

## In Pieces

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# **In Pieces**

by [Tonks914](#)

## Summary

During seventh year, Albus and Scorpius struggle to navigate the many changes that accompany the start of adulthood.

## Notes

Hello again! Welcome back for Part Two of The Potter Kids Find Love. If you're just joining us, you don't have to read Part One to enjoy this piece.

# Chapter 1

As Albus stepped through the barrier and onto Platform 9 3/4 he was hit with the usual sounds and sights that accompany Kings Cross station on September first. The roll of broken trolley carts, hooting of uneasy owls, and whispered goodbyes of nervous children all enveloped in the billowing steam from the massive engine. There was something more meaningful about today though as today was Albus's last first day at Hogwarts.

The realization of just how profound the day was had him searching frantically for a familiar tuft of white hair amongst the crowd.

"Merlin, you're pathetic." Lily cackled as she wheeled her trolley beside him.

Albus shot her a glare as he flashed two fingers in her direction, smiling when he saw her face fall in annoyance.

"Dad! Albus is making vulgar hand gestures at me!" She whined in her best little sister voice as she smiled at her brother.

"Uh huh, and I'm sure the sight of it robbed you of your innocence." Harry deadpanned. Albus met his eyes and smiled, he was sure that he had been about to be scolded and wanted to make his appreciation clear.

"And don't tease your brother about Scorpius. They've never been apart this long, of course he's anxious to see him again." His mom added, attempting to be helpful but from the way Lily fell into giggles, it was clear that her statement had the opposite effect.

Lily smirked at her brother. "Do you know what codependency means?"

Albus was just about to lay into his sister when two, warm hands snaked from around the back of his head, landing firmly on top of his eyes. He instinctively held his breath with excitement. There was only one person who would initiate this kind of contact with him and it had been three long months since he'd been in the same country with him, let alone close enough to touch.

"Guess who!" His favorite voice said and Albus immediately whipped around and threw his arms around his best mate. Scorpius stumbled backwards, laughing but somehow managed to wrap his arms around Albus with the same ferocity. "You're no fun! You were supposed to guess."

"Oh, bugger off! I've missed you too much to waste time with guessing games." Albus said into his shoulder.

Scorpius tightened his grip slightly. "Me too. No more separate, long holidays."

"I one hundred percent agree with that sentiment." A voice interrupted. Albus broke the embrace to see Scorpius's father, Draco Malfoy joining the group, wearing a warm smile. "It

wasn't the same without our yearly wizard's chess tournament. Scorpius just isn't competitive enough for me."

Albus smiled at him and reached out to shake his hand. "It's good to see you, Draco."

"You too, Albus." Draco said as he accepted his outstretched hand and clapped him once hard on the back.

"A wizard's chess tournament?" Harry asked, raising his eyebrows. "I taught Albus everything he knows so if he's good competition for you then maybe we should have a go?"

Ginny rolled her eyes next to her husband. "Here we go."

"Oooh, this sounds like the perfect opportunity to make some money. I'm taking bets!" Lily announced, wringing her hands excitedly.

Albus glanced over, meeting Scorpius's eyes and smirked. "I've got 4 galleons on Draco." He shouted.

Harry's mouth dropped open as he shot Albus an incredulous look. "You would bet against your own flesh and blood?"

"Don't think of it as betting against you, Dad. Think of it as betting to win." Albus said with a cheeky grin.

Draco immediately let out a belly laugh. "This one..." He shouted, motioning to Albus. "This one is Slytherin through and through."

Albus beamed at him gratefully. He loved the way that Draco spoke of their common house. Although his own family had stressed that they never cared which house he belongs to, he always felt that they loved him in spite of his house, not because of it. Draco, on the other hand, made him feel like he should be proud of his Slytherin traits and it was because of this, that having Draco in his life made Albus feel just a little bit more comfortable in his own skin.

"Uh huh." Harry said impassively. "Well that settles it. You'll have to come around during the break so I can restore my son's faith in me and lose him some money in the process." His dad gave him a smug smile which Albus met with an eye roll.

"Christmas!" Draco interrupted without acknowledging Harry's challenge. "I almost forgot, Scorpius was wondering if Albus could stay with us on Christmas Eve? That way they could be together on Christmas morning?"

Albus instinctively looked at his friend who was standing to his right. Scorpius was wearing a sweet, shy smile and instantly pinked and looked at his feet when he met his eyes. There was a warm, tightening sensation in Albus's chest at the sight of him and he couldn't help but smile; he had missed that smile so much. He started to lift his hand, intending to pull Scorpius into another hug, but remembering Lily's teasing, stopped short and let his hand fall back to his side. He turned back to the parents who were still discussing Christmas plans.

"...because James will be with Bria until ten so we won't be opening gifts until then anyway." His mother said, reasoning out the offer. "So, as long as Albus wants to..."

"I do!" Albus interrupted a little too loudly.

"Ugh! Lily sighed dramatically. "That's so unfair. Why do I have to suffer and wait too? "

Ginny rolled her eyes at her daughter. "Please. You act like you are EVER awake before ten! Dial back the dramatics, Lils."

Lily was huffing something under her breath when the train let out a whistle, alerting them that it was almost time to depart. Everyone began saying their final goodbyes but when it became apparent that his mother was becoming overly emotional, Albus grabbed Scorpius's wrist and turned towards the train.

"I'll write." He shouted over his shoulder as they broke into a run, Scorpius scolding him all the way about his inability to humour his mother.

It took several minutes of searching but they eventually came to an empty compartment and made their way inside. After situating their bags in the above head shelving and situating themselves cross legged on the train seat, Albus sat surveying his friend and smirked when the two made eye contact.

Scorpius easily returned the smile and Albus again felt that tug in his chest and twitch in his arms to reach out and touch him. He silently chastised himself, three months away from his only friend and he had turned into a needy, first year girl.

"So..." Scorpius said, reaching into his cloak and brandishing two pepper imps. "sweets?" He asked with a smile, tossing one to his friend.

Albus caught it easily and laughed. "I'm told they help you make friends." He said as he opened the packaging and took a bite. Suddenly the nostalgia of eating sweets, with his best mate, on the Hogwarts Express descended upon him and he felt an emptiness in his chest, as if he was mourning something that wasn't even gone yet.

Scorpius must have felt it too because his face took on a pensive quality. "Seventh year." He said shaking his head as if he couldn't believe it.

"Yeah, this is it, mate." The two friends locked eyes for a moment and something unfamiliar passed between them. "You seem different." Albus blurted out unexpectedly.

"What? No, no I don't. It's just me. Still me in all my Scorpius glory. Well not glory, per se, more mediocrity. Or perhaps not mediocrity because I'm slightly above average intelligence and slightly below average in social interactions." Scorpius said suddenly uneasy.

Albus furrowed his brow and shook his head. "Scorpius, relax. I didn't say it was a bad thing! You just seem less fidgety or something, like France did you some good." Immediately Scorpius flushed and started playing with the hem of his shirt, Albus chuckled. "Well, maybe not less fidgety, just more mature."

Scorpius nodded but stayed silent. Albus couldn't help but feel like he had something more on his mind and was about to broach the subject with him when Scorpius stood suddenly. "Presents! And pictures. Pictures and presents." He said, reaching into the front of his luggage and returning to the train seat with a black photo album and a small box wrapped in plain brown paper. "Which first?" He asked, extending the photo album and then the box in a repeated rhythm.

"Pictures." Albus said, impressed with his own restraint as he grabbed the photo album from Scorpius's right hand. He laid the book across his lap and opened it as Scorpius slid next to him.

When he looked down, Draco and Scorpius stood waving at him from a very Parisian looking street.

"That's where we stayed." Scorpius pointed to the stone front building on the corner. "And this," he said as he leaned across Albus and turned the page. "This is the family we stayed with. Monsieur and Madam Durand and their son, Luca."

"Luca the prat?" Albus asked, chuckling lightly. Scorpius had attempted to be diplomatic about their host's annoying son at first, but as the summer wore on, he became more and more frank about his dislike for the teenager.

Scorpius nodded and shot him a look as if to convey, 'you have no idea,' before turning the page. "Oh! The Eiffel tower! It really is just as magical as they say." He said, motioning to the next photograph. Albus was only vaguely aware that there was a giant tower in the picture as his sole attention had fallen to the unknown, light-haired boy with his arm around Scorpius.

"Who's that?" Albus asked, pointing to the boy in question.

"Oh, that's Julien, the neighbour's son? I mentioned him in my letters." Scorpius said as he turned the page again.

Albus remembered Scorpius briefly mentioning that the neighbour's son had taken him sightseeing, but he wasn't aware that the excursion had lasted more than one day. If the pictures were any indication, the two had spent the entire summer together. Albus ignored the heaviness in his chest and feigned interest in the rest of the photo album until Scorpius closed the book and tossed the neatly wrapped gift to him.

Happy for the distraction, Albus surveyed the package trying to predict the contents when Scorpius lost his patience. "Just open it, already!" He yelled with a smile.

Albus smirked at him as he slowly and carefully removed the paper. Scorpius rolled his eyes and began drumming his fingers on the train seat, impatiently. After succeeding with his attempt at annoyance, Albus increased his pace and ripped the rest of the paper off, throwing the lid onto the seat next to him.

Inside were two, delicious looking eclairs and a smaller box that sat unwrapped. "I suppose I'm supposed to share these with you?" He asked, indicating the pastries.

"Only if you would like to be a good friend. If you would rather continue your reign as a selfish wanker then by all means, eat them both." Scorpius laughed as Albus pushed him hard in the shoulder.

Albus lifted the smaller box from the package and set the eclairs in between them, motioning for Scorpius to take one. "My reign has ended." He announced dramatically.

Scorpius only laughed and then pointed to the box in Albus's hands. "That will need a bit of explanation."

Albus smiled and popped the lid off, lifting the silver chain from the paper, ignoring how his heart raced at the realization that he was gifted jewelry from his best mate. He set the box down so that he could catch the stone in his hands, bringing it close to his face for inspection. The stone that dangled from the end was light green with flecks of emerald, brown, and forest green throughout.

"Fuchsite." Scorpius offered. "I went to a magic shop in Paris. A muggle magic shop - just for laughs, really. It is quite remarkable how many factual associations the muggles were able to stumble upon, like the healing properties of amber, for example. I guess there was much more incorrect information, though."

"Scorpius." Albus interrupted.

"Right. Right, sorry. So I saw this and it immediately reminded me of you. The stone is the perfect mix of Slytherin green and your eye colour." Scorpius didn't notice Albus's cheeks pinking at his words and he continued. "So then I read the description and it said that the stone was to help the wearer gain insight into their purpose in life. Perfect for you!"

"Because my life has no purpose, motivation, or direction." Albus deadpanned.

"Because you are struggling to choose which life path to go down." Scorpius corrected, slightly annoyed. "I'm sorry if it's stupid." He added self-consciously. "You don't have to wear it."

Albus felt immediately guilty for his bad joke. "No, I actually...I really love it." He said genuinely and placed the necklace around his neck. "Thank you."

They smiled warmly at each other when the compartment door flew open and in walked Rose Granger Weasley.

"About time to get those robes on gentlemen." She announced with her usual tone of pretentiousness.

Albus looked at Scorpius and rolled his eyes. "Good to see you're not letting your Head Girl status inflate your ego." He said sarcastically. "And don't you have anything better to do than bother seventh years about putting on their robes?"

Rose narrowed her eyes at him. Although their relationship had improved over the years, they never quite moved passed the near constant annoyance they felt for each other. "Actually,"

she said smugly, "the list of duties for Head Girl includes making sure two, specific seventh years make it off the train, at the correct location, in their robes, and on time."

"You're talking rubbish." Albus exclaimed indignantly but by the way Scorpius sunk into the seat, it was clear that he believed her instantly.

Rose laughed. "You're right, of course. After jumping off of the train year four and then falling asleep and failing to leave the train year six, everyone perfectly trusts you to make it to your destination on your own." She spat at him.

Albus's eyes flashed dangerously. Last year had been quite embarrassing and he'd been attempting to block the memory from his mind. Since Bria was missing the sorting ceremony for St. Mungo's orientation, Scorpius and Albus were in a compartment alone, much like today. After eating their weight in sweets the two had fallen asleep and were unceremoniously awoken by a furious trolley witch. As anyone could imagine, with their experience, their greeting to her was less 'warm hello' and more 'scream at the top of your lungs until the woman has no choice but to hit you with stupify and levitate you up to the castle.'

Albus shuddered at the memory and was about to bring up an equally embarrassing memory from Rose's past when Scorpius cut in to avoid a fight. "Thanks, Rose. We'll manage this year."

She nodded to him and then noticing the empty wrapping, asked, "Oh, what did you get?"

Albus shifted uncomfortably in his seat. He would have told her to quit being nosey and bugger off, but he didn't want to give Scorpius any further reason to think that he didn't like the gift. "Um, eclairs and this necklace." He mumbled, toying with the charm on his chest.

Rose pulled an impressed face. "Chocolate AND jewelery?" She asked. "Maybe I made a mistake turning you down all those years ago, Scorp. That's top boyfriend material right there!" Scorpius's face went tomato red and Rose laughed. "Well, I have to get back - prefects meeting. I'll see you guys later." And with that she was gone.

The silence was heavy, after she left and Albus couldn't quite figure out why. Unexpectedly a loud, welcome yawn escaped Scorpius and broke the silence. "Tired?" Albus asked chuckling.

"No. I mean, yes. I wouldn't dare go to sleep and risk another Hogwarts Express disaster though." Scorpius replied.

