

**Title:** Windfallen

**Author Name:** Cinnamon

**Rating:** R

**Spoilers:** PS/SS, CoS, PoA, GoF, OotP, QTTA, FB. Written between Order of Phoenix and Half-Blood Prince.

**Genre:** Drama, Slash

**Era:** Multiple Eras

**Main Character(s):** D, H

**Ship(s):** None

**Summary:** A new Unforgivable is spreading like wildfire and only Harry Potter is immune to its power, and only he can soothe its effects. When Draco is hit by the curse and left for dead by his own side, a misguided sense of duty compels Harry to care for him, and in doing so, he learns more than he ever thought possible about nightmares, hatred, love, and above all, the true nature of forgiveness. Harry/Draco, semi-consensual Charlie/Harry, Ginny/Lucius, and Ron/Ginny. Post-Hogwarts, post OotP, and very dark.

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**Author's Notes:**

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### **Windfallen** Chapter One: A Slow Drowning

*You could almost touch heaven,  
right there in front of you.  
Liberty just slipped away on us,  
now there's so much work to do.  
Oh, the door that closes tightly,  
is the door than can swing wide.  
Oh no not expecting to collide...*

He wondered if it were possible to drown in a rainstorm. If you grew tired enough, if you slipped and fell. If you were hiding and you had been for hours and mud had soaked through your clothes, could you fall asleep, maybe, and the rain fall into your face, mouth, nose? You could drown and never know it was happening, it would be slow and subtle, a slow drowning. Water sneaking into your air passages.

Harry risked a deep breath, the sound of it muffled under the rain. There was a distant flash of lightning and he flinched. How long had he been crouched here, in this underbrush? Hours, maybe days. Probably mere minutes.

But the people he was hiding from, their voices were fading away now, distant. All hell had broken loose and he'd been hiding from them ever since.

The voices were fading into the distance, and his muscles were cramping. He had to move, to retreat. It hadn't worked, the mission had failed, he'd have to report back to the Weasleys, to Ron, and tell him. Tell him it hadn't worked out, that there would be other chances, that of course it didn't mean there was no hope. It was a retreat, not a surrender. Ginny was still alive. She had to be. And they'd find her.

He glanced around carefully before darting out of the underbrush and over a fallen log, the wet pine needles covering the ground making his passage nearly soundless, just another shadow, brushing through an inky blackness of shadow.

Until he slammed into something that hadn't been in his path a moment ago. He reeled from the shock and slipped in the mud, coming down hard on his back, and for a stunned moment, he lay that way, rain running into his nose and mouth and stinging. Then, he rolled over and crawled onto his hands and knees, blinking hard to clear the rain out of his eyes.

*Ginny* Through the mud and the darkness and the blood, he recognized her. She was lying there, very still, but she had been moving when he ran into her. She had to be alright.

Slipping in the slick mud, he crawled over to her. "Ginny, Ginny, you're not dead," he chanted, his sticky hands pushing her hair out of her face. She was breathing, and just as he was about to crush her to him, he became aware of someone standing nearby, watching. Harry lifted his head and saw a shadow there.

He reached for his wand, fully prepared to defend himself with the Death Curse if necessary. A flash of lightning illuminated the shadow, however, and it felt as if the bottom had fallen out of his stomach. It was Draco Malfoy, his silver eyes narrowed in a calculating sort of way. He was watching how Harry crouched protectively over Ginny, and he was frowning thoughtfully.

But the men who'd been out searching had heard Harry call her name and they were circling back around, their calls loud, furious.

Harry glanced back at Ginny, unconscious in his arms, and then back at Malfoy. He'd have to do it. He'd have to kill him. It shouldn't be that big a deal, Harry had killed before. In his line of work, it was necessary.

"It's Malfoy!" his mind kept shrieking. And for one disorienting second, Harry couldn't figure out if that was a reason he *should* kill him, or the reason he couldn't possibly.

"Run," Malfoy hissed, and then he was gone. "Over here!" he shouted to the men who were searching, and Harry thought, for one second, that he was bringing them straight to them. But he wasn't, he was leading them away.

It was too strange and alien to even consider, and he was wet, muddy, and so very tired. Ginny was in his arms, and he was bringing her home. Finally, he was bringing her home.

He lifted her easily, she barely weighed a thing, and hurried soundlessly in the opposite direction Malfoy had taken.

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"Is she alright?" Harry asked anxiously, the second Ron slipped out of Ginny's bedroom and down the stairs.

"She's, she's alive. Harry, you *found* her," Ron replied, in a voice heavy with shock and awe and tears. "I didn't, I was so scared, she's?"

"Hey," came the gentle response, as Harry clapped a hand on Ron's shoulder. "I told you I'd find her. I told you. But how is she?"

"The doctor says she's weak and, and it looks like she'd been beaten. Or, or something. We don't know what happened to her. But he says she'll live. He's healing the injuries and everything."

"Is she awake?"

"No."

"Well, of course, I mean, she has to be exhausted, from everything?" Harry trailed off, not voicing his worry. Ginny hadn't moved or made a sound since he'd run into her, hadn't regained consciousness.

Ron grinned tiredly. "I'm so thankful, Harry."

Feeling uncomfortable, Harry shrugged. "I told you I'd find her." He didn't tell Ron about how he *had* found her. In the company of Draco Malfoy, who'd let her go. Helped her get away. It still didn't make sense to him.

But then, nothing about Draco Malfoy had ever made sense to him. Not even in school, and certainly not now, now that the war was on. He hadn't actually *seen* Malfoy since leaving school, which he was rather

glad of. He hadn't wanted to have to kill someone he recognized, not even someone who'd made his life Hell, someone fighting for Voldemort.

He'd killed. They'd all killed. Sometimes he woke up itching from all the blood he felt still stained his hands, arms, face. It tasted like copper, he knew. Blood of his enemies tasted the same as his own. Same as his allies. Pureblood, Muggle-blood, Mudblood. All the same and hardly worth fighting over, or even fighting for.

Charlie came flying down the stairs, his hair wild, almost as wild as his eyes. "She's awake," he said. "We think. Sort of. She made a sound, a word. She's talking. The doctor said it wasn't lucid, but, it was a sound. She's waking up. Ginny's waking up."

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But she wasn't, not really. Ginny was far, far away, in a dark place where snippets of words and memories were blending into some false reality. She didn't know which way was up anymore, it was like being swamped by a huge wave that tore the ground from under her feet and flipped her around so many times that she couldn't remember which direction the sky lay. Up or down? Maybe to the side. Front or back? She couldn't tell, and she didn't care.

Soft and gentle fingers were stroking her face, feeling for a fever, no, no, that was wrong. They hadn't been feeling for a fever, they'd been, touching. Tracing tiny circles over her skin that had made her giggle. Over her cheekbones and down her neck, over her collarbone, her chest, her stomach, lower. Breathless giggles, soft circles over her skin.

"Miss Weasley? Miss Weasley, can you hear me?"

No, no, that wasn't right, that hadn't been the words, whispered in her hair, lips brushing her ear. What had the words been?

"Ginny, Ginny, do you need me?"

"Yes."

"She spoke. Did you hear that? I heard her, she's coming around."

Ginny shifted and whimpered, trying to force the voices she didn't care for away, to bring him closer. Because she needed him, she couldn't *not* need him. And oh, how she'd tried.

"Please," she called out, because he was slipping away.

Someone took her hand. Rough, clinging, desperate, sweaty. Wrong, it was all wrong.

"It's alright, Miss Weasley, calm down. You're safe now, it's alright."

"The Malfoys will never touch you again, Ginny, I swear it."

Never again? It wasn't bearable, and she pushed it all away, falling deeper into darkness where a stranger's words did not distract from the fingers stroking over her pale skin, the soft, breathless giggles, and the whispers.

"I need you."

And if she never left this darkened place, he could have her, all he wanted.

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She couldn't remember if it had really happened that way, or if her mind had warped it into a fantasy, a dream.

*"Drink this, it will calm you."*

*Silk, she'd never liked silk. His voice was that way, silken smooth and flawless. God, she'd never liked silk.*

*Her eyelashes fluttered; she was so afraid. He pressed a glass of white wine into her trembling hand.*

*Ginny had never had wine before. Funny that the first time she was to taste it wouldn't be in a fancy restaurant in her finest robes. It would be shaken and terrified, a bruise making one side of her mouth ache, her robes filthy, torn. Fancy wine that felt like cold silk on her tongue. Everything about him was like silk. Ginny loathed silk, in the beginning.*

*"You're trembling."*

*"I'm scared." Rash impertinence, but Ginny had always said, if she was to die, she'd die defiantly. One was not born with flame red hair and a coward's spirit, after all, her mother had always said.*

*The corner of his lips turned upwards, a cool smile, cold eyes blankly tossing her own reflection back at her. "You should be. Drink your wine and eat. I will return with clean robes later." He had stood, his robes (her memory was playing tricks on her because in the memory, he wore silk, but she knew that he would never wear silk. Too garish, it reflected too much light and he liked his clothing to absorb light, never reflect. Velvet, mostly. It whispered when he walked.) fluttering around him. He glanced over his shoulder at the door and she tensed, waiting for something, some hint of what was to become of her. There was nothing in his eyes but an empty coldness and her own reflection. "You shan't come to harm while under my protection." And then he had turned and left her there, alone in the most opulent bedroom she'd ever seen, wine glass in her trembling hand.*

*"Ginny."*

She jumped and a bit of water sloshed over the edge of the tumbler she was holding, wetting her fingers. Ron stood in the doorway, looking worried. He did that now, ever since she'd been brought back. Randomly came and checked to see if she were still there, still alright. It vexed her, truth be told. He interrupted the remembering.

Ever since she had woken up, two days before, Ginny had found this reality harsh, grating, and jarring. There were no flutes of white wine nor velvet and silk in this house, her childhood home that belonged to Ron and had since her parents had been killed the year before.

"Are you alright? You looked a million miles away," Ron said, and Ginny blinked very slowly. Everything she did seemed slow these days, and she wondered if it was just that time had moved differently there. If it had fallen in slower patterns, lazy patterns, and everything here just moved too fast.

Her lips twisted in a smile, forced and slow, but an effort. "Fine," she replied, holding out the glass of water. "But I, I don't think I want this."

He took it automatically and set it aside. "Do you want anything else?" he asked anxiously. Ginny wasn't allowed to get out of bed just yet.

Idly stroking her throat, eyes distant, she asked softly, "Have we got any wine?"

If he replied, she did not hear it, because the remembering was coming back, and the harsh and grating reality fell away like a silken bed sheet.

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"It's not getting better," Ron moaned, flopping onto the couch near Harry. "She's still disoriented and strange. What if she doesn't get better?"

"She will." Charlie's voice was sharp, and Harry fought the urge to blush or flinch or, or something. It wasn't his natural inclination to react to Charlie's voice, but he felt, somehow, that it was his duty. "You remember how long it took after the Chamber of Secrets, Ron. Mum wouldn't let us take her to St. Mungo's then, and she was fine."

"What if she wasn't?" Ron snapped. "What if she was still broken and she hid it well and whatever happened while she was gone, it just broke her again? What if she doesn't get better?"

"She will," Charlie snarled.

Harry, for the most part, felt forgotten. He hadn't been here after the Chamber of Secrets incident, he didn't know how to help Ginny now. He'd done his part; he'd gotten her back, both times. This, this healing, it was beyond him.

"She wants, she wants wine. I'm going to see if Mum left any in the root cellar," Ron mumbled, slipping from the room.

"Ginny doesn't *drink* wine," Charlie said.

"Apparently, now she does." With one last glance over his shoulder, Ron was gone, and Harry was left alone with Charlie. He'd been trying to avoid that for weeks now.

Awkward silence fell, and then Charlie touched Harry's leg, right above the knee. "Hey," he said, and his voice was soft, hesitant.

Harry did not like being touched. He'd never been touched with anything other than brisk disgust as a child, and then, after that, the only one to ever touch him for any prolonged length of time, that, that had been Charlie. Harry didn't like to think about that.

"Yeah?" he asked shakily.

"I meant to talk to you."

No, no, Harry didn't want to talk. "About what?"

"That night, I, haven't had the chance to apologize, someone always seemed to be hanging around."

There was a reason for that. Harry hadn't wanted to talk. "I, forget it."

But the hand was still on his knee. "No, really, Harry." Charlie sounded earnest, pleading, and Harry closed his eyes.

"I'd drunk so much and I was so angry, I let it get out of hand, and you were just trying to help. I took advantage of you."

"I let you," Harry said softly. He shifted away, and the hand fell from his knee. "Just forget it. It's not worth thinking of." It was a subtle way of phrasing it. A gentle rebuke. It would not happen again. Oh please, oh god, don't let it happen again. Harry didn't think he could bear it.

He didn't blame Charlie, it hadn't been *rape*. It had been a mistake, a drunken mistake, and sure, Charlie regretted it. He had been frantic and worried and feeling helpless and Ron had been out. Harry had come by to see Ron after a mission, and Charlie had been crying, so Harry had come in to talk, to try to comfort him. After all, Ginny's disappearance was his own fault.

And then Charlie had kissed him and if that was what he needed, though it was strange and new and *Charlie*, Harry had kissed him back. He had noticed that Charlie was attractive, in a distant sort of way. If Harry was gay, he didn't know it. If he was straight, he didn't know it. He had had no experience with either to know how to define himself. So he had let Charlie kiss him, a desperate sort of hunger in the man's mouth that Harry musingly tried to reflect back at him. If he failed at it, Charlie didn't seem to mind.

After that, after his initial surprise had faded and he'd returned the first kiss, it was all too easy to let it go on. And then he was underneath Charlie and Charlie was doing *something* that Harry didn't understand, hadn't been aware of even being possible and certainly hadn't *wanted* and hadn't known enough *not* to want. He twisted and cried out but the sound was caught in Charlie's mouth, more hot kisses that were suffocating and sloppy now and Harry thought he would panic and choke on his own tongue because everything was flipped around somehow and he was flipped inside out and the whiskey on Charlie's tongue was soothing, somehow. And then it was done, and Charlie was whispering drunken apologies, trailing drunken kisses over his face, and Harry, was glad. That it was done. That Charlie wasn't crying for his sister anymore. That Charlie had something else, something of lesser worth, to cry over.

That Harry himself was broken and aching and crying, that didn't seem to matter quite so much.

"I wasn't thinking," Charlie whispered.

"You weren't in a position to think. You were worried about Ginny, we both were. It was, a mistake, but it's over, alright? Now stop talking about it because if I have to console you even a little bit more, I'll fall apart"

He smiled and Harry returned it and then Charlie was on his feet and leaving the room. Relief was warm and cradled Harry for a long moment, before he got up and went upstairs to visit Ginny.

She lay on her bed with faraway eyes, humming softly, and Harry watched her until Ron came up with a tumbler of brandy. "It was the best I could do," he told Harry quietly. "I'll send Percy out for wine later. It's strange. Like she's a stranger."

"She'll adjust to being home again, Ron. You'll see," Harry promised. "But I've got to go. I just stopped in for a while on my way to meet with the others."

Ron's eyes brightened with a mixture of worry and envy. "There's a mission, is there?"

Nodding, Harry replied, "There's to be a battle tomorrow night. By Godric's Hollow."

"Good luck," Ron whispered, his voice heavy with a yearning to be there. Harry didn't reply to it; he never knew what to say.

It wasn't a battle so much as a slaughter. Harry could not help but think of how much cleaner war would be if the Killing Curse did not sap so much energy. In order to conserve strength, it was only used rarely. The rest of the time, they relied on spells to cause physical harm. Blood and painful screams, flashes of light, it was a nightmare.

It had been a planned ambush. Dumbledore's spies had reported that a unit of Death Eaters was planning an attack on a Muggle-born family in Godric's Hollow, and Harry and his unit were sent to wait for them.

They'd have Dementors with them, Death Eaters had begun bringing at least two Dementors with them on every mission, ever since they had made an alliance with the creatures the year before. That was Harry's purpose to his unit. Every unit was equipped with at least one person with a strong Patronus, who would attack first and scare the Dementors away before they could seriously affect the other members of the unit.

The wizard in charge of the Patronus would be stationed a distance ahead of where the others waited to ambush the Death Eaters, and Harry waited in a tree on the outskirts of Godric's Hollow. Everything happened as planned, at first. They would bring any Death Eater that was left alive to Azkaban to await a trial, and the rest would perish in the fight.

What they didn't count on this time, however, was that the Death Eaters had developed a new Unforgivable. It wasn't an Unforgivable yet, of course, only because it had not yet been defined as such, but it would become one, as soon as Dumbledore and the ministry learned of its existence, and that was the night that they did.

He saw them coming, they weren't exactly all that subtle, with their masks and all. Of course, most of the Death Eater's power came from the terror inspired by those masks, and the marks that would scar the sky after their attacks.

Closing his eyes and forcing the sound of his mother's screams out of his mind as the Dementors approached, Harry waited until the right moment, and then dropped from the tree, screaming the Patronus Charm. A stag flew from his wand and chaos erupted as his unit streamed from their hiding place, casting their body binds and their stunning spells, their firebolts and lightning blasts; the sky was lit with flashes of colour.

But then something else happened, something that chilled him straight through that he didn't understand.

*Cassesprit!*

The flash that accompanied that curse was something like the Killing Curse, as oily and sudden and frightening, only it wasn't green. It was violet and it shivered with a cold chill, and snapped like lightning, into one of Harry's men, who fell over, as if dead.

It was a slaughter, after that. Harry's men fell like flies to this new curse that did not seem to drain the energy as the Killing Curse, but have nearly the same effect. Mass chaos and screaming and they tried, so hard, but were defenseless against this strange new curse, and so many of them fell.

Harry fought with everything he had, had managed to take out a few, but it was useless. All his men were falling, and he was felt like he was the only one left, in a desperate panic, he lashed out with his free hand at the Death Eater nearest to him, knocking that mask to the ground.

Draco Malfoy stared back at him, startled at suddenly being unmasked. Harry was no less so. He had grown comfortable, killing and hurting men in faceless masks and here was proof that not only did the Death Eater have a face, it had a face Harry knew nearly as well as his own.

A hoarse shout from the darkness came. *Cassesprit!* Snakes of light hurled towards Harry, a nameless Death Eater from the dark aiming to curse him. Malfoy reacted almost blindly, it seemed; Harry was too stunned to react at all, and then Malfoy was trying to back out of the way but he tripped on someone on the ground and he stumbled forward, trying to catch his balance and, and it hit him instead.

Malfoy dropped to the ground and lay very still. All around, that stillness was reflected in the stunned silence that fell over the Death Eaters. Silver hair shone in the stillness, and Malfoys' pretty, pale face stony against the dark, dark ground.

"Go," someone hissed, and the Death Eaters were fleeing. They'd cursed Lucius Malfoy's son, the punishment would be extreme.

Harry just stood there, staring in shock at Malfoy. And then someone spoke, a voice gritty and harsh with grief, fear, and hatred. "Leave him, Harry. Leave them all to rot. Someone will come take them to Azkaban in the morning. We've got to get our men back, maybe there's something to be done. That curse."

He helped them transport the fallen to St. Mungo's, and after it was done, after he'd reported to Dumbledore everything he remembered about the new curse, Harry nearly returned home, ready to collapse with exhaustion.

He didn't, however; he couldn't. Dumbledore had told him that the new curse didn't kill, those hit with it were still alive. Malfoy was still alive.

Apparating back to the road, he knelt over Malfoy's body. After all, he owed him this, this one favor. Malfoy had helped him save Ginny, and Harry could not in good conscience leave him there on the road until morning, when he would be carted off to prison and maybe execution.

He'd hide Malfoy at his house until he recovered from this curse, and then he'd let him go, in return for helping with Ginny. Then they'd be even and the next time they met, Harry could kill him with no remorse.

And he would, he vowed. This didn't mean he didn't someday intend to kill Malfoy. It just meant that he couldn't do it until they'd evened things out between them. It would be too like Malfoy to die with Harry owing him a favour, just to irritate him.

So he took Malfoy home, to his small flat in London, and laid him on the couch, straightening up and studying the other boy. It seemed so strange, Draco Malfoy on his couch, and Harry frowned, running his fingers through the silver blonde hair to straighten it, as if the incongruence lay only in that he was lying on Harry's couch with messy hair, not that he was laying on his couch at all.

It didn't help matters much, so Harry let his hand fall away, cocking his head and studying Malfoy again. Dumbledore and said that it seemed like a regular, if very deep sleep, from which they should waken naturally. Those struck with the curse from Harry's unit were receiving careful monitoring at the hospital, Dumbledore was hoping there'd be no more effects of the curse. But then, he hadn't *felt* it. It was dark and slimy and frightened him more than he cared to admit.

But Malfoy looked peaceful enough at the moment, and Harry was so exhausted. He got a spare blanket and tucked it carefully around the sleeping boy, before making his way to bed.

He was woken by ragged shrieks coming from the main room, where he'd left Malfoy. The painful, panicked screams sent him running from his bedroom, dressed only in his boxers and still struggling to put his glasses on.

Malfoy was on the floor, he'd fallen from the couch and the blanket was tangled around him. He was thrashing, his eyes opened but rolled into the back of his head, and he was screaming.

"Nightmare?" Harry whispered, falling to his knees and touching Malfoy cautiously. Calming somewhat even at that light brush of fingers, a strangled whimper was wrenched from Malfoy's lips and his body stilled a bit, though his chest heaved with panicked breathing. As soon as Harry retracted his hand, a scream tore from Malfoy's mouth, and he hurried to touch him again, this time pressing his palm against the other boy's heaving chest. It soothed him.

Malfoy's skin was burning with a strange sort of fever that didn't seem quite physical, and Harry retracted his hand and ran to the kitchen to get a cool cloth to bathe his face. It no longer mattered that it was Malfoy who was here strictly because Harry owed him a favour. It was someone who was ill and Harry needed to help.

He hurried back, kneeling there and stroking Malfoy's face. "Shh, it's alright," he soothed, and Malfoy calmed, his body relaxing with every stroke, every whispered word.

And then his eyes opened, slowly, fluttering weakly. As soon as they did, Harry tensed, because he was suddenly remembering who it was he was bending over; Only Malfoy had eyes that shade. "Don't," Malfoy rasped, grabbing his wrist. Then, his eyes narrowed in puzzlement, or maybe wonder. "Potter?"

"You'll be alright," was the automatic reply.

"Don't let go of me," Malfoy whispered. "Just don't let go."

If that had even been a moment of lucidity (Harry wasn't sure it wasn't some strange feverish rambling), it faded quickly, and Malfoy's eyes closed and his breath hitched. He moaned, a frightened sort of moaning, and Harry was afraid to stop touching him, for fear that whatever it was, it would take Malfoy again, and



make him scream. It was a terrible sort of desperate, lost screaming and he didn't know how much of it he could stand.

But he was exhausted, he could barely move. The cool cloth whispered over Malfoy's face, Malfoy rested nearly peacefully, and there was nothing to be done until morning. Maybe Dumbledore would know what was going on. Maybe this had happened to the others hit with the curse as well.

As for now, the only thing that seemed to help was if Harry were touching him. There was no help for it then; Harry dropped the cloth and lifted Malfoy's body against his chest, grunting with the effort that took. He staggered back into his bedroom, lay Malfoy in his bed, carefully loosened the other boy's robes so he did not turn and strangle himself in the night, and then Harry slipped into bed beside him, close enough to touch.

He was so exhausted that he did not even care about the strangeness of lying with Draco Malfoy pressed against his side, and Harry fell asleep quickly, Malfoy unconscious and quiet beside him.

**A/N:** The curse in this story comes from Beneath You, where it was mentioned almost in passing and made me think about the nature of the curse and thus led to the plot bunny that led to the creation of this story. The song lyrics at the beginning of the chapter come from the Tea Party song 'The Messenger'. Thanks to Umbralin, as usual, for the betaing job, and Aarynn and Sarah and all the rest for reading over it and telling me it was good enough to post. And Ani, for inspiring me to write it.

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## Windfallen

### Chapter Two: Everything is Twisted

*It's all coming back to me now.  
But try as I have to keep,  
The taste of you off of my tongue;  
Your face from my fitful sleep.  
And I wait and hope against hope like before.  
And I wait and hope that I won't anymore.  
And this won't stop till I do.  
Until I learn to kill the thought,  
Of everything I could have said:  
Of everything I wished I'd not.*

There was a difference between remembering and dreaming, and of course Ginny was aware of that, but the exact line between them was blurring. She couldn't quite tell when she was awake and remembering, or asleep and dreaming, and she didn't think she wanted to.

It had been strange at first, and frightening, having been taken by men in cowls and cloaks who spoke in strange whispers and cursed her into unconsciousness. She'd been with Harry, they'd had lunch together, and he'd been walking her back to her flat when the men had come out of the shadows. Blackness had followed quickly, and she'd woken up in the largest bedroom she'd ever, ever seen, on a bed that was softer than any she'd ever slept on. She hadn't noticed anything except the size, and the way it echoed like a cavern. She worried that she had died and this was some sort of hell, and then she had noticed the warmth and the silk underneath her and the window that showed endless gardens stretching all around, far, far below. Not hell, then; she didn't think they had gardens in hell.

It was Malfoy Manor, she'd been told later. Not at first, when the house elf brought her a meal of sandwiches and pumpkin juice, because the elf had been told not to talk to her. It was later, after she'd thrown the sandwiches and juice against the wall and crossed her arms sullenly over her chest and glared in silence at the elf. A hunger strike against the feeling of powerlessness. It was that which called Lucius to her for the first time, and he had brought wine to calm her. After that, it sort of settled into a hazy blur. Fear subsided into something like dull compliancy, which then faded into emptiness. Hours felt like days and days seemed to last forever, and the only thing to break the monotony was Lucius' visits. He came once a day, bringing food with him, and stayed until she'd eaten every bite, and it was only after the first week that Ginny noticed that she'd begun eating more slowly to prolong his visits, if only because it broke the emptiness of existing in this huge room with nothing to do except wait by the window and watch the hours and days slip by.

Sometimes Draco Malfoy walked in the gardens, she recognized him by his blonde hair, coarser than his father's, and his stride, which was longer, more hurried, and not half as graceful. Draco never came to visit her, however, and sometimes she wondered if he even knew she was there.

She did not know why they took her and kept her at Malfoy Manor, and after the first few days, she slid into a blurry, dream-like state, and now, remembering those long, hazy days, Ginny wondered if there had been a potion in her wine. It made sense now, and made things less, frightening, if only because she could feel at least a little as though she was not responsible.

Days and days of endless nothing broken only by visits from a man who fairly dripped with aristocratic disdain and danger and yet offered no blatant threat. It was too easy to let her days begin to wrap around him, and then her mind, and her heart, and then.

Ginny.

Remembrances broken, Ginny blinked blankly at the doorway of her small, garish, rough, uncultured Weasley bedroom. It was always jarring, when realities shifted that way, and Ron was standing in the doorway.

Ron.

He looked worried, but then, he always did. "You alright?"

"Perfectly."

He nodded, though he did not look sure. Cautiously approaching the bed, he lifted one hand but let it drop before he touched her. His hand landed on the bedspread and she studied it distantly, wondering what it would be like to be touched by a hand that rough and large, with nails bitten to the quick. It was hard to remember, the last time she'd been touched by him had been when she was a child, before the Chamber of Secrets, before she became something Alien and Strange and touched by dark magic, when she had still been just his little sister.

He'd asked a question but she'd missed it, too caught up in musing memories of childhood, so Ginny smiled vacantly and stretched a bit, like a cat. Her eyes, narrowed and lazy, noticed the way his watched her pajama top lift a bit, showing her stomach, pale and lightly freckled. Letting her arms drop, she watched as his eyes nervously skittered away, and she frowned, confused.

"I'm fine," she said again.

"Right," he stammered, and a slight flush was blooming on his face.

He left soon after and Ginny was glad, content to stare out the window and drift away in memories again.

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Malfoy stirred and Harry woke with a start. His bed, his room, his house, his arms around Draco Malfoy. All realizations slammed into his mind almost simultaneously, and then Harry yelped and sat up, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes with the back of his hand and blinking. Everything was a blur so he reached for his glasses and things blinked into focus.

Rumpled blonde hair mussed up around a pale face, cheek creased from Harry's pillow, one hand curled beneath the other cheek, eyes closed, lips slightly parted, he didn't look like Malfoy. He looked, looked like a little boy.

Harry frowned, running a hand through his hair and slipping from the bed. He dressed quickly, casting nervous glances at Malfoy from time to time, worried that the strange nightmares would return, or, worse, that the other boy would wake up before Harry could escape.

After he was clothed, Harry hesitated in the doorway for a long moment.

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## Windfallen

### Chapter Three: Daisy Chains

*So now you're sleeping peaceful  
I lie awake and pray  
that you'll be strong tomorrow  
and we'll see another day  
and we will praise it  
and love the light that brings a smile  
across your face ...  
Hold on  
hold on to yourself  
for this is gonna hurt like hell...*

The first time Lucius had kissed her was one of Ginny's favourite memories, because it was the first time he had let her out of her room, taking her out into the gardens. She didn't ask why she was being allowed such a privilege, didn't really care, because she was outside and the sun was on her face and it felt like it had been years, locked up in that room.

Lucius came with her, of course, though sometime in the past few days he'd stopped seeming to be a captor and started being something else, something less frightening. He stood nearby and watched as she took off running into the gardens, unable to walk or stop to smell a single flower because there were miles and miles of paths to run and the sun was on her face and the wind was in her hair and she felt free, even though that freedom was just an illusion.

There were butterflies too, monarch butterflies and tiny blue ones, and Ginny had always loved butterflies. So she'd chased them through the garden, laughing when one got tangled in her hair, even as she gently helped it escape.

Lucius had told her later that it had been that burst of laughter that had first made him look at her as anything other than someone he was meant to keep, to guard. Because she was smiling and she hadn't smiled in all those days spent with him up in her room, and because the way the sunlight hit her hair and made it shine like molten fire.

He'd kissed her angrily; angry that she wasn't just a little girl, angry that nothing was ever easy, angry that she'd been so careful in freeing the butterfly. Ginny should have been scared, but somehow Lucius, even angry, did not have the power to make her afraid.

She'd been startled, of course, but had kissed him back, sweetly and gently until his fury was gone and he was kissing her back the same.

And she hadn't been afraid.

She was afraid now, though. Because Ron was angry and he wasn't talking to her and all he seemed to do was glare. As if she had betrayed him. And he didn't even know the half of it. And sometimes when he thought she wasn't looking, he'd look at her in ways he wasn't supposed to, dark and possessive and angry ways, and she was scared.

And lonely, so lonely. She'd never felt so out of place and inadequate. As if she'd been pulled from her home and softened, smoothed, carved into something intricate and sophisticated and then returned to the Burrow where every sharp corner scratched and burned.

All Ginny wanted to do was go home. This wasn't home any longer, this was what she had come to fear the most. Graceless and awkward and everything Ginny had been before Lucius had molded her into something smooth and elegant. And then there was Ron, with his dark, dark eyes. Ginny just wanted to go home.

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Malfoy was sitting up and his eyes were dark and glazed. Harry hadn't tied him up since that day he'd come home to find him screaming, and Malfoy hadn't had the strength to try to escape. And so they existed together and talked sometimes and did their very best to forget that this was awkward and strange and that Malfoy was wasting away. And every night they slept curled up together and never ever talked about the strangeness of that.

"I'm going out," Harry said, poking his head in the door early one evening. Malfoy looked panicked and Harry was quick to reassure him. "Just for, like, twenty minutes. We're running out of food. Is there anything you want me to pick up for you?"

It had been said out of courtesy and Harry really should have known better. Malfoy was not so far gone in his madness that he did not still show signs of being a complete prat from time to time, and ten minutes later, Harry left for the store, armed with a list of at least ten items that Malfoy had decided he needed.

He bought food first and then went to get Malfoy's things. While standing in line and worrying that he'd taken too long and Malfoy would need him, Harry was startled to hear a not-too-familiar voice behind him.

"It's been years."

He turned and almost didn't recognize her. Then he blinked. "Pansy?"

She smiled a little. "Wow, Potter, you remembered. Ten points to Gryffindor."

More startled that she'd bothered to speak to him than anything, Harry stared for a long moment and then said, "Hi."

She rolled her eyes. "Hello."

What else was there really to say? And then he noticed that she was staring pointedly at the things he was holding. "Funny," she said, eyes lifting to hold his gaze levelly. "Those are all Draco's favourite things."

Harry nearly panicked but then took a deep breath and said, "Malfoy? I haven't thought about him in years! Do you two still see each other?"

"From time to time," she said absently. "Though not lately, of course. He's missing."

"Ah, sorry to, uh, hear that. I'm just shopping for myself. I happen to, umm, need some new leather gloves and, socks and such."

She ran a finger over the smooth leather of the gloves Malfoy had insisted he needed and smiled sadly. "Ah. Well. It's a good brand, Draco never wore anything else."

And then she turned and walked away. Letting out a relieved breath, Harry bought Malfoy's things and then hurried home.

Malfoy was lying there, awake, when he came in, and Harry relaxed. He'd been so scared that the madness would come again while he was gone.

"Here," he said, setting the things down on the bed. "Socks, clothes, hair comb, specialty shampoo, and those sodding leather gloves you insisted that you needed. Why was that, again?"

"They're comforting," Malfoy said absently, pulling them on.

"Ah. Right. Well. There you are then." He thought about telling Malfoy about seeing Pansy, and decided against it. "Are you going to have a bath? Want me to run it for you?"

"Bite me." Malfoy glared. He looked ridiculous, lying there in one of Harry's old shirts, wearing those gloves, and Harry shrugged and smiled a bit.

"Just checking. Are you gonna bathe though? Just let me know. Wouldn't want to walk in on you or anything. I've got enough nightmares to deal with, thank you."

Malfoy smiled weakly, and it was worth it, teasing him to see Malfoy smile. Harry was getting extremely worried about him.

"Maybe? After I sleep for a bit." He looked irritated, admitting that weakness, but Harry never teased him about it or even discussed it that often, aware of how difficult this whole thing must be.

"Right. I'll be in the kitchen, do you want anything to eat?"

"Stop treating me like I'm about to break," Malfoy growled.

Harry sighed. "Malfoy, being hungry is not a sign of fragility, I was just being polite."

"Well stop it," Malfoy mumbled sleepily.

"Forgive me," Harry said dryly.

"Forgiven," was the soft reply, and then Malfoy drifted off into sleep.

Not twenty minutes had gone by before there came a knock on the door. Terrified that it was Charlie again, Harry tensed and didn't move from the kitchen table, hoping that they would just go away.

They didn't. Knocking again, they waited for about thirty seconds and then there was a soft click as the lock snapped open. Startled, Harry stood up quickly and reached for his wand. They were breaking in.

The door slid slowly open and Pansy stood there, holding her wand. When she saw him, she blinked and frowned. "Ah, damn it, Potter," she snapped. "If you weren't sleeping or something, why the hell didn't you open the door?"

"What are you *doing*?" Harry cried. "Usually when no one answers the door, it means they don't want company!"

"Oh, trust me, I hardly want your company," she sneered.

"Then why are you here? Did you follow me?"

"Where is he?" she asked softly, ignoring his questions.

Harry was instantly nervous. "Who?"

"Oh, come on, Potter, you think I don't know that you were at that battle where Draco disappeared? We've questioned everyone from our side and they said the last time they saw him, he was on the road, and you were standing over him! And besides, then I see you in a shop buying all his favourite things? You've got him here, I know you do, and I want ..."

"Pansy," Malfoy greeted from the bedroom door, and Harry stiffened.

"What are you doing out of bed?" he hissed.

Malfoy, who was leaning against the doorframe and looking more pale and weak than ever, just tossed him a faintly amused look. Pansy's eyes were shining with tears and her lower lip was trembling. "You look like hell," she whimpered.

"Thanks," he said dryly.

Malfoy took a step forward and his eyes widened, face turning almost gray, and Harry was by his side in an instant to catch him as he staggered and nearly fell. Swearing under his breath, Harry helped Malfoy over to the couch and then glared at him. "Stupid thing to do, Malfoy, you shouldn't have tried to walk so far."

Pansy's eyes were very narrow. "Get away from him," she snarled.

"Pansy, love," Draco chided, trying to smile at her. It came out as more of a grimace.

"Draco," she snapped. "Just what is going on here? What are you doing, letting him fuss over you like this? Why didn't you come back? Why, why didn't you send word to me?"

Draco closed his eyes, too weak to reply, letting his breath out in a soft hiss. Harry glanced over his shoulder, considered briefly, pointed his wand at her, and cast a sleeping charm. Pansy fell to the ground, and Harry then pointed his wand at the front door, which she'd left open, and slammed it shut.

Dark gray eyes met his when he turned back to Draco, and Harry swallowed nervously. "If you hurt her," Draco threatened quietly, "I'll kill you."

"I won't hurt her," Harry promised. "As long as you go back to bed. I'll help you."

"I don't need your sodding help." Draco lurched to his feet and walked stiffly into the bedroom, trembling with the effort it took not to fall.

Sighing softly, Harry studied Pansy's body for a long moment and then pulled a kitchen chair into the middle of the living room. He lifted her and sat her in the chair, magically binding her ankles to the legs of it and her wrists to the arms. After a moment of consideration, he cast a silencing charm on her as well. Then he ended the sleeping charm and Pansy started snarling and thrashing. He watched for a moment to make sure the binds would hold, and then, nodding in satisfaction, went into the bedroom to check on Draco.

The other boy was sleeping fitfully, but at least not caught in the grips of the curse. Rather than risk it, and feeling more exhausted than ever, he returned to the living room.

"I'm going to sleep now," he told Pansy, who glared hatefully at him through a curtain of stringy hair. "You may as well do the same."

She tossed her head and Harry, probably unintelligently, ended the silencing charm to hear what she had to say. "You're *sleeping* with him?"

He blinked. "I sort of have to," he said.

"If you touch him, Potter, I swear, I'll ..."

He cut off her screams with the spell, pushed her hair out of her face, and frowned at her.

"Just go to sleep. We'll discuss all this in the morning."

And then, body aching with exhaustion, he went back into the bedroom, stripped to his boxers, and slipped into bed beside Draco, who curled up into a tiny ball as soon as he felt Harry's warmth, letting Harry pull himself up around him.

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Harry made breakfast the next morning. Eggs, bacon, toast, muffins. He wasn't all that great a cook, really, but he was nervous and couldn't bear the thought of lying next to Draco longer than necessary, or sitting in the living room watching Pansy sleep. So he cooked.

Fixing Pansy a plate, he popped his head into the room to check if she was awake. She was, and she glared hatefully at him.

"I, umm, made breakfast," he said.

She growled.

"If you promise not to scream, I'll untie your hands and take the silencing charm off. Just, just don't scream. I'm sorry about this, really, but I've got to keep Malfoy safe until, till I figure out how to reverse the curse."

Her eyes were dark, calculating now, and finally, she nodded. Harry sighed in relief, untied her hands, took the gag away, and handed her a plate.

"Thank you," she said acidly.

He tried not to be offended. "I'm going to check on Malfoy, I'll be right back."

He brought a plate into the bedroom, chewing his lower lip nervously. Malfoy wasn't awake yet, so he left the plate on the dresser and went back into the other room with Pansy.

They sat in long and awkward silence.

"Why are you doing this?" Pansy finally spat.

Harry blinked. "Excuse me?"

"This. Why? Why are you keeping Draco and me here?"

"I, well, I'm keeping you because I don't want to have to kill you and I also don't want you going back to his father and telling him that Draco's here. As for him, I'm keeping him because, he needs me."

"For *what*? And since when have you cared what Draco Malfoy needs?"

"He did me a favour; I owe him."

"Fine way of showing gratitude, keeping him here against his will."

"I saved his life, Pansy. In keeping him here, I'm hoping to save his sanity as well."

She considered this for a moment, and then said quietly, "You honestly want him well?"

"I don't want him to suffer. There's been so much suffering."



"Then let him go with me. I, I know some things."

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## **Windfallen**

Chapter four: Disease

*Do I care anymore - if there's a new beginning  
The simple plan is broken  
Every time it's given  
I needed thrust and love but grab the hand of hate  
To help me up again  
To fuck me up again  
Destroy all you see  
Tattoo the world - change everything  
Save the world for me...*

*Lucius did not like to laugh himself, but he liked to hear Ginny laugh. He did not like to dance but liked to watch her dance. He liked to see her clothed in silk, satin, and velvet, see her hair shine, liked it when she left it down and wild around her. He liked to feed her things she'd never tried before, liked the way her eyes widened when he did things to her he'd never done before, brought her to places she'd never before even dreamed were real. He liked to call her his flower, his blossom, his pet. He said she tasted like vanilla, the purest of tastes.*

*He kissed her, and every time he did, her eyes would flutter shut and she'd forget her old life completely, forget the poverty and the loneliness and how desperately she had wanted to be noticed and touched, cherished and worshipped as no one in the world seemed to want to, until Lucius. He kissed her and she closed her eyes, every time.*

He kissed her and she screamed. Her eyes flew open and Ron's flew open and they were so close and so *similar* that for a moment, Ginny thought she was looking into her own eyes in a mirror. He blinked; she didn't. The illusion shattered and she flinched.

"Oh god," Ron whispered. The words caused his lips to move against hers again and she scrambled away as quickly as she could. "I thought you were asleep, I mean, I wasn't, wasn't thinking, I, Oh god. Ginny, I didn't mean to scare ... I was just ... I'm sorry, I wasn't ... I was going to whisper in your ear."

Did she believe him? Ron's ears turned red when he lied and just now, his entire face was burning. She stared at him, shocked, and her lips were tingling. She couldn't tell if it was from memory or from Ron's lips on hers.

"Okay," she said faintly, accepting his excuse. He looked incredibly relieved.

"I didn't mean it," he said again, imploringly.

"Okay."

He scrambled off the bed and backed towards the door. Ginny warily slipped back until she was curled against the pillow, quilt pulled up to her chin. "G-Ginny?" She closed her eyes and did not reply because she knew, instinctively, she did not want to hear what he had to say. "You taste like vanilla."

And she wanted to die.

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## **Windfallen**

### Chapter Five: Respite

*I'll lie by your side and whisper your name.  
I'll clock all your dreams and knock over rails.  
I'll let go my past, write your name in my skin.  
I'll travel through time to love you again.*

There were books, piles of books, and parchment, all tucked away in another stone chamber. Pansy led Harry there later on in the day, gesturing to the books.

"These are the books we used to develop the curse. I'm going to teach you exactly how it works, all the steps we took to arrive at the final spell." She looked tired, and hooked a piece of hair behind her ear. Harry wondered if the exhaustion was due to the curse, or from having been part of the people responsible for the plague.

"How do you know what steps were taken to create the curse?" he asked.

"Because I was the one who created it."

She wouldn't say more as she flipped through one of the large textbooks, reading over pages heavily scribbled with notes in the margins. Harry finally gave up questioning her, and waited until she was finished flipping through the pages. She looked up.

"You know, of course, the basics. A Dementor feeds on hope and good thoughts, good memories, all of that, and in return, gives off negativity. Nightmares, madness, fear. It's an exchange of energy, good for bad. The good is taken inside the Dementor and returns back to the victim as everything dark and bad. So it's almost twice as powerful as you'd assume, because not only is it blasting darkness into you, it's sucking out light. The more light you've got inside of you, the more the Dementors can feed on. You've got a tremendous amount of light, that's why they affect you so strongly."

"Then why doesn't this curse affect me?" Harry asked, sitting heavily beside her.

"Because the curse is just a twisted version of this power. I'll explain that in a moment, I don't understand fully myself. Anyway. I spent a few weeks with a distant relative of mine, an aunt. She's a Squib, my parents don't acknowledge her, but I rather like her myself. She had a television, and spent hours trying to explain satellites to me. The idea that a single image could be taken and shot into the sky and then distributed so widely was what basically inspired this curse. It acts like that, like a satellite. Naturally, the Dementor's magic is wild. It isn't specifically aimed at anything, it just naturally latches on to anything with light in the vicinity. What the curse was designed to do was harness that energy and direct it into the mind of the victim hit with the curse. The Dementor's power was sort of melded into a collective consciousness, which is drawn from for the curse. We didn't realize it would be contagious." She shrugged.

"Oh, because it would be perfectly fine to just have it affect your enemies. It's only wrong when it spreads to your side as well." Harry rubbed his forehead, developing a headache.

Pansy shrugged. "It was war, Potter."

"Mmm. What do you want me to do about your curse? I still don't understand why I'm the only one who is immune."

"I don't fully understand either. It's got to have something to do with the strength of your Patronus, or the spell that kept you alive as a child, or the strength of your light and hope and all that. I'm not sure." Her head snapped up suddenly and her eyes narrowed, as if she were listening to something in the distance. Then, she was up and out of her chair, walking briskly towards the door. "Draco needs you," she said sharply over her shoulder.

"Save the world and be Malfoy's nursemaid at the same time?" Harry mumbled sarcastically, even as he took off quickly after Pansy.

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"It'll still happen like that," Pansy told him, fiddling idly with a goblet of water. Malfoy was sleeping, the nightmare having worn off, and Harry was aching and exhausted. "He'll have the nightmares. They're incredibly draining, but the potions will help recover strength. He'll need to work at it, though. The lack of undisturbed sleep has drained him physically, he'll need to start working on building that back up, as soon as he's strong enough. The curse has weakened his magical strength, so he'll need to start working on that. It's incredibly damaging, not just to the mind. Not to mention that the nightmares don't only have an effect when he's suffering from them. They disturb the mind. That's why madness is the inevitable result. After experiencing that which you most fear for so long, it becomes hard to *stop* reliving it, even in the waking hours, unless he is distracted."

Harry frowned. "Distracted. What do you mean?"

"I'm not sure." She looked, suddenly, quite tired and weak herself. "Listen, Potter, I don't know, I mean, it's getting harder." She shifted, looking uncomfortable.

"What is?"

"Remaining upright for so long. Not screaming when I sleep. Not listening to the whisperings of fear in the back of my mind. I don't know how much longer ... I don't want him to know ... I mean, I've told him it will be slow, he thinks I've got weeks or even months until the full curse hits me, but I don't. I can feel it coming, even now, and I don't want him to know. And I don't want you to waste your time making it better for me."

Harry blinked. "But it'll be hell, and you told me that I can make it a little better. Why wouldn't you want me to?"

She shrugged and smiled a little and said, "Because Draco needs you and I don't. I want you to protect him at all costs."

"Why do you care so much about him?" Harry whispered.

"I owe him about a thousand favors, you should understand what that's like."

"I do," he said softly.

"Besides, it's, it's my fault. This whole curse. It's mine. And I deserve to suffer with it."

Harry didn't like her, hated her for creating a curse like this, so he didn't argue. Somehow, he felt Malfoy would have hated him, if he ever found that Harry hadn't even bothered to argue. But since when had Harry placed any stock in what Malfoy would have hated him for?

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"Ginny."

She didn't blink, didn't move, didn't hear him at all. Ginny wasn't even aware that he was there, and it wasn't because she was dreaming or remembering or anything of the sort. She was dead and broken inside and Lucius had let her go and she did not want to be Ginny Weasley anymore because Ginny Weasley had never been worth anything until Lucius Malfoy had touched her, loved her.

