

## Turning Leaves

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/28801887) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/28801887>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Explicit</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Category:	<a href="#">M/M</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter</a> , <a href="#">Draco Malfoy/Charlie Weasley</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Harry Potter</a> , <a href="#">Draco Malfoy</a> , <a href="#">Hermione Granger</a> , <a href="#">Ron Weasley</a> , <a href="#">Pansy Parkinson</a> , <a href="#">Charlie Weasley</a> , <a href="#">Blaise Zabini</a> , <a href="#">Ginny Weasley</a> , <a href="#">Theodore Nott</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Time Travel</a> , <a href="#">Drunk Sex</a> , <a href="#">Pining Draco Malfoy</a> , <a href="#">Unspeakable Draco Malfoy</a> , <a href="#">Auror Harry Potter</a> , <a href="#">Unspeakable Hermione Granger</a> , <a href="#">Angst and Fluff and Smut</a> , <a href="#">Slytherin Harry Potter</a> , <a href="#">Hermione Granger &amp; Draco Malfoy Friendship</a> , <a href="#">Pining</a> , <a href="#">Angst with a Happy Ending</a> , <a href="#">Draco Malfoy &amp; Pansy Parkinson Friendship</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Hogwarts House Sorting</a> , <a href="#">Post-Battle of Hogwarts</a> , <a href="#">Hogwarts Era</a> , <a href="#">Hogwarts Prefects' Bathroom</a> , <a href="#">Clubbing</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Sectumsempra Scene</a>   <a href="#">Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter's Duel in the Bathroom</a> , <a href="#">Draco Malfoy is Obsessed with Harry Potter</a> , <a href="#">Draco Malfoy In Love</a> , <a href="#">Gay Charlie Weasley</a> , <a href="#">Harry Potter is Bad at Feelings</a> , <a href="#">angsty angst</a> , <a href="#">Quidditch Player Ginny Weasley</a> , <a href="#">Harry Potter Epilogue What Epilogue</a>   <a href="#">EWE</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-01-17 Completed: 2021-02-17 Words: 112,655 Chapters: 29/29

# Turning Leaves

by [Kbrick](#)

## Summary

Draco and Harry have a one-night stand that ends in disaster after Harry tells Draco he's unable to move beyond their poisonous past. So when Draco finds an unusual Time-Turner in the Department of Mysteries, he seizes the opportunity to start fresh with Harry. Only instead of fixing things, he keeps making them worse.

# The Worst Morning After

“I keep turning over new leaves, and spoiling them, as I used to spoil my copybooks; and I make so many beginnings there never will be an end. (Jo March)” — Louisa May Alcott, Little Women

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Even before he opened his eyes, Draco could feel the dull ache at his temples. Sunlight pressed heavy against his closed lids, and his limbs felt slow and damp with whiskey-tinged sweat. As he'd done countless mornings, he felt for the vial of hangover potion on the nightstand and, raising himself up onto one elbow, tossed it down his throat, trying not to gag at the sweaty-socks taste of it. It was cruel, to make a potion that fought off nausea so nauseating.

Draco opened his eyes reluctantly and fixed his gaze on the cool, dreamy blue of his bedroom walls. He'd shower - ugh, did he ever need a shower - and then he'd go to the office, finish up his work on the chest of drawers the department received last week.

He'd found, through trial and error and some preliminary research, the purpose of the top two drawers (a nude image of whomever you fancied at the moment would appear in the top drawer after a brief incantation, and if you placed a piece of paper with a name on it into the second, that person would feel intense sexual desire for you for the next several hours), but the lower two still eluded him.

His head had stopped pounding now and his thoughts were a bit clearer. Thank Circe. He turned back to the nightstand and noticed his wand wasn't there. Sometimes after he'd been drinking, he'd fall asleep clutching it, a remnant of those dark days when he was never safe, not in waking moments or dreaming ones. He turned to the bed to see if the wand was tangled up in his blankets.

He didn't see the wand, but then again, the moment he turned, he forgot to look for it.

Because Harry Potter was in his bed. Shirtless.

A shirtless Harry Potter was sleeping in Draco's bed.

Draco pulled up the cover an inch and peeked, curious, and was met with a vision of Potter's perky arse. He yanked the cover back down, his cheeks heating.

What the *fuck* was shirtless, pantless Potter doing asleep in his bed?

Draco's mind whirled. He remembered bits and pieces of the night before. Potter had been at the pub, but then he often was on Fridays, the Aurors mixing and mingling with those from

other Ministry departments.

The Unspeakables usually kept to themselves, off in a corner, except for Zabini of course, who flitted from table to table (Zabini was honestly the *worst* choice for the Departments of Mysteries; Draco marveled that he'd managed to go the last five years without breaching any secrecy standards). As for Draco, he preferred the booth in the corner to the pub at large. For one thing, it was full of his colleagues, who, at this point, respected him well enough to look beyond his past, unlike everyone else.

Even Granger – *Hermione*, now – had grudgingly accepted his presence after a few months of working by his side. She was the brightest mind in the department, which obviously annoyed Draco to no end but also came in handy when he needed someone to bounce ideas off of. A few months in, and he and Hermione were consulting with one another frequently. And somewhere in the midst of their many work-related chats, they'd begun to open up bit by bit, and eventually, they'd become...well, if not *friends*, exactly, then something close to it. She began to come round to his on Saturday afternoons when they were trying to crack open some particularly challenging piece of magic, and then a few months into that, she'd invited him and Luna to dinner at the house she shared with Weasley. It had happened a good number of times since then, too. Those dinners were occasionally peppered with tension, because Weasley was still a prick sometimes. Other times, though, they were fine. Pleasant, even. Draco could talk to Hermione forever, and counted Luna as a dear friend.

Over the course of their ever-developing relationship, Draco found himself telling Hermione things that he rarely told anyone, save perhaps Pansy. She knew he was gay, of course, and rather lonely. She knew of his conflicting feelings regarding his father's death and his worry for his mother. She knew a rather frightening amount of information about Draco, really, now that he thought about it.

But he'd never told her about Potter. He'd never told *anyone* about Potter, because that was the most embarrassing secret of all, because it was *Potter*, and he was Draco Malfoy.

And that was the other reason Draco preferred the corner booth. Potter and the other Aurors were usually parked up towards the front of the pub, rowdy and loud, hollering at everyone who walked past, bragging about their most recent adventures capturing baddies. Potter occasionally ventured to the back corner booth to speak with Hermione, but beyond that, he stayed away.

And that was good.

It was good because Potter was so bloody *nice* ever since the war ended, holding the lift for him if they found themselves in the lobby at the same time or making small talk with him at Ministry events.

Draco never knew quite how to deal with it. He knew how to shout at Potter, how to strive against him, how to *hate* him. But in this bizarre post-war landscape, where Potter asked Draco whether he'd listened to yesterday's Quiddich match or whether he had weekend plans, Draco found himself utterly lost. Because once the rivalry and that tangled mess of resentment had disappeared, he found he didn't actually hate Potter at all. He was jealous of

him, a bit – hard not to be, since he was the wizarding world’s brightest star – but even that was a sallow, impotent feeling. A bite with no teeth.

No, the terrible truth was, he mostly admired Potter, for, among other things, the way he tried to be personable and kind despite the ridiculous heights of his fame, and for the way that he had the highest solve rate in the Auror department, choosing to bust his arse rather than coast on his name.

He could admit it now: Harry Potter was an incredible person. Harry Potter had *always* been an incredible person, and deep down, Draco supposed he had always known it. After everything that had happened, Draco could admit that Potter was twice the man that he was. And the craziest part of it was that somehow, that admittance didn’t sting the way it should have. It was simply a truth, like the existence of magic or gravity.

Harder to admit were the other feelings, the dark, night-time thoughts that assaulted him when he was alone in his bed.

Last night, though...

Draco’s department had been celebrating. That afternoon, Unspeakable Clarke had wrapped up a two-year project that nearly killed him a dozen times, and Hermione and Weasley had gotten engaged the weekend before.

That was why Potter came to the back booth: to raise a glass to Hermione’s engagement along with the rest of them. Draco was already slightly untethered from reality, thanks to several rounds of shots, when Potter came ambling towards them in a soft, burgundy jumper and tight jeans that did things to Draco’s stomach.

He’d met Draco’s eyes with his fierce green ones, burning behind those stupid glasses that Draco had become unreasonably fond of. “Malfoy,” he’d said, and it held none of the old venom, and he’d been smiling crookedly.

They’d done more shots and Weasley had shown up. And then...

They’d played darts, then.

Yes, darts, and Draco had been on a team with Potter against Weasley and Hermione, and he’d played brilliantly, and he’d been stupidly proud because Potter was so pleased when he got two bullseyes in a row. They’d come up with some sort of handshake, hadn’t they? And then more shots, and then Blaise was whispering in Draco’s ear about how Potter was staring at him, and Hermione was giving him concerned looks, and then, oh shit, he *had* told her, hadn’t he? Whispered it to her in the women’s toilet as she was trying (and falling over herself in a giggly mess while doing so) to paint Draco’s lips with her lipstick.

She’d stopped messing with the lipstick then and raised her eyebrow at him. Then she asked him if he’d ever thought about doing anything about it. He’d said no, of course not, and she’d told him – archly, her facial expression much too prim for someone who was having to grip the sink to remain vertical– that perhaps he should reconsider. And then...

And then...

He had no idea. The rest of the evening was a complete blank.

The fact that Potter was here in his bed and Draco had no idea how he'd gotten there or what had happened seemed to be the worst sort of unfairness. It had probably been the best night of his life and he couldn't fucking remember it.

He would remember *this*, though, wouldn't he?

He looked over at the sleeping form next to him. Potter hadn't moved an inch and his breathing was deep and even, his lips parted gently. Had Draco kissed those lips? If Potter was naked, it stood to reason that they'd kissed. Just the thought of it made him his insides go soft and molten.

Potter's dark hair swept messily across his forehead, the edge of that famous scar peeking out from under it. His eyelashes were sooty against his cheeks. Draco had fairly well memorized the shape and color and gleam of Potter's eyes – they were so incredibly vibrant and so intense that it was difficult not to fall into them repeatedly. But he'd never taken time to appreciate the lashes, so long and dark and lovely. Potter's cheeks were pink, flushed with sleep, and he was so fucking beautiful that Draco could hardly breathe.

Should he wake him now? Shower and then wake him? Or perhaps he should wait in the kitchen until Potter woke up on his own, to give him some space.

But no, he didn't want to leave this bed, leave this moment, until he had to. He picked up one of the books that was on his bedside table – *Enchanted Root Cellars of London* – and opened it, ostensibly to read. Instead, though, he kept looking, his eyes tracing the shape of that familiar face again and again, trying to memorize every detail. Draco studied, unabashedly, the line of Potter's broad shoulder, the vulnerable, soft-looking skin of his neck, the muscles of his back, and the broad, calloused hand with fingers softly curled instead of clenched.

The sleeping figure shifted, and Draco felt his heart thud uncomfortably as he turned his gaze back to the book, staring at it so intently that he should've burned a hole in the pages.

"Wha-?" came a hoarse voice, and Draco pretended to have just noticed that there was another person in bed with him.

"Oh, hello," he said, his voice casual and impressively steady.

Potter shot up like a cannon blast. "What the fuck am I doing here?" he asked.

Draco felt his throat close up. "I was hoping you might be able to tell me," he said lightly.

"Accio glasses," Potter said, and pushed them onto his face. His eyes were green as summer grass.

"The pub," Potter said, running a hand through his hair, which only served to muck it up further. "Darts. And Hermione...*shit*."

“Did – did Hermione tell you something?” Draco asked. He would kill her, or maybe hide all of her Sleekeasy’s so she had to walk around with a head full of frizz like she had in school.

Potter nodded. “She kept saying I should, er, go for it.” His cheeks pinked and he turned away.

“Oh,” Draco said, his murder-y rage melting into a glowing feeling that made him want to hug Hermione and buy her expensive presents instead of ruin her hair.

“Would you like –“ Draco began.

“I should probably –“ Potter said at the same time.

“Oh,” they both said together.

“Draco,” Potter said, his eyes softening and meeting Draco’s directly for the first time.

Not Malfoy. *Draco*.

Potter’s calloused Auror’s hand reached up and Draco felt it brush against his cheek and he leaned into it, his eyes fluttering closed. Merlin, he’d wanted this for so, so long and now Potter – *Harry* – was here, naked in his bed, and *touching him*. It might’ve been a dream, except parts of it were gloriously real, from the smell of their boozy sweat to the almost painful ache of Draco’s cock to the absurd disaster that was Potter’s hair. It was *real*.

“I can’t do this.”

Draco startled, knocking the empty bottle of hangover potion onto the floor, where it clattered and rolled noisily to the wall. “What?” he asked, and it took every single ounce of control he had to keep his voice steady.

“I want to. Merlin, I *want* to. But I – I can’t.”

He wanted to, so that was not entirely bad, was it? Perhaps it was a practical matter of ‘can’t’. “Why?” Draco asked, trying not to sound desperate. “Do you have to be somewhere?”

Potter slipped his fingers under his glasses and rubbed at his eyes. “No, that’s not – Draco, this is crazy. Why would we do this? It won’t ever work, obviously. There’s too much – and I – and we –” he gestured wildly, as though it were the same thing as speaking actual words. “We just can’t.”

“We already did, though,” Draco pointed out.

“But we were absolutely pissed...” He trailed off and slumped against the headboard.

“You still hate me,” Draco said, steeling himself.

“God, no,” Potter said, sitting up again. “No! Of course not. But it’s not that simple. I can have forgiven you and still not be able to –“

*“Forgiven me?”*

Potter blinked at him. “Er, that’s not what I meant.”

“Good, because I don’t actually remember ever apologizing to you, *Potter*.” It was easy to slip back into the old habit of saying his name like a curse. Too easy.

“See? This is what I mean. It’ll never work. There’s too much history. Too much bad blood. Too many dark memories that will eat away at the good stuff.”

Shit.

There was a look of resolve in that aching lovely face, that face that was as familiar to him as his own. And he knew, from more than a decade of experience, that once Potter had made up his mind about something, there would be no changing it.

There was no hope for them, then.

Draco’s chest felt much like it had when Potter had slashed it open in the bathroom at Hogwarts. Exposed, bloody, torn. But even so, his pride -- his stupid, *stupid* pride -- would not let him grieve silently. “Listen,” he said, his voice suddenly cool. “I was hoping for another go with you this morning because – well, because why not? You were a decent enough fuck. But if you’re not up for it, that’s not a problem.” He rose, forcing himself to stand straight, to radiate utter confidence despite the ragged hole in his chest, despite his nakedness, both literally and otherwise. With fingers that only trembled a tiny bit, he picked up his black satin robe and thrust an arm into the sleeve.

It almost broke his resolve when he turned back around and glimpsed eyes that were wide and feverish, and cheeks that were bright pink, as Potter stared openly at him.

But, Draco chided himself, *so what?* Draco knew he had a fantastic body, long and leanly muscled and elegant. The dozens of men he’d fucked in loos and alleyways outside of clubs and hurriedly-booked hotel rooms always said so, and so what if Potter had noticed it? The naked lust written across Potter’s face didn’t change a thing.

“Well?” Draco pressed, pulling the robe the rest of the way on and knotting the belt. “Do you plan to sit there all day with your mouth hanging open, or are you leaving?”

Potter blinked, looking confused. “Leaving,” he said, shaking his head as if to clear it. Draco turned towards the window while Potter rose and fumbled around the room for his things. After a few moments, he heard footsteps coming towards him.

“Draco,” Potter said, and suddenly there was a hand on his back, warm through the thin robe.

Draco whirled on him, tossing the hand off. “What?” he snarled, unable to keep the rage from his voice. Fuck Potter for playing with him, for *pitying* him, and for never knowing when to stop pushing.

“I don’t know, it feels wrong. Leaving like this. I don’t know what to say,” he managed.



“Then don’t say *anything*, you complete *idiot*. Stop making this weirder than it has to be. We both enjoyed our little hate-fuck last night. There’s no reason to pick it apart.”

“I told you, I don’t hate you, Draco,” Potter said, his voice and eyes soft even in the face of Draco’s fury.

Draco remained silent, seething.

“I wish...” Potter began, sighing. “I wish things were different.”

“Oh?” said Draco, arching an eyebrow. “What *things*, exactly?”

A helpless shrug.

Draco growled in frustration. “Oh for Merlin’s sake! Why don’t you just say what you mean, Potter? That you wish *I* were different!”

Potter was shaking his head, his expression strange. “No, that’s not - ”

“A more interesting question,” Draco interrupted, “would be *how* different I would have to be to be good enough for our Savior. If I simply hadn’t done this to myself,” he yanked up the sleeve of the robe, exposing his dark mark, and felt a sick sense of triumph when Potter flinched, “could we run off into the sunset together? Or would it require more? Perhaps you’d like it if I had a different family, a different name. Or perhaps if I were nicer, hm? If I were nicer, *then* we could live happily ever after.

“Or maybe...” he continued, properly worked up now, his voice softer and yet somehow more menacing, “...maybe you’d like it if there were an entirely different *person* inside this shell you so enjoy gawping at and fucking, eh Potter?” He took a step forward and Potter took one back, still shaking his head.

“Now, if we’re done chatting, kindly get the *fuck* out of my house,” he finished, his voice low and perfectly cold. It sounded, he realized with some amount of horror, almost like his father’s.

Potter searched Draco’s face for one more moment before dropping his gaze. “Yes, alright,” he said. Draco breathed a sigh of relief as Potter made his way towards the door, but he relaxed too soon, because Potter was suddenly turning to face him one last time, looking determined. “It’s not *you* that I wish were different. It’s *us*; it’s how we are to each other. How we’ve *always* been to each other. I’d give anything to go back in time and erase all the cruel things we’ve said and done to one another over the years, but I *can’t*.”

“You realize that you were the one who started all of it, don’t you?” Draco snapped before he could help himself. “I offered you my hand, a long time ago, on the train. We could have been friends, you and I. But instead, you threw my kindness back in my face.” Draco was appalled by how fresh that rejection felt, given that it was over a decade old.

“Not exactly how I remember it,” Potter said, running his hand over the short hair at the back of his head. “And I recall you being an arsehole even before that. In Madam Malkin’s.”

Draco could almost picture it then, the two of them side-by-side, being measured for first-year robes. He couldn't recall it as clearly as the incident on the train, and he couldn't remember exactly what he'd said. But he'd been pleasant, hadn't he? Maybe he hadn't been *impressed* enough for Potter's taste, but at that point, he hadn't actually known that he was talking to the bloody Boy Who Lived. "I was *trying* to be friendly," he said. "And although I don't remember what I said, I certainly wasn't *cruel* to you."

"No, not to me. Just towards Hagrid and our muggle-born classmates and everyone else who wasn't pure-blooded and raised in a fucking manor," Potter replied.

For a moment, they stared at one another without speaking, and Draco began to think again about those dark eyelashes, and how they'd looked against his cheek, and that was no good. No good, because Potter had made up his mind, and all the wishes in the world couldn't change the way things were between them, the way things had always been. This whole conversation was a painful exercise in futility.

"Please just leave," Draco said, hating the raw edge in his voice.

Potter looked at him for a moment longer, so intently that Draco had to look away. And then Potter slipped out of the room, not even giving Draco the satisfaction of a slammed door.

He walked to the window and looked out onto the busy, sun-drenched street below, fighting the urge to be sick. Today's hangover potion must've been expired, he told himself. He'd have to get some fresh bottles.

Yes, he'd do that today. Fresh bottles of hangover potion, so that when he went out to a club tonight and got shit-faced, he'd have something to take tomorrow morning that wouldn't leave his stomach churning like this.

And while he was at it, maybe he'd get something new to wear tonight, something scandalous and decadent, and maybe he could talk Pansy into coming out with him, and they'd lose themselves in the thump of bass and the oblivion of strong drinks and in pointless sex and glorious anonymity. Pansy was always up for that sort of night; it was one of the many things Draco loved about her.

Surely a night like that would cure him of this feeling, the hollow feeling of loss that was flooding through his veins, branching out over every inch of his body like poison.

It would all be fine, he told himself. Nothing had changed, not really. His life was exactly the same as it had ever been. Potter was vaguely disgusted by him despite the obvious attraction between them, and that was nothing new. Absolutely nothing was different than it had been yesterday or the day before or even ten years before that.

But for some reason, the morning's developments didn't feel like returning to the status quo. It felt like something had been lost, some essential part of himself. "Fuck," Draco mumbled as he slid to the floor, resting his head on his knees. "Fuck."



# Mesh Shirts and Bathroom Blowjob

## Chapter Summary

Draco tries to nurse his wounds in unhelpful ways

“Ho! Ho! Ho! To the bottle I go  
To heal my heart and drown my woe”  
— J.R.R. Tolkien

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“He’s a fucking berk, Draco! Fuck’s sake!” Pansy said, taking a quick sip of her wine and putting on a second coat of mascara. Draco absently wondered how he always ended up in bathrooms with women who were putting on makeup, but that was neither here nor there. “You can do better, darling.”

“Actually, I can’t, according to *Witch Weekly*. He’s been their most eligible bachelor four years running.”

Pansy snorted. “We’re taking advice from those ancient, sexless harpies now, are we? Well, in that case, you really ought to change your shirt, because *Witch Weekly* would consider that an absolute fashion *don’t*.”

Draco looked down at his white, meshed top, through which his nipples were perfectly visible. “I look incredible,” he said.

“Oh, of course you do. That shirt is beyond hot. If you weren’t bent as a u-turn, I would definitely try to sleep with you,” Pansy said, giving her arse a shake for his benefit. “But the old biddies at *Witch Weekly* would not agree with me.”

“No,” he sighed, leaning back against the bright pink wall of Pansy’s bathroom. “I suppose they wouldn’t.”

“Damnit, stop looking like that!”

“Like what?”

“Like *that*!” she said, gesturing to his face. “All...sad. And wistful.” She leaned towards him with a brush of some sort and swept it over his cheeks and eyelids. “There,” she said. “A bit of shimmer. You truly look like sex on a stick, love.”

“Why are people always putting makeup on me?”

Pansy burst out laughing. “Who *else* puts makeup on you?”

“Hermione,” Draco mumbled.

“Ugh, that cow. She’s the one who got you into this mess, don’t you dare compare me to her.” Pansy put her hands on Draco’s cheeks and kissed him quickly on the nose. “It’s because your face is so gorgeous. Makes it fun to play with.”

Draco smiled at her, grateful. Pansy could be an utter bitch, but she could also be like this: fun and kind and compassionate without making him feel like a sad sack. Maybe he ought to just marry her, have one more night of drunken hetero sex (Merlin knew it wouldn’t be the first time for the two of them), pop out an heir, and then they could spend the rest of their lives talking shit about everyone else. There were worse fates, he supposed.

Pansy turned back to the mirror and Draco groaned. “See, this is why I could never marry you,” he said.

“Because I have a vagina?” she asked, smirking.

“Well, yes, and enormous tits, but also because you’re the only fucking person in the universe who takes longer than me to get ready. It’s maddening! Come on, let’s go. You look lovely.”

“Can’t rush perfection,” she said, but she put away her makeup bag and gulped down the rest of her wine. “Alright, let’s be off then.”

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Thanks to the mesh shirt and possibly also the shimmery stuff on his face, it took Draco approximately thirty seconds to catch the attention of some chiseled, dark-haired bloke on the dancefloor. When he saw the man making his way over, though, he grabbed Pansy and steered her towards the bar. “I need another drink,” he said.

“But that one was so fit!” she cried.

“I know, Pans. I just need a drink first.”

They each ordered double gin and tonics and gulped them down, and within minutes, Draco was feeling it. He’d already had several while waiting for Pansy to get ready, and this was putting him over the edge.

Good.

They took a shot of Jager for good measure and headed back out to the floor. Draco gave himself over to the music, and the night began to shine. This was one of his favorite things. To not exist, to be submerged in a frenzied, chaotic crowd, to feel nothing but the pulse of music pounding through his body. Pansy danced all up on him the way she always did when she was wasted, giggling and loose-limbed. The next hour or so flew by, and he was lost in it all and even happy.

Draco was just beginning to need a break when, out of the corner of his eye, he saw the man with dark hair from earlier. Maybe it was the extra drinks talking, but Draco could swear he

looked a bit like Potter without glasses. The man noticed him looking, and soon he was dancing next to Draco, smiling at him and putting a hand on Draco's waist.

The guy danced rather well. Potter probably danced like a complete moron, if Draco had to guess. He almost started giggling, trying to imagine it, and then all of a sudden the man's mouth was close to his ear. "You're so fucking sexy," he said.

Draco knew what came next. He let the man press closer, noting with some irritation that his eyes were blue and not green, and then they were kissing as they danced, their bodies brushing up against each other's, tongues meeting lips and tongues and throats, and a lovely rush of desire was flooding Draco's senses.

See? Potter hadn't broken him after all. He was fine. He was better than fine.

When he found himself in one of the stalls with his jeans unzipped, he told himself to relax and enjoy it. The man was apparently the giving sort, because all he wanted to do was suck Draco off. Draco wasn't complaining.

"Your cock's as gorgeous as the rest of you," the man whispered, his breath hot on Draco's neck as he wrapped a hand around the base of said cock. "Fucking hell."

He got down on his knees and took the tip into his mouth, swirling his tongue around the head, and then before Draco could even react, he was plunging his mouth down the shaft, pulling Draco deep into his throat, and moaning like it was the most delicious thing he'd ever tasted.

Draco leaned his head back against the tile and closed his eyes. He was not going to imagine this was Potter.

He was absolutely not going to imagine this was Potter.

He was imagining this was Potter.

He gasped loudly then, and watched as this lovely, very accommodating man who was *not Harry Fucking Potter* sucked him like a champ, maneuvering with a great amount of gusto and finesse. This man could win first-place in a dick-sucking competition, he truly could. He was playing with Draco's balls just enough, and keeping up a very fine tempo, and practically choking himself on Draco's cock.

Draco let out a rough groan as he felt himself barreling towards his climax, and he came fast and hot and the bloke just gulped it all down and smiled as he eased his mouth off of Draco. Draco felt very warm towards him, like he might towards a puppy that had fetched a newspaper. "Thanks," Draco said. "Do you want me to...?"

The guy blushed intensely red. "No, I...I already..."

"Oh," Draco said.

"Yeah," said the guy.

“Okay, well.”

“Could I...honestly, I’d love your number.”

Okay, maybe Draco didn’t feel all *that* warm towards him.

“No, I’m afraid not,” Draco said, zipping up. “But thank you. Really.” He stepped out of the stall and didn’t even stop to wash his hands, because he needed to get out. He needed to get out right now and he didn’t want to be in this fucking club, awkwardly avoiding this most-certainly-not-Harry-Potter-person, and he was sick of this fucking stupid shirt and why in Merlin’s name had he allowed Pansy to make him all shimmery?

He found Pansy on the dancefloor sandwiched between a blonde girl and a blonde boy who looked weirdly similar, like they might be a really kinky brother-and-sister-duo. He decided he didn’t want to know about it if they were, at least not until tomorrow morning. “Pans, I’m going,” he said loudly near her ear.

She raised her eyebrows. “That was fast.”

He managed a smile. “You know me.”

“You staying at mine tonight?” she asked.

He was going to go home and sulk, probably, so no. “No,” he said. “I wouldn’t want to ruin your chances with Hansel and Gretel.” He leaned in closer. “Do you not find them a bit creepy?”

“Yeah. Hot though,” she replied.

He supposed they were, in a strapping, Nordic, possibly twin-ish sort of way.

“Have fun,” he said, kissing her on the cheek. He hurried outside and decided to walk a bit, his boots clacking against the pavement, streetlights buzzing overhead. He wondered what Potter was doing tonight, whether he was thinking about Draco at all. If he felt terrible about this morning. Draco hoped he felt really, really terrible.

On top of the general melancholy that had enveloped Draco after his brief, post-coital haze faded, a strange sort of guilt was sweeping over him. It didn’t even make sense, given that Potter had made it clear there would be nothing more between them. And yet, there it was.

He didn’t want to consider that it was because Potter wouldn’t approve of messy bathroom blowjobs with strangers.

Though really, who cared what Potter approved or didn’t approve of? Fuck him. Fuck him and his stupid black and white view of the world and his stupid, bullheaded convictions and his stupid, priggish standards. And fuck his eyelashes, honestly. Fuck those fucking eyelashes straight to hell.

Draco got sick of walking then. He ducked into a dark alley and apparated home. But, standing in his dark and empty entryway, he decided that he didn’t want to be home after all.

Home was where his bed was, and his bed was where Potter had been, and he hadn't even washed the Potter-smell off of his sheets. Before he could even think about what he was doing, Draco stepped over to the fireplace and tossed some Floo Powder into it. "Ministry of Magic," he said, stepping into the green flames.



# Up the Mountain

## Chapter Summary

Draco takes a chance

“The past is never dead. It's not even past.”  
— William Faulkner

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The Ministry was dark and deserted, of course, seeing as it was the wee hours of Sunday morning. Draco wasn't a stranger to coming in when it was quiet like this. Sometimes, he'd solve some work-related puzzle or another in the middle of the night (he didn't sleep very soundly since the war) and instead of waiting until morning to check his theory, he'd throw on his robes and head in.

He usually hadn't been pounding gin all night, though. That part was new.

Draco didn't mind coming in at all hours, really. He loved his job. He was proud to be part of such an elite, historically-important department. The Department of Mysteries had existed before the Ministry itself, and some of its secrets were older still. And the work itself was always challenging, always interesting.

Some projects were like a game of chess: a series of complicated moves that you had to be quite strategic about if you wanted to win. And you definitely wanted to win, because losing often meant being injured or driven insane or any number of other unpleasant results. Other times, the work occupied a different space in Draco's head, taking him to a theoretical, almost dreamy place where no idea was too big or too strange, where it was acceptable to question anything and everything, and where he felt almost as though he were pulling at strings in the very fabric of the universe.

He liked both sorts of projects, although it was in the midst of the latter that he felt most like a wizard. Like Merlin, up in his tower, summoning lightning and learning the song of the stars.

The lift spat him out on Level 9. He was currently working in the Love Chamber, on that silly chest. The bottom drawer was the one Draco was most concerned about. There was something sinister there, something that, when Draco'd run his initial diagnostic on the thing, made his dark mark sting and his stomach heave. He was outside the entry to the chamber, about to go in, when something stopped him.

He was thinking, he realized, about Unspeakable Clarke and the Time Room. Nobody knew much about the project that had tried to murder Clarke again and again, except that it was

time related. Draco knew a bit about what went on in the Time Room because Hermione had worked on several projects there. Apparently, she had been interested in time ever since she'd used a Time-Turner back in school (a fact which made Draco incredibly jealous, because why had no one let *him* use a Time-Turner in school?).

He knew, from talking to Hermione, that a typical Time-Turner took a week or so to properly study and catalog. It stood to reason, then, that Unspeakable Clarke had not been working with anything close to typical.

Suddenly, Draco felt a burning urge to *know*. He'd been curious about Clarke's project from the start, but now that it was officially wrapped up, it was possibly – *probably*, Draco told himself – safe.

Safe-*ish*.

He turned away from the Love Chamber and made his way back past the lifts, past the Thought Chamber with its revolting Brain Room, and there it was. The Time Room. Draco had only been in there a handful of times, but he had clearance. Not to the little room off the back where Clarke kept whatever it was he'd been studying, but Draco would deal with that locked door when he got there. For now, he only had to wave his wand in front of the Time Room door and he was in.

The room was much more crowded than the last time he'd been in here. Time-Turners of all shapes and sizes sat unguarded on wooden desks and clinical-looking tables. Draco guessed these were mostly turners with Hour-Reversal Charms, which made them much more stable, limiting how far back a user could go. Five hours was generally considered the limit if you wanted to avoid trouble.

A few of the turners spread around the room had spells of protection in place. These, he guessed, did not have Hour-Reversal Charms, which meant you could use them to go way the hell back in time, back to the Stone Age if you wished. Hence, the added security.

But Clarke's Time-Turner must be something different, or it would be out here with the rest. And Draco desperately wanted to see it, to understand it. He walked towards the little room off the back, where the thing was kept, and ran his wand over the door. Warded to the gills. Of course it was.

Clarke's office was just outside of the Time Room. Draco popped back out into the hall and made his way towards it. He could get into a lot of trouble poking his head around in places he didn't belong, but the likelihood of someone finding him here at (he glanced at the clock) 3:52 in the morning was slim.

He tried the handle of Clarke's office, expecting wards or at least for it to be locked, but to his surprise, it swung open easily. Draco almost lost his nerve then, almost turned around, but he didn't. Instead, he tip-toed to the desk. "Lumos," he whispered, and gazed at the messy piles of papers and charts spread out across it.

And there, under a cup of tea long gone cold, was a catalog file with Friday's date stamped in red on the cover. It was *the* project – the one they'd been celebrating.

Draco picked it up, an irrational fear of getting caught washing over him, making his heart beat double-time and his palms go slick and cold. He read quickly, skimming, but then he had to slow down and read it again, because this...this was fucking incredible.

Instead of dragging you across the years at warp-speed (hence Eloise Mintumble, who traveled from 1899 to 1402 and back again, returning home five-hundred years older before promptly dying), it seemed that this turner picked you up where you were and plopped you down in another time, somehow protecting you from the wear and tear of the travel itself. Furthermore, it allowed you to jump around from point to point, forward and backward, without any limitations save one: you could only travel to times in which you were alive. If you went beyond the date of your birth, you would kill yourself. And if you went beyond the date of your death in the opposite direction, you would, once again, kill yourself.

Ah, so that explained Unspeakable Clarke's dozen near-misses. Draco wondered if the man had been trying to pinpoint the date of his own death. Draco could see himself wanting to do that, macabre as it was.

There were a few sketches of the turner included in the file. It looked nothing like the ones he'd seen, which largely resembled clocks and hourglasses. This was almost like a scale, the sort used in a healer's office, a row of numbers on top and one on bottom, with a piece that slid along each row.

Draco realized his head was spinning, and then considered it was nearly morning and he hadn't slept and was maybe still a bit drunk. But at least he hadn't been thinking about Potter for a while. That was progress, he supposed. And now maybe he was so beyond tired that he would be able to fall asleep when he got home, despite the Potter-smell of his sheets.

He put the file carefully back under the stale mug of tea. "Somebody needs to clean his bloody office," Draco muttered as he turned to leave.

Suddenly, though, something caught his eye. Something underneath Clarke's disaster of a desk, glinting silver in the light of Draco's wand. He bent down to take a look. There was a musky-smelling set of robes on top of whatever it was, and only a sliver of metal was peeking through. Lip curled, Draco moved the robes aside with his wand.

And gasped. Because there underneath Clarke's dirty robes was the Time-Turner. Carefully, Draco picked it up and set it on top of the desk. It looked exactly like the sketches, like the scale in a healer's office, but it was made of intricately embellished silver. The pieces that ran along the rows of numbers were gems: a ruby on the top row and a moonstone on the bottom.

There was a square of silver below the rows of numbers that juttred out, and set into the silver was a handprint. And in the palm of the handprint, words were carved: *The water of time flows downhill, but I will send it back up the mountain; I will bend its path to my will.*

Draco felt his hand rise, almost of its own accord, settling gently into the indentation, and something in the air seemed to shimmer.

He knew, suddenly, what he was going to do. Maybe he'd known it all along, or at least had been considering the possibility.

He was going to grant Potter's wish.

He was going to go back in time and fix all the things that had gone wrong between them. He was going to make it better, make *himself* better. Make himself worthy of Harry Potter's affections.

The top row of numbers was one through one hundred. The span of a life. Draco pushed the ruby over so that it rested in the notch above the number eleven. He slid the moonstone, which was on a scale of one through twelve, over to the place right before the number eight and then considered it for a moment. If this was Draco's lifeline, then perhaps it was not the month of the year that mattered, but the number of months beyond his own date of birth. He shifted the moonstone to a point just behind the number two.

He set his hand back down onto the silver handprint and felt the strange charge in the air again. Then he spoke the words he knew to be carved into the meat of the silver below his palm.

"The water of time flows downhill, but I will send it back up the mountain; I will bend its path to my will."

A feeling tore through Draco's body, incredibly painful, like he was being ripped in half.

He opened his mouth to scream but no sound came out, and then he realized he didn't seem to have a mouth, or any corporeal self at all. He was water, rushing water, and the world was spinning, spinning, like a great bathtub drain. Spinning and spinning, no end in sight, and Draco wanted to kick himself because he was going to die, wasn't he, in this stupid time bathtub, and what the *fuck* had he been thinking?

And then, suddenly, it stopped.

Draco opened his eyes – he had eyes again – and found himself staring down the bustling row of shops on Diagon Alley.

# Back to the Beginning

## Chapter Summary

Draco starts fresh

“Of course, a story always begins with such a coincidence.”  
— Kōji Suzuki, Ring

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Draco stood motionless, mouth opening and closing like a spectacularly dim trout.

“Draco?” came a voice from behind.

Draco spun around to look at his mother, bustling out of Twilfitt and Tattings with two overfull bags. She set one down and tapped her wand against the other, shrinking it down to the size of a coin before placing it into her pocket. She picked up the other one and huffed.

She was lovely.

She was still lovely, all those years from now, but here, on this sun-drenched street, Draco saw clearly how time had changed her. Here, before her life was full of blood and terror and pain and loss, the little worry lines across her forehead were not yet present and her eyes were clear and vibrant. She was thin, of course (she’d always been thin), but healthy, with none of her more recent tendency-towards-gauntness. She stood straight as a pin, unconcerned, proud, whole. A little irritated, perhaps, as she looked at him.

“Mother,” Draco managed, resisting the urge to throw his arms around her. His voice was high and strange; a child’s voice. As she approached, Draco realized that she was quite a bit taller than he was, something that hadn’t been true for years.

“I told you to meet me at Madam Malkin’s when you were finished! And what on earth is that thing?”

Draco looked down, dazed, feeling like he was in a dream, and realized he was clutching the Time-Turner. “It’s...it’s a scale. Supposed to be helpful for Potions.”

She tutted. “The only requirements for Potions are a cauldron and a textbook. I told you to stick to the list or we’ll be here all day. Here,” she said, taking the time turner and shoving it into her second bag before shrinking that one down. “I’ll carry it for you. Now, come along!” She pulled him down the street and into Madam Malkin’s Robes for All Occasions.

Draco blinked. Madam Malkin’s. Potter. Potter was here.

Madam Malkin herself was inside, squat and wearing garish mauve robes. “Good afternoon!” she greeted them. “Hogwarts?”

“Yes,” Draco’s mother said, giving him a gentle push forward. “First year.”

“Oh, how exciting!” Madam Malkin said. “Right this way.” She led him to the back, and Draco braced himself. Potter was back here, just back here...

It took him a moment to realize the back was empty except for another witch holding a pincushion. “Well, hello, dear,” the second witch said, smiling at him.

“First year at Hogwarts, Constance,” Madam Malkin instructed.

“Wonderful,” said the second witch. “Right up here, please, just up on this stool.”

Draco climbed onto the stool, reeling. He’d missed Potter, somehow. Probably he’d come too late. And the now he wouldn’t see him until the train, and by then, he’d already be with Weasley and Hermione, and everything would be the same disaster it had been the first time around. Draco’s throat felt tight and almost painful as the witch pulled a robe over him and began to pin the hem. It was hard to breathe, and hot, and he wanted to run out onto the street and look for Potter, find him *now*, before it was too late --

His thoughts were interrupted by a jingle at the door. “Hogwarts, dear?” he heard Madam Malkin say. “Got the lot here – another young man being fitted up just now, in fact.”

Then Madam Malkin was returning to the back of the shop, someone scurrying along behind her. Draco held his breath, trying to catch a glimpse of the other figure. Then all of a sudden Potter stepped into the room, skinny and shuffling. He wore messy muggle clothes and his hair was even worse than Draco remembered. His glasses sat slightly crooked on his smooth, childish face, and his eyes were bright like springtime behind them.

“Hello,” Draco said, after Madam Malkin had pulled a set of robes over Potter’s head. “You’re going to Hogwarts, too?”

Potter gave a crooked smile. “Yes.”

“Is this your first year?”

A nod. “How about you?”

“Yes, first year,” Draco replied. He was trying to keep his voice normal, trying not to sound too thrilled by this mundane conversation, but it was difficult.

A wide grin stretched across Potter’s face, and Draco watched, amused, as the other boy tried to temper it into something more casual and failed miserably. “You’re the first Hogwarts student I’ve met! Er, besides me, of course.” He blushed. “I’m Harry, by the way.”

Draco was the first Hogwarts student Harry had ever met? Draco hadn’t known that, and honestly, what were the fucking odds? Why had it always been like this, their lives tangled up in one another’s at every turn? “I’m Draco,” he said. “I know a few others who will be

starting with us. I can introduce you on the train if you'd like. The Hogwarts Express, I mean."

Potter looked deliriously happy about this. "Yeah, that'd be brilliant."

"Did you not grow up in the wizarding world, then?" Draco knew the answer, of course, but he wanted the conversation to keep going.

"I didn't, actually. This is...well, it's my first day. In it, I mean. Today."

Apparently, Potter had always been terrible at using his words. Draco found it rather adorable. "You've never been among wizards before?"

He shook his head, dark hair whipping chaotically through the air. "Didn't really know I *was* a wizard until recently."

Draco pretended to be surprised. "Oh," he said. "Well, what do you think?"

Potter laughed. "I don't know, to be honest. I'm still trying to believe that it's real."

"It's real, I promise, and it's very fun," Draco said, silently adding *when frighteningly powerful, semi-dead dark wizards aren't trying to kill everyone*. "I'm sure you'll take to it quickly. And Hogwarts is wonderful."

A look of relief washed over Potter's face. "You grew up knowing you were one, then? A wizard?" Potter asked.

Draco nodded, just as the witch pinning his robes stood up and stretched out her back. "You're all done, dear," she said. "You can take that off."

Draco pulled the robes over his head, feeling torn. He desperately wanted to stay here, to keep talking. But his mother was waiting for him and besides, he didn't want to seem strange or clingy. "It was nice to meet you, Harry," he said finally. "Look for me on the train, if you want."

"I will," Potter said, grinning. "Maybe you can save me a seat."

"I can do that," Draco said. Their eyes met, and suddenly it was a bit intense, a bit heated. Not romantic at all – Draco's current body had not yet developed enough to respond to anyone in that sort of way – but charged nonetheless. That intangible thing that had always been between them was humming with energy. "I'll see you then."

Harry smiled again and shuffled around on the stool. "Yeah, see you, Draco."

"Hold still, dear," Madam Malkin scolded as she stuck in another pin.

Potter waved as Draco left the back room, looking ridiculous and eager, and the sight of it warmed Draco down to the tips of his toes. He sighed. His mother was waiting for him up front, her eyes wide. "You *do* know who that was, Draco, don't you?" she said quietly.

“Yes, Mother. It was Harry. He’ll be going to Hogwarts this year.”

“It was Harry *Potter*. Harry Potter!” his mother whisper-hissed as she swung open the shop door and stepped out onto the bright street. “I didn’t realize – I suppose I didn’t realize he’d be at school with you.”

“He was very nice,” Draco offered as he blinked into the sunlight.

“Was he? Well, get to know him! He’s an important person; it couldn’t hurt to have him as a friend.”

Draco nodded, unable to stop grinning like a fool. Harry Potter was going to be his friend. And there was nothing Weasley or anybody else could do about it.

The next weeks crawled by at a snail’s pace. Draco felt trapped in the manor, trapped by his mother and father and their suffocating control over his life. How did children do it, he wondered? How did they let every moment of their lives be dictated by adults without going absolutely mad?

His mother had some of her friends over for tea one day, including Pansy’s mother, who brought the little terror along. “Run along and play with Draco, darling,” Pansy’s mother said as she strode through the foyer.

“Want to go outside?” Draco asked, marveling at how much snubbier Pansy’s nose was at this age. It would lengthen over the years, Draco knew, until it was cute rather than puggish.

“No thank you,” Pansy said, curling her lip. “It’s hot as a cauldron out there. Let’s go down into the cellar and explore.”

It was something they’d done as children, he remembered, but having people imprisoned down there during the war had effectively killed the allure of the cellar for him. “Upstairs. We can play with my new chess set.”

“Oh, all right, you brat,” she grumbled, stomping up the stairs behind him. “Merlin, I’m so hot. Mother insisted we walk from the end of the drive so we could ‘enjoy the sunshine’ and now I’m sweating through my dress. Also, one of your freakish peacocks almost murdered me.”

Draco laughed. This felt exactly like talking to a twenty-something Pansy; he supposed some things never changed. They set up the game on his bedroom floor after fighting over who got to be white (Pansy won, of course). Draco sprawled out on his side, head resting on his hand, and Pansy sat leaning against the foot of his bed.

“Did you hear Harry Potter’s going to be starting school with us this year?” Pansy asked as her bishop swung at Draco’s rook.

“Of course I know that. *You* only know because my mother told your mother. Did you know I met him?”



Pansy gasped before she could help it, then smoothed her expression into one of bored disdain. “Hmph. It’s not *that* exciting. You can stop grinning like an idiot.”

“I’m not grinning,” he said, grinning.

“What?” she asked, ignoring the game for a moment to study him. “What is it?”

“Nothing. He’s nice.”

“Pah, you just want to be cool by association. I know how you work.”

“No, he’s genuinely nice, Pansy.”

“You don’t even like nice people, *Draco*.”

“He’s not that sort of nice. Not irritating about it or anything.”

She looked wary. “I’ll be the judge of that. You’ll introduce me, won’t you?”

“Why, so you can be cool by association?”

“Yes, obviously,” Pansy said, before sticking her tongue out at him.

Finally, it was the first of September. The weather was lovely, with just a hint of chill in the air as his mother and father walked with him along the platform at King’s Cross Station. His mother disappeared through the wall after his father, and neither one looked back to see if Draco was following. He remembered, suddenly, that he’d had a flash of apprehension the first time this happened, a moment of wondering whether the wall would admit him, too. Doing new things always unsettled him. It had taken him a minute to gather his nerve that first time, and his father had been waiting, displeased by his hesitation, on the other side.

This time though, he was an old pro, walking through the wall easily to meet his parents. Together, they made their way along the crowded platform, surrounded by the flutter and screech of owls, the clunk of carts, the roar of voices. “This one’s open,” Draco said, halting next to one of the cars. His parents drew closer, his father’s eyes appraising, his mother’s warm.

“Make us proud,” his father said sternly, as he reached out and squeezed Draco’s shoulder.

Draco knew what it was to be a grownup, since until recently, he had been one. He knew how the war would go, knew who and what his father truly was. And yet despite all that, he still felt the full force of his steely gaze. He still felt himself wanting to coax a proud smile from that stern face, and he hated himself a little for it.

“I will, Father,” he said.

“Take care of yourself, darling,” said his mother, placing her hands on his cheeks and kissing his forehead gently.

“I will,” he said, and felt, suddenly, like crying. A part of him didn’t want to leave her side, didn’t want to leave her alone with his father.

But that was silly. Nothing bad would happen now. Not for years. He watched them walk away, not looking back.

“Hey, Draco!” shouted a voice. He turned and saw Blaise Zabini poke his head out of the next car. “Over here!”

Draco hauled his trunk a bit further down the platform. “Blaise,” he greeted the other boy as they hauled his trunk up onto the train. He peeked into the compartment and saw that Pansy and Daphne Greengrass were already there. Blaise would behave; he always did. Daphne was quiet and shy, so she’d be fine, too. Pansy was a bit unpredictable, but she tended toward snark rather than outright cruelty. She had some pretty shit views about muggles at this age, but Draco could try to steer clear of that subject. It ought to be fine; this lot would behave acceptably in front of Potter. Draco shoved his trunk in. “I’ve got to find someone,” he announced.

Blaise raised his eyebrows but nodded.

“Is it Harry Potter?!” screeched Pansy as Draco made his way back outside onto the platform. He ignored her.

The crowd was still massive, mothers and fathers and little siblings and familiars everywhere. Draco spotted a gaggle of Weasleys further down the platform. He squinted, and there, in their midst, was a familiar, disheveled dark head. Shit, they’d already got to him. How was that possible? Had Weasley put a tracker on him?

But no, Potter was walking past them, pushing a cart and looking positively overwhelmed. “Harry!” yelled Draco, waving his hand frantically through the air. His father would have some choice words to say if he caught Draco hollering and making a spectacle of himself like this, but he wasn’t here and Draco would’ve done it regardless. Because it was *important*.

A look of intense relief passed over Potter’s face as he waved back, rolling over his toe with the cart in the process. “Bugger,” Draco heard him mutter as he drew closer, limping a little, prompting Draco to shake his head in amazement.

“Hi, Draco,” Potter said breathlessly when he’d reached him. “I was wondering if I’d see you.”

“Told you I’d save you a seat, didn’t I?”

“I didn’t know if you would remember,” Potter said, pushing his glasses further up his nose.

“Course I did,” Draco said easily. “Here, let me help you.”

Together they lifted a trunk onto the train and then Draco ran back for the owl. “That’s Hedwig,” Potter said, looking fond.

“She’s lovely.” Draco ran a finger along the bars of the cage. Draco liked owls in general, but this one really was gorgeous, full of fluffy, snow-white feathers. “Come on, we’re this way.”

When they entered the compartment, Draco’s friends stopped talking and stared. “And who’s this?” Blaise asked, brow furrowed. It probably was odd for Draco to suddenly know someone new, someone outside their small circle of childhood friends and acquaintances.

“This is Harry,” Draco said. “Harry, this is Blaise, Pansy, and Daphne.”

“No bloody way. Draco! You really do know him!” Pansy gasped. She jumped up, pushed Potter’s fringe off his forehead, and gasped again. Potter turned the color of a ripe tomato.

“Pansy, quit molesting Harry’s hair,” said Draco.

“Nice to meet you Harry,” Blaise said, remaining perfectly calm, *thank god*.

“Hello, Harry” squeaked Daphne, blushing.

“Hi Blaise, Daphne,” Potter said. “Pansy,” he finished, gulping.

“You must sit next to me, Harry,” Pansy said, patting the seat beside her. Harry sat, looking scared. “I have so many things I want to ask you,” she continued. “Like -- ”

“*Pansy*,” Draco warned. “He’s not an exhibit at the *zoo*.”

“Oh, you’re never fun. Draco’s never fun, Harry, I should warn you right up front. Don’t want you getting your hopes up, thinking you’ve made a great new friend, only to have you learn the hard way that he’s one of the most sinfully boring individuals you’ll ever meet. He wouldn’t even explore his cellar with me this summer, and let me tell you, there is *nothing* you can’t find down there, so long as it’s terrifying or dangerous or both.”

“Sometimes you find things that are only perverted. Like that book last spring. The red one,” Blaise remarked, snickering.

“Ooh, the one that moaned!” cried Pansy. “And shouted about deflowering me. Although I think it fit well enough into the terrifying category.”

“Ew,” Daphne said, scrunching up her little nose. “Why did you have to remind me of *that*?”

“Oh, Daphne, sweet girl, are you jealous that the book didn’t want to deflower *you*?”

“Right, yes, that’s my problem with it,” Daphne said, rolling her eyes.

Draco was shocked to remember that they’d talked about this sort of thing when they were only eleven. He knew for a fact that none of them had even kissed anybody at this age, and yet here they were talking about sex like it was nothing. They’d tried so hard to appear world-weary and unimpressed, despite most of them living as sheltered a life as you could imagine.

Except Blaise, he supposed. Blaise really had seen a lot by this age.

Potter looked fascinated and slightly horrified by the conversation, but thankfully, he didn't seem particularly offended. Draco suspected that Potter only got his knickers in a twist over things when they were hurtful to other people.

Like Draco had been, the first time. Merlin, he'd been such an unforgivable bully. No wonder Potter had hated him.

Suddenly, the compartment door slid open, and Hermione poked her head in, Neville Longbottom in tow. Draco sat up, panicked. This might not go well. This might not go well at all.

Hermione was already wearing her Hogwarts robes, and she had that look on her face that Draco remembered so well -- sort of prim and slightly suspicious. Draco glanced at Pansy, silently urging her to be nice.

"Has anyone seen a toad?" Hermione finally asked. "Neville's lost one." He didn't remember her front teeth being so big. Lucky for her, she must have grown into them at some point.

"No toad in here, sorry," Draco said quickly, hoping they'd leave.

"You can sit though, if you like," Daphne said. Draco wanted to slap her.

"Oh," Hermione said. "Neville?"

"I'm going to keep looking. I'll come back."

Hermione nodded and sat. "Hermione Granger," she said, holding her hand out to Pansy, who looked at it like it was a hunk of rotting fish.

Draco leapt up and grabbed the hand. "Draco Malfoy. Pleased to meet you."

Pansy looked at him like he'd lost his mind.

"Daphne Greengrass," Daphne said, waving.

"Pansy Parkinson," Pansy muttered, crossing her arms across her chest.

"Harry Potter," Potter said, standing and shaking Hermione's hand.

"Oh, are you really?" replied Hermione. "I know all about you, of course. I read up a little on magical history this summer, and you're in a few of the books."

"Am I?" Potter said, turning pink.

"Well, yes, of course!" Hermione said with an air of exasperation.

"You are, Harry, sorry," Draco said, giving him a wry smile.

"Why'd you read up on magical history?" Pansy asked, eyes narrowed.

Shit, thought Draco. Shit. Please don't say muggle-born. Please don't say muggle-born.

“For fun,” Hermione said, shrugging.

Pansy groaned. “Well, you and Draco should get along. He’s a complete nerd, too.”

Hermione frowned at Pansy before turning to Draco. “You like to read for fun?” she asked.

“Sometimes,” Draco replied. “Depends what it’s about. I like reading about early wizards. Herpo the Foul and Merlin, wizards like that. And I like Potions.”

Hermione looked pleased by this. “I can’t wait to study Potions. I’ve already read the textbook.”

Pansy threw her head back against the seat and sighed.

“Merlin was a Slytherin, you know,” Blaise said, grinning.

“Of course he was. All the best ones are,” Pansy said.

“I heard Dumbledore was a Gryffindor,” Hermione said.

“What’s that mean?” Potter asked quietly, looking to Draco. “Slyther-Gryffin-whatever.”

“The houses. There are four,” Draco explained. “We get sorted into them when we arrive.”

“Oh,” Potter said, frowning. “Oh, so we won’t all be together?”

Draco shrugged. “Maybe. Maybe not.” He knew they wouldn’t be, but he was determined to not let that matter yet.

“Are they all different?” Potter asked.

“They all have a reputation,” Hermione said. “And you’re sorted based on certain personality traits, from what I understand.”

“Gryffindors are blundering idiots,” Pansy began. “So if you’re an idiot, that’s where you’ll go.”

“But they’re brave,” Draco said, and Pansy looked like she was seconds away from kicking him in the bollocks. “Well, they *are*.”

“Ravenclaws are fine, I suppose,” Pansy continued. “They love their books. You and Draco might be right at home there, Hermione. And then Hufflepuffs are…” she shuddered. “Ugh.”

“They’re hard workers,” Draco said.

Pansy rolled her eyes. “Yes, I’m sure they’re grand. And I hope you get stuck in there with the lot of them, you wanker.”

Hermione looked absolutely scandalized by this remark, but Pansy continued on, relentless. “And then there’s Slytherin, the best house. Slytherins are goal-oriented, resourceful, and brilliant strategists. That’s where I’ll end up, hopefully.”

“Oh,” Hermione said, frowning. “But I heard...never mind.”

“That Slytherins are ruthless? That Slytherins go bad?” Draco asked her.

“Well...yes.”

Harry looked on with interest, his eyes flickering back and forth from Draco to Hermione. Draco thought over his answer carefully. He needed Potter to be open to being friends with a Slytherin, and he also needed to avoid insulting Gryffindors, since Potter was about to become one. “Every house has strengths and weaknesses, just like every person. I think if you are put into the right one, it will help you develop into the sort of wizard you’re meant to be. That’s the whole point of houses. No house is good or bad, really. They’re just different.”

Blaise raised his eyebrows. “Hm, interesting take, Draco. Didn’t know you were one for inter-house unity. ‘Specially since your room at the Manor looks like Salazar Slytherin vomited all over it.”

Draco huffed. “I just don’t want to spend my years at Hogwarts in some pissing contest with the other houses. Waste of time, not to mention immature.”

That was the right thing to say to them. “It *is* rather silly,” Pansy said, which was the polar opposite of everything she’d ever said about the houses until that very moment.

“That’s a very thoughtful way to put things, Draco,” said Hermione, smiling at him. “I’m going to try to have an open mind.”

“You know, my cousin’s a Hufflepuff,” Daphne added.

“Oh, which one?” asked Blaise.

“Fortuna, she’s a fifth-year...”

“What do you think, Harry?” Draco said, leaning forward and speaking quietly. “Which house do you want to be in?”

“Dunno,” Potter replied, leaning forward too, his bright eyes on Draco’s. “It would be fun if we could be together. So, Slytherin, I guess? Do you think that’s where you’ll be?”

“Hard to say. Maybe. My parents were both in Slytherin.” Potter nodded, and Draco felt a sudden heaviness sweep over him. He didn’t want Potter to be in a different house. Hell, Draco was willing to be a bloody Hufflepuff if Potter was there, too. But that wasn’t how it worked.

“No matter what, we can still be friends, you know,” he managed. “You’re not with your housemates *all* the time.” *Just most of the time*, he thought glumly.

“Oh, well that’s good,” Potter said, smiling and relaxing back into his seat.

Conversation flowed easily after that, and thankfully Longbottom never returned, because there was no way Pansy was going to be nice to him. Greg and Vince poked their heads in to

say hi, but didn't stay. Hermione was a little grating in a way she very much was not as an adult, but every time she and Pansy began to rile each other up, Draco intervened.

Around noon, they heard the noisy clatter of the trolley in the corridor and the smiling trolley witch poked her head in. "Anything from the cart, dears?"

Draco jumped up and scooted out into the corridor, ready to order enough for everyone. It would make everybody happy, and he wanted everybody happy. He wanted them to like each other. He wanted Potter to like them enough to keep being Draco's friend, even when they were in opposing houses.

As he was considering what to purchase, he saw Potter making his way over, excited. But as he watched, Potter's grin slipped away and his brow furrowed. "What?" asked Draco.

"I've never heard of any of this stuff," Potter said, looking embarrassed.

"Oh, it's wizarding candy," Draco said. "Same as muggle candy, I expect. I like Chocolate Frogs the best. Don't usually go for Pumpkin Pasties or Licorice Wands, but that's a personal preference."

"What about Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans?" Potter asked.

Draco laughed. "It's a gamble. Some of the flavors are wonderful and some are disgusting. That's what makes it fun, though."

"Want to get some of each? We can share with everyone else."

"Yes, that sounds perfect," Draco said. After handing over a ridiculous number of Sickles and Knuts, the boys returned to the compartment with armloads of sweets and proud smiles.

"Enjoy, you pack of hooligans," Draco said, throwing the lot of it on top of a trunk that was sitting between the seats. Potter dumped his armload on top of Draco's, and everybody cheered before grabbing at the pile. Even Hermione joined in, looking excited. "I've never had one of these," she said, examining a Cauldron Cake.

"They're really quite good," Pansy said, throwing her a genuine smile. Trust Pansy to bond with a muggle-born over sugar.

Potter picked up a frog. "This first?" he asked Draco.

"Can't go wrong," Draco said, picking up one of his own. "Cheers."

Before he knew it, the train was pulling to a stop and everyone tumbled out into the cold night. A light appeared, and then Draco heard Hagrid hollering. "Firs' years! Firs' years, over here! Alright there, Harry?"

Potter waved at the huge man, grinning.

“Follow me, first years! Mind your step!”

Potter stuck to Draco’s side, like he really wanted to be there. Like they were friends.

Maybe it really would stay this way, even after they were sorted.

They made their way to the edge of the great black lake, getting their first view of the castle. The students around him oohed and ahed. Draco had to admit that it was beautiful, shining up there on the hill. The sight of it, unmarked by war and full of light, filled him with something sweet and painful all at once.

“It’s like a fairy tale,” Potter whispered beside him.

“Yeah,” Draco said, nodding. He tilted his head, staring up at the soaring towers. “A bit like that.”

“No more’n four to a boat!” Hagrid cried.

“Hermione!” Harry looked back to where Hermione was walking beside Pansy. “Come on the boat with us!”

Hermione looked over at them. “Yes, alright. You too, Pansy!”

“Bossy, bossy,” Pansy said, but came along anyway, hiding a smile.

The boats sailed across the glassy surface of the lake, underneath a luminous moon half-hidden by thick clouds. Then they were rushing through the tunnel and to the underground harbor, where the boats finally stopped. They clamored out onto the pebbly shore, hushed and pensive.

They were at Hogwarts at last.

Inside the Great Hall, everyone marveled at the ceiling that looked like open sky and chattered about the castle ghosts. Soon, McGonagall was perching the sorting hat onto a stool in front of the first years, and it was singing its usual tune.

The sorting began, moving quickly. It seemed like everyone and their mother was being sorted into Hufflepuff. Draco didn’t remember half of the Hufflepuffs, honestly, which was possibly a result of his assholery the first time around. Or maybe they really were that boring. Who could know for sure?

Hermione’s name was called and she turned pink – from excitement or nerves, Draco didn’t know. The hat was placed on her head and she sat still for long moments. “RAVENCLAW!” shouted the hat. Draco felt his jaw drop.

“Why are you surprised?” Potter whispered. “Isn’t that where the clever ones go?”

“Yes, but...” Draco stared, disbelieving.



It was different. Because of the train, everything was different. He felt nervous, suddenly, in a way that he hadn't been a moment ago. Would he be in Slytherin? Was the whole world turned upside down because of where they'd sat on the fucking train?

"Malfoy, Draco!"

Draco made his way up to the front, trying not to vomit all over his shoes. The first time he'd done this, the hat had hardly touched his head before it shrieked "Slytherin!". He had no idea what to expect now.

Too soon, he was looking at the inside of the thing, and the sounds of the Great Hall seemed muffled and far away.

"What's this I see?" said the voice in his ear. "A Slytherin by name, but the heart has changed. A shoot of something new, some courage, just a tad for now, but growing fast. And a mind sharp as glass, yes, you could do something with that brain of yours. Perhaps Ravenclaw might nurture it best. But you are single-minded, that is quite clear. You'll do anything to get what you want, won't you, and that brings us back round to SLYTHERIN!"

Draco felt oddly disappointed as he made his way over to the Slytherin table, where he was greeted by Greg and Vince. It had always been Slytherin for him, like it or not. A tiny bit of bravery was not enough to get him a seat at the Gryffindor table. Of course it wasn't. Not that he wanted to be there, because he didn't.

Except that Potter was going to be there.

Soon it was Pansy coming to join him, whispering furiously in his ear, but he was unable to rip his gaze away from Potter, who sat with the unsorted first years, looking anxious.

"Potter, Harry!"

"Let's see if the Boy Who Lived gets sent our way," Pansy said. "I wouldn't mind; he's cute. Has to do something with that hair, though, *Merlin*."

Draco's mouth felt dry, his hands damp. Why was he so nervous? Potter was going to be sent to Gryffindor, obviously. The Hermione thing was a fluke, or maybe the hat had gotten it wrong the first time. Hermione was nothing if not a brain.

Potter reached the front and faced the crowd, his eyes locking onto Draco's. Draco nodded encouragingly, and then the hat was dropped onto Potter's head.

This whole system was stupid, Draco decided. The sorting. The houses in general. They ought to all just be together. Everything would be so much easier. It was so stupid, and he was about to lose the fragile, tentative friendship he'd formed with Potter because some moron decided it was a good idea to let a bloody *hat* make all the decisions around here.

Damnit, the hat was taking an exceptionally long time. What in the world was happening? Had it fallen asleep? He had an urge to walk up and slap it off Potter's head and maybe stomp on it.

“SLYTHERIN!” yelled the hat, and the table around Draco erupted in cheers. Up at the head table, Dumbledore looked flabbergasted and McGonagall looked like she’d just bitten into a lemon and Snape was...well, Snape was sneering like usual. Draco found he couldn’t stand, because what the fuck was happening.

“Merlin’s balls,” Draco whispered. Potter strode towards the table, a grin on his face.

“Scoot over,” Draco ordered, pushing Greg gently away.

Potter fell into the newly empty seat. “I knew it,” he said, turning to Draco and looking triumphant.

“Did you?” Draco asked faintly.

The world really had turned on its head.

# Complicating Matters

## Chapter Summary

Draco doesn't share well

“Welcome to the wonderful world of jealousy, he thought. For the price of admission, you get a splitting headache, a nearly irresistible urge to commit murder, and an inferiority complex. Yippee.”

— J.R. Ward, *Dark Lover*

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Who would have guessed that Draco's friendship with Harry Potter would make Hogwarts feel like an entirely different place?

First-year memories (from Draco's first time through) were a bit fuzzy with age, but Draco knew that there had been a lot of drama that year: near-fights and actual fights, hurt feelings and wounded egos, and generous amounts of shit-talking sprinkled over the top of everything.

This time around, things weren't like that.

Sure, there was some house rivalry, especially when it came to Quidditch, but it felt as though it was being done out of some sense of muted loyalty, not because people legitimately wanted to murder each other. Draco noticed that Weasley had become chummy with Finnigan and Thomas, but that group kept their distance from Draco and the other Slytherins. Not a hostile distance. An indifferent one, really.

Much to Draco and Harry's amusement (after calling him Harry for a few weeks, Draco found it was difficult to keep thinking of him as Potter), Hermione and Pansy continued to spend time together, despite being in different houses. They didn't seem to *like* one another, exactly. They fought plenty and couldn't have been more different. But they seemed to enjoy their odd dynamic. Hermione smoothed Pansy's sharp edges and Pansy coaxed Hermione out of her shell a bit (and introduced her to Sleekeasy's a few years early, much to Draco's delight). Pansy struggled for a few days when she found out Hermione was muggle-born (“Don't you *dare* call her a Mudblood or I will *end* you,” Draco warned in private), but got over it pretty fast. Pansy was nothing if not flexible, morally speaking.

Draco, who, by about mid-October, had a mile long (and growing) list of things that annoyed him about Harry, understood all about cultivating a friendship with someone who drove you slightly mad.

Harry snored. Loudly. He mumbled in his sleep, too, and writhed about in dramatic fashion, skinny limbs flying every which way. Sometimes he fell off the bed entirely, landing with a loud thwump, followed by a mumbled string of expletives. Draco had taken to chucking things at him when this happened.

If Harry was restless in sleep, he was even worse when he was awake. Trying to study with him was a special sort of torture. Thank Circe for Hermione and Pansy, who often joined them in the library. Hermione's withering glare settled Harry down most of the time. And when that wasn't enough, when Harry got too chatty or wouldn't stop chewing on quills and shaking his legs and tapping his feet, Draco sent him off with Pansy, who was always looking to be entertained.

Harry had abysmal table manners and his clothes didn't fit. He had no filter whatsoever, and always said exactly what he was thinking even when it was embarrassing or got him in trouble. This happened often in Potions. Almost daily, Draco got to watch Snape's sense of house loyalty battle with his desire to crush Harry Potter. Crushing Potter usually won out, and Snape took an astounding number of points away from Slytherin as a result, much to Draco's dismay.

Harry was terrible at chess and took forever to pick up his dirty clothes. He left things everywhere – in the common room, in the Great Hall, in his classes. Draco felt like his mother, trailing around after him with forgotten books and papers and shoes and quills and even his wand. How someone managed to leave their wand behind so often, Draco didn't know. He felt naked without his.

According to Harry, Draco had plenty of bothersome habits, too. Draco didn't agree, obviously, but Harry claimed he took too long on his hair and cared too much about appearance in general. "You're like a *girl*," he'd said the other day. Draco wanted to point out that in a few years, Harry would very much appreciate Draco's carefully cultivated appearance, and want to do dirty things to Draco because of it, but he managed to refrain.

Harry also said that Draco was "an absolute horror" in the mornings, which may or may not have been true. He claimed that Draco was even worse when he was hungry, which...okay, that was accurate. But it was not Draco's fault. Draco was a growing boy, and he liked treats, especially chocolate ones.

Harry was more than happy to tell Draco when he was being petty, or fussy, or whiny, or grumpy, or any number of other very unflattering adjectives. Draco would then tell Harry he was being a stupid git, or maybe just call him a Hufflepuff. This often led to elbows being thrown or arms being pinched or hair being yanked, and *that* sometimes led to impromptu wrestling matches, refereed by a reluctant Hermione and a giddy Pansy, or sometimes a quietly-amused Blaise. Honestly, though, the wrestling was therapeutic, and Draco always felt at least fifty-percent less annoyed with Harry afterward.

So yes, after the first couple of weeks (during which they'd enjoyed a sort of friendship honeymoon period), Draco and Harry certainly knew how to bother the hell out of each other. Despite that, though, or maybe because of it, Draco found that he was *himself* with Harry in a way that he'd never been with anyone.

At night, sometimes, they'd sit out in the common room until they were the only ones left, just talking about nothing and everything. Draco told Harry what a mean fucker his dad could be, how cold and withholding, and Harry told him about the cupboard. How a family could treat a little boy like that made no sense to Draco at all. *Any* little boy, much less Harry Potter, who was kind and thoughtful and honest and brave, and was going to save the entire fucking world in a few years. *Again*, since he'd already saved it once, before he'd even been out of nappies.

Everything was going well – almost eerily well – until October 31.