"You go to sleep. After all the apparating this morning, I'm sure you need the rest." Albus said.

Scorpius eyed him skeptically so Albus continued. "I promise I'll stay awake this time! I'm not even the slightest bit tired."

"Really?" Scorpius asked, suddenly hopeful.



Albus smiled. "Really. Go to sleep."

Ten minutes later, Albus sat bored with his best mate's lifeless body at his side. He felt his eyes getting heavy and panicked when they drifted closed of their own accord. He searched around the compartment, frantically searching for something to hold his interest enough to keep him awake when his eyes landed on the black photo album.

Hesitantly, ignoring the weight that suddenly returned to his chest, Albus opened the book and began paging through it. Without Scorpius's narration and scrutiny, he was able to really look at every picture, surveying the facial expressions and small touches. He wasn't sure why he cared so much, he should be glad that Scorpius had someone with to spend the summer. Chastising himself for his selfishness, Albus was about to close the book when he noticed a photograph on the last page that Scorpius had skipped.

It was instantly apparent why Scorpius hadn't drawn his attention to this photo. There were no landmarks or historical buildings. It was simply an unremarkable photograph of two boys sitting on a bed laughing, their arms draped over each other in clear friendship. Only, it wasn't unremarkable because one of those boys was Scorpius Malfoy and the other was not Albus Potter.

Jealousy washed over Albus in waves. It wasn't as though Scorpius never had any other friends. He would often study or spend time with Bria or even Rose, who he had thought he was in love with for years, and it never made him feel this nauseous. He looked at the photograph again to try and assess his emotions. Scorpius was laughing so hard that he had to lean into this boy (Julien - what a stupid name, he thought angrily), for support. That smile, though, it wasn't the smile he gave Bria or Rose or even his dad. That was Albus's smile. And the touching - Scorpius was barely comfortable hugging his father, what was he doing hugging this random kid?

Albus sighed and threw the photo album back on the seat next to him. It was clear that Albus was no longer Scorpius's only close friends and Albus didn't like it one bit.

## Chapter 2

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Throughout the sorting ceremony and welcome feast, Albus did his best to steer his thoughts away from Scorpius's smile and Julien's stupid face. He refused to allow his jealousy of someone who wasn't even currently in the same country, to put a damper on his final school year. So he plastered a smile on his face, in an attempt to fake enjoyment until he tricked himself into believing it were true.

This proved to be more difficult than expected during their late night game of wizard's chess as every insignificant occurrence seemed to remind Scorpius of France. "The Louvre houses a beautiful, fifteenth century muggle chess set." "Did you know that France won the world's wizard's chess tournament this year?" "Julien is pants at chess."

By the next morning, he was much more successful in his endeavor and sat contentedly eating his breakfast while his best mate chattered on about goblin rebellions - Dumbledore knows how he got on that topic. Despite the comfort that he felt at Scorpius's rambling, a yawn unexpectedly escaped him.

Scorpius abruptly halted his sentence. "Oh, I'm sorry, Albus. Am I boring you?" He asked sarcastically.

Albus finished his yawn before nodding. "Absolutely." He answered, flashing Scorpius a cheeky grin, whose mouth had dropped open in a surprised smile at his reply. "That's not why I'm yawning though. I'm yawning because you kept me up half the night."

"Pardon me." Scorpius said with an air of faux indignation. "I thought you had said that you missed me and my nerdiness? I must have been mistaken."

Albus's smile grew. "Oh, I definitely said that. I was just using you for your sweets though. Now that you have nothing to offer..."

"Timetables!" A voice shouted from further down the Slytherin table. "Come and get them."

Albus cringed, recognizing the voice immediately - Lizzie Buchanan, his ex-girlfriend. They had dated for the better part of sixth year but it had ended badly, very badly and Albus had come away looking less than gentlemanly.

Scorpius must have seen the hesitation on Albus's face because he stood and said, "Don't worry, I'll get yours," as he scurried towards the head of the table.

Albus followed him with his eyes until his attention was pulled back to Scorpius's vacant seat when his cousin, Rose, loudly dropped into it. "I heard Lizzie's announcement. What's your schedule look like?" She asked, picking at the remnants of Scorpius's breakfast.

"Well, I don't know do I? Seems she's only just made the announcement and I haven't left this seat." He replied sarcastically.

Rose pulled an annoyed face at him but smiled excitedly when Scorpius returned. "So?" She asked, reaching for the single piece of parchment in his hands.

Scorpius handed it to her as he shot an apologetic look to Albus. "She says that each student must retrieve their own timetable."

Albus sighed dramatically and stood from the table. "Wish me luck!"

"Luck!" Scorpius shouted as Rose yelled, "You'll deserve whatever she does to you," from behind the paper.

Albus glared at her as he joined the short queue of Slytherins waiting in front of Lizzie. Once the two fourth year girls in front of him retrieved their schedules and retook their seats, Albus moved to the front of the queue and held out his hand.

"Name?" She asked, looking him dead in the face.

Albus rolled his eyes. "Seriously?" He asked.

Lizzie narrowed her eyes at him. "Name?" She repeated.

Albus sighed in clear frustration. "Albus Severus Potter."

Lizzie's face broke into a broad smile. "And year?" She asked cheerfully.

Albus's eyes flashed dangerously but he took a deep breath and remained calm. "Seventh." He said through gritted teeth.

"Oh right. Now I remember you. My apologies, it's just everything about you is so, very - forgettable." She said as she very pointedly looked at Albus's crotch.

Snickers could be heard from the students within earshot and Albus's ears burned with embarrassment. Lizzie's smile widened when she noticed his discomfort. "Here you go." She said, holding out the paper while maintaining fierce eye contact with him. Just as he reached out to grab his schedule, she let the paper fall from her hand and the snickers transformed into full laughter. "Oops." She said as she flicked her hair and brushed passed him calmly.

Seething with anger, he mumbled something about maturity as he stooped to retrieve the discarded parchment and stomped back, throwing himself into his seat. Scorpius, who was now sitting to his left, rubbed his back absent-mindedly while, presumably, reading over Rose's schedule.

"That could've gone worse." Scorpius said, initially full of cheer, but when his eyes met Albus's, he changed his tune. "No? No. No, of course not. That was very awful, with the making you beg in front of everyone and the insinuation about your lack of sexual prowess." Albus was now openly gaping at his best friend. "I was simply saying that I think that display was an improvement over the three beverages that you wore at the tail end of last year."

Scorpius gave his back a final pat before stealing a piece of bacon from his plate and returning to his reading.

"Really though, Albus..." Rose interrupted from across the table. "What did you expect? I mean, you broke up with her right after - well, you know..."

"I'm very aware of when I broke up with her, Rose." Albus spat, suddenly furious. "I also am not at all sure how I was expected to handle that situation? Was I just supposed to pretend that it was great for me and that I am super attracted to her? How is that better? How is that fair?"

"I still don't understand how it took getting naked with her to realize that she wasn't your type. I mean, I didn't have to shag Scorpius to realize that he wasn't for me." She said, laughing. "No offense."

Scorpius smiled at her. "None taken. I would prefer not to shag you either, to be honest." He said as he slid the paper back across the table. "It looks like we have history of magic and potions together."

"Oh! Good." She announced excitedly. "I was so worried that I would get stuck with someone incompetent as a potions partner. James warned me that it is really challenging and I don't want anyone holding me back."

Scorpius opened his mouth to respond but Albus interrupted him. "Oi! You don't get to invade MY house table, laugh while I'm publicly humiliated, imply that I deserved said humiliation, AND steal MY potions partner."

Rose contorted her face as if she had smelled something putrid and flashed a disbelieving look at Scorpius, who very purposefully avoided her gaze. "Godric, you're miserable today!" She shouted at Albus as she started to stand. "Number one. Public humiliation? Really? Could you be more dramatic, Albus? Two. I'm head girl and as such can sit wherever I damn well please." Albus very intentionally rolled his eyes but Rose ignored him and continued. "And Number three. I didn't even realize that you managed to make it into NEWT potions so I wasn't trying to steal anything from you!"

Albus opened his mouth to speak but Scorpius beat him to it. "Albus is actually quite capable in potions. He scored an E with minimal preparation."

Rose and Scorpius made eye contact and Scorpius raised his eyebrows in warning. As if she'd just realized what she said, Rose very tactfully back tracked. "I wasn't implying that I didn't think you were capable enough for NEWT level. I just didn't think you'd bother when it isn't necessary for any specific career path you have in mind."

"I decided to take it in case I choose to go into a field where it's a requirement." Albus mumbled, he hadn't missed her dig about his lack of career aspirations.

Rose smirked at him. "You mean, Scorpius told you that you should take it?" She asked, laughing.

"Rose!" Scorpius warned.

Rose put her hands up as if in surrender. "Alright, alright. I'm out of here!" She said as she turned and left the table.

Albus sunk down lower into his seat and angrily pushed his food around his plate. Between Lizzie and Rose - and let's not forget stupid Julien - his decent mood had quickly turned foul. He was feeling quite sorry for himself when he croaked out, "I understand if you'd rather partner with Rose. I don't want to hold you back."

"Albus." Scorpius said in a chastising tone.

When he looked up, Scorpius was giving him a reprimanding stare. Albus held his gaze for a moment before he couldn't help but laugh. Scorpius always had a way of bringing him back to reality when he was entering a dramatic, self-deprecating spiral. He sighed loudly and pushed his plate away. "It's just frustrating. Everyone else seems to have a handle on what they want in the future and I have no idea."

Scorpius turned his entire body to face his friend on the bench and laid his hand on Albus's knee. "Albus, look at me." Albus, who hadn't realized that he had been staring at his friend's hand on his leg, tore his eyes away and looked into Scorpius's grey, blue eyes. "You aren't like everyone else."

"Yeah, no kidding." Albus said as his eyes drifted down to the fuschite pendant that he was mindlessly fingering.

Immediately Scorpius reached out with his free hand and tilted Albus's chin up to force eye contact. Albus inhaled sharply at the surprising contact and hoped that Scorpius hadn't noticed. When the blonde boy only smiled warmly at him, he was sure he was in the clear.

"That's not a bad thing, Albus. You're intelligent and cunning. Fiercely loyal and absolutely hilarious. You'll find your place in it all." Scorpius dropped both of his hands and turned back to the table to finish eating his friend's bacon.

Albus's skin felt strangely cold where his best mate's hands had been. He swallowed hard and looked around to see if anyone had noticed the fairly intimate exchange, the handful of students remaining in the great hall had all been too preoccupied with their timetables and breakfasts to notice.

"And anyway..." Scorpius said, interrupting his thoughts. "Between the Malfoys and Potters, even if you do become a jobless loser, we have plenty of money to keep you in bread and milk."

The two fell into easy laughter as Albus shoved the blonde playfully in the shoulder.

It turned out that James was not exaggerating about NEWT level potions. After listening to Professor Bantall rattle off various required readings and expected potion formulas, the seventh years ate their dinners in a state of shell shock. As soon as they had finished their meals, Scorpius stood up and announced, "Right. Library."

"Noooo!" Albus said in his best whine. "Scorpius, today was the first day of classes. I'm already tired, please don't make me go to the library too."

Scorpius gave him a weak smile. "We have to, Albus. These potions requirements are intense. If we're not ahead then we'll fall behind."

Albus knew that he had to pull out all the stops to get Scorpius to change his mind so he immediately gave the puppy dog eyes that were usually reserved for his mother. "Can we at least study in the dorm? Please? Pretty please?"

Scorpius did his best to keep a straight face but the more Albus pouted and pawed at him, the more his resolve broke and he couldn't help but crack a smile. "Godric, you're a child. Fine! Let's go!"

Ten minutes later they entered the Slytherin boys' dormitory and Albus immediately threw himself onto his four poster bed.

"What do you think you're doing?" Scorpius asked, eyeing him skeptically.

Albus flashed him an innocent smile. "I'm just getting comfortable! Aren't you going to read to me?"

"No! You'll be asleep within ten minutes if you're all curled up like that." He said with a laugh as he leaned over and began poking Albus in the stomach in an attempt to get him up."

Instead of having the desired effect, Albus only giggled madly until he reached up and pulled Scorpius onto the bed by his shirt. Scorpius squealed as Albus's hands wasted no time in finding his most ticklish spot over his ribs.

Scorpius thrashed about the bed, laughing hysterically, unable to compose himself enough to make his escape. "Stop!" He yelled between chortles, attempting to pull his friend's hands away from his body. "Albus. Albus, quit. QUIT!"

Albus ceased his assault and fell back against the pillows with a satisfied chuckle.

Scorpius readjusted his body so that he was laying next to the raven-haired boy, and pulled the dropped potions book back into his lap. "You're going to fall asleep." He said one last time before opening the text to the appropriate page.

"I will not!" Albus said, crossing his arms. "I stayed awake on the train even though you had no faith in me then, either."

Scorpius only rolled his eyes as he began reading aloud, the properties of the Wiggensweld potion.

As Albus blinked into consciousness, he was aware of exactly two things. The first, that he did, in fact, fall asleep as his best mate had predicted. The second, that said friend was currently still in his bed, having fallen asleep himself.

In all honesty, this situation was not at all unfamiliar to Albus. Throughout their seven years of friendship, they had shared a bed on multiple occasions and woke up in various, strange positions. However, there was just enough different this time, just enough contact that crossed the line of friendship, that Albus felt his pulse quicken.