"Ginny," Ron said again, and he touched her shoulder, and then stroked her hair, brushing it over her shoulder so it fell down her back. Ginny didn't move. Ron cleared his throat. He swore under his breath and grabbed her so roughly by the wrists that they would bear fingerprint bruises afterwards. He jerked her forward, until she fell against him and out of her bed with a startled squawk.

"Ron!" she yelped. "What are you ..." The rest of her words were cut off as he lifted her and slung her over his shoulder, and she shrieked and pounded against his back with her fists. It was more life and fire than she had shown in weeks, and Ron wondered why he'd suffered so much patience when patience was obviously not what Ginny needed.

"What did he give you?" Ron asked calmly, as he maneuvered her down the stairs.

She quieted, breathing loudly, listening.

"What was it that he had for you that made you hate *this*? This house and this life and this family?"

"I never said I hated this," she said, her voice husky, on the edge of tears.

"You've been talking in your sleep since you arrived."

Ginny took a ragged breath but did not reply.

"Wine, was it? And silk, and fine clothes, and books, and poetry, and roses that changed colours in the sun and shadow? I think I remember all of that."

"Ron," she said quietly, pleadingly. "I meant no offence."

Ron was carrying her through the kitchen now. "But really, who wouldn't love what Lucius Malfoy has to give over what we have to give? What *I* have to give? Who wouldn't want grace and poise and velvet furniture and silk bed sheets and windows that gaze out over hills and hills of formal gardens? Anyone raised in a hovel like this would desire that. Anyone who was sent to school with second-hand books and robes would long for that." He paused. "Hell, I would have longed for that, once. Before I learned what really mattered."

"Please put me down," she whispered. He didn't.

They went out the back door, into the back garden, and she flinched and whimpered at the sudden brightness of the sun.

"Who wouldn't give their heart and body to a monster if he offered them all the riches of the world?" Ron asked her, solemnly. And then he put her down and spun her, away from him. Her eyes were held tightly shut, against the light of the sun, and he braced his hands on her shoulders. "Someone who had all of this waiting for them at home. Open your eyes, Ginny."

She did.

The garden was lit brightly with strands of sunlight, and flowers that, while not roses, and not changing colours in the sun, glowed with more colours than anything in Malfoy Manor ever had. Bright colours that were not inhibited by what was fashionable, by not wanting to seem crass, and that very disregard for rhyme and reason made it beautiful, wild, as Ginny once had been. There were twisted, broken stone paths that her father had laid down himself, in Muggle fashion, with stone and mortar and a shovel, beaming with every flagstone he put in. There were brambles and thistles, overgrown raspberry bushes, and the faint giggling of Garden Gnomes playing chase in the weeping willow beyond. And beneath that willow, the two modest graves of Arthur and Molly Weasley.

She swallowed heavily and her knees buckled, because there was not a smooth, rounded edge here, no peace or comfort in richness and grace. It was wild, untamed, and it was that secret part of Ginny that she had always loathed and loved with the same passion. The part her father had called her fire, that her mother had called her spirit, the part that Lucius had calmly tamed and destroyed when he made her into his doll.

Ron's hands slipped off her shoulders and to her elbows, holding her because she swayed dangerously and almost fell.

"Do you see it?" Ron asked.

"D-Dragonflies," she murmured weakly, because there were so many of them there, and Ron had used to catch them for her.

"It isn't velvet and lace and wine in crystal goblets," he said quietly.

A strangled whimper stuck in her throat, and she took two trembling steps towards the graves of her parents. Somewhere, a bird sang, and a gnome giggled.

She stumbled and Ron caught her, holding her hand tightly as she made her way over the broken path towards the willow tree, and he followed her to the ground when she collapsed in the thick grass beside their mother's grave.

Ginny was shaking, and Ron brushed the hair out of her face, over her shoulder. Her eyes were brimming with tears.

"Ginny, I ..."

She kissed him, because it was very quiet in the garden, and because it was easy, like falling into him, against him, and he caught her instinctively, he always had. She kissed him because it stopped whatever difficult thing he'd been about to say, and because he'd kissed away her tears and kissed her awake and then blushed and said it had been an accident. She kissed him because there were tears in his eyes and he was like her, scared and scarred and falling apart in the middle of a war that neither had wanted and neither had anything left to give to. She kissed him because it suddenly seemed so simple, and because, because it was so very quiet in the garden.

And he kissed her back and somehow, it got quieter, and the only sound was the whisper of dragonfly wings.

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"What are you doing?"

"Are you alright?"

"Potter."

Harry blinked and glanced uncertainly into Malfoy's eyes. "Yeah?"

"I don't need your assistance standing on my own."

He smiled a little and stepped back. "Sorry."

Malfoy rolled his eyes. "What did you bring me here for?"

They were standing in a large, empty cavern, lit with sconces in the walls. There was no furniture or anything, and Harry had brought Malfoy there partially to distract him from the fact that Pansy was very weak and had been sleeping all day, and partially on her advice, to help him rebuild his strength.

"I want to teach you how to cast the Patronus Charm."

Draco looked at him in silence for a long moment, and then smiled, a strange, small smile. "Alright."

"I don't know if ... Well, it's difficult, and you might be too weak, but we can try, I ..."

"Potter. Just get *on* with it."

"Right. Right." Harry nodded. "Okay. You have your wand? Okay, watch." He demonstrated the charm. He'd used it so often that it did not even take a Dementor to bring the strength he needed to conjure up a strong enough memory. The silver stag pranced about the room and then faded away. Malfoy did not look all that impressed.

An hour later, however, he looked weak, exhausted, and his face was bathed in a fine sheen of sweat. He hadn't produced anything more than a weak silver cloud, and the fury at having Harry so easily create a stag when he couldn't even do half as well, was making him tremble.

"It took me a while to get it," Harry offered, watching Malfoy worriedly.

Malfoy didn't reply.

The next day, they tried again, and the next, and the next. Malfoy's frustration grew, but so did his strength. Still, it was not enough, he could not produce a full Patronus.

"Maybe you should try focusing on another memory," Harry said desperately, after watching another silver mist disappear. "A happier one."

Malfoy was furious. He had never liked to be beaten at anything, Harry knew, and now it probably seemed to him that Harry was purposely parading the fact that he could do this charm and Malfoy couldn't in front of him, gloating him. Harry wasn't.

"A happier one?" Malfoy snarled. "A happier memory? I haven't *got* one!"

"Well, you have to, because that one's not working," Harry said reasonably. "What's the memory?"

"Oh, yes, Potter, I'm about to spill my secrets to you."

"Hmm. No need to get bitchy. Maybe it's just that you don't have anything to practice *on*. When I learned, Lupin had a Boggart that would take the form of a Dementor, that's my biggest fear, and I practiced my Patronus on it."

"Well, we haven't got any Boggarts here," Malfoy snapped, before stalking away. Harry watched him go, feeling strangely dejected but not going after him. He knew it didn't matter, Malfoy wouldn't go too far away, and in a matter of hours, he would be weak and falling apart in Harry's arms.

Later that day, when the curse hit Malfoy and he lay panting and moaning, locked in nightmares, Harry held him and cried. He was so scared and so lost, and this curse was going to destroy every person he knew and loved and millions more he didn't even know, and now, holding Malfoy tightly and stroking his back, crying into his hair, Harry could not help but be thankful for it. For the madness that let him have these moments with Malfoy where he did not have to be on his guard, did not have to suffer Malfoy's arrogance, nor his cruelty. The madness allowed Harry to hold him, made Malfoy need him, and in those moments, Harry could wonder about that almost-kiss that Malfoy seemed to have forgotten, think about that soft smile that had caused the world around him to shift. Think about how good and how right it felt to hold Malfoy.

And it was so, so wrong to wish that the curse never left. To wish that Malfoy could suffer this curse forever, just so Harry could keep him, like a pet, or a child, and sometimes, like a lover.

So he held Malfoy and he cried and he wished that things were different, and in another cavern a long distance away, Pansy fell prey to the madness and screamed, but no one came.

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Malfoy was sleeping, Pansy was brewing potions, and Harry was sitting alone in the cavern of books. There were burning candles all around, and his hair was wild, his eyes burning from lack of sleep. Crumbled parchments lay all over the floor.

He was drawing, because he'd spent so many consecutive hours writing notes and ideas and thoughts that words stopped having any distinctive meaning. The English language was blurring into indistinguishable sounds and sketching and scribbling seemed to be infinitely faster, and to convey more meaning.

The only sound was the hissing of candles and the scratch of his quill, and Harry was lost in dark, panicky thoughts, as he sketched the same thing, over and over again.

It was Malfoy's face, and it was bathed in tears. Harry couldn't *think*, couldn't concentrate, couldn't break the fucking curse, all he could do was doodle Malfoy's face all over his parchment, and every picture showed tears raining down his cheeks. He couldn't do it, couldn't, would never, he wasn't a hero, anyone who

thought he was one was wrong, was incredibly naive. The world could not be saved by a boy like him, who was so scared and so weak and so *alone*, who owed the world so much and had nothing left to give, except blotchy, ink sketchings of a boy who was going mad.

Harry snarled and threw his quill, collapsing in tears on the table. His tears mixed with Malfoy's inky ones, and the drawing blurred and twisted beneath him.

"I can't," he whispered, after the tears had ebbed. "I'm not a wizard hero, I'm just a boy. How can I stop a curse like this? I didn't even know I was a wizard until I was eleven and was always too busy to study. Hermione should be the fucking hero."

He trailed off, resting his chin on his folded arms, unaware of the ink stain on his cheek that so closely resembled the ones he had drawn on Draco's face. He thought about Hogwarts, Hermione and Ron, and how much simpler it was to find the Philosopher's Stone and beat Malfoy at Quidditch, than to save the world from a contagious curse and hold Malfoy every time the other boy descended into madness. And where were Ron and Hermione now?

It didn't matter. The war had destroyed more important things than the first friendships he'd ever had.

"They're lucky," he mumbled, thinking of Malfoy and Pansy. "Their nightmares don't last forever, but I'm stuck in this one and no one holds *me* and keeps it away. They threw me into this. It's a fucking nightmare."

Maybe he'd lost his mind to the curse like everyone else, and this *was* his Dementor-inspired nightmare.

But even if it was, Harry *would* beat it. Even if it wasn't real.

He began reviewing everything Pansy had told him about the curse and how it operated, determined now to find something, *anything*. He mumbled under his breath while he went over his notes.

And then a sudden thought made him sit up straighter. "It channels the Dementor magic like a satellite," he whispered. "Like Muggle television. Well, how do you stop the signal from being transmitted to a television? Cut the wire?" he trailed off, chewing his lower lip. "Or, or destroy the source of the signal."

He blinked. "Destroy the source. Kill them all. Fucking kill them all."

"You've got ink," came a bored, lazy voice from the doorway. Harry instantly recognized it as Malfoy's. "On your face, I mean."

He glanced up and stared blankly, his exhausted mind unable to process the fact that Malfoy was there, and had been for a while. Watching Harry lose his mind, listening to him talk to himself. "What?" he asked.

Malfoy frowned. "When was the last time you slept?"

"Slept?" Harry echoed, blinking.

Malfoy swore quietly, came into the cavern and took him by the wrist, tugging him out of his chair. "You're going to sleep," he told Harry. "C'mon."

"Can't," Harry mumbled, even as he swayed dangerously, eyelids fluttering weakly. "I have to research, have to, and then we were going to try the Patronus again, and, and ..."

"Shut up." He tugged Harry into the bedroom and nudged him out of most of his clothes and then forced him onto the bed. Then he turned to go, and Harry grabbed his hand.

"No," he said sleepily, shaking his head. "Don't go, please, Malfoy? Stay with me."



Malfoy studied him with dark, unreadable eyes, and then said, with a sardonic smile, "What, Potter, and hold you even after I threw you into this nightmare?"

"Please," Harry whispered, but he needn't have bothered. Malfoy was already crawling into the bed and curling up around him, holding him and stroking his wild hair soothingly.

Harry was asleep in seconds.

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Ron had left and memories of Lucius were whispering, but Ginny would not fall prey to them. Lucius hadn't come for her, hadn't stopped his son from taking her away, had not stopped Voldemort from nearly killing her when he'd found out about her and Lucius. Instead of remembering, she paced the kitchen where her mum had spent so many hours cooking, remembering everything she could about her. How she smelled and spoke and moved.

It helped keep her mind on the present until Ron walked in, looking tired and worn as he always was.

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## Windfallen

Chapter Six: Peace, Then.

*If you wait I will wait, Taste I will taste  
If you love I will love, Run I will run  
To my last breath.  
Last night I turned around and thought I saw myself turning  
Inside the strangest dream of life unloved and cities burning  
Awake in my arms, You cry unharmed  
Our age of the hours, While they still devour all  
So take it all.  
I doubt if we Will know it's gone  
Cause we've been here  
Since time began.*

"I don't feel like learning Patronus today," Malfoy said, sounding sullen. He was pale, his eyes rimmed with shadows, after a sleepless night plagued with dreams. Harry hadn't slept either, had held Malfoy and whispered secrets to him in an attempt to calm him, had cried over him because he was helpless, and now they sat listlessly on the floor of the practice chamber.

"You have to keep your magic strength up," Harry told him, though his heart wasn't in it.

"There are other ways," Malfoy said. "I'll teach you something."

"I don't want to learn a dark spell," Harry snapped.

Malfoy smiled coldly. "I always did wonder how you got into Gryffindor," he said casually.

"What do you mean?" Harry cried.

"Well, I thought courage was a requirement."

There was silence for a moment, and then grudgingly, Harry said, "I'm not afraid of dark spells, Malfoy."

Gray eyes narrowed. "Perhaps you should be."

Sighing, Harry shook his head. "I won't learn dark magic. I will not lower myself to that."

"It's not the magic that determines whether something is good or bad. Magic is just a force, to be bent to your will, and should that will be good, so will the magic. Just because it is dark magic does not mean it is evil."

"Usually dark and evil go hand in hand," Harry said dryly.

"Mmm, do they? Perhaps it's time we got over that bias."

Harry sighed again. "Fine, Malfoy, teach me your dark magic if it will make the time go by faster and help you get stronger magically. I don't really care."

"You should." There was a strange light in his eyes. "You really should, Potter. Get up." Harry was sitting on the floor, leaning against the wall, and he stood, rolling his eyes.

"It's not an Unforgivable, is it?"

"No, not even close," Malfoy said with a small smile. "Raise your wand like this." He demonstrated, watching Harry carefully as he copied the motion, holding his wand at a slight angle. "It isn't a swish and flick for this one," Malfoy said quietly, almost teasingly, and the sudden bittersweet memories of the Time Before, in Charms class, and the troll that Ron and he defeated with their Swish and Flick nearly brought Harry to his knees. He trembled once and Malfoy saw it but did not comment. "It's more like this," he said, snapping his wrist so the wand slashed through the air like a sword, changing the wand from a director of magic, to an advocate of violence.

Harry imitated it, clumsily, and Malfoy smirked. "You're enjoying this," Harry murmured.

"I am," Malfoy said with a smile.

He shivered a little, eyes widening, because that smile had taken him off guard. "What's the word for this spell?"

"I'll show you the spell. Get behind me." Malfoy took his arm and tugged him closer and Harry suddenly became a thousand times more nervous.

Malfoy repeated the slashing motion with his wand and hissed, "*Incursus*."

Something seemed to tear through Malfoy, and Harry only felt it because he was hovering behind him, peering nervously over his shoulder, fingertips resting just between Malfoy's shoulder blades. It was a force that seemed to make his skin shiver and grow fractionally colder, and then tear through him and through his wand, spilling from the tip in the strangest shadow Harry had ever seen. It was not the flat and dull lack of colour that shadow usually was, it was something that seemed like, should you stare into it long enough, you'd see all the colours of the rainbow. Like rainbows that hovered on oil patches, it was at once black and every shade imaginable, and so very deep that Harry felt he could fall into it, if he was close enough. It moved and shuddered with a life of its own, and it took a nearly endless second for Harry to realize that it was not a formless anti-shape, but had a definitive form.

It was a winged horse, a Thestral, black, or sort of black. Black that is endless shadow. It made no sound as it moved with effortless grace, stalking the dancing shadows with arrogance in every careful, precise step.

"What is it?" Harry whispered, shaken. There was something distinctly not right about the creature.

"My Patronus."

Peering at the creature over Malfoy's shoulder, Harry said doubtfully, "It's sort of black."

"I had noticed." The creature gradually faded out, and Harry carefully moved away from Malfoy, still confused.

"Okay, I don't understand," he admitted finally.

"You build your Patronus out of your happiest memory, and that is one built out of my worst. Hatred and terror and pain."

"A Dark Patronus?" Harry guessed softly, a little awed at seeing all the vulnerable parts of Malfoy take a physical form.

"In plebian terms, I suppose. We call it the Incursus Curse. It is not exactly the same as a Patronus, however. Where a Patronus defends, this will attack. It will kill." Malfoy was watching him carefully.

"Kill?" he echoed, eyes widening. "Kill what?"

"The same thing a Patronus will defend you from."

"Dementors."

Malfoy smiled again, and Harry was nearly undone. It was not right for Malfoy to smile at him like that, as if he approved of something, approved of Harry. "Yes," he said simply. "Now you do it."

"How?"

"Same was as you do the Patronus, only instead of your best memory, think of your worst. The one that makes you hate the most, or fear the most."

Harry tried; he thought of Voldemort killing his parents, and of Ron losing his magic. Of Ginny losing her mind and Charlie touching him. He thought of the war and the new curse and all of the blood he had spilt and touched. For hours, he tried, unable to produce anything more than the barest hint of a shadow.

All the hatred and fear and pain of Harry Potter was not even a shadow of Draco Malfoy's, and the knowledge humbled him and made him want to cry, because he hated so much, so badly, and yet, somehow, Malfoy hated more.

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Sometimes at night, Malfoy didn't slip into the curse. Sometimes they slept together calmly and peacefully, still curled together out of necessity and maybe, by now, habit or something more. They fit together though, and Harry had the vague idea that his sleep would be disturbed more often than ever by nightmares, were it not for the arm that somehow always ended draped over his hip, and Malfoy's soft breathing brushing his forehead, where his lips rested lightly, certainly not in a kiss, but just because they were that close.

More often than not, however, Harry would wake in the middle of the night because Malfoy cried out in his sleep, and so he was drained, exhausted, and running on very little sleep. Still, his exhaustion was nothing compared to Malfoy's, who always, always, fell asleep first.

Harry moved just fractionally closer, letting out a soft breath and smiling a little at the irritated sound Malfoy made in his sleep, annoyed at the slight disturbance. And then, nuzzling just a little against Malfoy's jumper and thinking rather hazily that he had never felt safer than this, Harry drifted off to sleep.

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"I think I love you," Harry said, and he hoped to god it hadn't been out loud. He was dreaming, and the dream was a nightmare of sorts but not really. More of a reflection of the things he longed for which could never be, so there was an undercurrent of feverish and unrequited longing that twisted what would otherwise have been the sweetest dream he had ever recalled.

In the dream, Malfoy was smiling the way Harry had never seen him smile. Fully, with his eyes lit up and the sparkle of laughter dancing in them. There were a thousand golden snitches all around, and the wind created by their wings was enough to ruffle Malfoy's hair and yet make no sound. There were strange colours drifting through the air in the way that dreams seemed to make the extraordinary become ordinary.

"I think I love you," Harry said, and Malfoy smiled and said, "I love you back."

The colours danced like dragonflies all around, and Malfoy kissed Harry and Harry kissed him back, whispering into his mouth, again and again, "I think I love you, I think I'm in love with you, I've fallen in love with you." And then, finally, as the colours drifted to the ground like forgotten flags, and softly, in a voice that was rather aching and lost, "Help me, help me, I've fallen in love without you."

And then he woke up, because Malfoy was moaning beside him, moaning and sweating and lost in his own brand of nightmares.

Harry stared blankly at him for a long moment, before remembering what the real world consisted of, the colours and the Snitches and the kisses fading. He wondered how long he'd slept for, and wondered if he had said anything out loud while he was sleeping, anything that Malfoy might have heard.

He hoped to god he hadn't.

"Malfoy," he whispered. "It's alright. Wake up." It did no good, but he cuddled closer, breathing in the scent of Malfoy even as the other boy's panicky breathing slowed. They were as close as they had been in the dream, but yet so far apart at the same time. Malfoy was *his*, was in his arms, closer to him than anyone had ever been (even Charlie had never gotten this close, when he was on Harry or even inside of him, he'd never been wrapped in Harry's arms). And yet at the same time, Malfoy was so far gone in nightmares that he didn't know it.

"I think," Harry whispered. He licked his lips and Malfoy's eyelids fluttered. His mouth opened and he moaned weakly. "I think I love you?" It was a question, and Malfoy did not reply. He shivered and whimpered. "I think I love you," Harry repeated, and then he kissed Malfoy's lips, experimentally, lightly. His breathing hitched and he shuddered, burying his face in Malfoy's hair, stroking his back again and again. "It's okay, it's okay, I love you," he chanted, until Malfoy calmed and was soothed. Falling into a regular sleep, Malfoy instinctively burrowed closer, until it was impossible to know where Malfoy ended and Harry began, and Harry thought contentedly that that was how it had always been meant to be.

Harry lost all track of time, and could not tell how long had passed before Malfoy's body stiffened and he sucked in a startled breath, waking almost instantly.

While his breathing calmed and the mad lights in his eyes faded and almost disappeared, Harry studied his face in silence. When Malfoy finally closed his eyes and grimaced a little, swallowing hard, Harry whispered, "What do you dream about?"

Malfoy's eyes flew open; he was furious. "I told you before, Potter," he spat. "I do not wish to discuss it."

Harry touched his face, tracing the red flush that rage brought to the other boy's pale cheeks. "Shh, I'm sorry," he whispered.

Wary silver eyes narrowed and met his. "What are you doing?" he whispered, swallowing hard.

"Answer me and I'll answer you," Harry replied, very softly. "Tell me what your nightmares are."

"Why do you want to know?" Malfoy asked evasively.

"How can I destroy them if I don't know what they are?"

There was blank and empty nothing in Malfoy's eyes as he struggled to deal with Harry's words and Harry's hand on his cheek. And then he blinked and an anger that was more self-preservation than anything bloomed there, and he hissed, "You want to know what my nightmares are, Potter? Surely you've got enough of your own and don't need any of mine."

Harry smiled because it did not matter if Malfoy shrieked and howled and tore him apart with his words and his tongue or even his teeth. The entire world had been steadily tearing him limb-from-limb for years and he had let them punish him for something he had not wanted, had not caused, and could not stop. And now, if Malfoy was to punish him for daring to love him, then Harry would gladly suffer that punishment. At least it was one he deserved.

Malfoy could hurt him and Harry would let him and like it.

"I need all of you," he told him. "Your nightmares and all the rest."

"I haven't offered you a single part of me," Malfoy spat.

Harry shifted awkwardly and his eyes skittered away. "I deserve this," he whispered, speaking of the hurt he felt and the confusion. Malfoy misunderstood.

"That's what this is, then? Another of your quests for punishment?" And then Malfoy was on top of him, pressing down on him, nearly suffocating him. Harry liked it. "You want a nightmare, Potter?" Malfoy hissed, and Harry nodded frantically.

"Yes, yes, yes," he said.

Malfoy kissed him hard, angrily, and Harry's eyelids fluttered weakly. His shaky hands held nervously to Malfoy's shoulders and his entire body was trembling.

Malfoy pulled away with a curse. "I don't want this," he told Harry, furious. "And neither do you."

Harry stared at him blankly. "When has it ever mattered what *I* want?" he said, not angrily, but in complete bewilderment.

Sneering, Malfoy got up and walked away. Harry waited until he was gone before he started to cry, aching, confused tears, because he was losing his mind. In love with Draco Malfoy? Of course not. But god, how he wanted to be, if only because he somehow knew that Malfoy was the only thing he *could* ever love. The only person in the entire world that Harry *could* help was the only one who didn't want a single thing from him. Not his help nor his heroism nor weak words of hope. Nothing but respite from madness.

But surely this was another form of madness. A stranger, more twisted form. That Harry should become addicted to the one person who had always known how to hurt him worse than anyone else spoke volumes for his mental state.

And so he cried and cried and wished he was ten again, before he knew he was a wizard, before he knew he owed the world his life, before everything had fallen down on him. When he was just a little boy locked in a closet who dreamed of seeing the world.

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There were silver stags dancing around the dining cavern, and Pansy was watching them like a little girl watching a frog turn into a prince. Her face was much thinner now, the curse had weakened her terribly. Her hair limp and dull, her eyes empty and dark, but a small smile lit up her face with childlike delight.

After they'd faded away, she turned to Harry, and said, "I wish I could do that."

"It's not so hard."

She snorted. "For you, maybe. But you're different. Where's Draco? I haven't seen him since early this morning, and he was in a terrible mood."

"He's avoiding me." Harry shrugged. "I don't mind."

She studied him for a moment and then said, "What have you done, Potter?"

"I, I don't know," Harry cried. "I wasn't thinking, I just wanted, wanted ..."

"Wanted what?"

"To know what his nightmares are."

"Why should he tell you that?" she scoffed. "What makes you think you deserve that? That's the most intimate part of him. Some people's deepest secrets are their dreams and hopes and that sort of shit. Not for Draco and not for me. Not for anyone like us. The deepest parts of us are nightmares."

"I want them," Harry whispered. "I want all of him. I want to, to save him."

She laughed huskily. "Oh, Potter, you'd have done well in Slytherin. The entire Slytherin House is built around the idea that the Malfoys need to be saved. From themselves, mostly. That's what we do, take care of them, see that they aren't hurt too badly by Gryffindors."

Harry felt vaguely stung. "Seems Malfoys do more hurting than Gryffindors do," he mumbled.

"Of course it would seem so, to a Gryffindor."

Changing the subject, Harry said, "It doesn't matter. He's avoiding me."

"I thought you said you didn't mind that he was avoiding you."

I don't! I mean, it's just, he's so bloody frustrating, he never admits that he needs anyone, never! Which is ridiculous, because he needs me, he does!"

She laughed. "It would be a cold day in hell before he admitted to needing anything. That doesn't mean he doesn't need. He *is* human. And he needs to learn the Patronus Charm, it will help him weather the curse more easily. You must keep teaching him."

Harry nodded and then said, "But he won't want to take instruction from me anymore. I fucked that up too."

"I will send him to you." She grimaced, getting out of her chair. The curse had nearly destroyed her already. "Wait for him in the practice room, he'll be there soon."

Harry watched her go, and then made his way to the practice room, grimly sure that Malfoy wouldn't come. Who would want to, really, after Harry had just... what had he just done? Confessed that he wanted... all of Malfoy. Fuck. He didn't want any part of him! Wanted nothing. This was madness. Some stupid side effect of the curse. How could they be sure he couldn't catch it? Maybe he had. He was crazy, it was the only explanation.

Malfoy did show up, and he was in a terrible temper when he did. He stalked into the practice room, glanced coldly at Harry once, and then scowled. There was a moment of silence, and then Harry opened his mouth to speak. Maybe to apologize, maybe to say something snappy and irritable. He never got the chance.

"Don't bother," Malfoy growled. "I don't want to talk about it. I'm only here because of Pansy, so let's get this over with."

Sighing, Harry nodded. "Fine, whatever you want, Malfoy," he said distantly. "The faster you learn Patronus, the better, I guess."

Malfoy turned to look at him again, sneering. "Patronus? We're not learning that anymore, remember? You're learning my spell."

Harry considered making an issue of it, objecting purely because he was feeling irritable, and maybe a little because the Patronus would help hold off the debilitating effects of the curse. Finally, he scoffed. "Whatever, Malfoy."

Malfoy smiled once and nodded, all very smugly. "Good. Let me see you try."

Harry did try, but still, he failed. He tried as hard as he could, calling up his most hateful, horrid memory, but there was not enough hatred and terror inside of him to cast the shadow. Instead, ribbons of darkness would twirl faintly to the ground and disappear.

"I can't," he said desperately. "I can't do it."

Malfoy looked, if anything, as if this pleased him. "Keep practicing," he mocked. "Now you know what it's like to be bested at something, at least."

Harry scowled. "I know what it's like to be bested at a lot of things," he said.

Malfoy laughed sarcastically. "I'm sure you do," he said.

Absently, Harry called up three silver stags, if only to reassure himself that just because he could not perform Malfoy's spell, that did not mean he was completely useless.

Malfoy's eyes narrowed and he watched the stags in the shimmering torchlight, before he snorted and, with a slash of his wand, called up a black Thestral.

It stood between them, shivering with nervousness, the tension on the air making it skittish. It tossed its head and flicked its wings, though it made no sound.

"Surely being more terrified even than I am is nothing to boast about," Harry sneered quietly.

He felt rather than saw his words go through Malfoy, felt the way Malfoy tensed, his shoulders straightening and his breath catching, furious that anyone would dare imply that it was fear rather than hate that he built his Thestral from.

That fury, directed at Harry, was enough to tell the Thestral what it was that Malfoy wished destroyed. It turned to face Harry, tossing its black head, and raising up on its hind legs, kicking its front hooves and tossing its head again. Harry stumbled back a step, startled, and glanced around for help, but his stags had all faded away.

The Thestral charged him, head down, wings tucked in, eyes blazing with black fire. Malfoy cried, "No!", but it was too late, the Thestral tore through him, ripping his skin and his soul in two and setting his nerves on liquid fire. The actual contact only lasted a moment, and there was no blood, no physical wound, for all that it had ran him through.

He was distantly aware of his body falling to the ground, very, very slowly, because everything was moving a thousand times more slowly than normal. And Malfoy was running to his side, but taking so very long, and it didn't matter, because he wasn't there anymore, in that body, on that floor, in that cavern. He was Somewhere Else, though where, he could not quite tell.

It was dark, and very still, though the silence echoed and was interrupted by the hissing of dripping water, like someone had left a faucet on. Harry was cold, and he shivered and wondered distantly why he was so terrified to be in a place of Nothing where someone had left the water running, why he felt like he was waiting for something to come from the Nothing and rip him apart. There was a nearly palpable taste of terror mingled with anxious waiting on the air.



And all the while, he was aware of his body, waiting as well, for Malfoy to get there. But it was so slow, was taking so long, and there was still such a long way for him to go.

And then suddenly, the waiting was over, because the shriek of a Dementor echoed loudly in the Nothing, and a series of visions, dreams, maybe nightmares, flew past, brushing Harry with fingers of icy fear. They surrounded him, bringing with him flashes of death and pain, visions where women were crying, their blonde hair stained pink with blood, where children lay dead, with glazed over eyes, where Dementors laughed, and it was a sound more terrible than their screams. Whispers rustled in the back of his mind, a thousand, thousand whispers, hisses, telling strange tales of torture and slavery and bondage. Harry screamed, and Somewhere Else, his body reared up off a cavern floor, and a terrified shriek flew from his lips.

There was terror on all sides and it would never end, he knew it would never end, he'd never ever get out of this, never be sane again. This was reality, this mad swirling mess of nightmare and fear. He'd never see the sunrise, never smile, never be anything but a terrified child stuck in a whirlwind of everything that was worth fearing.

He started to run, tearing through the nightmares that seemed to giggle at his attempts to escape, and spin all the more faster around him. But still, he ran, looking for calm and respite, and crying because there was none. This was his nightmare, this was his--

And then, Somewhere Else, Malfoy finally reached him, and fell to his knees beside him, and touched his face.

The nightmares froze, a murmur of confusion running through them like a cool autumn breeze.

Harry made his way around the frozen nightmares, which hung like horrible icicles in the shadow of the Nothing. He could hear his own confused breathing, because this was his nightmare, wasn't it? This had to be real...

And yet, there was that other reality, where Malfoy was stroking his face and talking to him. He could not hear the words, but he could see it, somehow, if he closed his eyes.

But he kept walking, looking for somewhere calm and safe, heading towards the center of the Nothing, as if pulled by an invisible string.

And then, moments later, Malfoy lifted him up into his arms, against his chest, and started rocking him, squeezing his eyes shut, still talking, though Harry could not hear him. He stumbled around more and more nightmares, and then stopped, because in the exact center of the Nothing, there was a boy, a silvery boy who stood straight and tall, and shone with some sort of halo, a silver shimmer all over his body. His head was tilted just a little, and there was a small smile on his lips, and just looking at him, Harry felt the world shift a little, and the Nothing started melting away. Because it was him. It was Harry Potter. These weren't *his* nightmares, they were Malfoy's, and in the midst of all the darkness and terror that made up Malfoy's core, Harry Potter stood as his Patronus.

And, in the other reality, Malfoy buried his face in Harry's hair, and whispered, "I'm sorry, come back, please, I'm sorry."

The Nothing dripped away, and Harry fell back to his body and to Malfoy, who was trying not to cry. Harry panicked, because those nightmares had become a part of him, had melted into his mind and if he closed his eyes, he could feel the cold terror and the fear. He started fighting against Malfoy, trying to get away, terrified and hyperventilating and sobbing. Malfoy only held him tightly, stroking his hair and whispering to him, until gradually, the nightmares faded to the back of Harry's memory, and he was holding onto Malfoy as tightly as Malfoy was holding onto him.

"Oh my god," Harry gasped, breathing heavily and bathed in sweat.

"Are you alright?" Malfoy asked shakily.

Harry whimpered and said, "It was... it was so cold and there was nothing... nothing... but everywhere, there was fear and death and whispers and it hurt... I couldn't... it was real... was that real? Oh god, Malfoy, that wasn't real, was it? Tell me it wasn't--"

Malfoy kissed him, not an angry kiss, or a sleepy kiss, but an infinitely gentle one that softly brushed the faint remains of terror away like dust bunnies or cobwebs. Harry's body, battered and aching from the screaming and the fear, went limp in Malfoy's arms, his eyes fluttered shut, and he let himself be kissed, though he did not kiss back. Rather than seeing the nightmares when he closed his eyes, Harry saw blue skies adrift with cotton clouds, and felt sunlight on his face. It was soothing and sweet, and he whimpered again, very softly.

"Alright?" Malfoy whispered again, pulling away.

"It wasn't real?" Harry asked quietly, staring up at Malfoy, who was still holding him.

"No," Malfoy told him, smiling a little, though his eyes were still dark and haunted.

"That's what you dream of? Those are your nightmares?" Harry shivered at the thought.

"Yes."

"Everything was twisted..." Harry could not help it any longer, and he started to cry.

"Honestly, Potter," Malfoy scoffed quietly, even as he pulled Harry closer and rested his chin on the top of Harry's head. "Shh. Come on then, you'd best sleep this off. *Do* stop crying, Potter..." He cast a lightening spell on Harry and lifted him, carrying him to their bedroom and tucking him in.

Harry grabbed his hand. "Don't go," he said, terrified, because he felt so weak and so sleepy that he was sure the nightmares would come back, the second he fell asleep. And, for the second time ever, Malfoy sighed and let Harry pull him into bed, and held him until Harry fell asleep first.

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Harry was buried behind a protective barrier of books, protective because he was terrified that Malfoy would come to find him, would mention those nightmares, or, more importantly, that kiss. He wasn't quite sure he was ready for dealing whatever had been behind the sweetest kiss he'd ever, ever experienced.

There were rolls and rolls of parchment all around him, and on them, he'd scribbled and doodled, long magical equations. All magic could be broken down into mathematical elements, though Harry himself had never been all that good with the mathematical derivatives of magic. Hermione had always been better at that.

After hours of staring at the equations, trying to figure out how it all fit together and how he could stop it, Harry felt like he was losing his mind. "I can't," he whimpered. "How am I supposed to stop this when I can't even figure out a fucking equation? I can't, I can't..."

And then, in a panic, he ran from the room and went to find Pansy.

"I need her," he said, bursting into the room Pansy slept in. He startled her, and a small glass vial slipped from her fingers and she stared at him in shock.

"Potter," she said, in a strange, thick voice, after a moment. "What the hell are you doing here?"

There was something brown and powdery leaking from the vial, and Harry barely paid it a second thought. He should have. "Hermione. I need Hermione. I need to talk to her, I need her help, she's better at this than I am, I need her to help me find a cure." He was rambling, shaking, everything from the past few days piling

up into a mad panic. He could not handle this alone anymore; he needed Hermione. Because she was familiar and she was his, and he needed someone to talk to as much as someone to help him stop the spread of the curse.

Pansy looked at him, her eyes dark and sunken, her face pale and waxy. "Granger?" she repeated.

"Yes. I need to go find her."

"You can't leave," Pansy argued. "Draco needs you."

"But I need her. I can't do this without her. *Please, Pansy...*"

She sighed. "I'll see what I can do. If you do something for me."

He was instantly wary. "What?"

"Go find Draco. He was in here a while ago, and he's upset."

"Malfoy doesn't get upset."

"He's afraid you're avoiding him."

"Avoiding him? Why would I be doing that?" he asked desperately. *Because he kissed you? Because you saw his nightmares? Because his nightmares are a part of you and his nightmares are the core of him, which means that the core of him is part of you as well? Because you're terrified?*

"He thinks you're afraid," she said quietly.

"Afraid of what?" he whispered.

"Afraid of all the darkness inside of him. He did not want you to know the dark place he comes from and now that you know it, have been inside it, he's afraid you'll be too frightened to touch him anymore."

"And he wants to make sure I can still help him with the curse." Harry's shoulders slumped.

She smiled, just a little. "No," she said. "He just likes it when you touch him."

"He told you that?" he asked, stunned.

"He didn't have to. Go and find him, and I'll see what I can do about Granger."

She got up, and Harry was suddenly terrified that she was going to fall. He had not really spared a thought for how weak she must be. Before he could catch her, however, she caught herself on the back of a chair and glared at him. "Just go."

She Apparated out of the cavern, and for a long moment, Harry just stood there, forcing himself to breathe and fighting down panic at the thought of going to find Malfoy.

In the end, he didn't have the courage to go, even though he'd promised her he would. Instead, Harry returned to his researching, hiding behind stacks of books. An hour or so passed, and then, even though the pile of books blocked his view of the door, Harry knew that Malfoy was standing there, because he could feel it. The room was suddenly just a little bit colder.

"You're avoiding me," Malfoy said.

Harry froze, holding his breath, hoping maybe Malfoy wouldn't see him there.

"Potter. I can see you."

He let out his breath in a rush and stood up, fidgeting a little bit. "I... I'm sorry," he said.

Scoffing, Malfoy snapped abruptly, "Shut up."

"What? I mean, I am!"

"You're always fucking sorry, for everything. It pisses me off."

Startled, Harry shook his head and said, "I'm sorry-- I mean... I mean... Fuck, why are you angry at me?" He felt more hurt than he cared to admit.

"I'm not." Malfoy ran a hand through his hair and snorted in disgust. "Forget it."

"Malfoy..." Harry pleaded, not understanding and yet still feeling like this was all his fault, somehow.

Malfoy's eyes narrowed and he glared at Harry hatefully as a tense silence fell over them both.

"Are you... are you alright?" Malfoy asked finally.

Harry blinked. "What?"

"The nightmares! I wasn't sure if they were going to... if you were going to be alright." He sneered, looking disgusted with himself and his concern.

"I'm fine," Harry whispered. "I mean, it was... it was terrible, but I'm alright."

Malfoy cocked his head and studied Harry for a moment, sweeping his hair behind his ear. It was a pointless move, because the blond hair just fell back into his eyes again, and Harry blinked and wondered why he'd even bothered to notice.

"And the kiss?" he asked, because the silence had grown too loud.

Malfoy's eyes widened and Harry wondered if it was the light from the fire reflecting off his face, or if Malfoy really had just turned a little red. "You kissed me first, remember?" he spat.

Wincing, Harry turned away, not wanting Malfoy to see his reaction. After all, the kiss he was referring to had been, to Harry at least, one of those secret little things he thought had been just his. That hazy memory, that bittersweet and very soft little kiss... It had become almost hallowed, sacred, in his mind. *That was a kiss that fairytales were made of*, somehow. And it had been just his. He had almost forgotten that it had been Malfoy he had kissed at all, the whole memory had taken on the haziness of a dream, in which Malfoy hadn't been Malfoy, but had been Draco, and Draco had been someone Harry had loved. This wasn't the same boy he had shared that kiss with, and therefore it seemed a violation that Malfoy even knew of it.

"Don't," he said shakily.

"What, you don't remember? Or you don't *want* to remember?"

Harry stared blankly at Malfoy, swallowing heavily. "Malfoy..."

"Fuck you!" Malfoy's face was red, eyes dark with fury, and Harry didn't know what he was so angry over.

"That's not it at all," he said softly, because he wanted to soothe that rage away and didn't know how. Malfoy shook his head slowly, anger gone in nearly an instant, replaced with an empty sort of confusion. He looked so vulnerable and confused, and Harry understood that confusion. Why the instinct to kiss or soothe would overtake them both when the other was falling apart made no sense to him and it suddenly occurred to him that Malfoy would feel the same.

Why, in his weakest, sleepest, *warmest* moments, Harry would think, by accident, that he loved Malfoy... Malfoy who shouted and raged against a weakness, a curse, that his best friend had created, who fell apart more and more every day, who had to sleep in the arms of the boy he hated more than anyone else in the world... Malfoy who hated him because he was the only shelter from his own nightmares...

Harry's shoulders slumped and, before he could think about it and change his mind, he whispered, "Why do you hate me so much?"

"Hate you?" Malfoy echoed, voice strange and quiet.

"Yes."

"I've always hated you." He sounded, now, like he was reciting something he'd memorized. "Well, maybe not always," he amended thoughtfully. "I used to want to be you."

Harry took a step back, because this was yet another side of Malfoy he'd never seen before, and he was not sure his heart or his mind could take many more glimpses into the secrets of Draco Malfoy. "You didn't," he denied.

Malfoy smiled self-depreciatingly. "Not after I got to know you, no. But before. When I was a boy and the house elves would whisper about the hero, Harry Potter. I wanted to be a hero." He trailed off, cocked his head, and smirked. "And now I'm nothing. Not even my own father will acknowledge me. How sweet, especially considering the curse he has forsaken me for has most likely infected him as well. I wonder if he will recognize me as his son if I go to his deathbed, or if he will still stubbornly refuse to acknowledge that I am his heir. Fathers are strangely arrogant, even in death, I'd imagine. You'd know more about that than I."

Harry blinked, not understanding, and wondering if this rambling was a new side effect of Malfoy's disintegration into madness. "My father..." he said, and then he paused, frowning. "My father is not arrogant in death."

Malfoy seemed to consider this for a moment, before saying, "It is of no consequence to me. I grew out of wanting to be you years ago."

"No, you didn't," Harry whispered.

Gray eyes narrowed spitefully. "How would you know?" Malfoy hissed.

"I saw," Harry said shakily. "I saw, in your nightmares. I was there, Malfoy. Not only me, but how you see me. I *glow* in your nightmares! I'm surrounded by a halo of silver!"

He laughed. "And that means that I want to *be* you? Because my subconscious mind has focused on you as a representation of...of..."

"Safety?" Harry suggested nervously.

"Yes. And..."

"Quiet."

Malfoy's eyes met his again, perplexed again. "Yes. But also..."

"Light. And goodness. Serenity, maybe? That's a horrible word. Peace, then."

"Potter..."

Harry shook his head, running a trembling hand through his hair. "A hero. A *fucking angel*. You're just like... you're just like...everyone... everyone wants... I can't. I can't, I'm not..."

"No. No! Stop it!" Malfoy came closer, but for every step he took forward, Harry took three more back.

"I can't *be* that! I can't be everything good in the world, I'm just a boy, just *one* boy! I can't even save myself or my own side, how dare your side expect me to save them too?" Hysteria was bubbling up inside him, and he started breathing faster and faster, tears threatening.

Malfoy reached out for him and Harry stumbled backwards. "Potter," Malfoy called quietly. "Please, stop it. This isn't..."

Harry had backed himself up against the wall, and he turned to face it, panicking because there was nowhere left to run. Hysterical now, and certainly not thinking straight, he started sobbing and trying to claw his way through solid rock, tears pouring down his face.

In a matter of seconds, Malfoy was there, grabbing his hands and pulling them away from the wall, holding them tightly in his own. Harry reacted instinctively, growling and twisting, trying to pull away and, failing that, turning around to attack Malfoy. He pushed against him, snarling, fighting against him, and Malfoy only held him tightly until exhaustion and confusion overtook the panic and rage. Harry slumped back against the wall, breathing heavily, and when his legs gave out moments later, Malfoy held him up. After a moment, Malfoy let go of his wrists and started drying his tears, still pinning him up against the wall, pressing his body to the length of Harry's.

Harry didn't fight, didn't open his eyes, didn't lower his head from where it tilted back against the wall. He didn't make a sound until Malfoy smoothed his hair back and slipped one hand back behind Harry's head, tilting his face back down.

"I don't want to be you," Malfoy said carefully, distinctly, "Because I would not have the strength for this and I know it. No one could be the world's hero better than you."

Harry opened his eyes wearily and tried to smile. "You said that before, you wanted to be a hero," he said.

Malfoy smiled a little and Harry suddenly realized that he hadn't backed off, hadn't let his hands fall away, and now Malfoy was cradling the back of his head and his jaw, very gently. "I can't even stay sane when it's just me I've got to fight for," he said.

"I don't know how to fight for you, or for anyone else," Harry admitted, his face crumpling a little.

Malfoy sighed. "There is a reason you are immune to the curse, Harry. It is because, in all the world, you are the only one with the emotional strength and capability to defeat the Unforgivables. You have survived the three originals and the fourth cannot touch you because of that."

"I don't want to be a hero," Harry whispered.

"Sometimes you don't get a choice."

Harry considered this for a long moment, wide eyes staring into Malfoy's, closer now than they'd ever been. "There's always a choice," he said finally. But he was growing so tired and so he rested his head on Malfoy's shoulder, closing his eyes.

"I want to shout at you," Malfoy admitted, as he pulled Harry away from the wall and guided him back to his chair by the books. "For letting yourself get this tired and so weak that you'll cry even when I'm around to see."

Harry grabbed his hand after he sat down, before Malfoy could move away. "Wait," he said.

Malfoy paused, smiling faintly. "What?"

"You can shout at me if..."

"If what?"

Harry swallowed. "If you're going to leave instead. I'd rather you stayed...even if it's just to shout... I mean, it gets kind of... lonely." He didn't even understand what he was asking for.

Malfoy looked just as confused, but he smoothed Harry's hair back off his forehead and kissed him there, lips grazing over Harry's scar. "I'll stay," he said. "But I won't shout. Tell me what you've found out."

Malfoy pulled up a chair to the other side of the table and straddled it, folding his arms on the back of it and resting his head there, listening attentively while Harry explained all his research. It was helpful, having someone to listen while he talked, to point out relevant things he'd missed in his magical equations, and they probably would have talked for hours had Harry not grown so tired that he could not stop yawning.

Rolling his eyes, Malfoy forced him to go to bed, only smirking a little this time when Harry begged him to stay, and holding him until he fell asleep, and then even a while longer.

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Ginny was thinking, about bricks and mortar and carpentry. About how things fit together and why, why people built the things they did, and why they all eventually crumbled. The foundation, that was the important part.