The day began typically enough. Draco opened his eyes and pulled back the heavy, green curtains, squinting around the room he shared with Harry, Blaise, and Theodore Nott. Blaise was gone – showering, probably – and Theo's curtains were still closed. In the bed next to his, Draco could see a skinny arm poking through the curtains, hand skimming the floor. Draco picked up a nearby ball of socks (Harry's, of course, because Harry apparently thought the floor was the same thing as a laundry bin) and used his foot to pull the curtains back before throwing the socks at Harry's head.

“Whasit?” Harry mumbled.

Draco didn't bother answering. Instead, he blearily made his way over to the sink that sat in a corner of their room and began to brush his teeth.

A minute later, Harry popped out of bed, looking perky (because much to Draco's chagrin, Harry very much *was* a morning person). “Good morning, Squinty,” he said, popping on his glasses.

“Who are you calling Squinty?” Draco asked. “You're the one who's blind as a bat.”

“Yes, but you never fully open your eyes until after breakfast. Before then, they're just these angry little slits. Makes you look quite evil.”

“Shut it, Potter.” Draco glared at him in the mirror, which only served to make Draco's eyes even squintier. He examined Harry's reflection for a moment. “Your hair, my *god*,” Draco said around a mouthful of toothpaste.

It was fascinating, actually, how terrible Harry's hair could get. It was always a mess, but in the mornings, it achieved seemingly impossible feats, sticking straight up in places – literally straight up in the air -- and snarling in great messy knots in others.

Harry stood still for a moment, grinning, before he flew at Draco. Draco yelped and tried to escape, but he was trapped, and Harry managed to rub his head against Draco's face, smearing toothpaste all over his hair (and Draco's face) in the process. “Ugh, get *off*, you hell beast!” Draco cried.

“You two are at it early,” Blaise said, sauntering into the room in a towel.

“He just attacked me with his bloody hair!” Draco cried.

Blaise snorted. "Harry, you're a brute."

"*Thank* you," Draco huffed.

"And Draco, you're a little bitch," Blaise finished.

"I am most certainly not a – Blaise, goddamit!" Draco shrieked as Blaise proceeded to shake his wet hair so that it flew all over Draco's toothpaste-smeared face.

"I hate you all!" Draco announced, snatching up his things for the shower very loudly and aggressively and adding in some quality stomping as well.

"I smell pumpkin," came the muffled voice of Theo.

"Because it's Halloween!" exclaimed Harry, jumping from one foot to the other, toothpaste all over his hair.

Draco rolled his eyes, unable to hide a little grin. "Ridiculous," he muttered, heading out for the shower.

They had Charms fourth period. It was Draco's favorite class after Potions, and when Flitwick announced that they were going to make things fly, Draco felt a rush of anticipation. It was terrible, really, learning all the basics, all the foundational stuff, when he knew it all already. He was more than ready to use magic to actually *do* something.

Flitwick went over the swish and flick wrist movement, and the pronunciation of *Wingardium Leviosa* before dividing them up into pairs. Draco was stuck with Vincent, who was terrible at this sort of thing, and Harry was paired with Pansy.

Draco, of course, had absolutely no problem with any of it, although he deliberately didn't get it right until his third try. "Wonderful!" Professor Flitwick declared, beaming at Draco's success. "Excellent technique."

Draco worked with Vincent for a while, until finally the other boy was doing a passable job of it. "Keep going, boys! Keep it up," Flitwick encouraged them.

Draco sighed and hovered his feather and dropped it down again, hovered his feather and dropped it down again. It was the classwork that was going to kill him, he decided. How dreadfully boring to repeat every last bit of it.

"Hey, Draco, look," Vincent said, elbowing him.

"Hm?" Draco said, raising his feather once again and letting it hover.

"Look!"

Draco turned around, trying to muster up some interest in whatever Vince was pointing at, and froze. Pansy, eyes alight, was using her feather to tickle Harry's neck, and he was

*giggling*. And then he started doing it back to her, the pair of them laughing and squirming and tussling and carrying on.

“Think she fancies him?” Vince asked, eyeballing Pansy’s early-bloomer bosom.

“She fancies everybody,” Draco snarled.

“Think he fancies her?” Vince asked.

“Of course not!” Of course Harry didn’t *fancy* Pansy. He didn’t even like...

Oh. But he did, sometimes.

He had liked Cho. And Ginny. And there had been a couple more after Ginny, even after he added men into the mix.

So yeah, he did.

But they were children, weren’t they? Draco wasn’t even getting boners yet, not really, so surely Harry wasn’t going around fancying people. Especially *Pansy*, with her ever-expanding cleavage.

When class ended, Draco found himself practically running out of the room. He didn’t want to see Harry or Pansy or anybody else for that matter. He slipped into first-floor boys’ bathroom and hid in the stall.

He was so *angry*. Angry at Pansy, for acting like such a slag all the time despite barely clearing a single decade, age-wise. Angry at Harry for going along with it. Angry because he had no right to be angry at all, because it was just a little harmless flirtation. Angry because Harry was supposed to be his friend, but Draco loved him and didn’t want to share him and that wasn’t fair to anyone. It wasn’t fair because Harry didn’t know, because he *couldn’t* know, or understand. And mostly, Draco was angry because he was trapped in this no-boner kid’s body, with all these feelings and no way to express them.

How many years of this shit was he going to have to suffer through? He knew there was something between him and Harry. It was undeniable. But how long until Harry figured it out? So far as Draco knew, Harry had never been interested in boys during school. Whether he’d been closeted or hadn’t even considered it was anyone’s guess. Was Draco going to have to sit through six years of this Pansy and Cho nonsense before he and Harry could be together? The thought was overwhelming. Suffocating.

Some time later, Draco heard everyone heading to the Great Hall for the Halloween feast. He stayed put. Harry was probably looking for him, but he didn’t want to be found. Or maybe he did.

He didn’t know *what* he wanted. He was positively frozen in his indecision. So he sat, and thought, and kicked at the wall a bit.

Then the troll came.





# Troll! In the Bathroom!

## Chapter Summary

A different trio takes on the mountain troll

“Bran thought about it. 'Can a man still be brave if he's afraid?'  
'That is the only time a man can be brave,' his father told him.”  
— George R.R. Martin, A Game of Thrones

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Draco couldn't believe he'd forgotten about the troll. But then again, it hadn't had very much to do with him the last time. Quirrell had run into the Great Hall and bellowed about the thing before fainting dead away. Draco had been ushered down to the dungeons and that had been that. Oh, and Gryffindor had been given loads of points, like always. Fucking Gryffindor.

The smell of the troll hung so thick in the air that Draco gagged. It was a hideous thing, lumpy and gray and enormous, with a teeny coconut head perched on top. A club hung from its over-long arm, clattering against the tiles of the floor.

It was beastly, but nothing Draco couldn't handle. He could easily hit it with an Impediment Hex or a Stunner and then throw a Body-Bind over it. Draco would be questioned about how he'd managed to single-handedly take down a troll, and he wasn't entirely sure how he'd answer those questions, but regardless, it was preferable to being clubbed to death.

He reached into his robes for his wand and felt...nothing.

Oh, *bollocks*.

He'd forgotten his wand in Charms.

All those times he'd scolded Harry, and now he'd gone and done the exact same thing, only it was going to kill him.

The troll was advancing, looking confused or perhaps hungry, and the smell seemed to be everywhere, so strong it was almost blinding. Draco stood perfectly still (except for the sickening tremor that was moving across his limbs) as he contemplated making a run for it, although he was almost positive he'd get a club to the face if he tried.

Suddenly, something was flying through the air behind the troll. It landed with a satisfying clunk on the troll's shoulder. The troll blinked and turned around, and Draco's eyes met

Harry's from across the bathroom. Beside Harry was Hermione, looking white as a ghost, her eyes huge and dark in her face.

The troll started toward them, and Draco panicked and picked up the only things he had on him – his books – and threw them, whacking the troll in the back of the head with one. The troll roared in fury and spun back, then stomped his thick trunk of a leg so hard that it broke the tiles of the floor, sending pieces shooting out in every direction.

The troll came at Draco rather quickly then, and Draco braced himself. Then something was flying at it again from behind, something big, and Draco gasped as he realized it was Harry, that Harry had *flung himself onto the fucking troll*, that absolute *psychopath*.

“Harry!” Draco cried, as Harry went about trying to shove his wand up the thing's nose. “Are you mad? What are you doing?”

“I'm saving your stupid arse!” Harry grunted, gripping onto the troll's lumpy flesh while the troll swung its club around helplessly. Harry took another go with his wand, and this time the wand went into the nostril and the troll emitted a howl that shook the walls. The troll flailed about again, managing to whack Harry with a huge, gray hand and then with his club. It wasn't a well-aimed strike, but it had to hurt nonetheless. Harry cried out but managed to hang on.

“Get off of there, you wanker! You're going to get yourself killed!” Draco yelled. Mustering every ounce of courage he had, which wasn't all that much, Draco charged. He had no real plan and ended up bouncing off of the troll's sticky body, but before he fell, he managed to kick hard as he could at the troll's knees (where the knees ought to be, anyway; it was sort of hard to tell).

He fell to the ground, panting, and the troll took a swing at him and hit him in his chest, knocking the wind right out of him. His body curled around itself, riddled with pain. “You bastard!” Harry cried from atop the troll, pounding on its head. The troll swatted absently at Harry, but still had his sights set on Draco. Draco scooted backwards across the floor, unable to stand, until his back met the tiled wall. Then he squeezed his eyes shut and waited.

“*Wingardium Leviosa!*” cried Hermione, who had thus far been standing wild-eyed and frozen in fear near the door. The troll blinked stupidly and watched as its club went sailing up into the air before coming down right on its head. Almost simultaneously, Harry leapt back, hitting the ground hard and rolling away.

The troll wavered on its feet for a moment before falling to the floor like a felled tree.

Hermione slid down the wall, trembling, and the three of them sat for a moment, panting and stunned.

“It doesn't smell very nice, does it?” Hermione said finally.

Harry managed a gruff laugh. He stood and stumbled over to Draco, his eyes raking over Draco's body. “Are you okay?” he asked, his hands patting along Draco's arm, then his other arm, then his shoulders and chest.

When he came into contact with the spot that the troll had whacked, Draco hissed and winced. "I'll be alright if you stop poking at it."

Harry smiled, relieved, before turning back to the troll. He approached it with caution and studied it for a moment. "It's still breathing," he said quietly.

"We only knocked it out, then," Hermione said.

Harry reached out and pulled his wand slowly from the troll's nostril, and they all watched in horror as a long string of troll boogies came with it. "Ew," Harry said.

Just then there was a commotion near the door, and they turned to see Professor McGonagall bustling in with Snape and Quirrell at her heels. She gasped when she saw the troll on the floor, then gasped again when she saw Hermione standing there, looking guilty.

"What in the world are you doing in here with this creature?" McGonagall asked, her voice a bit shrill. "You are supposed to be in your dormitories!"

"It was Draco, Professor," Hermione said. "He was in here, and we realized he hadn't heard the news about the troll, so we came to get him, and then, well."

McGonagall studied Hermione's face. "That was very reckless, Miss Granger."

"I know," Hermione said, looking at the floor. "But we couldn't leave him."

"No, I suppose you couldn't," McGonagall said, pursing her lips. "Are you hurt, Mr. Malfoy?"

"The troll got him with the club," Harry said. "He needs to see Madam Pomfrey."

"I'm *fine*," Draco insisted, although he wasn't actually sure about that. The pain was fairly overwhelming.

"You'll go to the nurse," McGonagall said in a tone that left no room for argument. "And you, Mr. Potter. Do you need to see Madam Pomfrey as well?"

Draco realized Harry was bleeding from somewhere along his hairline and swaying slightly on his feet. He blinked at Professor McGonagall.

"I'll take that as a yes," she said. "As for explicitly disobeying instructions, I understand why you did so. I'm not happy about this – you ought to have told one of us rather than charging in on your own." She sighed heavily. "Three children taking on a mountain troll. My goodness. It's a miracle you're still alive."

"Harry jumped on its back and stuck his wand up its nose," Draco said, grinning and then immediately wincing again.

Professor McGonagall's eyes widened slightly.

“Draco fought it, too,” Harry added. “And then Hermione used *Wingardium Leviosa* to levitate its club and hit it over the head. She’s the one who knocked it out.”

McGonagall’s eyes got bigger. “Well. I still wish you had come to one of us. Other than that, you handled yourselves very well. I’m awarding ten points to Slytherin for bravery and ten points to Ravenclaw for Miss Granger’s quick thinking.”

Hermione blushed.

“Now, you boys go with Professor Snape to the nurse. I’ll take Miss Granger back to her dormitory.” She looked Harry in the eye. “Next time, you find us first, Mr. Potter.”

“Yes, Professor,” Harry said.

They spent the night in the infirmary. Harry had a mild concussion and Draco had a cracked sternum and a horribly bruised chest. They were in neighboring beds in the otherwise empty room, and once Madam Pomfrey finished tending to them, they sat in silence until Harry broke it.

“Why were you in the bathroom?” he asked. “I looked everywhere for you, you know. Couldn’t find you.”

Draco exhaled slowly and closed his eyes. “I was having a bad day.”

“Yes, obviously, but why?”

“I don’t know. Leave it.”

Harry was quiet for a while. Draco peeked over at him and saw that he was staring intently at Draco, green eyes bright in the dim of the room. “Tell me,” he said.

“It’s nothing. I’m an idiot,” Draco mumbled.

“I know *that*,” Harry said, grinning.

“No, wait, sorry. *You’re* the idiot,” Draco amended. “I’m the smart one.”

“Well, smart one, I’ve got your wand back in our room.”

Draco huffed out a laugh. “Right.”

“I was so scared when it hit you,” Harry said suddenly, the smile falling away from his face. “I’ve never been so scared.”

Draco felt his chest tighten. “I - I wanted to - I wanted to *kill* it when it got you with the club. I was *furious*.” Even now, just thinking about it, Draco’s heart was beating faster, his fists clenching.

Harry smiled at him for a moment before facing the ceiling again. “Well, thank Merlin we’re alright. We fought a mountain troll and won. Kind of impressive, really.”

“I’ll say,” Draco said, turning to the ceiling as well.

“Goodnight, Draco.”

“Goodnight, Harry.”

The days seemed to pass quickly after that, rushing towards the holiday break. Draco was trying to talk Harry into coming to the Manor, but Harry was reluctant, arguing that he would be imposing. “I can’t just crash your family’s Christmas,” he said. They were sitting on the floor of their room, playing Exploding Snap.

“You *can*. On Christmas Eve my parents have a bunch of grownups over, and then on Christmas Day, we sit around doing nothing at all. It’s boring as shit.”

“Christmas Eve might be alright, I guess. Since there will be other people there,” Harry said, chewing his lip.

Draco sighed. “Fine. Christmas Eve then.”

“Fine.”

“Maybe after Christmas, I can come back early.”

Harry’s eyes lit up at that. “Really? That’d be brilliant! We’d have the castle to ourselves! I bet we could find all sorts of off-limit things to mess with.”

Draco laughed. “I imagine we could.”

Theo and Blaise came in then, ranting about their Transfiguration essays before joining in the game. Snow began to fall soft and clean around the castle, but the boys, nestled in their underwater room, didn’t notice until much later.

A few days after that, everyone was dragging bird cages and suitcases and cat carriers through the castle as they made their way to the Hogwarts Express. Draco and Harry were saying goodbye outside. “Remember,” Draco said, even though he’d already said it at least a dozen times, “Professor Snape is going to collect you on Christmas Eve and bring you through the floo.”

Harry groaned. “Why Snape?” he asked, yet again.

“Because he’s Head of House. Because he agreed to help. Because it’s not my fault you have some bizarre feud going with him.”

Harry sighed. "Fine."

"What're you going to do until then?"

A shrug. "I don't know. Talk to ghosts? Play with myself? Go slowly mad because I'm so bored?"

Draco tried not to think about the second option too much. "You should be coming with me, you stubborn goat. Don't know why you're not."

"Because I'm a stubborn goat," Harry said, smirking.

Just then, Hermione and Pansy came running over. Draco still hadn't quite forgiven Pansy for FeatherGate, despite knowing full well that his feelings were entirely unfair to her.

"Harry, I can't believe you're staying here! You're going to be so lonely!" Pansy cried, pouting.

Harry shrugged and kept his eyes on Draco, which made Draco soften towards Pansy just a little.

"I'm going to miss you all so much," Hermione said, her eyes weirdly shiny.

Draco blinked and realized she was about to cry. He pulled her into a tight hug, resting his head on top of her soft, smooth (thanks to Pansy and Sleekeazy's) hair. "We'll miss you, too," he said. "Especially me. I'm going to have to rein in these idiots all by myself."

He felt her laugh against him. He desperately wanted to ask her to come for Christmas Eve. Pansy and Greg and Blaise would be there, tagging along with their parents. But he knew his own parents would not take kindly to him bringing a muggle-born into their house. It sucked, but there was not much he could do about it.

"You know," he said, pulling away. "I'm coming back after Boxing Day. You could come back early, too."

She considered this. "Maybe. I'll talk to my parents. I *am* looking forward to being with them, though. I'd feel bad cutting my visit short."

"Well, think about it, at least, won't you?" Draco asked.

She nodded, looking slightly cheered.

Pansy pulled them all into a messy group hug, and then Pansy, Draco, and Hermione set off, leaving Harry alone in the snow. Draco turned back after a moment, and saw that Harry was still looking at them – at him, specifically – with an expression that was impossible to read. Draco lifted a hand, and Harry lifted one in return before making his way back to the castle. Draco, warm now despite the freezing temperatures, found himself smiling the rest of the way to the train.



# A Very Drarry Christmas, or the One Where Draco Makes a Deadly Mistake

## Chapter Summary

Draco celebrates Christmas with Harry and then does something stupid

“The only thing worse than a boy who hates you: a boy that loves you.”  
— Markus Zusak, *The Book Thief*

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Harry showed up at the Manor on Christmas Eve in late afternoon, a sour-looking Professor Snape trailing in behind him. Harry seemed tense and uncomfortable at first, but his demeanor improved the moment Snape disappeared.

“It’s nice to meet you, Harry,” said Draco’s mother, smiling down at the other boy. “Draco’s told us so much about you.” She was already dressed for the evening in a floaty, silvery gown. Draco had on his typical Manor garb: a crisp, tailored shirt and pressed trousers. Harry, on the other hand, was wearing too-big jeans and a faded jumper, because his clothes were all terrible. Much to Draco’s mother’s credit, she did not react to Harry’s disastrous wardrobe.

“Likewise, Mrs. Malfoy,” Harry said. He seemed overwhelmed by the Manor, by all the fine, hand-woven rugs and antique sculptures and vases, and by the sheer enormity of it, the corridors that stretched endlessly in every direction.

“Mother, may I show Harry my room?” Draco asked.

“Of course, darling,” she said.

“Your house is so *big*,” Harry whispered as they broke free from parental supervision and raced up the stairs.

Draco shrugged. “Who cares.”

“I dunno. I care, a bit. I mean, it’s nice. Impressive, or whatever.”

Draco gave him a look. There had been a time when he was also rather impressed with his house, with his lineage, with himself. That was before he’d learned, quite painfully, how those things didn’t matter in the slightest, and that good breeding and money were not the same as goodness. In fact, they often resulted in quite the opposite. “Well, my house is not nearly as impressive as your bloody *name*, so stop being weird about it.”

That brought on a little chuckle. “Fair enough. Dropping it.”



Harry looked around Draco's room with the same sort of awe, playing with toy after toy. Admittedly, Draco had plenty. After Harry finally tired of his exploration, they played a round of Exploding Snap, and then Draco's mother knocked. "Boys," she said. "The guests will be here soon. You'd better dress." She shut the door quietly behind her.

"Dress?" Harry asked, looking down at himself as if to confirm that he was not, in fact, naked.

"Yes, trust me, you do not want to wear that tonight. Mother ordered something for you."

"Okay," Harry said, looking nervous. "What is it?"

"A tuxedo, of course. Tonight's black tie."

Harry burst out laughing before realizing that Draco was not joining in. "Oh. You're serious."

"I am."

"Aren't tuxedos rather...muggle?" Harry asked.

"Not at the *holidays*," Draco said with exasperation.

Harry ended up looking quite dashing in his tuxedo, and he even let Draco put some product in his hair. Not that it did much.

"We look like tossers," Harry said, grinning at his reflection.

"We look *nice*, you pleb," Draco said.

Soon enough, Pansy was pounding on Draco's door. She was wearing a burgundy velvet dress trimmed with black satin at the hem. "Well, don't you boys clean up well!" she exclaimed. "I hope you're done primping, though, because you *must* come downstairs! Everyone's here, and the grownups are getting pissed already!"

They ran after her, all of them slowing to a brisk walk when they were within view of the adults. There was Blaise, in a tuxedo of his own, and Greg, too, wearing a three-piece suit. The grownups were indeed getting smashed, some of them anyway, guzzling firewhiskey and elfwine and champagne like it was water.

Draco's parents spotted them, and insisted upon introducing Harry all around, beaming at him like he was some sort of newly-acquired piece of art. It made Draco feel rather murderous, but he opted to grin and bear it, and it was over soon enough. Afterward, they found the other children, and together, filched some champagne and drank it in the loo downstairs. A tiny bit was enough to get their heads spinning. They all took turns dancing with Pansy, who seemed positively thrilled by all the attention, and laughed as she tried to teach Harry some basic steps.

They ate canapes and tiny, one-bite kabobs, and even smaller cakes and puddings, and when they finally tired of the ballroom, they ran to the solarium and spread out across the floor,

playing idiot games like twenty questions, being wholly inappropriate, and giggling endlessly.

It was much like every other Christmas Eve at the Manor: brilliant, sparkling, dizzying, colorful, lush. Only this time Harry was there, sprawled out next to Draco, their shoulders just barely touching. Draco watched Harry, entranced, noticing how his brow furrowed as he tried to think of another question to ask Pansy. Noticing how genuinely adorable he looked in a tuxedo.

Then too soon, the night was wrapping up, and everyone's sloshed parents came to collect them, and Snape, awkward and straight-backed in his professor's robes, came for Harry.

"You sure you won't stay? Mother would love to have you," Draco said.

Harry shook his head. He really was one of the stubbornest people Draco had ever met.

"Then I'll see you soon. Two days."

Harry nodded, looking a bit bereft. Draco wanted to shake him, because it was his own damn fault that he was going to be alone on Christmas. Instead, he found himself hugging the other boy, and realized it was the first time he'd ever done that. It was nothing special – brief and ordinary – but it was nice all the same.

The day after Boxing Day, Snape came back to bring Draco to school. Draco found Harry sitting in his bed, still in pajamas, reading a Quidditch magazine. "Oi!" he exclaimed when Draco picked up a ball of dirty socks and threw it at him. "You're back! I have something to show you! You'll never guess! It's incredible!"

Draco laughed. Harry was giddy over something, absolutely vibrating with it. "Alright then, what is it?"

Harry picked up something behind him and then suddenly disappeared.

"What the hell? Harry?"

He blinked back into view.

"What the Salazar was *that*?" Draco asked.

Harry stared at him, eyes dancing with mischief, then disappeared again.

"Okay! I see you learned a trick, damnit! Now tell me how you did it!"

Harry reappeared and then sat there grinning like a loon for a moment before whispering, "Invisibility Cloak."

Draco gasped. "What! Holy hell! That's – that's brilliant! And it explains a *lot*, actually."

“What do you mean?” Harry asked.

“Never mind. Let me try it!”

Draco did, and it was positively unnerving, watching himself disappear. And wickedly cool, too. He pulled the fabric over his legs and stared at the bedspread where his legs ought to be. He covered himself up with it up to his head, and then he and Harry laughed until their sides hurt, as his body-less head floated around the room.

“I have something else to show you, too, but it will have to wait until tonight,” Harry said.

That night, after the castle was quiet, they crept out of the dungeon and down a deserted hall, clinging to one another underneath the Invisibility Cloak. Harry carefully opened the door of a vacant classroom, and they slipped in, shutting the door behind them with a tiny snick.

There was nothing interesting about the room, except for the mirror that stood at its center. It had clawed feet, a gilded, ornate frame, and strange words inscribed on its edge. Something about the words, about the shape of the letters, reminded Draco, suddenly, of the Time-Turner tucked away in his trunk in the dungeons. Whatever this was, it contained some ancient and powerful magic, too; Draco could actually feel the magic pulsing through the air, weighty and tangible. “I don’t think we should be here, Harry,” he said, his throat thick around the words.

“No, it’s fine, I promise. I was here yesterday.”

Draco looked at him and let out a breath. “Okay. What’s so special about it then?”

“Look into it,” Harry said. “Just look.”

Draco stepped before the mirror, hating the way his palms were sweating. He was such a coward, really. Scared of so much. He was a grown man in a boy’s body (although, to be honest, he felt less and less like a grown man lately. His thoughts and feelings seemed to be regressing back to childhood ones), and he was more afraid than the actual eleven-year-old by his side. He forced himself to look, to keep his spine straight.

He was not looking at his own reflection. Or, not really. It was him, but an older version of him, the version that he was before all of this. He was standing, smiling shyly, and looking at the man beside him, at *Harry*, all grown up and devastatingly lovely. They were holding hands.

His breath caught. “What is this?” he whispered, stepping back, stepping far away. “Why are you showing me this?”

“What did you see?” Harry asked.

“Don’t you know?”

“Maybe. I don’t know if it was the same as mine.”

“Well, what did *you* see?” This was so confusing. Draco tried to reach into his Department of Mysteries brain and pick apart the possibilities. This showed your soulmate. Or, perhaps, the future. Or, a possible future, maybe the one you were striving towards. It was likely something like that.

“I saw my parents,” Harry said unsteadily. “I saw them, with me, looking at me like...like they *loved* me.” He sucked in a breath. “They were there, and loads of other people were there, too, people who looked maybe a bit like them. I think it might’ve been – I dunno, but I think it might’ve been my family.”

“Oh,” Draco said, his mind whirling.

He wanted to think this through, add this new information into his calculations, but Harry was looking hopeful and sad and strangely vulnerable as he opened his mouth to speak again. “Do you think they’re trapped in there, somehow? Is it a mirror that shows people who’ve died? Did it call them here when I looked?”

“No, I don’t think that’s it,” Draco said. It hit him, then. This was a mirror of wishes. Of desire. He glanced over the inscription once again. One of the words jumped out at him: *Erised*. Erised. Desire, spelled backwards. Of course.

“Well, what did you see?” Harry asked again.

“I saw...I saw myself. As captain of the Slytherin team,” Draco said. He rubbed at the nape of his neck, suddenly tired. “I think it shows you what you want. What you want most.”

He saw Harry process this, watched the light of excitement in his eyes dim. “So they’re not there, really. It’s not them at all. It’s my own...my own stupid wishes.” His shoulders were hunching forward, his body sort of caving in on itself.

“Your wishes aren’t stupid, Harry,” Draco said, taking his hand. “And maybe it is them, a little. Your parents. I don’t know. Maybe it’s possible.”

“Oh shut up, Draco. It’s not possible. Of course it’s not,” Harry snapped, yanking his hand away. His voice was hard and almost cruel, and it took Draco a moment to realize he was crying. “They’re dead. They’re not in this bloody mirror. They’re fucking dead.”

Draco slipped the cloak over them both. “Come on. Let’s go. We’ll talk in our room.”

Surprisingly, Harry let Draco haul him back to the dungeons. It was very late, and Draco was tired. Harry must be tired, too. When they got back, Harry crawled into his bed, leaving the curtains open, and burrowed under his covers, looking very small. He was shaking, just a bit, but Draco could see it. He curled up into a tiny ball, a shape so unlike his normal sprawl that Draco found himself grimacing at the sight of it. Harry stared at Draco, who was sitting on his own bed, hands in his lap. Those familiar green eyes were enormous, and Harry appeared so lost that it was causing Draco actual, physical pain to look at him.

“Harry,” he began, having no real notion of what to say. What do you say to a boy who’s never had parents? Who stumbled upon a ghostly image of them, conjured up out of his own

need, and tried to pretend it was real?

Draco watched, horrified, as Harry's breath hitched, and he began to cry again, this time rather noisily. "Bollocks," he whispered between sobs. "Don't laugh at me, Draco. Don't you dare."

"I'm not – I'm not going to *laugh* at you, you wanker," Draco said. "What do you take me for?"

Harry smiled, his lips rather wobbly.

Before he could stop himself, Draco had bridged the gap between them and was climbing under Harry's covers, shoving him over roughly. "Come here, idiot," he said, thrusting his arm underneath Harry's body and pulling him close.

If Harry thought this was strange, he didn't show it. He curled up rather fiercely against Draco, his head tucked under Draco's chin. Neither one of them said anything, but Draco could feel Harry crying softly against his chest, and pulled him tighter, moving his hand soothingly back and forth across the other boy's back.

Draco listened as the sniffing slowed and then stopped and kept listening as Harry's breathing became deep and even. He breathed in the smell of Harry's hair, and felt his warm, pliant body against his own. There was no arousal, not here, not in this body, not yet. Instead, it was something deeper, and brighter.

Draco loved him. He loved him in a way that he never thought he would love anyone, and it was painful and beautiful at the same time. He wanted to wrap Harry up in happiness, in light, in warmth and reassurance. He wanted to rage against all that Harry had lost, against the evil fucker who had taken Harry's parents, against his own family and the rest who had helped and would keep helping that bastard. He vowed to protect Harry from them, from his own family and from everyone else who wanted to hurt him, who wanted to pick him apart bit by bit until there was nothing left.

He wanted to hold Harry and listen to his awful snoring from now until the day he died. He wanted to be the one to tell him it was all going to be okay, to soothe away his hurts and his fears. He wanted...he *wanted*.

And he loved him. *Fucking hell*, how he loved him.

"I can't do this," Draco whispered into the dark. It was too much, and too slow, and he could not stay here in this eleven-year-old body with these feelings that threatened to split him in two.

He nudged Harry's sleeping form away as gently as he could, wrapping him tightly in the covers. He tiptoed to his bed and pulled the trunk out from underneath it.

It stood to reason that if he was here, in this timeline, that the future would be here, too. Would be an extension of this moment, these circumstances. He would move them forward, then, along this path. Part of him was sad to skip all the moments he would share with Harry

in the intervening years, but he suspected that they might be full of pain and far too much yearning. And nobody needed to live through the war twice, did they?

No, he would skip all that. He would take them to a place where the war was over, but Harry was his friend. His friend or... whatever they would be by then. If they were still friends at that point, and only friends, Draco was fairly certain he would be able to push them over the edge, and it would be delicious to fall together, to plummet into the unknown with Harry. To fall in love, together, properly.

He pulled out the Time-Turner and it shone silver in the strange, watery moonlight of their room. He pushed the ruby over to the number eighteen. That should do it.

What month? The war ended in May, and Draco had turned eighteen in June. Maybe he ought to skip past the trials. Those had been awful, and even if, in this timeline, he wasn't being tried (he expected he was not), his parents probably still were. He didn't need to watch them go through that again. September, then. He'd always loved Septembers anyway.

He pushed the moonstone over to the four. He placed his hand over the silver handprint and felt the room tremble. He whispered the words: "The water of time flows downhill, but I will send it back up the mountain; I will bend its path to my will."

Then Draco was ripped apart, pummeled into a place beyond time, beyond the physical world entirely.

He blinked his eyes open when it was done and cried out.

He knew immediately, with a sinking certainty, where he had surfaced.

He was in Malfoy Manor.

He was in the secret room below the drawing room, the place where prisoners were kept, and he was sitting in half an inch of cold water, and everything hurt. He looked down and saw shackles around his ankles, heavy chains wrapped around a stone pillar. He was clutching the Time-Turner in one trembling, white hand.

"Harry!" he cried into the semi-darkness. "Harry!"

# In the Dungeon(s)

## Chapter Summary

Draco has no fun at all in one dungeon, but the next dungeon makes up for it

“By night, Love, tie your heart to mine, and the two  
together in their sleep will defeat the darkness”  
— Pablo Neruda, 100 Love Sonnets

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“Shh!”

Draco’s head whipped towards the voice. It was Pansy, chained up further down the wall. She was pale as death and streaked with filth, garbed in a pleated skirt and button-up that looked like they had been on her for weeks, grime and dirt layered so thick on the fabric that you could hardly see the colors beneath. There were crescent moons of purple underneath her eyes, and her hair – her shining, gorgeous hair – was matted into greasy clumps, tangled into knots that would never come undone.

“You were dreaming again, darling,” she whispered. “I didn’t want you to wake up any of our minders with your yelling.” As she spoke, her bottom lip cracked open, a thin line of blood showing starkly against the dry whiteness of the rest.

Draco found he couldn’t speak. He could only look at her in horror.

Her eyes were bright red around the edges, like she started crying years ago and never stopped. “I dream about them, too,” she said, even softer now. “All the time.”

“Them?” he asked. His voice was hoarse, and it hurt to speak. When he moved, adjusting himself to try to find a comfortable position, he felt shivery and sick.

Pansy nodded and sniffed. Her wrists were shackled in a manner similar to her ankles, and she couldn’t lift a hand to wipe away the tears that slipped over her cheeks. “Harry and Hermione.”

“They...” he gulped, his voice giving out completely. “Where are they?”

She blinked at him. “I don’t believe any part of them *stayed*, if that’s what you’re asking. I don’t think...I don’t think it’s possible when...” She trailed off and her chest heaved once, heavily.

“They’re dead, aren’t they?”

She crumpled completely then, dissolving into quiet sobs. “What the fuck, Draco? Stop it,” she whispered.

“I’m sorry, Pans. It’s okay, I’m sorry.” He shouldn’t have asked. He knew already, just from the look in her eyes, the way she’d said their names.

He would have thought he’d feel grief, that the pain of it would overwhelm him. Instead, he felt empty, like his insides had been scooped out, and deeply, deeply anxious. Some part of his mind told him that this was shock, or something like it.

Pansy calmed after a moment and began speaking again. “Greyback and Dolohov were talking while you were asleep. They thought I was sleeping, too, so they didn’t keep their voices down. They were saying we might be let out after the raid on Vasseur. If it’s successful.”

Vasseur. The name was oddly familiar. Draco wracked his brain, trying to figure out why. It took a moment, but he remembered: Remy Vasseur, the French equivalent of a Minister of Magic.

“If they take Vasseur out, who’s left?” he asked, the anxious feeling digging deeper, taking root at the very core of him.

Pansy rolled her eyes, and it was somehow reassuring, that she could feel exasperation despite everything. “You really are all about the profound questions right now, aren’t you? Circe on a stick. After that, there’s nobody but the Americans. Who else could stop him?”

“But the Americans...their magical communities are fractured. They don’t work together,” Draco said, thinking over what he knew about American wizards.

She nodded tightly. “Yes. But that’s not the *point*. The point is we might get out of this hellhole soon thanks to your father, if he succeeds with Vasseur. I mean, fuck your father, *obviously*, but still.”

Pansy stared off into the darkness across the room. Draco sat silently, reeling, trying not to fall apart completely. His stomach cramped painfully.

“Draco?” Pansy said suddenly. “What is that?”

She was looking at the Time-Turner. Draco stared at it, uncomprehending. He’d literally forgotten it was there.

“What *is* that?” she asked, louder.

“Hey!” came a gruff voice from across the room. “Shut up, you cunts! I’m trying to sleep!” It was Dolohov, barely visible from where Draco sat.

“Hide it!” hissed Pansy.



“Shut the fuck up!” yelled Dolohov. “Or I’ll take another one of those fucking fingers!”

Draco started. Fingers? He glanced down at his own, but they were all accounted for. But Pansy...he couldn’t tell, couldn’t see her hands, but she’d gone even whiter at the mention of it.

Draco pulled the Time-Turner onto his lap. He was shaking so violently that he had trouble moving the ruby, but he managed to clasp it between his fingers and pushed it to sixteen.

“Malfoy! Malfoy, you stupid cunt! What the fuck is that?” Dolohov was rising from his chair, oily face gleaming in the gloom of the dungeon.

Oh, please no.

Shit. Shit. *Shit.*

Draco put his hand onto the silver handprint.

“The water of time flows downhill!” Draco cried. Dolohov had his wand out and was beginning to cast. “But I will send it back up the mountain!” He was practically screaming now. “I will bend it to my will!”

As he finished the final word, he felt the magic hit him, felt the sting of the hex.

Then the world shattered.

Draco was flying through space and time, broken into a billion pieces.

He shot upright, chest heaving.

He was in bed. In bed at Hogwarts. He was panting, sweating, convulsing. “Fuck,” he whispered. “Fucking *christ.*” His voice broke at the end and he dissolved into gasping sobs. He wasn’t crying so much as suffocating, and shaking so hard it hurt.

“Draco?”

A hand parted the curtains of his bed, and there was Harry, whole and alive, staring at him with concern.

“*Harry,*” he managed.

“What?” Harry asked, his voice panicked. “What is it?”

Draco couldn’t reply, couldn’t do anything. Couldn’t breathe. He knew he was looking at Harry with wild eyes and his face was probably a mask of horror, but he couldn’t fucking *breathe*, goddamnit!

“Oh my god,” Harry whispered. He sat. “Calm down, *please.* Just calm down. Everything’s fine. Everything’s perfectly fine. *Breathe.* Slow, like this,” he said, and demonstrated.

Draco couldn't calm down, though, because Harry had died, was going to die, and everything was going to go to shit, and there was nothing Draco could do about it and Pansy's *fingers* and her red-rimmed eyes, and --

Harry grabbed Draco's face, palms pressed firmly against Draco's cheeks. "*Look* at me."

Draco looked.

"Breathe. Like this." He took a breath, slow and steady, and Draco watched his bare chest rise and fall.

Draco made himself stop thinking. Made himself stop doing anything but watching Harry's breath. In and out. In and out. Slow. He matched it, sort of. The gasps were interfering. But eventually they smoothed themselves out, and Draco was breathing, nice and slow, in and out.

Finally, Harry stopped and looked at him. "Do you feel better?"

Draco was still shivering, but he could inhale without choking. So that was good, he supposed. He nodded.

"What happened? Was it a dream?" Harry asked, his eyes locked onto Draco's. "Lumos," he said, and his wand lit up the little world within Draco's curtains.

Harry was alive. He was *alive*.

Draco reached out and touched Harry's cheek. There was stubble there. "You're okay," he said, and his voice broke and he began crying in earnest.

Harry's arms were around him in an instant. "Of course I'm okay. Why the hell wouldn't I be?"

"I don't know, I don't know," Draco said.

"Merlin, that must've been some nightmare," Harry whispered, his words tickling Draco's hair.

Draco should've cared about propriety. About what Harry would think, about what their other roommates might think. But all he could manage to care about was that Harry was alive and intact and that nothing terrible had happened to him.

He pulled Harry closer, tugging him down onto the bed, and then arranged their limbs so that every part of him was touching every part of Harry. Toes touching toes, knees poking knees, hips lined up with hips, chest firmly against chest, nose brushing nose. He took Harry's glasses off and folded them carefully and set them aside. Then he put his hands on either side of Harry's face, cradling it and anchoring it against his own.

Harry didn't pull away. He didn't move, and he was so close that Draco could see all the flecks of color in his eyes, all the shades of moss and emerald and hazel.

“I really am okay,” Harry whispered. “I promise.” Draco could feel Harry’s words against his lips. And then Harry kissed him.

It was like nothing Draco had ever imagined. In all the (many, many) fantasies Draco had entertained over the years, their coming together was born of friction, of tension. Sometimes even of violence (of the light, sexy variety). But this was not any of those things.

This was a kiss that spoke of deep-seated trust, of a wellspring of soft and tender feelings. Of *love*. Harry’s mouth was incredibly gentle, and soft, and warm. When he parted Draco’s lips with his tongue, it was not an invasion, but a homecoming.

Harry’s hands trailed up Draco’s chest to his shoulders and into his hair. His fingers wove themselves through Draco’s fine strands, leaving shivery trails at the roots. Every place Harry touched felt like it was waking up, blooming, opening.

Draco couldn’t stop touching Harry’s face. He drew a thumb over Harry’s jaw with its hint of downy stubble. He ran fingers over Harry’s cheekbones and along the line of his ear, trailed them down the side of his neck. His heart beat with a single note: Harry, Harry, *Harry*, until he thought it might burst.

The hunger came on them slowly, in waves. They shifted closer together, ever closer, and soon Harry’s thigh was pressing between Draco’s legs. With careful fingers, Harry was lifting the hem of Draco’s shirt, up and over his head, and then there was a glorious press of warm skin against him. Harry’s hands made their way, slow as honey, down Draco’s back, down to the bare skin under his pants, his fingers brushing lightly over the curve of his arse.

Draco sighed against Harry’s mouth as Harry pulled Draco’s pants down and off, and again as he helped Harry out of his, and began to lose all ability to think when Harry’s prick touched his own and Harry began nuzzling at his throat.

“What do you want to do?” Harry whispered, kissing a trail along Draco’s jaw and coaxing a small keening sound from Draco that he hadn’t known he could make.

“Anything.” *Everything*. “What do you want?”

“Can I touch you?”

“Yes,” Draco whispered, grabbing his wand to cast a quick Muffliato.

Harry kissed him again, deep and slow, every stroke of his tongue a caress, and then he felt Harry’s warm, firm grip along his shaft. He moved his hips helplessly towards it, wanting more, more friction, more touch. More anything.

“I don’t know what I’m doing,” said Harry, his smile crooked.

“You do it to yourself. It’s the same bloody thing,” Draco said, smiling back at him.

“Prat,” Harry said, and began to move his hand up and down Draco’s cock with firm, slow strokes.

Draco drew Harry's mouth back to his, and they began to kiss again, hotter now, wet and a little filthy.

"Is this good?" Harry murmured against his mouth.

"Yes, it's good. It's so good, Harry," Draco breathed, biting down on Harry's lip.

Harry groaned and pressed hard against him, and Draco reached down to take Harry's cock in his hand. Harry felt bigger, thicker, the skin hot and silky and hard all at once.

Harry's body gave a little jerk as Draco ran his thumb along the slit and slid the precome over the head, circling around it once before stroking deliberately down the shaft.

"Fuck, you're good at this," Harry whispered, nipping at Draco's ear.

Draco felt himself moving his hips in time to Harry's strokes, head spinning with the sensation of it, of the feel of Harry warm against him, so unbearably close, of the feel of Harry's hard cock in his hand, and the sounds, *Merlin*, the *sounds* Harry was making in his ear.

He used his free hand to guide Harry's mouth back to his, and everything was circling higher and higher, Harry's mouth devouring his own, Harry's tongue hot on his, and the world narrowed to their cocks and their hands and the beat of Harry's heart and the slide of his skin. "*Harry*," Draco whined.

"Don't stop," Harry gasped, and then he was coming, hot and slick over Draco's hand, onto Draco's belly and cock, and then a moment later, Draco was coming and biting into the side of Harry's neck to keep from crying out.

They stayed there, unmoving, panting, trembling. Harry moved his arm, finally, and circled it around Draco's waist. Draco shifted his hand to Harry's hip and thought he could probably die a happy man now. He was floating miles above the earth, almost delirious. But then he noticed a little line forming between Harry's brows. "What?" he asked. What could possibly be wrong, when *that* had just occurred?

"What are we going to do?" Harry asked.

"About what?"

"About...about *this*. And...and Pansy. Hermione. It's all...oh, it's all a bit fucked, isn't it?" He sighed, absently running his thumb along Draco's eyebrow. Draco was, frankly, flabbergasted and entirely confused. Harry grabbed his wand and cast a quick cleaning spell over them both. "Probably shouldn't have done that," he continued. "I told you I've been wanting to end things. But I probably should've waited until I actually *did*. Because it's not right, doing this first. Not that we set out to do it, obviously, but...didn't stop doing it, either."

"Harry. What in Circe's name are you talking about?"

"Ending things with Pansy, obviously."

“You’re dating *Pansy*?”

“I just *told you* that I hadn’t ended things yet. So yes, I still am!”

Draco rolled onto his back and ran his hands over his face. “Oh my fucking god. I hate everything. And what, pray tell, does Hermione have to do with this?”

“Um,” Harry said, giving him a look. “She’s your girlfriend?”

“Oh, of course she is!” Draco exclaimed, throwing his hands up into the air and sounding borderline insane. “Of *course she fucking is!*” He started laughing then, strangled giggles that he couldn’t bring to a halt.

“When you’re done having a mental breakdown, we *need* to talk about this,” Harry said. “Because honestly, I have no idea what this means or what we ought to do.”

“Yes, Harry, I can’t wait,” Draco snapped. “I can’t wait to chat about our bloody girlfriends and what us being really, really hot for each other’s cocks could possibly mean!”

Harry frowned. “Now you’re just being an asshole.” He sat up and dug through the covers to find his pants and yanked them back on.

“But I thought we were going to *talk*, Harry!” Draco hissed as he pulled on his own pants. “Don’t you want to *talk* about how cozy it is here in this *closet*?! ”

“I refuse to deal with you when you’re like this,” Harry said, glaring. He parted the curtains and swung his legs over the edge of the bed.

“Fuck you!” Draco yell-whispered between clenched teeth.

“No, fuck *you*, you little fuck!” Harry yell-whispered back.

“I’m *taller* than you, you bloody idiot. You can’t call me little!”

Harry looked furious, like he was ready to literally rip Draco’s head off, and then suddenly he was laughing, shoulders shaking, and then Draco found himself laughing, too, albeit with a slightly hysterical edge.

“Shut the hell up,” mumbled Theo from the other side of the room. Oops, the Muffliato must have worn off. Hopefully not in the middle of their wank-fest.

“Sorry!” Harry whispered loudly. Then, quieter: “We’ll talk tomorrow, yeah?”

“Yeah, fine. Whatever,” said Draco, rolling to face the other way.

A moment later there was a hand on his shoulder. “I thought we were talking tomorrow,” Draco muttered.

“We will. But I don’t want you to think...” He pulled at Draco’s shoulder, turning him back around.

Draco tried to glare, but it was difficult, because the look in Harry's eyes was so soft.

"I don't want you to think I'm sorry it happened. Or that it didn't mean anything. I feel a bit guilty, only because of Pansy, but I'm not sorry it happened. And it did mean something, to me anyway. It meant quite a lot, actually."

Draco sighed. "It meant something to me, too. And...and I'm sorry."

Harry smiled his crooked smile. "Me too." Then he leaned over and kissed Draco once, chastely, on the mouth. "You're still a wanker, though," he whispered, then disappeared to the other side of the room before Draco could reply.

# This, Again

## Chapter Summary

Draco talks to Hermione and re-sets the clock

“Anybody can look at you. It's quite rare to find someone who sees the same world you see.”  
— John Green, *Turtles All the Way Down*

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When Draco woke the next morning, he was alone in the room. Thankfully, there was a grid tacked up to the bulletin board that detailed all four roommates' schedules. Draco apparently had first period free.

He dressed and hurried up to the Great Hall where breakfast was still in full swing. He found himself immediately scanning the room for Harry, looking first at the Gryffindor table (habit) and then at the Slytherin one. Harry, seated between Pansy and Daphne, looked up and noticed Draco. He didn't look away, and his gaze warmed, and for a moment, the rest of the room seemed to fade, and it was just the two of them – sometimes, it seemed it had always been just the two of them, in one way or another -- and the world made sense again. Then Pansy was elbowing Harry and saying something to him and laughing and Harry looked away. Draco couldn't help but notice that Harry was *not* touching her, in a deliberate sort of way, nor did he seem inclined to.

Draco shifted his gaze to the Ravenclaw table, where a more mature, not-at-all-frizzy-haired-or-buck-toothed Hermione sat, thumbing through her Arithmancy textbook and absently sipping at her tea. “Hermione,” he whispered in her ear. “I need to talk to you.”

She smiled and leaned over to kiss him quickly on the cheek. “Well, good morning to you, too,” she said.

Oh, Circe. This was going to be so awkward.

“I'm serious,” he insisted. “Can we talk? Privately?”

She nodded, finishing her tea and collecting her things before standing. “Alright, then. Where shall we go?”

The library didn't seem quite private enough, nor did either of the Common Rooms. He considered his own room but Blaise might be there, because he had a free period, too. Hermione's room might work, but then again, that might be a little *too* private, and there was a bed there, and really, this didn't need to be any more difficult than it already was. “Lake?” he suggested.

“Sure,” she said, slipping her hand into his as though it were the most natural thing in the world.

This was really throwing him. Was this alternate timeline’s Draco into women *and* men? How else could you explain this? Based on Hermione’s casual and almost absent-minded affection, it didn’t seem like this was a new thing, even. It appeared to be a solid, established relationship. Which meant that they had probably been together for a while, which certainly meant kissing and cuddling and oh Merlin he did not want to think of what else. Because *this* Draco – the one that he had always been -- was decidedly *not* bisexual in any way, shape, or form. Except when he drank ungodly amounts of alcohol. Or took ecstasy. But even then, he still had to pretend it was a bloke.

Hermione and Draco made their way out to the lake in comfortable silence (Outwardly, anyway. Inside, Draco was reeling), hands linked. The weather was cool but warming steadily, the way it tended to on early autumn days, and the sun was mellow and golden as it made its way up the sky. They found a place at the far edge of the lake to sit, and for a moment, Draco was worried that Hermione was going to try to kiss him or something and was edging towards a full-on panic attack, because how was he supposed to respond if she did?

She didn’t.

She even dropped his hand, and thank Salazar for that, because his palm had been sweating something awful.

He looked into her warm, brown eyes. She was a lovely girl, she truly was, and he had grown incredibly fond of her, but she was a *girl* and there was the pesky little matter of him being extremely and enthusiastically bent. He didn’t think he was up for trying to pretend otherwise.

“Hermione,” he began, not sure where to go after that.

“What? What is it? You can tell me.” She looked open and sincere, the sunlight playing over her hair, picking up the golden strands that were woven through the brown.

“Hermione, I’m gay,” he said.

There. That ought to do it. He braced himself, waiting for what, he wasn’t certain. Tears, maybe, or yelling. Tears *and* yelling. Whatever it was, he could handle it, with grace, even. Hermione deserved that much.

What he didn’t expect was for her to start laughing, rather loudly.

“Yes, Draco, I think we’ve established that.”

He felt his mouth drop open. “Um, sorry?” he managed.

Her grin slowly faded and she examined him. “What are you playing at, exactly? Are you joking? Or is there some other reason you’re announcing your proclivities to your long-term



beard?”

“Oh, thank you Merlin,” he whispered. The relief he felt almost made him shudder in its intensity.

“Seriously, what’s going on? Why are you being so strange?”

The odd thing was, as much as he had no desire to be in a *relationship* with Hermione Granger, he trusted her more than almost anyone. He trusted her to be kind, to be careful, and to be thoughtful. He trusted her to keep his secrets and give him good advice. And here, in this timeline, it was clear they were, though not truly dating, extremely close. “It’s a long story,” he said, looking out at the lake and watching the little circular ripples made by fish or whatever-the-hell-else might be down there. God, that lake had always given him the creeps.

“Lucky for you, I’ve got a free period,” she said, taking his hand again, only to squeeze it, once, briefly, before pulling back.

He took a deep breath and looked back at her, into her soft, serious eyes. And then he told her about the Time-Turner.

First period and second period were over, and they were working their way through third, though the conversation was far from finished. Hermione was sprawled out on her back, sort of glaring at the sky. “I’m engaged to *Ron Weasley*?”

“Seriously? *That’s* what you took away from this?”

She giggled. “Obviously that’s not the only thing. But it’s possibly the most disturbing part. Sure, he’s fit, I suppose, but he seems like such a prat!”

“Not wrong there,” Draco said, smiling. “About the prat part, anyway; I shudder to think that’s what you consider fit. But, anyway, for a prat, he seems to really love you. Makes you happy.”

She was shaking her head. “How strange. We’re still friends, though, right? You and I?”

He considered this. He thought of old-timeline Hermione as his friend, more and more as time went on, but they never called it by that name, and he had a difficult time, sometimes, believing that she could have truly forgiven him for everything. “We’re friends, in a fashion. We work together, like I said. We’ve become *work* friends, and it seems like it might be morphing into something more substantial. Maybe. Only...” He groaned. All the worst parts of the story still needed to be shared. Might as well get them over with, he supposed. “So, I told you that you and Harry and Ron were all in Gryffindor, in this other timeline, right?”

“Right, and you’re still in Slytherin with Pans.”

“Right. Only, it’s not like it is now. Slytherin and Gryffindor, in my timeline, were always at odds. I’m not talking about a casual rivalry. It was intense. None of us got along. And

actually, given that it's not nearly as extreme in this timeline, I think Harry and I might have been the reason for it."

Hermione frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Harry and I completely hated each other. I mean, *hated*. Got into fights all the time – with words and wands and sometimes fists. I broke his nose, once. Stomped on it. And I tried to Crucio him in the bathroom, and he sliced me open with some strange spell -"

"Oh my god!" Hermione gasped. Her eyes were huge in her face, and she had paled.

"Yeah. That's why I came back and changed things in the first place. To erase all the bad between us, so we could be together. I can tell he, well, in our timeline, when we're a bit older, I can tell that he fancies me, at least a little, only he thinks we can never get beyond what we did to one another in school. So I decided to change our past." He nodded to himself. There, he'd shared everything he needed to in regards to that – *oh*. No, he hadn't.

"Also," he began, grimacing. "I was sort of on the Dark Lord's side during the war. I wanted to go back and make a better decision there, too."

"You...that's...that's *mad*, Draco! Absolutely *mad*! I can't imagine any of that. I cannot imagine you and Harry fighting – I mean, not the stupid tussling and teasing you always do, but actually *fighting*. I can't imagine us not being friends. I can't imagine you siding against us *with You-Know-Who*, for Circe's sake! It's so strange to even hear you call him the Dark Lord! You always say his name."

"I do?" Now it was Draco's turn to be surprised.

"Yes, you and Harry, you're the only idiots brave enough to do it."

"Huh." That was interesting. This timeline's Draco was brave. He felt an odd twinge of pride. Even though it wasn't exactly him, it *was* him, in some small way. "Well, anyway, back to you and me. I wasn't exactly nice to you, either, Hermione. Not while we were in school. I said some horrible things. A lot of horrible things, if I'm honest. You hated me, too."

"Oh, I doubt I -"

"No, I think you did. And regardless, I deserved your hate and worse. But after the war, I apologized, and you said you forgave me, and we talked, and then we were both in Mysteries and we eventually discovered that we worked well together, and it just sort of...grew from there."

"I'm glad about that, at least," Hermione said, smiling gently over at him. "I can't imagine my life without you. Honestly, I can't. You're my best friend. Not that I don't love Harry and Pans to bits, but you're the one who always seems to understand me. You're the one I always find myself being honest with, even when it's hard. You're such a wonderful listener. Such a wonderful friend."

Draco's whole body filled with a bubbling sort of happiness at her words. He couldn't be that terrible if Hermione was his best friend, could he? If she thought that he was a good person?

He reached over and squeezed her hand like she had done earlier, to him. “So, tell me about this bearding situation, will you?”

She giggled. “Oh, goodness. Where to start? Well, it was right after Harry and Pansy became a thing at the start of fourth year. You were in a snit over it, of course, and wanted to see if you could make Harry jealous, and I, being the kind soul that I am, agreed to help. And Harry *was* jealous. Very *obviously* jealous, and still is. I mean, we always talk about how he stares at us and gets all tense whenever we cuddle up together, and how he’s always bringing up your inside jokes when I’m around, as if he’s trying to prove that he’s closer to you than I am or something. But he hasn’t really *done* anything about it yet.

“Anyway, even though the making him jealous thing hasn’t worked the way we wanted it to, it’s just been easier, I suppose, to keep the ruse up. Keeps things easy with Harry and Pansy, you know, so that the dynamic isn’t so awkward when we’re all together.” She laughed, suddenly. “Besides, I’m saving myself for Ron *Bloody* Weasley, apparently.”

Draco grinned. “Well, it’s very nice of you, to waste your teenage years on our fake relationship.”

“It’s not all fake,” she said, her voice soft. “I mean, we don’t go around shagging each other or anything, but we do love spending time together. And we sleep in each other’s beds, sometimes, and cuddle.”

“Really?” he said, surprised.

She nodded.

“Huh,” he said. It sounded very familiar, like what he and Pansy had been like at Hogwarts, minus the pretending to be dating part. Pansy and Draco had *actually* dated, but that was before Draco admitted to himself that he didn’t like girls. “Did we never...you know. Ever?”

She blushed. “Not really. We snogged a couple times when we’d been drinking. That’s it.”

“Ah, yes. Firewhisky will do that to a person.”

“It will.”

“Harry and I fooled around last night. He’s going to break up with Pansy.”

Hermione’s eyebrows shot up into her hair. “Oh! Well, that’s wonderful! But, oh.” Her face fell. “Poor Pans. Although, I know they’ve been having a lot of problems lately anyway. I don’t think either of them is all that happy being together anymore. It’s more like they’re just...used to it, at this point.”

Draco felt relieved. As much as he unfairly resented this timeline’s Pansy for snatching Harry up, he didn’t want to hurt her too much. He still loved the shit out of her.

Hermione was shaking her head, still chuckling. “Well, this has been the most surreal conversation of my life, Draco, and I say that as someone who has had hundreds of

conversations about defeating the forces of evil, waging a new wizarding war, and destroying a nose-less, undead dark wizard."

"I haven't told you just everything yet, Hermione," Draco said, feeling a tremor of fear. Hermione was just looking at him to continue, so he plunged on ahead. "Before I came here, to this point in time, I went to the future. Along this timeline. *Your* timeline. And it was... well, it was fucking *dark*, Hermione. Terrible, awful. I can't - " He felt his throat close up at the memory. Circe help him, how did you tell someone they were going to *die*?

"Just tell me," she said, evenly. "I'd rather know."

"You and – and Harry. You don't make it. Out of the war."

She paled, but to her credit, she didn't start sobbing or going into hysterics. "When?"

"I don't know, exactly. I only know it's between now and September of 1998. Although... when Pansy was telling me -- in the future, I mean – it felt like it had happened some months before. Just from the way she spoke about it. I should have asked her details, but I had to get out, before — well, let's just say we were in a dangerous situation. Voldemort wins, too, if you hadn't already guessed. He was in the process of taking over the whole world."

Hermione nodded, then looked out to the lake. "I don't want to die. And I don't want Voldemort to win."

His heart broke for her. "I don't fucking want you to die, either, Hermione! Is there no way to stop it, do you think?"

She had on her puzzle-solving face, suddenly, the one she wore when she was doing Potions homework or diagnosing a new magical object in the Department of Mysteries. He could almost see the wheels turning in that incredible brain of hers. "You know, I've used a Time-Turner. Not the same as yours, but..."

He smiled. "I know. You told me in the other timeline. I was very jealous that they let you do that."

She managed a smile, but it fell quickly. "I told you while it was happening, here in this timeline. You even joined me once. But, you know, maybe, if I can get that Time-Turner back..."

"You can use mine," he said, softly, realizing, suddenly, how obvious it was that she should. "It's more powerful. You could go way back, to the beginning of Hogwarts, like I did, and make different choices. End up in Gryffindor with Ron, and then you won't get hurt."

She was already shaking her head before he finished. "What if everything is horrible there, too? No. And besides, I belong here in this timeline. You don't. You're the one who should go."

"But I don't *die*, Hermione." He felt close to tears. He desperately wanted to save her, somehow, only he didn't know how.

She put a soft hand on his cheek. "There are worse things, aren't there? Like living through that kind of loss." She let the hand fall away and gazed out at the water. "I think there might be another way," she continued, sounding thoughtful now. "You know, I don't think the Time-Turner I used created new timelines. At least, I don't think it did. It was more like it erased a little bit and re-wrote it."

It tracked with what little he'd learned about ordinary turners. He thought once again of Eloise Mintumble. When she came back to 1899, it couldn't have been to an entirely new timeline, because her return altered specific things in the *same* timeline, such as causing the infamous un-births, where people who were going about their everyday lives simply vanished when Eloise made changes in the past that resulted in their never having been born.

"You could use it, then," he said. "Use it and stay here, in this timeline."

She nodded. "Exactly. If I find myself in a situation that seems dire, I can assume that it *is*, in fact, dire, and go back a few hours to change the course of events. I could save myself, and Harry."

"You'd have to have your Time-Turner with you always. And you'd have to act fast, no second-guessing yourself. If something feels too dangerous, you would need to go back."

"Yes," she said, resolutely. "And if it doesn't work, well, I'll take comfort in the fact that somewhere out there, there is a different Hermione who is perfectly happy and very much alive and about to marry Ron Soddng Weasley."

He tried to smile, but couldn't quite manage it. He didn't want to leave her here. He didn't want her to take this risk. "You're sure you won't use my Time-Turner? Please, Hermione. Just consider it."

"No," she said, shaking her head. "I won't."

"You'll - " he sucked in a breath. "You'll find a way to save him, too?"

"Harry?" she asked.

Draco nodded.

"Of course I will. How else are we supposed to win this damn war?"

He leaned over and pulled Hermione into his arms. She was so good and so brave and so steadfast. He didn't deserve to have someone like her in his life. He felt a rush of regret, then, that he had mucked up his school years so badly in his own timeline. That his own terrible decisions were the only things standing between him and this incredible friendship. But perhaps he could work on that back in his own time; try to make their friendship more constant and real. *If* he was going back there, which he still hadn't entirely sorted out.

"So what will you do?" Hermione asked, pulling away, as though she was reading his mind.

"I'm not sure," he said.

“You should return to your timeline. Regroup. You can always go back in time again and try changing something else. Some other event, something that happens after first year, maybe.”

He nodded. “Yes, I suppose that’s the way to go. I’ll have to go back to the beginning, to Madam Malkin’s, and do it the way I did the first time, won’t I? Otherwise, I’m still branching off of this timeline, right? Instead of my own?”

“Yes, I think so,” she said carefully, making the puzzle-solving face again before looking back up at him, her eyes bright. “Is it strange that beyond the awful consequences of all this, I’m fascinated by it? I can’t wait to learn more. Dig further into theories of time, and the magic behind the turners, and everything.”

Draco smiled, and it was almost a steady one. “That is the least strange thing that’s been said all morning. I’d be worried if you *weren’t* planning to run into the library right after we’re done talking.”

She looked at him, her eyes intense, almost pleading. “Be careful?”

“I will,” he promised. “You be careful, too. Please. *Please*, be so careful, Hermione.”

She squeezed his hand reassuringly. “I’m going to start carrying the Time-Turner around with me. And rewind if I catch even a whiff of impending doom.”

“Err on the side of caution, won’t you?”

She stood and brushed off her robes. “I will.” She gazed at him for a moment. “I know the *other* you is going to be around when *this* you leaves. Is it silly that I’m still a bit sad that you’re going?”

He shook his head. “When I go back, you’ll be there, or some version of you. But I’m still going to miss this one.”

“Make better friends with the other me, then. This me adores you, Draco. I can’t imagine it being all that different there, no matter what happened in the past.”

He pulled her into one more hug and kissed her cheek. “Be safe,” he whispered. “And keep him safe.”

He felt her nod against his chest.

Then he made his way back into the castle, leaving Hermione standing alone by the lake, with a burden that no sixteen-year-old should ever have to carry. But if anyone could do it, it was her.

He strode into Madam Malkin’s with his mother and was ushered into the back room. What he was about to do was going to break his heart. Not only that, but it didn’t even feel natural anymore. It felt like an old skin that he had shed long ago, a skin that was cracked and crumbling with age. Nonetheless, he had to put it back on, if just for a short time.

He wasn't surprised this time when Harry appeared beside him, scrawny and small, hair everywhere. Draco braced himself, and then plastered on the arrogant sneer that he'd worn for most of his life. He began talking, the words spewing out of his mouth like bile. His parents, Quidditch, Harry's dead parents – were they the right sort?, making fun of Hagrid. He hit on all the basics, and watched, sickened, as Harry's face grew more and more distant. By the end, Harry looked positively disgusted. The witch pinning Draco's robes and Madam Malkin didn't look too impressed, either. How had he not noticed any of this the first time? Had he been so oblivious, or had their reactions simply not mattered to him? He couldn't even remember anymore.

When his robes were finished, he dragged his feet out to the front, feeling sad and tired. "Mother, may I have my Potions scale? I want to look at it."

She tutted but grew the bag and handed it to him before stopping to talk to Mrs. Goyle, who was shopping on Diagon without Greg. While she was distracted, Draco pushed the ruby and the moonstone into place, set his hand over the silver handprint, and whispered the words he knew, now, by heart.

When he opened his eyes, he was standing in Unspeakable Clarke's deserted office, and it was nearly sunrise. He set the Time-Turner underneath Clarke's musty old robes and made his way home.

When he got there, he slept for the rest of the day and sat in the darkness of his room, restless, for most of the night.

# A Novel Idea

## Chapter Summary

Hermione plays matchmaker for Draco

"If you never did, you should. These things are fun and fun is good." - Dr. Seuss

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Draco's alarm went off at its usual time, but he couldn't make sense of it. It took him long moments to remember where he was, and when, and even *who*. Everything blurred together – the Hogwarts Express and chocolate frogs; Pansy, lip bleeding in the cellar; darts at the pub and victory handshakes; Harry asleep beside him, at various ages; Madam Malkin's back room; his mother's face in the sunlight, unmarked by war; eleven-year-old Harry in a tuxedo, learning how to waltz with Pansy; Hermione squinting up at the sky by the lake; his mesh shirt and the dark-haired man sucking him off in the loo; the silver Time-Turner. None of it seemed real.

Bit by bit, he arranged the pieces, putting them in an order, of sorts. It still left him reeling, but at least he'd sorted through the basics: he was here, in his own timeline. And he was late for work.

Draco'd hardly slept the night before. He briefly considered calling in sick, but he knew that napping the day away would only serve to muck up his internal clock even further. He took his shower, feeling strangely weak and unsteady, thanks to the time-travel or maybe just exhaustion. He dressed mechanically, putting on the first button-up and dress slacks he saw, and throwing his robes over the top. He had no appetite, but managed a quick cup of tea, and then was floowing into the Ministry lobby.

It usually bothered Draco that so few people greeted him in the lobby, despite his having worked there for years now. Today, though, their avoidance of him was a relief. He wanted only the white noise of work, the small pleasure of solving a puzzle, and to be left alone.

He slipped into a lift that was blessedly empty and exited on the ninth floor. He hurried to the Love Chamber and his chest of drawers, which was tucked away in a small, private room within the chamber. He shut the door and leaned against it, closing his eyes, a fine tremor running along his limbs.

Five minutes. He'd allow himself five minutes to stand here like this. He did not cry, even though he felt like it. And then, when the five minutes was up, he cleared his throat and got to work.



He spoke to no one and worked through lunch, counting the hours down as they passed: five more hours, four more hours, three. Every minute brought him closer to the moment when he could go home, throw himself onto his bed, and embrace oblivion.

At half past two, there was a knock on his door. Unspeakable Lewis, most likely, checking on Draco's progress.

When he opened the door, he was startled to find Hermione standing on the other side rather than his gray-haired supervisor. She had two travel cups in one palm and a takeaway sack in the other.

She looked much the same as she had by the lake. Less softness at the cheeks, perhaps, and hair that was pulled into a neat knot at the nape of her neck instead hanging loose around her shoulders, but otherwise, she was identical. "Hi," she said, slipping past him, setting down her things, and perching atop the room's desk. "Coffee? Chocolate croissant?"

"Yes, please," he said, taking the cup she offered and sipping. It was just how he liked it, sweetened with loads of cream instead of sugar.

"So," she said cautiously. "How'd Friday go?"

He frowned. He assumed she'd know about everything already, from the drunken shag on Friday to the wretchedness of Saturday morning. "Harry didn't tell you?"

"You're calling him Harry now, are you? Then things must've gone well."

Ha fucking ha, he thought, but said nothing.

"But no, actually," Hermione continued. "He was impossible to get in touch with this weekend. Still haven't seen him."

"Ah," Draco said, taking another sip of his coffee. "Pass the bag, will you? I could use some empty calories."

She handed him the white café bag and he reached in and picked up the croissant on top, which was flaky and still slightly warm, with chocolate drizzled artfully over the top. He bit into it, and a million crumbs drifted down to the desk. Bugger. He loved croissants but it was impossible to eat them neatly.

Hermione was still looking at him with raised brows, waiting for a real answer. "I don't have the clearest memory of Friday, to be honest," Draco said after a moment. "But I did wake up with Harry in my bed on Saturday."

Her eyes widened.

"It didn't go well, after that."

"Why? What happened?" she asked, pulling out her own croissant and taking a dainty bite.

Draco shrugged, trying to pretend that reliving this out loud wasn't almost as awful as experiencing it. "He told me it would never work. Didn't leave much room for discussion."

"He – but, on Friday at the pub..." she trailed off, her frown softening. "Oh, Draco, I'm so sorry. If he felt that way, he should never have asked you to leave with him. It's not like him at all, either; I don't understand why...oh, no!" she cried, looking at him.

Draco realized his eyes were full, and it was mortifying. He choked down a bite of his croissant – it seemed, suddenly, dry and flavorless in his mouth – and took a sip of coffee, blinking his unshed tears away. "Sorry," he said, before clearing his throat. "Wrong pipe."

Hermione gave him a look that said he was not fooling her one bit.

"It makes sense for him to feel that way," Draco continued, "considering what a bastard I was for so long. Hard to forget that sort of thing."

Hermione was shaking her head. "No. It's not on, him acting like that. He's my best friend and I love him, but it's not on." Draco tried not to feel a pang as he remembered that in another time and place, Hermione had called *him* her best friend.

