

## Knowledge of Self (Determination)

By tout a coup

### Summary

Post-HBP. Draco, now a Death Eater, is captured by the Order of the Phoenix and Harry Potter volunteers to look after him. War escalates as Draco is forced to come to grips with his captors, his circumstances, and himself. H/D.

### History and Story Information

"**Knowledge of Self (Determination)**" sits in the [book](#) category within the [Harry Potter](#) fandom. It was archived on **2008-06-20**, last updated on **2008-06-23** and has been visited **7427** times. It has [20](#) listed reviews, **18** chapters and a total of **84905** words.

Genre: Drama

Listed Characters: None

Average Vote: ★★★★★

### Disclaimer

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### WARNING

This story is rated X [V,S]

### Author's Notes

Beta'd by the incomparable Annie. The title of this story comes from a Black Star song. The story is finished but I'll be uploading it as I code it for this site...I'm too dumb to get my Word docs to upload directly. So it might take a couple of days, but fear not. Also, this was finished literally one day before Deathly Hallows came out, so it's essentially my (much slashier) idea of what might've happened that last year.

## CHAPTER ONE:

**In which the plot is set up and nothing else, mostly.**

Draco held his breath. He'd been sitting in this room by himself for quite a while. He expected his punishment would come soon enough. He could see the rattling, rotting Dementor breath as it closed in on him...

He exhaled. No, he refused to think about that. He'd made his choices. So be it.

He'd surveyed the room several times already. It was barren. It was a small room, perhaps even a vacated broom closet. Like the rest of Hogwarts, its walls were grey stone -- though these were not adorned by friendly portraits or ancient tapestries. He'd been alone in the room for a considerable amount of time, sitting in an uncomfortable straight-back chair. He knew this was on purpose. Whatever they claimed, the Order of the Phoenix were just as inhumane as anyone.

He closed his eyes, needing to block out the grey walls that seemed to accuse him with their silence. How had it come to this?

The attack had been a complete success. The Death Eaters were shifting into larger scale attacks. They'd raided the Muggle ministry. They'd killed the Prime Minister. Ha, he'd thought, let's see the Ministry of Magic cover *that* up! Everything had gone to plan until the very end. He'd heard popping noises all around him; the Death Eaters Disapparating back to headquarters, when he'd heard a slightly different pop. There is a barely detectable difference between the noise made by an Apparition and that made by a Disapparition. Draco had known something was out of place. He'd turned, and there had stood his former Defense teacher, the werewolf. He'd barely had time to react before he'd been Stunned.

He'd awoken at Hogwarts, in the very chair in which he was seated at the moment. Professor McGonagall had loomed over him, wand pointed at his chest as she glared at him with utmost loathing. It had felt strange, he remembered, to realize that she no longer regarded him as an irksome student; to her, he was now a Death Eater. An enemy. She'd left the room, swiftly, as though she couldn't stand the sight of him, and he'd been left to his own devices. He was without a wand, he'd been unsurprised to find, and the emergency poison that he'd been provided for just this sort of situation was gone as well.

The door opened. His heart leapt to his throat, but he swallowed several times, determined to remain calm. A bald black man who Draco thought he'd seen before entered the room, along with a grim-looking woman he'd never encountered. They stopped on either side of him, grabbing his arms, and led him out of the room.

They walked through the winding corridors of Hogwarts, Draco not putting up much resistance. He looked around him. It was eerie to see the school so empty. There were no students at Hogwarts; to his knowledge, it had closed after the raid he himself had perpetrated on the school a few short months ago. Most parents hadn't wanted their children to return with Dumbledore gone and the school's protection so obviously breached. Draco was puzzled as to why he'd been brought here at all. He'd been in Muggle London, and the rumor was that London was the location of the Order of the Phoenix headquarters.

Still, when he entered the Great Hall, there was no mistaking them. He was in the lion's den.

They all looked on him with disgust. There were the Weasleys, their flaming hair visible a mile away; his old professors, all, like McGonagall, no longer acknowledging him as a student of theirs; several people he recognized from the Hogwarts raid, and some he didn't; the half-giant Hagrid; the Mudblood Granger; and there, almost invisible, was Harry Potter.

Potter, for all his heroics and attention-garnering at school, looked very out of place here. The rest were drawn up and important, while he was hunched over a table, his black mop of hair covering his face. He looked as though he would rather be anywhere else.

Draco was led to a chair, identical to the one he'd sat in for at least two hours in the other room. The guards on either side of him forced him down, and he found he was magically bound. The silence loomed. He looked around again, his eyes resting on Potter, who still hadn't looked up. Puzzled, he watched him for a moment before McGonagall

cleared her throat.

"As you all probably know, this is Draco Malfoy. We caught him--" she said *him* as though she'd have rather said *it*, "during the attack on Parliament."

Draco felt his stomach begin to knot.

She continued, relentless. "Intelligence informs us that he has been a Death Eater for more than a year."

At this, he smiled grimly. Intelligence, what bollocks. Their only intelligence had been Snape. They were lost and doomed and too stubborn to admit it.

"He is largely responsible for the attack in which," she paused, seeming to collect herself, "Dumbledore was killed."

Draco could feel the anger in the room heighten. Dumbledore, their fucking savior.

McGonagall turned to the others. "How should we proceed?"

The knot in his stomach tightened, and a surge of anger flooded his mind. The complete self-righteousness...they were going to *prosecute* him! He screwed his eyes shut, willing back tears of frustration. Just because they were Dumbledore's stupid secret society they thought they owned the world.

"Kiss," said Hagrid gruffly. "e deserves it."

Draco fought to keep the sneer off his face. Dumbledore had always been special to the half-giant.

"He's only a child!" exclaimed a fat woman who Draco identified as Ron Weasley's mother. The indignity of being defended by a Weasley made him burn with shame, but all the same, he'd take pity over a Dementor's Kiss.

McGonagall looked solemn. "I am afraid not, Molly. Malfoy came of age in June; he can be tried as an adult."

Molly Weasley looked conflicted and glanced at her youngest son. Draco could tell she thought the idea of anyone the same age receiving a Dementor's Kiss was appalling.

"Life in Azkaban, then," piped up a gangly, scruffy-looking man, leering. "Then 'e can see 'is *daddy*."

Draco swallowed the bile that threatened to rise in his throat as the others nodded.

McGonagall pressed her lips together, looking grim. "Very well." The guards were reaching for him again when he heard a sound from across the room.

"Wait."

Draco blinked. It was Potter. The others looked just as shocked as he was.

Potter swallowed. "He went to school with us, for Merlin's sake!"

McGonagall regarded him sternly. "Now is not the time for pity, Potter."

But Potter was not deterred. "He took the Mark before he was of age." Seeing the unimpressed expressions around him, he continued, "The raid on Hogwarts—he couldn't do it. Said he had to or Voldemort'd kill him, but he still couldn't. Snape had to do it for him, 'coz he couldn't."

A chill went through the room at the mention of Snape. Draco was puzzled as to how Potter knew any of this. It had only been him and Dumbledore on the tower, hadn't it...?

McGonagall considered this for a moment. "You say he said he had to?"

Potter nodded. "Yeah, he said Voldemort had threatened to kill his family if he didn't do what he'd been asked."

The group absorbed this new information. *How did Potter know this?*

"What do you propose we do then, Mr. Potter?" McGonagall said, barely concealing her annoyance.

Potter looked startled to be put on the spot. He obviously hadn't thought that far ahead. "I..." Draco slouched as much as his magical bindings would allow. *I'm dead*, he thought miserably. However, to have the 'Chosen One' sticking up for you in front of the Order of the Phoenix...he had to admit his chances were significantly higher.

"I think we should keep him at Hogwarts."

Draco's jaw dropped, as did many others in the room. Keep him at *Hogwarts*? That was ridiculous!

"Excuse me?" sputtered McGonagall.

Potter seemed to be gaining confidence. "Keep him here. He can provide information under Veritaserum whenever we need him."

Draco didn't know much about the inner workings of the Death Eaters, being one of the newest among them, but he was damned if he'd tell them.

"I--I'll watch him. So he won't get in the way or try to escape or anything."

McGonagall turned to him for the first time since the procession had begun. "Will you cooperate, Malfoy?" she asked reluctantly.

Draco's survival instincts kicked in -- sod loyalty. "Yes," he replied immediately.

He felt pressure on his arms and realized the two guards were pulling him out of the chair. He got up, begrudgingly, and let himself be led out of the Great Hall.

Draco was led through another identical corridor into a small room. Following the two who he'd come to think of as his entourage were McGonagall, Professor Slughorn, and Mad-Eye Moody. Draco winced at the sight of this last addition; he still remembered a painful and humiliating experience as a ferret in fourth year.

Without a word, Slughorn produced a vial from his robes. Its thin, colorless consistency told Draco that it was probably Veritaserum. He swallowed. What if, once they questioned him, they decided to throw him in Azkaban anyway? What if he told them something that would get all the Death Eaters killed? What if it wasn't Veritaserum at all, but poison instead? Gods, what would his father do?

McGonagall looked at him pointedly and he slumped forward slightly to signal his resignation. Looking resolutely at the wall with as much pride as he could muster, he felt a callused hand on his jaw and opened his mouth obediently. Cool liquid cascaded down his throat. He'd never taken Veritaserum before--would he be able to control his speech? Would he even be conscious?

A warm, calm feeling of detachment overtook him. He was reminded of the Imperius Curse.

"What is your name?"

"Draco Lucius Malfoy," he heard himself say. He had no control over what he said, but it didn't really bother him. He felt serene, and happier than he had in a long time.

"Are you a Death Eater?"

"Yes."

"Did you take the Mark of your own accord?"

"No. Sort of."

"Sort of?"

"I'd always wanted to. To be like my father. But it wasn't my choice... the Dark Lord threatened me, he said he'd hurt my mother." Under any other circumstances he would have been outraged at the fact that they were making him admit things like this. All he could bring himself to do, however, was note somewhere in the back of his mind that perhaps he should be angry.

"Have you ever cast an Unforgivable Curse?"

"Yes."

"Which?"

"Imperius on the Three Broomsticks barmaid. Cruciatus on a few Muggles."

"Never the Killing Curse?"

"No." The interrogators exchanged significant glances.

"Where are the Death Eater headquarters?"

"Wales. I don't know where."

"What are you planning?"

"I don't know the details--" his serenity broke momentarily as he realized he might not have enough information to keep him out of Azkaban--"but there is an attack on the Ministry of Magic planned."

At this, Moody started. "When?"

"Within a few months, I think."

"How?"

"There are spies working for us in the Ministry."

"Who?" They were becoming increasingly excited.

"Jeffrey Keane. Theodore Ogden."

They looked at each other. Apparently he'd struck gold.

"What did the plan entail, exactly?"

"I don't know." Didn't they *listen*? He'd already said he didn't know. Honestly, it wasn't as if he could lie to them.

And so it continued for another hour. The Order asked stupid and often repetitive questions, and Draco was forced to respond, coming out of his potion-induced haze periodically to worry alternately over whether he'd said enough to stay out of prison and whether he'd said too much to be accepted back into the fold. Because sooner or later, he told himself, he'd get out of here.

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After Draco's interrogation, Moody and McGonagall produced what looked suspiciously like a dog collar.

"This disables you from leaving Hogwarts grounds."

Well, *obviously*. He hated the way she talked down to him.

She fastened the device around his neck and he touched it gingerly. He could feel it buzzing with magic. It wasn't painful, but still made for a fair amount of discomfort. He didn't look forward to sleeping with this apparatus. Moreover, to make him wear a *collar* was a deliberate shot at his already wounded dignity, he was sure.

He was then taken to the library. "You are Potter's charge, as you know," said McGonagall with an expression of distaste. "You will wait here for him." He ventured a sneer at her retreating back before taking a seat at a table and letting out a sigh.

Potter. What was he *thinking*? So he'd saved Draco from Azkaban--now what? Potter surely couldn't be so devoid of a life that he was prepared to spend his time making sure Draco didn't do anything evil or Death Eater-y. Draco suspected he'd be left to his own devices more often than not. This suited him perfectly.

The bigger question was why Potter had stuck up for him in the first place. It was common knowledge that Potter loved saving people (and the fanfare he received afterward, no doubt) but as The Chosen One and the Dark Lord's biggest annoyance, Draco would assume Potter would advocate the swift administration of justice in this case.

Potter also seemed to feel sorry for him. Almost unconsciously, Draco catalogued this into his mind--he might be able to take advantage of it later.

He heard Potter and his sidekicks approaching a few moments before they reached the door of the library and entered. Draco noted that, whereas usually Potter would have stood in the middle between Granger and Weasley, he was now standing to one side. His two cronies seemed to be very friendly. Draco smirked. They deserved each other.

All three became somber when they spotted Draco glaring at them from the table. They sat down across from him and an awkward silence ensued. Draco refused to break the ice; he'd been talking for over an hour. Besides, the less he spoke, the less likely he was to end up on the receiving end of Weasley's violence or Granger's pontification. It seemed the threesome was also disinclined to say anything. Knowing them, they were probably waiting for Draco to grovel at Potter's feet for saving him from certain doom.

Finally, Potter relented. "Hello, Malfoy."

Draco said nothing. Potter licked his lips and continued. "Erm...well, I'm to watch you to keep you from posing a danger to the Order. I've stuff to be doing sometimes, so then Hermione or Ron might take over, or someone else. The point is, you'll always be around if we need a Death Eater perspective on something or strategy advice."

Draco was tempted to point out that it was hardly advice if it was forcefully taken.

"As for your quarters...d'you want to sleep in Slytherin?"

A sneer crawled over Draco's features. Bloody Potter thought he was doing Draco a favor, being so *nice*. He could take his self-righteous bollocks and shove it.

"Sure," drawled Draco, uninterested, "Whatever."

The three seemed shocked to hear Draco speak. All he'd said in their presence so far was one single 'yes.'

Potter continued, faltering. "Well. I guess that's...that, then. Have you got any questions?"

Draco regarded him bluntly. "When do I eat?"

Potter blinked a few times. "There's three meals a day served in the Great Hall, just like at school."

To hear Potter mention school made Draco inexplicably sad. It seemed like a lifetime ago that he'd had breakfast in the Great Hall. Heaving a sigh, he shrugged to signal that he had no more questions.

There was a beat before Granger spoke. "Aren't you going to thank him?" she asked irritably.

Draco was silent. Granger sniffed haughtily. He spoke, tightly. "Why should I?"

Weasley fixed him with a glare. "Without him, you'd be in prison."

Draco scowled. "And what do you call this?" Deciding he'd had enough of the Golden Trio, he got up and left them to distribute the righteous indignation among themselves.

He let his feet carry him to the Slytherin dormitories, finding that the wall slid open without any password now. He stepped into the common room and the swooping sadness from the library overcame him again. The common room was bare. Not literally; all the Slytherin banners and awards were still hanging proudly; but there were no students. Draco had never felt so alone. He entered the familiar door on the left and went into his familiar room. He approached a bed and found several sets of clothes. He changed quickly, feeling as though someone was watching him, and slept.

He awoke several hours later with a pang in his stomach that told him he'd missed dinner. His neck was sore as well. He yanked on the collar in frustration, but to no avail--it was locked magically. If only he could get his hands on a wand, he could get the damn thing off...

Then again, if he had a wand, he could likely get out of this entire situation.

Deep in the dungeons without a watch, he had no idea what time it was or for how long he'd slept. He pulled on a pair of trousers and a shirt and made his way back into the common room. The fire in the fireplace was crackling happily and the torches on the walls were lit, which meant it was probably dark out. His stomach growled. He'd have to wait until breakfast to eat something.

"Malfoy."

He turned his head to see Potter sitting in a chair. He looked strange, surrounded by Slytherin colors. Green and silver suited him, Draco thought absently.

"Potter," he replied, approaching him.

Potter stood up and held out a package. "I brought you some food. You missed dinner."

Draco took the parcel from him. It was warm, and his stomach growled again in anticipation. He paused and looked at Potter, who looked at him. "Thanks," he said begrudgingly.

Potter gave a lopsided smile. Knowing Potter would probably follow, Draco walked to a chair and pulled up one of the small tables usually used for homework or chess. He opened the package and grimaced distastefully. Shepherd's pie. He began to eat it anyway.

As expected, Potter pulled up a chair across the table from him. Draco could feel him watching him as he ate. If Potter wasn't going to say anything, Draco felt he might as well voice the question that had been bothering him.

"How did you know I couldn't do it?"

Potter started. "Sorry?"

"In the tower. With Dumbledore. How'd you know about that?"

"Oh. Er...I was there. Hiding."

Draco accepted this, knowing he probably wouldn't garner much else. The thought that Potter had been there to witness his cowardice was embarrassing. He'd probably told all his friends and everything. Draco shook his head. But what did that matter now? Dumbledore had ultimately been killed anyway and Potter and his stupid friends were part

of a life Draco was no longer living.

He finished his shepherd's pie and looked up at Potter, who was staring off into space, thinking about something. Or nothing, more likely.

"Why did you do it?"

Potter started again, almost comically. "What?"

"Why'd you defend me?"

Potter flushed. "...it wasn't right. You're just a kid."

"I'm older than you are, Potter."

Potter looked away. "That's different."

Draco gritted his teeth. Trust Potter to think that everything about him was *different* and *special*. "And how's that?" he asked, failing to keep the anger out of his voice.

Potter looked back at him and paused before reaching out towards him. Draco froze, wary and bewildered. Potter touched the collar and smirked. "Not subtle, are they?"

Draco had no answer to that. Potter sighed, pulling himself to his feet. "See you tomorrow, Malfoy. I'd tell you to come to breakfast, but, knowing you, you wouldn't listen."

"You don't know anything about me," Draco shot back, incensed.

Potter held his gaze calmly. "Sure I do. I know lots of things about you."

Draco sneered. "Like what, Potter?"

"Well, your birthday's after Ron's but before mine, you get good marks, but not as good as Hermione's, you're a decent Seeker but," he smirked, "nothing special, you dated Pansy Parkinson at least once in the past, your best subject is Potions, you love having power over other people, your family's really rich and you've got your own manor, you used to have a house elf named Dobby, and you didn't really want to be a Death Eater at all."

And without another word, he exited the common room, leaving Draco to wonder exactly what had just happened.

After his long nap, Draco knew there was no chance of falling back asleep, so he stayed up and fumed.

Potter had a lot of nerve, going off like that about what an expert he was on Draco. What bothered him the most was that Potter had been right--about pretty much everything.

Draco scowled in frustration as he tried to construct a comeback, despite the fact that he knew he'd missed his chance. It wasn't as though Potter was some big enigma. Draco knew him back and front. He *loved* attention... well, no, he mostly just got attention whether he wanted it or not. He loved heroics, though, that was for sure. He was unfathomably and unjustly lucky. He was an orphan, everyone knew that. Had he grown up in an orphanage? Rumor was he'd grown up Muggle--but with whom? He was a phenomenal Quidditch player; Draco could shelf his pride enough to admit that, though he doubted he'd ever say it to Potter's face. What else did Draco know about him...?

Draco realized he didn't know much about Harry Potter at all.



## CHAPTER TWO:

In which I wrote this chapter too long ago to remember what it's about while writing this little summary.

After some hours of pondering, the torches extinguished themselves, alerting Draco that it was morning. Determined to spite Potter, Draco left the common room and headed to the Great Hall for breakfast.

Walking the corridors alone was very unnerving. This was not aided by the close watch the portraits seemed to keep on him--presumably under McGonagall's orders.

The occupants of the Great Hall were basically split into two groups: a larger group of adults, conducting many small conversations; and the group of kids to the side--much smaller, yet still managing to make much more noise. Draco winced. *Gryffindors*.

And they were. There was Potter, Granger, Weasley, and all of Weasley's assorted siblings, of which there were many.

Draco stood at the entrance, hesitant. Why the hell did he have to come here for meals? Couldn't a kitchen elf deliver food to his room and save him from this awful parody of social anxiety? Was he actually expected to *sit* with them? He was the *enemy*, for fuck's sake!

"Malfoy."

Draco looked up and Potter motioned him over. Draco sat down, warily, next to Potter, very aware that they were all staring at him with utmost loathing. He swallowed and, doing his best to sound aloof, asked, "May I read the paper?"

A *Daily Prophet* was shoved in his direction.

He had to struggle not to smile when he saw the headline.

PRIME MINISTER KILLED IN DEATH EATER ATTACK ON PARLIAMENT

As he read, he bit back the glee threatening to show itself. He assumed it would be a bad idea to celebrate the Death Eater victory in the middle of Order of the Phoenix headquarters, even though they undoubtedly hoped he would just so they could antagonize him for it.

"...spoiled heir Draco Malfoy went missing in the scuffle, and this reporter says good riddance." He grinned.

"Think it's funny, do you?" growled Weasley, predictably.

"I'm mentioned," he replied, not feigning any apologetic tone. "Seems they don't like me much..."

"Who does?" muttered the girl Weasley. Draco gritted his teeth and ignored her. It wouldn't do to insult her in front of her family of burly, hot-tempered brothers.

Draco spent the rest of the meal in silence, brooding. He was stuck in Hogwarts with all of his least favorite people, excluding Longbottom (this was a tremendous blessing), and all of his friends were off celebrating the successful attack without him. He wondered if they even cared he was gone.

Draco heard movement around him and noticed people were getting up. He had no idea as to what people actually did here, but everyone seemed to have some sort of purpose in mind as they left the Great Hall in groups.

Draco was left sitting at the table, unconsciously poking at his untouched food. Potter came to stand across from him.

"Right then, come on."

Draco cocked an eyebrow. "Where are we going?"

"Library," said Potter briskly, and he set off. Draco followed, sulking somewhat. He wondered what the library could

possibly have in store.

Pensieves, it turned out. A row of Pensieves was set up near the front of the library. Granger and Weasley were already there, standing very close together, though they sprang apart when Potter entered. Who did they think they were fooling?

Potter turned to Draco. "We're busy for a while, so I guess you can read or something."

Annoyed somewhat by Potter's lack of interest and bored by the thought of staying in the musty library all day, Draco sighed loudly. "Why do I have to *be* here?" he asked, knowing he sounded petty and obnoxious.

Potter fixed him with a glare. "Because you've got to stick with me. If you go roaming the halls mouthing off to the teachers I'll get in trouble."

Draco pursed his lips, but did not argue further.

Potter joined Granger and Weasley in front of the collection of Pensieves and they talked quietly for a moment before approaching one and leaning over it and falling in as if it were routine. Draco wondered if it was.

He looked around the library. Alone again. With nothing to do.

Then again, he could see the thin rope around the restricted section. Grinning, he stepped toward it. However, when he made to lift the rope, he found he couldn't touch it, and his neck began to itch. He struggled for several minutes, reaching uselessly for the rope, becoming more and more frustrated, until finally he gave up. He took a step back, gritting his teeth, and launched himself over the rope.

Ha.

As he took a step towards the shelves of dusty books, however, he felt an invisible hand close around his throat. Gasping, he felt for an invisible body with which to connect the hand, but he realized there wasn't one. It was the collar. He scratched helplessly at his throat, unable to make any sound. The hand pulled him away from the shelf and tossed him back over the rope.

He landed in a heap on the floor, coughing and sputtering. Having caught his breath, he swallowed slowly, regaining his bearings.

This was bloody stupid, he decided, and left the library. Fuming, he walked briskly down the corridor, vaguely aware that he was going somewhere. Mostly, however, he was overcome with anger; his hands were beginning to shake. He couldn't even get in the restricted section! What was he going to do, *read* them to death? How *dare* they treat him like that? All of this... so *pointless*!

The worst was Potter, unsurprisingly. With his bloody righteousness and his false kindness. *I'll be back whenever, Malfoy, so just entertain yourself while I'm gone, oh and you can't leave the library and you can't look at any of the interesting books unless you want to be strangled, so have fun!* Bastard. Potter thought he was so great and generous and altruistic, and everyone else was happy to oblige his delusions. Draco, however, wouldn't soon forget that Harry Potter was a fucking *prick* and nothing more. It suddenly occurred to him that he owed Potter a wizard's debt now. He growled and kicked the wall, which turned out to be an awful idea.

His anger slightly dissipated by the throbbing pain in his foot, Draco was now clear-headed enough to look up and notice he was in a very familiar corridor. The secret room! Draco hadn't been in here since the end of last term. He was not so naïve as to believe the Vanishing Cabinet was still there, but now at least he had a place to stay where he wouldn't be bothered by the ever-meddlesome Order of the Phoenix.

He walked past the concealed door. *I need a place to hide... I need a place to hide... I need a place to hide...*

And there it was. The door. He opened it, and stepped inside. The room was decorated like his bedroom down in the dungeons. Most everything was green and silver, and the bed was identical to the one he'd used for six years at Hogwarts. There was a couch to one side, facing a crackling fireplace.

He allowed himself a small smile. This was nice. He wished he could've gotten a look at some Dark books though...

He jumped about a foot when a bookshelf appeared to his left. His smile grew. Fuck you, McGonagall!

He perused the books for hours, gleefully reading about curses no sane wizard could have thought up and the geniuses who created them. Why, he wondered, couldn't they learn *this* in school? Maybe he'd pay attention to Defense Against the Dark Arts if it weren't just defense all the time... after all, how can you defend yourself against what you don't intimately understand? It was a real shame Draco had been so preoccupied during his lessons in sixth year; Snape had probably been the only decent Defense professor he'd ever have.

Stifling a yawn, Draco shut a particularly graphic old tome, sending up a cloud of dust, and threw it onto the couch. He then launched himself onto the bed, hoping fervently that McGonagall had murdered Potter for losing track of his charge.

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Draco awoke to find a very angry Harry Potter standing over him.

He stretched languidly. "Morning," he said sweetly, enjoying the vein pulsing in Potter's neck.

Potter set his jaw. "I thought I told you," he said through clenched teeth, "to stay in the library."

Draco shrugged. "I didn't want to."

"I don't give a fuck what you want, get up." Draco was startled to hear Potter swear. He'd thought Potter was morally opposed to bad language or some other such Gryffindor rot.

"It's not as if you missed me..." Draco grumbled as he swung his legs over the side of the bed. He noticed that in his haste to sleep he hadn't even removed his shoes.

Potter drew his wand. "Move." Draco gave him a sideways glance. The wand was a bit excessive, really. Draco was unarmed and he wasn't about to attack him like a common *Muggle*.

Nevertheless, he moved. "Where am I going?"

"Great Hall," replied Potter, wand still raised. Honestly, what the hell did he need a bloody wand for?

As soon as they exited the room, Potter put his wand away. Draco could have kicked himself--of course! Potter was worried he'd use the room to hurt him! And what an idiot he was for not having confirmed Potter's worries when he had the chance. As he plodded to the Great Hall, he pondered the many things he could have done with just a thought... *I wish Potter's head would explode... I wish Potter would leave me the hell alone... I really wish I could go back to sleep...* Fucking Potter.

It turned out to be time for breakfast, Draco deduced by the number of ginger heads in the room. Had he really slept for that long? He doubted it; although he supposed it wasn't unrealistic to think that he'd spent somewhere around eight hours reading Dark Arts books. Were his circumstances less dire, Draco might have worried over how well spells to melt someone's intestines held his attention.

Potter sat down amidst the many Weasleys and Draco, sighing, did the same.

"Where was he?" asked Granger.

"Room of Requirement," replied Potter. Draco was slightly taken aback; he didn't know the room had a name, let alone such a silly one.

"What was he doing?" Draco felt a twinge of annoyance at the fact that Granger was talking as though he wasn't even there.

Potter sighed deeply and looked at him. "Sleeping." Draco flashed a grin before reaching for a newspaper.

When they entered the library today, Granger and Weasley were nowhere to be found. Potter was apparently unperturbed by this, and made for a table to sit down. He motioned for Draco to sit across from him, before getting up. He returned moments later with a stack of books, opened one, and began to read.

Draco was again incensed by the fact that Potter had apparently forgotten he was sitting there. "What are you doing?" he asked sweetly, hoping to break Potter from some deep concentration.

"Researching," Potter replied, without looking up.

"Where are Granger and Weasley?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know."

"Nope. After breakfast they headed off somewhere, haven't seen them since."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Potter, how dense are you?"

Potter looked up from the book. "What do you mean?"

"Honestly, your observational skills are quite lacking if you haven't noticed that the two of them--"

"I know."

Draco raised an eyebrow. "I thought you said you didn't know."

"Well..." Potter stuttered, pulling on a loose string on his sleeve, "I mean, it's not my business. If they don't want to tell me, they don't have to."

Draco was struck suddenly by the surrealism of this conversation. Less than twenty-four hours ago, he'd been wishing Potter ill. Not an hour ago, Potter had been threatening him at wandpoint. And now, here they were, calmly discussing Potter's friends' sordid affair.

Draco smirked. "What you need, Potter, is new friends."

Potter raised an eyebrow. "Are you saying you'd be a better candidate?"

Draco shot him a withering look. "In your dreams, Scarhead."

"Good, 'cos I was going to ask if you'd gone insane. We've only hated each other for, what, six and a half years?"

"And whose fault is that?"

"Yours?"

"You started it, Potter."

Potter laughed. "Me! How? You've been nothing but evil since the moment I met you!"

Draco's expression remained stony. "If you'll recall, you were the one who refused my friendship on the train in first year."

Potter opened and closed his mouth several times, making himself vaguely fish-like. "...that's not fair. You'd just insulted the only friend I'd ever made, what was I supposed to do?"

The only friend he'd ever made? Draco made a mental note to ask about that later. "*He* started *that* too. He made fun of my name."

Potter stifled a laugh. "Well...it is a funny name."

"It is not!"

"It's a ridiculous name, admit it."

"It's *not* a ridiculous name! It's majestic, you twat!"

Potter shrugged. "Tomato, tomahto..."

Draco scowled. "Well, it's better than *yours*."

Potter looked affronted. "What's wrong with Harry?"

Draco sniffed haughtily. "It's *common*. At least people will remember me. There's about two million other Harrys for you to get mixed up with."

"People find it fairly easy to remember me," said Potter, gesturing to his forehead.

"Ah," replied Draco, "Good point."

Draco felt strangely disappointed when they lapsed into silence. Potter, who'd been using his finger as a bookmark, opened the book he was reading, then closed it again, and looked at him.

They seemed to share a thought -- what a strange conversation.

### CHAPTER THREE:

In which I introduce the only good character in this story.

**Also, this chapter quotes directly from *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* for a short while...though whether that's really more plagiaristic than the rest of this fic is sort of unclear.**

When Draco entered the Great Hall the next morning for breakfast, Potter, Granger, and Weasley were nowhere in sight. Puzzled, Draco made to leave--after all, if Potter wasn't here, why should he have to be?

As he turned, however, he felt a hand on his arm. He swiveled to find himself face to face with a Weasley. As for which one, he couldn't say. There were so bloody many of them. Draco hated that about them. This one looked quite a bit older than him, and took a lot after Ron (that was another thing Draco hated about them--there were so many of them that in order to differentiate he was forced to refer to them by their given names) in that he was tall and lanky, though less awkward-looking. His face was plagued by more freckles than Draco had thought imaginable and his hair reached past his shoulders, partially covering a fang dangling from one ear.

The most interesting thing about him, though, was that his face appeared to be somewhat deformed. One side was riddled with scars and crevices, and his mouth was lopsided, giving him a constant slight grimace.

Draco raised an eyebrow. "Can I help you?"

The Weasley stuck out his hand. "Bill Weasley."

Draco didn't reply, and the man lowered his hand.

"As you might have noticed, Harry's not around," said Bill Weasley, "So I'm to watch you for a couple days."

"Where's Potter?" asked Draco.

Bill smiled amicably. "Ah, well, can't really say. You'll have to ask him when he gets back."

"And when will that be?"

Bill waved a hand, apparently unconcerned. "A few days, most likely."

"Are his sidekicks with him?"

"What, you mean Ron and Hermione? Expect so, yeah."

Bill Weasley seemed to be an exceptionally laid back fellow. Either that, or mildly retarded.

There was a brief pause, during which Draco waited for Bill to say something. Bill, however, seemed content to stand there grinning like a prat.

Draco sighed. "Are you going to *do* anything?"

Bill shrugged. "What do you usually do?"

Draco shrugged back. "I don't know. Whatever Potter says."

"D'you want to go to the library?" said Bill.

"No," replied Draco. If Bill was going to be nice, it was only fair that Draco be as difficult as possible in return.

"Erm... chess?"

"No."

"Er...how about Quidditch?"

Draco was shocked. He hadn't been on a broom in ages. "Bloody hell, yeah!"

Bill grinned triumphantly. "Well, come on then."

The grounds were sunny and cool, and it struck Draco that he hadn't been outside since his arrival at Hogwarts. Bill produced a broomstick, evidently belonging to the school, judging from its shoddy appearance, and handed it to Draco.

"Aren't you going to come?" queried Draco.

"Erm, well, I'm not much of a flyer, really...that was always more Charlie's thing."

Draco didn't have a clue who Charlie was, but assumed it was another Weasley. Why would someone have so many children? All sporting ghastly red hair? It was truly a mystery to Draco.

"D'you have a Snitch?" he asked.

"Er, hold on a sec." Bill jogged back to the broomshed, disappeared for a moment, then reappeared with something balled in his fist. "Here you go," he said, handing a Snitch to Draco.

Draco threw the Snitch into the air before kicking off, grinning.

The next day, he and Bill went outside once again and sat by the Quidditch pitch. It was a warm, lazy sort of day, and Draco felt it appropriate for him to act accordingly.

"So, Draco..." Bill had a habit of calling him Draco, and otherwise treating him disconcertingly nicely, as if the fact that they were on opposite sides of a war wasn't really anything to bother with. "...are you and Harry friends?"

Draco let out a harsh laugh. "*Friends?*"

"Yeah, friends," said Bill, apparently not realizing the ridiculousness of this notion.

"What would *possibly* lead you to believe that Potter and I are *friends?*" sneered Draco.

Bill shrugged, grinning. "Dunno. Just seemed like maybe you were."

Draco decided that Bill Weasley was a pretty strange guy.

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Potter returned the next day, and Draco was almost sorry to see Bill go. He was so laid back all the time, one couldn't help but relax around him. Now Draco was back to oppressive silence, boredom, and the occasional halting conversation with Potter in the dusty fucking library.

Potter went back to his mysterious books as if nothing had happened. Draco, somewhat annoyed, resolved to bother Potter as much as possible.

"So where've you been? Off saving the world?" he asked.

Potter looked up. "Oh...me and Ron and Hermione had some stuff to do."

"Like what?"

"Just stuff."

"Mhmm... and where are they?"

"Who?"

"Weaselbee and Mudblood."

"Don't call them that."

"Where are they?"

"Who knows. Snogging, probably."

Potter went back to his book. Draco gritted his teeth and tried again.

"What happened to Bill Weasley?"

Potter looked up, more sharply this time. "What?"

"Bill Weasley's face, what happened to it?"

Anger flashed across Potter's face. "You remember that raid on Hogwarts you organized?"

"Yeah..." Draco didn't like where this was going.

"Remember when you said you'd stepped over a body?"

"Yeah." Draco recalled tripping over something warm, unmistakably human, and feeling a bit sick.

"That was Bill."

"Oh."

A pregnant pause ensued, during which Potter went back to his book.

"Is he... all right?"

"Yeah, fine."

Draco had the distinct feeling Potter wasn't telling him everything, but that was nothing new. He rolled his eyes, swallowed his irritation, and wished things weren't quite so boring.

Just then, McGonagall walked into the library, looking stern. Draco almost felt happy for the interruption. Almost.

"Malfoy," she said tersely, "It has come to my attention that you were reading some strictly out-of-bounds material earlier."

Draco couldn't help but snicker. It was a strong reminder of his school days with McGonagall, when she used to search actively for things to chastise him about. Honestly, that had been, what... a week ago? Prejudiced bitch.

He looked at her. "And?"

She made a clucking noise, apparently unimpressed by his gall. "Your quarters will now be in Gryffindor," she continued, "so that Mr. Potter may keep a closer eye on you." She gave Potter a severe look; clearly this was his punishment for losing track of Draco.

"Your things have already been moved," she said as she turned to leave.

"What things?" he inquired sarcastically. She pretended not to have heard him and made her way out of the library.



Draco felt a twinge of annoyance. Great, now he had to *sleep* with Potter as well? In bloody *Gryffindor*? He suspected he might go mad from the color scheme alone.

Potter looked at him. "Our common room's nicer than yours, you'll like it."

Draco scowled. "You'd better be a light sleeper, Potter, because I might not be able to stop myself from smothering you."

Potter dismissed this comment and went back to his reading.

That night, tensions were high in the Gryffindor dormitory.

"What the hell is Malfoy doing here?!" shouted Weasley. "He's a prisoner, he can't sleep in here!"

Potter merely looked at him. "If you'd been in the library, you'd know McGonagall put him here."

A pause. Trouble in paradise, it seemed.

"Why can't I sleep in another dormitory? You've only got about a thousand!" cried Draco indignantly.

Potter turned to him. "McGonagall wants me to keep an eye on you. That's the whole point!"

Draco failed to rein in his anger. "Well she's a stupid bint, how are you going to keep an eye on me while you're sleeping? And what the hell would I do, anyway?! I can't leave the grounds and I don't have a wand -- the most I could do is get lost!"

"I don't like this, Harry," said Weasley, "You should've told McGonagall no!"

"Would you both stop *fucking* yelling at me! Christ, I'm going to sleep!" Potter wrenched his bed hangings shut.

Draco shared a look of utmost loathing with Weasley before they each went to their respective beds.

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"NO!"

Draco snapped awake. What was *that*? Warily, he pulled back the curtains on his bed a bit -- nothing.

"No...please, oh god..."

It was Potter, Draco realized. He got up and padded over to Potter's bed, fully intending to tell him to shut the hell up, and pulled back the curtains.

"ARGH!" yelled Potter. "Hurts..." Potter was having a nightmare. Sweat was beading on his forehead and his face was contorted in what looked to be immense pain. He pressed a palm to his scar. "Hurts, shit, no!..."

Draco's curiosity was piqued. *Legilimency*, his sleep-deprived brain supplied. He smirked. He'd never been one for moral hang-ups, anyway.

There were two types of legilimency, Snape had taught him; conscious and unconscious, names which referred to the state of the one whose mind was being invaded. Conscious legilimency required more skill, since the conscious mind had to be surpassed. Unconscious legilimency was much more basic, since the mind was relaxed and its defenses were down. If one was practiced, as Snape had made sure Draco was, it didn't even require a wand in close proximity.

Draco hoped Weasley wouldn't wake up, or he'd be in a world of trouble. Peering around Potter's bed to Weasley's, however, he found he needn't have worried; the curtains were open and Weasley wasn't there. Draco would bet,

were there anyone here to bet, that he was paying Granger a midnight visit. The image made him cringe.

Draco looked back to Potter's mumbling, twitching form. "*Legilimens*," he whispered, holding out his hand, seeking out the connection in his mind. He found it, and entered Potter's mind, bracing himself for whatever would come.

He found himself in a dark, unkempt graveyard. Puzzled, he looked around.

There was Potter, a few meters to Draco's left. He looked younger, perhaps in third or fourth year. Fourth year, definitely; at his feet was what was unmistakably the Triwizard Cup.

Next to him was someone Draco hadn't thought about in years--Cedric Diggory. "Bloody *hell*," he breathed. He remembered Potter ranting about this at the end of fourth year. He was going to watch the Dark Lord return.

Without warning, Draco's head exploded in pain. He cried out, clutching his head, checking frantically for blood. Potter was on his knees, screaming in agony, hands clamped over his forehead. It dawned on Draco that this was Potter's pain channeling into him. This must be what Potter's scar felt like.

"Kill the spare," said a familiar, cold voice.

"*Avada Kedavra!*"

Draco didn't have to look up to know that Diggory was dead.

A cloaked figure stepped out of the shadows, and Draco felt a surge of hatred. *Wormtail*. Draco had encountered him often enough with the Death Eaters... he was slimy, simpering, malicious, and utterly useless as a wizard. He was a traitor, through and through, and flocked to whoever could protect him the best. Draco had no doubt that he would desert the moment the Dark Lord lost a battle or made a mistake. Not that that would happen anytime soon, considering the weakness of his opposition, but Wormtail was a disgrace to the Death Eaters.

Wormtail pulled Potter to his feet, dragged him to a headstone, and tied him to it. Gods, Potter looked terrified; he was terrified, Draco could feel it. Potter struggled helplessly as Wormtail dragged a huge cauldron into the clearing, and approached a bundle Draco hadn't seen before. He unwrapped it, revealing what was inside. Potter let out a muffled shout.

It resembled a human child, somewhat, but could not have been less like one. Draco was repulsed; it was scaly, feeble, and, *gods*, it looked...awful.

Wormtail carried the thing to the cauldron and dropped it in, and Draco felt Potter's scar burn.

"*Please...let it drown...*" said a voice in his head that was undoubtedly Potter's. Draco felt nauseous.

Wormtail raised his wand. "Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!"

A cloud of dust rose from the grave to which Potter was secured, and floated into the cauldron.

"Flesh -- of the servant -- w-willingly given -- you will -- revive -- your master."

Draco watched, horrified, as Wormtail hacked off his own hand, picked it up, and dropped it into the cauldron. That explained his silver hand, then.

Wormtail panted and gasped, clutching at the bloody stump where his hand had been, and approached Potter, whose eyes were screwed tightly shut.

"B-blood of the enemy...forcibly taken...you will...resurrect your foe." Potter strained uselessly against his confines as Wormtail pierced his arm with a dagger, catching a drop of his blood in a vial. Wormtail hobbled back to the cauldron, and tipped it in.

The liquid inside turned bright, bright white. Potter's fear rose to a fever pitch as vapor rose out of it, and

materialized...

Draco gasped, an instinctive shiver going up his spine. It was the Dark Lord.

Draco had seen enough. He stepped hastily out of the dream.

He stood back in the Gryffindor dormitory, breathing harshly. He looked at Potter, who was still thrashing around, fear and pain painted across his face.

Merlin, he'd only been fourteen when he'd faced the Dark Lord. *Fourteen*. Draco's biggest worry at age fourteen was the possibility of failing Arithmancy.

Without thinking, he grabbed Potter's shoulder. "Potter," he said in a low voice, shaking him.

With a loud gasp, Potter's eyes snapped open. He looked around wildly for a moment before his breathing quieted and he closed his eyes for a moment. He opened them again, calmer this time, and looked at Draco, eyes slightly unfocused.

Draco floundered for something to say. "...you...nightmare."

Potter sat up, running a hand through his hair, and reached over to the bedside table to put on his glasses. "What?" he said croakily.

"You were having a nightmare...or something. I heard you."

"Oh."

"You were screaming. So, er, I woke you up."

"Oh. Thanks."

An awkward silence loomed. Draco mentally smacked himself. What was he *doing*? "Don't think of it as a favor," he said, failing to muster up much of a sneer, "Just use a silencing charm next time."

"Right," said Potter.

Draco, having nothing left to say, turned around foolishly and climbed back into bed. Lying down, he wished he could think of anything besides the Dark Lord rising out of that cauldron, of Potter screaming in pain...

He let out a sigh. It would be a long time before he fell back asleep.

The uneven breathing he heard from the next bed told him he wouldn't be the only one awake for a while.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

In which these chapters were really short back when I started this story.

Draco awoke the next morning to a pounding headache as well as the usual sore neck. Cradling his head, he pulled open the hangings on his bed and cringed as light spilled in.

"Hell, did you sleep at all last night?"

Draco looked up to see Weasley examining a very exhausted-looking Potter.

"Erm, yeah..." mumbled Potter sleepily. "Just...nightmare." The two shared a knowing look.

"He was screaming bloody murder," said Draco smugly, addressing Weasley, "I can't imagine how you didn't wake up to help him like a proper best mate."

"Go to hell," said Weasley sourly as Draco made his way out of the dormitory chuckling.

Neither of them showed up at breakfast that morning, and Draco delighted in watching Granger's internal argument over whether to go stick her nose into whatever was keeping them.

Draco had already sat down at their usual table in the library before he realized that he'd come of his own accord. It must have become a habit by this point.

Potter came in about ten minutes later, looking as though he was in a terrible mood.

"Lovers' quarrel?" Draco inquired innocently.

Potter flipped him the V before retreating into the shelves. He returned with his usual immense stack of unidentifiable books, picked up the first one, pulled out a quill, sheet of parchment, and bottle of ink, and began taking notes.

The enjoyment of pissing Potter off quickly dissipated and was replaced by a boredom that set in alarmingly quickly. Draco pulled absently at the fraying sleeve of his jumper. In normal circumstances, he'd have never worn anything so shabby, but now he was forced to wear whatever boring clothes he found at the foot of his bed. He supposed he should be grateful they hadn't fitted him with an Azkaban uniform just to reinforce their point.

Looking up, he noticed that Potter had fallen asleep. His head was balanced precariously on his hand, which squished one side of his face and skewed his glasses. Draco watched, amused, as Potter's elbow slid out from under him and he landed face-first in his book, breathing shallowly. He looked quite...peaceful.

A sudden burning feeling in Draco's left arm wrenched him from his musing. He breathed sharply inward, biting his lip. His Dark Mark! It hadn't done anything for ages; he'd begun to wonder...

The burning became so intense that he stood up, looking for something to alleviate the pain. He walked briskly to the loo, trying not to seem as though anything was up. He didn't want to give any stray Order members any tips in case something important was going on.

His eyes were beginning to water by the time he entered the bathroom, practically sprinting by this point. He jerked up his sleeve violently, turned on a tap, and thrust his arm under the running water. It didn't have any effect on the Mark itself, of course, but it made the burning more bearable. He waited a few minutes before the pain died down, turned off the tap, and examined the Mark.

It looked darker and clearer than it had at any time since his capture. He'd assumed the Death Eaters were laying low in the aftermath of the huge attack, but he'd begun to wonder after the first week whether his was malfunctioning or something. Rubbing at it gingerly, he was reminded bitterly of the fact that the Death Eaters were still as active as ever, still planning, and he was missing out on it. He couldn't even have a proper trial full of media and crying relatives, no, he was *missing in action*... they probably thought he'd run away!

He sighed and shook his head. That was a stupid thought; there was no doubt he was better off here eating three

meals a day as Harry Potter's personal nuisance than he would be in Azkaban, curled up in a ball reliving his worst memories for the rest of his life.

After tidying himself up, he set off back to the library.

As it turned out, Potter had woken up during his absence. "Take a walk, did you?" he asked.

Draco sat down. "How was your nap?" he replied, avoiding the question.

"Spectacular," replied Potter, eyeing his arm. Draco realized he was clutching it unconsciously, and pseudo-casually moved his right hand to rest under his chin.

Potter regarded him strangely for a few moments, as if calculating something. "Are you afraid of death?" he asked suddenly.

Draco blinked. "I'm...*sorry*?"

"Are you afraid to die?"

Draco looked bewilderedly at him for a moment. Was this a joke? "Who isn't?"

"I'm not," answered Potter promptly.

"Well it isn't my fault if you're a suicidal lunatic, is it?" Draco shot back, annoyed and still confused as to the reason for this strange outburst.

"To the organized mind," continued Potter in his alarmingly calm voice, "death is only the next great adventure."

Draco sneered. "Whatever, Potter..."

"Dumbledore said that." He looked suddenly angry. Draco didn't reply; Potter appeared to be losing his mind.

"This..." said Potter as his hand shot out and grabbed Draco's arm, yanked up the slightly damp sleeve, "This is a complete fucking lie!" Potter's fingers burned into his forearm. Draco tried to pull away, startled by Potter's sudden change of mood, but Potter's grip was stronger than he'd anticipated. "You don't even want to be a Death Eater! You're just a fucking *coward*!"

Anger swelled up in him so fast he almost choked on it. "I didn't have a choice," he spat venomously.

"There's always a choice!" yelled Potter, whose fingers were still gripping him hard enough to bruise.

"He would have killed me, Potter!" Draco screamed, unsure of why he was defending himself to Potter. "He as good as *told* me he'd kill me if I didn't join him! He'd've killed my whole family!"

"He's killed my whole family," said Potter dangerously, "but I can still distinguish between right and wrong."

Draco lost all composure. "It's not *about* right and wrong, you sanctimonious bastard! It's about protecting my family! It's--it's about protecting the purity of magic!"

Potter sneered and released his arm. "You're disgusting."

"Mudbloods are called that for a *reason*, Potter! Their blood is *dirty*! They're diluting magic and they need to be gotten rid of before we die out entirely!"

Potter's green eyes flashed in anger. "Hermione's just as good at magic as you, you conceited shit!"

Draco let out a harsh laugh. "Oh, yeah, so she can recite a spell. Or follow a potion recipe. But she hasn't got any intrinsic magic. Ten galleons says she's awful at Divination."

Potter said nothing. Draco smirked; he knew he'd hit a nerve.

"Or how about Quidditch?" he continued smugly. "You need innate magic for Quidditch. All the best Quidditch players are purebloods."

"I'm a half-blood," said Potter.

*Cocky motherfucker...* "Well, fine, I guess Quidditch isn't really the best example, but--"

"Voldemort's a half-blood."

Draco suppressed the involuntary shudder at hearing the name. "No he's not, Potter."

Potter smirked humorlessly. "He is. His father was a Muggle. And you know what? So was Snape's. The Death Eaters are a pack of hypocrites."

Draco set his jaw. "I don't believe you."

Potter looked at him incredulously. "You don't have to! It doesn't stop Voldemort--" Draco twitched again, "--from being a psychotic maniac!"

"The Dark Lord is a genius! He's the most powerful wizard of all time!"

"Malfoy, *listen* to yourself! Not two minutes ago you were telling me he'd threatened to *kill your family* if you didn't become a Death Eater! Your family--some of his biggest supporters! And he was going to off the lot of them just to recruit an underage wizard?"