She wondered how many cracks there were in her foundations now, as she lay on her back, panting and staring up at the roof and waiting for the grip of the curse to ease.

It affected her differently than it affected Ron, she thought. Because Ron screamed and clung to her and sobbed as he was plunged into nightmares and Ginny... laughed. Even as it hurt and stung and *ached*, her nightmares were nothing to her because *this* was the nightmare. Therefore, they had no power over her mind. So she rode out the waves of madness with smiles while Ron screamed beside her.

He'd started sleeping in her bed for fear of nightmares, and Ginny could not find it in her heart (did she have a heart any longer? It was the first foundation to break) to tell him to leave. So he slept curled up beside her, except when the nightmares came, and he clung to her.

Sometimes he slept, though she never did. There was too much to think about, to plan, because this was unseemly. This life, this existence, this *world* where Lucius was not a comfort, where memories of Lucius were not a comfort, where Ron wanted touches and kisses that she should have been ashamed to give but that she gave because at least Ron closed his eyes when she kissed him. She could see no shame in brown brown eyes so much like her own, if those eyes were closed.

"I want to die," she said softly, because that was the conclusion she had come to. Countless days had passed, days spent between living nightmares and magical nightmares, and Lucius had never loved her and now Ron loved her and that was so wrong, very wrong.

He stirred beside her. "What?" he asked sleepily.

She took his hand and drew it to her breast, right above her heartbeat. "I," she said very slowly. "Want. To. Die."

He stared blankly at her, blinking stupidly. "Ginny," he said.

She let go of his hand, snarling in disgust. "You are of no use to me," she snapped, crawling out of bed. "I want to die, I want to die! This is pathetic, this house, this life, this...everything. Me. You."

Ron got out of bed, following her out into the hall nervously. "Is it the curse, Gin?" he asked.

"This whole *life* is a curse!" she howled.

He grabbed her by the arms and held her tightly against him, as if binding her to him would help ease whatever affliction had come over her. "Just calm down," he told her.

It didn't work. She bucked against him, shrieking and trying to twist out of his grip.

"Ginny!" he snapped, shaking her so hard that her head slammed back against the wall. There was a dull thud and then silence. "Ginny," he said again, gentler. "Oh god, I'm sorry."

To prove it, he kissed her, and because the shock and pain had startled her and made her look at him, really look at him, for the first time in weeks, close enough to see the pain and confusion in his eyes, Ginny let him. The sudden shame that was nearly making her sick would allow her to do nothing else but let him kiss her.

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Hermione was tied hand and foot, blindfolded, gagged, and trembling on the stone floor, when Pansy led Harry to her.

He stared, horrified, for a long moment, unable or unwilling to recognize her. But it was her and he knelt beside her, moaning softly in horror. "Why did you do this to her?" he snapped at Pansy, as he pulled the blindfold off.

"You said to bring her here, didn't specify her condition. She's lucky she's here at all, given the condition she was in when I found her," Pansy replied.

"Condition?" he echoed, frowning. The blindfold was off and Hermione's eyes were still tightly shut and she was trembling.

"It's the curse," Pansy said, shrugging. "When I found her, she was alone in an alley, screaming and lost in nightmares."

"Oh my god," he whispered, lifting her against his chest as he pulled the gag off, so her whimpers became screams. He cut the ropes that bound her and cradled her, stroking her back, as the shrieks calmed into whispers of terror, soothed by his touch.

She moaned and pressed her face into the side of his neck, and Harry rocked her, whispering to her and completely blind to the rest of the world. Pansy left, but Harry didn't notice.

After Hermione had calmed into a natural sleep, Harry glanced up, startled to find Malfoy standing there, eyes narrowed and watching him with something indefinable in his eyes. Harry blinked. "I didn't see you there," he said nervously.

"I know. That's Granger."



"Yes. She... she's got the curse. And she needs some place to sleep."

"Oh, what, not with you?" Malfoy spat sarcastically.

Harry stood up, still holding her, and said quietly, "I sleep with you, Malfoy."

Malfoy had been glaring at Hermione hatefully, and he lifted his eyes to Harry's, looking startled. Then, he said, "She can sleep in the next room. You'll probably have to go to her in the middle of the night sometimes."

"Thank you," Harry whispered, because Malfoy was going to let him help her.

Malfoy looked like he was going to say something, and then he just scowled and shook his head, walking away.

Hermione was still sleeping deeply when Harry brought her to the room closest to his, laying her in an unused bed and stroking her hair out of her face. He pulled a chair over and sat at her bedside, not bothering to think about how it was now second nature to crawl into bed with Malfoy when he was affected this way, and yet he could not do the same for Hermione.

He held her hand and stroked her face, studying it and noting the ways it had changed, grown slimmer and paler with worry and fear. There were dark circles under her eyes and she still wore her cloak, so he gently pulled it off and set it aside.

Something slipped out of her pocket, hit the stone ground, and slid across the floor. It was a gun.

"What is that?" Malfoy asked, and Harry spun around quickly, startled.

"I didn't know you were here," he said. "How long..."

Malfoy shrugged. "I was just checking. What is this?" He bent and picked up the gun.

"A gun," Harry replied. "I don't know why she had it."

"And what is she doing here?" Malfoy slipped the gun into his pocket and looked up almost hesitantly.

"I needed her help," Harry said, looking away, uncomfortable because that was only half of the reason he'd had Pansy bring her here. He needed some sort of buffer, someone to keep with him so he never had to be alone, either alone by himself or alone with Malfoy. He did not want time to think by himself and did not want time to consider what it was he felt for Malfoy and why.

"You love her," Malfoy said.

Harry blinked. "What?"

"Granger. The way you were holding her. You love her."

"She's my best friend, if that's what you mean. I hold you the same way."

"I didn't..." Malfoy trailed off.

"Didn't what?"

"Didn't remember. You holding me, I mean."

Harry smiled, because Malfoy looked strangely vulnerable, admitting that, his face a little flushed. He smoothed a lock of Malfoy's hair back behind his ears, mirroring the action he'd seen Malfoy make so many times before. "I like... holding you." He flushed and Malfoy's eyes narrowed in confusion.

"Potter, what are you--"

"I don't know." And he didn't. But he was tracing Malfoy's jaw, because it was so delicate and strong and soft, and then his fingers were sliding up, to the skin behind his ear, and then running through Malfoy's hair. It was madness, really, that he'd brought Hermione here to prevent just this and she was lying right there and yet there was still this...

He let out a breath he seemed to have been holding for all of his life and pulled Malfoy closer, a strange shiver running through his body when Malfoy's lips parted the tiniest bit and his eyes fluttered shut, almost against his will.

It was a hesitant kiss, because Harry knew that there would be no blaming this kiss on either sleep or hysteria. It was real and it was...soft. A slight brush of lips and faltering of breathing and then Harry's fingers flexed in Malfoy's hair, stroking a little. At that slight movement, Malfoy made a soft noise in the back of his throat, a longing sort of sigh that was too sweet and strange to belong to *Malfoy* (but then, maybe that was the point. It belonged to Harry and Malfoy had been saving it for him all these years). He tilted his head, fitting his lips closer to Harry's, and parting them just a bit further. Harry was trembling but he did the same, lips parting and pressing more firmly against Malfoy's, though the angle was wrong.

Malfoy reached up, cupped Harry's jaw, and tilted it towards a bit so they fit together more perfectly, and then left his hand there, cradling Harry's face and stroking his cheek.

It was very careful and fragile and still, as if they were both afraid that something was about to break, and maybe it was.

Then Malfoy's tongue hesitantly slipped just a tiny bit into Harry's mouth, a delicate taste, and Harry followed it back into Malfoy's mouth to do the same. Their tongues collided somewhere in the middle and it was there that the fragileness of the kiss was broken. Harry pressed closer and Malfoy's free hand slid up his back, pulling him closer still. Catching his breath, Harry ground his mouth against Malfoy's, tilting the shorter boy's head back running his fingers through his hair as he let Malfoy's tongue into his mouth, let him suck on his lower lip and graze it with his teeth.

It was all very intoxicating, Harry had never imagined a kiss could affect him as drastically as a few glasses of wine could, but the room was spinning and he couldn't catch his breath. Not to mention rational thought was all but impossible and he just wanted more of Malfoy's mouth, his lips, his tongue, his entire body, more of the nervousness and the hesitation and the kisses that neither could deny when they were over.

There was a sort of understanding in the way that neither was confident enough to end the kiss, because they both knew that when this kiss was over and they had to open their eyes, nothing would be the same again.

"Don't," Harry finally whispered, breath brushing against Malfoy's lips. He gave up whatever he'd been trying to say to kiss Malfoy again.

"Don't what?" Malfoy pressed his lips to Harry's again, kissing the corner of his mouth.

"Open your eyes."

Whether he had meant to say 'don't open your eyes' or had meant to say don't do something else and then had forgotten and meant for Malfoy to open his eyes, it didn't matter, because at his words, his own eyes opened and so did Malfoy's. They were very close, close enough for Harry to see the darker specks of black that rimmed Malfoy's irises and the very faint flush on his cheeks.

Somehow, Harry's arms had gotten tangled up around Malfoy's shoulders, and Malfoy's hand was still cradling Harry's cheek, the other resting between his shoulder blades. "Sorry," Harry breathed, though he didn't try pulling away.

"Uhm," Malfoy said in reply, clearing his throat. He pulled his hand away from Harry's cheek to nervously push his hair back behind his ear, wrinkling his nose when it just fell back to brush his cheek again.

Neither knew what to say and probably wouldn't have said anything at all, would have been content to stand there all night wrapped up and staring at each other that way.

"I told you," Pansy said from the doorway.

Yelping, Harry tore away from Malfoy so fast that he nearly tripped, and Malfoy had to grab his elbow to steady him. "Pansy," Harry said breathlessly, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. "What are you doing?"

She smirked. "Bringing a potion for Granger. Give it to her when she wakes up, it will help control the side effects of the curse and give her strength." She left the potion on a table and then slipped out of the room. Harry ran after her.

"Wait!" he called, grabbing her arm. "Wait. What did you mean, you told me what?"

Smirking again, she said, "That it's rather easy to love him."

"I--I don't," he stammered.

She just smiled and walked away.

Harry stared at her blankly, not sure what to think, though he was absolutely positively sure that there was no way in hell he could stand to turn and walk back into that room after *that*.

"Granger's awake," Malfoy said quietly from behind him.

Harry's back stiffened and he licked his lips subconsciously before turning. Malfoy was leaning against the doorway, watching him lazily, almost as if he wasn't as tense and nervous as Harry was.

"She is?" he squeaked, wincing at the frightened sound of his own voice.

Malfoy smirked and said, "You're blushing."

Harry swallowed heavily and his eyes widened. He wasn't sure how to take this, how to handle the way things had changed between them, wasn't sure how to bring it to Malfoy's attention that he was blushing too without making Malfoy hate him.

So instead, because he did not want to be seen as the weak one, because he did not want Malfoy to know how terrified he was of this, Harry walked towards him as if he had every faith in himself and what he was about to do.

He slid his hand up to cradle Malfoy's jaw, smiled carelessly, and brushed his lips lightly over Malfoy's. "Thanks," he said easily, slipping passed Malfoy and into Hermione's room. He didn't look back but he hoped Malfoy was stunned, shocked, breathless even, because god knows, Harry was.

Her face was flushed and Harry wondered how long she'd been awake for. Her dark eyes were hazy with weakness, and before he could forget, he helped her sit up and held the potion to her lips, making sure she drank it all.

"It will help you recover your strength," he told her.

Hermione drank, if only because she could not talk with the glass held to her lips, and as soon as he took it away, she reached up and touched his face. "Oh Harry," she whispered, voice rough. "What's happened to you?"

He smiled shakily at her. "I'm fine," he said. "How are you?"

She smiled a little bitterly. "I'm alright, considering. I was... worried about you. There were rumours that you were a spy and then you just disappeared."

"There's a lot I have to tell you," he said. "I'm sorry about everything with Pansy. I would not have sent her after you had I known she'd bring you back that way."

Hermione blinked and smiled a little. "Oh, that," she said. "I don't think she had a choice. I was a bit mad when she found me."

"And the gun?" he asked quietly.

She sighed. "The world is falling apart, Harry. It isn't safe anymore. Everyone is desperate for respite from nightmares and they're losing their minds. You must know what it's like."

He shook his head slowly and whispered, "I'm immune to it."

She studied his face again and then said solemnly, "Tell me what's been happening, Harry."

He told her everything he knew about the curse, the research he'd been doing, the conclusions he'd come to, while she listened attentively, dark eyes narrowed and focused on every word. Hours could have gone by and he wouldn't have noticed.

By the time he finished, his voice was hoarse and Hermione looked on the verge of passing out from exhaustion, though her eyes were still wide and bright.

"So I had Pansy bring you here so you could help," he said.

She blinked and considered for a moment and then said, "And Malfoy?"

"What about him?"

"Okay," she said, going along with him. Harry's eyes narrowed suspiciously but he didn't comment.

"You're tired," he said. "You should sleep." He smoothed the blanket up to her chin and she smiled ruefully.

When he tried to walk away, she grabbed his hand. "If the... if the nightmares come back..." she looked terrified.

"I'll be here," he promised.

"Thank you," she whispered, eyelids fluttering sleepily.

Harry blew out the candle on the bedside table and cast a dimming charm on the fire in the hearth before slipping from the room and going into his own.

It was dark and Malfoy was lying very still on his stomach, pressing his face into the pillow and trembling.

Harry blinked. "Malfoy? What's wrong?" he called, approaching warily.

Turning his face a little, Malfoy moaned softly. Harry could see how pale he was, how his skin glistened with sweat, his eyes tightly shut.

"It's the curse, isn't it?" Harry sighed. "Why didn't you call for me?"

Malfoy nodded, smiling a little ruefully. "You were busy," he ground out, still fighting the onslaught of nightmares. "I don't need..." Malfoy panted.

"Bloody hell," Harry mumbled, climbing onto the bed. "Come here."

With a strangled whimper, Malfoy lurched to his knees and fell against Harry, hitting him hard enough to knock him onto his back. Burying his face against Harry's chest, Malfoy moaned, shaking his head. "I hate it," he said, voice bleak. "I hate...I hate... Oh god."

"It's alright," Harry whispered, stroking his hair. "I won't let go."

Malfoy mumbled a little against him and held onto him tightly, his entire body trembling as he was sucked back into his nightmares.

Harry wouldn't have let go before, but now that he'd been there and he knew where Malfoy went when the madness took him, he wouldn't have let go for anything.

It did not take long for the nightmares to take him, and Harry held Malfoy all through them, stroking his back and whispering soothingly to him. He pushed his hair back and kissed his forehead, holding him until the nightmares faded into regular sleep, and only then did he let himself rest, drifting off to sleep with Malfoy still on top of him, pinning him to the mattress and breathing evenly against his collarbone.

**Author notes:** The lyrics at the beginning are from Wound by the Smashing Pumpkins.

Sorry this update took so long, I made it extra long in a mad attempt to make up for it! Hope you liked it!

Dedicated to Ani my valentine.

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## Windfallen

CHAPTER 7: Dragon

*Well I was there in the beginning  
And I saw you choose your path  
I watched your candle burning  
And I knew it wouldn't last*

*'Cos when experience comes knocking  
Innocence will pass  
And all that once seemed child-like  
Is now ugly, crude and crass  
And you wonder how you lost yourself  
So many years ago.*

Harry woke first, and sometime in the middle of the night, they had shifted, and now they were lying face to face. He watched Malfoy sleep for a long time, thinking about kisses and things, things like shame and regret and how none of them seemed to apply. Charlie had kissed him and there had been shame in that, and regret, of course, and Harry had come to think of kissing as shameful. Kissing had meant standing really still and hoping that kissing was where it would end.

But kissing Draco Malfoy... there was no shame in that. Perhaps there should have been. He should be crying and throwing himself off a bridge somewhere, wailing something about his only love springing from his only hate. Something melodramatic. Instead, all he wanted to do was kiss Malfoy again, and that wasn't melodramatic at all. It was rather...soft.

So he did kiss him again, barely brushing his lips across Malfoy's, surprised when Malfoy instantly and instinctively responded, mumbling in his sleep and sliding closer. One of his arms slid up around Harry's shoulders and his eyes opened a crack.

Licking his dry lips and burrowing closer, Malfoy murmured, "Potter?"

"Mmm?"

"Did you just kiss me?"

"Yeah." He flushed a little, and Malfoy smiled sleepily, eyes closing again.

"Oh." There was a thoughtful pause. "Right then."

"We should probably talk about that," Harry said reluctantly.

"I don't think so," Malfoy sighed contentedly.

"Why?"

"Too early. Sleeping."

Harry sighed and smiled and wondered when things had gotten so simple and yet so complicated all at the same time. "Sleep then," he said, but it didn't matter, because Malfoy already was. "You're impossible," he said softly, so as not to wake him, even as he rested his chin on Malfoy's head and closed his eyes.

He fell asleep again quickly, falling deeper and deeper into unconsciousness, and there, Harry started to dream.

In the dream, he was not Harry at all, he was a dragon, with huge, black wings, stretched leathery skin spread between fragile networks of bone sprouting from his shoulders, a long, arching neck, and a thick layer of scales covering his body. He was angry, and flame was slipping from his mouth, scorching the ground far below, leaving ash and soot in his wake. His wings beat easily and his body cut cleanly through the air, destroying everything in his path. Trees, animals, and even people burst into flame and died beneath him, sometimes even people he recognized. Hermione died, and Ron, Ginny, Pansy, Charlie, people he had known before and people he'd never seen before, all screaming as they burnt to death.

And then he saw someone it took him a moment to recognize. It was himself, lying bound on the ground below, arms spread wide, blood leaking from his torn hands and feet, where swords had been driven

through to pin him to the ground, like a butterfly. Blood stained his face and his neck, his clothes were torn and bloody, and his eyes open, spiteful and sneering up at Harry the dragon.

The urge to destroy was more intense than ever. So strong was Harry the dragon's hatred for the Harry who lay prone beneath him that he did not want to burn him, he wanted to tear him apart with his talons and his teeth. So Harry the dragon dove until he was crouching over Harry on the ground, who twisted and laughed and spat at him.

The dragon's talons tore into the flesh of Harry's stomach easily, ripping and pulling as Harry's laughter was cut off with shrieks. Harry the dragon began tearing at the face, aiming for the eyes, snorting smoke and flame from nostrils that burn with the heat of it.

Harry the dragon would have been content to keep ripping Harry on the ground into pieces, until he was bloody and unrecognizable, but Harry on the ground was shouting something now, but it was in English, and Harry the dragon didn't speak English.

So he kept scratching and pounding with claws that gradually, gradually, shifted and changed, until they were fists, human fists, pound and pounding, and Harry the dragon looked up, horrified, into Harry on the ground's green eyes. He blinked, and the green was gone.

It was Malfoy beneath him, gray eyes startled and terrified.

As the last wisps of the dream faded away, Harry stiffened, suddenly aware that he was straddling Malfoy, pinning him to the bed, and that his own fists were wet with Malfoy's blood.

There was blood leaking from scratches across one of Malfoy's cheek, from his nose and his lip as well, and one of his eyes was already starting to swell.

Harry's eyes widened, disorientation gradually giving way to absolute terror. "Oh my god," he whimpered, leaping off Malfoy and crouching at the edge of the bed, his entire body trembling. Sitting up slowly, Malfoy did not tear his eyes away, did not reach up to his face to try to slow the bleeding from his mouth or nose. He just stared, terror gradually disappearing from his eyes, replaced by confusion.

"Potter?" he whispered warily. "Are you--"

Harry clapped a hand over his mouth, eyes widening even further. With a strangled moan, he leapt of the bed and ran from the cavern into another not far away, that had been converted into a bathroom. He threw up there, violent retches combined with harsh sobs, the taste of vomit and tears mixing in his mouth. Then, as soon as the nausea faded away, he turned on the tap, cupped his trembling hand under the water, and scooped as much as he could into his mouth, rinsing and spitting. It didn't help.

Claustrophobia was threatening, his breathing coming faster and faster as memories of ripping himself apart whispered in the back of his mind, combined with the knowledge of what he had done to Malfoy.

He was nearly blind with panic when he took off running from the cavern, desperate to get as far away from Malfoy as he could, as if that might help him forget what he'd just done, what he'd just dreamed. Help him get the taste of vomit and tears out of his mouth, help him stop imagining he could taste blood there as well.

He ran into Pansy, nearly knocking her over.

She grabbed his arm, eyes narrowing. "Potter," she said. "What on earth... there's blood on your face."

Sobbing once, dryly, he tried to pull away. She did not let go, pulling him into the cavern she'd just left, which was her bedroom.

"Stop it," she instructed firmly, closing the door. It was dark in the room, and that calmed him a little, as he stood in the center of the room trembling and breathing heavily. She studied him in silence and then nudged him until he was sitting on the bed.

There was a basin of water on the desk near the door that he could barely see in the light of the dim lamp that was hanging from the ceiling, and Pansy fetched that and a clean washcloth. She sat beside him and wet the cloth and began gently washing the blood from his face. "What happened?" she asked.

"I... I hurt him," he admitted roughly.

The cloth stilled. "Draco?"

"I didn't mean to..." He started crying heavily, his face crumpling, and he pulled his knees up, wrapping his arms around them and burying his face there. Pansy cradled his jaw and tilted his face back up, and continued washing.

"What happened?" she asked again.

"I was dreaming and I woke up and I was *on* him," Harry confessed, sniffing and staring at her beseechingly, waiting for her condemnation. After all, she loved Malfoy.

"What were you dreaming of?" she asked instead, rinsing the cloth and then washing his tears away. Harry had not even stopped to grab his glasses.

"A dragon," he whispered. "I was a dragon and I killed everybody and I saw myself on the ground and I ripped myself apart and woke up and it was Malfoy."

She considered for a while, stroking the hair off his sticky forehead and letting her fingers linger there, as if checking for a fever. "Is he alright?" she asked finally, her hand falling away.

"I don't know."

"I'm sure he is. Calm down, Potter."

For all her firm tone and her brisk attitude, she was being remarkably gentle, and Harry sighed. "Why are you taking care of me?" he asked quietly, swallowing hard.

She laughed softly. "You're Draco Malfoy's, Potter. It is my job to protect anything belonging to him."

He opened his eyes and studied her in the darkness for a long moment, before whimpering softly and letting himself fall forward, until his head was pillowed on her shoulder. She stroked his hair and sighed. "I don't know what's happening," Harry whispered.

"With the dream?" she asked.

There was a pause. "With Malfoy."

"What do you mean?"

Harry considered for a moment, and then said, "I kissed him."

"You love him."

"I can't."



She was quiet for a moment and then said thoughtfully, "Why not?"

"Because he's Draco Malfoy. Because we fight for different sides. Because he would see my best friend tortured and killed for having Muggle parents. Because he is egotistical, impossible, and irritating. Because it would be a betrayal to my friends and my side in the war."

"And what about you?" she asked.

"What do you mean?"

"It would be a betrayal of your friends if you loved him, but what about yourself? Wouldn't it be a betrayal of yourself not to love him?"

Harry frowned. "I am not meant to love him. Anyone can see that just by looking at us. It isn't possible."

Pansy touched his chin, tilting his head up until his eyes met hers. "Listen to me," she said quietly, her voice very strong. "Anyone can tell, just from looking at you. If anyone ever tried to tell you that you could ever love anyone else as completely as you are meant to love Draco Malfoy, they never really saw you."

Tears were still stinging in his eyes, and when Harry closed them, a few escaped and rolled down his cheeks. "I owe them more than this."

"Owe *who*?"

"Dumbledore. Ron. Charlie." He could have gone on naming people, but Pansy snorted.

"Dumbledore's been using you since you were a child. Ron gave you up for a spy after you saved his little sister. Charlie turned you in for a spy after trying to take advantage of you."

He flinched and did not comment.

After a moment, when Pansy's shoulder grew sharp and uncomfortable, and Harry shifted restlessly, there was a knock on the door.

Pansy opened it, and Hermione was standing there, looking uncertain and nervous. "Malfoy's going mad," she said. "He's pacing around shouting and throwing things." Harry moaned and hugged his knees to his chest and Hermione glanced at him worriedly. "Did something happen?"

"Harry had a nightmare," Pansy explained briskly, stepping out of the room and closing the door, taking Hermione with her.

Harry was left alone in the dark in Pansy's bedroom and, weakly, he fell back onto the bed, curling up as small as he could get and smothering a whimper by biting his lower lip. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to will himself into death or unconsciousness, because he could not get Malfoy's terrified eyes out of his mind.

The bedroom door cracked open, letting in a sliver of light. Malfoy peered nervously through it. "Are you still here?" he asked, his voice shaking slightly.

Harry whimpered, flinching away from the light. At the sound, Malfoy pushed the door open further. "Hey," he called quietly.

Swallowing heavily, Harry didn't reply.

"How are you doing?" Malfoy tried, edging into the room.

"Are you still..." He trailed off.

"Am I still what?"

"Bloody." His voice cracked.

"Oh." Malfoy let his breath out in a rush. "Granger cleaned that up and healed it." There was a pause, and Malfoy crept farther into the room, closing the door.

"You were throwing things," Harry said softly. "Why?"

"Oh, that. Uhm. I came after you when you ran away and before I could catch you, you ran into Pansy and... I guess Granger got protective. She must have seen the blood and... stopped me... wouldn't let me come in... I was sort of...angry."

"At me?"

There was a surprised pause. "Why... why would I be mad?"

"I..." He winced, voice cracking. "I hurt... made you... bleed... I'm...S-sorry... Malfoy..." And then he couldn't help it anymore, and he started crying, harsh sobs making his throat burn.

Malfoy was there suddenly, leaping onto the bed and wrapping his arms around him, holding him tightly. "Stop. Stop it, Potter, it's alright, it's alright. Fuck, it's okay..."

Harry choked on his tears, clinging to Malfoy and sobbing harder than he could ever remember having cried before. As his crying started to calm a little, Malfoy stroked his hair and shifted him, so that Harry was lying on his side, head in Malfoy's lap, while Malfoy stroked his hair.

"It's alright," he said again. "It's okay. Stop crying."

Harry squeezed his eyes shut and nodded blindly. "Okay. I'm sorry."

"You had a bad dream?"

Shivering, Harry nodded again. "I'm sorry," he repeated.

"Shut up."

Harry laughed tearfully, wiping his face with his sleeve. "Okay," he said.

"It wasn't your fault, it was mine, anyway. I was... sometimes that happens. If someone gets hit by the Dark Patronus... sometimes it takes a while for their mind to adjust to not being in the nightmares, while they're asleep mostly. What happened in the dream?"

"I was trying to tear myself apart," Harry whispered, sighing. "And then I woke up and it was you and I was scared you'd be mad. I mean, I hurt you. Why... why didn't you push me off?"

Malfoy ran his fingers through Harry's hair. "I didn't want to hurt you," he said quietly.

Turning his face until it was pressed into Malfoy's leg, Harry started crying again, and Malfoy sighed and stroked his back, and Harry distantly wondered how there could be something even softer and sweeter than kissing Malfoy, and how it could be crying and having Malfoy touch him.

He pulled away rather sheepishly a moment later, drying his face on his sleeve and clearing his throat. "Hermione must be worried, I should..." he trailed off.

"Are you alright?"

"Pansy... Pansy called me yours." He didn't know why he said it, nor why he watched Malfoy's face so carefully when he did. He was a bit surprised by the slow smile that spread across Malfoy's lips.

"Did she?" he asked innocently, climbing from the bed and taking Harry's hand.

"Uh huh," Harry said, letting Malfoy tug him from the room.

"Smart girl, Pansy," Malfoy commented without looking back at him, leading him out of the room. Harry's eyes widened and he stumbled, trying to figure out what exactly he could have meant by that.

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Hermione was chewing her quill, and Harry watched, wondering where she'd picked up that habit. She looked stronger already, the curse not having caused her to deteriorate to an extreme degree, and the potion Pansy gave her giving her strength.

"I'm not sure I understand," she said. "Where exactly are we?"

"I think it's a sort of fortress, a secret, underground series of caverns. Probably created as a final retreat for the Death Eaters. No one knows we're here, I don't think." Harry flipped a few more pages in his book.

She considered for a moment and then said, "And you're immune to the curse."

"Yes. And I think I can stop it if I kill all the Dementors."

"I don't know if Dementors can be killed."

"They can! Malfoy knows a spell, a Dark Patronus, that kills Dementors. He's trying to teach it to me."

Hermione frowned. "Harry... what's going on with you and Malfoy?"

"What do you mean?"

"You had a nightmare this morning, right?"

"Yeah."

"And you hurt him in your sleep?"

"Yes."

"Why were you sleeping with Draco Malfoy?"

Harry blinked and then shrugged. "I... He needs me."

"Harry..."

"What?"

"I just don't know if it's wise to trust him. He's fighting for the other side."

He lost his temper. "There aren't sides anymore, Hermione! Everyone is dying! It was stupid to have sides to begin with. Over blood. We were fighting over *blood*. It all tastes the same and it all feels the same under my fingernails and I know that because it's *been* there and none of it matters anymore! This isn't us against the Death Eaters, it's Draco and I against... against everything."

"You called him Draco," she whispered.

Harry's eyes narrowed. "So?"

"So? What... what is he to you?"

"He...takes care of me. We take care of each other."

She sighed. "Harry, you've never needed anyone to take care of you."

He stared at her blankly. "I haven't?"

"You're the strongest person I know. You're a hero, Harry. I don't... it's just... I don't understand, I can tell you're attached to him, and I don't understand why. All of this is his fault, and the fault of people just like him."

"It isn't just their fault. If they hadn't invented the curse, we would have, eventually. It was war. It was fucking stupid. Everyone thinks they're right in arguments like this, theological ones. Who's to say that they aren't right to segregate the wizards from the Muggles?"

"That's... that's a terrible thing to say!"

"I didn't say I believed it! But think about it. Muggles are dying too because of this curse. We're not good for them. And they've been burning us at the stake for years. Maybe we can't get along. I'm not saying we should run around killing and torturing them, or that purebloods are better than anyone else. I'm just saying, the Muggles have never been all that interested in cultivating a relationship with *anyone* who is different than they are. Maybe it's better that we remain a secret from them. Maybe... maybe it's better for the Muggles and us if we stop having relations with them."

"Did Malfoy tell you all of this?" she whispered.

Harry scowled. "We've never discussed it."

"How can you say these things? How can you *believe* them?"

Harry snapped, "I don't know what I believe, just that I *don't* believe in giving everything I have for a world where nightmares are driving people mad! I don't believe in spilling blood in a mad attempt to save lives, I don't believe in killing people for what they believe in, and I don't believe that you could *possibly believe that I have never needed anyone to take care of me!*"

Hermione's eyes were sparkling with tears. "I'm sorry," she said.

He sighed. "Let's just forget it. I'm sorry that you've had to go through all this. I mean, Pansy and all that must have been terrifying enough, and then everything this morning, now this..."

She touched his hand. "Harry..."

He pulled away, because something in her touch made him shiver, but forced a smile. "It's fine."

She sighed. "Pansy wanted me to meet her in the kitchen so she could teach me to make the potions. I suppose I ought to go anyway."

He watched as she left and then turned back to the book he'd been studying, feeling frustrated and annoyed.

It came as a complete surprise when Malfoy was there suddenly, tilting his head up and slamming his lips down onto Harry's, kissing him hard. Surprise melted away into a perplexed sort of enjoyment as Harry kissed him back, closing his eyes and letting all his frustration fall away.

When Malfoy pulled away, he asked breathlessly, "What was that for?"

Malfoy kissed him again and again, until Harry's head swam and he was so dizzy that just staying in his chair took effort. When he was clinging to Malfoy's shoulders and panting loudly, Malfoy finally broke the kiss and said, "I was spying from the doorway."

"You were--" Harry started to echo contentedly, and then he stopped, eyes flying open and going very wide. "Malfoy," he hissed. "You can't do that! Can't just listen to people's private conversations!"

Malfoy was nuzzling the side of his neck, kneeling beside his chair, and he asked absently, "I can't?"

"No!"

"Hmm. That's unfortunate." He bit Harry's neck lightly.

"Malfoy."

"Yes?"

"What are you *doing*?"

Malfoy pulled away, laughing. Harry was incredibly startled by the sound, staring in shock. It took him a while to realize that it was because he couldn't remember ever having heard Malfoy laugh before. "I'm sorry," Malfoy apologized, sounding more like he had back at Hogwarts than ever. Both snide and smug and irresistible all at once. "I was overcome and not thinking clearly."

"Overcome?" Harry asked hesitantly.

"Quite."

"Why?"

Malfoy's smile turned from smug to something almost like shy, and he cleared his throat. "Because I was worried that you'd let her brainwash you into hating me again and I was listening from the doorway and... and because... well."

"Well what?"

"You're sort of..." He wrinkled his nose, searching for the right word. "Well... *kissable*, I suppose. When you're all indignant and ranty, I mean."

Harry wondered if he was blushing and touched his own cheek, just to check. He cleared his throat and said, "Thank you, I think." He took Malfoy's hand and, acting on instinct, kissed it. "Kissable?" he repeated doubtfully.

Malfoy nodded, grinning. "Yes. I couldn't help it." He pulled another chair over and straddled it, gesturing to the books. "What are you working on?"

"You sure you want to hear? I mean, should you be resting or something?"

Looking offended, Malfoy said, "I feel fine. Better than I have in a while." He looked serious for a moment and then said, "I think... I think you took my nightmares, this morning. Maybe, because of that, I'll have less."

Harry considered it for a moment, and then leaned forward and kissed Malfoy again, a sweet and lingering kiss. "Then I'm glad for it," he said earnestly.

"Shut up," Malfoy said playfully, rolling his eyes. "It's fine. But tell me what you've found out. The sooner we figure it out, the sooner we can leave these blasted caves."

So they worked together for a while, though Harry was more easily distracted than ever, both by Malfoy's playful mood and his own contentedness. He hadn't felt so warm and *young* in years.

Afterwards, when they went to get some lunch from the kitchens, Hermione smiled nervously at him and Harry smiled back, an unspoken agreement to forget their fight. It was for the best anyway, since living in the dark caves was claustrophobic enough without fighting to make it even more tense.

Harry spent the evening trying to learn to make a Dark Patronus and failing miserably, because he kept giggling breathlessly, not over anything in particular. Malfoy even had a bit of trouble creating one, he was so distracted by Harry.

Malfoy kissed him goodnight before they fell asleep, curled up together and smiling sleepily.

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Ginny was lost and wondering almost absently why it didn't hurt, why it was so cool and empty and a little harsh around the edges, when before, with Lucius, it had been so smooth and soothing and perfect.

This was not sex, nor fucking and certainly not making love. This was something shameful and meant to be kept secret and the stuff nightmares were made of, because she was Ginny Weasley and he was Ronald Weasley and he was inside of her and such things had never been meant to be.

She wondered what Charlie would say, or her mother, her father. What Lucius would say, if he could see her now, naked and pale beneath Ron as he moved inside her and kissed her sloppily and whispered empty promises into the hair at her temple and she cried.

He was crying too, and she was not surprised. He knew that this was wrong. Knew that it was a violation. Knew that she could not, would not, love him the way he loved her. Maybe he was ashamed of marking his baby sister's skin with kisses and bruises and love bites and such.

Ginny felt more and more dirty and sullied with every kiss and movement.

And then he was trembling and coming and she was thankful that it was over and wondering if she was crying.

She touched her face; she wasn't. That was a relief at any rate.

It had started out as a nightmare and had become worse. She'd woken up screaming and he had been beside her and had held her and kissed her and touched her in an effort to offer comfort, which had become more. More, more, more, she had thought it was alright. It was *Ron*, she owed him loved him did not deserve him and a thousand things more that she could not even recall, as he pulled her pajamas off.

It smelt of shame, as he lay spent and weak above her, if shame had a smell. Rather like burning leaves and old tires, she decided, though the smell that burnt her nostrils was not real, but just an image in her mind. A hazy, floating image of a used and dirty tire rotting in a field.

How had it come to this?

And then Ron's body stiffened with guilt or shame or something else, and he said, in an attempt at justification, "You will not be his doll anymore."

She looked at him blankly, her compliancy of before giving way to a cold and deadly rage. "Better Lucius Malfoy's doll than your whore," she spat.

He flinched. It was not his fault, she knew. She had wanted it. Wanted someone's fingertips to wipe away Lucius', because he had not come for her, not wanted her, not *remembered* her.

Before Ron could think of a reply, the door downstairs slammed and Charlie called his name excitedly. Ron paled. "Oh my god," he whispered, getting off of her and grabbing his trousers. He pulled them on while she lazily stretched and grabbed a sheet that had fallen to the floor, draping it over her hips and pulling it up and over one shoulder.

Charlie threw the door open and did not even think about Ron's naked chest or Ginny's wild hair. He grabbed his brother by the arm and tugged him out into the hall, swinging the door shut behind him. It did not close all the way, and Ginny heard every word he said.

"The stupid bugger's got it," Charlie hissed. Ginny wasn't particularly paying attention. There was an itching in the back of her mind, and she felt sure the nightmares were waking. There was a stickiness on her thighs and it made her want to vomit.

"Who?" Ron asked.

"Malfoy. Lucius Malfoy."

Her head snapped up and her eyes narrowed. Ron closed the door further, but she still heard. "What? He's got what?"

"The curse. Apparently the degree the curse affects you is somewhat connected to how much you have to fear. Apparently he has a lot to fear." Charlie snickered. "I hear he's already gone mad from it."

Ron said something that Ginny didn't catch, because she was too horrified to listen. Lucius all alone and mad with terror while she lay beneath her brother and stared up at the ceiling while he fucked her? She could not bear the thought.

Charlie and Ron were still talking, but Ginny couldn't hear a word. The itching in her mind had become a sort of frantic screaming, that tore from her lips and shattered the heavy terror that always hung over her bedroom these days. She writhed and shrieked as the nightmares came back, and Charlie and Ron were there by her side instantly.

"She's got bruises on her neck, like fingerprints," Charlie mumbled, touching the hickeys Ron had left there gently.

Ginny was not coherent long enough to hear Ron's reply to that.

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They dozed sleepily all morning, for the first time in weeks. Generally, the instant they became aware of being in the same bed together, touching or tangled together, they'd react instantly by putting as much

distance as they could between each other. This time, both were content to sleep, because they'd never felt safer.

When Harry finally woke for good, Malfoy was gone. Startled, Harry glanced around, smoothing his hair back and reaching for his glasses, feeling stung.

He left the cavern and made his way to the kitchen, where Hermione and Pansy were standing over a boiling cauldron and Pansy was snapping something about the concentration of belladonna in relation to the speed of the boil.

"Is Malfoy here?" he asked, nervous at mentioning him while Hermione was there. Hermione didn't even look up from the potion.

"Haven't seen him this morning," she said absently, concentrating hard.

Pansy glanced over her shoulder. "Researching," she said. Harry nodded his thanks and made his way to where he'd been conducting his research.

Malfoy was there, bent over a large book, frowning and tracing the words with his finger as he read. He glanced up and smiled when Harry paused at the doorway.

"I was worried," Harry said.

"Why?"

"I woke up and you were gone."

Malfoy scowled, rolling his eyes. "You slept like the dead, Potter. I tried to wake you."

Flushing a little, Harry said, "You did? Usually I'm a light sleeper."

"You were exhausted. It's fine. I've been researching. Do you know why the Unforgivables are called Unforgivable?"

Harry took the chair across from him and frowned. "No," he said.

Flipping back a few pages and pushing the large book across the table towards Harry, Malfoy said, "It's the nature of the curse. The original three correspond to ancient religions and what was seen as 'capital crimes'. Causing pain, taking away free will, and taking a life. Those are the things for which no one can ever be forgiven."

"And the fourth?" Harry asked, staring in horror at the black and white drawing Malfoy had shown him of the original Unforgivables. There were men twisting in agony and men with blank circles for eyes to signify the effects of the Imperius curse, and bodies sprawled over the ground, flashes of lightning around them. Then, towards the edges of the illustrations, were people whose mouths were open as they screamed, eyes squeezed shut and hands brought up to their faces in despair.

"It takes from them their sanity, their will to live," Malfoy said quietly.

Harry glanced up from the picture and met Malfoy's eyes. He cocked his head, brushed his hair off his forehead absently, and considered this for a moment. It was a heavy burden, trying to find out how to stop something that could not be forgiven.

"I don't think I want to be the world's hero," he decided finally, looking down at the picture again and shivering. His voice was bleak, all of the sweetness and giddiness of the day before fading as he



remembered his purpose and the weight of everyone in the world resting on his shoulders. He glanced back up again. "But I'll be yours, if you want me to."

Malfoy smiled a little. "Mine?"

"Your hero," Harry clarified.

"Why?" he asked, rolling his eyes. "Don't you think that's a waste of your time? I don't need a hero."

Harry bit his lip and considered this for a moment and then said, "You need a hero more than anyone I've ever met in my whole life."

Malfoy laughed, but it was not scornful or hurtful, but something gentler. Something inspired by the way Harry was letting Malfoy take care of him, and Malfoy was letting Harry be his hero.

Closing the book with its horrible images, Harry set it aside. He'd just opened his mouth to say something when Hermione walked in. Her eyes had dark shadows under them, and her hair was messy and pulled back off her face. She looked exhausted.

"Harry," she said briskly. "I was researching this morning--"

"Already?" Harry asked, surprised.

She smiled a little. "I tried to wake you, you sleep like the dead."

He glanced at Malfoy and cleared his throat, rolling his eyes. "Oh." It was amazing, at any rate, that Hermione had gotten the effects of the curse under control that quickly. It was mostly fueled by her desire to help him fix it, he knew.

"I was looking into the magical process of how the curse could channel the power of the Dementors. I mean, based on the laws of magical conservation, there has to be a transfer of energy or something of the like. I just want to make sure that Dark Magic works and reacts the same way as White Magic." She pulled out a scrap of parchment, reading over some notes she'd made that morning. "Also, I was thinking that maybe you are immune to it because of that whole thing when you were a baby, surviving the Killing Curse. Maybe your mother's protection spell extends to this as well."

Malfoy looked grudgingly impressed at all the thinking she'd done in the single day she'd been there. "You can't find that information in the books we've got here?"

She shook her head. "No. They're mostly on the Dementors themselves, there isn't anything on the theory of magic conservation or on how Dark Magic differs in reactivity from Light. I need *Pentigrams and Particles: A Magicular Theory on Magic*, it's a book in the Hogwarts Library."

"Hogwarts?" Harry asked, scowling. "We can't just walk into Hogwarts and take out a book, Hermione."

She frowned. "I know that. I mean, given the fact that if Draco Malfoy even tried to walk onto the grounds at Hogwarts, he'd be killed on sight, and that you're a wanted fugitive..."

"I know where we can get it," Malfoy said abruptly. "We've got a copy in my library at home."

Harry's eyes widened a little. "Malfoy, I thought your father--"

"My father shouldn't be there. He rarely was, after Ginny left."

Hermione looked at him sharply. "What happened to her?"

He smirked, probably just to irritate her. "She still hasn't confessed?"

Scowling sullenly, Hermione didn't look at him. "Fine, Harry, let him go home and get it. Hopefully his father will kill him and we'll never have to see him again," she said scathingly.

"Hermione," Harry snapped, though Malfoy only smirked. "Besides, I'm going with him."

This time, both Hermione and Malfoy had identical expressions on their faces: shock.

"No, Potter, you're not," Malfoy said smoothly, after a second of stunned silence.

"Certainly not. It's too dangerous," she agreed. It was a historical occasion, he decided sarcastically. Hermione Granger and Draco Malfoy *agreeing* on something?

"It's necessary. What if something happens?" Harry shrugged. "I'm going."

Shaking her head, Hermione asked, "Something like *what??*"

"The curse, Hermione," Harry said very slowly, as if speaking to a child. "If the curse begins affecting him, I have to be there."

"No," Malfoy said.

Hermione glanced from Harry to Malfoy and back again, before snapping, "Because you two take care of each other."

"Exactly," Harry said with a nod.

"No," Malfoy repeated. No one listened.

"Fine! Go with him, then. But I'm going too. Like I'd trust him alone with you, Harry."

"Hermione, I've been alone with him and Pansy for weeks," Harry pointed out, exasperated.

She scowled furiously. "I don't care. Now that *I'm* here to take care of you, he doesn't have to."

"Just yesterday you were saying he didn't need anybody," Malfoy growled possessively.

"And he changed my mind," she replied coldly. "You should feel thankful, Malfoy. Now that he's got someone else to rely on, he won't be forced to rely on you."

A blind sort of rage burned in Malfoy's eyes, and two red spots appeared on his cheek. "Hermione," Harry hissed, furious.

"No," Malfoy snapped. "It's fine. You're not a child, Potter, you can choose whoever you want to look after you. If Granger wants to come along and hold your hand, then why the fuck should I care?"

"Malfoy," he pleaded.

"Forget it. I'm going to tell Pansy where we're going." With one last cold look at Hermione, he swept out of the room.

Harry was very still for a long moment, eyes wide and breathing shallow as he fought the urge to throttle Hermione or collapse to the ground and cry. Finally, turning slowly, trembling with fury, Harry snarled. "I can't *believe* you."

"Harry--" she said pleadingly.

"Don't fucking say anything," he snapped. "Just... just don't. I can't... I just... You don't understand and you're not even making a fucking effort and don't you think this is hard enough without... without... You *hurt* him! You act like you fucking *like* hurting him and he's hurting enough already and I just..."

"Harry," she said gently. "Just listen to me. It's not good for you, this *attachment* to Malfoy. I mean, I understand--"

"No," he said, standing up quickly. "You don't." Then, before she could say anything, and without acknowledging her look of contrition, Harry hurried from the room.

He went to the kitchen, breathless and worried. Pansy looked up from the potion she was still working on and frowned. "Have you seen Malfoy?" he panted.

"Oh bloody hell, Potter, what have you done now?"

"Wasn't me," he said, shaking his head. "Hermione--"

"Oh, I'm going to kill her," Pansy hissed. "I swear to god, I'm going to."

"I have to find him."

"Of course you do," she said, like it was ridiculous for him to think that there could be any other option.

Harry nodded and left, nervously sucking on his lower lip and trying to think of something-- anything-- to say to Malfoy when he found him to somehow make everything Hermione had said less harsh. If that was possible.

He knew where Malfoy was a few moments later, as he rounded the corridor that led to the bedroom they shared, because he heard a gunshot.

For a moment, Harry went cold, shivers running up and down his arms, his eyes widening as a strange sense of *deja vu* overcame him and he flinched, feeling almost like he'd been here before. Which was ridiculous, but he was so sure that if he walked into his bedroom, he'd see blood, running in rivers in the cracks on the floor.

He held his breath. He didn't want to move or open his eyes or go on living because he was sure, *so sure*, that there were rivers of blood...

Then the silence was broken by a harsh curse, and Harry nearly fainted from relief.

He ran into the bedroom and then slid to a stop. Malfoy was standing in the center of the room, holding Hermione's gun awkwardly and scowling.

"What the hell are you doing?" Harry snarled, relief turning to anger. There was no blood, Malfoy seemed unharmed, and Harry was furious at the scare he'd received, and unnerved at the images of blood still whispering in the back of his mind.