"Either way, not much use dwelling on it, is there?"

She sighed. "Suppose not," she said, popping the last of her croissant into her mouth. "For what it's worth, though, I'm sorry. For my part in the whole thing, especially. If I hadn't pushed the two of you..."

"Not your fault, Hermione. Not even a little bit."

She nodded. "If you say so."

"Hey, on another note," Draco said. "Have you seen Clarke today?" Draco had been experiencing low-level anxiety all day thinking about whether Clarke would realize that Draco had used his top-secret turner.

"Oh, he's not in. Two-week holiday, remember? To Tuscany. Poor man hasn't taken time off work in two years; he deserves it."

Draco had forgotten all about that.

He had, subconsciously, convinced himself that he'd never see the silver Time-Turner again. He assumed Clarke would catalog it today, and it would be stored properly with high-security wards in place, and that would be that. But if Clarke was gone for two weeks, that meant the Turner was still sitting there, in an unlocked, empty office. And that meant Draco was going to have to resist the Turner's pull for two whole weeks.

On the other hand, maybe he didn't have to resist. Draco had closed up the other timeline, hadn't he? And he'd warned other-Hermione about the future. Which meant he'd left that line in better shape than before. So maybe it wasn't a terrible thing, to try again. Maybe...

"Well?"

“Sorry?” Draco said, shaking himself. He realized Hermione had been speaking for some time.

“Do you want me to set you up or not? He’s only here for a few weeks and then he goes back to Romania, so it would have to be sooner rather than later.”

Romania? Who the hell did Hermione know in Romania? Then it hit him. The older Weasley. The one who wrangled dragons.

“I doubt he’s interested in going out to dinner with a Malfoy. I don’t have the best reputation among Weasleys, as you may know.”

“Ron likes you well enough,” Hermione protested.

“Does not,” Draco said, sighing. “He tolerates me for your sake.”

“Well, Charlie’s a lot more open-minded than Ron. Besides, he enjoys taming grumpy beasts,” she said, smirking.

It was all a bit unsettling, but Hermione was obviously trying to be nice, and Draco didn’t want to discourage her. “Why not throw him in a room with Potter? Surely they’d have more in common.”

“I think it’s too close to home. They’ve known each other for so long. It would be a bit... incest-y.”

“Have you forgotten that Potter dated the Weasle – I mean, Ginevra.”

“Yes, when he was *eighteen* and recovering from war trauma. Besides, Ginny always had a crush on him, from the moment she met him. It was different.”

Hermione took a sip of her coffee and glanced around the tiny room as though scanning for eavesdroppers. “Never tell Ron I said this, but Charlie’s the fittest of all the brothers,” she whispered.

“Better looking than Bill?” Draco said, incredulous. He’d never met Charlie, but Bill was incredibly attractive. For a Weasley, at any rate.

She shrugged. “Depends on what you like, but in my opinion, yes. Charlie’s a bit...scruffier than Bill. He has great tattoos and wears his hair a little longer and looks a bit more, oh, I don’t know. *Dangerous*, you might say. He *is* a bit dangerous, at that. Lives life on the edge -- sort of an adrenaline junkie.” She was looking at him with a wicked glint in her eye. “Not that you go for that sort of thing.”

“Granger, you’re far too observant,” Draco said. “It’s disturbing.”

Because the reality was, Draco absolutely did go for that sort of thing. Harry was *exactly* that sort of thing, as were Draco’s limited number of ex-boyfriends. “Well, look. I’m not saying no, but I don’t even know this bloke. You’d better not make it seem like it’s my idea. And if he blanches at the mention of my name, drop it immediately.”

“You have my word,” she said, dusting croissant crumbs off of her robes. She threw the empty coffee cups into the empty bakery sack and stood, hesitating, by the door. Then she reached out with her free hand and grasped at his. It felt strange and familiar all at once. The Hermione here had never once touched him, not ever, but the other Hermione had doled out physical affection freely. “I *am* sorry about Harry,” she said softly. “I really thought that he...” She shook her head. “Never expected him to behave like he did, that’s for certain.”

“Yes, well. Like I said, I probably deserve it.”

“You don’t,” she said, giving his hand a squeeze before dropping it and slipping out the door.

He was so busy ruminating on how this newest interaction with Hermione might be an indication of real friendship that it took him a few minutes to realize he’d just agreed to a date with Charlie Weasley. Possibly.

The world was a strange place.

Draco heard tapping on his bedroom window late that night while he was waiting for sleep to find him. He opened it and found an unfamiliar Barred Owl waiting patiently for him. He untied the envelope from the owl’s leg and thanked it. But the owl lingered, obviously waiting for him to do something. He walked to the small desk across the room and picked up a letter opener, carefully separating the flap, and scanned the message.

*Hi Draco,*

*I apologize in advance for the randomness of this note (since, obviously, we’ve never met), but Hermione swears we might get on. I’m always up for meeting new people, so I figured I’d reach out. If you’re interested in getting to know a ginger who considers it appropriate to ask out complete strangers, let me know. I’d love to meet up with you on Friday, maybe for drinks (or even dinner), if you’re up for it. If Friday doesn’t work, give me a day that does and it’ll probably be fine. My schedule is flexible while I’m home.*

*From, Charlie Weasley*

*PS – If this is too weird, please feel free to say so. I would certainly understand.*

Draco stared at the letter for a long time before picking up his quill and drafting a response.

*Dear Charlie,*

*How could I not be interested in getting to know a ginger who solicits strange men via owl? Based on your behavior thus far, I must assume you are either extremely friendly or*

*deranged, and either way, I have no doubt that a meetup with you will prove to be entertaining.*

*I'd therefore be amenable to drinks on Friday, and perhaps dinner afterward depending on how the drinks go. My department usually meets at Sullivan's (near the Ministry) on Fridays around 6:00. Would you care to join us? Hermione would be there, too, incidentally.*

*Draco*

He sealed his reply in an envelope and tied it to the waiting owl's leg. He watched it fly away before slipping back under the covers and staring at the ceiling.

He didn't know if he was doing the right thing. He really didn't expect anything to come of this, but it would make Hermione happy, and he liked that.

And perhaps he ought to consider taking Charlie Weasley's approach of getting to know new people. It might be good for him. It was novel (to him anyway): this idea that he didn't have to limit his love life to serious boyfriends and anonymous hookups. He could simply...get to know someone. For fun. For no reason at all.

Harry Potter was not the only fish in the sea. There were plenty of other men out there. Attractive men who might like Draco and enjoy spending time with him. Men who might accept him for who he was now, rather than continuing to judge him for things he'd done a decade earlier.

He fell asleep thinking that this might be just the thing he needed.

# A First Date

## Chapter Summary

Draco and Charlie grab drinks. Things go well until Harry shows up.

“Anger, Tessa thought, was satisfying in its own way, when you gave in to it.”  
— Cassandra Clare, *Clockwork Angel*

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Draco bolted upright in bed on Friday morning at the sound of his alarm. He was soaked in sweat, positively drenched, his t-shirt dark with moisture. He'd been dreaming, as he had every other night that week, of the cellar, of Pansy's pale, chapped lips with the thin line of blood. In his dream, though, there was no way out, and Dolohov was coming for Draco's fingers. And Harry was gone, and there was no way around it, no Time-Turner to fix anything, and the feeling that filled Draco was an agony that he could not stand, that felt like acid burning him from the inside out.

He put his face in his hands and tried to calm his breaths, still enveloped in the feeling of horror and wrongness carried over from the dream. He thought of that other Hermione, who cuddled with him and put up with pretending to be his girlfriend. Was she safe? Was she being careful?

After showering, Draco disappeared, appearing with a pop inside Pansy's flat. “Pans?” he called into the hall. He heard some shuffling in the bathroom, and Pansy emerged, one fluffy, white towel secured around her chest and one wrapped around her hair. Her cheeks and chest were pink from the shower, her face free of makeup. She looked very young.

Draco walked over to her and put his hands on her rosy cheeks and kissed her nose and then just stared at her, taking in how happy and healthy and whole she looked.

She glared at him, yanking herself back. “What is it,” she asked, suspicious. “Did someone die?”

He shook his head and managed a strangled laugh. “Nothing like that. Just a bad dream. I needed to see you.”

She relaxed a bit and smacked him hard on the chest. “Christ, Draco, you scared the shit out of me!”

He rubbed the spot where she'd hit him; she had not held back. “Ow,” he protested. “That hurt. You're such a bully, Parkinson.”

She chuckled, pulling the towel off of her head and rubbing it against her hair to dry it. “You want to meet up tonight?”

“It’s pub night,” he said carefully. He didn’t necessarily want to get into the Charlie Weasley situation with Pansy right now; she still didn’t know.

“Yes, I’m aware. You’ve only been ditching me on Fridays for five years,” she said, rolling her eyes. “Merlin forbid you skip one fucking pub night, but anyway. I was talking about *afterward*.”

“Oh,” Draco said, scratching behind his ear. “I sort of have plans.”

Her eyes narrowed immediately. “What kind of plans?”

“Um, a date?”

“A date?” she mimicked him. “Is that a question?”

He coughed. “No.”

“With *who*, you sneaky little bint?”

“Charlie Weasley,” he mumbled.

Pansy shrieked loud enough that it probably woke any neighbors who were still asleep. “Holy shit, Draco!” She started laughing manically. “Just when I’d pegged you as the sorriest loser who ever lived, you go and pull this brilliant move. Un-fucking-believable. Cheers to you, darling. Truly. Potter’s going to go positively green with envy over this. Will Mr. Weasley be joining you at the pub?” She was practically jumping up and down. “However did you make it happen?”

“Yes, he’s coming to the pub,” Draco said, and Pansy let out a little squeal of excitement. “And I’m not doing it to make Potter jealous, just so you know. I’m doing Hermione a favor. She wanted to set me up with Charlie, and I went along with it to make her happy.”

Pansy looked taken aback. “That scheming hussy,” she whispered. “I can’t tell you how unnerving it is to feel something like respect for her in this moment.”

“She’s not scheming, Pans. Merlin, not everyone thinks like you. Hermione just wants to see me happy, and she thinks I’ll like Charlie.”

“Not scheming, my *ass*! She knows exactly what she’s doing, and so do you, so don’t play Mr. Innocent with me! I’ve known you too long, Draco Malfoy. I know how you work.” She took a deep breath, still bouncing on the balls of her feet. Nothing got Pansy worked up like high drama. “Which Weasel is this, anyway?”

“The dragon-wrangling one,” Draco said.

“Ooh, sexy,” Pansy said. “Love a man with a whip.”

“I don’t know that they use *whips* on them, Pansy.”

“They bloody well *should*. I’m getting all hot and bothered just thinking about it.”

“When are you *not* hot and bothered, you absolute slag?”

“Says the king of quickies in the loo,” Pansy said, laughing loudly.

“I’m going to work,” Draco said, ready to disappear before she embarrassed him further.

“Wait! Just hold on a minute. Can...can I come to the pub tonight, Draco? Please? Pretty please? I won’t interfere with your date. I’ll even talk to Hermione. And I won’t be mean to her, I promise. Cross my heart. Please?”

Pansy was doing that whining thing that made Draco want to stab his ears with sharpened pencils. “Oh for Circe’s sake, *fine*, just stop it with that voice. You know I hate that voice.”

Pansy resumed her jumping. “Oh, yay! I’ll be good, I promise! I’ll be so nice you won’t even think it’s me! I’m going to wear that blue dress, you know, the one with the tennis skirt?”

“Sure, great, wonderful. I really do have to go, though, or I’m going to be late.”

Pansy tackled him in a hug, and Draco held up her towel for her, lest it fall and provide him with a vision that he didn’t really fancy seeing first thing in the morning. “Of course, my love,” she crowed. “Enjoy your day being gainfully employed. Can’t wait to see you tonight!” She let go of him and squeed again for good measure.

Draco sighed heavily. “Goodbye, Pans. Enjoy doing whatever the hell it is that you do all day. And I love you, too.”

Draco found himself in a moral quandary at work. Was he just doing this to make Harry jealous? And was *Hermione* doing this to make Harry jealous?

He hadn’t been thinking about that when he’d asked Charlie to meet him at the pub. He truly hadn’t, or so he thought. At the time, he’d been thinking it would be easier, since they both knew Hermione, to be in a group, at least initially. Less pressure.

Of course he’d known Harry would be there. It wasn’t like he’d forgotten. But it hadn’t been at the forefront of his mind.

Had it?

Well, there was nothing for it now. Charlie was going to meet them there at six, and Draco couldn’t very well call off their date at four without seeming very rude.

Although, he thought, mind whirling, perhaps he could put some sort of spell on himself that sent him running around the Department of Mysteries spewing vomit. Then Hermione could vouch that Draco had been ill and wasn’t purposefully backing out of the date.



That seemed a bit extreme, though.

Too soon, it was half past five, and Hermione knocked on the door. Draco still hadn't figured out the bottom drawer, although the third drawer, he discovered earlier in the week, was like a sex-toy magic lamp. Make a wish for a sex toy, open the drawer, and voila! You had your wish, sitting there in the drawer in all its rubbery glory.

"You ready?" Hermione said, looking a bit anxious.

"Sure," Draco said. "I need to run to the loo before we leave, though." He shucked off his robes and slung them over his arm.

Hermione's mouth slid up into a tiny grin. "You're going to fix your hair, aren't you?"

"What? No, of course not," Draco huffed, hustling into the men's so he could fix his hair.

They took the lift to the lobby, fighting through the usual Friday rush, and made their way along Downing Street. Sullivan's was just up ahead. Draco checked his pocket watch. He'd dressed casually today – for him, anyway – figuring that Charlie was probably a casual person. He wore a crisp, white button down shirt with the sleeves rolled up (Draco liked to confront new people with his Dark Mark, just to see how they'd react. It was sort of a test). Over that was a light gray vest with silver buttons. He had a matching jacket as well, but had it draped over his arm along with his robes. His gray slacks were fitted but not tight, and the cut of them made his legs look especially long. He did not wear a tie. Hence, his determination that this outfit was casual.

He looked first at the Auror table; he couldn't help it. Potter didn't seem to be there and Draco didn't know if that made him feel relieved or not. "Hermione," he whispered. "Is Ron coming tonight?"

She shook her head. "No. A bunch of them have Neville's stag tomorrow night, so Ron wanted to stay home and rest up."

Then Harry likely wasn't coming, either. Probably for the best.

He scanned the room, and there, at the bar, was an unfamiliar red-haired bloke nursing a pint. The hair was lighter than Ron's, with more blonde tones, and longer, pulled into a little ponytail. It was thick and wavy, and below it were broad shoulders and a tapered back. Draco took a deep breath and Hermione grinned up at him, and then they were making their way towards the bar.

"Charlie!" exclaimed Hermione, pulling him into a hug.

"Mione," Charlie said into her hair as his eyes lifted to meet Draco's. They were not blue like Ron's, but a warm shade of brown. She pulled back and Charlie stood and offered his hand. He was clad in a casual black button-up, sleeves rolled to the elbows to reveal his tattoos, which were incredibly colorful and detailed and gorgeous. The one on the left was a blue-skinned dragon, and the one on the right looked to be a golden snitch in a swirl of green leaves. Draco wondered if he had tattoos in other places.

“Nice to finally meet you,” Charlie said, and his voice was deep and rich. He had a bright, wide smile set in a strong jaw, and his face was tanned and a bit weathered, like he spent all of his time outdoors. His eyes crinkled at the corners when he smiled and he had a tiny hoop threaded through the cartilage of one ear.

“You too,” Draco said, and took his hand. It was dry and warm, his grip firm without being aggressive. “We usually sit in that booth over there,” Draco said, pointing to where a few of the Unspeakables were already gathered. “That okay? Or we could sit somewhere else.”

“There’s fine,” Charlie said easily, the smile never leaving his face. He was looking Draco over discreetly, and it seemed as though he liked what he saw, his eyes skipping down Draco’s body and then lingering on his face.

“You two sit, if you’d like. I’ll get us some drinks. You want another one?” Draco asked, gesturing to Charlie’s nearly empty glass.

“Yeah, thanks,” Charlie said. “Half and half.”

“Sounds good,” Draco said, smiling as he met Charlie’s eyes again.

Then they were turning towards the table, and Draco was left to flag down the bartender. He ordered Hermione a glass of white wine (her preference) and two half-and-halves. He himself usually ordered lighter draughts, but decided to go along with Charlie’s pick, because why not? Tonight was all about trying new things, after all.

As he was waiting for his drinks, he felt hands slip across his face and cover his eyes. “Hi Pans,” he said.

“Oh, boo. How did you know it was me?” she asked. She had on a very short, light blue dress with a slutty schoolgirl vibe that strangely worked for her.

“Because you do that all the time. It’s not a surprise when you always do the same thing.”

She stuck her tongue out at him and took Hermione’s wine and gulped half of it down. He sighed and ordered another.

“Where is our dragon master?” she whispered, looking around. Draco tipped his head towards the back table and Pansy looked (not at all discreetly) and sucked in a breath. “Holy fuck. Oh, the dirty, dirty things I would do to that Weasel,” she whispered. “He’s bloody *gorgeous*.”

“He is rather gorgeous, isn’t he?” Draco said, leaving a couple of galleons on the bartop before settling the glass of wine in one hand and the pints in this other.

Charlie’s eyes met his as he was crossing the room, and he could’ve sworn he felt a little something at the sight of that broad smile. It might not have been the intense rush of heat he felt with...other people...but it was something, and it was nice. It felt good.

Draco was relaxed and happy and well into his third pint, listening to Charlie talk about the Antipodean Opaleye that had recently been sent to the sanctuary in Romania from New Zealand, when Harry Potter walked in.

It was getting late, and he was thinking to ask Charlie whether they ought to head out for dinner (because their conversation was easy and fun and showed no signs of petering out anytime soon). He and Charlie were seated against the wall, Hermione and Pansy opposite them, locked in an intense debate over something. Charlie sat in a sort of a relaxed sprawl, and at some point, his leg had touched Draco's and he'd kept it there. It was warm and slightly unnerving, but not in a bad way. In a nice way, a way that hinted at possibilities.

Then there was a commotion up front, and Draco glanced up, not even thinking about seeing Harry, but then there he was, laughing and shucking off his Auror robes and sliding into the usual booth. Almost immediately, his eyes went to the back table, and Draco looked hastily at Charlie and tried to stay focused on what he was saying.

A few moments passed, and Draco chanced another glance over, and saw that Harry was still looking, his brow furrowed, his eyes darting back and forth between Charlie and Draco.

Draco forced himself to look away. He would not let himself get caught up in whatever this was. It was rude, and while Draco might've been many things, he wasn't rude.

He laughed along with Charlie and took a sip of his pint and waited for a pause in the conversation, thinking now was as good a time as any to leave for dinner. But then over Charlie's shoulder, he saw a looming figure, standing at the table's end. Draco nearly spilled his drink when he realized it was Harry.

"Well, hello there!" Harry said, and though his words were friendly, and though he was leaning down to briefly hug Charlie, his face was strained. "Didn't know you were in town."

"Got back this week," Charlie said, flashing that easy, open smile. "How've you been, mate?"

"I'm well, thanks," Harry said, his eyes shifting over to Draco's and pausing for a moment before pulling away. "And you?"

"I'm good! Can't complain," said Charlie. "You want to pull up a chair?"

Oh no, thought Draco. He saw Hermione's eyebrows shoot up and an expression of panic flicker over her face. Pansy, on the other hand, looked ecstatic.

"Yeah, sure," said Harry and grabbed one from the next table.

Draco gulped.

"You must be hungry!" said Hermione rather frantically. "You two should go to dinner, shouldn't you?"

Charlie shrugged. "I'm fine with eating here, if you'd like, Draco. It's fun to see everyone."

"Oh, sure, why not?" Draco heard himself say faintly.

Harry pulled up his chair and fell into it, looking around the table. He opened his mouth to say something, but Hermione was chattering away at him before he could, effectively distracting him.

“So, pearl scales,” Draco said, his voice thin and strange. “Sounds brilliant.”

“They’re beautiful creatures. One of my favorites,” Charlie said, nodding. “This one was an adolescent...”

Draco was four pints in. Charlie was on his fifth, and somehow, so was Harry, despite having only been there for less than an hour. Hermione was looking increasingly terrified as she watched him gulp down glass after glass.

The topics of conversation were remarkably normal, but Draco (and everyone else, presumably, except for Charlie, who appeared completely at ease) could feel the strain bubbling under the surface. Draco and Charlie were going over their favorite Quidditch memories (turned out Charlie had been a Seeker as well, for Gryffindor) and Draco was resolutely pretending Harry was not two seats away.

“Slytherin played dirty, though. Otherwise you’d have never won that one,” said Harry, who had just a moment ago been talking about pizza crust recipes with Hermione. Draco looked beyond Charlie to see Harry’s green eyes narrowed right at him.

Pansy huffed with irritation, which was ridiculous, because Pansy had no idea what she was talking about when it came to Quidditch, having decided early on to despise it and the way it distracted her various romantic partners.

“We were a bit ruthless,” Draco admitted. He didn’t want to fight with Harry here, not in front of Charlie.

Harry barked out a laugh. “That’s the bloody understatement of the century,” he said.

“Now, Harry. Draco was quite good regardless,” Hermione said, much to Draco’s surprise. “He may not have had your speed, exactly, but I think he might’ve had an edge over you when it came to agility.”

Harry blinked at her. “Really, Hermione?”

“Yes. Really,” she said, through gritted teeth. Some silent battle was waged between them and Charlie looked over at Draco and raised an eyebrow, as if to ask what the hell was going on. Draco shrugged.

“Are we reliving memories of Hogwarts, then?” Harry said, his eyes capturing Draco’s once again. “You and I have some good ones, don’t we, Malfoy?”

Draco smiled woodenly and tensed. He realized he was gripping his pint too tightly when his fingers started turning white. “Oh, I doubt anyone wants to hear about all that,” he managed. He took a gulp of his drink. He looked at Charlie, who was frowning for the first time that

evening. He assumed Charlie knew some of what was being referenced, but he doubted he knew all of it. "Can I slip past you?" asked Draco.

"Course," Charlie said, standing and letting Draco out.

"Thanks," Draco said, and deliberately did not look at Harry, though he could feel eyes on him as he left the booth and hurried to the loo.

He entered into the first stall and stood there, trying to calm his rapidly beating heart. Whatever Pansy might have thought about making Harry jealous, Draco had not wanted this. Nothing like this. It felt horrible and awkward and Harry kept shooting him accusatory looks. And the worst part was that even though he knew what a prat Harry was being – honestly, he was so *angry* at him right now – he still couldn't stop wanting him. As charming and handsome and fun as Charlie was – and he really *was* - from the moment Harry had come into the pub, Draco hadn't been able to think of anything else.

He squeezed his eyes shut as he remembered Harry's eyes that night after Draco had been in the cellar. How he'd looked at Draco with such love and concern; how things between them had been so easy, even though it hadn't been easy at all, what with Pansy and Hermione and everything. But the connection between them had been so obvious, so strong, that it leant a sort of certainty to their interaction. Draco had known, without a doubt, that no matter what happened, they would still have each other.

Here, though, Harry was looking at him like he was a monster, a fraud, someone not to be trusted. It hurt even worse to see him like this, now that Draco had seen him another way.

He took a deep breath, realizing he couldn't very well stay in the loo forever, and went out to the sink to wash his hands, when suddenly the bathroom door was banging open.

"What the fuck, Malfoy? Is this some sort of scheme to rile me up?" Harry said, taking long strides across the room and getting right in Draco's face.

"It wasn't even my idea," Draco said, his voice soft in the aftermath of Harry's.

"Right. I suppose one day, Charlie Weasley just randomly thought, 'Hm, I want to track down *Draco Malfoy*, ask him out on a date!'"

"Hermione set us up."

Harry looked like he'd been slapped. His face got very, very red. "You're lying."

"Ask her."

Harry stared, his jaw working. "Fine, so she set you up. Now, what, you're just going to go out with him? Fuck him? No point in letting the grass grow under your feet, eh Malfoy?"

Draco felt his hand coil into a fist, and he had to do battle with himself to refrain from pulling his elbow back and letting it fly. "If I were to fuck him, it would be none of your damn business, Potter."

Suddenly he felt himself being shoved backwards against the sink. “You’re fucked up, you know that? Doing this. It’s fucked up,” Potter hissed, his face only inches from Draco’s, green eyes dark with fury.

Draco shoved back before he could stop himself, grabbing Potter’s shirt in his fists and pushing him until his back was against the wall. “No,” he said, low and violent. “What’s fucked up is fucking someone that you hate, and then telling them what a piece of shit you think they are the next morning.” He pushed Potter once more, shoving him against the wall again, before letting go.

He stood for a moment, glaring, reveling in the way Potter’s face had gone white in the harsh lighting of the bathroom. Then he straightened out his vest and ran a hand through his hair and left.

“Let’s get dinner somewhere else,” he said to Charlie, who was laughing at something Pansy was saying. “The food here is terrible.”

“Sure,” said Charlie amicably.

After kissing Hermione and Pansy goodbye, Draco and Charlie made their way out into the night. “Where to?” Charlie asked, taking his hand.

Back in the pub, Potter still hadn’t come out of the loo.

# A First Date, Part II

## Chapter Summary

Draco and Charlie finish the night on a high note

“You are the silence between the notes. The white space between the letters. The missing that makes everything else a something.”

— pleasefindthis, I Wrote This For You: Just the Words

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Hand holding was an unusual experience for Draco. In fact, he couldn't actually remember ever walking around the city holding hands with anyone. Somehow, though, Charlie's hand didn't make him feel strange or uncomfortable. It didn't feel like too much, or too intense. Like all things with Charlie, it seemed casual and spur-of-the-moment. Draco didn't know for certain, obviously, but Charlie struck him as the type of person who took someone's hand simply because he felt like it, with no real thought to what it meant or how it would be interpreted. It was the complete opposite of Draco's approach to such things, which was full of strategic evaluations and second-guessing, not to mention a healthy dose of fear. Draco found he quite liked being with someone who was nothing like him in that way.

He brought Charlie to a little Italian restaurant that was a few blocks away from his place. It was cozy and dim, upscale but in an understated, quiet way, and they were able to get a table without much of a wait. “You want to split a bottle of wine?” Draco asked as they looked over the menu.

Charlie's lip quirked. “Sure. Haven't the faintest idea what sort I prefer, though.”

“Hm,” said Draco, scanning the list. “You trust me?”

“Absolutely,” said Charlie, leaning forward conspiratorially. His eyes were dark and hot in the low lights of the restaurant. “I expect that you know exactly what I want.” He let that hang in the air for a moment, and Draco felt his cheeks heat. “With the wine, I mean,” he finished, sinking back into his chair, a smirk on his face. He proceeded to study the menu nonchalantly, while Draco tried to pick his jaw up off the floor.

Draco ended up ordering a bottle of Brunello and the veal. Charlie ordered the risotto with truffles and offered to split a Caprese salad with Draco. They battled good-naturedly over the last bit of fresh mozzarella and ate too much of the warm, crusty loaf of bread that came with it. Both the wine and the food were wonderful, and somehow, they never seemed to run out of things to say. By the end of the meal, Draco was feeling loose and happy and at ease.

“You know, I think you may have changed my mind about wine,” Charlie said, taking another sip. “I don’t usually drink it, but I’m wondering now if that’s because I’ve never spent more than three knuts on the stuff.”

Draco laughed. “I can point you towards some really good wines that aren’t expensive. But if you’re splurging, you can’t go wrong with a Brunello.” Draco stared into the ruby gleam of his glass, remembering. “I went to Tuscany a few years ago with Pansy and we took a guided tour of some of the vineyards in Montalcino. It was one of my favorite trips ever. Merlin, so much amazing food and drink and the weather was incredible. I’d love to go back.”

Charlie smiled. “I haven’t been to Italy yet. No dragons there, is the problem.” His leg brushed against Draco’s under the table and he kept it there. “Pansy’s a riot. I liked her a lot.”

“Did you? She’s not for everyone, but I love her to bits. She’s my oldest friend, you know. I feel lucky to have had her in my life for so long, especially since I never had brothers or sisters. She was sort of a fill-in for one.”

“Oh, Merlin. I used to *wish* I didn’t have brothers and sisters. Our house was always a bloody circus, this one whining about this and that one screaming about something else, and these two brawling over here. There was never a moment of peace, like, ever. Sometimes I think that’s why I moved to Romania.”

Draco laughed and simultaneously felt a little rush of guilt as he remembered the way he used to talk about the Weasleys. From what he’d gathered from Hermione, they were mostly nice people. And they’d produced Charlie; they couldn’t be that bad. “Was it hard to adjust, initially? When you moved?”

“The language was a bitch. I knew a little bit of Romanian beforehand, but not nearly enough. And it was hard, yeah, being away from home. But then I met friends there and fell into a routine, and soon enough, I found that I loved it. And I love my work, too, if you can’t tell.”

Draco nodded. “I can, and it all sounds so incredible. I mean, what little witch or wizard doesn’t want to work with dragons when they grow up? And here you are actually doing it. Sorry, by the way, that I can’t tell you too much in return. You know how *Mysteries* is.”

“Ah, yes,” Charlie said, grinning. “I understand *Unspeakable* Malfoy – we’ve had to deal with Hermione never answering anyone’s questions for years now. It’s all very hush hush, I know. At least they’re not making you hide the fact that you work in the bloody department anymore. I always thought that was a stupid rule.”

“Agreed. It would have made living a normal life very difficult.”

The waitress dropped off the check and Charlie snatched it up. “I insist,” he said. “I asked you out, after all.”

“But I ordered the wine, and that’s probably half the tab!” Charlie was shaking his head firmly. “Alright, alright, you win,” said Draco finally, nudging Charlie’s leg with his. “I could



hardly believe you had the bollocks to send someone you didn't know an owl like that, by the way."

"You thought I was mad."

"No, not mad," Draco replied, a bit shyly. "Brave."

Draco felt himself getting tense as Charlie walked him home. He didn't know what to do, whether to ask Charlie in for a drink or not. Did that indicate that he wanted sex? If he didn't ask Charlie inside, would they kiss? Or was this just a friendly date that would end with a handshake or a hug or something equally banal?

He thought back to the way Charlie had been looking at him during dinner, the teasing things he'd said. No, not just a handshake. Something was going to happen. But what? And what did Draco even *want* to happen?

They stopped at his front step, and Draco felt, suddenly, like some teenaged girl from a 1950's muggle television show, being walked home and daydreaming about a little kiss at the end of the night. It all felt so sweet and innocent.

Not all that innocent, though. They might fuck, mightn't they? Draco supposed he hadn't ruled that out yet, not entirely, although some voice in his head was warning him not to rush into anything, especially since he hadn't fully had time to process what had happened between Harry and him at the pub.

Charlie was looking into his eyes, a tiny smile edging the corner of his mouth upwards. "I had a really good time," he said quietly. "I'm glad we did this."

"Me too," Draco said, honestly. "I like you." He blinked, startled that he'd said the last part out loud. It had just sort of slipped out.

"Feeling's mutual," Charlie said, and leaned in, bringing his mouth to meet Draco's.

The kiss was soft, and a bit hesitant, and sweet. Charlie smelled nice, like sandalwood, and his mouth tasted like the after-dinner mint he'd swiped from the restaurant.

After a while, Charlie was pressing closer, and Draco could feel the muscles of his chest warm against his own. He lifted his hands to Charlie's waist, and could feel the hardness of the muscles there, too. Fuck, the guy was in good shape. He supposed wrestling dragons would do that to a person.

Charlie had one hand in Draco's hair and the other settled into the spot where Draco's shoulder met his neck, his thumb running lightly underneath Draco's collar. "Your hair's really soft," Charlie said against his lips. "It feels so nice."

Draco smiled against him and thought maybe he would invite Charlie inside after all. He was a bit of a slut for compliments.

But then Charlie was pulling away gently and tucking a wayward strand of hair behind his ear. He reached out and took Draco's hand again. "You want to get together again before I leave? I'd like to, if you're game."

Draco thought again about asking Charlie to come inside. He really, really thought about it. He expected that Charlie would come in if he asked. But once again, something stopped him. "I'd love to," Draco said. "What about next weekend?"

"Sounds perfect," Charlie said, pulling Draco closer to him once more. "Can I ask you one thing, though?"

"Mm hm," Draco said, placing another soft kiss onto Charlie's lips.

"What's the deal with you and Harry?"

Oh fuck. Fuckity fuck.

"Lot of history there," Draco said, which was true. "Not all good." And that was true, too. Although it might've been truer to say most of it wasn't.

Charlie nodded. "Yeah, I know. It just seemed like...has he ever said he's interested in you?"

Draco tried not to look as shocked as he felt. "No. I assure you, he's never said anything of the sort to me." And that was true as well. Harry might've fucked him, but he'd never, so far as Draco remembered, said anything about liking him. "In fact, he's made it clear that he can't very well stomach me."

Charlie frowned. "Oh. Must've read that wrong then." He ran a thumb over Draco's lower lip and then kissed it briefly. "Well, the thing about Harry is that he's a stubborn bastard. He's like a brother to me, don't get me wrong, and he's one of the bravest and best people I know, but once he gets something in his head, it's hard to change his mind. I wouldn't take it personally. I don't know what you were like in school -- or during the war, for that matter. But I think that right now...well, you're pretty fucking great from what I can tell."

Draco felt a rush of something that straddled the line between arousal and gratitude, and fairly well threw himself at Charlie, kissing him with all his might.

Charlie huffed a surprised laugh before pulling Draco closer, gentling the kiss, bringing it back to the soft, easy thing they'd shared a few moments before.

Draco remembered himself after a bit and decided he would be the one to pull away this time. He managed it, though part of him wanted to stay wrapped in Charlie Weasley's arms for much longer. "Thanks again, Charlie," he said.

"Thank *you*, Unspeakable Malfoy," Charlie said, winking. Merlin, he was able to pull that off far too well. Nobody should be able to pull off a wink without looking at least a little lecherous, but Charlie managed it somehow.

Draco slipped inside and leaned against the wood paneling of the front door.

And then he burst into tears.

It seemed to come out of nowhere, because he had been having a wonderful time, hadn't he? He genuinely *liked* Charlie, and Charlie had been such a gentleman, and so kind, and he'd said such lovely things about Draco, and had kissed him so soundly.

It had gone so well that Draco could almost see it; could almost see the potential for something to happen between them. Another date, or maybe two, before Charlie left. And then they might write, and then Charlie would come home again at Christmas and they'd pick back up where they'd left off. And then maybe Draco would visit Romania, and Charlie could show him all of his dragons, and then maybe at some point, they'd move beyond mutual liking into something more.

Draco knew they were at the very first stage, and of course he knew that it might not work at all, but he also somehow knew, in his gut, that it *might*. It felt good, being with Charlie, and Draco could tell that Charlie had felt the same way about him. He could tell that Charlie was a kind man, and fuck, was he ever good-looking, and he was interesting and funny and... Draco could see it. He could see some sort of shadowy possibility of a future between them.

And it broke his fucking heart.

He didn't want to fall in love with Charlie Weasley. He found himself stupidly, uselessly, clinging to memories of Harry that weren't even real here in this timeline. Memories of a Harry who was entirely unlike the one Draco had spoken to tonight.

Harry had looked so *disgusted* by him in the bathroom. Had acted like Draco was some fucking infection, tainting his beloved Weasleys. Why would Draco want that? Why would he want someone who looked at him that way?

But he did. And he had seen him in the other place, he had seen how much they might love one another, how much they might take care of each other, if given the chance. And now he couldn't *unsee* it. Those moments were burned into his soul, and he couldn't forget them, no matter how much he needed to in order to move on here, in his real life.

He shouldn't do it. He knew he shouldn't. It was such a bad choice to make. Probably the worst, out of all the choices set out before him. But even as he tried to talk himself out of it, he knew it was a losing battle.

He never did know how to turn away from a thing he wanted.

He walked over to his hearth and picked up a handful of floo powder. "Ministry of Magic," he said, and stepped in.

# If At First You Don't Succeed

## Chapter Summary

Draco tries a new approach to fixing his history with Harry and things get sexy

“Lift your hips for me, love.”  
— Tahereh Mafi, *Ignite Me*

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Draco surfaced in his room in the Slytherin dungeons. He was standing before the sink in the corner of the room, clutching the Time-Turner in one hand. His other arm was in a sling. He blinked at it for a moment, trying to piece together exactly what was happening, and then it hit him and he let out a groan of frustration.

“Is it hurting again, Draco? That asshole should’ve never been allowed near any of us, I still can’t believe – what the hell is that?” All of this came pouring out of Greg Goyle’s mouth as he crossed the room. Draco realized he was staring at the Time-Turner in Draco’s hand.

“Nothing,” Draco said, setting it on the floor and nudging it under his bed with a foot.

“Well, anyway,” Greg continued, looking absently at the place where Draco had shoved it. “I can’t wait until he’s canned. And Potter’s going to lose his shit over it, isn’t he, I can’t wait —”

“Shut up, Greg,” Draco said, eying him in the mirror and picking up his toothbrush.

“Oh, okay,” said Greg, looking down.

Oh, for fuck’s sake. Greg was responding to his words like a beaten dog. Had he been that much of a dick, even to his friends?

“Sorry, I didn’t mean —” Draco began, turning around. “I just don’t want to talk about all this. Because I’m done with it.”

“What do you mean?” Greg asked, his small eyes squinting even smaller.

“It was my fault, wasn’t it?” Draco asked. “With Buckbeak. Hagrid shouldn’t get fired over it.”

“But you said it was Hagrid’s fault?” Greg said, frowning.

“Yeah, well, it wasn’t.”

“But you’re hurt!”

“I’m really not,” Draco said, setting down the toothbrush and unwrapping the sling. Beneath the wrappings, his skin was perfectly healed without a single scar. “See?”

“Oh, well then why –”

“Because my father said it would make a stronger case, if I seemed very hurt. That’s why he brought in that private healer, to corroborate the story and put this thing on me.”

“Oh. But I don’t understand why you don’t want to get Hagrid in trouble.” Greg looked wholly confused. Not angry or upset in any way, just unable to comprehend what was happening and why.

“It’s not fair if I lie about it, now is it?”

“I ‘spose not,” Greg said uncertainly.

Draco set about brushing his teeth, looking at his firmly slicked-back hair in the mirror. Ugh, why had he done this to his hair? Fucking awful. He’d change it tomorrow, he decided. Right now, he needed to get to breakfast.

The Great Hall was bustling when he arrived, and more than a few students stopped to look at him. He recalled that he’d missed a few days of classes due to his ‘injury’ – maybe this was his first morning back. His eyes flickered over to the Gryffindor table, where Harry and Weasley sat glaring at him. Hermione looked up briefly and frowned before returning to her textbook.

“Darling!” cried Pansy as he approached his own table. “You’ve returned!” Her face was a study in grief and distress and her worried hands fluttered all over him, checking for injuries.

Draco had somehow forgotten how desperately she’d thrown herself at him before he told her he didn’t actually swing that way. It wasn’t pleasant to be reliving it, that was for certain.

“I’m fine,” he said rather sternly.

“But you’ve been in bed for days, and where’s your sling?” Blaise asked.

“I didn’t need it because I’m *fine*. This whole thing’s just been blown out of proportion.”

“Oh?” Blaise said, eyebrows raised.

“Yes. Now drop it.”

Blaise shrugged, tucking back into his toast, but Draco noticed he continued to steal curious glances at him, as though trying to sift through possible reasons for his sudden change of heart.

They had double potions with Gryffindor later that morning. There was a space open next to Harry, so after a moment of debate, Draco decided to set up his cauldron there.

“Thought you’d be moping about in a full-body cast, Malfoy,” Harry snarled under his breath as they began to take out the ingredients listed on the board up front. “Aren’t you supposed to be horrifically injured?”

“Turns out I’m fine. Healed up without a problem.”

Harry looked at him skeptically. “You know it was your own bloody fault, don’t you? Hagrid told us not to insult them.”

“I know,” Draco said.

Harry’s mouth fell open at that, but then Snape was up at the front giving a brief lecture on Shrinking Solution. Afterwards, they all went about organizing and preparing their ingredients, and the hum of quietly murmured conversation began to fill the room.

“What’re you playing at, Malfoy?” Harry said as he began to chop his daisy roots.

“I’m not playing at anything – here, give me that,” he said, leaning over to take Harry’s knife. Harry yanked it out of reach and Draco sighed. “You need to chop them evenly and avoid bruising them all up. Here, let me show you.”

“No,” Harry said, glaring.

“Leave him alone, Malfoy,” said Weasley, who was on Harry’s other side.

“Fine,” Draco said tiredly, turning back to his own roots.

Harry took a step back, his eyes trained in Draco’s. After a moment, he held out the knife. “Alright then,” He said. “Show me.”

Draco raised an eyebrow, but Harry only stood there impassively, waiting with the knife in his outstretched hand. Draco set down his own knife and took it. “The way that you chop matters,” he said, demonstrating. “You can’t just hack at the things. You need to use proper technique, like this,” he said. He lined up a few roots and let his knife handle raise and lower methodically while keeping the tip of the blade in place. “You see? And chopping implies a certain size. You want all of your pieces to look like this,” he finished, holding up one of the perfectly-sized bits.

Harry stepped back towards the table, still looking at Draco’s face. “Thanks,” he said in a rough voice, like it hurt him to say it. He resumed his chopping (using much better form, Draco noted with satisfaction), finishing rather quickly.

Then he set about skinning his shrivelfig. “Any pointers, Malfoy? I’m sure I’m doing this all wrong, too,” Harry said with an edge.

“If you don’t know how to properly skin a shrivelfig by now, you’re beyond my help,” Draco replied, and was rewarded with a huff of laughter.

They worked silently for a while, and Draco was painfully aware of Harry's presence beside him, of the glances Harry kept stealing at him. Finally, Draco couldn't take it anymore. "What?"

Harry looked taken aback. "Nothing. What?"

"You obviously want to say something, so say it."

He watched as Harry took a deep breath and then nodded. "What are you planning on doing about Hagrid? Are you trying to get him fired?"

Draco sighed. "My father is. But I'm planning to tell the truth when I'm asked. I ignored Hagrid's instructions on how to talk to hippogriffs. I brought it on myself. And I'm fine now, as it turns out."

"So you said," Potter said warily. "Why am I finding it hard to believe you?"

"Because I'm usually a prat about these things and you expected I'd do everything in my power to get Hagrid in trouble."

Harry's eyebrows shot up for an instant and then he recovered himself. "Well, yeah. I still think you will, to be honest."

"You'll just have to wait and see, then, won't you?"

"I suppose," Potter said.

Then Snape was checking over their solutions, making remarks about each one. "Excellent as always, Mr. Malfoy," he murmured as he walked by Draco's cauldron. "And Mr. Potter..." he looked into Harry's cauldron and blinked. "Acceptable," he managed.

Harry shot Draco another one of those unreadable looks, and then they were all filing out of class.

Nothing of note happened over the next few days. Pansy, Greg, and Vince vied for his attention, Weasley shot him hateful looks, Blaise remarked drolly on the whole situation, and Daphne and Theo tried to stay out of it. Harry looked at him too, quite often, but it was different from Weasley's glares. Harry looked like he wasn't quite sure what to make of Draco anymore. There was skepticism in his gaze, to be sure, but there was also a sort of fragility there. Something earnest and tentative.

Something that looked a little like hope.

On Wednesday the next week, Corbett Crankshaw, one of the Malfoy family solicitors, came to Hogwarts. Draco was called into Snape's office to speak with him, and Draco knew what he was supposed to say. He was supposed to tell the tale of Hagrid's recklessness, of his dire injury. But he didn't. Instead, he told the truth. Crankshaw was so frustrated by the end that he slammed his hand onto the table, muttering about how Draco was wasting his time.

Draco waited impatiently over the next day or so to hear whether his father was proceeding as planned even without Draco's testimony. His father wasn't talking to him, though; that became clear rather quickly. Draco had expected an owl by now (not a Howler; Malfoys didn't do Howlers) at least. Really, he'd expected a visit. But instead there was only silence, and waiting.

The following Wednesday after lunch, Draco was once again outside for Care of Magical Creatures. As it had been the week before, the lesson was tense. Hagrid lectured instead of using his usual hands-on, practical methods of teaching, and it was obvious that he hated it. Everyone was quiet and uncertain as they listened to Hagrid mumble on about Flobberworms, often losing his train of thought or speaking so quickly that they couldn't understand him.

Afterwards, Draco, feeling awful, was packing up his things when Hagrid approached. "Can aye have a word with yeh, Draco?"

Draco nodded, tensing. His father was moving ahead with things, he just knew it.

He forced himself to look up into Hagrid's broad, ruddy face, with its wreath of untamed hair. Hagrid was chewing on his bottom lip, looking uncertain. "Right. I don' know wha' happened, but yer father isn't going teh hurt Buckbeak. An' I don' know what ye had teh do wit' it, but it was something, wasn' it, and, well, yeh done a good thing. Wha'ever it was. If yeh hadn', Buckbeak was goin' teh be punished, but now he won'. So...thank yeh."

Draco found it difficult to speak. He had always treated Hagrid like utter shit, at every turn, and yet the man was here, *thanking* him for not following through on a plan to have him demoted and his beloved animal executed. Draco knew he did not deserve the thanks, nor any sort of kindness for that matter. "I'm sorry I didn't listen to you," he began softly. He didn't want to continue; he wanted to be done with this conversation, but there was more to say – so much more -- and he needed to try and say it. "You warned us, and I didn't listen. And I'm sorry I've been so terrible to you. You're not...you're not the worst teacher. And you're brilliant with creatures. And I'm sorry."

He chanced a glance up at the huge man's face and was shocked to see those small, dark eyes glistening with tears. And then he was even more surprised to feel Hagrid's enormous arms pulling him in for a bone-crushing hug. "I knew yeh wasn' so bad," Hagrid said.

It went on for an awkwardly long time, until finally, Draco pushed Hagrid gently away. Hagrid let go and wiped at a few stray tears.

"Thank you, Hagrid," Draco said.

Hagrid, who was apparently feeling so emotional that he was unable to speak, simply nodded, and Draco made his way back to the castle.

On Saturday, Draco was readying himself for a Hogsmeade trip. Theo and Blaise had already left, but Vince and Greg were waiting for him in the Common Room, along with, he



suspected, Pansy.

Draco hadn't spoken with Harry since that day in Potions, but he wanted to try, and he thought that the Hogsmeade trip might be a good time to do it. People tended to be a bit more relaxed and open outside of the castle, more willing to talk to and even sit with students from other houses.

On their way out, though, Draco spotted Potter hovering near the Great Hall, looking rather lonely. "Just a minute," he said to the trio on his heels. They all stumbled to a halt behind him and he rolled his eyes and silently cursed them. He didn't remember being this annoyed by his sycophants the first time around, but now, they were irritating the hell out of him. Even Pansy, because she wasn't even acting like herself. Instead she was fawning and saccharine, and he hated every minute of it.

"Potter," Draco said, approaching the other boy.

Harry looked up, surprised, and then immediately suspicious. "What?"

"Aren't you going to Hogsmeade?"

Potter's face turned slightly red and he narrowed his eyes. "Go on then. Laugh all you want, Malfoy. I don't care."

"Laugh at *what*?" Draco replied.

"At the fact that I didn't get my permission slip signed."

"Oh," Draco said. He didn't remember that at all, actually, and wondered if he'd ever known. "I didn't realize."

Harry huffed. "Right. Why else would you be here rubbing it in my face?"

"I didn't mean anything by it, I swear. I was curious why you were still here."

Another long look, and then the scowl gradually ebbed away, leaving a startling openness in its wake. Harry sighed. "Malfoy, why did you put a stop to the thing with Hagrid? Because I cannot, for the life of me, make sense of it. It's driving me mad."

Draco looked off into the Great Hall, thinking of how to answer. "Because it wasn't right, what my father and I were doing," he said finally. "It wasn't fair."

"Since when do you care about fair?"

Draco shrugged. "Since now, I guess."

"Hmph," Potter said, glancing away.

"What are you going to do all afternoon?" Draco asked. "Aren't you going to be bored?"

Now it was Harry's turn to shrug. "Catch up on schoolwork, maybe. I dunno."

“You like chess?”

“Not particularly,” said Harry. “I’m pants at it.”

Draco laughed, because it was true. “Good, then I’ll get to win and feel superior.”

“Wait, what?” Harry asked, furrowing his brow.

“I’ll stay here with you and keep you company.”

Harry was obviously wondering what the catch was. “Being able to beat your arse at chess would be worth missing out on Hogsmeade,” Draco said.

Harry snorted a laugh and considered this. “Alright, deal. But you’re coming to the Gryffindor tower. There’s no way I’m setting foot in the dungeon.”

“Fair enough,” Draco said, nodding. He turned to the others, who had stayed perfectly still while Draco and Harry talked, like soldiers waiting for orders. “Go on without me!” Draco called to them. “I’m staying.”

Pansy narrowed her eyes. Thank Merlin, Draco thought. Something besides fluttery lashes and compliments. “What’s going on, Draco?” she asked.

“I’m staying. I hardly have to explain my reasons to you, do I?”

She shrugged, irritated by this turn of events. Draco realized their first kiss had been in Hogsmeade at some point during this year. He wondered if today was meant to be the day. If so, that was all the more reason for him to stay at the castle.

“Bye!” Draco said, grabbing Harry’s arm and steering him towards the staircase.

“Let go of me, Malfoy!” Harry said after a few moments, yanking his arm back.

“Sorry,” Draco said, looking over. “Needed to get away from her.”

That made Harry grin. “She does seem a bit clingy.”

Draco didn’t want to say too much about Pansy. This was a phase, and he knew she wasn’t like this, not really. “She’s fine,” Draco said. “She wants more than friendship right now, though, and that’s awkward.”

“I thought you two were a thing,” Harry said with some hesitation.

“Nope,” Draco said.

They stopped in front of the portrait of the fat lady, and Harry shot him a look before leaning forward and whispering the password. He wasn’t any good at whispering, because Draco heard it loud and clear (it was ‘Fortuna Major’). He decided not to point this out.

Draco stepped through the portrait and realized he'd never been in the Gryffindor Common Room before. If he'd had to guess, though, he would have thought it was exactly like this: comfortable and cozy and absolutely slathered in red and gold. There were a few younger students scattered about, studying, and a group of boys playing Gobstones. Some looked up with interest – smitten with Harry, no doubt – but most didn't pay them any attention.

"Come on," said Harry, nodding towards a doorway in the rear of the room. They walked up a spiral staircase and into a dorm room that looked much like its Slytherin counterpart, except without the armchairs by the stove or the sink in the corner. Draco tried not to be pleased by the knowledge that his room was just a tiny bit better, but he was. Old habits die hard.

"It's very...red," Draco said, looking around. Good god, all that red really was quite overwhelming. The rug was mostly red, the curtains of the beds and the windows were all red, like the room was *bleeding*. It was a lot to take in.

Harry moved to one of the beds that had a bright orange Chudley Cannos throw on top that clashed horribly with everything else. Draco must've made a face, because Harry laughed. "Ron's a bit obsessed," he explained. He reached underneath and pulled out a box containing a wizarding chess set, and brought it over to the rug. "I bloody hate chess, I hope you know that."

Draco grinned. "Better than sitting all by yourself, I'd wager."

"Not necessarily. I've got to play with *you* after all," Harry said, trying to keep a straight face. It wasn't mean, the way he said it, though. It was teasing. Friendly. "I get to be white."

"What?" Draco cried. "You can't just – ugh. Fine. I'll still destroy you."

Harry stuck up a finger at him and began setting up the board.

They'd finished with their fourth game of chess (Draco had won every time, easily) and were starting in on their second game of Exploding Snap when the door burst open to reveal Weasley, trailed by Longbottom, Finnigan and Thomas.

At the sight of Draco, Weasley paled and appeared to brace himself for a fight. Then he seemed to realize that Draco was sprawled, rather lazily, on his side, and that there was a game spread out between him and Harry. He looked back and forth between the two of them for a comically long time, and the look on his face was priceless.

"I'll take that as my cue to leave," Draco said, standing.

"We can finish the game," Harry protested, but Draco could tell he was feeling rather awkward himself.

"No, that's alright," said Draco. He looked at the group of boys standing frozen just inside the room. "Weasley and company," he said, nodding at them before ducking out.

“Wait! Malfoy, wait!” Harry called, hurrying to catch up with him on the stairs. “I’ll walk you out. Don’t want anybody thinking you were up to something.”

“Oh, good point,” Draco said.

Thank Merlin that Harry had stopped him, too, because the looks Draco got from the newly returned Gryffindors were pretty disturbing, and that was *with* Harry by his side. Harry followed him out of the Common Room and into the hall, and they faced each other, both of them a little uncertain.

“I have no bloody idea why you stayed back with me today,” Harry said, shaking his head. “Half of me thinks this is all part of some long-term plan to take me down.”

Draco laughed. “It’s not, Potter.”

“We’ll see, I guess. But if it isn’t, then...thanks. I had fun getting my arse beaten.”

“We’ll have to do it again sometime,” Draco said, meeting those familiar green eyes.

Slowly, Potter smiled, and the world seemed to stand at attention, everything still and quiet, narrowing down to just the two of them. “Yeah. Maybe.” He shook his head and laughed.

“Are pigs flying? Because I’m certain that was supposed to be the prerequisite for me and *Draco Malfoy* becoming friends.”

“Dunno,” Draco said, laughing along with him. “Haven’t been outside today to check. Too busy hanging out in the sodding Gryffindor Tower.”

Harry shook his head again, still smiling, and turned back to the portrait of the fat lady. He whispered the password, which, once more, Draco could very clearly hear. He hoped Harry never did any undercover work as an Auror, because he seemed incapable of stealth. The portrait swung open, but before he went in, Harry turned around and gave Draco one more appraising look. “See you later, Draco.”

And there it was: Draco. “Later, Harry,” he said, before climbing back down the stairs.

It was all the confirmation he needed; Draco had laid the groundwork, and now he would see if it held.

That night, when everyone was fast asleep, Draco unlocked the chest he kept at the foot of his bed and carefully lifted out the silver Time-Turner. After the incident with Pansy in the cellar, he was afraid to skip directly ahead to the aftermath of the war. He decided he would not push the ruby quite that far this time, maybe ease into the future instead. He slid it over to the sixteen, and then moved the moonstone to seven. “The water of time flows downhill, but I will send it up the mountain,” he whispered, placing his hand on the indentation. “I will bend its path to my will.”

After the agony of being torn into a million pieces and being put back together again, Draco found himself in the shining tub of the Prefect’s Bathroom, surrounded by perfectly hot

water. Not the worst place to be, although it left him clutching the Time-Turner underwater. He hoisted it out and set it on the ledge, hoping it wouldn't tarnish as a result.

He sighed and let his head fall back against the edge of the bath, enjoying the feel of the colorful water lapping slowly at his skin. After a while, he realized he was getting hard below the surface, and he couldn't help but laugh at himself. It must've been a conditioned response -- he'd had many a wank here in this bathroom -- almost every time he'd used it, frankly -- and apparently his body still expected one.

He slowly ran his fingers along the underside of his shaft and felt himself get harder. He realized that, between all the drama and time-travel, he hadn't had a proper wank in ages. Maybe a quick one-off here or there in the shower, but they'd been done efficiently and without much fanfare.

He let his other hand dip lower to cup his balls, and dragged his fingertips up his shaft again. He thought of Harry that first morning in bed, before he'd woken up and freaked out, imagined what it would have been like if, instead of doing that, Harry had kissed him, pulled him on top of himself, let their warm, sleepy bodies become entangled. If Harry had touched every bare part of him, kissed him, licked him.

Draco felt himself gasp and took himself in hand as he envisioned Harry's eyes dark with desire, his lips pink and swollen.

Just then the door to the bathroom banged open. "I'm telling you, he's up to something!" exclaimed Harry, barging in and locking the door behind him. He was speaking loudly, agitated, his hands flying around for emphasis. "On the map, I keep seeing him move to the seventh floor, and then he --" Harry abruptly stopped talking when he realized that Draco was sitting there with his hand on his cock. "Oh."

Draco sat up straight, moving his hands away quickly, and felt himself turning very, very red.

"Don't stop on my account," Harry said, coming closer, his eyes suddenly focused and hot. "I mean... *fuck*, Draco. Please don't stop doing what you were doing." He sat himself down there, right at the edge of the tub, only inches away from Draco's head.

Then he leaned over and kissed him, letting his tongue slide gently along Draco's bottom lip.

"You could get in here with me," said Draco, his voice soft and uncertain. He didn't know exactly what he'd stumbled into, but whatever it was, he planned to go with it.

"Mmm, I could, couldn't I?" Harry said as he ran a hand down Draco's chest, getting the sleeve of his robes soaked in the process. He didn't appear to care. "What were you thinking about when I came in," he said, his mouth next to Draco's ear, his breath hot.

"You," Draco whispered.

Harry made a pleased sound and sucked at Draco's earlobe. "I want details."

Draco gulped and decided to go all in. “Your body next to mine,” he said softly. “Your skin all warm and soft. Your fingers on me, in me. Your mouth...ugh,” he groaned as Harry began mouthing along his neck. “Get the fuck in here.”

“So impatient,” Harry laughed. “What, exactly, was I doing with my mouth?”

“Licking me. Sucking me. Letting me fuck it, fuck your mouth.”

Harry was gone, suddenly, and Draco didn’t dare open his eyes. He was afraid it would all disappear. There was a splash at the other end of the tub, and then Harry’s body was pressing against Draco’s and the water was lapping against them, agitated from the movement Harry had made.

Then Harry’s lips were on his, and he was wet, like he’d gone underwater, and his hair was dripping onto Draco’s face and his shoulders, and everything was so hot and slippery and he could feel Harry’s cock against his leg, hard, moving against him.

“I almost died, seeing you like that,” Harry said against his mouth. Draco was running his hands over Harry’s muscled back, along his hips, back up to his neck; he wanted to touch everything, anything, all of it. “In the pink water, your face tipped back and your mouth open, your body spread out like that, touching yourself. Thinking of me. God, you’re so fucking beautiful.”

Draco shivered at the words, and felt his cock pulse, like he could come from Harry’s voice alone. “Fuck me,” he whispered. “Fuck me, Harry.”

Harry groaned into his neck. “Don’t have any lube,” he mumbled.

“I can do it,” Draco said, and did a little wandless lubrication charm. He felt the coolness of it inside of him as soon as he finished. “There.”

Harry pulled back. “What the fuck? You just...” He trailed off, laughing, as he reached under the water, and Draco felt fingertips brush against his cock. Just that small touch had him aching. Harry’s fingers moved lower, trailing over his balls and then to his hole. A finger reached in and Harry’s eyes widened. “Wow. Okay. Well, this is certainly new and exciting.”

Draco smiled, taking in the laughing green eyes in front of him. “Like to keep you on your toes.”

“I guess so,” Harry said, fingering him earnestly now, his mouth coming back to cover Draco’s.

Harry worked him open quickly, and Draco felt little resistance in his body. They must’ve been doing this a lot, for his hole to be so obliging. All the while Harry’s mouth was hot on his, devouring, and Harry was moaning as he pushed into Draco with his fingers. Harry’s other hand reached down and wrapped around his cock and began to stroke up and down the shaft slowly, and Draco threw his head back and cried out. “You’re already fucking ready, just like that,” Harry whispered. “You’re ready for me. *Fuck*. You want this so badly, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Draco heard himself saying. “Yes. *Please*, Harry.”

“Turn around,” Harry said, pulling at Draco’s waist. Draco turned and leaned over the edge of the bath, baring himself to Harry, and Harry murmured appreciatively as he leaned over Draco’s back, kissing his way along his spine, his hands everywhere. “I love you so much,” he said quietly, as his mouth slid higher, nipping at the nape of Draco’s neck.

Draco hardly had time to process that when he felt Harry’s cock pushing at his entrance, then felt the tip slide in. He gasped and leaned forward, one hand moving back to grip Harry, to pull him closer, the other lending him support. Then Harry was sliding in deeper, until Draco felt Harry’s balls pressing against his arse, and Draco shut his eyes tightly, unable to keep himself from crying out.

They began moving together, Harry hot and firm at his back, going further and further, closer and closer, as though he were trying to eliminate any space between them, trying to merge their bodies entirely. Draco could feel Harry’s cock in the deepest part of himself, hardly moving out at all, just in and in and in and in, and he could feel Harry all along him, skin touching skin everywhere. Harry’s voice was low and soft in his ear, telling him how good he was, how beautiful.

Harry adjusted himself slightly, and then he was pressing against a spot that made Draco see flashes of white behind his closed eyelids, and he found himself making small noises with every thrust. Harry’s hand reached around to his front to touch his cock, and almost instantly, it was all too much, and Draco was crying out and coming, riding out the waves of obscene pleasure that flooded through him, and the next moment he felt Harry shudder and come inside of him, his final thrusts a bit wild and uncontrolled. Then it was over and they stood together, wrapped up in one another, and there was only the sound of their breaths echoing against the tiled walls. They seemed to be breathing in tandem, everything in sync, matched, perfect.

After long moments, Draco pulled away, feeling Harry’s cock slip out of him. He turned around and took Harry’s face in his hands and kissed his mouth so softly it burned, and then he looked at him. “You love me?” he asked. He was still trembling in the aftermath of his orgasm, and was also trembling because Harry had said it, and because he needed to hear it again.

“Of course I do,” Harry said, pulling Draco in closer and wrapping him up in his arms. Harry began planting small kisses along Draco’s neck and across his cheek, and then he was kissing his mouth again, soft and tender, and if Draco hadn’t believed it before, he believed it now, because it was here in this kiss, in every brush of lips, in the way he was holding Draco so carefully, like he was some precious thing, like he was *everything*.

“I feel like I might fall over,” Harry said, pulling away after a time. “I need to crash, like, immediately. You coming to bed with me, or do you need to study?”

Draco bit the inside of his cheek and tried not to cry in the face of Harry’s casually issued invitation. This was something they did, then. They slept together. And it was apparently not surprising, or momentous, or even noteworthy. Everything was all so good, so perfect; he almost couldn’t take it. “I’ll come with you,” he said.





# A Recurring Problem

## Chapter Summary

Draco gets cozy in the new timeline before everything falls apart

“In every way that counted, I failed him.”  
— Sarah J. Maas, *Crown of Midnight*

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In the Gryffindor Common Room, nobody looked twice at Harry as he held Draco’s hand, or at the fact that Draco was there in the first place. Draco marveled at this development as they climbed the stairs to the dormitories. Harry’s room was much like it had been the day they’d played chess, except that atop one of the beds, there was a single green pillow with the Slytherin insignia on it. Weasley was sitting on the floor talking to Finnigan, and both boys looked up when Harry and Draco came in. “Hey, Harry,” Weasley said. His eyes narrowed. “Ferret.”

“Bite me, Weasel,” Draco replied, because the ginger git was an arsehole, in every timeline.

Weasley snort-laughed. “Thanks, but no. Think I’ll leave that to Harry.”

“Speaking of which, what’ve you two been up to?” Finnigan asked, grinning like a Cheshire cat.

“Enjoying the Prefects’ Bathroom, thanks for asking,” Harry said with a smirk.

“Ew! For Merlin’s sake!” cried Weasley. “Why would you ruin it for me? Now I won’t be able to set foot in there ever again without thinking of you two...ugh!”

“If it makes you feel any better, I’ve been wanking in there for ages. Tonight was really just more of the same,” Draco said archly.

Weasley buried his head in his hands and Harry laughed.

The door to the room flew open abruptly, banging against the wall, and Hermione stepped in. She looked around the room, sighing with relief when she saw Draco. “Oh, good, I was hoping you would be in here. This Alchemy essay is driving me mad! Would you mind taking a look at it?”

“Um,” he hedged, looking at Harry.

“Go on, then,” Harry said, giving him a gentle kick. “I’m quite used to you ditching me for Hermione.”

Draco, feeling that it was probably acceptable, leaned over and gave Harry a kiss on the cheek and Harry leaned into it, looking happy. “Don’t keep him up too late, ‘Moine. You know what a bastard he is without his eight hours.”

She giggled. “I’ll return him promptly.”

Draco followed her back down to the Common Room, where she was all set up at a little table, texts and papers spread out everywhere. Her parchment looked basically done; he wondered what she was worried about. He scanned over what she’d written. “You’re offering explanations to why all these attempts at developing an alkahest failed,” he murmured. It was quite advanced work; Draco couldn’t help but be impressed.

“Yes, but I’m trying to come up with a potential solution for the containment issue and I *can’t*.” Essentially, the problem was that if you successfully created an alkahest, which was a universal solvent that would dissolve every type of matter, you wouldn’t be able to store it anywhere, because it would, by definition, dissolve every container imaginable.

“Hermione, if you figured that out, you’d be famous. Wizards have been working on this for centuries.”

“I’m not saying I need to actually figure it out! I only want to include some hypothetical solutions here at the end.”

Draco sighed. “Alright, let’s think this over then, shall we?” he said, settling into the chair opposite her.

It was much like their work in Mysteries, the back and forth, push and pull of minds. It was enjoyable, but just now Draco didn’t much want to do anything besides return to Harry’s bed. Even so, the next hour passed quickly, and soon they were finishing up and Hermione was thanking him profusely.

“I owe you a butterbeer for this one, Draco. Really, thank you,” she said as she packed up her things.

“Hermione, do you remember when Harry and I first got together?” Draco asked, curious.

She sighed and offered him a tired smile. “Of course. How could I forget? Nobody could talk about anything else for months.” She looked thoughtful for a moment. “Although for those of us who were close to you both, it wasn’t that much of a surprise.”

“Happened gradually, didn’t it?” Draco said, guessing.

“Mm hm,” Hermione replied, tilting her head to look at him. “What’s this all about?”

Draco shrugged. “Just feeling a bit sentimental.”

She put her hand on his forearm and squeezed gently. “You’re such a soft heart. Never would’ve guessed it when I met you.”

“Should’ve been a Hufflepuff, eh?” he said.

“Absolutely not! You’d have scared those poor Hufflepuffs to death!” she exclaimed, laughing.

He found himself laughing along with her, and then he couldn’t help what came out of his mouth next. “Would you say we’re friends, you and I?”

Her smile fell away. “Why would you ask that? Is this about Ron and – well, whatever’s happening between Ron and me? Or, not happening, as it were. Because I know you two don’t always get along, but it’s been better, hasn’t it? He’s been making an effort. And even if Ron and I do end up...*together*, nothing between you and me has to change.”

“Good,” Draco said, feeling like his question had been answered in a round-about way. He looked at her small, serious face, her dark eyes that missed nothing. “I don’t know if I’ve ever said it before, but thank you. Thank you for giving me another chance, after everything.”

“Oh!” she exclaimed softly. “Well.” Her eyes got shiny and she looked off to the side, clearing her throat. “It’s a good thing I did, isn’t it, because otherwise how would I finish my Alchemy homework?”

He felt himself getting emotional as well, because beyond her words was a fondness that betrayed her. But getting emotional in the Gryffindor Common Room was absolutely unacceptable, no matter how much of a soft heart he’d become. “Come on,” he said, his voice a bit rough. “I’ve got early bedtime, remember?”

She swiped at her eyes. “Right,” she said, shaking herself as if to clear her head before heading towards the girls’ stairwell. “Goodnight,” she called.

“Night,” he replied, and then made his way up the boys’.

Back in Harry’s room, all was quiet. Draco was grateful that he’d seen which bed was Harry’s, because otherwise this would’ve been quite awkward, like the most horrific game of hide-and-seek of all time, given that all the curtains were pulled shut. He stepped quietly across the floor and pulled Harry’s curtain aside, easing himself onto the mattress. Harry was sound asleep, snoring loudly like always, and Draco chuckled at the sound of it. He did a quick privacy spell over the bed, although he suspected Weasley would rather set himself on fire than find Draco and Harry in a compromising position.

Draco stripped down to his pants, settling the rest of his clothes at the foot of the bed, and curled up against Harry, pulling him back into his chest so that they were spooning. He breathed into the back of Harry’s neck, taking in that wonderful smell, feeling Harry’s soft hair tickle his forehead. “I love you,” he whispered, and it felt so good to say it out loud, finally, despite his sleeping audience. Harry mumbled something unintelligible about a quaffle and scooted closer, throwing his leg over Draco’s. Draco fell asleep almost instantly and slept soundly through the night, thus getting his (apparently) requisite eight hours with a few extra minutes thrown in for good measure.

It was glorious, being with Harry. Exquisite. So wonderful that Draco began walking around with his heart encased in a thick layer of fear, because surely this could not last. The world would not allow him to be this happy for much longer.

There were problems simmering, of course. The “he” that Harry had been shouting about when he first came into the Prefect’s Bathroom turned out to be none other than Theo Nott, who appeared to be tasked with the mission Draco had been given in his own timeline. Theo looked awful, too, bony and pale, the skin beneath his eyes dark and puffy. He was keeping to himself, scurrying about in empty corridors and casting haunted looks all around, but Draco knew exactly what he was up to.

Unfortunately, there was little he could do about it, since Theo and the other Slytherins were no longer his friends. Even Vince and Greg barely grunted hello when Draco showed up in their room, and Pansy made snide remarks about him whenever she was nearby. It seemed that being Harry Potter’s boyfriend didn’t come without a cost.

Blaise and Daphne were the only ones who remained friendly, and they made his periodic visits to the dungeons slightly less horrible.