Draco couldn't believe he was hearing this. "You don't know what you're talking about, Potter."

Potter leaned forward, lowering his voice. "I know all about Lord Voldemort, Malfoy. He doesn't give a damn about purity of magic. He's trying to get revenge on his dead father - that's the only reason he kills Muggleborns! And--d'you know about his mad preoccupation with immortality? It consumes him. His name is *Voldemort*, Malfoy, you're French, right? It means stealing from death. You're called the *Death Eaters*, for God's sake! He's completely terrified of dying and he's obsessed with getting around it, and he's taking you all along for the ride!"

Draco's head swam. "How...how do you know all that?"

Potter grinned, holding up the book he'd fallen asleep on earlier. "What d'you think I've been reading about this whole time?"

"Why the overpowering desire to learn the Dark Lord's life story?"

Potter rolled his eyes. "You sound really stupid. Can't you just say 'Voldemort?'"

Draco's heart skipped. "No, I can't just say *the name*," he said in a harsh whisper, looking around instinctively. "It's disrespectful."

Potter snickered loudly.

"You're avoiding my question. Why've you made him your pet project?" Draco asked crossly, resentful that Potter could laugh at something so serious.

Potter sobered immediately. "That's none of your business," he said harshly, before reopening his book and picking up his quill, a clear signal that the conversation was over.

Draco looked at his still-exposed Dark Mark. He had a lot to think about.

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"Malfoy," said Potter, catching up with him after dinner. "I'm, erm, leaving again tonight."

Draco raised an eyebrow, nonplussed. "And?"

"And, er...just thought I'd let you know."

"Oh..." said Draco, beginning to flush inexplicably. "Are Weasley and Granger going too?"

"Yeah," said Potter, whose ears were acquiring a pink tinge. "Bill said he'd look after you again."

Draco was so preoccupied with getting rid of his stupid blush that he didn't even object to Potter calling it 'looking after' him. "Ah, right... erm, when will you be back?"

Potter looked at his feet. "In, er, about a week?"

"Er. Where're you going?"

Potter grinned lopsidedly. "That's secret."

Draco smiled weakly.

Potter cleared his throat. "Erm...well. Bye."

"You're leaving now?"

"Yeah."

"Oh." Draco paused, wincing at the sheer quantity of awkwardness that had overcome him during the course of this conversation. "Bye."

"Bye." Potter turned around and left.

Draco smacked himself on the forehead. What was going *on*?

"Ello, Draco," said Bill Weasley the next morning as he plopped down next to him at the table.

Draco ignored him and kept eating.

"What've you been up to since last we met?"

Draco gave him an unimpressed look. Truth be told, he enjoyed Bill's company well enough, but he couldn't let onto that.

"Come on," persisted Bill, nudging him, "Let's go outside."

Draco heaved an unconvincing sigh of exasperation before he followed.

It was becoming cooler outside, but Draco found the chilly air to be quite nice, especially after being cooped up in the library for so long. Bill sat down on the edge of the lake, and Draco, having nothing else to do, followed him.

Draco tossed a stone into the lake. "So what do you *do*, anyway?"

Bill tossed his own stone, sending it at least twice as far. "For a living, you mean? I break curses for Gringotts."

Draco raised an eyebrow. "Much money in it?"

Bill shrugged. "I'm well enough off. Besides, it's fun."

Draco threw another stone, grinning as it skipped once and surpassed the ripples Bill's had made. "So what are you doing here?"

"Oh, y'know," Bill threw a stone with considerable force, going the farthest yet, "Order work. Before that I was in France, visiting Fleur's parents."

"Fleur?"

"Yeah, my wife, Fleur Delacour. We got married this summer."

Draco stopped his search for another suitable throwing stone. "Wait--Fleur Delacour from the Triwizard Tournament?"

"Small world, innit?"

Draco nodded absently, staring out into the water. The Triwizard Tournament only made him think of Potter...of that bloody awful dream he'd had. He shivered.

"Cold?" inquired Bill.

"No," he said hastily.

Bill tossed another stone into the lake, humming tunelessly.

"Is Potter still with your sister?" asked Draco abruptly.

Bill gave him a sidelong glance. "Not that I know of. Then again, I don't really know much, given that no one ever wants to tell dearest big brother what's going on, but I do remember Mum being positively crushed that Ginny wouldn't be the mother of an enormous family of speccy little Potters. Hey--why d'you want to know?"

Draco, truthfully, had no answer to that. "I...don't."

Bill regarded him ruefully. "Ah...mate...how do I put this...Ginny sort of despises you. Plus, I think she's carrying an everlasting torch for Harry anyway."

Draco burst out laughing. "That is *not* who I meant."

There was a brief pause during which Draco mentally berated himself for his choice of words. A crazed grin spread over Bill's face.

"*That's* certainly not what I meant either!"

"Ah, yes it was! You meant Harry!"

"No, I *didn't*. That's *foul*."

"I *knew* it! I *knew* you and him had a thing!"

"We're *mortal enemies*." Gods above, how had this conversation gone this awry?

"Oh come on, it's only the most obvious thing in the world."

Draco was dumbfounded. How could something so nonexistent be so apparently obvious? *Remember*, his logic said, *Bill Weasley is completely mental*.

That assuaged his anxieties somewhat. Bill was just being...Bill.



"Fucking mental, you are."

"Whatever, Malfoy..."

Draco went to bed that night with a head swimming with things to sort out. Firstly, Bill's crass and unwanted remarks from earlier. How he could say something like that in jest...it had all seemed like a big joke at the time, but now that Draco thought about it, it hit him—he and Potter were *enemies*. They'd been acting surprisingly benevolently towards each other, presumably a result of their constant close proximity, but the fact remained that Draco was Potter's prisoner. He touched his collar gingerly. It was so easy to forget it when he was throwing stones into the lake with Bill Weasley, but it was still there. As nice as this was, it was still imprisonment. And as soon as he got out, these people were his enemies again. If he saw Potter on the battlefield, he'd kill him. Wouldn't he? Draco sighed, closing his eyes tightly.

Secondly, there was the issue of what Potter had said the previous day regarding the Dark Lord. Draco had avoided thinking about that at all, the predominant reason being his guilt over the fact that a few of Potter's points had made sense to him. That wasn't to say he was ready to denounce the Dark Lord and take up arms with the Order of Self-Righteousness, but... Potter had made a good argument, especially about the Dark Lord's questionable mental capacities. Draco had only met him a few times, but all of those were among the worst moments of his life. After he'd failed to kill Dumbledore, for example, when Snape had reported how he'd had to step in... Draco had had his first taste of the Cruciatus Curse. He couldn't help feeling bitter about it; after all, he'd done the rest perfectly, hadn't he? He'd thought his plan with the Vanishing Cabinets rather ingenious, and it had helped the Death Eaters into the previously unreachable Hogwarts castle. Draco felt that, at the very least, the Dark Lord was a bit severe in his ways.

Not to mention his reliance on fear, which Draco, upon reviewing his conversation with Potter and the few Death Eater meetings he'd been to, realized was rather prominent. The Death Eaters--even his closest advisors--didn't dare say his name. Surely it wasn't his real name; what was the point of making one up if you weren't going to let anyone use it?

What a time for his faith to waver. What would his father say?

Draco sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. Everything was cocked up now, and it was all Potter's fault.

## CHAPTER FIVE!

**In which Draco is a clueless motherfucker and Bill proves to be the only cool character.**

Draco spent the next several days thinking mostly about Potter. He couldn't help but be curious about Potter's mysterious activities. What errand could he be running that could take an entire week? He couldn't possibly be fighting the Dark Lord, or he'd take more people with him. But it had something to do with the war, Draco had gathered that much. He assumed that Potter's extensive research on who-knows-what had something to do with his outings with Weasley and Granger.

Draco wondered what Potter might be doing at the moment. He hoped it wasn't anything as frightening as the dream, which Draco still hadn't been able to shake. In fact, he'd now had a few nightmares of his own, made up of bits and pieces of Potter's nightmare, which was an utterly strange experience.

On the eighth day since Potter's departure, Draco became worried. "Shouldn't he be back?" he asked a bemused Bill.

"He'll be back soon enough," Bill replied. "He's got some important business to attend to."

Later that day, Bill handed him a broom. "Let's fly," he said, clutching one of his own.

Draco smirked. "I thought you weren't a flyer."

Bill grinned lopsidedly. "I'm not. That's why you're going to teach me."

Draco found it hard to believe that anyone with a family as Quidditch-obsessed as Bill's couldn't fly, but the man was abysmal. He had hardly any balance, and had to keep both hands on his broom at all times, which made it rather hard for him to do anything except fly little ambling paths through the sky.

"You're going to have to take your hands off eventually," said Draco, reveling in Bill's ineptitude, "or I can't teach you to play."

"Oh, sod playing. Can't I just fly around?"

"But that's *boring*," Draco whined.

Bill looked at him with an evil glint in his eye. "I'll race you, then." And he was off, not even giving Draco a chance to accept.

"Bloody cheater!" called Draco, starting after him.

Luckily, Bill wasn't much of a racer, either, and it wasn't long before Draco had one hand clamped around the end of Bill's broom.

Bill looked behind him. "What the--well, who's the cheater now?"

"I'm not a cheater," said Draco as he pulled ahead, "I'm a Slytherin!"

Before he could celebrate his victory, however, he stopped short.

Bill flew into him. "Ah, shite, don't stop like that!"

Draco pointed downward. There, just inside the Apparition boundary, were Potter, Weasley, and Granger. They looked *terrible*; from what Draco could see, they were covered in what looked to be blood, and other unidentifiable grime. Potter was unconscious, and Weasley was carrying him. Granger, meanwhile, was leaning on Weasley as well; she looked as though she had a broken leg.

"Come on," said Bill, flying towards them.

They landed, and made their way to the huddled threesome. "What the *fuck* happened?!" cried Draco, who had a

feeling there were a tremendous amount of things he didn't know about this situation.

"Inferi...dementors..." stuttered Granger, "It was t-terrible."

Weasley had laid Potter on the ground and was now talking in furious undertones with his brother.

"But he got it," said Granger, holding up an ornate goblet with an H on the front. "Harry got it..."

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The Golden Trio spent the next few hours in the hospital wing. Weasley, who had sustained the least damage, reemerged in time for dinner, and Granger came back, limping somewhat, about an hour later.

Where was Potter? Draco didn't dare ask either of his cronies, who were now putting on the usual Gryffindor show of martyred strength for the other Order members. To Draco's dismay, at least twenty Orderlings had lodged themselves in the Gryffindor common room to fawn over the recovering heroes. Everyone was careful not to say anything of substance too close to Draco, lest Draco pick up on it. Not that he had anyone to *tell*, or anything. He suspected they just liked to see him confused. He spent the evening scowling in front of the fireplace, feeling very left out.

Potter didn't reappear before bed that night, or in the morning.

"Don't worry," said Bill, who had mastered the art of not worrying long ago and obviously couldn't relate. "Madam Pomfrey'll fix him right up."

When Draco pointed out that he'd not worry so much if someone told him what was wrong, Bill just laughed.

Potter finally showed up sometime in the afternoon, coming outside to sit with Bill and Draco, who were engaging in another stone-throwing contest.

"Hi," he said in a hoarse voice.

"Harry!" Bill jumped up jovially. "How are you?"

Potter smiled weakly. "M fine. Got the job done."

"Draco here's been pitching a fit worrying about you."

Potter doubled over coughing. Draco felt his face heat up. Why did this keep happening? And why did Bill say such stupid things?

When Potter recovered, Draco fixed him with his most lethal death glare.

Potter coughed again. "Well...I'm gonna get back to the library."

Bill was incredulous. "Back to work *already*?"

"A savior's work is never done," said Draco cattily.

Potter gave a long-suffering sigh and started walking back to the castle, and Draco regretted his remark immediately.

"Aw, I think you've upset him," said Bill, grinning.

"Fuck off."

Bill threw his last stone into the lake. "Wanna fly a bit?"

"No, I..." *want to go talk to Potter*. Draco shook his head, trying to rid himself of the thought. "Erm, we should fly after dark--it's really fun."

"Blimey, I can't even fly when it's light out..." said Bill. "Well, shall I meet you here, then?"

"Sure," said Draco absently, as he watched Potter enter the castle.

"What time?"

"What? Oh. Er, half-seven?"

"Sounds good."

They walked back to the castle in silence. Once inside, Bill turned to him. "Where're you going? I've got to walk you there, in case you've got a Death Eater coup planned that you might initiate if I take my eyes off you for a minute."

Draco smiled. Finally, someone sympathized. "Er, library."

Bill grinned and said nothing further.

Upon entering the library, Draco spotted Potter's mop of black hair immediately. He sat down at his usual spot across the table. Potter seemed to be staring off at nothing.

He coughed lightly, and Potter snapped to attention. "Oh! Hi. You and Bill done doing...whatever?"

"Yeah, we're gonna fly a bit later tonight."

Potter's expression was unreadable. "Oh. I'll walk you there, then, I guess."

"In case I initiate a Death Eater coup in the two minutes it'd take me to get there on my own, right?"

"Exactly right."

They fell silent again. Draco gritted his teeth in frustration--Potter had to be the world's worst conversationalist. He sighed, and grabbed one of Potter's books, not bothering to ask for permission.

It turned out that Potter's mysterious literature was intensely boring. *The Unique Power of the Boggart on the Human Psyche* was among the dullest things Draco had ever read, and that included school-assigned books. How did Potter get through this stuff? And more importantly, why would he want to?

Draco had a peculiar feeling that he was being watched. "What're you staring at, Scarhead?" he said snarkily.

"Nothing," said Potter, a little too quickly. Potter was odd sometimes, Draco decided. He ventured a glance at him.

He was staring again.

Draco cleared his throat, smirking. Potter flushed instantly and went back to his book.

Draco thought back to Bill's words from the week before. *I knew you and him had a thing!*

Did he and Potter really act like that?

He thought for a moment before his logical mind caught up with him. No! Unless halting, awkward conversation and a six-year history of enmity were signs of burning, passionate love. Bill Weasley was an idiot.

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Draco and Potter made their way down to the Quidditch pitch in silence. Potter's disinclination to talk was really starting to irk Draco. He was going to go mad from the silence. At least in Azkaban he'd have the dulcet tones of other screaming prisoners to keep him company. Here it was just the crunching noises he and Potter made as they

trod over fallen leaves.

Bill spotted them from the stands and climbed down to meet them, handing Draco a broom as he approached.

Draco was about to kick off when Potter turned to him. "Try to come back before dawn, yeah? McGonagall will flay me if she knows you've been out."

Bill smirked. "Ickle Drakey'll be safe with me!" he said, reaching out to ruffle Draco's hair.

Draco swung at him with his broom. "Quit it!" Leering somewhat while Bill nursed a smarting ribcage, Draco turned back to where Potter had been standing.

Potter, however, had already begun making his way back to the school. Anger flared in Draco's chest--couldn't he even be bothered to say goodbye anymore?

"Well, now you've ruptured half my organs," said Bill, bringing him back from his brief tirade, "let's get to it."

With a scowl, Draco finally tore his eyes off of Potter's shrinking form. "Gladly."

Quidditch in the dark really was as fun as he'd remembered, especially with someone as hopeless as Bill. The man's navigational skills were poor at best, and the limited visibility did nothing to improve them. He did eventually succeed in learning the positions, but he had to use his siblings' names to remember. All those bloody Weasleys were good for something after all.

"Just to recap," said Bill, hovering precariously, "Ginny uses the red ball."

"Quaffle."

Bill continued as if Draco weren't there. "And she tries to get it through the hoops."

"Which are guarded by...?" Draco prompted helpfully.

"Ron."

"The Keeper, you mean."

Bill waved a hand dismissively, nearly losing his balance in the process. "Yes, whatever. And Fred and George have the bats. Why is that again?"

Draco gave a long-suffering sigh. "They're the Beaters. They hit the Bludgers at people."

"And that leaves Charlie. What does he do?"

"He catches the Snitch," replied Draco, holding up the golden ball.

"So Charlie and Harry play the same position, right?"

"Er, yeah."

"And what do you play?"

"Seeker."

"Eh?"

"Same as Potter."

"Oh, you too! Must be easy then."

Draco huffed indignantly. "We'll see about that!" Never one to refuse a challenge, even from--well, *especially* from such a beatable opponent, he chucked the practice Snitch into the sky.

He caught it easily fifteen minutes later, and looked at his adversary. "Still think it's easy?"

"Not fair," panted Bill, who was breathing harshly from his nonexistent effort, "You've had loads of practice."

Draco gave a derisive laugh, looking up at the sky. "Full moon," he observed.

Bill looked at him sharply. "No it's not." He cocked his head upwards. "Full moon's...tomorrow," he finished slowly.

He looked as though this were some horrific revelation as he flew down onto the pitch.

Draco followed. "What? What's wrong?"

Bill didn't seem to hear him. "Shit, I *completely* forgot..." Draco had to jog to keep up with his brisk pace as he hurried back to the castle. Bill turned to him. "Er, look, I've got to go. You can find your way back to Gryffindor, yeah?"

And with that, he was gone. Draco was utterly bewildered.

Well, if he was finally unsupervised, he might as well take advantage of it...

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Draco walked into the Gryffindor dormitory later that night, very ready to sleep for the rest of his life. He hoped fervently that Potter was already asleep.

He was disappointed to see light coming from Potter's wand. The light reflected off Potter's glasses, which turned to look at the doorway when Draco entered. Potter was--

*Oh.*

Potter was wearing a towel.

Potter immediately clutched at the towel, face flushing at an astounding rate. "Oh, fuck, sorry. Thought you were already in bed."

In better circumstances, Draco would have commented on the fact that Potter was supposed to keep better track of him than that, but at the moment he couldn't really think of anything to say at all.

The redness on Potter's face was beginning to creep down his neck, onto his chest. "I'll just...shit. *Nox.*" The light went out, leaving Draco in darkness, standing awkwardly at the door.

A loud thump resounded. "Ah, *fuck! Lumos!*" Potter looked warily at Draco, who still hadn't moved. "Sorry." Potter grabbed a bundle of clothes, leapt into his bed, and pulled the curtains shut.

*Well.* Draco blinked as he made his way back to his bed. What was *wrong* with Potter? No one gallivanted around naked in Slytherin... maybe it was a Gryffindor thing. Draco hoped Weasley wouldn't join in.

Draco hastily undressed and lay down, hoping to fall asleep quickly for once. His mind, however, kept producing the image of towel-clad, stuttering Potter, water droplets on his shoulders shining in the pale light of his wand...

Gods. What an awful thing to be thinking about. Clearly, he was going mad.

## CHAPTER SIX

**In which Draco and Harry get into a few really big fights involving more sexual tension than anything else, then end up making out, and the author abuses an online Latin translator and is a disgrace to journalism. Check my inverted pyramid!!! Actually, don't. This is my favorite non-pornographic chapter!**

Draco awoke the next morning having slept worse than usual, head full of half-remembered dreams he didn't care to dwell on. As he attempted to get his hair under control, he turned his head almost unconsciously to check Potter's bed.

The curtains were thrown back and Potter was nowhere to be found. Relief flooded Draco -- followed by acute embarrassment. Was Potter avoiding him because of the incident the night prior?

There was no use for it--he obviously couldn't avoid Draco, even temporarily. With a resigned sigh and a twinge of irritation, Draco dressed and headed down to breakfast. He'd have to be the bigger man, as usual.

As he entered the Great Hall, Potter caught his attention almost immediately. The black rag he called his hair was covering his lowered eyes and he was hunched over his plate, reminding Draco of the first time he'd been brought to Hogwarts at the start of this whole debacle. This time, however, Potter's motives were quite clear; he was avoiding looking at Draco. It was a bit much, really. Getting caught coming out of the shower was hardly a monumental happening. Didn't he use the Quidditch showers, for Merlin's sake?

Grinning to himself, Draco resolved to take full advantage of the situation. He sat down next to Potter, who refused to look up. "Good morning, Potter," he drawled, "It's good to see you've put some clothes on, finally." If his remark had any effect on Potter, it didn't show. Draco gritted his teeth for a moment. "Might I have the paper?"

This, oddly, brought quite a reaction; Potter's shoulders tensed and he bent his head further downwards as he reached for the *Daily Prophet*.

Puzzled, Draco took the proffered newspaper.

And then everything made sense. The headline read: "Dangerous Death Eater Malfoy Escapes From Azkaban."

Draco's heart leapt to his throat as he looked around him. Most of the Order was taking the same approach as Potter; though he was largely ignored by them, there was now a forced aspect to the way every head was pointed away from him. Mad-Eye Moody, however, was staring straight at him, almost daring him to say or do anything. Molly Weasley regarded him with a concerned expression that made him want to haul off and smack her. Bill, strangely enough, was nowhere to be found.

Pushing the stupid Order out of his mind, Draco turned back to the article.

*Convicted Death Eater and former Ministry of Magic benefactor Lucius Malfoy was discovered missing from his cell in Azkaban late yesterday evening, and is believed to be on the loose.*

*Azkaban guards were at a loss as to the exact time of Malfoy's escape, having only yesterday discovered his empty cell, though they are certain it could not have been more than a week ago. Details concerning Malfoy's method of escape are currently unavailable.*

*Aurors have been deployed throughout the country in search of Malfoy, one of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named's biggest and most powerful supporters. Though no Aurors could be reached for comment, Minister for Magic Rufus Scrimgeour stated at an emergency press conference that he had full confidence in his team. "Malfoy doesn't stand a chance against the Ministry," said Scrimgeour. "He will be found and placed back in Azkaban where he belongs."*

*Though he was acquitted 16 years ago of participation in Death Eater terrorism, Malfoy was found guilty on identical grounds 18 months ago following a Death Eater break-in at the Ministry of Magic.*

*The escape has prompted some Ministry critics to call for the Dementors' removal from Azkaban premises, claiming that they are wavering in their dedication to guarding the prison.*

*Malfoy's wife, Narcissa, and son, Draco, have also gone missing in recent months. Both are suspected of Death Eater activity.*

*Malfoy is extremely dangerous and should not be approached under any circumstances. Any sightings or information should be reported to the Ministry of Magic's emergency fireline...*

The article went on to describe how to get in touch with the Ministry and showed Lucius' Azkaban mug shot, looking haughty and aloof, like always.

Draco swallowed past the lump that had formed in his throat. He hadn't properly seen his father since Easter holidays in fifth year. The last time he'd seen him at all had been his travesty of a trial, and Draco hadn't had a chance to talk to him then. He'd never even got a chance to say goodbye, really. His mother had implored to him that Azkaban would fall soon anyway, but a life sentence had still seemed pretty daunting to Draco.

But now his father was out. Draco wondered if he'd made contact with the Dark Lord. Did he know Draco was missing? Draco knew there was no hope of being searched out by the Death Eaters, but surely Dad would come look for him...

But even if he did, Hogwarts was like a fortress. The Death Eaters had only ever been able to get in as spies or with inside help. Lucius was far too recognizable to get anywhere near the grounds, and Draco's damnable collar, he suspected, tracked his every move, making it impossible to facilitate another raid like the one in June.

His only hope was to get off the grounds himself. Once out, he could Apparate... though he didn't know where headquarters was; Wormtail had taken great pleasure in lording over him the fact that he was too junior a member to receive such information. He'd go to the safehouse where his mother was staying. Father would most likely go there anyway.

Draco only needed a way to get out of his bloody collar. He needed a wand. He looked at Potter, only to see him hastily shift his gaze elsewhere. Perfect.

As breakfast ended, Draco furtively watched Potter get up, stretch languidly, and make his way to the library, not even bothering to beckon Draco to come along. Draco set his jaw. Did Potter think he was a trained dog? No matter, he told himself, he'd be free of the lot of them soon enough.

His gaze wandered down over Potter's retreating form and a smirk crawled over his features. Potter kept his wand in the back pocket of his Muggle trousers. It was too easy.

He followed a few paces behind Potter in the corridor leading to the library. He checked behind him -- no one. Now was his chance.

Swallowing his apprehension, Draco crept up behind Potter. Now or never. He lunged, grabbing the protruding wand, and took off.

"What the..." he heard behind him as he rounded a corner. "MALFOY!"

Draco could hear Potter's frantic footsteps behind him, gaining. *Damn*, he thought frenziedly, *who knew Potter could run so fast?* He sent the first curse he could think of over his shoulder, the Jelly-Legs hex. He swore under his breath when the footfalls didn't stop; he must've missed. Sprinting furiously, he threw open the door to the grounds, momentarily blinded by the morning sun.

"*Alohomora!*" Well, he hadn't exactly expected that one to work, but it was worth a shot. "*Expeditus! Privatio! Resolvere carceris!*" He was beginning to panic. Nothing was working! What in hell had they done to this thing? "*Finite incantatem!*" he cried desperately. He fuzzily remembered a lengthy Arabic spell useful for breaking warded locks, but before he could incant--

"*EXPELLIARMUS!*" he heard from behind him.

"NO!" he cried uselessly as the wand was wrenched from his hand and he was thrown forward onto his stomach. He



rolled over, scrambling to get up, but Potter had already dived on top of him.

"What the *fuck* are you playing at?!" screamed Potter, holding his wand tightly. *How had he disarmed Draco when Draco had had the wand?*

Draco said nothing, only breathed harshly as he stared up at the boy pinning him.

"Do you know how fast you'd be dead if you left here?" shouted Potter, shaking him slightly. "The Death Eaters think you've deserted, and everyone else thinks you're a bloody Death Eater!"

Draco sneered, anger boiling inside him. "I am a Death Eater, in case you've forgotten. And my father knows I haven't deserted."

Potter gave a sardonic laugh. "Oh, your *father*, that's what this is about. I have news for you, Malfoy," he said, bringing his face so close to Draco's that Draco could feel his breath ghosting across his cheek. "Your father's as good as dead now he's out of Azkaban."

Draco wanted badly to hit Potter for his words, but the angle was too awkward and Potter was holding his arms down besides. Instead, with something between a sob and a growl, he brought his knee up and connected with Potter's ribcage. Potter fell off of him with a soft "oh."

"Fuck you," he snarled, shaking as he stood up and turned his back on Potter. He was fresh out of ideas for what to do next, but intended to get as far away from the Golden Boy as possible.

"Wait," he heard behind him. Seething, he ignored it. "Wait! *Petrificus totalus!*"

Draco's arms and legs snapped together and he fell back onto the grass facedown. He burned with shame and anger. His one chance, completely blown... if only he'd had the brains to plan a real escape... he was going to be stuck here for the rest of his life.

He heard Potter get up, wheezing, and approach him, and felt a nudge on his side that flipped him over.

Potter looked down at him, clutching his stomach. "I promise not to do that again if you promise you won't run."

Draco would have told him where he could shove his promise if he could have moved or spoken at all. Potter, dim-witted as usual, mistook his silence for compliance and muttered a *finite*.

Potter offered him a hand as he got up, which he pointedly ignored as he gingerly stood and brushed off his clothing.

"Look," said Potter patiently, as if talking to a small child, "I know this isn't the best situation, but surely you realize it's better than the alternative. Let's just go back to the library. I'll tell the others we went for a walk, yeah?"

"*Sod* the fucking library!" Draco exploded. "Do you know how boring it is to just sit there and watch you read the dulllest books ever written for *eight hours*? I'm going spare! I'd rather be in fucking Azkaban!"

Potter looked hurt by his remark, inexplicably. Draco almost wished he would get properly mad again; Potter's anger was something he could deal with. "What would you like to do, then?" asked Potter levelly.

Draco was caught completely off-guard. "I dunno," he said warily, thinking of the one place he'd managed to have a good time in that bloody castle, "the Room of Requirement?"

Without reply, Potter set off towards Hogwarts. Perplexed, Draco jogged back up to him. "Wait--aren't you doing important research in the library? For your top-secret outings with Granger and Weasley?" *And aren't you supposed to be angry with me?* he left unsaid.

Potter waved a hand dismissively. "They can do some work for a change, I think. Besides, we found that last--thing. Now we're back to square one anyway."

Without the faintest clue what Potter was talking about, Draco followed him back up the stairs into Hogwarts.

Once in the Room of Requirement, Potter conjured a comfortable-looking couch and dived onto it.

"So," began Draco, anger rapidly dissipating as he circled around the back of the sofa, "How did you disarm me without a wand?"

Potter's disarrayed head poked over the sofa. "Huh?"

"Outside. You cast *expelliarmus* without a wand."

"Oh! Well, that's wandless magic," said Potter, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

"Where did you learn wandless magic?" asked Draco, who was genuinely curious despite himself.

"Well," said Potter, propping himself up and resting his chin on the back of the sofa, "I guess I sort of taught myself. It's part of the seventh year curriculum, but seeing as how we didn't have school this year..."

Potter's tone wasn't at all accusatory; strange, considering that the closing of Hogwarts had been Draco's doing entirely.

"How do you do it?" he asked, eager to move away from the subject before Potter figured he ought to be angry about it.

Potter pondered a moment. "It's mostly a matter of concentration, I suppose. Since you don't have a wand to channel your magic, you have to do it yourself, which takes a lot of power. Which means you also have to really want it, you can't just do it at whim until you get really good. So I could do it outside, where it was really important I get my wand back, but I probably couldn't do it now."

"Could you do it with any spell?"

"Some spells are probably too complex for anyone to be able to. So far I've been able to do a Summoning Charm, a Levitation Charm, and *Lumos*, which is pretty useless since it just lights the wand anyway. That was the first time I've done a disarmer," Potter finished with a smile.

Draco swallowed. "Oh."

Both were silent for a while and Potter got up to explore what the room had provided for them. "Not much to do, is there?" he said after a while.

Just then, a large chess set appeared between them on a small table. Draco blinked. It figured that Potter's idea of 'something to do' was chess. Boring Gryffindor prat. "I'll play you," he said.

Potter grimaced. "I'm pants at wizard's chess."

He was. Within minutes, Draco was able to smugly pronounce, "Check."

"Bugger," muttered Potter. Draco watched with what could be construed as morbid fascination as Potter pondered his next move, hushing his chess pieces, who were trying in vain to help him. Potter clenched his jaw as his eyes worked furiously over the board, sucking his lower lip between his teeth.

"Malfoy."

Draco looked up. "Huh?"

"It's your turn."

Draco moved. "Check."

"Bugger!" repeated Potter. Having given up any thought of winning, his pieces began to hurl insults at him. "You know, you ought to play with Ron. He's much better than I am."

"Huh." Draco personally thought it would be hard not to be better than Potter at chess, at this point.

"No, really! I bet he could beat you, even."

"You'd lose that bet, Potter. Weasley could never beat me at anything," he said haughtily.

"He *has* beaten you at something," said Potter as he moved again. "He beats you at Quidditch habitually."

"No," replied Draco, "his *team* beats my team habitually. Which is the result of blatant favoritism on the part of the referee, anyway. Checkmate."

"That's rubbish!" laughed Potter, giving no indication that he knew he'd just lost a game of chess. "I could beat you in Quidditch with *any* referee."

"Yeah?" said Draco. "Even if we rode the same broom? It's hardly a surprise you always catch the Snitch when your broom goes about ten times faster than everyone else's."

Potter stuck out his chin. "You're just jealous."

"Of your flashy, expensive broomstick? Hardly. I could buy one if I wanted to. I just like to give everyone else a specter of a chance. It's not just about winning, you know."

Potter looked at him quizzically. "And... how did you get into Slytherin with an attitude like that?"

Draco shrugged. "Well, I'm lying, of course. I'm just waiting for the Firebolt Two to come out. Then I'll whoop your sorry arse."

Potter laughed and began to set up the board for another round.

Watching Potter's fingers deftly avoid attack from the chess pieces, who were apparently still smarting over their defeat, something jolted inside Draco as he came to a realization.

He *wouldn't* ever whoop Potter's arse at Quidditch. He was never going to fly against Potter again.

He swallowed. Why was it so easy for him to forget?

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Over the next few weeks, Draco often found himself with nothing to do but replay that day in the Room of Requirement. Potter was in and out, constantly moving, and when he wasn't, he spent countless hours conferring with Weasley and Granger. Draco was curious as hell about their secret project, but more than that, he wished Potter would talk to him. The guy was a bit of a loose cannon and quite terrible at conversation, but something about him managed to hold Draco's interest. Maybe he was just the only interesting thing around.

The more time Draco spent with Potter, the harder it was to reconcile him with the image of the Boy Who Lived that Draco had known and loathed for so long. Draco had heard about Harry Potter throughout his childhood -- children he played with had a game where one boy (usually the leader of the group) got to cast a number of made-up spells on You-Know-Who, who wore a cloak and spoke in a deep, scary voice. Draco had had mixed feelings when, once he was old enough to understand, he found out that Harry Potter was a little baby who didn't cast any spells. But that gave him something of a mysterious quality - no one knew where he was now, only that he was Draco's age and had a wicked scar on his forehead.

When his parents found out, of course, he was banned from the game, or from discussing Harry Potter. What did he matter anymore, anyway? they said. It had been ten years and the boy was nowhere to be found.

Draco, however, had never forgotten about him. He clung to the fact that they'd be in the same year. Surely Harry Potter would go to Hogwarts?

And then, finally, Draco had met him. He'd been shocked to find out the scrawny, quiet boy was the Boy Who Lived. He hadn't believed it until he'd seen for himself that under that mop of unruly black hair was the fabled lightning bolt.

By that time, Draco wasn't quite so ignorant of his parents' beliefs and even had an inkling of his father's former position with the Dark Lord, and he knew that Harry Potter was not someone his parents would be pleased to find him befriend. Nevertheless, he offered Potter his hand on the Hogwarts Express. And Potter turned it down.

For the next six years, Potter was everywhere he went -- on the Quidditch pitch, in his classes, landed in the hospital wing every other weekend, and the subject of endless gossip, even in Slytherin, the house where he had more enemies than friends. Potter topped every list of dishiest blokes in the year, and Draco *always* ended up hearing about it from Pansy. (To his credit, Draco usually came in third after Blaise Zabini.) Draco knew more than he ever wanted to about Potter's day-to-day life.

So he antagonized him. It bothered Draco that someone could be so endlessly celebrated as Harry Potter, especially someone who'd exhausted all their usefulness at the age of one and was now just enjoying the ride.

And then there'd been sixth year. Draco was on edge all the time, constantly afraid someone would find him out, fighting Snape every step of the way. And there was Potter, practically stalking him, watching his every move, waiting for him to slip up.

Potter acted like a big hero, trying to live up to his own image. He was condescending and self-righteous, and his demeanor made Draco's blood boil.

Now...

None of these traits had really changed, Draco supposed, but what he was coming to find was that Potter was more than the sum of these things. He was...Draco didn't know, really. Intriguing. Something about him was intriguing.

Draco was sitting in the library one day, letting himself get preoccupied with these thoughts, while Potter, on a rare day off, was sitting across the table and writing what had looked to be a star chart on a cursory glance.

"What are you thinking?" Potter asked suddenly, startling him.

Draco felt strangely embarrassed. "What? Oh..." He tried not to flush. "Er, school."

Potter's eyes swept over the library. "It's easy to think about school, here."

"That's true," Draco said simply.

"Were you thinking about your friends?" Potter asked mildly.

Draco's mouth ticked at the idea of Potter as one of his school friends. Draco had never had much in the way of friends, anyway. Not because he wasn't popular -- the fact that his family was old money had always ensured that -- but because he hadn't really liked anyone very much. Crabbe and Goyle were little more than servants, Zabini was a snooty ponce, Pansy was whiny, Theodore Nott was...sketchy, for lack of a better word, and everyone from outside Slytherin was simply *intolerable*. Draco had been content to remain aloof, associate with his peers when it suited him, and command grudging respect from the younger students.

"Hello?" Potter said, waving a hand in front of him.

He started again. "Girls," he lied inexplicably. "I was trying to remember who'd been voted fittest girl in our year."

Potter went with it, to Draco's relief. "Parvati Patil," he said without hesitation. "I remember because I thought it was stupid that she could win over her own twin."

Privately, Draco agreed. He'd voted for Daphne Greengrass, anyway. Parvati Patil wore too much makeup.

Potter grinned. "D'you think they ever made a list of fittest blokes?"

Draco rolled his eyes. "Only every *day*. What rock were you living under?" He sniggered. "I guess Granger wouldn't have shared it with you."

"I'm sure she wanted nothing to do with anything of the sort," Potter said with a shrug. "Who won, then?"

*Oh, fuck. Lie. Say you don't remember.* "Er. You did."

Potter guffawed. "Now I *know* Hermione wanted nothing to do with it."

Potter's easy smile made Draco feel all of a sudden very strange. Like he was mid-air after falling off a broom. He looked resolutely downward. Was he ill?

Potter wasn't ready to let it drop. "Really? Me? The world's in a worrisome state if I'm the best Hogwarts has to offer."

"I quite agree," Draco muttered lamely, trying to get a hold of himself.

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Draco was convinced that his environment had reached its upper limit of unbearable people (Potter counting for several, naturally) when he was rudely disillusioned of this notion by the introduction of a new friend.

He was sulking in the Gryffindor common room and eavesdropping on yet another incomprehensible conversation between Potter, Granger, and Weasley, when the top of his head was quite suddenly ambushed by a mass of orange fur and claws.

He let out an unmanly screech and knocked it off, with some difficulty. He cast a glance at Potter to see that he, Granger and Weasley had stopped talking to watch. None of them deigned to ask if he was all right, of course. Or detain the beastly thing.

He looked down at his feet where the animal, a giant cat with a squashed face, was eying him angrily. He sneered at it and it hissed.

"Good kitty, Crookshanks," Weasley said.

"Crookshanks is my cat, Malfoy," Granger explained. "He's been living with my parents until we got settled in at Hogwarts. He's part-Kneazle."

Part-cat, part-Kneazle. Like Granger was part-Muggle, part-witch. Fitting, Draco supposed.

"You must be so proud," he said, glancing nervously at the cat as it stalked around him.

"He doesn't seem to like you too much," Potter observed unnecessarily.

Draco heaved a melodramatic sigh of frustration. "Oh, *damn*, and I've been so popular with everyone else around here." He sneered more forcefully at Crookshanks. "I hate cats."

"Crookshanks has a knack for judging people's characters," Weasley said gleefully as the cat growled, still not taking its eyes off Draco. If it leapt at him again, could he kill it and claim self-defense?

Granger tittered in amusement, but Potter frowned. "You didn't get along with Crookshanks for a long time, Ron," he said.

"Because of Scabbers," Weasley replied. "And we all know how that turned out."

Draco did not know how that had turned out, but he was well aware that they wouldn't tell him if he asked.

The cat jumped into Granger's lap, still staring at Draco. He resigned himself to having been judged and rejected by a cat. It was hardly the most degrading thing he'd gone through recently.

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Potter's absences were so common now that he didn't bother to inform Draco (or others, Draco suspected) when he and his sidekicks left, especially as they were usually only gone for two or three days. Draco was not surprised, then, when Potter and Weasley barged into the dormitory after a several-day trip one mid-morning. Weasley heaved an exhausted sigh and fell onto his bed, while Potter acknowledged Draco with a small up-nod and began unpacking his rucksack.

Draco stalked into the bathroom, irked that Potter had decided to return just when he was about to have a shower. He turned on a tap to wash his face and studied himself in the mirror. His hair was starting to fall in his face, which annoyed him to no end. He needed to cut it, but the chances of him getting a wand or a pair of scissors were equally unlikely. He grimaced, sticking his chin out. He needed to shave, too. Having very light, very fine hair was fortunate in that he could get away with not shaving for a while, but he was beginning to look a bit scruffy. He resolved to bother Potter about it. Maybe Potter would let him borrow his wand...

He marched into the dormitory, greeted by the sound of Weasley's snoring. "Potter," he said, causing Potter to look up from the drawer he was rummaging through. "I need to shave."

Potter shot him an infuriatingly bewildered look. "So do." Draco stared at him scathingly. "Do you want to borrow my razor?" he asked finally.

"Your what?" Draco returned impatiently.

Potter blinked. "My razor blade."

Draco was aghast. That sounded like an archaic Muggle invention if he'd ever heard one. "You shave with a *blade*?" he asked, raising his eyebrows.

"What do you use?" Potter replied, as if taking a blade to your face was the most natural thing in the world.

"My wand, of course," Draco said haughtily. He reveled somewhat in Potter's very limited knowledge of common charms. He couldn't imagine trying to live a magic life with only the strictly utilitarian spells they learned in school. "You just use a localized depilating charm." He smirked. "Do you, like, shear yourself? That is so medieval."

Potter rolled his eyes, walking over to the table next to his bed and pulling what looked like a stick out of a drawer. "No, look -- the blade's in here. You drag it on your skin and it cuts the hair." He touched the silver bladed end to his arm briefly and pulled it away to reveal a small bare patch of skin. "See?"

Draco was fascinated despite himself. "So you can use it on your face?"

Potter nodded, mimicking dragging it across his jawbone. "Yeah, it's easy." He handed the stick to Draco. "Here, you can have that one, I've got another one somewhere." He reached into the bedside table again, pulling out a metallic can. "Put that on first," he finished.

Draco took his new possessions into the loo, setting them down on the sink. After a brief inspection of the razor, he pressed it to his jaw.

"Ow!" he yelped as it caught. A spot of blood appeared where it had been and he wiped it away, tsking in annoyance. Stupid Muggle contraption.

Potter's head poked into the loo. "What'd you, nick yourself?" Catching sight of Draco, he walked towards him with a long-suffering air. "I *told* you to use the shaving cream." He grabbed the can off the sink and, with an alarming noise,

squirted a very peculiar-looking white substance into his palm. He then stuck his hand out, offering the dollop to Draco.

Draco took it warily, absently noting the contrast between the cool substance and Potter's warm hand as he wiped it.

He looked at Potter for further instruction. Potter mimed rubbing his face.

Draco was becoming surer by the second that Potter was taking the piss, but he nonetheless rubbed the shaving cream on his face.

"Okay," Potter said, taking the razor in hand, "You have to do it lightly, and don't--" He sighed. "You know what? I'll do it."

With that, he stepped forward and reached for Draco's face. Draco felt the cool slide of the blade against his skin, watching Potter as he concentrated on his task. He studied Potter's face, the way he sucked his lower lip between his teeth as he focused and the way his green eyes crossed ever-so-slightly to look at Draco's jaw as he worked over it. He periodically ran the razor under the tap, tossing his hair as he turned back to Draco, giving him a glimpse of his usually-obscured scar.

After the first few strokes, Draco was pretty sure he could have done it himself, but for some reason he was content to leave it to Potter. He chalked it up to laziness.

Potter was thorough, going from long swipes over his jaw to short ones on his upper lip, not cutting him once. "Chin up," he directed, and Draco tipped his head upwards so Potter could get his throat. Finally, he put the razor down on the sink.

It suddenly occurred to Draco that Potter was standing rather close to him.

Potter seemed to have the same thought, because he took a large step backwards before gesturing to the sink. "Er, I'm done, you can rinse off."

Draco did so rapidly, feeling belatedly awkward about the entire thing. Potter turned to leave, but Draco spoke just as he reached the door. "Er -- do you think I could cut my hair as well?" he asked, surprised by his somewhat timid tone of voice.

Potter looked stumped. "All I have is a pocket knife."

"You have a wand," Draco pointed out, familiar snideness creeping into his tone again.

"I'm not letting you use my wand," Potter said firmly, before softening. "I could do it for you."

Draco scoffed. "With that head of hair? Not a chance."

Potter shrugged. "I could try and transfigure the knife into a pair of scissors or something..."

"Why don't you just hold onto your wand while I use it? I'm not going to *do* anything," he said with exaggerated exasperation.

"Er, all right," Potter said, trepidation evident in his expression. He pulled his wand out of his pocket and held his right arm out, keeping a tight hold on the handle.

With difficulty, Draco gripped the wand around Potter's hand, again noting how warm it was. Potter was reaching at an odd angle as Draco leaned toward the mirror and raised the wand. "*Depilo*," he muttered, picturing a trim. He felt a little jolt as the magic traveled through the unfamiliar wand -- strange, considering it was an uncomplicated charm. Perhaps it had something to do with Potter's hand under his, combining magic and all that.

He let go of Potter's hand, which retreated back to Potter's pocket, depositing the wand. Draco tousled his hair, satisfied with the results.

"Er," Potter said, taking a step back again, "do you always cut your hair that way?"

"What, magically? Yeah. Do you use scissors?" Draco found the idea dreadfully primitive.

Potter grinned. "I haven't had a haircut since I was ten years old." When Draco shot him a confused look, he continued sheepishly. "It kind of has a life of its own."

Draco smirked. "That much is evident."

"My aunt used to hate it since it wouldn't...behave or whatever. Sometimes she'd cut it all off, but it'd all be back by the next day."

Draco was very tempted to ask more about his aunt, knowing next to nothing about Potter's childhood, but instead he snatched the razor and shaving cream off the sink. A strange and disconcerting nervousness coiled in his stomach. He needed to leave. "Thanks," he said shortly, rushing out of the loo.

"Don't mention it," Potter replied cheerfully.

It was after that regrettable episode that Draco decided he had been spending too much time with Potter, or something, because Potter seemed to get weirder and weirder. And he seemed to make Draco act weirdly as well. Potter continued to flit in and out of Hogwarts without rhyme or reason, and it was Draco's personal opinion that Potter was having frequent near-death experiences out in the wild that were making him crazy, because each time he came back with a disconcerting upbeatness.

"Malfoy," he would always say with a small smile as he walked past to unpack his bag.

Draco would always feel an odd swooping something in his stomach, like taking a dive on a broom, which compelled him to answer, "Potter," in the same ridiculously jovial tone. It became a sort of game they were playing. And judging from the little smirk crawling onto the corner of Potter's mouth, Draco was pretty sure he was losing.

Draco often found himself watching Potter. Watching Potter had become a habit of his over the course of their six years in school together. It was usually with malicious intent, to make sure he didn't miss a single clumsy thing Potter did or a chance to antagonize him over, say, anonymous singing fanmail. In sixth year, Potter had become such an anxiety that he'd been added to the short list of people to always keep an eye on, the other two being Dumbledore and Snape. His eyes were continually sweeping the Great Hall, making sure none of them were looking his way as he got up to go work on the Vanishing Cabinet.

And so it felt oddly familiar to watch Potter over dinner, or in the library, but at the same time very different. The sense of revenge was gone, the sense that Potter *deserved* everything Draco could throw at him, no matter how cruel or juvenile, because he had it so *good* from everyone else. It had been replaced by a very strange stillness. A warm stillness that reminded Draco that pathetic though it might be, Potter was the only thing in his life that had survived sixth year and the tumultuous summer after it. He'd thrown away his life as a student to be a Death Eater, and now he didn't even have that. All he had was Potter.

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Draco watched Potter bite his nails as he hunched thoughtfully over his latest book in the library. Draco had grabbed *The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts* off the shelf Potter had briefly perused. He'd read it at least ten times already, and so was reduced to watching Potter bite his nails. It was an absolutely filthy habit, really, and Draco realized that for some reason he knew that Potter had started biting his nails during second year. He remembered it because he had wondered what Saint Potter had to be nervous about, and had come to the conclusion that he was most likely fretting over his newly acquired title of Heir of Slytherin. Draco couldn't help but smirk at the memory.

Potter lifted his gaze from the page. "What the hell are you smirking at?"

Embarrassed, Draco sneered as snottily as he could manage and reluctantly glanced back down at his book.



*The reign of terror of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named came to an abrupt end on Hallowe'en night of 1981.*

"Oh, look!" Draco said mock-cheerfully, "You're in here!"

Potter grunted, apparently uninterested. Honestly, if Draco saw his own name in a history book, he'd find it at least a *bit* cool.

"On that night, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named went to Godric's Hollow," he read as though reading a children's story, "prepared to murder two of the most influential members of the Order of the Phoenix working against him, Lily and James Potter, and their--"

"I know the story, thanks. I was there," Potter said coldly, flipping the page of his book tersely.

"Honestly, Potter," Draco drawled. "You mustn't be so touchy. It's not like you miss them, you don't even *remember* them."

Potter finally looked up, and Draco swallowed as he collected himself for what would inevitably become a screaming row or even a fist fight.

"Shut up," Potter said levelly, not batting an eyelash.

Speechless, Draco did.

Potter went back to his book, and Draco fumed for a few moments, frustrated that he couldn't get a rise out of Potter. He was so wrapped up in his anger that it took him a while to realize that his left arm was prickling insistently and was beginning to burn.

He squeezed his eyes shut against the urge to clamp his hand down on his forearm. He bit down against the inside of his cheek, watching Potter to make sure he didn't notice. Just as his arm became very painful, however, Potter dropped his quill and pressed the heel of his hand to his forehead, mumbling a curse.

Potter's scar. The rumor was true -- he really was connected to the Dark Lord.

Their eyes locked for one impossibly long moment. "He's calling," Draco said simply.

"He's happy about something," Potter said.

Draco knew he ought to be pleased that the Dark Lord was happy, but something about Potter's somber tone gave him a feeling of deep foreboding.

The sense of unease stayed with him throughout the day. He was constantly tempted to check on his Dark Mark, but he didn't want to reveal it under the watchful guise of the Order, though he assumed Potter had told various important people about his scar. Potter was watching him anyway, more closely than usual, his face displaying the same unease that Draco felt in his chest.

They walked into the Great Hall together that evening, and the room went stock still. Draco glanced at Potter, hoping for some sort of explanation, but Potter was staring straight ahead. Draco followed his gaze to Granger, who was mouthing something unintelligible.

Draco didn't realize he was frozen to the spot until Potter tugged at his shirt sleeve. "Come on," he said gruffly, and walked towards her. Draco followed, slowly, a panicky nervousness building up in his stomach. Something was wrong.