Scorpius laid facing him, his face so close that Albus could count the almost white freckles that he never knew were there. His hands were curled into his own body but his knee was bent and rested on Albus's upper thigh. Albus inhaled deeply when he realized that his own hand laid limply on Scorpius's hip bone.

He could have easily shoved him to the other side of the bed while making jokes about personal space. He should have done that. That's what any normal friend would have done in this situation. If James and Cam had woken up in bed together, there would have been jokes and teasing, not blushing and...curiosity.

Albus was curious though and his rational brain was not quite awake yet; so instead of pushing his friend's away, he very purposefully and gently flexed the hand resting on Scorpius's side. Albus swallowed hard as he brushed his thumb over the sharp, angular hip bone of his best mate.

His mind briefly flitted to thoughts about Scorpius's leg and how easily it would wrap around him with the slightest hip movement. He batted those thoughts away immediately, too worried where they would lead him and instead took his gaze to Scorpius's face.

Albus's heart was hammering in his throat, his chest rising and falling more rapidly with the anxiety that he was feeling. Still, he couldn't look away from the sleeping blonde. His perfect, white skin, his pink lips, parted ever-so-slightly, the way his too pale eyelashes fluttered as he dreamt, the loose strand of hair fallen down over his forehead, all begging to be touched.

Albus wasn't sure what was wrong with him. Clearly he had suffered some type of brain injury during the night. No matter what the cause, despite the waking, rational part of his brain screaming for him to stop, he tentatively extended his trembling hand towards that loose strand of hair.

He was within an inch of contact when a loud cough from a dorm mate startled him back to reality. In one swift movement, the terror coursing through every part of his body, he ripped his hand away from his friend and flipped his own body, allowing Scorpius's leg to fall unceremoniously to the mattress.

He laid, clutching his pillow, his chest heaving. What had he been thinking? What if his roommates had seen? What if Scorpius had woken? He buried his head into the pillow as he felt Scorpius stir beside him.

Scorpius gave an irritated sigh before tapping Albus in the back a little harder than necessary. "Albus? Albus!" He said, annoyance clear on his voice.

Terror welled up inside of Albus. Had he been awake? Is that why he was irritated? Luckily, he only had to suffer briefly before Scorpius continued. "Get up! I told you we were going to fall asleep!"

Albus breathed a sigh of relief before smiling and facing his friend. "I am not responsible for your actions, Mr. Malfoy. Your falling asleep is entirely on you."

Scorpius rolled his eyes but Albus could see the corners of his mouth threatening to turn up into a smile. "Valid point. Either way, now we'll have to study after breakfast. I'm going to grab a quick shower."

"Sounds good." Albus yawned. "I'm going to fall back to sleep."

Albus watched as Scorpius grabbed his toiletries and disappeared into the bathroom. Only then did he flip onto his back and put his hands over his face. He was most certainly going to work hard to repress the memories of this morning.

## Chapter End Notes

I have a hard deadline of two weeks for each chapter update. I'll post as I finish though so hopefully they'll be more frequent.

How is this so far? I struggle with their voices a bit, especially in attempting to age up Scorpius, so I'm not overly confident.

Thanks so much for reading/kudos/comments! Love to you all!



## Chapter 3

The entire way to breakfast, Albus kept repeating a mantra in his head. Act normal, be normal; over and over, in time with his footfalls. He could do this, this morning didn't mean anything. He was half asleep and luckily his - traumatic brain injury, seizure fit, descent into madness - whatever you wanted to call it, had gone unnoticed. Unfortunately, in his attempt to push his odd behavior out of his brain, he began to act a little bit manic.

Alright, I'll get our books ready while you grab our breakfast." Scorpius said as he settled into a seat at the Slytherin table.

"Yes. Right. On it!" Albus announced, much too cheerfully for a weekday before noon.

Scorpius lifted his eyes to meet Albus's without raising his nose from the book. "I don't need your snark, Potter. I just need some toast."

There was a second of hesitation on Albus's part where he opened his mouth to correct Scorpius's assumption that he was being sarcastic. However, when Scorpius raised his head and knitted his brows in confusion at his friend's wavering, he thought better and scurried to the head of the table to retrieve two, hot breakfasts.

When he returned, Scorpius had placed his potions books in front of his seat with a blank sheet of parchment and fresh quill. "Right." Scorpius said as he motioned to a page long list of potions. "I just need you to outline the ingredients and uses for this list here."

"Awesome." Albus said in a tone of complete sincerity, despite the copious amount of work his friend had just placed in front of him.

Awesome?" Scorpius said with an expression of total bewilderment. "Albus, this is the requirements for the entire term. I was joking."

Albus felt his cheeks go slightly pink. "Oh."

Scorpius's expression was shifting between one of fond, amusement and actual concern. "Is - is everything okay with you? You know that I was just having a laugh this morning, right? I don't blame you for our falling asleep. I - I'm sorry if it came across too seriously."

Scorpius laid a soft hand on Albus's and smiled warmly at him. At the contact, Albus was sure that his tongue had tripled in size because he was suddenly struggling to swallow around it, let alone speak. He subtly retracted his hand under the cover of wanting another bite of eggs and happily found that his brain was able to function again once the contact was broken.

He needed to get himself under control and now. "What? I'm usually such a miserable shit that you assume something is wrong if I'm friendly?" He asked indignantly.

Well, to be truthful, the last time that you were this compliant came soon after your flirting led to my torture." Scorpius said pointedly.

Albus flushed and downcast his eyes, guilt welling up inside of him. "D'aww, there's my brooding, best mate." Scorpius shouted as he reached over and pinched Albus's cheek. "Wrap up the pity party. We have fresh outlining to do! Knowledge yet undiscovered, Albus!"

Albus let out a hearty laugh in spite of himself and swatted his friend's hand away. "Bugger off! Now how many of these do I actually have to complete?" He asked.

Scorpius smiled. "Just the first one. A potion a day will keep the failing marks away." He finished in a sing-song voice. Albus rolled his eyes and quickly got to work.

There may have been some truth to Scorpius's ridiculously dorky rhyme because after ten measly minutes, they had a head start on next week's potions lesson. Albus made a mental note to try and listen to Scorpius's directions when it came to studying. Although he faintly remembered making similar mental notes at the start of every term since year two and those were quickly forgotten.

His train of thought was halted as the morning's owl post arrived. "Hey isn't that James's owl Daya?" Scorpius asked, indicating the tawny owl swooping in through the open window.

As the obnoxious creature - he was very much like his owner - landed in front of the duo, Albus let out a sarcastic, "seems so," reaching to untie the letter from her left leg. Just as his hands gripped the string, the little shit - another way Albus felt that she was just like her owner - bit him and extended her leg towards Scorpius.

Albus brought his hand to his lips and sucked the injured finger in slightly to ease the pain, watching as Scorpius's face contorted slightly before he shrugged and captured the letter in his hands, unrolling the parchment and flattening it to the table.

"What is it?" Albus asked as he fed his crust of bread to Daya, scratching the bird lightly on the head - he never could hold a grudge against animals - before she flew on her way.

Scorpius smiled before clearing his throat and beginning.

"Scorp - I addressed this letter to you solely to annoy my little brother." Albus rolled his eyes as Scorpius continued. "I was just writing to let you know that I was finally able to convince the beautiful Bria Thomas Finnigan to move in with me. If my memory is correct, this means that you will both owe Collin a few galleons - serves you both right! I'm convinced that attempting to thwart her brother's victory was the sole reason she held out this long in the first place. Anyway, hopefully the fact that we are throwing a house warming party on the first Saturday of October (one which I already secured permission from the headmistress for you to attend - you're welcome for being her favourite, by the way), will lessen the pain of the lightened pockets. We'll see you there! Be good. - James

Before Scorpius even rolled the parchment back up, they heard an enthusiastic whoop from the Gryffindor table. Albus looked up to see Collin Thomas Finnigan practically skipping towards them and happily throwing himself on the bench next to Scorpius.

"Gentlemen." He said with such an air of dramatics that Albus wasn't sure how he managed it with a straight face. "I'm sure you've heard that we have some business to settle." He finished, motioning to the parchment in front of Scorpius.

Albus laughed in spite of the loss of his three galleons because in this moment he couldn't help but remember a conversation that he had overheard the night before the start of term. His mum had been summarizing a discussion that she had had with Dean (Collin's dad) to her husband. It was no secret that despite everyone's initial optimism regarding Collin's prognosis after the attack, two years ago, it quickly became apparent that he would have some life-long effects. Although his personality and previous memories had been unaffected, he was struggling with memorizing even the most basic information for his classes and he'd completely lost his ability to perform wandless magic. His dad's wanted him to stay on an extra year at Hogwarts, in hopes that some of his mental faculties would return to him and he'd manage a few NEWTS. However, Collin had made it abundantly clear that he was done with school and would be leaving at the first possible chance. In this moment, like many others over the past year, Albus wondered how anyone could be concerned about the future of such a resourceful and charismatic guy. He may not end up a ministry employee, but Albus suspected he would manage to make a decent life for himself.

"To be perfectly honest, Collin, I only made that bet assuming you'd forget about it like you do everything else." Albus felt Scorpius stiffen at his side but remained unaffected. He knew that his flippant attitude towards Collin's impaired cognitive functioning was why they'd become actual friends over the previous year.

Collin let out a laugh which quickly turned into a cough as the swig of pumpkin juice he had just taken threatened to squirt out of his nose. "Lucky for me..." he said once he was composed enough to speak, "big brother Mattie gave me a very handy planner that regularly reminds me of my various bets and dates."

Albus chuckled slightly knowing how Collin's oldest brother's coddling behavior was driving him slightly mad, when Scorpius interrupted, attempting to join in on the fun. "Yeah, too bad you can never remember to actually write any of that down in the planner." He said with a laugh.

Collin's face instantly fell as he looked down at his hands. "Yeah, Scorp." He said in a dejected tone. "That's definitely a struggle, mate."

Albus tried to keep his laughter in as he shot Scorpius a reprimanding look. Scorpius's cheeks instantly reddened and his mouth opened, the look of panic apparent on his face. "Ah, right. Right. I'm so sorry. That's awful. I was just...ballocks, I'm sorry, Collin."

Collin and Albus both burst into hysterics at the same time. "Aww, Scorpius, I forget how sensitive you are sometimes. I was just playing with you, mate." Collin said, looping his arm around the blonde's shoulders.

The red in Scorpius's cheeks had overtaken his whole face as his panic turned into embarrassment and anger. "You! You are BOTH ridiculous prats. That was so mean." He said as he shrugged Collin's arm from his shoulders and stood. "I have History of Magic. I'll see you both later."

Watching Scorpius leave the Great Hall, Collin turned to Albus. "Do you think that I should go and apologize?" He asked sincerely.

Albus who had also been following his friend out of the hall, with his eyes, turned back to Collin when he spoke. “Nah, he’s too good to hold a grudge. Just don’t tease him like that too often.” He warned.

Collin nodded. “Always each other’s protectors.” He said as he stood. “So, I believe we have enough time to swing by your dungeon before Care of Magical Creatures. What says you, Mr. Potter?”

“I guess we better.” Albus said seriously. “Wouldn’t want to make you go to all the bother of writing ‘collect money from Albus’ in that planner of yours.”

Collin snorted as the duo made their way out of the Great Hall and towards the Slytherin dormitories.

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Over the next few weeks, Albus slowly began to forget about that strange morning with Scorpius. Between his rigorous course load and everyone’s excitement for the house warming party, he barely even had a spare second to think on it. Before he realized it, the day had arrived and he stood in his dormitory readying himself with Scorpius.

“You’re not wearing that, are you?” Scorpius asked with a look of disapproval on his face.

“What’s wrong with this?” Albus asked, motioning to his jeans and black t shirt – James hadn’t had his floo installed yet so they had to dress in muggle attire to avoid strange looks on the walk to the flat. In all honesty, now that he compared his outfit to his friend’s, he could see that he looked slovenly in comparison. Scorpius wore dark grey trousers and a light blue jumper that accentuated his eyes dramatically. Albus shook the thought of Scorpius’s eyes out of his head and continued. “It’s just my family, anyway. I’m pretty sure they wouldn’t be impressed with me even if I showed up in a tailored tuxedo.”

Scorpius rolled his eyes as he walked over to Albus’s trunk and pulled out a green and black, checkered button-down. “It’s not just your family.” Scorpius said as he opened the button-down and Albus shrugged it onto his shoulders, turning around as Scorpius started fastening the buttons. “Bria said that some of their coworkers will be there as well.”

“I don’t think I need to impress them either, Scorp.” Albus said as Scorpius finished buttoning up his shirt. “I know that I don’t have a definitive career path in mind but I don’t think healing is in my future.”

“Stop complaining.” He said as he grabbed his wand and pointed it to his hand, muttering a quick spell and then tucked it into his pocket. He then rubbed his hands together and began running the greasy substance through Albus’s hair, pushing it this way and that until he was satisfied. “There.” He said, smiling warmly. “Perfect.”

Albus’s chest tightened, having a strange feeling of déjà vu at the exchange. “Er, thanks.” He said awkwardly. “Well we better go. We don’t want to be late.” And with that the friends

made their way to the Headmistress's office to floo to muggle London.

Between the remaining Weasleys, Thomas Finnigans, Potters, and Malfoys taking the floo in turn and the brief walk to the flat, it took almost an hour before they arrived on James and Bria's doorstep. Albus suspected that his 'perfect' hair was looking slightly less perfect after the travel and his suspicions were confirmed as Scorpius began pawing at him during the short wait for their hosts. After snickers from Collin and Lily, Albus managed to swat his hand away just as Bria threw the door open and launched herself at them.