After mulling over how to bring it up, Draco told Harry about the vanishing cabinet in the Room of Requirement, saying that he’d tracked Theo there underneath Harry’s Invisibility Cloak. Harry told Dumbledore immediately, and Dumbledore had the cabinet removed that same day, placed in some secret location under lock and key. The next day, Theo looked even worse than usual. Draco felt sorry for him, horribly so, but the two times he’d tried to talk to him, Theo had lashed out, and they’d almost come to blows.

On and on it went, so that Draco began to forget this wasn’t really his life, lost as he was in the blur of classes and Quidditch and worrying about Theo. The nights, spent in Harry’s bed, were something else altogether. Nothing about *them* was blurry; everything that happened in that bed felt vibrant and bright, almost painful in its intensity. Every night was a wonder, a miracle, because everything was allowed: mouths and hands and bodies and words. For the first time, Draco let himself indulge in any whim that he wished, any silly show of affection, any primal urge. Nothing was off-limits. It was exhilarating and incredible, having this freedom, having this sort of access to Harry. He imagined that he would never get sick of it, not ever, and every time he remembered how awful it was being around a Harry who hated him, he simply held this Harry tighter and kissed him until the memory was wiped clean away.

Thanks to Draco’s intel about the cabinet, they had managed to keep the Death Eaters out of Hogwarts for the time being. But Dumbledore was summoning Harry into his office more and more frequently, and Draco could tell that the things they were discussing were weighing heavily on Harry. Harry wouldn’t talk about it, not even to Draco, but he began looking more exhausted as the days wore on. He seemed preoccupied and restless, so much so that he was no longer able to fall asleep without Draco rubbing soft circles on his back and massaging his hair until he passed out.

One night after Harry tossed and turned for over two hours before finally succumbing to exhaustion, Draco slipped out of the room and made his way to the dungeons. He rarely entered them except to shower and get fresh clothes, and every visit filled him with trepidation.

Pansy was there, much to his dismay, sitting with Blaise and Vince, and all of them stared at Draco as he entered the room. Theo was there, too, sitting a little bit removed from the rest, his expression wary. His eyes had a disturbingly hollow look about them. Draco knew all too well how he must feel, how the anxiety must be making it hard for him to eat or sleep.

Pansy rose and made her way towards him, and Draco tensed. He didn't want to deal with her, not now.

"Hello, Draco," she said, planting herself in his way and crossing her arms across her chest.

"Pansy," he said, watching her face and hands for signs of danger.

"Are you...are you alright?" she asked.

"What?" he said, because he wasn't certain at first that he'd heard her correctly.

"I *said* are you alright? Because you look like you might throw up. Did you and Potter have a little lovers' quarrel or something?"

He shook his head slowly. "No, nothing like that."

"Well, good," she said, pursing her lips. "That's a relief. If the two of you can't remain sickeningly happy, then the rest of us don't stand a chance." A small smile was played at the edges of her mouth.

He stood motionless, blinking at her.

"Oh, stop looking at me like that. Just because things are...*tense* at the moment doesn't mean I don't still care about you, you idiot."

He chuffed out a small laugh. "Okay. And how about you? Are you alright?"

Her smile remained, turning slightly bitter. "Of course not. The world's absolutely fucked."

"Yeah, it is, isn't it?" he said, trying to say with his eyes what he was afraid to out loud.

"Draco," she said softly, leaning in just a bit, her wide brown eyes fixed on his. "You know that when this all comes crashing down, I'll try to protect you in any way I can."

He couldn't take her hand or pull her to him, not in front of Theo's watchful gaze. "Same, Pans. Always," he said, hoping she would understand.

She nodded tightly, then fixed a nasty expression on her face and gave him the finger before walking away.

He felt something in him lighten, something he hadn't even realized had taken up residence there in his chest. Pansy wasn't his enemy, even if she pretended to be. She still cared about him. Always, he'd told her, and it was true. Pansy was, in her own way, his most constant companion, and they would never stop looking out for one another. The love between them, that peculiar sort of love that they'd shared for as long as he could remember, would be there no matter what happened. Even in this timeline, when they were on opposite sides of the war. In every timeline. Always.

He sat on his bed with the curtains drawn, privacy charms in place. He had the Time-Turner in his lap.

He was a coward, that was the problem. The war was heating up. He felt it in his bones, saw it in the faces of his former friends, and knew it because of how it had unfolded before. Soon, Theo would likely try to kill Dumbledore, and then the world would turn upside down.

Draco felt a stinging guilt over his decision not to muddle through it. Part of him wondered if he didn't owe Harry that, didn't deserve to see the war from the other side. But, as usual, fear won out.

He slid the ruby over to the eighteen, then the moonstone to the nine. The September after the war. He really, really, *really* hoped he didn't wake up in that goddamned cellar. He began shaking uncontrollably at the thought of it. It occurred to him, suddenly, that if something happened to him in this timeline, if *he* was the one to die, he might be rushing to meet that death. And if he took himself beyond his date of death in this timeline, he died for real. He died completely.

He whispered the words and braced himself for whatever was to come.

He was in an unfamiliar toilet, with moss green walls and shining gold accents. There was potpourri on the sink, and a gilded soap dispenser. He was clutching the Time-Turner, and in his other hand was a thin stack of papers stuck together with a charm.

He looked up into the mirror. He was wearing a navy blue suit, obviously tailor-made, a nice-enough white shirt, and, unfathomably, a Gryffindor tie. The tie was hideous.

His face looked strange, his eyes puffy. He felt weak, somehow. Not like he was actively sick, exactly, but almost as though he was just recently recovered from something.

There was a briefcase at his feet and his wand was sticking out of it.

He shrunk the Turner down so that it would fit neatly inside, and looked at the papers he'd been clutching.

Oh, bollocks. There was some horrible war memorial being dedicated today, and Draco, it appeared, would be attending. These things were so awful, so painful. He'd avoided as many

as possible in his own timeline.

The papers included a preview of Shacklebolt's remarks, as well as a page labeled 'Order of Events'. There were little stars drawn near the sections labeled 'Order of Merlin Induction' and 'Remarks by Order Recipients'. The start time listed on the programme was 4:00 p.m. Draco pulled out his pocket watch. Still an hour and a half away, thank Circe.

He took a deep breath and turned the handle on the bathroom, ready to figure out where the fuck he was.

He blinked into the room. It was richly decorated in deep greens and golds and blues, and appeared to be a cross between a sitting room and conference room. It looked vaguely familiar, but Draco was having trouble placing it. Then, suddenly it hit him -- he was in the Minister's chambers. He'd come here once or twice when Mysteries had been called in to help with one thing or another, and it looked essentially the same as it had then.

"Draco."

He looked over and saw Hermione standing by a little table with a teapot and cups. Her hair was wildly frizzy (no Sleekeazy's today), and pulled back into some semblance of a knot at the nape of her neck, and she was wearing black dress robes.

"Hi," he said, not having any clue how to proceed.

"Draco, Ron didn't mean it. He didn't mean any of it. He's not himself right now, he doesn't know what he's saying."

"Alright," Draco said, hoping his silence would convince her to keep talking and talking, until eventually he figured out what the hell was going on.

"He's just over in the next room if you want to try to talk to him."

"Mmm," Draco said.

"Are you okay?" she asked, frowning. "No, stupid question, of course you're not." She sighed, and to his horror, her eyes welled up with tears. "Oh, no," she said, taking a deep breath and letting it out. She pressed a careful knuckle under each eye, trying to avoid a mascara emergency, no doubt.

"I know you didn't start it, but maybe you could try to talk to him? It just doesn't seem right, the two of you fighting, today of all days."

"What should I say?" Draco asked, feeling quite clever because that was a good way to dig for more information.

"Tell him that you know he's upset, and that you're sorry. That you understand why he unloaded. If you do that, I think he'll apologize."

Draco sighed. That had not been particularly helpful. "Fine. Which room?"

Hermione pointed, and Draco slipped in, bracing himself for the Weasel's wrath.

What he was not prepared for, however, was the sight of Ron Weasley sitting on a sofa with his head in his hands, sobbing.

"Weasley?" he said.

"Get the fuck out of here, Malfoy," came the muffled reply. "I'm not talking to you."

"Hermione wants us to talk."

No response. Draco began to get a very bad feeling in the pit of his stomach.

He sat tentatively on the edge of the couch. "I'm sorry you're feeling so shit," he said.

"And I'm sorry you're *not*," Weasley said, looking up at him. "How are you sitting there like everything's fine? Fuck's sake, Malfoy, he'd still be here if it weren't for you. He *told* you not to come with, but Draco Sodding Malfoy never listens to anyone, does he? If you had stayed back, none of this would've happened." Weasley shot up off the couch and stalked over to the window. After a moment, he spoke, his voice quietly furious. "Get the fuck out of here. I can't even look at you."

The bad feeling was spreading all over his body now, infecting him. He felt like he was moving through molasses; his limbs were so heavy. He managed to walk over to the window. "Ron," he said quietly. "Where's Harry?"

A fist came flying at his face, connecting brutally with his jaw. He cried out, tumbling backwards, and then Weasley was on him, hitting and kicking and tearing at his hair and swearing.

"Get the fuck off!" Draco cried. "Get off of me!" He shoved Weasley away, hard, and Weasley went flying backwards, his head slamming into the wall. Draco stalked after him and managed to take him on the chin.

Hermione came running in then, eyes wide and frantic. "Stop! Stop it, both of you!" she yelled, and then a moment later, burst into tears. At the sight of her, Weasley went limp against the wall, his eyes fixed on her face, his own face slightly bloodied (but probably not as badly as Draco's). His chest was heaving.

The only sound in the room was Hermione crying.

Weasley rose up stiffly and went over to her, pulling her into his arms. "He would hate this," she was saying around her tears. "He would hate that you're behaving like this towards each other. He always wanted you to be friends."

Draco stumbled into the other room blindly. He tripped over his briefcase, which was still on the floor, and fell hard, catching himself on his elbows. He scrambled around, pulling himself up into a seated position, and grabbed the Time-Turner.

He slid the ruby to the thirteen, the moonstone to the nine, and whispered the words.



“Does it hurt terribly?” asked Pansy in Potions.

Draco tried to look sad and brave. He felt like an asshole. “Yeah.” She patted his shoulder and he moved to set up his cauldron next to Harry.

“Professor Snape, I can’t possibly chop my dandelion root with my arm in this sling!”

“Mr. Potter, please chop Mr. Malfoy’s dandelion root for him.”

“But, Sir!” Harry cried, outraged.

“Not another word, or it’ll be five points from Gryffindor.”

Harry shot Draco a glare and began chopping.

It took days, and every moment of them was torture. Draco mouthed off in Care of Magical Creatures, boasted about how he was going to get Hagrid fired, and smirked when he was called out of class to meet with the family solicitor. Harry was angrier with him by the minute, and Draco felt like utter shit.

Finally, he felt like it was done. He’d closed the timeline.

He pulled out the Time-Turner that night, and in an instant, he found himself back in Unspeakable Clarke’s office.

# Baby Steps

## Chapter Summary

Harry apologizes to Draco and Draco enjoys a night out with Hermione and Ginny

“What we don't often realize is that the rebirth and collapse of grand things do not begin with grand things at all, like the things we see, but with the small, like the things we are - in the things we do - in the things we say.”

— A.J. Darkholme, *Rise of the Morningstar*

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Draco put the Time-Turner back in a daze and forgot to cover it with the robe. He put one foot in front of the other until he was at the lifts, and then he leaned against the wall as he waited for one to arrive.

Everything in his head felt jumbled, moments skipping and repeating, faces shifting so fast he forgot which was the true one. Hermione with frizzy hair in fifth year, with sleek hair in first. Harry in Gryffindor robes and Slytherin ones. Pansy in the dungeon with cracked lips and Pansy at Hogwarts, calling him a traitor. He felt too full, stretched thin by the pure breadth of memories, and his head was pounding so violently that he thought he might be sick.

By the time he arrived home, he could hardly keep himself upright. He stepped into his own living room with a vague sense of relief and fell onto the couch, asleep before he landed.

There was a knock at the door. Draco shot upright, and for a moment, he couldn't remember why he was here, sleeping on the couch, but then it all came back to him. This was the night of his date with Charlie. He'd gone and visited the other timeline, but no time here had passed. This was the same night that Potter had yelled at him, the same night Charlie had kissed him on the front step.

The knock sounded again, and he glanced at the grandfather clock that stood proud against the wall. It was 12:20. His mind raced over the possibilities: this wouldn't be Pansy; she would have come through the floo. His mother would, too, if there had been an emergency of some sort. Blaise might come to the door, but why he would be here at this hour, Draco had no idea. Hermione, maybe. She and Pansy might've just finished up their night, and maybe she wanted to find out whether her matchmaking efforts had been effective. Although, even if she wouldn't have marched in through the floo, she likely would have floo-called rather than showing up on his doorstep.

He grabbed his wand, which was on the coffee table, just in case it was some crazy person at the door instead of Hermione. The post-war hecklers had mostly gone away, but still, every once in a while someone would show up wanting to give Draco a piece of their mind and maybe a swift kick to the bollocks. Halfway to the door, he realized that he was still in his suit trousers and button-down, except that now they were a wrinkled mess. He hit them with a quick smoothing charm and opened the door.

Harry Potter stood on the front step, dressed in the same ratty jeans and t-shirt he'd been wearing at the pub. His hair was a wreck (what else was new?), his expression grim. Draco's heart began to thud sickeningly at the sight of him.

"What do you want?" asked Draco, clutching his wand tightly.

Harry's eyes were dark and solemn. "To talk," he said. "Can I come in?"

Draco considered it for a moment. If this got heated, if Potter got angry enough to hurt him, Draco knew that he couldn't defend himself. Not with magic, anyway.

But, Draco realized, the look on Potter's face didn't seem to indicate that he'd come here to fight. In fact, his expression suggested that he'd already fought and lost, and was in the process of sulking over it.

"Fine," Draco said, stepping aside to let Potter pass. As he walked into Draco's entry, Draco found himself inhaling, taking in the familiar scent, which was currently tinged with a more than a hint of ale. "Kitchen's this way," he said, gesturing, and followed Potter into it.

"Could I have a cup of tea?" Potter asked, glancing at the kettle on the stove, and Draco nearly exploded at the nerve of him. "I can make it myself," Potter said hurriedly, as though he sensed Draco's mounting rage. "I can make you one, too, if you'd like."

"It's my bloody kitchen," Draco replied. "I can make the tea." He turned the burner under the red kettle to high, and watched the flame burst into brightness before settling down.

"You live in a muggle house," Harry said.

"I suppose you have an opinion on that?" Draco remarked, grabbing the tea cannister from the cabinet.

"No. Just didn't expect it, is all."

They were quiet for a moment, as Draco took out two of his small, yellow teacups.

"A lot of stuff in here is brightly colored," Potter said, eyeing the yellow cups and the red kettle and the various plants and decorations positioned around the kitchen. "I didn't expect – I guess I thought everything would be really sophisticated, and, like, muted or something."

"Is yellow not sophisticated?" Draco said, raising an eyebrow.

Potter exhaled, blowing up into his hair, sending his messy fringe everywhere and revealing his scar. "No, that's not... I like it, is what I'm saying. I like all the colors."

Draco wasn't certain how to respond to that. "Do you take milk?" he asked instead, even though he knew, from the other timeline, that Harry essentially drank milk with a splash of tea in it.

"Yes, please."

Draco stepped over to the refrigerator and pulled out the milk and set it down on the table next to the cups, then leaned against the stove, arms crossed over his chest, waiting for the kettle to boil. "Why are you here?" he asked.

"A lot of reasons."

"Care to elaborate?"

"Yes. When the tea's done."

Draco turned back towards the cabinet and pulled out his teapot, which was bright blue with a yellow top. He splashed some hot water from the tap into the teapot to warm it up, and then poured it back out. He placed three teabags inside and then tapped his fingers impatiently, thinking he would go mad waiting for the bloody kettle to boil. It did though, a moment later, and he quickly poured in the hot water and brought it over to the table where Harry had made himself comfortable. "Do we have to wait for it to steep as well, Your Highness?"

Potter chuckled, but there was no real mirth in it. "No," he said.

"Then by all means," Draco said, gesturing grandly.

"Draco," he began.

"Oh, back to using first names? Fascinating."

Potter shot him an irritated look. "Just shut up for a second and let me say this." He paused for a moment, looking extremely uncomfortable. "I want you to know that I'm sorry," he said, finally.

"Well, you bloody well should be!" Draco snapped.

To Draco's surprise, Potter didn't swipe back. Instead, he nodded. "I am. The way I acted was completely inappropriate, not to mention really fucking mean, and I'm sorry. You didn't deserve that."

Draco held himself very still. "I know you think I'm not good enough for him," he said, finally, looking down at his hands, which were clasped together on his lap.

There was a short burst of laughter and Draco looked up, surprised. "Is that what you think? Christ, Draco."

"Well, it's true, isn't it?"

"No."

Draco waited for him to say more. The moments stretched by, and finally Draco couldn't take it. "Well, what then?"

"Obviously, I was jealous."

Draco, whirling in the face of that statement, needed a moment to collect himself before replying. He picked up the teapot and poured them both a cup. Harry doused his with way too much milk, and Draco added just a splash. The cup felt good in his hands – calming - and the bright yellow color never failed to make him feel better. "If you *were* jealous," he said carefully, "it was hardly obvious. And that still doesn't make it okay."

"No, I know," Potter said. "If anything, it just makes it worse. After what happened last weekend, I know I have no right to say anything about what you do. You told me it was none of my business and you were absolutely correct. It's not. And I'm so, so sorry."

Draco watched Potter bring his cup to his mouth and noticed that his hands were slightly unsteady, and suddenly he found himself filled with rage.

How dare he? How dare he come in here with his fumbling words and trembling hands and expect everything to be *fine* all of a sudden?

"I don't understand," Draco said, his voice coming out hard as granite. "I *don't*. You didn't want me in the first place, so how can you be jealous?"

Harry curled his hands around the cup and slumped over the table a little. "You really don't understand anything, do you? Well, how would you – you wouldn't let me say anything to you on Saturday morning. Kicked me out of there before I could properly explain myself."

"Well, you're here now. Explain."

Potter looked right at him, then, and the moment their eyes met, Draco felt something hot and charring snaking through his body. He looked back down at his tea.

"There's no point," Potter said. "Won't change anything."

"Don't I deserve to know?"

Potter considered him again and cleared his throat. "Maybe you do, yeah, but I can't give you that right now. Not after...well, I don't really feel comfortable sharing it with you at this point, to be honest."

Draco took a sip of tea. It had already gone too cool for his taste – he liked it scalding -- but he drank it anyway.

"How'd the rest of your date go?"

Draco looked up at him, eyebrow raised. "You really want to know?"

A shrug.

“It went well. We had fun. Charlie’s incredibly nice -- but then you probably know that.”

Potter nodded, and Draco watched as his Adam’s apple bobbed in his throat. “He’s a good guy. One of the best.” He scratched at his neck absently and fiddled with the handle of his teacup. “He didn’t stay here.”

“Obviously not,” Draco said.

“It was hardly obvious,” Potter said, echoing Draco’s earlier words and looking him strangely. “I thought he might have.”

“And yet you showed up anyway?”

Another shrug. “I thought if you were...busy...you wouldn’t answer the door.”

Draco shook his head. “You’re really pants at thinking these sorts of things through, aren’t you? Do you have any idea how awkward it would have been if he *had* been here, and you’d shown up, banging on my door in the wee hours of the morning?”

Potter flushed, and Draco tried not to find it attractive and failed. “Would’ve been pretty terrible, I reckon.”

“Yes, Potter, you reckon correctly, you *bloody* git. Fuck’s sake.”

There was a tiny smile in response to that, but it fell away almost immediately. “He likes you, you know,” Potter said softly. “I could tell. The way he looked at you...I can’t remember him being like that with anyone, and he’s brought a few people to the Burrow. People he’s been dating.”

Draco found that he couldn’t look at Potter, so he looked at his hands again. “Mm,” he said eloquently.

“Do you like him?”

Draco nodded hesitantly. “Yes.”

"You're going to see him again?"

"Yes."

There was a heavy silence before Potter spoke again. “He’ll treat you well, I expect. He’ll manage all of those things -- ” his voice broke and he cleared his throat. “All those things that I – well. He’ll be good to you, is what I mean to say.”

Draco looked up then, and Harry was gazing at him, green eyes open and unguarded, hiding nothing. There was longing and regret and frustration and a thousand other things in his expression, things that were painful to bear witness to. Draco found himself wanting to reach out, wanting to touch Harry’s arm, take his hand, pull him close. Harry wanted it, too. Draco could see him practically vibrating with the urge to move, to make contact.

They were sitting on seats that were kitty-corner from one another, not all that far apart. Draco thought he could feel the warmth of Harry's legs across the space that separated them from his own, and his chest tightened at the thought of bridging that small gap.

He couldn't look away from Harry's face, couldn't look anywhere else. He was caught, ensnared, *trapped* by the look in those eyes.

"Harry," he murmured, shifting forward almost imperceptibly in his seat.

"Hm?" Harry's gaze fell to his mouth, so briefly Draco almost missed it, but he didn't miss it—he *knew* -- and that tiny movement made his stomach clench, made him feel almost dizzy.

Then Harry blinked, as if waking from a dream, and shot up out of his seat. "I should go. I should – it's late. Thank you for the tea. And for the talk. I promise I won't act like that anymore. You have my word."

Draco stood, reeling, completely adrift.

"Thank you for the tea," said Harry. "Oh, I said that already. Well." He was walking – practically running – to the door and yanking it open. Before Draco could even think through what was happening, he was hustling down the front walk. "Have a good night," he called, turning around with a wave.

When he reached the end of the walk, he disappeared with a pop.

Draco stared at the spot for long minutes after he'd gone, still clutching his cooled cup of tea.

He slept for twelve hours, waking up in the afternoon. A little while later, Hermione floo-called him to ask about Charlie, and he invited her in. She came though, wearing a cozy-looking t-shirt and worn jeans. She pulled her straightened hair into a knot and sat in one of Draco's wing-backed chairs, putting her feet up on his leather ottoman. "Alright, spill," she instructed.

She listened attentively while Draco, sprawled out on the couch underneath his blue throw, told her everything. Everything about Charlie, anyway. He left out the stuff about Potter.

"You're planning on going out with him again, then?" she asked, brow furrowed.

"I think so, yes. That's how we left it."

"But do you *want* to?"

"Um, yes," he said, not sure what she was getting at. Sometimes, he looked at Hermione and could practically *see* the wheels turning, could see her making connections and drawing conclusions, and it was frustrating as hell when he didn't know what those conclusions were.

She nodded. "And what about Harry?" she asked, carefully neutral.

“What *about* Harry?” Draco said, exasperated. “That’s a closed door, Hermione.” Even as he said it, he found himself protesting silently, compiling a list of reasons why maybe that door wasn’t *really* closed, why Draco shouldn’t extinguish all hope. It was embarrassing, the way he deluded himself.

“Are you sure? He seemed quite upset last night, didn’t he? I don’t think he much liked seeing you with Charlie.”

Draco blinked. Could Pansy have possibly been right? Could *Hermione*, of all people, have planned it all to make Harry jealous? It was an unsettling thought. Hermione was scary enough simply because she was always ten steps ahead of Draco -- and everyone else, for that matter. Add scheming and duplicity into the mix, and she became downright terrifying. “Even if he *was* jealous,” Draco said, trying not to remember the moment that Harry had sat down at Draco’s kitchen table and admitted it, “that doesn’t change anything. He’s decided that he could never be with me, and that’s that.”

“Ugh, I hate all of this so much,” Hermione said, throwing her head back against the chair. “He won’t discuss any of it with me, you know. He’s being very prickly about the whole thing, avoiding me. I assume he’s furious with me after last night, but he’s refusing to talk about it. It’s driving me mad, because I can’t understand why he – “ She let out a little huff of frustration. “I just want you two to be happy, and it seems like...” She trailed off and seemed to remember herself, sitting up a bit straighter. “Okay, let’s assume that the door is, in fact, closed. If you really do like Charlie, then let’s talk about that. He seemed to like you, too. Quite a bit, actually.”

Draco remembered Harry saying the same, remembered the devastating expression on his face as he told Draco that Charlie would be good to him.

“Do you think you might eventually like Charlie *enough*?” she asked. And Draco knew what she was really asking: whether he would be able to move on or not.

Suddenly, he wanted to be brutally honest with her. “I don’t know. Charlie’s wonderful, and I’m certainly *attracted* to him, but...I don’t know. But I also don’t think that I should let that uncertainty stop me from seeing what happens. Finding out if I could, in fact, like him enough. Does that make sense?”

Her eyes seemed to bore into his for a moment. Conversations with Hermione could be a little intense, but he was becoming fairly well used to them. “Yes, I guess it does,” she finally said. She glanced at the grandfather clock. “Well, listen, I’d better get going. I’m supposed to have dinner with Ginny tonight. Little girls’ night thing while the boys make idiots of themselves at Neville’s stag.”

“Sure,” Draco said, uncurling himself from the couch. “I need to figure out what I’m going to eat, too, for that matter. My refrigerator is disturbingly empty; I need to do some shopping tomorrow.”

“You could join us. If you want,” Hermione said, glancing over at him.

“For girls’ night?” Draco asked.



“Sure, why not? It’s only me and Ginny.”

Draco didn’t particularly relish the thought of spending time with the Weaslette, but he also didn’t want to turn down Hermione’s offer. It felt very different from their usual Saturdays of working at his house, different from this quick chat about Charlie. Different, even, from the carefully-planned dinners at Hermione’s with Weasley and Luna. This was a spur-of-the-moment invitation, the kind of thing you didn’t issue to just anyone. It was something you offered to a real friend. “If you’re certain Ginevra wouldn’t mind,” he said.

“She won’t,” Hermione said. “In fact, I think she’s a bit curious about you.”

“Oh?” Draco said, unsure how to take that.

“Because you and I are together quite often, and because of Harry. And now, because of Charlie. I think she’d like to see what all the fuss is about.”

That made Draco ridiculously pleased, for some reason, the notion that anyone at all was making a fuss over him. “I need to change,” he said, glancing down at his pajama trousers and t-shirt.

“That’s fine. We’re meeting at mine. Just come by when you’re ready.” She walked over to Draco’s fireplace and picked up a handful of powder. “We’ve got to be at the restaurant by 7:30, though, so don’t primp too long,” she said before she threw it.

“Yes, yes, I’ll be there with plenty of time to spare,” he said, and watched her as she stepped into the flames and disappeared.

By the time they finished their tempura ice cream at the trendy sushi place that Ginny had selected – which was better than average, he had to admit – Draco had come to a stunning realization, one that shook him to his core.

Ginny Weasley was a goddamned delight.

It was more than a little alarming for Draco to find that he now officially liked not one, but *two* Weasleys. Circe, what was this world coming to?

In the immediate aftermath of the war, Ginevra had been a straight-up bitch to him, not that he blamed her too much for it. He remembered one particularly unpleasant episode in the dungeons of the Ministry, in a hallway outside of the courtroom where his Wizengamot hearing was being held. Harry had just testified on his behalf, and Ginevra was most displeased, telling Draco that he was lucky that Harry was into charity, because otherwise he would be spending the next decade rotting away in Azkaban. She’d looked at him like he was a piece of gum stuck to the bottom of her shoe.

There were a few other instances around that time – any time he happened to cross paths with her, really – where she’d felt the need to tell Draco what a piece of shit he was.

Now, though, she appeared to have left all of that in the past. And it had, now that he thought on it, been two or three years since he'd last seen her. When she wasn't touring with the Harpies, she and Longbottom were cozied up in their home outside of Ottery St Catchpole.

Draco was surprised to find that Ginny was bitingly funny, particularly when her remarks were aimed at someone other than him. She was quick, too, and irreverent, and shockingly perverse. All good things, in Draco's mind.

After she'd had Draco and Hermione rolling with spot-on impressions of all her brothers, she began hurling questions at Draco about Charlie. He tried to answer honestly, even though he found some of them a bit invasive. "I don't understand why all these boys are so obsessed with you," she said finally, looking him over. "You're sort of pretty, I guess, but definitely not conventionally handsome. Is your cock enormous or something?"

When Draco finally stopped laughing, he answered. "One, I am gorgeous. Look at my fucking face, Ginevra. And two, I do indeed have an enormous cock, although I don't know that it is particularly relevant given my predilection for bottoming."

Ginny guffawed at his reply, while Hermione turned red and buried her face in her hands.

Things only got more entertaining from there.

By the end of the night, the three of them were sprawled out on Hermione's extraordinarily comfortable beige sectional, drinking shitty wine, and Ginny was detailing a particularly erotic encounter that she and Longbottom had in her parents' toilet while Molly and Arthur were on the other side of the door, having a conversation about garden gnomes.

"Hermione, you and Ron have shagged at the Burrow, right?" Ginny asked.

"What? No! Absolutely not!" Hermione cried, looking scandalized. Then she cleared her throat. "Well, only once, but it was right after the war and I was very emotional."

"I knew it!" Ginny cried. "You slag!"

"At least Molly and Arthur weren't there to bear witness to it!" Hermione shot back.

"Draco," Ginny said, turning to him with a wicked gleam in her eye, "how about you? Any public or semi-public shagging?"

"Mm, you could say that," Draco said, dozens of illicit encounters flashing through his mind.

"Gonna need a bit more than that, mate," said Ginny, giving him a look. "I feel like you have some good stories, and I'm always looking to add to my wank bank."

"Your...I'm sorry," Draco said, trying to keep a straight face. "Your *what*?"

"My wank bank. You know, things you can pull out and think about when you're having a good wank? Don't be daft, everybody has one. I'm getting married soon; I've got to collect new material where I can."

Hermione was burrowing under a pillow, and possibly dying.

“Ginevra, let’s just say that I’ve had my fair share of encounters in public toilets. And outside. And in stairwells and coat closets and rooftops. Once on the dancefloor of a muggle club.”

She looked giddy. “With *who*? And don’t say Charlie.”

“Not with Charlie, and like I’d tell you if it *were* with him, *god*. No, most of the time, I don’t really ask for their names.”

“Nice,” Ginny said. “Hot.”

“Draco!” cried Hermione.

“I know, I’m a shameless hussy,” Draco said, smiling ruefully. “But I *am* considering putting that behind me. Trying to move beyond anonymous shagging in clubs. I think part of the problem was that it was just so exciting, at first, to finally be out. I got swept up in it.”

“Does Charlie know any of this?” Ginny asked. She didn’t sound accusatory at all, just curious.

“Hasn’t come up. But if it did, I wouldn’t lie. I’m not ashamed of it.”

Ginny nodded, like this was the correct answer. “You know, Charlie was shagging girls at Hogwarts. Boys came soon afterward, and I think he went through a bit of that, too, once he realized that he could essentially fuck anybody on earth.”

“Ah, the joys of being bi,” Draco said. “Every hole represents a new world of possibilities.”

“Draco!” cried Hermione again, throwing a pillow at him.

“Sorry, my little delicate flower,” Draco said, putting his hands over her ears.

“Oh, she loves it,” Ginny said, laughing.

Just then there was a ruckus coming from the fireplace, and Weasley tumbled out, followed by Longbottom. A moment later, Harry stepped into the room unsteadily, bellowing about ordering pizza. He froze when he saw Draco, his eyes flickering between Ginny, who had her feet propped up on Draco’s lap, and Draco, who still had his hands over Hermione’s ears, and Hermione, who was giggling uncontrollably.

“Hello, boys,” Ginny said, rising and giving Longbottom a quick kiss. “How drunk are you, scale of 1-10.”

“Eighty-two,” said Longbottom, swaying.

“Wonderful,” said Ginny. “I’m not cleaning it up if you get sick, just so we’re clear.” Her words were harsh, but she was running a gentle hand over his hair.

“Kay,” he said, smiling down at her. “Les’ go home, Gin.”

“Alright, you poor dear,” Ginny said, pulling him into an embrace. They disappeared with a pop.

“I better go, too,” Draco said, standing. “It must be late.” He eyed Harry warily, and Harry eyed him warily right back.

“Don’t leave on my account,” Harry said, after a pause. He wasn’t nearly as wasted as Longbottom had been, though he was obviously not sober.

Hermione stood and made her way over to Weasley and pulled at his arm. “Let’s get you to bed,” she said. Weasley looked as though he were about to protest, but Hermione shot him a pointed look and he closed his mouth, letting her pull him up the stairs.

“What’re you doing here, anyway?” Harry asked when they were gone.

Draco hated how he asked the question, almost accusatorily, like Draco didn’t have the right to be in Hermione’s house. “Hermione invited me.”

“Oh, right, almost forgot, you and Hermione are best fucking friends now. What’d you do all night, sit around and braid each other’s hair, talk about what a bastard I am?”

Draco closed his eyes and exhaled slowly. He wanted so badly to deliver a verbal blow in return, to hurt Harry the way Harry kept hurting him. It would be easy to do it, and it would feel so good, just to lash out. And Draco was usually able to best Harry, at least like this, with words. It would be so satisfying, in a sick sort of way. But he knew, from experience, that if he did engage, he would only feel worse afterwards.

“Harry, do you remember when you came to my house *just last night* and apologized for acting like a complete dick?” Draco said, stepping closer to him and looking him in the eyes.

“Yeah,” Harry said, looking away.

“You’re being a dick again, and if you keep it up, I’m not going to invite you in and forgive you over tea. Not again.”

Harry glared at him for a moment, like he was itching to say something horrible, and then all the fight seemed to drain out of him. “Yeah, okay. Sorry. It’s just easier, sometimes. Talking to you like that.”

“I know,” Draco said softly, because he did know.

“I don’t even mean the things I say, really. Or at least, I usually don’t. I just say them because I know they’ll...”

“Hurt me?”

Harry looked pained at that, but he nodded.

"I do the same thing sometimes," Draco said, fiddling with the cuff of his sleeve. "That morning, last Saturday morning, the way I spoke to you..." he cleared his throat. "I don't actually think you're an idiot. A bit clueless, maybe, but not at all stupid. And I didn't really think that what happened between us was a hate fuck, because I don't actually hate you. I only – like you said, I was only trying to hurt you. Saying whatever I thought might accomplish that."

Harry was chewing on his bottom lip. "If it wasn't a – a *hate fuck*, as you called it, then what was it?"

Draco felt like they were getting into dangerous territory here, but he also felt that it was important. "I don't actually remember much of what happened, to be honest. But from what I remember, we were having fun together. At the pub. I assume that what happened was a result of us getting along like that, rather than us being awful to one another."

"Yeah," Harry said, nodding. His gaze was aimed firmly at the floor while Draco was speaking. He stood quietly for a moment before lifting his eyes back up to meet Draco's. "I remember it. I remember the whole night." He looked back down. "It didn't...it didn't feel like hate. If you were wondering. None of it did."

"Oh," said Draco, and then it was his turn to stare down at the multi-colored braided rug. "You know," he said slowly, thinking. "Maybe we ought to make an effort with each other. An effort to stop all this nastiness. We were doing rather well at that for a while, before." And they had been. It had been a little awkward, all those polite conversations in the lifts at work and at charity galas, but they had managed to remain civil. Until last weekend, anyway.

"Yeah, we really should. Although, I have to tell you, it was easier to be like that when I didn't see much of you. Lately, it seems like we're always around each other." Draco didn't point out that it was Harry who had come to their table at the pub when Charlie was there, and Harry who had shown up unannounced at his house. "Sometimes...sometimes I don't know quite how to be with you, Draco. I don't know what to say, or how to act."

"I think it'll get easier with time," Draco said. "I really do. And who knows, maybe one day we'll look at each other and realize we've become friends."

"Friends," Harry echoed faintly. "Stranger things have happened, I 'spose."

"Look, you killed Voldemort," Draco said, feeling a rush of pride at being able to say the name out loud. "Compared to that, being friends with me doesn't seem all that difficult."

Harry huffed out a laugh, and some of the tension seemed to fall away from his shoulders.

"Anyway, I really should be going," Draco said. "I need to get some sleep."

"Okay," Harry said, watching him closely.

Draco hadn't been drinking that much, but he generally didn't like to apparate when he was drinking at all (Though unfortunately, when he was really pissed, he came 'round full circle

and decided apparating was fine. It was a bad habit, but thankfully he'd not splinched himself yet.). He picked up a handful of floo powder instead.

"Draco, wait," Harry said suddenly.

Draco turned to face him and was suddenly overwhelmed with how very much he *missed* Harry. He'd gotten so used to him in the other timeline, so used to constantly touching him and being with him, that it seemed strange to hold himself at a distance.

But he knew, all too well, that this was a different place, with different rules.

"I want to...can I hug you?" Harry said, finally, and Draco watched as his cheeks turn slightly pink.

"You *would* be a hugger," Draco said, trying not to betray his emotions. "I suppose you can, though."

Harry approached him slowly, like he was afraid Draco would bolt. He stood and looked at him for a moment before roughly pulling him close. Draco forgot he was holding floo powder and set his hands on Harry's back, the feel of it incredibly familiar. He thought of the many nights in the other timeline that he'd rubbed soft circles across it until Harry had fallen asleep.

He breathed in that familiar Harry-smell and closed his eyes. The world seemed hushed and quiet all around them, as Draco buried his face in Harry's shoulder.

The hug lasted too long, and then longer still. Harry moved a hand up to Draco's hair and ran his thumb across Draco's scalp.

Slowly, the peace of the moment shifted into something else, into a painful sort of tension with which Draco was all too familiar. He stepped away, knowing that one of them needed to. This was going nowhere good, not with Harry's conviction that they could never really be together, and not with Charlie expecting to see Draco again next weekend. "Goodnight, Harry," Draco said, before picking up another handful of floo powder and tossing it into the fireplace. He stepped into the flames, walked into his living room, and made his way up the stairs.

He could have kissed Harry, and Harry would have let him, he knew. Or he could have simply waited, and Harry would probably have kissed *him*. But he didn't want that, didn't want these little physical pieces of Harry when he couldn't have the rest. The truth was, he only wanted Harry the way he'd had him in the other timeline: completely and constantly. He didn't think anything less than that would work. Anything less than that would only bring on that awful feeling again, the thing that had filled him when Harry left his room that morning.

That morning which was really only last weekend, even though it felt like centuries ago.

When Draco slept, he dreamt of Harry kissing along his spine, telling him that he loved him.

Draco lasted three whole days, Sunday through Tuesday, without touching the Time-Turner.

He was looking forward to another date with Charlie, he told himself. He and Harry had made peace with one another. Hermione was his friend, his *real* friend. Even Ginny Weasley was becoming his friend, for Merlin's sake. Life was good, better than it had been in a long time, and he had every reason to stay here, in his own time. Every reason to wake up happy in the mornings and fall asleep content.

Easier said than done, though.

On Tuesday morning, he and Harry found themselves trying to catch a lift at the same time. When the door opened, Harry held it and grinned at Draco crookedly. "After you, Your Majesty," he'd said, and it hadn't been mean at all. He'd been trying their new approach. Being friendly. Maybe being friends.

"Why thank you, Harry," Draco said.

The doors of the lift closed, and they both stood inside for several long moments, struggling to come up with something to say, when Draco realized that neither one of them had pressed any buttons, and he hurtled forward, feeling like an idiot for just standing around in an unmoving lift. Only Harry must've realized it at the same time, because he dove forward to press them, too, and ended up with his hand right atop Draco's, and then they both froze, then stepped back away from the control panel. Then they realized that they *still* hadn't pressed any buttons, and then the same damn thing happened all over again. Finally Draco had shoved Harry aside and pressed for both their floors rather aggressively, and they'd spent the short ride with red faces, stealing glances at each other, until the doors opened. Harry gave him a soft, playful shove before getting off the lift, casting another crooked smile his way, and Draco had practically dissolved into a puddle right then and there.

By the end of the day, he knew he was going to try again. He was a fucking idiot, and he knew it, and it was probably going to be awful again and he might wind up dead. Like, really dead. Only, if there was even the slightest chance it might work, that it might bring him to a place where he and Harry were together after the war, and happy, and in love, then he had to try. Because he wanted that. He wanted it so badly it hurt.

At home, over a quiet supper of reheated soup in one of his favorite yellow bowls, Draco considered his options. There were many places in time where he could go and try to fix things with Harry. Only, he worried that if it were too early on during their Hogwarts days, that he and Harry would once again become too close by the time the war came, and then Harry would end up dying, and it would, apparently, have something to do with Draco being stupid, as Weasley had suggested last time.

So far, all his fresh starts had been early on: first year, then third year. He knew that if he went back to their later years at school, Draco and Harry would have already established some destructive patterns, but he also knew that the war itself had made things ten times worse between them. It had turned boyhood rivalry into deep-seated animosity; ruined any chance for them to trust one another.

So perhaps if he went later, but still before the war, he might still be able to begin mending his relationship with Harry, but not so much that it led to Harry dying in the war because of something Draco had done.

It made some amount of sense to Draco as he mulled it over, though he wondered if he was able to think about any of this clearly anymore. Probably not. His mind was a mess lately.

Back in Unspeakable Clarke's office, he tried to decide which point in time would be best. There had been many dramatic moments there in his last two years at Hogwarts, but there was one moment that stood out as being particularly pivotal for Harry and Draco. One moment that turned everything between them much darker.

Draco still had the scars to prove it.

He would go back there, then. To the dark days of being the Dark Lord's bitch, back to the scene of Harry's Sectumsempra. He'd give it one more go, and if it didn't work this time, he'd accept the way things were here. He'd accept this life. He'd get up and go to work and go out with Pansy on the weekends. He'd go out on another date with Charlie and try to carry on as best he could.

He slid the ruby over to the sixteen, the moonstone to the eleven.



# Bridging the Gap

## Chapter Summary

Draco returns to a dark place and turns to Harry for help

“That's ridiculous. The only point in having enemies is so you can defeat them, kill them, brush them aside.”

“Or give them a chance to redeem themselves.”

— Derek Landy, *Death Bringer*

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The moment Draco surfaced, he knew *when* he was before he knew where. There was only one time in his life that he'd ever felt this way, so hollow and flat, and, at the same time, riddled with anxiety, waves of it sweeping over him continually, eroding his appetite, his ability to sleep, his will to live. He felt it inside him now, churning in his gut. He felt the unbearable heaviness of his own body, his own limbs. It was difficult to stand, to hold up his head. The Time-Turner felt like it weighed a thousand pounds, and he let it clatter to the floor.

He was gaunt, wasting. His arms, as he held them out in front of himself, were so thin that they hardly looked like his own, except that he knew they were because of the Dark Mark he saw there when he pulled back the sleeve of his robes.

He blinked around and took in his surroundings. He was in his dungeon dorm room, all alone. It was day; he could see the greenish, watery sunshine filtering in through the window. Without meaning to, he wandered over to the window and looked out, watching the familiar sway of water reeds. Time passed; he wasn't sure how much, but it was hard to care. He felt so very, very tired.

The door opened behind him. “Draco, you told us to meet you on the seventh floor. Did you change your mind?” It was Vince's voice.

He turned and blinked at them.

“What the fuck is that?” asked Greg, looking at the Time-Turner on the floor.

“Nothing,” Draco said, picking it up quickly and stuffing it into the trunk at the foot of his bed. He picked up his wand and cast a quick *Colloportus* to lock the trunk. “Let's go.” He

had no desire to go to the Room of Requirement, but he knew that if he didn't, his parents would suffer the consequences.

"Where's your Polyjuice?" Draco asked the other boys.

"We left it up there," said Greg.

"Oh, for Circe's sake," said Draco. "You *didn't*. Just sitting right there where anyone could find it?"

Greg and Vince looked at one another before nodding hesitantly.

"Well, come on, we'd better hurry."

Thankfully, the thermoses in which they kept the potion were still there outside of the now-concealed room. Greg and Vince swallowed a mouthful each, and soon they were spinning down towards the floor, shrinking in on themselves. When it was done, there were two very innocent-looking young girls standing there, and if Draco wasn't feeling so wretched, he would have laughed.

Draco let his need for the room, his need to protect his parents, come to the forefront of his mind, and walked by the spot three times. After the third, he was standing before a door. He entered the room, closed the door behind him, and made his way to the cabinet that made frequent appearances in his nightmares. It was a hideous piece of furniture, dramatically angled on one side, so that it looked almost sharp, like a weapon. Its faded paint was peeling, and it had rusting iron details in the shape of crescent moons at the corners. Draco turned the rusty handle to open it, and there, at the bottom, was the corpse of a canary, along with a note.

He shuddered, knowing that while the purported purpose of this garish display was to provide him with proof that the transfers were working, it was also meant as a threat. "Evanescio," Draco said, and the bird vanished. He picked up the note.

*Tomorrow, we will expect you in attendance on the other side. 11:00 p.m.*

Draco began shivering.

He remembered this, all of it. Tomorrow he would go through this cabinet and exit another cabinet at Borgin and Burke's, and there they would all be: Mother, Father, the Dark Lord, Aunt Bella, and all the rest. Draco would step out of the cabinet (at 11:00 sharp) just as The Dark Lord was in the middle of casting a Crucio at Draco's father for some supposed show of disrespect. Draco would know, of course, that this was done for his benefit more than anything: *See what I can do -- obey me in all things or this is what will happen.*

Draco, fighting back tears and trying not to look at his father sprawled out on the floor, convulsing and half-conscious, would report on the location of the vanishing cabinet in the

castle and gave updates on Dumbledore's and Potter's whereabouts. After that, they would arrange to have Aunt Bella attempt an entry into Hogwarts the following week, an attempt that would fail (They'd try again, though, a fortnight later, and that time, it wouldn't fail.).

By the end of the meeting in Borgin and Burke's, Draco's father would have recovered enough to stand, although he would still be white-faced and shaking, and everyone would act like the man hadn't just been hit with the torture curse, like none of it had happened at all.

That was the way it went, with The Dark Lord. Horrific things would simply happen, and you had to carry on without flinching. You had two options, essentially: delight in it, like crazy Auntie Bella, or pretend it didn't exist, like the Malfoys had done.

Because as much as Draco's father was an absolute bastard, and a horrible coward, and a power-hungry arsehole, he'd never reveled in violence the way some had. And Draco's mother, bless her, had even less of a stomach for it.

Draco knew first-hand the way the brutality of the war affected her. For the first year after it ended, when Draco's father was still alive in Azkaban and Draco was living in the Manor, not a night would go by without his mother waking up screaming. Draco would go to her (He was always awake then, anyway; he'd been suffering from the worst insomnia of his life and hadn't done more than catnap for most of that year), and sit next to her in his parents' enormous bed, stroking her hair until she finally calmed.

No, the Malfoys had not taken any pleasure from violence. They'd seen it as a means to an end. But that hadn't mattered, ultimately. They'd still committed acts of unspeakable cruelty. They'd still bowed and scraped before a madman.

It had still been their undoing.

Draco found himself near tears. He didn't want to go to Borgin and Burke's and relive that moment. Why had he come here? This was a terrible idea.

He scribbled down a quick note on a scrap of parchment (*I will be there*), placed it inside of the cabinet, and closed the door.

Then he walked back out into the hallway, where two small girls were patrolling. The door to the room vanished behind him, and without a word to his friends, Draco made his way back down to the dungeons.

He tossed and turned in bed, unable to stop thinking about the next day. He must have finally fallen asleep, though, because he was startled awake by a soft shake.

"Draco," Pansy hissed.

He blinked over at her. "What're you doing in here?"

"I just heard from Theo that you're meeting with...them. With *him*, tomorrow. Is it true?"

He nodded.

“How are you getting there?”

“You know I can’t tell you that, Pans. I literally wouldn’t be able to say it.”

“Oh, right, I didn’t think about that.” She studied his face for a moment. “You must be in knots over it.”

He shrugged, but her words brought him precariously close to tears. *Again*. Ugh, fuck this timeline. This timeline was the worst.

She lifted the covers and slid in, pulling him towards her, settling his head onto the cushion of her breasts. “I’m sorry,” she said, and kissed his hair. “I shouldn’t have woken you. I’m sorry. Circe knows you need the sleep.” She began stroking his hair gently as she held him. “Just relax. I’m here, okay? Everything’s fine.”

She continued muttering reassurances to him and stroking his hair until he drifted back into an uneasy sleep.

When Pansy slid out of his bed in the morning in her short pajama shorts, Blaise, who was already awake, whistled. Pansy gave him a couple fingers for his trouble and sauntered out of the room. She knew Draco was gay by this point, but nobody else really did. That included Blaise, who'd exchanged a hand job or two with Draco in their fifth and sixth years. The other boys seemed to assume that Draco's reasons for engaging in those sorts of illicit activities were the same as their own, that he'd merely done it out of boredom and his inexhaustible teenage hormones. He'd never had a conversation with any of them about his preferences until well after their Hogwarts years. To their credit, though, when Draco finally did tell them (struggling with more than a little anxiety leading up to the telling), none of them had given a fig about it, and had seemed almost insulted that he'd felt the need to explain himself to them. You might accuse Slytherins of many things, but being judgmental about sex was not one of them.

“Draco,” Blaise said when she’d gone, “you are a lucky man.”

Draco found this statement particularly ironic, given where he needed to be that night.

He showered and dressed and tried to ready himself for class. His schedule was *not* tacked up here in this timeline, and that was a bit of a problem. If push came to shove, though, he could just follow Blaise around and hope for the best.

He watched as Blaise picked up his books -- Ancient Runes, DADA, and Potions -- before fetching the same ones and heading up the stairs to the Great Hall.

He would have thought he’d have been prepared for the way Potter behaved, considering that he’d lived through this once, but somehow, he wasn’t.

From the moment Draco stepped foot in the Great Hall, Potter's eyes were on him, tracking him. He imagined that this was the face that criminals saw when they met Auror Potter: confident, assessing, focused. It seemed to say, "I will get you, one way or another. I may not know when or how, but I will get you." It was, frankly, chilling.

Several times through breakfast, Draco noticed that Hermione and Weasley tried to distract Potter, engage him, but Potter was having none of it. It was as though he were not just a Parseltongue, but an actual snake, and Draco a little mouse scurrying through a field.

Draco hadn't felt afraid of Potter for a long time, not really, but he did now, and it was deeply unsettling.

The rest of the morning was Potter-free, but Draco encountered him again in Potions after lunch. Potter set up his cauldron directly behind Draco, and Draco felt the other boy's eyes fixed on him throughout the class. Every time Draco reached for something or walked to the supply cabinet or to another table, he saw Potter's head jerk up, saw him start to trace Draco's movements again.

The meeting that night went exactly as Draco knew it would. He had to give a report to a roomful of Death Eaters and the Dark Lord while his father writhed on the floor. Then he had to leave without even saying goodbye. It was just as horrible this time as it had been the first.

The next two days slipped by without incident. Draco had a brief respite from his duties until the night Aunt Bella was supposed to come through the cabinet. This temporary hiatus calmed Draco to the point where he was able to eat a little and sleep a few hours straight without waking in a cold sweat. So he was feeling a slightly better on Thursday morning in the Great Hall when Potter entered and began striding towards the Slytherin table, a determined look on his face. Weasley yanked him back and dragged him over to the Gryffindor table, where a stern-faced Hermione spoke to him.

Draco had filled his plate with sausages and toast, but now he pushed it away, having suddenly lost his appetite. Because today, he realized, was the day. He absent-mindedly ran a hand over his chest, which was, under his robes, smooth and unscarred.

He knew he might not be able to stop Potter from doing it again, and that his flesh might be cut into ribbons this very evening. It had hurt, that first time. It had hurt incredibly, and it had been so frightening, seeing all that blood pour out of his own body. He remembered thinking, as he watched the bathroom floor turn pink as his blood mixed with water from the burst pipes, that there was no way he could be bleeding that much and live.

He remembered Harry looking down at him in shock and horror, obviously stricken by what he'd done. He remembered wanting to tell Harry that it was okay, to tell him that he was glad, really, that someone had brought about his end before he'd had a chance to complete his tasks.

But then Snape had come and healed him, and Harry had fled, and he'd lived. He'd lived and carried out his orders after all, at least until it came time to kill Dumbledore. That, he could

not do, despite his almost overwhelming fear of the consequences if he failed.

He couldn't focus in his classes at all that day. He couldn't pay attention to Pansy at lunch, or even respond when people said things to him. He felt like a ghost, not fully corporeal.

That evening, as dinner was approaching, he made his way to the sixth-floor bathroom. It wasn't hard to work himself up to tears. It actually felt good, letting himself crumble underneath the weight of it all. He let himself feel his fear, let himself feel it fully, for once.

"Poor boy," came a spectral voice. "You poor boy. They've been awful to you too, haven't they?"

"Hello Myrtle," he managed. He knew that Potter would be bursting in soon, and he was so afraid. "No, no one's done anything to me. I'm the one who –" He found himself unable to finish.

"Oh, no, you haven't done a thing, lamb. It's the others. They always like to tease and taunt."

He felt a wave of nausea, suddenly, and stumbled over to the sink to splash cold water onto his face. It was so hot in the bathroom, so dreadfully hot. He was sweating under his button-up shirt, he could feel it dripping down his back.

"You can trust me. Come now, tell Myrtle," said the flickering figure. "You'll feel better."

He suddenly felt entirely like his sixteen-year-old self again, with no one but a ghost to confide in, and the weight of the world crushing him, and an ocean of fear drowning him. He was separate from everything and everyone, and no one understood, not even his friends. How could they, when he wasn't allowed to tell them?

He choked on a sob, leaning forward over the sink. He could feel tears and snot running down his face, and the air of the bathroom seemed to be pressing in on him, flattening him, and he was broiling alive in his clothes. He splashed more water on his face, letting it wash away the salt of his tears.

There was a crash out in the hall.

"Oh, don't cry," Myrtle was saying. "Don't...I can help you."

The door to the bathroom cracked open. Potter was there, wand in hand, his green eyes sharp as knives. He seemed to be poised on a razor-thin edge; one wrong move and Draco knew he would bleed.

The first time, Draco had turned and thrown a curse. This time, he met Potter's eyes in the mirror. "I don't have my wand," he said, and it was true. He'd left it in his room.

Potter walked towards Draco with his wand still raised. "What are you doing in here?"

Draco wiped his wet face on his sleeve. "What does it look like?" he said.

“I want to check your pockets,” Potter said. “Show me.”

Draco showed Potter that they were empty – and it was a bit ridiculous because they wouldn’t have fit a wand anyway -- but Potter still didn’t lower his wand.

“What do you want with me?” Draco said. “You want to kill me? Hurt me?”

Potter looked taken aback. “What? No, I don’t –” He finally put down his wand, letting it hang limp by his side. “Of course not.”

“Then what are *you* doing here?”

“What does it look like?” Potter said, imitating Draco. “I’m following you, of course. Trying to see what the hell it is you’re up to.”

“Well, now you know,” Draco said. “You can go tell all your friends that Draco Malfoy was in the bathroom, crying to Myrtle.”

Potter frowned. “Why would I do that?”

“Why not? You hate me, I hate you. It’s what we do.”

Potter didn’t respond to that. “Malfoy, what’s wrong?” he asked instead.

Draco allowed himself to look directly at Potter. He knew that here, in this moment, Potter did, in fact, hate him. And yet, he was looking at Draco with concern etched plainly onto his face. Despite everything, Potter was worried, for *him*.

And that was the wonder of Potter, right there. His unfathomable goodness, apparent even in the worst of circumstances. Maybe *especially* in the worst of circumstances. The way he cared about other people, even when those other people were his enemies. He’d seen it when Potter had rescued him from Fiendfyre, and he was seeing it again now. It was who Potter was, at his core, and it was why Draco would never be able to stop loving him.

“Too many things to even know where to begin,” Draco said, and his voice sounded rough and unused.

“Just say the first one that comes to mind,” said Potter.

“I’m afraid the Dark Lord is going to kill my parents,” Draco said.

Potter’s eyes widened. “But they’re...doesn’t Voldemort *like* your parents?”

Draco laughed, and it had a sharp, bitter edge to it. “The Dark Lord doesn’t like *anyone*, Potter. He tolerates people who are useful to him, until they aren’t. Then he tortures and kills them.”

“Oh, you poor boy! I knew people were being mean to you!” exclaimed Myrtle from the stall.

Her voice was so unexpected, and so incongruent with the gravity of their discussion, that Draco couldn't help but huff out a tiny laugh.

Potter met his eyes and smiled, a bit grimly. "She's annoying," he whispered.

"She's not so bad. Especially when she's the only person you can talk to."

"You can talk to *me*," Potter said. And it was ridiculous that he'd said it, because it made no sense in the context of everything. No sense to offer that to a junior henchman of the Dark Lord.

"All right," said Draco. "I don't know how much I can say. I mean, physically, I won't be able to tell you certain things. But I can try to work around it."

Potter stood motionless, like he was trying to understand Draco's words and coming up short. "You – you're willing to – " he cleared his throat. "You're saying you'll – okay. Lemme think."

Draco wanted to shout "*Words*, Potter!" but he refrained.

"Okay, let's talk somewhere else," Potter said. "Not here. Not with Myrtle and –"

"Nobody ever wants to be with me!" cried Myrtle.

"Somewhere else."

"I know a good place," said Draco. "Follow me."

Potter looked uncertain for a moment, and then nodded.

Draco led him up to the seventh floor. He walked past the spot three times, waiting for a door to appear. When it did, he was shocked to find a small room with two armchairs facing each other on the other side instead of the vast room with the cabinet. "Oh," he said. He'd intended to show Potter what he'd been doing.

"Were you hoping for something else?" Potter asked. "Because this is what I thought about, what I thought we needed."

Draco looked at him in dismay. Of course Potter's magic had overpowered Draco's.

Or, Draco thought, perhaps it was that Potter's need was the truer one, for now.

"No matter," Draco said, finally, entering the room to sit down on one of the chairs. There was a table beside it with a mug of tea on top.

Potter sat opposite him. "Okay, what are you willing to tell me?" he said, leaning forward, his green eyes bright and intent on Draco's.

"Everything," said Draco.





# Galaxies Collide

## Chapter Summary

Draco and Harry talk

“your hand  
touching mine.  
this is how  
galaxies  
collide.”  
— **Sanober Khan**

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Hours later, Draco was still going over everything he knew, in whatever way he could, sometimes engaging Potter in elaborate guessing games when he was unable to tell him outright. The initial tension that saturated the room dissolved over time, and it was very late now, or so Draco assumed. They were both getting tired, leaning against the backs of their chairs and yawning.

“We’ll go to Dumbledore in the morning,” said Potter, taking off his glasses to rub at his eyes.

Draco nodded. He’d known it would come to that. “Yes,” he said. “I think I need to sleep, now, though.”

“I don’t want you going to the dungeons,” Potter said. “Not until after.”

“Why?” Draco said, feeling his temper flare, not for the first time.

“Honestly? I’m worried you’ll change your mind. Chicken out. Run away from the castle, who knows? I’m also worried your so-called friends will see that something’s wrong and report you.”

“They’re my *real* friends,” Draco said tightly. “They’re trapped by this just as much as I am. You don’t know, you have no idea —”

“No, Malfoy, I have no idea what it’s like to fear for my friends’ safety. No idea at all,” Potter said, giving Draco a look.

“It’s not the same. It’s the difference between being afraid of the snake in the grass and inviting one into your bed. If you’ve asked it in, and it bites, then that’s on *you*.”

Potter frowned at this, considering, and finally shrugged. “Either way, I think we should stay here. Get a few hours sleep. Then go talk to Dumbledore.”

“Fine,” Draco said. “I don’t care, I’m exhausted anyway.” He stood. “You’ll have to do it, I don’t have my wand.”

“Do what?” Potter asked.

“Well, I’m not sleeping in a *chair*,” Draco said.

Potter rolled his eyes. “Of course not.” He stood and transfigured the two chairs into narrow beds and gestured to one. “After you, Your Majesty.”

It was so similar to the way he’d said it in front of the lifts in the Ministry that Draco froze.

“What?”

“Nothing,” he said, shaking himself and climbing into one. It was rock hard and the blanket atop it was thin and scratchy. “This is awful.”

Potter pressed into the mattress and grimaced slightly. “Yeah, well, it’s the best I can do.”

“May I?” Draco asked.

Potter blinked at him. “You think I’m just going to – that I’d give – why would you – “

“*Words*, Potter,” Draco said, too tired to swallow it this time.

“Ugh, fine,” Potter said, handing Draco his wand.

The wand was unfamiliar in his hand, strange. It was still warm where Potter had held it, and there was something about it that reminded him of Potter, some windswept and wild feeling that radiated from it. Draco cast, and in a flash, the beds were larger and fuller, with down-stuffed mattresses and pillows and cool, cottony-soft sheets and warm comforters. “There,” he said, handing the wand back.

Potter tested the mattress. “Much better,” he said, reluctantly. “I knew you were good at Potions. Didn’t realize you were good at Transfiguration, too.”

“I have many talents that you don’t know about,” Draco said, and was surprised when he was rewarded with Potter’s slight flush. He turned then, knowing he was testing limits, but also not caring, and began to flick open the buttons of his shirt. He was doing it to see what would happen, yes, but also because there was no way in hell he was going to sleep in a button-up shirt and wool trousers. No thanks.

He slipped his shirt off his shoulders and began to unbuckle his belt, smiling to himself when he heard Potter inhale rather sharply. He didn’t stop until he was down to his pants, and then he turned and saw that Potter was standing motionless, staring resolutely at the wall, his lips pressed so tightly together that they were turning white, his cheeks a startling pink. “You going to sleep in your robes, then?” Draco asked.

“What? No,” Potter said, his eyes flickering over Draco’s bare chest. “You’re...you’re too thin, Malfoy. You weren’t that thin last year.”

Draco felt himself grimace. “Yes, well, being in the service of the Dark Lord will do that to a person. And anyway, how would you know how thin I used to be?”

Potter’s cheeks managed to get pinker. “Can’t help but notice when someone parades about in the Quidditch locker rooms like you used to.”

“You were watching me in the locker rooms, were you?” Draco asked, smirking. Though, admittedly, he had paraded, a bit.

“*No!*” Potter cried.

“Hm,” Draco said.

“Anyway” Potter said, “you need to eat more. You’ll be safe, now. Dumbledore will make sure of it. And your parents will be safe. So, you know. Hopefully that’ll mean you have an appetite.”

“I’m sure not constantly fearing for their lives will help,” Draco said. “And...and I promise to at least try. To eat more.”

“Good,” said Potter, slightly mollified.

Draco got into his bed, leaving the blankets pooled around his waist, his chest bare. He slung one arm up above his head and watched Potter. Potter, unable to wrest his gaze away from Draco’s, took off his robes, hands slightly unsteady. After the robes were gone, he hesitated. “Stop looking at me,” he hissed after a moment.

“You looked at *me*. It seems only fair.”

“Don’t know why you’d want to,” Potter mumbled.

Draco laughed. “Want to look at you? You’re not exactly terrible looking.”

Potter stilled. “But...how can you say... you’re a – and I’m a – “

Merlin, Potter was going to kill him with this inability to form complete sentences. “A man?”

“Yeah,” Potter said.

“It’s not unheard of, Potter. And I happen to like looking at other men. But if it offends your delicate sensibilities, I’ll refrain.” He moved his arm to cover his eyes.

“You, erm. You like looking at men? But, I thought you and Pansy...”

“No,” Draco said from under his arm. “Pansy’s my friend.”

“Oh,” said Potter. Draco heard no movement on the other side of the room.

“So have you ever?” Potter asked after a moment. “You know. With anyone?”

“Fooled around with a bloke? A bit. It’s not uncommon in the dungeons. We’ve all, ah, experimented, you might say.”

“Really?” Potter breathed.

“Can I take my arm down? If you’re not disrobing right now?”

“Oh, right. Yeah, course.”

Potter moved to his bed, and sat there, transfixed. His tie was loosened, but otherwise he was still fully dressed.

“I take it the Gryffindor tower was not conducive to such experimentation?”

“Er, no. And besides, I’d hardly want to – experiment – with *Ron*. Blech.”

“You have other roommates. Finnigan and Thomas, right?”

Harry shook his head. “No. No, I can’t think of them like that.”

“Thomas isn’t a bad looking bloke. And Finnigan...well, I’m almost certain he might be open to it. Just a hunch.”

Harry laughed loudly and then looked surprised at himself. “I’ve always wondered about Seamus.” Then he shook his head again, firmly. “No, I couldn’t, though. Who have you...you know. Experimented with?”

“I don’t know that I ought to be telling you,” Draco said. And it was true that he typically didn’t kiss and tell. But this seemed different, somehow. “You swear to keep it confidential?”

A brief nod.

“Blaise. Theo. Before that, Cassius and Miles.”

Potter’s eyes widened. “Cassius...that’s Warrington, isn’t it?”

“It is,” said Draco. “He was a bit older.”

“I know, I remember him. He played Quidditch. He was...”

“Quite fit?”

Potter reddened. “Yeah.” He looked off into the distance. “The two of you together, *Merlin*. That must’ve been. Well.”

Draco tried to suppress the shiver that went through him at the thought of Harry getting off on Draco’s sexual escapades. “Have you ever talked about this with anyone?” asked Draco.

Potter looked lost at that. “No, I don’t...no. I haven’t. But I like *girls*. I like Ginny Weasley, specifically.”

“You can like both,” Draco said, shrugging.

This caused Potter to pause. He chewed on his lip, brow furrowed. “Everyone would think it was weird.”

“I wouldn’t.”

Potter’s eyes darted up to Draco’s.

“I know my opinion doesn’t count for much. Seeing as I’m a Death Eater and all. But I wouldn’t think it was weird.”

“Former Death Eater,” said Potter, jutting his chin out. “Right?”

“Technically, yes. Former,” said Draco. “As of a few hours ago.”

Potter took off his tie, and, after a moment’s hesitation, began unbuttoning his shirt. “It’s rather brave, you know. That you’re doing this. It can’t have been an easy decision to make.”

“No,” Draco said. Potter kept promising that Dumbledore would try to extract Draco’s parents, would hide them, but he knew full well that it might not work. He took some solace in the fact that these were his parents in another timeline, but it still terrified him. They were still his parents, in a way. It would still hurt them. It might still kill them. “But it’s the right thing to do.”

Potter leaned over to take off his shoes and socks. “I didn’t know you cared about that.”

“I don’t, always. But with this...it’s not just hurting someone’s feelings, is it? It’s life or death. It’s the survival of our kind. It’s bigger than me.”

Quickly, Potter slid off his trousers. He didn’t ask Draco to turn around, and he didn’t slide under the covers immediately. Instead, he sat back atop the bed, leaning back on his arms, almost challenging Draco to look.

Draco, having a questionable sense of propriety at the best of times, did. Potter looked much the same as ever, and almost exactly the same as he had in the other timeline, the one where Draco had slept with him in the Gryffindor tower every night. His shoulders were broad, his arms wrapped in wiry muscle. He was on the thin side, with knobby knees. There was a small patch of dark hair on his chest, and a little trail running from his bellybutton down to his pants. He was, as ever, the most beautiful thing in the world. “Well?” he said.

“Well, what?” Draco replied, mouth a bit dry.

“Not terrible looking?”

Draco looked up at him in surprise. “Um, no. Not. Ah. No.”

*“Words, Malfoy.”*

Draco couldn't help it; he burst out laughing.

“I've been thinking,” said Potter. “Is this the first actual conversation we've had? In all these years? I can't think of a single time we've ever done anything but yell at each other.”

“Yes, I do believe it's the first. Unless you count the time you refused to shake my hand on the train, or that detention in the Forbidden Forest.”

“Pretty sure neither one of those counts,” Potter said. He finally slipped under his covers, mirroring Draco and leaving his covers pulled down to his waist and slipping the hand furthest from Draco up to support his head. “You know, I've thought about the train. Quite a few times. Do you remember that Ron was the one who started things? With you?”

Draco frowned. “What do you mean?”

“I'll be honest: I already had a shit impression of you from Madam Malkin's.” Draco's cheeks burned at this; he knew full well what a git he'd been, especially since having to relive it. “So I had that in the back of my head when you came up and introduced yourself. And then Ron, well, he swiped at you. About your name. Said some shit about it. And then you swiped back, only ten times harder —“

“I tend to do that,” Draco said.

“Yeah. Well, it was pretty terrible, what you said. It made me forget, for a while, that it was Ron who started it.”

“I don't even remember what Weasley said, to be honest,” Draco said.

“I don't either, exactly. But that doesn't change the fact that he did it.”

“So, what? You wish you'd become my friend instead of the Weasel's?”

“No,” Potter said, laughing. “I'd never give up my friendship with Ron. I'm only saying that maybe we both got swept up in a fight that wasn't really our own.”

“Not much has changed, then,” Draco said, looking over at him. “This war...”

“Yeah. I know. Voldemort and Dumbledore. This is their fight, isn't it? Not that I don't want to help, because of course I do. I will, as much as I can. But that didn't mean I had to keep fighting *you*. And now, well.”

“We've suddenly found ourselves on the same side? I know. Bizarre, isn't it?” asked Draco.

“Mm,” said Harry, nodding. He looked up at the ceiling. “You're different. From what I expected. I feel like I never really knew you, even though I always thought I did. Like maybe...like maybe I had this picture, of who you were, only it wasn't actually you at all. It was...well, it was a mixed-up jumble of things; things I hated, things I feared. But It wasn't ever real.”

Draco felt himself warm at that, but he tried to temper it. "I'm not a good person, Harry," he said.

"I'm not going to take your word for it, no offense. I prefer to form my own opinion. And I'm not saying that I've figured you out now, after this one day. You could still be a great big arsehole for all I know. Probably you are," he said, chuckling. "But I'm fairly certain what I thought before was wrong. And...I'd like to find out. Who you are, I mean."

Draco found himself blinking away tears, as a hot rush came over him. "Okay," he said.