Potter had reached the table before Draco was halfway there, and Granger cupped a hand to his ear and whispered. His eyes widened and they both turned to look at Draco. Before Draco could take another step, however, an owl swooped through the window, and flew down towards him.

He watched its slow descent warily. *Why* would he receive an owl? *How* could he receive an owl? *Who* even knew he

was alive?

And then the owl dropped a letter. His hands reached out to catch it of their own volition.

The letter was black. It was a death notice.

His heart plummeted. The room was ghostly still; all eyes were on him as he tore open the letter with shaking hands.

*Mr. Draco Lucius Malfoy,*

*We regret to inform you of the death of Lucius Abraxas Malfoy,*

He couldn't continue. He swallowed several times, unable to get around the enormous lump in his throat. His father was dead. And he had found out from an automated letter. His father was dead. His vision was beginning to blur as he stared at the formal, unfeeling script, and he blinked angrily. He would not cry in front of the Order of the Phoenix, who were probably reveling in his loss. He turned on his heel and walked proudly out of the Great Hall, the way his father would have expected of him.

His legs felt weighted as he walked blindly away from the Great Hall. He was repulsed by anything he'd come to call comfortable over the preceding months. He trudged onto the grounds, walking aimlessly for a while until he came to rest at the edge of the lake. It was bitterly cold outside, but he hardly noticed.

His father was dead.

He reexamined the letter, crumpled from the tight fist he hadn't noticed he was making.

*...found approximately twenty kilometres outside Alderbury, Wiltshire...*

*...Dark Mark above the building...*

*...In the absence of contactable next-of-kin, no funeral plans have been made. Mr Malfoy will be interred at Azkaban Prison cemetery.*

His father had been murdered. Apparently by the Dark Lord and his followers. It made no sense. Why would the Dark Lord do something like this?

Draco's stomach lurched. Potter had been right.

And now his father was gone. Draco's grief wasn't acute - he hadn't seen his father in over a year. Just a dull, regretful ache that nagged at him. He should have worked harder to break out of Hogwarts. He should have been smart enough not to get caught in the first place. He should have *missed* his father properly...

Regret and sorrow overwhelmed him, finally, and the tears he had been so stoically holding back finally flowed. He wept, sobs wracking his entire frame, at the complete unfairness of it all -- he couldn't even attend a funeral to pay respects to the most important person in his life, the one person who had always encouraged him to strive to be the best...

He was reduced to a collared prisoner, unable even to mourn.

As soon as Draco heard the faint groan of a door opening across the grounds he knew it was Potter. Tears were running freely down his face and he hated Potter for insisting on seeing him like this.

Draco tried to ignore the fact that Potter was approaching, concentrating on anything over his footsteps crunching on dead leaves.

"Hi," he heard behind him. He didn't respond, shivering a little as Potter sat down next to him. "Are you all right?" Potter asked. Draco didn't have to look at him to know his expression was open and somber and damnably unassuming.

"No," he spat, flinching at the sound of his own croaky voice.

A long silence stretched between them.

"I'm sorry," Potter said finally.

Of course Potter wasn't *sorry*. Potter hated his father, had sent him to Azkaban in the first place. The bloody Order was probably inside celebrating.

"I don't want your pity," Draco said automatically, too tired and cold to muster up much venom behind it.

There was another pause.

"What do you want, then?" Potter said quietly.

Draco slowly turned to look at him as the question sank in. Even behind Potter's fogged-up glasses, his eyes were blindingly *green*.

Not daring to think about it, Draco leaned in and kissed him.

Potter didn't shove him away. Or even sit there, frozen, in shock and horror.

Potter kissed him back.

Draco's heart was beating so fast he thought it would beat right out of his chest and every inch of him was on fire and *he was kissing Potter* and it was *so good*.

Cold reality caught up with him and he wrenched himself away, standing up clumsily.

Potter stared up at him from the ground, saying nothing.

Breathing harshly, the taste and feel of Potter still on his lips, he turned and fled.

He didn't go back to Gryffindor tower, but instead lay shivering and confused in the Room of Requirement, knowing Potter would know to look for him there but hoping he had the sense not to. Pushing the entire day out of his mind, he eventually fell into a restless sleep.

## CHAPTER SEVEN:

In which this is the last chapter with any real definition. Banzai! Pr0nzai! Ahaha.

Draco woke up with two very important thoughts.

Firstly, his father was dead. This was definitely more of a thought than a feeling -- he was quite sure that he hadn't yet come close to registering such a blow emotionally. He couldn't really say he missed his father, not acutely, since he hadn't seen him for almost two years anyway. He did feel a very deep regret not to have seen him. But the fact that he was used to his absence made it terribly easy to forget he was dead at all.

Secondly.

Secondly, he had kissed Harry Potter. On the mouth. It hadn't been Potter kissing him. That would have been all right. In fact, that would have been Potter taking advantage of him. But *he* had kissed *Potter*.

Did that mean he fancied him?

And Potter hadn't just sat there. He'd...contributed.

Did that mean Potter fancied him too? Or was Potter just being nice because Draco's dad had died?

Well. There was being nice, and then there was being *really* nice.

Draco shook his head. He needed to focus on what was important here. This sort of thing had implications. Did this mean he was... *like that*? He cringed at the thought -- how distasteful. He couldn't be.

This had to have been a fluke. The kiss was a total lapse of judgment.

So why did he want to do it again?

Draco banished that thought immediately. He *did not* want to do it again, because he didn't fancy Potter, and definitely didn't find him attractive because he probably weighed less than a hundred pounds and was a short, speccy git who thought way too much of himself, and most importantly, because he was a *bloke*, and even more most importantly, because he was Harry fucking Potter.

It was ludicrous.

Draco was not looking forward to seeing Potter that morning, lest Potter try to bring up Draco's regrettable actions from the night prior, and was relieved not to see him, Weasley, or Granger at breakfast. Bill motioned for him to sit down.

"I'm sorry about your father," Bill said as he approached, uncharacteristically serious.

Draco scoffed, ignoring the pang in his chest. "No, you aren't. Don't say you are if you're not."

Bill was unfazed. "I can't even imagine what it must be like for you. Do you want to talk about it?"

Was he *joking*? "What are you, my grieving counselor?" he shot back.

"Harry went outside to look for you after you left last night. Did he find you?"

*Oh, he found me all right.* "Yes," Draco said tightly. *And then I bloody kissed him!*

Draco tuned out Bill's presumptuous pseudo-sympathetic tirade as his mind drifted back to the kiss. He remembered it in so much detail that he could almost feel it. Potter hadn't hesitated at all; it was as though he'd expected it -- as though he'd *wanted* it. Potter's mouth moving against his...Draco could imagine how it might have progressed from there. More hands, less clothes...

He shut his eyes in horrified embarrassment. He couldn't think about Potter sexually. He just *couldn't*. That was so wrong in every conceivable way. He couldn't think of anything more absolutely forbidden.

How ashamed would his father be?

He swallowed thickly. His father could hardly be ashamed of anything anymore.

Ridding himself of that thought before it could catch up with him, he immersed himself in his current conundrum. Thinking of Potter sexually was the crux of the problem. Because if he thought about Potter sexually, it meant he was attracted to Potter. Who was a boy.

Which meant he was...

Well. He couldn't even think it.

And he wasn't just *any* boy. He was the absolute worst boy. He was the antithesis of everything Draco believed in and everything Draco fought for.

Fancying Potter was direct disloyalty to the Dark Lord. Worse still, a dishonor to his father's memory.

He noticed Bill was looking at him with a concerned expression.

"Come on," Bill said. "Let's get out of here."

Draco let himself be led out of the Great Hall and onto the grounds. He hoped Bill wouldn't go to the lake, or he might die of embarrassment.

They walked slowly, going nowhere in particular, Bill talking about anything that crossed his mind.

Draco swallowed, watching him. He couldn't stop thinking about it. About *Potter*. He had to know.

"Bill, I've a favor to ask you," he said seriously.

"Sure," replied oblivious Bill.

"Don't take this the wrong way," Draco said. He hesitated a fraction of a second, then grabbed Bill's head, screwed his eyes shut, and pressed his lips to Bill's.

He contemplated. It was nice. It was nothing compared to snogging Potter, but Bill wasn't doing much. But it was definitely nice.

Damn.

Bill pulled away. "Whoa, whoa! I appreciate the sentiment, but I'm a married man, remember?"

"Sorry," muttered Draco, wiping his mouth.

Bill stared at him for a moment. "Going to tell me what that was all about?" he asked pointedly.

"I just...had to check something," Draco stammered.

"What were you checking, dare I ask?" Bill said, a smile playing on his lips.

Draco flushed. "Whether I...I'm...never mind. Just...something."

Bill's eyebrows knitted in confusion. "Well, are you...something?"

"I don't know, all right?!" he snapped.

Bill looked taken aback by his reaction. "Yeah, of course it's all right," he said as if placating a child. "Are *you* all right?"

"I don't KNOW!" Draco repeated, his voice cracking slightly.

Draco spent the entire day with Potter on his mind, in one form or another. Consequently, by the day's end he was more confused than he'd started out. His thoughts had ranged from the moral, as in how he could possibly rationalize such a phenomenon, to, well... the more graphic.

The long and short of it was, Draco was a walking hard-on.

He couldn't very well deny it, because, well, there it was. Between his legs. Laughing at him.

He felt distinctly nervous as he eased himself into bed that night. He had the dormitory to himself, he rationalized. No one would find out.

He torturously replayed the kiss in his head, over and over again, until, swallowing his embarrassment, he let his hand snake down over his stomach to rest on his hipbone. He hadn't...done *this*...since he had been here, and he was all alone...but it would make his silly and growing crush on Potter indisputably real. When you're wanking over someone, it's safe to say you're attracted to them. Male attributes, dickweed personality, and ugly scar included.

He closed his fingers into a fist around himself, sighing -- he hadn't had the luxury of doing this for a couple months, which he thought was quite a long time to hold out considering he was a teenage boy.

As his hand started to work slowly up and down, he thought of Potter, fully clothed in his school uniform. Potter looked at him smolderingly as he shucked off his robe and started to loosen his tie.

Draco was too turned on to consider being properly mortified about such a fantasy. He spread his legs farther apart, imagining Potter slowly unbuttoning his shirt, continuing to look lustfully at Draco as he revealed a tanned, lean body. Potter walked towards him, placing a hand on Draco's chest as he leaned in for what started out as the kiss but soon became much deeper, and Potter worked his hand into Draco's trousers, and then Draco's trousers were gone because it was his fantasy and he didn't need to spend it fiddling with his trousers, and Potter was touching him, and it was so easy to imagine that his hand was Potter's...

Potter tilted his head to whisper into his ear, "Come for me, Draco," and with a ragged gasp, Draco did.

He swallowed as he came down. He had just wanked over Potter. He was fucking doomed.

Potter and his cronies stayed out for four days (not that Draco was counting), and Draco dwelled on his one brief moment with Potter until it took on a surreal quality. At times, he thought he'd dreamt it -- which, in fact, only made his very real and very problematic growing attraction to Potter even more worrisome, because the one thing that was keeping him from going absolutely insane was the thought that perhaps, wherever the hell he was, Potter was dwelling on this just as obsessively, and he'd return and they'd lock eyes and understand each other completely and passionately embrace and Draco needed to stop acting like a trashy romance novel.

His situation was becoming dire. For Merlin's sake, the kiss (or rather, The Kiss, as he was coming to understand it) had lasted a grand total of five seconds. There hadn't been any tongue. There hadn't been any *anything*. Potter had probably just reacted instinctively. He had probably laughed about it afterwards. He had probably told Granger and Weasley on their outing (conveniently leaving out the kissing back part, the bastard) and they'd all had a good laugh together.

Draco also worried that it was significant that he hadn't seen Potter since The Kiss, but had managed to develop this monstrous obsession with him in the span of four days which reduced him to an idiotic girlish *freak*. Maybe, he reasoned, it meant that he was more attracted to the *idea* of Potter than to Potter himself. That sounded comforting. And much less embarrassing. Fancying The Boy Who Lived didn't make him blind to how much of a complete git he was. Draco thought he had better taste than that.

Not to mention he'd thought his tastes leaned a little more in the female direction...

But that was a problem of considerable magnitude, and one he would rather not deal with until he at least saw Potter in person and could assess once and for all what the fuck his problem was.

The gods obliged him and Potter walked in that very day with his posse in tow, looking a little worse for wear but without any visible damage. As Draco looked at him, his mind flashed back to The Kiss and, more mortifyingly, to the rather inappropriate images his mind had conjured up since. He hastily averted his eyes.

They sat down at the dinner table looking lively, fielding carefully worded questions from the others while Draco studied Potter out of the corner of his eye. Potter didn't look at him, didn't say hello to him. He didn't ignore him pointedly, like he was embarrassed, but nonchalantly, like he had every day in the library since Draco's arrival.

Potter didn't care. It hadn't bothered him while he was gone. It probably hadn't even crossed his mind.

Draco was determined to look at this positively. It meant, for one thing, that Potter wouldn't *do* anything. And eventually *it* would go away. And Draco could take it to the grave, where it belonged.

He paused from mechanically shoving food into his mouth to allow himself a small smile. He could consider this horrifying chapter of his life over.

He turned out to be very wrong in that consideration, however.

The next two days passed without incident, and Draco was doing a damn good job of forcing away any unwanted thoughts or swooping stomach sensations when Potter smiled or looked at him. However, on the sixth day since The Kiss (again, not that he was counting), Potter did something that ruined all of his progress.

He gave him a *look*. Draco was reading in the library, and assumed Potter was too, but he looked up across the table and Potter was looking at him, quite seriously and earnestly. And when Draco looked back at him, Potter swallowed and ducked his head down.

The incident seemed inconsequential. Potter went back to ignoring him and he went back to ignoring every sick, weird image his brain supplied.

But the next day, it happened again.

Draco was determined to forget it. He hated Potter and Potter hated him. They'd kissed and both regretted it. That was that.

When it happened a third time, that idiotic, girly voice in his head, which had been slowly fading away, popped up and whispered that maybe Potter had thought about it a bit. And just maybe, he was still thinking about it.

Draco needed to get out of the library. "I'm bored," he said, careful to keep his tone bored.

"Sorry," said Potter, without looking up from the notes he was taking. Good, Draco thought. He wanted Potter to thoughtlessly dismiss him. It discouraged his weird...yearnings.

He found himself asking for trouble again after five minutes. (Not that he counted them...) "*Really* bored," he said.

This time, Potter put down his quill, and did look up. He paused for a moment, weighing his options. "Wanna play Quidditch?" he asked offhandedly.

Draco almost didn't stop himself from smiling. "Yeah, all right."

Potter turned around and called over to Weasley and Granger, who were sitting at the next table, engrossed in work. "Oi," he said. "Wanna play Quidditch?"

Weasley looked extremely relieved and exclaimed "Gods, yes!" just as Granger looked infuriated and said "Harry, we

have loads to do!"

Granger caved eventually and the four of them braved the cold weather and strode onto the Quidditch pitch. Potter fetched his Firebolt with a Summoning Charm and the rest of them got school brooms. Two-on-two Quidditch was not easy to configure, so they ended up scooting through the air mindlessly for a while, reminding Draco heavily of Bill. Granger feigned (he was sure) coldness and went inside after about an hour, and Weasley grudgingly followed her a few minutes later.

Potter procured a Snitch. "Wanna go?" he asked.

Draco rolled his eyes, falling easily into a condescending tone. "We've discussed this before. I'm not going to embarrass myself on this prehistoric broom trying to race a Firebolt. It's not an even match."

Potter looked at him levelly for a moment before flying back down onto the pitch. He disappeared into the supply shed and returned with a puttering old broom similar to the one Draco had commandeered. "Now it's an even match," he said with a smirk that caused Draco to lose his balance for a moment.

"Nervous?" Draco volleyed back. He certainly was. Watching Potter fly had always been a (very) guilty pleasure; now it was downright dangerous.

"You wish."

Potter chucked the Snitch and they were off. This practice Snitch was slower than the one used for games, which suited them fine -- they could follow it constantly instead of waiting for long stretches like they usually would in a match.

It also meant they stayed much closer together. Draco could admit he didn't really have the concentration needed of a Seeker; this wouldn't be the first time he lost track of the game. He grimly recalled the second year match when Potter had snatched the Snitch even as it hovered next to his head. Now, however, Potter was the distraction. He'd assumed his almost-trademark look and posture of adrenaline-pumped determination and Draco threatened to swoon right off his broom. As it was, he'd resorted to picturing his parents conceiving him in order to avoid a physical reaction. The hormonal humiliation that had been his third year had taught him nothing if not that riding a broom with an erection was a difficult thing to do.

Shaking himself, Draco watched as the Snitch zipped to the very lowest point on the field and paused precariously.

He and Potter glanced at each other before going into simultaneous nosedives. They were neck and neck -- he could hear Potter breathing next to him and feel the warmth of his shoulder when they bumped together. He got so engrossed that he almost didn't notice that the ground was rapidly closing in -- the Snitch couldn't be more than a foot off of it. He continued to dive, feeling a little crazy, and Potter didn't pull up either, and suddenly the Snitch darted away, leaving them both careening toward the grass.

He managed to pull up enough at the last second not to break the broom as it drove into the ground, but he was still thrown forward over it and landed on his back on the pitch. With an "oof," Potter toppled off of his broom as well, landing next to him.

Draco sat up, blessedly devoid of injuries, and, after a moment, began to laugh.

Potter started laughing too.

They giggled helplessly for a few moments. Draco took in Potter's disheveled appearance and noticed the tuft of grass caught in his windswept hair. Their laughter slowly died out, giving way to a surprisingly companionable silence. Potter continued to smile at him, somewhat worryingly, and then got a strange intensity in his eyes.

And then he lunged forward and kissed Draco on the mouth.

Draco ignited. He scooted closer to Potter as well as he could without breaking the kiss, gripping his shoulders, a thousand thoughts getting lost beneath one all-encompassing one: *Potter was kissing him*. Potter's chapped lips



moved against his and he took a chance and opened his mouth slightly and then Potter's tongue was in his mouth and it was sloppy and awkward and *so excellent*.

He desperately wanted to get closer to Potter but they were sitting down, and the only way to do it would be to climb in his lap, which seemed a little forward.

Potter broke the kiss, looking him right in the eye, and Draco knew that this was the point where he'd run away last time and hoped Potter wouldn't go the same route, and then Potter smiled and climbed into *his* lap, and it was a little forward, but he liked it.

He continued to clutch helplessly at Potter's shoulders as they pressed against each other, Potter's body a refuge from the bitter cold. He could feel Potter's heart beating against his chest and together they made the most erratic drumbeat he'd ever heard, and when Potter moved just a bit he felt something against his stomach that was most definitely not a wand.

He made a noise that sounded suspiciously like a moan into Potter's mouth as Potter ground down into him. He was sure Potter could feel that he was hard and it was great that Potter didn't mind, but if he came in his pants he didn't think he could live it down...

"Gods," he gasped, tilting his mouth away.

"Yeah," Potter agreed breathlessly. Draco could feel the rise and fall of his chest.

"This is fucked up," Draco said, making no move to get away. He couldn't really muster up much conviction when he could still feel the outline of Potter's erection quite clearly.

"I know," Potter said, leaning in once more. "I can't believe we didn't think of it before."

After a few more moments (or hours, or days), Potter broke away again. "We should go in. Ron and Hermione will be looking." He awkwardly eased himself out of Draco's lap and stood up, brushing himself off.

Draco also stood up, feeling cold again. Potter licked his lips and picked up his broom, straddling it. With an almost comical wince, he eased himself back off. "On second thought, I think I'll walk," he said, heading towards the Quidditch shed.

Forcing back a smile, Draco followed. Potter was silent as they walked, and each passing moment made it harder for Draco to think of anything to say. Would it be too obvious for him to take a trip to the loo? Because frankly, his balls were starting to ache and he didn't think there was any other solution to the problem while he was still staring at Potter's flushed cheeks and swollen lips.

Potter deposited the brooms back into the shed and locked it with a flick of his wand. It wasn't until much later that Draco remembered the practice Snitch, still zooming about by its lonesome, waiting for someone to chase it.

Granger and Weasley were in the library when they returned. Draco swallowed nervously as Granger looked up, scrutinizing them. What if she could tell? No, he reasoned, she couldn't. There was no reason for her mind to jump to any conclusion of that sort. Unless...Potter had told her about the first kiss. They were friends. What if he'd confided in her?

He risked a sidelong glance at Potter, who was resolutely looking downward.

"Have a good fly?" she said, somewhat disapprovingly.

"Yeah," said Potter, obviously uncomfortable. Merlin, what a bad liar. "S cold out, though."

Draco was comforted, though, by the fact that Potter was lying. She didn't know, and he didn't want her to. It was secret.

It was their secret.

They sat down at Weasley and Granger's table, and Granger pushed a thin book in Potter's direction, muttering something Draco couldn't catch and pointing at a passage of interest. He nodded, muttering back, and she rustled in her rucksack for a piece of parchment.

Draco's face burned. Potter slipped so effortlessly back into work mode. How did he do it? Draco, meanwhile, was still struggling with a certain pesky region of his body, which didn't seem to understand that the action was *over* and he no longer required it to stand at attention. He pressed the heel of his hand to himself to alleviate his discomfort and cursed Potter for, apparently, having a much higher tolerance for pain.

He stood up, hopefully not too abruptly. "I need the loo," he said roughly, and turned to exit the library as fast as humanly possible.

"Oi!" said Potter before he'd made much progress. "I have to come with you."

Draco's mind went wild at the double entendre. "Is that really necessary?" he said, making sure to sound properly annoyed, and invoking a sneer for good measure.

Potter nodded solemnly, walking up to him. He rolled his eyes, pushing the doors of the library open and heading to the bathroom nearby.

He went from embarrassed to completely mortified when Potter followed him into the bathroom. He stood, motionless, as Potter looked at him blankly.

"Have you forgotten how to use the loo?" Potter said, motioning towards a urinal.

Draco gritted his teeth. "I was going to wank, you pillock," he ground out.

Potter flushed instantly. "Oh. Oh! Jesus, why didn't you say so?"

"What, in front of your friends?" Draco said snottily, still bitter that Potter wasn't similarly vexed.

"You know," Potter said slowly, "I could help you out." He took a step forward. "And you could help me."

Draco stood corrected.

Potter closed the remaining distance between them and their mouths came together as though attracted by some unseen force. Draco screwed his eyes tightly shut, a feeling strangely akin to relief flooding him. His hands roved over Potter's back as Potter pressed against him and he could feel just exactly how corrected he stood. He vaguely registered his feet stepping backwards, stopping only when his back pushed against the nearest wall. Potter pressed into him more forcefully and canted his hips forward, sending an exquisite tingle up his spine.

Draco being somewhat taller, they didn't exactly fit together, and Draco bent his knees in frustration to get his groin to line up with Potter's, pushing his own hips forward impatiently. Potter gasped and his hands gripped Draco's waist hard enough to bruise. They ground together frantically, each erratic jerk of Potter's hips creating more friction and bringing Draco closer to the inevitable. Potter bent his head to rest it in the dip of Draco's collar and Draco could feel him exhaling hotly.

"Fuck," Potter muttered, and seized up.

It took Draco a moment to realize that Potter was actually *coming*. Perfect, saintly Potter was coming, practically humping Draco's leg with his face buried in Draco's shoulder.

It was too much.

Potter caught his breath, looking up almost cautiously at Draco. "Wow," he said.

Draco sincerely hoped Potter didn't think he was going to walk into the loo where Draco was trying to have a perfectly

respectable wank, make Draco harder than he'd ever been in his *life*, and get away with it unscathed. He let a keening noise escape from his throat, far beyond embarrassment. Potter kissed him languidly and then, unexpectedly, brought a hand between them to rub hesitantly against Draco's erection.

Pleasure spiked and Draco felt his climax coming from far away like an oncoming train. He threw his head back, knocking it against the wall painfully as Potter continued to rub up and down, driving him to ecstasy. And then he was coming, right into Potter's hand, with only the fabric of his trousers separating them. It lasted what seemed like forever, and all he could see was white behind his eyelids, and *fuck* Potter's hand was still there, moving insistently, and it was surely the best orgasm of all time.

He opened his eyes to find Potter looking at him from behind his eyelashes. "Wow," he agreed.

Potter hastily removed his hand from its now-offending position and stepped backward.

"Er," he said. Draco swallowed. "Right," Potter tried again, businesslike. "We'd best get back, then." He pulled out his wand and cast a couple of much-needed *tergeos* before peaking into the mirror to try and smooth his hair down. "Ruddy hair," he muttered, giving up. Draco took a moment to survey his own appearance. His face had something of a pinkish tint, and his lips were fuller than usual -- to be honest, he looked as though he'd been snogged silly. He turned on the tap for a moment and ran dampened fingers through his hair, which obeyed him easily. After straightening out his clothes, he pushed open the door to the loo and cast a quick glance to either side before heading back to the library, Potter following behind him.

They sat back down at the table in silence and Potter went back to work, looking at Granger's notes and nodding before writing something of his own.

Draco smirked.

It was their secret.

## CHAPTER EIGHT:

**In which intimacy is deepened considerably. Haha. I just quoted *Brokeback Mountain*. Appropriate?**

That night, Draco stared at the starry night on the enchanted ceiling for a very long time. The room was obnoxiously silent, but for the sleeping noises and occasional shuffling of bedclothes from Potter's adjacent bed. Weasley was, yet again, nowhere to be found.

Draco's head was buzzing, ceaselessly transitioning from one anxiety to the next.

Contributing to the majority of these anxieties was Potter, with whom his relationship had drastically, suddenly, and unalterably changed. It would have been one thing to have kissed once and tacitly agreed never to speak of it again, but Potter had pursued it. And now they'd done it three times. And the third time had been considerably more involved.

All of this led Draco to believe that this would, perhaps, become an enduring state of affairs. Did he want to be in a relationship with Potter? In all honesty, he had no idea. His feelings towards Potter were practically set in stone; they had actively loathed each other so intensely that theirs had become one of Hogwarts' most celebrated rivalries. And the circumstances were less than romantic -- Potter had him quite literally on a leash.

He almost couldn't bear to think about what this -- and his dubious attitude about it -- meant in terms of his sexuality. He'd never taken much interest in girls, it was true, but he'd always attributed that to their being so *stupid*. When faced with such profoundly unintelligent people as Pansy Parkinson and Tracey Davis, he was sure that most would choose to remain celibate. He'd always assumed that if and when he met a woman he *liked* enough, he'd appreciate her physicality more...passionately. The thought that the problem was that his interest lied *elsewhere* made his stomach turn with shame.

But it seemed to be the truth. Snogging Potter, all three times that he'd done it, absolutely trumped any other sexual experience he'd had (mostly with Pansy -- for appearances). Even being with Potter excited him.

That wasn't to say their routine got any more exciting. In fact, it didn't change a bit. During the next few weeks, Potter continued working in the library on whatever unfathomable project took up his time, and Draco was left to entertain himself.

And entertain himself he did. Perhaps it was due to his sexual revelation, or the fact that Potter was sitting right across from him, oblivious as you please, but Draco's mind did its very best to keep him from being bored by providing him with endless fantasies starring him, Potter, and a complete absence of clothing. He'd only ever seen Potter's bare chest, and in the *dark*, but that was what his imagination was for.

The greatest part was that it looked to anyone else like he was glaring a hole in Potter's head out of sheer loathing. No one would ever know that his head was filled with the most lustful images he'd ever conjured up.

Draco and Potter made very good use of the ample privacy to be found in Hogwarts. They'd soon snogged in half of the school's classrooms -- including, Draco was proud to say, on McGonagall's desk.

It was easy to fool Granger and Weasley -- after all, they weren't *looking* for anything of the sort, and people seldom see what they aren't looking for. Draco acted properly sullen when they were around, and Potter made sure to boss him around even more than usual -- which was a lot, considering what a bossy git he was.

They never wised up. After about three weeks, Potter began to get bold about it. Draco had no complaints at first -- Potter's excuses not to do whatever secret work he was assigned were wearing thin, and hiking around the castle ducking into broom cupboards was working steadily on Draco's shaky nerves. Potter gave up the pseudo-stealth altogether. "Come on," he said quite suddenly to Draco one day in the library. Draco looked warily at Granger and Weasley, only to find they hadn't even glanced at him. Draco knew that Potter had a sort of untouchable independence, but this bordered on ridiculous.

He stumbled out of his chair and followed Potter dumbly out of the room. He was halfway through asking what Potter meant dragging him out here when his mouth was forcibly stopped by Potter's. He didn't mind -- hell, what was to mind? It seemed to him, though, that Potter had a switch he could turn on and off. Upon returning from an epic snog,

Potter ignored him as skillfully and dispassionately as when Draco had taunted him in Potions class.

Draco came to realize after a time that Potter's nonchalance was probably borne of a complete disregard for what they were doing. The saintly individual had some Slytherin ruthlessness in him after all. He probably dismissed it as a valid stress reliever. Maybe he did this all the time -- he was the Boy Who Lived, after all, girls probably lined up to snog him -- and had, out of pure necessity, chosen to cavort with Draco.

In one sense, it was reassuring. It wasn't a gay thing, Draco told himself, it was a sex thing. Sometimes, though, this wasn't reassuring at all. The fact that he sometimes wanted *more* made him hate himself a little.

Of course Potter was nice about it -- after all, he was nice about everything. He would never come out and say "Malfoy, I'm using you to get off." But the fact remained that Draco had made the first move, albeit in a moment of extreme distress. Potter had then had a period of time to decide that yes, he wanted this, and had only then approached Draco, *knowing* he would react favorably.

The fact that he was *worrying* about this made him more frustrated than anything else, but try as he might, he couldn't rid himself of his uncomfortable thoughts. He spent way too much time in his own head. He wished there were someone he could talk to. There was no one here -- obviously not Potter, and Bill, though perhaps a friend, was definitely not a confidant. Draco had never confided in friends at Hogwarts anyway, and when things had got too bad for him to handle on his own, he'd always done the same thing -- written to his father.

It had become much less frequent over the years, and the nature of his letters had changed; where once he had pleaded for assistance, he later only asked for advice, and finally only used the letters as an outlet for anger or frustration. In his final years at Hogwarts he'd stopped sending the letters, using them more as a diary than anything else. They were more secure than a diary, as he addressed and magically sealed each one so only the intended eyes could read it, and the fact that they had an audience, hypothetically, kept him from getting too unnecessarily dramatic or emotional. It was a little strange, he realized, but it was cathartic.

Draco wondered if he didn't deserve some catharsis now.

He scribbled down a list for Potter and handed it to him.

"What's this?" demanded Potter without so much as glancing at it, ever-so-slightly indignant.

"It's a list of things I need," Draco replied tersely.

"New toothbrush, razor blades, quills, ink, notebook," Potter read. "What are you, writing your memoirs?" He glanced at the parchment again. "What do you need sets of robes for?"

"I hate Muggle clothing," Draco said. "I want proper robes. You don't have to buy them. I'll wear a school uniform if I have to. I dunno why the elves have gone to the trouble of finding me Muggle clothes to wear, anyway. I assumed you were making a statement or something."

Potter laughed. "Elves? I've just been lending you my clothes."

Draco flushed. There was something intimate about wearing Potter's underwear.

He smirked. "Why do they fit, then?"

Potter smirked back. "Some of them are Ron's."

Potter returned from his next mystery day-trip with the contents of Draco's shopping list -- minus the robes, since he was, of course, making a statement. Dipping a new quill in the ink, Draco expected to have lost his initiative. This was a little silly, after all, and embarrassingly sentimental. He opened the notebook to the first page, and began.

*Dad,*

He paused, swallowing around a lump in his throat. This was hard. It reminded him of better times, when he would

write to complain that Slytherin was full of idiots and couldn't he transfer to Durmstrang?, or that Granger was still beating him in every subject and he was pretty sure she was cheating. Those had seemed like real problems, then. Maybe this current situation would one day become a distant memory of a problem.

He started again, sighing.

*Dad,*

*You're dead. I'm sure you're aware. I'm at Hogwarts currently. I have no idea if you knew that when you died. Maybe you thought I was already dead.*

*Being a prisoner of war is much less exciting than it sounds. I expect to have soon read every book in the school library. I read the newspaper every day. No news of the D.E.s or Mum. I'm not sure if I hope Mum knows I'm alive. I don't want her to worry about me. Otherwise, though, she's all alone.*

*I tried to escape once and it worked out badly. At this point I may have to wait for the end of the war. I hope they aren't stupid enough to try using me for leverage, though I suspect that would have happened already if it were going to. They've got me fitted with a dog collar. It's really horrible. I have a constant crick in my neck and it chokes me when I do something wrong. I haven't seen my wand in ages. I hope they haven't snapped it, though truthfully I don't know what else they would have done with it.*

Draco sighed again, this time in annoyance. This was coming off like a bloody postcard. What was the point of writing a cathartic letter to his dead father if he wasn't even going to say anything of substance? He felt oddly self-conscious as he began again.

*I fucking miss you, Dad. I haven't seen you in a right long time, and now I guess I never will. It's easy to pretend you'll get this letter someday, though if that were the case I wouldn't have sworn. I hope you'll excuse a little self-indulgence.*

*I'll try not to write too often. It seems kind of desperate. Wouldn't want to disturb you, anyway. I'm sure you dead people get up to really cool stuff. Best wishes to Mum, though I hope you haven't seen her too recently.*

*Love,  
Draco*

Draco felt empty, having written it, and more than a little childish. He was frustrated at the length of the thing -- shouldn't he have more to say to his own dead dad? He hadn't even mentioned the Potter thing. He quickly jotted down an addendum.

*P.S.: About Potter -- I'm glad I'll never have to tell you about it.*

Draco smiled ruefully. That about summed it up.

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The letter did little but put him in a decidedly gloomy mood, afterwards. After sealing it with wax from a suspended candle in the dormitory, he angrily threw it in the fire, sure that Potter would nose around and find it otherwise. He went to dinner with a nameless anger in his gut -- the same impotent anger that he had become familiar with over the last few months.

A few *months*, he thought dejectedly. That's how long he'd been here. He'd spent hot August nights planning, attacking, running at the drop of a hat, and, in a cruel travesty of his school years, had returned to Hogwarts come September. All he'd accomplished as the trees turned outside and the temperature steadily dropped was to enter into a strange and sordid relationship with Harry Potter.

Potter tried to catch his eye as he sat down, but he stared resolutely at his plate. After a few excruciating minutes, he found it hard even to look at the disgusting food the elves prepared. He looked up, heaving a sigh. He could see out of the corner of his eye Potter looking at him, perhaps contemplating whether this would be an appropriate time to

drag him away for a snog.

Truly, he didn't know how much longer he could last in this place. He eyed the window. If not for his infernal collar, he could pick up a broom and fly right out, and away...

As if in response to his thoughts, there was a flutter in the open window, and an owl flew through. His heart clenched -- another owl at a strange time of day. The owl began to swerve towards him, and he was quickly consumed with dread. The scroll it carried was not black -- not another death notice, then -- but he felt nothing but foreboding as it neared him.

The scroll dropped neatly next to his plate, and he stared blankly at it. He felt the people around him still, waiting for him to react. He had figured out that everyone had known about his father as the owl bearing the news arrived -- that was what Granger had no doubt whispered to Potter as they'd walked in. But this time, everyone was held in the same suspense as him.

He finally reached for it, but it seemed to jerk away from him. He pulled back, confused, as he watched it arc through the room -- into McGonagall's outstretched hand. His dread was replaced swiftly by anger. How *dare* she read his post? Then again, the only reason she hadn't the first time was because she knew the contents. He watched as she checked it for hexes -- and smiled ruefully at the idea that anyone would send him a hex -- and opened it. Her eyes tracked over the page, betraying no emotion, and she rolled it back up. She directed it with her wand back to him -- giving her *permission* for him to read it. The nerve.

As he caught the rolled-up scroll, he was acutely aware that all eyes were on him. He forcibly repressed a sneer. It wasn't their business. He rose from the table and took the unopened scroll out of the Great Hall.

After a few absent-minded turns, he stopped in a satisfactorily stranded corridor and rested against a wall to read the letter. It was written in the same ultra-neat script that had adorned his death notice -- a Ministry letter, and a very brief one.

*Mr. Draco L. Malfoy,*

*Due to the recent death of Mr. Lucius Abraxas Malfoy, you, the named Malfoy heir, have inherited the entirety of the Malfoy estate, including Malfoy Manor, all other properties owned by the Malfoy family, the Malfoy family bank account and the personal bank account of Mr. Malfoy, as well as all other earthly possessions belonging to Mr. Malfoy.*

*However, you were declared Missing, Presumed Dead by the Auror Division of the Ministry of Magic, along with Mr. Malfoy's wife, Narcissa Black Malfoy, twenty-nine days ago. In the absence of any living next of kin, the Malfoy estate and all earthly possessions belonging to Mr. Malfoy will be seized by the Ministry of Magic in one business week. Should this letter find you alive and in good health, please present it in person at the Ministry of Magic to reclaim your rightful inheritance.*

He swallowed thickly. It was a trick, of course. As soon as he presented himself at the Ministry, he would be arrested as a Death Eater and thrown in prison. He knew his mother was too smart to fall for it either. Which meant that the Ministry would seize his home.

He had no doubt that they would do it; they'd been trying for years. Ministry officials would search the house every year, hoping to find anything to incriminate his father or damage the family's reputation. More often than not, Weasley's father was at the head of the delegation, salivating at the thought of stealing or destroying precious heirlooms whose importance he would never understand.

Now they'd finally found their loophole, the perfect excuse to take the ancient manor and -- if they were lucky -- incarcerate the only Malfoys remaining.

A sudden dizziness overtook Draco, and he clutched at his head as he slid down the wall. He had nothing. They'd taken everything away from him. His freedom, his family, and now his *home*, his only hope of returning to some semblance of normalcy if he ever escaped from this place.

He no longer had any incentive to try to leave, even. If he left, he had nowhere to go.

He was dreadfully unsurprised when Potter's overly inquisitive head poked around the corner. "Is everything all right?" he asked quietly as he approached.

Draco's hands shook as he held up the parchment. "They're seizing my assets," he said, his voice pathetically small. Why was he even telling Potter? As if he would care. "The Ministry. My father's dead, and my mother and I are presumed dead. So unless I turn myself in, they're taking everything."

Potter's fingers grazed the roll of parchment questioningly before taking it. Draco's frustration mounted as Potter read it. Why did he need to see it himself? Could the Boy Who Lived notice some new detail he'd overlooked that would save him?

After a moment, Potter let the parchment curl back up in his hand. "I don't know what to say," he said simply.

Potter's earnestness startled him -- and made him inexplicably sad. "You don't have to say anything," he said, resting his head in his hands.

Potter remained silent, still, but he slid down the wall to sit next to Draco.

"For all I know, my mother *is* dead," Draco vocalized, still unsure why he was letting his concerns fall on Potter's undoubtedly deaf ears. He felt a prickling behind his eyes and realized with no small measure of shame that he had yet again been reduced to tears. A tear slipped down his cheek before he could hide it from Potter.

"I'm getting pretty tired of you watching me cry all the time," he muttered.

Potter was obviously uncomfortable. "I -- I can leave if you want," he said, shifting as if to rise.

Something told Draco he didn't want that. "Stay," he said, almost a suggestion, and Potter relaxed.

They were quiet for a long while after that, until Draco spoke again, almost unintentionally voicing his deepest fear. "What's going to happen to me?" he whispered. He looked up, finally, wiping at the long-dry tear, and met Potter's open gaze.

Without warning, Potter wrapped his arms around him and enveloped him into a tight hug. "I don't know," he said. *But I'll save you*, Draco imagined.

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Draco noticed a distinctly hot-and-cold aspect to him and Potter. It seemed that they could simultaneously experience what Draco realized only afterwards was a ridiculously girly and pathetic moment, and continue to viciously argue most of the time.

It was quite logical, really. It wasn't as though either of them had really changed, revelations about sexuality notwithstanding. Draco still found Potter to be, on most occasions, one of the most singularly infuriating people he'd ever met.

And without Madame Pince's overbearing presence in the library, it became an ideal spot for shouting matches.

Potter was *still* ignoring him completely in favor of a seemingly endless supply of books. "You're a terrible host," Draco said grumpily. "It's been *months* and you haven't thought of a single thing to occupy my time. Do you think I like sitting here staring at you for hours and hours?"

Potter looked at him over the top of a thick, dusty book. "I don't know, do you?"

"No," Draco replied succinctly. "You're a speccy, boring git."

A coy smile played on Potter's lips. "And I'm not really your host, am I? More like your keeper. Count yourself lucky I



don't attach a leash to that collar. Now shut up, I'm reading."

*Prick.*

Where did he get off? And where had he learned to couple such nasty insults with such an amiable tone? Draco could learn from this.

"You still haven't answered my question," he said. "What am I supposed to do while you research your way to world peace?"

"Don't talk about things you don't understand," Potter said dismissively, not even bothering to look up.

That did it. "*Don't* presume to know what I do and don't understand, Potter."

"Jesus *Christ*, Malfoy," Potter sighed in that condescending way of his, like he couldn't be *bothered* to argue right now.

"And who the fuck is Jesus Christ, anyway?" Draco shot back, now resorting to arbitrary things that bothered him about Potter. "And why are you always saying his name when we snog?!"

Instead of inciting embarrassment like Draco had wanted, this comment seemed to amuse Potter, who stared at him for a moment before letting out an indignant laugh. Draco suddenly felt as though he had missed something important, which only enraged him further. Potter was always making him feel *stupid*.

"Jesus Christ? The son of God?" Potter raised his eyebrows, looking for some level of recognition. Draco had none to display.

"He's, er, like...the supreme being in Christianity," Potter continued.

*Christianity*. That struck a chord. Why had he never linked them together? He felt very silly blaming the differently pronounced vowel for missing such an obvious connection.

"Oh," he said disdainfully. "I'm glad not to know anything about *that*."

Potter looked taken-aback at his tone, and Draco knew he had recovered from the blunder. "Most people know who Jesus Christ is, Malfoy..."

"Most *Muggles*," Draco corrected him, before a sudden panic overtook him. "You're not a *Christian*, are you?" he asked, spitting out the word like the Muggle filth it was. He was already shagging a bloke, Harry Potter no less, *and* a half-blood. His father would roll in his grave if Potter was a Christian, too.

Potter merely shrugged. "I've been to church on Christmas and Easter, when I was younger..."

Draco found it hard to believe Potter could be vague -- undecided, even -- about this. "You do realize that Christians think witchcraft is a tool of Satan."

"You know this, and yet you somehow missed that the religion is named for after a man named Christ?" His words dripped with haughty amusement, the kind that made Draco want to haul off and slug him.

"I wasn't *interested* in them," he returned, feeling more and more sour. "I only needed to learn enough to know that they're my enemies."

Potter had the audacity to shrug again, his infuriating indifference replaced with casual defensiveness. "Don't make it out like all Muggles have a personal grudge against *you*. People fear what they don't understand," he said.

It was conversations like this that reminded Draco why he and Potter would never really get along. Potter, Boy Wonder that he was, thought he could apologize for centuries of persecution, enough to drive magical creatures into *hiding* in a world that was rightfully theirs, with a clichéd old adage.

"Muggles fear what they don't understand," Draco snarled. "No one understands magic -- that's what makes it *magic*, but we embrace it and celebrate it, while *they* see fit to burn us on stakes, call *us* abominations--"

"And what are you going to do about it?" Potter interrupted, raising his voice enough to cut Draco off. "Kill every last Muggle and take over the world? Hardly makes you much better, does it?"

Draco scoffed. "Of course not. That would be a waste of Killing Curses. Where would you come up with an idea like that?"

"That's Voldemort's plan," Potter said, assuming the clipped tone he reserved for discussing the Dark Lord. "Has he not kept you in the loop?"

After waiting just long enough to ascertain that he'd got the last word, Potter grabbed the book he'd been reading and headed out of the library. Draco watched the door swing shut behind him with barely contained anger. Potter just *had* to make a dramatic exit.

And how the hell did he know what the Dark Lord had planned? No one really knew, beyond the basics. He would depose the Minister of Magic, and reorganize wizarding society according to the old beliefs, the ones Salazar Slytherin had promoted for Hogwarts: Only those with pure blood were real wizards and witches.

But would he really attempt to regain wizarding dominance over the earth? The idea of roaming free, no longer having to be careful of just where you pulled your wand, or worrying if you were dressed correctly to pass yourself off...was undeniably appealing.

But Draco had his doubts about getting Muggles out of the way. Dumbledore's words still haunted him: *You are not a killer*. It had been an insult at the time, and even now, in the face of some of the less glamorous parts of being a Death Eater, he felt a certain weakness when he thought about it, but ultimately it was true. He didn't know that he could take a person's life with weapon or wand.

But a Muggle? All he'd learned about Muggles led him to believe that they were somehow lower than himself. *Animals*, he'd heard other Death Eaters call them. He could kill an animal, surely.

Having tried and failed to kill Dumbledore, Draco could no longer hide behind hypothetical situations. He thought about a situation where the Dark Lord might ask him to dispose of a Muggle. Lower than himself, maybe, but still human. All of the hatred and resentment he'd tried to impart on Potter would not be enough, he knew, to kill if the time came.

He hoped the time would never come.

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After wallowing in introspection for longer than he'd anticipated, Draco found his eyes becoming heavy, his limbs droopy. How was it even possible for him to get tired at night, he wondered, when he did so little every day? Perhaps his deep thoughts were so taxing as to sap him of his energy. Contemplating, he trudged up to the dormitory.

Spending days on end thinking, while perhaps not physically difficult as, say, having a life, did take its toll, he decided ultimately. Upon reaching this conclusion, he found it very appropriate that he should climb into bed and rid himself of any and all stressful thoughts for at least a few restorative hours. He gave Potter a passing grunt as he walked by his bed, where he was still hunched over the same book like it contained all the mysteries of life, and promptly went to sleep.

He was shaken from his sleep by a low moan what seemed like five minutes later. Upon a cursory glance around him, he decided it had been longer; the room was dark, which meant Potter had gone to bed, and his mouth tasted bad enough for it to have been a few hours.

Another moan resounded, louder this time. He was alarmed at first; it seemed as though someone was hurt. He waited a few moments, warily, before a string of conversational gibberish came from the next bed in a frantic tone.

Potter was having another nightmare.

Draco stumbled out of his bed and over to Potter's. He couldn't help wondering how often this happened to Potter. Maybe it was every night, and Draco was only rarely woken up by it. Just how many terror-inducing experiences had Potter had, that his mind could fabricate these nightmares?

He pulled open the curtain to find Potter tangled up in his sheets, a sheen of sweat making his face shine in the dim moonlight. He twisted violently, and mumbled something in a fearful-sounding voice. Draco tried to affect an irritated air to replace his concern, and prodded him somewhat forcefully with two fingers.

Potter reacted instantly; his hand shot out lightning-fast to grab Draco by the wrist as his eyes flew open.

"You were having a nightmare," Draco said unnecessarily.

After his breathing calmed, Potter seemed not to be fully awake, or maybe he couldn't quite focus his eyes without his glasses, but the gaze he turned on Draco was slightly detached as he tugged on the wrist he still held. "Sleep with me," he said in a thick voice.

It took Draco a moment to assure himself that Potter meant it in the literal sense. He would have refused, but his fatigue had caught up with him, and Potter's grip was far too difficult to fight off. So he climbed into Potter's bed and shut the curtains around them.

Potter was out by the time Draco got under the covers. He probably wouldn't remember the episode come morning. The bed was comfortably warm, and Draco let the heat of Potter's body next to his ease him into sleep.

He awoke the next morning when something twitched against his chest. It was a hand, he realized, and then remembered where he was. Potter's bed. He was lying on his side, facing away from Potter, whose arm was slung around him...they were spooning. Potter's hand seemed to have made its way under his pajama top to rest lightly against his chest. It was...nice, actually.

A telltale snore caught his attention and his heart skipped. They weren't alone. Of all the nights for Weasley to come and sleep in the dormitory...

As quietly as he could, Draco rolled over. He and Potter were almost nose to nose. He nudged Potter's leg with his foot and hissed his name very quietly.

Potter stirred. His arm around Draco tightened its hold and, without waking, he buried his face in Draco's shoulder.

"Wake *up*, you sod," Draco whispered, spitting out Potter's hair.

Potter hummed contentedly, his lips moving against Draco's throat. Draco closed his eyes in frustration. Potter shifted again, giving Draco momentary hope that he'd woken up, before slipping one of his legs between Draco's.

*Must you?* Draco thought irritably. Potter had pressed them together in the most maddening of ways, and was now *squirming* in his sleep. Maybe Draco's hard-on would wake him up...

Potter's head jerked suddenly away from Draco's collarbone and Draco was met with a very confused-looking pair of green eyes. "What're you doin' 'ere?" Potter said blearily.

"You *made* me sleep here after you had a nightmare," Draco whispered with no small amount of derision in his tone. "And be quiet, Weasley's in the next bed."

Potter shrugged nonchalantly. "Don't worry," he whispered back, "he sleeps like the dead."

"Harry? Is that you whispering?" called Weasley. Draco fixed Potter with a lethal glare.

"Sorry," Potter called back. "Must've been dreaming." He bent forward to whisper directly into Draco's ear, sending an

inopportune shiver down his spine. "He won't see you if you climb out the other side of the bed. But be quiet about it!"

Draco was moving slowly and silently until he heard Weasley's feet hit the floor. "You decent, mate?" he asked lightly as he padded over.

"Er, yeah," Potter said, giving Draco a shove. *Idiot!* Why didn't he buy more time?

