He twists his mug between his hands. "She'd been ill for a while."

I don't know what to say. I take a sip of beer, trying to mask my discomfort. "I'm sorry."

Draco lifts a shoulder. "It is what it is."

We fall silent, both drinking. The fire crackles in the hearth across from us, taking the chill off our corner, thank God. Tom--who thinks heat sweats the good poisons (whatever they might be) out of a body--is ridiculously stingy with his warming charms.

"You divorced Ginevra," Draco says finally.

I set my glass down. "Twelve years ago." I chew on my bottom lip. "Took me a bit to realise I didn't really want to be married."

Draco meets my gaze directly. His mouth tightens. "I would have said otherwise."

He's right. That's why I'd left him. Partially at least. I can feel my cheeks warm. I can still remember standing in the foyer of his flat in Kensington, telling him we were done. That I was going to go ask Ginny to take me back. To marry me. That I wanted a wife and a family and that I wasn't some poof anxious to spend my life with my cock up some bloke's arse. I wanted to be *normal*.

Damn fool I was. I could never be normal. Not me. And I'd tried so fucking hard.

I look down at the tabletop. Someone in years past has etched *up Hufflepuff* in the wood. Badly. I rub my finger over the misshapen curves and slashes of the letters. "I was a bit of a prick in my twenties."

"Slightly." Draco looks at me over the rim of his mug. "Although I recall at the time I preferred to refer to you as a giant flaming pile of donkey shit."

I give him a rueful smile. "Not far off the mark."

"That's what Pansy said."

I rub the back of my neck. The ragged ends of my fingernails catch in my hair. I need another haircut soon. "She knew about us?"

Draco arches his eyebrow. "I wasn't the one afraid to tell my friends who I was sleeping with."

"You didn't tell your dad," I snap back. It's the same excuse I threw at him when we were together. I'm ashamed. "Look, I'm sorry--"

"No, you're right." Draco tucks his hair behind one ear and stares down into his mug. "I married Astoria so that Father wouldn't know I wasn't a proper Malfoy." He laughs, bitterly. "The truly funny thing is that he knew all along I like men. It was just easier for both of us to pretend otherwise."

Lucius had committed suicide nine years ago, unable to deal with the collapse of his family's reputation and influence. He'd left an endowment to Hogwarts in Snape's name, possibly the only thing he'd ever done that I'd respected. "How'd you find out?"

Draco runs a finger along the rim of his mug. His nails are perfectly groomed. "Secrets don't always stay hidden," he says and takes a sip of wine. I pretend not to notice that his hand shakes.

"Dad!"

James bounds towards our table, still wearing the red and white striped robe of Fortescue's. He draws up short when he sees me with Draco. "Oh. Sorry, I didn't realise--I was just going to meet Teddy here for a bite, and I saw you--"

"It's fine." I touch his arm. "I'm just catching up with an old..." I hesitate. "Friend."

Draco snorts.

James turns wide eyes on him. "You're Draco Malfoy. Nicaea Brooms." I give him an incredulous look. He ignores me. "I didn't know Dad knew you--"

"We went to school together." Draco smirks at me. "He once cast a very nasty curse on me. Nearly killed me."

"Excuse me." I sit forward in my chair. "You Petrified me and stomped on my face."

The smirk fades. "You sent my father to Azkaban," Draco says, his voice deadly quiet.

We glare at each other; James coughs. "Right. Okay. Well..."

Draco shakes his head. "Apologies. Old stories for old men." He looks James up and down. "You fly."

James flushes and glances down at his robe. "This is just a job to pay rent." He laughs a bit self-consciously. "Would have tried Quality Quidditch, but old Marstowe wasn't hiring at the time, and, well, Florean Jr. pays a decent wage, right?" He rubs his hands up and down his sleeves, pushing them over his elbows then letting them drop back. I glimpse the phoenix tattoo on his forearm. "I'm a Chaser. Been doing a few tryouts here and there since Hogwarts. Bit rough going, you know."

"How'd the Caerphilly run go?" I ask.

"Not badly." James brightens. "Made the first cut, and they've set me up for another go week of Christmas."

I bump his arm. "Well done, you. Have you owed your mum?"

He shakes his head. "Not yet. Reckon I thought I'd give her and Viktor a few more days, you know?"

"Not a bad idea." I'm proud of him.

"Jamie!"

I peer past my son. Teddy has come in, Victoire trailing behind him. James's face falls. He tries to hide it. "Right," he says. "I reckon that's my cue. I'll try to head them both off before Teddy wanders over. You know how he is." He grimaces. "Talk, talk, talk...never wants to shut it...."

"Jamie," I say gently, and he coughs.

"Right. Nice to meet you, Mr Malfoy, and see you about, Dad." He turns, then looks back. "By the way, you should probably Floo Al. Turns out Gemma's got engaged or something. Poor bloke's heartbroken."

I nod.

Draco looks at me as James walks away. "Fortescue's?"

I shrug. "He won't let anyone help him get on a Quidditch team. Ridiculous of him, seeing as how Ginny or Viktor could get him placed in a heartbeat, but he refuses to. Wants to make it on his own merits, he says." I reach for my beer and take a sip. The head's still foamy. "He won't even tryout as James Potter. He uses a pseudonym and a glamour every time."

"Impressively moral." Draco looks over to where James is sitting with Teddy and Victoire. James looks miserable. "But very stupid of him. Everyone needs connections."

"He's a kid." I poke at the chips. They're starting to get soggy and congealed. Tom may be a brilliant bar-keep, but his food is shite. "And an idealistic one at that. Al's my practical boy. He researches Dark artefacts for Gringotts."

Draco raises an eyebrow. "A Potter in the Dark Arts? How very liberal of you."

"As if I could stop him." I mash one of the chips with my finger. Vinegary potato pulp squirts across the plate. Draco makes a face. "Al's always been his own man. And I trust him. He knows where the research gets dangerous."

Draco *hmmms* non-committally and finishes his wine. "I should get back to the shop. There's a few things left to do before we close." He shrugs back into his cloak.

I catch his arm as he stands. "Can we do this again, maybe? Just a drink?"

He doesn't say anything for a moment, just looks down at me. I'm poised for him to say no. He ought to say no. It'd be the obvious thing to do, and Draco's always obvious.

"All right," he says finally, and I'm taken aback. "Tomorrow. Same time." He looks at me over his shoulder. "By the way, Scorpius's fiancée?"

I look at him curiously, waiting.

A small smile plays over his face. "Her name is Gemma."

I'm left staring after him as he walks away.

Al's going to hate me.



Photo by Happy Dave

# three

**M**y son loathes your son," I say, taking the glass of firewhisky Draco hands me. I'm sprawled in a chair at the Leaky Cauldron. In the past week, drinks after work seem to have become a regular occurrence for the two of us. I stopped bothering to ask three days ago, and we've still managed to meet at half-five. I have to admit it's become the highlight of my day, settling down with a whisky and a bit of sparring. Ron thinks I've lost my mind. Maybe I have.

Draco sits down, across the table. "Mine's not so fond of yours either."

"I think the words fucking, asshole, and bastard cunt were used." I blow the steam off the rim of my glass. "Not necessarily in that order."

"One would certainly hope not." Draco clinks his glass to mine. "I'd like to think the boy whose heart my son stamped on had a verbal intelligence at least a slightly bit higher than your average Hufflepuff."

I glare at him. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree with Malfoys, it seems.

Draco just smirks and drains his glass.



I want to hate him. I really do. For Al's sake at least.

I don't.



"You're late again, love," Hermione says, budging her chair over so I can slip past her. The table at Vinalia's is packed with my friends--Ron and Hermione on one side, Seamus and Dean on another, Neville and Hannah across from them. Luna sits in the corner, nursing some sort of outrageously purple drink with fruit hanging from the rim. "I'm already on my second glass of wine."

I drop my bags next to the table and lean down to kiss her cheek. I've run the length of Diagon twice this afternoon, and I think I've satisfied the extensive wishlists my kids have dropped on me. Ginny and I usually split the shopping during the holidays, but she won't be back from her honeymoon until after Christmas.

"Sorry." I sit down next to Luna, and Ron pushes a beer my way. "I met Draco for a drink. Lost track of time."

"Been doing that a lot, I hear." Neville hands me the basket of breadsticks sitting in front of him. They've nearly been decimated. "The drinking with Malfoy, that is, not the losing track of time. *That's* par for the course for you. Malfoy not so much." I take a breadstick and eye Luna.

She shrugs, and her bell earrings jangle. "I didn't think it was a secret."

"It's not." I look over at Seamus and Dean. "Lils is planning to Floo over Friday night. She's packed two bags already."

Dean grins. "Em's waffling on three. For a weekend. Girls, I tell you. Hand to God, Emily has two dresses that look exactly the damn same and she's taking both. Why, I ask, and she just looks at me like I'm off my nut and tells me it should be obvious. Which it bloody well isn't." He shakes his head. "Mum's the same. Fifty years she and Dad've been married now and they still can't get through Heathrow without her checking a bag or twenty. Got to be something in that second X chromosome."

"That is incredibly sexist," Hannah protests, leaning forward. "I pack less than Neville does."

Neville sets his wineglass down. "One time. One bloody time I pack an extra bag and it was filled with specimens for a paper presentation, thanks."

"Oh, whatever." Hannah laughs. "Ruin my rant, will you? See if I let you in bed for a cuddle tonight." Neville just smiles at his wife and tugs a lock of her hair lightly.