They were silent for a while, and Draco could hear the rapid beating of his own heart in the quiet of the room. "What did you do?" Harry asked suddenly.

"About what?" asked Draco, confused.

"With those blokes."

Draco chuffed a laugh. "Potter, are you asking me to talk dirty to you?"

"What? No! I just...I'm curious." He continued to look resolutely skyward.

Draco joined him in studying the ceiling. "I could –" he couldn't say this, could he? Not now, at this pivotal moment between them. But the words slipped out before he could stop them. "I could show you."

Potter very audibly gasped, then went entirely still.

Draco wanted to die, wanted to sink right down into the stone floor and disappear. Merlin damn him and his big mouth and his inability quash his desire where Potter was concerned. They'd made all this progress, and now he'd gone and ruined it and –

"Okay," Potter said quietly.

"I'm sorry, that was totally inappro – wait, what?"

"I said okay."

"Oh," said Draco, feeling torn between whooping for joy and vomiting. He knew his cheeks were flaming – he could feel their heat.

"I'm assuming you can't show me from there," Potter said, his voice teasing.

"Right," he said. "Right, sorry. I just need a moment to recover from the shock."

"Fine, I'll come to you then, shall I?" Then before Draco could react, Potter was sliding into his bed, and his warm limbs brushed up against Draco's, although he made no move to touch him further. He just lay there, his eyes bright and strangely trusting. It threw Draco, because how could Potter trust him – this version of him, anyway? "Well?"

"I assume you know how to kiss someone?" Draco managed.



“Yeah. I wouldn’t say I’m an expert or anything. But I know a bit.”

“Well, it’s always acceptable to start with that,” Draco said. “May I?”

“Yes,” said Harry, his eyes never leaving Draco’s.

Carefully, Draco leaned over and removed Harry's glasses and set them aside. Then he began to kiss Harry, nothing fancy, just his lips moving gently over Harry's warm and slightly chapped ones. Potter had become *Harry* again, somehow, Draco thought absently. The world, the nature of their relationship, had shifted, once again.

This Harry kissed differently, like he had something to prove. It wasn’t a bad thing; it was really quite enjoyable. Harry wrapped his hand around Draco’s neck and pulled him firmly against him, and the kiss became insistent and a bit rough, lips caught against teeth, tongues twining hotly.

Draco pulled back and looked at Harry. “Well?”

“I think I like both,” Harry said, looking dazed.

It took Draco a moment to realize what he meant, and then he laughed. “Well, check that off the list, then. You’ve figured it out.”

“I should be certain, though, shouldn’t I?” Harry said, grinning. “I mean, *really* certain.”

Draco exhaled, trying not to give in to the desire to press his cock against Harry immediately. “What would that entail, exactly?”

“You tell me,” said Harry.

“Well...I could touch you. You could touch me. Or, you know, a combination of the two.”

“Yes,” said Harry.

“Yes. You’ve said yes. Okay,” said Draco. He was feeling dizzy.

“*Is* that okay?”

“Um,” said Draco. “Yes. It’s definitely okay.”

Harry reached for him, then, kissing him again, just as passionately, with that edge of forcefulness that caused Draco’s cock to throb in his pants. Then Harry was tugging at the pants in a way that allowed for no hesitation, no question of what it was he wanted. Draco slid them off and Harry’s hand was on his cock in an instant, gripping it firmly. This Harry wasn’t like the one who had laughed and told him he wasn’t sure what he was doing. This Harry didn’t know what he was doing either, but he was very obviously determined to figure it out without help. He began to stroke Draco, and Draco groaned into his mouth and reached for Harry’s pants.

When they were off, Draco tried to slow the pace. If he didn't, he was going to come much too soon, with the way that Harry was handling him. He trailed soft fingertips along Harry's shaft, let them reach lower, massaging there for a moment before making his way back to the tip. Harry's hand slowed and then he removed it, wrapping his arms around Draco instead, and pulling him closer.

Draco continued to tease his way along Harry's cock, and Harry began sighing and shivering. Draco took the opportunity to kiss along his jaw, then lower, to his chest, pausing at a pink nipple to lick across its surface. Harry groaned roughly, gripping Draco hard.

Draco kissed down his stomach, allowing his tongue to flicker over the skin there, biting softly right above the dark, curly patch of hair around Harry's cock.

"I want your mouth on me," Harry said, his voice sounding hoarse. "If that's okay."

Draco didn't reply, only scooted lower and licked a firm stripe along the thick shaft of Harry's cock.

"Oh, *fuck*," Harry moaned. "Fuck."

Draco did it again, then teased his tongue around the tip. He took Harry's tip into his mouth, sucking once, and then tongued his way back down. He licked a line between Harry's bollocks and back again, and Harry strained against him, gripping his shoulder tighter.

Draco took the tip in his mouth again, pausing, his eyes on Harry's, who was watching him with his own eyes half-closed. "Oh, god, you look..." Harry spasmed, thrusting into Draco's mouth. Draco was ready for it, and he took Harry in, letting him fuck into his mouth. "Sorry," Harry said. "But if you keep looking at me like that, I'm not going to last much longer."

Draco removed his mouth for a moment to grin. "That's not a problem," he said, taking Harry deep into his mouth, to the back of his throat, until it almost hurt, until he could feel himself practically choking, and then he pulled back, his tongue dragging along the bottom of the shaft.

Harry began thrusting his hips. Draco could tell he was trying not to, but he was half-gone, lost to his pleasure, his eyes slitted open, his mouth parted, his hands scratching trails along Draco's scalp and shoulders. Draco encouraged him, using one hand to cup Harry's arse, pulling it towards him before letting it sink back down onto the bed.

He was increasing his pace now. "God, Draco, fuck. Fuck. I'm going to come. I'm going to come." He seemed to be trying to pull away, but Draco stayed him, encouraging him to continue thrusting, and then Harry was crying out, his nails digging into Draco's skin, and Draco felt his mouth fill with the slightly bitter taste of Harry's come. He swallowed it down easily, without hesitation, and then slowly worked his way down Harry's shaft again, softer now, letting Harry ride out his orgasm to the end.

Then he finally pulled away, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, and settled onto the pillow. Harry had his eyes closed beside him and was breathing roughly. He peeked over at Draco and reached out a hand, gripping Draco's neck again, pulling him close and kissing

him. "I can taste it," he whispered against Draco's mouth. "On you. Oh my god, that's so...can I do that to you?"

"How about just your hand, for now. You look fairly well wrecked."

Harry snickered. "Yeah, alright." He kissed Draco again, and went back to stroking him, his other hand ghosting along Draco's side and down to his arse. His fingers neared Draco's hole and he paused. "Do you ever do anything here?" he asked.

"Sometimes," Draco said. "But I don't want to do that with you. Not now. Even though you seem to want to jump headfirst into everything, I think you should probably take it a little slower."

"Fuck slower," Harry said. When Draco looked unmoved, he sighed. "Later?"

"If you want to, then sure. Later."

"Okay," he said, and continued kissing Draco.

Draco let himself relax, let himself ease into the feel of Harry's skin, of his hands. He let himself be surrounded by the familiar Harry-smell, let himself take in the taste of Harry's mouth.

It was like coming home.

# On the Brink of War

## Chapter Summary

The war heats up while Draco and Harry fall in...love? Lust? One of those.

“Sex is kicking death in the ass while singing.”  
— Charles Bukowski

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Draco wasn't sure what to expect after he and Harry talked to Dumbledore. They left the Headmaster's office and stood facing one another a bit awkwardly. “Thank you again,” said Harry. “Thank you for doing this.”

“I needed to,” said Draco.

Harry reached up a hand and squeezed Draco's shoulder, then walked away without looking back.

In the days to come, Draco learned that this was not the Harry of the last alternate timeline. There were no sleepovers in the Gryffindor tower, no holding hands in the halls. This Harry didn't even say hello to Draco, because they were supposed to act like they were still at odds with each other, at least in public.

Draco soon found out that Harry had told Hermione about Draco's betrayal of the Dark Lord, though, because Hermione sneaked up behind him in the library one day. “Malfoy,” she said softly. He was alone in the stacks, and he jumped a little at the sound of her voice.

He whirled and found himself looking at a frizzy-haired version of Hermione wearing a tight, wary expression. “Hello, Hermione,” he said.

She looked surprised by that, that he had used her name. “I came to tell you that, well, I *know*. About everything.” She looked suddenly nervous. “I hope that's okay with you?”

“It's fine,” Draco said.

“Oh, good. Anyway, I wanted to tell you —” she stopped, her mouth pursing. “This is not to say that I *like* you, incidentally. You've never been anything but horrible to me, and I —”

“I know,” he interrupted her. “I'm sorry, for what it's worth. And I don't blame you for however you feel about me.”

Her eyes widened. “Oh.” She cleared her throat and looked in his direction, though not really *at* him. More like at the books behind his head. “In that case, I'll finish what I came to say.

Which is that I think it's brave of you to do what you're doing. I respect it, and I appreciate it. And while you're working with us, anyway, I'll do what I can to look out for you." Finally, she allowed herself to meet his gaze.

"Thank you," he said quietly. "I don't know that I deserve that from you, but thank you."

"You're welcome," she said. She hesitated, looking back and forth down the row of shelves. "Are you terribly worried? About your parents?"

"Yes," he replied. "Sometime this week, it's supposed to happen. The extraction. I don't know the details, but I know it's this week."

"Well. I hope they're alright. I really do. For your sake." She glanced away, then, and seemed to relax, like it had been taxing to look directly at him. "That's it. That's all I wanted to say."

"Okay," he said.

She nodded once more, then turned on her heel and left.

He had a difficult time eating supper that night, even though it was one of his favorites. It was more hurtful than he'd expected to face this version of Hermione, who very obviously did not relish being anywhere near him. But he forced himself to take some bites of the roast anyway – after all, he'd promised Harry.

The first time it happened, Draco was dawdling in the corridor outside of the Great Hall. He was late to supper. It had been four days since he'd spoken to Hermione, and his anxiety about his parents was growing by the minute. He didn't feel like seeing everyone, didn't feel like talking. He would've skipped supper altogether but for his promise.

"Draco," came Harry's voice from behind him.

"Harry," he said, turning to face him. "Hi."

"Are you all right?" Harry asked, his eyes on Draco's face.

"No, not really," Draco said.

"No word yet?"

Draco shook his head.

"Care for a distraction?"

"I – what sort of distraction?" Draco asked. Despite the ambiguity of the statement, his cock seemed to accept the filthiest possible meaning as fact, and he felt his blood rush in its direction.

Harry grinned and glanced around before taking Draco's hand. "Come on," he said, pulling him into a quiet corridor. He shoved him into a little alcove and then attacked him with his mouth.

"Oh, this sort of distraction," Draco said between kisses.

"Mmm," said Harry. "I've been thinking about doing this for days." He licked Draco's neck.

"Oh?"

"Yup," Harry said, biting. "Had a good wank over it last night, if you want to know."

Draco felt his stomach drop in a delicious way. "You – you thought of me?"

Harry pulled back slightly. "Is that so surprising?"

"I don't know," Draco said. "We never talked about it. Which is fine, I mean, we're not supposed to be talking at all. But still... I didn't know what to think."

Harry put his mouth to Draco's ear. "It's been on my mind constantly. The feel of you, the feel of your mouth on mine, your mouth on my body. *Constantly*."

Draco swayed on his feet. "Oh, well, that's good then."

Before he could say anything else, Harry was opening his robes and pulling at his flies. "Harry!" he whispered frantically. "Anybody could catch us!"

"Isn't that half the fun?" Harry replied with a smirk. He reached into Draco's pants and gripped his cock.

"Oh *god*," Draco said, and leaned back against the cool stone wall.

Afterward, Harry did a quick cleaning spell and smiled at him crookedly. "Well? Were you distracted?"

Draco laughed. "What do you think?"

"I don't know, you might've been faking your enthusiasm."

"Shut up," Draco said, giving him a gentle push. "As though I could fake *that*."

"Good," said Harry. He gave him a quick kiss on the mouth before sauntering away, leaving Draco leaning against the wall in a daze.

The second time, Harry must've followed him into the Slytherin Common Room under the Invisibility Cloak, because when Draco finished brushing his teeth, he pulled back the curtains of his bed to reveal Harry, sprawled out on his back, hands behind his head, grinning. Draco pulled the curtain shut immediately, because Blaise was just across the room, reading.

When he opened it again, Harry had disappeared. He climbed in, and accidentally kneed invisible-Harry in the balls. “Ouch!” Harry cried.

“You alright?” Blaise asked, looking up.

“Fine, stubbed my toe,” Draco said, pulling the curtains shut and casting a privacy charm.

After that, it became a regular thing, the two of them kidnapping one another for quick hand jobs in empty hallways, and Harry sneaking into his bed. They still didn’t speak in public, but Draco caught Harry looking at him sometimes, a faint smile on his face. Draco would return it, then look quickly away before anyone saw.

Draco didn’t hear anything about his parents for nearly two weeks after the day he and Harry had spoken to Dumbledore. He was nearly choking on his fear when Dumbledore came to fetch him after supper one night. He followed the Headmaster into his dimly lit, mysterious office, heart in his throat.

“We have your mother. She is safe,” Dumbledore said.

Draco digested the words. “And – and my father?”

“He wouldn’t come. He refused.”

Draco shook his head. “No. No. My mother would never leave his side, she wouldn’t, just to save –”

“She didn’t come with us to save herself, Draco. She did it because she wanted to make sure that you were being taken care of. She wanted to advocate for you. I told her that you were in my care, that you have been in my care the entirety of this year, and that I would do everything in my power to ensure your safety. However, she wanted to see you for herself.”

“Hello, darling,” said a voice behind him.

“*Mother!*” cried Draco, throwing himself into her arms.

She was crying. Silently, but still. His mother – his mother with her ever-present poise and her ability to bear all things – was crying.

“You could have stayed with him,” Draco whispered to her. He choked on a sob. “You didn’t have to –” He couldn’t continue; his throat felt entirely closed.

“No, love. I couldn’t have. You are my *child*. I couldn’t stay there while they plotted against you. And I couldn’t stomach the thought of you going off on your own. You would have been all alone...”

He was sobbing into her shoulder, in a way that he never had, not once, not since he was a tiny child. She did not judge him for it, did not reprimand him. She only held him tighter and

kissed his cheek.

When he looked, he realized Dumbledore had gone.

She was sent to a safe house. Where, Draco didn't know. He received letters from her every week or so, hand-delivered by Professor Snape via Dumbledore.

Harry stopped pulling Draco into quiet alcoves after a while. He began to look exhausted, haunted. Draco remembered this from before, from the timeline where he rubbed Harry's back at night to help him calm down. He knew trouble was brewing. Only this time Draco was not going to run away. He was going to stay and face it.

Then, one especially warm day, Harry was suddenly gone, and Dumbledore with him. Everyone pretended that nothing was wrong; they'd all gotten very good at that this year, with everything that had happened. The world was falling down around them, and still they studied for exams.

Draco found Hermione alone in the library that afternoon and sat down across from her. "Hermione," he whispered. "Where's Harry?"

She looked up at him, and though her voice was calm, her eyes were wide and terrified. "He's fine. He's with Dumbledore somewhere."

"Where?"

She shrugged helplessly. "I don't know."

Snape. He would ask Snape.

He tracked down his professor in his study. He hadn't talked openly with Snape about his defection, though he was certain that Snape knew, either from the Dark Lord's side or from Dumbledore. "I want to know where Harry is," he said.

Snape gave him a look that was usually reserved for tedious Gryffindors. "I wouldn't know," he said.

"I'm worried about –"

"*Mr. Malfoy*, it is none of your concern. I assure you that wherever Mr. Potter is, he is in good hands. What you ought to do is go back to your room. Stay in the dungeons tonight." He looked back down at the parchment he was grading.

"Sir –"

"Not another word, Mr. Malfoy."

Draco growled in frustration and left the room.



He made his way to the Slytherin Common Room and tried to relax. Pansy was there, and she begged him to play a round of chess with her. She was very good; usually one of his favorite people to play with. But he couldn't focus, and she beat him much too quickly.

"Why are you so agitated?" she asked, eyeing him. "You're freaking me out."

"Something's wrong. I don't know what. But something."

She frowned. "Should I be worried?"

"I don't know," he said. He knew that the Death Eaters had breached Hogwarts around this time, right at the tail end of the school year, in his own timeline. But the vanishing cabinet had been taken away from Hogwarts in this one, and as far as he knew, there was no other way in. It was, perhaps, possible that the Dark Lord had found some other way to enter since Draco had defected, although readying the cabinet had taken them the better part of a year, and, to Draco's knowledge, there had been no backup plan in place.

"I have some firewhiskey in my room," Pansy said. "You want me to get it?"

He nodded.

They went to his room, since he wasn't allowed in the girl's corridor. Daphne and Millie tagged along with Pansy after she went to their room to fetch the firewhiskey, and Blaise was already in Draco's room, reading, when they arrived. Soon Theo and Vince wandered in and joined them. Theo also happened to have a bottle of firewhiskey tucked away, so they were well on their way to getting wrecked when Draco realized what had been bothering him.

"Where's Greg?" he asked. Pansy was lying with her head on Draco's lap, clad in her button-down pajama shirt and a pair of very short pajama shorts, and Blaise had been staring at her legs like he wanted them wrapped around his face immediately. Draco wanted to tell him he could go for it, that she and Draco were not a couple in any sense of the word. Just as he had been opening his mouth to say something, though, he realized that Greg was not there, had not been there at all that night, and suddenly he could not think of anything else.

Everybody looked at Vince, who shrugged. "Haven't seen him. Hey, anybody want to play truth or dare?"

"Ooh, I do!" cried Pansy. It was her favorite game, and she was merciless when it came to asking truths.

Draco moved Pansy's head off of his lap and stood. "I'm going to look for Greg."

"Don't be silly!" Pansy said, sitting up. "He's probably trying to snog that poor fifth year Hufflepuff he fancies."

"Greg fancies a *Hufflepuff*?" asked Blaise.

“My cousin was a Hufflepuff,” said Daphne, taking another swig of firewhiskey. “They’re not *all* bad.”

“What makes you think that, Pansy?” Draco asked.

“Well, he’s always running off to talk to her. Study with her. That sort of thing. Haven’t you all noticed that he’s been gone a lot lately?”

Everyone shook their heads.

“Who is she?” Draco asked.

Pansy frowned. “I don’t know, actually.”

“I’m going to find him,” Draco said again, and found himself practically running towards the Common Room door.

“Mr. Malfoy, stop,” said a voice. Draco whirled, and saw Snape sitting at one of the small tables, tucked away in a corner of the room, a piece of parchment on the table in front of him. “No one is allowed to leave the dormitories tonight. You must go back to your room.”

“Why?” asked Draco.

“You would need to ask the Headmaster because I don’t know. But even if I knew, I wouldn’t relay that information to you, as it is none of your business.”

“Professor, I can’t find Greg Goyle. I need to look for him.”

Something flashed in Snape’s eyes, but he quickly smoothed it over with his usual expression of disdain. “I’ve no doubt that Mr. Goyle can take care of himself. If he’s somewhere he doesn’t belong, he’ll be found and brought back here. Now, please return to your room or I’ll be forced to take points from Slytherin.”

Draco wanted to tell Snape he could go fuck himself with those points, but he could also tell, by the expression on Snape’s face, that it would make no difference. No matter what Draco did, or said, he was not getting out of that door. He trudged back into his room with thick, snaking tendrils of fear curling around his heart.

No one else seemed particularly worried. They had begun truth or dare, and Draco walked in on Blaise daring Pansy to kiss him. *Finally*, part of Draco thought, but the rest of him was itching to move, to get out of this room and find out what the hell was going on.

“Draco,” said Pansy when she was finished giving Blaise the thrill of a lifetime. “Truth or dare?”

“Ugh, I don’t fucking care,” he said, throwing himself on the ground. “Dare.”

“Drink the rest of that bottle of firewhiskey. You look like you need it.”

There wasn't all *that* much in the bottle she was pointing to, not any amount that was going to kill him or anything, but there was probably a good four or five shots left.

He picked up the bottle and gulped it down.

He didn't remember falling into his bed that night, nor did he remember what happened to everyone else who had been playing truth or dare. He wasn't aware of much of anything until he felt a hand shaking his shoulder. Opening his eyes, he felt, immediately, like the room was spinning. He was still drunk, he realized. Really drunk.

Potter was there, looming over him, the tip of his wand illuminating the space within the curtains.

"You've come for a shag," Draco said. Or at least tried to say. It didn't sound quite right when it came out.

Potter shook his head. "I need to talk to you. Why is every single sixth-year Slytherin passed out in your room?"

"Party in the dungeon, Potter. You should've come. I'd have dared you to kiss me." Draco started giggling at that because it seemed very funny. "Had to do *something*. We were locked inside with only our firewhiskey for company." He poked Harry in the chest. "And don't go telling McGonagall on us, you dirty little Gryffindor!" He leaned over and bit Harry's shoulder, and started laughing again. "Snape wouldn't even lemme leave to look for Greg, that fucker. Snape, not Greg. Or Greg, too. Or...I dunno. Harry, I'm drunk. Do you want to shag me?"

"Draco, stop. *Please*."

Harry sounded upset. Draco looked at him, confused. "Hey, where were you? All day, you weren't anywhere. I looked."

"Draco, is there a way to make you sober?"

"Ummmm, yes? Sobriety charm, *hello*, Potter. It's in the name, fuck's sake."

Potter took a deep breath. "Do you know how to do it?"

"Course. What do you take me for, a firs' year?"

"Can you do it on yourself?"

Draco blanched. "Harry! It hurts like a motherfucker. I don't wanna do that!"

"Please," Harry said. "*Please*." Draco stared, and saw that his eyes were all red, like he'd been crying.

"Oh, shit. Harry, shit. What is it?"

“Can you just do the goddamn charm, Draco? *Please!*”

“Yeah, okay. Yeah.” Draco scrambled around for his wand and found it tucked under his pillow. He pointed it at himself. He’d never done this to himself, only to his friends. He hoped it worked. “Vino vacuum,” he muttered, and he knew immediately that he did it correctly, because it hurt like a bitch, dragging all the alcohol from his blood – not gently -- and evaporating it. “Fuck,” he hissed, grinding his teeth against the sensation.

When it was over, he was gasping for breath and doubled over, but he could think clearly. “Okay, what happened?” he said between clenched teeth.

Harry was quiet. When Draco finally straightened himself to ask again, Harry grabbed him and pulled him close, and began kissing him hard -- almost too hard, but not quite. “So you did come for a shag after all,” Draco whispered.

“Shut up,” Harry said, only he wasn’t laughing. He threw Draco back against his pillow and climbed on top of him. Draco blinked up at him, feeling horny and a little scared. Harry took Draco’s hands and pinned them above his head and began kissing him again, in a way that was relentless and almost violent, and, with his free hand, began pulling down Draco’s pajama trousers.

“Harry?” Draco whispered.

“I said shut *up*,” Harry hissed, and began sucking on his neck, hard, like he meant to leave a mark.

Draco was wholly spooked at this point, but he didn’t want to get into a fight, and Harry was clearly teetering on some sort of edge. He tried to make his body relax, and soften, and when Harry took his mouth again, he kissed Harry back as gently as he could. Harry kept up his rough approach for a few moments, and then, to Draco’s immense relief, he slowed, and let go of Draco’s hands.

Draco wrapped his arms around Harry’s back, and pulled him close. They were kissing softly now, and Harry seemed to be trembling. Draco pulled back slightly to look at him, to ask, again, what had happened, but Harry brought their lips back together immediately.

After a while, Harry sat back and moved his hands towards Draco’s pajama shirt, carefully undoing the buttons. When he was finished, he pulled his own shirt off. “Take off your trousers,” he said, his eyes dark.

Draco slid them down and tossed them aside, and Harry took off his own as well. He settled down next to Draco, facing him. His hand came up to Draco’s face, his thumb sliding across his cheekbone, and Draco sighed and leaned forward to kiss him again. Harry kissed him back now with an almost bruising tenderness, like all his rage had burned away, leaving only the soft center behind. Draco ran his hands over Harry’s chest, down to where his cock was hard against Draco’s own.

“Draco,” Harry whispered. “I want to --” he stopped, looking shy.

“I’m not going to do it if you can’t even say it,” Draco said, only half-teasing.

“I want to fuck you. Please.”

Draco leaned his forehead against Harry’s. “Are you sure?”

Harry nodded, and shut his eyes tightly.

“Okay.”

Draco had lube tucked into his mattress, thank Merlin, because this didn’t feel like the time or place for the excitement of a lubrication spell. He grabbed it and took Harry’s hand, putting a generous amount on his fingers. He guided the hand down to his hole, and Harry watched, entranced, as he showed him what to do. “One at first,” he said, touching Harry’s finger. “Then two.”

“And that’s all? Then I can...?”

“Yes.”

“And it won’t hurt?”

Draco shook his head.

He felt the first finger breach his entrance and he closed his eyes, trying to relax into it. Harry lowered his head to Draco’s again and began to kiss him, not quite as softly as before, but almost. His tongue was hungry and hot, though, and Draco found himself craving friction against his cock. Harry ran his other hand across Draco’s chest, down his stomach, and Draco felt himself groan.

“Will you touch yourself for me?” whispered Harry.

Draco obligingly wrapped his hand around his cock and began to stroke himself, and Harry pushed further into him with his fingers and watched him. “Fuck, Draco. God, you look... ugh,” He groaned. Draco realized Harry was touching himself too, with the hand that wasn’t inside of Draco.

Draco took his hand off his own cock and brought it to Harry’s. “I want you inside me,” he whispered, shivering at the thought of it.

Harry looked half-dazed as he nodded. He brought his mouth down to Draco’s cock, licking it once, twice, and then wrapping his mouth around it. Draco felt Harry’s fingers moving inside of him, close, but not quite to the spot he wanted. “Up higher,” he whispered. Harry, ever the quick learner, adjusted, and soon Draco was biting his lip and feeling his hips jerk as Harry continued to finger him and suck him.

Harry pulled off after a few moments, leaving Draco breathless, and Draco watched, hazy with lust, as Harry smoothed a bit of lube over his cock, which was swollen and red and beginning to leak. Harry’s mouth was red and swollen, too.

“Like this?” he said, settling himself between Draco’s legs. Draco pulled them up a bit to give him better access, and nodded.

Harry leaned over him, positioning himself, and began to push in, stopping after a moment. “Okay?”

“Yeah,” said Draco. “I’m good.”

Harry pushed himself the rest of the way in, slowly, and then shut his eyes tight. “Oh, *god*,” he whispered. “This is...god, this feels good.”

“Come here,” Draco said, and Harry leaned over, finding his mouth for a moment. Harry began to move faster then, his hands on either side of Draco’s head, his forehead resting on Draco’s.

Draco could feel his own cock pressed between them. Harry began to move deeper into him, and he cried out in pleasure and surprise, the sensation causing shivers to run up and down his spine and all the way to his fingertips and toes. Harry moved a hand to his face, his thumb tracing over Draco’s mouth.

Harry was looking into his eyes as he fucked into him slow and deep, and Draco found himself moving underneath him, matching his rhythm. Moving together like this, with Harry’s eyes on his, Draco felt something like magic flow through him, something almost divine.

“You’re incredible,” Harry whispered. “Beautiful.”

Draco closed his eyes and groaned, and Harry slid his thumb into Draco’s mouth, and Draco sucked it, and then Harry was fucking him harder, Draco arching up into him, matching his thrusts. “Harry,” He groaned. “*Harry*.”

“Come for me. I want to feel you come.”

And then suddenly he *was* coming, as though his body obeyed Harry unquestioningly, and he was shuddering and sobbing Harry’s name. Then he could feel Harry let go, and they were rocking together and Harry was saying Draco’s name over and over. The moment felt like death and like life and like lightning, and then like the pitch-black aftermath, when you can still see the ghost of the jagged streak carving a path across the sky, even though it’s already run to ground.

Nether one of them moved for a time. They were covered in sweat and come, and after a while, Draco realized that Harry was sobbing into his neck. He tightened his grip on him and waited.

Harry pulled out and rested heavily on top of Draco, his face still hidden against Draco’s skin. “He’s dead. He’s dead.”

“Who’s dead?” Draco whispered.

“Dumbledore.”

Of course, Draco thought. Of course. That part of the Dark Lord's plan had held.

"It was Goyle. He —" A gut-wrenching sob tore out of him.

"Greg," Draco whispered. "Is he - ?"

"Yes," said Harry.

Draco found he couldn't cry. One of the most powerful wizards of the age and one of his oldest friends, and he couldn't even cry, because he knew that no matter how terrible this was, how much it made him want to scream and throw things and rip things apart, it was nothing compared to what was to come. This was only the beginning.

"It was supposed to be you," Harry said after a moment. "It was supposed to be you who killed Dumbledore, you lying dead on top of that tower. You would've been dead, Draco. *Christ*, don't you see how close you came?"

"Harry, I would've never been able to kill him."

"How do you know?"

"I know myself. I'm too much of a coward. I never would have done it."

Harry pulled up and looked at him, his eyes a little clearer. "It's never cowardice to do the right thing," he finally whispered.

Draco, not knowing what else to say, kissed him.

Of all the ways he might've envisioned the summer unfolding, he'd never imagined *this*.

"I want to stay with my mother," Draco said.

"As I've told you, that's not possible," said Snape, wearily.

"What about my Aunt? Andromeda would let me stay with her."

"Not secure enough. We've gone over this, Draco."

"Harry's aunt and uncle, then."

"The protection only extends to him. You wouldn't be safe there."

"But I don't want to spend my summer with the bloody Weasleys!" Draco cried, for what felt like the thousandth time. "Surely you can understand that, Professor."

"On occasion, we must do things we don't want to do," Snape said, his mouth quirking.

"Sometimes that means risking our lives or endangering those we love. And sometimes it means cohabitating with Weasleys."

“You’re mean,” Draco said, pouting.

“I’ve never claimed otherwise,” said Snape.



# A Summer of Weasleys

## Chapter Summary

Draco spends a summer at the Burrow

“But why is it so hard to forgive?” Mrs. Connors asked.

‘Pride,’ Dad said. ‘This person has already wronged you in some way, and now you are the one who has to swallow your pride, give something up, in order to forgive him.’”

— Bree Despain, *The Dark Divine*

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What became quickly apparent in the following weeks, as Draco tried to make himself as small and unobtrusive as possible as he hid inside the Weasley’s ramshackle tower of a cottage, was that the Weasleys were not fans of Draco Malfoy.

Weasley – or Ron, as Draco was trying to think of him, since it became rather confusing to think of him as Weasley when everyone else was also Weasley – liked to look up from whatever game he was playing or magazine he was reading to glare at Draco until he left the room. The twins spent their time making fun of Draco, with one of them beginning the insult and the other finishing. Ginevra was particularly fond of sticking her tongue out at him, and Bill Weasley, who was occasionally around, eyed him with vague suspicion.

The Weasley parents were trying to be nice, which was almost worse. Whenever Mrs. Weasley spoke to Draco, it appeared to exhaust and disgust her, so that by the end, she looked slightly green-ish and like she was ready for a long nap. Mr. Weasley was making the greatest effort to be friendly, which resulted in him bringing up a variety of inane topics to Draco, engaging in thirty seconds of stilted conversation, and then running away, having completed his duty.

Hermione was there, too, and she seemed to be pretending Draco didn’t exist at all, keeping her head buried in a book whenever he was nearby.

When Mr. Weasley threw up extra wards around the property one day and suggested everyone get their brooms for a game of Quidditch, Draco nearly cried with relief. He was not going to play, obviously, but he would have the house to himself, which was, at that point, the thing he wanted most in the entire world: a space totally devoid of Weasleys. Even Mrs. Weasley and Hermione were going, to referee.

When the house was empty, Draco leaned back in one of the shabby armchairs in the sitting room and let out a sigh.

He sat there, perfectly still, for one or two sublime minutes, savoring the silence, and then he heard someone clear their throat.

Ginevra Weasley was standing right in front of him, glaring, her arms crossed. "I'm supposed to convince you to come and play with us or entertain you inside."

"I don't have a broom," Draco said weakly. He'd left most of his things at school with Snape, bringing only a single suitcase with him here.

Ginevra rolled her eyes. "Wonderful. Well, then, what do you want to do?"

Draco shrugged. "You don't have to entertain me. Just do whatever you want. I won't tell on you."

"I suppose you think you're too good to hang out with me, don't you?" she said tightly. "Think I've got some poor-person disease? Well, fuck you. My dad told me to entertain you, and I'm going to entertain you whether you like it or not." She stood there, glaring, chest heaving.

"I don't –"

"Shut up, Malfoy. Chess or Gobstones?"

"Chess," squeaked Draco.

The Weaslette nodded and strode across the room, her long hair trailing after her in a shining banner. She really did have beautiful hair. All in all, she was quite pretty, and he hated that Harry thought so, too.

She threw the chessboard onto the coffee table and quickly set it up. "I'm white," she said. Draco did not argue.

They played in silence for a while, and the Weaslette wasn't bad, though Draco figured out pretty quickly what she was trying to do. He considered letting her win, but thought she'd possibly chop off his balls if she noticed.

"Why'd you do it?" she asked. It had been quiet for so long that Draco jumped at the sound of her voice.

"Do what? Become a turncoat?"

She nodded.

"Dunno. Seemed like I should. Kind of fucked up being on the side that wants to kill half the wizarding population and all."

One side her mouth went up, but when she realized, she forced it back down and regarded him stonily.

"You're still a dick."

“Yup,” he said.

“You’ve been an asshole to everyone in this family. Even my dad, who’s the nicest man in the universe. You’re a terrible, terrible person, Malfoy. I’d like to punch you in the face.”

“Yes, well.” He cleared his throat. “I don’t think you’re alone. There’s probably a waiting list.”

The corner of her mouth went up again. “Long one.”

“Very. If it makes you feel better, you can. Punch me in the face, I mean.”

She tilted her head sideways. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

With almost no hesitation, Ginevra Weasley stood up, cocked back her arm, and punched him right in the nose. There was a flash of pain, and then everything went dark.

He blinked his eyes open a few minutes later, and he was still on the shabby armchair, leaning back, and Ginny was standing right in front of him, staring at him. “Healed it for you. Didn’t want to, but I would’ve gotten in a lot of trouble. Your move.”

Draco sat up and felt his nose. It felt okay, maybe a little tingly. “Did that help?”

She smiled. “Yeah, it did, actually.”

After that day, Ginny began to talk to him. Just a little bit here and there, and most of it involved making fun of him in some capacity, but Draco could tell she was warming up to him. He let her rage and be cruel when she felt like it; he supposed that she probably was entitled to it, considering that Draco’s father had slipped her that diary that ended up possessing her for almost an entire academic year.

One night there was a knock on the door of the little closet of a bedroom that they’d placed him in, and a moment later, Ginny came in with a bottle of firewhiskey.

“You drink?” she asked.

“Yes. Why?”

“Want to get pissed?”

“Okay,” he said, eying her. “Any particular cause for celebration?” he asked.

She snorted. “Celebration? Ha fucking ha. I’m in mourning, because my teenaged years are circling the drain while this bloody war rages on. I’m spending some of the prime months of my life in hiding with my parents and my brothers and Draco Fucking Malfoy. I can’t shag

Neville and I can't shag Harry and I'm stuck here in this goddamn house with nothing to do. So. No. Not really a celebratory thing, really."

Draco tried not to react to the mention of Harry, but she must've seen something.

"What?"

"Nothing," he said.

"Something. You made a weird face." She passed him the bottle. "Here. We're playing Never Have I Ever."

"Oh, god."

She cackled. "I knew you'd have lots of fun shit to uncover. I'm going first. Never have I ever shagged anyone."

Draco rolled his eyes before taking a swig, then passed it to Ginny, who also took one. Draco immediately wondered if it was Harry. He'd never asked Harry or Ginny about that, in any timeline. "Never have I ever kissed a girl," he said.

Ginny drank and then Draco did, too.

"Ooh, Ginevra, you minx," Draco said, laughing. "Never have I ever kissed a bloke." They both drank.

"Hm. Interesting," she said, considering him. "Never have I ever given head."

Draco drank, maintaining eye contact, and Ginny fell back onto the bed, squealing. "Haha! Oh, Circe! Draco Malfoy is a pouf!"

He raised an eyebrow at her. "Not that there's anything wrong with it," she amended. "My brother Charlie's bi and I couldn't care less. I just never would have guessed."

"You never would have guessed? Really?" he asked, still keeping his brow raised. "Is your radar broken?"

"Fuck off, I'd never exchanged five words with you before this summer, how would I have known?"

"Fair enough," he said. "Never have I ever been bum-fucked."

Ginny drank and now it was Draco's turn to giggle. "You're quite scandalous Ginevra." He drank then, too. "What? It goes with the territory," he said at her shocked face.

"Never have I ever touched a vagina," said Ginny. Draco drank. "Oh," said Ginny, frowning. "So you're –"

"No, not really. Youthful indiscretion."

“Ah,” she said, then grabbed the bottle and took a swig as well.

“Explain, Weaslette,” he said.

“Youthful indiscretion,” she said, grinning.

“Never have I ever had a threesome,” Draco said. Ginny shook her head, offering the bottle to Draco, who shook his. At twenty-one, twenty-two, he would try a few of them, and quickly discover they weren’t his cup of tea, so to speak. He was too jealous to handle that sort of situation, and preferred all the attention for himself, if he was honest.

“Hm,” said Ginny. “You gonna tell me who all these mystery sexual companions of yours are?”

“Not bloody likely,” Draco said.

“Boooring,” said Ginny.

“Fine, but you go first.”

“Dean was most of it. He’s really the only guy I’ve ever done much with. I messed around a bit with Neville once at the end of the year. The girl was Parvati.”

“Ah, not surprised. She strikes me as being very...flexible, with her love life.”

“She is,” Ginny said, nodding vigorously. “She’s a bit of a freak. In a good way.”

“And what about Harry?” Draco asked. He couldn’t help it; he needed to know.

“Ah, no, unfortunately. Basically broke up with Dean for him and then he just...didn’t seem interested, all of a sudden. So I hooked up with Neville. Not, like officially, but. You know. Although I think Neville does really like me.”

“I’d imagine so,” Draco said. “A lot of guys like you.”

Ginny narrowed her eyes. “Shut up. Are you being sarcastic? Shut up.”

“No! I mean it. Even the Slytherins talked about wanting to shag you.”

“Oh,” said Ginny, looking pleased. “Like who?”

“Blaise, Theo, Greg, Vince. All of them, basically. Now stop fishing for compliments.”

Ginny giggled. “*Fine*. What about you, then? Who’s on your list?”

“Blaise, Theo, a couple older Slytherin guys. Pansy and Daphne, sort of. Not really too much with Daphne. That’s mostly it.”

“Mostly?”

Draco did not want to tell her about Harry. No, he did not. “No, I mean, yeah. That’s it.”

“Okay,” she said, looking skeptical. “Well. Blaise is really hot. And Pansy’s got nice tits.”

“So I hear,” Draco said, giggling. He was a little drunk, he realized. Light-headed.

“You have a crush on anybody these days?” Ginny asked, reclining against the wall and taking a generous swig of whiskey.

“Mmm,” said Draco. “Kind of.”

She kicked at him with her socked foot. “Come on, Malfoy. Spit it out. You’ll feel better.”

“Doubtful,” he said. He knew he should say nothing, but he so rarely got to talk to anyone about Harry that it was difficult to refrain. “There’s someone. Someone that I’ve liked for a really long time. Only I never really know how much he likes me. And it’s...I don’t know, it’s complicated. There are a lot of reasons why it might never work.”

“Like what?” asked Ginny. “Is he straight?”

“No,” said Draco. “Or, well, not entirely. But. I—” he paused, looking back at Ginny. She was regarding him very seriously, and her eyes, he realized, were exactly like Charlie’s. Warm and brown, with a hint of kindness behind them. “I don’t know if I’m good enough for him. I think that’s one of the main problems. I mean, I *want* to be. I’m trying to be. But, you know, sometimes I think it’s just not enough. Like...like no matter how hard I try, there will *never* be enough goodness there. Inside of me, I mean.”

Ginny was quiet for a moment. “That’s the saddest fucking thing I’ve ever heard, Draco. You can’t think that way, or it’ll eat you alive. I mean, you’re not necessarily a *nice* person, but I don’t think that means you’re *bad*. Especially now that...now that I know you, a little. *I* don’t think you’re a bad person, anyway. And no matter *what* you are, we all have the capacity to change, right? Isn’t that the point of life? To keep making changes to yourself, to keep growing?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know. I don’t pretend to know what the point of life is.”

She stared at him for another moment and then laughed. “This is getting too deep.”

“A bit,” he said, giving her a small smile.

“You drunk?” she said.

“Yes,” he said. “Indisputably.”

She sniggered. “Me too. Can I crash here? I’m tired.”

“Absolutely not. Your father would castrate me.” He shoved at her, and she made herself deadweight against him, giggling.

“I’ll tell him you’re bent,” Ginny said. “It’ll be fine.”

“You’ll do no such thing,” he said, trying to lift her up and push her over the edge.

Suddenly, she sprang to life, jumping on him and tickling him, and he fell back against the wall, whacking his head. “Ow! Ginny Weasley, that *hurt!*” he cried, giggling uncontrollably. He managed to pinch her arm and she yelped and tickled him more brutally, and he began shoving at her with his feet.

“Ew!” she cried. “Your toes are so long!”

“They’re aristocratic!”

“They’re fucking weird!” she said, pulling hard on them.

“That’s it, you menace,” he growled, diving on top of her and trying to tickle her armpits.

The door banged open, Ron took one look at them, marched over to the bed, and punched Draco right in the face.

For the second time that summer, Draco was rendered unconscious by a Weasley.

Ten minutes later, Draco had been revived, and healed, again, by Ginny. Ron was sitting in a chair in the little closet-room of Draco’s, and Ginny was sitting on the floor. Draco was leaning back against the wall, trying to make sure his nose had been healed properly.

“Hey’s *gay*, you idiot! He wasn’t trying to make a move on me!” Ginny exclaimed, again.

“I really wasn’t. Swear to Salazar,” Draco said.

“Probably thinks he’s too good for a Weasley,” Ron muttered.

“Weasley, what part of *gay* don’t you understand?” Draco huffed.

“Fucking figures that you’d be a tosser. I always said you were one. Although I didn’t mean it literally at the time.”

“Shut up,” said Ginny to her brother.

“You know what, Ron?” Draco said. “Fuck you. I’ve been punched in the face by your sister and didn’t put up a fight. I just got punched in the face by you, and I’m not trying to hit you back. You’ve had a shot at me, so why don’t you just lay the fuck off?”

Weasley’s fists curled. “It wasn’t anywhere near what you deserve.”

“What do you want me to do? Off myself? What would make you happy, Weasel, please tell me. At this point, I’ll do it. I’ll do whatever the fuck it takes to get you off my back.”

“I don’t want you in my house.” Weasley said, helpfully.

“Shut up, Ron. You’re so stupid. You know he can’t leave,” said Ginny.

“Oi!” came a voice, and one of the twins poked a head into the room. “What’s all the racket?”

“Ron’s being a prat,” said Ginny.

“Wonniekins, is that true?” said the twin.

Ron stuck up his fingers in the direction of the door.

“He just punched Malfoy in the face,” said Ginny.

“Oh?” said the twin. “So what’s the problem, then?”

“Haha, very funny,” said Ginny. “He punched him in the face because he thought he was trying to take advantage of me, but Draco’s gay. He wasn’t doing anything wrong. I’m the one who was tickling *him*, in fact. Or at least, I started it.”

“Malfoy’s bent?” said the twin. “Good to know.”

“Thank you, Ginevra,” Draco muttered.

The other twin poked a head in. “Did you just say – “

“Yeah,” said the first twin. “Malfoy’s bent.”

“Ah, interesting,” said the second.

Draco thought that maybe he had died in one of the other timelines after all, because this was most certainly hell.

“How long have you been chasing after cock, then, Malfoy?” said the first twin.

“Must be a recent development –” said the second.

“—or we’d have heard,” said the first.

“He’s still a complete git,” said Ron. “No matter who he likes to shag.”

“Probably true,” said the first twin.

“Well, as fascinating as this is, we’ve got better things to do. We’ll leave you three to it,” said the second.

“But tell us if you’re going to punch him again, Wonniekins. We’d like to watch,” said the first.

Then they disappeared, leaving Ron, Ginny, and Draco sitting there.

“I don’t actually care if you’re bent,” said Ron, looking at him and frowning. “Makes no difference to me. It’s everything else.”

“Good to know,” said Draco.

“You can’t act like you haven’t always been a huge asshole to me. Or to my family.”



“I’m not trying to act like anything, Weasley. I know I’ve been a huge asshole. And you’ve been one right back, haven’t you?”

Ron scowled.

“Look, I’m trying to stay out of your way while I’m here, which wasn’t my choice, I might add. But I’m making an effort to irritate you as little as possible. It’s like walking on fucking eggshells! Your whole family hates me –”

“I don’t really hate you anymore,” Ginny said.

“Okay, your whole family except Ginevra hates me,” Draco amended. “And I’m trying to just deal with it and get through the summer. But it fucking sucks! And I know that it’s my own damn fault – I know that! But what am I supposed to do? Honestly? I’d like to know. Because it seems like you’re all mad at me, at this point, for having the audacity to exist, but unfortunately, I *do* exist, and also unfortunately, I’m stuck here, and there’s not a damn thing I can do about it!”

The door swung open again and a familiar, handsome face appeared. “Hello Ronniekins, hello Gin-Gin. Hello Malfoy-Person.”

“Charlie!” cried Ginny, running over to him and tackling him. “You’re here! I thought you weren’t coming until next week!”

“The Swedish Short-Snout egg hatched early, so I left sooner than anticipated,” he said, hugging her tight and lifting her up off the ground before setting her back down. “Mum was pissed I came home at all; she says I should stay in Romania while all this is going on. Fat chance, though. Like I’m not going to help fight evil.”

“Oh, yeah, such a tough guy,” said Ginny, giggling and punching Charlie on the arm.

“Are these two giving you a hard time?” asked Charlie, looking at Draco.

“Uh, no, not really,” Draco lied.

“Liar! Ron’s being a complete git,” said Ginny.

“Shocking,” said Charlie. “Ron’s usually such a delight.” He turned back to Draco. “I’m Charlie, by the way. The older, much cooler brother.”

“Nice to meet you,” said Draco, dying inside. “I’m Draco. Last name’s Malfoy, but you already know that, I guess.”

“Draco means ‘dragon’, doesn’t it?”

“It does,” Draco said.

“Well,” said Charlie, giving him one of those thousand-watt smiles. “I happen to like dragons.”

“Do you?” Draco said faintly.

“I do.”

“Merlin save us,” muttered Ginny under her breath.

“Oh, fucking *gross*, Charlie. Stop flirting with Malfoy,” said Ron, grimacing. He pushed past Charlie and fairly well ran out the door.

“Nice to meet you, Draco,” said Charlie, winking at him before slipping away.

“This is going to be so much fun,” said Ginny.

“I’ll bet,” said Draco.

The next few weeks flew by in a ginger-tinted blur. One day, Ginny baked him a chocolate cake. “You never celebrated your birthday,” she said, a bit shyly. “You should have said something. Turning seventeen is a big deal.” The cake was, frankly, almost inedible. Ginny was a shit cook. But Draco ate a big slice anyway, and ate it gladly.

Draco spent a lot of time talking to Ginny and Charlie and, increasingly, to the twins, who were quite fun in a ridiculous sort of way. Ron seemed determined to continue hating him, and Hermione hardly looked up from her books. But living in the Burrow became bearable, mostly. Charlie and Draco took to playing Seeker v. Seeker in the backyard pretty regularly, and those days were Draco's favorites. After flying, his heart was light, and he felt something close to happiness, despite everything.

Charlie flirted with him blatantly, a fact upon which Ginny was more than happy to comment (“Snog him!” she kept hissing in his ear one night). And given that Draco was still incredibly attracted to Charlie, it was difficult, at times, not to respond in kind. There were more than a few moments where Draco found himself wanting to give in and kiss the other boy, to let it happen, because it seemed like it would be so simple. Draco would hardly have to *do* anything. It wasn't like with Harry, where he had to fight for every little thing, where he was forced to constantly make himself vulnerable. Being with Charlie would be a simple matter of letting go.

But he didn't let go. He didn't give in, because he knew that the day before Harry's seventeenth birthday, Harry would be coming to the Burrow. And despite how hard it always was, despite how much his thoughts of Harry were tied up in his fears and insecurities, Draco's heart remained with him, as ever.

Harry and Draco had not talked about anything related to the future, or a relationship. They hadn't even said goodbye to one another properly, after that night in Draco's bed. In the end, it didn't matter, though. Draco knew what he wanted. It was the same thing he had wanted forever, in every timeline, in every version of his life. He wanted Harry. It was why he was spending a summer at the Burrow in the first place.

And so he counted down the days until July 30th.

# It's Not A Love Triangle If You're All Alone

## Chapter Summary

Draco screws it all up

“Don't let two men fall in love with you...It's not the sort of thing that ends well.”

— Ally Carter, *Uncommon Criminals*

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The plan to get Harry from his aunt and uncle's house to the Burrow was a complicated one, and Draco was not invited to participate. Neither was Ginny, though, so they commiserated together, moaning over how unfair it all was. Draco truly did want to help; he was so worried about Harry it made him sick. The Dark Lord was sure to know the date of Harry's birthday, and the fact that Harry's mother's protection would end on that day. He would be waiting for them.

The plan involved Polyjuice and a bunch of Harrys flying in different directions on motorbikes, brooms, and thestrals. They'd use portkeys to get from their designated destination back to the Burrow. This was supposed to confuse the hell out of the Dark Lord and his minions, thus allowing Harry to escape unharmed.

The day of the thirtieth finally arrived, full of sunshine that betrayed the danger awaiting them. It was a typical summery day, hot by midmorning, with barely a breeze to be found. After breakfast, Draco approached Hermione where she sat with a book on hand-crafted cauldrons, of all things. She looked over at him, surprised, when he sat down next to her on the sofa. “Sorry to interrupt your reading,” he said quietly.

She kept looking at him, so he kept on talking. “I just wanted to say that I hope today goes well. I hope you're careful. I hope you stay safe. And...that's all, I guess.”

She studied him for a moment. “Thank you,” she said. “That's kind of you.”

“I mean it,” he said, looking into her eyes. “I know you don't care much for me, but I like you. I admire you and respect you. And I'd like to see you back here tonight in one piece.”

She nodded, and then seemed to want to say something else, so Draco waited patiently. “What did you say to Ginny to get her to forgive you?” she finally asked, sliding a bookmark into her book and letting it close on her lap.

“Oh, I, ah.” Draco shrugged. “I let her punch me in the face.”

Hermione let out a surprised laugh. “Oh! That's...that's a bit funny!” she said.

“Painful, more than funny. From my perspective, anyway. Probably mostly funny from Ginny’s.”

“Hm,” said Hermione.

“Do *you* want to punch me?” Draco asked.

Hermione giggled, but sobered up quickly. “No, I don’t want to punch you, Malfoy. But I *have* decided to try and forgive you. Only...I’m not yet certain how to do it. It’s been more difficult than I expected.”

He tried not to wince as he thought of all the times he had called her a Mudblood, teased her for her hair, or her teeth, or for the way she always had her hand up in class. Of everyone, he might have been the cruelest to Hermione, and it shamed him to his core. “Take your time,” he said. “All the time you need. There’s no rush.”

She nodded. “Alright. And...thank you, Draco. For your well wishes. We’ll need them, tonight.”

“I know,” he said, feeling his stomach churn at the thought of it.

She reached out, then, and took his hand, squeezing once, briefly, before dropping it. He saw through her cool exterior, then, and it was like he was suddenly faced with every version of Hermione at once. They were all the same, he realized.

There were small differences, to be sure, but in every timeline, the *foundation* of Hermione – what made her who she was -- was identical. In every iteration, she was steadfast and true, forgiving and kind, gentle, and endlessly wise. As he looked at her, he saw them all, together: the Hermione of the first timeline, crying over leaving Pansy and Harry and Draco at Christmas break, and then, years later, sitting with Draco at the lake as he confided in her about the Time-Turner; the Hermione of the second timeline, who’d turned to Draco for help with Alchemy and encouraged him to get along with Ron; and, finally, the Hermione of his own timeline, who had put her feet up on his ottoman and doled out dating advice, and laughed at Draco and Ginny’s antics until she was red in the face.

He didn’t think he could ever love her more than he did in that moment, sitting with her on the Weasley’s battered sofa and remembering all of those versions of her while she offered him a tentative hand, despite all the wrongs he had committed against her.

“I’ll be alright, you know,” she said. “This is hardly the first time we’ve faced You-Know-Who.”

“I know,” said Draco. “If anyone can do this, it’s you three.”

She nodded. “I’ll keep a close eye on Harry, too. We all will.” She gave Draco a small, knowing smile, and for the hundredth time, Draco wondered how Hermione always managed to notice things that nobody else did.

“I – oh. Good,” said Draco.

Hermione opened up her book again, and Draco wandered into the kitchen for a cup of tea.

Everyone besides Ginny and Draco left after lunch. It was torture, being in the quiet house and not knowing what was happening. They knew, at least, that the truly dangerous part would begin after sunset. Still, the minutes dragged.

"I can't even eat," moaned Ginny around dinnertime. "I feel like I'm going to puke."

"Yeah," said Draco, grimacing. "When is your mother coming home?"

"Dusk," said Ginny.

"Harry's riding with Hagrid, isn't he?" Draco asked.

Ginny nodded. Even though they'd not been allowed to participate, they had listened in on the plans.

"Ugh, I hate that. Hagrid doesn't always have the best instincts," Draco said.

"Yeah, but You-Know-Who is going to assume Harry's riding with Moody, or one of the other Aurors. He won't expect Harry to be with Hagrid."

"I know," Draco said. He banged his head on the kitchen table and left it there. "I hate it all."

"I want to start drinking," Ginny said.

"Can't," Draco said, his voice muffled against the table. "Got to be sober in case people need help when they arrive."

"Yeah, yeah," said Ginny. "I hate that Charlie's going to be flying on his own. He shouldn't have gone."

"Nope," Draco said. "Shouldn't have."

"That arse just loves to throw himself in harm's way," Ginny said.

"Him and Harry both," said Draco.

"You're talking an awful lot about Harry today," Ginny said, and Draco kept his head down, not wanting her to see the expression on his face. "How come?"

"Future of the wizarding world rests on his shoulders, Ginevra," Draco said.

"Hm," said Ginny. "Tell me again who you have this big, secret crush on?"

Draco finally turned his head towards her and sighed.

"It's Harry, isn't it?"

Draco hesitated for a moment before nodding.

“Oh my *god*. You’re a complete cockhead, Draco. You really ought to have told me that. You know I’ve got a thing for Harry, too, or at least I did until recently, when he stopped...hey! Wait a minute!”

Draco winced and waited for the blow.

It came, hard against his shoulder. “You wanker! You absolute wanker! He lost interest in me exactly when you defected last spring. Literally the very next day.” She paused. “You fucked around with him, didn’t you?”

Draco kept his eyes closed and Ginny whacked him again. “Answer me!”

“Yes,” he said quietly.

“Ughhh!” Ginny cried. “Ugh, you...you...ugh!” Draco heard her get up and start pacing.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you before,” he said.

“Ugh!” said  
Ginny.

“Don’t you like Neville now anyway?” he asked.

“Shut up!” she said. “I do, but that’s not the point.”

“I’m sorry.” He felt terrible, then. He wasn’t sure what he felt so guilty about, whether it was from getting in the way of Harry and Ginny in the first place or not telling Ginny earlier in the summer, but he felt terrible, just awful. He could hear the hurt beneath Ginny’s anger and he hated that he’d caused it.

“I’ve had a crush on him since I was ten years old, Malfoy!”

Draco didn’t respond, but he did sit up straight and look at her.

“Ten years old, and I had already planned out our wedding in my head. And things were happening between us, I could tell. The way he was looking at me, talking to me...I could tell. I broke up with Dean because of it. And then you just swoop in and decide to take him.”

“It wasn’t some arbitrary thing, Gin. I’ve liked him for a long time, too.”

“Humph,” she said. She sat back down at the table. “He likes you then?”

“He – yes. To some extent. I don’t know how much.”

“Enough to drop me like a hot potato.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Liar. Don’t say you’re sorry when you’re not. If you like him as much as you say you do, you’re not sorry.”

“I’m sorry to have hurt you,” Draco said.

“Yeah, well,” said Ginny, swiping at her eyes angrily. “Too late for that.”

“Do you hate me again?” Draco asked in a small voice.

“Do I --? No, of course not. I’m really mad at you, though. And also, what about Charlie? You know he likes you, and you’ve been flirting with him.”

“I haven’t –”

“Yes, you have. Stop lying!”

“I’ve tried not to. Charlie’s very charming.”

She sighed. “I’ve never had a friend steal a boyfriend from me before.”

Draco tried not to smile. “So, I’m your friend, then, am I?”

“You *were*, before I found out what an underhanded slag you were.”

“I think you love me,” Draco whispered, smiling at her.

“I don’t,” said Ginny, trying not to smile. “I don’t love you, you man-stealer.”

“I think you do, Ginevra.”

She sighed heavily, then hit him again. “Shut up.”

Mrs. Weasley returned and it all became worse, because every moment that passed after that was a moment that someone might be getting Avada Kedavra-ed. They sat around in the sitting room, taking turns peering out the windows at the portkeys, everyone white-faced and tightly wound.

When Harry and Hagrid appeared in the yard, Mrs. Weasley, who was at the window, gave a yelp. Draco and Ginny were on their feet immediately, running towards the back door. Harry, swaying slightly and looking disoriented, began telling Mrs. Weasley how they’d been attacked by Death Eaters and then Voldemort himself, and she pulled him into a hug. Draco stood silently, looking him over for injuries. He had a few cuts and bruises, but nothing too dire.

Harry glanced at him and stilled. “*You’re* here?”

Draco nodded.

“Nobody told me.”



“He’s been here all summer, Harry,” said Ginny, hugging him. “I’m glad you’re alright.”

“Thanks, Gin,” Harry said.

“Haven’t got any brandy, have yeh, Molly?” asked Hagrid. “For medicinal purposes?”

Mrs. Weasley hurried into the house to fetch it.

Harry walked towards Draco, standing directly in front of him. Draco felt overwhelming relief at the sight of his face, of him, alive and well. “It’s good to see you,” Harry said, and pulled him into a tight hug.

“You too,” Draco murmured, putting his arms around Harry.

“Well?” Harry asked, pulling away after a moment. “Where’s everyone else?”

Ginny shook her head. “Ron and Tonks were supposed to be back first, then Dad and Fred. But nobody’s come.”

Harry grimaced.

Suddenly a blue light appeared several feet away, growing larger and brighter until Professor Lupin and George appeared. It took Draco several moments to realize that not only was Lupin supporting George, who was unconscious, but George was also bleeding profusely.

Draco ran over and grabbed George’s legs, and then he and Lupin hauled him into the house and set him down on the sofa. Everyone gasped as they looked down at him, because of all the blood, and because they now saw the reason for it: George’s ear was completely gone.

Mrs. Weasley began to cry, fussing over her son, and Lupin dragged Harry off into the kitchen. Ginny took Draco’s hand and held it tightly, her face ashen as she watched over her mother and brother.

The night was far from over. Mrs. Weasley mostly stayed inside with George and Hagrid, hurrying out the back door whenever someone new materialized, while the rest of them stayed outside to wait. The others began to trickle in: Kingsley and Hermione came first, followed by Mr. Weasley and Fred, and then Tonks and Ron. Charlie appeared after that, and then it was only Bill and Fleur and Mad-Eye and Mundungus missing.

Kingsley had to leave after a while, but the rest of them remained vigilant as they searched the skies for brooms or thestrals, hardly able to breathe around their fear. Draco couldn’t stop looking over at Mrs. Weasley, who was standing outside with them now. She was positively frantic, and his heart went out to her. To have so many children in danger at once...he couldn’t imagine it.

Finally, they spotted a thestral soaring in the distance and everyone let out a cry. “It’s Bill and Fleur!” yelled Ginny.

They landed gracefully and Mrs. Weasley pulled her son into a hug. Bill stepped away from it quickly, though, his eyes dark. “Mad-Eye’s dead,” he announced without fanfare.

Everyone became very still and quiet. Draco glanced at Harry, who looked like he’d just had the wind knocked out of him. Bill and Fleur began to explain how it had happened, but Draco could only look at Harry, at the way his face twisted with grief. Draco edged towards him, not touching him, but just standing nearby. Without seeming to even realize he was doing it, Harry leaned against him and shut his eyes tightly.

Finally, they made their way inside, where, Draco realized, George was awake and lucid and seemed generally fine except for the missing ear. Draco tried not to stare at the spot where it had been.

Lupin summoned glasses of firewhiskey for everyone and held his aloft. Draco was grateful that he hadn’t been excluded from the toast, but also felt a bit like he had no right to raise a glass to his former professor, who hadn’t ever cared for him, and who had once turned him into a bouncing ferret. “Mad-Eye,” Lupin said, and drank deeply.

“Mad-Eye,” echoed the rest. Draco’s throat burned as the whiskey slid down, and he embraced the numbness that soon followed.

“So Mundungus disappeared?” asked Lupin afterward, sidling over to Bill. They spoke quietly for a while, and then they agreed to fetch Mad-Eye’s body and were gone. Draco had found his way over to one of the shabby, comfortable armchairs. He was starting to feel like an outsider to all of this, like he shouldn’t be there. He wondered if he ought to head upstairs.

Suddenly, Charlie was there, putting a hand on Draco’s shoulder. “You alright, mate?” he asked. “You look a bit shattered.”

“I’m fine,” Draco said. “My life wasn’t on the line today, though; yours was. I’m glad you’re okay, by the way. How are you feeling?”

Charlie shrugged. “I wasn’t in any real danger. The whole experience was harrowing, though, I have to say. When we were all taking off, not knowing whether any of us would make it home...”

“I can’t imagine,” Draco said. Charlie squeezed his shoulder before sitting down in another chair. They were all sitting now (everyone except Harry that was), looking sad and deflated. Draco felt it too, felt the adrenaline fading, leaving him exhausted and aching, for reasons he couldn’t even name. It wasn’t as though he’d particularly liked Mad-Eye. It was more that the whole thing was sad and dark and wholly unavoidable.

“I’ve got to go, too,” Harry suddenly announced, and everyone turned to look at him.

“Don’t be silly, Harry,” said Mrs. Weasley, frowning. “What are you talking about?”

“I can’t stay here,” he said, rubbing his forehead. “You’re all in danger while I’m here, and I don’t want —”

“Harry!” cried Mrs. Weasley. “Everything that happened tonight was to get you here. And Bill and Fleur’s wedding is in a few days and –”

“If Voldemort finds out I’m here –” Harry interrupted.

“He won’t,” said Charlie, vehemently. “He’s got no way of knowing which safe house you’re in.”

“It’s not me I’m worried for!” Harry exclaimed.

Everyone began arguing, telling him all the reasons why he couldn’t go, and Draco watched, helpless, as he began to look more and more upset.

“I KNOW!” he cried when the room had reached a fever-pitch. Everyone was quiet for a moment, and then Harry stomped out into the yard.

“Hedwig,” said Mrs. Weasley quietly. “He didn’t have Hedwig, did he?”

Ginny looked up at her mum and her face screwed up like she was going to cry. “Oh, poor Harry,” she said.

They all looked worriedly at one another. “Draco, maybe you should go out there,” Hermione said softly. “He talks to you.”

Draco felt uncomfortable, like she had just revealed something that Draco hadn’t necessarily wanted to be revealed, although he couldn’t pinpoint exactly what that was. Still, someone needed to talk to Harry; that much was clear.

Harry was standing outside, looking into the sky, but as Draco approached, he began to clutch his head, and then he cried out.

“Harry!” Draco called, fear suddenly shooting through him once more. “Harry!” He ran towards him as fast as he could.

When Draco reached Harry’s side, he pulled at him, trying to get Harry to straighten and look at him, but he seemed to hardly be there at all as he moaned in pain, a hand over his scar.

“Harry,” he said again.

Harry blinked at him, then seemed to sag. “Ollivander. Your father’s wand, Draco. Voldemort had it. My wand destroyed it. Voldemort doesn’t understand why. *I* don’t understand why. What’s happening?” He swayed slightly.

Draco caught him and held him. “I don’t know,” he said quietly.

Hermione and Ron came out, then. “Is he alright?” asked Hermione a bit frantically.

“His scar...” Draco said.

“What?” Hermione cried. “Again? I thought that was finished, I thought –”

“We should talk about it tomorrow, hm?” asked Draco, giving her a look.

She closed her mouth, took another look at Harry, and nodded. “Right. Maybe we ought to get you to bed, Harry. Mrs. Weasley’s got you in Ron’s room –”

“I’m going to stay with Draco. I need to talk to him about something,” Harry said. “I’ll transfigure myself a bed of some sort.”

Hermione looked back and forth between the two of them, and Ron’s eyes went wide. But Harry was in a mood that did not allow for questions. After a moment, they both seemed to acquiesce.

They made their way upstairs, everything tense and strange and heavy. Draco saw Hermione put a hand on Harry’s back as they made their way up the stairs, and he looked at her and tried to smile, and then she kissed his cheek. “See you in the morning,” she said.

“Night, Harry,” Ron said, his gaze darting towards Draco for a moment. “Night, Malfoy.”

“Goodnight, Draco,” said Hermione.

“Goodnight, Hermione, Ron,” he said, and then suddenly he was alone in his tiny room with Harry.

“Are you –” Draco began.

“Can we not talk?” Harry said, wearily.

“Yes, of course,” said Draco. “You just want to...” You just want to fuck, was what Draco meant to say. You want to use me to forget. He felt slightly dismayed at the thought that they would just be doing that, *again*, without communicating properly.

“I just need to go to sleep,” said Harry. He fell down onto the bed and began slowly taking off his shoes and socks. “I can hardly think right now. It’s all...everything’s a jumble.”

“Oh, Harry,” said Draco, leaning down to hug him. Harry stopped messing with his shoes and hugged back, holding Draco so tightly he could barely breathe.

They got ready for bed, and Draco knew, suddenly, that there would be no sex or anything like it. That’s not what this was. It was something quite different.

Harry climbed into bed after Draco and burrowed himself into Draco’s side. Draco was reminded of an eleven-year-old Harry, who’d curled up against him like this after looking into the Mirror of Erised. It felt the same, too, like there was no room left inside of Harry for fear or striving or bravery. Like Harry had cycled through all those things already, and now there was only a bone-deep weariness, and a desperate need for rest.

“I missed you,” Harry whispered, his breath warm against Draco’s chest. “I didn’t know if I’d see you again until after the war.”

Draco kissed the soft hair that tickled his chin. "I missed you, too." He let the arm that was around Harry glide up and down Harry's back in gentle strokes, and heard Harry sigh against him. They fell asleep like that, warm and tangled up together, and stayed that way until morning.

Harry was desperate to leave. He was terrified that his staying was endangering everyone else. It consumed him, Draco could tell, even though he only brought it up on occasion. And when he did, his concerns were quickly brushed aside by Mrs. Weasley's insistence that he stay for the wedding, or by Ron and Hermione's promises that no one was going to get hurt. They all knew that none of them could make that promise, not in good faith, but they made it anyway.

Whether Harry left or not didn't matter much to Draco; wherever Harry was going, he was going. It was as simple as that.

Harry stayed in Ron's room after that first night, likely because it was too awkward to do otherwise. Nobody had really noticed the first time, but then again, that night had been chaotic and emotional, and the Weasleys had been tending to George, and everyone had been mourning the loss of Mad-Eye. Now that it was calmer in the Burrow, they were sure to notice. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley kept a close eye on things.

Charlie pulled Draco outside for a quick Seeker match two days before the wedding, and it helped, a little, to lessen Draco's mounting anxiety. The mere fact of *moving* helped, and the novelty of fresh air. Being cooped up in the house was starting to drive him mad.

They came tumbling back inside afterwards, laughing and windswept. Draco had won this match, although they were about fifty-fifty overall. "I thought you were going to hit the ground face-first," Charlie said as he grabbed a glass of water. "I couldn't believe you managed to pull up so late. You're a maniac." He reached over and mussed up Draco's hair, which was already mussed.

"Nothing maniacal about it," Draco said, taking Charlie's water from him and gulping some of it down. "I'm very calculated. I knew exactly when I would need to pull up and I did."

"So you keep saying, but I don't believe you. I think you're a madman," Charlie said, stepping closer. He didn't move away, and his eyes were intent on Draco's, and Draco realized he was going to be kissed very soon if he didn't do something.

"Okay, which one of you amateurs took that round? Because I want to play the winner," said Harry, bursting into the kitchen.

Draco jumped away like he'd been burned, and Harry's eyes met his for a moment before flickering over to Charlie. "Sorry," Harry said, backing up. "I'm sorry." He turned on his heel and pretty much ran up the stairs.

"Harry!" Draco called after him. "Shit."

When Draco looked back at Charlie, he was studying Draco's face. "I need to –" Draco began.

"Talk to Harry. Right," said Charlie. "I've been a complete idiot, haven't I?"

Draco felt a pang in his chest. "No, you haven't. It's not – I just need to talk to him, okay?"

"No one's stopping you," said Charlie rather harshly, and then *he* turned on his heel and headed back outside.

"Fuck," said Draco to the empty kitchen.