Draco ducked out of his side of the curtain just as Weasley pulled the other side open. Draco huddled on the floor in case Weasley could see his silhouette and crawled, tuning out their inane conversation, back to his own bed. He got in and paused an impatient moment before making his grand entrance, wrenching his curtains loudly open.

"Good morning," he said as he walked casually by them, interrupting Weasley mid-sentence.

They shot him identical glares. "Fuck off," Weasley grumbled.

"But that would make your life so *easy*," Draco drawled. He stretched languidly, watching with amusement as Weasley's face distorted into a snide expression of disgust while Potter's eyes slipped noticeably to where his shirt rode up his midriff.

"Try not to drool, fairy-boy," he said to Potter with a triumphant smirk.

Potter sneered. "That's rich, coming from the biggest queer at Hogwarts. Everyone knows why you were Snape's *favorite*." Weasley let out a sycophantic laugh as Draco turned on his heel and headed for the loo. His heart was still hammering. That had been altogether too close.

He took his time there, not wanting to spend any more time interacting with Potter and Weasley than he had to. There was something about them together that pissed him right off, always had. They each pissed him off individually, of course -- Weasley for being a blood traitor idiot and Potter for being Potter -- but together they made him see red. He hated the *easy* way Potter interacted with Weasley, completely relaxed as though he wasn't hiding at least one enormous secret from him. Draco had seen small glimpses of that camaraderie, and how genuinely *nice* Potter could be, but Weasley got it without working for it at all.

It hit him suddenly as he brushed his teeth: He was jealous. He was jealous of the broad smiles and easy laughs Weasley could bring out in Potter without so much as cracking a joke. And he was jealous of the way they got along, like real best mates, the kind you only read about in stupid kids' books.

It made Draco's purposeful aloofness from his peers seem a little...shallow.

He splashed cold water on his face. He'd been pondering this for far too long. What the fuck was he thinking, anyway? Jealous of *Weasley*? He didn't want to make Potter smile, he wanted to make him come.

As a teenage boy, he spent a lot of time trying to keep his hormones under control. Rarely did he have to remind himself to give them the precedence they deserved.

In accordance with his newfound deliberateness, Draco contemplated whether a shower would be worth it to properly commemorate having woken up in Potter's bed this morning. It was a definite step forward from the uniformly excellent but relatively tame snogging they'd been enjoying. Draco, who continued to desperately hold onto the idea that once they got far enough the gayness of the sexual experience would be off-putting instead of so bloody enticing, was reluctantly admitting to himself that he'd quite like a few steps forward. He strained to hear voices in the dormitory, but was met only with silence. A gut feeling told him to forgo the wank and the shower, so he padded back into the dormitory.

Sure enough, Potter was alone. "That was low, calling me fairy-boy," Potter said with a wry grin.

Draco raised an eyebrow. "Next time you might reconsider mentally undressing me with Weasley sitting right there. And," he continued, "since when am I the biggest queer in Hogwarts? Forgotten about Justin Finch-Fletchley, have you?"

"Leave off Justin Finch-Fletchley," said Potter, missing the point entirely as usual. "You don't even know him."

"Thank Merlin for small favors," Draco muttered darkly.

Potter gave him a sidelong glance. "And what exactly did you say you were doing in my bed this morning?"

Draco smirked. "You had a nightmare. And being the altruistic person that I am--" Potter coughed loudly, "--I went and woke you from it. And when I did, you confessed you were afraid of things that go bump in the night and couldn't I stay and protect you from them?"

Potter rolled his eyes. "And being such a chivalrous individual, you naturally agreed."

"Actually, I called you a big girl's blouse and refused, but you physically prevented me from leaving your side so, in the end, I gave up."

"Sounds like it was really hard for you," Potter said sardonically. "And now that I remember, felt like *you* were really hard for me this morning."

Draco was torn between embarrassment at being caught and amusement at Potter's ridiculous phrasing. "I wasn't the only one, as I recall," he shot back, taking a step towards Potter.

Potter took a step as well. "Well, unless that's a wand in your pocket I'd say you've been hard for me all morning."

Potter was the king of bad sex banter, Draco decided. "And I'm still not the only one."

They were very close together by this point, and Draco felt heat pool in his groin as Potter's green eyes looked up at him through dark lashes.

"Er," Draco said, "we might take some privacy measures this time."

Potter locked and Imperturbed the door to the dormitory with a flick of his wand before tossing it on the bedside table. "Now where were we?" he inquired teasingly.

Their lips met as though it was the most natural thing they'd ever done. Potter's lips were always a bit chapped, and he was a few days overdue for a shave, but Draco was overcome with a warm dizzy feeling as he opened his mouth to invite Potter's tongue. He cupped the back of Potter's neck with one hand, running his fingers through the soft hair at the nape, while his other hand circled around Potter's waist to draw him closer. Potter, being the midget he was, had to tilt his head considerably upwards to reach Draco, and clutched tightly at his hips, using the grip to try and lift himself further up. The prat ought to get a stool, Draco thought happily as Potter ran his tongue along his bottom lip.

After a moment Draco registered that Potter's hands were no longer clutching at his hips, but fiddling purposefully with his denims.

"Wh-what are you doing?" Draco asked, lips brushing against Potter's.

"Want to touch you," Potter said huskily, before pausing. "Is that all right?"

"Are you *daft*?" Draco replied. Had anything ever *been* more all right? He let out a giddy laugh as Potter finally succeeded in unfastening the button and pulling down the zipper. Muggle trousers really were unnecessarily complicated.

Fortunately, they were also too large on him, and Potter pushed them easily over his hips along with his boxer shorts. His cock bobbed up eagerly and Draco wasn't as embarrassed by Potter seeing it as he thought he would be. At the moment, his entire brain was still stuck on Potter's tone as he said *want to touch you*.

His brain found a new and more excellent something to focus on as Potter's hand closed around him. He made a sound somewhere between "gaaahh" and "nnngghhh" as he watched Potter's face. Potter was looking downward, wearing a peculiar expression of almost-surprise as if taken aback at his hand's decision to start moving.

Draco could hardly stand the sharp pleasure of it. Pansy had done this once and it had been awkward and clumsy; Potter was certainly no stranger to clumsy, but *gods* he was gripping him *exactly right*, moving at an intoxicating pace.

"Like that?" Potter said, cocky grin in place.

Draco almost couldn't bring himself to be snide in return with Potter's hand on his dick. Almost. "Being an expert wanker isn't really something to be proud of, Potter," he said, trying not to pant.

Potter squeezed and Draco's knees buckled. "This won't take long," Potter mocked.

That was a challenge if Draco'd ever heard one. "Are you kidding? I -- *ahh* -- I'm bloody tantric compared to you!"

Potter scoffed, checking an imaginary watch on his unoccupied wrist. "It's been, like, thirty seconds and you're about to blow."

For the record, Draco most certainly was not. He looked Potter in the eye, cocking an eyebrow as he made the challenge official. "Let's go, minute man," he said confidently, and unceremoniously plunged his hand down Potter's trousers.

Using all his willpower to ignore the feeling of Potter's calloused fingers on him, he unbuckled Potter's belt and undid his flies with his other hand to give himself more working room. He felt a thrill of excitement as his fingers closed around Potter's hot flesh, earning him a muffled groan in his ear as Potter's hand faltered for a moment. It was just like wanking, he mused, only backwards. He pushed Potter's trousers and shorts down over his hips just as Potter had done and. Well.

There it was.

He'd thought about Potter's cock quite a lot recently, to be sure, and had privately pondered what Potter would look like in the altogether more times than he cared to remember, but now it was actually right in front of him, the blood-darkened head poking out from the fist he'd made around it. His prick twitched appreciatively at the sight, spurring Potter back into action. From that point it was a full-on race; Draco pulled out his best moves, having learned nothing in six years of boarding school if not how to have an excellent wank. Potter was soon groaning and gasping as Draco swiped his thumb over the head, smearing the precome that formed.

Potter had never been one to give up, though, and began twisting his hand maddeningly on the upstroke. Draco barely contained himself, and knew in that moment that he'd have to play dirty in order to win this.

He leaned forward, lips brushing lightly on the shell of Potter's ear as he began to whisper. "Mm, Potter, I love the way your cock feels in my hand," he said breathily. Potter's only response was to jerk his hips forward, pushing himself farther into Draco's fist.

Draco moaned quietly into his ear. "I think about your cock all the time, Potter, I fucking *crave* it...I think about what it would feel like in my mouth or," he let his voice drop an octave, "inside me."

"*Ohmygod*," Potter gasped, and Draco felt wetness spread over his hand. He grinned smugly as he straightened back up to find Potter looking at him severely. "You cheated!" he said.

Draco shrugged. "Slytherin," he said apologetically.

Potter, who had lagged somewhat in his performance in the last few moments of the race, reached his other hand down to fondle Draco's balls as he went back to work, setting a furious pace.

"Bugging bloody fuck!" Draco yelled as white-hot pleasure shot through him and he came, knees threatening to give out. Satisfaction washed over him and he wanted nothing more than to pull Potter back into bed and sleep.

"I don't think that should count," Potter said frankly as he wiped his hand on his bedsheet. "You cheated."

"I didn't cheat," Draco said with exaggerated exasperation.

"Who said you were allowed to say pervy things into my ear?"

"You can't make up new rules after the fact," Draco drawled. "And you had a head start, besides. The logical conclusion here is I've got more stamina than you have."

Potter looked at him seriously. "We *will* be having a rematch."

Draco smirked. "I count on it."

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Draco was pretty sure he and Potter were going to have sex. It was an alarming thought, having sex with Harry Potter. Then again, the thought of snogging him day and night at the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix was pretty damn alarming too, and he'd been doing that for a good six weeks.

What was more alarming still was that he absolutely wanted to have sex with Potter. He knew what two blokes did in bed together -- well, maybe not the specifics, but the general...buggery -- and while, in the abstract, the thought of having something up *there* did nothing for him, when Potter was added into the equation it was a completely different story.

Draco didn't know how soon it would happen, but he realized with no small degree of embarrassment that he would probably say yes no matter when Potter asked him. He'd go ahead and propose the idea himself, only he was sure he would be quite terrible at sex.

He was a virgin, for reasons that seemed quite telling now that he looked back on them. Potter had probably had sex before, loads of times probably, because...well, he was Harry Potter, how could he not have? The point was that this was yet another arena where Potter would be effortlessly better than him. It seemed a little pathetic that his accursed inferiority to Potter, which had literally plagued him throughout his entire Hogwarts career, should continue to follow him now, when his relationship with Potter was decidedly removed from the enmity they'd enjoyed for so long.

And that was another problem -- the delicacy of their newfound...bond in the face of everything else going on. How could he sleep with Potter when he couldn't even wear a short-sleeved shirt without revealing the Dark Mark on his arm? He took great pains to hide it from the Order -- they all knew it was there, but seeing it would just make them angry. Potter had seen it once, in the library, and thrown a fit. He couldn't very well take his shirt off and avoid Potter seeing it. What if the sight of it put Potter off sex with him? It seemed ridiculous to let a tattoo upset you that much, but Draco had learned from experience that the Mark induced pretty strong reactions.

As if in malicious answer to his worries, Draco awoke one cold morning to find, at the end of his bed, a short-sleeved shirt.

"Potter," he said pseudo-casually, as Potter pulled on a pair of socks, "what is this?"

Potter smirked. "Why, that's a shirt, Malfoy."

If there was one thing Draco hated more than when Potter was stupid, it was when he *pretended* to be stupid. "Indeed," he said icily. "It's a tee shirt. It's December, you realize."

"That's all that's clean," Potter said calmly. "We'll stay inside, you won't be cold."

Potter fixed him with a stare that dared him to say something. Draco knew at once that he was being taught a lesson in Potter's usual condescending way. *You took the Mark with pride*, Draco could practically hear him say. *Why can't you show it off?*

He gritted his teeth as he pulled on the tee shirt. Even from the edges of his vision, his Mark seemed to jump off his pale skin.

He could already tell it would be a long day.

He walked into the Great Hall with his left arm pressed resolutely against his side. He looked very silly in his tee shirt; most everyone else was wearing winter robes or long sleeves. Draco had never worn a tee shirt in his *life*, come to think of it, not owning a single article of Muggle clothing aside from a few appropriately expensive items for the odd foray into Muggle London.

Muggle clothes were quite unrefined, in his opinion, especially the ones he was currently wearing. They looked very unnatural on him, and felt uncomfortable, which was frustrating because Potter, with whom he shared something of a similar build, looked quite good in them.

He sat down, and promptly put his left arm under the table, feeling grumpier by the minute. Hadn't he nicely asked Potter for robes, anyway?

His attire didn't escape the notice of anyone sitting at the table. "Malfoy, would you pass the marmalade?" asked one of the twin Weasleys as soon as he sat down. He cast a glance downward to find that the marmalade was directly on his left. He reached awkwardly with his right hand and passed it over.

Not two minutes later, he heard a buzzing in his left ear, and reached automatically with his left hand to swat at it. It wasn't until he noticed the other twin's wand pointed surreptitiously at him from the table that he realized they'd forced him into bearing his Mark after all.

He put his arm back down, fuming, but not before the hot prickle of a Stinging Hex made itself known along his forearm.

He trudged into the library with Potter, Granger and Weasley, as usual. Potter was looking at him occasionally with an expression of guilty concern, as if he hadn't expected his haughty punishment for Draco to incite so much harassment. If he would only keep the guilty lip-biting to himself and just go get him a jumper...

Another Stinging Hex smarted along his Mark and he lost his patience. "A Stinging Hex, Weasley? How old are you again?"

Weasley seemed to be inspired by his brothers' bravado. "I'm sure I've no idea what you're talking about."

"Let me see your wand and I'll show you a *real* hex."

"Maybe it's your *master* calling, you Death Eater scum."

Draco lunged threateningly forward. Granger whipped out her wand immediately. "Try it, Malfoy," she said calmly, almost bored. Potter was carefully ignoring the entire exchange, which only made him angrier.

"You keep out of it, Mudblood," he said before he could stop himself.

"Shut your mouth!" Weasley shouted, and now two wands were trained on him.

"You're as dirty as she is, you blood traitor. Even your Muggle-loving father managed to find a proper witch--"

"*Silencio*."

He continued speaking a few more syllables before it occurred to him that no sounds were coming out of his mouth. Potter had cast the Silencing Charm as coolly as you please. Granger pocketed her wand primly and Weasley did the same after taking a moment to smirk at him.

They each went back to their research and he scowled mightily at Potter. It was taking all of his strength not to throttle him.

"*Fari*," Potter said, in the same infuriatingly cool voice, and Draco stood up so fast he knocked over his chair.



"Fuck you," he snarled, humiliated, wishing he could think of something to say that would hurt Potter as deeply as a curse.

He half-expected Potter to follow him out of the library, to further reprimand him or perhaps even attempt a phony apology, but the door swung resoundingly shut behind him and he met no one on his way to Gryffindor Tower.

Once there, his anger only increased as he realized he'd come up to the wretched dormitory of his own volition. Had he nowhere to go but where Potter instructed him? Now he was there, too far away from anything else for it to be worth it to settle somewhere else. He took off the horrible shirt and muttered "*Diffindo*," imagining it shredding into thin slivers. He ached for his wand. He would curse the hell out of Potter for doing this to him, and Weasley for being a common playground bully.

He sighed shakily and looked out the window.

Potter lumbered into the room about an hour later, as far as Draco could judge without watch or wand.

Draco turned to face him, jaw set for another argument, but Potter didn't say anything. His eyes flicked down from his face, and Draco realized belatedly that he still wasn't wearing a shirt. This was the first time Potter had seen him without one. He felt his face flush under the scrutiny.

Potter was staring, and Draco was becoming a bit uncomfortable, really. He hoped Potter's eye hadn't been caught by the Dark Mark, in embarrassingly sharp relief from his skin. He self-consciously pressed his left arm to his side, again.

It wasn't until Potter took a step forward that Draco realized what he was looking at.

A thin scar ran from just below his shoulder on his right side to his ribs on his left. It was hardly visible, just the faintest hint of silver. It wasn't raised, Snape had seen to that, and much more subtle than the long, deep, arrow-straight gash it commemorated. Potter continued to step toward him until his outstretched fingers quietly brushed along the path his curse had once taken. Something sparked deep inside Draco.

"*Sectumsempra*," Potter murmured, lost in thought. Draco remembered it vividly: burning humiliation at Potter's intrusion; his desire to make Potter feel a fraction of his pain; Potter's panicked face as he yelled the word, slashing his wand violently. Then blood, blood everywhere, and the knowledge that Potter had finally done him in...

"I had no idea what that curse would do," Potter muttered, eyes still on Draco's chest. "I thought I'd killed you."

"I thought so too," Draco said quietly.

Potter stepped forward again, and pressed his palm flat against Draco's breastbone. "A curse scar is an interesting thing," he said slowly, finally meeting Draco's eyes. "It can create a connection between two people."

*Connection.* "Interesting," he said lamely, stumbling over the word.

Potter laughed, a low, rumbling sound that made Draco's heart beat a little faster. He wondered if Potter could feel it, with his hand still pressed to his chest. His fingers curled slightly inward as they relaxed.

"I guess you're sort of an expert, Scarhead," Draco said, with trepidation. He hoped Potter wouldn't react badly to such a statement.

To his relief, Potter laughed again, and pulled his hand away. Draco found he missed the contact. Potter held up the back of his hand at Draco's eye level.

His hand seemed to have a series of bumps...they almost looked like *words*...

"I...must...not...tell lies?" Draco read. "What?"

"I did lines for Umbridge in fifth year," said Potter ruefully. "With a rather unique quill."

With that shocking addition, Potter really did have the market cornered on interesting scars. "Well I was more referring to, erm..." Draco gestured vaguely at Potter's forehead.

Draco had never looked at the famed scar up close before. Its shape was remarkable -- a perfect lightning bolt. Otherwise, it looked like an ordinary scar. Raised, puckered pink flesh, drawing a thin zig-zag down the middle of Potter's forehead.

Before he knew what he was doing, Draco was reaching out, brushing Potter's hair to the side more gently than he knew he could do. With the ghost of a tremble, he ran his index finger along the scar. It felt normal under his touch, but Potter's eyes fluttered closed for a moment. Maybe he could feel something.

"No one's ever done that," Potter said, looking at him unblinkingly. "Well..." He swallowed. "Except for Voldemort."

Draco didn't think anyone had ever said something so intimate to him in his life.

## CHAPTER NINE:

**In which Draco gets the short end of the sexual stick, not once but twice. Don't worry Draco, I have written many more sex scenes which you will enjoy more heartily.**

"We're all going to be leaving for a while," Potter said as he packed a suitcase.

"Christmas holidays?" Draco said, sneering.

"Er, sort of," Potter replied. "The Weasleys are going home to the Burrow for this week. The family's coming in."

There were *more* of them? Draco, frankly, did not believe it. "And you'll be going with them," he stated.

"And Hermione. We'll be back Christmas morning. So you won't spend it alone." He shut his suitcase and shrank it to fit in his palm.

Draco folded his arms, feeling cross. "Just this entire *week* beforehand. Honestly, I thought you were meant to be my keeper."

Potter gave him a sympathetic glance. "I know it'll be difficult getting on without me. You'll just have to wank, like, every hour."

Draco swallowed the lewd reply on his tongue when the door to the dormitory opened and Weasley's orange head poked in. "Harry? You ready?"

Potter tossed his tiny suitcase into the air and caught it. "Just about." He stepped towards the doorway, and shot Draco a toothy grin over his shoulder. "Bye, Malfoy," he said, an unmistakable playfulness in his voice.

As subtly as he could, Draco ran a pointed tongue across his teeth.

Potter was right, however. Alone in the dormitory, in Potter's absence, Draco found he wanked a *lot*.

Much as he disliked the Weasleys, they were the only interesting features of the dreadfully boring Order of the Phoenix. Everyone remaining had faded into background during his stay thus far, for the simple reason that they saw no reason to interact with him at all. He soon fell into a singular boredom that put his days of shadowing Potter in the library to shame.

The week trickled by slowly, days blending seamlessly as he spent the vast majority of his time staring at the ceiling of Gryffindor Tower, becoming more and more resentful of Potter's holiday.

Christmas Eve, when it finally arrived, was the most depressing Christmas Eve of Draco's life. Potter was off pretending he was the long-lost Weasley brother at their Weasel Den or whatever it was bloody called, and Draco was left in the custody of the other Orderlies. That is, those who didn't have somewhere jolly to be on Christmas.

Namely, Mad-Eye Moody.

Hence, he was up in the dormitory by himself praying the crazy bastard didn't come looking for him.

He'd long gotten bored of sulking and ill-wishing Potter and his ginger-haired adoptive family, so he was now doing his best to root through all of Potter's things.

The trouble was, Potter didn't have many things. Luckily he'd left his trunk open for one reason or another, probably assuming Draco would be too occupied undergoing frightening trials under Moody's guise to stop by the dormitory. So far, Draco had found a lot of ugly clothing large enough to fit a whale, a useless Remembrall that served only to bitterly remind him of the time he'd accidentally got Potter onto the Gryffindor Quidditch team in first year (thereby solidifying his status as Most Popular Person Ever), some quills, some books, and, stuffed in, a yellowed, blank piece of parchment. Salazar, Potter had to be the most boring person ever. Where was the large collection of embarrassingly kinky pornography? Where was that wicked invisibility cloak he had? He didn't even have any weed.

Draco decided to move on to other people's belongings. He explored some of the other dormitories, stopping at one in particular with a pair of twin beds and what looked to be an entire potions classroom. The insane Weasley twins would perhaps have something worth pilfering.

He looked under the bed and sure enough, came face to face with a bottle of Ogden's. "Oh, thank Merlin..." he sighed. If he was going to be alone on Christmas Eve, the least he could do for himself would be to make sure he didn't think about anything completely morose like what his mum was up to at the moment.

A pang in his chest followed the mere thought of such a thought, so he quickly unscrewed the cap of the firewhisky and took a generous swig. He immediately pulled a face. It was awful, and burned terribly on the way down. Frankly, he couldn't stand anything more potent than a fruity mixed drink, which he supposed probably meant something about his own fruitiness, but that was another depressing thought unfit for Christmas. So he took another gulp.

He made his way back to his dormitory, open bottle in hand, and sat down on his bed.

*Let's play a game*, he thought. *Every time you think of something sad, you take a drink, and then you're happy again!*

*Well here's something sad*, he volleyed back. *You're playing a drinking game by yourself. And a really pathetic one.*

He pondered. That counted. He took a sip. *Yeah?* he countered. *Well, you're talking to yourself.*

That also merited a sip.

He vaguely wondered what Potter was up to. *Ooh, there's another one, obsessing over Potter, you poncey idiot.* For that one, he took a generous gulp. Maybe he'd get alcohol poisoning and die. How stupid would Potter feel then, if he found Draco lying dead on his bed on Christmas Eve, a study in loneliness and neglect? He'd probably cry. Maybe he'd kill himself. And then the Dark Lord would give Draco a big pat on the back!

But he'd be dead.

Damn.

Perhaps he could fake his poisoning death, and then Potter would find him and kill himself, and then Draco could wake up.

Hadn't he read a book like this once?

Draco realized he was starting to get a bit pissed.

This counterproductive and rather pitiful pattern continued for some time until Potter barged into the room with his usual lack of finesse. He looked at Draco for a moment. Draco did his best to resemble a study in loneliness and neglect. "What the fuck?" asked Potter.

Draco intensified his loneliness-and-neglect face.

Potter's brow furrowed. "Malfoy, where in hell did you get a bottle of -- is that *firewhisky*?"

Draco opened his mouth to speak, but found it wasn't really obeying him. "Frengeorge, I fink," he slurred.

Potter raised an eyebrow. "Fred and George gave you something and you took it? Voluntarily?"

Draco emitted a small hiccough. "Gods, no. Nicked it. Look, Potter, I may be stupid bu' I'm no' drunk." He paused. "I mean, I may be drunk, but 'm no' stupid."

"Why are you up here by yourself?" Potter asked as he sat down on the bed and gently pried the bottle of firewhisky from Draco's fingers.

"Cos I 'ate erryone...what're you doin' 'ere?" he said, immensely angry that Potter had tricked him into giving it up.

Though he wasn't really sure there had been much tricking.

"Oh, well, I..." Potter stammered. Draco waited. Whenever Potter stammered it meant he was going to say something unbelievably girly and idiotic that only he could get away with because he was so bloody dashing. "I wanted to make sure I saw you on Christmas Eve."

Wow, Draco had underestimated that one. And had he just thought Potter was *dashing*? He needed another swig to remedy that. "Gimme my firewhisky, I've more sorrows ter drown," he implored. He made a grab for it, reaching across Potter, but the room tilted traitorously at that moment, sending him head-first into his lap. "Whoops," he murmured, glancing up at him.

Potter smirked. "Yeah. Whoops."

Draco didn't move.

Potter didn't ask him to.

He sighed heavily. In for a knut, in for a galleon. "Yer so lucky m'judgment's 'mpaired righ' now, Potter," he said as he rolled off the bed, landing in a heap on the floor before pulling himself up onto his knees with considerable gracefulness for someone who'd possibly downed most of a bottle of whisky by himself in the space of about an hour.

He braced his hands on the bed on either side of Potter's knees. "Le'z fuckin' do this," he mumbled.

Potter blinked. "Are you...really? Er...I mean, not that I'm complaining...but, er, you're completely rat-arsed. Are you sure you won't be very angry about this tomorrow morning?"

Draco thought on it. "M pretty sure I will be, now getcher trousers off 'fore I sober up."

Potter did as he was told, shifting away for a moment to toe off his trainers and pull off his trousers as well as his boxer shorts. And then he turned back towards Draco. And he was below-the-waist naked.

Draco cracked up.

Potter looked a little insulted. "I don't appreciate you laughing at me, Malfoy, and I don't see you getting naked, you insecure twat!"

Draco wanted to assure him that it had nothing to do with his particular below-the-waist nakedness, which he was drunk enough to admit was quite nice, but more of the fact that Draco was about six inches away from Potter's below-the-waist nakedness, which he was going to keep calling below-the-waist nakedness (or BWN for short) because if he called it a...you-know-what...it would remind him too much of the fact that he was about to suck Potter's you-know-what. Which was about the gayest thing a person trying to overcome a worrying bout of gayness could ever do.

He'd heard once that sometimes one must laugh to keep from crying, and he thought that applied rather nicely here.

He forced himself to stop giggling and looked at Potter's BWN seriously, raising an eyebrow. He wondered fleetingly how stupid it would be to have a staring contest with it. He exhaled a bit of hot air at it experimentally and it gave a faint twitch.

He inched closer, staring at its stupid face until it started to go out of focus.

"Are you serious?" Potter groaned. "Look, how different could it be than yours? If you don't do something soon I'm just going to shoot on your face, and how would you like that?"

Draco wouldn't like that. In fact, he found it a little vulgar that Potter would mention such a thing, and pretty insulting that Potter was pressuring him like this, even though he suspected Potter was possibly kidding. Some supportive boyfriend he was, pressuring him into sex. Or he had a strange and dark sense of humor. Either way, Draco ought to dump his sorry arse.

Draco rewound over those last few thoughts, and paused at the offending one. Potter was *not* his boyfriend.

"You aren' my boyfrien'," he said, in case Potter needed clarification, and then put the out-of-focus BWN in his mouth.

Not-his-boyfriend gave a little dog yelp and arched off the bed, pushing the entire length of his BWN into Draco's mouth, knocking the back of his throat. He gagged and his eyes started to water, so he took a firm hold of Potter's hips and shoved them back onto the bed. He wasn't about to choke to death doing this. Imagine Potter if he did. Maybe Draco's jaws would lock together. Maybe Potter would have to get his BWN cut off! But then Draco would be buried with it in his mouth and wouldn't that be embarrassing...

What kind of person, he wondered, ponders his own death while giving head?

To his horror, he began to giggle again. Laughing with food in your mouth was bad enough, but with an entire ... thingermajigger? Besides embarrassing, it also proved to be quite difficult. Which only made him laugh harder. He must have been drunker than he'd anticipated, because his shoulders were shaking, his eyes were tearing up, and he was uttering big guffaws, which were supposed to be "Ha ha ha" but came out hilariously as "Hng hng hng" instead.

Clearly he was not mature enough for this.

He looked up to check on Potter, who was enjoying himself as one might expect of someone in his current situation, and sniggering a bit as well, most likely because he thought Draco was a complete nutter.

"I'm not a nutter, Potter," Draco said. "You'd laugh too, I bet."

Except it was more like "Ag nogga nugga pah, woo wa foo ubbuh."

Potter reacted unexpectedly to that, arching his back and moaning like Draco had said something really dirty. Maybe he'd heard wrong.

Draco's knees were beginning to hurt despite the carpeting on the floor, and his jaw was getting a little tired, so he decided to end this escapade and hollowed out his cheeks to create suction.

Potter gave another yelp, again not unlike a dog but perhaps a bigger one this time, and grabbed onto his head with both hands. If Potter pulled out any of his hair, there would be hell to pay. Potter's leg muscles tensed and the you-know-what occupying his mouth gave one last jerk before he felt an all-together odd sensation of hot fluid filling up his mouth.

He pulled a face. It was bitter. Not exactly the worst thing he'd ever tasted, which he hated to admit, and probably better for him nutritionally than firewhisky. He imagined for a moment if he'd tried to drown his sorrows this evening in come instead of alcohol -- it would have taken a lot longer, for one thing. And quite possibly caused more sorrow than it alleviated.

He came back to reality as Potter pulled away and out of Draco's mouth, which was still full. He looked at Potter, who was wearing a big dopey grin.

"Nn!" he yelled.

"Wha?" said Potter. "Oh...oh, ew, swallow it or something!"

"Nn!" he said again, getting to his feet. He aimed his legs for the loo, but started to deviate from his path with a series of drunken stumbles.

"Oh, for fuck's sake..." said Potter, getting up off the bed. He still had no pants on, which would have made Draco laugh out loud except that would have made Potter's...fluid...go everywhere, which would have been rather disgusting.

Draco felt a warm arm on his shoulder guiding him towards the toilet, and "nn"ed thankfully. He got to the sink and spat, watching the viscous substance creep down the drain.

"Blech," he said.

Potter laughed, and then started. "Oh! I forgot about you!"

Draco wondered what he could possibly mean by that until he reached for Draco's flies. Draco's nether-regions seemed to be completely uninterested, however, so he waved him off. "S'all righ'."

Potter faltered a little. "You're not...not at all?"

Trust Potter to feel guilty about a thing like that. Draco should have been happy -- maybe it meant he wasn't a bender after all, but found himself saying instead, "'S prolly jus' the whisky," as Potter steered him back to his bed.

"Consider tha' yer present, Potter," he slurred sleepily, "I 'aven't go' anythin' for yer."

Potter smiled. "Happy Christmas," he remarked.

Even drunk, Draco wasn't enough of a sentimental berk to respond in kind. "G'night, Potter," he mumbled as he crawled into bed.

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Draco awoke the next morning feeling, frankly, like complete shite. He had a massive headache and felt more than a little queasy. He groaned pitifully when he opened his eyes to find that the room was unbelievably bright. How much had he *drunk*?

Draco screwed his eyes shut. Gods, he must have got really hammered. There was a bloody awful taste in his mouth and he couldn't figure out what it was...

Oh. *Oh*.

He'd *sucked Potter off*. He rubbed his temples, shame mixing unpleasantly with his nausea. Talk about huge drunken mistakes. Wasn't he trying to get *rid* of his urges concerning Potter?

Potter's bloody cheerful head popped up from the next bed. "Happy Christmas!"

Happy Christmas indeed. He had a hangover and was stuck with the damn Order of the Phoenix in damn Hogwarts where he hated everyone and everyone hated him on bloody Christmas day, and, worst of all, he'd sucked off Harry Potter. He squinted at him, cradling his head. "I hate you."

Potter took it in stride. "Come on, there's gifts in the common room and everyone's there!"

Draco smoldered. "Number one, we both know there are zero gifts waiting for me in the common room, so you'll excuse me if I'm not terribly excited to go watch you and stupid Weasleys open yours and gloat and make merry; number two, I have the worst hangover I have ever had the misfortune to experience and I plan to spend the entirety of today unconscious; and number three, thanks so much for taking advantage of me while I was drunk, you absolute pig."

Potter looked highly affronted. "I didn't take advantage of you!"

Draco sneered. "Oh? What is it usually called when you use the fact that I can't string two sentences together to pressure me into letting you shove your cock down my throat?"

Potter winced visibly.

Draco continued. "And I didn't even get off! Ever hear of teamwork, you selfish arse?"

"You were...not interested!" Potter said defensively.

"Shouldn't that have told you something? Like that I *wasn't interested?*"

Potter pointed an accusatory finger at him. "You offered. And you seemed quite bloody enthusiastic about it. Don't try and blame me because you're upset that you enjoyed it."

Draco stilled for a moment before recovering and narrowing his eyes. "Go celebrate, Potter," he spat.

"Whatever," Potter said dismissively as he walked out, leaving Draco very confused. *Don't try and blame me because you're upset that you enjoyed it.* Was that true?

Well, he could admit he'd exaggerated a bit. His memory was a bit fuzzy but he was beginning to recall most of the major events, including his absolutely mad laughing fit, and Potter hadn't really done much pressuring at all. And he *had* offered. And Potter had said maybe they shouldn't. And he'd insisted.

Okay, so maybe his accusation was completely unfounded.

And maybe he'd enjoyed it. A bit. Only because he was drunk. Why shouldn't he be upset about that?

His head throbbed painfully as a burst of laughter drifted up from the common room. *Oh, sod this*, he decided, and clambered down the stairs.

The overpowering amount of orange in the room alerted him to the fact that the entire Weasley clan had apparently come back for Christmas. They were all sitting in a clump, taking turns opening presents. He recognized Fleur Delacour huddled against Bill, and marveled -- he really *was* married to her! He also spotted a woman with violet hair whom he suspected was a cousin of his; he ran down the list of disowned relatives before stopping -- could it be Aunt Andromeda's half-blood daughter?

He realized he was staring and averted his eyes before she noticed, awkwardly shuffling towards Potter, who caught his eye and motioned for him to sit down.

He hugged his knees, scooting between Potter and Granger.

"Here's one for you, Harry," said a Weasley Draco couldn't think of a name for. He shook the parcel. "Sounds like sweets," he said, tossing it.

"Excellent," Potter replied, catching it. He tore the wrapping to find, sure enough, Chocolate Frogs. He popped one in his mouth.

The festivities continued, and Draco learned that the unfamiliar Weasley was the Charlie Bill had referred to during Quidditch. Draco suddenly made a connection -- Charlie Weasley had a Quidditch trophy in the Hogwarts trophy room that he'd had to clean once at detention.

Potter nudged him. "You want one?" He held out a Chocolate Frog.

Draco looked around. It seemed everyone had just noticed he was there. "Er, yeah." Potter handed the Frog to him and he ate it quickly, not relishing the feel of everyone's eyes on him. He flipped over the card, and discovered a note attached.

*Payback tonight. Hopefully I won't laugh too much. Happy Christmas.*

Draco's heart skipped a beat. He stole a glance at Potter, who was laughing at a joke someone had made and didn't acknowledge him at all. He looked furtively around the room, looking to see if anyone was still looking at him, as if they could have read the note from across the clump of people or understood its content.

He stuffed it in his pocket, trying not to blush too noticeably. The clump slowly started to break up into smaller conversations, and Potter was pulled into a lewd-sounding one with Fred and George. Draco flailed inwardly.



"Wotcher, Draco!" He looked up to see that the violet-haired woman had moved to stand in front of him and was smiling down at him.

He stood and greeted her cordially, remembering her name just in time. "Nymphadora." He thought he remembered hearing she went by her father's name now, Tums or something. If she wanted him to call her by some ugly Muggle name instead of her perfectly respectable wizarding one, she'd have to ask.

She cuffed him on the shoulder playfully a little harder than she'd intended, and he stumbled slightly. "How the hell are you?"

Why was she acting like they were family? Well, they *were* family, technically, but her mum was disowned -- meaning the Blacks didn't even acknowledge Nymphadora. "Surviving," he replied slowly, too perplexed to think of anything else.

"How's Aunt Narcissa?" she inquired. "Haven't seen her in a fair few years now. Do you know she used to come visit me and my mum in secret? Got my best toys from her -- you lot are loaded, yeah?"

Draco blinked. "Erm. I suppose so."

She grinned jovially. "Yeah, we missed out on our share of Black money, what with Mum being disowned and all. Rotten luck, that. Oh -- no worries, I don't blame you a bit. You weren't even born yet! Aunt 'Cissy brought you to see us once -- you were so adorable! Completely bald except for one little tuft of hair, almost totally white. Some things don't change, I see -- blimey, are you always this pale?"

Draco paused, trying to register everything she'd said. "Er...pretty much, yeah."

"That's a shame -- you ought to get more sun. How's your mum these days?"

Draco tried not to smirk at her repetitiveness. "Haven't talked to her in a while."

"Oooh, right!" she said, motioning to his collar. "Hope you aren't too miserable. Better'n Azkaban, though, am I right?"

Draco looked over at Potter, who was doubled over laughing as Weasley was tackled by several of his brothers. "Right."

"Heard about your dad, I did. Sorry about that -- I never knew him personally -- did duel him once though -- but my dad died a while back so I know it's tough."

Draco looked over her shoulder. "Er...yeah, it is. Er," he said, trying to steer the conversation elsewhere, "how's Andromeda?"

"Oh, she's great! She's here, in fact -- well, not *here*, but with the adults drinking champagne or whatever -- technically *I* should be there too, but me and Bill decided we're kids at heart -- you lot are much more fun anyway. Anyway!" She gesticulated wildly with her hands, whacking a scandalized-looking Fleur Delacour as she passed by. "Oh, sorry!" she called after her. "Bloody clumsy, I am. Anyhow, Mum's taken up bridge and likes it *very* much - she loves the Order and is *so* happy to be back at Hogwarts -- so am I, really, Grimmauld Place was dead cramped, I knocked something over every time I walked into a room! Well, I'll let Mum know you asked after her -- I'm sure she'd love to talk to you about Aunt Narcissa. Cheers, Draco!"

Draco watched, dumbfounded, as she bounced away from him. He spotted Potter coming towards him and bump into her on the way. He had no trouble hearing what she was saying halfway across the room.

"Wotcher, Harry! Just had a chat with Draco over there -- bit quiet, inne? I expected he'd be a bit more exciting after I found you on the train last year. Well -- they say it's the quiet ones you've really got to keep an eye on!" Draco blanched as he remembered the incident from the start of sixth year. He wondered how angry Potter still was over it. Potter said something back to Nymphadora that Draco couldn't catch before he walked up.

"I see you've met Tonks," Potter said with a knowing grin.

"Yeah," Draco replied, still a little stunned.

"Learn anything interesting?"

"Er..." he tried to recall anything of the conversation. "Her mother's taken up bridge, and I was an adorable baby."

"Oh, right, you're related, I forgot."

Draco nodded. "We're cousins. Not *really*, though, as Andromeda was disowned when she ran off with that Mud—gleborn." He tried to finish the sentence without too much open distaste in his tone. He cleared his throat.

"Nymphadora's very...cheerful," he said.

"Don't I know it," Potter replied. "You should've seen her last year, she was a right mess. Now that Lupin's finally agreed to date her, though..."

Draco pulled a face. "*Lupin*? What's he, like twice her age?"

"Oi, watch it," Potter warned. "They're good together."

Draco smirked. "Guess Lupin's got a thing for black sheep of the family."

Potter raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

"Lupin and dear cousin Sirius, of course." For all that you weren't supposed to talk about a disowned family member, Sirius was a staple of conversation at big family get-togethers. The man had been an utter disappointment to the family, but *damn* was he fun to talk about.

Potter tensed and Draco belatedly remembered his close relationship with Sirius. "That isn't true," he said dismissively.

Draco held up his hands. "Just repeating what I've heard."

Potter pursed his lips. "Did you get my note?" he asked, changing the subject somewhat hamhandedly.

"Err...hmm, no, can't say that I did," said Draco, looking confused. "What *are* you talking about?"

"Shut up, I know you got it. I just wanted to remind you that I plan to capitalize on it."

Draco gave him an unimpressed look. "I'm counting down the minutes, Potter."

Potter surveyed the room. "Well, I've been talking to you way too long, so I think I'll go organize another Ron ambush."

"Mm, I think I'll sulk menacingly in the corner for a while and then go upstairs for a nap," Draco replied. Potter grunted and went to go accost Fred and George.

Draco was succeeding greatly in his endeavor to sulk menacingly, and was about to phase into the nap stage of his plan, when a familiar prickling in his left arm startled him. *Shit*. Not *now*! The prickling quickly passed through uncomfortable into truly painful and he clutched uselessly at his arm, resisting the urge to pull up his sleeve and look at it.

He heard a pained yell, and was afraid that he'd unconsciously cried out until he noticed that Potter was on his knees, clutching at his forehead. "It's...he's..." he groaned weakly.

Draco tore his eyes off of Potter, and noticed that everyone was looking at him. Gulping, he slowly removed his hand from his Mark, lowering both arms to his sides.

Nymphadora approached him, no longer smiling. "Show me your Mark," she said coldly.

Silently, he hiked up his sleeve and there was a collective gasp in the room. The Mark was crimson.

Nymphadora turned to the others. "He's calling the Death Eaters. Let's go. Meeting, now." Everyone made their way hurriedly out of the common room. Granger helped Potter out, as he was still clutching at his scar. He didn't look back.

When everyone had filed out, Nymphadora stood on the other side of the open portrait hole. "We can't risk you overhearing," she said to Draco, and muttered something as she tapped the portrait before closing it.

As soon as he heard the portrait door click shut, he rushed forward and shoved it, to no avail. He needed a *wand*.

And so he waited. After a few hours, his stomach began to growl -- he hadn't had breakfast, after all. He watched the sun move across the sky, briefly considering looking for more firewhisky in Fred and George's room, but foregoing it, remembering that if Potter got his way, he'd need to have a reaction of the sort he hadn't managed the other day.

Eventually, the sun started to set and Draco became fed up. He tried the door again, but it wouldn't budge. He tried some of Potter's wandless magic, concentrating on the door with all his might and yelling "*ALOHOMORA!*" at the top of his lungs, but finally had to give up when all he got was a thundering headache.

"LET ME OUT!" he screamed. "OPEN THE FUCKING DOOR!" He pounded on the portrait, trying in earnest to punch a hole in the damn thing, but the canvas appeared to be enchanted.

He collapsed in one of the common room's overly cushy chairs. The sun was now completely down, and he had little hope of Potter returning that day. With nothing better to do, he went to bed.

He woke up the next morning still alone in Gryffindor tower. He sat at the fireplace, angry that the house elves had had the presence of mind to start a fire, but not to get him anything to eat. He was bloody starving, not having eaten since dinner two days before, and the first thing he was going to do when the portrait opened was take a trip to the kitchens. He just hoped it would open today.

He was reading an incredibly boring tome he'd found in Granger's room (which had all of Weasley's things as well, ergh) when the portrait finally swung open and Potter's disheveled head poked in.

"Thank Merlin," he sighed, getting up. He stepped around Potter without a word and out of the portrait hole.

"Hello to you too!" Potter called after him. He kept walking. "What's the matter with you? Is this because I didn't keep my promise yesterday? Because that's petty, even for you."

Draco had trouble even coming up with a response to that. "*No*, you complete wanker, I couldn't care less whether you give me your insipid Christmas present. I'm actually on my way to the kitchens because as you seem not to have noticed, I didn't get to eat yesterday." He turned away and walked down the corridor, not surprised when he heard Potter jogging to catch up with him.

"*What* did you say?" Potter said, coming to walk beside him.

"I said I'm starving and I'm going to the kitchens," Draco repeated, looking straight ahead.

"The house elves didn't bring you anything?"

Draco gritted his teeth and increased his walking pace. If there was something he absolutely didn't need right now, it was Potter's righteous anger on his behalf.

"No, the house elves didn't bring me anything. They weren't instructed to. Because no one here *cares* whether I eat or not. I am a *prisoner*, Potter, and you can bring me to as many bloody Christmas mornings as you want, but your Order will never take the trouble to feed me if they have something more important to do!"

He didn't bother to look at Potter's face, which he knew displayed a mixture of indignation, distraught, and concern. Potter was so predictable.

They walked the rest of the way to the kitchens in silence. Draco tickled the pear in the painting and stepped inside, immediately covered in doting house elves. He brushed them off, and stated, "I'm hungry. Get me something French."

Seconds later, a group of house elves came back with two barstools and a plate of coq au vin, and he tucked in. Potter watched him. "Quit staring," he said, not bothering to curb his irritable tone. "Do you want some or what?"

Potter held up a hand to signify 'no thanks,' and looked away before a grin spread over his face. "Dobby!" he cried as a house elf scampered toward him.

*Dobby.* The name rang a bell.

"Harry Potter has come to visit Dobby!" it said in a high-pitched voice. "Happy Boxing Day, Harry Potter! Is you having a good Christmas?"

"Yeah, I did. Got the socks, by the way. Thanks very much." He tugged up his trousers to show off a pair of knobby blue socks with snowflakes.

The house elf began to cry, much to Draco's distaste. "Oh, Harry Potter is so good to Dobby! Harry Potter need not be thanking Dobby -- it is Dobby's pleasure!"

Then it clicked. "Hey," Draco interrupted. "You used to belong to my family!"

The ear-splitting grin on the house elf's face vanished. "Dobby is honored that Master Draco has remembered him," it said coldly.

Draco was pathetic, he decided, if he couldn't even get respect from a house elf anymore. He gave the elf a swift kick to the ribs. "That's no tone of voice to speak to your old master, Dobby," he reprimanded.

Potter shoved him. "What the fuck? Don't touch him! Dobby's a friend of mine!"

Draco sat there in silent disbelief as the house elf began to cry with gratitude again. "Oh, Harry Potter, you is too, too good to Dobby! Dobby does not deserve the friendship of great Harry Potter!"

"Er, don't mention it," Potter said, casting a nervous glance at Draco.

Dobby also looked at Draco, scowling. "Ooh, Master Draco is a wicked, wicked boy! Is not Dobby's place to say, but good Harry Potter should not be talking to a wicked boy like Master Draco!"

Draco rolled his eyes and put his head in his hands. The thing's shrill voice was giving him a headache. "Can I get a sodding glass of water?" he demanded. A tray immediately appeared at his knee and he took a generous gulp.

"Malfoy--" Potter started.

"Fuck off, would you?" Draco cut him off.

"Master Draco will not speak to Harry Potter in that way!"

"*Mind your place, elf!*" Draco snarled. Potter opened his mouth to tell him off again, but Draco beat him to it, dropping his plate on the floor for Dobby's friends to clean up. "Fancy that, I've lost my appetite," he said calmly, getting up.

"Malfoy, don't be an idiot, you haven't eaten for--"

"Thanks so much for coming with, Potter," he said sarcastically as he headed for the exit. A cluster of house elves appeared at his feet, offering more food. "Send something to my room," he instructed before stepping through the doorway and shutting it behind him.

Draco was enjoying a warm meal on the floor next to his bed when Potter barged in. "Malfoy," he said levelly. "I'm sorry."

"Don't shove me around like I'm your girlfriend," Draco said calmly, continuing to eat.

"You can't just kick him around like a dog! He's a magical creature!"

Draco was glad, on some level, to be arguing with Potter. It felt good. "He's impertinent."

"He's my *friend!*"

Draco looked up for the first time, putting down his fork and pushing his plate away as he stood and folded his arms over his chest. "The great Harry Potter, friend to the weak and pathetic."

That touched a nerve, as Draco knew it would. "Shut up."

"Is that what I am, Potter? A pity case for the Boy Who Lived?"

Potter looked increasingly flustered. "Don't call me that!"

Draco raised an eyebrow, ignoring him. "Though I suppose I can see why you befriend the weak and pathetic if you get free head out of it..."

Potter looked as though he wanted to hit him. Draco silently dared him to. Potter sighed and looked downward. "That's not what you are," he said quietly.

*What the hell am I, then?* Draco thought.

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Eventually, he and Potter got back into the swing of things. The trip to Weasley's rabbit hole had breathed new life into the trio's project, which Draco was no closer to understanding. The Order, on the whole, was abuzz with news carefully kept out of Draco's earshot.

Draco, for his part, continued to scrutinize the *Daily Prophet*. There seemed to be no obvious action in connection to the call through his Mark. He assumed that the attack on the Ministry had been thwarted by his Veritaserum confession -- it had been planned to happen during the winter. He no longer had any idea what the Death Eaters were doing.

He spent most days, like always, in the library with Potter.

"Potter," he hissed quietly across the table, where Potter was reading. "I know you're bored, let's go snog or something."

Potter, hearing his words, cast a panicked glance to either side, and gave him an *are you mad?* expression.

Draco smirked in return. "I thought Gryffindors were meant to be daring," he muttered.

Just as Potter looked convinced, however, Granger and Weasley barged into the library. Draco scowled at them.

Catching his eye, Granger pulled out her wand. For a split second, he thought she was going to hex him for his scowl, but she said succinctly, "*Surdesceri.*"

The air suddenly felt as though it was plugging up his ears. He could hear nothing beyond a faint high-pitched whine that served only to irritate him.

Granger said something to him, but it was as though someone had turned down the volume in his brain. He flipped

her the V, for good measure. Satisfied, she began to chat amiably with Potter and Weasley.

More about their project, no doubt. Draco was going to find out what it was if it killed him. He watched their entirely mute conversation with mild interest. Granger was doing most of the talking, unsurprisingly. Eventually, she gave Potter and Weasley what were evidently instructions and strode purposefully into the stacks. Weasley shrugged helplessly at Potter before following her.

Potter settled back down to his book.