"My boys!" She announced excitedly, hugging them fiercely. "I missed you two so much. Come in!"

"Hey! I'm your actual brother." Collin shouted indignantly. "Where's my love?"

Bria pulled her brother to her chest and ruffled his hair. "D'aww, does ickle Cowwin feel left out." She said as she placed a kiss on his head and pushed him over the threshold, greeting her remaining guests in turn.

As Albus stepped into the crowded living room, he was tackled from behind in what he supposed was meant to be a hug. However, the intensity of it propelled him forward and he just had time to brace for the impact before falling awkwardly onto the couch.

"Little brother!" James yelled and because of his unnecessarily loud volume and pinked cheeks, Albus strongly suspected that he had already dipped into the firewhiskey.

"Did you greet everyone by attempting to break their limbs?" Albus deadpanned, struggling to break free under his brother's weight.

James stood up and extended a hand to help Albus to his feet. "Only my very favourite people, Albus. And if you're going to break a limb, this is the place to do it. We have at least half a dozen healers on site. Which reminds me, you know our family and Bria's family, of course. There's a couple coworkers here though. Nidhi is over by the drinks with Marques and Joanne. Oh and this is Spencer." James said, indicating the wizard who stood less than a meter away. At the sound of his name, the light haired man turned to face them.

Albus wasn't sure why he was expecting all of James's healer friends to be old but this man was far from that. Spencer was about James's age and was wearing tight black trousers and a white, collared shirt. When he looked at them over his black rimmed glasses, he revealed dark brown eyes which stood out due to the contrast with his light hair. He smiled warmly at Albus and extended his hand. "There's no doubt you're a Potter." He said before pulling him into a firm handshake.

James chuckled at his side. "That's a bit of a sore subject, mate." He said, winking at Albus. "This is my brother, Albus and his..." James hesitated as he indicated the blonde who stood awkwardly to Albus's left. "Scorpius." James finished happily.

“Scorpius.” Spencer said, smirking ever so slightly as they shook hands for a moment too long. “It’s a pleasure.” Spencer released his hand but maintained eye contact.

Scorpius smiled shyly and looked at the ground. “You too. Nice to meet you too.” He said, quietly. Albus felt something stir in his chest and was about to suggest they go for drinks when Teddy appeared at his side.

“Alby!” He said, using the nickname from his childhood that only Teddy had ever been permitted to use. “How goes it?”

As Albus was sucked into a conversation with Teddy, he saw Scorpius and Spencer start conversing out of the corner of his eye. Teddy led to Victoire, who led to Louis, who led to Albus’s own parents and before he knew it, hours had passed, deep in conversation with various family members.

“Well, us old folks have better get home and to bed.” Harry said, standing and stretching.

Ginny laughed. “Speak for yourself, old man. Not all of us fall asleep on the couch at 9:15.” She said as she stood and made her goodbyes before following her husband into the floo. Only after they disappeared in a puff of smoke, did Albus notice Scorpius’s absence.

“Has anyone seen Scorp?” He asked, looking around the room.

“Yeah.” Rose offered, helpfully. “He’s in the kitchen with Spencer.”

Albus felt his stomach churn and realized that it was becoming increasingly difficult to name the feeling as anything but jealousy. He took a deep breath and stood to retrieve his friend.

“Oh!” James said from his spot on the couch, his head on Bria’s lap. “Fill my drink while you’re in there? And now that the parents are gone, everyone who is of age can have a few drinks.”

“Don’t overdo it though!” Bria warned. “We only have a few sober up potions and the headmistress will have our heads if we send a slew of drunk students back through her office.”

Albus forced a smile and grabbed James’s cup, making his way into the kitchen. When he pushed through the door, neither man looked up, too engrossed in their conversation.

“That sounds absolutely amazing.” Albus heard Scorpius say sincerely.

Spencer chuckled softly. “I’m not sure everyone would share your enthusiasm but maybe you could floo in sometime and I’ll take you on a tour.”

Albus swallowed hard before clearing his throat. Scorpius visibly jumped at the unexpected sound. “Albus!” He squeaked out, as if he was a child caught with a sweet before dinner time. “Albus, Spencer was just telling me about a mini-museum INSIDE of St. Mungo’s. It follows the evolution of magical healing over the years. Doesn’t that sound amazing?”

“Oh yeah.” The dark haired boy said sarcastically. “Rivetting.”

Scorpius narrowed his eyes in the way that was reserved solely for when he was being rude. He pointedly ignored the warning and went to pour James and himself drinks.

“Well, I need to get going.” Spencer said. “I have a shift in a few hours and want to get a bit of shut eye first. It’s been really great talking to you though, Scorp.” At the use of Albus’s nickname for his friend he began to feel utterly murderous and downed his glass of firewhiskey in one gulp before refilling. “I was serious when I said to floo me.”

Scorpius smiled warmly as Albus downed another drink in one go. “I definitely will.” Spencer smiled and then nodded a goodbye to Albus before exiting the kitchen and heading for the floo.

Albus and Scorpius stood in awkward silence for a moment before Louis’s screech of “Truth or Dare!” sounded throughout the flat. The two friends wordlessly joined the rest of the party in the living room.

“Albus! Truth or dare?” Roxanne asked excitedly.

Albus stared her down as if assessing her worth. “Truth.” He said finally.

“Is it true that you dumped Lizzie the day after taking her virginity?” She asked with a giggle.

A sigh escaped his lips before he’d even had a chance to reply but that was apparently answer enough for the few members of his family, who did not know the whole story, because the room erupted in shocked whispers.

“Alright, alright. Not my proudest moment but I’ve moved on.” He said in an attempt to calm the group. “Now, Dominique, truth or dare?”

“Dare.” She said without a moment’s hesitation.

A wicked smile overtook Albus’s face. “I dare you to sniff Hugo’s sock for ten seconds straight.” Every Potter and Weasley who was present gasped at the dare. Hugo’s feet were infamous for their disgusting ability to render people unconscious. To Dominique’s credit, she completed the dare as a true Gryffindor and only looked as though she was going to pass out for the briefest of moments.

As if it were the antidote for the smell, Dominique took a shot before continuing the game. “Okay, hmm...Scorpius!” She said as she turned to the blonde. “Truth or dare?”

Scorpius bit his bottom lip before shocking everyone and announcing, “Dare!”

Albus’s cousin looked absolutely thrilled at her luck. “I dare you to kiss...” At the word kiss, Albus felt his entire body stiffen. He was sure that his name would be the next word off of her lips and he wasn’t sure if the idea horrified him or excited him. He gripped the glass in his hands tightly, bracing when Dominique finished with, “Louis.”

Scorpius's mouth dropped open and he went very pink in the cheeks. "Um..." he stammered. "I'm not sure that's such a good idea."

Louis who was sitting opposite Scorpius only shrugged. "I don't mind." He said much too casually for someone who was just told that he got to— er..HAD to kiss Scorpius Malfoy.

Scorpius swallowed hard. "I think you might though..." Letting his trail of thought end abruptly.

"Why?" Louis asked pointedly. "Because you're gay?"

Albus felt all the air escape his lungs as the room fell eerily silent. Scorpius sat for a moment, opening and then closing his mouth repeatedly. Albus knew that he should say something; he should come to his best mate's defense. Scorpius wasn't gay. Right? If Albus was so sure of that though, why was it that he was rendered completely speechless by the accusation?

The uncomfortable silence felt as though it stretched on for an eternity until Dominique's hard smack to her younger brother's leg brought everyone back to reality. "I'm sorry, Scorpius." Louis said, clearly flustered. "I just assumed because..." he motioned briefly to the door and then to Albus but never verbalized the thought. "I feel like a complete arse."

"No!" Scorpius broke in attempting to soothe the sixth year's conscience. "You're not an arse. I am. Well, gay that is, not an arse. I mean I am gay. I am not an arse. Sorry."

Louis's face broke in to a broad grin as the collective tension in the room dissipated. That is, the tension for everyone except Albus Potter. Albus, who although he had not fully comprehended what had just transpired, still couldn't control the overwhelming hammering in his chest. Scorpius Malfoy, Albus's Scorpius was gay? And not only was he gay but he had never said anything to him. He had kept this secret from his best mate and as Albus let his eyes scan the room briefly, watching his family members patting Scorpius on the back and congratulating him, it was clear that he was the only one who was surprised about the revelation. Had Scorpius told other people? Did Bria know? Did Rose? Albus tasted bile in the back of his throat as he thought back to the exchange he had witnessed in the kitchen with Spencer. Was that flirting?

"You might want to close your mouth, mate." Collin's whispered voice brought him back to the present as Albus did just as he suggested and nodded his thanks. Somewhere in the last three minutes, he had completely lost his ability to speak words.

"Well now that that's settled." Louis said, happily. "I'm not gay but I've kissed blokes before and really don't care."

"Oi!" Victoire shouted from her husband's lap. "Which bloke's have you been kissing?"

Lily excitedly waved her hand in the air shouting, "I know, I know," but Louis silenced her with a death glare.

Scorpius chuckled although it wasn't his usual lighthearted laugh, as though the earlier tension had not yet left him. Serves him right, Albus thought bitterly. "Well, if you're sure."



Scorpius said, tentatively and it took Albus until the two boys were leaning forward to realize that he was referring to the kiss.

As their lips crashed together in a shy, giggly kiss, Albus could never remember wanting to be anywhere else more in his entire life. All the awkward dinners with his Gryffindor family, the teasing in the dormitory, the complete cockups in the classroom; they were all child's play compared to this moment. Watching his best mate, the one he shared everything with – or at least thought he did – sharing a kiss with his cousin was torture. Albus sat still as a statue and bit the inside of his cheek until he tasted blood. He wanted so badly to flee but could feel eyes on him and knew that he'd never live it down if he didn't stay rooted to the ground.

The kiss ended after what felt like an eternity although it was probably only a few seconds. He sat, desperately trying to clear his mind and working hard to avoid everyone's eyes in the room, especially those of his best mate. A few more rounds of truth or dare transpired before Collin came to his rescue. "Allllbuuuus." He said in his best whine. "I'm thirsty. Please get me a refill?"

Albus knew that it would be more natural to throw an insult his way but in that moment he couldn't manage it. Instead he forced a lopsided smile before standing and retreating to the kitchen. Once the door shut behind him, he leaned on the bar, his chest heaving and his eyes stinging with tears. He couldn't cry here. Everyone would know.

"Albus?" Bria's kind voice was unmistakable. "You okay?"

He forced himself to swallow and steady his breathing before answering. "Yep. It's only two drinks, I'm sure I can manage."

"That's not..." Bri began but Albus cut her off.

"I'm fine." He spat out with such hostility and finality that she left without saying another word.

Before he returned to his friends and family, he had to get himself under control. His eyes scanned the room, settling on the bottle of half-consumed firewhiskey to his left. Without another thought, he uncorked the bottle and consumed its contents in three swallows.

As Albus woke up he recoiled at the burning sensation traveling down his throat. He was vaguely aware of people standing over him, speaking to him in hushed tones but the burning forced him to squeeze his eyes shut.

"Wake up, sleepy head." His brother's voice came slowly into focus but he didn't dare open his eyes.

"Come on, Albus." Bria's soft words held none of James's mocking tone but they still didn't move him out of his drunken stupor. "You need to drink this before you head back. Open up."

At her sweet coaxing, Albus swallowed more of the liquid being pressed to his lips, only to be bombarded with the same sickly burning sensation again. “Bloody hell! That is awful. Get away from me.” He said as he feebly swatted into the air.

“Huh. I’m shocked to see that Albus is a moody drunk – said no one ever.” James laughed obnoxiously at his own joke as snickers from Bria and Scorpius joined the chorus. As if he hadn’t already wanted to hit his best mate today, the mocking laughter certainly solidified that thought in his brain.

“I know it’s awful, Albus.” Scorpius said in the tone that usually calmed him but at this moment in only made him angrier. “I had to take some too. Just down the rest of the sober potion so that we can get back. The headmistress is only keeping the floo open for ten more minutes.”

Albus finally opened his eyes and glared at his three captors, taking the potion from Bria’s hand and throwing it into his mouth. “Fine. Let’s go.” He said, feeling considerably more sober but no less angry.

He landed in the headmistress’s office first and did not wait for his fellow Slytherin before setting off toward the dungeon. It wasn’t until he was entering the common room that Scorpius caught up.

“Albus! Albus will you slow down?” His friend said, clearly out of breath.

Albus rounded on him so quickly that they almost bumped heads. “How could you not tell me?” He yelled, his voice full of hurt and anger.

“How could I not tell you?” Scorpius retorted in a voice which betrayed his own annoyance.

“Yes. I’m supposed to be your best mate and I found out with the rest of my bloody family. Do you know how embarrassing that was?” Albus asked, feeling his voice tremble but willing himself not to cry.

Scorpius’s eyes went wild for a brief moment, as if he couldn’t quite believe what he was hearing. “Embarrassing?” He asked indignantly. “I’m sorry, I just want to make sure I’m understanding correctly. My being forced to come out, in front of pretty much everyone we know, during a game of truth or dare was embarrassing? ...for you?”

“Yes!” Albus just about screamed, all the hurt, rage, and jealousy threatening to boil over him at any moment. “I’m meant to know everything about you, aren’t I? And I had to sit there like a total idiot. Watching you have your first kiss with my bloody cousin, of all people.”

Clearly attempting to calm himself, Scorpius didn’t speak right away. When he did his voice was full of controlled anger. “First of all, that was hardly my first kiss, Albus.”