He knocked on the door to Ron's room and prayed to Merlin that Ron wasn't inside. "What?" came Harry's voice.

Draco nudged the door open. "Hey," he said.

"Hey," said Harry, eying him warily from where he sat on the bed, his back against the wall. The room was otherwise empty.

"That's not what it – there's nothing between Charlie and me," Draco said, slipping in and shutting the door. "I mean, we're *friends*. But nothing has happened between us."

"Not what it looked like."

"He wanted to kiss me, I think, but he hadn't. And I was trying to figure out how to get out of there."

Harry snorted. "Right, you looked really scared, Malfoy. Look, it's – whatever. I'm not your bloody boyfriend. You don't owe me anything. We fucked around a few times, big deal. You're allowed to do what you want."

Draco sat carefully on the edge of the bed. "I don't *want* to do anything. Not with him. And I think whatever is going on between you and me is a little more than just fucking around a few times, don't you?"

Harry looked away. "No. Not really," he said.

Draco reached out and touched his shoulder. "Harry."

"I don't need this shit, Malfoy. Things are hard enough without...without whatever this is. I don't need another mess. I have enough messes in my life."

"It doesn't have to be like that," Draco said, his voice pleading. "I don't *want* it to be like that."

"Just leave it, okay? Just leave me alone." He was still resolutely looking anywhere but Draco.

Draco, wanting to cry in frustration, stood and managed to make his way to the door, and headed down the hallway to his tiny room. He sat down on his bed and picked up his pillow. Holding it up to his face, he screamed into it as loud as he could.

The day of the wedding arrived. Harry and Charlie were still giving him the silent treatment. He'd made a fucking disaster of everything, and he was seriously considering asking a Weasley to punch him in the face again, just so he could spend a few unconscious moments *not* thinking about what a colossal arsehole he was.

There was a big, beautifully decorated tent in the backyard, and Hermione and Ginny and Mrs. Weasley and Fleur and Fleur's sister were fluttering through the Burrow in gorgeous dresses, shrieking about hair and makeup and shoes. Ron and the twins were lounging about in the sitting room with Draco (who was very determinedly reading Hermione's book about hand-crafted cauldrons, even though it was boring as sin) until Mrs. Weasley screamed at them to go get dressed. "Draco," she said, only looking a little bit sick at the sight of him (he swore that she was warming up to him, teeny, tiny bit by teeny, tiny bit). "Do you need to borrow dress robes for today? I can't believe I didn't ask you earlier – I'm so sorry. So much going on, I didn't even think of it."

"No, thank you, Mrs. Weasley. I'm all set; I brought some, just in case."

Ron rolled his eyes. "You brought dress robes *just in case*? You are *such* a ponce."

"Ronald!" said Mrs. Weasley. "Don't use that word. And maybe you should take some pointers from Draco. Merlin knows you could benefit from a few lessons on how to pack appropriately." She smiled at Draco and left the room. Ron stuck his finger up at Draco and left, too.

Draco sighed.

He made his way upstairs behind the twins and went to his room. His light gray summer dress robes were wrinkled from their time in the suitcase, but he hit them with a smoothing charm and they looked good as new. He smoothed out his bespoke suit, too, which was made of the same lightweight material, and then did his light blue button-up and his navy tie.

He'd even thought to bring his favorite hand-stitched, Italian leather Oxfords. Ron Weasley be damned, there was no excuse for not dressing properly for a wedding.

Not that anyone would care, since they weren't speaking to him.

"Knock knock!" came Ginny's voice.

"Come in," he said.

"Oh, don't you look handsome!" Ginny squealed.

Draco smiled and gave a courtly bow in her direction. "Thank you, Ginevra. You look absolutely stunning, as well. That color is incredible on you."

She did look rather lovely, in a golden, low-cut dress, her hair pinned up in the front.

“We’re going to break some hearts tonight, eh, Malfoy?” she said, spinning so that her dress swished around her ankles delicately.

“*You* might. I, on the other hand, am going to demand that you dance with me at least twice so that I’m not a wallflower for the duration of this event.”

“Deal,” she said, offering her hand. “At least two dances.” He’d already told her what happened two days earlier in the kitchen and she was vacillating between sympathy and a sort of ‘serves-you-right’ sentiment.

They shook hands firmly. “You ought to get out there, by the way. Guests are beginning to arrive. I’ve got to go, too; bridesmaid duty calls.”

“Go knock ‘em dead, Weaslette,” he said, and she shook her tits at him and glided away, golden skirt fluttering prettily behind her.

Draco took out a bottle of firewhiskey that he’d nicked from the kitchen and took a few swigs. He was going to need a little liquid courage to make it through the night.



# A Beautiful Wedding

## Chapter Summary

Harry surprises Draco (and everyone else)

It was a gorgeous night, warm and lush, fireflies lighting up the dark spaces outside of the tent. The ceremony had been picture-perfect: Fleur was extraordinarily beautiful, and Bill was handsome, even with his scars. The mothers cried, the other guests sighed happily when the newly-wedded couple kissed, and the world seemed, in those moments, like a good place again.

After the ceremony, the chairs disappeared, replaced by a dance floor. Ginny danced with Neville and Viktor Krum and Lee Jordan before approaching Draco. “Oh, decided to fit me in, hm?” Draco asked, grinning at her. He hadn’t cared too much; Luna, with whom he’d danced on occasion as a child, had taken a turn with him already.

“I’m quite popular, as you may have noticed,” Ginny said, smirking. “But a promise is a promise.”

He brought her hand up to his mouth and kissed the back of it. “You are both honorable and beautiful, Ginevra,” he said, leading her to the center of the dance floor.

They began to move effortlessly together. Draco had gotten the impression, from watching her dance with all of her admirers, that Ginny was light on her feet. Now, though, as they glided across the floor together, he could tell just how truly skilled she was. “Did Molly have you in dance lessons, then?” Draco asked.

She spun away from him gracefully and came back, rolling her eyes. “No. Not all of us were treated like performing monkeys as children, Draco. I can just picture you at four or five, in your miniature tuxedo, waltzing across some gilded ballroom floor with – oh, probably Parkinson – while Mummy and Daddy and all their posh friends oohed and aahed.”

“That is...surprisingly accurate,” he said, laughing. “Then where’d you learn? You’re excellent.”

“Mum,” she said. “She and Dad were quite the ballroom dancers back in their day. Competed and everything. They’ve got a shelf full of trophies in their bedroom.” She giggled. “They danced a lot after dinner, when we were younger. Used to try to get all of us to join in, but I’m the only one who ever would. The boys would all run for their lives. Anyway, while Dad was at work and everyone else was away at school, Mum and I used to practice. Even now, sometimes, she and Dad will still take a turn around the sitting room after dinner. They’re fun to watch.”

Her words filled him with some complicated emotion he couldn't quite name. "They love each other quite a lot, don't they?"

Ginny looked surprised. "Mum and Dad? Well, yes, of course."

"It's nice," said Draco. "Your family's rather lovely, Ginny."

She gave him a look before he dipped her. "Shut up," she said when she came back up.

"I'm serious," he said.

She considered him, like she still thought he might be having a go at her. "They do, they love each other a lot. I know it's hard to picture my Mum as anything but a mum, but she was quite pretty as a girl."

"Probably looked like you," said Draco.

Ginny grinned. "Yeah, she did. But, you know, I think my Dad still sees that, when he looks at her. It's like he doesn't see the crow's feet or the gray hairs or any of it. He just sees the girl he fell in love with. It's...it's wonderful, actually. I want that, someday. I really do."

"Would be nice, wouldn't it?" Draco said, and then, without meaning to, found himself scanning the room for Harry. He spotted him talking with Ron and Hermione by the bar, looking gorgeous in a well-flitted dark suit, his green eyes shining all the brighter above it. He seemed especially tense tonight, though, and Draco wished he could talk to him about what was bothering him; wished he could hold him and kiss him until he calmed.

"So, what, your parents *don't* love each other?" Ginny asked.

Draco felt a sudden ache in his chest. "No, they do, actually. My father is...a bit like yours, I suppose. Smitten. I know he's a huge arsehole and everything, but he does truly love my mother. He always has. He'd move mountains for her. Die for her. It's...real. What they have."

"Then why didn't he go with her? When she defected from You-Know-Who?"

Draco frowned. "I've thought a lot about that," he said, feeling his throat tighten. "I think he's trying to keep her safe. He really believes that the Dark Lord is going to win the war. And I think he's hoping that if he stays loyal, he'll be able to beg for leniency for my mother. Maybe for me. But certainly for her."

Ginny was watching him, and he noticed that her eyes were a little shiny. She blinked rapidly and cleared her throat. "I never thought I'd feel bad for Lucius Malfoy, but..."

"It's sad, I know," he said, quietly.

She nodded and tried to smile. "Well, I have to say, you're a better partner than Viktor or Lee, and a *much* better partner than Neville, bless him. My foot still hurts from where he stomped on it."

“He’s mad for you, you know,” Draco said. “His face, when you were dancing. He looked like he was going to die of happiness.”

She blushed. “He’s rather adorable, isn’t he?”

“A bit,” said Draco.

“You better stay away from him,” she said, pinching him.

“Ouch! I want nothing to do with Neville, *Christ*. I promise.”

“Humph,” said Ginny.

They danced together for several songs, learning the style and strengths of one another, and getting better and flashier as they went. Draco thought that if he were at all straight, he might’ve fallen in love with Ginevra that night. She was *that* fetching, and that much fun to guide around the dancefloor. After Ginny was finished with him, he danced with Luna again, and then, much to his surprise, Hermione asked him. She was technically proficient on the floor (though she was no Ginny), but more than that, he was just thrilled that she’d asked him, and even happier when they made easy small talk the entire time and nothing felt forced.

He was by the bar, taking a break and nursing a glass of Hendrick’s on the rocks (with a little twist of lemon), when Charlie approached. He’d noticed, during the ceremony, how handsome Charlie looked. He was Bill’s best man, and he was wearing dark dress robes with deep plum accents, sort of mirroring Bill’s plum robes. He had on a paisley tie like Bill’s, too, of silver and deep blue.

“You’re certainly popular with all the girls tonight,” Charlie said, quirking a smile at him.

Draco returned it, feeling strangely nervous. “I’m a dashing gay man who loves to dance,” he said. “It’s like catnip to them at weddings. I’m a big hit at galas and Yule balls, too.”

Charlie laughed and then grew serious. “Listen, Draco, about the other day. I’m sorry I got angry. You didn’t do anything wrong. You never said you liked me or anything, and I had no right to expect –”

“Charlie, stop,” he said, looking over at him. Charlie’s brown eyes were gentle and warm as always, with no trace of anger. “You had *every* right. I liked having your attention. I encouraged you. And that wasn’t fair, not since I’m –”

“In love with Harry?”

Draco grimaced. “A bit.”

“So you’re telling me I *should* be mad at you?”

“I’d rather you not. But I’d understand if you were.”

Charlie sighed. "I'm not one for holding grudges, to tell you the truth. Life's too short. And you're rather fun to be around." He bumped Draco with his shoulder. "I think I just need to get over it. Be your friend."

Draco's heart felt suddenly light, like it might float out of his chest and flutter away. He smiled, feeling a little shy. "I'd like to be friends."

"Well, we should do that, then. Don't look at me like that, though, or I'm going to try to kiss you again, and then Harry will *really* be mad."

Draco looked down. "Sorry," he said.

"Okay, and stop fluttering those silvery lashes of yours around, too. *God*, how's a bloke supposed to be your friend when you do things like that?" He took a swig of his whiskey. "I need to fuck back off to Romania, is what I need to do."

"Probably should anyway," said Draco. "I hear there's a war brewing."

"Think I heard something about that, too. Lot of fuss over nothing, I'm sure."

"Mm, you know how people are. Making mountains out of molehills."

Charlie laughed, and then leaned over and kissed Draco's cheek. "Well, you let me know if you ever get over this Potter thing, alright? And until then, I'm looking forward to continuing to beat your arse in Quidditch."

"You wish," Draco said, and then Charlie left his side, wandering into the crowd.

Draco leaned back against the bar and looked around the crowded tent, feeling full of a lot of different, messy things: relief, over his conversation with Charlie; wistful, thinking about the conversation he and Ginny had about love; and a bit forlorn, thinking of Harry. He spotted Harry once again, across the room, in a conversation with Ginny. Just talking; nothing more. Draco tried to quash the flash of jealousy that spiked through him, but it wasn't easy. Merlin, he was such a greedy, hypocritical bastard. Wanting to talk to Charlie, but not wanting Harry to talk to anyone else at all, except maybe Hermione and Ron. And Neville. Neville was probably okay. But everyone else, well, Draco figured they'd just start falling in love with Harry, too, because who wouldn't, and he hated that. He hated the idea of Harry with anyone else so much it made him sick.

He sighed and made his way over to a table where Luna sat, drinking a sparkly turquoise drink with fruit and an umbrella sticking out of it. "Mademoiselle Lovegood," he said, sitting.

"Hello, again, Draco," she said. "Your aura is all over the place tonight, you know. Pink, then silver, then yellow, and now..." she looked around him. "Kind of a dark purple."

"Huh," he said. Sometimes that was all you could say to Luna. He stared into his drink like it had all the solutions to his problems hidden in its icy depths. And maybe it did; sometimes alcohol did solve problems, at least until the next day.

“Harry’s looking at you,” said Luna, in that same calm, dreamy voice. “You should look over at him, and then I think he’ll ask you dance.”

“Luna, he’s not going to ask me to dance.”

“I think he is. He’s coming over here.”

“What?” Draco cried, his head jerking up. “Hi, Harry,” he breathed.

Harry stood beside the table, his eyes on Draco. His gaze flickered across Draco’s face like he was searching for something there, and Draco’s breath caught in his throat. Harry seemed especially beautiful then, in his well-cut suit, with his bright eyes and his broad shoulders and his ridiculous hair. He seemed so beautiful, suddenly, that Draco almost couldn’t stand to look at him.

“Hello,” Harry said finally, and then held out a hand.

Draco wasn’t sure what was happening. Surely this wasn’t an invitation to dance. Maybe Harry wanted to shake? But that didn’t really make sense. Draco found himself having a miniature panic attack as he stared at Harry’s hand, though he really did need to do *something* other than sit there blinking at it, lest Luna take the opportunity to point out something embarrassing, like how Draco was suddenly sweating. Also, if he didn’t move soon, Harry was going to think he was having a stroke.

He slipped his hand into Harry’s.

Harry pulled him to his feet, gently, and, still holding his hand, led him to the dance floor. When they reached it, Harry stopped to face him. “I’m a terrible dancer,” he said. His face was so close, his eyes wide and uncertain behind his glasses, and his hand was still warm around Draco’s.

“I’d never assumed otherwise,” Draco said, putting his free hand on Harry’s waist and adjusting the position of their joint hands. Harry smiled.

A new song began, slow and shivery, and they began to move. “Harry, I’m sorry,” Draco said after a moment. “I’m so sorry that I hurt you.”

Harry shook his head. “Don’t apologize. Just tell me. Do you like Charlie?”

“No, you idiot,” Draco said. “I like you.”

“Good,” said Harry, moving closer. “Because I like you, too.”

“So you admit it’s more than just fucking around?” asked Draco.

“It’s more than just fucking around,” Harry agreed. “I’m starting to think it’s quite a bit more. Although, that part’s fun, too.”

Draco laughed. “It is, isn’t it?”

“Mm,” said Harry in agreement.

Their feet were barely moving as they gazed at one another. Harry was rubbing Draco’s palm with his thumb, and Draco could feel that small touch ricochet all down his arm and along his spine. “I want to kiss you,” Harry whispered.

Draco felt himself blush. “Everyone’s looking. You’ll out yourself to every Weasley-adjacent witch and wizard in the U.K.” He glanced around, and indeed, plenty of people were watching, most of them with their mouths hanging open. Ron looked particularly ridiculous.

“I’m dancing with my face two inches away from yours, Draco,” Harry said, grinning. “I think I’m already outed. Might as well give them a show.” Harry had his other hand on the back of Draco’s neck, and now he began playing with the hair there, tugging softly.

Draco shivered at his touch. “Never pegged you as an exhibitionist, Potter.”

Harry pressed his forehead to Draco’s, his glasses bumping softly against Draco’s face. “I want them to know,” he said, and Draco could feel Harry’s breath against his lips. “I want them to know you’re mine.”

Draco sucked in a breath and tried not to faint. “Oh,” he managed.

“Kiss me, Draco,” Harry said.

And so, with the entire Weasley family looking on (minus that prat Percival, anyway), Draco did. And after a moment, he forgot that anyone else was there at all.

After their rather spectacular display on the dancefloor, Harry and Draco slipped out of the tent. Harry, hand still linked with Draco’s, guided him through the yard towards the house, stopping to kiss him every few feet. “We’re never going to make it inside if you keep doing that,” Draco whispered against Harry’s lips.

“I know, I can’t help it,” Harry replied, laughing and kissing him again.

“Harry,” Draco said, giggling as Harry began kissing his ears and his throat. “Go.”

“Ugh,” Harry said. “Fine.” He pulled suddenly away, dropping Draco’s hand, and began full-on sprinting towards the door. “I’m winning!” he called over his shoulder.

“That’s because you bloody cheated!” cried Draco, breaking into a run.

Harry was fast, but Draco was fast, too, and besides, his legs were longer. They ended up banging into the back door at the same time, pushing each other out of the way to grab the handle. Draco managed first and burst inside. “Ha! You cheated, but I still won, Potter!” He laughed, breathless, and turned to face Harry, who was shutting the door behind him and scowling.

“You tripped me,” Harry said, sliding his hands around Draco’s waist. “So you’re disqualified, which means I win by default.”

“I did not, you liar,” said Draco, letting his lips trail over the line of Harry’s jaw.

“Did so,” Harry said, tipping his head back to expose his throat and groaning. “I’ll find witnesses. This injustice will not stand.”

Draco ran a hand over Harry’s strained trousers. “Upstairs,” he said. “My room. Keep your witnesses out of this part.”

They kissed and stumbled their way up the stairs, and Draco felt almost drunk with joy, with the notion that this was real, that everyone *knew*, and that it was all okay, and the world hadn’t blown up or anything because of it. Draco was allowed to be here, with Harry, to be kissing him and laughing with him, and everyone knew because Harry had *wanted* them to know.

Draco pulled Harry inside of his room, breaking from his mouth for a moment to pull out his wand and mutter “Colloportus” at the door. Then they were kissing again, and scrambling to kick off shoes and socks, to undo buttons, to pull off robes and coats and shirts.

“I almost hate to see you take all that off,” Harry said, watching him with lust-darkened eyes as Draco shucked off his waistcoat. “There’s something about you all buttoned-up and formal that makes me want to absolutely wreck you.”

Draco moved closer to pull Harry’s shirttails out of his trousers, kissing near his Adam’s apple. “Hopefully you’ll be able to rouse up *some* level of interest while I’m naked,” Draco said. “Difficult as that might be.”

Harry pulled at Draco’s flies. “I just don’t know if I can,” he said, grinning. “We’ll have to give it a test run.”

Draco slipped out of his trousers and spread himself out on the little bed, letting his eyes drift over Harry’s bare chest and down to where his belt was undone, his trousers slipping low on his hips. He watched as Harry’s eyes got hot, saw Harry’s prick straining against the dark fabric. Draco reached down to tug at his pants, and his own prick sprang free, hard and hot and pink. Deliberately, his eyes on Harry’s, he reached down and began to stroke himself, letting his legs fall open wantonly, reveling in the feel of his own hand, and in the feel of Harry’s eyes on his body. He saw Harry take in the long, lean lines of him, eyes going dark and then darker as he watched. He wanted, suddenly, to drive Harry out of his mind, to make him ache for it, *beg* for it. He let out a low moan and let his head tilt back slightly, let his eyes flutter closed.

Based on the growl that Harry made after a few moments, and the way that he essentially jumped on top of him and pinned him to the bed in one fell swoop, Draco thought he was probably doing an acceptable job of it.

“Fucking hell, Draco,” Harry breathed in his ear. “The look of you. Thought I was going to come before I’d even touched you.”

“You’d better not,” Draco said, arching up into him and feeling Harry’s hard cock against his own, separated only by the thin fabric of Harry’s pants. Their eyes were intent on one another’s, wholly focused. “Because I really, really want you to touch me.”

Harry took his mouth roughly, licking into it without mercy, in a way that had Draco whimpering and wrapping his legs up around Harry’s back, trying to pull him closer. “You want me,” Harry said, breath hot in his ear. “You want me to fuck you.”

“Yes,” Draco said, grabbing Harry’s arse and pressing his hips up. “Yes.”

“Say it,” Harry said, nipping at his throat.

“I want you to fuck me, Harry,” Draco said, his voice barely more than a moan.

Harry reached down and pulled at his pants, and then it was all hot skin on skin, Harry’s prick leaking against his own. Draco felt his eyes close at the sensation, pinpricks of pleasure exploding across his body as Harry began to rut against him, licking and biting at his mouth and his jaw, tangling his hands in his hair and scraping his nails across his scalp until Draco thought he might die from it. He wanted Harry to touch him everywhere, wanted Harry to fill every part of him with his tongue and his cock and his fingers. He wanted it so badly he nearly cried. “Please, Harry. I need it. I need you,” he whispered, begging now.

“Yeah. Yes,” said Harry, kissing a trail down his chest. “Turn over.”

Draco shivered at the roughness of his voice, at the way Harry grabbed his hips and flipped him onto his stomach without waiting for Draco to comply.

Then Harry’s mouth was kissing and licking down his back, down to the cheeks of his arse, biting and sucking and making his way slowly towards his hole, and then he felt Harry’s tongue, hot and wet, licking once, twice, over it, and he shuddered and cried out into the pillow, pulling his knees up underneath him and moving his cock against the mattress.

Harry apparently liked his response, because he doubled down on his efforts, lapping and sucking at Draco’s arsehole, and then he pushed his tongue inside. Draco moaned and rolled his arse back against Harry’s face, wanting to feel that hot tongue fuck him. Bright sparks of light were dancing behind his closed lids, and he could almost feel them trailing their way down his limbs, to his fingers and toes. His whole body felt aflame as Harry pushed one finger and then two inside of him as he continued to lick and suck his hole, and Draco found himself making small whimpering noises as he clutched at the sheets. “Fuck me, Harry,” he moaned, his voice muffled against the bed.

There was a pause and he felt a cool twinge as Harry hit him with a lubrication spell, and then Harry was pushing in, not stopping with the tip, but pushing all the way in, slowly. Draco cried out at the brief pleasure-pain of it, but his body, nearly molten by now, adjusted quickly, taking Harry in and craving more.

Harry’s hands were all over him, in his hair and across his back, down his legs and on his cock. Draco thrust up against him hard, wanting it to hurt, wanting it to burn, because it felt honest, somehow, and real, and beautiful. Harry grabbed Draco’s hips and began to make



wild sounds as he drove into him harder and harder. Suddenly, he stilled and pulled out. "Turn around," he said. "I want to look at you."

Draco turned and gazed up at him, then reached a hand up to Harry's hair, smoothing it off his forehead. Harry leaned down and kissed him again, softly, this time and then Draco felt Harry's cock pressing at his entrance once more, and he spread his legs wide and hitched his hips up. "I love you like this," Harry said, his eyes on Draco's. "Spread open for me."

*I just love you*, Draco thought, but was afraid to say. Harry leaned over him, practically bending him in half, to kiss him as he pushed his cock in, and it felt so fucking good, all of it. Harry began to fuck him harder again, and it was incredible, to be split open like this, to be taken this way. Draco tried to find purchase for his feet so that he could rise to meet Harry's thrusts, and put a hand up against the headboard as their movements grew more and more frantic. Draco watched Harry shuddering above him, and then saw him tighten and cry out, calling out his name. He could feel Harry's spunk filling him, leaking from him, and then suddenly Draco was coming, too, his cock still largely untouched. He clutched at Harry, his climax bright and hot and surging, and his come splattered up against them both, painting them in streaks of white.

After, Draco blinked up at Harry, hardly able to believe it was real, that any of it was actually happening. It seemed too beautiful and too brilliant, like a dream. Draco inched up and felt Harry's cock slide out of him, and he pulled Harry down into his arms and kissed him. "Draco," Harry breathed between kisses. "I love you."

Draco couldn't help it. He felt like a giant wanker, like a fool, but he started crying. Harry looked slightly panicked, swiping at his tears and kissing frantically at them, his eyes full of confusion. "I'm sorry," he said. "I shouldn't have —"

"Fuck you, Potter. I'll kill you if you take it back."

Harry smiled, a small, tentative, precious thing.

"Because I love you, too," Draco said, tracing Harry's smile with his fingers. "If you didn't know."

"That's good, then," said Harry, rolling sideways off of Draco, just to pull him firmly against his chest.

"It is, isn't it," Draco murmured into Harry's neck.

They must have dozed, then, because when the screaming began, Draco jerked awake, and couldn't, for a moment, remember where he was.

# Horcruxes and Deathly Hallows

## Chapter Summary

Draco, Harry, Ron and Hermione are on the lam and looking for Horcruxes

“Oh, but you must travel through those woods again and again... said a shadow at the window... and you must be lucky to avoid the wolf every time...

But the wolf... the wolf only needs enough luck to find you once.”

— Emily Carroll, *Through the Woods*

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Draco was pacing in circles around the clearing. They would be found and captured, he thought. Tortured, probably. He knew how many deranged methods of inflicting pain the Dark Lord had, not to mention dear Aunt Bella. He realized he was muttering to himself, and tried to keep his lips pressed together. If they saw him talking to himself, they'd worry, although maybe they should be worried because Draco was almost positive he was losing his mind.

But even if they weren't captured and horribly tortured, they'd never find all the Horcruxes. Merlin, he wished he'd never heard of the bloody things. The Dark Lord was entirely off his nut, but he was clever, Draco had to give him that. The whole bit with the Horcruxes was testimony to that fact.

Anyway, they'd never find them, and they'd be stuck in this horrible forest forever, living off of nuts and berries and mushrooms and conjured water.

Draco felt himself get even tenser at the thought of water. He didn't know, had never read, whether it was possible to live off of water you'd Augamenti-ed. Conjured water was real enough to sate you, sure, but was it real enough to sustain you over time? Probably not. It likely lacked some essential thing, something that the body needed. And fuck, dying of dehydration was probably painful as hell, and slow, and they'd have to languish in these fucking woods, watching one another succumb to it.

He stopped pacing and pressed his fingers to his temples. “It's the fucking water that's going to kill us. Of all the bloody —”

“Draco,” said Harry, putting his hands on Draco's shoulders. Draco looked up into worried green eyes. “I think you've had enough of the locket.”

“No, I’m fine,” Draco said, wrapping his hand around it and accidentally brushing against his chest where it had burned the skin a little. “Not to worry, Harry.”

“Give,” Harry said gently, peeling Draco’s fingers off of it and lifting the chain over Draco’s head. Draco felt an immediate rush of relief, of cool, fresh air, as the cursed object left him.

He closed his eyes and sighed. “Thank you.”

“You should tell us when you’re feeling like that,” Harry said, as he put the necklace on himself, wincing as the locket made contact with his skin.

“I ought to be able to keep it on for more than a day,” Draco said. He was angry with himself. When he didn’t wear it long enough, that usually meant Harry would try to make up the difference.

“No, you shouldn’t. It’s getting harder and harder for all of us to keep it on that long. We should start rotating after no more than twenty-four hours, because I think it’s only going to get worse. It seems like its effects are cumulative.”

“Look at you, using words with more than one syllable,” Draco said, leaning forward and letting his lips brush Harry’s softly.

“I know, I’m impressive,” Harry said, wrapping his arms around Draco’s waist and deepening the kiss.

Draco pressed himself more firmly against Harry. “You’re especially impressive when you put your mouth –”

“Oh my *god*, not again. Get a fuckin’ room, you two,” cried Ron, who had stopped on his way towards them and was looking ill.

“You’re just jealous that Hermione doesn’t snog you in public,” replied Draco.

Weasley flipped him the bird and headed back towards the tent.

“And there aren’t any *rooms*, by the way, Weasel!” Draco yelled at his back. “We’re in a fucking forest!”

Ron held his fingers up again without turning around.

“If you two could just *try* to get along, it’d be wonderful,” sighed Harry.

“He tests my patience,” replied Draco, scowling.

“For me?” Harry asked in a syrupy voice, batting his eyelashes idiotically.

Draco huffed. “Ugh, *fine*. I’ll try. *Try*, you hear me? I’m issuing no guarantees.”

“That’s all I ask,” Harry said.

“You’re lucky you’re adorable,” Draco muttered.

Living in the forest was not as romantic or fun as it had initially sounded – not that they had any choice in the matter. Grimmauld Place had been compromised after they’d escaped from the Ministry with the locket, and they’d been forced into hiding. It hadn’t been that terrible at first, when it had been a bit warmer. Now, with snow covering the ground and icy winds leeching through their clothes and warming spells, it was miserable.

They’d had an especially memorable Christmas Eve. It wasn’t quite the festive gathering at the Manor that Draco was used to. No, this Christmas Eve involved visiting Harry’s parents’ graves and nearly getting eaten by Nagini, who had been hidden in Bathilda Bagshot’s rotting corpse. They hadn’t gotten the Sword of Gryffindor (or accomplished much of anything, really), and Harry’s wand had been broken in the process.

Deck the Halls, indeed.

Now they were all taking turns being driven mad by the locket. Draco went into anxiety spirals when he wore it; Hermione turned inward and obsessive about cracking the code of the Horcruxes; Ron got even shittier than usual, and weirdly jealous about Hermione talking to Harry or Draco; and Harry became even more reckless and often tried to ditch the rest of them, claiming they’d all be safer without him. All in all, it was boatloads of fun.

Harry was on locket duty for now, until Hermione took over. Draco wasn’t sure which he hated most: wearing the locket himself, or having to be constantly vigilant regarding Harry when Harry wore it.

The remainder of the day slogged by. Harry grew increasingly restless, Draco and Ron irritated each other, Hermione read, and they all dined on a pathetic supper of stale raisins and roasted chestnuts. It was dark early, so they retreated to the tent, except for Draco, who was first up to keep watch.

He transfigured a piece of parchment into a blanket and huddled in the snow, shivering despite his warming charms. After a while, he rose and began to walk back and forth, just to keep his extremities from freezing. “Fuck this forest,” he intoned as he jumped up and down and wriggled his fingers and toes. “Fuck this forest. Fuckity fuck this stupid forest.”

“Nice song, Draco,” said Hermione, approaching from the direction of the tent.

“Not really a song. More like a chant.”

She gave him a grim smile.

“What’re you doing here already?” he asked. “My watch isn’t up yet, is it?”

She shrugged. “Can’t sleep.”

None of them were sleeping well, which wasn't helping with the whole 'going mad because of an evil locket' thing. "Sorry," said Draco. "You want to take my turn? I can cover your spot later tonight if you'd like. Maybe you'll be able to sleep by then."

"That's alright," she said, grabbing an edge of his blanket and wrapping it around her shoulders so that it enveloped them both. "Just thought I'd keep you company, since I was up."

They made themselves comfortable at the base of an ancient-looking, twisted oak, sitting in silence for a while, although it wasn't a tense silence. It was more that there was nothing to say that hadn't been said a thousand times already. It seemed like conversations were all circular lately, like they were all chasing their tails.

"I'm so tired," Draco sighed.

"I told you I could –" Hermione began.

"No, I know," Draco interrupted. "I don't mean like I need to sleep. I just mean...I feel tired. Mentally. Emotionally. I don't know."

"Yeah," she said. "I know. Everything seems impossible and pointless, lately. We're making no progress, not since we got the locket."

"Which we can't figure out how to destroy."

"Right."

After a while, Draco was yawning. "Go to sleep, you," Hermione said, shoving him gently. "I'm fine."

Crawling into bed with Harry and warming up did sound delicious. "If you're sure," Draco said.

"I'm sure," she said.

He rose, stretching his limbs. "Thanks, Hermione."

She nodded, then pulled her knees up to her chest and stared out at the clearing, lost to her own thoughts.

The snow crunched under his feet as he made his way back to the tent. It hadn't snowed in a few days, but it wasn't melting either. Just packing itself down more and more as they walked over it.

The tent was quiet and dark. It was the quiet that sent prickles of unease up Draco's spine first. It was never this quiet. Not with Harry's incessant snoring.

He pulled back the privacy curtain he and Harry had hung in front of the bed they shared and froze.

“Salazar’s tit,” he whispered. He whirled around and scanned the rest of the tent futilely, and then ran back outside.

“Hermione, Harry’s gone!” he cried. Hearing the words aloud made him realize how truly fucked this situation was, and he felt himself begin to panic. Harry was gone. Harry was wearing the locket, and he was gone.

Hermione jumped up. “Where’s Ron?” she asked.

“Asleep in the tent.”

“Come on,” she said.

They raced back to the tent and shouted at Ron to wake up. “Ron, your deluminator!” Hermione cried. “Where is it?”

Ron sat up, hair stuck to his face. “What? What’s going on?” he asked, squinting at them.

“Harry’s *gone*, Ron,” said Hermione, her voice shrill. “We’ve got to find him.”

“Ugh, Merlin’s arse,” Ron said, jumping up. He yanked on his coat and rifled through his bag. “Oi, I can’t find it, ‘Moine,” he cried. “Where’d I put the bloody thing?”

“Ronald Weasley,” Hermione said. “Are you serious.”

“Oh, oh, here it is,” he said, pulling it out and displaying it proudly.

Draco rolled his eyes. “Idiot,” he muttered.

Ron turned on the deluminator and charged out of the tent. “Which way?” he asked, turning around in a confused circle.

“Ron, look!” Hermione cried. “When you point the deluminator that way, it shines brighter.”

They all studied it as Ron pointed it this way and that. Sure enough, when he pointed it in one particular direction, it glowed even brighter. “Oh, wow,” he said.

“We should go that way, then, shouldn’t we?” asked Draco.

“I think so,” said Hermione, her puzzle-solving face firmly in place.

They followed Ron in the direction the deluminator favored. They had to turn once or twice when the light seemed to diminish until they did, but soon, they were coming through the thick trees to another clearing. In the center of this clearing was a round, frozen lake.

And near the center of the round lake, Harry had just jumped into a hole in the ice.

“No!” cried Draco, racing towards it. Down near the edge, Harry’s things were piled neatly. “You idiot!”

“Oh, Godric,” breathed Ron, running up beside him.

They stared at the hole for a moment until Hermione reached them, and then Draco sprang back to life, running onto the ice, towards the hole. He slipped and fell onto his knees, and noticed Ron was still with him.

“I’m going in!” Draco cried.

“No, I’m going in!” Ron said.

Draco dragged himself the last two or three feet, and without hesitating, jumped into the freezing water.

It was so quiet and still beneath the ice, and so, so cold that it stole all the breath from him. He glanced around and saw Harry pressed up against the ice and swam towards him, quickly noting that the locket – the fucking locket! – was dragging Harry away from the hole. Draco got ahold of Harry – he was unconscious -- just as there was a commotion behind him.

It was Ron, he realized, and saw that Ron was not swimming towards them, but swimming down, towards the bottom of the lake, where a sword was shining in the darkness.

Draco, limbs almost uselessly heavy because of how cold they were, dragged Harry towards the hole in the ice and pushed him upwards. They broke the surface of the water, and Hermione was there, yanking on Harry as Draco pushed. She dragged him to shore while Draco scrambled out, and then she raced back to the hole, where a sword was emerging, Ron’s hand on the hilt.

Draco ran over to Harry’s side and grabbed his wand from where he’d left it next to Harry’s clothes, casting a hot air charm over Harry’s motionless, blue-ish body, followed by a warming charm. He rubbed his own frozen hands over Harry’s limbs, trying to increase circulation. Finally, Harry sputtered and his eyes opened. “Draco?” he whispered, and then immediately scrambled up to look out at the lake.

“Ron’s got the sword,” Harry said, his eyes wide. Draco looked and sure enough, Ron was there on the ice, dripping and shivering until Hermione cast a hot air charm over him, and he was clutching the Sword of Gryffindor.

“Yes, now get dressed!” yelled Draco. “You’re going to freeze to death.” Harry was sitting there in his pants, shivering almost uncontrollably, his teeth chattering, and he still looked sort of blue. Draco grabbed at Harry’s jeans and began to shove them onto his legs, only his hands weren’t working very well, and it was incredibly difficult to hold the jeans in place.

“Draco,” Harry said, looking at him and blinking. “You...you jumped in after me.”

“Stop stating the bloody obvious, Potter, and get your clothes on,” said Draco. It was hard to talk, too, since his teeth were clacking together so violently.

Harry grabbed Draco’s wand from his shaking hand and cast a hot air charm over him, and he felt the blanket of heat smack into him and dry his sopping wet clothes. He was still shivering afterward, but not nearly so much.

“Oh, I forgot,” Draco said stupidly. Because he had. He’d forgotten, somehow, that he was covered in icy water that was quickly turning to actual ice in the frozen air. He’d forgotten that he, too, might die of exposure.

“If I’m not allowed to freeze, you’re not either,” said Harry, meeting Draco’s eyes and finally pulling his shirt and hoodie back on. Draco supposed that was fair.

“I’ve got the sword, Harry!” Ron called. He ran towards them, Hermione right behind him.

Harry reached up and ripped off the locket, setting it on a large rock. “Ron, I’m going to open it, and when I do, you’ve got to hit it with the sword.”

Ron gulped. “I don’t want to,” he said.

“Then why’d you grab it?” Harry cried. “You’ve claimed the sword, now you’ve got to use it!”

Ron stared at the locket and his hands tightened on the hilt of the sword. “All right,” he said, looking suddenly determined.

Harry nodded and something intense passed between the two of them, something Draco couldn’t pretend to understand. Harry knelt next to the rock and began to whisper in Parseltongue. Even though Draco didn’t know the meaning of the words, they still set his heart pounding, still made him tighten his grip on his wand.

Suddenly, the locket burst open, and something thick and black and oily tore out of it and raced into the sky, gathering there like a monstrous cloud. Ron was looking up at it in horror, the sword dangling uselessly from his hand.

“Ron!” Harry yelled. “Hit it!”

It was like Ron didn’t hear him. He was just looking up at the black thing, almost mesmerized by it, his mouth twisting into a grimace.

“Ron!” Harry yelled.

“Please, Ron!” begged Hermione.

Nothing. No response, no movement.

“Swing the sword, Ron!” cried Harry.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” muttered Draco. He inched closer to Ron’s side, only slightly afraid for his life. Ron did have a sword, after all.

“Weasel, you ginger git!” Draco yelled when he was two or three feet away. “Stop standing there like you left your brain in the bloody lake! Break the locket!”

To Draco’s amazement, Ron blinked and turned towards him. “Sod off, Malfoy,” he growled. Then he raised the sword, looking unexpectedly brave and heroic as he did, and dashed the



ever-loving shite out of Salazar's locket.

They all stood perfectly still and silent for a moment afterward as they watched the oily blackness dissolve into the night sky. Ron dropped the sword into the snow, stunned, and then Hermione gave a loud cry and threw her arms around him. She snogged him, then, right in front of Harry and Draco, and honestly, good for her. And, based on the way the Weasel smiled and held her, he was pretty chuffed about it, too.

The sun was already up as they sat in bed, listening, quite against their will, to Hermione and Ron in the throes of passion (audible despite multiple Muffliatos). Harry turned to Draco. "You were going to sit there arguing with me about putting my clothes on until you froze to death. I know you're stubborn, but that seemed a bit extreme."

"I told you, I forgot."

"You forgot you were covered in ice cold water in the middle of winter."

"Yes," Draco said primly, angling his nose up in a way that he knew irked Harry.

Harry tapped a finger against the tip of Draco's nose. "You were worried about me, weren't you?"

Draco huffed. "Of course I was worried, you idiot. You're such a fucking Gryffindor, throwing yourself into a frozen lake like that without anyone nearby. If we hadn't come along when we did, you would have died down there, Harry. *Goddamnit*." He tried to control his breathing, but he was getting properly worked up now, latent adrenaline-tinged fear over pulling an unconscious Harry out of the lake coursing through his veins. "Even though you, apparently, don't care about staying alive, you might consider that other people prefer you that way. Alive, I mean. And by other people, I mean me."

"I'll try harder to stay alive, Draco," Harry said, kissing his cheek. "I'm sorry I scared you."

"I wasn't *scared*," Draco said, crossing his arms. "I was worried." He looked over at Harry, who had a bemused expression on his face. "Fine, I was a little scared." Harry kept looking at him. "Okay, I was fucking terrified, all right? I thought you were dead. You almost *were* dead."

"I'm sorry," Harry said again.

Draco sighed and put his head on Harry's shoulder. "Don't do it again."

"I won't," Harry said, putting an arm around him. "I promise."

Spring was coming. It was still chilly outside, but you could see it in the buds of the trees, in the patches of new grass.

It was making Draco nervous, because it had been spring when Harry, Hermione, and Ron were brought to the Manor and thrown into the dungeon in Draco's original timeline. He'd never known what events had resulted in their capture (working for the Dark Lord, you were really only privy to things for which you bore responsibility, not to the rest; the Dark Lord himself was the only one allowed to see the whole picture). Therefore, much to his dismay, though Draco knew that they had to be extra cautious in springtime, he didn't know exactly when or where the capture might occur.

On one cold and rainy day, Draco was sitting in the tent, reading *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* aloud to Harry, who had his head on Draco's lap.

"Oh my god!" cried Hermione all of a sudden. She came out from behind the curtain in front of the bed she shared with Ron. "Look at this!" she said, pointing.

She was holding up *The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore*, pointing to a page that contained a copy of a letter from Dumbledore to Grindelwald. "It's no accident," she said, handing Draco *Life and Lies* and snatching *Beedle the Bard* from him, flipping to the first page of the Three Brothers story. "He did it for a reason."

Draco looked closer and saw that the "A" in Albus was a miniature version of the same symbol.

"We've got to talk to Xenophilius Lovegood!" said Hermione. "He was wearing that symbol, at the wedding. Viktor said it was Grindelwald's symbol, but I think it's something else."

"Hermione," Harry said, clearly exasperated. "You've got to stop looking for hidden meaning in everything that Dumbledore gave us. It's led to one dead end after another."

Draco smacked Harry's shoulder and Harry frowned up at him. "Shush for a moment. I think she's right. That thing does keep popping up everywhere. It's uncanny. I think it might be worth a try."

"Besides," said Ron, poking his head out from behind the other curtain. "Lovegood's on our side. It'd be safe."

And that was true, Draco thought. Also, he recalled it being slightly later in the year when the golden trio had been dragged to the Manor. A tiny bit warmer. It was too early for the capture to occur.

Harry sighed. "Well, I'm clearly outnumbered," he said. "I guess we'll go."

Luna's house was spectacularly weird. Draco hadn't known what to expect, really; probably the only thing that would've truly shocked him was if it had been some typical, stone-faced country home.

It wasn't.

It wasn't the fact of the weirdness that surprised Draco, but the specifics of it. It was a bit like the Weasleys place, in that it was a tower-type structure out in the middle of nowhere. But it was black and oddly smooth, sort of militaristic in appearance. It looked, Draco realized, like a rook.

Inside was no less strange, he decided, as Xenophilius reluctantly allowed them through the door. The walls were all brightly painted with fantastical things, probably courtesy of Luna. All the walls were circular, and all the furniture and appliances were made to fit against them.

It was dusty and cluttered, but somehow homey at the same time. Nothing matched, there was a riot of colors, and in some places the sheer amount of stuff was so great that you could hardly walk through.

Xenophilius brought them up the stairs to a living room of sorts and, after Hermione had lectured him about the Erumpent Horn hanging on the wall, he ran off to look for Luna. When he came back, he informed them that Luna would be back from fishing soon, and settled in to tell them about the symbol around his neck, which, apparently, represented the three Deathly Hallows from the story about the three brothers in *Beedle the Bard*.

Hermione argued with him about it for a while, telling him that the Hallows weren't real, while Xenophilius insisted that they were. "Prove that they're not!" exclaimed Xenophilius.

"By that logic, you could claim practically *anything* was real. You could just start making things up and say they exist, because no one could definitively prove otherwise," huffed Hermione.

"*Exactly*," said Xenophilius.

Draco tried not to roll his eyes and glanced at Harry. He seemed distracted, bouncing his legs up and down and fidgeting, but then again, that was how he usually behaved, the hyperactive git. Ron was sitting on another chair gazing up at the ceiling like he wanted it to fall down and crush him just so he didn't have to listen to Xenophilius anymore.

"Won't you stay for dinner?" Xenophilius was asking.

Even though Luna's father would likely serve them something bizarre and possibly inedible, it'd been a really long time since they'd eaten a real meal. "Of course," said Ron, who always thought with his stomach. "Thank you."

Xenophilius disappeared down the stairs and they looked at each other.

"This is rubbish," sighed Hermione. "Total waste of time."

They continued to argue about it as a smell floated up from the kitchen. It wasn't a good one. It smelled sort of like dirty socks and sort of like cabbage. "I don't think I'll be able to eat whatever it is he's making," Draco said, wrinkling his nose.

Hermione and Ron launched into a heated debate over whether the Invisibility Cloak might be the one from the story, and Draco glanced at Harry again and noticed he was inching

towards the stairs, looking up. "What are you doing?" he asked.

"Hang on," said Harry, scampering up them.

"What's he up to?" Hermione asked, raising an eyebrow.

Draco shrugged. Who could know with Harry? "Being a busybody, I imagine."

A few moments later, though, Harry came rushing back down the stairs. "Luna's room," he said, his eyes wide. "It's all dusty. Unused. Looks like nobody's been in there for weeks."

Just then, Xenophilius came up the stairs with a tray of bowls. "Mr. Lovegood," said Harry. "Where's Luna?"

"She's coming, I told you," Xenophilius said, looking nervous and very, very suspicious.

"Then why did you only bring supper for four?" asked Draco, standing. "And why does it look like Luna hasn't been in her room in ages?"

Xenophilius dropped the tray, and everyone drew their wands. "They took my Luna," he said, his eyes wide and afraid. "You must stay. I have to get her back. I can't lose my Luna. They might give her back if I – if I –"

"Hand over Harry?" asked Hermione, glaring.

Draco didn't need to hear another word. He went and stood between Harry and Xenophilius, his wand aimed straight for the old arsehole. "That's not happening," he said. "We're leaving." He began to push Harry toward the stairs. Xenophilius grabbed at him, but Draco wrested himself out of his grasp.

"Take out your wand and I'll hex you, you bastard," said Ron from behind Lovegood.

Draco kept moving, dragging Harry down the stairs and through the kitchen. Suddenly, though, Harry grabbed onto the counter. "No, Draco. I'm not leaving them."

"Everyone's after *you*, Harry. What about that don't you understand? Ron and Hermione are hardly worth the Dark Lord's trouble. You on the other hand...need to get out of here. *Now*."

"No!" Harry said, trying to shove past him.

"What the fuck?" he cried. "You promised! You promised you wouldn't put yourself in danger for no reason!"

"It's not for no reason, you arsehole!"

"Ron and Hermione can fend for themselves! Hermione's smarter than both of us combined!"

"I'm not –"

“Get the fuck out of here,” Draco said, shoving the Invisibility Cloak into Harry’s hand “Go, you stubborn bastard!” Draco pushed him again, hard. “I’ll go help them.”

Harry stood and glared at him for a moment, then flung the cloak over himself and disappeared. The front door opened and closed, and Draco breathed a sigh of relief and stepped onto the bottom stair, trying to figure out what he should do with Lovegood. A Body-Bind would work well. Ron and Hermione were still yelling and Xenophilius was still yelling back, so that was good. Nobody had been hexed yet.

Suddenly, there was an explosion. Draco was thrown backwards down the stairs, and he watched in shock as the house shook and creaked and the sound of things falling and shattering filled the air. Plaster rained down from the ceiling onto his face. “Oh, Merlin,” he whispered, scrambling to get to his feet. He went and stood in front of the stairs, afraid that they might not be sturdy anymore. He glanced up; the stairs seemed to be intact. He cautiously stepped onto the bottom one.

Just then, the front door burst open. “Xenophilius!” came a gruff voice that Draco immediately recognized.

It was that arsehole Selwyn. Draco tried to creep up the stairs as quietly as possible, and then stopped dead when he realized something huge had fallen and was blocking the way.

He heard a laugh behind him. “Well, well, well.” Draco whirled around and saw Travers standing at the base of the stairs, his bushy gray hair haloing his sharp, cold features. “If it isn’t the little turncoat.” His wand was pointed right at Draco’s face. “Drop your wand, Malfoy, or I’ll blast your goddamn hand off,” he said in a casual voice, like he was offering tea.

Draco’s mind scrambled for a way around this, for an escape, and came up with nothing. He was totally trapped. He dropped his wand.

“Potter’s down there!” came Xenophilius’s voice from behind the blockade. “I told you I’d give you Potter.”

“Potter’s not here, you old loon!” growled Selwyn, coming to stand next to Travers.

“My Luna!” cried Xenophilius.

“You’re not getting your daughter until you give us Potter, Lovegood!”

“Please!”

“Shut the hell up or I’ll blast that stairway open and hex your arse!” Selwyn yelled.

It went silent upstairs.

“Thank Merlin that fuckin’ mad hatter shut his yap,” Selwyn said. He looked at Draco, as though seeing him for the first time. “Ah, it’s you, young Malfoy. Daddy will be so pleased to see you.” And then, with no warning, ropes appeared and wound themselves around Draco’s body. A wandless, wordless Incarcerous.

“Levicorpus,” said Travers, sounding almost bored. Draco felt himself flip upside down, and then it was as though he was being held by his ankles. He moved down the stairs that way, his head banging hard against the rail every now and then.

When he reached the two men at the bottom of the stairs, Selwyn crouched down and looked Draco in the face and cleared his throat. A moment later, his face was hit with a thick wad of spittle, some of it flying into his eyes. He couldn’t move his hands to clear it, so it dripped slowly over his upside down features.

Something slammed into his stomach then and all the breath left his body. He didn’t allow himself to do anything but grunt softly. It would be worse for him if he talked back, and even worse than that if he screamed.

A pair of arms wrapped around his legs, and suddenly, Draco had the sick sensation of being Side-Along-ed. When it ended, they were standing atop gravel that Draco recognized the instant he saw it, facing the gates of the Manor. Selwyn let go of his legs and Draco fell hard on his head, and laid there for a moment, stunned, before Travers delivered a sharp kick to his side. Draco cried out, curling around the point of impact. The ropes around his body disappeared.

“Stand up, you little prat,” said Travers in his unnervingly calm tone. “You’re home.”

# Captive

## Chapter Summary

Draco is held captive at Malfoy Manor and then Harry shows up

## Chapter Notes

This one's a little heavy, so I included a couple extra chapters today so you wouldn't have to end on this one. Happy Friday and hope you enjoy!

PS- if you want to work yourself up into a real good depressive episode, listen to Taylor Swift's 'epiphany' towards the end of the chapter. I did while writing it and let's just say... I don't recommend it if you are wearing mascara.

“End? No, the journey doesn't end here. Death is just another path. One that we all must take.”

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*

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Draco's father met them in front of the house. “Stand up straight and look at me, Draco,” was the first thing he said. Never mind that Draco had been in an explosion and had been dragged down stairs upside down, spit on, punched, and kicked. Draco tried raise himself to his full height and meet his father's eyes without flinching.

His father's expression was cold, his eyes even colder. His lip curled. “Lock him in his room,” he said to Travers and Selwyn. Draco noticed that his father had that red-eyed, ghoulish look about him that he'd borne during the war, so different from the way he appeared only months before.

“He's a prisoner, Lucius,” said Selwyn in his gruff voice. “He belongs in the dungeon.”

Lucius gave him a look that could've sliced through diamond. “He is my son. He'll be kept in his room.”

Selwyn muttered about it, but he took Draco's elbow and hauled him inside and up the stairs. Draco marveled at the fact that, despite having a traitor for a son and a traitor for a wife, his father's status with the Dark Lord didn't seem diminished. He wondered what horrible things Lucius had done to restore the Dark Lord's trust in him.

Selwyn threw Draco inside his room, which seemed familiar and strange all at once. “We’re not done with you, you know,” he growled from the doorway. “Daddy’s not always going to be there to save your disloyal arse.”

Draco didn’t acknowledge the threat, and after a moment, the door slammed. Draco felt in his pocket and pulled out a tiny Time-Turner. He’d kept it on him since they’d been on the run, just in case. Only now, he had no wand to Engorgio it. And he couldn’t use it without being able to place his hand on it – he’d tried.

He put the thing on top of his dresser, beneath a golden snitch that sat up on a stand. It was so small that he didn’t think anyone would bother with it.

It seemed ridiculous, given his circumstances, but he wanted a shower more than just about anything. He’d grown filthy in the forest, despite the hundreds of scouring charms he’d done on himself.

He made his way into the en suite bathroom, took out a towel, and turned the knob of the shower.

As steam began to fill the bathroom, he considered his options. He needed to get ahold of a wand so he could use the Turner. Then he could go back to before Lovegood’s house and avoid the capture.

On the other hand, he thought a few moments later as hot water sluiced down his back, maybe this was a good thing. If he wasn’t with Harry, maybe Harry would be safe. Maybe, he thought, hope growing warm and bright in his chest, maybe this was the *only* way to keep Harry safe. Maybe he’d accidentally stumbled onto the ideal situation.

True, the Dark Lord’s goons would try to make his life hell while he was here, but they had half the time anyway, in the original timeline, when they’d all been on the same side. His father would not let them kill him, Draco was almost certain of that.

Maybe this really was for the best. The war would play out like it had originally, only in the end, Harry and Draco would be together.

He put on some striped pajamas, breathing in the freshly laundered scent.

It had totally sucked to be dirty all the time. Draco was normally a fastidious person, and it had been a constant thorn in his side to feel grimy. To be clean and dry and warm seemed like an obscene luxury, and he couldn’t help but enjoy it.

He crawled under his Egyptian cotton sheets and fell asleep.

“I won’t,” Draco said.

“Draco,” his father said between clenched teeth. “If you don’t do this, I cannot protect you.”



“I’m not going to try to trick Harry into coming here, Father. He wouldn’t fall for it anyway. He’s not an idiot. He’s going to know it’s a trap.”

“Even if he knows it’s a trap, he’ll try to play the hero. He’ll come for you.”

“No,” said Draco. “Forge my handwriting if you want, but I’m not doing it.”

“I raised you to have a better sense of self-preservation than this,” said Lucius. “You’re being a fool.”

Draco stared at him, trying not to squirm.

“You *idiot* boy,” said his father, storming out of the room, black robes billowing behind him. The door slammed shut.

They’d been having this conversation for two weeks. His father was insistent that Draco needed to show renewed loyalty to the Dark Lord in some fashion, and thought that luring Harry to the Manor was the way to go about it.

Draco was never going to budge. Really, he was thrilled that Harry hadn’t already come for him. He thought that was a good sign. Hopefully, Harry knew that Draco could manage things here and was going about the business of destroying Horcruxes. So long as Harry continued doing what he’d done in Draco’s original timeline, he’d defeat the Dark Lord in early May. Draco was sure he could keep himself intact until then.

It wasn’t even that far away, he realized. He wasn’t sure of the exact date, but it had to be April, by now. Then it hit him.

It was *April*. And April was when Harry and Ron and Hermione had been captured and brought to the Manor.

Shit.

He started pacing. This wasn’t good. He’d pretended not to recognize Harry when they’d been brought in before, and that might have saved Harry’s life. If he wasn’t there to do it...

Shit.

He went through the events of that day in his head. The golden trio had been brought in, bruised and battered, and Harry had been glamoured. He’d looked strange, but Draco had somehow still recognized him. He supposed when you stared at someone every day for six years, you could spot them pretty easily, despite a half-arsed glamour.

Harry had used a stupid name, too. What had it been? Vernon, thought Draco suddenly. Vernon Dudley. He’d claimed to be a Slytherin. Draco tucked the name away in his head, thinking it might come in handy.

“We picked up some of your friends,” said Travers a few days later, sticking his head into Draco’s room. Draco shot up from where he had been sprawled out idly on the floor. “We think it’s Hermione Granger and the Weasley kid. They’re with Vernon Dudley.”

“Vernon?” asked Draco calmly. “What’s he doing with them? He’s a Slytherin.”

Travers frowned. “That’s what he said.” He looked at Draco for a moment. “Well, you were a Slytherin and you somehow ended up fucking Harry Potter, so who knows.”

Draco didn’t react to that, although it shocked him. How did they know that Draco and Harry were romantically involved? His father hadn’t given any indication of that; he’d only seemed to think that Draco had turned to Harry for help and that they were now allied. “What’s going to happen to them?” Draco asked, trying to sound unconcerned.

“Bellatrix has taken an interest in the girl. She’s...*getting to know her* as we speak,” said Travers, smirking. There was a wicked glint in his eye.

Hermione was being tortured, then. Right this second. Draco’s stomach heaved. “Aunt Bella really should try to control herself,” he said, rolling his eyes. “She acts before she thinks. What if Granger has information?”

“Then a bit of torture will get the girl to talk,” said Travers, like this was obvious.

“Not the way Aunt Bella does it. She always ends up knocking them out. Kills them half the time. Not going to get any information that way.”

Travers thought about this. “Mm. Might have a point there,” he said, reluctantly.

Draco shrugged. “Do what you want. None of my business.” He picked up a book from his nightstand.

The door snicked shut.

It was infinitely more difficult to while away the hours knowing that Harry was in the dungeon. Draco was surprised he hadn’t worn a hole in the floorboards with how much he was pacing. He wondered if Harry knew he was here. He might have suspected it all along, or maybe not. He supposed it was just as logical to think that Draco had been taken to a Death Eater safe house.

The door burst open suddenly.

It was Dolohov. Draco immediately tensed. Dolohov was one of Draco’s least favorite people, even before the timeline where Draco’d been with Pansy in the cellar and Dolohov had referenced hexing Pansy’s fingers off. Dolohov wasn’t mad, not like Aunt Bella, but he was all the more frightening for it. He always seemed wholly in control of himself, and wholly sane, while he was doling out his disturbingly creative cruelties. He was one who reveled in bloodshed, in destruction, but in a quiet, thoughtful way. He also had sadistic

sexual tendencies, and, in Draco's original timeline, had forcibly raped at least three prisoners (that Draco knew of), although Draco tried not to think too much about that.

"You're friends escaped. Along with some of our other prisoners."

Draco felt something unclench in his chest. Harry was free again. "Who fucked that one up?" he asked, arching a brow.

"Selwyn was supposed to be watching them," said Dolohov. Draco noticed that he didn't look particularly upset, which was strange, given the circumstances.

"Hm. The Dark Lord's going to have a field day with him, then," Draco said.

"I think the Dark Lord is going to be fairly well pleased, overall," said Dolohov, stepping closer. Draco didn't like the look on his face. He didn't like it one bit.

"What do you mean?" Draco asked, feeling his heart pound.

"One of those stupid bints stayed behind when the others left. And can you guess which one it was?"

Draco felt like he was going to sick up all over the Persian rug beneath his feet.

"It was your good friend Vernon Dudley. You know, the Slytherin? Only, what's funny is that he suddenly looks a whole fucking lot like Harry Potter. Isn't that strange?"

*Fucking hell.*

"I thought we might pay him a visit, you and I," said Dolohov. "Say hello, try to make some sense out of this whole thing."

"My father doesn't want me to leave the room," Draco managed. He knew that whatever Dolohov was planning, it wasn't anything good. For Draco or for Harry.

"Your father's not here," said Dolohov. His dark, beady eyes were burning as he looked at Draco. "Now come on, unless you want me to put an Imperius on you."

Draco felt himself sway on his feet, and suddenly Dolohov was crossing the room and grabbing his arm roughly. "Snap out of it," he said, giving him a little shake. "If you can't handle a little polite chit-chat, you fucking ponce, you're sure as shit not going to be able to handle the next part." He grinned down at Draco malevolently, and pulled him towards the hall.

"Let go of me," Draco said, wrestling himself away. "I can walk."

"Good," said Dolohov lightly. "That's the spirit."

Draco was trembling so hard by the time they came to secret passageway in the dining room that he stumbled on the stairs that led to the dungeon. Dolohov kicked him swiftly in the

back, sending him crashing down the last few. He landed hard on his front, his arm taking most of the impact. He cried out as something in his wrist snapped.

“Oops, sorry,” said Dolohov, flicking his wand towards Draco and healing the fracture wordlessly.

“Your mate’s over here,” Dolohov said, pointing to one of the back rooms. Draco gulped. The spot where he and Pansy had been chained up, in the main part of the dungeon, was open and clearly visible to anyone who came down the stairs. But there were two tiny rooms off the back where a lot of the torture occurred. And where a lot of other things occurred, too, things that nobody liked to talk about.

Draco stumbled towards them, and Dolohov flicked his hand (sans wand) towards one of the doors to open it. That was the other thing about Dolohov: he was powerful. Really good at what he did. Wandless, wordless, it didn’t matter. He was proficient in all of it.

Draco didn’t see anything in the room, at first, and he wondered, briefly, if Dolohov had been full of shit, if he’d just taken Draco down here to fuck with him, and maybe to rape him while Draco’s father was gone. But then he spotted a trainer poking out from behind the door, about two feet off the ground, and realized that Harry was being pinned against the wall by Dolohov. As he entered the room, Draco gazed up at Harry.

Harry had dropped the strange Vernon Dudley glamour, and the face that Draco’s eyes settled on was his true one. Green eyes wide and worried, mouth set tight. His skin was dirty and bruised, and he was still too beautiful for words.

“Why?” Draco found himself asking in a raw voice.

“I wasn’t going to leave you here,” said Harry, his eyes filling.

“You’re so stupid, Harry,” Draco whispered. And he was. He was so brave and so stupid, and it was going to be the end of them both.

“I know,” Harry said, and his eyes were too full then, and a tear slipped out over his cheek.

“Aw, if this isn’t the sweetest thing I’ve ever seen in my life,” said Dolohov, as he delivered a hard kick to Draco’s arse that sent him flying forward onto his knees.

He pointed his wand at Harry and Harry slid down the wall, his trainers making contact with the floor.

“Now, let’s see,” said Dolohov, tapping a finger to his mouth. “The Dark Lord won’t want me doing anything to *you*,” he said, pointing at Harry. “He’s a bit greedy where you’re concerned; wants to kill you himself, I guess.” He looked down at Draco. “But *you*, on the other hand, you pretty little thing...I’ve only got your father to worry about if I hurt you. And I’d much rather be on *his* bad side than the Dark Lord’s, I’ll tell you that.”

Dolohov scratched at his greasy hair, frowning. “You two are, what, boyfriends? Lovers? What do you call this arrangement?”

Draco glared up at him.

“I suppose it doesn’t matter. You like kissing each other, yeah?” Again, nobody responded. “Answer me when I ask you a question, Malfoy,” he said, directing his fingers towards Draco’s neck.

“Augh!” Draco cried, as he felt a Stinging Hex hit him there. He put a shaking hand up to the spot and it came away bloody.

“Do I have to do it again?” yelled Dolohov.

“Yes, we like kissing each other!” Harry cried.

“Good, thank you Mr. Potter. Now was that so hard? Okay, get up, little Malfoy. Stand up.”

Draco stood.

“Now go give your boyfriend a kiss.”

Draco looked at Harry, whose eyes were wide with fear. He leaned forward and let his lips brush Harry’s and then stood back and glared over at Dolohov.

“Lovely,” Dolohov said, clapping slowly. “Well done. Although I bet it’s usually a bit steamier, isn’t it? A bit filthy? I used to be a young man myself, you know. I remember how it was, walking around with a stiff prick all day long. Let’s see some real emotion behind it this time. Let’s see some of the heat.”

Draco stared at Dolohov and felt his cheeks burning. That mother fucker. That sadistic mother fucker.

“Come on now, Little Lord Fauntleroy. I know you don’t like blood.”

Draco stepped forward and brought his mouth to Harry’s again. He tried to imagine that they weren’t here, in this horrible dungeon, that they were together in Harry’s room in the Gryffindor tower, or maybe in Draco’s bed after Harry had snuck in under his cloak. It all seemed to bleed together, then, all those timelines, all those moments. Harry, every single version of him, loving Draco.

He carded his hand through Harry’s soft hair and let his other hand brush gently over Harry’s cheek. Harry did love him. He really did. And that was worth something, Draco thought, no matter what dark end they faced now. Harry’s love was something that no one – not Dolohov, and not the Dark Lord himself – could take from him.

When Draco drew back again, he met Harry’s eyes. Harry was looking at him with such bruising tenderness that it almost broke him, but Draco steeled himself and looked back at Dolohov. “Happy?” he ground out.

Dolohov put his hand on his own cheek and sighed. “Just beautiful. True love, I think. Brings a tear to my eye, it does.” He smiled, and Draco had to bite the inside of his cheek to keep from screaming at the sight of it.

“Unfortunately, little Lord, you’re not allowed to fall in love with your master’s enemy. You ought to have known this. It was very naughty, you realize, to have done it.” Dolohov tutted and then whacked Draco’s head with his wand. “Say *yes, it was*,” he ordered, in a wholly different voice, a voice that oozed with menace.

“Yes, it was,” said Draco.

“Alright. Good. Now, I’ll ask you – have you ever trained a dog, either one of you? Taught it not to beg at the table, not to piss in the house?”

“No,” said Draco.

“Oh, of course not, how silly of me. You had elves for that, I suppose. Well, the main thing is, when you’re training a puppy, there have to be consequences. When puppy begs at the table, it gets a smack. When puppy piddles on the floor, it gets a kick. You see? Then eventually, the puppy learns *not* to piss on the floor or beg at the table. Understand?”

“Yes,” said Draco.

“Good. Well, you, young Malfoy, have been pissing all over the Dark Lord’s floor. And now we’ve got to train it out of you.”

Draco’s legs almost gave out.

“Kiss your boyfriend,” said Dolohov, shoving him against Harry.

Fuck, this was going to hurt. It was going to hurt so much. “Don’t,” whispered Harry. But Draco knew that resisting would only be putting off the inevitable. He pressed his mouth to Harry’s.

The Cruicio hit him immediately, sending him to the floor. His mind went almost blank as he convulsed against the filthy stone, like the pain was too much to understand, too much to process. It burned everywhere, hot streaks of lightning across his skin, poison rushing through his veins, ripping apart his insides. He was dimly aware that his head was thudding against the stone floor as he shook, but that pain was so small compared to the rest that it was almost laughable.

Finally, it stopped. Draco came back to himself slowly, became aware of the fact that Harry was screaming obscenities at Dolohov.

“Now, do you see, Puppy? Do you see what happens when you piss on the floor?”

Draco, unable to speak, nodded.

“Good,” said Dolohov, wrenching him back to his feet. Draco started to fall, so Dolohov held him upright. “Now, kiss your boyfriend.”

Draco couldn't move at all by the time Dolohov was finished with him, so Dolohov left him in the back room with Harry. He'd gone into himself at some point, into some place where nothing seemed real, and he was having trouble coming back.

He knew, in some corner of his mind, that Harry had pulled his head onto his lap, that he was stroking his hair. He felt it when Harry cast a wandless cleaning spell over him and then a drying spell, because the piss that had spread over his trousers suddenly disappeared.

That was funny, almost. Dolohov kept comparing him to a puppy that pissed on the floor, and then, at some point during a Cruicio, Draco really had pissed himself. Part of him knew he ought to be embarrassed about it, but he couldn't quite manage.

"I'm so sorry," Harry said softly in his ear. He was crying. "I'm supposed to protect you." He took Draco's hand and brought it to his mouth, pressing kisses into it. "I'm so sorry."

Draco wanted to tell him it was okay, that there was nothing he could've done, but he couldn't speak. When he tried, it was like the message didn't quite reach his vocal chords or his diaphragm or his mouth, and nothing happened.

He didn't fall asleep so much as succumb to unconsciousness, but at least he passed out to the feel of Harry's soft hand smoothing his hair.

*Get up,* said a voice. *Get up, Draco.*

He knew the voice. Harry, he thought. No, not Harry. It was sharper than Harry's voice, more clipped.

Father.

Draco forced his eyes open and looked up into his father's face. He was crouched nearby, eying Draco and Harry warily. Harry was still cradling Draco's head on his lap.

"Who did this to you?" he asked, his voice steady despite the fear lurking behind his eyes.

"Dolohov," said Harry, spitting the name out like it was poison. "He's a sick bastard."

Lucius nodded. "I'll deal with him. Come with me now, Draco. You need to prepare yourself to see him."

"Who?" asked Harry.

"*Him*," said Lucius. "The Dark Lord. He's coming. And if you care about Draco at all, Potter, you'll let him go. You'll let him beg for forgiveness. In fact, if you really care about him, you'll insist upon it."

Harry's eyes were on Lucius's face, considering him. Finally, he nodded. "You should go, Draco," he said.

“No,” Draco rasped. His voice sounded like it had been destroyed along with the rest of him.

“Draco, *please*,” Harry said, his hand on Draco’s cheek, his eyes pleading. “I don’t want anything else to happen to you. You sent me away from Lovegood’s house, and I let you. Now let me do the same for you.”

Draco knew, on some level, that none of it mattered. He nodded, and allowed his father to haul him to his feet and practically carry him up to his room. He didn’t argue when his father put him in a bath of dittany, which didn’t do much, since the effects of a Crucio weren’t actually physical. He’d not been naked in front of his father since he’d been a toddler, but he was too shattered to care, and Lucius washed him in a gentle, detached way that almost felt like the touch of a Healer. He dried Draco off and helped him put on fresh trousers and a clean shirt, and then picked out a set of formal robes to put over them.