"Hello?" Draco said. Or at least, that's what he hoped he said. Speaking without being able to hear himself was more difficult than he'd thought.

Potter heard him say *something* though, and looked up. Draco motioned to his ears. Potter shrugged helplessly. Did he honestly not know the counterjinx?

With an impatient sigh, Draco grabbed the quill Potter was using to take notes, dipped it in ink, and wrote directly onto the page Potter was reading, *Audiri*. And added for good measure, *you fucking idiot*.

Potter rolled his eyes and cast the spell. Sound came rushing back like a crashing wave.

"What a bitch," Draco muttered, glaring at the stacks where Granger had long vanished. "Still want to go snog?"

A sly grin pulled at the corners of Potter's mouth. "Let's wait until tonight."

That night, Draco felt slightly momentous about the whole thing.

After taking what were now their standard privacy measures, they tumbled into Potter's bed. Potter lay on top of him, making it easy to feel every angular contour of his body. They snogged happily for several minutes before Potter looked at him oddly. "D'you want to have sex?" he blurted.

A thrill went through Draco. "Okay," he replied, propping himself up.

Potter's smile practically took up his entire face. "Excellent. Er...do you know what we do?"

Draco didn't understand the question. How much was there to know? "Doesn't one of us, er, bugger the other one?"

"Well, yeah, but how do we, like, position ourselves?"

"I guess that depends...who's gonna, y'know, get buggered?" Draco asked, figuring he was damned no matter which role he played.

Potter licked his lips, thinking about it. "Well, neither of us has done this before. Have you done it with a girl?" Draco blushed slightly as he shook his head. "Oh. Well, I have. Once."

"Who?" demanded Draco.

"Ginny," Potter admitted.

"Ginny Weasley? What was she, fourteen?!"

"She was sixteen! And I wasn't seventeen yet!" he said, looking highly embarrassed. "Anyway, I've done it before. How different could this be?"

Draco figured pretty bloody different, but he kept that to himself. "Right, do you just...do it, then?"

Potter's brow furrowed. "Er, no...I think we need a lubricant. Hold on." He got up and looked through the bedside drawer before pulling out a bottle of hand lotion. "Ron used it for wanking, I think," he said with a wicked grin.

"I hope you don't think you're shagging me with something Weasley uses for wanking," Draco said dryly.

Potter shrugged. "Looks like it's all we've got."

There was a pause, and it seemed as though there was nothing left but to do it. Draco had a sudden moment of hygienic panic. "Er. Er. Should I, like, take a shower first?"

Potter stared at him.

"I mean, it's sort of grotty, isn't it?" Draco continued, faltering. "I won't be long." He scrambled off the bed and into the loo, shedding clothes as he went.

In the shower, he tried helplessly to calm himself down. He was a little nervous, but the twinge in his stomach had more to do with the fact that he was also pretty excited. He was hard already, and it was getting pretty difficult not to touch himself, but he didn't want to ruin it before anything even happened. He exhaled deeply, reaching for the soap. He lathered his right hand and reached hesitantly behind him. He'd never seriously considered putting anything up his arse before.

He bit his lip as he pushed a finger in. It was a tight fit; he had no idea how anything much bigger would fit. It felt decidedly strange, besides, and not terribly pleasurable. Sex was sex, though, and he'd been led to believe that sex generally felt pretty good. Maybe Potter would feel more like sex and less like a healer's examination at St. Mungo's.

When he was convinced that he was clean enough to proceed, he hastily turned off the tap, scrubbed his hair furiously with a towel, and wrapped it around his waist, sniggering despite himself at the ridiculous tent his erection made.

He walked back into the dormitory to find Potter lying in approximately the same spot he'd been in when Draco had left.

Potter took in his appearance. "Oi, you've started without me," he said teasingly.

Draco smirked as best he could considering he was naked and about to get fucked. "I guess you'd better catch up."

Potter didn't need to be told twice. He had his trousers off in seconds flat and his glasses snagged on his shirt as he pulled it over his head. Draco watched, amused, as he tossed them on the floor in frustration. Potter glanced at him with something akin to bashfulness as he then pulled off his pants, leaving him completely naked.

Draco felt a jolt go through him. Potter was *fit*. He allowed himself to eye Potter up and down, appreciating his slender build, muscle definition, and the thin line of black hair that trailed from his navel down to his cock. Which was hard. For Draco.

Honestly, Draco was pretty sure it wasn't going to fit. A small cough from Potter tore his eyes away, back up his frame to rest on his face. He was blushing, and raised his eyebrows.

"Oh! Right," said Draco, and dropped his towel.

Potter let out a nervous laugh. "You are really good-looking," he said, smiling lopsidedly.

Draco climbed onto the bed. "So're you," he replied, not knowing what else to say.

Potter made room for him at the head of the bed. "Here we are," he said, smile broadening.

"Should I..." Draco faltered.

"Er...all fours, I guess?"

Feeling a little silly, Draco turned around and got on his hands and knees.

"Fuck," Potter said from behind him. "You're hot. Let's do this." He sensed Potter looming behind him and heard the squelch of Potter putting the lotion on himself. He tensed as he felt Potter's cock between his arse cheeks.

"Okay," breathed Potter, and pushed. Slowly, inch by inch, he felt Potter push further and further inside him. And fuck -- it *hurt*. He felt like Potter was going to split him in half. The thought of asking Potter to stop flitted through his head before he pushed it aside -- how humiliating would that be? No, he just needed to suck it up. Why would people do it if it didn't feel good? He'd heard that a girl's first time was painful, and though he hated to think of himself as "the girl" in this situation, maybe it was comparable.

Potter, on the other hand, seemed to be enjoying himself immensely. "Fuck...Malfoy...you're so *tight*..." he groaned as he stopped pushing, having got all the way in. Good. Maybe the worst was over.

"Thanks?" said Draco, still gritting his teeth against the pain. It faded a little, but Potter began to move.

"How is it?" Potter asked in a husky voice after a little while.

"Weird," replied Draco, relieved when Potter didn't ask further. The acute burning subsided after a couple of minutes, but he still wouldn't call it pleasurable; he'd lost his erection near the beginning and was trying to concentrate on something else. Potter was resting his head between Draco's shoulder blades, breathing harshly into his back, and Draco focused on the tickling feeling of Potter's hair as he waited for him to finish.

He squeezed around Potter to encourage him and, with a grunt, Potter spilled. And Draco *felt* it, which had to be one of the strangest sensations ever.

Potter flopped down next to him, flushed. "Wow. That was wicked. Sorry it was, er, over pretty fast."

Draco assured him it was okay and was immensely relieved when Potter dozed off without realizing that he had once again "forgotten" him. When he was sure Potter wouldn't wake up, Draco stood up gingerly and went to have another shower. He cringed as he felt a distinct wetness in his backside and reached behind him to find Potter's come leaking out of his arse. "Ergh," he muttered distastefully as he inspected it--only to find that it had a pinkish tint. Great, he was bleeding.

He sighed as he made his way into the bathroom. He hoped Potter wouldn't want to do this often.

The next morning, he woke up when Potter poked him in the ribs. "Oi, what're you doing back in your bed?"

"I had a shower after you fell asleep," he said, "and when I came back you'd taken up the whole bed." The best lies involved a bit of truth.

Potter sat down next to Draco's outstretched legs and looked at him with an unreadable expression, before speaking. "I realized something," he said. "You're a virgin."

Draco sat up. "Well, not anymore," he deadpanned.

"But...that was your first." It seemed almost to be a question.

"Yep," Draco affirmed.

Potter blinked. "I thought you and Parkinson..."

Draco wrinkled his nose. "*Pansy*? Are you joking? She looks like a dog."

Potter seemed confused. "Why do you date her, then?"

Merlin, Potter was such a Muggle. "Politics."

Potter guffawed. "Politics? Even in fourth year, politics?"



Draco shrugged, not really understanding Potter's incredulity. "Yeah, I suppose so. It's an advantageous marriage for my family."

Potter's eyes popped. "*Marriage?* You're marrying her?"

"Unless a better match comes along," Draco replied nonchalantly. It amused him a little to see Potter get so riled up over it. "For a while it was looking like we'd have to marry back into the Blacks. Thank Merlin Regulus didn't live to have a kid, or I'd've had to tolerate some whiny second year." He cringed a little as he remembered it. He wasn't a big fan of incest.

"You don't *have* to tolerate anyone, let alone marry them."

Draco sighed. "I'll go ahead and assume you haven't looked at my family tree. It just so happens that through a series of misfortunes having mostly to do with this war and the last one, I'm, er...the end of the line, currently. Of the Malfoys *and* the Blacks, since Sirius and Regulus are out of the picture, Aunt Andromeda's disowned, Aunt Bellatrix is batshit insane, and my mum's not really in a position to have more kids. So, yes, I am fairly obligated to get married and have an heir."

Potter looked aghast. "Forget that, Malfoy. Marry someone you love. How could you live every day with someone you didn't love?"

"Don't be naïve," Draco drawled. "My parents' marriage was arranged."

Potter appeared genuinely surprised. "And they were happy?"

"They had affairs all the time." Draco smirked at Potter's look of complete shock.

"You...you were okay with that? Like, as a child?"

Draco nodded. "That's how it is, Potter."

Potter held up his hands. "If you say so. I've no idea how anything works, the only pureblood family I spend time with is the Weasleys."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Yes, pity we can't all be a bit more like the Weasleys," he replied dryly.

"If you had five brothers, you wouldn't be obligated to get married to some girl you didn't even like," Potter pointed out.

"I probably would anyway."

"And if you didn't have to have a kid, you wouldn't have to be with a girl at all..."

Draco made a small noise at the insinuation, covering it up with a scoff. "I could have five hundred brothers and *that* still wouldn't be all right."

Potter tucked his legs under himself. "Oh, is it not 'all right' with you lot?" he said with a mocking smile.

Potter was so condescending. "It's generally frowned upon," Draco said.

He silently cursed as Potter perked up, seeming interested to continue in this vein. "Oh yeah? I mean, it sort of is with Muggles too, but I never really had occasion to ask anyone at Hogwarts."

Draco sighed, resting his head in his hands. He didn't really want to have this conversation. "Yeah. Definitely frowned upon."

Potter paused, looking solemn. Draco knew what was coming next and dreaded it. "Does it bother you, then?" he asked deliberately.

Yes, *immensely*, Draco wanted to say. *In fact, thanks to you and your stupid bloody green eyes and fantastic smile and even more fantastic arse, I get to hate myself that much more.* "Does what bother me?" he said instead, forcing himself to look up.

Potter stared at him, unblinking. "Being gay."

Draco grimaced. He hated that fucking word. "I'm not *gay*."

Potter snorted and Draco looked at him pointedly. "Well, yes you are! I mean..." he gestured vaguely at the air between them. "...there it is!"

"Maybe I'm just desperate!" Draco said harshly. "Or maybe I'm just whoring myself out to you to stay out of prison."

Potter blinked. "Well, you're not, right?"

Draco resisted the urge to smack himself on the forehead, anger beginning to boil in his chest. "Of course not, don't be daft." He was just an idiot with no self-control.

Potter got his serious look again and Draco braced himself for whatever patronizing comment he'd have to bear.

Potter didn't disappoint. "Malfoy, you don't have to be ashamed of yourself."

"Yes I bloody well *do* have to be ashamed!" Draco exclaimed. "It's *wrong*, Potter! I can't change it, so the least I can do is understand how fucking *shameful* it is!"

"Why be ashamed of something you can't change? That doesn't even make sense!"

"I just -- am." Draco felt very tired. "Okay? I was raised with a very clear idea of right and wrong, and this definitely falls under wrong."

"So are you telling me I ought to be ashamed too?" Potter asked.

"Well -- yes!"

Potter gave a mirthless laugh. "That is complete bollocks, Malfoy. Whose business is it anyway? I can shag whoever I want!"

Potter could save the righteous indignation for someone who bought that shite, Draco decided, and pulled his trump card. "Oh yeah? You're so comfortable? Tell Weasley, then."

Potter deflated. "What?"

"You heard me. Say, 'Ron, I like blokes and I'm shagging the resident Death Eater.'"

Draco watched Potter's Adam's apple bob as he swallowed helplessly, twin feelings of arousal and shame curling up idly in his stomach.

"No, I can't tell Ron," Potter admitted. "I don't -- know how he feels about it. He might get upset. And...I'd probably not mention you either way. No offense."

"None taken," Draco muttered sarcastically.

**CHAPTER TEN:  
In which everything goes to hell.**

Being a non-virgin didn't feel all that different, really. Well, except for the first few days. Those were marked by a distinctive twinge in his arse that only a foreign object by the name of Harry Potter could have caused. He spent several meals shifting awkwardly in his seat while Potter smirked knowingly at him from across the table.

Having had sex brought about no great change in the dynamics between him and Potter, either. They certainly weren't any more likely to hold hands in the corridors or whisper sweet nothings to each other. They rowed just as intensely over petty matters.

Draco was a bit bothered by the fact that, all in all, the sex hadn't been very good. He hadn't copped off, which meant, he was pretty sure, that it had in fact been quite terrible.

He wasn't inclined to think, though, that it would always be so terrible. As shameful and wrong as sex of that particular variety purportedly was, it was a common practice among people of their particular persuasion. Perhaps there was just a trick to it that he and Potter didn't know.

To Draco's relief, Potter did not immediately suggest trying again. However, their new experience together seemed to have opened the floodgates for, unbelievably, more snogging. In fact, Draco wondered that they had time to do anything else. At times, he suspected some sort of magical tampering; it was becoming harder and harder to keep his hands off Potter for an extended period of time.

One crisp morning, Potter was spreading jam on toast at breakfast. He was doing a very poor job of it, and ended up getting a fair amount of jam on his fingers. Draco watched, transfixed, as he brought his hand up to his mouth, and systematically sucked each finger clean.

Draco was instantly hard.

He cleared his throat. Catching Potter's eye, he looked toward the doorway, and back again.

Potter got the message loud and clear. "Right then, Malfoy," he said tersely, "let's go. Much work to be done."

They barely cleared the Great Hall before breaking into a run. "Library," Potter said breathily.

They entered the library, dusty and deserted as ever. "Come on," Potter said, leading him to some remote section. Draco pushed Potter up against the shelves and looked down at him. "Are we gonna snog or what?" Potter asked, grinning lopsidedly.

Draco returned the grin, and dropped to his knees with a loud thump.

"Oh, *gods*," Potter muttered as Draco undid his trousers and pushed them down to his knees. He looked up at Potter and licked his lips.

"Don't *tease*," Potter whined. Draco obliged quite happily, grasping the base of Potter's cock as he slid his lips over the head.

This was all right, he decided, when you weren't piss drunk. He ran his tongue in circles over the head of Potter's cock as he took more into his mouth, cringing a little when he felt drool starting to crawl down his chin.

"Nnggh," Potter intoned, which Draco took to mean, "Draco, you're a fucking god, please don't ever stop."

Or something.

Draco experimented, taking a chance to perfect his technique. He reveled in the noises and nonsense words Potter moaned as he alternated flicking his tongue and sucking hard, and his own prick throbbed uncomfortably when Potter threaded his hands in his hair.

With no real idea of what he was doing, Draco brought his other hand up to fondle Potter's balls, and received a gasp in return.

"Harry? Are you in here?" a voice came, alarmingly close.

"Oh my god!" Potter whispered, tugging at Draco's hair to pull him off.

Draco, however, was going to finish what he bloody started. He bobbed his head, suppressing a gag as Potter poked the back of his throat, and hummed.

"*Fuck!*" Potter hissed, and came.

"Harry?" called the voice again, and footsteps could be heard approaching them. Potter pushed Draco away from him and worked frantically to get his trousers back up while Draco ran his hands through his hair and hoped his lips weren't too horrendously swollen.

He looked down at himself and cringed, as his erection was quite noticeable through his damn Muggle trousers. If he were given robes like a proper wizard...

"Potter!" he mouthed, gesturing at himself.

"Sit down!" said Potter, pointing to the table nearby, and Draco scrambled to sit. "I'm here!" he called out.

Ginny Weasley rounded the corner. "Why're you all the way back here?" she inquired.

Potter was grinning hugely. So much for subtlety. "Oh, you know...there's this one book I thought I might find back here."

Her eyes flicked to the shelves. "You're in...elvish history."

Draco snorted, and had to cough a few times to make up for it. When he looked up, both of them were looking at him, Potter very pointedly. He smiled at Weasley, not trusting himself to speak. She pulled a face of disgust.

"Er, anyway," Potter faltered, "I don't think it's here. Let's go back out to our table, yeah?"

Weasley turned to go back, and Potter began to follow. "Potter!" Draco hissed. Potter gave him a scandalized look. "I can't *get up!*"

"Oh, for fuck's sake..." Potter sighed. "Try not wearing such tight jeans, you idiot."

Draco threw his hands up. "I wear whatever I find on my bed."

Potter stifled a laugh. "I guess I should resize my trousers before I give them to you."

Draco gritted his teeth. "Look -- the *point* is, someone could lose an eye if I go out there."

"Well...stay here and take care of it!"

Draco raised his eyebrows. "What -- sit and think of England until it goes away?"

"No!" said Potter, flushing. "Have a wank!" And he turned and left. Bloody traitor.

Draco paused for a long moment, disbelieving. He heaved a sigh, trying in vain not to resign himself to it. He could not really be about to do this.

He emitted a little groan. Potter owed him so much for this. Draco got up, looking around him. There was nowhere in the little alcove where he could guarantee not being interrupted -- which would be completely mortifying. Trying to look inconspicuous, he sat down against a shelf of books and unfastened his trousers.

He felt distinctly uncomfortable as he gingerly pulled himself out. How was he going to avoid making a mess? He couldn't get his denims soiled -- that would be worse than walking around with a bloody erection. In a moment of brilliance, he grabbed a book from the shelf behind him, not bothering to look at the title. He was about to ruin it anyway. He opened it and placed it across his lap like a napkin.

Casting one more furtive glance to either side, he closed his fingers around himself and set to work. As wanks went, it wasn't a particularly good one; he was nervous, sitting in the library where anyone could walk around the corner, and not very motivated to do anything but go as fast as possible.

His eyes fluttered shut as he quickened his pace, unsavory thoughts making their way into his head. He imagined Potter's smirk, Potter's voice, Potter's hands on him, and bit down hard on his lip to keep himself from making noise when he came.

Breathing unevenly, he opened his eyes to see that he'd shot over the pages of the unfortunate book. He flipped to another section, wiped off his hand, closed it, and put it back on the shelf, grinning to himself. He could only hope that someday a third year trying to do a History of Magic essay would discover the book.

He tucked himself back into his trousers and fastened them, running his hands through his hair again. He imagined he looked totally debauched. But Weasley was just stupid enough to miss it. He got to his feet, checked to see that he didn't look at all suspicious, and made his way back out to where Potter and the girl sat.

She looked at him strangely. "What kept you, then?"

He hazarded a look at Potter, who was stifling laughter behind her back. "Oh, you know me," he said with a winning grin. "Just dawdling."

She looked him up and down with a sneer. "Whatever."

He swallowed the scathing reply he almost shot back at her. Whatever, indeed. Draco wondered how she'd feel to know he'd just sucked off her ex-boyfriend. Maybe she'd cry.

"Malfoy -- oi!" He started, looking down at the table where Potter was looking at him with eyebrows raised.

He cleared his throat. "Sorry?"

"I said, go find something to do. We're working." Potter looked back down at his book without waiting for a reply.

Draco's jaw actually dropped in indignation -- after what he'd just done, Potter thought he could dismiss him like that? He glanced at Weasley, who had also looked back down at her book, not seeing anything objectionable in Potter's words. Well. She wouldn't. She didn't know. Which meant Draco couldn't say anything back to Potter. Fuming, he stalked back into the stacks, hoping against his better judgment that Potter at least felt like an arse for being so short.

Draco perused what few Dark Arts-related books there were outside of the restricted section. He read through a few, discovering them to be quite mundane, and ultimately began to rip out pages out of sheer boredom. This library was so dull. Honestly, why come to school if you can learn more from the books in your own house?

"Malfoy," came Potter's voice behind him.

Still a little incensed over Potter's behavior earlier -- not to mention that he'd left him to 'take care' of himself, which was inconsiderate even under the best circumstances -- Draco got up from the ground where he'd been sitting and faced Potter, arms folded over his chest.

Potter smiled, brows furrowing in mock-confusion. "What, are you angry? What did you expect me to say -- 'hey Malfoy, how'd that wank turn out?'"

Draco regarded him silently.

Potter took a step closer, smirking mischievously in that way that he must have known weakened Draco's resolve. "How did it turn out, by the way?"

"Nerve-wracking and embarrassing and horrible," Draco replied stonily, determined not to let Potter win. "Doesn't really seem fair you got a spectacular blowjob."

Potter chuckled, stepping still closer. "It was rather spectacular, I'll give you that."

Draco raised an eyebrow. "You owe me."

"I suppose I do," Potter replied, looking positively evil. Without warning, he grabbed Draco's head and pulled it down, connecting their mouths rather forcefully.

"Mmm, c'mere," Potter sighed, backing up until he found the nearest table. He hopped up onto it and pulled Draco towards him, wrapping his legs around Draco's waist. Draco kissed him again, slipping his tongue into his eager mouth. A stray thought crossed Draco's mind unbidden: *I could fuck him like this*. He moaned into Potter's mouth, head swimming as he felt Potter's hands clutch at his back.

"Harry, I forgot -- *Oh!*" Potter's body tensed and Draco wrenched himself away. Ginny Weasley stood in front of them, a hand covering her mouth.

*Fuck.*

All three remained frozen for a moment. Draco screwed his eyes shut as panic set in. They were so fucked. Or, more precisely, *he* was fucked. Of course this would get pinned on him. The idea of the Boy Who Lived being a bender was so unbelievably out-of-bounds, so absolutely appalling, that Draco would get shipped to Azkaban as fast as the Order could manage just to protect Potter from his freakish Death Eater *perversity*.

Finally, Potter eased himself off the table. "Ginny..." he said pleadingly, reaching towards her. "I can explain."

"Oh my god," she gasped, looking back and forth between them. "Oh my god!"

"Ginny," Potter said again, in a placating tone.

Her face twisted into a mask of disgust. "You -- you and *him*?! This is so sick! What the hell are you thinking, Harry?!"

"I--" Potter started.

"He's a boy!"

"I know--" Potter tried again.

"He's a *Death Eater!*"

"I *know*--"

"What's *he* got that I haven't?" she demanded, voice cracking.

Draco was angry despite himself at that. "I'd have expected that much would be obvious," he said with a cruel sneer, grabbing his crotch lewdly.

"Shut the *fuck up!*" Potter bellowed. Draco flinched slightly.

"You are so fucking disgusting, Malfoy," Weasley spat, and he was almost startled to see the absolute loathing displayed in her features. "You're fucking *scum*. In fact, you're worse than scum, you're *nothing*. I hope you burn in hell." She turned to leave.

"I'll see you there, bitch!" he called after her.

Potter shoved him, hard. "You keep your fucking mouth shut," he said in a dangerous voice before leaving to follow Weasley out of the library. Draco felt sick. He knew what Potter would tell her to make sure she didn't tell anyone. That it meant nothing -- it was only once -- it was just a fling without consequences -- just a silly experiment -- he didn't even *like* Malfoy...

Draco pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes for a moment as he collected himself. He didn't know what to do, but he sure as hell wasn't going to stay here like a good boy and wait for Potter to come back. He strode to the entrance of the library and peeked out into the hallway. No Potter or screaming hysterical jealous Weaselette in sight.

He made his way out to the front entrance, determined to make himself impossible to find. The air outside was cold and dry, and he could see his breath when he exhaled. His shirt didn't really hold up against the weather, but he didn't much care. He jogged around the perimeter of the castle, looking for a good place to have a sulk. Halfway around the grounds, as he was beginning to lose his breath, he came upon the Quidditch pitch. He came to a halt at its edge, and decided to see what he could see under the stands.

Under the stands, it turned out, it was dark and smelled rather strange. He walked a distance inside and sat down on the packed dirt. Cold seeped in through his clothes wherever he made contact with the ground. He lay down on his back spread-eagled, shivering as coldness engulfed his entire body. He closed his eyes. Maybe he would wake up and this would be a ridiculous drug-induced hallucination. He was living with his mother, fighting for a cause he believed in, nowhere near Harry Potter, about whom he didn't care one whit. He sighed.

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He didn't realize he'd fallen asleep until Potter's frantic voice woke him up, unsurprisingly. "Jesus, Malfoy, wake up!" He cracked an eye open to see Potter's stupid face staring down at him, apparently concerned.

"Oh, not you again..." he groaned. "Please fuck off. Please."

Potter ignored him, as per usual. "Are you mad? It's below freezing out here! You'll catch your death!"

Draco briefly indulged the morbid thought that death might actually be preferable to what he was enduring now.

"I'm quite comfortable, actually," he lied -- anything to get Potter away from him.

"Your lips are blue."

Draco closed his eyes for another moment, giving himself one more chance to wake up from this. He opened them again, and stood up. Potter rose from where he'd been squatting next to him, and Draco set off without a word.

He walked back out of the stands to discover it was still light outside -- he'd been asleep a couple of hours at most before Potter had found him. How in hell did Potter think to look under the damn Quidditch stands? He concluded that the collar must have a tracking charm.

"Hey," he heard behind him. He clenched his fists. He was just *not* in the mood for Potter's pseudo-understanding bullshit at the moment. "Hey!" Potter repeated, jogging up to him. Draco stubbornly kept walking, before a hand on his arm forcefully turned him around.

He shrugged it off violently. "Do *not* touch me," he hissed.

Potter held his ground. "What's your problem?"

Draco shook his head. The trouble was, he couldn't even pick one problem to focus on. "What'd you say to her?"

"I asked her not to tell Ron," Potter said simply.

That was it? No excuses that it was a meaningless one-off?

Potter ran a hand through his hair. "We have to be more careful."

Draco wasn't about to take the blame for this. "We don't have to do anything. It was your idea to do it in the library. I hate the library. Besides, better she catch us at that moment than the first time around."

Potter made a noncommittal noise.

"Don't you think it's better that she didn't walk in on you with your dick out?" Draco said, raising an eyebrow.

"Well, I dunno...what she saw was pretty bad."

Bullshit. "Why, because you were the one with your legs spread? Yeah, I guess it is better that she see *me* on my knees -- paints a much more accurate picture, right?"

Potter took a split second too long to open his mouth to deny it, confirming Draco's words. "So much for comfortable with yourself. You're the biggest hypocrite I've ever met," Draco spat, turning away again.

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It was only a day later the ordeal took its real toll. Having angrily avoided Potter since their argument, Draco was headed into the dormitory in hopes that he'd find it empty, when instead he heard what he was sure would amount to his imminent doom.

"Harry, Ginny told me about you and Malfoy," said a quiet voice that undoubtedly belonged to Hermione Granger.

"Did she tell anyone else?" replied another voice, Potter's.

"No, but--"

"Hermione, please, *please* don't tell anyone. If the Order finds out, they'll send him to Azkaban! They'll think that's why I pushed for him to stay here!"

A beat. "Wasn't it?"

"No, it wasn't! Look, he's an arse, but he certainly isn't fit for Azkaban!"

"Why should I even believe you, Harry? The fact that you and he are apparently *shagging* really does nothing for your argument!"

"Hermione, we aren't *shagging*!"

"You're not? Ginny was lying?"

"Er, not precisely...but it isn't like that!"

"Look, Harry, if you're into blokes all of a sudden it really isn't my business, but you have to understand how much your and his...*relationship* undermines the war effort!"

"It's not undermining anything! It's not as if I spend my time with him divulging Order secrets! I haven't told him about the Horcruxes or anything like that! Look -- I've got it under control. Sending him to Azkaban wouldn't help anyone."

"But it would, Harry." Granger lowered her voice and Draco strained to hear what she said next. "You've been a bit out of it with the Horcruxes and all, but...Ron's dad was telling us earlier -- this war isn't going well. The Death Eaters are up against the Ministry of Magic, the Muggle Ministry, *and* the Order -- and they're still winning! No one expected them to come back this strong -- almost all of the inner circle went to Azkaban sixteen years ago, and most of them are either dead or still there. But V-Voldemort's forces are coming back just as strong as before, if not stronger. And Dumbledore's gone now -- and he alienated a lot of pureblood families when he was alive--"



"What exactly does this have to do with Malfoy?"

Granger sighed. "The Ministry's losing support; people are realizing that Scrimgeour's no better than Fudge in a lot of ways. Everyone knows Stan Shunpike isn't a Death Eater, but if Malfoy were brought in, it'd show that they're not as infallible as they look right now."

"All it would show is that the Ministry has no problem throwing kids in jail!"

"He's Lucius Malfoy's son! No one would think he doesn't deserve it!"

"So basically, you're suggesting we hand him over to the Ministry and facilitate a huge lie about him -- all for the sake of politics."

The sound of a fist coming down on a table resounded. "It isn't a *lie*, Harry! Open your eyes for god's sake -- he's far from innocent! I can't believe you can forget *six years* of him making your life hell in the span of three months! He *isn't on our side!*" Granger's voice became calm. "You're putting a lot of people in danger. I suggest you quit thinking with your...*hormones* and face the facts." Footsteps. Granger was leaving the room, coming closer to the exit where Draco stood.

Draco barely had time to school his features into a scowl before Granger had shoved a wand into his throat.

"Watch yourself, Death Eater," she hissed. "I know damn well what you're playing at." Without another word, she left Draco standing there, hard pressed to think of a comeback.

Draco entered the room to find Potter sitting with his head in his hands. He jerked his head upward when he heard Draco approach. "Hi," he said wearily, offering a small smile that Draco did not return.

"What are Horcruxes, Potter?"

Potter's smile faded. "I take it you listened in on that whole thing, then."

"I must admit the Mudblood's perception of the war was startlingly reality-based for one of you lot. She must've forgotten to put on her Order-issued blinders this morning."

He watched Potter's temple pulse as he clenched his jaw. Draco knew picking a fight with his one solid ally was counter-productive, especially after hearing Potter defend him so vehemently, but the argument he'd overheard had left a foul taste in his mouth, and Granger's aggression had worsened his mood considerably. And besides, he didn't owe Potter a damn thing and he didn't want him to think differently.

"What are Horcruxes?" he repeated.

"None of your fucking business!" Potter screamed. "It's bad enough you even heard us talking about them!"

Draco smirked. "What, Potter, don't you trust me?" he asked in a mocking tone, only half joking.

He watched as Potter faltered. "I...it isn't a matter of whether I trust you or not. As soon as the knowledge is in your head, Voldemort can get to it."

Draco tugged on his collar. "There's no chance I'll be seeing the Dark Lord anytime soon with this bloody thing. I tried, remember?"

Potter looked at his hands. "It's...complicated."

Try as he might, Draco couldn't get another word out of him, and eventually went to sleep.

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Granger approached Potter the next morning as breakfast was breaking up. "Harry, could I talk to you for a minute?"

she said, glancing at Draco. "Privately?"

Potter nodded towards the library and Draco obliged him, hoping he could get whatever Granger said out of Potter later.

Potter entered the library some minutes later looking rather pale. Draco raised his eyebrows inquisitively.

Potter cleared his throat. "Hermione says that as Ron's best mate I am obligated to tell him about this."

Draco rolled his eyes. Typical Granger. She'd found out about "this" exactly one day ago and was already acting like she was in charge of it. "Don't," he said simply.

Potter looked down. "She says if I don't, she will."

An ultimatum. How melodramatic.

Draco didn't care one whit about Potter's sparkly golden friendship with Weasley, but he knew that if Weasley found out, his life would probably become more difficult. Plus Weasley couldn't keep a secret to save his life, and this secret needed to remain a secret if Draco wanted to stay out of Azkaban.

"Look," he said, playing mercilessly on Potter's crippling need for acceptance, "as much as I hate saying that Weasley and I have anything in common, we both grew up wizard and I can tell you that he's not okay with it."

"Just because your family are bigots doesn't mean everyone is," Potter replied harshly.

"Oh, so you think he'll be overjoyed you decided to hop into bed with a Death Eater?"

Potter set his jaw. "He's my friend. He'll support me."

Draco laughed derisively. "Who are you trying to convince?"

Potter sneered. "I'm not asking for your permission. I'm telling you that I'm going to tell him."

"Well, you're a fool."

"Do you want to be there?" Potter asked.

"Of *course* not," Draco said exasperatedly. "Are you doing it now?"

"No. After dinner."

Dinner was a quick affair, unfortunately, and Potter was looking more nervous by the minute. He sighed. "I can do this," he muttered to himself.

"Don't fuck up," Draco said encouragingly.

Potter looked at him severely.

"I'll be in the library," Draco said as he got up, giving Potter a thump on the back.

As he walked away from the catastrophe to be, he heard Potter say in his most contrite voice, "Ron, I need to talk to you..."

Chapter 11 "Guy Love Episode One"

**AND NOW...FOR A SPECIAL INTERLUDE.**

**Writing a mostly serious story was a big challenge for me, since I have not a single serious bone in my body. Thus, I had to vent my need for kooky hijinks into episodic interludes from Harry's POV, which mostly consist of him and Ron being idiots. This one's actually not especially hilarious, but there are more to come. The term 'guy love,' of course, gacked from "Scrubs." Without further ado:**

**Guy Love with Harry and Ron  
Episode One: On A Very Special Episode Of...**

Ron turned toward him. "Yeah, mate?"

Harry's heart sank. Ron was going to hate him. Definitely. He couldn't do this. He absolutely couldn't.

He felt a hand close reassuringly but firmly around his arm. "You're doing great, Harry," Hermione muttered encouragingly.

"Ron, I have to tell you something," Harry said, feeling very much like his mouth was moving of its own accord.

Ron was blissfully unaware of the tragedy that was about to befall him, and smiled genially. "Okay," he said.

"Um, it's something about myself," Harry said, wondering how long he could go without actually saying it. "And you're not going to like it."

Ron's face turned serious. "Harry, you can tell me anything."

Harry opened his mouth, hoping it would come out on its own, but nothing happened. Hermione nodded at him encouragingly. She still hadn't let go of his arm, he noticed. She was probably preventing him from running away.

The pause became ridiculously long, and he forced himself to say something. "So...so you know how I can't really have a relationship with a girl for very long? And how you're sort of the one carrying conversations about girls in general?"

Ron looked confused. "Er, I guess."

*This was it.* "I think I could be. Um. Gay." He'd said it! His heart pounded. It had actually come out of his mouth!

Ron didn't say anything. His face showed no expression.

Harry panicked. Maybe he didn't understand? What if 'gay' was a Muggle term or something? "Uh, you know, like. Homosexual. I like blokes, um, sexually. Instead of girls."

Ron's ears turned bright red. "I know what gay means, Harry."

"Well -- you weren't saying anything..." Harry said, flustered.

The redness was creeping onto Ron's face. "I was just...a little taken aback."

Ron was uncharacteristically devoid of emotion. Harry could only conclude that he was privately taking it very badly. "You're not angry, are you?" he asked pathetically. Oh, gods, if he was angry *now*...

"No!" Ron cried. "No, no, Harry, of course not! I'm your best mate, aren't I? I don't care!"

Relief washed over Harry. Couldn't that be enough? His and Ron's friendship had remained intact through his admission. He really didn't want to push his luck, but a pointed look from Hermione told him he had to go on.

"Okay, er, I'm glad to hear that. Because there's something else, too."

Ron froze. "Wait, you don't fancy me, do you?" he said, looking uncomfortable.

Harry blinked.

"Not -- not that I'd be upset or anything," Ron added hastily. "It's just that I can't really, er," he faltered under a stare from Hermione, "return your feelings as such--"

"Of course I don't fancy you, Ron," Harry said, suppressing a laugh. "Don't be ridiculous."

Ron looked relieved. "Oh."

Harry took a deep breath, and took the plunge. "I'm seeing someone."

Ron's brow furrowed. "Right now, you're seeing someone? Like, a bloke?" He looked around, as if said bloke would pop out and introduce himself. If only. Said bloke was probably pissing himself laughing over what an arse Harry was currently making of himself. "Who is there to see?"

Harry opened his mouth, but didn't seem to be able to get a sound out. Hermione's grip tightened around his arm.

A dark look passed over Ron's face and Harry knew he'd just realized. "Surely not..." Ron said quietly, waiting for Harry to correct him.

Unfortunately, all he could do was confirm. "Yeah. Er. Malfoy."

Ron was definitely angry now. "That is so fucking...Harry, Malfoy is a Death Eater!"

"I'm aware," Harry said miserably.

"Why would -- are you thinking at *all*?" Ron asked hotly.

"I can't really explain it, it just...happened." Otherwise he'd have explained it to himself a long time ago.

Ron turned to Hermione, who had kept her face carefully neutral. "Did you know about this?"

"Yes," she said shortly. Harry's heart sank further. That really wasn't going to help.

"You told her and not me?" Ron said, sounding a little hurt now.

"Ginny told me," Hermione said, helpfully trying to shift blame away from Harry, not realizing that this was even worse.

Ron's eyes popped. "You told *Ginny* and not me?"

"No!" Harry said desperately. "You're the first person I've told! Ginny found out...by accident."

"By accident?" Ron repeated. "You mean she...saw you?"

Harry really wanted to flee the scene. This was so mortifying.

Ron seemed less angry now. "Harry, I mean...do you...do you *like* him?"

That's where it got complicated, he supposed. "I -- I know he's sort of a bastard a lot of the time--"

"Not to mention evil, and, oh yeah, working for the guy who wants to kill you and everyone else," Ron finished succinctly.

"I don't think he really believes in that stuff all that much," Harry said, feeling inexplicably a little defensive.

"You're not actually defending him, are you?" Ron said, getting angry again.

"I--" Harry started.

"Have you shagged him?" Ron demanded.

"I'm not sure that's really--" Hermione said delicately.

"Yeah, I have," Harry said challengingly.

That set Ron back a bit, and he forgot his anger. "You *have*? Like...really, actually, had sex with him. Er. That way."

"Yes," Harry said shortly.

Ron's mind appeared to be blown. "Er. If you don't mind my asking, did you..." His voice got quiet. "*Take* it?"

Harry was so relieved that Ron seemed to have calmed down that he didn't think twice about answering such a personal question. "Er, no, I, er...was on top."

Ron looked distinctly relieved, which made Harry feel a little bad. He leaned in, conspiratorially. "How was it?"

Harry couldn't keep the grin off his face. "Brilliant."

Ron laughed. "So...do you find Malfoy attractive?" he asked, grimacing a little.

Harry stammered helplessly for a moment. "He's a bit pointy..."

Ron held up his hands. "I wasn't going to say it."

"But overall, he's pretty fit."

Ron squinted thoughtfully for a moment before shaking his head. "No, I'm afraid I don't see it."

"Don't worry, Ron, I don't either," Hermione added.

"So you don't hate me?" Harry asked, the knot in his stomach finally loosening.

"No!" Ron said, smiling. "But honestly, mate, it's pretty gross that you're shagging Malfoy."

"And you're all right with me...preferring blokes...in general?"

Ron shrugged. "I mean, it's something to get used to, but what do I care?"

A broad grin split Harry's face. He felt giddy.

Chapter 10 continued

**AND NOW BACK TO YOUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED CHAPTER...**

Draco couldn't look up as the golden trio walked into the library. He felt embarrassed, more than anything else. Weasley and Granger knowing about it was just...weird. He fervently hoped they wouldn't bring it up in conversation, like it was some fun inside joke they shared. In fact, it would be best if they just awkwardly avoided the subject. Forever.

"Malfoy," said Potter casually, "can I talk to you for two seconds?"

"Er, sure," he replied, very aware of Granger and Weasley. He felt like talking to Potter in front of them was like holding up a big sign over their heads saying "WE'RE SHAGGING."

Potter nodded toward the far end of the library and Draco followed him over, careful not to stand too close.

"How'd it go?" he asked warily.

Potter exhaled. "Well, I think."

Draco ventured a glance at the table, and swallowed. Weasley was watching them. "He's glaring."

"He's not glaring," Potter said impatiently. "He's just...taking it in. Getting used to the idea."

"What do you think he'd do if I just grabbed your arse, right now?" Draco asked, carefully keeping a straight face.

Potter's eyes boggled. "Don't you dare," he hissed. "He'd have a fucking meltdown."

"I was joking," Draco grumbled.

Potter shook his head. "Whatever. Anyway, what I was going to tell you is that I'm heading off tomorrow morning. Just for the day."

Draco shrugged. "All right. Bill's around, yeah?"

Potter bit his lip. "Er, actually, I'm going alone. Ron and Hermione are staying."

"Are you taking the piss?" Draco half-whispered, aghast. "You tell Weasel the only thing in the world that could make him hate me more and then leave me with him? He'll kill me!"

"Don't call him that," Potter said exasperatedly. "And he will not. I talked to him about it and I think he's really all right. He took it really well. Honestly."

Draco believed that for about zero seconds. "Fine," he said, glancing at Weasley again. He was still glaring. Draco could tell this would end badly.

He and Potter walked back over to the table, keeping a safe distance apart, and sat down. "So, er, Harry," said Granger, reassuring Draco that they would indeed use the awkward avoidance strategy, "all prepared for tomorrow?"

Draco didn't need to hear another one of their infuriating too-vague-on-purpose secret conversations, so he put his head down on the table and tried to plan his escape from Weasley hell.

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The next morning, Draco awoke to find that Potter had already left. He'd slept through half of breakfast, so he decided to skip the rest and walked down to the library, assuming someone would show up there eventually. Potter's universe revolved around the library, the big nerd.

He sat down at the same table as always and braced himself for pain as he opened a boring-looking book. He'd been through worse, he told himself. Hopefully.

The door creaked as it opened and Draco could hear Weasley and Granger walking up behind him. Maybe they'd be too embarrassed to mention it. Maybe they'd just ignore him altogether. Maybe they'd let him go back up to the dormitory and not bother with him for the rest of the day. He hoped.

Weasley rounded the table to face Draco and smirked unkindly. Draco's hope died.

"Do you have anything to say for yourself?" Weasley asked. Draco continued to study his book. Weasley wasn't going to get to him.

"Always knew you were a poofter," Weasley continued.

"Ron!" came Granger's scandalized reply. Draco barely contained himself. He hated Weasley so much...

"If I am, then isn't Potter as well?" Draco asked calmly.

"Do *not* answer him," Granger hissed to Weasley, but Weasley's face was becoming red. Good. Draco needed a good fight.

"Have you ever heard the term *prison bitch*?" Weasley snarled. Draco flinched a little at that. "What, d'you think Harry *fancies* you, Malfoy? You're just someone to fuck -- someone he doesn't care about -- though the fact that you enjoy it anyway says a lot about--"

"Shut the fuck up, Weasley!" growled Draco, rising out of his chair.

"Am I upsetting you?" Weasley leered as he came back round the table towards Draco. "I guess it's tough knowing the only way you'll get anywhere is by sucking cock. Did you learn that from dear old Dad?"

Draco's fist connected soundly with Weasley's mouth before he even thought about it. Weasley staggered back, and through the blood pounding in his ears Draco could faintly hear a shrill cry from Granger.

And then Weasley attacked him. He doubled over after receiving a punch to the gut, then a blossom of pain in his face told him he'd been hit in the jaw. Weasley was raining blows on him -- he tried to cover his face but was too slow -- Weasley gave him an upper cut to the nose and blood splattered loudly onto the floor.

"STOP IT," screamed Granger, pointing her wand at Weasley. Draco covered his face with his hands and felt blood oozing from between his fingers.

"Merlin, Ron, look what you did to him!" Draco didn't bother to check if Weasley looked remorseful -- he knew he didn't.

Granger sighed exasperatedly as she tugged on Draco's hand. "Let me see it!" He reluctantly pulled his hands away, letting blood flow freely down his face and neck and onto his shirt. Granger's eyes crossed a bit as she scrutinized his nose. She muttered something he didn't recognize and tapped it rather forcefully with her wand. "There. Go clean yourself up."

Draco wheeled around to find the loo. After scrubbing his face and checking to see that his nose wasn't crooked, he went up to Gryffindor tower to change out of his bloody clothes. He didn't return back downstairs. As if he needed more of *that*.

After a few hours of impotent rage, he was compelled to check the state of his nose again by a faint headache. He cringed as he looked in the mirror -- he now had two enormous black eyes. His nose looked completely normal and didn't hurt at all, and he grudgingly admitted Granger must have done a good job healing him.

He wandered back into the dormitory to find Granger waiting for him. She grimaced slightly as she caught sight of him. "Dinner, Malfoy," she said, not looking at his face. He followed her down to the Great Hall in silence.

He sat down to dinner feeling morose. He *hated* that he'd seen a speck of plausibility in what Weasley had said -- What if Potter just thought of him as someone to shag that he didn't need to worry about? They'd certainly never discussed their "relationship." And what did Draco care anyway? He didn't care about Potter. Right?

Potter walked in at that very moment to little fanfare, looking much the same as when he'd left. "Hey," he said to all, and then did a double take. "Jesus, Malfoy, what happened to you?"

Draco was fully prepared to rat Weasley out, until he noticed Weasley staring at him very coldly. He swallowed -- surely he wasn't really afraid of Ron Weasley?

"I...er, fell down a flight of stairs," he heard himself reply.

He was afraid of Ron Weasley.

"Shite," said Potter appreciatively.

"Dumbarse," muttered Weasley, and everyone laughed. Draco noticed that Bill shared in the chuckle. Traitor.

Granger gave a small cough.

Weasley continued to glare at him.

Draco locked his gaze on his food and resolved not to look up for the rest of the meal.

Dinner ended up stretching for quite some time, after extensive conversations detailing goings-on in the lives of acquaintances, politics, the war, Quidditch, and what Potter had got up to on his outing (this last, Draco suspected, was in code, as he hadn't understood a word of it). It was roughly nine o'clock when Potter stifled a yawn and announced he would be going to bed. Draco didn't move until Potter tapped him on the shoulder and added, "Come on, then," innocent enough to those not aware of the connotation but enough to make him burn with embarrassment at the way Granger looked at him. It didn't help that Weasley mouthed 'bitch' when Potter turned his back.

Draco walked a few steps behind Potter on the way back to Gryffindor. The long trek to the tower gave ample time for his resentment to grow, and by the time they reached the fat woman, Draco didn't want to talk to Potter let alone shag him, and had little interest in being his...whatever...anymore.

They made their way up to the dormitory, where Draco promptly sat down on his own bed and started to pull the curtains shut.

Potter put a hand on the curtains to stop him. "Hey."

Draco looked at him icily.

Potter sat down next to him and Draco cursed silently. "I missed you," Potter said with a crooked smile.

Draco didn't return it. "You were gone for one day. Not even."

Potter shrugged. "Still missed you," he said, and leaned in.

Draco let Potter kiss him, not moving and keeping his eyes open to look at Potter's out-of-focus forehead, his scar jumping out. He felt a little sick.

Potter pulled back, brow furrowing. "Are you all right?"

*NO!* he wanted to scream. "My head hurts," he said instead.

"Oh, right," said Potter, appraising his face with a mocking smile. "How did you manage to get two black eyes on your way down a staircase?"



Draco felt his temper begin to rise. "I didn't," he said tightly, knowing it was a bad idea. "Weasley hit me."

Potter's smile died. "He hit you? Ron *hit* you? Why?"

No way was he going to tell Potter what Weasley had said to him and how he'd reacted. "How should I know? You're the one who said he took it so *well*."

Potter seemed to be in shock. "Hermione didn't...stop him?"

"Eventually. She fixed my nose."

"He broke your nose?" Potter said, looking distraught. Draco gritted his teeth. Why did Potter pretend to care anyway? They both knew he'd choose Weasley over Draco in any argument.

"Yes, he did. See?" he fished around on the floor and found the bloody shirt, which hadn't been taken away by the house elves yet. "Here," he said, flinging it at Potter. "Now if it's bothering you so much, why don't you sleep on it? I would personally love to go to bed right about now."

Potter took the hint and climbed off the bed, looking at the shirt with distress. "I'll talk to him tomorrow."

Great. Now Draco would get a beating for telling on Weasley. "Fantastic," he said dryly.

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Draco sat in the library by himself for several minutes before he heard the door open. He turned around to find Weasley approaching him with a smirk and felt an uncomfortable nervous twinge in his stomach. He wished Potter would return.

"Well, well, Malfoy, you lasted what -- twenty minutes before you ran to Harry?"

Draco's heart sank. Potter had talked to him. "Piss off, Weasley," he grumbled.

"Did you ask him to beat me up for you?" Weasley said in a cruel voice.

"I didn't say anything!" he lied.

"Yeah? How'd he know what I said to you, then?"

"How should I know?" he asked truthfully. "I didn't tell him!"

"Did I hurt your feelings, Malfoy? Did I make you cry?"

"Fuck you," he snarled.

"You wish, bloody shirtlifter."

"That's 'homosexual' to you, Weasley, unless you want Potter to hear you slurring his lifestyle choice," Draco shot back, cursing the way his voice quavered.

Weasley laughed sharply. "You're the one taking it up the arse."

That stung, but he covered it up with a smile. "Jealous?"

"Don't be disgusting, Malfoy."

"Everyone knows you want it from Potter, anyway." As soon as he said it, he knew it was a bad idea. Weasley lunged at him and grabbed a handful of his shirt to haul him up to eye level.

"I'll yell," he muttered, hoping Weasley wouldn't call his bluff.

Weasley grinned. "Go ahead, Malfoy. Go cry to Harry, you girl." He waited.

Draco was silent.

Weasley's smirk grew as he let go of Draco's shirt. "Bitch," he said as he turned on his heel.

Draco let out a sigh of relief despite himself as he watched Weasley leave the library.

Not five seconds later, Potter emerged from the stacks with a pile of books. Draco stared at him for a moment. "Oh, excellent," he said. "You heard that whole thing, then? Fantastic."