Malfoy turned quickly, eyes widening, surprised for one moment before a strange sort of empty cold drained even that away. He didn't speak, didn't smile, nothing, only turned away, still holding the gun.

Harry went after him and grabbed him by the shoulder. "Wait," he said pleadingly.

Malfoy stiffened and then very deliberately stepped out of reach before turning to face him. "What?"

"What are you doing with the gun?" Harry asked

Malfoy sneered icily, as if he sensed Harry's thoughts and was amused by the very idea that he could ever possibly be driven so far into grief by Harry that he would *kill himself* over it. "I'm bringing it. What did you think?"

He winced. Of course it was ridiculous. Like Malfoy would do something like *that* because of Harry. "I don't know. I was worried, is all. You're alright?"

"Fuck off." It was said with a casual shrug, and Malfoy turned away again.

"But... Just listen, okay?"

"To what? I don't think you're going to have anything worth listening to at the moment, and I'm rather busy."

"Stop it."

"Stop what?" He sounded extremely uninterested.

"Stop trying to pretend like you're not pissed off at me! Let me explain!"

"Why should I be pissed off at you, Potter?" he sneered. "Wasn't your fault. Besides, she's right."

"How is she right?" he said weakly, feeling a bit stunned. He hadn't expected Malfoy to agree with her, when he so vehemently did not.

"She just is. Makes perfect sense. You don't need me anymore, you've got her." He tossed the gun negligently onto the bed, and Harry winced, expecting it to go off. When it didn't, he sighed with relief and then turned back to Malfoy, who was rummaging through a chest at the foot of their bed, face blank.

"I..." He trailed off, swallowing hard, eyes stinging with frustration as he tried to think up some way to explain. "Honestly, Malfoy? I've had her just as long as I've had you, either as friend or enemy, and I've always needed you, just as much, if not more, than I've needed her."

The result was not quite as he had expected it to be. Instead of reassured, Malfoy was furious. "Then *why did you bring her here?* If not so that you wouldn't need me anymore? If not to prove it to me. If not because you fucking *like* it."

"I... I needed her--"

"There? You see? She was right. It just took you a little while to remember, that's all. And now that you have, it's fine. I don't care."

"Then why are you shaking?" Harry said quietly.

"I'm not! I'm not fucking shaking and I don't fucking care and if you believe all that shit she said to you, *I don't care!!*" To emphasize his point, Malfoy kicked the bedpost, his face instantly going white as he gritted his teeth to restrain a pained moan.

"Smart," Harry snarled, instantly hurrying to his side, drawn to his pain. "Break your foot, because that makes all of this better."

Malfoy hissed, flinching away, and Harry tried to grab his arm to hold him close. Reacting instinctively, Malfoy shoved him, and Harry was so startled that he stumbled backwards and tripped, falling hard on his back and lying there, stunned. Before he could react, Malfoy sneered, "Get it through your head, Potter. I Do Not Want You."

"You don't have to," Harry whimpered, closing his eyes.

"So this is just another way to punish yourself?" Malfoy scoffed.

Harry lost his temper. "Don't you get it? Don't you fucking get it, Malfoy? Everything I have done from the moment you fell in that battle for me, has been for you! Because I cannot stand to see you hurt, because it hurts me to be so fucking helpless when you're terrified and stuck in the fucking nightmare! I don't care what Hermione says about you or this, whatever the fuck this is, because it has nothing to do with her! I brought her here so she could help me end the curse *for you*. Because all that matters to me is that you stop hurting. Nothing else *matters* and you're hurting right now and your fucking foot is broken or something and you're *angry* at me and it hurts and *I don't know how to stop it!* I can't save you! How can I save the world if I can't even save you?"

Sometime during this speech, Malfoy had moaned softly, an irritated sound of surrender, falling to his knees and crawling over to Harry. If Harry had intended to say anything more, it was lost when Malfoy kissed him suddenly, to shut him up and because he could not help it, or maybe because something was breaking inside him that could have been his heart or his mind or his will to resist this. So he kissed him, and Harry sobbed once, closing his eyes and tangling his fingers in Malfoy's hair and pulling him closer, forcing his tongue into Malfoy's mouth almost angrily. The kiss tasted of salty tears that hadn't actually been cried, and their tongues collided as Malfoy's hands came up to cradle Harry's jaw. Malfoy pulled away, breathing heavily.

"If you cry," he said, very clearly, scowling at Harry. "I'll be so disappointed in you."

Harry was trying very hard *not* to cry, and he laughed shakily, though it sounded more like a sob. "I'll try," he said.

Sucking in a shaky breath, Malfoy nodded, trailing his fingers almost absently down Harry's cheek, until his thumb was brushing his lip. "You'll be alright, Harry," he said.

Harry's eyes fluttered shut with shock, whether at the unexpected gentleness, or the suddenness of Malfoy saying his first name. "I will?" he asked.

"Of course you will. You think I'd let you be anything less?" Malfoy asked, and Harry smiled a little. With a weary sigh, Malfoy lowered himself down until his head was resting on Harry's shoulder, and Harry's arm automatically came up to wrap around him.

"We'll both be alright," Harry whispered.

Malfoy didn't reply.

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It was an easy choice, when she considered the options and all the ways this could turn out.

Ginny Weasley had been taken to Lucius Malfoy, who had been told to hold her until Voldemort was ready for her. Instead, Lucius had... fallen for her? Taken advantage of her? Played with her? Ginny didn't know, all she knew was that she loved him, wasn't whole or sane without him, was losing her mind even further to

this curse, and that she wanted to die and wanted to die *now*, but couldn't see dying anywhere but in Lucius Malfoy's arms, if he'd hold her, or broken, bleeding, and kicked at his feet if he wouldn't.

And so she left the Burrow without a note or a bag or so much as a change of clothes, hailing the Knight Bus and riding as close as it would bring her to Malfoy Manor and walking the rest of the way.

It was raining, and by the time she got to the front gates, she was soaked straight through. If there were security charms on the gates, they did not activate when Ginny touched them. They swung open silently, the falling of rain and splashing of puddles the only sound as she walked through them

Malfoy Manor was dark, a hulking and empty shadow, and she fancied she could see bats flying around the taller turrets and gables of the gothic style home.

The door was partially open, and a small stream of water had gathered on the front step and overrun the lower edge of the doorjamb, spilling into the front hall. In the darkness, she could make out vague reflections of solemn Malfoys reflecting off the walls and frowning at her upside down and backwards. She stepped into the hall and shattered their reflections, the rain soaking through her already dripping shoes.

She knew Lucius was there, despite the house being so empty, dark, and forgotten. If he was going mad, he would not want anyone around to see it, after all.

Pulling at the clasp of her sodden cloak and letting it fall to the floor, she walked silently through the halls to the main staircase, sliding her hand up the railing as she climbed them.

Up two floors, down a hall, around a corner, then another: Lucius' room was in the northern wing of the house.

It was silent, dead silent, and then suddenly, as she stepped into the master's chambers, there came a shattering of glass. She stumbled to a stop, surprised, having fallen into an almost dream like state, spurred on by the memories that were coming back, and the shadowy, hazy atmosphere of the manor.

There came another smashing sound, and another. She followed the sounds into the master bedchamber, where Lucius stood, wearing silk like she remembered, his hair unbound and falling over his shoulders in a silver wave.

He was filling wine glasses with red wine and throwing them against the wall ritualistically, watching with utmost satisfaction as they smashed, and the red wine was spreading like blood on the marble floor.

There was a tall mirror near where the glasses were shattering, and when lightning flashed a moment later, he must have seen her reflection in it.

He turned, the last glass slipping from suddenly numb fingers, and shattering like crystals of ice on the ground around his feet. A strange sort of hatred flared in his silver eyes.

"Get out of here," he snarled.

Ginny flinched but did not turn to go. "There is no where else I am meant to be," she said.

"You are not meant to be here! I will not bear it for another second!" He was shouting, eyes wild.

She stepped closer, tears of broken glass grinding beneath her feet. "I am meant to be wherever you are."

*"I will not watch you die again."*

"Watch me *die*?" she echoed.

He grabbed her roughly by the shoulders and shook her, and even as her head slammed painfully backwards, she liked it, and gasped at the feel of his fingers on her arms. "Never again," he hissed. He kissed her hard, punishing her, bruising her lips with his mouth and her arms with his fingers. She moaned weakly, because she was always weak when he touched her, and his tongue was in her mouth, trying to bruise.

He lifted her and crushed her against him, growling against her lips. "I will not let them have you this time."

Her hands had instinctively wrapped around his neck, and now his hands slipped to her thighs, wrapping them around his waist and carrying her until they were falling together onto the bed with its silken sheets, and she moaned again, arching against him and scratching his back with her nails.

"Mine," he hissed, rocking against her and biting her neck hard. "You will not leave me again."

"Leave you?" she gasped indignantly, as he ground against her possessively and tore the buttons on her shirt. "Never *left*."

But this was feverish and wild and more animalistic than she remembered it being, because Lucius wasn't even all that aware that she was there.

It was like a dream, a hazy dream, the kind she'd been living in since she'd been taken from him, only much more vivid. A thousand things she'd forgotten-- oh god, how could she have forgotten? The way his hair fell over his shoulder and brushed her face and her chest, the way the muscles in his back flexed under her fingertips and nails, his breath against her throat, the dark shadows in his eyes, and his lips...

He slammed inside of her and her nails drew blood as she arched up against him and cried out, calling his name over and over again, drawing her legs up and around him. She traced her own ragged scratches in his back as he kissed her again, hard and desperately, all the force of his madness and her own behind it.

"More, more," she moaned incoherently, panting and begging and falling apart. He bit her shoulder, growling again, and she twisted her fist in his hair and tilting her head back so he could bite her throat.

It was over quickly, and they lay together for a long moment while lightning crashed out the window. His eyes were closed, he was still inside her, and Ginny was quite sure she'd died and this was some sort of hell. Certainly too sinful for Heaven, but if this was Hell, she deserved it, longed for it, would have done anything for it.

There was an endless silence between them, and she drew her fingers away from his back, studying the faint traces of blood there absently in the quicksilver illumination of the lightning spilling in from the window.

She licked one finger, and Lucius lifted his head and watched her. Before she could lick the other, he took it and drew it into his own mouth, wrapping his tongue around it.

Moaning faintly, she shivered, and watched until he pulled her hand away and flattened it beneath his on the bed.

"Ginny?" he asked, looking, for the first time in all his years, uncertain.

She touched his face, smoothing his hair over his shoulder. "Yes, sir?" she whispered, shifting against him to remind him that he was still inside of her, because she liked the power that gave her.

"You didn't fade away."

"Was I supposed to?" she asked, smiling flirtatiously.

"Is this a new sort of hell?" he snarled, and he pulled away so suddenly that Ginny whimpered in protest.

Lucius was naked, and Ginny rolled onto her side, stretching like a cat on the silk sheets and watching as he walked to the fireplace, wondering where his clothes had gone.

"Come back," she purred. "I didn't get to taste you."

He glanced over at her, looking untamed and perplexed. "You're not real," he told her, sneering.

"What do you mean?" she asked, getting off the bed, grabbing a robe he'd left on the foot of the bed, and wrapping it around herself. She crawled onto his lap and curled up like a kitten, tucking her head under his chin.

"You have died in my arms every night for weeks," he said coldly, even as he held her tightly.

"I haven't died," she said, pulling back and studying his face, frowning. "I should think I would be the first to know if I had." She licked his bottom lip. "Besides, a person can only die once, love."

"Die only once," he repeated, burying his face in her hair and holding her so hard that she fancied instant bruises formed. "But then over and over again in my dreams."

"Oh, that," she whispered, cradling his face and sprinkling light kisses over his cheeks. "The nightmares. That is what you dream of?" She remembered Charlie and Ron, saying that those with the worst nightmares deteriorated faster, and she smiled brightly. His nightmares were driving him madder than anyone and he dreamed of losing her? It was a compliment, surely. "I never died, Lucius, not even once."

He lifted his head. "This is just another form of madness," he told her. "My son saw you die."

Her eyes narrowed dangerously. "Draco?" she hissed. "He told you I was dead?"

He smoothed her hair back and studied her face, not even seeming to have heard a word she said. "And yet if this is madness, then mad I'll be, I'd rather be mad and lose you every night knowing I'll have you the next, than sane without you."

She convinced him she was real after hours passed, hours of whispering and explaining where she had been and what she had done, as she wrote her name again and again on his skin with her nails to prove it. Blood and sex never lie, and so she scarred his tortured mind with images too vivid and sexual to be madness.

**Author notes:** The song lyrics here come from 'The Hero' by J. Englishman, who is brilliant. Dedicated to Katie and Caroline. Oh, and one more note. I don't have Americanisms in my writing, I have Canadianisms. Small but important difference-- which is: Wah I am not an American trying to sound British! That is all.

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## Windfallen

CHAPTER 8: Breathless and Bleeding

*Wandering properties of death  
Arresting moons within our eyes and smiles  
We did rest  
Amongst the granite tombs to catch our breath  
Worldly sounds of endless warring  
Were for just a moment silent stars  
Worldly boundaries of dying  
Were for just a moment never ours*



*All was new  
Just as the black horizons blue  
Then along the bending path away  
I smiled in knowing I'd be back one day*

"I don't want her to go," Harry said, his eyes very narrow. "I don't want her anywhere near me at the moment and certainly no where near you."

Malfoy laughed a little, though the sound was pained, and leaned heavily on Harry's shoulder. "Now is not the time to get all possessive, Potter...fuck."

"Well don't stand on it!" Harry snapped, helping him hobble over to the bed. "Honestly, it's your own fault... here." He helped him sit on the bed, knowing full well as he did that Malfoy was probably making the injury to his foot seem worse than it was. He didn't mind.

He knelt down at Malfoy's feet and gently pulled his shoe and sock off, inspecting the foot, holding it gently. "Don't move," he said, biting his lower lip and carefully feeling for fractures in the delicate bones.

Malfoy touched his lower lip and Harry's head snapped up, eyes widening. "What?" he asked, suddenly breathless.

He smiled. "Sorry."

A bit confused, Harry turned back to his foot, pulling out his wand and gently healing the very minor break in Malfoy's big toe. He did not want to let go of Malfoy's foot because it seemed somehow sacrilege to let it touch the cold and dirty ground.

He swallowed hard and looked up at Malfoy again, suddenly nervous. "Is it better?" he asked, his voice a husky whisper.

"Yes." He wiggled his toes. "You can let go of my foot now."

"Just don't go kicking anymore beds and you should be fine," Harry said, putting Malfoy's sock back on his foot, and then his shoe, tying it. Mostly all of that was an effort to stall the moment when he'd have to stop touching Malfoy and go about pretending that he didn't need that. Which he did, maybe as much as Malfoy needed it in his nightmares.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Malfoy said quietly. Everything had gotten so quiet suddenly. "I don't kick beds, Potter."

"Obviously," Harry breathed, standing up. He was feeling strange, breathless.

Malfoy smiled. "Obviously."

Shaking his head, Harry sat on the bed, trying to puzzle through his hazy thoughts. "I think I have a fever," he mumbled.

Malfoy, apparently, understood much better than Harry himself did, because he kissed him suddenly, hard, turning to kneel on the bed beside him, one hand curling into his hair and holding him close, the other slipping down to rest on the small of his back.

Surprised, Harry mumbled a little against Malfoy's lips, closing his eyes and letting Malfoy kiss him sweetly, and it was the sweetest thing Harry could ever remember experiencing. Malfoy's tongue, very gently touching his, tracing his lower lip and Malfoy's hand on his back and in his hair...

Harry melted against him, letting Malfoy hold him up, which was something he had never done before, and the sensation was dizzying, even more so than the kiss. Laughing softly and kissing the corner of his lips, Malfoy nudged him and Harry let himself be guided until he was lying on his back, so Malfoy could kiss him more fully.

His eyes flew open. "M-Malfoy," he stammered.

"Mmm?"

"The gun."

Malfoy sat up. "What about it?"

"It's digging into my back." Harry rolled, still a little disoriented and startled that he'd forgotten everything that was supposed to matter because of a kiss.

Malfoy picked up the gun, studying it. "We've got to go," he said quietly. He looked up. "You distracted me."

"Certainly not on purpose. You're not taking that, you'll kill somebody."

Draco smirked. "I am taking it, and that could very well be the point. We've got to go find Granger."

"She's not coming," Harry said, shaking his head. "I don't want to see her."

"She has to come, she might as well get a good look at what else we've got in the library that she can use. You said yourself, Potter. This isn't about who's on what side anymore, we've got to work together and put all these personal grudges aside."

Harry frowned. "She hurt you."

He laughed scornfully. "I'm Draco Malfoy, Hermione Granger couldn't hurt me if she tried."

"Give me the gun and I'll let her come," he said.

Draco rolled his eyes and got off the bed, straightening his clothes. "I was going to give it to you anyway," he said. "For your protection. I don't even know how it works." He handed Harry the gun, and it felt cold and alien in his hand.

"Let's go find her then, if Pansy hasn't killed her yet," Harry sighed.

Pansy hadn't killed Hermione yet, but that was not for lack of trying. Harry could hear the shouting long before he was anywhere near the kitchen and he glanced at Malfoy, rolled his eyes, and took off running towards the sound.

He burst through the door just as Pansy slapped Hermione hard across the face, and both girls froze when they saw him-- or, more correctly, when they saw Malfoy behind him, looking furious.

"We do not have time for this," Malfoy snapped.

"She just hit me!" Hermione cried.

Harry sneered, not feeling at all charitable towards her. "You're lucky. She told me she was going to kill you."

There was an uncomfortable silence, Hermione's eyes welling up with tears, and Pansy looking disappointed that she hadn't managed that. Malfoy just rolled his eyes.

"We're going to my library," he said to Pansy. "We shouldn't be too long."

She glanced at the gun that Harry still held. "Why does he have that?"

Malfoy shrugged. "Protection. Coming, Granger? That is, if you don't require medical attention for your face." He sneered and Hermione flushed, letting her hand drop from where it had been pressed to her cheek, where Pansy's slap had fallen.

"I'm fine," she said stiffly. Malfoy nodded and turned away. As soon as he wasn't looking, she looked imploringly at Harry, but he ignored her.

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Lucius was lost in madness and Ginny was right by his side, singing lullabies and holding his hand, though he held hers so tightly that she could feel the bones grinding. She didn't mind. She could hear her own madness and nightmares whispering in the back of her mind and she was aching to be taken by them, to join Lucius in his fever and terror.

The nightmares came soon enough, and she liked them, the way they crawled over her skin and spilt it and let her fall out of it and into Lucius' because they were one together.

The fever of madness flared and burned for a few hours and died, leaving her aching and tired, spent and lying weakly while the final waves of heat lapped through her veins.

She moaned softly and Lucius was there, holding her. He whispered and kissed her temple and Ginny would have been glad to die like that.

She laughed, not because she found anything particularly amusing, but because she knew he liked the sound. He kissed her and smiled against her lips.

"There are bruises on your neck, love," he whispered, licking them.

She stiffened in his arms, eyes widening. To distract him, she said, "Tell me how I die in your dreams," because she did not want to think of Ron's mouth on her neck, and maybe a little because she got off on knowing. Death and madness go hand in hand and she'd been flirting with death since the first time he took her.

"There is a dragon," he explained to her. "I hold you and you fall apart in my arms and then a dragon tears you apart and you die in my arms, bleeding."

A small smile played with the corners of her lips. "And do you die with me?" she whispered.

"I can do nothing else," he confessed. "I tear the dragon limb from limb and then die beside you."

She stroked his face and smiled. "And that is a nightmare? It seems a fitting end to me."

He bit her lower lip and then he kissed her. Closing her eyes, Ginny melted against him, wistfully wondering if this was madness or if she'd ever been sane.

There was a crash and the door flew open. A house elf stood there, eyes wide, glowing in the darkness. Outside, the sun was rising. Ginny wondered when the storm had blown over. "Begging your pardon, sir," the elf said. Ginny recognized her as Pinky, who had served her during her previous stay at the manor.

"I do not wish to be disturbed," Lucius snarled.

"Pinky knows that, sir, only there is something Pinky must tell Master Malfoy," Pinky whimpered.

"I'm sure it can wait," he said, burying his face in Ginny's hair.

"It can, Pinky knows, sir, only it does not want to. It is throwing a fit, sir."

"It?" Ginny echoed, frowning.

"The intruder in the library. Pinky found him, she did, climbing the gates to the Manor." Pinky's skin was turning a hopeful red, as if she were nervously wishing for praise.

Lucius finally gave his full attention to the elf. "Who is it?"

"Pinky doesn't know, sir, only that he is throwing books and screaming about... about Ginny Weasley, sir."

She paled. "Ron," she whispered.

Lucius glanced at her for a moment and then nodded curtly to the elf. "You left him in the library?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will attend to it."

Pinky withdrew and, without a word, Lucius got dressed and walked out of the room.

Cursing under her breath, Ginny hurriedly dried her own clothes with a spell and pulled them on, as the sun cast a shimmering glow in the eastern sky, starting to rise over the grounds of Malfoy Manor.

She hurried to the library, still cursing, and threw open the doors. Ron was bound to a chair in the middle of the room, a rather recent development, given the number of books that had been flung from the shelves. His face was white, except for two bright patches of red that were evidence of his rage. Lucius sat in an armchair nearby and watched him thoughtfully, with the air of a healer making a diagnosis.

"Ginny," Ron cried gratefully, when he saw her. "I was so worried, I--"

His voice cut off when she slipped into the library and over to Lucius, sliding onto his lap and curling up like a kitten. Lucius smiled at her and stroked her hair.

"Get away from him," Ron snarled.

Ginny turned to study him evenly. "You don't understand, Ron, I don't know if you ever did."

His brown eyes flashed but, before he could speak, Lucius drawled, "You've put me in quite a difficult position, Weasley. I am sure that Ginny will not want to see you dead at my hand. However, there are always consequences for those who feel the need to break into Malfoy Manor."

"I don't care what you do to me," Ron said bravely, rashly. "As long as you let Ginny go."

Ginny turned her face into Lucius' shoulder to smother a giggle. Lucius laughed gently. "I do not think you understand the situation," he said. "Ginny does not want me to let her go."

"She doesn't know what she wants," he growled.

"Doesn't she?" Lucius purred.

Ginny lifted her head, eyes narrow, and spat, "And I suppose you do know what I want, Ron?"

"I know you don't want this," he said desperately.

"Of course I don't," she mocked. "I want your clumsy kisses. I want your rough hands. Yes, Ron, that's perfectly what I want, to lie underneath you and wonder what it would be like to *die* because I am so ashamed and so dirty and so *wrong*."

Lucius' breath hissed from between clenched teeth very slowly, deliberately, and his thumb stroked the marks on her neck. "What," he said very clearly, "are you referring to, love?"

Ron looked stricken. "Ginny," he implored. "I didn't... I'm...I'm sorry, I...You're my baby sister."

Seething with rage, she slid off Lucius' lap and shrieked, "Exactly! That's what it was, that's always what it was! You're so broken and stupid and fucking weak and you've lost everything and can't *do* anything anymore because you got hit by that stupid curse in that stupid battle that you're not even a whole man anymore. Who can respect *that*? A man who can't even do *magic* anymore! An impotent *wizard*! Who in the world would respect that? The only one who has to! His little sister! So don't tell me it was my body you wanted, Ronald Weasley, because you didn't and if you had thought about it for one second you would have known that fucking me wasn't *it*. It wasn't *enough*! You would destroy me to prove you're a man. You call that love?"

His eyes were huge and glazed with shock and pain. He was shaking, she could see it, and so, so pale, but Ginny would not let herself feel bad. "And what do you call what he gives you?" he whispered. "He did not even come for you."

She flinched, falling back onto Lucius and burying her face in his shoulder, shame making her ill. Lucius licked the bruises on her neck tenderly and then said coldly, "You're dead, Weasley. Every breath you take from this second on, you take only because I have allowed it, because I have not killed you yet. But your time will come. When Ginny is not there to see it, you will meet your end."

"He did not come," she moaned. "Because Draco Malfoy told him I was dead." Regret, then, for the first time since she could remember, washed over her. Regret for all the time that had passed, all the pain and the madness and the memories that had made her want to die... And she did not blame Ron for that. She blamed Draco Malfoy, both for taking her from Lucius, and for making her hurt Ron this way. Her hands clenched into fists, and all of her rage and hate shifted and focused on Draco Malfoy.

Which was why she was so grimly, furiously pleased, when he Apparated into the library a moment later. She did not see the people with him, did not focus on them at all. All she was aware of was Ron's pain in his chair, Lucius' hand on her neck, and Draco Malfoy's startled gray eyes across the room.

Ron was shouting something, something about spies and the Ministry, Lucius was speaking to his son, and there were other people, talking, talking, everyone was talking, and none of it mattered. Ginny did not want to *talk*, she wanted to hurt.

They were fighting, arguing. Lucius was getting angry, and Ron was crying. Ginny did not care. No one was looking at Ginny, no one, no one at all, so she slipped off Lucius' lap and grabbed the nearest weapon she could find. A fire poker from beside the hearth. Her wand lay forgotten in her pocket. She did not want a clean death, she wanted blood.

And no one was watching...

The gray eyes were dark now, with fury, sparkling with that snide arrogance that had inspired him to decide she was not worth his father. Ginny moved closer, eyes locked on his. She raised the fire poker above her head...

There was an explosion, a snapping of earth air fire water everything, all elements split in two and screamed, the explosion echoing and fading, and she did not understand. All sound was gone, and there was silence, such a heavy silence.

And then there was a white-hot sort of heat, and wetness. Her fingers went numb, and the poker fell to the ground. Somewhere, someone whimpered and broke the silence. She turned to see who had made that sound, and it took so long... Green eyes. Harry. Harry who had taken her from Tom who she had loved and was holding something strange and cold. She recognized it, after a moment. A gun.

It was then that blood trickled up into her mouth and she could feel it on her chest, growing stickier and stickier. Her legs crumbled beneath her and she fell...

Her vision started blurring a little, fading in and out with her raspy breathing, and then there was Lucius, beautiful eyes huge and terrified.

"No, no, not again, not now," he hissed as he gathered her up in his arms.

The dragon had come for her after all.

She coughed and there was a trickle of blood on her lips when he kissed them a moment later, and he licked it tenderly, carefully. And then Ginny died.

It all happened so very *slowly*.

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It all happened so fast. Harry was left with a series of images, like Muggle photographs. The library with the books all over the floor, Ron tied to a chair, Ginny on Lucius' lap, and the sun rising out the large bay window behind the armchair they sat on together. And then there were flashes of conversation, strings of words.

"You are not welcome here."

"Father..."

"...he's a spy... Hermione, he's betrayed us all..."

"Get her out of here..."

"...took her from me..."

None of it mattered, Harry was in shock. Nothing was making sense because this was not going as planned. Lucius was not supposed to be here, Ginny was not supposed to be here, and Ron... Ron said he was a spy... still thought him a spy... And Ginny...

Was standing up. Was staring at Malfoy.

It was instinct. It was a wild, natural, instinctive thing. *Someone meant to do Malfoy harm*. No.

And so he aimed the gun and pulled the trigger, all in one heartbeat, without thought, without reason, without anything except the fierce and possessive knowledge that anyone in the world who sought to bruise, mar, hurt Draco Malfoy would die at Harry Potter's hand.

And the shot. Oh god, the shot. Nothing had ever been so loud as that shot.

There was a trembling moment of shocked silence, broken when a whimper tore from his throat, and then the sounds, so many sounds, slammed into him in an indistinct roar. Someone was screaming (Ron?) and someone crying (Hermione?), and someone was calling his name... Malfoy... that had to have been Malfoy. Harry was still pointing the gun at where Ginny had been standing, and now she wasn't standing at all, she was down... down, and there was blood, and Lucius was holding her and-- oh god, oh god, why was *he* holding her? Kissing her? Suddenly that was what mattered. That Lucius Malfoy was kissing Ginny Weasley and Ginny was dying-- or was she dead? Oh god oh god and the gun was so hot in his hands but he could not remember how to work his fingers to drop it.

He turned away, because he could not stand to see the blood (he had not done that, he had *not* done that. Harry Potter does not kill anyone who does not deserve it-- did Ginny deserve it? She had sought to kill Malfoy... but Malfoy deserved it...*did* he deserve it? No, no, oh god, but nor did she...) Instead of seeing Lucius and Ginny, Harry was aware, very distantly aware, of Hermione and Malfoy just out of his line of vision... and there was Ron, who was sobbing and trying so hard to tear free of his magical bonds...

Harry stepped forward to help, acting blindly, his mind still reeling and trying to talk him into some sort of understanding that just was not *coming*. Ron snarled and tried to kick him, hated him with every bit of passion that he still had in him, that had not died when Ginny died... Ginny died. Oh god.

Flinching, Harry turned away, at a loss. He was the hero, he was the fucking hero, what would a hero do now? Kiss her lips, revive her, bring her back, but Lucius had already tried. Oh god.

He was going to be sick. He was going to will himself into death. Death could take him and leave Ginny and everything, everything in the world would be evened out, Harry would be dead and Ginny would still be laughing and putting her elbow in the butter dish and Mrs. Weasley would be alive again and Mr. Weasley... and Ron would still smile and he'd still cast fires and turn on lights with the merest flick of his wand, still unlock locks with magic because the magic was not locked inside him and... and..

And Lucius Malfoy was picking up the bloodied, fallen poker and his eyes were so dark, so dark, with madness and rage and maybe, maybe faint reflections of dragons... not as if he himself was a dragon, but as if he was looking at a dragon, which would mean that *Harry* was the dragon... which was just like that dream. The dream where Harry was the dragon... and dragons were meant to be slain, so Harry held very still and watched Lucius come closer and closer and at the last second he whimpered, flinched, turned away, and the blow fell across his shoulder blades and knocked him to the ground. The poker raised up again, for a killing blow, and he closed his eyes and waited for it to fall.

There was a flash of green that danced on his closed eyelids and Harry's eyes flew open, staring in shock as the light in Lucius' went out. He fell, slowly, slowly, and landed hard on the floor nearby. Something cracked when he fell-- had something broken? Oh god, oh god, nothing was making sense.

But Harry's eyes were wide and staring, because he could see the window still, and the sun was rising... it had been so long since he'd seen the sun, so long living in a cave, and here was the rising sun, and he could only see it because Lucius, who had been blocking his view, had fallen.

And then there was Malfoy. Standing there, wand still raised, and eyes very wide, because it had been his Killing Curse that had killed his father, and everything (except the sun), was very, very still.

Harry moaned, a weak, pained sound, and closed his eyes.

"No," Malfoy hissed, and he was there suddenly, beside Harry. "No. You're alright. Potter. Don't..."

Harry opened his eyes, because he was not dying, though he wanted to. He was broken and raw and aching, but not dying. Malfoy didn't know it, and he picked him up, cradling him and burying his face in Harry's neck, breathing deeply and struggling for a calm that seemed to have deserted him.

His father was dead nearby, and Ginny, broken and bloody, was by the fireplace. Hermione had untied Ron and they were now clinging to each other, and crying.

And still, even so, just out the window, the sun was still rising.

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There was a shuddering moment, and then Malfoy found the calm he'd been seeking. He lifted his head, carefully studied Harry's face, and said quietly, firmly, "You're alright." Then he gently set Harry down, careful not to hurt his back, which burned from the blow. "We've got to find that book."

Harry blinked, because that did not make sense. Books did not matter anymore, had never mattered, nothing mattered, there was nothing... But Malfoy's hands were shaking and Harry could understand, distantly, that Malfoy could *not* fall apart because a Malfoy never did. So he let his hand fall away from where it had wrapped itself in Malfoy's shirt, and he let Malfoy go.

So then Malfoy was gone and Harry was alone with the rising sun. People were crying, wailing softly, and Malfoy was looking for that fucking book, but Harry didn't care. He crawled over to Ginny, whose eyes were still open and staring in shock. She was wet with blood, and very light, so he picked her up and cradled her, studying her face in silence. He slid across the floor, still holding her, until he was beside Lucius.

Malfoy was suddenly kneeling beside him. "Harry," he said, very gently. "What are you doing?"

His eyes were very wide, and he stared at Malfoy for a long moment before things crumbled and he started to cry. Instinctively, Malfoy grabbed his shoulders, shaking him roughly. "Stop it," he snapped. "Stop, stop, oh god, Potter, *don't*..." And Malfoy was kissing him, instinctively, holding his face roughly and pressing his lips hard to Harry's, squeezing his eyes shut. "Stop," he said again. Harry closed his eyes and whimpered and nodded. Resting his forehead against Harry's, Malfoy took a deep breath. "Leave her here, with... with my father..."

And Harry nodded again, because that had been the point, the point of all of this. So he put her down carefully right beside Lucius, so it looked as though they'd died together, and then he said, "They need to be covered," as he closed Ginny's eyes, and then Lucius'. It was a plea for forgiveness, for absolution, because all he could see in her brown eyes was accusation.

Malfoy stroked his hair, and nodded, kissing his forehead and then leaving the library to get a blanket.

Harry glanced up while he was gone; the sun was up and the golden lights were fading into the mundane brightness of day.

It was a silk sheet that Malfoy found, and he helped Harry spread it over them both.

"I've got to take Ron to safety," Hermione said softly from behind them. Harry turned to look at her, feeling raw, distant, and broken. She looked just the same.

"Where will you take him?" he asked. He glanced at Ron, who was now standing at the window and shaking like he would crumble at any moment.

"I don't know."

Malfoy stood and took a ring from his finger, pressing it into her hand. "This will bring you back to the caverns," he said. "If you plan on coming back."

"I do," she said distantly. Her eyes welled up with tears. "I will be back, after I care for him. He needs me, and..." She glanced at Harry now, and then back at Malfoy. "And you two take care of each other."

Draco nodded. "Hold it in your left hand and say 'Pendragon'."



Nodding, she went back to Ron then, and talked softly to him. Malfoy took Harry's hand, because Harry was staring longingly at Ron again, and shaking. His hand was stiff with blood, but Malfoy didn't seem to mind. "Come on," he said, still so gently. Taking care of Harry was the one thing keeping Malfoy from falling apart, Harry knew. "We've got to get back before anyone senses all of that magic and comes to investigate."

All of that magic? There had only been one spell, only one... Harry's eyes flew back to the black silk sheet at his feet, and started breathing too quickly and erratically. Malfoy kissed him lightly, right near his ear.

Hermione glanced at them with huge, sorrowful brown eyes, and then she and Ron Apparated away. Malfoy squeezed Harry's hand and they did the same, leaving Lucius and Ginny together under a shroud of silk.

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He staggered a bit, when they reappeared in the caverns, because Harry was under the distinct impression that his legs were going to give out from beneath him at any moment. Malfoy caught him before he fell.

"Alright?" he asked, worrying.

Harry just closed his eyes and shook.

"Sit down," Malfoy said, pulling him over to the bed. "You'll be alright."

Nodding, Harry sat down heavily, swallowing. "I'm fine," he said, though his voice was gravelly.

"I've got to go tell Pansy..." Malfoy hesitated.

"Go on," Harry said.

After studying him worriedly one more time, Malfoy left. It was very silent after that, and Harry stared blankly at the ground, biting his lip. The numbness that had acted as a sort of insulation in his mind was wearing off and replacing it was a whirling, panicky series of images. Ginny staring at him in shock, Ginny falling, Lucius holding her and coming at him in a rage, all of it, over and over in his head. As the numbness faded, he began feeling the searing pain across his shoulders were Lucius had hit him. A harsh sob cracked in his throat and Harry winced, burying his face in his hands, which were still stained with blood.

It was strange, he'd killed before, had been stained with blood before, and never reacted like this. He had tried to convince himself that death did not matter, but he had only ever killed men in masks before, never Ginny Weasley, who used to love him, who he'd spent so much of his time *saving*...

But then, he should have expected it. Everyone who had ever meant anything to him was punished for it in the end--

His eyes widened and a painful breath lodged in his throat. *Oh god*. There was no one in the world that mattered as much to him right now as Draco Malfoy did.

When Malfoy returned a few minutes later, Harry was mumbling to himself under his breath and digging through the chest at the foot of the bed.

"What... what are you doing?" Malfoy asked.

Harry glanced up. His eyes were wide and stinging with tears. "I have to go, Malfoy."

"No."

"I have to."

There was something other than that strange, dark control Malfoy had been exhibiting since killing his father. Panic. "No. *Why?*"

"I'm a disease," Harry said, going back to digging through the chest, looking for his possessions. "I hurt and I kill and anyone who I love gets hurt."

There was an endless silence, and Harry finally grew unnerved and looked up. Nothing could have prepared him for the black rage on Malfoy's face.

"It doesn't work that way," he hissed.

Harry stood up, eyes widening. "Malfoy..."

"You don't do that to *me*."

"Do what? Calm down! I just--"

"You don't *leave* me when I have just given up the one thing that mattered to me more than anything else in the fucking world! I *killed* him! I fucking killed him, for you, and you're going to just walk away? After everything.... after everything I gave you..." he was breathless, voice harsh with fury.

"What...what did you give me?" Harry whimpered.

"Parts of myself that I have never even let other people know existed," Malfoy said, voice all at once bleak and painful, and so, so angry.

"But Malfoy, that's why I have to go," he said, closing his eyes because they were filling with tears and he did not want to cry. "This is my fault and if I stay, you'll end up... dead like Ginny or weak like Charlie or broken like Ron or--"

"Shut the fuck up," Malfoy snarled. "I'm not a fucking Weasley, I'm not going to fall apart, and *none of that was your fault!* You're not... not a disease, you're... you just..."

Harry touched his shoulder gently. "I just don't want to hurt you. I have to go. If I go far away, no one will get hurt."

"*I will.*"

"Malfoy, I have to--"

Malfoy shoved him. "No, Potter, I don't think you're understanding the situation here. You're *not* leaving."

"I have no choice--"

He shoved him again, anger glowing brighter in his eyes. "No. I will not let you go."

"Malfoy!" Harry shouted, growing frustrated. "It isn't your choice!"

Grabbing him roughly by the front of his shirt, Malfoy leaned very close and hissed, "I'm making it my choice, Potter. *You're mine.* You think I will let you walk away from me?"

"Sometimes you don't get a choice," Harry snarled, trying to pull away.

"You think I don't *know* that?" Malfoy shouted, shaking him. "You think I had a choice about this fucking curse? Or being stuck here with you? Or killing my father? Maybe I didn't have a choice about that, but I do have a choice about letting you go, and I *won't*."

With the last word, Malfoy shoved Harry so hard that he flew back onto the bed, casting a binding charm that tied him there. He landed hard on his back, which was already bruised deeply and aching, and he arched up and cried out, pain shooting through his body. "It hurts," he whimpered, sucking in a startled breath.

All of the rage in Malfoy hissed out in a rush, and he whimpered, crawling onto the bed so that he was straddling Harry. "Oh god," he whispered, his lower lip trembling. "Oh fuck. I'm sorry, I just... " He touched Harry's face with trembling fingers. "You can't go, you can't, not now, *please*."

Harry's eyes, already burning from the throbbing pain in his back, welled up with tears. "You *have* to let me go or let me die or something. I don't want to hurt you."

Malfoy was shaking his head, eyes closed. "You can't go."

"You can't keep me tied to your bed," Harry said quietly, gently.

"You did it to me," Malfoy said. He ran his hands through Harry's hair. "Does it still hurt? Your back, I mean."

"No." It had faded to a dull throb. "Let me go."

"No." Malfoy slipped off him and left the cavern, returning moments later with a basin of water and a rag. While Harry watched, he wet the cloth and gently washed the blood from Harry's hands, face, and neck. Harry's breathing hitched a little at the careful consideration shown there, and it only strengthened his resolve to leave.

When he was done, Malfoy started unbuttoning Harry's shirt, smoothing it back over his shoulders so that his chest was bare, and then washing that as well. Some blood had soaked through his shirt from where he'd held Ginny against his chest.

"Malfoy," Harry said, very softly, because there was no blood left on his chest and Malfoy was still washing in an attempt to avoid having to look him in the eyes again. "Look at me." He didn't. "Draco."

Draco looked up through his lashes. "What?"

"I need to--"

Draco kissed him suddenly to shut him up, and when he pulled away, Harry opened his mouth to talk again. Before he could make a sound, Draco was kissing him again, desperately, and Harry tried to turn his head aside. Whimpering into his mouth, Draco cradled his face, stroking with his thumbs to soothe him, calm him, keep him still, and Harry finally relented with a soft sigh he could not restrain. Draco was straddling him, leaning on him, kissing him, and it wasn't like he had much of a choice... and so he moaned quietly and kissed him, opening his mouth again when Draco licked coaxingly there, and slipping his tongue into Draco's mouth when the other boy teasingly demanded it with his own. His hands were still tied and he shifted restlessly against the bonds, growing frustrated with the inability to move.

Draco broke the kiss but left him tied. "Stay," he whispered hotly, kissing his jaw lightly.

"I can't."

"Harry."

"I *can't*." He was going to cry, and that was embarrassing, but he could still see Ginny's accusing and dead eyes and he had *caused* that. He refused to hurt Draco, refused...

Draco evidently gave up on pleading, and instead slid lower, kissing his neck. He rocked his hips a little, and Harry yelped, eyes flying wide. "Draco," he stammered, because that was different and he was not sure he wanted it. Wanted to give to Draco what Charlie had taken. Because Charlie had been a mess and had needed comfort and now Harry was the mess... and he refused to do to Draco what Charlie had done to him.

"Mmm," Draco whispered, licking his neck lightly. "It's alright. I won't hurt you."

Harry frowned, because that was not what he was concerned about. He did not want to *cause* hurt. But Draco was licking his collarbone, rocking his hips again, straddling Harry, and Harry squeezed his eyes shut and moaned in terror. *Nothing good could come of this*. Nothing good ever had. Only shame and guilt and fear.

"Please don't," he whimpered.

Draco lifted his head and bit his lip, looking a little hurt. "Why?" he whispered.

Harry licked his lips and swallowed hard and tried to think of what to say. "Because... because I'm afraid," he admitted finally. He flinched, expecting laughter or a smile or something. He didn't get it; instead, Draco just kissed him again, carefully and gently, stroking his face and smoothing his hair.

"It won't be *like* that," Draco growled softly, biting Harry's lower lip. "Do you trust me?"

Harry was broken and Draco was broken and maybe their broken edges would fit together. He stared up at him for a long moment and then nodded hesitantly. Trust was an important part of fitting together.

Draco nuzzled him and smiled against his skin, just a little. Maybe he *did* need this, but Draco needed it too, so it was different than it had been with Charlie.

Then Draco's hips shifted again, differently, grinding down, though very carefully. Startled, Harry shifted suddenly in shock. The wound on his back grated down against the mattress, and he sucked in a painful breath, eyes widening with the sudden pain.

Draco cursed softly and undid the binds, forcing him to roll over. He pulled Harry's shirt off, gently inspecting the vivid bruise there, making Harry wince despite his care. Then, rolling his wand over the tender place between his shoulder blades, Draco whispered healing charms, and the marks faded, and with them, the pain. Kissing the spot where the wound had been, as if he was trying to smooth it away with his tongue, Draco ran his hands down Harry's back, over the muscles there.

Nervous again, Harry whimpered, turning his face to the side, his hands folded under his chin. He was breathing heavily, nearly panicking, and Draco leaned down and kissed his cheek. He was straddling Harry's back now.

"It's alright," he whispered again, and he kissed the back of Harry's neck.

"Mm hmm," Harry agreed, though he was shaking, terrified.

Draco could tell, and he laughed softly, sitting up and running his hands down Harry's back, along his spine, again and again until Harry could not help but relax. burying his face in his folded arms and closing his eyes. Gradually, Draco's touch grew firmer, until he was massaging all of the knots of terror and tension from Harry's back. He had oil then, which he massaged into Harry's skin, smoothing it over and over in long strokes down his naked back, until Harry moaned softly into the pillow and arched up into his touch.

Harry rolled onto his back, eyes feeling sleepy and heavy, and he could not imagine being anywhere but here. Images of Ginny and Lucius and all the rest had faded, until it seemed distant and dusty and no way as vivid as Draco's eyes.

He was breathing heavily, every exhalation nearly a sob, and Draco smiled approvingly and kissed him hard, grinding down again, and this time, Harry was too lost in all the heat to be afraid of being ashamed. It built from there, like a fire where every movement and kiss and whisper added more and more fuel.

When Draco gently coaxed him onto his stomach again, Harry obeyed unquestioningly, and Draco leaned down and kissed him over his shoulder, trailing fingertips down his oily back lightly, teasingly, between his shoulder blades, following the line of his spine, and lower.

There was no shame in this, and Harry wondered how he could ever have thought that this and what he'd had with Charlie could even be considered the same thing. This was not a physical thing, was not Charlie taking comfort that Harry was too weak to refuse. This was... everything.

On the most basic level, it was Harry and Draco and Draco was behind him and above him, muscles straining and chest heaving with breaths that were both hot and trembling. This was trembling hands clutching sweaty shoulders and sliding down backs where muscles moved under silken skin. Eyes dark with hunger and a painful yearning that might have been there all along and that both had been too scared to see. Eyes sliding shut and lips parting for breathless moans and words that could have been English but had no real definition.

It was Draco's tongue running down Harry's back, tracing the bumps and hollows of his spine and swirling over the expanse of skin between his shoulder blades. It was fingers threading through hair and tracing circles over feverish skin, and soft cries, and heads tilting back and tongues on throats and collar bones. It was everything.

Harry's fingertips ran over Draco's face, tracing his cheeks and nose and lips, which parted the tiniest bit, and then Draco's tongue was tasting those fingers. His gray eyes fluttered shut and his tongue coaxed Harry's fingers into his mouth, warm and wet and tongue gently sucking and swirling and taking Harry's fingers deeper.

Harry wondered, as Draco's mouth took his fingers, if he could taste the blood there, the blood that stained his hands. His own blood, Ginny's blood, Ron's blood, Draco blood, and the blood of a thousand others who had never even had the chance to tell Harry their names.

It did not matter, because Draco's hands were cradling Harry's now, stretching them out flat against the mattress, palm down, Draco's hands laid over top, pinning them there. Harry's chest was pressed down against the mattress, his head tilted to the side, and Draco was kissing the back of his neck, whispering and nuzzling behind his ear, on top of him, behind him, holding him there, though Harry ached and strangled a whimper by pressing his face into the mattress. It came out sounding like a ragged sob.

But none of that mattered. The blood and the tears and the scars that marked him were nothing beneath Draco's hands and mouth and tongue.

Harry was feverish, aching, every nerve in his body singing, and Draco was there, all over and behind and above and *inside*, and Harry wanted to scream or die or... or fall apart. This was why the entire world had been created, he decided, in those hazy moments when all that mattered was Draco's breath against the back of his neck and every place they touched.

It would stay that way for the rest of Harry's life.

The entire world had been constructed for this, made for this. Made to fall apart for this.

If anyone ever tried to tell him that he could ever love anyone else as completely as he was meant to love Draco Draco, they never really saw him, and now Harry's eyes were wide and so very dark and he felt like he was seeing himself for the first time.

He could feel Draco's hair brushing his own cheek, as Draco kissed his shoulder and whimpered.