"Best part of being bent?" Dean lifts his beer. "Seamus just throws a toothbrush and some Marks and Spencer y-fronts in his pocket and off we go."

"What more do you need?" Seamus asks. "Bang me a breadstick, Harry." I toss one across the table to him. He nearly drops it. "Clean teeth, clean pants, you're set. None of this trying on fourteen different dresses for one night shit."

"Unless you're Malfoy," Ron mutters into his beer.

The table falls silent.

"Ron," Hermione murmurs.

Ron sets his beer down and looks at me. "Are you going to tell them, Harry? They think it's just odd that you're meeting that ferrety little sod for drinks--"

"I don't," Luna pipes up. She sucks on a wedge of orange.

Ron ignores her. "They've no idea how absolutely fucking *stupid* you're being."

Hermione touches his arm. "Could we do this later, please?"

"I vote for now." Seamus looks between Ron and me with interest; Dean kicks him beneath the table. "Ow. What the hell was that for, you fecking twonk? You were thinking it."

"Shut it," Dean snaps. "Christ." Seamus rolls his eyes. Neville muffles a laugh behind his hand, only to be poked by his wife. Luna drains her glass. She squeezes my hand under the table as she motions to the waiter for another drink.

"It's fine," I say. I meet Ron's gaze evenly; he looks away, reaching for his beer again. "Ron's just worried, is all."

"Damn right." Ron still won't look at me. Hermione sighs.

I take a deep breath and a swig of beer. I set my glass down and turn to Seamus. "Remember when you were dating Ginny right before I asked her to marry me?"

Seamus shrugs. "Sure. Narked me off but good, you proposing to my girlfriend like a shitty tosser."

It had been a bit underhanded, that. Seamus hadn't talked to me for a year, not until after he and Dean got pissed out of their minds on New Year's Eve and ended up in bed. Ginny still liked to joke that she'd managed to turn three of her exes queer. She'd even warned Viktor off when they first started dating, saying her track record with straight blokes wasn't so brilliant.

I tear off the end of a breadstick and pop it into my mouth. It's soft and warm and garlicky. Oh, fuck it. Just say it, Potter. Jesus. I wipe my fingers on a serviette. "I was shagging Draco."

There's a crash of glass.

Hermione dabs at the wine she's spilled over her plate. The waiter's next to her immediately, all apologies, collecting the shards of wineglass with a sweep of his wand. "So sorry," Hermione murmurs. "Very clumsy of me." She doesn't look at me.

No one says anything, even after the waiter bustles away. Neville scratches the back of his neck, staring down at his plate. Seamus and Dean just exchange a long glance. Ron gives me an I-told-you-so look over his beer. Bastard.

"Oh, for heaven's sake." Luna slaps her hand on the table. Her silverware rattles. "It's not the end of the world. Stop acting like it."

Dean snorts. "Malfoy? And Harry? I'd say that's the fucking apocalypse."

Ron raises both eyebrows and nods, lifting his beer again.

"Don't be an arse," Luna says. She turns to Hermione. "Talk some sense into them."

Hermione fiddles with her fork, rubbing a thumb across the tines. "I don't know that they're not wrong," she says quietly. She looks up at me then, and her mouth is tight. She pushes her chair back and stands. "I need some air." She slips through the tables, her shoulders stiff.

I catch Ron's arm as he stands. "Let me." He hesitates, then sighs and nods.

Hermione's outside, shoulders against the brick facade of the storefront next to the restaurant. Her arms are crossed over her chest; the wind ruffles her short curls.

"It's cold out here." I lean next to her and pull a pack of cigarettes out of my jeans. The cellophane crinkles. I offer one to her. She shakes her head.

"Those are awful for you, and you should give them up." She brushes her hair back. "Not that I care, though, because you're a giant shit, Harry."

I light the cigarette and sigh. "I'm sorry."

"Twenty-three years, and this is the first I hear?" She runs a thumb beneath one eye, turning away from me. "Sod you."

"I never told Ginny either." I roll the cigarette between my fingertips. A curl of smoke twists up into the light from the streetlamp next to us. It's swathed in fir and dark red ribbons. The door to Vinalia's jangles and garlic warmth wafts over to us as a family leaves, laughing and bundled in scarves and mittens. They glance over at us curiously. I smile and nod and lift my cigarette. Much better they think I'm out for a smoke than arguing with one of my best friends. Less chance of that ending up in the *Prophet*.

With a sideways glance at me, Hermione plays along, taking the cigarette from me and lifting it to her mouth. As soon as they're gone, she coughs and hands it back to me. "Christ. That's disgusting. You're going to kill yourself with those things."

Probably. "Unfiltered, sorry." I take another drag and blow out a thin stream of smoke. "And thanks."

She sighs. "I'd prefer not to be Rita Skeeter's next blind item." She tilts her head. "Why doesn't Ginny know?"

"She'll have to now, I reckon." The wall is cold against my back. A few stray snowflakes drift down, sparkling in the lamplight. "It just seemed better not to tell her at the time, right? 'Hey, love, marry me, and by the way, I've been shagging a bloke for the last six months'--"

"It lasted that long?" Hermione's brows draw together. A brisk wind bursts down the street again, swirling the dusting of snow that's still on the ground. She shivers again.

I lift the cigarette to my mouth again. "More or less." I stare up at the sky. There are no stars to be seen. Just thick grey-black emptiness stretching across London, tinted orange from Muggle lights. "It was just sex."

She blushes. Hermione's always been a bit uncertain about my being queer, even though she hides it well. Not that she objects to my sexual preferences; I just think there's a part of her that secretly worries about my friendship with Ron. As if she needed to. Ron hasn't had eyes for anyone but her since Lavender dumped him in sixth year. "This is how you knew..."

"That I liked cock?" I give her a faint smile. "It was a slight indication, yes." I tap ash off the end of my cigarette and push my glasses up my nose. The tip stings, and I sniffle. Fucking cold. "I didn't cheat on her. It happened after Gin and I broke up. There was this Ministry thing--you know, that shit they always wanted me to attend after the war--and Draco was there, and both of us were trying to avoid everyone else."

Hermione leans her head against the wall. The brick catches her hair. "And you had a moment?"

I laugh softly. "We had an argument. In a corner of the Atrium, of all bloody places. We'd both been drinking, and..." I stare off over her shoulder. "Well, the only way I could shut him up was to kiss him, yeah?"

His mouth had been warm and slightly chapped. He'd tasted like the pinot blanc he'd been drinking all night. And when I'd kissed him, he'd breathed in sharply against my lips for just a moment before he'd pushed me back against the wall, his fingers twisted in my robe.

It'd been the best damn first kiss I'd ever had. Still was, actually.

"Oh, Harry." Hermione's hand falls on my arm.

I take another drag, enjoying the burn of the smoky nicotine in the back of my throat. "I'm pathetic, I know."

"You really are an idiot," she agrees gently. "Ginny deserved to know."

"I know. I couldn't..." I trail off. I've been lying about this for decades now. Even to myself. "I wouldn't." I press the ball of my palm to my mouth. Smoke from my cigarette curls around my hair. "You know, I've always said it was because I didn't want to hurt her. But that wasn't it. I didn't tell her at first because I

was fucking scared of being a poof, and I knew she wouldn't take me back if she thought I was. I hurt both of us because I was a coward." My mouth twists to the side. "Up Gryffindor."

Hermione shakes her head. "You're not a coward."

"I've had the past twelve years to tell her. So why didn't I?" I meet Hermione's gaze. Her eyes are gentle. I don't want her pity. I don't deserve it. "I've no good reason for that. You said yourself. Ginny deserved to know."

"Harry--"

"We should go in before you freeze." I drop my cigarette to the ground and grind it out with my heel. I hold the door open; warmth seeps out. "Ron'll be out looking for us in a moment."

Hermione just sighs and steps through the door. It swings shut behind us, bells jangling.

Ron's already headed towards the door. He stops when we meet, and he slides his arm around Hermione's waist. "You okay?"

She nods. "It's fine." She reaches out and takes my hand. "Let's go back. I think Harry should tell us a bit more about having drinks with Draco."

"Oh, God," Ron mutters.

I have to agree.



"Do you think we could ever be friends?" I ask. I sidestep an elderly wizard laden with shopping bags. Curls of shiny gold ribbon trail behind him across the cobblestones.

Draco looks at me as if I've lost my mind. Perhaps I have. "No." He's muffled by a thick scarf wrapped twice around his neck and mouth. The temperature keeps dropping. I hate that about winter.

"Then why are having drinks?"

Grey eyes regard me calmly over green cashmere knit. The tip of his nose is pink. "Because," he mumbles, then with an annoyed sigh pulls the scarf down beneath his chin. "It's your turn to buy, and I don't turn down free wine."

"I thought you said Tom's wine was cack." I tug at my gloves. The warming charm barely lasts in this weather. The sky's heavy and grey, and Lily woke me up this morning singing of white Christmases.

Draco shrugs. "It is." He doesn't look at me. Instead he wraps his arms tighter around himself, hands tucked beneath his armpits for warmth, and leans forward against the brisk breeze that whips down Diagon. A knit cap in the same green cashmere as his scarf is pulled over his hair. It looks good on him, I think. He'd probably just laugh at me if I told him so.

"Did you sleep with Donaghan?" The question bursts out of me before I realise it's even in my mind. Draco stops in the middle of the street, his mouth half-open. "Fuck. Sorry. None of my business."