Potter looked lost. "Sorry."

Draco sneered at him. "Yeah, that's fine. Oh, and try not to help me out anymore, yeah? I can take care of myself." Not to mention every time Potter stuck his nose in, things got considerably worse for Draco.

Potter held up his hands. "Look, I just wanted to set him straight. He shouldn't think he can treat you like that."

Draco rolled his eyes. "He isn't going to break my nose again -- I said I can take care of myself!"

Potter raised his eyebrows and shrugged as if to say, "If you insist..." and there was a long silence before a wicked grin spread itself across his face. He took a step closer. "Wanna go explore the restricted section with me?"

Draco's anger was almost palpable. Not only was he physically unable to enter the restricted section because of his collar, but he was astonished that Potter could overlook the fact that the entire Weasley debacle had begun *because* he'd insisted on messing about in the library -- and it was frankly insulting that Potter thought he could fuck up and apologize with sex. "I'll pass, thanks," he replied.

"Oh, come on," Potter said pleadingly, before perching himself on the table.

Draco lost it. "NO. I'm not your *bitch*, Potter, and you can't shag me whenever you fucking fancy it!"

Potter took it like a physical blow. "I...what? Of...of course not."

Of course not. Potter played so bloody innocent. "If you want someone who'll spread their legs for you whenever you want it then go talk to Ginny Weasley," he spat.

Potter rounded on him. "Don't you talk that way about her!"

"Do *not* order me around!"

"What is this about, Malfoy? Is this about what Ron said to you? Because I told him he was out of line."

"This isn't about fucking Weasley! It's about how *you* treat *me* like I'm your personal...fucktoy!" He knew that was a gross exaggeration, but didn't really care.

Potter's eyebrows flew up. "Malfoy -- what are you *talking* about? We've only done it once!"

Draco felt his face begin to heat up. If they were on the topic of sex, he might as well say it. "Yeah, well...it was a lot more enjoyable for you than it was for me, wasn't it?"

That slowed Potter down. "Oh."

Yeah. Oh.

"Do you...not enjoy it?" Potter said softly.

Draco cursed him for being so bloody *nice*. "Never mind," he sighed.

Potter didn't let it go. "I can be...on the bottom, if you like. You want to?" he said, motioning towards the restricted section as he wrapped his legs around Draco's waist.

Draco pushed them back down. "Just -- forget it. You don't have to sacrifice your virgin arse to me just to feed your stupid martyr complex." Before Potter could protest any further, he walked away from the table and out of the library.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN:

**In which there is make-up sex, and some vague twitching life-form that might just be the plot. WHAT PLOT?**

Draco skipped lunch and dinner in favor of fuming in Gryffindor tower, and had just managed to doze off when Potter opened the door. "Hi," he said, closing it and approaching.

Draco regarded him blankly, sitting up.

"Er, I'm sorry."

Draco supposed he ought to apologize as well, but his pride stopped him.

Potter sat down on the bed and tucked his legs under him. "Missed you at dinner today."

Draco gave him a skeptical look. "I'm sure you're the only one."

Potter smiled in a way that made Draco's stomach do a little flip. "Mm... but I'm the only one who matters, right?"

Draco smiled back a little, cursing his lack of resolve. Since when couldn't he stay mad at Potter? This was infuriating. "I suppose so," he said with a mock-exasperated sigh.

Potter chuckled and took Draco's face in his hands. "You're pretty, Malfoy," he said teasingly. "Even with raccoon eyes."

Draco raised an eyebrow. "Wish I could say the same for you, speccy."

Potter laughed again and took off his glasses. "What about now?" he said.

Merlin, but his eyes were green. "You'll do," said Draco, and leaned forward to kiss him, wanting to forget about the row and Weasley and sodding everything. He felt Potter smile and leaned back, pulling Potter on top of him. His fingers carded through Potter's hair and he felt Potter start to get hard against his hip -- a sensation which still made him giggle. His hands snaked down to Potter's arse and brought them into alignment before grinding up into him. Potter pulled his mouth away with a small hiss before pulling himself up to hover over Draco.

"May I?" he asked breathlessly, playing with the buttons on Draco's shirt.

"You may," Draco replied, rolling his eyes. Potter's fingers were clumsy as they fumbled to open his shirt, but it was worth it to feel Potter's hands on his skin, burning him wherever they touched him.

Potter paused for a moment to remove his own jumper and threw it unceremoniously on the floor as Draco reached for his flies. "May I?" he asked with a smirk.

"Be my guest," said Potter.

Removing Potter's trousers while lying down was actually quite difficult, and it ended up being a two-man job. Draco blushed when he saw the tent in Potter's pants, and made to reach for the waistband before Potter held out a hand. "I'll get those myself, thanks," he said, "You had your chance."

Draco watched, mesmerized, as Potter pulled off his boxer shorts, and then flushed even more as his own trousers tightened considerably. Potter was stark naked. Draco didn't mean to stare, but he...well. Suffice it to say he wouldn't soon get tired of this view. He tore his eyes away lest Potter notice him gawking and fiddled with his own trousers before finally getting them open and off, along with his underwear.

Potter looked him up and down and whistled in appreciation.

"Oh, enough of this," Draco muttered embarrassedly as he pulled Potter's head back down. Potter's body followed as he latched onto Draco's neck, and Draco cried out when his cock brushed against Potter's. Potter bit down gently on his neck and his hips bucked, sending another wave of sensation through him. "Gods...Potter, if you don't stop I'm

gonna..."

"Mm, see that you do," Potter murmured in the vicinity of his collar.

"N-no..." he said, and Potter pulled his head up to look at him. "Fuck me," he half-whispered.

Potter went still. "Are you sure?"

He nodded.

Potter smiled enthusiastically. "Yes, sir!" He reached for the lotion, which had long ceased to belong to Weasley, and squirted a bit onto his fingers. He lifted one of Draco's legs over his shoulder and Draco braced himself for the initial pain. His eyes shot open, however, when he felt something much smaller probe him.

He looked down. Potter had a finger in his arse! "What are you doing?" he asked in bewilderment as he propped himself up on an elbow to watch.

"Turns out you're supposed to get stretched out first," replied Potter, grinning sheepishly.

"Really," said Draco, wriggling a little at the feeling of Potter's finger moving around inside him. "And where did you learn this?"

"Found a book in the library," Potter said. "Here comes number two."

Draco snorted at Potter's comment as he felt the pressure increase a bit. "So you did some research, then?"

Potter's cheeks colored a little. "Well, you said you weren't enjoying it...figured I must have been doing something wrong. Learned a lot of bloody useful stuff, too. Watch this." He shoved the two fingers in as far as possible and then hooked them upward. Draco jerked and practically screamed as a bolt of lightning went through him.

"Potter! What the hell was that?"

Potter laughed gleefully. "Your prostate."

Draco laughed as well. "Are you serious? My prostate does that?"

Potter scissored his fingers before adding another one. "Gonna try and get your whole hand in there?" Draco teased.

Potter smirked evilly before hooking his fingers to brush that spot again, and Draco's hands clutched at Potter's shoulders as he desperately willed himself not to come. "*Fuck*. Do it."

Potter needed no further prompting, and pulled his fingers out and wiped them on the sheet before reaching for the lotion again and squirting it liberally over his hand to stroke himself. He looked at Draco and his hand sped up. "You're sexy, you know that?"

"Look, you'd better not keep that all to yourself," Draco replied, pointing to his groin.

"Right," said Potter, hooking Draco's other leg over his shoulder. "Hold still."

Draco bit his lip as he felt Potter line himself up and begin to surge forward. The familiar burn was still there, but much less intense. "Okay?" said Potter.

"Yeah," he said, grinning, "you?"

Potter leaned down and kissed him. "Great. You're amazing."

Draco looked away at that. No need for Potter to get all soppy and girly on him. "Malfoy," Potter said, drawing his attention again. "I know you're, ah, adjusting and all, but I'd really love to move right about now."

Draco smirked. "If you insist."

Potter kissed him again, almost chastely, as he pulled out and then back in. Draco marveled -- it didn't hurt nearly as much. In fact, it felt sort of good, weirdly. Potter grabbed the headboard with one hand and began thrusting in earnest, head down in concentration. Draco felt pressure starting to build inside him, and hummed his contentment.

Suddenly Potter looked at him a bit crazily. He pulled almost all the way out, shifted his hips, and, with a huge grin, snapped them forward forcefully, driving himself right into that spot again.

"Aaah, fuckpottery!" Draco yelled, throwing his head back.

"That's what I like to hear," Potter said in a rough voice, still grinning. He began aiming for the spot with every thrust and Draco knew he wasn't far from coming. He reached for himself, but Potter batted his hand out of the way. "I believe -- *that* -- is mine," he practically growled, his hand closing around Draco's cock. The feeling of Potter touching him was enough to set Draco off and he came with a hoarse shout, spilling over Potter's fingers and his own stomach.

He lay there limply as Potter continued to pound into him. After a few moments he regained some higher thought processes. "Come on, I haven't got all day here," he teased.

"Now who's -- the minute man?" Potter panted.

Draco squeezed his arse muscles in retaliation and Potter stopped speaking in favor of gibberish as his hips bucked and Draco felt him come.

With a sigh, Potter collapsed on top of him. "Whoa, not okay, Potter. You're heavy."

Potter grunted and rolled to the side. "I feel sticky."

Draco looked at him pointedly. "You're not the one with spunk leaking out your arse."

Potter dissolved into giggles. "You said 'spunk,'" he said weakly.

"Are you twelve years old?" Draco demanded. "Did I really just sleep with you?" Potter giggled helplessly into his shoulder. "Pull yourself together, man."

"You're gooey," Potter countered.

"It's your goo, Potter," he replied. "Maybe you ought to be a bit more careful with it. And your hair looks like a frightened animal."

"It always looks like that," Potter muttered.

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Draco awoke the next morning in desperate need of a shower. He could feel Potter spooned up behind him -- not wearing anything -- which led him to believe that, for once, he'd managed to wake up first. He supposed it made sense; Potter had done most of the strenuous work, after all.

After the repugnant discovery that the stickiness from the night before had now turned into a crust on his stomach, Draco was preparing to search for something to wear into the bathroom when the curtain on Potter's four-poster was wrenched forcefully open.

"Harry, you've missed breakfa--AAAH!" Granger shielded her eyes and turned away as Potter jumped to life and fell out of bed.

"Sorry!" Potter cried from the ground as he scrambled for clothing, tripping amusingly over himself in an attempt to

pull on a pair of trousers.

Draco watched as Potter, hair still sticking up ridiculously, guided a very scandalized Granger away from the bed and out into the common room.

"Oi!" he called after them, chucking Potter's glasses at him with a smirk.

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Draco emerged from the shower, feeling much cleaner, to find Potter sitting on his bed once again, with the remnants of a furious blush staining his cheeks. Draco could only imagine the magnitude of the lecture Granger had given him.

"Good morning," he chirped.

Potter looked at him blankly. "Hermione was not pleased."

Draco wasn't surprised. "Are you grounded?" he mocked.

Potter held up a little box. "She says we have to use a condom."

"What's a condom?" Draco asked, nonplussed. The only thing it brought to mind, strangely, was the word 'commandant,' which gave him the image of a little man jumping out of the box and directing them in how to have a proper shag.

"It's a Muggle thing. It stops the, er, exchange of fluids. For protection."

The little man now had a sword and shield. "Protection against what?"

"Diseases."

Draco pulled a face. "Have you got diseases?"

"No!" Potter said, looking affronted.

"Well / certainly haven't got any, so looks like that's settled."

Potter paused for a moment, as if trying to think of how to formulate his next words. "I think the point is that maybe you wouldn't know about them."

Draco barely managed not to snort. "Did Ginny Weasley give you secret diseases?"

Potter's blush intensified as it always did when Ginny Weasley came up in conversation. "I -- we used a condom. To make sure she didn't get pregnant. To be honest, I didn't even think of it with you though, cos...well, you can't get pregnant." He paused, cocking his head. "Can you?"

Draco itched to smack him. "Of course not, you idiot!"

Potter shrugged. "Look, you're always telling me I don't know anything about wizarding culture. I thought maybe there was a potion or something."

Potter's thought process was unfathomable. "A potion to rearrange all of my internal organs? Do you know *any* magical theory? Do you even understand your own anatomy? I mean -- where would it come out? My arse?"

Potter snorted. "All right, I wasn't thinking."

Draco pointed to the box. "Let's see it, then."

Potter opened the box and pulled out a flat, metallic square.

"That's it?" Draco asked, raising an eyebrow.

"No, it's inside. You can't use it if you unroll it, and I'm not wasting one, because I'm sure as hell not asking Hermione for more."

Draco heaved an exasperated sigh and grabbed it out of Potter's fingers. Ignoring Potter's protests, he tore open the package and pulled out the rubbery thing inside. To piss Potter off, he unrolled it.

He wrinkled his nose as he held it up. It looked like a shriveled balloon. "This is going to protect me against your Weasley diseases?"

"I haven't got--"

"It looks like a little stocking!" he continued, stifling giggles. "Muggles are so backward..." He blew into it and it engorged, causing him to erupt in laughter.

"You are so immature," Potter muttered as he snatched it away.

"But in all seriousness, Potter," Draco said, not managing to look very serious, "you do realize there's a spell for that."

"Really?" Potter said. "What is it?"

"Dunno," Draco said, shrugging. "But there must be one."

Potter blinked, getting a very intense look in his eyes. "If there is, do you know what this means?"

"Er, we won't have to use the little stocking?" Draco said, confused.

"It means I'll have found a spell Hermione doesn't know about!" Potter replied, looking a little batty.

That was sort of a big deal, Draco conceded. "I bet it'll be in that book of yours from the library."

Potter misunderstood. "Malfoy, I dunno if you've noticed this, but I look at a lot of books from the library."

Draco rolled his eyes. Potter was *dense*. "The one with the finger trick."

"Oh. Oh! Yeah," Potter said, flushing. "Right. That one." He padded over to one of the other beds and pulled a thick book out from under it. "Here it is, then," he muttered, embarrassed, as he dropped it down onto his own bed and sat down.

Draco plopped down next to him. "Budge up," he said as he looked at the book. "Polishing His Wand: The Newly Self-Actualized Wizard's Guide to Gay Sex," he read. "Nice, Potter. Classy."

"Look, the restricted section only had so many relevant books, and that was the only applicable one. I didn't need to know how to find your clitoris."

Draco sniggered. Potter said some pretty off-color things for the savior of the wizarding world.

"Anyway," Potter sighed, "let's see what we can find out. It'd probably be at the beginning, right?"

"Just look in the index," Draco suggested.

Instead of flipping the book over like a normal person, Potter attempted to turn all of the pages at once to get to the back, and ended up opening to a page in the middle.

A very interesting page.



"Whoa," he said as Draco gave a low whistle.

"You didn't tell me this book had full-color illustrations," Draco said, studying the picture.

"Yeah," Potter said absently. "Did you know people did that?"

"I hadn't the faintest," Draco replied. "But it's called 'rimming,' it says here. That is *really* dirty."

"Oh, look," Potter said, pointing. "It gives a cleaning spell to use."

"Ergh, you could have the cleanest arse on the continent and I still wouldn't put my tongue in it," Draco said, turning to the index. "Spells: binding, cleaning, engorging, lubricating, masochistic, orgasm-delaying -- that's what you need, Potter -- performance-enhancing -- protective, page 39." He flipped to the correct page and skimmed.

"There," he said, showing Potter, "*Praemini*."

Potter mouthed the spell. "I should tell Hermione," he said.

"She can't use it," Draco said, reluctant as he was to think about Granger in the sort of situation where such a spell would be handy. "It's not contraceptive."

"Right, but I still want to brag about finding it. But then again," Potter said, grimacing, "she'd probably ask to see the book."

"What could she possibly want with a book about gay sex?" Draco asked.

Potter shrugged. "She likes to research."

"Whatever," Draco sighed, pushing the book towards Potter. "Learn the spell, I'm not using her funny little Muggle thingers."

Potter was silent for a moment before he snorted. "Malfoy, did you read this? It says to do the spell you have to put your wand up the person's arse!"

Draco held up his hands. "Damn, you know, I haven't got a wand these days. Looks like that'll have to be yours." Potter pulled a face. "Or you could try the spell wandless, mister magic fingers."

"You love it, Malfoy," Potter shot back, wiggling his fingers.

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Over the next few days, Draco began to see unfamiliar faces at meals. Wizards and witches he'd never seen before could be spotted, often shaking hands as though introducing themselves. And once they appeared, they seemed to stay.

The Order was recruiting.

Draco scanned the *Prophet* for news of imminent movement by either side, but nothing was evident -- at least nothing that made its way into the papers. His Dark Mark, too, remained dormant. Nevertheless, by the end of the month the Order had at least fifteen new members.

Potter and his posse, of course, acted as though nothing was up, probably assuming that doing so would prevent Draco from picking up. They could deny it no longer by one chilly February morning, when Luna Lovegood sat down next to him at breakfast.

"Hello, Draco," she said dreamily. "That's a lovely necklace you have on." Potter snorted into his juice and Weasley unsuccessfully covered a loud guffaw by coughing. Scowling, Draco scooted away from her. Loony Lovegood gave

him the creeps. At least she was too spaced out to take any real notice of his presence. If any of their other contemporaries showed up, though, someone would have to explain. He wasn't looking forward to it.

Sure enough, Neville Longbottom appeared the next week. "No shit?" he said incredulously upon seeing Draco in the common room. "You've joined the Order?" Draco flipped him the V and left, catching Granger's prim "Actually..." as he stepped through the portrait hole. Longbottom, thankfully, was scared enough of him that they didn't interact again.

Time alone with Potter, already limited, became a rarity. It was easy enough for Potter to persuade Longbottom to sleep in another dormitory ("We each get our own? Wicked!"), but Potter no longer had a valid reason to excuse himself from group activities. Which meant that Draco didn't either, and had to sit through countless boring periods of "hanging out" with Granger, Longbottom, Lovegood and the Weasleys wherein Potter ignored him and he ignored everyone else.

"Oi!" said one of the Weasley twins excitedly in the middle of a particularly snore-worthy day. "We've finally got enough people for a pick-up Quidditch match!"

"Good thing I put my life on hold to join the Order of the Phoenix," said Longbottom sarcastically. "So I could complete your pick-up Quidditch team."

Potter laughed. "I'll go get my broom." After a moment, Draco felt a tap on his shoulder. "Come on, then."

"I'll sit this one out, thanks," he said irritably, earning sneers from the others.

"Come *on*," Potter repeated. Draco was compelled to look up by Potter's stubbornness, and was faced with a very significant pointed stare.

*Oh.* He scrambled to his feet and followed Potter up the stairs.

As soon as the door to the dormitory closed he found himself pushed up against it with Potter's mouth latched onto his. He attempted to make some pithy insult about Potter's subtlety or lack thereof, but found it was quite impossible to talk with his tongue in Potter's mouth. And anyway, pithy insults were hard to think of with deft fingers sliding up under his shirt.

"I think I should find an excuse to skip out on that Quidditch match," Potter said as he broke away for air.

"Granger and Weasley won't buy it," Draco said, grinding impatiently against him.

"Fuck 'em," Potter said, and leaned in to continue.

It occurred to Draco as Potter nibbled lightly on his neck (which he truly was the *perfect* height for) that Potter had been 'getting his broom' for a conspicuously long time. Granger had probably already figured out what they were doing. Moments later, a telltale thumping could be heard as someone climbed the stairs.

"Shit," Potter hissed. They had nowhere to hide; the only door out of the dormitory was the same one someone would momentarily burst in through.

Potter scrambled to his bed and pulled out from under it a shimmery material, which Draco recognized as he tossed it to him as an Invisibility Cloak. The door opened just as Draco flung it around himself. Longbottom stood in the doorway wearing a quizzical expression.

"Hey Nev," Potter said in a casual tone that sounded completely contrived to Draco, but seemed to fool Longbottom. "Sorry, couldn't find it." His broom was placed quite obviously leaning on the wall next to the bed, and he reached awkwardly for it.

Longbottom's brow furrowed. "Wasn't Malfoy here?" Draco tensed. He prayed Potter had the brains to think of something acceptable.

"Yeah," Potter said, not missing a beat, "he's in the loo. You go ahead, I've got to wait for him anyway." Longbottom lumbered back down the stairs.

Potter stood in the center of the room. "Malfoy?" he called quietly. Feeling inexplicably mischievous, Draco crept up quietly behind him in preparation for an ambush. Potter stilled, looking strangely nervous, until Draco was less than a meter away.

A floorboard creaked under his foot and in less than a second, Potter had whirled around, pulled the cloak off him, and pointed his wand at his chest.

Draco blinked. That was unexpected.

They stood there for a moment, eyes locked, with Potter's wand between them. Finally, Draco pushed it gently to the side with one finger. "Honestly, if I were going to attack you, I'd plan it out a bit better than that," he said snidely, trying not to wince at the angry undertone he hadn't managed to conceal.

Potter pocketed his wand, evidently having caught onto Draco's anger. "Er, Malfoy, I--"

"Spare me," Draco said. "Have a good Quidditch game."

Potter floundered silently. Draco didn't need his pathetic attempts to communicate 'meaningfully.' "Don't worry, I'll be good and stay here."

Potter sighed. "Prick," he muttered, and stalked out.

Draco shook himself. What was he so upset about? He and Potter argued all the time. More heatedly than this, usually. He didn't understand why Potter immediately going for his wand would hurt him so much. It was already established that Potter didn't trust him; even as they became more and more intimate physically and borderline friendly socially, Potter kept him firmly removed from all Order business. As well he should. They were enemies, Draco forcefully reminded himself. And besides, why should Potter's trust mean anything to him?

Potter's escapades with his friends lasted the remainder of the day, and Draco's anger eventually dissipated into a resentful surliness he was well-accustomed to.

Potter returned well after nightfall and the atmosphere between them was still tense as he sat on the bed adjacent to Draco's.

"Er, Malfoy," Potter started almost tentatively. "I need to talk to you."

Draco didn't think much of it, initially. Potter said 'I need to talk to you' every time he went on one of his secret outings. Then again, Potter looked a bit nervous this time, and was picking at his fingernails as Draco regarded him, eyebrows raised inquisitively.

"Er," Potter continued. "It's about, er...us."

Draco's first panicked thought was that Potter was breaking up with him. But, he reasoned, that would be something of a bad move on Potter's part; after all, they spent practically every second together. Maybe Potter would forgo the awkwardness and just, having no use left for him, ship him off to prison.

Draco heaved a sigh. He was being irrational. Hopefully.

"Er," Potter said, making Draco wonder if he was going to start every sentence in this conversation with 'er,' "This is sort of a stupid question, and you can tell me to bugger off if you want, but, well..." He swallowed. "Do you hate me?"

Draco could do nothing but stare at him for a few moments, disbelieving. That had come out of nowhere. He opened his mouth, not knowing quite what would come out, when Potter held up a hand and preempted him.

"Er, er, well, okay, I know that, yeah, with the whole Death Eater, mortal enemy, opposite sides of the war thing of

course you hate me but, like, minus all of that. Just...me. As your, er..."

"Boyfriend," Draco supplied.

"Right," Potter said, looking like he wanted nothing more than to leave the room. "That. Just, you know, within our, er..."

"Relationship," Draco said helpfully, reluctantly acknowledging that it was sort of cute for Potter to be so embarrassed about it, even if, truth be told, he was probably even worse.

"Yeah. Our...relationship. Do you hate me?"

"Er," he faltered as Potter looked at him earnestly. What was he supposed to say? 'Them' was something they *never* talked about, for the simple reason that talking about it brought to mind just how fucked up it was. He considered it for a moment -- did he hate Potter? The part of him that remembered six years of name-calling, hexes, jealousy and that time Potter had had his father incarcerated desperately wanted to say yes, but something stopped him. Potter was a right prick most of the time, with more jingoism than he knew what to do with, but Draco somehow managed to enjoy his company. After all, he couldn't blame his attraction to him solely on his appearance. Potter wasn't *that* good-looking.

He realized he'd been silent for a little while and Potter was looking more crestfallen with every passing second. "I suppose not," he said warily, inwardly cursing his unbearable desire to please Potter. "Why do you ask?" He was a little flustered and irritated that Potter had tricked him into being nice.

"Well," Potter said, ears distinctly red, "when I talked to Hermione a while back and, y'know, she gave me the condoms, we also talked about, er, you and me. Us."

"And she told you I hated you," Draco stated.

"No! No. That, er, I said that. She suggested I ask you."

Was Granger their marriage counselor now?

"Also," Potter said, redness creeping onto his face and neck, "do you thinkweremoovntoofst?"

Draco blinked. "Come again?"

Potter cleared his throat. "Er. Ah. Do you think. That we're, er, moving, err, too fast. Because Hermione does."

What the hell did *Hermione* know? Who *wouldn't* like moving fast? Maybe a girl. And luckily for them, there were no girls involved. Unless one counted Granger, who was a busybody.

Draco looked at him pointedly. "Do *you* think we're moving too fast?"

"No!" Potter said without hesitation, and then caught himself. "But -- no, I mean, what I think isn't the point. What I mean to say is, erm, do you feel like...like I pressure you? To, y'know...do things?"

"Er...no?" Draco said.

Potter exhaled forcefully and looked down before getting that serious look which told Draco they'd left the realm of Granger-imposed ideas. "It's just...well, it doesn't seem fair sometimes."

Draco couldn't tell what he was talking about, and hoped he wasn't making a mistake in pursuing it further. "How do you mean?"

"This is sort of hard to say," Potter said with a laugh. He faltered, looking at his hands.

"Spit it out," Draco said impatiently.

"You -- you've done a lot more than me! You've pulled me off more than I have you. And -- and you've, er, gone down on me twice, *and* let me shag you twice." By the end, he was as red as Draco had ever seen him.

"Not that you're counting," Draco said with a smirk.

"And it's been a couple of times where you haven't got off at all!" he continued, looking distressed. "It's just...you're so willing to do all that stuff."

"Maybe I like doing that stuff," Draco said, uncomfortable as he was with such a prospect.

Potter finally looked up at him, green eyes piercing. "But it makes me think that you think you have to."

Draco didn't know what to say to that.

"I mean," Potter continued. "You don't think that *this* is just...you doing things for me, because I'm in charge of you...right?"

Draco felt a little uneasy. The thought had crossed his mind, especially recently with the Weasley debacle. He was reassured, though, by Potter's obvious distraught at the idea. "Don't be stupid," he scoffed, "of course not."

Potter wasn't buying it. "Because you know, I'd be willing to do any of those things."

"Oh yeah?" Draco leered mockingly.

Potter looked at him coyly. "I've thought about it often enough."

Draco resisted the temptation to deflate Potter's attempt at sexiness with a derisive remark, and instead played along. "And what exactly have you thought about?"

A smile played on Potter's lips. "What you would feel like. Inside me."

Draco's mouth went dry, and all thoughts of ridiculing Potter's sexiness flew out the window. "Oh -- oh, is that right?" he mumbled as Potter got up and walked closer to him.

"Definitely," Potter said with a grin, coming to stand between his legs. "I've even practiced on myself a couple of times, with my fingers."

Draco tried in vain to get the image of naked Potter with his own fingers up his arse out of his head. He found himself reduced to stuttering as Potter towered over him. "Y-you have?"

Potter played with the buttons of his shirt as he smirked at him. "I had to figure out where the spot was before I could try it on you."

All this served to do was place his image of naked Potter in the library, in a remote corner (possibly the same one where Draco had blown him), holding up his silly book as he tried to figure out how to poke his own prostate. He gave a giddy little giggle.

Potter leered at him. "Something funny?"

Draco couldn't resist any longer. "Other than you trying to be sexy, no."

A faint blush stained Potter's cheeks, but he recovered quickly and glanced down at Draco's crotch. "Ha!" he said, gesturing towards his obvious arousal. "It worked, you can't hide it."

Draco jumped at the chance to regain the upper hand and spread his legs further, shooting Potter the same coy look he'd been using. "What are you gonna do about it?"

Draco had the upper hand for about two more seconds before Potter sank to his knees with an absolutely evil expression. "What I've been meaning to do since Christmas," he replied.

In a brilliant and unpredictable moment of clarity, Draco remembered the unforgiving nature of the floor upon one's knees. He swung his legs up onto the bed and scooted towards the headboard, so he was halfway sitting up. "Get up here," he said, "Less work for your knees."

Heaving a sigh, Potter got back up off the floor and climbed onto the bed, pausing between Draco's legs. "Go on, then," Draco encouraged, and Potter reached for his trousers with both hands. After a great deal of fiddling, he was able to get them off, which left Draco in his boxer shorts silently pleading with Potter to go a lot faster.

Potter looked down at him, contemplating. "So you've never done this before, right?" he said, fingers dipping teasingly below the waistband of Draco's pants.

"Right," Draco said breathlessly.

"So I can do a terrible job and you'll still think it's really good," Potter grinned.

"Probably," Draco conceded.

"Good," Potter said as he pulled Draco's shorts over his straining erection and down to his knees. "Gives me room for mistakes."

Draco was so hard he ached and the puffs of air from Potter speaking were driving him insane. "Potter," he ground out. "You are *killing me*."

Potter pulled his shorts down over his legs and tossed them on the floor. "Yeah?" he said, grinning lopsidedly. Draco groaned and fisted his hands in the sheets. "Oi, who am I?" Potter said mockingly as he crossed his eyes, slack-jawed, and started to laugh.

"That isn't *funny*!" Draco insisted as Potter cackled, still paying no attention to the task at hand. "Just do it!"

Potter sat back on his haunches. "Beg me."

What a time for Potter to have a power trip. "What? What did you bloody say?" he demanded, aghast.

"I said," Potter repeated, looking smug, "beg me."

This was so unfair. Draco had never asked anything like this of Potter. He'd never so blatantly sought to humiliate him. "Never," he said, sticking his nose up.

Potter held up his hands. "Fine, you take care of yourself then," he said jokingly.

What Potter continued to underestimate, however, was Draco's capacity for mind games. Potter had already shown his weakness and Draco knew he could guilt him into it. "Oh, you're just looking for an excuse not to," he said, drawing his knees together and looking annoyed. "If you don't want to do it, you don't have to pretend you do."

As predicted, Potter protested. "No! Of course not!" He pulled Draco's knees apart with his hands and bent down to hover over him.

"You're so fucking easy, Potter," Draco murmured, chuckling.

Instead of retaliating verbally, Potter licked a long stripe up the underside of Draco's cock. Draco swore colorfully as his toes curled into the bed. His entire consciousness rapidly narrowed down to his groin and the exquisite things Potter was going to do to it. He was on fire. He was going to *die*.

"Fucking *hell*," he said breathlessly as Potter slid his lips over the head and enveloped Draco in fantastic wet heat. "Where the fuck did you learn to do this?"

To his dismay, Potter pulled off to answer him. "From the master," he said, tipping an imaginary hat.

Wow. Draco was apparently pretty damn good at this. He mentally patted himself on the back as he watched Potter slide lower, taking more in, sending sparks flying through him. Potter sucked hard and Draco bit off an embarrassing moan -- gods, he sounded like he was in a fucking porno. He let one of his hands thread into Potter's hair, crazy as usual, and tried not to pull, which was hard since his fists clenched every time Potter did that *thing* with his tongue...

Potter shifted his weight to one arm as the other one came up to grasp the base of Draco's cock, but it didn't stay there long. Draco made a series of really humiliating noises as Potter dragged his fingernails along his inner thigh, and then pointed straight at Draco's face with two fingers.

"Wha-what?" Draco asked. Potter shook the fingers and Draco understood, bending forward to pull them into his mouth. He swirled his tongue over them and let them go with a pop, and Potter grinned around his mouthful before reaching behind his balls to slowly work one finger and then the other into Draco's hole. And then, just as he hooked them upwards into that spot that sent Draco's other hand into his hair as well with another obscene moan, Potter looked straight at him.

Draco came so hard he blacked out for a second.

Potter swallowed around him, sitting up as he sucked his teeth. "Not the worst thing I've ever tasted," he said.

Draco was jelly.

Potter blinked bemusedly, wiping his mouth. "How was it?"

Entirely without meaning to, Draco said, "You are a sex god."

Potter burst out laughing. "That good, huh?"

"Yeah," Draco said, still unable to move. "If you want a turn, you're gonna have to wait a minute. I can't move."

Potter blushed furiously. "Oh, that...won't be necessary." He held up his left hand, which was covered in come.

Draco raised his eyebrows. "You pulled yourself off?"

Potter hurriedly wiped his hand on the sheets. "What? It was more exciting than I thought it would be." He flopped down next to Draco. "Oi, scoot over."

"I told you I can't move."

Potter heaved an exaggerated sigh and pulled the bedspread over Draco's still-naked lower half, giving him a shove to one side to sidle in next to him. "See? That wasn't so hard." He leaned over and kissed Draco, who ran his tongue along Potter's lips and dipped inside.

"Your mouth tastes like come," he said as he pulled away.

"Yeah, well, that's your fault," Potter retorted.

**A SPECIAL INTERLUDE (CHAPTER 11B):  
Guy Love with Harry and Ron  
Episode Two: You Know How I Know You're Gay?  
And,  
Episode Three: A Great Big Ship To South America**

**(Episode Two, of course, is based off the "You Know How I Know You're Gay?" routine in "The 40-Year-Old Virgin.")**

"So Harry," Ron said, leering, "What is it that you like about Malfoy?"

Harry was so thrilled that Ron wasn't angry that he had no reservations about answering. "Well...he's funny, in this cynical, sarcastic sort of way, and, er, he certainly isn't nice, but I sort of like that -- he always lets me know when I'm being a git. And even though he's really prejudiced and neo-conservative, I think it's admirable that he stands up for his beliefs." Ron gave him a *look*. "In an abstract sense. And, er...I guess I like that he's so different from me. Like, on a basic level. He just...thinks about things differently than I do."

Ron smirked. "So you're only in it for his *fantastic* personality."

Harry blushed. "Ah, no. I mean, I wasn't sure if you wanted me to talk about that as well. You probably can't relate that well..."

"Give me a little more credit, Harry!" Ron said, hands on his hips. "Just because I don't actively want to jump his bones doesn't mean I can't see what might be attractive about him to someone who was interested."

"Er, okay," Harry said, "Well, he's got, er, a nice build. Tall and lanky, but not too skinny."

Ron looked put out. "I'm tall and lanky, Harry! I'm taller *and* lankier than Malfoy."

"What's your point, Ron?" Harry grinned. "D'you want me to shag you instead?"

Ron pointed an accusatory finger at him. "Admit I'm more of a stud than he is."

"I will not."

"But he's so *girly!*"

Harry's face heated up. "He isn't *girly*. He's sort of delicate, yes. But definitely masculine."

Ron scoffed. "There is nothing masculine about Malfoy. He might as well wear a skirt and call himself Draco-lina. He's a girl."

Harry decided it was time to make Ron uncomfortable. "Look, I've seen firsthand. He's got some masculinity going on."

Ron pulled a face. "Oh, gross, Harry, I don't need to hear about that."

Harry held up his hands. "Look, I'm just telling you, he's most certainly not a girl."

"Moving on," Ron said wearing a face of distaste.

"Moving on...he has really long legs, which I like."

Ron stuck one of his legs into the air and pointed at it.

"And I enjoy his blond hair and pale, unfreckled skin," Harry continued pointedly.

"Oi, mate," Ron said with a straight face. "I think you're in denial about your true feelings for me."



Harry rolled his eyes. "*I'm* in denial? You're the one trying to convince me I'm in love with you! Projecting much?"

Ron grasped at his heart. "Harry, I would never jeopardize our friendship that way. Besides, you're too short for me. Continue."

Harry sniggered. "Okay, well, I really do like his hair. Er. It's really soft."

"You remember when he used to slick it back in second year? What a ponce."

"You had a mushroom cut until, like, two years ago," Harry pointed out.

"You know how I know you're gay?" Ron said, grinning, "You keep track of my hairstyles."

"You know how I know *you're* gay?" Harry countered. "You asked me if you were more of a stud than Draco Malfoy."

"You know how I know you're gay?" Ron continued. "You described Draco Malfoy as 'masculine.'"

Harry laughed. "You know how *I* know I'm gay? I gave Draco Malfoy the best blow of his life."

Ron groaned. "Oh, you did *not!* Harry, he probably has weird Death Eater diseases. Who knows what crazy sex games they get up to."

"Actually," Harry said, smiling, "He's a virgin."

Ron regarded him levelly. "Shut the fuck up."

"No, I'm serious. Or he *was* a virgin. I took care of that."

Ron looked at him with a strange grin on his face. "So you really blew him?"

Harry laughed. "Yeah."

"How was it?" Ron asked, wrinkling his nose.

"Pretty good," Harry said. "Actually, it's a lot harder than you'd think. There isn't much maneuvering to be done. It sort of just takes up your whole mouth."

Ron raised an eyebrow. "Did you spit or swallow?"

Harry grinned. "Swallowed."

Ron nodded appreciatively. "So...is he packing?"

Harry was aghast. "Ron, you know how I know you're gay? You just asked me how big Malfoy's dick is."

"It's a perfectly reasonable question!"

"Er...he's, er, got nothing to be ashamed of."

"Bigger'n you?"

Harry flushed. "Yeah, er, I mean, it makes sense...in terms of proportion."

Ron grinned and Harry knew what he was going to ask before he asked it. "Who's bigger, me or him?"

"I'm not answering that."

"Ha! I am, aren't I?"

"Ron, you're like eleven feet tall, it hardly means anything," Harry said, scrubbing his face with his hand. "Besides, I can't *really* judge...I've never seen you at, er, full capacity."

"I just want to point out that there is nothing you've said about him so far that I don't also have, Harry. I really think you're in love with me."

Ron was asking for it. "Okay, here's what I really like about him. His arse. I *love* his arse. It is so bloody perfect. I can't keep my hands off it. And lemme tell you, there is no better feeling on this earth than sinking into that sweet arse."

Ron wasn't backing down. "I've got a great arse, Harry, as I'm *sure* you've noticed..."

"God and his *cock*," Harry moaned, determined to make Ron squirm, "I am fucking gagging for it. Gods, it feels so fucking good in my mouth and I can't wait to get it inside me, I'm sure it's amazing and I want to feel him pounding into me, gods I can fucking feel it, ohh yes, yes Draco *harder*--"

"Point made, Harry, you don't have to cream your pants."

Harry smirked. "You found that incredibly erotic, didn't you."

Ron rolled his eyes. "Not in the slightest. And don't call him Draco, that's just fucking...weird."

"What, I'm supposed to call him Malfoy while he deflowers me?"

Ron shook his head. "Don't say 'deflower' either, that's even weirder."

"You're jealous, Ron. You can have sloppy seconds if you want."

"You're such a slut, Potter."

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Harry had assumed, after their conversation, that Ron would be comfortable about it. For the next few days, however, he noticed Ron shooting him furtive glances every so often, wearing an utterly bewildering expression.

Harry was about to resign himself to giving Ron another lecture to the effect of "just because I'm gay doesn't mean I'm not still the same old Harry!" when Ron pulled him aside after dinner one day. "Harry," he said, sounding somewhere between nervous and nauseous, "I have to talk to you."

Harry glanced at Malfoy, who was walking swiftly away, presumably to the library. He started to yell to him, when Ron waved a hand frantically. "N-no! Er, this is -- don't, just leave him."

"Okay," Harry said slowly, raising an eyebrow.

Ron looked at his hands, ears reddening. "Er, let's not do this here."

Harry was becoming a bit concerned as to the nature of "this," but he followed Ron nonetheless as he led them, seemingly aimlessly, to a nondescript corridor not too far away.

Ron stopped abruptly and looked at him, fiddling uselessly with his hands.

"Ron," Harry said cautiously, "is everything all right?"

Ron looked resolutely over Harry's shoulder, not a mean feat considering he was almost a foot taller. "I, er," he stammered, "I was thinking about, er, what you said earlier."

"Oh yeah?" Harry said helpfully, without the faintest clue as to what Ron was talking about.

"Yeah," Ron said, looking at him finally. He looked somewhat faint. "And I was thinking, well...oh fuck it, you know I'm no good with words."

Harry was halfway through reassuring him that he would listen to whatever Ron had to say when Ron grabbed his jaw and pulled it forcefully upward, and kissed him.

*WHAT THE FUCK?* thought Harry, as Ron's lips moved over his.

That wasn't to say he pulled back.

Because, well...he could admit he'd thought about it. How could he not have? Here he was, thinking about sexuality in a whole new light, and having spent almost all of the last six years attached at the hip to one very tall, very ginger and recently very attractive Ron Weasley. It was only natural for him to have the occasional inappropriate thought...or dream. Or several dreams.

Ron eventually pulled away, looking even fainter than before.

"Was it everything you'd hoped for?" Harry asked, smirking a little.

"Yes, unfortunately," Ron replied, looking somewhat peaky. "Harry, you know you're like a brother to me..."

Harry wondered privately whether that was really an appropriate connection for Ron to make after planting one on him. He nodded, looking at Ron with raised eyebrows.

Ron set his jaw. "Let's never speak of this again."

"Agreed."

Ron started to step away, but faltered. "Once more for luck," he said quickly, and then leaned down to kiss him again.

Harry was pondering whether it would be too forward for him to stick his tongue in Ron's mouth when a telltale shriek interrupted him. "OI, POTTER, WHAT THE SHIT IS THIS?"

Ooh. Damn. Ron wrenched himself backwards to give Harry a clear view of a completely livid Draco Malfoy. Harry opened his mouth, having no real idea of what was going to come out, when Ron preempted him.

"Malfoy, this -- FUCK. This isn't, er, what it looks like."

Malfoy seemed to be stuck in shouting mode. "YOU ARE A MAN-STEALING WHORE."

Ron took this very personally. "No, no, no! It was an accident! Please! You can have him!" he pleaded.

Malfoy took a moment to brush an angry strand of hair out of his face. "I DON'T WANT HIM, HE'S A TWO-TIMING BASTARD. YOU CAN HAVE HIM."

Ron was really starting to panic. "I don't *want* him!"

Harry was starting to get a little fed up with this. "What the hell, two bloody minutes ago everyone wanted me!"

Malfoy pointed an enraged finger at him. "YOU STAY THE HELL OUT OF THIS."

"You're hurting my ears with all that bloody yelling..." Harry muttered.

Malfoy ignored him, turning back to Ron. "*Why*, in the name of all things holy, did you think it appropriate to snog my boyfriend after spending a hundred hours telling everyone what a homophobic shit you are? Did punching me in the face mean *nothing* to you?"

Ron held up his hands disarmingly. "Look, we were talking the other day about what he likes about you, and I just *happened* to remark that we had a lot of things in common, and he said that I was projecting my feelings on him, and, well, it was a valid point that I had to explore."

Harry knew he'd been right about that.

Malfoy didn't look satisfied, however. "Whoa, Weasley, back the *fuck* up. We don't have anything in common."

Here Harry had to step in. "Actually," he said matter-of-factly, "you're both tall and have nice smiles, and a really admirable sense of familial duty, and Ron if you don't mind my saying, you got pretty svelte this summer."

Ron beamed. "Ha! I am more of a stud than he is, aren't I? I fucking knew it!"

"Oh, no you are absolutely not," Malfoy snarled. "I am infinitely studlier than you."

Harry had a faint sense of dread over the direction of this conversation. He was grateful, however, that neither of them had thought to blame him yet.

"Oh, pur-lease," Ron scoffed. "You're pale and pointy."

Malfoy stuck his nose in the air. "I know it's probably foreign to you, but this is what money looks like. Plebeians like you would kill for my complexion. And," he said, an evil sneer crawling across his face, "your hair is *horrid*."

Ron opened and closed his mouth several times before recovering. Harry cringed in advance. All bets were off, now.

"Yeah?" Ron said in a quiet voice. "Well my dick's bigger than yours."

Harry felt a look of sheer horror pass over his face as Malfoy glanced at him briefly, silently promising himself, Harry was sure, to kill him later.

Malfoy folded his arms across his chest. "Been looking, have you?"

Ron shook his head indignantly. "Harry told me."

Thanks, Ron. Thanks a bloody lot. Just...spell it out, loud and clear. Harry was pretty sure Malfoy was going to murder him.

Malfoy looked at him again, more pointedly this time. "I've never heard him complaining."

"I wasn't complaining!" Harry said, jumping at the chance to redeem himself. "That's what we were talking about in the first place! I said I was quite satisfied with your dick -- didn't I, Ron?"

Ron looked down at Malfoy with a snide expression. "He's only satisfied with you because he doesn't know any better."

Malfoy took a challenging step forward. "Oh, you can do better?"

Ron raised an eyebrow. "Harry seemed pretty eager, earlier."

No, Ron! Why? Why did he say these things?

"Ha!" Malfoy retorted. "He was probably being nice. Trying to help out a confused friend in need. I bet you kiss like a fish!"

Ron looked mortally offended. "I am a *great* kisser, I'll have you know."

"It's true," Harry said sheepishly, "he was pretty good."

Malfoy looked at each of them furiously for a moment before grabbing two handfuls of Ron's jumper and kissing him forcefully on the mouth.

Now Harry was just confused. He watched, bewildered, as each of them tried to best the other -- the result being that they were very soon snogging quite passionately. Harry wasn't really angry...they looked sort of nice together...

They broke away, gasping for breath, and each shot a look at Harry -- Ron guilty and Malfoy vengeful.

"So," Harry said, smiling winningly, "does this mean threesome or what?"

Malfoy shot him a venomous look that made him very grateful that they'd taken away Malfoy's wand. "You aren't off the hook yet."

"I don't see what the big deal is," Harry said, shrugging.

"You snogged Weasley!"

"And?" Harry said exasperatedly. "You snogged Bill!"

This Ron couldn't take. "HE DID WHAT?"

Malfoy had the good grace to look very slightly contrite. "How do you know about that?"

Ron was still awe-struck. "YOU SNOGGED BILL?"

"He told me," Harry replied.

"Well," Malfoy said, looking for an excuse to stay angry, "that was before we got together. So it's not the same."

"But it was after you kissed me," Harry pointed out. "So we were sort of together. But, I mean, whatever. It's all right."

Ron spluttered helplessly. "HOW IS IT ALL RIGHT THAT HE SNOGGED MY BROTHER?"

"Oh, quiet, Ron, he snogged you too," Harry snapped.

Ron turned to Malfoy, looking highly suspicious. "Anyone else you've been snogging? Are you trying to turn the entire Order gay? Is that your big Death Eater plan, Malfoy?"

"Yes, Weasley, that's my plan. You've found me out," Malfoy replied sarcastically. "Although you didn't need much turning."

"I am *not* gay," Ron said indignantly.

"That's what they all say," Malfoy muttered, examining his nails.

"I'm not!" Ron insisted. "Unlike you nob jockeys, I've shagged a girl."

An uncomfortable silence fell. Harry focused on keeping his face entirely devoid of expression.

"Actually..." Malfoy said gleefully. Fuck! Harry wished a giant anvil would fall out of the sky and crush the pointy bastard.

Ron raised an eyebrow, misunderstanding. "You can't fool me, Malfoy, Harry told me you were a virgin."

Malfoy looked as though Christmas had come early, and he'd unwrapped the priceless gift of selling Harry out in such a desperately delicate situation. *Bastard!* He officially no longer had the right to be angry about Harry snogging Ron. "Who said we were talking about me?" he said evilly.

Ron slowly turned to look at Harry, cogs silently turning in his head.

"Ah...mate..." Harry stalled desperately.

"He bonked your sister, mate," Malfoy clarified.

"I AM NOT YOUR MATE," Ron roared. "I CAN'T DEAL WITH THIS. I'M GOING TO GET ON A GREAT BIG SHIP TO SOUTH AMERICA AND LIVE THERE UNTIL THE END OF MY DAYS. NEVER CONTACT ME AGAIN." And with that, he stomped off down the corridor.

"A job well done," Malfoy said proudly.

"I hate you," Harry replied with fervor.

"You're just upset I ruined your threesome," Malfoy grinned.

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**You know how I know you're gay? You gave me a reach-around when you mounted me.**

## CHAPTER TWELVE:

**Fuck chapter twelve. Horcruxes should be written about by JK Rowling only, I know that now.**

Knowing that his and Potter's *relationship* was now something that Potter had discussed, at length, with Granger and Weasley, and analyzed enough for Granger to have come up with all sorts of know-it-all advice was something that made Draco feel very alone.

Up until recently, it had been something that he and Potter alone shared. Keeping it that way had been nerve-racking, yes, but now that Potter's friends were back in the loop, it was once again painfully obvious that Potter had other people to turn to, while Draco did not.

Draco wondered what exactly he told them, now that they could serve as sounding boards. Draco could easily imagine Potter going to his friends with complaints over him and commiserating. He blanched at what sort of lewd conversations Potter and Weasley might have, laughing together over things that Draco might want kept private. Draco felt like he was on the outside of yet another inside joke -- only now, the joke was him.

He and Potter remained completely aloof around others. Potter's closest friends finding out was very different from going public, and the less people who knew, the better. Even in the library, when Potter, Granger and Weasley worked alone on their project, Draco was careful to put a prudent amount of space between himself and Potter at all times, and not to speak to him with too familiar a tone. Draco did not share Potter's compulsion to open up to them, and strove to keep them out of his private business.

One advantage of Weasley and Granger's finding out was that Weasley was able to drop any pretenses about sleeping in Potter's dormitory. He and Granger still puzzlingly refused to admit their own romantic involvement, which Draco suspected Potter found quite frustrating, but Weasley became comically paranoid about accidentally interrupting, as he put it, their "alone time."

Draco, who relied mainly on Potter as his alarm clock, slept through breakfast one morning and trudged down to the library, hoping against hope that he would find Potter alone.