“What?” The realization that there were more people than just Louis who knew his friend in a way that Albus didn’t, was almost too much for him to handle.

Scorpius continued, either not hearing the interruption or just not caring. “And secondly, you can’t possibly be this self-absorbed, can you? Oh, I’m sorry that I didn’t think about how you’d feel about your place in the queue of who gets to find out my sexual preferences. I must have been selfishly focused on the terror of coming out to my father or the guilt of being the likely end of the Malfoy line. Maybe I even had the audacity to wonder if being an out queer would make my school life a bit more challenging. I’m so sorry that I embarrassed you tonight, though. That really should have been my sole focus.” When he finished his sarcastic rant, the blonde was openly shaking from the force of holding back tears.

Part of Albus wanted to reach out and pull him into a hug but there was a jealous beast inside Albus who was clawing at his chest for more. More information, more pain, just more. “What do you mean that wasn’t your first kiss?”

Scorpius threw his hands into the air. “You have to be kidding me!”

“How could you not tell me that you had your first kiss?” Albus asked, his voice betraying him and his pain more than he would’ve liked. “I told you every detail about my time with Lizzie.”

For the first time in their friendship, Scorpius seemed unaffected by his sadness, too blinded by his anger in that moment. “Yes and to be honest, I could’ve done without quite a few of those details.”

“That’s what best mates do though!” Albus yelled as he turned his pendent over in his fingers repeatedly.

Scorpius scoffed. “Well maybe some best mates but I’m apparently a bit more private about my sex life.”

There was no doubt that Albus would’ve been in less pain if he’d been actually slapped. When he spoke his voice sounded small. “Your sex life? You have a sex life? Who?” Even as the question first left his mouth he knew the answer but he waited to see his friend’s reaction. When Scorpius only crossed his arms in front of his chest and stared at him, he put words to his suspicions. “Oh, Julien was it? I knew there was something off about those pictures.”

Under Scorpius’s challenging stare, Albus wilted slightly. “You should have told me. I had a right to know.”

“You had a right to know?” Scorpius asked, shaking his head in exasperation.

“Yes!” Albus shouted, his resentment returning in the face of his best mate’s indifference. “People could think that we were a couple or something with the amount of time we spend together.” It wasn’t the truth but he wasn’t ready to face the source of all the pain and jealousy from this evening.

“People were going to think that we were a couple whether you knew I was gay or not.” Scorpius shouted moving towards his friend threateningly. “That knowledge doesn’t change anything.”

“It does for me!” He shouted into Scorpius’s face, shaking from the weight of the words that rolled so simply off his tongue. The knowledge of how true those words were just about broke Albus. Tonight did change things.

“It changes things for you?” Anger giving way to pain in Scorpius’s voice for just a moment. “Oh I get it now.” He said with a laugh. “This has nothing to do with other people. What’s wrong, Albus? Are you afraid that I might have feelings for you? Afraid that I might make a big gay move on you?”

Terror coursed through Albus’s body, rooting him to the spot. The knowledge of how close to the truth his friend was, yet how far, breaking his heart. He considered briefly closing the gap between them and pulling his mate, his Scorpius, into a hug but images of his lips on Louis, his smile to Spencer, his arm around Julien made his legs feel like lead. He could only stand and stare.

“You’re unbelievable.” Scorpius said, letting out a laugh that in no way reached his eyes. “Well you caught me now! I’ve suffered through seven years of your dramatic belly aching all to get into the pants of the Slytherin Squib.”

Albus actually flinched and took a step backwards at his words. He spared a brief look at Scorpius who met his eyes before looking away.

“Listen, Albus...” He started, clearly attempting to pause the argument for a time when they were both feeling more rational.

“No.” Albus said, choking back his cries. He promised a long time ago not to give people the satisfaction of his tears. “No it’s good to know what you actually think of me. Now that you have at least one other friend you can quit playing nice and putting up with me.”

“Albus...” Scorpius said, reaching his hand out to his friend. It was clear that he was tired of the fight but that didn’t make his words any less true and Albus wasn’t going to let him take them back.

“NO.” He said definitively, his mind was made up no matter how much it was going to destroy him. “This is better this way. I wouldn’t have wanted to be friends with some disgusting pouf anyway.”

Albus bit the inside of his cheeks, forcing the pain back inside of him. Each second spent suppressing the sobs felt as though his was dying but he would not cry. He stood and stared directly at the person who had hurt him so intensely. The person he broke tonight. The person he loved.

On the other hand, Scorpius, who had frozen at his friend’s words, looked everywhere but at Albus, silent tears rolling down his cheeks. After a few minutes he slowly started nodding his head. “Right.” He said, taking a deep breath as though each syllable was painful. “Okay then.” Then, without warning, he brought his eyes up to meet Albus’s, those beautiful, grey, blue eyes piercing into green, as if he could see straight down to the raven haired boy’s soul. He couldn’t though, he couldn’t see that it was just fear, not the truth that he saw that night.

So when he choked out the last two words to his best mate of seven years, he meant them. And he never doubted that they were the ones that Albus wanted to hear.

“Goodbye, Albus.”

# Chapter 4

## Chapter Notes

I didn't get the chance to respond to them all, but I LOVED all the comments on the last chapter. Writing from Albus's head gives me a very skewed perspective and I found all of your reactions so helpful...and hilarious.

Shock froze Albus for an indefinite amount of time, staring at the spot that Scorpius last stood. In some irrational part of his brain he felt that if he just stayed still, if he didn't let time pass in a normal fashion, then maybe this would all prove to be a bad dream. But if it wasn't...

"Goodbye Albus."

The words echoed heavily in his ears, in his chest, in his heart. He didn't say they'd talk in the morning, he'd said goodbye. The finality of it, the pain in which the words were spoken, Albus knew he should be running up the steps, that he should drag Scorpius out of bed and apologize. Something was holding him back though.

"...all to get into the pants of the Slytherin Squib."

The Slytherin Squib. How many times did those words cause him to break down to Scorpius? Four syllables that destroyed eleven years of self confidence and he had spat them out without any regard, as if he'd meant them. And if he'd meant them, did that mean that there was no coming back from this?

Albus could feel it building. The lump that had perched in the back of his throat since the party was creeping to the surface. The burning sensation overtaking his eyes could no longer be ignored. He didn't want to move, to cry, to acknowledge that this was real but he was losing the battle with his body.

In one last effort he lifted both of his hands and clamped them over his mouth. Instead of halting the tears, the movement had the effect of opening a dam. Hot tears flowed down his cheeks, spilling over his hands. A strangled, pained cry, more animal than human, reached Albus's ears and it took a few moments before he realized that the horrible sound was coming from him. His body shook with the ferocity of rolling storm clouds.

With as much need as he had for stillness just a few moments before, Albus desperately craved movement. He turned and hurled himself through the common room entrance. As soon as he was passed the stone wall, he broke into a sprint.

With sobs racking his body, he ran with everything that he had left. The burning in his chest and legs, a constant reminder that this wasn't a nightmare. His footfalls echoed loudly throughout the corridor and he was sure that the caretaker would descend upon him at any

moment. Despite the looming threat, Albus couldn't bring himself to care. His entire world was crumbling around him and the only thing he could think to do was flee.

Quite on accident, or maybe completely on purpose, he arrived at a seldom used hallway on the seventh floor. He double checked the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy that his brother had told him about, before walking determinedly passed the blank spot on the wall three times. All the while thinking, "Please, I need a place to hide."

Relief flooded through him as a wooden door appeared; he grabbed the handle and pushed his way inside. The room was large and nearly empty, save a four poster and a small, wooden desk. At that moment, he couldn't even be bothered to cross the small distance and crawl into bed. Instead he pushed the door closed and leaned against it, his chest heaving both from the exertion from the run and the tears. He let his legs give way as he slid down onto the floor.

As soon as his body settled onto the ground, Albus let go of the little restraint that was left to him. He allowed the despair to course through every part of his being, his wails bouncing back to him off the stone walls of the room of requirement. The cries of mourning, he thought darkly, his mind briefly floating to the noises that Scorpius's aunt was making at his mother's funeral. They were unlike any he had ever heard, sounds that reverberated through the ages, that connected all humans through their pain; sounds that Albus was making now.

He was in mourning. Mourning the boy who had shared his sweets, the dorky, best friend who permeated nearly every happy memory.

Mourning the person Albus thought himself to be, a person with morals and kindness, not someone who strikes to kill the second his feelings are hurt.

Mourning the blond, young man with the beautiful smile and the touches that lingered a second too long; taking all future possibilities with him.

Mourning.

Albus let the thoughts come, each darker than the last, and with them, the tears. He wasn't sure how long he laid on the floor sobbing before, but eventually, sleep claimed him.

When Albus woke, he was instantly greeted with protests from his aching body. The stone floor and unnatural sleeping position had proved to be very unforgiving. He stood and stretched, feeling the cracking down his spine, as he did. He blinked his eyes rapidly, attempting to adjust to the dim lighting of the room, their puffiness making it that much more difficult.

There were no windows or clocks to show how long he'd been asleep but by the way his stomach grumbled loudly, he suspected it was well passed noon. He sighed, wishing there

was some way to tell the time without leaving his sanctuary, when he turned to see a small clock had materialized on the desk. He raised his eyebrows in surprise, the magic of the room was very impressive, before walking to the desk and lifting the clock - 4:49. How was it possible that he'd slept half the day away and still felt exhausted?

He shrugged, placing the clock back onto the desk and thought about asking the room for a way to contact the house elves, he probably should eat. The more he thought about it though, the more the idea repulsed him and he instead crawled beneath the warm duvet of the four poster bed and fell quickly back to sleep.

Albus drifted in and out of consciousness several times throughout the next night, each time allowing his eyes to focus on the clock, only to force himself back to sleep when he realized it was not quite morning.

When morning finally arrived, Albus laid staring blankly at the ceiling. He knew that if he wanted to have time to change before class that he'd have to leave immediately. At the thought of running into Scorpius in the dorm or even in class, his skin prickled with anxiety. He felt the familiar lump reforming in his throat and desperately hoped that he'd be able to keep the tears at bay. His head was pounding and he wasn't sure he could handle another round of sobs.

Albus let out a loud sigh as he tried to weigh his options. Going to class was not a possibility as he was sure he'd fall into hysterics the second his eyes fell on Scorpius. He briefly considered 'pulling a Weasley' as his Uncle George had done during his seventh year but since Albus had no business plan as he had had, he was sure that this would only further solidify his status as the Slytherin Squib. This left only one option but he'd have to wait a little while before putting his plan into action.

After an hour, when he was sure that Scorpius would be well into class, he reluctantly stood and made his way over to the door, cracking it open slightly. After being in the stale, recycled air of the room of requirement for so many hours, the corridor felt large and breezy. He shivered slightly as he crossed his arms over his chest and hastened determinedly towards his destination.

Luckily, since at this time most students were either in class, breakfast, or still asleep, he managed to arrive at the hospital wing without encountering a single person.

He looked around the empty room. "Hello?" He asked hesitantly.

Madam Pomfrey scurried out from behind a curtain. "Oh..." She said, her voice laced with surprise. "The younger Potter boy. What can I do for you?"

Albus felt the familiar twinge of annoyance at her greeting but bit back his usual sarcastic reply. He wanted to stay on her good side, after all. "Er...I'm ill." He said, attempting his most pitiful look, although after sobbing the better part of two days, this feat proved anything but challenging.

"And what seems to be the problem?" She asked.



"Umm, I have a pounding headache and I'm too nauseous to eat anything." Albus responded, happy that he was able to answer with complete honesty.

"Mmmhhmmm, mmmhhhhmmm." She hummed to herself. "And tell me, dear boy, does this sudden illness have anything to do with a certain Mr. Malfoy?"

Albus froze at her knowledge and could only stand, staring open-mouthed.

"Oh what," she said, waving her hand at him dismissively. "Professors do converse outside of classes, you know. And besides, Mr. Potter, that cousin of yours possesses many wonderful attributes but a quiet speaking voice is not one of them."

Albus was instantly furious. Of course Scorpius would have confided in Rose and of course Rose, the insufferable gossip that she was, would have jumped at the opportunity to bad mouth Albus with fervor. In the safety of the Room of Requirement, he had almost convinced himself that all life had paused, as he had. Now, once again in the cold, reality of Hogwarts castle, he could see that that wasn't the case.

"I'm sorry." Madam Pomfrey said sincerely. "I can't provide health related excuses for bad break ups. Now, I suggest you head to class."

Albus froze, feeling the panic clawing at his chest and throat. "I can't." He pleaded, meeting her eyes. "Please, I can't. I don't know how...I can't be here without him. I just need some time, just a week to get my head back on straight. Please."

Madam Pomfrey was silent for a long moment and Albus was sure that he was going to be forced to beg his parents to pull him out of school for the week. Finally when she spoke it was with much more kindness than he was expecting. "Three days."

"What?" Albus asked, not wanting to misunderstand but already feeling the tightness release in his chest.

She smiled at him sadly. "I'll excuse you for three days but then after that it's back to class."

Without meaning to, Albus had pulled her into a warm hug. She chuckled softly and patted his head. "Take a food tray on your way out." She said, indicating the food cart next to the door. "Neglecting your body is not the way to heal your heart." Albus nodded as he moved to leave. "And Albus, you aren't the first person to nurse a broken heart. You'll be okay, I promise." Albus nodded and made his way to the Slytherin dormitory.