His father had him drink a potion that seemed to restore some strength to his limbs, so that at least Draco could stand upright and talk. Not that he bothered to talk, because what was there to say? A house elf – Draco didn’t notice which one – brought up a bowl of broth and a cup of tea. His father helped him spoon the broth into his mouth, and then held the tea cup for him.

A knock on the door sounded. “He’s here,” said Aunt Bella, her face stretched into a rictus grin. “He’s here!”

“We’ll come down to greet him in the foyer,” said Draco’s father.

Aunt Bella looked at Draco and curled her lip. “Draco deserved it, you know,” she said. “That and worse. He betrayed *the Dark Lord*, Lucius. How can you even look at him – “

“Enough, Bellatrix,” said Lucius tiredly. “We don’t know whether he was acting of his own accord. We know nothing. It’s entirely possible that Dumbledore forced him. That Potter forced him. Until I find out, I’m going to give him the benefit of the doubt.”

“Humph,” said Aunt Bella, looking like she’d like to say more. “Well. Hurry up. You mustn’t keep him waiting.”

After she left, Draco’s father gave him another sip of tea. “You’ll need to force yourself to stand tall. You mustn’t let him see you so weak. Fall apart afterward, if you must.”

“I know, Father,” said Draco.

“It’ll be alright, Draco. I’ll get you through this.”

Draco was shocked by the tenderness in his father’s voice. But he only nodded and got to his feet, steadying himself as best he could.

The Dark Lord was every bit as terrible as Draco remembered: slits where the nose should be; too-smooth, too-pale skin; eyes like the devil’s.



“The prodigal son,” he said, casting his horrible gaze upon Draco. “He’s returned.”

“Yes, Lord,” said Lucius, slightly bowed, looking at the floor.

“Stop looking so afraid, Lucius. It’s not him I’m interested in at the moment. Where is Harry Potter?”

“In the dungeon, Lord,” said Lucius.

“Good. Get him. Bring him to the front of the house.”

“My Lord?” asked Lucius, frowning.

“Do it, Lucius.”

Draco watched his father nod, and then retreat to the dining room.

“Draco, come. Walk with me,” said Lord Voldemort, turning towards the front hall. Bellatrix hurried ahead of him to open the door, bowing and scraping as he passed.

“You’ve done a foolish thing,” said Voldemort.

Draco said nothing and kept his head down.

“You know there are consequences for all of our actions.”

Draco nodded.

“Your father has been my lost loyal servant. You are lucky in that regard. Because of it, I have decided that your punishment will be merciful. Instead of killing you, you’ll only need to watch while I kill Harry Potter. It seems fitting, does it not? For you to lose the thing that made you betray me?”

Voldemort looked at him closely; much too close for Draco’s liking. He could see how translucent his skin was, could see the veins running purple around the edges of his mouth. He shuddered.

“You are right to be afraid, Draco,” he said. “Now sit.” He gestured to a stone bench that stood near a hedge. Draco, happy to be moving farther away from him, went, collapsing onto the cool surface of the stone.

Harry came out then. Draco’s father held one of his arms, and Bellatrix was holding the other. He looked at Draco, and Draco saw that he wasn’t afraid. Or, if he was, he was able to mask it completely. He looked full of righteous anger, determined, and a bit wary, but not afraid. Draco had thought he couldn’t love Harry any more than he already did, but he found, in that moment, that he could.

Voldemort came to stand several feet in front of him. “Harry Potter,” he said, smiling. “The Boy Who Lived.”

Bellatrix began to laugh, but a look from Voldemort shut her up.

“Come here, Harry,” Voldemort said, almost gently. “Come here to die.”

“You’d kill me unarmed? Like a coward?” Harry spat out at him.

Voldemort chuckled. It was a truly unnerving sound. “Still fighting the inevitable, I see.” He glanced around the otherwise empty front lawn. It was only the five of them: Bellatrix, Lucius, Draco, Harry and Voldemort. “Bellatrix, give him your wand.”

Bellatrix handed it over unquestioningly.

“We’ll duel, then, shall we?” asked Voldemort.

“I’ve already faced you once, Tom Riddle,” said Harry. “And I’m still here. What makes you think you can best me now?”

“I’ve grown much stronger since then. Much, much stronger.” When Harry stood motionless, Voldemort sighed. “If you won’t duel, then I’ll kill you outright. Either way, it has to be done.”

“Fine,” Harry growled. He strode closer to Voldemort, Bellatrix’s wand pointed at the ground. He looked Voldemort right in the eye, and he didn’t flinch.

They lifted their wands and then held them low at their sides, and bowed, or, at least, inclined their heads. Draco felt his heart pounding painfully in his chest as he watched them. He didn’t have a wand, and he felt completely helpless.

Voldemort and Harry turned, so their backs were to one another’s. “Three paces, Potter!” shrieked Aunt Bella. “It’s only sporting!” She began giggling again.

Harry walked the full three paces before turning, and that was his undoing.

Because of course, Voldemort didn’t. And why would he? He had one goal, and that was to kill Harry Potter. He didn’t give a fuck about fairness or rules. He spat on them at every turn. Harry should’ve known that.

“Avada Kedavra!” cried Voldemort, just as Harry spun around. The wave of pulsing green magic flew from the tip of his wand, knocking Harry in the chest. The light flashed over everything, like an atomic blast, almost knocking Draco off of the stone bench. He sat, breathing heavily, as his eyes adjusted in the aftermath.

Harry was sprawled out on the lawn, motionless.

“No!” Draco felt the word rip out of his throat. He hurtled himself forward, his limbs still so weak they almost gave out, and collapsed by Harry’s side. “Harry!” he yelled, shaking him. “Harry!”

“Draco, stop,” his father said quietly. “Step back.”

“Fuck you, I won’t!” Draco screamed. “I’m not leaving him!”

“*Draco*,” said his father.

Draco didn’t reply, only held on tighter to Harry, sobbing into his chest.

Suddenly, the Dark Lord’s voice was in his ear. “Feel that? *That* is your punishment, Draco. That feeling. Worse than death, sometimes.”

Draco shut his eyes tightly.

Voldemort left him and a moment later, he heard him telling Bellatrix and Lucius that they needed to gather everyone, that everyone needed to see for themselves that Harry Potter was dead. “Too bad we can’t mount his head on the gates,” said Bella, sounding downright giddy. “That would surely get the message out.”

Draco’s eyes caught on Bellatrix’s wand, which was still clutched in Harry’s hand. The Time-Turner was in his pocket, where he’d put it while his father had been getting his robes. He was about to take it out when he saw Harry’s mouth twitch.

No one else was paying attention. They were still busy talking over how to get word of Harry’s death out to the world as quickly as possible.

Harry’s fingers moved. Draco was hardly breathing, watching him. He couldn’t still be *alive*, could he? But no, there it was again -- fingers were twitching once more, lips pressing together, and Draco was sure, now, that he wasn’t imagining it.

Harry’s eyes fluttered open. “Hit him, Harry. Now,” whispered Draco as softly as he could. “He’s behind me, standing between my father and Bellatrix.”

Harry blinked, and Draco saw him comprehend the words. He seemed to gather himself, and then sprang up faster than Draco would ever have imagined, and pointed Bellatrix’s wand, yelling the words of the killing curse.

But Draco’s father had seen something. Must have seen Draco’s posture change, or felt something strange emanating from his son. Because before the curse could spring forth from the tip of Bellatrix’s wand, Lucius Malfoy had shouted a curse of his own, and it hit Harry right in the chest, the same green light as before, the same supersonic, silent boom ripping through the air.

Harry flew back and was still again. Draco crawled to him and took the wand. He already had the Time-Turner in his hand. “Engorgio,” he whispered.

“Put down the wand, Draco,” yelled his father. Draco threw it into the grass, keeping his back to them.

He moved the jewels and put his hand in the indentation. Just as his father reached him, he whispered the words. “The water of time flows downhill, but I will send it back up the mountain; I will bend it’s path to my will.”

Back to the Room of Requirement. Back to the Vanishing Cabinet. Doing it all like a good little Death Eater.

Draco watched his father writhing on the floor of Borgin and Burkes. And then, a few days later, he faced down Harry in the bathroom, and had his chest sliced to ribbons once more. And once more, Snape healed him.

When he was well enough to return to his room in the dungeons, Draco took the Time-Turner out of his locked trunk and returned to Unspeakable Clarke's darkened office.

He sat there for a long while, holding the Time-Turner to his chest. It had been his torment, in many ways. He would never forget what it was like to hold Harry's lifeless body in his arms. The sight of Harry, with all his bright spark extinguished, and the feelings that filled him in that moment, would haunt him forever.

But the Time-Turner had also allowed him to see so much beauty. It had let him feel, if only for a short while, what it could've been like with Harry. It showed him what it was to be loved by Harry, and, as horrible as everything else had been, he couldn't hate that part. He felt grateful for it.

He considered, briefly, trying again. There must be a way, he thought, to do it right. If only he could find the right time, the right moment, the right words...

But Draco had always believed in forces beyond himself. In magic. In fate. And what had become clear to him as he watched Harry die – twice – was that if Harry loved Draco, he would not live through the war. One way or the other, he would die before its end.

It was cruel, this line that fate appeared to have drawn in the sand, but then, life was cruel. And Draco knew he had no right to rail against its unfairness. After all he'd done, after all the hurt he'd caused others in the past, he had no right to protest. And Harry had done so much good, *was* so good, that perhaps the universe was stepping in to show Draco that he didn't deserve him. That he would never deserve him.

But Harry was alive here, in his own timeline. Harry was alive and well and whole, and while he didn't love Draco, maybe that was alright.

Because Draco would rather live in a world where Harry was alive than one where he wasn't.

He ran his hand along the elegant lines of Time-Turner once more and tucked it carefully back under Clarke's robes. And then he made his way home, one painful step after another. He didn't sleep that night, only stared at the ceiling, while memories of nights full of tangled limbs and soft hands pressed down on him, making it hard to breathe.

# One Foot In Front Of the Other

## Chapter Summary

Draco tries to move on

“You can spend minutes, hours, days, weeks, or even months over-analyzing a situation; trying to put the pieces together, justifying what could've, would've happened... or you can just leave the pieces on the floor and move the fuck on.”

— Tupac Shakur

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Draco made it through the next day, somehow, thanks to some serious compartmentalizing and multiple espressos and cups of tea. That night he slept like the dead and woke up feeling, if not good, exactly, then resolved, at least. This was his only life, his only timeline, and he was going to make the best of it. He took Hermione out for lunch, and was able to laugh a little with her, as she described Ron's awful hangover the morning after Neville's stag.

That night, as Draco was making spaghetti sauce on his stovetop, the Barred Owl tapped on his window. Draco hurried over to let it in and untied the message from its leg.

*Hello again Draco,*

*I hope your week is going well. My mum's been driving me a bit mad with all her fussing (what else is new?), but other than that, I've just been relaxing and catching up with family and some of my mates from school.*

*I've been thinking quite a lot about Friday, and about you in general. I'd like to see you again if that's okay. You said maybe this weekend -- how does Saturday sound? Or, if that doesn't work, what about tonight? I can come over right now!*

*Kidding! (Sort of.)*

*Really, though, let me know if you're free on Saturday. If you are, I'll think of something fun for us to do.*

*Charlie*

Draco retrieved his quill, feeling determined.

*Dear Charlie,*

*I would love to see you on Saturday. Maybe you can buy me some more expensive wine.*

*Kidding! (I really am kidding, at least about the wine.)*

*Draco*

He tied the letter to the owl's leg, gave it a quick pat, and sent it off.

When he was in bed later that night, the window tapped again.

*Draco,*

*I can't wait for Saturday. How do you feel about skydiving?*

*Charlie*

Draco frowned. Skydiving? He'd never heard the term. Did you get on your broom, fly over a swimming pool, and dive in? Because that's what it sounded like.

*Dear Charlie,*

*I don't know what that is, but I don't like the sound of it. Explain yourself, please.*

*Draco*

An owl dropped off a letter for Draco on Thursday at the Ministry, and it came to him through inter-office mail.

*Draco,*

*Skydiving is when you board an airplane, let it take you high up into the sky, and then jump out of it. You have a parachute on so you don't die. Since we're wizards, we can control the 'chutes a bit, thus eliminating any of the potential hazards that muggles face when they do this.*

*But honestly, if muggles can do it, surely you can.*

*Say yes, won't you?*

*Charlie*

Draco felt his chest tighten. Oh, fuck, that sounded awful. Heights were not his forte, nor was bravery for that matter. But Charlie had taunted him, and that could not stand.

*Dear Charles,*

*You are a madman, but I am no coward. I will jump out of this airplane with you.*

*If I end up dead, I will be most displeased.*

*Draco*

That night, he got another owl, this one short, sweet, and to the point, except for the postscript.

*Draco,*

*I'll come to collect you on Saturday morning at 9:30 a.m.*

*Charlie*

*PS - Please don't call me Charles, even if you're mad at me. That's my mum's job, and I'd rather not associate you with my mum. It would make things quite uncomfortable, particularly since I would like to see you naked.*

Draco laughed and took up his quill.

*Dear Charlie,*

*I am willing to jump out of this plane, but I am going to do it with all my clothes on. This point is non-negotiable.*

*Draco*

On Friday, for the first time in his entire career, Draco skipped pub night. He wanted to rest up for his potentially life-ending adventure, and besides, getting a little distance from Potter couldn't hurt.

Saturday dawned bright and warm, and Draco was anxious as he put on a pair of jeans and a gray, long-sleeved shirt over a plain white short-sleeved one. Charlie had said to dress in light layers; hopefully this was acceptable. At 9:30 sharp, Charlie stepped out of the floo. Draco was waiting for him in the living room, having spent the last half hour dusting and straightening things that really didn't need to be straightened in an attempt to burn off some of his nervous energy.

"Hello," Charlie said, wiping soot off his shoulders. He was dressed similarly to Draco, in jeans and a light blue t-shirt and smart-looking trainers.

"Hi," Draco said, feeling suddenly shy as Charlie approached and kissed his mouth briefly.

"You're freaking out, aren't you?" Charlie said with that broad, open grin.

Draco considered bluffing, but decided against it. "I really am."

"It's incredible, I promise. I've done it loads of time. And it really is safe. The place I go to is wizard-run, so there's charms and protections on the equipment. They've never had a single accident." Charlie went quiet and looked at Draco for a moment. "We don't have to do this if you don't want to."

"No, I want to," Draco said. "Or at least I want to prove that I *can*."

"You're sure?"

Draco nodded.

"Alright, here," Charlie said, offering his arm. "I'll Side-Along you."

They apparated into what looked to be an airfield. "We're southwest of Lowestoft," Charlie explained. "Come on."

Not too far off there was a disturbingly tiny plane and two wizards waiting nearby. One was only a little older than Draco, the other middle-aged. "Charlie, mate, good to see you!" said the younger one.

"Hullo!" Charlie said, giving him a quick, back-slapping hug. "This is Draco," he said, pointing. "First timer, like I said."

"We'll take good care of you," said the other man, nodding at Draco. "I'm Ben, and this is John. John's been running this operation for fifteen years; he's an old pro."

"Nice to meet you," Draco said, his heart in his throat.



John went through an introduction to all the equipment, and the process. He explained how to jump and how to position yourself. He explained that Draco would be jumping in tandem with Charlie, which made Draco feel just a tiny bit better. Draco had to sign some waivers, and then Ben helped Draco into a black jumpsuit and a helmet, then strapped on his parachute, checking all the buckles again and again. Then they were boarding the airplane, which was really very small.

Soon they were up in the sky, seated on benches along the side of the plane, able to see out the windows for miles around. They were strapped in, but the flight was really very smooth, the weather perfect. The sea was visible in the east, and thin white clouds were scattered around beneath them. When they reached a certain altitude, they were allowed to take off their seatbelts and wait by the door. Draco's palms were sweating.

"You ready?" asked Ben.

Charlie looked at Draco and Draco nodded tightly. "Ready," said Charlie.

A red light was flashing above the door, and then suddenly the door on the side of the plane was sliding up. The light turned green. Ben began to clip Draco's back to Charlie's front, and when he finished with that, he checked over all the equipment again. Then he gave them both a thumbs up.

The world below looked perfectly flat, and very, very far away, and the air rushing past them was cold.

"Ready?" Charlie asked in his ear.

Draco nodded.

"3...2...1"

Together, they fell out of the door, and Draco was afraid he would start screaming or throwing up. He squeezed his eyes shut tightly and clenched his teeth, bracing himself for that gut-churning feeling of falling.

It never came. The air felt like a cushion, buoying them up. The wind was cold and intense, and Draco felt as though he could hear his heartbeat in his ears. His chest felt too full of adrenaline, like it might explode, but he found he rather enjoyed the sensation. He opened his eyes, and the world below was unending and hazy and far away, and suddenly he was overcome, whooping as they continued to free-fall, every part of him singing with life.

After a bit more of this, Draco felt a dramatic jolt, like he's run smack into something, and he realized it was the parachute opening up above them. They slowed, floating, and everything seemed peaceful and bright, the whole world open below, the whole sky above. Draco thought of Harry, then, of what he would think of skydiving. He imagined he would like it.

The earth grew closer and closer. Too soon, Charlie was handing him the parachute handles, and he was gripping them tightly, and the ground was rushing up to meet them. They pulled up their legs, landing on their arses like they'd been instructed.

Draco felt Charlie's arms around him. "You did it!" Charlie cried.

And holy hell, he had, hadn't he?

They went back to Draco's afterward and cleaned up, then ordered Thai (even though it was a bit early for dinner; they'd skipped lunch) and ate in the living room, seated on the floor by the coffee table. It was easy to be with Charlie -- easy and comfortable. Being with him gave Draco a warm feeling, cozy, like sitting in front of a fire on a cold day.

And if it wasn't what he felt when he was with Harry, well, that was something Charlie never needed to know.

When Charlie started kissing him, it was easy to let him, easy to give in. It was easy to let Charlie come upstairs, to let Charlie undress him slowly. It was easy, even, to let Charlie fuck him gently, and it was simple, to hold him and kiss him and move beneath him.

When they were done, Charlie pulled Draco close and slipped off into sleep.

Draco stayed awake for a long time afterward, thinking of Harry, of his green eyes with their too-dark lashes. Remembering that other life where things had been so different, where Harry had been the one holding him.

Finally, Draco took Charlie's hand in his. It was big and warm and limp with sleep. Draco held it tighter and drifted off.

They went out once more before Charlie left. A third date, as Draco had predicted, this one on the Monday night after their skydiving excursion. Unspeakable Clarke had come back to the office that morning, and Draco knew that the Time-Turner was now forever out of reach. He'd spent a humiliating lunch break in the loo, crying over the loss of it. It hadn't been a surprise, of course. He'd known Clarke was coming back that day. But it felt final in a way he hadn't been anticipating.

Charlie and Draco ate at a little fish and chips place, one that Charlie swore was the best in the entire world, and it was, in fact, very good. The place had a comfortable, slightly frayed air to it that reminded Draco of the Burrow. The lighting was warm and golden, the tables worn smooth with many years of use.

They walked around the city afterward, holding hands. "Would you mind if I wrote you from Romania?" asked Charlie.

"Not at all. I'd like that," said Draco.

They made love again in Draco's bed, and Draco groaned into Charlie's mouth as he came. As he fell asleep, he thought of Harry.

In the morning they said their goodbyes, and Charlie kissed him for a long time, and said he would miss him. “I’ll miss you, too,” Draco said, and that was true. He would.

Days kept passing, as days do, and Draco finally returned to pub night in mid-September. He kept his eyes away from the Auror booth – for the most part, anyway.

Hermione was working on another Time-Turner, and Draco was still messing around with the bottom drawer of the smut chest, along with a new project involving a mysterious love potion that was making amorous lovers accidentally bite little bits off of their partners in the throes of passion. In general, he was anxious to get the hell out of the Love Chamber and work on something unrelated to romance.

Pansy and Draco resumed their wild nights out, although Draco was no longer having illicit sex in loos or in alleys or in hastily-booked hotel rooms. A few kisses here and there, but that was all.

Charlie wrote every week or so, filling Draco in on the newest developments at the sanctuary, and what he and his friends were doing on the weekends. The arrival of Charlie’s owls made Draco’s chest warm, and he read the letters with pleasure. He did, in fact, miss Charlie a bit. The missing was a tolerable thing, though, and it didn’t keep him up at night.

Thoughts of Harry still, in fact, kept him up at night, but Draco was certain that those would fade with time.

Mostly certain, anyway.

September ended, and October arrived with its bright leaves and cold nights. Draco finally broke the mystery of the bottom drawer: if you put a picture of your lover inside, it would place a curse on them that prohibited them from ever being happy with anyone else. Draco thought he understood why someone would wish to dole out such a curse, although he himself would never dare. And really, deep down, he wouldn’t want to. Even if Harry couldn’t be happy with him, Draco’d still rather Harry be happy.

“Draco!” called a voice from the fireplace. Draco sighed and peeled himself off his sofa and looked into the flames. “Come on through! I’ve got something for you,” said Pansy when she saw him. “But take off those hideous trousers first!” He was wearing flannel pajama trousers. It was seven o’clock in the evening. He had been wearing them since last night. He was having a bit of a lazy weekend, but it was quite cold now, so he felt entitled.

“Oh, alright. Give me a minute,” he said, and began to climb the stairs.

“Put on the black leather ones!” Pansy yelled.

“To sit on your couch?”

“We’re not sitting on my couch!”

Draco wasn't in the mood to go out, but Pansy obviously *was*, and she never said no to him when he was itching to go somewhere. He supposed he ought to accompany her. He stomped up the rest of the stairs, showered and shaved, and squeezed himself into his black leather pants, picking out a plain black t-shirt to go with them. He looked gloomy in all black, like he was in mourning.

"There's a good lad," Pansy said as he wandered into her kitchen a few minutes later. She was leaning against her stainless-steel refrigerator, wearing a skirt so short it should have been illegal. "Here, have a drink." She handed him something pink with a pineapple slice sitting on the rim.

"What the hell is this?" he asked, eyeballing it.

"Delicious," she said.

He took a sip. It was bubbly and sweet, but not entirely awful.

"Got you something," she said, grabbing a little gift bag off the countertop.

"Oh, you shouldn't have!" Draco said, smiling and feeling himself brighten, just a bit.

Pansy giggled. "You're such a whore for presents."

"Hush," Draco said, digging through tissue paper. He pulled out a soft, delicate something in a glowing, florescent blue. "Another mesh shirt?" he asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Can't help it. I have a fetish," she said, smiling wickedly. "And besides, you need to be gorgeous tonight. We're going to a place that just opened and we're going to have the best time we've ever had in our entire lives."

Draco smiled, or at least tried to, before setting the shirt down on the counter. He took another sip of his pink drink.

"Granger's coming, by the way."

Draco coughed and sent the contents of his mouth flying everywhere. "Come again, now?" he asked, absently using a cleaning spell on his now pink-drink-spotted shirt. "I could have sworn you just said Granger was coming with us."

"She is," Pansy said.

"Explain yourself." Draco crossed his arms in front of his chest and tried to look severe.

Pansy sighed. "She owled me this morning to ask me how you were doing -- turns out I'm not the only one worried about you. Anyway, I owled back and then she popped in for tea and then --"

"You had *Hermione Granger* over for tea? What the fuck, Pansy!"

“It was *for you*, you ungrateful slag. Anyway, we decided we were going to take you out tonight, get you wasted. So.”

“So,” Draco echoed. “Well, this is unexpected. And bizarre. But alright, I like Hermione. Can’t quite picture her clubbing, though. And I distinctly do *not* like the idea of you two bints running around behind my back, plotting against me.”

“Plotting *for* you. It’s different. Now go put on your new shirt.”

“Ugh, I hate you, Pansy.”

“You love me.”

Draco went to the bathroom to change into Mesh Shirt Number Two and had to admit he looked excellent in it. The color did wonderful things to his complexion. Between the mesh and the leather, he also looked a bit – okay, a lot – like a deviant, in a way he very much enjoyed. He dug around in Pansy’s makeup case. He wasn’t a fan of wearing makeup, exactly, but he did love a nice black eyeliner.

“Here, do this,” he said, coming back into the kitchen.

“That’s the spirit!” Pansy cried, clapping, before taking the eyeliner from him. She worked quickly, nodding to herself. “Gorgeous!” she declared when she finished.

“Hello?” called a voice from the other room.

“In the kitchen!” Pansy called.

Hermione rounded the corner and stopped dead in her tracks, her eyes sweeping over Draco. “Oh,” she said. “You look...”

“Painfully hot?” Pansy offered, downing down the rest of her drink.

“Well,” Hermione said, gulping. “Yes.”

“Don’t even think about it, Granger,” Pansy said. “Even if you were able to talk him into shagging you, it’d be awful. He’d lay there, close his eyes, and think of England.”

“Not England, Pans. Cock.”

“Right,” Pansy said. “English cock.”

“I’m quite international about it, actually. Cocks around the world.”

Hermione was sputtering. “I’m not – I only –” She stopped trying to speak when she saw Draco and Pansy were laughing at her.

“I’m just teasing,” Pansy said. “Don’t do it, though. You would be extremely disappointed. Trust me.”

“Wait,” Hermione said, looking back and forth between the two of them. “Do you mean that you...have you two...?”

“Oh, loads of times,” Pansy said. “All our most pathetic and lonely moments. Always terrible.”

“Not any time recently!” Draco protested, feeling himself blush.

“New Years Eve?” Pansy shot back, raising a brow.

“Oh, well. But that doesn’t count. That was that night with the, you know, and I was off my arse. Merlin, I was practically humping your couch.”

“We had an interesting time experimenting with ecstasy,” Pansy explained to a very wide-eyed Hermione. “By the way, you are *not* wearing that.”

Hermione looked down at her jeans and perfectly nice top. “Well, I don’t even own anything like *that*,” she said, eying Pansy and Draco.

“Yes, but I do,” Pansy said, grinning.

“Oh, as if your clothes would fit me!” Hermione cried. “You’re,” she said, gesturing to Pansy’s ample bosom. “And I’m,” she finished, gesturing to her own small breasts.

“Don’t worry,” Draco said. “Nothing Pansy wears is actually her size. She likes to buy everything five sizes too small so that her tits look even more obscene than they do otherwise. Trust me, you’ll fit.”

Hermione laughed loudly before covering her mouth like she hadn’t meant to. “Oh, why the hell not?” she managed.

# Dance Monkey

## Chapter Summary

Pansy and Hermione take Draco out on the town. Guess who shows up?

I saw myself, the way one does in dreams, moving amongst the guests. Moving slowly, much more slowly than one can in life, the others a blur of silk and sequins.

I was looking for someone.”

— Kate Morton, *The House At Riverton*

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An hour later, they’d guzzled down more of Pansy’s pink drinks, which were much, much stronger than they appeared. Hermione was wearing a pair of low-slung suede pants that clung to her like a second skin, along with a precariously small white halter top. She kept clutching at her stomach and Pansy kept pushing her hands away. “Stop hiding! You look really good!” Pansy scolded.

“I don’t,” Hermione moaned. “I look naked.”

“All your bits are covered,” Draco said, “which is more than I can say for Pans. And you do look gorgeous.” She did, too. Pansy had gussied up her hair and makeup, and she was surprisingly fit underneath all the button-ups and cardigans and work robes that she usually wore.

“Fine. But I need to drink more then,” Hermione said. “By the way, what’s the name of this club? I want to let Ron know.”

“New place called Patronus. I know one of the owners; we’ll get right in,” Pansy said, pouring tequila shots.

“Patronus?” Draco said, frowning.

“Yeah, it’s a bit of a theme, from what I hear. Blue and white lights and iridescent animal décor and what-not,” said Pansy.

“Tell me it’s not going to be full of furies,” Draco said.

“Furies?” asked Hermione.

Pansy giggled and slung an arm around the other girl. “Oh, I am going to have so much fun corrupting you, Granger.” She handed Hermione one of the shot glasses and picked up her own. “To corruption.”

Draco grabbed one, too. “To corruption! But not too much!” he cried, clinking his glass with theirs and downing the shot. “Wouldn’t want Weasley to murder me,” he said, winking at Hermione, before setting the glass firmly back down.

The club was packed. It was not full of furies, thank Merlin. The crowd was mostly young, sexy, and a bit edgy; Draco was not the only one in a mesh shirt. The DJ was killing it, the drinks were strong, and before long, Draco and Pansy managed to get Hermione out on the dance floor. Her confidence seemed to grow as the night wore on, though Draco wasn’t sure whether that was because of the shots she kept taking or because guys were hitting on her left and right. Probably a bit of both.

When Pansy started sticking her tongue down some poor bloke’s throat, Draco and Hermione decided it was time for a water break.

“You seem like you’re enjoying yourself,” Draco said after he’d chugged half the glass.

“Well, I am, in fact,” Hermione said, grinning around her straw. “Pansy’s surprisingly...”

“Nice?” Draco suggested.

“No. Not really,” Hermione laughed. “But fun, in a strange way.”

“Mm, she is. Strange, I mean. I love her dearly.”

“I can tell. You’re different with her, you know. Less guarded.”

“Well, we *have* been friends since we were about two years old,” Draco said.

“It’s lovely,” she said.

Draco gave her a look.

“No, really!” she cried. “It is! It reminds me a bit of me and Harry, actually. It’s different in some ways, of course. Harry and I don’t have sex with each other for one thing,” she said, biting down a smile. “But in other ways, I think it’s quite similar. He’s the best at telling me when I’ve been stupid and getting beyond what I *say* to what I actually *mean* and knowing what I need, when I need it. Does that make sense?”

Draco nodded, feeling a phantom ache at the mention of Harry’s name, and another ache at the memory of being that person for Hermione. “Yes,” he said.

It must have showed on his face, because Hermione winced. “Oh, I’m sorry, Draco. I’m an idiot. I shouldn’t have brought him up.” She sighed. “How’re things with Charlie, by the way?”

“Good,” Draco said. “We’re still writing. Probably won’t see him until Christmastime, when he’s home.” He looked closer at her. “Why do you look surprised?”



“Oh, I’m not,” she said quickly. “It makes a lot of sense that you two get on so well.” She played with her engagement ring, twirling it around and around. “Does he makes you happy?”

He looked up at those too-sharp eyes of hers, eyes that missed nothing. “He does,” Draco said firmly.

She looked oddly saddened by that, as she reached over and squeezed his hand. “I’m glad to hear it,” she said, and somehow he knew, then, that they were both lying.

“Let’s go dance some more, shall we?” she said, forcing a smile. “The boys out on the floor probably miss us.”

“Mostly you, Miss Cropped Halter Top,” Draco teased, nudging her. “Shots first?”

“I’m going to feel like such hell tomorrow,” Hermione groaned. “But fine. Yes. Tequila. Let’s do this.” She smacked her hand firmly on top of the bar and gritted her teeth. Draco was a little smitten with tonight’s version of Hermione. She was relentless and determined as ever, but all her energy was directed towards getting absolutely pissed.

They ordered and threw back their shots before they could talk themselves out of it. Hermione winced. “Oh, fuck me, those burn going down.”

“Did...did you just say fuck?” Draco asked, an enormous grin spreading across his face.

Hermione giggled. “Shut up. It’s not nearly as offensive as half the things *you* say. Come dance with me, Mr. See-Through Whore Shirt!” She grabbed his hand and yanked him away from the bar.

“Hermione Granger! *Language!*” he cried, letting her pull him back into the writhing crowd.

Draco was fairly well fucked up. Not so drunk he couldn’t walk or see, but everything had taken on a slightly surreal tint. Pansy finished her snog and resumed dancing with them, and soon she and Hermione were getting a bit naughty with each other, in a way that Draco felt was probably for the benefit of all the men that were looking on with their mouths hanging open.

Draco danced briefly with a few guys but wasn’t into it. He was too fuzzy-brained to respond to that sort of attention, and really didn’t want to meet anyone tonight anyway. He was feeling good, happy(ish), lost in drink and dance, his body free of all inhibition, his mind free of nearly all thought.

“We’re getting drinks!” Pansy yelled, leaning close to him and pecking him on the cheek.

He smiled at her and let the beat pulse through him, let the throbbing lights paint him in shades of blue and silvery-white.

A hand found his waist, and he turned around at his own pace, unconcerned. The man was handsome. A blonde, though, and he didn't usually go for blondes. Dark blonde, but still. His face was quite nice, though, his jaw broad and strong, his hooded eyes glimmering under sharp brows. He was built, but not in a gym-rat sort of way. He was even taller than Draco. Overall, quite delectable.

Draco put his hands on the man's chest because he was curious. It felt as well-muscled as it looked, and Draco smirked up at him from under his eyelashes.

A thumb slid under the mesh of Draco's shirt, soft against his skin.

Oh, why not? It wasn't like it mattered.

When the man leaned closer, Draco tipped his head back, lips parting softly. A hungry mouth covered his own, tongue hot and wet against his. It was a well-executed kiss, skilled in every respect, but Draco felt nothing.

He pulled away, looking into a pair of eyes that were brown and not green. But even if they had been green, they still wouldn't be the eyes Draco wanted to see. And this wasn't the chest he wanted to press himself against. And those weren't the hands he wanted tracing lines along his bare skin.

They never were the right ones, were they? It always felt empty because of that, because his heart was already spoken for – had been spoken for – for such a long time.

He'd had so many hands on his body, had tasted so many mouths. But never the right hands. Never the right mouth.

Except that they had been, once, when he was too drunk to remember it. Only once – in this timeline, anyway.

"I've got to find my friends," he said, taking a step away from the man. "Sorry."

"Whoa, whoa," said the guy, pulling at Draco's shirt. "Hang on."

Draco stilled and glared. "Take your hands off my clothes," he said, his voice low and dangerous. The guy was yanking on the fabric, just standing there stretching out Draco's brand-new shirt. *Arsehole*.

The guy grinned. "Tease, huh?" he asked.

Draco took a step closer and yanked his shirt away. "I'm not a tease. I simply realized I'd rather chop off my own cock than fuck you with it."

"A *mouthy* tease," the guy said, taking a step closer, and Draco felt a hand press firmly against his groin.

Draco was pulling his arm back to take a swing when something else collided with the man's face. Draco jumped away and suddenly Harry was there, pushing the other man down to the ground and hitting him repeatedly. Hermione and Pansy were standing nearby, mouths

shaped like two little O's, and then Weasley was there too, pushing through the crowd, trying to get to Harry. Unfortunately, a bouncer got there first, and then another bouncer, and Draco was being hauled away, and then in a blink, he found himself standing outside on a curb next Harry, who had a rapidly-swelling eye and a split lip.

"I could have handled that myself," Draco snapped.

"Yeah," Harry said, sounding tired. "Probably you could've."

Draco sighed and, with a quick glance around, took out his wand and pointed it at Harry's lip. He murmured the words quietly, and the skin began to knit itself back together. He repeated the process with Harry's eye, and the swelling stalled and then began to reverse itself.

"Thanks," said Harry, touching his lip carefully. "And I know you could've handled that on your own. I'm sorry, okay? It was none of my business, like usual."

Draco nodded. "It wasn't. Where did you even come from, anyway? How were you suddenly *there*?"

"We'd been in the club for a few minutes at that point. We were looking for Hermione."

"She knew you were coming?" Draco asked, feeling slightly betrayed.

"No. Or, I don't know. She stopped texting Ron after he offered to come and get her."

Draco snorted. "I don't think she did it on purpose. She's kind of wasted."

"Yeah," Harry said. "I noticed. Ron and I are also far from sober, by the way. Sort of explains why we decided to show up unannounced. And why I was wailing on that bloke."

Draco examined him. He did look slightly intoxicated, eyes a little unfocused, movements a little exaggerated. Not staggeringly drunk, but certainly tipsy. Draco wasn't exactly sober, either. "So what, you were just hanging out and happened to notice that guy being an asshole?"

Harry looked over at Draco and made a face. "Eh. Not exactly."

Draco raised an eyebrow.

"I might have been, ah, well."

"*Words*, Potter."

"Staring. At you. I was having a hard time taking my eyes off of you, to be honest. You look...really, er, nice."

Draco inhaled sharply.

Harry ran his hands through his hair, making it even wilder. "Fuck, sorry. I'm not sure why I said that. I mean, it's *true*, but I just...I'm a bit drunk, like I said."

“Weasley and the girls are probably looking for us,” Draco said, looking down at his feet.

“Oh,” Harry said. “Right.” Neither one of them moved.

“Draco...” Harry’s voice was suddenly very soft.

Draco looked up again, and the expression on Harry’s face made his breath still in his chest. They stood like that for a moment, eyes locked, the air around them thick and almost humming with tension, and then Harry’s mouth caught his.

Harry’s lips were soft and full and sweet, and Draco could taste whiskey on his tongue. He couldn’t move. He couldn’t move, or breathe, or do anything besides *feel*. His skin was tingling and he was reeling in sensation of the mouth pressed against his own, the hands that snaked up into his hair, the breath against his lips. “*Harry*,” he gasped.

Harry groaned in reply, deepening the kiss, wrapping his arms around Draco, pulling him flush against his own hard body. Draco found himself backing up slowly until he felt the brick of the building under his shoulder blades. He let his head fall back against the wall, and then Harry’s mouth was on his throat, the soft spot beneath his ear, pressing hotly against the sensitive skin there.

“Fuck, Draco,” Harry groaned, nipping at his earlobe before taking Draco’s face in his hands and kissing him again. His hands slid slowly over Draco’s shoulders and down his back, settling at his waist for a moment before dipping down over the curve of his arse. “You don’t know,” he said breathlessly against Draco’s mouth, his words sending shivers down Draco’s spine. “You don’t know what you do to me.”

Draco pressed closer, letting his own hands drift towards Harry’s hair. For all its wildness, it was soft as down, and Draco burrowed his face in Harry’s neck, inhaling, dizzy with the smell of him. He smelled a bit like sheets that had been hung out to dry in the sunshine, and like soap, with an almost imperceptible tang of some woodsy cologne or aftershave. He smelled like himself. Like nothing else in the entire world.

Harry was trying to pull him ever closer, and he could feel the considerable length of Harry’s cock against his own. Harry’s hands slipped below the waist of his leather pants, teasing along the edge of them. “These fucking trousers,” Harry said, giving Draco’s lower lip a bite. “My *god*, the way you look in these trousers. And this,” he said, running a hand up Draco’s stomach and chest, making Draco shudder. “The fuck are you trying to do, wearing this? Trying to kill me?”

Draco started to laugh, but it was swallowed up by Harry’s mouth and tongue, hungry and unrelenting. Draco forgot that they were out on the street, forgot that this was a completely terrible idea, and gave himself over to it, shuddering against the ferocity of Harry’s kiss, letting his hands travel down over Harry’s chest. He slipped them underneath the thin t-shirt, felt the smooth, hard planes of Harry’s stomach and back, and wished their clothes would just spontaneously fall off. “You feel so good,” Draco whispered. “Fuck, Harry, you feel so good.”

Harry dug his fingers into Draco's back. "I want you," he said, biting at Draco's neck then smoothing over it with his tongue. "Come home with me. Please."

Just the thought of it sent a rush of blood to Draco's cock, and he ground his hips harder against Harry, who kissed him like he meant to drag his soul out of his mouth. "Yes," said Draco, his voice unsteady.

"Yeah?" Harry said, sliding his tongue against Draco's and reaching a hand down to Draco's cock.

Draco heard his own breath hitch, heard Harry moan against his lips.

And then he stopped, frozen in place.

Harry was drunk. Harry was drunk and asking Draco to go home with him, and it was going to be a repeat of last time. Harry would wake up, explain that it was all a mistake and couldn't happen again, and Draco would have to feel that empty, hollow ache again, that ripped-out-heart feeling again, and it would be even worse, because he would actually *remember* it this time. He would remember every single one of Harry's touches, every single one of the kisses that Harry pressed against his mouth, every sensation of skin dragging against skin. He would remember every ragged, whispered word that passed between them. And it wouldn't be the Harry of some other timeline, some other place, some other life. It would be *this* Harry. Here. Now.

And then Draco would never get over it. Never.

It was nearly impossible to push Harry away. Draco's body protested at every point, wanting nothing to do with putting a stop to the sensations that were thrumming through it. It was begging him to let it happen and to hell with the consequences. But he managed, by some heroic effort of will, to push off of Harry gently.

"Wait. Stop."

Harry, to his credit, drew away instantly.

"I can't go home with you. I'm sorry," Draco said, and his voice sounded like silk snagging and ripping along a trail of broken glass, both impossibly soft and shredded, all at once. "I know you don't really want this. You're drunk. It'll just end up like last time."

Harry blinked. His mouth was bright pink and swollen, his eyes dazed. "It's not like last time."

"Of course it is. You're still you. I'm still me. Remember?"

Harry stared, confused, like Draco was speaking Veela. "I need to leave," Draco said. "I can't...I *can't*."

And before Harry could say anything more, Draco disappeared.

Hermione, still dressed in her club clothes, was waiting for him in his kitchen. She had started the kettle. “Hermione?” he called uncertainly.

She took one long look at him and knew. “Oh, Draco,” she said, coming over and wrapping him up in a hug. “What happened?”

“What are you doing here? Don’t you need to get home to Weasley?” he mumbled into her hair.

“I don’t. I told him I needed to talk to you.”

He pulled away and considered her for a moment. Her face was so familiar to him, and, at this point, so dear. He recalled their day out by the lake at Hogwarts, when he’d confided in her. That had been a different Hermione, yes. But, after seeing different versions of people in all his timelines, Draco had learned that they were always only ever themselves. If Hermione was capable of being that kind of friend to Draco in the other timeline, she would be capable of it now.

“I want to tell you something. But it’s a bit...involved. It’ll take some time.” It was already past one in the morning.

“I don’t have anywhere to be, Draco,” she said, giving him a gentle smile. “And we’ve got tea coming.”

Draco nodded, feeling an unexpected lightness sweep over him. He’d never stopped to consider what it had cost him to keep all of this tucked away inside himself, to never share it with anyone. He was ready to unload the weight of it now, he decided. More than ready. “You know Clarke’s mystery project? The one that took him two years?”

She nodded, frowning. “Yes, but what does that have to do with anything?”

“I think I need to start with that.”

# Hard Truths

## Chapter Summary

Hermione talks to Draco

“Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”  
— Leo Tolstoy

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“Wait, wait, wait,” said Hermione. “I want to hear what a Time-Turner has to do with all of this, but first, you have to tell me what happened tonight.”

“Oh, right,” Draco said. “Well, ah. Harry punched that bloke.”

“Right.”

“And we got tossed out of the club.”

“Yes, saw that, too. What then? Did you get into a fight with Harry about it?”

“Not exactly,” said Draco as the kettle began boiling. He went to fetch the bags and the teapot from the cabinet and quickly assembled them. “We ended up snogging,” he said, sitting down across from her.

“Draco!” exclaimed Hermione. “What in Merlin’s name...well, then why did you come home looking so sad?”

“I put a stop to it. Because, you know...”

“I’m afraid I *don’t* know,” said Hermione. She stood up to fetch cups, which he’d forgotten to get out. He liked that she knew right where they were in his kitchen.

“Because he’d just do the same thing again, Hermione. He was drinking, and he wanted me to go back to his, and I didn’t want it to be a repeat of last time, when he woke up and told me it wouldn’t work and left.”

Hermione sighed.

“I couldn’t handle it, not again. There’s too much, on my end, anyway, and...” Draco shrugged.

“Explain what that means -- ‘too much’. When you told me that night at the pub that you fancied Harry a bit, what were we talking about, Draco?”

Draco covered his face with his hands. "I don't know," he said, his voice muffled.

"I can't help you if you're not honest with me," said Hermione, peeling his hands away.

"It's...I *really* fancy him, let's say."

Hermione arched an eyebrow.

"Oh, Salazar," Draco said, banging his head on the table. "I've been obsessed with him since sixth year. Well, no, that's not true. Obsessed with him since first year, crushing pathetically on him since sixth year. A bit in love with him, probably."

Hermione patted his head reassuringly and then he heard her pour their tea, so he sat back up and wrapped his hands around his cup. She'd used the yellow ones; she *did* know him, didn't she?

"Sixth year? How did that work? You and Harry didn't exactly get on in sixth year."

"No, I know. But I was terrified out of my mind that entire year, you know, because of what I had to do. And there Harry was, shouting the Dark Lord's name to anyone who would listen, and he was just so...so *fearless*. And the Dark Lord *was* afraid, I could tell. He was afraid of Harry. And somehow, I don't know, I started to think of him as a bit of a hero."

Hermione took a sip of her tea and smiled. "Understandable. He was."

Draco sighed. "I used to imagine...oh god, this is so embarrassing. But when I was at the Manor seventh year, when everything had gone to hell and there were a bunch of psychopaths living there, doing all sorts of horrible things right in front of me, I used to imagine that Harry would *know*, somehow, that I was afraid, that I was essentially trapped, and that he'd... oh, I don't know. Come find me. Get me the hell out of there." He smiled over at her ruefully.

Hermione had her head tilted to the side when he finished and patted his hand. "That's quite sweet. Makes me feel a little sad, thinking of how it must have been for you back then, but it's sweet, too."

"Foolish, more like."

"Not so foolish. He likes you, too, Draco."

"Not in the same way. Clearly."

"Well, I don't know," she said, thoughtfully. "Harry's not one to spell things like that out. But you don't go around constantly trying to snog someone you don't like. Not to mention getting jealous over them, and getting into fist fights over them, and talking your friends' ears off about them, and --"

"He's talked about me?"

"Well. Not lately, no. But I think that's because you and I have gotten close. Before though, he did. Ever since the war, any time he'd see you, he'd always go on about it. What you'd



said or done, marveling at how things between you and him seemed friendly. He'd speculate on what it must be like for you, trying to move beyond your past. It wasn't just once or twice, Draco. It was...a lot. And there were other people, like Pansy or Greg, who ran into him occasionally, but he never talked about *them*. Just you."

Draco tried to wrap his head around this and found he couldn't. "I really thought we'd turned a corner that night at the pub. We were having so much fun together, and then that morning... he just seemed so horrified by the whole thing."

"He certainly didn't seem horrified by you that night. Circe, he was acting absolutely smitten. Staring at you, flirting with you. Everybody saw it, Draco. Why do you think I talked to you about it?"

"Because you knew I liked him?"

"No. I didn't. Not then; not until after I asked. I brought it up because I could tell Harry liked *you*."

"Oh."

"After darts, when you two sat down at the table and started making up that card game – "

"What? We made up a card game? I honestly don't remember this at all."

Hermione giggled. "It was ridiculous. You wouldn't tell the rest of us how to play it, and you were all huddled up together in the corner booth, whispering and writing all these rules on a napkin, and giggling together. God. It was really funny. And then Harry shouted something about how you'd cracked the code and you were brilliant, and then he kissed your cheek. And then you got really pink, and then he whispered something else to you, and then the next thing I knew, you two were Disapparating. Which, by the way, was very dangerous, given how much you'd had to drink."

"Yeah, I do that. When I'm really pissed."

"Not a good habit."

"No."

"So. Now tell me, please, what all this has to do with Unspeakable Clarke's project?"

Oh, shit. Draco had gotten so wrapped up in Hermione's analysis of Harry's feelings that he'd forgotten the purpose of this whole conversation. "Right," he began. "So that Saturday, after Harry left...I was a bit upset. Scratch that. I was really upset. And I went out with Pansy, because that's how I tend to cope with things, and I got pissed, and then I ended up going to the Ministry at two or three in the morning, thinking I'd do some work since I wasn't going to be able to sleep. And instead, I found myself peeking into Clarke's office, and, ah, the Time-Turner...well, it was sitting there, under his desk."

Hermione gasped. "He hadn't secured it?"

Draco shook his head. “I was still really upset over Harry, and something he’d said that morning stuck with me. He’d said he wished he could go back and erase all the cruel things we’d done to each other, but we couldn’t. But looking at that Turner, I thought, what if we *could*? What if we had always been friends, instead?”

“Oh, Draco, you didn’t.”

He grimaced. “I did.”

“But how – you haven’t aged ten years. Nothing was altered here, no un-births or anything. How?”

“It’s difficult to explain, but suffice it to say that Clarke’s Time-Turner is a different beast altogether. You can skim up and down over the years, travel down different timelines and come back. It’s incredible.”

Her eyes widened. “So what did you do?”

“I went back to first year. Before first year. I went back to the very beginning.”

He told her, then, about the first alternate timeline, where he’d befriended Harry at Madam Malkin’s, and Harry had been a Slytherin, and Hermione had been a Ravenclaw, and the four of them – Harry, Draco, Pansy and Hermione – had been best friends. He told her how Harry and Pansy had begun dating, and Hermione had been Draco’s beard (she laughed at that). He told her how he and Harry fell for each other then, how Harry was planning to end things with Pansy. And then he told her how, after the war, he had found himself in the cellar with Pansy, and that Harry had been dead (he left out the part about Hermione being dead, too, because why freak her out unnecessarily?).

Then he told her about the second alternate timeline, where he’d refused to speak against Hagrid over the Hippogriff incident, and had become friends with Harry then, in third year. And then, that he and Harry, by sixth year, had been unquestionably together, and Draco had spent all his time in the Gryffindor tower, and all the Slytherins hated Draco, but he and Hermione had worked on Alchemy together. And how, still, in the end, Harry had been dead once more, and they’d been preparing to speak at a memorial service for him. He told her how he’d gotten into a fight with Ron over it, because Ron blamed him.

Then he told her about the third alternate timeline, which had been, in many ways, the one to touch him most deeply. He told her about the night in the bathroom, where, instead of dueling, he and Harry had decided to go to the Room of Requirement to talk and wound up doing more than talking. How Draco defected, and his mother did, too, and how he and Harry took to sneaking around because no one could know. He told her about his summer at the Burrow, and how Ginny had slowly warmed up to him, and how Charlie had been there, too, and how that had almost caused problems with Harry when Harry arrived. He told her about the wedding, and how Harry had kissed him in front of everyone (he left out the incredible shag), but then the Death Eaters had arrived, and they’d all fled. He told her about the Forest of Dean, how miserable it had been, but that, despite the circumstances, they’d found some measure of happiness: Hermione with Ron and Draco with Harry. He explained how Hermione had forgiven him, slowly this time, but that they had, bit by bit, learned to trust and

rely on one another. Then he told her the worst part, about his capture and the torture by Dolohov, and Harry's final stand against Voldemort.

Then he sat, looking into Hermione's face, while she tried to process it all. She seemed (understandably) overwhelmed, and sad, and deeply, deeply affected.

"You shouldn't have done it," she said first.

"Right. I know."

She sighed. "You only hurt yourself, in the end."

"Maybe. I created all those timelines, and those other Harrys and Hermiones and Pansys and Ginnys... what about them?"

She shook her head vehemently. "No. You didn't create them. They already existed."

He frowned. "What do you mean?"

"You know I do a lot of my research in the Time Room, yes?"

He nodded.

"Well, I'm developing a theory of time, of reality. And in my theory, which I believe to be accurate, there are infinite timelines. Every decision we make, every variant of every decision, exists, somewhere, simultaneously."

She took a sip of tea. "In fact, I don't believe in time at all, really, at least not in the way we experience it. I think every moment exists all at once, that while you, Draco, are here in this kitchen, you are also aboard the Hogwarts Express for the first time, and also in the Ministry, preparing for Harry's memorial. All of it, every variation, every moment along every line, is happening right now, and will happen again and again, ad infinitum."

Draco felt like his head might explode. "Wow. That's quite a different take on it."

She nodded. "Yes. But the important part for you to know is that you didn't *create* a new timeline. Every decision you might make, any thing you might think to change, already exists somewhere. The Time-Turner, if I'm right about all this, merely places your consciousness in one of the other already existing timelines. What happens to the Draco-consciousness that existed there previously, I'm not certain. Point being, you didn't create a new Hermione. You didn't create a new Harry only to kill him. That Harry was already there, already on his path. The only different thing was that your consciousness, the one from this timeline, suddenly appeared there. Does that make sense?"

He nodded. "I think so."

"So let go of your guilt over that. Alright?"

"I'll try," he said.

“Good. Now, tell me about the conclusions you’ve drawn regarding these adventures. What lessons do you think you’ve learned?”

He cleared his throat. This felt a bit like an interrogation, and a bit like a Socratic-method-style lecture, but it was good for him, to think of these things. To say them out loud and sort through them. He knew it, even as it was uncomfortable. “One, I was an enormous arsehole in this timeline. When I was considering all the things I could change, there were so many. And to get back to this timeline, I would have to go back and do it the way I had originally, and it was...painful. I was a horrible little shit.”

She smiled. “Not new information. What else?”

“Two, I noticed that in every timeline, people were a little different, but still themselves. There was a continuity there that I didn’t expect.”

“Like how you and I managed to become friends in each timeline, despite circumstances.”

“Right,” he said. He’d been thinking of that precisely. “Three, Harry always fell in love with me in the other timelines, which makes me think that the war changed something – irrevocably – between us. Because here, he doesn’t fall in love with me.”

She frowned at that, but didn’t say anything.

“Four, whenever Harry loved me, he died. In different ways, but I think it was always linked to me. I think the most likely explanation is that we’re not meant to be together. That the universe doesn’t allow for it, for whatever reason. Probably because Harry’s meant to be with someone better.”

Hermione’s frown deepened.

“And...well, I think that’s mostly it.”

She sighed and poured more tea. “Draco, your logic is quite flawed.”

He bristled at that. “In what regard?”

“Not on the first two points. Those seem like accurate observations. But as to the last two, the ones that have to do with Harry, you’re not thinking clearly.”

“I *am*, Hermione, and I’ve had a lot of time to consider –”

She held up a hand. “Listen, won’t you? You say that the universe won’t allow you to be with Harry. That it kills him off any time he loves you. That makes no sense, you realize that, don’t you? If the universe, or fate, or what-have-you, was looking out for Harry, why would it kill him? Why wouldn’t it kill you?”

Draco didn’t really have an answer for that.

“Not to mention, we have no reason to believe the universe or fate is involved at all. I think there’s an explanation there, somewhere, a pattern, that leads to Harry dying, but I don’t

believe it stems from anything but the circumstances. I don't know for certain – you'd need to test it properly to know for sure, set up controls and whatnot – but I think it has to do with vulnerability. Harry's more vulnerable when he's in love. That makes sense, doesn't it? We're all more vulnerable then."

Draco had to admit that it did make sense. Merlin knew his own love made him feel horribly unguarded. It was why he'd left tonight, why he'd fled Hermione's house when Harry had been looking at him like *that* after Neville's stag. Love was weakness, undoubtedly.

"And as to the war changing something between you and Harry, making it impossible for him to love you, well, I just don't think that's true. Firstly, nothing in the actual war pitted you and Harry against each other."

"I served the Dark Lord, Hermione. I was a Death Eater."

"Draco, we all saw how you were during the war. You wouldn't kill Dumbledore, you looked absolutely terrified whenever you were around Voldemort, you didn't turn Harry in, and your mother saved his life. It was clear you weren't exactly a willing participant in things."

Draco had known that about himself. But he hadn't known other people had known.

"If anything, I think the war made Harry reconsider what he thought of you. It was only after the war that he began to talk about you so much."

"Then what is it?" he asked softly. "Why won't Harry love me now?"

"That's an assumption in itself – that he won't. You don't know that for sure. But let's say that it's true, at least for now, since he hasn't said otherwise. Even then, there's another explanation there, only you're too blind to see it."

Draco wracked his brain, coming up with nothing. "What?" he asked, and realized his heart was beating fast now, that he was hanging onto Hermione's words like they were life preservers, and he was drowning.

"*You*, Draco."

He blinked.

"In all those timelines, *you* were the one who took the chance, who made the first move. You befriended him, snogged him, told him how you felt. *You* were the one who bridged the gap. *You* were the one who was brave. Not him."

"But I'm not brave. Harry's brave," he said, almost to himself.

"Harry's brave, yes. It's the first thing we think of when we think of him, isn't it? Always putting himself in danger, always speaking out when no one else will. But I'll tell you, as his best friend, that he isn't *always* brave. When it comes to matters of the heart, he's not brave at all." She sighed and adjusted herself. Draco looked at the clock and saw that it was nearly three in the morning.

"I think it has to do with how he grew up, you know," she said. "His aunt and uncle weren't very nice to him, and I think...I think he always feels like nobody will ever *really* care about him. Like no matter how many good things he does, nobody will love him. I think, sometimes, that that's why he does all of it: to try to earn people's respect and affection. But, anyway. Bottom line is, when it comes to love, Harry's not brave. In everything else, yes. In love -- in friendship, even -- no."

"I didn't -- I never even considered --" he began.

"Of course you didn't. Who would? But, you know, think, now, of how you were raised. I know your parents -- your father, at least -- did a lot of things wrong. Put a lot of the wrong things into your head. But they loved you, didn't they?"

"Unquestionably," said Draco, thinking of how his father had tended to him so carefully after Dolohov had Crucio'd the shit out of him. "Even my father. Yes."

"I think that makes you strong, then, in that regard. You know, deep down, that you're worthy of being loved. You expect it. Demand it, even. You think you're not brave, but you were brave in every other timeline, at least when it came to Harry."

"But those timelines weren't my real life, were they?" Draco asked. "If it all went to hell, I could come running back here. The consequences weren't the same. *This* is my real life, Hermione. If it all goes pear-shaped here, I'm stuck with it."

"I'm not saying it won't require more bravery here than it did there. I'm just saying, I think you have the tools required to do it."

Draco sat back in his chair and ran his hands through his hair. "Charlie's expecting to see me in a few weeks when he comes home. I can't just drop him and go running after Harry. And what if it doesn't work, anyway? Or what if I can't work up the courage to do it?"

Hermione sighed. "I blame myself for the situation with Charlie," she said. "I never thought you two would really try to make a go of it. I thought it would just be a casual date, help Harry realize that he wanted to be with you."

"So you *did* do it to make him jealous, then! Pansy was right!"

Hermione blushed. "I *did* think that you and Charlie would have fun," she protested.

"You're dangerous, you. I'm officially afraid of you," Draco teased.

She giggled. "Shut up. You need to end things with Charlie, though. You know that."

"But I really do like him. He's incredibly sweet, and he's handsome, and he likes me and I never have to worry about whether he does. He wants to be with me."

"And I know that must feel good. But it's not enough."

"Maybe it could be, someday, though. I do like him a lot. We have fun together."

“Draco,” said Hermione in a stern tone. “You’re never going to love him the way you love Harry. Admit it.”

He sighed. She was right. She was always right.

“There’s more to being brave in love than just telling someone you care about them. You have to make yourself available to them, too. You can’t hide behind someone else, just because it’s easy. And no matter what you’re telling yourself about Charlie, about how maybe it will magically work out, you know, deep down, that it won’t. And you owe it to him to be honest about that.”

“Ugh,” he said.

“It’s a lot, I know. But I do think it comes down to you, Draco. What you decide to do. What you decide to risk.”

“Ugh,” he said again.

She yawned, and he realized that she looked utterly exhausted. She’d been here for...nearly three hours, talking to him about his problems. “Go home. You’re wrecked.”

She smiled. “I am, a bit.”

“It’s good to know you’re still smarter than everybody else even after you’ve been downing tequila shots and dirty dancing with Pansy. As though I didn’t have reason enough to be jealous of you.”

She laughed. “Yes, but I don’t look nearly as good in mesh as you do.”

“True,” he said.

She leaned over and hugged him, and he leaned against her, feeling tired and hopeful.

“You’re a wonderful friend, Hermione,” he said. “In the other timelines, and in this one, too.”

She kissed his cheek. “You’re a wonderful friend, too. We have a little bit of a kindred spirits thing going on, don’t we?”

“It’s the nerdiness, I think. Absolute dorks, the two of us.”

She snorted. “We did just have a conversation about your love life that included theory on the construct of time.”

“We did,” he said. “We really did.”

# Bad Choices

## Chapter Summary

Draco tries to get his life in order before declaring his love for Harry

“She didn’t want to explain the recklessness, the pleasure of making the bad choice, the glory of at least this once, picking her own path to damnation.”  
— Holly Black, *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*

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The next Tuesday, Draco ran to catch a lift that was about to close, only to find Harry already on it. He considered running away. Instead, he steeled himself and got in.

Brave. He was supposed to be brave, because Harry wasn’t.

Harry was almost wincing, like he expected a perfunctory slap or at least a verbal lashing. “Good morning, Harry,” Draco said.

“Oh, er. Good morning?” Harry said/asked, his eyebrows lifting so high that they were hidden under his fringe. He coughed. “I’m, ah, glad to see you, actually, because I wanted to —”

“Apologize?”

Harry nodded vigorously.

Draco sighed. “Now, why would you go and do that? You weren’t exactly snogging yourself, were you? We both did what we felt like doing, until we didn’t anymore.” Harry was turning a fetching shade of puce. “I’m fine with dropping the whole thing if you are.”

“Oh,” Harry said, as the elevator slowed and then stopped. “Yeah. Yeah, I think we should, I think that would be great, or, at least...if you’re okay with it.”

“I suggested it. I’m obviously okay with it,” Draco said.

Harry exhaled so long that Draco was surprised he didn’t deflate himself. “Okay. Good. Brilliant.” He finally moved to get off the lift.

“Harry?” Draco said, holding the door.

“Yes?” Harry whirled around and looked at him with an expectant, slightly dazed expression and for a fluttery moment, Draco wondered how he’d respond to being snogged right then and there.



He took a deep breath and pretended he was wearing a red and gold tie, that he had iron in his veins.

He could do this.

“Would you like to grab lunch with Hermione and me today?” He didn’t even know if Hermione was free, though she probably was. He hoped she was, or he’d feel like quite an idiot.

Harry blinked. He blinked again. He stared so long that Draco almost waved a hand in front of his face. “Er, me?”

“No, the other Harry,” Draco said, trying not to roll his eyes.

Harry chuckled in a sort of strangled way. “Right. I, ah...sure. Yeah. Sure. What time?”

Draco shrugged. “Twelve-thirty? In the lobby?”

“Brilliant, yeah. I’ll, erm. See you there?”

“Yes,” Draco said, nodding once and pulling his hand away. The door to the lift began to close, but then Harry’s hand shot back through, almost getting squashed in the process, to stop it. Draco raised an eyebrow at him.

“Where?” he asked. “Where will we go?”

Draco found himself grinning. “I don’t know yet, you speccy git. Now let go of my lift.”

Harry smirked. “Just for that, I’m not moving my arm ‘til tomorrow. Have fun sleeping in here.”

“You must not like your arm very much, then. Because I’m about two seconds away from hexing it off,” Draco said, trying to look foreboding and failing miserably because he kept having to bite his lip to keep from laughing.

Harry, who had the maturity of an eleven-year-old, somehow managed to maneuver himself into the lift, kick Draco in the arse, and jump back out before the doors closed. “See you at lunch!” he called before the lift whooshed down the chute.

“What in Melin’s name are you so happy about?” asked Hermione when Draco pranced into the Hall of Prophecies, where they were wading through a batch of very uninteresting predictions from the year before that nobody had ever bothered to listen to or catalog. Draco thought that since they’d been languishing about in prophecy purgatory for a year, it was probably alright to sort them directly into the rubbish bin, but Draco’s supervisor disagreed. Hermione, being the kind soul that she was, had agreed to help -- though now, on day two, Draco thought she might be regretting her decision.

“You and I are going to lunch,” he said.

“Okay,” she said, frowning. “That’s fine, I guess.”

“With Harry,” he said.

“Oh?” she said, eyes widening. “Wow. So you did that, then, did you?”

“I did.”

“But what about –”

“Charlie?”

She nodded.

“Not going to have that conversation with him via owl,” Draco said. He’d thought long and hard about it, and it didn’t seem right. Charlie would be home in a few weeks and Draco would talk to him then. “And it’s just lunch. With *you*. Hardly a date.”

She considered this. “Fair enough. Might be good for you two. Getting to know each other better in a casual way. I mean, I know you were really close in those...” she glanced around. “Other *situations*. But in this one, you really haven’t spent a ton of time together.”

“That’s what I thought, too,” he said.

She beamed at him, like she wished they were at Hogwarts so she could award him points.

Lunch wasn’t without its awkward moments, even with Hermione there. Given what each of them knew, and what they knew the others knew, there was a lot of tension floating below the surface. But they made it through their salads and soups without dying of embarrassment, and by the end of the hour, things seemed easier than they had at the beginning of it.

“You know,” Harry said, as they all piled back onto the lift. “Tuesday is usually a really good day for me. For lunch, I mean. Monday’s a madhouse, dealing with all the things people got up to over the weekend, but then by Tuesday, we’ve usually sorted through all that and are a bit slow. So if you guys wanted, we could do this again.”

“Next Tuesday, then,” said Draco. “Let’s get it on the books.”

Hermione was looking down at the floor, grinning like a nutter. Draco elbowed her and she bit down on her lips.

“Brilliant,” said Harry, getting off onto the Auror floor and waving back at them.

As soon as the doors closed, Hermione let out a little shriek. “I can’t stand it. I *can’t*. He likes you, Draco. It is so bloody obvious. Merlin help me, I’d like to just smash your faces together and be done with it.”

“Smash our faces together?”

She giggled.

“Sounds painful, Hermione. Please don’t do that.”

“Oh,” she said, patting his arm. “You know I won’t. Doesn’t mean I don’t want to, though.”

Tuesday lunch became a thing. And it was good – *very* good – to sit and just talk to Harry, with Hermione serving as a pseudo-chaperone. Draco took to buying her a coffee and a croissant on the way back to the Ministry every week as a thank you.

A few weeks in, and that silly agreement he and Harry had made, to be friendly – to be *friends* – didn’t seem quite as silly. Because it suddenly felt like maybe they were actually getting there.

Days slipped away along with the riot of brightly-colored autumn leaves. Soon, branches were bare and the wind was frigid, and Draco took to wearing gloves and scarves, but never hats, because hats did horrible things to his hair. He broke out his dragonhide boots when the first snow fell, because they kept his feet the driest and warmest. Plus they were quite sexy, in his opinion.

Finally, it was a week and a half until Christmas, and Draco was trying to mentally prepare himself for seeing Charlie, who would be coming home on Saturday. Much to his dismay, Harry brought it up at lunch on Tuesday.

“Ron said Charlie’s going to be home for hols soon,” he said.

“Mm,” said Draco.

“Oh!” exclaimed Hermione, looking back and forth between the two of them worriedly. “I keep forgetting Christmas is so soon! I’ve not done all my shopping! How about you, Harry?”

Harry would not be so easily sidetracked, though. “Not all of it,” he said, and then focused once more on Draco. “Will you see him, do you think?” He said it casually, but Draco knew that this was not a casual discussion.

He *was* seeing Charlie that weekend, as a matter of fact. He was seeing him for the sole purpose of explaining that they couldn’t see each other anymore. “Yes. On Sunday,” he said. He felt his face getting hot.

“Oh,” said Harry, taking a gulp of his water. “Tell him I said hello.”

*It’s not like that*, Draco wanted to say, but couldn’t. It didn’t feel right to inform Harry of that sort of thing before he actually did it. It seemed improper, underhanded, even, to tell anyone else – Harry in particular -- before telling Charlie himself.

The rest of the conversation was a little strained, despite Hermione’s desperate attempts to keep it going. When they all returned to work, Draco realized it was the first time he’d come

back from a Tuesday lunch feeling anything but sublimely happy. He didn't like it. He didn't like it one bit.

He met Charlie at a muggle coffee shop on Sunday. When he saw Charlie's face light up at the sight of him, he almost lost his resolve. Charlie looked wonderful, bundled up in a sporty coat and faded, soft-looking jeans, his cheeks pink from the winter air, his red-gold hair tousled from the wind. Draco hugged him and he smelled like the cold even though he felt quite warm. Charlie kissed his cheek before stepping back to take his coat off. "It's good to see you," Draco said. "You look great."

"It's good to see you, too. And you look gorgeous as usual," Charlie said, settling down into the other armchair by the little fireplace. Draco tried not to preen too much in the face of the compliment, but it was difficult. "Although I am a bit vexed at you for not agreeing to go snowboarding with me."

Draco laughed. "I would never snowboard. Skiing's the civilized way to hurtle down a mountainside."

"Of *course* you would be a skier," Charlie said fondly.

Draco found himself gazing back just as fondly and quickly sobered. "That's...that's not the point, though. That's not why I didn't want to go snowboarding. I didn't want to go snowboarding because I needed to talk to you."

Charlie frowned. "That sounds ominous."

He didn't want to say it. He didn't. He didn't want to hurt Charlie, and what was worse, part of him still wanted to cling to this. He loved the way Charlie made him feel, so wanted and so sure of himself. He didn't want to lose that. It felt too good.

But Hermione was right. He might love how Charlie made him feel, but he was never going to *love Charlie* while he was in love with Harry. And to pretend otherwise, to pretend like it might happen for him at some point, was dishonest not only to Charlie, but also to himself.

"You are one of the best people I've ever met," Draco said. He was able to look Charlie in the eye as he said it, because it was true. "We have so much fun together, and you're wonderful. You're kind and you're handsome and you have the best outlook on life. You're so open to things and true to yourself." Draco paused. "I really do like you so much, Charlie."

Charlie was fiddling with the handle of his mug. "But?" he asked. "I feel like there's a but coming."

Draco nodded. "But I'm not really available. For this. For you."

"Are you trying to tell me that you're dating someone else?" Charlie asked. "I mean, it's okay if you are. We never talked about it or anything. I haven't been, but that's just because I

haven't wanted to, because I like you. But it's not like I thought I *couldn't*, if I wanted to. We never said."