This was why he existed at all. The entire reason for Harry's existence was here, in the way Draco was grinding down into him, these breathless gasps and arching, fighting, melting... more, yes, like that. Yes. This was everything.

Nothing mattered, nothing had ever mattered, except the scars on his skin that Draco's tongue traced, nothing mattered, nothing had *ever* mattered, except this, and nothing ever would, ever could, ever...

And then he was moaning, Draco's name or something like it, some variation of some term of endearment or something, anything, it did not matter, for in moments like this, it all comes down to the same. And he arched and he came and he sobbed harshly, burying his face in his arm and pressing himself down, down, into the mattress and shaking.

There was a low cry, a whisper, a sort of longing whimper that was strangled and quiet but still made Harry shiver more than anything else, and then Draco was kissing his shoulders and the space in between, whispering husky things that Harry was sure weren't in English but that he was too exhausted to ask about.

There were shattered pieces in Harry's mind, like a wine glass had fallen and broken into tiny fragments of crystal, making some random design on the floor that looked like a pattern of fallen diamonds or raindrops.

They were raw and they were broken and had waited breathless and bleeding for so many years for this.

**Author notes:** The lyrics at the beginning of this chapter are from Rufus Wainwright's song 'In A Graveyard' and this chapter is dedicated to Ani, who introduced me to the song, and Caroline and Umbralín, who beta'd the chapter. Also to my lovely 'sort of betas' who read as I write to tell me if it's crap or not. You know who you are.

Thank you to all the reviewers of the previous chapters as well, who are an inspiration to us all. Hehe.

This chapter was, for the record, the hardest to write. So far, anyway.

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## Windfallen

Chapter Nine: This Was Freedom

*Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.  
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,  
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;  
Divorce me, 'untie or break that knot again,  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
Except you'enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.*

There was a silence, not because there was nothing to say, but because in that silence, it was all being said. It was said the way Draco lay beside him, breathing heavily, almost nervously, in the way one arm was stretched out over Harry's shoulders, holding him there but gently, as one would hold a butterfly they feared crushing. In the way Harry's eyes were wide and fixed on Draco's face, and the way Draco could not seem to open his.

Harry finally turned his face away, until it was pressed into his folded arms, his eyes shut. When he spoke, his voice was muffled. "I'm so, so sorry."

There was a drawn out silence, a silence of a different sort, and finally, Harry peeked out of the corner of his eye at Draco. The other boy was lying very, very still, his eyes still closed as if he were afraid to look, as if he were bracing himself for a blow, one he was not sure was coming. "And why is that, Harry?" he said at last, voice nearly toneless.

"For making you think that doing that would convince me to stay."

Harry could feel Draco flinch, the shock that ran through him and caused him to pull his arm away. Letting out a sharp breath, Draco sat up, running a hand through his hair. "Because that's what that was," he said, sounding tired. "But then, what else..." he trailed off.

"What else what?"

"What else could it be? Certainly not... something... something I wanted. Or that you could want. Because things like this, with you... they're fucking currency."

"Currency?" Harry echoed uncertainly.

"Something to give out when you've done something that you feel you should be ashamed of. Something to give out for comfort when you think you've made somebody cry." Draco sneered. "Like Charlie."

Harry flinched. "This is nothing like that! How could you say that?"

Draco laughed, though it was cold and spiteful, and when he turned to look at Harry, his eyes were dark and bleak, furious and aching empty at the same time. "Because that's all you are, Harry. This fucking empty, wasted, terrified little boy who's been convinced that he's nothing and has nothing and owes the world a thousand favors and you've run out of things to give to repay it so now you give the last thing you've got. It isn't hope or faith or heroism, you ran out of all of that and people keep coming back for more and more and more and so you give them bits of you but I don't... I don't..." The fragile control in his eyes was slipping, cracking, and Harry was terrified.

"You don't what?" he asked, shaking a bit as he crawled off the bed.

"I don't want bits of you, I want all of you and I thought I had it but I'm just like them!" The words echoed and Harry stared at Draco and tried to think of some reply to that. The control in Draco's eyes had shattered, and all of the darkness and fury had changed, grown sharper, and there was a sheen of tears there now, and hurt. That was it then, there it was. The pain that Harry had known would be there, eventually. He should have left already, then it wouldn't be there. None of this should have happened. It was his fault, Draco was shaking and nearly crying and naked and vulnerable and it was *Harry's* fault.

"This never should have happened," he whispered, shaking his head and swallowing heavily.

Draco got off the bed, turning very slowly to face him, his face so pale that it was nearly gray. He did not speak, and Harry started getting dressed, trembling and unwilling to look up at him.

"I've... I've got to go, Draco," he started to say. "I can't--"

He didn't get any further, because with a growl, Draco was over the bed and shoving him so hard that Harry lost his balance. He fell back, onto the bed with its twisted sheets, his head slamming against the headboard. Stunned, Harry moaned softly, but before the room even stopped spinning, Draco was pinning him down. Bracing one hand on his chest, he straddled Harry and used the other to tilt his face up, holding it there until Harry's eyes opened and stared up at him.

Leaning very, very close, Draco hissed, "You're not going anywhere." Then, before Harry could react or speak or anything, Draco stretched his arms up over his head and bound them there with a spell.

He smiled a little, though certainly not an amused smile. It was rather strained and bitter. "You can't keep me here, Draco."

"Try to leave," Draco whispered, a challenge.

Harry halfheartedly tried to sit up, but found he couldn't. "I can't."

Draco sneered, "Then reason would suggest, Potter, that I'm doing a fucking brilliant job of keeping you here."

"You *can't*," Harry shouted, his voice high with hysteria. "You can't, Draco, you can't, I have to go, I'm all bloody, and....and..." he was breathing quickly, hyperventilating and thrashing against the magical bonds, a sudden panic attack leaving him terrified.

Stroking his hair soothingly, Draco kissed the corner of his lips. "Close your eyes," he whispered. "It's alright. Just breathe."

"I can't..." Harry whimpered, trembling, because the image that being with Draco had served to brush from his mind like cobwebs and shadows was coming back, reminding him why he couldn't be here, couldn't be near Draco. Because anyone who was near him ended up broken and bleeding all over him and if his hands were ever stained with Draco's blood, he would die. "You have to let me go."

"Because I made you kill her for me."

Harry stilled, going cold, images of Ginny and her blood flashing through his mind. "Ginny," he whimpered. "Oh my god." He had not wanted to think of it, had not wanted to remember, and now he couldn't stop it. He was trembling and aching and scared and he had killed her and killed Mr. and Mrs. Weasley and hurt Charlie, and Ron would never speak to him again and he'd failed them all and he was a fucking disease and - "Get off me!" he shrieked, bucking and trying to twist away from Draco. His hands were still bound, but Draco, startled, scrambled off of him. "Don't touch me!" Harry sobbed, though his eyes were dry. "Don't... don't touch me."

Draco stumbled backwards, still naked, eyes wide and uncertain, stunned and hurt. "Harry I didn't mean for you... I didn't mean to make you do that," he whispered, shaking. "I-I'm sorry...."



Harry didn't hear. He closed his eyes and whimpered, breathing faster and faster now, chest heaving with his sobs. He was not thinking of Ginny any longer, or Ron, Charlie, Molly, any of them. Instead, Draco's face after he killed his own father was etched in Harry's mind, because he had caused that pain as well.

"Don't touch me," he whispered raggedly, because Draco had crept forward and brushed his fingers along Harry's shoulder, trying to calm him.

"What's happening?" It was Pansy, and Harry's eyes flew open. She was standing in the doorway, looking, as usual, pale and weak, a mere shadow of herself. "Draco, dear, put some clothes on." Despite her coolly amused words, she came up behind him and stroked his arm soothingly. "Everything's fine," she whispered. He turned his huge, shaken gaze to her and stared blankly for a moment, before swallowing and nodding.

When Draco moved to find his clothes, Harry closed his eyes, trying to calm his breathing. Pansy sat beside him on the bed and studied him in silence, before saying very gently, "Harry, stop it." She touched his bare shoulder, and he wished desperately that he'd had time to grab a shirt before Draco had tied him. As it was, he had only gotten his trousers on, though he thanked god for that. Maybe if there were less of his skin to touch, people would be safer... Though it was not rational, his mind latched onto that idea.

His eyes flew open. "Pansy," he said. "You've got to get him out. Get him away from me."

She studied his feverish face for a moment and then dismissed his words, turning to Draco. "Why is he tied?"

"He tried to leave," Draco said defiantly, dressed now and evidentially recovering from his speechlessness of a few moments before.

Sighing, Pansy turned back to Harry. "He's not alright, Draco. I think he's in shock or something."

"Why would he be in shock?" Draco snapped. "I didn't attack him... It wasn't *rape*, I just--"

Harry flinched and closed his eyes. Draco was not meant to sound so confused and defiantly hurt and that, too, was Harry's fault. Pansy sighed again. "Draco. I didn't say that. It probably has a lot more to do with what happened before."

"Then why won't he let me touch him?" Draco whimpered, all his defensiveness giving way to a lost loneliness that made Harry want to die.

"Get him *out*," he screamed, and both Pansy and Draco jumped. "I don't want to see him, get him away, oh god, please, please..."

"Draco," Pansy whispered, jumping off the bed. "Come on." She started pulling him towards the door.

"No!" Draco snapped. "I--"

"Just until he's calm. I'll talk to him. Please... he's going to hurt himself if he keeps panicking this way..."

Draco scowled but let her push him from the room, and then, after he was gone, Pansy came back to Harry's bed. He was breathing heavily, eyes wide, terrified.

"Listen to me, Potter," she said firmly. "Stop this. Whatever it is, stop it. Whatever you blame him for, it wasn't his fault. *You* killed her, not him. He had nothing to do with it, and blaming him for it won't fix it and won't bring her back."

"You don't understand," Harry whimpered.

"What is there to understand?" she snapped.

"I know all of that. It wasn't him. It was me. It was me, it's always me, and I can't... can't..."

"Can't what?"

He whispered, "Can't risk that it'll be him next. I destroy anything I care about."

She was silent for a long moment and then, without a word, she walked out of the room.

Harry started to cry a short while later, worried and exhausted and too terrified to sleep. He did not think he could stand to live through all of that at the Manor again, not even in his nightmares.

"Harry?" Draco called quietly from the doorway, after a short while had passed. Harry's eyes were squeezed tightly shut, and he did not open them.

"Go away," he said huskily.

"Shut up."

Finally, Harry looked, though it was through a haze of tears. "I don't want you in here."

"Why are you crying?" Draco came closer, looking nervously uncertain, but determined.

"I'm not. Get out." He was proud of the shaky control he had over his voice and closed his eyes again, conscious of the tear tracks down the side of his face that proved his words a lie and not caring.

When Draco gently traced them with his fingertip, however, Harry reacted instinctively and flinched, reacting violently in the only way he could. He bit Draco's hand, and Draco's eyes widened in shock. He snatched his hand back and Harry stared at him, startled.

There was a long silence, in which Draco didn't seem to know what to say. Finally, Harry whispered, "I'm sorry."

"You're sorry for everything," Draco spat, his cheeks colouring as he cradled his hand and looked indignant.

"Not everything," Harry replied softly, turning his head away. He didn't know what he was thinking, or why he was acting like this, talking like this. "Not this. I mean, not you."

There was a strange pause, and Harry turned back to look at him, confused to find him looking hurt. "Not this?" Draco repeated. "Fuck you."

"No! I mean... I meant before. You. And me. That I wasn't sorry... because I..." Harry closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Even when he tried to take back the hurt he'd caused, he ended up just multiplying it. "Just leave, okay? I can't... can't do this... I don't want... *please*." And then, though he tried to stop it, Harry started to cry, heavy, hiccupping sobs.

Looking stricken, Draco reached out to touch him, though his hand never made contact, only hovered uncertainly over Harry's naked chest. "Stop. Don't. I didn't mean... don't cry... Harry."

"*Get out!*" Harry sobbed. "Just leave me alone, stop looking at me, I don't want to see you look at me like that! I can't stand it! I can't stand *looking at you!*"

Stumbling back, Draco looked uncertain. "Harry..." he said, almost pleadingly.

Harry just shook his head wildly and cried. After a moment, and with one last helpless look, Draco left, and Harry only cried harder, until he fell into an exhausted and restless sleep.

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Harry did not dream of streams of light, nor flocks of golden snitches, but in his dream, he was twirling around and around and falling to the ground, over and over again, and around him, black stars with tails of silver were falling. He woke up, dizzy and disoriented, and Draco was beside him, eyes closed, cuddled up close to him. In his sleepy state, this made perfect sense, so Harry murmured contentedly and kissed Draco's forehead, snuggling closer. He was no longer tied, but had forgotten being tied at all, so he did not question it.

Draco's eyes flew open and he stared at Harry, something like terror in his eyes. Then he blinked and it was gone. "You're awake," he said huskily. "I'll go. I meant to go. Before you woke, I mean. I mean... I'm sorry. I..." he said up.

Mumbling incoherently, Harry pulled him back until he was lying down again, and held him there. "Don't go," he whispered, closing his eyes. They were sticky and aching from tears, and he was trying to remember why.

Draco whimpered; it was so strange a sound, that Harry's eyes flew open and coherency returned with the force of a cold shower. "Make up your mind," Draco said, his eyes squeezed tightly shut.

"Oh," Harry breathed, remembering. "I'm--"

"Sorry. I know." Draco smiled self-depreciatingly and turned onto his side, so he and Harry were face to face, his head pillowed on his arm as he studied Harry thoughtfully.

"Why am I not tied?" Harry asked.

"The bonds were cutting into your skin. I healed it while you slept."

"Thank you."

He shrugged and they were both silent, uncertain.

"Ginny..." Harry said finally, biting his lower lip.

Instantly, Draco looked wary. "What about her?"

"What happened to her?" Harry swallowed hard. "I mean, how did all of that happen?"

Draco's eyes narrowed and he didn't speak for a moment; Harry worried that he wouldn't speak at all. Finally, he said quietly, "Voldemort wanted an heir and he wanted it from her because she was already his. He claimed her in the Chamber of Secrets. So we took her and were instructed to keep her until it was convenient for him to come for her, but instead, my father fell in love with her, and she him. I did not know she was at the manor at all, she was kept in seclusion, my father and the house elves her only visitors. When Voldemort found out, which was inevitable, he was livid. That night was when I found out that she was there, because some of Voldemort's men came and they punished them both. Ginny was beaten, whipped. Voldemort wanted her to bleed for it, which is why she was such a mess when you found her. My father was punished as well... I do not know how. Anyway, when I heard of what had happened, I was furious. Reflected badly on the family, you know." He smirked a little, bitterly. "Voldemort was going to come for Ginny anyway. My father wanted to rescue her." Snorting, he shook his head, and then continued. "So I got to her first. I took her out of the manor and into the woods... I was going to kill her." He glanced at Harry and then quickly away. "I was going to kill her and leave her body there... instead, I ran into you."

Harry considered this, and what his reaction should be. Finally, he said, "You could have killed us both."

"No," Draco said, very, very quietly. "I could not kill you."

"Why?"

"For the same reason I could not let you get hit by the curse on that battlefield."

Harry's eyes widened. "You *let* it hit you?" He shook his head. "I saw it, Draco. You *tripped*. It was an accident!"

Draco grimaced. "I did not trip," he said, almost indignantly. "Stumbled, yes. I was... scared." He flinched a little and sneered at having to admit that. "In my haste to stop it, I stumbled."

"No," Harry whispered, because he refused to be responsible for that as well. "*Why?* You should have let it hit me!" He was panicking again, breathing faster, and Draco reacted to the hysteria in his eyes and smoothed his hair back, burying his fingers in it.

"Don't," he pleaded. "Calm down."

"But why? I'm not worth... all of this... and I would have been immune, right?"

"I didn't know the curse was contagious at the time and I certainly didn't know that you would be immune. Besides, I doubt you would have been immune to the full effects of the curse. The contagious version of it is weaker, in some ways. Had you been hit with the full force, it would have affected you."

Harry was shaking his head. "You still haven't said why," he whimpered.

"*Because!* How could I let Harry Potter suffer this? The nightmares and the fear and the terror and pain? I couldn't do it! I couldn't kill you and I couldn't kill *her* because you were holding her and I couldn't let anyone bring you pain, I couldn't *do it*, I could barely *imagine* it, alright?" Draco snapped.

Harry's eyes narrowed a little. "Because I'm Harry Potter. You couldn't kill me because I'm Harry Potter. Boy Who Lived. Hero. Fucking goddamn hero." It wasn't said angrily, just blankly. He'd always expected more from Draco, which is what had bound them together, even in Hogwarts. The idea that Draco would not spare him because of his scar.

"No," Draco said slowly. "Not because of that. Because of the way you were *holding* her. Like you would kill anyone who tried to take her from you. Like you'd rip them apart."

"You were afraid..."

"No," he repeated, frowning at the idea. "No. Because..." he looked at Harry helplessly. "Because... Harry... it was... I can't even explain..."

"Try."

He grimaced and thought for a moment and then said carefully, "It was because you weren't Harry Potter, The Boy Who Lived. Because you..." He trailed off. "You weren't a hero, or a... knight in shining armor or anything like that. You were just a boy covered in mud. And... and you were there because of her. Because you cared. For her. It wasn't some self-righteous quest to prove you were a hero. Because I recognized that... desire. To tear apart anything that threatened someone I loved." He had turned away while speaking, as if unable to meet Harry's eyes, and now cleared his throat. "It's hard to explain."

There was a long silence, in which Harry was unable to look away from Draco, who had turned away and could not look at him. Finally, Harry whispered shakily, "Then I've already destroyed you."

Draco turned towards him again, eyes narrowed. "What?"

"It's my fault! The nightmares! Because of me!" he cried.

"I would have caught it anyway, soon enough." Draco shrugged. "And I'd hardly say I'm destroyed. I think..." he considered for a moment and then said, "I think seeing you suffer this curse would have destroyed me. This is nothing compared to that." He smiled, though it was strained, and took Harry's hand, holding it lightly. "But I will not let you convince yourself that this is more reason to leave before you destroy me further. *Leaving me* would destroy me."

Harry stared at him, breathing heavily, face sticky with tears. "You don't understand," he said. "Draco... if... if I hurt you.... make you bleed... I'll die. I've destroyed everyone... everyone who ever..." he faltered helplessly. "I didn't mean to, I... wouldn't have... I wouldn't hurt you for all the world."

"For all the world?" Draco echoed, smiling a little.

Harry studied him for a long moment, licking his lower lip nervously, somehow feeling like he was getting in over his head, confessing things he was unsure of, uncertain if he even knew how to define. He nodded slowly. "Yes," he said. "Which is why I have to go." His voice was weak with uncertainty.

"No," Draco said simply, and then he cast the binding charm again, tying one of Harry's wrists to the headboard, still holding his other hand.

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A few days passed, and Harry remained there, bound to Draco's bed by one wrist. He grew restless, images of what had happened at the manor echoing over and over in his mind, until he could not close his eyes for fear of seeing Ginny's face again. It was not her face, or even Lucius', that haunted Harry's nightmares, however. When he slept, he dreamt of the look on Draco's face when Harry had forced him to kill his own father. It was the horror at having caused that which woke Harry, sweating and trembling in the darkness, terrified to move or breathe for fear of waking Draco. It took him so long to fall asleep at all that Harry would not wake him for the world.

Even in sleep, his body knew not to move, no matter the nightmares that plagued him, because Draco was beside him and so exhausted, that Harry could not risk waking him. He'd sleep as much as he could, until the nightmares came, and then he'd wake and hold absolutely still, gradually relaxing because Draco was there, breathing softly and curled up beside him, one arm across his chest, the other under his cheek, pillowing his face. Draco was there sleeping and not standing there staring at his father as he fell to the floor and cracked. So it was okay. And Harry would stay up all night watching over Draco, listening to his breathing and waiting for it to change and for Draco to wake and smile sleepily and then remember himself and get out of bed. Then he'd dress and go get something for Harry to eat. Harry would scowl at him and look indignant and Draco would look defiant and untie Harry long enough to let him go to the bathroom and then tie him again and leave the food beside him. Harry would eat and stare listlessly at the walls and grow more and more restless, longing to get up, find Draco, kiss him, touch him, make him laugh, or crawl up the walls onto the roof and then somehow through it, climbing through stone until he reached the sun and the sky and the fresh air and left all this behind. It was driving him mad, he could not imagine spending another day here, alone, while Draco and Pansy researched and left him with nothing more to do than to stay tied to Draco's bed and long to be anywhere else.

One particular night, it was not his own nightmares that woke him, but Draco's, because the other boy moaned in his sleep and tossed restlessly. Harry had been awake when Draco had come to bed, had watched silently while Draco kicked his shoes off and fell onto the bed beside him, too tired even to take off his robes as he usually did.

Now, awake and watching Draco's eyelids flicker with nightmare in the dimmed torchlight, Harry bit his lower lip thoughtfully. "Draco?" he whispered. The other boy didn't stir, except to flinch in his sleep.

Sliding his hand over Draco's ribs, letting his fingers graze the fabric of Draco's robes, Harry held his breath, watching Draco's face even as his hand slipped into his pocket. Curling his fingers around Draco's wand, Harry carefully pulled it out, breathing more quickly now and trying not to think of what he intended. Seconds later, he held Draco's wand in his hand, and a heartbeat later, he'd untied his wrist.

"It's for your own good," he whispered, but of course Draco did not reply. He merely moaned helplessly in his sleep, one hand slipping to the warm place Harry had left beside him.

Harry studied him a moment, and then leaned down, kissing his forehead. "I'll find you when this is all over, I promise." Then, he turned to go.

He only made to the doorway when he froze, because Draco had just whimpered in his sleep, calling for his father. Turning slowly, Harry stared in horror as Draco's lower lip trembled a little and the other boy turned onto his stomach, burying his face in the pillow, shoulders shaking.

"Oh god," Harry whispered, feeling ill. He could hardly walk away now, but this was his fault. What right did he really have to stay?

Still, his feet carried him back to the bed, though he knew that he would pay for his selfishness later. He had so much to pay for already, however, that he felt one more sin would hardly tip the balance.

"Shh," he whispered, crawling back onto the bed. Draco instinctively moved towards him, and Harry lay beside him, gathering him close and kissing his temple. It was not a nightmare brought on by the curse, so it was easily broken, and Draco woke, breathing heavily and confused.

"Harry?" he whispered. "What--"

"It's alright," Harry said quietly, running both hands down Draco's back. "Bad dream."

"My father--"

"I know."

There was silence. Draco was sleepy and disoriented, still frightened. He mumbled against Harry's chest when he spoke. "I'm sorry."

"For what?" Harry kept stroking his back, eyes wide and so dry that they burned as he stared into the darkness, damning himself the longer he stayed.

"Not being stronger."

Harry smiled a little. "It's just a bad dream, Draco."

"You never have them."

"I do."

Draco scoffed softly. He was still trembling, breathing heavily. "When?" he asked.

"Nearly every night since I killed her."

Pulling away, Draco lifted his head, brushing his own hair out of his eyes. "I never knew."

"I know." There was silence. "Draco?" Harry asked finally, as Draco lay his head back on the pillow.

"Yeah?"

"Why did you kill him? Your father, I mean."

There was a thoughtful, sleepy silence, and then Draco whispered, "He hurt you and you're mine."

"Yours to hurt?"

"Mmm." Another pause. "Yes. And to protect from being hurt..." He trailed off, murmuring in his sleep and burrowing close, closing his eyes. Harry sighed and held him, waiting until Draco had fallen asleep before finding his wand again, casting the binding charm on his wrist, before dropping the wand to the floor. Draco need never know that he nearly walked away.

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Hermione returned to the caverns the next day, pale and grim. Harry knew of her return moments before he saw her, because he could hear her screaming from the hall at Draco, and then she stormed into the room.

"Draco Malfoy," she was shouting. "I swear, I'm going to kill you! What *have* you done?" Then she was kneeling on the bed, stroking Harry's face gently. "Harry," she said gently. "Are you alright? I'm so sorry, I never would have let him take you if I'd know he'd do this. What did he do to you?"

Somehow, saying *fucked me, made me love him, made me want to die but gave me something to live for all at the same time* seemed the wrong answer. Instead, Harry blinked at her and then looked over her shoulder, to where Draco was scowling from the doorway. "Where's Ron?" Harry asked, trying to change the subject.

"I brought him to my parents. They're... surviving. The Muggles are calling this whole thing Mad Cow Disease, can you imagine?" her voice sounded strained. "They're caring for him. He's quite... distraught. But I don't wish to discuss it. Let me untie you." She reached for her wand and Harry caught her wrist with his hand.

"Don't," he said softly. Then he looked back at Draco. "I need to talk to her, can you give us a minute?" he asked, gently because he knew how Draco reacted to Hermione and did not wish to make it seem he was choosing sides. With another scowl, Draco left.

"Don't?" she repeated. "Harry, you can't spend the rest of your life tied to that boy's bed."

"You don't understand," he said. "It was hard."

She let out a frustrated breath, puffing her stringy fringe up off her forehead. "I don't understand it, Harry? I watched my best friend's little sister die and spent the last three days trying to convince him he still had something to live for, even thought it was his best friend who killed--" she stopped abruptly.

Harry had closed his eyes, focused on his breathing, tried not to panic. The silence was long and nearly unbearable. "I," he said carefully, after a long moment. "Didn't mean that. I mean, this. I can't leave him."

"I didn't mean leave him! If this is some way for you to avoid any more responsibility for the things that go wrong, Harry--"

His eyes flew open and widened. "*Avoid responsibility?*" he echoed dumbly.

She winced. "I didn't mean it as if you were avoiding it, I just meant--"

"I *know* it's my fault, okay? I know that all of this was because of me! I'm not avoiding anything. I'd... I'd do anything to take it back and make it right and bring them back."

"Them?" she whispered. "Ginny and... and..."

"Lucius."

"Harry. Some people deserve to die."

"Who am I to decide who they are?" he asked. Then he shook his head. "It doesn't matter. I'm not avoiding responsibility. Being tied to Draco's bed hardly seems the best way to get out of doing research, Hermione. What do you take me for?"

"Nothing is coming out the way I mean it to!" she cried. "I didn't mean it like that! Listen, Harry, I'm trying to be understanding. I'm not accusing you of anything, I'm not blaming you for what happened back there. I don't *understand* how you could-- I mean... I know that sometimes some things have to be sacrificed to win a war and Ginny was--"

"Shut the fuck up, Hermione," he said coldly. "I can't... can't listen to this anymore."

"I'm trying to make it better," she whimpered.

"It's not working."

She took a deep breath. "Explain to me," she said carefully, "How this is helping our cause."

"Not everything is about the cause."

"Harry. Why won't you just let me untie you so we can research and figure out how to stop this? I've got some ideas, about the Dark and Light Patronus and the sort of power necessary to project that type of magic, convert it to--"

"The thing is," he said, very carefully. "If I was not tied here, I would not be here, and Draco is not ready to let me go."

She blinked. "I don't understand."

"Everything I love gets twisted and killed and I will not let him die the way so many have, dying because of me or for me or following me into battles we were not meant to win."

"Love?" she whispered, eyes going wide.

"Draco," he told her quietly, "Is the one person I would fight this war for, the one person in the world who sees me as I am and not a means to an end, a symbol of hope and faith and all that shit I stopped believing in years ago. A hero meant to lead us all to victory, to fight battles others are too afraid to fight. I would fight for him, die for him, but I know he'll follow me because he needs me and I will not lead him into anything I cannot win and I *can't beat this*. I am not meant to survive this war, we've both known that, you more than me. But I won't see him die as well."

"We're going to find a way, Harry."

"I'm going to find a way. Alone. Without help. That's what heroes do."

"You said before that you couldn't do it," she said, shaken. "Let us help. We *want* to help. You said you wouldn't fight--"

"I said I would fight for him, and I will. But not with him. But I cannot just leave him. You don't think that I wouldn't have walked away by now, if I could?"

"Then why--"



"I guess it comes back to responsibility. He needs me, Hermione, I know it. I keep him sane, which is why he doesn't think he can let me go. To him, I represent the only form of control he has against the nightmares, which are taking his strength and his mind from him. He is terrified of losing control and that's what I am to him. I can't leave him; it will crush him. I will not be responsible for that, I can't. But I can't stay. I kill everything I love. So he has to let me go."

She was breathing heavily, eyes stinging with tears. "Because if he makes you leave, it won't be your choice and Malfoy won't be able to blame you for it."

He nodded.

"So you'll abandon us all to this curse rather than risk Malfoy's life."

"Draco is suffering the same curse as the rest of you are, and I will end it. But I will do it alone. That's what heroes do, after all. They live alone and fight alone and die alone and that's what I'll do and he will be alright because I will make sure of it."

"It's selfish," she said, tears rolling down her pale cheeks. Harry wondered if it was because he was willing to die for Draco and yet had made no similar promise for her or if she was honestly appalled that he would leave them and fight alone.

"It's the only thing I can do," he said, sounding helpless, his own eyes welling up.

Hermione shook her head slowly. "Then I'm glad he's got you tied here," she said quietly. "Because it sounds a lot like cowardice to me, and if magical ropes are what it takes to give you the courage to stay, I'm glad for them."

She turned and walked away without another word.

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"Are you alright?"

Harry looked up; Draco was standing in the doorway, looking uncertain. "Why?"

"Granger's in a right state, threw a few books across the room and swore to hex me if I so much as said a word to her."

He grimaced. "Oh."

"What happened?" He came into the room and sat on the edge of the bed.

"We talked. She thinks that I'm using my captivity to avoid taking responsibility for killing Ginny."

Draco's eyes narrowed. "I'll kill her," he snarled, getting off the bed.

"No, Draco, wait," Harry cried, "Don't... just... let it go... She didn't mean to imply it..."

"She deserves to die."

"She said the same about your father and I defended him."

The rage in Draco's eyes slowly faded to a dull and confused darkness. He slumped back onto the bed. "Thank you," he said, after a short moment of silence. "I should get back and make sure Granger and Pansy haven't murdered each other yet."

"Don't... Don't go. Stay with me. I'm so tired but I can't sleep... please, Draco? I keep... dreaming and--"

Draco glanced at the door and then back at him, smiling ruefully. "Stay here with you or go watch Pansy rip Granger apart? Honestly, Potter, you think you can hold a candle to that?" Despite his words, Draco stretched out beside him. After a moment's hesitation, he broke the binding curse. "Promise not to leave me," he said.

Cuddling up to him, Harry murmured, "Couldn't if I wanted to."

Draco kissed him on the mouth lightly, and said, "Sleep then, Potter. I'll watch over you and wake you if you start to dream."

Harry sighed softly and obeyed.

He dreamt of strands of discordant music that flashed with pulsing colour, though only distantly. He was far removed from it, twirling again, around and around, because he was always twirling these days, spinning in manic circles, and falling with his arms outstretched. Pieces of colours, music, sound, flashed all around in alternating patterns, twisting down all around. Colours that were tiny snapshots of various things that had shaped him-- Ginny's red hair, Gryffindor's scarlet and gold, Draco's gray eyes and his own green, and the vibrant yellow of the sun. The music was snippets and whispers of memory, voices and whispers, songs and screams and then, just as he felt the twirling and dizziness had a purpose, a point, that he was about to discover what it was he was falling for, those brushes of sound making that discordant music, twisted and trembled and echoed in a gunshot. And there was Draco, in the dream, face empty of all understanding. Pale, shaken, and horrified.

It was not a nightmare, though it should have been. There was terror and hatred and regret all around, but in the dream, Harry was only distantly aware of it, of the colours of his past and maybe his future. Instead, the only thing that mattered was that it was Draco, that Draco was there, in his dreams and in his heart, as it had always been, or should have been.

And so, in the dream, when Draco's cold and empty eyes fell on Harry, it did not matter that Draco's hands were stained with his father's blood, all that mattered was Harry was there, and Draco smiled. It was that smile that made the dream worth having, made the sun come up, yellow lights burning all the strands of colour and sound into ash.

He woke when Draco shook him and called his name, smoothing his hair back and stroking his face. Still sleepy and soft, Harry mumbled in distress at having been pulled from that dream which should have been a nightmare but wasn't.

"You were dreaming," Draco whispered, kissing his ear. "Bad dream?"

"Good dream," Harry murmured, sighing softly, sleepily.

Draco looked surprised, smiling a little. "Wow," he said. "That's rare."

"Mmm." He nuzzled Draco's neck and closed his eyes, one hand slipping under Draco's shirt to press against his skin. He wondered if it was nighttime. That was one thing he'd never get used to, living in caverns the way he was. Never knowing what time it was, if the sun was up, if it was dark out.

There was a long pause, and Harry almost fell asleep again, and then Draco whispered hesitantly, "Harry?"

"What?"

"Did you mean that?"

"Mean what?" The words weren't registering so much as the soft voice was, and he smiled a little, trying to focus.

"That you would die for me."

Had Harry said that? He frowned thoughtfully, trying to remember. Draco buried his face in Harry's hair out of nervousness, and mumbled something that Harry did not catch. "What?" he asked.

"You said love."

"When? I--" He blinked. "You listened from the doorway again."

"Just... the last bit," Draco admitted. "Well, mostly. I didn't mean--"

"Shut up," Harry grumbled, thinking as quickly as his fuzzy mind would let him, trying to piece together what exactly he had said to Hermione earlier. He couldn't remember his exact words, though the sentiments were still clear enough. He tried to explain. "Everything... everything I am... all the parts that I am sure of and that make sense, are the parts that you see. And you're the only one. I thought that I was what they told me I was... and that everything else I thought I was, it was pretend. Shadows of me or what I wanted to be. But you see them. I would die for that, yeah. Because you define me the way I want to be defined. Does that make sense?" He lifted his head and looked at Draco imploringly.

Draco considered for a moment and then nodded. "It isn't love, you know," he said, firmly and gently.

"It isn't?"

"No."

Harry smiled. "I know. Love is... fluffy bunnies and... lollipops. Maybe candy floss. And flowers. And sunrises. Sunlight. And..." he trailed off, sighing sleepily, nuzzling close again. "And chocolate kisses. All good things."

Draco smiled against his temple. "And this is?"

"Hatred and terror and insanity," Harry replied without thought. "Everything dark and scary. Good-bye kisses and bloodstained hands."

There was a strange, thoughtful silence. Draco had no reply for Harry's husky words, no denial and no agreement he'd risk confessing, and then Harry fell asleep, Draco's arms wrapped around him, cradling him protectively.

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It took three days for the strange, dark sort of paradise that Harry had allowed himself to exist in to fall apart at the seams. It would not seem heaven to most, this being kept against his will. Draco had bound him by one wrist again, but it was not the captivity that was heaven, it was that Draco would come so often to check on him, to bring him food and sometimes to insist on feeding him, though not because Harry was incapable of doing it himself. So Draco would slip pears and plums into Harry's mouth and Harry would pretend to protest and Draco would look indignantly offended until Harry let him do it. And then Draco would lie beside him and talk with him about anything except the war or the curse or anything of that nature. And sometimes Draco's curse would come upon him and Draco would curl up beside Harry with his eyes closed, trembling until the terror passed. Other times, Draco would watch over Harry while Harry slept, and always, the last thing he saw before he fell asleep, would be Draco's face, and Harry could not imagine a better heaven than that.

It fell apart though, because no sort of Eden lasts forever.

Harry was asleep when it fell apart. One moment, dreaming of inconsequential things, the next, Draco was on the bed, calling his name and shaking him roughly.

"Up. Wake up, Potter. Now. Get up."

"What's happening?" Harry asked sleepily, reaching for his glasses with his free hand.

"We're going out."

He blinked. "Out where?"

"Shut up, it doesn't matter, just out. To see the sunrise. Yeah. That's where we're going."

Harry didn't believe him, but it only took one look at Draco's pale, pinched face to convince him not to question him further. "Alright," he said, getting out of bed. "I need some clothes or a jumper or..."

"Hold on." Draco threw the chest open and rummaged quickly, pulling out a jumper and tossing it to Harry. "Hurry."

"How long will we be? Does Hermione know?"

"Granger," he snarled, going cold. "Does not know a thing and nor will she."

"If we're going to be long, I should say good-bye." Harry didn't understand, was growing more and more worried. What if Draco had finally lost his mind to the curse?

Draco shook his head. "Just hurry."

He bit his lip and wanted to argue, but when Draco turned and walked away, Harry sighed and followed.

They went deeper into the caverns than Harry had ever been before, down twisting corridors, Draco's wand glowing brightly, the only thing holding the shadows at bay.

Harry didn't speak, and Draco didn't explain. He looked grim and kept glancing over his shoulder behind them, as if expecting to be chased. Finally, Harry felt a brush of fresh air against his face and, a moment later, they were standing on a rocky ledge on the side of a steep cliff. It was a dark, clear night, about to give way to the dawn, and Harry swallowed hard, staring at the rolling hills that spilt out before him and disappeared into darkness far in the distance. He'd missed large spaces like this, missed the enormity of the sky.

"Come on," Draco said quietly. "I've only got one broomstick."

"Flying?" Harry breathed, his breath catching. He'd missed the freedom of that more than anything.

There was a broomstick leaning against the wall of the cavern, just inside the opening. "It's mine. I left it the last time my father and I had to stay here. We've got to go, Harry."

"Why?"

"Does it matter? It's what you wanted. Get on behind me."

He did, though it was awkward and he was nervous. Still, he trusted Draco completely, and seconds later, as they took off into the sky, he leaned against him, shivering from the chill in the night.

If he closed his eyes and forgot everything he was afraid of at that moment, everything he didn't understand, then the entire world consisted of his arms around Draco's body, the sky and stars all around them, and the earth far below. Nothing could touch them here. So he did.

Eyes closed, he breathed deeply and hoped with all his heart that he wasn't wrong to trust in this.

The sun was coming up; Harry was only aware of this because of the warm lights that danced on his closed eyelids, and so he opened them, squinting at the sun as it started to rise over the eastern horizon. He rested his head on Draco's shoulder and tightened his arms around him.

His lips felt chapped from the wind and the cold. "Draco?" he whispered, voice a little hoarse.

"Almost there."

"Almost where?"

"As far away from there as I can imagine taking you."

Despite how much he tried begging for more information, Draco wouldn't give it, and soon enough, they landed.

Harry stumbled a little, legs unused to the firm ground, and Draco watched him, eyes wide and guarded.

"Where are we?" Harry asked, glancing about and then up at the sky. He felt like spinning in mad circles until dizziness took him and sent him crashing to the grass under his feet. Instead, he turned back to Draco, swallowing hard, because something wasn't right.

Draco let out a shaky breath and reached into his pocket, pulling out Harry's wand. "Here," he said. Harry took it automatically, his brow wrinkling in confusion. Unable to meet his gaze, Draco pointed off into the distance and said, "If you walk that way for about twenty minutes, you'll get to Hogsmeade. From there, you can Floo anywhere in the world you want to go."

The earth shifted a little under Harry's feet. "What?" he whispered, stunned.

Draco closed his eyes. "And I'd suggest you get as far away from me as you can."

He stumbled back a little. "Draco."

Shaking his head and choking back a strange sound, Draco kept talking, voice low and nearly breaking. "You wanted to get away, Harry, here's your chance." Finally, his eyes opened, looking bleak and dark.

"I don't want to leave you," Harry said softly, though he had been saying since the incident at the manor that all he wanted to do was leave.

Draco swallowed heavily, and a light breeze brushed his hair into his eyes. Pushing it back, he said thickly, "Trust me, Harry, if you don't go, you'll regret it. There are some things that I will not sacrifice for anything, and you're one of them, and if you don't...leave...I... I *refuse to use you the way they have*. So go, and hurry." Draco bit his lip and looked uncertain. "I'll come for you," he said finally. "When this is all over. I'll find you."

"You will?" Harry whispered huskily, forcing himself to breathe. It was getting harder and harder.

"Course I will," Draco scoffed, though it was gentle and aching.

He didn't understand, but at the same time, he did. Maybe not specifically what had happened to drive Draco to this, to convince Draco that the only option was to let him go, but he understood the need to push what you cared about so far away, that your own curses would not bring them down with you.

Harry would always remember him that way, standing alone and so thin, with dark, empty eyes, bruised and vulnerable and letting go of the one thing he felt could save him. Harry wondered about Pansy's definition of Slytherin then, and finally understood. This was what they were meant to save. Not snide, evil, calculating Malfoys, but those who would give up anything for love. Empty, reluctant heroes, burning too brightly and waiting to die.

He tried to speak but no words would come.

Draco smiled at him, a half-mad, all-wild, and somehow gentle smile, and then he turned to go.

Still, the words would not come.

Instead, he blindly reached out and grabbed Draco's wrist, a low sob caught in his throat. Draco turned back, his eyes burning with tears and, without even questioning it, pulled Harry to him and kissed him hard, desperately. It tasted of tears that no one had cried yet though that Harry knew he would, as soon as this was over and Draco was gone.

But the kiss was fragile and bittersweet, lingering the way none of their other kisses ever had, because as soon as it was over, they both know that everything else was as well. It ended, though, with a few softer, sweeter kisses, on the corner of Draco's lips and on Harry's cheek and then Draco's neck and Harry's ear and then they were closer than before, clinging to one another, in a hug that was more out of a desperate need to hold on than out of a desire to say good-bye.

There were no words, and Harry kept his eyes tightly shut after Draco pulled away. The silence was broken only by a soft breath of wind as Draco flew away, leaving Harry standing alone.

Finally, when Draco was too far gone to hear, Harry let out a low, painful whimper. "Wait..." But Draco didn't, and maybe it was for the best.

He glanced around, feeling incredibly uncertain and alone, more than ever. It was freedom, more freedom than he'd ever had, but Harry didn't know what to do with it. There was no one waiting for him to save them, he'd already let everyone in the world down.

With his heart in his throat, his eyes wide and burning, hands trembling, Harry took one faltering step and then another. Hesitantly, he made his way down the grassy hill Draco had left him on, and into the field of wheat that wound around it. He felt very small and yet somehow powerful.

This, this was freedom. It was huge and wild and awkward, but it was freedom.

It went to his head, even as tears ran from his eyes, and he longed to turn and run the other way, back into Draco's arms.

**Author notes:** The poetry in this chapter comes from a sonnet by John Donne ('Batter My Heart...') and this one is dedicated to my LJ flist...

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## Windfallen

Chapter Ten: Claustrophobia

*I was staring at the sky, just looking for a star  
To pray on, or wish on, or something like that  
I was having a sweet fix of a daydream of a boy*

The sun had fully risen when Harry finally made it to Hogsmeade, the brilliant lights of dawn dulling to the ordinariness of the day. The city was nearly deserted. If people still lived there, they hid in their homes and nursed loved ones or suffered the effects of the curse themselves. It was silent, hushed, and eerie.

The Floo Powder Hub was empty, and Harry nervously helped himself to some leftover powder and tossed it in the nearest fireplace. Green flames roared up and he stepped into them, all his movements automatic. He was following Draco's orders blindly. Getting as far away as he could.

But then, standing in the flame, he could not think of where in the world he should go.

"Diagon Alley," he said halfheartedly a moment later, and then he was spinning like a top and exploding into the abandoned Leaky Cauldron.

A fine layer of dust had settled there. No one was drinking or skulking in the shadows, which he supposed was a good thing. Sort of. No one to turn him into the Ministry, if even that still existed.

He walked to his home, which was near Diagon Alley, and did not see a single other person on the way. It was all very quiet and strange, and Harry was unnerved. He hadn't given much thought to the effects the curse would have on the world at large. Up until this point he had been focused on what it meant to him personally, which was that Draco was weakening and losing his mind. He could barely imagine a world without Draco Malfoy in it, and now was suddenly faced with the prospect of a world without anyone in it at all. Whether they had died of madness and suicide, or were home nursing loved ones, or cowering under their beds, they were gone, and Harry was more alone than he had ever, ever been.

The door to his apartment complex was standing open, and Harry let himself in, his footsteps echoing in the stairwell. He opened the door to his apartment, glanced around dully at the furniture that no longer seemed his, and the rooms that had stood empty for lifetimes or more, it seemed. Kicking the door shut, he made his way slowly into his bedroom, eyes burning and dry, and fell, face-first, onto his bed.

He lay there unmoving for three days, sleeping or staring blankly at the wall, breathing shallowly and without making a sound. He left the room in a daze every now and again to go to the bathroom, splashing water on his face and staring emptily into the mirror, and then returned to his room and stared.

Finally, when hunger drew him into the kitchen, he moved slowly, his legs not used to such a long journey, his body trembling with hunger it had nearly forgotten how to feel.

He ate half a sandwich made on bread charmed never to go stale and it was all he could hold down. Shaking with nausea and the strange feeling of having lived in complete silence for three entire days, without even the sound of his own voice, he moved to the window, hungering for any sign of another human being.

There was nothing there.

Listless and craving something he could not define, that could not be human contact because he never wanted to have to talk to anyone else again, at least not until it was all over and Draco came for him, Harry left his apartment. He made his way up onto the roof, staring out over the rooftops of London. There were odd patches of complete darkness, where people did not even bother turning their lights on anymore, and other parts that blazed with more lights than ever, as if people thought brighter lights would mean the madness stayed away. Or maybe they just seemed brighter next to the patches of dark.

He stretched out on the low concrete wall that ran around the perimeter of the roof, lying on his back, arms folded under his head. There was a cool breeze blowing, and it was the only sound.

For hours, he lie there, staring up at the stars that grew brighter and brighter as the night progressed and he stared at them. The lights of London were slowly fading out, as people fell asleep or into the curse or death, and others gently shut them off. Dark was stealing over the city and with it, the stars shone brighter.

He was resting. He had promised that he'd break the curse and he *would*, but he was so tired. It was all empty and echoing, silent and still, and all he wanted to do was die. He couldn't, though, of course he couldn't. Harry Potter Boy Who Lived did not lie sleeping while the world fell apart. The world would fall into despair and madness and death and everyone would die, and Harry would be the only one left. But he had no energy to move, let alone fight.

He was too exhausted to cry about it, and finally closed his eyes. He slept there, right on the edge of the roof, and woke when the sun was up and there was a faint murmur from the streets below; the guilty whispers of those in a hospital or funeral home.

He stared blankly up at the sky, which was blue and cloudless. He moaned softly, the sound startling him and breaking the silence. He closed his eyes and fancied he could hear Draco sneering about how pathetic this all was. Lying here and waiting for the world to end when it was his responsibility to do all he could to stop it.

So he got up, ran a shaking hand through his hair, and took a deep breath. "Ready," he whispered, voice husky, promising himself that he would do whatever it took. Wasting away on a rooftop would not save his own life, nor would it save Draco's.

He went back inside, full of determination with no clear idea what he was going to do. He had fleeting ideas of himself armed with something archaic like a bow and arrow, flitting through shadows and assassinating Dementors one-by-one, until he'd killed them all. There was no time for such trivial ideas, however, and besides, he wasn't a very good shot.

But there had to be something. He still couldn't cast the Dark Patronus, which was the only known way to kill a Dementor. He had another fanciful idea of he and Draco stalking the Dementors together, combining their magic and casting both Light and Dark Patronus Charms, but that idea seemed even more farfetched than the first.

Growing irritated and disillusioned, Harry scowled; it was Hermione who came up with the plans, at least the ones with any hope of succeeding. Harry wasn't a strategist.