Draco entered the library to find Potter in his usual slump at a table. Today, however, there were no books surrounding him, no enormous piles of parchment, no pensieves, and, Draco was pleased to find, no doting friends.

Something, however, held Potter's interest.

Draco walked toward him and it became evident that he was staring at a slip of parchment. It was old and yellowed, and something about it was causing Potter to glare at it as though casting a silent hex.

Draco snatched it out from under his nose with a smirk.

"Malfoy, give that *back!*" Potter positively whined as he leapt out of his chair.

Draco did no such thing, however, angling it out of Potter's reach as he read aloud. "To the Dark Lord: I know I will be dead long before you read this, but I want you to know -- quit *grabbing*, Potter -- that it was I who discovered your secret. I have stolen the real Horcrux and intend to -- I mean it, Potter, piss *off!* -- destroy it as soon as I can. I face death in the hope that when you meet your match you will be mortal once more. R.A.B." He finished with a flourish as Potter finally succeeded in pulling the tattered parchment out of his hand, face flushed and angry.

"Don't just *take* things from me, Malfoy, that's really important!"

Draco ignored his outburst. "Pretty straight-forward stuff. Can you not read or is the handwriting hard for you to decipher?"

Potter's face became even redder. "Stop making fun of me, you fucking bastard! There's a lot riding on this shit, and I've been staring at it for *months*, and I don't know what to *do*, and R.A.B. could be anyone in the entire bloody *world!*" He threw the parchment onto the floor as he slumped back into his seat.

Draco blinked. Surely...he couldn't really not know. Potter did nothing but research, day in and day out. He had to

have come up with this answer before.

"Potter," he said slowly, disarming his tone so Potter would look up at him. Their eyes locked, and Draco felt a strange exhilaration as he spoke his next words. "It's Regulus Black. Regulus Arcturus Black."

Potter was silent. Neither of them spoke for about a full minute.

Finally, Potter blinked once, twice, and a third time. "R.A.B. Regulus Arcturus Black."

Draco watched Potter warily.

"Regulus Black," he said again. "Regulus *fucking* Black!"

Potter leapt out of his chair so fast he knocked it over. "REGULUS! REGULUS BLACK! REGULUS BLAAAAACK!" he sang at the top of his lungs, voice cracking.

Granger and Weasley emerged from the stacks, each holding a tall pile of books and wearing identical looks of confusion and irritation.

"Harry, what are you *shouting* about?" Granger admonished.

A crazed grin spread over Potter's face. "REGULUS ARCTURUS BLACK!" he screamed again.

Weasley looked dumbfounded, but Draco enjoyed watching comprehension dawn on Granger. "R.A.B.," she breathed. Without a moment's hesitation, she dropped her stack of books onto the floor and rushed to throw her arms around Potter, crying, "Oh, *Harry!*" in a delighted tone.

Weasley eventually understood as well, and pummeled Potter as though he'd won a Quidditch match.

Draco began to feel a little out-of-place at that point, and looked for an escape route. He figured they wouldn't notice if he walked out the front door. Granger was actually reduced to tears.

Unexpectedly, Potter broke from the trio lovefest to look at him. "You did it," he said simply.

Granger and Weasley looked at him too, aghast. "*He...?*"

Potter took a step toward him, not breaking eye contact. "He took literally one fucking look at the note and said 'Regulus Arcturus Black.'"

Draco was decidedly uncomfortable with the look of adoration Granger was giving him.

"Gods, you're a fucking genius," Potter said, much closer to him than he'd last remembered, and kissed him.

Draco could do nothing but stand there, stock still, as Potter kissed him passionately in front of his best friends.

As he heard Weasley cough awkwardly, he couldn't help but smile against Potter's mouth.

After that, Weasley and Granger were much nicer to him. Granger still had an obnoxious habit of casting Deafening Hexes on him instead of asking if he could excuse them for a moment, and Weasley still threatened him sometimes, but the fact that he had somehow helped their secret project along had upgraded his status from useless Potter-shagging nuisance to minutely helpful Potter-shagging nuisance.

Which only made him more determined to figure out what they were up to.

He began paying closer attention to the books Potter was always reading, though they were boring as ever. He couldn't really detect a pattern, other than that they were all Dark Arts-related in some way, but that was to be expected. He also had the word Potter had slipped, *horcrux*.



That lead went dead almost as soon as he'd started following it; the only mention he found in any book was the introduction to *Magick Moste Evile*, which read, *Of the Horcrux, wickedest of magical inventions, we shall not speak nor give direction*. And from Granger's disapproving frown as she saw him reshelving the book, she'd already found the passing reference.

At a loss, Draco watched idly as Potter performed his morning ritual of pulling out his books for the day. They were immediately striking: *Hogwarts: A History*, *An Appraisal of Magical Education in Europe*, *The Founders Four*, *Rowena Ravenclaw: A Biography*.

Potter was researching Hogwarts.

Draco's suspicions were confirmed when he wandered around the library just long enough for them to forget about him, and then crept quietly over to eavesdrop.

"It's got to be at Hogwarts, then, hasn't it?" Potter was saying.

"Harry, don't be stupid, Dumbledore would have known if it was here," Granger replied.

"He didn't know about the Room of Requirement. Or the Chamber of Secrets!"

"But you said yourself Voldemort--" Draco gave a shudder, "--couldn't get back in to hide anything."

"Well we'll just have to go look, won't we?" Potter said decisively.

Whatever they were doing had to do with the Dark Lord directly -- something he had hidden at Hogwarts. Perhaps what he'd hidden was a Horcrux, whatever that was.

The very next day, Potter woke him up with a prod to his shoulder. "I'm leaving," he said simply. "With Ron and Hermione."

"For how long?" Draco said groggily.

"Couple of days at most."

Draco waved him off sleepily and prepared to go back to bed. But as he cast a final glance at Potter's back as he walked away, he noticed that Potter wasn't carrying any sort of bag. He always did, even for day trips. Draco didn't know what it contained, but he'd assumed it to be a necessity. There was only one reason Potter wouldn't need it: He wasn't leaving the castle.

Draco was suddenly wide awake. He darted across the room and felt under Potter's bed until his fingers grazed the soft material of the Invisibility Cloak. He threw it over himself, taking a moment to appraise himself in the mirror (or rather, not) before moving swiftly after Potter through the common room. He slipped out behind him through the portrait hole and followed as soundlessly as he could manage as Granger and Weasley joined him. They walked and talked, but Draco could hardly concentrate on the conversation for his excitement.

The anticipation was killing him. He was finally going to bear witness to their secret adventures. It was a little jarring to realize that his curiosity was just that. He had no plans to fly to the Dark Lord with the news that they were investigating him to whatever degree -- he just wanted to know what they were up to. More than anything, he was more than a little sore that he couldn't get Potter to tell him anything. Perhaps it was just the principle of the thing.

The trio traipsed down the stairs, past the ground floor, and descended into the dungeons. Here they stopped.

"Okay, Harry, lead the way," said Granger, who still sounded skeptical about finding whatever it was they were looking for down here.

Potter looked thoughtful. "Ravenclaw's two passions were teaching and potions. It's got to be in the Potions classroom."

They entered, but it looked quite the same as always.

"Harry," Granger said in the same exasperated tone of voice, "if there were anything down here, I'm sure Snape would have found it at some point over the years."

"Maybe he was the one keeping it safe," Weasley said darkly.

"Check the storeroom," Potter instructed, and they filed in. Draco stood in the doorway.

Potter's jaw worked as he looked around. He looked at a dusty case of bottled potions for a moment, before pulling out his wand and succinctly muttering, "*Evanesco*." The case vanished, leaving a bare patch of wall.

"Harry!" Granger shrieked. "Those could have been really valuable!"

He ignored her. "*Aparecium*." A trapdoor appeared in the floor.

They all gaped for a moment, Draco included. He didn't know how Potter did it, sometimes.

To Draco's relief, a thin set of stairs led downwards from the trapdoor. Had it been a drop, he wouldn't have been able to follow them undetected. They each lit their wands and walked down the stairs with trepidation.

They found themselves in what looked to be another storeroom, though a much more ancient one. The cases of potions were falling apart, shelves out of place, and a thick layer of dust coated everything.

"Found it," Potter said, deadly serious.

Draco turned to see him crouching in front of a thoroughly unremarkable pewter cauldron. Potter blew on it, and an ornate R was visible. R for Ravenclaw, Draco supposed.

Potter stood up. "Should we kill it, then?"

Weasley's shrug and Granger's curt nod were barely visible from the dim wand light.

Potter raised his wand, but as soon as he had done so, he was jerked forward by his wand arm. He let out a pained yell.

Weasley rushed forward, but Granger held him back. "*Don't*, you'll only get pulled in too!"

"Well what the fuck do we do then?" he yelled.

Potter's arm seemed to be stuck in a field of some sort. Draco's eyes widened when he saw the tips of Potter's fingers go white, then black. It was Dark magic, corruptive magic.

The kind he'd accidentally stumbled upon guarding some of the more delicate artifacts at Malfoy Manor.

Without thinking, he threw the Invisibility Cloak off himself and rushed forward. Lunging between Potter and the cauldron, he shoved Potter backwards with all his strength.

And then blinding pain attacked his whole body. Resisting the urge to scream, he took one step, two, three away from the cauldron, each one more weighted, and finally fell forward.

When he opened his eyes, he was on his back on a bed in Gryffindor Tower. He remembered everything perfectly, including the excruciating pain -- which made him wonder why he wasn't in any pain now. In fact, he felt rather good. He brought a hand up to his head -- or tried to, as it seemed his arms were bound to the bed.

"What the hell?" he asked no one in particular.

Having apparently heard him, Potter, Weasley and Granger appeared by the side of the bed.

"You've got some explaining to do," Granger said to him coldly.

"Me?" he replied indignantly. "Why've you tied me to the damn bed?"

"Well," said Potter, sounding not-quite-apologetic, "we had to figure out why you were spying on us."

"I wasn't spying," Draco said snottily, before realizing that that was exactly what he'd been doing. "Or, all right, I was. But I saved you!"

"And that's the other thing," Granger said. "How did you do that?"

"The cauldron had a protective field of pure Dark magic," he explained, feeling very smug to be teaching Granger such a thing. "Dark magic is corruptive in nature, and those well-versed in it--"

"Are less easily corrupted, yes, I know," she interrupted. He wanted to correct her; it wasn't that they were less easily corrupted -- in fact, they were more corrupted, but had a certain degree of resistance. He figured he was pushing his luck as it was, though.

"So you were able to resist the field while Harry wasn't," she finished.

"That still doesn't explain why he was tailing us," Weasley grumbled.

"Aren't people allowed to be curious anymore?" Draco shot back acidly. "*Honestly.*"

As Weasley sneered at him, Draco still felt quite unexplainably bouncy. *Why?* He'd saved Potter's life! seemed to be the only answer his overjoyed brain could come up with. But why should that make him so ecstatic?

His eyes caught Potter's, and suddenly it hit him. "I repaid my wizard's debt!" he exclaimed.

"See?" said Weasley, who was still looking for an ulterior motive of some sort. "It was for a wizard's debt."

Granger turned to him. "Don't you know anything? The debt is only repaid if the debtor saves the creditor's life with pure intention. Which settles it, then."

Everyone else looked at her blankly. "Settles what?" Potter asked.

"He didn't have any malicious intent," she said with a sigh, as if explaining this to a group of very stupid people. She flicked her wand and Draco's arms were released.

"Well, *obviously,*" he muttered.

Having no further business with him, Granger and Weasley left the room, still bickering. Potter stood by the side of the bed, hands stuffed awkwardly in his pockets.

"Er," he stuttered. "Thanks for saving me."

"Don't mention it," Draco said dismissively, hopping off the bed. "Only, what exactly did I save you from?"

"A Horcrux," Potter said cryptically.

Draco waited for him to say more, but he was as tight-lipped as ever. All that for nothing. Draco could have kicked himself. Well, he thought resignedly, at least his wizard's debt was paid.

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He awoke in the middle of the night and couldn't quite remember going to sleep. He was in his bed, though, hating himself even as he thought it for calling the stupid thing in Gryffindor Tower *his* bed.

He had no idea what had awoken him, but he could only assume it had been something, because he was frustratingly and startlingly alert. He coughed against a niggling scratch in his throat.

He had finally ceased feeling so joyfully accomplished whenever he looked at Potter, but was excited to get on with things no longer owing him for saving him from Azkaban. Maybe they were on equal footing now, or as close to it as they could get with Draco still wearing an infernal dog collar. He coughed again.

Potter probably hadn't understood anyway what the wizard's debt entailed and thus -- *why couldn't he stop coughing?*

Draco felt the first inkling of panic creep through him as his face heated up. He *really* couldn't stop coughing, great heaving dry coughs that were fast taking away his breath, but he couldn't gasp for air because all he could do was *cough*.

Was there something stuck in his throat? He didn't feel like he was choking, but he couldn't get a sound out around the rasping coughs wracking his whole body. He pulled his hand away from his mouth where it had automatically covered it politely and real hysteria tore through him as it came away with dark spots of what looked in the dark to be blood.

"Malfoy?" Potter called groggily from the next bed. *Help, you stupid sod!* Draco tried to say, but all he could do was continue to cough loudly. His throat felt raw.

Potter pulled open the curtains around his bed and appeared, bathed in pale wand light. The spots on his hand shone crimson; he was coughing up blood, what was wrong with him?

Potter looked at him with concern. "Do you want a glass of water?" he said helplessly.

A wave of nausea overtook Draco and he retched dryly, leaning forward. He coughed again, forcefully, and more dark spots appeared on the white sheet.

"Shit," Potter said quietly.

"I'm going to be sick," Draco ground out as his head swam.

"Er--" Potter tried.

Draco vomited. He immediately felt much better, but was put off by the taste in his mouth, which was not acidic, but *coppery*. He opened his eyes to see a sickening splatter of red staining the sheets.

He hardly noticed his vision going gray around the edges, and only registered slightly that Potter seemed to be yelling, but had the ridiculously rational thought that that was probably more blood than he was really supposed to be losing.

He noticed, vaguely, that he was sinking towards it. "Don't let me pass out in my own vomit," he instructed Potter, and let go.

He woke up, and decided right then and there that this would be the last time he woke up somewhere with no idea of how he'd gotten there, in a blindingly white room.

The hospital wing, then.

Someone was yelling. "...good thing you had the sense to firecall...don't know how long he'd have lasted..."

Draco recognized the voice as belonging to Madame Pomfrey, yet another fixture of Hogwarts he'd hoped to escape indefinitely. He'd got along very poorly with her ever since he'd been attacked by that wretched hippogriff, when she'd staunchly insisted there was nothing wrong with him no matter how vehemently he'd demanded treatment. He opened his mouth to say something rude to the woman, before realizing that she'd probably done something to warrant her tirade, and it had probably included healing him. Also, he noticed, he seemed to have lost his voice.

"Hello?" he wheezed. It came out as a whisper.

"Harry, he's awake," came Granger's unmistakably grating voice, and she, Potter and Weasley came trudging around a corner.

Before they could so much as greet him (or interrogate him, as they had done the previous day, and Draco had no doubt they'd want to do again), Madame Pomfrey bustled in behind them, and made her way up to the side of his bed.

"You," she said, pointing a finger so close to his face that he had to cross his eyes to look at it, "are nothing but a troublemaker. Jumping into a Dark magic field like that, just *hoping* for the best! Why, it's a wonder you came out alive at all! You've been--"

"Purging Dark magic, I *know*," he whispered, trying to cut her off and show her that he had known what he was doing and what would happen, and he probably knew more about Dark magic than everyone else in the room combined, but unfortunately he couldn't raise his voice loud enough to get her to stop talking.

"--some tests, you'll be fine, I think, just take this, and I'll be staying here to keep an eye on you lot, and *don't*," she shook the finger at his nose, "think you'll be so lucky a second time."

She handed him a Blood-Replenishing Potion and glared at him until he downed it, whisking away the empty bottle and marching off back to whatever she did when she had no one to lecture.

"Well," he croaked.

"Gave us a scare, there, Malfoy," Potter said quietly.

"I'll say!" Weasley intoned. "Harry woke the whole castle up with his screaming."

Potter went a little red, and an awkward pause loomed.

"Come on, Ron," Granger said briskly, tugging at his sleeve. "Let's just be going then."

"What?" Weasley replied, as immune to subtlety as ever.

"I said, let's *go*," she repeated, fixing him with a pointed look, and dragged him out.

Potter smiled a small smile at him, the kind that would have made him weak at the knees had he not been propped up in a bed.

"Are you all right?" Potter asked.

"Been worried?" he whispered, smirking.

Potter chose to ignore his dig. "You look pale," he observed.

"Is that supposed to be a joke?" Draco shot back.

Potter laughed.

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Draco's recovery was a swift one, and while on the whole he didn't know too much more about the secret project -- besides that it was bloody *dangerous* -- his curiosity was quelled for the time being.

His "episode" had not gone unnoticed by the other inhabitants of Hogwarts. Draco had deduced that Potter's project was too top secret for anyone besides Granger, Weasley, and, through his own insistence, himself to know about.

From what he'd gathered, however, Potter had not managed to deal with his sicking up blood and passing out in a secretive way -- in fact, he'd woken up half the castle screaming for help. Without explanation, though, most everyone had come to the conclusion that he was delicate and sickly, and prone to fainting spells.

Echoes of "All right there, Malfoy?" followed him through the corridors, making him further yearn for the days when he and Potter could alternately row and snog in peace.

As everything trickled back to normalcy, the atmosphere around Potter and his friends became tangibly more relaxed. Draco knew this was due to the acquisition of the Horcrux, though what impact this had on anything he had no idea. Unfortunately, it meant Potter yet again had time to *hang out* with his friends, and Draco had no choice but to tag along. He found himself in the middle of some very mundane conversations about people for whom he couldn't care less.

"Tonks and Lupin, there's a good couple," Ginny Weasley was saying. "I've not seen them row since he finally agreed in the first place." Draco wondered how often she and Potter had rowed. He hoped it had been a lot.

"That's not exactly healthy," Weasley said, with a definite defensive air. "Just agreeing on everything all the time." Draco knew he was bitter because he and Granger bickered constantly.

"Fighting can disguise passion," Lovegood said dreamily, forcefully reminding Draco that she was even part of the conversation. "Harry and Draco fight all the time."

Draco froze. It took a moment for him to realize the full impact of her having said that out loud. He could feel heat rising to his cheeks.

"Er," said Weasley.

"I thought," Potter said carefully, "that it was sort of clear no one was going to tell anyone about that."

"I haven't!" Weasley and his sister said simultaneously, the latter wearing a definite scowl. Draco reveled in her jealousy. Pitiful, really.

"Oh, Harry, it's plain to see," Lovegood said in a singsong tone. "The way your auras have shifted, I couldn't help but notice!"

Potter looked as weirded out as Draco felt. "Well, if you could just please not tell anyone...we could get in a lot of trouble, you see..."

"Why?" Lovegood inquired, her huge eyes growing rounder.

"Fraternalizing with the enemy..." Weasley muttered.

"A wise man once said, 'love your enemy,'" she declared.

A pregnant pause ensued. She'd unknowingly just spoken the word Draco had most staunchly avoided, even in his own mind.

"A wise bumper sticker, more like," Granger said sardonically, although Draco had no idea what she meant. Some Muggle nonsense, most likely.

They trudged to the library, a nameless tension between Draco and Potter.

Once there, Granger whipped out a small, strangely shaped black box. "I think I've managed to make it work in the castle," she said proudly.

"Wicked!" Potter exclaimed. "Let's see it, then."

Draco had no idea what she was doing as she punched a code onto what looked to be a pad of numbers, and waited.

"Hello, Mum, it's Hermione!" she said excitedly after a pause. She proceeded to have a conversation with no one. Draco was pretty sure she'd lost her mind.

"What is that?" he asked Potter and Weasley, who were watching her use her contraption.

"A fellytone," Weasley said knowledgeably. "It's so Muggles can talk to each other over long distances."

"It's called a telephone," Potter interjected.

"Whatever," Draco and Weasley said together.

"She's modified it so it'll work at Hogwarts," Weasley continued.

"Of course they'll say hello," Granger said, and pulled the box away from her ear. "Say hello, boys," she instructed, and held it out to them.

"HELLO," Weasley bellowed.

"Hello, Mrs. Granger," Potter said politely.

"Can it hear me?" Draco inquired.

He heard a very quiet voice say, "Who was that, dear?"

Granger glanced at him before answering. "Er, a boy called Draco Malfoy." A pause. "No, you haven't met him." Another pause. "Yes, it is interesting. I'll ask." She put her hand over the end of the box where she'd been talking. "Malfoy, where did you get your name?"

"It's Latin," he said icily as Weasley snorted. "For dragon."

She shot him a *well, obviously* stare. "He says he doesn't know," she said into the box.

"Seems a silly contraption," Draco said as he followed Potter and Weasley into the bowels of the library to give Granger some privacy.

"I can't get the hang of it," Weasley agreed. "It's so weird talking to someone when you can't see them. I never know if I'm talking loudly enough."

"Trust me, you are," Potter interjected.

Draco couldn't see why you wouldn't just use a Floo, and he said so.

Potter looked at him seriously. "Hermione's parents can't use a Floo. They're Muggles."

To say that Draco had never realized that Granger's parents were Muggles would be completely false. He'd called her Mudblood often enough, after all, and had made it a point to learn who the Muggleborns were in his year as soon as he'd got to Hogwarts.

What he'd never quite put together was the idea of having Muggles for parents. He'd spoken to Granger, spent more time with her than he'd ever wanted to, and obnoxious though she was, she certainly didn't seem to have been raised by *savages*. She had manners, probably more than Potter and Weasley combined, and he couldn't deny that she was clever.

And she had *Muggles* for *parents*. Not only that, but he'd just seen her speaking to them over her fellytone. He'd always imagined having to speak to a Muggle slowly and deliberately. She spoke to her mother very much as Draco might speak to his own. And her mother seemed shockingly normal as well: asking after her, saying hello to her friends...

Muggles were *lacking*. Draco knew this as basically as he did his own name. They were lacking in magic and that made them lower than wizards. But he'd heard horror stories of witch trials and pogroms. *Animals*.

What if Muggles were more like him than he'd thought?

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"May I have the paper?" Draco inquired, and for the first time was refused.

"I'm reading, Malfoy," Weasley said gruffly. Not a minute later, however, he threw down the newspaper in disgust.

"What's up, Ron?" Potter asked.

"Cannons lost *again*," Weasley reported gloomily. "To *Ballycastle*. Three-hundred and twenty to forty."

After thinking about Muggles and their fellytones for an entire day, Draco jumped at the chance for a proper wizarding conversation.

"You're a Cannons fan?" he asked with no small amount of derision. And he'd thought Weasley could sink no lower.

"Yeah, I am," Weasley said defensively.

"Do you just enjoy rooting for the underdog, then, or do you genuinely like losing?"

Weasley stuck out his jaw defiantly. "They're going through a transition period."

"A period of a couple centuries."

"Who's your team, then?"

Draco felt a surge of glee. It really had been such a long time since someone had asked who his Quidditch team was. "Falmouth, of course," he said proudly.

Weasley groaned. "A Falcons fan. I should've known. I suppose you've supported them since they won the cup four years back?"

"They're my home team," Draco informed him. "I've supported them since I was *born*."

Weasley looked around the table. "Neville," he said, evidently wanting to pull someone else into the conversation. "Who do you support?"

"Tornadoes," Longbottom said, shrugging.

Draco and Weasley let out identical noises of disgust.

"Potter, what about you?" Draco asked.

Potter went red. "I don't really follow Quidditch."

Draco could hardly believe his ears. Harry Potter, legendary Gryffindor Quidditch captain, youngest Seeker in a century, did not follow professional Quidditch?

Evidently, Weasley knew how he felt. "Unbelievable, am I right?" he asked amiably.

That's when it hit Draco that he was having an amiable conversation with Weasley. Weasley who had called him 'ferret' since fourth year, who shot Stinging Hexes at him for fun, who had clocked him in the nose for sullyng his best mate.



"Unbelievable," Draco agreed.

Draco and Weasley's Quidditch conversation continued into the Gryffindor common room, where Potter led them that day, and attracted the twins and their little sister. Draco was proud to be able to hold his own against so many misguided Cannons fans.

"Collins was a *hack*," he said. "The fact he's your most famous Keeper says something, because he only saved, like, one in twenty shots."

"Yeah, but some of his saves were wicked," Weasley replied. "Wish Charlie was here, he saw Collins play once or twice, he could tell you."

Draco remembered Charlie from Christmas and hadn't noticed his disappearance until just that moment. "Where is he?"

"Romania," Ginny answered. "Breeding dragons, and recruiting for the Order."

Draco sort of remembered what Charlie looked like -- all of the Weasleys looked rather similar at first glance -- and was pretty sure he didn't have glasses. He remembered clashing often in the hallways with a bespectacled Weasley who was head boy in his younger years. Could there be *another* Weasley?

"Was Charlie head boy?" he asked.

"No, that was Bill," Weasley said somewhat glumly. "Charlie was Quidditch captain. And a prefect."

"George and I remain the only Weasleys to have the honor of graduating Hogwarts completely undecorated," said one of the twins.

"Or rather, not graduating," said the other, wearing a reminiscent expression. Draco recalled easily their spectacular departure in fifth year.

"Oi, I'm not decorated," inserted Ginny.

"You'll definitely be Quidditch captain when the school reopens, though, with Harry gone," Weasley pointed out.

Draco was still confused, however, as to the identity of the glasses-wearing Weasley. "But Bill's much too old to have been at Hogwarts when I was there. There was a head boy who was always taking points off me. He had glasses, I think?"

"Oh," said all four Weasleys, each adopting the same disgruntled expression. "Percy."

"Who's Percy?" Draco asked warily.

"He's between Charlie and Fred and George," Weasley said. "When the Ministry was going after Dumbledore, he was just starting out work there. So he made a career move and announced he wanted nothing to do with the family." He sneered. "And now the war's on, just like Dumbledore said, and he still won't apologize and come home. He's had Mum and Dad in a right state."

Draco could easily imagine wanting to get away from the Order of the Phoenix and their oppressive and unbending opinions, but he absolutely couldn't fathom going back on one's family, especially in a tumultuous time of war. He'd got into a right mess taking the Dark Mark, but knowing that doing so had protected his family made it worth it ten times over.

"He sounds like a git," Draco said.

The Weasleys all looked at him with a peculiar expression, and he had the feeling that he'd not said what they'd expected him to.

"Yeah," Weasley said, "he is."

Draco had just won some major points with the Weasleys.

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The cheerfulness that his conversation with the Weasleys had instilled in him did not last even a full day, of course.

He was awoken in the middle of the night by a searing pain in his Dark Mark, and spent five minutes with his arm under the tap in the loo, trying to be anything other than annoyed at the Dark Lord's summons.

The Mark was still dark and clear in the morning, if no longer painful. As soon as he saw the headline of the *Daily Prophet*, he understood.

MUGGLEBORN AND FAMILY KILLED IN DEATH EATER MASSACRE, the headline read. The Order was somber. Draco wondered if they'd made an attempt to prevent the attack.

He found his eyes flicking to Granger as she quietly ate her breakfast. He couldn't help but think back on her conversation with her mother. A few months ago, he wouldn't have given a second thought if a photograph of her and her family were attached to such a headline.

For the first time since he'd taken the Mark, he felt ashamed of what it stood for.

He followed Potter to the library, not missing the tension in his back and shoulders. Potter ignored him in a way that could only be described as violent, plucking books off the shelves with unnecessary force and hunching down over his table. The silence that ensued was almost threatening.

Draco stared at the top of Potter's head, still lost in thought. His rationalizations for the actions of the Death Eaters were unraveling startlingly quickly.

As if to punish him for his blasphemous thoughts, his Dark Mark twinged horribly, and he couldn't hold back a small hiss of pain as he clutched at it.

In the oppressive silence, it was enough to get Potter's attention. His eyes flicked down to Draco's hand on his Mark and back up to his face. "Are you proud of that thing?" Potter asked, baiting him. "Are you proud of what your people did yesterday?"

No, he wanted to say, but he absolutely could not.

"Why did you do this to yourself?" Potter asked, shaking his head in disbelief.

"I told you," Draco snarled, "I had to protect my family."

"*Fuck* your family!" Potter said, raising his voice considerably. "They made their own choices, and you've got to make yours."

"Figures you wouldn't understand, Potter," Draco said derisively, choosing his words carefully to hurt. "You haven't *got* a family. You haven't got anyone depending on you to keep them safe, you walked into Hogwarts with a silver spoon in your mouth--"

"That isn't true," Potter said, deadly quiet. "I have more people depending on me than you will *ever* understand."

Draco was fed up with Potter's cryptic remarks. "Make me understand," he challenged.

Potter opened his mouth, and for a moment Draco thought he would finally get something out of him. But then he closed it again, swallowed, and went back to his book. Draco sighed, defeated and at a loss.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN:

**In which Chapter 12 was 38 pages long and ridiculously piecemeal, so I broke it in half and put the rest in this other chapter.**

"Oi, Harry!"

Potter and Draco both turned toward the direction of the voice, to find Seamus Finnigan and Dean Thomas standing in the portrait hole, each wearing a broad grin.

Draco groaned. This was becoming a regular Gryffindor reunion.

Potter stood and greeted them warmly, and it was a moment before Finnigan caught sight of Draco. He nodded toward him. "The fuck's he doin' here?"

"Er, long story, I'll explain later," Potter said, steering them away. "Want to set up in a dormitory?"

The junior Order had not grown very much with these two additions, but their presence seemed to make it even harder to avoid people. And Draco very much wanted to avoid them all, especially Finnigan, who seemed never to run out of things to talk about. Parties were his newest obsession, and he often announced his intention to get the entire Order good and sloshed before the war was out. It would be good for morale, he insisted.

Potter had another dilemma. It seemed that he and Thomas had something of a tense relationship over Ginny Weasley. Draco, who couldn't stand Ginny Weasley and hated to be reminded of the fact that Potter had dated her, could not care less, and refused to sympathize with Potter's woes.

Ginny Weasley, for her part, was of course extremely wounded that Potter had dumped her and subsequently gone queer, and so proceeded to hook up with Thomas almost as soon as he arrived, which only served to infuriate her many older brothers.

When he thought about it, it was more than a little pathetic that Draco could now follow Gryffindor social politics.

With them snogging and Finnigan nattering about his kegger, Draco and Potter could hardly find a moment's peace. "Come on," Potter said finally, and led him out of the common room.

"Where are we going?" Draco inquired half-heartedly, used to being dragged around the castle by now.

"Somewhere private," Potter said shortly.

Draco became confused as they bypassed the Room of Requirement and descended further down the stairs. When they reached the dungeons, Draco realized they were heading towards the Slytherin common room.

Draco hadn't been in the Slytherin dormitories since his very first week as a captive. He honestly had no idea why Potter was taking him here now. Potter was right, after all -- Gryffindor tower was much more comfortable, even if you had to walk up a thousand flights of volatile stairs to get there.

"Okay," Potter said, stopping them in the middle of the common room.

Draco looked around him. He felt like he was being set up for something, and checked for a bull's-eye under his feet.

Potter looked gleefully at their green and silver surroundings. "This is perfect," he said brightly. "Take off your trousers."

Draco was taken aback. "Excuse me?" He hadn't really gotten a sexual vibe from Potter's demeanor.

Potter motioned to the fastenings on Draco's trousers before going for his own. "Get 'em off. We're having a rematch."

It took Draco all of one second to figure out what he was talking about, before he lunged forward and knocked

Potter's hands away, hiking Potter's trousers down to free his cock, which was rising under his attentions. Ha. Draco wasn't more than half-hard. He'd win again, no doubt. He spat in his palm and went to work. "Get ready to lose again, Potter," he said smugly, squeezing for good measure.

Potter put his smugness to shame with a smirk of his own. He took his time with Draco's trousers, teasing him with feathery touches. He tilted his head to suck leisurely on Draco's pulse point, sending a wave of warmth through him.

"Ahh...fuck, Potter, that's so fucking good," he murmured, playing up a breathy tone in his voice. Potter always got off when he was talkative.

Potter moved up Draco's throat, placing open-mouthed kisses as he went, and up his jawline to rest his mouth at Draco's ear. "Testing," he said.

That served adequately to take Draco out of the moment. He pulled his head back to regard Potter skeptically. "What are you testing?" he asked. But Potter wasn't looking at him. He was looking upwards, at something hanging from the ceiling. Draco craned his head to see a huge banner with the Slytherin crest.

And then he heard it. An inhuman hiss.

He turned back to Potter so fast it was a wonder he didn't get whiplash. Potter was looking at the banner and *hissing*. And fuck if it wasn't the hottest noise Draco had ever heard. Potter looked back at him, and opened his mouth again to let out another series of sibilant sounds.

The Slytherin crest was a snake. Potter was a Parselmouth.

Draco was going to *lose*.

Potter moved back into his position by Draco's ear as he finally took a firm hold of him with a low hiss. It turned into many, similar to Draco's untrained ear but subtly different, identifiable as a language.

*Gods*, Potter was talking to him and it sounded like pure sex. Potter could be reciting a potion for all Draco knew but all he cared about was that it didn't stop. "Gods, oh gods, shit, keep talking," he said, honest now in his abandon.

Potter obliged him, continuing to hiss gods knew what into Draco's ear and giving it the occasional nibble as his hand attempted to pull out his fucking soul. Fuck, but Potter had to be saying something incredibly dirty. Draco couldn't believe that such an overtly sexual tone could be achieved simply by talking like a snake. A thousand sordid thoughts flashed through his mind -- Potter could be saying *anything*.

Draco let out a low moan, almost a growl, and twisted his hand around Potter. "Wanna suck your cock," he gasped. He fucking *did*, too, he wanted Potter's prick in his mouth and he wanted to get *fucked* and gods he just needed Potter to *never stop talking*.

Potter let out one final long hiss before smashing that amazing mouth against Draco's, and their mouths were wide open and their tongues tangling like fucking *snakes* and Draco was coming, white-hot, in long ropes and moaning obscenely into Potter's mouth and he didn't think he was going to survive.

Panting, he rested his head on Potter's shoulder, a little too low to be comfortable but fuck if he cared. "I win," Potter said simply, back in English.

Draco wasted no time in shoving him into the nearest chair and kneeling between his legs. "You don't have to," Potter insisted, puzzlingly shy not moments after putting on such a show. "It's a *wanking* contest."

Draco raised an eyebrow, looking up at him. "To the victor go the spoils."

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Finnigan succeeded in his plans for a party rather easily, with the help of Fred and George Weasley. It was kept secret from the adults, and a lot of something called Guinness was brought in, which Draco later learned was a

Muggle beer (Muggle beer was apparently cheaper) that tasted approximately like tar.

The party took place in Potter's dormitory, so as not to attract undue attention, and consisted of a lot of lewd and embarrassing revelations, idiotic courses of action and general drunken revelry. It was quite a departure from the parties thrown in Slytherin House, which generally involved a good deal of sitting around wallowing in aloof hatred and snorting fairy dust.

Draco refrained from participating in the festivities, not really trusting his inebriated self to be prudent around Potter with everyone else around. After several hours, people began trickling out of the dormitory, slowly but surely leaving him and Potter alone.

Even then, Draco didn't allow himself to think about the fact that he was drinking Seamus Finnigan's cheap Muggle beer with Potter until he was comfortably halfway through his second bottle.

Potter hiccupped. "My alcohol tolerance is really low," he said apologetically. "It's because I'm so skinny."

Draco could only assume that he suffered from a similar dilemma, because he seemed to find Potter's explanation strangely endearing.

"So I guess I'm gay," Potter said, out of the blue.

"Could be a phase," Draco offered sympathetically. He was still praying that his own predilection for blokes (specifically Potter) would right itself in time.

"Yeah, but I don't think it is, you know?"

Boy, did Draco ever know.

"I mean, shit, I wanted to get married and have kids, y'know?"

Draco took a generous swig of his beer and wished it were something stronger. Turpentine, maybe. "You could still get married," he said, thinking of his own plans not to let down his family line no matter *what* his cock had to say about it.

Potter giggled. "We could get married."

Draco expected to be horrified and disgusted by the idea, but he instead found it rather amusing. "That's not legal, Potter."

"We could go to Amsterdam."

"There's still the problem of us hating each other," Draco said, smirking.

"Oh, that wouldn't be a problem," Potter countered with another hiccup. "We'd be too stoned to remember we hate each other."

Draco laughed appreciatively, hoping Potter was at least a bit more drunk than he was.

Potter continued to giggle. "Gods, can you imagine our *kids*?"

Draco decided he must be more inebriated than he'd counted on if he was actually imagining them, biological impossibilities that they were. "Would be some fucked up kids."

Potter grinned. "I wonder what house they'd be in?"

Even in the hypothetical, Draco could not abide by such blasphemy. "Slytherin. Duh."

Potter sighed. "Oh, come on. I get to have one in Gryffindor. You can have one in Slytherin."

"I'd disown the other one," Draco said petulantly.

Potter scoffed. "You would, too."

Draco snorted abruptly as he considered a thought. "What d'you think they'd look like?"

"I'm picturing them looking like you with my hair." He laughed. "And glasses."

"They would have my hair," Draco said firmly.

Potter raised an eyebrow. "No way. Black hair is a dominant trait and blond is recessive." He straightened proudly. "It's science."

"Science is for Muggles," Draco insisted. "All Malfoys are blond."

"And you know what?" Potter said with a hint of agitation, seeming to have temporarily forgotten the children. "I'm sick of you going on about my hair. It's really not that bad at all."

Draco regarded Potter's horrible mop of hair for a moment. "I know you've probably had people surrounding you your whole life eager to tell you how great you are and they've instilled in you this notion that you have this wild, just-shagged look going on, but trust me. It is that bad."

Potter looked at him stonily for a moment before cracking up. "How did I never notice how *gay* you are?"

Draco huffed and folded his arms. He didn't appreciate that at all.

Rather than apologize for his remark, Potter took a moment to finally notice what was going on around him. "Where the fuck is everyone?" he said, swiveling his head.

Draco looked around the deserted dormitory. "I expect they've cleared out to give us some private time," he said dryly.

"We shouldn't let it go to waste then," Potter replied without missing a beat, a suggestive smile playing on the corner of his mouth.

Draco's heart skipped at Potter's tone. He turned to face him, familiar with this game by now. "If you want something, Potter, you're going to have to ask for it directly."

He relished the blush that rose to Potter's cheeks. "You know I'm no good at that..." he said, looking downward. "You're the *sexy* one who can do the whole, like, seductive thing..."

"Seductive thing, huh?" Draco repeated.

"Yeah, man, you're all looking at me through your eyelashes and doing that voice that's all, 'I totally want you but I'm gonna make you work really hard for it.'"

Draco beamed inwardly at the compliment. Potter honestly found him attractive. Seductive, even. The idea made him a bit giddy. But, well, he couldn't disappoint now. He cocked an eyebrow and adopted his most predatory tone. "You think I'm sexy, do you?"

Potter's blush deepened. "I didn't say that," he mumbled.

"Yes you did," Draco continued. "You do think I'm sexy. You're dying to fuck me, aren't you? You're so fucking hard for me." He scooted closer in what he hoped was a subtle way.

Potter smiled gleefully. "We *are* gonna shag! Thank Merlin."

Thank Merlin, indeed. Clothes were shed with due haste (and much groping) and then Draco was in what he would never admit to anyone was becoming one of his favorite places -- under a naked Harry Potter.

"You know," said Potter casually. "I never thought I'd enjoy having my fingers up your arse."

Draco'd never thought *he'd* enjoy it either. He hummed contentedly as Potter's index finger breached him. He wanted more, he realized, a little embarrassed. "Hurry up," he muttered.

"It's your funeral," Potter grumbled. Draco was grateful for the almost excessive caution Potter exercised now that he realized how he'd hurt Draco the first time. Draco knew deep down that Potter wasn't really to blame -- they were almost equally inexperienced and neither had really known what to do -- but he was content to be petty about it because, to be frank, he enjoyed guilt-tripping Potter. He liked having Potter worry over him (care for him, he didn't dare add) and didn't mind manipulating him a bit into doing so.

Potter's fingers brushed over that spot that made Draco's toes curl and he gasped. "Do it," he said, locking his legs at the small of Potter's back. "Now."

"Pushy," Potter said, rolling his eyes in mock exasperation as he positioned himself. Draco could feel the blunt head of Potter's cock nudging at his entrance and forced himself to relax. He looked up at Potter's face as Potter slid in, relishing the barely contained ecstasy so evident in the furrow of his brow and the way he bit his lower lip. Draco felt absurdly proud to be the cause of that pleasure.

His eyes traveled down Potter's form, newly arousing every time he saw it, to the point where their bodies joined. Potter slid home, slowly, so *fucking* slowly, until Draco could feel his balls and his bony hips and he felt so bloody full and stretched and...

When had he begun to enjoy this so much?

'Enjoy' ceased to fully convey the sentiment when Potter started moving, rocking gently at first. Just the sight of Potter above him was enough to make Draco's cock jump, and the combined sensation of Potter inside him was so unbelievably fantastic that Draco doubted shagging a girl could ever measure up.

Potter angled for that spot again, knowingly, and Draco could do nothing but moan. His hands scrabbled to touch as much of Potter as they could, gripping and squeezing and *pushing* at his arse as if they could fit *more* of Potter into him. "More," Draco vocalized.

Potter looked down at himself. "There is no more," he said, bewildered.

"*Harder*," Draco said, raising his voice more than was probably wise, but he couldn't bring himself to care in the least.

"Oh fuck," Potter said breathily, and slammed into him hard.

Draco let out a yell as he saw stars. His brain was over-heating and his entire world was shrunk down to Potter's cock in his arse and his hips snapping forward jerkily and the pressure building up in his own sorely neglected groin, and he wanted to touch himself but all he could think was more, more, more, more...

"Come on, harder, fuck me," he growled, meeting Potter's thrusts violently with his own hips. "Like you mean it!"

"Shit Malfoy you are so *hot!*" Potter panted desperately, his hips more spastic than ever.

"Fuck, I'll do it myself," Draco said and, working purely on instinct and *need*, tensed his legs around Potter's back and hugged him around the neck and rolled.

It was a miracle he didn't roll them right off the bed but he managed to get himself on top of Potter, sitting impaled on him, his own purple-red cock jutting out from his flushed body.

Potter's eyes widened comically as he realized the switch. "You're a genius," he almost sobbed, grabbing hold of Draco's hips with both hands, eyes sweeping over his body almost reverently.

Draco rose up off his haunches and let gravity do the work as he slammed back down, seeing pinpricks of white at the edges of his vision. He wanted to scream. Potter did scream.

Draco set to work, moving up and down, up and down, fucking himself furiously on Potter's cock, every motion pushing him closer to the edge. He found he could aim for the spot himself and hit it hard enough to send sparks through his entire lower half.

"Oh...oh...ohmygod," Potter gasped as he thrust shallowly upwards, "I'm gonna..."

Draco snarled down at him. "Don't you *dare* come before me," he ordered, but Potter shook his head helplessly.

With an inhuman growl, Draco wrapped a sweaty hand around himself, bouncing obscenely, and almost died of the relief and the surge of heat he felt.

"Oh *fuck!*" Potter yelled, as wanton as Draco had ever seen him. His eyes were glued to the furious motion of Draco's hand. "You're *wanking!*"

Draco half-laughed, half-moaned in response, and watched as Potter's mouth fell open in a silent scream as he emptied himself into Draco.

Draco was hyperaware of everything -- the maddening movement of his own hand, the bruising slam of Potter's hipbones, the tight grip Potter still had on his waist, Potter's half-lidded, sated, *gorgeous* fucking face as he watched him and his cock filling him up. Draco's senses overloaded and he came hard, riding out wave after wave of it, shooting all over his hand and -- *fuck!* -- Potter's chest.

Breathing heavily, he mustered the strength to lift himself up and let Potter slip out of him before collapsing bonelessly next to him.

They lay silently for several minutes, Draco's mind warmly blank and body exhausted.

"*Jesus,*" Potter said finally.

Jesus, Draco recalled, the son of God. As he drifted seamlessly into sleep, he wondered if Potter had found it a religious experience.

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Draco was jostled awake by a firm grip on his shoulder. He panicked momentarily, thinking of the midnight evacuations he'd done at least once weekly throughout the summer.

"Wake *up,* Malfoy," said a whiny voice that brought him back to the present as he was shaken again. He shrugged the hand off his shoulder and rolled over.

"Malfoy, I swear you sleep more than anyone I've ever met."

Draco wished he didn't like Potter's voice so much, or he'd have been able to muster more conviction behind his grumbled "Go away, you tosser."

"It's lunch time. You've slept through the whole morning. I'm not leaving until you get out of bed." Potter grabbed Draco's leg and began to literally drag him out from under the covers.

It wasn't until he felt a distinct draftiness that Draco thought to snatch his leg back. "Potter! I'm not wearing anything!"

"I'd say it's a bit late for modesty," Potter scoffed. That it was, but Draco liked to consider himself a man of propriety, at least sometimes.

"Go find me some pants," he ordered grumpily, abandoning all hope of returning to sleep. Potter handed him a pair



and he pulled them on before swinging his legs over the side of the bed and standing. He took a step to discover a disconcerting ache in his backside.

"My arsel!" he groaned pitifully. "*Fuck*, but I'm sore."

Potter grinned at him cheekily, presumably proud of his handiwork. "You've no one to blame but yourself."

"Yeah, and your bony fucking hips. And anyway, don't act like it wasn't the best experience of your short life." He stalked into the bathroom without another word.

He emerged, refreshed from a hot shower, to find Potter still perched on the bed. "Were you waiting for me?" he inquired, a little alarmed by the idea.

"Er," said Potter predictably. "Yeah. Haven't anything better to do."

Draco smirked. "Don't you have, like, worlds to save?" Potter laughed darkly but declined to answer.

Potter's gaze followed him unsubtly through the dormitory as he walked. "Stop ogling me, you pig," he said, barely concealing his smile.

"Stop walking around naked, you cocktease."

Draco found himself amused by the insult. "Deal with it," he said smugly. He dropped his towel, presenting Potter with his arse as he searched for clothes.

"Good *lord!*" Potter said, laughter brimming in his voice. "Look at you!"

Draco looked down and laughed. His hips were dotted with red and blue-purple marks where Potter had gripped him. "I bruise easily," he said by way of explanation.

"I'll say," Potter said. "Must be that albino complexion of yours..."

"I'm fair, you peasant," Draco said as he pulled on some ill-fitting clothes. "And at least I'm not the one going to lunch with a hard-on."

Potter apparently had no comeback for that, and followed Draco silently out of the dormitory.

McGonagall was waiting for them at lunch, and Draco's first panicked thought was that she *knew*. Without so much as a nod in his direction, however, she ushered Potter away for a private chat about some Order business. Draco gritted his teeth in annoyance, unsurprised to find that everyone else ignored him when he sat down. It was no surprise that he'd taken up with Potter, really, when he was the only person to pay him any attention.

Except for Bill, the cosmos reminded him as Bill plopped down next to him, a ways away from the others. "'Lo, Draco," he said with a hint of playfulness in his voice.

"Bill," Draco replied evenly, without looking up. Draco hadn't actually spoken to Bill in a while, not since he'd snogged him several months prior. If Bill's tone was anything to go by, he'd been waiting all this time to take the mickey out of him for it.

"So," continued Bill, "haven't seen you in a while. Gotten up to anything interesting?"

Interesting was hardly the word to describe just what he and Potter had got up to.

"Not really," he said.

A wide grin split Bill's face and Draco knew what was coming. "So now that you've had a chance to collect yourself a bit, I must ask -- *why* did you snog me, out of the blue, and then disappear entirely from my life? Not even a single owl...what's a bloke supposed to think?"

"Laugh it up, Weasley. I was in a lot of turmoil over my father's death. My head wasn't working properly just then." He hoped Bill would buy it. It was just the sort of emotional tripe these Gryffindors loved.

"That's a good answer," Bill said, and Draco's heart sank at the distinct undertone of mockery still present. "But it doesn't explain the massive hickey you've got there."

Draco's hand flew to his neck. How could neither he nor Potter have noticed such a thing? Maybe Potter *had* noticed...and opted not to tell him, to let him be discovered.

"I...I don't know what you're talking about. Maybe it's an insect bite. This place is crawling with them, you know."

Bill raised an eyebrow. "No, I'd say that's quite obviously a hickey." He held up a hand and smiled at the panic that must have been evident on Draco's face. "I'm quite impressed you've managed to get any action here. *Who's the lucky bloke?*"

"Could be a girl," Draco mumbled without feeling. He was a bit disheartened that his preference seemed to be so easily evident to everyone.

Bill leaned in further and lowered his voice. "It's Harry, isn't it?"

Draco looked straight ahead, not trusting himself to speak, but his silence spoke just as clearly. Bill clapped him on the back, nearly hard enough to send him flying into his food. "Well *done*, Draco!"

"Shut up," he ground out, his face burning.

"No, really!" Draco cringed at the volume of his voice. "S quite a pull! Took Ginny six *years* to get him to notice her."

"Would you keep your voice down?" Draco hissed.

Bill cast a nonchalant look around him. "Who else knows?"

In a split-second decision, Draco opted to lie. "No one else knows, and you'd do well to keep it that way." He didn't know if the lie would pan out in the long run, but he was uncomfortable with it becoming one of those secrets that everyone knew. Part of him was already regretting having owned up to it at all.

He watched as Potter finished his business with McGonagall and went to sit with the others. Draco was grateful that he hadn't looked over or hesitated to sit away from Draco. Perhaps he did grasp the concept of secrecy.