"No, it's definitely not." Draco's nostrils flare. That's a sign he's annoyed. I remember that all too well. "What the hell are you thinking?"

I don't really know. I tug my tweed newsboy down further over my forehead. "I said I was sorry." I refrain--barely--from adding *so did you?*

Draco snorts and we start walking again, slower now. His mouth is pursed, his eyebrows drawn together. After a moment he glances over at me. "Why do you care? Is it just because you shagged him first?"

"No." I frown. "He told you we were together?"

"It was in the *Prophet*."

"Ten years ago!" I stop. A witch pushing twin boys in a stroller nearly bumps into me. She gives me an annoyed glare.

Draco's cheeks turn pinker. I wasn't certain that was possible. He scowls at me. "Just because I was living in France doesn't mean I didn't read the London papers." He shifts from foot to foot. "It was a bit of home. Even the Quibbler." He wrinkles his nose.

"And you kept track of my boyfriends." I can't keep from smirking. "From ten years ago."

"Fuck off," Draco snaps. He walks on; I hurry to catch up. He glances at me. "So why do you care then if I slept with him?"

We're almost at the Leaky Cauldron. I hesitate, waiting until we reach the door and I open it. The pub's barely warmer inside than it is out. I step in, looking back at him, and smile. "Because I shagged you first."

His stunned expression is priceless.



Luna presses her hand to her mouth, muffling her laughter. She's sitting on our kitchen counter, her bare feet bumping against the cabinets. "What did he *say?*"

"Nothing." I top off her glass of wine and pull another beer out of the cupboard for me. Marinara sauce bubbles on the cooker. Lily will be bouncing in any moment, having been out with Emily supposedly

Christmas shopping. I suspect, however, there was a great deal more boy-scoping involved than I would prefer.

"Impossible." Luna picks a leftover piece of tomato off the cutting board and pops it into her mouth. "He had to make some sort of witty and/or scathing remark. We're talking about Malfoy here."

I lean against the refrigerator. "No. Not a word. Just walked in past me, took a seat and told me to order him the most expensive white wine Tom kept behind the counter and to tell him not to be a stingy bastard and to actually cough it up this time."

"And nothing the entire time you were there?" Luna sips her merlot. She worked from home today which means she hasn't bothered to change out of her pyjamas at all. Fluffy sheep wander across the pale blue flannel field of her thighs. Her hair's pulled back with a headband, not out of any concession to fashion but rather to keep it from falling in her face after her morning shower. It's dried into tight spirals that bounce as she shakes her head. "You scared the poor bastard. He probably doesn't have any idea what to think of you."

"I'm fairly certain Draco Malfoy has never been in the position where he didn't know what to think of someone." The bottle clanks against my teeth. I wipe the back of my hand against my mouth. "I just made him uncomfortable."

Luna studies me for a long moment. "You like him," she says, setting her wineglass on the counter.

"Don't be ridiculous." I push off of the refrigerator and go to stir the sauce. The wooden spoon scrapes against the sides of the pot. I can feel Luna watching me.

"I don't think I am," she says slowly. "I mean, usually I might be, but this...no. I really think you do like him."

The sauce pops. It splatters over my hand, thick and red and burning. I wipe it away with a tea towel. "Luna."

I hear her slide off the counter, hear her feet pad up behind me. She wraps her arms around my waist. "You should tell him."

"That will go well." I pull away from her and open the refrigerator. I stare into it blindly. "He doesn't even think we can be friends."

"Maybe he's just afraid too," Luna says softly. "Or he has a Wrackspurt in his brain." That makes me laugh. I close the refrigerator and look back at her. Her eyes crinkle at the corners. "Have you asked him out properly yet? Of course not. Honestly, boys are all the same even when you're men."

I pick up my beer again. "If he doesn't think drinks are dates--"

"Well, they're not, are they?" she asks matter-of-factly. "You don't even think they are."

She has a point. I lift my bottle to my mouth. "What do you suggest?"

"Dinner." She taps her finger against her chin. "Someplace very nice. Which means I should make the booking for you or you'll end up taking him for curry and *no*, Harry, that's not a proper dinner date."

I roll my eyes. "Fine. And when he tells me to bugger off and that I've lost my mind if I think he'll even consider going out with me of all people?"

Luna pats my arm and reaches for her wineglass. "I'll be here with a bottle of Glenfiddich to help you nurse your wounded soul."

"Bint."

She smiles at me over the rim of her glass. "You love me."

I suppose in my own way, I do.



The shop is empty, save for the young clerk behind the counter. He looks up from a copy of *Quidditch Monthly* when I come in and nods. "He's in the back if you are looking for him." His accent is thicker than Fleur's.

"Thanks, Luc." I push open the door from the shop to the workroom. It's not the first time I've been back here, but it's new enough that it intrigues me. The smell of wood and broom polish hangs heavy in the air, and it takes me back to Hogwarts and the Quidditch broom sheds.

Draco has a broom handle on the lathe, spinning it as he leans forward, goggles obscuring half his face, wand hovering above the wood as he casts a sanding charm. I stand back, watching him as he works. He's graceful with his wand, barely moving it across the smooth grain to sand it down. It's been a while since I've taken a significant interest in racing brooms, but James has told me that Draco's handcrafted brooms are considered the best of the best. The care he puts into forming them is renowned, according to my starry-eyed son. Who knew a Potter would become such a fan of a Malfoy? It's odd.

I lean against the wall, hands in my pockets, and watch. Draco's happy tucked away back here in his workshop, I can tell. Much more so than he was when we were twenty-two and he was living off the remnants of his family fortune, hearing his father tell him how useless he was.

Christ, I'd been such a fucking coward back then. I should have helped him. I could have helped him. But I hadn't wanted anyone to know I was even associating with a Malfoy, much less fucking one.

Draco straightens and he pushes his goggles up onto his forehead. The lathe slows, just slightly, and, picking up a heavy jar, he scoops a dollop of polish up with three fingers and begins to smear it over the broom handle. His hand curls around the wood, stroking up and down. I swallow. That should not be so erotic. Christ, I'm a bloody pervert. Really.



"What do you want, Harry?" He doesn't turn around. The lathe slows more; Draco's thumb caresses the grip of the handle. The wood gleams a deep chestnut.

"Oh." I cough, caught unawares. I step forward. Dust swirls in the light from the window next to me. "I just..."

Draco stops the lathe and looks back over his shoulder as he unfastens the broom handle. He carries it over to a worktable. Twigs are spread across the surface, neatly trimmed. Draco sets the handle next to them and wipes his hands on a rag. "Just what?"

No one should look that good in a leather apron and thick goggles. It's just bloody wrong is what it is. "What are you working on?" A chalkboard next to the table is filled with Latin and maths, all scrawled in Draco's distinctively illegible hand. I have no bloody idea what  $F = (m \dot{V})_e - (m \dot{V})_0 + (p_e - p_0)$  \* Ae even means. None of it makes any sense to me, but Charms had never been my strong point.

"An experimental model." Draco picks up a twig and a pair of clippers. "I've been playing with the thrust equations a bit. I think I might have fixed the drag problem that was slowing the last line of brooms I put out." With a frown, he carefully snips a twig, then runs his wand across the end, tapering it into a fine point with a charm before blowing the dust fragments away. He tosses that twig into a shallow box on the side of his table and picks up another, only to bin it when he realises it's just a bit crooked. "This is the second prototype."

"Go to dinner with me tonight." The words come out in a rush. Brilliant, Potter. Very good. Sound like a complete twit, why don't you?

Draco stills, another twig in his hand. He sets it down slowly. His shoulders are tense. "What?"

I push my glasses back up my nose nervously, grateful that his back is still to me. "You heard."

"Dinner. With you." Draco turns around, leaning against the table. He eyes me warily. "What are you on about?"

"Just that." I move closer to him. The polish on the broom handle smells like lemon oil and almonds. "Dinner. With me. Tonight."

The muscles in his neck twitch. "Why?"

"Does there have to be a reason?" I touch one of the twigs; he smacks my hand away.

"There's always a reason." His eyes narrow suspiciously. "What do you want?"

You, I want to say. I don't. "Dinner," I say instead. "Only dinner."

Draco doesn't look convinced.

"I want to go out with you." I shove my hands in my pockets. "In public. The way we should have twenty-three years ago."

He pulls the goggles off and brushes past me. "I don't need your pity or your guilt, Potter."

I catch his arm. "It's not either." We look at each other. He's so close I can feel the warmth of his body. My stomach twists and I take a shaky breath. I drop my hand. "Go to dinner with me, Draco."

A long moment passes; he searches my face. "You're mad," he says finally.

"Maybe." I grin. "I have a booking for eight."

Draco tenses. It's the wrong thing to say. "I am *not* that easy," he snaps.

"I didn't say you were!" I run a hand through my hair. "Bookings are a hell of a lot easier to cancel than to get." Or at least that's what Luna had told me. I hope she's right.

Evidently she is. Draco's brow smooths. "Oh." He hesitates, then nods curtly. "Fine. Where?"

"Lotus." It's a new Thai place down Diagon that's impossibly difficult to get in at the moment.

Draco raises an eyebrow, suitably impressed, only to frown immediately. "I suppose it helps to be Harry Potter."

I snort. Not likely. "More like it helps to have a flatmate who happens to have dated the sous chef." I brush past him. "Meet me there at eight."

He's still staring after me when I walk out.