He fell back into his armchair, sighing. The chair nearly tipped over, and he started swearing under his breath. One of the legs had broken off before all of this with Draco had even begun, and he'd been gone so long that he'd forgotten.

Randomly reaching for a few books off his bookshelf, Harry started stacking them under the chair to balance it, and, on the third title he'd pulled off the shelf, his hand stilled. *Pentagrams and Particles: A Magicular Theory on Magic*.

He started to laugh, his voice harsh with the irony and pain of discovering the book that had sent him to Malfoy Manor to recover, right in his own living room.

The laugh ended in a choked sob, and he finished stacking the books under the chair and then curled up in it, holding the book Hermione had decided held all the knowledge necessary to stop the curse on his lap.

Charlie had given it to him, he remembered. For his birthday, which had fallen a few weeks after the first time he had been with Harry. Charlie had never known him, not really, and had thought he'd like it. Harry had smiled an awkward sort of thanks he did not mean, and stuck it on his shelf, never looking at it again.



On the inside front cover, Charlie had written, "*Harry- Thanks. For everything. -Charlie.*"

Harry let out a sharp breath and turned the page.

He read for hours, learning more about the natural properties of magic than he ever had before, even in school. It was different, sitting through hours of classes and wondering rather absently if he'd have to remember anything from that class for his N.E.W.Ts. This meant life or death, for the wizarding world, the Muggle world, and Draco. This was everything.

So he turned page after page, learning about magic as a physical thing, with a set quantity in the world, like any other element. How different sorts of spells took up different amounts of energy, how that energy had been recycled from different elements, and how, if he did manage to end the curse, there would be a horrific amount of magical fallout created. He learned all the molecular theory behind the different brands of magic, light, dark, natural and unnatural. Magic that manipulated space and time, magic that added to existing things, and magic that subtracted from it. He learned of the different ways they interacted with the natural environment, taking elements from nature and shifting it to various degrees to cause what Muggles would ignorantly call unnatural results.

In the end, after night had fallen and he had carefully read every page, he felt he knew nothing more than he had to begin with, which was that magic could be neither created nor destroyed, just like energy.

Distraught, frustrated, and on the verge of a panic attack, he went into the kitchen and made another sandwich with peanut butter and jelly.

Feeling bleak and helpless, Harry left the peanut butter and jelly out and went back up to the roof. He sat on the edge of it and watched the stars for a while again, thinking about how hopeless it all was and feeling very, very small. He couldn't beat this. He couldn't even save himself, how could he save anyone else in the world? He wasn't a hero... he was nothing. The only way he knew how to define himself anymore was when he was with Draco, and he was beginning to think that letting Draco fly away and leave him there alone was the most foolish thing he'd ever done.

He could barely breathe without Draco. How was he supposed to do this without him?

It was getting too much, the silence and darkness, and the huge sky he'd missed so much was pressing down on him, making him claustrophobic. Harry went back inside, desperate for some sound other than his own heartbeat and breathing, the warmth of someone's hand touching him because his skin was going numb from not being touched. It was strange that he'd gotten so used to physical human contact in the relatively short time he'd been with Draco.

He stared at the book he'd read that day, which he'd left on the table, and something cold seemed to coil up inside him and make him shiver. Charlie knew what loneliness was, Charlie knew how to make loneliness go away. Charlie would touch him, and Harry was beginning to forget what it was like to be touched. Charlie... Charlie liked to touch him. Of course, Harry did not like to be touched by Charlie...

But he was so *lonely*.

Picking up the book, he went into his bedroom and fetched his broomstick, climbing back onto the roof. London was so intent on curling up in a little ball and dying of madness that he hardly thought they'd care if a boy flew over them on a broomstick. So he did.

He flew through the dark skies for an hour, landing outside a small house on the outskirts of London, where Bill and Charlie had lived together before Bill had died a few years before.

As far as Harry knew, Charlie still lived there.

There were lights flickering on the second floor, and Harry knocked lightly on the door. When no one came, he knocked again, louder, and then louder still.

Finally, the door opened and Charlie stood there, his hair wild and eyes wilder still. It took a moment for his eyes to fall on Harry's face, and then he went incredibly pale.

"You're dead," he said, but it wasn't a threat. It was empty and dull, as if he could not muster the strength to care. There were echoes of nightmares all around him, in his skinny frame and mad eyes. Obviously, the curse was thriving within him.

"I'm not."

"Oh." Then Charlie hit him, his fist suddenly slamming into the side of Harry's face, cracking his nose and gashing his lip on his front teeth. Harry had a moment to blink, startled, before he was falling sideways, his head smashing into the pavement, and then there was only darkness.

When Harry came to, it was by slow, painful degrees, and the first thing he was aware of was a sort of buzzing, that was a pain he could not quite feel yet but that radiated from his cheek and nose. After the pain had become actual pain, instead of that strange vibrating whisper in the back of his mind, he realized that someone's hands were running feverishly over his body, and that he was being held, cradled, like a child. And finally, he heard a voice, which was Charlie's, of course.

"Oh, shh, Harry, Harry, I'm so sorry, so sorry, wake up... c'mon, baby, I'm sorry," he said, and Harry finally opened his eyes, staring blankly up at him. Charlie's face was paler now even than before, and his eyes wide and shining with tears. "I didn't mean to, I swear, are you alright? I was just so... so... You're bleeding. Oh god."

"It's alright," Harry tried to say, but the words were slurred and broken because of his slashed lip. It didn't matter, because Charlie was lifting him, holding him, supporting his head and angling him carefully as he made his way through the doorway into his house, and Harry could only protest weakly before he was carefully placed on the couch.

"Alright? Alright?" Charlie kept chanting. He gently touched Harry's nose and Harry flinched. "Aww, fuck," he whispered. "Broken. I'll fix it." He left, to get water, ice, and his wand to heal Harry's nose.

While he was gone, Harry, feeling weak and trapped, helpless, like a mouse who willingly walked into a trap he'd escaped once before, started to cry. He did not want to be here, did not want Charlie to touch him, did not miss being touched so much as being touched by Draco and now he was bleeding and aching and Charlie *had* touched him and it didn't matter... Harry was still so very, very lonely.

He remembered the last time he'd seen Charlie, how Charlie had kissed and touched and scared him, and how Pansy and Draco had protected him. Now there was no one and nothing except for Harry's blood and Charlie's madness and he was a fool for coming here.

He wanted Draco and whimpered his name softly, just as Charlie came back into the room. Charlie froze and then, after a moment, came close, kneeling beside him. He gently began cleaning away the blood on Harry's face and Harry flinched, terrified of his reaction.

"Shh," Charlie cooed. "It's alright, Harry. It's alright." He smoothed back his hair as Harry tried to wonder desperately how anything was alright. "I would have done the same."

He made a sound of protest in his throat, and Charlie, met his eyes and then looked away. Harry pushed his hands away and sat up, swallowing the blood that had run into his throat and coughing. He pulled out his own wand before Charlie could react or reach out to stop him and healed his own nose with a soft spell. There was a split second and then the bones slid back into place, erasing the pain, and he cleaned the blood with Charlie's cloth and then healed his lip as well. Charlie had sat back on his heels and watched all of this with the faintly indulgent smirk of a father watching his child learn to walk for the first time, fully expecting them to fall.

Harry let the cloth fall to the ground and then looked nervously at Charlie. "It's fine," he said, voice a little rough. "What do you mean?"

"By what?" Charlie sat beside him, too close.

"You would have done the same."

"I would have."

"The same as what?"

"If it was me." Charlie ran his hair through Harry's hair. "It must have been so hard. I...wanted to tell you how sorry I was. I was startled that day. At your flat. When Malfoy came out of the bedroom, with that girl. I wasn't thinking. I mean, I should have known..."

"Known *what*?" Harry was confused, nothing was making sense, and he was quite sure this wasn't the way things were supposed to go.

"Known that you were innocent. I mean, you're Harry Potter, The Boy Who Lived. You don't go harboring enemies and that sort of thing, you're... you're a *hero*. Infallible. It's one of the things I admire most about you."

Harry stared at him for a long moment, and then said, "I was, though."

Charlie ignored him and slid an arm around his shoulders. "I was just...well... I was jealous. I thought..." he laughed quietly, burying his face in Harry's shoulder. "I thought that you and he... It was stupid."

"Charlie." Harry edged away. "What did you think it was, if not me harboring enemies or... or sleeping with them? I mean, what the hell else could it have been?" He was beginning to get indignantly angry.

"Obviously, Malfoy was there after you. He was attacking you. And then when I woke up and escaped, threatening to send the Ministry after him, he ran. I'm just glad I was able to keep him from taking you. After I heard about you escaping the Ministry, I was frantic. I was so worried he'd find you and hurt you." Charlie scowled furiously. "He didn't, though, did he? If he touched you, I'll kill him."

Harry leapt off the couch, an angry flush blooming on his cheeks. "Okay. Okay, Charlie, just... stop talking. Because every time you open your mouth, something fucking stupid comes out and I need to think, before you make it worse." He ran his hand through his hair and shook his head furiously.

"Harry, calm down," Charlie said pleadingly. "Come and sit with me. What's wrong? Did I say something--"

"You fucking said thousands of things! Everything you've ever said to me has been a complete waste of my time and your breath!" He was shouting and he didn't care; it was a strange feeling, shouting and not caring that he was saying things he'd regret when he was calm. He spun back towards Charlie and hissed, "He did touch me, Charlie, and I fucking liked it, which is more than I can say for when you did it."

"*Harry*." Charlie sounded shocked.

"What, did I *disappoint* you?" he sneered. "I'm not a hero, Charlie, I never claimed to be. If that's the thing you admire most about me, you don't even know me. Draco was in my house because I brought him there. I wanted him there. You were there because I felt *pity* for you."

Then Charlie was there, wrapping arms that should not have been as strong as they were around Harry's shoulders, pinning him against Charlie's chest. "Shh, Harry, just calm down, alright?" he whispered. "It's alright, I won't hurt you... God, I'm so sorry, I didn't know..."

Harry froze, confused. "Didn't know what?" he asked warily, sure that Charlie was misunderstanding again, because if he knew what had really happened, he'd be beating Harry again, like he had when Harry had shown up on his doorstep.

"That he hurt you."

"He didn't."

He sighed. "Shh, baby, I understand."

"I don't think you do."

"Like I said, I would have done the same."

Harry shoved him away. "Done the same as *what*?"

"Convinced myself I loved him because I was alone and scared and because that would make it right."

Harry was shaking, just a little. "Make what right?" he whispered.

Charlie looked very solemn. "The fact that I could not make him stop touching me." He touched Harry's chin. "Did he rape you, Harry?"

Harry started laughing in a way that was painful and soon cracked and he was crying. Charlie rocked him and stroked his back and told him that it was alright, but it really, really wasn't. It was so morbidly wrong that Harry wanted to die. Or go crawling back to Draco and let him lick all of Charlie's fingerprints off his skin.

"Don't touch me," he said finally, sobbing. He shoved Charlie back with all his strength. "Don't, because I *don't* like it. I... I like...Draco... and... and you shouldn't touch me because Draco would kill you if he knew." The last was said all in one breath.

Charlie was watching him strangely, as if he didn't quite recognize him. "Then what are you doing here, Harry?"

"I wanted to give this back to you." He pulled out the book Charlie had given him. "Thank you. For giving it to me. But I don't want anything from you, anything." It wasn't exactly why he had come, but Harry suddenly could not think of anything except getting as far away from here as he could.

Charlie took the book, staring at it blankly. "Don't you--"

"I don't," he said quickly. "And... I'm sorry. For everything. But it wasn't my f-fault. It was an accident. Ron and your parents and G-Ginny and--"

Charlie blinked. "Ginny?" he echoed.

"I didn't mean for her to die."

There was an endless silence, and then Charlie croaked, "Die?"

Harry's eyes widened and his mouth went dry. *Charlie didn't know*. "It... It was an accident..." he stammered. "I... I should go. I... I...Charlie..." he held out one hand pleadingly.

"I think you've made a mistake," Charlie said, very coldly.

Harry nodded frantically. "I have, I know. It was a mistake. I didn't mean to do it, but she was going to hurt Draco and I--"

Charlie twitched and his eyes darkened. "I'll kill him. I'll rip him apart. He deserves to be hurt. *What the hell happened to Ginny?*"

"She... she died, Charlie. And he doesn't. Deserve to die. And if you try to hurt him, I-I'll kill you too." It was a weak threat, and he swallowed convulsively.

"You killed her." It wasn't a question, but a soft hiss.

"By accident," Harry whispered.

"How?"

"I had a gun. And she tried to hurt Draco. I'm sorry, I'm sorry,

**Author's Notes:** This chapter is extra long in honour of those who felt necessary to comment on the shortness of chapter ten, which I had not noticed, actually. See? I do read all your reviews and take your comments into consideration! Hehe. Anyway. Hope you like it. I will update again soon.

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## Windfallen

Chapter Eleven: Something Like Tears

*Last time I saw you  
We had just split in two.  
You were looking at me.  
I was looking at you.  
You had a way so familiar,  
But I could not recognize,  
Cause you had blood on your face;  
I had blood in my eyes.  
But I could swear by your expression  
That the pain down in your soul  
Was the same as the one down in mine.  
That's the pain,  
Cuts a straight line  
Down through the heart;  
We called it love.*

Harry Apparated back to his apartment, leaving his broom, clutching the book to his chest and shaking. It hurt to breathe, his side burned from Charlie's kick, and he wanted to go home; this wasn't home any longer, this was nothing. It was empty and echoed the way Harry did without Draco.

The door to his apartment was standing open, and for a long moment, Harry wondered blankly if he'd left it that way. He hadn't.

Pansy was sitting at his kitchen table, her arms folded on the table there, head pillowed on them, eyes closed.

"Pansy?" Harry asked dully, closing the door. She looked like she was barely alive, as if she had shrunk and was only a shadow of herself.

She lifted her head, eyes dark, glazed, and empty, with dark circles around them. Brushing her limp hair out of her face, she smiled faintly. "Potter," she said. "Took your time, thankfully you got back before it was too late."

"How did you know I was here?" He did not have the energy or inclination for this, he just wanted to curl up on his bed and die.

"You left the peanut butter out."

"Yes, but what are you doing here?" he asked, coming in and sitting across from her, staring blankly, trying to keep breathing and forget the drying blood on his hands. Pansy hadn't commented on it, hadn't seen it, and he hid his bloody hands behind his back. He did not want her to know. A sudden thought made him freeze. "Is Draco--"

"He's fine." She thought for a moment and then said carefully, "You're a fucking idiot."

"What? Pansy, I--"

"No, shut up. I don't have enough time." She studied his face for a second and then said, "Granger thinks that it is easier to learn to hate than it is to love, to forgive. Do you believe that?"

Harry frowned a little, feeling slow-witted and numb, icy. He did not want to have to think, he wanted to die. "It is easier to find cause to hate," he said carefully, thinking of Charlie. "But it doesn't sit as easily with me. I would rather love."

"Do you know how to hate?"

"Yes." He answered without pause.

"What do you hate?"

"I hate to see someone I love hurt."

"That is not hate," she snapped. "You all think that's hate. That isn't, it's love. The three of you, you don't know what hate is. Not even Draco." She let out a frustrated breath.

"It isn't," he said after a moment. "It is love if you despair when someone you love is hurt. It's hate if you destroy whatever it is that does the hurting. You love the one being hurt and that love twists into hate for whatever causing the hurt. It's hate. Hate that comes from love is the strongest kind."

Her eyes narrowed and she considered this. "Pray it is strong enough, then," she conceded.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "And you never said what you were doing here."

"I came for you, to send you back. He's lost without you. Everything is lost without you. You've got to go back."

"Why...why didn't he come for me?" he asked softly, a wave of sharp longing making him tremble. He needed Draco. He never should have left him.

"He doesn't know I have. He thinks you're safe here. I can only imagine how safe you'll be, after the world dies and you're alone. Draco thinks to protect you from your own nobility, your need to be a hero." She looked into his eyes carefully. "But that nobility and heroism is going to be the thing to save you. Do you understand me? Of course you don't. Harry... listen to me." It was the only time she'd ever called him Harry. "Sometimes we have to give up everything we have for something greater than ourselves. Do you believe that?"

"Yes," he said quietly.

"Draco... doesn't. He would seek to save what is most important to him, though it would cost him the world. And that's you. Most important to him. So he's hidden you away where he thinks you will be safe, though it means he dies and the world dies with him."

Harry flinched. "He won't die," he argued, though it was weak.

"He will," she said savagely. "We all will, except you, because you are resistant to the Unforgivables. But there is still hope. Do you understand?"

"No," he whispered, eyes stinging with tears. "What hope can there possibly be?"

"There's you and there's Draco and that's worth fighting for. Don't think about whatever Granger thinks of it, don't think about whatever it is you thought about that made you worried that you'd destroy him. Don't think about Charlie Weasley or the world on your shoulders or the curse or whatever trivial things brought Draco into your arms. Do you love him?"

"Yes." Again, it was said without pause.

She smiled. "You were meant to. Not only because you deserve him-- which is saying a lot in itself-- but because there can be nothing else strong enough to see the world through this."

"I don't understand."

She touched his face and her hand was clammy yet cold. "I know you don't," she whispered. "But listen-- there was a reason I chose you for him. It was not because you were the one in the world who could resist the curse I created, or because you are The Boy Who Lived, or because you were the one who cared for him when he fell in battle. It was because I knew I would not survive long enough to see he survived all of this, and there was no one else in the world I would entrust his care to. You were meant to be in Slytherin, and that isn't an insult. He was meant to be yours and it is the biggest compliment I have ever given anyone." She closed her eyes, going paler, and Harry was suddenly worried. Before he could act on it, however, she opened her eyes again and said, very firmly, "If none of it would have happened-- the rivalries and the war and the petty childhood hatred and the friends whispering in both your ears about how you were meant to hate each other-- if the two of you had met as two boys on the playground or on the street, on a train or in a shop, alone, without any of that history behind you... you would have known it at once, the way I knew it. I hated you for it and made sure he hated you too, and I bet Weasley saw it too, instinctively. But you would have known it, if you would have looked and seen each other, rather than seen everything we told you two that we saw. None of that matters anymore. And I want you to remember one thing. Draco would not leave you for *all the world*."

Harry did not tell her that they *had* met before, in a shop, a robe shop, because Draco hadn't told her and he wondered what that meant. Did Draco not even remember it? He had to... But what had he seen? Harry thought back to that meeting, wondering if there had been anything worth seeing... Just a boy with huge, silver eyes... but then, he'd been so scared that he hadn't seen anything at all, really. Just those eyes... but what had Draco seen? Harry wondered if it was important enough that he wouldn't even tell his very best friend about it and he shivered, going cold and not sure why. "Pansy," he said beseechingly. "I don't understand."

"I know. It doesn't matter." She looked solemn. "You will, and soon, I promise. You've got to go back."

"I don't know the way." He was crying quietly because there was nothing more he wanted now than to collapse at Draco's feet and cry and beg for forgiveness or at least understanding for what he had just done.

"I brought this for you." She took a ring out of her pocket and handed it to him. Her eyes narrowed when she saw his hand, stained with blood, but she did not comment.

He recognized the ring as the one Draco had given Hermione at the Manor, the Portkey. "Hold it in your hand and say 'Pendragon'," she told him.

His eyes widened. "What about you?"

"Me?" She laughed a little. "Don't worry about me. Just..." She pulled a small leaf out of her pocket and gave it to him. It was velvety and a pale green, the edges ridged and sharp. "He'll understand. And tell him that... I'm sorry I wasn't strong enough."

"What do you--"

"Just go."

With one last confused look, he nodded once. "Thank you..." he said slowly. "For... everything."

She smiled and stood up, kissing his cheek. "Remember what I said."

"Will I see you when it's over?" he asked awkwardly, unable to look her in the eye.



She laughed quietly, solemnly. "Just go, Harry. Are you hurt?"

He looked at her silently and then nodded. "A little," he said.

"Go to him then. You need him as much as he needs you." She smiled, and Harry nodded, clutching the ring and closing his eyes as he whispered the magic word. He was jerked out of his apartment a moment later.

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Hermione and Draco were arguing, Harry could hear it echoing through the dark corridors he had come to think of as home. He could barely make out the words but followed the sound of voices, until he was peering nervously into the library.

Draco looked cold and impassive, staring down at the book before him, and for a long moment, Harry studied him, soaking in every detail. He looked tired, and Harry wondered wistfully if sleeping alone had proved as worthless to Draco as it did to him.

Then he looked at Hermione. Her face was red with rage and her hair wild. "I will *not* shut up about it, Malfoy! I just still don't understand how you could *do* that without consulting us! And now Pansy's run off as well and no one knows where Harry is and we *need* him if we're to--" She saw him standing there and broke off abruptly, going pale and looking horrified.

Without looking up, Draco drawled in a bored tone, "I've told you a thousand times, Granger, I won't go along with it, but if he comes back, it's his own sodding fault and you can do whatever you like--"

"I'm right here," he said.

Draco's head snapped up and the book fell from his lap and hit the ground with a crack, the spine splitting in two. His eyes were wide and stunned, his lower lip trembled the tiniest bit, and he was paler even than Harry had ever seen him.

It was Hermione who broke the silence. "Oh, *Harry*," she breathed, tears rolling down her cheeks. "You weren't ever supposed to come back." She ran from the room, crying softly, and Harry watched her go, startled.

By the time he looked back at Draco, the other boy had had a moment to collect himself and his eyes were dark and shuttered. "Well," he said, a strange coldness in his voice. "I thought I made myself clear. I don't want you here."

Harry swallowed hard. "Pansy said--"

"Pansy? Did she go to fetch you? I had wondered. And where is she? I'd like a few words with her." He was still being so *cold*.

Harry let out a shaky breath. This wasn't going the way he'd imagined it would. "Didn't... didn't you miss me?" he whispered beseechingly.

Draco's lips tightened for a moment, and his eyes narrowed. "Miss you?" he sneered.

Harry flinched. "I'm sorry, I thought--"

"No, you didn't! Thinking is so fucking beyond you that it never even occurred to me that you would have *done so* and come to the conclusion that coming back here, after I specifically told you to stay away, was at all the best idea!" He was shouting, losing all control, face slowly turning red with rage, and Harry shrunk back, stunned.

"Draco," he pleaded.

"What, did you think I sent you away for my *own* health and safety? Of course not! You're so fucking dense and I told her she could do whatever she wanted if you came back but you weren't supposed to! You're fucking stupid, Potter, I can't *believe you!* Where's Pansy? I swear, I fucking want to kill her, I--"

He took the leaf she'd given him out of his pocket and held it out to Draco, interrupting quietly, "She said you'd understand."

Draco froze, staring at the leaf. "Where is she?" he asked in a shallow whisper.

"She said you'd understand," Harry repeated, and he started crying quietly.

"No. Where.... Harry, where is she?" he said again, eyes pleading and very wide.

"She didn't come back," he said, breathing heavily and leaning against the wall, sliding down it and hugging his knees to his chest. "I don't know where she went, but she didn't come back."

Draco crouched before him and took the leaf from him, studying it and looking almost crushed. He swallowed heavily and looked back up at Harry. Leaning forward, he tilted his chin up and kissed his lips lightly. "I did," he said very softly. "Miss you, I mean." Then, without another word, he got up and walked away.

Harry sat there for a long while, staring at the broken book, wondering if Hermione was still crying somewhere and what Draco was doing. He rested his chin on his folded arms and closed his eyes, trembling. All of his fears and worries about Charlie were brushed aside, however, because Draco was hurt and scared and Harry was waiting for him to come back for him.

He might have slept, he wasn't sure. Time blurred into a mess of thoughts and daydreams, and then Draco was calling his name. He lifted his head.

"I wasn't sure you'd still be here," Draco said from the doorway.

"I had nowhere else to go," Harry said truthfully. "Besides, I'd rather be hurt with you than empty without you." He smiled a little and then gasped. "Oh my god, Draco, what did you do to your hand?" It was stained with blood.

He grimaced. "That leaf," he explained vaguely. "I crushed it, the edges were rather sharp."

Harry came to him and took his hand gently, inspecting it and scowling. "You're an idiot," he said absently, trailing off, because his own hand was bloody too. He'd forgotten.

"It was poison," he said.

Raising his head and not letting go of Draco's hand, Harry echoed, "Poison?"

He nodded. "Called Nunsot. It's a rare plant, if you grind and dry it, it makes a powder, a popular sort of assassination device. It's tasteless and slow acting, so that the symptoms could be attributed to a hundred different harmless illnesses. After a time, however, the... body shuts down. It's a painless death. You fall asleep and then you don't wake up."

Draco looked like a lost little boy, and Harry tightened his hold on his hand, tugging him closer. "And why did Pansy have it?" he asked very gently, even as he pulled Draco down to the floor, until they were sitting close together, leaning against the stone wall.

"She was taking it and I didn't know," Draco said quietly, leaning his head on Harry's shoulder. Harry remembered the times he'd seen Pansy pour a strange powder into her drinks, and the time he'd startled her and she'd dropped a vial that had shattered, spilling powder over the floor.

He smoothed Draco's hair back. "Why was she doing that?" he asked.

"Because it was a punishment. She caused this, and that was how she punished herself. By dying. I bet she'd been doing it the whole time."

He considered this for a moment, still stroking Draco's hair. "If she wanted to punish herself, why choose something slow acting? There are faster ways to die."

"She had to help us as much as she could first," he explained faintly. "But she couldn't do that in good conscience without punishing herself, so she took the poison the whole time. And she chose this one because it is painless. She is a Slytherin, after all. It is enough that she was causing her death, she did not want to feel pain at the same time."

Harry turned and kissed the top of Draco's head, wanting to give comfort and not all that sure he even knew how. "I'm sorry," he said, thought it sounded too trite and meaningless.

Turning his head until his face was buried in Harry's shoulder, Draco started to cry, painful, broken choking sounds that he tried desperately to restrain. Swallowing heavily, Harry whispered, "Oh, god, Draco, I'm sorry," and it didn't sound so trite this time. He turned to Draco, pulling him against his chest and rocking him a little, holding him tightly, breathing deeply and carefully because his hands were now stained with Charlie's blood, Draco's blood, and a little bit of poison, and somewhere, Pansy was dying alone, and Harry didn't know how to feel about that. So instead, he let Draco cling to him and cry, because as much as he didn't know how to comfort, he didn't think Draco knew how to cry.

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Draco did not cry long, but then, Harry hardly expected him to. He calmed, breathing heavily, still curled up against Harry and shaking. Harry didn't know what to say, so he kept holding him, breathing shallowly because Draco was curled up against the side that Charlie had kicked, and every breath was agony.

"Harry?" Draco said quietly.

"Yeah?"

"There's... there's blood all over you."

He tensed and the sudden straightening of his posture made him moan faintly. Pulling away, Draco looked at him critically. "Oh, Harry, what have you done?" he asked, finally having seen the blood on Harry's hands and clothes.

Harry flinched, which hurt him more, and he let out a careful breath. "Nothing," he said, forcing a smile.

"You're hurt..." he trailed off, angrily drying his tears on his sleeve. "Where?"

"I'm not--"

"*Harry.*"

Harry's eyes welled up with tears and he fell silent. He swallowed heavily and then whispered, "Charlie..."

Draco went very, very white, with rage and horror. "Oh *god*, Harry, don't tell me I set you free and you went to *him*. What did he *do* to you? I'll kill him, I'll fucking kill him."

That's when Harry started crying, which hurt his side worse than anything, and he cried harder, which hardly helped.

"Stop it," Draco snapped. "Stop it, Harry, right now. Where does it hurt? What did he do? Are you *bleeding*? Why didn't you *tell* me?"

"You were upset and it's nothing and... and... it *hurts*."

"Where?"

Harry bit his lip and touched his side lightly, which Draco was still pressed against. The contact was enough to burn. "There," he whispered.

"Oh," Draco said quietly, sliding back until he was not touching Harry at all. He then gently pushed his shirt up, exposing the fresh, livid bruise. A painful breath hissed through his teeth, and he shot Harry a reproachful look. "What did he do?"

"Tried to get me to say that loving you was a lie."

There was a strange silence and then, gently, Draco said, "I meant to cause the bruise, Harry."

"But I did," Harry whimpered. "I did say it. I told him it was a lie. I told him I loved him. I told him...told him he could have me... that...that you raped..." he trailed off, because he was choking on his own tears and hysteria. "Tell me it was okay," he begged. There was a long, tense moment, in which Harry held his breath and waited for forgiveness or understanding. Then, Draco let out a shuddering breath and touched the bruise lightly, not commenting.

"Draco?" Harry whimpered. "Tell me it's okay. I-- I need--"

"Do you want me to heal it?" Draco asked abruptly, coldly.

"Draco..."

He pulled his hand away, letting Harry's shirt fall. "Why did you come back then?" he said savagely.

"Because I thought you'd understand!"

"Understand *what*? That this is a lie and that you think I *raped* you? And that you'd rather be with him when he hurts you like this and makes you bleed--"

Harry suddenly paled, eyes going wide. "It- it isn't. I don't think that.... Draco, no, no, I lied to him, I was... I was scared and... and I would have said anything..."

Draco sneered. "That desperate, were you?"

"And the blood, it isn't mine."

Draco went still, dark eyes staring into Harry's, and then he whispered, "Whose is it?"

"It's Charlie's," Harry whimpered, and then he started crying again. The bruise on his side burned and he winced, choking and trying to stop crying, but he couldn't. So he sobbed painfully, because he hurt and he was covered in blood and Draco was furious and he couldn't sort things out in his mind enough to fix it.

"Shh," Draco said, after a moment. "Calm down, Harry, I'll fix it... Stop... stop crying and tell me what happened... Please, Harry, shh." He stroked Harry's arm, sliding closer. "Breathe, calm down, I'll take care of it."

"Okay," Harry sobbed, falling against him and only crying harder. Somehow it was okay, though, because Draco wasn't pulling away any longer.

"Shh," Draco whispered again, holding him with one arm and pulling out his wand with the other. He gently healed the bruise and then pushed Harry away. "Tell me what happened."

Harry took a deep breath, trying to calm down. "I didn't mean to," he said shakily.

"Didn't mean to what?"

"Kill him."

There was a pause and then cautiously, Draco said, "Charlie's dead?"

"Yes."

"Well that's one less thing I've got to see to, then."

Harry grimaced and swallowed painfully. "I did it on purpose," he whispered. "I mean, I *did* it. I held him down and I hit him and choked him and he died and I was *there* and I didn't stop it, because... because he said that I was *his* and that he would kill you and that y-you had hurt me and I only thought I loved you because you wouldn't stop touching me and that you'd r-raped me."

Draco let out a very careful breath, and Harry could see how fragile the control over his temper was. "He told you that?"

"He wanted me to admit all of it."

"And you did."

Harry shook his head wildly. "I didn't, Draco, I swear."

Draco closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "You said you did, Harry."

"He was *dead*. I would have said anything to..."

"To what?" Draco took his hand, which was still stained with blood.

"To undo it. I killed him, Draco. His blood was all over. I killed him because... because I knew that you would have hated it. To see me under him on the floor, barely able to breathe because he had kicked me, and--"

"Why did he kick you?"

"I don't remember... He wasn't... wasn't stable. The curse, I think. He broke my nose and--"

Draco trailed a finger down the bridge of Harry's nose and sighed. "Why did you go to him?"

"It was all so quiet."

"I'd kill him again if he wasn't already dead." Draco looked away. "But you... you didn't mean it? What you said to him? That you loved him and that I'd raped you? Because I swear, Harry, it wasn't like that, I--"

"I didn't know what I was saying. He...said I owed him. Because he'd lost so much to my war, his brothers and his sister--he hadn't known about Ginny and I told him... he said that I'd cost him so much and owed him and that I should love him because--"

Draco shook him roughly. "Don't even fucking think it."

Eyes stinging, Harry swallowed hard. "It isn't true?" he whispered pleadingly.

"You don't owe the world a single fucking thing." Draco was scowling indignantly and he wrapped an arm around Harry's shoulders, pulling him close.

"I don't?" Harry whimpered, feeling drained. He leaned his head on Draco's chest.

"You don't."

"Not even you?"

There was a long, long silence, and then Draco said hollowly, "This isn't like that, Harry."

"What's it like then?" Harry asked sleepily.

"You need to sleep. I'll explain it in the morning." Draco pulled him to his feet and led him from the room, holding his hand. He stopped in the bathroom and cleaned up as much of the blood as he could.

Moments later, tucking Harry into the bed they'd shared before, Draco placed a light kiss on his forehead, near his scar, and said, "Everything's fine, Harry. You did nothing wrong, he deserved to die, for saying those things. Go to sleep and we'll talk when you're rested."

Harry held onto his hand tightly and whimpered, "But where are you going?"

"To find Granger. I'm...worried." He grimaced.

"Thank you."

Draco nodded and smoothed his hair back, his touch short but soothing all the same.

"Draco?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm sorry. About...Pansy."

Draco was very still. "I know. Now sleep, alright?"

Harry mumbled sleepily and closed his eyes. He was asleep before Draco had even made it out of the room, though he slept fitfully, sleep disturbed by fleeting nightmares.

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Harry woke up and the sheets and blankets were tightly wound around him, causing a moment of disoriented panic in which he thought someone had bound him in his sleep.

He fought his way free and sat up, reaching for his glasses and blinking owlishly. The pillow beside him was smooth and did not look as if anyone had slept there. Draco had not slept beside him.

Staring at the pillow for a long moment and fighting another wave of panic, Harry took a deep breath, trying to recall what had happened between them the night before. It was all sort of a blur, a panicky, wild, hazy mess of stammering words and pleading glances.

"Draco?" he called softly, wistfully, but Draco wasn't there and hadn't been all night.

Harry started breathing erratically, lightly, suddenly claustrophobic and afraid. Draco wasn't there, why wasn't Draco there? Maybe he was dead like Ginny or Charlie, maybe he'd left because he was disgusted, maybe-- maybe... had Harry done something? Said something to offend him?

Then he remembered. Of course he had. He had said that it had been rape.

He moaned softly, biting his lower lip and crawling off the bed. He had to find Draco, to explain.

There were too many things going on in his head, too many things he was supposed to be sorry about. There was Ginny and Charlie and Pansy, but none of that mattered next to the idea that he had said something to hurt Draco. So he changed into something clean and left the room hesitantly, not at all sure Draco would want to see him.

He went to the library first, but much to his surprise, Draco was not there. In fact, all the books were closed and stacked neatly on the table, as if they had finished with them, as if everything had been decided. Harry could not remember having been told of any decisions being made, and he felt a growing sense of unease as he made his way towards the kitchen. Surely Hermione and Draco did not intend to try to stop the curse alone? Why else wouldn't they have told him what conclusions they'd found, if they meant to leave him behind?

Draco was in the kitchen, sitting at the small table there, a mug of coffee before him, untouched and cold. One hand still curled around the handle, and he gazed off thoughtfully into space, looking solemn and sad.

"I was worried I wouldn't find you," Harry said quietly, after a moment.

Draco blinked rapidly a few times, turning to look at him. For a long moment, he just looked, eyes blank, and then he said, "Are you--"

"Alright? I'm fine."

"I was going to say over yesterday's hysterics." Draco smirked a little, and it was very cold.

"I..." he trailed off, uncertainly. There was a strange energy radiating from Draco. It was almost like fury, but an icy sort that he wasn't used to and did not know how to handle. "I'm sorry."

"For what?" Draco pushed the mug away with a sneer of disgust.

Harry flinched. "Everything."

"Coming back when I wanted you to stay away? Coming back bloody and hysterical and worrying me nearly to death? Leaving me and running to Charlie Weasley and letting him *hurt* you?"

"I didn't leave you, you let me go," Harry said weakly.

"Mmm. You weren't supposed to come back. I didn't want you anywhere near me." Draco looked away, the muscles in his jaw tightening.

Harry was silent for a moment. "That wasn't what I was apologizing for. I'm sorry for....for saying the things I did. After Charlie d-died. For saying that he was right. That it was a lie and it was rape and everything else I said. Because I know it isn't true. I'm yours. You never hurt something that belongs to you, right?" he smiled a bit dryly.

Turning to look at him again, Draco's eyes were darker than ever now. It was not fury, but something deeper and more frightening. After an endless moment, he said, "It goes both ways, Potter."

Confused, Harry shook his head. "What do you mean?"

"I don't think you realize that just because everyone keeps telling you that you're mine..." he trailed off, running a hand through his hair.

"What about it?" Harry asked quietly.

"I'm yours as well." It was abrupt, harsh, and Draco turned away, shaking his head in disgust.

"That doesn't make sense," Harry said, scoffing.

"Why the hell not?"

"Because who in their right mind would want to be mine?" Harry's eyes were filling with tears and he blinked desperately, trying to hold them back because Draco had sneered at his hysterics already and he did not want to disappoint him again.

Draco pushed his chair back so suddenly that Harry was startled. He stumbled back, eyes widening, and stared at Draco, wondering why he was suddenly afraid. "You think I chose it?" Draco hissed. "You think, if given a choice, I would have chosen any of this or anything it means I have to do? You have no idea what this means, the fact that you couldn't fucking leave me, and the position it puts me in! I did not choose to be... to be whatever I am to you and I did not choose to let you be e-everything... everything to me." He stopped abruptly.

"Draco...what are you talking about?" Harry whispered.

"It wasn't rape," Draco said, confusing Harry with his abrupt subject change. "You wanted me. Gave yourself to me. Right?" It was only with the last line that his tone changed, going from self-assured to seeking reassurance.

"I wanted you to have me," Harry agreed, watching Draco worriedly.

"It... it *hurt* more than you lying about all of that when you said..." he scowled and broke off, running a shaky hand through his hair. "When you said that you *owed* me. As if this is all just... you paying back a debt."

"I didn't mean it like that," Harry whispered, eyes going wide again.

"Are you sure?" It was asked softly, seriously.

"Yes," Harry said, though his voice cracked and he started shaking. It hurt, this entire conversation hurt, made everything inside of him feel bruised.

"I want... I want you to prove it."

Stepping back nervously, Harry swallowed and said, "D-Draco, don't."



"Don't? You don't know what I'm doing yet."

"Trying to make me do something I don't want to do." Harry glanced over his shoulder at the doorway, regretting waking up, regretting waking up that morning, regretting coming back here, regretting all of this.

"No, that's just it," Draco said quietly. "You can only do it if you want to. Because it will prove everything. That you're mine and I'm yours and that this is real to you."

"Wh-what do I have to do?" Harry whispered, unnerved by the dark solemnity in Draco's eyes.

"You're always surrounding yourself with people who want pieces of you," Draco said, and Harry could tell that he was choosing every word carefully. "They've taken everything you've got."

Stung by that rather pathetic image of himself, Harry snapped, "And how does this make you different? You want something from me too."

Draco smiled, very gently, and held out one hand. "No, Harry, I don't want anything from you. You already gave yourself to me, remember? I want you to have me. To take me. Because I don't think you've taken anything in your whole life."

There was a moment in which Harry was afraid to breathe, because there seemed to be almost a fragile enchantment being woven by the ideas that Draco was carefully describing, and he was afraid to break it. Afraid he was misunderstanding, or that this was a strange dream and he was still asleep.

"I don't think I understand," Harry whispered finally.

Draco's hand, still held out towards him, wavered a little but did not fall. "You said that you never hurt something that belongs to you and I want to. Belong to you, I mean."

"But I'm a murderer," Harry whimpered uncertainly. "Who would want--"

"We covered this already, Harry," Draco interrupted quietly. "I would. Will you let me?"

"L-let you?" Harry stammered. His face was slowly flushing.

"Yes. Let me. I mean, I can't be yours unless you want me to." He smiled a bit, self-deprecatingly. "It's not so hard. Haven't you ever wanted anything before?"

Harry rolled his eyes, still blushing. "I have," he admitted. "I wanted you, before."

"And now?"

"Now, I'm not exactly sure what you're suggesting."

"Well..." Draco chewed his lip and looked thoughtful. "Well, if I was yours, that would mean that you could do whatever you wanted to me."

"Anything?" Harry echoed, looking unnerved at the idea.

"Anything. Kiss me, shag me, hit me, hurt me, make me bleed..." he trailed off, smirking a little.

"I-I wouldn't hurt you," Harry whispered.

"Well, that's my part in it. I'd trust that you wouldn't. That's... that's what belonging to someone is all about. Trusting that they would never...never hurt you." He swallowed and looked away suddenly.

"I don't know if I can trust..." Harry trailed off, his lower lip trembling just a little bit.

Draco pulled his hand back quickly, as if it had been stung. "You don't trust me?" he breathed, eyes very wide and stunned.

"I don't...I don't..." Harry started to stutter with panic. Desperately, he reached forward and took Draco's hand, holding it tightly. "I don't trust myself," he finally managed to say, the words jumbled together. "Not to hurt you, I mean. I hurt everyone..."

Draco's jaw clenched for a moment and he cocked his head to the side thoughtfully. His other hand came up and lightly brushed Harry's cheekbone. "And what if I hurt you?" he asked quietly.

"Then it would be because I deserved it," Harry answered quickly, automatically.

"No," Draco said patiently, though it sounded a little strained. "It would be because sometimes I fuck up."

Harry smiled a little, skeptically, and then slipped his fingers through Draco's.

"You're missing the point," Draco growled, frustrated.

"Sorry," Harry whispered, pulling his hand away and biting his lower lip. "Maybe if you--"

"Shut up." Draco grabbed his hand again, holding tightly, and thinking for a moment. "Would you... hurt me on purpose?" he asked carefully.

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I love you." Harry certainly hadn't planned to say it, it had come out automatically, instinctively, and a jolt of shock went through him when he realized what he had said. He straightened up, flushed, and tried to pull his hand away, but Draco didn't let go; instead, he stared almost blankly at him, eyes wide and startled.

"Harry..." he said quietly.

"I'm sorry! I wasn't thinking. I know, I know, I'm missing the point again. I didn't mean to, I'm sor--"

"Shh, don't say that," Draco told him gently, stroking the back of his hand with his thumb.

Harry paused thoughtfully and then asked, "Which part? That I love you, or that I'm sorry?"

"It... sort of depends," Draco confessed. They were both talking in muted whispers, as if afraid to be overheard. "On if you're sorry for saying it, or sorry for doing it... For loving me..." he trailed off.

Harry opened his mouth to reply, didn't know what to say, and closed it again, his jaw muscles flexing. He studied Draco, who studied him back solemnly. For the life of him, Harry could not think of what to say to that. He was just *sorry*. He was always sorry. It was his responsibility to be sorry, for everything. Someone had to be. And it was Harry's job because... because...

He honestly didn't know. If there was a reason for it, he had long forgotten what it was. "I'm just..." he said, starting to say that he was just sorry, but he trailed off, frowning and looking at Draco helplessly.

"Why?" Draco asked, stroking his hand again and biting his lower lip, whether from nervousness or something else, Harry couldn't tell.

He didn't *want* to be sorry. He didn't think he was sorry. Or if he was, it was only because he thought he *should* be. Which didn't make any sense at all.

Finally, slowly and in a husky voice, he said, "Honestly? I don't think I'm sorry for any of it."

A slight smile tilted up the corners of Draco's lips. "I think you're finally catching on," he said.

"Am I?" Harry said doubtfully. "Because I'm feeling a bit more lost than before."

Draco sighed, looking exasperated and slightly amused. "Honestly, Potter, do you need me to spell it out for you?"

Looking a little sheepish, Harry shrugged.

"Okay. Okay, this is what I'm saying. You're mine, we're aware of this because Pansy told you, so you believe that, right?"

"Yes..."

"I want to be yours. I want you to take me-- yeah, Potter, like that." He smirked as Harry's face turned scarlet. "Do you get it?"

"But *why*?"

"Because I had you. You trusted me and let me have you, trusting I wouldn't hurt you. And you don't think I trust you, you won't believe me when I tell you that you're not going to hurt me, so I'm going to prove it to you. Because I *do* trust you and you have to trust in that or else..." he trailed off.

"Or else what?" Harry asked.

Draco kissed him hard, eyes dark and distant when he pulled away. "You're just going to have to trust me," he said, and Harry did. "Everything...everything for the rest of our lives depends on you trusting me. I swear, Harry, I won't let you hurt me."

His eyes widened a little, and Harry's breath caught. It was different, hearing it said that way. Not as if Draco trusted Harry not to hurt him, but as if Harry had to trust Draco not to let himself be hurt. "You won't?" he whispered.

"I promise. And... and I won't hurt you either."

"Okay," Harry said. "But, uhm, I don't think I know...how."

"How what?"

"To take... anything." He cleared his throat and Draco looked stunned.

"Harry..." Draco said, eyes widening. "Charlie wasn't your first..."

He cleared his throat and looked away, carefully pulling his hand back. "I'm not gay," he said.

There was a strange silence. "You're not gay. You don't like boys."

Harry glanced at him nervously. "I never really thought about it. I mean... when I was in school, sure, there were girls... Well, just Cho, really... And then... I didn't have much time to think about it. I was so busy, with the war, and..."

"I'm wasting my time," Draco said slowly, sounding oddly crushed. Then he tilted his head to the side and studied Harry, whose mouth was open like a fish out of water as he struggled to explain something of what was whirling about in his head, sure that he could make Draco understand but uncertain as to how to word it correctly. He was sick of saying the wrong thing.

"I'm not..." He began, trailing off and scowling.

"I don't believe you," Draco said suddenly, and Harry blinked. Draco *had* to believe him, that was what trust was *for*. But Draco grabbed him roughly and jerked him forward, kissing him hard and startling him. Harry whimpered in protest, his hands flying up to Draco's shoulders. As soon as he adjusted to the sudden movement, however, he melted against Draco's chest and kissed him back just as wildly, closing his eyes and wrapping his arms around the back of his neck.

Draco pulled away suddenly, eyes wide and breathing heavily. "Oh fuck," he hissed, trying to pull away. Harry was startled but didn't let go.

"What is it?" he whispered.

"You're not... and I was going to force you.... like Charlie... make you forget... and you would have let me..." Draco stammered, self-loathing on his face.

"No, no," Harry said quickly. "No. Draco. You didn't let me finish. I don't like *boys*. Generally. I don't like you because you're...a boy. Fuck, *this isn't making sense!*" he cried, resting his head against Draco's shoulder and thinking hard. "I want you," he said. "I don't want boys or girls, just you."

Draco was still breathing heavily, and Harry held him more tightly, lifting his head and kissing Draco's jaw. "That didn't come out right," he said nervously.

Laughing shakily, Draco shook his head. "No, I can't say that it did."

Harry pulled back, biting his lower lip. "Nothing I try saying seems to these days."

"Then... then maybe if you stopped talking, you wouldn't keep nearly giving me a heart attack," Draco suggested, and when Harry opened his mouth to reply sarcastically, Draco kissed him.

It was a careful kiss, as if Draco was still not quite certain this was the right thing, a nearly chaste, sweet, closed-mouthed brushing of lips that irritated Harry more than served to quiet him.