"So..." Bill said, raising his eyebrows conspiratorially, "how's it feel to date a celebrity?"

Draco almost laughed. "Potter is not a celebrity."

"He's only one of the most famous wizards living," Bill said matter-of-factly.

Draco hadn't really ever thought of it that way. Perhaps he'd known Potter too long, but he didn't consider him a "celebrity" so much as a prat who got far too much undeserved attention.

"A lot of magazines would pay good money to know how he is in the sack," Bill continued, a crooked smirk fixed on his face.

Draco felt himself blushing. He doubted he'd ever give that interview.

Lunch was slowly breaking up around them as they continued to talk, Draco deftly avoiding divulging anything juicy.

When the coast was relatively clear, Potter sat down next to them. "Lo Bill," he said jovially. "How're you feeling?"

"Better," Bill replied. This struck Draco as odd; he hadn't noticed Bill looking ill. The now-familiar feeling of being

severely out of the loop returned.

"Well," said Bill, patting the table as he stood up, "I'll leave you two." He winked at Potter in a way that could only be described as wolfish before turning to leave.

Once he was safely out of earshot, Potter rounded on Draco. "Why the hell is he winking at me? Did you tell him?"

"It's only fair," Draco said in a childish tone, "you've told practically everyone you know."

"Oi, I've only told Ron, and only because Hermione made me."

"Does she make you give him live updates on your sex life? I'm not stupid, you know."

Potter huffed impatiently. "I'm rebuilding trust! Besides, who would he tell?"

Draco suspected that if it didn't involve his very best mate, Weasley would yell it from the rooftops just to humiliate him. "Bill guessed, anyway. Apparently I've got a massive hickey." He presented his throat to Potter, who laughed.

"Shite, you have." He furtively cast a glamour on it.

There was a beat of silence before Draco sniffed. "So what are we doing today?"

"Well, I expect I'll work, and you'll sit around being a useless lump," Potter replied succinctly.

"You could always let me go..." Draco said, surprised by the lack of conviction in his tone. Since when was escape not his driving goal? Perhaps it'd become too evident that he wasn't leaving until the Order was good and ready to part with him. It certainly had nothing to do with sympathy for their cause; he heard next to nothing about the war, anyway. And it certainly wasn't sympathy for Potter.

Potter seemed to have picked up on his sudden introspection, or else mistakenly thought that he'd drifted off having remembered his desire to be free. "C'mon," he said too casually. "Let's walk."

They meandered out onto the grounds, crisp but sunny, with no particular direction in mind, at least none that Draco could detect.

Potter turned to him abruptly. "Do you want to fuck me?"

Draco blinked, dumbfounded momentarily. Here he was, assuming they were having some sort of deep thoughts walk, and Potter was talking about sex. He should've known. "We just fucked yesterday," Draco said, flustered.

Potter raised an eyebrow. "It's not just for special occasions now, is it? We're fucking -- we can fuck whenever we like."

Draco gazed at the familiar grounds surrounding them. "Here?"

"No!" said Potter with mock-exasperation. "I just mean, you know. Next time. Tonight, if you like. Do you want to, y'know, do it the other way around."

"I didn't realize this sort of thing had to be planned so far in advance. Shall we set a start and end time?"

Potter sighed, now with real irritation. "You're just scared to ask for it."

In reality, Potter wasn't far off the mark. Draco was a bit scared, but not of asking -- of *doing*. Draco, unlike Potter, had never fucked anyone before, and was quite sure he would mess it up somehow and embarrass himself. He knew it was irrational; as a male of the species he was *born* to fuck. But he seemed already to have gotten a very abnormal introduction to sex.

"I am not," he said, several moments too late. Potter raised his eyebrows skeptically. Draco sighed. "Fine, I'll ask."

Can I fuck you?" It was strange to be talking about it so frankly.

Potter was unsatisfied. "Well don't you *want* to?"

"Yes," he said, wondering how he had gotten into such a ridiculous argument. "Of course I want to."

Potter smirked at him condescendingly. "Don't be nervous. I'll help you."

Draco repressed the urge to hit him, with difficulty.

"So, er," Potter said, his smirked widening into a mischievous grin. "You doing anything right now?"

"Yeah," Draco said, looking down his nose at him with an equally mischievous grin. "You."

Potter Summoned his Invisibility Cloak, which gave Draco pause. "Wait, we're not really doing it out here, are we?"

"No, idiot," Potter said, wrapping the cloak around them. "This way no one will bother us on our way there."

"There" turned out to be the Slytherin dormitories, which were much closer to ground level than Gryffindor, and blessedly devoid of other people. Getting there, though, became something of a challenge, seeing as two gangly teenage boys had difficulty fitting together under one cloak without standing very close to one another.

Which resulted in a lot of snogging.

Draco had Potter pressed up against a corridor wall when Granger and Weasley rounded the corner and approached them. "Shit, *stop*," Potter breathed.

Draco waited until the two were directly in front of them before squeezing the front of Potter's trousers, eliciting a muffled squeak.

Weasley paused momentarily, wearing an expression of confusion, before continuing on his way.

Draco laughed softly in Potter's ear. "I hate you," Potter mumbled.

They made their way into the dungeons and entered the Slytherin common room, shedding the cloak and taking yet another snogging break. Draco doubted he'd ever tire of Potter's mouth.

Potter looked around. "Er, I actually don't know where to go from here."

Draco took him by the hand. "Nearly there," he said as he led them to his old dormitory. It was strange to see his old living space so thoroughly spotless and uniformly green-and-silver. Theodore Nott's collection of flashy posters had adorned the room for many years.

He flopped down on the bed that had once been his, and pulled Potter down on top of him. Potter sat up, astride him, and pulled his shirt over his head. Or he attempted to, anyway. "Fucking glasses..." he muttered as he finally succeeded in maneuvering them out of his hair. Potter lifted off him to take off his trousers, finishing with a rakish grin as he pulled off his pants.

Heat pooled in the pit of Draco's stomach. Potter was so unbelievably *hot*.

"Let's go," Potter said, pulling off Draco's shirt. "You have to contribute, here."

Draco sat up and pushed Potter down onto the bed, effectively switching their places. "Oh, I'll contribute all right," he said with a smirk, hovering over him on his hands and knees.

He went to work with his mouth, sucking hard on Potter's neck and collarbone. He loved the taste of Potter's skin. Working on instinct, he traveled over Potter's chest and tongued one of his nipples experimentally, reveling in Potter's small gasp and the way it peaked under his ministrations. He pulled it into his mouth, sucking, before doing the same

to the other. Potter groaned as Draco licked down his hard stomach and jutting hipbones, coming to hover over his cock.

After a moment, Potter poked his head up. "What the hell are you waiting for?"

Draco smiled. "I won't do it unless you ask." He ran a finger ever so lightly from base to tip.

"Fuck, *fuck!* Do it, *please* do it." Potter's head thrashed helplessly from side to side.

"Please do what?" he asked sweetly, inching closer.

"Please suck my cock!"

Hearing those words out of Potter's mouth sent a jolt through him, and he slid his lips over the head of Potter's cock, relishing the bitter taste of precome as he traced his tongue over the slit.

Potter mumbled nonsense words as Draco took more into his mouth, more than he'd ever managed. He swallowed around the head even as his throat threatened to gag, continuing to tongue the underside. Potter let out a litany of curses as he pulled back off and bobbed his head. He let his other hand wander from its resting place on Potter's hip, climbing up his torso and giving a nipple a hard pinch.

"Stopstopstop," Potter said desperately, pulling at Draco's hair. "I'm r-really about to c-come!"

Draco continued, humming, until Potter cried out and spurts of hot fluid filled his mouth. He swallowed languidly as he came up, met with Potter's affronted glare.

"What'd you do that for?"

"You're seventeen years old," Draco said dryly. "Don't try to tell me you can't get it up again in five seconds. And whatever happened to 'thank you'?"

Potter grinned. "You know what'd get it back up? If you finished getting undressed."

Draco noticed with some amusement that he was indeed still mostly clothed. He still had his shoes on, even. He toed them off and sat on his haunches, canting his hips forward as he slowly undid the fastenings on his trousers. "I'm gonna make you scream, Potter," he said, sounding much more confident than he actually was. He got his trousers off and his pants soon after, and he was finally naked.

Potter's eyes swept over him and his cock twitched back to life. Potter laughed breathlessly, the sound going straight to Draco's groin. "What'd I tell you?"

A thrill of excitement went through him. He was going to fuck Harry Potter.

He breathed, resisting the urge to panic. He knew how to do this. First, he used his fingers. He paused. "Don't I need, er. Lubricant?" he asked.

"Oh, damn," Potter muttered. They'd left it in Gryffindor tower. "Well, there's a spell, but I've never done it." He fumbled for his wand on the table and reached around behind himself. "*Lubricus* -- ahh, fuck, that's *cold!*" Draco sniggered. "Give me your hand." He cast it again and Draco's fingers were covered in some sort of oily substance.

"Lift your hips," he murmured, and slipped a pillow underneath Potter. Licking his lips, he slid a finger down to Potter's arsehole, and pushed inside. He marveled at the sensation; it was tight, and he honestly had no idea how he was going to fit his cock in there, but if Potter had done it, he'd be able to. He pushed another finger in and scissored them, and Potter gasped. He grinned, aiming for the same spot that made him feel so good...

"Yes right there FUCK!" Potter screamed, twisting his hands in the bedclothes. "Just do it, do it now."

Draco was hesitant, after such cursory preparation considering it was Potter's first time. "It'll hurt a bit..." he said,

before wondering why the hell he was trying to disagree when Potter was asking him to shag him.

"No," said Potter, "it's okay, I've practiced."

Draco cocked an eyebrow. "When have you practiced? I'd have noticed you standing around with your fingers up your bum." He punctuated his sentence with another brush over Potter's prostate.

"Ohgods, s-sometimes when I'm out with Ron and H-hermione."

Draco laughed out loud. "What, do you have to wank every time you're away from me for a day?"

Potter seemed not to be in the mood for banter, however. "Get your cock inside me *now*," he ground out.

Draco leaned back. "How do you want to do it?"

"Put my legs over your shoulders," Potter instructed. Draco leaned down to kiss him for a long moment before complying. He lined himself up and pushed, until the head of his cock had breached the tight ring of muscle.

Holy *fuck*.

"I know, right?" Potter laughed. He swallowed heavily, his Adam's apple bobbing. "Just...give me a minute."

"Give *me* a minute," Draco muttered. He was desperately willing himself not to come right then and there, not even having got all the way in. It felt...shit, it felt *great*. Potter was tight and hot and the sight of him laid open for Draco was making it very hard not to move.

"Okay," Potter said, and Draco practically sobbed in gratitude as he pushed himself in to the hilt, as slowly as he could manage. He marveled at how completely different but similarly fantastic this was from doing it the other way around.

Potter was absolutely breathtaking. His dark hair fanned out against the white pillow under his head, his cheeks were flushed, and he looked Draco right in the eye, waiting for him to move...*trusting* him.

He pulled out, careful to continue going slowly, and pushed back in, watching Potter's face for cues as to what he was doing right. They were rocking in unison, and Potter had closed his eyes at some point. Draco canted his hips at a few different angles before he finally found the one that made Potter's back arch.

"Fuck," Potter said eloquently as Draco hit it again.

"Clearly, yes," he replied breathlessly, and thrust hard, seeing stars.

"*Draco*," Potter moaned.

Draco froze. Had he just...? He had!

Heat coiled in Draco's stomach. Potter had never called him Draco. Especially not like *that*. Draco had never known his name could sound so...good.

Potter swallowed. "Er, sorry," he said.

Draco had a new inspiration. "Say it again," he growled, and quickened his pace.

Potter smiled, which only caused Draco's hips to jerk more forcefully. Potter's *voice*, and his *smile*...

He was close. He could feel his balls tightening, he was going to come; he almost didn't want it to end.

Shifting his weight to one arm, he closed a hand around Potter's cock caught between them and wanked him in counter time with his thrusts.

Potter dug his hands into the sheets and threw his head back. "Fuck, yes, DRACO!" he shouted as he came.

Just when Draco didn't think it could get any better, the force of Potter's orgasm made him clench impossibly tighter around Draco.

He grunted feebly as he thrust as deeply as he could and nearly passed out from euphoria as he filled Potter with his seed.

He felt weak as he lifted Potter's legs off of his shoulders and collapsed onto the bed.

He looked at Potter, who looked back at him. They both chuckled for a moment.

"Good for you?" Draco asked.

"Shit, yeah," Potter replied. "You?"

"Passable."

Potter grinned. "We should do this more often."

Draco personally thought that it would be difficult to fit more sex into their schedule of sex, fighting, reading, and sex, but was nonetheless open to the idea. "Trust me, your arse is going to need a few days to recover," he said with a light laugh.

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Over the next few days, Potter made himself scarce. Draco thought at first that he might feel badly about having been bugged, or something, but decided that if Potter harbored any such thoughts he would be more inclined to share them, loudly, with Draco than hide them away.

Draco walked into the dormitory after an entirely Potter-free morning to find Potter perched on the edge of his bed, holding something as he took note of Draco's presence.

It was peculiar-looking. "What's that?" Draco asked, genuinely curious. He assumed it was a Muggle device of some sort, made mostly of metal with a complicated collection of bits and pieces.

Potter put it down, looking a little trepid. "It's a gun," he said seriously.

It was a moment before Draco realized Potter was taking the piss. Making fun of Draco's ignorance of Muggle life. He scoffed. He could've taken Muggle Studies if he'd wanted to.

"You don't actually expect me to believe *that* is a gun," he drawled. "I've *read* Martin Miggs. I *know* what a gun looks like."

Potter's brow creased in seeming confusion. "What's it look like?"

"It's big," Draco said, holding out his hands. "You don't hold it in one hand like that, it's both hands, at your hip. And it makes a noise." He imitated the buh-duh-duh-duh noise of the little projectile thingers coming out of a gun.

Potter blinked blankly for a few seconds. "You're thinking of a machine gun. This is a handgun. You know..." He looked for some sign of recognition. "A pistol?"

And, as usual, Potter made him look like an idiot.

"What do you need a piss-tol for?" Draco asked haughtily.

Potter looked at the gun. "Well, it's interesting. To kill someone with magic, you have to hate them. A *lot*. Enough to

power a spell fueled entirely by your desire for their death."

"Potter," Draco interrupted. "Don't attempt to lecture me on Dark spells. Go ahead and assume I know more than you ever will about Dark magic."

Potter glared at him momentarily before continuing as though he hadn't spoken. "But for Muggles, it's much easier. All you have to do is squeeze this trigger the smallest bit," he pointed to a small lever, "and aim correctly. And it's faster than any spell, too fast to dodge or protect against. It's almost too easy."

"Of course it's too easy," Draco said automatically. "Muggles love killing each other."

Potter ignored him.

He tried again. "Who are you planning on killing?"

Potter had the audacity to roll his eyes, as if Draco should have been unsurprised to discover his extensive hit list. "I'll give you three guesses. The first two don't count."

Draco knew what he was hinting at, of course, but it was ludicrous. "You get more arrogant every day. As if you could kill him. And with a Muggle weapon, no less."

Potter shrugged. "The gun's just a possibility I was thinking about. Irony, and all that. But I will kill him. Or die trying."

Draco had trouble conceiving of Potter's commitment to such a thing. Potter's hero complex was legendary, but did he really think *he* could take down the Dark Lord? A mere teenager? He was a nuisance to the Dark Lord, yes, but hardly a threat.

"Isn't there someone a little more qualified for the Order to assign a task of such gravity?" Draco asked skeptically.

Potter looked downward and paused for a long moment. "It's prophecized."

Draco stilled. "What?"

"It's prophecized. I'm the one with the power the Dark Lord knows not. I'm going to do it."

Draco's mouth was suddenly dry, his heart thudding in his ears. "So you really are the Chosen One."

Potter smirked and nodded his affirmation.

Draco could hardly breathe. He was sitting inches away from the potential downfall of the Dark Lord. The Dark Lord, to whom he'd pledged his allegiance. A pledge that seemed more and more remote every passing day.

The war would end, eventually, and when it did, either Potter or the Dark Lord would be dead. Draco would have expected to instantly write Potter off.

But looking at him now, the picture of quiet determination, he wasn't so sure.



## CHAPTER 13B: A SPECIAL INTERLUDE

In which I hate plots.

### Guy Love with Harry and Ron

#### Episode Four: Let's Talk About Buggery, At Length

"Ron!" Harry yelled excitedly, bounding through the common room. "Ron, I did it!"

Ron's brightly-colored head popped out of the doorway at the top of the girls' staircase. It was still a little funny to Harry that Ron lived up there now, when Harry had never even been in that dormitory. Hermione must have had to fix the stairs for him, as they were set to reject boys. "Did what, mate?"

"I bottomed!" A second later, it occurred to him that he had just yelled that across a large room, and he felt his face start to heat up.

Ron's eyes widened and he took the stairs two at a time. "No way!" he said.

"Way!" Harry replied, a grin plastered on his face.

Ron plopped down on the couch next to him. "So? How was it?"

Harry couldn't keep his smile from taking over his face. "Brilliant. Completely brilliant."

Ron raised an eyebrow. "It didn't...hurt? I definitely think that would hurt."

"Well, it does, a bit, and usually a lot the first time -- like for Malfoy it really hurt." Harry considered briefly that Malfoy would probably kill him if he knew Harry was divulging such information to Ron, but continued anyway. "But not for me, because I *practiced*."

"Practiced?" Ron repeated. "With what? You don't have a..." His voice became very small. "*dildo*, do you?"

Despite all the sex he'd been having recently, Harry supposed he would always just be something of a prude, because even hearing such a word out of Ron's mouth made him burn with mortification. "No! No, no, I used my fingers!"

Ron wiggled his fingers thoughtfully. "But that's not *really* the same. I doubt it would have really, er, prepared you."

Gods, Ron was really asking for it. "Well, er, I may have used an engorging charm or two..." Harry mumbled.

Ron snorted. "You engorged your finger. Into a dildo."

"Will you *stop*?!" Harry said, becoming embarrassingly shrill. "Gods, I don't know why I tell you these things."

"Me neither," Ron said with a guffaw. "But I'm glad. You won't be living that one down anytime soon."

Harry wanted to weep. But that reminded him of something else he would likely never live down. "Oh, Ron, I did the dumbest thing..."

Ron practically slavered in anticipation for more ammunition to use against Harry. It was probably unwise to share this with Ron at all, but he needed to tell *someone*...

"I called him by his given name."

"Oh. So what?" Ron asked with obvious disappointment. Evidently this wasn't nearly embarrassing enough for him.

Harry had hoped Ron would understand what a blunder it was. "We don't *do* that! He *always* calls me Potter. We're not *friends*. I don't even know where it came from. It was an accident!"

Ron quirked an eyebrow skeptically. "For not-friends, you're pretty friendly..."

"But you *said* it was weird for me to call him Draco!"

Ron gave an almighty shrug. "I also said it was weird for him to deflower you, and now I guess he's done that."

Harry's heart swelled. Behind Ron's nonchalance was something else: acceptance. He was really, finally all right with Harry and Malfoy.

"Did he react poorly or something?" Ron fished.

Harry blushed. "Not exactly..."

"Not exactly' meaning what?" Ron prodded.

"He, erm. Asked me to say it again."

A wicked grin spread itself across Ron's face. "So he *liked* it!"

"Guess so..." Harry said miserably.

Apparently this was enough for Ron. "There you go, then. Maybe you should just call him by his given name all the time."

The idea made Harry feel odd. "I think of him as Malfoy, though. And what if I accidentally said it in front of someone else?"

"I wouldn't care," Ron said. "At this point I'm unshakeable. And no one would really jump to conclusions."

"I suppose it's not the sort of thing people really suspect," Harry said wryly.

"So," Ron continued, eager to get them back on the most mortifying track possible. "How was Malfoy on top?"

At that moment, however, the portrait swung violently open. "DO NOT ANSWER THAT QUESTION," boomed a familiar voice.

"Hullo, Malfoy," Harry mumbled, head in his hands.

"I am sick and tired of you telling him about *everything* that goes on between us," Malfoy ranted. "Privacy, Potter! If you won't respect your own, at least respect mine!"

"Okay, Malfoy, sorry," Harry replied, defeated.

"Now wait just a minute!" Ron interjected. "Harry can tell me whatever he likes! I'm his best mate!"

Harry surmised from the way Malfoy's eyes narrowed that this conversation would be taking a turn for the upsetting very soon.

"Well *I'm* his boyfriend, and as such I have a legitimate say in whether *my* sexual escapades get broadcast all over this castle!"

"Need I remind you whose friendship Harry chose in first year?" Ron said smugly.

"FOR THE LOVE OF MERLIN," Malfoy roared. "IT WAS A FUCKING HANDSHAKE. That was *first year*, who the *fuck* cares about that *stupid* train ride?!"

Why, why, why did Malfoy have to be so angry all the time? And *loud*?

Ron sighed with exasperation. "Well, Harry, I suppose we'll finish this conversation later without Captain Bitter over here--"

"No, please," Malfoy said, changing his demeanor completely. "Stay. But if you want to talk about us having sex, you have to tell us about you and Granger. In *excruciating* detail."

Ron's ears went instantly pink. Harry felt very bad for him, and also very much did not want to hear about Ron and Hermione having sex in excruciating detail. Malfoy was evil. How had Harry ended up with such an evil person? He was nice, right? He was a good guy. How had this happened? Malfoy was an evil scorpion, who had evilly seduced him.

"We're waiting," Malfoy said evilly.

Ron floundered. "Well, we, er, have sex and stuff."

"Ah, to be heterosexual," Malfoy continued sarcastically, stifling a fake yawn. "Honestly, Weasel, there's much more fun to be had on the other team."

"No, thank you," Ron said defensively. "Girls have arses too, you know."

"DO NOT WANT!" Harry yelled, his voice considerably higher than usual. Now they were talking about anal sex with Hermione. *Great*. Just bloody fabulous.

"You're right of course," Malfoy said politely to Ron, with an evil glance at Harry. It became clear at that moment that this conversation was, like so many other things, a very involved way for Malfoy to punish him.

"You're the devil," he stated to Malfoy.

"Good thing I'm a proper pagan and don't believe in the devil, or I'd be really insulted," Malfoy smirked. "And besides, you told me the other day I was the god of blowjobs, so that can't be right, can it?"

Ron erupted in laughter. "Oi, Malfoy, did he tell you what he did to practice for getting bugged?"

They were both evil. The whole world was against him. Harry decided to surrender himself to Voldemort.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN: In which I put this bitch to REST.**

The war escalated very suddenly. Draco's Mark, which had only burned a handful of times since September, was now a near-constant twinge. The Order, too, mobilized. Potter, who had been left to his own devices thus far as far as Draco could tell, was now being pulled away by McGonagall, Lupin, Moody or Tonks for lengthy discussions Draco could never hear about. While the adults projected an image of calm, the younger Order members could not disguise their anxiousness nearly as well, and were visibly jumpy and secretive.

Except for Potter. Potter could only be described as the eye of the storm. He was cool and collected, as if he'd been born for this. And, thinking back to his revelation, Draco supposed he had been.

Weasley and Granger began ambushing Potter at unsuspected times to get him alone to talk about the project. With everyone bustling around, it must have been as hard for them to proceed as it was for Draco to get Potter alone.

"Well, that's it then," Granger said briskly as they approached. "All that's left is the locket. When we've got that, there's only Nagini, and you'll probably have to do her and him at once." She glanced at Draco, belatedly realizing she'd said all that in front of him.

"*Surdesceri*," Potter said lazily, and they continued talking.

Potter, in fact, was treating him more coldly than he'd done in a long time. Draco knew it had to do with his Mark, which he kept a hand on more often than not, and the rising tension outside the castle.

Potter had a weary look about him most of the time, and Draco felt helpless. He wasn't even surprised at his sickening desire to help Potter, but with Potter angry at him there was little he could do anyway.

Draco found him one night reading on his bed, and figured now was his chance. He perched at the foot of the bed and slowly crawled towards Potter.

"I want you," Draco purred, making his voice low and gravelly.

"I am completely not in the mood," Potter said grumpily.

"And I'm quite accustomed to getting what I want," Draco continued regardless, though that wasn't quite true, not for a long time, not since his father had gone to Azkaban.

"You don't even know what you want," Potter snarled, and shut his book with a loud thump. The mattress groaned the same disappointment Draco felt as Potter stalked out of the room.

After that, they didn't speak for several days. Potter was busy, disappearing and reappearing without explanation along with the rest of the Order.

With nothing else to do, Draco stayed in the dormitory. He had the strange and disconcerting feeling that he was biding his time.

Finally, Potter showed up one evening. He looked terrible, like he was supporting a physical weight on his shoulders to match the metaphorical one.

Just as Draco considered saying something to win Potter over, his Mark flared as if aflame, and he let out a small grunt of pain, cursing the Dark Lord's sodding timing.

Potter didn't adopt his usual look of cold, disdainful fury, but instead looked at him seriously for a long moment. Finally he spoke, in a soft voice. "I know you want to get out, Malfoy. I can help you. Dumbledore offered you amnesty. I can do the same."

Draco felt a deep ache in his chest. "Your head's bigger than I thought if you think you have the same sway as Dumbledore," he spat. He prayed Potter wouldn't notice that he'd not directly answered the offer.

Potter's mouth quirked into a little smile. Draco wondered if Potter knew how disarming his smile was. He probably didn't. "Malfoy, we're Gryffindors! We *live* for this redemption shit! The Order would never turn down someone looking for protection. Christ, I mean, you're already here and everything -- the only change would be they'd take off your dog collar."

He finished with a mild look that Draco determinedly did not return. "Open your eyes," he snarled, perhaps with more vitriol than was necessary. "McGonagall will never, *never* grant me amnesty. I was damn near her least favorite student for six years. My *name's* enough to condemn me with you lot. Fuck, I knew you were naïve, but this is just willful ignorance."

There was a tense pause as the words hung in the air between them. Potter spoke in the same soft voice, but it carried a dangerous undertone now. "You're gonna tell me about *ignorance*? *You* are going to call *me* ignorant?" he said, getting louder. "Gods, Malfoy, all the *filth* that comes out of your mouth--"

"With everything you put in my mouth I can hardly get a word in edgewise, can I?" Draco shot back, knowing any sexual remark would make Potter flush with embarrassment. He was truly angry now -- only someone as bloody righteous as Potter could swing from offering him protection to railing about his politics in the course of one minute.

Potter didn't flinch, however, or seem to take in the remark. "My mum was ace at Divination, you know," he said, as though that meant something.

"Oh, what the fuck do I care?" Draco moaned, decidedly tired of this conversation.

"Magic," Potter said calmly, "occurs spontaneously in Muggleborn children. There is no such thing as intrinsic versus non-intrinsic magic."

Draco belatedly remembered the fiery argument where this must have come from. "Fine," he said, acting as though this didn't change a thing though in fact it was news to him. "I don't *care*, Potter."

Potter leaned in close. He smirked. "And you know what? You got fucked by a half-blood and you *liked* it."

Draco lunged at him. "You'd better shut the fuck up, Potter," he hissed, upset that Potter could get to him like this and that Potter was playing on his insecurities.

Potter shot him a condescending look. "What are you gonna do, Malfoy? Suck my dick?"

Draco punched him squarely in the jaw. Potter's head snapped back and he stumbled briefly before righting himself. "You hit like a girl," he said derisively.

Draco hit him again, harder. He swung a third time, but Potter dodged and landed a punch of his own to the side of Draco's head. His ear was ringing as he launched himself at Potter, determined to hurt him even if Potter was physically stronger. They fought brutally, shoving and kicking, fists swinging wildly and connecting randomly, until both were gasping for breath. And then they continued.

A door opened behind them but neither stopped swinging or even broke their glowering eye contact. "Whoa--*shit!*" said Ron Weasley, and Draco felt a magical tug before he was thrown backwards through the air. He landed high on the far wall with a painful thud and slid down to the floor, finding he couldn't move for sheer exhaustion.

"Oh fuck," Weasley said. "Malfoy, all right?"

Draco coughed in response, looking at Potter, who was still standing in the middle of the room, knuckles raw, breathing hard.

They shared a long look.

"Er," Weasley said, obviously uncomfortable, as he always was when they interacted.

"Go away, Ron," Potter said, still looking at Draco. "We're handling this."

"Clearly," Weasley muttered sarcastically, stalking out the open door.

Draco continued to stare coldly at Potter. He wasn't going to say anything before Potter did, and he certainly wasn't going to apologize.

Potter took a deep breath. "I know you're too smart to believe any of that, Malfoy. My offer still stands." He walked to the door of the dormitory and closed it behind him with a resounding finality.

Draco stayed on the floor for a long time.

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He awoke to an oppressive silence.

A glance to his left told him that Potter had gone to breakfast without waking him up, a sure sign that he was still angry.

*My offer still stands.*

Potter's words churned in his mind. His offer had none of the urgency of Dumbledore's on the tower, and if Draco were brutally honest with himself, he was more ready than ever to take the offered amnesty.

He would never agree with Potter and Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix, on many levels. No matter how rationally Potter argued, he could not suppress his mind's subconscious categorization of people according to their blood purity, nor did he want to.

But neither could he picture himself taking orders any longer from the Dark Lord. His methods were brutal, more brutal than Draco thought himself capable of. And he'd long ago let go of the misconception that helping the Dark Lord to greatness would bring him any power of his own. The Dark Lord was a cruel and selfish man -- Draco had learned that much when he'd been assigned to a suicide mission designed more to vicariously punish his father than anything else.

Draco couldn't agree to anything, however, until he had complete assurance that his mother would be protected. She probably assumed him dead by this point. With his father dead by the Dark Lord's hand, her protection by the Death Eaters was unlikely, unless Bellatrix were to do it. Though, Bellatrix's devotion to the Dark Lord was so fanatical that Draco easily believed her capable of abandoning her widowed sister.

Draco made his way down the dormitory stairs. The common room, too, was empty. He honestly had no idea what time it was; he'd gone all this time without a watch or the means to perform a simple *tempus* spell.

The oppressive silence followed him through the corridors. The portraits watched him closely, unnervingly closely, something he'd been able to ignore over the past several months by focusing on Potter, usually trudging along beside him.

It was when Draco reached the ground floor that the silence became disturbing. He'd not seen a soul since leaving the dormitory. Where was everyone?

He turned the corner into the Great Hall and the bottom dropped out of his stomach.

Empty. The Great Hall was deserted.

He walked warily through the castle, picking up speed as he went until he was finally jogging around corners, hoping to find Potter's surly face glaring at him for interrupting a top-secret meeting. But there was no one to be found.

He pushed the entrance doors open and walked out onto the grounds. It was pleasantly warm now.

After taking a few moments to affirm that the grounds, too, were deserted, he sat down on the grass near the front entrance, at a loss.

The Order's absence could mean only one thing: the war had started in earnest. He wondered where the battle was being fought. He wondered if Potter and the Dark Lord would face off.

He wondered if he would ever see Potter again.

"Malfoy?"

Startled, Draco turned toward the source of the voice. The tone of haughty incredulity was instantly familiar to him...

Just on the edge of the wards, in full Death Eater robes, stood Blaise Zabini.

Draco had several thoughts at once. Firstly, this meant that the fight was *here*, or at least very close. Secondly, it meant he could finally take his leave of wretched Hogwarts castle. And thirdly, it meant that *Blaise Zabini* had joined the Death Eaters.

"Zabini?" he asked, matching Zabini's incredulity.

Zabini raised an eyebrow. "I thought you were dead."

Draco rolled his eyes in return. "Clearly, you were mistaken."

Draco and Blaise Zabini had never really got on very well. Unlike so many people with whom Draco had got on badly at Hogwarts, their mutual disdain for each other had nothing to do with blood purity or House rivalry or any outstanding grudge. It was the fact that Draco came from old money and Zabini came from new money.

It was quite petty when Draco stopped to think about it. But it had always infuriated both of them when people assumed they were friends because of their shared aristocratic breeding and views on pureblood superiority. The truth was that they had each spent most of their Hogwarts careers trying to become the more respected name in Slytherin House.

"Are you a Death Eater now?" Draco asked snottily. "I thought you were content to leave the dirty work to those of lesser breeding."

Zabini's veneer of condescending aloofness slipped and he cleared his throat. "The Dark Lord's a persuasive man," he said quietly. Draco thought he could hear the faintest hint of regret tingeing his words.

Draco sympathized unbelievably. "Are you Marked?" he asked, careful not to betray any emotion one way or the other.

"Not yet," Zabini said. "This is my trial run." His brow furrowed. "You're not -- with the Order, are you?"

Draco let out a suitably convincing dry laugh and tugged on his collar. "I was captured. In *September*. Been here ever since."

Zabini pulled something out of his pocket and flicked it, revealing a knife. For a split second, Draco had the absurd thought that Zabini would want him to prove his loyalty, but Zabini merely motioned him closer.

"Cuts through anything," he said, and Draco's heart leapt.

After a few awkward moments standing too close to Zabini, Draco saw the collar fall to the soft grass. He rubbed his neck, groaning gratefully, and stepped off of the Hogwarts grounds.

"What are the Death Eaters doing here?" he asked finally.

"It's an attack on Hogsmeade. Everyone knows the Order's at Hogwarts, but the place is a fortress, so we're bringing

them out. Hopefully enough of them will die to finally kill the stupid group of vigilantes."

"It worked. Castle's deserted."

Zabini shrugged nonchalantly. "Shall we go, then?"

Draco managed a smirk, but his mind was racing. He could only come to one conclusion. He needed to get to Hogsmeade, and he needed a wand.

He could see Potter leaning over the back of a couch, wearing a modest smile. *It's mostly a matter of concentration, I suppose....you have to really want it.*

"*Expelliarmus*," Draco said calmly, and felt the magic working through his outstretched fingers.

Zabini's wand flew neatly into his hand.

Zabini's mouth opened, as if to say something, but Draco cut him off. "Zabini," he said seriously, making sure he had his full attention. "Get out while you still can."

He Disapparated to Hogsmeade, knowing that Zabini would not follow.

The small village was overrun with witches and wizards. Curses were flying everywhere, and Draco immediately ducked for cover. The differently colored flashes of light from wands looked almost like a light show.

His eyes swept the main street of Hogsmeade, careful not to linger on any of the bodies strewn across the ground, lest he see a too-familiar face. He spotted Potter and relief washed over him just for the knowledge that he was still alive.

But just barely. He was fighting two Death Eaters at once, firing off spells with almost acrobatic agility, and it looked like they would soon overtake him. One of the Death Eaters wore his mask, but the other...

Draco swallowed. It was his aunt Bellatrix.

He hesitated. To act now would be to show himself to one of the Dark Lord's closest Death Eaters that he was no longer loyal to the cause. But to go back now...was inconceivable.

A curse finally hit Potter and he faltered. Draco's choice was suddenly very clear.

"*Stupefy!*" cried Draco, hoping his stunner wasn't too rusty. The unfamiliar Death Eater fell to the ground in a huddle.

Which left Aunt Bellatrix looking straight at him. "What have we here?" she cooed, catching her breath. "My very favorite nephew! Draco, dear, we thought you were dead!"

"Well," he said, steeling himself for whatever madness was to come. "I'm not."

He didn't dare look at Potter, but could see out of the corner of his eye that he was struggling to move against invisible restraints. And looking right at Draco.

"Where have you been, pray tell?" Bellatrix asked him with a simpering grin.

"Hogwarts. I was kept prisoner." He willed his heart to slow down and cleared his mind, knowing Bellatrix would probably begin to pry at any time.

"*Legilimens!*" she shrieked, and he braced himself. He realized, however, when no probing force in his head became apparent, that it wasn't him she was interested in. It was Potter.

Potter, who couldn't occlude to save his life.



Fuck.

She pulled back, looking at him with a knowing grin. Draco cursed Potter for making this that much more difficult. "Oh-ho-ho, Draco! Potter here has *quite* the different story. You seem to have kept yourself occupied." He forced himself not to blush. "I'm glad your father didn't live to see his son playing bumboy for Harry Potter."

He swallowed his anger and schooled his features into his familiar old smirk. He decided to go all-out. The only way to get Bellatrix's guard down was to get her to trust him.

To get her to trust him, he had to betray Potter.

He'd never been sure exactly where he stood with Potter, or how much Potter cared about him outside the context of their almost complete isolation, but he knew that to save Potter and himself, he needed Bellatrix to think he was selling Potter out to the Death Eaters. And the only way to do it would be to get Potter to think the same thing.

So be it.

He let his smirk grow as he paused for a moment. "Surely you know better than anyone, Bellatrix," he said slowly, "that we must all do things we don't enjoy to get what we want."

Now he did look levelly at Potter. He briefly considered trying to communicate that he was lying, but it wasn't worth the risk. He felt a little twinge in his chest as realization spread over Potter's face, followed by betrayal.

Potter bought it. He thought he'd been played. Draco smiled coldly at him, thankful Potter couldn't speak.

Bellatrix seemed to believe him too. "And did you get what you wanted?"

Draco studied his fingernails. "Yes, Potter's trust proved quite useful in my escape. Plus," he added, casting another glance at Potter, "he's got a talent for sucking cock."

Potter strained violently towards him, utmost loathing painted across his features.

Draco considered how easy it was to convince Potter he'd been lying the whole time. Potter truly must not have trusted him much to begin with.

Bellatrix regarded him for a moment, calculating. *Please, please buy it*, he willed.

"Splendid, Draco," she said in a dangerous tone, "This will be a pleasure for you, then." She waved her wand and Potter collapsed to the ground. "Hurt him."

He swallowed. She was testing him. Bellatrix wouldn't kill Potter, he reasoned. The Dark Lord had said expressly that he would be the one to kill Potter. But Draco had no such guarantee for himself. Potter looked at him angrily as he stood up.

Sorry, Potter. "*Sectumsempra!*" he yelled, purposefully aiming the spell off-center. In a way, he supposed it was a sort of poetic justice.

Potter cried out helplessly, clutching his shoulder as he staggered backwards. "YOU FUCKING *WHORE!*" he screamed, voice thick with emotion.

It hit Draco like a slap across the face, but he knew he couldn't stop there. He concentrated his anger at the situation, looking Potter in the eye. "*Crucio,*" he hissed.

Nothing happened.

Panic swept over him. "*Crucio,*" he said again, raising his voice a little. *Nothing.* This couldn't be happening. He could do this spell. He'd done it before. He'd *practiced* this spell. "*CRUCIO!*" he screamed, desperate. Potter stood there, obviously confused as to what was going on.

Draco closed his eyes. Dark magic depended on dark feelings. He didn't *want* to hurt Potter. So he couldn't.

"This isn't my wand," he said to Bellatrix, cursing inwardly as he heard the too-casual tone of his voice and prayed she would believe him. "It's not working properly."

All it took was one look at the wolfish grin on her face to know that he'd blown it.

Bellatrix regarded him with a predatory smirk as she restrained Potter with a flick of her wand before training it on Draco. "Isn't that sweet."

He set his jaw and tightened his grip on his wand as his mind raced. He couldn't duel her -- she'd beat him easily, and probably have no qualms over killing him.

"Ickle Drakey can't curse his *boyfriend*," she said in a sing-song tone.

"The wand doesn't *work!*" he yelled. "Please, give me yours, let me show you I can do this! I *want* this, Aunt Bellatrix!" He let his almost uncontrollable panic work to his advantage as his voice cracked on the word 'want.'

He saw uncertainty flash across her face before he felt a push at his mental walls.

"Why are you occluding," she asked softly, "if you have nothing to hide?"

He had no answer. And he certainly couldn't let her see his thoughts. His eyes flicked to Potter, who was watching him intently. He wasn't cut out for this hero shit. Steeling himself, he pointed his wand at Bellatrix, shouting "*Eviscero!*" -- the first spell that popped into his head, hoping to catch her off-guard.

His heart sank when she blocked it silently, grin returning. He swallowed thickly. *Run*, his mind commanded, but his body didn't respond.

"This," she said evilly as she once again let Potter fall to the ground, "will be a pleasure for *me*. *Imperio!*"

He suddenly felt detached, all the stress and adrenaline of the moment gone. Everything would be all right.

Potter immediately jumped to life. "Malfoy, don't--"

*Hurt him*, said a soothing but firm voice.

"*Crucio*," he heard himself say, with all the conviction he'd lacked before. He watched, unaffected, as Potter writhed and screamed. What did it matter, really?

Yes, *that's right*, the voice told him. *It doesn't matter. He doesn't matter.*

Potter didn't matter to him, finally, and he was glad of it. All was well.

After a few minutes, though, the curse began to drain him.

Hmm, if he was starting to hurt from the curse, Potter couldn't be doing any better. He'd been under Cruciatus for a long time. He was contorting in what might have been a sickening way if Draco really cared, and his voice was raw from screaming.

*It doesn't matter*, the voice reassured him. *He deserves it, right?*

Right!

*He deserves worse, doesn't he?* The voice sounded giddy.

Yeah, Draco agreed. He does!

*He deserves to die.*

That didn't sit quite so well. What? He panicked. Wasn't this not supposed to happen?

*Kill him.*

I don't want to kill him, he insisted, the haze clearing away a little.

*Yes, you do.*

No, no, I really don't.

*Kill him!*

No!

*DO IT!*

He felt a pressure closing in on him. He resisted, but it was *so strong*.

*KILL HIM!*

"*AVADA KEDAVRA!*" he bellowed, and a blinding flash of green light erupted from his wand. He felt the Imperius curse break. *No, no, nonononono...*

He looked down. Potter was on the ground, curled in on himself. And twitching.

*And breathing.*

Draco was rooted to the spot. Potter was alive!

And then he looked to Potter's left. Bellatrix was dead beside him.

Her shocked face stared up at him, and his elation was replaced by a swooping nausea. He'd killed her. His own flesh and blood. Draco felt sick. He'd just *killed* someone. He'd killed a fellow Death Eater to protect Potter.

Which meant he couldn't ever go back. He was a traitor.

Raspy, uneven breathing from somewhere around his feet spurred him into action.

"Oh gods," he muttered, kneeling down. "Potter." No response. Draco's eyes traveled down to Potter's shoulder, where a sizeable bloodstain was blossoming.

Swearing wildly, Draco picked Potter up, noticing how light he was. "Potter," he said again, "wake the hell up, we have to get out of here!"

Potter seemed to have heard him that time, since he slowly opened one of his eyes to look at Draco.

"Potter, you're not well. You need a Healer."

Potter mumbled something unintelligible against Draco's chest.

"Say again?" said Draco desperately. Between the heavy bleeding and the prolonged exposure to Cruciatus, there was no telling how long Potter would last. "Don't move. I'll Apparate us to Hogwarts."

Potter gave a worrisome giggle. "Y'can't Apparate to 'Ogwarts, git..." he said weakly.

"Well, what the fuck should I do?!" Draco demanded, panicking.

"Honeydukes... trapdoor in the cellar..."

Draco ran as fast as he could while still cradling Potter, not bothering to check if he was being followed. He tore through the deserted Honeydukes shop, into the back room, down to the cellar, and magicked open the trapdoor. He climbed down and peered down what appeared to be a long tunnel. "*Lumos*."

He lay Potter down on the packed dirt to look at him. He was rather grey, and his shoulder was now a crimson mess. Draco didn't know any healing spells besides the most basic (his objective had always been to cause damage, not minimize it), so he took off his jacket and tore off some fabric with his teeth. "Where does this passage lead?" he asked, ripping the sleeve off Potter's shirt to see the wound.

"Mm... 'Ogwarts... Pomfrey's there..." He trailed off, closing his eyes.

"NO!" cried Draco, shaking him. "Don't you fall asleep..." He searched frantically for something to say to keep Potter awake. "Are you in pain much?" he tried, realizing as he did what a stupid question that might have seemed like if Potter were in his right mind.

"Shoulder hurts a bit..." Draco looked grimly at Potter's shoulder, which looked even worse exposed. "An' I 'ave a killer headache..." He rubbed at his scar uselessly. Draco didn't know if it was a good or bad sign that Potter couldn't feel the effects of several straight minutes of full-body torture, but he seemed not to have much motor control. Draco lifted his arm to wrap the fabric around his shoulder, hauling him back up into his arms before starting down the tunnel at a hurried pace.

"You tricked me..." Potter said after a moment with a groggy smile.

"Guess so," Draco replied absently.

"'M sorry...tha' I called you a whore... tha' was righ' rude of me..."

"I've been called worse."

"Bloody good actor, you are..." Potter muttered, dozing off again.

"No no *no*, stay with me, oh *fuck*...Potter!" He shook him again, harder. "HARRY!"

Draco thought he'd lost him for a moment before Potter giggled weakly. "Aw. You called me 'Arry..."

"So I did," Draco replied absently, increasing his pace to a jog.

Potter giggled again. "S'pose I 'ave to call you Draco then."

Draco smiled despite himself. "You don't *have* to."

"Draaaaaycoooo..."

Draco wondered momentarily if this was what Potter was like when he was really rat-arsed. He almost sniggered at the thought.

"D'you remember when I said Draco was a stupid name?" continued Potter, who seemed to be a bit more lucid now.

"Yeah," wheezed Draco, feeling a little breathless. He was beginning to feel the strain of holding Potter while he ran. He hoped this tunnel wasn't too long.

"I was lyin'. It's quite lovely, really." Perhaps Draco had been wrong about Potter being more lucid. "Draco Malfoy," he said to himself. "What's your middle name?"

"Lucius."

"Ewww..."

"Shut up, Potter."

"But that's an awful name," said Potter, giggling again.

"Oh, I'm sure...yours is much...better," replied Draco. He marveled inwardly over how he could argue with Potter even when Potter was practically dying in his arms in the middle of a Death Eater attack.

"It is," said Potter proudly. "It's James."

"That's the same...thing!" cried Draco, resisting the urge to drop Potter out of indignation. "It's your...father's name!"

Potter laughed, weaker this time. "You'd think they could be more creative."

Draco didn't miss a beat. "Tell me...about...your dad, Potter," he prompted -- anything to keep him awake.

"Dunno 'im, do I?" Potter muttered.

Draco cringed. Maybe not such a good choice. "S'pose not...what d'you know...about 'im?"

Potter closed his eyes. "Mmm...looked a lot like me."

"Yeah?" Draco knew this already, of course; the Potters were the most famous fallen heroes of the first war -- he'd seen their photos hundreds of times.

"E was a nice bloke. Brave. Bit of a bully sometimes though. Picked on Snape a lot when they were at 'Ogwarts..."

Draco couldn't suppress a smirk at that. "Really?"

Potter smiled back. "Yeah...s'why 'e 'ates me so much..."

"How much...longer...is this tunnel, Potter?" Draco panted, exhaustion creeping up on him.

"Thought you were callin' me 'Arry now."

"Sorry. Harry." When he spoke it deliberately, the name felt foreign on his tongue.

"Anyway, I've no idea," Potter muttered unhelpfully.

Just then, Draco saw a tiny speck of light, which he could only hope was the Hogwarts end of the tunnel.

"Thanks fr...carryin' me this whole way," Potter said with a dopey smile.

Draco, however, didn't have the energy to reply. Running with Potter's weight was becoming truly taxing, his muscles were screaming for release, and he hoped he could *make* it to the blasted end of the tunnel.

By the time he climbed out of a familiar statue of a humpbacked witch with Potter on his back, he was deathly afraid he would pass out before he could find Pomfrey.

He checked on Potter and his heart clenched to see that Potter had fallen asleep during the lag in conversation. He summoned energy he didn't know he even had and dashed to the hospital wing.

Madame Pomfrey opened the door with a stern expression -- which melted as soon as Draco laid Potter's prone form at her feet. He smiled at her. "Mission accomplished," he said cheerfully, and knew no more.

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When he awoke to the blindingly white ceiling of the hospital wing, he vowed that it would be the last time he ever did so.

*Potter*, he immediately remembered, and cricked his neck looking for him. He was in the next bed, looking ashen. The fact he was still there though, and not being carted off to the morgue, was reassuring, Draco figured in an uncharacteristic moment of optimism.

He was further reassured when he watched Potter long enough to see a definite rise and fall to his chest. He was alive. And bodily intact.

But what if *Cruciatus* had driven him insane? Or left him paralyzed?

At that moment, Madame Pomfrey came bustling into the room, and Draco did not waste a second. "Is he all right? Can he walk? Is he sane?" he asked, each question coming out louder than the last.

She shushed him impatiently. "Potter's uncanny ability to survive against all odds has served him once again. He's resting now, unless your shouting woke him up."

She didn't even bother to tell Draco anything about his own condition, so he assumed he was all right. Once she'd rounded the corner again, he crept quietly out of his bed and perched on the end of Potter's, watching him quietly while he slept.

Draco was more at sea than he'd ever been. Since childhood, his parents had made it plain what sort of person they wanted him to be, and he'd followed their guidance, made their beliefs his own, sought to follow in his father's footsteps.

Now his father was dead, his beliefs confounded, and his parents' guiding hand gone. He was alone, for the first time, and his own path lay before him.

He looked at his Mark, and back at Potter, and Potter's eyes fluttered open.

"Hey," Potter said croakily.

"Hey, Harry," Draco replied, liking the way the name felt more and more.

Potter smiled. "Hey, Draco," he said. Draco considered pointing out that he'd now said 'hey' twice, but decided against it. Instead, in a moment of mortifying sentimentality, he grabbed Potter's hand in his own, and held it.

Potter looked down at their hands for a moment. "Things are going to be different now," he stated.

"Yeah," Draco agreed. "They are."

Draco would never be like Harry Potter, crusader for the weak and dispirited. He couldn't lead the fight for equality among wizards, and he couldn't save the world from megalomaniacal Dark wizards.

But maybe he could be himself.

And maybe that would be enough.

*fin.*

Thanks for reading. I had a blast writing this and I hope it was half as fun to read.