Photo by jo'nas

# four

I'm nearly twenty minutes late.

Draco's already taken a table, tucked discreetly away behind a potted palm. I'm not surprised. I don't particularly want to be seen tonight either. He sets his wineglass aside as I sit down across from him. "Have you ever noticed how many of our encounters occur over alcohol and food?"

I unfold my serviette and drape it across my lap. "Are you suggesting we need to be pissed to tolerate each other?"

"That's a possibility I hadn't considered," Draco says thoughtfully. His eyes are bright, his cheeks flushed.

I look at him suspiciously. "How many glasses have you had?"

"How late are you?" He twists the stem of his wineglass between his fingers. "I ordered starters. I thought perhaps you might be planning to stand me up."

"Sorry." I sigh and run a hand over my face. "Minor child crisis. Al was over this afternoon, and he and his sister had a bit of a row. Again. Honestly, I think they pick on each other on purpose. Be grateful you only had one."

Draco takes a sip of wine. "It does make sibling rivalry a non-issue." He eyes me. "Do you like being a father?"

The waiter comes by with plates of satay chicken and spring rolls; I order a Singha. "I do," I say after he walks off. "My kids...they're fun. They're mental at times, of course, and they've driven me mad more than once, but I love them, and I really *like* them." I pick up a skewer of chicken and dip one end into the peanut sauce. "You?"

"I never thought I would," Draco admits. He tucks his hair behind one ear. "Until I held Scorpius the first time."

I know what he means. I'd felt the same thrill of wonder and sheer terror each time the Healer had placed one of my kids in my arms. I'd always been afraid that I wouldn't love the next one the way I had the one before. That I didn't have enough room in my heart for one more person. Stupid of me. There's always space for love.

The waiter sets my beer in front of me. I lift the glass. "To our kids."

Draco smiles. "I believe I could second that." He clinks his glass against mine. "To our children. Exasperating though they may be on occasion."

I laugh and drink my beer.



An hour and a half later and our plates have been cleared and a second bottle of wine has been brought out. I've abandoned my beer in favour of the Riesling. I'm surprised at how relaxed I am; I'm always tense on first dates. Always on display. I hate that feeling.

I've taken my jacket off and draped it over the back of my chair; Draco's shed his outer robe. He pours another glass of wine and leans back, studying me.

"You're not the same Potter you were twenty-three years ago."

I shrug and take a sip of the Riesling. It's crisp. Sweet. Draco's always had good taste in wine. "People change. Grow up."

"Yes." He rubs his thumb along the curve of his glass. "You've never asked about my shop."

"Of course I have." I frown at him. "Haven't I?"

Draco sets his glass down and leans forward, his elbows on the table. A few drops of red curry sauce stain the white tablecloth where his plate was. "Do you remember the weekend in Nice?"

"We didn't get out of bed for two days." I smile faintly. It had been our next-to-last encounter. I'd gone back to Ginny a few weeks later. "Yeah, I remember that."

Draco laughs softly. "Yes, well, what *I* remember--other than you shagging me senseless on the floor of the bath--is that you told me I should stop whinging about no one wanting to hire me and just find something to do that actually made me happy."

"Right." My brows draw together and I purse my mouth. I can't resist teasing him. "I vaguely recall that. I'm fairly certain that I told you to shut it and suck my cock right after."

"Arse." Draco shakes his head. "As a matter of fact, you did. You were such a sodding prick back then."

"You weren't exactly the most pleasant bloke around either." I drain my glass. "You spent half the time we were actually fucking insulting my intelligence *and* my sexual prowess."

Draco lifts one shoulder and rolls his eyes, a perfect picture of Malfoy disdain. "You needed someone to put you in your place instead of telling you how marvelous you were, O Chosen One."

"Yeah." I set my wineglass aside and sigh. "Really, I never thought I was. You don't know how I hated them all acting like that. I'm not anything special. I never was."

"Bollocks." Draco fills my glass again and sets the empty bottle down. "You're the Saviour of the Wizarding World. You killed the Dark Lord. That makes you special whether you like it or not, and it's disingenuous of you to be morose about that."

I sigh. It's a subject that's bothered me for decades now. I'm not certain anyone will ever understand. "That wasn't anything but an accident of birth. No different from you being born a Malfoy."

"Being born a Malfoy is *never* an accident," Draco says archly.

"After everything? With all your family's gone through? Your dad killed himself, Draco."

He flinches, and remorse floods me. That's a subject best left alone.

"I'm sorry." I pick up my wineglass. "Just...it doesn't bother you anymore that people still can't see past your name?"

He doesn't say anything for a moment, then he takes a breath and looks away. "Not any more than them not being able to see past that scar on your forehead bothers you."

We're silent for a moment, each lost in our own thoughts, in the years that have stretched between us.

"You're not the same person you were," I say softly. "I'm not either."

"I know." He looks at me then. "Why do you think I'm sitting here with you? If I thought you were..." He trails off. "I apprenticed myself to a broom maker after you--after we split. Father was furious with me. I think I nearly gave him a heart attack. Mother told me I was going to kill him." His mouth twists. "How ironic."

"Look where you are now. He'd be proud." Even I'm not pissed enough to believe that.

Draco laughs. "No, he wouldn't. He'd be horrified at the idea of a Malfoy in trade. It's not on the approved list of professions, trust me." He twists his glass between his fingers. "But I'm happy with it. I'm good at it. That's what you told me I should want." He shakes his head. "You do not know how much it's galled me over the years that you of all people were right."

I just look at him for a long moment. There's a calmness about Draco that wasn't there when we were younger. A peace almost.

"You give good advice, Harry," he says. "You just don't know how to apply it to yourself."

"I'm happy," I say, but my voice is thick in my throat.

"No." Draco meets my gaze. "You're just not unhappy. There's a difference."

I don't say anything. I can't. I sip my wine slowly, staring down at the tabletop. Finally I look up at him. "Were you happy with your wife?"

"Enough." Draco runs a finger over the edge of the table. He pleats the tablecloth slightly. "I wasn't in love with her, if that's what you mean. But I loved Astoria." His face softens, saddens. "A great deal, actually. When she died..." He sighs. "I've had too much to drink."

I hesitate, then lean forward. "I married Ginny because I was afraid of who I was. You made me afraid." I drain the rest of my wine. "There. I've had too much to drink, too."

Draco's silent for a moment. "Stupid Gryffindor."

"I know."

He stands, reaching for his robe. I look up at him. "Pay the bill," he says softly, his eyes glittering in the lamplight. "Then take me home."

I reach for my wallet.



We go to his townhouse in Islington. My flat has too damn many people in it.

I've barely managed to stumble out of the Floo before Draco shoves me against the wall. I can smell the wine on his breath. "You're really pissed," I say. I don't pull away.

"I wouldn't call you sober either." Draco pushes my coat off my shoulders. My jacket goes with it. I let them both slip to the floor. "Funny, isn't it? The first time you kissed me we were both drunk." His hands smooth over my sides. I can feel their warmth through my shirt. "Perhaps there's a causal correlation. The more alcohol I indulge in, the better you look?" His breath gusts my lips. If he doesn't kiss me, I'll fucking kill him.

My fingers close on his waist; I slide my hands down to his hips. "It's called beer goggles, you twat." I brush my mouth against his, lightly, barely touching. "Now will you please, for the love of all that is fucking holy, shut it and kiss me."

Draco groans and he catches my mouth with his, kissing me roughly, eagerly. Our teeth clash before we find our balance. My glasses are knocked askew. I don't fucking care. He tastes sour-sweet, and the way he swipes his tongue against mine drives me mad. His body presses me against the wall; I can feel his cock against my hip.

I've been part of a lot of kisses since fifth year when I'd had my first clumsy, awkward fumbblings beneath the mistletoe with Cho. I've kissed women; I've kissed men. And none of them has been as fucking incredible as it as Draco Sodding Malfoy.

I could kiss him forever.

He tugs away, gasping. His eyes are shadowed. He licks at my bottom lip, just one quick drag of his tongue that leaves me aching and wanting more.

"Draco," I say, but he only puts his finger to my mouth. I catch it between my teeth, nipping lightly, sucking the tip into my mouth. His eyes flutter shut for a moment and he breathes out as my tongue curls around his finger, flicks at it before I slide my mouth further down.

He pulls his finger back; it slips out of my mouth with a slick pop.

I watch him. His mouth parts slightly, wet and pink. I run my hands up his sides, over his chest, my fingers undoing his heavy black wool robe. "Are we going to do this?" I ask quietly. Shadows from the hearth dance across the foyer walls. I can see the shapes of portraits behind him, their paint shifting in the darkness.

Draco steps back. His hands go to the last button of his robe, at his throat. He slides it through the buttonhole, then lets the robe drop to the floor. His jacket follows, then his fingers find the buttons of his shirt. My breath comes in sharp, short pants; I flatten my palms against the wall. I want to touch him again so fucking badly.

The shirt, white and pristine, hits the floor. The firelight warms his pale skin, giving it a golden glow. He's thin still, but not as willowy as he was twenty-three years ago. His muscles have softened; his waist has thickened slightly.

He still looks fucking amazing.

Draco holds out his hand. "Come upstairs," he murmurs.

I can't refuse. I don't want to refuse.

He leads me up a curving staircase. Portraits eye me, frowning, as we climb the steps, but the Malfoy clan be damned. I can't take my eyes off the smooth expanse of Draco's back, the dip of his spine just before it meets the flare of his arse. His trousers hang low on his hips. I want nothing more than to drop to my knees and press my face into the small of his back, licking my way down the crease in his arse.