He pulled back, shot Draco a disgruntled, narrow-eyed look, and kissed him hard, surprising Draco and sending him stumbling back a step, against the stone wall. Draco laughed mid-kiss, catching Harry against his chest as he tumbled after him. When the laughter caught Draco off-guard, Harry slipped his tongue into his mouth hungrily, having something to prove now. He kissed him as if he knew what he was doing, which he really didn't, having only ever been kissed this way before and never quite knowing how to respond.

It was easier, when he forgot about kissing and started wondering what Draco would taste like or feel like, if he moved his own tongue just like *that*, and so he did, his eyes closing as he lost himself in it.

He wondered if maybe Draco would taste as good everywhere else as he did there, and so he pulled away, breathing heavily and leaning fully on Draco for support. Draco didn't mind, in fact he was holding Harry up, holding him firmly by the upper arms, though his own face was flushed and his breathing fast.

"Are you sure?" Draco panted.

Harry just rolled his eyes and licked Draco's throat thoughtfully, his hands sliding up to Draco's jaw to tilt his head back. He kissed his chin then, and the tender flesh under his jaw, and his throat again, tasting the skin there lightly, before pulling away, looking pensive.

"What?" Draco asked huskily.

Harry smiled. "Tasting you," he said. "That's okay, right? I mean, I just wanted to--"

Draco kissed him lightly. "'S fine," he mumbled, and Harry smiled against his lips.

Licking Draco's lower lip teasingly, Harry bit it gently and then kissed his throat again, before moving up to the side of his neck and tracing a small circle over his pulse with his tongue.

"Mmm," he whispered thoughtfully, and Draco laughed, though it was strained and breathless.

He slid up to Draco's ear next, sucking his earlobe into his mouth and tracing it with his tongue gently, before kissing the area just behind it and pulling away. He looked thoughtfully at Draco, cocking his head and swallowing nervously.

"Can I..."

"What?"

Harry shifted a little, his hands slipping down to the neckline of Draco's shirt, tracing his collarbone until it disappeared under the fabric. "I want to taste you there," he said, his hands trailing lower, over Draco's chest.

"Harry," Draco chided, and Harry yelped when he was suddenly lifted up off the ground and spun, until his back was against the wall. Draco did not lower him and Harry instinctively wrapped his legs around the other boy's waist, resting his arms on his shoulders. "You can do whatever you want, remember? I'm yours."

Harry smirked a bit and undid the first two buttons of Draco's shirt, pushing it aside. He licked Draco's collarbone and bit gently, and would have pushed the shirt all the way off Draco's shoulders, had not Hermione cleared her throat pointedly from the doorway.

Harry's head jerked up, eyes widening, and he started fighting to get away. "Uh uh," Draco mumbled, kissing him pleadingly. "Ignore her."

"Actually, Malfoy," she said, voice icy. "I need to talk to you."

Draco kissed Harry's cheek and his temple, his eyes closed tightly. "Oh, go away," he whispered, and only Harry could hear.

"Draco," he hissed, pushing weakly at him and smiling in a flustered sort of way.

She looked righteously indignant and said, "It's rather important, Draco. You know what it's about."

He rested his forehead on Harry's shoulder and took a deep breath, before slowly letting him slide to the ground. "That's right," he said. He smiled a little, bitterly. "I do."

Harry glanced from one to the other, eyes narrowing, though he didn't speak. He longed to tell them he knew they planned to kill the Dementors without him, and that's why they'd sent him away, but instead, he stayed quiet. This was trust, after all.

"We'll talk in the library," she said, crossing her arms over her chest pointedly.

Draco turned back to Harry and took his hand, kissing his knuckles lightly. "Wait for me, I'll be back soon," he said.

Brushing his hair off his forehead, Harry forced a smile. "I will."

Smiling quickly, Draco started backing away, though he did not let go of Harry's hand until the last possible second, holding onto it lingeringly.

Harry watched until he was gone, and then sighed, feeling incredibly abandoned and more alone than ever.

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Harry did not wait in the kitchen, though he made a sandwich before wandering back to the bedroom. His hands were trembling a little, having the opportunity to think for the first time since things had started going so wrong. Think about Charlie and Pansy and Ginny, Lucius, Ron, everything. It was piling up and he didn't know how much longer he could stand it before he lost his mind.

He fell back onto the bed and closed his eyes, sandwich forgotten on the dresser. He did not move, did not think, was aching and bruised and empty, and the stillness and silence soothed him a little. Losing all track of time, he focused on his own heartbeat until gradually, all worries and aches drifted away.

It was hours later, though he could not tell how many for sure, when the door slammed shut and Draco's harsh breathing caused him to sit up and open his eyes.

"What is it?" he asked, instinctively sensing something was wrong even before he saw the gun in Draco's hand.

"N-Nothing," Draco stammered, though his eyes were wide and dark with something Harry could not define. He carefully set the gun on the dresser beside Harry's sandwich, and Harry relaxed, just slightly.

"Draco," he said gently. "What is it?"

Pale and trembling, Draco shook his head. "Nothing. Nothing." He forced a smile.

Growing suspicious, Harry got off the bed, approaching cautiously. "Did she say something to you? About me...?"

Draco laughed, though it was choked off in the middle and ended almost in a sob. "Forget it, Harry. Seriously. I just..."

Trailing his fingertips along Draco's cheek, Harry said quietly, "I know what you guys are planning."

Draco started to choke and managed to say hoarsely, "You do?"

"Yeah. That you're going to try to defeat the Dementors without me."

He took a deep, shaky breath, closing his eyes, and then said softly, "Trust me, Harry. When the time comes for the final battle, you'll be there. I promise."

Harry considered this for a moment, tracing Draco's lips. "When?" he asked.

"Tomorrow." Draco's eyes opened, and they were shining with tears. "The Dementors draw their power from a place distantly connected to these caverns and they gather there... Most of them will be there now, now that they aren't involved in battle."

Nodding, Harry let his hand fall from Draco's face and took his hand instead. "And you won't go without me?"

"Harry," Draco said softly, pleadingly. "Don't."

He was trembling and so pale, and Harry relented, nodding. "We won't think of it. Tomorrow's soon enough. C'mere."

"What--"

Harry smoothed his hair back and wrapped his arms around him. "It'll be fine," he said softly. "You don't think I'll fail at this, do you? It's for you, Draco. I'll do it for you. Anything. I told you before that I'd be your hero, and I will."

"I don't need a hero," Draco said, and it was muffled. Harry wondered if he was crying, wondered if this somehow came back to Pansy, because that was all Draco had ever cried over before.

"Hey," he chided gently, tilting Draco's face up. He was not crying, but his eyes shone brightly with tears. "Shh, Draco, it's fine," he said. He smiled and kissed Draco lightly, lingering over it and whispering, "I'm going to save you. Everything will be fine, I swear it will be."

"How are you going to do it, Harry?" Draco spat, looking furious suddenly. "Kill all of them. You can't cast the one spell that will kill them!"

"It's not my fault I can't...hate like that. Or hurt like that. But I'll find a way. I have to." He ran his fingers through Draco's hair. "Some things are worth risking everything for."

Draco flinched and buried his face in Harry's shoulder. "Do you honestly believe that?" he asked, very quietly, barely breathing.

"Yes," Harry said. "I would sacrifice anything to stop the curse."

"Would you..." Draco trailed off, swallowing hard and then trying again. "If it meant losing your own life, would you do it?"

"If it meant you would live? Yes. Because if I didn't and you died, I wouldn't want to live anyway. I don't think you get that, Draco. I wasn't living before you, I was barely existing and waiting for an easy way out. I... don't ever want to fall that low again. If you died, I would die with you, or right after you."

"What if, to save the one person you cared about, you had to destroy them? Could you do it?"

Harry considered for a moment, smoothing Draco's hair, and then said quietly, "I would destroy anything that threatened you, even if it was you, as long as you went on living."

"Am I a terrible person because I don't think I can do the same?" Draco whispered, lifting his head.

Harry cradled his jaw and kissed him very gently, tenderly. Then he nuzzled the side of his neck and kissed him there. "You can," he said quietly, almost wistfully. "No one thinks they can give up the things that matters most to them until the time for it comes. That's the point. And I would give anything to stop the curse and stop it from hurting you and I know you'd do anything to stop me from being hurt. It's like you said before, Draco. You trust me not to hurt you and I trust you not to hurt me."

Draco trembled violently, his hands slipping around to the small of Harry's back and holding him tightly. He nodded, though Harry was sure he was crying now, just a little bit, so he rocked him gently.

"Stop that," he sighed. "Draco... I told you, we won't think of it till tomorrow. C'mon..." He tilted his head up, wiped the few tears away, and kissed Draco's cheek, where an angry sort of flush had risen. "Nothing else matters, okay? Nothing else ever has. Just this." And he kissed Draco achingly sweetly, trying to draw him into it and soothe him, stop him from shaking and being afraid of whatever it was he was so afraid of.

"Harry... Harry, I can't do it, I have to tell you, I--"

Shaking his head, Harry kissed him more firmly, tangling his hands in Draco's shirt. Draco struggled at first, but gradually relaxed into the kiss, sighing softly and melting against him. Only when he was sure that Draco had given up, Harry whispered, "Tell me tomorrow. Now I'm gonna make you mine... I mean...if that's... okay?"

Draco's eyes were dark and hard to read. "I'm already yours," he said, voice husky. He reached up, gently pulling Harry's glasses off and setting them aside, before kissing his forehead, on his scar. It seemed to throb lightly at the soft brush of lips, but it could have been Harry's imagination. He let out the breath he'd been holding, crushed Draco to him, and buried his face in his shoulder, breathing deeply, trying to memorize Draco's scent.

"Okay," he said, though his voice cracked. He was standing at the edge of something very deep, and dizzily waiting for the ground to drop away and to feel himself falling into whatever it was, and not at all sure he was ready for this. The ground wouldn't drop away, however; it was up to him to take the last step, and he didn't know, suddenly, if he had the courage. The idea of being responsible for another person's heart was terrifying to someone as clumsy as he was, even with his own heart. He lifted his head, his own eyes shining with tears. The room was already blurry because he was not wearing his glasses, but now the tears served only to twist it further, into a random mess of colours and flickering light from the hearth and the only thing he could focus on was Draco's face. "Are you sure?"

Draco smiled. "Even if I had a choice in the matter, Harry, I wouldn't choose anything else."

Harry brought his hands up to Draco's face, cradling his jaw and stroking his cheeks, taking a deep, calming breath. He kissed Draco's forehead lightly, the way Draco had kissed his, and then kissed his lips, just as lightly. His eyes slowly closed and he moved closer, until they touched from head, to shoulder, to hip, and lower, no space between them. Instinctively, Draco slipped his hands around Harry's waist, and Harry could feel him trembling. He wondered what it was that Draco was afraid of, wondered if it was the coming battle or anything as ridiculous as that, but knew instinctively that it had to be more. Draco *had* to know that Harry would not let harm come to him. He had to know that nothing would touch Draco without ripping through Harry first.

And if he didn't... Harry would teach him. Show him.

So he kissed him, a bittersweet, soft kiss, and then another, harder and more possessive. At first, it was as if Draco had forgotten how to respond, how to move. He stood there and shook, eyes clenched shut, hands on Harry's back, fingers tangled in his jumper.

Then Draco melted with a soft moan and fell against him, opening his mouth and tilting his head up so that their tongues collided in a mess of heat and heavy breathing. They moved, shifting instinctively closer, though only moments before, Harry hadn't thought they could *be* any closer. But they could and they were, all trembling and aching and broken but Harry couldn't for the life of him remember who was supposed to be trembling and who was supposed to be soothing, because it all seemed one and the same, suddenly.

So he fell into that and forgot that he was supposed to be proving to Draco that he-- what? Loved him? Worshipped him? Would die for him? All of that, and more.

Harry *was* taking him, was breathing him in, bits of him to replace the broken bits of himself that had crumbled to dust years and years before, and he wonder if Draco could feel it, could feel those forgotten places inside of himself coming alive because of him, because of Draco, breathing into his mouth.

It didn't matter though, because *he* could feel it, and it *was* like taking the last step into something dark and deep, without definition, but it wasn't like drowning at all... it was like... like flying with someone to hold on to and someone to hit the bottom with.

And he did fall, and he knew without asking that Draco was falling, into him as much as Harry had fallen into him before.



He didn't know quite what he was doing, but Draco guided him, whispering shakily, kissing him softly when he lost his confidence, and holding him when he was so lost in it that he could not remember anything except that it was Draco who held him.

And then he was inside of Draco, which was strange but right, and he wondered why it should be that way, that he should feel right when there were dark hints of pain in Draco's eyes. Harry moved, just slightly, experimentally, and Draco flinched, yet it was still right, somehow, and he didn't understand.

"Does it hurt?" he whispered, kissing Draco's temple.

"No," Draco lied, stroking his back, and that's why it was alright. Because Harry was hurting him but Draco was letting him and somehow, that made more sense than promising *never* to hurt. Sometimes hurting was unavoidable and sometimes... sometimes hurting was part of what made something worth shattering for. Something fine and possessive and more exclusive than anything else, because Harry knew there was no one else in the world that Draco would let hurt him. Draco was his and Harry could hurt him, shatter him, and hold him together afterwards, and then Draco would do the same to him and maybe that was love.

He fell apart, and Draco fell too, and all their pieces fell together, and Harry did not care if they were ever whole again, because he would rather be broken with Draco than whole by himself.

And afterwards, when he was shaking and weak, damp with his own sweat, and on top of, inside of, Draco, he could not think of a time when he felt more whole.

Draco, who had lost himself as much as Harry had, who was breathing heavily and trembling more than ever, closed his eyes very slowly and whispered, "Oh god, Harry, I love you," as if it were something to fear.

Harry swallowed hard, because he had known Draco needed him, but had not known he *loved* him. He smiled, a fleeting, bittersweet smile. "You do?" he asked, very softly.

"More than anything."

"But why?" he asked huskily, pulling away and curling up sleepily beside him.

"I was made for it," Draco said, only partially coherent.

Harry pressed his face against Draco's chest, breathing deeply, feeling lethargic, sleepy, and as if this was all a dream.

"You should sleep," Draco told him gently, stroking his back. He kissed Harry's temple.

"Don't want to," Harry mumbled, perfectly content to be awake and in Draco's arms.

Draco laughed quietly and held him tighter. "You should, though. Tomorrow will be... hard."

"Did you sleep last night?" Harry whispered. "You weren't here, with me."

"I didn't sleep."

"Sleep now. I'll watch over you." Harry smiled at him.

"Don't want to," Draco replied gently, teasingly echoing Harry's own words.

Harry smiled at him, and snuggled closer, so they were tangled together, and Harry's eyes fluttered shut as he was slowly being lulled to sleep by the sound of Draco's breathing.

"Sleep," Draco said softly. "Let me watch over you, okay?"

Harry shook his head in protest but even so, drifted slowly off to sleep.

He woke up when the curse took Draco, worse than ever before. He did not know if it was because it had gotten worse in the days that Harry had been gone, or if Draco suddenly had something new and more terrifying to fear, but he held him for hours until Draco calmed, and then watched over him while he slept, smoothing his hair and whispering secrets that Draco didn't hear all through the night.

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Harry woke up alone, his throat feeling tight and rough, his eyes dry and stinging. He stared up at the ceiling for a long moment, blinking slowly and feeling vaguely dirty, as if his skin were covered in a faint sheen of dust. Everything was piling up on him, everything he'd done and every person he'd hurt. Ginny, Ron, Charlie, Pansy, Lucius... he'd fallen asleep sometime in the night, while holding Draco, and had instantly fallen into strange, distant nightmares, the kind with dragons, circling.

Needing comfort, he turned, intending to curl up against Draco, craving human contact.

Draco wasn't there.

Startled, Harry sat up, reaching for his glasses and pushing his hair back, staring around the room as if he did not recognize it. It was the same room, the same chest and barren dresser and torches on the wall. Same hearth with a small fire burning cheerfully, magically smokeless. Same rug and chair before it.

But he could not help feeling that something was missing, something important.

He fell back onto the bed, closing his eyes and moaning softly. Something wasn't right, he could sense it. He closed his eyes, took a deep, and then sat up again, so suddenly that his head started to hurt. They'd left with out him! Hermione and Draco had gone off for the final battle and left him behind.

He leapt out of bed and had just hurriedly dressed when there was a soft knock at the door. He froze and then slowly went to it, pulling it open.

It was Hermione, looking pale, eyes very dark and hair scraped back off her face and pulled back harshly. "We need to talk, Harry," she said, though she glanced longingly over her shoulder, as if she wanted to be anywhere but there.

"Where's Draco?" Harry asked, having decided that Draco could not have gone off without Hermione to kill the Dementors.

She didn't reply, only slipped into the bedroom, glancing around nervously. Her eyes lingered on the twisted bed sheets, the clothes that Draco had left thrown about the floor, and then she looked back at him and took a careful breath. She smiled. "I brought you some coffee," she said, handing him the mug she'd been holding.

He took it automatically, though he did not feel like drinking it. Perhaps it would help his fuzzy mind, however. He sipped it and then asked again, "Where's Draco?"

"Oh, Harry," she snapped, irritated suddenly. "I need to talk to you. Can't you stop thinking about him, even for a moment? This is important."

Feeling chastised despite himself, Harry mumbled, "Sorry," and sank down on the bed. He took another drink of coffee, and waited until Hermione perched nervously on the chair by the hearth. "What did you need to talk about?"

She considered for a moment and then whispered, "Have you learnt the Dark Patronus yet?"

He shook his head and took another drink, a long swallow, if only to avoid looking at her. He should have learned it, should have practiced until he could do it, instead of wasting so much time...

"Draco can't do the Light Patronus, he's been trying all morning..." she said absently, gazing into the fire. Flames flickered in her eyes, or it could have been tears, Harry didn't know.

"Where is he?" he repeated, very softly. Hermione did not appear to hear him. "Please, Hermione, I need to see him," he begged.

She looked at him, and he could see now that it was tears causing her eyes to shine. "You will, Harry. Finish your coffee and I'll tell you where he is."

He drained the mug and set it on the bedside table. It hadn't cleared his muddled mind, however. Things were more dream-like than even before, and he got to his feet, grimacing. "I don't feel well," he mumbled.

She didn't move. "It's... it's easier to learn to hate than it is to love, Harry."

Confused, he shook his head, unable to quite follow the conversation. "It's not," he said.

"He's in the library." She took a deep breath. "He's in the library, Harry, and he's... he's not...well. The curse... too much... he can't... he's... that's what it does. You were gone so long, Harry, and...and it got worse, and he can't...he's going to...oh god, Harry, *hurry*."

He stared at her in complete confusion for the longest moment, and then, slowly, turned to the dresser, where Draco had left the gun the night before, a terrible suspicion growing in his mind. The gun was gone.

"Oh my god," he whispered.

Harry ran as fast as he could, breathing heavily with panic, and when he found Draco, it was in the library. Draco was standing by the hearth, staring into the flames, and he was holding the gun in his left hand.

"Draco," Harry called gently, so as not to startle him.

Draco turned slowly, a strange and bright smile lighting up his face. The flames behind him cast an almost halo around his entire body, making him seem hazy and not-quite-real. "Harry," he greeted quietly. "Hello."

"Give me the gun, Draco." He took a step forward.

"Don't come any closer," Draco warned, grimacing a little. "I suspect, judging from what happened with Ginny, that shooting oneself in the head can be quite messy."

"Shooting oneself in the ..." Harry trailed off, horrified. "Draco. Draco, give me the gun."

"That would be counterproductive," Draco said.

"Depends on whose side you're looking at it from," Harry said desperately. "Please, Draco." He held out his hand but rather than put the gun in his hand, Draco lifted it to his temple. "*Give me the fucking gun, Draco*," Harry shrieked.

Draco smiled. "It will be alright, you know." There were strange lights in his eyes, or maybe they were shadows and reflections of the flames in the hearth. Like with Hermione, Harry couldn't tell. God, why was everything so blurry?

"You don't have to do this. Just sit down, Draco, it'll pass. It's just the curse, it's, it's doing to you what it did to Pansy, this *isn't the way to solve this*."

Taking a deep, steadying breath, Draco said sternly, "This has nothing to do with Pansy, nor her weakness. And yes, this will solve everything. I suspect you won't understand until later, but it doesn't matter." He cocked the gun awkwardly.

"Give. Me. The. Gun."

"Why?" Draco asked softly.

"Because I don't want you to die," Harry whimpered.

"And you love me?" Draco was watching his face carefully, and had Harry known why, he would have said no, no, a thousand times no.

"Yes," he said instead.

"And it would destroy you to lose me?" Again, had Harry known, he would have screamed that losing Draco Malfoy would be the best thing that ever happened to him.

Instead, he said softly, "Yes."

"Then listen to me carefully, Harry," Draco said slowly, gently. And then his voice hardened and became deliberately cruel. The madness in his eyes changed to something else, something more like tears. "This is your fault. This is because of you. Like everything else, this is because of you."

And then he pulled the trigger.

*So we wrapped our arms around each other,  
Trying to shove ourselves back together.  
We were making love,  
Making love.  
It was a cold dark evening,  
Such a long time ago...*

**Author notes:** The lyrics in this chapter are from 'Hedwig and the Angry Inch', the song 'Origin of Love', which I felt particularly suited it. Don't worry, my intention with this story isn't to kill off everyone in this story, and this is NOT the end of the story. I promise. Thank you for reading. Dedicated to everyone who doesn't throw a fit over the ending of this chapter. Trust me.

**Author's Notes:** Dedicated to: ifihadameadow, crimson\_stained, eclipses, katfusion, thereallyle, breila\_rose, primroseburrows, rikkustears, featherduster, siobhanohare, unrouen (you guys remember why, I hope).

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## Windfallen

Chapter Twelve: Wild

*What ravages of spirit  
conjured this tempestuous rage  
created you a monster  
broken by the rules of love  
and fate has led you through it  
you do what you have to do*

\*

*I don't know how to let you go  
every moment marked  
with apparitions of your soul  
I'm ever swiftly moving  
trying to escape this desire  
the yearning to be near you*

\*\*\*

There was a tense and nervous silence, and then, "No."

But blood was running, in trickles and pools that soaked into the cracks and fissures of the dark stone, and the only sound was the flickering of flames in the hearth. The halo from the flames was no longer angelic because it was tinged with red. Still, it cast a hazy light over Draco's body, almost disguising the blood. Draco had fallen on his side, the wounded part of his head against the floor, and Harry could not see how much damage had been done. Still, Draco did not seem to be breathing or moving or even living any longer.

"No," Harry said again, but there was no one there to deny it with him and make it true. And then, in a snarl, "I'll follow you."

He picked up Hermione's gun and held it to his temple, his hand shaking, his eyes squeezed shut. He breathed through his nose carefully and his finger trembled on the trigger.

"No." It wasn't his voice this time, and Harry's eyes flew open. Hermione watched solemnly from the entrance. "Harry, no." Her face was shining with tears.

"I have to follow him," he said.

"You can't," she whispered. "Harry, you can't follow where he's gone. You can't save him this time."

"This is your fault," he spat. She flinched. "Why did you bring this gun here? Why did you teach him how to use it? It's *your* fault!"

She was sobbing now. "I'm sorry, Harry, I am. But you can't follow him!"

Harry stared at her empty, and Draco's body lay between them. "But I've got no where else to go, and no reason to go there, if he's not there."

"Harry." She tried to reach over Draco's body to touch him, but Harry flinched.

He dropped to his knees in the blood and reached through the glowing haze lit by the fire and touched Draco's hand. It was lying on the ground next to his face, nearly flat on the stone, and stained with blood.

Hermione was at his side suddenly, whispering things meant to be soothing. She pulled him against her chest and rocked him. "You can't follow him yet, Harry," she said, her voice thick.

"You have no right," he hissed, struggling. "No right at all to tell me what I can do now. I *want to die*. It's my fault, it's my fault!"

She cupped his face and stared intently into his eyes. "Listen to me. You can't. Not yet. We need you. You cannot leave us now. You're our only hope."

He shoved her so hard that she fell back, landing hard on the stone floor. "*Fuck that*," he screamed. "Fuck being your only hope! I've got nothing! Draco had the only spell to help you and now he's *dead*."

Crawling to his side and stroking his hair, she kissed his cheek and said softly, "Please, Harry. Just give us this last thing, and then I'll let you go. Then you can follow him. Please?"

A strange sound, like an animal in pain, echoed through the chamber, and it took Harry a long moment to realize that it was his.

"Here," Hermione said, holding her hand out to him. A golden ring with the Malfoy family crest rested in her palm. "He told me to give this to you."

"*You knew?*" Harry breathed. "*You knew.*" He shoved her again, and she fell back, sobbing and curling up into a little ball. She did not deny knowing that Malfoy was going to kill himself, didn't say a thing. The ring fell from her fingers and rolled a ways, shining dully in the torchlight, resting right by Harry's foot. He didn't notice. "I hate you," he hissed.

Rage, a hotter, more encompassing rage than he had ever known, bloomed inside him, making him tremble and burn as though he was on fire. It was wild and untamed and *ferocious*, and Harry could not have stopped himself nor the rage from lashing out at Hermione if he had even had the desire to try.

He did not have the desire to save her, wanted to rip her apart, because she had kept him there, in the bedroom, while Draco had been here alone, and had decided death was his only option. He was breathing heavily, acting on instinct, and he lashed out with magic, blindly. She screamed as she was lifted and sent flying through the air, crashing against the stone wall, and again as she fell to the ground. There was silence then, though he could see she was still breathing, collapsed on the floor, face-down.

It was not enough, those screams and that silence, and he attacked her again and again, screaming until his voice was hoarse and she lay very still. She was breathing, and it was very faint.

Nearly animalistic now, feeling wounded and betrayed, Harry fell to his knees beside Draco. He was barely conscious, the force of his rage so strong that it prevented any sort of rational thought at all.

He moaned softly, crouching over Draco and smoothing back his hair that was sticky with blood. Gathering Draco up in his arms, Harry cuddled him close against his chest, holding him, rocking him, and whispering to him.

"I was yours," he said, flinching and burying his face in Draco's bloody hair. "Now there is nothing."

A black wave of grief took him there, and he began to cry, huge, gasping, broken sobs as he held Draco to him, blood in a river all around.

There were screams building up in his throat, furious, hateful screams. He did not permit himself to scream, because that one ounce of fragile control was the only thing keeping him from tearing the world apart with

the force of his rage. He had only ever wanted one thing before, and now that one thing lay shattered in his arms.

Instead, he whimpered, "Why?"

He knew why. He should have seen it coming. Because it was easier to hate than it was to love, easier to learn the Dark Patronus than it was the light. And Draco had been teaching him to hate. Had destroyed himself so that Harry might live.

But he had gotten it all wrong. Harry did not want to live if Draco was not with him. There was nothing worth living for, nothing worth dying for, nothing mattered, except that there was blood on the floor and it was Draco's and Draco had spilt it to save the world. Reluctant heroes were always the first to die.

But not for nothing.

Harry set him down carefully in his own blood, and kissed his forehead, before standing up. He was breathing heavily, still furious, still aching, still hateful towards the world that had brought them to this.

Hermione moaned softly and Harry followed the sound, rolling her onto her back. Her face was broken and bloody.

"What am I to do?" His voice was cold and dark, and her eyes widened at the sound. He could feel the dark magic in his veins.

"The ring is a Portkey to the gathering place of the Dementors," she said, voice faint. "It is a trap for those who dare to spill Malfoy blood. When the ring is wet with Malfoy blood, the next person to touch it is transported to the center of the Dementors... An execution."

He did not really care. His fingertips were sparking with dark energy, and he stared at the ring Draco had left for him, which now lay in Draco's blood. "I will do it," he said tonelessly.

He picked up the ring and it burned, searing the Malfoy family crest into the palm of his hand. Closing his eyes, he tilted his head back and screamed with the agony of it as it wrenched him out of the caverns and into the gathering place of Dementors that Draco had told him about only the night before.

There were thousands.

The rage faltered under a wave of terror. *He could not do this, did not know how, was not strong enough, Draco had died for nothing...* And then, as the cold fear inspired by the Dementor magic stole over him, a voice in his mind shrieked, *I am not ready to die, not even for Draco, I am not ready to die.*

But then, he certainly wasn't ready to live without Draco.

He shrunk back; there was a stone wall behind him, nowhere to run, and the creatures were turning and moving closer. There was no sound, no breeze, and far above, he could see the early morning sky.

He cast the Patronus Charm, though what good it would do against a thousand Dementors, he did not know. They flinched back a little and then kept coming closer, the force of their combined terror overcoming one paltry Patronus. And so he cast more and more, until a ring of silver stags danced around him, and he could only distantly hear the sounds of his mother screaming in his mind, and the rapid secession of gunshots, first the one that killed Ginny, and then the one that killed Draco, over and over again.

He was broken and weak, he'd known it all along. The force of terror was bringing him to his knees, and he cowered on the stone floor, the clear morning sky above, and he cried.

The Dementors could not penetrate the ring of stags, and he was safe for the moment, save for the visions and sounds in his head. When one stag faded, he'd create another, growing weaker and weaker as the sun moved across the sky.

He was panicking, and stupid for thinking he was strong enough for this.

A fitting way for Harry-Potter-Boy-Who-Lived-By-Accident to die. Crying and trembling on his knees in a stone pit under a perfect sky while a thousand Dementors watched on and laughed.

*Oh god, oh god, I'm not ready...*

The sun set, and Harry was still there, still terrified, still frozen, still protected by useless charms created from memories of his school days with Hermione and Ron, from Draco's kisses and smiles, from Pansy's words of belonging to Draco Malfoy. Weak, weak, weak. He was doomed and not ready to die.

It was dark soon, where had the day gone? Hours of reliving all of the most terrible things he had done-- he wondered if this was what Azkaban was like, and wondered further if this was hell. Had he killed himself after all, after Draco had died? Killed himself and gone to hell, but that meant Draco would be here somewhere too, in this hell. Though if Draco shared his hell, it wouldn't be hell at all, but heaven, and the very idea that Draco had abandoned him to his own private hell made Harry so *furious*.

Used him, used him not as his lover or his...his friend even, but as a Hero. Someone to break into dust and rebuild into someone capable of saving the fucking world.

But he'd failed. This was Draco's fault. Draco hadn't made him strong enough. Hadn't taught him well enough. Hadn't broken him because Harry could still feel what it was like to lie in Draco's arms, to be inside him, to have Draco inside him, to kiss him, taste him, laugh with him, and all of that... all of that was enough to keep Harry from breaking. Somehow. *But it didn't make sense!* Nothing was making sense. Nothing except that this was hell and Draco was not here.

"I hate you," he shrieked, getting to his feet, though his legs trembled and he wanted to fall. He screamed to the stars, who did not care that he was in agony, that he was dying, while gunshots echoed in his head. He screamed to the Dementors, who waited so patiently for him to go mad, to grow tired, so they could have him. He screamed to Draco, in case this was hell and Draco was standing somewhere, watching. He screamed and screamed until his voice gave out, and then, because he could not scream, and tears were running down his pale cheeks, and he hated *everything*, he lashed out blindly with his wand.

The hate ran through him like a black wave, trickling through every cell and bursting from his fingertips, channeled through his wand like a cold breath, and spilled out in a shimmering black shadow. It twisted into serpent, a basilisk, writhing on the stone floor and then rising up, preparing to strike.

It did strike, destroying one Dementor, which melted to ash when the basilisk dove through it. Then the Dark Patronus was gone, the Dementor was gone, and nine hundred and ninety nine stood in its place.

Harry started to laugh, drained, exhausted, longing to die, and Draco's spell was proving worthless. Draco had destroyed him to give him the power to kill one fucking Dementor.

The world was doomed, and so was Harry Potter.

He kept up the defensive ring of stags around him, and they cast a silver halo over him and the Dementors that waited for his strength to give out, and he began picking off one Dementor at a time, though it was pointless. He soon tired, his legs trembling, his face sticky with tears.

Hatred was not enough, love was not enough.

He moaned softly when his strength gave out, and it was all he could do not to fall to the ground. He could hear his own breath echoing harshly, and he did not have the strength to lift his wand for another spell.



Night was passing quickly, and soon it would be dawn. Harry did not know if his Patronus would last the night.

And it was Draco's fault. Draco was supposed to be here, holding his hand, telling him it was alright that he wasn't strong enough, brave enough. Draco had promised not to hurt him, had promised to be with him in hell, and now here hell was, and Harry was alone.

He started to cry. There was no hope, nothing. It was all darkness and a fading silver halo, hundred of Dementors waiting patiently for their chance at all of his lightness, their chance to devour his soul.

If they knew that he'd lost his heart and soul to Draco already, he wondered if they'd still be there, waiting for the silver stags to fade.

And Draco had taken them with him when he died. Draco had taken everything good about Harry with him, was the only good thing Harry had left to lose and now Draco was gone. There was nothing inside of him for the Dementors to feed on, and Harry let out a soft breath, and with it, the last bit of his fury.

After all, just the night before, he had given Draco permission to break him this way. *"What if, to save the one person you cared about, you had to destroy them. Could you do it?"*

*"I would destroy anything that threatened you, even if it was you, as long as you went on living."*

*"Am I a terrible person because I don't think I can do the same?"*

*"You can. No one thinks they can give up the things that matters most to them until the time for it comes..."*

Maybe there had been no hope for them in life and Draco had known that. And maybe, after all of this was over, Draco would be waiting for him on the other side.

There was only one thing to be done.

"I forgive you," he whispered, eyes wide and voice bleak, because it was the only way. He forgave Voldemort for a thousand murders, killing for his better world, and he forgave Sirius for being so clumsy as to fall behind the veil, and he forgave Ron for losing his magic and Hermione for being so busy, and Ginny for losing her mind. He forgave Charlie for making him feel like he was to blame, and Pansy, for starting the Unforgivable. And most of all, he forgave Draco, who had loved him and left him and broken him.

That forgiveness poured out of him and twisted with the hatred, because for all that he forgave, he could not *love*. He had forgotten how. But the hatred and the forgiveness tangled together, silver starlight and darkest shadow, howling as it tore from him all of his strength and courage and power, shrieking through his veins. He did not scream, though he longed to. The screams lodged in his throat and echoed in his mind, with all of those nightmares that plagued him. His mother's screams and Sirius' stumble and Draco's blood, all over his hands... and then the Dark Patronus twisted upwards, into the air, and, with a hiss, it dove back again, to the army of Dementors. The forgiveness froze them in terror, and the hatred ripped them apart.

The two Patronus twisted together into one, projecting their power, combining forgiveness and hate with enough power to crack through the terror of the Dementor magic, and destroy every Dementor that had gathered there, and then Harry's magic, his courage, and his despair, expanded throughout the world and destroyed every Dementor that existed.

And then the fallout began.

Wild magic snapped back towards him, magical remains of the curse that had held every mind captive, magic that had locked nightmares in the minds of humans all over the earth. It could not be destroyed, so it reflected back, wild and expending itself in light and heat. The sky seemed to burn, even as the sun began to rise in the east, and the stars, fading already, seemed to crackle as the Dementors burned and turned to ash.

Not all of the feral rush of energy was expended in light and sound, however, because Harry's magic had been torn from him and other magic rushed in to restore the equilibrium.

As soon as the magic entered him, however, it became twisted and dark, because Harry was now twisted and dark. There was no room within him for lightness, and so he took in the darkest parts of the wild magic. The nightmares, the terror, the desire to die that had been torn from the minds of the curse victims all tore through Harry. He tilted his head back and shrieked with the agony of it, even as he craved more and more.

And then it was over.

When the Dementor dust slowly settled all around in a thick layer of soot, Harry fell, so slowly, to the sun-baked earth. With a soft breath, he gave in to the weakness, and willed himself to die.

The dust and the burning soot settled, a hazy cloud drifting slowly to earth and covering him like a blanket. Harry did not move, scarcely breathed. He just lay there, on his stomach, one hand pillowed under a hollow, bruised cheek, the other closed into a fist on the steaming ground. One knee was pulled up a little, the other leg stretched out, and his jumper had risen up a bit, showing a vulnerable patch of his back, and the slight shadow of his spine. His hair ruffled a little in the breeze, and his glasses lay broken nearby. His scar blazed a brilliant red, and he waited and wanted to die.

It should not have taken long. He was beaten and bruised and so incredibly weak. He could have just slipped away, drifted away into nothing. He was so tired.

But he was not allowed to die.

Draco was there suddenly, stepping into the bright light of the sun that nearly blinded him. His silhouette caused the light to refract and beam around him, giving him a halo and what seemed like fragmented angel wings.

"I'm dead, then," Harry decided, with no small amount of relief. He was so tired, and now he could let go. Now Hermione would let him go. He closed his eyes.

"Shit!" Now *that* wasn't right. Angels never cursed. He opened his eyes, and the light had shifted, Draco was kneeling beside him, and he didn't look angelic at all. His face was coated in a fine sheen of soot. "Wake up," he commanded.

"I am awake," Harry said dully, except that his lips didn't move, and no sound came from his throat. His body was very stiff and sore, and he couldn't tell if he was breathing. He didn't *want* to breathe. He had betrayed himself and everything he'd ever believed in, for this fucking cause. For the right to die and follow Draco, who had betrayed him and left him. And now he wanted to die. That was why he'd done this, so he could rest. Sleep. Die. There was nothing here for him any longer. Not love, nor hatred, nor blame.

He closed his eyes.

"Open your eyes," Draco hissed. It wasn't real, though, because Draco was dead. He had died because of Harry. Blamed Harry for his own death. So Harry didn't listen. "Breathe. Fuck, Harry, breathe. Why isn't he breathing? Shit!" Draco-who-wasn't-real was touching Harry's face, and his fingers were cold. Maybe it was just because Harry's skin was burning with fever.

"He doesn't want to breathe." Another voice, this one cool and calm, though Harry did not allow himself to be fooled into thinking the speaker did not mean him harm. His entire being, his heart and his soul, felt chafed and raw. He did not open his eyes. "Oh, Harry, please!" He was vaguely aware that Hermione was there, touching his face, pushing sweat-soaked hair off his forehead, but he didn't care.

Until she leaned close to his ear and he could feel her tears falling on his face. She whispered, "It wasn't real."

He was aching and empty and cold, and it hurt, but he opened his eyes and stared dully up at her. His throat burned a tiny bit as he sucked in a shaky breath.

She watched him, brown eyes sharp with tears, and she stroked his face, swallowing hard. "I'm so sorry, Harry," she whimpered. "It wasn't real."

Sorry it wasn't real? It made no sense... Harry was sorry it *was* real, and his eyelids fluttered again as though they were going to close.

Suddenly, Harry wasn't lying on the ground any longer. He was lifted roughly into someone's arms, and then Draco was hissing, "Harry. Harry, fucking stop this, right now, I *will not let you die*."

"That's funny," Harry tried to say, but his throat was closed and frozen. "Because I thought the same about you."

But then Draco was kissing him, a hard, punishing kiss, and Harry lifted his fists weakly and pushed against him. Hermione was shrieking something in a fury, and tugging his shoulders, twisting him out of Draco's hold. And then Harry was falling back to the ground, his mind cracking and cracking more and more, the closer to the ground he fell... *This was it. This was dying. And Draco, wait for me...* Harry's mind shattered before he hit the ground, and then there was nothing.

\*\*\*

*a glowing ember  
burning hot  
burning slow  
deep within I'm shaken by the violence  
of existing for only you...*

**Author notes:** The lyrics in this chapter are from come from "Do What You Have To" by Sarah McLachlan. I know this chapter was dreadfully short, but the next shall be extra-long to make up for it, and updated right away.

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## Windfallen

Chapter 13: Shining Now, So Bright

*Maybe I've been here before  
I know this room, I've walked this floor  
I used to live alone before I knew you  
I've seen your flag on the marble arch  
Love is not a victory march  
It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah.*

\*

*There was a time you'd let me know  
What's real and going on below  
But now you never show it to me, do you?  
And remember when I moved in you  
The holy dark was moving too  
And every breath we drew was Hallelujah...*

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*August, 1991. Diagon Alley*

Draco had *known*. He had taken one look and known, without knowing how, that he had fallen completely, madly, and dizzily in love. Oh, it wasn't like *that*. He had not wanted to tackle Harry, snog him, shag him, or anything at all, really. He'd just wanted to sit there and stare at him and try to figure out what it was about him that did not seem to want to let Draco look away.

He would not even notice it then, and it would only become clear in retrospect, that Draco had been dizzy for him... It had been Pansy who had realized it, who had noticed Draco glaring at Harry, sneering at Harry, hating Harry with his eyes, unable to look away, who had brought up the idea. It was not something as soppy as 'soulmates' or as messy as 'true love'. It was something darker, deeper, some tangled need that bound them, made them need each other. Not in love, but in *anything*. Hate or love is the same to the soul because it still keeps the other soul just as close.

Which was why it was so easy to come to hate him as a child and so easy to come to love him as a man. His soul had gotten it right from the start and it only took his heart all those years to catch up.

It hadn't mattered. In things like this, the heart was almost an afterthought. Draco had never put much faith in his heart, anyway. It beat and it pumped his blood and every now and again it fluttered weakly when Harry looked unguarded across the Great Hall and accidentally met his eyes and automatically smiled. Those moments were easy to ignore.

That first moment, however, when Harry had walked into the robe shop and Draco had, for some inexplicable reason, felt like he'd been there for a thousand years, waiting for this, that moment was unforgettable. It was always there in the back of Draco's mind in all the years to come, shimmering like an image seen through a thin sheet of running water, raindrops on a window. That one day when Harry Potter wasn't Harry Potter, but was just the Boy From The Robe Shop that made Draco's heart beat faster and faster though he did not know why. It was defined, in his mind, as excitement. The opportunity to meet someone new.

Except that the dark-haired boy did not *seem* new. It seemed like he'd known him *forever* and had been waiting, breathless, to see him again.

*It was not meant to be love. It was just meant to be.*

It was only chance, an accident, a random twist of fate that turned whatever it was that bound them into love.

But it had happened, and Draco had come to love Harry as much, if not more, than he had hated him before. He hadn't thought about it, though, because he had a job to do, a father to please, a war to win, and Harry was easy (almost) to forget, in the heat of battle, the drive to survive. It had always been a subconscious thing, however, lingering in the back of his mind ever since that day in the robe shop. The urge to prove himself better than Harry, to get Harry's attention. To make Harry *proud*?

To make Harry *anything*. To make him *look*, even. With Harry, even the smallest reaction was worth everything to Draco, because it meant he was *aware* of Draco.

And that was all that mattered.

That was why it had been instinct to move forward to intersect the spell meant to steal Harry's conscious, to pollute it with nightmares and madness. He had fallen then, tripped, stumbled, ungraceful in his desperation to fall for Harry, to protect him. He'd been falling for Harry his whole life and didn't see why this should be any different. So, he fell and then the curtain of dark had fallen as well and Draco had slipped away.

The madness had first been like the deepest, heaviest crush of the darkest, coldest water. It had sucked at his skin and his eyes, pulling him down and sending him swirling madly through a vivid and terrible world of nightmares and terror. And then it had faded, ebbed away like a tide, and every time the tide rolled off of him like hands coated in feathers, he'd open his eyes and it would be Harry bending over him. Harry looking worried, concerned, soft around the edges and hesitant but *there*, looking *at Draco*, aware of him... And that was all that matters.

It was waiting for the waves of madness to drift away, focusing on the brief glimpses of Harry waiting for him on the shores, that had given Draco the strength to beat back the madness so quickly, to be so lucid in his waking moments. He would not *allow* himself to be near Harry and be weak, delusional, vulnerable. Both because he did not *trust* Harry and more because he did not want Harry to see him like that.

The days spent with Harry in his flat and then later, in the caves, were like a richly woven tapestry, flashes of scenes and smiles and words that made no sense alone but twisted together with the others to create a dark, intricate woven scene that did not seem real. Mad nightmares entangled with the most bittersweet moments with Harry, seemingly cut from the same fabric, telling the same story... threads of such darkness and light wrapped up in each other, tangled together, the way Draco was entangled with Harry, by the end of it. He lived for him, breathed for him, suffered for him, and realized that it had always been that way.

And then Draco had let Harry go... To save him because he did not dare to break him. It happened like this:

\*\*\*

*Before*

How many days had it been? Draco couldn't remember. It didn't matter, how many days had passed or how many *would* pass, until he was driven to madness and could no longer tell the setting of the sun from the rising of it. Because he had let Harry go, let the world's salvation go, had doomed them all to die screaming and mad-- and he didn't care. Harry would be alright.

Granger had wanted to tear him apart, when she woke up that morning, after Draco had returned from leaving Harry on the most gorgeous hill he could find, in the light of the rising sun. When she asked him where Harry was and Draco had said defiantly, "Gone," she had wanted to kill him. But there had been relief there, too. She hadn't wanted to destroy him, Draco had known that. Pansy had known that. Pansy had said, "Some people will risk everything, Draco. For the greater good. Granger is one of them. Are you sure you're strong enough to be one of them too? Doing good was never your strong point." And then she had smiled.

He'd assured her he was strong enough. He had lied. But then, he had not realized that being strong enough would mean crushing, breaking, and tearing Harry apart, and then abandoning him in the pit of the curse. And when Granger had told him that was the only way (to teach Harry to hate and hurt enough that he'd be able to cast the Dark Patronus, to break him so badly that he may never heal, to take from him the *one*

*thing he had ever had that was truly his own and belonged to no one else*), he hadn't been able to do it. So he had taken Harry and set him free and then returned coldly defiant.

Granger had shouted; Draco hadn't listened. Finally, when her lectures had grown louder and more tiresome, and Pansy had looked pale and disappointed in him, Draco had snapped, "Some things are worth dying for."

There was a ringing silence, and then Pansy had said softly, "Draco, you've condemned him to a worse fate now, by letting him go. Do you realize what is going to happen? We will all go mad, day-by-day it gets worse, and we will all seek death as an escape from that. We will all die; he won't. He's the only one immune to the curse, because of his scar. Like tempered steel, he was made resistant to the Unforgivables when Voldemort cast that curse on him as a child and his mother saved him. So he won't go mad, at least not magically. But he will be alone. Until he dies."

Draco's eyes had stung with tears at the images those words brought to his mind, but he fought them back, because like hell Granger would ever see him cry. "If he comes back," he spat, "you can do whatever you like to him. But only if he comes back. I will not abandon him to your fucking plan without at least a chance to escape."

And then Harry had come back.

They'd been in the library, researching other plans (though there weren't any. Nothing was working, nothing would work. Harry was the only one who could do it, was the only one strong enough to kill the Dementors), and Granger had been lecturing him again on how he had doomed the world to madness. Pansy was gone, and Draco was worried, though he had tried not to think about where she might have run off to. She'd be back.

"None of this would have happened if you hadn't taken him away," Granger had snapped. She went on and on for a while longer, and Draco grew tired of it.

"Shut up about it, Granger," he'd said, feeling listless and drained, like pieces of him were missing. Leaves pulled from branches by an unforgiving wind and fallen in senseless patterns all over the cold ground.

"I will *not* shut up about it, Malfoy! I just still don't understand how you could *do* that without consulting us! And now Pansy's run off as well and no one knows where Harry is and we *need* him if we're to--" Her voice, which had risen with every word, cut off abruptly.