It was amazing how quickly three days went by when you spent the majority of it sleeping. He knew that he had promised Madam Pomfrey that he'd return to class today, and although it caused him guilt, he found himself incapable of moving. Instead he'd finished the last of the previous night's dinner tray - another cause of gratitude for the healer - and snuggled back under his duvet. After an hour of counting the stitches on his hangings, his private world was imposed upon by a very familiar voice.

"Little pig, little pig, let me come in." His brother yelled in a ridiculous voice, quoting a muggle fairytale from their childhood.

Albus sighed. "Bugger off, James."

Instead of leaving, James wrenched open the curtains and leaned against the post. "Bloody hell, Al." Albus glared at him. "Al-bus. Sorry, you look rough." James said with actual concern as he laid a soft hand on Albus's forehead.

Albus batted the hand away. "Piss off." He spat as he pulled the blankets up around his neck.

James instead threw himself onto the bed next to his little brother. "So how's your week been?" He said in a mock friendly voice.

Albus turned and stared at him threateningly. "Why are you even here?" He shouted.

"Woah! Watch your tone, ALBY!" He said in his best big brother voice. "You should be thanking your lucky stars that MY good standing with the Popster meant that she contacted ME instead of our parents. Now, come on." James said as he stood and attempted to pull his brother's blankets off. "We need to go and find your adorably geeky and gay best friend so that you can apologize."

"What? NO!" Albus said, forcefully pulling his blankets back to his chest. "I'm not apologizing. You don't know what he said."

James yanked the duvet back off of Albus and looked at him pointedly. "I know exactly what he said and I also know what YOU said. Trust me, you have much more to apologize for. Now come on!"

"NO!" Albus screamed as the two boys fell into a very heated game of tug of war with the blanket. He felt the tears behind his eyes threatening to spill over again and just wanted his brother to leave him cry in peace.

"Quit being stubborn!" James yelled, meeting his brother's intensity. "You're miserable and you'll feel better once you apologize."

"I won't!" Albus spat. "Just leave, James. This isn't your business!" He was now shaking in his attempt to hold back the tears. His emotions were too fresh to hold it together in this heated of an argument.

"I don't understand why you're willing to throw your friendship away over something that I know you didn't mean!" James shouted.

"Because he doesn't want me!" Albus screamed, dropping the blanket in disgust. And that was it, that simple reference to the end of his friendship, the first time he spoke his desires aloud, and Albus felt the tears drip through his already wet eyelashes. He knew that he should feel embarrassed, he hadn't cried in front of his brother for at least six years but in that moment he didn't care. In that moment he just needed to open up to someone, so he didn't even try to stop the flow of tears. "I don't even know if he still wants to be my friend anymore

but I know he doesn't want..." Albus let the thought go unfinished. "And I can't, James. I can't watch. Merlin, I can't even hear about any of it. It just makes me so jealous because I really thought..."

"Hey, hey. Alby, it's okay." James said as he sat back onto the bed and pulled his brother into a hug. Albus melted into him as he combed his hand through Albus's hair in the same manner their father used to when they were kids. "So, he doesn't want you? Okay. Romantic relationships aren't everything."

Albus sat up and rolled his eyes wiping the tears on the back of his sleeve. "That's easy for you to say you have Bria."

James chuckled. "First of all, don't let her hear you say that, I don't 'have' Bria, I'm 'with' Bria. And if it were to end between us, I would be devastated because I love her but I wouldn't cease to exist, Albus. I'm with her because she brings out a better person in me but she didn't create that person. All those good parts that you were with Scorpius are still inside of you. I mean, you've definitely reserved them just for him since you were eleven but maybe it's not a bad thing to let someone else in for a change." He said with a warm smile. "So, he doesn't want you; and maybe that means that your future is going to look a bit different than you had planned. Or maybe it just means that you need to spend some time apart, to focus on figuring out who you are away from him. Maybe you'll find your way back to a friendship after or maybe you won't - either way, you're going to be okay, Albus. But the way to be okay is not by shutting everyone out and it's definitely not by avoiding all forms of personal hygiene as you have been." James finished, pulling a disgusted face.

Albus let out a laugh in spite of himself and threw a pillow at his brother. "Shut up!"

James let out a good natured laugh as he stood. "I convinced Poppy to give you the rest of the week. After that, though I expect you to be back in top form, alright?"

Albus nodded, love for his brother swelling in his chest. "Yeah, alright. Thanks, James."

James reached out and pulled his brother into a standing position before crushing him in a back breaking hug. "Don't mention it. Now for the love of Dumbledore, go get a shower so that we can sneak down to the kitchens and have the house elves make that potato casserole that I love!"

And with that, Albus was off for his first shower in five days.

It really was remarkable how easy it was to avoid someone when they were equally as determined to ignore you. Over four weeks had passed since their falling out and Albus had yet to make eye contact with his ex best mate. Of course it didn't hurt that the new partnerships and seats had been arranged during Albus's vacation from reality. He was also

purposefully training his eyes to look away from all tufts of blond hair so overall it was going more smoothly than expected.

They'd even come to a sort of unspoken division of territory. Albus studied in the common room or dorm where Scorpius kept to the library. They both split their meal times between the Slytherin and Gryffindor tables, however they easily fell into a rotation schedule.

On this particular Wednesday afternoon, Albus sat in his dorm attempting to memorize the medicinal properties of Dittany, when movement in the terrarium above his desk caught his eye. His snake slithered around his home, a sure sign that he'd be ready for a meal within the next day.

Albus reached into his shirt and fingered the fuschite pendant - a habit that he had developed whenever he was deep in thought, smiling at the memory of adopting his dear pet. After two years in Slytherin, he had decided that he needed to trade his owl in for a more suitable companion. Despite his hesitation, his dad had taken him to pick one out, another feeble attempt at bonding. Albus laughed aloud at the memory of his father's face when Albus named him Salazar.

Designing Salazar's terrarium had been his favourite part of the experience. He'd spent a week reading about his natural habitat before researching the appropriate heating and extension charms to use. Looking at his pet now, he couldn't help but feel proud. Salazar was healthy and happy with his home.

Albus thought briefly about buying another pet for the sole purpose of designing their environment when he froze. He quite enjoyed that work and he seemed to be rather good at it. Furthermore, he vaguely recalled Aunt Luna complaining about the lack of competent Habitat Engineers within the Magizoologist community, during one of her Sunday tea visits.

"Huh." He said aloud.

He found Neville in greenhouse four, elbow deep in some foul smelling manure. When he first approached, it seemed that the professor was muttering under his breath but after a moment it was clear that the man was singing softly to his plants.

"Um, Neville?" Albus said with a laugh.

Professor Longbottom jumped at the unexpected intrusion but smiled when his eyes settled on the middle Potter child. "Albus! What do I owe the pleasure?" He asked as he made to shake Albus's hand, thinking better of it at the last moment and instead taking out his wand and casting a quick cleaning charm.

"Ahh.." Albus stammered, feeling suddenly nervous. Maybe this was a really stupid idea. "I was wondering if I could talk to you about a career possibility?"

Neville's face broke into a broad grin. His Godfather was the type to fill with pride over the smallest accomplishments of his Godchildren. "Of course. What are you thinking?" He said,

sitting down. "Herbology?"

"Not exactly." Albus said as he took the seat across from Neville. "I was actually thinking about Magizoology, more specifically Habitat Design and Engineering?"

"That'd be brilliant, Albus!" Neville said, sincerely, beaming as he spoke. "It's actually a really smart specialty. Most people who pursue Magizoology do so to work with adorable animals or for the thrill of dragon training, that specialty will make it loads easier to walk into a position."

"Right." Albus said, attempting to seem as though the thought of job security had ever crossed his mind. "So I know that the Care of Magical Creatures and Herbology NEWTS are important and I think I can manage them but the problem is..."

"...you didn't continue on with Transfiguration." Professor Longbottom finished for him, nodding in understanding. It didn't surprise him that his parents' best friend knew this fact off the top of his head considering how irritated Harry had been when Albus dropped Transfiguration in the first place. "Right. Well it shouldn't be too much of a problem considering you earned an OWL in the subject. And I'm actually quite good friends with Professor Bell, I'm sure that I could convince her to give you a few private lessons and to draft a note stating such, for your portfolio."

Albus was at a loss for words. He wasn't quite expecting, well he wasn't sure what he was expecting exactly but he was positive that Neville's kindness would have exceeded all those expectations. "Wow. Thank you so much, Uncle Neville." The familial term felt foreign in his mouth, he'd never warmed to its use like James and Lily but in this moment he was sure Neville had earned it.

"Actually!" Neville announced with a level of excitement that was contagious. "Come with me to see Professor Grubbly-Plank! I think she has a project that she'd love your help on!"

Neville was wrong, Professor Grubbly-Plank did not have a project with which she needed assistance, however, she did have a project that she was more than willing to give Albus sole ownership over. Her spring lesson plans were focused on the bowtruckle and although she had a handful of the adorable creatures, she'd prefer to breed them so that each student could study their own. Unfortunately, they were known to breed at the height of summer and Hogwarts was struggling through an unreasonably chilly fall. Albus was tasked with creating an optimal breeding habitat and he couldn't have been more excited.

After every free moment being spent researching, designing, and building, he was thrilled that his hard work paid off when the bowtruckle started reproducing at the tail end of November. They really were adorable, and Albus found himself spending hours studying amongst them, inside the charmed pocket of the Forbidden Forest.

He was laying at the base of their tree when he heard voices outside the curtain of Shielding Ivy.

"Right through here." He heard the professor say as she walked through the entrance, shaking snow from her hair as she did. He was about to make his presence known when he saw that she was flanked by two students, Rose Granger-Weasley and Scorpius Malfoy, each carrying a few boxes.

"Woah!" He heard Rose exclaim. "It's like July in here. How did you do this, Professor?"

"Didn't your cousin tell you, dear girl?" Professor Grubbly-Plank asked, looking confused. "This is all his work."

"Albus?" This time it was Scorpius who spoke and at the sound of Albus's name on his lips, Albus felt a familiar tug at his heart.

"Right." The professor said, and then noticing Albus. "Oh! Here he is now. Albus, you should really be sharing your accomplishments with your family."

"It's really not that big of a deal. I just grew some Shielding Ivy and then transfigured the branches to seal off the gaps. The hardest part was placing the heating charm in the soil but I find a book that outlined it pretty well." He said modestly, dropping his gaze to the forest floor.

"It's brilliant." Scorpius said and when he spoke Albus made eye contact with him for the first time in over two months. His eyes were bluer than he remembered them and instead of being laced with pain and anger, as Albus expected, there was only pride staring back at him.

They held each other's gaze for only a moment when Grubbly-Plank's voice broke the trance. "Well, you two should be heading up to class." She said, shoos them towards the entrance. "Oh and Albus, these boxes here have your wood lice. I'll see you later."

Watching the three leave, Albus found himself hoping, for the first time in his life, that James might be right. Maybe they could find their way back to each other.

# Chapter 5

## Chapter Notes

Well, this is pretty much it. Just a very brief epilogue scene that will go up later in the week. Let me know what you think.

Only 48 hours into a Scorpius-less Christmas break and Albus was strongly considering apologizing to his ex-best mate. It was true that his relationships with his family were stronger than they'd ever been but being home was not the same without the constant exchange of owls. Although he knew he wasn't 'over' his romantic feelings for the blond, he still missed him fiercely and that moment in the Forbidden Forest had demonstrated that he might even be forgiven for his poor behaviour.

Laying on top of the covers in his room, Albus sat staring at his ceiling, his eyes unseeing, as he chewed his lip and toyed with his pendant. There was still the issue of this jealous beast inside of him. Even now, the thought of seeing Scorpius kiss another bloke made his stomach churn violently. Instead of pushing the thoughts from his mind he kept the image there, first of Louis leaning in and giggling, next of Julien, arms draped around Scorpius, pulling him into a passionate kiss. He would have to get used to the idea if he could ever be a decent friend again but as the scene replayed in his head he found himself becoming more and more agitated.

He sighed in frustration at himself, sitting up and scrubbing his hands roughly across his sleep stained face. Of all people he could fall for, why did it have to be Scorpius? He let his mind wander through memories of train rides, late nights, and wizard's chess and found himself smiling in spite of himself. How could it have been anyone but him? He could do this, he needed to do this, Scorpius deserved a decent friend, and besides, Albus had his own life now; he had his work, his family, his mate, Collin. Anytime he started to feel jealous, like he couldn't hold his tongue, he could always focus on those aspects of his life.

With a trembling sigh, Albus dragged himself over to his desk and rifled through the chaos until he found an unused piece of parchment and quill. After one last, long exhale he began to write. 'Dear Scorpius...'

Two hours and 18 wasted pieces of parchment later and Albus sat lightly banging his head against his writing desk. There seemed to be no way to word an apology that encompassed his feelings of regret adequately. He would have simply sent 'I'm sorry' and been done with it if he wasn't concerned that Scorpius would apparate over immediately, assuming that Albus was about to do something reckless.

A sudden knock on the door served as a welcome distraction from his task. "Come in!" He said much too eagerly.

When the door sprang open, in bounded Lily, her mop of red hair bouncing as she ran in and launched herself onto the open bed. "Albus!"

"Lily!" He said mockingly.

"Whatcha doing?" She asked, a knowing smirk tugging at the corners of her lips as she eyed the numerous balls of crumpled paper.

Albus sighed, looking back down at the fresh piece of parchment that sat at his fingertips. "Apparently nothing. Just wasting paper."

"Mmhm." Lily said distractedly and when Albus turned back to her, he saw that she had smoothed out one of the discarded letters and was reading it with fervor.