I shiver. I can't believe I'm here, can't believe I'm going to do this. Again. Ron will think I've lost my mind. Hermione will think I'm being reckless again. Luna will think it's about damn time.

I'm not certain what I think. I'm not certain I want to think.

Draco pulls me into a bedroom. His quiet *Lumos* sends the fire crackling and the lamp next to the bed flickering.

It's smaller than I expected, but larger than his bedroom in Kensington had been. The bed's the same, a heavy ebony four-poster. The coverlet is thick and cream. The brocade shimmers in the lamplight. Photographs line the mantel. His mother, his father. A boy who looks remarkably like Draco with a pretty, brown-haired woman. Her nose turns up on the end; it's spattered lightly with freckles. She raises an eyebrow at me and pulls her son closer. I've seen her once before.

She looks nice.

"Astoria," Draco says quietly, coming up behind me. "And my son just before Hogwarts."

"She's pretty." I look over at him. He smiles faintly and brushes the frame with a fingertip.

"Yes." He turns to me, reaching for my hips. I stop him.

"You're certain about this?" I have to know. For myself. For him. For the woman in the picture. It doesn't matter if she's dead.

Draco just looks at me for a long moment, then he catches my hand. "I didn't sleep with Astoria," he says after a moment. "Healers helped us conceive Scorpius. She always knew I preferred men. I never lied to her about that." He meets my eyes. "I loved her. She was my best friend. I miss her. Quite a lot." His fingers twist through mine. "But if you're asking me if I've been celibate all these years..." He leads me towards the bed. "I most definitely haven't."

He turns towards me, his fingers on my shirt buttons. He undoes them slowly, watching me, his fingers brushing each inch of skin that's revealed. I don't stop him. He pushes the shirt off my shoulders, pulls it from one arm, then the other before tossing it aside. I can barely breathe. My cock aches; my trousers are tented.

"Donaghan?" I ask finally. I don't know why it bloody matters.

Draco doesn't answer. Instead he slides down me, and I groan. He presses his cheek to my hip. His fingertips brush the bulge in my trousers. "Harry," he murmurs, and then he turns his head, mouths my prick through my trousers. It's all I can do not to slam my hips against his pretty face.

"Oh, God." I tangle both hands in his hair. My whole body is trembling. "Fuck--"

He pulls my trousers open, his fingers fumbling with the zip. I sway, nearly losing my balance when his mouth closes on my cock. He catches me, hands on my hips, steadies me.



I watch as he sucks me, as his tongue curls around the head of my prick, then slides down the underside, pressing it against my stomach. His hair is soft around my fingers, and when he cups one of my balls, squeezing it gently before moving his mouth down to suck at it, I nearly lose myself.

Gasping, I push my hips forward. My cock slides wetly across his cheek. "Draco. Oh, fuck--" I bite my lip. "I can't--"

Draco draws back, breathing hard. His mouth is slick and wet and swollen. I run my thumb over it; he sucks at it, nipping the nail with his teeth as he looks up at me. He's beautiful.

"Get up," I say, and my voice is rough, raspy. He stands, slowly, letting his body drag across mine. I want to throw him across the bed and bury myself in his pretty arse. Instead I slide my hand between us, rubbing against his cock. His breath catches; his mouth opens. I kiss him, pulling him closer as I unfasten his trousers, push my hand inside.

His prick is heavy and hot in my hand.

Draco hisses against my mouth. "Please."

I push him back; he falls onto the mattress, scrabbling up the bed. I grab his trousers and jerk them off. His pants follow. I look down at him, spread across the coverlet, pale and gold, long limbs askew. My stomach clenches. I want him.

Somehow I manage to get my trousers and pants down to my ankles. I step out of them. Draco toes off his shoes, letting them fall to the floor with a thud. He pushes his socks off. I do the same with mine. We stare at each other, shadows flickering over our skin.

And then Draco holds out a hand. "Come to bed, Harry."

My fingers curl around his. He draws me down next to him.

I run a hand down his side, over his hip. Draco plucks my glasses from my face and sets them aside on the table next to the bed. He turns back to me. "I want you," he murmurs. He slides across me; I can feel the heated drag of his cock against my hip.

"Draco." I catch his hips.

"Stop thinking." Draco brushes his mouth across mine. "The only time you ever do is always at the wrong moment."

I kiss him slowly. He straddles my hips. Our pricks press together. It feels fucking amazing.

My hands slide up Draco's back, the knobs of his spine against my fingers. I love kissing him. He's all tongue and teeth and wet, eager need. He drags his mouth down my jaw, biting lightly, then down my neck. When he buries his face beneath my arm, licking at my skin, I groan. The only person I've ever fucked who considered the armpit sexy was Draco. He breathes out against me and it sends a shudder of want through my body.

He kisses down my side. His fingers twist my nipples, hard, the way I like, then he scrapes a thumbnail over the aching nub. I cry out and pull his hip against me just as his mouth nips my hipbone.

Draco leans over me, his hair falling forward into his face. His cheeks are pink, his mouth soft and wet. "What?"

I smooth my fingertips over his jaw. Down his throat. Across his chest. My thumb circles his nipple, pressing down. He closes his eyes and arches against my touch. His cock slips over mine. Once, twice...I push up, rutting against him. He catches his bottom lip between sharp, white teeth and begins to move with me. His thighs spread wider; he lowers himself, his chest pressed to mine. I twist a hand in his hair and pull him into another kiss as I buck my hips against his.

Draco gasps. "Harry." His shoulders tremble. "Merlin--oh, *fuck*--"

I Summon the oil. The drawer in the table bursts out, skittering across the floor before slamming into the wall. The phial leaps up from it and flies into my hand.

"You're going to fuck my cock," I whisper into Draco's hair. He replies with a desperate, eager kiss. I can barely open the damn phial, my hands are shaking. Oil spills over my fingers, across his skin. It rolls onto the coverlet.

I drop the phial and smooth my fingers across his arse. Draco pushes it up against my hand. He looks down at me, eyes bright. When my fingertip brushes puckered skin, he breathes in sharply. "Fuck me," he whispers. "Please, Harry."

My slick finger presses into him. I watch him, watch the pleasure soften his face. His mouth parts; his eyes gleam. He pushes back against my hand.

"More."

I slide another finger into him, moving my hand slowly, my fingers twisting. Draco rocks into my hips, another slide of cock against cock. My balls tighten. After a few moments, Draco reaches back and pulls my fingers away.

"I want your prick," he says softly, and the look on his face takes my breath away.

Draco pushes up; I dig my still slick fingers into his hips. The first time he tries to slide down on me, my cock moves. He swears and grabs it, holding it as he presses down, his thighs wide.

There is nothing--*nothing*--in this world more fucking arousing than watching your prick disappear into someone.

I can barely breathe. My heart slams against my chest. It takes all I have not to shove my hips up, pushing all the way into that tight heat. I can feel a drop of sweat roll down my temple, catch in my hair.

And then he's on me, my cock deep inside of him and all I can think about is how far into him I am and how fucking incredible it feels, how tight he is around me, Jesus *Christ*.

Until he moves and I'm lost.

I jerk him down, desperate to kiss him, and his hips pull up, press back again. He catches my cheek with one hand, his mouth moving against mine. I'm not going to last long. It's been weeks since I've done anything other than toss off in bed late at night.

Still kissing Draco, I roll us over, press him into the mattress.

"Harry," he chokes out, and I reach between us, my fingers curling around his cock. I don't want him to last long either.

I love the feel of his foreskin sliding back, of the slick head slipping between my tight fingers. Draco arches up against me, his shoulders pushing into the pillows. He bites my jaw.

I fuck him in quick thrusts; my balls slap against his arse with each groan and pant. Draco wraps one leg around my hip, pulling me closer. Deeper. His other pushes into the bed, toes curled in the coverlet. He slams his arse up, meeting my hips.

His fingers grip my shoulder. His hair catches on his damp cheek. His skin is flushed, his stomach tight. "Harry," he says again. "Harry, Harry, Harry--" I twist my fingers over the head of his cock. He tenses; his eyelashes flutter; his mouth opens slightly. "Oh."

Another stroke of my hand down his cock, back up, and his fingernails scrape down my back. The sharp pain feels wonderful. I slam into him again, lifting his arse up off the bed.

Draco cries out, jerking beneath me, come spilling sticky-warm through my fingers, spattering against his stomach.

His leg slides off my hip. He's breathing hard, limp against the bed. I don't care. I fuck him, pushing myself up, one hand on either side of his shoulders. I want to see my cock sliding into him, want to see his come smeared against his skin. I draw in a gasping, ragged breath.

Draco drags his fingers through his come, then touches my arm, slides his fingers over my skin. They brush a sticky trail over my throat, my jaw, my lips. He pushes his fingers into my mouth and it's my undoing. I can taste him, salty-sweet, on his fingertips.

I come hard, slamming into Draco. I arch and my body shakes, my hips jerk. It feels so fucking good, so fucking amazing. I never want it to stop.

He holds me when I collapse on him. His fingers stroke my hair. Gently. Carefully.

My breathing slows. I can hear the steady thump of his heart. I turn my head, press my mouth against his chest. When I slide out of him, I suddenly feel naked. Odd, that. I lie there for a moment, stretched out next to him. We're both silent.