Why? Why was Charlie so goddamned sweet?

"I'm not, actually. Dating anyone else."

"Oh," Charlie looked confused. "Then why?"

"Because I'm trying to be honest with you, and with myself, and that means admitting that even if I'm technically available, I'm not, really. Not in the way that matters."

"You *want* to be with someone else."

Draco nodded. "And I have no idea if this person wants to be with me. I think there's a really good chance they don't, actually. But even if they don't, even if nothing ever comes of it, I can't pretend that I'm truly open to exploring this thing with you. Because I'm not. Not now, certainly, while I still feel this way. Maybe not ever."

Charlie didn't look angry. He looked hurt, a bit. But he also looked like maybe he'd been expecting this, somehow. "I knew, I think. I didn't want to look too closely at it, but I think I knew." He took a sip of his coffee and sat back, thinking. "It's Harry, isn't it." He didn't even phrase it as a question.

Draco tried to keep the grimace off his face. "Yeah."

"He was being a right asshole to you at the pub that night."

"I know," said Draco. "*He* knew. He apologized."

"Good," said Charlie. "I'm glad." And Charlie did seem glad, even though none of what they were discussing should've been anything but hurtful to him. "I wouldn't want you to be with someone who wasn't nice to you."

Draco wished, for the millionth time, that he was capable of loving Charlie. Not only because it would be easy, but also because Charlie deserved someone who loved him. And Draco knew, looking at him, that he was going to love the shit out of *somebody* one day, and be so good to them, and make them incredibly happy, and Draco felt a pang deep in his chest, because he knew that it wouldn't be him.

"Well, I don't mean to be rude, but I think I need to go," Charlie said. "I don't think I'm going to be able to sit and make conversation with you after that. Can we ask for the check?"

"I've got it," Draco said. "Go. It's okay."

Charlie nodded, stood, and put his coat back on. It seemed that he'd only just taken it off. He was only half done with his coffee. Draco gazed up at him, trying to memorize his face, because he wasn't sure when he would see him again.

“Don’t look at me like that, or I’m gong to sit back down and try to talk you out of fancying Harry.”

Draco felt himself flush and looked down at his mug.

“And stop fluttering those lashes of yours around, too, while we’re at it. Actually, just don’t move or do anything until I leave. Christ, how’s a bloke supposed to maintain his dignity around you?” He laughed and ran a hand through his hair.

It was all too much -- the deja vu (becasue that was almost *exactly* what he'd said in the other timeline), Charlie's unyielding kindness. Draco stood suddenly and grabbed Charlie’s hand and pulled him close. “Thank you. For everything. Even for throwing me out of the airplane and almost killing me.”

He felt Charlie sigh against his hair. “It was a pleasure,” he said. “Really.”

Then he kissed Draco’s cheek once more, and Draco fought down the urge to run after him as he slipped out of the café. He felt naked, in the aftermath. Exposed.

He had no one left to hide behind anymore.

He spent a quiet Christmas with his mother at the Manor. On Christmas Eve, it was just the two of them, so different from the old days, when everyone was in tuxedos and dresses, when the ballroom was packed with bodies and the champagne was flowing.

They talked a little about Lucius, careful not to say anything negative about him even though there was so much material there. They’d both been incredibly hurt by him, by the decisions he made on behalf of their family. But they’d both loved him, too, and it was by unspoken agreement that they mentioned only the best parts.

On Christmas Day, Aunt Andromeda came with Teddy, who was six years old and a little chatterbox. Andromeda and Draco's mother had spent years after Lucius’s death mending their relationship, and Draco knew it had been good for them both. Not to mention, his mother loved spoiling children, and Teddy was the only one she knew very well. Needless to say, Teddy got a lot of presents.

“I saw Harry yesterday,” Teddy told Draco after he’d opened the last one. “He’s my godfather. That’s not a real father, though, did you know that? It’s different.”

“Yes,” said Draco, nodding. “I had a godfather, too. It’s a very special thing, having one. You’re lucky.”

Teddy nodded sagely. “Where’s your godfather?” he asked.

“He died in the war, actually,” said Draco as lightly as he could.

“Like my parents,” Teddy said.

Draco nodded. "The war hurt a lot of people."

"Yeah, I don't like them. I don't think we should have any more."

"Good idea," said Draco, and then Teddy ran off to help Narcissa cut the Yule log.

Draco spent New Year's Eve at Blaise's elegant townhouse in Kensington. Most of his old school mates were there, along with an eclectic mix of socialites and Ministry grunts and Ministry officials. At the countdown, Draco kissed Pansy, as he had for as many New Year's Eves as he could remember (and plenty he could not), although this time, since he was mostly sober and not high off his arse, he didn't use tongue.

The Tuesday after New Year's Day, Draco could hardly wait for lunch. Hermione, who was proving to be the schemingest schemer of all time, begged off, claiming she had too much work to do, which Draco knew to be a lie.

I'm the brave one, he thought to himself as he rode the lift to the lobby. I'm brave. Having lunch with Harry isn't scary. It's just lunch.

It didn't feel like just lunch.

The tension that so often hummed in the air between Draco and Harry was back in full force with Hermione gone, and Draco found himself unreasonably nervous as he ordered his soup and salad at the counter.

"So," he said as they sat. "You have a good Christmas?"

"Yeah, it was fine. Spent it at the Burrow like always. Andromeda and Teddy came to mine on Christmas Eve."

"I heard," Draco said. "They were at the Manor on Christmas."

"I heard," said Harry, smiling.

They talked about Teddy for a while then, about what a great kid he seemed to be, and what a good job Andromeda was doing with him. Harry seemed to know him particularly well, and appeared to have fully embraced the godfather role, going above and beyond what was expected.

"I hate that he doesn't have Remus and Tonks. They were such good people. It doesn't seem fair, that he never knew them," Harry said.

Draco nodded. "It's not."

"I worry that'll mess him up some day," Harry confessed. "It's not rejection, obviously, but it can feel that way, sometimes. Not having them there, when everybody else has them. I told Andromeda that Teddy should see a Mind Healer when he gets a little older. They have Mind

Healers just for children, you know. Who work with them at their level, through play and all that. Teddy's not done or said anything to make me think it's a problem, but..."

"But you never know. Kids don't always tell you how they feel, or even *know* how they feel."

"Yeah, exactly."

They were quiet for a moment, eating.

"How about New Years Eve?" Harry asked. "What did you do?"

"Went to Blaise's. He had a big to-do."

"Yeah. Carmichael was there, wasn't he?"

Carmichael was an Auror, two years younger than they were. "He was, yeah. A few Aurors made an appearance."

"How Blaise managed to befriend everyone in the entire Ministry is beyond me. We tend to be a cliquey bunch, usually. Don't we?"

It was true. Departments tended to be rather insular. "That's Blaise for you. Networking's in his blood. He ought to run for office, rather than tinkering with us in Mysteries."

Harry nodded. "Always wondered about that. Odd career choice. For him, I mean. Not for you and Hermione."

"Blaise is clever, though. He does alright. Can't believe he's not broken the secrecy standards yet, but he hasn't, so far as I know." Draco sipped his water. "But what about you? You do anything fun for New Years?"

A little flush crept over Harry's cheeks. "Yeah, went to a thing."

"Ginny's?" Draco guessed. He knew from Hermione that Ginny and Neville hosted a party every year.

"No," said Harry, tugging on his ear. He was jiggling his leg even faster than usual. "A friend of a friend's holiday cottage, in the Cotswolds."

"Oh," said Draco, surprised. "Where?"

"Near Castle Combe."

"Lovely place," said Draco. "I used to know a family who lived just outside the village. Bloke named Darren Craig was one of their boys. Bit older than us, maybe four or five years. He was a Slytherin."

"Yeah, well," said Harry, turning pinker. "It was Darren's house. His family doesn't live there anymore, though. Neither does he, at least not full time."



“His parents moved to London, last I heard.”

“Mm, sounds right.”

“How did you meet Darren, then?” asked Draco. This was all strange. Darren Craig’s mother was a Fawley, one of the old pure-blood families who’d been in Draco’s parents’ social circles when he was a child. Why Harry was hanging out with Darren, Draco couldn’t guess.

“I didn’t know him very well until the party, really. I was, erm. Invited. By Cassius Warrington.”

Draco almost spat out his mouthful of water. “Cassius?” Cassius, who’d been the first boy to touch Draco’s cock? Cassius, on whom Draco’d had an enormous crush as a kid? Cassius, the bloke that Harry had admitted (in another timeline, but still) was fit? “How the fuck do you know Cassius?”

Harry pulled at his ear again. His leg was jiggling so hard it was shaking the table. “Saw him at a broom con. You know I consult with Nimbus sometimes?”

Draco hadn’t known but was in no way surprised. He guessed every broom company wanted Harry’s endorsement. “No, but go on.”

“Well, he owns Flyte and Barker these days,” Harry said.

“Yes, I knew that,” Draco said.

“Well, he was there. And I was there. And we got to talking, and ah. We’ve gone out a few times.” Harry shrugged.

Draco’s stomach fell right out of his body, or at least that’s what it felt like. Or maybe it was more like a hard punch to the gut. One of those. Definitely gut-related. Definitely unpleasant, bordering on painful. “Oh,” he said, his voice light and conversational. “How long’s that been going on, then?”

Harry shrugged again. “End of November.”

Harry was dating hot-as-fuck Cassius Warrington, Draco’s childhood crush. Cassius, who Harry thought was fit. Draco understood, suddenly, why Harry had almost beat the shit out of him in the toilet at the pub. Because Draco firstly wanted to beat the shit out of Cassius, but had no real reason to, considering he hadn’t talked to the prat in years. But secondly, he wanted to beat the shit out of Harry, and Harry was here, and available, and Draco’s fists *really* needed to collide with something.

“That’s nice,” said Draco. His voice sounded like someone was wrapping their hands around his throat while he was talking. “Good for you.”

Another shrug. Draco thought he might pick up the chair and whack Harry’s shoulders with it if he shrugged one more goddamned time.

“Better get back to work, those prophecies aren’t going to catalog themselves,” Draco said, apropos of nothing. He rose and started walking to the door, feeling like he’d been hit with a jelly-legs jinx.

But despite the jellied feeling in his legs, he needed to get out. Needed to get out right the fuck now.

“Draco, your coat!” Harry called, running after him. “Here, you git. You’ll freeze out there without it.”

“Thanks,” Draco said, thinking that he wouldn’t freeze. He wouldn’t freeze because his heart was pounding ten times too fast, and his body felt like a furnace. The cold would feel wonderful against his skin, because his skin was on fire. “Hey, I almost forgot. I need to run an errand before I go back. So, you know. I’ll see you. Have a good one.”

He power-walked down the street as fast as he could in the opposite direction from the Ministry without giving Harry the chance to say anything else. Faster and faster, until he reached a cross street, and then he turned and walked another block or so before stopping. There was an alleyway on his left. Nobody was around. He ducked in and disappeared.

“I’m *sorry*. He didn’t tell me anything about this. And even if he had, we’d already had our talk when he saw Cassius, so it wouldn’t have mattered.”

Hermione was sitting in the wingback chair with her feet up on the ottoman. She’d flooded in after work because Draco never came back to the office.

“Granger, do you *remember* Cassius?” Draco asked.

She shook her head. “No, I’m sorry. I don’t.”

“Clearly you weren’t a little gay boy at Hogwarts in the nineties. He’s bloody *gorgeous*.”

She winced. “It can’t be a big deal. If it were a big deal, Harry’d have told me.”

“They spent New Year’s Eve together. In the fucking Cotswolds!”

“At a *party*, Draco. Keep it in perspective. It wasn’t as though they were vacationing together.”

“Wasn’t it?!” he cried. “I’d say it bloody well was! Merlin, I’m sure they stayed there. The Craig’s place is like a goddamned palace; there sure as fuck are enough rooms to house a few people.” He felt his stomach plummet again. “Hermione!” his voice was edging on hysterical. Scratch that, it had gone over the edge, turned around, climbed back up and jumped off again. “They shared a fucking room together on New Year’s Eve in a palatial estate with snow all over the grounds, which are fucking gorgeous, by the way. Absolutely stunning. It probably looked like a goddamned fairy tale.” He bolted upright from the sofa and took to pacing again.

“Oh, Circe,” Hermione said, burying her face in her hands. “I’m sorry! I don’t know what you want me to say! Harry dates people sometimes. It’s not the first time and I’m sure it won’t be the last. It’s just a temporary setback.”

“I should go crawling back to Charlie, that’s what I should do. He’s still here until the end of the week. He’ll take me back, won’t he? I’ll beg. I *will*. I’ll apologize and I’ll beg and I’ll give him a really stupendous blowjob, and then he’ll definitely forgive me. We can get past all this, if I just –”

“Draco!” Hermione practically screamed.

He blinked at her.

“You are *not* going back to Charlie just because Harry’s been on a few dates with someone.”

“I think I am, actually,” he countered.

“Don’t be an idiot. This will all blow over. Trust me. I give it a couple more weeks.”

Draco gave it two more weeks. Harry didn’t mention Cassius again at lunch. And then the Friday after those two weeks went by, Cassius showed up at pub night. At fucking *pub night*. That was *their* night, the night that everything had started. Harry and Draco had played darts on pub night, and made up a handshake, and then they’d made up an entire card game that Draco might not remember, but still! They’d *shagged* after pub night! Harry had absolutely no right to bring *Cassius* to bloody pub night!

Draco stewed in the corner booth for a while, casting his worst glare back and forth between Harry and Hermione. Hermione looked sympathetic and also a wee bit afraid. Draco was thinking he might corner Harry in the loo just like Harry’d cornered him, except he wouldn’t yell and push, he’d just start throwing punches. Maybe hexes. Punches *and* hexes. He’d have to cast an Expelliarmus immediately, before Harry had time to really react, otherwise Harry would definitely win. And Draco did not want Harry to win. He wanted Harry to pay, preferably in blood, or at least in extreme humiliation.

Cassius was still really, really fit, all big blue eyes and curly gold hair. He even had one of those clefts in his chin, the kind that you just wanted to lick.

Mother. *Fucker*.

He sat a little while longer and decided that trying to kill Harry in the loo was probably not the best plan, and then he stomped out of the pub. He showed up at Pansy’s unannounced, where she was plying some unsuspecting bloke with a bottle of wine and her tits, which were on display to an even greater degree than usual. “Out!” Draco shouted at the man, who stood up scowling, like he was going to tell Draco off. Draco kind of hoped he would, because that would give him an excuse to punch something.

“Go,” said Pansy in a voice that did not leave room for negotiation. “I’ll owl you.”

The guy grabbed his coat, looking none too pleased.

“Sorry,” Draco said when he’d gone.

“Not to worry,” she said. “He was a berk anyway. If the way he kissed was any indicator, he was going to be terrible in bed.” She sighed and looked up at him. “What the fuck’s wrong with you?”

“Harry brought Cassius to pub night.”

“Oh, Draco!” she cried, coming over to wrap him in a breasty hug. “He didn’t! My poor baby!”

He pulled away. “I need to kiss somebody, Pans.” She smirked. “Not you.” She stuck her tongue out at him. “Or get fucked in a loo, maybe. *Something*. I need to go out.”

She stretched luxuriously, her tiny top revealing a very large swath of her very small waist. “Well, you’ve come to the right place. Being your wing-woman just happens to be my specialty, darling. Why don’t you get dressed and come right back.”

Draco tromped over to his house and put on his black leather pants and his tightest white t-shirt and his dragonhide boots and a cashmere scarf and a black military-style coat and flooded back to Pansy’s, where she was touching up her makeup in the magenta bathroom. She had a tumbler full of whiskey on the rocks sitting next to her. Draco picked it up and chugged half of it before setting it back down. “Eyeliner,” he said, pointing to his face. “And shimmer.”

“Hooray! We’re going to get really wasted tonight, aren’t we?”

“That’s the plan,” said Draco.

## Wait For It

“I’ve learned that waiting is the most difficult bit, and I want to get used to the feeling, knowing that you’re with me, even when you’re not by my side.”

— Paulo Coelho, *Eleven Minutes*

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“We ought to go to Patronus again. That place was fun. And the boys were delicious,” said Pansy after she’d finished Draco’s makeup. Which he didn’t really like, except for eyeliner. And maybe the shimmery stuff. He did look sexy as hell in it. So maybe it was alright to like it.

Okay, fine. He liked wearing makeup sometimes, so what? It wasn’t the worst realization he’d ever come to; it was a hell of a lot less stressful than that time he realized he liked cock.

“Hold on a sec,” said Pansy, dashing out of the bathroom. Draco rolled his eyes. She was probably going to change again.

But she came back right away, hiding something behind her back. “Ta-da!” she said, opening her palm to reveal two little pink candy-looking things with smiley faces on them.

“Where’d you get it?” he asked, raising an eyebrow. Whenever he and Pansy did anything besides smoke, they usually got it from Blaise, and Draco happened to know that Blaise and Pansy had been in a fight since New Year’s.

“Adam. Guy who just left.”

Draco burst out laughing. “You made him leave and didn’t even give him back his beans? Oh, Pans, you are too much sometimes.”

She smirked. “Fuck ‘em. We’ll have a lot more fun with this than he ever would’ve.”

“It’s the muggle stuff?” he asked.

“Sort of,” Pansy said. She turned the little tablets over, and Draco saw that the bottom was shining like molten gold. “Laced with Felix Felicis.” She raised her eyebrows. “What do you think?”

What did he *think*? He thought it sounded like the best idea anyone had ever had in the history of ideas. Merlin, to be feeling all loved up and dreamy the way you did when you were rolling, while also having the giddy confidence that came with Felix...

Draco leaned over Pansy’s hand and caught one of the tablets on his tongue and popped it into his mouth. “I think I can’t wait to dance,” he said.

She laughed gleefully. “See, this is why you’re my favorite person, even when you’re being a bitch.”

“I’m *not* being a bitch!” he cried. “I’m being fun!”

“Now, maybe. Half an hour ago you were *definitely* being a bitch. You looked my date right in the eye and yelled ‘out’ at him.”

“Fair,” he said, sighing. “You have any lollies?”

“Course,” she said, gesturing to her purse.

He grabbed her hand and they found themselves suddenly standing in the alleyway around the corner from Patronus.

Draco didn’t do drugs very often, but if he were ever to turn into a frequent flier, he thought maybe this would be his pill of choice. He didn’t think he’d ever felt so bloody good in his life.

And Patronus, with its surreal décor and pulsing lights and edgy clientele was an excellent place to be feeling it. He’d planned to pull as soon as humanly possible as a big fuck you to Potter, but he was finding that he was having too much fun to bother.

Pansy and Draco were dancing together again, and she had very soft skin. And her hair smelled delicious, too, like apples. “Apples!” he yelled over the music.

“Yum,” she yelled back. “Do you still grow those Winter Pomeroy’s at the Manor? Those were my favorites.”

Oh, those were so good. He could practically taste them on his tongue, dry and sweet and crisp all at once, with an almost spicy smell to them. They were beautiful, too – golden-skinned, with a soft pink flush across the face. He closed his eyes and imagined how it would be to bite into one. “So good,” he murmured.

His voice sounded quiet against the thrum of the bass. The bass was pounding in his chest, and he thought that maybe his heart had figured out how to pump in time to it. “Pans, I’m turning into the song,” he said by her ear. “My body’s changing.”

She giggled. “Mine too, love,” she said, kissing his mouth. Her lips tasted like grape lolly.

“Do you want to marry me?” he asked, kissing her again.

“Sure. Shall we do it tonight?”

“Yes, alright. Why not.”

“We’d have exquisite children,” she said, and her pupils were blown wide open inside of her soft brown eyes. Pansy was hard, in a lot of ways, but she *looked* endlessly soft, like a fluffy

ball of cotton. Soft skin, soft curves, soft hair, soft eyes. “But it would be difficult to explain why Mummy and Daddy both had boyfriends on the side.”

“Oh, that’s right. I forgot,” he said.

They stopped talking for a while and Draco could feel the colors of the music, all green and blue waves with bright streaks of pink cutting through periodically, all of it shining like fairy dust. He wondered if this was what Luna had meant by auras at Bill’s wedding. He wondered if Luna secretly did fuckloads of molly. It would explain a *lot*.

There was a hand on his waist, and he leaned backward and felt a person there. “Who is it, Pansy?” he asked her.

She tilted her head sideways. “It’s a Winter Pomeroy,” she said. “Bite it.” She started laughing and then twirled a little, running her fingers through her hair, mussing it.

Draco turned and found himself looking at a strangely familiar face. Dark hair, blue eyes, chiseled features. “I know you,” Draco said. “Who are you?”

“I sucked you off in the loo at Herbal,” the guy said, smiling.

“Ah, yes,” said Draco. He didn’t like remembering, even though it had been an above-average blowjob. It had been the night before everything happened with the Time-Turner. Thinking of that made him think of Harry and thinking of Harry was very much not contributing to his glowing sense of well-being. “You are lovely, but I’m with a date,” he said, gesturing to Pansy.

“*She’s* your date?” the guy asked, looking confused.

“Well, yes. I let pretty girls suck my cock, too, you know.”

The guy started laughing. His laugh was very nice. It vibrated deep in Draco’s chest. “You’re fucking with me, aren’t you?”

“I don’t know, maybe,” said Draco. “I met you on a bad day. Later that night I time-traveled. So I was eleven again. Long story. But anyway, I unfortunately associate you with all that.” He waved his hand around. “Make sense?” It was very obvious, what he was saying, but he didn’t know if this bloke was stupid or not.

The guy frowned. “Okay, sure. Well. Have a good night, I guess?” Then he disappeared. Draco felt little splotches of dark, sad blue creeping into his music colors. His aura was darkening, maybe. “I wish Luna was here,” he said to Pansy.

“Lovegood?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Mm,” he said.

Draco was dancing with a gorgeous man. He was tall and muscley, with smooth caramel skin and eyes like molten chocolate. He was a dessert - a decadent one. Draco licked the man's neck to see if he tasted like dessert and felt a hard cock press against him. The man's neck tasted mostly like sweat, but not in a bad way.

Suddenly, Pansy was there, pulling at him. "We should go," she said, and her eyes looked strange.

"Why would we go when –" Draco leaned forward. "What's your name?"

"Niran," the man said.

"Why would we go when Niran is *here*?" Draco asked.

"Because we need to *go*," said Pansy.

"You're being very bossy," said Draco. "Why are you being bossy? And why do your eyes look so weird?"

"Draco, *please*," she said, and that was, frankly, unnerving. Pansy never said please.

"My darling Pantalone," Draco said, untangling himself from Niran momentarily to drape himself all over Pansy. "You are so worried, and there is no reason to be worried. We are here, with all our friends, with *Niran*, and we're all having so much fun. I can feel you wanting to have fun, darling." He put his hand on her breastbone. "Right here. It's saying please, let me have more fun. Please, Pansy."

She began giggling.

"See?" he said, turning back to Niran, who was so fucking hot it shouldn't have been allowed. And his shirt was very tight, and that was so nice. Draco could see the muscles of his stomach through it, all nine thousand of them.

"Okay, but no," said Pansy, petting herself on the mouth in an apparent attempt to wipe away her grin. "I'm a fire alarm. I am fire alarming you, Draco Malfoy. You must listen to me."

"That makes no sense," he said. "You sound nothing like a fire alarm."

Pansy threw her arms up in the air. "Potter's here, okay? Alright? Potter's here, with Cassius."

"Oh, well," Draco's mind whirled. That was so bad, wasn't it, and he should leave. But he liked Patronus, it was his favorite place, and the music was so good and colorful. And he really would like to see Harry, because Harry's eyes were like spring and Draco loved spring, and Harry was so lovely, his whole face and his goofy fucking hair. He had a lightening scar, and that seemed lucky. Like Felix Felicis. And Draco would like to see Cassius, too, because Cassius was his old mate, sort of. His old something-or-other. Cock wrangler. "But Cassius is my old cock wrangler."



Pansy started laughing again, uncontrollably, so that tears were pouring down her face. “Oh, fucking hell, Draco. I love you so much. I’m obsessed with you. I want to get you high every day. Every fucking day.”

“I don’t think I would do very well in Mysteries under those conditions. I value my job,” he said, rather sternly. And then because she was cry-laughing, he started laughing too, because his favorite Pansy was a cry-laughing Pansy. “This Pansy is my favorite,” he said, petting her cheek.

“Are you...?” asked Niran, and Draco marveled at the question. It could mean anything.

“I *am*,” he said, gripping Niran’s considerable biceps. Because he *was*. He was here, very vibrant, very present. His aura was probably the color of Pansy’s bathroom walls.

“I meant to say, are you interested in coming home with me? Or not really?” asked Niran.

“I would love to say yes, because you look like cake. But I don’t want to leave, so. I *would* like to see your abs, though, without the shirt. But that’s neither here nor there.”

“Men’s?” asked Niran.

“Oh! Yes! *That* I can do,” said Draco. “It’s my specialty. Although I don’t kneel in loos. Just FYI. This is Italian leather.” He pointed to his trousers.

“Okay, sure,” said Niran, and Draco had a moment of intense dissatisfaction, because Niran did not seem to understand anything. But then Niran smiled, and it was wide and brilliant, like a Charlie Weasley smile.

“Can I kiss you first?” asked Draco. “That would be helpful. For knowing.”

Niran pulled Draco up against his muscley chest. The muscles were too well-defined to have come from any natural sort of activity. Niran probably spent a lot of time in a gym. Draco didn’t usually like that, but tonight it seemed okay. Niran’s lips met Draco’s, and they were incredibly soft, and really full, and fucking hell, he tasted a bit like dessert. Draco’s skin felt so sensitive everywhere, and his mouth felt like it was bursting with sunshine where Niran’s tongue brushed against it.

“Draco Malfoy,” said a drawling voice, the accent similar to Pansy’s, but not Pansy’s.

“Mm?” said Draco, his mouth still on Niran’s. He was sneaking a hand up Niran’s shirt to feel his stomach. Just a little. It was probably okay.

“I was rather insulted when you didn’t say hello earlier.”

Draco pulled away suddenly, staring. It was Cassius, sans Harry. No Pansy anywhere.

“Where the fuck did everyone go?” he asked.

Cassius chuckled. “Who’s your friend?”

“Niran,” said Draco.

“We’re not going to the men’s, I take it,” said Niran.

“No, I’m afraid not. Not because of the kiss, though. That was delightful.”

Niran sighed and took his beautiful abs someplace else.

Draco looked at Cassius, who was a bit shorter than he remembered. Still had the chin thing happening, though. “I used to want to lick your chin,” Draco said.

Cassius chuckled again, low and compelling. It felt warm against Draco’s skin. “You’re high as shit, aren’t you? Look at me.”

Draco looked down at his dragonhide boots. The scales seemed sparkly. He looked up at Cassius, who still had blue eyes like some prince in a fairy tale.

“Still a fucking flirt, I see,” Cassius said, smirking. “And your pupils have officially waged war against your irises.”

“I was looking at my boots,” Draco said. “The lights look beautiful against the scales.”

“*Merlin*, are you wearing eyeliner?”

Draco felt a little embarrassed about this suddenly. “Why?”

“Dunno. You never used to.”

“You knew me when I was, like, fourteen,” Draco said.

“Didn’t *behave* as though you were fourteen, did you?”

Draco felt very hot, then. He wished Pansy were nearby; he would ask her for water.

He didn’t want to think of it, but suddenly, his head was full of memories. The first time, Cassius had been studying in the Common Room with his friends, and Draco had been studying alone at a table, stressed out about some essay or another. It had been late, and the Common Room had been otherwise empty.

Draco had a habit of looking at Cassius, because he was gorgeous, and Cassius had taken to looking back, sometimes. Draco could feel Cassius’s gaze on him that night, but he told himself that couldn’t be what was happening, because Cassius was *Cassius*, and at the time, he was dating another seventh year named Lucy Culpepper, who was just as beautiful as he was. It was making Draco nervous, the sense of being watched while thinking he definitely *wasn’t* being watched, no way. He got up to go to the toilet, just to get away from that feeling for a moment.

And then suddenly Cassius was there, shoving him into a stall, and then Cassius’s hand was down his pants, and probably five seconds later, he’d had his first orgasm by a hand that wasn’t his own. And then Cassius had taken Draco’s hand and jerked himself off with it. And then he’d left without saying a word.

Draco felt too embarrassed to go out and get his books and his parchment, so he left them there and went to his room and got up at four in the morning to finish his essay.

That was in February. From February until June, Cassius got into the habit of finding Draco alone and pushing him into a toilet or a quiet hallway or his own room, when it was empty. They rarely spoke, and they didn't ever kiss. Draco tried once, and Cassius pushed him away. "I'm not a fucking pouf," he remembered Cassius saying in his low, precise voice. They did, however, graduate from hand jobs to blowjobs, and then from blowjobs to fucking.

Well, Cassius did the fucking. Draco just got fucked.

And then Cassius graduated, and Draco had only seen him a handful of times since. He'd never once talked to him. Until now. In Patronus. Where Draco was wearing eyeliner. And was rolling and high on Felix. And Cassius was on a date with Harry.

"Where's Harry?" Draco asked, because suddenly that seemed very important.

Cassius shrugged. "Went off to the bar with Parkinson." He looked back at Draco. "You looked very cozy with that big guy, whatever-the-fuck his name was." Draco stared back down at his boots. "But you didn't know him, did you? You'd just met him. Is that what you do these days? Fuck strangers in clubs?"

"I – no. Not really." Not anymore. He didn't anymore.

"You fucking liar," Cassius said, leaning closer. "You've still got a pretty mouth, though. You want to suck me off in the loo? For old times' sake?"

Draco couldn't move or think very well. That was bad, what Cassius was saying. It was really bad and it made Draco feel bad, and he was certain his aura looked like utter shit now. The music seemed heavy, all of a sudden, like it weighed a million pounds, all of it crashing down on Draco's head. And he wanted Pansy. Or Harry. Pansy or Harry. But not Cassius, not so close, and not saying this.

"You're on a date," was all he could manage to say.

Cassius laughed. "What's that got to do with anything? Thought you'd probably get off on giving head to your arch-nemesis's boyfriend."

"No, I wouldn't. I like Harry."

"Right, Harry says you're friends," Cassius said, and Draco hated hearing Harry's name on his lips. "But I know a thing or two about you, Malfoy. I know that you're a petty little bitch. And I bet you still fucking hate him, don't you? I mean, deep down."

"I *don't*," Draco said again. "I've got to go. I need to find Pansy."

"So go, find her."

Draco didn't move. He wasn't sure why. He didn't want to be here. It was like his legs wouldn't work.

“Not sure why you’re pretending this isn’t going to happen,” Cassius said, smirking.  
”Because I think you know it will, don’t you? You never could say no to me before. I can’t see you saying no to me now. Not for long, anyway. You like being fucked too much. And I always liked fucking you.”

“Darling!” came Pansy’s voice, and Draco could’ve cried in relief. “There you are.” She looked at him. “Are you okay?” she leaned in. “You look a bit peaked.”

Draco shook his head. “No, I’m good.”

Harry was standing there suddenly, in jeans and a fitted t-shirt. “Hey,” he said. His eyes were searching Draco’s face. Draco didn’t know what he was hoping to find there, but he didn’t think he could manage it, whatever it was. “Does he need to go home?” Harry asked Pansy.

Draco didn’t much care for people talking about him like he wasn’t right there, but he decided to let it slide. Harry’s eyes were very green, and Draco liked to look at them.

“Probably, yeah,” said Pansy.

“I’ll take him. Then I’ll come back for you, if that’s all right.”

Pansy nodded.

Cassius looked annoyed. “How long is this going to take?”

“Not long,” Harry said, giving him a quick kiss. Draco wanted to bite that kiss off of Harry’s mouth.

Then things happened and they were apparating into Draco’s front entry. “You do look kind of pale,” Harry said, looking him over again. “I mean, more than usual. You sure you’re okay? Do you need to go to St. Mungo’s?”

Draco shook his head vehemently. “No need. I’m perfectly fine.” He *would* be fine, if Harry would stop looking at him like that.

“You need some water, I think.” Harry steered Draco into the kitchen and pushed him down onto a chair, and then grabbed him a glass of water. “Here, drink the whole thing.”

Draco didn’t want it for some reason, but he knew he needed to drink it. He took a hesitant sip, and then a bigger one. It felt really good in his mouth, actually. Silvery.

Harry sat opposite Draco and ran a hand through his hair. Draco reached out and slid a piece of it through his fingers. It felt like silk. “I love your hair so much, Harry,” he said. “Even though it’s stupid.”

Harry chuffed out a laugh. “Thanks? I think?”

Draco kept playing with the piece of hair, watching it shine under the kitchen lights.

“Listen, I probably should go get Pansy home, too,” Harry said, not moving away. “I’ll come back. To check on you.”

“But you have a date waiting for you,” Draco said. He didn’t want to think about Cassius, but it was worth mentioning, because Harry had evidently forgotten.

“I know. I’ll explain it to him. But I don’t think you should be by yourself tonight. I’m a bit worried. And Pansy’s in no state to take care of you.”

Draco sighed. “Will you bring your hair back?”

Harry laughed. “I – yes. I’ll bring my hair back.”

“Okay,” said Draco.

Draco drank from his glass of water and looked around his kitchen. He wanted his yellow mug, so he got it and poured the rest of the water into it, and suddenly it tasted even better. Silver must go well with yellow.

He got up a while later to grab a vial of Dreamless Sleep from the cupboard. He always had a hard time sleeping afterward, and he hadn’t even come down all the way yet.

“Oh, uh-uh. No, no, no,” said a voice behind him. Harry was back. “Not a good idea.”

Draco looked at him. “I’ll never sleep otherwise,” he said.

“You’ll sleep. I’ll help. Put that stuff back.”

Draco kissed the vial. “Sorry,” he said to it, placing it gently back into the cabinet. He gave his hand to Harry. “Take me to bed, then.”

Harry’s cheeks turned pinkish. It was like the flashes of light cutting through the green and blue at Patronus. Draco rubbed his nose against it.

“Erm,” said Harry. “Come on.” He took Draco’s hand, pulling him up the stairs. He took Draco into his room and looked around. “Pajamas?”

“Second drawer,” Draco said, pointing.

Harry pulled open the drawer and grinned. “I’ve never seen a drawer this organized,” he said. “And it smells nice.”

“Cedar and lavender satchels. I’ll make you some.”

“Okay. Thank you,” Harry said, handing Draco his favorite pair of striped pajamas.

“I can’t possibly do this on my own,” said Draco, gesturing. “Do you see all these buttons?” He felt tired just looking at them.

“Jesus,” said Harry.

“Don’t know what he has to do with it,” said Draco, throwing himself back on the bed. “Get my boots.”

Harry obliged, pulling off Draco’s dragonhide boots and his socks, too. The air felt cold against Draco’s bare feet.

“These trousers are a bitch to get off,” Draco said. He unbuttoned them and tried to wriggle them down, but it was nearly impossible. “Harry!” he cried. “Help!”

Harry turned pink again and tugged off Draco’s leather trousers, averting his eyes a bit, which seemed silly, and handed Draco the pajama bottoms.

Draco just looked at them. “You act like this is my job, Harry. It’s your job. You’re helping me, remember?”

“You’re an arsehole, Draco,” Harry said, laughing. He helped Draco into his pajama trousers, and then pulled off Draco’s t-shirt. Draco decided to be very helpful, too, and put his arms up over his head as Harry pulled.

Harry was sitting down at the edge of the bed next to Draco, and he stilled, suddenly. Then he reached out and touched Draco with a soft brush of his fingers. Draco sighed and leaned back against the pillows. “That’s nice. Do that.”

Harry did, for a moment, and Draco realized he’d shut his eyes. He opened them back up, and Harry was staring at him, only his face didn’t look like how Draco’s face probably looked. “You’re sad,” Draco said. “Don’t be sad.” He looked down and realized Harry’s fingers were brushing over his scars.

Harry nodded and pulled his hand back, and Draco could see his Adam’s apple bob in his throat. “Shirt,” said Draco, holding out an arm.

Harry smiled again, a little weakly, and helped Draco into the pajama shirt. Then he pushed Draco aside and pulled back the covers. “Get in,” he said, patting the bed.

“You’re staying in here with me,” Draco said.

“I don’t know –” began Harry.

“You need to keep an eye on me, remember? I could die.” Draco crawled over to the spot where the covers were pulled down.

Harry rolled his eyes, and then, to Draco’s great delight, he began to unbutton his jeans. He kept his shirt and pants on, though. That was less fun. He looked at Draco, and looked at the bed, and sighed. “Scoot over, you,” he said.

Draco scooted, and patted the bed next to him. “You go here, Harry. I’ll even let you have my best pillow.”

Harry smiled. "Gee, thanks."

"You're welcome."

Harry climbed in, careful not to touch Draco, and pulled up the covers over them both.

Draco immediately attached himself to Harry's side, and let out a pleased sigh when Harry slid his arm underneath Draco's head. "What did Cassius say?" Draco asked, breathing in the Harry-smell of Harry.

"He wasn't happy. Got pretty mad about it. Said I was being rude."

"You weren't being rude. You were rescuing people."

Harry's chest rumbled with a laugh. "Sure, you go tell him that."

"I'm sorry," Draco said. But that wasn't true. "I'm not sorry, though, really. Cassius isn't fit to lick your shoe."

"Well, I don't think that'll be an issue anymore. We didn't exactly part on good terms tonight."

"You broke up?" asked Draco, raising his head. That was the best news. The absolute best news. He smiled.

Harry shrugged. "So far as you can break up with someone you've been casually seeing."

"I'm so glad, Harry. Cassius isn't the one for you. He's mean."

"I was starting to see that, yeah," said Harry. Draco nuzzled against his t-shirt. It was very soft and warm, and it seemed like maybe Draco could hear the blood circulating through Harry's veins.

"He was the first boy that ever fucked me, you know," Draco said. "And he wasn't very nice about it."

Harry stilled. "What? When? Recently?"

"Oh, no no no." He felt Harry relax a little and he reached up and patted Harry's cheek. "Back in school."

"School? But...but he's...three years older than we are."

"I know. Happened right before he graduated."

"But..." Harry frowned, and Draco pushed the corner of his mouth up with his fingertips, but it went right back into a frown. "He said he only dated girls in school."

"Yeah, well. He did. He was dating Lucy Culpepper."

"So how was he dating you?" asked Harry.

Draco giggled. “We weren’t dating, *god*. He just...had me jerk him off a bunch. No snogging, though. Because snogging was for poufs.”

Harry pulled away and jumped out of bed. Draco pouted. “I’m cold now,” he said.

“You’re telling me that Cassius fucked around with you when you were, like, fourteen and he was – what, seventeen or eighteen? – and was dating a girl, and told you snogging was for poufs?”

Draco nodded. “Yeah, that’s what I said. Now come back, please. My toes are cold.”

“What the *fuck*, Draco. That’s fucked up.”

“I know, I do a lot of fucked up things, Harry. I have terrible judgment. Just come back here, please.”

“No, not you. *Him*. Did he – did he, like, *rape* you?”

“No, no, stop being dramatic. I had a huge crush on him. Isn’t that so funny? He’s fit, though, you have to admit. But I had a crush on him, so of course I wanted to –”

“Did he ever ask?”

“Ask? Well, not exactly. He more just reached into my trousers. But I had a huge crush on him, like I said. You’re not paying attention to what I’m saying. I used to stare at him, probably rather pathetically. So he knew that I had a crush on him. You see?”

“The fact that you had a crush on him didn’t mean you wanted to fuck him, Draco. What the *fuck*.” He started walking around the bed, agitated. He turned back to Draco after a few moments. “I’ll be right back,” he said. He threw on his jeans again and disappeared with a pop.

Draco stared at the spot where he’d been and felt sad. He wanted Harry back in bed, because Harry was warm. Everything was sad. His walls, which usually seemed like such a bright, invigorating color, seemed sad.

*Pop.*

“Hey, sorry,” said Harry. He grabbed his wand from his pocket and then took off his jeans again and came over near the bed, touching his wand close to his ear and wincing. “He only got one in. But it got me in a weird spot. Sort of made my jaw feel off, like my bite’s not right.”

“One what?” asked Draco.

“Swing,” said Harry, quirking one side of his mouth. “Ow.”

“Come here,” said Draco. Harry sat on the edge of the bed. “Give me your wand.”

“You sure you should be trying to heal me when you’re like this?”



“I’m coming down a bit, and besides, I’m good at healing things.”

Harry handed over his wand, and Draco lifted careful fingers to his jaw. Harry winced. “Dislocated, I think,” said Draco. He murmured a spell and Harry’s jaw popped back into place.

“Ouch!” he cried, rubbing a hand over it. “Oh. Well, that feels better.”

“See?” said Draco. “Told you.” He really wanted to snog Harry. He looked at him from under his eyelashes. “So you and Cassius are definitely not still dating,” he said.

“No, I think it’s safe to say we are not,” said Harry, still rubbing his jaw.

“Will you kiss me, then?” asked Draco.

Harry looked at him sharply. “Um, no. Because. Well. You’re not really in your right mind. And also, because you’ve got a boyfriend. Remember?”

Draco was going to kill Hermione. For all her meddling, she hadn’t bothered to tell Harry *that?*

“I *don’t*. I ended things with Charlie before Christmas.”

Harry blinked. “Charlie never said.”

“Well now, he wouldn’t, would he? Considering I told him I couldn’t see him anymore because I liked *you*.”

“You – um.” Harry ran a hand through his hair. “Oh, Circe. But why...why didn’t *you* say anything?”

“You never asked,” said Draco. Although in retrospect, probably he should have said something.

“You *idiot!*” cried Harry. Draco frowned, because he wasn’t the idiot; Harry was.

“Excuse you,” said Draco, frowning very deeply indeed.

“Why the fuck do you think I was even dating Cassius? I knew you’d hear about it! I thought maybe, if you heard about it, you’d realize you didn’t like Charlie as much as you liked *me!*”

“Oh, Harry,” Draco sighed. “I can tell you from experience, that sort of thing never works. And I already knew I liked you, you git. I’ve been perfectly aware of that since I was sixteen.”

Harry blinked at him. Gulp. “Sixteen?”

Draco nodded. “Sorry if that’s intense. But *I’m* intense. So. You know. Live with it, or don’t.”

Harry buried his head in his hands. “*Jesus fucking Christ*,” he said. After a moment, he surfaced. “Not sixteen,” he said.

“It was so!” Draco said, feeling a flash of irritation. “I’m pretty sure I know when I fell for you. You don’t know *everything*, Harry, just because you killed Voldemort, *god*.”

“No, I mean *me*. I might’ve wanked to thoughts of you a time or two when I was sixteen, but I didn’t realize I liked you until a bit later.”

Draco felt suddenly sober. “When?” he asked.

“When you said you didn’t know me,” Harry said. “At the Manor.”

“But...but I was a Death Eater. I was a Death Eater.” It couldn’t be stated enough times. “How?”

Harry shrugged. “Just did.”

Not much you could say to that.

“Draco...” Harry began, and then sighed. “We should talk about this tomorrow.”

“No! I’m not that fucked up anymore, and I’m not waiting to have this conversation any longer. We’re having it now, or I swear to Merlin I will dislocate your jaw again.”

Harry looked at him, really looked. “Alright, fine,” he said.

“Fine,” said Draco.

“I’m terrified of you, Draco,” said Harry.

Draco giggled. “I know. I’m scary.”

Harry smiled. “Shut up. Listen.” He tucked some of Draco’s hair behind his ear. “I know I’m supposed to be brave. I know that. But for some reason, I can’t quite manage it when it comes to you. I want to say all these things and do all these things and I *can’t* because I can’t get past this fucking *fear*. It’s so much that sometimes I think I’m going to choke on it.”

Draco stopped breathing at some point.

“I’m afraid of you, of the way I feel about you, of how much I could get absolutely fucked over by this. I’m afraid you’ll hurt me, and – *god* – I’m just as afraid that I’ll hurt *you*. I’m worried that we’ll always bring out the worst in each other, and that this is never going to be anything but toxic, and I’m afraid to even be saying any of this at all.

“I’m scared that if I open myself up to you, it’ll only bring me a bunch of fucking pain, and I’m even more scared that if I *don’t*, it’ll eat me alive. I don’t know, Draco. I can’t – *Christ*, I don’t even know what the fuck I’m saying.”

He sat there, breathing unevenly in the aftermath of his tirade, looking down at his hands. Draco sat absolutely still, incapable of movement or speech or even thought.

When Harry spoke again, his voice was much softer. “You terrify me. But I want to try.”

Draco’s fingers clutched at the blankets. “You – you want to try.”

“Yes. If you want to.”

Draco let out a shaking breath. “Harry, I would never hurt you. I mean, I know I have. But I care about you, I – ” he paused, unsure of what he ought to say. “I don’t pretend to know what I’m doing when it comes to you. I never say the right things or do the right things...” He chanced a look up at Harry, who was sitting still, listening.

“But I want to learn. I want to figure out how to do them right. I want to learn how to take care of you. And how –” He gulped. “I want to learn how to love you. And if you let me, I’ll figure it out. I *will*. And I’ll take such good care of your heart, Harry, I swear it, I –”

Then Harry’s mouth crashed into his, wild and hot and desperate. “Ow,” Harry mumbled, as he threw Draco back onto the bed, covering Draco’s body with his own. “My jaw’s still sore.”

“Harry, I feel like we haven’t finished this conversation,” said Draco when he could free his mouth for a moment. “Don’t you think we should –”

Harry put a hand gently over Draco’s mouth, and Draco looked up and saw Harry’s green eyes shining in the darkness. “Stop talking, please. For once, alright? If you keep talking, I can’t kiss you.”

“You can’t kiss me with a hand over my mouth either, can you?” Draco said, his voice muffled against Harry’s hand.

Harry chuckled and moved the hand and began kissing Draco again, softer now, and Draco managed to keep himself from talking, for once.

Everything turned hot and slow and gentle, and it hit Draco then, what was happening. Harry – *this* Harry, *his* Harry – wanted to try. He wanted to try, even though he was afraid.

Draco pulled back slightly to look up at him, taking it all in. The mess of his hair; the stupid, beautiful scar; the eyes that seemed brighter than anything else ever did. As he looked, he felt Harry’s fingers trace his cheek. Then they were moving softly over Draco’s eyebrows, tracing the lines of them, so gentle that Draco could only just feel it. Finally, they came to his mouth, and he outlined Draco’s lips with his fingertips, his eyes fixed on their path as though he were memorizing it.

“Can you take off our clothes?” asked Draco.

Harry laughed. “No,” he said.

“But –”

“But nothing. I don't know if you're thinking clearly, and that's not okay.” He rolled off of Draco. “Sorry, probably shouldn't have even done that.”

“Harry, for fuck's sake.”

“And, besides. I wouldn't mind if it was. Well. You know. If we —” Harry put a pillow over his face.

“*Words*, Potter,” said Draco, yanking the pillow away.

“I wouldn't mind if it was a bit...special. It's like our first real time — hey, shut up! Stop laughing at me!”

“I'm not,” said Draco, laughing. “Sorry. You're adorable. And okay. We can wait a bit.”

“Okay. Can we sleep, then? I think it's nearly morning.”

Draco found himself yawning. “Yeah, sure,” he said. He still didn't know if he could sleep or not. But when he curled up against Harry, he felt exhaustion kicking in. Harry began to rub slow circles across his back, and his thoughts began to wander and chase themselves. Just before sleep took him, he felt Harry press a soft kiss to his forehead.

Draco woke to the smell of bacon and coffee.

He found Harry down in the kitchen, making a fry-up. “Hope you don't mind,” Harry said. “I was hungry when I woke up.”

Draco smiled at him. “No, it's fine, asshole. Just make yourself at home, why don't you?”

“Thanks. Think I will,” said Harry, grinning. He set down a cup of coffee in front of Draco. “From the place down the street. Thought you might need it this morning.”

Draco did feel like he'd been hit by a bus, maybe, but it seemed to hardly matter in light of everything else. “How's your jaw?” he asked.

“Fine,” said Harry. “Doesn't hurt today.”

“So you punched Cassius, did you?” said Draco, grinning behind his cup.

Harry made a face. “Yeah, s'pose I did. Think he'll still owl me?”

“Probably not. Think you went and fucked that one right up, Potter.”

“I'm devastated,” Harry said, setting a heaping plate in front of Draco. It smelled amazing.

Draco felt a little shy as they ate. Harry was in his t-shirt and jeans again, his hair all rumpled. His eyes were so bright in the morning sunlight, and they kept finding their way to Draco's face.

“Could use a shower,” Harry said after he’d cleared maybe half his plate. He was wearing a hopeful expression.

Draco leaned close, looking up at Harry from under his eyelashes. He put a hand on Harry’s thigh. “I’d join you, but I’m worried a shower isn’t *special* enough. You’re going to have to wait to fuck me, Harry. Goodness knows, I’ll need some time to prepare. I’ve got to buy some new candles, maybe some flowers, so I can sprinkle rose petals across the sheets for you. And music. I must find the right songs for this occasion. Special songs, for a special moment. Might not happen today at all, now that I think about it. Too much to do.”

“Draco,” said Harry, his mouth brushing over Draco’s ear.

“Mm?” replied Draco, shivering.

“Get the fuck upstairs.”

“Well, since you’ve asked so nicely,” Draco murmured.

They didn’t make it upstairs after all. Their first ‘real’ time happened on the floor of Draco’s kitchen, although the second time was done properly, on a bed and everything.

On Monday morning, Hermione was looking at him strangely when he strolled into the Department of Mysteries. He felt ready to crush every single puzzle the Department could throw at him.

“What’s happened now?” Hermione asked warily.

“Coffee,” he said, setting one down in front of her. “For you.”

“Why? What’s going on?” she asked.

“Not much, really,” Draco said. “Spent a nice quiet weekend with my boyfriend, is all. Well, mostly quiet. He can be quite the screamer.”

“Your...wait. What?”

“*Harry*, Hermione. Do try to keep up.”

She stared at him, her eyes comically wide.

“What’s on the agenda today?” he asked.

She closed her mouth, opened it, and closed it again. “We just got another huge shipment of prophecies in.”

“Prophecies, my favorite,” he said, taking a sip of his own coffee. It was delicious. “Let’s dig in, shall we?”

# The Last Beginning

“You can't stop the future  
You can't rewind the past  
The only way to learn the secret  
...is to press play.”  
— Jay Asher, *Thirteen Reasons Why*

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So, Harry Potter was his boyfriend. They spent the rest of the winter holed up in Draco's house, hardly seeing anyone, and having more sex than was probably healthy. They never fought or got mad at each other. They talked all the time, and cooked dinner together, and ordered take-out, and watched movies on Draco's new muggle telly-vision that Harry talked him into buying. They canceled all their other plans, and their friends, who were probably just relieved that the drama had died down for one goddamned minute, didn't get too offended.

Spring came, and they decided they ought to leave the house. So they started venturing out, like bears after a long hibernation, squinting into the sun. The press had a field day when they realized, and every day, there were new headlines about The Boy Who Lived's scandalous new relationship. Draco began collecting every article that had the words “former Death Eater, Draco Malfoy,” in it and ritualistically setting them on fire in the evenings.

Thankfully, mid-summer, some nutter up in the Highlands managed to disappear all the water from Loch Ness, and the papers, ever fickle, began covering *that* story ad nauseum, and Draco and Harry were suddenly yesterday's news.

They began to fall into routines. Harry always stayed at Draco's except on Mondays, when Harry worked late. They still had lunch with Hermione on Tuesdays, except now sometimes Ron came, too. Draco still sat with the Unspeakables on pub night and Harry still sat with the Aurors, although after an hour or so, Harry would find his way back to the corner booth. Saturdays were lazy days, full of domestic duties and books and walks through the city, although Saturday nights sometimes still involved clubbing. Draco still had the occasional quickie in the loo, although it was always with Harry now. On some Saturdays, Hermione would invite Draco for dinner with Ron and Luna, though Harry tagged along, too.

During one of these dinners in early fall, Draco was shocked to find Pansy in the kitchen with Hermione, drinking wine and chopping up parsnips. “What the hell?” asked Draco.

“You're not the *only* person Hermione's friends with, you berk,” Pansy said, rolling her eyes. Yes, Pansy and Hermione were sort of friends. No, it didn't make any more sense than it had in the other timeline. Draco had learned to accept that some things really didn't need to make sense.

Pansy sat next to Luna at dinner, and Draco noticed that Pansy seemed *nicer* all of a sudden. Almost sweet. Draco eyed her suspiciously.

Afterwards, Pansy began asking Draco questions about Luna. She began to talk about Luna's hair a lot, and later, started talking about auras and Nargles.

And then one Saturday, Pansy brought Luna to Patronus and Harry and Draco watched, agog, as the two of them snogged on the dance floor. "Isn't Pansy straight?" asked Harry.

"As far as I knew," said Draco.

A few days later, after Pansy had very stubbornly and uncharacteristically refused to say whether she and Luna had slept together, Draco asked the same thing. "I thought you strictly into blokes," he said.

"Oh, I am," said Pansy. "Women are fucking awful. I hate women. Except Hermione. Hermione's tolerable."

"But you're seeing Luna?"

"Well, yes, but Luna's different. She vibrates on a higher plane, darling. She's evolved."

"So...are you bi? I don't understand."

"I'm a Lunasexual, Draco. Just Luna. So long as she'll have me."

"Ah," said Draco, even though none of it made any fucking sense. But Pansy was happy, and that was all that mattered. She'd never gone out with the same person more than twice before, but as the weeks slipped into months, Pansy was still happily snogging Luna. When Ron and Hermione were married in October, Luna brought Pansy and they wore matching purple dresses that had a pattern of Moon Frogs along the edges of the sleeves and the hem. Pansy confided in Draco that Luna had wanted the entire thing to be covered in Moon Frogs, but they had compromised.

Harry and Draco got into their first major fight at the beginning of December. It was over Christmas plans, and whether Draco would go to the Burrow on Christmas Eve, and it devolved into arguments over old wounds and delicate subject matters. It seemed that Draco and Harry were not very good at conflict resolution. They fought until three or four in the morning, almost came to blows, and Harry stormed out and slept at Grimmauld Place. Draco stayed up until sunrise, crying and throwing all Harry's things into the front yard, and then slept until the afternoon.

When he woke up, he floored to Pansy's, where Luna and Pansy sat him down and told him to grow the fuck up and fix it. Draco cursed them for being terrible friends and then went over to Harry's and apologized.

Harry and Draco got into another whopper of a fight after Christmas, when Harry accused Draco of flirting with Charlie on Christmas Eve, which did not happen at all. Draco could not help what his eyelashes did, and he did not appreciate what Harry was implying. That one ended with a dramatic slap, and then an even more dramatic make-up shag.

But Draco didn't like fighting with Harry. It worried him, and it took a toll on them both. The make-up sex was not worth the fighting, no matter what anybody said.

Unfortunately, although their two big fights had technically ended, they seemed to bleed over into January and February. Draco and Harry took to sniping at each other about little related and unrelated things, and bringing up a lot of history that made them both miserable.

Finally, in March, Draco came to a decision. He hadn't traveled through time, watched Harry die, dumped Charlie Weasley, and battled with Cassius Warrington (metaphorically, at least) just to have his relationship with Harry end because he and Harry were idiots with the coping skills of a sleep-deprived toddler. Besides, when it came to love, Draco sometimes had to be the brave one.

One Friday, he demanded that they skip pub night and stay home. He cooked Harry his favorite pasta, rigatoni alla carbonara, and bought a nice bottle of Brunello. Then over dinner he informed Harry that they were going to a Mind Healer for couples counseling the following Wednesday.

Harry stormed out and Draco almost had an honest-to-god mental breakdown, but then a half-hour later, Harry came back and said okay.

The following Wednesday, they met with Dr. Nibley, a woman in her forties with short, spiky black hair and a penchant for wearing gorgeous pantsuits. It was a perfect match, and soon she was teaching them the proper way to approach conflict, asking them to recognize one another's strengths and weaknesses, and getting them to open up in a safe space about some of the more hurtful things in their past.

That summer, Draco came to terms with the fact that loving Harry was not always going to be easy or fun. Harry had massive abandonment issues, he got into black moods sometimes that were hard to understand, and when things got difficult, his first instinct was to flee.

Draco *also* came to terms with the fact he himself was no walk in the park. He always had to have his way, he was quick to judge and criticize, he wasn't the most empathetic person, and he resorted to snark and sarcasm any time he felt insecure (which was often).

They were a right mess, the two of them, but they were serious about making it work and sticking together. And Draco knew, as much as he knew it wasn't always going to be fun or easy, that the good outweighed the bad, and there wasn't anybody else on earth he'd rather muddle through all that awful stuff with.

By that fall, things started to feel good again. They were having 'constructive discussions' rather than arguments, their escapades in the bedroom were glorious (actually, that had been pretty consistent throughout), and they'd started talking about the future in a way that felt different and real.

Christmas was the polar opposite of the year before. Christmas Eve at the Weasleys was not nearly as tense, and Draco and Ginny surprised everyone by announcing that they were doing



a ballroom competition together in February (they'd been talking about it for over a year, but Ginny had been pregnant and then had a newborn, so they kept putting it off. It seemed like it was probably never going to happen, but then Ginny suddenly up and decided to register them). Also helpful was that Charlie had a girl named Divya with him, a fellow dragon wrangler who was absolutely charming. Something about the way Charlie was with her – the way he looked at her and touched her -- made Draco think it was serious. Her presence seemed to make Harry relax, too, thank god.

While none of the Weasleys besides Ginny seemed overly impressed with Draco, they all more or less accepted his presence beside Harry. And Mrs. Weasley even made him a sweater with a big fucking 'D' on it, which he wore for the rest of the day, rather proudly.

Christmas Day at the Manor was even better, lazy and relaxed, with Teddy buzzing around with all his new toys. Draco had taken up knitting that year, and he'd spent hours upon hours knitting Harry a throw that had a great big Gryffindor lion next to a Slytherin snake. It wasn't perfect (at all) but Harry hugged him for a long time after he opened it. Harry got Draco some carefully selected books and a framed picture of the two of them from the summer before, and then handed him one more box.

Draco opened it up and laughed. "What is this?" he asked. It looked like a not-entirely-clean napkin with a bunch of stuff scribbled on it.

Harry chuckled nervously and ran a hand over the back of his hair. "You might not remember, but it was our game."

"Our *game*?"

"From the pub. That first night. It was our card game. We never actually played it, we just made up the rules. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense, but..." He shrugged.

Draco turned it over. This side seemed to be the front. On the top, in Harry's handwriting, was the word 'Drarry', underlined twice. "What does that mean?" Draco asked, pointing.

"It's the name," Harry said, laughing. "Of the game. Can't believe you don't remember. You thought it up."

"Oh," said Draco. "How creative of me." He began to read the rules. It was a game for two players, and the napkin said, "All players must be named Harry or Draco, and there must be at least one Draco and one Harry playing at all times." Setup involved spreading out the deck face-down. Players took turns picking up a card and following the rest of the directions. The objective of the game as stated was 'To become friends with Harry and/or Draco.'

If you drew a two, three, or four, you would have to give the other player that many compliments. If it was black, the compliments had to be about physical attributes. If it was red, the compliments *couldn't* be about physical things.

If you drew a five, you had to tell the other player a recent secret. If you drew a six, it had to be an old secret. A seven, and you'd have to reveal something embarrassing about yourself.

Eight, and you'd have to buy the other player their next drink. Nine, and you'd have to offer to buy them a snack.

Ten was where it got interesting. A ten, and you'd have to give the other player a one-minute back rub. A Jack, and it was a one-minute head massage. Queens were 'one lengthy hug' and Kings were a one-minute snog. An Ace (and this was written in what was unmistakably Draco's handwriting) was a shag in the loo.

"What the fuck, Harry," Draco said, giggling all over himself. "This is amazing. Why in Merlin's name have you kept this from me for so long?"

Harry turned a little pink. "I was worried you might think it was stupid. That I kept it, or whatever." He ran his fingertip over the napkin. "And then after a while, I kind of forgot about it. I found it a couple months ago when I was sorting through some stuff at Grimmauld Place."

Draco looked over all the rules, unable to keep the smile off of his face. "Things escalate rather quickly once you get past Queens, don't they? Nothing between snogging and shagging. Just straight to it."

Harry snorted. "That's Draco Malfoy for you, folks. Cuts right to the chase."

"You know we're playing this tonight, right?" Draco said, looking over at him. "Until we go through the whole goddamned deck."

"That means we're going to have to shag four times," Harry pointed out.

"Oh, boo. However will we manage," said Draco, leaning over to give Harry a kiss.

"It'll be tough," said Harry, pressing his forehead to Draco's. "I love you, by the way. Like... a lot."

"I love you, too, Harry," said Draco.

Days passed, as days do. On New Year's Eve, Hermione declined her glass of champagne and revealed she was pregnant. In February, Ginny and Draco took third place in the competition for doing a sublime cha-cha, and decided to enter another one. In April, word came from Romania that Charlie and Divya were engaged, and also in April, Draco and Ginny won first place in their second competition with a foxtrot. In late July, Hermione had the baby, named Rose, and then in August, Pansy and Luna surprised everyone by moving in together. Blaise married Daphne Greengrass in early September, and the wedding was on the island of Capri. Harry and Draco decided to make a trip of it, and spent a few days in Tuscany before going home. They went on a wine tour, and Harry thought all the wines tasted basically the same. Draco supposed nobody was perfect.

Christmas came and went, and soon it was New Year's Eve again.

Draco was at Pansy's getting ready and drinking champagne. Earlier, Pansy had spelled streaks of bright pink (the color of her bathroom walls) into Luna's hair, and then into Draco's, because it looked so fun and Draco wanted pink streaks, too.

Suddenly a voice sounded from the floo. "Draco! Hurry up! You're going to make us late!"

"Can't rush perfection, Harry," Draco called back, smoothing the lines of his peacock blue waistcoat. He had on black trousers and a crisp, tailored white shirt, and a heavy black cloak to go over the top of it all. And a teeny bit of eyeliner, just because.

"Come *on*," said Harry, appearing at the bathroom door. "You look incredible. Nothing else can be done to improve you."

"You're just saying that because we're late," Draco said, glaring.

Harry took Draco's face in his hands. "No, I'm saying that because it's true," he said, kissing Draco's mouth softly.

"Oh, alright," Draco said, holding onto Harry.

They apparated right after Pansy and Luna into the Weasley's back yard. It was spelled to stay warm, and it felt nice and toasty, despite the fact that it was December 31.

A New Year's Eve wedding. Draco had thought it a bit tacky, at first, but now that he looked at it, it was lovely, everything covered with snow, with bright red berries and glimmering white and silver flowers everywhere.

"Draco!" cried Ginny, bustling over, a ginger baby on her arm. Though she wasn't showing yet, Draco knew she was busy growing Weasley-Longbottom Number Two, due in June. Number Two was greatly interfering with their competition schedule, but Draco was trying not to hold that against it. "I call at least two dances, okay? Don't let Harry hog you. He's a shit dancer, and you know it. Let him and Neville step all over each other's feet if they want."

"Ginevra," Draco said, kissing her cheeks. "You look lovely."

"Hi, Harry," Ginny said, hugging him next.

"Why don't you ever want to dance with me, Gin?" asked Harry.

"You're kidding, right?" Ginny said, rolling her eyes.

The tent was filled with silver Chiavari chairs, lined up on either side of an aisle that was covered in red petals. "Like our first time," Draco said, pointing. "Remember the petals?"

"Shut up, wanker," said Harry, laughing. He pulled them over to where Ron and Hermione were sitting and squeezed into the seats they'd saved.

"Hi, you two," said Hermione, waving. She had Rose on her lap, asleep.

“Hi, pretty girl,” said Draco, squeezing Rose’s blanketed foot. “Oh, look at her,” he gushed. “She’s such a good baby.”

“Like hell she is,” said Ron. “She never lets us bloody sleep. You think she’s so great, you come right on over at one in the morning. And at two-thirty. And four. See how much you like her then.”

“Any time, Weasel. I’m fantastic with babies.” That may or may not have been true; Draco wasn’t really sure.

“I’m going to take you up on it, Malfoy. I swear to Merlin,” said Ron.

The music started. “Shhh,” Hermione warned everyone and no one.

Draco looked up and saw Charlie standing near the alter. He looked radiantly happy. Draco felt himself getting misty, not really because of Charlie, but because of what Charlie had done. Of course Draco was going to attend the wedding with Harry, and of course Harry was invited. But Charlie had invited Draco separately, and had included a little note that said he hoped Draco would be able to make it. It was all very sweet and was making him feel very sentimental and weepy, which was already a problem for him at weddings. He squeezed Harry’s hand.

The bride was beautiful, with long, dark hair that curled down her back and a bouquet of white flowers with red berries throughout. She was crying a little, though, as she walked, and Draco feared for her mascara.

Draco thought back to the Christmas when they’d met Divya. “Did it bother you at all?” Harry had asked later that night.

“No,” said Draco, and it hadn’t. There was no room for anything in his heart but Harry; it was a silly question. “I’m happy. I wouldn’t want anything to be different.”

“Nothing?”

“Nothing,” said Draco.

“What if you could take back all that shit we did to each other, before. Wouldn’t you?”

“I wouldn’t,” said Draco.

“What? Why not?” asked Harry.

“Because if anything had been different, we might not be where we are now. And I want to be here, Harry. I like here.”

“I like here, too,” Harry had said. And then they’d gone on to have a spectacular shag.

Back in the present, Divya had reached Charlie’s side.

“Divya looks beautiful,” whispered Hermione.

“She does,” whispered Draco.

That night Draco danced with Luna and Ginny and Hermione and Pansy, and even with Divya, who said she had to see whether Draco’s skills were as excellent as Ginny claimed. But mostly he danced with Harry, who was a shit dancer, but a really great kisser, which was more important if you thought about it.

They got home at 11:30. They were still living in Draco’s house in Chelsea while they fixed up Grimmauld Place. Draco liked his house, but in the end, he didn’t have the connection to it that Harry had to his. However, Draco drew the line at living in a shithole. The renovation was costing more than a few Galleons, but thankfully, Draco still had some lying around. Being a Malfoy wasn’t totally useless, he supposed.

Draco walked into the bedroom yawning. “Ugh, I’m getting old,” he said. “Tired like this before midnight. I’m losing my stamina, Harry.”

“I beg to differ,” Harry said, kissing him. “Your stamina seemed fine this morning.”

“Hah, well. That’s true,” he said, and his cock twitched in his trousers, suddenly alert.

“You want tea?” asked Harry.

“Not really,” said Draco, raising an eyebrow. “I want bed.”

“I could really use a cuppa,” said Harry. “Be right back, okay?”

“Don’t take too long,” Draco called after him. “Or you’re not getting any! Once I go to sleep, that’s it!” That was a lie, probably, but Draco *was* quite tired.

He put on his pajamas and climbed into bed, picking up a book that Hermione had lent him. It was written by a muggle scientist by the name of Stephen Hawking, and it touched on all sorts of interesting concepts related to time and space. For a muggle, the Hawking fellow knew some things.

“Here we are,” said Harry, coming in with an entire tray for tea.

“What’s all this? Are you mad? I told you I didn’t want any.”

“Oh, but you should have some,” said Harry. “I made it.” He shot Draco a smile and Draco frowned at it, because it seemed like a strange smile. Trembly.

“Fine. Give me my cup,” Draco said, trying to be nice even though this was rather annoying. Harry handed him the yellow cup and saucer and Draco set it in front of him on the bed. “Pot?” said Draco, wriggling his hands. Harry passed him the teapot and Draco went to pour his tea.

“What the fuck?” he said, looking down into his yellow cup. “What the fuck is this shit, Harry. Holy *hell* – “

“Never imagined this moment being laced with so much profanity,” mumbled Harry, and then Draco jumped on him, and tea spilled all over the bed, but that was fine, because it was easy to spell that away, and the point was that cup had a little golden ring in it, and now that little golden ring was on Draco’s finger, and now all Draco wanted to do was kiss Harry.

“So, yes?” asked Harry between kisses.

“Yes, you tosser. Of course yes. Who else would I marry? You’re the only person I even like.” That wasn’t true at all. Draco liked and loved a lot of people. But Harry...well, Harry was his favorite.

“I love you,” said Harry.

“I love you, too,” said Draco, before Harry banished their clothes.

They shagged their way into the New Year.

The next morning, Draco felt thoroughly debauched and hazy, and was leaning against the kitchen counter, admiring his ring and drinking a cup of coffee from the place down the street. “Morning, Lover,” he said as Harry came stumbling into the room, his hair snarling and sticking straight up in the fucking air, defying gravity like usual. “Got you coffee.” He pointed.

“Morning,” said Harry, reaching for Draco’s cock.

“Merlin’s sake, Harry, was last night not enough? A man can only come so many times in a twenty-four-hour period.”

“Sorry,” said Harry, not looking the least bit sorry. He was pulling down Draco’s trousers, and his smile was rather evil, which made Draco decide he was probably up for another shag after all. “I just woke up from the best fucking dream, my god,” said Harry. “I dreamt we were back at Hogwarts, and I ran into the Prefect’s Bathroom, and you were in the water, which was all pink and steaming, and you were touching yourself and you looked bloody *gorgeous*, and then you told me to get in and oh my god, it was so fucking hot.” Harry was getting onto his knees, pressing kisses up Draco’s thighs.

Draco just about fell over. “Sounds like it,” he said in a strangled voice. And then he decided it probably meant nothing, that Harry had somehow seen into another timeline, and besides, here was better.

Here was the best.

Maybe someday, Draco would tell him.



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