Draco filled the silence, because silence was something he'd come to loathe. "I've told you a thousand times, Granger, I won't go along with it, but if he comes back, it's his own sodding fault and you can do whatever you like--"

And then the wind had picked up again and tossed the leaves wildly, swirling through the air, and all of Draco's pieces were rearranged again, and more senselessly than ever.

"I'm right here."

It was Harry and the world stopped spinning for just a moment. Draco looked up, felt ill, wanted to die, wanted to hide, anything to make this not have happened, anything to make it not be true. But Harry was standing there, tall and windblown and-- and bloody? No, no, it didn't matter, it was Harry and Draco wanted to die. What was a little blood? Nothing and he forced it from his mind and could only look at Harry's green green eyes and wish he was dead.

Granger was crying because Harry was back and that meant the plan would have to be done. Draco had known she hadn't wanted to do it, had been grateful to him for setting Harry free because honor had committed her to breaking her best friend. And she ran from the room in tears. Draco hardly noticed, only stared at Harry's throat, at his jaw, his cheekbones, his scar. Anywhere but his eyes, which were so heartbreakingly green that Draco knew he'd fall apart if he looked into them for another moment.

He was cold, everything was cold, and when Harry looked at him again, he said, "Well. I thought I made myself clear. I don't want you here."

And Harry's heart broke a little, Draco could see it. The world started spinning again, but dizzily so. "Pansy said--"

Draco was burning, aching, and the mention of Pansy hurt because she was lost to him too, and he did not know where she had gone. He snapped, "Pansy? Did she go to fetch you? I had wondered. And where is she? I'd like a few words with her."

Harry was going to cry and Draco turned away because he did not want to see himself reflected in anyone's tears, especially Harry Potter's. "Didn't... didn't you miss me?"

He was getting angry. It was not fair of the world to expect this from him. Draco Malfoy was not a hero, was not even trying to be. "Missed you?" he spat, as if there could be any doubt that he had.

"I'm sorry, I thought--"

"No, you didn't! Thinking is so fucking beyond you that it never even occurred to me that you would have done so and come to the conclusion that coming back here, after I specifically told you to stay away, was at all the best idea!" His heart-- if he had one, and he wasn't sure he did-- was breaking.

"Draco..."

"What, did you think I sent you away for my *own* health and safety? Of course not! You're so fucking dense and I told her she could do whatever she wanted if you came back but you weren't supposed to! You're fucking stupid, Potter, I can't *believe you!* Where's Pansy? I swear, I fucking want to kill her, I--"

And then the world stopped again, and Draco wasn't ready for it, was thrown off balance by it. Harry was holding a leaf, a velvety leaf, one that Draco recognized.

"She said you'd understand," Harry said gently, and Draco did-- but god, he didn't want to.

"Where is she?" He was whispering. This was not a conversation he wanted to have, *none of this was supposed to happen.*

"She said you'd understand." Harry started to cry, just a little, and Draco stared at him blankly, wondering if he could possibly understand what Pansy had done, and why.

"No." Draco whimpered. "Harry, where is she?"

Harry's eyes were wide and teary, and he sat down on the stone floor, as if his legs could no longer hold him up. "She didn't come back. I don't know where she went, but she didn't come back." He pulled his knees up to his chest and hugged them, looking small and lost.

It was a trembling sort of fury that made Draco fall before him, unable to stand. He wanted to scream and destroy things; instead, he gently took the leaf and studied it, trying to make sense of something he should have seen coming. Nothing made sense, however. Not the poisoned leaf in his hand, or Pansy being gone. Or Harry coming back to him. He looked up at Harry, into his eyes, and a fragile pain started to grow inside him, somewhere deep where nothing had ever existed before, except darkness, terror, and rage. It was the place he drew his Dark Patronus from.

He kissed Harry very carefully, because it was a kiss that resembled very thin ice, or glass, waiting to shatter. "I did... miss you, I mean," he whispered, because he could not leave Harry there alone, looking so small and afraid. Then he walked away, because everything was broken and bleeding and he could not fall apart in front of Harry.

He cried and didn't think he'd ever stop. He threw things, broke things, wished he was anywhere else in the world but there, in those caverns in the dark with Hermione Granger and Harry Potter, while Pansy was off somewhere dying of a poison that Draco had been too stupid to see. Punishing herself for creating the curse that was going to force Draco to destroy Harry Potter in an attempt to stop it. He wanted to kill Pansy himself then, but only for a moment. He crushed the leaf in his hand, and the edges were like broken glass, and slashed his skin.

He grieved, though he hadn't ever had much experience with grieving. Grief, he had experienced plenty of that. But never expressing it.

And then he'd gone back to Harry, because he was broken and bleeding and Harry was the only one in the world he had left.

He wondered if it would be enough, and at the same time knew that of course it would be. It was Harry....

He was worried Harry would have gone, and could not bring himself to hope he had. When he found Harry sleeping in the library, in the same position he'd been left in, Draco was relieved.

"Harry," he called. "Harry?" Harry looked up, sleepy and confused. "I wasn't sure you'd still be here."

"I had nowhere else to go. Besides, I'd rather be hurt with you than empty without you." Something crumbled a little inside Draco at that. Then Harry noticed his bleeding hand and started to panic.

Draco explained about the leaf, and Pansy's death, and all of it, while Harry held his hand and stood close to him, warming him with his own warmth and giving him the strength to stand just by standing beside him.

Then Harry was falling to the ground, to sit there again, and Draco followed, because it was alright to fall if Harry fell with him. So they sat there, close together and leaning against the wall and Draco kept whispering, trembling, as he told Harry about Pansy leaving him. Harry held him, and Draco tried not to think about it, about how much he needed it, because Malfoys *did not* need to be held (except sometimes, like now, Draco rather thought he did). And when Harry started stroking his hair, Draco decided that if a Malfoy did not need this, he must not be a Malfoy, and that did not seem to matter, as long as he was Harry's.

Draco could not, could not, help it when the tears returned, and he hid his face in Harry's shoulders and clung to him as he sobbed. Harry rocked him (like a baby, but Draco did not care) and held him, whispered to him, and Draco cried for everything. For Pansy and Harry and his father and even Ginny. For himself as well, though he didn't really know it.

And then the tears stopped, because they ran out and Draco did not think he had the energy to find more inside himself to cry. He was shaking though, and that took so much energy anyway, so he thought maybe it was alright.

He opened his eyes, feeling weak, drained, and tired, and looked at Harry, really seeing him for the first time since he'd come back. Not looking at him with horror or need, but just looking.

There was blood all over him, and Draco wondered how he could have forgotten.

"Harry?" he whispered, not sure he was ready to know if Harry was hurt or bleeding. He didn't have the strength for it.

"Yeah?" "There's blood all over you."

Shock ran through Harry and he jerked a little, and a pained sound at that movement made Draco wince. "Oh, Harry, what have you done?"

Harry smiled, a wane, fake, painful smile. "Nothing," he lied



Draco was suddenly furious at himself, for not even *seeing* the blood. He scrubbed at his own tears with his sleeve. "*Harry.*"

Still, he wasn't prepared when Harry whispered, "Charlie..."

Again, everything spun, and he was dizzy with the need to cry or scream or *something*. Instead, he hissed, "Oh *god*, Harry, don't tell me I set you free and you went to *him*. What did he *do* to you? I'll kill him, I'll fucking kill him."

Harry was crying and wincing and *hurt*. Draco panicked and Harry finally showed him where it hurt (the side, the one Draco had been leaning so heavily on just moments before).

Draco pushed up his shirt and the bruise there was new, and so, so dark. "What did Charlie do?" he whispered, because there was a strange look in Harry's eyes that he had not noticed before... shock or something like it.

"Tried to get me to say that loving you was a lie."

"I meant to cause the bruise, Harry."

"But I did. I did say it. I told him it was a lie. I told him I loved him. I told him...told him he could have me... that...that you raped...Tell me it was okay..."

But it wasn't, oh god, it wasn't, because had it been rape? *Draco was terrified that it could have been, because what if Harry hadn't wanted it? Had only let Draco do it because he felt...felt like he owed him something...*

Terrible, terrible rage made him tremble and want to scream.

He wanted to kill Harry. He wanted to rip him apart and scream and scream and scream because how dare Harry reduce what they had done together (or what Draco had done to *him*?) to *rape*? *Maybe it was rape, maybe it was, maybe Charlie was right. Thinking that Charlie could be right after everything that prick had done to Harry, Draco's Harry, made Draco want to rip something apart, if only Harry. Especially Harry.*

*How could Harry think that, say that? Believe that? Because sometimes when Draco was afraid that he was using Harry like the rest of the world had used him, he thought it, but he would never, never say it out loud.*

*It was a blur, those few seconds after Harry had said that, said he'd agreed with Charlie that it had been rape. Draco wanted to die or scream or fall and burn, burn, because everything was already burning (his skin, his heart, his eyes-- were those tears? Oh god he would not, could not, cry over this). Burn like molten heat or fire, consume like fire, consume himself and Harry and that would teach them all. Would teach Harry for saying that and Pansy for leaving him and the world for fucking him over like it had done.*

*Everything was a blur, a crazy, painful blur and he was shouting and Harry was crying and bleeding and nothing mattered, until finally...*

"The blood, it isn't mine."

*Everything stopped, for just a moment, and then, trembling, Draco whispered, "Whose is it?"*

*"It's Charlie's." Harry was crying then, and for a long moment, Draco wanted to walk away, to leave him, and to go somewhere dark and quiet and stay there forever where no one in the world could find him or hurt him or make him cry. Instead, he slid closer, whispered soothingly, tried to calm him, because it was Harry and he could not hate Harry for all the world. Harry fell against him and cried even harder and finally told Draco what had happened.*

*Charlie was dead and it had been Charlie, Charlie had said it was rape, had said it was all lies, had made Harry hurt, and had covered him in blood as if he had a right to cover Harry in anything and it wasn't true because Harry was Draco's.*

*And Harry was panicking and of course Draco understood why Harry had said that, had lied to Charlie, because Charlie had made him think he owed him...*

*"You don't owe the world a single fucking thing," he growled possessively, holding Harry against him.*

*"I don't?" Harry asked, curling up next to him.*

*"You don't."*

*"Not even you?"*

*Draco flinched. "This isn't like that, Harry."*

*"What's it like then?" Harry was falling asleep and Draco could not explain it now, because now was too broken and raw and Harry was too sleepy. So instead, he tucked him into bed and kissed his forehead and left.*

*He was still angry because Harry did not understand, still hurt because Pansy was gone, and still terrified because Harry had to be broken, and he spent the night in the library, frantically researching for any sort of plan that did not involve breaking Harry Potter.*

*Then, around dawn, when the sun was rising everywhere else except for in the dark caverns, he started practicing the Patronus Charm, though silver mist would do nothing against an army of Dementors...*

*\*\*\**

He had done it, though. Hermione's plan. Draco Malfoy had held a Muggle gun to his head, looked into Harry Potter's teary eyes, had told him that he was dying because Harry *loved* him, and then he had pulled the trigger.

Draco knew there was nothing in the world that would hurt Harry the way that would have. And so he did it. And then he had died... or had seemed to.

There had been a Confundus Charm in the coffee Granger had given Harry, to blur his mind just slightly to accept the illusion more easily. The gunshot, the blood, had all been a charm, cast by Granger at the appropriate moments. Draco's stillness, his coldness, had all been side-effects of more charms, illusions, that Granger had cast on him when Harry had been too busy begging him not to do it. And then Granger had given Harry the ring that was coated in his blood and Harry had been taken, broken and hysterical and so hurt, to the den of the Dementors.

The charms had taken hours to wear off, and Granger had waited by his side, though she had wanted to follow Harry to battle. It would not help him, however, so Draco had forced her to promise to wait for him. If Harry lost the battle, they would not be able to help him anyway. Whether this battle was won or lost rested solely on Harry's shoulders.

They had gone to him as soon as the charms had worn off and Draco had healed Hermione's cuts and bruises, had gotten there mere seconds before Harry had fallen.

The second when Harry's knees had crumbled and he had melted into the ground was forever engraved in Draco's mind, like a living painting on the backdrop of hundreds of Dementors turning into dust and ash but none of that mattered because Harry was falling and Draco was too far away to catch him before he hit the ground.

There were dirt and bruises and maybe blood on Harry's face by the time Draco got to him. It was hard to tell because of the shower of ashes that was falling, and the shadows, strange shadows, cast by the light that was so unreliable and about to flicker out and die and it couldn't because some irrational part of Draco's mind had fixed on the idea that if the light stopped flashing, Harry would die.

Which made no sense because Harry would not-- could not-- die.

But he was so still.

And Granger was shouting or maybe he was shouting, he couldn't tell, and then... and then Harry's eyes had opened and they had still been green which meant the world to Draco, suddenly. Because everything had to be alright if Harry's eyes were still green, despite the ash and dirt that had turned his body and his hair and his lips gray.

Draco lifted him, cradled him, and begged, pleaded. *I will not let you die.*

And Harry had looked at him with dark and empty eyes (*green eyes*) and then his lips had moved, though he didn't speak.

Kissing him was more instinct than anything, more out of frustration than desire (because Harry tasted like dirt and Dementor and that seemed, to Draco, to be a good way to describe the taste of terror, if terror should have a taste), but he had done it and Harry had *fought* him and then Harry had slipped away, fallen again, and... and something had broken. Though Draco would not know it until later.

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The next days were worse. The days in which there was no falling rain of ash and there was no physical terror, no reason to tremble and act on instinct without *thinking* because all there was time for, in those next days, was thought. So Draco thought and he worried and he fell apart. His mind (or his heart?), the very darkest part of it that he'd always thought was invincible and so strong and so...so *brave*, the part that no one had ever touched until Harry, started to crumble, bit by bit, until Draco couldn't tell where the darkness of madness and nightmare ended and the love for Harry began, because it had all become one and the same.

Harry was... Harry was broken. Draco stared at him through glass that seemed as fragile, soft, as a sheet of rain. He lay very still, on white, white sheets, in a white, white room, and nothing moved. Not Harry, not the glass, not the sheets, and certainly not Draco. He did not, could not, look away.

There was still blood on Harry's hands, on his face. His own blood. Or maybe that's the only way Draco could see him now. Draco wondered how he had made himself bleed. It had been a magical battle, and still, Harry had come out bloody. It made no sense, but then, nothing did.

Nothing made sense, and nothing moved. Nothing even breathed, not even Draco. Nothing would make the fragile chaos, fragile silence, shift or change or fade, because if it did, it could take Harry with it.

They still did not know if Harry was Harry any longer, or a shell that lived (hopefully) but did not feel, think, or move.

Harry could be dead and Draco did not know it, because the healers kept saying he was still breathing.

Draco wasn't (or at least, if he was, he couldn't tell), but Harry was, and therefore he was still alive. Maybe. Unless he was lost in the curse... kissed by the Dementors he had destroyed.

It made no *sense*.

"Malfoy."

He jumped and turned away from the glass. It was Granger, and she was holding a mug of coffee. Draco did not speak.

"Drink this," she said.

"Not thirsty," he said, throat raw, aching, with tears he would not cry. He stared at her blankly.

"Malfoy... don't do this."

"I have to," he said, because really, what else was there to do except watch and wait and... and beg. But no one was listening.

Panic threatened and he closed his eyes. Granger sighed and left again, to shout at healers, plead with Dumbledore, it didn't matter. Turning back towards the window that looked into Harry Potter's hospital room, Draco kept his eyes closed, and forced himself to breathe and recognize that he *was* breathing.

His eyes flew open a moment later, terrified that Harry would have faded away when he was not looking.

He hadn't, though, and Draco wondered desperately, guiltily, if it would have been better if Harry had.

He had not wanted to come to St. Mungo's, and only Harry's desperate need for medical attention could ever have brought him into the heart of Dumbledore's army, because if he did not stand at Harry's side as his guardian angel, who would? They'd cut up their hero into pieces and sell them off to the highest bidder for funds to rebuild the world that Draco and Pansy had shattered and that Harry had shattered to save.

He did not trust them, despite the fact that Granger had reassured him a thousand times that the war was all but forgotten and that he would not be punished for his part in it. The two sides, so intent on destroying each other mere months before, were working together now to rebuild the world.

Voldemort's whereabouts were unknown or perhaps kept secret. Draco didn't care.

All he cared about was that they did not take him from Harry's side.

He stared into the white room at Harry's bloody face (which wasn't really bloody at all, though Draco couldn't see through the blood in his memories and on his hands), and waited for Harry to breathe, so he could mimic it to reassure himself and Harry. *Come back to me because I'm still breathing, but only for you...*

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He slept, finally, against his will, because he could not remain awake for a second longer. Everything hurt and his mind was more exhausted, even, than his body. So he sat at Harry's side (they'd finally let him into the room rather than making him wait by the window and he was finally reassured that Harry wasn't bloody on the outside, just the inside) and rested his head on Harry's bed and slept, not touching him because he was afraid of breaking him.

He dreamed, little bits of conversation-- remembered and not fantasized-- whispering through his mind, of darker times, better times, when madness whispered in his mind but Harry whispered in his arms and that made the madness worth it.

*Granger spoke first, in the mixture of words in his dreams, and she said, "You underestimate him if you think he hasn't got any darkness in him," and then, to counter it, there was a memory of Harry Potter smiling at him and the smile was what Draco needed, in those caverns where there was no sun, because the smile was the colour of sunshine. "Give me something good," Draco had whispered when he'd seen that smile, because that smile was worth every bit of goodness Draco had ever possessed. And then the image of Harry smiling melted away and Harry was instead underneath him, eyes wide and frightened and yet... dark with something more and Draco was hissing "I do not want you," and Harry was replying, in a whisper, "You*

*don't have to." And Draco melted into him then though Harry would never know it, until later, much later. And then the images came faster now, words melting into images they did not match, and Draco was inside of Harry and Harry was crying out softly and someone whispered, "They never really saw you..." and then Harry was inside of Draco and no one had ever been inside Draco before because he had not let them, and someone-- it was Draco-- said wistfully, "Are you scared? Because this doesn't mean a thing if you're not scared."*

And Draco woke on those words and he was still at Harry's side and magic was still measuring Harry's breaths and Draco wasn't able to catch his.

"Don't do this," he whispered, but his voice was the only sound in the room. Well, Harry's breathing was there too, hushed and soft and forced, measured, counted by magic.

Draco stared at Harry's face, so pale, and the dark circles under his eyes, which were closed and had not opened since that moment when Harry had fallen. He let his eyes wander away, because he could not stand to look at that face without wanting to break or scream, and it was all so fucking quiet. There was an accusation in that silence, because if it was not for Draco, it would not exist. But it did. It did and Draco hated it, hated Harry for it, hated the Dementors and the world and anyone who ever thought that some things were worth risking everything for. But mostly, he just hated himself. It was not an angry sort of hatred, it was a deep, dark, loathsome, painful hatred that made him want to rip open his own skin as if spilling his blood, ending his own life, would give Harry back his.

It wouldn't, of course, and it was a ridiculous thought besides. Draco took a deep breath, his gaze slipping down to rest on Harry's hand, because it was so white and small. He touched it with his fingertips, vaguely surprised to find it warm, the skin soft. He could feel the bones and veins beneath the skin, and he bit his lip, almost unable to fathom the idea that this Harry lying here was as warm as the Harry who had spent so long lying with him had been. Because this Harry might never move again, might never see or speak again, might never wake, smile, laugh... might not even be alive, though magic kept his lungs working, his heart beating.

He carefully let his hand rest on top of Harry's, protectively. He could feel the scars there, faint and hardly noticeable, the words *I must not tell lies*, and he wondered how he had only come to notice them after Harry might never be able to explain who had scarred him that way. But there were other scars there too. Harry's hand was covered in scars, in marks that other people had given him.

After a few silent moments, he turned Harry's hand over, though he did not, could not, touch his palm.

There was a scar there too, a newer scar, and Draco did not understand it and was sure he wouldn't ever want to.

He glanced at Harry's vacant face, and back at the palm, destroyed by scar tissue. Taking a deep breath, Draco slowly stroked it, feeling the slight bumps that marked him.

"So many scars," he mumbled to himself. Harry Potter was scarred all over, inside and out.

He pulled his hand away and studied the mark there, cut raggedly into the flesh but still recognizable. It was the Malfoy Family Crest, backwards so that the dragon's flame flew left instead of right, the direction it flew in the crests and shields that decorated the manor Draco had grown up in, the direction it flew in the golden image of it that crowned his family ring.

The one Harry had still been clutching in his hand when Draco finally got to his side, after he had fallen. He'd been holding it tightly enough to cut, to scar. Draco could not imagine what would have convinced Harry that, in the end, Draco's ring was the one thing worth holding onto.

It was very, very quiet, a quiet meant to be shattered with screams, but Draco was screaming and had been since Harry had fallen. It was just that no one else could hear the ragged sounds because they were locked up deep inside with every bit of self-loathing and fear he refused to let anyone know he was feeling.

And still, Harry slept...

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Granger was not there. She was off explaining things to Dumbledore or coming up with announcements for the press or something that did not matter and never had. And the room was the same and Harry was the same except Draco wasn't looking and hadn't looked in days. He could not remember how long, but the thought of looking into Harry Potter's dead face, watching him waste away, trapped in fallout nightmares from the world he'd been forced to save, made him ill.

He had begun to measure his life by Harry's breaths, which were loud and rattling and, in Draco's mind, growing fainter. And days had passed, measured in false breaths inspired by magic and it was so bloody *infuriating* because Harry's breaths were not *enough*. He wanted his smiles and his voice and his touch and his laughter and *everything else* and it wasn't fair and--

Harry's breathing changed while Draco stared at the scars on his palm, and he tensed, because this was it, then. The magic was not enough and Harry was slipping away and this, this momentous event, the only change Harry had shown in all these days, meant he was dying and that meant Draco would have to *look--* to watch over him and beg forgiveness for not being able to protect him and because no one else cared enough even to *watch* and Draco would watch him die if only because he would finally have something of Harry's that no one else in the world ever had.

So Draco Malfoy looked up to watch Harry Potter die and instead, startled gray eyes met green and Harry was awake.

"Harry?" Draco croaked.

Harry was very still for a long moment and Draco struggled to realize what it was about this sudden wakefulness that disturbed him, and then Harry snatched his hand back and started to whimper, his face white with absolute, mortal terror.

Draco was stunned, both wanting to be elated that he had not died, and wanting to shake him for scaring him. There was some part of him that worried rather frantically that something was not right, because Harry's eyes were blank and dark and *odd* and he was so scared, so Draco did not move or breathe or speak while Harry fell apart in front of him.

*He hates me, he's afraid of me, he thinks I'm dead*, Draco thought in quick, panicky succession. And then, *he doesn't know who I am*.

The last was compounded when Harry hissed, "Get away from me," and Draco stumbled out of his chair and backed towards the door, wanting to do anything to make Harry stop being scared, even if it meant running from him and never coming back. *He doesn't know me*, the voice in Draco's mind screamed. He wanted to fall apart, to die, something.

Instead, he turned and fumbled with the doorknob.

"Draco," Harry moaned. Draco tensed and slowly turned back. "Please."

"What-- what is it?" Draco whispered, coming back, aching to touch him.

"Scared." He started to tremble, staring at shadows that Draco could not see. "Make them stop, make them *go away!*"

Growing more worried now, Draco glanced wildly around the room. "There's nothing here!" he cried. "Nothing. What... what do you want me to do?" He reached out and hesitantly touched Harry's arm and Harry reacted violently, his hand lashing out and cracking across Draco's cheek.

"Don't touch me," he snarled.

Draco stared in shock, not even feeling the pain or the tears or anything, and then Harry started screaming something about being afraid and shadows and he was scratching at his own skin and Draco didn't understand. He reacted instinctively, climbing onto the bed though he did not understand what was happening, and grabbing Harry's hands, smoothing them flat and then holding them tightly, wrapping his arms around Harry's shoulders and holding him.

"It's alright, it's alright," he chanted, while Harry writhed against him and growled. Finally he tensed and then collapsed against Draco's chest weakly, whimpering and clinging.

"What's happening?" Harry whispered, voice broken.

Draco did not know, so he merely stroked his hair and tried not to cry.

The door flew open and Granger was there, the nurses behind her, and Draco could only look helpless when she clapped her hand to her mouth and stared.

"He's awake," she breathed.

"He's... he's broken," Draco whimpered. Then he started to cry.

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Granger's arms were bony and skinny and Draco did not, would not, let her hold him, cling to him, or *touch* him. If she wanted to cry, she was welcome to it, but she would not ever cry on him.

Ronald Weasley came to St. Mungos when he heard (how he heard, Draco never knew, for the newspapers were only running in limited numbers and no one cared that Harry Potter, Hero, was still alive because so many were dead and what, really, did one boy matter?), and he rushed to Granger's side and tried to hold her, and that was when Draco jerked her into his arms and let her cling and cry and ruin his shirt, because better she cry on him than Ronald Weasley still exist. He should have died, should have disappeared, should not be allowed anywhere near Harry because Harry was broken and had gone mad and Weasley, where had Weasley been the whole time? Calling Harry a traitor, shouting at Harry, hating Harry, and now he'd come crawling back with his filthy Weasley blood-- and Weasley blood was worse than mixed blood, to Draco now, because at least Granger had been there.

Granger didn't care who held her, she was falling apart-- Draco decided grudgingly that maybe she had a right to, after everything she'd-- they'd-- done-- and Weasley's eyes were shuttered and dark, his face pale.

"What are you doing here, Malfoy?" he spat. "Shouldn't you be dying in a cell in Azkaban?"

Draco looked at him coolly and then looked away. He did not lower himself to reply.

If Weasley stuck around, Draco was not aware of it. He was curled up on an armchair with Granger beside him, and she sobbed for hours and hours, and Weasley did not matter and never had and if he'd fallen over and died right then, Draco would not have cared.

He was so angry. They had not let him in to see Harry in hours, trying to find out what was wrong and how to fix it.

Draco knew what was wrong. He'd broken Harry. Granger had decided the only way to make Harry hate enough, hurt enough, to cast the Dark Patronus was if Draco betrayed him. Broke his heart. Died and blamed him. And Draco had and now Harry would never come back and Pansy had told him some things were worth risking everything for and Draco had risked everything for the world and he'd lost and he wasn't strong enough but he certainly wasn't crying anymore. That had been a moment of weakness that was gone and his eyes were dry, so dry that they burned and Granger was crying and somewhere, Harry was broken,

and Draco was broken because if anyone thought... if anyone thought that Draco would be whole after he'd broken Harry's heart, they were mad. Absolutely fucking mad.

Hours passed in which the healers tried to calm Harry, or to sedate him, or to convince him that there were not monsters and demons in the shadows waiting to destroy him.

Finally, they gave up.

As with anything related to the new Unforgivable, it was difficult to define what was happening to Harry, though the healers certainly tried. Some merely thought he'd lost his mind, while others decided that it was a magical side effect of so much of the curse being filtered through him. The fallout effect was blamed, as the negative magic had to go *somewhere*. It had gone into him and had stayed there, plunging Harry into a permanent state of semi-awareness, mixed with nightmares.

The entire world's curse had hit him and broken him.

The World was too busy burying its dead and cleaning up the chaos and the aftermath to really notice the destroyed shell that was left of Harry, who had saved them, and Draco found it rather morbidly amusing. He'd always thought that there would be confetti and balloons and candy floss and carnivals after Harry Potter saved the world.

Instead, there was only mourning and a gradual clearing of the skies.

Harry did not change. There were times when he recognized Draco, though distantly, as one would recognize safety and shelter yet not have a name to put to it. Those were the times when Harry would whisper his name pleadingly, yearning for Draco to save him from nightmares that Draco could not see. Draco's touch did not soothe Harry the way Harry's had soothed him, and more often than not, Harry would react to it violently. In his new state, Harry needed to touch but could not stand to be touched.

Draco, though, needed to touch him, because Harry was still Harry even if at times he was all animalistic and terrified and strange.

He took Harry home (his new home, a white, clean, pristine, untouched townhouse in London that was very, very white) and Harry slept in Draco's room, though sometimes he'd get angry and attack Draco and Draco would have to close and lock the door and sleep on the couch (though he rarely slept those nights).

Weeks passed and Harry did not get any better. He was seeing a reality that Draco was only sometimes a part of, and even then only able to offer the barest sort of shelter.

The world healed, the dead were buried, the skies lost the gray haze that had been more an effect of terror than the weather, and the sun shone again. Those who had survived had buried their ghosts, their nightmares, their dead, had mourned and cried, but had moved on, because if anything serves to inspire one to get over a loss of a loved one, it is the secret guilty feeling of relief. Muggles and Wizards alike, those who were still alive and whole of mind enough to have any thoughts at all, thanked God and Merlin for taking somebody, anybody, other than themselves.

Children forgot all about the curse in a matter of days, flying kites and giggling in the streets, and less of them had been lost than anyone, because a child's mind is the most resilient.

The adults were still shocked, walking around with shadowed eyes, as they struggled to get things back in order again, restore order again, ignore that order had ever been lost.

And in Draco's townhouse, Harry Potter screamed and scratched wildly in a mad attempt to get out of his own skin, out of his own head, and people were too busy watching the kites and the skies to hear. Except, of course, for Draco.



He'd never particularly cared for kites and skies, and now had even less patience. If Draco had been lost before Harry, he was destroyed without him. It made the pain all the more sharp that Harry was still there, in some ways, but not in anyway that mattered.

Days slipped by unnoticed, and Draco cared for Harry, fed Harry, held him when Harry let him, and gradually, Draco began to fade away. The world moved on and Draco couldn't and the only thing that broke the cycle was when Granger came to visit.

Each time she did, she brought with her news of the outside world, the rebuilding of the ministry, the peace between Voldemort's followers and Dumbledore's, the Muggles recuperating from the devastating epidemic. Draco did not care, but a part of him was desperately glad for her company, because it was so unnerving, looking into Harry's tortured eyes.

Sometimes, when Draco looked into Harry's green eyes, though, they looked almost as they used to. Darker and wider, but still *Harry* in an indefinable way. And sometimes Draco lost himself inside of them, a little more, and by the time the end came, Draco felt as if he'd lost all of himself in haunted green eyes.

It happened as Harry leaned against him, calm and soothed and sleepy, nightmares distant memories as he drifted off to sleep. Draco was holding him, smoothing his hair, grateful for these moments when Harry was not fighting him. He was exhausted but would not sleep when Harry slept, because someone had to watch over Harry, and there was only Draco...

Except that Harry did not fall asleep this time. He shifted away from Draco's chest and looked up at him with wide, dark, thoughtful eyes and there were no reflections of dragons there, for *once* Draco could see his own reflection and he lost the last bit of himself then, and could not help himself for all the world. He let out the last bit of his soul with a soft breath and leaned down and kissed him.

It was sweet and light and so fragile that his breath caught and he nearly died right then from needing this, needing *Harry*, and Harry, for half a second (a half second that would last forever in Draco's mind), kissed him back.

The other half of that second was all the warning Draco got, as Harry tensed and then, in the next second, tore away with a growl, one hand coming up fast, instinctively, and cracking across Draco's face, dragging Harry's nails and leaving four red gashes that, as Draco stared at him, stunned, started gently to bleed.

Harry's eyes narrowed on the blood and he looked lost and confused and he flinched away and started to cry.

"Hush now," Draco said in a shaking voice. "It's alright... Oh merlin, I'm sorry..."

It took awhile to calm him again, and Draco finally did, closing his eyes tightly and ignoring his stinging face, as Harry fell asleep. Once he was sure Harry would not wake for at least a short while, Draco slipped off the bed and went into the bathroom.

He stared into the mirror for a long time, at his shaggy, messy hair that had not been combed in days, at his wide and teary gray eyes, and at the bloody scratches on his cheek. Then, before he could think or calm himself, he angrily lashed out at the mirror, slamming his open palm against it. His own reflection shattered before his eyes, and his hand started to bleed.

He did not know how much longer he could do this. It was his secret, that he was faltering, that he, after all Harry had done for him, did not have the strength to care for Harry now. But he would. Until he faded away and died, he would be beside Harry, would care for him, because no one else would.

There was a knock on the door and he tensed, eyes flying to the mirror that had repaired itself. He hurriedly washed the blood off his face and wrapped his hand in a face cloth before going to the door. It was Granger.

Her hair was pulled back and her face was clean and seemed brighter, somehow, than anything Draco had seen lately, other than the sun. It infuriated him to know that Granger was healing, glowing, while he and Harry faded.

"Draco," she said sweetly. "How are you? How is he? Has there been any change?"

She was not a bad sort, really. She cared, but there was nothing she could do and she knew it. Draco knew it too, only he would not accept it. He wondered if that made him the brave one, or her.

"No change," he said curtly. It had become harder and harder to keep up his mask of abrasive dismissal.

She had already walked past, as if she'd expected that. "I brought you some groceries," she said, pulling out the food she'd carried in. She had a habit of bringing by leftovers she'd made and sometimes purchasing groceries, and never seemed to notice that Draco did not eat it. There was no time to eat, Harry needed him.

Putting the food away in the cupboards, she kept up her usual chatter that Draco was too exhausted to pay attention to. He sat at the kitchen table and stared at the veins in the wood and when she was done, she sat beside him with a cool cloth, still babbling. She pressed the cloth to his cheek without commenting, and then unwrapped his torn up hand and healed it.

Then, finally, when he was cleaned up and still tracing veins in the wood with his eyes, she said very gently, "Draco, there's nothing more to be done for him."

Draco looked at her sharply. "There's plenty to be done!"

"Like what?" she asked patiently.

"Like holding him when he's scared and making sure he doesn't do anything stupid and he doesn't hurt himself."

"Draco. Harry's.... gone." She said it very, very gently, with tears in her eyes, and Draco knew it was not easy for her. "There is nothing more for you to do for him except move on. Harry... Harry wouldn't want..." she was going to cry and Draco looked away coldly. Finally, after she'd regained control of herself, she said, "There are others who could do for him what you do."

Draco's eyes darkened dramatically. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that his place isn't here, Draco. I'm trying to care for you like Pansy said I had to, and like Harry would have wanted. *He is not going to get better.* His mind is... it shattered... from the fallout. You know as well as I do, you were *there*. He... he needs more than this. He needs help from people who know... know what they're doing. He needs to go to St. Mungo's, Draco. They can help him."

"You said there is nothing to be done," Draco snarled.

Her eyes were brimming with tears again. "Do you think I wanted this for him?"

"Some people sacrifice everything..."

"But I did not want this! I wanted the curse to end and that was the only way but I never ever wanted this! He was my best friend long before he was anything to you, Draco Malfoy! You think this is *courage*? Holding onto him this way?"

"And locking him away, that would be courage?" he growled. "Is that what happens when you're done with heroes, when they've nothing more for you to steal? You lock them away so you can move on? If that's all

he is to you, then you don't deserve the world he saved for you! So fuck off, and don't fucking *try* to take him from me."

Granger was crying, sobbing raggedly, and she tried one last time. "Please..."

Draco sneered at her in complete disgust and left the room, going out onto the balcony. He knew she'd go into Harry's room to see him, to stroke his pale face and talk to him like he could hear, and knew that she would cry over him, she always did, and even now, he would not deny her that.

He stared blankly at the sky as the sun set and the stars came out and he sat on the balcony, lost in thought. Dark musings about the nature of heroes and the world and madness, as somewhere, he could hear someone playing a radio, and somewhere else, smell a barbecue. He wondered how long it had been since the curse ended, because it almost seemed like it had never happened at all.

Granger left, and still, Draco sat there, as the night slipped away.

She was probably somewhere with Weasley, planning to take Harry from him, and the Wizarding World had forgotten the nightmares that even now plagued Harry Potter. People smiled and laughed and the dead would turn to ash and the darkness would be forgotten because the light was shining now, so bright. Draco sat on the balcony and watched all of this and realized that the only spots of darkness left in the world, the only lingering and very faint regrets that would exist after the dead were ashes and dust, were Harry Potter, and himself, who still lived and breathed the decay and ash and dirt and terror. Which was when Draco realized the way all of this had to end.

The world was not made for darkness anymore, all shadows had to pass, and now the rising sun was just waiting for he and Harry to fade.

Maybe it was a last lingering hint of his own madness, maybe it was a new madness born of watching Harry Potter suffer the terrors of everyone else in the world, and maybe it was the same inner voice that had told Pansy that Harry and Draco were of the same soul. Whatever it was, watching the sun rise and the skies clear and the world move on, Draco knew it had left them behind, and they were the only ones clinging to it, to the darkness. Maybe there was something better waiting, somewhere light where they could forget the ashes that turned their skin gray and black. Maybe there was something else waiting.

He could not let Harry suffer anymore.

The flat was very quiet when he went back in, and Draco felt almost like he'd faded away already, like a ghost. He did not touch anything as he went back into the bedroom and to watch Harry sleep.

He watched him till nearly dawn, and gently shifted him, until Harry was on his back. Harry murmured in his sleep but did not wake, and Draco stretched his wrists above his head and bound them there. He was not shaking, though he was pale and filled with a grim sense of purpose. He was not afraid, and only distantly wondering if perhaps he should be.

Harry woke soon after, and he did not enjoy waking up to be bound this way. He shrieked and writhed against the bonds and Draco stood by the bed and watched, shaking a little now. He cast all sorts of protective charms around himself and then, he freed one of Harry's hands, pressed Harry's wand into it, and stood there and waited.

Then, when Harry's struggles had ended because he was exhausted, he channeled his rage at Draco, like Draco had known he would. He waited as Harry's hexes and curses bounced around like child's playthings, and then, when Harry had gotten so furious that he was pale and shaky and his eyes nearly black with rage, Draco stepped back, shaking more than ever.

"Harry?" he whimpered, because he was suddenly afraid. "I'm not sure--"

It was too late to be sure, however, because Harry's body arched off the bed with the force of his fury, and it was channeled into hate, directed at Draco. The Dark Patronus Harry had summoned, the same basilisk as before, coiled on the bed, raised itself up with a hiss, and then attacked. Its fangs ripped through Draco's protections, as he'd know then would, and sunk into his chest. Draco felt as if the basilisk truly still had the power to petrify with one glance, as he stiffened and seemed to turn to stone. It didn't, however, as it was only the shadow of a true basilisk. It didn't matter.

His head tilted back and he screamed with the agony of that, and then the world dropped away...

Draco's body, limp and pale, fell bonelessly onto the bed, lying across Harry's lap, as Harry, too, lost consciousness, the last spell having drained him. The spell that bound him dissolved, and Harry fell over, landing on Draco, and their breath, shallow and echoing, mingled in the sudden stillness.

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Harry's nightmares encompassed the whole world, and Draco was plunged into them, the same way Harry had been thrown into his, all those days before. He fell, forever, and landed on the bed in his bedroom, but Harry was not there.

The room was darker than it was in Draco's reality, and there were shadows and whispers everywhere. Draco swallowed hard at the realization that his clean and safe flat had been this to Harry, and he nearly lost his nerve, because there was something breathing heavily under the bed, and something watching from the closet, he could see something moving there, and outside the window, he could distantly see dragons, circling in burning skies...

Draco took a few careful breaths and sat up, wondering why Harry was not here, if this was Harry's world. He was alone-- but not quite alone.

The Dark Patronus, the basilisk that Draco had taught Harry to make which had destroyed him, was slithering out from under the bed. Draco watched, horrified (it was much easier to feel fear, here. Fear seemed more natural than breathing).

As it reached the door, which seemed to shimmer and shrink unnaturally, the creature raised up and looked back at him, flicking out a forked tongue, and waiting.

Following an instinct he could not explain, Draco got up to follow the basilisk, though his heart and his mind shrieked that it was madness. Draco did not care. That creature was the darkest part of Harry and this was the darkest part of Harry's mind, and that mattered some how.

The basilisk led the way out of the flat, and outside, the world bore no resemblance to London that he had known. It was an impressionistic painting of every nightmare that had held the world in its grasp, and Draco flinched back, repulsed. There were images of mutations, terrors, monsters, darkness, and other things he could not define, that made no sense, that had come straight from the minds of the people Harry had lost his mind to save. It was a morbid, twisted carnivalesque atmosphere and it made him long to turn around and run.

There was a trail, however, that led through the madness, a glittering trail like shattered glass that had fallen in a path that twisted away into the darkness and terror. The glass seemed to effortlessly catch the hints of sunlight that barely made it through the thick clouds above, and they shimmered. Without a hesitation, the basilisk followed the twisting path of broken glass, and Draco, after a pause, stepped onto the ashy road and followed it as well.

He glanced down as he walked, and he could see in the glass reflections of the bright parts of Harry's mind. Bright memories, bright thoughts, bright smiles, everything that had shattered when the curse had slammed through him. His stomach tightened reflexively and he thought he was going to be sick. Nothing had ever prepared him for making his way through the shattered remains of Harry Potter's mind.

Still, he walked, and around him, everything shifted and shimmered with dreamlike inconsistency.

The basilisk led him on, towards the dragons, and Draco followed, losing hope and dying a little more with every step. What if there was no Harry left to find?

There was, though, and Draco did not have to walk long to find him. He stood under the dragons, in the rocky crater which had housed the hundreds of Dementors, where Harry's mind had shattered. He had never left.

The basilisk slithered towards him and coiled about Harry's feet, watching Draco pleasantly.

The dragons circled in the burning sky, and Harry stood and looked very small beneath them. His head was tilted back to a painful degree, and his eyes very dark and wide. Every now and again, a dragon would swoop lower, and Harry would flinch and cry. Though there was still ash from the Dementors who had died all those weeks before, Harry's robes were clean and very, very black.

Draco approached cautiously, because this was hell and he was not sure that Harry would recognize him. Harry did not acknowledge his presence.

"Harry?" Draco called softly. His eyes were burning with tears and the sky was on fire, reflecting with the dragons in Harry's eyes. "Harry."

It did not matter, then, that hell was all around, that Draco's shoes still had broken pieces of Harry clinging to them, that the ashes from the entire world burning up coated his face and hands. He reached out and touched Harry with dirty, stained fingers that left a tiny smudge on Harry's cheek, and Harry's breathing shifted a little. Draco could have died right then, because it was a sign that he was really there, that Harry was aware of him on some level, and it was more than he'd come to hope since falling into this nightmare land.

And then, before he could die right then from the purest form of relief, Draco wanted more.

"Harry," he said again.

Harry stood still, transfixed by the dragons, a sort of terrified enchantment that Draco's voice alone could not break.

Draco looked up at the writhing mess of dragons and felt hopeless once more.

A dragon blew fire and Harry hiccupped in fear.

It would not do to have Harry afraid, even now, when Draco was here in hell with him. So he stepped forward, carefully, into the coils of the giant serpent, and touched Harry's pale cheek with his ash stained hand. "Harry," he called gently.

Harry still did not look.

Draco did not mind so terribly. He was touching Harry and who cared if the world fell apart, if the world burned, if there was a basilisk coiled about his feet. He leaned forward and brushed his lips against Harry's other cheek, and then his jaw, and finally his lips, kissing him very, very gently, and this time, Harry did not pull away. He turned into the kiss and returned it, a soft and confused sound coming from his throat, that Draco shivered at.

He pulled away and looked hopefully at Harry, because if this was a fairytale, Harry would wake up now, Harry would be his again.

Harry merely stared blankly at him and then looked back at the dragons above.

Draco smiled gently and smoothed his hair back, studied his face, his green eyes wide with awe, and something inside him *broke* in the most delicious way he could imagine, because *this* was love. This was love without caring that hell was closing in on all sides, that serpents and shattered glass had led the way, that the world was on fire. This was not love because of a curse, because of forced circumstances, because of fate. This was love because Draco could stop breathing now, and it would still be the most complete he'd ever felt, because it was Harry and it had always been Harry and Harry was not looking, was not aware of him on any level that showed, but he was aware of him on other levels, hidden levels, and maybe he always had been, and it *hadn't* been rape before, with Harry, or with Draco's heart, and it hadn't been forced, it had been inevitable. Whether it started as hate or *disguised* itself as hate in the beginning, whether Harry could not stand to feel anything other than terror now, hate and terror and panic and fear were, to Draco, love.

Which meant all the darkness inside of him, the place where his Dark Patronus came from, the parts of himself that had never before been anything but shadowed, those parts were suddenly parts that Harry, he knew, loved. Because love to them was everything. Not just the broken glass parts that were so fragile that they shattered first without leaving enough to inspire a Light Patronus...

Hate was love and so was fear and Draco had always know that little boys like him weren't made of snakes or snails or puppy dog tails, they were made of hate and fear and suddenly that was alright because that hate and that fear had led him to *love* and it did not make sense but nothing in hell made sense and all he knew was that he loved *Harry*, in hell or beyond.

And the dragons could not have him.

It was simple, much simpler than it should have been. He dropped his hand from Harry's cheek and to his wand instead, whispering the spell and the Light Patronus flooded through him and if the dark one felt like shadow, this one felt like ice cream and the lightest feathers, and it whispered through him and silver lights burst from his finger tips. They swirled madly and took the form of a griffin, with huge wings, that lifted effortlessly off the ground and blasted through the dragons, and they fell apart with shrieks and screams and bits of fire that rained all around. The griffin returned to earth then and the basilisk attacked it, silver mixing with the deepest black, and it did not matter, they could not destroy each other, they were a part of each other, opposite ends of each other, and they knew it.

The world stopped burning, and the darkness faded away. There were still shattered pieces of Harry all around, and the basilisk and griffin gradually crumbled to dust. A soft breeze whispered through the dust and ash and then there was nothing. The world was not gray any longer, but where hell had stood mere moments before, now was a wild and vibrant heaven.

It was suddenly very, very quiet, and Harry lowered his head, looking confused. He stared at Draco for a long, endless moment, and then his eyes cleared, the darkness and shadows and reflections of dragons fading away, until they were the same bright green that Draco had lost himself in that very first day in the robe shop. "Draco?" he breathed, voice cracking as fear gave way to a fragile sort of hope.

"Hello, Harry," Draco said, so gently. "I've come to take you home."

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Somewhere Else, in Draco's white, white flat, Harry and Draco lay tangled together, and slowly, in another endless moment, their last breaths whispered from their lips and mingled and were gone.

*We carried the weight  
and died for the cause  
is misery made beautiful  
right before our eyes?  
will mercy be revealed  
or blind us where we stand?  
will we burn in heaven  
like we do down here?*

~The End~

**Author notes:** The lyrics at the beginning of this chapter are from the song "Hallelujah", which I listened to as sung by Rufus Wainwright when I wrote it, but has been done by a million different artists before him. The lyrics at the end come from the song "Witness" by Sarah McLachlan.

Thank you for reading this story, feedback is much appreciated. Dedicated in its entirety to Umbralin, for the fantastic and fast betaing jobs, Aarynn and Tracy, for being part of the reason why I did not lose my mind before I finished it, primroseburrows for her thoughtful and inspiring comments, and Ani and Caroline for hours of listening to me whine about it. Also to all the reviewers (especially those who said nice things-- hehe, kidding), and Lady Morsmordre for getting me into slash in the first place (I know, I'm rambling, but this is going to be my last one, so...) and being patient enough to beta me when no one else would. Oh, dear, I'm getting nostalgic, so I'd best stop.

I'm sorry to anyone who doesn't like the ending, I hadn't planned to end this one this way, I swear, but then I realized it couldn't end any other way. I shall understand if you hate me for it, though.

Thank you for reading.