And then Draco curls around me, his head on my shoulder, his hand on my hip. "Don't go," he whispers, not looking at me. His fingers trace small circles on my skin. "Stay."

I do.



I find the tin of tea on the middle shelf of the pantry where Draco's always kept it.

It's usually awkward the morning after, navigating around someone else's rooms. The bath is never set up the same; you go through three kitchen cabinets looking for the teacups.

Not today. Draco's kitchen feels oddly familiar. All these years and he's still the same organisational system, the anal-retentive bastard. I smile as I pop two slices of bread into the toaster and tap it lightly with my wand. It shivers and shudders across the counter as it heats before shooting the toast in the air. I catch them with a plate and pull the marmalade from the refrigerator.

I'd left him upstairs, still curled in bed. He'd rolled against me when I'd kissed him and murmured, "Tea, please?" as if he didn't have an elf he could send for it. That was Draco though. I know when I go back up I'll likely find him sprawled across the whole bed, back asleep, arse in the air. He loathes mornings more than I do.

The kettle rattles on the cooker, just before it breaks into a rather bawdy version of *Rare Willie*. I snort and lift it off, pouring the steaming water into the teapot over the strainer.

"Well. You're not who I expected to see."

I nearly drop the kettle. I catch it before I scald myself and set it aside before turning around.

Donaghan drops his coat on the kitchen table. He eyes me. I'd pulled on my trousers at least when I'd come downstairs. Not that it'd matter.

"What are you doing here?" I already know the answer.

He shrugs. "I thought I'd come over to see Draco. I was going to ask him if he wanted have brunch, but I'm guessing he's other plans?" The smile he gives me is amused.

My stomach twists. "I didn't realise you were on terms for just dropping in unannounced."

Donaghan goes to a cabinet and opens it. He pulls out a teacup, then looks back at me, eyebrows furrowed. "You didn't think that the wedding was the first time Draco and I'd met, did you?"

I feel like a fucking fool.

"My God." Donaghan stares at me. "You did. Harry, Draco and I've known each other for almost a year now--"

"Harry?" A sleepy voice asks from the door. Draco pulls his dressing gown tighter and yawns. His eyes widen when he sees Donaghan. "What are you doing here?"

"Circe's tits." Donaghan sets the teacup on the counter. "I came by to ask you for brunch."

Draco brushes past him and takes out another teacup. "I can't."

"Obviously." Donaghan pours them both tea. "Was he any good? I mean, he was when we were together but that was ages ago."

The entire moment is surreal.

"Oh shut it," Draco says. He picks up a piece of toast and reaches for the marmalade. "You know I don't talk about that sort of thing."

I'm going to sick up. "I need to go."

"Harry." Draco turns to me. "You don't understand."

"I'm sure I do." I Summon my shirt and coat. They've fucked. They've been fucking. They are fucking. I don't care which it is. All I know is that it infuriates me, that I want to slam Donaghan's smug face into the wall and Jesus *Christ*, I have to get out of here.

"Harry," Draco says again, more urgently. He steps towards me.

"This was a mistake," I say. I'm numb. Somehow this feels like *deja vu*. I've said this before. I know I have. "That's all it was. Just a mistake."

The last thing I see before I Apparate is his face, stunned and angry as I leave. Again.



I've forgotten my shoes. I only remember when I land outside my building. The cobblestones are freezing against my bare feet.

Luna is on the sofa with James when I walk into the flat. She squeezes his hand and looks up at me, her eyes red-rimmed. My breath catches.

"Is everything all right?" I ask. Luna cries at the drop of a hat, usually over some nature programme on BBC Four. She can't bear it when some creature gets eaten. Tears don't automatically mean something's gone pear-shaped, but I've learned not to rule it out.

She rubs at her nose then tilts her head towards James. "I'll put the kettle on, shall I?" She doesn't ask where I've been. I suppose it's obvious. She hurries out of the sitting room. I can hear her turn the faucet on in the sink.

I hang my coat on the hooks next to the hearth. James is slumped into the corner of the sofa. He doesn't look up.

"Jamie?" I sit next to him. "All right, lad?"

"I'm fine." He stares blankly down at his lap.

I put my hand on his knee. I hesitate. "Is it the tryout? It's not for a few days--"

"Teddy proposed to Victoire." His voice is dull. Flat. "She said yes."

"Oh." I've been expecting this, but not so soon. I pull my hand away. "Jamie. I'm so sorry."

James looks up then. His eyes are empty. It scares me. "You knew?"

I nod. "I've suspected for a while. The way you look at him. It's not obvious, but I know the symptoms." I smile bitterly. "Been there myself more than once." Still am there. I shy away from that thought and what it might mean. I can't go there. I won't.

"You can't be a Quidditch player and be with a bloke." James runs his hands over his face. "Changing rooms--"

"Sod that." I look at him, mouth tight. "If they give that much a fuck who you sleep with then you don't want to play with them or for them. And I reckon they've been able to play men and women on the same teams for a few hundred years now, and you can't tell me that the whole lot of them haven't been madly shagging each other like two of Luna's Umgubular Slashkilters gone wild. Or that not one of them has ever been one of old England's great homosexuals."

Jamie twists the hem of his jumper between his hands. He leans forward, his elbows on his knees. "Name one."

I can't. But that doesn't matter. "Times have changed."

"They wouldn't even talk about Dumbledore, you said." James raises his voice. "What makes you think--"

"Because they *will* talk about me," I say calmly. "And they'll let Seamus and Dean have a daughter. You're not the first gay fellow, Jamie. You're not the only one. And if you're the first Quidditch player to be open about the fact you love men, then good for you. I'm proud of you and I always will be. But this isn't about that. Or about you suddenly realising you've feelings for a boy. This is about you and Teddy."

James leans against me. I wrap my arm around his shoulders. "He doesn't love me."

"He does." I rub my son's arm. It's the first time I've held him in years. He's grown up. They all have, all my babies. Even Lily. It's a strange feeling. "Just not the way you want him to."

"This sucks," James murmurs against my jacket. "The whole love thing."

I rest my head on his. "Welcome to the world, Jamiekins." I haven't called him that since he was seven. He laughs quietly, with a bitter tinge.

"Yeah. Brilliant."

I know how he feels.

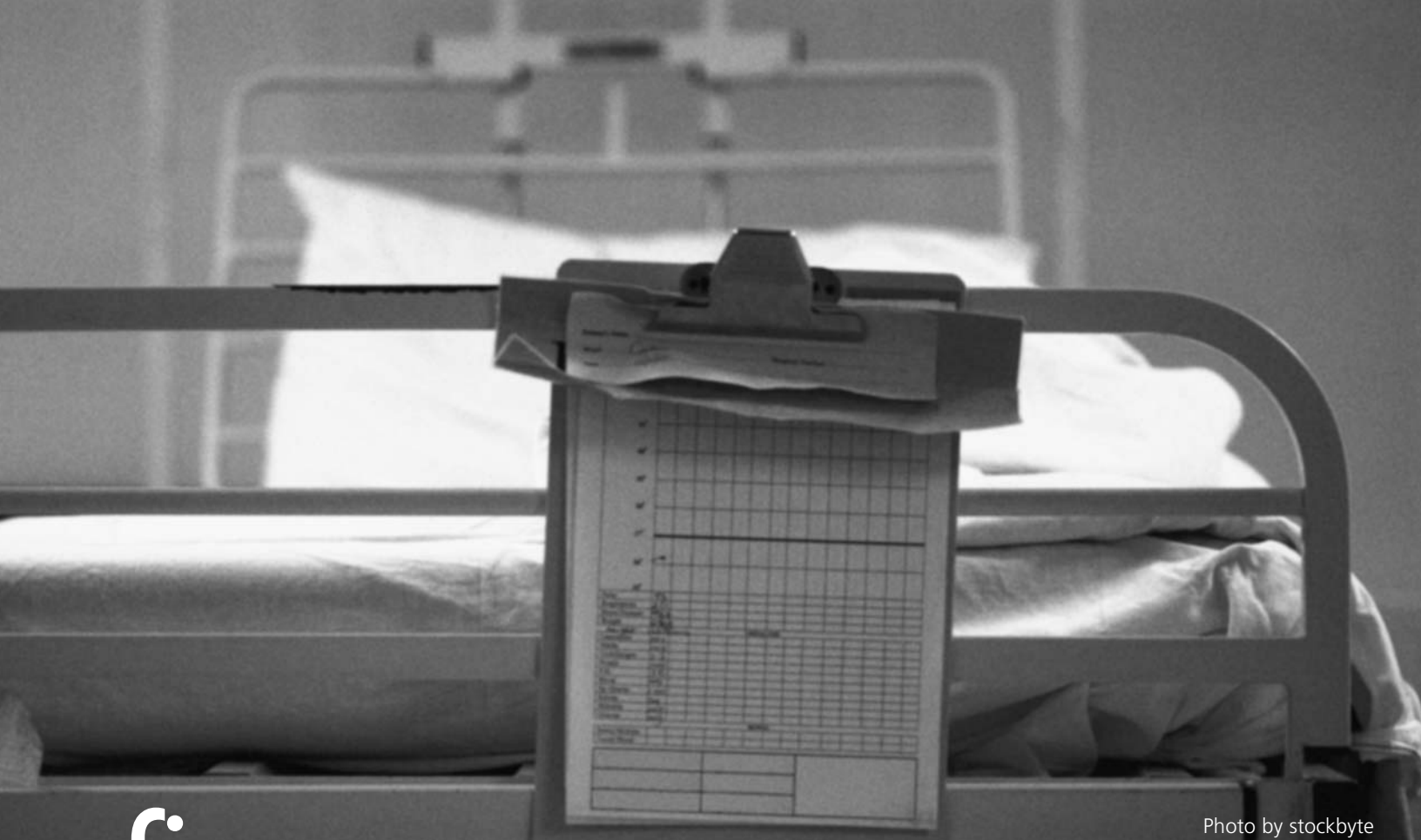


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# five

**D**onaghan comes to see my in my office.

I look up from the budget files I've been perusing, almost grateful for the interruption until I realise who it is. "What do you want?" I ask curtly. "And how the fuck did you get in here?"