"Lily!" Albus admonished, snatching the paper from her hands. "That's private."

She snorted. "That." She said matter-of-factly, motioning to the parchment in Albus's hands. "Was a shit apology."

"Yes." He said. "That's why it was crumpled into a ball, Lil. I'm not really sure exactly what to say, to be honest."



Lily only smiled at him. “Well, are you going to tell him...you know?”

Albus narrowed his eyes at her. “Oh, I know...but why do you know?”

“Umm...” She said through a guilty smile. “Well, I had already guessed but when James asked me to keep an eye on you, I told him that I wouldn’t unless he told me why. So are you going to tell him?”

Albus let out a sigh. “I think I have to, don’t I? I mean, unless I came down with a sudden, temporary case of homophobia, that’s the only explanation that makes any sense. I just don’t know how to go about it.”

“Why don’t you just say, ‘Dear Scorpius, I fancy the pants off of you. Sorry I am a wanker. All my love, Albus?’” She flashed him her cheekiest grin.

“Wow, Lil. You’re such a big help. Thanks.” Albus deadpanned.

Lily chuckled. “Honestly, I think you know that this is one of those conversations that you have to have in person.” Albus let his head fall back to his writing desks dramatically. Lily only laughed harder. “Instead of torturing yourself, writing a letter that you are never going to send, you should come shopping with me.”

Albus screwed up his face, thinking it over. “No. I have a book I want to read before the term starts so I don’t plan on changing out of my pajamas today.”

“Albus.” Lily chided. “If you don’t go shopping with me today then you’re going to end up shopping on Christmas Eve like you do every year. Normally I wouldn’t care what you do but then I’m going to have to listen to you moan and groan about how awful it is to shop on the day before Christmas. Break the cycle, Albus, come shopping today.”

“I’m going to go tomorrow morning.” Albus said, standing and retrieving his book from his trunk.

Shaking her head, Lily stood and made her way to the door. “Yeah, I’ll believe that when I see it.” She said over her shoulder and then disappeared through the exit.

Albus really hated shopping, especially Christmas shopping. And Christmas shopping on Christmas Eve had to be some sort of unforgiveable torture. Despite this knowledge, every year he found himself avoiding crowds of unhappy people, grumbling his way through various stores. And every year he swore to himself that he’d never wait to the last minute again. Yet, here he was, Christmas Eve, levitating nearly a dozen, precariously stacked boxes through the labyrinth of shop goers.

The one positive about this particular trip was the speed with which he completed it. With any luck, Lily would still be asleep when he came home and he’d be able to avoid her inevitable ‘I told you so.’ He silently wished for a short queue for the floo during his brief walk to the Leaky Cauldron. Right outside the entrance, Albus nearly tripped over a small child who had escaped his mother’s grip and although he dodged the boy with ease, his packages tumbled to the ground.

“Ballocks!” Albus said through gritted teeth as he stooped to start restacking the boxes.

“Albus?” At the sound of his name, Albus raised his head and found himself staring into a vaguely familiar face. He thought hard, trying to place where he might have met the man but was coming up empty. “Spencer.” Spencer offered, bending down to help reorganize the packages. “We met at your brother’s party.”

“Right!” Albus said, smiling and shaking his hand. “How’ve you been?”

“Can’t complain.” Spencer said, placing the last box and then standing. “Look who I ran into.” He said loudly, looking at the entrance to the Leaky Cauldron and motioning to Albus.

Albus turned around, expecting to see his brother or Bria when he found himself face to face with both Draco and Scorpius Malfoy. Albus’s mouth went instantly dry as he tried to steady his breathing. He attempted a casual smile but feared that it may have come out as more of a grimace.

“Albus.” Draco said, nodding his greeting.

Scorpius attempted to mimic his father's hello but instead of one, curt nod, his head bobbed repeatedly making him look like one of those figurines that sometimes sat on the dash of muggle vehicles. Albus fought the urge to chuckle at the sight, instead internally debating whether to invite Scorpius inside for a butterbeer or not. He was so focused on his nerves that he hadn't yet had time to question Spencer's presence when the trio's goodbye brought his focus back to the awkwardness of the situation.

Feeling suddenly out of place, Albus pointed his wand and levitated the boxes, waiting for his opportunity to offer a quick goodbye, the butterbeer would have to wait for another day.

"Okay, I really have to get back to the hospital. Draco, it was great to finally meet you." Spencer said accepting Draco's outstretched hand and pulling the elder Malfoy into a forced embrace.

Watching Draco's clear discomfort, Albus did let out a small chuckle that he quickly disguised as a cough. All humour evaporated from the situation, however, when Spencer leaned in and placed a chaste kiss on Scorpius's lips. There was no passion in it, just a quick goodbye as if they had done it a hundred times before, and maybe they had. Albus felt the familiar lump forming at the back of his throat and a wave of nausea spread through him, as his concentration broke and his packages, once again, tumbled to the ground.

"BALLOCKS!" He sighed angrily as he squatted down to pick up his things again. He didn't even acknowledge as Spencer said goodbye and left, too lost in his own jealousy.

Scorpius leaned down to help him. "I got it." Albus said abruptly.

At his words, Scorpius froze but didn't stand. Albus looked up from his task and into the younger Malfoy's face but the blond's eyes did not meet his; instead they were trained directly on Albus's chest. When he followed Scorpius's gaze he found that he was staring at the fuchsite pendant that must have slipped out of his cloak, in his haste to retrieve the fallen presents.

Albus grabbed the pendant and shoved it back into his shirt, meeting Scorpius's eyes for the briefest of moments. Anger fueled in his chest when he saw pity behind the pale eyes. When Scorpius made to stack another box, Albus cut him off rudely. "I said, I got it." He spat.

"Fine." Scorpius said coldly, turning to his father before continuing. "Are you ready to go?"

"I actually have one more thing I'd like to get for you so I'll meet you back at the manor." Draco replied.

"Okay." Scorpius said as he walked a few steps and disappeared.

Feeling Draco's eyes on him, Albus looked up. "Well handled, Potter." The man said sarcastically.

Albus narrowed his eyes at him, seeing the pretentious youth his father hated so much, in the kind man he knew, for the first time. "So you're okay with that, then?" Albus asked, standing and indicating the spot the other two men had said their goodbyes.

Draco smiled. "Oh Spencer? He's fine. Although he did hug me. Did you see that?" Draco asked with a grimace.

Albus chuckled in spite of himself and nodded.

Draco sighed. "Scorpius is my son, Albus. It did not surprise me in the slightest when he brought a man home. The only thing that surprised me was which man he brought, or rather who he didn't." Draco finished, looking pointedly at Albus, who blushed and dropped his gaze. "I really should hex you for the amount of tears you caused him, you know?"

Albus nodded. "Why don't you then?" He asked in a small voice.

Draco surveyed him silently for a moment before speaking. "Let's just say I know a thing or two about allowing your own pride and jealousy to get in your way. Take it from me though, son, it's a lonely life. I wouldn't recommend it."

"Yes, sir." Albus said, smiling weakly and extending his hand. Draco accepted without hesitation. "Happy Christmas, Draco."

To Albus's surprise Draco used their connected hands to pull him into a brief hug. "Happy Christmas, Albus." He said as he turned and disappeared.

Albus stood rooted to the ground for a few minutes after Mr. Malfoy had left. Saying that his first attempt at handling his jealousy could have gone better was a massive understatement. Letting out an exasperated sigh, he raked his hands through his hair before shaking his negative thoughts away. Draco was right, he needed to stop getting in his own way. As soon as he returned to Hogwarts, he was going to corner Scorpius and be completely honest. He was determined to win his friendship back.

A week into the term and Albus realized that he had been incorrect in assuming that it would be simple to approach Scorpius. When it was clear that the blond was never alone in the dormitory, he had taken to lingering in the library or the Great Hall in an attempt to catch him alone. However, it quickly became apparent that his fellow Slytherin had returned to actively avoiding him after their awkward exchange in Diagon Alley. If the boy was to be found at all, it was at the center of Rose and her band of Gryffindor girls and Albus would rather eat hippogriff dung than make a fool of himself in front of that audience.

"It's getting creepy, Albus." Collin said, watching the raven-haired boy eye Scorpius from across the Great Hall.

Albus moved his gaze from the Gryffindor table just long enough to glare at his friend. "If I don't keep an eye on him, I might not notice if he slips out of here alone for a change."

Collin nodded, raising his eyebrows until they touched his hairline. "Yep, definitely creepy." He said as he stood. "Listen, mate. I'm a sensitive guy, I get it. But all of this with the crazy eyes and the stalking, this is definitely not the way to go about it. From where I'm standing

you have two options. You either stand up on this table and apologize in a grand gesture, possibly serenading him, or you wait until Hogsmead in two weeks and you quietly pull him to the side while everyone's distracted. I mean, you could keep up with this creepy, unhinged persona if that's what you're going for, but I've got to be honest, I might have to jump ship if that's the case."

Albus snorted, his cheeks pinking slightly at the thought of his own behaviour. "Yeah, you're right. I'm pants at singing though so I guess Hogsmead it is!"

Collin's face broke into a wide grin. "That's the spirit! Now come on, I may or may not have a pocket full of stink pellets just waiting to be dropped on some unsuspecting third years."

Albus nodded, grabbing his things and the duo made their way out of the Great Hall.

As determined as Albus had been on cornering Scorpius during the first few weeks of the term, he found himself absolutely terrified as he made his way down the familiar path to Hogsmead. The winter weather had taken a break for the day, allowing everyone a comfortable preview of the spring to come. Albus welcomed the reprieve from the bone chilling cold but his nerves were causing him to sweat through his forest green jumper despite the perfection of the temperature.

By the time he reached the Three Broomsticks, he was desperately in need of an ice cold butterbeer. He scurried up to the bar and ordered before he'd even chanced a glance around the room and kept his eyes purposely fixed on his hands, until his drink was placed in front of him. As he took a sip, he nervously turned to face the various tables full of excited students for the first time.

There, almost completely obscured from his view, at the furthest table, to his left sat Scorpius who was nursing a warm butterbeer and talking animatedly. Albus could only assume that the subject was something history related due to the twinkle in his eyes and the way his hands whipped around anxiously, as if his enthusiasm for the subject would convince you that it were interesting.

Albus felt the familiar warming sensation that was purely Scorpius overtake the nervousness in his chest. He smiled and let out a long exhale, allowing the prospect of regaining his best-mate fill him with excitement instead of dread. He took one last swig of his drink before leaving it on the counter and making his way through the labyrinth of Hogwarts students. He wasn't quite within arms reach but was definitely in conversing range when he took stock of Scorpius's company for the first time. Spencer.

The constriction of Albus's chest was immediate as he stood frozen, looking like a complete idiot in the middle of the Three Broomsticks. A group of fifth year girls eyed him suspiciously but luckily they seemed to be the only ones who had deemed his presence strange. He turned on his heels immediately and walked briskly out of pub, crossing the street and dropping onto an old, stone bench.

'This is okay.' He tonight to himself. 'This changes nothing. You knew he had a boyfriend and you knew that you'd have to see them together from time to time. You can do this.'

After his brief pep talk, he considered approaching Scorpius despite Spencer's presence but thought better of it. He didn't think interrupting their date to announce that he wasn't, in fact, homophobic but just in love was the best way to start a positive friendship with his mate's boyfriend. Instead he decided to casually wait until Spencer left and then approach Scorpius on his way back to the castle. He also decided that Collin didn't need to be aware of his resurgence of 'slightly creepy stalking.'

It wasn't long before the couple emerged from the Three Broomsticks and said a quick goodbye - a goodbye which Albus averted his eyes for, he was no masochist, after all. Scorpius turned towards Hogwarts and leisurely strolled up the path, clearly in no hurry to return to the castle considering the warmer weather. Not wanting to seem as though he were pouncing on him, Albus allowed some distance to grow between them before following.

He was about to break into a jog to catch up when two men, slightly older than James, approached the young Malfoy from an alley. The taller of the two leaned in close and threw his arm around the blond; their close proximity giving the impression as though they were friends, or at the very least acquaintances. The last thing Albus wanted was to seem meddlesome and jealous so he stood in the wings, surveying the situation with growing apprehension. When the fat one jabbed his finger aggressively into Scorpius's chest, it was as if something disconnected in Albus's brain. His wand was out and he had joined the trio before he'd even made the decision to do so.

“Is there a problem here?” He asked, hoping that his voice sounded more confident than he was feeling.

The three men turned his way and the taller one flashed a sickly sweet smile. “A problem? No, I don’t think there’s a problem here. Is there Stephen?” He asked, sarcastically.

Stephen’s pale face broke into a grin that made Albus feel very uneasy. Scorpius felt it too because he shifted uncomfortably under the weight of the other man’s arm. “No problem at all, Chuck. You see, we were just having a little chat with our new friend here about appropriate behavior when in public.” Albus chanced a glance at Scorpius who looked so disgusted that he was on the verge of tears. “Run along now. This involves us and our new friend. It’s none of your business.”

Albus swallowed hard before lifting his wand and pointing it at Chuck, who still had his arm draped around Scorpius’s shoulder. “Get your hands off of him.” He said slowly.

The two just laughed, as if Albus’s arrival was the best thing that could have possibly happened. Then very slowly and menacingly, the fat one – Stephen, approached Albus until they were nose to nose. He smiled widely, his breath smelling strongly of garlic when he spoke. “Yeah? Or what?”