"Your assistant." He drops into the chair in front of my desk. I make a note to shout at Emmeline at an appropriate moment. "We need to talk about Draco. He's too damn stubborn to try himself and I know from personal experience how likely you are to admit you have your head up your arse."

"Fuck off." I pick up my quill and open the file again.

Donaghan leans forward and places his hand over it. "Harry."

I sigh. "What do you want me to say? Jolly good you're shagging and oh, by the way, I suppose I had an affair with your partner, sorry about that?"

"He's not my partner." Donaghan leans back in his chair and crosses his legs. He's nearly ten years older than me and he still looks younger. I hate him, the bastard. It's probably all the hallucinogenic potions he's taken over the years. They ought to have killed him instead. Sodding rock stars.



"You've managed to keep it quiet." I twist my quill between my fingers. The end is ragged. I still have a bad habit of chewing on it when I'm thinking.

Donaghan watches me. "We fuck sometimes. Neither of us like being celibate, thanks. But that's all it is, and really, mate, you should drop the self-righteous act because I know damn well you're the king of one night stands."

"Of course." I drop the quill and fold my hands together, pressing them to my mouth. "But I don't typically let my one night stands pop over to ask me to brunch the next day."

"Why are you so jealous?" Donaghan leans forward. "Are you interested in him? I mean, more than just fuck-ing?"

My throat tightens. "Don't be ridiculous." I don't look at him. "Draco and I are an awful idea."

"Right." Donaghan doesn't sound convinced.

There's a knock on my door; it opens before I can answer. Emmeline sticks her head in. "Sorry, Harry. I don't mean to interrupt, but..." She bites her bottom lip. "St Mungo's Floo'd--"

My blood chills. No. No, no, no, no.

--They've brought in James--"

Everything slows. I just stare at her. I can see her mouth moving. I don't know what she's saying.

"Harry. *Harry!*" Donaghan has my arm, shaking it.

I blink up at him.

"You have to go to St Mungo's," he says, looking down at me. I nod.

"James," I say, and my voice cracks. Emmeline's staring at me, one hand splayed across her chest.

James. I have to get to James.

I run.



"How is he?" I ask, looking down at my son. He looks so fucking pale against the hospital bed. I smooth his hair back off his forehead. His eyes are closed; his breath comes in ragged, painful gasps.

The Healer takes a moment to answer. Her name is Pye, I think. Or something close enough. She's young, hardly older than James. Her dark hair is pulled back at the nape of her neck. "His broom gave out fairly high up. There's trauma to his head and spine. The bones can be regrown overnight, but it's the possible damage to

the nervous system that I'm concerned for." She touches my arm. "We'll need your permission to use a few potions on him. They're dangerous and there could be negative side affects."

"Such as?" I look up at her.

Pye hesitates. "One has been known to affect the neuromagical centre of the brain. His ability to perform magic could be compromised."

"You mean he could end up a Squib."

A pause. "Yes."

I curl my fingers around James's. "And if I say no?"

"That could affect his mobility." She hesitates. "He could end up paralysed, Mr Potter."

Brilliant. I stroke my thumb over the back of James's hand. After a moment, I sigh. "I'll sign whatever you need me to sign."

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

I can hear the click of her heels against the granite floor as she walks off. I lift James's hand, kiss it.

I'm sorry. I'm so damn sorry.



Al comes first, then Lily. Her brother called her back from Brighton. They sit on either side of me in James's room, watching him. Al is pale behind his glasses. He holds himself stiffly, trying not to show how upset he is. Lily has it easier; she cries on my shoulder.

James sleeps.

It takes Ginny a few more hours. She and Viktor have been in Kyoto. Luna had to track them down.

"How did it happen?" she asks, her arms wrapped around Al and Lils. I've given her my chair. I want a cigarette. I don't dare light up in hospital. Viktor paces back and forth between the chairs and the door. It's driving me mad, but I can't tell him to stop. He's just as upset as we are.

"The charms on his broom gave way during the tryout." I lean against the wall, staring at James. He's still pale, even his freckles. "He fell before anyone could catch him."

Ginny closes her eyes. It's every Quidditch player's nightmare. She'd come close to it a time or two herself when she was playing with the Harpies. That's one of the reasons she'd finally quit. The *Prophet* was safer. The kids didn't worry so much. *I* didn't worry so much.

"I told him he needed a new broom," Viktor says. He tugs at his hair, pulling it down over his eyes. "He said it was his lucky charm."

"Not so lucky now." I rub my hand over my mouth. The potions haven't taken effect yet. The Healers have been in and out all afternoon.

Ginny stands up, walks over to James's bed. I follow her. "He'll be all right," I say softly.

"I know," she says. I'm not certain either of us believe each other.

We watch our son.



Luna brings me the note.

I know it's from Draco the moment I see my name scrawled across the envelope. I almost throw it away, but Luna watches me with steady eyes.

"See what he says."

It's no use arguing with her. I tear the envelope open. A small note falls out.

*Donaghan told me about your son. I'm sorry.  
D.*

That's all. I toss it towards Luna. It drops to the floor. "He's sorry for me," I say bitterly. "As if that will change this all."

Ron watches from across the room. He walks over, picks up the note and reads it. He looks at me. "This is from Malfoy."

I turn away. "He can sod off."

I know that's a lie.



Ron sits down next to me, hands me a tea in a paper cup.

I'm in the courtyard of the hospital, a cigarette in hand. I need the nicotine to steady my nerves, and I can't sit there another moment watching my son breathe. I wonder if that makes me a bad father.

"Malfoy?" Ron asks finally.

"Yeah." I turn the cup in my hands. It warms my palms. "What about him?" I take another drag off my cigarette and blow the smoke into the bare branches above me. If Pye saw me now, I'm certain I'd get a lecture.

Ron leans forward on the bench, his legs spread wide, his elbows on his knees. He takes the lid off his cup and blows across the tea before taking a sip. "Luna says you went out the other night."

"Might have done." I lift the tea to my mouth. It's strong and black. Not my preference. It doesn't matter. "And?"

"Harry." Ron looks at me. "Come on, mate."

I flick ash off the end of my cigarette. It drifts between my legs, settles next to my trainer. I scrape at it with my heel, smearing it across the pavement. I wonder how many other parents have sat here, waiting to see if they've destroyed their child's life. I sigh.

"We slept together." I tip the tea, pour a bit on the ground. It mixes with the ash, running off into the dirt beneath the bench. "And then I found out that he'd been sleeping with someone else too." I drag the toe of my trainer across the thin line of mud. "Donaghan, to be precise."

Ron doesn't say anything for a minute. "This bothers you?" He takes the cigarette from me and inhales before handing it back. Hermione'll have kittens. She hates it when he smokes. He coughs and wipes the back of his hand across his mouth.

"Pussy."

He flips two fingers at me. "Answer the damn question."

I watch a pigeon hop along the path. It's fat and grey and in search of whatever food some stupid human's discarded. I fucking hate pigeons. They're rats with wings. "Yeah," I say softly. "It bothers me." I look up at Ron. "That sort of thing's never bothered me before."

"I know." Ron drinks his tea.

"That's not good."

Ron glances over at me. "I know."

"He's a shit." I drop my cigarette to the pavement. I watch it smoke for a moment, tiny tendrils of grey that curl between my thighs. I slam my heel on it, grinding hard.

"I know that too," Ron says quietly.

A door opens behind us.

"Harry." Hermione's voice is tight and high. "You'd best come. He's awake."

I don't wait for Ron to follow.



James is still groggy when Pye arrives just after Ron and I.

She peers in his eyes, runs a wand over his torso. She *hmmms* a lot.

"Is he all right?" Ginny asks. It's the question we've all been thinking.

Pye nods. "Physically, yes. He's well on his way to mending."

"And his magic?" I step closer to James's bed. I'll never forgive myself if my boy can't fly again.

"Let's see." She hands James her wand. He nearly drops it at first. "Might be a bit buggier on you than your own, but see if you can cast a Levitating Charm."

"That's first year shite," Al protests, and his mother turns a sharp glare on him. "Well, it is."

Ginny slides her arm around our youngest son. "Hush."

James holds the wand awkwardly. "Arm hurts a bit," he says, his voice raspy.

"It will for a few days." Pye makes a note in his chart. "I'll up your pain potion." She drops a scrap of parchment on his lap. "See if you can make that fly."

"Right." James curls his fingers around the hilt. He licks his bottom lip; the wand dips down over the parchment. Swish and flick. Swish and flick. "Wing--" He breaks off into a cough that wracks his body. "Shit."

Pye scrawls something else. "Take it slow."

Swish and flick. "Wingardium Leviosa!" The parchment shudders, then slowly, jerkily lifts a few inches. It hovers for just a second, then drops back down to James's lap. "Fuck," he says in frustration, then blushes and glances at Pye. "Sorry."