In response Albus lifted his wand but was disarmed before uttering a single syllable. Instead of shrinking at the idea of being wandless, Albus felt liberated. He knew that his wand work left something to be desired but years of being raised amongst James, Teddy, and even Lily at times, had taught him that he was decent with his fists. He immediately launched his body at the man and caught him off guard enough to tackle him to the ground. Albus managed to land two, hard punches to the face before he was grabbed from behind, his arms contorted painfully behind him and his head tilted back by his hair.

Stephen stood, angrily spitting blood onto the ground. “I should have pegged you for a filthy mudblood the second I saw you.” He spat as he charged him, fist cocked.

Albus was able to register three punches to his head before he was dropped, unceremoniously onto the hard ground. He was disoriented, not quite understanding why they had stopped when he saw Stephen’s unconscious body fall onto the earth at his side. Scorpius’s hands frantically grabbed at his bicep, heaving him to his feet and lacing their fingers before pulling Albus after him. “Run!” He screamed.



Ridiculously, the only thing Albus could think about the entire time they were sprinting away from the scene of their crime was how perfectly Scorpius's hand fit in his. This was it, he might be forgiven, and they might actually be able to come back to each other after all the pain. The reality of the moment paired with the adrenaline coursing through his veins reduced him to tears before Scorpius had even fully steered him into an alley. As soon as they rounded the corner, he caught Albus's face in his hands, assessing his wounds with such tenderness that Albus only cried harder. Scorpius's eyes were tearing, his chest heaving from the exertion of the run. "Albus! Are you okay?" He asked between gasps.

Albus shook his head rapidly as tears and blood rolled down his face. "No. NO. I'm so sorry. I'm so, so sorry, Scorpius." He sobbed.

"Oh, Albus..." Scorpius said, his voice already brimming with a forgiveness so strong that Albus thought it might break him in two. Still cradling his face, Scorpius attempted to gently pull their bodies together but Albus resisted.

"NO! Listen! You need to hear this, you deserve to hear this. I didn't mean it. I never meant it. I was just so jealous."

"Shhh..." Scorpius whispered, combing his hands through Albus's hair. "It's fine."

"It's not though! I wanted to hurt you, Scorpius. You! The person who was everything to me. Just because I wanted you and you didn't want me." Scorpius's hands had stilled in his hair and Albus felt shame spreading through his body. "I know that I'm a terrible person for it. I know that I'm the worst friend. I can do better though. I'll work on my jealousy, hell I'll even be best man at your wedding one day, just please, please forgive me."

"Scorpius?" Someone yelling in a panicked voice caused the two friends to step back from one another. Spencer came charging around the corner, terror written all over his face. "Are you okay? Are you hurt? Some girls caught up with me and told me that someone attacked you?" Spencer reached out and pulled Scorpius's body against him.

Scorpius recoiled slightly. "I'm fine. It's Albus." He said, motioning to the pathetic sight in front of them.

“Merlin!” Spencer exclaimed, taking a step towards Albus who only took a step back. “Let me take a look at you, Al. That gash above your eye looks pretty bad.”

“No.” Albus said. “No, I just want to go back to the dorm. Thank you though.” He nodded to them both before starting on his way back to Hogwarts. At first it seemed as though Spencer would follow but Scorpius whispered something to him that stilled him and Albus was thankful for it.

It was over three hours before Scorpius returned to the Slytherin dormitory. In that time, Albus had managed to stop the bleeding from the wound above his eye, it was certainly going to scar but he was still counting it as a win, and he had succeeded in halting the tears so his resemblance to a first year girl was less prominent now. Overall, he was in a much better state by the time Scorpius set eyes on him again and the blond looked extremely relieved for it. When he bounded into the room, Albus had been sitting on his bed, pretending to read but tossed the book to the side at his sudden appearance.

“Hey.” Albus said.

“Hi.” Scorpius replied, sitting down on the end of the bed. “You look a lot better.”

“Oh yeah,” He said sarcastically, “I reckon St. Mungo’s might offer me a job the next time I pop in to visit James.”

Scorpius smiled weakly. “Most certainly.”

“I, um, I’m sorry that I sobbed every feeling that I’ve had over the last four months, at you, in 45 seconds.” Albus said, sheepishly. Scorpius actually snorted with laughter and the sound made a warmth spread rapidly throughout Albus’s body until he was chuckling too. “Really, though, mate, I’m sorry.” Albus said, meeting his friend’s eyes.

Scorpius held his gaze for a moment before swallowing hard and looking down at his hands. "Albus, do you know how I knew I was gay?" He asked.

"I'm told it was some bloke in France?" Albus joked.

Scorpius chuckled and shook his head. "No. It was, ah...Teddy and Victoire's wedding?"

"Ahhh, the night of the flowing firewhiskey!" Albus reminisced fondly. "The adults in my family still designate a 'sober grown-up' for every event so that the kids don't take advantage again."

"Right!" He said, eagerly. "Well, we had had one or two..."

"Or seven." Albus corrected.

Scorpius laughed. "We were pissed and dancing ridiculously with all of your cousins. And then out of nowhere, the song changed." Suddenly Albus's mouth went dry as he already recalled the memory vividly and the implications that this story could have made his pulse quicken. "A slow song came on next and you grabbed my hands and started dancing with me. Just for laughs at first, but then...after a few minutes, something changed. And I really thought that you were going to kiss me for a second. You didn't, of course, but I was left with this confusing new reality that I had wanted you to."

Scorpius tried to catch his eyes but Albus was too frightened of what he would find there to look up. Instead Scorpius continued.

"I should have told you that I was gay, Albus. I just didn't want to lie to you. I say 'I'm gay' and you ask 'how I know.' I couldn't lie but I wasn't ready to risk losing you." Scorpius's voice sounded heavy as he spoke.

There was a tense silence in the air that Albus didn't dare break. He needed to be sure that he was understanding correctly before he risked words.

"I broke it off with Spencer."

Albus audibly gasped, his head snapping up to assess the blond. "What? Why?"

Scorpius smiled a small, tentative smile. "Because, Albus, If there's even a chance that you..." Scorpius let the thought hang in the air.

"Love you?" Albus pressed.

He nodded. "If you love me." Albus watched his throat as he visibly swallowed, before whispering. "If you want me."

Those four simple words awakened something within Albus that he hadn't dared let himself feel. A sudden hunger mixing with the familiar longing that had been saturating his every cell for so long. As if by its own volition his body moved slowly towards the beautiful blond, his eyes flickering from the hard set, grey-blue eyes, down to perfect, pink lips, his tongue darting out to wet his own while he moved.

Scorpius's chest was heaving, as he attempted to keep his voice steady through his breathlessness. "...then Albus, how could there be anyone else?" He managed to say just as Albus reached him, his hands cupping the back of his neck, anchoring himself to the moment, in the tufts of blond hair.

When their lips finally met, Albus wasn't sure how one person could feel so many emotions simultaneously. Gentle laughter, relieved sighs, and soft tears, intermingled with a desperate guttural desire. Their lips, their bodies, their souls, like magnets that had been pulling towards this inevitability since that fateful day on the train. Albus was lost in Scorpius, his brain narrowing to a singular focus. More, closer, deeper, until finally after what somehow felt like both mere seconds and an eternity, they were one.

And every time that Albus's nerves started to get the best of him, that he felt as though he would flounder, Scorpius was there. His hands, his lips, his whispers, quietly leading him through the unknown, as he had since the day they met, so long ago. And as Albus moved through this new world with his friend beneath him, he fully started to understand James's words.

Albus was still himself, a whole person, without Scorpius in his life. He could find happiness, bring good into the world, and have meaningful relationships with the people around him. However, it was with this person gently guiding and encouraging him that he felt self-assured enough to reach his full potential. Simply put, with Scorpius, he was better. With Scorpius, the pieces of his life just fell into place.

And after, as he cradled his friend to his chest and ran his hand through his soft, blond hair, he couldn't help but smile at the perfection of it all.

As if reading his mind, Scorpius broke the silence. "I'm really proud of you, you know?"

Albus chuckled. "What did I finally find something I'm good at?"

Scorpius bit his lip, his cheeks pinkening slightly. "Well, yes. That's not what I meant, though." He said as flipped to his stomach so that he could fully look at Albus's face. "I really didn't know, Albus. I should have, but I didn't and that had to have been so hard on you, that the one person who knows you best just didn't see it. You made it through, though, and you didn't just survive, you excelled. I'm just really proud of you for that."

Albus took a moment before answering. "Thank you. Is it weird that I'm glad you didn't know? I think I really needed that time."

Scorpius smiled up at him before placing an innocent kiss on his chest. "I know. And to be honest, as hard as it was, I'm glad that you had it. Now that you're here though. Now that we're finally here in this new version of us, I'd really like it if you'd stay with me."

Albus's face lit up, he could not remember a time when he felt more whole. "Always, Scorpius." He said, leaning down and kissing him. "Always."

# Epilogue

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Four + years later -

"Would you stop?" Albus whispered, slapping his hand down on his boyfriend's knee in an attempt to stop the incessant bouncing.

Scorpius flashed him an apologetic smile. "Sorry! I'm just so nervous."

Albus chuckled. "Yeah, I picked up on that but now you're making me nervous." He squeezed his knee reassuringly before leaning in and placing a quick kiss on the blond's lips. "And anyway, it's going to be fine."

"I made pie!" Harry interrupted excitedly, entering the room with his wife close on his heels. "It's a new recipe though so you have to tell me if it's rubbish."

"He says that but don't really tell him." Ginny said in a stage whisper. "His ego is easily bruised."

"Har, har, har." Harry mocked "For that, you can get your own pie." He said, serving each of the boys before grabbing a piece and settling into his seat with a smug smile.

Ginny only rolled her eyes and cut an absurdly large piece for herself before turning her attention to their guests. "So, boys, what did you want to talk to us about?"

Albus felt Scorpius tense at his side, sending a ripple of anxiety through his body. "Umm..." He stammered, suddenly at a loss for words.

Instinctively his eyes flickered to Scorpius's face, who had looked back to him for the same reassurance. When their eyes met, emerald green staring into piercing blue, Scorpius's face split into a tender smile and Albus felt a warmth bloom in his chest. Albus grabbed his hand, suddenly forgetting every reason to be nervous and turned to face his parents. "We actually have some news..."

At that moment the unmistakable sound of the floor echoed throughout the dining room followed by a familiar, yet unwelcome, voice.

"Mom! Dad! Get in here, I have news!" Albus squeezed his eyes shut in an attempt to squelch his annoyance as his little sister bounded into the room.

He felt a comforting tug as Scorpius looped his arm around his shoulder and pulled him closer.

"Lily, now is really not a good time." Ginny said in the exasperated tone that was saved solely for the youngest Potter. "The boys were just about to tell us something."

Lily rounded on her brother with an impressive speed. "Have you seriously not told them yet?" When Albus only glared at her, she continued. "Well get on with it. My news is better."

Albus swallowed hard, irritation rapidly overtaking any warmth or nerves he was feeling. This was definitely not the way he had envisioned making this announcement. "Well..." He said, turning his attention back to his parents. "Umm, we've been meaning to tell you...that is, we've decided. We think it's best..."

"Oh for Dumbledore's sake!" Lily interrupted. "Albus finally worked up the nerve to propose to Scorpius and surprise, surprise, he said yes."

Albus's mouth had fallen open in shock at Lily's sudden outburst. He was so focused on his hostility towards his sister that he almost missed his parents' reaction.

"Seriously?" Ginny yelled excitedly.

"That's fantastic!" Harry said, jumping to his feet and pulling Scorpius into a warm hug.

"Yes." Lily continued, completely disregarding Albus's clear disgust with her. "And they were really nervous to tell you guys because they've decided that Albus will take the Malfoy name."

"Wait. What?" Harry said, the smile falling from his face as he released Scorpius, who looked as though he wanted the ground to swallow him whole.

"Lily!" Albus admonished. "I'm going to kill you."

Lily flashed him an innocent smile. "What? You would've taken all evening to spit it out. I've done you a favor. And anyway, I said I have news too."

Harry who had not moved or said anything continued as though no one was speaking. "Just Malfoy? Not Potter-Malfoy? Or even Malfoy-Potter?" He asked hopefully. Ginny had moved to stand beside her husband and was rubbing comforting circles on his back.

"Just Malfoy." Albus said decisively.

Scorpius looked between the Potter men, discomfort clear on his face before standing abruptly. "Lily has news! YAY!" He shouted in an almost manic voice, flailing his hands in the air.

The Potters all stared at him for a beat before falling into fits of laughter. When he had composed himself, Harry spoke. "Well it wouldn't have been my first name choice for you," he said, pulling Albus into a hug. "But it definitely would have been my first husband choice. Congratulations, son."



Albus beamed at him. "Thanks, dad."

"Aww, that's really sweet." Lily said insincerely from the door frame. "Now my news! Come on."

Her parents shrugged and went after her into the living room. Scorpius made to follow but Albus caught his arm and pulled him against his chest. "See?" He said, placing a sweet kiss on his fiancée's cheek. "Nothing to worry about."

"Oh yeah," Scorpius deadpanned. "Totally painless."

Albus chuckled. "I love you so much."

Scorpius caught his face in his hands and pulled him into a proper kiss. "Always, future Mr. Malfoy."

Suddenly Ginny's shrieking voice broke into their intimate moment. "You have got to be kidding me!"

Scorpius pulled a terrified face but Albus only smiled excitedly before grabbing his fiancée's hand and bounding into the living room.

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! I love being a part of such a fun and supportive community. I'll be back in two weeks with a brief Lily fic before launching into the sequel. See you there!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!