She laughs. "I've heard worse." Her quill scratches against the chart; she closes it and hangs it on the bedframe again. "I think your magic's safe," she says with a smile. "You'll be back on a broom in no time."

A cheer echoes through the room. James grins and falls back against the pillows.

Relief floods me.



Teddy comes by with half a pizza smuggled beneath his robe.

"Uncle Harry," he says and I look up from my paperwork. Ron's brought it over for me so that I can stay with James instead of going back in to the office. I've co-opted a table from an office down the hall and my files are spread across it.

"Teddy." I look over at my son. James sits up, wincing. The hopeful look on his face makes me twinge for him.

"Hey," he says to James, and James gives him a half-smile. "Told you to grip with your knees."

James snorts. "Arse." His eyes search Teddy's face.

"Victoire wanted to come, but they sent her to Sicily today. She Floo'd this over instead." Teddy hands James a slice of pizza and sits on the edge of the bed. "Would have brought beer, but I thought they might catch on to that."

James falls silent for a moment. He hides it by biting into the pizza.

"I've missed you," Teddy says quietly. "The flat's not the same without you around. Joscey's a right terror. Bitch ate my boot."

My son glances at me; I gather my papers and stand. "I should Floo these over."

Luna's sitting cross-legged in the corridor, a book in one hand, when I step out. I raise an eyebrow. She smiles at me serenely. "I saw Teddy going in and thought I'd give them a moment."

I hold up my papers. "Me too." I sit down next to her. "It's probably a bad idea. Teddy's never going to leave Victoire." I glance towards James's door. It's half-open; I can see Teddy sitting on the bed still.

"No." Luna tucks her hair behind one ear and sets her book down. Today's earrings are orange and green fish. With wings. "James knows that though."

"I hate to see him hurt."

"Of course you do," she says. "You're his father. It's a biological imperative. But the fact of the matter is that James is a smart boy. He knows how he feels and he knows how Teddy feels about Victoire. He's just Gryffindor enough to take the risk of being hurt." She looks at me. "I think you stopped doing that a long time ago, Harry."

I lean back against the wall. "I'm not twenty."

"Or twenty-two," she agrees.

I turn my head. "What are you saying?"

She pats my leg and picks her book up again. "You know exactly what I'm saying, Harry."

I hate it when she's right.



Photo by ewanmcdowall

# SIX

**J**ames comes home on Christmas Day.

He's tired still and on a nearly overwhelming regimen of potions for the next week. But his bones have healed and his magic seems stable, Pye says, so she releases him under my care when he says he wants to stay at my flat.

"No offence, Mum," James had said with a small laugh and a wince, "but I'd rather not be a third wheel for you and Viktor right now."

Ginny'd kissed his forehead. "As if you could be." She'd mocked-frowned at him. "You'd best expect me every day."

We'd all tumbled through the Floo, Viktor and I both holding onto James. Molly and Arthur had been waiting for us, with all the rest of the Weasley clan--children and wives included. I've no damn idea how the whole lot of us fit in my sitting room, but we managed.

Presents were opened and food was eaten, and by evening people had begun to filter away, family by family.

James is curled up on the sofa to sleep; Luna's sitting with him, lost in a book. Lily and Al have disappeared into the spare room to try out their latest presents from George. Muffled explosions keep coming from that end of the flat. I try not to be overly concerned. Limbs are regrowable, after all.



I'm in the kitchen with Hermione, scraping plates and setting dishes to wash when Ron comes in, a long, narrow package in one hand, empty pint glasses in the other.

"Harry?"

I drop a plate into the sink, barely missing having my knuckles scrubbed by the dish brush. "Yeah?"

Ron tosses the package at me. "This rolled under one of the chairs. It's got your name and James's on it."

I frown and reach for it. The brown paper's crisp beneath my fingers. I flip over the tag hanging off the twine. The handwriting's Draco's. I hesitate.

"Open it, Harry," Hermione says. She dries her hands on a tea towel and comes over the table, curious.

I unwrap it slowly, my heart thudding, spreading the paper across the table. It's a broom, sleek and smooth and beautiful, with a chestnut handle that's polished to a warm gleam.

"Wow," Ron murmurs. He touches it gently. "That's some beauty. Do you think it's cursed?"

I roll the broom to one side. The name of the model's on the handle, etched in gold. *The Potter*. "No," I say, my mouth twisting in a small smile. "It's not."

"Who's it from?" Ron runs a hand over the bristles. "This isn't a cheap broom." He sounds envious. I don't blame him.

"There's a note." Hermione reaches beneath the broom and pulls out an envelope. I recognise the heavy cream stationery. I take it from her and open it.

Ron raises an eyebrow. "Well?"

I hand the note to him. He skims it.

"Malfoy?"

I nod. I take the note back and stare down at it. The broom was for James, Draco had written, with the hope that it would last longer and fly better than the obviously ineptly crafted shite that had sent him plummeting. For me, however, he had a request. I could feel free to ignore it if I wanted, but he needed to see me, to talk to me. Could I come to tea at half five today if I could drag myself from the Weasley menagerie that he assumed would encircle me? If not, he'd know not to ask again.

There was no signature. Only an *I miss you* crossed out at the bottom.

I look at the clock. It's quarter after seven. I fold the note carefully.

"Why are you still here?" The quiet question comes from Ron. I look up at him, startled. Ron watches me steadily. His cheeks flush. "Look, I know I'm not Malfoy's greatest supporter, but..." He trails off for a moment, then sighs. "You should go. At least try to talk to him."

"You want me to go see Draco." I'm back in surreality again. "Is it Backwards Day and no one told me?"

Ron runs a hand through his hair, pushing it back. "He misses you, Harry. That fucking means something from the fucking ferret."

I look over at Hermione. She shrugs. "I think Ron's right." Her arms are crossed over her chest; she twists a finger in the sleeve of her jumper. "You're obsessed with him and that's either good or it's bad, but I don't think any of us know which it is. Even you." She catches her bottom lip between her teeth. "Maybe he's the worst thing in the world for you, but what if he's not? Giving whatever this is a chance just to see won't bring on the apocalypse."

"We think," Ron adds, serious.

I turn the note over in my hands.

I Apparate.



A Draco twenty years younger opens the door. I'm taken aback for a moment. The boy looks me up and down.

"Either you're Albus Severus's father," he says after a moment. "Or he's gone messing about with a Time-turner like a fool." The voice is different, but Christ he's the spitting image of his dad. "I'm going to assume the former. In which case I can tell you that your son's an utter twat. If it's the latter, well, *you're* an utter twat, and no, I'm not breaking it off with her."

A small smile twists my lips. "Scorpius, I assume."

"Yes." He holds open the door. "You're late. Tea's been done over an hour now. Any left in the pot will be tepid. Come in. Father's in the sitting room."

I step into the foyer. It's different in the light. The walls are a warm yellow above the walnut wainscoting. Paintings line the wall as I'd thought. I'm no expert in art by any means--hanging in the guest bath at home is a masterpiece of dogs playing poker--but even I can tell these paintings are expensive. I glance at one landscape as I pass. I can see the leaves trembling on the branches in a gust of imaginary wind.

Music is playing as I enter the sitting room. Draco sits at a piano bench, a wineglass on the piano next to him.

"I didn't know you played," I say after a moment.

Draco turns on the bench. "I don't." The keys still dip; the music continues. He picks up his wineglass and stands. He walks over to the bay window and stares out onto the street. Snow's begun to fall again, lightly. "What do you want?"

"What are you doing New Year's?" I step towards him. His eyes flick over to me. He takes a sip of wine.

"That's a ridiculous question."

I move closer. "It's not. So. What are you doing New Year's Eve?"

Draco twists his glass between his fingers. Lamplight catches it; the dark wine gleams. "I hadn't thought that far." He doesn't look at me, but he wants to. I can tell.

I take the glass from him and sip the wine. It's good. Very good. "Then you're spending it with me." I set the wine aside. He turns towards me, a question in his eyes.

"Am I?"

I nod. My fingertips brush his jaw. "Preferably in bed at midnight."

"You're a shit," Draco says. He doesn't pull away. "And as long as you're here, let me just say that Donaghan and I--"

I look away. "I know. He tried to explain." I lick my bottom lip. It's chapped. Dry. "I was just really sodding angry--"

"You were jealous." Draco splays his hands on my chest. I half expect him to push me away. He doesn't. "And idiotic. And completely irrational. Not that anyone should expect anything different from you, God knows--"

"All *right*." Christ, he can be exasperating. "Point made."

Draco sniffs, still annoyed. "I didn't owe you anything. You and I weren't in a relationship. Neither were Donaghan and I but that's beside the point."

My breath catches. "And now?" I settle my hands on his hips. I don't want him to move, to walk away.

"I..." He looks away. "Harry." The lamplight shadows his face.

"I have no fucking idea where this might go," I murmur. "I just think I want to give it a chance."

His fingers twist in my jumper. "It could end badly. *Very* badly. I might toss your lifeless body in the Thames one day."

"I'm willing to take that chance." I turn his face back to look at me. I can see his answer in his eyes. "The sex is really, really good. You know it is. My cock. Your arse..."

Draco laughs softly. He slides his arms around my neck. "Stupid Gryffin--"

I kiss him, certain that wherever this ends, it's going to be one hell of a journey.

I think I'm finally ready for it.

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